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INDO-EUROPEAN IDEOLOGY
IN THE *RĀMĀYAṆA* AND THE *ILIAD*

In both the *Iliad* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* a hero's relationship to his brother(s) plays a very important role. Brotherly love may not be the main theme, but it is present throughout both works[1]. Brotherly love is a traditional motif in folktales[2]. Both the *Iliad* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* show and adapt, to different degrees, other tale motifs that are normally associated to the "two brothers" motif. Among these is the presence of one (and only one) wife who is abducted[3] and has to be regained in battle. With the regaining of the wife balance is restored[4]. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when the restoration is achieved, the question of the succession to the throne is also solved. This motif is missing in the *Iliad*.

The epic has remodelled these folktale motifs based on the Indo-European tripartite ideology[5]. This tripartite ideology was first theorized by G. Dumézil in 1956[6]. It states that Indo-European society was divided into three classes or

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[1] S. Poolthupya, "Brotherly Love in the *Rāmāyaṇa*", in: *Indian Epic Values. Rāmāyaṇa and its Impact*, G. Pollet (ed.), Leuven, 1995, p. 215–219.

[2] H. Gehrts, *Rāmāyaṇa. Brüder und Braut in Märchen-Epos*, Bonn, 1977.

[3] In the *Aitareya Brahmana* 4.2. we read the story of the Aśvins abducting the daughter of the Sun, who was engaged to the Moon. There are also parallels of the legend of the abduction in Latvian mythology. In the Greek mythology, the Dioscuri, characters corresponding to the Indian Aśvins, are the brothers of the immortal Helen, thus Helen has to be abducted by someone else. (cf. M. L. West, "Immortal Helen", An Inaugural Lecture, 30th of April, 1975, Bedford College, University of London.)

[4] At least apparently. cf. R. Schmiel, "Telemachos in Sparta", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 103, 1972, p. 463 – 472 argues that between Helen and Menelaos not all is so nicely settled as it looks. Sītā has to undergo a fire trial at her arrival.

[5] G. Dumézil, *L' idéologie tripartite des Indo-européens*, Brussels, 1956.

[6] I have chosen to do a reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from the tri-functional point of view because studies of this nature have concentrated on the *Mahābhārata*. There are already some studies about the *Iliad* as an Indo-European poem. That is why this paper will analyze the *Rāmāyaṇa* more carefully.

functions. Each of these classes had their duties and expectations. The first class was the class of the priests and judicial officers, responsible for the social and religious well-being of the community. The second function was that of the warriors, responsible for security. The third one was the so called "productive and reproductive function", built by agriculturalists and merchants (once trade developed). The second function is subordinated to the first; the third to both of them. The division into castes in the modern Indian society is still a reflection of Indo-European social structure. The division of European medieval society into clergy, knights and peasants is also a reflection of the tri-functional ideology[7]. Caesar informs us about the Celtic society of his time being divided into druids, knights and *plebs*. Plato divides his ideal state into philosophers, guardians of the city, and workers. As well, this ideology had imprinted the myths of the Iranian, Germanic and Roman societies.

In the *Rāmāyana*, there are four brothers, sons of King Daśaratha and of three different wives. To Queen Kausalya only Rāma is born, to Queen Kaikeyī, Bharata, and to Queen Sumitrā Lakṣmaṇa and his twin brother Śatrughna. The three wives indicate the sons' different character. Rāma and his half-brother Lakṣmaṇa are very close. In the first book (generally considered a later addition[8]) we are told that, although they are born from different mothers, these brothers look like twins[9], which is a recurrent idea. Bharata prefers the company of Śatrughna, whose role in the epic is not as significant as the role of the other three. In the Indian and Germanic pantheon we also find four individuals performing the three functions. Generally, the twins performed the reproductive function, so we find in the Indian culture Varuṇa (god of magic power), Indra (warrior god), and the Aśvins, twins responsible for agriculture. In the Germanic world we find Odin (god of poetic inspiration), Thor (warrior god) and the twins Freyr and Freia (gods of vegetation and growth). The *Rāmāyana* has dislocated the natural twins. Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna perform different functions. On this account the twins' sympathies are split among the other brothers.

