

Hack thy Śepa - Crush thy Muṣka: Emasculation of Supernatural Sex Criminals in the Atharvaveda

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Abstract: The Atharvaveda that deviates from the hieratic tradition of Hinduism because of the popular or applied dimensions of Vedic religion in it contains numerous spells directed to the supernatural. The spells for exorcising spirits who commit sex crimes are notable for their coarse language and uncouth content, particularly when compared to Vedic laudatory hymns in a refined language. The *Gandharvas* and other supernatural beings notorious for sexually abusing mortal women encounter mantric threats characterised by derision. This paper examines the Vedic practice of imprecating upon supernatural sex criminals and analyses the language of the Atharvavedic spells employed for that purpose. Further, it argues that similar practices may have been in use to penalise mortal sex criminals as reflected in pertinent Vedic terms and phrases.

Keywords: Atharvaveda, supernatural beings, sex criminals, emasculation, Vedic literature

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the ways the content of the *Atharvaveda* (AV), aptly designated as the Veda of the masses, could vary is in terms of its language. Among the two categories of its spells recognised as ‘*atharvan*’ and ‘*aṅgiras*’, which roughly translate as white magic and black magic respectively, are found a good number of spells belonging to the latter category and presented in an intimidating and coarse language. The entire content of a spell of that sort cannot be generalised as linguistically and semantically uncouth but most of it deviates from the norm. Nor could the overall effect anticipated from the exercise of such spells be determined solely as black magic on the ground of its language since even the spells aimed at good purposes may contain coarse language against the evil. The Vedic literature is replete with loads of revealing references not only to the ancient Indians’ sexual life but also to both supports and disturbances to it by non-humans. Further, as reflected in the literature, most of the mundane dimensions of life, like sexuality, have anthropomorphically been attributed to non-humans. This fact is not different regarding manhood too. The objective of this paper is to examine briefly the Vedic practice of casting imprecations upon supernatural sex criminals and then to analyse the peculiarities of the language exercised for that purpose. The scope of this study is narrowed down to the sorcerous spells aimed at emasculating male sex criminals, the mortal in general and the supernatural in particular – precisely the *Gandharvas*.

II. GANDHARVAS: LECHEROUS SPIRITS

Although a few groups of fiends or lower spirits can be distinguished in the AV for their prominent interest in carnal pleasure with young human females and power to molest them, it is the *Gandharvas* that fall victim to cursing spells most frequently. The others, for instance, the *Kimīdins* who also sexually harass mortal women and slay their embryos¹, can be compared to the *Gandharvas* but the *Kimīdins* are more brutal and more directly associated with physical diseases than the latter group. The interaction of humans with the *Gandharvas* seems to be deep-rooted. Looked at from a wide viewpoint, the *Gandharvas* are a group of masculine nature spirits who the AV poets talk rather indignantly about. They often accompany the *Apsaras* as their female counterparts.² As depicted in the Rgveda (RV) and the AV, both these nature spirits reside in their arboreal resorts, various landforms close to rivers³ and in the firmament or atmosphere. The *Gandharvas* are described as those with a zoomorphic physique⁴ but very attractive⁵ while the *Apsaras*,

¹AVŚ. 8.6.23, 25: The *Kimīdins* are a group of demonic beings: Witzel (2003:72). See AVŚ. 12.1.50 for an account of the *Apsaras* and the *Gandharvas* as evil forces along with the *Arāyas* and the *Piśācas* from whom humans wish to escape. But in AVŚ. 8.8.15 the *Gandharvas* and the *Apsaras* are considered as killers of the enemies of mortals. The *Gandharvas* are introduced as embryo-slayers nowhere in the AV.

²AVŚ. 4.37.7 ‘*gandharvasyāpsarāpateḥ*’, 4.37.12: ‘*apsaraso gandharvāḥ patayo*’, 2.2.5 ‘*gandharvapātī*’. The story of an *Apsaras* known as *Urvaśī* and the king *Purūraya* who also became a *Gandharva* later (RV. 10.95; ŚB. 11.5.1, BhP. 9.14; BŚS 18 45) is well known in the Vedic and later literature. For *Gandharva* and *Apsaras* as a copulative compound (*gandharvāpsaras*) probably to take their roles as identical, see AVŚ. 8.8.15; 8.10.27; 10.9.9; 11.6.4; 11.7.27; 11.9.16; 11.9.24; 19.36.6; 19.54.4; Cf. *Gandharvas* and *Apsaras* occurring in Pali literature as *Gandhabba* and *Accharā* respectively: SN. I.46; MN. 1.253 for *Accharā* and DN. 2.212; AN. 2.39 (as birds), AN. 4.200 (with *Asuras* and *Nāgas*) for *Gandhabba*. The Elves in Germanic mythology and nymphs in Greek mythology can be compared to the *Gandharvas* and the *Apsaras* respectively.

³AVŚ. 2.2.3, 4.37.3, 10.12; allusion in RV. 10.10: Cf. Ave. Yasna. 15.28 for ‘*Gandarewa*’ whose abode is in the waters. See Turner and Coulter (2001:63) for an account of the interesting connection between sacred Banyan trees - abodes of the *Apsaras* - and women’s pregnancy.

⁴Ape-like and dog-like *Gandharvas* whose body is part of an animal. AVŚ. 4.37.11.

