PURĀṆIC STUDIES

Proceedings of the Purāṇa Section of the 17th World Sanskrit Conference , July 9-13, 2018

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
VANCOUVER, CANADA

THE 17TH WORLD SANSKRIT CONFERENCE

WSC

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

VANCOUVER, CANADA • JULY 9-13, 2018

EDITED BY
RAJ BALKARAN AND
MCCOMAS TAYLOR

All papers in this collection have been peer reviewed.

वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SANSKRIT STUDIES
अन्ताराष्ट्रियसंस्कृताध्ययनसमवायः

Table of Contents

Preface

Raj Balkaran and McComas Taylor

The last meeting of the World Sanskrit Conference (Bangkok, 2015) marked the first such conference at which there was a section solely dedicated to papers on the purāṇas. Prior to this, purāṇa papers were found in the Epics section, if anywhere at all. Clearly, the tides are turning with respect to purāṇic studies, evidenced by the even more robust turn out in the purāṇa panels in Vancouver in 2018.

Befitting all things Indic, we commence our collected volume with a paper on Gaṇeśa, lord of auspicious beginnings. Les Morgan's paper closely examines the structure of the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma found in the Gaṇeśa Purāṇa. He shows that the selection and arrangement of names in some sections of the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma was based on a formal meditation that included visualization of a *yantra*. His work reveals parallels to other Mahāgaṇapati worship sources, including the text of Jagannātha Bālakṛṣṇa Śrutapeṭava (Umānanda-nātha) of 1745 CE. He concludes that the Nityotsava's Mahāgaṇapati *pūjā* and the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma emerge from a shared ritual tradition dedicated to Mahāgaṇapati ('The Great Gaṇapati'), a tantric form of Gaṇeśa who is the focus of distinct religious practices.

Tying into the theme of ritual practice, we proceed to Mrunal Patki's paper on the use of *maṇis*, protective amulets ritually prepared and tied on the body to repel evil energies, bring luck and cure diseases. This study probes a chapter of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa that is related to this practice wherein the sage Puṣkara instructs Rāma on the Atharva Vedic incantations, materials and rituals employed for producing and properly deploying these protective amulets.

Madhavi Narsalay looks to the role of sacred geography in the development of sectarian consciousness. She examines the 1300–1350 CE text Karavīra Māhātmya, a *sthala-māhātyma* from the Padma Purāṇa. The text celebrates the sacred geography surrounding the Mahālakṣmī temple of Kolhapur, Maharashtra (also known as Karavīra). The Karavīra Māhātmya encapsulates the religious change taking place in Maharashtra in the 13th–14th CE, with the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in the region. Narsalay traces Śākta remnants in the text (unsurprising given the site's inclusion among India's *śaktipīṭhas*), now a predominantly Vaiṣṇava text.

Sucharita Adluri shows the dynamism innate to the purāṇic tradition in her study of philosophical commentarial traditions engaging the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. She compares Viṣṇucitta's 12th CE Viśiṣṭādvaita commentary, Viṣṇucittīya, to Śrīdhara's 13th–14th CE Advaita Vedānta commentary, Ātmaprakāśa, to show the extent to which the characterizations we see in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa undergo various permutations in the hands of these two exegetes.

We then turn to an avatar of Viṣṇu, as Christopher Austin examines the Kṛṣṇa-centric purāṇas: the Viṣṇu (ca 5th century CE), Bhāgavata (ca 9th century CE) and Brahmavaivarta (ca 15th century CE) to examine the significance of Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna. Austin shows the significance of three facets of Pradyumna's identity—as Kāmadeva, as *māyin* or controller of illusory powers, and as a replica or double of his father Kṛṣṇa—to the evolving Kārṣṇa bhakti cult.

This rich array of papers represents not only the diverse methods used to broach the purāṇas, but also the colossal reach of the purāṇas spanning across sociological, mythological, theological, historical, philosophical, geographical and ritual spheres of Indian religious life and culture.

The purāṇas themselves betray an acute awareness of their own dynamism, i.e., their penchant to respond to religious change across time. Apropos of their object study, the theoretical and methodological approaches to this very important genre showcased in this volume bespeak an evolution in Indological scholarship. It seems we have officially moved away from the stringent historicism that has dominated the field thus far. This volume commemorates this important rite of passage: it is a testament of the disintegration of that dominion in favour of receiving the purāṇas in a manner befitting their position as the dynamic life-blood of Indian tradition itself.

Structural Analysis of the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma as Found in the Gaṇeśa Purāṇa

With the Khadyota Commentary by Bhāskararāya

Les Morgan

lesmorgan.gh@gmail.com
https://amazon.com/author/lesmorgan

Abstract

Close examination of the structure of the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma (GSN) as found in the *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa* I.46 shows clear parallels to other sources for the worship of Mahāgaṇapati, including the *Nityotsava* (N), a text written in 1745 CE by Jagannātha Bālakṛṣṇa Śrutapeṭava (Umānandanātha). Mahāgaṇapati ('The Great Gaṇapati') is a Tantric form of Gaṇeśa that is the focus of distinct worship practices. This paper explains the organization of the GSN, with focus on passages that suggest the selection and arrangement of names in some sections was based on a specific *pūjā* or formal meditation that included visualization of a *yantra*. My approach to the topic is based on study of Bhāskararāya's *Khadyota* commentary on the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma, which has not been translated into English previously. The *Khadyota* commentary is of value to help put the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma into perspective as reflecting an established ritual tradition. My conclusion is that some ritual aspects of the *Nityotsava's* Mahāgaṇapati *pūjā* closely parallel portions of the GSN, with both texts reflecting a shared tradition. This paper also includes a summary of the organizational structure of the thousand names in the GSN.

Copyright and License

Acknowledgements

---

[1] Sharma, Ram Karan, ed. 1993. *The Gaṇeśa Purāṇa*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

[2] Sharma, Ram Karan. 1996. *Eight Collections of Hymns Containing One Thousand and Eight Names of Śiva*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

[3] Bailey, Greg. 1995. *Gaṇeśapurāṇa, Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa: Translation, Notes and Index*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

About the GSN

A *stotra* is a hymn of praise. A *sahasranāma stotra* is a hymn of praise in which a deity is referred to by a thousand or so different names. *Sahasra* means a thousand, or more generally, a very large number, but some works may contain only a few hundred names. The GSN contains exactly one thousand names. The word *sahasranāman*, as an adjective, means 'thousand-named.' Hindu scriptures often use terms like thousand-eyed, thousand-armed, or thousand-faced to express the concept of the limitless dimension of divinity. A *sahasranāma* provides an encyclopedic guide to the attributes and mythology surrounding a deity. The stories behind the names summarize powers, events and relationships. Details of the names and epithets included are useful for estimating dates of composition and placement of a text within a larger tradition. Both the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma and the *Khadyota* commentary by Bhāskararāya are metrical works composed in the *anuṣṭubh* class of meters.[4] *Anuṣṭubh* is a very common Sanskrit meter, used extensively in the epics, the Purāṇas, and other types of literature.

The GSN is a celebration of Gaṇeśa in all his aspects. The appearance of a *sahasranāma* dedicated to Gaṇeśa is a sign of his rise to prominence as a major divinity. Stories about Gaṇeśa appear in the early purāṇas (c. 300–500 CE) including the *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Matsya*, the Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa of the *Padma* and the *Harivaṃśa*. The middle and later purāṇas (c. 500–1300 CE) give more details about him, including the *Devī*, *Liṅga*, *Śiva*, *Skanda*, *Vāmana*, and *Varāha Purāṇas*. The Gāṇapatya sect produced two late Purāṇas (c. 1300–1600 CE) of their own, the *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa* and the *Mudgala Purāṇa*. These two Purāṇas include materials not found in the earlier sources and are considered authoritative by devotees of Gaṇeśa.[5] There are two different major versions of the GSN, with subvariants of each version. I will describe these two major types as the *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa* version and the alliterative version.

Gaṇeśa Purāṇa version

A Gaṇeśa *sahasranāmastotra* appears in chapter I.46 of the GP. No critical edition of the GP has been published, and different editions have variations in the

---

[4] For information on meters see Morgan, Les. 2011. *Croaking Frogs: A Guide to Sanskrit Metrics and Figures of Speech*. Pacifica: Mahodara Press.

[5] References to Gaṇeśa in the purāṇas are discussed in Krishan, Yuvraj. 1999. *Gaṇeśa: Unravelling an Enigma*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Pp. 33-70.

names used in that *sahasranāmastotra*. The versions I have seen are very similar, so this group of variants can collectively be called the 'GP' version. Bhāska-rarāya's *Khadyota* commentary (GSN-B) is based on a variant of the GP version of that *stotra*.

As my first primary source for the GP version I used the 1993 full-length reprint edition of the 1892 edition of the GP, which I cite as GP-1993.[6] It provides the full text of the GP in Devanāgarī script. Dr. Ram Karan Sharma, the editor of that edition, recalls that in the production of the GP-1993 edition he was not asked to edit the text, resulting in many typographical errors, misprints and grammatical impossibilities.[7] In 2004 and 2005 Dr. Sharma reviewed the text of GP1993 I.46 for errors and suggested many corrections for misprints. My second primary source for the GP version of the GSN is within Bhāskararāya's *Khadyota* commentary, which I cite as GSN-B.

Alliterative version

Apart from the GP version there is a completely different alliterative version in which all names begin with the letter *g* (ग). The names and structure bear no resemblance to the GP GSN. I interviewed the priests at the Gaṇeśa temples in Nashville, Tennessee, and South Jordan, Utah, and in both cases the alliterative version was the one they used for regular chanting at worship services. The priest at the Nashville temple said that the alliterative version was more popular than the GP version because worshippers felt that the use of the letter *g* for all names made it particularly auspicious. The priests did not know the source for the text. They kindly provided me with photocopies of the handwritten versions that they used for chanting. The alliterative version is available in print as a de-votional prayer booklet in Sanskrit that is sold in Hindu bookstores[8] and as a devotional audio CD chanted by Anuradha Paudwal.[9] A slightly modified version of this alliterative GSN was published with an English translation by Sadguru

---

[6] Sharma, Ram Karan (ed.) 1993. *The Gaṇeśa Purāṇa*, Nag Publishers, Delhi. Cited herein as GP-1993.

[7] Ram Karan Sharma, personal communication, 15 March 2004. Also see the 'Introduc-tion' to that volume dated Feb. 9, 1993, by Ram Karan Sharma.

[8] अथ श्री गणेश सहस्र नामावली ॥ प्रकाशक ॥ त्रिवेणी प्रकाशन ॥ माधववाग । सी पी टँक ॥

[9] Audio CD, *Shree Ganapati Sahasranamavali*. Sung by Anuradha Paudwal. Music by Shekhar Sen. Super Cassettes Industries Limited, Plot No. 1, Sector 16-A, Film Centre, NOIDA Distt. Ghaziabad (U. P.).

Sant Keshavadas.[10] There is no citation or bibliography within any of these works identifying the original source of the names appearing in the alliterative GSN. I have not been able to determine an authoritative source for the first appearance of the alliterative version, and I am not aware of any commentary on it.

Bhāskararāya's *Khadyota* Commentary

Bhāskararāya's commentary on the GP version of the GSN has not previously been translated into English.[11] I cite his commentary and the version of the source text used therein as GSN-B. GSN-B contains 607 *Khadyota* commentarial verses and 172 base text (*mūla*) verses. The source text for the *stotra* itself (*mūla*) in GSN-B generally follows GP-1993 but there are many differences in names and the versification differs slightly. I have followed GSN-B when readings differ from GP-1993.

Bhāskararāya titled his commentary *Khadyota* ('Firefly'), playfully alluding to two different meanings of that Sanskrit word. In his opening remarks Bhāskararāya says that some will say that because the commentary is very brief it is inconsequential like a firefly (*khadyota*) but to devotees it will shine like the sun (*khadyota*). The pun in the title is typical of the text, which delights in finding unusual interpretations for seemingly obvious names. The first printed edition of the *Khadyota* was published in 1889 by Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay.[12]

Dr. Ram Karan Sharma and I spent many hours over three years (2004 through 2007) discussing and making sound recordings of the text of the GSN, including Bhāskararāya's *Khadyota* commentary. During 2004 and 2005 we

---

[10] Keshavadas, Sadguru Sant. 1988. *Lord Ganesha*. Oakland: Vishwa Dharma Publications. There is no citation or bibliography within the book showing the source of the names appearing in the alliterative 'G'-based *sahasranāma*. The name list does not correspond to that in GP. The English translation was dictated by Keshavadas to Janaki Nivedita (Joane Franks), who informed me that 'Unfortunately, I don't know his original source, just that it was a Nagari or Kannada text' (personal communication, 23 February 2004).

[11] Martin-Dubost, Paul. 1997. *Gaṇeśa: The Enchanter of the Three Worlds*. Mumbai: Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd. On pp. 286, 334 he refers to this commentary but does not translate it completely. He identifies Bhāskararāya as a '13th century Śākta author from Bijapur' but provides no citation for that date. Bhāskararāya Bhārati was an 18th century scholar.

[12] Brooks, Douglas Renfrew. 1992. *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India*. Albany: State University of New York Press. P. 240, note 112.

worked with the text as given in Dr. Sharma's 1993 edition of the *Gaṇeśa Purāṇa* (GP-1993). In 2006 I obtained a copy of Bhāskararāya's commentary on a variant of the GP version of the GSN (GSN-B).[13] We began an audio recording project in which Dr. Sharma would chant and translate the entire *Khadyota* commentary. Recording of the entire commentary was completed on 16 May 2007, with a final session to chant the *sahasranāma* itself. Some of the audio files of those sessions are now shared with the world via the Internet.[14] Since 2007 I have been developing the materials into book form.[15]

Bhāskararāya Bhārati (b. 1690, d. 1785; fl. 1728–1750 CE), also known as Bhāsurānandanātha, was a celebrated 18th-century Ṛg Vedic brahmin and Śākta adept.[16] He was a great scholar who wrote over forty works. He was born in Bhaga in Maharashtra. He travelled widely before settling in Tamil Nadu under the patronage of the Maratha scholar-king Serfoji of Tañjavūr. Bhāskararāya revived the worship of Gaṇeśa in Maharashtra and restored the eight great Gaṇeśa places of pilgrimage (*kṣetras*) there. His first major work was the well-known *Saubhāgyabhāskara* commentary on the Lalitā Sahasranāma, completed in 1728.[17] The *Khadyota* commentary, which has numerous references that reflect Bhāskararāya's Śākta background, is part of a larger work he wrote on Tantric methods of worship of Gaṇeśa. The fact that there was a distinct Tantric tradition relating to Gaṇeśa is independently documented in the *Śaktisaṅgamatantra*, which refers to a Tantric sect of Gāṇapatyas, and in the *Sammoha* or *Sammohanatantra* which claims the existence of 122 Gāṇapatya Tantras.[18]

---

[13] Khiste, Baṭukanātha Śāstrī (ed) 1991. *Gaṇeśasahasranāmastotram: mūla evaṃ śrībhāskararāyakṛta 'khadyota' vārtika sahita*, Prācya Prakāśana, Vārāṇasī. Includes the full source text and the commentary by Bhāskararāya in Sanskrit. I cite this edition as GSN-B.

[14] URL verified 4 July 2018: http://www.mywhatever.com/sanskrit.

[15] Now planned for publication in 2019 as *The Thousand Names of Gaṇeśa: The Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma with Bhāskararāya's Khadyota Commentary*.

[16] Some details of Bhāskararāya's biography are drawn *passim* from Brooks, Douglas Renfrew. 1990. *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; and from Bhattacharyya, N. N. 1999. *History of the Tantric Religion*. 2nd revised edition. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

[17] Sastry, R. Ananthakrishna. 1970 (pp. vi-vii). *Lalitā-Sahasranāma with Bhāskararāya's Commentary*. 1st Indian reprint edition, 1986. Delhi: Gian Publishing House. For completion date of 1728, see Brooks 1990, p. 37.

[18] Bhattacharyya 1999, p. 51.

One of Bhāskararāya's students, Jagannātha Paṇḍita (Umānandanātha), summed up his master's teachings in the *Nityotsava*, a Sanskrit work written in 1745 CE. The *Nityotsava* details various rituals and mantras used in the Śrīvidyā school of Tantric worship.[19] Chapter Two of the *Nityotsava* covers the worship of Mahāgaṇapati ('The Great Gaṇapati', a Tantric form) and his *śakti*.[20] Enough details of worship as given in the *Nityotsava* are alluded to in some names of GSN-B to suggest that the *sahasranāma* was composed within the Mahāgaṇapati sect.

Mahāgaṇapati in the GSN

The Gaṇapati tradition includes several tantric branches.[21] Major tantric forms of Gaṇeśa that are explicitly mentioned in the GSN include Mahāgaṇapati and Ucchiṣṭagaṇapati.[22] The central importance of Mahāgaṇapati in the GSN is shown by the following key details:

1. The *prārambha*[23] and *viniyoga*[24] for the GSN refer to Mahāgaṇapati as the deity who revealed the thousand names.[25]

---

[19] Bhattacharyya 1999, p. 81.

[20] For a detailed study of the worship of Mahāgaṇapati as given in the *Nityotsava* see Bühnemann, Gudrun. 2003. *The Worship of Mahāgaṇapati According to the Nityotsava*. 1st Indian edition. Delhi: Kant Publications.

[21] For a detailed review of tantric forms of Gaṇeśa see Bühnemann, Gudrun. 2008. *Tantric Forms of Gaṇeśa: According to the Vidyārṇavatantra*. Reissue of 1989 edition. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld Ltd.

[22] Ucchiṣṭagaṇeśa is mentioned in GSN-B v. 67.

[23] *manasā sa vinirdhāya tatas tadvighnakāraṇam ।*
***mahāgaṇapatiṃ** bhaktyā samabhyarcya yathāvidhi ॥ GSN-B 1.46.3 ॥*
vighnapraśamanopāyamapṛcchadaparājitaḥ ।
*santuṣṭaḥ pūjayā śambhor **mahāgaṇapatiḥ** svayam ॥ GSN-B 1.46.4 ॥*
sarvavighnaikaharaṇaṃ sarvakāmaphalapradam ।
tatas tasmai svakaṃ nāmnāṃ sahasram idam abravīt ॥ GSN-B 1.46.5 ॥
After ascertaining mentally that cause of the obstacles, and worshipping the Great Gaṇapati (Mahāgaṇapati) with devotion according to the prescribed procedure… ॥ 1.46.3 GSN-B ॥
Śiva asked Gaṇeśa the way to allay all the obstacles. The Great Gaṇapati (Mahāgaṇapati) of his own accord was completely satisfied by Śambhu's worship. ॥ 1.46.4 GSN-B ॥
Gaṇeśa then imparted his own thousand names that relieve all obstacles and grant the fulfillment of all wishes. ॥ 1.46.5 GSN-B ॥

2. Mahāgaṇapatiḥ is included as name 37 of the GSN (GSN-B verse 10), and is included in a list of 21 names that are of special importance.[26] Mahāgaṇapati is explicitly mentioned in verse 167a of the GSN-B commentary on verse 48.

3. Names 177-278 correspond to a *dhyāna* for Mahāgaṇapati that is found in other sources. The ten attributes of the ten-armed Mahāgaṇapati are described in names 255-264 (GSN-B verses 46b-47). His eleventh attribute, a pot of gems held in the trunk, is mentioned in name 277 (GSN-B verse 50).

4. Names 280-323 correspond to a *yantra* for Mahāgaṇapati that is found in other sources. The inclusion of this *yantra* is not overtly explained in the text of GSN-B, but those familiar with the tradition could have been expected to recognize it. Recitation of the names in this series would constitute mental construction of the *yantra* that was used in physical rituals. For someone not aware of the tradition, the *dhyāna* and *yantra* are hidden features embedded within the *sahasranāma*.

The worshippers of Mahāgaṇapati are one of the six sects of Gāṇapatyas described in the *Śaṅkaravijaya* (14th c. CE), where his meditation is given as follows:

> One should meditate on the remover of obstacles, who holds in the raised lotuses of (his) hands: the fruit of the citron tree, a mace, bow of sugarcane, trident, discus, conch/lotus, noose, water-lily, tip of the rice(-shoot), (and) his own tusk, (and in his trunk) a vessel with jewels, who is embraced by Vallabhā, who holds a lotus in her hand (and) who has shining ornaments, (Gaṇapati), who effects the creation, mainte-

---

[24] GP-1993 1.46.6 version: *asya śrīmadgaṇeśadivyasahasranāmāmṛta-stotramālā-mahāmaṃtrasya ǀ śrī**mahāgaṇapatir** ṛṣiḥ.*

GSN-B version: *asya stotrasya **mahāgaṇapatir** eva ǀ mantradraṣṭṛtvād ṛṣiḥ.* The equivalent variant of verse 1.46.6 of GP 1993 appears in GSN-B, p.5, but without any verse number.

[25] GSN-B and GP-1993 give two variants of book 1, chapter 46, of the *Ganeśa Purāṇa* and differ in their organization of materials that precede the actual names. Some of these materials appear in only one or the other of the two sources, while others appear in both, but with notable differences.

[26] GP-1993 1.46.204-206a; GSN-B 1.46.211-213a.

nance, and destruction of the universe, (and) who grants (all) desired objects.[27]

The *Śāradā-Tilaka* (ŚT) Tantra 13:31-38 provides a *dhyāna śloka* for this ten-armed form. John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) translates the passage as follows:

> His face is that of the great elephant with the moon on it. He is red and has three eyes. He is held in loving embrace by his beloved who is seated in his lap and has a lotus in her hand. In each of his ten hands he is holding a pomegranate, a mace, a bow, a trident, a discus, a lotus, a noose, a red water-lily, a sheaf of paddy and his own tusk. He is holding a jewelled jar in his trunk. By the flapping of his ears he is driving away the bees attracted to his temples by the fluid exuding therefrom, and he is scattering gems from out of the jar held in his trunk. He is wearing a ruby-studded crown and is adorned with gems.[28]

Rao[29] gives a variant translation, with the hands bearing citrus fruit, mace, bow, discus, rosary, arrow, noose, blue lotus, tusk, and pot of jewels. Rao does not mention an attribute held by the trunk that is gesturing toward the *śakti* seated on his thigh.

Figure 1 is a reproduction of Mahāgaṇapati's form as depicted in the *Śrītattvanidhi* ('The Illustrious Treasure of Realities'), an illuminated manuscript prepared by scholars and artists at the court of the King of Mysore, Kṛṣṇa Rāja Woḍeyar IV (1794–1869), in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[30]

---

[27] Bühnemann 2003, pp. xx-xxi.

[28] Woodroffe, John (Arthur Avalon), ed. 1933. *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantram*. 1st edition, reprint, 2001. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Pp. xxxviii cites *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantra* 13:31-38. He gives this verse on p. 225:

बीजापूरगदाधनुस्त्रिशिखयुक्कक्राझपाशोत्पलव्रीह्यग्रस्वविषाणरत्नकलशान् हस्तैर्वहन्तं ॥ ३५ ॥

[29] Rao 2005, p. 77, citing commentary on *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantra* 13:70. Rao, S. K. Ramachandra. 2005. *The Compendium on Gaṇeśa.* 2nd revised & enlarged edition. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

[30] Martin-Dubost 1997, pp. 224-228. Thapan, Anita Raina. 1997. *Understanding Gaṇapati: Insights into the Dynamics of a Cult.* New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 169, 194.

Figure 1: Mahāgaṇapati, depicted with ten arms and accompanied by a śakti.[31]

Gudrun Bühnemann has published a detailed review of the iconography associated with Mahāgaṇapati that includes discussion of variant forms drawn from multiple ritual sources.[32] Table 1 compares the attributes of Mahāgaṇapati according to the *Nityotsava* with corresponding names in the GSN, along with Bhāskararāya's list of these attributes in his *Khadyota* commentary verse 164:

Table 1: Mahāgaṇapati attributes in the Nityotsava and the Khadyota commentary.

Nityotsava attributes[33]	Khadyota attributes[34]	GSN-B Name
1. A citron fruit (*mātuluṅga* or *bījāpūra*)	मातुलिङ्गं	255. Bījāpūrī 'Holding a citron fruit'
2. Mace (*gada*)	गद	256. Gadādharaḥ 'Wielding a mace'

---

[31] Public domain image. URL verified 27 June 2018:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahaganapati#/media/File:Mahaganpati.jpg.

[32] Bühnemann 2003 and Bühnemann 2008.

[33] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 112-113.

[34] मातुलिङ्गं गदेक्षूत्थं धनुः शूलं सुदर्शनम् । शङ्खपाशोत्पलव्रीहिकणिशानि रदार्धकम् ॥ *Khadyota* १६४ ॥

Nityotsava attributes[33]	Khadyota attributes[34]	GSN-B Name
3. Bow of sugarcane (*ikṣucāpa*)	इक्षूत्थं धनुः	257. Ikṣucāpadharaḥ 'Bearing a sugarcane bow'
4. Trident (*śūlam*)	शूलं	258. Śūlī 'Armed with a trident'
5. Conch (*śaṅkha*). Variant: lotus (*saroja*)[35]	शङ्खं	260. Sarojabhṛt 'Holding a lotus' 272. Kambudharaḥ 'Bearing a conch shell'
6. Discus (*cakra*)	सुदर्शनम्	259. Cakrapāṇiḥ 'Bearing a discus'
7. Noose (*pāśa*)	पाश	261. Pāśī 'Holding a noose'
8. Water-lily (*utpala*)	उत्पल	262. Dhṛtotpalaḥ 'Bearing a blue lotus'
9. Rice-shoot (*śālimañjarī*)	व्रीहिकणिशानि	263. Śālimañjarībhṛt 'Holding rice shoots'
10. His own broken tusk (*svadanta*)	रदार्धकम्	264. Svadantabhṛt 'Holding his own [broken] tusk'
11. In his trunk, a vessel filled with jewels		271. Pūrṇapātrī 'Whose pot of blessings is full' 277. Puṣkarasthasvarṇaghaṭīpūrṇaratnābhivarṣakaḥ 'Showering gems from a brimming golden pot at the tip of his trunk'
He bears the crescent moon on his head		107. Bhālacandraḥ 'Having the moon on his forehead' 105. Khaṇḍendukṛtaśekharaḥ 'Having the crescent moon as his headdress'
Rut is flowing from his temples		Numerous names in the GSN refer to the state of *mada*. The name in the immediate series that parallels the *Nityotsava* is: 273. Vidhṛtālisamudgakaḥ 'Having attracted a flock of bees' (attracted to his temples by flowing ichor)
His consort Siddha-lakṣmī is seated on his left thigh		280. Mahālakṣmīpriyatamaḥ 'Very dear to Mahālakṣmī' 281. Siddhalakṣmīmanoramaḥ 'Who delights the mind of Siddhalakṣmī'

---

[35] Conch is an alternate for lotus as an attribute of Mahāgaṇapati in some sources. Bühnemann 2003, p. xviii, note 18.