All four brothers love each other tenderly and when Queen Kaikeyī manages to send Rāma into exile and consecrate her son Bharata as heir of the kingdom, instead of a fratricidal war, Rāma accepts his destiny and is happy for his brother Bharata, while the latter, considering himself not as worthy as Rāma, begs him not to go in exile and to accept the kingdom that he deserves.

Brotherly love between them is an example of how an ideal Indo-European society (specifically the ideal kingdom of Ayodhyā) has to be able to unite the three principles that structure it, in Indian terminology the *brahmanas* (officials of religion and law), the *kṣatriyas* (warriors) and the *vaiśyas* (merchants and

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7   J. Batany, «Des 'trois fonctions' aux 'trois états'», *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, XVIII, 1963, pp. 933–938.

8   A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanscrit Literature*, London, 1900.

9   cf. *Rāmāyana* I. v. 48, 50, 70.

agriculturalists). It is now to be shown how the brothers Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata each represent one function of the Indo-European tripartite ideology.

From the Indian point of view, Rāma and his father and brothers all belong to the class of the *kṣatriyas*[10], but their behavior has traces of a superimposed ideology.

In the first *sarga* of the second book in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma[11] is described as accomplishing the first Indo-European function, the judicial one, after having conquered his passions and "mastered his anger"[12], i.e. after having subordinated the other two functions to the first. The epithet by which Rāma is described is "righteous". Righteousness is the main concern of the brahmanic class, as well as of the first Indo-European function. Rāma is further described as the complete person ready to take over the responsibilities of the throne, because (as we are informed in the first *sarga*) he is skilled in the sciences and their practice. He also can innately judge people and tell what is appropriate for each one, as expected of the person representative of the judicial function who is going to rule the destinies of the country. Besides these first function's qualities, Rāma also possesses the qualities (and none of the defects) of the second function, the ones typical for the protectors of the city. So he is described as being an invincible soldier, able to "lead the army skillfully". But his list of qualities does not end here. Rāma would give himself up to pleasure (and never immoderately) only after having accomplished his duties in righteousness and statecraft. The "righteous Rāma" understands the "true nature of righteousness, statecraft and personal pleasure". He thus embodies the virtues of all the classes. His character and actions please the king, "the *brahmanas*, the merchants and all who live in the realm", i.e. all the generic representatives of the first three Aryan (as well as Indo-European) *varṇas* or classes. To summarize, Rāma is "patient as earth, wise as Bṛhaspati (preceptor of the gods), and mighty as Indra". The qualities expected of the representatives of the three functions are incorporated in Rāma, who, through the values of the first function learned from the *brahmanas*, has mastered the possible faults in which people belonging to the second and third class (respectively anger (Achilles' fault) and immoderate pleasure (Paris' fault)) may incur because of lack of insight. Rāma represents through his character and education the Indo-European judicial function, more complete in its attributes and duties than the historic brahmanic class[13].

Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma's closest brother, is described as "powerful" when he is first mentioned with Rāma in the first *sarga* of the second book. In *sarga* 18 of

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10   R. Sharma, *A Socio-Political Study of the Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, New Delhi, 1971, p. 14 f.

11   For a complete characterization of Rāma see "Character of the Hero of the Rāmāyaṇa" in: B. Sarma, *Ethico-Literary Values of the Two Great Epics of India*, New Delhi, 1978, p. 190–224.

12   All quotations in English are from S. I. Pollock's translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as it appears in the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Expanded Edition, New York – London, 1995, p. 851–905.

13   For duties and privileges of each class in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see R. Sharma, op. cit., p. 14 f.

the same book, when he expresses his desire to follow Rāma into exile, he first tries to convince Rāma to take power by force, because "bow in hand" Lakṣmaṇa will protect Rāma and with his sharp arrows he will slaughter every-one who opposes his brother. Lakṣmaṇa is thus characterized as the loyal sol-dier, who defends and protects the righteousness of the state. Due to the lack of insight provided by the first Indo-European function, Lakṣmaṇa is inclined to-wards aggression and misjudgment, becoming dangerously rebellious against his father, King Daśaratha. Rāma, although the most wronged by the king's deci-sion, always respects his father and accepts his destiny without questioning his father or his brother Bharata.

