

JARROD L. WHITAKER

DIVINE WEAPONS AND *TEJAS* IN THE TWO INDIAN EPICS

The divine weapons (*divya astra*) of the two Indian epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, play a central and ubiquitous role in the narratives. Nevertheless, the subject has been woefully neglected. With numerous gods and heroes, most of whom wield at least one divine weapon, the epics have produced the most vivid and rich examples of divine weapon combat, quests, and histories. The heroes' victories are achieved only with divine weapons. The battle scenes are replete with divine weapons and the carnage they produce. Arjuna travels to the remote Himālayas to obtain divine weapons from Śiva, the four world guardians, and various other gods. Rāma obtains most of his divine arsenal from the divine sage Vasiṣṭha. Throughout both epics, histories of individual divine weapons are enumerated. It is within the epics that the divine weapons reach their most developed stage, while bringing to the foreground many beliefs and practices ancient Indians, especially the warriors, had about the world they lived in. In fact, in no other mythological corpus is the concept of divine weapons more developed and more complex than in the two Indian epics. Thus, without a proper understanding of the divine weapons the Indian epics cannot be fully appreciated.

However, the divine weapons cannot be properly understood without a comprehensive examination of the concept of *tejas* or "fiery energy." Embedded within the mythology is a recurring set of principles that pertain to the nature of *tejas*. This set of principles relates directly to the nature and function of the divine weapons. Therefore, because *tejas* governs the way the divine weapons operate in the mythology, the primary aim of the following paper is to outline its "intrinsic laws" and to codify them systematically in a working model. To stress the point, this paper is primarily a study of the nature and function of divine weapons in the two Indian epics, yet, as the episodes will show, the concept of *tejas* is intrinsic and thus totally indispensable. The significance of *tejas* has been overlooked, and a coherent depiction of it is crucial for an understanding of the divine weapons of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹

Indo-Iranian Journal 43: 87–113, 2000.

© 2000 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, scholars have not seriously expounded divine weapons in any detail.² When confronted with a divine weapon such as the *Āgneya astra* (“Fire-weapon”), historians have generally explained it away as an ancient musket, or similar gun-powder weapon (which disappeared before any western contact with India).³ While accepting this explanation, only Hopkins sympathetically acknowledges the traditional interpretation of divine weapons as originating from the supramundane realm, and that they can be united with ordinary weapons, endowing them with the divine weapons’ own power.⁴ He even seems to recognize the centrality of *tejas*, from \sqrt{tij} - “to be sharp”, when he writes “Fire is used not of fire, but of the swift sharp biting power of a weapon.”⁵

The problem of trying to find historical explanations for the divine weapons is twofold. Firstly, the divine weapons are much more destructive than an ancient musket or cannon could ever have been. Arrows, as one manifestation of a divine weapon, are fired from bows in a manner resembling modern day weaponry, and many of the divine weapons have the destructive capability of small tactical war-heads, killing thousands in one strike. If such a historical approach were in vogue today, scholars would not be satisfied until they found ancient AK-47s, or a nuclear capability.⁶ Secondly, as Hopkins seems to have understood, the fire of the divine weapons is not the element itself, but the more subtle energy-substance *tejas* or “fiery energy”. These are not weapons of fire *per se*, but weapons of energy.

Only in the realms of religious inquiry are the divine weapons given any serious treatment. Mehta aptly writes that the divine weapons are best understood as “God-given inner potencies and spiritual forces available to man, rather than physical instruments of destruction.”⁷ Begley’s insightful study of Viṣṇu’s *Sudarśana cakra* briefly surveys textual developments of the divine discus throughout the Vedic literature, before the bulk of his research turns to iconographical evidence of the personified discus in the post-epic and medieval sources.⁸ Like the historians before him, he is satisfied that the fiery nature of the discus refers to the use of incendiary weapons. For Katz, the divine weapons are symbols of ancient warrior initiation rituals, and of certain gods; thus when wielding divine weapons the heroes symbolically represent the respective deities.⁹ Similarly, for Hildebeitel, Arjuna’s use of Indra’s and Śiva’s divine weapons reinforces the hero’s identity with those gods, and the divine weapon battle between Arjuna and Aśvatthāman connects the two heroes with the gods Nārāyaṇa and Rudra respectively.¹⁰ This kind of symbolic interpretation cannot be faulted, as far as it goes, yet it treats the divine weapons as representations of other realities. However,

I prefer to treat the divine weapons as signs – direct indicators of an ontology that the epic authors wished to express about their universe.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND MEANING OF *TEJAS*

Before turning to the divine weapons themselves, it is necessary to examine the development and meaning of *tejas*. The Sanskrit word derives from the root $\sqrt{tij-}$, meaning “to be sharp”. It appears in older examples of Vedic literature, e.g., the *Rg Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. At this point, *tejas* refers to the sharp edges of weapons, etc., and is vaguely connected with the concepts of heat, fire, and light.¹¹ The metaphor of the sharpness of fire extends to the ferocity of humans, thus, even at this early stage, *tejas* features as a psychosomatic characteristic of individual beings. This set the stage for a metaphorical transition from “sharpness” to a kind of “energy”. By the time of the *Upaniṣads*, *tejas* surpasses other energy-substances while incorporating their diverse roles. It becomes the central creative principle of the supreme god, and furthermore, the energy of all movement and activity (*rajoguṇa*) in the universe.¹² It is further ascribed to be the subtle essence of the Hindu *ātman* or “soul”, and thus “is the ever-changing energy which is passed on along the downward current of evolution and taken back in involution.”¹³ Hence, by the time of the epics, Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu, can conclude in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*; “Whatever being possesses power, wisdom, prosperity, or is endowed with strength, know that it originates from but a fragment of my *tejas*.”¹⁴ Magnone expounds this point:

As an energy, *tejas* is eminently transferable, and the effects of its transfer are different according to whether the broader or the narrower notion of *tejas* is applied. In the former event, the grant of *tejas* is coextensive with creation, and its confiscation with dissolution. This is the case with most *avatāras*, when Viṣṇu becomes incarnate with a portion (*aṁśa*) of his *tejas* and then takes it back dissolving his form after completion of the task . . . When *tejas* is intended in the narrower sense, i.e., as the cause of mere excellence, and not generally of existence, then its acquisition and loss do not entail an absolute inception or cessation, but simply a promotion or demotion to or from a higher level of existence.¹⁵

By the epic period, *tejas* is well established as an energy-substance with distinctive fiery connotations. Furthermore, *tejas* can be classified into four kinds: (1) earthly (*bhauma*), such as fire; (2) divine (*divya*), such as lightning, or the constellations; (3) physiological (*audarya*), which occurs in gastro-intestinal secretions; and (4) mineral (*ākaraḥja*), such as metals, jewels, etc.¹⁶ On the gross level, *tejas* preserves its ancient connections with fire and heat, and when possessed by persons or objects suggests the English words “glory”, “majesty”, “ardour”, and

“splendour”. On the subtle level, as an energy, *tejas* is responsible for knowledge, and when in excess is highly destructive. For example, seers (*ṛṣis*) are referred to as *tejasvins*, and can threaten the universe with their energy. Correspondingly, warriors are constantly referred to as hot, even burning, and there is an almost endless supply of metaphorical comparisons between warriors and fire imagery. All of this culminates in the notion of *tejas* as found in the epics. Magnone concludes that by the epic period “*tejas* appears as a self-standing universal energy independent of the Lord, and obeying its own intrinsic laws, with which the Lord has himself to cope.”¹⁷ *Tejas* is thus best understood as tangible and functional.

THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE WEAPONS

The concept of divine weapons is fluid – they are weapons of energy. There is virtually no limit to the way they manifest themselves. They can be subtle forces of explosive power, like a massive fireball, or tangible instruments of death that are physically held, or both, depending on the situation. Through incantations (*mantras*) a *divya astra* is generally united with a normal weapon (*śastra*) – typically arrows – which obviously makes the latter more effective. Among the more tangible *divya astras* are Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa’s *Sudarśana* discus, Arjuna’s *Gāṇḍīva* bow, and Karna’s divine lance (*śakti*).¹⁸ While these divine weapons are material objects, tangible instruments of war, they are not always bound by such mundane conceptions, as the *Sudarśana* discus at times materializes on command.¹⁹ Other divine weapons create thousands of arrows, or even appear as large “stormclouds” discharging from themselves various kinds of divine and non-divine weapons. What is central is the mental relationship divine weapons have with their wielder as they reside in the mind.²⁰ Furthermore, divine weapons are closely connected with such emotions as rage and anger. When unleashed they invoke all the raw power of a warrior’s fury,²¹ infused with the *tejas* of the gods, and thus are capable of laying waste hundreds of opponents in one concentrated act of violence.

Most divine weapons are named after the deities who preside over them, and, in general, they manifest the natural phenomena associated with the particular powers they reflect. For example, the *Āgneya astra* (“Fire-weapon”) belonging to Agni, the god of fire, creates fire, and the *Vāruṇa astra* (“Water-weapon”) belonging to Varuṇa, the water deity, creates water.²² Thus, a large array of divine weapons exists, which produce storms, lightning, fire, wind, typhoons, mountains, rain,

etc. Likewise, on a more physiological level, there is the *Prasvāpa astra* (“Sleep-weapon”) which is countered by the *Sam̐bodhana astra* (“Awakening-weapon”). There are also the three ultimate divine weapons; the *Brahmā (-śiras) astra* of Brahmā, the *Nārāyaṇa astra* relating to Viṣṇu, and finally the *Pāśupata astra* of Śiva.

