




The Path to Salvation: A Key to Identifying the Religious Affiliation of the Original *Skandapurāṇa*

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Abstract: This paper proposes to analyse myths as narratives conveying doctrinal values and seeks to show that the conclusions drawn from this approach can complement the results of philological work. Focusing on the Sukeśa myth told in the original *Skandapurāṇa* (SP), this study aims to reassess Kropman’s hypothesis according to which the whole Naraka cycle could be a later addition, probably issued from a Smārta authorship. To this end, all her arguments are reviewed and a new approach to myths, which is based on their comparison with doctrinal texts, is applied in order to identify doctrinal values conveyed within their stories and to determine the religious affiliation of their authors. As the two authorships suggested belong to the Brahmanical orthodoxy and to the Pāśupata religion, I first define their main disagreements, i.e., their respective paths to salvation. Then I investigate the two versions of the Sukeśa myth told in the SP by highlighting the promoted paths to salvation. This analysis shows that both versions endorse a soteriology close to Pāśupata values and offer a Śaiva solution to Brahmanic imperatives such as the obligation to have a son to save the lineage of the ancestors. Finally, I demonstrate that the path to salvation can be a key for the identification of

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the religious affiliation and the authorship and conclude that, even if it is not possible to affirm that the Naraka cycle is a later addition, it is very unlikely that the author of the second version of the Sukeśa myth was an orthodox Smārta Brahmin.

Keywords: purāṇic studies, soteriological path, salvation, son, Brahmanism, Pāśupata religion, mythology, hells, *naraka*

1. Introduction

The religious allegiance of the original *Skandapurāṇa* (SP) is still under debate. If its stories glorifying holy places (*Māhātmyas*) have been related to Pāśupata centers, all or part of the so called Naraka cycle (SP 35–52) could reflect orthodox values. This cycle is introduced by a traditional narrative framework which seems to glorify salvation through a son: One day, a pious Brahmin called Sukeśa found his ancestors clinging to a clump of grass and was enjoined by them to produce a son in order to save them from hell. The outcome, however, is out of the ordinary: Sukeśa saves his ancestors without having a son. This is an expansion of the story told to Himavat in SP 11.

The requirement of having a son is precisely the main point of difference between the Brahmanical and the Pāśupata soteriological systems. However, several scholars¹ assign a Smārta authorship to all or part of the Naraka cycle, even suggesting that the Sukeśa myth is a later addition based on its first version in the 11th chapter of the SP.² This last statement is particularly interesting, because it would imply a change of religious affiliation of the text.

In order to assess the possibility of a change in the religious affiliation of the text, I suggest reexamining the arguments in favour of a Smārta authorship on the basis of a new methodology. By using the path to salvation promoted in the two versions as a key to identifying religious affiliation, I will demonstrate that the assignation of a Smārta authorship for the whole Naraka cycle is not justified.

1 Bakker (2014), Bakker & al. (2014), Kropman (2019).

2 Kropman (2019), p. 113.

2. The religious affiliation and authorship of the text

The original *Skandapurāṇa* reveals unique material for research, since its text is available in several manuscripts which represent three distinct and mostly datable recensions. The work on the critical edition done since 1998 by the *Skandapurāṇa Project* (SPP) team³ confirms an important special feature belonging to the whole purāṇic literature: its text has regularly been modified and was rewritten time and again. These modifications can be observed in the three recensions of the SP. Consequently, the SPP team assumes that the oldest recension of the text available does not represent the core of the original SP, and much of the research on the text is dedicated to finding clues to ascertain which part of the text belongs to the core of the SP and which does not.

Yokochi provides a reconstruction of the possible evolution of the text, which I will briefly summarise here.⁴ The SP could have been composed at the end of the sixth or around the beginning of the seventh century CE.⁵ At least two major events mark the history of its evolution and transmission. First, after its composition, sometime in the seventh century, the core of the SP split up into two versions called by Yokochi *alpha* and *beta*. The first one, the *alpha* version, is transmitted in the oldest manuscript available, S1, a Nepalese manuscript dated 810 CE. The second one, the *beta* version, is contained in two other Nepalese manuscripts, S2 and S3–S4, dated 800–850 and 900–1000 CE respectively.⁶ Then, probably before 1100 CE, a major revision of the text in circulation took place giving birth to a “new” SP, a proto-recension more or less readable in the unique manuscript labeled R and dated to the year 1682,

3 On the history of the project and its publications, see <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/the-skandapurāṇa-project#tab-1>

4 See Yokochi (2013), p. 57, and Bakker & al. (2014), p. 17.

5 On the respective dating of the SP, see Yokochi (2004), p. 25: between 550 and 650, and Bakker (2014), p. 137: from 570 to 620.

6 See Adriaensen & al (1998), p. 33–34.

and several manuscripts labeled A,⁷ the oldest available representative of which, A7, is certainly contemporary to the manuscript R.⁸

These events, the splitting up into two versions and the revision of the SP text in circulation before 1100, point out that purāṇic texts as a whole could be seen as “work in progress” and that they contain several layers. The purāṇic textual layering leads to a multiplication of authors and of their intents. If the text has been rewritten in the course of time, each rewriting initiative certainly reflects a new editorial intent.

In the various volumes, the text-critical editors of the SP present the SP in different perspectives. On the one hand, the study of the different Māhātmyas points to a Pāśupata milieu.⁹ In addition to the Māhātmyas, other clues making the case for a Pāśupata influence can be noticed, such as the use of connotative words or the lineage story of Pāśupata masters.¹⁰ On the other hand, the SP is also defined as an orthodox work reflecting everything belonging to the brahmanical universe and having no particular sectarian agenda.¹¹ As the editors suggest that the chapters

7 These manuscripts are labeled R and A from the colophon they respectively contain: the *Revākhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Ambikākhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*. For further details on the SP colophons and recensions, see the paper and the appendix of Harimoto in Bakker (2004), p. 41–64 and p. 139–190.

8 On the dating of the manuscript A7, see Bakker and Isaacson (2004), p. 10–12, and Bisschop (2004), p. 54 (note 51). On the proximity of datings of the manuscripts R and A7, see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 94–96.

9 Bakker (2014), p. ix: “The Māhātmyas related in the text were not value-free. They served the interests of the Māheśvara or Pāśupata communities by providing them with an authoritative basis for the claims to holiness of the sites and institutions in their charge.”

10 For the use of, e.g., the word *pañcārtha*, see Bisschop (2004), p. 41: “The designation ‘Pañcārtha’ is significant, for this is the very name given to the Pāśupata doctrine in Kauṇḍīnya’s *Pañcārthabhāṣya* (cf. annotation ad SPs 130b), and indicates familiarity with the Pañcārtha tradition.” Bakker (2019), p. 295, affirms that the use of this term indicates that the author(s) of the *Skandapurāṇa* belonged to circles that were closer to the Lākula than the Mausula division.

11 See Bakker (2014), p. 7: “The *Skandapurāṇa* professes to be a staunchly orthodox work, which is shown, inter alia, by the nearly total neglect of anything outside the world of Brahmanism”; see also p. 151.

describing hells could have been composed by Smārta Brahmins¹² and as Kropman sees the so called Naraka cycle (chapters 35–52 of the SP) as a later addition, these chapters are a particularly interesting case for study in order to observe a possible change of authorship. For Kropman's hypothesis to be confirmed, it will be necessary to prove that the entire Naraka cycle bears the imprint of a strong brahmanical affiliation.

3. The Naraka cycle

This narrative cycle is embedded in a myth, the story of Sukeśa and his ancestors, which constitutes the frame for a prescriptive discourse which teaches the nature of the different hells and how to avoid falling into these hells.¹³ The whole story is without parallels in any other *Purāṇa*. Thus it is a characteristic myth peculiar to the SP. The Sukeśa myth is told twice in the SP, once in SP 11 and again in SP 35. In both cases the main story is the following: One day, Sukeśa, a pure and abstinent sage (*vipra*), entered a cave because he had been frightened by a tiger. In the cave the Brahmin found some sages hanging on a clump of grass, overwhelmed with grief, who said they were his ancestors and they were about to fall into hell because of his abstinence. In order to save them from hell they urged him to produce a son. Nevertheless Sukeśa did not renounce his vow of celibacy, continued his practice of asceticism (*tapas*) and resorted to Śiva. Eventually he succeeded in saving his ancestors from hell thanks to the grace of Śiva.

The story is continued in the version of SP 35. Once his ancestors were saved, Sukeśa asked them about the nature of the hells, the length of their stay in each of them, and their arrangement. Chapters 37–50 of the SP are exclusively devoted to the description of the different hells, the lot of their inhabitants, and the list of faults leading to each of them.

12 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 99 (note 362): "It may again indicate that these chapters on hells do not come from the Pāśupata environment of the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa*, but stem from an orthodox Smārta milieu."

13 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 8–9: "The overall framework of the Naraka Cycle is the story of Sukeśa (SP 35–51); it includes a description of the hells by his biological father, Suśarman (SP 37–50). Added to the story of Sukeśa is a sort of appendix, in which Sanatkumāra gives an account of those who do not go to hell (SP 52.1–25)."

After this systematic and horrific report, Sukeśa, overwhelmed with grief, decided to resort once more to Śiva by worshipping him in order to save all the inhabitants of the hells described before.

As the Sukeśa myth is focused on the salvation of his ancestors from hells and on the rescue of their inhabitants, this frame-story is closely connected to the content of the descriptive discourse of the chapters SP 37–50, and it seems that the chapters 35–51 constitute a perfectly coherent unity dealing with the question of the path of salvation.

For SP 37–50, the identity and the obedience of their authors defined by the editors is quite confused. First, they explain that the number of thirteen different hells is “not shared by other Brahmanical or non-Brahmanical sources” and that the concept of ‘elevations’ found in them “is not known from other Brahmanical literature on hells, but it may be related to that of the *utsadas* referred to in Buddhist Literature”.¹⁴ On this point, they conclude on p. 10: “The presence of this unique concept may reflect Buddhist influence on this part of the text”. Secondly, relying on the fact that verse 46.10 specifies that the one who is attached to the cremation ground goes to the Raurava hell and noting a difference in style between the chapters describing the hells and the whole of the SP,¹⁵ they suggest that the chapters on hells would have been composed by Smārta Brahmins.¹⁶ Kropman (2019) retains only this last remark and goes one step further suggesting that the whole Naraka cycle, in addition to its being written by Smārta Brahmins, might have been added to the SP later and that it is not part of the core of the SP.¹⁷ Her argument

14 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 9.

15 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 10. Cf. note 19.

16 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 10: “These chapters on hells do not seem to stem from the Pāśupata environment to which we believe the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa* themselves belonged. Their origin may rather be sought in a more orthodox, Smārta milieu”. This statement is repeated in several places, see Bakker & al. (2014), p. 99 (note 362) and p. 95 (note 343), and also Bakker (2014), p. 9, and Kropman (2019), p. 113.

