

Mr̥tyu

— The Hindu Concept of Death —

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I. Introduction

(I-1)

Among the several Sanskrit words which mean “death,” such as *marāṇa*, *nidhana*, *parāsu*, *prāpta-paṅcatva*,¹⁾ *mṛtyu* seems to occupy a unique position.

Being derived from the same verbal root *mṛ-* (to die), it shares the same semantic field with such words as *marāṇa* and *māra*, the latter being personified in the Pali Buddhist literature as *Māra* (*-pāpimā*).²⁾ As a result, it is used synonymously with another abstract noun *marāṇa*, being freely replaced with each other, as is the case with *marāṇa-bhaya* and *mṛtyu-bhaya*, *marāṇa-kāla* and *mṛtyu-kāla*, etc.³⁾ Yet, unlike *marāṇa* which is compounded with other abstract nouns such as *duḥkha* (*marāṇa-duḥkha*), *dharma* (*marāṇa-dhamma*) (Aṅguttara Nikāya.3.392), and *jāti* (*jāti-marāṇassa pārāgā* [*Suttanipāta*] 32), *mṛtyu* is personified as is the case with Yama, the god of death, as is illustrated in the well-known story of Naciketas, which is proclaimed by *mṛtyu* (*nāciketam upākhyānam mṛtyu-proktaṃ sanātanam* in KU 1.3.16)⁴⁾ and Sāvitrī-upākhyāna in MBh.3.281.⁵⁾ As a matter of fact, in that Upaniṣad, Yama and *Mṛtyu* are used synonymously. When his father Vājaśravasa in anger gave Naciketas to Yama, this god of death is also called by the name of *Mṛtyu* (*mṛtyave tvādādāmi*:1.4d).⁶⁾ The boy also addresses Yama by the name of *Mṛtyu* (*mṛtyo!*).⁷⁾

II. Personification (1) (*mṛtyu*'s emotion)

However, unlike Yama, who is merely the object of awe and fear, *Mṛtyu* is more anthropomorphically illustrated, having intelligence (*bud-dhi*) and emotions of various sorts like an ordinary human being.

(II-1) Emotion

Mṛtyu is furnished with emotion, negative as well as positive.

(II-1-1) Anger (*kruddha*)

When Abhimanyu was killed in the battle-field, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked Saṃjaya what his father Arjuna looked like in rage.

*putra-śokābhisamṭaptam kruddham mṛtyum ivāntakam
āyāntam puruṣa-vyāghram katham dadṛśur āhave (MBh. 7.67.3)*

How did they (=warriors of the Duryodhana side) look at the tiger-like man, when he was advancing into the battle-field, who was like the all-destroying Mṛtyu himself in fury, being burnt with grief (caused by the death) of his son?⁸⁾

In praising Rāma, Śuka speaks as follows.

*yo bhindyād gaganam bāṇaiḥ parvatāṃś cāpi dārayet
yasya mṛtyor iva krodhaḥ śakrasyeva parākramaḥ (R. 6. 19.20)*

With his arrows he might rend the heavens and shatter the mountains.

His wrath is like that of Mṛtyu, and his valor like that of Śakra. (Goldman)⁹⁾

(II-1-2) Satisfaction (*tuṣṭa*)

Mṛtyu is satisfied with Naciketas.

*lokādim agniṃ tam uvāca tasmai, yāiṣṭakā, yāvatīr vā, yathā vā
sa cāpi tat pratyavadat yathoktam, athāsya mṛtyuḥ punar evāha tuṣṭaḥ
(KU 1.1.15)*

(Yama) spoke to him about the fire(-sacrifice) which is the beginning of the world.

Also about bricks (to be used in building the sacrificial altar), their number and their manner.

And he (=Naciketas) repeated as it was told. Then, pleased with him, Mṛtyu spoke again.¹⁰⁾

(II-2) Intelligence (*buddhi*)

He is furnished with intelligence. When Vālin, the chief of asuras, was defeated by Indra and deprived of his sovereignty, he remained unmoved. Seeing it, Indra wondered and addressed to him as follows.

*savajram udyatam bāhuṃ dr̥ṣṭvā pāsāṃś ca vāruṇān
kasyeha na vyathed buddhir mṛtyor api jighāṃsataḥ (89)
sā te na vyathate buddhir acalā tattva-darśinī
bruvan na vyathase sa tvam vākyaṃ satya-paraṅkramam (MBh. 12.220.90)*

Beholding (my) arm with the thunderbolt upraised, and Varuṇa's nooses,

whose intelligence in this world would not be agitated, including that of (all) killing Mṛtyu?

Your intelligence is unmoved and agitated even a little, seeing the truth.

Speaking only the word of true power, you are not agitated.

It is implied here that, seeing Indra in a rage, even the intelligence (*buddhi*) of *mṛtyu* is easily disquieted (*vyath-*).

(II-3) Mṛtyu's death (*mṛtyur mriyate*)

Even the god of death cannot escape death. He experiences death, as an ordinary human being. In *Vāgīśvarakīrti*'s Mṛtyu-vañcanopadeśa, we read.

*koṭi-saṃkhyā bhaved yāvat tāvat dhyānam idaṃ smaret
tataḥ sūkṣmāṅgī sūkṣmāntya-lokeśa-gata-cetasam (26)
dr̥ṣṭvā yogeśvaram mṛtyur mriyate svayam eva hi
anye 'pi skandha-jā dośāḥ svayam āyanti nāśitām (MVU 4.27)*

When one would continue this meditative concentration to the number of ten million,

his mind becomes concentrated to the Lokeśa, the most subtle among

the subtle.

On seeing this lord of Yoga, *mṛtyu* dies by himself immediately.
Other evils which sprang out of materials also disappear by themselves.

(II-4) Other aspects of Mṛtyu

(II-4-1) Cruel (*durātman, krūra*)

In the story of Sudarśana who subdued *mṛtyu* (*mṛtyumjaya*) we read.

*dhiṅ mṛtyuṃ ca durātmānaṃ krūraṃ duḥkha-karaṃ satām
tvāṃ caivāhaṃ vadhiṣyāmi pāpaṃ pāpasya kāraṇam (MBh. 13.1.57)*

Fie upon Mṛtyu, the cruel and evil fellow, who brings about suffering to the good.

Here I shall kill you, the evil one and the cause of evil.

(II-4-2) Fearful (*raudra-bhāva*)

In the same story, we further read.

*athedhmān samuṣpādāya sa pāvakir upāgamat
mṛtyunā raudra-bhāvena nityaṃ bandhur ivānvitah (MBh. 13.2.57)*

Meanwhile, the son of Agni came (back to his home), having collected his firewood,
constantly followed by Mṛtyu of the fierce nature as if a kinsman.

(II-4-3) Evil (*pāpa*)

The jester condemns Mṛtyu as an evil fellow. Pretending to be bitten by a poisonous snake, he says.

*(Vidūṣaka)—aho, pāveṇa miccuṇā gahīdo mhi (aho, pāpeṇa mṛtyunāgrhīto
'smi) (Mālavikāgnimitra 4.4 prose)*

Oh, I am grasped by the evil Mṛtyu.

(II-4-4) Disgusted (*jugups[-ita]*)

It becomes also the object of disgust *jugupsā*. In Bṛhaspati's discourse to Vasumanas, we read.

*tasya sarvāṇi rakṣyāṇi dūrataḥ parivarjayet
mṛtyor iva jugupseta rāja-sva-haraṇān naraḥ (MBh. 12.68.51)*

One should keep himself far from all that the king guards.
and abhor taking the king's wealth, as he does from Mṛtyu.

(II-4-5) Enemy (*śatru*)

Mṛtyu is hated as an enemy. When Rāvaṇa chose a boon from the god Brahmā, he said.

*bhagavan prāṇināṃ nityaṃ nānyatra maraṇād bhayaṃ
nāsti mṛtyu-samaḥ śatrur amaratvam ahaṃ vṛṇe (R. 7.10.16)*

O Lord, the living beings ever have fear, of nothing else but of death (*maraṇa*):

there is no foe (*śatru*) equal to *mṛtyu*. Therefore, I choose immortality.

(II-4-6)

Thus, *mṛtyu* is contrasted to the eternal *brahman*.

*dvy-akṣaras tu bhaven mṛtyus try-akṣaram brahma śāśvatam
mameti ca bhaven mṛtyur na mameti ca śāśvatam (MBh. 12.13.4 = 14.13.3 =
14.50.29)*

*brahma-mṛtyū ca tau rājann ātmany eva samāśritau
adṛśyamānau bhūtāni yodhayetām asaṃśayam (MBh. 12.13.5 = 14.13.4)*

Two-syllabled is Mṛtyu, but three-syllabled is the eternal, Brahman.

“Of mine” is Mṛtyu,¹¹⁾ while “not of mine” is the eternal.

O king, Mṛtyu and Brahman reside in one's self and without being seen, they cause the living beings to fight with each other. There is no doubt about it.

III. Personification (2) (*mṛtyu's outlook and belongings*)

As we have seen above, Mṛtyu is possessed of emotion, positive (*tuṣṭa*) as well as negative (*krodha, kruddha*), like an ordinary human being. However, we meet more often his pictures in rage than his satisfied ones, and when he gets angry, he is easily inclined to devour the living beings. It is because of this that this cruel god of death is furnished with a mouth (*āśya, mukha*) to devour them.

(III-1) Outlook

(III-1-1) *āśya* (mouth)

Mṛtyu is furnished with a huge mouth to swallow. Once filled with rage, he swallows all the living beings with his huge mouth (*āśya*).

Thus, we read in the description of the battle between Kṛpa and Śikhaṇḍin.

*sa vicarmā mahā-rāja khaṅga-pāṇir upādravat
kṛpasya vaśam āpanno mṛtyor āśyam ivāturaḥ (MBh.8.38.20)*

Fallen into the sway of the powerful enemy Kṛpa and thus deprived of his shield, still he (Śikhaṇḍin) rushed (toward him) with his sword in hand, like a sick man towards the jaws of Mṛtyu.

In Vāsudeva's discourse, the presence and absence of *mamatva* are contrasted with each other.

*labdhāpi pṛthivīm sarvāṃ saha-sthāvara-jaṅgamām
mamatvaṃ yasya naiva syāt kiṃ tayā sa kariṣyati (6)
atha vā vaśato pārtha vane vanyena jīvataḥ
mamatā yasya dravyeṣu mṛtyor āśye sa vartate (MBh. 14. 13. 7)*

Having obtained the entire earth with the mobile and immobile, what will he do with it, if he has no sense of self-possession? (6)
On the other hand, living in the forest and subsisting upon vegetables, he still remains in the mouth of Mṛtyu, if he has the sense of self-possession toward wealth. (7)¹²⁾

(III-1-2) mukha¹³⁾

In the dialogue between Tulādhara and Jājali, the former speaks as follows.

*yasmād udvijate lokah sarvo mṛtyu-mukhād iva
vāk-krūrād daṇḍa-pāruṣyāt sa prāpnoti mahad-bhayam (MBh. 12.254.19)*

A man, of whom all the people tremble, as of the mouth of Mṛtyu, because of his harsh speech and severity of punishment, meets with a great danger.

In the battle-field, Kṛṣṇa spoke to Arjuna as follows.

*mṛtyor mukha-gataṃ manye kuntī-putraṃ yudhiṣṭhiraṃ
hutam agnau ca bhadraṃ te duryodhana-vaśaṃ gatam (MBh. 8.43.10)*

He thinks, once gone under the sway of Duryodhana, Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira is within the mouth of Mṛtyu, and offered as an oblation to fire.¹⁴⁾

(III-1-3) daṃṣṭra (jaw)

Mṛtyu's mouth (*āśya, mukha*) is furnished with a terrifying jaw (*daṃṣṭra*), by which he eats up all the living beings.¹⁵⁾

Seeing the approaching danger, both Bhīṣma and Droṇa suggested to Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas.

