

ILLUMINATING THE RELATION  
BETWEEN PĀÑCARĀTRA AND  
THE EARLY ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVA COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION:  
TRADITIONAL VERSUS WESTERN ATTITUDES TOWARD SOURCES

“Die Anfänge des Viśiṣṭādvaita liegen noch völlig im Dunkeln.”<sup>1</sup> Thus begins GERHARD OBERHAMMER’s 1971 monograph on Yāmuṇa’s interpretation of the four *sūtras* in the Vedānta Sūtras that traditional commentators agree refer to the Pāñcarātra tradition. That study was the beginning of a large number of monographs and articles by OBERHAMMER and his students on the relation between the Pāñcarātra texts and the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. This symposium is another contribution to this study, which is paralleled by a number of scholarly studies of the same subject in India, Canada, and the United States. We may hope that as a result of all these studies, the beginnings of Śrīvaiṣṇavism are no longer “completely in the dark.” We have to keep in mind, however, that traditional Śrīvaiṣṇava scholars have never considered themselves “in the dark.” Our Western quest for accurate historical knowledge sets different standards for reliable historical data.

Śrīvaiṣṇavas themselves acknowledge the multiple strands in their tradition. They consider them to have been woven into a rich harmony, well attested by liturgical practice, layers of commentary on earlier texts, and a number of biographical accounts of their early poet-saints and authoritative teachers. Modern scholarship outside the Śrīvaiṣṇava community has been equally cognizant of the diversity but has often emphasized unreconciled divergences, whether between reactions of the community or between different generations, differences that are most obvious between (or within) different texts.

My first encounter with the radical difference between traditional and modern scholarship came when I arrived in India in 1957 and started my study of Rāmānuja. This occurred on two different

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<sup>1</sup> “The beginnings of Viśiṣṭādvaita still lie completely in the dark.” (OBERHAMMER 1971: 5)

fronts: first, the authenticity of the authorship of texts and, second, the historical value of hagiography. My fellow student at Yale Divinity School, ROBERT LESTER, followed the lead of his independent-minded guide within the Śrīvaiṣṇava community, AGNIHOTRAM TATACARYA, in questioning the authenticity of several writing attributed to Rāmānuja, as well as some later interpretations of Rāmānuja (LESTER 1976). A second more striking difference was between the utilization of the hagiographies by those in the Śrīvaiṣṇava community to interpret Rāmānuja's Sanskrit writings and a modern Western skepticism about the historical value of anything in the hagiographies. This was paralleled by a modern Western rejection of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition's synthesis of Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures traditionally called the "Dual Vedānta" (CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 3ff.). Modern interpreters perceived various logically irreconcilable approaches rooted in diverse Sanskrit and Tamil sources, opposing caste attitudes, and the conflict between two paths to salvation: disciplined meditation (*upāsana*) and abject surrender (*prapatti*).

Scholarly differences in interpreting Pāñcarātra at that time seemed small by comparison, in part because all scholars had to acknowledge the same group of texts, and in part because both Rāmānuja and his predecessor Yāmuna had commented on Pāñcarātra in what are accepted by the most skeptical modern scholars as their genuine writings. Nevertheless, similar differences in approach are evident, more specifically between a traditional amalgamation of textual evidence and liturgical practice, on the one hand, and modern focus on individual texts isolated from their cultic and social context, on the other.

More recently both Hindu and Western scholars have attempted to bring our scholarly approaches closer together: to combine close attention to individual texts and strands within texts with something of the traditional sense for continuity and complex unity within the tradition. The close study of particular texts is obviously important in the relation of the two traditions at various points in their long joint history. In her recent monograph on the Jayākhyasaṃhitā, MARION RASTELLI begins by pointing out that the different Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās are not unified but are distinguished from one another in many ways, written with different backgrounds and at different times and thus subject to diverse external influences. It is not possible at the present state of research, she believes, to speak of one doctrine or one Pāñcarātra philosophy; rather, only the doctrine of each particu-

lar Saṃhitā may be articulated. Her own study, moreover, demonstrates in great detail that there are diverse traditions and even contradictions within a single Saṃhitā. Nevertheless, she hopes that her study of one of the most significant Pāñcarātra texts will add a small stone to the “mosaic,” that is, the total scholarly picture of the tradition (RASTELLI 1999: 24). Only after many more of these texts have been studied can we reach conclusions as to whether there is one common doctrine or many diverse ones across the Pāñcarātra tradition (RASTELLI 1999: 23).

