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LIMINAL SPACES, AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURES AND ARTS

Essays in Honour of Professor Alexander Dubyanskiy

EDITED BY PAOLA M. ROSSI

Milano University Press

Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in South Asian Literatures and Arts

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An Introduction.
Liminal Experience as Aesthetic Experience?

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The present volume *Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in South Asian Literatures and Arts. Essays in Honour of Professor Alexander Dubyanskiy* is a collection of articles presented at the International Seminar ‘Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in Indian Cultural History’ in Milan, in September 2019, when we were on the brink of a historical change due to the pandemic experience, unaware that our lives were about to be transformed. Thus, this work was edited right in that state of in-betweenness, in that temporary transition which the lockdown was, across those thresholds of sorrow marked by the demise of our loved ones. The list unfortunately includes Prof. Alexander Dubyanskiy, a friend and colleague of ours, to whose memory this volume is dedicated. Therefore, in such a moment in suspended time, exploring liminality, at least in so far as such a category of reality may be applied to Indian culture and especially to art and literature, appeared to be a means to cope with an emergency the likes of which had never been seen before. Obviously, this work does not aspire to be exhaustive: ever since Arnold van Gennep, the enlightening and pioneering precursor whose work focused on the rites of passage (1909), through the innovative analysis performed by Victor Turner (*i.a. The Ritual Process* 1969) between the sixties and eighties of the last century, up to its contemporary application to a range of fields[1], the category of liminality implies a manifold of facets of which there are indeed enough variations to warrant a whole series of books. Nonetheless, the heterogeneity of the contributions in this book certainly provides us with a multifaceted perspective: in actual fact, since liminality implies potentially myriads of interpretations, it appears to offer one of the main keys to addressing the entanglement of reality, especially the complexity of the Indian civilization, past and present. Although the focus is particularly on the literary and artistic aspects of such an extraordinary cultural heritage as the Indian one, from the Vedic period up to modernity, the category of liminality also allows us to consider different anthropological issues: firstly, the ritual one, in compliance with van Gennep and Turner's approach, but also religious experiences, sovereignty and violence, dialectics of identity, social dynamics, etc. Literature and arts, by means of their aesthetic devices, mirror critical points characterising such issues, as if poetry and artwork, zooming in on specific transition elements, were themselves on the threshold of manifold layers of reality, able to pass through their interstitial discontinuities.

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[1] Amongst the large amount of literature, cf. Zanini 1997; Horvath–Thomassen–Wydra 2015; Calzolaio–Petrocchi–Valisano–Zubani 2017; Wagoner–Zittoun 2021.

Prof. ALEXANDER DUBYANSKIY, to whom this 'liminal' volume is dedicated, was an eminent scholar endowed with a strong sense of humanity, whose wide knowledge of Indian literature, especially Tamil poetry, and his extremely refined and sensitive way of enjoying beauty made him capable of revealing such 'edgelands', depicted by means of literary conventions, which thus allowed the hidden and erratic reality, conveyed by poetry, to be made clearly understandable. His last and unfinished article opens the collection and focuses on Tamil poetry composed by the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints (6th-12th CE) as an expression of the *bhakti* movement. The article aims to explore the devotees' attitude to self-humiliation and their unexpected change to ecstatic joy for their own god. This emotional antithesis is an example of that "in-between reality" which poetic art can express and unveil. Alexander Dubyanskiy notices it and highlights its liminal character. His peculiar way of interpreting the Tamil *bhakti* poetry as an example of liminal experience brings us back to his personal acquaintance with the liminal condition: in his picture, profiled by his daughter, the scholar TATIANA DUBYANSKAYA, on the basis of his private letters, he appears to be a man in transition; while discovering India for the first time in 1978, during a 9-month trip, he dived into multiple liminalities, exploring the intricate and at times contradictory feelings born out of that strange state of "non-belonging". And it was within such a shifting and oscillating Otherness that he built his relationship with the three worlds – Indian, Russian and Western. Therefore, his own words reveal an image of India as «a "soft power", a neutral secure space, where people and civilisations could meet and enrich each other», where dynamics of interaction develop peacefully and fruitfully, resulting in a renovated and richer identity.

I hope that this volume, consisting of four sections, with 16 papers in total, might be – at least partially – an expression of the same multiple aspects of liminality as experienced by Alexander Dubyanskiy on his trip in India.

The first section, dealing with Pre-Classical Literature, is opened by DANIELLE FELLER's contribution which deals with the cosmic aspect of liminality: it concerns the meaning of the word *vimāna* mainly in the Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A survey of epic occurrences – although quotations from the Vedic textual repertoire are also included – sheds light on the various semantic shades conveyed by the term *vimāna* in the ancient Indian literature. In particular, the name 'palace' was applied to the aerial palaces of the gods which, since they were unrooted in the sky, were thought to move about in the manner of celestial cars. In this way, they represent the fluctuating condition of liminality, inasmuch as a varying cosmic reality between heaven and earth, an intermediate dimension between the gods' realm and the human sphere, is referred to.

In this sense, the Epic Sanskrit *vimāna* may be correlated to the Vedic Sanskrit *antárikṣa* / *antárikṣā*, an outcome of **antári kṣā́*, meaning 'between earth and heaven', given that *kṣā́* is an elliptical dual from *kṣán* 'earth', parallel to *pr̥thivī́* (~*dyā́vā-pr̥thivī́*) and *ródasī* 'two world-halves'[2]. In actual fact, this oscillating intermediate space comes into existence through a binary reality: a tripartite cosmos is measured out (*vi-√mā*) by a pillar (*skambhá*) which, like a rising sun moving upwards to heaven, props the latter up (√*stabh* 'to prop'), thereby keeping the two world-halves apart (*ródasī*)[3]. In Vedic imagery and cosmology, it is the sunlight that maps the liminal dimension as such, by *shifting between* earth and heaven.

Another cosmic aspect of liminality is probed by PAOLA M. ROSSI's article: the relationship between "solar-ship" and liminality. In this case, it is also correlated to kingship. The paper deals with the Vedic *mahāvrata*, the winter solstice rite which, as a calendrical ceremony that marks the passage from the old to the new year, is definitely the critical liminal point, where sunlight, life and prosperity are renewed. This peculiar critical threshold appears to be related to the new paradigm of 'ecumenic' sovereignty promoted by the Kuru hegemony (1200-

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[2] Cf. Pinault 2012.

[3] For example, in R̥V 6.47.5; 8.41.10; etc.

900 BCE), especially as it is represented in the ceremony of the royal consecration (*rājasūya*). However, it also refers to the *vrātya* culture, the expression of the warrior brotherhood / *Männerbund*, characterised by initiation practices, connected to the course of the sun. Therefore, on the one hand, the Vedic *mahāvrata* ceremony may preserve some remnants of a sort of rite of passage that is implied in the *vrātya* initiation practices, that is the agonistic scene with a struggle to conquer the sun. On the other, it is the annual rite by means of which the Kuru sovereignty is publicly supported and confirmed.

The *vrātya* context and its relationship with liminality is the focus of EDELTRAUD HARZER's paper: in particular, her contribution is centred on the identity of the leader of the *vrātya* sodality, called both *gr̥hapati* and *sthapati* in the Vedic sources. Since the ancient *gr̥hapati* was responsible for the community and compelled to go on raiding expeditions to provide wealth, his role is especially liminal, inasmuch as he was also the head of those rituals - the *sattra* sacrificial rituals - which opened and closed the expeditions, and he underwent an arduous preparation for this purpose. Leadership is thus correlated to the liminal practices of both ritual and warrior initiation.

Another aspect of liminality is explored in the articles by DILETTA FALQUI and ZUZANA ŠPICOVÁ, both of which refer to the epic episode from the *Ambopākhyāyā* (MBh 5. 170- 193) that concerns gender-bending and androgyny. The former author opts for a philological approach, paying peculiar attention to lexical choices in MBh 5. 187-188, whereas the latter mostly adopts a narratological point of view, thus highlighting how the narrative structure is strongly influenced by the role of the characters. Moreover, Falqui's contribution is mainly focused on the relationship between the feminine character Ambā and asceticism (*tapas*), especially as correlated to the figure of Rudra and the obtainment of his boon *vrataphala*, 'fruit of vow'. The author maintains that asceticism, the Rudraic dimension and gender identity are correlated to liminal conditions. Instead, Špicová's paper takes a closer look at the issue of gender change and androgynous liminality from Śikhaṇḍin's perspective as Ambā reborn.

Finally, ANITA M. BORGHERO's contribution closes the first section: it deals with a grammatical issue, that is the feminine elliptic dual, as attested in the Sanskrit Vedic sources and interpreted in Pāṇini's teachings. The peculiar case of *mātárā* is analysed: in the Rigvedic occurrences it refers to a cultural *milieu* that is not the same as the Pāṇinian one, and thus even the grammarian explanation cannot reflect the original meaning of elliptic dual. Such an interpretative shift, from the Rigvedic elliptic dual, meaning 'father and mother', to the Pāṇinian simple dual, meaning 'two mothers', is an indicator of that cultural change which operated from the Vedic Kuru hegemony onwards.

The second section of this volume collects papers regarding Kāvya Literature and Hindī Poetry. It is interesting to note that in the literary sources belonging to the common era which mirror varying historical, geographical and political Indian contexts, liminality also appears to be correlated mainly to violence, warriorship, leadership, kingship and "solar-ship", even though more intimate emotional spheres are poetically unveiled and more refined stylistic devices and elaborate linguistic expressions are employed in such texts. Firstly, DANUTA STASIK's article is centred on the battlefield of Laṅkā as pictured in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* (1574); she focuses on a few aspects (time, space, actors and artefacts) which turn traditional warrior imagery into *bhakti* devotional imagery, thus characterising such a representation of the battlefield as a liminal space, or better, "betwixt and between" illusion and liberation. In his contribution, CHETTIARTHODI RAJENDRAN highlights how in *Kādambarī* (7th CE), Bānabhaṭṭa has captured the very moment of transition, when the young prince Candrāpīḍa is about to assume the throne: in the *Śukanāsopadeśa* or 'Śukanāsa's advice' the passage from the carefree life of youth to the social responsibilities of adulthood coincides with the transition from the innocent position of the young prince to the assumption of royal powers, with their burdensome responsibility. In this way, the threshold of royalty is pictured: the ancient rite of passage, which in the *vrātya* culture made the novice warrior the future chieftain, is turned into a sort of psychological transition, mirroring the anxieties of the young prince who is about to embark on an unknown way of life.

According to the analysis carried out by DAVID PIERDOMINICI LEÃO, liminality also appears to permeate kingship and royal powers in the *mahākāvya* work entitled *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, 'The Rise of the Pāṇḍya dynasty', (15th-16th centuries CE). This poem narrates and celebrates the origin and establishment of the Pāṇḍya kingdom, from the mythological past to the military campaigns against Kerala conducted by Campaka Parākrama (c. 1480-1508 CE), the Pāṇḍya sovereign and probably the patron of the poet. In particular, the valour of the Pāṇḍya King is praised through the significant epithet *pararājasūrya*, 'the Sun to Enemy Kings': the leader is depicted as the winner, who marches on the battlefield against the enemies like the sun, which, ascending the cosmos, conquers all the heavenly directions (*digvijaya*). In this way a sophisticated literary work of the pre-modern period recalls one of the crucial phases of the ancient royal consecration rite (*rājasūya*), that is the so-called 'mounting the heavenly directions' (*digvyāsthāpana*), in which the sovereign is represented as the rising sun, who / which transcends the terrestrial boundaries and conquers the world, thus placing himself / itself firmly at the centre of the universe[4]. Therefore, the *kāvya* portrayal of the Pāṇḍya sovereign is the reformulation of that traditional paradigm of kingship, inaugurated by the ancient Kuru hegemony itself[5]. Moreover, the closed relationship between the legitimisation of authority and cultural prestige, expressed by means of an extremely erudite work in the Sanskrit language, is also restated.

The liminal condition of adolescence, but from a feminine perspective, is the topic of ANNA TRYNKOWSKA's contribution: the focus is on the young heroine (*nāyikā*), who, in classical Sanskrit lyric poetry, is depicted during the process of her transformation from a little girl into a young maiden. Such a motif, known as *vayaḥsaṃdhi*, is especially developed in medieval lyric poetry by the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (14th-15th centuries CE). Here too, and just like the aforementioned case of prince Candrāpīḍa in *Kādambarī*, the transition from youth to female maturity is pictured from a psychological point of view in which the heroine is beset by uncertainties and intimate turmoil. Interestingly, just as this emotional condition leads prince Candrāpīḍa to the awareness of royal dharmic duties, heroines discover female dharmic duty, that is *kāma* as love and desire, in a similar way when the first awakening of love moves their heart during adolescence. Moreover, such a liminal state, on the edge of the dharmic roles pertaining to adulthood, is not only poetically represented as an intimate and emotional condition, but frequently portrayed with metaphors drawn from the conceptual domain of kingship and war. Therefore, once again liminality refers to violence and leadership.

The last article of the second section of the volume deals with a connotation of liminality which has yet to be considered, but which is implicit in all the previous *kāvya* contributions: liminality as an aesthetic caregory. ARIADNA MATYSZKIEWICZ's article deals with the question by comparing the Burkean sublime with the Sanskrit *mahākāvya* work, *Raghuvaṃśa* by Kālidāsa (5th century CE), trying to integrate the Western category of sublime with concepts of Sanskrit aesthetics and literary theory. Although cultural, temporal, and environmental differences between the authors are evident, she does however conclude that many elements recognised by Edmund Burke as sources of the sublime may be traced in

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[4] Cf. Heesterman 1957, 103ff.

[5] The *rājasūya* rite itself might have been instituted by the Kuru period: cf. Witzel 2005, 29.

Kālidāsa's language and his poetical devices, by means of which a peculiar natural imagery is suggested. Nonetheless, the aesthetic effect in Kālidāsa's poetry is mainly due to the filter of a highly refined and educated means of expression applied to Nature; inversely, the Burkean sublime relies on the conception of Nature, even by poetical art, as an uncontrollable force.

The third section of the volume contains some contributions dealing with modernity: the liminal dimension appears to be its characterising trait, since the very modern cultural identity of South Asia is fluctuating and fleeting between colonialism and post-colonialist claims, traditional heritage and innovations.

Firstly, the paper of HERMINA CIELAS concerns the Indian art of *avadhāna* ('attention', 'attentiveness') analysed here as liminoid practice. Special attention is paid to the figure of the practitioner (*avadhānī* or *avadhāninī*), the transition from the courts or private scholarly meetings to the public space and to the commercial character of the present day.

Finally, the literary field is the main subject of the other two articles: the first of these by MARTA KARCZ deals with the work of Kota Shivaram Karanth (1902-1997), one of the most significant and influential novelists, playwrights and conservationists of 20th century Karnataka; in particular, she focuses on one of his best-known novels, whose original title is *Comana duḍi*, first published in 1933, then translated into Hindi and English in 1978, and finally in 2017, translated into Sanskrit by Anantha Padmanabha Shastry, with the title *Comasya ḍhakka*. The author argues that the translation of such a text into a form of modern Sanskrit is also a turning point 'in translation' for modern-day Indian civilization: the very identity of the Sanskrit language, well known since antiquity as a token of cultural supremacy, nowadays oscillates between a language of the elite and a language available to all Indians who want to discover their own heritage.

The other article, which closes the third section, is centred on the identity transformation of travellers who undertook journeys from India to other Asian countries in the mid-20th century. Its author, WERONIKA ROKICKA, focuses on Bengali travel writing, looking especially into Ali's travelogue *Deśe Bideśe* (*Home and abroad*) and Ray's *Jāpāne* (*In Japane*); these works present the experience of the travellers as a liminal experience: they are accounts not only of writers in the liminal situation of travel, but also of intellectuals living in a liminal period, who contributed to making new visions of the world, such as Pan-Asianism, emerge.

The last section, the fourth one, deals with the Arts, especially templar sculpture and architecture. DARYA VOROBYEVA's paper especially concerns the sculpture images, dated back to the second half of the 1st millennium CE in some cave complexes located mainly in Southern India. The author focuses on the representations of the *vyantara-devatā* – the semidivine inhabitants who live in the space between heaven and earth, such as *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es, and other threshold beings such as *kiṃnara*s, and *bhūta*s / *yakṣa*s / *gaṇa*s. Their liminal *status* makes their images perfectly suited for being pictured in the temple *maṇḍapa*: this is the liminal space, where the transition from the sacred to the profane comes about. Her article also provides photographic documentation.

The last article of the volume is a convincing and innovative analysis of the narrative relief sculpture in the Sun temple at Modhera (1025-1026 CE), presented by DAVID SMITH. With the support of extensive photographic documentation, the author examines the temple's iconographic programme in detail, especially the relief sculpture on the pillars in the Closed Hall and Dance Hall. On the one hand, the sculptures are assumed to reflect the concerns of the court of the temple's presumed patron, Bhīma Rāja I (r. 1022-1064), especially through reference to Bhīma as an epic hero. On the other hand, it is significant that the temple deity is Sūrya himself thus suggesting once again the relationship between warriorship, kingship and "solar-ship". Moreover, these sculptures mark the threshold between the sacred and the profane and highlight the transition of the worshipper who, as they approach the deity, proceeds from the exterior world to the vision of the Sun god inside the temple. Finally, the author focuses on a very original interpretation which draws further attention to the "liminal" value of these sculptures: each panel is a kind of stage on which a particular performance is represented; musicians and dancers, duelling heroes, erotic scenes depicting a liminal world in-between nature and imagery, reality and work of art, that is – by the author's words – «a distorted dream world, a world of rampant liminality».

This overview of the articles in the book, its main topics and themes has served to demonstrate that the category of liminality is evidently closely related to both literary and art works: firstly, they are the result of a "poietic" act which implies a liminal condition, as a point of departure for the birth of new forms of expression between reality and imagery, through the shaping of unformed material. They are the output of a transition process from absence to presence. Secondly, the fruition of artistic and poetic creations is also a liminal experience, in so far as aesthetics is a sort of "liminoid" moment, suspended between normality and regulated everyday life and an alternative "world" pictured by poetry and arts. In a certain way, artistic and literary works represent a sort of "state of exception"[6], which must be absorbed and re-incorporated / re-integrated into dharmic taxonomies and fixed identity structures. The audience is on the threshold of this transformative experience that is poetry and art. Finally, also the artist, both as creator and demiurge, either educated brahmin or law-caste artisan, experiences the liminal state of "betwixt and between", during the poetic and artistic process from which work of art and poetry result. Although here is the risk that Western aesthetic categories are applied to the Indian culture, it is assumable that power dialectics and aesthetic creation-fruition appear to be closely correlated to the category of liminality in the South Asian cultural perspective too: here this erratic and unsolved existence conveys multiple possibilities of becoming. An issue that calls for further and deeper exploration.

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[6] Cf. Agamben 2018, 169ff.

Milan, January 2023

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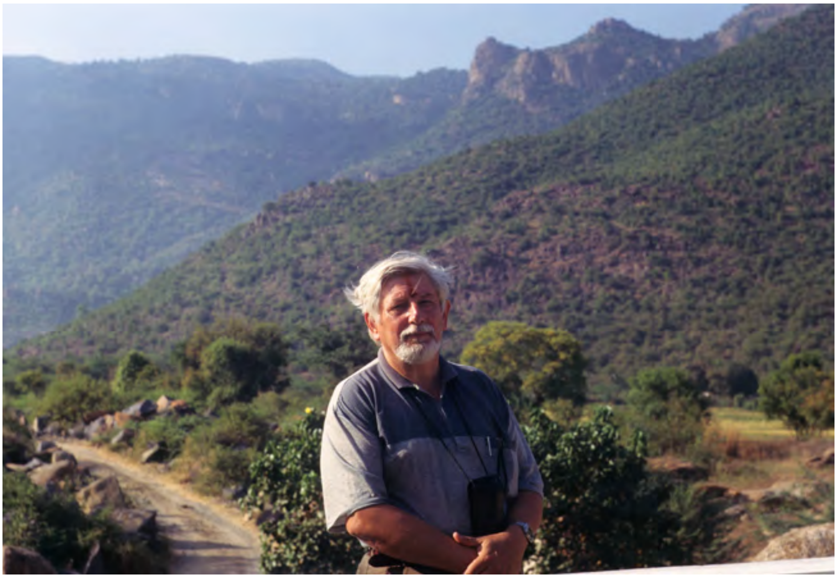

Alexander Dubyanskiy (1941-2020), by gracious permission of Tatiana Dubyanskaya

Homage to Professor Alexander Dubyanskiy (1941–2020)

Cinzia Pieruccini
(University of Milan)

This volume stems from an international Conference held at the University of Milan (*Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in Indian Cultural History*, 19–21 September 2019), funded by the Department of Literary, Philological and Linguistic Studies, which also welcomed the publication of the essays here in Consonanze, the series of volumes sponsored by the Department. The Conference, in turn, derived from a long collaboration with other Indological research centres, which currently include, alongside Milan, the Chair of Indology, Department of Literature, Languages and Cultural Heritage, University of Cagliari; the Department of South and Central Asia, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic; the Department of Languages and Cultures of India and South Asia, Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland; the Chair of South Asian Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland; and the University of Calicut, Kerala, India.

As part of this collaboration, twenty-eight international Conferences have been held since 1998, each year in turn at a different location, resulting in a long series of publications. We are pleased to recall here below the publications issued from the Conferences held in Milan.

Alongside scholars from the main centres involved in the collaboration, scholars from other centres and nationalities have consistently participated in the Conferences. Among them, almost from the very beginning was Prof. Alexander Dubyanskiy, of Moscow State University, a true luminary of Tamil literature, celebrated in India and everywhere in international academia. Prof. Alexander Dubyanskiy left us in 2020, and for Indology it was a great loss; but the loss was much more profound, and we say this without the slightest trace of rhetoric. Prof. Alexander Dubyanskiy enlightened our Conferences not only with his great expertise, but also with his extraordinary kindness, humanity, and lovely sense of humour, combined with an understatement that put everyone at ease, the beginning student as well as the most experienced scholar. The regret that he is no longer with us is deeply painful; we dedicate this volume to him, a very modest tribute if compared to his greatness as a scholar, and as a man.

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A Theme of Self-Humiliation in the Poetry of Tamil *Bhaktas*

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Abstract
It is well known that the religious movement called the emotional *bhakti* distinctly proclaimed itself in the poetry composed in Tamil language by Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints in the period between 6th and 12th CE. One of its major contents is a description of emotional attitudes of an adept towards the god. The range of such attitudes is very wide and includes different human emotional states beginning from overwhelming joy and ending with gloomy and even tragic feelings. Among them a position of self-humiliation or self-condemnation of a devotee appears to be rather prominent. Poems composed by the saints (*nāyaṉār*s and *āḻvār*s) give a great number of examples demonstrating the emotion of self-humiliation. Usually, poets call themselves slaves or servants (*aṭi*, *toṇṭaṉ*), often dogs (*nāyēṉ*), sinners (*pāviyēṉ*) and so on. They also express feelings of self-disappointment, remorse, inner struggle, despair. One of the interesting turns in such revelations is a feeling of despise towards one's own body which is looked upon as a dirty substance, not fit to get in contact with the god. The paper has its aim to represent the theme of self-humiliation of adepts with more details and examples.

Keywords: Tamil poetry, emotional *bhakti*, *nāyaṉār*, *āḻvār*, self-deprecation.

The contents of the old Tamil poetry (roughly the first half of the first millennium) is traditionally divided into two sections – *akam* ('the inner') and *puṟam* ('the outer'). The first is devoted to love and family matters, the second mostly consists of poems extolling kings and chieftains. Poets who composed

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panegyric songs praised the patrons for their military skills, valour and also for their generosity. In spite of the fact that many poets and performers who visited the courts of chiefs belonged to low social strata, due to their important role in what can be called 'a praise-ritual' they were respected and well rewarded for their activity. At the same time, they understood the distance between them and their patrons and sometimes notes of self-humiliation appeared in their songs. For example, the poet Ālattūr Kiḻār addressing the king says: 'I am nothing!'[1]. Another poet follows suit: 'What is the measure of ours, those who were born and raised in your shadow!'[2]. Though such passages could imply the difference in the social positions of the parties, they can also be interpreted as the poets' humble estimation of their artistic gift which is not sufficient to properly eulogise the greatness of their patrons. 'How should I speak about you?'[3], exclaims another poet. Such tunes of self-humiliation which are in fact rare in old Tamil anthologies form, however, a characteristic feature of the later religious poetry which describes a relationship between an adept and the god.

This poetry was born within the religious movement called the emotional *bhakti* and was represented in texts composed in the Tamil language by Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints in the period between the 6th and 12th centuries[4]. One of its major contents is a description of the emotional attitudes of an adept towards the god. The range of such attitudes is very wide and includes different human emotional states beginning from overwhelming joy and ending with gloomy and even tragic feelings. Among them a position of self-humiliation or self-deprecation taken by a devotee looks rather prominent. Poems composed by saints (Śaiva *nāyaṉār* and Vaiṣṇava *āḻvār*) provide a great number of examples demonstrating this emotional attitude. The feelings of one's unworthiness, guilt or humility became an important feature of a *bhakta*'s psychological portrait.

Self-deprecation which sometimes comes to the degree of self-flagellation can be considered in terms of a ritual behaviour which in the end serves as a way to point out an enormously high status of the patron in the dichotomy "adept/god". It is worth noting that in the poetic texts we are dealing with, the authors position themselves as *bhakta*s and, thus, express their personal feelings which at the same time represent the characteristic emotions of a religious person as a type. It should be added that these emotions are far from being straightforward and include a range of psychological states, such as self-disappointment or even self-despisal, remorse, doubts, inner struggle, despair and the like.

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[1] PN 34, 19: *yāṉō tañcam.*

[2] PN 38, 10-11: *niṉ niḻal piṟantu niṉ niḻal vaḷarnta em aḷavu evaṉō.*

[3] PN 39, 13: *yāṅkaṉam moḻikō yāṉē.*

[4] The expression "emotional *bhakti*" was coined as the contradistinction to the "intellectual *bhakti*" of the *Bhagavadgītā*. See Hardy 1983, 41.

The motive of self-humiliation is perceptible first of all in terms which poets regularly apply to themselves: a slave or servant (*aṭi*, *toṇṭaṉ*, *āḷ*), a dog (*nāyēṉ*), a sinner (*pāviyēṉ*) and so on. The term *aṭi* can be considered the most frequent. The first meaning of the word is 'a foot'. Due to the process of semantic extension it comes to denote a person who find himself at the feet of his master, or lord, that is 'a slave' or 'a servant'. In the context of religious poetry this word loses its negative connotation and functions as a synonym of a devotee who worships the god's feet and praises them.

The same can be said about the term *toṇṭaṉ* ('a servant')[5]. From this point of view the nick-name of one of the Vaiṣṇava poets *toṇṭaraṭippoṭi*, literally 'the dust under the feet of the slaves [of the God]', contains not only tones of self-humiliation but also the pride of being among a group of Viṣṇu's adepts (*āḻvār*). The semantics of the noun *āḷ* is connected with the verb *āḷ* ('to rule'), and the typical complex verb *āṭkoḷ* often met with in poetry means 'to subdue, to take as a servant'. The ambivalent character of these terms seems to be clear.

But the tone of self-humiliation is much more prominent in the semantics of one more frequent term – *nāy* 'a dog'. 'I am a dog', 'I am an ignorant dog' says one of the Śaiva poets Cundarar[6]. The same lexicon is used by Māṇikkavācakar: 'I am a dog', 'in my doggie body'[7] and other poets. One can argue that the comparison of oneself with a dog may signify a position of high self-estimation since the dog is universally considered to be an animal strongly devoted to its owner. There is no denying that such a notion can be discerned in the given examples.

However, in India the attitude towards dogs is known to be predominantly negative which is sometimes stressed by poets. For instance, Māṇikkavācakar says addressing Śiva: 'you invited me, a dog, to the good Tillai'[8]. A parallel passage clearly supports this interpretation: 'Oh flawless, who took me, contemptible, as a slave'[9]. A juxtaposition between the low and high, that is the adept and the god, is quite obvious here.

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[5] The usage of terms *aṭi* and *toṇṭaṉ* in the poetry of Cundarar is shown in the article by Olga Vecherina (Vecherina 2017).

[6] *nāyēṉ* (Cundarar 1994, 42; *Venneynallūr* 2, 1); *aṟivilānāyēṉ* (Cundarar 1994, 399; *Tiruvatikai* 38, 6). In quotations of Cundarar's verses the name of the poem and the number of the lines are given. In the case of the Māṇikkavācakar the numbers of the part and lines are added.

[7] *nāyiṉēṉ* (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 35; TV II. 127); *nāy uṭal akattē* (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 59; TV III. 172).

[8] *nāyiṉēṉai nalamali tillaiyuḷ* [...] *varuka eṉa* (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 35; TV II. 127). Tillai, or Cidambaram, is one of the most famous and sacred Śaiva temples in South India.

The poetry gives many examples of poets' self-deprecation. Cundarar calls himself *koṭiyēṉ* 'rude', states that *pala poyyē uraippēṉ* 'he a liar' (Cundarar 1994, 43; *Venneynallūr* 4, 3), *pāviyēṉ* 'a sinner' (Cundarar 1994, 394; *Tiruvārūr* 1, 2), compares himself with a 'demon'-*pēy*: *pēyāy tirintu* 'strolling as a demon' (*ibid.* 2, 3) etc. He is echoed by Māṇikkavācakar: *pollāviṉaiyēṉ* 'I committed bad actions', (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 5; TV I. 25), *koṭiyēṉ* 'I am rude' (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 59; TV II. 171), *nalamtaṉilāta ciṟiyēṉ* 'I am little, lacking goodness' (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 11; TV I. 58), *nāyiṉ kaṭaiyāyk kiṭanta aṭiyēṉ* 'I am a slave who is lower than a dog' (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 11; TV I. 60), *pēyaṉēṉ* 'a demon' (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 100; TV V. 23, 7), *vañcaṉēṉ* 'an impostor' (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 133; TV V. 73).

Self-humiliation of the *bhakta*-poet constitutes an unavoidable part of a complicated system of his relationship with the God, of a pallet of his emotional states and moods. One of these deserves special mention. This is a suffering from being separated from the God. It is very emotionally expressed by the words of Cundarar:

> *pattimaiyum aṭimaiyaiyum kaiviṭuvāṉ pāviēṉ*
> *pottiṉa nōyatu itaṉai poruḷ aṟintēṉ pōy toḻuvēṉ*
> *muttaṉai māmaṇitaṉṉai vayirattai mūrkkaṉēṉ*
> *ettaṉai nāḷ pirintirukkēṉ eṉ ārūr iṟaivaṉaiyē*
>
> I am a sinner to abandon *bhakti* and slavery,
> I have learned the meaning of my inner malady. I shall go and worship
> [Him], a pearl, a great precious stone, a diamond.
> A fool, for how many days will I be separated from my God from Ārūr?
> (Cundarar 1994, 394; *Tiruvārūr* VII 51. 1, 2).

In this strophe of the *patikam*, sung for Śiva in *Tiruvārūr*, Cundarar combines a high estimation of the God with straight self-deprecation. He accuses himself of being far from Śiva, of giving up his service to him.

This motive is even more expressively presented in the *patikam*s of another Śaiva poet – Appar, who was once converted to Jainism but, due to a miraculous recovery from a disease, returned to the Śaiva faith. His poems are full of reminiscences of his Jaina past and of remorse and repentance.

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[9] *nīcāṉēṉai* (Sanskr. *nīccha* 'lowness, meanness') *āṇṭukoṇṭa nimala* (Sanskr. *nirmala* 'flawless') (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 136; TV V. 78).

> *kati oṉṟum aṟiyātē kaṇ aḻalait talai paṟittu kaiyil uṇṭu*
> *pati oṉṟu neṭuvītip palar kāṇa nakai nāṇātu uḻitarvēṟku*
> *mati tanta ārūril vār tēṉai vāymaṭuttup paruki uyyum*
> *viti iṉṟi mati iliyēṉ viḷakku irukka miṉmiṉit tīk kāynta āṟē*
>
> I was lacking the [true] understanding and the way of salvation [attained]
> by drinking mouthfuls of the honey streaming in Ārūr
> that gave the knowledge to me who roamed not knowing any shelter,
> with inflaming eyes, having plucked hair from my head,
> eating from my hands, not being ashamed by mockery,
> when many people saw me in the long streets of the town.
> (Appar 1985, 7; VII 5, 7).

When poets call themselves fools or ignorant, they do not only mean self-accusation but sometimes also that Śiva is not comprehensible to an ordinary mind. For instance, Māṇikkavācakar says in one place: *ērriṉai eṭṭiṉōṭu iraṇṭum ariyēṉaiyē* ‘you accepted me who do not know what eight plus two will be’ (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 119; TV V. 49). It is extremely doubtful that the poet is confessing his ignorance in simple arithmetic. It is possible that here he meant ten syllables of the Śaiva *mantra ōm civaṉāmaccivāya*. In this case he reproaches himself for not knowing it, thus committing a fault.

Such self-accusation is often connected with emotions of remorse and vexation produced by the poet’s state of apathy, his doubts and hesitation, the lack of religious ardour. These moods are met with in the hymns of many *bhakta*-poets, but in Māṇikkavācakar’s monumental composition *Tiruvācakam* they are reflected in an especially expressive way. It seems that he managed to touch on all aspects of the relationship between the God and the adept, describing the dynamics of the adept’s spiritual life, his inner torments and pursuits. Emotions of self-accusation, self-humiliation take a great deal of space in his hymns. One more example:

> *viṉaiyilē kiṭantēṉai p pukuntuniṉṟu*
> *pōtunāṉ viṉaikkēṭan eṉpāy pōla*
> *iṉaiyaṉnāṉ eṉṟu eṉṉai aṟivittu eṉṉai*
> *āṭkoṇṭu em pirāṉ āṉāykku irumpiṉ pāvai*
> *aṉaiyanāṉ pāṭēṉ niṉṟu āṭēṉ antō*

alaṟiṭēṉ ulaṟiṭēṉāvi cōrēṉ
muṉaivaṉē muṟaiyōṉāṉ āṉa vāṟu
muṭivu aṟiyēṉmutal antam āyiṉāṉē

To you, who came to me, when I was in [the snares] of *karma*,
As if you say: “Enough, I am a destroyer of *karma*”
And informing me – “I am such”, took me in service,
To you, who became a Lord [to me],
I am like an iron doll: I do not sing, do not dance all the time, Lo!
I am not suffering, not withering, not losing my breath.
Oh, my leader! Is it a right way I am standing on?
I do not know a decision. Oh, you who have become the beginning and the end! (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 99; TV V. 22, 88).

It is worth noting that such spiritual struggles are sometimes accompanied with the motive of a physical, bodily impurity.

uṭaiyāṉē niṉ taṉaiuḷki uḷḷum perukum perumkātal
uṭaiyār uṭaiyāy niṉpātam cērak kaṇṭuiṅku ūrnāyiṉ
kaṭaiyā ṉēṉneñcu urukātēṉ kallā maṉattēṉ kaciyātēṉ
muṭaiyār puḻukkūṭu itukāttuiṅku iruppa tāka muṭittāyē.

Oh, Master! You who are the owner of those
who own the great love, which softens the heart, who think of you!
On seeing them reach your feet I, who am lower than a village dog,
I, with ignorant mind, do not melt in my heart, do not weep.
You chose that I shall be here to save this nest filled with worms up to the top.
(Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 123; TV V. 56).

The motive of bodily impurity, along with the motive of the falseness of the sense organs (by the way, common not only for Hindu but for Buddhist and, especially, Jaina teachings) appears more than once in the poetry of Māṇikkavācakar and can also be considered as a sort of self-deprecation.

The motive of a bad *karma* (*valviṉai)* can be added to this. It is also often mentioned in the poems and can be treated as a kind of original sin, which the poet tries to expiate by addressing the only person who can help him, that is Śiva.

One more aspect of the poet’s self-criticism is his complaint of his weakness, solitude and inner disorder.

taṉmai piṟarāl aṟiyāta talaivā pollā nāyāṉa

puṉmaiyēṉai āṇṭu aiyā puṟame pōka viṭuvāyō
eṉṉai nōkku vāryārē eṉ nāṉ ceykēṉ emperumāṉ
poṉṉē tikaḻun tirumēṉi entāy eṅku pukuvēṉē

Oh, Leader whose entity is unknown to others!
When ruling over me, the unworthy, a lousy dog,
will you let me go aside, o Lord?
Who will look at me [then]? What shall I do?
Oh, our greatness, our father, whose sacred body sparkles with gold!
Whence shall I go?
(Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 125; TV V. 59).

In many other places Māṇikkavācakar speaks about himself in like manner: *taḷarntēṉ* ‘I am exhausted’, *aṭiyēṉ* ‘I am a slave’, *tamiyēṉ, taṉiyaṉēṉ* ‘I am alone’ (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 78; TV IV. 170; Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 101; TV V. 26); *cōraṉēṉ* ‘I am tired’ (Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 24; TV V. 57). As if concluding his inner struggles, he states that he despises himself (*iḻintaṉaṉ eṉṉai yāṉe*)[10]. He simultaneously praises Śiva and asks him to end his life, but at the same time implores his mercy, pointing out that ‘the duty of the great is to be patient to the faults of others’ (*piḻaittavai poṟukkai ellām periyavar kaṭamai*)[11].

The verbal behaviour of an adept described here should not be taken too literally. Different human feelings, including self-deprecation and self-abuse, can be very strong and reach the level of ecstasy, but in the context of religious poetry, they represent a ritual behaviour. Māṇikkavācakar should be looked upon not only as the usual personal disposition of the adept but as attributes of his specific ritual behaviour. The idea that underlies such behaviour is to place oneself far from the sacred object and then to overcome the existing distance and in the end to reach the object, that is the God. From this point of view, it represents a sort of spiritual pilgrimage and the tactics of self-humiliation metaphorically express such a distance. There is no doubt that this ritual behaviour constitutes the so-called “rite of passage”. As is known, this rite has three stages and during the second, that is the middle one, a participant loses his usual characteristics, moves away from his normal state and enters the stage of liminality, during which he usually undergoes different trials and sufferings. This is the period of spiritual and mental transformation which leads to the third stage, the stage of renovation or revival. For an adept it means that the God accepts him, recognises him as a servant and gives him a place at his feet. It is worth noting that the rite in question has all the features of an initiation, and its middle stage is usually combined with the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. The tutor and master in this case is, of course, Śiva himself. There are too many places where poets mention how Śiva enlightened them, eliminated their ignorance, gave them the true knowledge and showed them the way to salvation. In one place Appar describes this powerful and almighty teacher in an extremely expressive way, addressing him thus:

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[10] Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 129; TV V. 66.

[11] Māṇikkavācakar 1997, 129; TV V. 66.

āṭṭuvittāl ār oruvar āṭātārō
aṭakkuvittāl ār oruvar aṭaṅkātārō
ōṭṭuvittāl ār oruvar ōṭātārō
urukuvittāl ār oruvar urukātārō
pāṭṭuvittāl ār oruvar pāṭātārō
paṇivittāl ār oruvar paṇiyātārō
kāṭṭuvittāl ār oruvar kāṇātārō
kāṇpār ār kaṇṇutalāy kāṭṭākkālē
(Appar VI. 95, 3).

If you make [us] dance is there one who won't dance?
If you subdue [us] is there one who won't be subdued?
If you make [us] run is there one who won't run?
If you make [us] melt is there one who won't melt?
If you make [us] sing is there one who won't sing?
If you make [us] serve [you] is there one who won't serve?
If you show [something] is there one who won't see [it]?
Who will see, oh you with the forehead eye, when you don't appear?

At last, the period of trials comes to its end and Śiva pays attention to the *bhakta*, chooses him as his servant and grants him his grace. In terms of the rite of passage this is the point where its third stage starts, that is the period of revival and new life. It manifests itself in the abrupt change of the inner state of the adept. The former melancholy, inactivity, hesitations and doubts, self-humiliation and self-abuse change to an emotional outburst, ecstatic behaviour and joy. They are expressively depicted in the lines of Māṇikkavācakar:

tappā mētām piṭittatu caliyāt
talalatu kaṇṭa melukatu pōlat
tolutuḷam uruki alututal kampittu
āṭiyum alariyum pāṭiyum paraviyum

koṭiṟum pētaiyum koṇṭatu viṭātuteṉum
paṭiyē yākinal iṭaiyaṟā aṉpiṉ
pacumarat tāṇi aṟaintāl pōlak
kacivatu perukik kaṭaleṉa maṟuki
akaṅkuḻain taṉukula māymey vitirttuc
cakampēy eṉṟu tammaic cirippa
nāṇatu voḻintu nāṭavar paḻitturai
puṇatuvākak kōṇuta liṉṟic
caturiḻan taṟimāl koṇṭucāruṅ
katiyatu paramā aticaya māka
(TV IV. 59-72).

[He] grasped me not letting me go away,
As wax before the constant fire
[My] soul, worshipping [him], melted,
The body trembled with weeping,
I danced, shouted, sang, prayed.
As jaws and fools [never] let go what [they] take,
Thus, I became with my never failing love,
As a wedge driven into a young tree,
The tears increasing, I was like the storming sea,
The heart was soft and the body was shivering,
People laughed – the demon! – [but]
I threw away shame and considered scorn as a decoration,
Never swerving, I lost cleverness, but acquired knowledge
And thought as a higher wonder of my fate…

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A Soviet Man on a *Rendezvous* with India: Alexander Dubyanskiy's First Field Trip in Letters

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> «Place is security, space is freedom:
> we are attached to the one and long for the other»
> Yi-Fu Tuan[1]

In September 1978, (the then Soviet) and Russian Indologist Dr. Alexander Dubyanskiy (1941–2020) arrived in India for the first time in his life. He, who had made about two dozen visits to his beloved country by early 2020, had been able to go on his first field trip relatively late in his scholarly life, a few years past the defence of his doctoral dissertation and after a number of fruitless attempts to receive a scholarship. Before such a trip was possible, he had gone through humiliating vetting procedures and experienced a few painful rejections. The longest trip in his life had a path-forming significance that goes far beyond its direct purpose of improving the knowledge of classical and modern Tamil.

This paper will look at this episode, well documented in private letters, as a cross-section of multiple liminalities, and explore the intricate combination of different, at times contradictory, feelings born out of this experience. The 9-month trip was a challenging enterprise, in logistical, socio-cultural and many other senses, but not least because of the underlying «fear of liminal experiences as truly personality transforming events» (Thomassen 2012, 30). The title refers to a famous literary essay by a 19th-century Russian literary critic Nikolay

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[1] Tuan 2014, 3.

Chernyshevskiy, *Russian Man on a Rendez-vous* (1858), dedicated, among other things, to a somewhat in-between status of "positive" literary heroes in Russian prose. Although this present piece has no *prima facie* connection to the principal message of Chernyshevsky's article, through allusion to its title, it highlights the feelings of anxiety, insecurity, even agony that go hand in hand with attempts to venture out into the unknown, encounter new worlds or test oneself in a different environment. This rendezvous with "Otherness" can, indeed, be a very disturbing experience, as we are «confronted by the limitations of our own constructions of identity and difference»[2].

It would be useful to take a closer look at the general circumstances behind Alexander Dubyanskiy's trip, before we analyse the epistolary sources. As might be well-known, during Leonid Brezhnev's reign (but of course, also before and after it), all trips abroad, even to the countries considered "Friends of the Soviet Union", were closely watched, applications were scrutinised on several levels, starting with trade union committees at workplaces and local Komsomol or Communist Party cells. After the candidacy of the person in question had been approved on these lowest levels, there came the turn of higher authorities to issue their opinion and approval (rejections were issued far more often, though). The lucky ones, who were finally cleared for crossing the border, could only do so after applying for and receiving their foreign passport, which had to be exchanged for their internal passport: the latter had to be kept at the personnel or other responsible department at their workplace during the whole length of the journey abroad. Finally, the last steps consisted in receiving a host-country visa and obtaining the USSR exit visa.

Alexander Dubyanskiy came from the family of a military serviceman, inevitably a Communist Party member, however, his own reputation did not inspire confidence at the Moscow State University administration: more than once he had said "no" to strong suggestions to join the CPSU, remaining expressively critical of the official ideology. Yet, back in 1978, the need to develop better programmes for teaching "rare" Indian languages in the USSR prevailed, and, Dubyanskiy, along with another colleague from the Institute of Asian and African Studies, was awarded a scholarship, which was jointly funded by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Soviet Ministry of Education. Following a few tough interviews and checking procedures, approval was finally obtained and both types of visas, the necessary papers and the Aeroflot tickets to Delhi were issued. This scholarship allowed Dubyanskiy to spend 9 months in

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[2] Thus Simone P. Fullagar put it, after Alphonso Lingis; see Fullagar 2001, 172.

India, from mid-September 1978 to mid-June 1979, as a postgraduate student at the Department of Tamil at the University of Madras.

As a matter of fact, this long trip was Dubyanskiy's first visit anywhere outside the borders of the Soviet Union. Hence, he saw it not only as an opportunity to greatly enrich his practical knowledge of South-Indian culture, to deepen his understanding of Tamil literature and master the language, but also as a precious chance to get closer to the world "outside the Soviet Union and India". In the 1970s and 1980s, India's economy might have been closed and highly regulated, but the country's cultural policy was incomparably more open than that of the Soviet Union, so it was only natural to take advantage of this attractive cultural opportunity and look at India as, in a way, a hub where different civilisations could mingle freely – a safe space amid the troubled waters of world politics.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Alexander Dubyanskiy's position in India, if seen within the context of the possibilities open to the average Soviet visitor to this country, had certain lucrative angles to it. Due to the specific conditions of the Indo-Soviet scholarship programme, while being affiliated to the University of Madras, his scholarship came from two sources – the ICCR and the Soviet Ministry of Education. This scholarship was good enough to purchase academic literature and almost any other books of his choice, move freely wherever he wanted on a daily basis and even make some long trips around India. He still needed to pay occasional visits to the Soviet Union Consulate in Madras, in order to receive mail and his monthly allowance, but, being a postdoctoral student, he was formally not accountable to any Soviet institution in India; thus, he experienced independence unseen by almost all Soviet citizens working or studying in India at that time[3]. Alexander Dubyanskiy maintained an intensive (as much as was allowed by the postal situation) epistolary exchange with family and friends, writing several lengthy and detailed letters every month. Postal correspondence served as the one and only stable channel of communication, since the telephone connection between India and the Soviet Union was almost non-functional at the end of the 1970s. These 30-odd letters have been securely preserved by our family, numbered and kept as a separate bundle in an archival box. From the present-day perspective, they may serve as an interesting, even unique documentary source which contains personal impressions and reflections on everyday experiences in India, reports on routines and adventures, vignettes of life in Madras and Tamilnadu in 1978–79, and also a subversively-presented story of Alexander Dubyanskiy's entangled emotional relationship with India, his home-country, and the world beyond the two. The 9-month-long trip, documented in letters, we wish to argue, exists within a distinct tempo-spatial unity, or, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, a «chronotope», which has unique features – we observe a Soviet traveller at the end of the 1970s, who has to deal with multiple "new" worlds while living in India, who undergoes *rite du passage* to embrace the "Otherness" and rethink his relationship with his own world[4].

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[3] 3. Noteworthy that in India, undergraduate students from the Soviet Union were always closely watched; they also had to regularly report their whereabouts to particular consular officers and obtain permission to travel.

The literary qualities of these witty, content-rich, epistolary notes allow us to see a value in them that oversteps their significance as purely private documents. In this paper, we treat the text as a travelogue of sorts, especially taking into the account that although the letters were meant as a private way to communicate with the closest family members, most passages were *de facto* written for public use, because the audience to whom they were read aloud often included a wider circle of relatives and friends. There was another angle, as well: it is worth bearing in mind that, in the 1970s, a person writing letters, as well as the addressees of letters, remained constantly conscious of the fact that in the Soviet Union privacy did not exist as such – private letters could be opened and subjected to perlustration at any given point on the way to their destination. Inevitably, the presence of hypothetical "controlling readers" made people avoid mentioning some details, refrain from expressing certain thoughts, sometimes even use enigmatic expressions and 'code-words' known only to their confidants.

The idea of using these letters as material for a kind of illustrated epistolary travelogue was discussed in our family during the early lockdown months of 2020. Eventually we postponed this project till autumn; in mid-October, shortly before his unfortunate illness, Alexander brought the bundle of these letters out from his archive. In this way, he sanctioned the work on them, and, our family wants to believe, he would not have minded us discussing them, at least partially, in public[5]. We opened the letters soon after his passing and immediately engaged ourselves in reading and digitising the texts. We found this experience of travelling back through the decades to be soothing, consoling, but also very entertaining and joyful. We could almost live through these weeks and months in India together with him, revisiting our own past and even stumbling upon some answers regarding Alexander's personal and professional growth.

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[4] Bakhtin 1981.

[5] The full edition of these letters, with only very minor omissions, is now in preparation. The book illustrated with colour slides, made by Alexander Dubyanskiy during this field trip, will hopefully be published in Moscow by early 2023.

The special nature of Alexander's status in India, we would like to argue, made him experience a strange state of "non-belonging", disturbing and exciting at the same time. As a scholar of Tamil, he longed to dive deeper into South-Indian culture; yet, even when full immersion was theoretically possible, he clearly realised that one could only experience it up to a certain limit. As a Soviet citizen, he treasured these months of detachment from the Soviet reality and cherished the unique sense of freedom India could give. But all too often he was desperately homesick; as time progressed, he dreamt more and more of going back home and taking a walk in the coolness of a Russian forest. Loneliness often caused gloominess and at times drew him towards somewhat uncomfortable relationships with some of the consular staff in Madras. Finally, it was in India that Alexander could experience and enjoy the "outer world", encounter and explore different other cultures without the fear of being punished: films, books, food items and, of course, people from countries to the East and to the West of India formed a very special cluster of his impressions. But here, too, he was often torn apart by contradictory feelings: on the one hand, his rich cultural background entitled him to see himself, at least at times, as a "citizen of the world", but on the other, the political reality of that time prevented even the dream that Soviet people could one day be part of the global community. No wonder that on leaving India in June 1979, Alexander experienced a keen tragic sense of forced separation from a newly-gained personal freedom and fullness of life. He had little hope of returning to India soon, and he was almost sure that even maintaining epistolary contact with some of the Western scholars he had met would hardly be possible. One cannot help but rejoice at the fact that life did, after all, prove his fears wrong!

Many remember Alexander Dubyanskiy as a generally relaxed person with multifaceted interests and a calm and positive attitude to life. That said, one could expect the letters from this first trip to be a testimony to his curiosity, adventurous spirit and optimism – which they were to a certain extent; but the end of the 1970s was, indeed, a dark hour for many Soviet citizens, the era has left its mark on people's minds and souls. What could strike the reader in these letters is a tangible sense of sadness and recurring acknowledgements of an unquenchable longing, born, among other things, out of an existential split that, in fact, many travellers experience: «Now that the first impressions have worn off, the *longing* is beginning to set in» (dated 2 October 1978); «My mood hasn't changed much. I've been feeling *homesick* lately, thinking about everyone all the time; in fact, I always feel togetherness with all my relatives [...] if I see something I think: "I'll tell everyone about it", if I take a picture: "I'll definitely show you this", etc. And waiting almost a month for the next post is just *excruciating*» (13 January 1979); «My mood, however, has been rather *crappy*, both because of general problems and in general – all sorts of festivities make me feel *unwell and lonely*» (23 February 1979).

Apart from deeper worries, it was sheer logistics of communication that brought added distress. It might be hard to believe now, but, having left Moscow in September, Alexander could only make one short voice call home on the 31st of December! It was made via radio communication installed on the captain's bridge of a Soviet commercial ship in the port of Madras (!). There were technical glitches, the conversation was hectic and, it seems, left everyone even more insecure than before.

A few months were spent by Alexander and our family exploring an opportunity for his wife Natalia to join him in India for a short while: «I feel a sense of *unease* (even guilt) towards you, coming from the fact that I'm having so many experiences, seeing so many interesting things – all without you. The thought of how good it would be to be with you together, to show you so many completely different things – constantly crosses my mind. I am even thinking of purchasing a trip to India for you and me someday, once I have saved up the necessary amount of money. Well, we'll see. It will soon be a month into my trip, and the impressions keep coming over me, so I really feel powerless to put them down on paper» (12 October 1978).

The project of a family reunion in India turned out to be futile: fearing that Soviet couples would elope together when abroad, the state only allowed couples from certain institutions and governmental structures to live together. There were no formal rules against such trips, but *de facto* it was impossible to get permission. The sense of disempowerment is clearly recognisable from this observation made after meeting a friendly Western Indologist in Madras: «I'm not sure if I'll see her here again in winter: her husband is going to come to India and they are planning a trip together (*I guess, he'll just come like this, he'll simply fly in!*)» (8 November 1978).

Alexander tried to develop strong connections with local people in Madras, he made friends with some colleagues, and started visiting people at their places (in cities, small towns, in villages). He felt good talking to people from different classes, took every opportunity to converse and even found bargaining in Tamil to be a very "rewarding" process. But at the same time, he chose to maintain a good relationship with some of his fellow countrymen. Amongst the other Indian cities within the Soviet network of influence in India, Madras remained a relatively important spot, given its size and the presence of the seaport there. The Soviet Union had a Consular department, a Centre for Science and Culture in a separate building with a concert hall, a trade representative and a few news agency offices. Soviet Novosti Press Agency (also known as APN) in Tamilnadu was at that time headed by the Frolov family, one of whom, Tatiana, was a fellow Tamilist and a good, supportive friend.

Alexander did not really have to maintain contacts with other Russians in Madras, but he still chose to do so, as if recognising the need to invest in an additional support system. From time to time, he took part in functions, festive dinners and informal parties; he did so, more often than not, out of a sheer sense of politeness and the need to have added security. Eventually, he did get some practical help from these circles, but it all came at a price. As a result of this *quid pro quo*, by March 1979, he ended up having accompanied (as a pianist) a few children's matinees and festive concerts (for example, for New Year's Day, Soviet Army Day, International Women's Day, etc.), given some kids musical training, organised a full classical concert for a vocal aficionado from the Consulate and even delivered a lecture on Indo-Soviet friendship himself.

The subversively-forced nature of these activities was another source of unhappiness: «I don't often like being in the Consulate, – he confessed in December 1978, – because it is a place where all sorts of gossip and rumours circulate; one always gets slanted stares and envious glares there, people just keep on chewing the fat. I am a free, independent person and, in principle, have no special relationship with anyone there [...]». In the end, Alexander managed to use his consular contacts to his benefit: a crucial task of sending his huge collection of books and exotic curiosities to Moscow via sea cargo would not have been possible to fulfil without a nod from the headquarters of the Soviet Consulate in Madras.

Affiliation to the University of Madras allowed Alexander Dubyanskiy to take part in academic events of very different levels, organised often in strikingly contrasting styles. These included, for example, an international anthropological conference (December 1978), which attracted a good number of Western scholars and was held in English, and a Tiruvācakam conference in Kumbakonam (January 1979), which took place in a Saiva temple, where everyone was wearing white ceremonial clothes to fit the dress code of the gathering. The emotional accounts of these events could reveal a bigger picture of how the protagonist was positioning himself in the intellectual world.

The anthropological conference, it seems, made Alexander painfully aware of his belonging to a different "camp", not so much in the political sense, but, rather, academically, as he felt, he was not sufficiently trained in listening to the 'conference style of English' and was not fluent in Western academic jargon. It was his gift of self-irony and humour that helped him add only light self-humiliating notes to his description of the event and avoid feeling uncomfortable for too long: «Among the bearded, pipe-smoking, self-confident Euro-Americans, I certainly felt out of place. And I *was*, in fact, *out of place*, as I knew no one and was not an official member of the conference, so no one knew me either. I think a lot of people looked at me and wondered, "Who the hell is this guy?" but no one asked me directly, except for one young and rather unsympathetic Canadian who came up to meet me but was disappointed, I think, when he found out where I was from» (22 December 1978).

The atmosphere of the Tamil conference in Kumbakonam was more jovial. Here, too, Alexander was aware of the differences between him and other conference guests, however, it expressed itself on a new level, as he felt "anything but ignored": to begin with, he was handed «a badge with a ribbon (as a participant), a programme and a book of food tickets». He goes on:

> It should be noted at once that I was dressed in a white *veshti*, i.e. *like everyone else*, although it turned out that I represented the "white race" at the conference *all alone* and was therefore *not like everyone else* – which again gave rise to many questions, conversations, interviews, etc. In general, of course, I attracted a lot of attention, which ranged from finger-pointing to all sorts of questions and conversations [...]. I was most concerned, however, with my inability to sit on the floor "tailor style", so I could only do it "failure style" and thus attracted even more, I should say, sympathetic attention (almost sympathy). And, to be noted in a parenthesis, I would have gladly accepted this sympathy, because by the end of each of the three days of the conference my body was crying out for mercy, aching and moaning – because all the papers had to followed from the floor level. (27 January 1979).

One is tempted to interpret the two descriptions in terms of a typical West *vs* East dichotomy, as we recognise here the depiction of a colder, rational, excluding, even unsympathetic "Western" crowd contrasted by the image of a warmer, emphatic, emotional "Eastern" community. Alexander, however, never needed to choose between the two, in order to go either the "Western" or the "Eastern" way. As it seems, at a certain point, he felt somewhat alienated from both, although in his later years, he did manage to integrate himself better in them, both academically and personally. Yet, truth be told, he never mastered snooty conversations and sitting in a cross-legged position.

One of his early contact figures in the "Western" academic world was Prof. Brenda Beck. She was affiliated to the University of Madras for a short while in 1978, and left a very bright impression on Alexander's mind, striking him as a very warm person, «without any trace of arrogance». She was ready to give her time and share valuable advice regarding Alexander's academic project; as he puts it in his letters, «I tried to give her the gist of it, but I did it confusingly, stammering in English so it was a shame» (8 November 1978). Prof. Beck sounded nevertheless encouraging and promised to send reprints of her articles to Moscow; she apparently kept her promise later on. She also spoke about the international Tamil conference that was due to take place in 1980; being a member of the organising committee she encouraged Alexander to come to India again – it was «a very tempting and honourable» invitation, but he was quite sure, nothing would come of it, as casual conference visits were almost never allowed to Soviet scholars.

Alexander's letters are a bitter testimony to the fact that closed borders, cultural and intellectual isolation are extremely harmful for academic life. While "classical" (in a very broad sense of this word) world culture was, with certain limitations, "allowed" in the Soviet Union, things like contemporary lifestyle and cultural trends, current intellectual achievements and modern philosophy were deemed "non-progressive", "reactionary", "dangerous" and were, therefore, considered unfit for the citizens. It didn't take much to bring a cultural shock to hapless Soviet visitors on their first trip abroad. The following passage describing Alexander's visit to Kerala's seafront reveals exactly this kind of innocence about the ways of the world:

> A few odd-looking characters show up now and then, wearing peculiar outfits – oversized shalwars, some sort of shapeless robes, loose shirts, *veshti*s, or even just loincloths. They walk with staffs in their hands, carrying primitive bags; they have beads, earrings, often long hair, some, on the contrary, are clean-shaven. These are the hippies. They have chosen Kovalam Beach as their camping ground (however, we later found out that the main hub of the hippies is in Goa). Near us, a couple settles down to enjoy the sun; the girl only has a strip of cloth on her loins. The sun is blazing all the time, but it does not bother her [...]. (27 February 1979).

Encounters with various "foreign" (for India) things were a common thing in Indian cities, there were a lot of international products on display: restaurants serving 'exotic' for India cuisine (Alexander mentions, among others, Chinese restaurants in Madras and a very authentic Vietnamese bar in Pondicherry), cinema halls where one could watch the latest "Bondiana" and popular American films, and, of course, rich and spacious bookstores (like the iconic "Higginbotham's" in Madras). Western books were especially tempting: he was determined to bring back to the USSR not only professional literature, but collections of comic books (the "Asterix" series), recent detective novels, some English classics, although he felt constantly stressed about transporting all these newly acquired treasures back home.

Two essentially "Western" places in Tamilnadu became for Alexander the metaphor for an unattainable academic paradise. The French Institute of Pondicherry was a place to admire: occupying «a luxurious two-storeyed mansion, overlooking the embankment», it served as the embodiment of «silence, cleanliness, grace» (April 1979). Its library and a friendly bookstore could only compare to the library and the territory of the Theosophical society in Madras – both places were deeply missed by him when he left, and he tried to pay a visit to them each time he returned to Tamilnadu thereafter.

As time passed by, the Western "exotic" things India could offer were getting more familiar: impressions were settling down, books were being packed to be sent back home and, generally, the hunger for the outer world was being quenched little by little. Alexander felt a bit less disturbed about his Soviet contacts in Madras; he was still missing home but was more in peace with his loneliness. In other words, he was, finally, ready to focus on his own "discovery of India". He occasionally admitted a sense of tiredness caused by the heat and noise, complicated logistics, intensity of life, but India at large took the central place in his epistolary reports.

Alexander Dubyanskiy was building his relationship with the three worlds – Indian, Russian and Western – mainly relying on human contact, for through this there was reconciliation with the foreign world as well as with one's own. The human dimension is extremely important in building a relationship with the "place" (in Yi-Fu Tuan's sense of the word) in India, which, eventually, was to be found in Madras. From the very first days, the capital of Tamilnadu was perceived as a friendly *topos*, but it was only in April 1979, when Alexander was able to express his deep love towards this city in a truly panegyrical way:

> Going past the lighthouse recently in the afternoon (the road to the consulate is just off Marina – along Marina Beach itself), I decided to climb its stairs [...]. I'd been up once, but it was during the rains, and although it wasn't pouring from the sky, there were dark clouds over Madras and the city was shrouded in fog, so the view from the lighthouse was limited (but still great). Now, on a

> sunny day, the skyline opened up and the city showed itself at its best – with its white buildings, tall hotels, promenade and masses of palm trees. From above, Madras was immersed in greenery – palm trees and all – what a beautiful city! And now it's so close and dear to me, and of course, I'll miss it. (24 April1979).

Madras was, of course, not home in a real sense, but, rather, a domesticated city, a place to recuperate after intensive escapades. The bigger space, or greater India, was waiting to be discovered and 'tamed'. The epistolary travelogue records the moment, when Alexander leaves Madras for the first time, to get to know and embrace rural Tamilnadu, on the way to Madurai. The passage about the joyful recognition of things that had been learnt in theory is self-explanatory:

> We set off early as it was a long journey. As we left and drove out from Madras, the countryside began – towns, villages, rice paddies, sugarcane plantations, coconut palms, bananas. Along came the village temples and shrines I'd read so much about – images of snakes or a goddess on a platform under a sprawling tree or just a stone tied with some cloth. Soon I started noticing the temples of Aiyanar, the village patron god: they are usually recognisable by sculptures of horses made of clay or terracotta. Beautiful landscapes, interesting scenes and pictures unfolded like in a movie, and it was a pity to rush past them so quickly. The road we travelled was good in itself, but here we must also take into account the peculiarities of local manners: free stretches were rare, and mostly it was busy with people carrying some kind of luggage (often on their heads), just lying almost on the roadway, cyclists riding as God intended, cattle – walking, lying down or pulling heavy carts, dogs sleeping right in the middle of the road, trucks rushing along so that they couldn't be avoided. In addition, crows, chipmunks, lizards and, on one occasion, monkeys, which I thus saw here for the first time in their natural state, almost climbed under the car's wheels. (12 October 1978).

In November, Alexander went on a month-long grand tour of the country, visited cities, archaeological monuments, and religious centres. Together with his colleague and travel-mate Dr. Boris Zakharyin, they covered a few thousand kilometres in four weeks, heading first to Kerala and Karnataka, then, via Bombay, to Ajanta and Sanchi, dropping by Lakhnau on the way to Benares and mapping the movement back towards the south from Calcutta, along the eastern coastal line. It was an extraordinary but tiring journey that ended in the present-day Telangana. The trip was a quintessential experience in terms of accepting the "Otherness" of the country and, what is most important, being accepted by India.

He would later refer to this trip as a ‘pradakshina’ and a life-shaping event that made him look into the depths of time and taste India’s troubled modernity. The trip was a “chronotope” in its own right, as the two explorers found themselves in a very special time-warp, which is typical for event-filled voyages into “exotic” worlds. For a few weeks to come, they could not maintain contact with their “own” worlds, as receiving letters or keeping in touch with families was technically impossible; the flow of impressions and the intensity of travelling, often by night trains or buses, made them almost forget everything and concentrate on living the “here and now”. Needless to say, this episode made Alexander unaware, at least temporarily, of political borders and cultural differences, helped him detach himself from the crisis of belonging he had experienced during his first weeks in Madras; he was, thus, able to give himself over to the frenetic spirit of the journey. The sense of liberation and ultimate freedom he experienced would not be recreated in any other circumstances later on.

The whirlpool of impressions was starting to calm down only when they reached Palampath, a quiet village in the Warangal district (present-day Telangana). Visiting a group of 13th-century temples – the creation of the Kakatia dynasty – Alexander experienced a catharsis-like moment that justified the hardships of the previous weeks. The energy of the trip transformed itself into *śānta bhāva*:

> From Vishakhapatnam we went to Vijayawada [...] then to Warangal, and from there we travelled to Palampath village by bus. This was the grand finale of our trip – indeed, a gorgeous experience. The place is apparently little visited by tourists – thanks God for that – so both the temples and the area itself retain a sense of intactness. There's a complex of medieval temples, sadly much ruined, but still retaining some gorgeous sculpture and stone carvings. The area is, as I said, rustic – silent, with only the sound of birds and the creaking wheels of heavy rice straw carts coming in a caravan from the fields to the surrounding villages. The landscape is very beautiful – fields, palm trees, forested mountains, huge boulders, especially in the bed of a dried-up river, and a large lake about a kilometre from the village. The dilapidated temples and shrines are hidden by dense greenery, often just braided by tree branches (Kipling comes to mind again). We made a considerable detour around. I can't tell you the thrill of walking on Indian land – in the middle of nowhere, in the countryside, in touch with the Indian nature and with the life, unhurried and simple, which had been going on like this for centuries. Actually, if we put aside the bus and the paved road, everything else – palm leaf covered huts, wooden ploughs, oxen, carts – is absolutely primordial. Of course, this is a superficial glance, there have been

> changes in the internal life of the village, but an outsider gets a sense of it being quite a patriarchal place. (19 December 1978).

The epiphany to "the wonder that was India" should bring us to the concluding part. Alexander's travelogue in letters, reveals, through his direct and indirect statements, the image of India as a "soft power", a neutral secure space, where people and civilisations could meet and enrich each other. In this way, the challenges of this essentially liminal experience could be, if not fully overcome, but at least levelled down significantly and turned into cultural advantages. For an engaged and attentive outsider like Alexander Dubyanskiy, even post-Emergency India – traumatised, economically and morally shattered – succeeded in playing the role of a cosmopolitan paradise. It was a paradoxically calm, integral space, where, in a striking contrast with the Soviet Union, free will, open-mindedness and freedom could be exercised without any fear. Not every Soviet visitor to India could experience these emotions and thoughts – it was due to the uniqueness of Alexander's position that he could enjoy the trips and the freedom of movement. He used to confess later on that the return to Moscow, as joyful as it might have been for personal reasons, was a moment of despair for him on a socio-cultural level. He could not have known back then if he would ever be able to make another escape to India, and he certainly could not have predicted that it would only take ten years for walls, some metaphorical, some real, to fall.

Alexander Dubyanskiy on the rooftop of Hostel for Postgraduate students, University of Madras (1978).

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Pre-Classical Literature: Vedic and Epic Literature

From Palace to Heaven: *Vimāna* in the Sanskrit Epics

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Abstract
The exact meaning – and hence translation – of the term *vimāna* is often unclear. The dictionaries give several definitions, such as 'measurement, palace, aerial car, throne, temple', etc. It is not always easy to decide which one is appropriate in which context. This paper aims to investigate the various semantic shades of *vimāna* in the Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In our conclusions, we posit that the term *vimāna*, which first means 'measure', then came to designate a palace – a building which has to be constructed by precise measurement; this name was then also applied to the aerial palaces of the gods, which, unrooted in the sky, were thought to move about in the manner of celestial cars, sometimes drawn by various beasts, sometimes self-moving; finally, *vimāna* came to designate a type of heaven – a meaning which is not listed in the dictionary definitions.

Keywords: *vimāna*; measurement; palace; flying palace; heaven; *Mahābhārata*; *Rāmāyaṇa*.

1. *Introduction*

The term *vimāna*, derived from the root *vi-√mā* 'to measure, mete out, pass over, traverse', is not easy to define clearly. We can already discern some perplexity in the definition offered by the *Monier-Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (*s.v.*):

> *vi-māna*: mf(*ī*)n. measuring out, traversing; m. n. a car or chariot of the gods, any mythical self-moving aerial car (sometimes serving as a seat or throne, sometimes self-moving and carrying its occupant through the air; other descriptions make the Vimāna more like a house or palace and one kind is

> said to be 7 stories high [...]); any car or vehicle (esp. a bier); the palace of an emperor or supreme monarch (esp. one with 7 stories); a temple or shrine of a partic. form, [...][1].

This definition appears both confusing and confused, and hardly allows us to form a precise idea of what a *vimāna* actually is. Is it a building or a chariot? Is it stationary or can it fly? But to be fair to the author of the dictionary, we must admit that there are a number of passages where it is indeed difficult to determine what is exactly meant by *vimāna*. In order to get a clearer idea of this topic, we shall presently examine the various usages of this term in the Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, two texts which appear to be the primary *locus* of its development.

Before turning to the epics, let us briefly examine the situation in the *Veda*. In Vedic literature, *vimāna* both occurs as an adjective meaning 'measuring out, traversing' and as a noun, 'measure', but the significations of 'palace' and 'aerial chariot of the gods' are conspicuously absent. In the *Veda*s, it is well-known that the gods were thought to travel about on *ratha*s, chariots drawn mostly by horses[2]. As Gonda (1965, 72) remarks:

> [...] it is a matter of no little significance that [the gods] are described as driving swift horses (R̥V 10, 92, 6), as tireless travellers (R̥V 8, 2, 18), as approaching the sacrificers in their chariots (R̥V 1, 84, 18; 7, 2, 5). It means, first, that they are supposed to be able to move rapidly and to exert their influence in all parts of the universe, and in the second place that, as far as they were conceived as anthropomorphous, they were represented as similar to very powerful human beings of nobiliary rank who also, in war and contest, drove their chariots, which bear the same name (*ratha-*).

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[1] And we are not even citing another, rather problematic, meaning of *vimāna* in the context of *Āyurveda*, which probably need not concern us here. See Wujastyk 2017.

[2] Riding horses was not completely unknown, but references to it are still scanty in the *R̥gveda*. Historically speaking, according to Gonda (1965, 95-114), who draws his evidence from various ancient cultures including India, men learned how to drive chariots yoked to horses long before they learned how to ride horses – or other mounts for that matter. The epics, as often, represent a stage of transition: at times, the god Indra rides his chariot driven by Mātali, but at other times he travels on a *vimāna* or he rides his white elephant Airāvata. In one and the same legend, Aruṇa becomes the charioteer of the sun-god, who performs his daily rounds of the heavens riding on a chariot drawn by ruddy horses, whereas his younger brother Garuḍa becomes Viṣṇu's mount (*vāhana*).

From this, we understand that the Vedic *ratha*s used by the gods were conceived of as very similar to the chariots used by the warriors on the battlefield, but huger, more splendid, and endowed with the power to travel through the air very swiftly. We may also note at the outset – because on this point the aerial *vimāna*s differ from the *ratha*s – that the Vedic gods' *ratha*s never serve as abodes, but are merely used as conveyances: the gods use them to travel and move about, either for the purpose of battle[3], or else to go to various sacrifices[4], to perform their daily rounds of heaven[5], or to fly to the rescue of people in distress[6]. Also, and this is another point which distinguishes the *ratha*s from the *vimāna*s, *ratha*s are always drawn by some animals, mostly by horses, but sometimes by other animals too[7]. While this is true for many *vimāna*s as well, some of them, especially Puṣpaka, are also said to be able to move about by themselves.

The anonymous author of the French Wikipedia article on *vimāna* seems to suggest that the concept of *vimāna* evolved out of the Vedic *ratha,* due to the occasional association of both terms, since *ratha*s are sometimes said to 'measure out' either space or the sky[8]. This occurs for example in *R̥gveda* 2. 40. 3, in a hymn addressed to the gods Soma and Pūṣan:

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[3] As Macdonell (1974, 55) remarks, «the epithet 'car-fighter' (*ratheṣṭhā*) is exclusively appropriated to Indra». Indra, the king of the gods, is «the first of the chariot drivers» (R̥V 1. 11. 1). He has a splendid golden chariot (R̥V 6. 29. 2; 8. 1. 24), which is larger than the mountains (R̥V 1. 11. 1) and which is drawn mostly by two, but sometimes by a hundred or even a thousand tawny (*hari*) steeds.

[4] This trait is especially prominent in the case of Agni, the god of Fire, who has a dazzling, golden chariot drawn by two or more ruddy (*rohita, aruṇa*) horses, with which he is wont to bring the gods to the sacrifice (R̥V 3. 6. 9). For Agni is the charioteer of the sacrifice (R̥V 10. 92. 1).

[5] Thus, the Sun-god Sūrya circles the earth every day on his one-wheeled car (R̥V 5. 29. 10) drawn by the horse Etaśa (R̥V 7. 63. 2), or by many – notably seven – ruddy (*harita*) horses (R̥V 5. 45. 9; 7. 60. 3). See Gonda 1965, 74-76 for the evolution of Sūrya's representation.

[6] The Aśvins are untiring on their golden three-fold car (it has three wheels, three fellies, etc., cf. R̥V 1. 118. 1-2) and their continuous course (*vartis*), «a word which with one exception is applicable to them only» (Macdonell 1974, 50), is mostly performed in order to help various creatures in distress.

[7] Gonda (1965, 82) notes that the god Pūṣan, a pastoral deity, is «specially concerned with the paths and consequently with the protection of the herd, the recovery of lost animals, the conveyance of souls to heaven» and «it is therefore in harmony with the god's character that he is (6, 55, 6) stated to be conveyed, on a chariot, by two sure-footed or firmly proceeding [...] he-goats. The epithet *ajāśva-* 'who has goats instead of horses' is in a significant way exclusively his». (Cf. R̥V 1. 38. 4; 9. 67. 10). The Aśvins' car is sometimes said to be drawn by horses, but mostly by birds like *haṃsa*s (R̥V 4. 45. 4) or eagles (R̥V 1. 118. 4; 8. 5. 7), and even by other animals like buffaloes or an ass.

[8] See https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vimāna (last access 29.10.2021).

sómāpūṣaṇā rájaso vimā́naṃ saptácakraṃ rátham ávíśvaminvam /
viṣūvṛ́tam mánasā yujyámānaṃ táṃ jinvatho vṛṣaṇā páñcaraśmim // R̥V 2. 40. 3 //

> O Soma and Pūṣan, the chariot [=sacrifice?] with seven wheels and five reins that measures out the airy realm but does not speed everyone, rolling in various directions, being yoked with mind, that do you quicken, you bulls. (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 459).

In my opinion, however, the basic idea behind a *vimāna* is not primarily that it measures out anything, but that it is, in itself, an object that requires measuring. For as we have seen above, *vimāna* also designates a palatial, probably many-storeyed mansion, which has to be built according to strict measurements. Whether in its terrestrial or flying form, *vimāna* designates a structure with a complicated architecture, of a type which was probably not common in Vedic times – if we can draw any conclusions from the extremely scanty archaeological remains from the Vedic age[9]. It is therefore most likely that the concept of *vimāna* does not derive in any way from that of the Vedic gods' flying *ratha*s, but that it is an entirely new concept that gains prominence at the time in which the epics were composed.

After examining closely all the passages in which the term *vimāna* appears in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we come to the conclusion that *vimāna* occurs under four different meanings in these two texts[10]. This term can designate:

– a terrestrial palace;
– a flying structure whose use is the prerogative of divine or semi-divine beings;

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[9] As remarked by Bhan (2006, 178), «the Vedic Tradition [...] reveals [...] the absence of fortified cities, town planning and drainage, monumental art and architecture of burnt bricks [...]». In Vedic literature, it is on the contrary the Dāsas or Dasyus, the enemies of the Indo-Āryans, who are regularly credited with the construction of fortresses (*puraḥ*) made of stone or metal, which Indra splits by means of his *vajra*, a feat which earns him the epithet *pūrbhid*, 'fort-shatterer'. See Macdonell 1974, 60. According to this author's naturalistic interpretation, these fortresses of the Dasyus are really aerial forts and represent the rain clouds – a representation which brings us rather close to a *vimāna* like Puṣpaka, said to be made of precious metal and stone, and frequently compared to a cloud.

[10] If we exclude one unique occurrence of *vimāna* in its Vedic sense of 'measuring', found in MBh 1. 3. 60, in a hymn addressed by Upamanyu to the Aśvins and composed in what Louis Renou has styled «hybrid Vedic Sanskrit». To this category also belong the *Suparṇākhyāna*, the *Bāṣkalamantra Upaniṣad*, etc. See Renou 1956, 3. On the hymn to the Aśvins, see Renou 1997.

– the heavenly flying palace Puṣpaka, an individual representative of the second category;
– a type of heaven.

I have examined elsewhere Puṣpaka's functions in the Vālmīki-*Rāmāyaṇa* and the relationship between the divine flying palace and its three successive owners, Kubera, Rāvaṇa and Rāma, who stand respectively for *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*[11]. Here, I propose to have a look at the term *vimāna* in its other meanings: palace, flying structure and heaven.

While the meaning of 'heaven' is probably slightly later than the other two, becoming really prominent only in some chapters of Book 13 of the *Mahābhārata*, it seems difficult to assign a chronological order within the epics to the appearance of the first two significations of the term ('terrestrial palace' and 'flying structure'): as far as the Vālmīki-*Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned, we may note that, except for Book 4 which only contains *vimāna* twice in the sense of 'terrestrial palace', all the other books of the *Rāmāyaṇa* contain instances of both meanings. On the other hand, occurrences of *vimāna* in the sense of an 'earthly palace' are much rarer in the *Mahābhārata* than in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. We find it used in this meaning without any ambiguity only in two *śloka*s of the Great Epic[12]. At times, a terrestrial *vimāna* can be compared to a flying one (see *e.g.* Rm 5. 6. 7) and at other times, both shades of meaning seem intended at once. For instance, when Sītā tries to persuade Rāma to take her along to the forest, she tells him:

> *prāsādāgrair vimānair vā vaihāyasagatena vā* /
> *sarvāvasthāgatā bhartuḥ pādacchāyā viśiṣyate* // Rm 2. 24. 7 //
>
> The shadow of a husband's feet in any circumstances surpasses the finest mansions, an aerial chariot (*vimāna*), or even flying through the sky. (Pollock–Goldman 1986, 135).

By semantic association with the preceding term, *prāsāda* ('mansion'), we would assume that Sītā is using *vimāna* in the sense of 'terrestrial palace', but by association with the following *vaihāyasagatena* ('flying through the sky'), we would tend to think that she means a 'flying palace'. We see that both shades of meaning of the term *vimāna* – 'palace' and 'flying structure' – are simultaneously present in Sītā's mind, and that the term *vimāna* functions as a pivot which allows her mind to leap from 'mansions' to 'flying through the sky' without any seeming incongruity. In a similar vein, when Hanumat examines Rāvaṇa's palace looking for Sītā, we are first given an elaborate depiction of the wonderful palace of the *rākṣasa*-king seen through the monkey's eyes. The description starts as that of a 'fabulous house' (*gr̥hottama*, Rm 5. 7. 5), 'looking like heaven fallen to earth' (*mahītale svargam iva prakīrṇam*, Rm 5. 7. 6) and 'having the splendour of a flying palace [...] drawn through the air by splendid *haṃsa*s' (*haṃsapravekair iva vahyamānaṃ śriyā yutam* [...] *vimānam*, Rm 5. 7. 7). What starts as a mere comparison between the earthly palace and a flying one then suddenly shifts without clear transition to the description of the *vimāna* Puṣpaka itself (here called Puṣpa), which is parked in a hall of the palace: 'The great monkey gazed upon that vast and resplendent flying palace called Puṣpa.' (*puṣpāhvayaṃ nāma virājamānam* [...] *mahākapis tatra mahāvimānam*, Rm 5. 5. 11). This shift from Rāvaṇa's palace to his flying palace Puṣpaka is again facilitated by the ambiguity of the term *vimāna*, which can be applied to both terrestrial immobile and celestial mobile mansions. Let us now examine the various meanings of the term *vimāna* in the two epics.

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[11] See Feller 2020.

[12] MBh 1. 176. 23 and 3. 198. 6. Two more occurrences of *vimāna* in the sense of 'terrestrial palace' may possibly be found in MBh 13. 20. 35 and 13. 83. 56, but the context does not allow us to decide clearly if a palace or a flying structure is meant.

2. Vimāna *as a Palace*

In both epics, most occurrences of *vimāna* in the sense of 'palace' are found in town-descriptions, in close association with semantically proximate terms, such as *prāsāda* ('terrace, top-storey of a lofty building, lofty palatial mansion, palace, temple'), *harmya* ('large house, palace, mansion, any house or large building', or 'residence of a wealthy person') and *gr̥ha* ('house'). More rarely it appears in connection with *valabhī* ('top or pinnacle of a house, turret', as in Rm 2. 82. 5), *gopura* ('town-gate, gate, ornamented gateway of a temple', Rm 6. 55. 64; 3. 198. 6) or *aṭṭālaka* ('watch-tower', MBh 3. 198. 6)[13]. This can be seen in the following examples.

In Rm 2. 53, Sumantra, Daśaratha's charioteer, reports to the aged king how the townspeople reacted when they saw him come back without Rāma, whom he had just left in the forest. Here *vimāna* is listed with *harmya* and *prāsāda* as the dwellings from which the women of Ayodhyā watch Sumantra's return:

[13] These meanings are given in the *Monier-Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary*.

> *harmyair vimānaiḥ prāsādair avekṣya ratham āgatam* /
> *hāhākārakr̥tā nāryo rāmādarśanakarśitāḥ* // Rm 2. 53. 9 //
>
> From mansions (*harmya*), many-storied buildings (*vimāna*) and palaces (*prāsāda*), the women observed the chariot come, and they raised cries of woe, tormented at losing the sight of Rāma. (Pollock–Goldman 1986, 197).

In the *Mahābhārata*, *vimāna* occurs in the sense of 'palace' in an extremely lively description of Mithilā, king Janaka's city, which an ignorant Brahmin visits in order to be enlightened by a hunter. Here again, the term *vimāna* is found surrounded by a cluster of related architectural terms, such as *gopura* ('gates'), *aṭṭālaka* ('watchtowers'), *gr̥ha* ('houses') and *prākāra* ('walls'):

> *tato jagāma mithilāṃ janakena surakṣitām* // 5 //
> *dharmasetusamākīrṇāṃ yajñotsavavatīṃ śubhām* /
> *gopurāṭṭālakavatīṃ gr̥haprākāraśobhitām* // 6 //
> *praviśya sa purīṃ ramyāṃ vimānair bahubhir vr̥tām* /
> *paṇyaiś ca bahubhir yuktāṃ suvibhaktamahāpathām* // 7 //
> *aśvai rathais tathā nāgair yānaiś ca bahubhir vr̥tām* /
> *hr̥ṣṭapuṣṭajanākīrṇāṃ nityotsavasamākulām* // MBh 3. 198. 5c-8 //
>
> At length [he] came to Mithilā, which was well governed by Janaka. It was a city demarcated by the boundaries of the Law, rich in sacrifices and festivals, holy, defended by gates and watch towers, and adorned with houses and walls. He entered the lovely town, which was surrounded by many palaces (*vimāna*), filled with many wares, with the main streets well laid out, crowded with many horses, chariots, elephants, and wagons, teeming with happy, well-fed people, and bristling with constant festivals. (van Buitenen 1975, 619).

If the phrase *vimānair bahubhir vr̥tām* is indeed to be understood in the sense of 'surrounded by many palaces' and not simply as 'filled with many palaces', then it appears that the palatial *vimāna*s are built on the edge of the town, somewhat in the manner of the villas of modern-day suburbia – and perhaps opposed to the more modest *gr̥ha*s of the town-centre.