*praśāmya bhārata-śreṣṭha bhrātr̥bhiḥ saha pāṇḍavaiḥ
rakṣemāṃ pṛthivīm sarvāṃ mṛtyor daṃṣṭrāntaraṃ gatām (MBh. 5.136.9)*

Oh, best of the Bhāratas, make peace with your brethren Pāṇḍavas, and save all the earth which is caught in the interior of Mṛtyu's jaw!

When Kṛṣṇa saw the old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra in a rage, he dragged Bhīma away, who otherwise would be killed by him.

*tivāṃ krodha-vaśaṃ āpannaṃ viditvā bhātar̥sabha
mayāpakṛṣṭaḥ kaunteyo mṛtyor daṃṣṭrāntaraṃ gataḥ (MBh. 11.11.24)*

Seeing you filled with rage, O bull among the Bharata-race,
the son of Kuntī who was in the interior of Mr̥tyu's jaws was drawn
back by me.¹⁶⁾

(III-1-4) *hasta** (hand)

Apparently, Mr̥tyu has a hand, by which he grasps the hairs of human
beings.

*arjajey jñānam arthāṃś ca pumān amaravat sadā
keśeṣv eva gr̥hītaḥ san mr̥tyunādharma ācaret (Cāṇakya Rāja-nīti śāstra
4.23)*

Man should ever acquire knowledge and wealth as if he were immor-
tal.

He should practise righteousness (as if) being grasped by the hairs¹⁷⁾
by Mr̥tyu.¹⁸⁾

*saṅgam akṛtvā smayam api na kuryāt—evam ahaṃ devānām api prārthanīya
iti//smayād ayaṃ susthītaṃ manyatayā mr̥tyunā keśeṣu gr̥hītam ivātmānaṃ na
bhāvayīṣyati (Vyāsa ad Yoga-sūtra 3.51)*

Giving up attachment (to the objects of senses) let him not even take
pride in thinking “it is he who is thus urgently desired even by gods.”
Such a man, if in his pride he deems himself secure, will not feel as if
he were one whom Death had gripped by the hair.¹⁹⁾

(III-1-5) *gras-* (swallow, devour)

By his mouth furnished with jaws, Mr̥tyu devours all the living be-
ings. Thus we read in Parāśara's discourse as follows.

*aho-rātra-maye loka jarā-rūpeṇa saṃcaran
mr̥tyur grasati bhūtāni pavanam pannaṅgo yathā (MBh. 12.287.27)*

Wandering in the form of old-age around the world, made up of days
and night,
Mr̥tyu swallows the living beings, as a snake swallows wind.

(III-2) Belongings

In addition to his frightful mouth (*āśya*, *mukha*) furnished with the terrible jaws (*damṣṭra*), by which Mṛtyu swallows (*gras-*) the living beings, he often carries some tools to catch them.

(III-2-1) *pāśa*²⁰⁾

Mṛtyu carries a snare (*pāśa*), by which he enmeshes the stupefied people, as *kāla* and the god Yama do.²¹⁾ Thus, Vidura taught the ignorant Duryodhana about the folly of fighting with kinsmen by illustrating an old story of foolish birds fighting with each other.

*tau yudhyamānau saṃrabdhau mṛtyu-pāśa-vaśānugau
upasṛtyāparijñāto jagrāha mṛgayus tadā (MBh.5.62.14)*

While both of them were furiously fighting under the sway of the noose of Mṛtyu,
the fowler approached unnoticed, and seized them both.

When Kṛṣṇa departed to the front, the Kurus were talking to each other.

*pramūdhā pṛthivī sarvā mṛtyu-pāśa-sitākṛtā
duryodhanasya bālīśyān naitad astiti cābruvan (MBh.5.135.26)*

All of the stupefied earth is enmeshed in the snares of Mṛtyu.
It comes to an end because of Duryodhana's madness.
(van Buitenen)²²⁾

(III-2-2) *daṇḍa*

He carries also a rod, like Yama²³⁾ and Kāla.²⁴⁾ In describing the single combat between Droṇa and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Saṃjaya says as follows.

*ādade ca śaraṃ ghoram pāṛśatasya vadham prati
śakrāśani-samasparśam mṛtyu-daṇḍam ivāparam (MBh.6.49.9)*

He (Droṇa) took up a dreadful arrow for the slaughter of Pṛṣata's son,

whose touch resembled that of Indra's bolt and which was like the second rod of Mr̥tyu.

Also in the single combat between Karṇa and Dhṛṣṭadyumna we read.

*tasya karṇo mahā-rāja śaraṃ kanaka-bhūṣaṇam
preṣayām āsa saṃkrudho mṛtyu-daṇḍam aparam (MBh, 8.42.12)*

Filled with rage, Karṇa then, O monarch, shot a gold-decked shaft that resembled the second rod of Mr̥tyu.

IV. Personification (3) (mṛtyu the awful)

(IV-1) bhaya

Because of his awful appearance and powerful belongings, Mr̥tyu becomes the object of fear for all living beings.

*udyataṃ śastram ālokya viśādaṃ yāti vihvalaḥ
jīvanaṃ prati saṃtrasto nāsti mṛtyu-samaṃ bhayam (IS. 1242)*

On seeing his weapon raised, a timid man is discouraged and terrified for even life itself. There is no fear comparable to Mr̥tyu.

*saṃcintya saṃcintya tam ugra-daṇḍaṃ mṛtyuṃ manuṣyasya vicakṣaṇasya
varṣāmbu-siktā iva carma-bandhāḥ sarve prayatnāḥ śisili-bhavanti (IS. 6691)*

Over and again, thinking of Mr̥tyu with the awful rod, all the efforts of a wise man shrink like a leather bag wet with rain drops.²⁵⁾

(IV-2)

Thus, it appears also in the context of threatening. When Śuka praised highly the enemy, Rāvaṇa in a rage threatened him as follows.

*kiṃ nu mṛtyor bhayaṃ nāsti māṃ vaktuṃ parusaṃ vacaḥ
yasya me śāsato jihvā prayacchati śubhāśubham (R. 6.20.9)*

Have you no fear of death that you say such harsh words to me, your sovereign,
whose tongue metes out rewards and punishments? (Goldman)

(IV-3) tras-

Under such circumstances, all the living beings tremble in front of Mṛtyu.

*janma-mṛtyu-jarā-duḥkhair nityam saṃsāra-sāgare
kliśyante jantavo ghore martyās trasyanti mṛtyutaḥ (IS.2333)*

Though the mortals are constantly tormented in the dreadful ocean of transmigration by the pains of birth, death (*mṛtyu*) and old age, they tremble (particularly) in front of Mṛtyu.

While the first line describes a general and objective circumstance, the second line speaks of a serious subjective situation of man's mind.

(IV-4) Its mercilessness

However, people fear *mṛtyu*, not because of his awful outlook and belongings, but more often because of the suddenness of his attack. Since *mṛtyu* attacks them unexpectedly and snatches them away (*mṛtyur ādāya gacchati*),²⁶ regardless of their expectation and desire, he is always feared by all living beings. Thus, we read in the dialogue between a son and father (MBh.12.169), where the wise son Medhavin teaches his father as follows.

*mṛtyunābhyāhato loko jarayā parivāritaḥ
aho-rātrāḥ patanty ete nanu kasmān na budhyase (9)
yadāham etad jānāmi na mṛtyus tiṣṭhatīti ha
so 'ham katham pratikṣe jālenāpihitaś caran (10)*

The world is assailed by Mṛtyu, and encompassed by old age.
Days and nights are passing (constantly). Why do not you realize this?

If I know that Mṛtyu does not stand still (but ever advances forward),

Being caught in a net (as it were), how do I remain in expectation?

*anavāpteṣu kāmeṣu mṛtyur abhyeti mānavam
śaṣpāñīva vicinvantam anyatra-gata-mānasam
vṛkīvorāṇam āsādyā mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (12)*

While man has not accomplished his desires, Mṛtyu approaches him and snatches him away, while his mind is still directed to something else,
as a she-wolf assails a ram in the course of its plucking grass.

Thus, it is advised.

*adyaiva kuru yac chreyo mā tvā kālo 'tyagād ayam
akṛteṣv eva kāryeṣu mṛtyur vai saṃprakarṣati (13)
śvaḥ-kāryam adya kurvīta pūrvāhṇe cāpāhṇikam
na hi pratikṣate mṛtyuḥ kṛtaṃ vāsya na vākṛtam
ko hi jānāti kasyādya mṛtyu-senā nivekṣyate (14)*

Do it now, for that is better! Let not the time pass!
Even the works have not been accomplished, Mṛtyu takes them away.
(13)
One should do today what is to be done tomorrow and do in the morning what is to be done in the afternoon,
for Mṛtyu does not wait, no matter whether it is done or not.
Who knows whom Mṛtyu's army will intend (to assail) now? (14)

*taṃ putra-ṣaṣu-saṃmatam vyāsakta-manasaṃ naram
suptam vyāghraṃ mahaugho vā mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (17)
saṃcinvānakam evaikam kāmānām avitrīptakam
vyāghraḥ ṣaṣum ivādāya mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (18)
idaṃ kṛtam idaṃ kāryam idam anyat kṛtākṛtam
evam ihā-sukhāsaktam kṛtāntaḥ kurute vaśe (19)
kṛtānām phalam aprāptam karmānām phala-saṅginam
kṣetrāpaṇa-grhāsaktam mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (20)
mṛtyur jarā ca vyādhiś ca duḥkhaṃ cāneka-kāraṇam
anuṣaktam yadā dehe kiṃ svastha iva tiṣṭhasi (MBh. 12. 169.21)*

While a man is fond of his son and cattle and his mind is attached to

them,

Mṛtyu snatches him away, as the huge flood carries a sleeping tiger. (17)

Mṛtyu snatches a man away, while a collector is unable to satisfy his desire,

as a tiger snatches cattle away. (18)

“This has been done, this is to be done, or it is half done,”

while one is thinking happily, death (kṛtānta) subjugates him. (19)²⁷⁾

Before the result of the works which have been started is obtained, Mṛtyu snatches a man away, while he is thinking of its result, no matter whether it is of one’s field, shop or home, (20)

While *mṛtyu*, old age, disease and suffering of various causes are attached to one’s body, how could you remain at ease (*svastha*)?²⁸⁾

Similarly, we read in Vyāsa’s discourse to his son Śuka.

*tiṣṭhantaṃ ca śayānaṃ ca mṛtyur anveṣate yadā
nirvṛttiṃ labhase kasmād akasmān mṛtyunāśitaḥ (18)
saṃcinvānakam evainaṃ kāmānām avitr̥ptakam
vṛkīvoraṇam āsādyā mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (MBh. 12.309.19)*

While Mṛtyu (always) seeks you, standing or lying,

how do you obtain peace? Without any cause, you are devoured by Mṛtyu. (18)

Mṛtyu snatches a man away, while a collector is unable to satisfy his desire,

as a she-wolf assailed a lamb. (19)²⁹⁾

V. Expressions of dying and killing

Despite its cruelty and unexpectedness, sometimes human beings can dispense with the interference of Mṛtyu. As a matter of fact, people kill each other in the battle-field with no regard to Mṛtyu’s cruelty. In the battle-field, warriors are willing to expose themselves to the danger of life and death without fear and rather they prefer honorable death to shameless survival. It is in this sense that we find the similarity of the delivered soul (*mukta*) and the heroic one, both standing beyond the duality of life and death in the world of transmigration. Below, we shall see what

expressions are used in dying and killing, especially in the battle-field.

(V-1) Dying

(V-1-1) *vaśa*

However, since we have various constructions with the compound *mṛtyu-vaśa*, we shall classify them into several categories.³⁰⁾

(V-1-1-1) *mṛtyu-vaśam gam-*

Deploring the untimely death of a boy of five years old, an old man accused Rāma's reign.