There are several types of Gaṇeśa *yantra*. Figure 2 shows the pattern used in the worship of Mahāgaṇapati as given in *Nityotsava* 4.0.15.[36] The *yantra* visualizes Mahāgaṇapati and Siddhalakṣmī located within the central triangle (see name 417. Ekārapīṭhamadhyasthaḥ). The triangle is within a hexagon (see name 870. Ṣaṭkoṇapīṭhaḥ). The hexagon is within an eightfold circular lotus (see name 899. Aṣṭapatrāmbujāsanaḥ). Five sets of deities are placed in these surrounding areas. Figure 3 colorizes the *yantra* to help explain the placement of the surrounding deities.
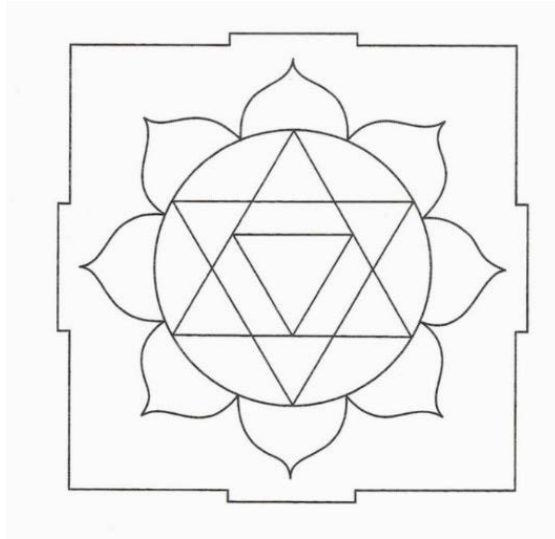
Figure 2: Mahāgaṇapati yantra.

---

[36] Bühnemann, 2003, pp. xviii, xxi. Figure 2 is a simplification of Bühnemann, 2003, plate 33.
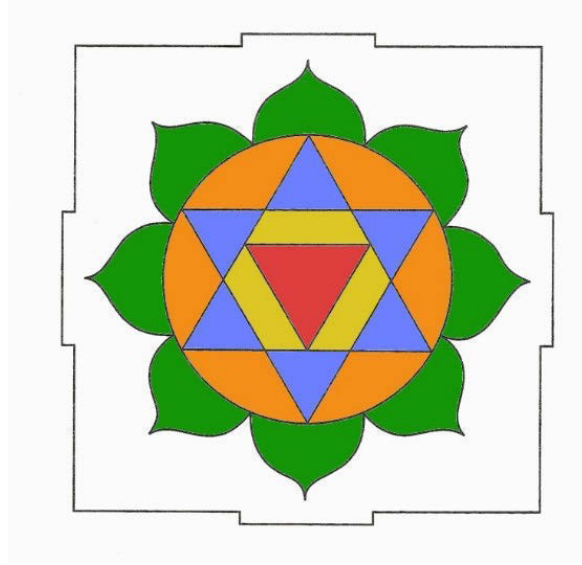
Figure 3: Mahāgaṇapati yantra (colorized).

Correspondences between GSN and ritual sources

Table 2 focuses on names 177-323 where the organization shows close parallels to ritual sources. This is a subset of the more detailed analysis of 1,000 names shown in Table 3. The column for Yantra Points refers to the numbering system used for the Mahāgaṇapati *yantra* published in Bühnemann 2003, plate 33.

Table 2: Structural parallels with Nityotsava and ŚT dhyāna and yantra.

GSN Names	Theme	Parallels	Nityotsava Yantra Points Bühnemann 2003, plate 33
177-180	Meditation on Gaṇeśa within the lotus of the devotee's heart	N 4.0.16	
191-194	Meditation on fabulous island and jewelled setting	ŚT 13.31-34	
380	Sea of sugarcane juice	ŚT 13.31	
195-203	Nine *pīṭhaśaktīs* surrounding the seat	N 4.0.19.2 ŚT 13.7-9	

GSN Names	Theme	Parallels	Nityotsava Yantra Points Bühnemann 2003, plate 33
204-206	Seated upon a lotus of letters (*mātṛkāmbuja*)	N 4.1.6.4 ŚT 13.34	4th enclosure
207-253	Meditation on the divine body		
255-264	Description of 10-armed Mahāgaṇapati	N 4.0.16 ŚT 13.35-38	
265-277	Other attributes, including some of Mahāgaṇapati		
278, 352-667	278: Bhāratī, goddess of Speech 352-667: Names in alphabetical order	N 4.0.14 alphabet *nyāsa*	
280-281	Mahāgaṇapati and Siddhalakṣmī	N 4.0.15	Central pair
282-285	Four pairs of surrounding deities placed to the East, South, North, and West, in the space between the triangle and the hexagon	N 4.1.6.1	1st enclosure, points 1-4
286-297	Six *vighna* pairs located in the hexagon corners	N 4.1.6.2	2nd enclosure, points 5-10
298-303	Six deities of the limbs (*ṣaḍaṅga*) located at the six joints of the hexagon	N. 4.1.6.3	3rd enclosure, points 13-18
304-305	Two lords of treasure with their consorts (associated with the six *vighna* pairs)	N 4.1.6.2 ŚT 13.51	2nd enclosure, points 11-12
306	Reference to all *sadgurus* connects to worship of a lineage of twenty teachers	N 4.1.5	3 parallel lines in space between top of central triangle and top horizontal line of hexagon

GSN Names	Theme	Parallels	Nityotsava Yantra Points Bühnemann 2003, plate 33
307-315	Guardians of the directions, weapons, and references to fierceness	N 4.1.6.5	Line of the square of the eight directions, points 27-34[37]
316-323, 903	Group of eight goddesses that may correspond to the eight mother goddesses (*mātṛkās*) placed on the petals of the surrounding circular lotus. Being surrounded by eight mothers is also mentioned in name 903 (Aṣṭamātṛsamāvṛtaḥ) 'Surrounded by the eight mothers'.	N 4.1.6.4	8 lotus petals, points 19-26

Organization of the GSN-B thousand names

The organizational structure of the GSN-B thousand names is summarized in the following table.

Table 3: Organization of 1,000 names in the Gaṇeśa Sahasranāma (GSN-B variant)

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
1-54	1a-12a	Most commonly used names and familiar associations.
55-60	12b-13a	A group of names based on a set of six *Vināyakas* mentioned in a ritual found in *Mānavagṛhyasūtra* and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (where the multiple *Vināyakas* are merged into one entity, Mahāgaṇapati).
61-72	13a-14a	Epithets on his powerful, imperishable, and pervasive nature.
73-79	14b-15a	Names inspired by the famous Vedic verse that celebrates Brahmaṇaspati as 'sage of sages' (*kaviṃ kavīnām*). Two Vedic *mantras* (*ṚV* 2.23.1 and *Yajur Veda TS* 2.3.143) originally addressed to

---

[37] N 4.1.6.5 has eight guardians of the directions but the GSN lists only four, so GSN numbering of these points would not correspond exactly to Bühnemann 2003, plate 33.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
		Brahmaṇaspati are interpreted in Gāṇapatya tradition as referring to Gaṇeśa.
80-126	15b-23a	General epithets and role as protector of the gods.
127-135	23b-24b	Relationships with Śiva and Pārvatī and his origin.
136-175	25a-31a	Description of the divine body on a universal cosmological scale.
176-180	31b-32b	Names with playful twists on elephant metaphors, including affectionate descriptions of his loving relationship with devotees. He is to be meditated on as residing in the lotus of the devotee's heart, which is playfully visualized as an elephant's pen. The *dhyāna* in *Nityotsava* 4.0.16 also specifies that the devotee is to meditate on Gaṇapati in the lotus of the heart. 176. Jyotirmaṇḍalalāṅgūlaḥ 'Having the stellar sphere as his tail' 177. Hṛdayālānaniścalaḥ 'Tethered at the hitching post of the [devotee's] heart' 178. Hṛtpadmakarṇikāśāliviyatkelisarovaraḥ 'Who resides in the space of the pericarp of the heart-lotus as his splendid sporting lake' 179. Sadbhaktadhyānanigaḍaḥ 'For whom the meditation of his true devotees is his foot-chain' 180. 'Enclosed [Held safe] within the elephant-pen of worship'
181-190	33a-33b	General epithets.
191-194	34a-34b	Traits visualizing his *loka* as a wonderful island in a sea of sugarcane juice and the setting for his throne.[38] This wonderful island is consistent with the *dhyāna* for Mahāgaṇapati in ŚT 13.31-34.[39] This is the beginning of an extended visualization series. 191. Cintāmaṇidvīpapatiḥ 'Lord of the island of the wish-fulfilling gem' 192. Kalpadrumavanālayaḥ 'Dwelling in a forest of wish-fulfilling trees' 193. Ratnamaṇḍapamadhyasthaḥ 'Situated at the center of a jewelled pavillion' 194. Ratnasiṃhāsanāśrayaḥ 'Seated on a jewelled royal throne'

[38] For the sea of sugarcane juice see name #380 (Ikṣusāgaramadhyasthaḥ 'Abiding in the midst of a sea of sugarcane juice', which is consistent with the visualization of his fabulous island as mentioned in ŚT 13.31. Scholars, A Board of, trans. 1988. *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantram*. Reprint edition, 2002. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, p. 145.

[39] *Dhyāna* in ŚT 13.31-38. Woodroffe 1933, p. xxxviii; Scholars 1988, p. 145.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
195-203	35a-37a	The nine *pīṭhaśaktīs* surrounding his throne. The nine are mentioned by name in *Nityotsava* 4.0.19.2[40] and in ŚT 13.7-9.[41] 195. Tīvrāśirodhṛtapadaḥ 'Placing his feet on the head of the goddess Tīvrā' 196. Jvālinīmaulilālitaḥ 'Who playfully puts the flaming goddess Jvālinī upon his head as a shining diadem' 197. Nandānanditapīṭhaśrīḥ 'The splendor of whose seat delights the goddess Nandā' 198. Bhogadābhūṣitāsanaḥ 'Whose seat is adorned with the goddess Bhogadā' 199. Sakāmadāyinīpīṭhaḥ 'Having the goddess Kāmadāyinī as his seat' 200. Sphuradugrāsanāśrayaḥ 'Resting upon the glittering goddess Ugrā as his seat' 201. Tejovatīśiroratnam 'Who has the brilliant goddess Tejovatī as a jewel upon his head' 202. Satyānityāvataṃsitaḥ 'Who eternally has the goddess Satyā as an ornament' 203. Savighnanāśinīpīṭhaḥ 'Having the goddess Vighnanāśinī as his seat'
204-206	37a-37b	Description of him seated upon the lotus of letters, glorified by the abode of the three fires. This corresponds to the placement of eight mother-goddesses in the eight petals of the lotus of the Mahāgaṇapati *yantra* described in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.4, the fourth enclosure of that *yantra*.[42] The lotus of letters (*mātṛkāmbuja*) also appears in ŚT 13.34.[43] In GSN-B, the names of the eight goddesses on the petals of the lotus of letters may be given later in names 316-323. Being surrounded by eight mothers is also mentioned in name 903 (Aṣṭamātṛsamāvṛtaḥ). 204. Sarvaśaktyambujāśrayaḥ 'Seated upon a lotus of all powers' 205. Lipipadmāsanādhāraḥ 'Seated upon the lotus of letters' 206. Vahnidhāmatrayāśrayaḥ 'Seated upon the hearth of the three fires'

---

[40] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 70-71, 117. Bühnemann notes that their names are also found in *Prapañcasāratantra* 17.11, ŚT 13.7-8, *Agni-Purāṇa* 313.1-6, *Nārada-Purāṇa* 68.22, and *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra* 2.7.

[41] ŚT 13.5-26. Woodroffe 1933, pp. xxxviii, ५१९. Scholars 1988, p. 143.

[42] Bühnemann 2003, p. 78.

[43] ŚT 13.34. Woodroffe pp. xxxvii, ५५४. Scholars 1988, p. 145.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
207-247	38a-44b	Description of the divine body, beginning with the feet.
248-253	45a-46b	Conclusion of the meditation on his body. Every epithet here begins with the word *sarva* ('all').
254	46b	254. Śārṅgī 'Armed with Viṣṇu's bow'
255-264	46b-47b	Description of the 10-armed Mahāgaṇapati, a tantric form. The description is consistent with ŚT 13.35-38. His eleventh attribute, a pot of gems held in the trunk, is mentioned in name 277. Mahāgaṇapati is explicitly mentioned in verse 167a of the GSN-B commentary (on verse 48). 255. Bījāpūrī 'Holding a citron fruit' 256. Gadādharaḥ 'Wielding a mace' 257. Ikṣucāpadharaḥ 'Bearing a sugarcane bow' 258. Śūlī 'Armed with a trident' 259. Cakrapāṇiḥ 'Bearing a discus' 260. Sarojabhṛt 'Holding a lotus' 261. Pāśī 'Holding a noose' 262. Dhṛtotpalaḥ 'Bearing a blue lotus' 263. Śālīmañjarībhṛt 'Holding rice shoots' 264. Svadantabhṛt 'Holding his own [broken] tusk'
265-277	48a-50a	Group of thirteen names listing other attributes associated with Gaṇeśa. These include some of the aspects included in the *dhyāna* for Mahāgaṇapati. 271. Pūrṇapātrī 'Whose pot of blessings is full' 272. Kambudharaḥ 'Bearing a conch shell'[44] 273. Vidhṛtālisamudgakaḥ 'Having attracted a flock of bees'[45] 274. Mātuliṅgadharaḥ 'Holding a citron fruit' 277. Puṣkarasthasvarṇaghaṭīpūrṇaratnābhivarṣakaḥ 'Showering gems from a brimming golden pot at the tip of his trunk'. This is the eleventh attribute of Mahāgaṇapati.[46]

---

[44] Conch is an alternate for lotus as an attribute of Mahāgaṇapati in some sources. Bühnemann 2003, p. xviii, note 18.

[45] The detail of bees attracted to the ichor flowing from his temples is noted in ŚT 13.36. Scholars 1988, p. 145.

[46] The attribute is mentioned in ŚT 13.37. Scholars 1988, p. 145.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
278	50b	Reference to Bhāratī (Sarasvatī) as goddess of Speech. In *Nityotsava* 4.0.14 there is a *nyāsa* with the alphabet (*mātṛkānyāsa*) that is followed by meditation on Sarasvatī (Bhāratī), whose body is the alphabet.[47] 278. Bhāratīsundarīnāthaḥ 'Lord of the beautiful Goddess of Speech'
279	50b	279. Vināyakaratipriyaḥ 'Fond of playing with Garuḍa'[48]
280-281	51a	Beginning of *yantra* series, with various deities surrounding Mahāgaṇapati and Mahālakṣmī/Siddhalakṣmī at the center.[49] *Nityotsava* 4.0.15 details a *yantra* for Mahāgaṇapati surrounded by five circles of deities. Mahāgaṇapati and Siddhalakṣmī are within the central triangle (see name 417. Ekārapīṭhamadhyasthaḥ). The triangle is within a hexagon (see name 870. Ṣaṭkoṇapīṭhaḥ). The hexagon is within an eightfold circular lotus (see name 899. Aṣṭapatrāmbujāsanaḥ). 280. Mahālakṣmīpriyatamaḥ 'Very dear to Mahālakṣmī' 281. Siddhalakṣmīmanoramaḥ 'Who delights the mind of Siddha-lakṣmī'

---

[47] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 110-111.

[48] The reason for mention of Garuḍa at this point in the series is not clear to me. Garuḍa is included in a list of the guardians of the directions in *VT* II 669.30-670.9 Bühnemann 2003, p. 122, note 58.

[49] *Nityotsava* specifies Siddhalakṣmī as Mahāgaṇapati's consort at the center, but some texts add Mahālakṣmī and a form of Gaṇapati as a fifth pair in the central grouping of the *yantra* (Bühnemann 2003, p. xviii, note 21). ŚT 13.45 adds Lakṣmī and Gopanāyaka (Woodroffe 1933, p. ५५६).

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
282-285	51b-52a	Four pairs of surrounding deities placed to the East, South, North, and West. These correspond to the first enclosure (*āvaraṇa*) of the *yantra* described in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.1, where four pairs are located in the space between the triangle and the hexagon.[50] 282. Ramārameśapūrvāṅgaḥ (East or upper) 'With Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu as his Eastern aspect' 283. Dakṣiṇomāmaheśvaraḥ (South or to the right) 'With Umā and Maheśvara as his Southern aspect' 284. Mahīvarāhavāmāṅgaḥ (North or to the left) 'With the Earth and the Boar as his Northern aspect' 285. Ratikandarpapaścimaḥ (West or last) 'With Rati and Kāma as his Western aspect'
286-297	52b-55a	Twelve names based on six *vighna* pairs associating forms of Gaṇeśa with *śakti*s. The same six *vighna* pairs are worshipped along with two *nidhi* pairs as parts of a Mahāgaṇapati *yantra* in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.2. The six *vighna* pairs are located in the hexagon corners, forming the second enclosure of the *yantra*.[51] The same six pairs are also listed in the ritual as given in ŚT 13.46-48. 286. Āmodamodajananaḥ 287. Sapramodapramodanaḥ 288. Samedhitasamṛddhaśrīḥ 289. Ṛddhisiddhipravartakaḥ 290. Dattasaumukhyasumukhaḥ 291. Kāntikandalitāśrayaḥ 292. Madanāvatyāśritāṅghriḥ 293. Kṛttadaurmukhyadurmukhaḥ 294. Vighnasampallavopaghnaḥ 295. Sevonnidramadadravaḥ 296. Vighnakṛnnighnacaraṇaḥ 297. Drāviṇīśaktisatkṛtaḥ

---

[50] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 77, 121.

[51] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 77-78, 121.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
298-303	55b-56b	The placement of six *śaktis* at this point corresponds to the instruction in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.3 that worship of Gaṇeśa's six limbs (*ṣaḍaṅga*) is performed in the six 'joints' (*saṃdhi*) of the hexagon (the third enclosure of the *yantra*).[52] The GSN-B commentary explicitly refers to these six names as forming a group. 298. Tīvrāprasannanayanaḥ 'He looks upon Tīvrā with delight' 299. Jvālinīpālitaikadṛk 'One of whose eyes is protected by Jvālinī' 300. Mohinīmohanaḥ 'Who enchants the Enchantress (Mohinī)' 301. Bhogadāyinīkāntimaṇḍitaḥ 'Adorned with the beauty of Bhogadāyinī' 302. Kāminīkāntavaktraśrīḥ 'The beauty of whose face is like the beauty of Kāminī' 303. Adhiṣṭhitavasundharaḥ 'Presiding over the goddess Vasundharā'
304-305	57a-57b	In *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.2, two lords of treasure (*nidhis*) and their consorts are worshipped along with the six paired *vighnas* (names 286-297) as part of the second enclosure of the *yantra*, within the hexagon.[53] The same two pairs are mentioned in ŚT 13.51.[54] 304. Vasundharāmadonnaddhamahāśaṅkhanidhiprabhuḥ 'He is the lord of Mahāśaṅkha, whose consort is the enraptured Vasundharā' 305. Namadvasumatīmaulimahāpadmanidhiprabhuḥ 'He is the lord of Mahāpadma, whose consort Vasumatī is bowing her head'
306	58a	Reference to all *sadgurus*, connects to the worship of the lineage of teachers in *Nityotsava* 4.1.5.[55] In the *Nityotsava* ritual a total of twenty teachers in three lineages are worshipped, placed in three parallel lines in the space between the top of the central triangle and the top horizontal line of the hexagon. 306. Sarvasadgurusaṃsevyaḥ 'Worshipped by all good teachers'

---

[52] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 78, 121. Bühnemann explains these as the six points of intersection of the sides of both triangles forming the hexagon.

[53] *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.2. Bühnemann 2003, pp. 23, 77-78, 121.

[54] ŚT 13.51: 'Besides the six angles Śankhanidhi and Padmanidhi shall be worshipped.' Scholars 1998, p. 146. Woodroffe 1933, p. ५५७.

[55] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 74-77, 120, and plate 40.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
307-310	58a-58b	Agni (#307), Īśāna (#308), Indra (#309), and Vāyu (#310) are four of the eight deities mentioned as guardians of the directions in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.5 in the line of the square in the eight directions.[56] This is the fifth enclosure of the *yantra*. Four deities mentioned in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.5 that do not appear in GSN-B in this sequence are Yama, Nirṛti, Varuṇa, and Soma. The *lokapālas* and their weapons are also mentioned in ŚT 13.53.[57] 307. Śociṣkeśahṛdāśrayaḥ 'One who is the shelter of the hearts of Agni' 308. Īśānamūrdhā 'Who is the head of Lord Śiva' 309. Devendraśikhaḥ 'The leader of Indra' 310. Pavananandanaḥ 'One who rejoices with the wind (Vāyu)'
311-315	59a-60a	More references to weapons, fierceness. and the guardians of the directions. 311. Agrapratyagranayanaḥ 'Having sharp eyes' 312. Divyāstrāṇāṃ prayogavit 'Expert in the use of divine weapons' 313. Airāvatādisarvāśāvāraṇāvaraṇapriyaḥ 'Fond of protecting Airāvata and the other elephants of the directions' 314. Vajrādyastraparīvāraḥ 'Surrounded by weapons such as the thunderbolt (*vajra*) and others' 315. Gaṇacaṇḍasamāśrayaḥ 'The one to whom the fierce *Gaṇas* go for shelter'

---

[56] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 79, 122, and plate 33.

[57] Scholars 1988, p. 146.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
316–323	60b–62a	A group of eight goddesses: Jayā, Vijayā, Aparājitā, Nityā, Vilāsinī, Śauṇḍī, Anantā, and Maṅgalā. The GSN-B commentary describes them as a group of eight aspects of the life force (*prāṇaśaktis*). This may correspond to the placement of eight mother-goddesses (*mātṛkās*) in the eight petals of the lotus of the Mahāgaṇapati *yantra* described in *Nityotsava* 4.1.6.4. This is the fourth enclosure of the *yantra*.[58] In the GSN, being seated upon a lotus of letters was previously described in name 205 (Lipipadmāsanādhāraḥ). Being surrounded by eight mothers is mentioned in name 903 (Aṣṭamātṛsamāvṛtaḥ). 316. Jayājayaparīvāraḥ 'Having both Victory and Invincibility as his attendants' If two goddesses, Jayā and Ajayā, were read here as indicating two different names of Gaṇeśa, it would bring the total to nine names in this group, not eight. Bhāskararāya specifically rejects this in his commentary. 317. Vijayāvijayāvahaḥ 'The one who brings victory to the goddess of victory' 318. Ajitārcitapādābjaḥ 'One whose lotus feet are worshipped by Ajitā' 319. Nityānityāvataṁsitaḥ 'Always wearing the goddess Nityā as an earring' 320. Vilāsinīkṛtollāsaḥ 'Who is made joyful by Vilāsinī' 321. Śauṇḍīsaundaryamaṇḍitaḥ 'One who is decorated by the beauty of Śauṇḍī' 322. Anantānantasukhadaḥ 'Giving infinite happiness to the goddess Anantā' 323. Sumaṅgalasumaṅgalaḥ 'The one who puts the good luck in good luck'
324–331	62b–64a	The threefold *icchāśaktijñānaśaktikriyāśakti*, and mention of other *śaktis* associated with Gaṇeśa.
332–334	64b	Reference to the *guru* concealing part of a *mantra*, success with *mantras*, and the Goddess of Speech. 332. Guruguptapadaḥ 'Part of his *mantra* is kept secret by the teacher' 333. Vācāsiddhaḥ 'Propitiated by chanting of *mantras*' 334. Vāgīśvarīpatiḥ 'Lord of the goddess of speech'
335–338	65a–65b	Further mention of various goddesses.

---

[58] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 78, 121.

GSN-B names	GSN-B verse	Themes
339-343	65b-66a	Huṃbīja, Tuṅgaśaktika, and other mantric references.
344-351	66b-67b	Names suggestive of Ucchiṣṭagaṇapati plus some general epithets.
352-667	68a-117b	Names in alphabetical order from *a* (अ) to *kṣa* (क्ष). The ritual in *Nityotsava* 4.0.14 is a *mātṛkānyāsa* in which the letters of the alphabet are placed on different parts of the body.[59] Apparently the authors could not find any names starting with *ḷ* (ऌ) or *ḹ* (ॡ), so in verse 78 they substituted four names beginning with *lu* (लु) and *lū* (लू) (names 413-416). Similarly, the authors could not find any names starting with *tha* (थ), so in verse 94b they substituted four names beginning with *stha* (स्थ) (names 507-510).
668-688	118a-121a	General epithets describing benefits Gaṇeśa can confer.
689-708	121b-122b	Series of time periods.
709-729	123a-124a	Series of astrological terms.
730-741	124b-125a	Terms associated with creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe and related philosophical ideas.
742-760	125b-126b	Gods and other types of beings.
761-766	127a	Six descriptors of the physical world, including past, present, and future.
767-793	127b-130a	Series of 27 disciplines and classes of scripture.
794-807	130b-131a	General epithets, including philosophical terms.
808-816	131b	Series of salutations and *mantras* used in rituals.
817-823	132a	General epithets, including philosophical terms.
824-1000	132b-172a	Names based on numbers, in ascending order, climaxing with 'Infinite' (*ananta*) names.

