

## Imperial Purāṇas

### *Kashmir as Vaiṣṇava Center of the World*

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#### Opening an Indian Text

For more than fifteen years I have been at work on a text called the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* (*VDhP*). When I first opened the printed version of this text, I had no intimation of the trouble we would cause each other. As a result of the dialogue I have had with this text and its authors, most of my views about the issues of texts, authors, genres, contexts, and cultural history have undergone a radical transformation. Most Indologists have considered the Purāṇas, the large genre of texts to which the *VDhP* belongs, to be of great importance. Present-day Hindus are supposed to accord them a respect second only to that given the Vedas, their oldest “sacred” texts, and the two Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Indologists have told us that the Purāṇas, like the Epics, are worth investigating because they contain information on the ancestor of contemporary Hinduism, an “orthodox” religion of ancient India, a “classical” Brahmanism or Hinduism. Most scholars have taken this to mean a unitary nonsectarian religion of “devotion” dominated by Brāhmaṇ priests that flowered (at the expense of the “heterodox” religions, Buddhism and Jainism) under the Gupta emperors, in India’s classical period (fourth to seventh centuries). In the same breath, however, they also tell us that these texts contain “medieval” and “sectarian” additions, usually failing to note that these are not odd interpolations here and there but constitute the overwhelming bulk of most extant manuscripts of the Purāṇas. To a very large extent, the study of the Purāṇas as a genre has consisted of various attempts to suture the texts, at the expense of their medieval contents, to a classical Hinduism as its genuine, original author.

Indologists generally translate the term that labels this genre of texts, *purāṇa*, by the term “ancient” or “old” in the sense of referring to cosmogonies, histories of a legendary past, or timeless myths. As we shall see, it has always been more than a little unclear what constitutes these texts as a genre. The only unity that seems to underlie analyses of these texts is the assumption that they consist of representations of a world based more on imagination than on observation. I originally wanted to find out from the *VDhP* about “medieval Hindu” ideas of kingship and their connections with “ritual,” ideas that I could somehow deploy historically. There was no shortage of such material in the *VDhP*. The problem was this: the more I read the more I could see that kings and rites seemed to be inextricably bound up

with the theology of the Pāñcarātra “sect” of Vaiṣṇavas, on the one hand, and with what seemed to me an imperial political agenda, on the other. That is, I seemed to be finding that the “religious” contents of the text were closely tied to purposive acts that were about the world. Was it possible that a purpose was inscribed here? Was this a text whose presumed author situated its argument in response to other textualized projects? If so, the text seemed to be at odds with the assumptions made by scholars about these texts.

This essay on that text is an exemplification of the agentive and articulative approach as well as a contribution to a new history of practices in South Asia. I first take up the question of authorship, and suggest that the idea of complex authorship provides a way around authorism, the notion of the unitary author (whether personal or collective) or his (*sic*!) absence. The person who took the lead in composing the *VDhP* was both a chronologer (“astrologer”) and a Pāñcarātra preceptor of an imperial king, but others, through a process of dialogue, also took part. I then take up the problem of intertextuality, and present the possibility of looking at the *VDhP* as supplementing and articulating a scale of texts. The *VDhP* was, I argue, a text that claimed to rework Indian traditions from a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava perspective, that of the emergent Āgamas, whose authors accepted the Vedas but supplanted the liturgy and the liturgical texts—the Kalpasūtras—that claimed to be based on the Vedas.

After that I show that the *VDhP* can be seen to have both a narrative and discursive aspect. The purpose of the complex author of the *VDhP*, as I have reconstructed it from the text, was to persuade an imperial king, a “king of kings,” of the truth of its particular wish for and account of the world, that of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas. Their ontology was a theist and activist one, as was that of their rivals, the Pāśupata Śaivas. It called on the king and his court to perform an ensemble of devotional works and other practices (such as vows) given in the text, the successful completion of which would eventually lead them to union with Viṣṇu. The grandest of these works would have the king of kings build a large, commanding Pāñcarātra temple after he had “conquered the quarters” and made himself the paramount king in an imperial formation that embraced all of India. That Pāñcarātra temple, together with its elaborate liturgy of image-honoring, would displace the Vedic sacrificial liturgy as the capstone of what I call the imperial formation of India in its own age. It would articulate India as a complex “chain of being,” a Pāñcarātra theophany that included all life forms.