*nedṛśam dṛṣṭa-pūrvam me śrutam vā ghora-darśanam
mṛtyur aprāpta-kālānām rāmasya viśaye yathā (8)
rāmasya duṣkṛtam kiṃcin mahad asti na saṃśayah
tvam rājañ jīvayasvainam balaṃ mṛtyu-vaśam gatam (R. 7.64.9)*

I have never seen, nor heard of before, such an awful matter,
as the untimely death (*mṛtyu*) of people in the realm of Rāma.
Doubtlessly, Rāma must have done some wrong!
O king, revive this boy who has gone to the will of death!³¹⁾

(V-1-1-2) *mṛtyu-vaśam upe-*

When the sun god Sūrya became aware of the approaching danger,
he came in person to his son and advised him as follows.

*yadi dāsyasi karṇa tvam sahaje kuṇḍale śubhe
āyusaḥ prakṣayaṃ gatvā mṛtyor vaśam upeśyasi (MBh. 3.284. 18)*

O Karṇa, if you would give away a pair of the beautiful ear-rings born
with you,
you will come under the sway of *mṛtyu*, having reached the end of
your life-span.

(V-1-1-3) mṛtyu-vaśam āpad-

In his single combat with Akampana, Hanumān is described as follows.

*tān mṛtyu-vaśam āpannān akampana-vaśam gatān
samīkṣya hanumān jñātīn upatasthe mahābalaḥ (R.6.44.8)*

Now, when mighty Hanumān saw that his kin had come under the power of Akampana and indeed, the power of death, he rushed over. (Goldman)

(V-1-1-4) mṛtyu-vaśam prāp-

*vaśam prāpte mṛtyoḥ pītari tanaye vā suhṛdi vā
śucā samtapyante bhṛśam udara-tāḍam jaḍa-dhiyaḥ
asāre saṁsāre virasa-parināme tu viduṣāṁ
vīyogo vairāgyaṁ dṛḍhayati vitanvañ śama-sukham (Prabodhacandrodaya
5.22)*

When father, son or friend comes under the sway of death, the people of dull thought are afflicted vehemently by sorrow, striking their belly. But for the people of wisdom, separation simply strengthens detachment, while enhancing the happiness of tranquility in the sapless world of transmigration which results in tastelessness.

(V-1-2) mṛtyu-lokam gam-³²

Prior to Arjuna's depart for single combat with Karṇa, Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna as follows.

*tad evaṁ samare tāta vartamāne mahā-bhaye
bhīmasenaṁ samāsādya tvāṁ ca pāṇḍava kauravāḥ
sa-vāji-ratha-nagāś ca mṛtyu-lokam ito gatāḥ (MBh.8.51.25)*

In the course of the most fearful battle, o Pāṇḍu's son, striking Bhīmasena and you, the Kauravas went from here to the world

of Mr̥tyu, together with their steeds, horses, chariots and elephants.

(V-1-3) mr̥tyu-deśam yā-

Rāvaṇa addresses Lakṣmaṇa as follows.

*diṣṭyāsi me rāghava dr̥ṣṭi-mārgam
prāpto 'nta-gāmī viṣarīta-buddhiḥ
asmin kṣaṇe yāsyasi mr̥tyu-deśam
saṃsādyamāno mama bāṇa-jālaiḥ (R. 6.47.91)*

How fortunate for me, Rāghava, that you, headed for destruction
your wits disordered, have come into my sight.
This very moment, stricken by my streams of arrows,
you shall depart for the land of death. (Goldman)³³⁾

(V-2) Killing

(V-2-1) mr̥tyu-vaśam nī-

Rāma refrained from killing his adversary Rāvaṇa, saying,

*kṛtam tvayā karma mahat subhīmaṃ hata-pravīraś ca kṛtas tvayāham
tasmāt pariśrānta iti vyavasya na tvam śarair mr̥tyu-vaśam nayāmi
(R. 6.47.132)*

You have performed great and fearsome deeds and struck down my
heroic warriors. Still, recognizing that you are exhausted from all
that, I shall not bring you under the sway of death with my arrows.
(Goldman)

(V-2-2) pradā- mr̥tyave

In the description of the braveness of Aśvatthāman we read.

*yuvānam indīvaradāma-varṇam cedi-priyam yuva-rājam prahasya
bāṇais tvarāvāṇ jvalitāgni-kalpair vidhvā prādān mr̥tyave sāsva-sūtam
(MBh. 7.171.65)*

Having smiled at the young prince of the hue of the dark lotus, the beloved of the Cedis,
he pierced at great speed with many arrows, which resembled blazing flames,
and handed him to Mṛtyu together with his steed and charioteer.

(V-2-3) preṣaya- mṛtyave

Kṛṣṇa comforted his sister Subhadrā who lost her son in the battle.

*jitvā subahuśaḥ śatrūn preṣayitvāca mṛtyave
gataḥ puṇya-kṛtām lokān sarva-kāma-duho 'kṣayān (MBh. 7.54. 15)*

Having vanquished a number of foes and sent them to Mṛtyu,
he repaired to those eternal regions of the righteous, that grant the fruition of every wish.³⁴⁾

(V-2-4) mṛtyu-lokāya

(V-2-4-1) prahi-

In the description of Aśvatthāman's night-attack, we read.

*apeta-śastra-saṃnāhān saṃrabdhān pāṇḍu-sṛñjayān
prāhiṇot mṛtyu-lokāya drauṇiḥ praharatām varaḥ (MBh. 10.8. 74)*

The son of Droṇa, the foremost of strikers, dispatched to the region of Mṛtyu
those agitated Pāṇḍus and Sṛñjayas, who were deprived of weapons and armour.³⁵⁾

(V-2-4-2) preṣaya-

*tato droṇaḥ kekayāṃś ca dhṛṣṭadyumnasya cātmajan
preṣayan mṛtyu-lokāya sarvān iṣubhir āśu-gaiḥ (MBh. 7. 130. 12)*

Then, Droṇa, with his swift-going shafts, dispatched all the Kaikeyas and the sons of Dhṛṣṭadyumna to the region of Mṛtyu.

(V-2-4-3) *nī-*

*etasminn antare rājan dṛṣṭvā karṇasya vikramam
ākarna-muktair iṣubhiḥ karṇasya caturo hayān
anayan mṛtyu-lokāya caturbhiḥ sāyakottamaiḥ (MBh. 7.120.74)*

Meanwhile, O monarch, beholding the prowess of Karṇa,
he (Arjuna) with the white steeds led four steeds of Karṇa to the re-
gion of Mṛtyu,
with four shafts shot from the bow-string, which was drawn to his
ear.

VI. Mṛtyu, Kāla, Yama, and Dharma

(VI-0)

In the well-known story of the cheating of death which is related
in the Kathā-sarit-sāgara 72, we read the dialogue between the rogue
Siṃhavikrama and Citragupta, the secretary of Yama. ³⁶⁾

*bhagavan na yathā mṛtyur bhaven mama tathā kuru (332cd)
tato 'bravīc citragupto mṛtyoḥ śakyo na rakṣitum
tathāpi tāvad yuktim te kariṣye tām ca me śṛṇu (333)
tataḥ prabhṛti nirdagdhaḥ kālah śveta-nimittataḥ
kupiteneśvareṇaha punaḥ kāryāc ca nirmītaḥ (334)
tataḥ prabhṛti yatraiva śveto vasati tatra saḥ
na jantūn bādhati 'nyān apy ājñayā yantritaḥ prabhoḥ (KSS. 72.335)*

(Siṃhavikrama asked) “Holy one, please make it so that there would
be no death (*mṛtyu*) for me.”

Then Citragupta said; “it is not possible to save anyone from death
(*mṛtyu*),

but I will devise a plan to save you; listen to it. (333)

Ever since *kāla* was consumed by Śiva in his rage on account of
Śveta,

but was created again in this world because he was needed, (334)

Since that time onward, in the place where Śveta dwells,
there he (*kāla*) does not annoy other people under the god’s com-
mand,”

Then, Citragupta took him to the hermitage of Śveta on the other side of the river Taraṅgiṇī, where death (*mṛtyu*) cannot invade. But, just before leaving him there, Citragupta warned him not to return to this side of the river, saying,

*āgataṃ vā pramādāt tvāṃ mṛtyur bādhiṣyate yadi
tad upāyaṃ kariṣyāmi para-lokāgatasya te (338)*

If, however, out of carelessness you return, and death (*mṛtyu*) seizes you,
I will devise some way of escape for you, when you have come to the other world.

Immediately after Citragupta disappeared, *kāla* appeared and he tried to bring Siṃhavikrama to this side of the river, but his effort was in vain because Siṃhavikrama observed Citragupta's warning. Yet, finally, having created a nymph (*divyā stri*), *kāla* succeeded in bringing him to this side. When Siṃhavikrama reached this side, *kāla* captured him by throwing his noose around his neck (*tatra prāptaṃ gala-kṣipta-pāśaḥ kālas: 3348*) and took him to the assembly hall of Yama (*tato yama-sabhāṃ nītaṃ kālenaitaṃ pramādinam 349*).

Here in this story, *mṛtyu* is personified as the god of death, who possesses his own territory and exercises his power over a mortal (332–333), but there exists the sacred place Śvetāśrama, where he cannot enter (*anākramya*) (337). As long as the mortal stays within that safe area, there is no fear of *mṛtyu*, but once they take a step over the boundary, they are exposed to his attack (*bādhaya: 338*). Likewise, *kāla* who has a strong wish to seduce the mortal (340–341) is anthropomorphised and finally succeeds in capturing him by throwing the noose around his neck (348). Yet, he remains simply as a servant of Yama, taking the dead person (*preta*) to his court for the final judgment. Yama, the king of the *preta-loka*, is also personified, being attended by his secretary (*kāyastha*), who prepares for his master the record of the acts of the dead person, while he was in this world. Though the three words, *mṛtyu*, *kāla*, and *yama*, have a different shade of meaning from each other, they are often translated by the single word of “death.” Under such circumstances, we are inclined to examine in more detail in what relation these three stand with each other. Though the problem is not so simple, we shall try to investigate it.

(VI-1) Kāla and Mṛtyu**(VI-1-1) Kāla, the almighty**

As we have seen above, both *mṛtyu* and *kāla*, having similar outlooks and belongings, become the object of fear among all living beings, but there exists a hierarchy between the two, the former remaining under the sway of the latter.

However, prior to entering into the main point, let us see the almightiness of *Kāla* as the god of destiny in the Great Epic.

kālah pacati bhūtāni kālah saṃharate prajāḥ
kālah supteṣu jāgarti kālo hi duratikramaḥ (IS. 1688)

Time ripens the beings, time destroys the creatures.

Time awakes while others sleep. Indeed time is hard to pass over.³⁷⁾

Time itself controls time.

kālah sṛjati bhūtāni kālah saṃharate prajāḥ
saṃharantaṃ prajāḥ kālaṃ kālah śamayate punaḥ (IS. 1696)

Time creates (all) the living beings, time destroys them.

Time pacifies time, which is destroying the creatures.³⁸⁾

In Vidura's discourse, we read.

na kālasya priyaḥ kaścīn na dveṣyaḥ kuru-sattama
na madhya-sthaḥ kvacit kālah sarvaṃ kālah prakarṣati (MBh. 11.2. 14)

There is none dear to *kāla*, nor hateful to *kāla*, O best of the Kurus.

Neither is *kāla* neutral to anybody; *kāla* drags them all (equally).

(VI-1-2) mṛtyu stands under kāla

mṛtyu apparently stands under *kāla*.³⁹⁾ As a matter of fact, *yama*, *kāla*, and *mṛtyu* make the trinity (*tritaya*) and appear in front of a Brahmin who recites *Sāvitrī*. After introducing themselves to the Brahmin, *mṛtyu* says as follows.