#### YĀMUNA’S DEFENSE OF PĀÑCARĀTRA

Recognizing the present state of scholarship means that the most meaningful comparisons between the Pāñcarātra and the Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions must begin with comparisons between particular texts. Fortunately for our purpose, there is an extended and explicit discussion of at least two dimensions of early Śrīvaiṣṇava views of Pāñcarātra in one of the earliest surviving Śrīvaiṣṇava texts: Yāmuna’s Āgamaprāmānya.<sup>2</sup> What makes the Āgamaprāmānya so distinctive is that, in addition to a traditional Indian philosophical debate about the Vedic and Vedāntic orthodoxy of Pāñcarātra doctrine, there is also a sharp discussion about the orthopraxy of those practicing Pāñcarātra rituals and their qualifications to do so based upon their caste status: whether they deserve to be considered Brahmins. Like most Hindu devotional movements, early Vaiṣṇavism in South India included devotees from across the caste spectrum. Their poet-saints sang their devotion in Tamil rather than Sanskrit, and the community focused on worship (*pūjā*) of Viṣṇu and the goddesses in temples influenced by Pāñcarātra, on the face of it a type of worship and a lifestyle very different from either public or domestic Vedic sacrifices.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to some studies by Śrīvaiṣṇava scholars in South India, there were at least four substantial studies of Yāmuna by Western scholars written between 1967 and 1977, two of them here in Vienna, one by Professor OBERHAMMER and the other by his student, ROQUE MESQUITA (MESQUITA 1990). My student, WALTER NEEVEL, was helped by many scholars in Madras and was able to utilize HANS VAN BUITENEN’s translation of and introduction to the Āgamaprāmānya (VAN BUITENEN 1977) as well as GERHARD OBERHAMMER’s pioneering analysis of Yāmuna’s sources in that same text (OBERHAMMER 1971).

Nevertheless, Yāmuna argued that those carrying out temple worship and domestic ceremonies according to Pāñcarātra specifications (who were called Bhāgavatas) were Brahmins whose rituals should be valued as much as those in the Vedic tradition. This was because their distinctive doctrines were a direct revelation from the supreme Lord Viṣṇu, and thus in complete accord with the central truths of the Vedānta.

NEEVEL demonstrates that “the charge that Pāñcarātra as a whole is in conflict with the Vedas derives primarily from” the conservative Brahmins in the Vedic ritualist school (Pūrva Mīmāṃsā) (NEEVEL 1977: 23), who were the ones with a vested interest in maintaining the Vedic ritual tradition (NEEVEL 1977: 25). After presenting in some detail the conservative Brahmins’ scornful descriptions of the Bhāgavatas’ life-style as unworthy of true Brahmins, Yāmuna presents a vigorous response that, NEEVEL shows, differentiates among four groups whom others called, or who called themselves, Bhāgavatas.

(1) Those called Vaiśyavrātyas by conservative Brahmins. They are members of the lowest twice-born caste who had lost their caste status by forsaking Vedic rituals and serving in rituals at temples to Viṣṇu. These are the people who have given the Pāñcarātra a bad name, but Yāmuna insists they are not true Bhāgavatas, for they do not follow the prescribed Pāñcarātra rituals.

(2) Genuine Bhāgavatas who are professional temple priests (*arcakas*) performing worship (*pūjā*) to the divine images. They face the scorn of conservative Brahmins for disregarding the stricture against taking payment for conducting worship. Yāmuna defends them by arguing, first, that not all Bhāgavatas conduct worship for their livelihood; some do it just for themselves. Second, that the orthodox traditions make allowances for less than ideal behavior in hard times. And third, that the scriptural prohibition is really only against worshipping other gods than Viṣṇu. NEEVEL thinks these arguments are rather lame.

(3) Bhāgavata Brahmins who perform Pāñcarātra rituals but only for themselves, and who perform a series of forty alternative sacraments. Yāmuna claims that these Brahmins are following a valid alternative, comparable to other Brahmin groups who claim that the distinctive rituals they practice are sanctioned by a part of the Veda that is now lost. Moreover, in contrast to other Brahmins who perform Vedic

sacrifices to gain wealth and other worldly ends, the Bhāgavata Brahmins are performing rituals in order to gain liberation.

(4) Those indisputably orthodox Brahmins, by lineage and learning, who perform both the path prescribed by Pāñcarātra texts and the Vedic rituals prescribed for Brahmins. There is no doubt that Yāmuna expects his family to be recognized as belonging to this group. NEEVEL notes that this discussion comes at the very end, just before two verses dedicating the work to his grandfather, Nāthamuni (NEEVEL 1977: 30-37).

Yāmuna argues that the presence of group (4) validates the Pāñcarātra texts on the same grounds that all other secondary scriptures (*smṛti*) are validated, that those who follow them also observe the Vedic injunctions. For more than a thousand years before Yāmuna the number and nature of such secondary scriptures had gradually expanded, some scriptures claiming to be based on lost portions of the Veda. Conservative Brahmins were forced to concede that those following *smṛti*, who were called Smārtas, provided that they were Vedic in their ritual practice, could consider their special scriptures and the beliefs and practices deriving from them as “inside the Vedas” (NEEVEL 1977: 37).

We don’t know what kind of reception Yāmuna’s book got from those who didn’t already agree with him, but I concur with NEEVEL that the presence of a leader of undisputed Brahmin lineage and practice served to make the less orthodox Brahmins more acceptable to other Brahmins outside the Śrīvaiṣṇava community. I suspect that it helped lift the status of the non-Brahmin devotees of Viṣṇu as well.

We shall return below to the second major concern of Yāmuna’s work: to refute the contentions of the two other schools of the Vedānta that the Vedāntasūtras treated Pāñcarātra as one of four Hindu traditions whose teachings were either partially or totally contrary to (“outside”) the Vedas. First, however, it is worth noting the significance of the validation of at least some Bhāgavatas as good Brahmins. Yāmuna thought that it was important to establish this, and NEEVEL’s analysis of the diverse constituencies in the early Śrīvaiṣṇava community clarifies that importance.