The divine weapons are also sentient beings, who often appear anthropomorphically.²³ They can even assume various theriomorphic and therianthropic forms, which in a bestial fury tear their victims apart.²⁴ The personification of divine weapons develops to the point in the *Purāṇic* literature where the *Sudarśana* discus, as one example, is not only “capable of following Viṣṇu’s instructions and acting independently of him, but it is also capable of feeling emotions like wrath and dissatisfaction.”²⁵

Ultimately, all *divya astras* are weapons of a single divine energy – *tejas*. This energy is channelled into the physical world by their wielders, who, with the correct *mantras*²⁶ and, more importantly, their own reserves of *tejas*, control the energy by uniting it with a more tangible weapon, most commonly an arrow, or the energy can be simply released on its own. Divine weapons are far more destructive and efficacious than ordinary weapons (*śastras*) and their use enhances a warrior’s natural prowess in combat. However, this weaponry represents immense and often volatile power, and is reserved for the greatest of heroes, putting them in direct communion with the gods, as any warrior possessing a divine weapon can unleash the energy of the gods in the human realm.

A MODEL OF THE DIVINE WEAPONS

I present here a tentative model of the divine weapons based on the principles of *tejas*, and each principle will be then systematically examined.

The Genesis of the Divine Weapons

Divine weapons are forged from the *tejas* of various gods.

The Neutralization Process

When unleashed or uncontrolled, *tejas* must be neutralized, and *tejas* is the active ingredient required to do this. The process of neutralization is affected by concerns of quantity (e.g., *mahātejas* over *alpatejas*), and *tejas* is itself ranked in a qualitative hierarchy, which further affects

the neutralization process (e.g., *brahmatejas* over *kṣatriyatejas*, watery *tejas* over fiery *tejas*, etc.). The neutralization process takes two forms; either greater *tejas* bestows the relative rigidity and hardness of an object, and thus resists and repels weaker *tejas*; or greater *tejas* absorbs and contains weaker *tejas*.

The Control of the Divine Weapons

Throughout the epics, heroes are concerned with acquiring maximal *tejas* in its most potent forms. Furthermore, any warrior who acquires divine weapons must also possess a sufficient quantity and quality of *tejas* to control and employ them.

The Danger in the Divine Weapons

Because *tejas* absorbs *tejas*, there is an inherent danger in the divine weapons, which can lead to catastrophic results.

The Loss of Divine Weapons

The loss of *tejas* due to a change in the *yugas* or world ages causes the divine weapons to be withdrawn from the epic heroes.

Divine weapons are created from, embody, and function due to the principles governing *tejas*. The divine weapons are one of Hinduism's richest examples of the workings of these principles. The consistent application of the principles is evident throughout all the divine weapon episodes. The completed model can be used to examine any given divine weapon episode.

The Genesis of the Divine Weapons

The mythology encompassing the creation of the divine weapons is most developed in the *Purāṇic* literature.²⁷ The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* provides a clear account of their genesis.

Thereupon, Viśvakarman neutralized [the Sun's] *tejas*. Having placed the Sun on a lathe [Viśvakarman] ground down his *tejas*, [and] he worked an imperishable eighth portion and cut the piece away. The *Vaiṣṇava tejas*, which Viśvakarman cut away from him, fell blazing violently down on the earth . . . With this *tejas* the blacksmith constructed the discus of Viṣṇu, the trident of Śarva [Śiva], the palanquin [or weapon] of the Wealth-Giver [Kubera], the lance of Guha [Kārttikeya], and the weapons of the other gods: all these Viśvakarman fashioned with the *tejas*.

tejasā śāmanam cāsyā viśvakarmā cakāra ha. bhramam āropya sūryam tu tasya tejo niśātanam, krtavān aṣṭamaṃ bhāgaṃ sa vyaśātayad avyayam. yat tasmād vaiṣṇavam tejas sātitaṃ viśvakarmaṇā, jājvalyamānam apatat tad bhūmau . . . tvaṣṭaiva tejasā tena viṣṇoś cakram akalpayat, triśūlam caiva śarvasya śibikāṃ dhanadasya ca. śaktim

*guhasya devānām anyeṣāṃ ca yad āyudham, tat sarvaṃ tejasā tena viśvakarmā vyavarddhat. (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.2.8b–12)*²⁸

Like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,²⁹ the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*³⁰ states that Viśvakarman forges the divine weapons from a fragment of the sun's *tejas*.³¹

Viśvakarman created the weapons of the other gods, and those splendid items were made with the *tejas* of the sun for the pacification of enemies.

anyeṣāṃ caiva devānām āyudhāni sa viśvakṛt cakāra tejasā bhānor bhāsurāṇy ariśāntaye. (MP.108.4b–5a)

The *Padma Purāṇa*³² contains an independent creation myth for Viṣṇu's *Sudarśana* discus. Here, all the gods, including Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu, emit their own *tejas*, which forms into an unbearable mass that only Śiva can fashion into the fabled *divya astra*.³³

Thereupon, due to the crushing from the dance of Śaṃbhu the [*Sudarśana*] discus was produced, which was furnished with three hundred thousand spokes, and filled with ten million bones. Due to the rubbing of Śarva's foot, sparks were released from the *tejas*, and with this Viśvakarman created *astras* and celestial chariots.

atha cakram samutpannam śaṃbhor nartanamardanāt, āralakṣatrayopetaṃ asthikoṭisamākulam, śarvāṃghrikaṣaṇāt tasya tejaso nisṛtāḥ kaṇāḥ, viśvakarmā ca tenāstraṃ vimānāni ca nirmame. (PP.6.9.31b–33a)

An earlier version of this myth appears in the *Mahābhārata*, and although the *Sudarśana* discus is not explicitly created from *tejas*, the energy-substance is present.³⁴ Both myths suggest the discus possesses such intense *tejas* that it is difficult, or even impossible, to look at.³⁵ Thus, it seems that in order to remedy this the name *Sudarśana*, meaning “beautiful” or “good-looking”, is bestowed upon it so others can look at it.³⁶ The *Nārāyaṇa astra*, called the “ultimate weapon” (*parama astra*: MBh.7.166.44), gives the wielder the ability to produce diverse showers of divine weapons (*divyāni śastravarṣāṇi*), and due to its very nature the wielder blazes with *tejas*.³⁷ In the *Mahābhārata*, an alternate creation myth for the *Nārāyaṇa astra* states that Viṣṇu constructs it from the *tejas* of Nārāyaṇa, and his *tejas* is the substance that “extinguishes the *tejas* of other *astras*” (*yat tan nārāyaṇam tejaḥ astratejaḥpramardanam*: MBh.7.170.40, 1401*3³⁸). The *Nārāyaṇa astra* and the other divine weapon myths of origin reveal a consistent principle: all *divya astras* are made from and embody *tejas*.

The Neutralization Process

The *Nārāyaṇa astra* is constructed from the *tejas* of Nārāyaṇa and his *tejas* “extinguishes the *tejas* of other *astras*.” Several important themes

can be extracted from this line. Firstly, *tejas* functions as the constitutive element of the divine weapon. Secondly, *tejas* functions as the divine weapon's destructive power. Thirdly, *tejas* neutralizes the *tejas* of other divine weapons. The influence of *tejas* over itself suggests that it is governed by a set of principles. The presence of *tejas* in other *divya astras* illustrates that it is a property shared among all divine weapons. Lastly, when Nārāyaṇa gave his divine weapon he also gave his *tejas*, which suggests that a *divya astra* contains the *tejas* of the specific deity who presides over it. These themes show that divine weapons are metonyms of *tejas*. Moreover, the *leitmotif* of the whole Nārāyaṇa *astra* episode is the danger posed by the Nārāyaṇa *astra's tejas*.³⁹ By exploring these themes the principles governing divine weapons can be clearly elucidated.

To begin, it is important to explore the motif in which *tejas* is bestowed upon a hero. This is illustrated in the *Mahābhārata*; before the warrior Kunalāsva slays the demon Dhundhu, he is told:

Viṣṇu will cause your own *tejas* to increase with his *tejas* . . . Whichever king slays this fierce and great Asura, then, the *Vaiṣṇava tejas*, which is dangerous to approach, will enter him. You must take upon yourself that *tejas* which is unbearable on earth . . . For Dhundhu who possesses great *tejas* is unable to be burnt up by insufficient [*alpa-*] *tejas*, indeed, even in hundreds of years . . .

