

Appendix 2: Text of the DVD booklet

About the DVD “Viṣṇu’s Children. Prenatal life-cycle rituals in South India” by Ute Hüsken and Manfred Krüger

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The DVD is available separately and as is part of the book publication.

Viṣṇu’s Children. Prenatal life-cycle rituals in South India by Ute Hüsken (Ethno-Indology. Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals 9). Translated into English by Will Sweetman. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009. ISBN: 978-3-447-05854-4.

The ritual occasions represented on this DVD are enactments of the prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali, “the offering to Viṣṇu,” which is specific to the Vaikhānasas, a group of South Indian Brahmin priests in Viṣṇu temples. This ritual is performed in the eighth month of pregnancy. It enacts and marks a transformation of the unborn child. Viṣṇubali, “the offering to the god Viṣṇu,” makes the unborn a Viṣṇu devotee, and confers on it its future right to act as a temple priest in South Indian Viṣṇu temples. The ritual is understood as a prenatal initiation, performed by the god Viṣṇu himself: Viṣṇu transforms the unborn into his own child.

The DVD contains audio-visual material recorded, edited, and commented upon by Ute Hüsken during her field research in South India (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) in 2000–2001. The DVD supplements the book, illustrates parts 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of the book, and gives access to the material on which the analysis of the performances of the viṣṇubali ritual is based.

Technical requirements

WARNING, the DVD It cannot be run on a stand-alone NTSC DVD player.

Please note that in all likelihood your DVD player's last settings will be applied when playing this DVD. So please be sure to switch the subtitles on.

There are chapter marks every two minutes on the DVD, which are the next entry points if you use the button "one chapter forward" or "one chapter back."

Contents

Three viṣṇubali performances are represented on this DVD.

One occasion ("full ritual") is given from the beginning to the end (except the preparatory rites) in order to give an impression of how an entire performance may look, and to enable the viewer to place the sections given in "parts of the ritual" in their context within the ritual event.

In the section "parts of the ritual" the diverse sub-rites of two or three events (depending on the availability of the material) are presented one after the other, with introductory texts and subtitles, in order to facilitate comparison of the corresponding rites in the different performances.

The menu "parts of the ritual" is further subdivided into "preparatory rites," "main offerings," "atonement," and "concluding rites." These subdivisions with their further subdivisions are arranged according to the sequence of the rites within the viṣṇubali performances observed.

The "full ritual" and the sequences are provided with short introductory texts and subtitles, commenting on the events shown. The subtitles can be switched off. In the subtitles the performers and participants are not referred to by their names (the names of the participants are given in the "credits" of the DVD, in the book and in this booklet accompanying this DVD), but are referred to by their ritual roles ("officiator," "pregnant woman," "priest," "assistant" etc.), in order to make comparison of the different ritual events easier.

The three ritual enactments and their participants

Date: 13.11.2000

Place: Cidambaram, Tamil Nadu

Participants: The officiator (and father of the unborn child) is K. Balaji Bhattachar, one of the hereditary priests in the Viṣṇu shrine of the famous Cidambaram Natarāja temple. His wife, Shrividya, is referred to as “pregnant woman.” Shrividya had not been well for some time and had been strictly confined to bed during the latter half of her pregnancy. The only exception was this event. Because of her condition I was asked not to take video coverage. The use of a video camera was perceived as an unnecessary risk to the woman’s and child’s health. But I was allowed to take still pictures, along with a professional photographer who was hired by the family. Thus, the sequences of this ritual presented on the DVD are still photographs with the corresponding sounds taken from my audio coverage of the same event. The acting priest in this performance is Katukallur S. Manivanna Bhattacharya, a Vaikhānasa ritual specialist famous all over Tamil Nadu. He was assisted by his brother, KS Vasudeva Bhattacharya.



Date: 27.11.2000

Place: Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, in the paternal home of Kalyani, the pregnant woman.



Participants: The officiator, Jvala Narasimhacaryulu, and his wife Kalyani, the main priest Parankusha Rangacaryasvami (father of the officiator) and the closest relatives of the pregnant woman in whose paternal home the ritual was performed. The assistant to the priest is Kalyani's father. Furthermore, her father's brother and his wife were present, as well as her mother and her grandmother. Another guest was A. Rangacharyulu, who had established the contact to this family and acted as a translator during the interviews after the performance. The coverage was done with a DV (NTSC) camera, kindly provided by M. Hariharan. The NTSC file was later transformed into PAL format.

