7 Conclusion

With the foregoing stratified analysis of the origin, transmission, reception history and potential interpretation of the PuCi, I hope to have shown that this text bears witness to how a very specialized branch of Brahmanic scholastic thought materialized in 17th-century Nepal and flourished thereafter.

The extant manuscript evidence for the PuCi—29 out of 32 known manuscripts transmitting the Sanskrit text were accessible for the present study—appears to reach back almost to the time of its writing. This corpus consists of closely related copies preserved in the Kathmandu Valley and can be conceived of as a tightly-knit network with areas of both horizontal and vertical transmissions. The present edition of the PuCi is based on the two oldest manuscripts—possibly apographs of the autograph—and two further copies that are representatives of the early, largely horizontal, transmission. It very likely comes very close to the PuCi as it was first written, and so represents the text in a more authentic form than the *editio princeps* produced by Jayamanta Miśra (PuCi 1966). The new edition shows that the text was not written in immaculate Sanskrit, and indeed that the author must have been aware of the fact that he had not produced a linguistically flawless text. As I have argued further, an author of a compilation (*nibandha*) almost inevitably has to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to orthography and grammar, and at times even has to accept cruxes in the text—here called "blind spots"—if he wants to remain faithful to his sources, often available to him only in single textual witnesses of questionable quality. This probably applies to a special degree to a text largely consisting of names, as the PuCi does. In this connection it should be stressed that, despite some grammatical inconsistencies, the PuCi remains almost completely understandable. A pragmatic treatment of language is conspicuous for the rendering into Newari, which is edited here for the first time. The variety in linguistic expression, which is limited in the root text itself, is reduced even further. Still more the case than in the Sanskrit, the conveyance of the contents in a comprehensible form seems to have been the main concern.

Certainly the most momentous improvement of the new edition in comparison to the previous one is the inclusion of the last two verses of the text. Thanks to the mention in them of the author, Māyāsiṃha, and his royal patron, Pratāpa Malla (r. 1641–1674 CE), the text can be located in time and space. The time frame for composition narrows down to the decade between the beginning of Pratāpa's reign in N.S. 761 (1641 CE) and the completion of the first dated copy in N.S. 771

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(1651 CE). The text can thus be regarded as an outcome of the prolific cultural activities under one of the most illustrious Nepalese rulers of the late Malla period. Hardly anyone else promoted the arts and culture of his city-kingdom Kathmandu as much as Pratāpa Malla, or distinguished himself as intimately familiar with and worshipful of the deities of his realm.

The closing verses, which identify the text as a literary product of the court of Kathmandu, were lost in many manuscripts, not only in the ones used in the *editio princeps*. In some copies, they were rephrased or altered; in two cases with the effect that the author's name no longer appears. This obliteration of the author might be related to an historical event. Different sources attest to a person named Mayāsiṃha being accused of involvement in the assassination of Bhīma Malla, a royal and a minister at the court of Kathmandu. The available historical documents remain, however, inconclusive as to whether or not the supposed plotter, Mayāsiṃha, and the author of the PuCi, Māyāsiṃha, were one and the same person. Whatever may have been reasons for later copyists to alter or leave out the last two verses of the text, it is important to register that the text continued to be transmitted without an author's name and even without the authoritative reference to the patronage by one of the cultural luminaries of the Malla period.

As for what ensured the survival of the text, the skilful tailoring of translocal textual traditions to local realities has been highlighted here as an important factor. The PuCi reflects Malla time religion as practised by the Nepalese elites, which traditionally, and up to recently, was centred on the king as its major ritual patron. The structure of the text—composed in the, at that time, very popular format of a compilation (*nibandha*)—mirrors a peculiar Nepalese combination of exoteric and esoteric worship (*pūjā*) practices. Flowers for Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya and the other planetary deities, and for the ancestor ritual (*śrāddha*) as well—the same range of topics as covered by *dharmanibandha*s—are dealt with in the first two chapters. The third chapter can be conceived of as a pivot point between the two ritual modi: concluding the area of Smārta worship, it deals with flowers for Durgā, who is considered to be the exoteric identity of the multitude of esoteric goddesses unfolding into different lines of transmission (*āmnāya*) of the Nepalese Tantric Kaula traditions dealt with in the last chapter of the text.