. . . *tejasā tava tejaś ca viṣṇur āpyāyayiṣyati . . . yas taṃ mahāsuraṃ raudraṃ vadhiṣyati mahīpatiḥ, tejas taṃ vaiṣṇavam iti pravekṣyati durāsadam. tat tejas tvam samādhāya bhūvi duḥsaham . . . na hi dhundhur mahātejaś tejasālpēna śakyate, nirdagdhum . . . sa hi varṣasatair api.* (MBh.3.193.24–27)

One principle conveyed by this myth is that *tejas* “can be given and taken, that is, it is transferable. When one is given *tejas* by others, his own *tejas* naturally increases. In the mythological sphere a god being given *tejas* by a more powerful god becomes stronger.”⁴⁰ The central principle is that *tejas* is affected by concerns of quantity. Clearly, one who is of *alpatejas* or “insufficient/limited *tejas*” needs greater quantities of *tejas* to defeat an opponent of *mahātejas* or “great *tejas*.” This principle features in other divine weapon episodes. For example, Viṣṇu's *tejas* enters and energizes Indra's *Vajra astra* (“Thunderbolt-weapon”), so the king of the gods can slay the demon Vṛtra.⁴¹ In an alternate version of this myth not only does Viṣṇu give Indra his *tejas*, but also all the gods and brahmins.⁴²

Several closely related principles that concern the destructive and hierarchical nature of *tejas* can be extracted from one central *Rāmāyaṇa* episode (Rām.1.53–55). To defeat the brahmin Vasiṣṭha, king Viśvāmitra practises asceticism (*tapas*) to gain divine weapons from Śiva. He attacks the brahmin with over three dozen different *divya astras*, which begin

to burn the ascetic's hermitage with their *tejas*. They are all literally swallowed ($\sqrt{\text{gras-}}$) by the brahman's staff (*danda*: Rām.1.55.6–13). The text continues:

When these [*divya astras*] were neutralized, [Viśvāmitra] released the *Brahmā astra* . . . All the three worlds became horrified when the *Brahmā astra* was set in motion. By brahmanical *tejas* Vasiṣṭha entirely consumed even that extremely fierce *Brahmā astra* with his *Brahmadaṇḍa* . . . While the great-spirited Vasiṣṭha was devouring the *Brahmā astra* he assumed a fierce and terrible appearance, which stunned the three worlds. From all the pores of skin of the great-spirited Vasiṣṭha flames accompanied by smoke shot forth like rays of light from fire, and the *Brahmadaṇḍa* raised by Vasiṣṭha's hand blazed forth like the smokeless Fire of Time or like another staff of Yama. Thereupon, hosts of sages praised Vasiṣṭha, that foremost of incantation reciters, "Your power is unfailing, O brahman! But you must contain the *tejas* with [your own] *tejas*! Viśvāmitra, who possessed great *tapas*, has been checked by you, O brahman, be gracious [foremost] of incantation reciters, O auspicious one! But the worlds must be freed from pain!" Being addressed in this way he [Vasiṣṭha] who possessed great *tejas* and great *tapas* neutralized himself. While breathing hard the injured Viśvāmitra said the following, "So much for the power that is the power of a kṣatriya! The power of *brahmatejas* is [true] power!⁴³ By a single *Brahmadaṇḍa* all my *astras* have been nullified. I have contemplated all this, therefore, with mind and body purified I will undertake great asceticism so as to attain brahmanhood."

teṣu śānteṣu brahmāstraṃ kṣiptavān gādhinandanāḥ . . . trailokyam āsīt samtrastam brahmāstre samudīrite. tad apy astraṃ mahāghoraṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brāhmeṇa tejasā vasiṣṭho grasate sarvaṃ brahmadāṇḍena . . . brahmāstraṃ grasamānasya vasiṣṭhasya mahātmanaḥ trailokyamohanaṃ raudraṃ rūpam āsīt sudārūnam. romakūpeṣu sarveṣu vasiṣṭhasya mahātmanaḥ marcyā iva niṣpetur agner dhūmakulārciṣaḥ. prājvalad brahmadāṇḍas ca vasiṣṭhasya karodyataḥ vidhūma iva kālāgnir yamadaṇḍa ivāparaḥ. tato 'stuvan munigaṇā vasiṣṭhaṃ japatām varam, amoghaṃ te balaṃ brahmaṇs tejo dhārāya tejasā. niḡhīta tvayā brahmaṇ viśvāmitro mahātapaḥ, prasīda japatām śreṣṭha lokāḥ santu gatavyathāḥ. evam ukto mahātejāḥ samaṃ cakre mahātapaḥ. viśvāmitro 'pi nīkṛto viniḡśvāsyedam abravīt. dhīgbalaṃ kṣatriyabalaṃ brahmatejobalaṃ balaṃ, ekena brahmadāṇḍena sarvāstraṇi hatāni me. tad etat samavekṣyāham prasannendriyamānaḥ tapo mahat samāsthāsye yad vai brahmatvakārakam. (Rām.1.55.14–24)

This myth reveals several important principles governing the way divine weapons operate. Firstly, *tejas* is harnessed, absorbed, neutralized, and contained by other entities that possess *tejas* themselves. *Tejas* is the active substance required to deal with *tejas*. Secondly, various qualities of *tejas* affect the outcome of the neutralization process. Here, a priest's *tejas* is superior to a warrior's *tejas*. Furthermore, these qualities define the hierarchy of *tejas*. Thus, not only does one need greater quantities of *tejas*, but to defeat an opponent of superior *tejas* one needs more potent energy, which is illustrated by Viśvāmitra's concern to attain brahmanhood in order to gain access to *brahmatejas*.

This principle features in other divine weapon episodes as well. For example, to slay the brahman demon Viśvarūpa, who possesses "unlimited *tejas*" (*amitatejas*:- MBh.5.9.7), Indra has his *Vajra astra* constructed from the bones of a brahman, and thus from *brahmatejas*.⁴⁴

When that supreme being departed, Dhātṛ collected his bones and created the *Vajra*. With this invincible and indestructible *Vajra*, which was constructed from the bones of a brahman, and permeated by Viṣṇu, Indra destroyed Viśvarūpa, and severed his heads.

tasya paramātmāny avasṛte tāny asthīni dhātā samgr̥hya vajram akarot, tena vajreṇābhedyenāpradhṛṣyeṇa brahmāsthisaṃbhūtena viṣṇupraviṣṭenendro viśvarūpaṃ jaghāna, śīrasaṃ cāsya chedanam akarot. (MBh.12.329.27)

It is naturally Viṣṇu's *tejas* that permeates (*pra-√viś-*) the *Vajra*,⁴⁵ but also, as the text itself concludes, Indra is only able to kill Viśvarūpa by being "increased with the power of *brahmatejas*."⁴⁶ Once again a brahman's *tejas* is more effective than a kṣatriya's *tejas*. Thus, as Hildebeitel has noted, Indra can defeat a brahman only by having access to another brahman's energy.⁴⁷

The qualitative hierarchy of the neutralization process can be seen working at other levels in the use of the *Vāruṇa astra* or "Water-weapon", which is generally employed to neutralize the *Āgneya astra* or "Fire-weapon". While it seems that water is naturally being used to counter fire, a more refined process emerges when the mythology surrounding fire and water is examined. Agni, the god of fire, offers the following explanation when he refuses to enter water:

I will be unable to enter the water, my destruction will be in it . . . Fire was produced from water, the warrior class was produced from the priestly class, and iron was produced from rock. The *tejas* which pervades them all is neutralized in their individual sources.

nāpaḥ praveṣṭuṃ śakṣyāmi kṣayo me 'tra bhaviṣyati . . . adbhyo 'gnir brahmataḥ kṣatram aśmano loham utthitam teṣāṃ sarvatragaṃ tejaḥ svāsu yoniṣu śāmyati. (MBh.5.15.31–32)

The central theme conveyed in this myth is that the subtle energy of both fire (*agni*) and water (*apas*) is *tejas*,⁴⁸ and also that the *tejas* of fire will be neutralized if it enters the *tejas* of water. Or more generally, *tejas* operates on *tejas* in such a way that one is neutralized by the other (the same sentiments expressed in MBh.7.170.40, 1401*3, and Rām.1.55.14–24). The process is hierarchical: though it resides in various phenomena, the *tejas* of water is superior to and thus neutralizes the *tejas* of fire; the *tejas* of brahmans is superior to the *tejas* of kṣatriyas; the *tejas* of rock is superior to the *tejas* of iron, and so on. To quote O'Flaherty:

The image of fire in water is used throughout Indian mythology to express the control of indestructible excess energy. Although in Western thought water brought to fire usually results in the extinction of fire, in India the fire almost always emerges intact from the combination, merely controlled or transformed . . .⁴⁹

In relation to the neutralizing power of *tejas*, it is no surprise that Vasiṣṭha's divine weapon, the *Danda*, is described as "exceedingly fierce

and possessing *tejas* equal to the Fire of Time”,⁵⁰ which is tantamount to calling it the apocalyptic weapon *par excellence*. The *Kāladaṇḍa* or “the staff of Death” stood incarnate next to Yama, the god of the dead, and “blazed with *tejas*.”⁵¹ The *daṇḍa* is also the staff employed by kings, with which they punish criminals and administer the law (*dharmā*).⁵² In the *Mānavadharmasāstra* 7.28, *daṇḍa* – “punishment” – is called a very great *tejas*. Thus, Vasiṣṭha’s *Brahmadaṇḍa* clearly possesses superior quantities of *tejas* and the most potent quality, making it quite capable of neutralizing any *divya astra*.⁵³

The major process of neutralization outlined above involves containing the *tejas* within an object that possesses greater *tejas*. However, there is another way to counter divine weapons. The centrality of *tejas* extends to the relative rigidity of an object. Rigidity here means an object’s ability to resist damage, its impenetrability, strength, hardness, etc. Firstly, Duryodhana’s body is made from “masses of diamonds” (*vajrasamcaya-*), and for this reason it cannot be penetrated by *astras* and *śāstras*.⁵⁴ The *Vajra astra* is considered adamantine, thus lending its name to diamonds. Central to the *Vajra*’s rigidity is the fact that it is constructed from *brahmatejas*.⁵⁵ Anything equated with the *Vajra* is believed to embody the highest quality of *tejas*, and furthermore, due to this energy it can resist attacks. Moreover, the physical strength of the body (*śarīrabala*) is due to the correct functioning of the physical element of flesh (*māṃsadhātu*). *Bala* determines one’s ability to perform any physical exertion, the nature of one’s muscular structure, and it also endows sturdiness, firmness (*sthairya*), and hardness (*dr̥ḍhatā*) to the body.⁵⁶ The ability of *śarīrabala* and the *māṃsadhātu* to work is contingent on the correct functioning of *tejas*.⁵⁷ Thus, Duryodhana’s body is only adamantine because he possesses vast quantities and the most potent quality of *tejas*.⁵⁸ No wonder the epic authors can have the heroes who possess great *tejas* (*mahātejas*) struck by hundreds of arrows and still live.

