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The most important South Asian worship ritual without question is *pūjā*. Accordingly, it has been called the “core ritual of popular theistic Hinduism” (Fuller 1992: 57). In one form or another *pūjā* is performed within most of the socially and ritually diversified groups and traditions, by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains alike, by lay people as well as by ritual specialists. *Pūjā* and the related verbal noun *pūjana* denote honour/worship and honouring/worshipping in a very general sense. As G. Colas aptly remarks,

pūjā, in the strict and literal sense of the term and in a religious context, is not a ritual but refers to devotion expressed by making offerings to a personal god, chanting his glory, making donations, etc. (Colas 2005: 25)

Besides its being deeply rooted in popular religion and in devotional contexts (ones often interpreted as anti-ritualistic), within the Brahmanic textual corpus *pūjā* has also been conceptualized as a rule-bound ritual activity.¹ The present book deals with one aspect of such a scholarly perspective on *pūjā*, namely the use of flowers in *pūjā* as codified in a concrete text. Before I introduce the subject proper, some general remarks on the concept and history of this particular form of ritual are in order.

The basic constituents of *pūjā* as a formalized practice are 1) the worshipper or actor, 2) the recipient of worship, and 3) the offerings, technically called *upacāras*, “services”. Typically, *pūjā* is an individual practice. The single actor can perform it either for her- or himself (*ātmārtha*) or for others (*parārtha*). In contrast to other rituals that require prior initiations or are restricted to certain groups, texts generally put no restrictions on who can perform *pūjā*.²

Recipients of worship may include all kinds and forms of deities and other revered beings—typically in the form of icons, but also more abstract representations—or else everyday objects, plants or animals that can serve as vessels for or be seen as manifestations of the divine. Moreover, special classes of humans,

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- 1 The role of devotion (*bhakti*) in *pūjā* and reflections of it in the PuCi will be discussed in chapter 5.2 below.
 - 2 The *dharmanibandhas* explicitly include women and Śūdras among those eligible to perform *pūjā*, groups otherwise often excluded from taking an active role in Brahmanic ritual (Kane 1968–77: II, 714; *Pūjāprakāśa* 1913: 1–3).

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such as Brahmins, ascetics, virgin girls and kings, or those having special meaning for the worshipper, such as one's teacher, parent, spouse or offspring, can be made the addressee of a formal *pūjā*.

A standard form of offerings is that of a set of five *upacāras* (*pañcopacāra*), i.e. scent (*gandha*), flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*), light (*dīpa*) and a food offering (*naivedya*). Another typical sequence is the extension of this set to include 16 offerings (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*). In principle, the types of *upacāra* can be extended at will. G. Bühnemann (1988: 63–64) has noted lists that include up to 108 different items. However long or short they may be, the lists normally always include the offering of flowers (*puṣpa*), which is the subject of the text studied here. *Puṣpa* is not only one of the “must-haves” in *upacāra* lists, it is also recommended in texts (and typically employed in ritual practice as such) as a default substitute for any missing *upacāra*.³ But flowers themselves can also be replaced by “unbroken” rice or barley grains (*akṣata*), by water or by simple devotion (*bhakti*). The whole *pūjā*, in fact, can be internalized and performed as a so-called *mānasapūjā*. It is to be noted, however, that such mental ritual is typically modelled on the external performance, as beautifully illustrated in the famous hymn (*stotra*) *Śivamānasapūjā*, where the whole series of *upacāras* is created by words in the mind of the worshipper and offered to the deity (flowers being among them) in the following sequence:

*jāticampakabilvapatraracitaṃ puṣpaṃ ca dhūpaṃ tathā
dīpaṃ deva dayānidhe paśupate hrīkalpitaṃ grhyatām (Śivamānasapūjā 1cd)*

O god, abode of compassion, Lord of Cattle, accept a flower offering (*puṣpa*) consisting of *jāti* and *campaka* [flowers] and *bilva* leaves, along with incense (*dhūpa*) and light offerings (*dīpa*), which have [all] been arranged in the mind.

