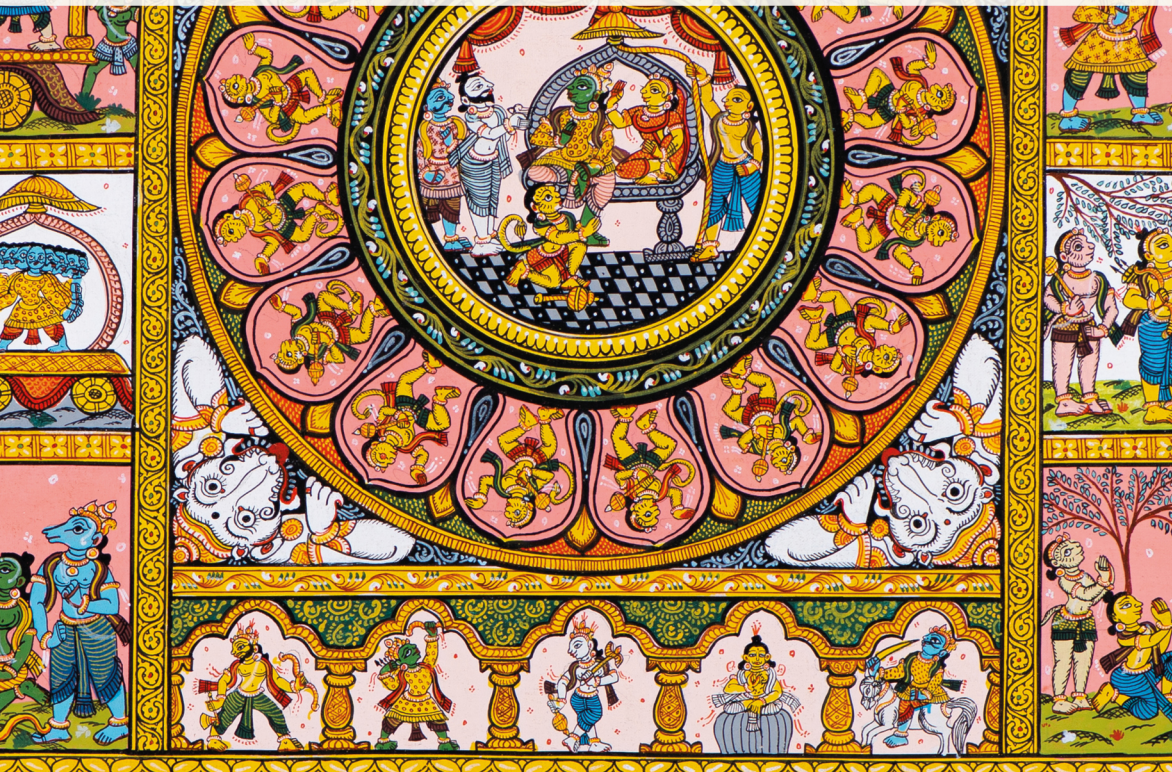
Oral-Written-Performed

The Rāmāyaṇa Narratives in Indian Literature and Arts

edited by Danuta Stasik



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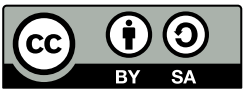

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Note on Transliteration

In view of the fact that contributions to this volume have a number of words transliterated and transcribed from several Indian languages, and different methods are sometimes used by scholars of the same language, the editor has not attempted to devise a unified system that might be used throughout this publication. Instead, care has been taken to maintain consistency within individual chapters.

On and Off the *Rāmāyaṇa* Narrative Paths

An Introduction

This book brings together contributions from some of the leading as well as new scholars in the *Rāmāyaṇa* field in the form of a thematically arranged collection of articles. They were originally presented in a panel at the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies (Paris, 24–27 July 2018), hosted at the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) with the CEIAS (Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, CNRS/EHESS) as the main institutional organizer. The Paris ECSAS gave all the panel participants an opportunity to meet and exchange their views in person, not only among themselves but also during discussions with a captivated conference audience.

The volume, like the panel from which it results, draws from the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition well known for an inexhaustible variety of forms and narrative structures transmitted by different media. Contributions, based on written, oral and visual *Rāmāyaṇa* materials from classical, early modern and contemporary India, despite a plethora of research devoted to the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition that nevertheless does not exhaust the topic of the Rāma story, have attempted to offer a new contribution to its understanding. The book focuses on the narrative strategies adopted in Sanskrit and vernacular texts, tellings, performances and sculpture, taking into consideration their socio-cultural milieu understood as an interpretive framework for further analysis. The authors seek to examine some of the essential forms in which the Rāma story has functioned in Indian literature and arts and to investigate the techniques used to transform the *Rāmāyaṇa* narratives. The volume addresses a variety of questions. For example, how do diverse narratives become vehicles for different ideologies that are expressive of sectarian concerns, literary conventions or cultural values? What is the interrelation between the narratives and their surroundings? To what extent do they influence each other and what is their interdependence?

Ten out of eleven articles were presented at the Paris ECSAS, with the only exception of Paula Richman's contribution that is different from her paper given during the conference panel. Bearing in mind the main object of this volume's interest—the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative(s)—the editor has tried to arrange its chapters, considering both a period and cultural milieu they pertain to as well as their com-

mon thematic and/or methodological traits. Nevertheless, in view of the broad spectrum of analyses, neither strict chronological nor thematic sequence could become its ultimate frame. As a result of all this, the first to appear are three chapters referring, in different ways, to the earlier *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition and/or such source materials as philosophical works by a seventh-century Mīmāṃsā author Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (Monika Nowakowska), programmes of sculptural reliefs on temple walls from the Gupta period onwards in North India and from the Pallava period in South India (John Brockington), and the sixteenth-century Braj Bhāṣā poetic works by Keśavdās (Stefania Cavaliere). Next comes a group of six contributions concerned with multifarious aspects of the past and present dramatical and performing traditions (Mary Brockington, Bożena Śliwczyńska, Paula Richman, Alexander Dubyanskiy, Danielle Feller, Sohini Pillai), with three papers based entirely on South Indian material. The volume closes with two chapters focusing on the Jain milieu, of early modern up to contemporary times, and their uses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition (Adrian Plau and Danuta Stasik).

The first chapter, 'Rāmavat Bhīṣma: Epic Narratives as a Source of Illustrations for Hermeneutical Discussions on *dharma*' by Monika Nowakowska, is the only article in the collection based on purely philosophical material. Its author deals with Mīmāṃsā, the specialized tradition of Vedic ritual hermeneutics to a great extent concerned with the question of the sources of knowledge of *dharma*, focusing on one of the main Mīmāṃsā authors, Kumārila-bhaṭṭa. In his *Tantravārttika*, Kumārila discussed sources of *dharma*, among them the so-called *sadācāra*s, i.e. practices and customs of persons considered exemplary. In his list of figures who at some point deviated from the path of *dharma*, Kumārila includes Rāma together with Bhīṣma; their alleged misdemeanour is that they performed a sacrifice without their wives being present with them. In her discussion, Nowakowska foregrounds the functioning and moral framing of the epic narratives in the hermeneutical discussions by Kumārila and his commentator Someśvara. She points out the criteria of selection and presentation of narrative elements and offers a richly illustrated examination of a traditional Brahmanical perspective on the actions of Rāma, especially towards his wife Sītā.

'Stories in Stone: Sculptural Representations of the Rāma Narrative' by John Brockington forms part of an ongoing project, conducted with Mary Brockington, in which they survey presentations of the Rama story as it developed from its origin in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* up to approximately the end of the eighteenth century (the results of their project have been deposited in the Oxford Research Archive and made available for others). In his article, Brockington examines narrative representations of the Rāma story contained in programmes of sculptural reliefs on temple walls in order to examine the relative popularity over time and in different regions of the various components of the narrative. Noting the regional distribution of these programmes, the author offers an

appraisal of the factors involved in this. Brockington also draws attention to the particularly interesting interrelationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes—whereas many earlier series basically follow the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, later ones either reflect the influence of vernacular retellings or may have even generated them.

Stefania Cavaliere, in her article '*Dhārmik* Kings in Courtly Agendas: The Figure of Rāma in the Works of Keśavdās', explores two works by Keśavdās, *Rāmcandracandrikā* (1601) and *Vijñāngītā* (1610), in which, in a different way, he interprets the figure of Rāma and his story, thus contributing interesting material for the understanding of the dynamics of adaptation of Sanskrit classical models into the new Braj Bhāṣā classical tradition that started developing in North India from the sixteenth century. Analysing both works, Cavaliere argues that Keśavdās, thanks to the polysemic figure of Rāma (a god, a *dhārmik* king and the exemplary seeker of salvation), creatively adapts the classical tradition to the new historical, cultural and linguistic context. By combining classical patterns and new historical claims, the poet is able to embody a model of sovereignty adapted to the modernity and acceptable to the addressee of the work—Keśavdās's patron Vīr Siṃh, King of Orcha.

The next contribution, 'Showing What Is Not: The Use of Illusion in the Classical Sanskrit Rāma Plays' by Mary Brockington, is the first to consider the multifarious aspects of the past and present of dramatical and performing traditions. The main argument of Brockington's article is based on two absolute requirements governing the *nāṭya* tradition. Firstly, the very essence of theatre is the acceptance by the audience of a visual illusion which has also lain at the heart of the Rāma narrative from its earliest form. The second absolute was the requirement for novelty, which was met by the dramatists with elaboration of a narrative by resorting to illusions and counterfeits. In the course of her analysis, Brockington explores the effect of illusion on the characters already established in the epics, finding that Rāma, Sītā and Rāvaṇa are all diminished in stature in the *nāṭya*s under discussion. She also observes that these plays, though primarily secular, reflect the evolution of Rāma as divine without seeking either to propagate or to deny it. An invaluable section closing this chapter is the Appendix that systematizes the foregoing analysis of illusions in *nāṭya*s by providing their ample illustrations with bibliographical references.

With the chapter 'The Rāmāyaṇa Story in the Cākyār Kūttu Format' by Bożena Śliwczyńska, we move to the South. Here, the author deals with the *Rāmāyaṇa* Cākyār Kūttu format of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre that over the centuries has functioned as a temple ritual. This theatre tradition as such concentrates on presenting Sanskrit dramas that also include works relating to the *Rāmāyaṇa* story—the *Abhiṣekanāṭaka* and the *Pratimānāṭaka* of Bhāsa, and the *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is also present in this tradition in a

specific stage form of Cākyār Kūttu—a solo performance dominated by Vidūṣaka who is the master storyteller here. In her article, Śliwczyńska focuses on this form, the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu, in which the *Rāmāyaṇa* story is presented in consecutive episodes and the complete performance takes about 160–170 days. Though the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu narrates the story of Rāma and extolls his name frequently, his figure does not dominate the stage presentation. Nevertheless, as Śliwczyńska observes, in fact the whole multilevel narrative structure is subdued to glorify Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandra who is to be praised at the performance conclusion.

Kerala, albeit of an entirely different milieu, is also the focus of Paula Richman's article 'Sreekantan Nair's Rāvaṇa in *Laṅkālakṣmi*' that examines *Laṅkālakṣmi* (*Lakshmi of Lanka*), the last play in the *Rāmāyaṇa* trilogy by C.N. Sreekantan Nair (1928–1976), a pioneering modern Malayalam playwright. As Richman notes, the play that has been performed multiple times since its debut and quickly acclaimed as one of most innovative and probing retellings of the last *Rāmāyaṇa* book, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, performed in modern India is also considered as one of the most eloquent and compelling modern plays in Malayalam. By presenting the events of the Laṅkā war entirely through *rākṣasa* eyes, it offers a fresh perspective with Rāvaṇa portrayed as a stalwart and art-loving king, devoted to his family and lineage, proud of its uniqueness, history and ideals. In order to create such a picture, Nair resorted to modernist theatrical ideas, while anchoring his play in what he saw as Kerala's cultural ethos.

In a chapter entitled 'Specific Features of the Tamil Ballad *Kucalavaṉ katai*', Alexander Dubyanskiy addresses a genre popular in folk literature that is performed orally by singers and storytellers (*villicai*) with the accompaniment of a string of a bow (*vil*) as well as of bells and small drums. Dubyanskiy in his analysis refers to the story of Kusalavaṉ as presented in two published manuscripts. The story is based on the *Uttarakāṇḍa* but here the context and the course of events leading to Sītā's exile and its aftermath are changed considerably. Dubyanskiy's analysis points up one of the key problems of *Kusalavaṉ katai*, i.e. feminine chastity so important for the traditional Tamil culture, that seems to be responsible for blaming Rāma for his mistreatment of Sītā. And Rāma is also represented differently—he is the *avatār* of Viṣṇu but human features and weaknesses dominate, although the nameless authors of the story make Rāma deny his faults and accuse his brother Lakṣmaṇa of all the misfortunes.

Danielle Feller's contribution 'Rivers of *rasa* and Hearts of Stone: The Female Voice of Pathos in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*' deals with Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, in which its author, unlike many others who base their plays on the *Rāmakathā*, addressed the tragic events of the traditional *Uttarakāṇḍa* in his drama. However, Bhavabhūti, bound by the laws of the dramatic genre, introduced such plot twists that the play ends happily with Rāma and

Sītā's reunion. Feller is concerned with the way in which Bhavabhūti 'feminizes' the story, introducing a large number of female characters (some of them play very little or no role at all in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*), and with the reasons for this narrative strategy of 'feminization'. Feller also observes that Bhavabhūti was especially interested in the aesthetic experience, and promoting *karuṇa*, the primary *rasa* in his play, was crucial to this work. He achieves this end thanks to the many female voices that not only allow themselves to manifest grief (*śoka*), but also because they allow the emergence of grief in the male characters, including Rāma himself.

The starting point of the article 'From Villainess to Victim: Contemporary Representations of Śūrpaṇakhā' by Sohini Pillai is that in all authoritative Indian *Rāmāyaṇa*s, both of the past and of the present—including those by Vālmīki, Kampaṉ, Tulsīdās, and Ramanand Sagar—the firmly established image of Śūrpaṇakhā as a dangerous and promiscuous monster, licentious 'Other' woman and a villainess is well established. However, examining several present-day *Rāmāyaṇa*s in Hindi, Tamil, and English from the realms of film, television, and performance, Pillai demonstrates that a new, highly sympathetic representation of Śūrpaṇakhā as a victim of sexual violence has emerged in modern India. Basing her argument on ample illustrations, she asserts that this new Śūrpaṇakhā reflects changing perceptions towards rape and sexual violence in contemporary India.

As already mentioned, the volume closes with two chapters focusing on the Jain perspective in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. In the first of them, 'Vernacular Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s as *satī-kathā*s: Familiar Structure, Innovative Narrative', Adrian Plau investigates how shifts in narrative emphasis generate new *Rāmāyaṇa* tellings, although not necessarily changing elements of the traditional story. He is particularly interested in new tellings emerging in the early modern period in vernacular languages across North India, which—in conformity with the rise of popular *satī-kathā*s—give special importance to Sītā's virtues and represent her as a *satī*, an ideal Jain laywoman. Plau investigates the spread of this mode of tellings, dividing them into three distinct waves, beginning with *satī-kathā*s as episodes within larger works until their final evolution into independent works. A prime example of such a *satī-kathā* is the mid-seventeenth century Braj Bhāṣā work *Sītācarit* by Rāmcand Bālak, which refers to itself as a '*kathā* of the heroic *satī*'. In his analysis, drawing on Bakhtin and Genette, Plau contends that subtle shifts in chronological arrangement allow *satī-kathā*s to stay within the familiar Jain Purāṇic superstructure and yet they emphasize the virtues of *satī*s, characters that are not amongst the Great Men (*śalākāpuruṣa*) of Jainism.

As the last one comes 'On Fire Ordeal: Who and Why? Ācārya Tulsī's *Agni-parīkṣā* or a Modern Jain Telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa*', a contribution by Danuta Stasik that deals with *Agni-parīkṣā*, a Hindi poem rooted in the Jain *Rā-*

māyaṇa tradition, published for the first time in 1961. Its author, Ācārya Tulsī, a famous Jain leader, features Sītā as the main character of the story and truly sympathizes with her as the epitome of women let down by their men and society. In 1970, the poem provoked agitation among *sanātanī* Hindus. The ensuing court judgement found some passages of the poem to be offensive and eventually all its copies were confiscated by the State Government of Madhya Pradesh. After court battles, also defending the poem, its revised version was published in 1972. In her paper, Stasik firstly offers a contextualized analysis of the poem's narrative and its characteristic features drawing on Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s. Secondly, she discusses the relevant passages of *Agni-parīkṣā*'s 1961 and 1972 versions, seeking an answer to the question why and how this telling composed by Ācārya Tulsī, who did not intend to insult anyone's feelings by his poem, was found offensive by traditionalist circles of contemporary Indian society.

This book could not have materialized in its present shape without the help of a number of people. Firstly, I would like to express my deepest thanks to the reviewers for their positive response to the request to peer review chapters of the volume, taking their time to read and comment on them. Secondly, sincere gratitude is due to Dr. Jacek Woźniak (Chair of South Asian Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw) for proofreading texts in Dravidian languages, and last but not least, I also offer a vote of thanks to Steven Jones for proofreading and correcting English of the entire volume.

Danuta Stasik
Warsaw, August 2019

Monika Nowakowska

Rāmavat Bhīṣma: Epic Narratives as a Source of Illustrations for Hermeneutical Discussions on *dharma*

The value of the *Tantravārttika* (TV) of Kumārila-bhaṭṭa (c. 600–700[1]) for Sanskrit epic studies was appreciated by G. Bühler, who in his *Indian Studies. No. 2. Contributions to the History of the Mahābhārata*, published together with J. Kirste in 1892,[2] referred to this commentarial text profusely, while drawing various conclusions on the formation and status of the *Mahābhārata* at the time of Kumārila. Since then, Kumārila's work has never ceased to inspire scholars, offering plenty of information not only on the standard Mīmāṃsā interpretative, Vedic hermeneutical and ritual issues, but also fascinating pieces of data on contemporary customs, communities, languages, and peoples from the perspective of Central India.[3]

The text of the TV is, however, primarily a very important source of knowledge with regard to the Brahmanical conceptualisations of *dharma*. This aspect of Mīmāṃsā has been re-researched recently, adding to our understanding of ancient Indian moral and legal institutions and their notional framing. Here, I reflect on a tiny, yet intriguing element of these dharmic studies, taking a closer

1 Cf. Jean-Marie Verpoorten, *Mīmāṃsā Literature. A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 6, fasc. 5, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987, pp. 3, 8; and, more up-to-date, Kei Kataoka, *Kumārila on Truth, Omniscience, and Killing. Part 2. An Annotated Translation of Mīmāṃsā-Ślokavārttika ad 1.1.2 (Codanāsūtra)*, Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 68, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011, pp. 14–20.

2 G. Bühler, J. Kirste, *Indian Studies. No. 2. Contributions to the History of the Mahābhārata*, Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hundertsiebenundzwanzigster Band, XII Abhandlungen, Wien: F. Tempsky, 1892.

3 On this geographical situation of Kumārila, see Kiyotaka Yoshimizu, 'Tolerance and Intolerance in Kumārila's Views on the Vedic *śākhā*', in *Vedic Śākhās: Past, Present, Future*, ed. J.E.M. Houben, Julieta Rotaru and Michael Witzel, HOS, Opera Minora 9, Cambridge, Massachusetts: South Asia Books, 2016, pp. 307–326 (especially pp. 320–322).

look at the narrative references illustrating the discussion on the sources of Aryan knowledge of *dharma* (*dharma-mūla*s) by focusing on the figure of Rāma. In the title, I qualify these illustrations, simplistically, as 'epic', because, firstly, most of them seem to come from the *Mahābhārata*, directly or possibly indirectly via its belleletristic reworkings, and secondly, Kumārila also uses the general term *itihāsa* while discussing the role of such texts as the *Mahābhārata* for recognizing and following the requirements of *dharma*.

1. The Dharmaśāstric and Hermeneutical Context

As scholars argue,[4] the earlier, not very significant Vedic term *dharma*(*n*) surfaced up around the third century BCE in its new incarnation, with a vengeance, as one of the fundamental notions—*dharma*—of the new Brahmanical worldview shaped in response to various non-Brahmanical ethical and societal counterproposals of mainly ascetic and antiritualistic origin. From its early literal meaning of 'a support, fundament', *dharma* evolved into a broader concept covering in its semantic range law, morality, social obligations and religious duties.[5] It grew up together with the literature genre of *dharmaśāstra* dedicated to theoretical systematization, categorization and detailed analysis of all aspects of law, justice and morality of the Aryan society from the perspective of Brahmins—first in the textual group of *dharmasūtra*s, and then developed in various *smṛti*s. Almost at the same time there gradually[6] took shape an accompanying and quite innovative

4 Cf. Paul Horsch, 'From Creation Myth to World Law: the Early History of *Dharma*', in Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Dharma: Studies in its Semantic, Cultural and Religious History*, Sources of Ancient Indian Law, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009, pp. 1–26; Paul Hacker, 'Dharma in Hinduism', in Olivelle (ed.), *Dharma: Studies*, pp. 475–492; and in particular Patrick Olivelle 'The Semantic History of Dharma: the Middle and Late Vedic Periods', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 32, issue 5–6 (2004), pp. 491–511 (= in Olivelle (ed.), *Dharma: Studies*, pp. 69–89); also very important observations by Albrecht Wezler, 'Dharma in the Veda and the *Dharmaśāstra*s', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 32, issue 5–6 (2004), pp. 629–665 (= in Olivelle (ed.), *Dharma: Studies*, pp. 207–232).

5 On the history of the term, see the volume edited by Olivelle, *Dharma: Studies*, and, in particular in our context, the article by Wezler, 'Dharma in the Veda'.

6 Patrick Olivelle, 'Epistemology of Law: *dharmapramāṇa*', in: *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra*, ed. Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis, Jr., *The Oxford History of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 49–59. Also Donald R. Davis, Jr., *The Spirit of Hindu Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 25–33.

trait of reflection on and identification of the valid sources of knowledge of this newly reframed *dharma*.[7]

1.1. The *dharma-mūla*s

The epistemological reflections were construed as pointing towards the roots (*mūla*s)—in the sense of valid sources, cognitive causes and truth criteria—of learning about and recognizing *dharma* (or *adharma*). The earliest, arguably, of the texts that found it necessary to mention the *dharma-mūla*s, declared either the Veda or the socially approved norms and practices as the main set of moral and legal instructions, with any other *dharma* sources being subordinate to the primary one. According to the *Gautama-dharmasūtra* (GDhS, the middle of the 3rd century BCE[8]), the Veda constitutes the main epistemic root of *dharma*, while important, too, are the tradition (*smṛti*) and habits (*śīla*) of 'those who know the Veda' (*tad-vid*).[9] On the other hand the *Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* (ADhS, the beginning of the 3rd century BCE[10]) declares the 'agreed-upon normative practices' as *dharma*s, in plural, on which authority (*pramāṇa*) belongs to the collective opinion of *dharma* experts (*dharma-jña*), and to the Vedas (*vedāśca*).[11] Thus, from the very beginning of the epistemological considerations on *dharma*, there is the opposition between the ultimate authority of the Veda and the approved practices and considered normative customs of the ethical elite, i.e. we observe some balancing between canonized textual instruction (as mediated in its instructive role by educated experts) and traditional practices (as represented and followed by educated experts). The experts' role in both approaches was deci-

7 Olivelle, 'Epistemology of Law', p. 50.

8 See Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha. Annotated Text and Translation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000, p. 9.

9 Cf. Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, 120–121: 'The source of Law is the Veda, as well as the tradition and practice of those who know the Veda' (*vedo dharma-mūlam* /1/ *tad-vidāṃ ca smṛti-śīle* /2/).

10 See Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, p. 10.

11 *Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* 1.1.1–3. Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, pp. 24–25: 'And now we shall explain the accepted customary Laws, the authority of which rests on their acceptance by those who know the Law and on the Vedas.' (*athâtaḥ sāmayâcārikān dharmān vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* /1/ *dharma-jña-samayaḥ pramāṇam* /2/ *vedāś ca* /3/). See also Olivelle, 'Epistemology of Law', pp. 50–51 ('Now, then, we shall explain the dharmas derived from agreed-upon normative practice. The authority is the agreement of those who know dharma; and the Vedas').

sive, however different was their epistemic grounding, in terms of the degree of their cognitive dependence on and subordination to the Veda, which question would become fundamental in the tradition of Mīmāṃsā (see below).

The two *dharmasūtra*s would also provide the incentive for subsequent doubts and discussions on the status of normative practices and customs, a representation of which we will look at below, but meanwhile, a couple of centuries later, around 100–200 CE one text of the younger generation of *dharmaśastra* treatises—*smṛti*s—gained its final shape. It provided the Brahmanical world with the classical formulation of the *dharma-mūla*s concept. The *Mānava-dharmaśāstra* (MDhŚ), i.e. *Manu-smṛti*, approaches the epistemology of *dharma* in the beginning of its second chapter. By way of a short introduction, in the very first *śloka* the text enjoins: 'Learn the Law [*dharmas*] always adhered to [*sevitaḥ*] by people who are erudite [*vidvadbhiḥ*], virtuous [*sadbhir*] and free from love and hate [*adveṣarāgibhiḥ*], the Law assented to [*abhyanujñāto*] by the heart [*hṛdayena*]'.[12] The main point in the verse is the proper educational, moral and spiritual formation of people who are to be followed in the matters of *dharma*, and clearly the focus is on their actions and practices as the instruction on *dharma*. The emotional control aspect expressed in the MDhŚ is also significant, it would come back in Kumārila's analysis of the problem—conscious dharmic decisions are and should be independent from emotional trappings. It is not surprising then that at this point the text of MDhŚ comes with a short 'excursus'[13] on the subject of desire—*kāma*—which is not commendable but which, on the other hand, prompts all human activity, including ritual. Immediately afterwards, the MDhŚ offers the classical formula of the four[14] sources of the knowledge of *dharma*: 'The root [*mūlam*] of the Law [*dharma*] is the entire Veda [*vedo 'khilo*]; the tradition and practice [*smṛti-śīle*] of those who know the Veda [*tad-vidām*]; the conduct [*ācāraś*] of good people [*sādhūnām*]; and what is pleasing [*tuṣṭir*] to oneself [*ātmanas*]'.[15] To make it clearer, the MDhŚ 2.10 explains that as *smṛti* one

12 Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 94, 403–405. MDhŚ 2.1: *vidvadbhiḥ sevitaḥ sadbhir nityam adveṣa-rāgibhiḥ / hṛdayenâbhyanujñāto yo dharmas taṁ nibodhata*. All over the article any Sanskrit terms in square brackets in quotations were added by myself.

13 Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 94.

14 The number of the sources in this verse and their interpretation became the topic of discussion. Here I follow the *Manusmṛti* itself (MDhŚ 2.12) and the perspective of Kumārila's Mīmāṃsā.

15 Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 94 (p. 404: MDhŚ 2.6: *vedo 'khilo dharma-mūlam smṛti-śīle ca tadvidām / ācāraś caîva sādhūnām ātmanas tuṣṭir eva ca*). Cf. also Wezler, 'Dharma in the Veda'.

should understand *dharmaśāstra*.[16] The verse MDhŚ 2.6 is repeated in a slightly different wording in 2.12: 'Veda, tradition [*smṛtiḥ*], the conduct of good people [*sad-ācāraḥ*], and what is pleasing [*priyam*] to oneself [*svasya … ātmanaḥ*]—these, they say, are the four [*caturvidhaṁ*] visible [*sākṣād*] marks [*lakṣaṇam*] of the Law [*dharmasya*]'.[17] The second formulation, with its clear epistemological perspective, enumerating *Veda*, *smṛti*, *sadācāra* and *ātmanaḥ priyam* as the sources of valid knowledge of *dharma*, would become the main point of reference for the parallel Brahmanical tradition, devoted to Vedic ritualistic exegesis and hermeneutics, i.e. Mīmāṃsā, from which we would have also the earliest comments known to us on this section of the MDhŚ.

1.2. Mīmāṃsā

The author of the comments and a long, detailed analysis of the concept of the four *dharma-mūla*s was Kumārila-bhaṭṭa, one of the main figures in the tradition of Mīmāṃsā, who very much respected the MDhŚ, considered it among the category of authoritative *smṛti* (as the *dharma* source), and often referred to and quoted it in suitable contexts. Mīmāṃsā, the intellectual current of Vedic ritualistic exegesis, most probably originated around the time of *brāhmaṇa* literature, manifesting the same interest—to explain and interpret the intricacies of Aryan rituals. Focused on language and its capacities, especially the word of the Veda, the current culminated in the huge collection of the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*s (MS) by Jaimini (c. 450–250 BCE?[18]) for which centuries later some Śabara (c. 4–5th CE) composed a commentary, the *Śabara-bhāṣya* (ŚBh). This text some hundred or two years later would go on to inspire commentaries on the MS via the ŚBh by Kumārila.

The main subject of considerations for Mīmāṃsā is, in fact, *dharma*, understood and interpreted by the MS first of all—as one can expect, considering the origins of the tradition—in a ritualistic light, as a ritual duty, sacrificial activi-

16 Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 94, MDhŚ 2.10 ab: 'Scripture' should be recognized as 'Veda', and 'tradition' as 'Law Treatise' (p. 404: *śrutis tu vedo vijñeyo dharmaśāstraṁ tu vai smṛtiḥ*).

17 Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 94, MDhŚ 2.12 (p. 405: *vedaḥ smṛtiḥ sad-ācāraḥ svasya ca priyam ātmanaḥ / etac caturvidhaṁ prāhuḥ sākṣād dharmasya lakṣaṇam*).

18 Cf. Verpoorten, *Mīmāṃsā Literature*, p. 5.

ties[19] to which one is enjoined, directing one to the realm above and into the afterlife.[20] The *dharma* direction and instruction is provided by the Veda, or precisely by one category of Vedic speech—ritual injunctions (*codanā*). Therefore, after the initial introduction to *dharma* in the ritual context and its domain, the MS analyse the text of Vedic corpus in general terms, identifying its various components and their functions, emphasizing the fundamental role of Vedic injunctions. However, other portions of the Vedas (like *arthavāda* and *mantra*, etc.) are also argued to be authoritative, because though secondary, they add a supportive value to the Vedas and follow them (see also below). Next, logically, the MS and the ŚBh broach the important topic of the sources of *dharma* and their authoritativeness, independent (as in the case of *śruti* that is the Veda) or relative to, i.e. dependent on, *śruti* (as in the case of *smṛti*, *ācāra)*. The ŚBh focuses its attention on *smṛti* (i.e. '[traditions transmitted by] memory'), in a way neglecting the *ācāra*s completely. However, à propos this very context, ad MS 1.3.7, there is a large portion of the *Tantravārttika* commentary by Kumārila-bhaṭṭa, and he refers back in his analyses to the *dharma-mūla*s of the MDhŚ and earlier *dharmasūtra*s. The first question then is of the reliability or not of the so-called *sad-ācāra*s. This will be understood in the TV as *satām ācārā*s, that is practices, customs of the good, moral people, interpreted as *śiṣṭa*, i.e. the educated representatives of *āryâvarta-nivāsin*s, inhabitants of *āryâvarta*.[21]

19 On *dharma* in the MS, cf. Clooney, X. Francis, S.J., *Thinking Ritually: Rediscovering the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini*, Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, vol. 17, Vienna: Sammlung De Nobili, 1990, pp. 149–161.

20 On various problems related to the changing interpretation of the term *dharma*, see Wezler, 'Dharma in the Veda', 2004; and Kiyotaka Yoshimizu, 'Kumārila and Medhātithi on the Authority of Codified Sources of *dharma*', in *Devadattīyam: Johannes Bronkhorst Felicitation Volume*, ed. Francois Voegeli, Vincent Eltschinger, Danielle Feller, Maria Piera Candotti, Bogdan Diaconescu and Malhar Kulkarni, Bern: Peter Lang 2012, pp. 644–646.

21 Cf. TV ad MS 1.3.10 (p. 149ff.).

2. The examination of not so moral practices among the good (TV ad MS 1.3.7[22])

Kumārila introduces the discussion on *sad-ācāra*s[23] with reference to the task of the accomplishment of the three ends of man (*tri-varga*).[24] He states that it is pointed out 'that there is some doubt about *dharmatva* in reference to the educated (*śiṣṭa*) people who display behaviour mixed with its [= dharma's] opposite, because it would be as observing [something which does] not inspire confidence', like, for example, 'an ill person [listening to] a doctor doing himself unrecommended things'. And yet—because of the possible roots of *sad-ācāra*s in the Vedas[25]—if some action is considered *dharma*, one should first look up to the Veda for possible teaching on the action, and in case there is no direct injunction, then one has to examine whether the action does not contradict all other teach-

22 The text of the TV has not been critically edited yet, some significant inroads in this direction have been made by Kunio Harikai ('Sanskrit text of the *Tantravārttika* Adhyāya 1, Pāda 3, Adhikaraṇa 4–6. Collated with six Manuscripts', *South Asian Classical Studies*, no. 4 (2009), pp. 359–396). Here the text of the edition *Śrīmajjaiminipraṇītaṃ Mīmāṃsādarśanam*, vol. 2 (ed. Subbāśāstrī, Ānandāśramasaṃskṛtagranthāvaliḥ, no. 97, Poona: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaya, 1929; cf. also SARIT), was verified against the publications by Harikai, *Tantravārttika* and Pandurang Vaman Kane, *The Vyavahāramayūkha of Bhaṭṭa Nīlakaṇṭha with an Introduction, Notes and Appendices*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1926. All the translations of the TV (with a few exceptions of identified quotations from sources already translated into English) are mine. The whole TV was translated, or rather paraphrased, with generous comments into English by Ganganatha Jha (*Kumārila Bhaṭṭa: Tantravārttika, A Commentary on Śabara's Bhāṣya on the Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtras of Jaimini*, vol. 1, Delhi: Pilgrims Book Pvt. Ltd., Reprint, 1998) already in 1924.

23 The portion has recently received more in-depth analyses, without, however, closer discussions of Rāma's case, in Donald R. Davis, Jr., 'On *Ātma-tuṣṭi* as a Source of Dharma', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 127, no. 3, 2007, pp. 279–296; Domenico Francavilla, *The Roots of Hindu Jurisprudence. Sources of Dharma and Interpretation in Mīmāṃsā and Dharmaśāstra*, ed. Oscar Botto, Torino: Corpus Iuris Sanscritorum et Fontes Iuris Asiae Meridianae et Centralis—A Series on Social and Religious Law, vol. 7, 2006, pp. 161–162; and Yoshimizu, 'Kumārila and Medhātithi', p. 648.

24 TV: *atra sad-ācārān udāhṛtya tri-varga-siddhy-arthaṃ vicāryate.* The expression *tri-varga* used does not necessarily mean that Kumārila would not consider *mokṣa* as another aim of human life. He mentioned precisely *mokṣa* beside *dharma* in an earlier portion of the TV ad MS 1.3.2, as well as all four *puruṣârtha*s in the TV ad MS 1.2.7. But, indeed, he did not seem to find this idea required yet from the Mīmāṃsā perspective. Cf. also his commentary on the initial portion of MS, *Ślokavārttika* 5(*saṃbandhâkṣepa-parihāra*).

25 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *tad-viparīta-saṃkīrṇa-vyavahāriṣu śiṣṭeṣv apy apathya-kāri-vaidyâtura-vad avisrambhaṇīya-caritatvāt saṃbhāvyamāna-veda-mūlatvāc ca dharma-saṃśayaṃ darśayitvā.*

ings of the Veda. In this light, any acts controversial in dharmic terms should be considered *adharma*. Human practices and customs are then dependent on the Veda in their dharmic value. This introduction sets the starting point of the analysis: the word *sad-ācāra*, interpreted as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, has two components—'customs, practices' (*ācāra*s) on the one hand, and *sat* (*sant*) understood as *śiṣṭa*, 'educated; a moral authority' on the other. And the *pūrva-pakṣa* will criticize the two compound members separately, recalling the two earliest *dharmasūtra*s.[26]

2.1. The *Prima Facie* View (*pūrva-pakṣa*)

Reliance on *sad-ācāra*s as the source of *dharma* is high-risk 'because', as the *prima facie* view observes, 'one can see (cases of) violation of *dharma* among practices of good men, as well as (excesses of) recklessness of such great [figures], beginning with Prajāpati, Indra, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Yudhiṣṭhira, Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana, Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vāsudeva and Arjuna, as also of many [men] of today'.[27] Kumārila thus recalls in this statement earlier *dharma* masters. Already the *Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* (II.13.7–9) states that '7. Transgression [*vyatikramaḥ*] of the Law [*dharma*] and violence [*sāhasaṃ*] are seen among people of ancient times. 8. They incurred no sin on account of their extraordinary power [*tejo-viśeṣeṇa*]. 9. A man of later times who, observing what they did, does the same, perishes'.[28] While the *Gautama-dharmasūtra* (I.3) teaches: 'Transgression of the Law and violence are seen in great men. They do not constitute precedents, however, on account of the weakness of the men of later times'.[29] And Kumārila's *pūrva-pakṣa* speaker will take the description 'great' (*mahat* of the GDhS) and 'of ancient times' (*pūrva* of the ADhS) quite literally,

26 Cf. Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, vol. 3, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973, p. 845.

27 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *sad-ācāreṣu hi dṛṣṭo dharma-vyatikramaḥ, sāhasaṃ ca mahatāṃ prajāpatîndra-vasiṣṭha-viśvāmitra-yudhiṣṭhira-kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana-bhīṣma-dhṛtarāṣṭra-vāsudevârjuna-prabhṛtīnāṃ bahūnām adyatānāṃ ca.*

28 Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, pp. 92, 93 (*dṛṣṭo dharma-vyatikramaḥ sāhasaṃ ca pūrveṣām* /7/ *teṣāṃ tejo-viśeṣeṇa pratyavāyo na vidyate* /8/ *tad-anvīkṣya prayuñjānaḥ sīdaty avaraḥ* /9/).

29 Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, pp. 120–121 (*dṛṣṭo dharma-vyatikramaḥ sāhasaṃ ca mahatāṃ na tu dṛṣṭârthe 'vara-daurbalyāt* /3/).

coming up with the following list of various timeless and great figures who happened to act in a way, at least apparently, adharmic[30]:

1) 'First, Prajāpati violated *dharma*, because he performed *adharma* in the form of approaching (sexually someone who was) unapproachable, as it is said: "Prajāpati came to his daughter Uṣas"'.[31]
2) 'The violation of dharma by Indra, too, (is known, which took form in his approaching (sexually) Ahalyā, the lawful wife of Gautama)',[32]
3) 'as well as the violation of *dharma* by Nahuṣa—while taking his (i.e. Indra's) position—because of his assault on the other's wife'.[33]
4) 'Similarly, (there is the case of) Vasiṣṭha's recklessness, who, pained with grief [on the death of his hundred] sons, (attempted) to abandon his life by entering water'.[34]
5) 'And Viśvāmitra helped a Caṇḍala (Triśaṅku) to perform a sacrifice'.[35]
6) '(There is also) Purūravas' deed, (who,)
7) like Vasiṣṭha, (thought of taking his life, when Urvaśī left him)'.[36]
8) '(Also) the fault of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana—who was under the vow of perpetual celibacy—of begetting the issue with the wives of (his younger brother) Vicitravīrya'.[37]

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30 For the list of all the episodes, with possible literary sources, see Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 3, pp. 845–848.

31 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *prajāpates tāvat 'prajāpatir uṣasam abhyait svāṃ duhitaram' ity agamyâgamana-rūpād adharmâcaraṇād dharma-vyatikramaḥ*. Cf. *Aitareya-brāhmaṇa* (TITUS) 1.33.1: *Prajāpatir vai svāṃ duhitaram abhyadhyāyad, divam ity anya āhur Uṣasam ity*. On the quotations from the *Aitareya-brāhmaṇa* already in the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, see D.V. Garge, *Citations in Śabara-bhāṣya (A Study)*, Deccan College Dissertation Series, Poona: Deccan College, 1952, p. 124.

32 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *indrasyâpi* [*gautama-dharma-patny-ahalyâgamana-rūpo dharma-vyatikramo bodhyaḥ*]* [*An editorial insertion (?) in the edition of *Śrīmajjaimini-praṇītaṃ Mīmāṃsādarśanam* as reported by SARIT, absent in the sources examined by Harikai.]

33 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *tat-padasthasya ca nahuṣasya para-dārâbhiyogād dharma-vyatikramaḥ.*

34 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *tathā vasiṣṭhasya putra-śokârtasya jala-praveśâtma-tyāga-sāhasam.*

35 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *viśvāmitrasya ca cāṇḍāla-yājanam.*

36 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *vasiṣṭha-vat purūravasaḥ prayogaḥ.*

37 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyanasya gṛhita-naiṣṭhika-brahma-caryasya vicitravīrya-dāreṣv apatyôtpādana-prasaṅgaḥ.*

9) ‘And Bhīṣma’s (case of) living contrary to all *āśrama* and *dharma* (rules). And though he did not have a wife, he performed sacrifices, like Rāma’.[38]
10) ‘Similarly, blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sacrificing by means of the wealth amassed by his brother Pāṇḍu is (an instance of) acting without entitlement (neither to perform sacrifices nor to take his brother’s means)’.[39]
11) ‘It is the same with Yudhiṣṭhira’s marriage with the girl (that had been) won by his (younger) brother (Arjuna), and telling a lie with the motive of causing the death of a *brāhmaṇa*—(his own) teacher’.[40]
12) ‘(Also) the marriages of Vāsudeva and Arjuna with their (maternal) uncles’ daughters (which is prohibited), Rukmiṇī and Subhadrā (respectively). Both [men also are said to] have continued drinking alcohol until vomiting, as it is said: “I have seen both of them, Keśava and Arjuna, vomiting wine”’.[41]

This choice of figures suspicious morally at some point in their lives or activities is quite striking. These are all rather divine personalities, either straightforward gods or powerful seers, or heroic epic characters of (semi-)divine origins, qualified by the adjective *mahat*. These are not normal, ordinary people respected for their education and moral integrity—as one would expect in a discussion on *sadācāra*—who might have made some moral misstep. These are characters from textual *śruti* and *smṛti* sources, elements of the two first *dharma-mūla*s, belonging to the realm of Vedic speech or to its subordinate and dependent *smṛti* category compositions. The latter, according to Kumārila, include also *itihāsa* and *purāṇa*s, i.e. the (*Mahā*)*bhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, too. The role of narratives in those sources is, among others, to inspire and guide, by praising (*stuti*) or reproaching, deprecating (*nindā*) narrated actions, situations or characters, helping in this indirect way to encourage dharmic activities.[42]

38 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *bhīṣmasya ca sarvâśrama-dharma-vyatirekeṇâvasthānam / apatnīkasya ca rāma-vat kratu-prayogaḥ*.

39 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124): *tathândhasya dhṛtarāṣṭrasyêjyā pāṇḍv-arjitair dhanair ity anadhikṛta-kriyā.*

40 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 124–125): *tathā yudhiṣṭhirasya kanīyo ’rjita-bhrātṛ-jāyā-pariṇayanam ācārya-brāhmaṇa-vadhârtham anṛta-bhāṣaṇaṃ ca.*

41 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 125): *vāsudevârjunayoḥ pratiṣiddha-mātula-duhitṛ-rukmiṇī-subhadrā-pariṇayanam, ubhau ‘madhv-āsava-kṣībav’ iti surā-pānâcaraṇam.* Cf. MBh 5.058.5: *ubhau madhv-āsava-kṣībāv ubhau candana-rūṣitau / ekaparyaṅka-śayanau dṛṣṭau me keśavârjunau*.

42 See TV ad MS 1.2.7; as well as ŚV 5(*sambandhâkṣepa-parihāra*)64–65.

Thus, the warnings from the old *dharmasūtra* teachers against any blind following in the footsteps of great men are tested and used by Kumārila in his examination of the role of narrative, non-injunctional illustrations. But it does not mean that Kumārila limits his investigations of *sad-ācāra* to *śruti* and *smṛti* examples only. Immediately after this passage, still in the *pūrva-pakṣa*, under the same MS 1.3.7, he discusses various contemporaneous practices and ways of living, thus focusing on the second component of the compound *sad-ācāra*. Here is the difference—*śruti* and *smṛti* are not considered by him as some historical sources of information on how people once lived; *śruti* and *smṛti* are ahistorical in the perspective of Mīmāṃsā. However, the world around Kumārila was a source of information in his time, and as such could be discussed. There is a longer review of various (especially morally controversial) regional practices and customs (*ācāra*s) in the text, with a fascinating analysis of the fourth *dharma-mūla*, i.e. *ātmanas tuṣṭir* or *ātmanaḥ priyam*, but at some point Kumārila returns to our controversial illustrations and presents his *siddhânta*.

2.2. The Refutation—*siddhânta*

In the beginning of his *siddhânta*, Kumārila offers a general definition of dharmic acts, contrasting them with two other spheres of *tri-varga*: these are such actions and practices that are performed or pursued by good people (*sādhu*) not because of their bodily needs (*śarīra-sthiti*) or pleasures (*sukha*), nor for material gain (*artha*), but for the reason that such acts or practices are considered and are performed as *dharma* by the educated (*śiṣṭa*). These are actions and practices enjoined by the Veda (*vaidika*), such as offerings, recitations, sacrifices, oblations to forefathers and deities, religious practices and observations, etc. etc., all based directly or indirectly on the Veda (*śāstra*).[43] In this light, we should contemplate Kumārila's explanations on the above list of possibly adharmic misdemeanours.

By way of introduction and announcement of his return to the enumerated excesses, Kumārila reminds us, firstly, that the point of the critique of *sad-ācāra* was the difficulty of relying on any person's, even great and of ancient times, propensity to act in matters of *dharma* always and exclusively according to

43 TV ad 1.3.7 (p. 126): *dṛṣṭa-kāraṇa-hīnāni yāni karmāṇi sādhubhiḥ / prayuktāni pratīyeran dharmatvenêha tāny api. śarīra-sthitaye yāni sukhârthaṃ vā prayuñjate / arthârthaṃ vā na teṣv asti śiṣṭānām eva dharma-dhīḥ. dharmatvena prapannāni śiṣṭair yāni tu kānicit / vaidikaiḥ partṛ-sāmānyāt teṣāṃ dharmatvam iṣyate / pradānāni japo homo mātṛ-yajñâdayas tathā (...) na śāstrād ṛte kiṃcid asti.*

dharma rules, and he implies, secondly, that (in)correct interpretation of various narrative portions in the *śruti* and *smṛti* sources was also relevant to the question. He observes:

> But as for (the objection in the case of) Prajāpati that he 'approached (sexually) his own daughter Uṣas', (or that) 'Indra was the paramour/destroyer of Ahalyā Maitreyī'—because of these and others illustrations, as well as illustrations from *itihāsa*, for those who perceive transgressions of *dharma* in the practices of the good, the authoritativeness of the practices of the good (as *dharma-mūla*) is difficult to apprehend.[44]

> To the above-mentioned this is replied: There will be no wrong here, either [a] because of the similarity only to *śruti* (teaching *dharma*, while the real purport is different), or [b] because human beings (only) are prohibited (to commit such things), or [c] (because it was redeemed) by force of the power of austerities, or [d] it (can and) will be explained in such a way that there would be no contradiction (with *dharma*).[45]

These four paths of explication from the perspective of textual hermeneutics are used by Kumārila in the case analysis below, but they do not cover all the cases. Some of the narrative incidents, often caused by strong emotions [e], are judged straightforwardly as adharmic; some other were reported by their own narration sources as acts punishable and punished, which Kumārila recalls. The two latter groups are, indeed, *dharma-viruddha*, violating the dharmic rules. Yet, the others are explained away with reference to the above vindication schema:

> Ad 1) 'Firstly, Prajāpati is called Āditya (the Sun), because he is appointed to protect the creation (*prajā-pālanâdhikāra*). And, [as the Sun] rising at the time of the break of day, at dawn, he approaches Uṣas (Dawn). She is born precisely because of his arrival, thus she is designated his daughter; and because of his shooting at her with his seeds, called red rays, there is a metaphorical expression (*upacāra*) here of a union of a man and a woman'.[46]

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44 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 129): *yat tu prajāpatir uṣasam abhyait svāṃ duhitaram iti ahalyāyāṃ maitreyyām indro jāra āsīd ity evam-ādi-darśanād itihāsa-darśanāc ca śiṣṭâcāreṣu dharmâtikramaṃ paśyadbhiḥ śiṣṭâcāra-prāmānyaṃ dur-adhyavasānam iti*.

45 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 129): *tatrôcyate—śruti-sāmānya-mātrād vā na doṣo 'tra bhaviṣyati / manuṣya-pratiṣedhād vā tejo-bala-vaśena vā // yathā vā na viruddhatvaṃ tathā tad gamayiṣyati*. See also Davis, Jr., 'On *Ātma-tuṣṭi*', p. 289.

46 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 129): *prajāpatis tāvat prajā-pālanâdhikārād āditya evôcyate / sa câruṇôdaya-velāyām uṣasam udyann abhyaita, sā tad-āgamanād evôpajāyata iti tad-duhitṛtvena vyapadiśyate. tasyāṃ câruṇa-kiraṇâkhya-bīja-nikṣepāt strī-puruṣa-yoga-vad upacāraḥ.*

Ad 2) ‘In the same way, the One of the United Energy (*samasta-tejāḥ*) who is called by the word “Indra”, being the cause of the ultimate sovereignty (*para-maiśvarya-nimitta*), the very Sun (Savitṛ), destroys (*jīryati*) [the night]—because he is the reason of the decomposition in the form of disappearance of the night (*rātri*) being called by the name “Ahalyā”, for at day she is dissolved (*ahani līyamānatayā*) (by the Sun); thus the very Āditya, i.e. by whom exactly risen [all this happens], is called “the consumer of Ahalyā” (*ahalyā-jāra*); not, however, because of any deviation (of his from *dharma*) with someone else’s wife (*para-strī-vyabhicāra*)’.[47]

Ad 3) ‘Nahuṣa, on the other hand, indeed, on account of his desiring of another’s (i.e. Indra’s) wife, immediately afterwards suffered [the punishment of being turned into] a large black snake (*kālâjagara*), with his own immoral behaviour well known. And it is well known how Śacī gained her power obtained by separation from her husband, born of the excellence of merit caused by her devotion to him’.[48]

Ad 4) ‘The action (i.e. a suicide attempt) of Vasiṣṭha, too, which [he committed] under confusion in his grief for sons (*putra-śoka-vyamoha-ceṣṭita*), because it (i.e. the action) also had other causes, [it does not give rise to any] confusion on the subject of *dharma* at all’.[49] ‘For only those practices of the good which are performed with the understanding of moral merit would fall into the [category] of *dharma* ideal. While such actions which are perceived as caused by desire, anger, avarice, confusion, grief, etc., will turn into a contradiction of that which is enjoined’.[50]

Ad 5) ‘Thus, also that action of Viśvamitra, who mounted the power acquired by austerities, which, too, was proceeded by passion and hatred, does wear off, [as he], following the principle that might is right, performed great austerities, by which [his faults] were brought to destruction, or his sins purified some other time by way of penances. For [those] of a feeble (ascetic) heat (*tapas*), it

47 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 129): *evaṃ samasta-tejāḥ paramaiśvarya-nimittêndra-śabda-vācyaḥ / savitaîvâhani līyamānatayā rātrer ahalyā-śabda-vācyāyāḥ kṣayâtmaka-jaraṇa-hetutvāj jīryaty asmād anenaîvôditenêty āditya evâhalyājāra ity ucyate / na tu para-strī-vyabhicārāt.*

48 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (pp. 129–130): *nahuṣeṇa punaḥ para-strī-prārthana-nimittânantara-kālâjagaratva-prāptyaivâtmano durâcāratvaṃ prakhyāpitam / śacyāś ca pati-bhakti-nimitta-puṇyâtiśaya-janita-tan-nirākaraṇâvāpta-prabhāva-lābhaḥ khyāta eva.*

49 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *vasiṣṭhasyâpi yat putra-śoka-vyāmoha-ceṣṭitam / tasyâpy anya-nimittatvān naîva dharmatva-saṃśayaḥ.*

50 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *yo hi sad-ācāraḥ puṇya-buddhyā kriyate, sa dharmâdarśatvaṃ pratipadyeta / yas tu kāma-krodha-lobha-moha-śokâdi-hetutvenôpalabhyate, sa yathā-vidhi-pratiṣedhaṃ vartiṣyate.*

would lead to the loss of their life (*ātman*), like eating of the leaves etc. of a great banyan (would be fatal) to elephants'.[51]

Ad 6) and 7) Purūravas' case, just like Vasiṣṭha's suicide attempts, did not seem to Kumārila to require additional explanation.

Ad 8) 'Neither Dvaipāyana did anything wrong (*atiduṣkaram*), (when) he begot sons with the wife of his (half-)brother, from his mother's side—following the precept (*āgamān*) that "on one's guru command a widow may wish to have children with [husband's] younger brother, urged by guru; (however, she) should not pass beyond the time for procreation (*ṛtu*)"[52]—[especially that it was mitigated] by the power of austerities (he had) performed before and would perform later (*prāk-kṛta-paścāt-kariṣyamāṇa-tapo-balena*). Anyone else, who be able to accomplish such ascetic power, would also do exactly that'.[53]

Ad 9) 'While in the case of Rāma's and Bhīṣma's completion of sacrifices (*yāga-siddhiḥ*): they required wives only for sacrificial purposes of the moment (*vidyamāna-dharma-mātrârtha-dārayor*), on account of (their respective) love (*sneha*; for Sītā in the case of Rāma) and devotion to father (*pitṛ-bhakti*; in the case of Bhīṣma); as well as they evidently had paid their debts to forefathers by having (directly or indirectly) children (*vyavahitâpatya-kṛta-pitr-ānṛnyayor*); [and in the case of Rāma] the producing of the golden (*hiraṇmayī*) [image of] Sītā, with the fear of people's gossip, had the purpose of dispelling [people's] suspicions of his lack of kindness towards abandoned Sītā (*tyakta-sītāgatânṛśaṃsyâbhāvâśaṅkā-nivṛtty-arthaṃ*) (or rather: of his lack of kindness towards Sītā abandoned with the fear of people's gossip, see below, in section 3.)'.[54]

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51 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *tena viśvāmitrasyâpi yad rāga-dveṣa-pūrvakam api tapo-balârūḍhasya caritam, tat sarvaṃ balavataḥ pathyam ity anena nyāyena mahānti ca tapāṃsi kṛtvā tāni kṣayaṃ nayata uttara-kālaṃ vā pāpa-viśuddhiṃ prāyaś-cittaiḥ pratikurvāṇasya jīryaty api / manda-tapasāṃ tu gajair iva mahā-vaṭakâśṭhâdi-bhakṣaṇam ātma-vināśāyaîva syāt.*

52 Cf. *Gautama-dharmasūtra* 18.4–5 (Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras*, pp. 166–167): *apatir apatya-lipsur devarāt* (4). *Guru-prasūtā nartum atīyāt* (5); 'When her husband is dead, she may seek to obtain offspring through her husband's brother after she has been appointed to the task by the elders. She should not have sex with him outside her season'.

53 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *dvaipāyanasyâpi, 'guru-niyogād apatir apatya-lipsur devarād guru-preritād ṛtum atīyāt' ity-evam-āgamān mātṛ-saṃbandhād bhrātṛ-jāyā-putra-jananaṃ prāk-kṛta-paścāt kariṣyamāṇa-tapo-balena nâtiduṣkaram / anyo 'pi yas tādṛk-tapo-balo nirvahet sa kuryād eva.*

54 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *rāma-bhīṣmayos tu sneha-pitṛ-bhakti-vaśād vidyamāna-dharma-mātrârtha-dārayor eva sākṣād vyavahitâpatya-kṛta-pitr-ānṛṇyayor yāga-sidhiḥ / hiraṇmayī-sītā-karaṇaṃ lokâpavāda-bhityā tyakta-sītā-gatânṛśaṃsyâbhāvâśaṅkā-nivṛtty-artham.*

‘And Bhīṣma—(in view of the principle:) “If among several brothers born to the same father one gets a son, Manu has declared that through that son they all become men who have sons’[55]—freed in this way from debts to his forefathers by sons born by the wives (*kṣetraja*) of Vicitravīrya, might have entered a marriage relationship for the purpose of a sacrifice only—thus it might also be explained by way of presumption (*arthâpatti*)—(as it is) unheard of [him normally that he be able to act in any way immoral]’.[56] ‘Or, how could he alone (i.e., without wife) perform a sacrifice, although did not put down a rice-ball even on the hand he knew to be his father’s for fear of transgressing a scripture (*śāstra*)’.[57]

Ad 10) ‘Dhṛtarāṣṭra, too, did also see at the time of the ritual, just like (he) saw his sons through the favour of Vyāsa (as presented) in the *Āścarya-parvan*[58]. As *śrūti* (the Veda) states: seers are capable of cursing and offering favours. Thus, just like he (Dhṛtarāṣṭra) is known to be born blind because of such [a *ṛṣi*’s] saying, the same way it should be easily understood by presumption (*arthâpatti*) that he could see for so long time (of a sacrifice), because it is stated that he performed a sacrifice.
Or else, that sacrifice should be (understood) in the sense of offerings, gifts (*dāna*) only, as in: ‘sacrificing [is used in the sense of] worshiping gods, connecting [with a result], offering’[59]. And *śruti* (the Vedas) teaches that offerings, the practice of austerities, etc., have also the same results as rituals. For this reason, (the mention of) the performance of rituals (by Dhṛtarāṣṭra might be meant) figuratively’.[60]

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55 Olivelle, *Manu’s Code*, p. 199, MDhŚ 9.182 (p. 780: *bhrāṭṝṇām ekajātānām ekaś cet putravān bhavet / sarvāṃs tāṃs tena putreṇa putriṇo manur abravīt*).

56 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 130): *bhīṣmaś ca—bhrātṝṇām eka-jātānām ekaś cet putra-vān bhavet / sarve tenaîva putreṇa putriṇo manur abravīt ity evaṃ vicitravīrya-kṣetraja-putra-labdha-pitr-anṛ̥natvaḥ kevalaṃ yajñârtha-patnī-saṃbandha āsīd ity arthâpattyânuktam api gamyate.*

57 Translation by Yoshimizu, ‘Kumārila and Medhātithi’, p. 648. *yo vā piṇḍaṃ pituḥ pāṇau vijñāte ’pi na datta-vān / śāstrârthâtikramād bhīto yajetaîkāky asau katham*.

58 Cf. Bühler, Kirste, *Indian Studies. No. 2*, p. 20.

59 *Dhātupāṭha*, *bhvādayaḥ* 1002; cf. *Dhātupāṭha of Pāṇini with the Dhātvartha Prakāśikā Notes by Kanakalāl Śarmā*, The Haridas Sanskrit Series 281, Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1969, p. 27.

60 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (pp. 130–131): *dhṛtarāṣṭro ’pi yad vyasânugrahād āścarya-parvaṇi putra-darśana-vat kratu-kāle ’pi dṛṣṭavān eva / śāpânugraha-samarthā hi maha-ṛṣayaḥ śrūyante / tad yathaîva tad-vacanād asāv andho jāto vijñāyate tathā yajñânuṣṭhāna-vacanāt tāvati kāle dṛṣṭavân ity arthâpattyā su-jñānam.*
yadvā ‘yaja-deva-pūjā-saṃgati-karaṇa-dāneṣu’ iti dānârtha evâyaṃ yajatir bhaviṣyati / kratu-phala-samāni ca dāna-tapaś-caraṇâdīny api śrūyante / tat-kāraṇāt kratu-kriyôpacāraḥ.