To be able to gain this view of Śrīvaiṣṇava history, it is necessary to utilize, though with considerable caution, the traditional biographies or hagiographies of the early leaders of the community. Many Western scholars are unwilling to rely on such traditional “his-

tories,” but without them historical reconstruction, in the Western sense of “history,” becomes impossible. Such reconstruction remains tentative, of course, and subject to drastic revision by later historians.

In my work on his theology, I had already concluded that Rāmānuja came from a more Vedic and prestigious Brahmin group than many of his followers (CARMAN 1974: 37-38). NEEVEL reached a similar conclusion about Yāmuna (NEEVEL 1977: 11), and his study shows why this is important. Yāmuna inherited his grandfather’s legacy in the school of logic (Nyāya) as well as the concern of his grandfather’s disciples to include both Vedānta and Pāñcarātra in that heritage. These disciples, however, were not from such prestigious families known for their lineage and Vedic practice (Śiṣṭa Brahmins). It was therefore crucial to persuade Yāmuna to accept his grandfather’s legacy so that he could then lead the small community of Bhāgavatas who at some point came to adopt the name Śrīvaiṣṇava. A generation later, when Yāmuna was looking for a successor to complete his unfinished tasks, it was important to find a Brahmin scholar who was personally devoted to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, was learned in the Vedānta, *and* came from a family of recognized Vedic lineage and Vedic practice. Rāmānuja was particularly suited to this need. The hagiographies present Nāthamuni and Yāmuna as coming from a Brahmin family specially blessed by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly Rāmānuja is identified as coming from a prestigious family of Northern (Vaḍama) Brahmins living near Kāñcipuram who also had connections with Yāmuna’s temple, Śrīraṅgam, to the south, as well as with the temple of Śrī Veṅkateśvara to the north (CARMAN 1974: 28). The high caste status of both Yāmuna and Rāmānuja made it possible for them to convince some orthoprax Brahmins of the legitimacy of a community that was both Brahmin and non-Brahmin, that followed both Veda and Pāñcarātra, and that was well versed in both Sanskrit scriptures and the Tamil hymns of the poet-saints of Lord Viṣṇu. In each case, however, the family prestige only insured an initial hearing. Both Yāmuna and Rāmānuja had to draw on their scholarly training and their own intellectual powers to convince other orthodox and orthoprax Brahmins of their interpretation of the Vedānta (NEEVEL 1977: 28). Interestingly the hagiographies consider Yāmuna a more effective debater than Rāmānuja, who persuaded more by the evidence of his devotional commitment. Outside the community, Rāmānuja was the name remembered, but his own writings indicate his indebtedness to the teacher with whom he never studied, Yāmuna.

For Yāmuna, the task of integrating traditions involved both defending those Brahmins following Pāñcarātra ritual and incorporating the Pāñcarātra doctrine of God into Brahmanical Vedānta. The defense of the Pāñcarātra required both the validation of those practicing its rituals and the demonstration that its distinctive doctrines were compatible with Vedānta. This was difficult to accomplish because both Advaita and Bhedābheda maintained that the author of the Vedāntasūtras, in the four short *sūtras* they considered dealt with this subject, was rejecting the authority and some of the specific doctrines of the Pāñcarātra. (They were less negative about the Pāñcarātra tradition as a whole than were the more conservative Brahmins following the ritualist school called Pūrva Mīmāṃsā.) OBERHAMMER has skillfully demonstrated in what NEEVEL calls a “ground-breaking analysis” (NEEVEL 1977: 18) that Yāmuna quotes or paraphrases four earlier sources that support his position. OBERHAMMER says that these older sources, which Yāmuna quoted because he needed both their arguments and their authority, testify to a long history of reflection on the authority of Pāñcarātra. Long before Yāmuna, Pāñcarātra had tried to show that it was not contrary to but rather supported by the Vedāntasūtras (OBERHAMMER 1971: 114).

OBERHAMMER believes that Yāmuna has incorporated two differing arguments, one that Pāñcarātra is valid because it is derived from the Veda, the other that it has an independent validity as the revelation of the omniscient Creator (OBERHAMMER 1971: 120-121). According to OBERHAMMER, the first position is the one that prevails among Yāmuna’s successors (OBERHAMMER 1971: 120). NEEVEL, on the other hand, places more emphasis on Yāmuna’s dependence on the sources articulating the second argument, which gave him the confidence to introduce the theology of Pāñcarātra, especially the doctrine of the four *vyūhas*, into his interpretation of the Vedānta (NEEVEL 1977: 69-75).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Yāmuna undertook this task in a work called the *Ātmasiddhi*, which has survived in a very incomplete state and possibly also in a lost work called the *Puruṣanirṇaya*. This makes any attempt to determine Yāmuna’s distinctive theological views a difficult task with uncertain results. NEEVEL has tried to do just this, which requires him to distinguish between the summary statements of Yāmuna’s own position (in the surviving portion) and the statements referring to other views.

In NEEVEL's reconstruction of the Ātmasiddhi, Yāmuna distinguishes between the Supreme Self (*paramātmān*) and the finite self (*pratyagātman*), and between the conscious self and the consciousness and other personal qualities that it possesses. These begin with the standard Pāñcarātra list of six qualities: *jñāna* and *bala* ("knowledge" and "strength"), *aiśvarya* and *vīrya* ("lordliness" and "immutability"), and *śakti* and *tejas* ("power" and "splendor"). All six are fully present in the *vyūha* Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa). In the manifestation of the universe, the first pair characterize the *vyūha* Saṅkarṣaṇa, the second pair the *vyūha* Pradyumna, and the third pair the *vyūha* Aniruddha. The "six qualities" are mentioned in the order that identifies them with their function in the *vyūha* theory of manifestation or extension, thus "defining the manner in which the Paramātmā is the material cause (*upadāna-karaṇa*) of the manifest universe" (NEEVEL 1977: 171).