⁵They have beautiful locks of hair (AVŚ. 4.37.11; ŚB. 13.4.3.7, 8) and wear fragrant or pleasing robes (RV. 10.123.7). Cf. AVŚ. 12.1.23; the etymology of *gandharva* is *gandha* (vapor) since they share the fragrance of the earth (Hopkins 1969:152). Why the *Gandharvas* are not emphatically praised for their handsomeness is understood in the contexts where they are threatened for being lecherous.

who are, etymologically ‘aqueous nymphs’, as those with bewitching beauty. Known for their skills at music, the *Gandharvas* are often depicted in the Vedic literature as musicians,⁶ choristers⁷, or dancers and fond of such pleasing activities⁸. Moreover, as in the RV in particular, they are tutelary spirits of Soma, a herbal libation to the gods.⁹ The *Gandharvas* eating the stalks of *Avakā* (Blyxa Octandra) plant are mentioned quite frequently in the Vedic literature.¹⁰ The *Apsaras* are known also by their names in the AVŚ¹¹, such as *Guggulū*, *Pilā*, *Naladi*, *Aukṣagandhī* and *Pramandanī* while there is also a plethora of such names in the related literature, early as well as later.¹² In general, the *Apsaras* are more frequently recognised for their alluring beauty, with which they seduce human males than for their demonic traits.

Particularly notable in respect of the *Gandharvas* in the present study is their fanatic interest in sex with young mortal maidens.¹³ As in the RV, the gods were crafty enough to optimise this Achilles heel of the *Gandharvas*, when stealing Soma from latter by means of employing the goddess *Vāc* as the bait.¹⁴ Comparable to the incubi in European mythological traditions, the immortal¹⁵ *Gandharvas* (and such other spirits) approach mortal women asleep and possess them to have sexual intercourse.¹⁶ Moreover, the *Gandharvas* are also incriminated for the crime of inseminating women, as a consequence of which they may get sick, have miscarriages, deliver deformed, premature or evil-spirited babies¹⁷, and

even die. Nevertheless, it is quite unclear why in the RV a nubile maiden is often introduced to belong, in addition to Agni and Soma, to the *Gandharvas*¹⁸ whose lascivious misconduct is never tolerated in the AV. Again, as also in the RV, the *Gandharvas* become rivals of a newly wedded husband¹⁹ because of their sexual jealousy towards him, whereas they, along with the *Apsaras*, are also considered to be fertility-givers²⁰ to wedded couples. It would, therefore, be interesting to compare the *Gandhabbas*²¹ or womb-coming entities²² in the Buddhist literature and the *Gandharvas* in the Vedic literature in terms of their role in impregnating women.

Pertinent spells in the AV reveal that the shaman's attempt is to prevent, by all means, the approach of the *Gandharvas* to women, although he strives to exorcise them from the possessed. Dancing gracefully and showing their youthful physique, they loom before women, particularly at night.²³ Unlike the *kimīdins* and *Arāyas* who have deformed bodies and consequently do not sexually arouse slumbering women, the *Gandharvas* appear in dreams with a very tempting figure²⁴ driving sleeping beauties towards disaster. The practice of exorcising these nocturnal paramours seems to involve several steps: to recognise them, to call them by their names, and then to exert threatening spells. This practice also accompanies the employment of objects of magical power²⁵, which serve as talismans for the sick and terrifying weapons for the *Gandharvas*. A significant observation in this context is that the exorcising spells on the *Gandharvas* are more frequently found to include threats of depriving them of their manhood as the major punishment for their sexual misconduct.

III. ŚEPA AND MUṢKA : SYMBOLS OF MANHOOD

Vedic texts refer to the membrum virile by numerous terms including *śepa*,²⁶ *medhra*,²⁷ *pasas*,²⁸ *mehana*²⁹ or *bhasat*³⁰ and to

⁶ RV.9.86.36; 10.139.5; AVŚ. 4.37.5 for the *divyagandharvas* such as *Viśvāvasu* (also RV 10.85. 21) and *Vāyukeśa* (also RV. 3.38.6).

⁷ RV.7. 94. 6. *Gāndharva* (with the elongated -ā-) is frequently found in the sense ‘related to *Gandharvas*’ but seems to be in use as an attributive, not differently from how *Gandharva* is employed. Interestingly, the divine lute player *Pañcaśikha* as in the Buddhist literature is also a *Gandhabba*, see DhA. iii. 225. ANA. 1.72; Vsm. 1.392, SN. 4.103.

⁸ Invoked at gambling; AVŚ. 7.109.5.

⁹ RV.8.1.2, 77.5.

¹⁰ AVŚ.4. 37.8-10: 6.106.1; TĀ.5. 10.6, RV. 10.142.8.

Known also as *Śaivāla*, *Avakā* has connotations such as vital breath, vital sap (ŚB. 7.4.2.12), and cattle (ŚB. 7.4.2.10). Cf. Gonda (1969:13). The *Gandharvas*’ dwelling close to the waters supports well their being fed on *Avakā* though I suspect if *avakādan* in AVŚ. 4.37. 8-10 might also be read as *avakhādān* which may mean ‘devourers or destroyers’: MWSED. 97. Col. 1. Cf. RV. 1.41.4.

¹¹ AVŚ. 4.37.3. *Gulgulū* can be a variant of *Guggulū*. Kosambi (1962:57) states that no name of the *Apsaras* except *Urvaśī* is found in the RV. Cf. VS. 15.15; TS. 4.4.3: The *Apsaras* roam in pairs like *Puñjikasthālā* and *Kratusthālā* accompanying gods.

¹² Turner & Coulter (2001:63).

¹³ AVŚ. 4.37.11: ‘*priyo dṛśa iva bhūtvā gandharvaḥ sacate striyaḥ*’ Cf. AVŚ. 8. 6.17.

¹⁴ AB. 1.27; TS. 6.1.6.5; MS. 3.7.3.

¹⁵ AVŚ.4.37.12: most probably in the sense ‘not human’ or ‘invulnerable’.