According to Lakṣmaṇa, his father Daśaratha is "debauched with pleasure" and "mad by [sexual] passion". So the second Indo-European function, repre-sented by Lakṣmaṇa, allies itself with the first one, represented by Rāma, against the third function represented by the king (subdued by a woman), and also by Bharata, who openly recognizes his inappropriateness to rule the city of Ayodhyā and places Rāma's sandals on the throne, while he rules the country from another city as a representative of Rāma during his exile. The alliance of the first and second class against the third is a common Indo-European narrative motif[14].

The inclusion of Bharata as representative of the third class is not without problems. More evident representatives of this class are the *Rakṣasas* (Rāma's enemies), especially Ravana, abductor of Rāma's wife, Sītā. Ravana is charac-terized by greed and hypocrisy, and "acts in defiance of any moral or human value"[15]. All these vices characterize a person of the third class who cannot control his passions. The *Rakṣasas* are generally characterized as dominated by passions – for example, the uncontrolled and non-returned passion of Ravana's sister for Rāma brings the abduction and war to a start – but also by luxury, as the monkey Hanuman's admiration of the *Rakṣasas*' palace lets us assume. Still Bharata shall be included in the third class, as his association with the twin Śatrughna suggests. In *sarga* 23 of the second book, when Rāma is advising his wife Sītā to obey Bharata as a new king, Bharata is characterized as a person who cannot bear opposition and requires absolute obedience. Although not with direct or offensive words, Bharata is still characterized as someone who has to be appeased. Rāma's observation is subtle and general. However, Rāma, who was supposed to be consecrated as the next king, has been described not much earlier as a prudent person who never answers back and shows respect towards other people, even those of lower social class. Further, we are not informed about Bharata's government except that he is not suited for such a responsibil-ity. So, by contrast, Bharata is shown as likely to be dominated by the passions,

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14 As an example we find the few Romans representatives of law and warfare fight against the numerous Sabines, characterized by richness and luxury. Also, as we are going to see later, the Greeks against the Trojans.

15 G. van Damme, "Aspects of Ravana's Character in Sanskrit Epic and Related Literature", in: *Indian Epic Values. Rāmāyaṇa and its Impact*, G. Pollet (ed.), Leuven, 1995, p. 47–51.

like the *Rakṣasas*, assuming automatically the third function that is not controlled (as in Rāma's case) by the other two.

Brotherly love differentiates Bharata from Rāma's enemies, the five *Rakṣasas*, (four brothers and one sister) who act as symmetric counterparts of Rāma, his three brothers and his wife. Bharata's brotherly love prevents him from acting the way Rāma unconsciously fears, i.e. showing the specific faults of the third class. His love towards his brother prevails and it is intense enough to oppose the unrighteousness of his mother Kaikeyī.

Another reason for the association of Bharata with the third function is the fact that he is son of Kaikeyī, the woman who with her passion has subdued the king and compelled him to send Rāma into exile. Although Bharata is ignorant of his mother's doing, his mother expects him to act the way she desires. Bharata may be an involuntary pawn in Kaikeyī's actions, but still all her endeavors are aimed to favor her son over his brothers.

The association with Kaikeyī also places King Daśaratha at the level of the third Indo-European function. Kaikeyī has two favors to ask from the king, who in her presence is "sick with worry and desire" (book 2, *sarga* 10), i.e. in her presence the king forgets his regal qualities and gives himself to the weaknesses of the third function. The two favors requested are the consecration of her son Bharata as successor instead of the elder brother Rāma, and Rāma's exile to the forest. The king is obliged to grant these favors, because on two occasions Kaikeyī saved his life in battle.