In Book 6 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Rāma's army reaches Laṅkā, an extraordinary sight meets their eyes:

> *śikharaṃ tu trikūṭasya prāṃśu caikaṃ divispr̥śam* /
> *samantāt puṣpasaṃchannaṃ mahārajatasaṃnibham* // 18 //

> *śatayojanavistīrṇaṃ vimalaṃ cārudarśanam /*
> *ślakṣṇaṃ śrīman mahac caiva duṣprāpaṃ śakunair api* // 19 //
> *manasāpi durārohaṃ kiṃ punaḥ karmaṇā janaiḥ /*
> *niviṣṭā tatra śikhare laṅkā rāvaṇapālitā* // 20 //
> *sā purī gopurair uccaiḥ pāṇḍurāmbudasaṃnibhaiḥ /*
> *kāñcanena ca sālena rājatena ca śobhitā* // 21 //
> *prāsādaiś ca vimānaiś ca laṅkā paramabhūṣitā /*
> *ghanair ivātapāpāye madhyamaṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ padam* // 22 //
> *yasyāṃ stambhasahasreṇa prāsādaḥ samalaṃkr̥taḥ /*
> *kailāsaśikharākāro dr̥śyate kham ivollikhan* // Rm 6. 30. 18-23 //
>
> There, reaching into the sky, stood one of the lofty summits of Mount Trikūṭa. Covered on all sides with flowers, it seemed to be made of gold. It was bright and lovely to behold, and its breadth was a hundred leagues. It was beautiful, grand, and majestic and impossible for even the birds to reach. It was impossible for men to scale, even in their imagination, let alone in reality. And there, on that peak, stood Laṅkā, under the protection of Rāvaṇa. The citadel was adorned with ramparts of gold and silver and with lofty gateway towers resembling white clouds. Indeed, Laṅkā was as magnificently adorned by its palaces (*prāsāda*) and mansions (*vimāna*) as are the heavens, Viṣṇu's middle step, with clouds at summer's end. In the city could be seen a palace (*prāsāda*) adorned with a thousand columns, which, seeming to scrape the sky, resembled the peak of Mount Kailāsa. (Goldman–Sutherland Goldman–van Nooten 2009, 195-196).

Here we are given a measurement – the breadth of the city is a hundred leagues (*yojana*s) – and again, we meet many architectural terms: gateway towers (*gopura*), ramparts (*sāla*), palaces (*prāsāda*), mansions (*vimāna*) and pillars (*stambha*). All these lofty constructions, whose combined colours are gold, silver and white, built upon the top of an even loftier mountain peak, seem to 'scrape the sky' (*kham ivollikhan*). Indeed, the city is built so high up that it is said to be 'impossible for even the birds to reach'. In short, it looks as if it were floating in the sky, an impression which is reinforced by the comparison between its towering buildings and clouds. We are here reminded of certain descriptions of the flying palace Puṣpaka, which is an equally dazzling architectural construction made of precious materials, and said to be so huge that, like Laṅkā, it is frequently compared to a mountain and seems to 'scrape the sky' (see *e.g.* Rm 5. 7. 12-15 and 6. 109. 22-27).

Towards the end of Book 7 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, two towns are founded by Rāma's younger brother Bharata, Takṣaśilā and Puṣkarāvatī. These are said to contain palaces (*vimāna*s) of the same colour:

> *ubhe puravare ramye vistarair upaśobhite* /
> *gṛhamukhyaiḥ surucirair vimānaiḥ samavarṇibhiḥ* // Rm 7. 91. 13 //
>
> Both of these splendid cities were charming and adorned with great wealth, as well as with extremely beautiful mansions and seven-storied palaces (*vimāna*) of identical colour. (Goldman–Sutherland Goldman, 2017, 427, modified).

While *gṛha* can designate a simple house, the terms *prāsāda*, *harmya* and *vimāna* designate a palace or a lofty building. It is difficult to ascertain from the passages at hand if the poet really intended to assign a different shade of meaning to each one of them, or if they are all listed together to achieve a cumulative effect stressing the huge size and luxury of the buildings and the opulence of their inhabitants. I would rather tend towards the second hypothesis. We see that Goldman *et alii* are not really systematic in their translations of the term *vimāna* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. At times, they translate it as 'mansion' (cf. Rm 6. 30. 22 quoted above) and at other times as 'palace' or more specifically as 'seven-storied palace' (see Rm 7. 91. 13 quoted above), following the commentators' gloss *saptabhūmiprāsādaiḥ*[14]. A *vimāna* would thus be a sub-type of *prāsāda* with many (or specifically seven) storeys. But the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself never explicitly alludes to (seven) storeys, even though they can probably be deduced from the sheer height of the buildings described[15]. As we see from the above examples, palatial *vimāna*s occur mostly in town descriptions, be it Ayodhyā, Laṅkā, Mithilā or other towns. While the *vimāna*s of human towns are probably made of ordinary materials, we see that those of Laṅkā are made of costly materials such as gold, silver and precious stones whose descriptions evoke superhuman, if not divine splendour.

While towns are said to contain palaces – in other words, *vimāna*s of the terrestrial type – taken as a whole, they can also be compared to celestial *vimāna*s. Thus, in Rm 1. 5. 19, Ayodhyā is likened to 'a palace in the sky that perfected beings had gained through austerities' (*vimānam iva siddhānāṃ tapasādhigataṃ*

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[14] See Goldman–Sutherland Goldman 2017, 1195.

[15] As far as I could ascertain, the only occurrence in the Sanskrit epics of a *vimāna* with 'seven storeys' (*saptabhauma*) is found in MBh 13. 110. 66, where this epithet is applied to a flying palace.

divi). In Rm 1. 69. 3, the auspicious-looking Sāṃkāśyā, the town belonging to Kuśadhvaja, King Janaka's elder brother, is compared to the *vimāna* Puṣpaka (*sāṃkāśyāṃ puṇyasaṃkāśāṃ vimānam iva puṣpakam*). Inversely, flying *vimāna*s can also be likened to towns, as in Rm 1. 42. 9, where the gods flock together by means of various conveyances to witness the Gaṅgā falling onto the earth:

> *vimānair nagarākārair hayair gajavarais tathā* /
> *pāriplavagatāś cāpi devatās tatra viṣṭhitāḥ* // Rm 1. 42. 9 //
>
> Even the gods, gathered there in their flying chariots looking like cities, with their horses and splendid elephants, were awed. (Goldman 1984, 206, modified).

In my opinion, the main characteristics shared between towns and flying *vimāna*s is that they are both huge and built of lofty and luxurious mansions. From these comparisons, we understand that the celestial *vimāna*s are not "mere" flying chariots but look rather like flying palaces or even flying towns consisting of many palaces.

3. Vimāna *as a Flying Structure*

Let us now turn to the second category of *vimāna*s, namely, the aerial, flying variety. The overwhelming majority of occurrences of *vimāna* in the *Mahābhārata* designate a sort of flying palace or even town (given that *vimāna*s are sometimes said to carry great numbers of heavenly musicians and nymphs)[16], enjoyed by the gods and other divine beings who use them either to fly about in the sky or to come down to earth. From these passages, we understand that *vimāna*s are essentially used as a means of transportation. We may note that the only books of the *Mahābhārata* which do not contain any references to aerial *vimāna*s are Books 10, 11 and 16, in which the term *vimāna* does not appear at all.

Towards its beginning, the Great Epic provides a genealogy of the gods and other supernatural beings. The divine architect Viśvakarman, the son of Prabhāsa the eighth Vasu, is here said to be the maker of all divine *vimāna*s – an honour which is the sole prerogative of Puṣpaka in the Vālmīki-*Rāmāyaṇa*:

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[16] For instance, in Rm 3. 33. 20 and 7. 68. 11.

> *viśvakarmā mahābhāgo jajñe śilpaprajāpatiḥ* /
> *kartā śilpasahasrāṇāṃ tridaśānāṃ ca vardhakiḥ* // 27 //
> *bhūṣaṇānāṃ ca sarveṣāṃ kartā śilpavatāṃ varaḥ* /
> *yo divyāni vimānāni devatānāṃ cakāra ha* // MBh 1. 60. 27-28 //

> Thus was born the lordly Viśvakarman, progenitor of the crafts, creator of the thousands of crafts, and carpenter to the Thirty Gods; greatest of craftsmen, he created all ornaments and fashioned the divine chariots of the Gods. (van Buitenen 1973, 149).

In the *Mahābhārata*, the *vimāna*s can be yoked to various animals, most frequently of course to birds such as *haṃsa*s (MBh 13. 14. 141; 13. 109. 52; 13. 109. 54), *cakravāka*s (MBh 13. 109. 43a), *sārasa*s (MBh 13. 109. 45a) or peacocks (MBh 3. 83. 29c), but also to white horses (MBh 7. 18. 5c), lions and tigers (MBh 13. 109. 49), elephants and rhinoceroses (MBh 13. 110. 67) and even once to the divine *ṛṣi*s, in the story of King Nahuṣa, who is of course swiftly punished for his insolence and thrown out of heaven (MBh 5. 15. 20). Likewise, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *vimāna*s can be drawn by a great variety of beasts. For instance, when Hanumat jumps from the mainland to Laṅkā, he meets many such conveyances on the way:

> *siṃhakuñjaraśārdūlapatagoragavāhanaiḥ* /
> *vimānaiḥ saṃpatadbhiś ca vimalaiḥ samalaṃkṛte* // Rm 5. 1. 159 //

> [That aerial path] was adorned with shining chariots that flew along, drawn by lions, elephants, tigers, birds, and serpents. (Goldman–Sutherland Goldman 1996, 112).

In both epics, the gods and other denizens of heaven mostly use *vimāna*s in order to fly about in heaven, for instance to visit each other, as in the case of the deceased King Pāṇḍu and his wives who frequently use this conveyance to visit Indra, as the latter informs Yudhiṣṭhira who has just arrived in heaven:

> *eṣa pāṇḍur maheṣvāsaḥ kuntyā mādryā ca saṃgataḥ* /
> *vimānena sadābhyeti pitā tava mamāntikam* // MBh 18. 4. 16 //

> Here is the great archer Pāṇḍu, united with Kuntī and Mādrī. Your father always comes into my presence on his *vimāna*. (My transl.).

Or else, the inhabitants of paradise come down to earth on *vimānas* to witness noteworthy events, such as, for instance, Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*:

> *athāyayur devagaṇā vimānai*
> *rudrādityā vasavo 'thāśvinau ca* /
> *sādhyāś ca sarve marutas tathaiva*
> *yamaṃ puraskṛtya dhaneśvaraṃ ca* // MBh 1. 178. 6 //
>
> Then riding the chariots (*vimāna*) came the Gods,
> Ādityas and Rudras and Vasus and Aśvins,
> The Sādhyas all and the Maruts too,
> Placing Yama ahead and the Lord of Wealth. (van Buitenen 1973, 351).

In Rm 3. 27. 30, they flock together to watch Rāma's fight against the *rākṣasa* Khara; in 6. 105. 3, they rush to Laṅkā on their divine flying palaces similar to the sun (*vimānaiḥ sūryasaṃnibhaiḥ*) to witness Sītā's ordeal and, in Rm 7. 100. 2-3, when Rāma decides to go back to heaven after his long reign, he is met by 'Brahmā [...] surrounded by all the gods and great seers and accompanied by hundreds of millions of celestial flying chariots'[17]. The god Brahmā, due to his continuing involvement with his creation, is particularly fond of visiting the earth on his *vimāna*, and there are many other instances where he comes down from heaven on this conveyance to grant boons (*e.g.* Rm 7. 5. 11) or to intercede in conflicts (*e.g.* Rm 7. 23. 8).

But *vimāna*s are used not only by the gods to come down to earth, but also by recently deceased meritorious people to go up to heaven. The *vimāna*s thus function as the outward sign of their newly-acquired divine status. For instance, in Rm 2. 58. 42, the young ascetic killed by mistake by king Daśaratha while hunting 'ascended straightway to heaven upon a heavenly chariot of wonderful construction' (*divyena vimānena vapuṣmatā āruroha divaṃ kṣipram*). In Rm 3. 10. 90, the perfected beings (*siddha*s) residing in Agastya's hermitage, go to heaven 'in aerial chariots gleaming like the sun' (*vimānaiḥ sūryasaṃnibhaiḥ*). In Rm 3. 68. 6, the monster Kabandha, who has just been slain by Rāma, suddenly appears before him in divine form, 'standing upon a luminous, glorious aerial chariot harnessed with geese' (*vimāne bhāsvare tiṣṭhan haṃsayukte yaśaskare*). At the very end of the story, after Rāma has regained his divine form as Viṣṇu,

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[17] *brahma* [...] *sarvaiḥ parivṛto devair ṛṣibhiś ca mahātmabhiḥ* / [...] *vimānaśatakoṭībhir divyābhir abhisaṃvṛtaḥ* // Rm 7. 100. 2-3 //.

Brahmā grants a boon to all his devotees and allows them to accompany him to heaven (Rm 7. 100. 21): 'Then each one, casting off his or her human body, mounted a flying chariot' (*mānuṣaṃ deham utsṛjya vimānaṃ so 'dhyarohata*).

In the *Mahābhārata*'s Forest-Book, Vyāsa tells Yudhiṣṭhira the story of sage Mudgala, who earned considerable merit due to his extremely frugal lifestyle as a gleaner, and who is consequently visited by a messenger of the gods who wishes to reward him by taking him to heaven on a beautiful *vimāna.* Here, we get a rather detailed description of this luxurious *vimāna*, flattering in equal measure to the eye, the ear and the nose:

> *devadūto vimānena mudgalaṃ pratyupasthitaḥ* // 30 //
> *haṃsasārasayuktena kiṅkiṇījālamālinā* /
> *kāmagena vicitreṇa divyagandhavatā tathā* // 31 //
> *uvāca cainaṃ viprarṣiṃ vimānaṃ karmabhir jitam* /
> *samupāroha saṃsiddhiṃ prāpto 'si paramāṃ mune* // MBh 3. 246. 30c-32 //
>
> The Envoy of the Gods approached Mudgala on a celestial chariot, which was harnessed with swans and cranes and sported a circlet of tiny bells; the chariot could go where it wished and it was colorful and fragrant with divine perfumes. He said to the brahmin seer, "Mount this chariot that you have earned with your deeds, for you have attained to the ultimate course, hermit.".
> (van Buitenen 1975, 703).

The Envoy of the Gods then describes paradise at length to Mudgala. But upon learning that the stay there is not eternal and that one falls back to earth after partaking of heavenly bliss, the sage wisely decides to renounce paradise and to strive instead for complete extinction (MBh 3. 247)[18].

By contrast, Arjuna, who, as Indra's son, receives the extraordinary honour of going up to heaven while he is still alive in order to pay a visit to his father, is taken there on Indra's chariot (*ratha*), driven by the charioteer Mātali. As it arrives, this awe-inspiring chariot is described in a manner which sharply differs from the more peaceful *vimāna*-descriptions and makes it clear that this chariot is used for war[19]:

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[18] This is one of the rare instances where a *vimāna* appears in a *nivṛtti*-context (only to be discarded), whereas the use of *vimāna*s is otherwise closely connected to a *pravṛtti* one – going to heaven after one's death.

[19] Arjuna's purpose in heaven is of course also war: for Arjuna is not (yet) going there to enjoy the rewards of a meritorious life, but to obtain divine weapons, and while sojourning in

> *ratho mātalisaṃyukta ājagāma mahāprabhaḥ* // 2 //
> *nabho vitimiraṃ kurvañ jaladān pāṭayann iva* /
> *diśaḥ saṃpūrayan nādair mahāmegharavopamaiḥ* // 3 //
> *asayaḥ śaktayo bhīmā gadāś cograpradarśanāḥ* /
> *divyaprabhāvāḥ prāsāś ca vidyutaś ca mahāprabhāḥ* // 4 //
> *tathaivāśanayas tatra cakrayuktā huḍāguḍāḥ* /
> *vāyusphoṭāḥ sanirghātā barhimeghanibhasvanāḥ* // 5 //
> *tatra nāgā mahākāyā jvalitāsyāḥ sudāruṇāḥ* /
> *sitābhrakūṭapratimāḥ saṃhatāś ca yathopalāḥ* // 6 //
> *daśa vājisahasrāṇi harīṇāṃ vātaraṃhasām* /
> *vahanti yaṃ netramuṣaṃ divyaṃ māyāmayaṃ ratham* // MBh 3. 43. 2c-7 //

> [...] the resplendent chariot arrived, driven by Mātali. Lifting darkness from the sky and shredding the clouds, it filled all of space with a roar like the thunder of the monsoon cloud. It held swords, terrible spears, clubs of ghastly aspect, missiles of divine power, and lustrous lightning flashes, as well as thunderbolts, wheeled battering rams, bellows that raised gales, loud like peacock and thunder cloud; Giant Snakes it carried, with fiery mouths, most terrifying, tall like white clouds and hard like mountains; ten thousand bay horses, fast as the wind, drew this eye-fetching, divine, magic chariot. (van Buitenen 1975, 307).

This terrifying car drawn by ten thousand bay steeds is certainly reminiscent of the Vedic Indra's flying chariot[20], but the choice of this particular term and vehicle used here to convey Arjuna to Indra's paradise also indirectly confirms that the use of *vimāna*s is the sole prerogative of the immortals and the deceased who have gained heavenly worlds, and that they are not meant for ordinary mortals[21].

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heaven, his father Indra requests his help to fight the demons called Nivātakavacas, whom Arjuna defeats riding on Indra's same *ratha*.

[20] Elsewhere, Indra is said to move about on a *vimāna*, as for instance in MBh 1. 51. 9, where he is helplessly drawn to King Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice with Takṣaka in his lap.

[21] This supposition is corroborated by MBh 1. 57. 14, where Indra grants to a still living king the exceptional boon to travel about on a celestial chariot:

> *tvam ekaḥ sarvamartyeṣu vimānavaram āsthitaḥ* /
> *cariṣyasy uparistho vai devo vigrahavān iva* // MBh 1. 57. 14 //

> Among all mortals you alone shall stand upon a grand and sky-going chariot, and indeed, you will ride there above, like a God come to flesh! (van Buitenen 1973, 131).

Elsewhere, however, the *Mahābhārata* emphasises the similitude between *ratha*s and *vimāna*s, especially – but not exclusively – in the war-books, where battle-chariots are frequently compared to *vimāna*s, and their owners to gods. Thus, Karṇa, setting out for battle on his glorious *ratha*, is compared to the god Indra standing on his *vimāna*:

> *hutāśanābhaḥ sa hutāśanaprabhe*
> *śubhaḥ śubhe vai svarathe dhanurdharaḥ* /
> *sthito rarājādhirathir mahārathaḥ*
> *svayaṃ vimāne surarāḍ iva sthitaḥ* // MBh 7. 2. 37c //
>
> Blazing like fire, he was surrounded by fire; in his gleaming chariot (*ratha*) he gleamed, wielding his bow. Warrior of warriors, the son of Adhiratha stood there and blazed, like the king of the gods in a car of the sky (*vimāna*). (Pilikian 2006, 53, modified)[22].

In a more pessimistic mood, comparisons between warriors falling from their mounts and heavenly beings falling from their *vimānas* illustrate that victory in the war is no more permanent than a sojourn on a *vimāna*, which lasts only as long as the merit gained in the previous life subsists, and is inexorably followed by a fall back into the pristine lowly earthly condition:

> *hayasyandananāgebhyaḥ petur vīrā dviṣaddhatāḥ* /
> *vimānebhyo yathā kṣīṇe puṇye svargasadas tathā* // MBh 8. 8. 7 //
>
> Struck by their enemies, the heroes fell from their horses, chariots and elephants, like the inhabitants of heaven fall from their *vimāna*s once their merit is exhausted. (My transl.)[23].

As we can see from this example and from other similar ones, the denizens of heaven are said to fall directly from their *vimāna*s once their merit is exhausted, and not from heaven. It appears as if the *vimāna*s served them not just as conveyances, but as permanent abodes during their heavenly sojourn.

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[22] See also MBh 9. 13. 9.

[23] Similarly, in MBh 9. 22. 86.

4. Vimāna *as Heaven*

In some examples of heavenly *vimāna*s adduced above, we have already noticed certain indices that make us suspect that these flying *vimāna*s are sometimes more than mere conveyances, but seem to serve as permanent places of sojourn in heaven. There are other clearer instances of this trend – especially in the *Mahābhārata* but also, to a lesser extent, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* – where the meaning of the term *vimāna* seems to overlap with that of *svarga* or *diva* ('paradise'). Thus, by semantic shift, this term comes to designate no longer merely the vehicle which takes the deceased to paradise, but the heavenly abode itself[24]. For instance, just before Rāma slays the *rākṣasa* Khara, he tells him:

> *adya tvāṃ nihataṃ bāṇaiḥ paśyantu paramarṣayaḥ* /
> *nirayasthaṃ vimānasthā ye tvayā hiṃsitāḥ purā* // Rm 3. 28. 13 //
>
> The supreme seers you killed in the past shall now look down upon you, they in their aerial chariots and you, slain by my arrows, in hell. (Pollock–Goldman 1991, 146).

Here *vimānastha* ('standing/residing on a *vimāna*') is juxtaposed to *nirayastha* ('standing/residing in hell'), as if *vimāna*s were the ultimate destination of well-doers, as opposed to hell, which is of course the final abode of evil-doers. In MBh 5. 100. 15 we find a description of the Rasātala, the other-worldly abode of the holy cow Surabhi, which is said to be an even more pleasant place to live in than the world of Snakes, or paradise, or the *vimāna triviṣṭapa* – Indra's heaven:

> *na nāgaloke na svarge na vimāne triviṣṭape* /
> *parivāsaḥ sukhas tādr̥g rasātalatale yathā* // MBh 5. 100. 15 //
>
> Neither in the world of the Snakes
> Nor heaven or Indra's paradise (*vimāne triviṣṭape*)
> Is the living as easy as in
> The World of Rasātala! (van Buitenen 1978, 391, modified).

The phrase *vimāne triviṣṭape* stands for the more usual *triviṣṭapa-* (or *tripiṣṭapa-*)*diva*. We see that here *vimāna* is used as a perfect synonym for *diva*, or paradise. Similarly, in the following passage which lists the merits gained by pilgrimages, the expression *gavāṃ vimāne* appears to be synonymous with *gavāṃ loke,* 'in the world of cows':

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[24] We may note that this meaning of *vimāna* as 'heaven' or at least 'type of heaven' is not listed in the dictionaries.

> *ye jīryante brahmacaryeṇa viprā*
> *brāhmīṃ vācaṃ parirakṣanti caiva /*
> *manasvinas tīrthayātrāparāyaṇās*
> *te tatra modanti gavāṃ vimāne* // MBh 13. 105. 44 //

> Those brahmins who grow old practising restraint and ever cultivate the sacred word, who are wise and perform pilgrimages, they enjoy themselves there, in the world of cows. (My transl.).

In its soteriological passages, most particularly in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*[25]*,* the *Mahābhārata* lists several means by which one can earn merit and consequently gain heavenly *vimāna*s. Pilgrimages are one of them, and descriptions of *tīrtha-yātrā*s ('tours of holy fords') enumerate the various sacred spots where one should perform ablutions in order to obtain *vimāna*s – either as conveyances to reach heaven, but sometimes also as permanent places of residence in heaven. The equivalence between *tīrtha-yātrā*s and sacrifices – traditionally regarded as the means *par excellence* to gain heaven – shows how the great epic is here trying to establish various parallel, yet equally effective, ways of gaining *puṇya* in an age where the performance of sacrifices was no longer acceptable in certain *milieu*s. In all the following examples, we see that the text does not mention the world obtained by the virtuous person, but only the *vimāna* – as if the latter had come to represent heaven itself:

> *dakṣiṇaṃ sindhum āsādya brahmacārī jitendriyaḥ /*
> *agniṣṭomam avāpnoti vimānaṃ cādhirohati* // MBh 3. 80. 72 //

> Carrying on to the Southern River, while remaining chaste and the master of one's senses, one obtains [the equivalence] of an *agniṣṭoma* and ascends a celestial chariot. (van Buitenen, 1975, 375, modified)[26].

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[25] As Sutton remarks (2000, 87): «The subject of gaining admission into heaven is discussed most exhaustively in the *Anuśāsana* and is a major theme of the teachings presented therein. Different sections of the *Anuśāsana* give different pious acts that bring rewards in the afterlife [...]».

[26] Similarly, in MBh 3. 82. 139; 3. 82. 143; 3. 83. 29.

The gift of cows is another means by which a *vimāna* can be obtained in the afterlife, as in the following passage which enumerates the virtues of cows and explains how they should be honoured:

> *gopradānarato yāti bhittvā jaladasaṃcayān /*
> *vimānenārkavarṇena divi rājan virājatā* // MBh 13. 78. 24 //
>
> He who delights in giving away cows goes, splitting the multitudes of rain clouds and shining in the sky, on a dazzling, gold-coloured *vimāna*. (My transl.).

Good deeds in general (*puṇya-karman*) can lead to the same result:

> *vimāneṣu vicitreṣu ramaṇīyeṣu bhārata /*
> *modante puṇyakarmāṇo viharanto yaśasvinaḥ* // MBh 13. 80. 28 //
>
> O Bhārata, those who performed good deeds enjoy themselves on charming many-coloured *vimāna*s, sporting about full of glory. (My transl.).

Fasting (*upavāsa*) is one more way of obtaining a favourable destiny after death. This topic is developed at length in MBh 13. 109-110[27]. These two chapters are particularly interesting, because at first glance they seem to display obvious unity and similarity in intent and content – explaining various fasts by means of which one can obtain different heavens after death –, but upon closer inspection they reveal some subtle differences. That these two *sarga*s are not unitary seems also confirmed by the fact that, at the beginning of 13. 110, Yudhiṣṭhira again asks Bhīṣma to describe fasts, saying that «the grandfather has just explained sacrifices, but please explain now how a poor man, unable to perform sacrifices, can reach heaven», as if Bhīṣma had not just expounded on fasting at length in 13. 109.

At the beginning of MBh 13. 109, Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma to explain the ways of fasting. Bhīṣma complies with his wish and enumerates various types of fasts which always conclude with the final journey to heaven, mounted on a *vimāna*, of the person who has performed the fast. In chapter 13. 109, these *vimāna*s are mere vehicles or conveyances, which, for the sake of variation, are said to be drawn by different species of beasts, and whose use seems restricted to the journey from earth to heaven. Thus, we repeatedly find the phrase: 'he goes by means of a *vimāna* and then enjoys himself in heaven' (*vimānena sa gacchati* [...] *divi modate*) (*e.g.* 13. 109. 45; 49; 52), with a clear distinction between heaven itself and *vimāna* as the means to reach it. As in the case of pilgrimages, the merits of fasting are always weighed against the merits of sacrifices, which, "by default" so to say, appear as the method *par excellence* whereby one can earn merit and consequently heaven.

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[27] Due to these two *sarga*s, the *Anuśāsanaparvan* is the book which contains the greatest number of occurrences of *vimāna* in the MBh.

In MBh 13. 110, fasting is presented specifically as an alternative means by which the poor (*daridra*), who cannot afford to offer costly sacrifices, can reach heaven (13. 110. 2-4). Bhīṣma enumerates various fasts, starting with fasts in which one eats twice a day (morning and evening) and going on up to eating only once a month. This practice is rewarded by increasingly long sojourns in various heavenly worlds (*loka*). What is especially interesting for our purpose in this long enumeration (*sarga* 13. 110 contains no less than 137 verses) is that it always contains a reference to the *vimāna* which is attributed to the person who goes to heaven. Whereas in MBh 13. 109 the *vimāna*s appear as mere means of transportation (with emphasis on the various animals used to draw them), in MBh 13. 110, they increasingly seem to be described as the permanent palatial flying residences attributed to individual meritorious persons within the various heavens of gods. These *vimāna*s are drawn by a great variety of animals, but are also sometimes said to be fashioned in the form of animals, especially *haṃsa*s (see *e.g.* MBh 13. 110. 12; 21: *vimānaṃ haṃsalakṣaṇam*), as if the actual draught animal had become a mere decorative item[28]. These *vimāna*s are furthermore said to look like towns (*nagarākāre*, MBh 13. 110. 126), a shape and size which is certainly more suitable to a permanent residence than to a mere chariot. They are filled with beautiful women who provide for sensual pleasures[29], and with great numbers of *apsaras*es and *gandharva*s who take care of the musical entertainment. Instead of the phrase 'he goes on a *vimāna*', we now find expressions like 'a man obtains a *vimāna*' (*vimānaṃ labhate naraḥ*: MBh 13.110.17; 37; 82), 'he climbs on a *vimāna*' (*vimānam adhirohati*: MBh 13. 110. 34; 67), 'he will gain a *vimāna*' (*vimānaṃ sādhayet*: MBh 13. 110. 43; 56), 'he is established on a choice *vimāna*' (*vimānavaram āsthitaḥ*: MBh 13. 110. 89; 92; 95; 109), 'he lives on a *vimāna*' (*vimāne* [...] *vasati*: MBh 13. 110. 126-127). Sometimes, a *vimāna* is said to be established (*pratiṣṭhita*) in a particular heavenly world, for instance in the world of Brahmā: *vimānaṃ* [...] *brahmaloke pratiṣṭhitam* (MBh 13. 110. 52-54). Once, even gods like Śiva and Brahmā are said to live in *vimāna*s:

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[28] Admittedly, the expression *haṃsalakṣaṇa* is rather vague: 'having the mark of a swan' or 'characterised by swans' might also mean that they are drawn by them.

[29] Not surprisingly, the people who enjoy these heavens are apparently all men!

> *abhigacchen mahādevaṃ vimānasthaṃ mahābalam /*
> *svayaṃbhuvaṃ ca paśyeta vimānaṃ samupasthitam* // MBh 13. 110. 47 //
>
> He will go to Mahādeva of great puissance, who resides on a *vimāna*, and he will see Svayaṃbhū sojourning on a *vimāna*. (My transl.).

We may note that in this long enumeration, the *vimāna*s obtained after death by the adepts of fasts are frequently given more prominence than the worlds they reach, which are even completely omitted on a few occasions. By contrast, the *vimāna*s are often lavishly described. This is the case for the person who eats only once a fortnight. We may quote this passage at length as an example. Here, there is no mention of a heavenly world, but only of the *vimāna* obtained as a reward, which clearly appears to be the ultimate abode itself:

> *yas tu pakṣe gate bhuṅkte ekabhaktaṃ jitendriyaḥ /*
> *sadā dvādaśa māsāṃs tu juhvāno jātavedasam /*
> *rājasūyasahasrasya phalaṃ prāpnoty anuttamam* // 64 //
> *yānam ārohate nityaṃ haṃsabarhiṇasevitam /*
> *maṇimaṇḍalakaiś citraṃ jātarūpasamāvr̥tam* // 65 //
> *divyābharaṇaśobhābhir varastrībhir alaṃkr̥tam /*
> *ekastambhaṃ caturdvāraṃ saptabhaumaṃ sumaṅgalam /*
> *vaijayantīsahasraiś ca śobhitaṃ gītanisvanaiḥ* // 66 //
> *divyaṃ divyaguṇopetaṃ vimānam adhirohati /*
> *maṇimuktāpravālaiś ca bhūṣitaṃ vaidyutaprabham /*
> *vased yugasahasraṃ ca khaḍgakuñjaravāhanaḥ* // MBh 13. 110. 64-67 //
>
> He who eats only one meal at the end of every fortnight, keeping his senses under control and constantly sacrificing to the fire for twelve months, obtains an unsurpassable reward [equivalent to] a thousand *rājasūya* sacrifices. He always rides a vehicle (*yāna*)[30] attended by swans and peacocks, set with heaps of precious stones, and plated with gold. He mounts a divine *vimāna* endowed with celestial qualities and graced with splendid women glittering with divine ornaments. This (*vimāna*) is highly auspicious, with one pillar, four gates and seven storeys, embellished by thousands of banners and by the sounds of

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[30] We may assume that *yāna* is used here as a synonym of *vimāna.*

> songs. It is decorated with gems, pearls and coral and shines like lightning. He will live [on this *vimāna*] for a thousand *yuga*s, drawn by elephants and rhinoceroses." (My transl.).

We thus see that there is a gradual shift between *sarga*s 13. 109 and 13. 110, from *vimāna* used as a chariot-like flying conveyance to go from earth to heaven, to *vimāna* becoming the palatial or even town-like permanent residence of heaven-dwellers. The *vimāna*s come to resemble individual capsule-like heavens floating in the sky within the perimeter of the heavenly worlds of the gods, somewhat like smaller intergalactic vessels surrounding a mother-spaceship – if we may be allowed this comparison borrowed from the realm of science-fiction.

As we see, this passage from the *Anuśāsanaparvan* insists on the luxury of the *vimāna*s obtained in the next world and describes them with a wealth of detail and an enumeration of costly and luxurious materials which evoke an irresistible picture of paradisiacal wealth and beauty. Such descriptions were probably meant to dazzle and attract the poor – whom we must imagine as living in squalor forming a radical contrast to the fabulous worlds described here – and encourage them to behave meritoriously in the manner prescribed by the text in order to reach a more pleasant state of being in the afterlife. Thus, these descriptions of heavenly *vimāna*s are essentially used in a *pravṛtti* world-view[31], which sets forth paradise – and not liberation – as the ultimate goal.

In all these points, the term *vimāna* as it is used in MBh 13. 110 cannot fail to remind us of *vimāna*s as they are described in the *Vimānavatthu*, or 'The Stories about *Vimāna*s', a Pāli Buddhist Canonical text belonging to the *Khuddakanikāya* of the *Suttapiṭaka*. The *Vimānavatthu* is composed in verse and contains 83 edifying stories showing how a simple meritorious deed can be rewarded by heavenly pleasures on *vimāna*s, described as mobile mini-paradises, comprising palaces, gardens, ponds, etc. In her introduction to the first English translation of this text, the editor, Mrs Rhys Davids (1942, vi) remarks that: « "Vimāna" is hard to render well. It is a Sanskrit, not a Pāli word». The word may be Sanskrit, but the concept of *vimāna* as a mini-heaven such as it appears in the Pāli *Vimānavatthu* may in turn have influenced the *Anuśāsana*'s representation of the same. But this topic deserves further investigation, especially into the relative dates of the two texts.

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[31] We remember Mudgala's decided rejection of the same in a passage extolling the *nivṛtti* world-view.

5. *Conclusions*

Drawing from the observations we have made so far, we can posit the following hypothesis as to the development of the concept of *vimāna* in the epics:

– *vimāna* first designates a palace, a building of some size and luxury, which has to be built according to precise measurements (the first signification of the term *vimāna*).

– From the very time when palaces started to be built, people must have started to imagine that the gods too inhabit similar buildings in paradise[32], only on an even grander and more magnificent scale, looking like flying towns built of palaces. Perhaps the sight of cities built on elevations and seeming to float in the sky may have helped to give rise to the notion of celestial *vimāna*s in heaven.

– Since the gods' palaces were of course up in the air, and therefore not rooted to the ground, it must have followed that they could move about and need not be fixed to a given point in the atmosphere.

– To allow them to travel in the sky or to come down to earth, the *vimāna*s were imagined to be drawn through the air by various beasts – in this, resembling the Vedic gods' *ratha*s, only looking more like mobile palaces or towns, not like chariots.

– Since not only the gods, but also newly deceased meritorious people were imagined as using *vimāna*s to go up to their final abode, the name of the conveyance used to reach paradise gradually came to designate, by semantic shift, paradise itself, or at least one particular type of individual mini-heaven, sometimes located within the sphere of a given divine world.

Heaven is in the image of a well-measured palace.

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[32] We have seen that it is not really possible to assign an earlier date to either the meaning of 'palace' or 'flying structure' in the epics.

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Conquering the Sun:
Sovereignty and Liminality in the Vedic *Mahāvrata* Rite

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the Vedic *mahāvrata* rite, or the rite of the so-called 'Great observance', as an important turning point in the definition of the late Vedic cosmic taxonomy related to the conception of cosmic sovereignty. According to the scholarly literature, the *mahāvrata* rite is an annual festival, marking the winter solstice, which takes place on the last but one day of the *gavāmayana* ritual, or 'March of the Cows'. It belongs to the *sattra* typology, a 'sacrificial session', which may reflect a pre-*śrauta* ritual reality, and a sort of clan sodality, according to which all the participants play reciprocally equivalent roles. Moreover, the same rite would represent a means through which a new paradigm of sovereignty was represented: in actual fact a sort of "dynastic chiefdom" was established, that is a large confederation, namely the Kuru realm, whose power was more stable and centralised than previous clan-based societies, with increasing social stratification and specialisation. Furthermore, as a solstice rite, it is combined with a solar mythology, especially with the Vala-myth, which could be well applied to a new cosmic and transcendent ideology of sovereignty. Therefore, the *mahāvrata* day represents a perfect "liminal" experience: it marks the passage from darkness to light, from death to life. It is not only expression of a mere popular seasonal festival, guarantee of prosperity and wealth, but also contributes to defining a 'power' taxonomy, inasmuch as the liminal condition of the *vrātya* initiation is turned into a sort of paradoxical permanent liminality, by which cosmic sovereignty is established.

Keywords: *mahāvrata* rite, Kuru sovereignty, *vrātya* initiation, solar imagery.

1. *Introduction: Conquering the Sun and Sovereignty*

The motif of conquering the sun or sunlight (*svàr / súvar* [PIE **s(é)h$_2$wl̥*][1]) is widespread in the Old Vedic culture. It is frequently expressed by means of a phraseology based on syntagms such as *svàr √san^i*, ‘to win the sun’, with its derivative *svar-ṣā́* ‘sun-winning, the winner of the sun’, and *svàr√ji,* ‘to conquer the sun’, particularly used in its nominal equivalent, the compound *svar-jít* ‘the conqueror of the sun’[2]. Such expressions refer to a common imagery concerning heavenly light, (*e.g.* Roesler 1997). Moreover, myths centred on the sun are essential in Rigvedic poetry, likely as heritage of Indo-European traditions (West 2007, 194ff.). In actual fact, as attested in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic collections, brightness, especially sunlight, is conceived of in the Vedic culture as corresponding to well-being and cosmic prosperity. It guarantees long life and wealth, whereas darkness conveys paucity and death[3]. Therefore, such a correspondence between dichotomies such as sunlight *vs.* darkness, life *vs.* death, wealth *vs.* paucity frequently overlaps with the antagonistic warrior context[4]: coping with Otherness, overcoming enemies / demons and conquering wealth, especially cattle, means finding and conquering brightness, as in R̥V 2. 23. 3:

> *ā́ vibā́dhyā parirā́pas támāṃsi ca jyótiṣmantaṃ rátham r̥tásya tiṣṭhasi /*
> *bŕ̥haspate bhīmám amitradámbhanaṃ rakṣohā́ṇaṃ gotrabhídaṃ suvarvídam*
> // R̥V 2. 23. 3 //
>
> Having pressed away evasive chatter and darkness, you mount truth’s light-bearing chariot, which terrifies, which vanquishes enemies, o Br̥haspati, and which smashes demons, splits cowpens, and finds the sun[5]. (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 433).

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[1] As for a detailed etymological analysis, see Pinault 2017.

[2] Although *svar-ṣā́* and *svar-jít* are both already attested in the Rigvedic collection (Scarlata 1999: 585; 161-162), the former is prevalent in the Rigvedic hymns, whereas the latter is mainly mentioned in the Atharvavedic collection.

[3] Cf. *e.g.* R̥V 6. 47. 8ab: *urúṃ no lokám ánu neṣi vidvā́n / súvarvaj jyótir ábhayaṃ suastí /* ‘[Indra], lead us along to a wide world, as the one who knows — to sun-filled light, to fearlessness, to well-being’. (Jamison-Brereton 2014, 836).

[4] In particular, the appearance of the Dawns is conceived of in cosmogonic terms, as «the victory of Light over Darkness, of Life over Death», according to Kuiper (1983, 159ff., namely 161), just in relation to the Vala-myth.

[5] The compound *suvarvíd*, ‘the finder of the sun’ is commonly mentioned in the Rigvedic collection (cf. Scarlata 1999, 585), in relation to manifold deities such as Agni, Indra, Br̥haspati, Soma, etc. However, it fully complies with the Vala-myth in which the sun is found and “brought to light”.

The above lines refer in particular to the Vala-myth which is a sort of duplicate of the Vṛtra-myth, that is the release of the sun / Dawns, equivalent to the cows / waters, by disclosing the cave of the demon Vala and smashing it on behalf of Indra / Br̥haspati[6]. In actual fact, the very phraseology meaning 'conquering the sun / sunlight' correlates Indra / Br̥haspati to the Vala-myth itself (*e.g.* R̥V 2. 18. 1; 3. 34. 4 ~ AVŚ 20. 11. 4; R̥V 1. 100. 13; 10. 47. 5 ~ MS 4. 14. 8) or alludes to the stealing of the sun wheel on Indra's behalf[7]. Finally, the motif of conquering the sun is highlighted by the explicit Rigvedic *bahuvrīhi* compound *svàrmīḷha*, literally meaning 'one whose prize is the sun', that is the definition of 'contest' as such, which is mostly correlated to Indra (R̥V 1. 56. 5; 1. 63. 6; 1. 130. 8; 4. 16. 15; 8. 68. 5), and his companions, the Maruts (R̥V 1. 169. 2), who are the winners of contests *par excellence*[8]. Thus, the following chain of equivalences is suggested: light → sun ~ cattle → conquering the sun ~ release of cattle → prosperity. The same motif is renovated in the ritual context: warrior deeds are already ritually re-evoked and re-founded through the somic liturgy in the Rigvedic somic book, for example, in R̥V 9. 97. 39:

> *sá vardhitā́ várdhanaḥ pūyámānaḥ sómo mīḍhvā́m̐ abhí no jyótiṣāvīt /*
> *yénā naḥ pū́rve pitáraḥ padajñā́ḥ suvarvído abhí gā́ ádrim uṣṇán //*
> R̥V 9. 97. 39 //
>
> The strengthening strengthener, being purified, Soma the rewarder, helped us with his light, with which our forefathers, knowing the track, finding the sun, burned the cows out of the rock. (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1342).

However, it is in the later Rigvedic textual layer and in the Atharvavedic collection that the motif of conquering the sun/sunlight is explicitly associated with sovereignty: *e.g.* R̥V 10. 120. 8 ~ AVŚ 5. 2. 8 ~ AVP 6. 1. 8

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[6] In the earlier Rigvedic textual layer Br̥haspati is an epithet of Indra: see Schmidt 1968, especially 237-240.

[7] Thus in R̥V 1. 130. 9; 1. 175. 4; 4. 30. 4; 5. 29. 5, 9-10; 5. 31. 11; 1. 121. 13; here a chariot race between Indra and Sun / Dawn is hinted at, alluding to the stealing of the sun wheel on behalf of Indra.

[8] The Rigvedic *mīḷha* ~ Ved. *mīḍhá* 'booty, prize, reward', OAv. *mīžda* 'wage, reward', Gk. μισθός 'wage' < PIE **misd*^{h}*h*$_{1}$*ó* 'reward, providing remuneration', is probably a derivative of PIE *√*mey* 'to exchange' (Mayrhofer 1996, 357-358; 314-315); also, the derivative *mīḍhváṃs* 'rewarder, generous', is employed as epithet of Indra in R̥V 2. 24. 1, with reference to the same Vala-myth.

> *imā́ bráhma br̥háddivo vivakti índrāya śūṣám agriyáḥ suarṣā́ḥ* /
> *mahó gotrásya kṣayati svarā́jo dúraś ca víśvā avr̥ṇod ápa svā́ḥ* //
> R̥V 10. 120. 8 //
>
> Br̥haddiva speaks these sacred formulations fortissimo to Indra: "the first to win the sun, he has dominion over the great cowpen of the sovereign king, and he opened up all the doors that are his own". (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1592).

Br̥haddiva, lit. 'one whose heaven is lofty' / 'one who has lofty heaven', is equivalent to Br̥haspati as the priestly counterpart of Indra (Griffiths 2009, 15ff.), and the references to the cowpen (*gotrá*) and the opening of 'doors' (*dúraś ca víśvā √vr̥*) allude to the Vala-myth (Schmidt 1968, 208); henceforth, the term *svarā́j* 'sovereign king' (lit. 'self-ruler') refers to Indra / Br̥haddiva[9]. Moreover, in AVP 5. 2. 8 ≈ TS 2. 3. 14. 6[10], Br̥haspati acts upon the cosmos, along the cosmic vertical axis, from the bottom (*budhnād* / *budhnyā́d*) to the top: he has conquered the sunlight (*súvar √ji*) in st. 4 (≈ AVŚ 4. 1. 4cd; 4. 1. 5ab; TS 2. 3. 14. 6; R̥VKh 3. 22. 3) and he is designated as overlord (*saṃrā́j*).

> *budhnā́d yó ágram abhyárty ójasā bṛhaspátim ā vivāsanti devā́ḥ* /
> *bhinád valáṃ ví púro dardarīti kánikradat gāḥ súvar apó jigāya* //
> AVP 5. 2. 4 //
>
> The gods try to win Br̥haspati, who powerfully rises from the bottom to the top; he broke Vala, he smashes the fortresses, roaring he has won the cows, the sunlight and the waters. (Lubotsky 2002, 17, slightly modified).

It is evident that conquering the sun ratifies the supremacy of the winner, so that it is the foremost token of overlordship. And the close relationship between kingship and cosmic solar attributes will be definitively formalised in the later dharmic literature, where the sovereign is compared to the sun (*e.g.* MDŚ 7.6)[11]. However, the association of sunlight with the emergence of sovereignty is parallel to the development of the Brahmanical priestly function and the correlated ritualism, since it becomes a means of legitimation of rulership. For example, the very ritual of the royal consecration (*rājasūya*)[12] was likely instituted by the Kuru hegemony (1200–900 BCE), that is, at the time when, according to Witzel (1995), a dynastic tribal confederation, led by the Kuru clan, emerged. By means of this rite the sovereign was recognised as such, insofar as he was provided with a solar body (Proferes 2007, 81ff.) and solar attributes (*várcas* 'splendor'). According to this correspondence between sovereignty and "solar-ship", the king was equivalent to the rising sun. He was called Rohita (*e.g.* in AVŚ 13. 2 = AVP 18. 20), literally 'the ruddy one', but also 'one who is caused to raise upwards' (< √*ruh*) and rose up like the rising sun, 'mounting the heavenly directions' (*digvyāsthāpana*) and offering oblations to the heavenly quarters[13], thus mapping space and measuring time. In this way a paradigm of supra-tribal or "transcendent" sovereignty was established, which had to overcome the clan divisions, thus representing a sort of a social "ecumenisation"[14]. In particular, the priestly function was reconfigured: whereas in pre-Kuru Vedic culture, priestly and royal functions were embodied by proto-Vedic chieftainship[15], the Kuru hegemony separated them. In actual fact, while on the one hand, the institution of a separated priestly category, such as the *brāhmaṇa* one, contributed to the development of the ritual as a support for the new ideal of sovereignty, on the other, a new social organisation was introduced, which saw the sacerdotal class come to increase its prestige, thus preluding the hierarchically stratified caste system. Nonetheless, in claiming the cosmic primacy of the kingship (*rājanya*), the *rājasūya* rite itself is an example of a liminal condition[16]: firstly, shining up to the cosmic limits, thus removing darkness and fostering prosperous existence is a role played at the edge of non-being, on the threshold of the dangerous lightlessness that recalls the same warrior tension which in the proto-Vedic myth leads Indra to find and conquer the sun, fighting against the Vala demon. Secondly, this ascent to heaven, spreading through intermediate space like the rising sun, implies a transitional reality from which a new identity stems, that is the royal one. For example, in R̥V 10. 139. 2 Sūrya himself, defined as the eye of mankind, is pictured as a cosmic entity emerging in-between the spatio-temporal polarity (*pū́rvam áparaṃ ca*):

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[9] The interpretation of these verses is controversial: Geldner (1951, III. 347) claims that *svarā́j* is an epithet of the demon Vala. Cf. also the translation and related discussion in Griffiths 2009, 15ff.: «Br̥haddiva speaks these poems as a fortifying [laud] for Indra, the first to win the light. He (Br̥haddiva) rules over the self-ruler [Indra]'s great cow-pen, and all his own doors he has opened».

[10] Cf. Lubotsky 2002, 13-17. TS 2. 3. 14. 6 closes with the reading: *súvar apó jigāya* 'he has won the sunlight, the waters'.

[11] Cf. *e.g.* Gonda 1969, 25-26.

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[12] Cf. Proferes 2007, 78-91; Tsuchiyama 2005; Heesterman 1957.

[13] Cf. Heesterman 1957, 103ff.; 196ff.

[14] As regards the definition of "ecumenisation", also in relation to the development of the *śrauta* ritualism, inasmuch as it outdid the clan divisions, see Proferes 2007, 12.

[15] Cf. Brereton 2004.

[16] Cf. Turner 1969, namely as for the rite of status elevation, p. 170ff.

> *nṛcákṣā eṣá divó mádhya āsta āpaprivā́n ródasī antárikṣam /*
> *sá viśvā́cīr abhí caṣṭe ghṛtā́cīr antarā́ pū́rvam áparaṃ ca ketúm //*
> R̥V 10. 139. 2 //
>
> With his eye on men, he sits in the middle of heaven, having filled both world-halves and the space between. He watches over [his mares? the ladles?] facing toward ghee, facing in all directions (*viśváñc*), between the earlier and the later beacon. (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1625, slightly modified).

The ritualisation of such liminal status by means of the *rājasūya* contributes to institutionalising the dominant and supra-tribal role of sovereign, that is to say that the state of liminality becomes permanent[17]: the royal consecration turns the proto-Vedic double chieftainship, based on the alternating phases of settlement (*kṣéma*) and mobilisation (*yóga*) and belonging to a semi-nomadic tribal society[18] into royal uniqueness, which is definitively "outsiderhood", that is over and beyond the fluctuant clan-lordship; in other words, it is a cosmic overlordship. Such a conception of sovereignty is mirrored in the Vedic textual *repertoire* which is directly associated to the Kuru hegemony, that is the first and the tenth Rigvedic books and the Atharvavedic collection whose compilation is indeed attributed to the Kuru period[19]. For example, in AVŚ 13. 2. 2-3 = AVP 18. 20. 6-7 the sun-Āditya / king, lit. 'one who shines like a sun' (*svaráyat*) is praised as a cosmic cowherd (*bhúvanasya gopā́* 'cowherd / protector of the living beings'), *éka* 'unique', who maps space and measures time:

> *diśā́ṃ prajñā́nāṃ* [AVP *prajñā́nam*] *svaráyantam arcíṣā supakṣám āśúṃ*
> *patáyantam arṇavé /*
> *stávāma sū́ryaṃ bhúvanasya gopā́ṃ yó raśmíbhir díśa ābhā́ti sárvāḥ // 2 //*
> *yát prā́ṅ pratyáṅ svadháyā yā́si śī́bhaṃ nā́nārūpe áhanī kárṣi māyáyā /*
> *tád āditya máhi tát te máhi śrávo yád éko víśvaṃ pári bhū́ma jā́yase // 3 //*
> AVŚ 13. 2. 2-3 //
>
> [Him] shining with the brightness, the foreknowing of quarters, well-winged, flying swift in the ocean — we would praise the sun, the shepherd of existence, who with his rays shines unto all the quarters.
> In that you go swiftly in front, behind, at will, [and] make by magic the two days of diverse form — that, o Āditya, [is] great, that [is] your great fame, that

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[17] Thomassen 2015, 54-55.
[18] Schmidt 1992; cf. also fn. 31.
[19] Witzel 1997, 262-264; 278.

> you alone are born about the whole world. (Whitney 1905, II. 719-720, slightly modified).

Significantly, in st. 30 of the same hymn, the well-known motif of conquering the sun is mentioned by means of the compound *svarjít*, 'conqueror of the sun'. In this case (AVŚ 13. 2. 30 ≈ AVP 18. 23. 7) the king / sun metamorphosis is fully realized, inasmuch as the very term *pátaṅga*, 'the flying one' occurs in R̥V 10. 177 as the embodiment of the sun:

> *rócase diví rócase antárikṣe pátaṅga pr̥thivyā́ṃ rócase rócase apsv à1ntáḥ /*
> *ubhā́ samudráu rúcyā vy āpā́ itha devó devāsi mahiṣáḥ svarjít //*
> AVŚ 13. 2. 30 //

> 'You shine in the sky, you shine in the atmosphere, O flying one; on the earth you shine, you shine within the waters; both oceans you have penetrated with your sheen; O god, you are the god, the sun-conquering buffalo'. (Whitney 1905, II. 724, slightly modified).

As regards these dynamics that concern the relationship between liminality, sovereignty and ritualism, it is worth recalling that in the *mahāvrata,* another peculiar Brahmanical rite, the mythical motif of conquering the sun is ritualised in the form of an agonistic scene, which sees two participants struggle to conquer an animal's hide, explicitly defined as the mesocosmic counterpart of the macrocosmic sun.

The frozen state of liminality in which the new sovereignty is unfolded comes about right here, between the mythical deed as evoked in the Rigvedic and Atharvavedic stanzas and its ritualisation in the *mahāvrata* rite.

2. *Liminality and the Vedic* Mahāvrata *Rite*

The *mahāvrata* rite or 'Great Observance' is an annual festival that marks the winter solstice and takes place on the last but one day of the *gavāmayana* ritual, lit. 'March of the Cows'. Given its ambiguous positions in Brahmanical ritualism, it appears to embody liminality as such. In actual fact, although it implies the classical somic liturgy like the *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice, it belongs to the *sattra* typology[20], which means that all the officiants are simultaneously sacrificers, that is to say that the traditional ritualistic roles are not observed: this is not completely in line with the Brahmanical orthopraxy[21]. Moreover, it is also characterised by non-standard ritual elements that confer a «bacchanal atmosphere» upon it[22], such as musical instruments, dancing and singing women, explicit sexual references, with obscene dialogues and intercourse. The *mahāvrata* is a calendrical rite and as a ceremony that marks the passage from the old to the new year, it is definitely the critical liminal point, in which sunlight, life and prosperity must be renewed and re-founded by means of peculiar performances[23]. In actual fact, these non-classical elements have been interpreted as remnants of a seasonal festival of prosperity, an expression of that popular culture that may have also had some non-Āryan components: mingled with the Āryan culture, they were subordinated to Brahmanical elitism[24]. However, given the peculiar agonistic scenes (verbal and physical contests, chariot-races), which also include the struggle to conquer the animal's hide equated with the sun, it has also been hypothesised that the *mahāvrata* may preserve remnants of a form of pre-classical rite, prior to the development of the *śrauta* reform, especially in relation to the antagonistic warrior *milieu.* For example, according to Heesterman, the *mahāvrata* rite corroborates the thesis that primordial warrior violence was the archetype of sacrificial violence itself, which was gradually converted to a metaphorical level, by means of the mediation of the priestly category[25].

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[20] As for the classical *sattra* ritual or 'sacrificial session', cf. Falk 1985.

Furthermore, references to the so-called *vrātya* culture have been highlighted[26]: the *mahāvrata* rite might have originated in the same warrior brotherhood / *Männerbund* of Indo-European matrix of which the *vrātya* culture is an expression[27]. Nonetheless, the *vrātya* culture itself is considered on the edge of Brahmanical orthodoxy, that is a token of the liminal condition as such. This would also mean that the *mahāvrata*, as a result of the Brahmanical process of ritualisation, is paradoxically an example of permanent liminality, that is institutionalised liminality. Lastly, it is worth recalling that this rite is correlated to the Kuru hegemony: in the *Kuntāpa* section (AVŚ 20. 127-136 ≈ R̥VKh 5. 8-22) which probably refers to the *mahāvrata* rite, the Kuru King Parikṣit and his kingdom are praised and celebrated[28].

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[21] As regards the relationship between *sattra* context and *śrauta* ritual, cf. Candotti–Pontillo 2015; Amano 2016.

[22] As Jamison (1996, 96-98) states; as regards this rite, cf. Keith 1908; 1909; Rolland 1973; Witzel 2005; also, the remarkable overview by Selva 2019, 398-399.

[23] Cf. Turner 1969, 168ff.; Kuiper 1960, 221-222. As for the relationship with Carnival Festivals, cf. also Selva 2019, 330-331.

[24] For example: Keith 1908; Rolland 1973.

[25] Cf. Heesterman 1985, 75ff.; in particular, in 1993, 55: «the actual sacrifice has been taken out of its context and remodelled according to the standard *śrauta* code».

[26] Cf. Hauer 1927, 246-267; Horsch 1966, 325-327.

[27] Falk 1986, 31; 44; Kershaw 1997, 338ff.

This would mean that, on the one hand, the Kuru sovereignty as "solar-ship" is a prerogative of the warrior heritage and, on the other, that such warrior heritage may coincide with the *vrātya* heritage, represented by the pre-Kuru young warrior brotherhood. In actual fact, the liminal character is emphasised especially in the agonistic scenes: the pre-determined limits are repeatedly challenged in the juxtaposition of figures playing antithetical roles and pronouncing antonymous expressions, and the borders between life and death become fluctuant. Reality here is unstable and uncertain, suspended between the binary oppositions, represented by the rivals, on the edge of chaos[29]; boundaries must be recursively redefined and a new cosmos re-founded thanks to the victory of one of them, who is to be the supreme lord as such. Therefore, the dynamics of rivalry, power and kingship are linked to the liminal condition, or better, the acknowledgement of lordship progresses through liminal dynamics.

3. *Conquering the Sun as a Passage Rite*

As is well-known, the notion of liminality is especially correlated to the rites of passages, on which the famous work of Arnold van Gennep, *Rites de passage* (1909), was focused. Such rites mark the passage from one social role to another and represent the ongoing process of transition, that is the threshold condition between the separation from regular life within a community, and the reincorporation into the community itself, but with a new official publicly recognised role. These two crucial moments are tackled by means of specific rites equated to the contest with death and attainment of rebirth through initiation trials. Liminality is the spatio-temporal translation between these two antithetical points. In the Brahmanical society and henceforth in the dharmic orthodoxy, these characteristics belong to the *saṃskāra* rites, which mark the stages of life (*āśrama*), especially the *brahmacarya*, or 'studentship' which is introduced and closed by two specific passage rites (*upanayana* and *samāvartana*). However, in the proto-Vedic clan-based society the classical *āśrama*s have yet to be outlined, and studentship in particular does not coincide with the scholarly learning of the Vedas, since the Brahmanical schools, committed to the preservation and the transmission of the texts did not exist yet: it is likely that in the earlier cultural phase, what becomes the later *brahmacarya* was equivalent to the stage of formation of future chieftains, those who held the double function of 'warrior-lord' and 'priest-lord'[30]. Moreover, the semi-nomadic tribal existence of the clan-based society was guaranteed by alternating phases of settlement (*kṣéma*) and mobilisation (*yóga*), which were managed by a double chieftainship, personified by mythical prototypes such as Varuṇa (*saṃrā́j* 'sovereign king') and Indra (*svarā́j* 'independent king')[31]: the former should represent the paradigm of lordship that preserves wealth, livestock and men in the settlements, while the latter should refer to the paradigm of lordship committed to collecting cattle and managing their seasonal movement and the correlated warrior operations. As far as a possible reconstruction of such a proto-Vedic cultural stage is concerned, it is assumable that the very *vrātya* culture as an example of Indo-European warrior brotherhood / *Männerbund* implied a form of initiation for the warrior-novices[32], so that it might be an expression of 'studentship' or initiation practices aimed at training young male members of the clan for lordship, especially for the Indraic form of lordship[33]. In particular, such an initiation period lasted a year: during the rainy season, starting with the summer solstice, ascetic life was practiced in the wilderness, under the guide of Rudra, whereas the war season, starting with the winter solstice and spent carrying out cattle raids, was led by Indra, who embodied warrior adulthood[34]. And it is reasonable that each of these two different phases of initiation was opened and closed by peculiar rites. In this sense, noting that such a warrior training period proceeds in parallel to the course of the sun, the "solar-ship" must be one of the foremost characterising formative traits of such a form of studentship[35]. In actual fact, the future Indraic chieftain must be able to orient himself and the livestock of his clan along accessible paths, following the rhythmical fluctuation of day and night, between sunlight and darkness; he must be expert at recognising animal traces, finding lost cattle, collecting and yoking livestock, releasing and even conquering his herds. In such an initiation context, a competition correlated to the sun esoterically equated to the cattle might be expected: the scene of the *mahāvrata* rite must be interpreted as a remnant of that initiation challenge, since the *mahāvrata* day marks the winter solstice itself. In actual fact, on the one hand, it might close the first formative stage, as a sort of sapiential trial. It is worth recalling that one of the verbal contests performed during the *mahāvrata* day is also a dispute between a *brahmacārin* and a woman defined as *puṃścalī*, conventionally translated as 'harlot', but literally meaning 'one who moves around the men'. On the other hand, as an auspicious and apotropaic rite it also opens the war season, ensuring a rich booty of cattle, wealth and prosperity. The final prize for this challenge is the sun itself, that is reincorporation into the clan community as the embodiment of Indraic lordship[36]. At this point, it is worth noticing that the Kuru paradigm of sovereignty must indeed be rooted in such a *vrātya* context, or better that Indraic lordship, modelled on the *vrātya* initiation, is reproduced in the Kuru model of supra-tribal overlordship; in this case, the prize for the challenge is the sun itself, that is cosmic leadership. This transformation owes much to the renewed priestly role and the consequent Brahmanical revision: the development of the ritualisation permits the liminality of the proto-Vedic initiation practices to be turned into a means to legitimise the Kuru sovereignty. In this way, paradoxically, liminality becomes permanent, transposed into the dynastic sovereignty, and the passage rites of the young warrior are institutionalised in the rite of the winter solstice. In this sense, a new social order is an output of the *vrātya* liminal state, led by renovated overlordship; however, it is the same new paradigm of sovereignty associated with the new social order that is about to stigmatise the *vrātya* culture, that is, liminality as such: reality must be wholly under royal supra-tribal control and the new boundaries are the cosmic limits.

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[28] Cf. Witzel 1995, 7-8.

[29] Turner 1969, 38ff.

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[30] Cf. Schlerath 1995, 20-46, namely 33-34; and 1960. As for the Vedic *brahmacarya*, cf. Neri–Pontillo 2014 [2015], 160ff.

[31] Cf. Schlerath 1960, 132-135; Schmidt 1992.

[32] Cf. Kershaw 1997, 88ff.; 395ff.

[33] Cf. Kershaw 1997, 342ff.; Selva 2019, 329ff.

[34] Cf. Selva 2019, namely 405. As for Indra as «a seasonal god, connected with the ceremonies that accompanied the transition from the old to the new year», cf. Kuiper 1979, 137ff.

[35] As for the relationship between sun-*rohitá* and *vrātya*-leadership, cf. Dore 2015, 39ff., namely 57.

4. *Conquering the Sun and "Solar-ship" as the Kuru Paradigm of Sovereignty*

The Vedic textual *repertoire* concerning the *mahāvrata* rite encompasses passages of prose sections from the mantric collections such as KS (34. 5) and TS (7. 5. 9. 3), and *Brāhmaṇa*s (PB 5. 5. 14-17; JB 2. 405; TB 1. 2. 6. 6-7). In these texts a ritual physical contest is pictured, combined with its etiological myth referring to the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, the *deva*s and the *asura*s, with the only exception being the TS prose, where the mythical counterpart is not referred to, and the ritual scene is only hinted at. Therefore, according to Witzel's reconstruction of the localisation of the Vedic schools (1987), PB, JB and TB are examples of Late Vedic products of the Brahmanical textual revision, belonging to the Kuru-Pañcāla realm; in particular, the Sāmavedic tradition, such as the Tāṇḍya recension (PB), is spread in the Kurukṣetra, whereas the Yajurvedic Taittirīya school (TS; TB) proliferates in the Gangā-Yamunā Doāb region, depending mainly on the Pañcāla realm, without any evident eastern interference. Lastly, the prose passage in KS is likely a late borrowing from the Sāmavedic tradition itself[37]; the JB passage comes from the southern extension of the Sāmavedic *Brāhmaṇa* of the Jaiminīya, dependent on the Pañcāla influence[38], in which both innovative and conservative characters are presented, probably due to its marginal localisation. This would mean that none of these texts mirrors directly the Kuru culture and the *mahāvrata* rite ascribable to the Kuru period; on the contrary, all the texts are affected by Brahmanical orientation, that is primacy of the ritualised *Weltanschauung* and priestly prestige, even though it is likely that the Sāmavedic textual tradition might preserve a closer reference to a form of archetypical Kuru rite.

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[36] Cf. also Parpola's interpretation (2000, 109-110).

> PB 5.5.14-17
> *śūdrāryau carmaṇi vyāyacchete tayor āryaṃ varṇam ujjāpayanti* // 14 // *devāś ca vā asurāś cāditye vyāyacchantas taṃ devā abhyajayaṃs tato devā abhavan / parāsurā abhavann ātmanā parāsya bhrātṛvyo bhavati ya evaṃ veda* // 15 // *yadāryaṃ varṇam ujjāpayanty ātmānam eva tad ujjāpayanti* // 16 // *parimaṇḍalaṃ carma bhavaty ādityasyaiva tad rūpaṃ kriyate* // 17 //[39].
>
> An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest a hide: of these two, they make the *ārya* rank the victorious one. The gods and the *asura*s [were] contesting the sun: the gods conquered it; henceforth the gods became [here], the *asura*s disappeared (*parā* √*bhū*): he, who knows thus, becomes [here] with his own [ranks], his rival disappears. When they make the *ārya* rank the victorious one, then they really make their own [ranks] victorious. The hide is circular shaped; indeed, that shape of the sun is made [here].

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[37] Cf. Heesterman 1962, 23, fn. 67.

[38] Cf. Witzel 1997, 305, fn. 236.

[39] Text after M. Kümmel, M. Kobayashi, A. Griffiths 2005; my translation.

JB 2.405
āryaṃ ca varṇaṃ śaudraṃ coparyupari cātvālaṃ bastājine vyāyamayanty ārṣabhe vā carmani. tayor antarvedy āryo varṇo bhavati bahirvedi śaudras. tayor āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanti. devāś ca vā asurāś cāmuṣminn āditye 'spardhanta. taṃ devā asurāṇāṃ avṛñjata. tad yad āryeṇa varṇena śaudraṃ varṇaṃ jyāpayanty etam eva tad dviṣato bhrātṛvyasya vṛñjate[40].

They make a member of the *ārya* rank and a member of the *śūdra* rank contest a goat's hide or a bull's hide, atop the *cātvāla*. Of these two, the member of the *ārya* rank is inside the sacrificial area (*vedi*), the member of the *śūdra* rank is outside the sacrificial area (*vedi*). Of these two, they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank. The gods and the *asura*s contested that sun. The gods turned around it [averting it] from the *asura*s. Since they cause the member of the *śūdra* rank to be overpowered by the member of the *ārya* rank, then they turned around that [averting it] indeed from the hateful rival (*bhrātṛvya*).

KS 34.5
[...] *śūdrāryau carman vyāyacchete // devāś ca vā asurāś cāditye vyāyacchanta / taṃ devā abhyajayan / āryaṃ varṇam ujjāpayati / ātmānam evojjāpayati / antarvedy āryas syād bahirvedi śūdras / śvetaṃ carma parimaṇḍalam̐ syāt / ādityasya rūpam /*[41].

[...] An *ārya* and a *śūdra* contest a hide. The gods and the *asura*s contested the sun; the gods conquered it; it makes the *ārya* rank the victorious one, it really makes his own [rank] victorious; the *ārya* should be inside the sacrificial area (*vedi*), the *śūdra* [should be] outside the sacrificial area (*vedi*); the hide should be white and circular shaped; [it is] in the shape of the sun.

TS 7.5.9.3
ārdré cárman vyā́yachete indriyásyā́varuddhyai /[42]

They two contest a wet skin, to obtain Indraic powers.

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[40] Text after Murakawa–Ehlers; my translation.

[41] Text after L. von Schroeder (1900–1910), electronically prepared by M. Fushimi 2015; my translation.

[42] Text after A. Weber (1871–1872), electronically prepared by M. Fushimi 2012; my translation.

> TB 1.2.6.6-7
> *devāsurā́ḥ sáṃyattā āsan / tá ādityé vyā́yacchanta / táṃ devā́ḥ sámajayan // 6 // brāhmaṇáś ca śūdráś ca carmakarté vyā́yacchete / dáivyo vái várṇo brāhmaṇáḥ / asuryàḥ śūdráḥ imè ʼrātsur imé subhūtám akrann íty anyataró brūyāt / imá udvāsīkāríṇa imé durbhūtám akrann íty anyataráḥ* / [...] *brāhmaṇáḥ sáṃjayati / amúm evā́dityáṃ bhrā́tr̥vyasya sáṃvindante* // 7 //[43].
>
> The gods and the *asura*s came into conflict: they contested the sun; the gods conquered it. A *brāhmaṇa* and a *śūdra* contest a piece of hide; the *brāhmaṇa* [represents] the divine rank, the *śūdra* the *asura* rank; the former should proclaim: ‘These succeeded, these acted well [producing welfare]’; the latter should proclaim: ‘These performed the act of abandoning (*udvāsa*), these acted badly [bringing disadvantage]. [...] The *brāhmaṇa* wins: they find that indeed, the sun of the rival (*bhrātr̥vya*).

Firstly, these passages clearly show that some sort of dramatic play is referred to: the causative verbal form such as ‘they make s.one the victorious one; they make s.one contest s.thig’ (*ujjāpayanti*, *vyāyamayanti*) appears to uphold this hypothesis, so that the ritual performance coincides with the enactment of the contest as such. This is performed on the edge of the sacrificial area (*vedi*) in the north-eastern corner, near to the hole in the ground (*cātvāla*) from which soil is taken to construct the *mahāvedi*. Moreover, the rivals are placed on opposite fronts, partially inside and outside the borders of the sacrificial space which well represents the liminal condition of the agonistic relationship. The prize for the contest is a circular shaped hide, more often a bull’s hide, corresponding to the sun, which perfectly reflects the conquered sun / cattle of the mythical Indraic deed. The terminology clearly refers to the social taxonomy as outlined at least in R̥V 10. 90. 12[44], hierarchically ordered in compliance with the *púruṣa*’s sacrificial body; thus, it preludes the dharmic order of castes, especially in TB, where members of the *brāhmaṇa* category*,* the highest social category, are counterposed to the members of the lowest social category that is the *śūdra* one. It is worth noticing that the lexical variant *brāhmaṇa*, alternated with *ārya*, anticipates the lexicon of the ancillary literature, especially the dharmic one. For example, in the

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[43] Text after M. Fushimi 2012; my translation.

[44] It belongs to the later Rigvedic textual layer, that is the tenth book: R̥V 10.90.12: *brāhmaṇò ʼsya múkham āsīd bāhū́ rājanī́yaḥ kr̥táḥ / ūrū́ tád asya yád vaíśyaḥ padbhyā́ṃ śūdró ajāyata* // 12 // ‘The brahmin was his mouth. The ruler was made his two arms. As to his thighs — that is what the freeman was. From his two feet the servant was born’. (Jamison–Brereton 2014: 1540).

*śrautasūtra*s, such as BŚS 16. 22, the reading *brāhmaṇa* is combined with the term *vr̥ṣala* 'low-born person', which replaces *śūdra*:

> *athaitau brāhmaṇaś ca śūdraś cārdre carmakarte vyāyacchete ime 'rātsur ime subhūtam akran / iti brāhmaṇas / ima udvāsīkāriṇa ime durbhūtam akran / iti vr̥ṣalas brāhmaṇaḥ saṃjayati naśyati vr̥ṣalaḥ /*[45].
>
> Then, those, the *brāhmaṇa* and the *śūdra*, contest a piece of wet hide; the *brāhmaṇa* [proclaims]: 'These succeeded, these acted well [producing welfare]'; the low-born person [proclaims]: 'These performed the act of abandoning (*udvāsa*), these acted badly [producing disadvantage]. The *brāhmaṇa* wins; the low-born person (*vr̥ṣala*) runs away.

Or in the Sāmavedic *śrautasūtra*s (Lāṭyāyana [LŚS 4. 3. 5-8; 13-15] and Drāhyāyaṇa [DŚS 11. 3. 4; 6-7; 11. 3. 12-14]), which describe the *mahāvrata* rite, the term *ārya* is replaced by *arya* glossed as *vaiśya*:

> LŚS 4. 3. 5-8; 13-15 ~ DŚS 11. 3. 4; 6-7; 11. 3. 12-14
> *dakṣiṇena mārjālīyam aryo 'ntarvedi dakṣiṇāmukhas tiṣṭhet bahirvedi śūdra udaṅmukhaḥ* / 5 / *aryābhāve yaḥ kaścāryo varṇaḥ* / 6 / *tau śvetaṃ parimaṇḍalaṃ carma vyāyacchetām* / 7 / *śūdraḥ pūrvaḥ* / 8 / [...] *sarveṣāṃ karmaṇi niṣṭhite tad* [...] / 13 / *avasr̥jya śūdraḥ pradravet* / 14 / *taṃ tenaivāvakṣiṇuyāt* / 15 /[46].
>
> An *arya* (comm. *vaiśya*) should stand to the south of the *mārjālīya* [hut][47], inside the sacrificial area, with his face to the south; a *śūdra* [should stand to the south of the *mārjālīya* hut] outside the sacrificial area, with his face to the north. Since there is no *arya*, anyone belonging to the category of *ārya* (comm. *brāhmaṇa* or *kṣatriya*) [may stand there]. They should both contest a hide, white and circular shaped. The *śūdra* is the first [to draw it away]. [...] Once the ritual action of all [the performers] has been completed, then, [...] the *śūdra*, having loosened [the hide], should run away. He (comm. *ārya*) should hit (comm. *hanyāt*) him (comm. *śūdra*) with that [hide] itself.

Such a development of the scholarly Brahmanical literature allows us to assume that the antithetical pair *ārya* and *śūdra* is the earlier reading than

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[45] Text after C. G. Kashikar 2003; my translation.

[46] Text after H. G. Ranade 1998; my translation.

[47] It is placed in the southern part of the sacrificial area: it is also on the edge between inside and outside the sacrificial area.

brāhmaṇa and *śūdra*. In actual fact, the agonistic scene of the mythical conquering of the sun is progressively dealt with in the same perspective as the dharmic system, dominated by the Brahmanical class. It seems that the proto-Vedic Indraic warrior deed and the supra-tribal overlordship of the Kuru hegemony eventually fade, persisting only as a backdrop. The liminal condition, fluctuant between life and death, order and chaos, challenging Otherness and Unknown, is definitively fixed as a simple ritualised scene performed within the marginalised space of the sacrificial area itself. It is normalised and institutionalised in order to legitimise the supremacy of the Brahmanical function. Furthermore, the mythical theme of the Indraic deed is transposed to the cosmological conflict between *deva*s and *asura*s, which is traditionally employed as the aetiological motif for "logically" explaining ritual practices as founding acts of cosmic reality, and, conversely, for turning the cosmos into the authoritative principle of the ritual itself[48]. It is the Brahmanical strategy of primacy insofar as Brahmins are specialists in ritual science: by making sacrificial oblation a rite founded on a cosmic myth, and, inversely, making the proto-Vedic Indraic deed establishing leadership a cosmic rite with sacrificial oblations meant becoming holder of cosmic leadership. Or better, the Kuru leadership, based on the acknowledgement of cosmic overlordship, is replaced by sacerdotal leadership, based on cosmic ritualism. Some traces of the previous royal primacy, even the remote warrior passage rite, may be identified through the linguistic phrases which echo them. For example, the term *bhrā́tr̥vya* conventionally translated as 'rival', is a kinship name: it must be an outcome of a secondary *u*-stem of *bhrā́tr̥* 'brother', combined with the genitival suffix **-ii̯o-*, so that it should designate 'ascendant kinsman on the brother's side'[49]. It therefore conveys a conception of rivalry ascribable to a clan-based society, characterised by lineages, correlated with each other by means of hospitality links or even competitiveness. In this sense it is similar to the very well-known term *arí* 'stranger', with its double value of 'rival' and 'guest / host', according to Thieme's analysis (1938). On the other hand, this terminology might also allude to the same warrior brotherhood to which the agonistic performance of conquering the sun also pertains: Indra himself is *bhrā́tr̥* in R̥V 3. 53. 5b; in other words, the competition for leadership can be fought only between peers, members of the same identity group. Moreover, partaking in *vrātya* sodality meant giving up, at least temporarily, the rules of the clan-community and adhering to a code of behaviour pertaining to an initiatic way of life other than the regular clan society. Therefore, despite his kinship, a *vrātya* represents Otherness, and conquering the sun means imitating the *vrātya* initiatic mechanism but turning it into a means of establishing cosmic rulership.

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[48] Cf. *e.g.* Patton 2005, 19-20.

[49] As for such an etymological reconstruction, cf. Rau 2011 [2012], 14. In Old Iranian it means 'brother's son, nephew', but in Vedic Sanskrit it means 'cousin', that is 'father's brother's son', because of a secondary semantic shift: cf. Benveniste, 1969, 259-266; *contra* Szemerényi 1977, 62-63.

As regards the reference to the mythical conflict between *deva*s and *asura*s, it is worth noticing that in the Indraic myth itself the term *valá* also refers to the enemy as a sort of demon which blocks cattle and hides sunlight. In this sense, the representation of the mythical cosmic dichotomy between *deva*s and *asura*s appears, on the one hand, to develop the same motif of the enemy equated to a demoniacal being while, on the other, it reflects the same relationship between the Rigvedic antagonistic pair *ā́r$_i$ya* and *dā́sa / dásyu*, especially combined with the same term *várṇa*. It is also worth recalling that in the Rigvedic textual layer the term *várṇa* means 'outer appearance', even 'colour' and that it has yet to imply any hierarchically structured social system. Neither is a racial value so predictable[50], even though the colour of the white skin of the *ā́r$_i$ya* is counterposed to the black one (*kr̥ṣṇa*) of the enemies *dásyu / dā́sa*: this is a reference to the visible appearance of the daylight, that is the sunlight (R̥V 4. 5. 13d: *sū́ro várṇa-* 'visible appearance of sunlight'), which represents wellness and long life, counterposed to the dangerous darkness, invisible as such, equated to death. Thus, Rigvedic expressions such as *ā́r$_i$ya- várṇa-* (R̥V 3. 34. 9) or *dā́sa- várṇa-* (R̥V 2. 12. 4) mean the visible and auspicious 'colour' belonging respectively to the *ā́r$_i$ya* and *dā́sa* groups[51]. Therefore, the ritual contest that takes place between *ārya* and *śūdra* is in compliance with the same conception of sunlight / prosperity mirrored by the Indraic myth of the conquering of the sun and by the correlated model of Indraic clan-lordship. The term *ārya* employed in the Brahmanical textual *repertoire* may be interpreted as the *vr̥ddhi* derivative of the same term *arí* 'stranger' on which the proto-Vedic clan-based relationship of hospitality is based: in this case *ā́rya* means 'related to the hospitable one' and refers to practices of hospitality and sodality, thus implying dynamics of group inclusion and exclusion, also consistent with the liminal dynamics of passage rites. However, the same later term *ārya* may be the output of a form of *vr̥ddhi* morphological derivation of *árya*, - *e.g. ā́rya* - which might be confused with the Rigvedic *ā́r$_i$ya*: the variant *árya* results from a change of accent applied to the homonym term *aryá*, actually related to the PIE root *h$_1$ár- 'to fit, to comply with', and not to *aryá* as derivative of the *i*-stem *arí* 'stranger'[52]. Therefore, *árya* denotes one who is 'appropriate', in compliance with a taxonomic system of rules and semantically differentiated from *aryá*, 'related to strangers, hospitable'. Such an accentual shifting and the correlated semantic overlapping may be attributed to the historical Kuru phase, since it is attested from the Atharvavedic collection onwards. Thus, in R̥V 1. 130. 8a-e, which is part of the analogous textual stage, the term *ā́r$_i$ya* evokes both clan-based hospitality and links to sodality and the member of a regulated and institutionalised "ecumene" that is the cosmos, inasmuch as it relies on the observance of commandments (*vratá*) and sacrificial practice, thus preluding the dharmic order: *ā́r$_i$ya* is both *yájamāna* 'sacrificer' and warrior, or a warrior sacrificer[53]:

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[50] Hock 1999 *vs.* Parpola 1988.

[51] Rigvedic *ā́r$_i$ya* and *dā́sa* are frequently mentioned in relation to the conquering of light (*jyótis*) and / or sun (*i.e.* R̥V 1. 130. 8; 2. 11. 18; 3. 34. 9; 7. 5. 6; 10. 43. 4).

> *índraḥ samátsu yájamānam ā́riyam* / *prā́vad víśveṣu śatámūtir ājíṣu* /
> *súvarmīḷheṣu ājíṣu* / *mánave śā́sad avratā́n* /
> *tvácaṃ kr̥ṣṇā́m arandhayat* / [...] // R̥V 1. 130. 8a-e //
>
> Indra aided the *ārya* sacrificer in battles, affording a hundred forms of help in all contests - in contests whose prize is the sun. Chastising those who follow no commandment, he made the black skin subject to Manu [...]. (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 299-300, slightly modified).

In this later Rigvedic passage the scene of contesting the sun in the *mahāvrata* rite, as textualized in the later Brahmanical *repertoire*, somehow appears in between the lines. Similarly, the double role of sacrificer and warrior conqueror of enemies' wealth of those who recognise the authority of overlords is suggested in this stanza from the *Kuntāpa* section (AVŚ 20. 128. 5 ≈ R̥VKh 5. 12. 5 ≈ ŚŚS 12. 20. 5)[54]. The role of the supra-tribal overlord is explicitly equated to the sun, who is generous (*maghávan*) like Indra, and equivalent to the pastoral hero of Indo-European matrix, since the root *ví √rapś* is a secondary derivative of the compound PIE

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[52] Cf. Dunkel 2014, 2. 288-293; 25. As for the very complex reconstruction, cf. also Pinault 1999–2000 [2001].

[53] This image of 'warrior-sacrificer' might refer to the *sattra* context, or better, the later figure of patron-*gr̥hapati* (*yájamāna*), who must refund the priest-officiant, might be anticipated by the *sattrin* figure who is officiant and sacrifcer at the same time, especially in relation to the *vrātya* context. Cf. Candotti–Pontillo 2015, and Harzer's contribution in this volume.

[54] As for the texts and the proposed emendations, cf. Kim 2021, 1165-1166; cf. also Scheftelowitz 1906, 157-158.

**uih*$_x$*ro -peḱ-ó* ‘men and cattle’, thus denoting the protector of men and livestock, the ‘cowherd’ as such[55].

> *yé ca devā́ áyajantā́tho yé ca parādadúḥ* /
> *sū́ryo dívam iva gatvā́ya maghávā no ví rapśate* // AVŚ 20. 128. 5 //
>
> By going to the sky like the sun, the bountiful one brims [with men and cattle]
> for us, [who are the] gods who made sacrifices and who hand over [much][56].