In inverse proportion to the importance *pūjā* has in South Asian religiosity, research on it is still limited; encouragingly, though, it has been growing.⁴ Major studies on the subject the present book builds on include G. Bühnemann's (1988) monograph on the Smārta form of ritual, S. Gupta's (1979) treatment of *pūjā* texts from the Tantric Śrīvidyā tradition, G. C. Tripathi's (1978, 2004) studies of the temple cult of Jagannātha at Puri, G. Colas's (1996, 2005) studies of ritual manuals in the Vaikhānasa tradition, R. Davis's (2000) book on worship in the Śaivasiddhānta tradition and F. Nowotny's (1957) edition and translation of the *Pūjāvidhinirūpaṇa*,

3 On options for reducing the number of *upacāras* and substituting for missing ones, see Bühnemann (1988: 65), Kane (1968–77: II, 730).

4 With Foulston (2020) a commented bibliography has now become available. For an overview, see Valpey (2020).

a manual dealing with the daily worship of the goddess Bhuvaneśvarī. Moreover, L. Babb's (1975: 31–67) and C. Fuller's (1992: 57–82) chapters providing anthropological perspectives on *pūjā* should be mentioned, as well as C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw's (1994) study of Jaina *pūjā* practice.

The history of the term *pūjā* and the early development of the ritual are still matters of scholarly discussion.⁵ Different proposals published since the 1920s relate the origin of the word, and with it the origin of the ritual, to different religious traditions. The two most well-known approaches are those of J. Charpentier (1926) and P. Thieme (1939). Charpentier connected the word *pūjā* with Dravidian *pūśu-* (Tamil) / *pūsu* (Kannada), “to smear, to stick on, to paint over”⁶ and so opted for a Dravidian origin of the ritual. Thieme (1939) supposed a development within the Indo-Aryan tradition going back to the old Indian honouring of guests. He asked whether “the role of the ‘word-begetting impression’ in the creation of the word *pūjā*”⁷ was perhaps played by the offering of a mixed potion (*madhuparka*). Accordingly, he proposed connecting *pūjā* with a hypothetical **prñcā* and relating it to the same root as *-parka*, i.e. *prc*, “to mix”. These along with other approaches did not gain general acceptance, whence the etymology of *pūjā* remains “not convincingly clarified”⁸.

Linguistically less relevant, but within the frame of the present study at least interesting, are different attempts to establish “worship with flowers” as the original meaning of the term *pūjā*. In 1923, M. Collins proposed the hypothetical Tamil compound **pū-cey* “used in the sense of ‘flower act, offering flowers’” (1987: III, 61) as the origin of the word. This solution, declared a “mere suggestion” (*ibid.*) by its author, was later brought up by S. K. Chatterji (1956) against B. K. Chattopadhyaya (1956). The latter conceived the term as a contraction of the Sanskrit words for “flower” (*puṣpa*) and “offering” (*yajana*). As a last stab in this discussion, R. L. Soni (1958), on the basis of these two etymological proposals, claimed that Buddhists had been the first to worship with flowers, and both the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan tradition had taken up the practice only later. Apart maybe from Collins's, all these arguments seem to be more a polemic aimed at claiming the “invention” of flower-based worship, an element highlighted as central for *pūjā*, for a particular religious tradition, and so presenting it as the original home of the whole practice.

More meticulous investigations of the ritual's history and development draw a more nuanced picture. The first textual reference for the root *pūj-* is already

5 For another discussion of many of the following points, see now also Lidova (2020).

6 “beschmieren, aufkleben, übermalen” (Charpentier 1926: 284).

7 “die Rolle des ‘wortzeugenden Eindrucks’ bei Schaffung des Wortes *pūjā*” (Thieme 1939: 122).

8 “nicht überzeugend geklärt” (Mayrhofer 1963: s.v.).