*mṛtyuṃ mā viddhi dharmajña rūṣiṇaṃ svayam āgatam
kālena coditaṃ vipra tvām ito netum adya vai (MBh. 12. 192. 31)*

Know me as *mṛtyu*, himself come to you taking form, o knower of righteousness,
being urged by *kāla* to take you from here now.

Indeed, he is under the command (*codita*) of *kāla*.⁴⁰⁾

Similarly, in Sītā's speech to Hanumān, *mṛtyu* simply works for *kāla*.⁴¹⁾

*mama pratipādanaṃ hi rāvaṇasya na rocate
rāvaṇaṃ mārgate samkhye mṛtyuḥ kāla-vaśaṃ gatam (R. 5. 35. 10)*

Rāvaṇa does not like me to be released from here (despite Vibhīṣaṇa's advice).

But *mṛtyu* seeks after Rāvaṇa in battle, who is already under the sway of *kāla*.

Here Sītā is convinced that Rāvaṇa is destined to be killed (*kāla-vaśaṃ gata*) by the hand of her husband. His death is already determined by the god of destiny (*kāla*), and *mṛtyu* works as a forerunner of *kāla*.

(VI-2) *mṛtyu*, *kāla*, and *karman* (*mṛtyu-gautamī-ādi-saṃvāda*)

Yet, both *mṛtyu* and *kāla* stand under the sway of a more powerful category, that is, *karman*. The situation is best illustrated in the beginning of the Anuśāsana parvan (MBh.13.1), where we have a controversy among five, that is, a hunter named Arjunaka, a serpent, a lady called Gautamī, *mṛtyu* and *kāla*. The story goes as follows.⁴²⁾

When Gautamī's son was killed by a bite of a serpent, a hunter named Arjunaka came to her and promised to take revenge on the serpent in her place. She, however, did not agree to kill that serpent, saying that even when it is killed, her son will not come back to his life. Listening to their dialogue, the serpent speaks as follows.

*ko nv arjunaka doṣo 'tra vidyate mama bālīśa
asvatantraṃ hi mām mṛtyur vivaśam yad acūcudat (28)
tasyāyaṃ vacanād daṣṭo na koṣena na kāmyayā*

tasya tat kilbiṣaṃ lubdha vidyate yadi kilbiṣam (29)

O foolish Arjunaka, what is wrong (*doṣa*) with me in this matter, for *mṛtyu* urged (*acūcudat*) this helpless (*vivaśa*) me, regardless of my will (*asvatantra*)! (28)

By his order, this man was bitten by me, not out of anger or desire. If there is any sin (*kilbiṣa*) here, this is attributed to him (= *mṛtyu*). (29)

Despite this self-defense of the serpent, Arjunaka was not convinced and both of them did not stop quarrelling. At this moment, *mṛtyu* himself came up and said to the serpent.

*kālenāhaṃ praṇuditaḥ pannaga tvām acūcudam
vināśa-hetur nāsyā tvam ahaṃ vā prāṇināḥ śiśoḥ (42)*

*yathā vāyur jaladharān vikarṣati tatas tataḥ
tadvaj jaladavat sarpaṃ kālasyāhaṃ vaśānugaḥ (43)*

O serpent, I urged you (to bite him), being myself driven by *kāla*. Neither you, nor I are the cause of the destruction of this boy. (42) As the wind drags clouds here and there, so I dragged the serpent as a cloud, I myself follow the will (*vaśānuga*) of *kāla*. (43)

Despite *Mṛtyu*'s explanation (*kāla-pracodita*: 60), the hunter Arjunaka was not convinced and tried to kill *mṛtyu* as the evil-doer. *Mṛtyu*, then, said to him as follows.

*vivaśau kāla-vaśa-gāv āvāṃ tad-diṣṭa-kāriṇau
nāvāṃ doṣeṇa gantavyau yadi samyak praṇaśyasi (58)*

Both (I and serpent) are helpless (*vivaśa*) and subject to *kāla*'s will, performing his order. If you see rightly, you should not attribute the guilt to us both. (58)

At this moment, *kāla* finally came up and said to the hunter.

*naiivāhaṃ nāpy ayam mṛtyur nāyaṃ lubdhaka pannagaḥ
kilbiṣī jantu-maraṇe na vayaṃ hi prayojakāḥ (63)
akarod yad ayam karma tan no 'rjunaka codakam
praṇāśa-hetur nānyo 'sya vadhyate 'yaṃ sva-karmaṇā (64)*

*yad anena kṛtaṃ karma tenāyaṃ nidhanaṃ gataḥ
vināśa-hetuḥ karmāsya sarve karma-vaśā vāyam (65)*

Neither I myself, nor this *mṛtyu*, nor this serpent, O Fowler,
are guilty of the death of living creatures, for we are not the instigator
(*prayojaka*). (63)

O Arjunaka, the *karman* that this man did (in the past) is the instigator
(*codaka*) of us.

Nobody else is the cause of his destruction. This man was killed by
his own *karman*. (64)

The *karman* which he has done (before), by this he died.

His *karman* is the cause of his destruction. All of us are under the sway
of *karman*. (65)

Then, *kāla* concludes as follows.

*evaṃ nāhaṃ na vai mṛtyur na sarpo na tathā bhavān
na ceyaṃ brāhmaṇī vṛddhā śīśur evātra kāraṇam (69)
tasmīṃs tathā bruvāṇe tu brāhmaṇī gautamī nṛpa
svakarma-ṣṭyāyāṃ lokān matvārjunakam abravīt (70)
naiva kālo na bhujago na mṛtyur iha kāraṇam
svakarmabhir ayaṃ bālaḥ kālena nidhanaṃ gataḥ (MBh. 13. 1. 71)*

“Thus, neither I, nor *mṛtyu*, nor the serpent, nor you yourself,
nor this old Brahmin lady, but this boy himself is the cause in this
matter.” (69)

While he was speaking thus, the Brahmin lady Gautamī thinking that
(all)

the people depend upon their own *karman*, said to Arjunaka as fol-
lows. (70)

“Neither *kāla*, nor this serpent, nor *mṛtyu* is the cause here in this mat-
ter.

This boy died at the proper time (*kālena*) by his own deeds (in the
past).” (71)

Hearing the words of his mother, they left that spot and returned to their
own residence.⁴³⁾

Here in this story of death of Gautamī’s son, which develops out of
the accusation of the hunter Arjunaka and the self-defense of a serpent,

appear both *mṛtyu* and *kāla*, and finally *karman*. Since each succeeding one stands as superior to the preceding one, we get the impression that there exists a sort of hierarchy among these three, that is, *karman*, *kāla*, *mṛtyu*, who stand beyond the power of living beings such as a hunter and a serpent.

(VI-3) Dharma, Kāla, Mṛtyu, and Yama (*jāpakopākhyāna*)

By the side of these stories which speak of the powerful influence of *mṛtyu*, *kāla*, and *yama* over living beings, we have a story where these principles lose their power over a human being. In an episode called *Jāpakopākhyāna* (MBh.12.192), these three *kāla*, *mṛtyu*, and *yama* seem to be content with a meagre position to a devoted Brahmin reciter (*jāpaka*). In this story, *dharma* appeared first and advised this Brahmin to abandon his body in order to ascend to heaven. But his proposal is mercilessly rejected by him who says that he does not need heaven by abandoning his body. Then, *dharma* says as follows.

*yadi tvam necchasi tyaktum śarīraṃ paśya vai dvija
eṣa kālas tathā mṛtyur yamaś ca tvām upāgatāḥ (MBh. 12.192.27)*

If you do not wish to abandon your body, look, Brahmin,
here come to you *kāla*, *mṛtyu*, and *yama*.

Then, Bhīṣma continues the story as follows.

*atha vaivasvataḥ kālo mṛtyuś ca tritayaṃ vibho
brāhmaṇaṃ taṃ mahābhāgam upāgamyedam abruvan (28)*

Then, the trinity (*trītaya*), Vivasvat's son (=yama), *kāla*, and *mṛtyu* came to this great Brahmin, and said.

Then these three introduced themselves to him one after another, saying *yamo 'ham* (29), *kālo 'ham* (30), *mṛtyuṃ mā viddhi* (31). It is here to be noted that these three are considered as a trinity (*trītaya*: 28). Upon this, that Brahmin welcomes these four, saying.

*svāgātaṃ sūrya-putrāya kālāya ca mahātmane
mṛtyave cātha dharmāya kiṃ kāryaṃ karavāṇi vaḥ (32)*

Welcome to you, the son of the sun (=yama), the great *kāla* and *mṛtyu* and (finally) *dharma*, What shall I do for you?

At that time, the royal sage Ikṣvāku happened to pass the place, and this Brahmin and the royal sage exchanged greetings. Then both of them insisted to give each other what he has, but finally the king conceded to the brahmin and agreed to accept his offer of giving half the fruit of his recitation,⁴⁴⁾ saying.

*kṛtaṃ sarveṇa bhadraṃ te japyaṃ yad yācitaṃ mayā
svasti te 'stu gamiṣyāmi kiṃ ca tasya phalaṃ dada (50)*

Dear sir, enough of all this! What I wanted was (just the half fruit of) your recitation.

I am going now, but what is the fruit of this (recitation of yours)? Give it to me!

Upon this the Brahmin answers.

*phala-prāptiṃ na jānāmi dattaṃ yaj japitaṃ mayā
ayaṃ dharmāś ca kālāś ca yamo mṛtyuś ca sākṣiṇaḥ (51)*

I have never thought of the acquisition of fruit. But what I have recited is given!

Here, *dharma*, *kāla*, *yama*, and *mṛtyu* are our witnesses.

The Brahmin was perplexed, when it was demanded that he show his merit of recitation in a concrete form, for he had never thought of any particular aim (*abhisam̐dhi*) of his recitation.

*nābhisam̐dhir mayā japye kṛta-pūrvah kathaṃ cana
japyasya rāja-sārdūla kathaṃ jñāsyāmy ahaṃ phalam (54)
dadasveti tvayā coktaṃ dadāmi tathā mayā
na vācam̐ dūṣayiṣyāmi satyaṃ rakṣa sthiro bhava (MBh. 12.192.55)*

I have never thought of some special purpose (*abhisam̐dhi*) in recitation.

How shall I know the fruit of recitation, oh lion among the kings?

Since you said “give me,” I said “I give.”

I will not defile my speech. Protect true speech and be steadfast.

It is clear that this reciter (*jāpaka*) practises recitation simply for the sake of recitation. His practice reminds us of the teaching of the Bhagavad-gītā which extols practice for the sake of practice with no regard for its result. One should not act for its result or fruit, leaving everything to the theistic god (*bhakti*) with no regard to the egoticism (*nirahaṅkāra*). In front of such serious practitioners, such deities as *dharma*, *kāla*, and *mṛtyu* could not exercise their influence, and simply remain as witnesses (*sākṣin*) of *jāpaka*.⁴⁵⁾

VII. Mṛtyu, a girl

However, unlike *kāla* and *yama*, Mṛtyu appears in the form of an innocent girl (*abalā*) in the great Epic. This story of Mṛtyu as a young girl is related in the Śānti-parvan by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira who, being annoyed by the grief over the death of his friends and relatives in battle, raised the following question.

*atha ceme mahā-prājñā śerate hi gatāsavaḥ
mṛtā iti ca śabdo 'yaṃ vartaty eṣu gatāsuḥ (4)
ime mṛtā nṛpatayaḥ prāyaśo bhīma-vikramāḥ
tatra me saṃśayo jātaḥ kutaḥ saṃjñā mṛtā iti (5)
kasya mṛtyuḥ kuto mṛtyuḥ kena mṛtyur iha prajāḥ
haraty amara-saṅkāśa tan me brūhi pitāmaha (MBh. 12.248.6)*

Those men of great wisdom who are lying (on the bare ground), being deprived of life;

To them deprived of their life, the word “dead (*mṛta*)” is applied. (4)

These kings who were mostly men of awful prowess are now “dead.”