Furthermore, the analysis of the texts used for composing the PuCi attests to a strong link to the transregional Sanskrit tradition and yet at the same time to its Nepalese provenance. On the one hand, texts are quoted which by the 17th century must have become "classics" among the authorities on Nepalese ritual matters, such as the Śivadharma literature or the *Manthānabhairavatantra*. On the other hand, the text heavily draws on North Indian *nibandha*s, which must have been "brand new" at that time, such as Narasiṃha Ṭhakkura's *Tārābhaktisudhārṇava*. These findings affirm that Pratāpa Malla was one of those royal figures who actually imported scholars and new texts in order to "update" the Nepalese version

of what we commonly subsume under Hinduism. From a wider perspective, the PuCi also bears testimony to how fast knowledge and texts travelled at that time in South Asia.

The use of transregional cultural forms and topics and their presentation in a Nepalese garb is very typical of the late Malla period. B. Bledsoe (2004) has argued that the rulers of the two newly independent city-kingdoms of Kathmandu and Patan in particular adopted a "neo-classical mode". They sought to fulfil the classical role of a king committed to dharma, and tried to surpass their rival kings in promoting all kinds of cultural activities. Thus the cultural climate of 17th-century Kathmandu Valley and the court of a king who was personally very fond of the divine inhabitants of his realm provided an ideal breeding ground for a composition specializing in an aspect of *pūjā*, of the most popular ritual practice.

The lasting popularity and influence of the PuCi as a Nepalese scholarly treatise (Śāstra) can be concluded not only from its own history, where some of its manuscripts attest to its enduring transmission in the royal environment. Research into Nepalese manuscripts has uncovered an even larger textual tradition on *pūjā* flowers surviving in some one hundred manuscripts. These texts are closely interrelated. Newly emerging texts are seen to have taken material from older compilations as their framework and filled it out with new references or became self-sustained developments of parts of their predecessors. Texts were translated into the vernaculars: into Newari and later on into Nepali. The *Puṣpacintāmaṇi* is an early and paradigmatic representative of this tradition. Its translation into Classical Newari comes in the course of time to take on a life of its own, the Sanskrit text or parts thereof forming the nucleus for later texts (e.g. the *Puṣparatnākara* and the *Puṣpamāhātmya*). The Nepalese textual tradition devoted to the topic positively bloomed from the late 17th to the early 18th century and was still going strong well on into the 20th, with the latest manuscript studied here dating from 1931 CE. As far as could be ascertained during the present endeavour, the PuCi has enjoyed no direct reception outside Nepal, but it has slipped, in the form of acknowledged or unacknowledged quotes, into other Nepalese *nibandha*s, such as the *Tantracintāmaṇi* or the *Puraścaryārṇava*, which treat Tantric ritual more comprehensively and have a translocal reputation. Hence the PuCi has contributed at least indirectly to the transregional śāstric tradition. At some point in time the PuCi "lost" its author and patron, and further down the line the text itself was lost, but not before parts of it merged into ever new textual articulations on the subject. The information collected in the PuCi persists, whereas authorship and the concrete textual form were treated less protectively.

The PuCi belongs to the prescriptive *śāstra* literature, which by its own standards seeks out earlier authorities for legitimation. It aims at establishing normative discourse rather than normalizing existing practice. The text is highly specialized, focusing as it does on a single material aspect of ritual, the *upacāra*

"flower" (*puṣpa*) to be offered in *pūjā*. Within the set of regulations, general and special rules can be distinguished. The general rules on proper procurement, treatment and disposal of *pūjā* flowers echo Brahmanical values of purity and exhibit parallels to rules formulated for food (*anna*) and gifts (*dāna*).