¹⁶ As in the later literature, Cf. AB. 5.29.2 ‘*gandharvagrhitā*’, SS. 6.60.8 ‘*gandharvagrāha*’.

¹⁷ AVŚ. 8.6.9: ‘*yaḥ kṛṇoti mṛtavatsām avatokām imām striyam*’; Cf. RV. 10.10.4-5: *Yami* or *Yamī*, the first human born to a *Gandharva* and an ‘aqueous woman’ (*apyā yoṣā*), probably an *Apsaras*. Notably, a child born from the waters, ‘*apyā kāmyāni*’ (RV. 10. 95.10) was considered to be not an Āryan (*janiṣo āpo nāryaḥ*), i.e. one of noble birth. This fact may also connote the mean attitude towards the *Gandharvas*’ crime of impregnating women but as in AVŚ. 14.2.4, the *Gandharvas*’ involvement in childbirth is held positively. The erotic significance of the waters as hinted at in RV. 1.105.2: 9.74.9 would also be worth examining in this context.

¹⁸ RV.10. 85.21, 22; 10.85 40, 41. As regards *Arāyas*, AVŚ. 8.6.14: ‘*ye pūrve badhvo yānti*’.

¹⁹ RV.10. 85. 22.

²⁰ PB. 19.3.

²¹ MN. 1.265; MP. 123 etc. as those who preside over child-conception.

²² Obeyesekere (2002:331): ‘Rebirth-seeking entity’ or ‘rebirth-linking consciousness’; Harvey (2000:312): ‘between-lives being’. See Harvey (1995:89-108) for an excellent discussion on this topic.

²³ AVŚ.4. 37. 11 ‘*priyo dṛśa iva bhūtvā*’.

²⁴ How the *Gandharvavivāhais* related to the characteristics of the *Gandharvas* in the AV is of considerable importance. If a couple makes love first and enters the wedlock later, that type of marriage is known as *Gandharvavivāha*. This is the opposite to the other types of marriage where observing celibacy until marriage is mandatory while obeying marital laws and seeking parental and religious blessings. MSmr. 3.21, PP. 1.40 ; ĀŚS. 2.5.11.17.

²⁵ Cf. AVŚ. 4.37.2.6: The herb *Ajaśṛṅgī* (Odina Pinnata), literally ‘one with goat’s horn’, bearing fruits that resemble goat horns.

²⁶ RV.10.85.37; AVP.4.5.1; AVŚ.6.138.5: 14.2.38; VS.6.17; *Śepa* is a variant not found in the AVŚ but interestingly in the AVP. 12.7.9 and certain *Gṛhyasūtras* such as HGS. 1.14.7. *Śepa* < *keipo-, koipo- or skeipo- (peg/sharp piece of wood or stone, a meaning retained at least partially in Latin *cippus*). The Indic word *śepa* denotes both ‘tail’ and ‘penis’.

²⁷ AVŚ. 7.95.3; MS. 1.2.16: 26.10; VS. 6.14; ŚB. 3.8.2.6 etc.

²⁸ AVŚ.6.72.2: 20.136.2 etc.

²⁹ AVŚ.1.3.7; AVP.1.4.4: 15.18.1 etc.

the testis often by *muṣka*,³¹ *vr̥ṣaṇa*³² or *aṇḍa*³³ while more such terms occur in classical Sanskrit literature. Particularly in the AV, when the manhood of a male, spiritual or mortal, is addressed with contempt or anger, his genitals are more obviously mentioned than the other symbols of masculinity such as a fully-grown beard or muscular body. The *Gandharvas* and other such spirits who sexually molest women are also exorcised with threatening spells that highlight their penis and the testes being smitten. The punishments imposed upon such fiends could also be in the forms of killing or driving away but crushing the genitals is more recurrently stated as the sole method of destruction or as a significant part of other methods.³⁴

Moreover, it is observed that the term '*muṣka*' usually denotative of the 'testis' has also been employed to mean the pudenda muliebre³⁵ though its usage in some contexts as a dual noun (*muṣkābhyām*) pose some doubts on its meaning as the testes. However, more obviously in the *Brāhmana* literature,³⁶ we find *muṣka* in dual form often in the sense of the pudenda. Consequently, that '*muṣka*' bears both the meanings that alter in keeping with the context would be a logical conclusion. The testes are defined as fruits (*phala*)³⁷ in the sense of the "storages of the essence" and virility is considered to be associated mainly with a man's testes as in most occurrences in the AV. For instance, Indra, the most powerful deity³⁸ in the RV in terms of his physical and sexual strength³⁹, is described to have one thousand testicles

(*sahasramuṣka*)⁴⁰ confirming the testes being considered to be the hallmarks of manhood and/ or virility.⁴¹ By contrast, some references in the AV support the assumption that virility rests in one's penis⁴² since it is the penile strength and amplitude that assures his manhood.⁴³ For instance, in a spell⁴⁴ aimed at the achievement of penile enlargement, the spell practitioner prays (to pertinent relevant spirits?) for his client to have a penis as large as that of an elephant, an ass, a rhinoceros (?)⁴⁵ and of a stallion full of vigour.

The *Gandharvas* can obviously be recognised as having distinct manhood throughout the body of the Vedic texts except for few cases where they are labelled as 'effeminate' spirits. Given the above perspectives on one's manhood depicted in the literature, it would be safe to imagine that their purported femininity or at least hermaphrodite traits stemmed from their being emasculated for being lecherous and committing sexual crimes. Twofold consequences, therefore, ensue from such a punishment, unmanning the culprit and making him sexually impotent⁴⁶ and thereby making him a eunuch, and more interestingly, a 'womanlike'.

