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DHĀṬṚ AND VIDHĀṬṚ AS FATE DEITIES IN THE SANSKRIT EPICS¹

From the *Ṛk-Saṃhitā* onwards, Dhātṛ “Placer” and Vidhātṛ “Ordainer” appear both as epithets for different gods and as distinct deities. In Avesta, *dātar-* denotes the ordaining aspect of Ahura Mazdā and Aməša Spəntas, and some of their activities are described using the verb *dā-* (<**dhā*) “to place, to set up”. Verbal correspondence and correspondence in meaning and function speak in favour of the Indo-Iranian background of the concept that served as an epithet for the highest Lord *Asura. By the time of the Brāhmaṇas and epics, Dhātṛ’s ordaining characteristics had become mixed with the creative characteristic of gods like Viśvakarman, Tvaṣṭṛ, and Prajāpati. In the epics, in addition to his ordaining and arranging role, Dhātṛ took on a creative role and became mixed with Brahmā, who also took characteristics of older creator deities. Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ became associated with fatalist doctrines in the epics. Fatalism might have already existed in the time of the epics in warrior circles as “warrior-didactics” (Vassilkov 1999:28). This heroic fatalism might have incorporated Dhātṛ into its world-view, supposing that Dhātṛ’s “ordaining” role, known since Vedic times, had developed into a “pre-ordaining” role in the epics. On the other side, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ became associated with ascetics that preached fatalism as a spiritual didactics that cultivates dispassion. Another development of the fatalist doctrine with Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ as its presiding deities can be seen in epic episodes wherein Dhātṛ determines the fate of individuals according to their past deeds, thus making Dhātṛ a god responsible for the distribution of the fruit of action.

Keywords: Fate, predestination, *dhātṛ*, *vidhātṛ*, fatalism, Ahura Mazdā.

¹ This paper owes greatly to Prof. Vassilkov’s paper “Kālavāda (the doctrine of Cyclical Time) in the Mahābhārata and the concept of Heroic Didactics” (Vassilkov 1999), which aroused in me a keen interest in the fascinating phenomenon of fatalism in the Sanskrit epics. I encountered the name Dhātṛ for the first time in this paper where “epic god of Fate – Dhātṛ” (Vassilkov 1999:20) is mentioned.

Introduction

In the *Mahābhārata* (=MBh) 3,31, a remarkable speech by Draupadī mentions deities named Dhātṛ “Placer” and Vidhātṛ “Ordainer”² in a very peculiar deterministic context. Draupadī laments Yudhiṣṭhira’s apparent shamefaced attitude towards Kauravas, who exiled Pāṇḍavas to the forest. According to Draupadī’s speech, man does not act according to his own free will, but according to the will of the God Dhātṛ “Placer”:

“It is Lord Placer alone who sets down everything for the creatures... These creatures, hero among men, are like wooden puppets that are manipulated; he makes body and limbs move.³ ... man follows the command of the Placer, consisting in him, entrusted to him. At no time whatever is man independent, like a tree that has fallen from the bank into the middle of a river.” (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:280f)⁴

In 3,31.35, the deity Draupadī refers to appears under the appellations *svayambhu* (self-existent) and *pitāmaha* (grandfather), common epithets of the god Brahmā:

“So the blessed God, the self-existent great-grandfather, hurts creatures with creatures, hiding behind a disguise...” (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:281)⁵

Draupadī concludes her lamentation with a strong condemnation of Dhātṛ:

¹ Van Buitenen usually translates Dhātṛ as “Placer” and Vidhātṛ as “Ordainer”. This is followed consistently by Bailey (1983) and Hill (2001), and will be followed in this paper as well. Jamison & Brereton (2014) shift their translation according to the context, thus Dhātṛ appears as “Ordainer” (2014(3):1400;1606;1660), “Placer” (2014(3):1641) “Establisher” (2014[1]:928) etc.

³ MBh 3,31.21–22:
dhātaiva khalu bhūtānām sukhaduḥkhe priyāpriye |
dadhāti sarvam iśānaḥ purastāc chukram uccaran || 21 ||
yathā dārumayī yoṣā naravīra samāhitā |
īrayaty aṅgam aṅgāni tathā rājann imāḥ prajāḥ || 22 ||

⁴ MBh 3,31.25bc–26
dhātur ādeśam anveti tanmayo hi tadarpaṇaḥ || 25 ||
nātmādhīno manuṣyo ‘yaṃ kālaṃ bhavati kaṃ cana |
srotaso madhyam āpannaḥ kūlād vṛkśa iva cyutaḥ || 26 ||

⁵ MBh 3,31.35
evaṃ sa bhagavān devaḥ svayambhūḥ prapitāmahaḥ |
hinasti bhūtair bhūtāni chadma kṛtvā yudhiṣṭhira || 35 ||

“...the capricious blessed Lord plays with the creatures like a child with its toys. The Placer does not act toward his creatures like a father or mother, he seems to act out of fury, like every other person! ... I condemn the Placer, Pārtha, who allows such outrages!” (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:281)⁶

Draupadī’s fatalism and condemnation of the whimsical turns of Fate, if understood as a rhetorical device, masterfully depict her rage and disappointment. As will be shown, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear frequently in fatalistic passages in MBh, and thus it seems improper to consider it no more than a rhetorical device. However, it is possible that it is a distant echo of some ancient worldview. Hill (2001:171) claims that the views Draupadī expresses are not the result of a sudden outburst, for they are based on an ancient tradition.⁷ After Yudhiṣṭhira’s soothing talk (3,32), Draupadī changes her attitude towards determinism in 3,33 and begins with a strong condemnation of fatalism, advocating the doctrine that man’s actions determine his destiny:

“The man who believes that everything in the world is fate and the one who professes that it is chance are both apostate; it is the spirit to act that is extolled.” (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:284)⁸

Soon thereafter, Draupadī changes Dhātṛ’s role — he is no longer a master of puppets, but rather a deity that presides over the rightful distribution of the fruits of action:

“The Placer himself, the Lord, ordains any one’s acts, for whatever reason, and distributes the fruits of what men have previously done.” (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:284)⁹

⁶ MBh 3,31.36cd–39cd
krīḍate bhagavan bhūtair bālaḥ krīḍanakair iva || 36 ||
na mātṛpitrivad rājan dhātā bhūteṣu vartate |
roṣād iva pravṛtto ‘yaṃ yathāyam itaro janaḥ || 37 ||

...

dhātāraṃ garhaye pārtha viṣamaṃ yo ‘nupaśyati || 39 ||

⁷ Vassilkov (1999) argues that the doctrine of Time (*kālavāda*) is a part of old Heroic warrior didactics. Vassilkov (1999:27) defines this phenomenon as heroic pessimism or epic fatalism. The heroic didactics that appear in the epic material of the MBh in addition to later Brahmanical didactics might not be a structured system of thought according to Vassilkov.

⁸ MBh 3,33.11
yaś ca diṣṭaparo loke yaś cāyaṃ haṭhavādakaḥ |
ubhāv apasadāv etau karmabuddhiḥ praśasyate || 11 ||

⁹ MBh 3,33.20
yad dhy ayaṃ puruṣaḥ kiṃ cit kurute vai śubhāśubham |
tad dhātṛvihitaṃ viddhi pūrvakarmaphalodayam || 20 ||

This peculiar change of events calls for a small investigation into the nature of Dhātṛ, as there are many other passages in MBh where Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are associated with fatalistic attitudes.¹⁰ Although Dhātṛ is identified with the God Brahmā in this passage, it is usually only Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ that are associated with fatalism, unlike other forms of the God Brahmā. The passage in which Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī criticise fatalism almost looks like a part of some ancient debate between upholders of fatalistic ideas and those who believe that man's actions determine his destiny. The latter, of course, gained the upper hand in the end, leaving only traces of the condemned rival theory. This paper will therefore attempt to explore Dhātṛ's role in ancient Indian and Iranian literature to investigate the origins and development of the concept of Dhātṛ and to explore its association with fatalism.

Dhātṛ in the Vedic literature

According to MacDonell (1897:115), Dhātṛ belongs to a class of deities whose nature is founded on abstraction. More precisely, Dhātṛ is an "Agent God", one of those deities whose name denotes an agent. The agent noun *dhātṛ* is a primary derivation from the root $\sqrt{dhā}$ "to put, place" and the suffix for agent nouns *-ṭṛ*. Vidhātṛ is accordingly derived from the verb *vi* $\sqrt{dhā}$ "to distribute, arrange, ordain". According to MacDonell (ibid.), Dhātṛ and other "Agent gods" are not direct abstractions, but rather developed out of an epithet for other deities that denotes an aspect, activity, or the character of the respective deity.

In the *Ṛk-Saṃhitā*, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear in 15 hymns. They appear three times (4,55.2 [Vidhātṛ]; 8,93.29 and 9,10.3) denoting sacrificial priests. In 10,82.2–3, *dhātṛ* and *vidhātṛ* are epithets for Viśvakarman,¹¹ while *dhātṛ* and *vidhātṛ* are epithets for Indra in

¹⁰ Hill (2001:86–194) discusses the role the gods play in destiny. He narrows the list of gods who act as agents of Fate to Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Śiva, and abstractions such as Dhātṛ, Vidhātṛ, and occasionally Śāstṛ (Hill 2001:124). However, Hill (2001:180) rightfully concludes that "the agent of predestination is invariably not a great God directly but a personalized abstraction such as Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ."

¹¹ A pun on the name Viśvakarman: he is *vīmanā* "vast in mind," *vīhāyā* "vast in power," and *vidhātā* "vast distributor"—the last, the one who distributes widely (Jamison & Brereton 2014[3]:1516).