According to AiB 6. 32. 19, this stanza is the last of a mantric sequence of five stanzas which are to be recited on occasion of the ‘arrangements of the (five) cardinal quarters’ (*diśām kḷpti*), that is one stanza for each cardinal quarter; four quarters are traverse (*prā́ñc* ‘in front-east’; *adharā́ñc* ‘below-south’; *apā́ñc* ‘behind-west’; *udáñc* ‘above-north’), but one is upwards (*ūrdhvā́ díś* ‘zenith’), that is it proceeds from the earth to heaven along the vertical axis[57]. The motif of the cardinal quarters is associable with the royal consecration by which overlordship is definitely a sort of “solar-ship”: royal authority fills up the whole cosmos and covers everyone who belongs to it. This clearly refers to the two functions of the proto-Vedic clan-lordship: the priestly role, correlated to the sacrifice, and the role of ‘handing over’ (*párā √dā*) and sharing the booty, especially cattle, conquered from the enemies, that is the warrior role *par excellence*[58]. However, the solar sovereignty holds a higher rank than these two functions: the Indraic model of lordship is turned into a cosmic leadership. Therefore, in R̥V 1.81.2b Indra is not only one who gives away wealth, but above all *bhū́ri parādadí*, that is he is ‘the one who hands over much, so giving away further the limits’: he is the supreme distributor of wealth, that is ‘men and cattle’, interacting hyperbolically with Elsewhere. In actual fact, it is worth noticing that the sphere of *párā* ‘far away, further, over to the other side’ is introduced here. Etymologically speaking this is a petrified instrumental form (< PIE **pérh*$_2$*-eh*$_1$)[59], *párā* related to *pára* ‘further’, ‘on the other side of’ which, in the Rigvedic collection basically refers to the moving ‘here and afar’ (*ā́ ca párā ca*), ‘going away’ (*párā √i / √yā*), thus hinting at the mobility phase of the clan-based society: in R̥V 3. 53. 5a the ‘brother’ Indra is evoked so that he can go hither and yon with his chariot (*párā yāhi maghavann ā́ ca yāhi*), between the somic oblation and the conquering of booty, also alluding to the rhythmical solar movement[60]. On the other hand, in the later Rigvedic and post-Rigvedic texts *párā* refers to the sphere of Elsewhere[61], clearly seen in the expression *párā √bhū* ‘to disappear’ employed in the Brahmanical passages concerning the *mahāvrata* rite with a negative value where it means «dying, destruction and getting lost».

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[55] Cf. Vassilkov 2011, 214-220, and the related bibliography.

[56] My translation.

[57] In AiB 6. 32. 19: *pañca vā imā diśaś, catasras tiraścya ekordhvā* /. As for the five directions in relation to kingship, also in AVŚ 3. 4. 2.

[58] As for the use of this root *párā √dā* combined to the warrior role of conquering wealth from enemies and distributing it to the community, see for example R̥V 1.81.6: *yó aryó martabhójanam* / *parādádāti dāśúṣe* / *índro asmábhyaṃ śikṣatu* / *ví bhajā bhū́ri te vásu* / *bhakṣīyá táva rā́dhasaḥ* // 6 // ‘He who hands over to the pious man the sustenance for mortals that belongs to the stranger (*arí*) — let Indra do his best for us. Share out your many goods: might I have a share of your generosity’ (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 209); in the same hymn (1. 81. 2b), also the expression *bhū́ri parādadí* occurs.

Finally, in TB 1. 2. 6. 7 the expression *amúm evā́dityáṃ bhrā́tr̥vyasya sáṃvindante* ‘they find that indeed, the sun of the rival’ refers to the earlier well-attested Rigvedic and Atharvavedic syntagm *svàr √vid* ‘to find sun’, especially as the compound *svarvíd-* ‘the finder of the sun’[62], basically recalling the Vala-myth and the Indraic deed of conquering the sun[63]. However, here it is replaced by *ādityáṃ saṃ √vid* ‘to find, to obtain the sun’. The term *ādityá* is employed as an equivalent for the sun only from the later Rigvedic textual layers onwards and refers exclusively to it only from the Atharvavedic attestations onwards[64]. It is not etymologically ascribable to solar imagery, but to *áditi*, lit. ‘boundlessness’ and denotes the complex relationship between authority and observance of the commandments, so that *ādityá* is the epithet attributable to the lord of the commandments (*vratá*) within a community, but their observance is based on mutual obligations between the lord and the members of the community itself[65]. Such a relationship is at the basis of a wealthy existence: the assumption of royal authority on the one hand, and obedience to the royal commandments on the other guarantee prosperity for the community. In this sense, *ādityá* is not just the sun, as the cosmic light which rules the world, but represents a sort of identity principle, embodying a common ideal of right behaviour and a close connection between the authority of overlordship, clan-community and the natural world. *Ādityá* embodies the pact between the clan-lord, his clan companions and natural phenomena, and *ā́rya* becomes whosoever obeying the commandments behaves in compliance with them: *ādityá* and *ā́rya* represent the cosmos and are the core of the new paradigm of sovereignty[66]. In actual fact, in the *mahāvrata* Brahmanical version one linguistic datum constantly appears, that is the *asura*s are associated with the expression *párā √bhū*, literally meaning that, once defeated, they are relegated to the sphere of *párā*, in the distance, the sphere of Elsewhere. This means that the cosmic order is definitely established: the antagonist of the *ārya*, that is the *śūdra*, is definitively excluded from the ritual space which coincides with the royal cosmos as such; only the *ārya* can be the sacrificer and as such support sovereignty as "solar-ship". In fact, the figure of the *śūdra* is definitively reduced to a subordinate and marginalised category.

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[59] Cf. Dunkel 2014, 609.

[60] Cf. Bodewitz, 2019 [2000], 163-164.

[61] Cf. Bodewitz, 2019 [2000], 164; especially in the derivative *parāvát* it denotes yonder world, with a negative value: «as a prefix to verbs *párā* means “away, off”; see *e.g. parā-i* and *parā-bhū*. These compounded verbs express dying, destruction and getting lost».

[62] Cf. Scarlata 1999, 585; *svarvíd-* ‘das Sonnenlicht findend, gewinnend’ is attested 30x in the *R̥gveda* and is very common in the Atharvavedic collection as well. Cf. fn. 5 also.

[63] *E.g.* in R̥V 3. 51. 2cd Indra is defined as follows: *vājasánim pūrbhídaṃ tū́rṇim aptúraṃ / dhāmasā́cam abhiṣā́caṃ suvarvídam* // ‘winning spoils, splitting strongholds, swift at crossing the waters, attending to the ordinances, attending closely, finding the sun’. (Jamison–Brereton 2014: 534).

[64] Cf. Brereton 1981, 314.

[65] As for such a complex relationship, cf. Brereton 1981.

5. *Conclusions*

The Vedic *mahāvrata* rite has been explored here in light of the notion of liminality as devised by A. van Gannep and his successor V. Turner, that is, with reference to the ritualisation of experiences which mark transitory situations, such as the rites of passage. As attested in the Brahmanical sources, the *mahāvrata* rite, with its non-standard elements and especially with the performance of a contest between an *ārya* and a *śūdra* to win a bull's hide equated to the sun, may actually provide not only some traces of the Kuru paradigm of sovereignty, which was at the basis of the Kuru hegemony, but also those of a pre-Kuru passage rite, ascribable to the *vrātya milieu.* Despite the *śrauta* reform applied by the dominant priestly category during the Late Vedic period, the liminal condition as a characteristic trait of the earlier warrior initiation practices, on which the Kuru paradigm of sovereignty also depends, is trackable especially through linguistic hints. However, the Brahmanical process of ritualisation has turned the fluctuant transitional liminal condition of warriorship and kingship into a sort of frozen liminality, that is the social roles of warriors, ruler and priests are definitively fixed in the hierarchical social system, preluding the dharmic caste system. And the *vrātya* liminality, with its initiation practices, is definitively excluded from the cosmos, marginalised like the *śūdra* condition.

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[66] In actual fact *ādityá* is the epithet of Aryaman, Varuṇa and Mitra, the guardians of the right behaviour (Brereton 1981).

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The Liminality of *Gr̥hapati*,
the Leader of an Aggressive Sodality, the *Vrātya*s

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Abstract
The memory of *gr̥hapati* or *sthapati*, the leader of sodalities, is preserved in the earliest sources. The *R̥gveda* presents Budha, the son of Soma, as the first *sthapati* known by name. Neglecting to ask the god Varuṇa for a place of consecration for Budha to become *sthapati*, plunged the subsequent generations of the sodalities into a perpetual struggle to secure their livelihood during the scant season, and likewise cut off their access to heaven. Falk, the foremost contemporary scholar of the *vrātya*s, pondered why people would turn to raiding in order to get provisions. The term *gr̥hapati*, with respect to social and economic issues, was probably already rescinded by revision or censure in the *Brāhmaṇa*s: the *gr̥hapati* was responsible for the family unit and, to be able to provide for all, he was compelled to go on raiding expeditions, which were bracketed by ritual sessions (*sattra*), one before the expedition and one after. Later on, the *sattra* became a conduit for the *śrauta* rituals. The liminality of the *gr̥hapati* or *sthapati* lay in the arduous preparations he underwent for the *sattra* and expeditions; both of these major undertakings were fraught with isolation.

Keywords: *vrātya*, *sthapati*, *gr̥hapati*, *sattra*, *vrātyastoma*, wolf / dog, *dīkṣita*, Khaṇḍobā, Rudra, Maruts, Dālbhya, Budha, *keśin*, Ekavrātya, *Śrautasūtra.*

1. *Introduction*

The leader called *gr̥hapati* or *sthapati* and his actions and responsibilities have nearly all disappeared from the textual sources, although some relevant living practices still persist in modern times on the central and southern South Asian peninsula. From references to the leader of the *vrātya* sodality as the ritualist at *sattra*s performed for expeditions, through which they would acquire goods to survive the meagre winter months, we learn that he relinquished all the spoils, as shown below in an example from the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 10. 6. Although this and other early texts provide evidence of changes within the society and religious practice, there are absences, even lacunae, where we might expect to find more presence and activities of *gr̥hapati* / *sthapati*, together with the *vrātya*s. It is possible to speculate that traces were blurred, or even removed.

This study aims to discuss the previously unexplored position of this *vrātya* leader, the *gr̥hapati* or *sthapati*, in ancient times on the South Asian peninsula, and the survival of *vrātya* practices, in great likelihood, to modern times in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Scholars such as Harry Falk[1] have pointed out that some of the practices survived elsewhere not only among other Indo-European groups, as evidenced in Greece and Rome, but also in the steppes of the vast regions of Southwest and Central Asia, as explored by Y. Vassilkov[2].

Other works may provide an additional tool and appreciation for an inquiry of this kind. The work of Bjørn Thomassen, in particular, not only focused on examples from his fieldwork but also delved into how European historical development, particularly from the 15th century to about the mid 17th century CE, was a calamitous experience, forging a path to the French Revolution, industrialisation and such new phenomena as the breaking up of extended family life, eventually leading to the nuclear family, etc. He characterised this as a liminal experience of this time period, full of anxiety and insecurity – what everyone had taken for granted no longer held. He summarised the condition with the phrase «loss of taken-for-granted structures»[3]. Perhaps this would be the most succinct definition of the term 'liminality' in the context of the current study. In other words, all norms, familiarity and customs are challenged. As happened in many times in Europe in the 15th century to about the mid 17th century CE, there have likewise been periods of liminality in South Asia.

The sources for this inquiry are primarily late Vedic textual evidence, such as the *Brāhmaṇa*s and *Sūtra*s, but also the *Upaniṣad*s and their explorations by modern scholars, and then the anthropological work of Sontheimer (1997) and to some extent that of Vassilkov. Hence is it possible to say that the methodology is hybrid: examining late Vedic texts as well as what is available in the life of modern-day rural religious rituals and performances in a number of locations in Central South Asia[4].

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[1] Falk 1986.

[2] Vassilkov 2009, 50.

[3] Thomassen 2016, 113.

2. Gṛhapati / Sthapati *and the* Vrātya*s in Vedic Sources*

In early references to *gṛhapati* / *sthapati*, we observe that these were primarily gods, and their position was called "*sthapati*": Budha, son of Soma, Agni, and most prominently Rudra with his sons Maruts[5], as well as the gods Indra, and Savitṛ (Sūrya). Apart from a few scholars in the past century, perhaps only one in this century, Moreno Dore, has inquired into the divine aspect of the *vrātya*. For example, in his article entitled *The Ekavrātya, Indra and the Sun*[6], he offers a comparison between the gods and three particular Vedic figures: the *keśin* (ṚV 10. 136), the *vrātya* (AVŚ 15), and the *brahmacārin* (AVŚ 11. 5). These figures had a connection to esoteric knowledge. Dore argues that if *keśin* and *brahmacārin* are gods among gods, then *vrātya* should be understood as also having divine status. Furthermore, he proposes that AVŚ 15. 1. 1-6 provides insight into the path of the Vrātya – assuming the role of Indra to become Ekavrātya.

Stephanie Jamison observed that there is a connection between Agni and *gṛhapati*. She paid close attention to the term *gṛhapati* in her recent article (2019), as she considers *gṛhapati* to be a precursor of *gṛhastha* but could not definitively link the two[7]. Jamison focused on the term with great intent but did not imagine it referring to anything other than a master of a structure or, another time, a house with a wife. The wife is *gr̥hapatnī*, but *gr̥hapati* does not refer to her husband. Rather, it refers to the domestic sacrificial fire[8]. In her historical examination, she investigated the Indo-Iranian and Indo-European background of the word *gr̥ha-* and its Iranian cognates, including the Younger Avestan *gərəda*, along with Elamite *kur-da-bat-ti-iš*, Akkadian *ga-ar-du-pa-tu*, and also Middle Iranian[9]. The development of the Sanskrit form of *gr̥ha* was not straightforward, but that is truly a different subject[10].

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[4] There have been mentions of similar practices in southern Kerala, the most southern state in India. Vassilkov (2015, 233) refers to a communication with Lidia Sudyka (Jagiellonian University of Cracow) about her fieldwork in Kerala regarding a local god, Muthappan, which seems to fit the category of a local Rudra whose companions are dogs. They are ritually fed every day inside the temple.

[5] ṚV 5. 61. 17:

etám me stómam ūrmiye /
dārbhiyā́ya párā vaha /
gíro devi rathī́r iva // 17 //

This praise of mine, O Night, carry off to Dārbhya,
[my] hymns [carry away] like a charioteer, O goddess.

Here the name of Dālbhya is Dārbhya – not unexpected as the semivowel / r / was replaced with / l / with time and relocation eastwards. Text metrically restored by Barend A. van Nooten and Gary B. Holland. Translation by Jamison–Brereton 2014, 742. For Dālbhya, cf. Koskikallio 1999.

[6] Dore 2015.

[7] Jamison 2019, 7; 8-14; 19.

Jamison examines the term *gr̥hapati* in both the *R̥gveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, noting that the term occurs in the *Atharvaveda* only four times and in sharp contrast to how the term is used in the *R̥gveda*. She also points to the single employment of the referent Agni in both of the texts. Unfortunately, she misinterprets the expression *gr̥hāḥ* as meaning 'homestead,' because it presumably consisted of several structures. But Rau established the term to mean precisely all the participants, from people to animals, of the family unit, with no mention of solid structures, indeed, no mention of a dwelling place in this very context[11]. Another term, *gr̥hyāḥ*[12], was used for people who lived on the property (*gr̥hāḥ*) with some land, which formed the smallest territory; it represented the smallest social unit.

I suppose Jamison's misinterpretation might stem from her not realising that in the *vrātya* context the term *gr̥hapati* is synonymous with *sthapati*, who was the consecrated (*dīkṣita*) and the head of the *sattra* sacrificial ritual as well as the leader of the *vrātya*s' expeditions. Also, sometimes he would not receive any of the spoils that the *vrātya*s collected on their plunder "runs". This head was selected on the grounds of such qualifications as superior knowledge of sacred arts or high moral qualities or great wealth. There was no fee for the performer of the rituals, nor a sponsor. The term *gr̥hapati* overlapped two functions – the first just mentioned, the other that of the head of the family unit encompassing the immediate family, servants, slaves, guests and casual company[13].

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[8] *Ibid.*, 10.

[9] *Ibid.*, 7.

[10] See *ibid*, 8. for the formation of *gr̥ha*. Here Jamison also observes that *gr̥hapati* always occurs in the *Rgveda* in the singular, whereas the word *dampati* is used in both the singular and dual. These two words seem to her to be synonymous, even though they often appear next to each other.

[11] Rau 1957, 38-39ff.

[12] *Ibid.*, paragraph 27. 1.

[13] *Ibid.*, 38.

The term *gṛhapati* occurs not only in the *Śrautasūtra*s but is also found in the *Gṛhyasūtra*s: *Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra* 1. 4. 24, *Khadira Gṛhyasūtra* 1. 5. 36 and 3. 3. 16; 24, *Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra* 2. 9. 14-15, *Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra* 1. 1. 2[14]. Outside the brahmanical sources, Oliver Freiberger[15] searched for the equivalent of *gṛhapati* in the Pāli canon with the following results: the Buddha instructs them; *gahapati* can become a member of the Buddhist *sangha*; a *gahapati* may belong to the wealthy merchant class; for a monk a ragged robe is like a chest full of garments to a *gahapati*, etc. In the conclusion, the term *gahapati* is described as not being so specifically defined as similar terms are and is the most flexible term. Claire Maes[16] explored similar terminology in the Jain context. She observes that the *ardhamāgadhī* term *gāhāvaī* is equivalent to *gṛhapati* and considers it the most common term for the householder in the early Jain sources.

As Rau observed, the term *gṛhapati* occurs in religious contexts, where it means the head of a longer *sattra* event, not the head of a family unit, although he did find an example where *gṛhapati* is the head of a family unit. As he was aware of the rarity of the instance he had found[17] involving *gṛhapati*, he added *veśmapati* and *jyeṣṭha* – terms that appeared to indicate the head of the household[18]. Unfortunately, Rau misinterpreted these latter terms as only functioning to refer to the family unit leader, rather than considering that they may be synonyms of *gṛhapati*, as he lists them all together. As such they would equal the "dual role". I doubt that *veśmapati* is a term for the head of a household only. Rau quotes as evidence from JB 1. 69: [...] *śūdro 'anuṣṭupchandā veśmapatidevas* [...], '[...] *śūdra* has as his poetic meter the *anuṣṭubh*, as his god *veśmapati* [...]'. It is known that *anuṣṭubh*[19] is the verse form of the *vrātya*s. The term *veśmapati* appears to be a synonym of *gṛhapati*. The same should be considered for *jyeṣṭha,* as this term is one of the fourfold categories of *vrātya*s in *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 17. 4. 1[20].

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[14] Lubin 2019, 96.

[15] Freiberger 2019, 72-73.

[16] Maes 2019, 90-91.

[17] Rau 1957.

[18] *Ibid.*, paragraph 28. 2.a.

[19] Interestingly, Mary Carroll Smith focused on what the versification of a particular metre can indicate for a piece of tradition. Her argument in Smith 1992 was that *anuṣṭubh* versification indicated the oldest layers of the *Mahābhārata*. Other explorations of the *vrātya* presence in the *Mahābhārata* (Pontillo, Harzer), as far as I know, have not taken advantage of the *anuṣṭubh* metre as an aid to their research.

[20] Falk 1986, 51 discusses the four types of the *vrātya*s, drawing primarily from *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 17.1-4: reflecting on reasons for joining a *vrātya* sodality, realising that it was economic

Rau bemoaned the lack of examples where the term *gr̥hapati* is used to express a domestic head and to indicate that he was also the head of an expedition. Still, he did identify an example, as can be observed in the passage in which the family unit anticipates the return of *gr̥hapati* from a raiding expedition (*proṣúṣa*)[21].

While *sthapati*[22] is an established term, it is not found very frequently. The term appears to be used as a synonym for *gr̥hapati*. Scholars, such as for example Stephanie Jamison[23], have taken great pains to explain *gr̥hapati* as an early use of what later became known as *gr̥hastha* but have not really proved that the two terms can be understood developmentally. The term *gr̥ha* in particular had different meanings in different time periods. What seems to be an easier interpretation is the derivation indicating the wife of the «family chieftain» (after the fashion of van Buitenen, 1973, 56 *ad* MBh 1. 4. 11.), that is *gr̥hapatnī*, who was the co-participant with her husband the *gr̥hastha* in the domestic ritual[24].

The term *gr̥ha* does not connote a house in the early texts. Rather, it can mean property, for example a wagon that is used as a mobile home in the migrating caravans[25], akin to those used by some of the First Nations in North America. Or, as in the case of acquiring goods in *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 10. 6[26], when Dālbhya, after he and his *sattrin*s returned from an "expedition" in the process of distributing the spoils, approaches Dhr̥tarāṣṭra to receive *gr̥hān* (masc. acc. pl.) – it can mean goods, equity, or possibly cattle[27]. But Dhr̥tarāṣṭra mistakenly thinks that his starved herd

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need. Of the four categories, the fourth is *jyeṣṭāḥ śamanīcāmedhrāḥ*, old men who had lost their sexual ability.

[21] Rau 1957, 38, paragraph 28. 2. a, see also n. 23 and n. 24, this paper.

[22] The term did not refer to a single meaning or function: (a) *sthapati*, leader of the *vrātya*s at *sattra*, etc. (b) The term (with a short / a /) has been used for clan chieftain, overseer, fief sovereign, town councillor, and also driver of a combat vehicle (*ratha*) as well as a minister or ministerial position (*ratna*). There was also another *ratna* (a ministerial position), and last of all, a runner, *pālāgalá* (ŚB 5. 3. 1. 11), whose attire seems to closely resemble that of a *vrātya*. There is a feminine form, *pālāgalī*, which indicates the fourth wife of the head of a family unit. In other texts, the runner position is not mentioned, even though messengers (*dūta*) are quite often referred to.

[23] Jamison 2019.

[24] Jamison 2019, 9-12, 13-14.

[25] Vassilkov 2009, 50.

[26] Cf. Harzer 2016.

[27] Here *gr̥hān* is not houses, as Falk 1986 wrongly translates; rather, it should be 'property,' '*Anwesen*,' which includes land, but also *gr̥hyāḥ* (nominative plural masculine), with the meaning 'family or those who live and move together,' as in Rau 1957, 37, paragraph 27. 1ff. Note that the term *gr̥hān* in a different context above is also masc., but in the acc. pl., which is a direct object in the syntax of the sentence – Dālbhya was going to ask Dhr̥tarāṣṭra for some goods to help him survive.

died because of Dālbhya's black magic. He throws him out, asking him to take the dead beasts along with him.

Rau provides an apt example of *gṛhāḥ* (this time masc. nom. pl.) referring directly to the people forming the family unit, who are the recipients of whatever *gṛhapati* brings, be it goods or his mood and behaviour upon his return from an expedition[28]. In that passage, Rau[29] indicates that the term *gṛhapati* is an expression meaning 'family head (*Haupt*)'[30]. Since he is coming back from an expedition, be it successful or not, we may thus postulate that he may have been the leader of the expedition. Let us consider that the term 'family' comprises not only people related to each other but also servants, slaves, goats and cattle, for whose survival and safety the head is responsible. In this sense, *gṛhapati* coalesces into both the head as the chieftain of the extended family and the head of the expedition, for which he may have officiated as a priest at a *sattra*. Of course, this is a hypothesis, based on the statement here that *gṛhapati* returned from *proṣúṣa* (from *pra*-√*vas*), an expedition (employing rather unsavoury methods) to provide food and goods for the family unit. Not only was the main provider away, but also his dependents (*gṛhāḥ* 'those who form the family unit') were anxious regarding his mood upon his return. These dependents contemplated whether he would speak and act, which induced fear in them. Yet they also contemplated whether he might not speak or act, in which case they would be grateful[31]. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2. 4. 1. 14, and possibly also 8. 6. 1. 11. The master of the house is called *gṛhavat* / *gṛhavān* when possession is expressed.

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[28] Expeditions are for obtaining foodstuff and cattle, etc. See Harzer 2015.

[29] Rau 1957, 38, paragraph 28. 2a, in which the term *gṛhapati* in the literature on rituals did not connote the head of a household but rather the head of a number of participants (*sattrin*s) at a *sattra*. The use of this term is specific to sacrificial purposes.

[30] It is not very clear whether Rau was aware that if *gṛhapati* came back from a *proṣūṣa*, which is synonymous with the better-known term *pravāsa* (both the terms are derivatives of *pra*-√*vas* – the former a perfect participle in gen. sg. (*proṣūṣaḥ*), the latter a noun, refers to the same activity, meaning that *gṛhapati* went on an expedition to procure goods.

[31] *Ibid.*, 38, paragraph 28. 2a, but see also the passage on 39, in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs:

ā́thāto gṛhā́ṇām evòpacāráḥ. etád dha vaí gṛhápateḥ proṣúṣa ā́gatād gṛhā́ḥ
samūttrastā iva bhavanti: kím ayám ihá vadiṣyáti kíṃ vā kariṣyatī́ti. sá yó ha
tátra kíṃcid vádati vā karóti vā tásmād gṛhā́ḥ prátrasanti. tásyeśvaráḥ kúlaṃ
víkṣobdhor. átha yó ha tátra ná vádati ná kíṃ caná karóti táṃ gṛhā́
upasáṁśrayante: ná vā́ ayám ihā́vādīn ná kíṃ canā́karad íti.

The later term *gṛhastha* may have been used for someone who stayed and settled in the house and society, no longer in a mobile caravan. Might this also mean that he did not go on expeditions anymore[32]?

3. *The* Gṛhapati *and the* Sattra

Harry Falk, in his article *Zur Ursprung der Sattra-Opfer*[33], gives an overview of *sattra* and provides a comparison with the classical Soma ritual. Falk categorised the Soma ritual according to the number of days of pressing Soma. *Sattra* usually lasted twelve days, occasionally sixty-one days, whereas classical Soma rituals could be one-day events or, when longer than one day, between two and twelve days. *Sattra* did not have a patron (*yajamāna*), although there was a need for a patron after the first day of the *sattra*. A participant from the group took on the role. All the proceeds only went to the other participants. The volunteer lead sacrificer would not be renumerated, as there was no established patron. In other words, there was no fee (*dakṣinā*) because there was no patron. In general, a twelve-day ritual is the basis for *sattra*.

Since Falk[34] was unable to find any research comparing the *sattra* and the *vrātyastoma*, he attempted in broad strokes to delve into the similarities. Even though he considered the similarities useful, they did not do much to illuminate the connections between the two. He undertook to examine the *sattra* practices and their appropriation into the *śrauta* ritual[35], but, including the mention of the required seventeen priests in a *śrauta-soma* ritual, he confessed that it may become questionable or dubious.

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[32] The Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray employed Bandhopadhay's narrative for the film *Pather Pancali*, where the *brāhmaṇa* officiated at different *pūjā*s during the day, while at night he would turn to robbery to accumulate enough means for his daughter's dowry. Thus, the *brāhmaṇa* led a kind of hyphenated existence. Cf. Harzer 2015.

[33] Falk 1985. As it was hard to find references, Falk used the *Vishvabandhu Index*, which mentions *sattra* and *sattrin*s only in passing. Nevertheless, from the mentions in the Index, it was possible to establish that the summary description of a *sattra* was not precise.

[34] Falk 1986, 30-31, emphasised that there were no *sattra*s that were not followed by an expedition (*vrātyā*), and also that there were no *vrātya*s who did not start as *sattrin*s. *Sattra* sacrifice and *vrātya*hood parted during the *Brāhmaṇa* period, from which time they began to develop along separate lines.

[35] Falk 1986, 31-49. To discuss this in full is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current study.

As always, the seven *ṛṣi*s were named as the performers of *sattra*. Texts such as *Maitrayāṇī Saṃhitā* 12. 4 and *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2. 19 mention them, whereas *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2. 3. 3. 1 and *Aitareya Saṃhitā* 6. 1. 1 often replaced them with the *devas*. Moreover, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2. 19 contradicts the claim that only Brahmans can bring success to a *sattra*. The example given is of Kavaśa Ailuṣa, son of a non-brahman and a slave woman, who proved to be more successful in the *sattra* than others. *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 2. 299 and 2. 387 name the participants of *sattra* (*sattrin*s) after their leader (*gṛhapati*). For example, in *Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa* 23.8 they are called *jābālagṛhapatayaḥ,* after Satyakāma Jābāla[36].

Sacrificial fees (*dakṣinā*) were not a custom in the *sattra*s. It was said that it was their *ātman* that replaced the fee. It seems that they became a norm for the *vrātya*s when performing the *vrātyastoma*. There it was customary to have a sponsor of the sacrifice (*yajamāna*) who then employed an officiating priest (*adhvaryu*) along with his assistants. Pontillo drew ample evidence from the not-so-early *Śrautasūtra* texts and postulated that *vrātyastoma* required the attending *vrātya*s to provide their *gṛhapati* at the end of the *stoma* with thirty-three cows each. But there seem to be some differences. Pontillo wonders whether the number thirty-three is not according to the traditional number of gods, but it also almost matches up with the syllables in *anuṣṭubh* (which are thirty-two). Still, Pontillo considers it more likely that the required number thirty-three originated much earlier, when it may be better linked to the divine *vrātya*s[37].

A further distinctive detail has been revealed regarding *sthapati*/*gṛhapati* and the *vrātya*s[38] involving Budha, the son of Soma, the great-grandfather of the divine *vrātya*s, and their *sthapati*. In verse 2 of the *Tāṇḍya-Mahā-Brāhmaṇa* XXIV, 18, the crucial point of celebration and loss of privilege is documented. Namely, the divine *vrātya*s arranged for a large sacrificial event (*sattram āsata*) with *sthapati* Budha at the helm. They went ahead with the consecration without asking Varuṇa for a sacrificial spot. Varuṇa cursed them: «I am excluding you from participating in the sacrificial ritual. You should not be able to recognise the path to the gods (*devayāna*)». Therefore, no *havis,* etc., was brought to them. But eventually Budha was consecrated [...] so whoever performs the sixty-one-night *sattra* (*ekaṣaṣṭirātra*) will obtain success.

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[36] The narrative of Satyakāma shows among other things how he was accepted by a teacher as a Brāhmaṇa – for his speaking the truth when he was asked for his lineage, he just repeated what his mother had told him, namely, that he had not had one. Olivelle 1998, 219-223.

[37] Candotti–Pontillo 2015. Cf. also fn. 41.

[38] *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* or *Tāṇḍya-Mahā-Brāhmaṇa* XXIV. 18. Cf. Hauer 1927, 85ff.

On account of the *vrātyas*' negligence, the *sthapati* doubly disowned the divine *vrātyas*. Therefore, the *vrātyas* lost their way to heaven. They thus lost both their position and identity. Their state became truly liminal. Their in-between condition was spelled out as their not having their *sthapati*, nor access to heaven. Atonement was essential for *vrātya* practices, although perhaps not initially, as there are instances of killing and of expulsion of sacrificers (cf. games of dice)[39].

An important inquiry into the *vrātyastoma* is a chapter entitled *Aims and Functions of Vrātyastoma Performances*, by Candotti and Pontillo[40]. The *vrātyastomas* were used as a kind of atonement that allowed the *vrātyas* to return to their societies. It is said that after the *stoma* they were fit to engage in social intercourse. The authors cast light on important aspects of *vrātya* activities and document significant changes in the development of the ritual performances. The *vrātyastoma* examples from the early *śrauta* sources provide information regarding a major change in the ritualistic practices, in particular that there is a sacrificial fee and an officially appointed sponsor of the sacrifice (*yajamāna*). Neither of these features were part of the *vrātya* ritual.

It is difficult to compare the historical events of the transition periods in the South Asian continent to a European experience (cf. Thomassen 2016), yet there is a scholarly effort now in progress to understand the transition from the early migration of the people of Indo-European descent[41], specifically, how elements of *sattras* (ritual sessions) were adapted into the *śrauta* rituals. It seems likely that a disruptive liminality generally characterises such epochs. Just as Thomassen describes Europe in the Middle Ages, from the second half of the 15th century to the middle of the 17th century, when everything was overturned and there were no customary boundaries, the epoch portrayed by Vedic textual and archaeological evidence is similar.

4. Vrātya *Context and Liminality*

In the *vrātya* context, the issues of liminality are not solely of the *sthapati*/*gr̥hapati*, the *sattras*, but also occur in other contexts. As we learned in the process of inquiring into the identity and function of *sthapati* / *gṛhapati*, the leader of the *sattrin*s (the participants in the ritual of a *sattra*), there are references to expeditions of the *vrātya*s, but also references to the conclusion of Vedic students' studies, to ritual killing, etc.

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[39] Falk 1986, 73-187.

[40] Candotti–Pontillo 2015.

[41] 'Aryan' refers to the people who actually migrated together. Some stayed in what is more or less the territory of Iran today. Others continued their migration to the South Asian peninsula; these were known as the Indo-Aryans in the early periods. The name 'Iran' is derived from an earlier form, *Aryānām*. See Witzel 1999.

What is it that makes the *vrātya*s and their leader liminal? From the gleaned examples, we can see that the *vrātya*s led a hyphenated or double life, as some of them belonged to the ruling family, and / or were also professional priests, yet we also learned that there were merchants and landowners who participated in expeditions, described in the text in euphemistic terms in today's view, as *vrātyāṃ caranti* or *vrātyāṃ dhāvayanti*[42]. The *sattras* bracketed the raiding expeditions, before and after[43] and served as a kind of expiation ritual, allowing the *vrātya*s to re-enter the more ordinary life of their societies.

We understand that the *sthapati* or *gṛhapati* was in a liminal position, especially at the *sattra*, as he was the leader of the rituals. He would have to be consecrated, prior to which, he had to abstain from his customary life among a tribal community for 3 days. He was in a state inconsistent with leadership which might generally be imagined as active. He was portrayed lying down on a rough-boarded cart, as if dead, his bow unstrung, as a sign of being completely inactive.

The liminality of *gṛhapati* / *sthapati* lay in the fact that although he underwent arduous preparations for the *sattra* and collateral activities, he would not, in early times, receive any of the plunder. In an adverse case, when he attempted to keep the spoils, the members of the sodality harassed and threatened him until he surrendered the booty. The recorded example is of Dālbhya.

An obvious example would be the framework and the first beginning of the *Mahābhārata*, where Śaunaka, a *vrātya* by any measure, is the officiating *gṛhapati.*

The *Mahābhārata* has not one beginning, but two, and there might also be a third one. It is commonly known that the *Mahābhārata* was first recited at King Janamejaya's Snake Sacrifice (*sarpasattra*). The king was the sponsor / patron of the sacrifice (*yajamāna*) [44] ; the officiating ritual performer (*gṛhapati*) was Śaunaka[45], and the location was the Naimiṣa Forest. We find at least two pieces of information here, which in the larger context of the Vedic, but mainly late Vedic text, are *Sattra* and the Naimiṣa Forest. *Sattra* is a 'sitting ritual' lasting one day[46] or twelve days, and sometimes differing lengths of time, such as sixty-one nights. Even though it seems that there were a large number of participants, *sattra*s were secretive performances, and to date no exactly identifiable geographic location has been determined, and perhaps never will be, as they may have been mobile events[47].

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[42] Harzer 2015.

[43] *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* 22. 5. 4.

[44] Does the Janamejaya functioning as a patron (*yajamāna*) of the sacrifice at the *sarpasattra* already indicate the transition to the *śrauta* practices?

[45] Bowles 2019, 177. Bowles uses the spelling *satra*, which is generally considered an early form of *sattra*. Cf. *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā*, where both forms occur.

I suspect that the *Mahābhārata* still preserved this liminality, as many of the major protagonists exhibited certain features that would fit *vrātya* characteristics. This is also Vassilkov's claim[48]. What comes to mind is Yudhiṣṭhira's dog (which perhaps Tiziana Pontillo inquired into). Wolves, dogs, and even bears were symbolic animals which played an important role in different ancient European sodalities, as Falk (1986, other articles) and others were able to identify. Dogs and wolves in particular featured in other parts of what we might call the Indo-European homelands. Yaroslav Vassilkov was able to show how these animals were part of such sodalities and how these non-subtropical fauna betrayed their locales. At the same time, there was a change from canines and also bears, to more subtropical fauna, such as tigers and lions[49].

Although Petteri Koskikallio discussed Vaka / Baka / Keśin Dālbhya (other forms: Darbhi / Dārbhya) throughout his book-length article, his charts provide a good overview of the collected references. Focusing on Dālbhya (Baka Dālbhya)[50], based on textual evidence from Vedic ritual, Epic, and Purānic sources, the charts avail a glimpse of the importance of Dālbhya as a ritualist, king (*yajamāna*), and *gr̥hapati* (*sthapati*), as well as *naimiṣīyānām udgātr̥* of *sattra* in the early records[51]. Baka Dālbhya is also identified with Glāva Maitreya; both are mentioned as Vedic students. Koskikallio knows that the form *vaka* is derived from *vr̥ka*, meaning wolf, and that both Baka Dālbhya / Glāva Maitreya appear with dogs[52].

Dog- and wolf-warriors have existed since the early Bronze age (fourth or third millennium BCE) on the Eurasian steppes[53]. It is quite impressive to find the wolf (*vr̥ka / vaka / baka*) representation in India, as the example of *Vaka / Baka*

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[46] Falk 1985. According to Falk's detailed exposition of the *sattra*, the norm for the *vrātya*s was either a two-day *sattra* or a twelve-day *sattra*.

[47] Cf. Hiltebeitel 1998, 170-171, and Hiltebeitel 2001.

[48] Vassilkov 2015.

[49] Vassilkov 2009; Vassilkov 2015.

[50] Koskikallio 1999, 380-387.

[51] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 2. 14.

[52] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 12. 1-5, Koskikallio 1999, 380. Also, *Vakajātaka* No. 300 (*vaka* = wolf).

[53] Koskikallio 1999.

Dālbhya shows[54]. One may ask why, in the earliest mentions of Dālbhya, he was referred to as *keśin*, 'the hairy one.'

The early form 'Vaka', which became standardised as 'Baka,' as in Baka Dālbhya, is *vṛka* in Sanskrit. In the Euro-Asian steppes, sodalities of dog and wolf warriors were widespread[55]. There Vassilkov points to two dog episodes in the *Mahābhārata*. One is the narrative of Trita, in *Mahābhārata* 9. 35[56]. When his brothers (Ekata and Dvita – all three sons of Prajāpati / Brahman) plan to rob him, a wolf appears and Trita runs away. He eventually punishes his brothers by turning them into wolves forced to roam the forest. This leads to the supposition that when the brothers were banished, they were deprived of any economic support and hence had to survive as robbers. The second narrative is the quite well-known episode of Yudhiṣṭhira, who refused to enter heaven without his loyal dog. And then Indra, who is already recognised as being associated with *vrātya*s in studies on the subject[57], appears to solve the question.

Vassilkov suggests that since we do not find any *puruṣavyāghra* in the Vedic texts (*saṃhitās*?), the source for this term may lie at the "basis" of the *Mahābhārata*: cf. 'tiger-man' or also 'lion-man,' with their frequent repetitions accompanying the appellations of heroes or kings[58].

By the way, in his conclusion, Koskikallio unfortunately missed the opportunity to see a clue in the gradual maligning / deprecation of Baka Dālbhya, even though, interestingly, the memory of his practices, as far as we know, lasted over a number of centuries, to over two millennia in Central India,

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 1. 1-10 is about the High Chant as represented by the syllable OM. When Baka Dālbhya learned about it[59], he became the *udgātṛ* priest of the people of Naimiṣa. This put him in a position to fulfil the needs and desires of those people.

In another section, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 8., three men mastered the High Chant "OM". One of them was Dālbhya. His full name was Caikitāyana Dālbhya (we know Dālbhya as Keśin and also as Baka / Vaka (Sanskrit *vṛka*), who sometimes has a double, Glāva Maitreya)[60]. The three men quizzed each other and found that they were not fully knowledgeable, particularly Dālbhya. But they learned from each other; otherwise, there was the threat that their heads would shatter, as they would say to each other. Then they were hired to perform some rituals. A known performer by the name of Uṣasti Cākrāyana appeared as the three were setting up for the performance[61]. Uṣasti repeated the phrase «shattering their heads» in case they did not know to what deity their signing was linked. All three stopped, and Uṣasti took over all their roles, stipulating that they should stay and sing. He (Uṣasti) asked to be given the same fee as the priests, to which the king consented. The three priests asked Uṣasti to teach them the correct links to the deities, so their heads would not shatter. He did this. So, this could be called the education of the novice priests, one of them being Dālbhya.

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[54] The form *Vaka* occurs only in the earliest texts; it soon changes, perhaps to reflect some regional pronunciation. See the table in Koskikallio 1999, 300ff.

[55] Vassilkov 2015.

[56] Vassilkov referred to Lincoln 1976. Vassilkov does not give the precise quotation for Trita chasing away his brothers. He talks about two episodes with dogs but refers to one wolf and one dog.

[57] Dore 2015.

[58] Vassilkov 2015, 236.

[59] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 2. 13. Olivelle 1996, 99ff.

The next section of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* starts with the High Chant of Dogs, where Dālbhya appears as Baka Dālbhya (or was it Glāva Maitreya, his double?). On his way, he observed some dogs gathered around a white dog, whom they were asking to get them jobs singing praise songs at the rituals because they were very hungry. The white dog asked them to return the next morning. Baka Dālbhya came the next day to find out how he could get a job singing and observed that the dogs were holding on to each other's backs, moving covertly, which was comparable to the priests as they moved into secret places to sing songs of praise, making the sound 'hum' as they sat down. They sang for food and drink, appealing to Varuṇa, Prajāpati and Savitṛ: «Bring food ..., OM!»[62].

This narrative and the similar ones can provide us with some clues as to some of the missing or deleted passages. According to Koskikallio, at times Baka Dālbhya was not a very successful ritualist, while at other times he was. Here we have an example of how one could become successful – by initially practicing with others who were at the same stage, wishing to earn some livelihood by performing ritualistic functions and then eventually having access to someone like Uṣasti Cākrāyana, who could teach them the connection to the deities. And there is a lot to know, seeing how important the High Chant[63] is. And indeed, there is the appearance of Rudras and Maruts, and they figure in the central position in the grouping of threes in the different pressings of Soma[64].

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[60] *Ibid.*, 1. 8. 1.

[61] Uṣasti went begging for food and got some groats from a rich man. An interesting discussion occurred when the rich man offered him something to drink. Uṣasti refused, as it would be leftovers. He considered it optional to drink, whereas he would die from lack of food. He took some of the groats to his prepubescent wife (*āṭikī*). Then, he went to look for work. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 10. 1-5.

[62] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1. 12. 1-5.

[63] *Ibid.*, 1. 13, etc.

The study of early religious, cultural, and social history is especially important when there is still a very-much-living representation of practices, customs, and historical tradition observable in contemporary times. And this is all the more critical because much of the evidence of the early practices seems to have been removed or obliterated in various ways on account of radical changes in the socio-political realm. Numerous scholars have established that, apart from the Indo-European sodalities, others were traversing large stretches of the Eurasian plains / grasslands and eventually spreading in every direction, following various paths to their final destination, mostly by chance. The *vrātya* narrative is one of these. And their distributed living representation is still evident, as described below.

5. *Khaṇḍobā and the Marginalised* Vrātya *Status*

Regarding the many different types of sodalities, it seems that the formation of such groups preceded the practices in South Asia and were introduced with migration. The evidence of this is still detectable. Sontheimer was able to contribute a great deal to our understanding of this enigma. Kapila Vatsyayan, in her *Foreword* to the essays collected in *King of Hunters, Warriors and Shepherds*, pointed to Sontheimer's understanding of Indian civilisation, both in details and in terms of his approach. His research on the *vrātya*s was conducted in the second half of the 20th century and has been collected in the above-mentioned title. The following material was drawn from this work to substantiate claims that various *vrātya* practices persist in a fairly large part of the Indian subcontinent.

In the section titled the *Social Separateness of Some Followers of Rudra and Khaṇḍobā*, in the chapter on *Rudra and Khaṇḍobā*, Sontheimer recalls *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 4. 5. 3: *taskarāṇām,* [...]*, paricarāyāraṇyānāṃ patiḥ*, meaning 'chief of Thiefs and those who roam about in the woodlands'[65]. At the same time, Rudra is lord of the forest / trees as well as fields: *kṣetrāṇāṃ patiḥ* in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 4. 5. 2g[66]. He can be invoked to protect and is a guardian of groups such as Rāmośī's, who have special rights in the Khaṇḍobā practices. Similarly, Khaṇḍobā, lord of robbers, is at the same time a protector of the fields (*kṣetrapāl*). Also close to Rudra are the *niṣāda*s, hunters, fishermen, and robbers (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4. 5. 4)[67]. The leader of these ethnic groups, Rudra is called "*sthapati*" which incidentally is the title of the *niṣāda* chief[68], an ethnic group which seems to be closely associated with the Kuru–Pañcālas[69].

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[64] *Ibid.*, *e.g.* 3. 16. 1-7. It should be noted that in this section, which starts with the declaration that the sacrifice is a man. There are three pressings of Soma, in the morning pressing, *gāyatrī* metre is employed. *Gāyatrī* has twenty-four syllables for the man's first twenty-four years. The following forty-four years of the man are represented by the forty-four syllables of the *triṣṭubh* in the midday pressing. It is dedicated to the Rudras. *Triṣṭubh* has twenty-two syllables, so this case seems to involve a doubling. The man's next forty-eight years represent the third pressing, this is performed with the *jagatī* metre, which is said to have forty-eight syllables.

[65] Sontheimer 1997, 93.

Sontheimer found the ethnic groups, such as Malhār Koḷīs and Mahādev Koḷīs, were traditional Maharashtrian hunters and fishermen, engaged in predatory activities. These groups were the first to serve Mahādev. Mahādeva (the Sanskrit version)[70] is one of the names for Rudra in *Atharvaveda* 15. 5. 6 and *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* 2. 9. 1[71]. Rudra is the best trader (*vāṇija*), for example, *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4. 5. 2k[72]. As a lord of hunters, Rudra's special weapon is the bow and three arrows, more natural than Indra's *vajra.*

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Rudra is asked to loosen the bow (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4. 5. 11 and others). The bow (*jyāhnoḍa*) is also the weapon of the *vrātya*s and of the Ekavrātya. The unstrung bow of Mailār (another name for Rudra) plays an important role in the Dasarā festival in Devaraguḍḍa. The height of the bow is eight metres. At the festival, the eldest Vaggaya[73] of the Kuruba caste climbs an eight-metre high pole at the peak of the festival. Vaggaya, the eldest Kuruba communicates with Mailār; the Kuruba personifies the god. Sontheimer proposes a comparison between this Vaggayya and Ekavrātya because of their respective performance of some cosmogonic rituals. Sontheimer then says, «His communion with Mailār at this moment very much reminds us of the activities of the Ekavrātya, or rather, the *sthapati*[74] of the Vrātyas, who becomes the Ekavrātya by performing certain cosmogonic rituals»[75]. He is thereby identified with Mahādeva, Rudra, Īśāna, etc. Then Sontheimer reminds us that in *Atharvaveda* 15. 1, it says, «He became the Ekavrātya, he took to himself a bow, that was Indra's bow».

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[66] *Ibid.*

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] *Niṣāda*s were an ethnic group in the Chambal river area, which is southwest of the Yamunā river. Cf. Witzel.1999. According to Rau, when combined in a compound such as *niṣādasthapati*, it is a *karmadhāraya* and translates as '*sthapati* who is a *niṣāda*'.

[69] For example, not only Dālbhya was closely connected with them, but there was a requirement for an uninitiated (*adīkṣita*) to spend three days among the *niṣāda*s before a religious event in order to become initiated.

[70] Many of the Sanskrit names have been adopted into modern regional languages with slight modification, as in this case; others have undergone considerably greater modification, resulting in their Sanskrit origin being hardly recognisable.

[71] The Sanskrit textual references, which Sontheimer provided, have not been consulted.

[72] Sontheimer 1997.

[73] The description of the performance of the ritual is repurposed from Sontheimer 1997, 94. Vaggaya is also spelled Vaggayya – variation is often witnessed in renderings of local names.

There are several questions that arise with respect to the topic of the *vrātya*s. Why did they disappear from the textual heritage? Why would anyone want to lead an unstable life when the society had become stabilised by settling or semi-settling (still moving to new pastures, for example)? Why do the early records, for example the early *Upaniṣad*s, show them always hungry, often trying to get by with occasional employment doing what is translated as 'singing,' that is, singing praise songs and such. Falk[76] pondered this issue but soon realised that those who were ready to embrace *vrātya*hood were marginalised by their economic and social status[77].

6. *Conclusions*

From the description of the one instance in which *gr̥hapati*, as the head of a family unit comprising blood relatives, slaves, servants, cattle keepers, guests, occasional drop-ins, cattle, sheep, etc., was returning from an expedition, of which most likely he was the head, also head of *sattra*s, we might surmise that by engaging in the *vrātya* sodality, it was actually possible to become wealthy enough to be able to care for a large family unit.

Sontheimer's astute research regarding the various ethnic groups in several central states on the Indian peninsula shows that they have continued to preserve a very ancient heritage of festivals, with reverence and dedicated representation of the tradition, to contemporary times. Many elements of the attire and behaviour at these festivals, in which adherents will behave like dogs at certain points, for example, believably point to the heritage going back to the steppes of Western and central areas, as presented by Vassilkov.

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[74] I took the liberty of not copying *sthapati* with the long / ā / as it may have crept in surreptitiously.

[75] Sontheimer 1997, 94.

[76] Falk 1986, 51.

[77] *Ibid.* Also, cf. the narrative of Satyakāma Jābāla in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4. 4. 1ff.

It has to be acknowledged that Vassilkov's and Sontheimer's work puts the textual research in a relevant context, which may eventually become the framework for the claim that the *vrātya*s were one of the groups that roamed in ancient times, similarly to a number of other sodalities. Practices resembling those of the *vrātya*s go back to the 4th or 3rd millennium BCE, in the context of sodalities of dog- or wolf-warriors who roamed the Eurasian steppe and surrounding areas up to late medieval times. It can hardly be doubted that the *vrātya*s existed and that they derived from an Indo-European background. Vassilkov provides the external evidence of localisation and Sontheimer corroborates this with internal evidence on the ground in central South Asia. In particular, the bracketing framework of these scholars may lay to rest the nationalistic theory that the original movement was from the South Asian peninsula outward, that is, that the peninsula was the original homeland of South Asian people. The work of Russian archaeologists and ethnographers provides plenty of evidence that the movement was into India, instead of being out from India.

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Rudra’s Involvement in Ambā’s Liminal Ascetic Path

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Abstract
The *Ambopākhyāna* is widely acknowledged as the most renowned case of liminality in the *Mahābhārata*, especially in terms of the narrative agency of female characters. Several scholars have examined it from diverse viewpoints, especially as concerns the Vedic background of the prototypical bond between Rudra and Ambā. With respect to such *status quaestionis*, this paper mainly focuses on the ambiguities arising from Ambā undertaking the ascetic path, given her status of unmarried woman. However, first and foremost, it inquires into the details of “how” she managed to be granted a very special boon by Rudra/Śiva. Hence, some tentative issues to further reconsider Ambā’s character as an ascetic will be advanced, mainly via reconsideration of lexical choices in selected sets of *śloka*s in the *Ambopākhyāna*, and through comparison with another recipient of Śiva’s boon, *i.e.* the *tapasvinī* Arundhatī.

Keywords: Rudra, Ambā, Ascetic, *tapasvinī*, *vrātya* culture, *strīdharma*.

1. *Introduction*[*]

The story of Ambā has always been of great interest as a renowned *Mahābhārata* (MBh) case study of character liminality, related to both the topic of gender-bending and the idea of androgyny[1]. Throughout the 19th century, many eminent scholars devoted considerable attention to this particular topic from various perspectives, all of which contributed to the construction of a general framework in which the narrative structure and literary interpretation of the *Ambopākhyānā* may be placed. Smith (1955) conducted one of the first comprehensive philological analyses of all the versions of Ambā's story, accounting for a tentative diachrony of the interpolations. From an anthropological and gender-related point of view, Doniger's 1980 pivotal work and Goldman (1993) focused primarily on the text's perception of the concept of both transsexualism and androgyny, also from a comparative perspective (Doniger 1999)[2]. Scheuer (1982) encompassed Ambā's story in his inquiry into Śiva's key role in the MBh, whereas Jamison (1996, 219) and Hiltebeitel (2011, 362-83) hinted at the *Udyogaparvan* version of Ambā's story, in diachrony with Vedic texts.

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Thus far, in terms of literary criticism, the 20th century has been as productive as the preceding decades. Brodbeck and Black's 2007 collective work on gender and narrative gathered many contributions regarding scholars' literary, textual and critical analysis of the *Ambopākhyāna* such as Custodi (2007, 208-229), who discussed the ambivalence of the binomial androgynes Arjuna / Bṛhannaḍā and Ambā / Śikhaṇḍin(ī). More recently, Adluri (2016), as regards MBh theology, conducted a philosophical analysis of Ambā's role as the divine androgyne[3], whereas Chakravarti (2018), and Morales-Harley (2019) represent a fresh approach towards Ambā's narrative role and agency. Finally, Howard (2019, 232-235) focused, *inter alia*, on Ambā's *tapas*, acknowledging its often-overlooked details which the present paper proposes to amplify and corroborate.

By relying on such a background, I will focus primarily on selected lexical choices of *śloka*s from MBh 5. 187-188 in which the true scale of Ambā's *tapas* is presented and her obtainment of a boon from Rudra as *vrataphala*, 'fruit of vow'. Then, I will briefly compare her ascetic experience to that of the *tapasvinī* Arundhatī (MBh 9. 47), who was also granted a boon from Śiva.

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[1] Ambā's status of being unmarried can be defined as ambiguous due to the development of her condition: she was kidnapped by Bhīṣma, together with her sisters – see Mani 1975, 27-29 for a detailed summary of Ambā's story – during the *svayaṃvara* (MBh 5. 170. 1-20); she then refuses to marry him because already in love with King Śālva, then flees (MBh 5. 171. 5-10); once she comes back to his beau, however, he rejects her since she now belongs Bhīṣma (MBh 5. 172. 1-5). Therefore, Ambā is not an ordinary maiden, but a woman whose social status is unlawful, because a) the *svayaṃvara* is technically unfulfilled; and b) Śālva's claim of being Ambā's righteous husband is, in fact, infringed by Bhīṣma's act of violence.

[2] Along the same lines is Pattanaik's mention of Ambā, in his overview on Hindu tales about sexual transformation and gender metamorphosis (2002, 23-24).

[3] Adluri 2016, 276: «the Ambā narrative – by evoking a constellation of themes central to the theology of the Goddess such as the divine androgyne [...] – is a vital element of the epic's philosophical architecture».

2. *Ambā's* Quête *for Vengeance: Her Ascetic Path and* Tapas

After Rāma has repeatedly told Ambā that he cannot fulfil his promise to avenge her by killing Bhīṣma[4], she decides to take the *quête* for vengeance upon herself:

> *na cāham enaṃ yāsyāmi punar bhīṣmaṃ kathaṃ cana* // 8 //
> *gamiṣyāmi tu tatrāhaṃ yatra bhīṣmaṃ tapodhana* /
> *samare pātayiṣyāmi svayam eva bhr̥gūdvaha* // 9 //
> *evam uktvā yayau kanyā roṣavyākulalocanā* /
> *tapase dhr̥tasaṃkalpā mama cintayatī vadham* // 10 // MBh 5. 187. 8c-10 //
>
> "[...] and I won't go back again to Bhīṣma in any way. But I will go there where I myself can cause Bhīṣma to fall in war, o great ascetic, offspring of Bhr̥gu!". After speaking thus, the virgin whose eyes were full of wrath, went away, firmly resolute on *tapas*, planning my death in her mind.

Here, I propose an alternative translation of the compound *dhr̥tasaṃkalpa* with the dative *tapase*. First of all, I have chosen to stick to Hara's definition (1998, 634) of *tapas* as a «power-substance [...] stored up within the bodies of ascetics in the course of the practice of severe bodily mortification», and to not translate *tapas* itself as 'austerities'. In fact, I believe that Ambā, at that very moment, decided to resort to asceticism already making its consequences her goal. The compound occurs twice in the MBh in a context of war, conveying the idea of a firm resolution to achieve a goal perceived as ineluctable[5]. Van Buitenen (1978, 518) translated it as, 'she set her mind on austerities'. However, in order to highlight Ambā's

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[4] See Brockington 1998, 285; 463, and Thomas 1996, 66-69 as concerns Rāma Paraśurāma's championing of Ambā and his intervention in other events.

[5] In MBh 5. 151. 27 there is a reference to the Pāṇḍavas: *tatas te dhr̥tasaṃkalpā yuddhāya sahasainikāḥ / pāṇḍaveyā mahārāja tāṃ rātriṃ sukham āvasan* // 27 // 'Thereupon the Pāṇḍaveyas, having firmly resolved upon war, great king, passed the night comfortably with their troops' (van Buitenen 1978, 468; tr. slightly modified). And in MBh 9. 11. 37, which refers to Kaurava legions entering the battlefield under the command of Droṇa's son: *vijaye dhr̥tasaṃkalpāḥ samabhityaktajīvitāḥ / prāviśaṃs tāvakā rājan haṃsā iva mahat saraḥ* // 37 // 'Your [troops] threw [themselves on the battlefield] firmly resolute on victory, wholly renouncing their life, like geese in a large lake'.

«unstoppable force»[6], I propose instead to render it markedly different following the semantic meaning of the root *saṃ-√kḷp* ‘to fix, settle, determine’. Moreover, she is presented as intensely enraged; her eyes are *roṣavyākula*, ‘full of wrath’, due to Rāma breaking his promise. In actual fact, such seemingly casual hints at her rage are instead poignant: to be consistent with Hara’s definition, anger should diminish her *tapas*, because it is «most responsible for the loss of *tapas* [...] [and] is called the enemy of the *tapas* » (1977, 156). Indeed, if one does not subdue anger, one is easily subject to the dispersal of energy. However, surprisingly her *tapas* will, on the contrary, be increased instead of being discharged. Interestingly, the critical apparatus reports the *varia lectio* only attested in K$_2$ a Northern manuscript[7] – *vyākulacetanā* ‘[whose] consciousness is full of [wrath]’, which is representative of an even more deeply-rooted negative mindset that, *a fortiori*, should have caused a great discharge of *tapas*.

Afterwards, Bhīṣma became frightened[8] of Ambā, who was steadfastly employing extreme practices of mortification with the aim of gaining *tapas*, in order to bring about his death:

> *yadaiva hi vanaṃ prāyāt kanyā sā tapase dhṛtā* /
> *tadaiva vyathito dīno gatacetā ivābhavam* // 14 //
> *na hi māṃ kṣatriyaḥ kaś cid vīryeṇa vijayed yudhi* /
> *ṛte brahmavidas tāta tapasā saṃśitavratāt* // 15 // MBh 5. 187. 14-15 //

> When indeed that virgin, firmly resolute upon ascetic heat, moved to the forest, then indeed I became troubled, afflicted, nearly bereft of sense. Because no Kṣatriya could ever defeat me in battle by strength, besides the one who knows the Brahman, dear, whose vow has been sharpened by ascetic heat.

What is most noteworthy is that Bhīṣma refers to Ambā as *brahmavid*, a Brahman-knower whose vow has been *saṃśita*, sharpened by *tapas*. In their survey of the usage of this compound in Vedic and *Sutta Piṭaka* sources, Neri–Pontillo (2014

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[6] Howard 2019, 233; *ibid.*: «She engages in her austerities — not to achieve ultimate spiritual or marital bliss — but to bring down the icon of patriarchal structures. Her determination shakes even the heart of Bhīṣma, who was not shaken by any mighty forces, including those of his Guru who subdued generations of kṣatriyas».

[7] See Adluri–Bagchee 2018, 245-258.

[8] See Howard 2019, 233: «Perhaps he (= Bhīṣma) is disturbed by Ambā’s austerities because she is a woman and a woman who is neither married nor unmarried. The Patriarch no doubt feels threatened by the fact that Ambā’s motivation for tapas is not to find a good husband but to gain the power to slay him».

[2015], 176) showed how the epithet «may be a specific form of knowledge pointing at direct perception of the *bráhman* and of the gods, *i.e.* at achieving divine status». This is indicative of how Ambā's ascetic practices are quite advanced and are directed at achieving a specific goal. It should also be pointed out that the critical apparatus reports that K_2 reads *bhuvi* in place of *yudhi*, which reveals that even more power is concerned, if she could succeed in decisively annihilating Bhīṣma, whom no Kṣatriya on earth could ever defeat. As concerns epic usage, instead, *brahmavid* is attested in 6. 27. 20[9], where it describes the characteristics of those who pursue the *brahman*, within the wider context of the fifth *adhyāya* of the *Bhagavadgītā* and more generally refers to prominent characters, such as the *purohita* Dhaumya (2. 69. 9). More importantly, in two *loci* it is an epithet of Droṇa (1. 221. 9 and 7. 5. 17), who, along with Bhīṣma, could be representative of the aftermath of *vrātya* culture[10].

Furthermore, the *bahuvrīhi* compound *saṃśitavrata* with the instrumental *tapasā*, is found in the MBh in two other instances: the first is found in the so-called *Kāmagītā* of *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, a didactic tale told by Kr̥ṣṇa to Yudhiṣṭhira[11], in which Kāma affirms that no one can suppress desire, *i.e.* destroy himself, not even one whose vow has been sharpened by *tapas*[12]. However, it is significant, in my opinion, that the second instance occurs in an excised interpolation (App. 1, no. 55) of an older version of Ambā's story in *Ādiparvan*. Smith, who extensively discussed and analysed this interpolation[13], recognises it as «the original version from which the longer ones (in V 187-188) develop»[14], due to the presence of Skanda in place of Śiva[15]. Skanda gives Ambā a *sraja*, a magic 'garland' that, if worn, bestows the power to kill Bhīṣma. Then, she asks Drupada for help, giving him the garland, and at his refusal[16], she runs away leaving him with the unwanted token. In the *pāda*, Ambā is categorised as *vyudastāṁ sarvalokeṣu*, ‘dispersed among people’, and *tapasā saṁśitavratām*, ‘whose vow is sharpened by *tapas*’ (App. 1, no. 55. 91).

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[9] MBh 6. 27. 20: *na prahr̥ṣyet priyaṃ prāpya nodvijet prāpya cāpriyam / sthirabuddhir asaṃmūḍho brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ* // 20 // 'May he not rejoice after reaching the desired [= good], nor may he tremble after reaching the undesired [= evil], the one who has a solid intelligence, the one who is not confused, the one who knows the Brahman, stands in the Brahman'. On this matter see Brockington 1998, 273, as regards the Brahman being exalted «as both the goal of Yoga and as an external agency».

[10] I refer to Pontillo 2016, 205, where she calls them « *vrātya*-seniors».

[11] Agarwal 2002, 204.

[12] MBh 14. 13. 16: *yo māṁ prayatate hantuṁ tapasā saṁśitavrataḥ / tatas tapasi tasyātha punaḥ prādurbhavāmy aham* // 16 // 'The one whose vow is sharpened by ascetic heat, who should try to kill me, indeed I shall become manifest again in his ascetic heat'.

[13] Smith 1955, 108-125.

[14] *Ibid.*, 121.

[15] See also Scheuer 1982, 139, n. 20.

Which brings us to the first round of Ambā’s ascetic experience recounted a few *śloka*s later in the text after Bhīṣma has expressed his concern over it:

> *sā tu kanyā mahārāja praviśyāśramamaṇḍalam* /
> *yamunātīram āśritya tapas tepe 'timānuṣam* // 18 //
> *nirāhārā kṛśā rūkṣā jaṭilā malapaṅkinī* /
> *ṣaṇ māsān vāyubhakṣā ca sthāṇubhūtā tapodhanā* // 19 //
> *yamunātīram āsādya saṃvatsaram athāparam* /
> *udavāsaṃ nirāhārā pārayām āsa bhāminī* // 20 //
> *śīrṇaparṇena caikena pārayām āsa cāparam* /
> *saṃvatsaraṃ tīvrakopā pādāṅguṣṭhāgradhiṣṭhitā* // 21 //
> *evaṃ dvādaśa varṣāṇi tāpayām āsa rodasī* /
> *nivartyamānāpi tu sā jñātibhir naiva śakyate* // 22 // MBh 5. 187. 18-22 //

> Great king, the virgin after entering into a territory of hermitages and seeking refuge on the bank of the Yamunā, built up divine ascetic energy. Abstaining from food, emaciated, soiled, [her hair] twisted together, covered with dust and mire, and for six months eating [only] air, [she] became an ascetic rich in ascetic heat[17] immovable [as a tree trunk]. Remaining seated near the bank of the Yamunā, that shining woman withstood another full year of no food and [having] the water as [her] house. And moreover, she survived another full year on a single withered leaf, boiled with intense [anger] while standing on the tips of her big toes. She generated ascetic heat in this way for twelve years turning it toward heaven and earth and she could not be dissuaded from it even by [her] relatives.

An often-overlooked detail is the fact that her ascetic practices consisting in *nirāhāra* ‘fasting’[18], and *vāyubhakṣa* ‘feeding off air’ are exceptionally qualified as *atimānuṣa*, ‘superhuman’ or ‘divine’. In fact, the adjective is mostly employed in the MBh to qualify deeds of various entities, but never once does it refer to ascetic practices[19]. Once again it is also noted that she manages to not discharge energy, despite being *tīvrakopā*, 'boiling with intense anger'. For the second time, the text hints at her being powerfully enraged, yet her ascetic energy is actually widening instead of narrowing. Moreover, it is noteworthy that even her *jñāti* 'relatives' could not dissuade her, a sign that her ascetic practices may have truly reached a stage in which she has detached herself from earthly bonds.

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[16] See Smith 1955, 122: «There seems to be some confusion in the poet’s mind as to whether the garland is a bribe, a bond [...] or talisman. [...] it lays an obligation without any guarantee of success and the *kṣatriya*s and Drupada seem chary of it for that reason».

[17] The critical apparatus registers *tapasvinī* as *varia lectio* read in K_4, D_3, D_4 and M1.2.

[18] Baldissera (2018, 75-78) recently surveyed the ascetic practice of food abstention in the epic.

She ultimately became a *tapodhanā*, '[woman] rich in *tapas*', an epithet which occurs 7 times in the feminine, referring to the goddess Umā (MBh 13. 129. 38), Kuntī (MBh 1. 148. 2), Draupadī (App. 1, no. 95. 68)[20] as well as Yayāti's daughter, Mādhavī (MBh 5. 119. 21 and App. 1, no. 52. 7-8)[21], who both obtained the boon of renewable virginity[22]. The last occurrence is registered in MBh 13. 134. 47, where Gaṅgā calls *tapodhanā* an ideal woman who fulfils her own *strīdharma*. One might wonder about the reason for employing such an epithet to describe a woman who does not comply with her *strīdharma* at all. Indeed, Ambā's role has been consistently analysed in comparison with other women – at her character's expense – under the paradigm of extreme gender role polarisation[23], but if nowhere does the text judge her autonomy harshly, why do we? Instead, she paved her own way, as a woman unencumbered by *strīdharma*[24], and lexical references are indeed indicative of the respect she earned, if not within the story, at least in the eyes or in the intentions of the narrator[25].

In this regard, it is possible to establish a parallel with the story Indra tells Bharadvāja's daughter Srucāvatī – who practised *tapas* in order to conquer Indra's love

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[19] The adjective occurs 28 times throughout the text qualifying mainly exploits (630*. 1 after 1. 68. 7; 1. 68. 9; 94. 25; 96. 46; 109. 4; 1214*. 3 after 1. 114. 24ab; 152. 11; 3. 12. 2; 231. 17; 254. 10; 4. 32. 18; 7. 40. 3; 73. 36; 43; 113. 24; 8. 32. 35; 9. 11. 20); appearance (1. 142. 1); tales (3. 98. 2); valour (4. 32. 36; 12. 29. 122); thrills (5. 8. 9); common (13. 5. 8) and superhuman behaviour (7. 88. 8; 14. 8. 32); the Adhyātma (12. 238. 20); beings (12. 245. 2), and the basics of daily life (14. 86. 20).

[20] MBh App. 1, no. 95. 68: *nityakālaṁ subhikṣās te pāñcālās tu tapodhane* // 68 // 'And now, woman rich in ascetic heat, the Pāñcālās have constantly abundant supplies'.

[21] MBh 5. 119. 21: *etasminn antare caiva mādhavī sā tapodhanā / mr̥gacarmaparītāṅgī paridhāya mr̥gatvacam* // 21 // 'And in that place, Mādhavī the rich in ascetic heat, after having worn a deer's skin, moved in a circle with her limbs covered in deer [skin]'.

[22] See Brodbeck 2009, 169, n. 10.

[23] I am referring to what Dasgupta 2000, 54 stated, by analysing parallelisms between the dynamics of Ambā and Mādhavī's literary role, from which emerges an overall discouraging assessment: «both are tools for male ambitions».

[24] Howard 2019, 34.

[25] Smith 1955, 160-161 acknowledges the author's originality in his sympathetic approach to Ambā's character.

– of how Arundhatī obtained a boon from Śiva, within the broader frame of Balarāma's arrival at the sacred *tīrtha* Badarapācana[26].

> [*bhagavān haraḥ* […] *'bravīt*]
> *bhavadbhir himavatpr̥ṣṭhe yat tapaḥ samupārjitam* /
> *asyāś ca yat tapo viprā na samaṃ tan mataṃ mama* // 41 //
> *anayā hi tapasvinyā tapas taptaṃ suduścaram* /
> *anaśnantyā pacantyā ca samā dvādaśa pāritāḥ* // 42 //
> *tataḥ provāca bhagavāṃs tām evārundhatīṃ punaḥ* /
> *varaṃ vr̥ṇīṣva kalyāṇi yat te 'bhilaṣitaṃ hr̥di* //43 // MBh 9. 47. 41-43 //
>
> [The Divine Destroyer […] said:] "The ascetic heat acquired by you at the top of the Mountain, is not equal to her ascetic heat, o sages, this is my opinion. Indeed, from this ascetic (woman) was generated an inaccessible ascetic heat, twelve years were endured by cooking without eating". Then the Divine spoke again to Arundhatī: "Virtuous woman, choose for yourself the boon which is desired in [your] heart".

If we look at both passages, we see that both women endure harsh penances for the same period of time, that is *dvādaśa*, 'twelve years' (5. 187. 22; 9. 47. 42) and Śiva acknowledges that Arundhatī's *tapas* is indeed *suduścara*, a formulaic adjective for describing exceptional *tapas*, inaccessible to most, the meaning of which is 'very arduous' or, in Hara's (1998) translation, 'hard to practice'[27]. We have already mentioned that anger is an enemy of *tapas*, whereas patience and endurance are its activators[28], thus, Arundhatī's mindset towards ascetic practices is consistent with the model *tapasvin*(*ī*) who does not yield to anger, in contrast with Ambā. Nonetheless, Śiva had previously acknowledged Arundhatī's patience in enduring twelve years of generating ascetic heat under proper *niyama*, '[self-]control'[29]. From the comparison, one can see how Ambā not only endured worse penances for the same period of time, but also, that she is entitled to amass the same amount of, and even more *tapas* despite her susceptibility to anger.

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[26] On the matter see Hiltebeitel 2016, 76-77 and Száler 2017, 334-335. Note also that Srucāvatī is referred to in the same way as Ambā, *i.e. dhr̥tavratā* '[whose] vows are firm', denoting the devotion the woman puts into her ascetic path (9. 47. 1-2). However, Ambā's *tapas* is considered *jihma*, 'dishonest' (5. 187. 33), and is directed towards revenge, whereas Srucāvatī's *tapas* is blessed by Indra and directed towards conquering the god's love due to which she consequently obtains *svarga* – cf. Sutton 2000, 86 and Brodbeck 2009, 44, n. 10.

[27] For a survey of some MBh occurrences of the adjective, with respect to practical aspects of *tapas*, cf. Hara 1998, 636. Furthermore, it seems that in the MBh it often characterises the *tapas* of deities such as Viśvarūpa (5. 9. 6), the Supreme One Puruṣa (12. 331. 47), Danu (13. 19. 20), Aditī (13. 82. 25); and *r̥ṣi*s such as Bāladhi (3. 136. 4), Uttaṅka (3. 192. 9); or other beings such as cows (13. 78. 1). It also occurs as an attribute of purificatory acts (5. 9. 31).

[28] Hara 1977, 158.

Furthermore, Ambā's sworn revenge is highly feared by Gaṅgā who is indeed concerned for her son's fate. The goddess is determined to dissuade Ambā from her goal of gaining even more ascetic merits, which could indeed cause Bhīṣma's defeat[30].

> *sainām athābravīd rājan kr̥tāñjalir aninditā /*
> *bhīṣmo rāmeṇa samare na jitaś cārulocane* // 30 //
> *ko 'nyas tam utsahej jetum udyateṣuṃ mahīpatim /*
> *sāhaṃ bhīṣmavināśāya tapas tapsye sudāruṇam* // 31 //
> *carāmi pr̥thivīṃ devi yathā hanyām ahaṃ nr̥pam /*
> *etad vrataphalaṃ dehe parasmin syād yathā hi me* // 32 // MBh 5. 187. 30-32 //
>
> King, then, that irreproachable [girl] replied, showing respect: "Beautiful-eyed one, Bhīṣma was not defeated by Rāma in combat, who could ever have [enough] power to defeat that earth-lord whose arrows [are always] ready? I will manage to generate a very dreadful ascetic energy [fit to realise] Bhīṣma's annihilation. Goddess (= Gaṅgā), I walk the earth. Thus, I myself could slay the king! May this indeed be the fruit of my vow in another body!"

The cognate construction *tapas tap-* is matched with *sudāruṇa* 'dreadful', which is consistently attested mainly in contexts of war where in 30 instances it occurs as an attribute of *yuddha*, but it can also be found in reference to prominent characters, and as an attribute of events and wonders, etc.[31]. Remarkably, this adjective also occurs twice as an attribute of *māyā*, 'extraordinary supernatural power'; in one instance, it is ascribed to the Dānavas, feared by Arjuna (MBh 3. 168. 24), and in the other, it characterises the magic conjured up by Bhīma's son, Ghaṭotkaca (MBh 6. 90. 39). In addition, it is even employed to describe Śiva's *tejas* (MBh 12. 274. 5), but to the best of my knowledge, it appears only twice as an attribute of a particular type of formidable *tapas*. The first instance is found in the *Nārāṇīyaparvan* (MBh 12. 321-339), acknowledged, on the one hand, as containing a high number of Vedic references (Brockington 1998, 13), on the other, as one of the sources in which Pāñcarātra's earliest ideas on creation theory can be found (Misawa 2016), and it is also often linked to Epic Sāṃkhya cosmology (Brockington 1999; Adluri 2016, 293-300)[32]. Here, Vaiśaṃpāyana tells Janamejaya that the gods underwent dreadful *tapas* which is *brahmoktaṃ* and *vedakalpitam*:

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[29] See MBh 9. 47. 32a: *arundhatīṃ tato dr̥ṣṭvā tīvraṃ niyamam āsthitām* / 'Then, having seen Arundhatī undertaking severe [self-]control [...]'; and MBh 9. 47. 39c: *prīto 'smi tava dharmajñe tapasā niyamena ca* / 'Law-knowing (woman) I am pleased with your ascetic heat and your [self-] control'.

[30] See Howard 2019, 235-236: «Ambā knows that [...] she will have to take another birth because her female body prevents her from going to battle with the mighty warrior. Although her feminine gender [...] is constant, Ambā's biological sex is transformed and used as an instrument for her revenge. [...] Ambā's intense tapas becomes threatening. Bhīṣma, his mother Gaṅgā, ascetics, and gods all grow wary of the power of Ambā's tapas».

[31] As an attribute of: a) general kinds of conflict (MBh 3. 12. 54; 6. 117. 29; 7. 23. 19; 35. 14; 64. 31; 94. 7; 107. 5; hand-to-hand combat in MBh 3. 154. 42; military array in MBh 6. 83. 17); b) despicable people and demons (MBh 1. 56. 18; 3. 43. 6; 264. 73; 7. 48. 47; 8. 49. 31; 12. 110. 7; 149. 96; 228. 5; 290. 42); c) prominent characters (Dhundhu in MBh 3. 193. 16; Lakṣmaṇa in MBh 3.

> [*brahmaṇā sārdham r̥ṣayo vibudhās*]
> *te tapaḥ samupātiṣṭhan brahmoktaṃ vedakalpitam* /
> *sa mahāniyamo nāma tapaścaryā sudāruṇā* // 40 //
> *ūrdhvaṃ dr̥ṣṭir bāhavaś ca ekāgraṃ ca mano 'bhavat* /
> *ekapādasthitāḥ samyak kāṣṭhabhūtāḥ samāhitāḥ* // 41 // MBh 12. 327. 40-41 //
>
> The *r̥ṣi*s and the gods, along with Brahmā, approached the *tapas* revealed by Brahmā and regulated by the Vedas. This dreadful *tapas* practise is called Mahāniyama, *i.e.* great [self-]control. The *manas* stayed fixing [the focus] on one point, [while they stayed] with [their] sight and [their] arms upwards, at the

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271. 23; Droṇa in MBh 7. 13. 8; Jamadagni's grandson in MBh 12. 49. 29); d) Agni (MBh 4. 59. 21); e) extraordinary – both positive and negative – happenings (MBh 5. 141. 5; 6. 61. 9; 7. 6. 29; 166. 26; 8. 26. 38; 9. 22. 20; 23; 16. 3. 20); f) and general actions (MBh 12. 286. 28; 13. 9. 10); g) weapons (MBh 6. 78. 31; 6. 98. 20; 7. 73. 18; 7. 90. 20; 7. 141. 5; 29; 8. 38. 37; 9. 13. 22; 9. 22. 88); h) emotions (MBh 3. 247. 39; 5. 20. 10; 6. 81. 34; 7. 120. 84; 154. 2; 9 .28. 74; 13. 61. 24; 118. 12); i) tales and speech-related terms (MBh 1 .2. 61; 1. 46. 24; 3. 188. 84; 189. 6; 5. 58. 16; 6. 99. 41; 5. 104. 6); j) time (MBh 1742*. 3 after 1. 163. 15; 9. 47. 37; 9. 21. 43); k) sounds (MBh 7. 73. 16; 9. 23. 13; 10. 1. 27); l) sacrifices and *sattra*s (MBh 1. 48. 2; 9. 40. 13); m) physical appearance (MBh 8. 51. 102; 9. 55. 12); n) places (MBh 2. 22. 33; 18. 2. 44); o) human-body related (MBh 8. 36. 31; 10. 8. 21); p) conduct (MBh 6. 80. 47; 12. 254. 44); q) animals (MBh 12. 273. 3; 4). It also occurs once as an attribute of *adharma* (MBh 12. 149. 37), and of the earth (MBh 7. 40. 19).

[32] . See Adluri 2016, 293, as concerns elements of Sāṃkhya's cosmology within the Nārāyaṇīya, which he links to Ambā's status of divine androgyne: «In the Nārāyaṇīya, the text refers to the seven Citraśikhaṇḍins, who compose the seven prakr̥tis [...] the names of these "colorful sages" recalls the name of Ambā upon her rebirth as a man, and in Sāṃkhya cosmology animating Prakr̥ti is the name for the female principle, the complement of Puruṣa. Further, in later theistic traditions, the Goddess is identified precisely with animating Prakr̥ti».

> same time [they] stood on one foot being like wood, [having their thoughts] collected[33].

It is noteworthy how, as mentioned above in MBh 5. 187. 18-22, Ambā seems to mirror divine ascetic practices; the gods stayed *ekapāda*, 'on one foot', while she managed to stay *pādāṅguṣṭhāgra*, 'on the tips of her big toes'. Both of them equally share the ability to stand still like wood or a tree trunk, which is expressed by a similar compounded *upamā*, *e.g. kāṣṭhabhūtāḥ* (MBh 12. 327. 41) and *sthāṇubhūtā* (MBh 5. 187. 19). The second instance, instead, is part of a much broader sequence of *adhyāya*s (113-116), which focus on Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma's dialogue about *ahiṃsā* and food abstention[34].

> *yas tu varṣaśataṃ pūrṇaṃ tapas tapyet sudāruṇam /*
> *yaś caikaṃ varjayen māṃsaṃ samam etan mataṃ mama* // MBh 13. 116. 59 //

> The one who would undergo dreadful austerity for a full hundred years and the one who would shun flesh in my opinion are the same. (Chapple 1996, 120)

In particular, the stanza stresses how the merits of abstaining from meat are the same as the ones that come from generating *tapas*, no matter how dreadful this might be.

The last observation on the *śloka*s under discussion here concerns the fact that when Ambā is reincarnated as Śikhaṇḍin(ī), she remains unaware of her promised *vrataphala*, something characterised by Smith (1955, 126) as being indicative of «a fairly late [...] insertion into the epic», whereas Adluri (2016) observes that her apparent loss of memory is a function of Ambā's divine ambivalence and considers this incognisance ontological[35]. It is plausible to assume that the author may have intentionally depicted Ambā as being confident that she will benefit from the fruits of her ascetic practices, leading to a successful outcome**,** *parasmin dehe*, 'in another body' (MBh 5. 187. 32), which finally brings us to what the true fulfilment of her *vrataphala* is – the triggering of Rudra's theophany.

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[33] According to the *Monier-Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, the term *samāhita* literally means 'put or held together', but also 'one who has collected his thoughts or is fixed in abstract meditation', therefore 'steadfast'.

[34] On the matter see Chapple 1996's translation and comment; Brockington 1998, 225; Sutton 2000, 310, and more recently Hiltebeitel 2016, 29.

[35] Adluri 2016, 278: «Śiva's promise does not contain a simple promise of memory of her former identity as a woman, that is, ontic memory, but rather, ultimately of memory of her true identity, that is, of her role in the Creation as the Goddess. This is ontological memory in contrast to ontic memory: that she will "remember" to bring down the Brahmā figure Bhīṣma. From Ambā's perspective, she will remember that she is not a hapless princess but the divine androgyne; from Śikhaṇḍin's perspective, she will remember to become the divine androgyne».

3. *Rudra / Śiva's Theophany*

Before Rudra's apparition, Ambā endured the last series of mortifications, and the first *tapas* she gained produces a *phala* Gaṅgā's curse has meddled with[36]. From the point of view of literary criticism, scholars have dealt with the passage in different ways. On the one hand, Smith (1955, 148-149) observed that this section is an addition, as opposed to the older version told in App. 1, no. 55, with a new twist – which would have served to cast Ambā in a negative light – which he attributes to local legend. On the other, Adluri (2016, 310) reads the curse of being half a girl, half a river as the most meaningful hint at her being the *ardhanārī*, the divine androgyne indeed, whereas Howard (2019, 236) does not dwell directly on it. On the basis of the interpretation I am proposing, I consider this ultimate curse as proof that Ambā's *tapas* is, in fact, so powerful that Gaṅgā has to take action against it. This is demonstrated by the fact that Ambā's ascetic merits have drawn the attention of Rudra, who appears to her as himself, granting her the well-known boon of becoming a man in her next life. Significantly, the author increases the expectation of Rudra's manifestation by not mentioning his name directly until after he has appeared. Instead, there is a build-up to a climax by first the employment of a kenning and an epithet (7a) after which, two *pāda*s later, the god is finally addressed by name (9a).

> *tāṃ devo darśayām āsa śūlapāṇir umāpatiḥ* /
> *madhye teṣāṃ maharṣīṇāṃ svena rūpeṇa bhāminīm* // 7 //

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[36] MBh 5. 187. 37-40: *kadā cid aṣṭame māsi kadā cid daśame tathā* / *na prāśnītodakam api punaḥ sā varavarṇinī* // 37 // *sā vatsabhūmiṃ kauravya tīrthalobhāt tatas tataḥ* / *patitā paridhāvantī punaḥ kāśipateḥ sutā* // 38 // *sā nadī vatsabhūmyāṃ tu prathitāmbeti bhārata* / *vārṣikī grāhabahulā dustīrthā kuṭilā tathā* // 39 // *sā kanyā tapasā tena bhāgārdhena vyajāyata* / *nadī ca rājan vatseṣu kanyā caivābhavat tadā* // 40 // MBh 5. 187. 37-40 // 'Sometimes for eight months, sometimes even for ten [months], that fair-skinned [girl] did not eat nor [drink] water. Kauravya, she [moved] by [her] eager desire for sacred places here and there the daughter of Kāśi's lord fell again in Vatsabhūmi. Then, Bhārata, she transformed into a river in Vatsabhūmi known as Ambā, which has water only during the rains, abundant in rapacious animals, with bad fords and running in curved lines. King, because of [her] ascetic heat**,** the virgin then became a river in Vatsa, transformed [into a being] half river and half girl'.

chandyamānā vareṇātha sā vavre matparājayam /
vadhiṣyasīti tāṃ devaḥ pratyuvāca manasvinīm // 8 //
tataḥ sā punar evātha kanyā rudram uvāca ha /
upapadyet kathaṃ deva striyo mama jayo yudhi /
strībhāvena ca me gāḍhaṃ manaḥ śāntam umāpate // 9 //
[...] *evam uktvā mahātejāḥ kapardī vṛṣabhadhvajaḥ /*
paśyatām eva viprāṇāṃ tatraivāntaradhīyata // 15 // MBh 5. 188. 7-9; 15 //

> The god who has a spear in hand, Umā's husband appeared with his own form to that shining woman in the midst of those great *Ṛṣi*s. Then, after being gratified with a boon, she picked out my defeat and the god spoke back to that [woman] of fixed mind: "You will slay [him]!". Then, the virgin said again to Rudra: "How could my victory in combat, *i.e.* a victory of a woman, be possible, o god? By means of womanhood, o consort of Umā, my will has plunged deeply into peace of mind. [...]". Then, having spoken, Kapardin, the god full of splendour, whose emblem is a bull, disappeared there out of Brahmans' sight.