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found in *Ṛgveda* 8.17.12 as part of a name (*śācipūjana*). As M. Witzel (1980: 37–39) has argued, in this context, as also in other early occurrences, it could be a rather disapproving reference to what seems to have already been a popular ritual practice, thereby implying a relatively late acceptance of *pūjā* within the Brahmanical tradition. Similar conclusions are drawn by S. Einoo (1996) in his treatment of early prescriptions for the ritual in late Vedic and post-Vedic texts. Distinguishing elements that were already known to be from Vedic ritualism from those that occurred for the first time in passages on *pūjā*, he demonstrates that a series of four *upacāras*—scent (*gandha*), a flower (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*) and light (*dīpa*)—occurred only sporadically in the early Gṛhyasūtras but then became central in later prescriptions for the ritual. Therefore Einoo proposes

that the use of *gandha*, *puṣpa*, *dhūpa* and *dīpa* in ritual ceremonies was brought in from a tradition belonging to a people whose religious customs were not documented in the *Śrautasūtras* and the main parts of the *Gṛhyasūtras*. (Einoo 1996: 80)

In the same vein, T. Lubin regards the

pūjā-type offerings ... as an innovation in the Vedic religion, and indeed a borrowing from a substrate or neighboring culture with which the Vedic priesthood and its traditional clientele were in contact—a culture the identity of which will likely remain forever uncertain. (Lubin 2016: 144)

The offering of flowers thus appears to belong to a set of ritual activities that were fixed in their sequence before they were textually codified. With their acceptance into the Brahmanical text corpus, this sequence was joined with elements from Vedic ritualism and, together with the food offering (*naivedya*), formed the nucleus of the *upacāra* series, whose offering doubtlessly constitutes the central act⁹ in *pūjā*.

The earliest full-fledged *pūjā* prescriptions, found in the late Gṛhyasūtras and their appendices, mostly contain only general injunctions to offer flowers (*puṣpa*) or flower garlands (*mālya*). Specific flowers are only rarely mentioned. Some Gṛhyasūtras feature a ritual for the appeasement of snakes (*sarpabali*), wherein *palāśa* flowers should be offered (Gonda 1980: 122; Gopal 1959: 406). As with many other ritual matters, there seems to have been a growing urge among Brahmanic

9 “The act of offering the 16 Upacāras to the Deity may, with all justification, be called the central and the most important act of the Hinduistic Pūjā” (Tripathi 2004: 310). Accordingly, Nowotny calls the offering of *upacāras* “*pūjā* in a more narrow sense” (“die Pūjā im engeren Sinn”; Nowotny 1957: 114).

scholars to clarify and systematize the subject. Accordingly, questions of which flowers are or are not to be offered to which deities and venerable beings become more complex in the course of time. Already in the *Mahābhārata* (13.101.1–43) there is a long discussion about worship with flowers, incense, scent and light—studied in detail by J. McHugh (2012: 218–243) in his monograph on South Asian olfactory culture. In this passage, flowers with different characteristics are assigned to different classes of beings and tapped for different purposes. In the case of scents at least a few concrete specimens are mentioned, but—with the exclusion of the lotus (*padma*) in 13.101.28—no names of particular flower species are found in this passage. The situation is different in the Purāṇas, which are a mine of information on the use of flowers in worship. Besides the glorification of certain plant species and the prescription of individual flowers for specific rituals, there are also extensive lists of flowers that are considered suitable or unsuitable for the worship of certain deities or on certain occasions.¹⁰ In the *nibandha* literature, which flourished from about the 12th century on, such information appears increasingly structured and constitutes a regular feature of chapters on worshipping deities. The highest degree of specialization is achieved in texts that exclusively consist of passages on *pūjā* flowers, either as larger chapters of *nibandhas* or in the form of independent texts. The *Puṣpacintāmaṇi*, the first critical edition and study of which is presented here, represents one such highly specialized digest that lays out options for configuring the one *upacāra* called *puṣpa*.