17 Kropman (2019), p. 113: “Although Yokochi seems to think that the Vindhyavāsini cycle was written after the Naraka cycle, I see no reason to assume this. On the contrary, the Vindhyavāsini cycle being connected to the main story of the SP seems to me to be primary. The Naraka cycle as a whole is an interruption of the Vindhyavāsini cycle, just as the Andhaka cycle is an interruption of the main story. The editors have also noted the distinctly different style of the Naraka

is based on its absence within the table of contents detailed in SP 2, the so-called *anukramaṇikā*,¹⁸ on the difference of style in which the Naraka cycle is written,¹⁹ on the fact that this cycle interrupts the main story, and finally on the repeated narrative of the Sukeśa story in chapters 11 and 35. From this she concludes that the first instance of the Sukeśa story (SP 11) belongs to the core of the SP and must have been a source of inspiration for the composers of the Naraka cycle.²⁰

cycle and its non-śaiva character – all this makes it likely that it was not part of the original conception. A problem with this interpretation is that the Sukeśa story is already told earlier, in SP 11 – that is, in a chapter that is very much part of the main story. I think, however, that rather than proving that the Naraka cycle belongs to the same layer as the main story, SP 11 shows that this cycle was added later, for it is a repetition, an elaboration probably inspired by SP 11 (there are textual correspondences), which gave the redactors the opportunity to introduce the Naraka material.”

- 18 Kropman (2019), p. 99. One can doubt the validity of the argument of “presence or absence within the *anukramaṇikā*” to prove an additional feature of a chapter, since Kropman herself subverts it concerning the chapters SP 31–33. According to her, these chapters belong to the core of the SP and she explains their absence in the *anukramaṇikā* in this way (p. 120): “A difficulty for this theory is the omission of SP 31–33 in the list of contents; I can provide no better explanation than a possible loss of some *pādas* early in the transmission of the text – however, I would imagine that the omission of these crucial chapters would be problematic for any explanation of the *anukramaṇikā*.”
- 19 This argument is also found in Bakker & al. (2014), p. 10: “As support for this supposition we may mention in particular SP 46.10b, which lists one who is attached to the cremation ground among those who go to the Raurava hell. It seems hard to imagine that an author with a Pāśupata affiliation would have written this, in particular in the light of the positive references to cremation ground asceticism in other parts of the text. In general it is non-orthodox behaviour and knowledge that is condemned in these chapters, while there is comparatively little that reflects distinct Śaiva values. Why, one might be tempted to ask, does one not go to hell for acts like desecrating a *liṅga* or the like? The style of the Sanskrit text is also markedly different, with its lack of the *Skandapurāna*’s characteristic humour and spirit.”
- 20 According to Kropman’s (2019, p. 122f.) table, the core of the SP comprises SP 1, 3–25, 31.15–33, 34.1–61, 53–55, 58–59, 60.14–21, 60.72 to the end, 61–69, 72.1–142b, and 163–165. In a second phase, the chapters SP 2, 26–31.14 and 174–183 must have been added. All other chapters present in the available S recension (SP

According to the different assertions suggested by Kropman, the situation appears as follows:

- The Sukeśa story in SP 11 is original and belongs to the core of the SP whose composers seem to be close to the Pāśupata movement or to be influenced by their doctrine.
- The Sukeśa story and the Naraka cycle in SP 35–51 are recent additions introduced before the separation of the *alpha* and *beta* versions and were composed by Smārta Brahmins.
- The Sukeśa story in SP 11 is the source of its second version in SP 35.

Here we are faced with a particularly interesting scenario from which it would be possible to track down the different editorial hands through which the SP may have passed and to determine a possible change of its religious affiliation. Nevertheless, the validity of this scenario has as yet not been proved. In order to do so, we need to demonstrate that the story told in SP 11 can indeed be an inspiration for Smārta Brahmins, that is to say, that it contains some elements close to their beliefs, that the Sukeśa story retold in SP 35 also bears a strong brahmanical mark, and that the prescriptive discourse and its style suggest another editorial hand and can not have been composed by authors influenced by the Pāśupata doctrine.

4. Methodology

4.1 Myths as doctrinal stories

Until now, the Pāśupata affiliation of the SP has been proved on the basis of philological clues evident in the text (e.g., the *pāśupatavrata* described in SP 33 or the presence of technical terms like *pañcārtha*) and by a comparison of the localities of the Māhātmyas mentioned with archaeological and epigraphic data. For my part, I propose a further method towards determining the religious allegiance of the SP, which is based on a comparative analysis of the myths and the doctrinal texts of each religious movement. I therefore assign to the myths a different function than the one generally attributed to them. If myths have the function of sanctify-

34.62–52, 56–57, 60.1–13, 60.22–71, 70–71, 72.142c–162, 166–173) would be recent additions made in a third time but before the copying of the S recension.

ing a place or a practice, giving it an ancient past that justifies its present existence and status, they can also be seen as narratives conveying values, doctrinal notions or concepts, or as representations of behaviours to be followed. Besides, *Purāṇas* generally intertwine myths and ritual prescriptions. Thus, myths can be representatives of ideological and religious conceptions. To determine the religious affiliation of one myth, I suggest comparing the underlying beliefs and underpinning values of this myth with doctrinal texts.

Given that there is some conflict between Brahminical and Pāśupata affiliation for the chapters concerned in this paper, we need to exactly identify what the differences are between these two religious movements. Once the points of divergence are defined, we will be able to read the Sukeśa myth in the light of the doctrinal texts and the values of each possible religious affiliation — Brahmanical and Pāśupata — and see which of these doctrinal texts the respective version of the myth reflects, which values it puts forward. Reading a myth in this light hypothesises a doctrinal intent of the author, a religious message of the story, as well as an exegetic function of myths.

4.2 Doctrinal texts embodying the Brahmanical Smārta views and the Pāśupata dogma

In the case of Brahmanism, the corpus of authoritative scriptures is quite vast. Generally speaking, it is the Vedic corpus, including the four *Vedas*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads*. From a mythological point of view, it seems that the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is a frequent reference text since many purāṇic myths draw their inspiration from this text. In terms of behaviour, the Dharmaśāstra literature appears as a fundament. The most common and most often-quoted work, the *Manu-smṛti* (MS), could represent a very Smārta version of Brahmanism.

For Pāśupata Śaivism, the doctrinal reference texts are easier to identify as just a few have come down to us. Considering the date of the SP, the only possible reference texts are the *Pāśupatasūtra* (PS) and its commentary by Kauṇḍinya, the *Pañcārthabhāṣya* (PABh). Obviously, more texts must have been available at the time of composition of the

original SP,²¹ but given that these texts are lost, I can only rely on the *Pāśupatasūtra* and its commentary. However, it is clearly established that these two texts had a very strong influence on all Pāśupata schools and that they were a source of authority even for various other Pāśupata schools such as Lākula, Kāpālika or Kālamukha.²²

Looking at the ideological values of these two religious movements, one realises that Pāśupata Śaivism and Brahmanism are not diametrically opposed. Both share mutually accepted values such as:

- the organisation of society into *varṇas*;
- education according to the Veda; according to the PS, Pāśupata aspirants must come from a Brahmin caste and have received the teaching of the Veda;
- the approval of the authority of the Veda even if what is understood by this term may differ;²³
- and the belief in the accumulation of *karman* and in the cycle of rebirths.

Finally, even if the Pāśupata observance was comprised of immoral and reprehensible behaviours from a Brahmanical point of view, the purification system of Pāśupata Śaivism is perfectly based on Brahmanical ethics.²⁴

However, there is a very important and substantive difference between a Pāśupata disciple and a Smārta Brahmin. Pāśupata Śaivism rejects the most important basis of Brahmanism, that is, the efficiency of sacrifices. For Pāśupata believers, the fire-sacrifices and the worship of gods and ancestors are ineffective. For them, Śiva is the universal cause,

21 As Bakker (2019), p. 295, states: “the author(s) of the *Skandapurāṇa* belonged to circles that were closer to the Lākula than the Mausula division”; it would be very interesting to have access to one of their doctrinal texts. Unfortunately, they seem to be lost.

22 The testimony of Kṣemarāja provides evidence of the recognition of the PS as an authoritative source and of the membership of the Lākula within Pāśupata Śaivism; see Sanderson (2006), p. 177.

23 Hara (1966), p. 107–108.

24 On the Pāśupata purification system, see Hara (2002), p. 57–66: “Pāśupata Concept of Purity”, and p. 104–138: “Transfert of Merit in Hindu Literature and Religion”.

and salvation from the cycle of rebirths does not come through fire sacrifices and ancestor worship. Only union with Śiva can bring salvation. Consequently, this means that, for a Pāśupata adherent, it is not necessary to have a son to obtain salvation, whereas orthodox Brahmanism teaches that a son is necessary to repay the congenital debt to the ancestors. This issue is precisely and in great detail dealt with in the *Manu-smṛti* and has produced an extensive corpus of treatises on inheritance.²⁵

Thus, one of the main points of opposition between a Pāśupata disciple and a Smārta brahmin is the way by which they will obtain liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Therefore their soteriological systems are completely different.

4.3 The Pāśupata soteriological system

Since the above information is crucial for the rest of my demonstration, I will summarise very briefly how a Pāśupata disciple attains liberation according to the PS and Kauṇḍinya's commentary. A Pāśupata disciple obtains salvation only thanks to the grace of Śiva after following a five-step observance that enables him to gradually unite with the supreme God.²⁶ This five-step observance prescribes very specific behaviours such as the bath in ashes, the practice of dishonour or the frequentation of cremation grounds, which clearly distinguish these prescriptions from those of other religious currents that were contemporary to it.²⁷ When he obtains the grace of Śiva, the devotee becomes a *mahāgaṇapati*, a "guardian of a multitude of bound souls",²⁸ and acquires divine qualities.²⁹ With the exception of specific practices such as the bath in ashes or

25 On the congenital debt, see Kāṇḍe (1941), Vol. 2, part 1, p. 560f.

26 See PS 5.40 and Sastri (1940), p. 4, line 19, p. 6, lines 1f., and p. 143, lines 21–23.

27 Some of these specific Pāśupata practices are described in the SP. For example, chapter 32 contains an etiological myth for the bathing in ashes. As pointed by Bisschop (2004) p. 109, the court dishonour, although not detailed, seems to be mentioned in SP 122.81–84 by using an expression used in the PS (the given verse number refers to the *editio princeps* by K. Bhāttarāi (1988), *Skandapurāṇasya Ambikākhaṇḍa*, Śrīmahendrasaṃskṛtavīśvavidyālayagranthamālā: Velajhuṇḍī).

28 Bisschop (2005), p. 536 and 543.

29 The divine qualities allow to be able to see, hear, think and know objects at a distance (PS 1.21), to be omniscient (PS 1.22), to be fast as thought (PS 1.23), ca-

the frequentation of cremation grounds, the general behaviour expected from the aspirant is fairly consistent with principles shared by other religions. These principles, described at length by Kauṇḍinya commenting on PS 1.9, are the abstinence from violence, from sexual intercourse, from trade, from theft, from anger, strict respect for the master, the purification of oneself, the obligation to eat lightly, and carefulness.³⁰ To perform the observance, no object is necessary except the body of the disciple, which he submits to transcendental gift, transcendental sacrifice and transcendental asceticism.³¹

As the main differences of the soteriological systems of Pāśupata Śaivism and of Brahminical orthodoxy have been established, it is now possible to search in the first version of the Sukeśa story which values are conveyed that would have justified Smārta Brahmins retelling this story in SP 35 and introducing the Naraka cycle into the SP.