10,167.3. In 10,2.2, Agni bears the epithet *man-dhātṛ*.¹² They appear as distinct deities in 6,50.12 (Vidhātṛ), 7,35.3 (Dhātṛ), 9,81.5 (Vidhātṛ), 10,85.47 (Dhātṛ),¹³ 10,158.3 (Dhātṛ),¹⁴ and 10,181.1–3 (Dhātṛ), although they are only invoked in these passages alongside other deities without any specification of their nature. More can be learned about Dhātṛ in funeral hymn 10,18.5, where he is described as a deity that arranges the orderly sequence of life and death, in which older should die before younger¹⁵. In 10,128.7, Dhātṛ is the Lord of creation (*bhuvanasya ... pati*). In 10,184.1, Dhātṛ is invoked to place an embryo in a womb. In 10,190.3, a small cosmogonic hymn, Dhātṛ “arranged, according to their proper order, sun and moon, heaven and earth, midspace and sunlight”¹⁶ (Tr. Jamison & Brereton 2014[3]:1660). From all this, it can be summarized that Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear in RS (a) three times in the plural as sacrificial priests, (b) as an epithet for Viśvakarman, Indra, and Agni, and (c) as a distinct deity connected with creation, fertility, and cosmic order.

In the Saṃhitās of *Yajur-Veda*, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ usually appear in the ritual context, invoked alongside a number of other deities. Rarely is anything more said about them. Most of the passages in which they appear are shared by *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* (=VS) of the White *Yajur-Veda* and *Taittirīya-* (=TaittS), *Maitrāyaṇi-* (=MaitS), and *Kāṭha-Saṃhitās* (=KS) of the Black *Yajur-Veda*.

Appearances of Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ in the *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* (=VS) will first be presented together with parallels in other *Yajur-Veda* Saṃhitās, after which appearances in other Saṃhitās that are not shared with VS will be briefly described.

¹² Iranian parallel=mazdā<iir. *m̥s+dhaH (Jamison & Brereton 2014[2]:136)

¹³ Dhātṛ is invoked at the end of this wedding hymn together with Mātariśvan and Deṣṭṛ to join the married couple.

¹⁴ In 10,158.3 The eye (i.e. Sūrya) is invoked to let Dhātṛ place for us (see Jamison & Brereton 2014[3]:1641).

¹⁵ RS 10,18.5

yāthāhāny anupūrvām bhāvanti yātha ṛtāva ṛtūbhīr yānti sādḥú |
yāthā nā pūrvam āparo jāhāty evā dhātā āyūṃṣi kalpayaiśām || 5 ||

Just as the days follow each upon the last, just as the seasons follow straightaway upon the seasons, so, o Ordainer, arrange their lifetimes, so that the later does not leave behind the earlier. (Tr. Jamison & Brereton 2014[3]:1400).

¹⁶ RV 10,190.3

sūryācandramāsau dhātā yathāpūrvām akalpayat |
dīvaṃ ca pṛthivīm cāntārikṣam ātho svāḥ || 3 ||

In VS, Dhātṛ appears in 13 verses¹⁷, while Vidhātṛ appears in 3 verses.¹⁸ Two verses are taken from the *R̥k-Saṃhitā*: a) RS 10,82.2, where Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear as an epithet for Viśvakarman, also appears as VS 17,27;¹⁹ b) in VS 32.10 (=RS 10,82.3ab), Vidhātṛ is an attribute of the highest Lord.²⁰ In VS 32,10, Vidhātṛ is an epithet for Agni. In most other cases, Dhātṛ is invoked alongside other gods. In VS 32,15, he is invoked alongside Varuṇa, Agni, Prajāpati, Indra, and Vāyu to grant wisdom; in VS 8,17,²¹ he is invoked with Savitr, Rāti, Prajāpati, Agni, Tvaṣṭṛ, and Viṣṇu; in VS 14,24,²² he is invoked alongside Agni and other gods of different classes; in 18,17, he is invoked alongside Mitra, Varuṇa, Maruts, and Indra (=TaittS 4,7.6.2); in VS 32,15, he is invoked to bestow wisdom (*medhā*). In three verses shared with MaitS (VS 24,5, 9 and 31),²³ different animals are assigned to Dhātṛ; in VS 25,4,²⁴ a part of sacrificial horse is assigned to Dhātṛ. Overall, it can be said that very little is said about Dhātṛ in VS, with the small exception of VS 14,28,²⁵ where he is designated as the overlord (*adhipati*) of the seven *ṛṣis*.

Dhātṛ appears more often in the *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā* (=TaittS) than in other YV Saṃhitās. Dhātṛ appears in 28 passages,²⁶ while Vidhātṛ appears in two²⁷ passages. Two verses are taken from the *R̥k-Saṃhitā* (RS 10,82.2²⁸ appears as TaittS 4,6.2.1²⁹, while RS 10,128.7 appears as

¹⁷ VS 8,17 (=ŚBr 4,4.4.9 = TaittS 1,4.44.1 = MaitS 1,3,38 = KS 4,12 = AS 7,17.3); 14,24 (=TaittS 4,3.9.1=2,8.5=KS 17,4=ŚBr 8,4.2.5); 14,28 (=TaittS 4,3.10.1; MaitS 2,8.6; KS 17,5; ŚBr 8,4.3.6); 17,26-27 (=TaittS 4,6.2.1; 5,7.4.3; KS 18,1); 18,17 (=TaittS 4,7.6.2; MaitS 2,11.5; KS 18,10); 24,5 (=MaitS 3,13.6); 24,9 (=MaitS 3,13.10); 24,31 (=MaitS 3,14.12); 25,4 (=TaittS 5,7.22.1); 32,15; 34,58; 37,12.

¹⁸ VS 17,26-27 (=TaittS 4,6.2.1); 32,10.

¹⁹ VS 17,26-27 *viśvākarmā mānasā yād vīhāyā dhātā vidhātā paramótā samḍḥk ...yó nah pitā janitā yó vidhātā yó nah sató abhy ā sāj jajāna*. (=TaittS 4,6.2.1; KS 18,1.).

²⁰ In the parallel passage RS 10,82.3ab Vidhātṛ in is an epithet of Viśvakarman.

²¹ VS 8,17 = TaittS 1,4.44.1 = MaitS 1,3,38 = KS 4,12 = AS 7,17.3 = ŚBr 4,4.4.9.

²² VS 14,24 = TaittS 4,3.9.1 = 2,8.5 = KS 17,4 = ŚBr 8,4.2.5

²³ VS 24,5 (=MaitS 3,13.6); 24,9 (=MaitS 3,13.10) and 31 (=MaitS 3,14.12.

²⁴ VS 25,4 = TaittS 5,7.22.1

²⁵ VS 14,28 = TaittS 4,3.10.1; MaitS 2,8.6; KS 17,5; ŚBr 8,4.3.6. Dhātṛ is here mentioned with Agni, Indra, Savitr, Pūṣan, Tvaṣṭṛ.

²⁶ TaittS 1,1.10.2; 1,4.44.1; 1,5.1.3.3; 1,7.11.1.6; 1,8.8.1; 2,4.5.1; 3,3.10.1; 3,3.11.2-3; 3,4.9.1-6; 4,3.9.1; 4,3.10.1; 4,3.11.2; 4,4.9.1; 4,6.2.1; 4,7.6.2; 4,7.14.3; 5,3.4.1; 5,5.12.1; 5,5.15.1; 5,5.23.1; 5,6.14.1; 5,7.4.3; 5,7.22.1.

²⁷ TaittS 4,6.2.1; 5,7.4.3.

²⁸ See VS 17,27 and KS 18,1; Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear as an epithet for Viśvakarman.

²⁹ TaittS 4,6.2.1 *viśvākarmā mānasā yād vīhāyā dhātā vidhātā paramótā samḍḥk ...yó nah pitā janitā yó vidhātā yó nah sató abhy ā sāj jajāna*. (= VS 17,26; KS 18,1.).

TaittS 4,7.14.3³⁰). In most cases, Dhātṛ appears in a larger group of gods (TaittS 1,4.44.1; TaittS 2,4.5.1; TaittS 3,3.11.2–3; 4,3.9.1; 4,4.9.1;³¹ 4,7.6.2;³² 5,7.4.3 with Vidhātṛ). Sacrificial animals for Dhātṛ are designated in 5,5.12.1, 5,5.15.1, 5,5.23.1, and 5,6.14.1, while a part of a sacrificial horse meant for Dhātṛ is specified in the context of *aśvamedha* in TaittS 5,7.22.1.³³ Dhātṛ is mentioned alongside Savitṛ and Varuṇa in the context of the *darśapūrṇamāsa* rite in TaittS 1,1.10.2 and TaittS 3,5.6.2.³⁴ Oblations are offered to Anumati, Rākā, Sinivālī, and Kuhū along with Dhātṛ in TaittS 1,8.8.1 and 3,4.9.6–7. This passage is closely related to AiBh 3,47.

More is said about Dhātṛ in only a handful passages in TaittS. Dhātṛ is the Lord of the World in TaittS 3,3.11.2–3 and TaittS 2,4.5.1;³⁵ he created the worlds and bestows a son upon the sacrifice.³⁶ He is the overlord of the seven *ṛṣis*³⁷ in TaittS 4,3.10.1.³⁸ Dhātṛ established fire with Agni as its divinity in 1,5.1.3; Dhātṛ is the year, and therefore offspring and cattle are born in the span of the year.³⁹ Dhātṛ is invoked in TaittS 4,3.11.2 for laying down *vyuṣṭi* bricks in the *agnicayana* altar.

Most of the passages in the *Maitrāyaṇi-Saṃhitā* that mention Dhātṛ are shared with VS, TaittS, and the other Saṃhitās. Some passages, however, appear only in MaitS, such as MaitS 2,7.13 (=AS 11.6.3), in which Dhātṛ is invoked alongside Varuṇa, Pūṣan, and Tvaṣṭṛ; in MaitS 2,13.22; 2,13.23 (=KS 13,15–16; AS 7,19.1), Dhātṛ is invoked to grant offspring. The most interesting passage in MaitS is 1,6.12 (=TaittBr 1,1.9.1.9), wherein Dhātṛ and Aryaman are the firstborn sons of Aditi; they are followed in successive rows by Mitra and Varuṇa, Aṃśa and Bhaga (Indra and Vivasvant are added in a closely related passage in TaittBr 1,1.9.1). The *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* (=PañcBr) 24,12 mentions eight sons of Aditi: Mitra and Varuṇa, Dhātṛ and Aryaman, Aṃśa and Bhaga, Indra and Vivasvant.

³⁰ (=KS 40,10)

³¹ =KS 34,14.

³² = KS 18,10; MaitS 2,11.5.