Ad 11) 'And as for the mentioned violation [of the principle] of a wife of only one [man] by the sons of Pāṇḍu, this also was presented as possible to be explained away, like in the case of Dvaipāyana. For the Dark One (Kṛṣṇā) arose from the middle of an altar in her (full) youth. And she was Śrī; and Śrī does not [become] tainted by being enjoyed by many'.[61]

'Hence, exactly, it was said: "And this great wonder the seer declared.

A wonder surpassing the power of man.
That the beautiful bride of majestic might
Each day became a virgin again"'.[62]

'For such things do not happen among ordinary women. Therefore, it was said that [she was] beyond humans. That is precisely why Vāsudeva said to Karṇa: "and on the sixth day Draupadī will approach you". Because otherwise how (someone being) the embodiment of authority (i.e. Vāsudeva) could talk in this way'.[63]

'Or, one could explain, by [the use of] presumption (*arthâpatti*), (on account of their normal) behaviour, that a number (of 5) of these same-looking Draupadīs figuratively [were spoken about] as one. Or else, the woman shall belong, indeed, to Arjuna only; while the reputation of her being shared (by all five brothers) was spread with the aim of (showing their) closeness'.[64]

'Just as Draupadī, dragged into the centre of the (royal) assembly on the instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira, immediately assumed an appearance of a menstruating woman to cause the disgrace of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, having many sons, and to gain recognition herself, the very same way she (could) show by the information about (their) sharing (one wife) both (1) that unknowingly by people, she was Śrī only, being the wife solely of Arjuna, and (2) that the mutual certainty of the close union (among *Pāṇḍava*s) had the aim to [leave] no room for any attempt of division (among them)—because of the easy avoidance with such and other (reasoning) options and because it was said that (any) behaviour

61 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *yā côktā pāṇḍu-putrāṇām eka-patnī-viruddhatā / sāpi dvaipāyanenaîva vyutpādya pratipāditā // yauvana-sthaîva kṛṣṇā hi vedi-madhyāt samutthitā / sā ca śrīḥ śrīś ca bhūyobhir bhujyamānā na duṣyati.*

62 J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata. Book 1: The Book of the Beginning*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 376.
TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *ata eva coktam—idaṃ ca tatrâdbhuta-rūpam uttamaṃ jagāda vipra-ṛṣir atīta-mānuṣam / mahânubhāvā kila sā su-madhyamā babhūva kanyaîva gate gate 'hani—iti.* MBh 1.198.14; cf. Bühler, Kirste, *Indian Studies. No. 3*, p. 13.

63 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *na hi mānuṣīṣv evam upapadyate / tenâtīta-mānuṣam ity uktam / ata eva vāsudevena karṇa uktaḥ 'ṣaṣṭhe ca tvām ahani draupadī paryupasthāsyati' iti. itarathā hi kathaṃ pramāṇa-bhūtaḥ sann evaṃ vadet.* Cf. MBh 5.138.15 *rājanyā raja-kanyāś câpy ānayantv abhiṣecanam / ṣaṣṭhe ca tvāṃ tathā kāle draupady upagamiṣyati*.

64 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *athavā bahvya eva tāḥ sadṛśa-rūpā draupadya ekatvenôpacaritā iti vyavahārârthâpattyā gamyate / yadvā bhāryārjunasyaîva kevalasya bhaviṣyati / sādhāraṇya-prasiddhis tu niśchidratvāya darśitā.*

caused by passion (or) avarice is not perceived as dharmic by the very experts, there is nothing wrong here'.[65]
'Likewise, in the case [of Yudhiṣṭhira] telling lies, (which) was an element in [the plot] to kill Droṇa, it is said that 'some [recommend] penances also in reference to [wrongdoings] committed purposefully (*kāma-kṛte*)', and thus, in the end, the *aśvamedha* (sacrifice) was, indeed, done as a penance (by Yudhiṣṭhira). That (act of telling lies) is not admitted as [an example] of the practices of the good'.[66]

Ad 12) 'While the [example] brought forward [of acting] contrary to the *smṛti* [regulations in the form of] drinking wine and marrying daughters of their (respective) maternal uncles by Vāsudeva and Arjuna, here the prohibition for the members of three (higher) *varṇa*s concerns only (alcohol known as) *surā* [which is produced] by transformation of food'.[67]
'Liquor is clearly the filth of various grains; sin is also called filth. Therefore, Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas must not drink liquor'.[68]
'But *madhu* and *sīdhu* are not prohibited for *kṣatriya*s and *vaiśya*s, because the subject (of the prohibition) is a *brāhmaṇa* only, as it is said: "intoxication (drinks) are always (prohibited) for a *brāhmaṇa*"'.[69]
'Thus, that they both get drunk till vomiting wine is not at variance (with the rules)'.[70]

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65 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *yathā yudhiṣṭhirôpadeśāt sabhā-madhyam ānīyamānā sahasaîva rajas-valā-veṣaṃ su-putrakasya dhṛtarāṣṭrasyâyaśa utpādayitum ātmānaṃ prakhyāpayituṃ draupadī kṛtavatī tathaîva kevalârjuna-bhāryāyā eva satyāḥ śrītvaṃ ca janenâviditaṃ paras-para-saṃghātâviśayaṃ ca bheda-prayogânavakāśârthaṃ darśayitum sādhāraṇya-prakhyāpanam-ity-evam-ādi-vikalpaiḥ su-pariharatvād raga-lobha-kṛta-vavahārasya ca śiṣṭair eva dharmatvenāparigrahasyôktatvād anupālambhaḥ.*

66 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *tathā ca droṇa-vadhâṅga-bhūtânṛta-vāda-prāyaś-cittaṃ kāma-kṛte 'py eka ity evam ante 'py aśvamedhaḥ prāyaś-cittatvena kṛta evêti / na tasya sad-ācāratvâbhyupagamaḥ.*

67 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 131): *yat tu vāsudevârjunayor madya-pāna-mātula-duhitṛ-pariṇayanaṃ smṛti-viruddham upanyastaṃ tatrânna-vikāra-surā-mātrasya trai-varṇikānāṃ pratiṣedhaḥ.*

68 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 132), MDhŚ 11.94–95: *surā vai malam annānāṃ pāpmā ca malam ucyate / tasmād brāhmaṇa-rājanyau vaiśyaś ca na surāṃ pibet* [*gauḍī paiṣṭī ca mādhvī ca vijñeyā trividhā surā / yathaîvaîkā tathā sarvā na pātavyā dvijôttamaiḥ*]. Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 219 (11.94–95): '(94) Liquor is clearly the filth of various grains; sin is also called filth. Therefore, Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas must not drink liquor. [(95) It should be understood that there are three kinds of liquor: one made of molasses, another from ground grain, and a third from honey. Just as drinking one of them is forbidden to Brahmins, so are all.]'.

69 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 132): *madhu-sīdhvos tu kṣatriya-vaiśyayor naîva pratiṣedhaḥ kevala-brāhmaṇa-viṣayatvāt / 'madyaṃ nityaṃ brāhmaṇasya' iti vacanāt.*

70 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 132): *tenôbhau madhvâsava-kṣībāv ity avirudham.*

> ‘While, as for their marriages with daughters (of their respective) maternal uncles—that is not [the case of action] contrary (to *dharma*), because of such a linguistic custom (to call someone one’s) brother, etc., even when there is a separation in terms of connection to mother’s sister’s daughter. Even though Subhadrā is called “Vāsudeva’s sister”, on account of the fact that, as born, Baladeva and Vāsudeva, as well as Ekānaṃśā (are) enumerated as blood-related (siblings), Subhadrā [is either] [his] mother’s sister’s daughter (*svasrīya*) or his mother’s father’s sister’s daughter’s daughter—because such marriage is permitted’.[71]

> ‘And Kaunteya (Arjuna) would have violated [*dharma*], (had he married a woman) born of Vāsudeva; but there is no violation of it (*dharma*) in the case (she was) born as a once removed relation’.[72]
> ‘For as it was said somewhere else:
> “Humans everywhere would follow in my wake, Partha”.[73]
> “Whatever the superior man does, so do the rest;
> Whatever standard he sets, the world follows it”’.[74]
> ‘How could he (Vāsudeva) being the embodied ideal for the whole world display a (morally) repugnant behaviour? This way (Kṛṣṇa’s) marriage to Rukmiṇī is also explained’.[75]

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71 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 132): *yat tu mātula-duhitṛ-pariṇayanaṃ tayos tan-mātṛ-svasrîyâdi-sambandha-vyavadhāne ’pi bhrātrâdi-vyavahārād aviruddham / yady api vāsudeva-svasêti subhadrā khyātā, tathâpy utpattau baladeva-vāsudevayor ekânaṃśāyāś ca nijatvânvākhyānān mātṛ-svasrīyā vā subhadrā tasya mātṛ-pitṛ-svasrīyā duhitā vêti pariṇayanâbhyanujñānād vijñāyate.* Cf. Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, vol. 2, pt. 1, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941, pp. 459–460: ‘she was Vāsudeva’s mother’s sister’s daughter or was the daughter’s daughter of the sister of the father of Vāsudeva’s mother’; cf. also Kane, *The Vyavahāramayūkha*, pp. 200–201.

72 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 132): *vāsudevâṅga-jātā ca kaunteyasya virudhyate / na tu vyaveta-sambandha-prabhave tad-viruddhatā.*

73 W.J. Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita. A new translation by…*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 16: *Bhagavadgīta* 3.23cd; MBh 6.25.23: *mama vartmânuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ.*

74 Johnson, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 16: BhG 3.21, MBh 6.25.21: *yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evêtaro janaḥ / sa yat pramāṇaṃ kurute lokas tad anuvartate*.
TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 133): *yena hy anyatraîvam uktam—mama vartmânuvarteran manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ / yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evêtaro janaḥ // sa yat pramāṇaṃ kurute lokas tad anuvartate // iti*.

75 TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 133): *sa kathaṃ sarva-lokâdarśa-bhūtaḥ san viruddhâcāraṃ pravartayiṣyati / etena rukmiṇī-pariṇayanaṃ vyākhyātam.*

2.3. Apologetical Vindication

At the outset, Kumārila introduced four possible solutions to the objections voiced in the *pūrva-pakṣa* (see the introduction in II.2 The refutation). The cases of Prajāpati and Indra come under the first one [a]: the phrases quoted should not be read literally (*śruti*), they need to be understood figuratively (*upacāra*). The case of Draupadī could be put into the second category [b]—she is not an ordinary woman; she is beyond humans and their rules do not bind her. A similar case is Vāsudeva. The third category [c] gathers all the cases of serious, again almost inhuman austerities—when performed, they can redeem any moral fault or adharmic behaviour. This indeed they do, as the characters recalled are perceived as guilty of moral missteps, remedied by ascetical mortifications. The most general is the fourth group [d]—situations which can be explained away with the proper application of reasoning and dharmic knowledge, like the case of Rāma or Bhīṣma, for example. The last category [e], set in a very significant ethical treatment, is a reference to 'other causes', other factors involved in someone's given actions (cf. Ad 3). Strong emotions: desire, fear, avarice or grief, cannot be treated, according to Kumārila, nor expected as any motivators for dharmic acts. Their appearance and influence leads the actor out of the *dharma* sphere (see table).

1) *prajāpates …*	[a] *śruti-sāmānya-mātrād* → *upacāra*
2) *indrasyâpi…*	
3) *nahuṣasya*	[e] *anya-nimittatvān*
4) *vasiṣṭhasya …*	[e] *anya-nimittatvān*
5) *viśvāmitrasya…*	[c] *tejo-bala-vaśena*
6) 7) *vasiṣṭha-vat purūravasaḥ …*	[e] *anya-nimittatvān*
8) *kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyanasya …*	[c] *tejo-bala-vaśena* + [d] *na viruddhatvam*
9) *bhīṣmasya … rāma-vat*	[d] *na viruddhatvam*
10) *dhṛtarāṣṭrasya …*	[d] *na viruddhatvam* or [a] *upacāra*
11) *yudhiṣṭhirasya …*	[b] *manuṣya-pratiṣedhād* + [d] *na viruddhatvam* [c] *tejo-bala-vaśena*
12) *vāsudevârjunayoḥ …*	[d] *na viruddhatvam*

Firstly, according to Kumārila, not all or any actions, even of a great man, can be categorized as *dharma*'s domain. Most everyday activities are dharmicly neutral, not enjoined by the Veda or taught in *smṛti*s. Secondly, there is a clear lesson emanating from the examples: desire, anger, grief or confusion do not lead to *dharma*, quite the opposite. Thirdly, in all the incidents explained above, however, the acts in question do belong to the sphere of *dharma* and are then subject to dharmic assessment: being either explainable otherwise as ultimately not

adharmic, or considered without a doubt as adharmic, providing an example of how human beings should not act, especially since they are not great figures of immeasurable power. Kumārila quotes the reservation of the *Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* towards contemporary people as contrasted with those 'of ancient times' who were able to follow *dharma* with impunity thanks to their 'extraordinary power' (*tejo-viśeṣeṇa*) of ascetic or otherwise atonement.

On the other hand, the narrative examples are of great (*mahat*) figures, mighty characters—by definition their actions cannot be seen, superficially even, as adharmic: different norms ruled their actions, they had greater, superhuman powers and could afford to act in ways morally hazardous. But proper textual analysis of their stories and all the components of their characters can and should demonstrate the true dharmic dimension of their actions. This is a clever way of reversing the argument under discussion whether great heroes and epic characters should be followed and imitated, in view of their occasional dharmic mistakes. Here it is claimed that it is precisely because of their greatness and moral integrity that nobody could possibly presume that they would be able to do anything morally wrong. Thus, one has to assume by presumption (*arthāpatti*) that they did not, and that behind the story, in its background there are paths towards a coherent, dharmic narration.

Rāma's illustration is rather interesting—Kumārila uses the trope of the golden image of Sītā assisting Rāma in his rituals, but does not feel the need to explain further how it was construed within the context of ritual requirements.[76] The fact that Rāma is included among the examples of dharmic ambiguities—even if not directly, even if only at first as a comparison to Bhīṣma—is also significant. This signals that at least at the time of Kumārila the hero could be perceived as morally controversial, notwithstanding that the problem seemed to be his *yāga* (without Sītā), not *tyāga* (of Sītā), although apparently the latter already started raising doubts in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[77]

76 More on the golden image of Sītā, see: Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 684; Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (tr.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. 7: *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 1123;

77 Cf. Peter Scharf, *Rāmopākhyāna—the Story of Rāma in the Mahābhārata: An Independent-study Reader in Sanskrit*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 10–11.

3. TV commentators—Someśvara

However, some shifting of accents can be observed in one of the earliest known commentators on the TV, by Someśvara (c. 12th century?). Of the two earliest published commentaries, dated more or less to a similar time, the *Ajitā*[78] by Pariṭoṣamiśra does not discuss these stories much, skips a number of culprits, focusing on *Mahābhārata*'s heroes, and Bhīṣma. However, Someśvara, the author of a work called the *Nyāyasudhā* (NS) or *Rāṇaka*[79], being a more generous exponent, provides quite long explanations on Kumārila's arguments. He also approaches the figure of Rāma suitably in two places. First, while relating the *pūrva-pakṣa* objections, and again while recalling and expounding on the refutation position. His is an explanatory form of interpretation, analysing the syntax and often offering commentarial remarks on single words and phrases.

3.1. Ad *pūrva-pakṣa*

> And in the case of Bhīṣma's non(-following of the) *āśrama* (order), who had no wife (this is to be said:) the very Bhīṣma, the leader of the Kuru family, by whom, summoning three hundred horse-sacrifices, rituals were performed, committed two transgressions of *dharma*. By words 'like Rāma' etc., it is pointed out that he (Rāma) also, because of the performance of rituals, (while) being single in result of his abandonment of his wife, violated *dharma*.[80]

While relating the *pūrva-pakṣa*'s objection, Someśvara does not add anything, but, indeed, points out that Bhīṣma's transgressions were greater. Rāma apparently could violate his *dharma* with only one action. The comparison link includes Rāma among the great who might have committed a moral mistake.

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78 Kunio Harikai, '*Ajitā*, A Commentary on the *Tantravārttika* (5)', *Acta Eruditorum*, no. 6, 1987, p. 15: *atra hetuḥ sītāyāṃ rāmasya sneho bhīṣmasya śantanau pitari bhaktiḥ / bhīṣmaḥ kila* (...).

79 Cf. Verpoorten, *Mīmāṃsā Literature*, p. 38.

80 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (*The Mīmāṃsā Darśana of Maharṣi Jaimini*. With *Śabarabhāṣya* of Śabaramuni with the commentaries of *Tantravārtika* of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and its commentary *Nyāyasudhā* of Someśvara Bhaṭṭa, *Bhāṣyavivaraṇa* of Govindāmṛtamuni and *Bhāvaprakāśikā*, the Hindi translation by Mahāprabhulāla Gosvāmī, vol. 1, ed. Mahāprabhulāla Gosvāmī, Prāchyabhārati Series—16, Varanasi: Tara Book Agency 1984, p. 381): *bhīṣmasyânāśramitvam apatnīkasya ca sa eṣa bhīṣmaḥ kuru-vaṃśa-ketur yenâhutāṃs triśato vāji-medhāḥ kratu-prayoga iti dharma-vyatikrama-dvayam / rāma-vad ity anena tasyâpi patnī-tyāgenaîkākinaḥ kratu-prayogād dharma-vyatikramaḥ sūcitaḥ.*

3.2. Ad the Refutation—*siddhânta*

In his explanation of Kumārila's *siddhânta*, Someśvara has much more to say, in his rather pedantic, commentarial style:

> And how Rāma and Bhīṣma did not violate (*dharma*)—this confutation he (Kumārila) dispels with the words 'Rāma…'. The word 'mātra' (only) is used to refute (the idea that he could do this) with the purpose of a son or sexual pleasure.
> But, if that is the case, [there might be another problem, because:].[81]
>
> The forefathers of someone who does not approach into intimacy with his wife who has bathed (after her) menses would lie during that month in her menstrual blood.[82]
>
> With such doubt (in mind one can claim) that it would be an offence, because of the transgression of what was enjoined; it was said (by Kumārila) that [Bhīṣma and Rāma did what they did] on account of (Rāma's) love (to Sītā) and (Bhīṣma's) devotion to (his) father (respectively).[83]
>
> Because Rāma out of his love for Sītā took a vow to not come to (any) other wife.[84]

81 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386): *rāma-bhīṣmayor yathā vā na viruddhatvam iti parihāraṃ vivṛṇoti rāmêti / rati-putrârthatva-nirāsāya mātra-śabdo nanv evaṃ sati.*

82 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386): *ṛtu-snātāṃ tu yo bhāryāṃ saṃnidhau nôpagacchati / tasyā rajasi taṃ māsaṃ pitaras tasya śerate.* Cf. a similar phrase in another context in the MDhŚ 3.250: *śrāddha-bhug vṛṣalī-talpaṃ tad ahar yo 'dhigacchati / tasyāḥ purīṣe taṃ māsaṃ pitaras tasya śerate.* Olivelle, *Manu's Code*, p. 121: 'If a man who has eaten an ancestral offering gets into bed with a Śūdra woman that day, his ancestors will lie in her feces during that month'.

83 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386): *iti vihitâtikramāt pratyavāyaḥ syād ity āśaṃkya / sneha-pitṛ-bhakti-vaśād ity uktam.*

84 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386): *rāmeṇa sītā-snehād bhāryântarâgamana-vrata-grahaṇāt.*

When Bhīṣma requested Satyavatī from her father for (his own father) Śaṃtanu, her father told (him) thus: 'I do not give her, because her sons would not get the throne, while you, powerful, are here, desiring to rule'. 'I will not rule', he (Bhīṣma) promised. 'Even if you do not want (to rule), out of fear of your offspring, her offspring would not be entitled to have a share in the throne'—thus her father said again.[85] (So Bhīṣma declared:) 'Now here I make my resolve about my progeny. From this day onward, I shall live as a monk'.[86]

Thus, because he took a vow of celibacy (*brahma-carya*) on account of his devotion to his father, and because of the suspension of the obligatory (*nityasya*) (rule) of approaching (a wife) at the time (after) the menses, by the special vow (*naimittikena vratena)* (he announced): 'I will marry a wife with the aim of *dharma* only'—thus having explained [it] away, the intention is that there would be no fault also in (his) not coming to his wedded (wife).[87]

Having a doubt: in this way also there would be an offence, because of his rejection of ancestors by his childlessness—(Kumārila) said: 'they evidently…' etc. Evidently, Rāma did pay his debt to forefathers by his offspring, Kuśa and Lava, while Bhīṣma paid his debt to forefathers by not immediate, Vicitravīrya's offspring, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and others.[88]

But the true nature of Rāma's (taking) another wife with (only) the purpose of *dharma* (is seen, as) at each sacrifice he produced Sītā, his wife, a golden one.

Having a doubt that the production of the golden (image of) Sītā would be meaningless (*anarthaka*), (Kumārila) said: 'the producing of the golden', etc. The meaning is: (the production of the golden image) has the purpose of dispelling (people's) suspicions of (his) lack of that kindness, i.e. non-harshness, (of his) towards her, i.e. for her, who was abandoned with the fear of gossip. She was abandoned only out of fear of the gossip of people that 'Rāma enjoys Sītā defiled by her abduction by Rāvaṇa', not because of Sītā's defilement, not also because of Rāma's harshness towards Sītā—to illustrate this [Kumārila used] (the compound of the type) *sāpekṣa-samāsa* of the word *tyakta* with the

85 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386): *bhīṣmeṇa ca śaṃtanave satyavatīṃ tat-pitaraṃ yācatā / tvayi mahā-bale rājyâbhilāṣuke tiṣṭhaty etarayāḥ putrāṇāṃ rājyâlābhān nêmāṃ dadāmîti tat-pitrā pratyākhyātena / rājyaṃ nâhaṃ kariṣyāmîti pratijñāte / tvayy anicchaty api tvat-saṃtati-bhayān naîtasyāḥ saṃtatī rājya-bhāginī syād iti tat-pitrā punaḥ pratyākhyātena*.

86 Van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata*, p. 226. MBh 1.194.87cd-88ab: *apatya-hetor api ca karomy etad viniścayam / adya prabhṛti me dāśa brahma-caryaṃ bhaviṣyati*.

87 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 386–387): *pitṛ-bhaktyā brahma-carya-vrata-grahaṇān naimittikena ca vratena nityasya rtu-kāla-gamanasya bādhād dharma-mātrârtham ahaṃ bhāryāṃ pariṇeṣyāmîti paribhāṣya pariṇītāyām agamane 'py adoṣa ity āśayaḥ.*

88 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 387): *evam apy anapatyatvena pitṝṇām apākaraṇāt pratyavāyaḥ syād ity āśaṃkya sākṣād ity uktam / sākṣād apatyābhyāṃ kuśalavābhyāṃ kṛta-pitrānṛṇyo rāmo vyavahitair vicitravīryasyâpatyair dhṛtarāṣṭrâdibhiḥ kṛta-pitrānṛṇyo bhīṣmaḥ.*

word ‘Sītā’ to show the fixed (syntactical) reference of the abandonment (of Sītā) to (his) fear of people’s gossip.[89]

3.3. The Focus on *tyāga* Not *yāga*

While commenting on Kumārila’s analysis, Someśvara adds an interesting interpretation of the problem of marrying someone just for ritual purposes, suggesting that it involves another dharmic issue—neglecting marital duties. He does also explicate the need of the trope of the golden Sītā—it seems, according to his interpretation, that the image was more for silencing public doubts about Rāma’s true feelings for Sītā, than for sacrificial purposes. One might also interpret that as Rāma’s public demonstration of his devotion to his wife.

Moreover, Someśvara states rather emphatically that Sītā’s *tyāga* was caused by Rāmā’s worries about public opinion. That such a causal relation was also understood by Kumārila is evident, according to Someśvara, syntactically in the TV as well.

4. Concluding Remarks

All the stories recalled in the TV *pūrva-pakṣa* and then developed in the refutation are assumed to be known. Kumārila sees no need to explain the context and the problems in more detail. Just a short reference, even a name, is enough to render the message, like *Rāma-vat*. Moreover, such individualized references were linked to very specific stories, identified by the context of the referential act (in the case of Rāma by the sacrificial activity requiring a male to be married) as if these episodes were not rooted in a given text, bound to some specific composition, but were more identified with a character, characters.

There would not have been, of course, any footnote with a precise source quoted. The recalled stories are just there, known and remembered, although sometimes Kumārila names his source in more general terms (like *āścarya-parvan*). But even the sporadic actual quotations are often not so precise. This might

89 NS ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 387): *nanu rāmasya dharmârtha-dārântara-sadbhāve yajñe yajñe prakurute sītāṃ patnīṃ hiraṇmayīm iti / hiraṇmayī-sītā-karaṇam anarthakaṃ syād ity āśaṃkyâha hiraṇmayîti / apavāda-bhītyā tyaktā yā tad-gataṃ tad-viṣayaṃ yad āṇṛśaṃsyam anaiṣṭhuryaṃ tad-abhāvâśaṃkā-nivṛtty-artham ity arthaḥ / rāvaṇâpahāra-dūṣitāṃ sītāṃ rāmo bhajata iti lokâpavāda-bhaya-mātreṇâsau tyaktā na sītāyā duṣṭatvān nâpi rāmasya sītāyāṃ naiṣṭhuryād iti dyotayituṃ lokāpavāda-bhītiṃ prati tyāgasya nitya-sāpekṣatva-darśanāya tyakta-śabdasya sītā-śabdena saha sāpekṣa-samāsaḥ kṛtaḥ.*

be caused by referring to some other recensions of a text, of course, but it might also be the result of the nature of a memorized 'reference library': sometimes *artha* (meaning) is remembered, not exactly the wording, as Kumārila himself mentions in an earlier portion of his TV (ad MS 1.3.1). If we try, however, to identify the most probable sources of the morally objectionable episodes, we might say that while such Vedic figures like Prajāpati and Indra come straight from the Vedic literature and ritual (as mantras etc. are quoted), other (possibly not) model characters come mostly from the *Mahābhārata* (at least this was also assumed by Bühler[90]). Therefore, Bhīṣma seems to be more important than Rāma in this light of the discussion, although Rāma presents the comparison link. Bhīṣma is shown as requiring more explanations, also maybe because he is presented as a doubly complicated character in dharmic terms. Moreover, this comparative and illustrative use of the figure of Rāma seems fitting with the tendency of the *Mahābhārata*[91] to refer to and associate Rāma with dharmic matters.

Although the title *Rāmāyaṇa* is never used in the TV, the name Vālmīki appears there together with Dvaipāyana[92] as Kumārila discusses the *Mahābhārata* (which he calls '*Bhārata*') and other texts of the subcategory of *smṛti*s, i.e. *itihāsa*s. In our discussion, Kumārila only generally refers to Rāma's story, recalling the episode of the last *kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, absent in the *Rāmopākhyāna*[93]. Therefore, one might wonder whether perhaps the *Raghuvaṃśa* (RV) was a more direct source of the episode (or at least more immediate in Kumārila's memory), than the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself. Kumārila definitely knew the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*[94], so he might have also been aware of Kālidāsa's retelling of the epic. The reason for such musings is the term he uses for the golden Sītā: *hiraṇmayī*, for the Northern recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa* apparently in all versions uses the term *kāñcanī* in the two places where the text talks about this ritual

90 Cf. Bühler, Kirste, *Indian Studies. No. 2*, pp. 7–21.

91 Cf. John Brockington, Mary Brockington, 'The Development of the Rāmāyaṇa Tradition', in *Development and Spread of the Rāma Narrative (Pre-Modern)*, https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002-45ff-b37e-7effb669768b (as of February 2019), p. 26.

92 See the TV ad 1.2.7 (p. 15).

93 On similarities between the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the Northern recension, see: John Brockington, Mary Brockington, 'Development', p. 23.

94 Quoting from it precisely in the TV ad MS 1.3.7 (p. 128) while discussing the fourth *dharma-mūla*.

situation (R 7.82.19[95] and 7.89.04[96]), while *hiraṇmayī* (*jāyā*, here *Sītā*) appears in the *Raghuvaṃśa* (15.61)[97]. However, some two Telugu manuscripts of the Southern recension record not *kāñcanī* but *hiraṇmayī* at R 7.89.04[98], like in the TV, which fits into the arguments for the geographical location of Kumārila-bhaṭṭa somewhere in Central India[99]. That the *Rāmāyaṇa* could have been Kumārila's direct source finds additional support in his quotation of an example of a poetical figure of speech[100] later made famous[101], the source of which, again, is—at least in some manuscript accounts and according to some commentarial testimonies[102]—the *Rāmāyaṇa*[103].

Though it might not seem very significant from the perspective of the successive ages of the story of Rāma in India and abroad, Kumārila's ethical problematics are limited to the Mīmāṃsā's understanding of *dharma* primarily in a ritual or religious setting. Quite significant in this light is the first choice of Rāma's possible dharmic troubles—just one, really, although the *Rāmāyaṇa* textual tradition itself already noted some discomfort about the abandonment of Sītā[104]. But, as we could see, the matter of *tyāga* (abandonment of Sītā) already resurfaced in the refutation section of the TV. At least one of Kumārila's com-

95 R 7.82.19: *kāñcanīṃ mama patnīṃ ca dīkṣârhāṃ yajña-karmaṇi / agrato bharataḥ kṛtvā gacchatv agre mahā-matiḥ*.

96 R 7.89.4: *na sītāyāḥ parāṃ bhāryāṃ vavre sa raghu-nandanaḥ / yajñe yajñe ca patny-arthaṃ jānakī kāñcanī bhavat*.

97 RV 15.61: *ślāghyas tyāgo 'pi vaidehyāḥ patyuḥ prāg-vaṃśa-vāsinaḥ / ananya-jāneḥ saîvâsīd yasmāj jāyā hiraṇmayī*. See C.R. Devadhar, *Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa*. Ed. with Critical Introduction, English Translation and Notes, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005 (1985), p. 295: 'The abandonment of Sītā was praiseworthy in a husband, who occupied the Prāg-Vaṃśa hall of sacrifice, and who had no other wife, had the golden image of Sītā for wife and no other'. Cf. John Brockington, Mary Brockington, 'The Development', p. 38.

98 See *The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. Critically edited for the first time*, *The Uttarakāṇḍa: the Seventh Book of the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. The National Epic of India*, critically ed. Umakant Premanand Shah, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1975, p. 483.

99 Cf. Yoshimizu, 'Tolerance', pp. 320–322.

100 TV ad MS 1.4.4 (p. 290): *rāma-rāvaṇayor yuddham rāma-rāvaṇoyor iva*.

101 By Vāmana as an example of *ananvaya* (*Kāvyālaṅkāravṛtti* 4.3.14).

102 See the data in the apparatus in the critical edition Shah, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, p. 713.

103 Cf. Hermann Jacobi, *Das Rāmāyaṇa: Geschichte und Inhalt nebst Concordanz der gedruckten Recensionen*, Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1893., p. 14; Berriedale A. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 44; also Shah, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, p. 713.

104 Cf. for example Scharf, *Rāmopākhyāna*, p. 10.

mentators, Someśvara, subscribes to Kumārila's point of view and moral judgement of the story. In his approach, he has a tendency to summarize episodes, too, suggesting possible dialogues as a means of immediate illustrative reference to narrative episodes. It is also quite remarkable how many times in a few sentences he repeats that Sītā was abandoned by Rāma only because of his fear of people's gossiping. One might say that for Someśvara, a bigger problem was certainly Rāma's *tyāga* rather than his *yāga*. It seems that—against the tradition of *dharma*'s required independence of the emotional aspect of individual human life—some emotional colouring influences the judgment on the situation, and we move from (ritualistic) *dharma* towards more universal ethics.

In general, however, all the examples as well as their explanations focus on a *śruti-smṛti* understanding of *dharma* redefined in the light of Mīmāṃsā ritualistic approach—i.e. as following of rules, injunctions and prohibitions taught originally and supported by the Veda; which seems natural for Mīmāṃsā in that it does not step into the arena of more subjective ethics not bound by rules. For Mīmāṃsā, programmatically, the identification and establishment of the *dharma-mūla*s and *dharma* are at stake. Even if the idea of discussing of the *sant*s of the compound *sad-ācāra*s was triggered by some earlier oppositions (as recorded in ADhS or GDhS) to the *dharma-mūlatva* of *sad-ācāra*s, one might wonder at first how Vedic and epic narratives could be any sources of *dharma*. The explanations of both Mīmāṃsakas seem to provide the answer, especially that these exemplary *sant* figures belong to *śruti* or *smṛti* categories of valid verbal sources in their non-injunctive, *arthavāda* capacity. As they all were construed in the narrative network of dharmic injunctions and prohibitions, everything could and should be covered and explained away in a coherent way, whether by being illustrations of either straightforward adharmic behaviour or adharmic consequences of strong uncontrolled emotions, or by providing opportunities for proper Mīmāṃsā textual analysis and appearing not so controversial in dharmic terms after all.

Abbreviations Used in the Article (for full data see below in Bibliography)

ADhS	*Āpastamba-dharmasūtra*
GDhS	*Gautama-dharmasūtra*
MBh	*The Critical Edition of Mahābhārata*
MDhŚ	*Mānava-dharmaśāstra*
MS	*Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*
NS	*Nyāyasudhā*
R	*Rāmāyaṇa*

RV	*Raghuvaṃśa*
SARIT	Search and Retrieval of Indic Texts (http://sarit.indology.info/)
ŚBh	*Śabara-bhāṣya*
TV	*Tantravārttika*

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John Brockington

Stories in Stone: Sculptural Representations of the Rāma Narrative

Visual representations of the Rāma story take many forms. My concern here is with narrative representations of the Rāma story contained in programmes of sculptural reliefs on temple walls, mostly in stone but some in terracotta.[1] Although the earliest examples are single items, I will exclude them unless they clearly illustrate or name a specific episode; in particular, I disregard representations of Rāvaṇa shaking Kailāsa, the so-called *Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti* (Śiva showing favour to Rāvaṇa),[2] which develops a largely separate distribution from any other episode linked to the Rāma story and is found on many Śaiva temples. My aim is to examine the relative popularity over time and in different regions of the various components of the narrative.

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1 This study forms part of an ongoing project, in which Mary Brockington and I have been engaged for over a decade, to survey presentations of the Rama story as it has developed from its origin in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, through its various transformations in all genres, media, languages, religions and geographical areas, up to approximately the end of the eighteenth century. We have deposited this material (in which fuller details of items mentioned here may be found) in the Oxford Research Archive, to make it available for others to consult even in its present, unfinished state, and we update it from time to time.
In this article, I deal only with reliefs (not murals or ceiling paintings) in stone, stucco and terracotta, since wooden reliefs are rare and relatively late. Possibly the earliest wooden reliefs are on the Markulādevī temple, Markulā-Udaipur from the second half of the sixteenth century, followed by a wooden panel on the Rāma *koyil*, Padmanābhapuram (1744 AD). The temple car of the Rāmaśvāmī temple, Kumbakonam, is exceptional in having an extensive Rāma narrative in around 150 carved panels, probably from the early twentieth century, although the car of the Kodaṇḍarāma temple at Vaduvūr shows some 40 episodes and a few others have individual scenes.
As far as place names are concerned, the general policy in this article has been to use anglicized spellings for modern place names (so e.g. Kumbakonam, Bihar, etc.) but exact transcriptions for temples and ancient place names (including names of sites of ancient temples).

2 On this form, see Thomas Eugene Donaldson, *Śiva-Pārvatī and Allied Images: Their Iconography and Body Language*, 2 vols, New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 171–195.

Whereas *Bālakāṇḍa* episodes are very well represented among the instances I have collected, *Uttakarakāṇḍa* scenes are virtually unknown before the Vijayanagara period and even then are not frequent; one limited exception is the episode of Vālin seizing Rāvaṇa (*VR* 7.34), found occasionally on Pallava, Cōḻa and W. Cāḷukya temples.[3] Scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* are relatively underrepresented, as are those from the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, apart from the extremely popular *saptatālabhedana* ('splitting of the seven *tāla* trees') and the combat between Vālin and Sugrīva. On the other hand, the martial scenes in particular of the *Araṇya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍa*s are well represented, from Rāma defeating Khara's army and Jaṭāyus vainly attacking Rāvaṇa to multiple scenes of the battle for Laṅkā and the final contest between Rāma and Rāvaṇa.

The popularity of different episodes and how they are represented also varies at different periods. Several episodes occur only in the period up to the tenth century AD: Bharata on his way to Citrakūṭa with his entourage (but the actual meeting with Rāma is common at all periods), the death of Triśiras, Lakṣmaṇa garlanding Sugrīva before his second fight with Vālin, Sugrīva instructing the search parties, and Hanumān searching Rāvaṇa's *antaḥpura.* In addition, during this early period several scenes are uniquely represented: Kausalyā nursing an infant Rāma (elsewhere all three mothers with their four sons are shown), Rāma shooting an arrow at Sītā's *svayaṃvara* rather than bending or

3 This episode is found on various Cōḻa temples (Valérie Gillet, 'Entre démon et dévot: la figure de Rāvaṇa dans les représentations pallava', *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 62, 2007, pp. 29–45), the Nandanagollu group, Prātakoṭa (Bruno Dagens, *Entre Alampur et Śrīśailam: recherches archéologiques en Andhra Pradesh*, 2 vols, Pondichéry: Institut Française d'Indologie, 1984, vol. 1, p. 228) and probably on the Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcī. Some *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes claimed by Sarkar (H. Sarkar, *The Kampaharesvara Temple at Tribhuvanam*, Madras: Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1974, p. 39) for the Kampahareśvara temple at Tribhuvanam built around 1212 AD are doubted by Loizeau; Rachel Loizeau, *Traditions narratives dans la sculpture du Karnataka: les représentations épiques, l'enfance de Kṛṣṇa et autres mythes puraniques dans les temples hoysaḷa, XII*e*-XIII*e *siècles*, Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2017, p. 203.
My comments on frequency are made on the basis of an extensive, but undoubtedly incomplete, collection of data on *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs throughout India and to that extent must therefore be regarded as provisional (this listing will be mounted on the Oxford Research Archive in due course). In addition, some secondary sources note the presence of *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs at various sites without giving any details of what is shown and these sites have had to be disregarded.

breaking the bow,[4] Sītā then garlanding Rāma,[5] Bharata and Śatrughna comforting Daśaratha (after the departure of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with Viśvāmitra),[6] his queens mourning Daśaratha, Daśaratha's corpse being placed in a vat of oil (with caption *rājā daśaratha tailya droṇek*), the exiles crossing the Yamunā by raft, the crow attacking Sītā, Hanumān searching Rāvaṇa's *antaḥpura*, and Hanumān announcing Rāma's victory to Sītā.

The earliest certain representations are reliefs on Gupta-period temples from the fourth to seventh centuries.[7] From then onwards a significant number of clearly identifiable representations survive, mostly relief sculptures in stone but also several terracottas, which are among the earliest representations. At the end of this period—in the late seventh or eighth century, in the territories of the later Guptas of Magadha—come a set of eight stucco relief panels on a brick temple at Aphsaḍ in Bihar which illustrate the story from the crossing of the Gaṅgā up to the meeting with Bharata in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*.

A considerable proportion of these terracottas have identifying captions or labels; this is a feature of this early period but for reasons that are unclear to me is then not common again until the Vijayanagara period.[8] A perhaps fourth-

4 A verbal form of this is found in the very late Kāśmīrī version (Shanti Lal Nagar (tr.), *Rāmāvatāracarita, composed in Kashmiri by Śrī Prakāśa Rāma Kuryagrāmī*, Rāmāyaṇa in Regional Languages Series 2, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, p. 7). It is also represented visually at Prambanan in Java (mid 9th century).

5 However, in many Hoysaḷa reliefs and on the *prākāra* wall of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara, Sītā stands nearby as Rāma breaks the bow, ready to garland him; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 230–233. Also on the Hoysaḷa temples at Basarāḷu and Somnāthpur (and the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara) Rāvaṇa is present at the breaking of the bow, as in several of the classical Sanskrit dramas and in the Kannaḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* (15th century).

6 We have not found any verbal version of this somewhat puzzling scene, identified as occurring on the ninth-century Kāmākṣyamma temple at Dharmapuri; Andrew L. Cohen, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of the Noḷambas (Ninth-Tenth Centuries)*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998, p. 88—5e.f.g.

7 A Kauśāmbī terracotta plaque assigned to the second-first century BC and now in the Allahabad Museum (no. 5108) has been identified as Rāvaṇa carrying off Sītā; U.P. Shah, 'rāmvanvāsanī bhūgol ane laṅkā', *Svādhyāya*, vol. 10, no. 1, VS 2028 (1972 AD), pp. 1–23. Fragments of early figurines that may show a similar scene have also been found at Kauśāmbī and elsewhere.

8 Limited exceptions are in the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal (c. 740 AD, where the pillars in the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* are carved in broad bands with scenes from both epics and on one pillar the figures are named above in vernacular forms, and at a Vaiṣṇava temple—later converted into mosque—of perhaps the twelfth-thirteenth century in the Triveṇī-Saptagrāma region with 'descriptive labels' alone surviving of presumed relief panels.

century terracotta panel from Jind of Hanumān destroying the *aśokavana* is captioned *hanumān aśokavāṭikāhantā*.[9] Several panels most probably originating from a fifth-century temple at Katingara all feature Hanumān, on one of which the two figures shown are labelled in Brāhmī script as Siṃghikā (i.e. Siṃhikā) and Hanumān.[10] Several in a set of terracotta panels from Nacārkheṛā include brief Brāhmī identifications of characters and one even has part of a relevant verse from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* written above it. A group of about forty terracotta plaques found at Palāsabāṛi (near Mahasthangarh) mostly include brief captions identifying the scenes shown (from the first three *kāṇḍa*s) in an eastern Prakrit, written in a Brāhmī script typical of the seventh century, although the artistic style of the plaques seems a century or more earlier. A similar group of 17 plaques from the nearby village of Saralpur are the same size, also have identificatory labels and probably came from the same temple.[11]

Stone temples of the Gupta period were also decorated with panels showing the Rāma story. Best known are the ten panels which once ornamented the plinth of the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh/Devgaṛh, a clearly Vaiṣṇava temple and probably of fifth-century date.[12] At Nācnā-Kuṭhārā six *Rāmāyaṇa* panels have been identified, probably dating to the fifth century or a little later. From a ruined temple at Rajaona come several finds of the fifth or sixth century, including a pair of relief panels that perhaps flanked its entrance stairway, one showing a scene at Sugrīva's court and the other one at Rāvaṇa's court. In the territories of the Gupta allies, the Vākāṭakas, stray finds of a series of larger reliefs from Pav-

9 Another panel from Jind appears to show the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva. The caption on a probably fifth-century but unprovenanced panel identifies the scene shown as Rāma killing Triśiras; Donald M. Stadtner, 'An Inscribed Gupta Terracotta Panel in the Linden-Museum', *Tribus: Jahrbuch des Linden-Museums*, vol. 64, 2014, pp. 206–218.

10 Laxshmi Rose Greaves, 'Locating the Lost Gupta Period Rāmāyaṇa Panels from Katingara, Uttar Pradesh', *Religions of South Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 117–153.

11 Other groups of terracottas showing *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes have been discovered at Barehat, Bhīṭā, Bhītargāṽ, Bilsad, Candraketugaṛh, Causā, Kauśāmbī, Neval, Pahārpur, Saheṭ-Maheṭ, Sandhaya, Śṛṅgaverapura, Sirsa and Sugh, to which can be added fragments probably of *Rāmāyaṇa* themes from a brick temple at Pavāyā and possibly on the Vākāṭaka-period Pravareśvara temple at Mānsar. Despite occasional statements to the contrary, there seem not to be any Rāma-related terracottas from Ahicchatrā.

12 Most of these panels have now been removed to the National Museum, New Delhi. They include Rāma's transformation of Ahalyā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā crossing the river, the visit to Atri's *āśrama*, Lakṣmaṇa mutilating Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāma killing *rākṣasa*s, the abduction of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa garlanding Sugrīva, Tārā with the dying Vālin, Rāvaṇa threatening Sītā in the *aśokavana*, and one which seems to show Rāvaṇa offering his heads to Śiva; Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, 'The Earliest Known Depiction of Rāvaṇa-Śiraḥ-Kṛṇttana in Indian Sculpture', *Purāṇa*, vol. 36, 1994, pp. 253–258.

nār, thought to come from a temple built by Prabhāvatīguptā, show *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes;[13] this temple, which most probably enshrined Viṣṇu's or Rāma's footprints, is datable to the very beginning of the fifth century. At Nālandā, a Hindu temple designated temple 2 has on its dado a series of 211 stone panels, five of which show *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes; the panels seem to have been carved in the seventh century, although the temple itself is probably later.

Outside the territories controlled by the imperial Guptas and their subordinates or allies, evidence for the popularity of the Rāma story is mostly rather later. However, some reliefs on pillars in the second storey of the rock-cut Anantaśayanagudi cave at Uṇḍavalli have been tentatively assigned to the Viṣṇukuṇḍins—the dynasty which superseded the Vākāṭakas in this area—and the fourth to fifth centuries.[14]

In Orissa, a number of temples constructed between the seventh and tenth centuries carry *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes.[15] At Bhubaneśvar, on the Śatrughneśvara temple (c. 600 AD) a group of five carved blocks carries scenes leading up to the death of Vālin; the Svarṇajāleśvara temple has two sequences, one on the north wall reading from right to left and one on the west wall reading from left to right, which raises questions about the direction of circumambulation; and there are also scenes on the Paraśurāma temple (late 7th century) and the Śiśireśvara temple (c. 775 AD). Elsewhere in Orissa, *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative reliefs are found on the Siṃhanātha temple (late 9th century), the Vārāhī temple at Caurāsi (perhaps first quarter of the 10th century) and the Pañcapāṇḍava temple at Ganeśvarpur (second quarter of the 10th century), as well as a few detached panels from Śukleśvara. Significantly, all these Orissan temples are Śaiva, apart from the Śākta Vārāhī temple, and none is Vaiṣṇava.[16]

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13 A grant issued in her name by Prabhāvatīguptā's second son, Pravarasena II, in his 19th regnal year records that it was issued from the feet of Rāmagirisvāmin (i.e., Rāma on Rāmagiri hill, the modern Rāmṭek). Significantly, he is also the reputed author of the *Setubandha*. Similarly an inscription dated 467–468 AD on the pavement of the Daśāvatāra temple at Gaḍhvā mentions the divine Citrakūṭasvāmin (*bhaga<va>cchitra<k>ūṭasvāmi*), by which Rāma must be intended.

14 They include Hanumān's meeting with Sītā; the same scene is apparently also carved on a pillar in one of the Mogalrajapuram caves also ascribable to the Viṣṇukuṇḍins in the sixth century; Calambur Sivaramamurti, *The Art of India*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977, p. 177.

15 One instance is even earlier: a damaged relief panel discovered at the Liṅgarāja temple, Bhubaneśvar, datable to the fifth or sixth century AD and in the Gupta style, whereas reliefs from the seventh century onwards are in the Orissan style.

16 The Anantavāsudeva temple is the only major Vaiṣṇava temple still standing at Bhubaneśvar and its Rāma-related sculpture is limited to the balusters of the north window of

In the Deccan, during the seventh and eighth centuries, a number of the temples erected in Karnataka by the Western Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi and in Andhra Pradesh by the Eastern Cāḷukyas of Veṅgi provide frequent instances of carved *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes. At the Western Cāḷukya capital of Bādāmi there are such scenes on the Upper Śivālaya temple (originally a Vaiṣṇava temple; early 7th century), as well as a relief of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā on the Mālegitti Śivālaya temple (built around 600 AD). At the nearby Aihoḷe in the inner porch and veranda of the Durgā temple (c. 725–730 AD) there are narrative reliefs of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* on the north through to scenes from the *Sundarakāṇḍa* on the south, up to Hanumān's exploration of Rāvaṇa's harem.[17]

Some Śaiva temples in the territory of the Noḷamba dynasty, ruling in Andhra and northern Tamilnad during the ninth and tenth centuries, are carved with reliefs from the epics. At Hemāvati the Doḍḍēśvara temple and the dilapidated Virūpākṣa temple both have epic scenes on their *maṇḍapa* pillars. At Dharmapuri the Kāmākṣyamma temple, also called the Mallikārjuna temple, has *Rāmāyaṇa* panels carved all round its basement, with the narration starting on the rear wall to the west and proceeding counter-clockwise from the *Bālakāṇḍa* through to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*.

Among temples with *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs erected under the Cōḻas between the tenth and twelfth centuries the majority are Śaiva; the adoption of the title Kodaṇḍarāma by Āditya I (871–907 AD), the main architect of Cōḻa independence from the Pallavas, may have influenced this frequency of representation. Most of the twelfth-century Hoysaḷa temples with *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes are Śaiva, as well as the Mallikārjuna temple at Basarāḷu (1234 AD).[18] We may suspect that in many instances the aim was implicitly to equate the local ruler with the universal sovereign, Rāma. Certainly, it has been strongly argued in the case of the

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the *jagamohana* with figures of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, Hanumān and a monkey-attendant.

17 The Mahākūṭeśvara temple at Mahākūṭa has *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes carved on its *vedikā*, between the uprights and the crossbar; Carol Radcliffe Bolon, 'The Mahākūṭa Pillar and Its Temples', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 41, 1979, pp. 253–268, see p. 258. Two images of demonic figures, which in local tradition (recorded in the *Mahākūṭamāhātmya*) are identified as Vātāpi and Ilvala, are now installed in a gateway at the SE corner of the compound, but one is female and so they may be Tāṭakā and Mārīca; Carol Radcliffe Bolon, 'The Pārvatī Temple, Sandur and Early Images of Agastya', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 42, 1980, pp. 303–326.

18 Besides its later date, the Mallikārjuna temple also differs in its sculptural programme from the main group of Hoysaḷa temples at Haḷebīḍ; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, p. 101.

Figure 1. Rāvaṇa enthroned, relief on exterior of Pāpanātha temple, Paṭṭadakal (Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi, 1st half, 8th century).

scenes from both epics which cover the outer walls of the Pāpanātha temple at Paṭṭadakal, built by the Western Cāḷukyas in the first half of the eighth century, that they were designed to bolster the dynasty's legitimacy shortly before its fall to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (figures 1 and 2)[19]

On the other hand, at Vijayanagara it was not until the early fifteenth century that the first Rāma temple was built, so the Rāma cult here is not a direct reaction to the Muslim presence in the Deccan, as sometimes suggested; indeed, various local sites have been popularly associated with *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes from at least the eleventh century. Nevertheless, the shift in placement of the reliefs from basement friezes to the main walls gives them greater prominence and suggests that they are intended to celebrate royal power. Eight temples in total are

19 Helen J. Wechsler, 'Royal Legitimation: Ramayana Reliefs on the Papanatha Temple at Pattadakal', in Vidya Dehejia (ed.), *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1994, pp. 27–42. However, Schmid has cast doubt on this for the Cōḻa period, accepting that there is a strong connection between Rāma and the royal function but asserting that Rāma is primarily an *avatāra* at this period; Charlotte Schmid, 'Of Gods and Mortals: Līlā Cōḻa', in *South Asian Archaeology 2001: Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of EASAA*, ed. Catherine Jarrige and Vincent Lefèvre, 2 vols, Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2005, vol. 2, pp. 623–636.

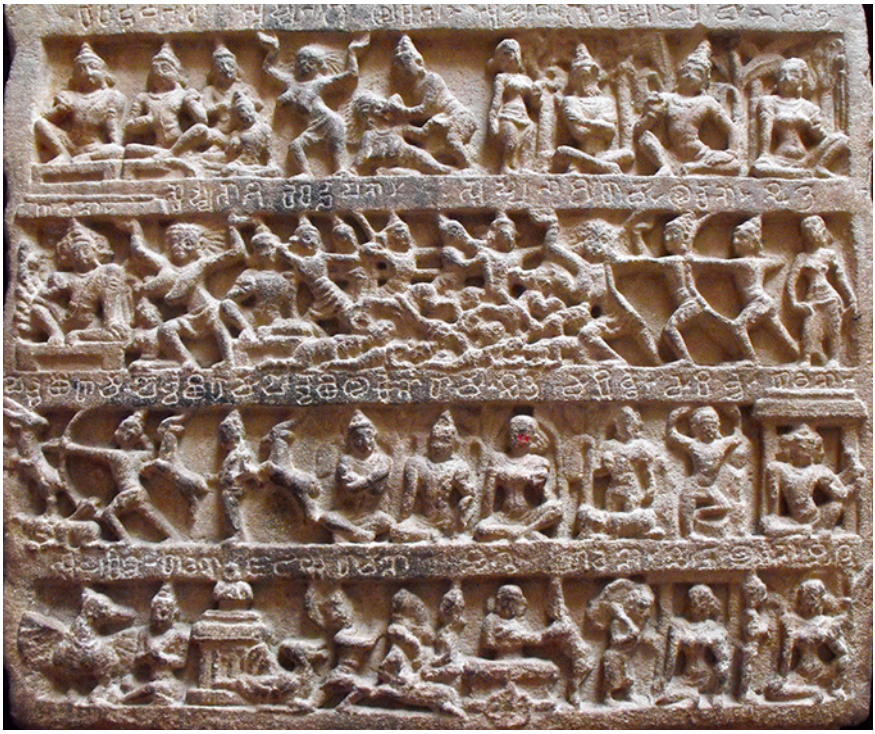

Figure 2. Relief panel in interior of Virūpākṣa temple, Paṭṭadakal (Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi, c. 740 AD), showing scenes from Lakṣmaṇa's mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā through to Rāvaṇa's killing of Jaṭāyus.

dedicated to Rāma at Vijayanagara itself, all built in the sixteenth century. In many cases their sculptural decoration includes Śrīvaiṣṇāva insignia, reflecting the impact of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas within the increasing sway of Vaiṣṇavism, while the influence of the Mādhva tradition no doubt prompts the substantial number of reliefs of Hanumān.

Particularly interesting is the relationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes. An obvious problem for visual representations is how to show invisibility.[20] In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (1.47.11–48.22), followed

20 Mary Brockington has commented on this problem elsewhere in relation to the painter Mānaku's failure to show Indrajit becoming invisible (Mary Brockington and John Brockington, 'Mānaku's *Siege of Laṅkā* series: Words and Pictures, *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2013, pp. 231–258, esp. p. 242)—a problem that is sidestepped in the rare reliefs of the *nāgapāśa* episode (only in a Gupta period terracotta from Sandhaya and on the tenth-century Dadhimatīmātā temple at Māṅglod).

in this by Kṣemendra and Bhoja, Ahalyā is cursed to remain in the *āśrama* invisible but in most other versions from Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* (11.34) onwards she is cursed to become a stone until released by Rāma.[21] Ahalyā turned to stone is universal in visual representations but the earliest examples, a terracotta from Saheṭ-Maheṭ and a stone relief from Devgaṛh, are roughly contemporary with Kālidāsa. So did visual requirements prompt this innovation, as logic perhaps suggests? But would it have been intelligible to viewers without some basis in a verbal narration? Again, a fifth-century relief from somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, now in the National Museum, New Delhi, shows Rāvaṇa with an ass's head; this motif is found sporadically in reliefs from now on (for example at Elūrā) and later very frequently in miniature paintings but the earliest verbal reference that we are aware of is to a horse's head, in the possibly ninth-century Khotanese version. Another motif is recorded almost simultaneously in verbal and visual versions; this is the ascetic boy who is killed by Daśaratha carrying his parents in panniers (*bahãgī* or *kẽvar*), which is first shown on the Sun temple at Moḍherā (1026–1027 AD), the Mallikārjuna temple at Basarāḷu (1234 AD) and the Vēṇugopāla temple at Kṛṣṇapaṭanam (probably early 13th century) and which is implied in the *Gautamīmāhātmya* (123.4—he places them in a tree), added in its final redaction to the *Brahma Purāṇa*, and also found in the Telugu *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* (probably 13th or 14th century).[22] One more example is that of Rāma piercing the seven *śāla*s,[23] where the innovation that the trees are growing on the back of a huge *nāga* is first found in visual form on the Pāpavināśeśvara temple, Pāpanāśī, erected by the Cāḷukyas of Kalyāṇa in the eleventh century and then

21 In South India, Ahalyā as a stone is found already in Kampaṉ; H.V. Hande (tr.), *Kamba Rāmāyanam, an English prose rendering*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996, pp. 40, 53 and 76. The motif is also found in several relatively late Purāṇas.

22 The most elaborate portrayal of this episode is found on four panels carved on the east face of the north gateway of the Rāmacandra temple, Vijayanagara. Much the earliest representation, however, is that based on the parallel narrative in the *Sāma Jātaka* painted in cave 17 at Ajantā (late 5th century AD); cf. Mary Brockington, 'Daśaratha, Śyāma, a *brāhman* Hunter, and Śrāvaṇa: The Tale of Four Tales (with pictures)', in *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, 2 vols, ed. Eli Franco and Monika Zin, Rupandehi, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010, vol. 1, pp. 89–116.

23 The basic episode is one of the most frequently represented episodes of any (and obligatory in vernacular versions from Kampaṉ onwards); by contrast, the immediately preceding episode of Rāma kicking Dundubhi's corpse features on only three Vijayanagara-period temples.

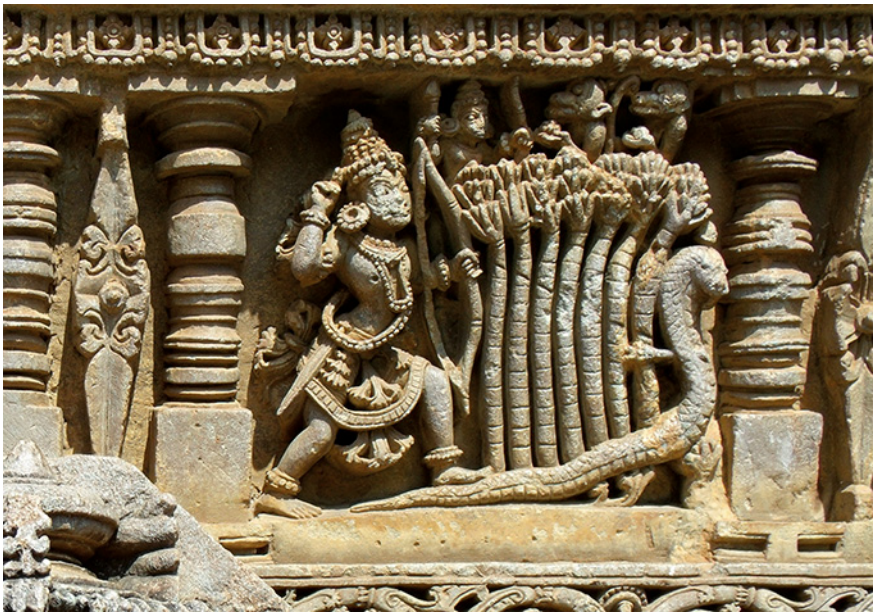

Figure 3. Relief panel from Amṛteśvara temple, Amṛtapura (Hoysaḷa, c. 1200–1206 AD), showing Rāma shooting through 7 *śāla* trees and the snake on whose back the trees rest.

very commonly on Hoysaḷa and Vijayanagara-period temples;[24] the verbal instances of this innovation are found in a fifth-stage addition to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (4 App.6), and in the *Mahānāṭaka* (in an elaborate form), the *Narasiṃha Purāna* and the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*—none of which is any earlier than, if as early as, the Cāḷukya temple—and also for example in the Kannaḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa*. Further visual developments of this episode are Rāma stamping on the snake's tail to bring the trees into line and his arrow then also piercing the snake's neck or Vālin (figure 3). Are these in some sense a visual equivalent for the arrow piercing the top of Mountain Ṛśyamūka and the earth before returning to Rāma's quiver (*VR* 4.12.3–4)?