5. Analysis of the first version of the Sukeśa story

5.1 Summary

The first version of the Sukeśa story is introduced in the frame story as an anecdote and can be summarised as follows:

While Himavat (the god-mountain) wishes for immortal fame, Kaśyapa tells him that this is attained through progeny. In order to illustrate his statement, Kaśyapa recounts an event once witnessed by him (SP 11.1–4). One day, while on his way to Vārāṇasī, he saw a pure and abstinent sage (*vipra*), who, be-

pable of metamorphosis (PS 1.24) and devoid of sensations (PS 1.25). In addition to these qualities, the disciple united to the God gets certain properties, as to control everything and to be uncontrollable (PS 1.27f.), the possibility to submit everything and the impossibility of being submitted (PS 1.29f.), the possibility of killing and the impossibility of being killed (PS 1.31f.), the absence of fear (PS 1.33), the absence of disease and the imperishability (PS 1.34), and finally the absence of obstacles (PS 1.37).

30 Regarding these prescriptions, the *pāśupata* innovation lies not in the list of them but in the way they are organised; see Hara (2002), p. 67–75: “Pāśupata Concept of *ahimsā*”.

31 See Hara (2002), p. 47–55: “*atidāna*, *atijajana*, and *atitapas*”.

cause he had been terrified by a tiger, had entered a cave (SP 11.5–8). In the cave, the twice-born man found some sages hanging on a clump of grass and overwhelmed with grief. Tormented, he asked them why they were hanging upside down and how they could be freed (SP 11.9–10).³²

They answered: “We are your fathers accompanied by our grandfathers and your maternal grandfathers, you have not made the pious act and we are tormented by your offence! This is hell, o illustrious one, it takes the form of a cave, and you are the clump of grass, we depend on you. As long as you live, we will remain in this state, o sage (*vipra*). Once you die, we whose minds are smeared with sins, will go to hell. If, after a marital union, you give birth to a progeny excellent by his qualities (*guṇa*), by this act, we will deliver ourselves one by one. O son, neither by another asceticism (*tapas*), nor by the fruit of pilgrimages, act according to our request, o you of great understanding, save your fathers from fear!” (SP 11.11–15)

The twice-born agreed, began to propitiate Vṛṣadhvaja (Śiva) and freed his ancestors from the cave, who thus obtained the status of attendants (*gaṇapas*) (SP 11.16). As for himself, he became an attendant (*gaṇapa*) dear to Rudra and was named Sukeśa (SP 11.17). Following this anecdote, Kaśyapa enjoins Himavat to practice asceticism (*tapas*), and then to beget a sublime and excellent progeny. Then he will attain glory (SP 11.18). Himavat practises asceticism until Brahmā appears. Himavat asks for a son, but is promised a daughter instead. He fathers three daughters on Menā: Aparṇā, Ekaparṇā and Ekapaṭalā, who practise severe asceticism, by which they sustain the worlds. Aparṇā is called Umā.³³

32 The motif of the hanging ancestors is not an originality of the SP. For references to this narrative motif in other works, see R. Adriaensen, H.T. Bakker & H. Isaacson (1998), note 61 p.80.

33 This summary is based on the synopsis of the chapter SP 11 in Adriaensen & al. (1998), p. 81f. Consequently some sentences are identical to it, but I have added some details.

This story, introduced as an illustration for the statement that fame (*khyāti*) is obtained through progeny, urges Himavat to produce a son. For that, he performs asceticism (*tapas*), obtains a boon from Brahmā and finally fathers the Goddess. Therefore the first version of the Sukeśa myth can be seen as the triggering factor of the birth of the Goddess as the daughter of Himavat. This story is so closely linked to the main story of the SP that it seems impossible to consider it a later addition.

Consequently, we have to assume that this story was written by the first composers of the SP which were certainly influenced by Pāsupata beliefs. If Kropman's statement – that this story inspired SP 35 and that the latter is of Smārta religious affiliation – is valid, then one should find in Sukeśa's story told in SP 11 some elements in favour of Smārta values.

5.2 Brahmanical or Pāsupata values in SP 11?

As the main topic of the story is to save the fathers from hells and as its outcome is the birth of progeny, it seems that it could promote salvation through a son. Aside from that, some more elements are in agreement with the necessity to have a son to be saved:

- the fathers request a son to be saved and claim that this is the only solution,³⁴
- the fact that Sukeśa has not yet produced a descendant is described as a fault,³⁵
- the fathers stay hanging from the clump of grass above hell as long as Sukeśa lives, and after his death they will fall into hell: this matches

34 SP 11.14f.: *yadi tvam dārasamyogaṃ kṛtvāpatyaṃ gunottaram | utpādayasi tenāsmān mucyema vayam ekaśaḥ || 14 || nānyena tapasā putra na tīrthānām phalena ca | tat kuruṣva mahābuddhe tārayasva pitṛn bhayāt || 15 ||*

If, after a marital union, you give birth to a progeny furnished with qualities (*guṇa*), by this act, we may be released one by one (14). O son, neither by another asceticism (*tapas*), nor by the fruit of pilgrimages, act according to this [request], o you of great understanding, save your fathers from the fear (15).

35 SP 11.11: *vayaṃ te 'kṛtapuṇyasya pītarāḥ sapitāmahāḥ | prapitāmahās ca kliśyāmas tava duṣṭena karmaṇā || 11 ||*

We are your fathers accompanied by our grandfathers and your maternal grandfathers, you who have not made the pious act and we are tormented by your offence!

the Brahmanical soteriological system and seems to reflect the consequence of the congenital debt;³⁶

- the agreement of Sukeśa by the word *tathā* in SP 11.16 could be understood as the rupture of his celibacy vow;
- the injunction of Kaśyapa at the end of the story is: “produce offspring to obtain glory!”;³⁷
- finally, the fact that Himavat fathers Umā suggests that one must produce an offspring to obtain glory and salvation.

This list gives the impression of agreement with the idea of salvation through a son, which could have been an inspiration for a later Smārta authorship. Nevertheless a more careful reading reveals that this is not the case and that the myth appears to bear a strong mark of a Pāśupata background.

Even though the fathers claim that they can obtain salvation only by a son, it is never said that Sukeśa breaks his celibacy vow. Moreover, it is only briefly mentioned that he resorts to Śiva.³⁸ Consequently Śiva appears as the supreme deity which permits to solve the problem. While this does not prove a Pāśupata authorship, it points to the idea according to which Śiva is the universal cause. If we consider the outcome of the myth, we notice that Sukeśa obtains not only his ancestors’ salvation by resorting to Śiva, but also acquires the status of *gaṇapa*.³⁹ This last favour

36 SP 11.13: *yāvat tvam jīvase vipra tāvad eva vyaṃ sthitāḥ | mṛte tvayi gamiṣyāmo narakam pāpacetasah || 13 ||*

As long as you live, we will remain in this state, o sage (*vipra*). Once you die, we whose minds are smeared by sins, will go in hell.

37 SP 11.18: *tasmāt kṛtvā tapo ghoram apatyam gaṇavattaram | utpādayasva śailendra tataḥ kīrtim avāpsyasi || 18 ||*

Hence, after performing a sublime asceticism (*tapas*), father a progeny with the most of qualities, then you will obtain glory, o you the best of the mountains!

38 SP 11.16f.: *sa tatheti pratijñāya ārādhya ca vṛśadhvajam | pitṛn gartāt samuddhṛtya gaṇapān pracakāra ha || 16 || svayaṃ ca rudradayitāḥ sukeśo nāma nāmataḥ | sam-mato balavāṃś caiva rudrasya gaṇapo ’bhavat || 17 ||*

After promising by saying ‘so be it,’ he strove to obtain the favour of the one who has a bull for a sign, delivered his fathers from the cave and made them attendants (*gaṇapa*). And he became himself a favorite of Rudra, called Sukeśa, a respected and powerful attendant of Rudra.

39 SP 11.16f. quoted in the above note.

is thought-provoking because it is precisely the aim of a Pāśupata disciple and his final status when he unites himself with Śiva.⁴⁰ Moreover, becoming a *gaṇapa* is not common in purāṇic literature but a specific feature of several myths of the SP.⁴¹ In each of these stories, the status of *gaṇapa* is associated with a series of qualities which find a close parallel with the divine qualities obtained by a Pāśupata united with Śiva.⁴² If we summarise the Sukeśa story, we find an efficient path to salvation: the worship of Śiva allows the one who performs it to obtain the salvation of his ancestors from hell, their promotion to the status of *gaṇapa*, and to become a *gaṇapa* himself. This procedure and its effects match the Pāśupata soteriological system more than the Smārta one.

The supreme position of Śiva as the only cause of salvation and the status obtained by his worshipper are no proof, but make it appear likely

40 PS 1.38: *ity etair guṇair yukto bhagavato mahādevasya mahāgaṇapatir bhavati*. “Thus endowed with this qualities of the Lord Mahādeva he becomes a lord of the great multitude” (translation Bisschop 2005, p. 538–543). On the exactly meaning of the term *mahāgaṇapati*, see Bisschop 2005, p. 536 and 543.

41 The result of the research on the word *gaṇapa* inside a vast corpus of purāṇic texts shows that the favour of the *gaṇapa* status occurs only in those stories which are shared by the *Skandapurāṇa* and other *Purāṇas*. I demonstrated elsewhere that the sentence including this favour is a stereotype phrase belonging to the SP and that it can be seen as a trademark of its authorship (on references to this stereotype sentence, see Adriaensen & al. (1998), p. 31 (notes 127f.); on the trademark, see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 237f., 242, 244, 248f., 273–5, 315, 339, 348, 351, 488f., and 830). The electronic texts I used to search for the term *gaṇapa* were those available on the GRETEL website in 2021 (<http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel.html#Pur>): *Agnipurāṇa*, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa*, *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Garuḍapurāṇa*, *Kūrmapurāṇa*, *Liṅgapurāṇa*, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Nāradaipurāṇa*, *Narasimhapurāṇa*, *Skandapurāṇa*, *Vāmanapurāṇa*, *Vāyupurāṇa*, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, and *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.

42 It should be noted that the salvation obtained by Nandin (SP 20–22), Upamanyu (SP 34), Kāṣṭhakūṭa (SP 52) and Sukeśa (SP 35) is quite particular. While it reflects strong links with Pāśupata aspirations, these stories also include a very special dimension, namely the filial relationship. On this topic, see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), chapter 7, p. 207–310. For a detailed comparison of the favour offered by Śiva in the SP and the divine qualities of Pāśupata *sādhaka*, see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 248f. On the stereotypical feature of the expressions *amaro jarayā tyaktaḥ* and *sarvaduḥkhavivarjitaḥ*, see Adriaensen, R., Bakker, H.T., & Isaacson, H. (1998), p. 31.

that the first version of the Sukeśa myth was composed by a Pāśupata author. In any case, it is very difficult to admit that Smārta Brahmins would consider this story a glorification of their own soteriological path, and even more so because the outcome of the whole chapter is not the birth of a son, but the birth of Himavat's daughter, the goddess Pārvatī.