It should be added that flowers, apart from their use as an *upacāra*, are important components in other parts of *pūjā*, too. When the *saṃkalpa*, the ritual declaration of intent, or any mantra, is spoken, the worshipper usually holds a flower. As Tripathi (2004: 315–324) describes from his observations at the Jagannātha temple, for example, each time an offering is made, first a flower is taken, the *upacāra* mantra is recited and the flower is laid on the ground, and only then is the *upacāra* offered (with another mantra). A flower is also a standard item for sprinkling water with in *pūjā* and other rituals. In Tantric *pūjā*, flowers function as instruments with whose help the deity is first awakened in the body of the worshipper, exhaled through the nostrils and then transferred through a flower into the icon (A. Zotter 2014: 200–201). The deity herself can be represented by a plate of flowers (S. Gupta 1979: 139). Besides the *upacāra* called *puṣpa*, other offerings may not only be replaced by flowers, but consist entirely of flowers.¹¹ The seat (*āsana*) offered to the deity as the first *upacāra* often is a flower, a leaf or grass. The deity can be summoned (*āvāhana*), welcomed (*svāgata*) or dismissed by offering a handful of flowers (*puṣpāñjali*). A flower garland (*mālā*) can be

10 For an exemplary study of such lists, see Duda (2006). References are given in Krause (2005: 13); for material from the *Skandapurāṇa*, see Pai (2000).

11 See e.g. Bühnemann (1988: 136–137, 175), Duda (2005: 115), Tripathi (2004: 278).

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offered as a separate item in the sequence of offering garments and adornment. Moreover, a vessel with the sipping water (*ācamana*) or one with water offered to an honoured guest (*argha* or *arghya*) usually contains different items, flowers being among them.

Even though the present book is the first monograph on offering flowers to Hindu deities, the fact that flowers and, more generally, plants play a significant role in South Asian religiosity has not evaded scholarly attention. As early as 1937 J. J. Meyer, following the approaches of Wilhelm Mannhard and James Frazer, published a three-volume work in which he dealt with the Indian festival culture, conceiving of plants thereby as “vegetation spirits” (“Vegetationsgenien”). The role of trees in Vedic and Buddhist literature was studied by O. Viennot (1954). More recently A. Nugteren (2005) published another monograph on trees, with a special focus on rituals and their symbolism. Functions and the significance of grasses in Vedic ritualism were treated by J. Gonda (1980). The Pandanus group in Prague with their eponymous journal has been bringing out a treasure of thematically diversified contributions on plants in South Asia since 1998. Among them, those by P. Duda (2005, 2006) are the most relevant for the subject at hand. Further, there is a recent collection of articles on plants in South Asian religions (Ferrari and Dähnhardt 2016). Many textual references to plants in Sanskrit literature are provided in R. Syed’s (1992) thesis on plants in the literary corpus. Moreover, there are various anthologies of myths and legends centred on plants, such as those put together by M. Gandhi (1991) and S. M. Gupta (2001). Information about the distribution, use and cultural significance of plants in Nepal has been compiled by P. P. Regmi (1983) and by T. C. Majupuria and D. P. Joshi (1997).

The present study approaches the role of flowers in *pūjā* through the lens of their treatment in a concrete text composed at a known time and place. The *Puṣpacintāmaṇi* (PuCi), the “Wish-fulfilling Jewel of Flowers”, presents instructions for using flowers as *upacāras* in a systematic way. The text is a *nibandha*, a digest of quotes from 47 named source texts only interrupted by short phrases that serve as subheadings or comments. In its close to 400 Sanskrit verses some 200 different flower names are mentioned. Written in the middle of the 17th century at the royal court of Kathmandu, the PuCi is extant in 29 Nepalese manuscripts and has been translated into Newari, the Tibeto-Burman Nepalese vernacular used in texts from the Kathmandu Valley since at least the 12th century.¹² The

12 Following the practice adopted by previous scholars, I will be referring to the language, also called Newar, *nepāla bhāṣā* or *nevāḥ bhāy*, as Newari throughout. For its literary history, see Malla (1982); for a brief and accessible overview, Otter (2021: 1–2). On the suppression of Newari in the Rāṅā period (1846–1951 CE) and on the campaign for formal education in it as part of the modern Nepal Bhasha Movement (*nepāla bhāṣā andolana*), see Shrestha and Hoek (1995).