A flower is, however, not just some offering material or gift to a deity. Specific characteristics can be related to the interplay of its use in a particular ritual sequence and its capacity as the reproductive organ of angiosperms. *Puṣpa*, the ritual flower, is part of a series of *upacāra*s in *pūjā* that are offered in a conventional sequence:

> The basic concept behind the rite of offering the Upacāras is to treat the Deity … as an honoured Royal Guest who has come to the place of the worshipper, his host, after a long journey. Just as one would welcome one's guests with pleasing words, offer him a seat, thereafter water for washing the feet and the face, then light refreshment and—after the guest has recovered from the fatigue of the journey—would request him to take bath, provide him with fresh garments, thereupon offer him choice food and entertain him with whatever means one has at one's disposal, so also the worshipper proceeds with his Iṣṭa-devatā. (Tripathi 2004: 313–314)

Flowers are offered to the deity after dressing it (*vastra*, *yajñopavīta*), and sometimes adding jewellery or scented ointments (*gandha*). As G.C. Tripathi explains: "the personal toilet of the Deity is finished with the offering of the flowers" (2004: 325). In the Jagannātha temple at Puri the deity is subsequently shown a mirror, "so that She can have a final look at Her dress and appearance" (ibid.). As this ritual syntax suggests, flowers—often bound into garlands—serve to beautify the deity as a guest worthy of the highest honours. Accordingly, aesthetic requirements are stated in the PuCi among the general rules. A flower should be of pleasant scent and appearance, as if it were a living and fragrant jewel.[645]

Differing from permanent jewellery (made of gems, gold or other precious metal), which can be worn by a deity for a long time,[646] flowers demand the worshipper's daily attention. They must be procured, transported, checked for purity and completeness and, finally, arranged. These special efforts are some

645 Flowers serving as jewellery for women are not only popular in literary contexts (Goody 1993: 325).

646 The close connection between flowers and jewellery is also attested to by the fact that artificial flowers or garlands made of precious metals are offered to deities. Even today goldsmith shops in Kathmandu sell garlands of silver or gold *tulasī* or *bilva* leaves, and also lotus or *kunda* flowers (see Fig. 7.1). For documents bearing witness to the long history of such offerings and cross-references from flower texts, see Pant (2007b).

Fig. 7.1 Silver *pūjā* flowers are offered in the shops of Newar goldsmiths. The physical characteristics of—from left to right—the lotus flower, leaves of the *tulasī* and the *bilva* and well as the *kunda* flower are clearly recognizable. The *kunda* flower even has a *dūrvā* shoot tucked into its calyx, following common practice (see Fig. 5.18 above); photo: 29 December 2012, Kathmandu.

of the suitable ways to express one's "devotion" (*bhakti*) to a deity. That *bhakti* is an indispensable requirement for performing daily worship is stated in the PuCi time and again. The relationship between worshipper and deity can be conceived of not only as that between host and (royal) guest; it has also been likened to the intimate relation between husband and wife (e.g. Fuller 1992: 78–79). In many Sanskrit texts, a gift of flowers and garlands "is connected with courting and marriage, carrying a strong sexual significance" (Goody 1993: 323). Thus, in *pūjā*, a flower may be interpreted as a subtle means of conveying the eroticism that the concept of *bhakti* at times expresses. In Tantric usage, a topic covered by the PuCi, the sexual connotations a flower has as a plantal sexual organ no doubt figure crucially. Alternatively (or simultaneously), a flower tendered with *bhakti* may also be interpreted as an expression of simplicity in ritual matters. A flower can replace elaborate and costly rituals or *upacāra*s. Anybody (including women and members of lower castes) is allowed to perform *pūjā*. Flowers and leaves are available at almost any time and place. The simplicity of the outer form of worship, assuming that *bhakti* is a given, is stressed in the PuCi, which states that a deity is pleased with any flower if only offered in devotion.