Indeed, if we consider that the message of the short Sukeśa story in SP 11 is an encouragement to produce offspring and that it reflects the belief of salvation by a son, we are faced with a major problem, namely the mismatch between the introductory myth and the events that follow it. The introductory question of the chapter is how to acquire glory or celebrity, and the answer – by perpetuity – is contained in the Sukeśa myth. By following the behaviour of Sukeśa, Himavat produces a descendant who is prophesied to bring glory. This descendant is none other than Umā-Pārvatī, that is to say, a daughter and not a son. Would it be possible that Smārta Brahmins accept that the power of salvation was given to a woman? This would be something totally unheard of and does not correspond to the brahmanical discourse.

But could the fact that a woman is capable of bringing supreme glory to her father be admissible from a Pāśupata point of view? In order to answer this question we need to consider the whole story of this woman, the goddess Pārvatī, in the SP. Her story in this text is quite particular. An exhaustive analysis is not possible in the present context, but I will briefly present some elements of it.

First, Pārvatī is originally an emanation of Śiva, born from his mouth and made of his ascetic energy (*tejas*) as it is told in SP 9.⁴³ Consequently, her existence is not the one of an independent deity: she is not outside of Śiva, but part of him, just like the whole of the universe. This perfectly fits the Pāśupata concept of the universe. In each of Pārvatī's births then, she claims that her sole goal is to be united with Śiva.⁴⁴ Her declaration of intent resembles the one of a Pāśupata disciple. Although the wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī is celebrated in SP 13f., it seems that she really wins her status of a spouse of Śiva in chapter SP 162 after having performed several kinds of asceticism (*tapas*) and after having adopted the *āsoka*

43 This story is original and very specific to the SP. See my analysis of the triple birth of the Goddess in the SP, in Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 311–332 (chapter 8.1).

44 See SP 10.3, 10.24, and 162.108.

tree as a son.⁴⁵ From this chapter onwards, she is permanently united with Śiva. Consequently, the final union of the goddess with Śiva has been gradually obtained by performing several kinds of asceticism. So the whole story of the goddess — her status as Śiva's emanation, the aim of her life, her behaviour to obtain Śiva and her final permanent union with Śiva — could be seen in terms of the stages within a Pāśupata's path to the final goal. Although the PS and the PABh reserve the Pāśupata observance to male disciples, epigraphical testimonies prove that it has been allowed to women, too.⁴⁶ As a result, if the story of Sukeśa intends to show an example of how to attain the Pāśupata way of salvation, the birth of Himavat's daughter is not inconsistent since she will be permanently united with Śiva. And the prophecy of supreme glory for Himavat is fulfilled through the union of his daughter with the Supreme God. Through a Pāśupata reading, the story of Sukeśa is consistent with the remainder of the chapter SP 11 and also with the SP as a whole.

The analysis of the religious values underlying the first version of the Sukeśa myth shows that, if the lamentation of his fathers appears to promote a salvation through a son, its outcome suggests a totally different strategy to escape from the hells. As for the application of this strategy to the case of Himavat, it confirms that the first version of the Sukeśa myth can in no way be an inspiration for Smārta Brahmins.

If, as Kropman suggests, the second version of the Sukeśa myth introducing the Naraka cycle and the entirety of that cycle are a later addition, probably issued from a Smārta milieu, then one should certainly observe either a change in the outcome of the story, or some inconsistencies between the first and the second versions, or at least an adaptation of the story so that it promotes Smārta values and salvation through the son.

45 Three verses at the end of SP 162 affirm that by the adoption of the tree and through the supreme asceticism she performed the goddess really becomes the spouse of Śiva. The first one, SP 162.96, is told by a *gaṇa* belonging to the audience of the adoption ceremony; the second one, v. 162.103, is spoken by the Goddess, and the third one, v. 162.108, is uttered by Śiva himself. See Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 492–495.

46 See Sanderson (2013), p. 228f., and Bisschop & Griffiths (2003), p. 322 (note 36).

6. Analysis of the second version

Before a close reading of the second version, let's briefly review the different arguments put forward to assign another and later authorship to the Naraka cycle. According to Kropman,⁴⁷ these are:

- the Naraka cycle interrupts the main story;
- the Sukeśa myth told in SP 35 is a repetition inspired by its first version in SP 11 which is original as the textual correspondences show;
- the literary style used to describe the different hells appears different;
- the Naraka cycle forms a whole in which the retelling of Sukeśa's story give the opportunity to Smārta authors to introduce Naraka material.⁴⁸

In my opinion, the fact that the Naraka cycle interrupts the narration of another cycle is not a decisive argument in the case of the SP, since much of the narrative construction of purāṇic literature rests on the nesting of stories following the principle of Russian dolls. I share Yokochi's opinion according to which linking passages and their inconsistencies could have been written during the composition of the text and are not necessarily a proof of a later addition.⁴⁹ The nesting of stories is an essential feature of a *Purāṇa* and the interruption of the main story by a minor one can be seen as natural.

Kropman argues that the repetition of the Sukeśa myth "rather than proving that the Naraka cycle belongs to the same layer as the main story, shows that this cycle was added later on." For her, the textual cor-

47 All her arguments are put together in a single paragraph in Kropman (2019), p. 113. See the paragraph quoted before in note 17.

48 Considering the Naraka cycle as an indivisible whole, Kropman attributes to all the chapters of this cycle a non-Śaiva origin, whereas the editors only propose a Smārta (or possibly even Buddhist) origin to the chapters describing hells.

49 The position of Kropman (2019, p. 112f.) disagrees with the one supported by Yokochi who argues that the Naraka cycle rather belongs to the original part. For Yokochi, the addition of some stories, like the story of the tiger Somanandin, could have been added during the process of composition and the inconsistencies observed could reflect the effort of the redactors to link two episodes with each other. Yokochi (2013), p. 46: "However, this does not necessarily mean that the relocation of the first part of these two chapters and its revision by adding the second part are secondary to the original composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*."

respondences are the result of a later elaboration and are not original.⁵⁰ However, textual correspondences cannot prove anything. They could equally be the result of an original authorship as well as of a meticulous secondary elaboration of an original. Nevertheless if the second version goes back to a Smārta authorship, we should observe some differences with the first one, in particular on the topic of the path to salvation.

Moreover, Kropman's argumentation in favour of the distinguishability of original parts of the SP from later ones is based on their respective mentions within the *anukramaṇikā*, a list of contents which is found in chapter SP 2. However, she is forced to admit that the *anukramaṇikā* has been added in a second step,⁵¹ that it does not always reflect the actual contents of the SP, and that some parts that she considers original are not referred to there.⁵² It must be noted that the reference of an episode within the *anukramaṇikā* as a proof for its belonging to the original core cannot be a valid argument either.⁵³ On the other hand, before adding a list of contents inside their work, the authors made use of narratological tools to advertise to the readers of their narrative agenda.⁵⁴ If we consider the first version of the Sukeśa myth from a narratological point of view, it can be stated that this story is a prolepsis of the second one.⁵⁵ Precisely Kaśyapa introduces the story he is about to tell Himavat as a vision he has obtained in the past by the power of his *tapas* (SP 11.4). So,

50 Kropman (2019), p. 113.

51 See the table in Kropman (2019), p. 122f.

52 See in particular Kropman (2019), p. 120, where she assumes the loss of a verse within the *anukramaṇikā* to maintain her theory.

53 The content of the *anukramaṇikā* still raises questions since some topics mentioned are not found in the manuscripts whereas others not mentioned are told in the SP. See Adriaensen & al. (1998), p. 43f. and 55.

54 These narratological tools are in particular defined by Genette (2014), p. 201–225. Among these tools, one can think about the choice of a suggestive title, a stereotypical introduction of the work telling the process of transmission coming back to the sage Vyāsa (see Bisschop 2021 and also Wattelier-Bricout 2020, chapter 6.1 on p. 171–185), the *incipit*, the statement of prophecies, various processes playing on the circularity of time (for an example of the spiral construction with overlaying rings, see Wattelier-Bricout 2020, p. 323–331, and Appendix K, p. 835–840).

55 A prolepsis qualifies the fact that an event which is to take place later in the narrative is told in advance.

the supernatural nature of a vision perfectly allows the narration of a future event. By introducing the first version as a vision, the authors seem to consciously use this as a tool to announce a second one. With this in mind, it appears that the first version participates in a programmatic function. Thus a narratological analysis makes it seem plausible that the two versions have been planned together. In this case, the first one is like a trailer of the second and it is true that the first one is shorter and does not give a lot of details, while the second one better explains how Sukeśa saves his ancestors and becomes a *gaṇapa* himself. To ascertain this idea, we should be sure that both narrations promote the same path to salvation and deliver the same religious messages.

One of the arguments argued by Kropman in order to assign a status of addition to the whole Naraka cycle is based on a remark made by the editors on the literary style employed in it. Actually the editors of volume 2B of the SP state that the chapters 37–50 could be attributed to another authorship because the “style of the Sanskrit text is also markedly different, with its lack of the *Skandapurāṇa*’s characteristic humour and spirit”.⁵⁶ Consequently, as only the chapters SP 37–50 seem to be written in a different style, this should not be an argument to assert that the whole Naraka cycle is an addition. That being said, this difference of style is only the result of the contents of these chapters and not attributable to another authorship. Indeed, by describing the torments endured in different hells, the authors cannot plainly maintain a humorous tone. Moreover, it seems to me that the vivid style noticed in several places by the editors is found inside the description of hells and its framework story, making the Naraka cycle a whole. Indeed, the description of the different hells is so horrific, overwhelming and tedious that it causes the grief of Sukeśa who decides to save the inhabitants from the hells the same way he saved his ancestors (SP 51). From a narratological point of view, the difference of style observed is both the result of the contents and of the narrative intent. In any case, this kind of observation cannot be a firm argument to attribute another authorship to a part of the text because it is based on a subjective point of view. Similarly, the remarks on stylistic differences made here and there should be based on a sys-

56 See also Bakker & al. (2014), p. 11, on the second part of the chapter SP 52: “The style of this episode is literary and contrasts markedly the rather dull description of the hells, which reaches rock bottom in SP 50.”

tematic analysis of the vocabulary, of the grammar, and of the stylistic figures, and the results must be considered with caution because the SP, and purāṇic literature in general, frequently uses an imitative style borrowing expressions or similes from the vast epic corpus, and also because the second-hand authors of the SP care a lot about writing in the original style of the SP.⁵⁷ In my opinion, the mythological part (SP 35–36, SP 51) and the prescriptive and didactic part (SP 37–50) of the Naraka cycle could be seen as a whole from a stylistic point of view.

Although Kropman asserts that the Naraka cycle forms a whole without resorting to stylistic analysis nor narratological arguments, it is indeed very clear that the Sukeśa myth serves as a narrative framing the description of hells (SP 37–50). On the one hand, the hell description is only narratively possible because Sukeśa saved his fathers from hells and as a result, having stayed there some time, hanging above the hells, the latter are able to narrate what they saw. On the other hand, the end of this description is followed by an extension of the story of Sukeśa (SP 51) who, overwhelmed by the horror of the torments suffered by the infernal inhabitants, reiterates the procedure by which he managed to save his ancestors and succeeds in saving all of hell's residents. The narrative scheme employed makes the description of hells (SP 37–50) and the story of Sukeśa (SP 35 and 51) inextricably linked. The whole Naraka cycle seems to have a didactic significance and to follow a logical plan: first, Sukeśa illustrates how to save the fathers from hells. Secondly, he learns about the different kinds of hells and the torments associated with each one. Finally, he reasserts the power of the path to salvation chosen by him as he succeeds in saving all the infernal inhabitants.