The final section deals with the historical situatedness of the text. I argue that the content of the text was in part articulated by the circumstances in which its complex author was situated, and that that author and text also rearticulated the world in accord with its contents. The *VDhP* was, I contend, the product of and producer of events in seventh- and eighth-century Kashmir. On the one hand, the authors of the text augmented their claims to paramouncy as the possibility of making Kashmir the center of an all-Indian imperial polity increased; on the other, the kings of Kashmir realized more of what the text foretold in its narrative and called for in its didactic, prescriptive chapters as they succeeded in extending their rule. Closely implicated in this process was the *Nilamata*, a Sanskrit Purāṇa



explicitly about Kashmir that antedates the *VDhP*. The use of another important Sanskrit text, Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, "River of Kings," completed in A.D. 1150, makes this historical reconstruction possible. The appendix to this chapter gives a brief critical history of the major assumptions and presuppositions involved in Indological studies of the Purāṇas in general and of the *VDhP* in particular.

As I point out in the Introduction, the idea of a religion dominated by "devotion," the translation of the term *bhakti*, has been central to the notion of a medieval India, distinguishing it both from an ancient or classical period and from the modern. I wish to problematize the notion of *bhakti* as "devotion." Scholars often point out that the basic or original meaning of the term is "participation," but then go on to ignore the implication, as if devotion were something almost completely separate. I would like to argue that the idea of participation in the life of a lord, be he a "god" (*deva*, as in Theism) or "great man" (*mahāpuruṣa*, as in Buddhism) remains basic to many if not all of the forms of *bhakti*. Certainly it is central to the idea of *bhakti* in the *VDhP*. There have been many different *bhaktis* historically, which is why the efforts at a single definition are bound to fail. A devotee could participate in the life of a lord by honoring him as a guest, as the servant of a great king, as the acolyte of a great teacher, as a paramour, or as a slave, to list some of the practices of devoted participation articulated in different disciplinary orders. Certainly an emotion of affect, attraction, or love is integral to this participation. The general term for this emotion in the discourse of the *VDhP* is *rāga*, from the root *rañj*, meaning to color, especially to redden. The major synonym for *bhakti* is *anurāga*, a term used for someone who is attracted to—pleased by, attached to, in love with—a higher personage, a master or lord. Yet it would be a mistake to treat this emotion as sentimentality, as a prefiguring of Christian love, or as a superstructural feature of feudalism.

The shift to devoted participation in the Theist ways of life entailed broad changes throughout the human world of those who did so. The older Vedic narrative of the human world constructed disciplinary orders that proceeded by a principle of exclusion. The discourse of the *VDhP* instead emphasizes that all can participate, but also stresses that the capacities to do so are graded. As a reminder of this participatory aspect, I shall generally render *bhakti* as "devoted participation."<sup>1</sup>

## Text, Author, Intertext

Adherents of a linguistic contextualism, Indologists have approached the texts of ancient or medieval India on the basis of an analogy: just as utterances are reducible to the normative system of a language, so texts are reducible to their genres, each of which is defined by an essence, a stable distinguishing feature or features. Relying on Indian "tradition," Indologists tell us that a Purāṇa has five distinguishing characteristics (*pañcalakṣaṇa*): cosmogony (*sarga*), the "emission"

<sup>1</sup>Krishna Sharma criticizes the representations of *bhakti* as a type of religion or as a mere adjunct of a feudal society in *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective; A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987).

of the cosmos at the beginning of a grand cosmic formation (*mahākalpa*) from the body of a cosmic overlord; regeneration (*pratisarga*) of the cosmos at the beginning of the present cosmic formation (*kalpa*); the successive generation and population (*vaṁśa*) of the world with its various beings; accounts of the epochs of Manu (*manvantarāni*), fourteen of which made up a Cosmic Formation; and the genealogical succession of kings (*vaṁśānucarita*) of the Solar and Lunar dynasties of the present epoch of Manu and cycle of four ages (*caturyuga*). Here, then, we seem to have the essence of the Purāṇa as a genre: it is an account of the divine origin and ordering of the world.

