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The Milk-drinking Hañsas of Sanskrit Poetry.—By CHARLES R. LANMAN, Professor in Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

THE Hindus say that the bird called *hañsa* has the faculty, out of a vessel of mingled milk and water, to separate and drink the milk and leave the water. To this wide-spread popular belief frequent allusion is made in the literature; and for it there must be some basis in the facts of natural history.

The facts which gave rise to the belief are in my opinion the following: the aquatic bird *hañsa* lives on lakes that abound in lotuses, and subsists in a measure upon the underground stalk of the lotus plant (such a stalk is called *bisa*), whose joint (*granthi*), when crushed (*bhagna*), exudes a juice designated by the word *kṣīra*, which is also a common name for milk. Thus the bird, as it floats on the lake, may be said to drink *kṣīra* or milk out of water.

For the sake of students of Sanskrit and others, it may be worth my while to assemble some of these allusions in the literature. And again it may be useful to put together the statements about the character and habits of the *hañsa* in order to subject them more easily to the criticism of students of natural history.

But first a word as to the general scope of these allusions. They are indeed often made directly in praise of the noble *hañsa*, and to show its superiority for instance to the heron; but oftener still, the point of the allusion is the marvelous discrimination,¹ fine and clear, displayed in the separation of things so hopelessly mixed as milk and water.²

Beautifully appropriate uses of our fable are made by the philosophers. Thus in the *Tattva-muktāvalī*³ we read: "Others

¹ Mentioned already by H. T. Colebrooke in a note to H. H. Wilson's "Analytical account of the Pancha Tantra" (1824), *Works*, ed. Rost, iv. p. 8. Benfey cites the note, *Pantschatantra*, ii. p. 367.

² The intimacy of this mixture is praised by the poets as absolute and complete (*Sprüche*, 2024), and it is thus a type of the closest friendship and mutual devotion (ib. 2026).

³ Edited and translated by Cowell, 1883, *JRAS.* xv. pp. 149, 167, çloka 85.

see not the difference when water is mixed with milk, but the swan at once separates the milk and the water; so too when the souls are absorbed in the supreme Brahman, the Lord,—the faithful, who have received the Guru's words, can at once draw a difference between them." Again, the Sāṅkhya aphorism, iv. 23, says: "By him who is free from passion what is to be left [i. e. Nature] is left, and what is to be taken [i. e. Soul] is taken; as in the case of the swan and the milk." And again, the beginning of the second *vallī* of the Kaṭha Upaniṣad says: "The better is one thing, and the more agreeable is another. . . . The wise man weighs them both well, separates them (*vi-vinakti*), and chooses the better." Čaṅkara, in his Bhāṣya, illustrates this by the fable of the *haṅsa*. *Vi-vinakti* is from the same root as *vi-vecana* which is used of the *haṅsa's* exploit.

First then—some of the allusions. The introduction to the Pañcatantra contains the familiar stanza *anantapāram* etc., which, as I thought it a fit motto for a brief Sanskrit grammar that I was minded to make, I Englished² as follows:

An endless science, as we know, is grammar.
And life is short; the hindrances are many.
Essentials keep, leaving the non-essential,
As swans drink up the milk, but leave the water.³

Here we may notice the passage in Kālidāsa's Čakuntalā,⁴ where an invisible being behind the scenes is threatening the buffo's life. Here the king promises that his arrow, which he thinks to let fly, shall slay the villain and spare the buffo—with the same uncommon discrimination that the *haṅsa* uses as betwixt the milk and the water.

In Böhtlingk's *Indische Sprüche*, 2d ed., the following numbers make express mention of the *haṅsa's* gift:

- 243, *anantapāram*, from *Pañcatantra*, introd. 5;
245, *anantaçāstram*, from Old Cāṅakya, xv. 10;
544, *ambhojinī*, from Bhartṛhari, *Nītiçataka*, 18;

¹ See the interesting comment hereon in J. R. Ballantyne's *Sāṅkhya Aphorisms*, 3d ed., London, 1885, p. 303.

² A dozen years ago, more or less. It has since then been put to this very use by R. Fick, *Praktische Grammatik der Sanskrit-Sprache*, Wien, no date, p. VII.

³ See F. Kielhorn's note to this stanza in the *Notes* to his edition.

⁴ Near the end of act vi., especially the stanza 155 (Böhtlingk) or 182 (Pischel).

- 4923, *prājñāsa tu*, from MBh. i. 74. 91=3078 ;
 6211, *viṣvāsojjhita-*, from *Rāja-taraṅginī*, vi. 275 ;
 7358, *haṅsaḥ ṣveto*, from *Subhāṣitārṇava* ;
 7605, *vedādyanekaṣāstrāṇi*, from the same.