IV. PENALISING THE GENITALS

Cutting off a man's genitals is reported to have been a dreadful practice performed worldwide for different reasons for ages. It was required in some contexts as part of keeping the purity⁴⁷ of a race or breed unspoiled and as part of slavery or for religious reasons while in some others to produce sexually active but impotent males or to penalise the guilty for

³⁰US.2.1.129; RV.6.3.4; AVŚ.2.33.5: 9.4.13; TS.7.3.16. 2 etc. Cf. KGS.30.6: a mantric formula applied to keep the vigour of the penis at coitus; Sen (1982:153).

³¹RV.4.2.2: 10.102.4; AVŚ.4.37.7: 6.127.2; AVP.1.90.2: 12.7.9 etc.

³²RV.4.6.9: 6.19.8; AVŚ. 20.72.2: 75.1; 11.1.2 etc.

³³AVŚ.8.6. 25; AVP.1.68.3: 7.19.5 etc. Cf. *aṇḍa* is a variant; AVP. 11.1.7: MGS.2.18.2 etc.: as ovaries, AVŚ.14.2.44: 20.16.7 etc: as eggs (of birds).

³⁴ Cf. Elinguation and excecation performed as punishments in western contexts and the relationship of each to the body part liable for the crime in question.

³⁵AVŚ. 8.6.5; 6. 138.4,5: Cf. Pokorny (2007:2151): 'both testicle and vulva'. *Muṣka* with the diminutive suffix *-ka* is from **mūs-* (mouse). Cf. TS.5.7.15.1; KSA.13.5: '*apsaraso muṣkābhyām*'.

³⁶TB. 2.4.6.4,5; '*muṣkayor adadhāt sapam*', '*muṣkayor nihitah sapah*'.

Ollivelle (2008:85, fn.29): Sāyana's considering this as the testes and its incompatibility in the context under concern. He suggests that the duality of the term is due to taking the vagina as constituted of two parts, *labia majora* and *labia minora*. Cf. Das (2003:98, fn. 306): for a justification for assuming *muṣka* to denote both meanings when looked at from the perspective of *Āyurveda*.

³⁷RV.1.18.9, Cf. RV. 10.102.4: use of '*muṣkabhārah*' for the testes as symbolising the vigour, and RV. 4.2.2; 4. 6.9: '*r̥jumuṣka-*' (stimulated testes or 'aroused virility'). Cf. AVŚ. 13.2-5; AVP. 1.3.1: '*śatavṛṣanyam*' (of hundred powers); Cf. **trei-* + **sta-* (standing by as the third) > Latin: testis - 'witness (of one's virility)'; Pokorny (2007:3153).

³⁸*Indra's* debauchery is well known in the Vedic literature. Cf. ŚaḍB 1. 1. 21-25; his promiscuous affair with *Ahalyā*, *Gautama's* consort, how he was cursed to have thousand vulva-marks all over the body (MBh. 13.41.21; PP. 1.56.15-53; KM. 4.32 etc.) which subsequently transformed into the eyes, and later how he got ram-testicles substituted for his own (RV. 1. 48. 8). Also Cf. MSm. 9.237: 'vulva-mark branding' as a punishment for adultery with the wife of one's teacher.

³⁹JB.1. 228: *Indra* being tied down by his testicles to stop being sexually active.

⁴⁰RV. 6.46.3, but Singhal & Gupta (2003:51) holds that *sahasramuṣka* suggests *Indra's* weakness in sex. RV.8.19.32: Also as an epithet of *Agni*.RV.10.101.12: '*kaprtha*' (i.e. penis, according to *Sāyana*), as an epithet for *Indra*. Cf. Mallory & Adams (1997:507).

⁴¹ Cf. AVŚ. 8. 6.15; '*kumbhamuṣkā ayāśavaḥ*' [those having pot-like testes (but) impotent or unfit for copulation]. Griffith (1985) translates *kumbhamuṣka* in AVŚ. 11.9.17 as 'deformed', which implies that having larger-than-usual testicles is a credit to neither masculine physique nor manhood.

⁴²AVŚ. 5. 25.1; '*śepo garbhasya retodhāḥ*'.

⁴³AVŚ.20.136.2: '*sthūlena pasasāṇau muṣkā upāvadhīt*', AVŚ.6.72.2: '*yathā pasas tāyādaram vātena sthūlabham kṛtam*'. Cf. Chakraborty (1997:56): *tāyādara* might probably mean '(that belonging to) a wild goat' [Hemitragus Jemlahicus] living in the Himalayan border whose meat is used as an aphrodisiac and horns as talismans. Other suggestions for *tāyādara* are '(that of) a deer' or a 'large animal'. Cf. AVŚ. 6.101.1.

⁴⁴AVŚ. 6.72.3.

⁴⁵*Pārasvatam* has been an ambiguous term to the commentators on the AV too. Rhys Davids & Stede (1993:440) suggests that it be the Sanskrit counterpart of the Pali word '*phalāsata/ pālāsata*'. But Oberlies & Pischel (2001:75, fn. 1; 84) and Watkins (2004:68) believe *pārasvant* as '(that of) a wild-ass' or 'an onager'. It seems to me that '(that of) a rhinoceros' is a more likely meaning as in Pali, since if both *gārdabham* and *pārasvatam* are close to each other in meaning as many argue, the semantic repetition '(that of) an ass' and '(that of) a wild-ass' does not appear to be the best the poet could have intended to convey.

⁴⁶Doniger (1973:85-86). As regards *Indra's* story of losing the testes, what signifies his being 'unmanned' is both being castrated and branded with vulva-marks.