Most surveys are careful to point out, however, that virtually none of the extant texts confines itself to these topics. Unlike the Vedas (including the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads), the Purāṇas and the Epics have undergone numerous modifications over the centuries. They have come to contain "later" material on "customs" and "rituals" added by priests with "sectarian" interests. Distinguishing the Purāṇas from the Vedas, E. J. Rapson, an empiricist, asserted that "the Purāṇas have adapted themselves to the changes which have taken place in the social and religious life of the people, and their text has been perverted by generations of editors and transcribers."<sup>2</sup> Here the Purāṇas seem to impinge on other genres of texts: the earlier Kalpasūtras, on "ritual," and the later Dharmaśāstras, texts supposed to be about religious law; and the Āgamas, sectarian ritual texts of the Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, and Śāktas.<sup>3</sup> This is so much the case that many scholars consider the Purāṇas to be in actuality religious texts and not primarily histories.

The *VDhP* is typical of the Purāṇic genre. It is obviously a text "influenced" by the Pāñcarātra sect of Vaiṣṇavas. Art historians cite it because it contains important "early" material on Hindu iconography and temples. It would appear, therefore, to poach on the turf of another genre of texts, the Śilpaśāstras and Vāstuśāstras, having art and architecture, respectively, as their proper topics. I myself had turned to it not so much for this or for its account of cosmology or early history as for the information on Hindu kingship, one of the topics of Dharmaśāstra that comprises the entire second part of this text.

To make matters worse, the Hindu tradition speaks of eighteen of the Purāṇas as *mahā* or "great," and any number of others as *upa* or "lesser." The *VDhP* is nowadays classed as an Upapurāṇa (though there is no evidence of this distinction in the text itself). A close examination of some of the manuscripts has revealed that the contents of these texts overlap. Different names are applied to the same text, and the same name is applied to differing texts. As we shall see, the *VDhP* is also pesky in this regard, giving rise to considerable confusion over its name and contents. The apparent heterogeneity and volatility of this genre of texts have led Indologists

<sup>2</sup>E. J. Rapson, "The Purāṇas" in *Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 1: 266.

<sup>3</sup>P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India)* (*HD*) ([1930–1962] Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute) (1962–75) in 5 volumes; 1 (1968–75), 408–21; 5 (1962–74), 815–1002. Jan Gonda, "Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit" in *Epics and Sanskrit Religious Literature*, vol. 2.1 of *A History of Indian Literature*, edited by Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), pp. 114–15.

again and again to speak of them as “encyclopedic” and as “storehouses” of Hindu lore. Once again, the *VDhP* is more than typical, incorporating condensations or paraphrases of texts on everything from archery and medicine to astronomy and divination. Since many scholars have found this material attractive, they have tried to date it to India’s “golden age,” that of the Guptas.

### *Composite Authorship*

Surprisingly little is said in scholarship on the Purāṇas about their authors. Scholars characterize them as the texts of “popular” Hinduism, and assume that they were more or less unconsciously and almost accidentally congealed collections of genealogies, myths, and legends, which originally belonged to an oral tradition and were the property of bards (see Appendix). Without saying much about what sort of persons in what positions and under which historical circumstances would have composed, learned, recited, and heard these texts, Indologists continue to assert that the Purāṇas were used to educate the “common” man and even to unify the diverse populations of the subcontinent. Many of these scholars simply assume that a unitary Brāhmaṇi priesthood has been the instrument for the conversion of these texts of the mass mentality into works of a “great” or Sanskritic tradition and has either to serve its own self-interests or to popularize the radical monism of Advaita Vedānta, made interpolations of rituals and other extraneous material into them in the process. R. C. Hazra’s view is fairly typical.<sup>4</sup>

Now, there can be little doubt that Purāṇas have been differently situated in India’s successive imperial formations (the complex polities consisting of a hegemonic empire and other allied and rival kingdoms), and within the same formation (see Introduction). One could, furthermore, make the case that the rise of a Hindu bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century and the use of the printing press may have brought about a certain “democratization” of the Purāṇas. But there is no reason to assume that an elite and mass dichotomy that was brought into existence in nineteenth-century India, as it was in Europe, is an essential feature of a civilization at all times. Nor is there any reason to substitute the Brāhmaṇs—thought of as a group version of the abstract individual of political economy, a unitary class with its own insatiable desires for wealth—for the uniquely inspired author of the European text. On the contrary, I think it is important to distinguish in broad terms the uses that Vedists made of Purāṇas redacted in polities where Buddhist monastic orders predominated from the uses that Theists made of the Purāṇas they redacted in polities where their ways of life held sway. And I would want to distinguish these, in turn, from the uses that Theists as Hindus made of the Purāṇas redacted or dispersed over digests in polities of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries where some configuration of Islamic orders was hegemonic.<sup>5</sup> Precisely because differing

<sup>4</sup>Hazra, “The Purāṇas,” in *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958–86), 2: 268–69.