³³ =VS 25,4; MaitS 3,15.5.

³⁴ =TBr 3,3.10.2.

³⁵ = MaitS 4,12.6; KS 13,16.

³⁶ *dhātā dadātu no rayīm iśāno jāgatas pātih | sā naḥ pūrṇena vāvanat |*

³⁷ See ft. 24.

³⁸ TaittS 4,3.10.1 *saptābhir astuvata saptarśāyo 'srjyanta dhātādhipatir āsīt.*

³⁹ TaittS 1,5.1.3 *tām dhātādhatta téna dhātārdhnot saṃvatsaró vái dhātā tasmāt saṃvatsarámprajāḥ paśávónu prá jāyante |*

Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear in 36 verses of the *Atharva-Saṃhitā* (Ś).⁴⁰ Some verses have parallels in RS, the *Yajur-Veda* Saṃhitās, and the Brāhmaṇas. Thus, AS (Ś) 5,3.9 has parallels in RS 10,128.7; AS (Ś) 5,25.5 has parallels in RS 10,184.1 (=KS 40,9=ŚBr 14,9.4.20/BĀU 6,4.20); AS (Ś) 7,17.4 has parallels in VS 8,17 (=TaittS 1,4.44.1= MaitS 1,3.38=KS 4,12=ŚBr 4,4.4.9); AS 7,19.1 has parallels in MaitS 2,13.22–23 (=KS 13,15–16); AS 11,6.3 has parallels in MaitS 2,7.13; AS 12,2.25 has parallels in RS 10,18.5.

In many of these verses, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are invoked alongside other deities. Only those passages in which something significant is said about them will be presented here. In a number of AS (Ś) verses, Dhātṛ is associated with marriage; he is invoked to secure a husband (2,36.2; 6,60.3; 14.1.59), while he brings a bride to Sūrya in 14,2.13. In one hymn (5,25.4–5 and 10), he is associated with conception as he is invoked to plant a male child in a woman's womb (see RS 10,184.1). In other passages, he is invoked to secure prosperity (3,8.2; 7,19.1; 19,31.3) or rain (7,18.1). In 4,12.2, he is even connected to healing as he is invoked to set a broken bone. He is associated with death in two hymns; he is invoked in 8,1.15 (alongside Savitṛ, Vāyu, and Indra) to revive a deceased man, while Soma, Varuṇa, Aśvins, Yama, and Pūṣan are invoked to guard us from the death appointed by Indra, Agni, Dhātṛ, Brhaspati and Savitṛ in 19,20.1. In the funeral hymn 18,3.26, Nirṛti and Dhātṛ guard the southern side during the funeral ceremony. In 18,4.48, he is again indirectly connected to death as he is invoked to prolong one's lifetime. He appears in 13,4.3 as an epithet for Vāyu.

It is important to note AS (Ś) 10,6.21, wherein Dhātṛ arranges what exists.⁴¹ In 6,60.3, he upholds the Earth, Sky, and Sun⁴².

⁴⁰ AS (Ś) 2,36.2; 3,8.2 (=7,17.4); 3,10.10; 4,12.2; 5,3.9 (=RS 10,128.7); 5,25.4–5, 10 (=RS 10,184.1=KS 40,9=ŚBr 14,9.4.20/BĀU 6,4.20); 6,60.3; 7,17.1–4 (7,17.4=VS 8,17= TaittS 1,4.44.1= MaitS 1,3.38=KS 4,12=ŚBr 4,4.4.9); 7,18.1; 7,19.1 (=MaitS 2,13.22–23=KS 13,15–16); 8,1.15; 8,5.18; 9,7.10; 9,7.21; 10,6.21; 11,6.3 (=MaitS 2,7.13); 11,8.5, 8–9; 11,9.25; 12,2.25 (=RS 10,18.5); 13,4.3; 14,1.33–34, 59; 14,2.13; 18,3.26; 18,4.48; 19,9.12; 19,10.3; 19,20.1; 19,31.3.

⁴¹ AS (Ś) 10,6.21
taṃ dhātā praṭyamuñcata sa bhūtaṃ vyakalpayat |
tena tvam dviṣato jahi || 21 ||

⁴² AS (Ś) 6,60.3
dhātā dādihāra pṛthivīm dhātā dyām uta sūryam |
dhātāsya agruvai patim dadhātu pratikāmyam || 3 ||

It might come as a surprise that Dhātṛ appears quite rarely in the Brāhmaṇa literature. When Dhātṛ does appear, the basic patterns from the Saṃhitās are followed. Thus only eight occurrences are found in ŚBr.⁴³ ŚBr 4,4.4.9 has parallels in VS 8,17 (=TaittS 1,4.44.1= MaitS 1,3,38=KS 4,12=AS 7,17.3), while ŚBr 8,4.3.6 has parallels in VS 14,28. In ŚBr 8,4.2.5, he is invoked during the building of an *agnicayana* altar. In ŚBr 9,5.1.35–38, Dhātṛ is an epithet of Prajāpati compared to the Sacrificer:

This here is Prajāpati. Becoming embodied, he thought himself complete. Becoming established in the four cardinal directions, he places (*dadhat*) and ordains (*vidadhāt*) all of this; as he continues placing and ordaining, he is the Placer (Dhātṛ). Just the same, the Sacrificer, established in the four cardinal directions, places and ordains all of this.⁴⁴

Dhātṛ is the year in ŚBr 1,5.5.38, just as in TaittS 1,5.1.3 and TaittBr 1,7.2.1. Dhātṛ is the Sun (*sa yaḥ śā dhātāsau śā ādityāḥ*) in ŚBr 9,5.1.37, just as in AiBr 3,48 (*yaḥ sūryaḥ sa dhātā*). In ŚBr 14,1.3.22, he is invoked alongside Agni, Indra, Savitṛ, and Bṛhaspati. In ŚBr 14,9.4.20 (=BĀU [M] 6,4.20) he is invoked to place an embryo in a woman's womb (see RS 10,184.1; AV (Ś) 5,25.5; AV (P) 12,3.3d,8; KS 40,9d).

In TaittBr, Dhātṛ appears 16 times.⁴⁵ In TaittBr 1,7.2.1, Dhātṛ is the year (just as in TaittS 1,5.1.3, ŚBr 9,5.1.35–38 and MaitS 4,3.6) (*dhātré puroḍāśam dvādaśakapālam nīrvapati* (=TaittS 1,8.8.1.1) / *saṃvatsaró vai dhātā* = TaittS 1,5.1.3 = MaitS 4,3.6); 2,1.7.1 alongside many gods (Bṛhaspati, Savitṛ, etc. of different classes). In 2,2.8.4 (= 2,3.1.1= 2,3.5.6), he is invoked alongside Soma, Agni, Indra, Prajāpati. In TaittBr 3,3.10.2 = 3,3.10.2, Dhātṛ is an epithet for Agni; he is invoked in 2,7.17.2 alongside Indra, Bṛhaspati, and Savitṛ; he is invoked alongside Soma, Vāta, and Vāyu in 3,7.4.15; an oblation to Dhātṛ is mentioned in 3,8.23.3 (see TaittS 5,5.23.1); Dhātṛ is connected to Death in 3,12.9.6.9 (*mṛtyus tad abhavad dhātā*)⁴⁶.

⁴³ In ŚBr 2,3.4.14, *dhātr̥bhiḥ* denotes priests.

⁴⁴ ŚBr 9,5.1.35

etad vai prajāpatiḥ | prāpya rāddhvevāmanyata sa dikṣu pratiṣṭhāyedaṃ sarvaṃ dadhad vidadhād atiṣṭhad yad dadhad vidadhād atiṣṭhat tasmād dhātā tathavaitad yajamāno dikṣu pratiṣṭhāyedaṃ sarvaṃ dadhadvidadhattiṣṭhati.

⁴⁵ TaittBr 1,1.9.1; 1,7.2.1 (see TaittS 1,5.1.3); 2,1.7.1; 2,2.8.4; 2,3.5.6; 2,3.1.1; 2,3.5.3; 3,3.10.2; 3,3.10.2; 2,7.17.2; 3,7.4.15; 3,8.23.3 (see TaittS 5,5.23.1); 3,12.9.6.

⁴⁶ In AiBr, it seems that Dhātṛ appears only two times (3,47–48, see above). It seems that he does not appear in *Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa* and *Aitareya-Āraṇyaka*.

Dhātṛ does not play an important role in the older Upaniṣads. Dhātṛ is invoked by the teacher in *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 1,4.3 to fetch him students. Man perceives the grandeur of the Self by Dhātṛ's grace (*prasāda*) in *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* 2,20cd. The same verse appears as *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* 3,20cd and *Mahānārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad* 8,3cd, with minor variations⁴⁷. In *Maitrāyaṇīya-Upaniṣad* 6,8, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are enumerated alongside many other gods such as Rudra, Prajāpati, Hiranyagarbha, Prāṇa, Haṃsa, Śāstr, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Arka, Savitr, Indra, and Indu (van Buitenen 1962:108).

Few conclusions can be drawn about Dhātṛ from the Vedic literature. Generally, he appears 1) (in the plural) denoting sacrificial priests; 2) as an epithet for Viśvakarman, Indra, Agni, Sūrya (or Āditya), Vāyu, and Prajāpati; 3) as a distinct god, Dhātṛ is invoked alongside other deities — sometimes with gods of different classes, but usually with “agent” gods, such as Savitr and Tvaṣṭṛ, or Ādityas, such as Aryaman, Mitra, Varuṇa, Bhāga, and Aṃśa. Indra, Agni, and Soma also appear in these enumerations quite often. It should be noted that Dhātṛ appears as one of the six sons of Aditi in MaitS, and later as one of her eight sons in TaittBr and PañcBr; 4) Dhātṛ's characteristics are sometimes specified; in RS, he is connected to arrangement and proper order on a macrocosmic level (Sun, Moon, Midspace, Heaven, Earth, and Sunlight) and to the orderly sequence of life and death on the microcosmic level. On the other hand, he is also connected to creation and fertility in RS. In AS, in addition to what appears to be his key aspect of arranging and ordering, a special stress is placed on fertility and marriage, as well as death and funerals. It should be noted that Dhātṛ does not appear in any kind of fatalist context in Vedic literature.