Representations both of the ascetic boy carrying his parents in panniers and of the *saptaśālabhedana* episode belong to the period after the tenth century, to which I now turn more fully. There are many more representations extant from this later period and a correspondingly longer list of episodes first found then.

24 See Desai, Devangana, 'Narration of the Ramayana episode—Vali-vadha—in Indian sculpture (upto A.D. 1300)', in *Indian Studies: Essays Presented in Memory of Prof. Niharranjan Ray*, ed. Amita Ray and H. Sanyal, S.C. Ray, Delhi: Caxton, 1984, pp. 79–89 and Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 258–262.

The motivating factor for several is the enhancement of Rāma's status and secondarily that of Hanumān. Reliefs of the gods imploring Viṣṇu to descend to earth, though not common, are an obvious example.[25] Rāma shooting Mārīca and Subāhu serves to emphasize his youthful valour and is linked with greater frequency in this later period of his killing their mother, Tāṭakā, despite reservations expressed elsewhere about killing a female. The enthronement of Rāma's *pādukā*s by Bharata stresses his growing divinity, as does the rise in frequency of reliefs of his encounter with Rāma Jāmadagnya, and at the other end of the narrative his *abhiṣeka* underlines his sovereignty. Surprisingly, Rāma's worshipping a *liṅga* at Rāmeśvaram is shown just twice, once on a twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava temple at Jāñjgīr and, less surprisingly, once on an eighteenth-century Śaiva temple, the Nīlakaṇṭheśvara temple at Jambiṭige Agrahāra.

Reliefs centred on Hanumān first found after the tenth century are his carrying Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa across the ocean on his shoulders and his encounter with Kālanemi, while Rāma giving his ring to Hanumān and his burning of Laṅkā both become markedly more frequent and Rāma himself sending Hanumān to search for Sītā occurs uniquely on one Vijayanagara-period temple.[26] Other episodes only occurring in post-tenth-century reliefs include: Daśaratha and Vasiṣṭha conferring; Daśaratha conferring with Sumantra; Kaikeyī demanding the boons (although reliefs of her plotting Rāma's exile do occur earlier); Rāma meeting Śarabhaṅga; the *vānara*s bringing to Sugrīva the clothes dropped by Sītā and also their showing Sītā's jewellery to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa; Tārā warning Vālin against opposing Rāma; Lakṣmaṇa rebuking Sugrīva for inaction; the *vānara*s meeting Sampāti; *vānara*s carrying Sītā in a palanquin to Rāma, and the return to Ayodhyā.[27] While several of these are quite well known in the verbal tradition, they are not central to the main narrative, on which visual representations must concentrate, being limited usually to depiction of a small number of episodes.

Episodes of which I have so far found only one example cluster mainly in the early period, largely because of the wide variety illustrated on terracotta reliefs, and in the Vijayanagara period (around fifty), for which there are proba-

25 A single earlier representation on the Brahmapurīśvara temple, Puḷḷamaṅgai (Cōḻa, c. 910 AD) hardly alters this pattern.

26 Rāma entrusting his ring to Hanumān is shown on all the Hoysaḷa temples except that at Belūr and on several Vijayanagara-period ones but earlier only on the Kāmākṣyamma temple, Dharmapuri (Noḷamba, 9th century),

27 With the limited exception of one on the Sāsbahu temple, Nāgdā (Pratīhāra, late 10th century), the small number of representations of Sītā entering the fire all belong to the later period.

bly multiple reasons in the greater number of episodes carved at any one site (and especially the inclusion of episodes from the *Uttarakāṇḍa*), the better survival rate of more recent material and the increasing influence from vernacular verbal versions, whether written or oral. An interesting sidelight on this is that the first relief in the series on the outer walls of the main shrine of the Rāmacandra temple at Vijayanagara, showing two figures seated on thrones, is identified by local people as the poet Pampa reciting the story to king Devarāya.[28] But we also find, for example, only one instance of the crow attacking Sītā (as already noted), on a fifth-century terracotta relief from Bhītārgā̃v; yet the episode is widespread in verbal form. Similarly, the episode of the returning *vānara*s ravaging the *madhuvana* is rare in visual form but frequent in verbal form.[29]

An episode occurring very frequently on Hoysaḷa temples is that of Lakṣmaṇa slashing bamboos and accidentally decapitating Śambūka, Śūrpaṇakhā's son; this episode is characteristic of the Jain verbal narratives from Vimalasūri onwards, including the Kannaḍa *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* by Nāgacandra (late 11th to 12th century), which follows the standard Jain version (specifically subverting the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*) and is probably the immediate source for these visual representations.[30] The occasional representations on Hoysaḷa temples of Rāvaṇa sacrificing (rather than Indrajit) have analogues in the broadly contemporary *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* by Nāgacandra and *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to Gōna Buddhā Reḍḍi (also in the *Adhyātma*, *Ānanda* and *Mollā Rāmāyaṇa*s[31]). It is also on some Hoysaḷa temples that we first find the motif of Sītā being lifted still in the hut as Rāvaṇa abducts her, either in his chariot or more often on the palm of his hand; this renders more precise still the motif found in the *Uttarapurāṇa* of the Jain Guṇabhadra (second half of the 9th century) that Rāvaṇa dare not touch a woman against her will, already made more concrete in Kampaṉ's *Irāmavatāram* (probably 12th century) where Rāvaṇa lifts Sītā on a huge ball of earth and places it on his chariot.

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28 See Dallapiccola, Anna Libera, J.M. Fritz, G. Michell and S. Rajasekhara, *The Ramachandra Temple at Vijayanagara*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992, p. 93.

29 So far I have only found instances on a pillar from a seventh-century Ālampur temple and on the Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana temple, Tāḍapatri, from the first half of the sixteenth century.

30 The decapitation of Śambūka is also found in the fourteenth-century *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to Huḷḷakki Bhāskara and in the fifteenth-century Kannaḍa *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* of Narahari. Before the Hoysaḷa period the episode is shown on the wall of well no. 1 at Sirival (Rāṣṭrakūṭa, c. 940 AD) and later on the Vijayanagara-period Cennakeśava temple complex at Puṣpagiri but it is absent from Cāḷukya and Cōḻa monuments; Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, p. 241.

31 Cf. Loizeau, *Traditions narratives*, pp. 266–267.

Around 150 episodes are spread over 205 panels on the Vijayanagara-period Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana temple at Tāḍapatri which are clearly in part inspired by the Telugu *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*;[32] they include unique representations of Sītā dropping her ornaments as she is abducted, an episode which is quite elaborately treated in the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, of the leaders of the search parties, named in the Telugu captions as in the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, and of the dying Vālin addressing Sugrīva. However, I have not yet found a verbal parallel for two unique scenes, both occurring on Vijayanagara-period temples: one of Rāma removing a thorn or something similar from Sītā's leg, found on the Kōdaṇḍarāma temple, Penukoṇḍa, and one of Rāma presenting Lakṣmaṇa with a bow following his mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā, found on the Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramana temple, Tāḍapatri. Somewhat similar is the relief on the Nīlakaṇṭheśvara temple, Jambiṭige Agrahāra (dated 1733 AD), of Daśaratha looking in a mirror (and presumably seeing grey hairs, one of the traditional signals for retirement in the *dharmaśāstra*s) which amplifies his realization of increasing old age which prompts his thoughts of abdication from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* onwards and which has been claimed rather unnecessarily to have a folk story origin.[33]

To sum up, the popularity of different episodes and how they are represented varies at different periods. Terracotta relief panels from the Gupta period are numerous. Then, after an early but minor peak on Orissan temples in the seventh to tenth centuries, followed by another from the period of Cōḻa dominance of South India between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the largest number of *Rāmāyaṇa* friezes or series of panels are found on Hoysaḷa and Vijayanagara temples. In many instances, especially when they are carved on Śaiva temples, the aim seems to have been implicitly to equate the local ruler with the universal sovereign, Rāma.

Bālakāṇḍa episodes are very well represented; the martial scenes of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* are also well represented but the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is relatively under-represented, as is the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, apart from the extremely popular *saptatālabhedana* and the combat between Vālin and Sugrīva; *Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes are virtually unknown before the Vijayanagara period.

32 See Anna L. Dallapiccola, 'Rāmāyaṇa Reliefs of the Cintāla Veṅkaṭaramaṇa, Tāḍapatri', in *Temple Architecture and Imagery of South and Southeast Asia: Prāsādanidhi, Papers Presented to Professor M.A. Dhaky*, ed. Parul Pandya Dhar and Gerd J.R. Mevissen, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2016, pp. 221–235, esp. pp. 225–226.

33 Anila Verghese, 'Nīlakaṇṭheśvara Temple at Jambitige: A Preliminary Study', *Indica*, vol.48, no. 1, 2011, pp. 47–68.

Particularly interesting is the relationship between visual and verbal representations of some episodes, including the effects of practical restraints imposed by the visual medium. Also, whereas many earlier series appear basically to follow the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, later ones represent episodes in ways that either reflect the influence of vernacular retellings or may even have generated them.

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Stefania Cavaliere

Dhārmik Kings in Courtly Agendas: The Figure of Rāma in the Works of Keśavdās

The figure of Rāma and his story constitute a privileged topic to analyse the dynamics of the adaptation of Sanskrit classical models into the Braj Bhāṣā literary tradition flourishing in the sixteenth-century North India. They are traditionally acknowledged as authoritative subjects that legitimize the language in which they are narrated as a suitable literary means. With such a purpose, we will analyse how they are variously interpreted in the works of the poet Keśavdās (1555–1617), who mainly retells the story of Rāma in his *Rāmcandracandrikā* (*Moonlight of Rāmcandra*,1601) and *Vijñāngītā* (*Praise of Knowledge*, 1610). In the first case, he describes Vālmīki appearing in a dream and empowering him to retell such divine story in the vernacular (*bhāṣā*), reshaping the content in a new form made of rhetorical figures and a sophisticated literary style. In the second work, the story of Rāma is taken from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and reinterpreted from a philosophical perspective, still open to *bhakti* influences. Rāma is the young prince who is educated to the rules of *dharmarājya* ('righteous kingdom') and learns the principles of morality and metaphysics. Combining classical models and new historical claims, he embodies a model of sovereignty that adapts to modernity and can be acceptable for the addressee of the work—Keśav's patron Vīr Siṃh, the king of Orcha. But the figure of Rāma also occurs in other works by the poet, such as the *Kavipriyā* (*Manual for Poets*, 1601) and the *Chandmālā* (*Garland of Metres*, 1602) with a more secular attitude: it is reinterpreted for aesthetic and political purposes and readapted to different historical, religious and cultural contexts thanks to its endless symbolic potentiality.

1. The Divine Nature of Rāma in the *Rāmcandracandrikā*

The *Rāmcandracandrikā* was composed in 1601 and consists of 39 chapters called *prakāśa*. It opens with an invocation to Gaṇeśa (1.1), Sarasvatī (1.2) and Rāma (1.3, see infra, paragraph 1.1), and, abiding by poetic conventions, it continues to mention the lineage of the poet—a family of Sanāḍhya Brahmins,

experts in all the classical treatises in Sanskrit (*aśesa śāstra*, 1.4).[1] Within this authoritative line of ancestry, Keśavdās defines himself as a slow-witted poet, who dares to celebrate the glory of Rāma in the vernacular (*mandamati śaṭa kavi*, 1.5). Following the canonical set of topics to be described in a poem, we then find the date and the reason for the composition of the work, before the narration of Rāma's story commences.

As his source of inspiration, Keśavdās mentions Vālmīki appearing in his dreams and soliciting him to celebrate Rāma's name and virtues to reach a condition of ultimate bliss (*kyoṁ pāūṁ sukhasāru?* 1.7, *Rāma nāma / satya dhāma*, 1.9). Persuaded by Vālmīki, the poet chooses Rāma as his favoured deity and composes this work in his praise (*Keśavdās tahī karayo Rāmacandra jū iṣṭha*, 1.18).

This work—as many others belonging to the *rīti kāl*—has been neglected for a long time because literary critics such as Rāmcandra Śukla refuted any originality to be found within and criticized its mannerist style.[2] Still, referring to his source of inspiration declared as the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, we can see that Keśavdās elaborates the story in his own peculiar way and his *Rāmkathā* follows a different arrangement of the topics.

Out of 39 chapters:

8 correspond to the *Bālakāṇḍa* (76 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

2 correspond to the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (111 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

2 correspond to the *Āraṇyākāṇḍa* (71 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

1 corresponds to the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (66 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

1 corresponds to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* (66 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

8 correspond to the *Yuddhākāṇḍa* (100 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*);

17 correspond to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (116 *sarga*s in the *Rāmāyaṇa*).

While the chapters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are mostly balanced with a substantial equilibrium among the different parts of Rāma's life—his youth, the exile, the war and the reign—in the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, we can immediately notice a disproportion in the number of chapters dealing with the final part of Rāma's story, which implies Keśavdās's predilection for some themes connected to the king-

1 As he asserted in the *Kavipriyā* (2.6–7, 19), his forefathers had received patronage from the Delhi Sultan Alāh ud-Dīn and Keśavdās himself frequented Akbar's court. Cf. Heidi Pauwels, 'The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundela Loyalty', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 52, issue 2, 2009, p. 201; Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings. The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 56–59.

2 Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, Ilāhābād: Lokbhāratī Prakāśan, 2002, pp. 141–42, cf. also Danuta Stasik, *The Infinite Story: The Past and Present of the Rāmāyaṇas in Hindi*, Delhi: Manohar, 2009, p. 124.

dom of Rāma at the end of his epic actions.[3] In particular, in this concluding section of the text we find descriptions of the court with its gardens, customs and riches, dialogues among sages and the king, prescriptions about his royal duties, his behaviour towards his wife and the appointment of his sons as heirs to the throne. These descriptions meet the requirements that any poem shall include, as stated by Keśavdās himself in his *Kavipriyā* (chapter 7), prescribing the topics to be addressed in order to produce a refined *kāvya* in *bhāṣā*.[4]

This preliminary survey on the beginning of the work and its general structure allows some introductory remarks to be made concerning the author's approach to Rāma's story: as proved by the figure of Vālmīki who gives him official investiture, the poet's choice seems to be made out of literary intermediation more than devotional fervour. Still he does not omit the celebrations of Rāma's salvific virtues and philosophical statements about his supreme divinity: 'He is the venerable Absolute, and he is considered both as the descent of the deity [upon earth] and the one who makes this descent happen' (1.17f).[5]

Keśavdās's purpose in retelling the story of Rāma in Braj is very much open to question: was it a religious one? Did he want to propose his own model of devotion to Rāma, alternative to the *bhakti* of Tulsīdās—to whom he is often compared—and a new path for salvation accessible to the devotees? Did he have solely a literary concern and want to legitimize himself as the modern Vālmīki?[6]

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3 Parenthetically, in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* the proportion is reversed with a bulk of the narrative dealing with the first two *kāṇḍas*, especially 361 sets of *caupāī-dohā* in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, 326 sets of *caupāī-dohā* in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, 46 sets in the *Āraṇyākāṇḍa*, 30 in the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, 60 in the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 121 in the *Laṅkākāṇḍa*, 130 in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Cf. Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, Gorakhpur: Gobind Bhawan-Karyalaya, Gita Press, 2001.

4 'A country, a town, a forest, a garden, a mountain, an ashram, a river, a pond; / A sun[rise and a sunset], a moon[rise and a moonset], a sea, all seasons and times [are called] the adornments of the earth' (translation by Danuta Stasik, '*Bhūmi-bhūṣaṇa* or How Nature Should Be Described. A Few Glimpses into Keśavdās's *Kavi-priyā*', *Cracow Indological Studies*, vol. 7, 2005, p. 279). The city must be described in all its parts, being the walls, the fort, the tower, the gate, wells, prostitutes and courtesans (7.4). Then in chapter 8, the poet goes on to describe the reign with its ornamental components, being 'the king, the queen, the crown prince, the court priest, generals, messengers, ministers, advisors, soldiers, horses, elephants and impressive battles' (8.1).

5 *soī parabrahma śrīmān haiṁ avatārī avatāra maṇi*.

6 Rāmcandra Śukla maintains that the purpose of Keśavdās was to compose a *prabandhakāvya* in the vernacular without any interest in the deeper meaning of Rāma's story, but he overloaded it with so many figures and stylistic effects that he deprived it from any emotional appeal or poetic beauty (*keśav kī racnā ko sabse adhik vikṛt aur aru-*

Or did he instead mean to offer a pedagogical model for his patron, composing a work that had some political relevance?

To possibly address these questions, we propose to begin our overview from a philological analysis of the text. Probably, we will not detect the same religious import as in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, but we will definitely gain a critical perspective on it, by acknowledging that it was composed responding to a different political, cultural and literary agenda.

Although Keśavdās is generally considered to be a worshipper of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa within the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the tone of his work in praise of Rāma is pervaded by devotion.[7] We can see the divinity of Rāma in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* from many different examples.

1.1. The Benedictory Stanza in Honour of the Supreme God

In the *maṅgalācaraṇa* (1.3), Rāma is praised as the supreme god:

> All the Purāṇas and the old sages say that He is the Absolute,
> Nothing different they say.
> He offers His vision to the ones who cannot understand the [abstract] philosophical systems.
> [And] the Vedas that describe Him as 'neither this, nor that', excluding any [other] way out.
> Knowing this, the poet Keśavdās keeps repeating every day the name of Rāma,
> Without any fear of [the poetical flaw of] repetition.
> His figure confers the power of becoming invisible, His virtues [confer] the power of becoming huge,
> Devotion towards Him confers greatness; His name confers liberation (1.3).[8]

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cikar karnevālī vastu hai ālaṅkārik camatkār kī pravṛtti jiske kāraṇ na to bhāvoṁ kī prakṛt vyañjanā ke liye jagah bactī hai, na sacce hṛdayagrāhī vastuvarṇan ke liye; cf. Śukla, *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, p. 143).

7 For references cf. Stasik, *The Infinite Story*, p. 125.

8 *pūraṇa purāṇa aru puruṣa purāṇa pāripūrṇa / batāvaiṁ na batāvaiṁ aura ukti ko / daraśana deta jinhaiṁ daraśana samujhaiṁ na, neti neti hakaiṁ veda chāṁḍi āna yukta ko / jāni yaha keśodāsa anudina rāma rāma, raṭata rahata na ḍarata punarukti ko / rūpa dehi aṇimāhi guṇa dehi garimāhi, bhakti dehi mahimāhi nāma dehi mukti ko*. Transcriptions of stanzas from Braj Bhāṣā record an inherent 'a' for metrical reasons, the same as the names of the Rāmāyaṇa characters. Names belonging to the modern literary tradition in Hindi follow the phonetic transcription of R.S. McGregor's *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (e.g., Keśavdās, *Rāmcaritmānas, rāmrājya*). Whenever not differently indicated, all translations are mine.

Rāma is celebrated here as the indescribable Absolute and as such identified with the Upaniṣadic formula *neti neti*. Still, from this supreme dimension of ineffability he is able to assume a visible shape and to become the god Rāma, whose celebration passes through the devotional practice of *jāpa*. The repetition of a name, which in poetical theory is a flaw of tautology, is upset by devotion and becomes a meritorious practice, as if to say that religious zeal trespasses the rules of poetry. Or that religious motivation makes also speech flaws such as repetition acceptable, even for poetically sensitive listeners.

1.2. Claims on Rāma's Omniscience

As in Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas*, Rāma's omniscience in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* is already known both by him and by the other characters of the story, such as the demon deer Mārīca (chapter 12).

When Rāvaṇa asks for Mārīca's help in abducting Sītā, the demon warns him by saying that he will not find a place in the entire universe to hide, because Rāma, in his supreme divine nature, is all-pervasive and all-knowing.

> Do not consider Rāma as a [simple] man, the fourteen worlds are filled with Him.
> I don't see any place where you can go [and hide] with Sītā, I feel the Lord [everywhere] on the water and the earth (12.9).[9]

Listening to these words that cast doubts on his might, Rāvaṇa loses his temper and threatens Mārīca, who finally resolves to fulfil his order because, dying by the hand of Rāma, he will be released from sins.

> Mārīca went, knowing in his mind that he would die soon in both cases.
> But by hand of Rāvaṇa he would [get to] dwell in hell, by hand of the Lord in heaven (12.11).[10]

This episode represents the prelude to the abduction of Sītā to Laṅkā and the adventures of Rāma to release her. Just before his journey starts, Keśavdās inserts one *dohā* that explains the reason for undertaking all these actions although he is omniscient: Rāma assumed his shape and performed the divine

9 *rāmahi mānuṣa kai jani jānau / pūrana caudaha loka bakhānau // jāhu jahāṁ siya lai su na dekhauṁ / hauṁ hari ko jalahū thala lekhauṁ.*

10 *jāni calyo mārīca mana marana duhūṁ bidhi āsu / rāvana ke kara naraka hai harikara haripura bāsu.*

acts described in the *Rāmkathā* in order to please his devotees who are unable to grasp his supreme immaterial form.

> Even if the Lord Raghunātha is [always] equal [to himself], all pervasive, all knowing,
> He performs his divine play as a man, so that [also] unwise people are enchanted (12.26).[11]

1.3. The Theme of the Shadow Sītā

Again, like in the *Rāmcaritmānas*,[12] Keśavdās follows the tradition of the Shadow Sītā, starting with the Purāṇas and adopted in several later versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* such as the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. Being the supreme god, Rāma would never allow his wife to be abducted and taken to someone else's house; therefore, to protect her when she is alone, he creates a circle of fire and the Shadow Sītā.[13]

> [Rāma says:]
> Princess, listen to my speech now, I am going to destroy the burden [of evil] on earth.
> Remain [hidden] in the fire and create a shadow body [for yourself with which] you will wish for the deer [that will be passing nearby] (12.12).[14]

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11 *jadapi śrī raghunātha jū sama sarvaga sarvagya / nara kaisī līlā karata jehi mohita saba agya.*

12 Cf. Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, *Āraṇyākāṇḍa* 24.1–2, p. 682: 'Listen, my darling, who have been staunch in the holy vow of fidelity to me and are so virtuous in conduct: I am going to act a lovely human part. Abide in fire until I have completed the destruction of the demons. No sooner had Śrī Rāma told Her everything in detail than She impressed the image of the Lord's feet on Her heart and entered into the fire, leaving with Him only of a shadow of Hers, though precisely of the same appearance and the same amiable and gentle disposition'.

13 The tradition of the Shadow Sītā is analysed by Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 12ff. and mentioned by John Brockington, *The Sacred Thread: Hinduism in Its Continuity and Diversity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984, p. 237; V. Raghavan, *The Greater Ramayana*, The Professor K. Venkataraman Lectures for 1971 at the University of Madras, Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust, 1973, p. 45.

14 *rājasutā eka mantra suno aba, cāhata hauṁ bhuva bhāra haryo saba / pāvaka meṁ nija dehahi rākhahu, chāya sarīra mṛgaiṁ abhilākhahu.*

Rāma already knows the upcoming turn of events and instructs Sītā about what is going to happen. Differently from the other versions of the story, it is Rāma here who instils in his wife the desire for the deer, reducing somehow her responsibility in this matter. In view of the inescapable consequences this will provoke, he intimates her to get prepared, creating the Shadow Sītā that will take part in the ventures that are about to happen, while the authentic Sītā will remain uncontaminated. This illusory double, protecting her from Rāvaṇa's rape and preserving her purity in front of the people, is created through the fire and will be ultimately destroyed in the fire, in the ordeal to which she will be called upon at the end of the story.

1.4. The Issue of the *Agniparīkṣā*

The treatment of Sītā's trial by fire is an interesting point that neatly differentiates Keśavdās's perspective from Tulsīdās's work. When inserted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*s with a devotional inspiration, this episode becomes problematic because it poses questions about how a benevolent god can come to compromise with such cruel treatment. Tulsīdās solves the problem by toning it down, as a necessary ritual to burn away the Shadow Sītā and allow the real one to come back. The episode in the *Rāmcaritmānas* is then resolved in few lines and its inscrutability is attributed to the limited human mind that cannot understand the choices of a god.[15]

Differently, in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* the scene is deprived of any cruelty —in no way attributed to the king—and becomes a real apotheosis of the queen

15 Tulsīdās deals with the episode in the *Laṅkākāṇḍa* 108.7–109, when Rāma, after defeating the *rākṣasa*s and winning the war, asks Hanuman to bring Sītā back to him. The author says that as Sītā had been previously lodged in fire, Rāma now sought to bring her back to light, and for this reason he addressed her some reproachful words that pressed her to the ordeal by fire, which she accepted with obeisance and dedication. She entered the flames as though they were as cool as sandal paste. 'Both her shadow form as well as the social stigma [occasioned by her forced residence in Rāvaṇa's] were consumed in the blazing fire; but no one could know the secret of the Lord's doings. Even the gods, the *siddha*s and the sages stood gazing in the air. Fire assumed a bodily form and, taking by the hand the real Śrī [Sītā], (…) presented her to Śrī Rāma as if the Ocean of Milk presented Goddess Indirā [Lakṣmī] to Lord Viṣṇu. Standing on the left side of Śrī Rāma, She shone resplendent in Her exquisite beauty like the bud of a gold lily besides a fresh blue lotus'. Cf. Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, Chand 109.1–2, pp. 930–931. The ordeal is minimized in this description by saying that the people around who were forlorn listening to Rāma's request simply did not understand its deeper import that is the burning of the Shadow Sītā and the return of the real one.

delivering herself to the fire, probably closer to a Rājpūt ethic widespread at the time of composition of the text. The annihilation of the queen for the glory of her king is given for granted in the political agenda of the seventeenth-century Hindu courts. It is contemplated among the royal strategies, and does not cause any moral or emotional commotion.

In chapter 20, after the end of the war and the defeat of Rāvaṇa, Rāma finally meets Sītā 'adorned with all the ornaments' (*saba bhūṣaṇa bhūṣita*). On the way towards her husband, she comes into the embrace of fire 'as a chaste maiden is welcomed by her father with open arms' (*pitā aṅka jyoṁ kanyakā śubhra gītā / lasai agni ke aṅka tyoṁ śuddha Sītā*; 20.4 cd). For her brightness, Sītā sitting in the fire is compared to different goddesses, such as Śacī, Indra's wife, sitting on a jewel throne (*mano ratnasiṃhāsanasthā sacī*; 20.5c), Sarasvatī lavish with water (*girāpūpa meṃ hai payodevatā sī*; 20.6a) or Lakṣmī on a lotus bud (*kidhauṃ padma ke koṣa padmā bimohai*; 20.6d). Her firmness is further equated to the one of an ascetic woman on the mount Sindūr (*sindūra sailāgra meṁ siddha kanyā*; 20.7a) or a yogini in the red twilight (*dagdāha meṁ dekhiye joginī sī*; 20.8b). The redness of the fire makes her appear like a figurine painted with red sandal (*āraktapatrā subha citraputrī*; 20.10a) or the vermillion on the forehead of Gaṇeśa (*mano birājai ati cārubeṣā*; 20.10b). She is attractive like the image in a mirror adorned with jewels and steady like the affection in the heart of a lover (*hai manidarpana meṁ pratibimba ki prīti hiye anurakta abhītā*; 20.11a).

In stanzas 20.12–13, all the gods come to see Sītā passing through the fire, while in stanza 20.14 Rāma is pleased by her purity and welcomes her after she proved her innocence to the entire world (*śrīrāmacandra haṃsi aṅka lagāi līnhoṁ / saṃsāra sākṣi śubha pāvana āni dīnhoṁ*).

Here follows a section in praise of Rāma by Brahmā and the other gods gathered (20.15–23). It is the same fireproof to become the reason for praising Rāma, and a confirmation of his supreme condition through the sacrifice of his wife. Interestingly, the metaphysical qualities of Rāma as the Absolute are granted by Sītā, in a kind of mystical relation between the god and his *śakti*, close to the new devotional trends attributing a crucial importance to the female complement for the realization of the supreme nature of god.

> [Brahmā] (*dodhaka*)[16]
> Rāma, you are the one who always dwells inside [the heart, still] you delight the fourteen worlds.

16 A subdivision of *triṣṭubh* (verse having 11 syllables in each of the four *pāda*s), consisting of the *gaṇa*s *bha bha bha ga ga* (ꓲꓲ ꓲ ꓲꓲ ꓲ ꓲ). Cf. Maheshwari Sinha, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody (Rāmānanda-Keśav, 1400–1600 A.D.)*, Bhagalpur: Bhagalpur University Publications, 1964, p. 39.

Someone in the world knows you as the one without qualities, someone [else] describes you as always endowed with qualities.

Your light awakens the world [but you are] not said nor heard or seen.
Nobody can grasp your extent, [you have] no beginning, no end, no shape (20.15–16).[17]

The Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophical stance of the text is clearly stated in the following stanza that slightly brings the discussion from the unqualified plane of the Absolute as *nirguṇa brahman* to a description of the different shapes it acquires with the creation.

(*tāraka*)[18]
You have a shape endowed of qualities [and at the same time] you are the possessor of qualities,
From one single shape you created many shapes.
Your shape is made only of the quality of light.
You made the creation and are known as the Creator (20.17).[19]

The apex of Rāma's praise is reached mentioning the different shapes he assumed (*avatāra*) to save the world from any outrage.

You are the world and the world is in you, you created the limit of the world.
When someone exceeds that limit, then because of that you take a visible shape.
In the guise of a fish you released all the sufferings [of the earth], in the shape of a turtle you held a mount,
In the shape of a boar you became celebrated all over the world, and snatched the land of [the demon] Hiraṇyakaśipu.

You assumed the shape of a lion-man and dispelled the long sufferings of [your devotee] Prahlāda,
In the shape of a dwarf you cheated [the demon] Bāli, as [Paraśurāma] Bhṛgunandana you destroyed the Kṣatriya warriors [who tyrannized people].

You killed your enemy Rāvaṇa and saved the law that was sunk,

17 *rāma sadā tuma antarayāmī / loka caturdaśa ke abhirāmī // nirguṇa eka timhaiṁ jaga jānai / eka sadā guṇavanta bakhānai // jyoti jagai jaga madhya tihārī / jāya kahī na sunī na nihārī // kou kahai parimāna na tāko / ādi na anta na rūpa na jāko*.

18 A subdivision of *ati jagatī* (verse having 13 syllables in each of the four *pāda*s), consisting of the *gaṇa*s *sa sa sa sa ga* (IIS IIS IIS IIS S). Cf. Sinha, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody*, p. 40.

19 *tuma hau guṇa rūpa guṇī tuma ṭhāye /tuma eka te rūpa aneka banāye // ika hai jo rajoguṇa rūpa tihāro / tehi sṛṣṭi racī vidhi nāma bihāro*.

> You will then take the shape of Kṛṣṇa and having defeated all enemies you will alleviate the burden of the earth.
>
> Out of compassion you will take the shape of Buddha, then as Kalki you will destroy hordes of barbarians,
> In such a way you have manifold shapes, achieving all purposes with your greatness (20.19–23).[20]

Afterward, Mahādeva praises Rāma as the Lord of the world and the compassionate son of Daśaratha, who finally intervenes to convince him about Sītā's purity as a kind of acknowledgement of his own excellence.

> [Daśaratha] (*niśipālikā*)[21]
>
> Rāma, son! Accept Sītā as virtuous in your heart.
> Consider her as the life-breath of your kinsfolk and the ensemble of all your female ancestors.
> [And you] Lakṣmaṇa! Acknowledge Rāma as Equal to Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā,
> Praise him as the supreme Lord (20.25).[22]

1.5. Meeting with the Sages and Dialogue with Vasiṣṭha

Chapters 23–25 represent a point of novelty in Keśavdās's story, when a group of sages from the forest go to meet Rāma in Ayodhyā at the end of the 14 years of exile. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the *ṛṣi*s come to the court to pay homage to the king and they tell him the genealogy of the *rākṣasa*s, in order to glorify Rāma, who defeated them.

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20 *tumahī jaga hau jaga hai tumahī meṁ / tumahī biracī marajāda dunī meṁ / marajādahiṁ choṛata jānata jāko / tabahī avatāra dharo tuma tāko // tuma mīna hvai bedana kī ugharo jū / tumahī dhara kacchapa beṣa dharo jū / tumahī jaga yajña barāha bhaye jū / chiti chīna laī hiranācha haye jū // tumahī narasiṁha ko rūpa saṁvāro / prahlāda ko dīragha dukha bidāro / tumahī bali bāvana veṣa chalo jū / bhṛgunandana hvai chiti chatra dalo jū // tumahī yaha rāvaṇa duṣṭa saṁhāryo / dharaṇī maha būṛata dharma ubāryo / tumahī puni kṛṣṇa ko rūpa dharoge / hati duṣṭana ko bhuva bhāra haroge // tuma baudha sarūpa dayāhiṁ dharoge / puni kalki hvai mlecca samūha haroge / yahi bhāṁti aneka sarūpa tihāre / apanī marajāda ke kāja saṁvāre*.

21 A subdivision of *ati sarkarī* (verse having 15 syllables in each of the four *pāda*s), consisting of the *gaṇa*s *bha ja sa na ra* (ꓽII IꓽI IIꓽ III ꓽIꓽ). Cf. Sinha, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody*, p. 41.

22 *rāma, suta! dharmayuta sīya mana māniye / bandhujana mātugana prāna sama jāniye / īśu sura īśa jagadīśa sama dekhiye / rāma kahaṁ lakṣmaṇa! viśeṣa prabhu lekhiye*.

This part in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* has a completely different tone, being a philosophical dialogue to console Rāma who does not want to go back to his royal duties after having spent many years as a hermit in the forest.

> Listen great sages, I cannot see any pleasure in the world,
> The individual Self cannot prevent death and once dead he cannot extinguish rebirth (24.1).[23]

Throughout the chapter Rāma describes the sorrows that afflict man at every moment of his life, and compared his dull mind to a ship floating in a sea of sin, with waves of lies that make the flow of greed grow (*pairata pāpa payonidhi meṁ mana mūṛha manoja jahāj caṛhoī / khela taū na tajai jaṛa jīva jaū baṛavānala krodha ḍaṛhoī*; 24.22ab). He then asks the sages to teach him a means to release the Self (24.28a). Viśvāmitra invites Vasiṣṭha to make Rāma understand the authentic unchanging nature of the Lord (*īśa ko aśeṣa satya tattva*; 24.30b) and enlighten the intellect of Rāma (*devadeva rāma deva ko prabodha bodhiye*; 24.30d).[24]

In chapter 25, Vasiṣṭha makes Rāma realize his identity with the Absolute and, as such, his state of liberated-in-life. He remarks that being the supreme Self, not even his master can teach him anything but he needs to become conscious of the truth he knows perfectly by himself.

> You are one [and the same] at the beginning, in the middle and the end, [even if] the Self takes different births.
> [This] creation that you create by your [own] thought, how could I grasp it, Murāri? (25.1).[25]

This dialogue between Rāma and Vasiṣṭha is an interesting passage that draws his inspiration from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and will be taken up again in a later work

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23 *sumati mahāmuni suniye jaga mahaṁ sukhkha na guniye / maranahiṁ jīva na tajahīṁ mari mari janmana bhajahīṁ*.

24 This closing verse hints to the possible source of inspiration for this chapter as the Sanskrit allegorical drama *Prabodhacandrodaya* (11th c.), which describes the vices that bewilder the mind as an army that must be defeated by virtues and discrimination to obtain enlightenment. As we will discuss in some details (cf. paragraph 3), Keśavdās will propose his own version of this drama in a later work called *Vijñāngītā*. Apart from the direct mention of his source of inspiration in the last verse (*prabodha bodhyate* < *Prabodhacandrodaya*), the poet builds the entire chapter around the discussion of the vices that affect the mind using the same names that will take the shape of autonomous characters in the *Vijñāngītā*.

25 *tuma ādi madhya avasāna eka / aru jīva janma samujhai aneka // tumahī ju racī racanā bicāri / tehi kauna bhāṁti samajhauṁ murāri.*

by Keśavdās, being the *Vijñāngītā* (1610, see infra paragraph 3). Considering that the *Rāmcandracandrikā* was composed in 1601, we can presume that the author had been interested in this subject for a long time and almost ten years later he dealt with it in detail. In some occasions, he even used the same stanzas in the two works, e.g. *Rāmcandracandrikā* 25.39 and *Vijñāngītā* 21.52 (see infra).

While the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* describes the spiritual training of the young prince Rāma by Vasiṣṭha that is part of his royal education, the dialogue in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* occurs at a moment when Rāma has been crowned king but wants to give up to his royal duties because he is disappointed with mundane life after getting used to the ascetic habits of the forest. Therefore, the role of Vasiṣṭha completely changes in this context, being deputed to convince the king not to give up his reign because it would fall into disorder and could be jeopardized. The approach he recommends to Rāma is the one of the liberated-in-life (*jīvanmukta*), who lives in the world fulfilling his duties but with an enlightened mind and being already liberated from the bounds of *saṃsāra*.

> Keśava says—those in whose heart [only] self-restrain glows, [still] outside they enjoy body pleasures.
> Those having the mind always under control—for them the forest is like a house and the house is like a forest indeed (25.39 cd).[26]

The end of the dialogue gives an explanation to the entire chapter: as it is implausible that God needs to learn from someone else about his intimate nature, because he is already omniscient, here Rāma reveals that he already knew all what Vasiṣṭha expounded, but he kept it secret so far in order to perform his wonderful acts that delight his devotees. Still, having achieved the symbolic meaning of his story, they are now ready to learn the highest philosophical truth.

> I did not make known all what you made known today,
> Now what has been said be done [and] the act you said [be accomplished] (25.41).[27]

26 *kahi keśava yoga jagai hiya bhītara bāhara bhogana yoṁ tanu hai / manu hātha sadā jinake tinako vana hī gharu hai gharu hī banu hai*.

27 *mohi na huto janāibe / sabahī jānyo āju // aba jo kahau so kījiye / kahe tumhāre kāju*.

2. Rāma as the *dhārmik* King in the *Kavipriyā*

In the same year 1601, Keśavdās composed both his adaptation of the story of Rāma, the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, and a treatise on poetics entitled *Kavipriyā*.

In the *Kavipriyā*, aiming to show poets some refined examples of poetry to imitate, he elaborates some stanzas that can serve as a model. As already mentioned, chapter 8 of the text is dedicated to the court and its ornaments, among which we find the king, the prince, the queen and their military and bureaucratic equipment. This chapter is fully imbibed with the imagery connected with *rāmrājya* that is the model for any virtuous kingdom and Rāma is the perfect sovereign incarnating *dharma* and Hindu morality. The ideal of *rāmrājya* as the perfect kingdom is used as the standard of comparison also for the Mughal emperor *Jahāṁgīr*, in whose honour Keśavdās composed a panegyric entitled *Jahāṁgīrjascandrikā* in 1612. Interestingly, in the *Jahāṁgīrjascandrikā* 1.35, Keśavdās refers to the rule of Jahangir using the same stanza he composed almost ten years before in honour of Rāma to celebrate his virtuous rule in the *Kavipriyā*.[28]

> Over each of his cities only thundering clouds approach,
> He is not concerned by calamities; his only concern is for the populace's poverty.
> Even inaccessible routes are taken towards the cities of enemies,
> (or: [intercourse with] inaccessible women is made only in the cities of enemies).
> [In his reign] inconstancy [towards women] is only a literary item and the only theft is of others' pain.
> In his role of landlord, he is considered the deity who sustains the earth.
> Keśavdās says—abhorrent is only abhorrence of human bodies;
> On the top of castles only the statues of deities are seen.
> Such is the political policy of King Raghuvīr/*Jahāṁgīr* (8.5).[29]

This passage is emblematic both of the versatility of the author, who easily adapts his poetry to completely different contexts, and of the efficacy of the model of *rāmrājya* as the virtuous paradigm of sovereignty that could represent a source of inspiration even to the Mughal empire. On the other side, this nonchalant overlapping of the two sovereigns, one being the emblem of Hindu kingship

28 Cf. also Allison Busch, 'Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium: the Historical Poems of Keśavadāsa', *South Asia Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005, p. 47.

29 *nagara nagara para ghanahī tau gājaiṁ ghori īti kī na bhīti bhīti adhana adhīra kī / ari nagarīni prati karata agamyāgauna bhāvai bibhicāri jahāṁ corī para pīra kī / bhūmiyā ke nāte bhūmibhūdhara tau lekhiyatu durgani hī kesorāya durgati sarīra kī / gaḍhani gaḍoī eka devatā hī dekhiyatu aisī rti rājanīti rājai raghuvīra/jahāṁgīra kī.*

and the other the Mughal emperor, unveils the political dynamics of tightening the ties between Hindu courts and the Mughal empire, which tried to have them absorbed into its sphere of influence by appropriating of their cultural models.[30]

3. Rāma as a Seeker for Liberation (*jīvanmukta-mumukṣu*) in the *Vijñāngītā*

Keśav's *Vijñāngītā* is one of the oldest adaptations in Braj Bhāṣā of the Sanskrit allegorical drama *Prabodhacandrodaya*, which was composed by the poet Kṛṣṇa Miśra in the eleventh century. The text describes the fratricidal war between the two kings: Discrimination (Viveka) and Bewilderment (Mahāmoha), in order to appease their father Mind (Manas) and liberate the Self (Puruṣa). The drama moves from an Advaita Vedānta philosophical standpoint and describes the process of the gradual awakening of the Self and the ascent towards a monistic experience, passing through this symbolic interior war.[31] The transmigrating Self is progressively released from the mirages of the illusory world and the traps of *saṃsāra*, becoming aware of its identity with the Absolute and ultimately liberating itself. Renowned for providing a model of an allegorical play for classical

30 Many literary works such as imperial panegyrics and mythical genealogies combining legendary Hindu ancestors and new Muslim rulers witness the transfer of local Hindu courts into the Mughal sphere of influence, close to imperial politics. On this topic see, for example, Muzaffar Alam and Subrahmanyam Sanjay, *The Mughal State: 1526–1750*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Busch, 'Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium', pp. 31–54; Simon Brodbeck and James M. Hegarty (eds), *Genealogy and History in South Asia*, *Religions of South Asia* (special issue), vol. 5, no. 1/2, 2011; Brajdulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1998, pp. 73–86; Carl W. Ernst, 'Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2003, pp. 173–95; Monika Horstmann, *Visions of Kingship in the Twilight of Mughal Rule*, Thirteenth Gonda Lecture, Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006, pp. 7–20; Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1995, pp. 692–722.

31 Sita Krishna Nambiar, *Prabodhacandrodaya of Kṛṣṇa Miśra: Sanskrit Text with English Translation, a Critical Introduction and Index*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, p. 18.

Indian literature, the *Prabodhacandrodaya* had a flourishing tradition of translations and adaptations into many different languages.[32]

Keśav's adaptation is particularly interesting because it is set against the historical and cultural scenery of seventeenth-century North India, offering a portrait of that crucial phase both for Hindu-Muslim encounters and new *bhakti* developments.[33] It was written in 1610, in a flowering period of translations from Sanskrit into modern Indian languages, which provided legitimacy to the use of vernacular for literary compositions in a process of cross-pollination of different traditions, especially in royal courts connected to the Mughal Empire.[34]

A creative textual approach emerges from Keśav's work, where the story of the *Prabodhacandrodaya* becomes the impetus for composing a compendium of philosophy, ranging from classical Purāṇic lore to treatises on morals, opening the text to many other influences coming from a variety of works. In particular, with the same creative approach he used the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, Keśav completes the description of the war between Discrimination and Bewilderment in the first twelve chapters of his work, and dedicates the last nine to many other stories taken from the most disparate texts.

In Kṛṣṇa Miśra's drama, after the war we find King Mind overcome with the grief over the loss of his sons, who has resolved to put an end to his life, until goddess Sarasvatī is sent to persuade him to fulfil his royal duties, with a peaceful attitude and dedication to Hari.[35] Differently, in Keśav's work this spur toward action assumes the shape of a teaching for the king about his royal duties and his moral elevation. In particular, many legends are introduced, mainly taken

32 At least 25 versions are known in Hindi, but many others are found in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Persian, apart from various other adaptation in Sanskrit. Cf. Saroj Agravāl, *Prabodhacandrodaya aur uskī hindī paramparā*, Prayāg: Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, 1962.

33 This complex allegory combines *māyāvāda* with *viṣṇubhakti* in the philosophical framework of theistic Vedānta; Matthew Kapstein, *The Rise of Wisdom Moon by Krishna-Mishra*. New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2009, pp. xxxii–xxxiv. Devotion is the means through which man obtains a peaceful mind and the Self attains its true nature of oneness with the Supreme Self, which is identified both with Viṣṇu and Brahman; Nambiar, *Prabodhacandrodaya of Kṛṣṇa Miśra*, pp. 11–12. Therefore, *bhakti* represents a crucial theme of the *Prabodhacandrodaya*, notably evolving in its many later translations and adaptations.

34 Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004; Carl W. Ernst, 'Muslim Studies of Hinduism?'; Audrey Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2012, https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8WM1MFZ/download (accessed 10.08.2019).

35 Nambiar, *Prabodhacandrodaya of Kṛṣṇa Miśra*, pp. 23–24.

from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which is the other textual source that strongly influenced Keśavdās's composition, as already mentioned in paragraph 1.5.

On the one side, hearing about the stories of great *bhakta*s such as Gādhi or Prahlāda, the listener—Rāma in the case of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and Keśavdās's patron in the case of the *Vijñāngītā*—learns that through intense austerity (*samādhi*) and Hari's grace, he can become a *jīvanmukta* and obtain release, introducing the theme of the divine grace as a reward for one's own spiritual commitment and devotion.

On the other side, Keśavdās makes a parallel between himself and the author of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*: just like Vasiṣṭha instructed Rāma, Keśavdās is now instructing his patron Vīr Siṃh about the possibility of attaining the path for liberation practicing detachment from desire (*virakti*) while being in one's own house. He then asks about the path of Devotion to the Lord (*haribhakti*), which he may realize.

This passage draws on some classical sources for the kings' education, accurately readapted and incorporated, in order to present a kind of 'Mirror for princes' for King Vīr Siṃh.[36] The main source in the *Vijñāngītā* for teachings on royal duty are the two classical Indian epics, that is to say the *Mahābhārata*, which assumes once more its central role in the production of royal culture and aesthetics,[37] and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is regarded as the most important text affirming the *rājadharma* and promoting royal authority.

Vīr Siṃh is depicted as facing a moral dilemma for having dismissed his elder brother Rām Shāh from the throne of Orcha and made a strategic alliance with the emperor *Jahāṁgīr* in a kind of mutual support in the respective illegiti-

36 On this popular genre of manuals prescribing the rules for the moral and political education of the kings, see for example Sajida Sultana Alvi (tr.), *Advice on the Art of Governance. Mau'iẓa-i Jahāngīrī of Muḥammad Bāqir Namj-i Sānī, An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, Persian Text with Introduction, Translation and Notes by Sajida Sultana Alvi, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

37 The fascinating topic of the reproduction of the epic space of the *Mahābhārata* sustaining the discourse on power in premodern India is widely dealt with by Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 223–237. Many sovereigns patronized regional translations of the epic as a mode of articulating their imperial claims by appropriating its geography and adapting the storyline to their specific political needs. Moreover, the Persian translation of the *Mahābhārata* had a crucial role 'in the production of a Mughal imperial culture in the 1580s and a new Indo-Persian imperial aesthetics' (Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters*, pp. 181ff). In a close intertwining of aesthetics and politics, texts have the power to reshape the realities they represent and 'not only reflect but actually produce political power' (Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters*, p. 250).

mate ascent to the throne.[38] Therefore, in order to reassure Vīr Siṃh about the fact that a war undertaken to restate a condition of law is nothing but the *dharma* of kings and should not affect their moral and spiritual ascent, Keśav cites some famous examples of unfathomable wars from the two classical epics.

From the *Rāmāyaṇa* he mentions the story of Kuśa and Lava engaged in a conflict against their father, since the sacrifice horse that Rāma had released for his *aśvamedha* strayed into their forest. Being unaware that the horse belonged to Rāma and that he was their progenitor, Kuśa and Lava were finally forgiven and appointed crown princes (stanza 9.38).

As had already emerged with regard to the *Rāmcandracandrikā* (cf. paragraph 1.5), in the *Vijñāngītā* the quest for spiritual liberation is always associated with liberation in life (*jīvanmukti mumukṣutva*). Therefore, the figure of Rāma as the supreme deity that takes a human form and accomplishes his royal duty is the perfect example of virtue and spiritual elevation that everyone should imitate, especially kings who have political responsibility towards their reign.

In the case of his patron as the addressee of the text, the political strategy that Keśavdās is suggesting to Vīr Siṃh is a mix of commitment to royal duty, detachment from the feebleness that weakens the spirit, and a necessary pragmatism that helps to detach oneself from the triviality of one's own actions, with a bigger awareness of the ultimate goals of life, always keeping Rāma as a model to imitate for spiritual and political elevation.

3.1. Merits of Reciting the Name of Rāma

After having identified the individual Self with the Absolute and getting release from the wordily illusions, in line with the Advaita Vedānta perspective from which it started, in its last chapter the *Vijñāngītā* comes to a devotional point celebrating the name of Rāma as the ultimate means for salvation.

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38 The political alliance between Prince Salīm and Vīr Siṃh was sealed through the murder of Abul Fazl, the personal counsellor of Akbar. Jahangir considered him responsible for Akbar's predilection for Khusrau as his successor to the throne; therefore, he arranged for murdering him at the hand of Vīr Siṃh. In return, Prince Salīm, who became Emperor Jahangir, supported Vīr Siṃh's ascent to the throne of Orcha in 1605. See Richard Burn (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 4, *The Mughal Period*, planned by Walseley Haig, Delhi: S. Chand & Co, 1937, p. 149, and John F. Richard, *The Mughal Empire*, vol. 1, part 5, The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 95.

Vīr Siṃh asks Keśavdās how to dedicate only to Devotion to the Lord (*haribhakti*). The poet recommends him to worship the name of Rāma, listening to which the mind becomes pure above all.

> If austerities and sacrifices are not performed, nor is grasped the core of the precepts of law and morality,
> If a poor man lacks any ability in any way, which way [to salvation] will be told to him, oh lord?
>
> When [the supreme being made of] existence, consciousness and beatitude takes a [visible] shape, he dispels the three sins of the three worlds (21.59cd-60).[39]

All the people chant the name of Rāma, which must always be accomplished with pure pronunciation.

> (*bhujaṅga prayāta*)[40]
> It is said that half of the name can destroy any hindrance, if the full name is remembered, then he is the Absolute.
> Two syllables can save the two worlds [that is this world and the other world], any syllable that is pronounced dispels deceit from the heart.
> If one makes listen and another one listens to it, that becomes a meeting of saints. If one makes recite and another one recites it, it will destroy the multitude of sins.
> If one makes remember and the other remembers it, all the latent impressions are burnt away. Gaining the name of Rāma, the four lineages [i.e. the four castes] are discarded[41] (21.62).[42]
>
> [Vasiṣṭha] (*caupāī*)
> When the Vedas and the Purāṇas will disappear, and prayers and austerities will be performed only in holy places,

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39 *joga jāga kari jāhi na āvai / dharma karma bidhi dharma na pāvai / hai asakta bahu bahu bhāṁti bicārau / kauna bhāṁti prabhu tāhi ucāray //*
vahī saccidānanda rūpai dharaiṁ / su trailoka ke pāpa tīnau haraiṁge / kahaigo sabai nāma śrīrāma tāko / sadāsiddha hai suddha ucchāra jāko.

40 A subdivision of *jagatī* (verse having 12 syllables in each of the four *pāda*s), made of *gaṇa*s *ya ya ya ya* (ISS ISS ISS ISS). Cf. Sinha, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody*, p. 39.

41 Because anyone from any caste can obtain liberation immediately.

42 *kahai nāma ādhau subyādhau nasāvai / smarai nāma pūro su pūro kahāvai / sudhārai duhūṁ loka koṁ barna doū / hiyeṁ chadma chāḍai kahai barna koū / sunāvai sunai sādhusaṃgī kahāvai / kahāvai kahai pāpapuṃjau nasāvai / smarāvai smarai bāsanā jāri ḍārai | lahai rāmahīṁ baṃsa cāro udhārai*.

> When it will be advised either to kill or set on fire,[43] then only the name [of Rāma] will discard that Era of Damnation (*kali*[*yuga*]) (21.63).[44]

In these verses Rāma is celebrated not only in his metaphysical value and equated to the supreme being having the shape of existence, consciousness and beatitude (*saccidānanda*), but also in his relevance within devotional practices that immediately give freedom from sins and salvation to whoever offers him sincere dedication.

4. Combination of Secular and Religious Perspectives Connected to the Name of Rāma

In his dialogue with Vālmīki opening the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, the author plays with the name of Rāma to glorify the Lord, just before the narration of his epic acts starts.

The same stanzas can be found in another of his works, the *Chandmālā*, being a treatise on metrics in which he explains a new set of metres with definitions and examples that might serve to the poets who want to use Braj Bhāṣā for their poetic compositions. The verses from the *Rāmcandracandrikā* are also reported in the *Chandmālā* as examples of each metre (e.g. *Rāmcandracandrikā*

43 Probable hint to the logic of violence that prevails in the Era of Damnation (*kaliyuga*).

44 *jaba saba beda purāna nasaihaiṁ / japa tapa trīatha madhya basaihaiṁ / so upadesa ju māri ki bārai / taba kali kevala nāma udhārai.*

1.8 = *Chandmālā* 1.5;[45] *Rāmcandracandrikā* 1.12 = *Chandmālā* 1.8;[46] *Rāmcandracandrikā* 1.13[47] = *Chandmālā* 1.9).

As for the verses, Keśavdās and Vālmīki discuss the merits of celebrating the name of Rāma and his story because no other is as pure and redeeming as his.

> (*śrī chand*) (Muni)
> Prosperity [and] success [is the name of Rāma]!
> The name of Rāma [is] the truth and the law.
> Of which use is any other name?
> (…)
> I will describe with my words [what is indescribable], he is the shelter of the world.
> The son of Raghu is the root of bliss; the world praises him as the 'Friend of the world' (1.8–1.10, 1.12–13).[48]

Notwithstanding the solemnity of the dialogue, that—as we saw—represents a kind of literary investiture to retell the story of Rāma by Vālmīki himself (cf. paragraph 1.1), these verses show again the complex multi-layered relation that Keśavdās had with the figure of Rāma. Even being so deeply imbued in the literary tradition celebrating Rāma as the supreme god, still the author keeps a

45 Explaining the metre called *śrī*, formed by monosyllabic words each made of one long vowel (SSSS), before giving the example taken from the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, Keśavdās gives its definition in *Chandmālā* 1.5. as follows: 'When putting one long syllable, the word is pleasant, / As an auspicious treasure for the world, that is called *śrī* metre' (*dīrgha eka hī barana ko dījai pada sukhakanda* / *maṅgala sakala nidhāna jaga nāma sunahu śrī chanda*). Cf. Keśavdās, *Chandmālā*, in *Keśav Granthāvalī* (khaṇḍ 2), ed. Viśvanāth Prasād Miśra, Ilāhābād: Hindustānī Ekeḍemī, 1955, p. 431 and Sinha, *The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody*, p. 35.

46 Explaining the metre called *taraṇijā*, formed by *na gaṇa* (III) + one long (S) in each hemistich (IIIS IIIS IIIS IIIS), Keśavdās gives its definition as such: 'The metre with one *na gaṇa* and one long vowel at the end is known as *taraṇijā*' (*nagana ādi guru anta hai chanda taranijā jāni*); Keśavdās, *Chandmālā*, p. 432. Maheshwari Sinha (*The Historical Development of Medieval Hindi Prosody*, p. 35) describes it as a subdivision of *pratīṣṭhā* having four syllables in each of the four *pāda*s.

47 Explaining the metre called *māyā*, defined by Keśavdās as formed by two short syllables (II) + the *ra gaṇa* (SIS) (IISIS IISIS IISIS IISIS), he gives its definition as: 'The metre with one *ra gaṇa* at the end and two short [vowels] at the beginning is described as *māyā*' (*ragana anta dvai ādi laghu māyā chanda bakhānu* / *kesavadāsa prakāsa so pañcabarana paramānu*). Keśavdās says, this can be of five kinds. Cf. Keśavdās, *Chandmālā*, p. 432.

48 *sīdhī* / *rīdhī* // (*sāra cand*) *rāma nāma* / *sātya dhāma* // *aura nāma* / *kona kāma* // (…) (*taraṇijā*) *baranibo barana so* / *jagata ko sarana jo* // (*māyā*) *sukhakanda haiṁ raghunandajū* / *jaga yoṁ kahai jagabandajū.*

dynamic relation with him, leaving scope for literary creativity that sometimes spills over into playful wit.

5. Conclusion

Notwithstanding with his personal religious perspective, Keśavdās has a very secular, albeit articulated relation with Rāma and the *Rāmkathā* in his works. The way Rāma's character is portrayed demonstrates the versatility of his figure. From a god, to a *dhārmik* king to the exemplary seeker for salvation, he embodies and encompasses three conditions that are completely different on the ontological plan. As already pointed out by Sheldon Pollock, much of his aesthetic power derives from being an 'adaptation of an ancient mythopoetic morpheme (…) that requires the existence of a new life-form to destroy extraordinary evil'. Rāma is not simply a god or a man but a 'combinatory being that draws from and transcends the powers of both realms'.[49]

On the one hand, Rāma represents probably a unique example in the Hindu pantheon, which highlights how the tradition reinterprets its own elements with plasticity, in concomitance with new historical and cultural conditions. Both in the trend of vernacularization and in the new balance of power between Hindu and Islamic rulers from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the *Rāmāyaṇa* entered the realm of public political discourse because it offered a conceptualization of divine political order that could be narrated as the stronghold against a 'fully demonized Other [that] can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned'.[50]

On the other hand, the figure of Rāma represents an excellent vantage point for appreciating the literary freedom of an author like Keśavdās who, thanks to such a polysemic character, could adapt and reinterpret the classical tradition to the new historical, cultural and linguistic context in which he lived and that is reflected in his works.

49 Sheldon Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1993, p. 282.

50 Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination', p. 264.

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Mary Brockington

Showing What Is Not: The Use of Illusion in Classical Sanskrit Rāma Plays

The very essence of theatre is the acceptance by the audience of visual illusion, the illusion that they are watching an actual event as it happens, while knowing perfectly well that they are not.[1] Illusion, and the delusion it may or may not induce, has lain at the heart of the Rāma narrative from its earliest form: if Sītā had not been deluded by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a marvellous deer and uttering a dying cry for help, causing Rāma and then Lakṣmaṇa to leave her unprotected in the hostile forest, and if she had not then been deluded by a counterfeit mendicant, enabling Rāvaṇa to abduct her safely, the story as it is told in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*—and in most subsequent retellings—could never have happened. Other illusions however (the counterfeit head of Rāma produced by Vidyujjihva to demoralize Sītā, and the counterfeit Sītā apparently killed by Indrajit) have no lasting effect on the plot, for the victims are soon disabused by their friends.[2] Authors of classical Sanskrit dramas (*nāṭya*s) based on the Rāma story exploit this concept in the form of abundant additional illusions but with equally little effect on the traditional basic narrative. In this they are conforming to the one principle transcending all boundaries within and between the differing genres in which the Rāma story is presented, the need not to deviate too blatantly from the well-known, well-loved, traditional plotline. Sītā must be abducted; Rāvaṇa must be overcome. This basic requirement is absolute.