Śaṅkara's first Vedāntic criticism of Pāñcarātra dealt with an early form in which the origin of the self is identified with the emanation of the second *vyūha* Pradyumna from the first *vyūha* Vāsudeva.<sup>4</sup> Such a notion of an evolving and changeable self contradicts the Vedāntic view of the eternality of the Self. Both Yāmuna and Rāmānuja are able to deal with this criticism in the same way, by quoting from Pāñcarātra texts that present all the *vyūhas* as aspects of the one eternal Godhead, and therefore regard the evolution from one to another as a rearrangement of the six divine qualities in different "battle formations" (*vyūhas*) within the Godhead. Śaṅkara recognizes the divine character of the *vyūhas*<sup>5</sup> but regards any modification or distinctions within *brahman* as ultimately unreal. Moreover, Śaṅkara regards any transformation of a divine material cause into finite things as false.

At an earlier stage of Indian thought, Being (*sat*) was not regarded as immutable. Therefore *brahman* could be understood as the Divine final cause producing the finite universe out of his own matter. This view became known as *bhedābheda*, "difference and non-difference." During the cosmic night all is "one" in *brahman*, but during the cosmic day the whole diverse universe is spread out and is clearly different from *brahman*. Since the Vedānta regards *brahman* as the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe, Śaṅkara

<sup>4</sup> VAN BUITENEN 1971: 22-23. Cf. NEEVEL 1977: 172.

<sup>5</sup> VAN BUITENEN 1971: 24-26. Cf. NEEVEL 1977: 172-178.



has to make a sharp distinction between the true *brahman* and the lower *brahman* from whom the universe has originated.

RASTELLI has shown that the Jayākhyasaṃhitā includes a number of doctrines of creation, which at times are arranged hierarchically in a single comprehensive doctrine and at other times allowed to stand with their differences unreconciled (RASTELLI 1999: 39-42). RASTELLI thinks that these diverse views were included because the author(s) considered all the sources from which they came to be equally authoritative revelations concerning the world's creation (RASTELLI 1999: 93-94). She also suggests, as a "Western" interpretation, that these views might be considered as different perspectives on reality, but she acknowledges that it is questionable whether such an interpretation would be acceptable within the tradition (RASTELLI 1999: 88, n. 281).

In any case, all the doctrines have to struggle with reconciling two widely-held Hindu beliefs: on the one hand, that ultimate reality is one, and on the other, that there is a fundamental difference between the Self (whether infinite or finite) and matter (both primordial matter and the visible matter of which all bodies are made). Both the universe as a whole and each material body is animated by an indwelling soul, which requires a connection between spirit and matter that infringes on the purity of spirit and the sole reality of spiritual being (*brahman*). The major Vedāntic "solution" to this paradox before Śaṅkara was *bhedābheda*. The Jayākhyasaṃhitā moves repeatedly from a pure state of *brahman* before creation through a pure creation to the present impure creation of our transitory world (*samsāra*). While it does not use the term *bhedābheda*, it uses similes suggestive of Bhedābheda either to distinguish between the nature of *brahman* before and after its embodiment in creation, or to indicate the paradoxical relation between *brahman* as the personal Lord (*īśvara*) and his divine consort, who is the active power (*śakti*) enabling creation as well as its primordial substance (*prakṛti*) (RASTELLI 1999: 98-99, 115).

Yāmuna's efforts to incorporate Pāñcarātra doctrine into the Vedānta involve some recognition of the Bhedābheda view permeating Pāñcarātra. In order to avoid Śaṅkara's criticism of the Bhedābheda, however, Yāmuna has to develop his own distinction between *brahman* in the pure state and *brahman* as the creative power behind and within the universe. For him, this distinction is between God as the possessor of qualities and the divine qualities thus possessed, out

of which the universe evolves (NEEVEL 1977: 184-191). He admits that his view can be described as “difference and non-difference,” since a quality can be regarded both as distinct from its underlying substance and as included within it. His successor Rāmānuja does not want to risk confusion with the old “Difference-and-non-difference” school of Vedānta, and he therefore insists that *brahman* in his own proper being is infinite and never becomes anything finite (NEEVEL 1977: 191). The entire finite universe is one with *brahman* because it is the possession, quality, mode, or body of the divine indwelling-Self. The *vyūhas*, the *avatāras*, and even consecrated images are not transformations of the Infinite into the finite material world but rather forms of divine presence within the material world, possessing, where they are visible, their own real but distinctive bodies of “pure matter” (CARMAN 1974: 167-173). For Rāmānuja cosmogony – the history of the world process – is quite different from ontology, in which the Lord is always and everywhere the inner self of the finite world. Rāmānuja appears to be more precise than Yāmuna and more consistent in avoiding expressions that sound either like Bhāskara’s *Bhedābheda* or Śaṅkara’s *Advaita*. Perhaps this was an additional reason for Rāmānuja, despite his defense of Pāñcarātra, to avoid turning to Pāñcarātra texts to support his position or incorporate concepts from Pāñcarātra into his basic summaries of his own position. As NEEVEL puts it, “Rāmānuja’s Vedānta cannot in any technical sense be termed a system of ‘Pāñcarātrika Vedānta’ as can Yāmuna’s” (NEEVEL 1977: 192). On the other hand, Rāmānuja incorporates much of the devotional flavor of Pāñcarātra into the frequent sentences of praise interspersing his exegetical and logical arguments, and if the little text on daily worship (*Nityagrantha*) is by him (CARMAN 1974: 62-64), we have an example of the kind of minute ritual instruction that looms large in many Pāñcarātra texts.