⁴⁷ KaU 2,20cd *tam akraṭuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuprasādān mahimānam ātmanaḥ* || 20 ||
 “Without desires and free from sorrow, a man perceives by the creator's grace the grandeur of the self.” (Tr. Olivelle 1998:387)

ŚvU 3,20cd *tam akraṭuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuprasādān mahimānam īśam* || 20 ||
 “A man who, by the creator's grace, sees that desireless one as the majesty and as the Lord will be free from sorrow.” (Tr. Olivelle 1998:423)

The concept of Dhātṛ in the Avesta

In the Avesta, *dātar-* appears as an epithet⁴⁸ for Ahura Mazdā⁴⁹ and Aməša Spəntas.⁵⁰ Forms of the verb *dā*⁵¹ (<iir. *dhā<ie. *dheh₁)⁵² appear in Avestan and Old Persian texts to describe an aspect of Ahura Mazdā and his actions that were traditionally understood as creative (see Malandra 1994:165f). Thus, the epithets *daduuah-/daθuš-*⁵³ for Ahura Mazdā, consisting of the active perfect participle of *dā* and the agent noun *dātar-*, are traditionally associated with the creative aspects of Ahura Mazdā. In his thorough and detailed study of the verb *dā* in Old Avestan, Kellens (1989) concludes that the verb *dā-* does not mean “to create”, but rather denotes the placement of the constituent elements of the universe in their respective place. Thus, Ahura Mazdā does not create, but rather establishes and shapes the riches that feed living beings. According to Kellens (1989:228), Old Avestan Mazdaism did not conceive the universe as the result of creation, but rather understood the universe as having been organized by its gods out of initial chaos. In this respect, Ahura Mazdā as *dātar-* is not a creator, but a “placer” or “ordainer”. Kellens (1989:227f) discusses *Yasna* 44,3–5, in which it is asked who has set (*dāt*) the path of the sun and the stars, who put the light and the darkness in their place, and who put sleep and the

⁴⁸ In *Yašt* 1,8; 1,12 and 1,13, *dātar-* is one of the 74 names of Ahura Mazdā.

⁴⁹ Ahura and Mazdā are both epithets for the Iranian supreme deity, and they were still independent in Old Avestan texts (Skjærvø 2002:400). According to Skjærvø (ibid.), Ahura designates the ruler and engenderer aspect, while Mazdā denotes the poet-sacrificer. Traditionally, Ahura Mazdā is interpreted as “the wise Lord” or “Lord Wisdom” (see Kuiper 1976 and Thieme 1970). According to Kuiper (1976:39), the interpretation “Lord Wisdom” advocated by Thieme is baseless; Ahura was a title and the holiest name of a god whose name became lost due to taboo (the Vedic Varuṇa must not necessarily be the proper name of this god according to Kuiper [1976:40]). Mazdā can be added as a specification to the title Ahura. Thus, Kuiper (1984) translates Ahura Mazdā as “the wise Ahura.”

⁵⁰ Bartholomae 1961:727 “der schaffend hervorbringt, Schöpfer”.

⁵¹ Bartholomae 1961:714 “etwas setzen, stellen, legen”, but also “hervorbringen, produzieren” by Aməša Spəntas (*Yasna* 58,5; *Yašt* 19,52); by Ahura Mazdā *Yasna* 1,1; 12,7; 37,1; 38,4; 44,5; 45,4; 46,6; 71,10; *Yašt* 18,1; 18,3; 19,58 etc.

⁵² The Old Avestan verb *dā*, which defines some divine activities, represents a confluence of two Indo-Iranian verbs. The loss of aspiration of voiced occlusives resulted in the congruence of iir. *dhā “to put” and *dā “to give”. With the suffix *-tr for action nouns, both verbs form a word that is sometimes hard to distinguish.

⁵³ For a list of passages where *daduuah-* appears as an epithet for Ahura Mazdā, see Gray (1926:109)

day before in their place.⁵⁴ A few lines later (44,7), Ahura Mazdā is invoked as the “placer of everything” (*vīspanəm dātārəm*). Skjærvø (2002:399) follows Kellens’ interpretation in his translation of *Yasna Haptanhāiti* 37,1–2:

Thus, in this manner we are sacrificing to Ahura Mazdā, who put in (their) places both the cow and Order (who) put in (their) places both the good waters and the plants, (who) put in (their) places both the lights and the earth and all good (things in between), by his command and greatness and artistries.⁵⁵

Ahura Mazdā is frequently invoked with the formula *ahura mazda mainiio spēništa dātārə gaēdanəm astuuaitinəm ašāum* “O Ahura Mazdā, Thou most life-giving Spirit/inspiration! placer/ordainer of the worlds of living beings with bones, o sustainer of Order!” (*Yasna* 19,1; *Yašt* 1,1; 8,10; 10,73; 14,6 etc. Vd 2,1; 2,39 etc.).

The ordering and arranging aspect of Ahura Mazdā bears clear resemblance, both etymologically and semantically, to Dhātṛ in Vedic literature. This attestation in Old Avestan points strongly towards Dhātṛ’s Indo-Iranian background. The Iranian epithet **vīdātār*-corresponding to skt. *vidhātṛ* does not appear in Avesta, although the verb *dā* (<**dhā*) with the prefix *vī-* does appear in few passages (Bartholomae 1961:722). Because of this, it is quite possible that the concept of *vidhātṛ* (<*vi*√*dhā*) is of Indian origin, developed on the model of *dhātṛ* (<√*dhā*).

Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ in the Sanskrit epics

Generally, it can be said that epic concepts of Dhātṛ follow the patterns from Vedic literature. However, a new concept developed in a significant number of epic passages that is not attested in Vedic literature. This concept developed around the distinctively fatalistic notion that human destiny does not depend on human activity, but is

⁵⁴ *kasnā xvəŋh starəmcā dāt̥ aduūānəm kē yā mā uxšiiēitī nərəfsaitī θβat̥ tācīt̥ mazdā vasəmī aniiācā viduiiē ... kasnā dərətā zqm̥cā adə nabāscā auuapastōiš kə apō uruuarāscā kə vātāi duuqnaibiiāscā yaogəṭ̥ āsū kasnā vaŋhəuš mazdā dāmiš manəŋhō ... kə huuāpā raocāscā dāt̥ təmāscā kə huuāpā xvafnəmcā dāt̥ zaēmācā*

⁵⁵ *Yašt* 37,1 *iθā āṭ̥ yazamaidē ahurəm mazdaqm̥ yə gqm̥cā ašəm̥cā dāt̥ apascā dāt̥ uruuarāscā vaŋuhīš raocāscā dāt̥ būmīm̥cā vīspācā vohū.*
Yašt 37,2 *ahiiā xšaθrācā mazənācā hauuaparəhāišcā tēm aṭ̥ yasnanəm pauraatātā yazamaidē yōi gəuš hacā šiieitī.*

rather preordained. In this context, the names of the gods Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear in a number of passages in the MBh closely connected to the god Brahmā.

Before an examination of this, patterns similar to older concepts attested in Vedic literature will be reviewed. Passages featuring Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ can be roughly be divided into a few categories. The first are passages in which Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear only as a part of a group of gods, and in which nothing is specified about them.⁵⁶ In ŚBr 6,1.2.8 and 11,6.3.8, the twelve Ādityas are mentioned, but their names are not specified. By the time of MBh the list of twelve Ādityas had stabilised. The same list of the 12 sons of the goddess Aditi (Dhātṛ, Mitra, Aryaman, Indra, Varuṇa, Aṃśa, Bhaga, Vivasvant, Pūṣan, Savitr, Tvaṣṭṛ, and Viṣṇu⁵⁷) appears in MBh 1,59.15–16; 1,114.55 and 12,201.15. Curiously, in MBh 1,60.49, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are sons of the god Brahmā, while Svayambhu (Brahmā) created Dhātṛ in the beginning in 12,282.10.⁵⁸ However, it is quite clear that Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are very often used as names for the god Brahmā in MBh. Holtzman (1884:209f, ft. 6), attempting to distinguish between the usage of Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ as distinct deities and as an epithet for the god Brahmā, regarded that they appear as distinct deities in such passages, as mentioned above. Passages such as MBh 1,218.32 can be added, wherein it is written that Dhātṛ's weapon is a bow, a rare iconographic note that distinguishes him from the god Brahmā, who is usually not depicted with weapons, but with symbols of creation and knowledge, such as the four Vedas, a wooden ladle (*sruva*), a noose (*paśā*), a rosary (*akṣamālā*), and a vessel for water (*kamaṇḍalu*). In 12,15.18,⁵⁹ where it is said that people bow down before someone because of their power, but not in front of Brahmā, Dhātṛ, and Pūṣan, Dhātṛ is also clearly distinguished from Brahmā (and Pūṣan).

In some other lists of deities in MBh,⁶⁰ more or fewer gods are enumerated alongside Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ, but the general tendency is

⁵⁶ MBh 1,59.15–16; 1,114.55; 3,118.12; 4,51.11; 6,116.38; 9,44.4; 12,201.15; 13,15.31; 13,16.22; 13,17.101; 13,17.102; 13,18.47; 13,86.15; 13,135.18; 13,135.64; 13,135.115; 14,42.61.

⁵⁷ MBh 1,114.55 adds Parjanya, thus resulting in 13 Ādityas instead of 12.

⁵⁸ MBh 12,282.10ab
svayambhūr asṛjac cāgre dhātāraṃ lokapūjitaṃ |

⁵⁹ MBh 12,15.18cd
na brahmāṇaṃ na dhātāraṃ na pūṣāṇaṃ kathaṃ cana || 18 ||

⁶⁰ See MBh 3,118.21; 3,125.20; 13,86.15; 14,42.61.

to list them with Mitra, Varuṇa, Pūṣan, Savitr̥, Tvaṣṭr̥, and others, following a pattern from the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas. Dhātṛ (as a deity not connected to Brahmā) appears in lists of the 1,000 names of Keśava,⁶¹ the 1,008 names of Śiva,⁶² and the 108 names of the Sun.⁶³ Otherwise, he appears as an epithet for a king (3,183.22), Viṣṇu (1,57.86), Agni (1,22.29), the seer Agastya (3,103.5), Nārāyaṇa (12,203.21; 12,321.24), or, most frequently, for Kṛṣṇa.⁶⁴ As examples of Dhātṛ distinguished from Brahmā, Modhey (1982–1983:199) mentions MBh (BE) 7,93.27,⁶⁵ wherein Droṇa invokes Brahmā, Dhātṛ, and Vidhātṛ for Duryodhana’s protection, and MBh (BE) 9,45.23 (MBh [CE] 9,44.21), wherein both Brahmā and Dhātṛ are present at Skanda’s consecration.