Date: 20.1.2001

Place: Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, in the small Kodaṅḍarāma temple



Participants: The couple, Shrinivasa Cakravartin and his wife Vasudhara enacted the ritual in the small Kodaṅḍarāma temple, in which the pregnant woman's father serves as main priest. The performing priest, Parankusham Vasudeva-caryulu came from a nearby small town for this ritual, and brought some assistants (his students) along with him. The coverage was taken with a VHS camera.

Structure of the DVD

Main menu	Submenu 1	Submenu 2
introduction (08:10 min)		
full ritual (28:28 min)		
parts of the ritual	preparatory rites	formal declaration (03:51 min)
		vitalisation of the fire (06:45 min)
	main offerings	pūjā for viṣṇu (11:09 min)
		offering into the fire (09:01 min)
		viṣṇu marks the foetus (09:53 min)
	atonement (03:46 min)	
concluding rites (04:43 min)		
credits		

Detailed descriptions of the contents

Introduction (colour photographs with voice-over; length: 08:10 min)

Ute Hüsken tells the story of the DVD. She talks about how the DVD came into being, about the occasions at which the audio-visual material was recorded, she introduces the participants, and explains her own position during the field research. The text of this introduction is given as Appendix 3 in the book.

Full ritual (video with subtitles; length: 28:28 min)

This section presents the edited material of the full viṣṇubali ritual performed on the 27th of November 2000 in a domestic setting in Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh).

Parts of the ritual

This submenu gives access to the diverse rites / sequences of rites Ute Hüsken identified (with the help of the *Vaikhānasasūtra* and the diverse commentaries and / or ritual handbooks on the topic) as seminal to the performance of *viṣṇubali*. These rites are:

Preparatory rites — further subdivided into

formal declaration (video with subtitles, colour photographs with sound; length: 03:51 min): the “formal declaration” (*saṃkalpa*) marks the beginning of the ritual, identifies the main performers and names the rites to be performed. First the enactment in the *Kodaṇḍarāma* temple in *Vijayawada* is presented, and then the corresponding acts of the *viṣṇubali* performance in *Cidambaram*.

vitalisation of the fire (colour photographs with sound, video with subtitles; length: 06:45 min). The sacrificial fire is lit by the priest together with the officiator. First the enactment in *Cidambaram* is presented, and then the corresponding acts in the *Kodaṇḍarāma* temple in *Vijayawada*.

Main offerings — further subdivided into three parts

pūjā for viṣṇu (colour photographs with sound, video with subtitles; length: 11:09 min): As part of the main (*pradhāna*) acts of the ritual a *pūjā* is performed for *Viṣṇu* in his twelve forms. First this ritual sequence in a domestic setting in *Vijayawada* is shown, followed by the corresponding sequence in the performance in the *Kodaṇḍarāma* temple in *Vijayawada*, and then the corresponding acts of the *viṣṇubali* performance in *Cidambaram*.

offering into the fire (colour photographs with sound, video with subtitles; length: 09:01 min): The couple offers milk porridge (*pāyasa*) and ghee into the fire as offerings to *Viṣṇu* in his twelve forms. First this ritual sequence is shown in a domestic setting in *Vijayawada*, followed by the corresponding sequence in the performance in the *Kodaṇḍarāma* temple in *Vijayawada*, and then the corresponding acts of the *viṣṇubali* performance in *Cidambaram*.

viṣṇu marks the foetus (colour photographs with sound, video with subtitles; length: 09:53 min): Two dabs of milk porridge are marked with the heated metal symbols of *Viṣṇu*'s weapons, the disk and the conch, and then the pregnant woman is made to eat them. This act signifies that *Viṣṇu* himself marks the unborn child with his weapons and thus makes him a gar-

bhavaīṣṇava, a Viṣṇu devotee by birth. First this ritual sequence is shown in a domestic setting in Vijayawada, followed by the corresponding sequence in the viṣṇubali performance in Cidambaram, and then the corresponding acts of the performance in the Kodaṅḍarāma temple in Vijayawada.

Atonement (video with subtitles; length: 03:46 min)

This act of atonement (prāyaścitta) purifies the ritual event from any possible flaws; it is mainly an atonement for not performing the prenatal life-cycle rituals at the prescribed time, since some of the prenatal rituals performed together with viṣṇubali are prescribed for the 3rd or 5th month of pregnancy. First this ritual sequence is shown in a domestic setting in Vijayawada, followed by the corresponding sequence in the performance in the Kodaṅḍarāma temple in Vijayawada.

Concluding rites (video with subtitles; length: 04:43 min)

After the performance of the main acts, the couple is blessed by the participants. First this ritual sequence is shown as performed in the Kodaṅḍarāma temple in Vijayawada. This is followed by the corresponding sequence in a domestic setting in Vijayawada.

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