⁴⁷ It is worth examining if castration was practiced to keep the *Āryan* race from being mixed with local inhabitants in the Vedic era. Compared to the AV, the RV might not be the best source for such a study since it has undergone highly Brahmanic revisions for centuries.

their sexual misconduct. Even in India, castration as a punishment for sex crimes was not confined only to the Vedic society but also found across the ancient Indian history up to recent time.⁴⁸ Moreover, we encounter a number of elaborated stories about castrated humans and non-human beings in the Vedic and Purāṇic mythology and even in the legal system as advocated by Manu. For example, if one makes love with his teacher's wife, Manu recommends that he hack his genitals by himself, hold them in his two cupped hands and set out to the southwest region until he meets death.⁴⁹

It should be questioned at this point whether *vandhyakarana* meant sterilisation by means of hacking one's genitals and, again, whether unmaning was done by removing one's testes only or by cutting off all genitalia. The Sanskrit term *vandhya* used as an attributive means 'barren' and can be applied to both sexes.⁵⁰ Some show evidence from relevant contexts in ancient western civilizations that, in contrast to the Freudian definition, castration does not essentially include hacking the penis.⁵¹ In the threatening spells to supernatural and human paramours, we invariably find the practitioner's resounding urge to destroy their both penises and testicles. Moreover, how the testicles of such an evil spirit should be castrated is emphatically stated in some spells. For example, despite the duality of the testicles denoted by the dual form of the nouns such as '*muṣkau*' or '*āṇḍyau*', the dual attributive '*ubhe*' is added to underscore that both the testes would be crushed simultaneously.⁵² In some places, the term denotative of the testicles is replaced with a more elaborate phrase, 'the vasa deferentia where virility rests'.⁵³ This type of mantric vasectomy convincingly substantiates that unmaning a male inevitably included hacking off of the testicles.

The certainty that the shaman is not ready to extenuate his punishment by making a *Gandharva* recognised for a sex crime impotent by crushing only his testes comes from the reference that he unconditionally continues to make him sexually inactive too by hacking his penis. To sever the penis may thus have been within the range of the penalties sentenced on sex criminals because the removal of the testes only would not prevent them from committing again the very crime.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Vedic shamans seem to have

considered the penis removal as what deprives such untraceable nocturnal paramours of potentials to deflower sleeping virgins and sterilisation as what helps protect mortal women from being demonically impregnated. Because even the appearance of voluptuous *Gandharvas* in the dream was believed to result in women's physical and psychological disorders, the ultimate goal could have been the annihilation of those fiends.

With such a type of barbaric punishment, death is certain for a human victim, though it appears to have actually been in practice. A closer reading of the pertinent spells makes clear that the threats to kill sex criminals by means of destroying their genitals are purposively underlined to intensify the seriousness of the imprecations because such spirits, unlike human culprits, cannot be 'destroyed' fully.⁵⁵ Terrorising the *Gandharvas* with strong swearing to destroy their manhood by chopping off the genitals could have been more effective since by doing so their masculine pride could be shattered. As noted above, unmaning a man that way must have been the most despicable in the Vedic social milieu. On a further note to illustrate the point, it is observed in the AV that even physical diseases considered to have masculine demonic forms⁵⁶ are threatened with the spells in which crushing their testes is especially emphasised. For instance, *viṣkandha*, doubtfully recognised as tetanus or a rheumatic problem⁵⁷, is frightened with the threats to smite its testes.⁵⁸ Destroying one's testicles could, therefore, have been the most horrid way to abominate him so that the victim can no longer confront others in society.

In classical Indian literature, a good number of terms refer to one with congenital absence of manhood, to one with the genitals removed later in his life, and to one who consequently becomes a non-man (*napuṃsa*).⁵⁹ The meaning of some of such terms maps onto that of English terms while some Vedic and Sanskrit terms are semantically particular. Among the Sanskrit terms, *vadhri* is the one whose testes have been destroyed for some reason whereas *klība* is born underendowed.⁶⁰ Because of the contemptible nature of losing manhood at a certain point in life, *vadhri*⁶¹ signifies the most ashamed man whereas an inborn *klība* could remain relatively

⁴⁸ Cf. *Hijra* (etymology allegedly associated with Sanskrit *Kinnara*): Pattanaik (2001:11).

⁴⁹ MSm. 11.105; both the penis and the testicles (*śiṣṇavṛṣṇau*) should be cut off. Also Cf. MBh. 1.94.90: *Devavrāta* becoming *Bhīṣma* due to the fierce act of hacking his own genitals.

⁵⁰ Cf. SS. 6.38.4-5; *vandhyā* (barren woman). MWSED. 919. Col. 2: doubts about the root **bhend-* > *vbandh-*. Cf. Pokorny (2007:375).

⁵¹ Taylor (2000:52-53).

⁵² AVŚ. 6.138.2

⁵³ AVŚ. 6.138.4: '*nāḍyau devakṛte yayostiṣṭhati vṛṣṇyam*'. Here '*devakṛte*' apparently means 'that obtained by birth/ naturally' which confirms the congenital manly form of the criminal. Many including Watkins (1995:341) and Roy (1966:92) understand it merely in its literal meaning, i.e., 'created by god', which seems unacceptable.

⁵⁴ Cf. ĀDS. 2.10.26.20: '*śiṣṇaśchedanam savṛṣṇasya*', Gautama's curse to sever promiscuous *Indra*'s penis along with the testicles as a punishment for

seducing *Ahalyā*. '*Aṇḍakarṣaṇa*', a local term in the sense 'castration' as given in MWSED. 11. Col. 3 also supports this view.

⁵⁵ Cf. AVŚ. 4.37.12 '*amartyā*'.