Each classical dramatist accepted a second absolute, the requirement for novelty, and met it with his own increasingly fanciful elaboration of a narrative loaded with illusions and counterfeits; but since novelty was paramount, the

1 In this article it is not my intention to add to the number of admirable studies of classical Sanskrit poetics or dramaturgy, but to concentrate instead on the largely unexplored topic of narrative and its impact on the development of the Rāma tradition.

2 *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (henceforth in footnotes abbreviated as *VRm*) 6.22–24; 6.68–71 (critically edited by G.H. Bhatt and U.P. Shah, 7 vols, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975).

corollary was that no dramatist might reproduce a novel element in another's work without incorporating at least a minor change.

A further convention much employed in the *nāṭya* tradition was that acts of violence were often made to occur off-stage, to be subsequently reported verbally to the audience;[3] a stage production of the epic Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, preeminently a warrior tale based on repeated violence, would be in danger of degenerating into a boring monologue. Entertaining episodes involving short-lived counterfeits provided the most successful dramatists with welcome new visual episodes that nevertheless had virtually no effect on the progress of the narrative; after any brief period of delusion, the *status quo ante* was restored. The tyranny of the original plot, however embellished—or distorted—could not be overthrown. Logical anomalies could result from the tension of this inevitable clash between conformity and novelty.

1. *Kāvya*s

The requirements for conformity embellished by novelty also applied to the poets recreating the Rāma narrative, in whole or in part, throughout classical Sanskrit literature. *Kāvya* authors fulfilled these requirements by concentrating on poetic form and expression, producing emotive, linguistic or metrical elaboration. While drama is primarily a single-experience visual medium, such poetry is best appreciated by being heard or read repeatedly. New plot elements could not have the same impact—surprise—in the classical *kāvya*s as they did in the *nāṭya*s. Accordingly, the profusion of deceptions produced by illusions and counterfeit characters found in the *nāṭya* narrative schemes does not feature prominently in *kāvya*s, with two minor exceptions (illusions 11.1., 11.2.).[4] For example, Rāma Pāṇivāda composed both a *kāvya* (*Rāghavīya*) and a *nāṭya* (*Sītārāghava*); the *kāvya* follows the standard epic narrative closely (but see illusion 11.2.), whereas the *nāṭya* introduces several new counterfeit characters (illusions 1.3., 2.5., 5.1.).

3 For exceptions to this practice see Bożena Śliwczyńska's article 'Death on the Stage in Sanskrit Classical Theatre: A Long-Sustained Misinterpretation', in *CEENIS. Current Research Series*, vol. 1, eds Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska, Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2013, pp. 68–75.

4 For a list of illusions produced by these counterfeits, see the Appendix. Fuller references to the material on which this article is based can be found on the Oxford Research Archive (ORA) to be found at http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8df9647a-8002-45ff-b37e-7effb669768b.

The form Kālidāsa chose for his retelling, the *Raghuvaṃśa*, as early as the fourth or fifth century (almost certainly earlier than any of the Rāma *nāṭya*s) was that of the *kāvya*. Accomplished composer both of *kāvya*s and of *nāṭya*s on other subjects that he was, he may well have realized that the violent nature of the Rāma story made it unsuitable for the stage. He generally followed the narrative of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, but introduced a considerable amount of new material by extending it backwards and forwards by a number of generations. Genealogies of Rāma's ancestors were a standard part of the tradition,[5] but Kālidāsa accompanies the names of Dilīpa, Raghu and Aja, and of some of Rāma's successors, with elaborate and affecting stories.[6] The chief impact of the many colourful details with which he embellished his narrative was to soften the image of the warrior-heroes and give the epic a gentler, more romantic touch.

2. *Nāṭya*s

In Rāma dramas, the tone varies. Bhavabhūti, in one of his Rāma plays, the *Uttararāmacarita*, and Dhīranāga[7] even more inventively in his *Kundamālā*, are unusually perceptive in capturing Rāma's desolation at the sacrifice he has felt obliged to make by banishing Sītā. The device they choose to use is the concept of invisibility, and they employ it to great effect, producing poignant delusions in

5 *VRm* 1.69 and 2.102. For additions to the Ikṣvāku genealogy, not identical to Kālidāsa's in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Mahābhārata*, see Mary Brockington, 'Rāma Dāśarathi, the Absent Presence in the *Harivaṃśa*', in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures*, Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, September 2002, ed. Petteri Koskikallio, Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005, pp. 299–302 and 312.

6 Kālidāsa, *Le Raghuvamça: la lignée des fils du soleil*, tr. Louis Renou, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1928; also *Raghuvamsam: the Line of Raghu*, tr. Aditya Narayan Dhairyasheel Haksar, Gurgaon: Penguin Books India, 2016. A few later authors do refer to some of these incidents: Aja's grief at the death of Indumatī is mentioned in the *Pratimānāṭaka* (*The Statue: Bhāsa's Pratimā in English Translation*, tr. S.S. Janaki, Madras: Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1978, vol. 3, p. 36); it was also used, together with Dilīpa's decision to live in the forest to serve a cow in order to engender offspring, in Abhinanda's *Rāmacarita*; see Venkatarama Raghavan, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit and Prākrit Mahākāvya Literature*, Professor P.D. Gune Memorial Lectures 1977, Pune: Board of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Poona, 1985 (repr. Chennai, 2017), pp. 59–60, and Anthony Kennedy Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, 7 vols, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972–1992, vol. 5, pp. 100–101.

7 This dramatist's name is variously transcribed as Dhīranāga/Vīranāga/Diṅnāga.

several characters and tender, delusive encounters between the sorrowing Rāma and his unrecognized wife (illusions 9.1., 9.2., 9.3.).

Most dramatists, however, peopled their narratives with counterfeit characters, producing an effect ranging from the startling, via the comic, to the farcically chaotic.

In Murāri's *Anargharāghava*, it is startling to find Rāma's exile contrived, not by his enemies, but by three of his closest allies or admirers, Jāmbavān, the Śabarī, and Hanumān (illusion 2.3.).

A comic note is struck in Subhaṭa's *Dūtāṅgada*, when Aṅgada is sent to Laṅkā with a defiant message from Rāma. He is confronted by a Sītā created on Rāvaṇa's instructions telling him that she is now Rāvaṇa's wife, and advising Rāma to return at once to Ayodhyā, for the city has been devastated by *rākṣasa*s and Bharata is dead. Aṅgada's delusion does not last long: the deception is revealed when news is brought that the real Sītā is attempting suicide, and the panic-stricken Rāvaṇa predictably (and necessarily, if the narrative is not to be wrecked) orders her guards to save her (illusion 6.2.).

As for Śaktibhadra's presentation of the abduction scene in his *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, where counterfeits abound to the extent that he has one Rāvaṇa, one Mārīca, one Śūrpaṇakhā, two Lakṣmaṇas, two Sītās, and three Rāmas (some of them real) all on stage at the same time, their conversations interlaced, it can be called nothing less than a fast-paced farce contrived with admirable skill, and we can only imagine the delight of the audience (illusion 4.4.).

To the theatre directors counterfeit characters present both a considerable challenge and also a great opportunity to exploit the comic potentialities of the situation. The illusions must be accurate enough to purport to convince the fictive victims, but not so accurate as to confuse the audience as to which is the false character and which the genuine; they must be carefully prepared before they can follow the appearance of counterfeits on stage.[8] The audience must realize that Rāma (the real Rāma) is not talking to Sītā but to Śūrpaṇakhā, but Rāma himself must not.

Most of the newly-invented illusions are detected quickly and any delusion they have produced is dissipated, often by the arrival of the person counterfeited (e.g. illusions 1.3., 4.3., 5.1., 6.3., 7.2.). Such scenes would allow a competent

8 For the method used to present the counterfeit characters of Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* in the continuing tradition see the translation of a Malayalam production manual in *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel in Performance*, ed. Clifford Reis Jones, tr. Venkatarama Raghavan, *With the Production Manual from the Tradition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama*, tr. D. Leela A. Nambudrippad and Betty True Jones, Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies/Oxford University Press, 1984.

stage director to whet the audience's appetite by having the genuine character appear predictably at the back of the stage unnoticed by all … except the audience.

When the medium of a visual presentation is not live (a drama), but static (paintings or carvings), illusions are all the more difficult to convey. Śūrpaṇakhā's failure to use her shape-changing powers in the earliest verbal texts and appear as a beautiful human in her attempt to seduce Rāma (concentrating as they do on the humour of such a grotesque misalliance) has often been seen as an anomaly, rectified in many later versions in most verbal genres; when represented visually her identity may be explained either by simple context, by an inscription, or by showing her reversion to her original form when mutilated. However, the core episode of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is so well-known that the image of Sītā in conversation with a mendicant is unlikely to cause any misunderstanding; examples are too many to list. Within Southeast Asia the episode where Rāvaṇa attempts but fails to demoralize Rāma by ordering a *rākṣasī* Benjakai to counterfeit the dead body of Sītā is also so well-loved and so widely disseminated in verbal texts that visual examples of it are common.[9]

The basic factor uniting all the illusions found in classical *nāṭya*s is the very fact that they appear in dramas: more particularly, that they have been created by dramatists, specifically for a medium—theatrical performance—dependent on visual illusions, and conventionally said to require a 'suspension of disbelief' on the part of the audience. In the classical Sanskrit tradition, this feature is regularly emphasized by a prefatory discussion between the director and the cast; indeed, the actor playing the so-called 'director' may himself be considered a counterfeit of the unseen person actually directing the performance. When the play introduced by such a preface begins, it can almost be regarded as a 'play-within-a-play', and the idea of theatre as illusion is reinforced in those *nāṭya*s that advance their narratives by means of a further-emboxed 'play-within-a-play'

9 Mary Brockington, 'The Ladies' Monkey: Hanumān in Boston', *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 300, 2012, pp. 199–214 and 'From Kanauj to Laos: Development of the "Floating Maiden" Episode in the Southeast Asian Rāma Tradition', to appear in *Connecting Cultures: Rāmāyaṇa Retellings in South India and Southeast Asia*, Proceedings of an International Conference Held in Bangalore, 2017, ed. S. Settar and Parul Pandya Dhar (Mangalore: Manipal University Press). On the problems of representing invisibility in paintings see Mary Brockington, 'Drawing the Words', pp. 242, 255, 258, in M.B. and John Brockington, 'Mānaku's *Siege of Laṅkā* Series: Words and Pictures', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 73, 2013, pp. 231–258.

watched by some of the characters;[10] at least the living audience—as opposed to the fictive one—have been forewarned not to be deluded into believing that they are watching the living Rāma, Sītā and Rāvaṇa (illusions 10.1., 10.2., 10.3.).

3. Rāma

The minimal effect all these fleeting illusions exert on the overall plot of the narrative is in stark contrast to their cumulative effect on the personality attributed to heroes and villains alike. In the *nāṭya*s, Rāma is repeatedly subjected to delusions of various kinds, repeatedly he is expected to despair at false reports, repeatedly he must be reassured that counterfeits are not genuine; his openness to being deluded continues in some *nāṭya*s even as the victors are approaching Ayodhyā, with Māyurāja piling effect upon effect in an effort to prolong and increase the tension felt by an audience who know perfectly well that the wily *rākṣasa*s are never going to succeed, but may well be exasperated by a hero who never learns to check the sources of his information (illusion 7.2.).

In many respects, the composers of Rāma *nāṭya*s stand outside the conventional understanding of the figure of Rāma developing from epic hero to supreme deity. They do not portray him with increasing reverence; their portrayal is more likely to arouse scorn and exasperation in his audience than the wonder and admiration evoked by the warrior of the epics, or the devotion evoked by the *bhakti* movement. Rāma is still seen as physically powerful, but so gullible and open to delusion and despair that he is consistently unable to make use of that power. In Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, the Daṇḍaka sages are so worried about him that they give him a magic ring to protect him from counterfeit *rākṣasa*s; in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, it was *they* who had begged *him* to protect *them* from *rākṣasa*s.[11] This talisman will reveal the nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* who touches its wearer. To Sītā they similarly give a hair-jewel that will reveal the true nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* whom she touches; that the recognition token which she sends to Rāma via Hanumān is acknowledged to be that same protective device is a further example of the tyranny of the original plot-line (fortunately for her, this rash act, depriving herself of its protection, is not exploited).[12]

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10 The effect of the play-within-the-play in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, the *mise en abyme*, is examined by Lyne Bansat-Boudon, 'L'épopée mise en scène: l'exemple de l'*Uttararāmacarita*', *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 288, 2000, pp. 83–111.

11 *VRm* 3.1.19–20; 3.5; 3.9.

12 Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*, 3.8–10, 34–39; 6.21; see illusion 4.4.

It goes without saying that, in order for Sītā to be rescued from captivity and Rāvaṇa killed, she must first be abducted. But when Rāma is to be presented as the world's supreme warrior, how can this happen without bringing forward the defeat of Rāvaṇa to the middle of the abduction and shortening the proposed narrative drastically and unacceptably? Such was the dilemma confronting the originator of the tale. For Rāma to leave Sītā alone at all, especially in such a dangerous setting, would be a dereliction of his duty to protect her; the counterfeit deer lures him and Lakṣmaṇa away, but is not gullibility almost as culpable? The composer or composers of the earliest, *kṣatriya*-oriented layers of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text were little troubled by such concerns, but some limited criticisms are found, mostly in allusions in a few non-*Rāmāyaṇa* texts.[13]

The supreme example of Rāṃa's openness to delusion is his welcoming Rāvaṇa to his hermitage, and then confiding Sītā to the care of her abductor (illusions 4.1., 4.2., 4.3.). The author of the *Pratimānāṭaka* makes strenuous efforts to present Rāma's folly more seriously than before, as an act of great piety rather than as weak surrender to the demands of a petulant wife. Māyurāja takes several steps to soften any anticipated criticism of his conduct: he makes Rāvaṇa take the form of an ascetic known to Rāma (introducing a mild note of parody when, predictably, Lakṣmaṇa subsequently meets the true ascetic—too late, necessarily, to prevent the inevitable catastrophe); further, he makes Rāma leave, urged by Sītā herself, deluded by a fictive appeal for help from Lakṣmaṇa. This interesting inversion of the epic's abduction plot even gives Lakṣmaṇa the opportunity to

13 However, at *Mahānāṭaka*, 4.179 (tr. Raja Kali Krishna Bahadur, 2 vols (in 1), Calcutta: N. Robertson and Co., 1840), Rāma is said to pursue Mārīca despite the manifest impossibility of a golden deer. Elsewhere he is criticized for being deluded: in a late, poorly attested allusion in the *Mahābhārata*, 2,583*1–2, inserted after 2.67.4, (critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar and others, 19 vols, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966), Yudhiṣṭhira is excused for his folly in returning for the second dicing encounter despite knowing that it would bring disaster, on the grounds that 'although a golden deer is impossible, yet Rāma was enticed by it'; such an allusion cannot be regarded as conferring wholehearted approval on either hero. Similar references can be found at *Śukasaptati*, 36 tale 6 (*Seventy Tales of the Parrot*, tr. Aditya Narayan Dhairyasheel Haksar, New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2000) and in Nārāyaṇa's *Hitopadeśa*, 1.64 (*'Friendly Advice' by Nārāyaṇa & 'King Vikrama's Adventures'*, tr. Judit Törzsök, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2007). In Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, 5.106 (*Rāma's Last Act*, tr. Sheldon Pollock, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2007), Rāma's as yet unrecognized son Lava also criticizes him for retreating three steps before Khara, an accusation exaggerated out of what was represented as skilful evasion at *VRm* 3.29.23cd.

criticize his older brother for leaving Sītā behind in the hermitage; it may indicate some influence from Jain reconstructions.

Māyurāja is not the only dramatist to give Lakṣmaṇa an enhanced position in the narrative. Virūpākṣadeva's brief, one-act *Unmattarāghava* focuses, as the title indicates, on the complete mental collapse suffered by the hero on discovering the loss of his wife; this episode is developed from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, where, encouraged by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma soon recovers his stability enough to embark upon the search. Virūpākṣadeva presents a state of delusion that is much more serious and crippling—potentially tragic rather than comic or even farcical—than any of the temporary deceptions produced by the *rākṣasa* counterfeits, and it leads to a more radical revision of the narrative. Lakṣmaṇa is made to take over Rāma's role as warrior-avenger and liberator: Lakṣmaṇa alone receives Jaṭāyus' report, Lakṣmaṇa kills Rāvaṇa, and Lakṣmaṇa returns to Daṇḍaka with Sītā on the *puṣpaka* chariot, all proclaimed by a heavenly voice in a single verse with scant details.[14] This stratagem fulfils the convention that *nāṭya*s are expected to have a happy ending, but such an ending could have been achieved almost equally well if the voice had prophesied Rāma's recovery and traditional victory, rather than shifting the emphasis to Lakṣmaṇa. Bringing out the pathos of Rāma's grief has had the consequence of diminishing his character as a warrior-hero.

The depiction of Rāma's character presented by his reaction to these illusions is not entirely one-dimensional. A more nuanced view appears in two early *nāṭya*s that still retain some traces of the *kṣatriya* ethic. In the *Rāghavābhyudaya*, Rāma realizes that accepting an offer from Rāvaṇa to exchange Sītā for peace—he does not know at that point that she is in reality a *rākṣasī*—will prevent him from carrying out his promise of sovereignty over Laṅkā to Vibhīṣaṇa, and hesitates (illusion 6.1.). In Māyurāja's *Udāttarāghava*, Rāma (admittedly urged on by Sītā) makes rescuing Lakṣmaṇa from his supposed danger more important than staying with her (illusion 4.3.); in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* it was not until he was confronted by Lakṣmaṇa's apparently dead body in the battle for Laṅkā that he came to realize that he valued his brother more highly than his wife.[15]

One aspect of Rāma's character in the traditional narrative that has aroused criticism has been his initial refusal to believe that Sītā could have remained chaste during her captivity. Śaktibhadra's treatment of this theme has made the loving husband seem not only more harsh but foolishly unperceptive. In his ver-

14 Virūpākṣadeva, *Unmattarāghava*, see Juthika Ghosh, *Epic Sources of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series XXIII, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1963, pp. 175–177.

15 *VRm* 6.39.

sion, Anasūyā's traditional gift of clothes or cosmetics is modified to a boon that restricts its effect to perpetual beauty, but only in the eyes of her husband; that Rāvaṇa nevertheless finds her beautiful enough to wish to abduct her is yet another anomaly resulting from the tyranny of the well-established plot. When Rāma sees her at the end of her captivity she still appears beautiful to him; he misinterprets this as proof of her infidelity and agrees to her entering fire as a punishment, rather than simply divorcing her on suspicion as in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Sītā laments that the boon is no longer a blessing but a curse, having much earlier been puzzled that Rāma should not find it strange that her beauty had been untouched by the sufferings of thirteen years living in Daṇḍaka forest.[16]

By the early thirteenth century, efforts had been made to lighten this negative image of Rāma, but with little success. In Jayadeva's *Prasannarāghava*, a magic illusion enables Rāma to watch, indignant but helpless, as Sītā resists Rāvaṇa's murderous threats in the *aśokavana* (illusion 6.5.), but she still enters fire after her liberation.[17] In the first half of the seventeenth century, the paradoxes were resolved in a much more convoluted way. In his *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, Mahādeva has Rāma provided with a magic mirror that enables him to hear Rāvaṇa declare Sītā's chastity to be too great for him to overcome. Rāma nevertheless declares that Sītā will still have to provide proof, and subsequently believes that she has performed her fire ordeal voluntarily as a demonstration to satisfy the public; he is unaware that a counterfeit of himself, produced by Maya in conspiracy with Śūrpaṇakhā in a vain attempt to cause her to commit suicide, has deluded her into thinking that he has repudiated her (illusion 6.6.).

The other example of Rāma's severity towards Sītā, banishing her from Ayodhyā in order to preserve the integrity of his position as ruler, has evoked much criticism within the tradition and beyond. Rarely has the personal cost to Rāma, made clear from the inception in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, been given full weight. Bhavabhūti does make some reference to Rāma's sorrow in *Uttararāmacarita* act 7, but in Dhīranāga's *Kundamālā* act 4 we are presented with a Rāma whose impotent desolation arouses our full sympathy.[18]

16 Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*: 2.5; 7.16.

17 Jayadeva, *Prasannarāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 488–498.

18 Dhīranāga, *The Jasmine Garland (Kundamālā)*, tr. A.C. Woolner, Punjab University Oriental Publications XXVII, London: Oxford University Press, 1935.

4. Sītā

The epic human Sītā, stalwart and steadfast protector of her own virtue during her captivity in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, undergoes a transformation to match that of her husband. She too comes to be venerated and eventually seen as a goddess, and this view is also reflected in the dramas. Not merely to preserve her own sexual reputation, but crucially to protect the god Rāma from the pollution of tolerating an impure wife, her virtue must, at all costs, be seen to be safeguarded; but this protection comes at something of a cost to her personality. At the end of the tenth century Śaktibhadra's hair-jewel, revealing the true nature of any transformed *rākṣasa* whom she might touch (illusion 4.4.), does not rob her of all awareness of her situation or control over her actions; by the end of the seventeenth century, when the emphasis is even more firmly on preserving her purity by magical means, she is not merely deluded and misguided but completely passive. Bhagavantarāyamakhin makes Anasūyā's gift an apotropaic bark-cloth garment to guard her from Rāvaṇa's touch, removing from Sītā any lingering element of responsibility for herself;[19] the stalwart and steadfast resistance to Rāvaṇa's threats and blandishments she displays throughout the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* can no longer suffice to convince dramatists' audiences, or even, in a number of cases, to convince the now-divine Rāma himself. In Mahādeva's convoluted *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, Rāma's response to the magic mirror's assurance of Sītā's chastity is that she will still have to provide proof (illusion 6.6.); and there are other dramas where various magical means of protecting Sītā's virtue do not satisfy the sceptical Rāma. It seems that Vālmīki's vindication by fire was too good an episode to be jettisoned.

Śaktibhadra's complex and chaotic device of enticing Sītā to contribute to her own abduction by entering Rāvaṇa's chariot willingly (illusion 4.4.) is entertaining, and only mildly to be taken seriously;[20] she has been deluded by a counterfeit Rāma (Rāvaṇa, of course), but she finds Rāvaṇa's trick so convincing that

19 Bhagavantarāyamakhin, *Rāghavābhyudaya*, ed. P.M. Padmanabha Sarma, Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal Series, CCVI, Thanjavur: Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1985, Act 4.

20 A later teller in the *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* recounts a simpler, non-farcical episode so similar that the two can hardly not be related. Sītā is told by the disguised Rāvaṇa that he has brought a message from Rāma that Bharata has arrived to take them all back to Ayodhyā; deceived, she enters his chariot (*Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, ed. Puspendra Kumar, Delhi: Nag, 1987, 49.81–86). The version appearing in the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* differs only slightly in detail: Rāvaṇa attempts to lure her from hermitage by saying Kausalyā wishes to see her urgently (*Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, ed. Haraprasád Śástrí, Bibliotheca Indica, 6 fascicules, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1888–1897, 19.49).

Śaktibhadra can present her as satisfied by her abductor's explanation of why she can see Rāma (the real one) apparently talking to herself (in fact Śūrpaṇakhā). These delusions do not last, but are resolved when the author skilfully uses the two magic motifs for which he has already carefully prepared the audience.

However, the episode of Sītā contributing to her own abduction is more than simply entertaining: it ensures that she enters the chariot untouched by her abductor, with no stain on her purity. Some Purāṇic redactors went to even greater lengths to promote a pious image of her as unpolluted and therefore unpolluting: from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* onwards Rāvaṇa is made to abduct, not the true Sītā, but a substitute created by Agni.[21] Paradoxically, given the fondness of the classical authors for counterfeits, I have found no instances of this motif in the classical *nāṭya*s.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa had twice attempted to break Sītā's resistance by convincing her that her husband had been killed in battle, first by showing her Rāma's counterfeit severed head and later by having her shown Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lying motionless on the battlefield, ensnared by Indrajit's snake-arrows.[22] After an initial period of despair, Sītā had been reassured by one of her *rākṣasī* attendants. In the *nāṭya*s, further illusions torment her. In the *Hanumannāṭaka*, the illusion is not that Rāma is dead, but that he is victorious (illusion 6.4.): Rāvaṇa courts her in the counterfeit form of Rāma, carrying his own counterfeit ten heads, but Sītā is disabused by her virtue as a faithful wife and reassured in unoriginal fashion by a heavenly voice that she will suffer no further deceptions, for she will not see the real Rāma again until she sees the dead body of her captor.

Sītā's role becomes even more passive when she is counterfeited by Śūrpaṇakhā to satisfy the *rākṣasī*'s frustrated lust. In Dharmagupta's *Rāmāṅkanāṭikā*, when Śūrpaṇakhā's purpose is to delude Rāma into accepting

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21 *Kūrma Purāṇa*: 2.34.115–37 (tr. Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, 2 vols, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, vols 20–21, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981–1982); *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*: 2.14 (ed. J.L. Shastri, 2 vols, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984–85, repr. 2004); *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*: 9.16.31–53 (Bambaī: Khemarāja Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa, ?1988; repr. of Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1889); *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*, 42.30 (ed. Pushpendra Kumar, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1983).

22 *VRm* 6.22–24; 6.37–38. Heads of both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa counterfeited: *Abhiṣekanāṭaka*, 5 (ed. and tr. V. Venkataram Shastri, Lahore: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1930); *Hanumannāṭaka*, 2.368 (in *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus*, 2 vols, by Horace Hayman Wilson, London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., vol. 2, pp. 363–373, 1835); *Mahānāṭaka*, tr. Bahadur, 8.508. Vidyujjihva creates further illusions to delude *vānara*s: Mallinātha, *Raghuvīracarita*, see P.G. Lalye, *Mallinātha*, Makers of Indian Literature, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, p. 98.

her as his wife, the true Sītā is shown in an ineffectual light, inferior to the amorous *rākṣasī* when she is (fortunately for her) unable to fulfil the identity-test proposed by Lakṣmaṇa (illusion 3.). At about the same time, but for no apparent reason, Bhāskarabhaṭṭa presents her in a purely inconsequential illusory marvel: she strays into a region cursed by Durvāsas, where she turns into a gazelle, but is soon restored by Agastya.[23]

Stripped of all the strength of character that adorns the epic human woman, and robbed even of the opportunity to say 'No', in the dramatists' hands this divinity is irreproachable but often deluded, ineffectual, passive. Like her husband, Sītā is diminished.

5. *Rākṣasa*s

The diminution of Rāma's stature, perhaps surprisingly, does not lead to a corresponding rise in the stature of his arch-enemy. The tricks of Rāvaṇa and his henchmen fail—unless success is demanded by the traditional plot—and the failure is often comical and predictable, especially when it is Rāvaṇa himself that is deluded. Those tricks that must succeed may be even more devious, as when he contrives to be welcomed into the hermitage by Rāma himself, but the violent passion of the fearsome monster whose power could terrify the gods themselves is now presented as weak lovesickness. Mocked and subjected to delusions contrived by his inferiors, even the all-powerful *rākṣasa* king is diminished in stature by the classical dramatists.

*Rākṣasa*s had always been presented as *kāmarūpin*, able to change shape at will,[24] yet they are seen to make relatively little use of this troublesome power in early versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; many scholars have expressed surprise that Vālmīki's Śūrpaṇakhā approaches Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in her own form, not (as in many later versions) as a beauty, enticing by human standards. The authors of many *nāṭya*s, on the other hand, seized on the opportunity to exploit the *rākṣasa*s' shape-changing ability in ever more fanciful and complex ways, occasionally even putting it to use not to deceive their enemies, but to delude and comfort their own lovelorn king.

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23 Bhāskarabhaṭṭa, *Unmattarāghava*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 174–175.

24 The Thompson Indexes classify this widely-employed motif as D40 and D630: Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols, rev. edn Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955–1958 (repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, no date); Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India*, Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series X, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958.

From at least as early as the beginning of the tenth century, Rājaśekhara and other dramatists had shown Rāvaṇa as lusting for Sītā from the time of the suitor test, and even competing in it. That he must fail is inevitable. The plot says so. He leaves Mithilā still pining for Sītā, and physically humiliated; the awe-inspiring might that could momentarily lift Kailāsa has been overshadowed when what appears to be a puny ascetic youth lifts and breaks Śiva's bow.[25] Rājaśekhara presents the elderly *rākṣasa* Mālyavān as commissioning the creation of a counterfeit Sītā in an attempt to comfort the lovesick Rāvaṇa (illusion 1.1.; see also 5.2.). Initially deluded, Rāvaṇa soon realizes the deception, as he must be made to do to allow the mandatory traditional abduction narrative to proceed undisturbed.

In the late seventeenth century, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita exploits the comic potential inherent in the confusion produced when he brings counterfeits and true characters together at the suitor test; in his *Jānakīpariṇaya* he has Mārīca plot with the traditional *rākṣasa* maker of counterfeits, Vidyujjihva, to create an illusory Sītā apparently leaping into fire before her marriage, in an unsuccessful attempt to delude the genuine Rāma into imitating her, leaving the field clear for Rāvaṇa to satisfy his desire for the real Sītā (illusion 1.2.).

Also at the suitor test, Rāma Pāṇivāda aims his illusions at military rather than romantic goals in a complicated plot to avenge Rāma's victories over Tāṭakā, Mārīca and Subāhu. A *rākṣasa* counterfeits Daśaratha (along with his driver Sumantra), but loses his opportunity to forbid Rāma to take the suitor test when—predictably—the true Daśaratha and Sumantra arrive; the same *rākṣasa* then incites Paraśurāma to attack Rāma, with the usual lack of success; finally he incites Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā (illusion 1.3.).

Subhaṭa's version of Aṅgada's embassy to Laṅkā (already mentioned), where he meets a counterfeit Sītā, and Rāvaṇa panics into revealing the deception (illusion 6.2.), is replaced by a much less inventive illusion in Mahādeva's *Adbhutadarpaṇa*; news is brought to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a *vānara* ally that Aṅgada has been subverted by Rāvaṇa, news that is predictably countered by the return of Aṅgada.[26] The same *rākṣasa* later deludes them by purporting to show them Sugrīva's severed head (illusion 6.3.).

Vengeful *rākṣasa*s continue to persecute the victors during and after their return to Ayodhyā (illusions 7.1., 7.2.). Śūrpaṇakhā continues to pursue her malice against Rāma and Sītā for many years after their return to Ayodhyā, hoping to

25 *VRm* 7.16.17–20; 1.66.17.

26 Many post-*VRm* authors explore the fact that as the son of Vālin, killed with questionable legitimacy by Rāma, Aṅgada's loyalty is open to subversion by Rāvaṇa; I have met no version in which the attempt succeeds.

destroy the whole family, now that she has two scores to settle: her mutilation, and the death of her brother. In Kalya Lakṣmīṇṛsiṃha's drama, she possesses the washerman whose gossip deludes Rāma into banishing Sītā, then provokes the conflict between Rāma and his sons by planning to steal the *aśvamedha* horse; when Lava has been drawn into battle with Śatrughna, she counterfeits Sītā jumping into fire, bringing about his capture by Bharata when the delusion has caused him to swoon (illusion 8.).[27]

6. Secondary Villains

The secondary villains of the original narrative, Kaikeyī and by extension Mantharā, are accorded a rather different fate, in that the early dramatists absolve them of all guilt for the exile, although Kaikeyī's excuse in the *Pratimānāṭaka* is clumsy and unconvincing.[28] The process, already started in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, of deflecting Daśaratha's responsibility on to the women is extended and reversed by Bhavabhūti, Rājaśekhara and Murāri; Rājaśekhara extends the innocence to include Daśaratha himself (illusions 2.1., 2.2., 2.3.; see also 2.4., 2.5.). This entails focusing attention rather more on the *rākṣasa* perpetrators of similar delusions than on their victims, with the consequence (possibly unintended) of presenting Bhavabhūti's and Rājaśekhara's Mālyavāns, and particularly the favoured and obedient little granddaughter Śūrpaṇakhā, as less sinister, while they achieve greater stature than the erstwhile villain. On the other hand, Rāma's future allies lose some sympathy in Murāri's rewriting, where the power of counterfeiting is now attributed to the *vānara*s and their motives seem unconvincing: his Mantharā is counterfeited by the Śabarī on the instructions of Jāmbavān (illusion 2.3.). This policy of absolving Mantharā of guilt is in direct opposition to the process in some non-classical versions, where Mantharā acts less out of loyalty to her mistress but more out of a desire to avenge herself against Rāma, who, as a boy, had treated her in a way we now consider cruel.[29]

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27 Moorty reports that similar motifs are found in Telugu tradition (Kalya Lakṣmīṇṛsiṃha, *Janakajānandanāṭaka*, ed. and tr. C. Lakshmi Narasimha Moorty, Arakere: Vidya Samvardhani Parishat, 1992, p. 24).

28 She claims (illogically) to have procured the exile to fulfil the blind ascetic's curse on Daśaratha, and then mistakenly to have said '14 years' when she meant '14 days'; *Pratimānāṭaka*, tr. Janaki, 6.73–74.

29 In Sanskrit, the revenge motif is first recorded added to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* in some Northern mss (2.124*), then by Kṣemendra (*Rāmāyaṇamañjarī*, see Raghavan, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit*, p. 86, and Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 6, pp. 365–366); there is also an allusion at *Agni Purāṇa*, 6.8 (tr. N. Gangadharan), Ancient

7. Implications

Were the classical dramatists not worried that they were presenting a negative view of their hero? Of a hero, still irreproachable but perplexed and deluded, saved by agencies other than his own strength? Of a hero assailed by his enemies at all points in the narrative, but with weapons that his own superhuman strength cannot counter? Although a few early *nāṭya*s credit him with some *kṣatriya* values, in the main he has lost his towering epic stature. At the best, he is an object of pity. Now that he is a god, he seems more human.

The composers of some at least of the *nāṭya*s seem to have gloried in deliberately irreverent parodies, not only of Rāma, but also of a Rāvaṇa early portrayed as less strong than Rāma, who must be comforted by counterfeits, and liable to panic in a crisis. He has become less terrifying, more a figure of fun, now that the violent passion of the fearsome monster whose power could terrify the gods themselves is presented as weak lovesickness. Is he a fitting opponent for the once-superhuman, now divine, Rāma?

The circumstances in which these dramatic retellings were produced may provide an answer to such conundrums. The *nāṭya*s differ from other categories in being conceived as entertainment for the Sanskrit-speaking, cultured, elite court circles; they are primarily secular, but set within the religious and social context of their time, reflecting the developing understanding of Rāma as divine without seeking either to propagate or to deny it; similarly, the growing image of Hanumān as celibate is reflected by his self-control in Abhinanda's *kāvya* (illusion 11.1.).[30] These tellers took care not to reproduce each others' works in detail, and so could not expect their own to be reproduced; generally speaking, their variants did not enter the tradition, nor, it seems, were they intended to.

In that case, how far does it matter that the character they ascribe to hero, heroine and villain has been redrawn? The plays were not aimed at devotees, and

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Indian Tradition and Mythology, vols 27–30, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984–1987. The motif also appears in vernacular adaptations at the latest from the twelfth century onwards (Tamil: Kampaṉ, *Rāmāyanam*, tr. H.V. Hande, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996, p. 107; Telugu: *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, tr. Shantilal Nagar, Delhi: B.R. PC, 2001, 1.591–600; 2.141–150; Malay: *Hikayat Seri Rama*, see Alexander Zieseniss, in *Die Rāma-Sage bei den Malaien*, Hamburg: Friederichsen and de Gruyter 1928, p. 11, tr. P.W. Burch and *The Rāma Saga in Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963, p. 15; Thai: *Rāmakien*, tr. Ray A. Olsson, Bangkok: Praepittaya Co., 1968, pp. 70, 89). Whether this behaviour caused audiences of the time to see the young prince in quite such an unsavoury light as modern ones are likely to do is open to some doubt.

30 The image of Hanumān as celibate is largely limited to India; the view of his sexuality in Southeast Asia is startlingly different.

their authors were protected by the status of their patrons—as long as that patron remained in power; it comes as no surprise that a great many plays are known to have been lost, perhaps victim to the overthrow of their patrons. Unlike the epic continuators, unlike Paurāṇikas, Buddhists, some later vernacular tellers, and most certainly unlike Jains, they did not set out to present 'the right version'; even Virūpākṣadeva's revision of the narrative's outcome is at best scanty and half-hearted. Bhavabhūti himself presented two quite different plots without commenting on their lack of relationship; both the *Mahāvīracarita* and the *Uttararāmacarita* were possible ways of telling Rāma's story: that they were different evidently did not matter. These tellers were not interested in telling the old, well-loved story 'the right way'; they did it 'my way'—or, in the case of Bhavabhūti—in at least two incompatible 'my ways'. There is an irony inherent in the constant, restless search for novelty and fanciful elaboration of the narrative they had inherited. Constrained ever to seek novelty, the dramatists were destined by the rules of their genre never to achieve innovation. Their new features did not enter the tradition, and were not designed to enter it. Their *nāṭya*s are all what narratologists term 'variants'. Each play stands—or in some cases falls—alone.

Appendix

1. Illusions surrounding the suitor test

1.1. Rāvaṇa lusts for Sītā
Mālyavān commissions the creation of a counterfeit Sītā and her nurse/companion Sindūrikā to comfort the lovesick Rāvaṇa; though initially deluded, Rāvaṇa soon realizes the deception.

> Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa* (acts 1–5), tr. S. Venkatarama Sastri, Bangalore: Irish Press, 1910, 1.42–43; 2.17–20; 3.9; 5.6–9.

1.2. Mārīca plots with Vidyujjihva to create an illusory Sītā apparently leaping into fire before her marriage, in an unsuccessful attempt to delude Rāma into imitating her, leaving the field clear for Rāvaṇa to satisfy his desire.

> Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, *Jānakīpariṇaya*, see Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha, *Janakajānanda-nāṭaka*, pp. 22, 24.

1.3. Rāma Pāṇivāda aims his illusions at military rather than romantic goals in a complicated plot to avenge Rāma's victories over Tāṭakā, Mārīca and Subāhu. These illusions produce no corresponding delusions in their victims. A *rākṣasa*

counterfeits Daśaratha (along with his driver Sumantra), but loses his opportunity to forbid Rāma to take the suitor test when the true Daśaratha and Sumantra arrive; the same *rākṣasa* then incites Paraśurāma to attack Rāma, with the usual lack of success; finally he incites Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā.

> Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, ed. Suranad Kunjan Pillai, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series CXCII, Trivandrum: Suranat Kunjan Pillai, 1958, pp. 3–4.

2. Illusions surrounding the exile

Foundational episode recomposed by some dramatists to such an extent that little remains recognizable beyond the mere fact that Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa leave for the forest.

2.1. Bhavabhūti makes the *rākṣasa* Mālyavān the chief culprit, helped by Śūrpaṇakhā; he knows he must remove Rāma (and especially Sītā) from the safety of Ayodhyā to the forest where Rāma will be vulnerable to attack from Virādha, Kabandha and others, and Rāvaṇa will be enabled to abduct Sītā; to save Laṅkā from carnage, Mālyavān expects Vālin to kill Rāma. Śūrpaṇakhā counterfeits the absent Mantharā and demands the exile from the deluded Daśaratha.

> Bhavabhūti, *Le Mahāvīracarita de Bhavabhūti accompagné du commentaire de Vīrarāgava*, éd. et trad. François Grimal, Publications de l'Institut français d'indologie Pondichéry, LXXIV, Pondichéry: Institut français, 1989, Act 4.

2.2. For Rājaśekhara Daśaratha too is innocent: sentence of exile is pronounced by a counterfeit created on the orders of Mālyavān, this time with Kaikeyī impersonated by Śūrpaṇakhā, and Mantharā by Śūrpaṇakhā's servant.

> Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, 6, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 5, pp. 441–445.

2.3. For a quite different purpose, Murāri introduces a similar far-fetched ruse to contrive the exile, organized, not by Rāma's enemies, but by three of his closest allies or admirers: Jāmbavān, the Śabarī ascetic-woman, and Hanumān. The conspirators wish to depose Vālin and restore Sugrīva by promoting an alliance between Rāma and Sugrīva. Mantharā dies on her way to Mithilā and is counterfeited by the Śabarī on the instructions of Jāmbavān, presenting a forged letter apparently sent by Kaikeyī demanding the exile, while Hanumān cares for the Śabarī's body.

Murāri, *Anargharāghava*, 4.49.207–214; 5.3, in *Rama Beyond Price*, tr. Judit Törzsök, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2006.

2.4. The exile is secured by less inventive means: a counterfeit Kaikeyī created by Śūrpaṇakhā claims the two boons from Daśaratha.

Sundaramiśra, *Abhirāmamaṇi*, 'Reconstructing Abhirāmamaṇi, a Lost Sanskrit Play', Radhavallabh Tripathi, *Sanskrit Studies*, 4, 2015, pp. 45–51; see p. 50.

2.5. Mantharā is counterfeited by the *rākṣasī* Ayomukhī, in order to promote her friend Śūrpaṇakhā's lust for Rāma.

Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, p. 4.

3. Śūrpaṇakhā's abortive attempt to seduce Rāma

Śūrpaṇakhā approaches Rāma as a counterfeit Sītā. This clumsy plot fails, for Rāma is not surprisingly bewildered to be faced with two apparent Sītās. Lakṣmaṇa saves the situation by asking them both to fetch a Pārijāta flower from heaven; the real Sītā is quite unable to perform this feat, and Śūrpaṇakhā is exposed when she carries it out with ease.

Dharmagupta, *Rāmāṅkanāṭikā*, see Doniger, Wendy, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 19–20.

4. Abduction

Rāma is included in the delusion produced by the disguised Rāvaṇa.

4.1. Rāma welcomes the counterfeit mendicant to the hermitage, consults him about what offering he should make at Daśaratha's forthcoming *śrāddha*, and is advised to obtain a golden-flanked deer from the Himālaya; he prepares to leave to fetch one, taking Sītā with him. To avert the threatened ruin to Rāvaṇa's plan, the counterfeit mendicant hurriedly produces a new claim: a suitable one has appeared near the hermitage. In Lakṣmaṇa's absence, the deluded Rāma decides to go to hunt it himself, instructing Sītā to honour their guest, with the usual consequence.

Pratimānāṭaka, tr.Janaki, 5.57–61.

4.2. Rāma is deluded when approached at the hermitage by Rāvaṇa (with Prahasta disguised as a woman) impersonating Virādhita.

> (Jain) Rāmacandra, *Raghuvilāsa*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 160–162 and 171–175.

4.3. Māyurāja has Rāvaṇa take on the identity of a named mendicant known to Rāma. This time it is Lakṣmaṇa who goes to hunt Mārīca, but Rāma and Sītā are sufficiently alarmed by a false pre-arranged report that Lakṣmaṇa has been carried off (brought by Rāvaṇa's similarly-disguised companion) that Rāma, urged by Sītā, entrusts her to Rāvaṇa's care and rushes to the rescue. Lakṣmaṇa, returning from killing Mārīca, meets the true mendicant.

> Māyurāja (Mātrarāja) Anaṅgaharṣa, *Udāttarāghava*, Acts 2, 3; critically edited by Venkatarama Raghavan, Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2016.

4.4. Śaktibhadra's retelling of this scene is even more complex. Rāvaṇa and his charioteer counterfeit Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, deceiving Sītā so that she enters Rāvaṇa's chariot voluntarily, deluded into believing that Bharata has been attacked by enemies and that they are going to his aid. The true Rāma, meanwhile, or rather his corpse, has also been counterfeited by the dying Mārīca, so that Lakṣmaṇa (the true Lakṣmaṇa), encountering them both, does not know which is his real brother; the true Rāma solves his dilemma by kicking the corpse (which of course reverts to *rākṣasa* form from the effect of the sages' magic ring). They then return to the hermitage, where they both suffer further delusion: Sītā has herself been counterfeited by Śūrpaṇakhā, until Rāma eventually wipes away her tears, and his touch causes her to revert to *rākṣasī* form (he is still wearing the sages' ring). It is from her that he learns of the abduction. Watching this close by in the chariot with the counterfeit Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the true Sītā is puzzled to see the true Rāma talking to a counterfeit version of herself, but is reassured by Rāvaṇa, who is still counterfeiting Rāma, until she bashfully brushes away his hand and he reverts to *rākṣasa* form (the effect of the sages' other gift, her hair jewel).

> Śaktibhadra, *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel*, Acts 3, 4.

5. Illusions during the search

5.1. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa wait impatiently for news from the search parties, and despair when a counterfeit Hanumān reports that Sītā has been killed by Rāvaṇa;

the true Hanumān returns from his leap to Laṅkā just in time to prevent the suicide of Sugrīva.

Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Sītārāghava*, p. 5.

5.2. Rāvaṇa attempts to demoralize Rāma and prevent him building and crossing the causeway by throwing to the northern shore the severed head of a counterfeit Sītā; reassurance is provided by a bird (see illusion 1.1.).

Rājaśekhara 7, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 5, p. 444.

6. Illusions during the battle

6.1. Rāvaṇa attempts to secure peace by offering Rāma a *rākṣasī* counterfeiting Sītā; the ploy fails when the deception is detected by Lakṣmaṇa.

Rāghavābhyudaya, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 3, pp. 248–249.

6.2. Aṅgada, sent to Laṅkā with a defiant message from Rāma, is confused when several *rākṣasa*s assume Rāvaṇa's form, then confronted with a Sītā created on Rāvaṇa's instructions telling him that she is now Rāvaṇa's wife, and advising Rāma to return at once to Ayodhyā, for the city has been devastated by *rākṣasa*s and Bharata is dead. Aṅgada's delusion lasts only until news is brought that the real Sītā is attempting suicide, and the panic-stricken Rāvaṇa orders her guards to save her.

Subhaṭa, *Dūtāṅgada*, tr. Louis H. Gray, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 32, 1912, pp. 58–77; see pp. 69, 71.

6.3. The episode of Aṅgada's embassy is later supplied with a much less inventive illusion; news is brought to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by a *rākṣasa* counterfeiting a *vānara* ally that Aṅgada has been subverted by Rāvaṇa, news that is predictably countered by the return of Aṅgada. The same *rākṣasa* later deludes them by purporting to show them Sugrīva's severed head.

Mahādeva, *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 177–178.

6.4. Rāvaṇa attempts to convince Sītā that Rāma has already triumphed; he courts her in the *aśokavana* in the counterfeit form of Rāma, carrying his own counterfeit ten heads, but she is disabused by her virtue as a faithful wife and reassured in unoriginal fashion by a heavenly voice that she will suffer no further

deceptions, for she will not see the real Rāma again until she sees the dead body of her captor.

Hanumannāṭaka, Wilson, vol. 2, p. 368; *Mahānāṭaka*, tr. Bahadur, 3.513–515.

6.5. A magic device enables Rāma to watch events unfolding in Laṅkā; he watches Sītā repulse Rāvaṇa's advances as Hanumān arrives.

Jayadeva, *Prasannarāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 488–498.

6.6. A magic mirror enables Rāma to watch events unfolding in Laṅkā. Though providing Rāma with reassurance by showing him Rāvaṇa declare that Sītā's chastity is unassailable, his reaction is to declare that Sītā will still have to provide proof. The traditional rejection of Sītā after the victory is actually performed (unknown to Rāma) by a counterfeit, in such a fashion that the true Rāma believes Sītā's attempted fire-suicide to have been a voluntary demonstration aimed at the public; it is actually an unsuccessful attempt by Śūrpaṇakhā and Maya to gain vengeance by provoking Sītā to commit suicide.

Mahādeva, *Adbhutadarpaṇa*, see Ghosh, *Epic Sources*, pp. 28–29.

7. Illusions post-victory

7.1. Counterfeit tactic inverted: a spy of Rāvaṇa's relative Lavaṇa deludes those anxiously awaiting their return to Ayodhyā that Rāma and his companions are dead and that those approaching in the *puṣpaka* chariot are counterfeits, so that Bharata prepares to shoot Vibhīṣaṇa, assuming that this *rākṣasa* is Rāvaṇa until he is undeceived by Vasiṣṭha.

Someśvaradeva, *Ullāgharāghava*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 7, pp. 633–651.

7.2. Vengeful *rākṣasa*s plague both the returning victors and those anxiously awaiting their return. Counterfeits delude both parties, persuading them that the others are dead, so both parties prepare to commit suicide in the river Sarayū, to be saved just in time by the appearance of the others.

Māyurāja, *Udāttarāghava*, Act 6.

8. Śūrpaṇakhā pursues her malice against Rāma and Sītā after their return to Ayodhyā

Śūrpaṇakhā possesses the washerman whose gossip deludes Rāma into banishing Sītā, then provokes the conflict between Rāma and his sons by planning to steal the *aśvamedha* horse, hoping to destroy them all; when Lava has been drawn into battle with Śatrughna, she counterfeits Sītā jumping into fire, bringing about his capture by Bharata when the delusion has caused him to swoon.

Kalya Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha, *Janakajānandanāṭaka*, Acts 3 and 5.

9. Delusions without counterfeits

9.1. Janaka becomes an ascetic when he is deluded into believing that Sītā has committed suicide, and Kausalyā too grieves.

Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 4.17–19, pp. 31–49.

9.2. Sītā, invisible, is sent by Gaṅgā to comfort her distraught husband, who has swooned at the memories brought back by his visit to Janasthāna; her touch and tears revive him, but she remains invisible until permanently reunited with Rāma in Act 7.

Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 3.13–14, 46–63, pp. 190–261.

9.3. Vālmīki, having invited Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to his hermitage, and knowing that many people will come to the bathing pool, makes the hermitage women, including Sītā, invisible so that they can continue to bathe there. Sītā's reflection nonetheless remains visible in the pool, glimpsed by Rāma, who faints when he cannot find her; Sītā cannot stop herself approaching and her touch revives him. Rāma begs forgiveness, wipes his eyes on her garment, pulls it off (she is still invisible) and puts on her wrap, while she puts on his and leaves. The repentant Rāma's hopes are shattered when the jester Kauśika announces that the nymph Tilottamā intends counterfeiting Sītā, and he concludes that he has been deceived.

Dhīranāga, *Kundamālā*, Acts 3 and 4.

10. Plays-within-plays

10.1. Rāvaṇa has failed the suitor test and left Mithilā without knowing the result; pining for Sītā, he is shown a drama of the outcome.

> Rājaśekhara, *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, tr. Venkatarama Sastri, Act 3.

10.2. The captive Sītā is enabled to see what has happened in Daṇḍaka since she has been abducted, reassuring her that Rāma is taking steps to locate and rescue her and that Hanumān is indeed a messenger to be trusted and not a counterfeit *rākṣasa*. However, in this case the dramatic illusion is not used to save the playwright from presenting his whole narrative in the previous acts.

> Bhagavantarāyamakhin, *Rāghavābhyudaya*, Act 5.

10.3. Vālmīki arranges for Rāma and others to watch the dramatic nature of Sītā's disappearance during labour into the care of Earth and Gaṅgā. Bhavabhūti's audience already know what Vālmīki's audience do not, that Gaṅgā has long since taken the weaned twins, Lava and Kuśa, away from their mother, to be fostered and educated in Vālmīki's hermitage.

> Bhavabhūti, *Uttararāmacarita*, tr. Pollock, 1.101; 2.16; 3.9; 7.22.

11. Illusions within *Kāvya*s

11.1. Within Svayaṃprabhā's cave, Hanumān resists a seduction attempt by a certain Māyāmaya counterfeiting a *vānarī*.

> Abhinanda, *Rāmacarita*, see Raghavan, *Rāmāyaṇa in Classical Sanskrit*, p. 66.

11.2. Sītā is briefly deluded by the sight of Rāma's corpse (not just his head) counterfeited by Vidyujjihva; reassurance by her *rākṣasī* sympathizer, Saramā, is supplemented by the proof of her own eyes when she is taken to see the true Rāma standing fit and well beside Lakṣmaṇa on Mt. Suvela, and she believes what she sees.

> Rāma Pāṇivāda, *Rāghavīya*, ed. L.A. Ravi Varma, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series CILVI, Trivandrum: Supt., Govt. Press, 1942, 16.66–69.

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The *Rāmāyaṇa* Story in the Cākyār Kūttu Format

The Cākyār Kūttu is a striking element of the temple Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre tradition[1] in Kerala (South India) that was and still is a temple ritual. Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre as such concentrates on presenting the Sanskrit dramas according to its own rules referring to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The Kūṭiyāṭṭam artists belong to two communities of temple servants (*ampalavāsi*)—Cākyārs (actors) and Nampyār-Naṅṅyārs (musicians and actresses). Their profession is hereditary and only members of these communities can perform in the temple theatre (*kūttambalam*). The dramas staged in the temple theatre include those relating to the *Rāmāyaṇa* story—*Abhiṣekanāṭaka* and *Pratimānāṭaka* of Bhāsa, and *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra. These three dramas enacted together created a very unusual performance called *The Mahārāmāyaṇanāṭaka* of twenty-one acts (in following order *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, *Pratimā* and *Abhiṣeka*).[2] The presentation took one year and it used to be commissioned by the rulers of the Cochin kingdom for the special occasion. The three '*Rāmāyaṇa* dramas' are still enacted, or rather some of their acts, in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam format.[3]

The *Rāmāyaṇa* motive is present in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam-lore not only while staging the Sanskrit dramas mentioned above. The Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors—Cākyārs—have their own stage form called Cākyār Kūttu or Prabandha Kūttu presenting stories of the Epics (the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and Purāṇas. It is a

1 About Kūṭiyāṭṭam see: Farley Richmond, 'Kūṭiyāṭṭam', in *Indian Theatre. Traditions of Performance*, Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, Phillip B. Zarrilli, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993 (1st published Honolulu 1990), pp. 87–129; Bożena Śliwczyńska, *Tradycja teatru świątynnego kudijattam*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2009.

2 The last act of the *Abhiṣeka* is divided into two in the stage presentation of the *Mahārāmāyaṇanāṭaka*.

3 According to the Kūṭiyāṭṭam rules, an act of the play is enacted as a full-fledged performance, preceded by two stage segments: *puṟappāṭu* (the ritual of beginning) and *nirvahaṇa* (a flashback) that can last for many days.

solo performance dominated by just one Vidūṣaka[4] who is the master storyteller here. He is definitely a drama personage, although his presence onstage during the Cākyār Kūttu has nothing to do with his role in the dramas in which he participates, except for his humour and wit and, importantly, the freedom to ridicule anyone, including those of highest rank and esteem. The episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas are not presented in a 'chronological order', only the most popular ones are chosen for staging. The *Rāmāyaṇa* may occasionally be performed fragmentary as well. However, there is tradition that the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* story is presented in consecutive episodes. At the moment such a performance is only staged in the Vaṭakkunātha (Śiva) temple in Trichur (central Kerala) on regular basis.[5] The Cākyār Kūttu is held for forty-one days every year (in the period of August-September-October) in accordance with the temple ritual calendar. The *Rāmāyaṇa* story in the Cākyār Kūttu format takes about 160–170 days to be completed. The full presentation spans three-four years.[6] The Cākyār Kūttu performance is meant to be a ritual offering to the God who resides in the temple.

The performance always starts with stage rituals that must be conducted every day of the Cākyār Kūttu cycle: lightening the stage lamp with the fire brought from the *sanctum sanctorum* (*garbha gṛha*), the initial drumming (the *miḻāvu* drum played by a Nampyār), and sounding the idiophones (the *tāḷam* by a Naṅṅyār). Only then does Vidūṣaka enter the stage, saluting the *miḻāvu* first, after which he performs his special *nitya kriyā*s, i.e. praising all quarters of the world and their divine guardians while presenting his own nature with characteristic gestures and poses. Later on, he recites an invocation (*pīṭhikā*) that is relatively long and in its final part the name of god is invoked—here Rāmacandra.[7]

4 For more about Vidūṣaka in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre see: Kiḻḷimaṅgalam Vāsudevan Nampūtirippāṭ, 'Kūṭiyāṭṭattile vidūṣakan,' *Bhaktapriya*, āgaṣṭ 2001, pp. 35–37; Śliwczyńska Bożena, *Tradycja teatru świątynnego*, pp. 179–204.

5 The *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu is occasionally presented in the Kūṭalmāṇikkam temple in Irinjalakuda, albeit with certain intervals in the episode succession. In this article, I shall use terms *Rāmāyaṇa* Cākyār Kūttu or *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu.

6 In this paper, I refer to my long-term field research (1998-up today) on the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre tradition including the Cākyār Kūttu; here especially I refer to the two cycles of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Cākyār Kūttu that took place in the Vaṭakkunātha temple. The first began in August 2003 and finished in September 2006, the second started in August 2009 and ended in October 2012. They were presented by Ammannūr Parameśvara Kuṭṭan Cākyār with a few day help of his nephew Ammannūr Rājāniś Cākyār (in the second cycle).

7 Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Parameśvara when the *Mahābhārata* or Purāṇic stories are enacted. The rest of the invocation text remains the same.

After completing his ritual of beginning (*puṟappāṭu*),[8] Vidūṣaka begins his flow of incredible storytelling.

The presentation is based on the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* that represents a *campū* type of *kāvya* where both verses (*padya*) and prose (*gadya*) occur. The text is in Sanskrit with a couple of Prakrit stanzas. There are altogether around 850 passages (*padya* and *gadya*) in the printed edition,[9] although their number may be dissimilar depending on the certain Cākyār family tradition. The *Rāmāyaṇaprabandh*a is a composition-compilation of Nampyārs and Cākyārs of several generations, a text of 'long-term formation'. Definitely the composers made use of popular stanzas of other poets and included them in the text. A striking element of the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* are the numerous interpolations from the *prabandha*s of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭattiri (16th-17th century). He is a famous *prabandha* composer, among his works we can find *prabandha*s on isolated episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*,[10] some of them incorporated into the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* text in longer or shorter fragments. One must know that while presenting the *Rāmāyaṇa* story onstage, the actor can modify it and add new stanzas or prose, as was practised in the past as well as today. Some of them retained and formatted the text that was then orally transmitted to successive generations. Such was the origin of the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* performed in the Cākyār Kūttu format nowadays. Most probably the urtext was created much earlier than the seventeenth century.

The text performed onstage (the stage text), though based on the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha*, creates its own narrative structure. In fact, it may slightly differ in every *Rāmāyaṇa* Cākyār Kūttu cycle. Many portions are omitted or swap places, while some stanzas taken from different sources are added to lighten up an episode or a sub-episode. Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* stanzas are often incorporated into the stage text as well as stanzas from the '*Rāmāyaṇa* dramas' presented in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre. Just to mention a battle between Bālī and Sugrīva in the *Bālīvadha* episode where three stanzas from the first act of the

8 More about the *puṟappāṭu* segment see Bożena Śliwczyńska, 'The Ritual of Beginning. The Puṟappāṭu Segment of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Theatre Tradition,' in *Theatrum Mirabiliorum Indiae Orientalis: A Volume to Celebrate the 70th Birthday of Professor Maria Krzysztof Byrski* (*Rocznik Orientalistyczny*), vol. 60, no. 2, 2007, ed. Monika Nowakowska and Jacek Woźniak, pp. 357–361.

9 *Rāmāyaṇam prabandham*, ed. Koccāmpiḷḷi Maṭhattil Rāman Nampyār, Tṛśśivaperūr: Bhārattha Prass, 1930. The text is in Malayalam script and accompanied by a short commentary (*laghuvyākhyā*) as well as translation into Malayalam by K. M. Rāman Nampyār.

10 A famous *Śūrpaṇakhāpralāpa* (or *Niranunāsika*) composed without nasal sounds, then *Rākṣasotpati*, *Tārakavadha*, *Ahalyāmokṣa*, *Bālakāṇḍa*.