[59] Bühnemann 2003, pp. 11-13, 52-55, 110-111. The alphabet forms the mystical body of Sarasvatī (Bhāratī). By this rite the devotee's body becomes identified with the alphabet.

Bibliography

Bailey, Greg. 1995. *Gaṇeśapurāṇa, Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa: Translation, Notes and Index*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Bhattacharyya, N. N. 1999. *History of the Tantric Religion*. 2nd revised edition. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Brooks, D.F. 1992. *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Brooks, D.F. 1990. *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bühnemann, G. 2008. *Tantric Forms of Gaṇeśa: According to the Vidyārṇavatantra*. Reissue of 1989 edition. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld Ltd.

Bühnemann, G. 2003. *The Worship of Mahāgaṇapati According to the Nityotsava*. 1st Indian edition. Delhi: Kant Publications.

Joshi, Labhashankar Mohanlal. 1998. *Lalitā-Sahasranāma: A Comprehensive Study of One Thousand Names of Lalitā Mahā-tripurasundarī*. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd.

Keshavadas, Sadguru Sant. 1988. *Lord Ganesha*. Oakland: Vishwa Dharma Publications.

Khiste, Baṭukanātha Śāstrī, ed. 1991. *Gaṇeśasahasranāmastotram: mūla evaṃ śrībhāskararāyakṛta 'khadyota' vārtika sahita*. Vārāṇasī: Prācya Prakāśana.

Krishan, Yuvraj. 1999. *Gaṇeśa: Unravelling an Enigma*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Martin-Dubost, Paul. 1997. *Gaṇeśa: The Enchanter of the Three Worlds*. Mumbai: Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd.

Morgan, Les. 2011. *Croaking Frogs: A Guide to Sanskrit Metrics and Figures of Speech*. Pacifica: Mahodara Press.

Rao, S. K. Ramachandra. 2005. *The Compendium on Gaṇeśa*. 2nd revised & enlarged edition. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Sastry, R. Ananthakrishna. 1970. *Lalitā-Sahasranāma with Bhāskararāya's Commentary*. 1st Indian reprint edition, 1986. Delhi: Gian Publishing House.

Scholars, A Board of, trans. 1988. *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantram*. Reprint edition, 2002. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Sharma, Ram Karan. 1996. *Eight Collections of Hymns Containing One Thousand and Eight Names of Śiva*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Sharma, Ram Karan, ed. 1993. *The Gaṇeśa Purāṇa*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Thapan, Anita Raina. 1997. *Understanding Gaṇapati: Insights into the Dynamics of a Cult*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Woodroffe, John (Arthur Avalon), ed. 1933. *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantram*. 1st edition, reprint, 2001. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Tying of *Maṇis* in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa

Mrunal S. Patki

Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute
mrinal.9030@gmail.com

Abstract

One particular chapter of Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (2.109) cast addition light on the concept of *maṇi* in the Atharva Veda. Before looking into the details of this chapter we need to understand the Ātharvaṇik Concept of *maṇi*. Basically these *maṇi*s are objects that work like amulets. They are prepared from herbs (*vanaspatija*), metals (*dhātuja*) and from the material produced by animals (*prāṇija*). They are tied on the body to repel evil energies, to bring luck and to cure diseases.

Introduction

The Atharva Veda is a diverse Veda. It portrays the life of the common man in all its lights and shades, hopes and fears from pre-natal to post-death conditions. Many of its hymns are about curing diseases, prayers for long life and health, and charms for all-round prosperity of family, cattle, fields and all other occupations. It also contains charms to get rid of sins and guilt, mantras for marriage and love and also for royal families to conquer or destroy enemies.

The employment of these hymns can be seen in various rituals in the Kauśika-sūtra, such as the Bhaiṣajyāni, Pauṣṭikāni, Sāmmanasyāni and Strīkarmāṇi, etc. These hymns address many types of disturbances and fears of man and the different means to overcome them. These means have been elaborated in various ritual texts. One means is the use of *maṇi*s. Basically, *maṇi*s are objects that function like protective amulets. They are prepared from herbs (*vanaspatija*), metals (*dhātuja*) and from the material produced by animals (*prāṇija*). They are tied on the body to repel evil energies, to bring luck and to cure diseases.

The Atharva Vedic seers consider that evil spirits such as *kaṇvas*, *kābavas* and *cātanas* infected the human race with diseases and disturbed people's physical and mental health. These demons may be driven out of the body by spells, *maṇi* and medicines. To control these negative factors, people tried to find remedies in their surroundings. To be in constant contact with the magical elements giving the desired effects they devised *maṇis* composed of various substances. These substances include medicinal plants, certain metals and other objects such as pieces of a chariot wheel or plough, etc.

Few sources give basic information about the term *maṇi* in the Atharva Veda. One exception is Shende (1961) who gives an overview of the beliefs in the period of the Atharva Veda. The use of spells and *maṇis* were a crucial part of that belief system. Shende mentions the names of all the *maṇis* and briefly describes the purpose of tying them. The *Bhāratīya Saṃskṛtīkośa* Volume VI (1970: 681) elaborates on the Atharvavedic *maṇi*. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* also has an article on charms and amulets (394–472). That article describes how these items were used in various ancient cultures, and mentions their use in Vedic culture. Beni Gupta's *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions* is an exhaustive work covering the theories and practices of magic and superstitions. It contains discussions about magic in the Atharva Veda, including the use of *maṇis* (133–177), and gives examples of a few hymns in the Atharva Veda. A recent MA dissertation by Sara Spayer (University of Copenhagen) deals with the post-Vedic concepts of *maṇi*, *ratna* etc. In the preliminary discussions of these words, we find occasional mentions of the word *maṇi*. All the above works, however, merely touch the periphery of the subject.

Mahulikar (1993) introduces every variety of *maṇi* in her article. She has also tried to trace present practices to some extent. Parivrajak Brahmamuni (1976) discusses all the *maṇis* mentioned in the Śaunaka branch of the Atharva Veda. Sometimes this writer has tried to show that the herbs prescribed for a particular disease in the Atharva Veda are also used for the same purpose in ancient medicinal texts, such as Caraka Saṃhitā and Suśruta Saṃhitā.

The above review of previous work shows that a complete study of the Atharvavedic *maṇis* is yet to be done. The word *maṇi*, when it appears in the Atharva Veda, conveys a completely new concept. This uniqueness makes it more important to study the Atharva Vedic concept of *maṇi* in detail. It is important to know what exactly the Atharva Veda Saṃhitā wishes to say when hymns use the word. The above review of the literature shows that most of the available works just touch on one aspect of *maṇi*.

A major focus of the current study is to explore the materials used to produce *maṇis*. There are many hymns that mention herbs and metals but 35 selected substances are used in *maṇis* in the Atharvavedic tradition. The present paper explores these materials and their relation to the hymns and rituals. This study naturally casts light on many aspects of social life.

One particular chapter of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (VDP) is related to the concept of *maṇi* in the Atharva Veda. There is a dialogue in VDP 2.109 between the sage Puṣkara and Rāma. Rāma requests the sage to teach the *vidhi* of those *maṇis* that are tied on to accomplish desires and also to get protection from mishaps. This dialogue focuses on the Ātharvaṇik concept of *maṇi*. Puṣkara tells Rāma that he will give him knowledge about the *maṇikarma* with proper procedure, as conveyed by Ātharvaṇa (belonging to Atharvans).

This chapter of the VDP talks about all the important *maṇis* that fulfil desires and repel ill fortune. In the first part of the chapter the sage mentions a common ritual that is to be performed to make any type of *maṇi*. This ritual begins with the cutting of a plank from a branch to carve the *maṇi* and ends with the enchanted *maṇi* ready for tying. After this, the chapter elaborates on specific types of *maṇis*, their purposes and their rituals along with their mantras. The sage follows a specific order to describe the ritual of any *maṇi*. The first step is the selection of a herb or material. The second step is to carve it, and the last step is to enchant the *maṇi* and tie it. He suggests a mantra for addressing the herb or substance. Then another mantra is suggested for its carving. In the end the sage recommends a mantra for tying the *maṇi*. This process is common throughout the chapter. While describing each *maṇi* he sometimes discusses the required shape. In the following section these topics are discussed in detail.

A common ritual for maṇis

The common process is as follows. A person approaches the tree from which he wants to create a *maṇi*. Uttering the first *caraṇa* of the verse *dhruvaḥ tiṣṭhet*, a person sprinkles the place from where the *maṇi* is to be carved. Accompanying the second *caraṇa* of the same verse the *maṇi* is prepared. Then the *subandhuḥ cet* verse is recited while cutting a part of the tree for carving the *maṇi*. Using the third verse of the same hymn a person brings the *maṇi* to the place where the further ritual will be done.

Regarding the specifications of shape, it is known that these *maṇis* should have be size of the phalange of the thumb on all sides. It should be well finished or possibly square, and should have four knots on four sides and on the head and

at the root as well. Then the wood shaped thus is to be made hollow and washed with water. A vessel is placed on a fire and the *maṇi* is kept in it after a thread has been inserted through it. Reciting the verse *yatrācakṛ-rityanayā*, ghee is poured on it. Remnants of the *homa* (fire sacrifice) are brought to the iron vessel filled with pacifying waters. Uttering the *liṅgamantra*, whatever remnants are left are also poured on the *maṇi*. Uttering the verse *vimucya sarvaṃ* this *maṇi* is stirred in the same vessel. After this process it becomes ready to wear.

Types of maṇis and their rituals

Maṇis made of herbs and other substances

Turning now to the description of the *maṇis* made with herbs and other substances, the text says that the presence of the wife is important while performing rituals on the *maṇis* made from substances and plants. The sage then tells Rāma about the *vidhāna* (the method of performing a ritual) for *oṣadhi*. So saying, he starts describing *maṇis* that are carved out of herbs. First, he explains a common ritual for all *maṇis* made from herbs. The process is as follows. While uttering mantras, twenty-one blades of rice and barley should be cut. In this way a clever person who desires prosperity should use a specific herb grown at a specific place. Accompanied by the two verses *ghṛtāhuteti*, the *maṇi* should be sprinkled with ghee. Again uttering *māteriṣyati* it should be empowered. A person should then apply to it a perfume (*gandhaṃ samchhadayet*). This common ritual is performed for all herbs.

Ekaka maṇis

Maṇis carved for a single purpose are termed *ekaka*. This type of *maṇi* is prepared from herbs. The text defines the term *ekāṅka* as a *maṇi* for one purpose (*ekāṅka ekakāmāyetyekāṅke vidhivatkhanet*). The sage explains that knowledgeable people should carve out *ekaka maṇis* with the *liṅgamantras* (mantras that include the name of that herb which is used to tie *maṇi*). Under this *ekaka* type of *maṇi*, the chapter mentions names of many herbs. Those are *madhugha* (*Madhuca longifolia*), *nitanī, kapikacchu* (*Mucuna pruritus, khaj kuiri*), *daśadhā, mahākhyā, ḍhabī, pippala* (*Piper longum*), *saidhraka, svargapatrī, māṣaparṇī* (*Glycine debilis*) and *khaṇḍārikā*. I could identify very few among these.

The chapter describes the process of tying the *maṇi* formed by each herb. Rather than considering every plant in detail some examples are considered here. For example, accompanying the verse *iyaṃ vīrut*, one should dig the *madhugha* tree. Reciting the whole hymn this *maṇi* is tied. *Imāṃ khanāmi* is uttered

and *nitanī* is carved out. Uttering *pratīcī saumamasitāṃ*, *nitanī* should be tied. A similar practice is prescribed for every herb. With the hymn *yātvā gandharva indrābhyāṃ* intelligent people dig the *kapikacchu*. With the same hymn *tanmedre* it is tied. *Daśadhā* is cut uttering *imāṃ khanāmi*. Uttering the *pāṭhā* hymn, *ekarajñī* should be tied. Uttering the two verses *daśaśīrṣa* a herb named *mahākhya* should be carved. With the hymn *āpaḥ punantu* it is tied. Chanting the hymn *imāṃ khanāmi auṣadhīṃ tvām*, a herb named *ḍhabī* should be cut. With the *kāṇḍīya* verse it should be tied.

Ekārka maṇis

The next category of *maṇi* the sage talks about is *ekārka maṇi*. Elaborating on this concept the sage says that the hymn *samīyātvāha varuṇa* mentions material used as fuel in the sacrificial ritual. The material should be used to prepare the *maṇi*. Again it also has a procedure. That direction is already given in the Vedic texts, hence it should be followed as it is. Chanting the *liṅgamantra*, the earlier method of common ritual should be followed.

Maṇis of the kuṣṭha plant

Further, the chapter mentions five *maṇis* prepared from *kuṣṭha* (*Saussurea lappa*). Whether these *maṇis* should be considered amongst *ekārka* or not is unclear. About these five *maṇis*, the text says that intelligent people know that five *maṇis* of *kuṣṭha* are kept in a pot of purifying water. We have heard that each verse should be uttered for purity. This *maṇi* should be made square, just like the *añjana maṇi* (*maṇi* of collyrium). With the mantra *imaṃ me kuṣṭha* five planks of the *kuṣṭha* plant should be collected. Preparing the water with the proper procedure, a host should drink the water. Five *maṇis* of *kuṣṭha* wood should be prepared with the common ritual. Each of them gives different results. One *maṇi* destroys headaches. The second one saves from poison. The third one is said to be a destroyer of *viṣamajvara*. Likewise, the fourth one cures a recurring fever. The fifth *maṇi* is for the eyes. Butter should be mixed in a vessel filled with water. A *maṇi* of *kuṣṭha* should be then dipped in that water. After tying that processed *maṇi* the bearer drinks the water. The same water should be smeared on the wounded part.

Naimittika maṇis

The *naimittika* types of *maṇis* (*maṇis* that are tied occasionally) include *ghora* (*maṇis* for witchcraft) and *sāmpada* maṇis (for prosperity). While tying the *ghora* type of *maṇi*, the *ghora* mantra is uttered, and for *sāmpadas* the *saṃpada* mantras are used. This chapter gives one example of each type. First it describes the *ghora*

maṇi. Perhaps the hymn *sīmātryātvāha sīmasaṃ* is a bid for leadership among people, but due to the ambiguous text it is difficult to determine the exact meaning. It is the destroyer of *piśācas* and antidote to witchcraft. It is to be recognized by the *mantraliṅga* which is described in the mantra. Joining the *sīsa* on the shaft of an arrow and bending the string of a bow a person who is suffering should draw the picture of the *piśāca* and beat it with the help of priest. Only the northern arrow can kill the *piśāca*. This method diverges from the commonly known image of the *maṇi*.

Then comes the example of the *sāmpada maṇi*. This *maṇi* is cone-shaped. The text is corrupted hence I will try to convey what I have understood. The *ānusūryaṃ* mantra is used to tie the cone-shaped *maṇi*. From the description it seems that this *maṇi* is composed from the skin of a red cow. The skin is stretched on the floor and a *śaṅku* is kept on it. The cone-shaped *maṇi* is fashioned from the area where the *śaṅku* was placed. Such a *maṇi* brings prosperity. It destroys diseases that aggravate passion and it also gives long life to the bearer. If a person sits on the skin from which the *maṇi* is produced, he is blessed with ornaments and milk.

Maṇis against witchcraft

The chapter further talks about the *vidhi* for *maṇis* against witchcraft, and a *maṇi* of salt is given as an example. The text states that with the verse *yāh purastāt*, the *maṇi* of salt should be tied. The salt should be covered in a cloth belonging to one's father and tied, which then destroys malign practices. With the verse *vyāghrarūpa* (*khantacyam vāṭaruṣakaṃ*), it should be dug. With two verses of the same hymn it should be tied. Certainly this *maṇi* will become the slayer of demons. Other *maṇis* for witchcraft should be prepared in the same way.

Four animals like the *pataṇga* are used by clever people to make four *maṇis* to overcome witchcraft. While cleansing the whole body one should utter the *tṛṣṇatvaptai* mantra. With the first hymn *dravamaṇi*, the *veṇu* is fashioned. The *veṇu* should be created from *devadāru*. Beans should be crushed uttering the same mantra. The paste then should be applied on the body. Utterance of a common mantra *tṛṣṇatvaptai* thereafter counteracts witchcraft. This process is also different from the usual concept of *maṇi*. Combining *vidhūla* and *dhūśira*, a *maṇi* should be fashioned and it should be blocked by *gunja* (*Abrus Precatorius, raktikā*). It is unknown what exactly *vidhūla* and *dhūśira* mean. Hence here it is hard to understand the indication of the text.

Pratisara maṇis

The verse *dūṣyā* is used to fashion *pratisara maṇi*. Tying should accompany the mantra *ayaṃ pratisaraḥ*. It should be tied with thread. It is said that with the same ritual Indra killed Vṛtra. Uttering the mantra *aśaṃsa* it should be tied with proper rituals. It is fashioned to make one's life free from evil. One ties this *maṇi* when departing on a journey. At the time of departure, it is tied on the hands as it slays enemies. The *pratisara* destroys *yakṣas* and dispels the powers that create trouble for wellbeing and prosperity, etc.

The seven *maṇis* fashioned from bamboo are inserted in the bow string. It should be tied on the fourth month of pregnancy. Every month one *maṇi* should be dropped towards the west uttering the mantra *prācīdigiti udīcī bhayanāśanī*. It is well known that the peacock, cow, gods and old people all know these two. (It is hard to guess exactly what the sage wants to indicate when he says this).

Other Maṇis

Abhīvarta maṇis

Let us now turn to the *abhīvarta maṇi*. As mentioned above, one should perform the prescribed ritual and offer remnants of ghee to the *maṇi*. While offering remnants one should utter three verses of the hymn beginning with *abhīvartena maṇinā*[1] or verses of the hymn beginning with *ayaṃ*.[2] These two optional hymns are suggested here for offering remnants of ghee to the *maṇi*. The hymn beginning with *abhīvartena maṇinā* is from the Śaunaka branch of the Atharva Veda and the hymn beginning with *ayaṃ* appears in the Atharva Veda Paippalāda. The sage further states that '*datvā sarveṇa sūktena maṇeḥ ādhanvanaṃ bhavet*'. The offering of the remnants when reciting each verse should be accompanied by immersing the *mani* in pacifying water (*śānti udaka*).

Dākṣāyaṇa maṇis

The text specifies that a *homa* should be performed for all *dākṣāyaṇa maṇis*. The word *dākṣāyaṇa* refers to the descendants of Dakṣa. The text is talking about the *maṇis* used by them. We only know one of these *maṇis*: the *maṇi* of gold (AVŚ 1.35) which is termed *dākṣāyaṇa maṇi* in AVŚ 1.35. Uttering the hymn *viṣkandasya iti triparṇī*, this medicinal herb famous in the world should be scooped for the *maṇi*. It repairs a damaged shoulder. The hymn *yasmādaṅgāt gaṇas* is sung. The ritual

---

[1] The AVŚ hymn (1.29.1,2,3): 144-145.

[2] The AVP hymn (1.11.1): 10.

for *gaṇas* is common and it is not necessary to perform it every time. Rituals should be performed for both *saindhava* and *lavaṇa maṇis*, as for *vyāghra* and *yava maṇis*.

Shape of maṇis

There are no specifications about the shape of *maṇis* in the Atharva Vedic traditional texts. The text recommends *maṇis* of different shapes based on their purpose. The *maṇis* that are fashioned for a single purpose (*kāraṇa kālajau*) and those that are carved for some limited period must be square in shape. The other type of *maṇis* that are prepared for certain occasion (*naimittikas*) should be understood to have a shape like a *maṇi* i.e. perhaps round. These *maṇis* have their own mantras. In this way the sage says that he has conveyed all the *maṇis* that fulfil desires and which are auspicious. If they are tied, they repel evil, dispel fear and bestow prosperity.

Conclusion

In the post Ātharvaṇic period the text discussed here is the only material where the Ātharvaṇic concept of *maṇi* is discussed in detail. Along with the basic rituals of Atharva Veda we can see some elaborations. The chapter introduces different types of *maṇis*. It also recommends different shapes for serving different purposes, whereas specific mentions of shape are absent in the earlier Atharva Vedic texts. The eleventh-century text by Keshava mentions that the *maṇi* is square. Perhaps it is due to the Mughal invasions where *taviz* were used for protection, as these were always square. It doesn't seem that the author was aware of *maṇibandhana* chapter in the Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Generally *maṇis* are carried by the person or tied on the body for protection. This chapter includes two examples that are different from the common image of *maṇis*. In one example, a person draws the name of a demon on the floor and beats it, and in the second, a person applies paste on the body for protection in the Ātharvaṇic tradition. The majority of mantras found in the text are from the Paippalāda Saṃhitā. This suggests a connection between this chapter and that earlier text. There are a few verses which are unidentified, and the text is quite corrupt and needs serious revision. We propose to publish an edition of this chapter in future.

Bibliography

Joshi, M. et al. (eds). 1968. *Āyurvedik Śabdakośa.* Mumbai: Maharashtra Sahitya and Sanskriti Mandal.

Mahulikar, Gauri. 1993. Maṇidhāraṇa in the Atharva Veda: a comparative study. *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* 31–32: 37–46 (published in 1998).

Monier Williams, M. 2008. *Sanskrit English Dictionary*. Delhi: Parimal Publication.

Parivrajak Brahmamuni. 1976. *Atharvavedīya Mantravidyā*. New Delhi: Dayanand Sansthan.

Sharanasimha, N. 1985. *The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. Delhi: Naga Publishers.

Shende, N.J. 1961. *The Foundations of Atharvaṇic Religion*. n.p.

Upadhyay Kunjabihari. 2010. *Atharvaṇa Veda: Paippalada Samhita*. Puri: Nijiya Publication.

Vishvabandhu et al. (eds) 1960–1962. *The Atharvaveda* (Śaunaka, with the *padapātha* and Sāyaṇācārya's commentary). Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvarananda Vedic Research Inst.

Whitney, W.D. 1962. *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā,* Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas.

The '*Sthala*' Analysis
of the Karavīra Māhātmya

Madhavi Narsalay

Department of Sanskrit, University of Mumbai
madhavinarsalay@yahoo.com

Abstract

Śrī Karavīra Māhātmya is a *sthala* māhātyma pertaining to the formation of the sacred geography in and around the temple of the goddess Mahālakṣmī alias Ambābāī of Kolhapur, also known as Karavīra, a district in the state of Maharashtra. The text is a self-proclaimed section of the Padma Mahāpurāṇa comprising 73 chapters. This māhātmya has been edited by Prof. G.V. Tagare using seven manuscripts located in Kolhapur and Pune. However, existing works studying the origins of the goddess Mahālakṣmī and of Kolhapur as a city give subordinate treatment to the Karavīra Māhātmya. As a result, the processes of acculturation and appropriation (the '*sthala*' dimensions) of this māhātyma remain underexplored. Investigating these aspects systematically may help develop new scholarly insights into evolution of the temple of the goddess Mahālakṣmī, which regarded as one of the śaktipīṭhas located in Maharashtra. Drawing insights from a detailed textual analysis, this research will provide a comprehensive *sthala* analysis of this sacred text.

Introduction

Sacred geography plays a pivotal role in the development of religious consciousness of people. In India, this development is encircled by the compositions of various Sanskrit māhātmya texts. In the words of Anne Feldhaus, generally a māhātmya glorifies a particular holy place, but there are also māhātmyas that praise a particular ritual practice, a certain month of the year (Feldhaus 2003: 18). These māhātmya texts, which are attached to the Purāṇas, connect the religious sensibilities of people with the place, shrine and the deity. As the deity or the shrine become popular, the area i.e. the *sthala*, encircling them sanctifies them, giving rise to numbers of minor deities and their shrines. These minor

shrines and their deities are connected to the central deity and its shrine through numbers of myths and legends. Pertaining to Maharashtra, these māhātmya texts, which are attached to the Sanskrit Purāṇas were later translated or abridged in Marathi. To cite a few, we have the Gautamī Māhātmya, a Nadī Māhātmya attached to the Brahma Purāṇa; the Renuka Māhātmya attached to the Skanda Purāṇa eulogizing goddess Reṇukā of Mahur, and the Karavīra Māhātmya attached to the Padma Purāṇa.

About the text

Śrī Karavīra Māhātmya (KM), a *sthala* māhātyma, pertaining to formation of the sacred geography in and around the temple of goddess Mahālakṣmī (alias Ambābāī) of Kolhapur district in the state of Maharashtra, is a self -proclaimed section of the Padma Purāṇa comprising of 73 chapters. The KM is not included into the table of contents of the Padma Purāṇa as given in the Nārada Purāṇa (1.93), nor is it found printed in the extant editions (both the Vyankateshwara Press of Bombay or the Anandashram edition of Poona). It is to be noted that Kolhapur and its surroundings are also known as Karavīra. The text of this māhātmya has been edited by Prof. G.V.Tagare using seven manuscripts located in Kolhapur and Pune in 1980 (Tagare 1980: 2). Tagare has argued that the māhātmya is to be dated to approximately 1300–1350 AD.

The author of the text call himself as Vyāsa. Through the study of the KM and references to various *tīrtha*s, gods and goddesses, there is a probability that he may have been brahmin by birth. However, it is to be noted that the author has not taken into account historical facts of Karavīra, e,g. who built the temple of the goddess, details of the image of the goddess etc.