This illustration can be extended to the correct functioning of armour. At Rām.6.59.1ff. Lakṣmaṇa battles the demon Atikāya (*mahātejas-*). The battle between them involves various divine weapons.⁵⁹ When the demon’s defenses are thwarted, thousands of arrows hit him, but their points shatter on his divine armour, which he previously obtained from Brahmā.⁶⁰ The armour is adorned with diamonds or the *Vajra* itself (*vajrabhūṣite*: Rām.6.59.93), and is considered invulnerable (*avadhyakavacaḥ*: Rām.6.59.95). Vāyu tells the hero that Atikāya’s armour is impenetrable, and of all *divya astras* only the *Brahmā astra* will work.⁶¹ Lakṣmaṇa releases the *Brahmā astra*, which is further said

to “resemble the *Vajra*” (*vajrakalpam*: Rām.6.59.100). The *Brahmā astra* penetrates the armour and kills the demon. Thus, to by-pass the armour, which embodies *brahmatejas*, Lakṣmaṇa has to employ the *Brahmā astra*, itself constructed from *brahmatejas* (the same sentiments expressed in Viśvāmitra’s battle with Vasiṣṭha, and Indra’s battle with Viśvarūpa).⁶² Therefore, the capacity of a given object, e.g., divine weapons, armour, and flesh, to resist being penetrated or destroyed depends on both the quantity and quality of its *tejas*. Thus, not only can superior energy absorb and neutralize an inferior source, but a superior source can also repel the energy altogether. Only the context of the given episode will indicate which form of neutralization is occurring, i.e., repulsion or containment. The former is probably the primary way divine weapons counter each other in the standard combat portrayed in the epics, much like any parrying blow or shield would work. However, it is the latter method of neutralization that causes the greatest problems in the texts.

The Control of the Divine Weapons

When Vasiṣṭha absorbs and contains the *Brahmā astra*, its *tejas* is so intense that the brahman is transformed, making him more violent and a threat to the universe. The incoming fiery energy is so excessive that flames shoot forth from his skin. In a verse that encompasses the neutralization process, the text even implies that the brahman could lose control of himself. Vasiṣṭha is told: “You must contain the *tejas* with your own *tejas*!”⁶³ In addition, only by performing a balancing act between his own *tejas*, the *Danda*’s *tejas*, and the *Brahmā astra*’s *tejas*, is the brahman able to neutralize himself, as an intake of excessive energy can cause uncontrollable rage or self-annihilation.

Clearly, one must possess adequate *tejas* to handle an intake of new energy. It is no surprise, then, that before a warrior receives any *divya astras* his own *tejas* levels are evaluated. This is evident in the following episodes: before Arjuna receives the dreaded *Pāśupata astra* he practises *tapas*, and is said to possess fierce *tejas* (*ugratejas*:- MBh.3.39.20).⁶⁴ Disguised as a mountain man (*kirāta*) Śiva engages Arjuna in a duel, by which the hero’s *tejas* levels are tested.⁶⁵ Arjuna attacks Śiva with various divine weapons, but the god swallows (*√gras*-) them all.⁶⁶ The deity neutralizes the divine weapons by containing them within himself, a feat worthy of the Doomsday god, who is said to be the receptacle (*nidhi*) of all *tejas* and *tapas*.⁶⁷ Arjuna continues to attack the deity with the *Brahmā astra*:

When all of those [*divya astras*] were neutralized, I brought forth the *Brahmā astra*. Thereupon, he was completely covered with blazing arrows, and as he was covered by my great *astra* he increased in size. Then, the world was scorched by the *tejas* that was produced from me, and for a moment all the heavens were completely ablaze. Then the one who possessed great *tejas* [Śiva] instantly overpowered even that *astra*.

teṣu sarveṣu santeṣu brahmāstram aham ādiṣam. tataḥ prajvalitair bāṇaiḥ sarvataḥ sopacīyata, upacīyamānaś ca mayā mahāstreṇa vyavardhata. tataḥ saṃtāpito loko matprasūtena tejasā, kṣaṇena hi diśaḥ khaṃ ca sarvato 'bhividīpitam. tad apy astraṃ mahātejāḥ kṣaṇenaiva vyaśātayat. (MBh.3.163.33–35a)

Dismayed at Śiva's power, Arjuna grapples with him, but the deity overpowers the hero with his *tejas*.⁶⁸ After the battle, Śiva tells Arjuna; "My and your *tejas* and virility have been matched today, O faultless one."⁶⁹ Only after this test does Śiva present Arjuna with his own *Pāśupata astra*.

Similarly, before Arjuna receives divine weapons from Indra he is tested (*parīkṣārtham*: MBh.3.164.28) regarding their correct use. Indra only gives Arjuna his divine weapons when the latter promises never to use them against humans (*mānuṣa*:- MBh.3.164.26), a process that directly relates to the principles of *tejas*. In similar fashion, in exchange for Indra's divine lance (*śakti*), Karna cuts his preternatural armour and earrings from his body. However, Karna only agrees to this gruesome bargain when Indra promises to restore his *tejas* to its original level. The reason for this is that Karna loses *tejas* when his innate armour and earrings are removed.⁷⁰ This illustrates that warriors draw upon the energy of objects, and any loss of *tejas* in the forms of armour, earrings, weapons, etc., depletes the warriors' energy pool. Finally, when Aśvatthāman prays to Śiva for divine weapons, various creatures appear before him, literally intent on ascertaining the extent of his *tejas* (*jijñāsamānās tattejāḥ*: MBh.10.7.48). Only after their evaluation does Śiva appear in person, and gifts a divine weapon in the form of "supreme and stainless sword" (*vimalaṃ khadgam uttamam*: MBh.10.7.64), but not before Śiva's own *tejas* enters Aśvatthāman.⁷¹ This clearly demonstrates that a warrior's energy must be adequate before he can receive divine weapons. The reason for this is that a warrior must be successfully able to contain and employ the divine weapon's *tejas* with his own *tejas*.⁷²

This point can be further illustrated by the fact that warriors are preoccupied with maintaining their energy levels. They acquire as much *tejas* as possible in many different forms, such as divine and non-divine weapons, armour, adornments, jewellery, chariots, and banners – all of which contain *tejas*. As one example from the epics, amulets and other forms of jewellery are said to blaze with *tejas*. Various kinds of amulets

(*mañi*) appear throughout the Vedic literature, which bestow upon the wearer many different energy-substances, including *tejas*, when bound to a part of the body.⁷³ In the *Atharva Veda* an amulet is addressed thus; “‘*tejas* art thou, confer *tejas* (hold *tejas* fast) on me’ (*tejo ’si tejo mayi dhārayādhi*).”⁷⁴ This is also the case with other items and materials, such as a gold plate, which bestows upon the wearer its innate *tejas*.⁷⁵ Thus, the innate energy of these items is drawn upon to augment one’s own energy pool.

During battle a warrior’s *tejas* can be depleted, and if it is lost he will die.⁷⁶ According to Indian medicine (*āyurveda*), energy-substances are lost through lacerations, broken bones, internal injuries, and the like.⁷⁷ In one episode, Rāma’s troops are severely wounded, but are given herbs that are said to blaze and burn.⁷⁸ In a separate myth, herbs (*oṣadhi*) are created from the *tejas* of the sun and moon.⁷⁹ Warriors speak to other warriors to increase their *tejas*,⁸⁰ and before battle the *tejas* of a hero is enhanced by musicians playing drums and singing praises.⁸¹ Arjuna’s *tejas* combines (*tejas tejasi samprktam*: MBh.6.45.50) with the energy of another warrior, so the latter can survive a deadly attack. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa receive a series of power words (*mantragrāma*) known as *Balā* and *Atibalā* (which are also associated with divine herbs) that protect the brothers from hunger, fatigue, and a demoness, and all this is because the *mantras* are full of *tejas* (*tejaḥsamanvita*:- Rām.1.21.16). Thus, the maintenance of *tejas* is a vital theme for warriors in the epics – without sustained energy they are dead.

A warrior can further acquire *tejas* from an opponent in battle. In a heated argument with Śiśupāla, Kṛṣṇa calls forth the *Sudarśana* discus and proceeds to cut off the king’s head:

Thereupon, the [assembled] kings watched an excellent *tejas* rise up from the body of the king of Cedi . . . like the sun rising from the sky. Then, that *tejas* worshipped the lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, who is honoured in the world, and it entered into him . . . Having seen that, all the rulers of the earth thought it was wonderful that the *tejas* entered into the mighty-armed one, who is supreme among men.

tataś cedipater dehāt tejo ’gryaṃ dadṛśur nṛpāḥ, utpatantaṃ . . . gaganād iva bhāskaram. tataḥ kamalapatrākṣaṃ kṛṣṇaṃ lokanamaskṛtam, vavande tat tadā tejo viveśa ca . . . tad abhutam amānyanta dr̥ṣtvā sarve mahīkṣitāḥ, yad viveśa mahābāhuṃ tat tejaḥ puruṣottamam. (MBh.2.42.22–24)

The text even states that Kṛṣṇa contrives the execution of the king for the sole purpose of reintegrating the energy, because Śiśupāla is said to be a fragment (*amśa*) of the deity’s own *tejas*.⁸² While referring to this episode Hara appropriately states: “In single combat it was believed that the *tejas* of the killed warrior entered into the one who kills.”⁸³

There are episodes where the *tejas* of a slain warrior goes elsewhere. When Karṇa is slain his *tejas* returns to the sun,⁸⁴ and when Droṇa is killed he ascends to heaven like a blazing meteor (*ulkāṃ prajvalitām iva*: MBh.7.165.57⁸⁵). Fire acts as a standard mode of transport between various realms. For example, Śiva descends to earth in a great blaze of fire (*mahārciṣmat*: MBh.3.40.3). Similarly, when mortally wounded, Vālin's *tejas*, *śrī*, *parākrama*, and *prāṇa* enter a necklace.⁸⁶ While wearing the necklace he remains alive and only dies when the necklace is given to his brother Sugrīva.⁸⁷ This further implies that Sugrīva acquires all of his brother's energy.