Although all these chapters form a coherent whole with didactic value, this does not exclude the possibility that the description of hells (SP 37–50) could be inspired by an external source, whether Buddhist or Smārta. That being said, the didactic scope of the whole and the similarity between the two methods used by Sukeśa invite us to see the mythological part and the didactic part as working towards a same goal on the narrative level. The question then arises whether the details indicating a potential Smārta origin in chapters 37–50 are echoed in Sukeses's narra-

57 I observed this meticulous care within the additional parts of the chapter SP 162 in which the authors use not only the same similes or vocabulary but also the same narrative construction; see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 48f.

tive. If so, it will be possible, as Kropman does without providing proof, to attribute a Smārta authorship to the whole Naraka cycle.⁵⁸

To this end, I will first take a look at the context and the purpose of the introduction of the second version. Subsequently, I will search for elements of Brahmanical or Pāśupata values within SP 35 in order to determine the authors' religious affiliation.

7. The introduction of the second version

In the chapter SP 34, Pārvatī decides to leave Śiva after being teased by him. She arrives at an inaccessible mountain peak and begins to perform extreme asceticism (*tapas*). At this point, Vyāsa interrupts the narrative by asking the narrator Sanatkumāra what Śiva was doing during his separation from Pārvatī. Sanatkumāra then tells Vyāsa three successive stories: the myth of Upamanyu, the second account of the Sukeśa myth, and the myth of Kāṣṭhakūṭa. These three stories are linked by an identical outcome:⁵⁹ all the three characters named above have obtained Śiva's favour to become a *gaṇapa* surrounded by their family members in a magical place. Once Upamanyu has become a *gaṇapa*, Śiva goes to Sukeśa. Here begins chapter SP 35:

Sanatkumāra said:

Then, o Vyāsa, the divine Lord turned a brahmin (called) Sukeśa (and) solely devoted to truth and to asceticism also into a *gaṇapa*. (1)

58 The fact that the editors also suggest a Buddhist influence is totally neglected by Kropman. Indeed, to attribute a strong Buddhist influence to the whole Naraka cycle could be more convincing than a Smārta one if we consider how Sukeśa shows compassion, one of the most important Buddhist values, in chapter SP 51.

59 Bakker & al. (2014), p. 11–12: “The theme of Pārvatī's *tapas* thus serves as a narrative device to introduce three additional stories about Śiva's devotees and their asceticism. The outcome of their *tapas* is remarkably similar. Both Sukeśa and Kāṣṭhakūṭa acquire the status of Gaṇeśvaras and are provided with a magical mountain that can move at will (*kāmaḡa*). Their family members join them on this abode: Sukeśa acquires the Trikūṭa mountain for himself and his ancestors, Kāṣṭhakūṭa is joined by his parents on the heavenly Śveta mountain. Upamanyu's end result is also comparable. He receives a continent (*dvīpa*) for himself and his family, which is surrounded by an ocean of milk (*kṣīroda*) and can move at will.”

Vyāsa asked:

How could this brahmin enter the state of *gaṇeśa* (lord of troops)? By which kind of asceticism (*tapas*) did he satisfy the Lord in order to obtain the state of *gaṇapa* (master of troops)?
(2)⁶⁰

By this introduction, the authors announce more precisely the topic and the aim of this second version: the reader will learn how to become a *gaṇapa*. Therefore the introduction of the second narrative really promises the clarification and explanation of the outcome of the first one.

8. The second version

In order to carry out a detailed analysis of the retelling of the Sukeśa myth in the chapter SP 35, I give here an integral translation on which I will rely:

Sanatkumāra answered:

Once upon a time there was a brahmin, born in the lineage of Vasiṣṭha, who spoke the truth, who was pure, dedicated to pilgrimage and solely devoted to fasting (3). In a foreign country he once saw a terrible tiger standing in his way in a forest with opened jaws and armed with claws and fangs (4). At the sight of it and quickly leaving his way, the sage (*vipra*) entered a frightening forest that was empty of living beings (5). There he saw in front of him men holding on to a clump of grass and hanging from it, lamenting and extremely afflicted (6). Then, seeing these very afflicted twice born (*dvija*) men hanging with their heads down and crying, he asked them: “Who are you?”. And they answered thus (7): “All of us are your fathers with our heads down in this hell. We are clinging to the grass as we are relying upon you by your fault, o fool! (8) Men desire sons because they think they will be saved by them from hell. While you are that son, you will make us fall, unfortunate as we are!” (9) The sage (*vipra*) said: “You must escape (yourself)

60 The text used is the one edited in Bakker, H.T., Bisschop, P.C., & Yokochi, Y. (2014) and is reproduced in the appendix to this paper; the translation is mine.

from this pit, o forefathers (*pitāmahāḥ*), with the help of all the meritorious deeds that I have performed since my birth, and the asceticism (*tapas*) that I have acquired by going on pilgrimage.” (10) The fathers replied: “We are not able to escape from this pit by means of (your) asceticism (*tapas*), nor by a sacrifice, or in any other way. Do as we tell you! (11) Make an offspring furnished with qualities and endowed with asceticism (*tapas*) come forth. Then we may escape from this pit, if you agree to do.” (12) The sage (*vipra*) retorted: “I have taken this vow: ‘I am chaste.’ I will not take a wife, but I will save my ancestors (13).” Then after dismissing them, he, overwhelmed with great pain, took refuge in Rudra. Then the fathers disappeared (14). When the fathers had thus disappeared, the twice-born remained feeding only on air (*vāyubhakṣa*), became like a piece of wood, a clod of earth or a stone (*kāṣṭhaloṣṭhopalibhūta*), and held his breath (15). Fixing his mind on Rudra, motionless, perfectly absorbed, he stood under the sky muttering “Rudra” in his heart (16). After a month, a big storm and heavy rain broke out, unbearable, with a terrifying sound, and destroying all creatures (17). He withstood the heavy rain without feeling either physical or mental suffering (18). In the seventh month, the venerable God appeared to him in the guise of Viṣṇu and said to this best of the twice-born: (19) “I am pleased with you, blessed are you, because of your *tapas*, o you who are virtuous! Choose the boon of your choice, o wise sage (*viprarṣi*)!” (20) When Sukéśa saw that Nārāyaṇa had come, he replied: “I desire only Śaṃkara’s favour, not yours.” (21) Viṣṇu retorted: “Enough of your obstinacy! Even the gods cannot see Hara, o wise sage (*viprarṣi*), so it is even less possible for ordinary men!” Sukeśa said: “Whether it is a good thing or a bad thing, I wish for a boon from Śaṃkara only, not from you Cakreśa (Viṣṇu) or anyone else, never! (23). Since even you, the gods, (including you, Viṣṇu,) have to honour and praise that god, it is really why he is called the utmost.” (24) Seeing his determination, Lord Hara was satisfied and said to him: “O best of sages (*vipra*), be my indestructible *gaṇapa* (25), immortal, free of old age, free from all sufferings, endowed with sovereignty, dear

among my people (26). And that divine mountain I have created, named Trikūṭa, provided with golden dwellings, moving at will, I give to you (27). And all these fathers on whose behalf you endeavoured to satisfy me, o son, are saved from the terrible hell by you, a good son, o sinless being, and are elevated to the status of *gaṇeśa* (28). They will become your servants, forever without suffering, they will be your *gaṇeśvaras*, following your wish (29). And you will be known as Sukeśa and you will live forever in full possession of the sovereignty⁶¹ and of the eight qualities.” (30)

Sanatkumāra said:

Then, seeing his fathers accompanied by their loved ones saved from hell and furnished with the honorable status of *gaṇeśvara*, (31) he was delighted in his heart, bowed his head, and with folded hands and shining with joy he addressed Maheśvara with eloquence (32).

Sukeśa said:

“O lord, the status of *gaṇapa*, sovereignty, immortality, imperishability, as well as the excellent state to be free from old age have been obtained (33). These my fathers have been saved and have become *gaṇapas* by me. And by your grace I have obtained this mountain that moves at will (34). I wish that you Mahādeva, together with Umā and the Pravareśvaras, will always be well-disposed and clearly visible, o benevolent!” (35)

Sanatkumāra said:

Thus addressed by the magnanimous Sukeśa, the Lord spoke thus: “All this shall be (as you said), o *gaṇeśvara*! (36) Once you have resorted to this mountain with these your excellent ancestors, follow your own desired way, o my son, and protect the gods and *vipras*!” (37) After leaving the leader of *gaṇas* (*gaṇanāyaka*) Sukeśa, Mahādeva, accompanied by Umā, disappeared to the eyes of the world (38). As for Sukeśa, on this mountain in a town resembling heaven, he diligently asked his fathers about the nature of the hells. (39)

61 The sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) is defined by Kaunḍinya as the acquisition of the six capacities described in the sūtras PS1.21–26. See Sastri (1940), p. 46, line 10.

Vyāsa asked:

Why, o Brahmā, did the *gaṇapa* ask his fathers? And how did the fathers of this learned one answer? (40) I wish to know about this from you truthfully, o father, in extenso or in summary, this good story that brings happiness to all.” (41)

Addressed in this way, the lord, son of the creator of the Suras (gods), the creator of the celestial car, the one who moves freely, sung the song that was made in the past, that destroys all sins, that connects to the world of the gods (42).

Thus ends the thirty-fifth chapter of the *Skandapurāṇa*.⁶²

By asserting that this second version serves to introduce a part that would have been written by Smārta authors, Kropman’s hypothesis implies that we would be able to notice a change in the religious affiliation within the SP. In this case, one should observe in the second version a subversion of Pāsupata values in favor of brahmanical values.

9. Brahmanical values in SP 35?

As in the first version, the discourse of the ancestors seems to be based on orthodox values and to promote the path to salvation through a son. Indeed, the fathers’ laments expressing the suffering due to the lack of a son born from Sukeśa (SP 35.6) are those of all fathers who see their sons take the path of renunciation and celibacy. This is expressed very clearly in SP 35.9:⁶³

Men desire sons thinking “they will save us from hell.” You are our son, you will make us fall, unfortunate as we are!

Although this verse directly refers to the semantic etymology of the word *putra* which can be found in a verse of the *Manusmṛti*,⁶⁴ it cannot

62 This translation is based on the text of the critical edition (Bakker, H.T., Bisschop, P.C., & Yokochi, Y. (2014), p. 227–234) that I have reproduced in the appendix.

63 See the Sanskrit text in the Appendix below.

64 MS 9.138: *pumṇāmo narakād yasmāt trāyate pitaraṃ sutaḥ | tasmāt putra iti proktaḥ svayam eva svayambhuvā ||*. “The Self-existent One himself has called him ‘son’ (*putra*) because he rescues (*trā*) his father from the hell named Put”; translation by Olivelle (2009), p. 165.

prove a Smārta authorship, since it clearly belongs to the proverbial material.⁶⁵ The knowledge of the *Manusmṛti* and its use as reference is not restricted to Smārta Brahmins. Quite the contrary, the *Manusmṛti* is even quoted in the PABh.⁶⁶

Finally, two more details in the fathers' discourse prevent assigning a Smārta authorship to the whole Naraka cycle as Kropman asserts. First, the fathers claim there is only one way to save them. By this assertion, they also state the inefficiency of sacrifice.⁶⁷ Yet, it is one of the main controversial points opposing Smārta Brahmins and Pāśupata aspirants, the latter rejecting the practice of sacrifices and affirming their inefficiency. Consequently, it seems difficult to imagine that Smārta Brahmins have written the fathers' laments. The path to salvation requested by Sukeśa's ancestors also includes one peculiar detail: they want a son "furnished with qualities" (*guṇasamyukta*, SP 35.12). In a Pāśupata context, this requirement could take on a new significance because to be furnished with qualities is the state obtained when the disciple achieves the end of suffering.⁶⁸ This could be a clue for a Pāśupata authorship.