About the goddess

The goddess, who is the focal point of this māhātmya, finds mention in texts other than the KM. Some of these texts were composed before the KM. The Devībhāgavata Purāṇa mentions Kolapura, wherein resides the goddess Mahālakṣmī (7.38.5–6). Mahāpīṭhanirṇaya, a text referred to by D.C.Sircar mentions of 51 *śaktipīṭha*s, incorporating the goddess Mahālakṣmī of Kolāpura as one among them (Sircar 1998: 107–108). When Satī immolated herself in the sacrifice of Dakṣa, Śiva wandered throughout the world with her burning corpse. The places where her organs fell became *śaktipīṭha*s (Dhere 2009: 4–5). At Kolhapur,

the eyes of Satī fell on the ground rendering it one such place. The Sahyā-drikhaṇḍa (2.25–27) mentions Karavīra and its deity Lakṣmī.[1]

Another myth mentioned in the popular tradition is that of Bhṛgu and his tryst with the Trinity. Once the sages gave him the task of finding the best amongst the Trinity. Bhṛgu approached Brahmā, who did not even notice him. Śiva ignored him as he was busy with Pārvatī. Viṣṇu was dozing off while having a conversation with Lakṣmī. Enraged, Bhṛgu kicked the chest of Viṣṇu, who did not express any resentment at this deed. On the contrary, he asked whether the delicate feet of Bhṛgu have been hurt by kicking the hard heart of Viṣṇu. Bhṛgu's behaviour angered Lakṣmī, who left him and settled in Kolhapur.[2] Interestingly, neither of these accounts is mentioned in the KM. The same story of Bhṛgu kicking the chest of Viṣṇu is associated with Srivenkaṭeśvara of Tirupati, wherein the angered goddess leaves Viṣṇu and settles in Karavīra. It is said that every year, Srivenkaṭeśvara sends a sari to the goddess in order to appease her.[3]

The effigy of the goddess is 2 to 2.5 feet in height. She has four hands wielding the mace, shield, citron fruit and a bowl. Her crown has the phallus (*liṅga*) and the hooded serpent. Caturvargacintāmani by Hemādri mentions of this iconography.[4] The earliest records of the shrine and the goddess occur in the epigraphy of the Rashtrakuta king Amoghavarṣa who offered his little finger to the goddess to redeem his subjects from an epidemic in about the 9th CE. The

---

[1] *tanmadhye pañcakrośaṃ ca kāśyā yavādhikaṃ bhuvi | kṣetraṃ vai karavīrākhyaṃ kṣetraṃ lakṣmīvinirmitaṃ || tatkṣetraṃ hi mahatpuṇyaṃ darśanāt pāpanāśanam | tatkṣetre ṛṣayaḥ sarve brāhmaṇā vedapāragāḥ || teṣāṃ darśanamātreṇa sarvapāpakṣayo bhavet | tatkṣetraṃ kevalaṃ pīṭhaṃ mahālakṣmyāśca tattvataḥ ||*

[2] https://ramanan50.wordpress.com/2017/01/29/thirupati-balaji-padmavathy-kolhapur-maha-lakshmi-history-verified/ accessed on 6 January 2019, at 1.30pm. https://www.livehistoryin-dia.com/snapshort-histories/2018/04/23/kolhapur-mahalakshmis-tirupati-connection accessed on 6 January 2019, at 2.00pm.

[3] Interview with Mrinalini Newalkar dated 20 May 2018: https://timesofindia.india-times.com/city/kolhapur/Tirupati-trust-offers-shalu-to-goddess-Mahalaxmi/arti-cleshow/54748426.cms, accessed on 6 January 2019, at 2.15 pm.

[4] *dakṣiṇādhaḥ kare pātramūrdhve kaumodakī tathā | vāmordhve kheṭakaṃ dhatte śrīphalaṃ tadadhaḥ kare | bibharti mastake liṅgaṃ pūjanīyāṃ vibhūtaye ||* (Khare 1958: 54). Another work with the title Nityakarmasaṅgraha says, '*dhṛtvā śrīmāturliṅgaṃ tadupari ca gadāṃ kheṭakaṃ pānapātraṃ | nāgaṃ liṅgaṃ ca yoniḥ śirasi dhṛtavatī rājate hemavarṇā || ādyā śak-tirstrīrūpā triguṇagaṇayutā brahmaṇo hetubhūtā | viśvādyā sṛṣṭikartrī mama vasatu gṛhe sar-vadā suprasannā ||* (Khare 1958: 55).

shrine is built in Yadava style (Hemadpanti), but it is not clear who built it or when (Tagare 1980: 21).

This paper will comment on the process of acculturation and appropriation in the light of three episodes mentioned in the KM. The text has involved a number of narrators in the course of its narration. Vyāsa narrated it to the Sūta, the Sūta narrated it to the sages in the Naimiṣa forest, among whom the sage Mārkaṇḍeya was present. He narrated it to Nārada, who in turn narrated it to Agastya, Agastya narrated it to his wife Lopāmudrā.

The KM as a text has not found prime preference in scholarly works written on Mahālakṣmī and Kolhapur. However, works studying the origins of the goddess and of Kolhapur as a city provide subordinate treatment to Karavīra Māhātmya. As a result, the processes of acculturation and appropriation (the 'sthala' dimensions) of this māhātyma remain under-explored. Exploring them systematically may help develop new scholarly insights around the evolution of temple of the goddess Mahālakṣmī, regarded as one of the three and a half śakti-pīṭhas located in Maharashtra.

The KM at the very outset discusses how Karavīra is superior to Vārāṇasī. The deity Viṣṇu founded two Vārāṇasīs, one to the north and one to the south. The northern one was assigned to Śiva and the southern to Śakti. In the dispute between Śiva and Śakti regarding the greatness of each, Karavīra literally outweighed Vārāṇasī (KM 2.27–35). The Śākta character of Karavīra and its goddess becomes evident in this myth. This is indicated by the presence of Bhairava named Raṅka and his shrine Raṅkatīrtha, near the temple now known as the water body Raṅkāḷa-talāv. The myth of the eyes of Satī falling at Karavīra, wherein a Śākta shrine developed, is conspicuously absent from the KM.[5] That Viṣṇu plays a judgmental role indicates that the Vaiṣṇava tradition appropriated this place from the Śaiva-Śākta tradition. The place is described as having the shrine of Kātyāyanī and 64 yoginīs, which indicates the Śākta linkages of the goddess and the shrines. However, the mythology encircling this māhātmya has de-emphasized these linkages and emphasized on its Vaiṣṇava character (KM 6.90–91 and 13.17)

The narratives in the KM show how the place is Vaiṣṇava in nature (*ādyam tu vaiṣṇavam kṣetram śaktyāgamasamanvitam| bhuktisuktipradam nṛṇām vārāṇasyā yavādikam* 2.25). It is in fact Viṣṇu residing in the form of Lakṣmī at Kolāpura. (It needs to be noted that the spelling used in the text is Kolapura, the official spell-

---

[5] *yasmin kṣetre vilasati mahābhairavo raṅkanātho devyā yo vihito viduṣṭadamane rakṣaṇe saj-janānāṃ* KM. 50ab and 13.19.

ing is Kolhapur with the *mahāprāṇa 'h'* for *kolhā-* stands for jackal in Marathi.) The same chapter mentions the fact that Dattātreya visits this place for alms (KM 2.57).

The Episode of Parāśara (Chapters 6-15)

The episode of Parāśara opens with Agastya settling down in the south in order to prevent the Vindhya mountain from extending its height to compete with Meru (Chapter 6). He was instructed by Śiva to settle in Karavīra as he yearned for Vārāṇasī. During the journey from the banks of Godāvarī to Karavīra, Agastya narrated the greatness of this place to his wife Lopāmudrā.

Agastya narrated the story of sage Parāśara and how he could overcome the obstacles to his penance due to the efficacy of Karavīra. Parāśara wished to have a son like Viṣṇu, as he would rearrange the Vedas and Purāṇas to preserve the heritage during the age of Kali (KM 7.14). He came along with his wife Satyavatī and selected Panhāḷā (Pannagālaya) in the vicinity of Karavīra. Due to the intensity of Parāśara's penance, Indra, feeling insecure, sent Rambhā the *apsaras* to disrupt Parāśara's penance, along with a retinue of Kāmadeva and Vasanta. Kāma shot two arrows but they were in vain. He used the arrow which was used firstly for Śiva due to which Parāśara opened his eyes.

The entire episode of Rambhā, Kāmadeva and Vasanta bears striking similarity with that of Madanadahana in Kumārasambhava. It clearly indicates that the author of KM was influenced by Kālidāsa. But the spiritual efficacy of Karavīra was so great that he was not disturbed by the seductive advances of Rambhā. Just as the heavens were scorched by the penance of Parāśara, so were the lower realms. Nāgas attempted to disturb the penance of Parāśara, but were subdued by him using the Garuḍa-mantra. They freed the waters which they had blocked and filled the place with the river known as Pātāla-gaṅgā. The goddess Mahālakṣmī appeared before him and was ready to offer him a boon of a son equivalent to Viṣṇu. Parāśara was doubtful whether this Mahālakṣmī even had the capacity to bless him with the boon, as the task could not be complete without the blessings of Viṣṇu. Mahālakṣmī showed him Viṣṇu seated within her.[6]

The author of the KM is aware that Vyāsa was born to Satyavatī whose lover was Parāśara and not her husband (KM 16.2). Agastya narrated the story of Satyavatī receiving a curse from Parāśara for delaying her duties by watching a fish in sexual contact. Satyavatī was reborn as Matsyodarī and Vyāsa was born

---

[6] *mām eva viṣṇurūpāṃ vai tvaṃ jānīhi mahāmate | asti cet saṃśayaṃ tarhi paśya viṣṇuṃ mayi sthitaṃ ||* 15.33.

out of her sexual contact with Parāśara. Thus, the story of Satyavatī and Parāśara in the Mbh, in which Vyāsa was born out of wedlock to Parāśara was a curse by the later according to KM.

The KM was composed in the medieval period, when the norms of marriage and procurement of progeny became very strict. Vyāsa, as a child of an unlawful union had a bizarre kind of birth. The KM provided justification for the story and for the absurdity of Vyāsa's birth by weaving a story of the curse of Parāśara himself and sanctifying the entire episode, which appeared in the Mbh. In the course of narration, there is a striking similarity between the narrative of Jamadagni and Reṇukā wherein the chastity of Reṇukā was endangered and she was delayed in providing her services to Jamadagni as she watched the amorous sport of *gandharvas* and their wives in a pond.

There are certain key points highlighted through the episode of Parāśara. The narrative is an example of how Vaisnavaization of the Śākta shrine has taken place. This is a case of appropriation. The Bhairavas and 64 yoginīs are mentioned but are ignored and not given any importance. There is no mention of Śiva in this narrative. Mahālakṣmī does not emerge as a mother goddess but a consort goddess, the consort of Viṣṇu. The powerful, dominant mother having unlimited powers, superseding the entire plethora of gods and goddesses is replaced by a consort, the powers of whom are doubted by Parāśara, the boon-seeker. Mahālakṣmī had to show that the powers of Viṣṇu are vested in her and that the desire of Parāśara to seek a boon for a son will be fulfilled by her. Viṣṇu had to personally appear before Parāśara to reassure him of the same. This indicates that this episode of the KM emerges as a Vaiṣṇava text eulogizing Mahālakṣmī as the consort of Viṣṇu.

Mahālakṣmī killing the demons (Chapters 33–34)

The second episode is that of Mahālakṣmī killing the demons, which indicates a surviving Śākta strand of the KM summarized in two chapters. Gayāsura had two brothers, namely Lavaṇāsura who was kicked to death by Viṣṇu at a place called Viṣṇu-gayā, and Kolāsura who performed penance at Kolagiri or Kolāha-lagiri, after which Brahmā made his body adamantine, lustrous and unbreakable (KM 33.57–58). He wrested back his kingdom from demon Sukeśin, who usurped it during his absence, and ruled piously. In old age he crowned his eldest son Karavīra and went to the forest for penance. Karavīra wanted to wreak havoc in revenge for the treacherous killing of his uncles by the gods (KM 33.115–116). In the battle that ensued between them, Rudra struck down Karavīra but

was so pleased with his valour that he gave a boon to the dying hero that the battlefield will be known as Karavīra after him (KM 33.223–224). When Kolāsura heard of his son's death, he was aggrieved (KM 34.2), but he knew that the gods were invincible due to Mahālakṣmī's favour. He performed penance and requested Mahālakṣmī to bestow a boon that she will vacate the place for him for hundred years (KM 34.23–24). Unwillingly Mahālakṣmī did so and Kolāsura wrought havoc in this place. At the behest of the gods, Mahālakṣmī undertook a campaign against him. Rudra caused him to fall down and stood on his body, along with Viṣṇu and Brahmā, and Mahālakṣmī with her eighteen hands slew him. Kolāsura asked for a boon that his body should become Gaya *tīrtha* and the place should be known as Kolāpura, and in memory of his killing a *kūṣmāṇḍa* fruit be split every year (KM 34. 128).

This episode is an indication of the Mother-Goddess nature of Mahālakṣmī, in which she is raised over and above the Trinity. It does not have much similarity with the Devi Māhātmya and gives sanction to the ritual of Kūṣmāṇḍa-bhedana. Just as in the Devi Māhātmya, the goddess kills demons like Mahiṣāsura, Śumba-Niśumba, Raktabīja, similarly in the KM the goddess kills Kolāsura. Here we come across the interrelationship between myth and the ritual. It is difficult to argue whether the myth emerged first or the ritual is prior to the myth. In either case, the ritual and the myth have come together in the KM, both sanctioning each other.

Tryambulī (Chapters 37–39)

The third episode is of Tryambulī also known as Ṭembalāī in Marathi. In her previous birth Tryambulī was Satyavratā, the chaste wife of sage Kauṇḍinya. While she was massaging the feet of her husband, she rose to give alms to a mendicant. The infuriated sage thoughtlessly cursed her to be a slave, but on knowing the correct reason he gave a boon that she will become the slave of Mahālakṣmī (KM 37.131–140). She was born of a childless brahmin called Bhārgava at Maṅgalaka. As per their vow to Mahālakṣmī, the parents dedicated her to the services of Mahālakṣmī (KM 37.146–147). Mahālakṣmī assigned her to guard the golden lotuses in Mallatīrtha, which she did all the time and hence was named Tryambulī.[7] Tryambulī had Maṇigrīva the *yakṣa* as her superior. Kāmākṣa, the son of Kolāsura, wanted to avenge the death of his father. As per the advice of Śukrācārya, he and his sister Raktā convinced and took the *yogadaṇḍa* from sage

---

[7] *yatastriṣvapi kāleṣu tvamambuṣu layaṃ gatā | ato nāmāstu te nityaṃ tryambulīti viniścitaṃ ||* KM 37.180.

Kapila and converted Mahālakṣmī and other gods into goats and sheep (KM 38.15–27). Tryambulī kicked Raktā to death. Later she took a form of an old woman, filled a basket with stones and cow dung cakes, and pretended to be unable to lift it. When Kāmākṣa came to offer help she dashed the basket against him and caused him to fall on the ground. She grabbed the *yogadaṇḍa* and trampled him to death. By the power of *yogadaṇḍa* she restored the gods and goddesses including Mahālakṣmī to their original glory. However, for the *kūṣmāṇḍa* splitting, all the gods and goddesses forgot her (KM 38.209).

When Mahālakṣmī realized this, she went straight to the hillock and tried to convince her to come, but she refused. Mahālakṣmī gave her a boon that every year she will personally come to visit her and the *kūṣmāṇḍa* splitting ceremony will take place in front of her shrine on the fifth day of the bright half of Āśvina month, i.e. during the Lalitā Pañcamī day of autumnal Navarātri (KM 38.237).

In this episode we come to understand that the journey of the name Ṭemblāī to Tryambulī is the Sanskritization of the name of this goddess. The fact that this goddess Mahālakṣmī will personally visit Tryambulī every year and the Kūṣmāṇḍa ceremony will be performed in front of the temple of the goddess indicates her acculturation. There is a possibility that she may be a minor local goddess or a *yakṣiṇī*, a tutelary goddess of the mountain. That is the reason why the goddess is the slave of Mahālakṣmī. Thus the identity of Tryambulī in the mainstream culture as an independent goddess was dissolved and she became one among the deities of the pantheon with Mahālakṣmī as the head. Another historical fact brought out through the narrative of Tryambulī is the practice of offering children to Mahālakṣmī, which is an indication of the *devadāsī* custom, which is no longer in vogue.

Conclusion

The Karavīra Māhātmya is a predominantly Vaiṣṇava text, with some remnants of Śākta traditions in it. The myth of the *śaktipīṭhas* is conspicuous by its absence in the text. With the onslaught of Vaiṣṇava dharma spreading in and around Maharashtra through saints like Dnyāneśvara etc, the shrine pushed Śāktism to the background, and the Vaiṣṇava nature indicated by the name Mahālakṣmī came to the forefront. Thus an in-depth study of the KM will play a key role in understanding the religious change taking place in Maharashtra in the 13th–14th CE.

Bibliography

Dhere, R.C. 2009. *Karavīranivāsinī Śrīmahālakṣmī* (Marathi). Pune: Padmagandha Publications.

Feldhaus, A. 2003. *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage and Geographical Imagination in India.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gaitonde, V.D. 1972. Śrīsahyādrikhaṇḍa (Marathi, tr. from Sanskrit) Bombay: Katyayani Publications.

Khare, G.H. 1958. *Mahārāṣṭrācī cār daivateṃ* (Marathi). Pune: Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal.

Prabhudesai, P.K. 2005. *Devīkośa* (Marathi), Vol. I-IV. Pune: Anjali Publications.

Sircar, D.C. 1998. *The Śākta Pīṭhas*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.

Tagare, G.V. 1980. *Śrīkaravīramāhātmyaṃ*. Kolhapur: Shivaji University.

Who Is the Viṣṇu
of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa?

Sucharita Adluri
Cleveland State University
s.adluri16@csuohio.edu

Abstract

Between the 12th to the 14th centuries, two commentaries on the Viṣṇu Purāṇa were composed by Viṣṇucitta (~12th CE) and Śrīdhara (13th–14th CE). Known as the Viṣṇucittīya and Ātmaprakāśa, they are interpretations from the perspectives of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita Vedānta respectively. While the purāṇa weaves together Viṣṇu mythology of a creator god active in the world and worshipped in various forms with the upaniṣadic doctrine of the highest Self, this characterization undergoes various permutations in the hands of the two exegetes. In examining their commentarial strategies, this paper broadens our understanding of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as not simply a root text, but a textual tradition comprising commentaries and its function as a text of persuasion for larger theological contexts, such as Vedānta.

Introduction

From the 12th century onward, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (VP) becomes the focus of interpretation as several commentaries made it the preserve of specific Vedānta schools.[1] Two of the earliest extant commentaries on the VP are the Viṣṇucittīya (VC) by Viṣṇucitta (12th CE) and the Ātmaprakāśa (AP) by Śrīdhara (13th–14th CE), written from the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita Vedānta perspectives respectively.[2] The VP consistently affirms Viṣṇu as the supreme being, however his nature and relationship to creation are contested issues as each exegete secures a different conception of the deity exploiting the multivalency inherent in the purāṇa

---

[1] The critical edition of the VP lists four commentaries by Ratnagarbha, Nṛhari, Viṣṇu Vallabhā and Gangādhara in addition to the two by Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara (1997: 16).

[2] Also known and Viṣṇucittīyavyākhyā and Śrīdharīya, respectively.

itself. Commentaries on purāṇas were important in medieval South Asian religion as exegetes employed them to draw correspondences between popular Vaiṣṇava religion and philosophical systems (*darśana*) such as Vedānta.[3]

Apart from one study on the influence of Rāmānuja, the synthesizer of Viśiṣṭādvaita, on the Viṣṇucittīya, both commentaries are little studied and this paper contributes to this gap in scholarship (Ranganayaki 1999). While it has been suggested that the VP itself espouses certain fundamental Advaita doctrines, it was nonetheless a contested text as we do know that commentaries on it were written from other Vedānta perspectives as well (Mahadevan 1971). The goal of this paper is not to prove that the purāṇa expounds either of the Vedānta philosophies exclusively, rather it is to discern the commentarial strategies of each Vedāntin on specific verses of the purāṇa that elucidate the nature of Viṣṇu. Simply put, it asks, 'Who is the Viṣṇu of the VP for the two commentators'?

In their interpretation of the VP, each commentator is constrained in his interpretation of the VP by adherence to a specific Vedānta tradition. Viṣṇucitta belongs to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition of South India that propounds Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (unity-of-the-differenced). He was a pupil of Piḷḷāṉ, a direct disciple of Rāmānuja. Some hagiographic accounts portray Viṣṇucitta's early training as taking place under Rāmānuja himself (Ranganayaki 1999: 68–79).[4] Viśiṣṭādvaita advocates Viṣṇu as the supreme Brahman who exists in a self-body relationship with creation. Though the divine essential nature is consciousness and bliss, through his various manifestations (*vibhūti*) he is accessible to individual selves bound up in creation. The right knowledge of Viṣṇu's relationship to creation and actions (*karma*) in the form of devotion (*bhakti*) to him, are the way to achieve liberation.[5] Viṣṇu as the inner self is the inner ruler, controller and support of all, but does not suffer the vicissitudes of saṃsāra. The term, inner ruler (*antaryāmin*) has different meanings in the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita systems. In the latter case, Viṣṇu as the inner self of all existence, including individual selves means that he exists in a self-body relationship to the world. His causal nature is real, but is not affected by the defects of his 'body', that is, the world of matter

---

[3] For more on the genre of purāṇas see Rocher 1986.

[4] The Guruparaṃpara Prabhāvam (3000 paṭi) considered authoritative by the Vaḍagalai tradition is composed by Trutiya Brahmatantra Svatantra Jeeyar Swami. It provides more information on this topic in its section on Ācārya Vaibhavam, p. 135ff.

[5] There is development within Śrīvaiṣṇavism, especially within the Teṉkalai tradition, of taking refuge in Viṣṇu as the only means to liberation as well.

and individual selves. When Śrīdhara invokes Viṣṇu as the inner self, the connotation is quite different.

Śrīdhara, popular for his commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, was a resident of a Śaṃkarite monastery near Puri and a disciple of Paramānanda (Gode 1949, Acharya 1965, Sheridan 1994).[6] In his benedictory verse on the commentary, he pays homage to the Advaita ācārya Citsukha (~13th CE) and claims to base it on this Vedāntin's interpretation of the purāṇa.[7] As an Advaitin, the key teaching Śrīdhara advocates is that of non-dualism—as one ceases to identify one's self with what it is not, one ultimately intuits one's own self as Brahman. Realization of the self through knowledge of scripture, is the only way to escape saṃsāra. Where does Viṣṇu fit in? How does Śrīdhara navigate the theistic sections of the VP? He equivocates between two views of Viṣṇu whom he envisions as Kṛṣṇa. On the one hand, he is a personal god (*īśvara*), and on the other hand, he is none other than one's own inner self. This is quite different from what Viṣṇucitta means when he denotes Viṣṇu as the inner self.

To facilitate such a reading, early on in his commentary, Śrīdhara introduces the distinction of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* as specific contexts within which to understand the nature of Viṣṇu. These two distinct ideologies on the practice of dharma are evident in ancient Indian philosophical systems (Bailey 1985). The path of action and social engagement, following the dictates of dharma and ritual is the way of *pravṛtti*. The end result of such a living is a meritorious after-life either in the realm of the gods or in a better future birth. Contrasted to this was the path of *nivṛtti* or social withdrawal, which calls for the abandonment of society and the dictates of dharma. Pursuit of such a life with the study of scripture was to result in liberation from the cycle of saṃsāra. Negotiation between these two distinct paths is undertaken in various ways in both the epics and the purāṇas. In his commentary, Śrīdhara admits the significance of *pravṛtti*, with its attendant ritual and devotional aspects in one's spiritual journey toward liberative realization, as it helps purify the mind. However, knowledge alone and the path of *nivṛtti* is the final means to release. His interpretations of Viṣṇu consistently push the aspirant to question and move beyond theistic, *pravṛtti*-orient-

---

[6] Much has been written on Śrīdhara's commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. To begin with, S.K. De (1986), P. Sheridan (1994), and R. Gupta (2007). are helpful.

[7] He also claims that he has consulted other commentaries on the VP that are both concise and elaborate and has chosen to take the middle way: *śrīvidvatsukhayogimukhya-racitavyākhyāṃ nirīkṣya sphuṭaṃ tanmārgeṇa subodhasaṃgrahavatīm ātmaprakāśābhidhām* (Sharma 1995: 1).

ed understandings of the deity. Though he does not utilize terms such as illusion (*māyā*), and ignorance (*avidyā*), in the sections discussed in this paper, we see that in his interpretation, he is nonetheless firmly rooted in Advaita Vedānta.

The source material for this paper, to evaluate the nature of Viṣṇu as understood by Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara, is comprised of their benedictory verses, their commentaries on the first chapter of the purāṇa, specifically 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, and the last verse 1.1.31. Of the three sections that this paper consists of, in the first, the invocatory verses of the two exegetes are evaluated (Ia, Ib). In addition, Śrīdhara utilizes a version of the VP that has some benedictory verses that are included at the beginning of the purāṇa, on which he comments. The critical edition of the VP notes that certain manuscripts include such verses prior to the first stanza of VP (1.1.1). These passages are found only in the version of the VP that Śrīdhara utilizes. Though these are not invocations by the exegete himself, because he comments on them, we need to consider this material (Ic). In the second section, the commentary on verses 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 is examined. The VP begins with a series of questions posed by Maitreya to Parāśara. In six verses, 1.1.4 to 1.1.10, the former enquires about world creation, its material cause, its re-creation after dissolution, the place where it emerged from and where it will recede to.[8] Of these seven verses, 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 attract the attention of the exegetes, and their commentary gives considerable information on how they envision Viṣṇu (IIa-d).

Section I: Invoking Viṣṇu

a. Viṣṇucittīya maṅgalaśloka
b. Ātmaprakāśa maṅgalaśloka
c. Ātmaprakāśa introductory verses
    (part of the VP version utilized by Śrīdhara)

Section II: Viṣṇu's Causality

a. Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.4
b. Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.4
c. Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.5
d. Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.5

---

[8] These questions comprise the five components of purāṇas (*purāṇa pañcalakṣaṇa*) that is thought to be their subject matter. The five characteristics enumerated are 1) primary creation, 2) secondary creation or dissolution, 3) genealogies of gods and patriarchs, 4) periods of Manus, and 5) history. For more on this topic, see Rocher 1986: 24-30.

Section III: Viṣṇu's Identity with the world

a. Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.31
b. Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.31

In that last verse of chapter one, 1.1.31, Parāśara offers a summary answer to Maitreya's questions and proclaims Viṣṇu as the source from which the world originates and into which it is absorbed at the time of dissolution. Each of the commentators reads this verse in a different way. This offers much on their views on the supreme deity. This material is considered in the last section of the paper (IIIa-b). Together, these three sections of the paper elucidate the connection between Viṣṇu and Brahman on the one hand and Viṣṇu and the world on the other. Though both exegetes agree that Viṣṇu is Brahman who is the world, each qualifies this identity in a unique way.