About the stanzas from the *Sprüche* a few words may be of interest. No. 4923 is from the old Epic story of Çakuntalā, where she says: "On hearing good and evil counsel, a fool takes the evil, as a swine does filth, and a wise man takes the good, as the *haṅsa* the milk." Cānakya's verses, badly mutilated, are recognizable in the famous *Sidharubam seu grammatica Samserdamica* . . . auctore Paulino a S. Bartholomaeo, Rome, 1790, p. 19. Bhartṛhari's stanza is thus rendered in Abraham Roger's *Offne Thür zu dem verborgenen Heydenthum*, Nürnberg, 1663, p. 506-7: "Wann *Bramma* auf seinen Träger *Ampsa*¹ zornig ist, kan er ihn zwar wol aus seinem Wasser-pfuhl vertreiben ; aber ihm gleichwol die Macht nicht benehmen, dass er (wofern Milch und Wasser untereinander vermengen) die Milch nicht solte allein trinken, und das Wasser überlassen können."

The Indian anthologies contain chapters, certain sections of which form a kind of Oriental bestiary. Among these are sections made up, wholly or in part, of epigrams concerning the *haṅsa*. Four such collections may be noticed :

The Paddhati of Çārṅgadhara [A. D. 1363], ed. by P. Peterson, Bombay, 1888. Nos. 796-814 are called *haṅsānyoktayah*.

The Subhāṣitāvalī of Vallabhadeva [A. D. 1400-1450], ed. by P. Peterson, Bombay, 1886. Nos. 689-717 are about *haṅsas* and *sārasas*.

The Subhāṣita-ratna-bhāṇḍāgāram, or Gems of Sanskrit Poetry, selected and arranged by K. P. Paraba, 2d ed., Bombay, 1886. Nos. 3-40, pages 367-369, are of *haṅsas*.

Subhāṣita-ratnākara, compiled and edited by K. Bhāṭavaḍekara, Bombay, 1888. Nos. 1-19, pages 217-220, are of *haṅsas*.

In all these stanzas from the Indian anthologies, the material is similar or in good part identical, and of course from very diverse sources. Among these stanzas, the following ten make reference to the *ksīra-nīra-vivecana*: in Çārṅgadhara, only no. 797; in Vallabhadeva, nos. 697 and 716; in Parab's collection, nos. 6, 10, 15, and 20; in Bhāṭavaḍekar's, nos. 2, 14, and 18. Of

¹ *Ampsa* [*haṅsa*] sind ein Geflüg, fast wie die kleinen Endvögel [Enten].—Roger.

these, 797, 15, and 2 simply repeat Bhartṛhari's stanza; 6 = *Sprüche* 7358; and 10 and 14 are a pleasing quotation from Bhāminīvilāsa, i. 13, ed. L. R. Vaidya, Bombay, 1887. Thus there are five with new allusions, namely 697, 716, 20, 18, and 10=14.

Of the many stanzas without these allusions, almost all are interesting and instructive as to the character and habits of the *haṅsa*. Richest in points of description are perhaps Vallabhadeva's nos. 715 and 710, which read thus :

No. 715. "His beauty is enchanting; charming his mate. For drink, he has the sweet juice¹ of the lotus; and for a playground, the waters. Among the lotuses is his dwelling; their pollen is his ornament. He subsists on the excellent underground stalk of the lotus.² His friends are the sweet-humming bees.—Free from servile labor, poverty, and humiliation, happy lives the *haṅsa*!"

No. 710. "There are everywhere waters clear as pearl, with lotus-roots whose knots show milk when they are crushed;³ abundant draughts of lotus-juice;⁴ sand-banks fit for sport and play. What means this, then, O *haṅsa*, that thou takest up thine abode in this horrid, muddy, old pool, beset with impudent shrieking herons?"

Kālidāsa's Meghadūta, stanza 11, is relevant at this point. The Yakṣa says to the cloud that is to bear the message to his wife, "The *rāja-haṅsas*, eager to get to lake Mānasa, will be thy companions as far as mount Kāilāsa, having pieces of the shoots of the *bisa* as their provisions for the journey (*pātheya* or viaticum)." H. H. Wilson⁵ says: "The *Rājahansa* is described as a white *gander*, with red legs and bill, and together with the common *goose* is a favourite bird in *Hindu* poetry. Not to shock *European* prejudice, I have in all cases substituted for these birds, one to which we are rather more accustomed in verse, the *swan*." In rendering *haṅsa* by 'swan' instead of 'gander,' or 'goose,' Wilson has been generally followed; but Jerdon says, under the *Cygnidae*, that there are no swans in India. Kālidāsa again speaks of the *bisa* as the *pātheya* or viaticum of the *rāja*-

¹ *madhu*.—² *bisa*: cf. Vallabhadeva, 717^c.—³ 'Stalk-knots with milk that appears (*vilasant*) upon breaking (*bhaṅga*).'⁴ Lit. 'tāmarasa-extract or -liquor.'

