

Deva-garbha and Tathāgata-garbha

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The Sanskrit compound *tathāgata-garbha* is well known to Buddhist scholars. The compound is usually rendered into English as “the embryo, or womb of (the Buddha) Tathāgata” and indicates a religious concept peculiar to Mahāyāna Buddhism, having the implication that all living beings are capable of being enlightened like the Buddha himself (*sarva-sattvās tathāgata-garbhāḥ*). It became a highly philosophical and theoretical term in East-Asian Buddhism, and many important studies have been made by Buddhist scholars on this subject.

The present writer is not a specialist in Buddhism and is almost ignorant of the complicated philosophical content of the *tathāgata-garbha* theory, but he became interested in this compound *tathāgata-garbha* because of its similarity in construction with *deva-garbha* or *amara-garbha*,¹ terms which appear occasionally in the great epic, *Mahābhārata*. It is out of the personal respect for Professor David Seyfort Ruegg’s achievement in the field of the *tathāgata-garbha* studies, that he undertakes this study and dedicates it to his Felicitation volume.

I. The similarity of the two compounds, *tathāgata-garbha* and *deva-garbha* (or *amara-garbha*), is remarkable because the terms which precede the word *garbha*, that is, *tathāgata*² and *deva* (*amara*), indicate the highest religious beings, the former in Buddhism and the latter in Hinduism respectively. Yet, the

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¹ The similarity in construction of *tathāgata-garbha* with *sarvajña-bīja* in *Yoga-sūtra* 1, 25 has been noted by Professor Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, Paris, PEFEO, 70, 1969, 496 ff.

² It is also called *buddha-garbha* (*Ratnagotravibhāga*, 1, 27–28) or *jina-garbha* (1, 95). As for *sugata-garbha* (not attested in Sanskrit, but reconstructable from Tibetan), cf. Ruegg, *op. cit.*, 501, note 2 and *Le traité du tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston rin chen grub*, Paris, PEFEO, 87, 1973, 68, n. 2.

epic compound, *deva-garbha* (*amara-garbha*), is usually rendered “divine child”, “Götterkind”, whereas in the case of Buddhism, the compound *tathāgata-garbha* is almost unanimously translated as “embryo or womb of (the Buddha) Tathāgata”.³ Here one may wonder why in the case of Buddhism the last part of the compound, that is *garbha*, is translated into “embryo”, while in Hinduism the same word is rendered “child”, despite the fact that the same word is used in a similar construction. One can, of course, answer this question by attributing this difference of translations, “embryo” on the one hand and “child” on the other, to the different nature of their context, philosophical in Buddhism and literary in the *Mahābhārata*. But is this the only possible and satisfactory solution to the problem? Is there any possibility of finding the element common to both “child” and “embryo”, that is to say, the element which links together these two meanings of the word?

The present writer does not intend to solve the problem completely, but he trusts that his study of the epic use of the word *garbha*, as attested in the compound *deva-garbha* and other instances, may shed some additional light upon the concept of the Buddhist *tathāgata-garbha*, if not contributing to a better understanding of it.⁴

³ As regards the analysis of the compound *tathāgata-garbha* (*tatpuruṣa* or *bahuvrīhi*) cf. Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, 507-513 and *Le traité du tathāgata-garbha de Bu ston rin chen grub*, 52 ff.

⁴ As remarked by Ruegg, (*La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, 501 ff.), the word *garbha* means both “matrice” and “embryon”, that is, the receptacle and its content. A certain differentiation may be observed when we examine its construction with particular words. Below is given a short list illustrating how the meanings are differentiated.

- (1) “Matrice” (when construed with words expressive of staying in, dwelling at). *garbha-stha* cf., for examples, *Mahābhārata*, 1, 44, 20; 3, 181, 31; 3, 217, 1; 6, 11, 7; 10, 16, 3; 11, 3, 12; 12, 49, 54; 14, 60, 39; 14, 67, 16; *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 22; 47, 24. *garbha-gata*, cf. *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 21. *garbha-vāsa*, cf. *Mahābhārata*, 4, 66, 10; 11, 7, 4; 13, 117, 28, *Indische Sprüche*, ed., Böthlingk, 1966, 2093; *Harivaṃśa*, 48, 9 (*garbha-vasati*), *Indische Sprüche*, 5467 (*garbhe nivāsa*). *garbha-śayyā* cf. *Mahābhārata*, 1, 171, 5; 12, 174, 14 (cf. Sternbach, “*Mahābhārata* Verses in Cāṇakya’s Compendia”, *JAOS*, 83, 1963, 62). *garbha-sayana*, cf. *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 11; 48, 27.
- (2) “Embryo” (when construed with words of production, conception, development, and other).
 - (a) Words expressive of production: *sambhu-* (*Mahābhārata*, 3, 292, 1), *samutpad-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 1, 168, 23), *upapatti* (*Mahābhārata*, 14, 17, 39).
 - (b) The word expressive of mother’s conception: *dhṛ-* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 168, 24; 1, 169, 20; 1, 170, 3; 3, 292, 2; 5, 189, 11; 9, 43, 7; 9, 50, 10; 12, 49, 16; 12, 122, 16; 12, 293, 13). Cf. also *garbha-dhāraṇa* (*Mahābhārata*, 3, 292, 8). The pregnant woman is called *garbha-dharā*, *garbhavati*, *garbhiṇī* (= *āpanna-sattvā*).

First, we shall collect the epic instances of *deva-garbha* denoting a divine “child”, and the expressions *deva-garbhābha* and the like, which illustrate an extraordinary “child”. Next, we shall discuss the meaning of “child” (*arbhaka*) as implied in the word *garbha* itself, which is attested in such an expression as *jāta(-mātra) garbha* and in the compound *garbha-rūpa* (child, or youth).