The issue of Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ as epithets of Brahmā is in no way clear, as passages in which their names are directly attested as epithets for the god Brahmā are scarce, unlike the other divinities such as Kṛṣṇa, Agni, Prajāpati, etc. However, there is good reason to claim that their names indeed denote the god Brahmā in some cases. One example has been mentioned at the beginning of this paper, in which Draupadī speaks about Dhātṛ, referring to him as *svayambhu* “self-existent” and *pitāmaha* “great-grandfather” (3,31.35), common epithets for the god Brahmā. Another straightforward example is MBh 8,24.6ff, in which *pitāmaha* (Brahmā), pleased with the austerities performed by the Asuras, grants them a boon;⁶⁶ a few verses later in 8,24.30f*242,4 (left out of the Critical Edition), Dhātṛ is named as the giver of the same boon⁶⁷ (cf. Holtzman 1884:210, Modhey 1982–1983:199). One other

⁶¹ MBh 13,135.18; 64; 115.

⁶² MBh 13,17.101–102.

⁶³ MBh 3,3.18

⁶⁴ MBh 3,187.4; 6; 53; 5,69.6; 05,149.36; 06,30.9; 6,31.17a; 6,32.33; 6,62.32c; 13,15.31; 13,16.22.

⁶⁵ In MBh(CE) 7,69.41 Brahmā is invoked and in 46 Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are invoked.

⁶⁶ MBh 8,24.6

*damena tapasā caiva niyamena ca pārthiva |
eṣāṃ pitāmahaḥ prīto varadaḥ pradadau varān || 6 ||*

⁶⁷ MBh 8,24.30f*242,3–5

*nāśakat tāny abhedyāni yadā bhettuṃ puraṃdaraḥ
purāṇi varadattāni dhātṛā tena narādhipa
tadā bhītaḥ surapatir muktṛvā tāni purāṇy atha*

When the Sacker of cities could not destroy those indestructible cities that had been granted a boon by the creator, ruler of men, the lord of the gods was terrified. (Tr. Bowles 2006:315)

clear example not identified by Holtzman is 12,224, in which Vyāsa describes creation. From 12,224.31 on, Brahmā awakens and creates (*srjate*) the world (*jagat*). In 12,224.48–49, Brahmā is called Dhātṛ when he appoints different qualities to beings according to their earlier deeds. In 12,327.84, Hayaśiras addresses Brahmā as Dhātṛ “Placer” of all beings,⁶⁸ while Vyāsa adds that Brahmā is Dhātṛ, object of meditation (*dheya*), in vs. 89b.

As such straightforward examples are quite rare, Holzman (1884:210) shows a correspondence between the activities of Brahmā and (Vi-)Dhātṛ through verbal expression. The participle *vihita* “ordained, arranged”, which is used for some of the most important ordinances of Dhātṛ, is used predicatively with different names of Brahmā, for instance: *vihitāni svayambhuvā* “ordained by the Self-Existent” (1,60.14); *vihito brahmaṇā* “ordained by the Brahmā” (3,218.43); *vihitā brahmaṇā* (12,181.15); *pitāmahena... vihito* “ordained by the Grandfather” (3,168.21). Parallel expressions appear using Dhātṛ instead of Brahmā: *vihito ... dhātrā dharmah* “law ordained by the Placer” (3,34.53); *dhātrā vidhir yo vihitaḥ* “rule ordained by the Placer” (3,26.13); and Vidhātṛ: *vidhātṛvihitaṃ* “ordained by Vidhātṛ” (1,1.187; 1,99.29); *vihitaṃ vidhātrā* “ordained by Vidhātṛ” (3,26.15). The case is similar with some other forms of the verb *vi/dhā*. Dhātṛ appears in MBh 1,84.9: “...what the Placer has ordained (*vidadhāti*) for me will surely befall me in this world”⁶⁹ and Brahmā (Nārada describes Brahmā’s hall) in MBh 2,11.13: “...the Grandfather of the world ordains (*vidadhat*) the worlds...”⁷⁰. The case is also the same with some other participles in predicative function, such as *nirdiṣṭa* “decreed”. Brahmā thus appears in MBh 3,170.12: “But Brahmā has of old decreed (*nirdiṣṭa*) that a human would be their death”;⁷¹ while Dhātṛ appears in MBh 9,64.22: “It has been said that the Placer has decreed (*nirdiṣṭa*)

⁶⁸ MBh 12,327.84cd

dhātā tvam sarvabhūtānām tvam prabhur jagato guruḥ || 84 ||

⁶⁹ MBh 1,84.9cd

dhātā yathā mām vidadhāti loke; dhruvam tathāham bhaviteti matvā || 9 ||

⁷⁰ MBh 2,11.13

*tasyām sa bhagavān āste vidadhad devamāyayā |
svayam eko 'niṣaṃ rājaṃ lokāṃ lokapitāmahāḥ || 13 ||*

⁷¹ Tr. by van Buitenen 1983:549.

MBh 3,170.12ef

mānuṣo mṛtyur eteṣāṃ nirdiṣṭo brahmaṇā purā || 12 ||

such a law for mortals.”⁷² The participle *diṣṭa*⁷³ “appointed, assigned” is also used predicatively with Dhātṛ (2,51.25; 2,52.14; 5,39.1; 5,71.4; 9,58.19; 12,20.10) and Brahmā (3,169.31).⁷⁴ A common participle used as a predicate with both Dhātṛ and Brahmā is *sṛṣṭa* “discharged, created”: “Dhātṛ created riches for sacrifice” (12,20.10a);⁷⁵ “Dhātṛ created you, Kaunteya” (12,27.32)⁷⁶; “Vidhātṛ created the all-snatching Death” (3,46.18);⁷⁷ “Dhātṛ created it earlier” (6,72.26);⁷⁸ see also 9,30.34; 12,66.20; 12,92.11; 12,227.16; 13,14.58; 13,35.4; 13,129.2. Brahmā is associated with *sṛṣṭa* and other forms of the verb √*sṛj* in numerous passages in MBh; “The Self-Existent created (Śrī) as a wife to the gods” (1,189.49);⁷⁹ “You were the first to be created by Brahmā” (3,207.13);⁸⁰ “...created the world with wisdom” 12,224.33,⁸¹ etc.⁸²

Hopkins (1915:192) mentions a few passages in which he considers Dhātṛ to be Brahmā. In MBh 3,20.24, Dhātṛ ordains that Śālva will be killed by Kṛṣṇa.⁸³ However, to the best of this author’s knowledge, only

⁷² MBh 9,64.22ab

īdṛṣo martyadharmo 'yaṃ dhātrā nirdiṣṭa ucyate |

In this passage Duryodhana stricken by Bhīma laments his condition.

⁷³ Participle *diṣṭa* appears as substantive in neutrum meaning “fate”. See ft. 86.

⁷⁴ But also with Mahādeva (Śiva): MBh 3,104.22ab *mahādevena diṣṭam te putrajanma narādhipa |*

“The Great God has disposed the birth of your sons in this manner” (Tr. van Buitenen 1983:425)

⁷⁵ MBh 12,20.10ab

yajñāya sṛṣṭāni dhanāni dhātrā; yaṣṭādiṣṭaḥ puruṣo rakṣitā ca |

⁷⁶ MBh 12,27.32ab

yathā sṛṣṭo 'si kaunteya dhātrā karmasu tat kuru |

⁷⁷ See ft. 81.

⁷⁸ MBh 6,72.26c *purā dhātrā yathā sṛṣṭam...*

⁷⁹ MBh 1,189.49c

sṛṣṭā svayaṃ devapatnī svayambhuvā ...

⁸⁰ MBh 3,207.13ab

tvam agne prathamah sṛṣṭo brahmaṇā timirāpahaḥ |

⁸¹ MBh 12,224.33ab

ahar mukhe vibuddhaḥ san sṛjate vidyayā jagat |

⁸² For Brahmā as a creator see Hopkins 1915:198–202; Bailey 1983:85–127 (see also Bailey for further literature).

⁸³ MBh 3,20.24

kṛṣṇaḥ saṃkalpito dhātrā tan na mithyā bhaved iti |

mṛtyur asya mahābāho raṇe devakinandanah || 24 ||

“Champion, you may not kill Śālva under any condition! Withdraw the arrow, for he is not to be slain by you. Not a man in battle is safe from this arrow, but, strong-armed warrior, the Placer has ordained that Devakī’s son Kṛṣṇa is to be his death, and that may not be gainsaid” (Tr. van Buitenen 1983:261)

Dhātṛ appears in this episode, with no direct statement that Brahmā is Dhātṛ. The second is MBh (BE) 3,173.8, in which Svayambhu appears and gives a boon to Daityas, but only Svayambhu appears in this episode, not Dhātṛ.

Dhatṛ appears in MBh in the non-fatalistic sense in a number of passages in which the same characteristics from Vedic literature are followed. In MBh 1,69.30, a voice from the sky tells Duḥṣanta that he is a placer (*dhātṛ*) who planted a child in Śakuntalā's womb.⁸⁴ This bears resemblance to AS (Ś) 5,25.4–5 and 10, in which Dhātṛ is invoked to plant a male child in a woman's womb. In some passages, Dhātṛ is the one who establishes *dharma* (3,34.53; 9,30.34; 12,66.20).⁸⁵ In 9,30.34, Yudhiṣṭhira scolds Duryodhana, who took shelter after battle, and exclaims that *dharma* ordained by Dhātṛ for warriors is bravery. Dhātṛ also ordains the duties of the twice-born according to their social status (13,35.4).⁸⁶ In 12,15.35, Dhātṛ is credited with the creation of punishment (*daṇḍa*), which is important for maintaining law and order and protecting *dharma* and the *varṇāśrama* system. Dhātṛ also created the *brāhmaṇas*, who are regarded as gods among mortals for saving the worlds in 13,129.2. Dhātṛ is associated with the formation of the *kṣatriya* social class in 2,19.48, where it is said that he has put his own might in the arms of the *kṣatriyas*.⁸⁷

He is also associated with Death (Yama) in 12,227.16, where it is said that he creates beings and drags them to Yama's abode;⁸⁸ in 3,46.18,

⁸⁴ MBh 1,69.30cd
tvaṃ cāsyā dhātā garbhasya satyam āha śakuntalā || 30 || Repeated in 1,69.30.