A woman's intervention to save a hero's life in the battle can likewise be attributed to the third function's "weakness"[16]. Every "good" hero that belongs to the second function would rather die in combat, despite the supplication of a woman, as Hector does in the *Iliad*. The woman that saves a hero's life is characterized by her beauty and sexual appeal, as in the case of Kaikeyī. Also in the *Iliad*, Aphrodite (goddess of love) rescues Paris from the battle[17] (cf. *Iliad* 3. 380) and brings him to Helen, the most beautiful woman on Earth[18]. So even if in the *Iliad* Paris is not saved by a woman, but by a goddess, the motif is similar, because both King Daśaratha and Paris forget their duties in the presence of such a desirable woman. The fact that in the *Iliad* it is Aphrodite who rescues Paris, does not alter the fact that Kaikeyī and Helen play a similar role. Aphrodite and Helen should be considered as a double figure of one character. Paris and King Daśaratha need to be rescued by a female who, because of her beauty, is able to make these men forget their obligations and give themselves to pleasure, as shown in Hector's reproach of Paris (*Iliad* 6. 325f.) and Lakṣmaṇa's re-

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16   The Aśvins are also said to save the life of some warriors in battle, as do also the Dioscuri, one of whose epithets is "sōteres", saviours.

17   Aphrodite also rescues her son Aeneas (*Iliad* 5. 311–313), who according to some versions accompanied Paris to Menelaos' house when Helen was abducted. The motif of the "twin" brothers is once more re-elaborated in the saga of Troy.

18   Helen's attempt to oppose Aphrodite's will is shortly counteracted by the goddess, cf. *Iliad* 3, 390–417.

proach of Daśaratha (book 2, *sarga* 18). The men associated with these seductive women clearly represent the third function.

On the other hand there are two other women who reflect as well their husbands' qualities and who provide a contrast to Kaikeyī and Helen: Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Andromache in the *Iliad*. Sītā decides to share Rāma's fate and Andromache, even if she tries to convince Hector to abandon his obligations towards the city, is always described as a loyal wife. The fact that she does not succeed in separating Hector from his duties is enough not to align her with the third function[19].

The role played by the wives and their sharing of the husbands' function connects another important thematic parallel between the Trojan saga and the *Rāmāyaṇa* that also concerns the relation between brothers, namely the abduction of the wife of one of them. Helen is abducted by Paris and this action initiates the whole expedition against Troy, when Menelaos, her husband, and Agamemnon, his brother, recruit troops to gain her back. Sītā is abducted in the forest by Ravana, king of Lanka. The abduction of Sītā and the fights to gain her back form the kernel of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. There is, however, in both works a very important difference concerning the destiny of the woman abducted. This difference hinges, in my opinion, on the Indo-European function with which the women are associated. Helen, a representative of the third function, comes back to Sparta to rule beside her husband. Even if she did not show any feelings for him in the *Iliad*, in the *Odyssey* she plays again the role of Menelaos' loving wife. Nobody questioned (at least openly) her chosen infidelity. This could be due to the fact that the third function, i.e. reproductive representatives, are accepted as having multiple partners, as Aphrodite does. We have seen already the interchanging of roles between Helen and Aphrodite in the episode of the separation of a man from war. The analogy between the two helps us also explain why nobody blamed Helen. On the other hand, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā has to prove her innocence and vindicate her virtue through a fire trial. Even after her success, Rāma is obliged to send her to the forest as a hermit because of fear of public scandal. Sītā has to be immaculate as a representative of the first function[20]. Even the suspicion of Ravana having touched (and by doing so, desecrated) her, makes her unable to remain in her role as queen. This episode probably does not belong to the body of the original *Rāmāyaṇa* and is a later addition[21]. This is not relevant to the fact that Sītā's conduct is considered reprobable, whereas Helen's is not. Perhaps also specific cultural differences played a role in each woman's destiny, but there is more to it than that, namely

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[19]   Ovid, *Amores*, I, 9. 35, says that it was Andromache herself who set the helmet on Hector's head. In *Ars Amandi*, II, 645 Ovid describes her as bigger than normal "spatiosior".

[20]   The legend of Sītā was at some point independent from Rāma. Her name means "Furrow" making reference to the way she was born from the earth. Her association with the reproductive function was lost, once she was subordinated to Rāma.