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- (c) The unmarried mother tries to conceal it: *vi-ni-guh-* (*Mahābhārata*, 3, 292, 2).
(d) It increases: *vṛdh-* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 44, 16; 3, 97, 22; 3, 277, 22).
(e) It moves in the womb: *spand-* (*Mahābhārata*, 14, 18, 7, *spandayate 'ṅāni sa garbhaḥ*).
(f) It develops: *pariṇāma* (*Harivaṃśa*, 47, 4).
(g) Indra splits it into seven: *bhid-* (*Rāmāyaṇa*, ed., G.H. Bhatt, 1960–75, I, 45, 17–19).
(h) Other words expressive of injury and slaughter: *han-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 47, 2; 48, 38; 48, 45), *vadh-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 47, 10), *vinipātaya-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 8), *kṛt-* (*garbha-kṛntana* *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 1; 47, 8, *garbhāvakartana* *Harivaṃśa*, 69, 23.; *ā garbhād anukṛntantaḥ* *Mahābhārata*, 1, 169, 18 and 13, 56, 3), *utkṛt-* (*Mahāvīracarita* 2, 48a), *utsādana* (*āgarbhotsādanam* *Mahābhā-rata*, 1, 171, 6).
(i) Words expressive of decay and death (in mother’s womb): *saṃpra-lī-* *Mahābhārata*, 14, 61, 8), *mṛ-* (*Mahābhārata*, 10, 16, 8), *mṛtyu* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 47), *yama-kṣaya* (*Harivaṃśa*, 47, 28).
(j) Words expressive of miscarriage: *ni-pat-* (*Dūtavākya*, 49d), *sru-* (*Bālacarita*, 3, 6), *pātaya-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 64, 8), *vigarbhaṃ kṛ-* (*Mahābhārata*, 5, 108, 8). Cf. also such compounds as *garbha-kṣaya*, *garbha-pātana*, *garbha-vicyuti*, *garbha-saṃsraṇa*, *gargha-saṃplava*, *garbha-srava*.
(k) It can be dragged out: *karṣaṇa* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 6). Cf. also *saṃākṣ* - in *Kathāsaritsāgara*, 26, 260.
(l) The word expressive of protection: *rakṣ-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 9).
(m) Words expressive of coming out: *nir-gam-* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 169, 21), *niḥ-sr-* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 2 and 4), *pat-* (*Mahābhārata*, 12, 122, 16), *muc-* (*garbha-mokṣa* *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 35).
- (3) Miscellanea.
garbha in *garbhāmbu* (*Harivaṃśa*, 48, 27) must be “matrice”.
garbha in *garbha-śalya* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 7, 3 8) may be “matrice”.
garbha in *garbha-kleśa* (*Indische Sprüche*, 2092 = *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa* 21, 46) can be taken in both senses, either “pains of matrice” or “pains caused by embryo”.
garbha in *garbhāvakrānti*, *garbha-saṃkramaṇa* may mean “matrice” (cf. Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgata-garbha et du gotra*, 501, n. 1), but in such expressions as *garbhe jīva-praveśana* (*Mahābhārata*, 14, 18, 8) and *garbhe jivopapādana* (*Mahābhārata*, 14, 18, 9) it means “embryo”, in which *jīva* enters. Here, *garbha* (embryo) is a physical entity which has no consciousness itself, and experiences the stages like *kalala*, *arbuda*, etc.
- (4) As regards the meaning of *Leibesfrucht des Himmels* with connection to the *arka-vrata* (*Manusmṛti*, 9, 305), one may add to the passages given in the *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, ed., G.H. Bhatt, 1960–75, 7, 4, 23–24 and *Raghuvamśa* 10, 58.

Following this semantic analysis, we shall ascertain that the word *garbha* has the meaning not only of the word “embryo”, but also of “child”. After ascertaining these two meanings of the word, pre-natal as well as post-natal, we shall, then, try to investigate the semantic field of the word extended as far as its primordial origination, that is, paternal blood (*retas*, *bīja*) being ejaculated and conceived in the mother’s womb. Finally, we shall discuss the social implication which is suggested by such expansion in the semantic field of the word *garbha*, from its origination in the form of paternal seed to its final result in the form of a born child.

II. To begin with, let us collect the passages from the *Mahābhārata*, in which the compound *deva-garbha* appears, and examine their context.

As is well-known, the epic hero Karṇa is termed *deva-garbha*, because he is the son of the god Sūrya, who begets him in the womb of Kuntī. The original story as it is related in *Mahābhārata* 3, 290 runs as follows. Once upon a time, when Kuntī stayed in the house of the king Kuntibhoja, she was put in charge of attending to the welfare of those who were engaged in religious duties. At that time, the sage Durvāsas arrived there and stayed for one year as the king’s guest. The young girl served the sage during his stay with so much care, patience and devotion that the sage was immensely pleased. He, consequently, at the time of his departure gave her as a token of gratitude a divine *mantra*. This *mantra* was furnished with a special power: if she calls up any god by repeating the *mantra*, that god would manifest himself and bless her with a son equal to him in glory. After the departure of the sage, the innocent girl (*bālyāt* 3, 290, 23), out of curiosity (*kautūhalāt* 3, 290, 6 and 11), wanted to test the power of the *mantra* and recited it while meditating upon the sun. Instantly the god Sūrya descended from heaven and demanded she engage in sexual intercourse. Being afraid of this sort of experience, and also of the ill fame of becoming an unmarried mother, she refused the proposal of the sun-god. But her repeated refusal was in vain, and the god was persistent in his demand. As the efficacy of the *mantra* never fails, she became pregnant⁵ by the mere act of being touched on her navel

⁵ As for the divine impregnation by touching, cf. *Mahābhārata*, 15, 38, 21 which reads:

santi deva-nikāyās ca saṃkalpāj janayanti ye |
vācā dṛṣṭyā tathā sparsāt saṃgharṣeṇeti pañcadhā ||

Cf. E.W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, Strassburg, 1915, 62, and J.J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, Delhi, Varanasi, Patna, 1971, 370, n. 3.

The *siddhas* had similar procreation because of their great asceticism. In the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 1, 15, 80, we read:

saṃkalpād darśanāt sparsāt pūrveṣām abhavanāḥ |
tapo-viśeṣaiḥ siddhānām tadātyama-tapasvinām ||

In Pali literature, this motif of touching the navel is quite common. See, for example, *Mātaṅgajātaka* (*Jātaka*, ed., Fausböll, 1963, 497, 4, 3 78, 5–6: *ath’ assā aṅghuṭṭhakena nābhim parāmasi, kucchiyam gabbho patiṭṭhāsi*). Cf. also *Kusajātaka* (*Jātaka*, ed., Fausböll, 1963, 531, 5, 280, 28–281, 2, 16–18), *Sāmajātaka* (*Jātaka*, 540, 6, 73, 25–26; 73, 28–74, 1), *Milindapañha* 127, 21ff. Cf. also E. Windisch, *Buddha’s Geburt, und die Lehre von der Seelenwanderung*, Leipzig, 1908, 20ff. and J. Charpentier, “Zur Geschichte des *Caryāpiṭaka*”, *WZKM*, 24, 1910, 397. As regards Jaina literature, see H. Jacobi, “Eine Jaina Dogmatik: Umāsvāti’s *Tattārthādhigama Sūtra*”, *ZDMG*, 60, 1906, 318.

(3, 291, 3). In due course a son was born to her. Being embarrassed by the event and also afraid for her reputation, with the help of her nurse she put that child in a box and floated it on the river Aśvā. The box, drifting slowly at the mercy of the wind, reached finally Campāpuri, where Sūta Adhiratha recovered it out of compassion and brought up the child with his wife Rādhā.

This birth-story of Karṇa is repeated in the *Mahābhārata*,⁶ but here we quote only two passages in which he is styled as *deva-garbha*:

“The burning god, whose work it is to illuminate, planted *garbha* unto her. From it (she) gave birth to a hero, the best among all the weapon-bearers. The illustrious son of a god (*deva-garbha*), clad in armours, was covered with good fortune.”⁷

When Sūta Adhiratha discovered the baby drifting in a box on the river, he thought the baby a divine child (*deva-garbho* 'yaṃ 8). He took him and then entrusted the care of the baby to his wife:

“Surely, the gods have given this (child) as a son to me whom am childless.’ With these words he gave the son to Rādhā, O king, and Rādhā accepted the divine looking (*divya-rūpin*) child duly as her son, the child of a god (*deva-garbha*) luminous as a lotus cup (*kamala-garbhābha*)⁸ and covered with good fortune.”⁹

⁶ cf. J. Scheuer, *Śiva dans le Mahābhārata*, Paris, 1982, 58 (table).