All this, however, has to be said of what we know from the surviving Sanskrit writings of both Yāmuna and Rāmānuja. But what of the oral teaching of both in Tamil – presumably in the heavily Sanskritized Tamil of the later written commentaries on the *Tiruvāymolī*? Here we have only a handful of comments on particular verses that are preserved in the later commentaries, plus the claim of the tradition that *Piḷḷān* was Rāmānuja’s cousin and direct disciple and that he incorporated his teacher’s views in his “Six-Thousand” commentary (CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 145-146). We may never be able to answer these questions, and even partial answers will have to

be somewhat speculative. Yet lack of clear answers, or of any answer at all, does not change the multiform nature of the subject we are investigating. The organized worship of Viṣṇu, his consorts, and all his emanations and descents was influenced by, and, in turn, influenced many Pāñcarātra texts, which stood in a variety of relations to the scholarly side of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

#### TANTRIC INFLUENCES ON THE RELATION BETWEEN PĀÑCARĀTRA AND VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA THOUGHT

In my study of Rāmānuja I noted that he accepts his community's important doctrine that the Lord (*īśvara*) has constantly accompanying Him the Goddess Śrī. His references to Śrī (Lakṣmī) and the subordinate divine consorts Bhūmī and Nīlā, however, are relatively brief and leave in doubt Śrī's metaphysical status, which became a point of dispute among his followers.<sup>6</sup> They agreed with Rāmānuja, however, in (implicitly) rejecting the Tantric view that the Goddess (*śakti*) is the material cause of the universe, the underlying substance of which all beings are constituted. In addition, they gave Śrī a distinctive and crucial role in the process of saving souls: She is the *pu-ruṣakāra*, the mediatrix conveying Divine grace to the soul. I concluded in my study that Rāmānuja emphasized both the unity of God and Goddess and the subordination of Śrī, granting Śrī no role separate from Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa's in either creation or redemption (CARMAN 1974: 240-244).

In his treatment of "God as Mother," K.C. VARADACHARI argues against the Tantric division of the Divine nature between absolutely passive consciousness, on the one hand, and dynamic but unconscious power (*śakti*), on the other. He considers the Vaiṣṇava Āgamas (which include both Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa texts) to "accept the Motherhood of God along with the Fatherhood of God," the former always subordinated to the latter (VARADACHARI 1950: 123-124). OTTO SCHRADER, the first Western scholar to study Pāñcarātra, has a very different view, for he considers the Tantric distinction between God and Goddess also to be characteristic of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. The distinction between the two that is said to

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<sup>6</sup> "The Vaḍagalais consider Śrī to be infinite, like the Lord, whereas the Tengalais considers Her to be first among finite spirits." (CARMAN 1974: 238)

persist even in the great dissolution of the cosmos he regards “as a makeshift for preserving the transcendent character of Viṣṇu: Lakṣmī alone acts, but everything She does is the mere expression of the Lord’s wishes” (SCHRADER 1916: 30). Indeed, SCHRADER goes further: “However, the transcendent aspect of Viṣṇu (*Param Brāhma*) remains so completely in the background in the Pāñcarātra that we are practically only concerned with the one force (Lakṣmī) which, as Bhūti, appears as the universe, and, as Kriyā, vitalizes and governs it.” (SCHRADER 1916: 31)

The Ahirbudhnyasamhitā, on which Schrader most heavily relies for his interpretation of the Pāñcarātra, is not one of the three Pāñcarātra Āgamas that Schrader himself says Śrīvaiṣṇavas have considered most authoritative (SCHRADER 1916: 21). More recent studies suggest a varying range of Tantric influences on different Pāñcarātra Samhitās. RASTELLI’s study of the Jayākhyasamhitā does indicate a view of the Goddess that appears closer to that of the Ahirbudhnyasamhitā than to that in Rāmānuja’s writings or later Śrīvaiṣṇava views. The Goddess enables the Supreme Person to become connected with matter: every activity of God is brought about by the Goddess, who is his active power (*śakti*). She does not exist independently or separately from God, but represents one aspect of God. She comes into being out of the highest *brahman* during the course of the “pure creation” and is herself transcendent, eternally pure and without duality. Indeed the highest *śakti* of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa shares his divine qualities. She has the form of highest joy and a body filled with ambrosia (RASTELLI 1999: 114).