Abhiṣekanāṭaka by Bhāsa are added[11] to describe in detail the figures of two brothers engaged in lethal a fratricidal struggle. But there is something more peculiar and interesting in the Cākyār Kūttu presentation. All *padya* and *gadya* fragments recited onstage are explained and commented by Vidūṣaka, the narrator of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, in Maṇipravāḷam (Sanskritized Malayalam). The method of presentation is as follows: a stanza or prose passage is recited in Sanskrit, then Vidūṣaka concentrates on certain phrases or words, repeats them in Sanskrit, and translates them into Maṇipravāḷam. However, it is not a mere, or literary translation, but a rather annotated one. Such treatment of the text opens 'unlimited space' for Vidūṣaka's individual interpretation that sometimes goes much beyond the topic of the recited portion. He can also refer to actual public events or affairs and to spectators gathered in front of the stage. Thus, no wonder, that the stage text is a creation of its own. The *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu is foremost based on the *vācikābhinaya* (a stage technique based on sounds or words) with a slight addition of *āṅgikābhinaya* (a stage technique based on body movements).

According to the tradition, the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* must be preceded by a presentation of the *Rākṣasotpati* (or *Rākṣasolpatti* in Malayalam script notation) composed in the *prabandha* style by Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭattiri. Thus, the wrong is to be born first, then the right can enter the world (the stage). The text consists of 94 passages[12] (*padya* and *gadya*). Its method of delivery is as described above, although there are no additional stanzas incorporated into the stage text. The whole presentation of the *Rākṣasotpati* (*The Origin of Rākṣasa—Rāvaṇa*) always lasts 13 days. The staging of the succeeding episodes and subepisodes is 'uneven'. Yet, each and every portion of the text recited onstage must be commented, though Vidūṣaka can pay little or more attention to certain episode-stanzas and explain them in depth or in short. The story begins with the advent of two Rākṣasas, Heti (the first demon king known for taking possession of Sūrya's chariot) and Praheti (a pious one leading a life of the hermit). Subsequently, the sons of Sukeśa Rākṣasa, Māli and Sumāli demons, appear. The latter is a father of Kaikasī (who is called *manasvinī kanyakā* or 'a young lady suitable

11 Bhāsa—*Abhiṣeka* I, 10; I, 11; I, 12. The latter is incorporated into the *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* text, the first two are added to the stage text. All three stanzas are popular and very much elaborated during the *Bālīvadha* Kūṭiyāṭṭam (thus of the first act of the *Abhiṣeka* presentation). For example, enacting the stanza (I, 10), where Viṣṇu 'lotus-like eyes' are mentioned, can take an hour or so, since that particular phrase gives an opportunity to concentrate more on the Viṣṇu figure, especially on his Narasiṃha *avatāra*.

12 According to the printed text of the *Rākṣasotpati* added to the *Rāmāyaṇam prabandham*, ed. Koccāmpiḷḷi Maṭhattil Rāman Nampyār 1930.
There are 96 stanzas in the text according to the *Prabandhamañjarī. Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa viracitaprabandhāḥ*, ed. N.P. Unni, Rāṣṭriya-Saṃskṛta-Saṃsthānam, Dillī 1998.

for marriage'[13]), a mother-to-be of Rāvaṇa. Sage Pulasya and his son Viśravas, a father-to be of Rāvaṇa, appear in due course as well. Since the future parents of the main figure of the story are mentioned, soon the birth of Daśamukhī (Rāvaṇa), their first offspring, is announced and commented. Then the narrative quickly unfolds presenting different accounts of the remarkable couple's son (Brāhmaṇa Ṛṣi, thus the *ṛṣi* who is a descendant of god Brahmā, and Rākṣasī). The episode of Daśamukhī's severe penance and a great boon (of not being killed by gods, heavenly beings like Gandharvas and others, demons, inhabitants of the underworld)[14] received from Brahmā is much evaluated. The boon, in fact, defines all future deeds of young Rākṣasa. It is a turning point in the story, very much commented by Vidūṣaka. One of the most elaborated episodes onstage is lifting the mount Kailāsa with Śiva-Pārvatī in a love quarrel. The episode is fairly complex, so there is much scope for Vidūṣaka's reflections on the subject —a detailed description of the mountain, remarks on a new name (Rāvaṇa) given to Rākṣasa by Śiva, discussing love passion and the nature of female beings, ridiculing the phenomenon of self-admiration. Rāvaṇa's successive conquest of three worlds and subduing all enemies gives Vidūṣaka an opportunity not only to comment on various victories (Rāvaṇa's bravery is extolled, as well as his enormous pride, though the latter is often ridiculed), and to describe the nature of Trailokya and the residents of the *svarga-bhūmi-pātāla*. He particularly remarks on human beings inhabiting the *bhūmi*. It is a perfect possibility to criticize the *trivarṇa* society,[15] the Brahmins above, as well as to refer to current local affairs. Since we are in the South, it is no wonder that the figure of Rāvaṇa is treated with a certain friendly attitude. His softness of character is greatly emphasized and underlined in Vidūṣaka's *vyākhyā* with reference to Rāvaṇa's filial dedication to his mother Kaikaśī, his devotion to Brahmā and Śiva in particular, his responsibility for the Laṅkā, along with his affection and care for Mandodarī (the first wife). The *Rākṣasotpati* finishes with a picture of Rāvaṇa as the mighty king of the Laṅkā kingdom and conqueror of Trailokya. The great glory of Rāvaṇa is indisputable. He enjoys his unquestionable position (for the time being), joyfully wandering through his imperial dominion extending over three worlds, occasionally shaking the worlds to remind them who is their only Sovereign.[16]

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13 *Rākṣasotpati* 22 (*gadya*) and a commentary (*vyākhyā*).

14 Humans are not mentioned as they served as food for Rākṣasas.

15 The fourth *varṇa* (*śudra*s) is not worth mentioning according to the stage text.

16 *Maghonastadghoraṃ kuliśamalasīkṛtya samare bhunakti svārājyaṃ tribhuvanabhaṭoyaṃ daśamukhaḥ / śriyo nānāvāsabhramaṇaramaṇīya capalatāṃ mavacchidya svasminnapi bhujavane pūrayati yaḥ*; *Rākṣasotpati* 94. This is the last stanza of the *Rākṣasotpati* text as well as of the stage text.

Thus, the story of the origin of Rākṣasas and their most prominent scion Rāvaṇa has to be presented as a separated unit of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* performance. The *durātman* ('evil-natured') hero is born and he has played his role in the wrong for the *ātman* ('good-natured') hero to appear. Such an arrangement refines further narrative stage presentation. Later on in the performance, there are only short references to Rāvaṇa's early stage of life (before the advent of Rāma), mainly in the Vidūṣaka's explanatory text. The *Rākṣasotpati* is a full-blooded story with an intimate touch towards the figure of the magnificent Rākṣasa who is the worthy enemy of the saviour to come.

Definitely the time is right for the saviour was born. Evil has governed the three worlds for too long. The *Rāmāyaṇaprabandha* follows the order of the main succeeding episodes of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, from the *Bālakāṇḍa* to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* in general. There is no doubt that Rāma is considered a divinity. He is addressed as Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandra (Vidūṣaka's text). The initial invocation (*pīṭhikā*) contains his name and blessings (*sa Rāmacandra vaḥ pāyāt*). Please note that his name appears in the invocation only the moment he is born as a son of Daśaratha (after a week of staging the text); previously, a name of Padmanābha is invoked. Thus, Rāma is considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In his *avatāra*-life, he is perceived as a human being, the supreme human being (*nara-deva*). From the first stanza, the story is settled in Ayodhyā, a glorious capital town of the kings of the Raghu's ancestry, in the kingdom of Kosala. The well-known events keep unfolding onstage. The episodes significant for the story are elaborated in detail: Rāma's birth, his marriage with Sītā, court intrigues leading to his exile—all are discussed by Vidūṣaka at some length. However, the most elaborated and commented are the episodes while in exile: Śūrpaṇakhā's tragic love affair and her mutilation,[17] Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa, Jaṭāyu's death, Vālin-Sugrīva conflict, Rāvaṇa's advances to Sītā in the Aśokavanikā (Sītā's disapproval of Rāvaṇa's actions very much emphasized), Hanumān with a ring as Rāma's messenger, a war with Rāvaṇa and Rāma's victory over the Rākṣasa king of Laṅkā.[18] The death of Rāvaṇa caused by Rāma purifies Trailokya. The magnificent Rākṣasa himself attains a final liberation (*mokṣa*) and heavenly happiness (*Rāvaṇasvargasantoṣam*; Vidūṣaka's text). The *Rāmāyaṇa*

17 In this episode we can find four initial stanzas from the *Śūrpaṇakhāpralāpa* (*Niranunāsikaprabandha*) of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭattiri. See *Rāmāyaṇam prabandham* 366, 367, 368, 371.
Her loss of nose (and ears) due to Lakṣmaṇa's cruel action seems to matter less to her than the loss of her breasts. Vidūṣaka vividly describes her figure shedding streams of blood that flow from her cut nostrils, ears and breasts.

18 The episodes of the exile are particularly popular with the audience, not only in the Kūttu presentation, in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam drama staging as well.

Kūttu storytelling finishes with Vibhīṣaṇa's coronation as a new ruler of Rākṣasas. Rāma-the-Conqueror goes back to Sāketa (Ayodhyā) with his wife Sītā and his dearest friend Sugrīva (*priyasakha*).[19] The final benedictory stanza clarifies that he is crowned there.

The general structure of the daily performance unit is as mentioned earlier. Usually it lasts two hours in the Vaṭakkunātha temple. After completing the everyday ritual of beginning with the final invocation stanzas, Vidūṣaka takes a seat in the front of the stage lamp. First, he recites a summary of the past events of the previous performance days, and only then does he continue the episode or start a new one. A number of stanzas recited and commented is not defined for a certain performance unit. It depends on the episode or sub-episode, but first and foremost on the text and speech versatility of the Cākyār-Vidūṣaka. Thus, the number of stanzas can vary from a couples up to twenty or twenty-five per daily Kūttu. The privilege of being the only stanza presented in a performance unit is traditionally given to the one containing the words of grief-stricken Sumitrā to her son Lakṣmaṇa. The very short stanza of few yet meaningful words offers Vidūṣaka a whole spectrum of lectures (divided into twelve segments) concerning the duties of the individual towards others as well as comments on the varied unexpected issues of fate.[20]

The *Rāmāyaṇa* Kūttu focuses on the story of Rāma. His name is frequently extolled, although his figure does not dominate the stage presentation. The hero is somehow overshadowed by other characters who have their due share in the story performed. Well, without any doubt, they and their deeds are a better target for Vidūṣaka's witty and critical (even hypercritical) comments than Bhagavān Śrī Rāmacandra.[21] However, it must be stated that irrespective of the multifarious episodes and their 'narrative personages', it is Rāma to be praised at their conclusion. The whole multilevel narrative structure is subdued to glorify Śrī Rāma.

Vidūṣaka of the Cākyār Kūttu is not 'a frolicking idiot' (in general public opinion) of the Sanskrit dramas, but a person of immense wisdom. He is considered a perfect teacher of the divine and mundane affairs, a great sage (*mahārṣi*) who explains the divine to the humans. He tells the story of Rāma, weaving into it multiplied subordinary narratives. Though they often stray away from the mainstream narration, they enlighten in order to finally merge with it. The *Rāmāyaṇa* story with all its complexity serves the superb stage *ācārya* to

19 Concluding stanza of the *Rāmāyaṇam prabandham* 848.

20 *rāmamdaśaratham viddhi mām viddhi janakātmajām ayodhyāmaṭvīm viddhi gaccha tāta yathāsukham*; *Rāmāyaṇam prabandham* 253.

21 Though Rāma is not completely spared from humorous remarks of the narrator.

provide people with wise instructions on how to lead a dharmic life. Thus he, the temple bard who extols the right and condemns the wrong, should be considered as a genuine creator of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Cākyār Kūttu narrative structure.

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Paula Richman

Sreekantan Nair's Rāvaṇa in *Laṅkālakṣmi*

Nearly two decades after Indian independence, an innovative Malayalam theatrical production by C.N. Sreekantan Nair (1928–1976) emerged, based on the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* of India's *Rāmāyaṇa* textual tradition. Nair earned his livelihood as a writer but devoted much of his energy to cultural activities in accord with his leftist political ideals. Later in life, he grew disillusioned with party politics that stymied effective governance and dedicated himself to enriching Malayalam drama by introducing modernist theatrical ideas, while holding fast to what he saw as Kerala's cultural ethos. Conceived, researched, and written during Nair's final two years of life, his *Laṅkālakṣmi* (*Lakshmi of Lanka*), the last of his trilogy on the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, first appeared on stage in 1976.[1]

Laṅkālakṣmi's three acts are set in Laṅkā's assembly hall where Rāvaṇa, Mandodarī, the chief warriors, and court ministers debate about what lessons can be drawn from *rākṣasa* history to help repulse Rāma's imminent attack on the island. The prologue and epilogue of *Laṅkālakṣmi* reflect on the transience of wealth and glory, as epitomized by Lakṣmī's departure from Laṅkā, doing so through a philosophically monist view of the universe. Rāma never appears in the play; Sītā speaks only in the epilogue. Unlike texts that depict Rāvaṇa as driven by unbridled desire for pleasure, wealth and fame, Nair represents him as a patron of the arts and a monarch devoted to family and lineage. Unlike most *bhakti* texts which present the war through the victors' eyes, Nair focuses on the 'losers', especially Rāvaṇa.

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1 In 1961, Nair published his first play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, *Kāñcana Sītā*, which draws on the *Uttarakāṇḍa* to explore how Sītā, Ūrmilā, and Rāma suffer due to his rigid interpretation of his *dharma* as a king. In 1975, he published *Sāketam* (another name for Ayodhyā), which draws from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*. In 1976, Nair published *Laṅkālakṣmi*, which draws from the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Thus, the chronology of Nair's playwriting differs from the order in which the episodes appear in the story (e.g., Nair's first play deals with events in the sixth *kāṇḍa*). The Malayalam edition listed in the bibliography (C.N. Sreekantan Nair, *Nāṭakatrayam* (*Three Plays*), Tiruvananthapuram: DC Books, 2001) contains all three plays.

1. From Politics to Organic Theatre

Even during his college days, Nair played a leadership role in local politics, in 1947 as secretary of All Travancore Students Congress and in 1948 as Vice-President of All India Students Congress. After graduation, he worked as a writer in various venues, editing weeklies, serving as chief editor of *Kerala Bhushanam*'s daily edition, and publishing well-regarded Malayalam poetry. Later he worked as a District Information Officer for Kerala state. Toward the end of his life, he also started his own press. During much of this time, he was actively engaged with leftist politics aimed at enhancing social and economic equality in Kerala. Yet the many ideological disagreements and rivalries among leftist groups eventually left him discouraged about achieving the kind of change that he saw as necessary to reform society.

In 1960, Nair withdrew from politics and channeled his energies into building a Malayalam 'Little Theatre' movement. He organized one of the first Malayalam drama festivals, started a group titled Nava Rangam (New Theatre) for play-reading sessions, wrote scripts, and arranged theatre workshops. The main target of his criticism was Malayalam popular theatre of his day, much of which he saw as indebted to Victorian staging notions, filled with melodramatic plots, overly commercial in its inspiration, and lacking in engagement with contemporary life in Kerala.[2] The solution to these flaws, he argued, lay in what he called *tanatu* (indigenous, organic, or rooted) *nāṭaka vedi* (theatre).[3] K.S. Narayana Pillai, a scholar of Malayalam literature, voices scholarly consensus in

2 Nair articulated the flaws of popular Malayalam drama of his day and set out his vision for modern theatre in his collected essays: C.N. Sreekantan Nair, *Nāṭum nāṭakavum* (*Land and Theatre*), Tiruvananthapuram: Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2000.

3 Nair coined the Malayalam phrase to describe his envisioned Little Theatre Movement but later K.N. Panikkar's English translation, 'Theatre of Roots', gained currency outside Kerala. The Sangeet Natak Akademy in Delhi reified the phrase, using it to distance itself from colonial-era theatre, link actors to nationalist goals, and fund playwrights who drew on indigenous theatre (whether deeply or superficially). Nair used the phrase fluidly, but Delhi's patronage of 'roots theatre' led to the financial marginalization of playwrights who did not use indigenous theatrical forms during this period. See Rustom Bharucha, 'Government Policy: Anatomy of an Official Cultural Discourse', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27: 31/32 (August 1–8, 1992), pp. 1667–1676. Erin Mee also draws attention to Safdar Hashmi's objections to appropriating older theatrical genres since they often endorsed outdated social hierarchies; Erin Mee, *Theatre of Roots: Redirecting the Modern Indian Stage*, New York: Seagull Press, 2008, pp. 187–205.

crediting Nair with initiating 'significant changes in the concept of drama in Kerala'.[4]

After independence, many in the theatre world beyond Kerala were seeking an 'Indian' theatre. Certain regions of India—among which Kerala was pre-eminent—had long-standing performance traditions yet, 'Indian theatre' was identified as a national desideratum by elites in Delhi.[5] Instead, Nair focused on what he knew best: Malayalam theatre. In 1967, Nair and G. Sankara Pillai invited directors, actors, and theatre critics to a workshop to explore theatre that was 'rooted' in Kerala, an event which, in retrospect, was a turning point for theatre in Kerala.[6] Nair found modernism's critique of social institutions compelling, but rejected the claim that modernism was a universal form that transcended specific localities. Instead, Nair urged actors and directors to create a Malayalam theatre that grappled with the dilemmas of modern life while simultaneously rooting itself in speech, music, ritual, and performance conventions of Kerala.[7] He did so by writing (and urging others to write and perform) plays about current concerns in Kerala, including disbelief in ritual among youth, pointless violence stirred up

4 Scholar and poet K. Satchidanandan identifies dramas by two playwrights, Nair and C.J. Thomas, as 'the first truly modernist plays in Malayalam'; K. Satchidanandan, 'Introduction', in C.N. Sreekantan Nair and Sarah Joseph, *Retelling the Ramayana: Voices from Kerala*, tr. Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 14.

5 Ebrahim Alkazi, first Director of the National School of Drama (NSD), established a three-year training course for students in 1967, drawing largely on British curricula. Although he did not intend to exclude indigenous theatre, little curricular precedent existed for educating pupils in 'national' Indian theatre. The next director, B.V. Karanth, actively integrated it into NSD's curriculum in 1977: he organized traditional theatre festivals, added courses that gave 'exposure to a wider range of approaches and styles through visiting experts', and required that students be exposed 'to at least one traditional form'; Kirti Jain, 'National School of Drama', in *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. Anand Lal, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 305. By 1977, Nair and his playwriting Malayalam colleagues had been experimenting for a decade with indigenous theatrical forms.

6 The workshop, directed by Nair and G. Sankara Pillai (1930–1989), was held in Shastamkotta (Kollam District) and attended by students from all over Kerala. Sankara Pillai composed over 20 full-length plays, established the School of Drama at Calicut University in 1977, and served as its first director.

7 K.S. Narayana Pillai sums up Nair's vision: '[t]he theatre of Kerala could become creative and strong only if it had an identity of its own and, to achieve that, it had to be rooted in the native culture and associated with the artistic tradition of the land'; K.S. Narayana Pillai, 'C.N. Srikanthan Nair', *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, p. 472. Kerala boasts one of India's richest set of performance traditions, including centuries-old Sanskrit drama (*kūṭiyāṭṭam*), martial dance-drama (*kathakaḷi*), ritual possession (*teyyam*), and leather puppetry (*tōl pāva kūttu*).

by politicians, and the failure of the Communist government to eradicate elite privilege.

Nair pursued these issues in *Kali*, staged in Kottayam in 1967, which was immediately recognizable as a modernist work. Its plot unfolds abruptly, punctuated by acts of violence. Nair names his characters after ideology (Revolutionary), corporate entities (the People), appearance (Charming Woman, Boy, Lunatic), and occupations (Professor, Oracle, Mother, Helper). Verbal exchanges between characters are abstract, stilted, and schematic. Even Nair concedes the anomalous nature of the play, calling *Kali* an 'off-beat form, off track journey' with 'a mythological appearance'.[8] I summarize *Kali*'s plot:

> In Act 1, Revolutionary discovers a *mūrti* (image of a deity used for worship) before whom people bow and chant mantras that sound like political slogans. While Lunatic sings, Revolutionary becomes possessed by the deity, who demands human sacrifice. From now on, Revolutionary takes on the role of Temple Oracle. As Act 2 opens, the *mūrti* has grown taller and dominates the stage. Young Man is slain as an offering while Lunatic sings. When Oracle orders Lunatic to be silent, he defies the order. Charming Woman then dances to his song. Many others also begin to dance. Suddenly, Oracle kills Lunatic, who has been standing with People. In Act 3, the even taller and more menacing *mūrti* is identified as Kali. Mother and Boy worship Kali, then Mother tells Boy that he should become Oracle, but Charming Woman tries to dissuade him. A masked figure abruptly enters and drags Boy away, as Mother calls him the 'next sacrificial goat'. Professor offers to sacrifice himself but instead the khaki-clad Oracle orders him to burn his books and he obeys. Lunatic's singing is heard (but he does not appear) as Helper announces over a loud speaker that Kali needs more blood. Everyone shouts that Oracle should be the next victim, but he points to Charming Woman. Refusing to submit, she shouts that Oracle has killed life, acting on behalf of death. Boy suddenly returns on stage and kills Oracle. As the other characters destroy the *mūrti*, the play ends.

The figure of Kali, familiar from the *Mahābhārata* incident in which he possesses Nala and compels him to gamble away his kingdom, exemplifies the multivocality of the play. To punish Kali's misdeeds, King Parikṣit has decreed that he must dwell only with gamblers, drunkards, murderers, and other evildoers. Moreover, Kali is also identified with Kalki, Lord of the final *yuga*, a time when people transgress *dharma* with pleasure.[9] In *Kali*, Revolutionary explains what Kali symbolizes within the context of Nair's play:

8 Cited in Abhilash Pillai, *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision and Mission of a Theatre Activist*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007, p. 175.

9 Vettam Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, p. 376.

> The last incarnation of Vishnu is Kali. The last Nabi [Prophet] is also Kali. Kali is the last Christ. Kali has already achieved Plato's Republic, Thomas Moore's Utopia, Gandhi's Ramarajya, and Marx's Communism.[10]

Here, Kali is identified with figures from the three main religious communities of Kerala (Hindus, Muslims, Christians) and with secular leaders—all of whom promote utopian ideologies of radical change.[11] Nair has fashioned Kali to stand as a condensed representation of all those whose ideologies promise a better society but instead prove futile.[12] *Kali* conveys feelings of betrayal about utopian visions that were never actualized in society but led to loss of lives.[13]

In his detailed notes for producing *Kali*, Nair emphasizes that the staging should include 'organic theatre or rooted theatre' (*tanatu nāṭaka vedi*), and provides practical instruction for how cultural features of Kerala should be highlighted in it.[14] He specifies that the ritual drums played in Kerala temples should sound when the *mūrti* is found by Revolutionary; when it is destroyed at the play's end, Nair calls for the auspicious sound of the conch. Nair bases the character of Oracle on those who serve as mediums for goddess temples in Kerala. Nair also likens the worship of the Kali *mūrti* in the play to a ritual in north-cen-

10 Pillai, *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision*, p. 167.

11 Plato's *Republic* depicts an ideal Greek polity, More's *Utopia* preaches eradication of private property, and Gandhi idealizes a self-reliant Indian village. According to T.J. Nossiter (*Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 1) leftists in Kerala created, except for the tiny Italian principality of San Marino, 'the first case of democratically elected communist government in the world'.

12 The play is so open-ended and depersonalized that 'Kali' could refer to radical figures or events ranging from the messiah, the French revolution, Stalin, Mao, to Gandhi who preached a radical ideology of non-violence.

13 Splits between leftist parties and sparring between state and centre made it difficult for leftist groups to implement changes in political practice. Leftist movements in India formed, split, coalesced, and shifted many times between 1930 and 1960. During WWII, some leftists supported Russia, others rallied behind Subhas Chandra Bose, while others postponed the independence struggle until the war's end. In 1949, after the Kerala Socialist Party split, one group joined the Revolutionary Socialist Party and established a strong Kerala branch. Nair worked for it under the leadership of N. Sreekandan Nair, who won a seat in the 1952 Lok Sabha elections. In 1957, Kerala elected a communist government which sought to dismantle the elite near-monopoly in landholding. Nehru thwarted that plan in 1959 by dismissing the ministry, dissolving the Assembly, and appointing a caretaker administration.

14 The character of Kali would be familiar to *kathakaḷi* audiences from *Naḷacaritam*, an often-performed work among Malayalam speakers. Composed by Unnayi Variyar (1675–1716), it depicts how Kali possesses Nala and induces him to gamble.

tral Kerala which cleanses a village of sin. In an interview, Nair told Malayalam poet Katammanitta Ramakrishnan: 'I tried to project the indigenous character of Kerala or *Thanatu* of our rural areas'.[15] Nair's modernist play, thus, was grounded in its region.

The audience's reception at *Kali*'s opening night pushed Nair to think specifically about how to change the expectations of audiences at Malayalam theatrical productions. During the play's debut, the audience grew increasingly impatient, shouting insults so loudly that it was hard to hear the play's dialogue. The final act prompted more hostility in the audience than on stage.[16] *Kali*'s failure impelled Nair to analyse why audiences responded so negatively.[17] He realized that staging modernist plays was insufficient to achieve his goals; theatre workers also needed to create new expectations among spectators. Audiences in 1967 expected to watch conventionally depicted characters from popular drama; they lacked experience in decoding characters as symbols in modernist plays.[18] Eight years after *Kali*, Nair again deployed characters who represented ideological stances but did so within a familiar narrative framework that aided his audience in interpreting what occurred on stage.

Before writing *Laṅkālakṣmi*, Nair studied *Rāmāyaṇa* texts ranging from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and the anonymous c. fourteenth-century Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (both of which had become available in Malayalam translation by the time that Nair wrote his script) to Michael Madhusudan Dutt's 1861 epic, *Meghanādavadha kāvya*, the first modern Bengali work to depict *rākṣasa*s in

15 In his *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision* (p. 175), A. Pillai cites this quote from Nair's interview with Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan (1935–2008), a colleague who shared many of Nair's cultural commitments and was also active in leftist groups of Kerala. President of the Kerala State Library Council and the Progressive Writer's Association of Kerala, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan began writing poems in the 1960s. In the estimation of P.P. Raveendran and G.S. Jayasree, he was among the most widely-read among modern Malayalam poets; P.P. Raveendran and G.S. Jayasree (eds), *In the Shade of the Sahyadri: Selections from Malayalam Poetry, Short Fiction, and Drama*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 26.

16 The description comes from A. Pillai, *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision*, p. 172. The response to *Kali* echoes reception of the avant-garde *Rite of Spring* in 1913 with Igor Stravinsky's orchestral score and Nijinsky's choreography, where insults from the audience grew so loud that dancers could not hear the orchestra. A scuffle broke out, leading to a near-riot.

17 *Kali*'s script was published posthumously as *Kali: Nāṭakam*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Cooperative, 1977. My summary draws from it, A. Pillai, *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision*, pp. 160–176, and correspondence with K. Satchidanandan.

18 The statement applies to all but a small number of enthusiasts of modern theatre in Kerala at that time.

unorthodox ways.[19] Given that *Laṅkālakṣmi* deals primarily with the war in Laṅkā, Nair gave particular attention to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* in Eḻuttacchan's sixteenth-century, Malayalam *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam*.[20] Nair's *Laṅkālakṣmi* thus took its place in what K. Satchidanandan, Malayalam poet and scholar, calls a long lineage of 'innovation, revision, and interrogation' in Malayalam *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition.[21] Nair innovates in *Laṅkālakṣmi* by demythologizing *rākṣasa*s, refraining from 'othering' *rākṣasa*s, depicting them in familiar kinship relationships, and by revealing how *rākṣasa*s perceive and define their own *dharma*.

2. Representations of *Rākṣasa*s in *Laṅkālakṣmi*

The characters in *Laṅkālakṣmi*'s three acts exhibit no supernatural powers.[22] Instead of depicting *deva*s (gods) and *rākṣasa*s as performing miraculous deeds, Nair portrays both groups as separate communities, each sharing its own distinctive beliefs, values, and practices. That is, Nair 'demythologizes' both *rākṣasa*s

19 Dutt wrote: 'People here grumble that the sympathy of the Poet in Meghnad is with the Rakshasas. And that is the real truth. I despise Ram and his rabble, but the idea of Ravan elevates and kindles my imagination. He was a grand fellow', cited in Clinton Seely, 'The Raja's New Clothes: Redressing Rāvaṇa', in *Meghanādavadha Kāvya*', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p. 137.

20 'Eḻuttacchan' was originally a term for a Malayalam teacher of village children from *jāti*s such as the Nāyars. Eḻuttacchan drew upon the Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, but adapted it to Malayalam literary conventions, such as endowing the text with a parrot translator in keeping with the literary genre of *kili-pāṭṭu* (parrot songs). Rich Freeman ('Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 480) notes that Eḻuttacchan's text spread 'with a phenomenal popularity in manuscript form from one end of Kerala to the other in Nāyar and other middle-caste homes' and became the classical Malayalam rendition of the story. In many Hindu households of Kerala, it is recited daily during the month of Karkadakam (July-August).

21 Satchidanandan, 'Introduction', p. 5–6. The oldest extant retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story in Malayalam (c. 12th century), the *Rāmacaritam*, retells the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, the same *kāṇḍa* Nair chose for *Laṅkālakṣmi.*

22 In many *bhakti* tellings of the story, when Rāma kills foes, they attain salvation, so their death is a triumph. In contrast, since *Laṅkālakṣmi* lacks creatures with supernatural powers, Rāvaṇa's departure for his final battle with Rāma, when he knows with certainly that he will die, is a deeply tragic moment.

and deities.[23] For example, when monkeys slain earlier in the war later return to life, a character explains that it is not a miracle but the work of a physician with knowledge of the healing qualities of certain herbs (II: 221–222).[24] By giving rational explanations for seemingly supernatural deeds in the plot, Nair depicts *rākṣasa*s and deities not as those with miraculous powers but as a community among multiple communities, each of which exhibits its own ideals and conventional behaviour.

Second, Nair de-exoticizes the *rākṣasa*s by situating them in kinship relations, the basis for human belonging and identity in Hindu culture. In *Laṅkālakṣmi*, Nair portrays four generations of warriors, all related by blood, in Rāvaṇa's court. The oldest generation of *rākṣasa*s (Mālyavān, Sumālī, and Mālī) founded the dynasty but only Mālyavān remains alive, serving as the court's elder statesman. His son and Sumālī's sons, Prahasta (army commander) and Supārśva (king's advisor), form the second-oldest generation and play key roles in court. Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarṇa, and Vibhīṣaṇa represent the second-to-youngest generation.[25] Rāvaṇa's sons (Indrajīt and Atikāya) and Kumbhakarṇa's sons (Kumbha and Nikumbha) lead the youngest generation. By filling Rāvaṇa's court with his own relatives, Nair stresses kinship solidarity among the *rākṣasa*s, thus presenting them as like humans in valuing blood ties.

Moreover, Nair refrains from essentializing the *rākṣasa*s. Rather than portray Rāvaṇa as '*the*' *rākṣasa* and others as nearly indistinguishable fighters in war, Nair crafts the distinctive character of both the king and each of his chief

23 Other Indian self-declared modern writers have also demythologized characters from Indian epics. S.L. Bhyrappa, a Kannada writer who retold the *Mahābhārata* in the form of a novel, acknowledges presenting mythological characters with only human abilities, stating: 'I was aware all along that I was not giving exact copies of the characters of the original Mahabharata, but only the different facets and forms of human nature and human relationships'. See S.L. Bhyrappa, *Parva: A Tale of War, Peace, Love, Death, God and Man*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994, p. viii.

24 An English translation of *Laṅkālakṣmi* appeared serially in *Samyukta: A Journal of Women's Studies*: Act 1, tr. Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, vol. 1, no. 2 (July 2002), pp. 196–214; Act 2, tr. B.S. Bini, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 219–231; Act 3, tr. B.S. Bini, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 2004), pp. 213–224. When I cite from or refer to the translation, the act and page number appear in the text in parentheses immediately afterwards.

25 For *rākṣasa* kinship, see Mani, *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia*, pp. 435, 901, 906 (*rākṣasa* genealogies); Robert P. Goldman, Sally Sutherland Goldman and Barend A. van Nooten (tr.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume VI. Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 1553–1556 (glossary), and Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (tr.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume VII. Uttarakāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1403–1405 (family trees).

warriors by having them articulate differing views on matters of warfare and *rākṣasa* history in court debates. In fact, Nair mined older sources to match the speeches of specific *rākṣasa*s to their ancestry, past deeds, and martial styles.[26] For example, Kumbhakarṇa's huge size leads him to refuse offers for troops to join him in battle, leaving him alone to fight Rāma's entire army. In court debates, Supārśva raises suspicions about the motives of the other *rākṣasa*s but laments that he lacks the creativity to identify solutions to problems. In a similar manner, each *rākṣasa* plays an individual role in debate and war, rather than in just one in a mass of *rākṣasa*s.

One major division between those members of Rāvaṇa's court derives from age. Rāvaṇa and older *rākṣasa*s express pride in Laṅkā's military ability, pointing to its heroic warriors, strong forts, protective moats, effective weapons, and long record of victory in war. Indrajīt, Rāvaṇa's favourite son, articulates the views of younger *rākṣasa*s when he urges elders to stop recalling past victories and prepare to cope with new battle strategies because, he warns, war has changed. It no longer consists of one-to-one duels between champion warriors because now military tacticians also employ psychology and trickery to demoralize foes.[27] Although his elders despise such tactics, they continue to show respect to Indrajīt because they know that, whatever his views on battle tactics, he is brave, loyal, and willing to risk his life for Laṅkā.

In contrast, Nair depicts Rāvaṇa's brother, Vibhīṣaṇa, as a traitor to *rākṣasa-dharma*. When Rāvaṇa offers him the coveted honour of leading the troops into battle, Vibhīṣaṇa turns it down, insisting that Laṅkā cannot defeat Rāma because he possesses an 'invisible aura of unconquerable strength' (I: 209).[28] Instead, Vibhīṣaṇa tells Rāvaṇa that he should offer to return Sītā to Rāma before the war commences. When Rāvaṇa refuses the idea as insulting to his royal dignity, Vibhīṣaṇa vows to leave Laṅkā and requests the customary permission to depart.

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26 Nair refused to let his carefully researched scripts be modified without his permission. It was unusual since, at that time, directors often altered scripts and actors added topical references; A. Pillai, *C.N. Sreekantan Nair: Vision*, 2007, p. 195.

27 Indrajīt's military strategies stress efficacy. He wanted Rāvaṇa to attack Rāma's forces as they crossed the causeway, so it would be easy to pick them off. He also advises Prahasta to kill Sītā and show her dead body to Rāma's army to sap their will to fight. Later, he notes that Vibhīṣaṇa's alliance with Rāma is part of a recurrent pattern: 'It is Rama's strategy to befriend the younger brother to fight against the elder one. The weak one can be kept in obedient servitude as a dependent chieftain' (II: 222).

28 *Pariveśom*, translated here as 'aura', denotes a positive external manifestation of an inner quality, alluding here to a visible manifestation of Rāma's inner power. The term signals an inner greatness, described in *Purāṇa*s as radiating light that glows from a great ascetic or king. I thank Rizio Yohannan Raj for clarifying its nuance here.

Rāvaṇa accuses him of betraying his country, but Indrajīt goes further, demanding that his uncle be killed on the spot. Unwilling to oversee his brother's murder, Rāvaṇa orders Vibhīṣaṇa to leave at once, while the other *rākṣasa*s denigrate him as a coward and turncoat.

Vibhīṣaṇa's transgression of *dharma* leads to a debate about *rākṣasa-dharma* in the realm of intimate male-female relations, since Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā has led to war. Supārśva asks if mixing *rākṣasa* blood with non-*rākṣasa* blood weakens the *rākṣasa* lineage. Indrajīt responds that, on the contrary, Mālyavān, Sumālī, and Mālī were offspring of a union between a *rākṣasa* father and *gandharva* mother. Rāvaṇa adds that his sons begotten on non-*rākṣasī*s in his harem have fought bravely for Laṅkā in war.[29] Thus, all agree that *rākṣasa-dharma* allows males to move outside their lineage to marry females from other groups (unlike humans who are enjoined to marry within their social rank).

Nikumbha defines *rākṣasa-dharma* in this way: 'Whenever one sees beauty, taking it with or without force is the dharma of rakshasas' (I: 202). Rāvaṇa agrees, adding that '[a]nything which is rare in the three worlds should belong to Lanka'.[30] He declares that he abducted Sītā as the 'perfection of beauty', just he seized Kubera's Puṣpaka Vimāna (a beautifully ornamented chariot that flies through the air). Rāvaṇa's love of beauty has also impelled him to use his war booty to enhance Laṅkā's grandeur. He declares, 'I am a lover of all rare and beautiful objects. All things of beauty this Ravanan will win. They will adorn Lanka and will be a lasting fortune for the clan of rakshasas' (I: 207).[31] Since *rākṣasa-dharma* entails taking what is rare and precious, Rāvaṇa claims that abducting Sītā fulfills his *rākṣasa-dharma*.

3. Shared Narratives and Doubt

Despite their distinctive strengths and opinions, the play's *rākṣasa*s share knowledge of two central narratives about their lineage. The first narrative tells of how it lost its honour by fleeing from battle. That was long ago, when Mālī, Sumālī, and Mālyavān recklessly attacked Indra, king of the Vedic gods. At that time, the

29 He refers to *apsaras*es, celestial female dancers, and forest spirits in his harem.

30 He does, however, concede that one reason for abducting Sītā was his own passion for her.

31 For example, Rāvaṇa had Maya (Mandodarī's father) construct a building with a golden dome visible from all over Laṅkā. When the dome Maya built was damaged during the fire set by Hanumān, Rāvaṇa ordered it rebuilt so tall that its glow would radiate across the southern seas, attracting attention to his capital city.

three brothers assumed that the gods did not know of their plan to attack heaven, so the brothers did not expect Viṣṇu to come to Indra's aid, but Indra had learned of the plan and decided to pre-empt it by enlisting Viṣṇu on his side. When the *rākṣasa* attack came, Viṣṇu immediately arrived and killed Mālī on the spot. Terrified, Sumālī and Mālyavān fled for refuge in the netherworld, where Sumālī died. With hindsight, Mālyavān realizes that the attack was a catastrophe. He sadly recalls that before the attack, he had reigned happily, flanked with a brother on each side of his throne. He laments, 'At the end of that heroic journey spotted with massacre, demolition and conquests, total destruction awaited us; a fall so absolute!' (III: 214). The narrative shows that action lacking forethought leads to death, flight, and shame for oneself and one's lineage.

The second narrative, a sequel, recounts how Rāvaṇa restored the *rākṣasa*s' honour. Nair's speech by Rāvaṇa about restoring the honour of his lineage employs vertical imagery and the 'royal we' to describe his rise from the nadir of his life to Rāvaṇa's rule over the cosmos:

> We had walked from hidden valleys to the hills. We have trodden earth, we have tramped over rocks, we have triumphed, we have climbed. We climbed and climbed to every mountain peak, and when we arrived at the summit, we saw it was difficult to climb further; but we grasped at the stars, we tramped among the spheres, still climbing. And as we ascended, we raised up a family that had been destroyed.[32]

Many *rākṣasa*s view Rāvaṇa as saviour of the lineage. The second narrative suggests that valour and persistence on behalf of one's lineage earn victory, fame, and prosperity for all *rākṣasa*s.

By the middle of *Laṅkālakṣmi*'s second act, however, Rāvaṇa and his court come to realize that neither of the two shared narratives can guide them in their battle with Rāma. Like their three reckless *rākṣasa* ancestors (Mālī, Sumālī, and Mālyavān) who attacked heaven and were defeated by Viṣṇu, Rāvaṇa recklessly abducted Sītā, wife of Viṣṇu's avatar. And despite Rāvaṇa's harsh self-mortification, which led to his rule over the three worlds, his arrogance led to a foolish error: he neglected to request invincibility from lowly humans, as he had done for deities and *rākṣasa*s. And, thus, the tide of the war turns toward Laṅkā's defeat.

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32 For this quote, I have used Clifford Hospital's translation of Rāvaṇa's speech because it so effectively replicates the triumphant momentum of the Malayalam original. Clifford Hospital, 'Rāvaṇa as Tragic Hero: C.N. Srikantan Nayar's *Laṅkālakṣmi*, in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1991, pp. 92–93.

Now, the audience sees that *Laṅkālakṣmi*'s prologue has foreshadowed the play's dramatic arc. The prologue began with Hanumān's arrival in Laṅkā, where he encountered a *rākṣasī* guarding the entry gate to Laṅkā and attempted to enter. When she blocked his path, Hanumān knocked her onto the ground. She quickly regained her original divine form and told him that she is Goddess of Good Fortune (Sanskrit, Lakṣmī), who was cursed to be reborn as a *rākṣasī* guardian in Laṅkā. The curse was partly mitigated when a Brahmin blessed her and declared that the curse would end when a monkey hit her. Now that it has ended, in the prologue, she leaves Laṅkā taking good fortune with her, thereby signaling that Laṅkā's downturn in fortune will begin.

In Act I, the *rākṣasa*s boasted of unsurpassed military resources as they prepared confidently for war but, in Act 2, nearly all Laṅkā's famed warriors are slain in battle. By Act 3, Rāvaṇa realizes that defeat is inevitable. He sees that his former fame, wealth, and glory was transient.[33] Rāvaṇa, Mandodarī, his brothers, sons, and other valiant warriors will all die by the play's end, as in a Shakespearean tragedy.[34]

The most radical transformation in *Laṅkālakṣmi* is seemingly invincible Rāvaṇa turning into someone overwhelmed by self-doubt. Due to his boon of invincibility from the *rākṣasa*s and deities, he rarely harboured any questions about his abilities in the past. His first crisis results when his trusted military commander, Prahasta, is slain and Rāvaṇa rushes into battle to avenge his death. Although Rāvaṇa recently saved Vibhīṣaṇa from death at Indrajīt's hand before he left Laṅkā, when Rāvaṇa enters the battle, Vibhīṣaṇa launches a potent missile directly at him. Rāvaṇa parries the missile, but the attack forces him to accept that his traitorous brother will now use any means to guarantee Rāma's victory. Uncharacteristically, Rāvaṇa now wonders if his current ill fortune might result from a curse that his heads would be smashed, uttered after Rāvaṇa sexually assaulted Nalakūbara's fiancée, Rambhā. He pushes the idea aside, denying the possibility that the consequences of his past deeds might now come to fruition, and clings to the hope that he has suffered only a temporary setback.

To regain the upper hand in the war, he then awakens Kumbhakarṇa, his humongous brother who usually sleeps for six months at a time. As soon as he has eaten mountains of food and drink, he insists on entering the battlefield alone, without a *rākṣasa* army to support him. Before leaving for war, the huge brother states: 'I promise now in this court, when Kumbhakarṇa is alive, you don't have to fear from anybody' (II: 227). Kumbhakarṇa spreads terror in battle,

33 The play takes its name from Lakṣmī, as Gatekeeper in the prologue and as Goddess Sītā in the epilogue.

34 Only the *rākṣasa*s that left Laṅkā, Vibhīṣaṇa and his advisors, survive the war.

dueling first with Lakṣmaṇa and then single-handedly mowing down battalions of monkeys, leaving those remaining ready to flee for their lives. Even when his limbs are cut off, he continues to fight but eventually even he succumbs to his wounds. Rāvaṇa laments that he and Kumbhakarṇa were so close that his loss makes Rāvaṇa feel as if half his body is gone.

Characteristically, Supārśva's words raise a doubt that disturbs Rāvaṇa, thereby adding salt to the king's wounds. Referring to the boons that Rāvaṇa won by performing tapas, Supārśva declares, 'those immense gifts were spent in annexing countries and gaining wealth and pleasures. When you finally come to know that all those are frivolous and futile—then restlessness creeps in' (II: 229). Essentially, Supārśva implies that Rāvaṇa wasted his precious boons by using them to acquire things that do not last. Stung by his words, Rāvaṇa begins to wonder if his life has been a meaningless waste. At this point, when most of Laṅkā's chief warriors have died, Indrajīt enters the court and entreats his father to let him lead the troops.

Eager to evade his increasing doubts, Rāvaṇa quickly takes refuge in the delusion that Indrajīt can single-handedly turn the tide of the war. The father glorifies his son's war prowess, shouting, 'Let the auspicious war cries pierce the four directions!' and telling Indrajīt, 'The ocean of war is a small estuary for you. Let the cosmos marvel at your prowess' (II: 231). Indrajīt fights fiercely and cleverly but after some time, he too is slain. Now Rāvaṇa recalls another curse upon him: Vedavatī was performing tapas to win Viṣṇu as husband when Rāvaṇa sexually assaulted her. She cursed Rāvaṇa that Viṣṇu would ruin him. Rāvaṇa wonders if Vedavatī has taken birth as Sītā and Viṣṇu as Rāma.[35] Now overcome by doubt, Rāvaṇa asks Mandodarī if his life has been futile. She replies that she vehemently disagrees with that view.

4. From Sacrifice to Cosmic Monism

Although Mandodarī does not believe that all is lost, her close observations of Rāvaṇa lead her to suspect that he has lost some of his energy and self-confidence, so she encourages him to conduct a fire sacrifice (*homa*) to Śiva. She urges him to complete the *homa* so he will win the war and warns that, if he does not, he will be defeated. She promises that, after the ritual is done, she will anoint his forehead with auspicious vermilion before he goes into battle. Once again, Rāvaṇa gains hope. He lights the sacrificial fire and chants a Sanskrit

35 When Rāvaṇa raped Vedavatī, she vowed to cause his death in a future rebirth and sacrificed her life by entering a fire.

hymn that he has composed for Śiva, which lauds the deity's power. Examining textual precedents for this sacrificial rite that can produce the sacrifice special powers will show how Nair has transformed it.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Indrajīt, not Rāvaṇa, performed a special sacrifice to gain powers of illusion to deploy in the war. Indrajīt tried to dishearten the monkey army by creating an illusory double of Sītā, which was then killed in front of the monkeys. At first alarmed, they rally when Vibhīṣaṇa explained that it was only a trick. Then Indrajīt went to the Nikumbhilā grove to conduct a sacrificial ritual that will win him invincibility in combat (VI.71.22). Vibhīṣaṇa warned Rāma that Indrajīt must be slain before he completed the sacrifice; otherwise it would be impossible to defeat him. Rāma ordered Lakṣmaṇa to the grove and, when he arrived, Indrajīt was in the middle of conducting his ritual. Lakṣmaṇa challenged the *rākṣasa* to a duel and slayed him, leaving the sacrifice incomplete and, hence, useless (VI.78.33).

In the Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, in contrast, the ritual to gain special powers in battle was undertaken by Rāvaṇa, Indrajīt's father. In that text, Rāvaṇa's guru gave the king a mantra and told him that, if he performed a *homa* without interruption, a chariot, bow, and arrows would emerge from the fire; with them Rāvaṇa would defeat Rāma.[36] To avoid interruption, Rāvaṇa dug out a secret sacrificial hall beneath the palace, and began the *homa*. Vibhīṣaṇa saw its smoke emerging and warned Rāma that the ritual was taking place and would have to be stopped or Rāvaṇa would gain invincible power. Sugrīva, Hanumān, Aṅgada and other monkeys were sent to the hall to distract Rāvaṇa from the sacrifice. They went there but failed to break his concentration. Aṅgada then went to the women's quarters of the palace, dragged Mandodarī by the hair to the underground hall where Rāvaṇa was chanting, and ripped off the jewelled belt that bound her clothing. Disrobed, she lambasts Rāvaṇa as shameless for not coming to his wife's rescue. Now aware of her anger, he stopped the ritual and attacked Aṅgada with his sword. After interrupting the ritual, the monkeys then fled back to Rāma's camp.[37]

Eḻuttacchan's Malayalam retelling of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* increases the magnitude of the episode's drama by depicting ten crores of monkeys accompa-

36 V. Raghavan expresses surprise that Rāvaṇa's guru in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is Śukrācārya, guru of the *asura*s, because he is 'completely out of the picture in Valmiki or elsewhere'; V. Raghavan, *Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇas Other than Vālmīki's: The Adbhuta, Adhyātma, and Ānanda Rāmāyaṇas*, Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 1998, p. 33.

37 Lala Baij Nath (tr.), *The Adhyatma Ramayana*, Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1913, pp. 161–162.

nying Hanumān and Aṅgada to disrupt Rāvaṇa's *homa*. Aṅgada crushes the boulder that blocks the cavern and enters, seeing Rāvaṇa's eyes closed in meditation. The monkeys now rush in, extinguish the Vedic fire, and strike Rāvaṇa with the oblation ladle but he ignores the commotion. When monkeys remove the queen's jewellery and her clothing falls to the ground, she cries, 'What did I do to deserve this insult?' and declares, 'A husband should protect his wife, yet foes torment me while you sit idly by, no longer desiring wife or honor'.[38] Realizing what is occurring, Rāvaṇa chases the monkeys away in fury. The Malayalam account of ten crores of monkeys wrecking the *homa* reads almost like a spoof of stories about *rākṣasa*s polluting fire sacrifices.[39]

Nair's rendition is less dramatic but far more harrowing. Only Aṅgada, crown prince of the monkeys, finds the hidden door to the palace. The sound of him entering draws Mandodarī away from Rāvaṇa's *homa* to investigate. Seeing Mandodarī alone, Aṅgada rushes over and threatens her. Horrified, she demands to know whether Rāma ordered him to insult her. When he replies that, in war, a soldier must destroy all chastity in the foe's land, she takes her own life with her dagger. Aṅgada's matter-of-fact justification for raping a dignified and elderly queen illustrates clearly how war degrades all its participants. Back at the ritual hall, when Rāvaṇa recognizes enemy voices, he realizes that it will be impossible to finish his *homa*. He dons his armour, Mālyavān anoints him with Mandodarī's blood, and the king goes to meet his death. Earlier Rāvaṇa recalled how he raped two women; now a monkey has raped his wife.

After Act 3 ends with Mandodarī's suicide and Rāvaṇa's departure for war, the epilogue, which follows it, serves as a commentary on the entire play. Structurally, the epilogue is akin to the prologue: both feature a dialogue between Hanumān and a goddess. Yet, the identity and characteristics of the goddess differ. When the *rākṣasī* gatekeeper recovers her true form as Goddess Lakṣmī, she departs, along with good fortune. In contrast, Sītā has remained in Laṅkā throughout the war and expresses her feelings of identification with those who suffered during it. She articulates her close link to the war by defining herself as both a witness to the war as well as its cause. Indeed, she has watched an entire era's destruction. Remarking that the spilled blood of war has washed away

38 Reade Wood (tr.), *The Adhyatma Ramayana Translated from the Original Malayalam*, Cochin: Printers Castle, 1998, pp. 151–152.

39 Eḻuttacchan's account evokes the Purāṇic story of Śiva commanding Vīrabhadra to pollute and wreck Dakṣa's Vedic sacrifice because he refused to invite his son-in-law Śiva to the event. Mandodarī's disrobing and Draupadī's disrobing both occurred when a male sought to humiliate another male foe by removing his wife's clothing.

Laṅkā's sins, Hanumān asks Sītā to forgive Laṅkā. She replies that she has already done so and now reveals her true nature to Hanumān.

Declaring, 'I feel Lanka has become a part of myself and I an element of Lanka' (III: 223), Sītā conveys that she perceives no difference between herself and Laṅkā. This philosophical statement echoes the central premise of Advaita Vedānta, namely that the substratum of the universe (*brahman*) and the divine essence in all creatures (*ātman*) are non-different. Her words lead Hanumān to realize that the Goddess exists in all entities as the underlying divine essence of the universe and that she abides in them all. Reverently, he tells her that he sees in her 'the fall and rise of aeons', echoing Arjuna's wonder at Kṛṣṇa's theophany in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. As Hanumān asks to pray at her feet and 'spend the rest of my life in tranquil serenity', a play about war ends with a request for eternal peace (III: 224).

5. Conclusions

Nair's *Laṅkālakṣmi* innovates in multiple ways. At the level of plot and characterization, the play recounts the war in Laṅkā differently from both the epic account in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and devotional tellings by authors as far apart as Kampaṉ in Tamil and Tulsīdās in Hindi by presenting events almost entirely from the perspectives of the *rākṣasa*s. Some individual *rākṣasa* warriors possess a three dimensionality rarely encountered in any other retellings. Although Indrajīt, Kumbhakarṇa, and Vibhīṣaṇa are usually represented in compelling ways in other retellings of the narrative, even minor *rākṣasa*s such as Supārśva and Prahasta come across as full-bodied characters, while Mālyavān stands out as a cautious statesman willing to disagree with Rāvaṇa despite the king's anger when criticized. Nair does not leave Mandodarī as a background character, instead revealing how astutely she encourages her husband's unique talents, while empowering him when he feels that his life has been wasted. Nair succeeds in creating a *Rāmāyaṇa* play with an absent Rāma, a hard feat to accomplish. Most impressive, Nair has presented Sītā simultaneously as the human wife of Rāma subject to abduction and the Great Goddess who underlies the cosmos, all in the play's epilogue.

Laṅkālakṣmi delves into some of the same issues as Nair's earlier experimental play, *Kali*, but succeeds in grappling with those issues in a framework that makes them accessible to his audience. Both explore the dissatisfaction of youth with ritual practices: the *mūrti* in *Kali* symbolized how ritual could compel submission to abstract notions that limit thought; the failure of Rāvaṇa's *homa* reveals the inadequacy of ritual prescriptions to save one from death in battle. *Kali* portrayed how young people were pressured to sacrifice their lives for

ideology, while *Laṅkālakṣmi* raises ethical questions about the slaying of young warriors because Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā. *Kali* identifies its main character with all those who promise a utopian society but fail to deliver it; *Laṅkālakṣmi* portrays a monarch who gained power through conquest, looting, and abduction but deludes himself that he is virtuous because he patronizes art and beauty. Nair rejected popular Malayalam melodrama for ignoring the dilemmas of modern Kerala. *Kali* dealt with them in a way that proved opaque to its audience but *Laṅkālakṣmi* grapples with those dilemmas by placing them in the context of an already familiar narrative. Nair's Indrajīt shares views with many leftist youths in Kerala who condemned their elders for clinging to outmoded views rather that facing up to new ways of thinking.

Laṅkālakṣmi has been performed multiple times since its debut in 1976 and is required reading for many studying Malayalam literature. Prominent theatre workers in Kerala rank it one of the most eloquent and compelling modern plays in Malayalam. The production in which thespian Murali (Muraleedharan Pillai**)** played Rāvaṇa for Natyagriham is, even today, remembered as a masterpiece starring a master actor. The text was chosen as a script for intensive study at the University of Calicut's School of Drama in Thrissur, Kerala; recently a reunion of its alumni included a read-through of the play. Abhilash Pillai played the role of Indrajīt in a 1987 production directed by Krishnan Namboodiri. In 1994, Pillai then directed *Laṅkālakṣmi* (translated from Malayalam into Hindi by Sree Janardanan) at the National School of Drama, Delhi. Nair's play will probably be performed long into the future.[40]

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40 Look on YouTube for excerpts from recent productions of *Laṅkālakṣmi.* The one by Lokadharmi (deeply reflective of symbols, colours, and rituals from Kerala) includes striking costumes, scene design, and oratory, all aspects that Nair considered crucial to modern theatre and emphasized at workshops.

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Alexander Dubyanskiy

Specific Features of the Tamil Ballad: *Kucalavaṉ katai* (*The Story of Kusalavan*)

It is a well-known fact that there are quite a number of renderings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in vernacular languages.[1] Two main directions of this process can be outlined: rendering the whole poem or taking up one part of the poem, or only a certain episode. Various literary forms are used by the authors (poems, dramatic pieces, stories, songs etc.) but in all cases the original version (conventionally the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*) is recast, to a greater or smaller extent, according to local traditions and often to a particular social and even political situation. In the words of Romila Thapar, 'The appropriation of the story by a multiplicity of groups meant the multiplicity of versions through which the social aspirations and ideological concerns of each group were articulated. The story in these versions included significant variations which changed the conceptualization of character, event and meaning'.[2] In fact, the variations concern all levels of compositions: the plot, the treatment of the heroes, the ideological background, descriptive fragments, not to speak of the language, which in a majority of cases tends to be vernacular. In this regard, the most intriguing and interesting problems of literary analysis of such pieces include the changes that were introduced by their authors (known or unknown), their aims and origin, the local material used, as well as the language peculiarities revealed and the like.

In the present article, a description of one of the variant stories based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* is offered. It is *Kucalavaṉ katai* (*The Story of Kusalavan*) in the Tamil language, composed in a form which is usually, by Western and also Indian scholars, defined by the English term 'ballad'. But its original name is *katai*, i.e. *kathā* in Sanskrit ('story'), or *pāṭṭu* ('song'). Such compositions may be based on stories of different origin (classical or folk, pan-Indian or local). They are very popular and performed orally, as a rule, particularly by the so called *villicai* groups—singers and storytellers who accompany themselves by playing a string

1 For more see Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Rāmāyṇas. The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

2 Quoted by P. Richman in *Many Rāmāyṇas*, p. 4.

of a bow (*vil*) and beating bells and small drums. If the stories happen to be written down on palm-leaves or printed on paper, they do not have names of either composers or performers.

The manuscript (or, rather, manuscripts) of *Kucalavaṉ katai*, whose author is also unknown, was published twice. It was initially brought out by the International Institute of Tamil Studies and edited by Irā. Vacumati.[3] One more edition (with English translation) was undertaken by the Institute of Asian Studies.[4] There are a number of discrepancies between both editions (including the titles) but the bulk of the story is the same. What strikes the eye, however, is the beginning of the pieces. The first variant was obviously edited by somebody who tried to shape it as a sort of a medieval poem with all the necessary traditional preliminary parts: the glorification of a god (Śiva in this case), homage (Tamil *tuti* < Sanskrit *stuti*) to other gods (Gaṇapati, Sarasvatī, Nārāyaṇa, family gods), to parents, to the teacher. The second variant of the story is lacking all these.

The story is based on the events of the last part of the epic poem (the *Uttarakāṇḍa*). In short, it runs as follows:

> Rāma is back in Ayodhyā. He enquiries Bharata about the life of its citizens, then summons them to him and tells them to bring the gourds needed for a rite devoted to his father's memory. Then he distributes the gourd seeds among them and gives one to Hanumān. With the passing of time only Hanumān's seed produced fruit, an enormous gourd. Rāma orders those who failed to grow gourds to bring gold in a quantity equal to the weight of Hanumān's gourd. The citizens are angered by Rāma and leave in tears. He wants to find out what people think of him and decides to walk along the streets of Ayodhyā in disguise. That night he overhears the agitated conversation between a washerman (*vaṇṇaṉ*) and his wife, accusing her of unfaithfulness. In the course of the quarrel, the situation with Sītā is unpleasantly mentioned.
> Meanwhile Kaikeyī who also suspects Sītā of infidelity instigates her to draw a picture of Rāvaṇa. Sītā says that she has never seen him, but even so draws Rāvaṇa's portrait. Rāma returns home and she hides it under the bed. Rāma finds the picture and when a drop of his sweat falls on it, Rāvaṇa is resurrected. Rāma once more has to fight and kill him. He scolds Sītā and in anger orders Lakṣmaṇa to take her to the forest and kill her with his magic sword. Lakṣmaṇa defies Rāma and, in the forest, Sītā gives birth to a child who is named Kucalavaṉ and then raised by Vālmīki. One day, when Vālmīki was absent, she takes the boy from the *āśrama* and Vālmīki, thinking that Kucalavaṉ is lost, creates another child, Acalavaṉ, out of the *darbha* grass. The

3 *Kucalavar cuvāmi katai*, Patippāciriyar irā. vacumati, Ceṉṉai: Ulakat tamiḻ ārāycci niṟuvaṉam, 1995.