⁷ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 104, 10:

prakāśa-karmā tapanas tasyāṃ garbhaṃ dadhau tataḥ |
ajījanat tato vīraṃ sarva-śāstra-bhṛtāṃ varam ||
āmukta-kavacaḥ śrīmān deva-garbhah śriyāvṛtaḥ |

cf. also, *Mahābhārata*, 5, 143, 5:

prakāśa-karmā tapano yo 'yaṃ devo virocanaḥ |
ajījanat tvāṃ mayy eṣa karṇa śāstra-bhṛtāṃ varam || (4)
kuṇḍalī baddha-kavaco deva-garbhah śriyā vṛtaḥ |
jātas tvam asi durdharṣa mayā putra pitur gr̥he ||.

⁸ For this alliteration, see *deva-garbhābha* below, and *garbhaṃ ghana-garbha-samaprabham* in *Rāmāyaṇa*, ed., G.H. Bhatt, 1960–75, 7, 4, 24.

⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 3, 293, 10:

anapatyasya putro 'yaṃ devair datto dhruvaṃ mama |
ity uktvā taṃ dadau putraṃ rādhāyai sa mahīpate || (9)
prati jagrāha taṃ rādhā vidhivad divya-rūpiṇam |
putraṃ kamala-garbhābhaṃ deva-garbhah śriyā vṛtam ||

cf. also, *Mahābhārata*, 6, 117, 17; *Mahābhārata*, 11, 27, 14:

brahmaṇyaḥ satya-vādī ca tejasārka ivāparaḥ |
deva-garbho 'jitaḥ saṃkhye manuṣyair adhiko bhuvi ||
yasyeṣupātam āsādyā nānyas tiṣṭhed dhanamayāt |
kathaṃ putro bhavatyām sa deva-garbhah purābhavat ||.

Not merely Karṇa, but also Arjuna, who is in reality the son of the god Indra with the same Kuntī, is called *deva-garbha*. In the description of the single combat of Karṇa and Arjuna, both of them are called *deva-garbhās*:

“Beholding Karṇa and Arjuna, the tigers among men, come together, the sons of gods (*deva-garbhau*), similar to gods and equal to gods in shape....”¹⁰

In addition to the compound *deva-garbha* as we have seen above, there appears occasionally in the same epic the expression *deva-garbhābha* which illustrates an extraordinary child. The son of Śakuntalā, who is called Sarvaṃdama, is styled as *deva-garbhābha*:

“The illustrious child, wearing on his palm the sign of the wheel,¹¹ with a large head and grew valour, great up there (in Kaṇva’s hermitage) instantly. The boy looked like the child of a god.”¹²

He is described as *suropama* (like a god) in *Mahābhārata*, 1, 68, 16.

The son of Śarmiṣṭhā also appeared as if a god’s child (*deva-garbhābha*):

“O king, in due course, she gave birth, eyes bright like the blue lotus, to a boy who appeared as if the child of a god, eyes bright like the blue lotus.”¹³

He is described as *kumāra* ... *deva-rūpin* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 78, 12), and *dāraka* ... *deva putropama* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 78, 13).

Āstika, the son of Jaratkāru, is also styled as *deva-garbhābha*:

“In due course, the sister of the snake (king) gave birth, O brahmin, to a boy who appeared as if the child of a god and was (promised) to dispel the danger to his parents.”¹⁴

¹⁰ *Mahābhārata*, 8, 63, 17:

deva-garbhau deva-samau deva-tulyau ca rūpataḥ |
sametau puruṣa-vyāghrau prekṣya karṇa-dhanamjayau ||.

¹¹ This is one of 32 *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa* as related in Buddhist literature. Cf. *Rāstrapālapariṣṛcchā*, ed. by Finot, 24, line 13 (*cakrāṅkitam... paṇi-yuga*), 47, line 12 (*kara-tala... cakra-citra*). Cf. also 7, line 9 (*cakra-jāla-cita-pāda*) and *Lalitavistara*, ed., Lefmann, 106, lines 2 ff.

¹² *Mahābhārata*, I, 68, 4:

cakrāṅkita-karaḥ śrīmān mahā-mūrdhā mahā-balaḥ |
kumāro deva-garbhābhaḥ sa tatrāśu vyavardhata ||.

¹³ *Mahābhārata*, I, 77, 27:

prajajñe ca tataḥ kāle rājan rājīva-locanā |
kumāraṃ deva-garbhābhaṃ rājīva-nibha-locanam ||.*

¹⁴ *Mahābhārata*, I, 44, 17:

yathā-kālaṃ tu sā brahman prajajñe bhujaga-svasā |
kumāraṃ deva-garbhābhaṃ piṭr-mātr-bhayāpaham ||*

*Its feminine form appears also in *Mahābhārata*, 5, 116, 15 (*kumārīm deva-garbhābhām*).

This child is said to be shining like the god Śiva himself.¹⁵

In the same compound, the first component, that is the word *deva-*, is occasionally replaced by its synonym *amara*. Sarvaṃdama, the afore-mentioned son of Śakuntalā, is also styled as *amaragarbhābha*:

“Taking with herself the lotus-eyed son, who was like the child of an Immortal, the radiant woman left that forest that Duṣṣanta himself had known.”¹⁶

In Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita*, the infant Buddha is described as *sura-garbha-kalpa*:

“Then (his) aunt, who equalled his mother in majesty and did not fall below her in affection and tenderness, brought up the prince, who was like a scion of the gods, as if he were her own son.”¹⁷

Similarly, the last component of the compound, namely the word *-ābha*, is replaced by such words as *-sama-prabha* and *-upama*. We shall give an example for each case. When Hiḍlimbā saw Bhīmasena, she immediately fell in love with him and addressed him as follows:

“When I saw you, who appeared like a divine child, I lost my desire to take as my husband anyone other than you. I am telling you the truth.”¹⁸

The same Bhīmasena is styled as *deva-rūpin* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 139, 19) and *amaropama* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 139, 22).

The sons of Draupadī are described as *deva-garbhopama*:

“Accompanied by sons, broad-chested and very powerful, who are like divine children, the sons of Pāṇḍu found a great joy, O the tiger among kings.”¹⁹

¹⁵ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 44, 22: *bhagavān iva deveśaḥ sūla-pāṇir...*

¹⁶ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 68, 13:

grhītvāmara-garbhābhaṃ putraṃ kamala-locanam |*
ājagāma tataḥ śubhrā duṣṣanta-viditād vanāt ||

*Its feminine form appears also in *Mahābhārata*, I, 8, 7 (*kanyām amara-garbhābhām*).