Here, I propose to look at two alternative lexical choices. The first one regards interpreting *manasvinī* in the sense of 'with the mind fixed' on something higher, and not 'spirited' as van Buitenen translated it, intentionally hinting at her reaction to the god's theophany. Secondly, Howard has already observed how she could have actually been successful in subduing her passion[37], due to the fact that her intention of pursuing *tapas* is *dhṛta*. Such a consideration is also supported by the fact that it was previously stated that during her ascetic practices, she would not listen to anyone, not even to her relatives, showing that she had successfully overcome earthly bonds. However, as regards Śiva's role in granting a boon to Ambā, Smith (1955, 121) also acknowledges that Skanda's «supersession by Śiva means either he has moved down the pantheon, or the tale has become more pretentious or both». But in my opinion, there is a third alternative to be considered, and that is a plausible intention on the part of the author to rehabilitate Ambā's character as a powerful ascetic, *i.e.* her *tapas* became so powerful as to trigger the god's theophany as an instant *phala*. In fact, an antithesis can be established by comparing once again Ambā's and Arundhatī's ascetic experiences, namely that Rudra manifested himself *svena rūpeṇa*, 'in his own form', only before Ambā, but showed himself to Arundhatī *brāhma rupaṃ kr̥tvā*, 'disguised as a brahmin':

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[37] Howard 2019, 236: «it is the Sanskrit term *śānta* [...] that has been translated as "meek" and "still." Ambā presents herself not as a *śāntaḥ strī* (a peaceful woman) but a woman whose mind [...] is at peace [...]. Perhaps austerities have purified Ambā's body and brought peace to her heart, without diminishing her indomitable intent to bring about Bhīṣma's death for his unpardonable violation of her».

> *arundhatīṃ tato dr̥ṣṭvā tīvraṃ niyamam āsthitām /*
> *athāgamat trinayanaḥ suprīto varadas tadā* // 32 //
> *brāhmaṃ rūpaṃ tataḥ kr̥tvā mahādevo mahāyaśāḥ /*
> *tām abhyety ābravīd devo bhikṣām icchāmy ahaṃ śubhe* // 33 //
> MBh 9. 47. 32-33 //
>
> Then, after having seen Arundhatī performing severe [self-]control, the tree-eyed boon-giving, very pleased, went towards [her]. After the very glorious Mahādeva disguised himself as a brahmin, the god approached her and said: "Fair-one, I long for alms".

4. *Conclusions*

In summary, I have attempted to demonstrate how the liminality of Ambā's character drives her ascetic experience as regards her agency in following the ascetic path and her social role as a true ascetic. Firstly, Howard has already demonstrated that Ambā cannot be considered a victim[38], therefore, on a textual level, I have endeavoured to show how the vocabulary employed is undeniably intended to portray Ambā as a powerful ascetic. Because she is alluded to as *brahmavid*, Brahman-knower, some considerations regarding her characterisation, apart from her condition as an unmarried woman, can certainly be conceded. As we have seen**,** the text employs an ambivalent lexicon in order to intersect and superimpose the conventional image of a rejected and unwanted maiden with and upon that of a powerful ascetic daring to perform a *tapas* which is indeed *atimanuṣam* 'divine', *sudārunam* 'dreadful'. There seems to be a prominent intention by the author to depict Ambā in terms of a powerful ascetic by echoing other passages referring to powerful *tapasvin*s, or even gods. This is consistent with what Smith (1955) demonstrated regarding the interpolations and the changes that the Ambā episode of the *Udyogaparvan* includes, as opposed to other mentions in the earliest *parvan*s. Moreover, we have seen from frequents hints, *e.g.* MBh 5. 187. 10a and 187. 21b, her tangible wrath does not in any way prevent her from gaining *tapas*, while conversely, several *tapasvinī*s, whose characters were analysed by Hara (1977) are commonly more prone to be hampered specifically by their anger. Her liminality as an ascetic drives her agency: not only does Ambā not discharge *tapas*, she even manages to amplify it.

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[38] Howard 2019, 242: «It is neither another account of the victimization of a woman entrapped by patriarchal customs nor a tale of scintillating gender themes».

Secondly, by comparing Ambā to Draupadī, Hiltebeitel (2011, 496-497) underlines Ambā's status as an outcast woman, who is thereby penalised in her inability to fulfil her *dharma* as a wife and mother (Hiltebeitel 2011, 380). However, in renouncing any return to her father's house or even to Bhīṣma's protection, she also renounces the fulfilment of her husband's *dharma*, to pursue an unconventional and unorthodox *dharma* which is all her own, or as Chakravarti (2018) stated, that her austerities are indeed «an attempt to return autonomy to a woman»[39], even managing to effectively obtain merits. Thereby, her liminality also encompasses her social role; she renounces her "*strī*"*-dharma* to fulfil her "*sva*"*-dharma.*

Lastly, in reference to Rudra / Śiva's involvement and, above all, his theophany, I propose to view it from the standpoint of both a narrative and cultural reconstruction. In fact, the comparison with Arundhatī's story seems to show that Rudra's involvement in the path of female ascetics is being invoked as a consequence of obtaining a certain amount of *tapas*, however, only in Ambā's case was her *tapas* so powerful that it triggered Rudra's theophany *svena rūpeṇa*[40]. As Jamison (1996), Hiltebeitel (2011) and, more extensively, Adluri (2016, 301) first hinted, there is more to Rudra's connection with the Ambā episode relating to a Vedic background, and – a far more daring hypothesis – a link to a *vrātya*-related one. Indeed, scholars have already demonstrated that there are hints in the *Udyogaparvan* which could trace back to a pre-orthodox socio-cultural context[41]. For example, the employment of the epithet *kapardin* (MBh 5. 188. 15a) is common in depicting Rudra as a «divine model for a vrātya chief» (Parpola 2015, 25). Therefore, a parallel could be tentatively established with those particular passages from the *Ambopākhyāna* in further consideration of the general framework of cultural reconstruction of the ascetic warrior society. The lexical choices at hand seem ultimately to allude to a typology of ascetic practice aimed at achieving a goal and not as an end in itself, and its occurrence in *loci* dealing with magic or referring to suspected *vrātya*-related characters hints at a broader framework of asceticism directed at reaching a god-like status (Pontillo 2016); her *tapas*, despite being cursed, forcefully unleashed the manifestation of Rudra's divine persona.

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[39] Chakravarti 2018, 174: «The austerities and ambivalent shifting sexuality leading to her transgendered history is a product of her attempt to reclaim some degree of autonomy in the battle over her reified body».

[40] See Smith 1955, 158-159: «The substitution of Śiva for Skanda in Ambā's vision is also probably new. Skanda is but a pale figure against Śiva in classical times, and an interview with him would show about as much *tapas* as would compel a *yakṣa*: we want more».

[41] I refer mainly to Brockington 1998, 155; 232-234; Harzer 2005, 163-178; Pontillo 2016, 205-246; and Vassilkov 2016, 181-204.

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«You Are the Same Śikhaṇḍinī»: Narrative Constructions of Śikhaṇḍin's (Gender) Identity in the *Mahābhārata.*

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Abstract

In the *Mahābhārata,* Bhīṣma creates the narrative of his own death: he connects his not fighting against Śikhaṇḍin, an alleged (former) woman, to his famous vow of celibacy, thus also to his boon of *svacchandamaraṇa*, and claims that killing a woman would mean killing himself (MBh 5. 193. 65). Bhīṣma is the primary source of information about Śikhaṇḍin, as well as the person most affected by it. The problem of Śikhaṇḍin's gender is discussed on several occasions in the *Udyogaparvan*, especially in the *Ambopākhyāna* (MBh 5. 170-193), and the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, and its importance is limited to Bhīṣma's death. The truthfulness of Śikhaṇḍin's (former) womanhood is almost exclusively dependent on Bhīṣma's reliability as a narrator, and his entire character is authoritatively defined by Bhīṣma as well. Bhīṣma presents the issue slightly differently to the Kauravas (the emphasis is on Śikhaṇḍin's "current" womanhood in the *Ambopākhyāna* and in MBh 6. 94. 16), to the Pāṇḍavas ("former" womanhood [MBh 6. 103. 70-82]), and to Śikhaṇḍin himself ("current" womanhood [MBh 6. 104. 41]), and also creates presumably deliberate ambiguity between referring to Śikhaṇḍin's birth gender and previous life as Ambā. Other characters merely quote him and are obviously puzzled by the news of Śikhaṇḍin's status as a *strī* 'woman' (*e.g.* MBh 6. 160. 15)*, strīpuṃs* 'woman-man', or *strīpūrvaka* 'former woman' (*e.g.* MBh 5. 169. 19-20). They simply use the fact without either refusing or confirming it, thus taking part in the narrative presented by Bhīṣma, which authoritatively defined Śikhaṇḍin's character and created a powerful self-myth.

Keywords: *Mahābhārata, Ambopākhyāna,* Bhīṣma, Ambā, Śikhaṇḍin, narrator, narratology, gender, liminality, polyphony, identity.

1. *Introduction*

The *Mahābhārata* is, as it claims, an *itihāsa* 'history'[1]. The term *itihāsa* itself can be compared to the notion of factual narration as used in modern narratology, as opposed to a narration that is overtly fictional[2]. Events, facts and characters presented in a typical factual narration are supposed to exist outside of the text, outside the particular storyworld, ideally in the "real world". What is different from a typical factual narration is the fact that the *Mahābhārata* is not narrated in the neutral extradiegetic third person[3] but much of the narration is intradiegetic: it is composed, at least partly, as a polyphonic[4] interpretation of a factual discourse. To put it bluntly, even though there is a presupposed set of events and facts as they "really happened", the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* decides not to present them to the recipient in such an easy monophonic "history book" type of way. Rather, on the contrary, the *Mahābhārata*'s uniqueness lies precisely in these different voices and general lack of unequivocal answers: it is too close to the everyday experience of its audiences, even that of the audience of the real world, where assumptions, gaps and insufficient understanding of events are a rule rather than an exception.

When dealing with the depicted events but also with characters, the subjectivity of the respective voices is crucial: there are issues of external or contextual subjectivity (what is narrated, by whom, to whom, under what circumstances) and of internal subjectivity. As a result of the aspectual storyworld[5], every character has an individual narrative or "personal script" of the events presented in the *Mahābhārata*: he or she can never know everything that is going on, nor are they able to see all the implications of an event, and they organise and interpret the events according to their own knowledge, personality, and memory. There are at least two things that have to be taken into account when dealing with narrators / characters and their narrations: that there is a certain way they perceive the events and characters, and a certain way they present them, and that these two things are closely interconnected but not necessarily the same: one can for example perceive a character as brave, and yet present him or her as a coward when it suits one's purpose. Or, as I argue in this paper, the characters can perceive and / or present someone, in this case Śikhaṇḍin, on different occasions as a man, a woman, a *rākṣasa* incarnate or Ambā reborn. In addition to its many voices, there are various types of audience in the *Mahābhārata*, and it has to be emphasised that the characters' versions of the events are not the same as the reader's, and that any character, narrator, or member of the narrative, authorial, or flesh-and-blood audience[6] has a different way of perceiving them.

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[1] *Itihāsa* is not the only word used in the *Mahābhārata* to describe itself, but one of the most common (after *ākhyāna*) and certainly one of the most important. For more about the self-presentation of the *Mahābhārata,* see Hiltebeitel 2016, 20-21.

[2] The distinction between a fictional and factual narration is, however, rarely a sharp one. Peter Hühn (2014, 156) writes that «[t]he commonsense understanding is that this opposition concerns the question of referentiality, in other words, the ontic status of the signified, of the represented entities and happenings (characters, situations, places, points in time, changes of state as well as attitudes, emotions, experiences), namely, whether the representation refers to something that exists independently of the act of representation or whether the represented is (wholly or predominantly) invented, fictive, and projected by the semiotic representation in the first place. This opposition is, however, less clear-cut and less discriminating with respect to texts than it purports to be». The *Mahābhārata*'s self-presentation as an *itihāsa* certainly claims referentiality to the real world, even though the references cannot be confirmed. For a more detailed analysis of the distinction between a factual and fictional narrative, see Schaeffer 2009.

[3] The terminology of extradiegetic (heterodiegetic) and intradiegetic (homodiegetic and autodiegetic) narrators follows Genette 1980.

[4] For the importance of polyphony and dialogue in the *Mahābhārata,* see Hiltebeitel 2011, Fitzgerald 2003, Black 2007 who speaks about the *Mahābhārata*'s «complexly interwoven dialogical structure» (*ibid.*, 57), and the importance of various primary and secondary (eavesdropping) audiences, or Reich 1998, who interprets the *Mahābhārata* quite aptly as a «battlefield of a text».

As a consequence of the subjective presentation of the events, the facts are in a state of a continuous negotiation and truth is often elusive. Bhīṣma's death and the nature of his slayer(s)[7] is one of these extremely elusive facts. In the *Ambopākhyāna* (MBh 5. 170-193), which is a subjective autobiographical narrative[8], Bhīṣma presents several facts that can neither be confirmed, nor refuted by other portions of the text, but it does not mean that they are not discussed or pondered by the other characters and various audiences inside and outside the storyworld. Rather, on the contrary, the facts presented by Bhīṣma in the *Ambopākhyāna* and elsewhere are of crucial importance not only for his death, but also for its interpretation.

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[5] As Palmer (2014, 146) mentioned «readers read novels by seeing the storyworld as aspectual: different characters experience the storyworld differently».

[6] For the different audiences, I follow Phelan (2017, 92) who distinguishes «three audiences in nonfictional narrative and four audiences in fictional narrative, namely 1. flesh-and-blood readers, 2. the authorial audience, 3. the narratee, and 4. narrative audience, the observer position». Even though the *Mahābhārata* presents itself as a factual discourse, there is a considerable body of readers who do not accept the depicted events as the historical truth and read it as fiction and we do not have information about the authorial audience's views, hence I have retained the narrative audience as well.

[7] The blame for (or glory of) killing Bhīṣma is ascribed variantly in the text to Śikhaṇḍin (*e.g.* Saṃjaya in MBh 6. 14. 5-9; Janamejaya in MBh 7. 1. 1; Dhr̥tarāṣṭra MBh 8. 1. 36; Gaṅgā in MBh 13. 154. 21-25), to Arjuna (*e.g.* Ugraśravas Sauti in MBh 1. 21. 57; Dhr̥tarāṣṭra in MBh 1. 11. 26; Kr̥ṣṇa in MBh 13. 154. 28-29). Probably the best solution to this problem is to acknowledge that the matter is undecided and as puzzling as Śikhaṇḍin's gender (*e.g.* Custodi 2007, 218).

[8] I have argued elsewhere that Bhīṣma's narration is subjective and can even be seen as unreliable. See Špicová 2019.

2. *Śikhaṇḍin as a Liminal*[9] *and a Composite* Palimpsest *Character*

When dealing with Bhīṣma's death, Ambā seems to be the traditional starting point. In this paper, I will start from Śikhaṇḍin as not every character is aware of Śikhaṇḍin's former life as Ambā, and indeed most of the characters who do know, show no interest in this piece of information. When summarising the story of Bhīṣma's (second) death, it is usually said that Bhīṣma was killed by the team of Śikhaṇḍin and Arjuna (and Kr̥ṣṇa): Arjuna put Śikhaṇḍin before himself because Bhīṣma would not fight against a (former) woman that is Śikhaṇḍin. We may also add, in our summary[10], that Śikhaṇḍin was born a woman and later obtained manhood from the *yakṣa* Sthūṇākarṇa and that he had been Ambā in his former life, the very same Ambā who had been kidnapped by Bhīṣma, an event that had effectively ruined her life, so she had practiced austerities in order to be reborn as a man and finally kill Bhīṣma. The problem is that most of these facts come from Bhīṣma's own narration[11], a narration that is very subjective, quite often unreliable, narrated purposely with his death in mind, and, furthermore, not available to all the audiences of the *Mahābhārata,* especially not to all the characters, including Śikhaṇḍin himself.

The character of Śikhaṇḍin is one of the elusive facts co-created through many voices. For the narrative / authorial audience and the flesh-and-blood readers, Śikhaṇḍin is, like most of the *Mahābhārata*'s characters, a *palimpsest* character:

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[9] For liminal characters, I follow Doniger's (1980, 284) list of liminal figures which «include the eunuch, the transvestite (or sexual masquerader), the figure who undergoes a sex change or exchanges his sex with that of a person of the opposite sex, the pregnant male, the alternating androgyne (male for a period of time, female for a period of time), and twins».

[10] The summary conflates the events narrated by Vaiśaṃpāyana in MBh 1. 96, by Bhīṣma in MBh 5. 170-193, and parts narrated by Saṃjaya, especially in MBh 6. 114.

[11] Even though scholars do usually at least mention that Bhīṣma is the narrator of the *Ambopākhyāna* (*e.g.* Howard 2019, 220; Adluri 2016, 275), they do not seem to consider it a thoroughly narrative-changing feature. The narrative aptness of Bhīṣma as the narrator is also sometimes commented upon (van Buitenen 1978, 178; Howard 2019, 222) but generally Vaiśaṃpāyana's narration in the *Ādiparvan* and Bhīṣma's autodiegetic narration in the *Udyogaparvan* are treated in the same way.

behind the human Śikhaṇḍin, another character can be seen. Śikhaṇḍin might even be what I call a composite *palimpsest* character, that is, a human character with more than one previous life, divine and mortal. Composite *palimpsest* characters are more an exception than a rule in the storyworld, the chief examples being the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī, and Śikhaṇḍin. At first sight, Śikhaṇḍin can be seen as someone who is a man / a woman, is / is not Bhīṣma's killer, and is a positive / negative figure. In different places in the *Mahābhārata,* Śikhaṇḍin is said to be: 1. a (male) *rākṣasa* incarnate; 2. Ambā reborn; and 3. someone who was born a girl and later changed into a man. These identities are presented by different narrators to different audiences. All of the characters have a certain way of perceiving other characters, in this case Śikhaṇḍin, as well as of presenting them to others, and, by extension, to the various narratees, and to the narrative, authorial, and flesh-and-blood audiences. Śikhaṇḍin is a character who is almost exclusively defined by the other characters and narrators, as opposed to Bhīṣma who is one of the most self-defined characters of the text (with the exception of the two characters with a special metarelation to the storyworld, namely Kṛṣṇa and Vyāsa).

3. *Śikhaṇḍin is a* Rākṣasa

There are two important lists in which Śikhaṇḍin is mentioned as a *rākṣasa* incarnate: one of them appears in the *Ādiparvan* and is narrated by Vaiśaṃpāyana to Janamejaya[12], and the other is told to Gāndhārī and others by Vyāsa in the *Āśramavāsikaparvan*[13]. The first list serves as an interpretative key to the characters for the audiences from Janamejaya upwards, which includes the narrative / authorial audience and the flesh-and-blood audience, but excludes the characters themselves. On the other hand, the second list is available to the characters as well, or at least to the characters who have survived up to that point and is meant (theoretically) to help them deal with their grief after the war. Even though these two lists are not the same, they both mention Śikhaṇḍin and agree on his *rākṣasa* nature – it is double-confirmed by the two most reliable voices of the *Mahābhārata.*

For the interpretation of Śikhaṇḍin's character, the instances where Śikhaṇḍin is *not* mentioned as a *rākṣasa* incarnate are equally as important as those where he is. Bhīṣma never alludes to Śikhaṇḍin's *rākṣasahood,* even though it would be an amazing opportunity to enhance his wickedness: it is quite clear that

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[12] MBh 1. 61. 87c.
[13] MBh 15. 39. 14c.

Bhīṣma is not aware of this fact. Similarly, Droṇa calls Śikhaṇḍin a person conversant with deceit (MBh 6. 108. 17), yet does not even allude to the *rākṣasahood.* Śikhaṇḍin's former life as a *rākṣasa* is known only to the narrative audience before the battle, and to the survivors after the battle, so the authorial / narrative audience can – and should – frame Śikhaṇḍin's personality and actions as *rākṣasa*-like right from the beginning. However, the characters only get the possibility to do so after the battle is over, and it can be presumed that this information could be a true discourse-shifting "plot twist" for some of them, as it would enhance the guilt of killing Bhīṣma by *adharmic* means. The authorial / narrative audience is supposed to perceive the transgender character of Śikhaṇḍin as a malevolent being.

4. *Ambā Reborn*

Most of the papers that deal with the characters of Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin and / or with Bhīṣma's death take the fact that Śikhaṇḍin is Ambā reborn absolutely for granted but it is not as self-evident as it might seem. This is because the fact itself is not narrated by the "objective" Vaiśaṃpāyana, the conveyor of the voice of the implied author, but by Bhīṣma who has proved himself to be a subjective and occasionally unreliable narrator on this occasion. Furthermore, the fact that Śikhaṇḍin is actually Ambā reborn was "deduced" by Bhīṣma rather than witnessed – it is impossible to claim with complete certainty that a character was reborn as someone else if there is no specific metarelation or a boon of divine vision. What is most intriguing about this fact is that it is unequivocally presented as the truth by the two characters who prominently receive a boon of divine vision, but "before" they get the boon. It would have been easy for the authors of the *Mahābhārata* to let these characters claim or at least confirm this fact during their respective authoritative discourses, but they did not do so, nor did they have the author himself, Vyāsa, present this fact, as is the case of Draupadī's former lives.

In the *Ambopākhyāna,* Bhīṣma establishes or confirms the fact that Śikhaṇḍin is a former woman (to the Kauravas and for the narrative audience), both in this life and in the former one, and that both the girl's austerities and her sex change were performed in order to bring about his own death. The story of Ambā constitutes by far the largest part of Bhīṣma's narration in the *Ambopākhyāna.* Apart from that, there is only one other character who explicitly mentions the unity of Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin. In his short summary of Śikhaṇḍin's life in the *Udyogaparvan*[14], Saṃjaya mentions a terrible *tapas* of the girl from Kāśī who wished for Bhīṣma's death even at the cost of her life, was born as a daughter of Pāñcāla and became a man by fate. Saṃjaya also hints at the story of Ambā very quickly after Bhīṣma falls on the bed of arrows in the *Bhīṣmaparvan*. He does not really connect Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin as a single person but mentions that Bhīṣma lies on the bed of arrows, he who defeated all the assembled kings in a great battle in the city of Kāśī on a single chariot[15] and he who was not killed by Rāma Jāmadagnya and has his origin in a Vasu (*vasusaṃbhava*), was killed by Śikhaṇḍin. Taking into account that Saṃjaya already provided Dhṛtarāṣṭra with the information that Śikhaṇḍin is, in fact, the reborn Kāśī princess (*i.e.* Ambā, [MBh 5. 49. 31]), this might be a knowing allusion to Śikhaṇḍin's former life as Ambā. On the other hand, Saṃjaya's first narration was before he received a boon of divine vision, and the second one after that. The fact that Ambā is not mentioned here might also be seen as a "correction" of his previous beliefs: Śikhaṇḍin might not be Ambā reborn after all. In any case, the story of Ambā is given prominence only in Bhīṣma's narration to Duryodhana and seems to be a rather "private" reason ("private" in the sense that it is meant for the Kauravas, even though many assembled kings are mentioned) for his refusal to fight against Śikhaṇḍin. Whenever Bhīṣma is asked elsewhere about the reason behind this, he simply points out Śikhaṇḍin's (birth) sex which then becomes the 'official' reason for most of the characters. Thus, Bhīṣma actively creates two narratives in the *Ambopākhyāna*: Śikhaṇḍin is Ambā reborn and Śikhaṇḍin was born a woman, but in any further communication he only confirms the latter. His lengthy narrative about Ambā and her austerities may seem like his acknowledgement of guilt towards the girl whose life he had ruined and his acceptance that she was the cause of his death[16]. However, in any later speeches including the famous advice to the Pāṇḍavas, he never mentions her again, and after his fall, he almost aggressively refuses that Śikhaṇḍin had anything do with it, beginning in MBh 6. 114. 55-61 where he claims that the arrows which are killing him belong to Arjuna and repeats the phrase 'these are not Śikhaṇḍin's arrows' (*neme bāṇāḥ śikhaṇḍinaḥ*) six times.

[14] MBh 5. 49. 31-34.

[15] MBh 6. 140. 6.

[16] Such is the argument of *e.g.* Howard (2019, 222) who says that «Bhīṣma accepts in advance his defeat by Śikhaṇḍin as the just consequence of his own deed of *adharma* toward Ambā». Similarly, *ibid.*, 227; 237. He might accept her privately as the cause of his death, but he is certainly trying to exclude her from any further discussion about his demise.

5. *The Sex Change*

The problem of Śikhaṇḍin's gender is discussed almost exclusively in the *Udyogaparvan* and the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, and its importance is limited to Bhīṣma's "death" after which this attribute of Śikhaṇḍin and indeed Śikhaṇḍin himself – are all but forgotten. Śikhaṇḍin's gender identity is puzzling, and certainly not every character perceives him in the same manner, but it is crucial for Bhīṣma and his death.

The sex change is only briefly mentioned by other narrators apart from Bhīṣma, usually when they are summing up the events of the *Mahābhārata* or introducing the heroes of the battle. There are a couple of mentions by Vaiśaṃpāyana at the beginning of the text in which he summarises the events of the *Mahābhārata* and presents genealogies. Śikhaṇḍin is listed as being born a girl, daughter of Drupada, and afterwards as receiving manhood from the *yakṣa* Sthūṇa[17]. The second reference in the list of partial incarnation presents Śikhaṇḍin as a *strīpuṃsa*, a woman-man, who used to be a *rākṣasa* in his previous life[18]. From the very beginning the outer audiences are aware of Śikhaṇḍin's birth as a female and his liminal nature. Both these pieces of information are present in the summaries of the text by the narrator who already knows everything that has happened and who is the voice of the implied author, and therefore someone to be taken seriously.

Apart from Vaiśaṃpāyana, there is also Saṃjaya's account in the *Udyogaparvan* where he names the heroes which the Pāṇḍavas mustered. Śikhaṇḍin is mentioned as someone who was born as Drupada's daughter and gained manhood from the *yakṣa*[19]. In the *Droṇaparvan*, Dhr̥tarāṣṭra uses very similar words to ask about Śikhaṇḍin as Saṃjaya in the *Udyogaparvan* with only a minor alteration, using the word *strīpūrva* here instead of *strīpuṃsa*[20]. Saṃjaya's evaluation of Śikhaṇḍin's sex is successfully transmitted to Dhr̥tarāṣṭra and to all the audiences upwards. It is however still nothing the parties involved in the Bhīṣma / Śikhaṇḍin struggle would necessarily be aware of.

Bhīṣma's claims are quite straightforward and his narration of the *Ambopākhyāna* is the central source of information about Śikhaṇḍin's birth gender, his life and former life, especially for the characters involved in the battle. It is Bhīṣma himself who brings this assertion into the spotlight for the other characters of his level of narration in the *Udyogaparvan* where he enumerates the heroes on the Pāṇḍava side to Duryodhana which is exactly how Śikhaṇḍin was introduced by both Vaiśaṃpāyana and also Saṃjaya. Almost immediately after this, he claims that he will fight against anyone except Śikhaṇḍin, and uses the *pāda* 'I will not slay Śikhaṇḍin' (*nāhaṃ hanyāṃ śikhaṇḍinam*)[21], which he will repeat several times throughout the rest of the *Udyogaparvan*, and which is also quoted by other characters four times in the *Bhīṣmaparvan*.

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[17] MBh 1. 57. 104.

[18] MBh 1. 61. 87. We can also read it as simply being a "demonic" woman-man. It is, however, a list of partial incarnations, so a divine or demonic lifetime is to be expected.

[19] MBh 5. 49. 32.

[20] MBh 7. 9. 41.

As a reason for not fighting against Śikhaṇḍin, he claims that Śikhaṇḍin is a *strīpūrvaka,* a former woman[22]. When Duryodhana does not seem to understand the reason behind Bhīṣma's statement, Bhīṣma begins a long narrative to explain it in detail. As a reaction to *strīpūrvaka* Duryodhana poses his first question ('Why will you not slay Śikhaṇḍin?')[23], to which Bhīṣma replies with the story of Ambā. Duryodhana's second question ('How did Śikhaṇḍin, having been a woman, become a man?')[24] is answered with the story of Śikhaṇḍin(ī). The problem of Śikhaṇḍin's gender is therefore presented in the second part of the *Ambopākhyāna,* and Bhīṣma's narration retains a certain fuzziness between Śikhaṇḍin's former womanhood as Ambā and as Śikhaṇḍinī. However, the account apparently gives more prominence (certainly in terms of length, sources and details) to the former while retaining the latter as the "official" version: even though the answer to the question 'Why will you not kill Śikhaṇḍin?' which here is 'Because of Ambā', is never repeated again.

6. *Deliberate Deadnaming: Śikhaṇḍin(ī)*

The problems of misgendering and deadnaming, so much discussed in the current discourse, are not something modern society has invented. The English terms might be relatively new but examples of the concepts can also be found in the *Mahābhārata*: Bhīṣma's identification of Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin, and his notion that Śikhaṇḍin is a woman includes instances of what we would now call misgendering (calling Śikhaṇḍin a woman, even though he is male both socially and biologically) and deadnaming (calling Śikhaṇḍin with his former female name, Śikhaṇḍinī). The very existence of a transgender person in the storyworld[25] inspires a wide range of reactions from various audiences. For the characters, the reactions include strong opposition (Bhīṣma), silence (Śikhaṇḍin) and general puzzlement (everyone else).

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[21] MBh 5. 169. 16.

[22] MBh 5. 169. 120.

[23] MBh 5. 170. 1a.

[24] MBh 5. 189. 1.

There are two versions of the name: Śikhaṇḍin (lit. 'peacock') and Śikhaṇḍinī (lit. 'peahen'). Apart from Bhīṣma and the characters in Bhīṣma's narration (Drupada and his wife), nobody uses the feminine version of the name which seems to suggest that for everyone else, Śikhaṇḍin is simply a man. No other characters ever use the name Śikhaṇḍinī or even Ambā when talking about the Pāñcāla prince. Nevertheless, the usage of the two versions of the name Śikhaṇḍin(ī) does not seem to be quite as important as the usage of masculine or feminine grammatical forms. "Śikhaṇḍin" can be seen as a neutral form which may be used with both the masculine and feminine grammatical forms, "Śikhaṇḍinī" is a highly marked form used only to highlight the hero's femininity. This is how it is used by Bhīṣma in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* to enhance the usage of feminine grammatical forms and make sure that his message is absolutely clear[26].

7. *(Mis)Gendering: (S)He*

Grammatical forms used to describe Śikhaṇḍin are quite coherent in the narrations of Vaiśaṃpāyana and Saṃjaya: in the reconstructed text of the Critical Edition, feminine grammatical forms are used before the sex change, and masculine forms after it. However, in various manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, masculine grammatical forms can be found in places where the reconstructed text has feminine forms and *vice versa*[27], which shows that the problem of Śikhaṇḍin's gender was by no means a solved one and that the scribes and various audiences of the *Mahābhārata* shared the characters' puzzlement. What I find extremely interesting is that some of the papers concerning Ambā often talk about Śikhaṇḍin using female pronouns, thus agreeing with Bhīṣma's interpretation of events, even though they might not be sympathetic to Bhīṣma himself and his deeds[28]. Śikhaṇḍin's gender still seems to be an open question.

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[25] There are other instances of a sex change and transvestitism in the *Mahābhārata,* most notably Arjuna in the *Virāṭaparvan*, also Ila / Ilā who is mentioned both in the *Mahābhārata* (as the mother and father of Purūravas, 1. 70. 16) and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (7. 78-81), and the king Bhaṅgāśvana (narrated by Bhīṣma in 13. 12). The god who is most involved in Śikhaṇḍin's life, Śiva, is also famously an *ardhanārīśvara.* The transgender topic is discussed by various scholars, including Brown (1927), Goldman (1993), Doniger (1997, 1980), Custodi (2007), Adluri (2016) and others. They all see Śikhaṇḍin as a special case, mostly due to the unusual female-to-male transition, the relative stability of the change and its crucial consequences. For instance, Goldman (1993, 380) calls this episode «the most complex and elaborate single instance of a case of sexual transformation in the literature and one of the few significant accounts of female to male transsexualism».

[26] *E.g.* in MBh 6. 104. 41: *yaiva hi tvaṃ kṛtā dhātrā saiva hi tvaṃ śikhaṇḍinī* //'you are the same Śikhaṇḍinī the Creator made you'.

The *Ambopākhyāna* is narrated by Bhīṣma as an autobiographical narration, a highly subjective one, and the usage of masculine or feminine grammatical forms for Śikhaṇḍin depends on Bhīṣma's own personal script, including his views and beliefs. Before the sex change, the usage of masculine / feminine forms seems to be slightly chaotic, but a distinction between "her" private life and "his" public life can be traced: a girl is born but presented and raised as a boy[29]. Bhīṣma's usage of gender-related pronouns seems to show the distinction between Śikhaṇḍin's biological sex (female) and social, publicly displayed gender (male). Privately, the royal couple talk about the child as a girl, and Drupada even addresses his publicly male child as «Śikhaṇḍinī»[30]. Feminine forms are also used by Bhīṣma as the narrator of this episode when Śikhaṇḍinī reaches youth and is recognised as a woman by her wife[31]. In connection to the marriage and Śikhaṇḍin's public life and family, masculine forms are used[32]. The situation changes when Śikhaṇḍin's sex begins to be the subject of rumours, and feminine grammatical forms are used again, even in public[33]. When Śikhaṇḍin's mother publicly takes blame for the deceit, she talks about her child as a girl, Śikhaṇḍinī[34], but Bhīṣma as a narrator uses the male name when describing Śikhaṇḍin's mother[35].

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[27] *E.g.* in MBh 5. 49. 34, the Critical Edition has *yāṃ yakṣaḥ puruṣaṃ cakre bhīṣmasya nidhane kila*, but Sukthankar (1940, 247) notes *yaṃ* in manuscripts K4, B, Dn, D1. 3-6. 10, T, and G1. 2. 4.

[28] *E.g.* Adluri on various occasions prefers Ambā over Śikhaṇḍin: «Ambā / Śikhaṇḍin's problematic sexuality, and her ability to transform, [...]» (2016, 277), and even when only Śikhaṇḍin is in question feminine pronouns are used: «These are the last words he utters to her, [...]» (*ibid.*, 293). There are other options, *e.g.* Goldman (1993, 381) chose to use s/he. Most papers which deal with Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin – including this one – somehow retain the characters' puzzlement.

[29] MBh 5. 189. 12-17.

[30] MBh 5. 191. 18.

[31] MBh 5. 190. 12-14.

[32] MBh 5. 190. 9.-10; 13; 17.

[33] MBh 5. 190. 22; 5. 191. 3, 17.

[34] MBh 5. 192. 1-4.

[35] MBh 5. 191. 12; 5. 192. 1.

Feminine grammatical forms are used when Śikhaṇḍin enters the forest, along with both versions of the name. The *yakṣa* continually addresses Śikhaṇḍin as a woman – it would be strange to address her as a man when she is about to change sex with the *yakṣa's* help. After the sex change, Śikhaṇḍin's sex and gender are in line, and Bhīṣma as the narrator of the *Ambopākyāna* invariably talks about Śikhaṇḍin as a male: the male version of the name, masculine pronouns and grammatical forms are used, except for a single notion that after her father-in-law's departure, Śikhaṇḍinī was exceedingly happy[36]. After Kubera's arrival at Sthūṇākarṇa's abode (in the embedded narrative), the *yakṣas* refer to Śikhaṇḍin as a woman: for them, she is Drupada's daughter Śikhaṇḍinī, a woman who, for a limited amount of time, acquired the 'sign of a man'[37]. They do not talk about any event that occurred after the sex change, thus their usage of the feminine grammatical forms is unsurprising. On the other hand, Kubera refers to Śikhaṇḍin with a masculine pronoun when he curses Sthūṇa to remain a woman[38], thus confirming the transition.

After Kubera's departure, Śikhaṇḍin is invariantly referred to in masculine grammatical forms in the narration but Śikhaṇḍin's womanhood is by no means forgotten by Bhīṣma and he constantly places it in the foreground, while stressing his own inability (one would even be tempted to say "impotence") and unwillingness to kill a woman. Contrary to the narrator's and the characters' treatment of Śikhaṇḍin's gender, only masculine grammatical forms are used for Sthūṇākarṇa, even after the sex change. The closest the description comes to a feminine form is *strīsvarūpa*, *i.e.* 'in "his" feminine form'[39]. It is never even hinted that Sthūṇa should be described as a real female. The reasons behind this can be partly the impermanence of the change and the fact that he was a *kāmarūpin*: the *yakṣa* will live much longer than Śikhaṇḍin and has always been able to change his appearance at will no matter what. This connects him more to Arjuna / Bṛhannaḍā[40] than to Śikhaṇḍin's newly gained masculinity, because for Sthūṇākarṇa and Arjuna, the sex change is nothing but a short episode, but for Śikhaṇḍin, it changes his entire life.

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[36] MBh 5. 193. 29.
[37] MBh 5. 193. 36.
[38] MBh 5. 193. 43.
[39] MBh 5. 193. 40.
[40] During Arjuna's disguise, his female name Bṛhannaḍā is used along with Arjuna's usual names, and there are both masculine and feminine grammatical forms. Masculine forms are predominantly used by the narrator and feminine forms during dialogues with other characters which is logical and does not disturb the audiences.

In the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, Bhīṣma mentions Śikhaṇḍin's birth sex to Duryodhana, Yudhiṣṭhira and even to Śikhaṇḍin himself, explaining to all of them why he will not fight against Śikhaṇḍin. In the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, it is easy to observe that Bhīṣma's presentation of this particular fact is subjective, not only because of his personality and personal script, but it also depends on his audiences and circumstances: he presents a slightly different set of facts to different audiences.

He repeats his former claim to Duryodhana, that he will not fight against Śikhaṇḍin because he used to be a woman[41]. Bhīṣma here really highlights Śikhaṇḍin's (even current) womanhood: she is the same woman Śikhaṇḍinī the Creator made her, and in this *śloka*, Bhīṣma uses exclusively feminine grammatical forms[42]. This *pāda* is near-repeated by him once more in his dialogue with Śikhaṇḍin[43]. To summarise, when he talks to the Kauravas or to Śikhaṇḍin, Bhīṣma's claim is very straightforward: Śikhaṇḍinī is simply a woman for him. There is no ambivalence in his claims here, as he is talking to someone who has to understand and accept his position in order to make his plan of self-destruction – which is neither shared with the Kauravas nor with Śikhaṇḍin at that point – successful: Śikhaṇḍin is a woman and Bhīṣma cannot fight against a woman.

On the other hand, when presenting the plan he himself created in order to enable his own death to Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīṣma talks about Śikhaṇḍin purely in masculine grammatical forms, about someone who used to be a woman and then gained manhood, not mentioning his "current womanhood"[44]. Unlike when he talked to Duryodhana, he also claims that the fact of Śikhaṇḍin's former female sex is known to all of the Pāṇḍavas[45]. Even though he calls Śikhaṇḍin inauspicious (*amaṅgalyadhvaja*)[46], he goes no further in claiming that the chief ally and relative of the Pāṇḍavas is, in fact, a female.

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[41] MBh 6. 94. 14.

[42] MBh 6. 94. 16-17.

[43] MBh 6. 104. 41. Śikhaṇḍin replies to Bhīṣma's speech with an alteration of the first verse of this *śloka*.

[44] MBh 6. 103. 70-82.

[45] MBh 6. 103. 76.

[46] MBh 6. 103. 74c.The word *dhvaja* can mean a flag, a banner, but also a sign in general, and an organ of generation (*strī, puṃs*). Here, it is probably most logical to assume that it means 'an inauspicious sex organ'. Another sound interpretation would be that Śikhaṇḍin as such is an inauspicious sign for Bhīṣma. The term *amaṅgalyadhvaja* might also refer to the Śikhaṇḍinī / Śikhaṇḍin sex change and the fact that his newly acquainted sex organ does not belong to a human, but to a *yakṣa*. It has to be noted that the *yakṣa*s are mostly seen as inauspicious, only a step away from the *rākṣasa*s.

Apart from Bhīṣma's own words, there are also Saṃjaya's reports regarding the moments when Śikhaṇḍin approached Bhīṣma, Bhīṣma refused to fight against him, "remembering / keeping in mind his / Śikhaṇḍin's womanhood". Saṃjaya always uses male pronouns for Śikhaṇḍin, even when he reports Bhīṣma's opinions[47]. Every other character merely quotes Bhīṣma on this matter. There is no character who adds any information about this fact from another source, even though characters with divine vision, great ascetic merit, and even presumed witnesses of the events are present, such as Saṃjaya, Vyāsa, or Kr̥ṣṇa. There is also nothing new from Śikhaṇḍin himself or his family. Śikhaṇḍin's birth sex is alluded to twice by Duryodhana when he explains his strategy to his brother Duḥśāsana and asks him to protect Bhīṣma from Śikhaṇḍin. In both versions, he starts by quoting Bhīṣma's famous *pāda* 'I will not slay Śikhaṇḍin' (*nāhaṃ hanyāṃ śikhaṇḍinam*). In the first version, the quotation only spans one *śloka* and, interestingly, the word *śrūyate* 'it is heard' is used, so it is much less authoritative than Bhīṣma's own former narration[48]. The second quotation is more elaborate: the first verse is the same one used by Duryodhana previously and the second verse is quite similar, the only difference being the use of *strīpūrvako hy asau jātas* ('he was born as a woman before')[49] instead of *śrūyate strī.*

Similarly, Arjuna also quotes Bhīṣma, his famous *pāda* and the fact that Śikhaṇḍin was born as a girl and became a man[50] as a conclusion of his emotional dialogue with Kr̥ṣṇa which takes place after the Pāṇḍavas' visit to Bhīṣma's tent where they discovered that the only way to slay him is to position Śikhaṇḍin before Arjuna. Interestingly, the *pāda nāhaṃ hanyāṃ śikhaṇḍinam* was not used by Bhīṣma then, and in this quotation, Arjuna uses the word *jātā* for Śikhaṇḍin's birth and not for becoming a man as it was used when Bhīṣma talked to Duryodhana. Even though this quote may be read as also alluding to Ambā – if we read the word *purā* as meaning 'in the previous birth' – the Pāṇḍavas never show any explicit knowledge of Ambā but are said to know about Śikhaṇḍinī, so it seems that the Pāṇḍavas' understanding of the situation is that the problem is Śikhaṇḍin's birth sex and not his former life as Ambā.

Droṇa also quotes the same *pāda* and repeats the assertion that Śikhaṇḍin is the same woman the Creator made her, and also describes Śikhaṇḍin as 'being conversant with deceit' (*nikr̥tiprajña*) and having an 'evil mind' (*pāpacetas*). Droṇa also repeats that Śikhaṇḍin is *amaṅgalyadhvaja*, *i.e.* one with an inauspicious banner or sex organ or an inauspicious sign in itself and claims that Bhīṣma does not fight him for this very reason[51]. Droṇa is supposed to know Śikhaṇḍin very well, as he was, according to Bhīṣma, Śikhaṇḍin's *guru.* At the same time, Droṇa and Śikhaṇḍin's father Drupada have a very complicated relationship which might also be the reason for Droṇa's unflattering description of Śikhaṇḍin. As negative as the description of Śikhaṇḍin may be, it only makes use of masculine grammatical forms and names, with the exception of a direct quotation of Bhīṣma's words.

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[47] MBh 6. 65. 28; 6. 82. 26; 6. 99. 7; 6. 112. 80; 6. 113. 46.

[48] MBh 6. 16. 15.

[49] MBh 6. 95. 8.

[50] MBh 6. 103. 100.

8. *Who Is Śikhaṇḍin?*

To summarise, Śikhaṇḍin's identity as a composite and liminal character is quite puzzling. There are six basic readings of this character that can be applied for the outermost audiences, including the flesh-and-blood reader. If we suppose some of the portions of the *Mahābhārata* are "late", we can say that Vaiśaṃpāyana's and Vyāsa's lists of partial incarnations are both later *addenda* to the text and Śikhaṇḍin is simply Ambā reborn[52]. On the other hand, seeing that Bhīṣma is a subjective and occasionally unreliable narrator, we may conclude that Bhīṣma's claim that Śikhaṇḍin is Ambā reborn is unreliable, and he is therefore simply a *rākṣasa* as claimed by Vaiśaṃpāyana and Vyāsa. This reading is problematic because Saṃjaya, who is generally a very reliable, albeit necessarily partly subjective narrator, also says that Śikhaṇḍin is Ambā reborn. A very suspicious reader might even assume that both Bhīṣma's and Vyāsa's / Vaiśaṃpāyana's claims are false (unreliable and / or later *addenda*), and Śikhaṇḍin is simply Śikhaṇḍin, without any reliably narrated former life.

Śikhaṇḍin's former life as Ambā is the one with the greatest narratological potential: the celibate Bhīṣma was killed by a woman whom he had kidnapped in her previous life. The rebirth gives Śikhaṇḍin – who in this reading is still perceived as a woman – the right to do this and the audience would therefore see it as rightful vengeance, allowing them to experience some kind of 'poetic justice'[53]. Without the *rākṣasa* former life, the story of Ambā and Bhīṣma would resemble the story of Vedavatī and Rāvaṇa (Rm 7. 17): the harassed woman returns to become the reason for the kidnapper's / rapist's demise in her next life while the kidnapper's only vulnerable spot is the woman's (Śikhaṇḍinī / Sītā) male counterpart (Śikhaṇḍin / Rāma). This would align Bhīṣma with the "villains" far more than the narrative audience is supposed to perceive him, and it is his narration of the *Ambopākhyāna* and Śikhaṇḍin's other life as a *rākṣasa* which saves him from this fate.

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[51] MBh 6. 108. 17-18.

[52] Any reader can of course simply "opt out" from the authorial audience which is led, or even forced to see Śikhaṇḍin as a malevolent being because of his former life as a *rākṣasa*. As Phelan (2017, 100) put it, «[a]ny member of the actual audience is of course free to decide that any narration is deficient, especially along the axis of ethics, because any reader can resist or reject the ethical values that undergird an author's narrative».

There are three other options which take into account both claims: Ambā is a (male) *rākṣasa* incarnate, who was then reborn as Śikhaṇḍin; the human female Ambā was reborn as a male *rākṣasa* before becoming a female (Śikhaṇḍinī) again; and Śikhaṇḍin is comprised of a part of the female Ambā, and a part of the male *rākṣasa* which seems to be the most probable conclusion with no additional unexplained sex changes necessary. The "reliable" narrators present him as a *rākṣasa* incarnate and as someone who was born as a woman and subsequently became a man. The identification of Śikhaṇḍin with a *rākṣasa,* which instantly makes him an antagonist, is only available to the audiences from Janamejaya upwards, and not available to any of the characters, probably not even to Śikhaṇḍin himself or his family. It is only authoritatively presented as a fact later by Vyāsa who, by presenting this former life and keeping silent about Ambā, almost absolves Bhīṣma of any guilt and shows Śikhaṇḍin as the villain of the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, at least for the authorial audience. The modern flesh-and-blood reader might quite often be more sympathetic towards Ambā and Śikhaṇḍin than towards Bhīṣma.

On the other hand, Śikhaṇḍin's former womanhood is ascertained by Vaiśaṃpāyana, just as it is known to Saṃjaya and Bhīṣma, so it can be taken for a reliable fact shared by all types of audiences. However, it is not certain what "womanhood" is alluded to by the different characters. Śikhaṇḍin's identification with Ambā never successfully crosses the boundary between the characters and the reliable framing narrators. The Ambā / Śikhaṇḍin identification only exists in the background, apparently with no importance for anyone except for Bhīṣma who gives this very identification as the reason for his death to Duryodhana, if not to the Pāṇḍavas. Yet the outermost audiences, including today's flesh-and-blood readers and scholars take Ambā's revenge – seemingly almost against Bhīṣma's later expressed wishes – to be the reason for his death.

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[53] However, the fact that Ambā's revenge is somewhat disappointing has frequently been commented upon. Custodi (2007, 217) says that Ambā «doesn't even really ever accomplish what she set out to do»; Doniger (1997, 141) notes that «[t]here is therefore something anticlimactic about the killing of Bhīṣma by Śikhaṇḍin»; Howard (2019, 239), however, sees such an interpretation as a misconstruction of Ambā's life.

Bhīṣma is a character who self-defines himself continuously and almost aggressively: by his vow, by creating his own self-myth; other characters may not agree with his self-identification (like Śiśupāla), but they can do little to change it. On the other hand, Śikhaṇḍin is a character defined almost exclusively by other characters, mostly by Bhīṣma. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about Śikhaṇḍin without the voices of other characters, and he never gets the chance to define himself. There are various liminal Śikhaṇḍins for various audiences. To the Kauravas, Bhīṣma presents Śikhaṇḍin explicitly as a woman, and to the Pāṇḍavas, more carefully as a man who used to be a woman, showing the difference between perception and presentation. The outer audiences can accept either of these two versions according to their own personal scripts. In the *Ambopākhyāna,* Bhīṣma presents Śikhaṇḍin as Ambā reborn but other characters do not comment on it and the outer audiences can make their own choices to believe or not to believe Bhīṣma's words. The only reliable framing information about Śikhaṇḍin is his former life as a *rākṣasa* and his liminal nature. The character of Śikhaṇḍin is a quintessential liminal character of the *Mahābhārata* that changes with different points of view: a malevolent woman for the Kauravas, a heroic man for the Pāṇḍavas, a tragic hero(ine) and / or a *rākṣasa* incarnate for the narrative, authorial and flesh-and-blood audiences. What, however, cannot be answered, is who is Śikhaṇḍin for Śikhaṇḍin himself as there are also no signs of his self-presentation or even a friendly presentation seeing that his character is almost fully defined by his enemy Bhīṣma who creates a new Śikhaṇḍin for every audience.

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Choosing What Should Be Left Unsaid: Is It an Outcome of Grammatical Issues or Rather Evidence of Cultural Transformations?

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Abstract
In Vedic Sanskrit, both the duals of the terms *pitr̥* and *mātr̥* possess the distinctive trait of conveying the sense of 'parents' (Macdonell 1916, §193). However, the feminine option is excluded from Pāṇini's teachings, which only give an account of the other one (see the *ekaśeṣa* section A 1. 2. 64-73). Besides, this feminine elliptic dual has been replaced by a masculine one in the tradition of a sacred text (R̥V 10. 140. 2; TS 4. 2. 7. 3). The present work aims at focusing on the analysis of Vedic verses that selected the dual of the term *mātr̥*; the fact that such a formation gains a stable place in the presence of recurring themes is a crucial piece of evidence of its ancient belonging to a shared cultural background.

Keywords: Vedic Sanskrit, Pāṇini's *ekaśeṣa*, *dvandva*, cultural transition.

1. *A Technical Premise*[*]

There is no perfect matching between language and thought, just as there is no perfect coincidence between word-forms and their *denotata* as well. As for Sanskrit, the lack of such a one-to-one relation was noticed even in the earliest extant treatise of grammar, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, and then in the relevant commentaries[1]. This is not surprising: Vedic poetry makes repeated use of elliptic depictions of gods whose strict association was a kind of *cliché* for poets and worshippers of that age. One of the most known examples regards the divine pair Mitra and Varuṇa, often referred to with the Vedic Sanskrit du. *mitrā́* and, at least in R̥V 5. 62. 3b, with the du. *varuṇā́* (Wackernagel 1877, 151)[2]; even within a simple frame of reflection on the language, the meaning of these duals happens to be "equivalent" to a copulative compound or to a coordinative syntactic string which overtly expresses both the names of the given gods, and thus: *mitrā́* = *mitrā́váruṇā́*[3] = *mítraś ca váruṇaś ca*. The fact is common in the Indo-European languages[4].

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As Macdonell 1916 suggests, such a device is often employed in order to denote strictly linked male and female individuals of the same class: in fact, this is a core point of Pāṇini's *ekaśeṣa*[5]. A set of ten *sūtra*s in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* deals with the present problem; this sequence of *sūtra* depends on the first one: *sarūpāṇām ekaśeṣa ekavibhaktau* (A 1. 2. 64); it describes the procedure that allows the usage of a single item as a remainder (*ekaśeṣa*) in the place of several items having the same form (*sarūpāṇām*), and the application of a single nominal ending

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[1] As for the correspondence principle, see Bronkhorst 1996 and Candotti–Pontillo 2013, fn. 72. The idea behind this conception lies in the philosophical problem of the relation between the linguistic items of a true statement with the corresponding ones in the phenomenal world. In a grammatical sense it consists of the one-to-one relation between word-forms and denoted objects (see M 1. 233 l.16 vt.1; l. 20 vt.2 *ad* A 1. 2 64).

[2] Elizarenkova 1995, 293, while talking about the evocative power of theonyms, states that the usage of the vocative with the imperative produces that «emotional style» which permeates the hymns.

[3] As for the double accent of *mitrā́váruṇā,* Macdonell (1910, 156) notices that «In the commonest and earliest type of the old *Dvandvas* each member is dual in form and has a separate accent». He considered this type as originating from two grammatical practices frequent in the Vedas: (a) the juxtaposition of two coordinate words without *ca*, (b) the use of the elliptic dual. In fact, as Macdonell emphasises, the dual *dvandva*s alternate with these usages, *e.g.* «*mātárā-pitárā* 'mother and father' [appears] beside *mātárā* or *pitárā* and *pitre mātré* and other cases, the VS (IX. 19) having pleonastically even *pitárā-mātárā ca* meaning 'father and mother'». However, some doubt arises in considering these word-forms as *dvandva*s, since the accent plays a non-secondary role in the perception of univerbation, as the ancient grammatical reflection suggests (see A 6.1.158). More on this subject (in the *padapāṭha* perspective) in Deshpande 2002.

[4] Also consider *e.g.* Gr. du. Αἴαντε 'Ajax and Teucer' or common nouns, Gr. du. τόξα 'bow and arrows'; further details of the general phenomenon in Page 1959 and Schwyzer 1988.

[5] Joshi–Roodbergen 1992 discussed many problems raised by the *ekaśeṣa*-technique. As for the elliptic duals, they consider the peculiarities of such linguistic devices as unconnected with the grammar.

(*ekavibhaktau*) to it, *e.g. aśvaś ca aśvaś ca > aśvau*; *e.g aśvaś ca aśvaś ca aśvaś ca > aśvāḥ*. The nature of this rule has been the object of much reflection: while Patañjali and modern interpreters (see *e.g.* Cardona 1997, 260) reject the possibility of reading it as a substitution rule, there are several arguments that seem to suggest the contrary with repercussions on the entire section; the topic is also dealt with in Borghero–Pontillo 2020.

If we examine the issue in greater depth, we find that A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā* aims at the retention of the masculine form (*pumān*) when it combines with a feminine one (*striyā*), given that the input condition is represented by items having an equal form. The syntactic structure of this *sūtra* – and that of the following ones – involves a nominative and an instrumental case which self-evidently overlaps with the scheme introduced in the *overture* of the treatment of compounds, A 2. 1. 4 [*sup* 2] *saha supā*: an inflected *pada* (*sUP*) with another inflected *pada*[6]. However, the section of the *ekaśeṣa* hints at a non-fully uttered combination of words, whose entire realisation subsists only in the mind of the speaker and in the coherent mirroring offered by the semantic and grammatical analysis. As Deshpande 1989, 121 remarks «Pāṇini is not concerned about words in a sentence which someone may drop. He is concerned about words which one does not drop»: indeed, he concentrates on teaching the single remainder by representing it with the *sUP* inflected in the nominative case[7]. After A 1. 2. 67, Pāṇini points out special cases by extending the general statement (*i.e.* the retention of the masculine form when it combines with a feminine one) to items which do not have an equal form and, nonetheless, stand as regular masculine and feminine counterparts[8].

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[6] In Pāṇini's description, the next step is represented by the zero-replacement of the nominal endings according to A 2. 4. 71.

[7] Consider that «all the rules devoted to the formation of compounds have to teach two inflected words [...] namely the so-called *upasarjana*, expressed in the nominative case in each single provision and the non-*upasarjana*, expressed in the instrumental case [...] The metalinguistic device which allows the *upasarjana* constituent to be recognised in the relevant rules, is explained in A 1. 2. 43 «*prathamānirdiṣṭaṃ samāsa upasarjanam*», What is stated in the nominative in [the *vidhi* teaching to form] a compound is called *upasarjana*» (Mocci–Pontillo 2019, 5).

[8] A 1. 2. 68 *bhrātr̥putrau svasr̥duhitr̥bhyām* teaches the retention of *bhrātr̥* 'brother' when it combines with *svasr̥* 'sister' and the retention of *putra* 'son' when it combines with *duhitr̥* 'daughter': the Sanskrit dual forms *bhrā́tarau* and *putrau* can denote, respectively, 'a brother and a sister', 'a son and a daughter'. With rule A 1. 2. 69 *napuṃsakam anapuṃsakenaikavac cāsyānyatarasyām,* the only stem retained (out of the equal stems marked by different genders) is the neuter one, *e.g. śuklaṃ ca śuklaś ca śuklā* ca = *śuklāni* / *śuklam*. According to A 1. 2. 71 *śvaśuraḥ śvaśrvā* the du. m. *śvasurau* 'parents in law' also stands for its feminine counterpart *śvaśrvā* 'mother in law'. As hinted above, the input forms mentioned in A 1. 2. 68; 70; 71 are not *sārūpa*, *i.e.* they do not have equal form and they can be intended as a parenthetical note to A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā.*

To reach the heart of the present paper, let us concentrate on A 1. 2. 70 *pitā mātrā*, which teaches that when the term *pitr̥*‘father’ combines with the term *mātr̥* ‘mother’ only the former one remains; consequently, the dual inflection of this word thus represents exactly the same coordinative relationship as the corresponding *dvandva* or syntactic string, whose meaning is ‘mother and father’[9]. This linguistic phenomenon will be investigated as far as the *R̥gveda* and the Pāṇinian tradition are concerned; then, a related Vedic Sanskrit *varia lectio* will be treated.

2. *Vedic Heritage*

In the elliptic procedure, while the chosen word is utterly expressed, the other one remains in the back of one’s mind, floating in an (un)conscious way between speaker and listener between the poets and their audience: what is unsaid virtually accompanies what is being said aloud and, together, they ensure the success of the communicative event.

The architecture of this phenomenon is based on a play of *praesentia* and *absentia*; however, there is a mandatory condition for such an elliptic game to work: every player must be involved in a context made up of shared information. Indeed, when faced with *mama pitarau,* no one will ever think about both parents due to a purely intuitive instinct, but a common cultural background shared by reciter and listener will prevent any failure in communication[10].

Let us focus on the above-mentioned rule A 1. 2. 70 *pitā mātrā*: Pāṇini teaches that a neuter optionality[11] governs the output for the input combination ‘*pitr̥* and *mātr̥*’. In other words, to convey the sense ‘father and mother’, one can choose a copulative compound or an *ekaśeṣa*, whose surface realisation consists in the nominative dual form of the constituent inflected in the metalinguistic nominative case in the relevant rule (*pitā*), *i.e.* Skt. *pitarau*, Ved. *pitarā*. Although not mentioned in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the dual of *matr̥* is also used in the *Saṃhitā*s to express the sense of ‘mother and father’ according to Macdonell 1916, 1 §93. As already observed by Edgerton (1910, 116), this specific usage presents some analogies with Gothic pl. *berusjos* «Sg. **berusi* [...] *mother*, actually 'she who has borne'» (Lehmann 1986 *s.v.*): he wondered whether it could be considered as possibly «a reminiscence of a matriarchal system» for the ancestral Indo-European culture.

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[9] As for relevant special compounds, see below §3.

[10] For example, the *R̥gveda* must have only contained a limited amount of sometimes intentionally unclear passages, almost riddle hymns. Of course, poetry cannot be compared with ordinary speech; the former makes free use of stylistic devices and poetic license, while in the latter such freedom would be neither functional (nor productive) at all. As such, the mutual permeability of the linguistic material is not always expected.

[11] *I.e.* neither “preferable” nor “marginal” according to Kiparsky's 1979 reconstruction of Pāṇini's optionality; *anyatarasyām* is continued by *anuvr̥tti* from A 1. 2. 69.

2.1 *Textual Evidence*

Since Pāṇini documents a phonetic specificity of the Śākalya's *padapāṭha*[12], the composition of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* has to be chronologically set after its compilation and before our version of the *R̥gveda*. In fact, by applying Pāṇini's rules of *sandhi* we obtain a different text that represents an archaic stage of the Rigvedic textual development. As a consequence, it would be deeply inconsistent to use the surviving redaction of the *R̥gveda* in order to test Pāṇini's phonetics; however, there is no reason why we should refrain from making use of its morphology and syntax[13]. This is the reason why the present study relies on the *R̥gveda* evidence. So, in order to better understand how Pāṇini might have conceived the elliptic behaviour of the language, with special regard to the application of A 1. 2. 70, one has to examine all the occurrences of the dual form of the stem *mātr̥* and to verify its actual nature by analysing the relevant context[14]:

a) Reference to the *aráṇi*s:

e.g. R̥V 8. 60. 15ab

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[12] See Bronkhorst 1981; 2016. While Bronkhorst maintains that this *padapāṭha* was composed in a written form, Witzel 2011 believes that it was still subject to oral transmission.

[13] However, consider that the Vedic Sanskrit is not Pāṇini's main target (see *e.g.* Kulikov 2013).

[14] See also the Appendix and cf. Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1145. Two occurrences (R̥V 1. 46. 2; 6. 59. 2) have been excluded from the list since their inflection is only determined by the syntax of the context. As for the interpretation of the occurrences of the du. of *mātr̥*, see also Ditrich 2006, 227ff.: the author points out the general reference to Heaven and Earth in a large number of occurrences and gives a reason for the metaphorical comparison with human parents in R̥V 3. 33. 1; 3. 33. 3; 7. 2. 5; 10. 1. 7. It seems that R̥V 8. 99. 6 can also be added to this group.

> *śéṣe vánesu*[15] *mātróḥ sáṃ tvā mártāsa indhate* /
>
> You (Agni) lie in power in the forests, in your parents[16]; mortals kindle you.

As is well-known, the *araṇi*s are two pieces of different kinds of wood used to kindle the sacrificial fire. The grammatical features of *mātr̥* are consistent with the denotatum of this specific word-form (since it is a feminine dual denoting a pair whose grammatical gender is feminine); nonetheless, it is self-evident that the whole ritual procedure actually hints at the ignition of the fire as a production of offspring by copulation, *i.e.* involving a male principle, the *uttarāraṇi*, 'the upper fire-drill', and a female one, the *adharāraṇi*, 'the lower fire-drill'. Even if the *araṇi*s actually generate the fire, the mythological birth of Agni is manifold, as Bergaigne (1963, I, 21) explained; moreover, he quoted, *e.g.*, R̥V 10. 46. 9 as a passage from which one can infer the origins of Agni. Judging from the syntax of the first part of that verse (*dyā́vā* [...] *pr̥thivī́ jániṣṭām*, '[Agni,] whom Heaven and Earth begat') it is possible to conclude that the fire-drills might almost systematically have been treated as a parallel pair of parents (with respect to Heaven and Earth).

b) Reference to Soma's parents:

> *e.g.* R̥V 9. 9. 3ab:
>
> *sá sūnúr mātárā śúcir* / *jātó jāté arocayat* /
>
> He, the radiant, born son, caused his two parents to shine[17].

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[15] See R̥V 10. 4. 6ab *vanargū́* 'two ones who wander in a forest', where the term *vana* conveys the idea of the forest and of the *araṇi*s, since they are both made of wood; the 'two ones' are both two robbers and the arms of one of the officiants who kindle the sacred fire.

[16] 'Parents' stands as a compromise: the fact that Vedic Sanskrit allows both forms to denote the parental pair offers the slight (but powerful) variation in its perception. Perhaps, a faithful translation would be 'the mother with the father' and the reverse version in the opposite situation.

[17] Probably the two pressing stones, which 'shine' due to the tawny colour of the just produced Soma. In st. 1b they are called *naptyor*: it seems quite paradoxical that the birth of Soma is caused by two members of its own progeny, and that this pair is referred to as *mātárā* in the same hymn; perhaps, during the performing of the ritual practice, the two stones are considered as being constantly renewed due to their contact with the Soma. This complex relation seems underlined by the double use of the past participle of √*jan* referring to each of them in the verse quoted above.

They are Heaven and Earth[18]; Agni and Soma share the fact that they were both born from a pair of ritual instruments: two pieces of wood, two pressing stones (or mortar and pestle) respectively. Their production implies the superimposition of the human physical union (apt to generate) on the whole craft process[19].

c) Reference to Indra's parents:

e.g. R̥V 10.120.7cd:

ā́ mātárā sthāpayase jigatnū́ áta inoṣi kárvarā purū́ṇi /[20]

You cause your moving parents to halt; then you advance towards many deeds.

The peculiarity of Indra's family is testified *e.g.* by R̥V 10. 54. 3, where the god is directly addressed as he who begot (*ajanayathās*) his own parents (*mātáraṃ ca pitáraṃ ca*). As Bergaigne (1963, II, 162) states, these 'parents' can be recognised in more than one pair, including, again, Heaven and Earth[21].

d) Two occurrences that refer (a) to the parents of Viṣṇu (b) to the parents of the Aṅgirases. These isolated cases seem to denote Heaven and Earth: in (b) in particular, the allusion to the Vala myth implies the cosmogonic perspective of creation of light: see also R̥V 6. 17. 5, where the Sun and the Dawn (*sū́ryam uṣásam*) are allowed to shine for the first time.

e) Reference to *ródasī*:

e.g. R̥V 9. 85. 12cd:

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[18] See Geldner 1951, III, 16; Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1244.

[19] De Witt Griswold (1923, 223, n. 4) points out the sexual innuendo of both practises and recalls the phonetic proximity between the verbal roots √*su* 'to press' and √*sū* 'to procreate'.

[20] Indra causes the fixity of his parents, *i.e.* Heaven and Earth; he makes the union between them (and therefore his own conceiving) possible. Compare this verse with AVŚ 5. 2. 6c *ā́ sthāpayata mātáraṃ jigatnúm áta invata kárvarāṇi bhū́ri*, 'cause ye to stand there the moving mother; from it send ye many exploits' (Whitney 1905, 224; Roth (*ibid.*, 224) interprets this as a time-dilating stratagem). This seems a later version with respect to R̥V 10.120: *e.g.*, in the AVŚ the dual of *matr̥* did not survive and became an accusative singular.

[21] However, the reference to these two elements in R̥V 4. 22. 3d (*dyā́m* [...] *bhū́ma*) does not seem to represent either the parents of Indra or the divine pair at all.

> *bhānúḥ śukréṇa śocíṣā vy àdyaut prā́rūrucad ródasī mātárā śúciḥ* /
>
> Brightness (*i.e.* Soma identified with the Sun in the form of a Gandharva) has flashed forth with its radiant radiance; he caused Heaven and Earth, his parents, to shine – he who is the radiant one.

According to the translation by Jamison and Brereton (2014, 1320), the feminine *ródasī* in its dual inflection denotes the 'two world-halves' (Heaven and Earth). This dual form possesses the denotatum of two different items: therefore, a never indicated word must represent the counterpart of the expressed one. First, it should be pointed out that *ródasī* can morphologically be analysed as a dual in the sense of 'Heaven and Earth' as well as a feminine singular denoting 'Rodasī', *i.e.* the proper name of the wife of Rudra / partner of the Maruts[22]. Clearly, a superimposition of two divine pairs (respectively 'the two-world-halves / Heaven and Earth' and 'Rudra and Rodasī') could have occurred. In contrast with the occurrences analysed here, in R̥V 7. 6. 6 the du. *ródasī* is qualified by the du. of the term *pitr̥* (*ródasyor* [...] *pitrór*): this is the evidence of the involvement of a masculine item in the pair and makes it reasonable to infer that the du. of *matr̥* conveys the sense of both a masculine and feminine item, and that even here it does not merely mean 'two mothers'. An analogous conclusion can be drawn from the internal comparison of R̥V 9. 75 (which is a *Soma Pavamāna*, as its collocation suggests): whereas, still with reference to *ródasī*, verse 2 features the du. *pitrór*, verse 4 involves the feminine *mātárā* and these duals allegedly refer to the same pair (*i.e.* the parents of Soma). This fact indeed validates the interpretation of the feminine dual in the elliptic sense, and, even here, it implies its being rooted (at least) in the linguistic register of ritual practice.

f) Reference to the compound *dyā́vāpr̥thivī́*[23] and to *dyā́vā* and *pr̥thivī́* in asyndeton:

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[22] The difference between these forms can only be grasped in accented texts, since the oxytone *rodasī́* corresponds to the singular (with the meaning of 'Rodasī'), while the proparoxytone *ródasī* coincides with the dual (with the meaning of 'Heaven and Earth'), even though «the latter can also sometimes be used for Rodasī» (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 364-365). As regards it, see *e.g.* R̥V 6. 66. 6. Vasilkov (1989, 396-397) notes that the Maruts own the goddess Rodasī as a *sā́dhāranī́*, «a woman in common possession». Needless to emphasise the parallel with Draupadi's polyandrous marriage in the *Mahābhārata*.

[23] More details in Ditrich 2018.

> *e.g.* R̥V 1. 159. 3ab[24]:
>
> *té sūnávaḥ svápasaḥ sudáṃsaso mahī́ jajñur mātárā pūrvácittaye* /
>
> These skilful, powerful sons begot the powerful parents to obtain their first thought.

While *pr̥thivī́* is a feminine dual, *div* is employed both in the masculine and in the feminine gender. Indeed, as Bergaigne (1963, 236) noted, the Heaven can be seen as both a female and as a male entity: in the former case the rain is the semen, in the latter it is the maternal milk (see R̥V 10. 114. 1). Therefore, this series provides many opportunities for understanding the du. of *matr̥* as an elliptic one.

Finally, let us consider some verses that feature the use of metric formulas[25]: the syntactic string *ródasī mātárā śúciḥ* preceded by the verb *pra-√ruc* at the end of R̥V 9. 75. 4 and R̥V 9. 85. 12 seems to have been created *metri causa*; the same happens with *yahvī́ r̥tásya mātárā* in R̥V 1. 142. 7; 5. 5. 6; 9. 102. 7; 10. 59. 8[26]. Also consider the slightly inverted formula *mātárā yahvī́ r̥tásya* in R̥V 6. 17. 7[27].

Now, the myth provides another clue: the *R̥gveda* contains many hymns devoted to the R̥bhus; a complete analysis of their nature is offered by Bergaigne (1963, II, §2). They are considered as divine officiants of the sacrifice as well as mythic craftsmen; for the present scope, only one of their many powers needs to be considered: that is the ability to rejuvenate their parents, «c'est-à-dire le ciel et la terre» (Bergaigne 1963, II, 411)[28]. This special idea is commonly expressed by referring to the parental pair with the du. of *pitr̥*: *pitárā* (R̥V 1. 20. 4; 1. 110. 8; 4.

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[24] In this hymn the meanings of *pitur* [...] *mātur* (v.2), *pitarā* (v.2) and *mātarā* (v.3) are equivalent.

[25] There are a few cases where the dual of *matr̥* agrees in gender and number with *rihāṇé* (R̥V 3. 33. 1; 7. 2. 5) and with *saṃrihāṇé* (R̥V 3. 33. 3) from √*rih* 'to lick'. This relation seems to rely on their being envisioned as mother-cows (see parallel cases with *matr̥* inflected in the plural number in R̥V 9. 100. 1; 7).

[26] Night and Dawn are considered as the mothers of the *r̥tá* and at the same time its youngest daughters (see Witzel–Goto 2007, 705, n. 7). That is why there is an apparent contradiction in terms in R̥V 6. 17. 7 between *pratné* 'ancient' and *yahvī́* 'yung' which both refer to *mātárā*. The connotation of this pair seems more temporal than spatial: on the contrary, the gender opposition of Heaven and Earth, is not so manifest. As such, the efficacy of the translation of this formula could present some limits.

[27] The parallel case of *yahvī́r r̥tásya mātáraḥ* in R̥V 9. 33. 5 is characterised by the plural inflection of the term *matr̥* (and of *yahva*) instead of the dual one.

[28] However, the whole procedure of rejuvenation raises doubts in many directions (see Pontillo 2019).

33. 3; 4. 34. 9; 4. 35. 5; 4. 36. 3); *pitṛ́bhyām* (R̥V 1. 111. 1; 4. 33. 2); *pitrór* (R̥V 3. 5. 8). However, while in the latter case (R̥V 3. 5. 8) the parents of the R̥bhus are referred to with the masculine dual, the preceding verse features a different lexical choice by introducing the feminine *mātárā* (R̥V 3. 5. 7) with respect to the same pair. This evidence seems to corroborate the idea of the comprehensibility (and allegedly of the spreading) of the special meaning of the dual analysed here: since *mātárā* is used in a context where *pitárā* is usually involved, it is very likely that the author of R̥V 3. 5 was perfectly aware of the possibility of denoting the parental pair with both the elliptic dual *mātárā* and *pitárā*; and he used each possibility within the distance of a single verse[29].

Since the present series of occurrences bear witness to the elliptic nature of the du. of the term *matr̥* and also give reasons to believe that its meaning was not at all obscure, why did Pāṇini avoid teaching it?

3. *Back to the Core Point*

The silence of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* about this fact is quite perplexing, since its description of the language also encompasses many usages restricted to special literary and geographical contexts (Joshi–Bhate 1984, §5). For example, A 6. 3. 32 *mātarapitarau udīcām*, which teaches that the *dvandva mātarapitarau* without the thematic form of the first constituent, is promoted by Northern grammarians; moreover, A 6. 3. 33 *pitarāmātarā ca chandasi* means that *pitarāmātarā* (the reversed form with respect to the previous case) is found in the sacred literature, (as taught by the loc. s. *chandasi*). Both rules are good instances of Pāṇini's attempts to give an overview of the language known to him that is as complete as possible.

An interpretation of the order of the constituents of the just quoted compound is offered by Patañjali's commentary on A 2. 2. 34 *alpāctaram*, 'the *pada* which contains the fewer number of *aC* [all the vowels], is placed first (30) in a *dvandva* (32)'[30]. This *sūtra* (along with A 2. 2. 32 and A 2. 2. 33) traditionally deals with the order of the constituents of copulative compounds; Kātyāyana proposes a detailed set of information in the relevant *vārttika*s about the mandatory features of the first *pada*, given that both could be placed first according to 2. 2. 34, *i.e.* by being endowed with the same number of vowels (see in vt. 3 ad A 2. 2.3 4

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[29] The philological perspective is in contrast with the philosophical belief that the Vedas are eternal and, as such, beginningless and authorless.

[30] The translation is mine.

'*samānākṣarāṇām*'). The following point seems to be culturally rather than linguistically oriented (M 1. 436 ll. 18-19 vt. 4 and M ad vt. 4 ad A 2.2. 34):

> ***Abhyarhitam*** / *abhyarhitaṃ pūrvam nipatatīti vaktavyam* / *mātāpitarau* (...) /
>
> **[The constituent standing for] the greatly honoured.** It has to be said that the [constituent standing for] the greatly honoured [is placed first]. [For instance:] *mātāpitarau* 'mother and father' [...][31].

The traditional grammatical reflection gives a non-technical explanation to this word-order; this cultural interpretation seems quite inconsistent with the masculine horizon towards which the spoken language known to Pāṇini tends (see A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā*)[32]. What is it based on?

4. *Literature as a Mirror: a Vedic Sanskrit* Varia Lectio

Due to the transformation of a given cultural milieu, the relevant language undergoes changes of various kinds[33]. In the light of what has been said so far, it seems interesting to consider that R̥V 10. 140. 2 was later modified in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* to replace the du. of the term *matr̥* with the more acceptable / understandable masculine dual form[34]:

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[31] The translation is the author's.

[32] Cf. the inverted order in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 2. 225: *ācāryaś ca* ***pitā caiva mātā*** *bhrātā ca pūrvajaḥ / nārtenāpy avamantavyā brāhmaṇena viśeṣataḥ*, 'Teacher, father, mother, and older brother – these should never be treated with contempt especially by a Brahmin, even though he may be deeply hurt'. But see this well-known passage: 2. 145 *upādhyāyān daśācārya ācāryāṇāṃ śataṃ pitā / sahasraṃ tu pitṝn mātā gauraveṇātiricyate*, 'The teacher is ten times greater than the tutor: the father is a hundred times greater than the teacher; but the mother is a thousand times greater than the father' (Olivelle 2005, 34). As for the maternal role and the historical background with respect to the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* see Ditrich 2010, 151 «The maternal power was perceived as overwhelming and uncontrollable, too complex to be approached consciously. It is, therefore, omitted and suppressed in the *Law Code of Manu*. The silencing and the repression of the mother in the text enabled the construction of the patriarchal vision of a male-created and male-dominated society in the *Law Code of Manu*».

[33] This scenario is quite common in history: consider *e.g.* the Latin word 'minister' which commonly denotes a high position in a government department, even though it originally indicated a mere 'servant' (**minus-ter*), subordinate to the *magis-ter*.

[34] Keith (1914, 319, fn. 8) notes the *varia lectio*.

> R̥V 10. 140. 2: *putró* ***mātárā*** *vicárann úpāvasi pr̥ṇákṣi ródasī ubhé* /
>
> TS 4. 2. 7. 3: *putráḥ* ***pitárā*** *vicárann úpāvasy ubhé pr̥ṇakṣi ródasī* /[35]
>
> Spreading towards his parents, you, son, behave friendly, you unite Heaven and Earth.

Now, it is worth making a few considerations; firstly, the *Saṃhitā*s of the Black *Yajurveda* form a closely connected group. Their material and its distribution point to an organic unity. Their agreement is often even verbal, especially in those mantras which were borrowed from the *R̥gveda*. Though representing a later stage, the language of the mantra portion on the whole agrees with that of the *R̥gveda* (Gonda 1975, 324)[36]. The origins of the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* are in the Central Gangetic area which «shows a clear dependence on the western (Kuru) KS / MS traditions»[37]. As Witzel remarks, the Kuru state along with its «new socio-religious basis» was solid and enduring, also in exerting its influence: «The changes were carried out in the center of political power and of contemporary culture, in Kurukṣetra, which now also became the center of the newly emerging Vedic orthopraxy and "orthodoxy"». Due to chronological and areal reasons, it is likely that the TS text was reformed.

In such a framework, the specific reading treated above could represent a (small) outcome of a strategy of cultural transformation.

5. *Conclusions*

The present inquiry is just one piece in the mosaic of the changing aspects of the Vedic world, whose many implications continue to require extensive studies. No definite historical explanations are expected from this linguistic analysis, since it only pays attention to a thought-provoking inconsistency between Vedic Sanskrit and Grammatical literature and aims, where possible, to preserve the original intention which led the poet to choose the feminine dual rather than the masculine one. It is impossible to provide a univocal interpretation which sheds light on the reason why one constituent of a given pair should be left unsaid; however, the cultural role in the natural selection operated by the language is far from being undervalued. The image of markedly maternal parents (which recalls the hypothesis of a primordial matriarchal system at which Edgerton hinted) had been fixed in the literary dimension in the form of a reminiscence, which had the expressive merit of being strongly evocative. This process indeed seems close to a sublimation, an irreversible metamorphosis: why did the special use of the du. of *mātr̥* became a poetic prerogative? As the paper has tried to show, this is a quite recurring presence in the *R̥gveda*, and it might represent a crossroads between two different ages and social *milieux*, with the latter even removing this Vedic Sanskrit dual from the TS, a sacred text. Then, when Pāṇini composed his grammar around the 400–300 BCE*,* he did not formulate an *ad hoc* rule to introduce its elliptic usage: the meaning of the dual of the term *mātr̥* must not have been any different from the ordinary one, *i.e.* 'two mothers'. This fact could represent the indicator of a (more or less induced) cultural transition. It goes without saying that the choices made by the author of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* had an enormous influence on the classical Sanskrit language (and on Indian culture by extension) which has lasted until the present age[38].

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[35] 'Visiting thy parents thou aidest them; thou fillest both worlds' (Keith 1914, 319).

[36] See Witzel 1989, for a detailed analysis of the Vedic dialects.

[37] Witzel 1997, 12.

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[38] A possible opposite situation has likely occurred with respect to the passive *janyate* and *tanyate* from √*jan* 'to be born' and √*tan* 'to stretch'; as explained by Kulikov 2013, even if these forms are taught by Pāṇini, the Vedic *corpus* does not feature any occurrence of them in the place of the usual *jāyate* and *tāyate*. Nonetheless, they are attested in Classical Sanskrit (see Kiparsky 1979), legitimised in the light of many centuries of Pāṇinian tradition.

Appendix

ARAṆI*S*	
1. 122. 4d	*prá vo nápātam apā́ṃ kr̥ṇudhvam prá* ***mātárā*** *rāspinásyāyóḥ* Put forward for yourselves the Child of the Waters (Agni), forward the two parents of the noisy Āyu[39].
1. 140. 3b[40]	*kr̥ṣṇaprútau vevijé asya sakṣítā ubhā́ tarete abhí* ***mātárā*** *śíśum* Floating quickly through the black (the smoke), lying together, both his parents pass across each other for the sake of the child.
3. 1. 7b	*ásthur átra dhenávaḥ pínvamānā mahī́ dasmásya* ***mātárā*** *samīcī́* The swelling cows stood here; the powerful parents of the wonderful one are united.
3. 7. 1b	*prá yá ārúḥ śitipr̥ṣṭhásya dhāsér ā́* ***mātárā*** *viviśuḥ saptá vā́ṇīḥ*[41] From the home of the white-crested (the fire), they move forth; they pervade the parents and the seven voices.
7. 7. 3c	*ā́* ***mātárā*** *viśvávāre huvānó yáto yaviṣṭha jajñiṣé suśévaḥ* Being summoned to your parents who possess all treasures, o new-born, you have been generated extremely auspicious.
8. 60. 15a	See §2. 1
3. 5. 7d	*dī́dyānaḥ śúcir r̥ṣváḥ pāvakáḥ púnaḥ-punar* ***mātárā*** *návyasī kaḥ* Shining, the bright, sublime, pure one (Agni identified with the R̥bhus) again and again has made his parents new[42].

[39] The legend of Purūravas and Urvaśī is allegorically compared to the *araṇi*s already in TS 1. 3. 7; 6. 3. 2. Note in R̥V 1. 31. 11 the identification of Agni with the *prathamam āyum*, and its powerful epithet in st. 2 *dvimātr̥*. Within this specific hymn (st. 11) the father is identified with the sacrificer. Is it possible to consider him as the mortal counterpart of the pair, as the archetype of Purūravas?

[40] In this column only the *pāda* where the dual of *matr̥* appears is specified.

[41] Note the use of the du. m. *pitárā* in the following verse (1c). «Agni's "mother and father" might be Earth and Heaven – especially since his parents are probably Heaven and Earth in *pāda* c. But they could also be the two fire-churning sticks, the *aráṇi*s, in which case *mātárā* might better be "the two mothers". If the *mātárā* are both Earth and Heaven and the churning sticks, then the poet may be deliberately exploiting the paradox that Agni, the ritual fire, is the child of the churning sticks, and Agni, perhaps as the sun, is the child of Heaven and Earth» (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 478). The identity of the *saptá vā́ṇīḥ* is not clear.