4 *Kucalavaṉ katai*. *The Story of Kusalavan*, general editor G. John Samuel, ed. G. Selva Lakshmi, R. Jayalakshmi, English rendering D. Thomas, Cheṉṉai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2006.

> grown-up brothers are described as great heroes and later enter a fight with Hanumān for the horse which emerged during a sacrifice conducted by Rāma. The brave boys beat Hanumān and then defeat Rāma's army. In the end, they are identified as Rāma's children but they refuse to go to Ayodhyā and return with their mother to the *āśrama*.

Even such a schematic presentation of the plot (with some episodes omitted) shows that it differs considerably from Vālmīki's poem as well as from the classical Tamil poem *Irāmavatāram* by Kampaṉ.[5] Some principle events such as Sītā's exile, the birth of children, their life and studies in Vālmīki's *āśrama* are preserved but they are treated quite originally and supplemented with several new episodes. In fact, this is a piece of literature in its own right, saturated with attitudes and problems which the creators and the performers (who, in principle, may coincide) considered interesting and topical for their audience.

First of all, it is clear from the very beginning that the figure of Rāma is not presented in a favourable light. True, the story does contain a certain glorification of him; various traditional names and epithets of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are applied to his figure (Perumāḷ, Nārāyaṇaṉ, Hari, Acyuta, Kōpāl, Tirumāl, Māyavaṉ etc.), and he is certainly recognized as the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, but his image on the whole is considerably humbled and human weaknesses prevail in his character. Even his martial bravery is doubted and crumbles when he encounters his sons on the battlefield. In the episode with his citizens, he is cunning and cruel; when he finds Rāvaṇa's portrait his reaction is close to hysterical. He exclaims:

> Is it proper to draw a picture of dead Rāvaṇa and make him return?
> Is it proper to draw a picture of the gone Rāvaṇa which [makes him] come again?
> How much did I suffer during the war with Rāvaṇa!
> Is it proper to depict Rāvaṇa with a crown which is worshipped by kings?[6]

These rhetoric questions obviously disclose Rāma's wounded ego, which screens his other emotions. Only at the end of his monologue does he reproach Sītā for staying in Rāvaṇa's realm:

> You, who lived with the wild *rākṣasa*, be away from my eyes, be gone!

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5 *Kamparāmāyaṇam: Irāmavatāram*, nāṅkām accu, Ceṉṉai: Kampaṉ kaḻakam, 1984.

6 *cettiṟantupōṉa Rāvaṇaṉait tirumpappaṭattil eḻutalāmō / māṇṭiṟantupōṉa Rāvaṇaṉai maṟuttumpaṭattil eḻutalāmō / Rāvaṇacammārap pōrmuṭikka nāṉum ettaṉai pāṭupaṭṭēṉ / tēcaracarkaḷ vaṇaṅkuvarō tirumuṭitaṉṉait tarikkalāmō*; *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 66.

> You, who was beside the king of Laṅkā, do not stand in front of me, be gone![7]

Rāma even tries to commit suicide but his three mothers manage to pacify him. Instead he intends to punish Sītā with the utmost cruelty. Incidentally, later, when Sītā is found alive in the forest, he denies his faults and blames his brother Lakṣmaṇa for all the misfortunes.

One of the main problems in Tamil folk creations which attracts attention of the performers (as well as of the audience) is the problem of family interrelations. In this case it manifests as the Rāma-Sītā conflict. To be more precise, the central motif of the story is the feminine conjugal chastity, a notion which is extremely significant for the traditional Tamil culture. It is known under the term *kaṟpu* and is eulogized in many pieces of Tamil literature (for instance, in the sixth chapter of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*).[8] In this connection an interesting and telling detail which stresses the importance of *kaṟpu* might be mentioned. In Tamil readings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa in order not to touch Sītā abducts her by lifting the lump of ground and the hut near which she stands. This detail was introduced, perhaps, by Kampaṉ[9] who understood that the idea of a male physically touching a married woman was absolutely unacceptable for the Tamil audience. In this story, Kaikeyī before asking Sītā to draw a picture of Rāvaṇa reminds her the events connected with Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa and says: 'he lifted you with the soil to the chariot' (*maṇṇōṭe uṉṉait tēril ēṟṟi*).[10]

Interestingly enough, the episode with the portrait is well known in the South and appears, for instance, in Telugu songs. But its treatment is a little bit different: it is Śūrpaṇakhā who came to Sītā disguised as a hermit and asks her to draw Rāvaṇa's figure. Sītā complies with the request but draws only Rāvaṇa's feet and Śūrpaṇakhā herself completes the picture.[11] Generally speaking, the motif of drawing a portrait of a beloved person is a commonplace in Indian literature. Here it is connected with Śūrpaṇakhā's lust for Rāma. It is known that she was rejected and insulted by him and she looks for revenge by means of slandering Sītā. Besides, being jealous of her, she intends to make Sītā and Rāma

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7 *kāṭṭarakkaṉōṭu vāḻntavaḷtāṉ kaṇṇilmuḻiyātē appuṟampō / ilaṅkaivēntanōṭu cērntavaḷtāṉ eṉmuṉṉillātē appuṟampō*; *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 67

8 The meaning of the term *kaṟpu* is discussed in: Alexander M. Dubianski, *Ritual and Mythological Sources of the Early Tamil Poetry*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999, pp. 127–129.

9 *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, p. 532 (lines 3386–3390).

10 *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 59.

11 Velcheru Narayana Rao, 'A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, p. 126.

fight. In the Tamil story, the active figure is Kaikeyī who obviously lusts for Rāvaṇa and is also jealous of Sītā—she is sure that Sītā was Rāvaṇa's lover. Thus, again the Tamil version switches from a mythological epic to family matters.

Taking into consideration the importance of the notion of *kaṟpu* to Tamil culture, Rāma's cruelty to Sītā, perhaps, can be explained in terms of a certain counterbalance to her alleged infidelity. On the other hand, the folk story obviously tends to blame Rāma for his abuse of Sītā. In the above-mentioned episode, Lakṣmaṇa reproaches Rāma and says:

> Chastity never was destroyed. Virgin Sītā must not be cut down.
> The way of *kaṟpu* is difficult. Oh, you with the complexion of the rain-cloud!
> Sītā must not be cut down. It is a fault to harm women. The elders won't accept it.
> Oh, Perumāḷ, my hand will not rise to cut down the woman Sītā'.[12]

Sītā is referred to in the story as 'the germ of chastity' (*kaṟpu cūṭāmaṇi*), 'the precious garland of chastity' (*kaṟpu maṇi mālai*). Lakṣmaṇa, who brings Sītā to the forest, believes that since her chastity is not destroyed neither tiger nor bear can kill her. Indeed, she is quite safe in the forest and, moreover, Varuṇa, Vāyu, snakes, wild animals and birds worship and guard her. In a way Sītā's stay in the wilderness can be considered as another trial of her marital fidelity which she successfully undergoes.

One more feature of the story that attracts our attention is its discernible Śaivite overtones. This, of course, does not mean that the Vaiṣṇava background of the story is diminished. As I have already mentioned, Rāma is recognized as Viṣṇu's *avatāra* and in some places he is worshipped. Bharata is sometimes named as Bharatāḻvār (following Kampaṉ's *Irāmavatāram*) but there are many facts that disclose the authors' inclination towards Śiva.[13] In the second part of the story describing the events in the forest, the goddess Bhadrakāḷi appears. Sītā asks Vālmīki to bring the goddess to her, explaining that she is her relative, which is indeed true because according to Tamil mythology Bhadrakāḷi (otherwise Durgā or Koṟṟavai) is a younger sister of Tirumāl, that is Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa or Rāma (*Māyavar taṅkai Pattirakāli*).[14] Vālmīki summons her and she comes as a

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12 *kaṟpu orunāḷum aḻiyavillai. kaṉṉi Cītaiyai veṭṭa vēṇṭām / kaṟpuneṟiyatu pollātu. kārvaṇṇā Cītaiyai veṭṭa vēṇṭām / peṇpāvam piḻai tarumē. periyavarukkum ēlātu / peṇṇāḷ Cītaiyai veṭṭutaṟku perumāḷe eṉakkuk kaivarumō*; *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 71.

13 In another variant of the story mentioned earlier the text begins with the glorification of Śiva (*kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu*).

14 *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 97.

midwife and helps Sītā to deliver a child. She gives Sītā medicine, rocks the cradle and sings a lullaby to the child. Later she appears in disguise as a hunchback woman before the brothers (Kucalavaṉ and Acalavaṉ), tells them about their origin and gives them the sacred Śaivite ashes (*tirunīṟu*). Then Śiva himself appears on the scene, having heard about the wild hunt the brothers undertook in the forest. He orders Yāma to fetch them but Yāma gets frightened. Śiva goes to Ayodhyā as an old brahmin, meets Rāma and reproaches him for the absence of wife in his house. He says: 'Will Vedic people eat in the house where there is no hostess?' (*maṉaiyāṭṭi yillāta maṉaiyatilē maṟaiyōr amutu pucikkalāmō*) and leaves for Kailāsa.[15]

The example of the *Kucalavaṉ katai* shows that it is a good case of a rendering a pan-Indian story by a local folk tradition. We see that the creators of the story (nameless authors and performers) feel free to introduce considerable changes into a well-known plot, to invent and add new episodes, to accentuate certain elements. The sources of changes and additions are many and varied: universal folk motifs, local stories and songs, *bhakti* hymns and local mythology, even classical poetic tradition. Everything is combined and melted in the flexible creative process by local poets and performers, which certainly deserves further investigations.

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15 *Kucalavaṉ katai*, p. 127.

Danielle Feller

Rivers of *rasa* and Hearts of Stone: The Female Voice of Pathos in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*

Bhavabhūti's[1] *Uttararāmacarita* (URC) is a play of the *nāṭaka*-type,[2] composed in seven acts. The play is mainly based on events described in the last book of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Rm),[3] the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, from which it derives its name.[4] In this, Bhavabhūti's play differs from many other versions of the *Rāmakathā*, which often end the narrative at the point when the heroes return to Ayodhyā after their long exile. Thus, they end on a happy note and avoid the tragic events of the last book.[5] Bhavabhūti, on the other hand, does not hesitate to tackle the

1 From the prologue of his play *Mālatīmādhava*, we learn that Bhavabhūti was born in a distinguished family of learned and traditional Brahmins, in the country of Vidarbha (nowadays northern Maharashtra). According to V.V. Mirashi (*Bhavabhūti*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974: chapter 1), he was in all likelihood active as a playwright at the court of King Yaśovarman of Kanauj between c. 700 and 730 AD. Bhavabhūti is the author of three (known) plays: the *Mahāvīracarita*, the *Mālatīmādhava*, and finally the *Uttararāmacarita* (probably composed in this order). On the order of composition of Bhavabhūti's plays, see Gary Tubb, 'The Plays of Bhavabhūti', in *Innovations and Turning Points. Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman and Gary Tubb, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 403–410.

2 A *nāṭaka* is a heroic comedy composed in five to ten acts, based on a theme borrowed from *itihāsa*; see Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *Théâtre de l'Inde ancienne*, Paris: Gallimard, 2006, p. 1498. Its hero is either a king or a supernatural being.

3 References will be given throughout to the text of the critical edition established by Govindlal Hargovind Bhatt, et al. (ed.), The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa, 7 vols, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975.

4 Unless mentioned otherwise, the text and the translations of the URC are by Sheldon Pollock (tr.), *Rāma's Last Act by Bhavabhūti*, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press and the JJC Foundation, 2007, but with the diacritics maintained. As far as we can tell from the extant literature, Bhavabhūti was the first playwright to bring the story of Rāma onto the stage. See Pollock, *Rāma's Last Act by Bhavabhūti*, p. 30, and Tubb, 'The Plays of Bhavabhūti', p. 397.

5 This reluctance may also have been shared by the visual arts. See John Brockington's article 'Stories in Stone: Sculptural Representations of the Rāma Narrative' in this volume (p. 49): '*Uttarakāṇḍa* scenes are virtually unknown before the Vijayanagara period'.

heart-rending subject-matter of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, but, bound by the laws of the dramatic genre, he introduces some interesting twists in the tale.

In the URC, the story unfolds as follows:

> When Rāma comes to know that the people are murmuring against Sītā[6], he orders his brother Lakṣmaṇa to abandon her in the wilderness, despite her advanced state of pregnancy. Then, there is a gap of twelve years in the plot, during which time Rāma remains convinced that Sītā is dead, devoured by wild beasts. In reality, and this is revealed to him only at the end of the play, Sītā gives birth to twins in the waters of the river Ganges, and is rescued by the goddess Gaṅgā and by her own mother, the goddess Earth. She takes refuge in the Earth with her two babies. When they have been weaned, the two boys are handed over to the sage Vālmīki for their education, but Sītā remains in her mother's underground realm.
>
> Twelve years after these tragic events, Rāma starts the performance of a horse-sacrifice. He then goes to the Daṇḍaka forest and slays, though with outmost reluctance, the *śūdra* ascetic Śambūka who is unlawfully performing austerities (*tapas*).[7] Rāma recognizes the forest-environment in which he had spent many enjoyable moments with his beloved Sītā during their exile, and breaks down during a conversation with Vāsantī, the goddess of the forest. Meanwhile, Sītā herself arrives on the scene in the company of the river-goddess Tamasā, sent by the Goddess Gaṅgā who is afraid that the memory of happier days will revive Rāma's grief. Sītā remains invisible, thanks to a boon of the Gaṅgā, but a touch of her hand can be felt by Rāma who revives from his fainting-fit.
>
> Then the scene shifts to Vālmīki's hermitage, which is just then being visited by all the elders, Sītā's father King Janaka, and Rāma's mothers with Vasiṣṭha and his wife Arundhatī, who have all just returned from a twelve-year sacrifice tended by the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. At the same moment, Rāma's sacrificial horse arrives at the hermitage protected by an army, and Rāma's son Lava challenges the passage of the horse. Lava fights with great valour alone against many, with the help of the Jṛmbhaka-*astra*s which Rāma had made over to his sons before their birth. Then the elders recognize Lava and Kuśa as Rāma's children, and Rāma himself, who arrives shortly afterwards, gradually recognizes them too. The play ends with a 'play within the play', which Vālmīki has been composing, and which is staged in front of a distinguished audience comprising gods and other semi-divine beings. This inserted play explains what happened to Sītā after she was sent to the forest and the birth of her twins in the waters of the Ganges. At the end of the play, Sītā in person comes out of the

6 Implying, of course, that she has been unfaithful to her husband during her captivity in Rāvaṇa's palace, and that Rāma should not have taken her back. This is never mentioned in so many words in the play, since it would be deemed improper. Whenever certain characters allude to this event, they whisper about it in each other's ears.

7 In the Rm 7.76, Rāma likewise kills Śambūka, though without any qualms, and then visits Agastya's hermitage. But there are no reminiscences of his stay near the Godāvarī.

> Ganges, fiction thus merging with 'reality'[8], supported by the Gaṅgā and the goddess Earth, and is returned to Rāma with the goddesses' commendation and Arundhatī's solemn testimony as to her purity.[9]

As we see, Bhavabhūti's play significantly differs from the Rm's *Uttarakāṇḍa*. My purpose here is not to list these quite numerous changes, since this has already been done before,[10] nor to address the somewhat vexed question of Bhavabhūti's sources.[11] Clearly, Bhavabhūti was thoroughly acquainted with the Rm, since he quotes five verses directly from it in his two plays based on the *Rāmakathā*, the *Mahāvīracarita* and the *Uttararāmacarita*.[12] But it is equally obvious that he did not feel bound to follow this particular model.[13] Rather, he consciously remodelled the *Rāmakathā* to suit his time and age, and his chosen genre, the drama. Thus, in the URC, the sage Vālmīki does not compose an epic

8 On this merging of fiction with reality, see David Shulman ('Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', in *Questioning Ramayanas. A South Asian Tradition*, ed. Paula Richman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 63 and 76) who remarks: 'In this respect, the *Uttara-rāma-carita* is situated firmly within the Ramayana tradition, where the 'story', or the text that embodies it, always has an autonomous quality superseding any external reality; at critical points, the overt reality of the narrative tends to fuse mysteriously into its own frame, which hereby swallows up sequential notions of time'. And further: 'The embedded play becomes fully convergent with its external setting which, for want of a better word, we might call "reality"'.

9 In Rm 7.87.14–20, it is sage Vālmīki who testifies to her purity before the ordeal, putting at stake all the merit gained by his austerities. As we shall see below, it is quite significant, and in accordance with the overall importance of women in the play, that a woman should assume this authoritative role in the URC.

10 See e.g. Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti*, pp. 260–261.

11 See Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti*, pp. 264–265, for the question of whether the URC is not rather based on the *Rāmakathā* as told in the *Padmapurāṇa* (that also contains the episode in which Rāma's sons oppose the passage of the sacrificial horse). Mirashi on the contrary argues that it is the *Padmapurāṇa* which borrowed from Bhavabhūti's play, for, as he notes, there is no proof that the *purāṇa* is older than the URC.

12 According to Mirashi (*Bhavabhūti*, pp. 258–259), he drew from the northern recension of the Rm.

13 See the remark by Mary Brockington in her article 'Showing What Is Not: The Use of Illusion in Classical Sanskrit Rāma Plays' in this volume (p. 92): 'These tellers were not interested in telling the old, well-loved story "the right way"; they did it "my way"'.

but a play,[14] which clearly becomes Bhavabhūti's own play,[15] and the *dénouement* of the story takes place on a stage,[16] and not on a sacrificial ground.[17] Most importantly, of course, he introduces a happy end, imposed by the rules governing the dramatic genre, in which Sītā, instead of disappearing forever in the Earth, emerges out of the Ganges in the final 'play within the play' and is reunited with her husband and her two sons.

What I propose to do in this paper is to examine the way in which Bhavabhūti 'feminizes' the story, and why he has recourse to this narrative strategy of 'feminization'. I suggest that he does so for two main reasons.

In the first place, the numerous female characters of the play unite their voices[18] in blaming Rāma for his cruel deed of abandoning the pregnant Sītā in the forest and in challenging this decision.

Secondly, as a playwright, Bhavabhūti was of course especially interested in the aesthetic experience. Giving rise to pathos (*karuṇa*), the primary *rasa* of the URC, was crucial to his play. In my opinion, the many female voices precisely contribute to the production of pathos. This is achieved not only because these women characters themselves manifest grief (*śoka*), but also because they allow the emergence of grief in the male characters—first and foremost in Rāma himself. We shall tackle these two points in the above order.

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14 Furthermore, according to the prelude of the URC, the play was being shown at the festival (*yātrā*) of Kālapriyanātha. On this point, see Shulman, 'Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', pp. 61 and 79.

15 'Bhavabhūti, the master-poet, seems to have been subsumed within the persona of the first poet, Vālmīki, and (…) Bhavabhūti's *Uttara-rāma-carita* has merged into Vālmīki's text'; Shulman, 'Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', pp. 77–78.

16 The scene of Sītā's disappearance into the earth already has clear dramatic value in the Rm: all the people belonging to the four *varṇa*s (7.96.8), besides *rākṣasa*s, monkeys (7.96.7), gods (7.97.6–8), sages (enumerated in 7.96.1–6), *nāga*s, *suparṇa*s, *siddha*s (7.97.8), etc., assemble to witness the event. As if they were watching a theatrical performance, they applaud, shouting 'bravo, bravo!' (*sādhu*, *sādhu*!), and rain flowers. Everybody, except Rāma, is highly pleased and rejoices.

17 The Vedic sacrificial ritual was certainly waning in Bhavabhūti's times, even though *aśvamedha*s continued to be performed occasionally until a very late date. The last on record (not counting of course modern-day revivalist performances) was undertaken by the Maharaja of Amber, Jai Singh II (the famous astronomer king), in 1716.

18 On the question of the female voice in the Rm, especially Sītā's voice unmediated by male voices, see Sally Sutherland Goldman, 'The Voice of Sītā in Vālmīki's Sundarakāṇḍa', in *Questioning Ramayanas*.

As far as the first reason is concerned, what particularly intrigued me, while reading the play, is its plethora of female characters—eleven in total.[19] Some of them play very little or no role at all in the Rm, which in any case is not primarily about women and their worldview. As Sutherland Goldman puts it: 'The concerns of Vālmīki's epic prove primarily masculine, leaving little opportunity for expression by women of feminine concerns'.[20] What is more, in the URC, all the female characters, with the exception of a doorkeeper (*pratīhārī*), are persons of authority, such as queens, elderly Brahmin ladies, and even goddesses, and many of them speak Sanskrit, a clear sign of high standing.[21] Their roles are evenly distributed throughout the URC, and there is hardly an act in which they do not play an important role, except perhaps act 5, a concession to the martial spirit of the initial *Rāmakathā*, which describes the battle between Lava and the protectors of Rāma's sacrificial horse.[22] Here is the list of the female characters in the URC, first human, then divine, in order of increasing hierarchical importance:

Pratīhārī—a door-keeper (speaks Prakrit);
Sītā—the heroine, queen (speaks Prakrit);
Kauśalyā—Rāma's mother (speaks Prakrit);
Ātreyī—a female ascetic (*tāpasī*) (speaks Sanskrit);
Arundhatī—Vasiṣṭha's wife (speaks Sanskrit);
Vidyādharī—the wife of a *vidyādhara* (speaks Prakrit);
Vāsantī—a sylvan goddess (*vanadevatā*) (speaks Sanskrit);
Muralā—a river goddess (speaks Sanskrit);
Tamasā—a river goddess (speaks Sanskrit);

19 In this regard, we may notice an interesting progression in Bhavabhūti's three successive plays—*Mahāvīracarita*, *Mālatīmādhava* and *Uttararāmacarita*—in which the women characters increase in number and importance.

20 Sutherland Goldman, 'The Voice of Sītā in Vālmīki's Sundarakāṇḍa', p. 224.

21 Tubb ('The Plays of Bhavabhūti', p. 402) comments on Bhavabhūti's 'brahmanically intellectual way' of composing plays and on his reluctance to use traditional Prakrit metres, remarking that even Prakrit-speaking women in the URC switch to Sanskrit whenever they utter a verse. On Bhavabhūti's Prakrit, see the interesting remarks made by R.G. Harshé, *Observations sur la Vie et l'Oeuvre de Bhavabhūti*, Thèse pour le doctorat de l'Université, Paris: Éditions littéraires de France, 1938, pp. 60–63.

22 Although a woman has one of the leading roles even in this act, since this battle is not enacted on stage but indirectly narrated in a dialogue between a *vidyādhara* and his *vidyādharī* wife. However, we should note that the dictate against enacting battles and death on stage was not an absolute one, as shown by B. Śliwczyńska in 'Death on the Stage in Sanskrit Classical Theatre: A Long-Sustained Misinterpretation', in *CEENIS Current Research Series*, ed. Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska, Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2013, pp. 68–75. For instance, at the beginning of act 2, Rāma apparently slays Śambūka on stage.

Bhāgīrathī/Gaṅgā—a river goddess (speaks Sanskrit);
Pṛthivī—Sītā's mother, the goddess Earth (speaks Sanskrit).

Among the prominent characters, we may note that Sītā, Kauśalyā and the Earth play the same role as in the Rm.[23] On the other hand, Ātreyī, Muralā, the *vidyādharī* and Vāsantī do not appear at all in Vālmīki's text. Arundhatī's name is cited a total of three times in the Rm, but only in the context of comparisons in which she figures as the ideal virtuous wife. She plays no role in the story. The two river goddesses Tamasā and Gaṅgā of course appear in the Rm as rivers, as does the Godāvarī, which is mentioned in the URC but does not appear in person on stage. In the Rm, Sītā prays to all the rivers they ford on their way into exile: to the Gaṅgā (2.52), then to the river Kālindī (= Yamunā; 2.55). The rivers are clearly considered as goddesses, but are not personified. In 3.64, Rāma, who is desperately looking for Sītā whom the demon Rāvaṇa has just abducted, talks to the Godāvarī and asks her if she knows where Sītā has gone. But the Godāvarī is scared of Rāvaṇa and does not dare to reply. The river appears as a sentient being, but she is not given a voice. The Tamasā (the river of darkness) is particularly well chosen in the URC as Sītā's companion, since Sītā in this text is said to spend her exile underground. In the Rm, the Tamasā is of course the river near Vālmīki's hermitage, not far from the Gaṅgā (cf. Rm 1.2.3), on whose shore the sage witnessed the pitiful scene of the *krauñca*'s murder and pronounced his first *śloka* emanating from his grief (1.2.14).[24] The Tamasā is thus a perfect choice as the river of pathos, and as the presiding deity of act 3 of the URC which positively drips with *karuṇa-rasa*.

Thus, by the sheer number of female characters, as well as by their high standing, we see that Bhavabhūti has given special prominence to the female voices and opinions in his play. In choosing to retell the inauspicious events of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, he was of course faced with the unavoidable problem of accounting for Rāma's cruel deed of abandoning the pregnant Sītā in the wilderness—a problem which all the interpreters of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whether ancient or

23 However, in the Rm, the Earth does not utter a word when she takes Sītā with her to her underground regions.

24 According to Biardeau and Porcher, Vālmīki, the sage 'from the termite-hill' (termite hills, as is well known, communicating with the underworld), living near the 'obscure' river Tamasā, is a consort of the Earth and hence a father-figure for Sītā herself'; Madeleine Biardeau and Marie-Claude Porcher (tr.), *Le Rāmāyaṇa de Vālmīki*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, p. 1692.

modern, have faced.[25] To excuse Rāma, he gives the standard answer, namely, that Rāma was forced by circumstances—the famous *vox populi* which should always be heeded—to behave as he did.[26] Furthermore, in the scheme of the triple path (*tri-varga*), consisting of religious duty (*dharma*), profit (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*), *dharma* necessarily comes first,[27] and ruin awaits a king who is too lustful and attached to sensory objects.[28] But the URC also raises another, more original question in this connection. It does not only ask, 'How could Rāma have done it?', but also, 'How could the elders, especially the *female* elders of the family, have allowed it?'. Thus, the sylvan goddess Vāsantī exclaims in act 2, when she comes to know of Sītā's sad fate:

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25 For a survey of the various literary responses to the abandoning of Sītā (*Sītātyāga*), see Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume VII. Uttarakāṇḍa*, Introduction, Translation and Annotation, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 82–104. Other deeds of Rāma are also criticized in the URC. Thus, Rāma's own son Lava sarcastically enumerates the list of Rāma's less than admirable actions in 5.35.

26 Even before the unhappy events unfold, there is a series of portents in act 1 that announce them and even predispose Rāma to act as he did. Thus, the elders send Rāma the following message: 'We have been detained at the sacrifice of your brother-in-law (Ṛṣyaśṛṅga). You are but a child and your kingship has just begun. Dedicate yourself to the conciliation of your subjects since reputation is a treasure more precious than life itself' (1.11: *jāmāṭṛyajñena vayaṃ niruddhās tvaṃ bāla evāsi navaṃ ca rājyam / yuktaḥ prajānām anurañjane syās svasmād yaśo yat paramaṃ dhanaṃ vaḥ*). To this, Rāma replies: 'Affection, compassion, pleasure… indeed, Jānakī herself I wouldn't scruple to renounce to propitiate the people' (1.12: *snehaṃ dayāṃ ca saukhyaṃ ca yadi vā jānakīm api / ārādhanāya lokasya muñcato nāsti me vyathā*). Admiring the wall-paintings in the royal pavilion which narrate their adventures in exile, Sītā innocently and yet prophetically remarks: 'I feel like visiting the unspoiled deep forest and bathing in the pure, placid, cool waters of the Bhāgīrathī' (act 1, after 33: *jāṇe puṇo vi pasaṇṇagambhīrāsu vaṇarāisu viharissaṃ pavittasommasisirāvagāhaṃ ca bhaavadiṃ bhāīradhiṃ avagāhissaṃ*). As Shulman ('Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', p. 71) notes, she uses the simple future tense, which makes her statement sound more like a prediction than like a wish.

27 See for instance *Manusmṛti* 4.176ab: 'He should renounce profit and pleasure if they should conflict with religion' and 12.38: 'Pleasure is the mark of darkness, profit is said to be the mark of energy, and religion the mark of lucidity, and each is better than the one before it'; Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (tr.), *The Laws of Manu*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

28 See *Manusmṛti* 7.27 and 7.30.

> How awful. How could such a thing have happened with Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha presiding over the Raghu clan, and the aged queens still alive?[29]

The answer is that all the elderly people had just left Ayodhyā to attend Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's sacrifice. The prelude to act 1 already takes care to stress the elders' absence. And we see that, excepting the sage Vasiṣṭha, all these elders are women:

> The queen mothers of Rāma have gone off—watched over by Vasiṣṭha and following Arundhatī—for a ritual at their son-in-law's ashram.[30]

Thus, the ill-starred couple were left alone in a deserted household, and Rāma acted rashly for lack of proper guidance. The fact that Bhavabhūti is so insistent on this point of course indirectly shows the power wielded by the women, at least in the family sphere, and implies that in normal circumstances, in the presence of the older ladies, Rāma would never have been allowed to abandon his wife—at least not in this extremely cruel fashion. The elderly women are thus white-washed, and the responsibility for abandoning Sītā squarely falls on Rāma's shoulders, whose own guilt is, however, tempered by his lack of experience: he is a mere youth (*bāla*).[31] In contrast, the Rm shows us a Rāma who acts as the omnipotent monarch, cowing from the start his brothers into silence (7.45) —which, of course, indirectly shows not only that his brothers, if allowed, would

29 *hā kaṣṭam. arundhatīvasiṣṭhādhiṣṭhiteṣu raghukadambakeṣu jīvantīṣu ca vṛddhāsu rājñīṣu katham idaṃ jātam*; prelude to act 2, after verse 6.

30 *vasiṣṭhādhiṣṭhitā devyo gatā rāmasya mātaraḥ*; 1.3. Again, repeated in the prologue, after 4: 'Out of deference to him (Ṛṣyaśṛṅga) the elders have gone on a visit, leaving behind their daughter-in-law Jānakī, though she is far advanced in pregnancy' (*tadanurodhāt kaṭhoragarbhām api vadhūṃ jānakīṃ vimucya gurujanas tatra gataḥ*).
In the URC, Śāntā, the wife of the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, is said to be King Daśaratha's daughter.

31 As Mary Brockington remarks in her paper in this volume 'Showing What Is Not' (p. 82): 'In many respects, the composers of Rāma *nāṭya*s stand outside the conventional understanding of the figure of Rāma developing from epic hero to supreme deity. They do not portray him with increasing reverence; their portrayal is more likely to arouse scorn and exasperation in his audience than the wonder and admiration evoked by the warrior of the epics, or the devotion evoked by the *bhakti* movement'. While things are clearly not carried so far in the URC as to 'arouse scorn and exasperation', it is clear nonetheless that Rāma appears very human in this text. But to be fair to Bhavabhūti, the Rm passages likewise abound in which Rāma laments and gives free vent to his grief after Sītā's abduction, behaving less than heroically.

have voiced dissent,[32] but also that Rāma did not trust himself not to yield to their entreaties. The elder queens and their reaction are not mentioned in the Rm, and we never hear what they have to say on the topic.[33]

The URC is quite harsh in its evaluation of Rāma's deed—harsher, as Goldman notes,[34] than Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṃśa*. Throughout the play, many reproaches are levelled at Rāma for abandoning Sītā: even Rāma's spy, the inauspiciously named Durmukha, who comes to give him the sad news of the townspeople's whispers, is shocked at Rāma's decision: 'The queen, already purified by fire, is purified the more by the continuation of the Raghu line she carries in her womb. How can my lord have reached such a decision on the basis of malicious gossip about her?'.[35] Later, Sītā's father Janaka feels anger mixed with grief as he remembers what happened: 'How dare anyone speak like this and insult us more when Rāma has already insulted us enough!'.[36] As Goldman rightly notes,[37] Rāma is equally hard on himself. His laments at the end of act 1, after taking the hard decision to abandon Sītā, are especially moving and reveal that he considers himself a monster. He calls himself a miserable wretch (*mandabhāgyaḥ*, after 41), a cruel man (*nṛśaṃsaḥ*, after 45), a butcher who slaughters his own pet bird:

> From childhood my delicate love fed on delicacies and was never parted from me because of our deep affection. And now I am ready to use deceit and deliver her over to death, like a man who butchers a small pet bird.[38]

His self-abusive vocabulary grows even more shocking in the subsequent lines: he calls himself an untouchable (*asparśanīyaḥ*), an outcaste, (*pātakī*), a pariah (*caṇḍāla*, verse 1.47), a poison tree (*viṣa-druma*, verse 1.47). Even twelve years

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32 See Goldman and Sutherland Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki ... Uttarakāṇḍa*, p. 84.

33 Rāma's mothers are of course still alive at that time, and nothing is said in the Rm about their being away from court. They die much later at the very end of the Rm (7.99).

34 Goldman and Sutherland Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki ... Uttarakāṇḍa*, p. 88.

35 *kahaṃ dāṇiṃ aggiparisuddhāe gabbhaṭṭhidapavittarahuulasaṃtāṇāe devīe dujjaṇavaaṇādo evvaṃ vavasidaṃ deveṇa*; act 1, after verse 44. To this, Rāma replies: 'Silence! How dare you call the people of the city and countryside malicious?' (*śāntam. kathaṃ durjanāḥ paurajānapadāḥ*).

36 *kaṣṭam, evaṃvādinā janena rāmabhadraparibhūtā api vayaṃ punaḥ paribhūyāmahe*; act 4, after verse 10.

37 Goldman and Sutherland Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki ... Uttarakāṇḍa*, p. 88.

38 *śaiśavāt prabhṛti poṣitāṃ priyaiḥ sauhṛdād apṛthagāśayām priyām / chadmanā paridadāmi mṛtyave sauniko gṛhaśakuntikām iva*; 1.46.

later, several descriptions of his physical decrepitude show that he is still consumed by remorse.[39]

But certainly, the women characters in the URC are the ones who heap the severest reproach on Rāma. Thus, in act 2, when Vāsantī, the goddess of the Daṇḍaka forest who used to be Sītā's dear friend, learns about Sītā's sad fate from the ascetic Ātreyī, she laments and cries out: 'Oh my beloved friend and most honorable woman, that such should be your lot in life. Dear Rāma, dear Rāma… No, enough of you!'.[40] She cannot even bring herself to talk about Rāma again. And when subsequently she meets Rāma in person, she does not hesitate to upbraid him sternly, telling him that he is ruthless (*dāruṇaḥ*, act 3, after verse 26), and quoting his own words of blandishment to Sītā back at him, with the irony of despair:

> 'You are my life, you are my second heart, moonlight to my eyes, nectar to my limbs', and so on—with countless honeyed words you charmed her, that simple girl… But enough, why bother saying more? (She faints).[41]

But soon recovering, she continues her scolding, not without reasoning, as we see:

> Ah, heartless man, you prize your reputation, they say, but what ill repute is worse than this? What can have become of the fawn-eyed woman in the woods, do you suppose? Tell me, my master.[42]

To this, Rāma can only reply that he believes she has been killed by beasts of prey (3.29). We may note that Rāma behaves perfectly meekly during the whole conversation, and fully confesses to his guilt, never once trying to justify himself or explain away his deed.

Sītā, who is invisibly listening in to the whole conversation, scolds Vāsantī *in petto*, because her words make Rāma suffer: 'You are cruel, Vāsantī, so

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39 The river goddess Muralā, act 3 after 1, says that he is exceedingly emaciated (*parikṣīṇaḥ*). Sītā in act 3, after 8, and Vāsantī in 3.23 make similar comments on his paleness and weakness. In 6.41, his mothers and Janaka even swoon when they see him so changed after 12 years.

40 *hā priyasakhi, hā mahābhāge, īdṛśas te nirmāṇabhāgaḥ. rāmabhadra, rāmabhadra… atha vālaṃ tvayā!*; act 2, after 6.

41 *tvaṃ jīvitaṃ tvam asi me hṛdayaṃ dvitīyaṃ tvaṃ kaumudī nayanayor amṛtaṃ tvam aṅge*; 3.27.

42 *ayi kaṭhora yaśaḥ kila te priyaṃ kim ayaśo nanu ghoram ataḥ param / kim abhavad vipine hariṇīdṛśaḥ kathaya nātha kathaṃ bata manyase*; 3.28.

cruel'.[43] But Sītā herself, who is still very much in love with Rāma and understands his reasons, is not above reproaching him—though not directly to his face. Hearing Rāma lament and call out to her, she says (her voice breaking with anger): 'My husband, really, this is hardly in keeping with all that has happened'.[44] Further, she tells her confidante, the river Tamasā: 'He disowned me like that so groundlessly'.[45] As for Rāma's mother Kauśalyā and the other queens, they express their disapproval and anger, not in words, but in deeds: they were so upset with Rāma's behaviour and Sītā's banishment that, not wishing to see Rāma's face ever again, they decided to go and live in Vālmīki's hermitage instead of returning to Ayodhyā, once the sacrifice was over.[46] Finally, in act 7, in the play within the play, Sītā's mother, the Earth herself, is unsparing in her words against Rāma, and her behaviour shows how extremely angry and pained she is by what happened to her daughter. Pṛthivī even swoons, which causes the Gaṅgā to remark: 'Even Earth who bears all can tremble—what force love for a child exerts'.[47] The Earth is supposed to be the hardest and most enduring of all beings, since she has to bear the weight of the creatures and witness their sufferings.[48] Yet even she feels sorrow and resentment. She remarks disparagingly about Rāma:

> To pay no heed to the hand he grasped in childhood, when he was a child, or to me or Janaka or Fire or her deference or his progeny.[49]

As we understand from her words, Rāma, by his action, did not only hurt Sītā, but he deeply insulted and offended all the elders and divine powers, besides hurting his own children. And when Sītā talks of Rāma, calling him 'my husband' (*ajjaütta*), Pṛthivī retorts with obvious scorn and disdain: 'Ha, do you have a husband?'.[50] We may note that the 'earth(l)y' goddesses of the Forest and of

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43 *dāruṇāsi vāsanti dāruṇāsi*; after 3.38.

44 (*samanyugadgadam*) *ajjaüta asarisaṃ khu edaṃ imassa vuttantassa*; act 3, after verse 12.

45 *ṇikkāraṇapariccāiṇo vi edassa evvaṃvidheṇa daṃsaṇeṇa*; act 3, before verse 13.

46 See act 2, after verse 6; act 4, after verse 10.

47 *viśvaṃbharāpi nāma vyathata iti jitam apatyasnehena*; act 7, before verse 4.

48 In act 4, between verses 4 and 5, Janaka calls the Earth very hard (*atidṛḍhā*) and in 4.5 cruel (*dāruṇe*), since she could bear all that happened to Sītā. As Shulman, Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion, p. 81, remarks: 'There is even a somewhat sinister resonance, throughout this play, between the chiming notes of *karuṇā*—all that is compassionate and empathic—and *dāruṇa*, 'harsh, terrible, cruel'.

49 *na pramāṇīkrtaḥ pāṇir bālye bālena pīḍitaḥ*; 7.5.

50 *āḥ kas tavāryaputraḥ*; act 7, after verse 5.

the Earth are harder against Rāma than the river-goddesses, who rather try to defend him and explain away his deed, as does the Gaṅgā when the Earth speaks harshly against him:

> The dreadful infamy had spread abroad and the purifying trial by fire took place on Laṅkā; how were people here to be expected to give it credence? The ancestral wealth of the Ikṣvākus lies in propitiating all the world. So, in these straits, truly dreadful straits, what was my child supposed to do?[51]

Thus, as can be seen from the above quotations, Bhavabhūti makes skilful use of the female characters of his play to voice direct or indirect reproach at Rāma's actions, and to promote dialogues or discussions—either with Rāma, or about him—concerning his decisions. We may surmise that the events of the *Rāmakathā*, especially the *Sītātyāga*-episode, were indeed a common matter of debate and controversy among the womenfolk in Bhavabhūti's own times, and that his play reflects their preoccupations. Certainly, the playwright shows sympathy with the women's cause, and we may even go a step further and imagine that to give voice—of dissent—to the female characters of his drama was perhaps a way of pleasing and attracting his female public—even though the last point would of course deserve further investigation.

Let us now turn to the second reason why, in my opinion, Bhavabhūti gave pre-eminence to the female characters in the URC—namely, in order to favour the production of the *karuṇa-rasa* or pathetic sentiment, which is the dominant *rasa* (*pradhāna-rasa*) of the play.[52] Since Rāma logically imagines that Sītā is dead (cf. 3.29), devoured by ferocious beasts, the dominant *rasa* of the URC is clearly the *karuṇa-rasa* and not the *vipralambhaśṛṅgāra-rasa* or sentiment of love in separation, because there is no hope left.[53] As Bharata in his *Nātyaśāstra* notes on the distinction between *karuṇa* and *vipralambhaśṛṅgāra*:

> The pathetic sentiment relates to a condition of despair owing to the affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death or captivity, while the Erotic sentiment based on separation relates to a condition of retaining optimism arising out of yearning and anxiety. Hence the pathetic sentiment and the erotic sentiment in separation differ from each other.[54]

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51 *ghoraṃ loke vitatam ayaśo yā ca vahnau viśuddhir laṅkādvīpe katham iva janas tām iha śraddadhātu*; 7.6.

52 Other *rasa*s in the play include *hāsya*, *vīra* and *adbhuta*.

53 See also the discussion on this point in Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti*, pp. 280–282.

54 NŚ 6.45; Manomohan Ghosh (tr.), *The Nāṭyaśāstra (A Treatise on Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics) ascribed to Bharata-Muni*, 2 vols, Calcutta: Granthalaya Private Limited, 1967 (1st published 1951).

On Sītā's side, things may be a little different, since she, of course, knows that Rāma is alive. This is illustrated by the following verse in which the river goddess Tamasā describes Sītā. Like Kālidāsa before him, Bhavabhūti was fond of alluding to the literary theory of *rasa* within his poetry itself, which of course also shows how important the topic was to him:

> Her face covered by her disheveled hair, all the more beautiful for her wan and sunken cheeks, the very image of pity, the embodiment of the pain of love's parting, is Jānakī entering the woods.[55]

As we see, Sītā is both the 'image of pathos' (*karuṇasya mūrtir*) and the pain of separation incarnate (*śarīriṇī virahavyathā*). She knows that Rāma is alive and longs for him, and yet she has no hope of ever being reunited with him.

Sorrow or grief (*śoka*), the durable psychological state (*bhāva*) giving rise to the *karuṇa-rasa*, seems to be narrowly connected with the female element, and this is already stated in so many words by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* 7.14: 'Sorrow relates to women, persons of the inferior type, and it has its origin in affliction (of any kind)'. Now, according to Ānandavardhana (in his *vṛtti* on *Dhvanyāloka* 4.5), the overall *rasa* (*pradhāna-rasa*) of the Rm is likewise the *karuṇa-rasa*.[56] It is of course clear that Ānandavardhana (9th century AD) composed his work much later than the Rm, and it is doubtful whether Vālmīki's concern with *rasa* was as central to his work as Bhavabhūti's. Nevertheless, the Rm's opening scene already stresses the importance of *karuṇa*: Vālmīki's first poetic utterance (the curse on the Niṣāda[57] who killed the amorous *krauñca* bird[58]) is the pure expression of grief, and the *śloka* which spontaneously bursts from his mouth to curse the hunter has its origin in the sage's *śoka* (grief). However, we should not forget that even before Vālmīki's voice, the first voice that is raised in grief in the Rm is that of the *krauñcī*, the female crane:

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55 *paripāṇḍudurbalakapolasundaraṃ dadhatī vilolakabarīkam ānanam / karuṇasya mūrtir atha vā śarīriṇī virahavyatheva vanam eti jānakī*; 3.4.

56 On this point, see the discussion in Goldman and Sutherland Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki … Uttarakāṇḍa*, pp. 60–63.

57 Rm 1.2.14: *mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhāṃ tvam agamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ / yat krauñcamithunād ekam avadhīḥ kāmamohitam*; 'May you not obtain a position of honour for all eternity, Niṣāda, since you killed one of this pair of cranes, the male, who was intoxicated by love' (translation mine). Bhavabhūti quotes this verse in URC 2.5.

58 The Indian sarus crane (*Grus antigone antigone*), according to the detailed investigation by Julia Leslie, 'A Bird Bereaved: The Identity and Significance of Vālmīki's Krauñca', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 26, 1998, pp. 455–487.

> Seeing him (the male *krauñca*) struck down and writhing on the ground, his body covered with blood, his mate uttered a piteous cry.[59]

Thus, the *krauñcī*'s primeval and inarticulate cry of grief sounds as a foreboding of Sītā's own voice, which will be raised in anguish several times in the course of the story. Indeed, more than Vālmīki's sorrow, and more than the *krauñcī*'s, it is really Sītā's lasting grief which allows the pathetic flavour to emerge durably from the Rm.

We see from the above examples that Bhavabhūti's choice of female voices to produce the *karuṇa-rasa* is not unprecedented in Sanskrit literature[60] and Sanskrit literary theory. This is not to say, of course, that Rāma himself feels no pain: there is no doubt that the hero and heroine of the play are the primary sources of *rasa*—the so-called *ālambana-vibhāva*s. Clearly, *śoka* is felt first and foremost by Rāma and Sītā themselves. But the female characters, in that they give free vent to their own grief—by crying, lamenting, swooning, scolding, etc.—in turn allow the male characters to express theirs. We might say that the women in the play have a maieutic function: by their expressions of grief, no less than by their questions and challenges, they allow the hidden and long-denied emotions to resurface through the hardened carapace of conventional behaviour.

Thus, Rāma breaks down when he enters the environment of the forest, which is overwhelmingly feminine, being embodied in, and personified by, the *vanadevatā* Vāsantī—the vernal one.[61] This forest is described at considerable

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59 Rm 1.2.11: *taṃ śonitaparītāṅgaṃ veṣṭamānaṃ mahītale* / *bhāryā tu nihataṃ dṛṣṭvā rurāva karuṇām giram*; tr. Robert P. Goldman: *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India. Volume I. Bālakāṇḍa*, Introduction, Translation and Annotation, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. In the whole description, the two birds are talked of in human terms, which heightens our feeling of empathy towards them. The *krauñcī* is the bird's wife (*bhāryā*). The male bird is repeatedly called *dvija* ('twice-born'), a term which can be applied to a bird but also to a Brahmin, thus opposing him starkly to the untouchable Niṣāda. This makes the latter's crime even worse, perhaps equal to murder of a Brahmin (*brahmahatyā*), and explains the harshness of the curse and the doom pronounced on the Niṣādas.

60 In this connection, we can also mention the highly pathetic and rightly acclaimed act 4 of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, in which Śakuntalā bids a tearful good-bye to the long-familiar and beloved world of the forest-hermitage, before leaving for king Duṣyanta's capital. A well-known anonymous verse quotes this act, among all dramas, and four verses within it (whose exact identity is a matter of dispute), as the acme of *kāvya*: *kāvyeṣu nāṭakaṃ ramyaṃ tatra śākuntalaṃ varam* / *tatrāpi ca caturtho 'ṅkas tatra śloka-catuṣṭayam*.

61 Spring (*vasanta*) is of course the season of love, the most sensuous of all seasons, and as such, more capable than any other of reviving the sparks of Rāma's passion for Sītā.

length (2.18–25),[62] and the aim of this depiction is clearly to plunge Rāma (and the readers and spectators of the play with him) into a sensuous environment infused with sights, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations which remind him of a happier past, and quite literally dissolve his composure.

> Here mountain streams run with water cold and clear and fragrant with the flowers of vines and rushes shaken by the lusty birds, and their strong currents noisily tumble amidst the arbors of rose-apple trees dark with their ripened loads of fruit.[63]

Reading the verse, we visualize the wild and charming forest, we feel the touch of cool waters, we smell the scent of wild flowers, hear the song of birds and taste the fruit of the rose apple-trees. When she sees Rāma, Vāsantī displays her command over the forest-environment by a welcoming verse in which she orders the woods to give him offerings that flatter all his senses:

> Let the trees offer a welcoming gift of flowers and fruits, drizzling them with honey. Let the forest breezes blow, bearing the full scent of freshly blooming lotuses. And let the birds begin a sweet unbroken song in full-throated warbling. For once again King Rāma himself has come on a visit to this forest.[64]

Even though he is described by the title 'king' or 'god' (*deva*), Rāma quickly loses his kingly, courtly, stiff and conventional composure, and is as overcome and helpless as any ordinary human being to resist this assault on his senses which reawakens his fondest memories:

> Maithilī would give these trees and birds and deer water, seeds, and grass from her lotus hand, and to see them again a certain emotion rises within me as if it were the liquid of my heart and capable of breaking even a stone.[65]

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62 As Manomohan Ghosh (*The Nāṭyaśāstra*, p. lix) remarks, long verbal descriptions also functioned in the stead of painted scenery, which did not exist in the Sanskrit theatrical tradition. He quotes as an example 'the grand description of the Daṇḍaka forest in the *Uttararāmacarita*'.

63 *iha samadaśakuntākrāntavānīravīrutprasavasurabhiśītasvacchatoyā vahanti / phalabharapariṇāmaśyāmajambūnikuñja-skhalanamukharabhūrisrotaso nirjhariṇyaḥ*; 2.20.

64 *dadatu taravaḥ puṣpair arghyaṃ phalaiś ca madhuścyutaḥ sphuṭitakamalāmodaprāyāḥ pravāntu vanānilāḥ / kalam aviralaṃ rajyatkaṇṭhāḥ kvanatsu śakuntayaḥ punar idam ayaṃ devo rāmaḥ svayaṃ vanam āgataḥ*; 3.25.

65 *karakamalavitīrṇair ambunīvāraśaṣpais taruśakunikuraṅgān maithilī yān apuṣyat / bhavati mama vikāras teṣu dṛṣṭeṣu ko'pi drava iva hṛdayasya prastarodbhedayogyaḥ*; 3.26.
In 3.26 c-d, I have followed the reading and translation found in M.R. Kale, (ed. and tr.), *The Uttararāmacharita of Bhavabhūti*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934, verse 3.25.

Rāma's own hardened heart is of course the stone that is breaking. Bhavabhūti is renowned for his metaphor of the breaking or weeping stone. Similarly, in 1.28d, while showing a wall painting depicting Rāma's despair when Sītā was abducted, Lakṣmaṇa remarks that his behaviour 'can still make a stone shed tears and break a heart of diamond!'.[66]

Further on, Rāma tells Vāsantī:

> The various objects of long familiarity move me; and so being helpless, I weep today; please forgive me.[67]

Sītā herself is similarly overcome and melts into tears when she sees Rāma again after their long separation. This is how her companion, the river-goddess Tamasā, describes her:

> A flood of tears surging in spate arising from your bliss and grief is released by your eyes wide with longing, and your glances flowing with love, white and sweet and innocent, are drenching the lord of your heart as if they were a stream of milk.[68]

As Shulman notes, 'Throughout this play (…) we find a preference, even a powerful yearning, for states of melting, flowing, flooding, heating, softening, depetrifying, weeping, bathing, soaking through a frozen or calcified surface'.[69] As we see, tears are not only painful, they also bring solace and, like milk or rain, sustain and nourish and ultimately revive the afflicted, hardened and deadened heart. As Tamasā remarks: 'So surely to weep is a blessing!'.[70] Grief, and the resulting *karuṇa-rasa* (and we remember of course that the term *rasa* primar-

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66 *api grāvā rodity api dalati vajrasya hṛdayam*; tr. Pollock, *Rāma's Last Act by Bhavabhūti*, modified.
As Shulman ('Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', p. 80) aptly remarks: 'This is an inner drama of water at war with stone'.

67 *ciraparicitās tv ete bhāvāḥ paridravayanti mām idam aśaraṇair adyāpy evaṃ prasīdata rudyate*; 3.33c-d.
Similarly, Janaka at the beginning of act 4 complains that he has not even been able to cry after Sītā was unjustly exiled: 'One is too ashamed even to weep to one's full' (*lajjayā svacchandam ākranditum api na śakyate*; act 4, before verse 4). But then he allows himself to be overcome by grief when he speaks with the older queens for the first time in 12 years, letting long pent-up emotions overflow.

68 *vilulitam atipūrair bāṣpam ānandaśokaprabhavam avasṛjantī tṛṣṇayottānadīrghā / snapayati hṛdayeśaṃ snehaniṣyandinī tedhavalabahalamugdhā dugdhakulyeva dṛṣṭiḥ*; 3.24.

69 Shulman, 'Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion', p. 73.

70 *bhavati nanu lābho hi ruditam*; 3.31d.

ily means 'juice' or 'sap', something liquid, that can flow) result into overall melting and sinking. Not less than three times in the play, we come across the metaphor of pathos (*karuṇa*) compared to a stream or flood of water (3.37; 3.48; 4.8.) In 3.36, Rāma declares:

> Every attempt I made with the greatest effort to control the intensification of pity as it was stirred to the point of wild frenzy, was thwarted within, each and every one, by an indescribable transformation of consciousness that then poured out in full strength, as flood water surging unabated pours through a dam of sand it has destroyed.[71]

The term *vikāra* (lit. change, alteration, emotion, deviation from the natural state) is already used by Rāma in 3.26 (quoted above). Clearly Rāma realizes that he is no longer himself, no longer master of his emotions and unable to keep up appearances. Continuing the same metaphor of the stream-like pathos, Tamasā exclaims in act 3:

> There is only a single *rasa*—pity—but it takes different forms since it changes in response to circumstances that are changing, just the way that water forms into whirlpool, bubble or wave though in the end it all remains the same: nothing but water.[72]

We see how aptly this verse is spoken by a river goddess, who, if anyone, knows all about 'eddies, bubbles and waves', and in particular by the river Tamasā, who knows everything about the many manifestations of pathos, having witnessed on her own shores the *krauñca*'s pitiful murder and Vālmīki's first *śoka*-born *śloka*. From the prologue to act 3 and the discussion between the two rivers, Muralā (a

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71 *helollolakṣubhitakaruṇojjṛmbhanastambhanārthaṃ yo yo yatnaḥ katham api mayādhīyate taṃ tam antaḥ / bhittvā bhittvā prasarati balāt ko'pi cetovikāras toyasyevāpratihatarayaḥ saikataṃ setum oghaḥ*; 3.37.
This verse composed in the Mandākrāntā metre contains manifold echoes (both lexical and semantic) of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*: 1.3; 1.13; 1.20; 1.28, etc… The *Meghadūta* is of course the poem *par excellence* on pain brought about by love in separation.
At the end of the drama, while watching the play within the play, Rāma is likewise plunged in 'waves of pity', *karuṇormayaḥ*, and is reduced to 'some condition that is impossible to describe', *kām api daśām* (7.12).

72 *eko rasaḥ karuṇa eva nimittabhedād bhinnaḥ pṛthak pṛthag ivāśrayate vivartān / āvartabudbudataraṅgamayān vikārān ambho yathā salilam eva tu tat samagram*; 3.47.
In a similar vein, Arundhatī remarks in 4.8: 'A person's sorrows from the loss of a dear kinsman may be flowing in spate but the very sight of a beloved friend makes them unbearable as if augmented by a thousand streams' (*saṃtānavāhīny api mānuṣāṇāṃ duḥkhāni sadbandhuviyogajāni / dṛṣṭe jane preyasi duḥsahāni srotaḥsahasrair iva saṃplavante*).

tributary of the Godāvarī) and Tamasā (a tributary of the Ganges), we learn that the Gaṅgā herself, forewarned of Rāma's visit to the Daṇḍaka-forest by the river Sarayū, had sent Sītā and Tamasā to the forest, so that Sītā in person could tend to Rāma who would surely be deeply affected by the familiar sights. And Muralā herself is carrying a similar message from Lopāmudrā, Agastya's wife, to the Godāvarī river, to ask her to revive Rāma, should he fall into fainting fits:

> The breeze off your waves cooled with water droplets and wafting the scent of lotus filaments—ever so gently direct it toward dear Rāma and soothe his soul if ever he grows faint.[73]

As we see, the rivers form a densely communicating grid over the Indian subcontinent, from the northern Sarayū to the southern Godāvarī, allowing the 'juice of pity' (*karuṇa-rasa*) to flow around and at the same time bringing with their cooling and perfumed streams solace to burning grief. Unlike the rather hard and unrelenting Earth, and the 'cruel' goddess of the forest Vāsantī, the rivers are mellifluous and soothing in their caring gentleness. We understand now why Bhavabhūti, who as a playwright was essentially interested in producing *rasa*, included in his play so many river-goddesses—fluidity personified, so to say—and how meaningful a role they are made to play in his metaphor of the stream-like pathos: like real rivers which can overcome the hard-crusted earth and even eat through rock, the river-goddesses are able to melt the Earth's righteous anger and dissolve hearts of stone. They make the characters and the audience alike melt into tears, however hardened by grief they may be, while simultaneously soothing their pain. At the same time, these divine personages embodying the forces of nature[74]—the earth, the forest, the rivers, even stars, like Arundhatī[75]—convey a sense of the cosmic and indeed elemental importance of the events that are unfolding on stage and lend an incomparable grandeur to the theatrical performance.

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73 *vīcīvātaiḥ śīkarakṣodaśītair ākarṣadbhiḥ padmakiñjalkagandhān*; 3.2.

74 Who are at the same time profoundly human, as Harshé (*Observations sur la Vie et l'Oeuvre de Bhavabhūti*, p. 42) rightly notes.

75 Arundhatī, this epitome of chastity and embodiment of good wifely behaviour, is the star Alcor, which forms a double star with Mizar (identified as her husband Vasiṣṭha) in the constellation Ursa Major. This stellar nature explains why the couple often appear in the play in a leading role, at the head of a group (e.g. in 1.3), since stars are used as guides to cross the night, ocean, desert or even *saṃsāra*.

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Sohini Sarah Pillai

From Villainess to Victim: Contemporary Representations of Śūrpaṇakhā[1]

1. Introduction

In the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vālmīki introduces his audience to the female character, Śūrpaṇakhā, by comparing her to the hero of his epic poem:

> Rāma was handsome, the *rākṣasa* woman was ugly, he was shapely and slim of waist, she misshapen and potbellied; his eyes were large, hers were beady, his hair was jet black, and hers the color of copper; he always said just the right thing and in a sweet voice, her words were sinister and her voice struck terror; he was young and attractive, and well mannered, she ill mannered, repellent, an old hag.[2]

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1 All translations are my own unless noted otherwise. This essay draws from and builds on my MA thesis 'Representations of *Rākṣasas* in Contemporary India' (Columbia University, 2015), an article entitled 'The Diversity of the Rama Epic' (*Lotus Leaves: The Society for Asian Art*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2016, pp. 10–19), a paper entitled 'Vamp or Victim? Representations of Śūrpaṇakhā in Contemporary India' (presented at the 'A Tale for All Seasons: The Rāmāyaṇa from Antiquity to Modernity in South Asia' symposium on 18 November 2016 at the University of California, Berkeley), and a paper entitled 'Fire and Blood: Sītā and Śūrpaṇakhā in Modern Rāmāyaṇa Dance-Dramas' (presented at the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies in Paris, France on 26 July 2018). The research I conducted for my MA thesis was supported by a Fulbright-Nehru Student Research Fellowship. I would like to thank Robert Goldman, Sally Sutherland Goldman, Sudipta Kaviraj, Vasudha Paramasivan, and Danuta Stasik for reading different versions of this essay and for their valuable suggestions. I am also very grateful for Prakash V.'s assistance with transcribing Tamil dialogue from the film *Rāvaṇaṇ*. I dedicate this essay to the memory of my beloved MA advisor, Allison Busch.