65 Brockington (1970), p. 224.

66 Sastri (1940), p. 31, translated in Hara (1966), p. 214: *kṛtsnām mahīm paryāyataḥ saśailavanakānanām | apamānāt param nāsti sādhanam manur abravīt ||*. "Manu has said that a man may wander over the whole earth with its mountains and forests and find no means of perfection better than scorn from others." Kauṇḍinya does not quote a verse in particular, but he relies on the authority of the sage Manu within his argumentation. So he shows he considers Manu an authoritative source. We could also add that in general, Manu is recognised as an authoritative source and is quoted in epigraphic documents regardless of the religious affiliation of the issuer of the gift or its recipient.

67 SP 35.11.

68 This state is described in the *sūtra* PS 1.38 (see the note 40 above). How this divine state is constituted of the acquired *guṇas* had been explained in the commentary on the *sūtra* PS1.26: *dharmitvaṃ ca* (PS 1.26). *atra guṇadharmeṇāyaṃ dharmī bhavati* (PABh 1.26.1). *yad etad darśanādyaṃ vikaraṇāntaṃ māheśvaram aiśvaryaṃ asyeśaprasādāt svaguṇasamvṛttaṃ tenāyaṃ guṇadharmeṇa dharmī bhavati* (PABh 1.26.2). Translation by Hara (1966), p. 243: "And the possession of a property (1.26). Here it is by a property (*dharma*) in the form of qualities (*guṇa*) that [the perfect one] becomes a possessor of a property. This sovereign power, beginning with seeing at a distance and ending with the being without instruments (PS 1.20–25) becomes his own qualities through the grace of God; and by this property in the form of qualities he becomes the possessor of a property."

Similarly, the loud and clear statement of Śiva's superiority of over all the gods in verses SP 35.22–24 seems to reflect another disagreement between Smārta Brahmins and Pāśupata devotees and appears in favour of a Pāśupata authorship.

The two statements found in the second version — that sacrifice is inefficient and that the supreme god is Śiva — seem to prohibit the attribution of a Smārta authorship to this second version.

10. Pāśupata values in SP 35?

If a Smārta authorship seems unlikely, this does not yet assure a Pāśupata authorship. It was pointed out above that SP 35 claims the inefficiency of the sacrifice and the superiority of Śiva. These two statements are in agreement with fundamental Pāśupata precepts. Now it is necessary to analyse the story in comparison with the Pāśupata doctrinal texts in order to assess if the way of salvation sketched in the Sukeśa myth matches the Pāśupata soteriological path. In order to do so, I will focus on the portrayal of Sukeśa, the triggering factor of the narrative, the place where the story takes place, and finally on the path to salvation chosen by Sukeśa.

In the preamble of the story, some details allow to consider Sukeśa a potential *sādhaka*⁶⁹:

- Sukeśa is designated a *vipra* [sage] in SP 35.5b and 10. This word has a particular connotation in a Pāśupata context since Śiva represents this qualification.⁷⁰
- Sukeśa is a Brahmin born in an illustrious lineage devoted to Siva's worship in the SP (v. 35.3a). A Pāśupata disciple must be a Brahmin as

69 The word *sādhaka* in the PS and the PABh refers to a Pāśupata worshipper undertaking the *pāśupata* observance.

70 PS 5.26 and its commentary in Sastri (1940), p. 126,1–3, translation by Hara (1966) p. 420): *atha vipra ity etad api bhagavato nāma. vipraḥ kasmāt? vida jñāne. vipratvaṃ nāma jñānaśaktiḥ. vyāptam anena bhagavato jñānaśaktiā kṛtsnam jñeyam ity ato vipra iti.* “Also A SEER is a name of the Blessed One. Why is he called a seer? The root *vid-* [in the word *vipra*] means knowledge. To be a seer means to have power of knowledge. He is called a seer, because everything that is knowable is pervaded by the Blessed One with his power of knowledge.”

it is stated in the commentary on *sūtra* PS 1.1,⁷¹ and he must worship Śiva alone.⁷²

- Sukeśa possesses some prerequisites expected from a disciple: he speaks the truth, he is pure, he is wandering and fasting (SP 35.3bd) and he holds the celibacy vow (SP 35.13). Among the commandments explained by Kauṇḍinya are: speaking the truth, purity, moderation in eating, and celibacy.⁷³

From this description, Sukeśa seems to have the right profile of a Pāśupata disciple.

71 Sastri (1940), p. 4,17f.: *atra ataśśabdaḥ śiṣyaguṇavacane, yasmād ayaṃ brahmā-vartadeśajaḥ kulajaḥ paṭvindriyo vividiṣādīsampannaḥ śiṣyaḥ*. Hara (1966), p. 159: “Here the word ‘therefore’ (*ataḥ*) is used with the reference to the premise (*guṇavacana*) that lies in the pupil, viz. this is a pupil who was born in Brahmāvarta, who was born of a good family, who has unimpaired senses, and such qualities as the desire to learn etc.” Sastri (1940), p. 3,4–8: *tathā brāhmaṇagrahaṇāt stripratiśedhād indriyajayopadeśac ca uktaṃ hi. bādhiryam āndhyam aghratvaṃ mūkatā jaḍatā tathā. unmādaḥ kauṇyam kuṣṭhitvaṃ klaibyaṃ gudāvartapaṅgutā* [PABh 1.1.30]. (*evam*) *ādirahitaḥ paṭvindriyo brāhmaṇaḥ śiṣyaḥ*. Hara (1966), p. 155: “In like wise, the pupil, because of the statement that [he must be] a brahmin (PS 4.20), the prohibition of women (PS 1.13) and the specific mention of victory over the bodily organs (PS 5.7), must be free from such defects as are given thus: deafness, blindness, inability to smell, dumbness, numbness, madness, malformation of the arm, leprosy, impotence, obstruction of the bowels and lameness. He must be a brahmin possessed of keen senses.”

72 See PS 2.10 with PABh: *devavat pitṛvac ca* (PS 2.10). *katham iti. ucyate pūrvam asya brāhmaṇasya devayajane pitryajane cādhiḥkāro ’dhigataḥ. tasmāt tebhyo devapitṛbhyo bhaktivyāvartanaṃ kṛtvā ubhayathāpi maheśvare bhāvam avasthāpya yajanaṃ kartavyaṃ nānyasya. caśabdaḥ pratiśedhe. yat tat pūrvam devapitṛṣu kārakatvaṃ sambhāvitaṃ tat teṣu na vidyate. atas teṣāṃ yajanaṃ na kartavyam ityarthāḥ. āha yady evaṃ tasmād ucyatāṃ devapitṛñāṃ ko doṣaḥ yasmāt te na yaṣṭavyāḥ. rudre vā ko guṇaḥ yasmāt sa eva yaṣṭavyaḥ* (PABh 2.10.1–8). Hara (1966), p. 275f. translates: “As [to] the Gods and the Manes (2.10) How? Previously [before he has joined the Pāśupata order] a brahmin has known the office of sacrifice to the gods and to the manes. Accordingly, he is [now] to renounce his devotion (*bhakti*) to the gods and manes, place his affection (*bhāva*) on the Great Lord (Śiva) in both these ways, and sacrifice to him and none other. The particle AND here serves as denial [of the worship of these two]. [That is to say,] the relation which he previously assumed to gods and manes no longer subsists toward them. The meaning is that one should no longer sacrifice to them.”

73 On these commandments, see Hara (1966), p. 187–194.

After the description of Sukeśa's profile, the story begins with his fear of a tiger. This triggering factor considered within the whole SP is not insignificant. Indeed, there is another myth told in the SP where fear is the triggering factor: this is found in chapter 32 which is relating the Pāśupata initiation of the Gods. This chapter contains the etiological myth of the practice of "bathing in ashes"⁷⁴ and is without a doubt a Pāśupata story. It tells that after the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice, the Gods surrender and go to Śiva to ask for mercy. The latter shows them the universe inside his own body. When they arrived in the eighth world contained in Śiva, the Gods are terrified first by a ferocious lion (SP 32.90–95) and then by a goddess named Kālakarṇī and produced from Devī's mouth (SP 32.100). In their fear the Gods enter a heap of ashes and by this way perform the *pāśupatavrata* of bathing in ashes. The comparison used in SP 32.103cd to describe the Gods' fear is interesting, because it also mentions the fear of the tiger.⁷⁵ According to this internal reference, we observe that the same fear is used as a triggering factor of the story in SP 35 and in a chapter which was without a doubt written by Pāśupata Brahmins.

Terrified by the tiger, Sukeśa enters a frightening forest empty of living beings and sees his ancestors there in a cave (SP 35.5 and 10). From an approach of storytelling, these details enhance the dramatic intensity. But the description of this place could also allude to the specific place of the third stage of initiation, the stage during which the union with God begins. According to PS 5.9, the aspirant should "reside in a deserted home or cave"⁷⁶

Some details describing the path to salvation chosen by Sukeśa deserve our attention. First of all, Sukeśa does not break his celibacy vow and he chooses to resort to Śiva (SP 35.14). Thus he does not follow a brahmanical path because he does not produce a son. Next, the descrip-

74 The bathing in ashes is prescribed three times by day in the *sūtra* PS1.2: *bhasmani triṣavaṇaṃ snāyīta*, "One must bathe three times with ashes" (translation Hara (1966), p. 171).

75 SP 32.103cd: *na śekuḥ purataḥ sthātuṃ vyāghrān mṛgagaṇā iva*, "The gods, overwhelmed and about to be killed, could not stand firm, resembling a troop of deer in front of a tiger." For a synopsis of the whole chapter 32, see Bakker & al. (2014), p. 47.

76 PS 5.9: *śūnyāgāraguhāvāsī*.

tion of the asceticism (*tapas*) performed, as it was the case concerning the triggering factor for his story, features several internal references.⁷⁷ For example, eating wind is a kind of fasting mentioned in other descriptions of *tapas*: the goddess does it twice in SP 10.1 and SP 34.40–41, and Upamanyu does it in SP 34.72 as well as the father of Kāṣṭhakūṭa in SP 52.42. Physical immobility is one more defining feature of Śiva’s worship and of *tapas* performance.⁷⁸ And finally, Sukeśa holds Śiva in his heart and mutters “*rudra*”, the god’s name (SP 35.16). The muttering is also described in a performance of *tapas* by Nandin (SP 20.65 and 21.2).⁷⁹ These internal references prove neither the originality nor the additional character of the chapter SP 35, but show that the descriptions of asceticism to obtain the grace of Śiva in the SP are consistent and follow the same pattern.