[42] Note that this identification may imply a *double entendre* referring to Agni: Heaven and Earth, and the *araṇi*s. The involvement of the R̥bhus, on the contrary, places an obstacle with respect

10. 79. 4b	*tád vām r̥táṃ* ***rodasī*** *prá bravīmi jā́yamāno* ***mātárā*** *gárbho atti* I say this truth to you, Heaven and Earth: while being born, the embryo eats his parents.
10. 115. 1b	*citrá íc chíśos táruṇasya vakṣátho ná yó* ***mātárāv*** *apyéti dhā́tave* Excellent is the growth of the new-born, and he does not reach his parents to suck[43].
PARENTS OF SOMA	
9. 9. 3a	See §2. 1
9. 68. 4a	*sá* ***mātárā*** *vicáran vājáyann apáḥ prá médhiraḥ svadháyā pinvate padám* Abandoning his parents[44], impelling the waters, the wise one (Soma) swells his traces with his own power.
9. 70. 6a	*sá* ***mātárā*** *ná dádr̥śāna usríyo nā́nadad eti marútām iva svanáḥ* Manifested as to his parents, he (the new-born Soma), that ruddy bull, flows roaring again and again like the cry of the Maruts.
PARENTS OF INDRA	
4. 22. 4c	*ā́* ***mātárā*** *bhárati śuṣmy ā́ gór nr̥vát párijman nonuvanta vā́tāḥ* The thundering one brings near his parents, near on account of the milk (the rain). The winds roar like men circling everywhere.
8. 99. 6b	*ánu te śúṣmaṃ turáyantam īyatuḥ kṣoṇī́ śíśuṃ ná* ***mātárā*** Heaven and Earth go after that rushing fire (Indra) like two parents [go after] their child.
10. 120. 7b	See §2. 1
PARENTS OF VIṢṆU	
1. 155. 3b	*tā́ īṃ vardhanti máhy asya paúṃsyaṃ ní* ***mātárā*** *nayati rétase bhujé* They (*r̥caḥ*) strengthen his powerful, masculine virility; he brings his parents (Heaven and Earth) to enjoy the semen (Soma).
PARENTS OF AṄGIRASES	
6. 32. 2a	*sá* ***mātárā*** *sū́ryeṇā kavīnā́m ávāsayad rujád ádriṃ gr̥ṇānáḥ*

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to the second possibility (see above §2. 1). As such, the collocation of the verse in this section remains doubtful.

[43] The interpretation of this passage is quite complex. The whole image probably refers to the fact that, once ignited, the sacred fire is not 'fed' by the two ones who begot him, as usually happens in nature between parents and their offspring. The ancestral idea of nourishment is represented by the maternal milk (note that the *aráṇi*s are compared with cows); Agni, as the son, 'sucks' it by means of the offerings, *e.g. ghee*, burnt in the flames by the officiant.

[44] *I.e.* moving out from the pressing stones.

	He made the parents of the poets shine with the sun; the praised one broke the stone.
REFERENCE TO RODASĪ	
3. 2. 2b	*sá rocayaj janúṣā ródasī ubhé sá* ***mātrór*** *abhavat putrá ī́ḍyaḥ* He (Agni Vaiśvānara) caused both Heaven and Earth to shine by means of his birth; he became the son to be invoked by those parents.
6. 17. 7d	*ádhārayo ródasī deváputre pratné* ***mātárā*** *yahvī́ r̥tásya* You (Indra) have fixed Heaven and Earth who have sons as gods, the two ancient but youthfully exuberant parents of *r̥ta*.
9. 18. 5b	*yá imé ródasī mahī́ sám* ***mātáre****va dóhate* [He (Soma)] who yields milk like the two parents together, these powerful Heaven and Earth.
9. 75. 4b	*ádribhiḥ sutó matíbhiś cánohitaḥ prarocáyan ródasī* ***mātárā*** *śúciḥ* Pressed with stones, the one made favourable by intentions, causes Heaven and Earth, his parents, to shine, [he who is] the radiant one.
9. 85. 12d	See §2. 1
10. 59. 8b	*śáṃ ródasī subándhave yahvī́ r̥tásya* ***mātárā*** Heaven and Earth are luck for Subandhu, the two youthfully exuberant parents of *r̥ta*.
10. 140. 2c	*putró* ***mātárā*** *vicárann úpāvasi pr̥ṇákṣi ródasī ubhé* Spreading towards his parents, you, son, behave friendly, you (Agni) unite Heaven and Earth.
REFERENCE TO THE COMPOUND *DYĀVĀPR̥THIVĪ́* REFERENCE TO *DYĀVĀ* AND *PR̥THIVĪ́* IN ASYNDETON	
1. 159. 3b	See §2. 1
10. 1. 7b	*ā́ hí dyā́vāpr̥thivī́ agna ubhé sádā putró ná* ***mātárā*** *tatántha* O Agni, indeed, you always extended towards both Heaven and Hearth, as a son towards his parents.
10. 35. 3b	*dyā́vā no adyá pr̥thivī́ ánāgaso mahī́ trāyetāṃ suvitā́ya* ***mātárā*** Let Heaven and Earth, those powerful parents today protect us, who are sinless, to obtain prosperity.
10. 64. 14b	*tè hí dyā́vāpr̥thivī́* ***mātárā*** *mahī́ devī́ devā́ñ jánmanā yajñíye itáḥ* Heaven and Earth, indeed, the powerful parents, the two deities[45] worthy of sacrifice, go towards the gods with their birth.
AGREEMENT WITH VERBAL FORMS < √*RIH* 'TO LICK'	

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[45] As for the *construtio ad synesim*, see Speijer 1886, 19.

3. 33. 1c	*gā́veva śubhré* ***mātárā*** *rihāṇé vípāṭ chutudrī́ páyasā javete* Like licking cattle, radiant parents, the Vipāś and the Śutudrī hurry on with their milk (as the first is a tributary river with respect to the second one and both together with respect to the Indus).
[…]	[…]
[3. 33. 3ab	*áchā síndhum mātŕ̥tamām ayāsaṃ vípāśam urvī́ṃ subhágām aganma*]
3. 33. 3c	*vatsám iva* ***mātárā*** *saṃrihāṇé samānáṃ yónim ánu saṃcárantī* I (Viśvāmitra) arrived at the very motherly river (the one who accepts all the waters?); we moved to the broad, prosperous Vipāś. Like parents licking their calf, they go together in the same womb (riverbed)[46].
7. 2. 5c	*pūrvī́ śíśuṃ ná* ***mātárā*** *rihāṇé sám agrúvo ná sámaneṣv añjan* Like parents licking the son, they anoint the many double [doors] like the virgins in the assembly.
FORMULAE ANALOGOUS TO R̥V 6.17. 7; 10. 59. 8.	
1. 142. 7c	*yahvī́ r̥tásya* ***mātárā*** *sī́datām barhír ā́ sumát* Let two youthfully exuberant parents(?) of *r̥ta*, sit together on the ritual grass.
5. 5. 6b	*suprátīke vayovŕ̥dhā yahvī́ r̥tásya* ***mātárā*** The two of beautiful appearance, of improving strength, the young parents(?) of *r̥ta.*
9. 102. 7b	*samīcīné abhí tmánā yahvī́ r̥tásya* ***mātárā*** The two youthfully exuberant parents(?) of *r̥ta*, connected with their own person.

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[46] The passage presents some interpretative difficulties which deserve further investigation.

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Classical *Kāvya* and Hindī Poetry

The Liminal on the Battlefield of Laṅkā in the Imagery of the *Rāmcaritmānas*

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Abstract
War positions societies, as well as individuals, in the transitional moments between the past and the future, between life and death as well as the spaces beyond, between the known and the unknown – both in the socio-political and the devotional and/or theological sense. According to Victor Turner's classical definition, this means that during wars they enter the liminal phase, that «interval, […] when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance». In my analysis, based on Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* (1574), I focus on the elements of time, space, actors and artefacts that structure the imagery of Laṅkā battlefield as the liminal space, the "betwixt and between". Different functions performed by these elements in the narrative of the poem are also addressed.

Keywords: *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāmcaritmānas*, war in *Rāmcaritmānas*, battlefield as liminal space.

1. *Introduction*

In the life of any society and of an individual, war positions them in the transitional moments between life and death and the spaces beyond. According to Victor Turner's classical definition[1], this would mean that wars situate both societies and the individuals that constitute them in the liminal phase, in that «interval […] when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance». In other words, we can say that the old, structured reality is suspended and the new one has yet to materialise[2].

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[1] Turner 1974, 75.

In this paper, we propose to analyse selected elements of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative concerned with the Laṅkā war as it is presented in the sixteenth-century Hindi epic and a major Hindi Bhakti text, Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* (1574)[3]. In our analysis, adopting Turner's approach, we will deal with different dimensions of this conflict and address not only its temporal perspective, so prominent in Turner's considerations, but also the spatial one, remindful of the fact that liminality «designate[s] a space or state which is situated in between other, usually more clearly defined, spaces, periods or identities [...] [it] might be disruptive of dominant discursive frameworks: it defies boundaries and erases the differences upon which regulatory frameworks depend»[4]. Such a perspective seems optimal for envisaging the events of the Laṅkā war that are, in one way or another, a transformative experience for all the actors involved in it, and especially for the people of Laṅkā who are directly exposed to it, and for Rāvaṇa, their ruler. Let us observe here that in the case of Rāvaṇa's opponent, Rāma, the most prominent actor in the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, transformation does not seem to be an issue at all. Of course, this has to do with Rāma's status: he is the all-pervading Lord who controls the Universe and as such he stands beyond all restrictions, of time and space too. What is noteworthy in this context is that his people are far away from Laṅkā, safe in Ayodhyā, living their day-to-day life. Until very late into the conflict, they were not even aware of the war in Laṅkā. It is Bharata, ruling as a regent during Rāma's banishment, who first learns about it from Hanumān, whom he shot down when Hanumān was flying over Ayodhyā on his way back from the Himalayas with herbs for Lakṣmaṇa wounded by Meghanāda (RCM 6. 54. 4-62. 1, esp. 6. 58-60 *ka-kha*[5]).

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[2] Cf. Turner 1986, 93.

[3] Due to different pronunciation and transliteration/transcription rules with respect to Sanskrit and Hindi words which are written in the same way in the Devanāgarī script, throughout my paper (except for transliterated passages), in order to avoid confusion and multiplying different forms of words, I use Sanskrit forms in the case of the names of literary characters and the technical terms that originated in Sanskrit literature. Otherwise, I follow the transcription commonly used for Hindi, in which short 'a' is usually dropped in final and certain intersyllabic positions. Therefore, I write Rāma but *Rāmcaritmānas*.

[4] Cuddon 2013, 398-399.

[5] All references to Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* (abbreviated in references as RCM) are to the vulgate text edited by Hanumānprasād Poddār, published in the Gita Press edition. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are all mine.

In order to get the most complete picture as possible, I will focus on these elements of time and space as well as on the actors and artefacts that structure the imagery of the Laṅkā battlefield as a hiatus, the liminal space between the known and the unknown, both in the socio-political as well as in the devotional and/or theological sense, carved out of the present here and now.

2. *Of Time*

First, let us visualise the Laṅkā war in temporal terms, as a liminal period/state in which the Laṅkā society remains *de facto* from the war's commencement till its end, *i.e.* for seven days (RCM 6. 39-103). This is the state when many, if not all, aspects of the normal functioning of the Laṅkā people are suspended, although the text of the poem does not address this problem directly.

As is well known from tradition, Rāvaṇa literally pushes to go to war with Rāma despite a number of mediation attempts, with the best-known mission being that of Aṅgada, sent to Rāvaṇa's court as Rāma's envoy (RCM 6. 17. 1-35 *ka*, 38. 2-38 *kha*) and the very earnest though futile efforts of Rāvaṇa's relatives and advisers (*e.g.* RCM 6. 5. 1-10. 3; 6. 36. 1-37; 6. 48. 3-49. 3). They do not speak directly about all the consequences of the imminent war, although the main message of their warnings is Rāvaṇa's inevitable defeat at the hands of Rāma. Especially outspoken is Rāvaṇa's wife, Mandodarī, who tries to dissuade her husband from entering into battle with Rāma. She says:

> Lord, be hostile to that one whom
> You can defeat with intellect and strength.
> As indeed, between you and Raghupati the difference
> Is such as between a firefly and the sun.
> [...]
> Don't oppose him, my lord,
> The one in whose hands [rest] Death, Fate and life [of all]![6].

Rāvaṇa is deaf to all her pleadings and does not accept any counsel. He is forgetful of everything, also of the inhabitants of Laṅkā for whom the obvious logical result of the defeat and the death of their ruler will be, as we shall also see, the uncertainty of a new life in the world yet to come and finally a transformation, first of all in socio-political terms but not only.

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[6] RCM 6. 6. 3-5: *nāthā bayaru kīje tāhī sõ / budhi bala sakia jīti jāhī sõ // tumhahi raghupatihi antara kaisā / khalu khadyota dinakarahi jaisā //* [...] *tāsu birodha na kījia nāthā / kāla karma jiva jākē hāthā //*.

In the case of the warriors of both warring parties, whose duty is to fight for their ruler and defend him and his people, the war – which does not only concern the suspension of the routine of everyday life – can be seen as a doubly transformative experience. This happens because wars, even if they are long, do not last forever and so, in this sense, they are not a day-to-day experience even for soldiers. When they perform their obligation towards society, they stand right on the front line, and, in fact, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative they are the only ones who also directly enter the zone between life and death, while the others wait in fear and trepidation. This is especially true during the daytime, as according to tradition, the fighting between both armies only takes place then[7]; combat ends after dusk and the armies retire to their stations where they remain until the next morning which means another suspension in the war narrative (*e.g.* RCM 6. 42. 2; 6. 44. 2; 6. 72. 2-4; 6. 77. 3-78. 1; 6. 99. 1-100. 3).

3. *Of Space*

When we think of the Laṅkā war in spatial terms, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the text does not speak of any specific, clearly defined battlefield, even if it is often depicted as such in paintings illustrating the *Rāmāyaṇa* war[8]. It is the city of Laṅkā and its surroundings that are the actual arena for the battle: fights take place right there, close to the city walls guarded by four gates (RCM 6. 39. 1) and the fort, and, later in the conflict, inside the city.

The fact that the arena of war embraces the whole of Laṅkā has important implications for the analysis of the *Rāmcaritmānas* narrative. This practically means that when we speak of the war, orienting ourselves towards its temporal dimension, we cannot isolate this perspective from the space in which it takes place: both the temporal and spatial dimensions of the events in Laṅkā are almost inextricably intertwined and practically inseparable. What is more, this dual spatial-temporal approach proves even more constructive in view of the fact that the spatial dimension, as more evident or visible, is easier to express in words. In fact, it seems to be better supported by the textual evidence, providing us with more productive insights into the problem of liminality in Tulsīdās's imagery of the battlefield of Laṅkā, largely founded on situations characteristic of the specific spatial and temporal passageway between what may be broadly understood as war and peace. It lets us better envisage the Laṅkā war in terms of the space between the known and the unknown, the space in which transitional beings[9] and phenomena become an objective reality at a given moment in time. Thus, these are the moments when the preternatural, *i.e.* something that is beyond what is expected or normal[10], comes to the fore. This category encompasses all the episodes which are concerned with the results of the *māyā*, understood as illusory, magical power (Avasthī 1991, 866), especially as used by *rākṣasa*s, or demons, different fabulous weapons, special sacrifices – one by Meghanāda (RCM 6. 75. 1-76. 1), the other one by Rāvaṇa (RCM 6. 84-8) – and different kinds of demonic and ghostly creatures that populate the horrifying battle scenes (RCM 6. 87. 1-88. 4).

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[7] See also Stasik 2016, 204.

[8] See *e.g.* the paintings from a richly-illustrated seventeenth-century manuscript referred to as the *Jagat Singh Ramayana*, *Mewar Ramayana* or *Udaipur Ramayana*. Its four books (2, 4, 6, 7) are held in the British Library and are available at: https://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=68b0d8eb-787f-4609-9028-8cd17ff05c96&type=book (last access 30.07.2022).

Let us focus first on *māyā*, the preternatural power of illusion, one of the tools used to build the battlefield narrative by means of a radical change in the course of imminent events. *Māyā* is particularly often resorted to by *rākṣasa*s, especially the most important *rākṣasa* actors, and, of course, it is a prerogative of Rāma whose power of illusion, as we shall soon see, should also be understood as "delusion", or a skillful counteraction of the illusion created by demons. What is important in Rāma's case is that the ability to use *māyā* effectively helps him to keep control of the entire Creation, to which demons unsuccessfully aspire and strive to seize from him.

The episodes in which *māyā* is employed should be seen as a kind of last resort after standard courses of action have failed; these episodes constitute key moments in the narrative, when one of the warring parties realises that the foe is gaining an advantage. An instant result of the use of *māyā* are unusual phenomena evoking curiosity and awe (*kautūhal*) in those who witness them. The ensuing state of awesome senselessness suspends the normal functioning of such individuals, excluding them from fighting for some time, until the effects of *māyā* are finally broken by the mighty Rāma or his allies. The poem abounds with such images (*e.g.*

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[9] Turner 1986, 94.

[10] This is the basic understanding of 'preternatural' applied in this paper: something beyond what is expected or normal. It can otherwise be understood as that which «stand[s] in the liminal space between the known world and the inexplicable», which is the meaning displayed on the website of the journal *Preternature. Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* (http://www.psupress.org/Journals/jnls_Preternature.html [last access 9.10.2021]).

6. 57. 1-58. 3, 6. 72, 6. 76. 6-8, 6. 88-89 *chand*, 6. 100); here let us take a closer look at three of them (RCM 6. 46. 5-47, 6. 51. 3-52 and 6. 73. 5-74 *ka*).

On the first day of fighting, when the demons realise that they are losing ground, their generals (Anipa, Akampan, Atikāya) take recourse to *māyā*. In an instant, complete darkness falls and the rain of blood, stones and ashes begins to fall. The distressed monkeys of Rāma's army, unable to see anyone, start calling to each other in fear. It is Rāma who dispels the darkness by shooting one of his arrows and bringing back light, thus restoring order to his ranks and their will to fight (RCM 6. 46. 5-47). Another example illustrating the narrative function of illusion is an episode that takes place on the second day of combat. Rāvaṇa's son, Meghanāda, attacks Rāma who deflects his assaults with great ease. Therefore, Meghanāda resorts to *māyā*. First, he causes a shower of hot coals to pour from heaven and jets of water to gush from the earth. All kinds of demons (*nānā bāti pisācā pisācī*) appear, dancing and shouting, inciting their comrades to fight. Then Meghanāda rains down excrement, pus, blood, hair and bones with intervening showers of stones. Finally, by causing a shower of dust, he brings about such darkness that nothing is visible at arm's length. Rāma, realising that all the monkeys are terrified, blows away the darkness by shooting one of his arrows and restoring brightness, which, in turn, returns the monkeys' will to fight (RCM 6. 51. 3-52). From a narrative and theological point of view in particular, the most interesting example is the episode in which the arrows shot at Rāma by Meghanāda, due to the power of his *māyā*, become snakes. They coil around Rāma and ensnare him, he who is 'independent, infinite, one and not subject to change' (*svabasa ananta eka abikārī*, RCM 6. 73. 6), who is well known as Time/Death himself (*kālarūpa*, RCM 6. 48 *kha*; *kālabyāla*; RCM 6. 56. 4) and yet has to be finally set free by Garuḍa[11] (RCM 6. 73. 5-74 *ka*).

> The lord of birds seized the swarm
> Of illusory snakes and ate them all.
> When all the illusion was dispelled,
> The entire monkey host rejoiced[12].

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[11] The mount or vehicle (*vahana*) of Viṣṇu, the king of birds, and an ardent enemy of serpents.

[12] RCM 6. 74 *ka*: *khagapati saba dhari khāe māyānāga barūtha / māyā bigata bhae saba haraṣe bānara jūtha //*.

Let us make it clear that the seemingly contradictory image of Rāma used in this passage is part and parcel of his *līlā*, or the divine play (cf. *e.g.* 6. 101 *kha*).

Māyā is often supported or destroyed by different kinds of ordinary weapons mentioned by generic names simply as bows, arrows, spears, etc. But there are also preternatural weapons with remarkable properties, known by their proper name and/or origin, which are reserved for radical interventions, such as Viṣṇu's bow Śārṅga in Rāma's possession (*e.g.* RCM 6. 67. 1-68; 6. 86. 5-86 *chand*), or Brahmā's spear (*brahmadatta sakti*; RCM 6. 83. 4-83 *chand*) used by Rāvaṇa. For example, Śārṅga is used by Rāma in the final phase of the war, when Rāvaṇa, realising that the monkey army has gained a definite advantage and will soon win, resorts to *māyā*, thanks to which his true self becomes invisible. After a while he multiplies himself, and there appear as many Rāvaṇas on the battlefield, as there are Rāma's monkey and bear troops – the host of Rāvaṇas overshadow the daylight. Rāma's entire army and almost all the gods are terrified and take flight. Rāma reaches for Śārṅga and with one shot of its arrow restores everything to normal (RCM 6. 96. 1-97. 2). In this context, it seems justified to see the appearance in the poem's narrative of Rāvaṇa's monstrous, terrifying brother, Kumbhakarṇa, in terms of a miraculous weapon. However, as in the case of other interventions instigated by Rāvaṇa, it is doomed to failure (RCM 6. 62. 3-71).

In the war narrative, an important function of the battlefield imagery is performed by different ghostly beings and demons other than *rākṣasa*s, such as *piśāca*s, *bhūta*s, *betāla*s and *joginī*s. They are all the most characteristic dwellers of Indian epic battlefields who feast on fresh blood and other bodily secretions, corpses and bones, and are usually assisted in their sumptuous repasts by scavenger birds and animals[13]. It is worth noting that these creatures are also made to appear by means of *māyā* as part of special spectacles meant to frighten the opponents and prevent them from fighting (*e.g.* RCM 6. 52. 1).

Occasionally, moments of suspension in the narrative and more or less panic during fighting are discontinued, when the actors become aware that they are in the very state between life and death and this awareness begins to act as a stimulus, driving them to fight. This happens, for example, in the case of the aforementioned Kumbhakarṇa. Seeing the demon host crushed in an instant, he manages to gather together enough fresh strength which allows him to fight with Rāma's army for a while longer (RCM 6. 69. 1-71. 4). Another example of this can be found in a duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa on the penultimate day of the war.

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[13] For more on the feasting on the Laṅkā battlefield, and on food and eating imagery in the battle passages of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Stasik 2016.

Rāma ceaselessly cuts Rāvaṇa's heads with his arrow shots but they keep on growing back. At a certain moment, Rāvaṇa, fully aware that his heads multiplicate, stops thinking of death. Brimming with fury, he rushes to fight with his ten bows ready to shoot at once (RCM 6. 92. 4-93)[14].

It is noteworthy that the Laṅkā war, understood in terms of the liminal experience of the moments between life and death and especially the spaces beyond (*e.g.* RCM 6. 45. 1-2; 6. 45. 1-2; 6. 54. 3), does not affect the soldiers of both fighting armies in the same way. In the case of Rāma's warriors, even if they lose their life, it is only temporarily – after the war, the god Indra restores them all to life at the instigation of Rāma (RCM 6. 114. 1-5), while *rākṣasa*s, Brahmin-eating demons, die and become liberated by Rāma. This was the fate of such prominent *rākṣasa*s as Kālanemi (Rāvaṇa's uncle), whose mission was to kill Hanumān to whom he actually finally fell victim (RCM 6. 56-58. 3), and Rāvaṇa's valiant son Meghanāda, killed by Rāma's brother Lakṣmana (RCM 6. 76). And, last but not least, Rāvaṇa, the mighty opponent of Rāma, is also liberated after death, being 'devoured by him' – literally 'his [life] energy has filled the mouth of Lord [Rāma]' (*tāsu teju samāna prabhu anāna*; RCM 6. 103. 5). As I have observed elsewhere, «In this multi-layered image, Rām figures as the all-devouring Time/Death, the Death of Death that stops the cycle of rebirths, bringing about liberation and allowing one to commune with the Lord in his abode»[15]. Here I shall not enter into the discussion of this tricky problem, which is not conclusive despite the great amount of attention devoted to it in the commentarial tradition (both oral and textual). I would only emphasise that in this way, Tulsīdās's poem conveys a profound devotional message: in the eternal all-embracing kingdom of Rāma there is a place for all – even unapologetic sinners can become united with Rāma after dying with his name on their lips[16].

4. *Conclusions*

The foregoing discussion of the Laṅkā war seen from the perspective of a liminal, or inter-structural, phase in the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative culminating in it, reveals its multifaceted character, unfolding simultaneously on different planes.

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[14] RCM 6. 92. 4-93: *dasamukha deki siranha kai bāṛhī/ bisarā matana bhaī risa gāṛhī// garjeu mūṛha mahā abhimānī/ dhāeu dasau sarāsana tānī//.*

[15] Stasik 2016, 211.

[16] For more on Rāma's image as the all-devouring Time/Death, see Stasik 2016.

First of all, the war as a political event deeply influences the social dimension of the Lankan society that is directly exposed to it. Its disruptive and yet simultaneously transforming effect on the hitherto existing, or implied, structures of the *Rāmāyaṇa* world is beyond any doubt. Its transformative quality makes it possible for the Lankan society to return to normal life, of course in a new form and on new terms under the leadership of the new ruler, Vibhīṣaṇa (RCM 6. 106. 1-106 *chand*). It is no wonder that the poem that is a major Hindi Bhakti text also gives great voice to the devotional dimension in its war imagery. This is especially manifest in the case of *rākṣasa* warriors who, having died with the name of Rāma on their lips, even if only by chance, become liberated and thus transposed to another existential dimension. Whereas, as mentioned previously, the monkeys and bears who fell on the battlefield are all restored to life – now they can continue their existence in a postwar order under Rāma's supremacy.

Outside Laṅkā, on the more general narrative plane, Sītā is restored to Rāma who can return home with his companions and be installed on the throne of Ayodhyā. This opens the way for him to fully implement *rāmrājya*, his righteous rule, not only in his kingdom and its society but in the entire Creation that has finally been brought out of chaos and put in order.

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The Novice on the Threshold of Royalty: Anxieties and Apprehensions in *Kādambarī*

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Abstract

The royal power is represented in Indian literature often in contrasting ways, as the seat of glory on one hand and as an allurement for evil leading one to ultimate fall on the other. Veteran statesmen like Kauṭilya, even while dilating the pomp and power of royalty have taken great pains to highlight the temptations and lapses which may prove to be the formula for the down fall of the king. A young prince on the threshold of royalty thus assumes tremendous psychological significance as he is to embark on an unknown way of life beset with uncertainties. It is remarkable that in *Kādambarī*, Bānabhaṭṭa has captured exactly such a moment of transition, when the young prince Candrāpīḍa, about to assume the throne comes to visit Śukanāsa, the veteran minister. The long piece of advice meted out to him by Śukanāsa, celebrated for its worldly wisdom and political acumen, is also a document portraying the transition point of a virtuous prince from innocence to maturity. The present paper will explore the anxieties and apprehensions expressed in Śukanāsa's advice and the ritualistic, psychological and philosophical dimensions of the transition as represented in the discourse.

Keywords: Kādambarī, kingship, *Arthaśāstra*, royal court, *Harṣacarita*.

1. *Introduction*

Kingship is the most powerful institution constituting the nucleus of a monarchical state. As a cultural construct in ancient India, it has several layers of discourses contributing to its complex and sometimes contradictory nature. These layers include origination myths, royalty-related rituals, literary representations of kings, prescriptions in *smṛti* texts and manuals like the *Arthaśāstra*. Some origination myths uphold the consensual nature and the congeniality of royalty as the ideal, as epitomised in concepts like that of the *mahāsammata*, the 'Great Chosen One'. On the other hand, myths favouring the divinity of the king underline the unquestionable nature and implicit infallibility of the institution[1]. Various rituals related to the king's coronation and sacrifices like the *rājasūya* and the *vājapeya* seem to reinforce the divinity of the king. The vulnerability of the office of the king and the inevitable fall of an undesirable ruler are also themes of sensitive description. Works like the *Mṛcchakaṭika* and treatises like the *Arthaśāstra* deal with the downfall of despots. Veteran statesmen as he is, Kauṭilya, even while dilating the pomp and power of royalty took great pains to highlight the temptations and lapses which may prove to be the formula for the king's downfall[2]. In short, while kingship represents glory and power, it is also not unaccompanied by grave dangers from within and without. While the name of a successful ruler is preserved for posterity as a model of good governance, failed kings bring ruin to themselves and the state they rule.

It is because of these vagaries of statecraft that the assumption of royal power becomes a moment of great anxiety for the country at large in general and for those close to the king in particular. Kings, despite the almost superhuman aura thrust on them in traditional societies, are also human beings vulnerable to temptations and follies, and one bad move on their part may cost them all their power and prestige. In this complex cultural background, the transition of an individual from his normal life to kingship is an event of momentous significance. For a prince, the crucial moment represents a transition from a carefree life to stressful officialdom and from innocence to maturity. The transition can also be beset with uncertainties and reversals, as the stories of both the two epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* seem to demonstrate. In the former, Rāma, the heir apparent loses the crown as soon as he gains it, while in the latter, a great fratricidal war is fought to determine succession. Unfortunately, such a liminal situation is seldom discussed in Indian literature with its inner complexities.

[1] Basham 1989, 82-84.

[2] Rangarajan 1992, 121.

2. *The* Śukanāsopadeśa *or 'Śukanāsa's advice' in* Kādambarī *of Bāṇabhaṭṭa*

In these circumstances, the celebrated section known as 'Śukanāsa's advice' (*śukanāsopadeśa*) in the prose romance *Kādambarī* (K) of Bāṇabhaṭṭa assumes tremendous significance due to the sidelights it sheds on royalty and the societal anxieties it shares at the time of transition of power. As the term implies, the *śukanāsopadeśa* is a long and elaborate piece of advice given by Śukanāsa, the seasoned minister of king Tārāpīḍa, to Candrāpīḍa, when the young prince, about to assume the throne comes to visit the former.

Bāṇabhaṭṭa had first-hand knowledge of the royal court of ancient India which he portrayed realistically in *Harṣacarita* (HC)*,* a biography on his patron king. Like the *Harṣacarita*, *Kādambarī* also centres on the lives of royalty. The main characters are Tārāpīḍa and Candrāpīḍa, the king and the royal prince, belonging to Ujjayinī. The author has made deft use of his knowledge deriving from his intimate connection with the royal court to depict aspects of court life in both these works.

Bāṇa's *Kādambarī* falls under the category of prose fiction (*kathā*) in Sanskrit literature and is written in a heavily ornamented style with figurative expressions, especially word play based on *double entendre*. However, neither the fictitious nature of the narrative nor its ornamental style detracts one from the message Bāṇa wishes to convey through the lengthy discourse put in the mouth of the seasoned minister: being selected for ascendency to royal power is a crucial moment in the life of a prince and its implications must be squarely faced by the novice. Bāṇa here captures a liminal moment in the life of a prince where he has to select a path either leading to further glory or to total destruction.

It is perhaps a bit disappointing that Bāṇa did not care to depict the excitement and anxieties of Candrāpīḍa himself who is the crown-designate and who is thus on the threshold of a career and assignment which is going to radically transform his life and attitudes. Perhaps a frank description of the existential dilemmas of a prospective king must have been looked upon as a confession of the weakness of that particular person. Be that as it may, Bāṇa prefers sharing the perceptions of the society at large when a young person assumes royal office. He makes the context an occasion for a sagacious and wise minister to share the genuine misgivings of his well-wishers. The message is clear: however learned, noble, high born, firm minded, preserving and alert a person is, wealth and power turn him into a wicked person. Royalty is dreadful because of 'thousands of extremely crooked and painful practices'[3]. The anxieties and apprehensions expressed in Śukanāsa's advice and the ritualistic, psychological and philosophical dimensions of the transition as represented in the discourse deserve closer scrutiny. It may be that these sentiments are neither character specific nor context specific and may apply to any such person facing a similar situation. In this regard, the advice needs to be de-contextualised and viewed against the backdrop of kingship and attendant dangers.

A factor enhancing the liminal nature of the transition is that it also synchronises with Candrāpīḍa's transition from childhood to youth. Youth is the age which produces greatest infatuation. Śukanāsa makes it clear that youth is a sensitive period of time in the case of any individual and its effects are more far reaching in the case of a prince. As if this is not enough, all this is further amplified by some other factors too. Actually, Candrāpīḍa has to be extra vigilant due to the combined effects of being rich at the time of his birth, his fresh youth, handsome nature and extraordinary physical strength. Each of these four factors is enough to make one mischievous and one can only imagine the havoc brought about by all of them working in tandem. This is the justification Śukanāsa offers for the long piece of advice he gives to the prince.

Śukanāsa pointedly refers to knaves, rogues, gallants, servants, enticing women, royal glory, arrogance, passion, sensual pleasures and luxury as attendant evils in the career of the prospective king. He is extremely anxious about any lapse on the part of the prince which would make him an object of ridicule in the eyes of the people. The ideal king envisaged in the words of the minister should be above the censure of the good people. He should not be the object of condemnation of the elderly people. He should not give any occasion for reproach from friends. He must not be an object of grief for the wise[4].

An important aspect of royalty surfacing time and again in Śukanāsa's discourse is the dehumanised atmosphere in a royal court where in power is centred on a single individual whose judgment could be clouded by the pomp and pageantry of the royal court. This is a sensitive issue which Bāṇa has to handle in his works also in some other contexts. It seems that in his view, it is more the system than the individuals which is at fault. In *Harṣacarita,* Bāṇa frankly recounts the embarrassing experience he had faced when he visited Harṣavardhana in his royal court for the first time. Bāṇa had admittedly lived a restrained less bohemian life in his youth in the company of friends of his own age, ‘to the derision of the great’ (*mahatāmupahāsyatām*)[5], but he was upset at the cold reception accorded to him in the royal court. When Bāṇa approached the royal presence, the elephant *mahout*, through a verse composed extempore, asked the elephant to give up his anger and behave properly, which was actually a dig at Bāṇa and his character. The king’s behaviour was no less humiliating. On learning that his visitor is Bāṇa, the king says that he is not going to see him, adding that the latter is a paramour. Bāṇa was not prepared to let this remark go unchallenged and he tells the king in no uncertain words that it was not proper for the latter to form an opinion of him based on the opinions of others. He makes a stout defence of his own lineage and learning and convinces the king of his worth. This incident must have led Bāṇa to realise that the kings are often led to prejudice and preconceived notions on the basis of the input they receive from sycophants.

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[3] Kale 1968, 179.

[4] K 179: *tathā prayatethāḥ yathā na upahāsyase janair na nindyase sādhubhir na dhikkriyase gurubhir na upālabhyase suhṛdbhir na śocyase vidvadbhiḥ* //. Edition and translation after Kale 1968.

That Bāṇa had no illusions about the estrangement between the king and his subjects is clear from another context in the *Harṣacarita* wherein the king orders a march against the enemies. Here the whole countryside comes in eager haste, curious to see the king. The villagers come with presents of curds, molasses, candied sugar, and flowers in baskets, demanding the protection of the crops:

> flying before their terror of irate and savage chamberlains, they yet in spite of distance, tripping, and falling, kept their eyes fixed upon the king, bringing to light imaginary wrongs of former governors, lauding hundreds of past officials, reporting ancient misdeeds of knaves[6].

Bāṇa also records that «some, contented with the appointed overseers, were bawling their eulogies: “The king is Dharma incarnate”; others, despondent at the plunder of their ripe grain, had come forth with their wives and all to bemoan their estates, and at the imminent risk of their lives, grief dismissing fear, had begun to censure their sovereign, crying “Where’s the king? What right has he to be king? What a king!”»[7].

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[5] Kane 1997, 19.

[6] HC 113: *upāyanīkr̥tadadhiguḍakhaṇḍakusumakaraṇḍair dhanaghaṭitapeṭakair sarabhasamsamutsardbhiḥ prakupitapracaṇḍadaṇḍivtrāsanavidrutardūragatair apiskhaladbhir apipatadbhir apinarendranihitadr̥ṣṭibhiḥ* //. Edition after Kane 1997; I have adopted the translation by E. B. Cowell and F. W. Thomas (1897, 208).

[7] HC 113: *aparair adiṣṭaparipālakapuruṣaparituṣṭair dharmaḥ pratyakṣo devaḥ iti stutīr ātanvadbhir aparair lūyamānaniṣpannasasyaprakaṭitaviṣādaiḥ kṣetraśucāsakuṭumbair iva nirgataiḥ prarūḍhaprāṇachedaiḥ paritāpatyājitabhayaiḥ kva rājā kuto rājā kīdr̥śo vā rājā iti*

It may also be recalled that Bāṇa paid scant respect to the theory of the divine origin of Kings. Basham rightly points out that in ancient India, between the mystical and contractual theories on the origin of monarchy, it was the former which «carried most weight, at least in thought»[8]. Even the *Arthaśāstra*, which had no illusion about the human nature of the king, found legends reiterating the divinity of kings of great propaganda value. While the Buddhists and Jainas explicitly denied the divinity of the king, Bāṇa went to the extent of calling his bluff describing it as the «work of sycophants who befuddled the minds of weak and stupid monarchs»[9]. He upheld a more humanistic perception of kingship and idealised kingship in fictitious characters and historical personages alike in his writings.

Bāṇa, through the words of Śukanāsa, analyses the process of the king's coronation without being overwhelmed by its mystifying nature. According to Śukanāsa, the various rituals associated with the coronation ceremony are actually various steps in the process of the dehumanisation of the king. It is significant that the myth of divinity was reinforced by the various rituals at the time of the king's coronation. According to Arnold van Gennep, «the ceremonies of enthronement or crowning show a very great resemblance to ordination ceremonies, both in detail and their order»[10]. He lists the handing over and acceptance of the sacra, including drums, sceptre, crown and a special seat. In the Indian context, the ceremonies include the construction of a sacred altar in a special pavilion with four pillars, the pouring of the water from sacred places in golden pitchers on the head of the king seated there, the Brahmin gift of the sacred *dūrvā* grass, sprouts of the barley plant, bark of the *plakṣa* tree, and the *madhuka* flower, the recitation of *Atharvaveda mantra*s, the gifts of dress and ornaments to the prospective king seated on an ivory seat, and the handing of the royal paraphernalia to him[11]. The ritual culminated in the king's journey to the assembly hall, and him sitting on the royal throne. Finally, he takes the sceptre and goes out in the streets of his capital riding on an elephant.

Bāṇa almost demystifies the coronation ceremony by asserting that each of the rituals is aimed at dehumanising and alienating the prospective king from the common folk and a life of morality. Here the speech of Śukanāsa becomes highly figurative and demonstrates how the elaborate rituals symbolically transform the incumbent and put him in a very vulnerable position susceptible to evil influences.

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prārabdhanaranāthanindam //. Edition after Kane 1997; I have adopted the translation by E. B. Cowell and F. W. Thomas (1897, 208-209).

[8] Basham 1989, 84.

[9] *Ibid.*, 84.

[10] van Gennep 1960, 110.

[11] Upadhyaya 1968, 92-93.

Thus, the very water poured on the kings at the time of coronation removes any trace of kindness in them. The smoke emitted from the fire altar itself makes his heart dirty. The patience of the king is removed by the broom made of the *kuśa* grass held by the priest. Any remembrance of old age is concealed by the silken head-gear. The perception of the other world is covered by the royal umbrella. The breeze from the chowries itself removes truthful speech. The good qualities are chased away by the cane. The beneficial advice is drowned in the din made by the sounds of hail. Fame is rubbed away by the foliage in the form of the royal flag. The resulting aloofness of the king-designate and his vulnerability are the sensitive points of concern for those who have hitherto been close to him.

Two other important points stressed by Bāṇa in the discourse are related to the changes brought about by wealth and sycophancy in a king. Here he uses extremely figurative language to drive home the passionate nature, perversity, instability, delusiveness, arrogance and cruelty brought about by wealth in a human being. Wealth, personified as the goddess Lakṣmī spurs a person to act in a wicked manner and the kings coming under her spell become arrogant and cruel, and insensitive to good advice. Sycophancy is another great evil which deludes a king and leads him to self-deception. Bāṇa describes sycophants as vultures devouring the flesh of wealth. They represent evils like hunting, drinking, arrogance and moral turpitude as good things and thus set a trap for the vulnerable king. The kings start believing that they are divine incarnations and behave accordingly, eschewing the company of good people.

3. *Conclusions*

Finally, we can see that Bāṇa shows his critical attitude towards not only the initiation rites of the king, but also the text books like that of Kauṭilya which are devoid of any compassion, consisting as they do of cruel advice, and the means of valid knowledge in statecraft[12]. The transformation of a good human being into an inhuman despot will be complete with such paraphernalia. It seems that it is only at the critical juncture on the eve of the coronation that a sensible minister can show the ideal path. Through Śukanāsa, Bāṇa was probably sharing the anxieties and apprehensions of a humane poet with prospective kings, if not with king Harṣa himself, whom he started admiring and trusting after their initial meeting.

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[12] For an account of Bāṇa's critical spirit as reflected in *Harṣacarita, and Kādambarī*, see Devahuti 1998, 11-14.

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Unfolding Politics, Merging Into the Sacred: Liminality and Transfiguring *Digvijaya*s in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*[*]

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Abstract

The paper discusses the possible applications of the concept of liminality in the realm of the classical Sanskrit literary production of South India, exemplified by the *mahākāvya Pāṇḍyakulodaya* (15th–16th centuries CE). Transcending from the ritual connotation ascribed to the anthropological category since van Gennep's theories, the modern application of liminality to broader historical and cultural changes will be taken into account. The close study of selected stanzas from this epic poem will show how the description of a military campaign seems to be permeated by liminal elements, which also appear in the portrayal of royal power. The new conceptualisation of kingship in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, interpreted as the new institutional paradigm after the transitional period investing the Pāṇḍya dynasty and its weakened political influence, will be analysed in the frame of the general categorisation of cultural reaction.

Keywords: liminality, *mahākāvya*, Pāṇḍya dynasty, kingship.

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1. *Introduction*

No introductory words are needed for the anthropological concept of liminality as theorised during the early decades of the 20th century. In 1909, the ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) elaborated the category of liminality applied to rites in small-class societies, in the general frame of his theorised three-fold structure of the "rites of passage"[1]. In recent years, after the implementation of the concept by Victor Turner[2], liminality has assumed a broader perspective and been applied to every kind of category describing historical, political or cultural changes[3]. In this view, the standard and confirmed assets of a given tradition, placed then in transitional liminal periods, may become uncertain or reversed, which may lead to the dissolution and reformulation of the precedent order. The moment created during liminality can provoke fluid situational events that may cause the rise and establishment of new institutional customs[4].

Malleable and inclusive dynamics characterise the Hindū tradition under several aspects. Everything is born and changes according to cultural and historical transformations and is dissolved and recreated in a new shape through the phagocytising trends of Indian culture. Men change according to in-progress cultural conceptualisations; their identities are constantly evolving through the centuries, sensible to the historical mutations which have created them. Nothing is established and fixed about human identities, especially those of kings. The paper will be devoted to a specific liminal period in South Indian history as mirrored by the classical courtly production in Sanskrit (*kāvya*), focusing on the re-creation of new idioms of royal ideology and cultural reaction in a Southern royal dynasty.

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[1] For further details about the original concept of liminality the interested reader may of course refer to van Gennep 1975 [1960]. Starting from the 1960s, the category was further re-studied by Victor Turner, and then generalised and applied beyond the limits of rituality by Thomassen, for instance, in the frame of political anthropology.

[2] Turner 1969.

[3] Thomassen 2009, 51.

[4] Szakolczai 2009, 141.

2. *A Liminal* Digvijaya

By the end of the 15th century CE, the Pāṇḍya dynasty[5] had been relegated to a small territorial area located in the Tirunelveli district. Driven away from their historical capital of Madurai during the Muslim invasion of the 14th century and weakened by the disastrous coeval internecine war[6], the Pāṇḍyas were rulers of a kingdom "in exile" under the direct control of the Vijayanagara empire (1336–1565), which extended its undisputed dominion over all the Southern parts of the Indian sub-continent. Despite the political decline and its subordinate position, the culture and patronage of the arts increasingly flourished at the Teṅkāśī court, especially at the closing of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries, marked by the composition of the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya* by Maṇḍalakavi.

The *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* ('The Rise of the Pāṇḍya dynasty') is an incomplete *mahākāvya* in 12 *sarga*s narrating the origin and establishment of the Pāṇḍya kingdom. The poem, in its actual form, retells the history of the dynasty from the mythological accounts to the times of King Campaka Parākrama, also known as Jaṭilavarman Tribhuvanacakravarti Kōnērinmaikoṇḍāṉ Parākrama Kulaśekhara (c. 1480–1508 CE). This later monarch of the royal line, whose reign from the capital city of Teṅkāśī constitutes the object of the fundamental *sarga*s X-XII, was in all probability the poet's patron[7].

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[5] For the chronological division of Pāṇḍya history I refer to the canonical periodisation in "early", "medieval", "imperial" and "later" phases proposed by Nilakanta Sastri and Sethuraman (Nilakanta Sastri 1929; Sethuraman 1978; 1980).

[6] Jalāl ad-dīn Aḥsan Ḵẖān, an officer with Sultan Muḥammad bin Tuġluq (1290–1351), was sent to subdue rebellious kings in the frame of the Muslim invasion of the Southern branches of the Indian sub-continent, which had started in 1311 with Malik Kāfūr, general of the Sultan of Delhi 'Alā' ud-dīn Ḵẖaljī (1267–1316). In 1335, having managed to subdue the Pāṇḍya region, Aḥsan Ḵẖān proclaimed independence and founded the Sultanate of Madurai (1335–1370), only to be driven away by Kumāra Kampaṇa, the son and general of the Vijayanagara emperor Bukka I (1357–1377) in 1365–1370 (Derrett, 1957, 170). Furthermore, in this difficult transition, King Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara Pāṇḍya I (1268–1308) was murdered by his own son, the co-regent Jaṭāvarman Sundara III (1304–1320), who started a civil war against his brother, Jaṭāvarman Vīra Pāṇḍya II (1297–1343) (Nilakanta Sastri, 1958, 208-209).

[7] The reign of Jaṭilavarman Kulaśekhara is attested by a dozen of unpublished records (ARE 1918, nos. 502-505; 508-510; 516; 524; 527; 534; 618); this epigraphical documentation attests the King's ascent to the throne in 1480. Record no. 618 attests the great patronage the monarch dedicated to temple building, just like his maternal uncle Arikesari Parākramadeva (1422–1463), the founder of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple in Teṅkāśī. This inscription, dated to 1508, involves the donations to and the maintenance of the Aḻagiya Cokkanār and Varaṃturam Perumāḷ temples in Kaḍayanallūr (Tirunelveli district).

Nothing is known about the author of the *mahākāvya*, Maṇḍalakavi, except for what he himself laconically stated in each colophon of the poem; for instance, the ending of *sarga* I[8]:

> // *iti kuṇḍinakulamaṇḍanasya maṇḍalakavīśvarasya kr̥tau pāṇḍyakulodaye prathamaḥ sargaḥ* //
>
> Here [ends] the first canto in 'The Rise of the Pāṇḍya race', composed by the Lord of Poets Maṇḍala, the jewel of the Kauṇḍinya clan.

The poet opens his narrative on the origin of the dynasty with the depiction of the mythical past, with the foundation of the city of Madurai and a long series of connected episodes. It appears quite clear, even at a preliminary reading, that the models for the first parts of the *mahākāvya* (*sarga*s I-V) were drawn from a Tamil heritage orbiting around the celebrated 'Sacred Games of Śiva', as, for instance, the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi (probably late 13th century) and a Sanskrit version of this material, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* (14th–15th century).

Canto XII, unfortunately incomplete, narrates the military campaigns against Kerala and King Jayasiṃha conducted by the Pāṇḍya sovereign, Campaka Parākrama[9]. After a colourful description of the setting of the King's army in the Keralan territory (stanzas 1-5), Maṇḍalakavi describes the beginning of the hostilities between the two sovereigns. The relative passages are quoted below[10]:

> *āvr̥tya hanta puṭabhedanam asmadīyaṃ*
> *balo 'pi khelati parākramapāṇḍyadevaḥ* /
> *praṇaiḥ kimebhir iti pallavitaprakopo*
> *dhīraś ca*[*cāla nagarā*]*j jayasimḥarājaḥ* // 6 //

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[8] Here and later on, I quote the text of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* according to the critical edition (Sarma 1981). If not otherwise stated, all the translations in the paper are mine.

[9] This King subdued by the Pāṇḍya army may be identified with Jayasiṃha Vīrakeralavarman, whose Kollam inscription (published in the *Travancore Archaeological Series* II; Gopinatha Rao 1914, 26-27), dated to 1496 CE, allows him to be placed as a contemporary of Jaṭāvarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara.

[10] Given the thematic element of this description, Maṇḍalakavi employed the *vasantatilakā* metre in the metrical asset of the canto. According to Kṣemendra's *Suvr̥ttatilaka* III, 19a, this 14-syllabled *vr̥tti* is more suitable for evoking the *raudra* and *vīra rasa*s, the aesthetic sentiments of fury and heroism (*vasantatilakāṃ bhāti saṅkare vīraraudrayoḥ*).

> The resolute King Jayasimḥha marched from his capital with rising fury, [asking]: “Ah! Why does the boyish Parākrama Pāṇḍya play with his own life turning towards my city?”

> *jhañjhāprabhañjanasamākulasāgarāmbhas*
> *sambhārasambharaviḍambanalī*[*mpakena*] /
> *sainyena tasya jayasimḥavibho raṇāya*
> *niryāṇakarma nidhilābham asāv amaṃsta* // 7 //
> He [the Pāṇḍya King] considered King Jayasimḥa’s act of going out to battle, with an army that resembled the spreading of the ocean’s waters greatly agitated by the storm over a region, as a great favour.

The poet indulged in imaginative passages in his description of the terrible clash between the two opponents, portraying the vehemence of the battle and the valour of the Pāṇḍya King:

> *āsīt samīkam anayor amarādhirāja-*
> *rāṣṭrābhivr̥ddhighaṭanālaṭahāstrapātam* /
> *asrair niṣiktam a*[*pa*] *rāmr̥śatā svam a*[*ṅgaṃ*]
> *yatra vyahāri yaminā mahatīkareṇa* // 8 //

> There was a battle between the two [kings], in which the discharge of missile weapons provoked the raising [of a number of warriors] to the kingdom of the Lord of Immortals; here (on the battlefield) the *Mahatī* lute bearer Sage – Nārada did not even wipe his blood-stained limbs.

> *āruhya kañcid ibham adrinibhaṃ prakopād*
> *āpāṭalākṣam arirājasarojabandhum* /
> *pratyarthināṃ pramathanāya paribhramantaṃ*
> *bhartā kathañcid avahat phaṇināṃ śirobhiḥ* // 9 //

> Somehow the Lord of the Snakes managed to support on his heads the Sun to Enemy Kings, who, with eyes reddened by fury, having mounted a mountain-like elephant, was moving about crushing the enemy [soldiers].

After a narrative sequence portraying the battle between the two armies (stanzas 10-17), Jayasiṃha is finally subdued and graced by the benevolence of Campaka Parākrama:

> *saṃvartavāta iva sānuma*[*to ’ṅgaṇasthaṃ*]

> *dhātrīruhaṃ vyaghaṭayaj jayasimḥarājam* /
> *vetaṇḍakarṇaviva[raiḥ prahitai]r vipāṭhaiḥ*
> *sphāyatparākramadhanaḥ pararājasūryaḥ* // 18 //
>
> The Sun to Enemy Kings, a treasure of increasing valour, destroyed King Jayasimḥa with *vipāṭha* arrows shot at the earholes of elephants, like the whirling wind [would destroy] a tree standing in a mountain valley.
>
> *[khinnaṃ bhrama]ntam adibhūmi muhur luṭhantam*
> *āśvāsya keralam ayāt pararāja[sūryaḥ]* /
> *[tuṅgaṃ] mataṅgajakulaṃ turagān [prabhūtān]*
> *vittaṃ praśastam api tasya jahāra vīraḥ* // 19 //[11]
>
> The Sun to Enemy Kings, after having comforted the Kerala [monarch] who was rambling in distress on the battlefield and who was constantly rolling [on the ground], led him away. The Hero carried away even the herd of strong elephants, the numerous horses and the renowned wealth of Jayasimḥa.

Having described the war with the Kerala King, Maṇḍalakavi proceeded to describe Campaka Parākrama's further march against other Indian kingdoms, offering the reader a true account of a *digvijaya* ('worldly conquest'). The several stages of this military campaign as described by the poet represent a political map of the Southern regions of India, whose depiction contributes to outlining a vivid fresco of the geopolitics of the 15th–16th centuries CE.

The first step in the Pāṇḍya *digvijaya* is the Tuḷu country[12], historically under the control of Vijayanagara:

> *paścād amuṣya calataḥ pathiketanāni*
> *mākandavr̥ndamakarandarasārdritāni* /
> *dūrīkr̥tāhavamadais tuluvai[r viti]rṇa-*
> *vetaṇḍakarṇapavanair agaman viśoṣam* // 21 //

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[11] As we shall also see later, several stanzas present somehow considerable and significant textual *lacunae* which have been arbitrarily filled by the editor of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, an attitude, unfortunately, adopted more than once in editing this particular *sarga* and the tenth one. They are symptomatic examples of the critical trends employed by Sarma in the presentation of the critical edition.

[12] The Tuḷu country comprehends two Western coastal areas of the contemporary federal state of Karnataka; the third dynasty of Vijayanagara – the Tuḷuva (1491–1570), coeval to the composition of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* and Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara's reign – was native to this geographical area.

> Moving then westwards, the flags [of the Pāṇḍya army] were moistened by the honey of the mango trees; they became dry due to the fanning of the ears of elephants offered by the Tuḷu people whose ardour for battle had been removed.

This introductory step of the military conquest, rather neutral in its detail, serves as a *trait d'union* with the following stage of Campaka Parākrama's march; in the next stanza the poet does indeed describe the Tamil monarch worshipping a Śiva idol on the banks of the Tuṅgabhadrā river and the subsequent battle with the *karṇāṭadeśapati*, "the Lord of Karnataka":

> *pāṇḍyo vilaṅghya tuluvaṃ pratipadya pampāṃ*
> *saṃsevya tat taṭagataṃ taruṇendumaulim* /
> *karṇāṭadeśapatinā kalitāhavena*
> *prapte kare paricacāla bhajan pramodam* // 22 //

> The Pāṇḍya [King], crossing the Tuḷu country and reaching the river Pampā, worshipped the Young Moon-Crested God – Śiva – installed there on the bank. As he happily received tribute with war with the Lord of Karnataka, he proceeded.

Pampā, the ancient fluvial goddess in the Kannada-speaking region, was identified with the Tuṅgā, the river which has its source in the Western Ghats and merges with the Kr̥ṣṇā in Andhra Pradesh. As the topographical reference and the periphrasis 'Lord of Karnataka' employed by Maṇḍalakavi suggest, it is quite clear that in the present narrative segment, Campaka Parākrama subdued the Vijayanagara emperor[13]. It is interesting to note that in the eulogistic plan of the *mahākāvya* the

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[13] An alternative form of the name of this river is Tuṅgabhadrā, due to the union with the Bhadrā river in Koodli, Shimoga district. In ancient times, this river was identified with the goddess Pampā, from whom the current name of the site derives (Pampā, old Kannada > Hampe/Hampi, modern Kannada). The popular use of the deity's eponymous name for the river, apart from being attested in Vijayanagara inscriptions, is also confirmed by the *Pampāmahātmya* (I. 7), the local *sthalapurāṇa*. This evidence probably denotes the genesis of Pampā as a very ancient fluvial goddess who, in the course of centuries, came to be identified as the folk deity of the area. Her antiquity is in fact a difficult matter to ascertain. According to scholars (Verghese 1995, 16) Pampā's cult is anterior to the 7th century CE, when an inscription by the Cālukya king Yuddhamalla Vinayāditya (680-696) refers to a royal settlement on the banks of the river. According to the south Indian process of 'Sanskritisation', where the usual dynamics of assimilation were based upon a symbolical marriage with a brahmanical deity, Pampā became the consort of Śiva-Virūpākṣa and identified with Pārvatī. In the course of time, the goddess became less important and, as a result of this process of assimilation she was gradually reduced from the position of preeminent deity to a secondary object of worship. In

Pāṇḍya monarch managed to overcome his nominal sovereign – who is completely anonymous in the stanza. Given the political situation of the dynasty at the dawn of the 16th century CE, the above passage is even more surprising. Furthermore, the depiction of the war is not coincidentally interspersed with a scene of religious worship, which we will examine in a more elaborated form later on.

Proceeding with the worldly conquest, the next stage of the campaign is even more undefined, but no less significative. In stanza 23 of *sarga* XII, the poet depicted his patron defeating a Muslim ruler:

> *paścāt tuluṣkam atiśuṣkamayaṃ prakurvan*
> *bāhābalena pararājapayojabandhuḥ* /
> *gandharvagandhajaṣaṇḍam atipracaṇḍam*
> *asyāpahṛtya dhanam apy acalat parastāt* // 23 //
>
> The Sun to Enemy Kings, with a strong army, defeating a Muslim ruler and plundering his large herd of mighty scent-elephants, proceeded further.

From the account given in the stanza, it is not really possible to ascertain the identity of the Muslim ruler defeated by the Pāṇḍya sovereign. Taking into account the historical criterion and the ruling date of Campaka Parākrama, it can be stated that the *tuluṣka* mentioned in stanza 23 was probably one of the rulers belonging to the five Persianate Sultanates – the so-called "Deccani Sultanates" – which arose at the closing of the 15th century after the weakening of the Bahmani kingdom (1347–1527), namely Ahmadnagar, Berar, Bidar, Bijapur and Golconda[14].

After the clash with the Sultan, Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara moved against the kingdoms of Vidarbha, Lāṭa, Aṅga and, finally, Vārāṇasī. The first three geographical areas are quoted through a string of *bahuvrīhi* compounds, compacting their description centred on a series of word plays:

> *vaidarbham ānanasarojavitīrṇadarbhaṃ*
> *lāṭaṃ lasaccharavihāradalallalāṭam* /
> *aṅgaṃ kṣatāṅgamayamāracayannayāsīd*
> *vārāṇasīṃ madanaśāsanarājadhānim* // 24 //

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fact, on the whole site, there is only one shrine dedicated to Pampā, the small one in the temple complex of Virūpākṣa. For further details, see Verghese 1995, 16-17 and Wagoner 1996.

[14] For the historical frame which saw the rise of these political entities after the collapse of the Bahmani kingdom, the interested reader may refer to Nilakanta Sastri 1958, 212-232.

> [The Pāṇḍya proceeded against] the King of Vidarbha[15], [who held] *darbha* grass in his lotus-mouth; the King of Lāṭa, whose forehead was struck by the distribution of flashing arrows; the Sovereign of Aṅga, who was crippled at the hand [of Campaka]. [The King] reached Vārāṇasī, the abode of the Destroyer of the God of Love.

The description of subsequent conquests is compacted through the use of a specific rhetorical device, the *lāṭānuprasa*, namely the repetition within the same verse of word/s with the same meaning that, depending on the context, assume different valence (as *vaidarbha*, 'King of Vidarbha' / *darbha*, '*darbha* grass' in the first *pāda*)[16].

Momentarily setting aside the description of the *digvijaya*, Maṇḍalakavi inserted some stanzas devoted to the city of Benares in this narrative portion. The verses from the *mahākāvya* focus on the holy character of the religious centre and its centrality for the funerary rituals and attainment of *mokṣa*[17]. In the frame of these descriptive passages, which arrest the fast flow of the 'world-conquest', the Pāṇḍya monarch is portrayed in pious attitudes, worshipping his ancestors on the banks of the Gaṅgā and bestowing ritual *dāna*s on Śiva:

aṃhoharāṇi sa japann aghamarṣaṇāni
bhajann jale 'tivimale marudāpagāyāḥ /
santarpayann api pitṝn amarān pratīraṃ

---

[15] The stanza is connected to the previous one by a morphological *yugmaka*; the series of terms inflected in the accusative case depend upon the main verb in the previous verse, *acalat*. For the sake of translation, I have supplied the sense in square brackets.

[16] Gerow 1971, 105-106. The *mahākāvya* is characterised by the massive employment of the rhetorical device called *anuprāsa*, which appears in almost every stanza of the poem. According to Gerow 1971, 102-103, "alliteration" is a particular figure consisting in the repetition of given phonemes or phonetic features in the verse in order to produce precise aural effects. It should not be confused with a different figure, the *yamaka*, namely the consistent repetition of verses or verse parts. Given their common characteristics, *lāṭānuprasa* and *yamaka* often overlap.

[17] See for instance stanza 26:

pañcānane vitarati praṇavaṃ janānāṃ
prāṇaprayāṇasamayaklamathapramātham /
yatrottarīyajanuṣam pavanaṃ kareṇa
prāleyaśailatanayā kurute bhavānī // 26 //

> As the Five-Faced God – Śiva – bestows on men the *praṇavamantra* that eradicates pain at the moment of death, Goddess Bhavānī – the Daughter of the Snowy Mountain – fans with her hand the [dying] man with her upper garment.

samprāpa campakaparākramapāṇḍyadevaḥ // 28 //

> Uttering the sin-effacing prayers and bathing in the pure waters of the heavenly river, Campakaparākrama Pāṇḍya reached the bank [of the Ganges], honouring even his immortal ancestors.

jāmbūnadāmbujaparamparayā sa śambhuṃ
sampūjya campakaparākramapāṇḍyadevaḥ /
dānāni ṣoḍśa mahānti mahāphalāni
tatrāpy adhatta dharaṇīramaṇāvataṃsaḥ // 29 //

> Campakaparākrama Pāṇḍya, the Ornament of Joy on Earth, worshipping Śambhu with a succession of golden lotuses, offered on that occasion even the sixteen great gifts[18] that bear high merits.

As is known, the standard relation between the institution of kingship and the temple donation can be summarised as a mutual and interdependent one. Bestowing gifts or concessions on a given shrine or deity was and always has been the tool in order to gain political legitimisation and temporal authority sanctioned by the divinity and, by extension, the Brahmanical class. Such a dynamic was perfectly described by James Heitzman with the notion of "gifts of power". Quoting his words, «the driving force behind donations was the concept of legitimization of authority, whereby gifts to the gods or their representatives on earth resulted in a transfer of divine sanctity and merits to the givers. The primary purpose of eleemosynary grants was, then, to tap into the power of the divine, to enhance sanctity and then to demonstrate it to society.»[19].

In the eulogistic plan of the poem as shown in *sarga* XII, Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara is portrayed by Maṇḍalakavi as the perfect king and perfect devotee, worshipping and bestowing ritual gifts on the religious institutions, which is a widespread and well-known *topos* in Indian literary and epigraphical documentation[20].

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[18] According to Puranic literature, and especially *Agnipurāṇa*, 210, the sixteen *mahādāna*s are as follows: 1) *tulāpuruṣa* ('weighing of a person and donation of equivalent weight in gold'); 2) *hiraṇyagarbha* ('gift of the golden embryo'); 3) *brahmāṇḍa* ('Brahma's egg'); 4) *kalpapādapa* ('the wishing-tree'); 5) *gosahasra* ('one thousand cows'); 6) *hiraṇyakamadhenu* ('wish-granting cow'); 7) *hiraṇyāśva* ('golden horse'); 8) *hemahastiratha* ('golden elephant chariot'); 9) *pañcalāṅgalaka* ('the five ploughs'); 10) *dhārā* ('the Earth'); 11) *hiraṇyāśvaratha* ('golden horse chariot'); 12) *viśvacakra* ('the universal wheel'); 13) *kalpalatā* ('wish-granting creeper'); 14) *saptasāgara* ('the seven oceans'); 15) *ratnadhenu* ('jewel-cow'); and lastly, 16) *mahābhūtaghaṭa* ('the pot of the great elements').

[19] Heitzman 1997, 1.

Moreover, the insertion of descriptive literary segments centred on religious devotion seems to add a secondary and significant connotation to the *digvijaya* in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. Starting with stanza 21, the world-conquest was described as directed against the major political entities of the sub-continent, covering areas encompassing both the Southern and Northern regions. The descriptive section dedicated to Benares is introduced alongside the political or royal aspect of the *digvijaya* the religious one, smoothly shifting from one domain to the other. We may then observe the description of the march of Parākrama Kulaśekhara in the *mahākāvya* as a march 'in between', in which the dynamics of politics and religious patronage are merged into another, creating a liminal tension in the whole canto and its ideological plan[21].

This tension seems to be exemplified by the following stage of the campaign. After the battle with the King of Vārāṇasī (*kāśīśvara*, stanza 30), Campaka Parākrama moved against Ayodhyā:

unmucya tām uragabhūṣaṇarājadhānīṃ
sāketam āpa [*nicitaṃ*] *savidheṣu yupaiḥ* /
ākāśalaṅghibhi[*r abhidyubhi*]*r adhvarārthair*
arkānvāyajanuṣām avanīpatīnām // 31 //

---

[20] The precedents in the Pāṇḍya epigraphical production are significant in this regard. For instance, Valerie Gillet has devoted an extensive paper to the study and edition of an unpublished inscriptional corpus of Varaguṇa Pāṇḍya II (862–880 CE). In her careful analysis of the geopolitical background of the inscriptions, the scholar has noted how this epigraphical group, recording several cases of temple donation, was placed in a political area that was not immediately under the dominion of the Pāṇḍyas, specifically in the Kāvēri valley – the traditional stage of the Cōḻa dynasty. Quoting her words, «[...] Māṟañcaṭaiyaṉ Varaguṇa Mahārāja has left, during the second half of the 9th century, a series of inscriptions in this region recording donations to temple, mostly lamps for the god, testifying to his sway over the Kāvēri region [...] through his donations, which eventually materialised as "gifts of power" embedded in a network involving other contemporaneous dynasties [...], Varaguṇa Mahārāja participated in the bustling religious life of the region. The choice of the locations for these gifts seems to have followed a sacred network woven into the hymns of the Tamil Bhakti, making the Pāṇḍyan appear as king-devotee» (Gillet 2017, 244-245). This conclusion seems to find confirmation in Varaguṇa's Tiruchendur inscription (EI XXI, no. 17), in which the King is portrayed as a great devotee of Śiva.

[21] Such descriptions of military campaigns are often mixed with scenes of religious patronage and donation; the interested reader may refer for example to the extensive study conducted by Lidia Sudyka on the description of a war expedition as described in the *Acyutarāyābhyudaya* by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima (16th century), 'in between' politics and pilgrimage (Sudyka 2013).

> Leaving the capital of the Snake-Ornamented God – Śiva –, [the Pāṇḍya King] reached the city of Ayodhyā, full of sacrificial stakes on every side, which reached up to the sky and were brilliant, [installed for] the purpose of sacrifices of the kings of the solar dynasty.
>
> *tatrārkavaṃśajanuṣā dharaṇīdhavena*
> *tasya praśasyayaśasaḥ samaraṃ babhūva* /
> *yad vīkṣayā tu raghupuṅgavasaṅgarasya*
> *sasmāra bhūtapr̥tanā saha nāradena* // 32 //
>
> Then there was a battle between [Campaka Parākrama] of Celebrated Fame and the King scion of the solar race; on seeing this [fight], with the hordes of demons and sage Nārada, it called to mind the battle of the Bull of the Raghus – Rāma – [in Laṅkā].

Traditionally Ayodhyā was the capital city of the solar dynasty and the city of Rāma, the hero of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, considered not only as the perfect king, but also as one of the *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. As happens partially in the case of the stanzas devoted to Benares, the military conquest of Ayodhyā contains in itself both the dynamics of politics and religion, marking the liminal character of this *digvijaya*. even more neatly. The Pāṇḍya sovereign subdued the city which was the abode of the temporal power of Rāma in a battle which, as stated by Maṇḍalakavi, was reminiscent of the Laṅkā war against the demon Rāvaṇa.

The seizure of Ayodhyā is the starting point for a change of route not only for the military campaign as described in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, but also for the ideological trajectory introduced by the poet. After the conquest of most of South and Northern India, the world campaign of the Pāṇḍya army seems to 'lose' its nature and transforms into a sort of religious or divine apotheosis for its leader. Indeed, at this point, Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara reached the slopes of the Himālaya and prepared his attack against the mountain:

> *paścād a*[*muṣya*] *tanayaṃ pararājasūryo*
> *rājye nidhāya ramaṇīyabhujāpadānaḥ* /
> *tena pradarśitapatho diviṣatkadamba-*
> *saṃbādham āpa* [*tuṣāragire*]*r nitambam* // 34 //
>
> Then, the Sun to Enemy Kings, whose heroic deeds [were celebrated gracefully], having placed on the throne the Son [of the dead King of Ayodhyā], following

> the path shown by this, reached the slopes of the Himālaya, which were full of assemblages of the Gods.
>
> *cakranda campakaparākramapāṇḍyasainyair*
> *āviṣkr̥tām asahamāna ivābhibhūtim* /
> *pāṣāṇabāṇaparijr̥mbhaṇasambhramena*
> [*pāṇḍyeṣu jālam akhilaṃ parikhaṇḍya cādri*] // 36 //
>
> The Mountain roared as [if] not tolerating the disrespect shown by the armies of Campakaparākrama Pāṇḍya, breaking all the pride of the Pāṇḍyas with a bustling of spreading stones as arrows.

Unfortunately, we may never know the fate of the *digvijaya* of Campaka Parākrama; in fact, in its actual form, the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* comes to an abrupt end in the middle of stanza 38, which describes the royal army's clashes with some mountaineers. We do not know if the Pāṇḍya monarch managed to conquer that mountain which is traditionally regarded as Śiva's abode[22].

In absence of further data and in order to fully understand the final step of the world conquest as described in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, we have to draw determinant details from elsewhere, namely from the 'true identity' of King Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara in the ideological plan of the *mahākāvya*.

The final part of *sarga* IX (stanzas 32-38) and the first ten verses of the next are devoted to the description of Dharma's journey to Kailāsa. As we gather from the reading of this passage, the personification of the Universal Law, distressed by the spread of evil, reaches out to Śiva for help. In Maṇḍalakavi's narrative, Śiva himself decides to put a stop to the affliction of the world, commanding Dharma to take birth in the Pāṇḍya dynasty:

> *tava dharma marmamathanaṃ vitanvatā*
> *kaluṣeṇa viśvam abhavat kadarthitam* /
> *tad upehi janma bhuvi tārakadviṣā*
> *samam adya pāṇḍyakula eva pāvane* // X. 7 //

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[22] The provisional conclusion of the *mahākāvya* may inform us about Maṇḍalakavi's probable intent to complete his poem through the "ring composition" modality. This final episode of Parākrama Kulaśekhara's attack on Himālaya is indeed perfectly specular to an episode narrated in *sarga* III of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* and drawn from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* the *digvijaya* of Princess Taṭātakā and march against the Himālaya, her fight with and marriage to Śiva, with the subsequent consecration of the God as the King of Madurai.

> Oh Dharma, the violation of your inner being by rampant sin has made everything meaningless! So, take now birth in the world along with the Enemy of Tāraka — Skanda — in the pure Pāṇḍya dynasty.

Dharma and Kārttikeya are to be incarnated as the future rulers of the Pāṇḍya kingdom in Teṅkāśī, Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara, the poet's patron, and his historical younger brother, Vīra. In the celebratory plan of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, the sovereign is then conceived as a god, the incarnation of universal order on earth. But Maṇḍalakavi's conceptualisation of kingship is not simply confined to a merely celebratory statement as in stanza X. 7, but implemented through an intentional literary strategy.

As the reader might recall, according to the canonical *kāvya* standard, the common trend to describe the physical appearance of human beings is the procedure defined as *nakhaśikhavarṇana* or *pādādikeśānta*, literally a 'description [starting] from the (toe)nails to the head'[23]. In stanzas 67-74, the poet gives an extensive description of his patron, isolating specific physical features of the King, namely his head/crown (67), forehead (68), face (69), arms (70), chest (71), hands (72), waist (73) and, lastly, his feet (74). The significant order of the description of each physical unit shows how the poet violated the standard order of representation from the 'toe-nails' to the 'head' of *kāvya* literature. But Maṇḍalakavi's depiction is actually of a different order: the poet portrayed the Pāṇḍya sovereign according to the classical dynamics used to describe gods, hence beginning with the head and reaching the feet only in the last stanza, thus following a procedure we could define as *śikhānakhavarṇana*[24]. This trend introduces a new conceptualisation of royal power in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, where the King is considered not just a purely celebrative manifestation of the divine, but, through the inversion of the *nakhaśikhavarṇana* convention, is stylistically portrayed and conceived as divinity proper. Given the impact of this ideological procedure on both the presentation of kingship and the conceptual basis of the *digvijaya* in *sarga* XII, allows us to make the following observation. We have already noted how the military campaign as presented by Maṇḍalakavi is permeated by liminal characters: the world conquest by the Pāṇḍya King advances towards two different realms, one of politics and the other of religious patronage/worship. The revolutionary idiom of royalty as shown in the physical description of Campaka Parākrama unifies the liminal tension between the two polarities and sublimates them further. The *digvijaya* in the last *sarga* of the poem is the march of a divine sovereign, a being "in between", crossing the threshold of the temporal world and the heavenly one, from worldly conquest to a spiritual apotheosis.

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[23] Lienhard 1984, 144.

[24] In the *Madhurāvijaya* by Gaṅgādevī (14th century), the Vijayanagara authoress described the hero of the *mahākāvya*, prince Kumāra Kampaṇa, the son of emperor Bukka I (1356–1377) and the general who uprooted the Muslim Sultanate of Madurai in the campaign of 1365–1370, but he is still described according to the standard *kāvya* convention of the *nakhaśikhavarṇana* (III, 7-16). Similarly, Tirumalāmbā (16th century), the Vijayanagara princess who authored *Varadāmbikāpariṇayacampū*, gave her description of the appearance of Acyutadevarāya (1529–1542) employing the same order (prose passage after stanza 69-stanza 76). The same convention of portraying the sovereign as a god can be traced once again in the 17th century Thanjavur: Rāmabhādrāmbā, consort of the Nāyaka King Raghunātha (1600–1634), described the hero of her poem according to the *śikhānakhavarṇana* dynamic (VII. 1-33). A more detailed survey of the topic of the divinisation of kings is unfortunately beyond the scope of the paper; the interested reader may refer for now to Gonda 1966, Pollock 1984 and Narayana Rao *et alii* 1998, 169-188. For the divinisation of the King in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya* cf. Pierdominici Leão 2020.

3. *Conclusions*

The closing of the 15th century and the dawn of the 16th represented a transitional period for the Pāṇḍya kingdom, marked by historical, political and cultural changes which affected this Dravidian dynasty. As we have already observed at the beginning of the historical introduction, during this time frame the Pāṇḍyas were relegated to a subordinated position ruling over a small territorial area which was virtually under the control of the Vijayanagara empire. The defiladed and secondary political importance of the dynasty after the splendour of the past centuries marked the beginning of what we may define as a liminal period.

This political weakness was the starting point for a fluid situational condition which led to the reformulation and establishment of new paradigms, recreated from canonical institutions and reinterpreted through the Sanskrit courtly production of the Pāṇḍya dynasty between the 15th–16th centuries CE. The most significant symptoms of the transitional period in question are attested by the composition of the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya* by Maṇḍalakavi, a text which embodied significant traces of cultural and revolutionary transformations.

As we have seen in due course, liminal elements are even present in the textual portions devoted to the description of the *digvijaya* of King Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara (1480–1508 CE). The stanzas which constituted the centre of our study portrayed the standard motif of the royal conquest. The military campaign depicted by Maṇḍalakavi contributes to mapping the geopolitics of South India at the closing of the 15th century and displays for the reader the relations of the Pāṇḍya dynasty with the major coeval political entities of the time, which were carefully selected for their ideological valence.

In the eulogistic plan of the *mahākāvya*, the poet described a sublimated conquest by the Tamil King of all the centres of power of the sub-continent. The transitional point ignited by the instable political situation of the dynasty led the Pāṇḍya court to project its identity and past towards universal claims of sovereignty, which might seem greatly surprising if we take into consideration its reduced political status at the dawn of the 16th century. After having been driven from their historical capital of Madurai in the 14th century, the Pāṇḍyas were relegated to playing a secondary role and function as a kingdom in exile in the Tirunelveli area, while the whole Southern areas of the sub-continent remained under the undisputed dominion of their nominal sovereign, the Vijayanagara emperor, who, in the ideological plan of the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya,* is defeated and subdued by the Pāṇḍya monarch.

Parallel to the political aspect, the *digvijaya* of the *mahākāvya* presents other details underlying its liminal character, namely those of religious patronage. As we have observed, similar depictions of political and military campaigns were commonly constructed on co-existent religious dynamics as well. The detailed description of worship and ritual giving in Benares as described in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*, for instance, was obviously directed towards the support of the royal legitimisation which was sanctioned by the divine authority through the *dāna* institution. But the liminal and internal polarity of this worldly conquest, in between politics and patronage, has to be put in relation with the new idiom of the royal ideology introduced by Maṇḍalakavi.

The portrayal of the Pāṇḍya sovereign as a god in the *mahākāvya* represents the reformulation of the traditional paradigm of kingship, a standard asset which is now dissolved and reformulated in the ideological plan of the poem. The transitional point initiated by the weakened political situation of the Pāṇḍya dynasty reversed the confirmed standard represented by the traditional idea of Indian kingship, which was then reshaped in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* with divine attributes supported by specific and intentional literary strategies – the *śikhānakhavarṇana* trend. Given the subordinated political role played by the dynasty in the 15th–16th centuries, this revolutionary turning point is just as surprising if we compare similar descriptions of the kingship in coeval texts, where the figure of the king is still described according to the standard *kāvya dictamina.*

The *digvijaya* of Jaṭilavarman Parākrama Kulaśekhara is then not purely the conquest of a king marching against enemy kingdoms, but the ascension of a God transcending the terrestrial boundaries and conquering the world. The figure of the new God-like sovereign, ideologically forged at the rising of the liminal period of political irrelevance, is a powerful sublimation of given institutions and an expression of cultural reaction against the waves of history.

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Female Adolescence in Indian Lyric Poetry

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Abstract

While the hero (*nāyaka*) of classical Sanskrit lyric poetry is, as a rule, an adult and a consummate lover, that is not the case with the heroine (*nāyikā*). Poets, anthologists and theoreticians of literature distinguish the various types, which differ, among other things, in their age and experience in love matters. They include the adolescent heroine, who is depicted during the process of her transformation from a little girl into a young maiden. This motif, referred to as *vayaḥsaṃdhi*, was also introduced into the medieval lyric poetry of north-eastern India, thanks to the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (14th–15th centuries CE), who used it in his songs on the adolescence of Kr̥ṣṇa's beloved Rādhā. The paper analyses in detail selected instances of the use of the motif in Sanskrit and Maithili sources, with a particular focus on metaphors employed to explain the liminal period of adolescence to the poems' listeners or readers.

Keywords: *nāyikā*; adolescent heroine; *vayaḥsaṃdhi* motif; Rādhā; classical Sanskrit literature; *kāvya*; Vidyāpati.

1. *Female Adolescence in Classical Sanskrit Literature and Classical Indian Literary Theory: Viśvanātha's* Sāhityadarpaṇa

In classical Sanskrit literature (*kāvya*), as well as in classical Indian literary theory (*alaṃkāraśāstra*), the adolescent heroine does not seem to have her own separate, traditionally established name. Let us consult, for example, Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (SD), which is a good source to refer to for information on the subject. In this 14th-century comprehensive *alaṃkāraśāstra* treatise from north-eastern

India[1], which develops the earlier tradition of the discipline, the author distinguishes, names, defines and illustrates in his own or other poets' exemplary stanzas, as many as 384 types of *nāyikā*. However, the literary representation of an adolescent female is not one of them. This does not mean that such a heroine is absent from Viśvanātha's work.

The first of the stanzas illustrating the *mugdhā nāyikā*, *i.e.* 'naïve' heroine, is the following one, in the *śārdūlavikrīḍita* metre, by the theoretician's father:

madhyasya prathimānam eti jaghanaṃ vakṣojayor mandatā
dūraṃ yāty udaraṃ ca romalatikā netrārjavaṃ dhāvati /
kandarpaṃ parivīkṣya nūtanamanorājyābhiṣiktaṃ kṣaṇād
aṅgānīva parasparaṃ vidadhate nirluṇṭhanaṃ subhruvaḥ // SD 3. 58 //

Her buttocks come to acquire the ampleness of her waist,
the smallness of her breasts passes to her distant belly,
and the line of her abdominal hair
hastens to assume the straightness of her gaze.
It is as if, on seeing that Kandarpa has been newly inaugurated
as a ruler in the kingdom of her mind,
among the parts of the body of the fair-browed one
mutual plunder instantly began[2].

Although the heroine is referred to above just as 'the fair-browed one' (*subhrū*), without specifying her age, the stanza clearly depicts an adolescent girl. Most of the noticeable physical changes which happen during female puberty are duly indicated here – our heroine's breasts develop, her waist becomes slimmer, she loses the protruding belly of a child, while she gains fat in the area of her buttocks; a small line of hair appears on her abdomen.

A certain change in the girl's behaviour is also pointed out in the stanza – she no longer looks other people straight in the eye but begins casting oblique glances at them. Obviously, this has to be comprehended as a symptom of psychological changes in the heroine – as a result of her increased self-awareness, as well as awareness of others and their judgements, characteristic of the period of adolescence, she becomes diffident, shy and easily embarrassed, while doing her best to preserve decorum at all times.

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[1] Gerow 1977, 281: «the first quarter of the 14th century»; *ibid.*, 282: «hailing from Orisa».
[2] Translation mine; cf. Mittra–Ballantyne 1865, 68.

However, sideways glances may also be interpreted as a display of the girl's newfound coquettishness, together with the playful movements of her eyebrows, to which the above-mentioned epithet *subhrū* possibly refers. In its turn, coquettish behaviour reflects emotional changes in our heroine – «Kandarpa has been newly inaugurated as a ruler in the kingdom of her mind», after all; in other words, she starts being curious about love matters, or perhaps even experiences the first stirrings of love in her heart, which, interestingly, is perceived by the poet not as a consequence of the onset of adolescence but, on the contrary, as its cause.

To emphasise how fundamental this transformation of the heroine is, and how critical the period of adolescence is in her life, the author skilfully uses contrast and an apt metaphor in the stanza.

The individual parts of the body of the adolescent girl, he demonstrates, are stripped of their childhood characteristics, which are then transferred to other body parts; eventually, each body part will acquire new, adult traits, opposite to the previous ones; in this process, it is as if our heroine were first deconstructed and then reconstructed from the same elements as before, but distributed very differently.

Metaphorically, adolescence is conceptualised here in terms of another liminal situation, namely interregnum, or rather the beginning of a king's reign – the new ruler has already been inaugurated but has not been able to assert his authority yet. This results in the instability of his kingdom, internal strife and the collapse of the old economic and political order; a new order will finally emerge and the situation will normalise, but with a great shift of wealth and power in the state.

2. *Female Adolescence in Classical Sanskrit Literature and Classical Indian Literary Theory: Classical Sanskrit Anthologies*

Stanzas depicting the adolescent heroine found their way into classical Sanskrit anthologies (*kośa* / *koṣa*) as well. The topic must have been quite popular, as in three well-known collections, namely Vidyākara's *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* (SRK) (probably 11th or 12th century CE)[3], Śrīdharadāsa's *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (SKA) (1205 CE)[4] and

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[3] Sternbach 1974, 15. Cf. Ingalls 1965, 30: «the latter half of the eleventh century A.D.»; Kosambi 1957, vii: «The first edition was compiled about A.D. 1100, the expanded edition about A.D. 1130»; Sternbach 1978–1980, I, 3: «cca 1100–1130»; Warder 2004, 1: «the beginning of the +12».

[4] Sternbach 1974, 16.

Jalhaṇa's *Sūktimuktāvalī* (SMĀ) (1258 CE)[5], it is given a separate chapter, invariably titled *vayaḥsaṃdhi / vayassaṃdhi* 'life-juncture' (Monier-Williams 2002: 920). The *vayaḥsaṃdhi* chapter (*vrajyā*) of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* is by far the largest – it contains 50 stanzas[6]; the *vayassaṃdhipaddhati* of the *Sūktimuktāvalī* contains 17 stanzas, while the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section (*vīci*) of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* has only 5 stanzas, but they are followed by a further 5 stanzas gathered in a section titled *kiṃcidupārūḍhayauvanā* / *kiṃcidupoḍhayauvanā* '[the heroine] whose youth has slightly grown / has come a little closer', which I will also take into account in this paper.