Those approaching the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition from prior studies of Śaiva or Śākta texts may be more likely to notice underlying similarities in all varieties of Tantra. This is certainly the case with the interpretation of SANJUKTA GUPTA. GUPTA considers Pāñcarātra to have been originally a Tantric sect in which “membership is achieved by initiation (*dīkṣā*)” and like other such Hindu sects, “at least in their first generations, ... [is] open to both sexes and all social classes” (GUPTA 1983: 69). This marks a “stark contrast to Brahminism,” a variance equally present in its soteriology: “... the aim of the initiate (as in all Tantric sects) was to realize his true identity with his (personal) God, to divinize himself through a combination of esoteric ritual and yogic meditation. At the same time – and this was typically Vaiṣṇava – this religious practice had to be permeated by

devotion to God, who had it in his power to reward his devotees and punish the wicked.” (GUPTA 1983: 70)

GUPTA goes on to say that the Pāñcarātra sect continues to the present under another name, having undergone great changes: “Its highest grade of membership came to be restricted to the highest caste, and its esoteric and mystical character receded in favour of a more public ritualism on the one hand and a theology of self-surrender to God on the other. These developments culminated in the great theologian Rāmānuja ... whose Vedāntic works ... finally accommodated Pāñcarātra to Vedic orthodoxy. Since then, a Pāñcarātrin is known as a Śrī-Vaiṣṇava.” (GUPTA 1983: 70)

The “search for respectability” began much earlier, GUPTA says, with attempts “to camouflage their Tantric character by incorporating” Vedic *mantras* and the daily fire sacrifice (*agnihotra*) (GUPTA 1983: 70-71). Earlier Tantric features, she continues, were juxtaposed with new features to form a synthesis in the initiation rites (GUPTA 1983: 71). While these rites have gradually taken on Vedic features that copy the transition from student to householder, much remains unchanged. “Thus the rites remain much the same, only their significance comes to be forgotten.” (GUPTA 1983: 71)

After describing the four successive initiations common to “medieval Hindu sectarian religious literature,” GUPTA shows how “this common Tantric structure” developed in Pāñcarātra. The four initiations lead to progressive acquisitions of power, which focus first on gaining worldly ends but after the third and fourth initiations can also be used for liberation from the material world. According to the Sātvatasamhitā, the advanced adept (*sādhaka*) attains “the six divine qualities and the marks of the divine personality,” while the fourth and final initiation (*para* or *brahman*) “brings about nothing but a total merging (*vilaya*) into the transcendental Reality, God” (GUPTA 1983: 81-82).

In a very late Pāñcarātra text, the Śrīpraśnasamhitā, GUPTA sees “the final development of Pāñcarātra religion.” Initiation is here seen as a parallel to Vedic initiation, enabling one to perform *pūjā* and *homa* (fire-sacrifice). Every part of this ceremony is a manifestation of Viṣṇu, so “there is nothing left for the initiate to do. His achievement (*siddhi*) of identification with God is complete, so he cannot be an ‘achiever’ (*sādhaka*). Instead, he is a surrenderer-of-the-self (*prapanna*), whose sole task is God’s service (*sevā*)” (GUPTA 1983: 85).

In this survey of Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās GUPTA sees a clear progression. Pāñcarātra changed from a Tantra-yoga giving the adepts magical powers to attain worldly ends to temple rituals for public worship that “idealize the goal of salvation at the expense of the goal of empirical and occult power and prosperity.” The Jayākhyasaṃhitā “plays down the status of the *yogin*” and “by the time of the Śrīprasānasāṃhitā, the meaning of the *sādhaka* and his initiation had been completely forgotten” (GUPTA 1983: 88). “The *sādhaka* slowly disappeared from the sect and there emerged a linear pattern in the four Tantric initiations ... Finally, the new *bhakti* ideology of self-surrender (*prapatti*) made the very idea of what the *sādhaka* was originally supposed to do heretical, for man could no longer aspire to become identical with God.” (GUPTA 1983: 88-89)

It is perhaps not surprising, given her starting point in non-Vaiṣṇava tantric studies, that GUPTA presents the historical development as a process of degeneration of Tantra-yoga, in which the original tantric meaning of the initiation was misunderstood, gradually forgotten, and finally repudiated in favor of the new and alien ritual of self-surrender. While traditional Śrīvaiṣṇavas might simply find GUPTA’s interpretation of degeneration offensive, those prepared to accept historical development could read the same data as evidence of progress rather than regress, specifically a gradual purging of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition of all traces of Tantric “heresy.” While I have some sympathy with the latter type of interpretation, I think the main problem with GUPTA’s position is to treat the Pāñcarātra texts as the defining characteristics of a religious community that at some point renamed itself “Śrīvaiṣṇava.” All the other textual and ritual markers of the community or communities that utilized and still utilize Pāñcarātra texts and ritual traditions are ignored. These would include both primary sources of scripture, Sanskrit and Tamil, that along with their commentaries form the Dual Vedānta. GUPTA’s research does, however, pose important questions as to *how* the Tantric dimension of Pāñcarātra was minimized or reinterpreted in the ongoing development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

#### HUDSON’S DISCOVERY OF THE BHĀGAVATA/PĀÑCARĀTRA TRADITION IN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Included in this conference volume is an article by DENNIS HUDSON introducing an approach to Pāñcarātra that he has already

disclosed in a number of articles and lectures over the last decade and that he is elaborating much more fully in a two-volume work to be published next year by Oxford University Press. He lays major emphasis on the name by which those carrying out Pāñcarātra rites and following Pāñcarātra texts were known in Yāmuna's time. They called themselves, and were called by their critics, Bhāgavatas or Sātvatas. HUDSON's primary evidence comes from the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple in Kāñcipuram, in which he has studied the architecture, the well-preserved sculptures and the lengthy inscriptions and sculptural panels concerning the king who had this temple built (completed around 770 CE): Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (731-796 CE). Both the king and the temple are praised by the Ālvār poet Kalikaṅṅi (Tirumaṅkai Ālvār) (HUDSON 1995: 137). The temple was built according to Pāñcarātra prescriptions and designed for Pāñcarātra ritual, but the content of the sculpture is largely derived from stories in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa whose meaning, HUDSON maintains, is elucidated by the esoteric chapters in the Bhagavadgītā. Utilizing a variety of evidence, including early Tamil literary evidence and coins from the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, HUDSON presents an outside scholar's picture of the historical situation in which the Pāñcarātra texts were produced and utilized that is considerably closer to traditional self-understanding than those of many other recent outside interpreters.