⁵⁶ Apparently, the gender of a certain disease is determined on how harsh it could become and/ or who would mostly be affected by it. Diseases that are often incurable and harder to prevent are considered manly. Similarly, some interrelated diseases are introduced as 'the members of their family tree'. Cf. AVŚ. 5. 2.12.

⁵⁷ Cf. Gonda (1975:257); Zysk (1985:54).

⁵⁸ AVŚ. 3.9.2; AVP. 3.7.3. Cf. AVŚ. 6.14.2: '*nir balāsaṃ balāsinaḥ kṣiṇomi muṣkaram yathā*'.

⁵⁹ CS. 4.2.17-21; 4.4; SS. 2.131; 3.2: different types of non-men that vary in terms of their sexual orientation, deformities of the genitals, and how they lose their manhood.

⁶⁰ Cf. CS. 4.2.21: *Vatika*, (one born without testicles), NS. 12.12: *Nisarga* (one born without proper genitals), *Baddha* (one having no testicles).

⁶¹ NS. 12.14; '*naraṣaṇḍha*' whose manhood is completely destroyed but not due to any intentional reason such as punishment. Cf. Das (2003:230. fn. 802).

less disparaged.⁶² Rather, a *klība* was deemed to be not only neuter or androgenous one but also distinguishably womanlike, a state which may have been considered more embarrassing.⁶³ In the ancient phallogocentric society in India, it may have connoted well the harsh contempt one had to endure who was physically a male but whose manhood was not present and the effeminate traits were dominant. *Ṣaṇḍha*⁶⁴ and *Paṇḍa/ Paṇḍaka*⁶⁵ are broader categories of individuals sexually impotent for various reasons.

Vadhri, which etymologically⁶⁶ means ‘the crushed’ and thus ‘the destroyed’ revealing that it is neither a prenatal nor a spontaneous physical condition a man could not subjugate, seems to be the most fitting term to recognise the to-be-gelded *Gandharvas* and other supernatural sex criminals in the present study. Further, the spell AVŚ. 4. 37, which depicts a *Gandharva* ‘like a *klība*’ evinces that *klība* is not one with crushed testes but rather effete most probably by birth per se. The RV⁶⁷ and the AV⁶⁸ contain a number of occurrences to *vadhri* being employed in the sense ‘a castrated one’. The usage of the compounds ‘*muṣkabarha*’ and ‘*vadhryaśva*’ in the sense ‘castrator’ also supports this viewpoint.⁶⁹ Even though associated with animal sterilisation those terms imply that the practice of castration in the form of removal of the testes (only or along with the penis) certainly existed in Vedic India, possibly as a harsh form of punishment.⁷⁰

V. LANGUAGE AND RHETORICAL DEVICES OF SPELLS

In comparison to the refined form of language in the RV, the language of the AV, particularly that in its sorcerous spells, sounds rather coarse. Despite having loads of information hidden behind, some obscure terms and cryptic phrases demand very careful handling where even the commentaries do not adequately help. Controversies over the exact meaning

of such terms and phrases in some cases considerably affect the entire import of the spells. What follows here is not a detailed analysis of the language of those threatening spells directed to lecherous spirits but a few general observations in brief.

For signifying both ‘crushing’ of the testes and ‘hacking’ of the penis of a *Gandharva*, a *kimīdin* or any other supernatural being, the verb forms derived from the root *√bhid-* are the most frequently employed whereas those from *√han-*, *√pīd-*, *√chid-*, *√mrd-* and *√śr-* are not as frequent as the former.⁷¹ As regards the person deictic finite verbs, the most commonly seen are the first person (often present tense)⁷² indicatives (e.g. *chinadmi*, *bhinadmi*) and the second and third person imperatives (e.g. *chindhi*,⁷³ *bhinattu*⁷⁴). The root *√bhid-* denotes a wide range of meaning such as ‘to split, cleave, rend asunder, shatter and ‘to destroy’, among which the last needs to be regarded, in this context, in the sense ‘to demasculinise’ by means of removing both the penis and the testicles of a male criminal.⁷⁵ Further, ‘*bhinadmi*’ has been exerted in some places⁷⁶ (a) as denotative of both ways of punishment, i.e. hacking of the penis and crushing of the testicles, which occur in the same hemistich of spells, while in some others⁷⁷ in separate hemistiches, (b) individually signifying each activity. It is observed that the first person indicative *bhinadmi* applies to the meaning ‘crushing of the testes’ only once⁷⁸ in the AVŚ while the third person imperative *bhinattu* is oftener found in that sense. This may inspire further research on several facets of the matter in question. Why does the exorcist more frequently desire to have another force, mostly *Indra*,⁷⁹ crush the criminal’s testes whereas he himself is inclined to destroy the penis? However, *bhinadmi* is found lavishly employed in another context⁸⁰ where the practitioner swears again to destroy several body parts of a demonic spirit (*yātudhāna*) such as its

⁶²Cf. Third-gender (*trītyaprakṛti*) people even in present India who are, in most cases, not discriminated on their gender identity but revered instead. Eunuch in ancient western cultures can closely be identified with *klība* in Indic contexts but unlike the latter, the former was not considered effeminate but physically stronger than a normal man. See Taylor (2000:38).

⁶³ Cf. NS. 12.13, 17: *śālīna* who is excessively inhibited even to approach a woman but not necessarily impotent. Cf. MBh. 9.4.25: ‘*nāyaṃ klībayitum kālah*’, *Arjuna*’s hesitation to get to the battlefield reproached as a trait of a *klība*. Shulman (2002:65), Doniger (1999:279-280), Pattanaik (2002:98).