The largest part of the text, however, covers instructions to offer not just any flowers, but very specific ones during specific *pūjā*s. The flower, a simple means of worship freely accessible to all is, from a textual Brahmanic perspective, subject to elaborate forms of classification. The special rules recorded in the PuCi, in which particular flower species are prescribed (*vihita*) or prohibited (*niṣiddha*), can be sorted not only according to the deities concerned, as in the text itself, but also according to the types of ritual they relate to, namely *nitya*, *naimittika* and *kāmya*. Further, on the basis of their physical characteristics and cultural associations flowers point to different portions of the stated rules. In *nityapūjā*, the flowers' features tend to correspond to those of the deities, in *naimittikapūjā* to the specific occasion, and in *kāmyapūjā* to the results to be achieved. For the latter two types of *pūjā*, the worshipped deities appear to play only a secondary role when deciding on appropriate flowers.

A greater number of differences can be observed between *nitya*- and *kāmyapūjā*, while the occasional (*naimittika*) worship tends to mirror *nityapūjā* and generally remains comparatively colourless. The expected results for *nitya*- and the *naimittikapūjā*s are usually couched in general terms. The emphasis on *bhakti* as an inner prerequisite for *nityapūjā* goes hand in hand with only a loose stress on compliance with the rules for outer worship. In contrast, the prescriptions for *kāmyapūjā* are very precise, and the results are almost mechanically related to the flowers, whereas there is no emphasis on *bhakti*. The contrast between *nitya*- and *kāmyapūjā* should, however, not be overstressed, as occurs, for example, when characterizing the latter as "magic". Texts such as the PuCi, after all, show that both kinds of ritual can be performed according to the same ritual pattern and involving the same deities. The rules are stated in the same texts, and at times are even intermingled, the only difference being that the "mechanics" of the rules hinge on different considerations. While the ritual requisites in *nityapūjā* appear to be deity-focused, in *kāmyapūjā* the focus is on the result.

In addition to differences between rules for the three types of *pūjā*, the analysis of the PuCi has also revealed ones between the first three chapters and the last chapter, namely features that set exoteric Smārta and esoteric Tāntrika worship traditions apart from one another. It has been observed that, generally speaking, the Smārta text portions remain true to the prestigious Vedic heritage in ritual flora—even if this requires the category "flower" (*puṣpa*) to be stretched considerably to include grasses and leaves—whereas plants known to be efficient in Vedic ritual tend to be more rarely prescribed, or are even prohibited, in passages on Kaula *pūjā*. A further point of difference in the treatment of exoteric and esoteric flowers has to do with adherence to the rules, which seems to be much more stressed in the fourth chapter, where drastic consequences are threatened for violating regulations. There is no sense in this part of the text (and not only in the passages on *kāmyapūjā*) that devotion (*bhakti*) is a legitimate substitute

for appropriate flowers. Thus even if Kaula ritual dissociates itself from Vedic ritualism in terms of its coding of material items, it is similar to it in its hyper-ritualistic approach (see Sanderson 1988).

Such oppositions discernible within the PuCi once more confirm that there are conceptual differences regarding the phenomenon of *pūjā* (see Colas 2006). Thus one has to be sensitive to the external textual contexts from which the rules are being cited. One should, however, not expect to be able to conclude much from these rules back to the theological systems. Texts like the PuCi are oriented towards treating the technical details of ritual, not towards establishing theoretical positions.