In this pattern, the kind of *tapas* performed by Sukeśa contains some interesting details. For example, the duration of his *tapas* can be deduced from SP 35.19b, where it is said that it ended “in the seventh month” (*māse vartati saptame*), i.e., after six months. The duration of six months is also prescribed for the third stage in PS 5.12.⁸⁰ In this stage, the aspirant must have conquered his senses and be exclusively focussed on Rudra.⁸¹ Then he must mutter the *gāyatrī* mantra, which is defined as containing different names of Rudra, and hold Rudra in his heart.⁸² The way by which Sukeśa worships Śiva exactly matches this process (SP 35.16). The conquest of his senses is sketched in SP 35.17f.: while there is a terrible storm with a terrifying and unbearable sound breaking out destroying all the creatures, Sukeśa remains motionless. The change of his reaction is striking if we consider his reaction at the beginning of

77 SP 35.15f.

78 The expression *kāṣṭhaloṣṭopalībhūtaḥ* (“he has become like a piece of wood, a clod of earth or a stone”) in SP 35.15c finds a parallel in SP 52.10.

79 The story of Nandin’s *tapas* is found in several *Purāṇas*, but the version told in the SP really seems to be the most complete and certainly the most ancient one. For a detail study of its different versions, see Wattelier-Bricout (2020), p. 234–243.

80 PS 5.12: *ṣaṇ māśān nityayuktasya*.

81 PS 5.11: *jitendriyaḥ*, and 5.10: *devanityaḥ*.

82 PS5.21: *ṛcam iṣṭām adhīyīta gāyatrīm ātmayantritaḥ*, 5.22: *raudrīm vā bahurūpīm vā*, and 5.25: *ḥṛdi kurvīta dhāraṇām*.

the story when he was in front of the tiger. His detachment indeed fits Kauṇḍinya's commentary on PS 5.18.⁸³

The dialogue between Sukeśa and Śiva in the disguise of Viṣṇu (SP 35.22–24) is also significant. First, it demonstrates the determination of Sukeśa, which is one of the preliminary conditions of a Pāśupata aspirant.⁸⁴ Second, the words said by Śiva in the disguise of Viṣṇu highlight a key principle of Pāśupata believes: Śiva is the supreme god and all the gods are within him.⁸⁵ Third, the answer of Sukeśa proves that he has achieved perfect detachment. All he wants is a boon from Śiva whom he considers the supreme God and it doesn't matter whether he obtains something good or bad.⁸⁶

And, last but not least, the outcome of the myth perfectly fits the description of the “end of suffering” (*duḥkhānta*) in the PS and the PABh. Indeed, if we precisely look at the boon granted by Śiva, it is possible to link step by step the benefits given with the description of the final state called *duḥkhānta*: the status of *gaṇapa* and *gaṇeśvara* (SP 35.25d and 29c) corresponding to PS 1.38 summarises the different divine qualities obtained. Sukeśa becomes indestructible, immortal and free from old age.⁸⁷ By giving Sukeśa a mobile mountain (SP 35.27), Śiva offers his devotee the capability to go anywhere without impediments (PS 1.37). Finally, by Śiva's grace, Sukeśa saves his ancestors from hell and offers them a kind of *duḥkhānta*, since they are “for ever without suffering” (*ni-*

83 PS 5.18 *godharmā mṛgadharmā vā*, “following the attribute of a bull or the attribute of a wild animal” (translation by Hara (1966), p. 405). Hara (1966), p. 406: “what is meant is their common attribute, which is the ability to bear the pain of opposites (heat and cold, etc.) whether this pain arises from oneself, (from the outside world, or from the fate).”

84 See Hara (1966), p. 156: “On the other hand [in this system the pupil's activity is] not for the purpose of merit (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), sensual gratification (*kāma*) or perfect isolation (*kaivalya*) [as it is in other systems]” (*na tu dharmārthakāmaikaivalyārthātreti*).

85 PS 2.11 and PS 5.26.

86 Once again, one can find a close parallel here with the commentary on PS 5.39 by Kauṇḍinya; see in particular the use of the words *kuśalā cākuśalā ca* in Sastri (1940), p. 139,17, tr. Hara (1966), p. 449.

87 Compare SP 35.25f. (text in the Appendix below) with PS 1.34: *akṣayaḥ*, PS 1.36: *amaraḥ*, and PS 1.35 *ajaraḥ*.

tyaṃ duḥkhavivarjitāḥ, SP 35.29b). When they are elevated to the status of *gaṇeśa* (SP 35.27f.) and designated as Sukeśa's servants, the latter becomes a "lord of the great multitude of bound souls" as intended by the *sūtra* PS 1.38.⁸⁸

Thus, when we read the Sukeśa myth with the help of Pāśupata doctrinal texts, we can arrive at a new understanding of the story. The description of Sukeśa makes him a potential aspirant. The location of the story and the duration of Sukeśa's *tapas* evoke the third stage of the Pāśupata observance. The triggering factor, the fear of the tiger, links the story of the Gods in the SP with the Pāśupata initiation and makes obvious the transformation of Sukeśa into a being perfectly detached even in a tempest. The description of the *tapas* performed, in addition to the construction of an ascetic pattern specific to the SP, fits the perfect conquest of the senses prescribed in the Pāśupata observance. Viṣṇu's test asserts the superiority of Śiva and consequently the inutility of sacrifices offered to the Gods and the ancestors. Finally, the outcome of the story offers to Sukeśa not only the salvation of his ancestors but also the divine qualities obtained by a Pāśupata aspirant when he reaches the end of suffering (*duḥkhānta*).

It seems that Sukeśa has satisfied the request made by his fathers at the beginning of the story (SP 35.12). Just as a Pāśupata aspirant is said to be born again when he obtains the supreme goal,⁸⁹ Sukeśa is reborn with the divine qualities obtained and he produces a new son for his ancestors and furnished with these qualities, too. The request of his ancestors was the same as in the first version of the myth (SP 11.14). Consequently, the path to salvation requested by the ancestors and the one performed by Sukeśa appear as one and the same. There is no inconsistency between the asking of a son for the former and the resort to Śiva for the latter, since the son should be a being furnished with the respective qualities thanks to the grace of Śiva.

By pointing out doctrinal values in the myth, it is possible to assert that the second version cannot be written by Smārta Brahmins. The path to salvation suggested in the two versions of the Sukeśa myth is to

88 See the translation of PS 1.38 and its glosses in Bisschop (2005), p. 543.

89 See PS 5.6 (*abhijāyate*) and Kauṇḍinya's commentary thereon, in Hara (1966), p. 385f.

produce a son furnished with certain qualities and by resorting to Śiva alone. Consequently, the two narratives bear strong marks of Pāśupata affiliation. Even if this does not prove that the two versions belong to the core of the SP, it shows that they come from the same background influenced by Pāśupata doctrine, and potentially, from the same author.

11. Conclusion and outlook on further studies

After the comparison of the two versions of the Sukeśa myth, we can conclude that a Smārta authorship of the whole Naraka cycle and its status of being a later addition is not at all proved. Quite the contrary, it seems that a strong consistency unites the two versions of the Sukeśa myth which promote a specific path to salvation. Through a new methodology which searches within the myths for the religious values conveyed, it has been possible to highlight that the two versions are very close to Pāśupata doctrinal texts and share the same soteriological concept. Consequently, the path to salvation seems to be a key element for determining the religious affiliation of the SP.

Can we deduce from this whether the two versions have been composed both at the same moment and by the same author(s) or in different times by different authors belonging both to a Pāśupata milieu, that is to say, that one could be original while the second could be a later addition? Both these hypotheses seem possible, but neither could be firmly demonstrated to be valid since the chapters SP 11 and SP 35 share not only textual correspondences but also a narrative and dogmatic consistency. Given that SP 11 would have a programmatic function, it is very likely that SP 35 was composed with the initial composition. In any case, there is no firm evidence for this chapter to be a later addition. On the contrary, there are numerous internal references, including stories that are unique to SP and stories that belong both to what Kropman considers the core of the SP and what she sees as additional parts.⁹⁰ Therefore, it must be admitted that this kind of hypothesis is speculative and does not seem to be provable.

⁹⁰ The Sukeśa myth in SP 35 has textual correspondences *inter alia* with SP 10, 11, 33, 34.1–61, and 52 (original to the *Purāṇa* are: SP 1, 3–25, 31.15–33, 34.1–61, 53–55, 58–59, 60.14–21, 60.72–end, 61–69, 72.1–142b, and 163–165).

Without denying the existence of a core and several compositional layers of the SP,⁹¹ the present case study suspecting the theory of two different authorships reveals that the two versions of the Sukeśa myth are consistent with each other and that they carry the same doctrinal message. This message has strong adherences with the Pāśupata doctrine, and even if it does not directly question the path to salvation of the Brahmanical orthodoxy, namely the production of a son, it gives it a completely different meaning to this path, one that is in line with the values defended by the PS and the PABh. If these stories do not reject the saving function of the son and his salvific power, an idea that forms the basis of Brahmanical doctrine and ancestor worship, they do not in any way support the practice of sacrifices, nor the idea that the son pays his debt by performing the ancestor worship. On the contrary, these stories seem to propose a serene resolution of the disagreement between Brahmanism and Pāśupata doctrine, a kind of compromise, by recognising the ability of the son to save his fathers from hells. Thus a man may, as in Brahmanism, desire a son to be saved. Just as in Brahmanism, this son is able to save the entire lineage of his ancestors. However, in order to achieve this, he does not have to make any sacrifices but follows a very specific path in which Śiva is the supreme god who grants his favor as the PS and the PABh claim. This salvation is also specific since it allows one to reach a state similar to that of the end of sufferings (*duḥkhānta*), a particular concept of the Pāśupata doctrine. The characteristics of this salvation are also identical to those of salvation obtained by other characters whose stories are narrated in the SP, for examples Nandin (SP 22.4–9), Kāṣṭhakūṭa (SP 52.121–126), Upamanyu (SP 34.110–114) or the sages Marīci, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Kratu, Bhṛgu and Aṅgiras in the present *kalpa*.⁹² This consistency in the description of salvation could be seen as a reflection of a doctrinal intention underlying the composition of the SP, the aim of which would be the promotion of a particular form of Pāśupata Śaivism in a society suffused with Brahmanical convictions.

91 The existence of a core of the SP different from the S recension is indisputable, since the manuscript S1 in certain chapters offers additional sentences in comparison with the manuscript S2. So the hypothesis of two versions, *alpha* and *beta*, seems perfectly justified.

92 Their names are given in SP 8.22–24, while the favor they obtained from Śiva is formulated in SP 9.22.

Where the Pāśupata manual, *Samskāraavidhi*, solves the problem of the ancestors by introducing a ritual forgiveness request during the initiation of a Pāśupata aspirant,⁹³ the SP offers the latter a way of conciliation between the Pāśupata path and the salvation of his ancestors by including them in the salvation path. Since listening to the SP is open to all Śaiva men and women, one might wonder whether this work would not be a tool for disseminating and converting to the Pāśupata doctrine by presenting the foundations that support it and showing its compatibility with social demands such as that of having a son.