⁶⁴ SS. 3.2.38-45; CS. 4.2.17

⁶⁵ NS. 12.8-18: 14-18. As regards female eunuchs such as *nariṣaṇḍha* (SS. 3.2.43, CS. 4.2.18) whose womanhood is completely destroyed, whether they become as such by castration remains uncertain. Kuiper (1997:57).

⁶⁶ Cf. Pokorny (2007:3233): **uehd-*→ Skt. *√vadh-*→*vadhri-*: *verschnitten*/ with crushed (*zerstoßen*) testicles, Gk. ἐπίς τομίας, κριός. Cf. Stankiewicz (1986:445) suggesting Gk. ἰθίς.

⁶⁷ RV. 1.117.24; 5.78.5-6; 7.18.9; 8.46.30; 10.39.9; 10.69.2,10,12; 10.102.12 etc. Cf. RV. 1.32.7 for *Vṛtra* being called a *vadhri*.

⁶⁸ AVP. 1.68.4; 3.7.3-4; 4.17.4; 5.8.7; 9.7.3; 11.1.4; 15.12.7 etc.; AVŚ.3.9.2-3; 4.6.7-8; 5.20.2; 6.138.3; 16.6.11 etc.

⁶⁹ AVŚ.3.9.2; AVP. 3.7.3; 13.3.4: ‘*muṣkābarho gavām iva*’ (*muṣkābarha*; lit. one who puts the testicles outside). Cf. RV.10.69.10-12; AVŚ.4.29.4; MS. 4.14.7: *vadhryaśva* (one who castrates horses).

⁷⁰ Cf. *andīra* (one with the testes), a vernacular term referring to a ‘full man’, may well be in the sense ‘one who is physically and psychologically endowed with everything deemed required to be a man’. MWSED. 12. Col. 1.

⁷¹ Cf. VS: 6.14, ŚB. 3.8.2.6: ‘*meḍhram te śundhāmi*’ [I shall remove your penis], AVŚ. 6.14.2: ‘*kṣīnomi muṣkaram yathā*’ (as if I destroy one with the testicles) and AVŚ. 20.136.2: ‘*muṣkāv upāvadhū*’.

⁷² Cf. AVŚ. 6.138.3: ‘*klībam tvākaram*’ with thematic aorist ‘*akaram*’ rarely as a special usage. The practitioner obviously convinces himself of the destruction of the victim’s manhood as if ‘already done’ probably in order to fortify the self-confidence. Also consider the vocatives employed here to achieve the very goal.

⁷³ AVŚ.7. 113.1.

⁷⁴ AVP.1.68.3; 12.7.9; AVŚ.6.138.2; Cf. the imperative *kr̥dhi* along with accusatives; AVŚ. 6.138.1,2.

⁷⁵ Etymologically **kes-*→ Gk. κεύζω, Lat. *casto*-→ Castration; Cf. Skt. *√śas-*; Pokorny (2007:1717).

⁷⁶ AVP.12.7.9: ‘*bhinattu muṣkāv api yātu śepah*’, AVŚ.4.37.7 (with the exception *śepah*, with unaspirated *-pa-*). Cf. Kulikov (2001:500): the ambiguity of the meaning is caused by the variants ‘*api yāmi/ dyāmi*’ in AVŚ. 4.37.7.

⁷⁷ AVŚ.1.3.7; 6.138.5, AVP. 1.4.4; 1.68.1; 15.18.1: (I shall destroy the penis).

⁷⁸ AVŚ. 4.37.7.

⁷⁹ AVŚ.8.6.13; AVP. 1.68.3.

⁸⁰ Cf. AVŚ. 2.84. Also Cf. AVŚ. 1.11.5: ‘*vi te bhinadmi takarīm*’ where *vibhinadmi* falls in the euphemistic sense ‘I would open up your pudenda’ so that the pregnant woman could deliver the child more easily. TS. 3.3.10.1; 4.1.2; KS.13.9, 10; AŚS. 9.19.3: *takarī/ tagarī-* which etymologically means ‘leg/ thigh’ may probably be from a Munda source according to Kuiper (1997:355) and Zysk (1985:195).

head, heart, jaws, and the neck but, interestingly, not the genitals. This is perhaps because that type of the supernaturalis more obviously known for their consumption of human flesh and blood rather than for committing sex crimes.

As regards the poetic merits of the spells examined, there are nicely delineated imageries of the appearance of the evil spirits, their behaviour, and the practitioner's emotional fortitude to destroy them.⁸¹ A demonic spirit whose physique is an imagery of the penis, for instance, sheds light on looking at such spells from a fresh perspective. It is AVŚ. 8. 6.5 where the penis is depicted as an *Asura* black in colour, hairy, stiff and with a snout.⁸² Similarly, the rhetorical usage of the terms that describe the action of destroying the genitals of sex criminals demonstrates the semantic conventions of the Atharvavedic time. For example, *śara* and *naḍa/ naḷa* (viz. reed, *Arundo Tibialis* or *Karka*) serve as euphemistic similes and metaphors for the penis in certain healing spells⁸³ but in a dysphemistic sense in some threatening spells.⁸⁴ As regards the simile of reeds in the latter category, the practice of women who split reeds using a pounding stone⁸⁵ for the purpose of plaiting carpets is brought into comparison with exorcists' splitting of the penis of the lecherous. Notable here is that the simplicity of and the carefree attitude towards the women's activity have been made well applicable to the determined goal of the spell practitioner to smite the penis mercilessly and effortlessly. Further, the mention of 'women' in the activity also plays here a significant metaphoric role by connoting two pieces of information; (a) destroying the criminal's genitals is so effortless that it does not need any masculine power or involvement and (b) even women generally considered "weaker vessels" in ancient Indic contexts could do it. On top of that, we should not ignore that this imprecation is made by a cheated 'woman' as a result of which the content looks reasonably unpretentious.