Tejas is thus the functional martial energy *par excellence*. It is employed both offensively and defensively. A *divya astra* is the means to release *tejas* into battle. In combat *tejas* must be controlled and takes many different forms. The acquisition and maintenance of *tejas* is vital for the survival of a warrior, and his skill and mastery in divine weapons. The epic warriors do not exclusively possess *tejas*, but because they are expected to monopolize violence, it is by function central to their needs in battle. Obviously, it is not better for a warrior to burn out, for he will fade away.

The Danger in the Divine Weapons

While many divine weapons have the destructive power to kill thousands in one strike, there is a further danger in the divine weapons that is related in the following episode. Arjuna acquires divine weapons from the gods and begins to demonstrate them. The world is afflicted with terrible omens and the sage Nārada says:

Arjuna, O Arjuna, you must not employ the *divya astras*! They are never at anytime to be released at an improper receptacle . . . Nor at anytime should one release them at a proper receptacle, when not pressed: for in the use of these *astras* lies a very great evil . . . When these powerful [*divya astras*] are protected according to tradition . . . they will bring happiness without a doubt. But when not protected, they lead to the destruction of the three worlds, O Pāṇḍava: never do this again!

arjunārjuna mā yuñkṣva divyāny astrāṇi . . . naitāni niradhiṣṭhāne prayujyante kadā cana. adhiṣṭhāne nā vānārtah prayujjīta kadā cana, prayoge sumahān doṣa hy astrāṇām . . . etāni rakṣyamāṇāni . . . yathāgamam, balavanti sukhārḥāni bhaviṣyanti na saṃśayaḥ. arakṣyamāṇāny etāni trailokyasyāpi pāṇḍava, bhavanti sma vināśāya maivaṃ bhūyaḥ kṛthāḥ kva cit. (MBh. 3.172.18–21)

The cataclysmic evil (*sumahān doṣaḥ*) of the divine weapons is so devastating that it can destroy the universe. This is a striking statement considering the importance of the divine weapons. At its strongest *doṣa* translates as “evil”, but means at least a “fault”, “deficiency” or “detrimental effect.” Therefore, what is the “detrimental effect” that can bring about the end of the universe?

One clue is offered about the danger in (mis-)using the divine weapons: Arjuna is told never to use the divine weapons on an “improper receptacle” (*niradhiṣṭhāna*). The following episode reveals the exact nature of an “improper receptacle”. When Arjuna receives the *Pāśupata astra* (equated with the *Brahmaśiras astra* and *Brahmā astra*) Śiva tells him:⁸⁸

I shall give to you the great *Pāśupata astra*, which is my favourite! O Pāṇḍava, [you are] capable of containing, releasing, and recontaining [this *divya astra*]. Even great Indra does not know it, nor Yama, nor the king of the Yakṣas, neither Varuṇa, nor Vāyu; how could the humans know it? However, O Pārtha, without deliberation it is not at anytime to be released at a human: for if hurled at one of insufficient *tejas*, it might burn down the entire world.⁸⁹ There is no one in the three worlds, moving and motionless, who is invulnerable to it. It can be directed by the mind, the eye, a word, or a bow.

dadāni te 'stram dayitam aham pāśupatam mahat, samartha dhāraṇe mokṣe saṃhāre cāpi pāṇḍava. naitad veda mahendro 'pi na yamo na ca yakṣarāt, varuṇo vātha vā vāyuh kuto vetsyanti mānavāḥ. na tv etat sahasā pārtha moktavyaṃ puruṣe kva cit, jagad vinirdahet sarvam alpatejasi pātitam. avadhyo nāma nāsty asya trailokyē sacarācare, manasā cakṣuṣā vācā dhanuṣā ca nipātyate. (MBh.3.41.13–16)

Evidently an “improper receptacle” (*niradhiṣṭhāna*) is a human (*puruṣa*, *mānuṣa*, etc.) who possesses “insufficient *tejas*” (*alpatejas*), and because of this lack of *tejas*, the divine weapons cannot be provided with a place to rest – a clear reference to the neutralization process. The category *alpatejas* is a statement of quantity. According to epic ontology, humans reside near the bottom of the creation and therefore possess limited amounts of *tejas*. This may very well be the reason why humans cannot wield divine weapons.⁹⁰ The imperative prohibiting the *divya astras* striking a being of insufficient *tejas* indicates that the neutralization process will fail.

The question remains: what would happen if a divine weapon struck an entity of “insufficient *tejas*”? By drawing upon the themes already encountered with the principles of the divine weapons the answer can be simply stated: if a divine weapon struck a being of insufficient *tejas* (*alpatejas*), its inherent *tejas* will not be neutralized; moreover, the divine weapon will take the *tejas* of its victim(s), causing it to increase in size, and after many such incidents it will possess enough energy to threaten the universe. This is the cataclysmic danger in the divine weapons! This occurs in one of the longest divine weapon episodes.⁹¹ The *Nārāyaṇa astra* is directed at the human footsoldiers and begins to swell to such proportions that the universe is nearly destroyed. It is only by Kṛṣṇa’s invention and his direct concern with cutting off the divine weapon’s access to any potential fuel sources that the *Nārāyaṇa astra* is finally countered.⁹²

The preceding analysis assumes that a divine weapon will appropriate the *tejas* of an inadequate target. This can be verified as the text reveals more about the nature of the divine weapons in the warning that identifies their misuse as a *doṣa* or “evil”. The word *doṣa* in addition means “bodily humour” and “disease”, and thus refers to the ancient Indian theory of three bodily humours (*tridoṣa*). According to *Āyurveda*, diseases occur from an imbalance in one or more of the three bodily humours (*tridoṣa*); “wind” (*vāta*), “phlegm” (*kapha*), and “bile” (*pitta*). The energy of the *pitta doṣa* or “bilious humour” is *tejas*, the very same energy found in divine weapons.⁹³ The three humours are the foundation and controllers of the psychosomatic condition of all beings. They act as basic constituents for the body in states of psychological and physiological health, but when unbalanced contribute to the contraction of diseases. For example, the *pitta doṣa* governs the metabolic and digestive systems, while *agni* (“fire”) is the active principle of the entire system, and correspondingly *tejas* is the subtle energy of *agni*.⁹⁴ The *pitta doṣa* is homologously and metonymically related to *agni* “fire” and *tejas* “fiery energy.”⁹⁵ *Pitta* and *agni/tejas* are virtually identical – the major difference is that *pitta* is the container and *agni/tejas* is the contained. The *pitta doṣa* is further responsible for visual perception and its impairment, the colour and beauty of the body, and such emotions as courage or fear, anger or cheerfulness, and the lucidity or confusion of the mind.⁹⁶ As the bilious internal heat of the body, the main function of *agni* is to stimulate digestion, and thus is central in the assimilation of nutrition. *Tejas* is responsible for the nourishment, transformation, and physiological functioning of the body’s “physical elements” (*dhātus*). Consequently, every *dhātu* inherently contains *tejas* (*dhātvagni* or *tejodhātu*).⁹⁷

A disease is originally produced when an imbalance occurs in the humours. The *doṣas* should ideally be in a state of equilibrium, but this balance is easily disturbed. When a disorder occurs in the balance of the three humours (*tridoṣa*), the physical elements (*dhātus*) are directly affected. Disease occurs when a *doṣa* becomes agitated and overflows its boundaries, thus causing an increase and an imbalance in a specific *dhātu*.⁹⁸ The cause of increase of all things is due to the general or those qualities shared in common (e.g., *tejas*), while the cause of their decrease is the particular or unshared qualities.⁹⁹ The nature of an individual container (the particular) is to separate the contained (the general), and when the container is compromised the contained gains the new but defective pathways that allow it to unite with its like substance.

Hence, *tejas* tends to attract and absorb *tejas*. This is not only true for the internal world, but for the external one as well.

The Loss of the Divine Weapons

The last principle pertaining to the divine weapons is Arjuna's loss of them after the Kurukṣetra war.¹⁰⁰ There are two central factors that relate to the loss of the divine weapons; (1) the change in the *yugas* or "cosmic ages", and (2) the subsequent loss of *tejas*.

By the epic period, a complex system of cosmological time had developed based on four ages of the cosmos (*yugas*) that make up one complete cyclic age of existence (*mahāyuga*). The four successive *yugas* are characterized by progressively decreasing lifespans, virtues, and quality of human life. The *Rāmāyaṇa* takes place in the *Tretā yuga*, while the *Mahābhārata* is set at the end of *Dvāpara yuga*. At the end of the great Kurukṣetra war *Kali yuga* begins. The present age of the universe, *Kali yuga*, is characterized by the final decline of *dharma* and a general sense of suffering and impurity. The world and human beings are at their worst in all matters. It is this general sense of deterioration in *Kali yuga* that can be specifically correlated with the loss of the divine weapons due to an intrinsic decline in the potential *tejas* available to all mortals, including warriors.