⁵ *The Mēgha Dūta, translated, etc.*, London (reprint of Calcutta ed.), 1814, p. 83.

haṅsa, to wit, in his Urvaṅī.¹ And again, in the same play, at the end of act i., as Urvaṅī ascends to the sky, Purūravas says that she has torn his heart out of his body, as the *rāja-haṅsī* tears the stringy fibre out of a lotus-stalk, the end of which she has broken off.

Professor R. G. Bhāṅḍārkar, in reply to my inquiry, kindly wrote me a letter dated Poona, July 16, 1888. From it a part of the words or of the substance may be given. "The physical facts, as distinguished from poetic fancies, that may be gathered from the allusions to the bird in Sanskrit poetical works appear to be these: 1. The birds are white, some having dark and others red bills and legs. 2. They feed on lotus-stalks (*bisa*). This lotus is of the Nelumbium order. They are also spoken of as fond of the water-lily of the *kumuda* species. 3. They pass their time in large lakes or ponds or on sand-banks of rivers. 4. They migrate about the setting in of the rains,² i. e. about the middle or end of May, to the North, and must be supposed to come to India in the beginning of the cold season, i. e. about the end of November."

He then cites C. J. Jerdon's *Birds of India*, vol. iii., and especially Jerdon's notices of the family of the Anseridae. One species, *Anser cinereus*, corresponds, says Jerdon, to the wild goose or gray lag-goose of England, and is a common winter visitant to the North of India, extending its migrations to Central India, but rarely seen further South. It is sometimes met with in small parties of from four to twenty; occasionally in vast flocks, which feed on young corn, grass, etc.,³ and during the heat of the day rest on some sand-bank in the large rivers or in the middle of a tank. The *Anser Indicus* is a goose that appears to be peculiar to India and probably the adjacent countries north of the Himālayas, where it breeds. It is chiefly a winter visitant to India.—So far Jerdon.

Habits and character of the *haṅsa*. The mode of flight of the wild geese as they migrate northward or southward is spoken of in characteristic phrase in the Rigveda, iii. 8. 9, *haṅsā iva gṛeṇīṣo yatānāḥ*, 'like wild geese that move in single file (*Gänsemarsch*);' so i. 163. 10. Their swiftness (*java*) is praised at

¹ Stanza *paçcāt saras*, Bollensen, no. 94, Parab and Telang, iv. 31.

² See *Kathā-sarīt-sāgara*, lxix. 129-32, Bombay ed.

³ Although Jerdon does not speak of the Anseridae as feeding on lotuses, the point is not doubtful.

Sutta-nipāta, 221, as against the slowness of the gaudy peacock. Their breeding-place and true home is the Himālayan lake Mānasa,¹ whose glories are the subject of many a verse,² and with which the every-day waters of India are set in contemptuous contrast.³ Their fondness for sandy banks is implied in the Çakuntalā,⁴ where the king, speaking of the unfinished background of the picture of Çakuntalā, sends for his brushes, saying, "The river Mālinī must yet be painted in, with a pair of *hansas* resting on its sandy bank, and the Himālayan foot-hills behind it."

Their beauty or splendor (*çobhā*) surpasses that of a thousand herons.⁵ Their angry pride is the subject of a beautiful epigram, Çārṅgadhara, 800. Their superb dignity is told in the stanza,⁶ "When near him the harsh chattering *jacana* shrilly shrieks, the *rāja-hansa* either goes away or keeps silent"; and still better in the stanza⁷ so charmingly rendered by Rückert,

Und wenn auf Erden gleich
Bliebe kein Lotosteich,
Doch scharfte nie der Schwan
Im Miste wie der Hahn.

The lofty devotion of Sumukha, so touchingly described in the Jātaka-mālā, xxii., may be a figment of Ārya-çūra's piety; but it is significant that it is ascribed to a *hansa*.

Dr. Elliott Coues of Washington, in most kindly response to my ornithological queries, propounds the following interesting solution of the milk-drinking fable: The members of the swan, goose, and duck tribe, and the flamingos also, have a series of lamellae on each edge of each mandible, which serve as a sieve for straining food from the water which they take in. A little poetic fancy would easily turn this habit into the exploit of separating "milk" (i. e. food or nourishment) from "milk-and-water" (i. e. water with food in suspension).

I think this can hardly be right: first, because the fable attributes this strange power, not to all of the Lamellirostres

¹ This is on mount Kāilāsa and is a sacred place of pilgrimage.—

² E. g. Kathā-sarit-sāgara, xlvi. 86 f.; Parab's collection, p. 365, no. 21; Çārṅgadhara, 805; cf. Jātaka-mālā, ed. Kern, p. 130²ff.—³ Çārṅgadhara, 805, 814.—⁴ Stanza 144, Böhlingk, 168, Pischel.