I. Invoking Viṣṇu: Supreme Deity, Absolute Consciousness

In their benedictory verses, Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara invoke Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa respectively. The former characterizes Viṣṇu as both the transcendent Brahman and the supreme deity in some of his specific manifestations who is the focus of ritual and devotion. The personal god who is the object of devotees' ministrations is the same as the ultimate reality that is of the nature of consciousness and bliss untouched by saṃsāra (section Ia). Śrīdhara identifies Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa in his invocatory passages. Overall, he equivocates between descriptions of Kṛṣṇa as the non-dual absolute with the fewest of attributes such as the 'witness of the mind' and Kṛṣṇa as the Lord, the supreme deity who is the cause creation (section Ib). The last section examines Śrīdhara's commentary on certain benedictory verses that are part of the VP version he utilises (Ic). Though they are not his own compositions, since he comments on them extensively, we need to consider their significance as they offer much on his interpretation of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇucitta's version of the VP does not include these introductory verses.

a. Viṣṇucittīya's Benedictory Verses (maṅgalaśloka)

Viṣṇucitta, in his first verse of benediction, invokes Viṣṇu as both transcendent and intimately involved with the world.[9]

---

[9] There are five invocatory verses listed prior to the beginning of the commentary. Of these, only the first two provide information on the nature of the deity. In addition, the last of the five verses is a benedictory verse by Viṣṇucitta's disciple, Vātsya Varada, extolling his teacher's erudition.

Obeisance to him, to Puruṣottama, the essence[10] of consciousness alone who is devoid of changes due to existence and non-existence

From whom this world was born, where it exists and where all this reaches in the end.[11]

He begins by referring to Viṣṇu as Puruṣottama. This is a common epithet for the deity, but has special significance for the commentator. The term Puruṣottama, meaning the 'highest person', is 'both a divine name and a metaphysical definition of God' (Carman 1986: 159). For the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Puruṣottama is the primordial man (*puruṣa*) of the Puruṣa Sūkta and the Lord Nārāyaṇa, whose dismemberment results in creation (Carman 1986: 159). In the Bhagavad Gītā, Puruṣottama signifies the supreme being, Kṛṣṇa, who encompasses matter and individual selves and yet transcends them as their inner ruler. For Rāmānuja, one of the systematizers of this Vedānta tradition, the epithet Puruṣottama is the divine name of choice after Brahman, illustrating the supremacy (*paratva*) and transcendence of Viṣṇu (Carman 1986: 81, 159). It has been noted that Viṣṇucitta utilizes Rāmānuja's writings frequently in his commentary on the VP and it is likely that this divine name has similar connotations for the commentator as well (Ranganayaki 1999). Puruṣottama, then, as Viṣṇucitta notes in his benedictory verse, is 'the essence of consciousness alone devoid of the changes due to existence and non-existence (individual selves and matter)'. Nonetheless, he is also the creator, sustainer and support of the world at all times even during dissolution, without suffering any modifications that are incumbent on a cause. How this is possible is addressed by the self-body analogy, discussed in the subsequent sections.

In the second benedictory verse, Viṣṇucitta portrays Viṣṇu as a personal god, the supreme deity:

Obeisance, to the bestower of wishes to the worshipper and of the wise, to the one who rides Garuḍa.

---

[10] The word translated as essence is *vapus*, it can also mean 'nature', 'body', 'figure' and so on.

[11] *yasmād idaṃ jagad ajāyata yatra tiṣṭhayante samastam idam astam upaiti yatra. tasmai namas sadasadādivikalpaśūnyacaitanyamātravapuṣe puruṣottamāya* (Sharma 1995: 1).

To the horse-faced one (Hayagrīva),[12] one's own self, the self of the world.[13]

Mythological details of Viṣṇu take center stage here, such as being aloft on Garuḍa, or as Hayagrīva, the horse-faced manifestation who recovers the lost Vedas. Viṣṇu riding the fierce bird Garuḍa is well-known in Vaiṣṇava traditions. In Śrīvaiṣṇavism for instance, Viṣṇu along with his divine vehicle and other celestial attendants is extolled in descriptions of Viṣṇu's heaven, Vaikuṇṭha. Yāmuna, the predecessor of Rāmānuja, in his Stotra Ratna, śloka 41, invokes the bird as a divine vehicle, a seat/throne, a friend, a banner and as possessing scars due to contact with the feet of a seated Viṣṇu (Nayar 1992: 104 fn 111).

Hayagrīva is not a popular form of Viṣṇu, but he is revered in South India as the god of learning and knowledge, and his worship is a living tradition in the temple town of Tiruvahindrapuram, Tamil Nadu. In the epics and purāṇas, he is said to have rescued the Vedas stolen by a demon and also figures in the esoteric ritual texts of Pāñcarātra (Nayar 2004: 170-191). The mention of Garuḍa along with Hayagrīva in this verse is not as unusual as it might seem as this association is prevalent in Śrīvaiṣṇavism.[14] Contrary to this celestial description of Viṣṇu as Hayagrīva and riding on Garuḍa, Viṣṇucitta ends this verse by referring to the deity as the inner self of one's own self and that of the world of matter. In the earlier passage, he first mentions the transcendent aspect of Viṣṇu as Puruṣottama and then his close connection to the world as its cause. Here, in the second verse, he begins with a description of the personal god and then ends with the transcendent aspect of Viṣṇu as 'one's own self and the self of all'. Though Viṣṇucitta vacillates between Viṣṇu as the supreme deity and personal god and as the transcendent Brahman, the two are identical for him.

---

[12] For more on the development of the tradition of worship of Hayagrīva, see Nayar 2004.

[13] *vidheś ca vidhuṣām iṣṭadāyine tārkṣyāyine. namas turaṅgatuṇḍāya svātmane jagadātmane* (Sharma 1995: 1).

[14] Though a successor of Viṣṇucitta, Vedānta Deśika (14th C), has an elaborate legend associated with this temple and his ability to ultimately become a literary master. This was made possible by the Garuḍa mantra and his initiation into Hayagrīva worship (Hopkins 2002: 62-63).

b. *Ātmaprakāśa's Benedictory Verses (maṅgalaśloka)*

In his first benedictory verse, Śrīdhara invokes Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa[15]

> Obeisance to him who is the form of existence, consciousness and bliss,
> to Kṛṣṇa, who is unwearied in action,
> who is known through Vedānta, to the guru, to the witness of the mind (*buddhi*).[16]

While the name Kṛṣṇa might conjure up the deity who was the hero of the Mahābhārata, the charioteer and teacher of Arjuna, the commentator's characterization points the reader away from such a context. He defines Kṛṣṇa as having the form of existence, consciousness and bliss: *sat, cit,* and *ānanda*. In Advaita, though Brahman cannot be conveyed through conventional language, certain definitions of Brahman such as *sadcidānanda* are considered to come close. These terms are not properties of Brahman, they are referred to as an essential definition (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*) of Brahman. *Sadcidānanda* defines Brahman by negating it from what it is not (Murti 1983: 83). Thus, '[s]at excludes *asat* (non-being); *Cit* (will or intelligence) excludes matter (*jaḍa*); *Ānanda* (bliss) excludes *duḥkha* (pain)' (Murti 1983: 83). What this means in the case of Śrīdhara is that, in as much as we can use language to define the non-dual Absolute, *sadcidānanda* is associated with the fewest superimpositions or attributions. So, Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of Brahman's essential nature known through scripture, i.e. Vedānta, points to the non-dual self, beyond all language and conventional experience.

For Śrīdhara, this Kṛṣṇa is also a guru. In benedictory verses, usually in addition to a deity of choice, the preceptors of one's tradition and lineage are also invoked. By identifying Kṛṣṇa as the guru, Śrīdhara follows a well-known Advaita tradition of considering Nārāyaṇa as the founder of the tradition. In this context, Nārāyaṇa is the 'most subtle personalized form of brahman, the Inner Controller and witness' (Hirst 2005: 58). Once again for Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa as the founder of Advaita Vedānta is Brahman bereft of all superimpositions except the sole adjunct of wisdom (Hirst 2005: 58).

Śrīdhara also envisions Kṛṣṇa as the 'witness of the mind'. In his *maṅgalaśloka* of Naiṣkarmyasiddhi, Sureśvara (~9th CE) also pays obeisance to Hari, the witness of the mind, destroyer of darkness, from whom the world, consist-

---

[15] There are four verses that comprise the *maṅgalaślokas*. Of these only the first two convey information on the nature of Viṣṇu. This verse is not found in the Parimal edition, but is found in the Nag Publishers edition.

[16] *sadcidānandarūpāya kṛṣṇāyākliṣṭakāriṇe. namo vedāntavedyāya gurave buddhisākṣiṇe.*

ing of ether, air, wind, fire, and water, comes forth just as a garland appears as a snake (Alston 1971: 2).[17] In later Advaita, Citsukha (~13th CE) in his Tattva-pradīpikā explains the relationship between Brahman and the witness-consciousness, i.e., the witness of the mind as 'the pure Brahman which has become all the inner selves [and] is known to be the witness-consciousness according to differences in finite individual beings' (Gupta 1995: 119). Kṛṣṇa as the witness of the mind is a way to 'point to the inactivity of the self and correct the idea that it could be the agent in [an] act of empirical cognition' (Alston 1971: 138–139). The ineffable self is inactive and is a non-agent. Śrīdhara envisions Kṛṣṇa as the witness of the mind, the seer behind the seeing, the true self, the non-dual absolute.

For the Advaitin, Kṛṣṇa is also the one who is unwearied in action—*ak-liṣṭakārin*. That is, the cause (*kārin*) which is unassociated with any defects (*ak-liṣṭa*). He is beyond the deficiencies of existence such as passion, anger, desire and so on, in that he is not affected by them as he is not in contact with them. Here, Kṛṣṇa can be understood as the Lord, the creator and the cause of creation, who is untouched by it. What we see in this verse is a continuum of envisioning Kṛṣṇa as the non-dual Absolute, in as much as this is possible, to Kṛṣṇa as the cause of the world. Suthren Hirst has discussed such a model in her study on Śaṃkara (Suthren Hirst 2005: 124–129). Thus, Śrīdhara does not speak of two Kṛṣṇas—only one with different attributions, ranging from the gross, such as Lord over the creation of which he is the cause, to the subtle, such as witness of the mind.[18]

Śrīdhara, in his second verse, pays homage to his deity of choice (*iṣṭadeva-ta*) and other divinities important to the sacred city of Kāśi

> I bow to Bindu Mādhava, the form of Supreme Bliss, to the goddess of speech,
> to the Lord of the universe, to Gaṅgā, and to the seer, the foremost Parāśara.[19] (2)

---

[17] *khānilāgnyabdharitryantaṃ srakphaṇīvodgataṃ yataḥ. dhvāntacchide namas tasmai haraye buddhisākṣiṇe.*

[18] I do not utilize the terms such as higher brahman and lower brahman or *saguṇa* brahman and *nirguṇa* brahman as Śrīdhara himself does not. He only introduces the *pravṛtti-nivṛtti* framework and so that is the only distinction that is addressed here. See Lott 1980 and Mahadevan 1968 for more on those distinctions.

[19] *śrībindumādhavaṃ vande paramānandavigraham. vācam viśveśvaraṃ gaṅgāṃ parāśara-mukhān munīn* (Upreti 2011: 1).

Bindu Mādhava is a regional form of Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa, whose temple is located in Kāśi (Eck 1982: 206-207). One of the myths surrounding this temple manifestation is that Viṣṇu granted the sage Agni Bindu a boon to remain in Kāśi as the *mūrti* in this temple. Śrīdhara balances the theistic tenor of the verse, by referring to this form of Kṛṣṇa as the form of Supreme Bliss (*ānanda*) that we have already come across as a definition of Brahman. While paying obeisance to Kṛṣṇa as a personal god, Bindu Mādhava, the commentator points beyond this created world, over which the deity is Lord but also transcends it, as one's own inner self, alluding to a proper Advaitin understanding. Śrīdhara also invokes Viśveśvara the form of Śiva important in Kāśi, the river Ganges, the goddess of speech and the sage Parāśara, the narrator of the VP.

In these two *maṅgalaślokas*, then, two understandings of Kṛṣṇa are conveyed. These can be seen as two poles of a continuum—on the one hand, Kṛṣṇa as the absolute with a minimum of attributions such as *sat, cit, ānanda* or as the witness of the mind, as the embodiment of supreme bliss etc. On the other hand, Viṣṇu as Bindu Mādhava, a specific form of Kṛṣṇa, is more relatable in the context of name and form.[20] For Viṣṇucitta, Viṣṇu is the transcendent Brahman and the personal Lord accessible to his devotees and intimately involved in the world though its creation, maintenance and dissolution. For Śrīdhara, Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa is also Brahman as the non-dual absolute beyond name and form realized ultimately as one's self within. However, until such a time as that, there are degrees to which Kṛṣṇa can be associated with various attributions relevant in the conventional world. So, the answer 'yes', to the question as to the identity of Kṛṣṇa and Brahman for Śrīdhara will have to be qualified.

c. *Ātmaprakāśa (commentary on additional ślokas that are part of Śrīdhara's version of the purāṇa)*

We begin by considering Śrīdhara's comments on two passages that are part of the version of the purāṇa he utilizes. His commentary on them is extensive and conveys much information on how he envisions Viṣṇu. Of the four verses, two are relevant to our discussion as the others address the importance of purāṇas and sage Parāśara. Prior to his commentary on these verses, Śrīdhara by way of introduction states that:

---

[20] For more on the concept of name and form, *nāmarūpa* in Advaita, see Hacker 1995: 57-100 and Suthren Hirst 2005: 89-115.

The questions by Maitreya to Parāśara, in the first *adhyāya* of the first *aṃśa* of the text, on the goal of *pravṛtti*, are found in twenty-two (chapters) of the purāṇa.[21]

By referring to the first book of the VP with twenty-two chapters as concerned with the goal of *pravṛtti* (*pravṛttyartha*), Śrīdhara offers the reader an interpretive framework within which to read the entire purāṇa. The distinction of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* imposes an Advaitic orientation. *Pravṛtti* is the realm of actions (*karma*), ritual and duality, which does not lead to brahman/self-realization and liberation. This path only perpetuates rebirth in saṃsāra. The realization of Brahman is only accomplished by severing worldly attachments, through renunciation and the study of *śruti*, which is the path of *nivṛtti*.

But, if these chapters are concerned with *pravṛtti* that is to be transcended, why bother reading or commenting on them?[22] Śrīdhara says that purāṇas have the essential nature of being the breath or extirpation (*niśvasita*) of the Lord (*īśvara*) and are rooted in Veda. Additionally, in the case of the VP, its lineage in the form of remembrance or recounting directly from the sage Vyāsa to Vaśiṣṭha to Parāśara makes its use and validity difficult to deny. After validating the authority of the purāṇas, especially the VP he goes on to say that commentaries on purāṇas are useful as their sole purpose is to illuminate various objects by refuting their respective false appearances. Śrīdhara adds, though such accounts among many purāṇas may be rare, in this very purāṇa, *pravṛtti* is proclaimed as best for the practice effecting the identity (*aikātmya*) of the supreme self, individual self and the world for those desirous of liberation (Upreti 2011: 1) The significance of purāṇas is recast to accommodate the Advaita exegetical practice of negation of superimposition and false appearance to gain the true understanding of reality. In the case of the VP at least, for those seeking liberation but who find themselves in the context of *pravṛtti*, the purāṇa helps one navigate the path of purifying the mind, which is essential for the path of knowledge and eventual realization. On the topic of the myriad narratives on origins of various beings and so on, Śrīdhara notes:

And of the genealogies of Manus, gods, sages, creation and dissolution, therein, by negation (*apavāda*) of that, liberation is the teaching. The use

---

[21] *tantrāṃśe prathame 'dhyāye maitreyeṇa parāśare pravṛttyarthaṃ purāṇasya praśnā dvāvimśati kṛtāḥ* (Upreti 2011:1).

[22] Suthren Hirst (2005) has shown that in the case of Śaṃkara, the importance of the context of *pravṛtti* is connected to the Advaita pedagogical method.

of the examination of narratives of the land of Bhārata, the earth, and
virtuous conduct, for liberation alone, immediately or ultimately ought
to be seen.[23]

In this way, purāṇic narratives have the ability to remove various appearances to
lead to the realization of the non-difference between the world, individual self
and the supreme self. This is the standard Advaita method of superimposition
(*adhyāropa*) and negation (*apavāda*): '[t]he Absolute cannot be denoted through
speech and negation is the fundamental process which leads to *viveka*—discrim-
ination of the true nature of the self' (Alston 1980: 136).[24] Thus, one may begin in
this context but one moves towards the realization of one's own self as Viṣṇu,
either 'immediately or ultimately', and this is the overall goal of the purāṇa.

Following this introduction on the meaning of the purāṇa and its signifi-
cance in liberation, Śrīdhara comments on the invocatory passages found prior
to the beginning of the VP. Among these four verses, his commentary on the first
two give us the most information on his conception of Viṣṇu. What we see as a
general rule is that Śrīdhara, when the text allows for it, interprets Kṛṣṇa as a
personal god but also frequently through negation and correction points to envi-
sioning him as one's own inner self. The first passage is from the famous *Jitam Te
Stotra* that is part of the Ṛg Veda *khila*, but is also found in some Vaiṣṇava Pāñ-
carātra texts.

> Victory to you, Puṇḍarīkākṣa, obeisance to Viśvabhāvana,
> Obeisance to you Hṛṣīkeśa, Mahāpuruṣa, Pūrvajā.[25]

Śrīdhara glosses each of the epithets from this verse combining theistic conno-
tations with more Advaitic interpretations. He offers four interpretations of the
term 'Puṇḍarīkākṣa'. First he says it can mean 'he who reaches/he who pervades,
the lotus called the heart'.[26] The Upaniṣads refer to the self within as the lotus
within the heart. For instance, Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.1 states 'now, here in the
fort of brahman there is a small lotus, a dwelling place, and within it, a small

---

[23] *tatra ca sargapratisargavaṃśamanvantaravaṃśānucaritānāṃ tad apavādena mukteś ca
pratipādanam. sadācārabhūgolabharatopākhyānādinirūpaṇasya sākṣāt paramparāyā vā muktāv
evopayogo dṛṣṭavyaḥ* (Upreti 2011: 1).

[24] Suthren Hirst's volume explores this in more detail (2005: 83–85).

[25] *jitaṃ te puṇḍarīkākṣa namas te viśvabhāvana. namas te 'stu hṛṣīkeśa mahāpuruṣa pūrvajā*
(Upreti 2011: 1).

[26] *hṛdayākhyaṃ puṇḍarīkam aśnute vyāpnotīti tathā* (Upreti 2011: 1).

space' (Olivelle 1998: 273). Śrīdhara's interpretation of Puṇḍarīkākṣa means one who 'reaches', that is, realizes one's true self.

The second meaning of Puṇḍarīkākṣa, according to Śrīdhara is 'he whose two eyes are like two lotuses'.[27] This is the most common understanding of the term as an epithet of the god, Viṣṇu. A third interpretation is that Puṇḍarīkākṣa can mean, 'he by whom the eye was made into a lotus for the purpose of the worship of Śiva'.[28] This is a reference to the myth of Viṣṇu worshipping the Śiva Liṅga with lotuses. Discovering that he had one less than the thousand needed, he plucked out his eye as an offering. It is found in the Koṭirudra Saṃhitā of the Śiva Purāṇa (Shastri 2002: chapter 43). So, with the second and third interpretations, he opts for a theistic reading, envisioning Puṇḍarīkākṣa as the personal god, Viṣṇu. Whereas, with the first interpretation he focuses on Kṛṣṇa as the indwelling self.

Śrīdhara ends with a fourth possibility citing part of a passage from the Udyoga Parvan of the Mahābhārata, which offers an etymology of Puṇḍarīkākṣa. The complete verse is the following: 'He is called *puṇḍarīka* which means the abode that is supreme, high, eternal and *akṣaya* means indestructible. Because of that Janārddana strikes fear into the hearts of wicked beings' (Sukthankar, 1933). Though the reference of this passage is to Kṛṣṇa, Janārddana, for the commentator, Puṇḍarīkākṣa is one who has seen this indestructible abode, i.e., has intuited the self. Puṇḍarīkākṣa is not so much the celestial deity Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, but the indwelling Brahman in one's heart that is finally recognized as duality is transcended.

His interpretation of *viśvabhāvana* is straightforward as one who 'is the producer of all'. This reading that underscores divine causality is more in line with Kṛṣṇa as a personal god. Śrīdhara does not interpret *hṛṣīkeśa* as Kṛṣṇa, as for instance in Bhagavad Gītā 18.1 (Sadhale, 1936). He takes *hṛṣīka* to mean the senses and *hṛṣīkeśa* as 'the lord of the senses', and he is their lord 'due to being the cause of the manifestation of them (Upreti 2011: 2). He cites Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.18 for support: 'the breathing behind breathing, the sight behind sight, the hearing behind the hearing, the thinking behind the thinking' (Olivelle 1998: 125). Here the self is spoken of as that which is real behind the vital functions, animating them and so *hṛṣīkeśa* is 'the sight behind the sight', in other words, the seer behind the seeing, a reference to Brahman.

---

[27] *yadvā puṇḍarīke ivākṣiṇo yasyeti* (Upreti 2011:1-2).

[28] *śivārādhanārthaṃ puṇḍrīkīkṛtaṃ akṣī yeneti* (Upreti 2011: 2).

Commenting on *mahāpuruṣa*, Śrīdhara first explains *mahā* as referring to something that is great 'due to separation from individual self (*jīva*) and *mahat* (an evolute of *prakṛti*/matter)'. He then cites as support Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1. This upaniṣad refers to two birds on a tree, one partaking of its fruit and the other does not do so, but looks on. Here, the latter bird is *mahā* due to the fact that, not partaking of the fruit, i.e., saṃsāra and its trappings, it has the nature of being eternally liberated (*nityamuktasvabhāva*). To explain *puruṣa*, he glosses it as 'however, due to resting in the body, results personhood' (Upreti 2011: 2) Overall, *mahāpuruṣa* is not Kṛṣṇa, a divine being, but a reference to the highest self that is embodied, but is different from the individual self, the material body and is a non-agent.

The Advaitin comments on *pūrvajā* as one who is prior to creation (Upreti 2011: 2). This is not however due to Viṣṇu being the cause. He starts from the premise that if the whole world is understood to arise from him then he is the cause. He goes on to say, 'one's self is indeed prior to creation, by the fact that creation manifests or by the fact that as cause, it is the indispensable antecedent of creation, from the dependence of the other (creation) on it (Upreti 2011: 2). Kṛṣṇa as *pūrvajā* is once again a reference to the self that is understood as the cause of creation not because he is, but because if the world is thought to arise/ manifest, it must have a cause. He does not say that Brahman is the cause. According to Advaita, Brahman is the cause in as much as it is the support on which the world is superimposed. In this sense, it is prior to creation and supports creation.

Finally, Śrīdhara provides one last interpretation of all the terms taken together as epithets of Viṣṇu/Krsna. However, instead of relating them to particular mythologies, narratives, or exploits of the deity, he reads them as the 'five attributes' of Viṣṇu mentioned in Book Five of the VP. In this section, the pious Yādava Akrura sent to accompany Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to the court of Kaṃsa, on seeing Kṛṣṇa eulogizes him as beyond matter and existing in five forms. He hymns: 'self of the elements, self of the senses, self of *pradhāna* (matter), the individual self, the supreme Self, and in that manner you are the lord who exists in five forms' (VP 5.18.50). According to Śrīdhara, *puṇḍarīkākṣa* means the self of elements, *viśvabhāvana* means the self of matter, *hṛṣīkeśa* means the self of the senses, *mahāpuruṣa* is the supreme Self and *pūrvajā* is called the individual self.

The interpretation of Viṣṇu's divine names in this way moves the reader away from envisioning a personal god with form, to an investigation into cosmic elements that make up creation and to ultimately question the support of it all. All epithets of Viṣṇu are pointers to something that lies beyond the personal god

and some can be useful for the purpose of meditation. Suthren Hirst notes that this method of 'interiorization' is found in Śaṃkara as well, where he 'takes both cosmological and psychological explorations unstructured as well as structured and turns them into interiorizing techniques that progressively focus attention on the self and enable the pupil successively to discard misidentification with what is not the self' (Suthren Hirst 2005: 83). These attributes of Viṣṇu draw focus to 'the search for the self, which is within yet other than the cosmos, within yet other than the individual, the unseen seer' (Suthren Hirst 2005: 127). Through an understanding of Viṣṇu as the self of these elements of existence, an aspirant can move beyond viewing him simply as the Lord over creation, pointing instead to one's own self.

In the commentary on the second verse that begins Śrīdhara's version of the purāṇa, he again equivocates between Viṣṇu as the self within that is to be realized and the deity as a creator, sustainer fulfilling the expectations accorded a personal deity.

> The Lord, the Person, Brahman who is imperishable existence,
> He has the quality to manifest as creation, existence, time, and dissolution.
> Bringing forth the whole world of *pradhāna*, *buddhi* etc.
> May he, Viṣṇu, gift to us wisdom, prosperity and liberation.[29]

Faced with a passage that unambiguously affirms the causal nature of Viṣṇu, he first notes that 'in order to explain the function and connection of the limbs of *pravṛtti* for the hearer this second verse is stated' (Upreti 2011: 2), meaning that the specifics of divine causality are provisional and for pedagogical purposes only. In no way are these instantiations to be taken as the end all. On the mention of Viṣṇu he says:

> He, the most celebrated Viṣṇu, has the disposition of pervasion, due to not being divisible in his essential nature by space and time. Or Viṣṇu means he who enters, one who has the disposition to enter as stated in scripture 'having emitted it, he entered it' (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6).[30]

The understanding of Viṣṇu as the pervader from the verbal root *viś*, is a common etymological meaning of the deity. Here Śrīdhara adds that this pervasion

---

[29] *sadakṣaraṃ brahma ya īśvaraḥ pumān guṇormisṛṣṭisthitikālasaṃlayaḥ. pradhānabuddhyādi-jagatprapañcasūḥ sa no 'stu viṣṇur matibhūtimuktidaḥ* (Upreti 2011: 2).