2 3.16.7–10; G.H. Bhatt and U.P. Shah (gen. eds), *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Critically Edited for the First Time*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975 in Sheldon Pollock's

With these verses, Vālmīki firmly establishes Śūrpaṇakhā as a repulsive creature who is the exact opposite of the noble prince, Rāma. As Kathleen Erndl, Karline McLain, and Heidi Pauwels have all shown in great detail, several other popular and authoritative Indian *Rāmāyaṇa* retellings also present Śūrpaṇakhā as a dangerous and promiscuous monster.[3]

In this essay, however, I argue that a new, highly sympathetic representation of the sister of Rāvaṇa has recently emerged in India. I suggest that this new Śūrpaṇakhā is a reflection of changing perceptions towards rape and sexual violence in contemporary India.

2. Śūrpaṇakhā the Villainess

Before discussing this new Śūrpaṇakhā, we first need to review some of the most well-known and authoritative depictions of the episode in which Śūrpaṇakhā's nose and ears are sliced off by Rāma's younger brother Lakṣmaṇa. Let us begin with the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, in which Rāma instructs Lakṣmaṇa to 'mutilate this misshapen slut, this pot-bellied, lustful *rākṣasa* woman'[4] after Śūrpaṇakhā unsuccessfully attempts to seduce Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and then threatens to kill Sītā. Due to Rāma's status as the perfect human being and the personification of *dharma* in Vālmīki's Sanskrit text, several commentators and readers have been baffled by Rāma's actions in this episode.[5] How can Rāma—the supposed ideal man and god on earth—command his brother to brutally attack a woman?

One answer to this question lies in Śūrpaṇakhā's identity as a member of the *rākṣasa* race. Sheldon Pollock argues that the *rākṣasa*s of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* are the 'Others' of Rāma's model human society and 'creatures whose lives are plunged in the pollution of violence, blood, and carnivorous filth'.[6] As the enemies of Rāma's civilisation, *rākṣasa*s—regardless of their gender—must be pun-

translation: *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India. Volume III. Araṇyakāṇḍa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 123.

3 Kathleen M. Erndl, 'The Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā' in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 67–88; Karline McLain, 'Sita and Shurpanakha: Symbols of the Nation in the *Amar Chitra Katha*', *Manushi*, no. 122, 2001, pp. 32–39; Heidi R.M. Pauwels, *The Goddess as Role Model: Sītā and Rādhā in Scripture and on Screen*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 320–329.

4 3.17.20 in Pollock's translation: *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki (...) Araṇyakāṇḍa*, p. 126.

5 See Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', pp. 70–72.

6 Sheldon Pollock, '*Rākṣasas* and Others', *Indologica Taurinensia*, vol. 13, 1985–1986, p. 280.

ished.[7] By having Rāma describe Śūrpaṇakhā as 'lustful', Vālmīki further suggests that Śūrpaṇakhā deserves to have her nose and ears sliced off because she is licentious, unlike Sītā, the epitome of womanhood. A virtuous woman would never roam around the forest shamelessly making sexual advances towards men she just met. As Erndl observes, 'Sītā is the chaste good woman; Śūrpaṇakhā the "loose" bad woman'.[8]

Kampaṉ's twelfth-century Tamil literary masterpiece, the *Irāmāvatāram*, presents the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā a little differently. In the *Irāmāvatāram*, Rāma is not present when Lakṣmaṇa attacks Śūrpaṇakhā and so he is no longer responsible for her disfigurement.[9] Kampaṉ's retelling also features a lovely scene in which, after seeing Rāma for the first time, Śūrpaṇakhā goes home to her crystal palace and spends the night longing for Rāma. Yet, while the image of Śūrpaṇakhā tormented by her lovesickness all night adds a level of sympathy to her character, Kampaṉ also tells us that Śūrpaṇakhā is a 'deadly woman with lies in her heart'.[10] Furthermore, given that Kampaṉ's Śūrpaṇakhā uses her *rākṣasa* powers of illusion to assume the form of a beautiful woman in an attempt to seduce Rāma, the Śūrpaṇakhā of the Tamil *Irāmāvatāram* seems even more devious than her Sanskrit counterpart.

The characterisation of Śūrpaṇakhā as a villainess is also found in Tulsīdās' beloved sixteenth-century *bhakti* (devotional) *Rāmāyaṇa* in Hindi—the *Rāmcaritmānas.* Tulsīdās informs us that 'Śūrpaṇakhā was Rāvaṇa's sister. She had a wicked heart and was fearsome like a snake'.[11] Like the Śūrpaṇakhā of the Tamil *Irāmāvatāram*, Tulsīdās' Śūrpaṇakhā adopts the form of an attractive woman to try to entice Rāma. The *rāmlīlā* theatre performances of North India, which are based on Tulsīdās' *Rāmcaritmānas*, present the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā as a

7 Śūrpaṇakhā is not the only *rākṣasa* woman who is violently assaulted in Vālmīki's poem. In the *Bālakāṇḍa*, Rāma's preceptor, Viśvāmitra, commands Rāma to kill Tāṭakā (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.25) and in the southern recension of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, Lakṣmaṇa mutilates another *rākṣasa* woman named Ayomukhī (*Rāmāyaṇa* 3, App.17).

8 Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', p. 83.

9 Notably, in an earlier Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* retelling, the final ten verses of Kulacēkarāḻvār's Perumāḷtirumoḻi (c. 8th or 9th century), it is Rāma, not Lakṣmaṇa, who physically disfigures Śūrpaṇakhā. See Suganya Anandakichenin, 'On the Non-Vālmīkian Sources of Kulacēkara Āḻvār's "Mini-*Rāmāyaṇa*"', in *The Archaeology of Bhakti I: Mathurā and Maturai, Back and Forth*, eds Emmanuel Francis and Charlotte Schmid, Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry-École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2014, p. 272.

10 3.7.148: *poy niṉṟa neñcil koṭiyāḷ*; V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariyar (ed.), *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, 6 vols, Madras: no publisher, 1926–1971.

11 3.17.2: *sūpanakhā rāvana kai bahinī. duṣṭa hṛdaya dāruna jasa ahinī*; Hanumanprasad Poddar (comm.), *Śrirāmcaritmānas*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1966.

humorous scene. Erndl describes the episode as 'a kind of burlesque, to which the (predominantly male) audience responds with ribald jokes and laughter'.[12] In the legendary thirty-day *rāmlīlā* of Ramnagar in Uttar Pradesh, the scene ends with the male actor playing Śūrpaṇakhā comically running around and spraying fake blood at the audience.[13]

Karline McLain observes that in the English-language *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book, *Valmiki's Ramayana* (1975), Śūrpaṇakhā and other *rākṣasa* women are depicted as ugly monsters who are 'dark-skinned and stocky, with sagging breasts, fangs, and exaggerated noses and lips'.[14] McLain adds that in this comic 'the immediate reason for her [Śūrpaṇakhā's] mutilation might appear to be her threatened attack on Sita, but the actual reason is more intimately connected with her gender, sexuality, and communal identity'.[15]

In Ramanand Sagar's immensely popular Hindi *Rāmāyaṇ* television serial, which was broadcast on India's national television network, Doordarshan, from 1987 to 1988, Lakṣmaṇa justifies his attack on Śūrpaṇakhā by telling Rāma 'she was an evil, immoral woman… there's no wrong in killing an immoral woman. I only cut her nose'.[16] Rāma seems to agree, remarking that 'when a shameless woman becomes lustful, there is nothing more terrifying'.[17] Zee TV's remake of Sagar's series, *Rāmāyaṇ: Sabke jīvan kā ādhār* (2012–2013), depicts Śūrpaṇakhā's disfigurement as not just a necessary action, but as a divinely sanctioned one with Hindu deities in heaven nodding their heads in approval and blowing auspicious conch shells in celebration after the mutilation.[18] We thus find representations of Śūrpaṇakhā as a vile demoness who deserves to be punished for her promiscuity in both premodern and modern *Rāmāyaṇa*s.

12 Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', p. 82.

13 Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: The Ramlila of Ramnagar*, Calcutta: Seagull, 1990, p. 117.

14 McLain, 'Sita and Shurpanakha', p. 34. On a similar depiction of Śūrpaṇakhā in Virgin Comic's *Ramayan 3392 AD* (2007), see Sarah Austin, 'Sita, Surpanakha and Kaikeyi as Political Bodies: Representations of Female Sexuality in Idealised Culture', *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, pp. 131–132.

15 McLain, 'Sita and Shurpanakha', p. 35.

16 *durācāriṇī duṣṭā thī… aisī duṣṭā nārī kā vadh karne mẽ koī doṣ nahĩ. ham ne to keval uskī nāk kāṭī hai*; *Rāmāyaṇ*, Episode 29, Doordarshan, 16 August 1987.

17 *ek lajjāhīn strī jab kāmātur ho jāe to use bhayānak aur koī nahĩ hotā*; *Rāmāyaṇ*, Episode 29.

18 *Rāmāyaṇ: Sabke jīvan kā ādhār*, Episode 28, Zee TV, 17 February 2013.

3. Śūrpaṇakhā the Victim

Yet, while the shameless, evil Śūrpaṇakhā of the poems of Vālmīki, Kampaṉ, and Tulsīdās can still be seen in some modern retellings, a more complex and sympathetic representation of Śūrpaṇakhā has also recently emerged in contemporary India.

Multiple modern *Rāmāyaṇa*s complicate the familiar representation of Śūrpaṇakhā as a wanton woman by depicting her as grieving mother or widow. In line with an episode that is first found in the Prakrit *Paümacariya* (c. 5th century) by the Jain poet, Vimalasūri,[19] in NDTV Imagine's 2008–2009 remake of Sagar's television serial, Śūrpaṇakhā approaches Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with the intention of killing them after Lakṣmaṇa accidentally slays her son Śambūka.[20] A similar depiction is found in Zee TV's Hindi television program, *Rāvaṇ* (2006–2008), in which Rāvaṇa viciously murders Śūrpaṇakhā's husband Vidyujjihva as she begs her brother to stop.[21] This backstory seems to have been inspired by an episode found in Vālmīki's *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7.23–24). In *Rāvaṇ*, an enraged Śūrpaṇakhā then decides to seduce Lakṣmaṇa and tell Rāvaṇa that he raped her since she believes that this will start a war that will lead to the death of the *rākṣasa* king. In Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* (2017), an English novel told from Śūrpaṇakhā's perspective, Śūrpaṇakhā seeks to avenge the murders of both her husband and her son.[22] When Śūrpaṇakhā's motivation for seducing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa is shifted from lust to revenge, audiences may be able to sympathize more with her character.

It is also highly significant that Lakṣmaṇa does not actually mutilate Śūrpaṇakhā in the *Rāvaṇ* serial. When Śūrpaṇakhā attempts to entrap Lakṣmaṇa, he angrily turns her away without mutilating her. Śūrpaṇakhā then rips her clothes, goes to her brother, and cries rape.[23] As I will soon discuss in greater

19 Eva De Clercq, 'Śūrpaṇakhā in the Jain Rāmāyaṇas', in *The Other Rāmāyaṇa Women: Regional Rejection and Response*, eds John Brockington and Mary Brockington, New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 23–24. This episode is also found in 'the puppet plays of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala; the chitrakathi tradition of southern Maharashtra; literary Rāmāyaṇas in Sanskrit, Prakrit (Jaina texts), Assamese, Telugu, Kannada, Thai, and Malay; [and in] an Oriya Mahābhārata'; Stuart Blackburn, *Inside the Drama-House: Rāma Stories and Shadow Puppets in South India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 71.

20 *Rāmāyaṇ*, Episode 75, NDTV Imagine, 2008.

21 *Rāvaṇ*, Episode 50, Zee TV, 28 October 2007.

22 Kavita Kané, *Lanka's Princess*, New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2017, pp. 164–184.

23 Śūrpaṇakhā also falsely accuses Lakṣmaṇa of rape in Jain retellings. De Clercq, 'Śūrpaṇakhā in the Jain Rāmāyaṇas', p. 25.

detail, rape and sexual violence against women are receiving more and more attention in mainstream Indian media. Could the decision to have Lakṣmaṇa not mutilate Śūrpaṇakhā be a conscious decision to show less violence towards women in popular media? Or, is this a way of further villainizing Śūrpaṇakhā by having her falsely accuse Lakṣmaṇa of rape? The issue of false rape allegations has dominated current public discourse in India.[24]

Rāma's murder of the *rākṣasa* woman, Tāṭakā, like the disfigurement of Śūrpaṇakhā, has also been viewed as a controversial incident in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition as it involves Rāma killing a woman. Both the NDTV Imagine[25] and the Zee TV[26] remakes of Sagar's serial mentioned earlier depict Tāṭakā as the victim of a curse who is trapped in the body of a gigantic *rākṣasa* woman. Although in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, it is briefly mentioned in a single line that Rāma gave Tāṭakā 'his own status',[27] this is not seen in the corresponding episode of Sagar's *Rāmāyaṇ*.[28] Again, did these two modern television serials decide to recast Rāma's attack on Tāṭakā as an act of compassion in order to make this violent murder of a woman less disturbing?

Yet, while some modern *Rāmāyaṇa*s eliminate violence against *rākṣasa* women, a number of others highlight and emphasize the brutality of Lakṣmaṇa's attack on Śūrpaṇakhā, thus making audiences seriously question the actions of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in this episode.

Perhaps the most disturbing recent depiction of Śūrpaṇakhā as an object of sexual violence is the one seen in the Tamil film *Rāvaṇaṉ* (2010), which was directed by Mani Ratnam.[29] *Rāvaṇaṉ* takes place in the jungles of Tirunelveli in present-day Tamil Nadu in South India and reimagines Rāvaṇa as a powerful low-caste Adivasi tribal leader and Rāma as a Brahmin superintendent of police. *Rāvaṇaṉ*'s Śūrpaṇakhā is presented as a lovely and likeable character who despite her playful nature is still a virtuous Tamil woman who deeply cares about her three older brothers and her fiancé: a handsome young Brahmin man.[30]

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24 Joanna Jolly, 'Does India Have a Problem with False Rape Claims?', BBC, 8 February 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38796457 (accessed 05.01.2019).

25 *Rāmāyaṇ*, Episode 17, NDTV Imagine, 2008.

26 *Rāmāyaṇ: Sabke jīvan kā ādhār*, Episode 5, Zee TV, 9 September 2012.

27 *nija pada*; *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.209.3.

28 *Rāmāyaṇ*, Episode 4, Doordarshan, 15 February 1987.

29 *Rāvaṇaṉ*, DVD, directed by Mani Ratnam, 2010, Chennai, India: Ayngaran International, 2011. There is also a Hindi version of this film called *Rāvaṇ* that was made concurrently with a slightly different cast.

30 All of the characters in *Rāvaṇaṉ* have different names than their counterparts in most authoritative retellings of the epic. For example, the Śūrpaṇakhā character is called

Tragically, her wedding day is interrupted by a police raid and Śūrpaṇakhā is separated from Rāvaṇa and abandoned by her new husband. When Lakṣmaṇa, a hot-tempered officer, harshly asks her where Rāvaṇa is, Śūrpaṇakhā sarcastically replies: 'You're the great policeman'.[31] She then smells the air like a police dog and snaps: 'Sniff and find out!'[32] Infuriated, Lakṣmaṇa then grabs her by the nose and hisses: 'I'll cut it!'.[33] As this Lakṣmaṇa seizes Śūrpaṇakhā's nose, we wonder if he, like his premodern literary counterparts, is going to slice it off. Erndl notes that 'the nose is a symbol of honor; in all versions of the story its removal signifies the loss of honor'.[34] The Lakṣmaṇa of *Rāvaṇaṉ* strips Śūrpaṇakhā of her honour, but in a far more disturbing way.

Śūrpaṇakhā is next seen the following morning. She is dressed in a policeman's khaki shirt and the orange petticoat of her wedding sari and her face is covered in bruises. In tears, she explains to Rāvaṇa what happened to her while she was being held by the police:

> I wasn't scared. 'Yes, your new husband has run off, who do you want to spend your first night with?' they asked… I swore at all of them… begged them not to make a mistake like this… 'This is all just a dream'. I closed my eyes. I told myself that I would soon go home. But they wouldn't let me go. I screamed. Begged. Cried. All night they took their revenge. I'm completely ruined. Everything is lost.[35]

As Śūrpaṇakhā tells her story to Rāvaṇa, we see flashbacks of her sitting on the floor of the police station. Lakṣmaṇa slowly unbuttons his shirt and several other police officers close in around the petrified Śūrpaṇakhā who angrily points her finger at them. Later that day, unable to bear the shame of what has happened to her, Śūrpaṇakhā commits suicide by throwing herself into a well. *Rāvaṇaṉ* thus takes the already disturbing episode of this *rākṣasa* woman's mutilation and makes it even more upsetting by having Śūrpaṇakhā brutally gang-raped.[36]

Veṇṇilā. To make things simpler, however, I will refer to all of these characters by the names of their *Rāmāyaṇa* counterparts.

31 *nī tāṉ periya pōlīsāccē*; *Rāvaṇaṉ*.

32 *mōppampuṭucci kaṇṭupiṭiccikka*; *Rāvaṇaṉ*.

33 *aṟuttuṟuvēṉ*; *Rāvaṇaṉ*.

34 Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', p. 82.

35 *nāṉ payappaṭavillai. ōm putu puruṣaṉ oṭippōyiṭṭāṉ. mutal iravu yāru kūṭa vēṇumṉu kēṭṭāṉuka… ellām ēciṉēṉ… tappuṭāṉṉu keñcuṉēṉ… itellām veṟum kaṉavu kaṇṇa toṟantā vīṭṭukkuppōyiṭalāmṉu collikkiṭṭēṉ. āṇālum eṉṉai viṭala. kattiṉēṉ. keñcuṉēṉ. aḷutēṉ viṭala. rāttiri muḻukka paḻivāṅkiṭṭāṉuka. ellāṅ keṭṭuppōccuṇē. ellām pōccu*; *Rāvaṇaṉ*.

36 It should be noted that revenge narratives in which the hero's sister, mother, or girlfriend is raped (and then often kills herself) are also very common in Tamil cinema, espe-

Rāvaṇaṉ's Śūrpaṇakhā brings to mind the Śūrpaṇakhā of the Self-Respect Dravidian cultural movement in Tamil Nadu. Founded by E.V. Ramasami in the early twentieth century, the movement asserted that Rāvaṇa and the *rākṣasa*s of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition were representations of the great South Indian people and that Rāma and his subjects were representations of the barbaric North Indian high-caste invaders who destroyed Dravidian civilisation.[37] Ramasami believed that Śūrpaṇakhā had been greatly mistreated by Rāma and he made plans to publicly burn pictures of her disfigurement in 1956.[38] Many other Tamil nationalists also saw Śūrpaṇakhā as an innocent woman whose suffering had been caused by the heartless Rāma. In Pulavar Kuḻantai's 1946 poem, *Irāvaṇaṉ kāviyam*, it is Rāma who wants a sexual relationship with Śūrpaṇakhā, not the other way around. When Śūrpaṇakhā refuses Rāma's advances in Kuḻantai's poem, she is not just mutilated, but murdered by Lakṣmaṇa.[39]

Both *Irāvaṇaṉ kāviyam* and *Rāvaṇaṉ* eliminate the hallmark of Śūrpaṇakhā's character in most authoritative *Rāmāyaṇa*s: her licentious behaviour with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. In *Rāvaṇaṉ*, Śūrpaṇakhā may be flirtatious with her own fiancé, but she is never promiscuous. She only interacts with Lakṣmaṇa after he ruins her wedding and she never even meets Rāma. Yet, when we listen carefully to the lyrics of the wedding song *Keṭā kaṟi aṭuppula keṭakku* (*The Meat Curry is on the Stove*), we find something that is somewhat perplexing when the women of Śūrpaṇakhā's community describe the young bride singing: 'If you look at her with your eyes, she has the features of Jānakī (Sītā). But if you look at her on the bed, she has the lineage of Śūrpaṇakhā'.[40] Why is *Rāvaṇaṉ* comparing its beautiful, innocent Śūrpaṇakhā character to her sexually assertive, 'loose' counterpart found in the authoritative retellings of Vālmīki, Kampaṉ, and Tulsīdās?

A closer examination of Śūrpaṇakhā's character in *Rāvaṇaṉ* reveals that she does indeed share some characteristics with premodern literary Śūrpaṇakhās. Erndl points out that Śūrpaṇakhā is 'denounced' in the *Rāmāyaṇa*s of Vālmīki,

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cially in films from the 1980s. See Sathiavathi Chinnah, 'The Tamil Film Heroine: From a Passive Subject to a Pleasurable Object', in *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*, ed. Selvaraj Velayutham, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 35.

37 See Paula Richman, 'E.V. Ramasami's Reading of the Rāmāyaṇa', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 175–201.

38 Paula Richman, 'Epic and State: Contesting Interpretations of the Ramayana', *Public Culture*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1995, p. 642.

39 K.V. Zvelebil, 'Rāvaṇa the Great in Modern Tamil Fiction', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 120, no. 1, 1988, p. 132.

40 *iva kāṇala pāta canaki amsam. kaṭṭil mēla pāta cūrppaṇakai vamsam*; *Rāvaṇaṉ*.

Kampaṉ, and Tulsīdās because of 'her status as an independent woman'.[41] She adds that 'the good woman [Sītā] is one who remains controlled, both mentally and physically, by her husband (or, in his absence, her father, brother, or son)… The bad woman [Śūrpaṇakhā] is one who is not subject to these controls'.[42]

Rāvaṇaṉ's Śūrpaṇakhā is by no means a 'bad', loose woman, but is definitely an independent one. She is not controlled by her brothers or fiancé and is shown to be constantly teasing them. When Lakṣmaṇa rudely questions her after ruining her wedding, Śūrpaṇakhā is not afraid to retort. In the police station, Śūrpaṇakhā yells at the police and points her finger at them. Also, unlike the Sītā character who is a Brahmin and whose husband was chosen for her through an arranged marriage, Śūrpaṇakhā picks her own husband. Moreover, Śūrpaṇakhā chooses a husband from a different caste and social class. In the Tamil *Irāmāvatāram*, one of the reasons why Rāma rejects Śūrpaṇakhā is because 'the wise always have said it is not fitting for human men to marry a woman from the Rākṣasas who live at ease'.[43] *Rāvaṇaṉ*'s Śūrpaṇakhā, like Kampaṉ's, does not care about caste or community and pursues the upper-caste man she wants to marry anyway.

Unfortunately, as *Rāvaṇaṉ* illustrates, Dalit, low-caste, and Adivasi women —who are perceived as dangerous 'Other' women by many upper-caste men— are repeatedly the targets of sexual assault and rape.[44] *Rāvaṇaṉ*'s Śūrpaṇakhā is an independent as well as a low-caste, Adivasi woman who falls prey to a horrific gang rape. *Rāvaṇaṉ* thus highlights the ways in which Śūrpaṇakhā could be perceived as the Other and sheds light on how it is often the Other woman who is the victim of rape in India today.

Another modern *Rāmāyaṇa* that presents Śūrpaṇakhā as the Other but that also depicts the attack on her in a sensitive and sympathetic manner is the Hindi dance-drama *Śrī Rām*, which has been put on annually by the Shri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra (one of Delhi's elite performing arts centres) since 1957 and which incorporates many different classical and folk dance forms from all over India. *Śrī Rām* presents Śūrpaṇakhā as the Other of Rāma's world by distinctly depicting her as a Dravidian. Throughout *Śrī Rām*, Rāvaṇa, his son Meghanāda, and Śūrpaṇakhā are all depicted via the *kathakaḷi* theatre form from Kerala and *karnāṭak* music is used in scenes centred on Rāvaṇa and Śūrpaṇakhā. This is all

41 Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', p. 84.

42 Erndl, 'Mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā', p. 83.

43 3.5.48 in George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz's translation: *The Forest Book of the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampaṉ*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 92.

44 Ruchira Gupta, 'Victims Blamed in India's Rape Culture', CNN, 28 August 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/27/opinion/gupta-india-rape-culture/ (accessed 08.10.2014).

in stark contrast to the North Indian dance forms and costumes chosen to depict Rāma and his family and the *hindustānī* classical music that is played throughout the rest of the show.

Like the traditional *rāmlīlā* performances described earlier, *Śrī Rām* would present the Śūrpaṇakhā episode in a comical fashion. The show's director, Shobha Deepak Singh, shared with me that while this scene used to bring much laughter, 'that laughter became less and less, year after year. I thought this was time to make a change'.[45] Thus, Singh decided to alter the scene in 2001. The current version of the scene is no longer comic, but quite serious.[46]

The simple make-up and modest costume that Śūrpaṇakhā wears when she approaches the brothers corresponds to those used to portray *minukku*, or 'radiant' characters (such as respectable women and servants) in *kathakaḷi* performances.[47] After being mercilessly teased by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (as she is in Vālmīki's epic), Śūrpaṇakhā exits and a new Śūrpaṇakhā, presumably in her 'true' *rākṣasa* form, enters. Yet this new Śūrpaṇakhā does not look very different from the previous one, apart from her lack of headdress and her face now featuring pale make-up. Also, the actress playing the real Śūrpaṇakhā does not don the dark, frightening make-up or costume for *kari*, or 'black' characters (who Phillip Zarrilli describes as 'the grossest and most grotesque of *kathakaḷi* characters'[48]) that Śūrpaṇakhā in her true form would have sported in a typical *kathakaḷi* performance. This costuming decision humanizes Śūrpaṇakhā.

Upon seeing the true Śūrpaṇakhā, Lakṣmaṇa accuses her for being consumed with lust. Ironically, Śūrpaṇakhā has not acted particularly promiscuously. Yet, Lakṣmaṇa still attacks her. Red lighting immediately floods the stage as Śūrpaṇakhā falls to the floor and flails around helplessly, screaming in pain. Rāma grabs Sītā and physically shields her from the mutilation. When Śūrpaṇakhā finally stumbles into Rāvaṇa's court, she repeatedly slams her head against the floor in shame, while a group of women try to console her as Rāvaṇa sorrowfully watches his sister further harm herself. In *Śrī Rām*, the South Indian costumes and dance forms used to depict Śūrpaṇakhā establish her as the Other of the North Indian Rāma. Yet, as with *Rāvaṇaṇ*, *Śrī Rām* seems to be suggesting that Śūrpaṇakhā is a modest and innocent woman. The presentation of her defacement is also rather distressing.

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45 Shobha Deepak Singh, personal communication, September 2012.

46 My observations on this production are based on the three times I viewed this performance in the autumn of 2012.

47 Phillip B. Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex: Performance and Structure*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984, p. 175.

48 Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex*, p. 175.

There are, however, other recent *Rāmāyaṇa* retellings that present Śūrpaṇakhā in a sympathetic manner despite her sexually assertive nature. Take *Maya Ravan*, an unauthorized dance-drama adaption of Ashok Banker's popular English *Ramayana* fantasy novels that was directed by the film actress and *bharatanātyam* exponent Shobana.[49] In *Maya Ravan*, which premiered in Chennai in 2007, Śūrpaṇakhā dresses in a Western-style leopard print dress (contrasting with Sītā's strictly Indian attire) and makes 'meowing' noises like a cat.[50] Śūrpaṇakhā is shown luring Sītā away from Rāma, drugging her, and assuming her form to go meet Rāma. While pretending to be Sītā, Śūrpaṇakhā seductively suggests that she and Rāma 'celebrate' being married and 'bathe in the river'. Following this exchange, Rāma realizes that this cannot be Sītā. Śūrpaṇakhā is far too eager to be intimate with Rāma to be his chaste wife.

Yet, although this Śūrpaṇakhā is sexually assertive, her mutilation is quite upsetting. In a familiar pattern, the *Rāmāyaṇa*s of Vālmīki and Tulsīdās have Rāma command or encourage Lakṣmaṇa to mutilate Śūrpaṇakhā. Yet, in *Maya Ravan*, Rāma clearly tells Lakṣmaṇa: 'Do not draw first blood!'. Despite this order, Lakṣmaṇa cuts off Śūrpaṇakhā's nose and ears anyway. Śūrpaṇakhā falls to the ground crying, 'Why! Why? I only wished to love you!'. As she runs away, Rāma sadly states: 'You should not have done that Lakṣmaṇa. You should not have'. What makes this sequence especially distressing is the fact that Lakṣmaṇa attacks Śūrpaṇakhā as she is leaving their home. Therefore, in *Maya Ravan*, Lakṣmaṇa's assault is not only shown to be downright malicious, but completely unprovoked too.

Another similar disturbing depiction of Śūrpaṇakhā's mutilation is found in Life OK's Hindi televised musical *Rāmlīlā: Ajay Devgan ke sāth* (2012).[51] In *Rāmlīlā*, Śūrpaṇakhā is a hideous creature with blue skin and pointed elf ears who looks very different from the lovely, fair-skinned women of Rāma's society. Upon seeing Rāma, however, Śūrpaṇakhā transforms into a beautiful woman with fair skin and a revealing outfit. She then proceeds to perform a song entitled *Maĩ kāhe kũārī* (*Why Am I Single?*) with a group of her friends.

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49 Despite the dance-drama's obvious debt to these novels, Ashok K. Banker 'had zero involvement or knowledge of the production'. He explains that, 'I was not informed of [the production] by the producers, nobody asked me for permission to use my work, there was no attempt made to include me in the production or even to invite me to attend a performance'. Ashok K. Banker, e-mail communication with author, March 2013. For Banker's depiction of the Śūrpaṇakhā's mutilation, see Ashok K. Banker, *Demons of Chitrakut: Book Three of the Ramayana*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005, pp. 566–570.

50 *Maya Ravan: Musical Dance Ballet*, DVD, directed by Shobana, 2009, Mumbai, India: Shemaroo Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.

51 *Rāmlīlā: Ajay Devgan ke sāth*, Episode 2, Life OK, 28 October 2012.

Sanjeeda Sheikh, the actress playing Śūrpaṇakhā, describes the song saying, 'there is nothing vulgar about the act and it has been beautifully choreographed (…) keeping in mind that we have a family audience'.[52] Yet, it is clear that *Maĩ kāhe kũārī*, which involves Śūrpaṇakhā shaking her hips and gyrating, is a typical 'item number'—a fixture in mainstream Hindi-Urdu films. Like all item numbers, *Maĩ kāhe kũārī* is meant to titillate and excite male audience members. In Bollywood movies, the woman performing this song is typically not the film's heroine. Instead, she is often the 'vamp', a sexually assertive woman who competes with the heroine for the hero's affection.[53] Upon seeing Rāma, Śūrpaṇakhā flirtatiously touches him and sings: 'I will make sure you become mine'.[54]

While this Śūrpaṇakhā is portrayed as a vamp, however, Lakṣmaṇa's attack on her is extremely graphic and horrifying. After Śūrpaṇakhā threatens to kill Sītā (as she does in Vālmīki's text), Lakṣmaṇa grabs Śūrpaṇakhā and slices off her nose with an axe. With the use of a special effect, it appears as if blood is being splattered on the camera lens. This effect of blood being splashed across the viewer's television screen is repeated twice. Each time the blood is sprayed, Śūrpaṇakhā screams. Sītā covers her face with her hands in horror as Śūrpaṇakhā's friends rush to her side as she falls to the ground. Rāma backs away from the scene in shock and Lakṣmaṇa bellows: 'Wretched, low-bred, sinful woman! This is your punishment!'[55]

The shaken reactions of Rāma and Sītā to Śūrpaṇakhā's maiming suggest that they disapprove of what Lakṣmaṇa has done. The original broadcast of *Rāmlīlā* on 28 October 2012 also included footage of the original audience's reactions to the performance. Throughout this scene the audience is seen enjoying and dancing along to this item number. Their reaction to the actual attack on Śūrpaṇakhā, however, is not as jovial. During the mutilation scene, multiple shots of audience members with grim expressions are shown. Other audience members (mostly women) appear shocked. While the Śūrpaṇakhā of *Rāmlīlā* is undoubtedly the Other woman and a pleasurable object of the male gaze, she is

52 'Pretty Sanjeeda Plays Surpanakha in Ram Leela', *Hindustan Times*, 26 October 2012, http://www.hindustantimes.com/Entertainment/Bollywood/Pretty-Sanjeeda-plays-Surpanakha-in-Ram-Leela/Article1-950561.aspx (accessed 10.11.2014).

53 The 'beautiful' Śūrpaṇakhā in *Rāmlīlā* wears a very similar costume to the one worn by the 'beautiful' Śūrpaṇakhā in Ramanand Sagar's *Rāmāyaṇ* television serial. As Pauwels notes, Sagar's Śūrpaṇakhā is also 'portrayed as a vamp, coded as the opposite of the good heroine'; *Goddess as Role Model*, p. 321.

54 *tujhko maĩ apnā banā kar hī jāũgī*; *Rāmlīlā*, Episode 2.

55 *adham nic pataki aurat. terī yah sazā hai*; *Rāmlīlā*, Episode 2.

also presented as the victim of a violent crime with whom the audience clearly sympathize.

As Pauwels points out, in several authoritative *Rāmāyaṇa*s, such as those of Vālmīki, Tulsīdās, and Sagar, 'it is remarkable that we do not get the slightest idea of Sītā's thoughts during the whole interlude'.[56] Two recent *Rāmāyaṇa*s that are told from Sītā's perspective, however, give Sītā a distinctly disapproving voice during this episode. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's English novel, *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), Sītā confronts her husband and brother-in-law: "Did you have to be so harsh?" I asked once Surpanakha's screams had died away. "To mutilate her so horribly? She was just an infatuated girl—you could've easily scared her off".[57] In Star Plus' Hindi television series, *Siyā ke Rām* (2015–2016), a distressed Sītā tells Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa that disfiguring Śūrpaṇakhā was 'not justified'[58] and she immediately runs after Śūrpaṇakhā to apologize. The protagonist of both of these modern 'Sītāyaṇas' clearly views Śūrpaṇakhā's mutilation as a reprehensible act of violence.

4. Conclusion

In light of the recent public conversations about sexual violence in India, it is significant that so many modern renderings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* present the attack on Śūrpaṇakhā as a sickening crime instead of the source of comic relief often depicted in the *rāmlīlā* tradition or as an acceptable punishment for a loose woman à la Vālmīki.

As Nilanjana Roy points out, 'a "Blame the Victim" mentality' is pervasive throughout India. Often more attention is given to the victims' 'dress, behavior, caste, and presence in insurgent areas', than the brutality and viciousness of the rapes themselves.[59] In the highly publicized 2012 Delhi gang rape, in which a woman was repeatedly raped by six men and tortured with an iron rod in a moving van, the victim was blamed for her own rape because she was out at nine

56 Pauwels, *Goddess as Role Model*, p. 327.

57 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Forest of Enchantments*, Noida: HarperCollins Publishers, 2019, p. 150.

58 *ucit nahĩ*; *Siyā ke Rām*, Episode 116, Star Plus, 13 May 2016.

59 Nilanjana Roy, 'In India, a "Blame the Victim" Mentality', *The New York Times*, 28 February 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/29/world/asia/29iht-letter29.html?_r=0 (accessed 12.03.2013).

o'clock at night.[60] As noted earlier, women belonging to certain communities are frequent targets of sexual assault and 'it is estimated that at least four Dalit women are raped every day'.[61]

The new Śūrpaṇakhā that has emerged in modern India is perceived as the Other for some particular reason such as her forward sexual behaviour, or her independent nature, or her non-Aryan identity, or her low caste. And she is violently assaulted because of her Otherness. Yet, the attack on Śūrpaṇakhā is presented as a shocking and deeply upsetting incident, regardless of this Otherness. Many could identify with this Śūrpaṇakhā and feel sympathy for her. Some women may even see themselves in her. The message of modern retellings like *Rāvaṇaṇ, Maya Ravan*, and *Rāmlīlā* is thus clear: the fact that Śūrpaṇakhā is an Adivasi, or wears a Western leopard-print dress, or performs a sexy item-number does not make her mutilation any less upsetting or deplorable. This message also vehemently challenges the victim-blaming that Śūrpaṇakhā has repeatedly been subjected to. As this recent representation of Śūrpaṇakhā as a victim indicates, the creators of new *Rāmāyaṇa*s are starting to seriously question and rethink the role of this *rākṣasa* woman and the brutal violence she faces.

Journalist Sumnima Udas has observed that in the years following the 2012 Delhi gang rape there has been a 'heightened awareness of sexual violence against women'.[62] She adds that 'women are now feeling more emboldened to ignore the stigma and report not just cases of rape, but even harassment, molestation, stalking, and voyeurism'.[63] Tens of thousands of people in cities all over India including New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bangalore took to the streets

60 Ellen Barry, 'Man Convicted of Rape in Delhi Blames Victim', *The New York Times*, 3 March 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/world/asia/delhi-gang-rape-mukesh-singh.html?_r=0 (accessed 13.07.2016).

61 Shobna Sonpar, 'Sexual Violence and Impunity: A Psychosocial Perspective', in *Breaching the Citadel: The Indian Papers I*, eds Urvashi Butalia and Laxmi Murthy, Zubaan Series on Sexual Violence and Impunity in South Asia, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2018, p. 257.

62 Sumnima Udas, 'Covering the Rape Case that Changed India', CNN, 15 December 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/04/world/asia/india-rape-problem-udas/ (accessed 10.04.2015).

63 Udas, 'Covering the Rape Case that Changed India'.

in protest after the Delhi gang rape.[64] In general, rape and sexual violence are becoming much more prominent topics in the Indian news media.[65]

Due to the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s status as one of the most prevalent and influential narratives in South Asia, the characters of this epic have been used by various communities to negotiate positions of political power and social status throughout the history of the subcontinent. Premodern Hindu kings have compared themselves to Rāma,[66] members of the Niṣāda community have aligned themselves with the tribal boatman Guha,[67] and frustrated Dalits have seen themselves as servile monkeys to the Congress Party.[68] The characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition thus hold an immensely potent ascribable power.

These recent depictions of Śūrpaṇakhā discussed in this essay show that *Rāmāyaṇa* characters still remain tools for addressing and negotiating current social and political issues in present-day India. Just as the Self-Respect Dravidian Cultural movement used *rākṣasa*s in their political project of regional nationalism in the early twentieth century and the Hindu Right utilized a specific idea of Rāma during the Rāmjanmabhūmi campaign in the late eighties and early nineties,[69] the creators of modern *Rāmāyaṇa* retellings are using Śūrpaṇakhā to draw attention to the social epidemic of sexual violence and victim blaming in contemporary India.

In 1991, in her introduction to the pioneering edited volume, *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Paula Richman speculated that: 'Perhaps someday Śūrpaṇakhā will be claimed as a symbol of the physical violence that has been unjustly perpetrated upon women who seek

64 Sanjoy Majumder, 'Protests in India after Delhi Gang-rape Victim Dies', BBC, 29 December 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-20863707 (accessed 10.04.2015).

65 Divya Arya, 'Headlining Sexual Violence: Media Reporting After the Delhi Gang-rape', in *Breaching the Citadel*, pp. 294–348.

66 Sheldon Pollock, 'Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1993, pp. 261–297.

67 Badri Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2009, pp. 128–129.

68 Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture, and Political Economy*, Calcutta: Samya Publishers, 1996, p. 59.

69 Anuradha Kapur, 'Deity to Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram', in *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, ed. Gyanendra Pandey, New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1993, pp. 74–109; Linda Hess, 'Marshalling Sacred Texts: Ram's Name and Story in Late Twentieth-Century Indian Politics', *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* vol. 2, no. 4, 1994, pp. 175–206.

independence from constraining social norms'.[70] Today, nearly thirty years later, it seems that Richman's conjecture has been proven true.

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70 Paula Richman, 'Introduction: The Diversity of the Rāmāyaṇa Tradition', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, p. 15. This comment was in response to Erndl's study of Śūrpaṇakhā in the same volume.

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Adrian Plau

Vernacular Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s as *Satī-Kathā*s: Familiar Structure, Innovative Narrative[1]

1. Introductory Notes

This paper shows how shifts in narrative emphasis generate new *Rāmāyaṇa* tellings without necessarily changing any of the traditional story elements. The received notion of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s is that they conform to the narrative structures of the wider Jain Purāṇa tradition, and especially to the notion of the sixty-three Great Men (*triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣa*). But in the early modern period, concurrent with the rise of vernacular languages across North India, new tellings of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story emphasized Sītā's virtues and painted her as an ideal Jain laywoman, a *satī*, in conformity with the contemporary rise of popular *satī-kathā*s. I trace the spread of this mode of the Jain *Rāṃāyaṇa* from its early beginnings in Sanskrit and Prakrit predecessors and up to its perhaps most striking formulation in the mid-seventeenth century *Sītācarit* by the Digambara poet Rāmcand Bālak. Drawing on Bakhtin and Genette in analysing the narrative strategies that Bālak and his fellow poets employed, I argue that subtle shifts in chronological arrangement allow these early modern *Rāmāyaṇa* tellings to stay within the familiar, Purāṇic superstructure while emphasizing the virtues of the

1 I am very grateful to Danuta Stasik for inviting me to join the Paris ECSAS panel. I first explored the argument in the present chapter in a previous paper of mine, '"There Was a City Called Mithilā": Are All Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s Really *Purāṇa*s?', currently in press for the forthcoming fifth volume of *Puṣpikā: Tracing Ancient India Through Texts and Traditions*, and sections of my PhD thesis at SOAS, University of London: *The Deeds of Sītā: A Critical Edition and Literary Contextual Analysis of the 'Sītācarit' by Rāmcand Bālak*, supervized by Francesca Orsini, Peter Flügel, and Rachel Dwyer. The present chapter builds on these earlier arguments to present a chronological framework and incorporates new, contemporary materials, shedding further light on the rise and prevalence of the *satī-kathā* branch of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s. All translations from Indian languages are mine.

characters who are not amongst the Great Men. In conclusion, I point towards some contemporary iterations of this mode of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Let me begin by admitting that the distinction between 'familiar structure' and 'innovative narrative' in this article's title is slightly confusing. What I have in mind here is simply the dynamic between what we may call the superstructure of any given story and the story itself. To take an easy example, the Gospel of John as it appears in The New Testament tells a story from beginning to end, complete in itself, though it clearly operates under the wider firmament of the cosmological superstructure of the Christian Bible as a whole. This relation is, of course, obvious. Yet when we shift our gaze to the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the relationship between superstructure and narrative grows more complex and, in the case of a certain branch of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, sometimes faint to the point of invisibility.

These are the *satī-kathā*s, stories of devout Jain women whose lives illuminate the fundamental Jain teachings of right insight, right wisdom, and right practice, even to the extent that the *satī*s become objects of veneration in their own right, and sometimes even outright worship. From at least the late medieval period and into the eighteenth century, North India saw the production and circulation of a number of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s that primarily focused on the figure of Sītā as a great *satī*. To these Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, Sītā's steadfastness in the face of her forest exile and her ultimate renunciation following her fire ordeal illustrate her profound insight into the workings of *karma* and her radical embrace of the Jain doctrines of detachment from worldly affairs.[2]

Such *Rāmāyaṇa*-inflected *satī-kathā*s were immensely popular. Tens of titles in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Maru-Gurjar and Braj Bhāṣā are recorded and many of these are still available in manuscript format, sometimes with dozens of extant copies of a single title spread across temple libraries and research archives across North India. Yet scholarly acknowledgment of and engagement with this branch of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s remain almost non-existent. This chapter is an attempt to fill this void. Beyond the fundamental task of identifying the distinct nature of a branch of Jain literature, I engage with the *satī-kathā* branch of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s so that we may better recognize that we have before us an unexplored source of material for the study of ideals of women's devotional practice in early modern North India.

2 Note the *satī* figure of Jain discourse is distinct from the self-immolating *satī* of nineteenth century Hindu and British colonial discourse. As Mary Whitney Kelting notes (*Heroic Wives: Rituals, Stories, and the Virtues of Jain Wifehood*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), the act of self-harm is unacceptable to the central Jain doctrine of *ahiṃsā* ('non-violence').

2. The Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s: Purāṇas and Transfocalizations

Every work on the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition will sooner or later refer to Ramanujan's[3] essay on the *Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas*, and here my moment comes already. Beyond its brilliant encapsulation of the mutability and diversity of the world's many *Rāmāyaṇa*s, Ramanujan also details what for many are the defining ingredients of what he terms 'the Jaina tellings';[4] Rāvaṇ as a tragic figure and his ten heads referring to his necklace of nine gems, the monkeys reshaped as celestials under a *Vānara* ('monkey') banner, and an overall rationalistic outlook. We do, of course, also know that Ramanujan spoke of the dynamics of variation between the *Rāmāyaṇa*s in terms of translation, stretching from the almost non-existent changes of the *iconic* translation via the contextual, but inessential, changes of the *indexical* to the radical transformation of the *symbolic*, where the source material has been reshaped to tell a completely different story. The Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, Ramanujan argues, would then fall under the latter category, in that they represent a radical departure from the story as it appears in Vālmīki.

This is all well and good, but we must pause to consider whether the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, which after all contains countless iterations in multiple languages and spans two millennia, can be effectively studied simply by noting its level of variation vis-à-vis the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Indeed, one reason for the missing engagement with its strand of *satī-kathā*s may be that the study of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s has at times been too occupied with asking question of how they differ from the Vālmikī-based *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, instead of how they differ from each other.

Kulkarni's[5] deep work on the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition does not fall into this trap, giving instead a detailed study of its defining iterations and their interrelations. We owe to Kulkarni the realization that the very first Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*, in all probability, is Vimalasūri's third-century Prakrit work *Paüma cariya*. Most of the elements Ramanujan highlighted are already present in Vimalasūri, and it lays down the narrative structure that later Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s follow or depart from.

The *Paüma cariya* also introduces the characteristic narrative framework, where the king Śreṇika asks Mahāvīra's disciple, Gautama, to ease his mind

3 A.K. Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred Ramayanas. Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 22–47

4 Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred Ramayanas', p. 33.

5 V.M. Kulkarni, *The Story of Rāma in Jain Literature: As Presented by the Śvetāmbara and Digambara Poets in the Prakrit, Sanskrit and Apabhraṃśa Languages*, Saraswati Oriental Studies, Ahmedabad: Saraswati Pustak Bhandar, 1990.

about the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. To Śreṇika, it all sounds a bit far-fetched. Indeed, Gautama assures, the others have got it wrong, and he proceeds to tell Śreṇika the story as it really is—that is, similar to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* in its basic narrative structure, but with character motivations and actions transformed to adhere to a Jain outlook. Kulkarni shows that such an outlook was not too clear to Vimalasūri in its sectarian affiliations. The later *Padma Purāṇa*, however, composed in Sanskrit by Raviṣeṇa in the seventh century, is clearer in its Digambara affiliation. Yet Raviṣeṇa, as Kulkarni brilliantly shows, follows Vimalasūri's framework most diligently, tracing his Prakrit predecessor from *parva* to *parva*. Raviṣeṇa's additions, apart from his references to Digambara *muni*s, is a tendency towards lengthened poetical descriptions. Very much a *kāvya*-inspired work, the *Padma Purāṇa* never misses a chance to muse poetically on a forest view or a battlefield. Should we use Ramanujan's tripartite scheme of translations to describe them, we would perhaps say that the *Padma Purāṇa* holds an indexical relationship to the *Paüma cariya*. Together, they form the lodestars of most currents of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition.

In identifying the interrelations and importance of Vimalasūri and Raviṣeṇa's compositions, Kulkarni's study is an essential work for Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* studies. Yet Kulkarni has also left us with two statements that I believe have tended to cloud our approach to the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. The first is his observation, when referring to a few titles in vernacular languages, that these works 'probably do not contain any new remarkable features but repeat in their own language what the older Jain writers have already said'.[6] Kulkarni's study, though expansive, is limited to tellings in Prakrit, Sanskrit and Apabhraṃśa, and later works in early modern vernaculars, which will include most of the *satī-kathā* tellings, fall beyond his scope. However, in his statement on their probable lack of innovation, Kulkarni demonstrates the not infrequently encountered assumption within the field of classical Indology that vernacular versions of earlier compositions essentially are simplified translations and that the real cultural significance lies with the (preferably Sanskrit) originals. This is, in many cases, true, but yet we should not forget that innovation comes in many forms. As the *satī-kathā*s show, the seemingly innocent act of reorganizing a narrative structure may yield an entirely new narrative, even without adding new elements.

And that leads me to Kulkarni's second statement. At the very end of his study, Kulkarni[7] concludes that 'the Jain Rāmāyaṇas, as a rule, are essentially Purāṇas'. With this, Kulkarni refers to their didactic tone, their encyclopedic scope of stories and lore, but, most of all, the fact that they are structured accord-

6 Kulkarni, *The Story of Rāma in Jain Literature*, p. 14.

7 Kulkarni, *The Story of Rāma in Jain Literature*, p. 248.

ing to the wider historical and cosmological structure of the Jain Purāṇas. This structure hinges on the essential concept of the sixty-three Great Men, *śalākā-puruṣa*s, who are born throughout the cycles of human history as teachers, leaders and rulers. The sixty-three include a series of twenty-four *tīrthaṅkara*s, establishers of the Jain order, followed by twelve *cakravartin*s, or universal rulers, and, finally nine trios *ardha-cakravartin*s, rulers of one third of the world, each trio containing heroic *baladeva*s, *vāsudeva*s, half-brothers of the *baladeva*s, and finally, nine *prativāsudeva*s, the *vāsudeva*s' natural enemies. The Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s are then, in Kulkarni's phrase, 'essentially' the story of the eighth trio with Rām as *baladeva*, Lakṣmaṇ as *vasudeva* and Rāvaṇ as *prativāsudeva*.

We have now arrived at the superstructure of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s—the greater story in which they live—and the scholarly consensus towards the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition is to approach it through this lens.[8] I do not argue against applying this perspective when approaching works such as the *Paüma cariya*, but it does fail to account for the distinctive quality of the *satī-kathā* strand of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s. The *satī-kathā*s do, at times, refer to this overarching structure of the *śalākāpuruṣa*s, yet that does not in itself mean that they are Purāṇas. The distinction is upheld within the material itself; the *Sītācarit*, a prime example of a Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* as *satī-kathā*, refers to itself as a '*kathā* of the heroic *satī*' (SC.11) and notes that it draws its inspiration from 'Raviṣeṇa's *Raghu Purāṇa*' (SC.2531).[9]

Before we turn to consider how exactly these *satī-kathā*s achieve this distinct quality, we must acknowledge that we cannot adequately describe the transformative processes of narrative rearrangement within them by relying on Ramanujan's tripartite degree of translations. We may state that they probably fall somewhere between the indexical and the symbolical, but that does not really describe in any detail how this transformation comes to pass. To alert ourselves

8 Ramanujan, too, highlights the *śalākāpuruṣa* aspect, and John E. Cort ('An Overview of the Jaina Purāṇas', in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 185–206) engages with the question of what constitutes a Jain Purāṇa and arrives at a position that, like Kulkarni, emphasizes the *śalākāpuruṣa*s. Finally, De Clercq ('*Paümacariya—Padmacarita—Paümacariu*: The Jain *Ramāyāṇa-Purāṇa*', in *Epics, Khilas, And Puranas: Continuities and Ruptures*, Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Puranas, September 2002, ed. Petteri Koskikallio, Zagreb: Academia Scientiarum et Artium Croatica, 2005, pp. 597–608) shows that the same underpins also the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition's Apabhraṃśa iterations.

9 All references to the hitherto unprinted *Sītācarit* refer to its critical edition in my PhD thesis, Adrian Plau, *The Deeds of Sita: A Critical Edition and Literary Contextual Analysis of the 'Sītācarit' by Rāmcand Bālak*, PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2018, which draws on several of the eighteen available manuscripts.

to the full range of operations at work, I prefer to draw on the analytical toolset offered by Genette in his works on narrative and intertextuality or, as he coins it, hypertextuality.

From his study on narrative,[10] we have the helpful distinction between 'story', 'narrative', and 'narrating'. By separating between any given story's elements ('story'), the manner in which they are put together as a 'narrative' in any given telling, and the act of 'narrating' that such a telling constitutes, we may more clearly differentiate between the different processes at work in the *satī-kathā*s, and in the following I use these terms (story, narrative, narrating) according to Genette's delineations.

For those processes, Genette's work on hypertextuality[11] suggests separating between the inaugural hypotext and the following hypertext. According to Ramanujan, the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story would then be the hypertext to Vālmīki's hypotext. Yet merely replacing one set of terms with another to describe the idea of differing degrees of variation does not in itself make any analytic difference. What makes Genette's analysis helpful to us is the wealth of operations and techniques he identifies that can bring any given text from hypotext to hypertext. Through the operations of changing a narrative's chronology ('temporal order'), the relation between the narrative and its narrator ('distance'), its pacing ('duration and frequency'), or its focus ('perspective'), a work's 'mode' can be radically altered; characters within the narrative are seen in a new light, casual asides become revelations, and incidental episodes are lifted to central importance. This, Genette tells us, is the act of transfocalization, and it is what we see at work in the *satī-kathā*s.

3. The Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s: The *Satī-Kathā* Strand

Jain *satī-kathā*s are not unique to the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition and stories of devout Jain women can be traced almost to the very beginnings of narrative literature in Prakrit. Kelting,[12] in her studies of *satī* stories amongst modern Jains, identifies a number of *satī-kathā*s across a variety of genres, from different for-

10 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1980.

11 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, tr. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

12 Kelting, *Heroic Wives*, pp. 13–14; Whitney Kelting, *Singing to the Jinas: Jain Laywomen, Maṇḍaḷ Singing, and the Negotiations of Jain Devotion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 38–40.

mats of epic and lyrical poetry to ritual songs and praise hymns, appearing from the twelfth century and continuing up to the present day.[13] The *satī* strand of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s roughly corresponds to a similar chronological expanse, and I will here attempt to present them according to a historical scheme that sees them evolve from beginnings as elements of other works into new, freestanding works featuring novel variations, proceeding to take shape as a distinct format of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*, crystallizing yet further on this path, before eventually shedding their superstructural ties entirely. This chronology is more of an analytic aid than an absolute framework; tendencies overlap, the archives await further exploration, and I only briefly touch on the modern period and the new materials that followed the introduction of print.

In the first instance, the *satī-kathā*s appear as episodes within larger works. This is what we see in the *Bṛhatkathākośa* by the tenth-century Digambara Hariṣeṇa.[14] Here the *Rāmāyaṇa* story is divided into two shorter *kathānaka*s, one depicting the story of Rām and the other that of Sītā after the return to Ayodhyā, including her forest exile, fire ordeal and eventual initiation into the Jain nunhood. Yet nothing about the *Bṛhatkathākośa*'s narrative is reported by Kulkarni to differ in any significant degree to what is present in Vimalasūri. What is new here is primarily the tendency to represent Sītā's story as distinct and, as Genette[15] comments, no transposition from hypotext to hypertext, though seemingly insignificant, is wholly innocent; in one way or the other, the hypotext's meaning is altered. By distinguishing between Rām's and Sītā's stories, the *Bṛhatkathākośa* indicates that though they may be both closely interlinked to each other and to a shared superstructure in the sixty-three Great Men narrative, they may also be told, and potentially thought of, as independent stories.

This tendency is then brought out with greater clarity in the next wave of works, which begins to appear from some point after the twelfth century and continues into the seventeenth century. Here we find titles such as an anonymous *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*[16] in Sanskrit, Bhuvanatuṅgasūri's Prakrit *Sīyacariya*,[17]

13 As far as I am aware, we lack a full study of the history of *satī-kathā* in Jain literature.

14 Hariṣeṇa, *Bṛhat kathākośa*, ed. Ādināth Nemināth Upādhye, Bombay: Bhāratīya Vidyābhavan, 1943, pp. 208–209, 215.

15 Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 294.

16 *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*, manuscript, n.d., Bühler 301 (India Office Library), British Library.

17 The *Sīyacariya* has not been available to me, but details in the Patan catalogue (C.D. Dalal and Lalchandra Bhagawandas Gandhi (eds), *A Descriptive Catalogue of Manu-*

Samaysundar's seventeenth-century Maru-Gurjar *Sītārāmcaupāī*[18], Brahmajīta's sixteenth-century Sanskrit *Hanumaccaritra*,[19] and Brahma Rāymalla's sixteenth-century mixed Maru-Gurjar/Braj Bhāṣā *Hanumāncarit*.[20] These are all epic narratives telling the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, but what they also have in common is a marked change in what Genette calls 'perspective' and 'temporal order'. By restructuring the narrative of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story, they subtly shift its weight onto the sequences where Sītā or other devout Jain women appear and use this process of transfocalization to highlight their stature as *satī*s.

Earlier Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s typically situate the *Rāmāyaṇa* story within the narrating framework of Śreṇika and Gautama and proceed to tell the stories of Rāvaṇ's former births, effectively situating the *Rāmāyaṇa* story within the superstructure of the sixty-three Great Men, before finally arriving at the births of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ. The *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*, however, eschews the Śreṇika-Gautama narrating framework and begins instead by telling the story of the births of Sītā and Bhāmaṇḍala, her twin brother. Giving only the absolute minimum of context, it presumes that its audience is familiar with the story of Bhāmaṇḍala's former lives. And when Rām and Lakṣmaṇ finally enter into its narrative in the story where a 'barbarian' (*mleccha*) tribe invades Janaka's kingdom, leading to Rām and Lakṣmaṇ's triumph on the battlefield and Rām's betrothal to Sītā, the *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra* shifts from the tone of these remarkable opening passages to follow the *Paüma cariya* closely, at times even translating verse by verse.[21] With that, it has entered the wider stream of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story and there it stays till it reaches Sītā's forest exile and fire ordeal at

scripts in the Jain Bhandars at Pattan, vol. 1, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1937, p. 136), Johannes Klatt (*Jaina-Onomasticon*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016, p. 895), and a discussion in Nāhṭā and Nāhṭā (Samaysundar, *Kavivar Samaysundar kṛt Sītārām Caupāī*, ed. Agarcand Nāhṭā and Bhāvarlāl Nāhṭā, Bikaner: Sādūl Rājasthānī Risarc Insṭīṭyūṭ, 1959) indicate that it is the direct inspiration to Samaysundar's *Sītārāmcaupāī*. Its dating is unknown, but the Patan manuscript is late sixteenth century.

18 Samaysundar, *Kavivar Samaysundar kṛt Sītārām Caupāī*.

19 Brahmajīta, *Hanumaccaritra*, manuscript, 1578, Or. 2129, British Library.

20 Rāymalla, *Hanumāncarit*, manuscript, n.d., 306, Nasiyā jī Jain Mandir, Bharatpur and *Hanumāncarit*, manuscript, n.d., 4335, Apabhraṃśa Sāhitya Akādamī, Jaipur.

21 Compare the following:
tattheva atthi deso, ekko cciya addhababbaro nāmaṃ
nissaṃjama-nissīlo, bahumecchasamāulo ghoro
tattha ya maūramāle, nayare parivasai mecchajaṇapaüre
nāmeṇa āyaraṃgo, rāyā jamasarisadaḍhasatto
And there was a land there named Addhababbaro,
Where lived many groups of *mlecchas*, undisciplined, ill-behaved and dreadful.
And there, in the town of Maūramāla, where many of the *mleccha* peoples reside,

the hands of Rām. Crucially, it ends after Sītā's passing of the fire ordeal, exalting her as a *mahāsatī*[22] and, unlike the *Paüma cariya*, refraining to tell the stories of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ's former births.