To turn to the loss of the divine weapons: the Kurukṣetra war is resolved, and *Kali yuga* commences. Only the Pāṇḍavas, their common wife Draupadī, and a handful of others remain alive. The *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa is mortally wounded by a hunter named Jaras or "Old age", and returns to the divine realms. While escorting women and children from Kṛṣṇa's city Dvārakā, Arjuna is engaged in battle by a thousand bandits (*dasyu*). Arjuna begins to fight these bandits but has trouble stringing his *Gāṇḍīva* bow, and when he summons his divine weapons they do not appear (MBh.16.8.52–53). Due to this, Arjuna cannot protect the women from being captured. Arjuna begins to lament his defeat, and blames his inability to employ his divine weapons on the nature of fate (*daiva*: MBh.16.8.62–64). The divine sage Vyāsa drives the point home when he informs Arjuna:

He who was once powerful loses that power, and he who was once a lord is ruled by others. Your *astras*, which have accomplished their mission, have gone and they will return in the future to your hand when the [appropriate] time arrives.

sa eva balavān bhūtvā punar bhavati durbalaḥ, sa eveśaś ca bhūtveha parair ājñāpyate punaḥ. kṛtakṛtyāni cāstrāṇi gatāny adya yathāgatam, punar eṣyanti te hastaṃ yadā kālo bhaviṣyati. (MBh.16.9.34–35)

Arjuna's loss of the divine weapons is thus due to the workings of fate (*daiva*) and time (*kāla*), and one manifestation of time is the *yugas*.

The loss of the divine weapons can also be correlated with a loss of *tejas*. Firstly, before the bandits attack Arjuna's caravan they state that they can only do it because the warriors, including Arjuna, are "shorn of *ojas*" (*hataujasaḥ*: MBh.16.8.46), while a variant text reads "shorn of *tejas*" (*hatatejasah*). Furthermore, while the critical edition has Arjuna lamenting the "deterioration in the virility of his arms" (*vaikṛtyam . . . bhujavīrye*: MBh.16.8.54), a variant text supplies "deterioration in the virility of his *tejas*" (*vaikṛtyam . . . tejavīrye*). If Arjuna has lost his *tejas* it would explain the reason behind the mysterious disappearance of his divine weapons. Without the correct quantity of *tejas* Arjuna will be unable to control or employ the divine weapons successfully. Correspondingly, a loss of *tejas* correlates with a loss in physical strength (*śarīrabala*), which is seen in Arjuna's inability to string his divine bow. The sage Vyāsa informs Arjuna that his weakness in battle is for the following reason:

Power, intuition, *tejas*, and foresight exist in times of prosperity, and they perish in the opposite conditions . . . All this has its root in time, which is the principal cause of the universe . . . Time thus unexpectedly takes it all away again.

balaṃ buddhiś ca tejaś ca pratipattiś ca . . . bhavanti bhavakāleṣu vipadyante viparyaye. kalamūlam idaṃ sarvaṃ jagadbījaṃ . . . kāla eva samādatte punar eva yadr̥cchayā. (MBh.16.9.32–33)

Vyāsa's statement is further clarified in the following:

[The wise man] knows in *yuga* after *yuga* that the natural law [*dharma*] is crippled in one foot, and that the life expectancy and energy of mortals follow the rules of the *yuga*.¹⁰¹

pādāpasāriṇaṃ dharmam vidvān sa tu yuge yuge, āyuh śaktiṃ ca martyānām yugānugam avekṣya ca. (MBh.1.57.72)

Thus, power (*bala*), intuition (*buddhi*), *tejas*, and foresight (*pratipatti*) all decline due to a change in time (*kāla*, *yuga*), and this consequently causes a loss in the potential life expectancy (*āyus*) of humans. The Sanskrit word *śakti* or "energy" is employed in the second passage as a general word for all energy-substances.¹⁰²

The epic authors are suggesting that in the world in which they live, *Kali yuga*, no one can own or employ divine weapons of the calibre portrayed in *Dvāpara yuga*. This is because of a decline in the potential amount of *tejas* any given individual can acquire. If the divine weapons are left in Arjuna's possession, his de-energized state would put the universe (not to mention himself) in jeopardy, since the divine weapons will not be able to be controlled. Thus, the divine weapons are withdrawn from circulation, so to speak, and returned to their divine owners. This is illustrated by Arjuna's inability to employ his *divya astras* and occurred when the *Brahmaśiras astra* returned

to Brahmā after its *tejas* was removed from the slain Parikṣit (see MBh.14.69.1–3).¹⁰³ Furthermore, after the incident with the bandits, Arjuna and his brothers encounter the god of fire, while travelling near an ocean. Arjuna still carries his *Gāṇḍīva* bow and two inexhaustible quivers. Agni proceeds to tell the Pāṇḍavas the following:

“Your brother Phalguna [Arjuna] should only go to the forest after giving up this supreme weapon, the *Gāṇḍīva*. He has no need of it anymore. That jewel of a discus, which stood next to the great-spirited Kṛṣṇa, has gone. When the time comes, it will return to his hand. For Pārtha’s use it [the *Gāṇḍīva*] was procured from Varuṇa by me. Thus, that best of bows, the *Gāṇḍīva*, must be given back to Varuṇa.” Thereupon, all those brothers urged Dhanamjaya, and thus he threw it into the ocean, and those two inexhaustible great quivers.¹⁰⁴

ayaṃ vaḥ phalguno bhrātā gāṇḍīvaṃ paramāyudham, parityajya vanaṃ yātu nānenārtho ’sti kaś cana. cakratmaṇi tu yat kṛṣṇe sthitam āsīn mahātmani, gatam tac ca punar haste kālenaiśyati tasya ha. varuṇād āhṛtaṃ pūrvaṃ mayaitat pārthakāraṇāt, gāṇḍīvaṃ kāmukaśreṣṭhaṃ varuṇāyaiva dīyatām. tatas te bhrātaraḥ sarve dhanamjayam acodayan, sa jale prākṣipat tat tu tathākṣayau mahesudhī.
(MBh.17.1.37–40)

Therefore, the divine weapons of the calibre portrayed in the epics can only be safely issued in the framework of a more powerful age. Moreover, because of a natural decline in the potential amounts of *tejas* anyone can acquire, those very divine weapons can no longer be owned or successfully employed, and must be returned to their owners to protect the universe from the cataclysmic danger inherent in their nature.¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

Divine weapons are created from, embody, and function due to the principles governing *tejas* or “fiery energy.” Firstly, all divine weapons contain *tejas*. Secondly, when violently active, *tejas* must be neutralized, and *tejas* is the active ingredient required to do this. The process of neutralization is affected by concerns of quantity (e.g., *mahātejas* over *alpatejas*), and *tejas* is itself ranked in a qualitative hierarchy, which further affects the neutralization process (e.g., *brahmatejas* over *kṣatriyatejas*, watery *tejas* over fiery *tejas*, etc.). Thirdly, throughout the epics, heroes are concerned with acquiring maximal *tejas* and in the most potent forms. Any warrior who acquires divine weapons must also possess the adequate quantity and quality of *tejas* to control and employ them. Fourthly, when contained the energy naturally expands, and can burst its container and move into other sources. When this occurs on a cataclysmic scale, such as the *Nārāyaṇa astra* episode, then the only option is to remove any potential sources of energy which

it can assimilate. The *Nārāyaṇa astra* leaches the *tejas* of its victims and swells to cataclysmic proportions, and only by the intervention of the *deus ex machina* – Kṛṣṇa – is the imminent destruction of the Pāṇḍava army avoided, and the universe saved. Lastly, it is the loss of *tejas* due to a change in the *yugas* that causes the divine weapons to be withdrawn from Arjuna. The application of the principles is evident throughout all the divine weapon episodes.

Without an appreciation of the principles of *tejas*, the divine weapon episodes cannot be adequately understood. This appreciation highlights the lucidity and skill of the epic poets and the implicit knowledge they drew on to create the divine weapons. The consistent appearance of *tejas* in the divine weapon episodes and the coherent application of its principles indicate a long and nurtured development in ancient Indian thought. When the divine weapons are considered in the context of an ancient Indian ontology they appear as rational creations based on a clear internal logic. The divine weapons are explicit and amplified examples of an ancient Indian physics – the principles of *tejas* – which are believed to permeate all forms of life, encompassing both the animate and inanimate worlds, linking the two together by a common property, which charges them, giving value, functionality, and power – and is based on empirical, intuitive, and inherited forms of knowledge. The divine weapon episodes and the principles of *tejas* are straightforward. The simplicity of the episodes and their underlying principles does not indicate a deficiency on the part of the authors, in fact, it indicates the exact opposite, highlighting the attention to detail and forethought given to the epics. Scholars have long noted the importance of fire in numerous ancient warrior cultures. I have demonstrated one aspect of this phenomenon in the ancient Indian context. By appreciating these principles, one begins to understand the metaphors, symbols, and relationships between warriors and divine weapons, normal weapons, fire, heat, light, anger, courage, physical strength, rigidity, and spiritual power – which all culminate in the notion of *tejas* in the epic period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to William S. Sax and Paul M. Harrison of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and John D. Smith of Cambridge University, England, for their various inputs into my ongoing research and drafts of this paper.

NOTES

¹ See V.S. Sukthankar et al., eds., *The Mahābhārata*, 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–72), and G.H. Bhatt et al., eds., *The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*, 7 vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–75).