Here on this subject a doubt has arisen in me; Whence comes the naming “dead”? (5)

To whom does death (*mṛtyu*) belong? Whence does it come? Why does it take away living beings? O grand sire, who resembles a celestial, answer me to this question! (6)⁴⁶⁾

Then Bhīṣma started a story of the great king Avikampaka in *kṛta-yuga*, who lost his son Hari in battle and himself was captured by his enemy.

Then the king devoted himself to the life of tranquility (*śānti-para*). But once he met with the sage Nārada, he told the sage of the sad history of his own. At that time, the sage told a story (*ākhyāna* 11, *samākhyāna* 12) which dispelled his grief. It goes as follows.⁴⁷⁾

A long time ago, when the Grand sire (*pitāmaha*) created abundantly the living beings, they never came to death (13). Then the whole world (*trai-lokya*) swelled with them and was crowded to such an extent that there was no space and people could not breathe any more. He thought of their withdrawal (*samhāra*) (15), but being unable to find a suitable means (*hetu-kāraṇa*), he became irritated (*roṣa*). Then, a fire issued out of apertures of his body (*khebhyah*) and it began to burn all the quarters (16). Seeing this, Sthāṇu, filled with compassion, sought to gratify the Grand sire, who was much pleased with him and granted a boon (*vara*) to him. (MBh.12.248.21)

Sthāṇu (Śiva) told him that the fire (*tejo-gñi*) raised by his anger (*kup-*) was going to burn all the creatures that he had created. To this, the Grand sire explained that he was not angry, nor himself wanted (*kāma*) to annihilate the creatures, but, seeing the goddess-earth being annoyed by the heavy burden of overpopulation, he wanted to lighten her burden (*lāghavārthaṃ dharanyās*) which was otherwise sunk into the water. It was due to his irritation at not finding a suitable means of withdrawal, that anger possessed him (*mām krodha āviśat*: MBh.12.249.5). Sthāṇu, then, chose a boon and asked him not to give way to wrath (*krodha*), but to neutralise the fire (*tejas*) by his own energy (*sva-tejas*) (9). Upon this the god Prajāpati suppressed that energy (*tejas*) within himself (13), but when he was withdrawing the fire which originated from irritation (*agni roṣa-ja*), a woman (*narī*) came out of all of his pores (*viśvebhyah khebhyah*: 15).

kṛṣṇā raktāmbara-dharā rakta-netra-talāntarā
divya-kunḍala-saṃpannā divyābhāraṇa-bhūṣitā (16)
sā viniḥsṛtya vai khebhyo dakṣiṇām āśritā diśam (MBh. 12.249.17ab)

She was black-coloured, wearing a red robe, with red eyes and palms of hand (*tala*), furnished with divine ear-rings and adorned with divine ornaments. (16)
 Having issued out of the apertures (*kha*), she resorted to the southern quarter.⁴⁸⁾

While both of the foremost deities looked at this girl (*kanyā*), the Grand Sire addressed her as follows.

mṛtyo iti mahīpāla jahi cemāḥ prajā iti (18cd)
tvam hi saṃhāra-buddhyā me cintitā ruṣitena ca
tasmāt saṃhāra sarvās tvam prajāḥ sa-jada-ṇḍitāḥ (19)
aviśeṣeṇa caiva tvam prajāḥ saṃhāra bhāmini
mama tvam hi niyogena śreyah param avāpsyasi (20)

Addressing (her) “o Mr̥tyu,” (he said,) slay these creatures!
 Since you were (born), while I was thinking of the thought of withdrawal
 (*saṃhāra-buddhi*),⁴⁹⁾ withdraw all the creatures, foolish and learned as well.

With no discrimination, withdraw these creatures!

By (performing) my command, you will acquire the best.

Thus addressed, the goddess death (*devī mṛtyu*), who was an innocent girl (*bālā*), began to reflect sorrowfully and shed tears in abundance (21), whereupon the god took these tears with both his hands (22a).

The large-eyed woman (*abalā*), impelled by the desire of doing good to mankind (*mānavānām hitārthāya*) and suppressing the grief of her own, besought the Grand sire with joined hands (MBh.12.249.22b-250-1) to exempt her from such dreadful work (*raudra-karman*). Though she was created by him, she was much afraid of such an evil act (*adharmā*) as killing human beings, for the tears of grief (*kṛpaṇāśru*) of those deprived of their kinsmen would burn her for many hundreds of years. Finally, she asked permission to devote herself to severe asceticism (*tapas*).

Yet, Grand sire would not change his mind; repeating that she was born out of his thought (*saṃkalpita*) to destroy the creatures (*prajā-saṃhāra-hetu*), he requested her to perform his order without hesitation (12.250.10). Hearing this repeated request of the god, she became silent and finally became as if deprived of her life (*gata-sattvā*). Then, the god Brahmā was soothed (*prasāda*) and smilingly (*smayamāna*) he looked at all the worlds. Meanwhile, she left his side without promising the destruction of creatures (*apratīśrutya prajā-saṃhāraṇam*) and went in a hurry to the holy places of asceticism (15). She devoted herself to severe self-tortures (16) in Dhenuka, in the rivers Kauśukī and Ganges, and in the Mt. Meru and Himavat simply for the sake of gratifying the god (23). When the god

uttered the same order, she begged him once again to exempt her from the task, being much afraid of the sin (*adharmabhaya*) (25). Then Brahmā, restraining (*nigṛhya*) his words, promised her that there would be no sin whatsoever to her (*adharmo nāsti te*), even if she performed the destruction (27) and the everlasting merit (*dharma sanātana*) would be with her (28) instead. When Mṛtyu refused again, the god said as follows.

*yān aśru-bindūn patitān apaśyaṃ ye pāṇibhyāṃ dhāritās te purastāt
te vyādhayo mānavān ghora-rūpāḥ prāpte kāle pīdayiṣyanti mṛtyo (33)
sarveṣāṃ tvam prāṇinām anta-kāle kāma-krodhau sahītau yojayethāḥ
evam dharmas tvām upaiṣyaty ameyo na cādharmam lapsyase tulya-vṛttiḥ
(MBh. 12.250.34)*

Those fallen tear-drops which I saw and which have been held by both my hands in front of you shall torment people in the form of terrible diseases, when their hours come. (33)

Furthermore, at the last moment (*anta-kāla*) of all the living beings, you shall appoint both desire and wrath (*kāma-krodhau*).

In so doing, immeasurable merit (*dharma*) will come to you, and you will incur no sin (*adharmā*), yourself being neutral in behaviour (*tulya-vṛtti*). (34)

Being thus persuaded, Mṛtyu finally said “Yes” (*bādham*). As a matter of fact, she was afraid of his curse (*śāpa*). From that time onward, she began to dispatch desire (*kāma*) and wrath (*krodha*) to living beings at the last moment, and through their agency, she put an end to their lives (36).⁵⁰ In this way, the innocent girl becomes exempt from the cruel act of killing, and is herself free of *adharmā*. Speaking thus, the sage Nārada concludes the story of Mṛtyu and consoled Yudhiṣṭhira in his distress.

Here in this story Mṛtyu appears as a girl (*kanyā, abalā, nārī*), who is also called a goddess (*devī*). Originally, she was born of the apertures (*kha-s*) of Brahmā in his irritation, when he was unable to find a suitable way of lightening the burden of the earth by destroying (*saṃhāra*) the living beings he himself had once created.

When she was born, she was black-skinned (*kṛṣṇa*) with red eyes (*rakta-netra*), wearing a red robe (*raktāmbara*) and a divine earring (*divya-kundala*), and adorned also with divine ornaments (*divyābharana-bhūṣita*) (MBh.12.249.15–16). But when she was going to leave the place for the

southern quarter (*dakṣiṇa diś*) (17), she was stopped from going and ordered by Brahmā to perform the dreadful act of killing all living beings. Naturally, she refused to accept this order, shedding tears in abundance, but when she found it impossible to resist the god's request, she asked him to prepare *kāma* and *krodha* as her assistants in addition to the various diseases (*vyādhi*) which were originally transformed out of her tear-drops (*aśru-bindu*). In this way, she was exempt from the sin (*adharmā*) of killing the creatures.

VIII. Conquest of Death (*mṛtyum jāya*)⁵¹⁾

We started our discussion from the cruel and merciless *mṛtyu* and ascertained its irresistibility from the side of human beings. Indeed, next to *kāla* and Yama, *mṛtyu* exercises the powerful influence on all living beings, yet on the other hand, born out of the anger of Brahmā, it becomes a feeble girl and with the help of disease (*vyādhi*) she could somehow accomplish the cruel act of killing. This weakening of *mṛtyu* culminates in its being subdued by human beings (*mṛtyum-jaya*). This aspect of *mṛtyu* distinguishes itself from *kāla* and Yama, for we never meet the concept of the subjugation in the case of *kāla* and Yama. Now, we shall discuss this negative aspect of *mṛtyu*.

(VIII-1) *satya*

It is only through the power of truth (*satya*), that one can encounter *Mṛtyu* and defeat it. As a matter of fact, both *satya* and *mṛtyu* stand in contrast.

na mṛtyu-senām āyāntīm jātu kaś cit prabādhate
ṛte satyam asaṃtyājyaṃ satye hy amṛtam āśritam (26)
tasmāt satya-vratācāraḥ satya-yoga-ṣarāyaṇaḥ
satyārāmaḥ samo dāntaḥ satyenaivāntakaṃ jayet (27)
amṛtam caiva mṛtyuś ca dvayaṃ dehe pratiṣṭhitam
mṛtyur āpadyate mohāt satyenāpadyate 'mṛtam (28)
so 'haṃ hy ahiṃsraḥ satyārthī kāma-krodho-bahiṣkṛtaḥ
sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣemī mṛtyuṃ hāsyāmy amartyavat (MBh. 12. 169.29)

Nobody can get over the approaching *mṛtyu*'s army except the truth. One should never renounce it, for it is in the truth that the immortal-

ity (*amṛta*) dwells. (26)

Therefore, ever mindful of the vow of truth, devoted to the yoga of truth and delightful in truth,

one should conquer death (*antaka*) by means of truth. (27)

Immortality (*amṛta*) and *mṛtyu*, the two are both established in (one's) body.

Mṛtyu comes from folly (*moha*) and immortality from the truth (*satya*). (28)

So, I shall abandon *mṛtyu* like an immortal, abstaining from injury, seeking after the truth, free of desire and wrath, equal in suffering and happiness, and ever enduring. (29)⁵²⁾

We notice here that *mṛtyu* is almost the same as *mṛta* as contrasted to *amṛta*. Since *satya* is established in *amṛta*, one can conquer *mṛtyu* by means of *satya*.

(VIII-2)

It is not limited to an abstract concept like truth, but is extended to human beings who are able to conquer *mṛtyu*. There is a group of people who have no fear of *mṛtyu*.⁵³⁾

(VIII-2-1) Man of Honour

First, the heroic warrior does not fear *mṛtyu*, rather he fears the loss of honour (*kīrti*). Karṇa rejected the advice of his father Sūrya who was aware of the approaching death of his son.

*bibhemi na tathā mṛtyor yathā bibhye 'nṛtād aham
viśeṣeṇa dvijātīnāṃ sarveṣāṃ sarvadā satām
pradāne jīvitasyāpi na me 'trāsti vicāraṇā (MBh.3.286.6)*

I do not fear *mṛtyu* so much as I fear falsehood (*anṛta*) ever (in front) of the good people (in general) and of the twice-born in particular even in giving life (*jīvita*), I have no hesitation about it.⁵⁴⁾

(VIII-2-2) Man of wisdom

The man of wisdom who realizes truth through serene eyes is not affected by fear of *mṛtyu*.