¹⁷ *Buddhacarita*, 2, 19:

tataḥ kumāraṃ sura-garbha-kalpaṃ snehena bhāvena ca nirviśeṣam |
mātr-śvasā mātr-sama-prabhāvā saṃvardhayām ātmajavad babhūva ||

¹⁸ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 139, 23 :

sāhaṃ tvām abhisamprekṣya deva-garbha-samaprabham |
nānyaṃ bhartāram icchāmi satyam etad bravīmi te ||

¹⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 213, 82:

deva-garbhopamaiḥ putraiḥ vyūḍhoraskair mahābalaiḥ |
anvitā rāja-śārdūla pāṇḍavā mudam āpnuvan ||

All the above quoted passages amply testify to the fact that the compound *deva-garbha* appears in an ordinary epic context with none of the philosophical implication that one meets within the Buddhist compound *tathāgata-garbha*. It simply means a divine child (*deva-putra*), a descendant of a god, as is the case with Karṇa and Arjuna who are, in reality, the sons of the gods Sūrya and Indra respectively. Furthermore, such expressions as *deva-garbhābha* and *amara-garbhābha* are all those which serve to illustrate the extraordinary child, who appears to inherit the divine blood in his father's line. However, prior to entering into the problem of consanguinity, we should investigate the semantic field of the word *garbha* in more detail.

III. In the previous section, we have seen that in the compound *deva-garbha* the semantic value of “child” in the word *garbha* is predominant, while the ordinary meaning of “embryo” seems to retreat. However, apart from this compounded form of *deva-garbha*, we can discern the meaning of “son” or “child” even in its more natural usage. The meaning in transition from “embryo” to “child”²⁰ seems to be best illustrated in such phrases as *jāta-garbha*, or *jāta-mātra garbha* (an “infant” who is [just] born). Here, in these phrases, one can render the word *garbha* into “embryo”, but a more natural translation of the word should be “child”, simply because it is already delivered out of the mother's womb. The semantic ambiguity of the Sanskrit word *garbha*, which extends over both “embryo” and “child”, is to be noted particularly when it stands in the accusative case of the verbs of parturition (*su-*, *jan-*). A few examples will suffice to illustrate the semantic situation. In the afore-mentioned story of Kuntī, we read:

“Then, in due course, the fair lady delivered (*suṣuve*) an embryo (or, child, *garbha*)... At the counsel of her nurse, the radiant maiden placed the infant (*garbha*) as soon as it was born in a basket that was well-packed on all sides.”²¹

As has been related above, the basket floated as far as the town of Campā, where Sūta Adhiratha and his wife retrieved the basket from the river and adopted the infant. This journey of the deserted child (*garbha*) is described as follows:

“Carried at the mercy of the waves, the infant (*garbha*), placed in the basket, came to the city of Campā, which is the dwelling place of the Suta on the bank of the Ganges.”²²

²⁰ The meaning of “the child in the womb” can be seen in a passage of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*, 6, 24, 37 (*nanu sa garbhaḥ pitryam ṛktham arhati*).

²¹ *Mahābhārata*, 3, 292, 6:

tataḥ kālena sā garbhaṃ suṣuve vara-varṇinī (4ab) |
jāta-mātraṃ ca taṃ garbhaṃ dhātryā sammantrya bhāminī ||
mañjūsāyāṃ avadadhe svāstīrṇyāṃ samantataḥ |.

²² *Mahābhārata*, 3, 292, 26:

gaṅgāyāḥ sūta-viṣayaṃ campāṃ abhyāyayau purīm |
sa mañjūsā-gato garbhas taraṅgair uhyamānakaḥ ||.

Here in the long journey of *garbha*, one must translate the word as “infant” instead of “embryo”.

In the epic version of Śakuntalā’s birth story, we read as follows:

“Once the baby (*garbha*) was born, Menakā abandoned her on the bank of the river Mālinī. Then, she returned back in haste to Indra’s assembly, as she had accomplished her duty (of seducing the ascetic to sensual pleasure). Seeing the baby (*garbha*) lying in the desolate wilderness that was teeming with lions and tigers, birds surrounded her protectively on all sides.”²³

We read also in the well-known story of Paraśurāma who exterminated the Kṣatriya tribe as follows:

“He killed each and every infant (of the Kṣatriya tribe) as soon as it was born.”²⁴

When Kṛṣṇa was born, his father Vasudeva replaced him with a girl who was born on the same night in order to deceive the wicked Kāṃsa. Kṛṣṇa predicted the event to the girl as follows:

“When the eighth month will come, we both shall be born simultaneously. Under the prevailing government of Kāṃsa, we shall experience the baby-exchange (*garbha-vyatyāsa*). I shall come to Yaśodā (your mother) and you must resort to Devakiī (my mother). Kāṃsa is to be deluded by this baby-exchange between us two.”²⁵

The process of the baby exchange (*garbha-vyatyāsa*) is described variously in different contexts.²⁶ Yet, in all these passages, the word *garbha* should be taken in the sense of “baby born”, because they were already born of their mothers,

²³ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 66, 10:

jātam utsrjya taṃ garbhaṃ menakā mālinīm anu |
krta-kāryā tatas tūrṇam agacchac chakra-saṃsadam || (9)
taṃ vane vijane garbhaṃ siṃha-vyāghra-samākule |
dr̥ṣṭvā śayānaṃ śakunāḥ samantāt paryavārayan ||

cf. *Mahābhārata*, 1, 8, 7: *utsrjya caiva taṃ garbhaṃ nadyās tīre jagāma ha/kanyām amara-garbhābhāṃ jvalantīm iva ca śriyā*; Rāmāyaṇa, ed., G.H. Bhatt, 7, 4, 25: *tam utsrjya tu sā garbham...*; and 26: *tayotsr̥ṣṭaḥ sa tu śiśuḥ ...*

²⁴ *Mahābhārata*, 12, 49, 55ab: *jātaṃ jātaṃ sa garbhaṃ tu punar eva jaghāna*

²⁵ *Harivaṃśa*, 47, 37:

aṣṭamasya tu māsasya jātāv āvāṃ tataḥ samam |
prāpsyāvo garbha-vyatyāsaṃ prāpte kaṃsasya śāsane || (36)
ahaṃ yaśodāṃ yāsyāmi tvaṃ devi bhaja devakīm |
āvayor garbha-vyatyāse kaṃso gacchatu muūdhātām ||

²⁶ *Harivaṃśa*, 48, 20 has *parivarte kṛte... garbhābhyaṃ* and 65, 50 has *vyāvartitāv etau garbhau*.

and also because the corresponding passages in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5, 3, 20–21 have the words *kanyā* and *dārikā* for the girl, and *bāla* for Kṛṣṇa.²⁷ Upon hearing the news that the eighth child was born to Devakī, the wicked Kāṁsa rushed to her house, caught hold of the child who was the exchanged girl, and was about to dash her against a rock. But she slipped from his hands and ascended to heaven:

“With her hair dishevelled, the girl instantly left the infant-body (*garbha-tanu*) and went up into the sky, being adorned with heavenly garlands and unguents. Though she was a mere girl (*kanyā*), she came to be praised by the gods ever since as a divine being.”²⁸

Here *garbha-tanu* (*pada a*) should be taken in the sense of “an infant body” instead of “embryo body”. This interpretation seems to be supported by two lines later, where *garbha* is replaced by *kanyā* (*pada e*).