How can the use of flowers in *pūjā* be apprehended in a broader perspective? Are flowers and other offerings means of communicating with deities (see e.g. Tripathi 2004)? Are we in addition being confronted with an indigenous grammar of a "language of flowers"? If so, what might the messages conveyed be? For the interpretation of *kāmyapūjā*, this approach sounds reasonable at first sight. There, a flower can be plausibly conceived of as the bearer of a concrete wish, whose fulfilment one expects in response. What about *nityapūjā*, then? Here, flowers may serve to express the worshipper's *bhakti* and the degree of intimacy of his or her knowledge of the deity worshipped. The texts themselves state that deities rejoice in flowers and the other offerings, that they are appeased by them or that they induce satisfaction with the worshipper. I think much more central than communication is the ritual enactment of the deities' presence. Offering appropriate flowers makes their particular features or the myths associated with them tangible. As P. Duda says:

> We may probably expect that a certain flower offered to a certain deity will be pregnant with one, or even a number of mythological scenes related to the given deity, be it a *dhattūra* flower offered at a *śivaliṅga*, evoking the image of Śiva drinking the poison at the *samudra manthana*, a jasmine garland evoking the image of Kṛṣṇa sporting with the *gopīs* in a fresh grove at full-moon night, or a *japāpuṣpa* evoking the image of fierce Kālī storming up and down the battle field lolling out her tongue. (Duda 2006: 296)

The fact that flowers mirror the characteristics of the deities makes them suitable and pleasing offerings. Depending on the flower species employed, certain aspects of the deity can be highlighted. One may argue further that the particular material setting of a *pūjā* creates a specific ritual atmosphere which is not only appropriate to the deity worshipped, but can be sensually perceived and thus may arouse a certain atunement within the worshipper. Even if the texts treated do not elucidate this point, one may be allowed to speculate that specific flowers

and other offerings may have the potential to be used by worshippers as concrete tools to help them experience their communion or, depending on theological outlook, identity with the deity worshipped.

The notion of the material enactment that may shape the worshipper's perception and experience can also be extended to the *kāmyapūjā*. Thus, the flower of the *śirīṣa*, praised for its tenderness and vulnerability, casts the desire to win a woman into sensually perceptible form; the flower of the dangerous *nimba* conjures up dissension and displacement (PuCi 1.114ab). Hence flowers can be regarded as potential instruments for creating a ritual reality based on their efficacy.

To try to discover a grammar of a "language of flowers" in the text would continue a long tradition of exoticizing flowers for their supposed secret messages.[647] The analogy to language, or more generally to communication, does, however, brush over the fact that flowers are material and multisensual objects (see Meier and Zotter 2013; A. Zotter 2014). The linguistic metaphor also presupposes that the human use of flowers is always intentional and serves some underlying communicative purpose. It thus does overlook the probably most typical case of worshippers using flowers, namely as a matter of convention and routine, without any higher aim and without any specific effect on them.

Examining the larger context surrounding the body of rules laid down in the PuCi has revealed above all that the Brahmanic aesthetics of *pūjā* flowers is closely interwoven with other fields of Sanskrit literature and knowledge. Parallels have been ascertained not only in religious thought and practice, but also in literary conventions dictated by poetics, or in properties ascribed to plants in the medical tradition. A text like the PuCi thus embedded within the scholarly and aesthetic literary culture of South Asia takes on the lineaments of an intellectual pursuit. P. Olivelle (2002: 353) cites the Belgian florist David Ost as having said, "Once a flower or a leaf is taken out of its natural habitat, it becomes an object of thought; it becomes a medium of expression."