One important aspect of his approach may be related to his starting point in Pallavamalla's temple: the relation of the king to Pāñcarātra ritual. Manusmṛti 10.44 gives Tamil (Drāviḍa) and Greek (Yavana) rulers the same ritual status. "Dravidas and Yavanas were judged to be among those dynasties born of Kṣatriyas who had fallen to the status of Śūdras because they had given up the sacred rites of Veda. In other words, they were Kṣatriya natures in Śūdra bodies. As far as I know, the only 'Vaiṣṇava' or Bhāgavata rites that could purify such a Śūdra ruler for Veda-based rites was the 'Man-lion initiation' (*Narasimha-dīkṣā*) of the Pāñcarātra Āgama (*Sātvata-saṃhita* 17)." (HUDSON 1995: 147)

This rite is the one that GUPTA refers to as the first and most general of the Pāñcarātra initiation rites. According to the Sātvata-saṃhita, this is a preparatory initiation that destroys sins (SS 16.25c-29b). While the text does not say that the impure (from a Brahmanical standpoint) Śūdra king is symbolically torn apart in the ritual in order to be purified, the very name evokes one of the most gruesome

acts of Lord Viṣṇu. This might suggest that the Śūdra king symbolically stands in the place of the demon-king Hiraṇyakaśipu, whose own sins were destroyed by the touch of Narasiṃha's lion-claws. This initiation is similar to those involved in *yoga* and in Vedic householder sacraments in enabling the initiate to move on to a higher stage, but it has the specific purificatory power to enable one to cross the sharp ritual divide between Śūdras and twice-born Aryans of the three higher *varṇas* (HUDSON 1995: 155). The importance of this for Śūdra kings seeking entry into what its Brahmin priests considered a "Vedic" society is evident. It is clearly also important in the creation of a community of devotees of Lord Viṣṇu that at least partially transcended caste distinctions, so that all shared access to a means of grace that would bring liberation at the end of this lifetime.

In the case of Pallavamalla, HUDSON suggests that his purification through Pāñcarātra initiation was essential to his becoming a Bhāgavata king in the tradition of the Veda. In any case, the unusual three-storey inner sanctum with surrounding sculpture on all four sides at the two lower levels does graphically portray the Pāñcarātra theology of the *vyūhas*, to be understood both as the four-fold form of God through whom the "spreading out of the world of space-time occurs," and as the devotee's pilgrimage to the inmost core of Divine being. HUDSON thinks that Pallavamalla's "reign as a Bhāgavata emperor appears to have stimulated Bhāgavata activity throughout the south for at least another century" during which time "at least five similar three-floor Viṣṇu-houses were built" (HUDSON 1995: 172). Moreover, this was also a time when four of the most influential Āḷvārs composed their hymns.

#### UNCOVERING THE MYSTERY OR DISCLOSING THE SECRET?

According to the later hagiographies, it was in another one of these "three-floor Viṣṇu-houses" that Rāmānuja made his most decisive break with the tradition of secret lore passed on by the *ācārya* to his chosen successor. Since Yāmuna had died before he could personally divulge these secrets to Rāmānuja, as he had hoped to do, Rāmānuja had to visit five of Yāmuna's disciples and learn the secret teachings from them, as well as Yāmuna's comments on the four thousand Tamil verses of the Āḷvārs. The newly chosen leader of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community had to travel eighteen times to Tirukoṭṭiyur



before Yāmuna’s disciple there would reveal the “supreme secret” to him and his two closest disciples, the meaning of the eight-syllabled *mantra*, “*om namo nārāyaṇāya*,” and then only after Rāmānuja promised to tell no one else. The very next day, however, Rāmānuja climbed up to the second floor balcony of the temple in Tirukoṭṭiyur and revealed the secret to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas standing below outside the main shrine (CARMAN 1974: 39). I have explained before that this action was slightly less shocking than it sounds in its modern more “democratic” version, told by people who assume that the “temple tower” was the *gopura*, the high tower between the temple precincts and the street outside (CARMAN 1974: 39-40). Rāmānuja did not simply shout out the secret teaching for passersby. Nevertheless, he had promised not to tell anyone and was therefore summoned back to Yāmuna’s disciple to explain himself. He confessed that he knew that the penalty for disobeying his spiritual guide was to go to hell, but “I alone shall go to hell. Keeping your feet in mind I have revealed it. Thus because of their connection with you these souls will be saved” (CARMAN 1974: 40). Yāmuna’s disciple was so impressed with Rāmānuja’s generosity of spirit that he declared him the new *ācārya*, whose teaching would define the community.