PuCi was first edited in 1966 CE in Varanasi as a “project financed from Indian aid to Nepal” (PuCi 1966: copyright page). Its editor, Jayamanta Mishra, had been deputed from India to teach Sanskrit at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. This *editio princeps* is based on three manuscripts kept in the National Archives of Nepal, but covers neither the last two verses of the text nor its Newari rendering. The advantages of critically editing the text in its entirety, and the major approaches to fruitfully contextualizing it, have already been identified in my MA thesis (Krause 2005). Based on these earlier studies, the present monograph sets out to provide a critically edited and translated text and to explore the historical, literary, and religious conditions and everyday realities under which it originated and with which its compiler interacted.

The book is committed to the text-in-context approach that has been one of the recurring demands to Indological research and has received growing attention lately,¹³ wherein texts are conceived “as expressions of cognitive contents belonging to specific historical circumstances” (Malinar et al. 2004: xiv) and in turn also as “historical documents that would provide information on the very context of which they were part”, with text and context thus forming a productive “hermeneutic circle” (ibid.). In addition to the text and its content proper, such an approach takes into account its production and reception history, and is often enhanced by methods and approaches developed in other disciplines, such as history, anthropology or religious studies. When critically interrogated within their contexts, texts are “no longer understood as monolithic documents but as produced by particular interests and conflicts” (Gengnagel et al. 2005: 9).

While approaching practical or historical contexts is arguably less productive, if not simply impossible, for Sanskrit texts whose origin is unknown, which circulate translocally or which deal with wholly theoretical issues, it will prove to be especially fruitful in the present case. The PuCi not only deals with a practical and tangible subject, but can be localized in time and space with great precision. Therefore here the text is first established philologically and then approached from different perspectives that shed light on aspects of its intra-, inter- and extra-textual contexts—historical, literary and practical. The guiding questions in this exploration include: Where, when, by whom, how and why was the text written in the first place? What was so special about the PuCi that led it to be copied so frequently and transmitted for several centuries? How does the PuCi’s specific treatment of its chosen topic stand in relation to similar texts, and what

13 See e.g. the contributions in Gengnagel et al. (2005), Malinar et al. (2004). For a theoretical discussion on the importance of a broadened concept of what constitutes a text and the fruitful confluence of different disciplinary approaches in the study of South Asia, see Michaels (2004), and Michaels (2020a, 2020b), together with the comments by Appadurai et al. (2020).

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contexts are relevant to it? What if any was or still is the PuCi's own relevance to *pūjā* practice and Hindu religiosity in Nepal and beyond? How can it help us to understand Brahmanic concepts connected with offering flowers?

The evident starting point is a critical edition and translation of the text. The edition is based on the complete available manuscript evidence and also—and for the very first time—takes into account the Newari rendering of the text. This strictly textual part, together with a brief introduction on the text critical methods applied—summarizing a more detailed discussion in the German thesis (A. Zotter 2013: 16–60) of the transmission history and the family relations between the different copies—forms the sixth chapter.