[30] *so 'tiprasiddho viṣṇur vyāpinaśīlo deśakālasvarūpato vyavacchedābhāvāt. viśater vā viṣṇuḥ praveśanaśīlaḥ, tat sṛṣṭvā tadevānupraviśad iti śruteḥ* (Upreti 2011: 2).

is due to his indivisible nature, that is beyond space and time. He also gives 'pervasion' an Upaniṣadic connotation of 'creating and entering'. In the Upaniṣad he cites, Brahman emits creation and then enters it. From this, results differentiation into the distinct and the indistinct, the resting and the never resting and so on.

But to counter the charge that as the cause, Viṣṇu is susceptible to change or modification he goes on to interpret 'pervasion' i.e., 'entering' as not associated with taking form:

> If the interpretation of the quality of entering of the word 'Viṣṇu' is obtaining of material form, this is refuted with the term Brahman, or fullness, this is the meaning. So then, if it is asked, in what manner does he pervade? This is stated with *sat*, uninterruptedly connected to everything. That is to say, due to the fact of appearing everywhere from phrases such as 'this is *sat*, this is *sat*', it is undestroyed. The use of the term 'imperishable' rejects modification.[31]

Pervasion means always existing and appearing everywhere due to the fact that Viṣṇu as Brahman is existence (*sat*). *Sat*, which is 'the real [can]not be produced in the sense of 'brought into manifestation'...[f]or any character of a real thing is constant' (Alston 1971: 32). In Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.1.4, clay is spoken of as a stand-in for *sat*. Though there are many modifications of clay they are in name only. Ultimately there is only clay. Just so, all that is thought of as modifications of *sat* are in fact only *sat*. *Sat* itself does not undergo production, manifestation and destruction. All modifications of *sat* are only apparent. Interpreting Viṣṇu in this way, means not envisioning him as the lord, *īśvara*, who projects creation, enters it and manifests in many forms.

While Śrīdhara interprets Viṣṇu as the indwelling self, where possible, he also allows for a theistic view when the text calls for it. He glosses 'may he gift to us wisdom, prosperity and liberation' as follows:

> 'May he to us gift wisdom, prosperity, liberation' means that by means of the power (*bhūti*) of understanding (*mati*), with preponderance of knowledge of reality (*tattvajñānaudreka*), may he bestow liberation (*mukti*). Or based on difference among aspirants; he gifts in this manner, under-

---

[31] *viṣṇupadasya praveśanaśīlārthatve mūrtatvaṃ prāptaṃ nirākaroti brahmeti pūrṇam ity arthaḥ. tadapi kuta ity ata āha satsarvānusyūtam. idaṃ sad idaṃ sad iti sarvatra pratīyamānatvād anuṣṭam iti yāvat. akṣaram iti vikāraṃ nirākaroti* (Upreti 2011: 2).

standing, which means highest wisdom; prosperity means wealth/sovereignty and liberation.[32]

He interprets *matibhūti* in the compound *matibhūtimuktida* together, rendering it as 'may he gift liberation (*mukti*) by the power (*bhūti*) of *mati* or understanding.' Here, he takes *bhūti* in the sense of 'birth', 'production'. He also offers an alternate interpretation that is based on the aspirations of the worshipper. Viṣṇu gifts liberation, prosperity, or highest wisdom. Here, Viṣṇu as the creator and controller of his creation is highlighted.

Śrīdhara's interpretation of other terms such as *pumān* and *īśvara* in the passage envisions Viṣṇu as a personal god:

> *Pumān*, 'person' means the unchangeable (*kūṭastha*).[33] In what manner? He is the bestower of death and so on, this is stated with the 'Lord', who has the ability (*samartha*) to do, not to do, or to do differently. Even so, in what manner does he remain unchanged? This is stated with quality. The qualities *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*, the appearance of them is produced from agitation.[34]

Kūṭastha in Advaita is a reference to the highest self, the unchangeable. But he takes unchangeable to mean Viṣṇu as the dispenser of death as a personal god, the Lord. He also has the capability to do whatever he pleases according to his will. Pressed by an objector, he defines the unchanging nature of Viṣṇu as a result of qualities of matter such as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and not the divine essential nature. Viṣṇu is *kuṭastha* because he has power over his creation as he bestows death, but is unaffected by modifications, which take place in qualities of matter such as *sattva* etc.

Lastly, in his interpretation of the term 'he has the quality to manifest as creation, maintenance, time and dissolution', he expressly indicates the Advaita doctrine of creation as a superimposition due to nescience:

---

[32] *matibhūtimuktido 'stu matibhūtyā tattvajñānodrekeṇa muktidaḥ. yadvā adhikāribhedāt matim uttamāṃ buddhiṃ bhūtim aiśvaryaṃ muktiñ ca dadātīti tathā* (Upreti 2011: 2).

[33] This term can also mean 'immoveable and 'supreme soul'. Here 'unchangeable' is a better interpretation as the discussion is on modification and change.

[34] *pumān kuṭasthaḥ kutas tarhi marttyādipradattamata āha īśvaraḥ kartum akartum anyathā kartuṃ samarthaḥ. kadāpi kuta ity atāha guṇeti guṇāḥ sattvarajastamāṃsi teṣām ūrmayaḥ kṣobhajanitāḥ* (Upreti 2011: 2).

In the phrase, 'creation, maintenance, time, dissolution', 'time' means dissolution. Among them (creation, maintenance, time, dissolution), *saṃlaya* (dissolution) means he on whom is the superimposition (*adhyāsa*), the connection. By the fact that he is the substratum (*adhiṣṭhāṇa*) of all, he is Lord is not contradictory, this is the meaning.[35]

First, Śrīdhara interprets the word 'time' in the compound 'creation-existence-time' as 'dissolution'. Then he takes *saṃlaya* not as dissolution, but in the sense of 'settling down', 'alighting', and so, the entire compound he interprets as 'he on whom is the superimposition of creation, existence, and dissolution by manifestation of qualities', instead of 'he has the quality to manifest as creation, maintenance, time, and dissolution.' He finishes by stating that being the substratum (*adhiṣṭhāṇa*) for the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of creation, he is the Lord. In Advaita, Brahman as cause is understood as the 'unmodified ground (*adhiṣṭhāṇa*) of the appearance' (Murti 1983: 72). While Śrīdhara invokes Viṣṇu as the personal deity, a ruler over creation and Lord, he also mentions this is a provisional reality. What we see in Śrīdhara's commentary on these two passages is in line with the framework of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* he establishes in his introduction to his commentary on these verses. He utilizes interpretations that align Viṣṇu more with the personal god, the realm of *pravṛtti*, but also where possible mentions the provisional nature of this view with Advaitic concepts such as negation (*apavāda*), superimposition (*adhyāsa*) and its substratum (*adhiṣṭhāṇa*).

In summary, in their respective benedictory verses, both Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara invoke Viṣṇu. However, there is a stark difference in who Viṣṇu is for each commentator. Viṣṇucitta invokes Viṣṇu as Puruṣottama, identifying the god with Brahman, the creator, transcendent beyond all vicissitudes of saṃsāra. Yet, he is immanent as one's own self and the self of the world, accessible also through his many manifestations such as Hayagrīva. The popular theistic dimension of Viṣṇu is also underscored by reference to his vehicle, Garuḍa, as mentioned in mythological accounts and iconographic depictions of the deity (Ia). Viṣṇucitta asserts both the fundamental involvement of Viṣṇu in creation and also his transcendence, but does not explain how this is possible. He does this through the self–body analogy, as we see in his commentary on subsequent verses.

Śrīdhara invokes Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa, more specifically as a regional form of the deity from Kāśī, Bindu Mādhava. However, this Kṛṣṇa is identified as *sad-*

---

[35] *sṛṣṭisthitikālāḥ kālaḥ saṃhāraḥ teṣāṃ saṃlayaḥ saṃśleṣo 'dhyāso yasmin sa tathā sarvādhiṣṭhāṇatvena īśvaratvaṃ avyāhatam ity arthaḥ* (Upreti 2011: 2-3).

cidānanda, as the witness of the mind, as the guru who is the source of all Advaita teaching (Ib). Śrīdhara in his commentary on the additional verses at the beginning of the purāṇa, which are absent in his predecessor's version, is quite explicit about the non-dual framework within which he envisions Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa as Brahman. He does this by introducing concepts such as false appearances due to superimposition (*adhyāsa*) and their negation (*apavāda*). The distinction between the paths of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* also works in conjunction with these concepts, as he extols the significance of the former even though only the latter leads to liberation. In the analysis of all the divine epithets of Viṣṇu, Śrīdhara makes an effort to go beyond the *pravṛtti*-oriented contexts of personal theism that are important in that they point to the reality beyond (Ic). Both exegetes agree that Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is none other than Brahman. However, in what way Viṣṇu is Brahman or how it is that Viṣṇu is Brahman is thus far only addressed by Śrīdhara (Ic). Viṣṇucitta has not done so, but conveys this in his commentary on VP 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 (IIa, IIc).

II. Viṣṇu's Causality: Aspect of Essential Nature, Substratum of Superimposition

Having examined the invocations at the beginning of the purāṇa of both exegetes, we turn now to their interpretation of passages 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, which address Viṣṇu's causal nature. In Chapter One of the VP, which sets the narrative context for the rest of the VP, Maitreya approaches Parāśara for instruction. The thirty-one passages of this first chapter state the questions that perturb Maitreya as to nature of the world and the way Parāśara has come to hear of the VP, whose contents are the answers to the former's queries. Apart from passages 1.1.4 to 1.1.10, which are Maitreya's questions and the last passage 1.1.31, that is a summary answer to all of Maitreya's questions, the rest of the chapter is not relevant to the topic of Viṣṇu's nature. Even among several passages that comprise Maitreya's questions, only 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 are commented on by the commentators. In the next four sections the commentary of Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara on 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 is considered (II a-d).

a. Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.4

Having bowed to Parāśara and paying him appropriate homage, Maitreya begins by requesting of Parāśara the following:

> I wish to hear from you, O knower of dharma, how the world was,
> how the world is and how the world will be, O pious one. (VP 1.1.4)[36]

Quoting Rāmānuja, Viṣṇucitta states that what is asked in verses 1.1.4 to 1.1.10 concerns the 'specific aspect of the essential nature of Brahman (*brahmasvarū-paviśeṣa*), the kinds of differences in his manifestation (*vibhūtibhedaprakāra*), and the specifics of the fruits in the form of worship of him (*tatāradhanasvarūpa-phalaviśeṣa*)'.[37] The questions of VP 1.1.4–1.1.5, which we consider here, concern the special characteristic or aspect of the essential nature of Brahman.[38] As support Viṣṇucitta cites Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.1.1:

> Because the essential nature of Brahman is understood by scripture such as 'that from which these beings are born, on which, once born they live, and into which they pass upon death—seek to perceive that! That is Brahman',[39] that very topic (causality) is questioned here. It is stated by Rāmānuja (*bhāṣyakāra*) that this is a question on the specifics of the essential nature of Brahman.... In this respect, because what is asked is about creation and dissolution, from looking at the answer (VP 1.1.31), the question of existence, maintenance and the agent of maintenance and dissolution also is intended.[40]

Not only do Maitreya's queries of world creation and so on address the essential nature of Brahman, these questions on causality are in fact important for liberation. The Upaniṣad, according to Viṣṇucitta, specifically, states Viṣṇu's causality as an important topic to be inquired into and Parāśara's response in VP 1.1.31, is about essential knowledge of Brahman and is not mere cosmology. The contrast with Śrīdhara's interpretation, which we address next, is that the questions of Maitreya in fact concern divine causality, which is a *brahmasvarūpaviśeṣa*, a spe-

---

[36] *so 'ham icchāmi dharmajña śrotuṃ tvatto yathā jagat. babhūva bhūyaś ca yathā mahābhāga bhaviṣyati* (VP 1.1.4).

[37] *atra bhagavatā bhāṣyakāreṇa brahmasvarūpaviśeṣatadvibhūtibhedaprakārās tadārādhana-svarūpaphalaviśeṣāś ca pṛṣṭā iti* (Sharma 1995: 2)

[38] For more on the concept of *brahmasvarūpaviśeṣa* in Viśiṣṭādvaita, see Adluri 2014: 31-38).

[39] Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.1.1, translation from Olivelle 1998: 309.

[40] *brahmasvarūpasya yato vā imāni ityādivākyasiddhatvāt tadviśeṣevātra praṣṭavya iti bhāṣyakāreṇa brahmasvarūpaviśeṣapraśna ity uktam ... atra utpattilayayoḥ pṛṣṭatvāt sthitipraśno 'py abhipretaḥ sthitisaṃyamakarteti prativacanadarśanāt* (Sharma 1995: 2).

cific aspect of Brahman's essential nature and this very cause manifests in different forms to be accessible for worship and this very topic is important for liberation. Considering divine causality as a *brahmasvarūpaviśeṣa*, is a direct response to the Advaita view of divine causality as provisionally true. Moreover, this very Brahman, who is the cause, is Viṣṇu in his many manifestations accessible for worship to his devotees. Thus, ritual and worship that are considered as comprising the context of *pravṛtti*, and which are of secondary importance for liberation in Advaita, are here defined as directly necessary for freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

b. *Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.4*

Whereas, Viṣṇucitta concludes that causality is an essential nature of Brahman, Śrīdhara simply states that Maitreya's questions on how the world was and how it will be again, concern the mode of production/creation (*janmaprakāra*).[41] While he admits that the topic of discussion is causality, his sparse comments on this verse underscore his perspective that world causation or dissolution are not topics of much importance. His prior commentary, as we saw, was extensive, and the reader needs to keep in mind those comments while reading the commentary on this verse as well (Ic). There Śrīdhara defines causality as a topic that is relevant in the context of *pravṛtti* only and is indirectly important as a means to purify the mind. His claim that Viṣṇu is the substratum of superimposition of the world, which is a result of nescience, is vastly different from Viṣṇucitta for whom causality as *brahmasvarūpaviśeṣa* is knowledge that is directly important for liberation.

c. *Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.5*

Among Maitreya's questions which span verses 1.1.4 to 1.1.10, the only other verse where Viṣṇucitta offers a substantial commentary is VP 1.1.5. Here, he introduces the paradigm of the self-body as the relationship that exists between Brahman and the world. This allows him to maintain Brahman/Viṣṇu himself as the cause without undergoing modification and to admit causality as an aspect of Brahman's essential nature. Maitreya questions Parāśara:

> What is the world made of, O Brahman, from where is this world of the movable and the immovable,

---

[41] *pūrvaṃ yathā babhūva punaś ca yathā bhaviṣyatīti jagato janmaprakāraprasnaḥ* (Upreti 2011: 4).

Where and in what way was it resting and where will it go at dissolution? (VP 1.1.5)[42]

Commenting on this verse, Viṣṇucitta first makes sure to establish intra-textual connectivity in that these questions of Maitreya's culminate in the last verse of this chapter, VP 1.1.31, with Parāśara's response that '(Viṣṇu) he is the world'. Second, to circumvent issues arising from the question of modification the cause might undergo, he writes that Viṣṇu's identity with the world is akin to the self-body connection

Because with the question 'from where' what is asked is about the instrumental cause, by 'what is the world made of' and so on, how creation acquires the status of an object and what the world is comprised of is asked. For this the answer is 'he is the world' (1.1.31). Here, the sameness of the nature by means of the form of the inner self, that is, by being the self of it, is the intended condition, but not (sameness in nature) due to identity with the object. Because the answer to the question 'what is the world made of' is 'he is the world', the connection is one of coordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*).[43]

In Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Brahman is understood to exist as the inner self of matter and of individual selves. They exist as his modes (*prakāra*). Just as the body is considered a mode of the individual self, so also matter and individual selves themselves are ensouled by Brahman. As Rāmānuja notes,

[t]herefore all words naming these objects...first signify the objects they name in ordinary parlance, then through these objects, the finite selves dwelling in them, and finally these words extend in their significance to denote the supreme self (*paramātman*) who is their Inner Controller (*antaryāmin*). Thus, all terms do indeed denote the entire composite being (*saṃghāta*)...this entire created universe (*prapañca*) of intelligent and material entities has Being (*sat*) as its material cause, its instrumental cause

---

[42] *yanmayaṃ ca jagad brahman yataś caitac carācaram. līnam āsīd yathā yatra layam eṣyati yatra ca* (VP 1.1.5).

[43] *yataś caitat carācaram iti nimittopādānayoḥ pṛṣṭavāt yanmayam ity anena sṛṣṭyādikarmabhūtaṃ jagat kimātmakam iti pṛṣṭam. tasya cottaraṃ jagac ca sa iti, idaṃ tādātmyam antaryāmirūpeṇa ātmatayā'vasthānakṛtaṃ na tu vastvaikyakṛtam. yanmayam iti praśnasyottaratvāt jagac ca sa iti sāmānādhikaraṇyasya* (Sharma 1995: 2-3).

and its support (*ādhāra*); it is controlled (*niyāmya*) by Being and is the *śeṣa* [subordinate] of Being (Carman 1974: 124).

This is the principle of coordinate predication (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*) where 'the name of a body can properly be applied to the self ensouling that body, and the name of an attribute or mode belongs to its underlying substance' (Carman 1974: 125). To the question what is the world made of, the answer can be Brahman is the world due to the principle of coordinate predication in that an attribute or mode of a substance can be used to denote the substance. As a mode of Brahman, the world can be identified with Brahman, but it is not identity due to similarity of substance, rather identity due to Brahman being its inner self.

Viṣṇucitta then goes on to explain that the *taddhita* suffix *mayaṭ* in Maitreya's question '*yan mayam*', 'what is it made of' has the meaning of plenitude, constituted by Viṣṇu as the self of the world.[44]

> Hence, the goal of plenitude (*prācurya*) alone is the entirety (of meaning). From that, the answer to the question 'what is the world made of' is that 'he is the world' and is the relationship of *sāmānādhikaraṇya*; the basis of the relationship of the self–body connection.[45]

Viṣṇu is the material and instrumental cause without bearing substantial likeness to the world and from this, 'the connection of self-body alone is the principle sense of *sāmānādhikaraṇya*'.[46] Viṣṇucitta argues that the Advaita view of Brahman's connection to the world would not make sense. That is, if Brahman is *nirviśeṣajñānamātra*, as Advaitins argue, then Parāśara's answer 'Viṣṇu is the world' to Maitreya's question of 'what is the world made of' would not make sense.

d. *Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.5*

Śrīdhara's comments on 1.1.5 in comparison to Viṣṇucitta are once again sparse. He simply notes that Maitreya's question what is the world made of, *yanmayam*, is a question concerning the material cause (*upādāna kāraṇa*). 'From where', *yataś*

---

[44] He rejects two other possible meanings of the '*mayaṭ*' suffix namely, *vikāra*, modification, and *svārtha*, in the sense of identity as in *prāṇamaya*, or made of.

[45] *ataḥ prācuryartha eva kṛtsnaṃ jagadātmakatayā tat pracuram eva tasmād yanmayam ity asya prativacanaṃ jagac ca sa iti sāmānādhikaraṇyaṃ śarīrātmabhāvanibandhanam* (Sharma 1995: 3).

[46] *tasmād ātmaśarīrabhāva evedaṃ sāmānādhikaraṇyaṃ mukhyam* (Sharma 1995: 3).

ca, is a question about the instrumental cause or agent (*nimitta*). Where it was resting, *yatra līnam āsīd*, is a question about the ground or support (*ādhāra*) of dissolution.[47] Having mentioned earlier that Maitreya's questions concern the goal of *pravṛtti*, he does not specifically mention the world as appearance or a superimposition on Brahman, but rather simply parses the VP passage as it relates to Maitreya's question. Once again the reader is to construe his Advaita stance from his earlier comments (Ic).

In summary, Viṣṇucitta's comments on VP 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 make four points that are of significance for the topic of Viṣṇu's causality. First, he claims that causality is a specific aspect of the essential nature of Brahman (*brahmasvarū-paviśeṣa*). This serves to reinforce the Viśiṣṭādvaita view that the world which manifests is Viṣṇu. Second, this Viṣṇu who is the world also manifests in myriad forms which are accessible for worship. Third, the topic of causality is not mere cosmological specifics, but rather an important and relevant knowledge for one desiring liberation. Fourth, the connection between Viṣṇu and the world is one of self–body. This means that as the inner self of the world he can be identified as the world.

Though Śrīdhara does not provide such detail in his comments on VP 1.1.4 and 1.1.5, he has done this type of exegesis already in his comments on some of the benedictory passages (Ic). He combines theistic and Advaitic interpretations in his discussion of Viṣṇu as Brahman. For instance, we saw that in his interpretation of the divine epithets he moves the reader away from envisioning a personal god with form and to focus on the reality that lies beyond. Through the distinction of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* he can admit the theistic context but also deems this as provisional truth. Viṣṇu then is not simply a personal god to be worshipped, but is one's inner self devoid of all adjuncts, that is to be meditated on. Creation manifests from Viṣṇu, but ultimately it is to be understood as a false appearance—a superimposition on Brahman due to ignorance. What becomes clear in the commentaries of these two exegetes is that Viṣṇu is Brahman and is the cause of creation, but what this means is quite different for each.

---

[47] *yanmayam ity upādānapraśno yataś ceti nimittapraśno līnam āsīd yatreti layādhārapraśnaḥ* (Upreti 2011: 4).

III. Viṣṇu's Identity with the World: Self to Body, Accidental Characteristic

In the discussion on the benedictory verses (Ia and Ib), the commentary on invocatory passages that are part of the purāṇa version utilized by Śrīdhara (Ic), and the commentary on VP 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 (IIa–d), the identity of Viṣṇu and his relation to Brahman and the world was the focus of the discussion. The main goal was to discern how Viṣṇu is Brahman and the nature of the world in relation to that. In the commentary on 1.1.31, both commentators grapple with the identity between Viṣṇu and the world that is set up by the purāṇa. Both Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara, agree with the VP that Viṣṇu is the world. However, for the former that identity manifests as a self–body relationship and for the latter the identity is a result of the world as an accidental characteristic of Viṣṇu.

a. Viṣṇucittīya on VP 1.1.31

We have already come across VP 1.1.31, Parāśara's answer to Maitreya's queries as the commentators have referred to it in their comments on earlier passages of this chapter such as 1.1.4 and 1.1.5. Now we examine the commentators' interpretation of this last passage of VP 1.1.

> The world originates from Viṣṇu and it exists there itself. He is the cause of preservation and dissolution of that world and he is the world. (VP 1.1.31) [48]

The purāṇa in this particular verse admits a close connection between Viṣṇu and the world as it identifies the two when it claims that 'he is the world'. Viṣṇu is the source of everything as creation evolves from him and recedes into him. The concept of Brahman as the material and instrumental cause is accepted by all Vedāntins. However, the nature of the connection is open to interpretation. Each commentator reads this passage from a Viśiṣṭādvaita or Advaita perspective envisioning Viṣṇu's relationship to the world in quite different terms. Though both agree that Viṣṇu is the cause of creation, Viṣṇucitta understands the identity as due to the world being the body of Viṣṇu who is its self. Whereas for Śrīdhara such an identity is due to the view that the world is an accidental characteristic (*upalakṣaṇa*) of Brahman.

   Viṣṇucitta comments that the meaning of Maiterya's questions to Parāśara, in the first chapter of Book One, beginning with 'I wish to know' (1.1.4)

---

[48] *viṣṇoḥ sakāśād udbhūtaṃ jagat tatraiva ca sthitam. sthitisaṃyamakartāsau jagato 'sya jagac ca saḥ* (VP 1.1.31).

concern the specifics on the thing that is the cause of the world (*jagatkāraṇavas-tuviśeṣa*) and along with that the specifics of the manner of its connection to the world (*jagatsambandhaprakāraviśeṣa*). Verse 1.1.31 is then a summary answer to those questions on the manifestation of matter (*pradhāna*) as is stated in more detail in the ensuing chapters of the purāṇa. As he has stated earlier, if the thing (*vastu*) is the cause of the world (*jagatkāraṇa*), then by the analogy of the self–body characterized as a relationship of controller–controlled (*niyantṛ–niyanta*) is the manner of connection (*sambandhaprākara*). Viṣṇu as controller or Lord, is an important aspect of his essential nature according to Viṣṇucitta.

He goes on to say that if the world is thought of as an adjunct (*upādhi*) or that it is a result of ignorance that is imagined (*avidyāparikalpita*), the relationship of controller–controlled would not be possible. Only with the manner of connection between Viṣṇu and world as controller–controlled can liberation be maintained as a legitimate goal of man (*puruṣārtha*). Only when the connection between them is of the nature of the subordinate–principle (*śeṣa–śeṣin*)—that is *jīva* as *śeṣa* and the lord as *śeṣin*—is Vedānta soteriology viable. Indeed, the fulfillment of worship and service (*kaiṃkarya*) to Viṣṇu of such an essential nature alone, as the ruler over his creation, is the goal of liberation.

With these introductory remarks that set up the overall framework for his interpretation, Viṣṇucitta comments more specifically on *viṣṇoḥ sakāśāt udbhutam* of 1.1.31:

> Here the answer (1.1.31) is to the question on the specifics of the cause of the world. *Sākṣāt* means appearance, visible appearance, knowledge. The meaning is: together with the visible appearance in the form of intention (*saṃkalparūpaprakāśasahita*) stated in scripture such as—'he thought let me create many' (Aitareya Upaniṣad 1.10) and 'he alone has expanded into many' (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.1-3). Or else the word *sakāśāt* means 'himself' as in from, 'the ācārya himself' (*ācāryasakāśāt*).[49]

The ablative '*sakāśāt*' from the word '*sakāśa*' means 'from' or 'from the presence of' and in VP 1.1.31, *viṣṇoḥ sakāśāt udbhūtaṃ jagat,* can mean the world originates from 'Viṣṇu himself'. It can also mean 'present' or 'visible appearance' and Viṣṇucitta reads it this way here when he references the Upaniṣad passages, where appearance has the form of intention/will (*saṃkalpa*). He goes on to say

---

[49] *atra jagatkāraṇaviśeṣapraśnasyottaraṃ viṣṇoḥ sakāśād iti. sakāśāt kāśaḥ prakāśo jñānam. sa aikṣata lokānnu sṛjeyā iti tadaikṣata bahusyām' ityādy uktasaṃkalparūpaprakāśasahitād ity arthaḥ. atha vā sakāśāśabdaḥ svarūpavacanaḥ ācāryasya sakāśād ityadivat* (Sharma 1995: 6).

that the *saṃkalpa* of Viṣṇu is of the form of remembrance of the order of creation from previous epochs (*pūrvasargakramasmṛtirūpasaṃkalpa*). This is similar to Rāmānuja's description of world production, '…the Blessed One, the supreme Person remembers the previous configuration of the world, and having resolved 'Let me be many' he diversifies' into the plurality of creation (Lipner 1986: 8).