Let us begin with a brief overview of the poems' content[7]. As noted above, in classical Sanskrit literature, the adolescent heroine does not seem to have a separate name. Thus, in some of our stanzas, she is referred to as 'a girl' (*bālā*)[8], and elsewhere, as 'a young maiden' / 'a young women' (*taruṇī*[9] / *yuvatī*[10]), or even as 'a woman' (*strī*)[11].

The period of adolescence is here usually referred to periphrastically, *e.g.* as the time 'when childhood is gone' (*gate bālye*, SKA 2. 2. 5), 'when childhood perishes' (*glāyati śaiśave*, SRK 335; *sīdati śaiśave*, SRK 348; SMĀ 51. 5), 'between childhood and youth' (*śiśutātāruṇyayor antare*, SRK 344; SMĀ 51. 9), 'when youth has slightly grown' (*stokārohiṇi yauvane*, SRK 346) or 'when youth comes closer' (*pratyāsīdati yauvane*, SRK 342); as 'the beginning of youth' (*taruṇimasamārambha*, SRK 334; 360; SKA 2. 2. 2; *yauvana [...] ārambha*, SRK 338; 339), 'first youth' (*tāruṇyaṃ prathamam*, SRK 345) or 'fresh youth' (*navayauvana*, SRK 337; 340; *navīnayauvana*, SRK 359; SKA 2. 1. 5). Some authors simply speak of 'youth' (*taruṇabhāva*, SRK 357; *taruṇiman*, SRK 336; 349; 375; SMĀ 51. 7; *tāruṇya*, SRK 341; 361; *yauvana*, SRK 363; 371; 380; SMĀ 51. 4). The term *vayaḥsaṃdhi*, given by the compilers of our three anthologies in the titles of their relevant sections, itself rather periphrastic and generic, is almost never used by the poets[12].

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[5] Sternbach 1974, 17.

[6] One of them (SRK 353), however, depicts an adolescent boy.

[7] Cf. Ingalls's introduction to his translation of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* chapter of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* (Ingalls 1965, 153-154).

[8] SRK 334; 354; 358; 368; 369; 372; SKA 2. 1. 3; 2. 1. 4; SMĀ 51. 7; 51. 16.

[9] SRK 356.

[10] SRK 363; 357; 374.

[11] SRK 335.

[12] The only exception being, interestingly, SRK 353, mentioned above, where it refers to male adolescence.

Just like Viśvanātha's father in *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58 discussed above, the authors of our poems keep track of, and describe in detail, the gradual transformation of their heroines' bodies occurring during puberty. The onset of menses, rather understandably, is never mentioned or even alluded to here; however, of the noticeable major physical pubertal changes, only rapid growth is omitted – the development of the secondary sex characteristics, namely enlarged breasts[13], wider and curvier hips[14], as well as a slimmer waist[15] and plumper buttocks[16] due to the redistribution of body fat, are all duly taken care of.

The appearance of abdominal hair is also a recurrent motif[17], while underarm hair is not depicted. Additionally, the authors point out the pale cheeks of the pubescent girls[18] and three folds of skin forming on their bellies[19].

However, once again similarly to Viśvanātha's father in SD 3. 58, the poets are perceptive and sensitive enough to observe changes in the behaviour of their adolescent heroines as well, which are indicative of a psychological transformation.

The heroines, they point out, are no longer little children in loose garments, with unbound hair[20], who used to look others straight in the eye[21], laugh without restraint, run and skip around[22], play with dolls[23]. Modest and bashful now[24], they cover their blossoming bodies[25] and restrain their laughter[26]. They become curious about love[27]; when their older, more experienced female friends discuss erotic matters, they listen attentively[28], while feigning indifference[29]. Day by day they advance in the art of coquetry – they learn how to gracefully move their eyebrows[30], cast oblique glances[31], walk slowly[32] with a slight smile on their lips[33]; they constantly check themselves out in a mirror[34] and practise binding their hair[35]. They do not speak much[36], but their words are imbued with double meanings and hints (*chekokti*)[37].

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[13] SRK 334; 337; 340; 342; 345; 347; 349; 351; 352; 355; 356; 361; 363; 364; 365; 371; 372; 375; 376; 377; 378; 379; 380; SKA 2. 1. 4; 2. 1. 5; 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 3; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 6; 51. 7; 51. 8; 51. 10; 51. 11; 51. 17.

[14] SRK 352; 355; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 11.

[15] SRK 355; 379; 380; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4.

[16] SRK 341; 343; 345; 347; 351; 360; 373; 375; 376; 379; 380; SKA 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 3; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 6; 51. 8; 51. 10.

[17] SRK 338; 363.

[18] SRK 341; 342.

[19] SRK 352; 356; 361; 363; 364; 371; SKA 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 8; 51. 11.

[20] SRK 335.

[21] SRK 383.

[22] SRK 355; 383.

[23] SRK 348; SMĀ 51. 5.

[24] SRK 339; 352; 372; 373; SKA 2. 1. 3; SMĀ 51. 11.

[25] SRK 335; 348; SMĀ 51. 5.

[26] SRK 348; 383; SMĀ 51. 5.

[27] SRK 339.

[28] SRK 369; SKA 2. 1. 3; 2. 1. 4.

[29] SKA 2. 1. 3.

Let us now discuss selected examples in more detail.

When I was reading our poems for the first time, what struck me most was that adolescent girls were frequently seen in them as somewhat vague, difficult to grasp, and thus hard to depict.

The best example of such conceptualisation of the heroine is probably the very first stanza of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* (SRK 334), in the *śikhariṇī* metre, ascribed to Vīryamitra[38], which was popular enough to be also included, anonymously, with only a few minor different readings, in the *Sūktimuktāvalī* (SMĀ 51. 7); its first half is also included in the *Saduktikarṇāmr̥ta*, where it is combined with a completely different second half to form a stanza ascribed to a certain Rājoka (SKA 2. 2. 2).

bhruvoḥ kācil līlā pariṇatir apūrvā nayanayoḥ
stanābhogo 'vyaktas[39] *taruṇimasamārambhasamaye*[40] /
idānīṃ bālāyāḥ kim amr̥tamayaḥ kiṃ madhumayaḥ[41]

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[30] SRK 334; 335; 339; 349; 358; 360; 372; 376; 380; 383; SKA 2. 2. 2; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 4; 51. 7; 51. 8.

[31] SRK 335; 345; 348; 349; 351; 352; 355; 358; 360; 361; 362; 367; 372; 375; 376; 383; SKA 2. 2. 3; 2. 2. 5; SMĀ 51. 5; 51. 7; 51. 10; 51. 11.

[32] SRK 355; 358; 376; 383.

[33] SRK 360; 367.

[34] SRK 346.

[35] SRK 335.

[36] SRK 376.

[37] SRK 335; 346; 348; 349; SMĀ 51. 5.

[38] A Bengali, or at least an easterner, of the time of the Pāla Dynasty, 900–1100 CE (Ingalls 1965, 32; cf. Kosambi 1957, c: «A Pāla author, [...] courtier»; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 473: «Court poet of Pāla kings. [...] Must have lived in the beginning of the 12th century or earlier [...] but probably earlier»).

[39] SMĀ 51.7: *vyaktas*; SKA (1) 2. 2. 2 = SKA (2) 2. 2. 2: *vyaktas*.

[40] SMĀ 51. 7: *taruṇimani saṃrambhasamaye*.

[41] SMĀ 51. 7: *viṣamayaḥ*.

> *kim ānandaḥ sākṣād dhvanati madhuraḥ pañcamalayaḥ*[42] // SRK 334 //

> Now comes a certain grace of eyebrow,
> a new development of eye,
> and the curve of breast appears
> at youth's commencement;
> while in the child's voice
> the note of love sounds clear,
> composed, one knows not which to say,
> of nectar, honey, or of bliss. (Ingalls 1965, 154).

In the first half of the poem, the adolescent girl's eyebrows acquire 'a certain grace' (*kācil līlā*; an indefinite article is used here[43]), the new-found maturity of her eyes is called *apūrva* 'unpreceded, unprecedented, not having existed before, quite new, unparalleled, incomparable' (Monier-Williams 2002, 96), and her developing curved breasts are referred to as *avyakta*. Ingalls chooses the reading *vyakta* (against the editors of the original Sanskrit text of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* but supported by the readings adopted in the edition of the *Sūktimuktāvalī* and in both our editions of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*), and hence his translation. However, I would argue that the reading *avyakta*, understood as 'indistinct' (Monier-Williams 2002, 111), suits the overall meaning of the poem much better.

In the second half of the stanza, the voice of the heroine, imbued with her eagerness to love and be loved, and thus as if attuned to the erotic *pañcama rāga*, is considered to be simply indescribable, even if as many as three standards of comparison – nectar (*amṛta*), honey / sweet wine (*madhu*)[44] and bliss (*ānanda*) – are proposed.

Another poetic device easily observable when reading our poems, once more similarly to *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58, is the frequent use of contrast to depict changes occurring in the adolescent heroine's outward appearance and behaviour, and to emphasise how radical they are. The best exemplification of this practice can be found in the 22nd stanza of the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* section of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*

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[42] SMĀ 51. 7: *dhvanitamadhuraḥ pañcamaravaḥ*. Ingalls 1965, 494: «*pañcamalayaḥ* [...] can scarcely be right, for *pañcama* is the name of a note or key and *laya* means tempo. Read *pañcamakalaḥ* [...] (*pañcamaravaḥ* [...] gives equally good sense)».

[43] Cf. the use of indefinite articles in SRK 335; 336; 339; 344; 346; 348; 349; 368; 372; 383; SMĀ 51. 5; 51. 9.

[44] Or poison (*viṣa*) according to the *Sūktimuktāvalī*.

(SRK 355), by the famous Rājaśekhara[45], which is also included in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (SKA 2. 2. 4):

> *padbhyāṃ muktās taralagatayaḥ saṃśritā locanābhyāṃ*
> *śroṇībimbaṃ tyajati tanutāṃ sevate madhyabhāgaḥ* /
> *dhatte vakṣaḥ kucasacivatām advitīyatvam āsyaṃ*[46]
> *tadgātrāṇāṃ guṇavinimayaḥ kalpito yauvanena* // SRK 355 //
>
> Liveliness, abandoned by her feet,
> passes to her eyes;
> her hips reject the slenderness
> that now her waist assumes;
> her torso wins companions in her breasts;
> her face, however, stands alone without compare.
> Thus adolescence brings about
> exchange of attributes in all her limbs. (Ingalls 1965, 158).

The stanza resembles SD 3. 58 to the point that it might well have been its model, so after all the previous discussion there is no need to explain it in detail.

However, let me point out the skilful employment here of the *mandākrāntā* metre. With its two contrasting consecutive series of syllables – four long (*guru*, lit. 'heavy') syllables and five short (*laghu*, lit. 'light') syllables at the beginning of each *pāda*, this metre is indeed most suitable to express the contrasting characteristics of the transforming heroine.

This is especially visible in the first and in the second *pāda*, where short syllables render the quick steps of a little girl, running and skipping around (*taralagatayaḥ*) and the slimness of her delicate hips (*tyajati tanutāṃ*), while long syllables represent the graceful slow gait of a young maiden (*padbhyāṃ muktās*), whose hips have become much wider, curvier and heavier now (*śroṇībimbaṃ*).

The metaphor used by Rājaśekhara is, admittedly, not that striking; it might have been drawn from the conceptual domain of the market, which is also a liminal sphere, «with its implications of choice, variation, contract» (Turner 1974, 71).

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[45] 9th–10th centuries CE. (Kosambi 1957, xciv: «He speaks of himself as the *guru* of King Mahendrapāla, and under the patronage of his son and successor Mahīpāla. This refers to the Pratīhāra kings of Kanauj who are known from inscriptions to have ruled *circa* A.D. 890–920»; Ingalls 1965, 32: «900»; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 305: «End of the 9th, beginning of the 10th century»).

[46] SKA (1) 2. 2. 4 = SKA (2) 2. 2. 4: *advitīyaṃ ca vaktraṃ*.

Let us now have a look, then, at the last stanza of the *kiṃcidupārūḍhayauvanā* section of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (SKA 2. 2. 5), in the *śikhariṇī* metre, ascribed to Śatānanda[47], in which a much more vivid metaphor is employed:

> *gate bālye cetaḥ kusumadhanuṣā sāyakahataṃ*
> *bhayād vīkṣyaivāsyāḥ stanayugam abhūn nirjigamiṣu* /
> *sakampā bhrūvallī calati nayanaṃ karṇakuharaṃ*
> *kṛśaṃ madhyaṃ bhugnā valir alasitaḥ śroṇiphalakaḥ* // SKA (1) 2. 2. 5 =
> SKA (2) 2. 2. 5 //
>
> Childhood gone, on seeing her mind wounded
> by an arrow of the god whose bow is made of flowers,
> fearful, her breasts wish to spring forth,
> her eyebrows tremble,
> her eye flies to the cavity of her ear,
> her waist grows thin,
> the skin on her belly forms folds / becomes depressed,
> and her hips suffer from exhaustion[48].

Yet again similarly to *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3. 58, the first awakening of love in the heroine's heart is seen here not as a consequence of the onset of adolescence but as its cause.

This witty poem resembles SD 3. 58 in one more aspect: adolescence, through numerous puns, is presented in the stanza in terms of another liminal experience from the conceptual domain of politics and war, namely a sudden invasion of a country. The previous ruler is gone, and an aggressor enters, causing stress, panic and general confusion in the hapless kingdom.

The image is so violent that its use for the metaphorical conceptualisation of pubertal changes in a girl's body, her new-found coquettishness, and her first love creates a slightly comic effect, while still successfully explaining to the readers the radicalness of her physical and behavioural transformation, as well as her emotional turmoil at this critical moment in her life[49].

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[47] A Pāla court poet of the first half of the 9th century CE. (Kosambi 1957, ci; Sternbach 1978–1980, II, 505).

[48] Translation mine.

[49] For other metaphorical conceptualisations of female adolescence in terms of situations from the conceptual domain of politics and war, see SRK 338 by a certain Laḍahacandra (a king founds a new city), SRK 362 (a country prepares for an invasion), SRK 382 (a king is defeated by a

3. *Rādhā's Adolescence in the Maithili Songs of Vidyāpati*

As already mentioned, the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* motif was also introduced into the medieval lyric poetry of north-eastern India, thanks to the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (V) (14th–15th centuries CE)[50], who used it in his songs on the adolescence of Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā.

The present paper does not aim to investigate this broad topic in depth; however, it might be worthwhile to analyse here just one among Vidyāpati's numerous *vayaḥsaṃdhi* songs, as an example of the influence of the classical Sanskrit literary tradition on vernacular Indian literatures:

śaiśava yauvana daraśana bhela /
duhu patha heraita manasija gela //
madanaka bhāva pahila paracāra /
bhina jane dela bhina adhikāra //
kaṭika gaurava pāola nitamba /
ekaka khīna aoke avalamba //
prakaṭa hāsa aba gopata bhela /
uraja prakaṭa aba tanhika lela //
carana capala gati locana pāba /
locanaka dhairaja padatale yāba //
navakaviśekhara ki kahaita pāra /
bhina bhina rāja bhina vevahāra // V 5 //

There was an encounter between childhood and youth;
the mind-born god of love went to see the two paths.
The first display of Madana's power[51] –
he has given his different subjects different rights.
The buttocks have acquired the heaviness / dignity of the waist;
the thinness / weakness of the latter is now supported by the former.
Laughter, previously unconcealed, stays concealed now;
the breasts have come out of concealment in its place.
The gaze will assume the restlessness of the gait;
the calmness of the eyes will pass to the feet.

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rival), SMĀ 51. 8 (when two claimants vie for the throne, a third pretender plans to conquer the kingdom).

[50] Jha 1972, 5; 10. Under the patronage of King Śivasiṃha and other rulers of the Oinavāra dynasty of Mithilā (Majumdar 1960, 404-407).

[51] Kapūr 1968, 11: *bhāva* = *sattā, prabhutva*.

What can Vidyāpati say? –
'Different kings, different customs'[52].

As we can see, Vidyāpati, in a structurally very different poetic text in another language, depicts physical changes happening to his adolescent heroine, as well as changes in her behaviour, indicative of a psychological transformation, in a way that is quite similar to Sanskrit authors. The song mentions the pubescent girl's heavier buttocks, thinner waist and enlarged breasts; it also points out the heroine's slower gait, restrained laughter and oblique glances, all three showing her heightened sense of decorum and her progress in mastering the art of coquetry. The onset of adolescence is presented here, just as in the Sanskrit *vayaḥsaṃdhi* poems analysed above (SD 3. 58 and SKA 2. 2. 5), as caused by the first stirrings of love in the girl's heart.

To help his listeners or readers better understand adolescence as a critical period in a woman's life, Vidyāpati – once again similarly to Sanskrit poets – employs contrast (in a manner already familiar to us after discussing SD 3. 58 and SRK 355) and a political metaphor, resembling those used in SKA 2. 2. 5 and SD 3. 58[53], but with a new twist.

The heroine's adolescence is conceived of in terms of a whole series of dramatic events taking place in a kingdom. When the previous monarch (childhood) is engaged in a battle with a rival (youth), yet another pretender (love) makes use of this opportunity to seize the throne himself.

Next, he immediately asserts his authority – some of his new subjects are stripped of their office, which is then offered to others; some, filled with fear, go into hiding, while some, on the contrary, come out of hiding after receiving convincing assurances. Thus, the old political order of the state, completely rearranged, gives way to a new one, more conducive to the new king's successful reign.

4. *Conclusions*

Summing up, in Classical Sanskrit literature, female adolescence appears to have been quite a popular topic, since in three well-known anthologies, namely Vidyākara's *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* (11th or 12th century CE), Śrīdharadāsa's *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* (1205 CE) and Jalhaṇa's *Sūktimuktāvalī* (1258 CE), it is given a separate chapter, titled *vayaḥsaṃdhi* / *vayassaṃdhi* 'life-juncture'. However, the authors of the poems included therein (and in another section of the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, titled *kiṃcidupārūḍhayauvanā* / *kiṃcidupoḍhayauvanā* '[the heroine] whose youth has slightly grown / has come a little closer', which has also been taken into account in this paper) almost never employ this term and, usually, refer to adolescence using various periphrastic expressions instead.

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[52] Translation is mine.

[53] Cf. also SMĀ 51. 8, as well as SRK 362 and 382 (see footnote 49).

The adolescent heroine, captured during the process of her transformation from a little girl into a young maiden, does not seem to have her own, traditionally established name. The authors frequently view her as vague, difficult to grasp, and thus hard to depict.

Still, they duly describe most of the noticeable major physical changes which occur during female puberty. They are also perceptive and sensitive enough to accurately observe and point out fundamental changes in the behaviour of adolescent girls, which are obviously to be interpreted as symptoms of a radical psychological transformation. Interestingly, the onset of adolescence is often considered by the poets to be caused by the first awakening of love in the heroine's heart.

To help the readers better comprehend how critical this period is in a women's life, the authors frequently resort to the skilful use of contrast and apt metaphors. Unsurprisingly, adolescence is often metaphorically conceptualised in terms of other liminal experiences. The poets have a special predilection for metaphors drawn from the conceptual domain of politics and war, which is also easily understandable. Even though the depictions of events such as an invasion, the fight of pretenders to the throne or the beginning of a new king's reign, with the ensuing general confusion and instability of the state, may sometimes create a slightly comic effect, they generally emphasise the turmoil of female adolescence quite convincingly.

Moreover, happenings of this kind would surely have been well-known to at least a part of the original – predominantly courtly – literary *milieu*. For them, the explanatory value of these metaphors must have been great indeed[54].

The last part of the paper discusses one of the numerous songs on the adolescence of Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā by the famous Maithili poet Vidyāpati (14th–15th centuries CE) as an example of the influence of the classical Sanskrit literary tradition on vernacular Indian literatures. As a detailed analysis demonstrates, in a structurally very different poetic text in another language, Vidyāpati treats the *vayaḥsaṃdhi* motif quite similarly to Sanskrit authors.

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[54] Additionally, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that some of our authors (many of whom were court poets, see footnotes 38; 45; 47) may allude to real-life events in their stanzas through the use of political and military metaphors. Thus, while depicting adolescent girls, they may also give indirect praise or advice to their kingly patrons.

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On the Sublime (and) Beautiful in *Raghuvaṃśa*. Edmund Burke Reads Kālidāsa

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Abstract

In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the 18th century Irish thinker, Edmund Burke, conceives the notion of the sublime in terms characteristic of liminality. He defines it as an aesthetic category derived from an ambiguous, primal sensation of 'delightful horror' and as a conceptual opposite of beauty. While his sublime, expressed through indefiniteness or excess, dominates over the experiencing subject, his beauty, expressed through definiteness and restraint, is fully dominated by the subject. The aim of this study is to compare the Burkean sublime with the Sanskrit *mahākāvya* work, *Raghuvaṃśa* by Kālidāsa (5th century CE). In the first place, it proves that many elements recognised by Edmund Burke as the sources of the sublime may be traced in Kālidāsa's language of hyperbolic affirmation based on natural imagery. In the second place, it shows the merging of Burkean dualities of the sublime and beautiful, man and Nature within the *mahākāvya* aesthetics of *Raghuvaṃśa*, and, accordingly, reappraises his account of sublimity conceived in liminal terms.

Keywords: aesthethics, Burkean sublime, the beautiful, *kāvya*, Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*.

1. *Introduction: the Sublime Liminality*

The concept of liminality as conceived by Arnold van Gennep and furthered by Victor Turner significantly overlaps with the concept of the sublime constructed within the Western philosophical discourse. Both of them connote a kind of "surplus", a threat to the self, something that escapes definition, transcending the experienced reality or imaginable forms, something “else” that may create a feeling of dread, amazement, or a deep, reverential awe. Moreover, both the sublime and liminality are underlain by duality or ambivalence. In this sense, liminality, as a culturally inclusive category characterizing a common social phenomenon observable in a variety of cultures, may be regarded as an anthropological counterpart of the philosophical category of the sublime, which was constructed by a number of Western thinkers within their own cultural contexts.

This study is intended as a task in applied comparative cultural aesthetics that prepares the ground for further enquiry into the possibility of recognizing the sublime as a culturally inclusive category that may be integrated with the corresponding concepts of the Sanskrit aesthetics and literary theory. The cognitive approach to literary aesthetics pursued here aims to foster a comprehensive reception of the Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, here represented by a work of Kālidāsa, and open a new intercultural perspective for the study of this genre.

1.1. *Edmund Burke and Indian Aesthetics*

The common duality shared by sublime and liminality is clearly visible in the theory of the sublime presented in the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1754) by Edmund Burke (1729–1797), where the sublime imagined as a quality creating an ambivalent feeling of pleasure and pain is defined through its dual opposition to beauty. Many of the phenomena identified here as the sources of the sublime, such as “terror”, “obscurity”, “privation”, “intermission”, “silence”, “infinity” fall within the scope of liminality[1].

This 18th century Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher, widely recognised for his life-long campaign against the injustices of British rule in India and the impeachment of Warren Hastings, is an often-overlooked founding father of the modern notion of the sublime. Contrary to his German successor, Immanuel Kant, who turned the sublime into an arithmetical abstraction of the mind, Burke concentrates on the empirical experience, the psychological reactions on the side of the subject and the physical objects that provoke them. Since he defines the sublime and beautiful through particular instances and values depiction above theoretical accuracy, his account of these aesthetic categories is marked by open complexity. This is one of the reasons why it appears to be much more conversant with the Indian literary-aesthetic tradition than the Kantian sublime adopted by Jean-

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[1] Burke 1823, 76-85; 96; 99; 106; 117.

François Lyotard in the 20th century. Since Burke's discourse is based on emotional states and their tangible sources, it is reminiscent of a central paradigm in Sanskrit aesthetics and poetics, namely *rasa* theory. Moreover, as will be noted below, several sources of the sublime recognised in Burke's treatise either correspond to conventional motifs employed in Sanskrit *kāvya* literature or serve as adequate points of reference for a contrastive analysis.

The physiological aesthetics[2] of the *Philosophical Enquiry* are founded on pre-psychological principles. The author commences by recognising "reason" and "taste" as universally human faculties that enable empirical data to be assigned to theoretical patterns such as beauty and sublimity. Although, in the light of the current state of knowledge regarding human culture, the statement on which Burke founds his enquiry: «The standard both of reason and taste is the same in all human creatures»[3], appears dangerously absolute, it also shows a biological approach to aesthetics, which, from the perspective of time, proves to be progressive. This is so because since Immanuel Kant, Western philosophical aesthetics was largely dominated by German idealism, which detached itself from the bio-psychological aspect of human apprehension and from Nature in general. It was not until the rise of cognitive studies in the late 20th century that this bio-psychological perspective, which is highly compatible with the Indian tradition, was reintroduced into the Western intellectual discourse including aesthetics and literary studies[4]. It may currently prove valuable in interpreting cultural texts through the comparison of regional conceptualisations of most general ideas, such as beauty, sublimity, or greatness, based on likely universal human experience.

1.2. *Pain and Pleasure*

In a similar way to the author of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Burke occupies himself with recognising several types of human emotions, whose broad spectre he divides into negative pleasure, designated as "delight", generated by the sublime, and positive pleasure, generated by the beautiful. Within his treatise human beings appear as mainly biological organisms ruled by their sensations of pain and pleasure. By "negative pleasure" Burke means the strongest possible feeling rooted in the human instinct of self-preservation. It arises from witnessing something dangerous or uncontrollable from a safe distance which allows one to reflect on one's natural reactions. What differentiates negative pleasure from a basic fear is the exaltedness and admirableness of the sublime behind it, which may be exemplified by emotions typically aroused by great natural or cosmic objects, such as mountains, oceans, rivers, the sky, or the luminaries. Another important aspect of the sublime experience mentioned by Burke is its disinterestedness, as it leads to a simulated detachment from the basic instinct of self-preservation by which it is induced:

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[2] Ryan 2001.

[3] Burke 1823, 1.

[4] *Ibid.*, 23: «On the whole, it appears to me, that what is called taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations o these, and concerning the human passions, manner and actions».

> [The sublime] [...] comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tyger, the panther, or rhinoceros. Whenever strength is only useful, and employed for our benefit or our pleasure, then it is never sublime; for nothing can act agreeably to us, that does not act in conformity to our will. (Burke 1823, 88)

Contrariwise, by positive pleasure Burke means an emotion comparable to "love" underlain by a sense of safety and domination induced by the fully controllable beauty of an object perceived[5]. Accordingly, within the polarised aesthetics, strongly determined by the author's gender, natural environment, culture, and time of life, sublime objects are specified as great, vast, massive, rough, dark, obscure, and associated with pain, while beautiful objects are small, light, smooth, polished, clear, bright, and delicate. The sublime may combine with the beautiful in the same way as white mixes with black. When they combine a softened version of the sublime or an intensified version of the beautiful appears. Nonetheless, they make the strongest impression as separate colours[6].

As befits a representative of British empiricism, Burke defines the sublime and the beautiful through ostension, or, in other words, through examples. The larger part of his treatise may be characterised as a catalogue of objects, qualities and ideas recognised as sources of the sublime and beautiful.

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5. *Ibid.*, 125; 162-163.
6. *Ibid.*, 183.

1.3. *Sources of the Sublime*

The empirical style of Burke's discourse results in a very strong contextualisation of his notion of the sublime. It is marked by a dualistic understanding of the relation between man and nature, determined both by the cold, oppressive, often overwhelming natural environment of the 19th century British Isles and the anthropocentric Western intellectual tradition. However, what makes his theory less timeless and seemingly less universal than the abstract Kantian sublime adopted by Lyotard, paradoxically, offers more solid grounds for intercultural studies conducted from a bio-psychological or cognitive perspective, which may foster a deeper understanding of Sanskrit aesthetics.

Among the sources of the sublime Burke mentions "terror", identifying it as the strongest, most perplexing emotion, and, accordingly, the ruling principle of the sublime[7]. He associates terror with: «Contemptible or dangerous objects or beings like snakes and other poisonous animals and things of great dimensions», best represented by the ocean, all of which pose a threat to the human sense of security, ego, or imagination[8]. This emotion is closely associated with another source of the sublime, which is 'obscurity' that induces fear of the unknown. He observes that imagination intensifies a sense of dread when the full extent of danger is unknown[9].

Obscurity along with other mentioned sources, including "privation", "vastness", "succession and uniformity", "magnificence", is related with a broader notion of "infinity"[10]. Infinity, conceived as a challenge to the imagination that produces venerable fear underlain with amazement, or a mixed feeling of pleasure and pain, should be regarded as a key characteristic of Burkean sublime. As a promise "of something more", infinity traced in phenomena such as changing seasons or young animals, is found as a generally pleasurable concept[11]. Nevertheless, the most important aspect connecting it with the sublime is the challenge it gives to the idea of form. While in its boundlessness infinity diverts from Burke's idea of beauty, it cannot also be classified as "ugly", as it does not connote "deformation", but rather "formlessness", which just like "intermission" or "chasm", which are also listed as sources of the sublime, provokes awe leading to a suspension of judgement. Burke illustrates this with a passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, depicting Death:

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[7] *Ibid.*, 74.
[8] *Ibid.*, 74-75.
[9] *Ibid.*, 76-77.
[10] *Ibid.*, 96-99; 101-110.
[11] *Ibid.*, 106.

> The other shape.
> If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none [...]
> (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II. 666–667)[12].

Another principal source of Burkean sublime is "power", whose appeal is based on terror mixed with reverential awe. Burke associates it with a superior, uncontrollable, external force exemplified by a figure of sovereignty, a deity, gloomy isolated landscapes or wild and dangerous animals[13]. Among the criteria enabling a given phenomenon to be identified as powerful in a way that is conducive to the sublime, he mentions an absence of their practical utility, which differentiates the strength or size of a creature or object from its power, supposed to dominate over human ego[14]. Whatever is subject to our will «can never be a cause of grand and commanding conception»[15].

In his use of the term "grand" as a synonym of the sublime, Burke clearly follows the earlier discourse of the term which since Classical Antiquity had been developed within the literary-rhetorical context[16]. He also uses this word in definitions of other sources of the sublime, such as "difficulty", by which he means a great struggle or effort indicating a grand idea behind it, and "magnificence", explained as: «A great profusion of things, which are splendid or valuable in themselves»[17]. Burke adds here that the disorder of profuse elements may intensify a sense of infinity indicative of the sublime. As examples of such a kind of profusion he mentions a starry sky, fireworks, and literary descriptions rich in profuse images (motifs), or epithets characteristic of panegyrics[18]. Burke adds here that the disorder of profuse elements may intensify a sense of infinity indicative of the sublime.

Among other sources of the sublime that may prove relevant to the aesthetics underlying Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, "light", "sound", and "colour" should be mentioned. Light should be possibly most intense, blinding, preferably emanating directly from the sun, emerging from deep darkness, passing into, or contrasting with it. In the same way, excessive sound, ideally created by massive natural phenomena like thunder, is considered as conducive to the sublime, since it creates a most extreme sensation[19]. Burke distinguishes the cries of wild animals as a separate source of the sublime, which he regards as an alien, external, and intense interruption in a familiar, safe fabric of reality[20]. He associates the sublime with dark gloomy colours, excluding from its scope any bright, "cheerful" hues like the blue of clear skies[21].

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[12] *Ibid.*, 77.

[13] *Ibid.*, 85-96.

[14] *Ibid.*, 88-89.

[15] *Ibid.*, 88.

[16] Represented by several Classical authors, the most influential of whom is the anonymous author of *Peri Hypsous* (1st century CE) referred to as Pseudo-Longinus, and Early Modern authors, such as Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711) and John Dennis (1658–1734).

[17] *Ibid.*, 107.

[18] *Ibid.*, 107-110.

2. *Burke's Aesthetics Applied to Kālidāsa's* Raghuvaṃśa

As the most prestigious genre of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, whose heroic narrative frame, normative function, eulogistic character, and close connection with the royal power suggests its classification as an Indian example of grand narrative, *mahākāvya* appears as one of the most accurate examples of Sanskrit classical literature to be compared with Burke's account of the sublime. Owing to the common aesthetics underlying the *mahākāvya* convention, observations regarding the "sublimity" of its grand narrative poetics made on the basis of one work generally apply to other stylistically different compositions. The above presented analysis focuses on Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* (5th century CE), which is one of the earliest and most celebrated works of the genre.

The second stanza of Kālidāsa's *mahākāvya* already contains several Burkean sources of the sublime whose presence pervades the entire work. It mentions the solar origin of the dynasty, which alludes to the senses through the image of the celestial body and its blinding brightness. The greatness of the dynasty is further emphasised through the comparison to the unnavigable ocean, indicating the vastness, obscurity, possible danger, and great difficulty faced by a solitary poet. Accordingly, it includes the following sources: "light", "terror", "obscurity", "privation", "vastness", "infinity", "difficulty":

> *kva sūryaprabhavo vaṃśaḥ kva cālpaviṣayā matiḥ /*
> *titīrṣur dustaram mohād uḍupenāsmi sāgaram* // Ragh 1. 2 //

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[19] *Ibid.*, 115-116.
[20] *Ibid.*, 118-119.
[21] *Ibid.*, 114.

> Where is this Sun-born dynasty and where is my limited mind? Tempted by my own foolishness, I am eager to cross the unnavigable ocean on a raft[22].

The affective potential of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* is built upon the material sublime, or in other words, the variety of the sublime that affects listeners through the presentable, palpable greatness of Nature and the Cosmos present in Burke's aesthetics. Within particular eulogies that are shared by the entire grand narrative of Raghu's dynasty, several monarchs are either identified with or compared to the sun: Ragh 3. 30; 5. 13; 8. 15; 8. 29–30; 11. 24; 11. 64; 11. 82; or to the moon: Ragh 3. 22; 4. 18; 8. 15; 11. 24; 11. 64; 11. 82. For example:

> *dhiyaḥ samagraiḥ sa guṇair udāradhīḥ kramāc catasraś caturarṇavopamāḥ* /
> *tatāra vidyāḥ pavanātipātibhir diśo haridbhir haritām iveśvaraḥ* // Ragh 3. 30 //

> The one sublime of mind, endowed with all intellectual merits, has crossed the four branches of knowledge, comparable to the four oceans, just like the Lord of Sky Quarters (the Sun) crossed the [four] directions with his horses (sunrays) swift as the wind.

As befits the epic chronicle of the solar dynasty, *Raghuvaṃśa* is full of blinding light expressing the grandeur of royal power:

> *sa rājyaṃ guruṇā dattaṃ pratipadyādhikaṃ babhau* /
> *dinānte nihitaṃ tejaḥ savitreva hutāśanaḥ* // Ragh 4. 1 //

> On receiving the sovereignty from his elder he became exceedingly bright, just like fire receiving light from the sun at the end of day.

Other celestial objects, both mythical and observable, serve as objects of comparison in numerous similes: *e.g.* Ragh 1. 46 (star Chitra and the moon); Ragh 2. 39; 8. 37 (Rāhu); Ragh 2. 75 (celestial Ganges).

Moreover, the royal grandeur is also expressed through comparisons to mountains and oceans, which constitute larger themes within the narrative:

> *sarvātiritasāreṇa sarvatejo 'bhibhāvinā* /
> *sthitaḥ sarvonnatenorvīṃ krāntvā merur ivātmanā* // Ragh 1. 14 //

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[22] Unless otherwise stated, the translations are all mine.

> Transcending the Earth, raised high above all in the likeness of Mt. Meru, exceeding all in energy, surpassing all in splendour.
>
> *bhīmakāntair nr̥paguṇaiḥ sa bhabhūvopajīvinām /*
> *adhr̥ṣyaś cābhi gamyaś ca yādhoratnair ivārṇavaḥ* // Ragh 1. 16 //
>
> Just like the ocean endowed with sea monsters coupled with gems, with his kingly traits [both] dreadful and lovable, he was [both] accessible and inaccessible to his subjects.

The elaborate descriptions used to portray mountain and ocean themes are additionally underlain with the Burkean category of "magnificence", which is alluded to through the profusion of valuable objects canonically assigned to each landscape[23].

Kālidāsa also translates the idea of royal power through animals which, as noted by Burke, exemplify power through their physical traits paired with an uncontrollable force. Here temporin-filled, open temples of an elephant during the period of musth along with fire fanned by the wind and the sun in the cloudless sky exemplify royal power in its fierce, unrestrained aspect:

> *vibhāvasuḥ sārathineva vāyunā ghanavyapāyena gabhastimān iva /*
> *babhūva tenātitarāṃ suduḥsahaḥ kaṭaprabhedena karīva pārthivaḥ* //
> Ragh 3. 37 //
>
> In his [Raghu's] company the king [Dilīpa] became practically invincible. They were like fire coupled with wind, like the sun coupled with the cloudless sky, or like an elephant coupled with open temples.

Nonetheless, in some other stanzas he expresses material grandeur only to show that the sublimity of royal power transcends it, approaching the state of infinity:

> *ārūḍham adrīn udadhīn vitīrṇaṃ bhujaṃgamānāṃ vasatiṃ praviṣṭam /*
> *ūrdhvaṃ gataṃ yasya na cānubandhi yaśaḥ paricchettum iyattayālam* //
> Ragh 6. 77 //
>
> It is impossible to measure his lasting fame that ascended mountain tops, penetrated the oceans, entered the underworld, and raised up high [to the sky].

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[23] Matyszkiewicz 2018, 55-76.

In a similar way, indicative of the Burkean idea of infinity as one of the key underlying features of sublimity, the poet imagines the nature of god Viṣṇu, praised in the tenth chapter of *Raghuvaṃśa*:

> *ameyo mitalokas tvam anarthī prārthanāvahaḥ* /
> *ajito jiṣṇur atyantam avyakto vyaktakāraṇam* // Ragh 10. 18 //
>
> You are the immeasurable measure of the world, the desireless source of desire, the unconquerable conqueror, an endless, unmanifest source of manifestations.

3. *Conclusions*

The main point of difference between Edmund Burke and Kālidāsa may be determined by their approach to Nature. Although he traces sublimity in the sensuousness of springtime, associated with the idea of infinity, Burke conceives Nature mainly as an oppressive, uncontrollable force that poses a threat to human subjectivity. Therefore, in his account, the sublimity of great natural phenomena is based on awe and fearful reverence. Sublime Nature is gloomy, dark in colour, unmelodious in sound, filled with gaps and threatening extremities. It dominates over the sentient subject by mere, primitive power further exemplified by the figure of a sovereign and a deity. *Raghuvaṃśa* also contains passages in which sublimity is derived from fear of the threatening force of Nature. For example, those that describe the omens witnessed by king Daśaratha on his journey, such as adverse winds, howling jackals, the sun encircled with a frightening halo (Ragh 11. 58-11. 62), or depictions of a bloodred sun, columns of smoke and dust covering the sky during the battle in the seventh chapter. Nonetheless, these are just a few stanzas of the entire work. The poem itself shows no tension between Nature and human ego, which are generally imagined here as interconnected[24]:

> *viṣṛṣṭapārśvānucarasya tasya pārśvadrumāḥ pāśabhṛtā samasya* /
> *udīrayām āsur ivonmadānām ālokaśabdaṃ vayasāṃ virāvaiḥ* // Ragh 2. 9 //
>
> The roadside trees praised with ecstatic sounds of birds Varuṇa's equal, who has expelled his flatterers.

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[24] Rajendran 2005, 21; 25.

Moreover, the imagery of Kālidāsa's work corresponds rather with what Burke identifies as a mixture of sharply outlined, contrasting categories of the sublime and beautiful.

For instance, the extreme brightness, identified by Burke as the source of the sublime, within *Raghuvaṃśa* definitely serves the strongly persuasive function associated with this category, at the same time merging with the quality of "whiteness", which for both Burke and Kālidāsa exemplifies the category of beauty:

> *pāṇḍyo 'yam aṃsārpitalambahāraḥ kḷptāṅgarāgo haricandanena* /
> *ābhāti bālātaparaktasānuḥ sanirjharodgāra ivādrirājaḥ* // Ragh 6. 60 //
>
> With a [white] garland of pearls dangling on his shoulders and body smeared with [red] sandalwood ointment he shone like the Mountain king (Himalaya) with its rumbling waterfalls and summits reddened by the morning sunbeams.

The sublimity of Nature and Cosmos, inscribed in great depths, heights, or amounts, appears here as an intensifier of beauty or the other way round: beauty seems to tame the sublime through sensuality[25]. This is clearly visible in the thirteenth chapter of *Raghuvaṃśa* where Rāma presents his consort Sītā with the touchstones of the landscape beneath their feet as they travel through the sky on *vimāna*:

> *velānilāya prasṛtā bhujaṃgā mahormivisphūrjathunirviśeṣāḥ* /
> *sūryāṃśusaṃparkasamṛddharāgair vyajyanta ete maṇibhiḥ phaṇasthaiḥ* //
> Ragh 13. 12 //
>
> Snakes stretched out for the coast wind are hard to distinguish from the massive, roaring waves, becoming noticeable only through the hue of jewels in their hoods intensified by sunrays.

> *tavādharasparadhiṣu vidrumeṣu paryastam etat sahasormivegāt* /
> *ūrdhvāṅkuraprotamukhaṃ kathaṃcit kleśad apakrāmati śaṅkhayūtham* //
> Ragh 13. 13 //

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[25] Matyszkiewicz 2018.

> The collection of shells, scattered by the force of rapid waves, with their sharp, upraised tips struggles to disentangle from the corals that emulate your lips.
>
> *velānilaḥ ketakareṇubhis te saṃbhāvayaty ānanam āyatākṣi* /
> *mām akṣamaṃ maṇḍanakālahāner vettīva bimbādharabaddhatr̥ṣṇam* // Ragh 13. 16 //
>
> Oh, long-eyed lady! As if having noticed my urgent desire for your round lips, the sea breeze honours your face with Ketaka pollen.

In these examples one can clearly see how the ocean with its primal dread is turned into a lover's playground. Its venomous snakes are characterised as jewels, corals and shells are likened to female lips. Therefore, the sublimity, inherent to the ocean as such, is sensualised, or turned into an enhancement of erotic pleasure, assigned by Burke to the domain of beauty. In this chapter of *Raghuvaṃśa*, the grand elements of Nature such as the ocean, mountains, of great rivers, which as bare concepts may be overwhelming in their excess, unfamiliarity, obscurity, otherworldliness, or sense of danger, are brought into a state of familiarity and submission. It is the king, a personification of power, who is in charge of the familiarised objects, not the other way round. Nature is imagined rather as a valuable extension of the personalised power, than as a serious obstacle. Moreover, the royal power itself does not rely here on mere terror, as would be imagined by Burke, but rather on sublimity refined into a magnified splendour. Accordingly, the grand narrative poetics of *Raghuvaṃśa* appeal through images of earthly opulence expressed through celestial brightness, precious stones, lofty thrones, mountains, or impenetrable depths.

To conclude, in spite of cultural, temporal, and environmental differences between the authors, the majority of the sources of the sublime recognised by Burke can be traced in the grand narrative poetics of Kālidāsa's poem. Nevertheless, the Sanskrit author presents a significantly different cultural reworking of these sources, which makes the Burkean sublime derived from the instinct of self-preservation appear as an intensifier, or a hyperbole of pleasurable beauty that serves eulogistic purposes. In this sense, *mahākāvya* aesthetics represented by *Raghuvaṃśa* may be interpreted as a form of overcoming the tension of liminality understood in terms of the Burkean sublime.

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Modern Literature and Liminoid Practices

Voices From the Stone, Figures on the Stage. The Development of *Avadhāna* and *Avadhānī*'s Identity

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Abstract
The paper aims to present and examine the Indian art of *avadhāna* ('attention', 'attentiveness') through the analysis of selected epigraphic and literary sources, fragments of practitioner's memoirs, congratulation letters and press reports, etc. which help to trace possible sources of the practice, determine its historical background and investigate the patterns of its continuity and modifications up to the present day. Special attention will be paid to the figure of the practitioner (*avadhānī* or *avadhāninī*), the transition from the courts or private scholarly meetings into the public space and to the commercial character of modern-day *avadhāna* which deeply influenced changes within the practice and its perception. The analysis will lead to a methodological investigation placing the art in the conglomerate of such phenomena as routine, ritual, tradition and cultural performance.

Keywords: *avadhāna*, performance, ritual, liminality.

1. *Introduction*[*]

The aim of the present paper is to examine the Indian art of *avadhāna* and to investigate its patterns of continuity and modifications against the background of its affiliation to such categories as routine, ritual, tradition and performance.

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What is *avadhāna*? The literal meaning of the term is 'attention', 'attentiveness' – the quality which is the focal point of described activity. As a starting point I propose to describe *avadhāna* as the act of showcasing highly developed cognitive capacities examined in the form of miscellaneous tasks accomplished in the presence of other people. This general working definition is by no means comprehensive since it omits important aspects of *avadhāna*. It does not take into account features that were characteristic for certain stages of the development *of avadhāna* as well as its systematisation and manifold divisions. Moreover, it only focuses on the culminative point – showcasing the skills – while the term *avadhāna* also encompasses everything that leads a practitioner (denoted as the *avadhānī* in the case of men or *avadhāninī* in the case of women) to this moment, *e.g.* the preparation, studies, etc. Nonetheless, it can serve as a frame comprising its varieties which differ from each other. To describe *avadhāna*'s development in a more detailed way and to draw its picture formed through the centuries it is important to focus on answering a few auxiliary questions: when?; where?; why? and, finally, who?[1] The first two queries address the matters of time and space. They can be analysed both on a micro- and macroscale, where the former is connected to the timing and placing of single *avadhāna*s and the latter to the art's origin. However, the second perspective does not influence the art's categorisation and requires a closer study which, for the clarity of my argument, will not be taken into consideration[2]. Since the matter of *avadhāna*'s temporal limitation is closely connected to the spatial aspect, they will be analysed in parallel.

2. *The Time and Place of* avadhāna

The earliest attestations of the art which are included in the epigraphic sources do not contain any direct data indicating the time and occasions on which *avadhāna*s were held or the places in which they were organised. Nevertheless, they inform the reader about practitioners who were closely related to the court, mostly poets who composed under the ruler's patronage, members of the highly educated *milieus*. The examples include for instance two inscriptions with direct references to the practice of *avadhāna* which come from the Western part of the Indian subcontinent. Both epigraphs are to be assigned to the king Vīra Narasiṃha II of the Hoysaḷa dynasty. The first one, from 1223 CE, is located in Kembālu (= Kembāla, Karnataka's Hassan District) on a stone in the *navaraṅgamaṇṇṭapa* of the temple of Narasiṁhadeva. The inscription contains a detailed record of the boons bestowed upon the king's chief accountant, Viśvanātha from Beḷvoḷa. The official was granted Kembāla, which was made the village of Vīralakṣmīnarasiṁha. Viśvanātha, who «could write letters with both hands, and go through a hundred *avadhāna*s (or mnemonic feats)», not only built the Vīralakṣmīnarasiṁha temple but also constructed large tanks in the *agrahāra*[3]. The same *avadhānī*'s skills and achievements were also recalled in another record of Vīra Narasiṁha II: the inscription from 1237 CE, inscribed on a stone near the Keśava temple at Hāranahaḷḷi, Karnataka[4].

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[1] I have not included the question 'what?' on this list. First of all, because the detailed systematisation of the types of *avadhāna* and the description of the consecutive tasks which can be completed during the events are not crucial for the main part of this study. My main focus is to determine whether *avadhāna* can be perceived as a routine, a tradition or a form of ritual or performance and to analyse the transformations of the figure of *avadhānī*. Secondly, because the various types of *avadhāna* and their possible challenges have already been described. See *e.g.* Sudyka–Galewicz 2012, Cielas 2017 or Cielas 2020.

[2] The interested reader may refer to Sudyka–Galewicz 2012 where, based on the analysis of epigraphic, historical and literary sources, the authors tentatively date the beginnings of *avadhāna* to at least the 12th–13th century CE and advance hypotheses regarding the place of origin of the art.

Another intellectually stimulating *milieu* which nurtured the practice of *avadhāna* was presumably the court of the king of the Vāghela dynasty, Vīsaladeva. Two Sanskrit records from the second half of the 13th century, originally placed on a wall of the Koṭīśvara temple at Koḍīnār (Amreli District of Gujarat), describe various figures residing at the court and their relatives. The epigraphs, the so-called Nānāka *praśasti*s, are devoted to a man named Vīsalanagarīya Nānāka and record the inauguration of the *sārasvatakrīḍāketana* or 'the play-ground of the learned' (*praśasti* I, not dated but probably older than the second one since it describes Vīsaladeva as *tridaśasuhr̥d*, 'the friend of the thirty gods', suggesting that the king was already dead. It must have been composed between 1262 and 1271 CE) and the *sārasvatasadas* or 'the abode of the learned' (*praśasti* II, dated to 1271 CE). The autograph left by Kr̥ṣṇa, the author of the first inscription, identifies him as a practitioner of the *aṣṭāvadhāna*, 'the eightfold attention'[5], who belonged to the family of professional *literati*; his grandfather was characterised as the author of the work called *Kuvalayāśvacarita*[6].

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[3] Rice 1902, 211.

[4] *Ibid.*, 384.

[5] The numeral in the name of the art denotes the number of tasks completed during the *avadhāna*. The *aṣṭāvadhāna* with eight challenges is the most common type of the art. Analogically, in the *śatāvadhāna*, 'the one-hundred-fold attention', there are one hundred tasks, in the *sahasrāvadhāna*, 'the one-thousand-fold attention', one thousand, etc.

These and similar records may suggest that the art of *avadhāna* was closely related to the court. The fact of undergoing trials before kings and courtly assemblies is especially well documented also in the literary sources. Suffice it to mention Siddhicandra and other Jain poets, such as for instance Vijayasenasūri or Nandivijaya, who showcased their skills at Akbar's and Jahāngir's courts in the 16th–17th century. In the colophon to Siddhicandra's *Ṛtuvarṇana*, 'The Description of Seasons', an anthology of *muktaka*s (*sūktisañcaya*) composed by various poets and by the author of the compilation, Siddhicandra is described as the one who managed to meet one hundred and eight challenges during a single meeting that dazzled Akbar. The episode was also mentioned in Siddhicandra's *Bhānucandracarita* (BhCC). In the fourth chapter the author recalled his *avadhāna* held at the court (BhCC 4. 81-86) and Nandivijaya's activity in the described art (BhCC 4. 17-18).

Other notable examples of literary sources pointing to the *avadhāna*'s association with the court are the works describing the achievements of Madhuravāṇī, the renowned poetess active at the beginning of the 17th century at the court of Raghunātha Nāyaka. Her attainments were attested for instance in her own work, the *Śrīrāmāyaṇasārākāvyatilaka* (*e.g.* ŚRSKT 1. 93; 5.111) or in Vijayarāghava Nāyaka's *yakṣagāna* titled *Raghunāthābhyudayam*, where the poetess is characterised as *āśukavitāvāṇī* – 'the voice of fast poetry'.

Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned sources refer to the time and occasions on which the *avadhāna*s were held. It can only be assumed that since the practice was related to the court, the events did not have to be directly connected to particular celebrations but played the role of an element of courtly cultural life, not limited in terms of timing. Such an assumption seems to be justified in the light of later sources. From the 19th century onwards, royal premises were no longer the most common primary venue for the *avadhāna*s. Nevertheless, even then, from time to time *avadhānī*s showcased their skills before the rulers. Vasiṣṭha Gaṇapati Muni (1878–1936), for instance, recalled accomplishing the *aṣṭāvadhāna* in front of the king of Mandāsa (Andhra Pradesh) who «had a huge assembly of scholars, poets and connoisseurs»[7]. The *avadhāna*s completed in the presence of a ruler were also mentioned by Sitapati. The author recalled *avadhāna*s by Māḍabhūṣi Veṅkaṭācārya (1835–1895) and the Dēvulapalli brothers (Subbarāya Śāstrī, 1853–1909 and Veṅkaṭa Kr̥ṣṇa Śāstrī, 1856–1912) which took place at the court of Gangadhara Rama Rao, the *rāja* of Piṭhāpuram between 1877–1890, in November 1879[8].

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[6] Unfortunately, I could not find any additional information about this work or trace its author. In the *praśasti* I, Kṛṣṇa did not give the name of his grandfather which makes identification even more difficult since the title *Kuvalayāśvacarita* is not unique.

[7] Leela 1999, 41. Since the *avadhānī*'s memoirs place this event ca. the turn of the 19th and 20th century the mentioned *rāja* was probably Meherban-i-Dostan Vasudev Rajmani Raj Deo who ruled between 1890-1914.

The sources from the turn of the 19th and 20th century generally contain more data concerning the timing and placing of *avadhāna*. It is also worth noticing that very often they speak of private meetings in closed circles of connoisseurs. According to these records the *avadhāna*s held at home were especially characteristic for new practitioners taking their first steps in undergoing the described challenges. Vasiṣṭha Gaṇapati Muni's first *avadhāna* took place in the house of a doctor who «was taking care of his needs and in whose house an evening congregation of scholars was a daily routine»[9]. Another famous *avadhānī*, Kandukūri Vireśaliṅgam (1848–1919), recalled the similar circumstances of his first trial in his autobiography: «In those days I could compose verses extempore, with the same facility with which I delivered talks in prose. So some friends [...] desired that I should hold a session in *Ashtāvadhānam*, and I held one shortly afterwards, in a private house, before a few friends. [...] it was my first effort [...]»[10]. Nevertheless, experienced *avadhānī*s also performed at home, for example, to mention but a few, the account describing how Vasiṣṭha Gaṇapati Muni underwent the trial in the residence of Dr. Krishnaswami Iyer in Madras[11] or the record by Telang speaking of Raṅgācārya Śāstrī's spontaneous *avadhāna* which took place on the veranda of his house in Mēṭṭupālayam (Tamil Nadu)[12]. Such impromptu private meetings, often organised without any previous arrangements or only with a basic preparation, on the request of guests visiting *avadhānī* and not for any particular occasion, are frequently mentioned in the 19th–20th-century sources. But the same memoirs, biographies, press reports or congratulation letters also confirm the fact that it was the time when the *avadhāna* gradually started to be commercialised and move from sequestered or closed spaces to the public sphere[13]. More and more often *avadhānī*s showcased their skills during certain festivities or on such occasions as for example the meetings of clubs or scholarly milieu, weddings, etc.[14]. Nowadays, *avadhāna*s, to mention but a few possibilities, take place on religious holidays (like the festival of *vasanta pañcamī*, Spring Festival), secular celebrations (*e.g.* on *ugādi*, New Year's Day for the Hindus of Andhra Pradesh) or at the annual galas of particular institutions, including schools, colleges, etc. On the other hand, even today *avadhāna* can be unconnected to any other event. It then becomes a festival itself, even lasting up to over a month[15]. It can be organised on a big scale (at the stadium or in a conference hall, with the presence of media and thousands of spectators) as in the case of Munishri Ajitchandrasagarji's *avadhāna* which took place on 16 November 2014 at The National Sports Club of India's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Stadium in Worli, Mumbai, with an audience of almost six thousand people[16]. On the other hand, now and again contemporary *avadhānī*s still meet and go through the trial in private. In contradiction to Lisa Mitchell's statement that «[...] the practice of *avadhānam* today is unthinkable in a small group made up only of participants, not because it has "gone out of fashion", but because today *avadhānam* cannot exist without a stage and an audience»[17] contemporary *avadhānī*s declare that private performances have always been a part of the art and that they still take place – amongst close friend and acquaintances, for their own entertainment and satisfaction, far from the media hype.

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[8] Sitapati 1968, 116-117.

[9] *Ibid.*, 31.

[10] Viresalingam 1970, 77.

[11] Leela 1999, 72.

[12] Telang 1944, 157.

[13] See for instance Leela 1999, 71, Tirupati Vēṅkaṭakavulu 1956, 153, 158 or Viresalingam 1970, 77.

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[14] See *e.g.* Telang (1944, 155) recalling Ātmārāmapant Sukhātme's performance held in 1890 on the occasion of the Hindu Union Club's meeting in Bombay or the account of Parasurama Rao mentioning that the Telugu poet duo known as Tirupati Vēṅkaṭa Kavulu (Divākarla Tirupati Śāstrī, 1872–1920, and Cēllapilla Vēṅkaṭa Śāstrī, 1870–1950) went through the *avadhāna* on 29 August 1921 in Kuḍḍāpāh (= Kaḍapā), Andhra Pradesh, to celebrate his niece's marriage (Rājaśēkharaveṅkaṭaśēṣakavulu 1932, 55-57).

[15] The duration of the *avadhāna* depends on the number of challenges completed during a trial. Theoretically, the *aṣṭāvadhāna* can be performed in about thirty minutes. But then, as emphasised by *avadhānī*s, it contradicts the goals of an intellectual feast. According to the practitioners, to bring value an *aṣṭāvadhāna* should last for about two and a half to three hours. Long enough to fulfil individual challenges, entertain spectators and provide them with an explanation of subsequent stages, but no longer, in order to keep the audience focused. The *śatāvadhāna* takes about twenty-four to thirty hours divided into six parts – morning and evening sessions lasting for three days in total. The *sahasrāvadhāna* takes twenty-five to thirty days. Duration is one of the main reasons for considering the *aṣṭāvadhāna* the most perfect form of the art. The others are believed to mainly satisfy the ambitions of *avadhānī*s. All the practitioners' statements presented in the article are based on the interview with a *śatāvadhānī* Dr. R. Ganesh conducted on 11 August 2016 in Bangalore and the interview with an *avadhānī* Dr. Shankar Rajaraman conducted on 13 August 2015.

[16] The event was widely commented upon in the local, national and international media. See *e.g.* Bella Jaisinghani's article titled *Jain monk brings the house down with his memory skills in Mumbai* (*The Times of India*, Nov. 17, 2014: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Jain-monk-brings-the-house-down-with-his-memory-skills-in-Mumbai/articleshow/45170823.cms), *A Master of Memory in India Credits Meditation for His Brainy Feats* by Max Bearak (*The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 2014: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/18/world/asia/prodigy-in-india-credits-feats-of-memory-to-meditation-and-jainism.html) or *Jain Munishri Ajitchandra Sagarji Created World Record By Performing 500 Avdhan Successfully* (Business Wire India, Nov. 18, 2014: https://www.businesswireindia.com/jain-munishri-ajitchandra-sagarji-created-world-record-by-performing-500-avdhan-successfully-41561.html).

3. *The Purpose of* Avadhāna *and an Apparent End of the Art*

As described above, *avadhāna*s took and take place on various occasions, in manifold places. But what is their purpose? Why did *avadhāna* originate? Sudyka and Galewicz enumerated three factors which according to them are responsible for the continuation of the *avadhāna* tradition:

> 1. Cementing regional identity – the *avadhāna*s performed in Telugu, Kannada and Tamil; the appearance of Sanskrit can stress the link with the glorious past. 2. Collective participation in the social and cultural event valued as educative and intellectual entertainment – a proof of good education of participants, who gain the sense of nobilitation besides amusement and interactions with other viewers. 3. Individual needs of a performer, both emotional and intellectual ones[18].

These elements can be perceived as a starting point for the investigation on the aim of the *avadhāna* and on the characteristics of its practitioner. The art was modified and evolved over the centuries, mirroring the cultural changes that also came about. The *avadhāna*'s transition from the courts or private scholarly meetings into the public space is one of the pieces of evidence that attest the cultural transformations. It seems that originally, especially in the case of the literary form of the practice, the art originated and prevailed as one of the extensions of the so-called *kavigoṣṭhī* ('assembly of poets') which nurtured the idea of intellectual games and competitions among *literati*. But *avadhāna*s were not only a pastime of educated people. They were (and still are) a way to show the practitioner's prowess in a certain field, to perpetuate tradition and cultural unity and, to quote Sudyka and Galewicz, «to gain the sense of nobilitation». In the past, *avadhānī*s, like other poets, sought the kings' patronage. The traces of this practice lasted until the early 20th century. According to Ramalakshmi, in the second half of the 19th century, *avadhānī*s still «used to move from one place to another place receiving honours from various Zamindars [...]»[19]. Even later, Vasiṣṭha Gaṇapati Muni described how he «went to find some financial help from the King of Gadwal»[20]. The skills of being able to successfully complete the *avadhāna* were the subject of mutual agreement between the poets and the rulers. *Avadhānī*s provided virtuosity and talent which were the source of entertainment but also the factor enhancing the king's reputation as the one who had created a cultured milieu of the best among the best poets. In return, *avadhānī*s gained prestige and a high position at the court. In this way they nourished their individual needs, but not only their emotional and intellectual ones; the economic factor also played an important role here.

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[17] Mitchell 2009, 153.

[18] Sudyka–Galewicz 2012, 189.

This *status quo* started to change around the end of the 19th century. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century *avadhāna* started to become less and less popular until the point when it almost ceased to exist. What was the reason behind such a sudden change? A possible explanation can be deduced from the testimonies of *avadhānī*s active at that time. In his autobiography titled *Svīya Charitramu*, Kandukūri Vireśaliṅgam, already mentioned as the *avadhāna* practitioner considered as the father of the renaissance movement in Telugu, referring to the art, writes:

> It was a mighty feat of concentration, but lay people and ignorant people attributed it to black magic and thought, in spite of my friend's assurances to the contrary, that I was a devotee of some dark spirits [...]. I realized then that it was only entertainment to fill idle moments and brought no real benefit either to the world or to me. So however much people begged of me afterwards, I refused to repeat a performance which entailed so much strain on my intellect and at the same time benefitted no one[21].

At that time *avadhāna* had already become public – anyone could attend, take part as a spectator. *Avadhānī*s, although still respected as *literati* and educated men, no longer – or at least to a lesser degree – occupied high positions at court. The rulers' support and patronage were transforming due to the political situation. Narayana Rao and Shulman suggest that at the beginning of the 20th century 'patterns of patronage, composition, and circulation were essentially no different from those

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19. Ramalakshmi 1977, 80.
20. Leela 1999, 60.
21. Viresalingam 1970, 79.

in Śrīnātha's time – even though the poets now travelled by train, and their verses came to be printed»[22]. Nevertheless, during the time of British rule, the consolidation and demarcation of sovereignty, freedom movements and the rise of pan-Indian and local nationalism with the formation of governments, kings were more worried about keeping their power than investing in poets. This tendency was even more visible in the 1930s–1960s. The modes of patronage – even if not entirely changed – were adapting. The poets, including *avadhānī*s, sought the support of not only rulers but also merchants or other wealthy members of the community. Referring to the statements of Narayana Rao and Shulman and to the aforementioned words of Vireśaliṅgam, Mitchell assumed that

> With printing suddenly easily available [...] memory no longer played the crucial role it once had. The fact that Viresalingam included this unusual passage in the midst of his account of the establishment of his own printing press and first periodical suggests that at some point – even if only subconsciously – he had been influenced by the role of printing in his own disavowal of the celebration of memory[23].

In my opinion, the source of the *avadhānī*'s pique expressed in his autobiography is clearly articulated and does not require further explanation. It results from a common trend of the early 20th century, namely that of seeking attention and recognition beyond the court. The scope and the accessibility of the royal patronage were transforming. Other *avadhānī*s also encountered this problem. Tirupati Vēṅkaṭa Kavulu, for example «had to face jealous politics of court officials and local scholars which made them wait [for being granted an audience with the ruler] for weeks, sending petition after petition»[24]. That is why the practitioners of *avadhāna* started to search for support elsewhere. But it was not as beneficial. As Vireśaliṅgam noticed, common people who were not familiar with the *avadhāna*, who did not fully understand the capacity of the human mind and who did not possess any knowledge of poetics, attributed it to black magic. *Avadhānī*s specialising in various forms of the art were also being accused of fraud[25].

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[22] Narayana Rao–Shulman 1998, 195.

[23] Mitchell 2009, 149.

[24] Krishnamurthi 1985, 36.

[25] See for example Ernest Wood's account in which he quoted the article by Henry Steel Olcott, an American officer, journalist and the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, who witnessed an *avadhāna* and stated that «the pandit remembered no less than one hundred things given to him

Moreover, there were other reasons which contributed to the *avadhāna* crisis. The practitioners often engaged in frequent squabbles and personal fights. They used to attend rivals' *avadhāna*s only to point out mistakes and inaccuracies, getting involved in public quarrels prompted by, for example, caste feelings or mutual hatred. More and more often they refused to continue their activity in the field of literary *avadhāna*, claiming that it did not result in good poetical composition. This opinion was shared by such *avadhānī*s as, for instance, Umākānta Vidyāśekhara (1889–1942) or Rāyaprolu Subbārāv (1892–1984). All of these reasons led to the nearly complete decline of the described art. It was only revived in the second part of the 20th century and adapted to fit the new reality governed by the mass media. Contemporary *avadhānī*s present their skills on television and on the radio, they advertise themselves on the Internet. The mass media play the role of a new patron: they give opportunity, time and a place to show off skills, they spread practitioners' glory and, most importantly, they provide financial support. The *avadhāna* is still intellectual entertainment but access to it is easier. The *avadhānī*s enrich their presentations with additional explanations for those who are not familiar with the art and the events often start with a detailed introduction bringing the character of *avadhāna* closer. Nowadays, practitioners come up with new challenges to be incorporated into the art to make it vivid, even more variated and modernised. They showcase their skills not only in Sanskrit but also in other Indian languages, like Telugu, Kannada or Tamil. In this way *avadhānī*s contribute to cementing regional identity and constituting / nurturing community. Not coincidentally, *avadhāna*s organised during such events as the annual meetings of the Telugu Association of North America (TANA) are one of the most watched parts of the programme. The art fosters communities, groups of like-minded people who often share a linguistic identity. It also reveals the extraordinary cognitive skills of the practitioners who become recognised and praised for their proficiency and talents. In the past *avadhānī*s were mostly men of high positions, from educated families, very often from the families of professional poets, people who held high positions at the courts. Nowadays, they are respected people who have gained prestige in many cases thanks to their *avadhāna*s. Very often they are not only poets and *avadhānī*s but have other jobs and occupations to secure their financial needs. To some degree, *avadhāna* and *avadhānī*s' abilities have become a product which, as we will see, corresponds to its classification within liminoid phenomena.

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at the one sitting [...]» but «twenty-four was about the maximum of new items that could be retained and the remainder must have been already known to the pandit» (Wood 1945, 129).

4. *Avadhāna* as a Liminoid Practice

The above description of *avadhāna* and its practitioners helps to place the art in the conglomerate of such categories as performance, ritual, routine and tradition. Lewis noted that «one problem with the term *performance* [...] is that it can be too open – that is, it is difficult to exclude any kinds of events, since almost anything can be seen as a performance»[26]. To address this problem and to determine whether *avadhāna* should be placed within the category in question, one can refer to the study by Landis and MacAulay. The authors formulated three basic tenets characterising formalised performance: 1) location, 2) the presence of an audience / performer, 3) the role of skills / products (presented, shown, experienced or heard during a performance)[27]. Landis and MacAulay meticulously analysed these principles and pointed out the difficulties brought by the various interpretations of their application. In the case of *avadhāna* these three axioms seem to be easily definable. As was shown before, along with the development of the art, the location of *avadhāna*s changed, but the events always took and still take place in a defined space, not one chosen at random. *Avadhānī*s, being the centre of attention, demonstrate skills which, depending on the kind of tasks, may lead to the creation of a product (a poem, painting, theatrical *étude*, etc.). All of these happen in the presence of an audience. Although in the past the *avadhāna*s were not held in a public space, spectators were always involved. Even in the case of private literary meetings organised for the benefit and entertainment of selected people, for example for a closed circle of poets, the very character of *avadhāna* required the presence of questioners (*pr̥cchaka*s) who played a double role – that of spectator and examiner.

This preliminary scrutiny places the *avadhāna* in the domain of performance. But what about the other previously mentioned categories? As observed by Bell «categorization develops a dizzying momentum of its own. The plethora of "ritual spaces", as Grimes points out, demonstrates how little certainty there is "in identifying either ritual's center or boundaries"»[28]. The classic Turnerian definition of ritual presupposes the presence of preternatural entities or forces[29] but it does not exclude *avadhāna* from the domain of rite. Similarly to the views presented by other scholars of religious studies, Turner's assumption does not negate the fact that this occurrence can be limited, *e.g.* to the usage of sacral symbolism in a secular activity[30]. To answer the question as to whether the *avadhāna* can be defined as a form of rite, suffice it to consult the formal properties of collective rites proposed by Moore and Myerhoff:

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[26] Lewis 2013, 4.

[27] Landis–MacAulay 2017, 6.

[28] Bell 1992, 69.

[29] Turner 1973, 1100.

1. *repetition* – of occasion and / or content, form;
2. *acting* – self-consciousness of action;
3. *special behaviour or stylization* – the occurrence of extra-ordinary actions and symbols or the extra-ordinary usage of the common ones;
4. *order* – the organization, marking a beginning and an end, the presence of spontaneous elements only in prescribed times;
5. *evocative presentational style* – producing an attentive state of mind;
6. *the collective dimension*[31].

All of these factors play an important role in the *avadhāna*. The *avadhānī*s show their skills during the events built upon certain schemes governed by a set of rules. Challenges are completed in a certain order, allowing improvisation only in prescribed moments. The «attentive state of mind» and «the collective dimension» are the basis of *avadhāna*. The successful execution of challenges depends on the practitioner's ability to focus, and the questioners and spectators are involved in the process. The presence of *pṛcchaka*s is one of the requirements of the *avadhāna*. The audience, although it may play the role of passive onlookers, often takes an active part in the event by asking questions, reacting in a lively way to the *avadhānī*'s words or actions and even participating in the course of formulating tasks. However, it is important to emphasise that the presence of the aforementioned formal properties of collective rites in the *avadhāna* may partially result from the numerous similarities between a performance and a ritual. Both phenomena are characterised by framing, limitation of space and plural reflexivity. Other features they have in common are formalism, traditionalism, invariance or rule-governance[32].

The *avadhāna* belongs, therefore, to the complex groups of performance and ritual. Or, as a more detailed analysis of this subject reveals, to the space between them[33]. It is not a routine, since only activities devoid of ideological importance, lacking in significant (both symbolic and ritualistic) function, fall into this category. The *avadhāna*, as has been shown, symbolically affirms and reaffirms the identity of its practitioners and the culture of the social groups they belong to; it perpetuates cultural unity and has a repetitive nature which justifies calling it tradition. The art's longevity and the fact that it is invested with the need for repetition endow it with the power that influences society's perception of the described practice. They also reveal the cultural necessity of *avadhāna* and bring us back to the previously mentioned performance aims elucidated by Schechner and Appel[34].

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[30] For example, Bell (1992 and 1997), Alexander (1991), Moore and Myerhoff (1977) referred to the possible usage of sacral elements in the secular activity. Dealing with the sacred and demonic was also one of the functions of performance proposed by Schechner and Appel. Other 'overlapping spheres' they mentioned were entertaining, making something beautiful, marking or changing reality, fostering community, healing and teaching / persuading (Schechner–Appel 2006, 46).

[31] Moore–Myerhoff 1977, 7-8.

[32] Bell 1997, 138-169.

The process of classification of *avadhāna* discloses the liminoid status of the art. We speak of a rite of passage when an individual leaves one group to enter another. It happens in the course of a ceremony or ritual. The original concept of a rite of passage, as outlined by van Gennep (1977 [1960]), assumes three stages: separation, liminality, and incorporation[35]. In the first stage, an individual prepares for what comes next, symbolically or physically separates from the group that he or she belonged insofar. The liminal or transition stage occurs when a person who withdrew from the previous status is in the process of entering the new one but has not obtained this goal yet. The incorporation marks the moment when a rite of passage concludes and an individual assumes a new identity and re-enters the society with a new status. Is it possible to perceive *avadhāna* as a form of secular rite of passage? In my opinion it is. A person who wishes to become an *avadhānī* or *avadhāninī* has to prepare for this challenge. It involves studies, training of memory and concentration, and — in the case of artistic *avadhāna*s — the improvement of artistic skills. The people who wish to perform *avadhāna* have to devote a lot of time to developing their knowledge, doing various exercises (depending on the type of *avadhāna* and kinds of tasks they want to execute; for example, solving manifold literary puzzles to improve their skills in versification in the case of preparation for literary *avadhāna*), enhancing their concentration and memory through the practice of *yoga*, meditation, following a particular diet, and alike. They do not go through any particular pre-liminal rites to mark the process of separating from the current state, like in the rites of passage described by van Gennep. Nevertheless, eventually, the pretenders to the *avadhānī* or *avadhāninī* title reach the transitional moment of the first performance. It corresponds to the liminal stage of a rite of passage. The person who enters the stage no longer holds a pre-performance status. The process of studies and preparation for *avadhāna*, the announcements of the trial, the appointment of an organizing committee, inviting the audience and the guests of honour — all these are to announce that the person who is about to perform is no longer a common member of society. The person on the stage is not yet an *avadhānī* but in the process of passing over the threshold; the fact that he or she is there, claims to be ready, is elevating. The claimant to the title is already "more" than the non-*avadhānī*s. The performance is a proper transitional stage, no matter the kind of *avadhāna*. The execution of challenges proves the acquired and innate skills of an individual. With every completed task, the performer is one step closer to becoming an *avadhānī* or *avadhāninī*, slowly moves on the other side of the threshold. The whole process is overlooked by the organizing committee, host, and questioners who play the role of masters of ceremony. Slowly, the people witnessing the *avadhāna* change their perception of the performer and start to perceive him or her as the *avadhānī* / *avadhāninī*. The transitional stage of *avadhāna* culminates at the end of the event. Then, a designated person announces the completion of performance and grants the performer with the title of *avadhānī* or *avadhāninī*[36]. There is no one prescribed formula for the announcement of the title. Nevertheless, this moment is a boundary marking the end of the stage in between and symbolically changes the social status and officially recognized identity of the performer. The announcement of the title is efficacious and ritual-like, it has the power of the performative utterance stating that the person has become someone that they were not before. This transition is one of the indicators of liminality and shows why the *avadhāna* cannot be denied the liminal-like character. On the other hand, the practice is optional, it belongs to the sphere of play. The need to separate phenomena marked with the trace of liminality but not entirely embodying it (*e.g.* stage dramas) brought Turner to coin the term 'liminoid'[37] which helped to establish a relation between performance (liminoid) and ritual (liminal). Since *avadhāna* bears distinctive traits of both, it is situated somewhere on the borderline; although, in my opinion, its character is more liminoid than liminal. In fact, as Turner noticed, liminoid phenomena «are not cyclical but intermittent, generated often in times and places assigned to the leisure sphere»[38]. *Avadhāna*s can be cyclical but this is merely a result of the periodical nature of events which such performances may, but are not obliged to accompany. It cannot be ruled out that in the past, when performances were being organised mostly at courts, they had a much more cyclical character, closer to liminal than liminoid. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, no data supports this view. Moreover, it seems that the decision of putting oneself to the test and stepping into the world of *avadhāna* was always a matter of personal choice. As Turner pointed out, liminoid phenomena «are bonded more by optation, by choice than by obligation – in the liminal case, persons *have* to undergo ritual by virtue of their natal status. Competition emerges in the later liminoid domain; individuals and schools compete for the recognition of a "public" and are regarded as ludic offerings placed for sale on a free market»[39].

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[33] For more information, readers can consult Cielas 2017, which focuses exclusively on the idea of placing *avadhāna* between the categories of performance and secular ritual.

[34] See fn. 30.

[35] Van Gennep 1977, 21.

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[36] The performers may be granted also the other titles, depending on particular skills showcased during the *avadhāna*.

[37] Turner 1979, 491.

[38] *Ibid.*, 492.

5. *Conclusions*

To sum up the above analysis, *avadhāna* can be described and categorised as a tradition situated in the domain of liminoid cultural performances bearing the features of a secular ritual. The performance of the art, especially the first one, is a moment of transition for a practitioner. The event as a whole is secular but its parts and stages are ritualised which, in my opinion, justifies classifying the *avadhāna* as a kind of secular rite of passage. Furthermore, the described tradition evolved over time and in the course of its existence faced its own interim moment. Because of the manifold changes which *avadhāna* underwent at the turn of the 19th and 20th century I suggest that this period be considered as a key moment in the art's transition. It moved from the private into the public sphere and from the domain of actively participated scholarly entertainment into a passively consumed element of popular culture. These transformations did not result in a complete change of the art's status since they did not entirely exclude the parallel occurrence of events conducted in the former way. Nevertheless, they influenced the modern face of *avadhāna*. Stepping into the commercialised public sphere was a way of securing the longevity of the tradition and responding to the expectations of society. Their necessity and the rightfulness of the process are attested by the revival of *avadhāna* in the second half of the 20th century and by the growing popularity of the art creating new paths and further possibilities for its development.

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[39] *Ibid.*, 493.

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On the Threshold of Social Changes. The Translation into Sanskrit of *Choma's Drum* by K. Shivaram Karanth

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Abstract

Kota Shivaram Karanth (1902–1997) was one of the most significant and influential novelists, playwrights and conservationists of 20th century Karnataka. Inspired in his early life by the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, he took part in the Indian Independence Movement and became an activist in many fields. During the most significant stage of his career, the need for major changes in society arose amongst Indian intelligentsia. Although Karanth belonged to an orthodox Brahmin community, he openly stood up against the rigidity of Brahmanism and many traditional practices. He therefore devoted a significant part of his literary output to mirroring the tragic conditions of the lowest strata of Indian society. Karanth often emphasised the injustice of the caste system and the necessity of changing the attitude towards Dalits. The paper focuses on one of his best-known novels, whose original title is *Comana duḍi.* It was first published in 1933. The novel tells the tragic story of an untouchable bonded-labourer, who struggles with many difficulties due to his social status. It not only emphasises the urge for changes in Indian society, but also openly criticises the Brahmins, and the conviction of their superior position in society. The novel was recently (2017) translated into Sanskrit. Therefore, the language which used to be reserved for the elites of Indian society and used to maintain the traditional social hierarchy is now employed to criticise them. This fact shows that the social changes are still outgoing, puts Sanskrit in the new role of a medium of reform and raises question about its position in modern Indian society.

Keywords: modern Sanskrit, translation into Sanskrit, Dalit literature, Shivaram Karanth, Kannada literature, *Choma's Drum*.

1. *Introduction*

Comana duḍi is one of the most classic novels in Kannada literature. It was written by Kota Shivaram Karanth and published in 1933. It was translated into Hindi and English in 1978. The film based on this novel (with a script written by Shivaram Karanth himself) was released in 1975. And yet, in 2017, a translation into Sanskrit by Anantha Padmanabha Shastry called *Comasya ḍhakka* was published by Manipal University Press. One may and should ask why? Both Hindi and English are more frequently spoken languages than Sanskrit. The latter, according to the 2001 census was spoken (as a mother tongue as well as a second or third language) by 0.49% percent of the Indian population. On the contrary, English and Hindi are the two official languages of the Government of India. Therefore, translating *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit to spread it further seems pointless. However, this difficult task was undertaken and completed. Hence there must have been another reason behind this enterprise. Perhaps the aim of this publication was something other than simply translating words from one language into another.

While discussing the translation of *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit, it is important to mention the author of this novel. Shivaram Karanth was a true revolutionist and activist. He showed by his own example that even people from the most rigid and orthodox communities can be progressive and open to change.

2. *Kota Shivaram Karanth*

Kota Shivaram Karanth is unquestionably one of the most important and influential figures in the contemporary history of Karnataka. He is frequently called *Kadala tirada Bhargava*, which means 'the Paraśurāma of the seashore'[1]. The west coast of the Indian subcontinent is believed to be the creation of Paraśurāma, who threw his battle axe into the sea[2]. Moreover, Shivaram Karanth also shaped the modern Karnataka in many ways[3]. Karanth was not only a novelist but a true

[1] Ramacandran 2001, 2.

[2] According to the version of this story from the *Mahābhārata*, the land created by Paraśurāma was the Konkan coast. The Udupi district – Karanth's homeland – belongs to this region. However, in some later texts, Kerala is claimed to be the land raised from the sea by Paraśurāma. For more information about this legend and its various versions presented in different textual sources, see Vielle 2014.

[3] One would say that there is also another reason to compare Karanth with Paraśurāma. They were both Brahmins, and both did not act according to the norms for this social class.

polymath. He was also a poet, playwright, social activist, thinker, journalist, musician, and a Yakshagana[4] artist. In total, he published an awe-inspiring number of 417 books, including 47 novels, 31 plays, 9 encyclopaedias, 13 books on arts, 2 volumes of poems and 40 books for children. Shivaram Karanth received many prestigious awards, among which the most important are the Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Academy Award, Pampa Award and the Swedish Academy Award. In 1968 he received the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian award in the Republic of India, even though not long after he returned it in protest against the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975[5].

Shivaram Karanth was born in 1902 in Kota near Udupi in Karnataka. He came from an orthodox and traditional community of Kota Brahmins[6]. During the time of his youth, India began to change. The need arose amongst Indian intelligentsia to create an independent country and to bring about major changes in society. As a young man, he was inspired by the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and he dropped out of college in order to fully devote himself to the Non-cooperation Movement. Despite his family's objections, Karanth was engaged in the struggle for independence of India as well as for changes in Indian society. He started to educate people about hygiene, health and the harms of superstitions, alcoholism, and prostitution. The atmosphere of those times influenced not only Karanth's activities as a social reformer, but also as a writer. He openly stood up against the discrimination against Dalits and the caste system, which is demonstrated not only in his books and articles, but also by his own example.

Shivaram Karanth's life is definitely situated in liminal space. He was not only a Brahmin who fought for the rights of Dalits, but even though he belonged to the highest social strata, he also suffered because of the caste system. In 1936 he married Leela Alva, a girl belonging to the Bunt[7] community. The inter-caste marriage caused an outburst of anger in the traditional and rigid local society. Karanth and his wife were ridiculed and despised in person, as well as in the press. He even sued one of those journalists for defamation and won a case against him[8].

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[4] Traditional South Indian form of theatre, which originated from the Udupi region in Karnataka, it combines unique music, dance, stage techniques and costumes. Dr Shivaram Karanth was one of the greatest populators of this form of theatre. Apart from many articles, he wrote two books on this subject.

[5] Ranganatha Rao 2004, 5.

[6] Kota Brahmins form a sub-caste concentrated mostly around Kota village, in the Udupi region in South Karnataka. They are followers of the *smarta* tradition. They consider their family deity – Ugranarasiṃha as their only *guru*. Despite living for many generations in a region called Tulu Nadu, where the most commonly spoken language is Tulu, they use a variant of Kannada. Cf. Abhishankar 1973, 108-110; Siraj 2012, 178-179.

[7] Bunts are an Indian caste traditionally living on the south coast of Karnataka. In the north part of South Karnataka they are also known as Nadavas. Although they originate from a former military class, their traditional occupation is agriculture and they are the chief landowners in the

3. Choma's Drum

Choma's Drum is one of the most important works by Shivaram Karanth. The book tells the story of Choma[9] – a widowed Dalit from a Mari Holeya[10] caste, who lives with his four sons and a daughter in south Karnataka. He is a bonded-laborer, connected for generations to his landlord's family. He therefore needs his master's permission to work anywhere else. Although he works hard in his landlord's fields, he can barely manage to support his family. He has two passions in his life – drinking toddy, a local alcohol and playing his drum, which is the only way he can express his feelings. Choma also has a dream – to own or rent some land and to be able to work it himself. However, it is not such a simple wish as it seems to be. Local tradition forbids the members of low castes to farm land. It is believed that this would cause the soil to become barren. He keeps asking his landlord for a strip of land, but his request is constantly rejected. However, Choma still hopes to fulfil his dream and for this reason, he keeps a pair of bullocks he had found abandoned in the forest.

In order to pay his debts, Choma sends his two sons to work on a distant coffee estate. Neither returns home – one dies of cholera and the other converts to Christianity, marries a Christian girl and abandons his family. Choma therefore sends his daughter to the estate to work to help him pay his debts. The girl is abused by the owner of the plantation and one of his workers. One day, after being raped,

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region. Bunts are the second class in the social hierarchy after Brahmins. They follow the *aliya-santāna* – matrilineal system of property inheritance. The community is divided into 93 clans and into 52 balis. Cf. Bhat 1998, 212; Siraj 2012, 179.