In all these passages, it is evident that the word *garbha* is used not in the sense of the “embryo”, which is supposed to remain in the mother’s womb, but of an “infant” that is already born (*jāta*, or *jāta-mātra*) from the womb. It is described in the corresponding passages as *bāla* (boy), *kanyā* or *dārikā* (girl).²⁹

IV. The meaning of “child” in addition to the ordinary meaning of “embryo” for the word *garbha* is not limited to the epic examples as we have discussed above, but is further attested to by passages in Indian lexicographical works and in the compound *garbha-rūpa*, which appears in dramas of Bhavabhūti and in Indian Buddhist literature.

First, let us briefly examine the examples in indigenous lexicographical literature. Amarasimha, for example, says as follows: *kukṣi-bhrūṇārbhakā garbhāḥ* (*Amarakoṣa* 3, 3, 135a). Here three meanings are attributed to the word *garbha*: womb (*kukṣi*), embryo (*bhrūṇa*) and child (*arbhaka*). We also read in *Anekārthasamuccaya* (396) as follows: *bhrūṇe garbhaṁ vijāniyāj jaṭharārbhakayor api*. According to Śāśvata, the word *garbha* means primarily embryo (*bhrūṇa*), but it can also mean womb (*jaṭhara*) and child (*arbhaka*). Halāyudha lists the meaning of “boy” for this term in his *Abhidhānaratnamāla*.³⁰

²⁷ cf. *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 5, 3, 21:

*rasudevo 'pi vinyasya bālam ādāya dārikām |
yaśodā-śayanāt tūrṇam ājagāmāmita-dyutih ||*

²⁸ *Harivaṁśa*, 48, 29:

*hitvā garbha-tanuṁ cāpi sahasā mukta-mūrdhajā |
jagāmākāśam āviśya divya-srag-anulepanā |
kanyaiva cābhavan nityaṁ divyā devair abhiṣṭutā |*

²⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 5, 142, 25; 12, 337, 48: *garbha* in *kānīna-garbha* is also used in the sense of “child”.

³⁰ *Abhidhānaratnamālā*, 2, 347:

*bālaḥ pāko 'rbhako garbhaḥ potaś ca prthukaḥ śiśuḥ |
śāvo dīmbhaś ca vijñeyo vaṭur māṇavako mataḥ ||*

cf. 2, 344 and 360.

Next we shall see the compound *garbha-rūpa* used in the sense of “boy”, or even “youth” in later Sanskrit dramas and also in Indian Buddhist literature. In his answer to Pṛthivī, Rama speaks as follows:

“Indeed (my) gurus (who are Pṛthivī and Bhagīrathī) are full of tenderness for those whom they consider as their children.”³¹

As pointed out by Todar Mall, the compound *garbha-rūpa* in this sense of child was one of the favourite words used by Bhavabhūti.³² The same compound appears often in Indian Buddhist texts such as the *Mahāvastu* and *Divyāvadāna*. Here we provide an example taken from the *Nalinījātaka* of the *Mahāvastu*. A young boy, Ekaśṛṅga, who is called *ṛṣi-kumāra*, the son of the sage Kāśyapa, is styled as *garbha-rūpa* in the following passage:

“So carrying the infant in his cloak of antelope’s hide, he took him to his hermitage... The seer cut the child’s umbilical cord with a fastener.³³ He put the child to the doe’s teat and she suckled him... When the child could use his own limbs, he would grasp the doe’s teat for himself and drink.”³⁴

In the above quoted passage, the same boy, Ekaśṛṅga, from his delivery from his mother’s womb to his grown up stage, is designated by the same compound *garbha-rūpa*.³⁵

The semantic development never ceases. Thus, we have *garbha-rūpa* even in Middle and Modern Aryan languages. In the monumental Dictionary of Ralph Turner, we see that our compound and its derivatives are further used in the

³¹ *Uttararāmacarita*, 7, 7, 1: *sakaruṇā hi guravo garbha-rūpeṣu*.

³² cf. *Mahāvīracarita*, 1, 18, prose: *diṣṭyā garbha-rūpakam tvam kuśalinam āgataṃ rājarṣi-grhāt paśyāmi*. *Mahāvīracarita*, 1, 55: *gurur bhavān garbha-rūpaś ca te vatso rāmahadrah*. *Mahāvīracarita*, 4, 32ab, prose: *raghu-janaka-grheṣu garbha-rūpa-vyatikara-maṅgala-vṛddhaya ’nubhūtāḥ*. *Anagharāghava*, 1, 15cd: *yad garbha-rūpaṃ iva mām anuśāsti sarvam adyāpi tan mayi gurur guru-pakṣa-pātaḥ*. *Anagharāghava*, 4, 28, prose: *bhagavan bhārgava guru-garbhārūpayor etāvad evāntaram*.

cf. also N. Stchoupak, *Uttararāmacarita*, 135 note, and Todar Mall, *Mahāvīracaritam*, 221 (note on page 9, line 15).

³³ As for the meaning of *phalaka*, see Edgerton, 1953, 396.

³⁴ *Mahāvastu*, ed. by E. Sénart, iii, 144, lines 9–16:

tena dāni garbha-rūpam ajinakena grhṇīya tam āśrmna-padam praveṣito... tena tasya garbha-rūpasya phalakena nābhi chinnā... so ṛṣi taṃ garbha-rūpaṃ tasyā mṛgīye stane allīpeti sāpi mṛgī pāyeti... yaṃ kālaṃ so garbha-rūpo pādehi pi aṇvitaḥ tato svayan tasyā mṛgīye stanam grhṇitvā pibati ||

³⁵ cf. *iti saṃcintya garbha-rūpāni grhe ’nupraveśayitum pravṛttaḥ*, in *Divyāvadāna*, ed. by E.B. Cowell & R.A. Neil, 238, lines 24–25.

sense of “young man, adult”, and even sometimes in the sense of “bridegroom” or “husband” in later phases of Indo-Aryan languages.³⁶

V. All the above discussions show that *garbha* has the meaning of “infant” in addition to the ordinary sense of “embryo”. Its semantic field extends from the pre-natal state of embryo (*bhrūna*) to its post-natal state of infant (*arbhaka*).³⁷ The fact that the word *garbha* here means the “infant” which succeeds the state of “embryo” invites us to imagine that it may also connote the state which precedes the state of “embryo”. That is to say, we must investigate now whether the word also implies the origination of the “embryo” itself. If its semantic field extends so far, the word, then, comprises the whole process of the formation of the “embryo” from its primordial origination to its final result in the form of the infant-born. The modal state which precedes “embryo” is for a mother to receive the paternal blood (*retas*), or seed (*bīja*). This implies sexual intercourse, the implantation of *retas* in *yoni*. We shall now proceed to investigate whether the word *garbha* has a semantic value comparable to words for the male seed (*retas*, *bīja*), and whether it can be seen as their synonym. As a first step, let us examine a passage in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka *Upaniṣad* 6, 4, 10–11, where the two opposite ways of man’s approach to woman are described:

“Now, after inserting his member³⁸ in the woman whom one may desire with the thought, ‘May she not conceive offspring!’ and joining mouth with mouth, he should first inhale, then exhale, and say: ‘with power, with semen, I reclaim (*ā-dā-*) the semen from you!’ Thus she comes to be without seed.”³⁹

“Now, after inserting his member in the woman whom one may desire with the thought, ‘May she conceive!’ and joining mouth with mouth, he should first exhale, then inhale, and say: ‘with power, with semen, I deposit (*ā-dhā-*) semen in you!’ Thus she becomes pregnant.”⁴⁰

³⁶ R.L. Turner, *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-aryan Languages*, London, 1973, no. 4057, page 217 (*garbharūpa*).