² See P.C. Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India* (Dacca: The University of Dacca, 1941). V.R.R. Dikshitar, *War in Ancient India* (Madras: MacMillan & Co., 1944). B.K. Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India* (Calcutta: The World Press, 1955). J. Sarkar, *Military History of India* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1960). G.N. Pant, *Indian Archery* (Delhi: Agam Prasad, 1978). J.R. Partington, *A History of Greek Fire and Gunpowder* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1960). E. Jaiwant Paul, *'By My Sword and Shield' Traditional Weapons of the Indian Warrior* (New Delhi: The Lotus Collection (Roli Books), 1995).

³ See Wilbrahim Egerton, *An Illustrated Handbook of Indian Arms ...* (London: White Orchid Press, 1880), p. 10.

⁴ E.W. Hopkins, *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India* (Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1972 [1889]), pp. 240–243.

⁵ Hopkins (1972), p. 241.

⁶ Many modern Hindus explain the divine weapons as proof of the ancient Indians' knowledge and employment of nuclear arsenals.

⁷ J.L. Mehta, "The Discourse of Violence in the *Mahabharata*", in J.L. Mehta, ed., *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990), pp. 268–269.

⁸ W.E. Begley, *Viṣṇu's Flaming Wheel: The Iconography of the Sudarśana-Cakra* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1973).

⁹ Ruth C. Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 96.

¹⁰ Alf Hiltebeitel, "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī", in *History of Religions*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1980), p. 159, *The Cult of Draupadī*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), and *The Ritual of Battle* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 328–329.

¹¹ Paolo Magnone, "The Development of *Tejas* from the Vedas to the Purāṇas", in *Proceedings of the VIIIth World Sanskrit Conference* (Vienna: 1990), p. 138. See also Chauncey Justus Blair, *Heat in the Ṛg Veda and Atharva Veda* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1961). Jan Gonda, *Ancient-Indian ojas, Latin *augos and the Indo-European nouns in -es/-os* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1952), and the same author's *Some Observations on the Relations between "Gods" and "Powers" in the Veda, a propos of the Phrase Sūnuḥ Sahasah* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1957).

¹² B. Dash, *The Concept of Agni in Āyurveda with special reference to Agnibala Parikṣā* (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1971), pp. 4–8.

¹³ Magnone, p. 142.

¹⁴ *yad yad vibhūtimat sattvaṃ śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā, tat tad evāvagaccha tvam mama tejomśasaṃbhavam.* BhG.10.41=MBh.6.32.41.

¹⁵ Magnone, p. 145.

¹⁶ Dash, pp. 12–13.

¹⁷ Magnone, p. 146.

¹⁸ It is important to note that *śakti* simply translates as a spear, lance, etc., and in the context of the divine weapons has nothing to do with the feminine principle or energy of later Hinduism. In fact, the very energy of the *Śakti* is none other than *tejas* (see Rām.6.88.22–45). However, I would like to suggest that the energies *tejas* and *śakti* share common properties, and research into their relationship is needed.

¹⁹ See MBh.1.17.20–23.

²⁰ See MBh.4.40.24, 764*6, MBh.10.14.2, Rām.1.26.24, and Rām.1.27.12.

²¹ It is wrong to think that divine weapons are the sole property of the epic warrior (*kṣatriya*). In fact, it is the epic priest (*brahman/brāhmaṇa*) who possesses and wields divine weapons the best. Any *kṣatriya* wanting to obtain them must study with a brahman, or go directly to the deity concerned. In contrast, see MBh.1.158.1ff., where Arjuna exchanges his *Āgneya astra* for an alliance with a defeated opponent.

²² See MBh.1.125.19 and MBh.1.122.47 (Appendix 76*1–15), where the *Vāruṇa astra* is used to create water. At MBh.6.116.21–24 Arjuna fires the *Parjanya astra* (“Rain-weapon”) into the earth, which causes a spring of water to gush forth. At MBh.1.125.19–20 not only does the *Vāruṇa astra* create water, but the *Āgneya astra* creates fire, the *Vāyavya astra* creates wind, the *Pārjanya astra* creates rain, the *Bhauṃa astra* allows the wielder to enter the earth, and the *Pārvata astra* creates mountains. The *Antardhāna astra* or “Disappearance-weapon” removes all the above phenomena. On his quest for all the divine weapons of the gods, Arjuna (re-)acquires all the *divya astras* of the four Lokapālas (see MBh.3.42.16–42), one of which is Kubera’s *Antardhāna astra*, which is itself said to steal *ojas*, *tejas*, and *dyuti* (MBh.3.42.33, cf. Rām.1.26.25, 700*31).

²³ See MBh.3.41.19–22, MBh.3.163.51, MBh.4.40.24, 764*1–7, MBh.18.4.3, Rām.1.26.22–25, Rām.1.27.10–13, Rām.5.46.34ff., and Rām.7.99.7.

²⁴ See MBh.3.170.38–48, and MBh.12.31.1ff.

²⁵ Begley, p. 21.

²⁶ A warrior learns three *mantras* to control divine weapons (although lists appear of five or more, see MBh.3.165.6, MBh.4.56.14, 986*7–8). The three *mantras* are *dhāraṇa*, *mokṣa*, and *saṃhāra*. The warrior must (1) “suppress” or “contain” (*dhāraṇa*) the divine weapon. After a divine weapon is (2) “released” (*mokṣa*), the warrior must once again (3) “withdraw” and “recontain” (*saṃhāra*) the *divya astra*.

²⁷ My use of the *Purāṇas* is somewhat minimal. I only turned to the *Purāṇas* to verify arguments regarding the epics. An exhaustive study of the divine weapons in the post-epic *Purāṇas* must be left for another time.

²⁸ *The Viṣṇumahāpurāṇam* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1985).

²⁹ VP.3.2.8–12. The myth also appears in the *Matysa*, *Padma*, *Bhāgavata*, and *Harivaṃśa Purāṇas*.

³⁰ K.M. Banerjea, ed., *The Marcandeya Purana*, Bibliotheca Indica series, vol. 29 (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1988 [1862]).

³¹ See MP.108.1–5.

³² *Śrī Padma Mahāpurāṇam*, no ed. given, 4 vols. (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1984).

³³ See PP.6.9.15–33.

³⁴ See MBh.13.14.54, 85*1–7.

³⁵ Dash, p. 13, notes that “heat and light represent the obverse and reverse of the same coin viz., *tejas*.”

³⁶ The discus is equated with the beauty of the primeval lotus (*ādīpadma*), and is as bright as the sun, with Kṛṣṇa’s arm for its stalk. However, the beauty is portrayed as fatal, as the lotus leaves are razor sharp, and armed with it Kṛṣṇa is said to resemble the Doomsday fire (see MBh.6.55.89–92). In a separate passage, Kṛṣṇa receives the *Sudarśana* discus from Agni. The discus is said to embody the *Vajra astra* or “Thunder-bolt” (*vajranābha*), and also to be an *Āgneya astra* (MBh.1.216.21).

³⁷ MBh.7.166.50.

³⁸ A variant of line three reads *sarvatejahpramardanam* or “extinguishes all *tejas*.”

³⁹ See MBh.7.166–173.

⁴⁰ Minoru Hara, “Transfer of Merit”, in *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (Madras: 1958), p. 383.

⁴¹ See MBh.5.10.12–38, and MBh.5.16.16.

⁴² See MBh.3.99.9–10.

⁴³ cf.MBh.1.165.42.

⁴⁴ For the main episode see MBh.5.9.1ff. cf.MBh.3.98–99.

⁴⁵ cf.MBh.5.16.16.

⁴⁶ *brahmatejahprabhāvopabrṃhitāḥ*. MBh.12.329.41.

⁴⁷ Hildebeitel (1976), p. 233, n. 14.

⁴⁸ *Tejas* is ascribed to be one of several energy-substances inherent in fire and water, see Gonda (1957), p. 43, and p. 58. For further analysis on fire and water, see D.M. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), pp. 112–115.

⁴⁹ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 286–287.

⁵⁰ MBh.1.49.24.

⁵¹ Rām.7.22.5.

⁵² See, for example, Louis Dumont, “The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India”, in Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980 [1966]), and Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, trans. by J. Duncan M. Derrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

⁵³ There are several episodes where the *tejas* of a superior being cannot be contained and neutralized by creatures of inferior *tejas*. The energy is contained only by a source capable of handling it. See, for example, MBh.8.24.57–61, and Rām.1.36–37.

⁵⁴ MBh.3.240.6–7.

⁵⁵ See MBh.12.329.25–41.

⁵⁶ Dash, pp. 120–121.

⁵⁷ Dash, p. XI and p. 120.

⁵⁸ See MBh.1.181.19–21, where Arjuna is said to possess *brahmatejas*. Katz, p. 50, n. 46, states, “In fact, throughout the *Mahabharata* various kings, including Arjuna, tend to be praised as *brahmanya*, which means either ‘brahmanic’ or ‘friendly to brahmins.’”

⁵⁹ See Rām.6.59.83–91.

⁶⁰ Rām.6.59.31.

⁶¹ Rām.6.59.97.

⁶² I wish to tentatively suggest here that this is one of the *leitmotifs* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as Rāma must possess immense amounts of the most potent *tejas* to destroy the demon king Rāvaṇa. Thus, Rāma is not a typical human of *alpatejas* that Rāvaṇa believes him to be. For Rāvaṇa’s assessment of Rāma’s *tejas*, see Rām.3.53.20–21, and Rām.5.18.33. For examples of Rāma’s actual *tejas* levels, see Rām.1.75.1ff., Rām.3.3.2, Rām.3.20.18, Rām.3.62.6, and Rām.6.59.25. Due to constraints of space I cannot explore this suggestion, but intend to in a later paper. For a related argument see Sheldon Pollock, “The Divine King in the Indian Epic”, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, no. 3 (1984).