[8] Ramacandran 2001, 15.

[9] I apply the anglicised form of the hero's name, in accordance with the English title of this novel (English translation by U. L. Kalkur, 1978).

[10] Mari Holeya is a subdivision of the Holeya community, who were considered as untouchables and the lowest class in the social hierarchy of Karnataka. The other important groups among Holeyas are Pombada, Bakuda or Mundala, Koragar and Nalke – the group with the lowest position even among other Holeyas. Holeyas worship a village deity Mariyamma and Bhūtas. Most of them follow the *aliya-santāna* – matrilineal system of inheritance. Gurikas – the heads of the castes perform all rituals for them. During festivals, Holeyas play their traditional instruments – drums called *dhudi*. Bhat 1998, 26; Siraj 2012, 182-183.

she is told that the debt is paid off and that she can return home. In the meantime, Choma loses his youngest son. The boy drowns while bathing in the river. Although there are plenty of people around, no one helps him because it is forbidden to touch an *avarṇa* man. Only one young Brahmin is ready to help him, however, he is stopped by the others. In this tragic scene, Karanth gives his readers a glimmer of hope, showing that the younger generation is willing to change cruel traditions, but is currently restrained by the elders.

Choma also considers converting to Christianity which would give him an opportunity to escape the caste system. What is more, he would receive a strip of land from the missionaries. This fact convinces him and he sets off for a church. However, on the way, he starts to hesitate. He is truly devoted to his deity Panjurli[11] and feels that this would be betraying him. Moreover, Choma does not want to escape from his Dalit identity, he wants to be respected and treated with dignity for who he is. He therefore returns home, but as he enters his hut, he discovers that his daughter has been having an affair with a worker from the estate. Enraged, he throws her out, chases his pair of bullocks away and locks himself inside his hut. Then he gets drunk and plays furiously on his drum till the morning, when he dies.

4. *General Remarks on Dalit Literature*

Dalit literature is an important stream of Indian writing present in most Indian languages, as well as in English. There are two approaches related to what can be called with this therm. According to an earlier formulation, it was the literature concerning Dalits and their lives. The second and more recent approach restricts this term to the literature written about Dalits, by Dalits, and with Dalit consciousness[12].

Dalit literature emerged after India's independence, when education and democratic ideas, reached many strata of Indian society. Humanistic ideas, such as equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice, spread among the nation. At the same time, discriminatory and unjust rules continued to exist in Indian society. It fuelled the feelings of dissatisfaction, injustice, and pain among the lowest social strata. Numerous people, who hoped that with independence and the new constitution, problems such as poverty and inequality would be solved, were disappointed. Thus, the educated Dalit youth wanted to express their anger against the established unjust social order in their literature[13].

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[11] Panjurli is one of the most important *bhūta*s worshipped in the southern region of Karnataka. He is imagined in various forms from a raging wild boar to a princely deity riding a boar. Cf. Dallapiccola 2007, 55.

[12] Limbale 2004, 19.

Dalit writers broke with Hindu culture and tradition, as closely connected to the caste system, which caused their ancestors to be deprived of power, property, and position. The fundamental purpose of Dalit authors is to inform about social injustice and inspire social transformation. Hence, numerous writers reject traditional aesthetics and think that their literature should be rather analysed from a sociological perspective. Dalit writers do not write to entertain or please the reader, but rather to inform him about the injustice and suffering and induce an urge for changes in society. A common feature of Dalit works is that they are often created based on the personal experiences of their authors. Writers stress aspects of society, which should be revolted against and rejected. They react bitterly to Sanskrit literature, especially to Hindu religious works, because they supported the caste system or portrayed the lower groups of society in a wrong way. They rarely employ religious symbols and references, and if they do, they usually deconstruct them and give them a new message and purpose[14].

5. Choma's Drum *as Liminal Novel*

Not only can Karanth's life be described as situated in liminal space, but the same would apply to his novel. In actual fact, it is not clear if *Choma's drum* can be called Dalit literature: *Choma's Drum* can be regarded as an example of Dalit literature, only according to the earlier approach, above mentioned. However, the fact of translating this novel into Sanskrit places it in a more ambiguous collocation. A preface written in Sanskrit by Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya has been added to the Sanskrit translation of *Choma's drum*. He also raises the issue of the situation of Dalits and the monopolism of the Sanskrit language.

Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya is a Sanskrit scholar from Udupi, Karnataka, who has also done much work in the field of popularising Sanskrit literature and Sanskrit as a language. Apart from being a specialist in Indian philosophy, he is the author of the translations of many important Sanskrit works into Kannada. These include Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam,* Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakatika* and Bhavabhūti's *Uttarāmacharita.* Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya is also the coauthor of the scripts for two films, both directed by G. V. Iyer[15], *Adi Shankaracachararya*[16] and *Madhvacharya*[17]. Both films concentrate on narrating the life story of two important Indian philosophers. The first of the two is noteworthy as it is the first film in Indian cinema history to be made in Sanskrit and Dr Bannanje Govindacarya is the author of its dialogues. He is therefore undoubtedly a pioneer in the popularisation of the Sanskrit language in contemporary India. It can be assumed that the project of translating Karanth's novel into Sanskrit was very close to his views and interests.

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[13] *Ibid.* 23-25.

[14] *Ibid.* 30-39.

In the preface to the Sanskrit translation to *Comana duḍi,* Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya mentions the problems of the miserable situation of Dalits at the beginning of the 20th century and the importance of Karanth's book. He also praises the Sanskrit translator of *Comana duḍi,* Kokkada Anantapadmanabha Shastry and comments on the translating issues the latter had to tackle during his work. In the penultimate paragraph of the preface, Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya raises the issue of the popularisation of Sanskrit among every class of Indian society:

> *gairvāṇī vāṇī brāhmaṇāṃ svam iti kecana paṇḍitamānino bhārtīyā vibabhramuḥ / diṣṭyā seyaṃ bhāṣā samprati comasyāpi bhāṣā babhūva / yasya kasyāpi viṣayasya jātiparicchinnatayaiva parimarśo 'dhunātanānāṃ cintakānām ajāyur āmayaḥ / kiṃ karaṇīyam? etādr̥śānāṃ rujāyā nāsty auṣadham / etādr̥kṣu nikṣiptacakṣur upaniṣad evam ujjughoṣa – avidyāyāmantare vartamānāḥ svayaṃ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitammanyamānāḥ / dandramyamāṇāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ //*[18].

> "Divine speech is Brahmins' property" – some Indians, who considered themselves as learned, said these words. Luckily now this language has become Choma's language. The consideration of any issue through the caste division is

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[15] Ganapathi Venkataramana Iyer (1917–2003) was an Indian director, screenwriter, actor and film producer from Karnataka, known also as 'Kannada Bheeshma'. He is best known for being the first director to make a movie in Sanskrit – *Adi Shankaracachararya* (1983). In 1993 he directed his second film in Sanskrit – *Bhagavad Gita*.

[16] The Sanskrit film *Adi Shankaracarya* tells the story and teachings of an 8th-century philosopher Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. It was received very well and won four awards at the 31st National Film Awards – the most notable and prestigious award ceremony in India. It received awards in the following categories: Best Film, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography and Best Audiography. The film was produced by the National Film Development Corporation of India – an institution founded to support Indian Cinema and improve its quality. It is subject to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India.

[17] The Kannada film *Madhavacarya* tells the history and teachings of a 13th-century Hindu philosopher Madhavācarya. It won the National Award for the Best Music Director.

[18] Govindacarya 2017, VIII. This verse comes from *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1. 2. 5

> a non-medical sickness of modern thinkers. But what is to be done? For this kind of people there is no cure for [their] disease: The Upanishadic "eye opener" proclaimed to them:
> «Living among ignorance, considering themselves as wise and learned men, confused people run to and fro and go round, just like blind men led by a blind man»[19].

These words show that Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya is clearly against any restrictions toward using and learning Sanskrit. According to him, it should not be limited to any group and even people of low origin, in terms of the caste system, like Choma, should be able to claim it as their own cultural and historical background. He offers very harsh words for those who claim their right to monopolise Sanskrit and keep the restrictions of the caste system in modern Indian society. At the same time, he admits, that there are some people who deny this to people from lower social strata.

At the end of the preface Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya expresses a hope:

> *nirmatsarāṇāṃ satāṃ śrīmān śāstrī priyo bhavati / vidyā ca vinayaśca taṃ parasparaṃ spardhamānāv iva bhūṣayataḥ /abhivardhatāṃ gīrvāṇabhāṣāpoṣaṇī sāhityavarivasyā tasyābhīkṣṇaṃ / abhivardhatāṃ saṃskr̥tabhāratī iti śam /*[20].
>
> Dear Mister Śastry is one of the unselfish and honest people. Knowledge and discipline as if competing with each other adorn him. May his devotion to literature that nourishes the Sanskrit language constantly increase. May Sanskrit speech prosper happily.

Dr. Bannanje Govindacarya emphasises that a project such as this translation is very beneficial for Sanskrit, it enriches this language and shows new possibilities for it to last and thrive in the modern world.

In the Sanskrit translation of *Comana duḍi*, there is also a short introduction written by its translator, Kokkada Ananta Padmanabha Shastry. In this preface, he summarises the plot of the novel and reveals some interesting facts about the project of translating it.

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[19] All the translations from Sanskrit are mine unless otherwise stated.

[20] Govindacarya 2017, VIII.

> *prāyaḥ trayastriṃśadvarṣebhyaḥ pūrvam ahaṃ śrī śivarāmakārantāt* comana duḍi *kādambarīm*[21] *anuvādayitum anumatiṃ prārthatavān / so ’vadat “anumatiṃ dāsyāmi, tāṃ kaḥ prakaṭīkariṣyati” iti / aham anuvādaṃ kṛtavān /*[22].

> Perhaps thirty-three years ago I asked Mr. Shivaram Karanth for permission to translate the novel *Comana duḍi.* He said: “I will give permission to the one, who presents it”. I have translated it.

Kokkada Ananta Padmanabha Shastry reveals that Shivarama Karanth knew about his intention to translate this novel. Unfortunately, he died before the translator finished his task and the author was unable to approve it himself. However, Kokkada Ananta Padmanabha Shastry pursued his intention and found a way to publish his work.

6. *Translation of* Choma's Drum *into Sanskrit and the Dalit Identity*

Sanskrit has always had a special place on the linguistic map of India. It became the language of refined and sophisticated elites, literature, religion, and science. As a “language of gods”, it was closely connected to religious practices. It was a universal medium for exchanging thoughts, knowledge, and expressing emotions between speakers of different vernacular languages. Thousands of manuscripts concerning very different subjects were created in Sanskrit – a great number of them have still to be published. It also became a language of politics and as such travelled to the courts of Southeast Asia and some parts of Central Asia. From the beginning of the common era to the 14th century, inscriptions in Sanskrit were spread all over India and beyond. This so-called “public poetry” occurred in the area between Kabul and Java. These inscriptions not only had a political character, but also a poetic value and they belong to the history of Sanskrit poetry, too[23].

At the beginning of the second millennium, vernacular languages grew as literary languages and started to challenge Sanskrit in this field as well as in that of politics. However, the importance of “the language of Gods” still was and is huge. It remains the language of rituals and its literature has never ceased to be created. Modern poets’ works concern many subjects which are not typical for traditional *kāvya.* Through the centuries, Sanskrit, although it was hardly anyone’s mother tongue, was constantly developing. It interacted with other languages and literary cultures of India influencing them and, vice versa, was enriched by them. That is why Sanskrit has become an important element of culture also in South India.

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[21] The use of the word *kādambarī* in the sense of a novel is noteworthy here.

[22] Anantha Padmanabha Shastry 2017, X.

[23] Pollock 1995.

Today Hindi is the most-spoken language in India. However, the efforts to make it the national language or the only official language of India have never succeeded. Each attempt to impose Hindi on the whole of India evoked large and violent protests in southern states. South Indians were and still are afraid that their culture and their role in the country would be diminished. They therefore objected even to the introduction of making the learning of Hindi compulsory in all schools in India. However, such attempts are constantly being made. The last one happened in 2019, when Bharatiya Janata Party proposed the draft education policy recommending the use of a three-language formula from the primary schools onwards. The three-language formula was adopted by the India Parliament in 1968, however, it was not introduced in Tamil Nadu. This state follows two language policy, according to which Tamil and English are compulsory taught in schools. The three-language formula project involves teaching Hindi, English and one other modern Indian language in the Hindi-speaking states. In the non-Hindi speaking states, Hindi learning was proposed to be made mandatory besides a regional language and English. The proposal of introducing it caused an instant uproar in Tamil Nadu[24]. Therefore, there is a rather reluctant attitude towards Hindi in South India. As far as Sanskrit is concerned the situation is very different. In fact, a trend to make Sanskrit films has recently emerged in South India. Since 2015 numerous Sanskrit films have been made in India, most of them in Kerala[25].

Interestingly, nowadays English seems to be the modern lingua franca of India but it is the mother tongue of hardly any Indians. However, contrary to Sanskrit, it was never associated with a particular religion or caste and there were no

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24. Mariappan 2020.

25. After the *Bhagavadgītā* by G. V. Iyer was released in 1993, there were no new films in Sanskrit until 2015. Then a film called *Priyamanasam* directed by Vinod Mankara based on the life of an 18th-century poet from Kerala named Unnayi Variyar was released. In 2016 the audience saw another Sanskrit film *Ishti*, which is the first Sanskrit film to deal with a social theme. It tells the story of a family of Nambudiri Brahmins and criticises their orthodox and patriarchal traditions. One year later, the film *Anurakhti* was announced as the first Sanskrit film with song and shot in 3D, and the film *Suryakantha* was advertised as the first Sanskrit film set in contemporary times. 2019 brought another Sanskrit movie: *Madhurasmitham* – the first Sanskrit film for children. It was based on the book *Wings of Fire: An Autobiography of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam* – autobiography of Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam the 11th president of India. In 2020 *Punyakoti* was made – the first animated Sanskrit film. A number of recently released films in Sanskrit, along with the variety of subjects presented in them, show that the trend of making Sanskrit films is growing.

restrictions in learning it. As Salman Rushdie noticed: «After spending quite some time in South India, I've become convinced that English is an essential language in India, not only because of its technical vocabularies and the international communication which it makes possible, but also simply to permit two Indians to talk to each other in a tongue which neither party hates» [26].

It must be also noted, that the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and his administration give great importance to promote and revive Sanskrit in India. The Prime Minister in his speeches often has stressed the cultural importance of this language. Ever since the BJP came to power in 2014 there has been an emphasis on learning Sanskrit at all levels of education. Special emphasis is placed on presenting it as the language of science and learning, suitable also for speaking about modern technology[27]. In 2020 three Sanskrit universities have been upgraded to the status of central university by the Indian Parliament. What is more, Sanskrit is perceived by Hindutva activists as «a symbol for unifying Hindus around Hindutva»[28]. It is significant, that Hindutva is not interested in Sanskrit as a medium of ancient literature, but rather considers it as a device to promote a Hindu supremacist agenda[29].

But there is also another "liminal factor" which should be stressed in connection with the translation of *Comana duḍi.* Sanskrit has always been a language of the religious, intellectual and political elites and never a language of the masses. The privilege to learn and speak it was determined by one's birth. Being at the very bottom of the caste system, Dalits were excluded from any chance of gaining knowledge of it and participating in its culture. They were prohibited from learning it, because it was believed that their impurity would affect and injure the power of the Sanskrit words[30]. In practice it was limited to twice-born men (from an upper strata of society)[31]. But thanks to this translation, Dalit literature or, more precisely, a novel about Dalits aspires to the realm of Sanskrit culture. In the past such aspirations of Dalits were hardly possible.

Translating *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit, which is still regarded as the language of gods, the language of high culture and the language of elites was not motivated by a will to promote this novel. It was done rather to achieve other mostly symbolical goals. The first of these is to give Dalits the right to fully participate in

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[26] Rushdie 1991, 65.
[27] Vajpeyi 2016, 49-50.
[28] Truschke 2020, 6
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] Doniger 2014, 510.
[31] Ramaswamy 1999, 339-381.

Indian culture and history. Sanskrit is undoubtedly an essential element in both of them. Thus, as already noticed, Sanskrit works were not greatly appreciated by Dalit writers. On the contrary, Sanskrit literature was considered as a means to legitimize the system of oppression against them. They often reject the Sanskritised culture and Hindu tradition.

Translation such novel into Sanskrit shows that every stratum of Indian society is equally entitled to use this language and there is nothing wrong when Dalits use it. In fact, giving Dalits the right to speak the language which was regarded as belonging to Brahmins has stressed that both groups should be viewed as equal.

Nowadays Dalits are allowed to learn Sanskrit, but it is still not easy for them. The autobiographical essay *The story of My 'Sanskrit'* by Kumud Pawde tells about her struggle to learn this language. Born in 1938 to a poor family of Dalit labourers inspired by Ambedkar, she was encouraged to attend school and learn Sanskrit in spite of the discrimination and humiliation she faced. Pawde managed to complete her MA studies in Sanskrit and wanted to work as a teacher. However, because of her Dalit origins, she heard many times that she could not teach Sanskrit. She remained unemployed until her inter-caste marriage, when she changed her surname[32]. Although she became a role model and inspiration for many, there are still cases of Dalit children who are not accepted in the Sanskrit school because of their caste[33].

As Sheldon Pollock noticed «We may unhesitatingly grant the premise that classical culture, Sanskrit for example, offers at one and the same time a record of civilization and a record of barbarism, of extraordinary inequality and other social poisons»[34]. For centuries laws responsible for the discrimination and underprivileged situation of Dalits were based on Sanskrit texts, to which only members of upper classes had access. Deprived of the right to even learn this language, Dalits were efficiently excluded from taking part in this discourse. In the same paragraph, Pollock suggested a possible way to change this situation: «You cannot simply go around a tradition to overcome it, if that is what you wish to do; you must go through it. You only transform a dominant culture by outsmarting it»[35]. In my opinion, translating a novel exposing the miserable situation of Dalits and the need for change into Sanskrit is exactly a way to "outsmart tradition". The language that used to be a carrier of harmful customs and traditions, through this book became a language fighting against them. *Comana duḍi's* translation stands exactly on the border between caste divisions, engaged literature and the poetic search for a new means of expression, such a characteristic feature of Sanskrit poetry.

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[32] Pawde 1994, 24-34.

[33] Sunar 2019.

[34] Pollock 2011, 39.

[35] Pollock 2011, 39.

In ancient and early medieval India Sanskrit was the language of science, religion, politics and therefore the majority of the most important works for Indian culture were written in it. Even outside India it was used in the royal courts. Thanks to Sanskrit, texts gained more importance and prestige. Therefore, the translation of *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit may be considered as giving more emphasis to this book and its message – the fight against the discrimination of Dalit. Is this needed in modern India, when the caste system is legally banished? One might think that the situation of Dalits has remarkably improved since 1933 when *Choma's drum* was published. In fact, the Indian constitution outlaws the discrimination of Dalits as well as the practise of untouchability. In 1989 another law was introduced to protect them from offence. However, recent reports show that caste discrimination in India still exists. Nowadays, discrimination against Dalits has decreased in urban regions and public sphere. While some Dalits are successfully integrated into Indian society in cities, where caste origin is less visible, the discrimination continues to persist in rural areas and private sphere. In villages, caste origin is more obvious and Dalits frequently remain excluded from local religious life, although some evidence indicates that this exclusion is decreasing[36].

According to the 2011–2012 survey, 27% of Indians did practise untouchability in some form. The study shows that the attitude towards Dalits does not depend on economic status. The group which is the most biased against Dalits are Brahmins. However, discrimination is less common among educated families[37]. Thus, there is still a need to promote equality among Indians and to educate people about Dalits' rights. Even if this translation is addressed to a very small group of people, it is still a symbol showing that Dalits have a place in Indian society, history and culture.

7. *Conclusions*

The translating of *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit seems to really suit the values in which Shivaram Karanth believed. As a social activist he promoted the need for equal rights among all Indians. He was not scared of controversy and he did not let traditions and harmful superstition stop him from his work or have an impact on his personal life. *Comasya ḍhakka* may also be regarded as a controversial issue by some rigid conservatives. However, it is precisely because of its revolutionary character that it may have a chance to draw attention and make a difference.

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[36] Dasgupta 2010.

[37] Chishthi 2014.

The translation of *Choma's drum* into Sanskrit also makes an impact on modern Sanskrit literature. Of course, *Comasya ḍhakka* is not the first translation from other languages into Sanskrit. The adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramas is especially famous. However, *Comasya ḍhakka* still shows new possibilities for contemporary writers. The novel is not a frequent genre among Sanskrit writing just as the life of Dalits is not a common theme. This case proves that there are new opportunities, which may be explored by contemporary Sanskrit authors.

The role of Sanskrit in modern India has been changed. Although it was used as a tool to oppress Dalits, it has now been employed to promote equality among Indians. In many cases it is still not available for the whole of society, but it is no longer a privilege reserved for particular groups. *Comasya ḍhakka* shows that Sanskrit is nowadays in the liminal state between a language that belongs to the elites and a language available to all Indians who want to learn it and accept it as part of their own heritage.

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Bengali Travel Writers of the Mid-20th Century in Search of an Asian Identity

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Abstract

This article looks into two Bengali travelogues, Syed Mujtaba Ali's *Deśe Bideśe* and *Jāpāne* by Annada Shankar Ray, to examine the identity transformation of travellers who undertook journeys from India to other Asian countries in the mid-20th century. Both writers, a Bengali Muslim in Afghanistan and a Bengali Hindu in Japan, find themselves in spaces alien to them, but as they keep discovering common history, culture and values of Asian societies they develop a strong sense of belonging. Encounters with people and historical artefacts inspire them to reflect on their own cultural identity. The article argues that the selected narratives can be read in the light of Pan-Asianism, a discourse that gained popularity in India in the first half of the century, and that Pan-Asianism itself can be considered an intellectual outcome of the liminal experience of societies undergoing rapid transformation during the fall of colonialism.

Keywords: Indian travel literature, Bengali travel literature, Pan-Asianism, liminality, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Annada Shankar Ray.

1. *Introduction*

Throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century Western Europe remained the most desired foreign destination for Indian travellers[1]. However, rising anti-colonial sentiment made some eager to seek different routes or rediscover old ones. Among such travellers were Syed Mujtaba Ali (Saiẏed Mujtabā Ālī) and Annada

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[1] Sen 2005, 6.

Shankar Ray (Annadāśankar Rāẏ) who went to Afghanistan and Japan – countries that at some point in history were closer geographically and culturally to India than England or France, but which more recently had not been attracting similar crowds of Indian visitors as Europe. This article will look into Ali's travelogue *Deśe Bideśe* (*Home and abroad*) and Ray's *Jāpāne* (*In Japane*) to examine their changing attitude towards fellow Asians and the identity transformation the travellers experience during their journeys. It will argue that the period when they wrote their accounts, the mid-20th century, can be identified as a liminal era when societies and individuals were forced to rethink their identities amid a rapidly changing political landscape, driving some to embrace ideas such as Pan-Asianism.

The term liminality, initially used by Arnold van Gennep to analyse transition rites in traditional societies, was later adapted by Victor Turner to examine various cultural, social and political phenomena. Turner defines a liminal state as «betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial»[2]. In this transitional stage which leads to a change or transformation, the liminal entities form «unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals»[3]. Recently Bjorn Thomassen proposed his typology of liminal situations[4] arguing that the term can apply to experiences of single individuals, social groups but also of entire nations or civilisations. They can happen in the timeframe of moments, longer periods or epochs, in spaces as diverse as specific places, buffer zones or regions.

2. *Pan-Asianism in India*

The fall of colonialism in Asia constituted a long political, economic and cultural process, and although it might be considered an era of liberation and hope, it also brought instability and insecurity. Borders shifted. Identities and loyalties were questioned. Countries and individuals remained in the transition period. From this liminal experience new visions of the world emerged to replace old ones. One of them was Pan-Asianism, the ideology or discourse «claiming that Asia can be defined and understood as a homogenous space with shared and clearly defined characteristics»[5].

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[2] Turner 1991, 95.

[3] *Ibid.*, 96.

[4] Thomassen 2014, 90.

One of the most influential Indian thinkers of this time to advocate for Asian unity was Rabindranath Tagore, an outspoken critic of nationalism and imperialism[6]. Fascination with Japan or China and in general with Indian influences in Asia was a larger phenomenon among Bengali intellectuals in the early 20th century[7] but Tagore, with his numerous journeys across the continent, stood firmly as the greatest champion of Pan-Asianism. He travelled to Japan, Persia, Iraq and South-East Asia searching for a glimpse of shared cultural heritage, *i.e.* the legacy of Buddhism and Hinduism in the East and South-East Asia[8]. He calls the journey to Persia «my pilgrimage»[9] claiming a common ancestry of Indians and Persians, as well as acknowledging the contribution of Persians to the South Asian cultural landscape.

Tagore elaborates on the future of the world in a number of his writings and speeches, often focusing on the role of Asia in the new world order and envisaging glorious years ahead. At the same time he firmly believes that he lives in an in-between period of historic shift. He writes in his letters from Persia in 1932:

> Today we are born at the end of an epoch in the history of humanity. Perhaps in the drama of Europe the scene is being changed for the fifth act of the play. Signs of an awakening in Asia have slowly spread from one end of the horizon to the other. [...]. If the new age has indeed come to Asia, then let Asia give voice to it in the own special idiom of civilisation[10].

However, for Asia to succeed in the future, it must look back at and learn from its distant past, ancient times, when all the regions of the continent remained connected and lived peacefully, exchanging ideas and goods. India must work towards the re-establishment of this lost link[11]. In a speech in Singapore in 1927 Tagore calls upon his fellow Asians to awake:

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5. Stolte–Fischer-Tiné 2012, 65.
6. Sen 2010, 63-74.
7. Gooptu 2018, 200.
8. Bose 2011, 13-15.
9. Tagore 2003, 33.
10. Tagore 2010, 28-29.
11. Lahiri 2013, 140.

> We have our common interest in a new era of rejuvenation for this ancient continent whose children we both claim to be – a continent which once was the cradle of great civilisations and the source of the streams of spiritual truth which still feed the life of the greater part of the human world and therefore we in the name of Mother Asia have come to lay our claim to you – the inheritors of a luminously glorious past that has given to man profound systems of philosophy, high codes of social and political ethics, a profuse wealth of inventions and creations of beauty that have their endless inspiration for all time to come. We have come to ask you to awake into a full consciousness of the great personality of your race and lead it to a future which will rescue Asia from its age-long humiliation of obscurity[12].

Although undoubtedly an influential figure Tagore was not the first and not the only Indian opinion-maker advocating for Asian unity. The discourse remained a part of mainstream political thought in the interwar period, with India soon claiming to be the leading force in the Pan-Asian movement[13]. However vague or incoherent the ideology might be, it seemed appealing in this liminal era when the old world order was crumbling.

3. *Search for an Asian Identity in Bengali Travel Writing*

Besides prominent figures like Tagore, other Indians travelled to Asian countries and subsequently wrote their accounts of their journeys. As a young graduate Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904–1974) worked as a teacher in a college in Kabul in the late 1920s. After spending a year and a half in Afghanistan, he later took more than a decade to finalise his memoirs, published in 1948 as *Deśe Bideśe* (translated into English as *In a Land Far from Home*). Annada Shankar Ray (1904–2002), a renowned writer, attended an international literary conference in 1957 and extended his stay to see a bit more of Japan. His book *Jāpāne* was released the following year. Both travelogues are now considered Bengali travel writing classics[14].

At first glance Afghanistan and Japan seem exotic to the travellers. Ali describes the Afghan landscape: «You would not be able to spot, even with the most powerful binoculars, a single green leaf in this land through which we were travelling. All you could see was thick turfs of burnt yellow dry grass on the rock faces, here and there»[15]. Ray, on the other hand, is a bit afraid of typhoons and earthquakes[16]. The language barrier is a challenge for Ray while Ali speaks Persian and apart from a few awkward moments generally easily communicates with the Kabulis.

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[12] *Ibid.*, 151-152.

[13] Stolte–Fischer-Tiné 2012, 75.

[14] Rabbi 2013, 208.

However, both narratives are dominated not by the feeling of alienation but by the sense of belonging. Ali and Ray mention common challenges facing their homeland and the countries they visit such as the fight for political and cultural recognition in the world and standing up to colonial powers or Europe more in general. Ray invokes the Russo-Japanese war of 1905: «I was born in the year of Japan-Russia war. It was Japan who won, but we too felt so proud. Have you seen that? Asia defeated Europe!»[17]. It is worth pointing out that the Japanese victory gave a significant boost to the pan-Asian movement at the time[18]. Later Ray adds with pity: «Growing up I focused on the West, not on the East. I was thinking and reading about America and Europe. I did not look eastward»[19]. The changed context of newfound independence requires one to become familiar with the rest of the continent, he claims. Meanwhile Ali, leaves a couple of unfavourable comments on the Europeans and especially the British in his account *i.e.*, «You could not explain the attitude of the British minister without mentioning this sense of "snobbery" and the idea of "nobility"»[20]. The image of Afghanistan he paints is of a melting pot of Asia, where many cultural influences and ethnicities meet, and of a country of fierce people who would not refrain from unimaginable violence if attacked or invaded[21]. On the other hand, Ray emphasises that Japan was able to stand up to the European powers because it succeeded in modernising itself economically and culturally and emerged as one of the most successful countries in the world[22].

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15. Ali 2015, 43. Ali 2018, 46: *Ekhan bās yācche yekhān diẏe sekhān theke dūbin diẏe tākāleo ekṭi pātā paryanta cokhe paṛe nā. Thākār madhye āche ekhāne-okhāne pātharer gāẏe halde ghāser paũc.*

16. Ray 1959, 5.

17 *Ibid.*, 11: *Ruśjāpānī juddha ye bachar haẏ se bachar āmār janma. Jāpāner jaẏgarbe āmrāo garbī haẏechilum. Dekhcho to! Eśiẏā hāriẏe dila Iuropke!*

18. Stolte–Fischer-Tiné 2012, 69.

19. Ray 1959, 12: *Baṛa hate hate āmi kintu pūbamukho nā haẏe paścimmukho haẏe uṭhi. Takhan Āmerikār kathā bhābi, Iuroper kathā paṛi. Pūbadike tākāine.*

20. Ali 2015, 243. Ali 2018, 213: *Iṁrejer ei 'abhijātye', ei 'snabāri' chāṛā anya kono kichu diẏe Britiś rājdūter manobr̥ttir yuktiyukta artha karā yāẏ nā.*

21. Rabbi 2013, 208.

22. Ray 1959, 31.

However, instead of elaborating on the wrongdoings of colonialism both authors focus on how much Asians from different regions have in common. The similarities they identify are of two kinds: shared history or cultural heritage and common values and patterns of daily life. Forgotten routes and a mutual past across Asia fascinate them. Mujtaba Ali explains to his readers: «The history of Afghanistan's north, meaning Balkh and Badakshan, was linked to Turkistan beyond Amu Daria river in Central Asia (Bakshu in Sanskrit); the western region of Herat had connections with Iran; and the east, meaning Kabul and Jalalabad, was intrinsically linked with India and Kashmir's history»[23]. He picks various examples of historical figures, events and cultural phenomena to prove his argument: Alexander the Great, Gandhara art, Buddhism, Islam and above all Emperor Babur whose memoirs he reads on the way. He criticises Indian historians for «putting a big full stop» at one point of the common past of the regions and ignoring the Muslim heritage in India[24]. Although Ali identifies as Muslim, he considers all elements of South Asian cultural heritage his own. And this is clearly shown in his recollection of an Indian concert in Kabul:

> In a booming voice he sang, "Jawan shawam. I will be young again, I will regain my youth if only I get a kiss". The room was filled with mad dancing – I could see Shiva dancing with Parvati, breaking his meditation. One boom after another – "Jawan Shawam, jawan shawam". That was not the old man with his sitar, it was like the Mongol dancers who were jumping, drawing lines in the air with their legs, thrusting our their chests, creating a whirlpool with their long hair. I saw Shah Jahan coming out of the Taj Mahal with Mumtaz, holding hands. They were young again, ending their centuries of separation[25].

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[23] Ali 2015, 87. Ali 2018, 84-85: *Āphgānisthāner uttar bhāg arthāt Balkh-Badakhśāner itihās tār sīnanta nadī Āmudariẏār (Grik Akṣus, saṁskr̥ta Bakṣu) opārer Turkisthāner saṅge, paśchimbhāg arthāt Hirāt añcal Irāner saṅge, pūrbabhāg arthāt Kābul Jalālābād Khās Bhāratbarṣa o Kaśmīrer itihāser saṅge miśe giẏe nānā yuge nānā raṅ dhareche.*

[24] Ali 2015, 89.

[25] Ali 2015, 138. Ali 2018, 122: *Hunkār diẏe geẏe uṭhlen, 'Joẏan śaom. Tāhale āmi joẏan haba - ekṭi cumban pele luptu yauban phire pāba'. Sabhāsthal yena tāṇḍab nr̥tye bhare uṭhla – dekhi Śankar yena tapasyā śeṣe Pārbatīke niẏe unmatta nr̥tye mete uṭhechen. Hunkārer par hunkār – 'Joẏān śaom', 'joẏān śaom'. Kothāẏ br̥ddha setārer ustād – dekhi sei joẏān maṅgol. Lāph diẏe tin hāt upare uṭhe śūnye du-pā diẏe ghanghan ḍherā kāṭche, ār du-hāt mele buk cetiẏe māthā pichane chū̃ṛe kālo bābri culer ābarter ghūrṇi lāgiẏeche. Dekhi Tājmahaler darjā diẏe beriẏe elen Śāhjāhān ār Mamtāj hāt dharādhari kare. Nabīn prāṇ, natun yauban phire peẏechen, śatābdīr bicched śeṣ haẏeche.*

And finally, the way in which he bids farewell to Afghanistan is a testament to how diverse Ali's identity is. Visiting the grave of Emperor Babur, a man born in Uzbekistan, who died in India and was buried in Kabul, Ali writes: «Standing next to the tomb I always felt I was visiting the grave of an ordinary man, possibly even a relative of mine»[26]. And there he recites for his symbolic forefather a poem by Rabindranath Tagore followed by a verse from the Koran.

Annada Shankar Ray also wanders in time and across cultures during his journey to Japan. He describes his feelings during a visit to Horiyuji temple: «The bus was moving towards the 7th century. From the past farther into the past. One more step closer to India»[27]. Buddhist temples in Tokyo, Kyoto and Nara make him realise how close Japan and India had been in the past. This leads him to conclude: «Just like now what starts in Europe goes far beyond Europe, in the Ajanta period what started in India went far to the north, south and east parts of Asia, just not to the west»[28]. He identifies other cultural similarities as well: to his surprise a form of the caste system existed in Japan too[29] and wood print art reminds him of Bengali patua paintings[30].

Discovering and appreciating common cultural heritage and history constitute a substantial part of both writers' narratives and it can be considered the intellectual side of the experience of togetherness. Equally significant for both travellers is the more private and sentimental side that comes from the observation of everyday life and interactions with people. Syed Mujtaba Ali captures for example how seasons and nature are different yet similar in both countries. «The spring in this country could be compared with our monsoon. There, the parched earth waited eagerly to flourish into a new life with the touch of early monsoon. Here the earth went into a deep slumber in winter and opened her eyes with the first sun of spring»[31]. Roaming around the bazaars of Kabul also makes him feel at home.

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[26] Ali 2015, 276. Ali 2018, 242. *Kabarer kāche dāṛiẏe mane haẏ āmi āmāri mato māṭir mānuṣ, yena ek ātmajaner samādhir kāche ese dāṛiẏechi.*

[27] Ray 1959, 114: *Bās calla saptam śatābdīte. Atīta theke āro atīte. Āro ek pā Bhārater dike.*

[28] *Ibid.*, 118-119: *Ādhunik yuger prabāha yeman Iurope ārambha haleo Iuropei ābaddha naẏ temni Ajantār yug chila Bhārat theke śuru kare Eśiẏār uttare dakṣiṇe pūrbe prasārita, kintu paścime sīmāmbita.*

[29] *Ibid.*, 65.

[30] *Ibid.*, 67.

[31] Ali 2015, 199. Ali 2018, 175: *Edeśe basanter saṅge āmāder barṣār tulanā haẏ. Sekhāne griṣmakāle dharaṇī taptaśaẏane pipāsārtā haẏe paṛe thāken, āṣāṛhasya ye-kono dibasei hok indrapurīr nababarṣaṇ bārtā peẏe natun prāṇe sañjībita han.*

«People who had been to the old bazaars of Agra, Amritsar or Benaras, would know what they look like»[32], he claims.

The truly emotional experience of unity for both travellers comes from the intimate relationships they manage to form with local people. Mujtaba Ali makes a lot of friends but one very particular bond he has is with his servant Abdur Rahman who stays by his side from the beginning to the end. «In festivity, in celebration, in famine, in revolution and if I consider the last farewell as the funeral, then Abdur Rahman joined me at my funeral too»[33]. In Japan Ray travels in time visiting Buddhist shrines but the pivotal moment of his narrative comes when he stays at the house of a local teacher, Mr Todo, and his family in Kyoto. He enjoys their hospitality, observes their daily routine and is astonished to hear mantras as they pray together[34]. Nowhere has he felt so close to Japan and at home than at Mr Todo's house. He states: «When one heart is drawn towards another, all barriers vanish. I have loved Japan and Japan has loved me»[35]. He ends his stay in Kyoto with a poem (printed in a local newspaper according to the author). One of its lines reads: «I suddenly came to the Land of the Rising Sun. I got love and went back in love»[36].

Such strong focus on the positive side of their experience does not make the writers completely overlook cultural differences. However, some alien or incomprehensible elements of the local culture are presented as rationally explicable. Geishas and their presence in public spaces leave Annada Shankar Ray feeling shocked but he easily accepts the explanation that these are educated women who took up the profession to support their families[37]. Other differences are deemed to be simply weird, funny or just a manageable annoyance. Ali's servant's behaviour provides material for many anecdotes. Ray finds the institution of taxi dancers in clubs strange but amusing. And in the end, even the dangers of Kabul are downplayed as a part of life.

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[32] Ali 2015, 117. Ali 2018, 106: *Amr̥tsar, Āgrā, Kāśīr puron bājār yārā dekhechen, e bājārer gaṭhan tā̃der bujhiẏe balte habe nā.*

[33] Ali 2015, 303. Ali 2018, 266: *Utsabe, byasane, durbhikṣe, rāṣṭrabiplabe ebaṁ ei śeṣe bidāẏke yadi śmaśān bali tabe Ābdur Rahmān śmaśāne āmāke kā̃dh dila.*

[34] Ray 1959, 137.

[35] *Ibid.*, 139. *Hr̥haẏ yakhan hr̥daẏ ṭāne takhan muhūrte sab bādhā sare yāẏ. Jāpānke āmi bhālobesechi, Jāpān āmāke bhālobeseche.*

[36] *Ibid.*, 179: *Suryodaẏer deśe // haṭhāț āmi ese // bhālobāsā pelem ebaṁ // gelem bhālobese.*

[37] *Ibid.*, 29; 71.

4. *Conclusions*

Travel is almost by definition a liminal experience. A traveller leaves his native land and culture, spends time in an unfamiliar environment, often facing difficulties on the road. And then he/she is reintegrated with society, although generally as a changed person. Both travelogues presented here, *Deśe Bideśe* by Syed Mujtaba Ali and *Jāpāne* by Annada Shankar Ray, touch upon the issue of transformation experienced as a result of travel. This is directly articulated in the latter as Ray reflects about his changing worldview and attitude towards Japan. He even goes as far as to declare that the journey made him an advocate for stronger ties between Asian societies: «We need to build bridges between India and Japan, [professor] Shinya Kasugai told me. Most probably I won't be able to build bridges but certainly could form bonds»[38]. Syed Mujtaba Ali avoids such unequivocal statements. Nevertheless, the final scene of his travelogue is profoundly emotional. He looks out of the plane window and sees the unmistakable figure of his servant: «His turban was dirty, as we did not have any soap for such a long time. But I felt Abdur Rahman's turban was whiter than the snow and whitest of all was Abdur Rahman's heart»[39]. Ali had to flee Afghanistan due to an eruption of political violence, but he leaves the reader with an expression of love for the country and its people.

As this article demonstrates the selected travelogues of Bengali writers who travelled to other Asian countries in the mid-20th century have a strong Pan-Asian message. They are accounts of men in the liminal situation of travel but also individuals living in the liminal era, in the in-between of two political world orders, when Pan-Asianism was flourishing, providing an alluring vision for the future. And although the authors refrain from mentioning the ideology or those who advocated for it, their travelogues seem very much at one with the spirit of the epoch.

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[38] *Ibid.*, 64. *Setu bā̃dhte habe Bhārater saṅge Jāpāner, balechilen āmāke Śiniẏā Kāsugāi. Setu bā̃dhte pārba nā haẏto, kintu rākhī bhā̃te pārba.*

[39] Ali 2015, 303. Ali 2018, 266: *Bahudin dhare sābān chila nā bale Ābdur Rahmāner pāgṛi maẏlā. Kintu āmār mane hala caturdike barapher ceẏe śubhratar Ābdur Rahmāner pāgṛi ār śubhratam Ābdur Rahmāner hr̥daẏ.*

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Arts and Liminality

Heavenly Musicians of Cave Temples as Liminal Beings of the Sacral-Profane Boundaries

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Abstract

The study deals with the sculpture images of cave complexes located mainly in Southern India carved in the second half of the 1st millennium CE. The focus is on the cave temples of Ellora, where temples of three religions are represented (Jain, Buddhist and Hindu). As well, the images in the nearest Buddhist temples of Vakataka and Kalacuri (Ajanta and Aurangabad), and likewise the caves of the Cālukya (Badami) and Pallava (Mamallapuram) dynasties are investigated. The main purpose of celestial musicians – *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es, *kiṃnara*s, and *bhūta*s / *yakṣa*s / *gaṇa*s – depicted in a *prabhāmaṇḍala* or in a spatial *maṇḍala* of a temple is to honour the object of worship: play heavenly music and bring offerings. Nevertheless, being in the same space with the believer, celestial musicians meet and accompany those who enter the temple and their images are placed in the important focal points of the believer's path from the profane world to the sacral. Thus, saturated with liminal images, the very space of a temple *maṇḍapa* may be interpreted as the liminal space, where spiritual transition takes place: the ascension of a believer from a profane to a sacral space.

Keywords: *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es, *kiṃnara*s, *toraṇa*s, *mudrā*, cave architecture, Ellora, Ajanta.

1. *Introduction*

It is difficult to overestimate the role of music in Indian culture. Since ancient times music has featured as an important component of religious practice for India's different faiths. Celestial musicians are repeatedly mentioned in the literature, particularly the *gandharvas*, *apsaras*es and *kiṃnara*s. These figures often appear in the sculpture of the temples of the three religions of early medieval India – Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. What functions do celestial musicians have as liminal beings? What are the differences between celestial musicians in the iconography of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism? Where are these images located? What new meaning might be perceived in these images if they are interpreted according to Arnold van Gennep's theory? This article tackles these questions, among others. Cave temples provide excellent material for research, primarily because almost all the images have been preserved *in situ*. In addition, the space of the cave temple is a kind of liminal zone.

The tradition of cave architecture in India is unique. In no other part of the world have so many large-scale monuments been carved completely out of rock. More remarkably, the rock used is often very hard, such as basalt. Nonetheless, these rock carvings include intricate architectural elements, sometimes bordering on sculpture (for instance the Kailasanātha temple or the *ratha*s of Mamallapuram). The boundaries between architecture and sculpture in the Indian tradition are blurred, and often architectural elements are at once also sculptural figures.

The thousand years of the Indian tradition of cave architecture emerged simultaneously with the tradition of building in stone. The practice did not follow strict rules, in this early period rules had not yet been formed and fixed. In many ways the entire period of the existence of rock architecture was a time when traditions were in the process of being established, therefore the iconographic programme of the cave temples is characterised by a great mobility. Yet, at the same time it is also obvious that this architecture is rooted conceptually and at the semantic level in the culture that came before it. In these temples one can see both a reflection of doctrinal prescriptions and autochthonous mythological ideas. One can read the attempts of the central government to influence local cults, yet at the same time one can also find a reflection of the broader development of religious ideas and ritual elements that characterised a particular time. All this is very vividly reflected in the iconography of the threshold imagery of the temples. Of the wide variety of threshold images, which are *dvārapāla*s, *nāga*s, *yakṣa*s, *mithuna*s (or *maithuna*s), *makara*s, *vyāla*s, etc., this article focuses on heavenly musicians as the most ambiguous personages. Everybody knows that music has a great power to transform spaces. Music always features at the beginning of the rituals that help a person to cross the boundary between the sacral and the profane world in their mind. And heavenly musicians depicted in the temple space play the same role.

My research deals with the sculpture images of cave complexes located mainly in Southern India which were carved in the second half of the 1st millennium CE – from the 5th to the 9th century. This was the epoch of the rise of cave architecture in India. The focus of this article is on the sculpture of the cave complex of Ellora, because here there are temples of all the three religions – Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. As well as the images of the nearest Buddhist temples of Vakatakas and Kalacuris (Ajanta and Aurangabad), I also investigate the Hindu caves of Cālukyas of Badami and Pallavas in Mamallapuram. This set of monuments seems to me the most representative: 1. It covers different dynasties of the early medieval period; 2. They are royal monuments (meaning they were ordered by *mahārāja*s) and they have the most developed sculptural programmes with a large number of additional figures; 3. The iconography of the three main religions of early medieval India are represented here. By this point the tradition of cave architecture had already been developing for a long time.

2. Citratoraṇa*s*

As regards threshold images, I will focus on the semidivine musicians – the personages of the *citratoraṇa*s[1]. The frames of the doorways in the cave temples contain many images, along with decorative ornamental design. When I speak about the *toraṇa*s, I mean not only the doorframes, but also the spatial *toraṇa*s formed by pillars and beams inside the columned hall, the *maṇḍapa*, where the space is overshadowed by bracket figures. Thus, the *toraṇa*s are understood in a broader sense.

The sacred space inside the cave temple has, as a rule, a hierarchical structure, which is emphasised by the raising of the floor level and the creation of additional portals – *toraṇa*s. The images depicted on “these” *toraṇa*s are the same as those that meet the adept at the very threshold of the temple, accompanying him throughout his journey inside the temple. If we consider the classic type of cave temple, it usually has a square or rectangular plan. Its entrance hall, the *ardhamaṇḍapa*, is usually delimited from the profane space by a colonnade or a row of pillars decorated with numerous figures. As a rule, there is also a developed bracket sculptural group similar to the capital of the “Indian type” (the largest bracket figures are characteristic of the cave temples of the Early Cālukyas dynasty of VI–VII CE). After passing through the central doorway, a person enters the *maṇḍapa* – a hall for performing rituals. Its space is delimited by pillars, adorned with figures that overshadow and dominate the space.

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[1] Acharya 1946, 216-222.

The sanctuary of the cave temple, which is called the *garbhagṛha*, is always located on the central axis at the far end from the entrance. It is a small cubical room, in which only one person can enter to honour the shrine of the temple. The entrance is decorated with the same sculptural images as that of the entrance zone.

So, these are the threshold images. Yet in fact, they are figures who not only meet the believer at the entrance but also accompany him along the entire path through the temple space to the shrine. They mark the most important "liminal" zones of the temple at which point sacrality is heightened. They serve as a guide from the profane to the sacred, helping a believer make the transition across the borders of sacred space.

Threshold images are participants of the spatial *maṇḍala* of the temple, by being placed on poles, and also an integral part of the relief *maṇḍala*s, in the centre of which is the object of worship. In this way they form a transitional link between the sacred and the profane worlds. And their images are very multifaceted.

3. *Indistinguishability of Images*

An important thing to note about liminal images is that almost all of them are the same in the iconographic programmes, of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples. In rare cases there might be multiple objects of worship in a temple that are characteristic of a particular religion, but mainly threshold images are images of semidivine creatures. The uniformity of the pantheon of the three religions as regards peripheral characters is a result of a religious policy that included autochthonous beliefs in the pantheon of the dominant religion[2].

The peripheral characters of the threshold zones are divided into three large groups: 1) *vyantara-devatā* – the semidivine inhabitants of the airspace living between heaven and earth, including *vidyādhara*s, *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es and *kiṃnara*s; 2) underground inhabitants connected with the earth, including various *yakṣa*s and *yakṣiṇī*s, *vyālī*s; and 3) creatures associated with water such as *nāga*s and *makara*s.

The images of the threshold zones themselves are semidivine and insignificant and have not provoked much attention from art historians, but they have repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers of Indian literature and tend to have separate chapters dedicated to them in studies of Indian mythology. Besides these, the works of R. S. Panchamukhi[3], K. Krishna Murti[4] and N. G. Tavakar[5] dedicate some room to the analysis of visual depictions in addition to literary sources. A. K. Coomaraswamy[6] has also compiled a detailed textbook on the *yakṣa*s, which this article will refer to more than once. Comparing the existing literary sources with the images reveals an important difference. It shows that while the literary descriptions often do not coincide and are not uniform across the religions, uniformity develops quite quickly in the visual arts and this can be seen in the iconographic programmes of Hinduism, Buddhism and even Jainism.

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[2] Cohen 1998.

For example, images of the *mithuna*s - amorous pairs of semidivine characters - are often depicted in all the religions. This love union reflects the sustainable idea of fertility and the subsequent idea of well-being. As a rule, they play the role of donors, presenting various offerings, such as garlands, fruits, shells or jugs of water and musical instruments.

Traditionally, iconographic images of Indian deities are given certain recognisable attributes. However, creatures of a semidivine nature are often not endowed with such attributes. Therefore, the difficult task of differentiating images can be achieved only by identifying certain formal elements or motifs: for example, if the relief depicts a beautiful man or women accompanied by a motif signifying glorification, then they are *vidyādhara*s[7] or *gandharva*s and *apsaras*es. This is also indicated by the flight pose. Since *yakṣa*s and *yakṣiṇī*s are closely connected with the earth, in iconography they are frequently depicted standing on the ground. Female characters are mostly leaning on a tree, which reflects the ancient idea of fertility (a stable iconographic motif of the *śalabhañjika*).

On the other hand, when we see admirers with musical instruments, then, if there are no other obvious signs, they must be *gandharva*s and *apsaras*es, since these are the musicians described in the literary sources. However, there are exceptions and, in the reliefs of the temple complexes of Aurangabad and Ellora, you can even see *nāgarāja* playing on *vīṇā*. In this case, his iconography is clearly marked by the presence of a halo formed from the cobra hoods behind his head.

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3. Panchamukhi 1951.
4. Krishna Murti 1985.
5. Tavakar 1971.
6. Coomaraswamy 1928.
7 . Cf. Mehta 2004.

4. Gandharva*s and* Apsaras*es*

*Gandhava*s and *apsaras*es are messengers of the gods. They deliver certain ideas to humanity by communicating directly with them and sometimes they even live among people. Many literary works are devoted to such stories, the most famous being Kālidāsa's love stories, including the legend of Urvaśī and Pururavas which tells the story of the relationship between an *apsaras* and a king, and the legend of the beautiful Śakuntalā (daughter of King Viśvāmitra and the *apsaras* Menakī) and Duṣyanta. For this reason, researchers often call them demigods. However, they should be differentiated from the demigods of classical mythology who are born from the marriage of man and God. The Indian *gandhava*s and *apsaras*es can live in both the heavenly and earthly realms, contributing to the communication of man with the gods and acting as the vehicles of divine ideas. They are truly liminal beings.

The liminality of *gandharva*s is also emphasised by the fact that they are directly related to the liminal state of *antarābhavasattva*. From Vedic times to Buddhist Mahāyāna there existed the theory of rebirth. In the *Rigveda* there is a phrase: «*gandharva* in a womb»[8], which is a reference to the condition between death and future birth known as *gandharva-sattva*. This intermediate existence of *antarābhavasattva*, absent among the Theravāda followers who believed that rebirth immediately follows death, appears in the theory of Mahāyāna rebirth and then develops in Tantric Buddhism. This further consolidates the connection between the *gandharva*s and a state of intermediacy or transition. Thus, *mithuna*s with musical instruments are known as *gandharvas* and *apsaras*es and they can be depicted playing music. Most frequently the *gandharva* will play the *vīṇā* and the *apsaras* the *karaṭāla*s (small metallic cymbals).

5. Kiṃnara*s*

In the visual arts, the regular appearance of the *kiṃnara*s developed in early Buddhist monuments under the influence of *garuḍa* images, as noted by Monika Zin (2008). The contamination of the *kiṃnara*s by these images brought about their eventual transformation. The images became paired figures with musical instruments, half-bird and half-man, dancing on short legs. If a *kiṃnara* plays the *vīṇā*, a *kiṃnarī*, as a rule, strikes *karaṭāla*s.

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[8] Wayman 1973, 218.

As for the written texts of Hinduism, there is no unity when describing the *kiṃnara*s even later on in their history; sometimes they are attributed a horse's head and a human body or vice versa, sometimes the face of Garuḍa and the wings of a bird, sometimes a human body and animal paws, and so on. The *Mānasāraśilpaśāstra* prescribes to depict a *kiṃnara* in a demonic form with a human torso, the legs of an animal and an eagle's face with wings. The *Vachaspatyam* writes about a *kiṃnara* with a horse's head and a human body. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* says that *kiṃnara* can have either a human head and a horse's body, or a human body and a horse's head. In South Indian treatises, *kiṃnara* is listed among the eight *parīvāra-devatā*s of the Subrahmanya (Karttikeya) temple as a guardian figure, therefore supposed to have a frightening appearance. In this tradition, a couple of *kiṃnara*s, along with other deities, were usually portrayed next to the main deity, either Viṣṇu or Śiva, on the back wall of the sanctuary (the class of the deity – the highest being *uttama*, the middle *madhyama* and the lowest *adhama* – depended on the number of those who were in a *prabhāmaṇḍala*). Only the *Rūpavālia*, a treatise on Sinhalese painting, describes images similar to those that can be seen in the visual arts. In this treatise, the *kiṃnara*s are described as having a human torso and the legs of a bird, a beautiful radiant face, a graceful neck with a garland on it and a tufted head of hair[9].

In Jain iconography, the *kiṃnara*s, like the *gandharva*s, belong to the *yakṣa* class. Borrowing an image from ancient mythology, the Jains made significant changes: the *kiṃnara*s in their view have three faces and six arms; their attributes in Digambara iconography are the following: a disc, a *vajra*, a stimulus, a club and a rosary. They are depicted in the *varadamudrā* and their *vāhana* is fish. However, images of this kind did not appear in the iconographic programme of the temples.

Despite the fact that the *gandharva*s and *kiṃnara*s are mentioned in literary sources as equal in status, one can conclude from the images that there is a hierarchy in place, and that the *kiṃnara*s occupy a lower position than the *gandharva*s. There are often far fewer images of *kiṃnara*s, they are located further from the object of worship and depicted on a smaller scale. In addition, of course, it should be noted that in the literature there is no mention of the cult of *kiṃnara*s, unlike the cult of the *gandharva*s. The texts do not provide any information about how the *kiṃnara*s were worshipped or what prayers or offerings were made to them. However, the fact that the relief image of *kiṃnara* is quite unusual in the iconographic programme of the temples adds exclusivity to the image when it does appear, raising its sacred status.

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[9] This issue is considered in detail in Panchamukhi 1951, 3-15.

6. *Divine Singers*

Singing has always played a significant role in Indian culture. During my studies of the images of *gandharva*s in the reliefs of Ellora, Ajanta and Aurangabad cave temples, I have noticed one major inconsistency between visual and literary culture. While there are lots of singers in Indian literature, there are no singing figures in sculptures, carvings or paintings. The *gandharva*s are first and foremost described as singers; the *Nāṭyaśāstra* tells us that Bharata created Nārada and *gandharva*s exclusively as singers for Gods, and they were acknowledged as masters of vocal music in Indian mythological tradition.

In the Western artistic tradition, it is customary to depict singers with their mouths open. In the Indian tradition, however, the opposite is true. In fact, there were restrictions on images with open mouths dating from the earliest period in Indian history. This was because open mouths and protruding teeth were traditionally reserved for the depiction of demonic figures. The *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Pūraṇa* states: «[The depiction of God] with an open mouth can lead to the death of a whole family» (VD III 38. 21)[10]. Therefore, due to the fact that depictions of open mouths were prohibited, sculptors were forced to look for another way to represent singing. Since *gandharva*s, *kiṃnara*s and *apsarase*s are primarily depicted in mythology as singers, sculptors had to invent a "singing" gesture, and celestial musicians are often depicted with such a gesture, a fact that is always neglected in existing research. After many years of studying images of Indian musicians, I have managed to identify this gesture and will now elaborate my theory.

Due to the fact that *mudrā*s and *hasta*s play a very important role in Indian culture, a gesture was the only way to depict singing for Indian sculptors. I was unable to find any mention of such a gesture in literature, so I then started to search for it in depictions of *gandharva*s in the cave temples of Maharashtra. After studying hundreds and thousands of images, I identified a recurring gesture which might be the "singing" symbol: a raised arm, bent at the elbow, with the palm directed towards the object of worship.

According to *The Mirror of Gesture* (Coomaraswamy 1917), there are two gestures that should mean singing – *haṃsāsya* and *saṃdaṃśa mudrā*s, originating from the Dakṣiṇamūrti and Goddess of Speech respectively. But this gesture seems to be far from it. «*Saṃdaṃśa* (grasping): the fingers of Padmakośa's hand are repeatedly opened and closed. Usage: generosity, sacrificial offerings, [...], worship.

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[10] Vertogradova 2006.

[…]. According to another book: the middle finger of *Haṃsāsya* hand is outstretched. […]. Usage: […] singing (*saṃgīta*) […]»[11]. And as for the *haṃsāsya mudrā* it is said: «*Haṃsāsya* (swan-face) […] the tips of the forefinger, middle finger and thumb are joined, the rest extended […]. Usage: instructing in wisdom, ritual (*pūjā*) […] speaking, reading, singing, meditation […]»[12].

The gesture I identified appears to resemble the so-called *viśmaya hasta*, which primarily signifies astonishment or wonder. The *ardhacandra mudrā* gesture is also somewhat similar, but this gesture is used to greet people of lower castes. Neither of these gestures seems to coincide in any way with singing.

Seeing that there is no literary evidence of such a gesture, I suggest it might have come from real singing practice.

There is some evidence to support this theory. In one of the cave temples of Ellora there is a sculpture of a singing dwarf (in fact there are several similar sculptures, but this is the clearest example). Dwarf images do not have strict depiction laws, and he is shown with an open mouth and the singing gesture I identified: the singing *vāmana yakṣa*. If we assume this gesture to be a *hasta* of singing, then we see that there are a lot of sculptures of liminal creatures that display this gesture and, most importantly, that the majority of them are representations of divine singers and musicians – *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es and *kiṃnaras*.

7. *Dwarf Musicians*

Now I would like to return to the dwarf figures. Their images are the most numerous and they inhabit a large number of liminal zones in the temple: the *toraṇa*s, the capitals and corners of *stambha*s, the friezes (*mālā*s) on the walls and along the base of the temple.

These dwarfs do not signify monolithically but can represent a range of things. They can be both the *vāmana-yakṣa*s or *gaṇa*s of various deities, *bhūta*s and *ayudhapuruṣa*s (the personification of certain attributes), as well as the personification of certain philosophical concepts[13]. In the space of the temple they are depicted not only holding musical instruments as attributes, but also playing them – they blow into conch shells – *śaṅkha*s and flutes (*suśira-vādya*), beat drums of different shapes and sizes (*avanaddha-vādya*), pinch strings of *vīṇā*s of different types etc. Their images, which are located at the corners of the columns, make up a spatial ensemble.

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[11] Coomaraswamy 1917, 37.

[12] *Ibid.*, 36.

[13] Vorobyeva 2014, 212-243.

From the 6th century onwards, a certain type of frieze appears which is made up of dancing and playing dwarfs. This type of frieze comes to be particularly prevalent in South Indian temple iconography. The most characteristic instrument for the dwarves is the *ghaṭam* – a percussion instrument which is fundamentally an ordinary stove pot. All the dwarfs hold different types and sizes of this instrument in their hands.

8. *Threshold Beings and the Aquatic Myth*

Another small observation should be made regarding the threshold images of the temples, which is their connection with the aquatic myth. An analysis of the figures depicted reveals their universally close connection with water. The term *apsaras* in Sanskrit means 'moving in the waters', a name that comes from the Vedic idea that there are demonic creatures that inhabit the forest and the water who are closely associated with the moon, which is also reflected in the water. *Apsaras* is a water nymph.

The oldest mythical connotation of *gandharva* is the spirit of water, a monster of the depths. *Gandharva* is also connected with clouds and the sun, and it is precisely through the image of water, and in particular the rain which fertilises mother earth, that the *gandharva* is associated with the idea of abundance.

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy explores the symbolic role of the element water in the imagery of the *yakṣa*s in detail as part of his study of water cosmology and its connection with iconography. He argues that since the life of people depended heavily on water, in particular on the rain fertilising the earth after the dry season, a variety of rituals were designed to summon rain. All the images of the threshold zones are directly connected with water, including the *mithuna*s (loving couples) through the idea of fertility.

It is no coincidence that the most popular frame of both doorways and *devakoṣṭha*s are *makara-toraṇa*s, formed by the figures of two fantastical creatures that are particularly closely associated with water (these are sometimes called dragons, sometimes crocodiles, but are essentially polymorphic in nature).

The idea of water cosmology and the images of the aquatic myth are not accidental in the threshold zones. The most important ritual through which the believer had to go regardless of religion was the ritual of purification before visiting the temple, during which not only the body but also thoughts and soul were cleansed. Thus, the connection of all the images represented on the reliefs of the threshold zones of cave temples with water is deliberate and complements the ritual cleansing the believer performed before entering the temple.

Threshold images mark three worlds – celestial, terrestrial and underground. However, semantically, all the threshold images are somehow connected with water cosmology. Water, both in the sky in the form of clouds, and on the earth as rain, flows into rivers, cleansing and fertilising the earth. In this way, water connects all three worlds. Thus, the temple's *toraṇa*s form a kind of *jaladvara*, passing through which a person receives the necessary ritual cleansing. And it is through *jaladvara* that water comes out from the symbolic bathing in the *garbhagṛha*. The ring structure of the temple action is closed, recalling that it is the circle that is the main figure in the Indian world order. Water, the driving force of nature, also rotates the universe, serving as the beginning and end of everything.

9. *Function of the Liminal Musicians*

The main purpose of celestial musicians – *gandharva*s, *apsaras*es, *kiṃnara*s, and *bhūta*s / *yakṣa*s / *gaṇa*s – when depicted in a *prabhāmaṇḍala* or in a temple space *maṇḍala* is to honour the object of worship; to play heavenly music and bring offerings. The figures of divine musicians are on a par with garland bearers, donors with jugs and other offerings. Instead of these physical gifts, their offering is music. At the same time, the figures of musicians are the representation of divine music in sacred space – the conception of *divyā dhvani*.

Nevertheless, being in the same space with the believer, celestial musicians meet and accompany those who enter the temple: their images are placed in the important focal points of the believer's path from the profane world to the sacral.

Threshold images mark not only the entrance space, indicating the transition from the profane to the sacred zone, but also other transition zones, where the sacrality of the space is heightened. These are precisely the images that meet the believer or the future adept at the threshold of the temple, serving as a guide from the profane world to the sacred world – accompanying his transition across the borders of sacred space. It is remarkable that the images of the heavenly musicians are the same in the iconographic programme of the temples of all three main religions of ancient India. There are no differences between either the Hindu, the Buddhist or the Jain iconography in the cave temples.

In literary works, peripheral deities are often considered to be the heralds of the gods. They deliver ideas to humanity, communicate with human beings directly and even live among people in some cases. Being liminal deities, they are the vehicles of divine ideas. Moreover, they are closely related to the element of water, revealing a connection with the aquatic myth and the idea of purification.

Thus, saturated with liminal images, the very space of temple *maṇḍapa* may be interpreted as a liminal space where spiritual transition takes place, where the believer transcends the profane and reaches the sacral zone. *Toraṇa*s act like transitional points in the temple space, from the entrance to the *garbhagṛha* and from the profane to the sacral space. In the darkness of the womblike space the person can feel transformation and achieve mental rebirth.

10. *Conclusions*

The function of divine musicians is as liminal beings, marking the boundaries and threshold zones of the spatial *maṇḍala*.

1. Musical offering – glorification of the deity.
2. Simultaneously, the representation of divine music in the sacred space.
3. The overshadowing of the temple space, and with it the believer.
4. Accompanying the believer on the way to the sanctuary.
5. Purification – connection with the aquatic myth.
6. Apotropaic function – protective magic.

Divine musicians occupy a peripheral position, they are the characters of the mandala rim, often decorating the liminal threshold zones of the temple. These are in many ways intermediate, transitional creatures, many of which, according to mythological ideas, are capable of changing their appearance. This hybridity is primarily a characteristic of the *gandharva*s and *apsaras*es. On the other hand, these characters, precisely due to their liminality, easily pass from earth to heaven, from one religion to another.

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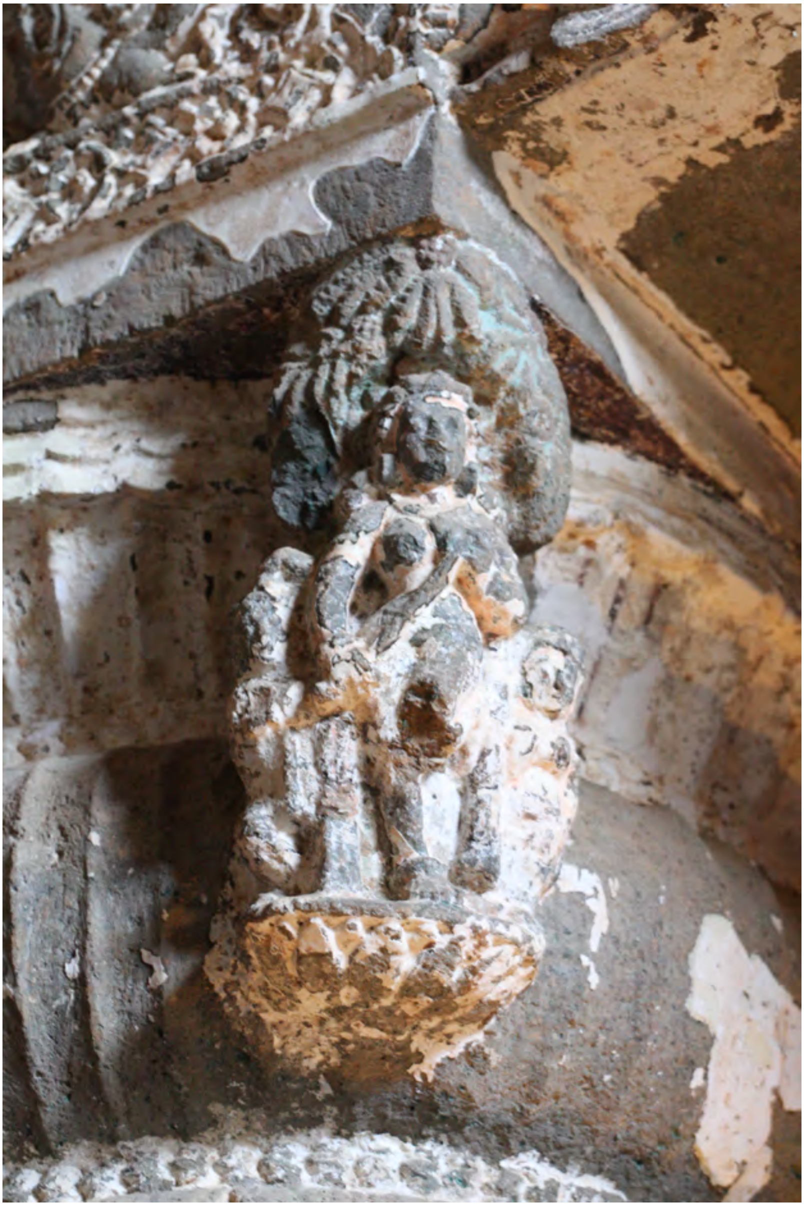

Fig. 1 *Śālabhañjikā* with stick zither *vīṇā*. Ajanta, cave №26

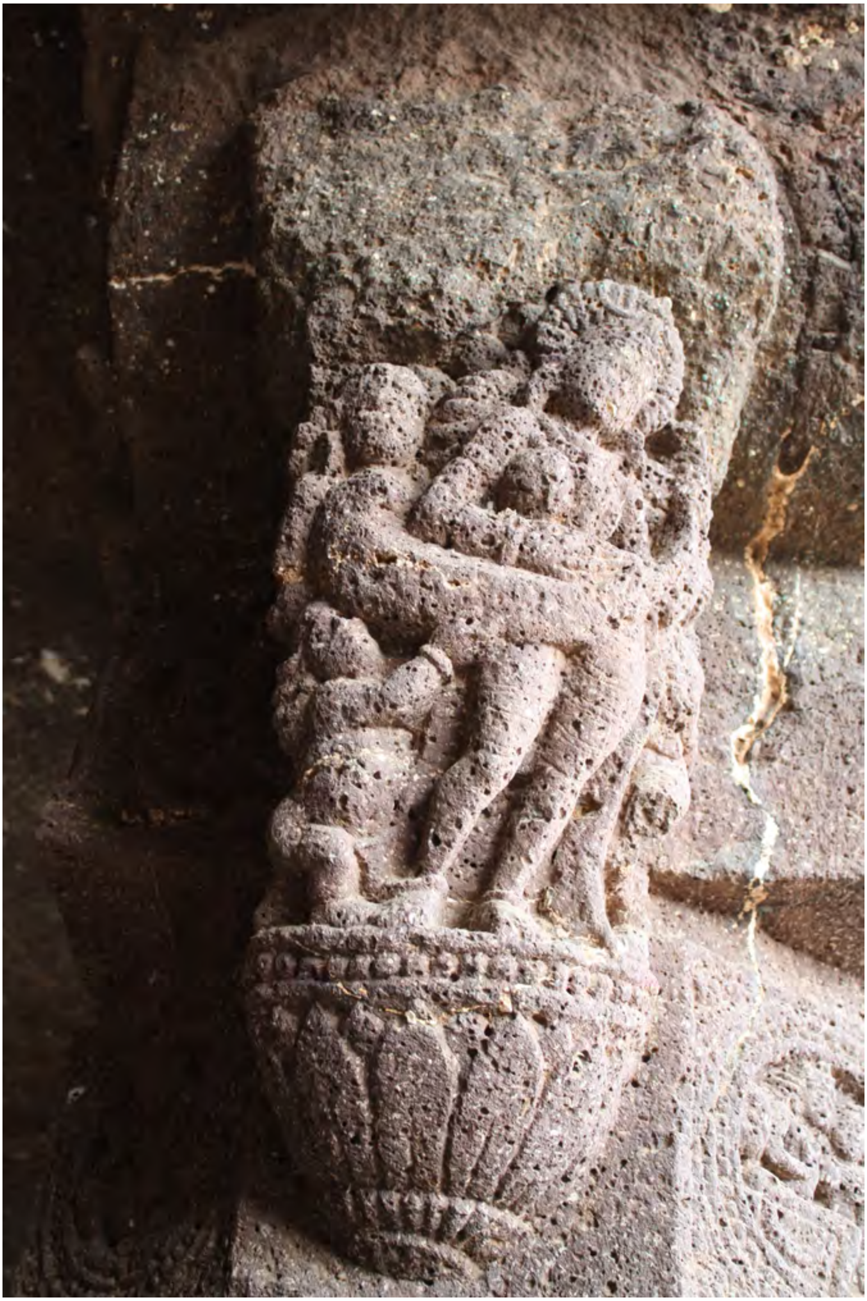

Fig. 2 *Śālabhañjikā* with bow-harp *vīṇā*, Aurangabad, cave №1

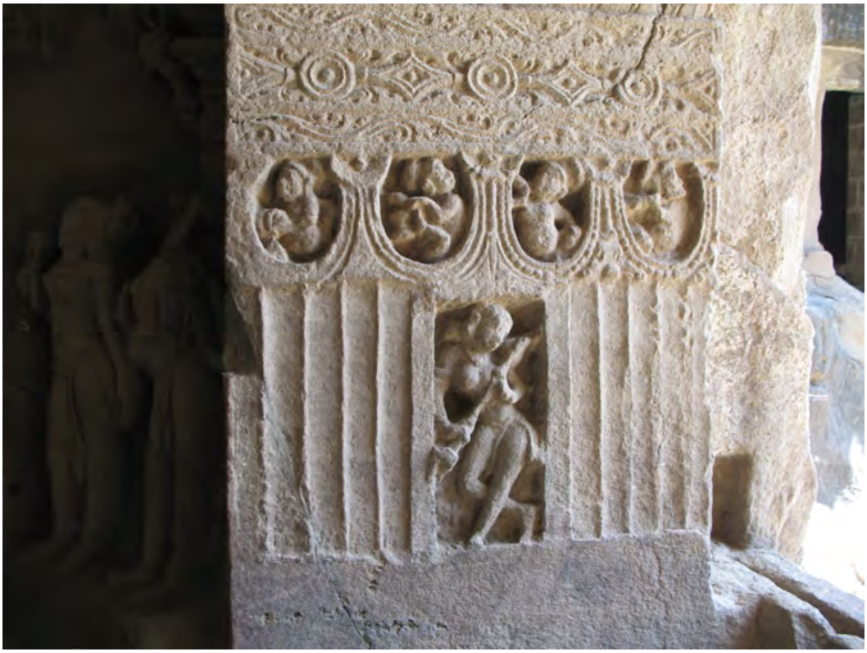

Fig. 3 *Śālabhañjikā* with stick zither *vīṇā*, Ellora, Jain cave №31

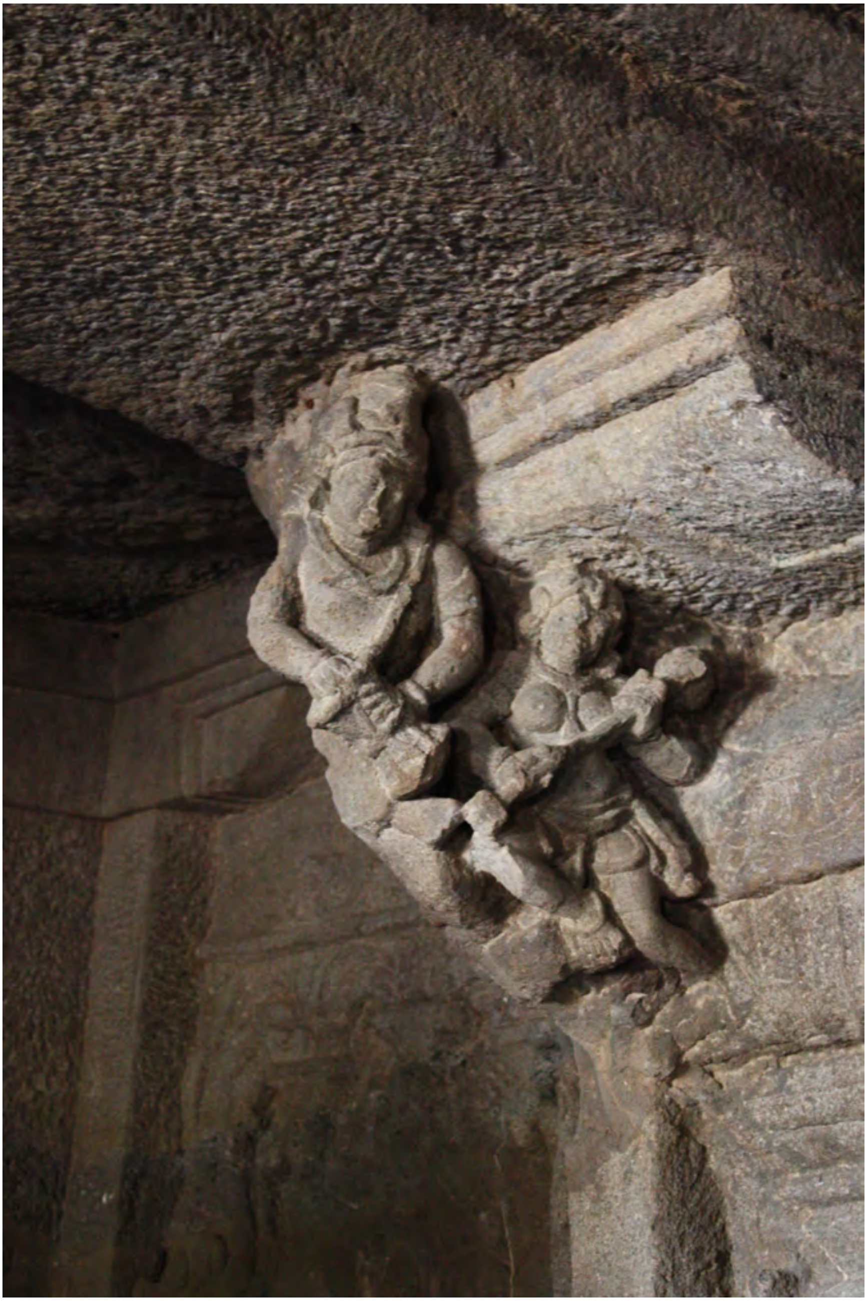

Fig. 4 *Mithuna*: *gandharva* with *ḍamaru* and *apsaras* with *vīṇā*, Ellora, Jain cave №33

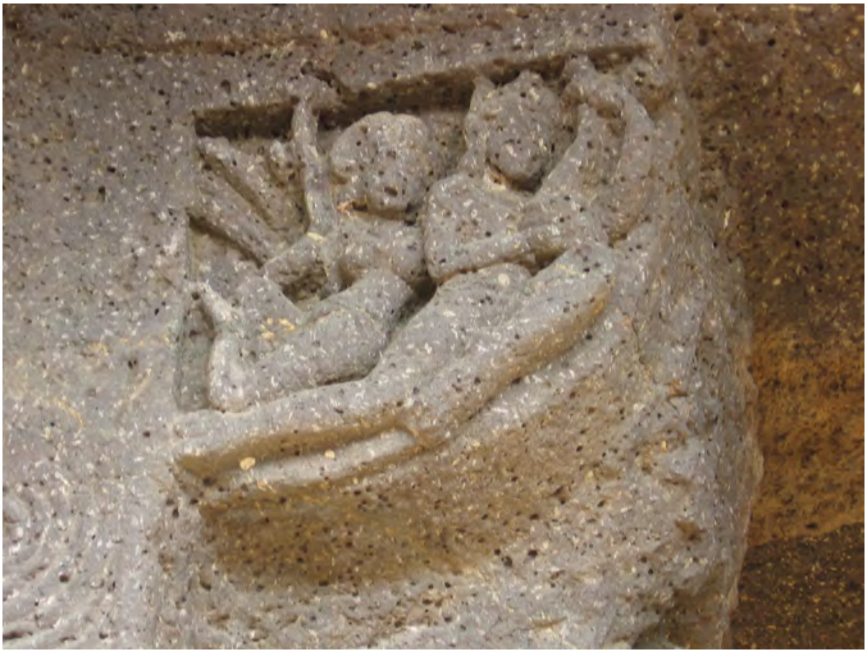

Fig. 5 *Gandharva* and *apsaras* with 2 types of *vīṇā* (zither and harp)
Aurangabad, cave № 1

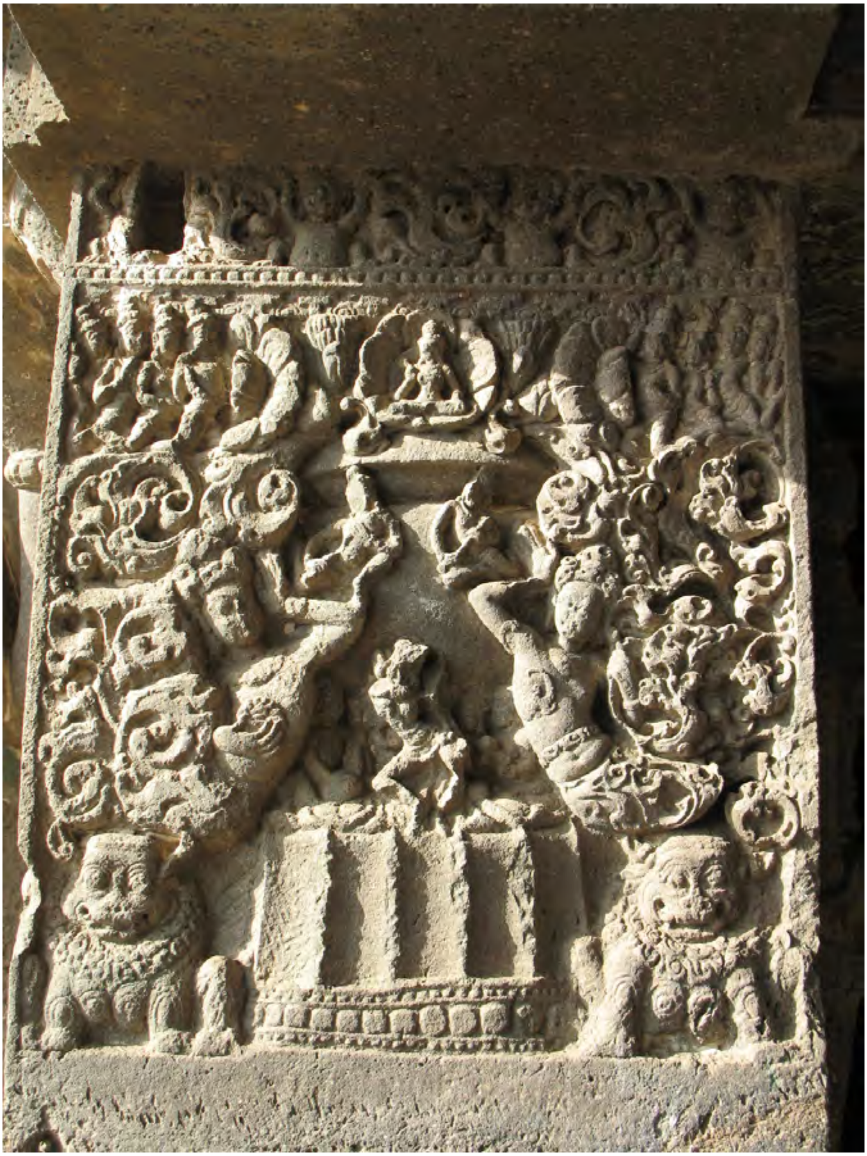

Fig. 6 Dance and music scene on *stambha*. *Kiṃnara*s with singing gesture, Ellora, cave № 15

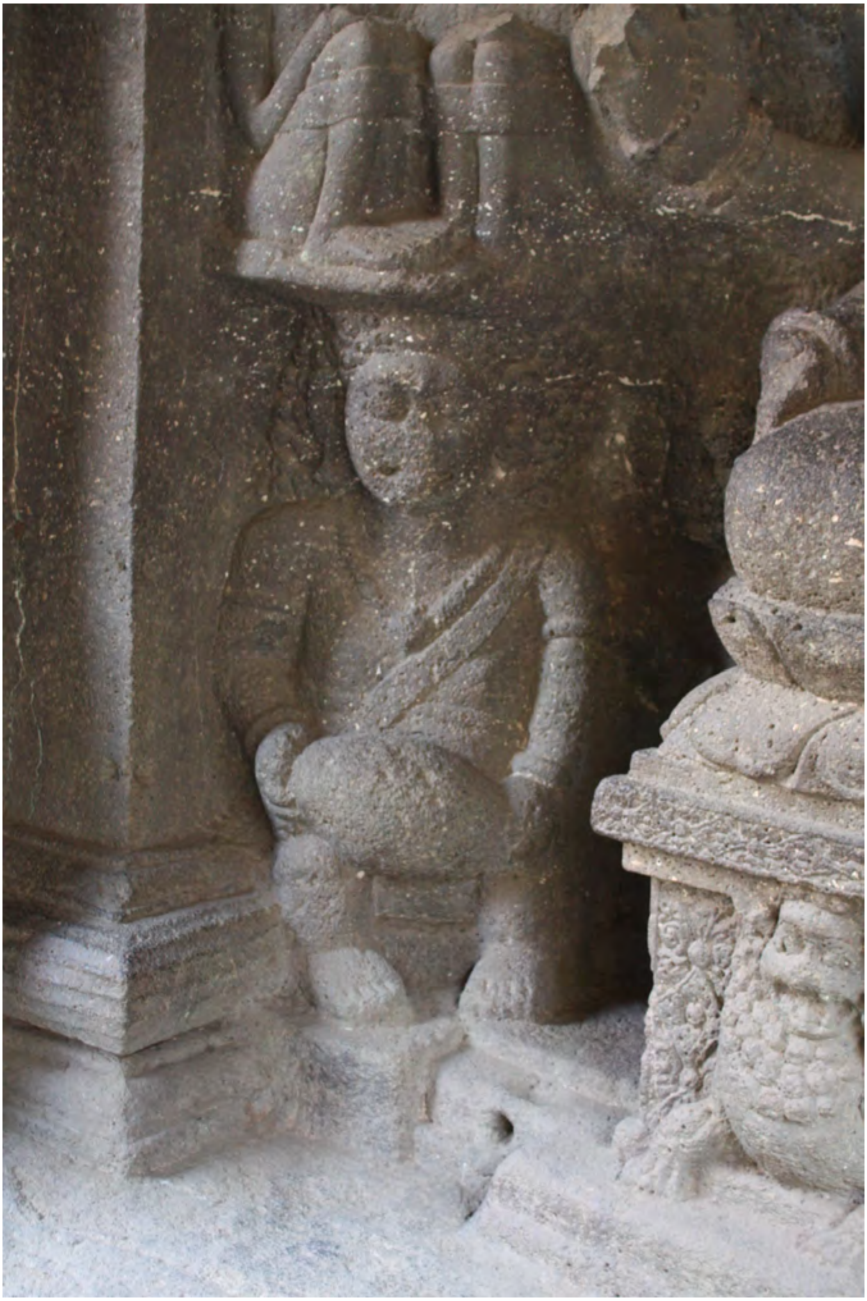

Fig. 7 *Gaṇa*s with drums. Detail of Śiva Mahāyoga relief panel, Ellora, Kailasanātha

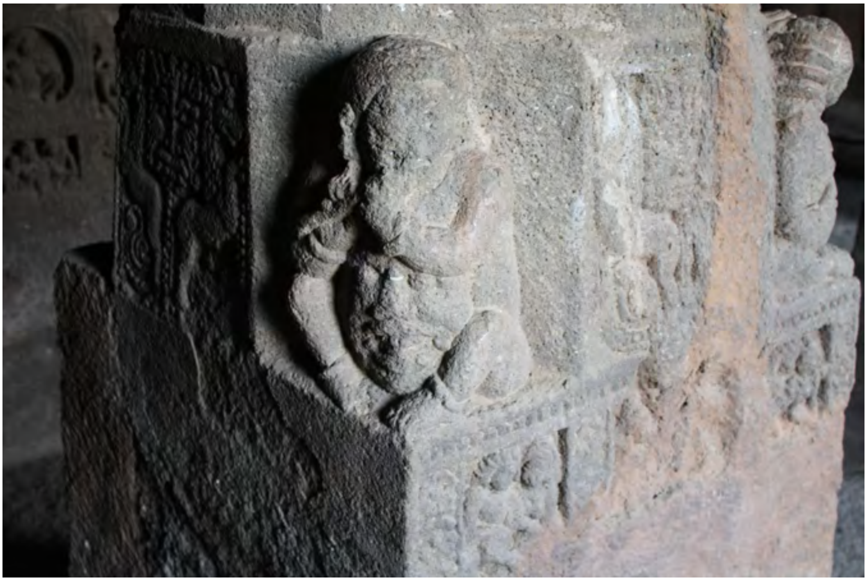

Fig. 8 *Vāmana-yakṣa* with flute, Aurangabad, cave №3

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Liminality, Court Culture or Octagonality? An Introduction to the Narrative Pillar Sculptures at the Modhera Sun Temple[*]

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Abstract
The Sun temple at Modhera (1025-1026 CE) has distinctive narrative relief sculpture on a section a little above eye-level on 8 pillars in the Closed Hall in front of the Sūrya shrine, and on 32 pillars in the Dance Hall which is between the temple tank and the main temple. The 320 sculptured panels on these octagonal pillars, not discussed in Lobo's study of the temple's iconographic programme, are varied in theme and treatment, and often problematic in content and meaning. Placed as they are on the worshipper's approach to Sūrya, the deity of the temple, might they reflect the liminal state of the worshipper, placed between the exterior world and the vision of the Sun god? The disjointed nature of the sculpture's references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, the fleeting presence of Sūrya in the Closed Hall, and of his son Revanta in the Dance Hall, along with frequent and insistent erotic scenes, in which naked Jain monks appear, all in the context of alternating battle and dancing, of communitas, flow, conflict and blindness, suggest a highly charged state that is different from the normal order of temples' horizontal wall friezes. This might reflect and allude to the liminal states that pertain to both halls. Alternatively, the sculptures may reflect the concerns and attitudes of the court of the presumed builder of the temple (Bhīma I, reigned 1022-1064), not least because of the dominant presence of his namesake, Bhīma, great warrior of the *Mahābhārata*. Or, the puzzling complexity might be merely the result of the pillars being eight-sided. Most of the pillars of the Closed Hall are examined in detail; in the Dance Hall, just one pillar, along with an analysis of themes, and explanation of some especially problematic panels.