The chapters preceding the text proper are devoted to introducing and analyzing it. Chapter two starts things off with a look at the historical setting of the text's production. With the PuCi we are in the enviable position of having a known patron and transmission history, so that the origins and further trajectory of the text can be pinned down to a high degree of accuracy. The chapter thus introduces the local, historic and religious milieu it arose in, deals more specifically with its royal patron, King Pratāpa Malla of Kathmandu (r. 1641–1674 CE), and poses questions about its author, Māyāsiṃha. Then, in chapter three, the process of compiling the text is considered in some detail. On the basis of a comparison of the PuCi with the sources it quotes from,¹⁴ I propose a possible scenario to account for which concrete texts the author had at his desk and reflect on his underlying working methods. Moreover, this chapter traces the principles governing how the text was structured and how primary and secondary sources were cited and adapted to fit this scheme. Moreover, I demonstrate how the textual structure and cited texts mirror the local, temporal and religious settings. The next—the fourth—chapter treats the larger Nepalese corpus of flower texts and the place of the PuCi in it. Over the centuries, over one hundred manuscripts with other similar texts were produced in Nepal, there being a virtual boom in the topic in the 17th and 18th centuries. Chapter five, the most extensive of all chapters, then turns to an analysis of the content proper. It looks at the body of rules and investigates the extent to which these rules can be conceived of as a system. General rules are treated first, to see, among other things, what they reveal about Brahmanic conceptions of *pūjā* flowers and how the way texts deal with them compare to how they deal with other topics. Then the special rules are looked at in terms of their relevance to the three common types into which *pūjā*, or Brahmanic ritual in general, is classified: the regular (*nitya*), the occasional (*naimittika*) and the optionally wish-for (*kāmya*). Specifically, I try to understand the “mechanics” of these rules by looking at how natural and cultural aspects of flowers are framed

14 S. M. Katre has described this as the fourth step of textual criticism, i.e. “(4) *Higher Criticism* or separation of the sources utilized by the author” (Katre 1954: 31).

in these types of worship. I argue that the flowers used each highlight a different component of the rules that apply to the three types of *pūjā*. After thus treating the systematic features of the texts, I point out those places where the system breaks down or interpretation is limited, be it due to the presence of esoteric content, to inconsistencies or simply to textual corruptions in passages that have lost their meaning along the path of textual transmission. Finally, when investigating the Newari rendering more closely, I deal with the strategies of translating Sanskrit plant names into Newari and delve into the text's "traction on the ground", into its relation and relevance to actual worship practice. The major findings are then summarized and the overall questions revisited in the final conclusion that forms chapter seven. The appendix features a separate list of flower names that lays bare what difficulties plant identification has in store for those who immerse themselves in Sanskrit texts. Information has been assembled for each Sanskrit name mentioned in the PuCi, and in each case the possibility or impossibility of identifying these names locally or translocally with concrete plant species is discussed.

Along the sketched route I introduce the PuCi and its contexts in what appeared to me to be its major dimensions. If, as in the present book, a concrete text is taken as an entry point into a particular setting, seemingly separate fields in the study of South Asia can be brought together and seen to be interconnected in unique ways. Ritual discourse relating to history and flowers pops up in unanticipated places. When my journey with the PuCi started back in 2001 I never imagined that it would take me to Nepal, that I would have to read inscriptions in strange languages, hunt for textual parallels in genres I had limited understanding of or spend days brooding over botanical names. I have tried to master the challenges the text confronted me with to the best of my ability and hope that along with introducing an arcane and admittedly insignificant text the book can also be relevant when discussing broader questions. As a textual study, it adds to our knowledge about Nepalese manuscripts and their transmission. It discovers unsuspected interconnections within the corpus of Nepalese religious literature and its relation to the larger transregional Sanskrit tradition. The text opens a new window onto Nepalese history, sheds light on known actors and reveals unknown ones. It exemplifies how texts were composed in concrete settings. From still broader perspectives, it may advance knowledge of how the *pūjā* ritual was construed within the Brahmanic scholastic tradition, how local and trans-local religious and literary cultures interacted, how plants and their perceived characteristics were shaped by their use as ritual objects, and in turn shaped a ritual culture. Over these many years, the *Puṣpacintāmaṇi* has been a constant companion and teacher to me, a true wish-fulfilling jewel sparkling with stories of flowers, gods and scholars.