³⁷ Equation of *garbha* with *kumāra* is also seen in the following cases. The expression *āgarbhād anukṛntantas...* (*Mahābhārata*, I, 169, 18. Cf. also 13, 56, 3; I, 171, 6) is to be compared with *kulam iha hamni samastam ākumāram* in *Viṅāvāsavadattam*, 2, 1 and *ākumāram abhiantum...* in 6, 4. Also in illustration of *śeṣavad anumāna*, *Yuktidīpikā*, 38, line 15, has *tad yathā kumārakaṃ dṛṣtvā dvaya-samāpattim*, while in the *Carakasamhitā*, I, II, 21, we have *maithunaṃ garbha-darśanāt*.

³⁸ For this meaning of the word *artha*, cf. H. Oertel, *Euphemismen in der vedischen Prosa und euphemistische Varianten in den Mantras*, München, 1942, 20.

³⁹ Paragraph Ten:

atha yām icchen na garbhaṃ dadhīte tasyām arthaṃ niṣṭhāya mukhena mukhaṃ samdhāyābhiprānyāpānyād indriyeṇa te retasā reta ādada ity aretā eva bhavati || (10).

⁴⁰ Paragraph Eleven:

atha yām icched dadhīte tasyām arthaṃ niṣṭhāya mukhena mukhaṃ samdhāyāpānyābhiprānyād indriyeṇa te retasā reta ādadhāmīti garbhīny eva bhavati || (11).

One may compare the expression *garbhaṃ dadhīta* of verse ten with *reta ādad-hāmi* of verse eleven, and again *aretā* in verse ten with *garbhiṇī* in verse eleven. Śaṅkara apparently equates *retas* with *garbha*, while commenting on the last passage of 10 as *aretā eva bhavati na garbhiṇī bhavatīty arthaḥ*.

In addition to the expressions *garbhaṃ dadhīta* and *reta ādadhāmi* that we have just seen, we shall now examine the compound *garbhādhāna*. It is well-known that *garbhādhāna* is considered as the first among the Hindu sacraments (*samskāra*).⁴¹ Though it became obsolete in later times, and consequently the later *Smṛti* literature does not provide detailed prescriptions, it is the ceremony of first intercourse after marriage with a view to procure a male offspring. Literally, the compound *garbhādhāna* means the act of placing (*ā-dhā-na*) the embryo (*garbha*). This ceremony is referred to in the *Manusmṛti* as *niṣeka* (pouring of male seed).⁴² Among the commentators, Medhātithi says *niṣeko garbhādhānam... garbhādhānaṃ ca vivāhād anantaram prathamopagame viṣṇur yoniṃ kalpayatu iti mantravaṭ keṣāṃ cid vihitam*, and Sarvajñanārāya explains *niṣeko retaḥ-sekaḥ garbhādhānam*.⁴³ Furthermore, the term is paraphrased as *ṛtu-saṃgama* (man's approach to his wife in the proper time) in some *Smṛti* literature.⁴⁴ We note here that *garbhādhāna* is paraphrased as *niṣeka*, and more precisely, *retaḥ-seka*, implies the husband's act of pouring his seed inside his wife. Thus, it is a logical conclusion to assume that the concept *garbha* is tinged with an erotic dimension. We have noted such an erotic atmosphere in the passages quoted above, namely Sūrya's approach to Kuntī and Hiḍimba's love for Bhīmasena. Let us now proceed to provide a further list of some passages from the epic where the word *garbha* is used synonymously with *retas* or *bīja*.⁴⁵

In the epic version of the Śakuntalā episode, the heroine takes to the court of Duṣṇanta the six year old boy, and demands of the king to recognize the boy as

⁴¹ R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*, 1949, 79–98.

⁴² *Manusmṛti*, 2, 16:

*niṣekādi-śmaśānānto mantrair yasyodito vidhiḥ |
tasya śāstre 'dhikāro 'smiñ jñeyo nānyasya kasyacit ||*

Manusmṛti, 2, 26:

*vaidikaiḥ karmabhiḥ puṇyair niṣekādir dvijanmanām |
kāryaḥ śarīra-samskāraḥ pāvanaḥ pretya ceha ca ||.*

⁴³ *Manusmṛti*, 1, 192–3, 205.

⁴⁴ cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, II, Poona, 1941, 201ff.

⁴⁵ However, one must note the usage *baijikam garbhikam cainas* in *Manusmṛti*, 2, 27, where *bīja* belongs to father and *garbha* to mother.

his legitimate son. But her request is mercilessly rejected and she is thrown out from the court. At that time there is heard a voice in heaven, saying:

“The mother is (only) a water sack (of semen). The son is derived from the father, by whom he himself is born. Support (your) son, Duṣanta. Do not despise Śakuntalā. The son who holds the (paternal) seed (*retodhā*) saves (his ancestors) from Yama’s abode, O God among men. You are the man who has planted (*dhātr*) this child (*garbha*). Śakuntalā has spoken the truth.”⁴⁶

The first line of *Mahābhārata* I, 69, 29 is a well-known, yet somewhat obscure passage which speaks of legitimate attribution of a child.⁴⁷ In the first line of I, 69, 30,⁴⁸ the legitimate son is called the holder of the paternal seed (*reto-dhā*), while, in the second line, the father is styled as the person who imparts or confers (*dhātr*) the embryo (*garbha*),⁴⁹ who is now a boy of six years. These two expressions, *reto-dhā* as the son and *dhātā garbhasya* as his father, seem to invite us to consider whether the words *retas* and *garbha* are used almost synonymously. Another passage in which we can discern a synonymous use of *garbha* and *bīja*⁵⁰ is met with in the *Bhagavadgītā*. In the relevant passages where Kṛṣṇa describes his cosmogonical activities, *garbha* is paraphrased with *bīja*:

“For me great Brahman is a womb; therein I plant the germ. The origin of all beings comes from that, son of Bharata.

In all wombs, son of Kuntī, whatsoever forms originate, of them great Brahman is the womb. I am the father that furnishes the seed.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Mahābhārata*, I, 69, 30:

bhastrā mātā pituḥ putro yena jātaḥ sa eva saḥ |
bharasva putraṃ duṣanta māvamamsthāḥ śakuntalām || (29)
retodhāḥ putra unnayati nara-deva yama-kṣayāt |
tvaṃ cāsya dhātā garbhasya satyam āha śakuntalā ||

cf. *Mahābhārata*, I, 90, 31–32 (*mātā bhastrā...*) and *Uddālakajātaka Jātaka* 1963 487, 5 (4, 301, 14–17):

bhaccā mātā-pitā bandhū yena jāto sa yeva so |
uddālako ahaṃ bhoto sotthiyā-kula-vamsako ||

cf. also H. Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften, Göttingen, 1940, 353ff., and J.J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, 201, no. 1.