Three points to be noted in Viṣṇucitta's commentary on this purāṇic verse are that, first, the *jagatkāraṇavastu*, the thing that is the cause of the world is Viṣṇu. Second, the *jagatsambandhaprakāra*, the manner of connection or the mode of connection of Viṣṇu to the world, is a manifestation of the self–body relationship characterized as one between controller and the controlled. Third, the discussion of Viṣṇu's *saṃkalpa* and his remembrance of the past order of creation as he wills creation into being indicates immediacy and intimate involvement in world causation. Causality is not an accidental attribute, but is an aspect of the essential nature of Viṣṇu. As the self of creation that is his body, he does not undergo modification, but remains the fundamental cause, material and instrumental, as he impels the unmanifest into manifest existence.

b. Ātmaprakāśa on VP 1.1.31

Śrīdhara agrees with Viṣṇucitta that VP 1.1.31 is a summary answer to the questions posed by Maitreya earlier in Chapter One, but with an exception. He says:

> In brief, then, by way of answer to the questions (of Maitreya),
> the goal of the purāṇa is stated with the verse VP 1.1.31.[50]

Viṣṇucitta has noted that this verse is the answer to Maiterya's questions on world causality and he argues that knowing this is important for liberation (Ic). Śrīdhara does not admit that the questions posed by Maitreya are in regard to the world cause, specifically, but rather recasts VP 1.1.31 as the answer to the overall goal of the purāṇa, which for him is liberation (see Section I a). For the Advaitin, knowledge of creation and world causality is important only in the context of *pravṛtti* and in fact the first twenty-two chapters of the first book of the purāṇa Śrīdhara sees as concerning this preliminary path (Ic). Its function is to purify the mind only, but it does not directly bring about liberation as is the case for Viṣṇucitta (Ic). So, though he goes on to discuss Viṣṇu's causal nature, he undercuts its importance significantly. On *viṣṇoḥ sakāśād udbhūtam*, he notes:

---

[50] *saṃkṣepatas tāvat praśnottaratayā purāṇārtham āha viṣṇor iti ślokena viṣṇor iti* (Upreti 2011: 6).

That is to say, *sakāśāt* means appearance, visible appearance, seeing. From association with that, the world arises from Viṣṇu.[51]

He seems to be implying that by the fact that one sees the world, one begins to posit an origin for it and *from association with that*, that is seeing the world, Viṣṇu as its cause is understood. For Śrīdhara, once one is aware of existence in the mundane world, then questions as to its causality etc. become relevant and he finds support for this in scripture.

> This is established by *śruti*—'he thought (*aikṣata*) 'let me create the world" (Aitareya Upaniṣad 1.1) and 'he desired (*akāmyata*), 'let me become many" (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6). The power of reflection (*citśakti*) and power of desire (*icchāśakti*) are synonyms, where seeing (*īkṣaṇa*) has the nature of reflection. In this way the world arises. This is the answer to the question 'how the world was' (1.1.4), and there itself (in Viṣṇu) it remains at the time of dissolution. This is the answer to the question of the substratum (*ādhāra*) of dissolution and from the word 'and', it is said that even existence of the world is there itself. That alone is the agent of world maintenance and dissolution and of creation, but as an accidental characteristic (*upalakṣaṇa*).[52]

By means of Viṣṇu's power of desire or reflection, the world is brought into existence. The verbal root *īkṣ* 'to see' from which the word *aikṣata* is derived in the Upaniṣad passage is interpreted as reflection/thought which is the same as the power of desire. That is, through his *śakti*, Viṣṇu creates. While there may be some similarities to Viṣṇucitta, Śrīdhara essentially devalues the topic of divine causality and the importance of knowledge of it for liberation.

Padmapāda in his Pañcapādika (II.5) notes that an *upalakṣaṇa*, indicative or accidental characteristic, 'stands outside only of Brahman and yet denotes Brahman by indirect characterization and not by the description (of its nature)' (Venkataramiah 1948: 261, 263). As an illustration, Murti notes that '[a] crow perching on the house-top does serve as a mark to single out a particular house from among several others without forming a permanent fixture therein.

---

[51] *sakāśāt kāśaḥ prakāśa īkṣaṇam iti yāvat tatsahitād viṣṇor jagad udbhūtam* (Upreti 2011:6).

[52] *sāikṣata lokānnu sṛjeya iti so 'kāmayata bahusyāṃ prajāyeya ityādi śrutisiddham. cicchakti icchāśaktiparyāyaṃ yad īkṣaṇaṃ locanātmakaṃ tena prakāreṇa jagad udbhūtam anena yathā babhuvety asya praśnasyottaram. tatraiva ca sthitaṃ pralayakāleti layādhārapraśnasyottaram. caśabdāj jagataḥ sthitir api tatraivety uktam. asya jagataḥ sthitisaṃyamayor asāv eva kartā janmano 'py upalakṣaṇam* (Upreti 2011: 6).

Likewise, the world may be 'indicative' of Brahman 'without being constitutive of it.'[53] Following his Advaita predecessors, Śrīdhara envisions the deity as Brahman in quite a different sense than Viṣṇucitta. Beginning his comment on VP 1.1.31 as concerning the overall goal of liberation rather than as about Viṣṇu's causality, he follows this up with the fact that origin and cause of the world are important only from the context of *pravṛtti*. He concludes by defining causality as an accidental characteristic. Though both commentators speak of Viṣṇu's fundamental relationship to the world through his materiality and instrumentality, as one of identity, the nature of the connection (*saṃbandha*) between them is envisioned differently. For Viṣṇucitta causality is an essential nature of Viṣṇu and Visnu is the world through the self–body analogy. For Śrīdhara, causality is a topic that is relevant at the level of *pravṛtti* only and its knowledge does not directly bring about liberation. For him Viṣṇu is also the world, but causality is not an essential nature of Brahman and the world is an accidental attribute of it.

Conclusion

The three sections of this paper examine the ways in which Viṣṇu is invoked and introduced as Brahman and his relationship to creation. Viṣṇucitta's and Śrīdhara's interpretations on this purāṇa paint two different portraits of the deity. One of the reasons this is so is the ontological frameworks imposed by the commentators in their reading of the purāṇa. The main goal of Viṣṇucitta, writing from the Viśiṣṭādvaita perspective, is to identify the personal deity Viṣṇu as the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. That is, he sees Viṣṇu as the creator, the supreme deity, the sovereign ruler over his creation, but also the unchangeable, immutable absolute Brahman. To accommodate this, the strategy he employs is to define causality as an aspect of the essential nature of Brahman, *brahmasvarū-paviśeṣa*. Utilizing the paradigm of the self–body characterized as one of the controller and the controlled, Viṣṇucitta integrates the theistic vision of Viṣṇu with the language of Upaniṣads and Vedānta. Viṣṇu is Brahman, identical to the world that exists as his body.

For Śrīdhara, causality is an accidental characteristic (*upalakṣaṇa*) of Brahman and is unrelated to its essential nature. The strategy he utilizes to accommodate Viṣṇu as the non-dual Absolute and as the Supreme Deity in a theistic sense is by introducing the distinction of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* in the introduction to his commentary. *Pravṛtti* and its constituent ideology of ritual and wor-

---

[53] For more on this, see Murti 1983: 72-87.

ship can be useful indirectly for the aspirant when the goal is liberation, but not as an end in itself. In his interpretation of the sections of the purāṇa discussed in this paper on creation and Viṣṇu's relationship to it, he concurs with the theistic aspects of the text, but when possible interprets Viṣṇu as pointing to the nondual Absolute. The supreme deity Viṣṇu as Brahman is ultimately none other than one's own inner self. The understanding that Viṣṇu is the cause of creation and the specifics of his relationship to it, which comprise the path of *pravṛtti*, are ultimately to be transcended when one comes to realize that the world is simply an accidental attribute of Brahman.

Bibliography

Acharya, P.P. 1965. A short note on Śrīdhara Svāmin and Baladeva Vidyābhuṣaṇa. *Orissa Historical Research Journal* 13(1): 1-9.

Adluri, S. 2014. *Textual Authority in Classical Indian Thought: Rāmānuja and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Oxon: Routledge Publishers.

Alston, A.J. 1980. *Śaṃkara on the Absolute*. London: Shanti Sadan.

Alston, A.J. 1971. *The realization of the Absolute: Naiṣkarmyasiddhi of Śrī Sureśvara*. London: Shanti Sadan.

Bailey, G. *Materials for the Study of Ancient Indian Ideologies: Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti*. Torino: Instituto di Indologia. 1985.

Carman, J.B. 1974. *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

De, S.K. 1986. *Early History of Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd.

Eck, D. 1988. *Banaras: City of Light*. New York: Penguin Publishers.

Gode, P.K. 1949. Śrīdhara Svāmin, Author of the Commentaries on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other works. *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 30 (3-4): 277-283.

Gupta, B. 1995. *Perceiving in Advaita Vedānta: Epistemological Analysis and Interpretation*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Gupta, R. 2007. *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvamī*. Oxon: Routledge Publishers.

Hacker, P. 1995. Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology of Śaṅkara: Avidyā, Nāmarūpa, Māyā, Īśvara. In Halbfass, W. (ed). *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*. Albany: State University of New York Press : 57-100.

Hopkins, S.P. 2002. *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedāntadeśika in their South Indian Tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Lipner, J.J. 1986. *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lott, E. 1980. *Vedāntic Approaches to God.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Mahadevan, T.M.P. 1971. *Advaita in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Gurudeva R.D. Ranade Memorial Lectures. Poona: The Poona University Press.

Mahadevan, T.M.P. 1968. *Preceptors of Advaita*. Secundarabad: Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Sankara Mandir.

Murti, T.R.V. 1983. The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita. In Coward, H. (ed.) *Studies in Indian Thought: Collected Papers of Prof. T.R.V. Murti*. Columbia: South Asia Books: 72-87.

Nayar, K.E. 2004. *Hayagrīva in South India: Complexity and Selectivity of a Pan-Indian Hindu Deity*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Nayar, N.A. 1992. *Poetry as Theology: The Śrīvaiṣṇava Stotra in the Age of Rāmānuja*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Olivelle, P. 1998.*The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pathak, M.M. 1997. *The Critical Edition of the Viṣṇupurāṇam*. 2 vols. Vadodara: Oriental Institute.

Ranganayaki, S.T. 1999. *Śrī Viṣṇucittīya of Śrī Viṣṇucitta: Commentary on Śrī Viṣṇupurāṇa*. Thesis submitted to University of Madras for Doctor of Philosophy Degree. Department of Vaisnavism.

Rocher, R. 1986. *A History of Indian Literature: The Purāṇas*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Publishers.

Sadhale, G.S. 1936. *The Bhagavadgītā with Eleven Commentaries*. 3 Vols. Bombay: Gujarati Printing Press.

Sharma, R.N. 1995. *The Viṣṇumahāpurāṇam with Sanskrit Commentaries of Viṣṇucitta and Śrīdhara*. New Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Shastri, J.L. 2002. *The Śiva Purāṇa*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Sheridan, P. 1994. Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. *Journal of Vaisnava Studies* 2(3): 45-66.

Sukthankar, V.S. 1933. The Mahābhārata: Udyoga Parvan. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Suthren Hirst, J.G. 2005. *Saṃkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching*. Oxon: Routledge Publishers.

Upreti, T. 2011. *Viṣṇumahāpurāṇam of Vedavyāsa with Sanskrit Commentary 'Ātmaprakāśa' of Śrīdharācārya*. 2 vols. New Delhi: Parimal Publications.

Venkataramiah, D. 1948. *The Pañcapādikā of Padmapāda*. Baroda: Oriental Institute.

Kṛṣṇa's Son Pradyumna as Kāma and *Māyin* in the 'Kārṣṇa' Purāṇas

Christopher R. Austin

Dalhousie University
christopher.austin@dal.ca

Abstract

Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna appears first as a significant figure in the Harivaṃśa (ca 3rd century CE), and remains over the following centuries an important character in the Sanskrit renderings of Kṛṣṇa's life. In his signature narrative, Pradyumna is abducted as a young child and comes quickly to sexual maturity. He acquires magical powers (*māyā*) from his foster mother and wife Māyāvatī, slays the demon Śambara, and is finally revealed to be Kāmadeva, the God of Love and Desire, reborn. This episode is included in the Kṛṣṇacaritas preserved in the 'Kārṣṇa' or Kṛṣṇa-centric Purāṇas: the Viṣṇu (ca 5th century CE), Bhāgavata (ca 9th century CE) and Brahmavaivarta (ca 15th century CE). Across these sources, developments in the larger culture of Kṛṣṇa bhakti effected subtle shifts in the understanding of Pradyumna's relationship to his famous father. This paper argues that three facets of Pradyumna's identity—as Kāmadeva, as māyin or controller of illusory powers, and as a replica or double of his father Kṛṣṇa—took on mounting significance in the context of the evolving Kṛṣṇa devotional culture which came increasingly to valorise the role of desire and affective response to a beautiful and entrancing deity.

Introduction

Over the past several years, a single figure of Hindu mythology has monopolized my research energies and demanded my attention, namely Pradyumna, the first-born son of Kṛṣṇa and his wife Rukmiṇī. This has yielded a full monograph study (Austin 2019b) which addresses a number of related questions touching on the theology of the *avatāra* and its intersection with human genealogical con-

cerns, on sexuality, masculinity and the gendering of violence in the South Asian context, and on the role of aesthetic and literary conventions in the construction of Hindu mythic figures. Naturally I cannot revisit all of these issues here. Instead I would like to examine the handling of the basic Pradyumna myth in the 'Kārṣṇa' or Kṛṣṇa-centric Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas in order to isolate and articulate one of the larger scale patterns that we see in the evolving mythology of Pradyumna in Sanskrit literature. This is a trend toward a total identification of Pradyumna with Kāmadeva, the God of Love and Desire, whereby an early mythic association becomes increasingly significant and invested with meaning in the context of the evolving Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* movement. I will argue that particularly for the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the episode of Pradyumna's birth and maturation served as a means to restate important truths about Pradyumna's father: Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate inspirer of *kāma*, controller of *māyā*, and the object of women's desire, and the perpetuation of these functions in the person of the son can be read as a kind of commentary on the nature of the father.

After laying out briefly the account of Pradyumna's abduction as we find it in the oldest source, the *Harivaṃśa* (hereafter HV), and the closely related Viṣṇu *Purāṇa* (ViP), I turn to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP) in order to trace subtle but important shifts in the configuration of the episode. Here I shall be concerned with the finer points of detail in the Purāṇas' presentation of Pradyumna's sexual maturation. I argue that, particularly in the BhP, three facets of Pradyumna's mythic profile interact and resonate together meaningfully in ways they had not in the HV and ViP, namely his identity (a) as Kāmadeva or the God of Desire, (b) as *māyin* or controller of illusory powers, and (c) as a 'chip off the old block' or double of Kṛṣṇa. I articulate why it is that these three features of Pradyumna's character appear to take on a richer significance in the BhP than they had in the HV and ViP, and this requires an understanding of certain developments in the devotional, soteriological and aesthetic culture of the larger Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* movement over the 5th to 10th centuries CE. A brief and concluding look at how the Pradyumna episode is handled in the relatively late *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (BVVP) will then help to punctuate and underscore these trends as they play out in the context of a theology emphasizing the divine feminine as none of the earlier 'Kārṣṇa' Purāṇas do.

The Pradyumna Abduction Scene in the HV (99) and ViP (5.27)

The narrative episode of Pradyumna's birth, abduction and maturation originates in the HV, the 2nd or 3rd century CE (Couture 1991: 72–77, Couture 2015: 67–87) supplement to the Mahābhārata (MBh). The HV provides us with the first continuous biography of Kṛṣṇa, although it omits episodes already related in the MBh such as the slaying of Śiśupāla (MBh 2.33–42) or the death of Kṛṣṇa and his fellows Vṛṣṇis in the infamous club battle (MBh 16.4.15–5.20). The birth of Pradyumna—Kṛṣṇa's first son by his chief wife Rukmiṇī—is related at HV 99 and, very briefly, unfolds as follows: as soon as he is born, Pradyumna is abducted by a demon named Śambara. Śambara gives the child to his wife Māyāvatī to raise as her own son. Unaware of his true identity, the boy grows to young manhood, at which time Māyāvatī, impassioned by his beauty, reveals to him that she is not his true mother. She makes amorous advances towards him. He is initially shocked by this unmotherly behavior, but quickly accepts her as a sexual partner as well as the empowering *māyā* of her namesake, which she passes over to him. Pradyumna summons and slays—with his newly acquired *māyā*—his false father Śambara, and returns to his true home in Dvārakā with his new wife. There, his extraordinary resemblance to Kṛṣṇa astounds everyone, particularly Rukmiṇī who sees him as another Janārdana (*vijñāto 'si mayā cihnair vinā cakraṃ janārdanaḥ*, HV 99.38cd). The all-knowing Kṛṣṇa appears, welcomes the lad home again and explains to all that Pradyumna is in fact the rebirth of Kāmadeva (*manmathe tu gate nāśaṃ gate cānaṅgatāṃ purā … HV 99*), referring presumably to the myth of Śiva's incineration.[1] He also explains that Māyāvatī, who had in fact been deploying a māyic body in her physical contact with Śambara, is none other than Rati reborn.[2]

The first question I wish to pose concerning this scene is whether Pradyumna and Māyāvatī have any awareness of their deeper identities as Kāma and Rati. It is important to note that Kṛṣṇa's explanations come after the fact. His comments are a final explanatory gloss, and he seems (perhaps understandably) concerned to establish that the apparently incestuous Pradyumna-Māyāvatī relationship is in fact legitimate, and that Māyāvatī is a virgin who had used a māyic form to delude Śambara. This raises the question of Māyāvatī's self-awareness as Rati. While the *māyārūpa* body seems to indicate a design on her

---

[1] See for example Doniger 1981 [1973], 141-171 and Benton 2006, 39-65.

[2] *māyārūpeṇa taṃ daityaṃ mohayaty asakṛc chubhā || na caiṣā tasya kaumāre vaśe tiṣṭhati śobhanā | ātmamāyāmayaṃ rūpaṃ kṛtvā śambaram āviśat ||* HV 99.46cd-47.

part to preserve herself for her true husband, little else in the episode suggests that she has any awareness of what is unfolding. She is not said to recognize the baby boy brought to her as her former husband, nor does she consciously engineer the union as a *reunion*, but rather is said to have her faculties disturbed by desire (*kāmena vyathitendriyā*, HV 99.16). The appeal she makes to convince her son to become her husband makes reference only to biology and not to any divine or supernatural identity; she does not reveal herself to be Rati seeking reunion with Kāma, but only explains to the boy that she is not his true mother. Māyāvatī has a hard sell to make to the young Pradyumna, who indeed is outraged at first, unable to believe his mother's behaviour.[3] One can hardly imagine that she knows the deeper mythic identities, but neglects to mention them. Thus —at least this is my reading of the affair—Kṛṣṇa's final comments about Māyāvatī's virginity-preserving *māyārūpa* do not quite amount to proof that she fully understands herself to be Rati reborn prior to Kṛṣṇa's revelation.

Pradyumna meanwhile betrays no awareness of his Kāma identity. He barely speaks in the episode and his sexual appeal works on Māyāvatī in a fairly raw and artless way. As a kind of two-stage ugly-duckling figure, Pradyumna has first to learn that he is a Vṛṣṇi and not an Asura, and subsequently that he is not only Kṛṣṇa's son but is the God of Desire reborn. Moreover, no connection is drawn between the *māyā* power received from his mother-wife and his identity as Kāma. Neither do the authors seem to have any concern to pursue the implications of the fact that he is both the handsome Manmatha reborn and a near carbon-copy of his father. In other words these three facets of his character— Kāma, controller of *māyā* and double of his father—sit side by side rather inconsequentially in the terse HV account. As the story passes to the ViP and thence to the BhP, this changes in intriguing ways.

The brief HV 99 account of Pradyumna's abduction and maturation (49 verses) carries forward in South Asian literary and religious culture over the next millennium, finding re-expression in Jain materials and Purāṇic literature. A second and far more elaborate Pradyumna narrative involving a romance with a demon princess named Prabhāvatī also emerges, and this is taken up in *kāvya* compositions in both Sanskrit (e.g. Austin 2019a) and vernacular (e.g. Rao and Shulman 2006). But my concern here is with the handling of the HV 99 abduc-

---

[3] *mātṛbhāvaṃ parityajya kim evaṃ vartase 'nyathā || aho duṣṭasvabhāvāsi strītvena calamānasā | yā putrabhāvam utsṛjya mayi kāmāt pravartase ||* HV 99.11cd-12.

tion scene in the ViP (ca 5th century CE), BhP (ca 9th/10th century CE),[4] and the BVVP (15th or 16th century; Rocher 1986: 163). For the most part these three 'Kārṣṇa' Purāṇas each draft their Kṛṣṇa biographies on the basis of the preceding one: the ViP models itself upon the HV, the BhP upon the ViP, and the BVVP loosely on the BhP.[5]

The ViP, which barely post-dates the HV, does not radically alter the episode in substance. Its chief innovation is to render more complex the route by which Pradyumna comes to Māyāvatī. Here, Śambara's motives are more explicitly hostile: recognizing the baby as a future foe (*mamaiṣa hanteti*, ViP 5.27.2), the demon seizes the boy and throws him into the ocean where he is promptly swallowed by a fish (ViP 5.27.4). The fish is caught and brought to the kitchen of Śambara. Māyāvatī, who is in charge of the household (*sarvagṛheśvarī*, ViP 5.27.7) and overseer of the cooks, sees the baby boy in the belly of the fish once it is cut open. Nārada appears in order to explain to her that the boy is Viṣṇu's son, abducted by Śambara—but he says nothing about Kāmadeva, despite the fact that later it will be he and not Kṛṣṇa who explains the Kāma-Rati identities. Again when Pradyumna grows to adolescence, Māyāvatī is powerfully drawn to him, overtaken by desire for him (*bālyād evātirāgeṇa rūpātiśayamohitā*, ViP 5.27.11). Much as in the HV, her transmission of *māyā* to him seems to be a reflex of her blind passion.[6] Here again she does not appear to be truly conscious of her identity as Rati. The episode then unfolds very closely in step with HV 99—Pradyumna acquires *māyā* from her, defeats Śambara and returns with his new wife to Dvārakā where his resemblance to Kṛṣṇa is remarked upon. The Kāma-Rati identities are explained after the fact (now by Nārada), including the same assurance that Māyāvatī had deployed a *māyā* body with her demon husband. But

---

[4] In accepting this dating for the *Bhāgavata*, I follow Hardy 1983 (particularly 526 and 637–646) and not the revisionist hypothesis of Hudson (1995) that seeks to push the text's date of composition back prior to 770 CE, the date of the completion of the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ Temple in Kāñcīpuram. Much less do I follow Bryant, who seeks to push this date back even further ('the Gupta period as the latest probable date', Bryant, 2002: 69) and reverse Hardy's hypothesis of a Southern and Tamil-influenced context of composition.

[5] On the matter of this chain of derivation or modeling, see Ingalls, 1968: 383–384; Hardy, 1983: 497–509; Podzeit, 1992: 59; Couture, 1992: 138 note 47; Brockington, 1998: 338 note 66; Matchett, 2001: 109; Couture, 2018: 44.

[6] *māyāvatī dadau cāsmai māyāḥ sarvā mahātmane | pradyumnāyānurāgāndhā tan nyastahṛdayekṣaṇā ||* ViP 5.27.13.

now Nārada says that, 'when Manmatha perished, [she] devot[ed] herself utterly to his rebirth' (*manmathe tu gate nāśaṃ tadudbhavaparāyaṇā*, ViP 5.27.28). The sense that Māyāvatī is consciously engineering this reunion is becoming clearer, but again her behavior at times suggests rather a woman deluded by passion and not fully aware of her mythic identity. Nārada's comment can perhaps be understood to refer to Rati's resolve at the time of her husband's incineration by Śiva, which did not necessarily carry over consciously into her subsequent birth as Māyāvatī.

In ViP 5.27, then, the authors do introduce a new theme—what we might call the 'Śakuntalā's (or Duḥṣyanta's) ring-and-fish motif—and so we see they are not simply transposing the HV material in a static way or shying away from creative developments. The sense of Māyāvatī's self-awareness is a little sharper than the HV, without becoming fully and transparently an awareness of her former identity. And as before, Pradyumna's handling of *māyā*, his identity as Kāma, and his resemblance to his father each remain as they did in the HV inert with respect to the other. All of this changes in the BhP rendering.

Pradyumna's Abduction in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP 10.52)

In the gap separating the ViP (5th century CE) and the BhP (9th or 10th century CE), a number of important changes in the theological, devotional and aesthetic contexts necessitated a shift in the meaning and significance of Pradyumna's character. From the beginning of the BhP account, Pradyumna's Kāma identity is set more conspicuously in the foreground, even while Kṛṣṇa's paternity is stressed. Kāma is said to be a 'portion of Vāsudeva' (*kāmas tu vāsudevāṃśo*, BhP 10.52.1) who sought to generate a new body for himself after Śiva's fiery reaction to his presence. He was thus 'created anew by the virile power of Kṛṣṇa' and was 'in no respect inferior to his father'.[7] From the very beginning of the account we see that the authors wish us to understand that Kṛṣṇa's own sexuality is implicated in, and proven abundantly by, his fathering of the God of Desire who in a sense is his equal and double. The abduction and fish incident play out as in the ViP, but now it is said that Māyāvatī is Rati awaiting the restoration of her husband.[8] She immediately recognizes the baby boy as Kāma when he is discovered in the fish (*kāmadevaṃ śiśuṃ buddhvā*, BhP 10.52.8). And so when the boy reaches

---

[7] *kṛṣṇavīryasamudbhavaḥ … sarvato'navamaḥ pituḥ*, BhP 10.52.2.