Samaysundar's composition *Sītārāmcaupāi* (1631) is, at first sight, a more traditional Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*, in that it sets up the narrating framework of Śreṇika and Gautama. However, here Śreṇika is not worried about the weirdness of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, but comes simply for 'advice'. Gautama obligingly lists causes of sins that one should be aware of and mentions, in passing, the 'sorrows of Sītā'. Śreṇika is intrigued, and Gautama promptly begins a narrative of the former births of Sītā and Bhāmaṇḍala, eventually arriving at the same general stream as the *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra* and following the *Paüma cariya* from there. The *Sītārāmcaupāī* continues further than the *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*, following the *Paüma cariya* also through the final few episodes, but also inserts several songs of praise to Sītā as a *satī*.

This wave of *satī-kathā*s does not substantially supplement or change any of the elements of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story. They do not state that the *śalākāpuruṣa* superstructure is not present in their narratives. But they do, through simple modifications of narrative structure and subtle omissions, shift the balance of the narrative to focus on the *satī* figures. They build on the simple distinction in the *Bṛhatkathākośa* and reframe the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story as partly the story of a *satī*. The superstructure is, like Bhāmaṇḍala's former lives, taken for granted or, at the very least, no longer the prime focus. We see a strikingly similar shift in the two Hanumān *caritra*s, which both choose to begin by telling the story of Hanumān's mother, princess Añjanā, a *satī* in her own right.[23] All the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s of this wave invite us into the familiar story by first alerting us to the

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There king Āyaraṃga lives, firm and capable, resembling Yama.
Vimalasūri, *Paümacariyaṃ: āyariyasirivimalasūriviraiyaṃ. hindīaṇuvāyasahiyaṃ*, ed. Hermann Jacobi, Varanasi: Prākṛta Grantha Parishad, 1962 (2nd ed.), vv. 27.5–6.
asti vaitāḍhya kailāśanagayoraṃtarālagaḥ
deśo 'rddhabarbaro nāmajanmabhūr iva pāpmanaḥ
māyūramālanagare tasya deśasya maṃḍane
ātaraṃgatamo nāma mlecha rājo 'sti dāruṇaḥ
There was a land between the Vaitāḍhya and Kailāśa mountains;
Called the Ardha-barbara, birthplace of sin.
In the ornament of this land, the city of Māyūramāla
The fearful Ātaraṃgatama was king of the *mlecchas.*
Mahākāvya Sītācaritra, vv. 1.30–1.31.

22 *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*, v. 4.194.

23 The Sanskrit *Hanumaccaritra* is even recorded under the alternative title *Añjanācaritra*; Hari Damodar Velankar, *Jinaratnakosa: An Alphabetical Register of Jain Works and Authors*, Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Series Research Institute, 1944, p. 459.

presence of *satī*s within it and implicitly to think of the story from that perspective.

Yet when these *satī-kathā*s reframe the narrative structure of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story to begin with Sītā's birth, they face the issue that Sītā's iconic *satī* moment only arrives at the very end. The *Paüma cariya* and its successors are far more interested in telling the story of Bhāmaṇḍala's birth and upbringing than of Sītā's, and since there seems to be a reluctance towards adding completely new material to the story itself, these *satī-kathā*s, even in their ingenious reordering of the narrating entry points, are forced to tell the bulk of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story in relatively conventional ways.

The third wave of *satī-kathā*s solves this issue by taking the unprecedented step of reframing the majority of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story as a subplot to Sītā's forest exile. This wave is headed by the mid-seventeenth century Braj Bhāṣā composition *Sītācarit* by Rāmcand Bālak. I have not found other works that employ the same radical innovation and it is of course possible that the idea is unique to Rāmcand Bālak, but seeing how the manuscript archives of Jain narrative literature in Braj Bhāṣā remain dramatically unexplored, we should assume that new discoveries are waiting.

The first instance of narrating in the *Sītācarit*, following an introductory series of benedictions and prayers, simply states that 'Having defeated Rāvaṇ, Rām came to Ayodhyā with Sītā' (SC.12).[24] From this beginning, it proceeds to detail how gossip spreads amongst the citizens of Ayodhyā, their complaints to Rām, and his decision to send Sītā into forest exile. He orders an army commander to take her to the forest on the pretext of going to a Jain temple, and as Sītā and the commander arrive in the forest, an initially bewildered Sītā responds with a stoic speech on the essence of *dharma*, the bonds of *karman* that ensnare all living beings, and how enlightened beings accept all these things and remain steadfast on the course of good actions. And this, she tells the commander, is how a *satī* acts:

> So this is the good nature of the satī;
> she never blames another,
> but endures the bonds of her own actions
> and the fruits that arise from them.[25]

Sītā's speech to the commander leaves no doubt about her quality as a *satī*. And when King Vajrajaṅgha later finds her alone in the forest and one of his servants

24 *Rāvana kūṃ jīti rāma sītā lai binītā āe*.

25 *Tātaiṃ satī subhāva iha dosa na kāhu dehi / vaṃdhai apa krama bhogavai udai āi phala jehi*; *Sītācarit*, v. 71.

whispers that 'this is a stained woman' (SC.92),[26] Vajrajaṅgha retorts that she 'is a great *satī*! The blessed who enjoys her *darśan* immediately reaches the further shore!' (SC.93).[27] From Sītā's speech to Vajrajaṅgha's devotion, this opening sequence illustrates the essential doctrines of Jainism, the virtue of the *satī* in her embrace of these, and the benefits lesser Jains attain through devotion towards the *satī*. It is an effective encapsulation of the potentially central position of the *satī* in popular Jain practices, but also an operation of narrating that effectively transfocalizes the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story into an explicitly *satī*-oriented outlook.

Sītā eventually gives birth to her twin sons, Lavaṇ and Aṅkuś. When they reach young adulthood, they accidentally meet the wandering sage Nārad, who comments that they remind him of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ. Lavaṇ and Aṅkuś, unknowing of their actual parentage, wonder who these are, and Nārad obligingly sits down to tell them, more or less, the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* (SC.146–153). The episode is not new to the *Sītācarit*; it also appears in its self-appointed hypotext, Raviṣeṇa's *Padma Purāṇa*,[28] where Nārad gives the twins a summary of the story so far. What is new in the *Sītācarit*, is that Rāmcand Bālak seizes on this narrating instance in Raviṣeṇa to embed the entirety of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story within it.

For the following 2000 verses, out of a roughly 2550 verse total, Nārad tells the twins that story, with a variety of minor and major additions, reductions and rephrasings that are unique to the *Sītācarit*. It also takes care to note that several of the women whom Rām and Lakṣmaṇ meet throughout their adventures, in their own ways, are *satī*s too.[29] When Nārad reaches the end of his story, we are back in the narrative present. As Nārad retreats, the *Sītācarit* resumes the narrative of Sītā's forest exile, fire ordeal and final renunciation, ending on a note of veneration towards Sītā as a *satī* and leaving a mournful Rām to 'go home' (SC.2516).[30]

We may briefly consider how the *Sītācarit* narrates the fire ordeal sequence, where, in the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, the bed of fire is through divine agency replaced with a royal throne. In the *Padma Purāṇa*,[31] Rām immediately responds by venerating the seated Sītā, asking her to leave any anger aside and to come home with him. Sītā, of course, responds by declaring that the time has come for her to

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26 *E tau triyā kalāṃkita*.

27 *E satī yāṃ siradāra/ bhāgavaṃta isa darasa sauṃ lahai turata bhava pāra*.

28 *Jain Rāma Kathā, or, Padma Purāṇa* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2008), v. 102.

29 I cannot detail these modifications here, but a fairly expansive overview is given in Plau, 'The Deeds of Sita', 2018.

30 *Cale nija geha*.

31 Raviṣeṇa, *Jain Rāma Kathā, or, Padma Purāṇa*, vv. 105.61–70.

renunciate. In the *Sītācarit* (SC.2479–2487), however, Rām's speech is moved and Sītā declares her decision to renounce without any prompting from him. The gods and *muni*s sing her praises, joyful that 'this great woman was in the world'.[32] Only after this praise does Rām enter with his speech. It is unaltered in essence from the *Padma Purāṇa*, yet simply appears out of touch coming after the more or less universal veneration that just followed. Sītā's retort is almost shockingly direct—'Only idiots are angry'[33]—and it sets the stage for another long speech on the same theme as her initial speech to the army commander at the very beginning. It even begins with a phrase ('Who is the son, who the brother, the father?')[34] that echoes one of the closing statements of that first speech ('Who is the son, who brother, father?').[35] It is a brilliant display of narrative bookending and it effectively highlights how the *Sītācarit* upholds the *satī* Sītā as an ideal of Jain conduct through which we are encouraged to understand the actions and decisions of the other characters of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story.

In this, the *Sītācarit* is a Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* that essentially is a *satī-kathā*. Rām, Lakṣmaṇ and Rāvaṇ's status as *śalākāpuruṣa*s is referenced, but never to any great length, and the stories of their former births and Rām and Lakṣmaṇ's lives after Sītā's renunciation and eventual death and ascension to divine status are all omitted. The *śalākāpuruṣa* superstructure is still there, but the *Sītācarit* clearly does not aim to instruct its audiences in the finer points of that structure. If anything, it presupposes that everyone already is familiar with it.[36] In its restructuring of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story as a subplot to be viewed through the lens of Sītā's forest exile, the *Sītācarit* is perhaps the clearest example of a *satī-kathā* that draws on a familiar structure to weave an innovative narrative.

The *Sītācarit* was followed by a wave of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s that exclusively told the story of Sītā's forest exile and fire ordeal, completely omitting the rest of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story. One such is the undated *Sītā pacīsī*,[37] a short undated, anonymous composition that appears in a nineteenth-century manuscript and is

32 *Jaga maiṃ aha moṭī nārī*; SC.2482.

33 *Krodha karai so mūḍha hai*; SC.2488.

34 *Kuṇa veṭau kuṇa bhāī vāpa*, SC.2489.

35 *Kūna veṭau ko bhāī vāpa*; SC.75.

36 Similarly, there are references to Śreṇika and Gautama discussing matters in the ongoing narrative, though the narrative framework of Śreṇika telling the story to Gautama is never formally introduced. Rāmcand Bālak clearly assumed that his audiences were familiar with other Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s.

37 *Sītā pacīsī*, manuscript, 1862, 3673/1, Apabhraṃśa Sāhitya Akādamī, Jaipur.

written in a Braj Bhāṣā bordering on modern Hindī.[38] A short cycle of songs, it sets the tone with its very first line—'Rām abandoned the faultless Sītā alone in the forest'[39]—and proceeds to give a narrative that is very similar to that of Sītā's forest exile and fire ordeal in the *Sītācarit*. Yet Nārad's story session with Lavaṇ and Aṅkuś is dropped and the focus turns exclusively to Sītā as a *satī*. As far as Genette's notion of the transfocalization goes, the *Sītā pacīsī* may be its ultimate example amongst the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s. Rām and Lakṣmaṇ are here merely supporting characters to the main drama, and Rāvaṇ little more than a shadow on a past horizon. Though it is without a doubt a *satī-kathā*, one might indeed question whether it really is a *Rāmāyaṇa*.

As Sītā's story as a *satī* here crystallizes, its ties with the rest of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *śalākāpuruṣa*s, though always implied, grow ever fainter. And so we reach the final wave of the *satī-kathā* strand of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, were the bond is severed entirely. Kelting[40] writes of the story of Añjanā, Hanumān's mother, that the further it 'gets from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the more it stresses her virtues as a satī'. And indeed, Añjanā the *satī*, Kelting shows, has now taken on a position in Jain popular storytelling practice where her roots within the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story are completely omitted. They are simply no longer relevant to her story. In a similar turn of events, I spoke with a practising Jain at the 20th Anniversary Jaina Studies Workshop at SOAS in 2018, who had heard Sītā's name many times in popular hymns listing the names of great Jain *satī*s, but had never considered that this was '*the* Sītā' of *Rāmāyaṇa* fame.

Fully detailing the afterlife of Sītā as a *satī* in modern Jain practice must be the task of future studies, and here we can only make a few attempts in that direction. One such is of course Danuta Stasik's chapter in the present volume on Tulsī's *Agni-parikṣā* and the controversy that followed in its wake. A much less visible modern Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* is the 2010 pamphlet *Sītā caritra*,[41] which I encountered in the library of the Vīr Sevā Mandir in Delhi. Unfortunately, no further information on the publication was available but that contained in the booklet itself. Its title page informs us that one thousand copies of this text were printed in Delhi on 1 April 2010, at the behest of Jaykumār Nīraj Jain, owner of

38 The Patan manuscript catalogue (Muni Jambūvijayajī, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Pāṭaṇa Jain Bhaṇḍāras*, vol. 3, Ahmedabad: Sharadaben Chimanbhai Educational Research Centre, 1991, p. 525) refers to several short works with titles such as *Sītā sajjhāy* and *Sītā satīnī sajjhāy*, the *sajjhāy* being a particularly popular format of *satī* praise song. Further research may reveal whether these titles bear similarities to the *Sītā pacīsī*.

39 *Ara niradosa jyānakī raghupati nai choḍī vana mai yekalī.*

40 *Heroic Wives*, p. 66.

41 Elācārya Vasunandī, *Sītā caritra*, Delhi: Nirgrantha Granthamālā, 2010.

Delhi Sweets. The pamphlet was printed at the 'holy occasion' of the first anniversary of Vasunandī Jī Munirāj's ascension to the position of 'First Teacher' (*elācārya*), one of the highest orders within the Digambara monkhood. It is also Elācārya Vasunandī who is credited as the 'editor' (*sampādak*) of the pamphlet's text.[42] The attribution as 'editor', combined with the fact that the text is not listed amongst Elācārya Vasunandī's authored works on his own webpages, indicate that the text may be gathered from lectures and storytelling sessions given by the Elācārya. This potentially differentiates the *Sītā caritra* from Tulsī Ācārya's *Agni-parīkṣā*, in that it seemingly has a more oral origins than the latter. Unlike the *Agni-parīkṣā*'s relatively elaborate structure with eight sections, including a closing *praśasti* chapter, and its many instances of verse, Elācārya's *Sītā caritra* is a short text of 41 pages, consisting of 19 brief prose sections interspersed with only a few songs and verses.[43]

The text itself gives a succinct Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* that clearly belongs to the *satī-kathā* branch. Like the anonymous *Mahākāvya Sītācaritra*, Elācārya's begins by recounting the birth of Sītā and Bhāmaṇḍala in Mithilā, entirely skipping the stories of Bhāmaṇḍala's former births. The entirety of the narrative from Rām, Lakṣmaṇ, and Sītā's setting out from Ayodhyā up to and including their victorious return is covered in seven brief sections, where the narrative elements are mostly given very cursorily. For instance, Rāvaṇ's setting out for his final battle and his death at the hands of Lakṣmaṇ all takes place in one brief paragraph. Throughout, the focus is on dialogue over action, with Rāvaṇ and Sītā's conversation in the *vimāna* after her kidnapping stretching over several pages. As is by now familiar from other *satī-kathā*s, the concluding scenes of Sītā's forest exile and fire ordeal are given more space, and the exiled Sītā is even called '*satī* Sītā'. And like in Bālak's *Sītācarit*, it is here Sītā, not Rām, who suggests that she should undergo a fire ordeal. As the ordeal passes successfully, the pamphlet ends with Sītā rejecting Rām's entreaties and taking up renunciation. As in other *satī-kathā*s, we learn no more of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ's fates.

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42 Elācārya Vasunandi has a relatively active website 'Vasunandiji Blogspot' (*Vasunandiji Blogspot* (blog), accessed 24.08.2018, http://vasunandiji.blogspot.com/), yet little information is available apart from basic biographical data. Vasunandī was born in 1967 with the name Dinesh Jain in Dhaulpur, Rajasthan, and renunciated in 1979. His ascension to Elācārya status seems to have been a big public event, taking place in Delhi's Green Park. In 2015, five years after the publication of the *Sītā caritra*, he attained the ultimate *ācārya*-title. As noted above, the website's list of his many works does not include the *Sītā caritra*.

43 These include a song by Nyāmat Siṃh, a Jain poet and playwright of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Very little information is available on him. The other song is a brief, uncredited *caupāī* in Hindī.

Through both the *Agni Parīkṣā* and the 2010 pamphlet *Sītā caritra* runs a centuries-long current of *satī-kathā* storytelling, where Rām, Lakṣmaṇ and Rāvaṇ are abandoned to the margins of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* story while Sītā becomes its natural centre. As a final testament to this tradition, we may briefly consider a mural that can be found on the wall of a study alcove in the Baṛā Terā-panthiyā temple of Jaipur's Old City, which is deemed by its trustees to be one of Jaipur's oldest Jain temples. The mural was painted in 1957 by the artist Gopīrām, with additions by Mainābāī Sonī in 1975 and 1981, seems to have been commissioned by a group of women that met in the temple on Mondays. The mural's marginal images give a panorama of scenes from the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*, including Rām returning victorious from Laṅkā and the exiled Rām, Lakṣmaṇ and Sītā's adventures in the forest. The mural's two main images, however, are of Sītā before and after her ordeal by fire, divided by a *dohā* describing the event. In the uppermost image, portraying Sītā's ultimate triumph as a royal throne has replaced the bed of fire, Sītā sits majestically at the mural's centre. As a whole, the mural is a striking encapsulation of the *satī-kathā*s shift of narrative gravity, away from the all-important superstructure of the *śalākāpuruṣa*s towards the definite centring of Sītā, the *satī*, at the story's core.

4. Conclusion

The brief survey of the *satī-kathā* strand of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s that I have given here is of course quite rudimentary. Research archives and, especially, temple libraries hold vast amounts of material that can contribute towards a better delineated and more precise understanding of their historical rise and dynamic evolution. What I would like to underline here, at this tentative stage, is again that we must be alert to the ways the processes of narrative rearrangement at work in these compositions, with their subtle shifts of emphasis, focus, and perspective, can amount to genuinely novel narratives. These *satī-kathā*s are firmly Jain and they are for the most part certainly full-fledged *Rāmāyaṇa*s, but in their act of drawing on a familiar superstructure to craft transfocalized, innovative narratives they are also distinct from the Purāṇic branch of Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s and they should be recognized as such. I suggest, as a step towards acknowledging this distinctive quality of the *satī-kathā*s, that when we think of the 'many *Rāmāyaṇa*s' perspective, we also spare a thought for the 'many Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s'.

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Danuta Stasik

On Fire Ordeal: Who and Why? Ācārya Tulsī's *Agni-parīkṣā* or a Modern Jain Telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

1. Contextualizing *Agni-parīkṣā*

Ācārya Tulsī (1914–1997) was one of the most prominent modern Jain teachers and religious leaders, a figure of pan-Indian stature reaching far beyond the limits of his community. In the years 1936–1994, he served as the ninth Ācārya of the Śvetāmbara Terāpanth[1] and in 1949, he initiated the Anuvrat Movement, or the movement of 'little/partial vows' (*aṇuvrata*) for the Jain laity as a moderate version of the five great vows (*mahāvrata*) of Jain ascetics: nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), truth (*satya*), abstention from stealing (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacarya*), and renunciation of all possessions (*aparigraha*). He was also instrumental in establishing, in 1991, the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute in Ladnun (Rajasthan), his birthplace.[2]

1 More on the history, doctrine and practice of Terāpanth order see Peter Flügel, *Askese und Devotion. Das rituelle System der Terāpanth Śvetāmbara Jaina*, Alt-und Neu-Indische Studien, vol. 56.1–2, ed. Albrecht Wezler and Lambert Schmithausen, Dettelbach: J.H. Röll, 2018 (a copy by courtesy of the author), and esp. on Tulsī: vol. 1, pp. 228–232, 927.

2 The Jain Vishva Bharati Institute (now University) evolved from the Shiksha Kendra —founded in 1971—a study centre for Terāpanth mendicants that in 1977 was integrated into the Jain Vishva Bharati (JVB), also founded in 1971. In 1991, it was accorded the status of a 'Deemed to be University'. In 2006, its name was changed to Jain Vishva Bharati University. Concentrating on the academic education of the members of the Terāpanth order, it is also open for non-Terāpanthīs and non-Jains. Peter Flügel, 'The Codes of Conduct of the Terāpanth Samaṇ Order', *South Asia Research*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2003, p. 8; http://www.jvbi.ac.in/ (accessed 14.04.2018) and http://www.jvbharati.org/activities/education/jvbuniversity/ (accessed 7.07.2018).

Tulsī is the author of many works not only on the doctrine and practice of Jainism but also of literary texts,[3] one of which is his *Agni-parīkṣā* (1961)[4], a poem written in Hindi that focuses on Sītā and events related to her banishment by Rām. It is based on the tradition of Vimalasūri's *Paümacariya*,[5] written in Jain Māhārāṣṭrī Prakrit (?478 AD[6]). This tradition was continued by later Jain authors, with different narrative and/or doctrinal alterations, in Sanskrit, e.g. by Raviṣeṇa (7th century) and Hemacandra (12th century), in Apabhraṃśa by Svayambhūdeva (8th century) and in Rajasthani Hindi by Keśrāj (17th century) in his *Rām-yaśo-rasāyan-rās* that has proven very popular in Sthānakavāsī and Terāpanthī Jain communities and is said to have wielded a major influence on Tulsī.[7]

The pedigree of Tulsī's poem should also be sought in Jain narratives about the lives of outstanding characters. Sherry Fohr, in her book on Jainism[8], points to the popularity of these narratives, noting that they help explicate 'some basic Jain values, beliefs, and practices through its narrative tradition. (…) Narratives about those who are considered heroic and/or spiritually accomplished often provide models for culturally and religiously successful action in the world', and she further adds that 'Jainism is unusual in South Asia [as] the only religion in which there is an entire genre of narratives that provides paradigms of ideal religiosity for both laywomen and nuns'.[9]

Sītā occupies a special place in Jain narratives such as *kathā*s or *caritra*s. This is consistent with the tradition of *satī*s, or virtuous women empowered with miraculous might stemming from their chastity, where Sītā is commonly recog-

3 Many of them are available from the online library of the JVBI.

4 Ācārya Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, ed. by Sāgarmal and Mahendrakumār 'Pratham', Dillī: Ātmārām eṇḍ Sans, 1961.

5 Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 12.

6 *Paümacariya*'s dates range from the first to the fifth centuries AD; see John E. Cort, *Framing the Jina: Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 50.

7 Śivāśaṅkar Trivedī, *Ācārya Śrī Tulsī kṛt 'Agni-parīkṣā' kī agni-parīkṣā*, Sardārśahar: Śivāśaṅkar Trivedī, Sṛjan-Cetnā, 1970, p. 42. For *Rām-yaśo-rasāyan-rās s*ee e.g. Jyoti Prasad Jain (ed.), *Muni Keśrāj kṛt sacitr Rām-yaśo-rasāyan-rās jain Rāmāyaṇ/The Illustrated Manuscript of Jaina Ramayana*, Arrah: Sree Dev Kumar Jain Oriental Research Institute, [1990].

8 Sherry Fohr, *Jainism. A Guide for the Perplexed*, London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

9 Fohr, *Jainism*, p. 2.

nized as one of the sixteen *mahāsatī*s ('great virtuous women')[10]. Some of these *satī*-related stories fall within well-studied texts of 'Jain Universal Histories', such as Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* devoting its considerable part to *mahāsatī* Sītā, as well as within independent *satī*-narratives, most of which have yet to be studied or reconsidered, such as the anonymous Sanskrit *mahākāvya Sītācaritra* (n.d.), Bhuvanatuṅgasūri's *Sīyacariya* in Prakrit (? 14th century?, before the end of the 16th century), Samaysundar's Maru-Gurjar *Sītārāmcaupāī* (1631), or the mid-seventeenth-century Braj Bhāṣa *Sītācarit* by Rāmcand Bālak (1657).[11]

The above-mentioned texts had a more or less direct bearing on Tulsī's *Agni-parīkṣā* that published in book form by a well-known Delhi publisher (Atmaram and Sons) was in fact intended to reach an audience much larger than the Jain community. It is also worth mentioning here that the Jain *satī*-narratives are still told by Jain renouncers in sermons to laypeople,[12] which—as we shall see further in this paper—also fell into the lot of *Agni-parīkṣā*, a modern poem and not a traditional *satī*-narrative.

Concluding this short introduction, we can say that *Agni-parīkṣā* belongs to this thriving current of pan-Indian *Rāmāyaṇa* narratives in which Sītā is not only given special importance but also has a fully fledged narrative subjectivity and acts in her own right as the main character. In this context, it seems noteworthy that especially in the later phase of the early modern period, outside the Jain lore, works of this kind have become of special significance in Mithilā, the birthplace of Sītā-Maithilī, in the form of *Sītāyān*s exemplified by such works as the eight-

10 The lives and deeds of *mahsatī*s are recorded both in Jain canonical and non-canonical literature which documents their transition from pious laywomen to nuns. For more see Manisha Sethi, 'Chastity and Desire: Representing Women in Jainism', *South Asian History and Culture* 2009, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 45. Nalini Balbir lists the following sixteen *mahsatīs*: Brāhmī, Sundarī, Candanbālā, Rājīmatī, Draupadī, Kausalyā, Mṛgāvatī, Sulasā, Sītā, Damayantī, Śivādevī, Kuntī, Subhādrā, Celanā, Prabhāvatī, Padmāvatī; eadem, 'Women in Jainism in India', in *Women in Indian Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 82; cf. M. Whitney Kelting, 'Thinking Collectively about Jain Satīs: The Uses of Jain Satī Name Lists', in *Studies in Jaina History and Culture. Disputes and Dialogues*, Routledge, ed. Peter Flügel, London-New York 2006, esp. pp. 181, 191–192 and Fohr, *Jainism*, p. 56. The most venerated of them is Candanbālā, who was ordained by Mahāvīra as the first Jain nun.

11 For the dates of these works and more on Sītā-related *kathā*s or *caritra*s see Adrian Plau, 'The Deeds of Sītā. A Critical Edition and Literary Contextual Analysis of the *Sītācarit* by Rāmcand Bālak', PhD Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2018, eg. pp. 10, 29, 42, 85–87. See also his paper 'Vernacular Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s as *Satī-Kathā*s: Familiar Structure, Innovative Narrative' in this volume (p. 177–193).

12 Fohr, *Jainism*, p. 56.

eenth-century Maithilī poem by Rāmpriyāśaraṇ[13] a *mahant* from Janakpur, or *Sītāyān* by Vaidyanāth Mallik 'Vidhu'—an entirely contemporary epic, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976.[14]

In the discussion of Tulsī's *Agni-parīkṣā* that is based on the tradition of Vimalasūri, it is essential that one is aware of the most specific features of this tradition as they translate into the narrative and the functions of its protagonists. The main characters here are: Padma, or Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa. They represent one of the nine triadic configurations of *baladevas—vāsudevas—prativāsudeva*s who appear in each time cycle and belong to the group of 63 great illustrious men (*triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣa*). Padma-Rāma is the eighth *baladeva*, Lakṣmaṇa—the eighth *vāsudeva*, and Rāvaṇa—the eighth *prativāsudeva*. The actual opponents are Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa—Rāvaṇa dies at the hands of Lakṣmaṇa. After Lakṣmaṇa's death, Rāma becomes a Jain monk, attains perfect knowledge and later receives liberation, becoming a *siddha puruṣa*. Lakṣmaṇa, before he can be liberated, has to go to hell (the fourth one) as killing Rāvaṇa meant renouncing *ahiṃsā*. Rāvaṇa suffered the same fate as Lakṣmaṇa, although he went to the third hell, as he could not control his passion for Sītā, someone else's wife. They are ethically and narratively both doomed to each other in consecutive births but finally achieve liberation. From the theological and ethical point of view, Rāma is the most important in this triad—it is only he who, as a model of Jain *dharma*, achieves liberation immediately after death, while Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa must wait with liberation until their next birth, having broken the laws of *dharma*. Sītā, in turn, becomes a Jain nun and devotes herself to terrible mortifications after which she is reborn in the twelfth, of sixteen, heaven (*devlok*). Significantly, it is her power (of chastity) that helps Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa achieve liberation.[15]

13 Rāmpriyāśaraṇ, *Śrī Sītāyāṇ*, Janakpur: Janakpur: Udyog Vāṇijya Saṅgh, 1994, pp. iv–v.

14 Vaidyanāth Mallik 'Vidhu', *Sītāyān: mahākāvya (maithili sāhitya kā utkṛṣṭ granth)*, Rājanagar: Sītāyān Prakāśan, 2031 (1974); Mohan Lal (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: Volume 5—Sasay to Zorgot*, Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992, pp. 4114–4115. There is a number of other works focused on Sītā in different languages which could be mentioned here, such as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Sitayana: Epic of the Earth-Born in English* (Madras: Samata, 1987) or more recent Vayu Naidu's *Sītā's Ascent* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012), both in English.

15 Cf. V.M. Kulkarni, 'Jain Rāmāyaṇas and Their Source', in *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, ed. Raghavan, Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980, pp. 226–241; V.M. Kulkarni, *The Story of Rāma in Jain Literature as Presented by the Śvetāmbara and Digambara Poets in the Prakrit, Sanskrit and Apabhraṁśa Languages*, Ahmedabad: Saraswati Pustak Bhandar, 1990; K.R. Chandra, *A Critical Study of Paumacariyaṁ*, Vaishali: Research Institute

This role of Sītā draws our attention to the fact that the Jainism of the Śvetāmbara denomination came—increasingly over time—to consider women as independent subjects on the spiritual path. Although they stand lower in the community hierarchy, they have a chance to renounce their secular life and attain liberation. Śvetāmbaras, unlike Digambaras, maintain that the nineteenth *tīrthaṅkara*, Māllīnātha, was a woman.[16] It is observed by scholars that, apparently, nudity as a fundamental concept associated with the ascetic Digambara path added to the non-subjective status of nuns in their community and deprived them of the possibility of liberation, which is possible only in the next incarnation, if they are reborn a man. Interestingly, in terms of numbers women dominate Jain monastic communities.[17]

2. *Agni-parīkṣā*: An Overview

Agni-parīkṣā was composed in 1960 during *cāturmās*[18] in Rajnagar, in Rajasthan, in an aftermath of *cāturmās* spent in Calcutta and a long walk back to Rajasthan. Tulsī would work on the poem until late at night after the evening prayers. He was assisted by two monks—one of them (Sāgarmal), thanks to his ability to write in the dark, noted down the poem, and the other one (Sohanlāl Seṭhiyā) supported Tulsī with his excellent memory.[19]

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of Prakrit, Jainology and Ahimsa, 1970, pp. 252–265; Eva De Clercq, 'Jain Rāmāyaṇas', http://www.jainpedia.org/themes/principles/sacred-writings/other-writings/jain-ramayanas.html (accessed 8.04.2018) and http://nileshpatni.blogspot.com/2017_05_09_archive.html (accessed 27.06.2017).

16 Flügel, *Askese und Devotion*, vol. 56.2, pp. 426–427 and Cort, *Framing the Jina*, p. 289, note 5.

17 For numbers see Flügel, *Studies in Jaina History and Culture*, chapter 'Demographic Trends in Jaina Monasticism', pp. 312–398, esp. tables on pp. 322–323 and Balbir, p. 88.

18 *Cāturmās*—'four months' during rainy season when Jains fast, observe austerities, take different vows, e.g. of silence or of abstaining from favourite items and/or activities, listen to religious sermons etc. It begins on the eleventh day of the light half of the month of *āṣāṛh*, known as *śayanī ekādaśi* (e.g. in 2018, it fell on 23 July), and ends on the eleventh day of the light half of the month of *kārttik* (in 2018, *prabodhinī ekādaśi* fell on 19 November). For itinerant monks—and as Fohr notes (*Jainism*, p. 27) 'the tradition of itinerancy (…) is still preserved today from earlier periods of Jainism'—*cāturmās* means the four-month rainy season retreat, when they have to stay the entire period in one place; they devote a lot of time to teaching and giving sermons not only to the lay Jain community but also to the local public. It is said that during his lifetime Ācārya Tulsī covered over 70,000 km, walking on foot.

19 Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 17 and Lalwani, p. 127.

The immediate reason behind writing the poem, of which we learn from its second 1972 edition,[20] were Tulsī's many years of attempts to understand how mere gossip, the words of one person, a washerman (*dhobī*), might have caused Rām, the paragon of equanimity (*samatva*), to banish *mahāsatī* Sītā. In the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s, Tulsī found the answer that it must have been a large conspiracy, the source of which was *antaḥpur* in Rām's palace, or the female apartments and those who lived there.

The poem was first published in 1961 with an introduction written by the editor Mahendra Kumar 'Pratham', one of the two editors (*sampādak*) of the poem; the other editor was the above-mentioned *muni* Sāgarmal (NB: there was also an editor-in-chief (*prabandh sampādak*) of this version—Sohanlāl Bāfṇā). Mahendra Kumar 'Pratham' devotes some fifteen pages to different versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and briefly discusses the differences between tellings of the mainstream Hindu tradition, on the one hand, and Jain (as well as Buddhist) tellings, on the other hand, underlining that Tulsī's poem is derived from and based on the tradition of Vimalasūri's *Paümacariya*. The editor also draws the attention of the potential poem's audience to Maithilīśaraṇ Gupta's *Sāket*[21] as a source of narrative inspiration, pointing up to the fact that *Agni-parīkṣā* begins exactly where *Sāket* ends—with Rām's return to Ayodhyā[22] as well as to the closeness of both works with regard to their structure and style of language. It is worth noting here that this introduction is missing from the second edition of the poem published in 1972.[23]

Agni-parīkṣā[24] is preceded with a blessing stanza (*maṅgalācaraṇ*) in which Rām is addressed as a Jain saint, 'an omniscient being (…) "worthy of worship"'[25] (*arhan*): 'Hail, auspicious, supreme lord, *arhan Ātmārām!*'.[26] The titles of the following eight cantos of the poem clearly indicate their narrative content.

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20 Ācārya Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, Cūrū: Ādarś Sāhitya Saṅgh, 1972, p. 6.

21 For more on the composition of this prominent Hindi poem, published in1932, see Danuta Stasik, *The Infinite Story. The Past and Present of the Rāmāyaṇas in Hindi*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2009, pp. 176–188.

22 *Śrī Maithilīśaraṇ Gupta kā mahākāvya 'Sāket' Ayodhyāgaman ke prasaṅg par pūrṇ hotā hai aur Ācārya Tulsī kā yah pratīt kāvya 'Agni-parīkṣā' isī prasaṅg se ārambh hotā hai*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, pp. 12–13.

23 In this edition, unlike in the first one, there is also no mention of the editors.

24 All references in this section are to the 1961 version of the poem.

25 See e.g. the entry *arhat* in *Jainpedia*'s 'Glossary': http://www.jainpedia.org/resources/glossary/contaggedpage/2.html (accessed 7.07.2018).

26 *jay maṅgalmay param prabhu, / arhan Ātmārām*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 2. This may also be read as referring to the name of the founder of this publishing house.

The first canto, *Śubhāgaman* (‘Welcome’, pp. 3–18), opens after the exiles, Rām, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇ, return to Ayodhyā from Laṅkā. It depicts their welcome by the entire population of the city and ends with installing Rām as King of Ayodhyā.

The second canto, *Ṣadyantr* (‘Conspiracy’, pp. 19–43), narrates the plot conceived by Sītā’s co-wives (*paṭrāniyā̃*).[27] Disappointed by the fact that Rām has lost his head for her completely, especially after she became pregnant, they aim to make Rām banish Sītā and ask her to draw a picture of Rāvaṇ. At first, she refuses to do so and says that she does not know what Rāvaṇ looks like as in his presence her eyes were always downcast (which, of course, is self-evident proof of Sītā’s virtue as a woman). Finally, she yields to her co-wives’ repeated requests and draws a picture of Rāvaṇ’s feet that, as it soon proves, is used instrumentally against her. Jealous women also spread scandalous rumours against Sītā, basing them on the fact that she was alone in Laṅkā for six months, and Rāvaṇa had always felt a great passion for her.

The third canto, *Parityāg* (‘Abandonment’, pp. 44–68), narrates how helpless Sītā, at the order of Rām, is left in a terrifying forest by Kṛtānmukh, a commander in Rām’s army. Filled with indignation and confused as to why Rām has treated her thus, all that she really wants, quite paradoxically, is that Kṛtānmukh conveys to Rām, Lakṣmaṇ and her co-wives a message with good wishes.

In the fourth canto, *Anutāp* (‘Torment’, pp. 69–96), Sītā finds shelter in Puṇḍarīkpur ruled by King Vajrajaṅgha. She settles in a hut and, practically speaking, functions there like a Jain nun in an *aṇuvratī* community and is known to everyone merely as ‘Sister’ (*bahanjī*). When Kṛtānmukh comes back to Ayodhyā and conveys Sītā’s message to Rām, he realizes with utter clarity what a mistake he has made in forsaking Sītā. He rushes to the forest to bring her back but unable to find her comes back to Ayodhyā (called Sāket this time), all the while regretting his deed. Nothing pleases him; he stops seeing his queens who, realizing to what a wretched state their actions have brought their husband, regret them sincerely.

The fifth canto, *Pratiśodh* (‘Retaliation’, pp. 97–120), narrates the life of Sītā’s sons, Lav and Aṅkuś—their birth, upbringing and education. When the time of their marriage comes, they learn from *ṛsi* Nārad about their lineage, who their father is and that he abandoned Sītā on false accusations. (NB. In this part of the poem, Nārad functions on a principle similar to *deus ex machina*—his sudden appearance is an evident narrative device in the poem, resulting in more or less unexpected twists in the course of action.) Once they get to know this, they

27 This is in compliance with the tradition of the Jain *Rāmāyaṇa*s.

vow to avenge their mother, and with this aim they get ready to proceed to Ayodhyā. Sītā tries to prevent her sons from going there but to no avail.

The ensuing fierce combat of Lav and Aṅkuś with Rām and Lakṣmaṇ is described in the sixth canto, *Milan* ('Meeting', pp. 121–150). The intervention of Nārad puts an end to it. The father and his sons are publicly reconciled.

The narrative reaches its zenith in the seventh canto, *Agni-parīkṣā* ('Ordeal by Fire', pp. 151–174), in which Rām sends Hanumān to bring Sītā back to Ayodhyā. At first, she refuses but then changes her mind, expressing her wish to undergo *agni-parīkṣā.* She thus wants to prove her purity as well as to be cleared of her ill repute.

After Sītā enters fire, it turns into water which forces the panicking people to praise her as Mahāsatī. The water rises and floods everything around, which frightens everyone even more. People become aware of the fact that this is a direct result of their wrongdoing—inventing and circulating rumours about Sītā, the one who is Mahāsatī. Greatly distressed, they pray to Sītā for forgiveness:

> Om, hail Mother Sītā!
> There is no saviour but you, oh Mother of the World!
> Om, hail Mother Sītā![28]

Sītā is moved by the people's prayer and also sees how terrified they are—gesturing with both her hands, she makes the water start to recede. The situation returns to normal. Her sons, Rām and other family members pay Sītā due respect.

The last canto, *Praśasti* ('Eulogy', pp. 175–180), at first glance seems to have no direct relation to the poem's narrative. In fact, it can be seen as *Agni-parīkṣā*'s metatext helping its reader to understand strategies applied in the poem that enhance how its meaning can be construed. There it is stated that although there are many versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Indian culture speaks through all of them and opens 'the knots of cognizance' (*jñān-granthiyā̃*). Many of these tellings underline Sītā's valour (*Sītā kā śaurya*) that has always been a positive challenge for women and their awakening.[29] This canto also refers to the immediate circumstances of the poem's creation and the names of persons who are seen as a source of inspiration for the poet (this also includes Tulsī's mother). An important stimulus for writing down a telling earlier conceived by Tulsī was the bicen-

28 *oṃ jay Sītā Mātā, / tere binā na koī Jagadambe! trātā. / oṃ jay Sītā Mātā*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 170.

29 *vāstav mẽ Bhārat kī saṃskr̥ti / hai Rāmāyaṇ mẽ bol rahī, / apne yug ke saṃvādõ se / vah jñān-granthiyā̃ khol rahī. // jis mẽ Sītā kā śaurya bharā, / jīvan detā sandeś nayā, / ādeś nayā, upadeś nayā, nārī-jāgr̥ti unmeṣ nayā*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 177.

tenary of the Terāpanth order that fell on 26 June 1960. And the very symbolic date of its completion on 15 August 1960, or the Indian Independence Day, is followed by well-wishing verses for ruling class(es). One may read these verses as an expression of the immersion of *Agni-parīkṣā* in an entirely present-day reality but in fact, by means of a double entendre used here, the poem's audience is also immersed in the Jain context—via the multiple use of the word *vardhamān* ('increasing, growing; prosperous'), Mahāvīra—born as Vardhamāna, the great reviver of the Jain tradition and a paragon of prosperous kingship—is evoked.[30]

3. From a Work of Poetry to 1970 Riots in Raipur: Causes and Aftermath

In 1970, nine years after the publication of *Agni-parīkṣā*, Ācārya Tulsī was spending *cāturmās* in Raipur, in the-then state of Madhya Pradeś. In his review article on *Agni-parīkṣā*, K.C. Lalwani notes that after all those years after publication, the poem:

> became a victim of fanatical agitation and political action (…). If during these years the Sanatanist orthodoxy could survive despite the work, it would have remained equally unscathed even in future. But this was not going to be and the Sanatanist orthodoxy suddenly woke up. (…) behind this Sanatanist uproar there is the hidden hand of some of the leading lights of the Jaina order who never viewed the Acarya's reformist mission with sympathy and who may have provided the necessary fuel to ignite the fire'.[31]

In view of the scarcity of material available on this subject, I have been unable to determine whom Lalwani meant as 'the leading lights of the Jaina order'. At least one source mentions a religious leader who acted against Tulsī and his poem[32]; Peter Flügel refers to 'the Śaṅkarācārya sect and the "Hindu government"'.[33] We also learn from Lalwani's review that when the situation had

30 *vardhamān śāsan mudit vardhamān pariṇām. / vardhamān sāhitya hai vardhamān sab kām*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 180. I would like to thank Eva de Clercq for drawing my attention to the double entendre used in these verses.

31 K.C. Lalwani, 'Agni-pariksa (a review article)', *Jain Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1971, p. 134. I express my gratitude to Peter Flügel for drawing my attention to this review.

32 It is said that this leader presented some passages from the book to the public in Raipur, 'claiming that the Acharya had insulted Sita'; http://aryashaadi.com/svetambar/default.aspx (accessed 3.06.2018).

33 Flügel, *Askese und Devotion*, vol. 56.2, pp. 721, cf. also p. 927.

already unfolded, Ācārya Tulsī was persuaded 'to give a sermon on his version of the Rama-story which he did in good faith on August 16, 1970'.[34] Public opinion was not convinced by his narrative and fell prey to intensified agitation against *Agni-parīkṣā* (and thus against Tulsī?). All this resulted in the violent communal disturbance that broke out in Raipur on 16 August; the tent in which Tulsī was giving his sermons was burnt down and the town left at the mercy of the rioters.[35] The troubles continued until 8 November 1970 when Ācārya Tulsī realized that there was not much he could do to help calm the situation but leave Raipur, which he did despite the fact that Jain monks are not allowed to travel during *cāturmās*.

The book itself, or rather all its copies, were to be confiscated by the Government of Madhya Pradesh by the order of the State Government. Particular allegations were made against the verses on pages 29, 33, 38, 39, 43, 44 and 86 of the poem. A relevant section of the order in the case 'Ramlal Puri[36] vs State of Madhya Pradesh', examined by the Madhya Pradesh High Court in 1970, says:

> Bhopal the 28th September, 1970, No. 4581–6014-I-K-70, whereas it appears to the State Government that couplets finding place on pages 29, 33, 38, 39, 43, 44 and 86 of the book named 'Agni Pariksha' written by Shri Acharya Tulsi and published by Atmaram and Sons Delhi, Jullunder, Jaipur, Meerut, Chandigarh are grossly offensive and provocative and contain matters which are deliberately and maliciously intended to outrage the religious feelings of Sanathani Hindus by insulting the religion and religious beliefs of the said class and the publication of such matter is punishable under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (45 of 1860).
> Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 99-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (5 of 1898), the State Government hereby declares every copy of the said book 'Agni Pariksha' to be forfeited to the Government of Madhya Pradesh.[37]

From this order we also learn that the State of Madhya Pradesh justified its action by stating:

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34 Lalwani, 'Agni-pariksa' p. 134.

35 Lalwani, 'Agni-pariksa', pp. 134–135 and Nirmal Baid, 'Life of a Legend: Acharya Tulsi', *Jaina Studies: Centre of Jaina Studies Newsletter*, March 2015, issue 10, p. 44, with two photos related to the Raipur riots.

36 Ramlal Puri of Atmaram and Sons, the publisher of the first edition of *Agni-parīkṣā* in 1961.

37 Section 3 of the order of Madhya Pradesh High Court 'Ramlal Puri vs State of Madhya Pradesh on 24 December, 1970'; http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1645758/ (accessed 27.09.2017).

> 6. '(…) For generations, in the hearts of the Hindus, Shri Ram and his consort Sita, were recognised as incarnation of Vishnu and Lakshmi. In matters of filial, fraternal and conjugal love, affection and devotion and above all in the discharge of the duties as a Ruler, prepared to sacrifice any and every personal pleasure, he set an ideal—Generations have deified him and his consort'.

To which Madhya Pradesh High Court responds:

> 7. The said book 'Agni Pareeksha' does not evidently treat Shri Ram and Sita as incarnation of Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, but describes Shri Ram as a 'Siddha Punish,' [sic DS] which means, he was a man who had attained perfection and ultimate Nirvan. Similarly, Sita is described not as incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, but as one of the 16 Maha Satis, who proved her virtues as an ideal woman by going through the ordeal of putting herself into fire.

In 1972, in the aftermath of all these events, a slightly modified, the already-mentioned version of *Agni-parīkṣā* was published by a different publisher—Ādarś Sāhitya Saṅgh from Churu in Rajasthan.

4. *Agni-parīkṣā:* What Was Objectionable?

Let us now scrutinize these verses of *Agni-parīkṣā* that were indicated as offensive by the State of Madhya Pradesh and compare them with the relevant portions of the 1972 version.

4.1. Page 29/1961

The passage on page 29 focuses on the beginnings of the scheming of Sītā's co-wives:

> While returning from a meeting,
> Raghuvar instinctively cast a look
> At a picture put on the pedestal
> Together with *pūjā* accessories.
> 'Feet resembling Rāvaṇ's feet here?'
> Surprised Ārya began to question [the queens].
> 'How can we know? This is [for] the daily rite
> Of [our] master's beloved chief queen'.

‘Don’t talk nonsense!’,
The Lord of Ayodhyā simply ignored them and departed quickly.[38]

The rest of the verses on page 29 develop the thread of conspiracy against Sītā—the queens with the help of their servants spread the gossip that she worships Rāvaṇ’s feet. What is interesting, the whole content of this page has been left exactly the same in the 1972 version.[39]

4.2. Page 33/1961

The State of Madhya Pradesh also indicated as objectionable a passage found on page 33 in which the results of the next stage of the conspiracy against Sītā are dealt with.

While in the women’s quarters respect [for her] has grown,
In the houses [of Ayodhyā] this so-called *Mahāsatī* has earned ill repute.

For six months continuously, she lived all alone in Laṅkā,
How can one believe in her unshakable purity?
The heart of Daśmukh had always been drawn to her,
And he wanted to fulfil his desire being gentle and harsh.[40]

Sītā, derisively referred to as the ‘so-called *Mahāsatī*’, and furthermore her reputation are put to a severe test by Rāvaṇ’s scandalous attitude towards her in the original poem. The 1972 version, while still referring to people’s suspicion, does not leave the least doubt about her flawless nature and determined attitude towards Rāvaṇ.

1972
While in the women’s quarters respect [for her] has grown,
In the houses [of Ayodhyā] doubt surrounds this Mahāsatī, Janak’s daughter.

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38 *rakkhā vah citr pīṭhikā par / pūjā sāmagrī sāth-sāth, / saṃsad se āte Raghuvar kā / ho gayā sahaj hī dṛṣṭipāt, / Rāvaṇ ke se ye pair yahā̃ / vismit ho, baiṭhe pūch ārya. / ‘ham kyā jāne’ yah to Prabhu kī / priy paṭrānī kā nitya kārya. / kyõ kartī ho tum sabhī vyarth, anargal bāt. / sahaj upekṣā kar cale tvarit Ayodhyānāth*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 29.

39 Cf. Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1972, pp. 26–27.

40 *sarvādhik sammān baṛhayā apne antaḥpur mẽ. / tathākathit us mahāsatī kā apayaś hai ghar-ghar mẽ. / Laṅkā mẽ ekākinī rahī satat chaḥ mās. / uske aḍig satītva par kaise ho viśvās. / ākarṣit Daśmukh hṛday rahā sadā us or. / banā vāsnā-pūrti ko, komal aur kaṭhor*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 33.

Sītā suffered a lot, being all alone in Laṅkā
But her virtuous nature has remained flawless.
The heart of Daśmukh has always been drawn to her
But Jānakī's heart has remained unshaken and hard.[41]

4.3. Pages 38–39/1961

The verses on pages 38–39 describe the growing despair of Rām, who roams around the streets of Ayodhyā and on each street corner hears about sinful Sītā and the downfall of morality in the royal house. Close reading of this section reveals that the objectionable pages belong to a much longer passage covering pages 37 to 41 that offers an image of what can be called *bhraṣṭ rām-rājya*, or the corrupt Rām's reign.

Wherever Rām goes, he overhears people talking ill of him and Sītā, of their disgrace and the loss of respect by the family of Raghu.

Alas! The delightful Solar Dynasty is being disgraced.
The ornament of the Raghu family has become a slave of the depraved one.
He is infatuated with her day and night,
With her who enjoyed herself in Lanka for six long months.[42]

Rām goes on and comes across mothers concerned about maintaining proper behaviour in their families and thus their dignity (*kul-maryādā*); they call Sītā 'fallen' (*patitā*) and 'promiscuous (principal) queen' (*kulṭā paṭrānī*).[43] Then he chances upon a group of the elders (*vṛddhjan*) who criticize Sītā's lack of restraint, ignorance of what propriety and family honour are,[44] and thus infer that she must have behaved indecently in the presence of Rāvaṇ.[45] The elders are especially exasperated by the fact that under Rām's rule, no one listens to those who, thanks to their life experience, know what the bounds of propriety (*mar-*

41 *sarvādhik sammān baṛhāyā apne antaḥpur mẽ. / janak-sutā us mahāsatī ke prati śaṅkā ghar-ghar mẽ. / Laṅkā mẽ ekākinī, sahe bahut santāp. / lekin sītā kā rahā, śīl amal niṣpāp. / ākarṣit Daśmukh hṛday, rahā sadā us or. / kintu Jānakī kā hṛday, avical aur kaṭhor*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1972, p. 30–31.

42 *hāy! kalaṅkit ho rahā hai sūryavaṃś abhirām. / durācāriṇī ke bane haĩ Raghukul-tilak ġulām. / usmẽ hī āsakt ve rahte haĩ āṭhõ yām. / jisne Laṅkā mẽ kiyā cha-cha māsik ārām*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, pp. 37–38.

43 Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 38.

44 *yõ ucchṛṅkhal rahne vālī, maryādā kyā jāne? / kul kī ān aur ghar kī ujjvaltā kyā pahcāne?*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, 39.

45 *Rāvaṇ ke sāth rahā niścit uskā anucit vyavahār*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961.

yādā) are. They see this situation as a result of the *kaliyug* influence. Finally, Rām encounters rebellious youths (*yuvak*) critical of his unjust rule, ready to defend justice in their motherland (*mātṛbhūmi*) and India's dignity (*bhārat kā gaurav*).[46]

In the 1972 version, the contents of these pages (37–41) have been substantially reworked and shortened roughly to one page (34–35) with the purpose not to sully the good names of *rām-rājya*, Rām and Sītā (this order being not incidental but expressive of the hierarchy of priority).

4.4. Pages 43–44/1961

The verses on pages 43–44 refer to the climax of a quarrel between a washerman (*dhobī*) and his wife (*dhoban*).[47] She comes home late and her husband does not want to let her in. He calls her a fallen, sinful woman (*patitā*, *pāpinī*) and tells her to go back to her new lover.

> You fallen woman, stop this idle prattle!
> Go to your new beloved,
> You will be treated there with [due] esteem,
> There is no place for you here.[48]

Dhoban does not give up. She answers back insultingly by referring to her husband's female lineage[49] and adds:

> I saw your esteemed family and good lineage!
> Oh, can there be anyone superior to the crest jewel Rām?

46 Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, pp. 40–41.

47 See Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, pp. 41–44.

48 *patitā rahne de bakvās, / jā us nav priyatam ke pās, / hogā terā sammān vahā̃, / tere lie nahī̃ sthān yahā̃*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 43.

49 *terī mā̃, dādī, nānī kī mahimā ghar-ghar mẽ phailī hai re*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 43.

Haven't you heard of high e s t e e m in his palace t o w a r d s Sītā?
H e r, w h o w o r s h i p s Rāvaṇ's feet, r e g a r d i n g h i m a g o d?
You wretched, in what capacity are you speaking more and more insultingly?
Stop bragging, get up and open the door![50]

This passage in the 1972 version is reworked in the following way:

I saw your esteemed family and good lineage!
Oh, can there be anyone superior to the crest jewel Rām?

Haven't you heard of S ī t ā ' s h i g h p o s i t i o n in his palace?
H e r s, w h o e v e r y m o m e n t h a s r e s p e c t f o r Rāvaṇ in her heart.
You wretched, in what capacity are you speaking more and more insultingly?
Stop bragging, get up and open the door![51]

The comparison of both versions makes it clear that the wording of the 1972 lines focuses on changing the nature of the relationship between Sītā and Rāvaṇ. The 1961 version must have seemed especially outraging to petitioners because of Sītā's god-like veneration of Rāvaṇ, while in the 1972 version this has been greatly softened from direct contact worship into an indirect, socially acceptable, expression of respect to a man and, a king, by a woman. It may also be noted here that *dhoban*'s behaviour in both versions is expressive of the potential threat Sītā poses to the maintenance of social order if women were to behave improperly.

4.5. Page 86/1961

The lines on page 86 refer to an episode that is concerned with Kṛtānmukh's return to Ayodhyā and conveying Sītā's message to Rām. The general tells Rām of her fear, helplessness but also of a mixture of self-pity and indignation at the fact that Rām broke the relationship with her deceitfully and for no good reason.

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50 *dekhā terā ucc gharānā, dekh liyā terā kul-vaṃś! / are! Rām se bhī ũcā kyā hai, koī avataṃś [sic DS]? // nahĩ sunā kyā unke ghar mẽ Sītā kā kitnā sammān? / pūj rahī hai jo Rāvaṇ ke caraṇ mān karke bhagvān. / tū becārī [sic DS] kis gintī mẽ bol rahā baṛh-baṛh kyā bol? / bas rahne de ḍĩg hãknā, uṭh, jhaṭpaṭ dravāzā khol*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 43.

51 *dekhā terā ucc gharānā, dekh liyā terā kul-vaṃś! / are! Rām se bhī ũcā kyā hai, koī avataṃs? // nahĩ sunā kyā unke ghar mẽ Sītā kā kitnā sthān? / jo pratipal apne man mẽ detī hai Rāvaṇ ko sammān. / tū becārā kis gintī mẽ bol rahā baṛh-baṛh kyā bol? / bas rahne de ḍĩg hãknā, uṭh, jhaṭpaṭ dravāzā khol*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1972, p. 37.

She wishes him well but cannot understand why he betrayed her. From a close reading of this passage, we infer that speaking of Rām as a traitor and a partial person as well as referring to Sītā as base may have seemed especially objectionable:

1961
Why did [my] lord betray me,
Instead of openly telling what was to be told?
Sītā was not that base,
Why did [her] master show partiality towards [her]?[52]

1972
Why did [my] lord betray me,
Instead of openly telling what was to be told?
All get justice, so why
Such partiality towards Jānakī?[53]

5. Conclusions

In the context of Hindi literature, Tulsī's *Agni-parīkṣā* offers an original vision of the well-known course of events that finally led to Sītā's rejection by Rām. The poem speaks in a distinctive authorial voice firmly rooted in the Jain tradition. However, for some Hindu traditionalists, commonly referred to in India as Sanatanis (*sanātanī*), '[Jain] deviations' in the way of presenting the characters and the narrative, and especially these sections that are underlining deep understanding for Sītā and full of compassion for her, and women in general, appeared to be an unbearable expression of open criticism of the Hindu tradition, an insult to Hindu feelings and faith, as well as to the Hindu deities—Sītā and Rām. Of special significance in this context is the fact that by specifying the date of the poem's completion and adding the wishes that follow it, by the use of the name Bhārat and by referring to Indian culture (*bhāratīy saṃskṛti*, *bhārat kī saṃskṛti*[54]) in a number of instances, the author linked his poem with the actual Indian reality. All this made his work, as well as himself, a much easier prey for communal and political attacks.

52 *kyõ kiyā nāth! viśvāsghāt / jo kahnī kahte spaṣṭ bāt / sītā na kamīnī thī itnī / kyõ rakhā īś ne pakṣpāt*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, p. 86.

53 *kyõ kiyā nāth! viśvāsghāt, / jo kahnī kahte spaṣṭ bāt. / sab pāte nyāy, jānakī ke / hī sāth rakhā kyõ pakṣpāt*; Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1972, p. 80.

54 Tulsī, *Agni-parīkṣā*, 1961, e.g. pp. 164 or 177.

The foregoing analysis of two versions of *Agni-parīkṣā* reveals how the writer's technique—in this case featuring a more cautious use of language in the 1972 edition, mainly in the form of omissions, lexical modifications and reworking the implied meaning—ceases to be a mere sequence of tactical actions and becomes a strategic choice, even if forced by external circumstances, that determines the final result.[55]

We may also add that the case of *Agni-parīkṣā*, on the one hand, vividly exemplifies the feeling of unintentional effect, as first of all, Tulsī did not intend to offend anyone with his poem. On the other hand, the interest in the poem—to a large extent caused by anxieties surrounding it—was significant enough to publish, as has been mentioned, its second, revised edition in a muted form meant to no longer affect traditionalists' feelings, though this attempt was not fully successful.[56] This all speaks volumes not only about their great influence, the narrative strategies adopted to meet a desired end but also, to use Peter Flügel's phrasing, 'how politically controversial the reinterpretation of traditional rites and myths is in India'.[57]

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55 Valerij Tjupa, 'Narrative Strategies', *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, p. 1 of the PDF retrieved on 17.06.2017 from http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de.

56 Peter Flügel mentions in this context conflicts with the Śaṅkarācārya sect and with the followers of Sthānakavāsī and Mūrtipūjaka Jain sects in Churu; Flügel, *Askese und Devotion*, vol. 56.2, p. 972.

57 *… wie politisch kontrovers die Neuinterpretation traditioneller Riten und Mythen in Indien ist*; Flügel, *Askese und Devotion*, p. 689.

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The Rāmāyaṇa tradition is well-known for an inexhaustible variety of forms and narrative structures transmitted by different media. *Oral-Written-Performed* examines selected textual, oral, visual and performing forms in which the Rāma story has functioned in Indian literature and arts. It also investigates the techniques that transform the Rāmāyaṇa narratives. The volume addresses the question how narratives become vehicles for literary conventions and ideologies expressive of diverse sectarian concerns, or cultural values. It is an excellent companion to earlier publications on the Rāmāyaṇa tradition and indispensable reading for students of South Asian literature, arts and religion.

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