⁴⁷ cf. H. Scharfe, *Untersuchungen zur Staatsrechtslehre des Kauṭalya*, Wiesbaden, 1968, 54; P. Horsch, *Die vedische Gāthā- und Śloka-Literatur*, Bern, 1966, 83; and von H. Stietencron, “Die Rolle des Vaters im Hinduismus”, *Vaterbild in Kulturen Asiens, Afrikas, und Ozeaniens*, Stuttgart, 1979, 55.

⁴⁸ cf. P. Horsch, *op. cit.*, 79. Nīlakaṇṭha explains *retodhāḥ retaḥ-sektā yaḥ eva putraḥ pitur ananya evety-arthaḥ* (page 143).

⁴⁹ Nīlakaṇṭha reads *dhātā niṣektā* (page 143).

⁵⁰ For the equivalence of *garbha* and *bīja*, cf. Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgata-garbha et du gotra*, 506.

⁵¹ *Bhagavadgītā*, 14, 4:

mama yonir mahad brahma tasmin garbhaṃ dadhāmy aham |
saṃbhavaḥ sarva-bhūtānāṃ tato bhavati bhārata || (3)
sarva-yoniṣu kaunteya mūrtayaḥ saṃbhavanti yāḥ |
tāsāṃ brahma mahad yonir ahaṃ bīja-pradaḥ pitā ||.

Here, *mahad brahman* is *prakṛti*, the female principle (*yoni*) of procreation, and Kṛṣṇa himself is the male principle (*pitṛ*) that furnishes the seed (*bīja-prada*). The phrase *garbham dadhāmi* (I plant the germ) in 14, 3 is paraphrased by Śāṅkara as *bījam nikṣipāmi* (I pour the seed). Furthermore, the compound *bīja-prada* (the father that furnishes the seed) in 14, 4 is rendered by the same commentator as *garbhādhānasya kartā pitā* (the father, the agent of the act of planting the germ). All these renderings by the commentator lead us to conjecture that *bīja* is used here synonymously with *garbha*.⁵² Though *bīja* belongs to the male and *garbha* is attributed to the female,⁵³ the phenomena of impregnation (*bīja*) on the male side and conception (*garbha*) on the female side take place simultaneously. Here again the erotic nuance of sexual intercourse is evident.

The erotic implications attached to the word *garbha* are more clearly discernable in the story of Jaratkāru.⁵⁴ In the birth-story of Āstika, the sister of Vāsuki, the king of snakes, is married to the sage Jaratkāru with a view to procuring a male offspring in the lineage of the snake. Soon after the marriage, however, the husband sage leaves the wife behind in anger and goes to the forest. At the time of departure, the wife entreats him as follows:

“O good man, having planted (*ādhāya*) in me *garbha* (male seed) of unmanifested form (*avyakta-rūpa*), why, a great man, do you want to depart, leaving me behind, this innocent woman?”⁵⁵

Upon hearing this Jaratkāru speaks to his wife:

“There is a *garbha* in you (= you have already well conceived my seed), that is bright like the fire, O fortunate woman.”⁵⁶

In this dialogue between wife and husband, *avyakta-rūpa garbha* in 36 is the husband’s *bīja* or *retas* which has not yet taken the definite form of an embryo in his wife’s womb, while *garbha* in 38 means the embryo now conceived as such (**vyakta-rūpa?*) in her womb. The erotic connotation of *garbha* is here also in-

⁵² cf. *Śakuntalā*, 6, 26:

saṃropite 'py ātmani dharmā-patnī tyaktā maya nāma kula-pratiṣṭhā |
kalpiṣyamānā mahate phalāya vasuṃdharā kāla ivopta-bīja ||.

⁵³ cf. the note 45 above (*baijikam garbhikam cainas* in *Manusmṛti*, 2, 27).

⁵⁴ For the story of Jaratkāru, cf. H. Schneider, “Die Geschichte von den heiden Jaratkāru”, *WZKSO*, 3, 1959, 1–11, and H. Shee, *Tapas und tapasvin in den erzählenden Partien des Mahābhārata*, Reinbek, 1986, 56 ff.

⁵⁵ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 43, 36cf:

imam avyakta-rūpaṃ me garbham ādhāya sattama |
kathaṃ tyaktvā mahātma san gantum icchasy anāgasam ||.

⁵⁶ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 43, 38ab: *asty eṣa garbhaḥ subhage tava vaiśvānaropamaḥ*

licated by the question put in the mouth of Vāsuki to his sister. Upon hearing this unexpected departure of the sage Jaratkāru, the brother asks his sister as follows:

“Is there any *garbha* in you from that great sage (= have you conceived a seed of that sage), fortunate woman? I do not wish that the wise man’s marriage (with you) be barren. Surely, it is not proper that I should put questions to you on such a matter, but the matter is too grave for me not to prompt you.”⁵⁷

Here, the brother is rather hesitant to ask his sister about her private matters of an erotic nature. The insemination and the conception of a child are very much intimate matter between a married couple. The above example shows that even the wife’s brother refrains from asking about such things. At any rate, all these passages suffice to establish that the concept of *garbha* is endowed with an erotic connotation.⁵⁸

Lastly, we shall quote a proverbial passage from the *Mahābhārata*, where the term *garbha* can be taken in the sense of the male seed:

“Pride destroys the prosperity of persons of little intelligence. A virgin is defiled by *garbha* and a Brahmin incurs reproach by keeping at home.”⁵⁹

The phrase *garbheṇa duṣyate kanyā* is usually rendered as “a virgin incurs reproach by conception (= if she conceives)”,⁶⁰ but we can simply read it as “a virgin is defiled by the male seed(= if she had a sexual intercourse).”

VI. All the passages quoted above amply testify that the Sanskrit word *garbha* does not simply mean “embryo” (*bhrūṇa*) as it is usually translated into English, but that its semantic domain encompasses the stages which precede as well as succeed the state of the “embryo”. The preceding stage is that of the primordial origination of the “embryo” (*garbhādhāna* = *reto-niṣeka*) in the form of the male semen (*retas*, *bīja*) which is first implanted (*avyakta-rūpa*) and then conceived in the female womb (*kukṣi*). Its succeeding stage is that of a child (*arbhaka*) that is

⁵⁷ *Mahābhārata*, 1, 44, 6:

apy asti garbhaḥ subhage tasmāt te muni-sattamāt |
na ceccāmy aphalaṃ tasya dāra-karma manīṣiṇaḥ || (5)
kāmaṃ ca mama na nyāyāṃ praṣṭuṃ tvāṃ kāryam īdrśam |
kiṃ tu kiāya-garīyastvāt tatas tvāham acūcudam ||.

⁵⁸ cf. also the story of Agastya (śraddhāvān) and Lopāmudrā (śraddadhānā) related in *Mahābhārata*, 3, 97, 21 23. For the meaning of the word śraddhā, see my forthcoming paper in the J. May Felicitation Volume.

⁵⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 13, 36, 17:

atimānaḥ śriyaṃ hanti puruṣasyālpa-medhasaḥ |
garbheṇa duṣyate kanyā gr̥ha-vāscna ca dvijaḥ ||.