[21]   A. Macdonell, op. cit.

the characterization of the men responsible for the wife's return (i.e. Rāma and Agamemnon) and their treatment of public opinion.

Public opinion towards the abducted wife in Homer and the *Rāmāyaṇa* differs considerably. Criticism of Helen's behavior is placed in Homer only in words of lower class characters, as the swineherd Eumaios in the *Odyssey* (14, 68). In the *Iliad* there is no direct reproach to her actions, except by herself. Menelaos places the blame on Paris (Il. 3.100). This could be attributed to not wanting to appear as a betrayed husband, if in deed Helen freely agreed to her abduction, but Hector also blames Paris for the war (*Iliad* 3.39f.). Helen's self-characterization as "bitch" is immediately denied by Priam's words in *Iliad* 3.164: "For me you are not responsible, the gods are". Achilles' words (*Iliad* 9. 340) that the Atreidae are not the only ones who love their wives are not directed against Helen, but against Agamemnon. Also Thersites, representative of the common soldier in the *Iliad*, addresses his speech not towards Helen's infidelity, but towards Agamemnon's ambition (*Iliad* 2. 225f.)[22]. Agamemnon, who, as *anax* of the Greek army, is the representative of the first Indo-European function in the *Iliad* is characterized by in the fault typical of his rank: confusing the common interests with his own private ones. This makes him not listen to other members of the expedition. The reasons for the war (i.e. Helen's abduction or infidelity) play thus a secondary role to Agamemnon's selfish behavior. Homer does not stress Helen's, but Agamemnon's conduct.

On the other hand, Rāma, the ideal king, respects and obeys the opinion of the common people, because unlike Agamemnon, he is not dominated by personal ambition. Rāma, torn between the love towards his wife and towards his people, chooses the latter. The innocent Sītā has thus to go back to the forest and be punished for nothing for which she should be held accountable.

In contrast to the love shown by Rāma and his brothers, the *Rāmāyaṇa* also depicts the rivalries between brothers in the case of the *Vanaras* (allied to Rāma) and the *Rakṣasas* (Rāma's enemies)[23]. The *Vanara* brothers Valin and Sugriva are portrayed as ready to use force against each other. In fact, Sugriva asks Rāma to help him kill his brother, thus revealing a jealous character. Also among the *Rakṣasas*, the relation of Ravana, king of Lanka and abductor of Sītā, towards his brothers differs enormously from the relation between Rāma and his brothers. Ravana's brother Vibhīṣaṇa deserts him and unites with Rāma, because he disagrees with his brother's kidnapping Sītā. Bharata, Rāma's brother, is also confronted with having to chose between the righteous part (represented by Rāma) and the unrighteous (represented by his mother Kaikeyī). On such an occasion, he chooses the loyalty to the brother, uniting brotherly love with righteousness. Vibhīṣaṇa chooses justice instead of his brother. On the other hand, in the *Iliad*, brotherly love goes beyond the distinction between righteous-

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22 H. Homeyer, *Die Spartanische Helena und der Trojanische Krieg*, Palingenesia XII, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 4–12.

23 On brotherly relations see J. L. Brockington, *Righteous Rāma. The Evolution of an Epic*, Oxford, 1984. p. 163f.

ness and unrighteousness. Hector will remain loyal to Paris, even if this decision makes him fight on behalf of his morally unrighteous brother. Although realizing that it is because of Paris' action that he has to fight the Greeks, Hector will never abandon his brother and will fight at his side until the end.