*mṛtyor bibheṣi kiṃ bāla na sa bhītaṃ vimuñcati
adya vābda-śatānte vā mṛtyur vai prāṇināṃ dhruvaḥ (IS.4958)*

O idiot, why are you afraid of *mṛtyu*? It does not excuse a man, even when he has fear (of it).

mṛtyu is certain for every living being, whether it comes today, or at the end of a hundred years.⁵⁵⁾

(VIII-2-3) Man of detachment

When Indra vanished Namuci, he asked Namuci who remained peaceful, despite his complete loss of sovereignty. Namuci who became a complete determinist said to him as follows.

*yad evam anujātasya dhātāro vidadhuḥ purā
tad evānubhaviṣyāmi kiṃ me mṛtyuḥ kariṣyati (MBh. 12.219.21)*

I shall simply experience what the primordial creators formerly ordained
for (the creature) who was born later. What could *mṛtyu* do for me?

(VIII-2-4) Man of duty (*sudarśanopākhyāna*)

The conquest of *mṛtyu* is more concretely described in MBh.13.2.⁵⁶⁾ The story goes as follows.

King Sudarśana in Kurukṣetra, who married Oghavatī, the daughter of king Oghavat, took the vow (*pratijñā*) of conquering *mṛtyu* while leading the life of a householder (*grhastha*).

*grha-sthāś cāvajesyāmi mṛtyum ity eva sa prabho
pratijñāṃ akarod dhīmān dīpta-tejā viśāṃ pate (40)*

This mindful and illustrious man made a vow that he would prevail over *mṛtyu*, while staying in the stage of a house-

holder.

He always instructed the duty of a householder (*grhastha-dharma*) to his wife Oghavatī and ordered her to observe attendance to a guest (*ātithya*, *athithi-pūjā*).

*jigīṣamānaṃ tu grhe tadā mṛtyuḥ sudarśanam
prṣṭhato 'nvagamad rājan randhrānveṣi tadā sadā (47)*

At that time, o king, *mṛtyu* followed behind Sudarśana, who wanted to prevail over him (while staying) in the house, with the intention of finding his flaws.

One day, however, when Sudarśana went out to fetch firewood, an illustrious Brahmin came to Oghavatī and requested her service to such extent as to offer her own person (*ātma-pradāna*: 53–54). In her strict observance of her husband's order, she bashfully presented herself to that Brahmin. At that time, Sudarśana came back.

*athedhmān samuṣpādāya sa pāvakir upāgamat
mṛtyunā raudra-bhāvena nityaṃ bandhur ivānvitah (57)*

Now he, the son of Agni, came back with the firewood, being followed as ever as if a kinsman by *mṛtyu* of violent nature (*raudra-bhāva*).

He called her name repeatedly, but she did not answer him, being held in the arms of that Brahmin (59).

*ucchiṣṭāsmīti manvānā lajjitā bhartur eva ca
tūṣṇīm-bhūtābhavat sādhvī na covācātha kimcana (60)*

That pious woman thought of herself as abandoned and, being ashamed (of her deed) to her husband, remained silent, and said nothing. (60)

While Sudarśana was wondering where she was gone, the Brahmin answered him in her place from within the hut (*uṭaja-stha*).

atithiṃ viddhi samprāptam pāvake brāhmaṇaṃ ca mām (63cd)
anayā chandya māno 'haṃ bhāryayā tava sattama
tais tair athiti-satkārair ārjave 'syā dṛḍhaṃ manaḥ (64)

O son of Agni, know me as a Brahmin who has come as a guest. (63)
 O the best of men, I am satisfied by your wife with various entertainments to a guest.

Her mind is firm in sincerity (*ārjava*). (64)

It is expected that a husband would become filled by rage, seeing his wife violated by an other man, and thus *mṛtyu* was ready to kill him at the moment when he got enraged.

kūṭa-mudgara-hastas tu mṛtyus taṃ vai samanvayāt
hīna-pratijñam atrainam vadhiṣyāmiti cintayan (66)

Mṛtyu with his iron club in his hand pursued him,
 thinking “I will kill him here as soon as he abandons his vow.”

But, contrary to his expectation,

sudarśanas tu manasā karmanā cakṣuṣā girā
tyaktersyas tyakta-manyuś ca smayamāno 'bravīt idam (67)
surataṃ te 'stu viprāgrya prītir hi paramā mama
grhasthasya hi dharmo 'gryaḥ samprāptātithi-pūjanam (68)

But Sudarśana with jealousy and anger cast off in mind, action, eyes, and voice as well, smilingly said as follows. (67)
 “May the sexual pleasure (*surata*) be with you, o best of Brahmins. It is indeed my highest pleasure, for it is the foremost duty of the householder to entertain a guest (who has) arrived.”

He said that it was the vow (*vrata*) of the householder to offer to the guest anything he possesses (*vasu*), including his life (*prāṇa*) and his wife (*dārā*) (70). Upon this, the Brahmin came out of the hut and revealed himself as Dharma.

dharmo 'ham asmi bhadraṃ te jijñāsārthaṃ tavānagha

prāptaḥ satyaṃ ca te jñātvā prītir me paramā tvayi (78)
vijitās ca tvayā mṛtyur yo 'yaṃ tvām anugacchati
randhrānveṣi tava sadā tvayā dhṛtyā vaśīkṛtaḥ (79)

“I am Dharma, glory to you! I came here in order to test you, o sinless one!

Having ascertained the truth (*satya*) about you, I am highly pleased with you.⁵⁷⁾ (78)

You have subdued *mṛtyu* who had ever been following after you, constantly

trying to find your flaws (*randhrānveṣin*). You have subdued him by means of steadfastness (*dhṛti*).⁵⁸⁾ (79)

Dharma further assured that this chaste woman should follow her husband with half of her body, and with the other half become the celebrated river Oghavatī for the purification of the world (82).⁵⁹⁾

As for the husband, he continues.

anena caiva dehena lokāṃs tvam abhipatsyase
jitās ca tvayā mṛtyur aiśvaryaṃ ca tavottamam (85)

You will attain the (eternal) worlds with this corporeal body.

You have conquered *mṛtyu*, and the highest sovereignty is now with you.⁶⁰⁾

Dharma praised Sudarśana, saying that he had risen above the five elements (*pañca-bhūta*), subdued passion (*manobhava*), desire (*kāma*) and anger (*krodha*) by performing *gr̥hastha-dharma* (86).

As for Oghavatī, Dharma said that she conquered affection (*sneha*), passion (*rāga*), drowsiness (*tandri*), illusion (*moha*), and malice (*droha*) by means of obedience to her husband (*śuśrūṣā*) (87).

(VIII-3) Gods

We have seen above in (MBh.12.169.29) that the man who subdues *mṛtyu* becomes immortal (*amṛta*) like an immortal (*amartyavat*). Here it seems to be presupposed that the immortal (*amartya*) is the conquerer of *mṛtyu*. It is true that we have passages which testify to the fact that gods are above *mṛtyu*.

(VIII-3-1) Śiva

The compound *mṛtyum-jaya* appears as one of the epithets of the god Śiva. Thus we read in the Amara-kośa.

śambhur īśa paśupatiḥ śivah śūlī maheśvarah (25)
īśvarah sarva īśānah śamkaraś candra-śekharaḥ
bhūteśah khaṇḍa-paraśur giriśo giriśo mṛḍah (26)
mṛtyumjayah kṛtti-vāsah pinākī pramathādhipah
ugrah kapardī śrī-kaṇṭhah 'śita-kaṇṭhah kapāla-bhṛt (Amarakośa 1.1.27)

We see that Śiva as the immortal (*amṛta*) becomes naturally the subduer of *mṛtyu*.⁶¹⁾

(VIII-3-2) Yama

mṛtyum-jaya is an epithet of Yama. In the Baudhāyana Dharma-sūtra it appears among the ten names of Yama.

oṃ yamaṃ tarpayāmi/oṃ yama-rājam... / dharmam... / dharma-rājam... /
kālam... / nīlam... / mṛtyum... / mṛtyumjayam... / vaivasvatam... / citram... /
citraguptam... / audumbaram... (Baudhāyana Dharma-sūtra 2.5.9.11)⁶²⁾

(VIII-3-3) Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara

In the *Mṛtyu-vañcanopadeśa*, attributed to the Buddhist abbot Vāgīśvarakīrti of the eleventh century, the compound *mṛtyum-jaya* is used as the epithet of Lokeśvara.

japtvā daśākṣaram mantraṃ taṃ mṛtyumjaya-saṃjñinam
daśa-lakṣaṃ tato homaṃ kurvīta kusumaiḥ sitaiḥ (60)
ghṛtāktair lakṣa-saṃkhyātair lokeśvara-guroḥ puraḥ
mantra-śaktes tato 'vaśyaṃ jāyate mṛtyu-vañcanam (61)
oṃ ādau tata āṃ-kārah syād iṃ-kāras tataḥ param
uṃ oṃ mṛtyumjaya oṃ syād ayaṃ mantro daśākṣarah (3.60–62)

Having recited the ten-syllabled *mantra* which is named “conquerer of death” one million times, he should make a fire-sacrifice with white flowers (60), which are besmeared one hundred-thousand times by

ghee in front of Guru Lokeśvara. Due to the power of the *mantra*, one can surely avoid death. (61)

In the beginning *om*, then the syllable *āṃ*, next *īm* and *ūm mṛtyuṃjaya om*. This makes a *mantra* of ten syllables.⁶³⁾

IX. Others

Since we meet some curious compounds in addition to a neutral and ordinary one *mṛtyu-kāla* (the time of death), below we shall list some of them.

(IX-1) *mṛtyu-senā*

As we have seen above, Mṛtyu has an army (*senā*) to attack the living beings.⁶⁴⁾

*śvaḥ kāryam adya kurvīta pūrvāhṇe cāparāhṇikam
ko hi tad veda kasyādyā mṛtyu-senā nivekṣyate (MBh. 12.309.72)*

One should do today what he intends to do tomorrow, and in the morning what to be done in the afternoon,
for who knows whom Mṛtyu's army aims (to attack) today?⁶⁵⁾

(IX-2) *mṛtyu-gr̥ha*

Two *āśrama*-s, *gr̥hastha* and *vānaprastha*, are contrasted with each other.

*mṛtyor vā gr̥ham evaitad yā grāme vasato ratiḥ
devānām eṣa vai goṣṭho yad arāṇyam iti śrutih (MBh. 12.169.23)*

It is nothing but Mṛtyu's house, that is the pleasure in living in the town.

It is the abode of gods, that is the forest. Thus it is traditionally said.⁶⁶⁾

(IX-3) *mṛtyu-dvāra*

Apparently, Mṛtyu's house is furnished with the entrances through which all the living beings enter.

*anucita-karmārambhaḥ svajana-virodho baliyasā spardhā
pramada-jana-viśvāso mṛtyor dvārāṇi catvāri (IS.316)*

Undertaking of the unaccustomed work, conflict with kinsmen, rivalry with the stronger
trust in the careless people; these are the four doors (leading to) death.

*haratā maithilīm yena mām ca roṣayatā bhṛśam
ātmano jīvitāntāya mṛtyu-dvāram apāvṛtam (R.4.6.22)*

The entrance (leading) to Mṛtyu is opened for self-destruction, by whom Sītā was carried away and my wrath was kindled vehemently,⁶⁷⁾

(IX-4) *mṛtyu-yāna*

Yudhiṣṭhira was tormented, reflecting the great slaughter in battle.