⁸⁵ MBh 3,34.53cd
eṣa te vihito rājan dhātṛā dharmāḥ sanātanaḥ || 53 ||
MBh 12,66.20ab
yaḥ sthitaḥ puruṣo dharme dhātṛā sṛṣṭe yathārthavat |
MBh 9,30.34ab
eṣa te prathamo dharmāḥ sṛṣṭo dhātṛā mahātmanā |

⁸⁶ MBh 13,35.4
atra gāthā brahmagītāḥ kīrtayanti purāvidāḥ |
sṛṣṭvā dvijātīn dhātā hi yathāpūrvaṃ samādadhāt || 4 ||

⁸⁷ In MBh 10,3.18 Prajāpati (Brahmā?) ordained (*vidhāya*) tasks for four social classes. He also assigned (*samādhatta*) different qualities to each them.

⁸⁸ MBh 12,227.16cd
dhātṛā sṛṣṭāni bhūtāni kṛṣyante yamasādanam || 16 ||
See also 12,230.20ab
dhātedaṃ prabhavasthānaṃ bhūtānāṃ saṃyamo yamaḥ |

Vidhātṛ is the creator of all-snatching death.⁸⁹ Dhātṛ's connection to death is not new, as it is already attested in the funeral hymn RS 10,18.5, in which he arranges the natural sequence by which the older die before the younger; see also AS (Ś) 8,1.15; 19,20.1 and TaittBr 3,12.9.6.

In 5,103.4 Garuḍa complains to Indra that he interfered in the natural process of living and dying set by Dhātṛ when he granted prolonged life to the serpent Sumukha, whom Garuḍa wanted to eat and use to feed his family when he dies. Indra intervened and disturbed the process ordained by Dhātṛ, which is understood as natural. Dhātṛ is connected with the distribution of food in 12,277.18, where he ordains (*vihīta*) food for everyone on earth.⁹⁰

In MBh 12,251.22, Dhātṛ even commences the practice of moneylending⁹¹ in order to harmonize social differences in society; a few verses later, in 12,251.25, Vidhātṛ is said to have ordained signs of *dharma* and *adharmā* in order to ensure welfare in the world (*lokasamgraha*).

In a number of passages, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are associated with the beauty of women: Dhātṛ creates Tapatī's beauty in 1,160.30; Vidhātṛ is responsible for Draupadī's beauty in 1,182.13; Dhātṛ places a birthmark between Damayantī's eyebrows as a sign of good fortune in 3,66.6.

In 12,329.27, Dhātṛ makes a thunderbolt (*vajra*) for Indra out of the bones of Dadhīca (In RS 1,32, Tvaṣṭṛ makes the *vajra* for Indra!). In chapter 13,38.30, characterized by misogyny, Dhātṛ is casually mentioned as the ordainer of worlds, from whom five great elements originated.

Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are closely associated with fatalistic doctrines in many passages in MBh. Such passages will be examined in the following paragraphs.

The first time Vidhātṛ appears in a fatalistic context is at the beginning, in MBh 1,1.187, in which Saṃjaya consoles grief-stricken King Dhṛtarāṣṭra after the loss of his sons. Vidhātṛ appears here as a deity that ordains one's destiny, being, and happiness. Also, the word *kāla* ("Time") appears in its fatalistic aspect in the same verse.

⁸⁹ MBh 3,46.18cd
sṛṣṭo 'ntakaḥ sarvaharo vidhātrā; bhaved yathā tadvad apāraṇīyaḥ || 18 ||

⁹⁰ MBh 12,277.18ab
dhātrā vihītabhaksyāṇi sarvabhūtāni medinīm |

⁹¹ MBh 12,251.22cd
etasmāt kāraṇād dhātrā kusīdam sampravartitam || 22 ||

No one steps beyond the path the Ordainer has ordained. All this is rooted in Time to be or not to be, to be happy or not to be happy. Time ripens the creatures. Time rots them. And Time again puts out the Time that burns down the creatures. (Tr. Buitenen 1983:30)⁹²

This passage appears as a fine example of fatalistic *kālavāda* in the context of what Vassilkov calls *heroic didactics*. Another comparable example can be found in the *Śāntiparvan* (12,26), in which Vyāsa consoles grieving Yudhiṣṭhira, telling him not to grieve because man's destiny is ordained by Vidhātṛ, and that man achieves everything only through Time (*kāla*). It is interesting to note Vyāsa's words that man will not attain his purpose through intelligence and study of the scripture if the Time is not ripe.⁹³

In 1,84.7, Yayāti, whom Indra casts from heaven, sings a praise to Fate (*daiva*),⁹⁴ which is superior to human effort:

Good luck or ill luck, if man will find it. It is fate that found it, not his own doing.

So understanding that fate is stronger one does not get overly happy or upset. (Tr. Buitenen 1983:30)⁹⁵

In this passage, it should be noted that (a) Yayāti clearly extols Fate over human effort, and (b) this fatalistic notion is set within the frame of spiritual didactics — predeterminism actually humbles man and detaches him from worldly things, since his actions do not control his

⁹² MBh 1,1.187

vidhātṛvihitam mārḡam na kaś cid ativartate |
kālamūlam idaṃ sarvaṃ bhāvābhāvau sukhāsukhe || 187 ||
kālaḥ pacati bhūtāni kālaḥ saṃharati prajāḥ |
nirdahantaṃ prajāḥ kālaḥ kālaḥ śamayate punaḥ || 188 ||

⁹³ MBh 12,26.5cd–6ab

paryāyayogād vihitam vidhātṛā; kālena sarvaṃ labhate manuṣyaḥ || 5 ||
na buddhiśāstrādhyayanena śakyaṃ; prāptuṃ viśeṣair manuṣjair akāle |

⁹⁴ Usual terms for Fate in MBh, besides *kāla* "time", are *diṣṭa*, *daiva*, *vidhi*, *vidhāna*, and *vihita*. For a discussion on these terms, see Schrader (1902: 21–23) and Bailey (1983: 141–159). Schrader also discusses other terms like *bhavitavya*, *bhāvya*, *haṭha*, and *bhagadheya*. For a reflection on terms *diṣṭa* and *daiva* in the context of the dice game (*dyūta*), see Gönc-Moačanin (2005:159–162).

⁹⁵ MBh 1,84.7

sukhaṃ hi jantur yadi vāpi duḥkhaṃ daivādhiṇaṃ vindati nātmaśaktyā |
tasmād diṣṭaṃ balavan manyamāno na saṃjvaren nāpi hr̥ṣyet kadā cit || 7 ||

fortune. This motif will be predominant in fatalistic passages framed within the didactic part of the epics in later books. A few verses later, in 1,84.9, Dhātṛ is introduced as a deity that presides over ones turn of events in this fatalist context:

In danger, Aṣṭaka, I never falter, and no anxiety hurts my mind,
I know that that is sure to befall me what the Disposer (Dhātṛ) has
set for me. (Tr. Buitenen 1983:30)⁹⁶

In these examples, Dhātṛ does not appear to be connected directly to the god Brahmā. He is a deity presiding over personal destiny, and one can only adopt an attitude of indifference before his power in the sense of cultivating dispassion.

The next episode in which Dhātṛ plays even a more significant role is the dice game (*dyūta*) in the *Sabhāparvan*. Fatalistic notions appear quite often in the *Dyūtaparvan*,⁹⁷ and it is no wonder that Dhātṛ is found there. Renate Söhnen-Thieme (1999:142) summarizes the role of fate⁹⁸ in the dice game and its consequences: “Thus it is fate that demands that the game of dice takes place, fate that will culminate in the great battle, no doubt; and Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira has to succumb to it.” Fatalist notions are frequently uttered by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who often invokes irreversible destiny to justify his decision to permit Duryodhana’s plan for the dice game.⁹⁹ In MBh 2,51.25 Dhṛtarāṣṭra exclaims:

No quarrel bothers me, Steward, here,
For otherwise fate would run counter to dicing.
This world submits to the Placer’s design,
And thus does the world run, not by itself. (Tr. Buitenen 1983:124)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ MBh 1,84.9

*bhaye na muhyāmy aṣṭakāhaṃ kadā cit; saṃtāpo me mānaso nāsti kaś cit |
dhātā yathā māṃ vidadhāti loke; dhruvaṃ tathāhaṃ bhaviteti matvā || 9 ||*

⁹⁷ For the structure and text-history of the *Dyūtaparvan*, see Söhnen-Thieme (1999).

⁹⁸ For the role of fate in the dice game and a comprehensive bibliography regarding *dyūta* and *diṣṭa/daiva*, see Gönc-Moačanin (2005:159–162).

⁹⁹ Cf. Lipner (1994:180), who claims that, besides Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira also uses fate only as a cover-up for his passion in gambling.

¹⁰⁰ MBh 2,51.25

*neha kṣattah kalahas tapsyate māṃ; na ced daivaṃ pratilomaṃ bhaviṣyat |
dhātṛ tu diṣṭasya vaśe kiledaṃ; sarvaṃ jagac ceṣṭati na svatantram || 25 ||*

Dhṛtarāṣṭra's phrase *dhātrā tu diṣṭasya vaśe kiledaṃ* from 2,51.25 ("this [world] submits to Dhātṛ's design") is repeated by Yudhiṣṭhira in 2,52.14¹⁰¹ when he leaves for Hastināpura for the dice game, exclaiming that Fate (*daiva*) takes away one's reason and that man obeys Dhātṛ's authority as if bound with a noose.¹⁰² Dhātṛ is again invoked by Yudhiṣṭhira in MBh 2,52.18, another fateful moment when the Pāṇḍavas return for the second game of dice:

It is at the disposing of the Placer that creatures find good or ill.