In the *Iliad*, the set of brothers Hector – Paris on the Trojan side has its parallel on the Greek side with Agamemnon and Menelaos. The plot of the *Iliad* also involves four brothers and one wife. These pairs are also characterized by brotherly love, to the point that one brother assumes his brother's cause as his own and is ready to risk his life and fight for it. Although the three Indo-European functions are not so clearly portrayed in the *Iliad* as in the Indian epic[24], basically we can say that Menelaos and Paris represent the third function. Menelaos and Paris share the same wife, Helen, whom we just saw as inducer of love and pleasure, making the men abandon their duties. Both Menelaos and Paris are characterized by their scarce courage, and in their physical appearance both are blond[25] and good looking. Even if from completely different origins, they could be considered "twins" in opposing factions as their Indian counterparts, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna[26]. On the other hand, Agamemnon and Menelaos, could be also considered parallel to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Although they do not look like twins as the Indian pair, they are married to Clytemnestra and Helen, who are twins born to the same mother the same day, even if conceived by different fathers. Furthermore, Helen's brothers are the most famous twins of Greek mythology, Castor and Polydeuces. Hector is representative of the second function, and like Lakṣmaṇa, he does not fight for his own cause, but for his brother's and, because of his brother[27], is willing to accept the risk of death.

Agamemnon, as we just mentioned, although not as completely as Rāma, could represent the first function in his role of chief commandant (*anax*) of the Greek contingent. The distribution of the individual functions in the *Iliad* does

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24   C. S. Littleton, "Some Possible Indo-European Themes in the *Iliad*", in: W. Meid (ed.), *Dichter und Dichtkunst in Indogermanischer Zeit*, Innsbruck, 1978, p. 229 – 246.

25   Menelaos is directly characterized as being blond "xanthos". Paris' beautiful hair is mentioned in the *Iliad* 3. 55 without a reference to the colour. We have to assume that his hair is beautiful because he is also blond.

26   Another pair of fictitious twins in the *Iliad* is represented by Achilles and Patroclos. They are similar enough for the Trojans to mistake them for one another. They can be considered a parallel to the twin-looking brothers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Achilles like Lakṣmaṇa represents the second Indo-European class. A categorization of Patroclos in the class system seems more difficult. Patroclos is subordinated to Achilles, which would make him a representative of the third class. On the other hand, in book 9 of the *Iliad*, he is presented performing a sacrifice (*Iliad* 9. 219–220). I am inclined to ascribe him to the third class, because he dies "usurping" Achilles' role, so revealing that he is not fully qualified for it.

27   Safety of his family and city and personal glory are the most important reasons for Hector to fight. Only once Hector (*Iliad* 6. 325f) rebukes his brother for not fighting and being responsible for the war. Neither Hector nor Priam accused Helen of being guilty of the condition in Troy.

not completely agree with the individual functions in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first and second functions (Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa) are opposed to the third (Bharata and Śatrughna and King Daśaratha). In the *Iliad*, the Greek set of brothers fulfills functions number one (Agamemnon = judicial) and three (Menelaos = reproductive) and the Trojan set of brothers fulfills functions number two (Hector = warrior) and three (Paris = reproductive). In general, the Trojan can be associated with the Indo-European third function (among other things by the fact that Aphrodite is their protective goddess after Paris' famous judgement sided them with "pleasure" as opposed to wisdom and power). The Greek side would generally represent the first (Agamemnon and perhaps Nestor) and second functions[28]. Even if the distribution of ideological functions has been varied, brotherly love, as we saw, also remains a constant in the *Iliad*.

To summarize, we can consider a thematic parallel[29]:

1) The presence of two opposed sets of brothers. A pair of twins (real or figurative) is split into factions.

2) The brothers are united by mutual loyalty. One brother makes the orther's cause his own .

3) The distribution of the brothers in the different functions of the tripartite ideology. To the function of the male character corresponds a woman who also incorporates the values of her partner's function.

4) A woman (or goddess) representative of the third class, saves her husband from death in combat.

5) The abduction of the wife of one of the brothers. (Although Helen's abduction is not the theme of the *Iliad*, it is the kernel of the saga of Troy, as much as Sītā's abduction is the kernel of the *Rāmāyaṇa*).

These thematic parallels have different specific weight in their own national traditions and literary works. Some motifs are treated differently in the *Iliad* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Each tradition developed independently and re-elaborated common themes of the past following its own moral, social and aesthetics norms.

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28   For details see Littleton, op. cit.

29   Probably from an Indo-European common time, although some parallels like the brotherly love are attested in very different cultural traditions.