[8] *sā ca kāmasya vai patnī ratir nāma yaśasvinī | patyur nirdagdhadehasya dehotpattiṃ pratīkṣatī || BhP 10.52.7.*

adolescence and draws Māyāvatī's lustful gaze, she finally explains to him not only that he is the son of Kṛṣṇa but that she is Rati and he is Kāmadeva (BhP 10.52.12). Again, she does not avail herself of this persuasive argument in the HV and ViP. Only now in the BhP is she truly assigned full cognizance of the deeper identities. She knows the boy is her long lost husband Kāma, and thus when empowering Pradyumna with *māyā* as a means of defeating Śambara, she tells the lad to 'slay this one … by means of [your] *māyās* such as Mohana and so on' (*māyābhir mohanādibhiḥ*, BhP 10.52.14), and she then gives Pradyumna a *mahāmāyā* able to defeat all other *māyās*. The ensuing battle is explicitly a war of illusory weapons and counter-weapons. As in the previous sources, when Pradyumna returned to Dvārakā he inspired amazement on account of his striking resemblance to his father. The harem women in fact initially take him to be Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇaṃ matvā striyo*, BhP 10.52.28). A *vasantatilakā* verse excluded from the critical edition takes up this perspective of the harem women and caps the episode with an observation that finally spells out explicitly the deeper significance in the triangle of identities between father, son, and the God of Desire:

> It is no wonder at all that even his own mothers immediately adored him, their affections secretly aroused within them and feeling towards him as towards their own husband due to his resemblance to his father. What then of other women, when Kāma Smara, the spitting image of the abode of Ramā, is before their eyes?[9]

> *yaṃ vai muhuḥ pitṛsarūpanijeśabhāvās*
> *tanmātaro yad abhajan raharūḍhabhāvāḥ |*
> *citraṃ na tat khalu ramāspadabimbabimbe*
> *kāme smare 'kṣaviṣaye kim utānyanāryaḥ ||* CE 10.52.38 *179

I suggest that the BhP's subtle but important modifications of the ViP scenario reflect and can be understood in the light of some of the most important developments in the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* environment of the 5th–10th century CE period. Again, the way I have chosen to frame this is by identifying three facets of Pradyumna's profile—his identity as Kāma, as *māyin*, and as the double of his father—which the HV authors establish, but do not coordinate in any significant way. To be sure, these features do have a particular function within the context of the HV, and I explore this in my larger study (Austin 2019b) and elsewhere

---

[9] On the matter of this chain of derivation or modeling, see Ingalls, 1968: 383-384; Hardy, 1983: 497-509; Podzeit, 1992: 59; Couture, 1992: 138 note 47; Brockington, 1998: 338 note 66; Matchett, 2001: 109; Couture, 2018: 44.

(Austin 2018). But here the issue is how and why the three character facets are more fruitfully permitted to cross-fertilize and inform each other in the BhP context. In a very basic sense, the idea that Kṛṣṇa's son was Kāmadeva reborn and a controller of *māyā* cannot have had the same meaning to the authors of the HV and ViP as it did to the authors of the *Bhāgavata*. This becomes clearer when we consider some of the key theological, devotional and aesthetic changes unfolding in the period separating the ViP from the BhP.

If today we understand *bhakti* to mean an emotionally charged devotion, or even passion, for god, it is not because the term has always carried this meaning. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa is not invested with eroticism, embodied sensuality, or significantly expressed as a passionate aesthetic response to the god's beauty in the earlier MBh, *Bhagavad Gītā*, HV or ViP. This sense of *bhakti* does not emerge truly until the BhP, where particularly the intense and erotic *virahabhakti* exemplified by the pining Gopīs of Vṛndāvana represents the end point of centuries of development in poetics, aesthetics, and theology roughly across the 3rd–9th century CE period. Hacker (1959) and Hardy (1983; see also Schreiner 1983: 281-282; Schreiner 2013: 596) have documented the emergence of this affective and ecstatic mode of devotion out of what seems initially to have been a more intellectual, yogic or cerebral *bhakti* sensibility.[10] Hardy identifies particularly the 6th–10th century CE Tamil Āḻvārs, who worshiped Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa as Māyōṉ ('The Dark One'), as key shapers of the Southern devotional tradition from which the BhP emerged, and whose poetry, he demonstrates, directly informs the BhP. Consequently, while Kṛṣṇa of course had always been described as handsome in earlier texts, the BhP stresses as never before the aesthetic, embodied and sensual response of the devotee to the beauty and charm of the Lord. Consequently, *kāma* becomes in the BhP not an obstacle to salvation, as it is in renunciant soteriologies, but a means thereto.[11]

Closely tied to this is the changing meaning of *māyā*, which similarly comes to have a meaning in the BhP that inherits significantly from the Tamil corpus. *Māyā* is 'perhaps the most important single term that describes the modality of how the Āḻvārs experience Māyōṉ' (Hardy 1983: 284–285). For the

---

[10] I cannot take up here in an adequate way the enormous issue of bhakti and its evolution, more broadly understood, in Hindu tradition. For important developments, however, see Prentiss 1999, Francis and Schmid 2014, Francis and Schmid 2016, and Couture 2017.

[11] On this point see Vaudeville 1962 and more broadly Macy 1975. Coleman (2002, 2010 and 2014) treats this issue from a very different angle: see below.

Tamil poets, to relish Kṛṣṇa's beauty is to contemplate the great mystery and paradox of his captivating and charming forms (Hardy 1983: 285–286). Māyōṉ is in truth beyond human sensual perception, and yet we can approach this transcendent absolute through the ultimately unreal display of his charming transformations here in this world. While the BhP uses the term *māyā* in the sense of trick or magical subterfuge, as well as in the Vedāntic sense of deluding force that ensnares the soul in *saṃsāra*, it deploys it in a third and more positive sense, particularly when personified as *yogamāyā* (Bryant 2003: xxvi–xxix). Kṛṣṇa's *yogamāyā* is that illusory power which conceals what would otherwise be an unbridgeable gap between the transcendent absolute, beyond all form and name, and the embodied and profoundly limited human senses and emotions. Through *yogamāyā*, Kṛṣṇa manifests in ultimately unreal, but tangible and adorable form so as to draw the devotee to himself in salvific play. In complex ways, then, the BhP with its Āḻvār heritage builds a theology and soteriology that redefines the role and meaning of desire, beauty, sensuality and illusory representations, making them instrumental as never before in the devotee's relationship with the Divine. *Kāma* and *māyā* are not problems in this theology, but a fundamental part of what makes the deity accessible to the *bhakta/ā*.

Keeping in mind such important developments as these, I return to the BhP Pradyumna account and the matter of Māyāvatī's self-awareness as Rati. As we saw, it was not until the BhP that Māyāvatī becomes fully conscious of her true identity as Rati engineering a reunion with Kāma. She seeks to empower him specifically as the God of Desire, revealing this deeper identity to him prior to his encounter with Śambara. *Māyā* in other words awakens and inspires Kāma as she seeks to unite with him. This is a point raised briefly by Catharine Benton in her study of Kāmadeva, which treats the Pradyumna abduction scenario (Benton 2006: 65–74). While tending to collapse the sources and so ascribe to the HV what really belongs only to the BhP, she has quite rightly sketched out some of the most fundamental dynamics here:

> Desire and illusion are purposefully intertwined in the structure and fabric of the story as it is told in the earlier variants, so that this mingling becomes the core element. In one variant, out of her own desire to be reunited with Kāma (Desire), Māyāvatī (Illusion) manipulates the demon's desire for her and deludes him into marrying her illusory form…. In all variants of the tale, desire is properly united with illusion in the end. (Benton 2006: 72)

Benton points in the right direction here, although it is my purpose to articulate precisely how what is proper for the BhP—i.e. a *bhakti* rationale wherein *kāma* and *māyā* do inform each other intimately—is not in fact proper to the HV, as Benton suggests. Only now in the BhP is it proper and especially meaningful for *māyā* and *kāma* to inform each other in a positive and constructive way. Most important here is the fact that, when empowering Pradyumna against Śambara, Māyāvatī prompts him to slay the demon '*māyābhir mohanādibhiḥ*' (BhP 10.52.14). Māyāvatī-Rati is prompting Pradyumna–Kāmadeva to reclaim his own intrinsic māyic powers in the form of the five powerful arrows—Mohana and the other four. Pradyumna's awakening to his identity as the God of Desire thus now entails his reclamation of the māyic and entrancing powers of his five celebrated weapons. Pradyumna's identity as Kāmadeva and his assumption of control over *māyā* sat side by side somewhat passively in the earlier sources, but come to cross-fertilize significantly in the *Bhāgavata*, where the two principles are as never before mutually implicated and cooperate in an affective-aesthetic soteriology quite distinct from that of the HV or ViP. The BhP authors contemplate here the image of a personified *māyā* and *kāma* uniting; the result is an awakened and self-conscious God of Desire, empowered by the reclamation of his signature bundle of five *bāṇas*.

This much concerns the deepening significance of Pradyumna as both Kāma and *māyin*. But this Kāmadeva is also the son and double of Kṛṣṇa. Neither the HV nor the ViP are invested in a theology of Kṛṣṇa that significantly stresses his sexual appeal or the passionate and affective response to his beauty. The formula 'like father, like son' is therefore deployed in all sources, but is, I argue, only read in both directions in the BhP, for there Kṛṣṇa's relationship to *kāma* takes on an entirely new level of meaning. Kṛṣṇa's fathering of Pradyumna amounts to the creation of the God of Desire by his 'virile power' (*kṛṣṇavīryasamudbhavaḥ*, BhP 10.52.2), and again the result is a man in every respect his equal (*sarvato 'navamaḥ pituḥ*, BhP 10.52.2). We are directed by the authors to understand the implications of Kṛṣṇa's fathering of Pradyumna: this is a god of extraordinary sexual vigour and power. This again is clearest at the end of the episode, when the returned Pradyumna is beheld by the many women of the *antaḥpura* or women's quarters in Dvārakā, who, although his step-mothers, look upon him desirously as a form of their attractive husband.

I argue that Kṛṣṇa's fathering of the God of Desire means something altogether new in the BhP. To draw a final point of emphasis on this matter I refer briefly to some important observations of Tracy Coleman's concerning the famous *rāsa-līlā* (BhP 10.29–33) wherein Kṛṣṇa frolics with the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana.

In three closely related pieces (2002, 2010, 2014), Coleman challenges common understandings of Kṛṣṇa's beauty in the *Bhāgavata*, particularly in the *rāsa-līlā* scene. It is often said that in this episode, erotic *bhakti* is liberating for women, who leave conventional morality and identities behind and unite with god through their passion and desire. As such the BhP is characterized as socially progressive.[12] But Coleman has pointed out that the Gopīs are not liberated from their conventional domestic identities, and that the *virahabhakti* or devotion-in-separation they adopt for Kṛṣṇa once the tryst is over in fact perpetuates and re-inscribes conventional *strīdharma* identities and expectations for the women of the cow-herding camp (Coleman, 2010). More importantly, Coleman stresses the emotional gap separating the cool and detached Kṛṣṇa from the amorous Gopīs. She points out that in the original HV scene, Kṛṣṇa reciprocates the Gopīs' passion and is fully emotionally engaged with them; the BhP by contrast repeatedly stresses Kṛṣṇa's aloofness: he inspires *kāma*, provokes it and manipulates others with it, but is wholly above it—he is said to be *āptakāma* or fully satisfied already of all desire, engaging the Gopīs in a state of yogic neutrality (e.g. BhP 10.29.38; 30.36). This asymmetry is, as Coleman demonstrates, repeatedly stressed in the BhP and serves as a model of affective *bhakti* tied to a decidedly conservative social agenda, and not a democratizing or subversive one as is commonly claimed. The BhP is therefore invested in a model of male beauty that is unidirectional, instrumental and gendered in a very conservative way: Kṛṣṇa is the author, deployer and provoker of *kāma*, but never its victim. He does not seek, but is sought out by women (Coleman 2010: 392–403). He inspires passion, but is above passion; he does not truly participate in the emotional, affective and erotic experience of the Gopīs any more than he is fooled by his own māyic creations.

In this *Bhāgavata* context, where Kṛṣṇa is the beautiful object of an impassioned feminine gaze, the equation Pradyumna = Kāmadeva = Kṛṣṇa clearly takes on a new level of meaning. Significantly, Pradyumna is never said to be drawn to Māyāvatī; he does not experience desire for her. What may appear to be a parity or partnership between Rati and Kāmadeva might well be another example of a tendency among women in the BhP when they catch sight of one of those handsome Vṛṣṇi men: Kāmadeva inspires love and Rati's activity—she approaches and initiates the relationship with him—but he does not truly reciprocate. Like father, like son, and again I suspect that for the BhP authors, this tale about the son was in large measure understood and valued as a powerful com-

---

[12] Coleman (2010: 385) identifies particularly Bryant (2003: *liv-lv*) and Huberman (1998: 175) as exemplars of this view.

mentary on the father: this most desirable of all possible men, Manmatha incar-
nate, magnetically attracts *māyā* and assumes control over her. As *kāma* embod-
ied, he can never fall prey to the passion he inspires in her or in others. Such is
the beauty and virile creative power of Kṛṣṇa, who fathered this deity and double
of himself.

Pradyumna–Kāmadeva in the BVVP (Kṛṣṇajanmakhaṇḍa 112.1–32)

A fourth and final 'Kārṣṇa' source—the BVVP—is worth consulting briefly, as its
variations on the scene continue to play the three facets of Pradyumna's persona
off each other, even as it introduces a number of new features consistent with
the work's broader theological trends. The most striking innovation in the ac-
count is the fact that the name of Pradyumna is finally lost altogether: only
names of Kāma are used. The abduction and first years of the boy in Śambara's
home unfold as in the earlier renderings, but it is the goddess Sarasvatī, and not
Kṛṣṇa or Nārada, who explains the Kāmadeva–Rati identities directly to the
couple once Kāma comes of age. In fact she prompts them to consummate their
reunion on the spot (BVVP KṛJK 112.16). The conflict with Śambara ignites when
the cuckolded husband comes by chance upon the couple *in flagrante delicto*, and
he sees Rati in her fit of sexual abandon (*kāmena mūrcchitāṃ suratotsukām*, BVVP
KṛJK 112.20). Here the battle with Śambara is not occasioned by the revelation of
the demon's having abducted the baby, but by Kāma's coming to the aid of Rati,
whom Śambara attempts to kill after hurling his outrage upon the pair. In the
ensuing fracas, the gods appear in order to prompt Smara or Kāma to remember
(*smara! smara*) Durgā, the Great Māyā who destroys distress (*mahāmāyāṃ durgāṃ
durgatināśinīm*, BVVP KṛJK 112. 28), and indeed it is she who renders useless the
demon's final assault upon the God of Desire.

   The more prominent role of the divine feminine, and the more vigorously
physical reunion of the couple can be understood in the context of the Purāṇa's
heightened emphasis on the goddess and quasi-dualistic theology. In fact, the
purpose of Kṛṣṇa's descent to earth in the BVVP is to reunite with the goddess
Rādhā, who had been cursed to a birth in Vṛndāvana (BVVP KṛJK 2.1-19). Unlike
the cooler and more detached Kṛṣṇa of the BhP, Kṛṣṇa in the BVVP enjoys a reci-
procal passion with Rādhā. In brief, this functions within a more dualistic
Sāṃkhya mythology in which the feminine *prakṛti* binds the masculine *puruṣa*
with *māyā*, although like Kṛṣṇa's *yogamāyā* in the BhP, this *māyā* in fact functions
to liberate the deluded soul (Brown 1974: 188-194). And so in the 'Pradyumna'
episode, the feminine divine—an aspect of *prakṛti*—is the active or stimulating

factor, quite literally impelling the couple to a rapturous sexual union, the likes of which Kṛṣṇa himself engages in as well—with important cosmogonic implications. Unlike the BhP, the male here responds passionately to the feminine power and unites with her.[13]

Moreover in earlier sources, Pradyumna either receives māyic power directly from Māyāvatī (HV, ViP) or is prompted by her to reclaim his own māyically deluding arrows (BhP) as a weapon against his demon foe. In the BVVP this empowerment comes directly from a goddess explicitly characterized as Mahāmāyā (BVVP KṛJK 112.28), who in a sense takes over the role from Rati-Māyāvatī and announces more clearly than ever the true location and source of *māyā* in the divine feminine. We see in this source, then, that *prakṛti* and the goddesses who embody her powers impassion the masculine *puruṣa*, but as embodiments of *māyā* they are themselves the granters of liberation and power over illusion. In terms of the three facets of Pradyumna's persona, then, I would argue that Kāma's assumption of māyic power and identity as Kṛṣṇa-double are now resonating together with yet greater significance amidst an operating theology that amplifies the role of a feminine divine more independently configured as *prakṛti* and source of *māyā*.

But by far the most significant feature of the BVVP 'Pradyumna' episode is the fact that Pradyumna's name is never once used, only names of Kāmadeva (*kāmadeva*, 8, 21; *kāma*, 10, 13, 27; *manmatha* 17, 19, 24, 28, 29; *sundara* 18; *smara* 28). Kṛṣṇa's son is now the God of Love *tout court*. In other words, what began in the HV as almost an afterthought—the after-the-fact revelation that Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna is Kāmadeva reborn—has now arrived at a totalizing identification leaving no trace of the original Vṛṣṇi clan figure, and the triad of bio-mythic identities (Kṛṣṇa = Pradyumna = Kāma) collapses into a pair (Kṛṣṇa = Kāma). The BVVP, as much as the BhP, is invested in a *bhakti* model premised on Kṛṣṇa's extraordinary beauty and power to draw Rādhā to himself. And so in this, the total and absolute identification of Pradyumna with Kāma, we see the full realization of the theological impulse of the BhP to tie Kṛṣṇa to Kāmadeva through the medium of his son.

Conclusion

In this short study of the HV and three 'Kārṣṇa' Purāṇas I have attempted to lay out in concentrated form an argument made elsewhere in much greater sub-

---

[13] *śṛṅgāraṃ ramayā sārdhaṃ kurvantaṃ kautukena*, BVVP KṛJK 112.19.

stance and detail (Austin 2019b). This concerns the changing meaning of Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna roughly over the period of the 3rd to 15th century CE, and in particular concerns three features of his identity which react together with increasing fruitfulness or significance over time: his identity as the God of Desire, his control over *māyā*, and his status as son and near-replica of Kṛṣṇa. From the HV to the ViP and thence to the BhP and BVVP, changes in the *bhakti* culture evolving around Kṛṣṇa necessarily caused a subtle re-think of the received narrative of Pradyumna's abduction and sexual maturation. In the HV and ViP, neither his power over *māyā*, nor his close resemblance to his father were significantly coordinated with each other or with his identity as the rebirth of Manmatha. In the hands of the Bhāgavata authors however, these personality traits reacted in new ways and resonated with a Kṛṣṇa theology completely distinct from that of the HV and ViP: Kṛṣṇa, the divine lover and ultimate object of (particularly women's) desire, who inspires but is never the victim of *kāma*, created Kāmadeva-Pradyumna, who is of course nearly indistinguishable from his father. The Pradyumna episode, I argue, can only have been seen by the Bhāgavata authors as a kind of commentary on Kṛṣṇa, helping to underscore what is so often expressed elsewhere in that text: this is a god of surpassing charm and beauty, the master of *kāma* and *māyā*. This turning of the significance and role of Pradyumna's identity as Kāmadeva then reaches a logical end-point in the BVVP, where nothing remains of the name Pradyumna, and a totalizing Kṛṣṇa = Kāma equation plays out in a theological environment where the divine feminine—the seat and source of *māyā*—plays an even greater role as an independent prompting agent to the divine masculine. In this way, the person of Pradyumna—lover, magician, and scion of the *avatāra*—played an important role in the evolving understanding of Kṛṣṇa, both reflecting and speaking back to a tradition that came to assign an increasingly positive soteriological function to *māyā*, *kāma*, and embodied desire.

Bibliography

Austin, C.R., trans. 2019a. *The* Pradyumnābhyudaya *of Ravivarman: A New Sanskrit Text of the Trivandrum Edition and English Translation*. Drama und Theater in Südasien Series no.12. Harrassowitz Verlag.

Austin, C.R. 2019b. *Pradyumna: Lover, Magician, and Scion of the* Avatāra. New York: Oxford University Press.

Austin, C.R. 2018. The Abducted Male: Sexual Conquest, Lineage and Divinity in the Narratives of Pradyumna and Aniruddha. In Dimitrova, D. and Or-

anskaia, T. (eds). *Divinizations in South Asian Traditions.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 6-26.

Benton, C. 2006. *God of Desire: Tales of Kāmadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Shastri, H.G. et al. 1996–2002. *The Bhāgavata [Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa].* 1st ed. 4 vols. in 6 pts. Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research.

Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa. Jhā, Tāriṇīśa, and Svargīya Paṇḍita Bābūrām Upādhyāy, eds. 2001–2002. *Brahmavaivartapurāṇam.* 2 vols. Prayāga: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelana.

Brockington, J. 1998. *The Sanskrit Epics.* Leiden: Brill.

Brown, C. M. 1974. *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India. An Historical and Theological Study of the* Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa. Hartford, VT: C. Stark.

Bryant, E.F. 2002. The Date and Provenance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 11 (1): 51–80.

Bryant, E.F., trans. 2003. *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God.* Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa, *Book X with Chapters 1, 6 and 29-31 from Book XI.* London: Penguin Books.

Coleman, T. 2002. Suffering Desire for Krishna: Gender and Salvation in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 10 (2): 39–50.

Coleman, T. 2010. Viraha-Bhakti and Strīdharma: Re-Reading the Story of Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (3): 385–412.

Coleman, T. 2014. Dharma, Yoga, and Viraha-Bhakti in Buddhacarita and Kṛṣṇacarita. In Francis, E. and C. Schmid (eds.) *The Archaeology of Bhakti I: Mathurā and Maturai, Back and Forth.* Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 31–61.

Couture, A., trans. 1991. *L'Enfance de Kṛṣṇa: Traduction des Chapitres 30 à 78 (éd. cr.).* Paris/Laval: Les Éditions du Cerf/Presses de l'Université de Laval.

Couture, A. 2015. *Kṛṣṇa in the* Harivaṃśa. vol 1: *The Wonderful Play of a Cosmic Child.* New Delhi: DK Printworld.

Couture, A. 2017. Observations Concerning the Notion of *Bhakti* in the *Mahābhārata*. In *Kṛṣṇa in the Harivaṃśa* (n.e.). vol 2: *The Greatest of all Sovereigns and Masters*. New Delhi: DK Printworld, 293–336.

Couture, A. 2018. The Recasting of Krishna's Childhood Narrative in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* to Include the Goddess Rādhā. In Dimitrova, D. and T. Oranskaia (eds.) *Divinizations in South Asian Traditions.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 38–58.

Doniger (O'Flaherty), W. 1981 [1973]. *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* [*Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*]. New York: Oxford University Press.

Francis, E. and Schmid, C. (eds). 2014. *The Archaeology of Bhakti I: Mathurā and Maturai, Back and Forth.* Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient (Collection Indologie 125).

Francis, E. and Schmid, C. (eds). 2016. *The Archaeology of Bhakti II: Royal Bhakti, Local Bhakti.* Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient (Collection Indologie 132).

Hacker, P. 1959. *Prahlāda: Werden und Wandlungen einer Idealgestalt. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hinduismus.* 2 vols in 1. Wiesbaden: Mainz Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur.

Hardy, F. 1983. *Viraha-bhakti: The Early History of Krishna Devotion in South India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Harivaṃśa. Vaidya, P.L. (ed.) 1969–1971. *The Harivaṃśa: Being the Khila, or Supplement to the* Mahābhārata. 2 vols. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Huberman, E. 1998. The Parā-Bhakti of the Gopīs in the Rāsa-Līlā Pañcādhyāyī. *Journal of Viaṣṇava Studies* 6: 153–182.

Hudson, D. 1995. The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Stone: The Text as an Eighth-Century Temple and its Implications. *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 3(3): 137–182.

Ingalls, D.H.H. 1968. The *Harivaṃśa* as a Mahākāvya. In (n.e.) *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou.* Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 381–394.

Macy, J. 1975. The Dialectics of Desire. *Numen* 22 (2): 145–160.

Mahābhārata. Sukthankar, V.S. (ed). 1933–1966. *The Mahābhārata.* 19 vols. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Matchett, F. 2001. *Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra? The Relationship Between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

Podzeit, U. 1992. A Philological Reconstruction of the Oldest Kṛṣṇa-Epic: Some Remarks in the Light of the Pralamba-Myth. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 36: 55–59.

Prentiss, K.P. 1999. *The Embodiment of* Bhakti. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rao, N. and Shulman, D. trans. 2006. *The Demon's Daughter: A Love Story from South India*. Albany: State University of New York Press [*Prabhāvatīpradyumnamu* of Piṅgaḷi Sūranna].

Rocher, L. 1986. *The Purāṇas*. A History of Indian Literature 2.3 (Jan Gonda, general ed.). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Schreiner, P. 1983. Bhakti in the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*. In Datta, B. (ed.) *Aruna-Bharati Professor A.N. Jani Felicitation Volume*. Baroda, 273–282.

Schreiner, P. trans. 2013. *Viṣṇupurāṇa: Althergebrachte Kunde über Viṣṇu. Aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt und herausgegeben von Peter Schreiner* (Verlag der Weltreligionen). Berlin: Insel Verlag.

Vaudeville, C. 1962. Evolution of Love-Symbolism in Bhagavatism. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82 (1): 31–40.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Pathak, M.M. (ed.) 1997–1999. *The Critical Edition of the* Viṣṇupurāṇam. 2 vols. Vadodara: Oriental Institute.