There is no averting of either, if we must play again. (Tr. van Buitenen 1983:158)¹⁰³.

According to Söhnen-Thieme (1999:142), chapters 51 and 52, where fatalistic notions appear, contain the highest percentage of *pādas* typical of older, *triṣṭubh* metre; it is quite likely that such passages may go back to the fairly older time of metrical Upaniṣads. These *triṣṭubhs*, which contain fatalist notions and Dhātṛ's name, may present remnants of an older version of the narrative that has been amalgamated or substituted by the *anuṣṭubh* narrative (Söhnen-Thieme 1999:152).

From MBh 3,31 to 3,37 a discourse takes place between Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira (referenced to at the beginning of this paper) in which Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ are often mentioned (Dhātṛ 18 times and Vidhātṛ 3 times). At the beginning, Dhātṛ appears in a strict fatalist sense – man is not independent in his actions, but rather Dhātṛ determines everything. He sets down everything for the creatures, happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and sorrow (3,31.21); man follows Dhātṛ's command like a pearl strung on a string, like a bull held by its nose ring (3,31.25); creatures fall before his power like straw blown away by

¹⁰¹ MBh 2,52.14

*mahābhayāḥ kitavāḥ samniviṣṭā; māyopadhā devitāro 'tra santi |
dhātrā tu diṣṭasya vaśe kiledaṃ; nādevanaṃ kitavair adya tair me || 14 ||*

Most dangerous gamblers have been collected,

Who are sure to play with wizard tricks.

But this world obeys the Placer's design -

I do not refuse now to play with those gamblers. (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:126)

¹⁰² MBh 2,52.18

*daivaṃ prajñāṃ tu muṣṇāti tejaś cakṣur ivāpatat |
dhātuś ca vaśam anveti pāsair iva naraḥ sitaḥ || 18 ||*

¹⁰³ MBh 2,67.3

*dhātur niyogād bhūtāni prāpnuvanti śubhāśubham |
na nivṛttis tayor asti devitavyaṃ punar yadi || 3 ||*

the wind (3,31.28); the body is only his tool (3,31.30). Man is not independent in his action, he is tossed around like a tree trunk in a river (3,31.26). At the end of 3,31, Draupadī reviles Dhātṛ for allowing the outrages that befell her and Pāṇḍavas at the hand of Kauravas. In his answer (3,32), Yudhiṣṭhira extols *dharma*, warns Draupadī that what she is saying is heresy (*nāstikya*), and that she should not revile Dhātṛ and *dharma* (3,32.14). He exclaims that *dharma* always bears fruit, and that Dhātṛ distributes fruit according to man's actions:

No, knowing that the Placer gives the rewards when the weal is assured, they have always practiced the Law, Kṛṣṇā, for that is the eternal Law. This Law bears fruit; Law is never said to be fruitless; for we see that learning and austerity also bear fruit. (Tr. Van Buitenen 1983:283)¹⁰⁴

Yudhiṣṭhira's speech is undoubtedly directed against fatalism, which he regards as heresy. Draupadī soon calms down and assents to Yudhiṣṭhira. In 3,33.20, Draupadī says:

When a man does anything, whether good or bad, know that it was ordained by the Placer, arising as the fruit of acts done before. (Tr. van Buitenen 1983:20)¹⁰⁵

This passage is important because Dhātṛ no longer controls one's destiny, but is rather the one who regulates the law of the proper distribution of the fruit of action. Draupadī strongly condemns fatalism in 3,33.12, claiming that he who believes that everything in the world is fate or chance is an outcast (*apasāda*); then she praises action.¹⁰⁶ With the words *namo dhātṛe vidhātṛe ca* "Homage to Placer and Ordainer" (3,38.25), she pays her respect by forsaking her heresy.

¹⁰⁴ MBh 3,32.28

*phaladaṃ tv iha vijñāya dhātāraṃ śreyasi dhruve |
dharmam te hy ācaran kṛṣṇe tad dhi dharmasanātanam || 28 ||*

¹⁰⁵ MBh 3,33.20

*yad dhy ayam puruṣaḥ kiṃ cit kurute vai śubhāsubham |
tad dhātṛvihitaṃ vidhi pūrvakarmaphalodayam || 20 ||*

¹⁰⁶ MBh 3,33.11

*yaś ca diṣṭaparo loke yaś cāyam haṭhavādakaḥ |
ubhāv apasādāv etau karmabuddhiḥ praśasyate || 11 ||*

"The man who believes that everything in the world is fate and the one who professes that it is chance are both apostate; it is the spirit to act that is extolled" (Tr. van Buitenen 1983:284).

The idea that Dhātṛ ordains man's destiny according to his past deeds appears in some other passages in MBh as well. In a discourse between the *brāhmaṇa* Kauśika and a hunter (3,198),¹⁰⁷ the hunter exclaims that what he does for his living is terrible, but that he is only following the work Dhātṛ has ordained for him.¹⁰⁸ However, it is important to note that this is not ordained by Dhātṛ's whimsical will, but rather by the hunter's past deeds:

No doubt, my living is loathsome, but the Ordinance of our previous deeds is powerful and hard to pass by, brahmin. This is the resultant evil of the evil I did before... (Tr. van Buitenen 1981:623)¹⁰⁹

In 12,224.48–49, Dhātṛ appoints different pairs of qualities such as violence-nonviolence, mildness-cruelty, *dharma-adharma*, and truth-falsehood to beings on account of their previous deeds. In 12,277.18, in which it is said that Dhātṛ ordained food, it is also said that the fruit is actually determined by people's deeds. In these passages, Dhātṛ is responsible for the rightful distribution of the fruit of action, i.e. for the functioning of the law of *karman*.

Dhātṛ appears quite frequently in the MBh in the strict fatalistic sense in which man's actions do not determine his destiny, especially later in the *Śāntiparvan*. In 4,19, Draupadī laments her position to Bhīma and exclaims that she must have done something to displease Dhātṛ (4,19.13).¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that 12,105.30 states that evil-minded people blame Dhātṛ when deprived of their fortunes.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed discussion on this discourse, see Hill 2001:16–21. Hill (2001:21) observes that this discourse, although introducing the idea that final escape from *karman* can be achieved only through escaping from the cycle of birth and death, still advocates the observance of *dharma* in this world and those duties prescribed by the *varṇāśrama* system.

¹⁰⁸ MBh 3,198.20ab

dhātṛā tu vihitam pūrvam karma svam pālayāmy aham |

¹⁰⁹ MBh 3,199.1cd–2

yad aham hy ācare karma ghoram etad asaṃśayam || 1 ||
vidhis tu balavān brahman dustaram hi purākṛtam |
purākṛtasya pāpasya karmadoṣo bhavaty ayam || 2 ||

¹¹⁰ MBh 4,19.13ab

nūnam hi bālayā dhātur mayā vai vipriyam kṛtam |

¹¹¹ MBh 12,105.30

purastād bhūtapūrvatvād dhīnabhāgyo hi durmatih |
dhātāram garhate nityam labdhārthhāmś ca na mṛṣyate || 30 ||

In the *Udyogaparvan* 5,39.1, the phrase *dhātrā tu diṣṭasya vaśe kilāyaṃ* appears for the third time, and Dhātṛ appears in a fatalistic passage in 5,71.4 directly connected to warrior ethics, in which it is said that “victory or destruction on the battlefield has been ordained eternally by Dhātṛ”.¹¹² Dhṛtarāṣṭra admires his army in 6,72, and exclaims that if it is to be destroyed, it can only be through Fate (*diṣṭa*); he invokes Dhātṛ again in 6,72.26, comforting himself by saying that what Dhātṛ created (*sr̥ṣṭa*) cannot be averted.¹¹³ It is worth noting that Saṃjaya exclaims that Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s own mistakes actually brought this war in the next verse (6,73.1). The next passage in which Dhātṛ appears three times is concerned with Śikhaṇḍin(i), where Bhīṣma exclaims that Dhātṛ is the one who made Śikhaṇḍinī a woman (6,94.17; 6,104.41), but that she became a man through Fate (*daiva*) (6,108.18).

In 7,118.41, soldiers commenting on Sātyaki’s unlawful killing of Bhūriśravas say that his killing was ordained (*vihita*) by Dhātṛ, and that it is not Sātyaki’s fault. This is comparable to MBh 3,20.24, in which Dhātṛ ordains that Śālva will be killed by Kṛṣṇa. It is no wonder to hear such exclamations when Dhātṛ (alongside Indra, Agni, Bṛhaspati, and Savitr) appoints (*nyadhuh*) the time of someone’s death in AS (Ś) 19,20.1. It should be also emphasized that fatalism in Sātyaki’s case again serves as justification for a hero’s doubtful behaviour. In 9,58.19, Yudhiṣṭhira laments the tragic consequences of Duryodhana’s acts and exclaims that “It has surely been ordained by the powerful, great-souled Dhātṛ that we wish to do you harm and that you wish to do us harm.”¹¹⁴

Dhātṛ is mentioned in a conversation between Indra and Śrī, who has just departed from the demon Bali’s body. This dialogue is set amidst a group of dialogues between Indra and the demons Prahlāda, Bali, and Namuci, all of whom preach fatalistic doctrines. In 12,218.10, Śrī explains the reason for his leaving Bali’s body; neither Dhātṛ nor Vidhātṛ control her, but rather time (*kāla*) elapsed. In the next dialogue in 12,219, the demon Namuci, like Bali, lost his splendour (*śrī*) due to

¹¹² MBh 5,71.4ab

jayo vadho vā saṃgrāme dhātrā diṣṭaḥ sanātanaḥ |

¹¹³ MBh 6,72.26

*atha vā bhāvyaṃ evaṃ hi saṃjayaitena sarvathā |
purā dhātrā yathā sr̥ṣṭaṃ tat tathā na tad anyathā || 26 ||*