*saṃyuktāḥ kāma-manyubhyāṃ krodhāmarṣa-samanvitāḥ
mṛtyu-yānaṃ samāruhya gatā vaivasvata-kṣayam (MBh. 12.7.12)*

Combined with desire and anger, and accompanied with indignation and impetuosity,
they, riding upon Mṛtyu's wagon, went to the house of Yama Vaivasvata. (Fitzgerald)

(IX-5) *mṛtyu-maṇḍana*

*Mālavikā (ātma-gatam)-hiā! alaṃ suhidadāe, vvaṭṭhido aaṃ vihavo / ka-
haṃ dāṇiṃ attānaṃ moceaṃ? / ahavā edaṃ evva me mitta-maṇḍanaṃ bhavis-
sadi (hṛdaya! alaṃ sukhitayā, upasthito 'yaṃ vibhavaḥ / kathaṃ vedānīm
ātmanaṃ mocayeyam? / atha vā etad eva me mṛtyu-maṇḍanaṃ bhaviṣyati)
(Mālavikāgnimitra 3.10 prose)*

Oh heart! enough of this feeling of happiness that this greatness has come to you. How shall I free myself now? Or perhaps this itself may prove to be my funeral decoration.

(IX-6) aprākṛta mṛtyu (noble death)

*āpanne tūttarāṃ kāṣṭhāṃ sūrye yo nidhanaṃ vrajet
nakṣatre ca muhūrte ca puṇye rājan sa puṇya-kṛt (23)
ayojoyitvā kleśena janam plāvya ca duṣkṛtam
mṛtyunāprākṛteneha karma kṛtvātma-śaktitaḥ (MBh. 12.286.24)*

He is the man of good deed (*puṇya-kṛt*), who meets with death (*nidhana*),
when the sun is in the northern declension,⁶⁸ and at an auspicious
constellation and an auspicious moment (23)
Without tormenting anybody, having cleansed himself of (all the)
sins
by noble death, and having done all his best.

(IX-7) His family**(IX-7-1) Mṛtyu's sons**

Prior to the battle, Śuka described to his lord Rāvaṇa about Rāma's
army who came to Laṅkā to fight with them. In praising the valour of
Sugrīva's attendants, Sumukha and Vimukha are called *mṛtyu-putra*.

*yāv etāv etayoḥ pārśve sthitau parvata-saṃnibhau
sumukho vimukhaś caiva mṛtyu-putrau pituḥ samau (R. 6. 19. 8)*

And those two whom you see standing beside them, looking like
mountains, are Sumukha and Vimukha
They are the sons of Mṛtyu, and they are just like their father. (Gold-
man)

(IX-7-2) Mṛtyu's sister (svasṛ)

*tāṃ vai śaktiṃ lelihānāṃ pradīptāṃ
pāśair yuktām antakasyeva rātrim
mṛtyoḥ svasāram jvalitām ivolkām
vaikartanaḥ prāhiṇod rākṣasāya (MBh. 7. 154. 54)*

He (Karna) hurled at the Rākṣasa (Ghaṭotkaca) the dart (*śakti*),

thirsty (for blood) (*lelihāna*) and effulgent, twined with strings, which seems to be the night of death (*antaka*), the sister of *Mṛtyu*, and the blazing meteor.

X. Conclusion

So far we have discussed several aspects of *mṛtyu*. Though it shares the same semantic field with other words expressive of death like *maraṇa*, *nidhana* etc., the ancient Hindus attributed to *mṛtyu* various kinds of emotion and action comparable to ordinary human beings.

Being furnished with emotion, it becomes the object of fear (*bhaya*) as a cruel and merciless being, particularly when it becomes angry (*krodha*). It has a hand to catch a man's hair (*keśa-grahaṇa*) and also a mouth (*āśya*, *mukha*) furnished with a sharp jaw (*daṁṣṭra*) to swallow (*gras-*) the living beings. It holds a stick (*daṇḍa*) and snares (*pāśa*) to capture them. It has its own world (*loka*) where people are destined to go after death.

Its powerfulness is compared to that of *kāla* (time, destiny) and *yama* (the god of death). Yet, among these concepts of destruction, *mṛtyu* remains under the sway of *kāla* the almighty, but all these three, *mṛtyu*, *kāla*, *yama* become powerless in the face of *karman*, the act of human beings in previous existences which determines the destiny of their own.

A concession to the other concepts of destruction further leads *mṛtyu* to a feeble innocent girl. Born out of the god Brahmā's anger, she accomplishes her duty of killing imposed by the god with the help of diseases (*vyādhi*) which were originally transformed out of her tears (*aśru-bindu*) held in the hands of the god Brahmā. Finally, it becomes the object of subjugation (*jaya*). Furthermore, *mṛtyu* itself is said to be destined to die (*mṛtyur mriyate*).

Surveying what we have discussed, it becomes clear that, from the merciless enemy (*śatru*) down to the miserable object of defeat, the ancient Hindu imagined the uniquely personified god of death in the form of *mṛtyu*.

Notes

1) Cf.

*anto nāśo (dvayor) mṛtyur maraṇaṁ nidhana (śtrīyāṁ)
parāsu-prāptapañcatva-ṣareta-preta-saṁsthītā (Amara-kośa 8.2.85)*

2) As is elucidated by Windisch (195), the predecessor of Māra pāpimā who

attacked the Buddha at the time of his enlightenment is the Vedic epithet *pāpmā mṛtyu* in AV.VI.26, 93 and XVII.29, and also *mṛtyu pāpman*, which appears in TS.7.4.21, SB.8.4.2.1–2, BAU.1.5.23.

- 3) Ordinarily, *marāṇa* is enumerated in the Buddhist list of the eight kinds of suffering (*aṣṭa-duḥkha*), that is, *jāti-*, *jarā-*, *vyādhi-*, *marāṇa-*, *priya-viprayoga-*, *apriya-saṃprayoga-*, *yad apicchāyāparyeṣamāṇo na labhate*, *saṃkṣṭeṇa pañcopādāna-skandha-*, but occasionally *mṛtyu* appears in place of *marāṇa* (MBh.12.169.21). Cf. also MBh.3.200.33 (*jāti-mṛtyu-jarā-duḥkhaiḥ*), MBh.6.36.8. 12.208.2 (*janma-mṛtyu-jarā-duḥkhaiḥ*), MBh.13.135.116 (*janma-mṛtyu-jarāṭigah*). As regards, the four kinds of *duḥkha*, cf.

janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi-duḥkha-doṣānudarśanam (MBh.6.35.8)
janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi-vedanābhir upadrutam (MBh.12.9.33)
janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi-bhayaṃ vāpy upajāyate (MBh.13.135.131)

- 4) It is interesting to notice that, when Naciketas asked Yama about *marāṇa*, Yama prohibited him from asking about it (*naciketo, marāṇaṃ mānuṣṛkṣiḥ*), and suggested to him to enjoy sensual pleasures instead (KU.1.1.25). Cf. also KU.2.2.6 (*yathā ca marāṇaṃ prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama*). It is also to be noted that the concept of re-death is always expressed by *punar-mṛtyu*, but not *punar marāṇa*, and *vimṛtyu* (ChU.8.1.5, KU.2.3.18 and MU.6.4 and 25 *virajo vimṛtyu*), but not *vimarāṇa*.
- 5) Here Yama is described as follows.

muhūrtād iva cāpaśyat puruṣaṃ pīta-vāsasam
baddha-mauliṃ vaṣuṣmantam āditya-sama-tejasam (8)
śyāmāvadātam raktākṣam pāśa-hastaṃ bhayāvaham (MBh.3.281.9ab)

All of a sudden she saw a man, wearing a yellow garment and a turban. He was handsome, like to the sun in brilliance. His skin was clear, yet dark; his eyes red; in his hand he held a noose; he was terrifying (Brough).

- 6) In Naciketas' reflection it is said: *kiṃ svid yamasya kartavyam* (1.5).
 7) KU.1.10, 1.13, 1.22, 1.29.
 8) Cf. MBh.7.66.40 which has *tyajantam tumule prāṇān saṃnaddham citra-yodhim* in the second line. Cf. also MBh.7.24.6b (*kruddho mṛtyum ivāhave*).
 9) Cf. R.7.21.20 (*mṛtyus tu parama-kruddhah*).
 10) However, in the Nāciketopākhyāna as related in MBh.13.70, there is no word *mṛtyu*, but simply *yama* and *vaivasvata* only.
 11) For *mamatā* and Mṛtyu, cf. MBh.14.13.7.
 12) For their variants, cf.

labdhvāpi pṛthivīm kṛtsnām saha-sthāvara-jaṅgamām
na bhūṅkte yo nṛpaḥ samyaṅ niṣphalam tasya jīvitam (9)
atha vā vasato rājan vane vanyena jīvataḥ

dravyeṣu yasya mamatā mṛtyor āsye sa vartate (MBh. 12. 13. 10)

For further references to *mṛtyor āsya...* cf. MBh.6.101.32, 8.42.41 (*mṛtyor āsya-gataṃ yathā*), MBh.12.170.11 (*mṛtyor āsya-gato yathā*), MBh.6.82.3, 7.145.28 (*mṛtyor āsyam anuprāptaṃ*), MBh.8.47.10 (*mṛtyor āsyam vyāttam ivānvapadyan*), and MBh.7.157.39 (*mṛtyor āsyāntarān muktaṃ*).

- 13) For *mṛtyu-mukha*, cf. KU.1.11 and 1.3.15. Cf. also Rau p. 161 and 167 (Rachen des Todes).
 14) For Pali *maccu-mukha*, cf. Suttanipāta 776 and Mahāniddeśa p. 48.
 15) For the jaws of Yama, cf. MBh.7.69.17 (*yama-daṃṣṭrāntaram prāpta*) and 7.85.18 (*yama-daṃṣṭrāntaram gata*).
 16) Cf. also,

*tam āpatantaṃ samprekṣya matta-vāraṇa-vikramam
 tāvakānāṃ rathāḥ sapta samantāt paryavārayan
 madra-rājam pariṣanto mṛtyor daṃṣṭrāntaram gatam (MBh. 6.45.46)*

- 17) Cf. Hara 1986.
 18) Cf. also,

*ajarāmaravat prājño vidyām arthaṃ ca cintayet
 grhīta iva keśeṣu mṛtyunā dharmam ācāret (Hitopadeśa 1.3)*

- 19) Cf. Hara 1986.
 20) For *mṛtyu-pāśa*, cf. KU.1.1.18 and for *mṛtyor yanti vitatasya pāśam*, cf. KU.2.1.2.
 21) For the snare of *kāla* (*kāla-pāśa*), cf. MBh.8.63.69 (*kāla-pāśopamāsi*), 16.6.10 (*kāla-pāśa-graha*), and 12.220.81 (*niyatam kāla-pāśena baddham*) and for that of Yama, cf. MBh.3.281.9 (*śyāmāvadātam raktākṣam pāśa-hastam bhayāvaham*) and KSS.66.25. Cf. also Scheftelowitz 20. As regards Pali *maccu-pāśa* cf. Suttanipāta 166 and J.5.367.6.
 22) Cf. also,

*tato 'ham abruvaṃ kṛṣṇa tadā duryodhanaṃ nṛpaṃ
 mṛtyu-pāśa-parikṣiptam śakuniṃ putra varjaya (MBh. 11. 18.23)
 mohito daiva-yogena mṛtyu-pāśa-puraskṛtaḥ
 na veda kṛṣṇam dāsārham arjunaṃ caiva pāṇḍavam (MBh. 7. 10.40)*

Cf. also R.3.17.18, 3.22.25. 3.25.11.

- 23) For *yama-daṇḍa*, cf. MBh.12.15.5 (*yama-daṇḍa-bhaya*), 6.96.4, 6.107.11, 7.131.130, 7.141.34 (*yama-daṇḍopamaṃ ghoram*), R.7.98.20 (*yama-daṇḍam ivodyamya*).
 24) For the rod of Time (*kāla-daṇḍa*), cf. R.3.17.18, 3.22.25, 3.25.11 and Scheftelowitz 19.
 25) *ātmaupamyena gantavyaṃ buddhimadbhir mahātmabhiḥ
 mṛtyuto bhayam astiti viduṣāṃ bhūtim icchatām (MBh. 13. 116.22)*

Cf. also MBh.8.59.39 (*mṛtyor bhītāni bhārata*), MBh.9.35.30 (*mṛtyor bhīto hy*

asomapaḥ), and MBh.11.5.4 (*mṛtyor api bhaya-pradam*).