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Keywords: Sun temple, Modhera, Sūrya, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, Bhīma, Hanumān, Bhīma Rāja I, narrative sculpture, liminality, flow, blindness.

1. *Introduction*

The narrative sculptures on the pillars of the Sun temple at Modhera are remarkable for their variety of topics and treatments[1]. This 11th century CE temple marks out stages of liminality for the worshipper in the clear line of access to its east-facing shrine of Sūrya. From the further and longer side of the temple tank (*kuṇḍa*) the worshipper descends the steep steps to the water, bathes, and then ascends the yet steeper steps on the west side, passes through the free-standing gateway structure (*toraṇa*) and into the Raṅga Maṇḍapa (Dance Hall, henceforward RM). The worshipper then passes amid the 32 pillars with their narrative friezes and into the Gūḍha Maṇḍapa (Closed Hall, henceforward GM) of the main temple with its 8 pillars with narrative friezes, and finally reaches the adjoining *garbha-gṛha* with the glorious image of the Sun god. The rays of the equinoctial rising sun are said to fall directly on Sūrya's east-facing *mūrti*, though no *mūrti* now, nor for an unknown number of centuries.

A drawing by Percy Brown recreates the temple as it once was, complete with the *śikhara*, the pyramidal roofs of the two halls, and the top of the gateway (*toraṇa*), all now missing[2]. According to a key Sun-god text, *Sāmba Purāṇa* (Srivastava 2013), Kṛṣṇa's arrogant son Sāmba was cursed with leprosy by Kṛṣṇa, leprosy which was cured by building the archetypal temple to Sūrya (first understood to be at Multan, later at Konarak) and then worshipping him[3].

A piece of stone with the date *vikrama saṃvat* 1083 (1025-1026 CE) found in a chamber beneath the *garbha-gṛha* seems to show that the temple was built early in the reign of Bhīma I (1022-1064). Dhaky has pointed out stylistic changes that prove that the RM is later than the main temple; and he suggests that the RM was constructed in the reign of Bhīma's son Karṇa (1064-1094 CE)[4]. The frequent appearance in the RM pillar sculptures of the *Mahābhārata* hero Bhīma, second of the Pāṇḍava brothers, noticed in the present paper, would give added point to Dhaky's closing suggestion that RM may have been «a lovely tribute» built by

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[1] Bharucha 1951; Tiwari 1986; Giri 1987-88. Lobo 1982, 45, fn. 46 mentions a forthcoming study of the pillars, but it was never written (Lobo e-mail 15 May 2019).

[2] Brown 1956, Pl. CVII, Fig 2. Reproduced Lobo 1982, 40.

[3] Srivastava 2013, xii-xiii and *adhyāya* 3.

[4] Dhaky 1963.

Karṇa as «an act of reverence» to his father[5]. Alternatively, Bhīma Rāja himself might have built it in the closing years of his own long reign.

In addition to considering the narrative sculpture pillars as possibly distinctively liminal, I shall look at them as conceivably directly relevant to the court culture of the builder, Bhīma Rāja I, not least because the King might have viewed the Pāṇḍava Bhīma as his own *alter ego*.

The sculptures to be considered are panels, framed niches, on two sets of heavily carved octagonal pillars separated in time of construction and in details of form, but both with an ever-changing narrative frieze a little above eye level[6]. This particular section, termed 'the second figural frieze' by Lobo in what is the only detailed academic study of the temple, is in the most visible position on the pillars[7]. The bottom of GM panels is 1.87m. from the floor, the panel 37cm. high; the bottom of RM panel 1.73m. from the floor, the panel 38.5cm. high[8].

The 256 RM panels are far more varied than the 64 of the GM, but it is true to say of both sets that the panels refer fairly often to the two Sanskrit epics; that several panels have detailed and complicated scenes which seem to be from known events, historical or otherwise, for which at present there is no certain explanation; that many panels present generic scenes which do not belong to any specific narrative: fighting, dancing, and erotic encounters sum up such scenes; and finally, that there are scenes which present peaceable group activities, the purpose of which is not clear, with a strong flavour of communitas.

What immediately differentiates these panels from the narrative friezes that are found on many temple walls is that the latter friezes are linear, and if textually related are sequentially ordered; whereas these pillar panels, each complete in itself (except for some GM pillars), tend to present disorder and confusion when considered in relation to each other.

What on further reflection differentiates these panels from everything else on the temple is that they are not part of the iconographic programme of the temple

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[5] Dhaky 1963, 222.

[6] The *mūrti* of the temple deity would of course be behind its own special limen, the sculpture of the doorway of the *garbha-gṛha*, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. Other sculpture in a liminal position not referred to here include the door-frame of the GM and the two external pillars beyond it, the sculpture on the external seat-backs (*kakṣāsana*s) of RM, on the *toraṇa* pillars at the eastern entrance to RM, and on the sides of the steps from the tank on the plinth of the eastern side of RM.

[7] The first figural frieze, larger, at leg level, is of repeated standing figures, almost always *apsaras*es; and on RM pillars there is a small third frieze, near the top, of repeated little dancing figures.

[8] Detailed scale drawing of pillars in Burgess 1903, Pl. LIV; and brief analysis in Lobo 1982, 24-26, 41-43. My measurements are made from the scale drawings in Burgess.

(set out by Lobo), nor are they merely decorative patterns, ornamental designs; though they have that effect when viewed from a distance. The panels of the two friezes in GM and RM are often problematic. Could the concept of liminality assist our understanding?

Certainly, as I study these 320 panels as two collections of photos set out two-dimensionally on paper in two large rectangles, a parallel such as the choir screen placed between the worshipper and the sanctum in medieval Christian churches is to some extent illuminating[9]. In whatever order one goes past the Modhera panels, they too are collectively a kind of screen of imagery between the outer world and the deity, instances of ambiguity at the threshold. Many things in the discourse of liminality – carnival, communitas, the erotic, and conflict, for instance, are abundantly present. One feature of liminality as seen by Victor Turner, namely 'flow', people acting together with total involvement is exceptionally clearly represented at Modhera [10].

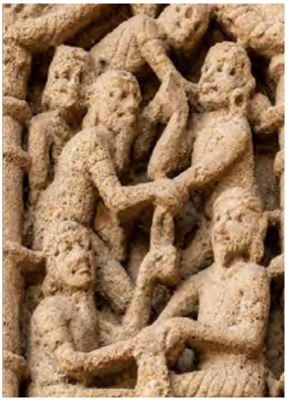

Fig.1 RM1 e.n. north

At least five panels show a group absorbed in passing an unknown object from one to another: it clearly flows between them, as for instance in **RM 1 e.n. north** (Fig. 1). One thing flows from another. Indeed, flow in general can be shown to be a key element of the panels, especially of RM: the ceaseless switching from one sphere of action to another in a rippling movement. Closely related to flow is symmetry: symmetry is common in, for instance, the arrangement of battle scenes and orgy scenes. In all panels it can be said that activity is concentrated, focussed, and intensive.

There are alternative explanations for the special quality of the sculpture under discussion. It could be claimed that the composition and arrangement of the panels at Modhera are governed merely by the demands of ornamentation. The ornamentation of a large number of pillars that keeps each different from another demands a large range of themes. Or again it could be claimed that these pillar sculptures constitute the intrusion of the dominant ethos of current court culture into sacred architecture.

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[9] Cf. Jacobs 2018. Jung 2013, p 43: screens with their «profusion of sculptural imagery» were «things to be contemplated, [...] [but] their very presence also heightened the distinctiveness of the spaces on either side and refashioned the simple act of walking [...] from one zone to another into an act of considerable ritual force». See also Jacobs 2018, 8.

[10] Turner 1979, 87-90.

Yet, when the narrative panels are carefully examined, the presence of a guiding intelligence – conscious or unconscious – in their placement is inescapable, a will to construct a neutral zone, betwixt and between, free from the contraints of standard iconography and standard morality. Most striking of all is the instance of the first three pillars we shall shortly look at in detail, where the very process of worship is boldly subverted.

2. *The Pillars of GM (*Gūḍhamaṇḍapa*), the 'Closed Hall'*

I shall examine the GM panels first. They are the closing stage of the liminal state of the worshipper, when one is thinking with one's liminality cap on, so to speak; but at the same time, they are the origin of the Modhera narrative panel style. They are reviewed and summarised far more easily than those in the RM since there are only 64 of them, and with a much narrower range of themes.

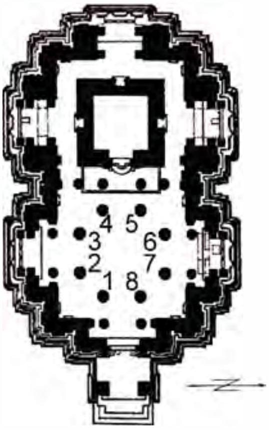

Fig. 2 Numbering of GM pillars

The panels of the GM are positioned slightly higher than those in the RM, and are slightly narrower and shorter than those in the RM; they are obscured in the gloom of the closed hall. The position of the 8 GM pillars, all of which support the domed ceiling above them, is shown in Fig. 2.

I have numbered them in clockwise order from the entrance, and note the direction each panel faces[11].

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[11] In setting out for myself all my photographs of the pillars, I positioned the panels identically, with the eastern panel on the left, and then moving to the right, north-east, north and so on. This enables the orientation of the panels to be understood at a glance; and I have continued this practice in the illustrations here when several panels of a pillar are shown together, unless adjustment is necessary to clarify narrative sequence. When describing each panel generally I refer to left and right as seen by the external observer, but with regard to body parts I refer to left and right from the point of view of the individual represented.

Fig. 3 shows **GM 1** as seen on entry to the GM and turning to face the first pillar.

GM 2 is almost completely hidden by **GM 1**, looking like a shadow down the left edge of **GM 1**.

GM 3, with the east-facing panel of Sūrya, standing holding two blooming lotuses and with his two attendants Piṅgala and Daṇḍin, is visible to the right of **GM 1**, and **GM 4** is at the right of the picture. Sūrya's empty shrine is further back to the right of **GM 4,** out of sight.

Some light comes from the window on the left, and a tiny amount from the south window to the *pradakṣiṇa* of the *garbha-gṛha*. So, on **GM 3** Sūrya faces east, the direction from which the deity is approached. But what looks directly east on **GM 1**?

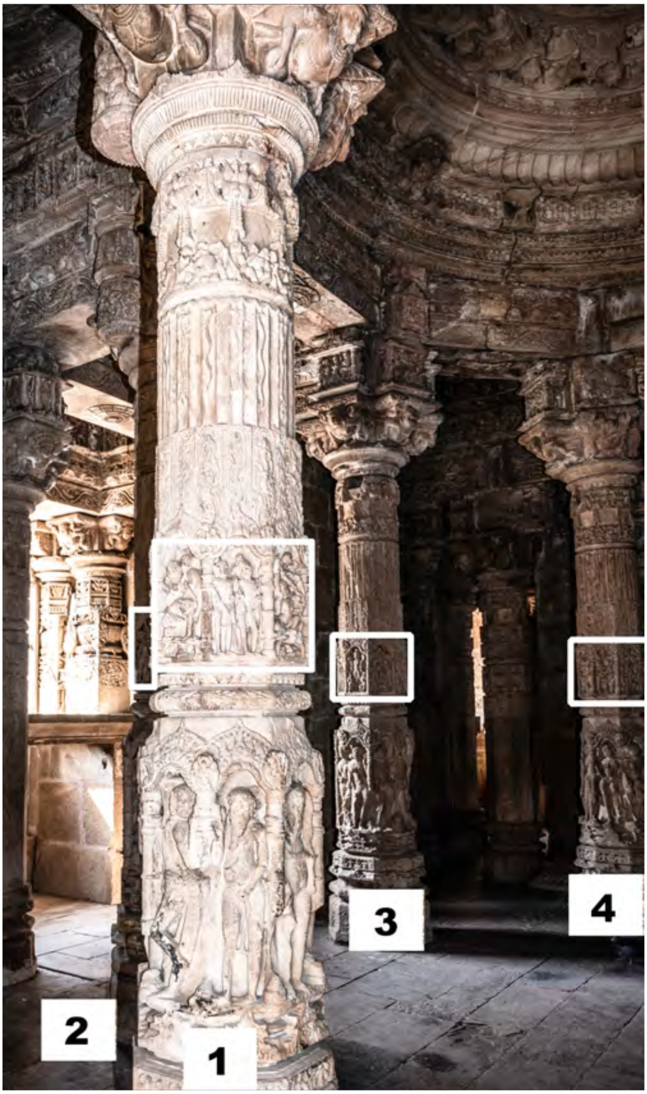

Fig.3 GM1, GM2, GM3, GM4 looking **n-e** from entrance

2.1. *GM1: Pillar 1*

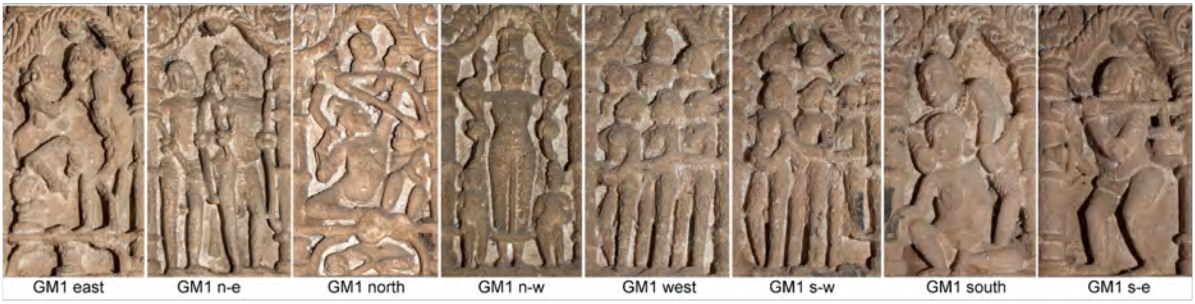

Fig. 4 Overview of **GM1**

(In Fig. 4, **GM 1 east** is on the left. Moving left from there we would move round the octagon to reach **GM 1 s-e**, which is on the far right of Fig. 4.)

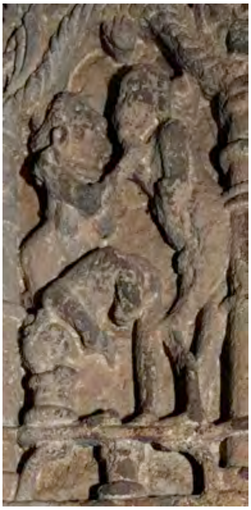

Fig. 5 GM 1 east

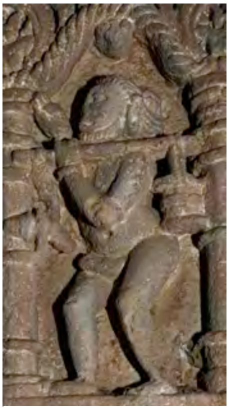

Fig. 6 GM 1 s-e

Facing east, then, as does the *mūrti*, we see a damaged erotic panel (Fig. 5). A man to the right bends foward, about to kiss the woman who is pulling him towards her by his beard, while another woman (or the same woman subsequently) bends her head down to a wicker seat, presenting herself in the animal congress position to the man. Moving left of **GM 1 east** to **GM 1 s-e**, that is to say to the far right of Fig. 4, we see a wandering ascetic with his material possessions suspended from the staff over his shoulder (Fig. 6). Not only material objects: obtruding on to the left boundary of the niche is not a pestle hanging down, but the end of his penis, which is so long it has to be thus supported. This is not at once obvious because a middle section of the penis has broken off.

Next comes a bearded man with a brahman's tuft (*śikhā*), **GM 1 south** (Fig. 7), well dressed and ornamented, standing behind a seated woman, whose upper left arm he grasps; and his other arm is about to seize her by the neck. Her left arm, which wears a bracelet, is perhaps also raised in indignation or expostulation.

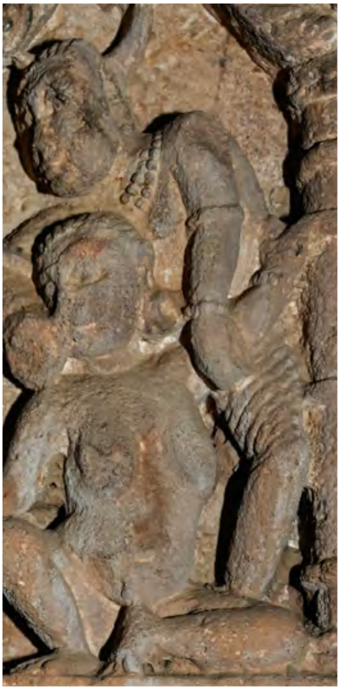

Fig. 7 GM1 south

Continuing left in Fig. 4's overview, both **GM 1 s-w** and **west** look left, and clearly the foreground people, headed by a woman, are looking at Sūrya (**GM 1 n-w**) who stands facing inwards, away from the entrance. There is a clear and continuing leftward movement in the panels from the left of **GM 1 east**.

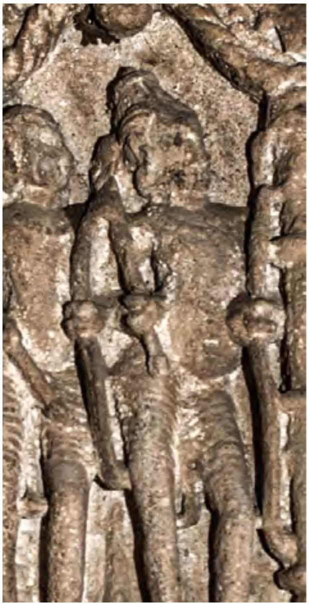

Fig. 8 GM1 n-e

Leaving **GM 1 south**, the man seizing the woman, unexplained for the moment, let us return to where we started, **GM 1 east**, and move instead to the right, where we come to two men each holding an arrow and a bow, the man on the right wearing a crown (Fig. 8). These two figures are readily identifiable as Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma.

That they face right suggests a rightward narrative movement, just as the ascetic in **GM 1 s-e** facing left began a leftward movement.

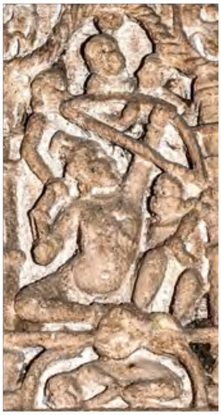
Fig. 9 GM1 north

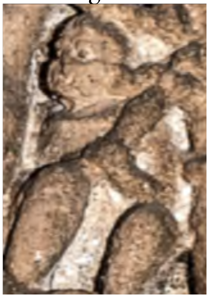
Fig. 10 GM1 n (detail)

Continuing to the right, a crowned archer shoots an arrow upwards (Fig. 9). That this is Rāma again is confirmed by the figure sitting between the bow and Rāma's left knee, who rests a mace on his shoulder (Fig. 10). This must be Hanumān. The figure on the ground looks like a dead monkey. Despite the bed, to which I shall come back shortly, this must be the field of battle in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. As Sūrya stands to the right, **GM 1 n-w**, I suggest that Rāma has just recited the *Ādityahṛdaya*, the hymn to the sun taught to Rāma by Agastya, according to the southern recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, prior to shooting his final arrow at Rāvaṇa[12]. The definite presence of Rāma now explains the travelling ascetic and the scene he is moving to. He is surely Rāvaṇa in disguise, who then abducts Sītā in his form as royal brahman, lacking his ten heads[13].

With the next three panels, **GM 1 s-w**, **west**, and **n-w**, (Fig. 11) we leave the *Rāmāyaṇa* in abeyance. **GM 1 s-w** and **west**, each comprising a group of worshippers headed by a woman, gaze devoutly to the left, the sixth face of the pillar, which is Sūrya, as already described on pillar 3, holding two lotuses and with his attendants Daṇḍin and Piṅgala. So a woman, Sītā, is being ill-treated, and appropriately enough, a divine presence, Sūrya, is near at hand. Two panels of devotees look towards him.

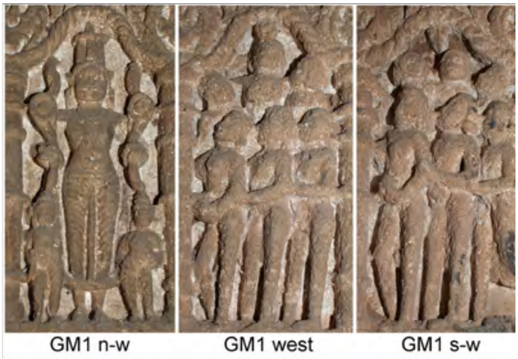
GM1 n-w GM1 west GM1 s-w

Fig. 11 GM1 Partial view

Women head the two groups, and it is possible both foreground groups are meant to be all women. The repetition of the scene could be for emphasis which would be appropriate here, but other pillars have similar duplication of a panel for other reasons. Sometimes, in RM, the sculptor has a second go because the first attempt was not satisfactory; or, as might be the case here, because they could not think of anything else to do to complete the octagon.

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[12] Cf. Goldman 2009, 1341ff.

[13] It should not be thought that the five discs to the right side of Rāvaṇa's hair visible in the first small photograph of **GM 1 south** taken in 2006 (Fig. 4, overview) represent so many of his ten heads: they are made by animals or insects, and are not present in the larger photo (2020) of the panel (Fig. 7).

The upper figures in both panels, who do not look to the left, are fillers of neutral significance as upper figures on GM and RM so often are. Nevertheless, it should be said that this pillar is exceptional, unique in its double narrative sequence.

Nor have we yet finished with it. Where does the erotic panel **GM 1 east** (Fig. 5) fit in? Could it be Rāvaṇa enjoying himself in his *antaḥpura*, prior to snatching Sītā? One woman is shown synoptically, before and during intercourse, or two women are enjoying the man's attentions. The man is thinner than the rather chubby travelling ascetic. Examination of other panels both in the GM and RM will suggest that what in fact we have here is the first of many instances of the wilful and insistent insertion of the erotic where it does not normally belong. This sex scene splits apart what is the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a nutshell, the two halves of the kernel being Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā and Rāma's slaying of Rāvaṇa. The narrative is, as it were, cracked apart.

It is unnecessary for the love-makers of **GM 1 east** to be standing on a bed; it is even more unusual for Rāma to be shooting an arrow from his bed. In the epic he is on his war chariot. But beds and bedroom scenes are so much the favourite locus of the Modhera sculptors that they do not hesitate to place Rāma in his crowning heroic action on a bed.

2.2. *GM 2: Pillar 2*

Moving on to the second pillar (Fig. 12), just three contiguous panels call for discussion. The other five panels (unshown) have couples canoodling and groups cavorting.

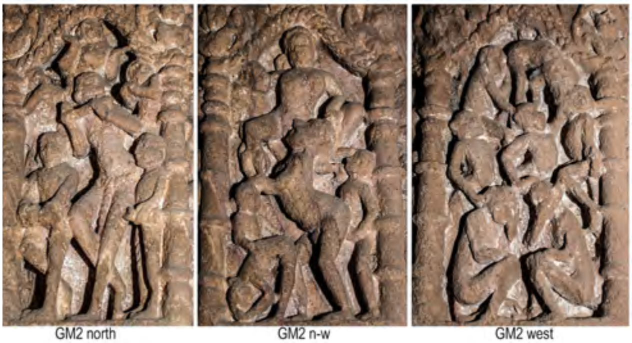

Fig. 12 GM 2 Partial view

The north panel in Fig. 12 is perhaps the significant one.

A tall man plays the flute, accompanied by two drummers (Fig. 13). The right drummer, if indeed it is a drum he holds by his side, is strangely inactive, perhaps entranced by the sound of the flute. Behind the tall man's head a woman leaps excitedly, her legs widespread, though her left leg is not visible.

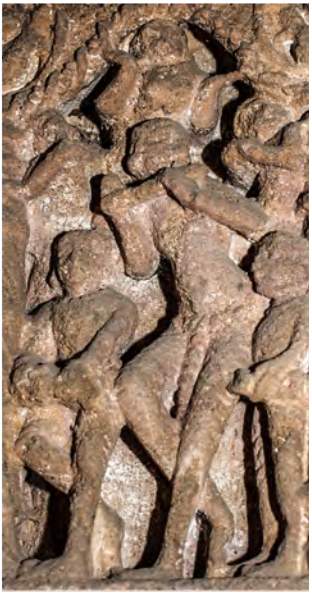

Fig. 13 GM 2 north

If it were possible to show a connection between Modhera and the Sāmba of the *Sāmba Purāṇa*, this might be Sāmba. Sāmba, Kṛṣṇa's son, himself a great lover, and archetypal worshipper of Sūrya, was tricked by Nārada into entering Kṛṣṇa's *antaḥpura*, and the women there were so excited by the handsome young man that the juice (*śukra*) of their *yoni*s was apparent on their lotus seats[14].

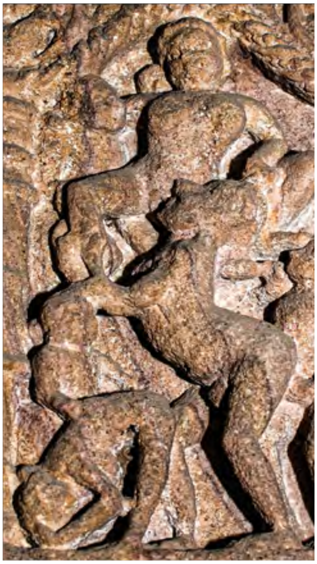

Fig. 14 GM 2 n-w

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[14] Srivastava 2013: *Sāmba Purāṇa* 3. 37 and 44.

It was on seeing this that Kṛṣṇa cursed his son to become a leper, a condition from which Sāmba freed himself by building the temple to Sūrya at Multan, and worshipping Sūrya there.

In fact, I don't think there is reference here to Sāmba, but the story just referred to does relate to the erotic sculptures at Modhera, insofar as cunnilingus with its excitement and lubrication of women's *yoni*s plays a relatively prominent role here.

Moving to **GM 2 n-w** (Fig. 14) we see a large man, a woman presenting herself in the position for animal copulation in front him, while he turns his head to give cunnilingus to the substantial woman he holds above his shoulder.

This woman's placement is strongly analogous to that of the woman above the flute-player, and though the figure of the central man differs considerably between the two panels, given the limited powers of this and many other of the sculptors of these panels, I would suggest the two scenes are connected.

The woman in the arch of the panel rises triumphantly, continuing and developing the position she held in the previous panel. The large man's penis is missing. The watching man behind him is analogous to the drummer on the right in the previous panel.

The narrative movement spills over slightly into **GM 2 west** (Fig. 12 Partial view of **GM 2**), where a group of monkeys fills the panel. At the top a monkey sniffs the bottom of the monkey who bends down in front of him.

Quite possibly this action is prompted by the example of the preceding panel. Apart from this detail, the group is an instance of a common type of panel, especially in RM, where a group, human or monkey, performs some group activity or task in unison, with an evident sense of communitas. Here two old monkeys ponder in the foreground, while younger monkeys are more active above.

2.3. *GM 3: Pillar 3*

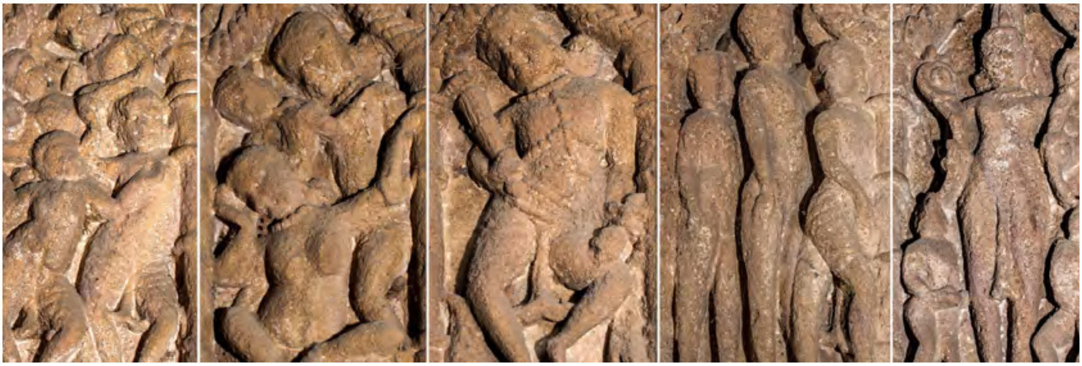

Fig. 15 GM3 Partial view

Pillar 3 (Fig. 15) has the only other image of Sūrya on the GM pillars (and there is none on the RM pillars – except for a rare composite, Sūrya-Revanta), and its panel pertinently faces east. One sequence is clear: the three men in **GM 3 s-e** are standing before Sūrya. I think the other three (**GM 3 w**, **s-w**, **s**) might all relate to Bhīma, whom I take as the big powerful man holding an elaborate mace as he dances in **GM 3 s**[15].

In GM he lacks the characteristic hairstyle he has in RM, as discussed later. Beyond the two instances in GM of two men fighting with maces, the frequency of Bhīma in RM makes his presence in GM more plausible. Here in **GM 3** we see, conceivably, the same tilted head at the top of the west, south-west, and south panels.

What stands out, of course, in **GM 3 s-w**, is the degree of resemblance of the seated foreground figure to the Sītā in **GM 1 south** (Fig. 7). The standing man's hand is perhaps visible holding the foreground figure's left elbow from beneath. But the woman, seated comfortably on a cushion, with her right hand raised to her chin, seems almost to be simpering. Is it she herself subsequently, or another woman simultaneously, who, behind the seated woman, has her right hand on a tall man's shoulder? That standing woman, whoever she is, has her back arched because, presumably, the man draws her to him with his unseen right arm.

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[15] The *Ratnamālā* describes Bhīma I as «dark, stout, tall, and hairy, handsome, haughty, fond of war» (Majumdar 1956, 56).

In **GM 3 west**, conceivably the same man and the same foreground woman of **GM 3 s-w** are dancing in the foreground, and making love in the missionary position above, the woman with at least one leg lifted up. Note that in **GM 3 west** both the foreground left figure (whom I take to be a woman, the woman in question) and the woman above on her back have their arms flung out in a gesture of wild abandon; and the woman in the quasi 'Sītā' posture has one arm thrown out.

Stronger and simpler is the case of the other two panels, Sūrya and his worshippers (Fig. 16); but there is an interesting nuance. Unlike the two panels on GM1 where a group of women look in adoration at Sūrya, here the figure nearest to Sūrya looks not towards Sūrya but back over his shoulder to the two others, who are standing straight upright, eyes fixed on Sūrya (**GM 3 s-e**).

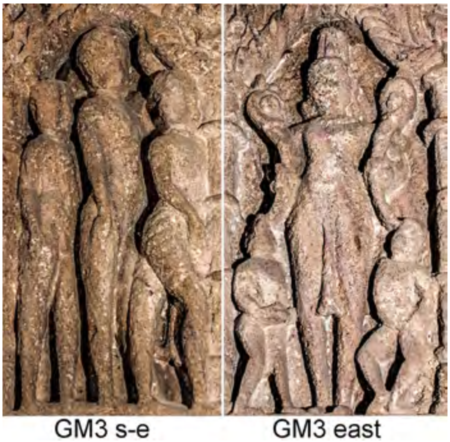

Fig. 16 GM 3 Partial view

The figure looking back is clothed, with a necklace. Of the other two, the rear one is naked, with his penis clearly visible in my 2006 photograph shown here (but covered over with fresh mortar in 2020); stone is missing from the pubic region of the middle figure.

Although they lack the tell-tale mark of the peacock feather broom[16], I suspect they are *kṣapaṇaka*s, naked Jain Digambara monks, who are certainly present on the next two pillars. On this reading, the foremost figure, looking back expressively, is a Hindu who is introducing the two Digambaras to the god Sūrya.

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[16] Part of the broom handle is perhaps visible across the middle man's chest. The front man's hand before his groin shows awareness of the nudity of the men behind him, as they stand before Sūrya.

2.4. *GM 4: Pillar 4*

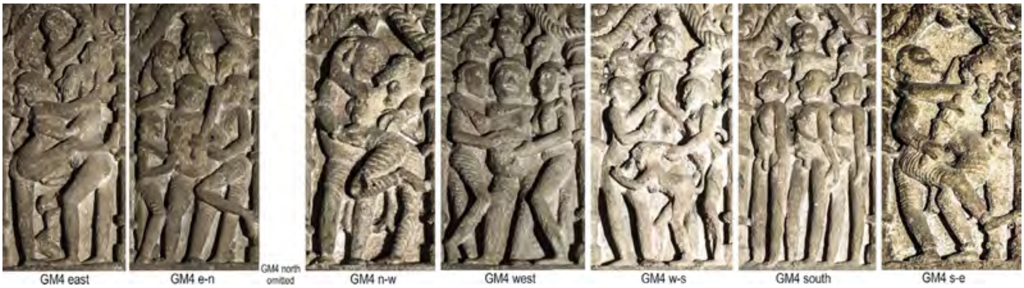

Fig. 17 GM 4 Incomplete overview

In **GM 4 south** (Fig. 17) we come upon three naked men avidly gazing to the left. Their brooms under their left arms prove them to be *kṣapaṇaka*s. Although they are lined up like the worshippers of Sūrya in **GM 1** and **GM 3**, it is not the god who is the object of their gaze. In the erotic scene to the left (**GM 4 s-w**) with its three naked participants, the man on the right is shown to be himself a *kṣapaṇaka* by the broom under his arm (Figs. 17 and 18). What might look like a beard is in fact unfinished carving; the figure immediately above him is also unfinished. His straight broom aligns with the upraised arm of the woman immediately behind the foreground threesome, who is expressing horror at what is going on by covering her eyes with her hands and also fascination by peeping through her fingers[17].

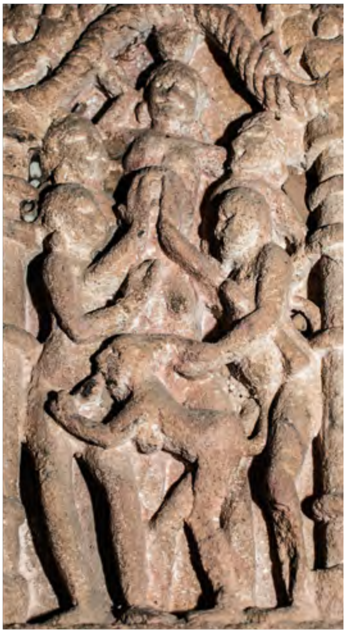

Fig. 18 GM 4 s-w

The participant on the left wears an earring and has his hands in *añjali*: he is a Hindu venerating the Jain at the other end of the woman; or, more likely, thanking him for initiating the erotic event. The *kṣapaṇaka* is pulling the woman's hair.

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[17] Such a gesture is common in erotic sculpture at this period, and to my knowledge always includes looking through the fingers that ostensibly hide the eyes, whenever the sculpture is adequately detailed.

The other four panels shown (Fig. 17 above) all feature a Bhīma-esque man who could conceivably represent Bhīma Rāja. In **GM 4 s-e**, on the grounds of the evidence of RM pillars, he fights Duryodhana, though unlike RM there is no attempt to distinguish the two contestants. In **GM 4 n-e** he stands amid a group, holding a club-like mace, and his left hand is raised in what might be seen as self-affirmation. The man with a woman on either side is strong and bulky, with Bhīma's characteristic square head. Possibly the man copulating in **GM 4 e** and embracing in **GM 4 n-w** is Bhīma too. As for the man on the left in **GM 4 s-w** with his hands in *añjali*, the absence of the square head and burly form both characteristic of Bhīma rule him out; indeed, the very gesture of *añjali* is unlikely for the Bhīma of Modhera.

2.5. *GM 5: Pillar 5*

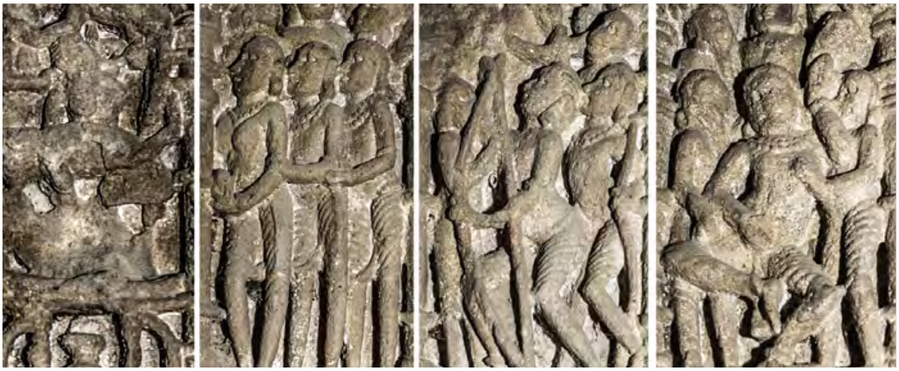


Fig. 19 GM 5 Partial view

In **GM 5 n-e** we have the last group of onlookers in GM (Fig. 19). Again, I think they are probably meant to be all women, all gazing raptly to the left, excitedly grasping the elbows of the person in front. There can be no doubt that the **GM 5 n.** pair of archers are hurriedly proceeding left, their eyes fixed on what lies before them. Neither wears a crown, but given their earlier appearance in **GM 1 n-e**, they have to be Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

The object of the women's and archers' gaze is a damaged and perhaps unfinished panel (**GM 5 east**), wherein is to be found a copulatory couple on a bed, and above them a male standing as he receives *fellatio* from a large woman in the centre of the panel, and leans over to kiss another woman.

With carefully rendered pigs' ears, both the male figures indeed really are elongated pigs.

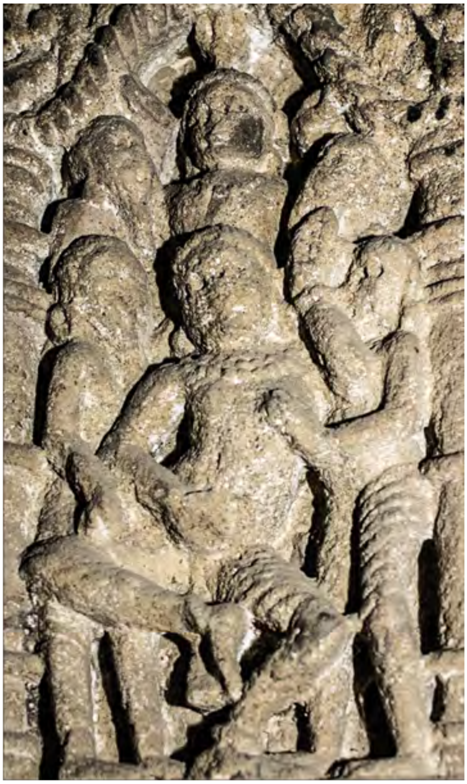


Fig. 20 GM 5 n-w

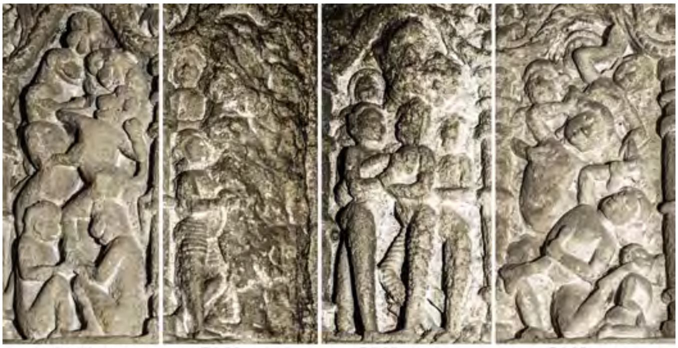
Also included in this selection from **GM 5** is a powerful male dancer with a heavy double necklace, and squarish head – perhaps Bhīma or Bhīma Rāja (Fig. 20).

Unshown here are three well rendered single woman dancers (**GM west**, **s-w**, and **south**); and lastly a male figure with head strongly resembling the male dancer in **GM 5 n-w**, who gives *cunnilingus* to a woman who fellates him.

She, hanging upside-down with her back to us, her elbows on his akimbo knees, raises her face to look out at us, as does the man, who supports her outstretched knees with his hands.

This latter scene, facing south-east, is prominent as one looks towards to the shrine from the entrance to the GM.

2.6. *GM 6: Pillar 6*



GM6 n-e GM6 north GM6 n-w GM6 west

Fig. 21 GM 6 Partial view

On pillar 6 there is another appearance of *kṣapaṇaka*s, whom we met before on pillar 4, and possibly also on pillar 3. Here (Fig. 21) they are neither having *darśana* of Sūrya nor watching an orgy. In **GM 6 n-w** a *kṣapaṇaka* left foreground, his peacock feather broom tucked under his right arm confronts two clothed men, the nearer one, the same height, holds with his left hand the right wrist of the Jain. The man behind is smaller.

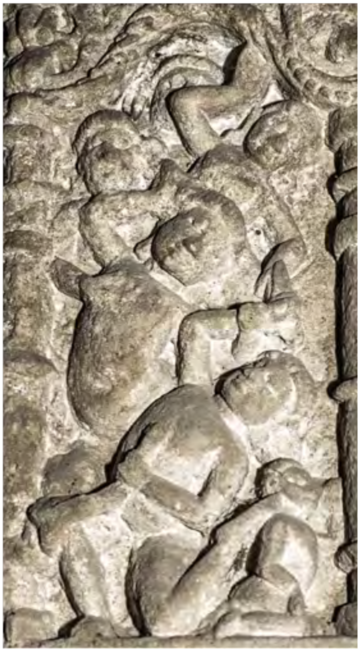


Fig. 22 GM 6 w

Another figure is in the background above, and most of the background is uncarved. **GM 6 north** is unfinished but looks as if it might have been intended to be a different version of **GM 6 n-w**'s meeting. To the right, **GM 6 w** (Fig. 22), the same figures, it would seem, are engaged in a wild dance. The *kṣapaṇaka* dominates the foreground, left knee on the ground, leaning back with his peacock broom held out before him and his right arm raised.

Above him what I take to be the same two clothed figures who were meeting him on the west face, now likewise with their upper bodies bent back. Strange is the small figure bottom right, not unlike the small figures at the bottom of sculptures at Khajuraho, but there they are onlookers, while here the figure looks away.

Is he just an unimportant space-filling figure, or a someone who disapproves of what is going on? Does his small size show his small-mindedness? However, what is really remarkable in this panel is that the *kṣapaṇaka* holds in his upraised right hand a dagger that pierces the left lower arm of the uppermost leaning back figure, and the dancing man immediately above the *kṣapaṇaka* is holding and restraining the wrist of the stabbing hand; and we should remember that the figure right in front of the *kṣapaṇaka* in the panel to the left grasps his right wrist there, holding it against his own chest.

The **n-e** panel of this pillar has in a group of monkeys a somewhat parallel instance of dancing (Fig. 23). The bottom two monkeys are sitting on the ground, and one holds the other's wrist in a friendly way. Above them and most fully in view are a pair of monkeys their bodies in seemingly ecstatic motion, and at the top three monkeys seem to confer with each other. In both panels can be seen a clear presentation of communitas. However, in the human instance, the threat of the dagger somewhat hinders such an interpretation.

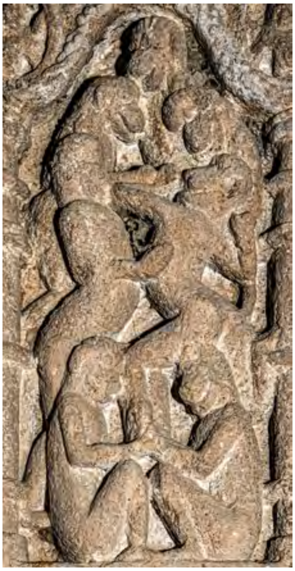


Fig. 23 GM 6 n-e

2.7. *Summary of GM Pillars*

In the foregoing treatment of the GM pillars, which support the ornate circular ceiling, we have ourselves circled round six of the eight pillars, taking each pillar as we find it, tackling their respective panels in a variety of ways, attempting to follow what seems to be a logic varying from pillar to pillar. The pillars each stand apart, separate in the gloom. In the GM one is led, forced, to examine one pillar at a time. The first three pillars strongly suggest a narrative structure from panel to panel on each pillar; though any such structuring seems to wither away in the remaining pillars. Perhaps the guiding vision of the architect ceased to be applied.

In **GM 3 s-e** I have suggested a Hindu is introducing *kṣapaṇaka*s to the worship of Sūrya. One should be careful of labelling *kṣapaṇaka*s shown in Hindu temples as necessarily representatives of Jainism in any specific sense.

*Kṣapaṇaka*s in erotic scenes, as at Khajuraho and elsewhere, are there as exemplars of the ascetic's superabundance of semen and consequent sexual power, all the more powerful from the Hindu point of view, on account of the transgressiveness of their heterodoxy. Nevertheless, these scenes could refer to particular contacts with specific *kṣapaṇaka*s.

As well as the summing up of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in pillar 1, there are as already mentioned two instances of two men fighting with maces, who might well be Bhīma and Duryodhana.

This is all the more likely because in **GM 7 east** it is highly probable, in the light of RM, as we shall soon see, that Bhīma is pulling off Duḥśāsana's arm; a portion of uncarved stone is exactly where Draupadī would be expected to be witnessing the deed. There is none of the generalised fighting or standing groups of warriors so common in RM and temples in general.

Without a doubt, pillars 3 and 4 are linked, and worship of Sūrya is paralleled with watching orgiastic sex. With the exception of pillar 3, every GM pillar has at least one scene of sexual intercourse. This bending of boundaries, this distortion of normal limits suggests that we are in the realm of liminality.

Alternatively, the sexual force of what may fairly be called Bhīma Rāja's court culture could be said to distort and pull apart the righteous world of the *Rāmāyaṇa* here, bringing Rāma firmly into the Rāja's own louche ambit. Aside from Rāma and Sītā, the only divine presence on the pillars themselves has been the two panels of Sūrya.

If there is a visible liminal process at Modhera, it is in these GM panels a process liable to misdirection, diversion, one might even say perversion. The powerful figure of a proto-typical Bhīma has everything his own way, so to speak, within the organising consciousness that governs the pillars.

Here he has inserted himself into the narrative as his brother mace-bearing Hanumān, and turned aside from holy Rāma and Sītā. Like him, the very style of these pillars is brash, bold and bulky. Love-making and dancing predominate in what can be summed up as luxurious court scenes economically presented.

3. *RM:* Raṅgamaṇḍapa, *the 'Dance Hall'*

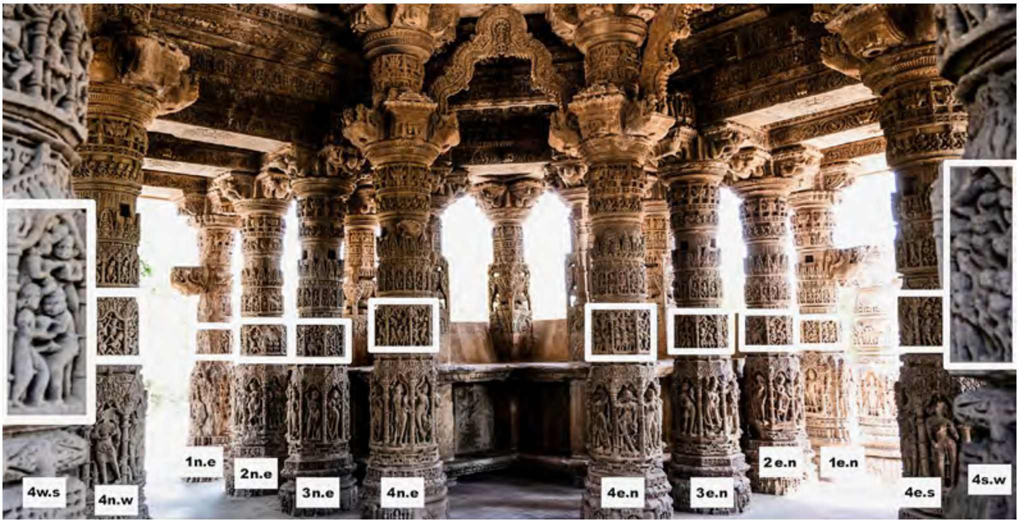


Fig. 24 Twelve narrative pillars of RM viewed from s-w.

RM is open on all sides, flooded with light. Not only are the friezes here illuminated, they are much more closely positioned, and it is easy, indeed unavoidable, to see many panels at once. In Fig. 24 we see 9 north-east facing panels, and partial views of 23 panels. Amid the rich overall carving, the narrative panels do not stand out as they do in GM, and their scenes, vibrant though they are, cannot be taken in at a distance. Prominent are the figures on the larger figural frieze below, who are mainly *apsaras*es. Above the narrative frieze a smaller frieze of repeated dancing figures also distracts.

Whereas with the GM I was able within the scope of this paper to discuss a third of the panels, with the 256 panels of the RM I must abbreviate my treatment considerably, and mainly resort to analytical summaries. The rudimentary narrative guidance provided by a few of the panels in the GM is entirely lacking, but is perhaps made up for by the repetition of themes, repetition which shows which themes are particularly significant to the designer and makers.

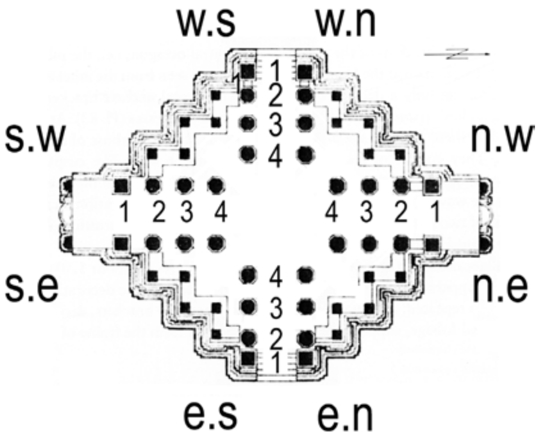


Fig. 25 Plan of RM ceiling panels

The outermost pillars, all numbered **1** on the plan (Fig. 25) have square bases and a goddess on each of the four sides before becoming octagonal and exactly like the other pillars.

On the ceiling (Fig. 26), four oblique slabs each contain 10 square narrative panels, related to the pillar panels, but which are simpler in content and more rudimentary in technique. Just three of these ceiling panels will be mentioned later. RM has four identical entrances.

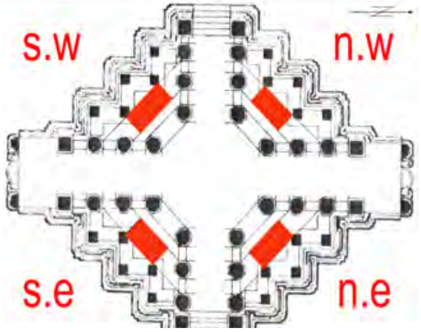


Fig. 26 Plan of RM oblique ceiling slabs panels

Where to start? Considering only the outward-facing panels with a deity on the outermost pillars, **1 e.n. east** has a scene of *liṅga* worship (and **1 e.n. south** has Śiva killing Andhaka). **1 s.e. south** has an eroded Revanta, Sūrya's son, the hunter, as usual shown on horseback, under a *chattra*.

Lastly, and most significantly, **1 w.n. west**, facing the worshipper as they leave the GM and go towards RM, has the rare and imposing form of Sūrya-Revanta, crowned, on horseback, and under a *chattra*, and the same time holding the two blooming lotuses; and Revanta as well on another panel of the same pillar (**1 w.n. s-e**) I shall select this pillar as my one complete example of a RM pillar (Fig. 27) and centre my presentation of RM on it.

3.1. *RM Pillar* ***1 w.n.***

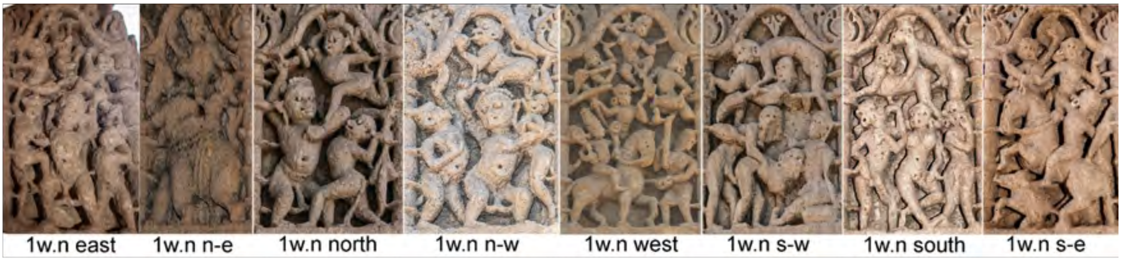


Fig. 27 1 w.n. – Example of a complete RM pillar

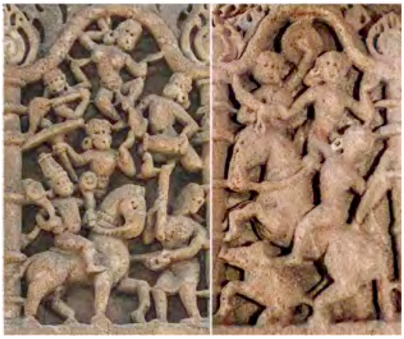


Fig. 28 Sūrya-Revanta (**1 w.n . west**) and Revanta (**1w.n. s-e**)

Other than his special form in **1 w.n. west** (Fig. 28) Sūrya does not appear in the RM, nor does Revanta appear at all in the main temple. Revanta is here (**s-e**), accompanied by warriors and is hunting a pig. In RM every one of the four pairs of open passage-ways formed by the narrative frieze pillars has at least one representation of Revanta: the west the two just mentioned (Fig. 28), the east two (**4 e.n. east**; **4 e.s. south**), the south four (**1 s.e. south** with *chattra*, **2 s.e. east**, **2 s.e. w-s**, **4 s.e. east**), the north one (**3 n.e. n-w** with *chattra*).

Revanta's pervasiveness is reflected by the fact that the common theme in *Mahābhārata* friezes on other temples of two opposing bowmen facing each other on their chariots, usually Arjuna versus Karṇa, and which is found as normal on the RM n-e oblique ceiling slab, when it is executed on the **3 n.e. east** and **3 n.e. n-e** pillar panels has 3 pigs added in front of each bowman, so that the battle becomes a hunting scene as well.

There is added weight to Revanta's frequent appearances when the rare appearance of other deities in RM is considered. Viṣṇu appears twice, as Varāha lifting Bhūmi and Lakṣmī, and as Narasiṃha; and Śiva twice as Andhakāntaka, both sets of appearances showing the two deities as wild and terrible. In the Andhakānta panel **3 s.e. north**, a giant figure of Bhīma appears faintly to the left of Śiva. Possibly the Bhīma is left over from a different plan for that panel; but it could be argued that the fact that those just mentioned panels are the only appearances of the two great gods, suggests they are the only forms worthy of paralleling mighty Bhīma, a suggestion his presence beside Śiva would confirm.

Also Gaṇeśa appears three times, twice on the same pillar which also includes a war elephant (**2 w.s. n-w** and **south**). Kṛṣṇa from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* occurs just twice, once as a boy reaching into the butter churn, and once standing above the butter churn and lifting up Mt Govardhana. The dominant presence of Revanta, the roaming hunter, might be taken as relating to the element of wild freedom in the panels' wide-ranging choice of topic.

Returning to our specific pillar, **1 w.n.**, my photo of **1 w.n. n-e** (Fig. 29) is not very clear but in fact shows a warrior holding a curved sword sitting on a kind of platform over an elephant's head, a structure that occurs several times on the RM pillars. Here is the common depiction of generic warfare, in an image of weight and power. More frequent are scenes of warriors as coherent and symmetrical groups. Then again, a large figure sometimes occurs who fills the arch of the niche without doing anything specific, just dominant and awesome or threatening. Probably in such cases, the sculptor just felt they had to fill the empty space with something, but an uninterpretable large figure remains a brooding presence in several RM panels[18]. No less than three panels here in the specimen pillar show the *Rāmāyaṇa* monkeys attacking the giant Kumbhakarṇa, with Hanumān taking the lead, wielding his own mace in **east** and **north** panels. Not only is this a popular theme, occurring additionally some eight times, but there is a marked similarity between representations of the demon and those of Bhīma. Only the large ears distinguish the former from Bhīma. Both are big and strong and wield a mace.

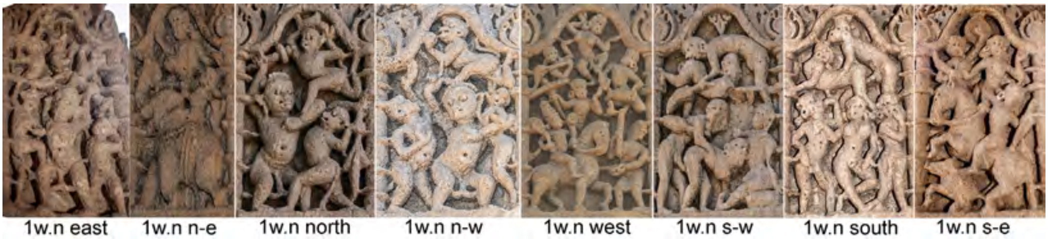


Fig.29 1 w.n. – A complete example of an RM pillar (Fig. 26 repeated).

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[18] A good example is found below, in a panel I classify as erotic (**3 w.s. south**. Fig. 34).

Sometimes, as in all three examples in this pillar, Kumbhakarṇa is not even very tall. The clinching factor, that shows the similarity to be deliberate, is the identity of hairstyle.

A fine example of Bhīma's headpiece shows the hero smashing Duryodhana's thigh as the defeated warrior lies on the ground (Fig. 30 **4 w.s. west**). It is common for Bhīma's hair in sculpture to resemble the hair of demons and Bhairava; and his nature in the epic has demonic elements[19], but here we see it only with Bhīma and Kumbhakarṇa. It is not clear to me whether a hat is involved as well as an arrangement of hair.

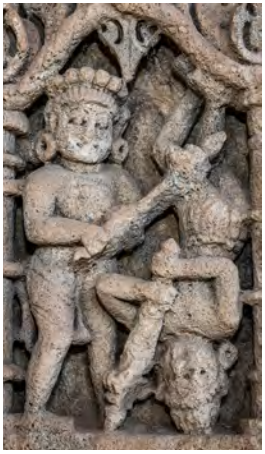

Fig. 30 4 w.s. west

In **3 s.w. north** (not shown) a very tall Kumbhakarṇa lacks the special hairstyle and Hanumān leaping overhead has his own hair in that style or holds that head-piece.

Fig. 31 is similar, with the flying figure clearly holding a sort of crown, except that here Kumbhakarṇa is as normal with Bhīma-like hair; is Hanumān shown twice? It is of course entirely appropriate for Hanumān to adopt this aspect of Bhīma, for they are brothers, both sons of Vāyu, god of wind. Their borderline natures are inherently liminal[20].

Note how Hanumān's tail in Fig. 31 seems to extend and swell up into the tip that looks like an enormous arrowhead beneath his mace, perhaps suggesting he is about to increase in size.

The **east** panel (Fig. 29, far left) shows Hanumān as tall as Kumbhakarṇa. RM rejoices in Bhīma and Hanumān. They are the two dominant images. Hanumān leaps overhead carrying the hill of herbs.

At least twice Bharata as defender of Ayodhyā, in a story not in Vālmīki, shoots an arrow at the unknown intruder; at other times Hanumān is not really separable from an unknown person leaping out of sheer exuberance over the top of fighting warriors, who sometimes are Bhīma and Duryodhana.

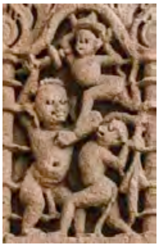

Fig. 31 1 w.n.north

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[19] Sattar 1990, Chapter 3; Loizeau 2017, Chapitre 10; for Bhīma's hairstyle, see Loizeau 2017, 437-438.

[20] Sattar 1990, Chapter 4.

Once Hanumān stands before Rāma who sits in state as Viṣṇu. Very often he is fighting Kumbhakarṇa, a Kumbhakarṇa who, as we have seen, looks like Bhīma.

Bhīma, for his part, is big and strong like Kumbhakarṇa: fighting Duryodhana (eight times) he twice smashes Duryodhana's thigh; he rips off Duḥśāsana's arm in front of Draupadī four times, once holding up the removed arm. He lifts up an elephant, presumably to throw at Karṇa, on three panels.

Pillar **4 e.s.** gives us Bhīma holding the elephant over his head (**north**), a war elephant and rider (**n-w**), Bharata shooting at Hanumān as he flies overhead with the hill of herbs, three more war elephants (**s-w**, **south**, **s-e**), and Hanumān fighting Kumbhakarṇa (**east** and **n-e**).

In addition, as in GM, a figure who may well be either Bhīma the Pāṇḍava or King Bhīma I, dances and besports himself.

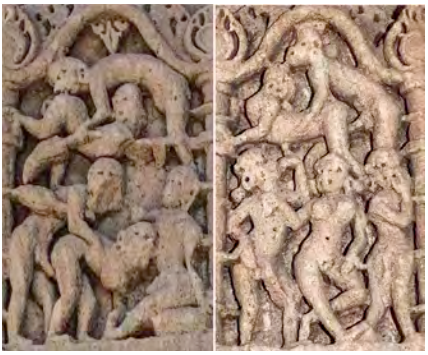

Fig. 32 1 w.n. s-w and **1 w.n. south**

The two remaining panels of the pillar that is being examined in detail (**1 w.n.**) are erotic (Fig. 32), and if it is correct to give special weight to the appearance of Sūrya-Revanta facing people as they leave the main temple, should not also some emphasis be allowed here to the juxtaposition of the erotic to the sacred? We have seen it clearly enough in GM.

Throughout the RM there are surprising conjunctions, distortions of expected reality, which could be satisfactorily classified under the heading of liminal states.

It is only here in **1 w.n. s-w** that the *kṣapaṇaka*s occur in RM, at this closest point to GM. Note the very unusual representation of the *picchikā*s that here look more like closed *chattra*s.

The two contiguous scenes of orgy on the **1 w.n.** pillar (Fig. 32) are bounded by images of Sūrya-Revanta and Revanta, the holy next to the transgressive.

3.2. *Some RM Problem Panels*

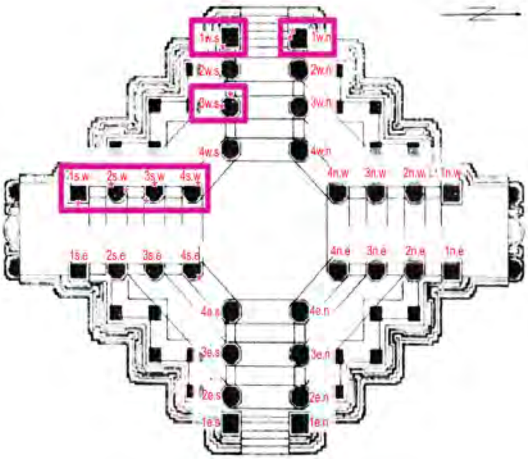

Fig. 33 Map of RM erotic panels

There are considerable differences between erotic scenes in the two halls. Whereas GM has more than one male taking part only twice, and in one of these panels the plural male performers are pigs not men, RM is more varied, has *cunnilingus* thrice in rich and artistic arrangements, but the erotic plays a proportionally much reduced role.

In GM, erotic scenes are present on all but one pillar. In RM I was surprised to discover that all the eleven erotic panels are on the west and south axes (Fig. 33).

One highly unusual panel presents in a novel way an erotic encounter just before it takes place. In **3 w.s. south** (Fig. 34) a naked woman bends to kiss a dog, a man behind her has his hand on her back, a man in front of her holds up a pot. The man holding the pot is clothed; but a hand, either his or the bending woman's, has pushed aside his lower garment to reveal his penis. A very tall woman behind, with parts of her breasts and her face missing, presents an indecipherable emotion.

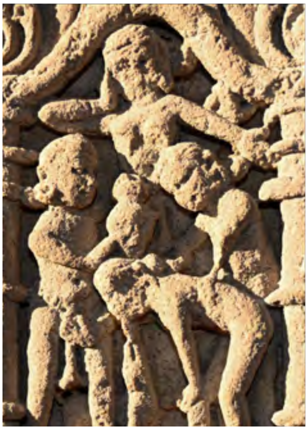

Fig. 34 3 w.s. south

However, there can be no doubt that the pot the man holds is going to be placed on the ground for the woman at the front to lean on as she performs with both men at once. The panel is a meditation on the purity of a woman's mouth vis-a-vis *fellatio*.

Several of the RM panels are very puzzling, but one difficult panel becomes explicable by looking at the other set of narrative panels in RM, those found on the oblique ceiling slabs. They are considerably simpler than the pillar panels but they are not easy to see.

Two panels from the s.w. oblique ceiling slab are combined in **RM 2 w.s. s-w**. Because of its complexity, I give two separate photos of **RM 2 w.s. s-w**. Above top right (Fig. 35b) on the ceiling, Rāma shoots an arrow at Mārīca, the demon disguised as the golden deer, and who is shown coming forth from the slain animal[21]. With the brio sometimes found in RM pillars, on the pillar (top left, Fig. 35a) the demon casts aside the deer's head with his left hand, throwing it off like a mask. In the ceiling version (Fig. 35b), the deer's head is on the ground. In the lower part of the pillar panel, as the ceiling panel parallel makes clear, Rāvaṇa, shown as holding what looks like a casket in his left hand, with no sign of Sītā, holds the curved sword with which he is about to cut off Jaṭāyu's wing. Jaṭāyu occurs three times in the ceiling panel, flying up, attacking Rāvaṇa, and fallen to the ground with his wing cut through.

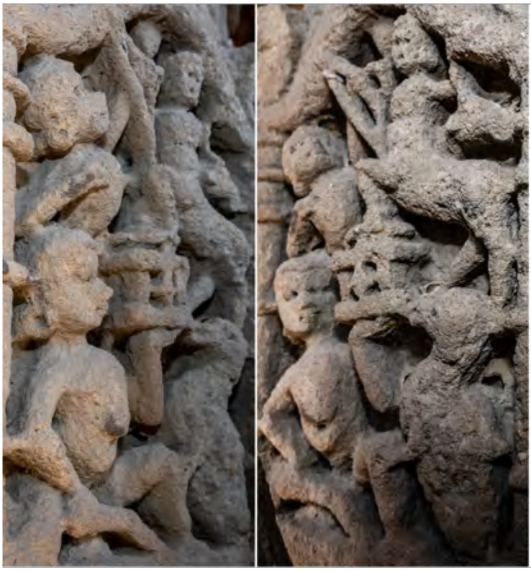

Fig. 35a 2w.s. s-w (2 views):

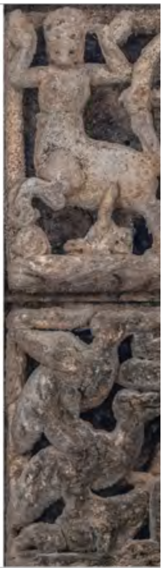

Fig. 35b ceiling slab **s-w**

The artist of the pillar panel is bold and incisive; not only that, he arrogantly, or carelessly, dispenses with any attempt to delineate Rāma or Rāvaṇa in their proper forms. The demon flings off the deer's head; the artist flings aside the bother of accuracy. It might of course be the case that the artist was not capable of fitting in Rāvaṇa. The casket Rāvaṇa holds is explained by a 13c version from Karnataka of Rāvaṇa fending off Jaṭāyu: the demon holds in just the same way a miniature Sītā in a miniature hermitage[22]. The casket here is the hermitage, a sacred container with Sītā inside but not visible. At any event, strange though 'Rāvaṇa' is, the sculptor far surpasses the rudimentary ceiling squares.

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[21] I am grateful to Corinna Wessels-Mevissen for confirming my identification of Mārīca by pointing to another example of a human Mārīca emerging from the theriomorphic form, this time from Hangal in Karnataka (Kanitkar 2020).

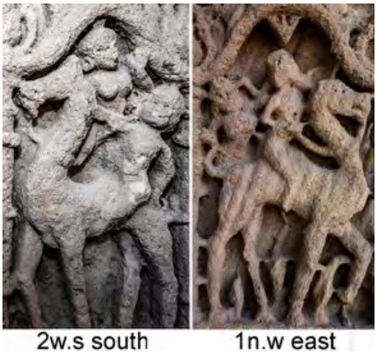

Fig. 36

Right next to this panel is another puzzle, a man on a camel and a woman coming to him (Fig. 36: **2 w.s. south**), perhaps referring to a romantic ballad like the centuries later Ḍhola-Maru where King Ḍhola finds and brings home his forgotten first wife. This is certainly not an abduction, and it is possible that it is intended to be a deliberate contrast to Rāvaṇa's taking of Sītā. Another version of the scene, (Fig. 36: **1 n.w. east)**, is shown beside it, eroded but with a better camel.

I close this brief presentation of RM pillars by showing a few of several prominent panels (Fig. 37) which in addition to expressing flow, mutuality, and symmetry, feature a particularly horrible act, namely stabbing someone in the eye. These are part of general scenes of battle, with no specific reference (though one has a Bhīma figure). Stabbing the eye does not bring complete darkness, and it is a thoroughly practical procedure in sword and dagger fighting, the eye being a soft and easy target. Nevertheless, the dagger plunging into the eye is the bringer of darkness, of the closing down of coherence and order, even in the sunlit complexity of the Dance Hall. Two features of the sun often mentioned in texts are that his radiant heat is dangerous, and that his brightness destroys darkness and ignorance. Prior to the Sun's presence being gained in the *garbha-gṛha*, the worshipper is flooded with imagery, but they are also blinded, as it were, by the dangerous multiplicity of the everyday world that the pillars sum up.

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[22] Loizeau 2017, 212, fig. 83; Loizeau 2010, 15, fig. 33.

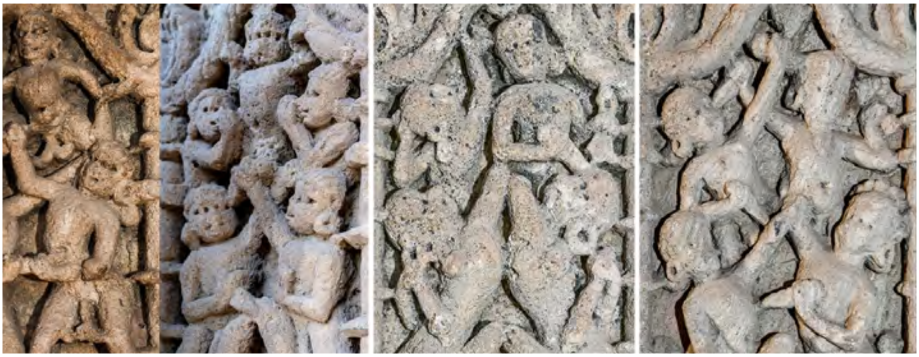

Fig. 37

RM is later than GM, but the greatest difference between their panels arises from the arithmetic. Eight pillars allow a slow and ponderous working through of a few themes, themes which by the last two pillars are reduced to the interaction of loving couples and a couple of appearances by Bhīma. Thirty-two pillars demand considerable change of topic if the pillars, bathed in light, are to maintain novelty and freshness of appearance. Avoiding undue repetition, RM is necessarily kaleidoscopic. RM builds on the sculptural examples of the GM pillars, but takes them much further. RM presents an amplified situation, freed from a single entrance and exit, and freed from any goal within its own confines. Although one can take a straight line from the further side of the tank through to Sūrya in his shrine, quite possibly the RM was usually entered as now predominantly from the south. The appearance of the erotic in RM solely on the inner axes of south and west is an interesting problem, among the many that Modhera presents. Perhaps this was the most popular route to the *mūrti*.

4. *Conclusions*

I hope that this brief introduction to Modhera's narrative panels has made an initial case for them to be more fully examined as complex works of art. I will in conclusion summarise my preliminary findings, briefly recapping two alternative explanations for the special character of these sculptures, before summing up the case for liminality as the key factor.

In the first place, one basic fact of architecture is a possible explanation for the special character of the sculpture of the two halls. The architect, or architects, evidently wanting to produce a highly ornamental temple, opted for eight-sided pillars, with narrative sculpture on the set of panes a little above eye-level. The mere necessity of ringing the changes from pane to pane, extreme because of the octagonality, might conceivably have produced as a kind of by-product the strange concatenations of imagery here described. However, another consequence of octagonality is, I believe, is of even greater significance; namely the large number of panels that are more or less directly in the onlooker's field of vision. The effect is all the greater amid the multiple pillars of RM, which also benefit from the increased natural illumination. This multiplicity of lines of vision causes a cross-contamination of imagery, presenting an almost overwhelming variety of narrative sculpture to the moving eye.

Secondly, there is the question of social background. As noted above, the frequent representations of Bhīma, mighty warrior of the *Mahābhārata*, especially when combined with a very similar looking figure in music and dance scenes, and even perhaps in love-making, suggest that all these figures should be understood as multiforms of Bhīma I, the king who built the temple. In which case, might not all the various tensions and distortions found in the imagery we have examined be nothing more than a reflection of the quality and tone of life in the court of Bhīma I, and also that of his son if it were he who built RM?

Both explanations could each stand alone, but they are both more plausibly seen as contributions to the argument for the influence on the artwork of its liminal situation. Modhera is undeniably a treasure-house of liminal themes. From the very first pillars of GM to the scattering of instances of violent blinding in RM, the orderly progression of normal Indian temple imagery is shattered. The panes are virtual theatres, displaying an ever-changing variety of scenes, scenes that destroy certainty, disrupt calm; with the occasional exception of scenes of communal peaceful cooperation! Images of Sūrya himself and his son Revanta are occasionally present in the mêlée, as also fierce forms of Śiva and Viṣṇu, but as merely incidentals in the heaving tumult of human and animal life, deftly and powerfully portrayed. All this is the highly charged anteroom to the *mūrti* of Sūrya.

The notion of liminality has mushroomed since its origins in the ideas of van Gennep and Turner. Its sphere has developed from tribal ritual to being an allpervasive feature of modern life[23]. The liminality at Modhera is at a kind of midpoint between those two poles. Early in this chapter I made a passing reference to recent work on liminality in medieval western art, which lies on the same midpoint. Here, just as there, a leap of imagination is necessary to find liminal art in a liminal situation when there is no evidence of deliberate intent on the part of the art's creators. Frequently visible within the panes themselves is the leaping overhead of Hanumān, like Bhīma son of the god of wind, like Bhīma wielder of the mace; an inherently liminal figure, Hanumān is emblematic of leaping imagination. As Lynn Jacobs argues in the case of medieval and early modern Netherlandish art, the art itself can be seen to have agency in liminal situations[24].

As already mentioned, the parallel of the medieval church altar screen occurred to me because I had set out in front of me the entire surface of narrative 'liminal' sculpture at Modhera, reducing it to a flat surface not entirely unlike a screen. In fact the total actual lifesize surface area of the Modhera sculpture which I class as 'liminal' is approximately 4 square metres in GM, and 17.3 square metres in RM. In reality, of course, the sculpture presents itself on octagonal surfaces, and can only be seen in full by twisting and turning one's body on a journey of many metres in distance.

There has been no scope in this chapter to bring out how greatly this 'liminal' sculpture differs from everything else at Modhera. The oblique ceiling panels briefly referred to each contain ten panels, but these are not framed in the same way as on the pillars; they are not in the least theatrical, and they lack narrative force, and liveliness. Figs 35a and 35b make the contrast crystal clear. Secular friezes on the outer walls of the main temple necessarily stretch out, lack focus, are merely linear, lack dynamism. The standard iconography, set out by Lobo, is formal, drab, extensive, measured, whereas the 'liminal' panels grab the attention, pull you by the arm.

A key factor, which is visible on every photograph here, is framing: pillars and arches frame every panel. Each panel is a kind of theatre, a stage, on which a particular performance is represented. Many are specific performances, such as musicians and dancers, and groups of monkeys, in for instance solemn conclave, imitating humans. Again in many scenes of duelling with clubs, we have either Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata*, or King Bhīma I showing his skill with his mace; or again, an actor on the stage imitating either of them. To repeat, each panel is a stage, a viewing point, a window into intense and complex life. Ambiguity and uncertainty serve as prelude to the divine glory of Sūrya, the Sun god.

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[23] Cf. Szakolczai 2017 and the Contemporary Liminality Series of books that he edits for Routledge.

[24] Jacobs 2018, 28.

Two particular sets of panels may stand for all the others, in that they are emblematic of the representation of liminality at Modhera. Firstly in GM where panes on pillars 1, 3, 4 and 5 play about with the very notion of *darśana*, similar groups of people looking spellbound at the divine and then at the erotic. As noted above, the first panel directly facing the viewer is erotic, featuring very probably Rāvaṇa; but elsewhere on that pillar two groups of worshippers behold Sūrya. On pillar 3, two naked Jain monks and a Hindu behold Sūrya. But on pillar 4 three naked Jain monks watch an orgy; and on pillar 5 three women and even Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa view another orgy[25]. Secondly the weird representations of the abduction of Sītā in GM and RM, utterly different from each other, but both extreme distortions. An unconcerned seated Sītā is grabbed from behind by a Rāvaṇa resembling a landlord from an early Bollywood film[26]; and in an extremely ambitious panel we have both Rāma shooting an arrow at the golden deer, and Rāvaṇa about to strike Jaṭāyu as the bird seeks to rescue Sītā from Rāvaṇa's sky-chariot[27], with Sītā invisible in the chariot reduced to a casket, and most notably the dissolving of all physical attributes belonging to Rāvaṇa, so that he is simply a lithe young warrior. In sum, all the panels present a distorted dream world, a world of rampant liminality.

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[25] Figs. 11, 16, 17, 19.

[26] Fig. 7: **GM 1 south**.

[27] Fig. 35a: **RM 2 w.s. s-w**.

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Photograph of the participants in the International Seminar, taken on the 21st of September 2019, by Prof. Alexander Dubyanskiy, at the University of Milan.

The present volume is a collection of 16 papers presented at the International Seminar 'Liminal Spaces, and Identity Transformations in Indian Cultural History' in Milan, in September 2019, when we were on the brink of a historical change unknowingly. And afterwards, during the pandemic experience, exploring liminality, as category of reality applied to Indian culture and especially to art and literature, appeared to be a means to cope with an emergency the likes of which had never been seen before. Obviously, this work does not aspire to be exhaustive, nonetheless, the heterogeneity of the contributions offers a multifaceted perspective: in actual fact, since liminality implies potentially myriads of interpretations, it appears to provide us with one of the main keys to addressing the entanglement of reality, especially the complexity of the Indian civilization, past and present. The focus is particularly on the literary and artistic aspects of such an extraordinary cultural heritage, from the Vedic period up to modernity; literature and arts are the lens through which variegated anthropological issues, crossing different historical phases, are investigated: firstly, the ritual question, in compliance with van Gennep and Turner's approach, but also religious experiences, sovereignty and violence, dialectics of identity, social dynamics, gender identity, etc. Literature and arts, but still by means of their own aesthetic devices, mirror critical points characterising such issues, as if poetry and artwork, zooming in on specific transition elements, were themselves on the threshold of manifold layers of reality, able to pass through their interstitial discontinuities. Finally, it is a great honour to dedicate such a volume to the memory of Professor Alexander Dubyanskiy (1941–2020), eminent scholar in Indian literature, especially in Tamil poetry, who experienced multiple aspects of liminality both of the South Asian culture and life.

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