⁵ Parab, p. 367, no. 5.—⁶ Çārṅgadhara 798, Vallabhadeva 692, Parab, p. 367, no. 8, *Sprüche* 408,—many variants.—⁷ Ç. 811, Vall. 691, Parab, p. 367, no. 9, *Sprüche*, 5220.

(not, for example, to the *caḅravāka* or *Anas Casarca*), but only to the *haṅsa* and *rāja-haṅsa*; and, secondly, because this particular word for milk, *kṣīra*, is never used for food or nourishment in general. *Kṣīra* is used of the milk of cows, goats, and women, and especially of the milky juice of the broken stalks of flowers.¹ And a Sikh gentleman, Mr. Hari Singh Purī, on a visit here from India, assured me last week that the juice from the crushed or broken lotus stalks is milky in color.

It remains to inquire whether this fable can be traced back to Vedic literature. The stanzas RV. x. 131. 4, 5, and especially the occurrence of the word *vy āpibas*, used elsewhere of ‘separating mingled liquids in drinking,’² hardly prove the fable to be known to the Rīgveda; but I refer the reader to the learned discussions of the passage by Bloomfield and Oldenberg.³

The Yajurveda, on the other hand, does speak of a bird, a *kruñc* or curlew, which can separate and drink the milk from water with which it is mingled. The passage occurs in the Māitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā, iii. 11. 6, in the Kāṭhaka, xxxviii. 1, in the Vājasaneyī, xix. 72–79, and in the Tāittiriya Brāhmaṇa, ii. 6. 2¹⁻³. I quote from the first-named text :

adbhyāḥ kṣīrāṁ vyāpibat
krūññ āṅgirasó dhīyá . . .
adbhyāḥ sómaṁ vyāpibac
chāndobhir haṅsāḥ cūcisāt, etc.

Other mention of this power of the curlew I have not found save in two passages⁴ from the Pāli Buddhist literature. One is from the Udāna, viii. 7, “The wise man leaves the evil as the milk-drinking curlew the water,” *vidvā pajahāti pāpakāṁ koṅco khīrapako va ninnagam*. The other is from the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, p. 305, where Buddhaghosa likens a true disciple to a curlew, because, if a bowl of spirits and water were put to his mouth, only the water would enter it and not the spirits; just as,

¹ E. g., Çakuntalā, ed. Pischel, st. 59, *sammīlantī*.

² Cf. Mahīdhara’s *vivicya pītavān*.

³ JAOS. xv. 148 ff., 159. And *Göttinger Nachrichten*, 1893, no. 9. The story of the milk-drinking eagle (*suparṇa*), cited above by Oertel, JAOS. xix. 102, 101, does not refer to the milk-separating power now under discussion.

⁴ Cited by Dr. R. Morris, *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* for 1887, p. 168.

he continues, if a mixture of milk and water were offered to the *kruñc*-birds, only the milk would be taken by them and not the water.

Sāyana, in his comment on TBr. ii. 6. 2, says that the *haṅsa* is the soul in living beings, and that Indra, taking on its form, drank the soma, separating it from the water; and then, with some other curious remarks¹ suggested by the passage, adds the following illustration (p. 660):

yathā loke kruñ krāuñca-pakṣī . . . dhiyā sva-buddhyā kṣīram adbhyo vivicyāpibat, kṣīra-pātre sva-mukhe prakṣipte sati, mukha-gata-rasa-samparkāt, kṣīrāṅṣo jalāṅṣaḥ cobhāu vivicyete, tatra jala-bhāgam parityajya kṣīra-bhāgam eva pibati,—tadvad ayam indro ‘pi soma-rasaṁ jala-bhāgād vivicya pibati.

Here the point of most interest for us seems to be that the milky part of the mixture is coagulated by contact or mingling (*samparkāt*) with the fluid (*rasa*) in the mouth (*mukha-gata*) of the bird when it puts its bill (*mukha*) into the vessel (*pātra*).

Now by a singular coincidence, Swāmī Abhedānanda, a Bengali gentleman, calling at my study last week on the same day as Mr. Purī and while my mind was upon the subject of this essay, told me that his teacher had explained the *haṅsa*-fable to him by saying that there was a secretion in the bird's mouth which coagulated the milky part of the mixture,² so that the resulting curdy portions became easily separable. Whether there is any acidulous *rasa* or any rennet-like *rasa* in the *haṅsa*'s mouth, I must leave to the ornithologists. At any rate, the Swāmī's theory seems to be essentially like that of Sāyana.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., June 7, 1898.

¹ E. g. *evam indro ‘py asāram parityajya ekasmīn api pātre sāram eva svi-karoti*, p. 661.

² Somewhat after the fashion of rennet? But see *Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia*, 1893, vol. ii., p. 216, s.v. *Cheese*, on the character of the action of rennet, etc., in coagulating the curd.