Moreover, the terms *opaśin*⁸⁶ (pillow-sitter), *tirīṭin*⁸⁷ and *kurīrin*⁸⁸ (one with a women's hairstyle) add much more to

⁸¹ Some of them have already been discussed in the foregoing sections.

⁸² *yaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ keśyasura stambaja uta tuṅḍikaḥ*. Regarding *stambaja* here, with unspirated *-ba-*, it may mean 'born in a bush or tuft' [Cf. Orlandi (1992:173): '*nato in un ciuffo*'] though *stambaja* seems more appropriate. Griffiths (1895-6) accepts the possibility of the both; Cf. Abhimanyu (1962:404); MWSED. 1257. Col. 3: *stamba* may be a phonetic variation of '*stambha*'. Cf. AVŚ. 6.72.1: for the black (*asita*) snake metaphor.

⁸³ AVŚ. 1.3.1-5.

⁸⁴ AVŚ. 6.138.5; Cf. AVŚ. 4.19.1 '*prajāṃ naḍam ivā chindhi vārṣikam*'.

⁸⁵ The tools for crushing the genitals appear to have often been (grinding) stones (AVŚ. 6.138.2, 5) and wooden wedges (AVŚ. 6.138.4).

⁸⁶ RV.1.173.6; 8.14.5; 9.71.1; 10.85.8 and AVŚ. 6.138.1,2; 9.3.8, PB. 4.1.1; VS.11.56; TS. 4.4.5.3; MS. 2.7.5.

Opāśa is an ambiguous term even to Sāyana. It is not certain whether *opāśa* is either an ornament or a style used for dressing the hair or both. Griffiths's (1895-6) translation of it in AVŚ. 9.3.8 as 'diadem', in AVŚ. 14.1.8 9 as 'cross-bars of the pole', and in AVŚ. 6. 138.1-2 as 'horn of hair' are also mutually inconsistent. MWSED. 235. Col. 3: 'cushion/ pillow' looks more logical to me because '*opāśin*' then sounds like 'pillow-sitter', viz. one who invariably prefers cozy sitting. Cf. Macdonell & Keith (1912:124-125) for different views.

⁸⁷ AVŚ. 8.6.7: '*klībarūpāms tirīṭinaḥ*'. Cf. Chakraborty (1977:155).

the revilement against the incriminated spirits who would lose their manhood. Irrespective of the uncertainties of the precise meaning of such terms, it can be established with more certainty that they stand for deriding the to-be-transvestites thenceforth for, with their lost manhood, any attempt of the *Gandharvas* and such others to flaunt as 'manly' with the help of masculine attire or behaviour would be ridiculous. Given that line of thought, the most corresponding 'masculine counterpart' of such feminine ornamentation seems to be the codpiece from the west. It is clear from Shakespearean and the contemporary literature that the codpieces were worn to highlight one's manhood and to disguise one's womanhood because of their being considered as the hallmark of masculinity at that time. It would, therefore, be logical to assume that the terms *kurīra*, *kumba*⁸⁹ or *tirīṭa* in the Vedic literature were employed in a similar sense. They must have been the most obvious parts of one's attire to reveal 'her' womanhood though physically 'she' might also be a gelded man or an inborn eunuch.

VI. CONCLUSION

The above account is not pertinent only to the threatening spells directed to the *Gandharvas* but to the imprecations on such other demonic spirits and treacherous sex criminals from the mortal world in the Vedic society. As stated already, the intention of the spell practitioner was, primarily and largely, to shatter the pride and dominance of the supernatural in the most scurrilous way he could, which is, though via his mantric prowess, to emasculate them. Further, although the threatening spells on the evil spirits outnumber those on human criminals, with what the practitioner penalises all does not vary in terms of its content because it echoes what is commonly applied to the culprits of sexual harassments and adultery, be they supernatural or mortal.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
ĀDS	Āpastambha Dharmasūtra
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
ANA	Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā
ĀŚS	Āpastambha Śrautasūtra
AV	Atharvaveda

⁸⁸ AVŚ. 5.31.2: Cf. Kuiper (1997:355): a hairnet worn by women and eunuchs. Sāyana on this spell provides '*keśagāḷam... kurīrāḥ keśāḥ tadvantaṃ kuru*'. Macdonell & Keith (1912:163-164) raises doubts about the meaning and usage of the word as suggested by H. Zimmer and K. Geldner in particular. Cf. Singh (1997:71. fn. 9).

⁸⁹ AVŚ. 6.138.3.

Ave	Avesta
AVP	Atharvaveda Paippalāda
AVŚ	Atharvaveda Śaunakīya
BhP	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
BŚS	Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra
CS	Carakasamhitā
DhA	Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
HGS	Hiranyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
KGS	Kāṭhaka Gṛhyasūtra
KM	Kārttikeya Māhātmya
KS	Kāṭhaka Samhitā
KSA	Kāṭhaka Samhitā Aśvamedhagrantha
MBh	Mahābhārata
MGS	Mānava Gṛhyasūtra
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
MP	Milindapañña
MS	Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā
MSmṛ	Manusmṛti
MWSED	Monier Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary
NS	Nāradaśmṛti
PB	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
PP	Padmapurāṇa
RV	R̥gveda
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
ṢaḍB	Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
SS	Suśruta Samhitā
TĀ	Taittirīya Āraṇyaka
TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TS	Taittirīya Samhitā
US	Uṇādisūtra
VS	Vājasaneyi Samhitā
Vsm	Visuddhimagga

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