Clearly this was not the end of secret traditions in the Śrīvaiṣṇava community. The account does not tell us what Rāmānuja shouted down, and the “five sacraments” accompanying a Śrīvaiṣṇava’s initiation continued to include the secret *mantra* whispered in the initiate’s ear. Moreover, there is a whole class of later texts that are called “secrets” (*rahasya*). Nevertheless, like the events remembered in the lives of Nāthamuni and Yāmuna, this much-told tale about Rāmānuja indicates an important change in the merging of traditions. These would include the appearance in a dream to Nāthamuni of Lord Viṣṇu in his particular form in Nāthamuni’s home temple. Nāthamuni was on a pilgrimage with his family to Kṛṣṇa’s boyhood home in Brindāvan and was so attracted by that setting that he decided they would settle down there. The divine command in the dream, however, was for Nāthamuni to return to South India and serve Lord Mannanār, who is Kṛṣṇa, in his temple in the Kāverī delta (CARMAN 1974: 25). Neither pilgrimage-devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa in Brindāvan nor the importance of the sacred river Yamunā is repudiated, but the locus of the new community of Viṣṇu-worshippers including Brahmins and non-Brahmins is to be a Kṛṣṇa temple on the local sacred river, the Kāverī. Other stories refer to Nāthamuni’s col-

lection of the Āḷvārs' hymns and to his incorporation of them into the temple worship of Viṣṇu, and to Nāthamuni's extraordinary powers both as a *yogin* and as a master of logic (Nyāya) (CARMAN 1974: 24).

The story about Yāmuna concerns his loss of his grandfather's secret of *yoga* because he forgot his appointment to receive the secret just before the death of Nāthamuni's disciple (CARMAN 1974: 25). He forgot the appointment because he was so taken with the saint Nammālvār's description of the reclining image of Lord Viṣṇu in the Ananta Padmanābha temple several hundred miles away in Trivandrum (TVM 10.2), that he had made the long journey to Kerala to have *darśan* of that image. Again, no tradition is repudiated, but there is a clear indication of shifting priorities regarding *yoga*, Tamil hymns, and *darśan*.

Rāmānuja did not forget to receive a crucial secret; he deliberately disclosed one, not to the world at large but to those Śrīvaiṣṇavas who were standing outside the temple. We do not know whether the storyteller presumes that all those in the audience had undergone the five-part single initiation (the *pañcasamskāra*), which solemnized their status as willing slaves of Lord Viṣṇu who had the privilege of contributing their own small offerings to add to the Divine glory (CARMAN 1992).

In light of DENNIS HUDSON's study, moreover, one must ask whether it was just a coincidence that this disclosure occurred at one of the three-tiered temples, in which, HUDSON says, the vertical dimension embodied the secret theology of the *vyūhas*. This means that at least in the case of Pallavamalla's temple, the worshipper could not only circumambulate the central shrine, but physically ascend and descend in order to penetrate spiritually the Supreme Form, whose human manifestation is Lord Kṛṣṇa and his family.

The Vedic tradition remained for millennia a secret tradition, passed on from generation to generation through incredible feats of memorization. The *yoga* tradition has had different kinds of secrets, requiring secret words and secrets of bodily practice. In contrast, Pāñcarātra has served, through temple worship, to make the Vedic tradition accessible to those excluded from these secrets of both Veda and *yoga*.

Pāñcarātra, however, also has a secret side. This is difficult to understand, not so much because of lack of information, but because both its ritual and its theory bring together different traditions and themselves contribute to different traditions relating to the various

smaller devotional communities that we refer to collectively as the Śrīvaiṣṇava Sampradāya. Those within a particular community have had, and continue to have, a sense of the whole. Those studying from outside will progress toward greater understanding both by careful study of particular texts and rituals and by imaginative efforts to reconstruct the shape of the larger Vaiṣṇava community in particular periods. Imagination disciplined by data is necessary to see a larger picture, but our study involves much guess work that our successors may deem to be far off the track of either scholarly understanding or spiritual discernment.

I return in closing to Professor OBERHAMMER's opening sentence, opening not only his monograph but a fruitful development of scholarship over the past thirty years. I should like to suggest two different "translations" of that sentence – or perhaps extended paraphrases.

The first is addressed to the community of modern scholars, no longer exclusively Western. The beginnings of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community espousing Viśiṣṭādvaita, despite the progress we have made in tracing traditions back, are still largely "in the dark" because we know so little about how these various traditions met in the lives of Pāñcarātra adepts, Śrīvaiṣṇava leaders, and many lay men and women, both Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Fortunately the darkness not yet dispelled challenges us to ask new questions and pursue old questions in new ways. Many recent studies have helped us by placing the texts in a ritual context. Critical use of hagiography may also prove illuminating.

The second "translation," still from outside the community, tries to imagine a voice from inside. The origins of the community of Bhāgavatas, devotees of the family of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, remain hidden in the mystery of the Dark Lord (Kṛṣṇa), who discloses his secret in dreams, in whispered words, and in the mutual gaze of his *darśan*. Our approach as scholars outside the traditions we are studying may come up against mysteries we cannot penetrate. Those are "secrets" that, like the temple sculptures, may be in plain sight, but that we do not have the keys to understand: privileged disclosure and faith in the source of the disclosure. Here we remain outsiders, but we can respect a mystery in which we do not participate.