The role of the PuCi (and its literary interpretative context) in practical usage must have been very limited, though. In actual ritual practice, at least in most of the cases, the absence or presence of interpretative contexts does not make any difference to the stipulated performance (see Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 34–35). Worshippers, even when referring to the same textual prescriptions, may come up with different interpretations for the offering of particular flowers, even mutally

647 Concerning the invention of the "language of flowers" that Europeans of the 18th and 19th centuries sought to decode in oriental cultures, see Goody (1993: 232–253). A re-import of this largely invented language to India is attested to in efforts to pin down the messages of different flower species by Mirra Alfassa, better known as "The Mother" of the Sri Aurobindo tradition (The Mother 1992; Sri Aurobindo Society 1993).

contradicting ones. A person can offer flowers without interpreting the act at all. Moreover, śāstric treatises are not concerned with recording existing practice, but rather give an account of what is recorded as the norms and knowledge relating to it (Pollock 1985). Accordingly, the PuCi is a catalogue of what the textual tradition at the author's disposal had to say about the use of *pūjā* flowers. This catalogue is no wild hodge-podge of instructions; rather, it carefully arranges and rubricizes information, adapting it to time and place. It conforms to general principles of *nibandha* writing (De Simini 2015) and attests to the author's attempts to produce a stringent and concise treatment by reducing, for example, redundancies and by rejecting passages considered unauthoritative.

Despite remarks on the systemic character of the rules, from an overall perspective it must be said that the text does not seem to aim at presenting a closed and comprehensive system. There are obvious contradictions, incomprehensible passages and unidentifiable flower names. These leave the text with dark and impenetrable fringes. The translation into Newari confirms the impression that the text was not meant to be a highly sophisticated product down to its core, meaningful and understandable in every detail. Many flower names mentioned in the text were translated mechanically into Newari, if not left out altogether. But there are also some cases in which the Newari text, seemingly in order to provide plants of importance in local *pūjā* practice with a Sanskrit identity, adopts names that are either unintelligible or whose botanical identity is at best a matter of discussion. In any event, the text remains aloof from actual practice. It was probably not meant to serve as a practical guide (*prayoga*) but to operate on a different level. It assembles śāstric references possibly specifically tailored to providing validating backup (*pramāṇa*). It is a link in the chain that loosely connects translocal śāstric discourse with local *pūjā* practice. The translation into Newari can be seen as the next step towards ritual application.

In general, the PuCi can be called a successful attempt to relate the pan-Indian scholarly tradition to the Nepalese context. With J. Goody (1993), the subject of the text, worship with flowers, can be regarded as one aspect of a "culture of flowers", a luxury that societies allow themselves. If the subject of the text makes it part of a luxury culture, the same holds true for the text as an object, ensconced as it is in the royal milieu. Like its topic, the text is more décor or ornamentation—a jewel—whose raison d'être certainly was not any immediate necessity. There was no pressing need for a text like this and the world could have got along without it. Pratāpa Malla would not have been a less illustrious king, and the local culture of flowers would probably not have been less diversified. The PuCi may have offered itself more as an intellectual exercise or even pastime for some pandits. But the fact that outside material and personal resources were drawn upon to compose and preserve the text and its contents is indicative of the richness of Nepalese religious culture, whose deep attachment to *pūjā* flowers deserves full

admiration. This vivid interest is also mirrored in the Nepalese royals' enduring engagement in establishing and maintaining flower gardens for the supply of temples' immediate needs.[648] The relationship scholastic texts such as the PuCi have to such sponsorship, and to the Nepalese gardening culture more generally, would provide the topic for a wholly new book,[649] but it is high time to close the present one. A small act, such as the offering of a flower, can lead into an entire field of enquiry enough to keep one's mind engaged for a long time.

648 Many historical documents relating to the establishing and maintaining of temple gardens for the supply of *pūjā* flowers can be found in the Documenta Nepalica database (https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de) and have yet to be studied.

649 Further analysis would also have to take into account the prominent place flowers have in how Nepalese society is imagined in political texts. In the *Divya Upadeśa* (2013: 50), considered as Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha's political legacy, the father of the nation speaks about his realm (*muluka*) as a flower garden (*phūlabārī*)—consisting of all species/caste-groups (*jāta*)—that needs to be cared for by all. The new national anthem starts: "Made of hundreds of flowers, we are one Nepalese garland …." (*sayaũ thũgā phūlakā hāmī, euṭai mālā nepālī …*).