¹¹⁴ MBh 9,58.19

*nūnam etad balavatā dhātrādiṣṭaṃ mahātmanā |
yad vayaṃ tvāṃ jighāṃsāmas tvāṃ cāsmān kuruṣattama || 19 ||*

Fate. It is interesting to note verse 12,219.20, in which Namuci says that a mortal man cannot obtain that which is unobtainable even through the power of the Vedic mantras, wisdom, or any human exertion (*pauruṣa*).¹¹⁵ Namuci also mentions Dhātṛ in 12,219.11: “Whatever Dhātṛ decides over and over again, there a being dwells, not wherever it wishes.”¹¹⁶ Several verses later (12,219.21), Namuci explains that he lost his splendour because Dhātṛ ordained it (*vidadhuh*) in ancient times. Namuci expounds the view that Fate gives or takes away regardless of human actions. There is no mention of good or bad action determining the quality of one’s next life. When Namuci says in 12,219.17 that “whatever condition befalls one, one should remain calm without suffering pain”¹¹⁷, it becomes understandable that he preaches fatalism as a kind of spiritual didactics that helps reach equanimity of mind towards all twists of fate, quite the same as in Yayāti’s speech in MBh 1,84. Dhātṛ ordains what ought to happen; there is no reason to lament, for man is not an agent of his own deeds.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Dhātṛ appears only six times, while Vidhātṛ appears three times. In 1,48.14, it is said that Ahalyā is as beautiful as if Dhātṛ created her. In 2,22.2, he is enumerated with Pūṣan, Bhaga, and Aryaman; the shrines of Brahmā, Agni, Viṣṇu, Mahendra, Vivasvant, Soma, Bhaga, Kubera, Dhātṛ, Vidhātṛ, and Vāyu are mentioned in 3,11.18, while he is mentioned as a son of Aditi in 2,86.21. He is mentioned in a sense resembling instances of fatalistic notions in the MBh in 7,47.3, in which Sītā laments after being banished that Dhātṛ created her body only for it to suffer miseries.¹¹⁸ These accounts are quite consistent with accounts in other Sanskrit literature; Dhātṛ is enumerated alongside the other Ādityas, he is Aditi’s son, he created the beauty of woman, and he is blamed for calamities.

¹¹⁵ MBh 12,219.20

*na mantrabalavīryeṇa praññayā pauruṣeṇa vā |
alabhyam labhate martyas tatra kā paridevanā || 20 ||*

¹¹⁶ MBh 12,219.11

*yatra yatraiva saṃyunkte dhātā garbham punaḥ punaḥ |
tatra tatraiva vasati na yatra svayam icchati || 11 ||*

¹¹⁷ MBh 12,219.17ab

yām yām avasthām puruṣo 'dhigacchet; tasyām rametāparitapyamānaḥ |

¹¹⁸ Rm 7,47.3

*māmikeyam tanur nūnam sṛṣṭā duḥkhāya lakṣmaṇa |
dhātṛā yasyās tathā me 'dya duḥkhamūrṭiḥ pradṛṣyate || 3 ||*

Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the material presented in this paper, a few conclusions will be proposed here. Firstly, from the *Ṛk-Saṃhitā* onwards, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear both as epithets for or aspects of different gods (Viśvakarman, Indra, Agni, Sūrya, Vāyu, and Prajāpati) and as distinct deities. In Avesta, *dātar-* denotes the ordaining aspect of Ahura Mazdā (and Aməša Spəntas); furthermore, a number of Ahura Mazdā's activities that are traditionally regarded as creative are described with the verb *dā-* (<**dhā*). According to Kellens (1989), the verb *dā-* in Old Avestan texts means “to place, to set up”. This divine aspect or epithet that ordains the universe is comparable to accounts in RS in which Dhātṛ arranges the orderly sequence of life and death (RS 10,18.5), or in which he places the Sun and Moon, heaven and earth, midspace and sunlight in their proper order (RS 10,190.3). Ahura Mazdā sets the path of the sun and that of the stars in *Yasna* 44,3–5. Dhātṛ arranges what exists in AS (Ś) 10,6.21, and he upholds the Earth, Sky, and Sun in AS (Ś) 6,60.3. Verbal correspondence (skt. *dhā* and av. *dā* < iir. **dhā*) and correspondence in meaning and function speak in favour of the Indo-Iranian background of the concept of *dhātṛ*. As no epithet **vidātar-* is found on the Iranian side, it is possible that the concept of *vidhātṛ* developed only on the Indian side following the model of *dhā*>*dhātṛ*. The fact that Dhātṛ appears much more often than Vidhātṛ and their synonymous appearance can be added as an argument for the assumption that *vidhātṛ* might have developed later on the Indian subcontinent.

Other functions also appeared by the time of RS and the later *Saṃhitās*, such as the conception of a child (“placing” embryo in the womb). In AS, he is further associated with marriage (securing a husband), rain, prosperity, and health. In many passages in Vedic literature, Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear alongside other gods, usually “agent gods” like Savitṛ and Tvaṣṭṛ or the Ādityas Aryaman, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aṃśa, Bhaga, Indra, and Vivasvant. Dhātṛ is referred to as a son of Aditi at least from *Maitrāyaṇi-Saṃhitā* onwards. The process of stabilizing the number of the 12 Ādityas, the sons of Aditi, appears to have been completed and systematized by the time of the epics.

Most of Dhātṛ's characteristics from Vedic literature are maintained in the epics, although he appears in a new, fatalist context in the *Mahābhārata*. Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ appear as gods directly associated with a fatalist world-view. In this fatalistic context, they appear to be connected to Brahmā, although Draupadī's discourse with Yudhiṣṭhira

in 3.31–33 is the only fatalistic passage in which Dhātṛ is directly connected to the god Brahmā. Nevertheless, the question arises as to how Dhātṛ was identified with Brahmā. In Indo-Iranian prehistory, Dhātṛ (iir. **dhaHtar*) was an aspect of or epithet for the highest Lord; Iranian evidence (*dātar* as an epithet of Ahura Mazda) points towards the Indo-Iranian *Asura,¹¹⁹ one of the names of the highest Lord whose name is not preserved.¹²⁰ By the time of the Sanskrit epics, Dhātṛ's ordaining characteristics were mixed with the creative characteristic of gods like Viśvakarman, Tvaṣṭṛ, and Prajāpati; in MBh, Dhātṛ's actions are expressed with the verb √*srj* "to emit, discharge, create", while in RS and AS the verb √*kṛp* "to be well ordered, regulated" is used (RV 10,18.5; 10,190.3; AV[Ś] 10,6.21). The verb *vi*√*dhā* "to ordain, arrange" is used in the Brāhmaṇas (ŚBr 9,5.1.35) and frequently in the epics. According to Ježić's study of the transfer of divine attributes (1987:99; 1989–90:173), Tvaṣṭṛ developed out of iir. *Asura, who developed out of the Indo-European supreme divinity. The same divine attributes were taken on by the creator God Prajāpati in the era of the Brāhmaṇas and by the three great gods in the epics. The god Brahmā in the epics, according to Ježić's table (1989–90:167), was the successor to the divine attributes of the supreme deity. This helps provide an understanding of how Dhātṛ became identified with the god Brahmā in the epics, because av. *dātar-* is an ordaining aspect of Ahura Mazda, who developed out of iir. *Asura, while Brahmā, according to Ježić, inherited attributes of an old supreme divinity out of whom iir. *Asura developed. In the epics, in addition to his ordaining and arranging role, Dhātṛ took on a creative role and became intertwined with Brahmā, who also took characteristics of older creator deities like Viśvakarman (with whom he was identified in RS 10,82.2–3), and with Prajāpati on the Brāhmaṇa level (ŚBr 9,5.1.35–38). Fatalism might have already existed in the times of the epics in warrior circles¹²¹ as "warrior-didactics", as

¹¹⁹ Thieme 1960:308 observes that the correspondence of the R̥gvedic *asura* and the Avestic *ahura* establishes a Proto-Aryan (Indo-Iranian) religious form. See also Ježić 1989-90:165, according to whom Varuṇa developed out of iir. *Asura on the Indian side and Ahura Mazda on the Iranian side.

¹²⁰ According to Kuiper (1984): "The Old Iranian high god was historically identical with Varuṇa (in part also with the dual deity *Mitrā Vāruṇā*), but had no proper name."

¹²¹ According to Scheftelowitz (1929:7), fatalistic ideas in the Sanskrit epics are rooted in astrology, a religiously systematised prediction of the future. Scheftelowitz, however, sees all fatalistic material in MBh as quite young, as astrology is comparatively late.

claimed by Vassilkov (1999:28). This heroic fatalism might have incorporated Dhātṛ into its world-view, supposing that his “ordaining” role, known since Vedic times, developed into a “preordaining” role in the epics. On the other hand, Dhātṛ might have become associated with ascetics, preaching fatalism as a kind of spiritual didactics meant to cultivate dispassion and impassiveness towards turns of events (in the discourse of Namuci and Indra in 12.219 and Yayāti in 1,84). Another development of the fatalist doctrine with Dhātṛ as its presiding deity can be seen in the episodes of Draupadī (3,31–34) and the conversation between the hunter and *brāhmaṇa* Kauśika (3,198), in which Dhātṛ determines people’s destiny according to their past deeds, thus harmonizing fatalism and Dhātṛ with *karman* retribution theory.

Abbreviations

AiBh	Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa
av.	Avestan
AV (P)	Atharva-Saṃhitā Paippalāda
AS (Ś)	Atharva-Saṃhitā Śaunaka
BĀU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad
BhG	Bhagavad-Gītā
ChU	Chāndogya-Upaniṣad
ie.	Indo-European
iir.	Indo-Iranian
KaU	Kaṭha-Upaniṣad
KS	Kaṭha-Saṃhitā
MBh (BE)	Mahābhārata Bombay Edition
MBh (CE)	Mahābhārata Critical Edition
MaitS	Maitrāyaṇi-Saṃhitā
PañcBr	Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa
Rm	Rāmāyaṇa
RS	Ṛk-Saṃhitā
skt.	Sanskrit
ŚBr	Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa
ŚvU	Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad
TaittBr	Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa
TaittS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā
Vd	Vendīdād
VS	Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā
YV	Yajur-Veda

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