⁶⁰ cf. *Indische Sprüche*, 496, which has *abhimāna* for *atimāna* (“Schwangerschaft schändet ein Mädchen”) and L. Sternbach, *Mahāsubhāṣitasamgraha*, 1, Hoshiarpur, 1974, 101, no. 590.

born (*jāta*) out of the mother's womb. The last semantic aspect is further attested to by the compound *garbha-rūpa* which is found in later Sanskrit literature, and whose further development is seen in Modern Indo-aryan languages. It is remarkable that all these stages of the child, starting from the very moment of impregnation and ending with its development into infant and youth, are equally denoted by the single Sanskrit word *garbha*.

However, here we wish to ask about the sociological importance of this semantic scope of the Sanskrit word *garbha*, which ranges from the inception as the result of sexual intercourse to the final crystallization in the form of a born child. In other words, what social responsibility is the man expected to assume at all stages including the final development of the paternal blood (*retas*, *bīja*) in the form of a born child (*garbha-rūpa*, *arbhaka*)?

As we have seen in the dispute between Śakuntalā and Duṣanta, the *garbha*, whose semantic field covers all the stages from *retas* to *arbhaka*, causes a serious problem of child-recognition to the persons sexually involved. That is to say, viewed in the light of social responsibility, a man who approaches a woman with carnal desire and impregnates her with his seed (*retas*, *bīja*) is expected due to his act of *garbhādhāna*, to reap the fruits of his action, once the seed conceived by her is developed into an embryo (*bhrūṇa*) and eventually born as a child (*arbhaka*). Thus, the *garbha* is no more a physiological or ontogenetical entity, but a human reality which necessarily involves the problem of social and family responsibility of the persons involved. The social and legal responsibility towards the born child, then, takes the form of the recognition of its legitimacy. Now, the man must acknowledge the child as his own, and take social and family responsibility for the child (*reto-dhā*) in his capacity as father (*dhātā garbhasya*). By introducing this social implication, we shall be able to combine all the semantic aspects of the word *garbha*, that is, *retas* (*bīja*), *bhrūṇa* and *arbhaka*, altogether. Father (*dhātā garbhasya* = *bīja-prada*) is obliged to acknowledge the legitimacy of the baby born (*jāta garbha* = *arbhaka*, *garbha-rūpa*) as the holder of his seed (*reto-dhā*), when the embryo (*bhrūṇa*) takes the form of a child (*garbha-rūpa*).

But, what does this social implication impute to the Sanskrit word *garbha* itself? By asking this question, we come to the basic meaning of the word. The paternal blood (*retas*, *bīja*), its development into embryo in the mother's womb (*bhrūṇa*), its final birth as a child (*arbhaka*), and lastly, the man's act of recognition of the child's legitimacy—all these elements indicate the family lineage, which combines the father and the son. This concept of family lineage through the paternal blood seems to underlie the concept of *garbha*, which comprises within itself all the three stages of *retas*, *bhrūṇa* and *arbhaka*.

VII. Bearing in mind the semantic field of the Sanskrit word *garbha*, let us return once again to our original problem of *deva-garbha* and *tathāgata-garbha*. As shown above, *deva-garbha* is a divine offspring, who inherits a divine lineage on the father's side. An extraordinary child who could hardly be imagined to be of human origin is styled *deva-garbhābha*, or *amara-garbhopama*: one who appears to inherit the divine blood on the paternal side. A descent from the gods or a divine lineage through the paternal blood is clearly implied in the compound *deva-garbha*. This compound is occasionally equated with *deva-putra*.

Now, in the case of the compound *tathāgata-garbha*, we scarcely detect any of the erotic connotation we have seen in the epic stories of Kuntī and Jaratkāru. However, the legitimacy (*aurasa*) of and family relationship (*kula*, *gotra*) with the Tathāgata (Buddha) seems to be implied there. In a sense, the Buddhists discarded the erotic tinge of the word *garbha* and used it only in the spiritual sense.⁶¹

We have seen above, in the story of Śarmiṣṭhā, that her son is described not only as a *deva-garbhābha* (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 77, 27), but also as a *deva-putropama* (*Mahābhārata*, I, 78, 13). Here, we notice that *deva-garbha* is used synonymously with *deva-putra*. Then, within the context of the analogy of *deva-garbha* as equivalent to *deva-putra*, we would expect to find for the term *tathāgata-garbha* such a synonymous expression as **tathāgata-putra*.⁶² The compound is, however, apparently not attested in Buddhist literature but we have a similar construction in the term *śākya-putra* instead.⁶³

Irrespective of the presence or absence of the compound, the word *putra*, when it stands as the last member of a compound, means *Zugehörigkeit zu einer Klasse oder Gruppe (Mitglied)*, rather than *Sohn*, as has been pointed out by such scholars as H. Lüders⁶⁴ and L. Alsdorf.⁶⁵ The same may be applied also to the word *garbha*, which primarily implies here family lineage.

⁶¹ We may notice this in the usage of the words *bīja* (seed) and *antarvatī strī* (pregnant woman) in the well-known nine illustrations (*nava udāharaṇa*) of the germ covered with defilements as given in *Ratnagotravibhāga* (J. Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra)*, Rome, 1966, 268ff.). Here *bīja* is used not in the sense of *retas*, but in connection with *aṅkura* (1, 115), and there is no erotic nuance to the woman in question (1, 121–122).

⁶² As regards this problem, cf. Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgata-garbha et du gotra* 511 n. 4.

⁶³ Mr. Silk communicated to me that there is the compound *buddha-putra* in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*.

⁶⁴ H. Lüders, *op. cit.*, 86 (*rāja-putra* = *kṣatriya*, *deva-putra* = Mitglied des Deva).

⁶⁵ L. Alsdorf, *Kleine Schriften*, ed., A. Wezler Wiesbaden 1974, 375 n. 9 (Zugehörigkeit zu einer Klasse oder Gruppe) and 587ff. Cf. also K.R. Norman, *The Elders' Verses I, Theragāthā*, London, 1969, 131, no. 41.

Furthermore, it might not be just a coincidence that such concepts as *kula*, *gotra* (lignée spirituelle)⁶⁶ and *dhātu* (élément spirituel)⁶⁷ make their appearance in the context of the *tathāgata-garbha* theory. These words expressive of family lineage (*gotra* and *kula*) and that of blood-relationship (*dhātu*) are basically not foreign to the philosophical context of the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine.

Regardless of the difference in translation, “child” in *deva-garbha* and “embryo” in *tathāgata-garbha* as we have mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the concept of family-lineage, especially the lineage through the paternal blood, seems to be the underlying concept fundamental to the Sanskrit word *garbha*. These two, “child” and “embryo”, are simply representing different aspects of the same *garbha*.

⁶⁶ G. Roth advocates the rendering of the word *gotra* into “innate spiritual predisposition (to reach enlightenment)”. There he also quotes L. Schmithausen’s translation “Anlage”, “Heilsanlage”, “von Anfang an gegebene Anlage zum Heil”. Cf. G. Roth, *Indian Studies*, edited by H. Bechert & P. Kiefer-Pülz, Delhi, 1986, 169, 473.

⁶⁷ Note that *dhā-tu* in *buddha-dhātu* is the *nomen actionis* of the root *dhā-*, which is a composite member of *reto-dhā* and *garbha-ā-dhā-na*.