- 26) Curiously enough, this recurring phrase of the Mahābhārata does not occur in the Rāmāyaṇa. Another recurring phrase in the great Epic which contains the word *mṛtyu* is *mṛtyuṃ kṛtvā nivartanam* (making death the place of retreat), which illustrates the brave warriors in the battle-field. Cf. MBh.6.53.2, 7.127.20, 8.26.32, 8.32.9, 8.41.7, 7.55.73, 8.56.47, 9.7.5, 9.7.59, 9.10.8, 9.20.4, 9.27.21.
- 27) A similar action is also ascribed to *kāla*.

*idam adya kariṣyāmi śvaḥ kartāsmṛti vādinam
kālo harati saṃprāpto nadi-vega ivodṛupam (MBh. 12.220.98)*

- 28) Cf. Hara 1995.
29) Cf. also,

*saṃcinvānakam evainam kāmānām avitrptakam
vyāghraḥ paśum ivāsādyā mṛtyur ādāya gacchati (MBh. 12.317.24)*

Cf. also MBh.12.169.18 quoted above, which, however, has *evaikam* for *evainam*.

- 30) For Pali *maccu-vasa*, cf. Suttanipāta 587 and 1100.
31) Cf. also,

*mama putrā durātmanāḥ sarve mṛtyu-vaśam gatāḥ
yeṣāṃ yuddham durādharṣaiḥ pāṇḍavaiḥ pratyupasthitam (MBh. 3.46.7)
rājānaś ca mahātmano nānā-jaṇapadeśvarāḥ
āgamyā mama putrārthe sarve mṛtyu-vaśam gatāḥ (MBh. 15.36.28)*

- 32) For *mṛtyu-loka*, cf. Gonda 1966 pp. 65–66.
33) lectio varia read for *mṛtyu-deśa*, *mṛtyu-loka*, and *mṛtyu-śoka*.
34) Cf. also,

*preṣayiṣyāmi mṛtyave (MBh. 7.77.34, 8.42.23)
preṣayām āsa mṛtyave (MBh. 6.60.28, 6.73.66, 6.85.27, 6.92.36, 6.110.24,
7.169.102, 9.9.14, 9.14.24, 9.24.20, 9.25.13)*

- 35) Cf. MBh.6.50.74, 6.84.22, 6.109.13, 7.27.30, 7.29.6, 7.68.50, 7.132.23, 7.132.25, 7.136.3, 7.136.5, 8.58.2,
36) For this story, cf. also Scherman pp. 202ff.
37) Cf. also IS.1695 and MBh.12.231.25 which reads.

*kālah paçati bhūtāni sarvāny evātmanātmani
yasmimś tu paçyate kālas taṃ na vedeha kaścana (MBh. 12.231.25)*

- 38) Cf. MBh.1.1.188 which reads *nirdahantaṃ prajāḥ kālaṃ kālah śamayate punaḥ* in the second line.

- 39) Scheftelowitz 18–19.
 40) Scheftelowitz 19.
 41) Cf. Scheftelowitz 9 and 18 note 1.
 42) For this story, cf. Scheftelowitz 21–22.
 43) Mṛtyu is enumerated together with *kāla* among the witnesses (*sākṣin*) of human deeds in this world. It is said that, without being seen, they watch their good and evil deeds.

ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi lokānāṃ karma-sākṣiṇaḥ (40)
apī yañāsya vettāro dattasya sukṛtasya ca
adr̥śyāḥ sarva-bhūteṣu paśyanti tridaśeśvarāḥ
śubhāśubhāni karmāni mṛtyuḥ kālāś ca sarvaśaḥ
viśvedevāḥ pitṛ-gaṇā mūrtimantas tapodhanāḥ
mumayaś caiva siddhāś ca tapo-mokṣa-parāyaṇāḥ (45)
śuci-smitāḥ kīrtayatāṃ prayacchanti śubham nṛṇāṃ (MBh. 13. Appendix 18=
13.150.19ff. Bombay)

Cf. also Scheftelowitz 29 note 2. Furthermore, Mṛtyu is mentioned as one of various epithets of *Yama*. Cf. Scheftelowitz 30 note 1.

- 44) For this idea of merit-exchange, cf. Hara 1994.
 45) Three deities, *kāla*, *dharma*, and *mṛtyu*, later appear again together with *kāma* and *krodha* (MBh.12.192.115). Other occurrences of these deities in groups are as follows.

agastyo 'tha mataṅgaś ca kālo mṛtyus tathaiva ca
yajvānaś caiva siddhāś ca ye ca yoga-śarīriṇaḥ (MBh.2.8.26)
dharmāś ca bhagavān devaḥ samājagmur hi saṃgatāḥ
kālo yamaś ca mṛtyuś ca yamasyānucarāś ca ye (MBh.9.44.15)

- 46) It is told twice in MBh., once in the Droṇa-parvan and again in the Śānti-pavan. It is established now that the story in the Droṇa-parvan is a later addition, and thus the Critical Edition put it (MBh.7.48–50 [in Bombay edition]) into the Appendix I,8 23–265 (pp. 1071–1084). Thus, we here depend upon the version given in MBh.12.248–50. The remarkable differences between the two are, for example, in MBh.7.48, the cause of Yudhiṣṭhira's grief as particularized by the death of his nephew Abhimanyu.
 47) In the Droṇa-parvan, the reciter is Vyāsa, instead of Bhīṣma, and the name of the king is Akampana.
 48) In MBh.7, she is further furnished with a red tongue and face, and she smilingly looked at those two gods (*smayamāneva cāvaiḥśad devau viśveśvarāv ubhau*: 122) before leaving for the southern quarter.
 49) Cf. *tvaṃ hi saṃhāra-buddhyātha prādur-bhūtā ruṣo mama* in MBh.7 (125) (You appeared out of me in wrath, which I cherished for the destruction [of the universe]).
 50) In the Droṇa-parvan, the god Brahman said to her that Yama and various diseases (*vyādhi*) will be her helpmates (*sahāya*) (200). Upon this, she further

requested to have the following eight vices as her forerunners.

*lobhaḥ krodho 'bhyasūyeṣṣyā droho mohaś ca dehinām
ahrīś cānyonya-paruṣā dehaṃ bhīndyuh pṛthag-vidhāḥ (206-7)*

Let covetousness, wrath, malice, jealousy, quarrel, folly, shamelessness and other abusive (speech) tear the bodies of all embodied creatures.

- 51) For the *mṛtyuṃ-jaya sūkta*, cf. RV.7.59.12. Cf. also Renou 1962 p. 104.
52) In Vyāsa's discourse to his son Śuka, it is said that one can cross over all the difficulties including *mṛtyu* by the raft of *dhṛti* and the carriage of *dharma*

*kāmaṃ krodhaṃ ca mṛtyuṃ ca pañcendriya-jalāṃ nadīm
nāvaṃ dhṛti-mayīm kṛtvā janma-durgāṇi saṃtara (16)
mṛtyunābhyāhate loke jarayā pariṇidite
amoghāsu pātantiṣu dharmayānena saṃtara (MBh. 12.309.17)*

- 53) For Pali *maccu-hāyin* (leaving death behind, victorious over death), cf.

*ye ca rūpe pariññāya arūpesu susaṅghitā
nirodhe ye vimuccanti te janā maccu-hāyino
(Suttanipāta 755=Itivuttaka pp. 45-46)*

But those who comprehend the fine-material realm and do not stand firm in the formless (realms), these people leave death behind. (Norman)

*apī ce hoti tevijjo maccuhāyī anāsavo
appaññāto 'ti naṃ bālā avajānanti ajānatā (Thera-gāthā 129)*

Even if one has the triple knowledge, has left death behind, and is without *āsavas*, ignorant fools despise him as being unknown. (Norman)

- 54) It is supposed that *mṛtyu* could not touch the great hero. Deploring the death of Karṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra wondered.

*karṇaṃ tv asyantam astrāṅt divyāni ca bahūni ca
katham indropamaṃ vīraṃ mṛtyur yuddhe samasṛṣat (MBh. 8.5.64)*

How could *mṛtyu* have touched Karṇa, the hero equal to Indra, while he was shooting his manifold celestial arrows in the battle field?

- 55) Cf. also,

*mṛtyur janmavatām vīra dehena saha jāyate
adya vābda-śatānte vā mṛtyur vai pṛāṇinām dhruvaḥ (IS.4954)
jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca*

tasmād aṅgīhārye 'rthe na tvam śocitum arhasi (IS.2383)

- 56) It is called also by the name *mṛtyum-jaye sudarśanopākhyāna* in some manuscripts. Cf. the Critical Edition vol. 17 part I p. 26.
 57) For *satya*, cf. MBh.12.169 26ff. as quoted above.
 58) For *dhṛti*, cf. MBh.12.309.16 quoted above.
 59) One is reminded of the story of Ambā, as related in MBh.5.187.39–40.
 60) The word *mṛtyu* appears also in 89 and 93.
 61) Similarly, we read in Śiva-sahasra-nāma which appears in the Padma-purāṇa.

*viśveśvarāya sūryāya gaurīśāya varāya ca
 mṛtyum-jayāya vīrāya vīra-bhadrāya te namaḥ*

- 62) Cf. Scheftelowitz 19, though Hultzsich' edition omits the compound *mṛtyum-jaya* (Leipzig 1922).
 63) Cf. also, Schneider p. 60.
 64) For the army of Māra (*māra-senā*), cf. Lalitavistara 21 and 13 18ff., as elucidated by Wīndisch.
 65) Cf. also,

*na hi pratīkṣate mṛtyuḥ kṛtam vāsya na vākṛtam
 ko hi jānāti kasyādyā mṛtyu-senā nivekṣyate (MBh. 12. 169. 14)
 na mṛtyu-senām āyāntīm jātu kaścit prabādhate
 rte satyam asaṃtyājyaṃ satye hy amṛtam āśritam (MBh. 12. 169. 26)*

Cf. also *kāla-sainya* in MBh.217.44.

- 66) For Māra-maṇḍala, cf. LV.300.7 and Māra-bhavana LV.300.9.
 67) Cf. also,

*kas tvayā sukhinā rājan nābhinandati pāpa-kṛt
 kenedam upadiṣṭaṃ te mṛtyu-dvāram upāyataḥ (R. 3.39.3)*

- 68) As for the southern declension, cf.

*kāla-cakraṃ ca sākṣāc ca bhagavān havya-vāhanaḥ
 narā duṣkṛta-karmāṇo dakṣiṇāyana-mṛtyavaḥ (MBh. 2. 8. 28)*

The Wheel of Time and the blessed lord Fire himself
 men of evil deeds and those who have died during the sun's southern
 course. (van Buitenen)
 For the hour of death in general, cf. Edgerton ABORI.8 (1926–7)
 pp. 219–249.

Abbreviations

- ABORI. : Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Poona).
 AS. : Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques (Bern).
 AV. : Atharva-veda-saṃhitā.
 BAU. : Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.
 ChU. : Chāndogya Upaniṣad.
 IJ. : Indo-Iranian Journal (Dortrecht, Leiden).
 IS. : Indische Sprüche, herausgegeben von O. Böhtlingk
 (Osnabrück Reprint 1966).
 J. : Jātaka, ed., by V. Fausbøll (Pali Text Society, London).
 KSS. : Kathā-sarit-sāgara of Somadeva-bhaṭṭa, (Bombay 1930).
 KU. : Kāṭhaka Upaniṣad.
 MU. : Maitri Upaniṣad.
 MBh. : Mahābhārata (Poona Critical Edition).
 R. : Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa (Baroda Critical Edition).
 RV. : Rg-veda-saṃhitā.
 SB. : Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.
 TS. : Taittirīya Saṃhitā.

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