⁶³ cf.MBh.12.249.9, where Śiva gives Brahmā the same command when the latter is about to destroy the universe. Śiva said, “Therefore, this *tejas* must be restrained with your own *tejas*.” *tasmān nivartyatām etat tejaḥ svenaiva tejasā*.

⁶⁴ It is not clear whether practising *tapas* increases *tejas*, but obviously one needs both to acquire and employ divine weapons successfully. The relationship between *tapas* and *tejas* is unclear, although neither one is given precedence, as one ancient author surmises; “*Tapas* is appeased by *tejas*, and *tejas* by *tapas*.” From the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, quoted in Cornelia Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen, eds. & trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 70. A Wezler of Universität Hamburg has kindly informed me that research exists in German on the

relationship between *tejas* and *tapas* by such scholars as Hacker, Rüping, and Shee. Regrettably, I have not looked at these sources.

⁶⁵ See MBh.3.40.1ff., and MBh.3.163.1ff.

⁶⁶ MBh.3.163.29–32.

⁶⁷ MBh.13.14.51. cf. MBh.7.69.57, where the gods see Śiva as “a mass of *tejas* as brilliant as millions of suns.” *apaśyaṃs tejasām rāśiṃ sūryakoṭisamaprabham*. cf. MBh.8.24.40, and MBh.8.24.51.

⁶⁸ MBh.3.40.48–49.

⁶⁹ *samaṃ tejaś ca vīryaṃ ca mamādyā tava cānagha*. MBh.3.40.53.

⁷⁰ MBh.3.294.29–32. Throughout the *Mahābhārata* the Pāṇḍavas diminish Karna’s *tejas*, so that he will pose no threat to Arjuna, and can in the end be slain. Yudhiṣṭhira conspires with Karna’s charioteer, Śalya, and the latter agrees to help reduce Karna’s *tejas* (*tejovadha*:- MBh.5.8.27, and MBh.8.4.95). Śalya states that Karna will be easily slain with diminished *tejas* (*hṛtatejas*:- MBh.5.8.31). Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that without his armour, earrings, and lance, Karna has become like a man (*mānuṣatām*: MBh.7.155.27, 1247*1–2), indicating that Karna’s *tejas* is impaired, as men (*mānuṣa*) possess *alpatejas*. With diminished *tejas* from the loss of his armour, earrings, lance, and from Śalya’s actions, Karna is killed (MBh.8.67.1ff.). When he dies, his remaining *tejas* returns to the sun (MBh.8.67.27).

⁷¹ MBh.10.7.65.

⁷² For a major divine weapon episode where Aśvatthāman loses control of the *Brahmaśīras astra* due to a lack of *tejas*, see MBh.10.6–16, esp. MBh.10.7.5 variant, MBh.10.7.48, MBh.10.7.65, and MBh.10.15.15–16.

⁷³ Gonda (1957), p. 59, notes that “the amulet and its property are distinct, and the ‘power-substance’ *tejas* obviously constitutes a supra-normal and supra-phenomenal element by means or agency of which the amulet can be the useful instrument applied in rites for obtaining a great variety of desires.”

⁷⁴ AV.19.31.12. Trans. Gonda (1957), p. 58. See also Gonda (1952), pp. 5–6, and p. 49.

⁷⁵ Gonda (1957), p. 60. See also Gonda (1952), p. 20.

⁷⁶ Gonda (1957), p. 59, notes that in the *Atharva Veda* a man prays for his *tejas* to be saved (AV.9.1.16f.); “‘as the bees and flies smear honey upon honey, so, O Aśvins, let my *varcas* (‘splendour’), *tejas*, physical strength and *ojas* be maintained’

⁷⁷ Kings are advised against standing on the ground barefoot or their *tejas* will discharge into it (this also calls to mind the fact that gods’ feet never touch the ground). Similarly, to prevent the sun stealing the king’s *tejas* an umbrella should always be employed. See Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969). To highlight the superiority of Arjuna’s *tejas*, at MBh.2.69.17 it is learnt that the hero gains *tejas* from the sun. Moreno and Marriott (1990), p. 157, note, “Footwear is recommended in Hindu medical books to maintain sexual potency and sharpen eyesight, evidently by helping to conserve the vital fluids [read *tejas*] that empower these functions. The books teach that semen and other vital bodily fluids are stored mainly in the head and chest, but may drain away by a sensory-motor channel that links the eyes directly to the feet . . . from the feet fluids may leak out unless restrained by shoes.” See Manuel Moreno and McKim Marriott, “Humoral transactions in two Tamil cults: Murukan and Mariyamman”, in Marriott, M., ed., *India through Hindu Categories* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990). For the relationship between *tejas* and semen (*retas*), see Mary Carroll Smith, “Epic Parthenogenesis”, in A. Sharma, ed., *Essays in the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991). For *tejas* and eyesight, see MBh.2.71.10–11, MBh.3.106.1ff., MBh.5.11.1ff., MBh.5.13.19, MBh.5.15.13–19, 106*1–2, MBh.5.16.21–26, and MBh.12.329.30.

⁷⁸ See Rām.6.61.1ff.

⁷⁹ MBh.3.3.6–9.

⁸⁰ cf.MBh.4.46.5, MBh.5.75.20, MBh.7.56.6, 403*2, and MBh.7.160.1–7.

⁸¹ Hara, p. 386. Hara is here referring to MBh.7.87.60–63.

⁸² MBh.2.41.3.

⁸³ Hara, p. 386. Gonda (1952), p. 25, notes that among other substances *ojas* and *tejas* “enter a man at the moment of the death of his adversary.”

⁸⁴ MBh.8.67.27.

⁸⁵ cf.MBh.7.165.40.

⁸⁶ Rām.4.17.4–5.

⁸⁷ Rām.4.22.16–24.

⁸⁸ cf.MBh.1.123.74–77.

⁸⁹ cf.MBh.3.163.49, 840*1.

⁹⁰ See MBh.4.59.36.

⁹¹ See MBh.7.166–173.

⁹² Once again due to space constraints I can not delve any deeper into the *Nārāyaṇa astra* episode (MBh.7.166–173). However, in the future I intend to elucidate the release of the *Nārāyaṇa astra* and the principles of *tejas* in a separate paper.

⁹³ Margaret Trawick Egnor, *Principles of Continuity in Three Indian Sciences* (University of Chicago: Thesis, unpublished, 1974), p. 37.

⁹⁴ Vasant Lad, *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing* (Wilmot: Lotus Press, 1990), p. 39.

⁹⁵ See McKim Marriott, “Constructing an Indian Ethnosociology,” in Marriott (1990), p. 16.

⁹⁶ Dash, p. 33.

⁹⁷ Lad, p. 111, and S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 307. See also Gerald J. Larson, “*Āyurveda* and the Hindu philosophical systems”, in Thomas P. Kasulis, ed., *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 114.

⁹⁸ Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), pp. 230–231.

⁹⁹ See *Caraka Saṃhitā* 1.1.44–45.

¹⁰⁰ MBh.16.8.44ff.

¹⁰¹ I would like to thank Luis Gonzalez-Reimann of Berkeley University for informing me of this passage.

¹⁰² In the epic literature *śakti* rarely conveys its later connotations of a primarily feminine energy-substance, which is closely associated with the Goddess. In fact, in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* *tejas* is the *raison d’être* of the Goddess. She is created from the *tejas* of various gods, e.g., Śiva’s *tejas* becomes her face, Yama’s *tejas* forms her hair, Viṣṇu’s *tejas* forms her arms, and so on (MP.82.8–17). She is given replicas of the deities’ divine weapons (MP.82.18–31), and her sole function is to battle a demon (see MP.83.1ff.).

¹⁰³ Although Kṛṣṇa removes the divine weapon from the dead child, what is implicit is that it is first contained by the infant. What is interesting, then, is that the unborn child of the royal lineage is employed to contain the *tejas* of the *divya astra* (see MBh.10.15.32). By turning to the mythology surrounding royal babies it becomes apparent why such an action is undertaken. At MBh.1.6.1ff. an unborn prince destroys a demon with his *tejas*. Royal children are born “endowed with excessive *tejas*” (*atīva tejasā*: MBh.1.43.12 variants), and possess “great *tejas*” (*mahātejāḥ*: MBh.1.44.16). According to the *Mānavadharmasāstra* “the earthly ruler is formed or constituted of the supranormal principle of fiery energy (*tejas*) of all the gods (Manu 7,11): ‘He in whose favour resides Padmā, the goddess of fortune, in whose valour dwells victory, in whose anger abides death, is formed of the *tejas* of all gods.’” Gonda (1957),

p. 61. The reason the child is chosen as the target for the divine weapon is so that his immense *tejas* will contain the *divya astra's tejas*.

¹⁰⁴ At MBh.5.96.18–20 the *Sudarśana* discus and the *Gāṇḍīva* bow are said to reside in a lake of fire.

¹⁰⁵ There are suggestions that the relative power of a *divya astra* is contingent on a specific *yuga*. At MBh.13.14.131 Kṛṣṇa has a divine vision of the *Pāśupata astra*, which is said to be the most powerful divine weapon. Yet next to the *Pāśupata astra* stood the divine *Śūla* or spear employed by Lavaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and is said to be equal to or even more powerful than the former divine weapon. Kṛṣṇa's vision takes place in *Dvāpara yuga*, while the *Rāmāyaṇa* is set in *Tretā yuga*.

University of Texas at Austin

E-mail: jlwhitaker@mail.utexas.edu