To refine the identification of the religious affiliation of the Naraka cycle, three other stories integrated in it would deserve an exhaustive study from the point of view of the doctrinal message conveyed. First, the legend of the seven Brahmins (SP 36) is very interesting since this story is also found in the *Pitrkalpa* part of the *Harivaṃśa*. Saindon (1995 and 1998) has highlighted that the *Pitrkalpa* is a work glorifying salvation through a son and the cult of the ancestors. Although Yokochi (2000) has already laid down philological markers by comparing the versions of the legend of the seven Brahmins in the *Harivaṃśa* and in the SP, she has not questioned the message underlying these two stories. A study could elucidate if the version given in the SP promotes the ancestor worship or not. Then, two stories may confirm the hypothesis of a Buddhist influence on the Naraka cycle.⁹⁴ First, the salvation of the infernal inhabitants by Sukeśa (SP 51) could be a noteworthy case of study from a doctrinal point of view. Indeed, this story comes directly after the description of the thirteen hells (SP 37–50). The latter is so horrifying that Sukeśa is overwhelmed with compassion for all those who reside in hells. He then decides to save them from this suffering and resorts to Śiva's grace for this end. To the best of my knowledge, this myth has

93 See Acharya (2007), p. 40, verses 36cd–37.

94 Kropman's argument only takes into account the assumption of a Smārta authorship for chapters SP 37–50 and ignores the parallels with Buddhist literature mentioned in the notes 280, 285, 310, 317, 320 of the synopsis in (Bisschop & Yokochi (2014). As one can see by reading the glossary of hell terminology proposed by Van Put (2007) p. 213–221, the hells described in chapters SP 37–50 have similar names to those described in Buddhist literature and they also function in the same way with a system of elevations and the idea of increasing time spent in each one.

no parallel in Purāṇic literature. The mention of Sukeśa's compassion and his behaviour towards beings suffering in hells is reminiscent of the compassion shown by a Bodhisattva and his willingness to save beings from suffering.⁹⁵ Similarly, a second story closing the Naraka cycle could be analyzed from a doctrinal point of view: the myth of Kāṣṭhakūṭa (SP 52). This story also has no Purāṇic parallels and features the sacrifice of a son who offers his body to Śiva to save his dead parents. This self-sacrifice in turn evokes the fate of the hero of the *Nāgānanda* of Harṣa, whose story is inspired by the Buddhist corpus, which was composed in the same time as the SP and was very popular during that time.⁹⁶

Therefore, in order to extend this study and to define even more precisely the underlying doctrinal discourse of the SP, one could now observe how the Buddhist narratives may have influenced the SP and how Buddhist doctrinal concepts coexist with those of the Pāśupata ideology in the SP.

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- PS *Pāśupata Sūtras*, ed. R.A. Sastri (1940), Trivandrum: Oriental Manuscript Library of the University of Travancore.
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95 From a narratological point of view, I have presented some parallels of narrative construction between the SP and texts issued from the Theravāda Buddhism in a talk entitled “Usages et fonctions de la spirale narrative: des *Jātaka* aux *Purāṇa*” (see *Journée du monde indien 2022*, Journée d'étude, *Calenda*, published on June 3, 2022: <https://calenda.org/1001138>).

96 On the popularity and Buddhist origin of the *Nāgānanda*, see the introduction given in Skilton (2010).

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Appendix: SP 35⁹⁷

sanatkumāra uvāca |

*tataḥ sa bhagavān devaḥ sukeśaṃ gaṇapaṃ punaḥ |
cakāra brāhmaṇaṃ vyāsa tapaḥsatyaparāyaṇam || 1 ||*

vyāsa uvāca |

*kathaṃ sa brāhmaṇaḥ pūrvaṃ gaṇeśatvam upāgataḥ |
kenāsyā tapasā tuṣṭo gaṇapatvaṃ dadau prabhuḥ || 2 ||*

sanatkumāra uvāca |

*āsīd vasiṣṭhakulajo brāhmaṇaḥ satyavāk śuciḥ |
tīrthayātrāsv abhirata upavāsaparāyaṇaḥ || 3 ||
sa kadā cid videśastho vane 'paśyat pathi sthitam |
vyāghraṃ vyāttānaṃ ghoram nakhadaṃṣṭrāyudham varam || 4 ||
dṛṣtvā taṃ sa tadā vipras tyaktvā panthānam āśugaḥ |
viveśa mahatīm ghorām aṭavīm prāṇivarjitām || 5 ||
tatrāpaśyat sa purato vīraṇastambam āśritān |
puruṣāṃl lambamānāṃś ca krandaṃmānān suduḥkhitān || 6 ||
tān avākśiraso dṛṣtvā lambamānāṃs tadā dvijān |
ke yūyam iti papraccha te caivam idam ūcire || 7 ||
tava smaḥ pitarāḥ sarve narake 'sminn adhomukhāḥ |
vīraṇe tvayi lambāmas tava doṣeṇa durmate || 8 ||
putrān icchanti manujās tārayiṣyanti nas tv ime |
narakād iti sa tvaṃ naḥ pātayiṣyasi duḥkhitān || 9 ||*

vipra uvāca |

*mayā tīrthābhigamanāt tapo yat samupārjitam |
janmaprabhṛti yac cāpi mayā kiṃ cit kṛtaṃ śubham |
tena yūyam ito gartād uddharadhvaṃ pitāmahāḥ || 10 ||*

pitara ūcuḥ |

*na vyaṃ tapasā śakyā na yajñenāpy ato 'nyathā |
gartād asmāt samuddhartuṃ yad brūmas tat kuruṣva naḥ || 11 ||
apatyaṃ guṇasaṃyuktam utpādaya tapoyutam |
tato vyaṃ ito gartān mucyema yadi manyase || 12 ||*

97 The text is taken from the SP edition by Bakker & al. (2014).

vīpra uvāca |

*ūrdhvaretāham ity etan mayā vratam udāhṛtam |
na dārān āhariṣyāmi tārāyīṣye ca vai pitṛn || 13 ||
tataḥ sa tāms tadotsṛjya duḥkkena mahatā vṛtaḥ |
jagāma rudraṃ śaraṇaṃ pitaro 'ntarhitās tataḥ || 14 ||
pitṛṣv antarhiteṣv evaṃ vāyubhakṣas tadā dvijaḥ |
kāṣṭhaloṣṭopalībhūto nirucchvāso 'vatiṣṭhata || 15 ||
saṃdhāya sa mano rudre niścalaṃ susamāhitaḥ |
hṛdayena japan rudrān ākāśe samatiṣṭhata || 16 ||
tasya pūrṇe tadā māsi vātavarṣam abhūn mahat |
sarvasattvapramathanaṃ duḥsahaṃ bhīmaśabdavat || 17 ||
tena varṣeṇa mahatā naiva tasyābhavat tadā |
duḥkhaṃ vāpy athavā bhaṅgaḥ samyag evāvatasthivān || 18 ||
atha taṃ bhagavān devo māse vartati saptame |
viṣṇurūpadharo bhūtvā provāca dvijasattamam || 19 ||
tuṣṭo 'smi tava bhadraṃ te tapasānena suvrata |
varaṃ varaya vīprarṣe yas te manasi vartate || 20 ||
sukeśas tu tato dṛṣṭvā nārāyaṇam upāgatam |
abravīc chaṃkarād icche varaṃ na bhavato hy aham || 21 ||*

viṣṇur uvāca |

*alam etena vīprarṣe nirbandhena haraṃ prati |
devair api na śakyo 'sau draṣṭuṃ kim uta mānuṣaiḥ || 22 ||*

sukeśa uvāca |

*śaṃkarād eva cakreśa śubhaṃ vā yadi vāśubham |
varaṃ kāmḷkṣe na ca tvatto na cānyasmāt kathaṃ cana || 23 ||
bhavanto 'pi hi taṃ devaṃ yasmāt sarve samāhitāḥ |
arcayadhvaṃ stuvadhvaṃ ca tasmāc chreṣṭhaḥ sa ucyate || 24 ||
tasya taṃ niścayaṃ jñātvā tutoṣa bhagavān haraḥ |
uvāca cainaṃ vīprendra gaṇapo me bhavākṣayaḥ || 25 ||
amaro jarayā tyaktaḥ sarvaduḥkhavivarjitaḥ |
aiśvaryaṇa ca saṃyuktaḥ priyo mama puraḥsaraḥ || 26 ||
idaṃ ca matkṛtaṃ divyaṃ trikūṭaṃ nāma parvatam |
bhavanaiḥ kāñcanair yuktaṃ kāmagaṃ te dadāmy aham || 27 ||
yeṣāṃ kṛte ca tvam putra mām toṣayitum udyataḥ |
te ceme pitarah sarve suputreṇa tvayānagha |
tāritā narakād ghorād gaṇeśatvam upasthitāḥ || 28 ||*

kiṃkarās te bhaviṣyanti nityaṃ duḥkhavivarjitāḥ |
gaṇeśvarās tavaiveme bhaviṣyanti vaśānugāḥ || 29 ||
sukeśa iti nāmnā ca prathitas tvaṃ bhaviṣyasi |
sadā cāṣṭagaṇaiśvaryasamāyuktaś cariṣyasi || 30 ||

sanatkumāra uvāca |

tataḥ sa dr̥ṣṭvātha pitṛṇ narakāt sasuhṛjjanān |
tīrṇān gaṇeśvaratvena punaḥ pūjyena saṃyutān || 31 ||
maheśvaram ḥṛṣṭamanāḥ śirasā prāñjalir nataḥ |
uvāca harṣamāñāsyaś tadā vacanakovidāḥ || 32 ||

sukeśa uvāca |

bhagavan gaṇapatvaṃ ca labdham aiśvaryaṃ eva ca |
amaratvaṃ tathākṣayaṃ tathaiṅvājaratā varā || 33 ||
pitaras tāritās ceme gaṇapās caiva me kṛtāḥ |
nagaś ca kāmagō hy eṣa labdho me tvatprasādataḥ || 34 ||
icchāmi tvāṃ mahādeva somaṃ sapravareśvaram |
sadā sumukham atyarthaṃ sudr̥śyaṃ caiva kāmada || 35 ||

sanatkumāra uvāca |

sa evam ukto bhagavān sukeśena mahātmanā |
uvācaivam idaṃ sarvaṃ bhaviṣyati gaṇeśvara || 36 ||
imaṃ giriṃ samāśritya sahaibhiḥ pravair varaiḥ |
gaccha sveṣṭāṃ gatiṃ vatsa devān viprāṃś ca pālaya || 37 ||
viṣṛjya taṃ mahādevaḥ sukeśaṃ gaṇanāyakam |
jagāmādarśanaṃ somaḥ sarveṣāṃ eva paśyatām || 38 ||
sukeśo 'pi girau tasmin nagare svargasam̐nibhe |
narakāñāṃ sa tattvārthaṃ pitṛṇ papraccha yatnataḥ || 39 ||

vyāsa uvāca |

kim arthaṃ gaṇapo brahmaṃś tān pitṛṇ paryapṛcchata |
kathaṃ ca pitaras tatra ācakhyus tasya dhīmataḥ || 40 ||
etad vistaraśas tāta saṃkṣepād vā yathātatham |
tvatto 'haṃ śrotum icchāmi hitaṃ sarvasukhāvaham || 41 ||
sa evam uktaḥ suraśṛksutaḥ prabhur vimānakartā vigataprayojanaḥ |
jagāda vākyaṃ suralokabandhanaṃ purākṛtaṃ duṣkṛtasarvanāśanam || 42 ||
iti skandapurāṇe pañcatriṃśo 'dhyāyaḥ ||