<sup>5</sup>Nor should we fail to consider the uses that Islamic scholars and aristocrats made of texts like the Upaniṣads and *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*) or the use that Alberūnī made of the *VDhP* itself (see appendix to this chapter).

societies formed by disciplinary orders and lordly courts considered Purāṇas as authoritative sites for world accounts, they saw them as media for the articulation of themselves as complex agents, as coagents of the splendid and mighty beings described in the Purāṇas that could work their will in the world.

The argument I make here is that the *VDhP* was produced by and for a complex agent consisting of Pāñcarātra adepts and an imperial king and his court. That complex agent was synonymous with the disciplinary order of the Pāñcarātrins in the course of making itself paramount by combining its will with that of the ruling society of Kashmir, the king of kings and other dignitaries of the imperial court. The crucial part in this process was played by the royal preceptor and chronologer. This complex author should not, however, be seen as pregiven, as is often the case in studies using an unexamined notion of "patronage."<sup>6</sup> The very process of articulating the text, that is, of transforming preexisting and new textual elements into the *VDhP*, was also articulative of its author—the disciplinary order and imperial court. Let me begin with the way in which the *VDhP* situates itself.

The form taken by a Purāṇa is that of a "dialogue" or "colloquy" (*saṃvāda*) between a master and pupil, in which the former imparts an "account of the ancient past" (*purāṇa*) to the latter in response to his repeated questions or assertions of doubt. The knowledge imparted in this way may box within itself still earlier dialogues between other masters and pupils. The master of our text is the ancient sage (*ṛṣi*), Mārkaṇḍeya, a savant of the Brāhmaṇ or priestly estate. His pupil and interlocutor is Vajra, a king of the Kṣatriya or warrior estate. Mārkaṇḍeya, son of Mr̥kaṇḍa and a man of the Bhṛgu clan, the foremost clan of sages and priests, was, it may be inferred, a master not only of the Veda but also of the Pāñcarātra.

This latter was the name of the major "order" or "rule" (*vidhi, vidhāna*) of Vaiṣṇavas in "early medieval" India, that is, in the eighth to twelfth centuries. The Śrīvaiṣṇavas or Rāmānujīyas of south India in the "late medieval" period and down to the present are a transformation of the earlier Pāñcarātrins. The other, lesser order of Vaiṣṇavas of which we have evidence from early medieval India was that of the Vaikhānasas.<sup>7</sup> The referent of the term Pāñcarātra, which literally means "relating to the five nights," has been a source of speculation for Indologists.<sup>8</sup> The *VDhP* gives no definition, but it is probable that authors of that text would have pointed to the two five-day festivals that mark the beginning and end of the four-month sleep of Viṣṇu's image (II.153). The reason for reticence is that the early Pāñcarātrins

<sup>6</sup>Nor should we think that single persons as authors are, by contrast, unitary. They are, if not complex to the extent possible in the case of a joint author, at least composite entities.

<sup>7</sup>Jan Gonda, "Religious Thought and Practice in Vaikhanasa Visnuism," *School of Oriental and African Studies Bulletin* 40 (1977), 550–71.

<sup>8</sup>See J. A. B. Van Buitenen, "The Name Pāñcarātra," *History of Religions* 1.2 (1962), 291–99; V. Raghavan, "The Name Pāñcarātra: With an Analysis of the Sanat Kumāra-saṃhitā in manuscript," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85.1 (1965), 73–79; H. Daniel Smith, "A Typological Survey of Definitions: The Name 'Pāñcarātra'," *Journal of Oriental Research* 34–35 (1964–66), 102–17, according to whom (p. 104) some Pāñcarātra texts of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas refer to a sage as receiving the knowledge of the Pāñcarātrāgama in a session of five nights; p. 116, contemporary Pāñcarātrins (i.e., Śrīvaiṣṇavas of south India) use the term to mean the gift of god in five forms, and especially in the fifth, that of the image (*arcā*). See also Kane, *HD* 5 (1962–74), 954 n. 1546; and Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, pp. 43–47.



probably used the term to refer to a Vedic sacrifice that this later liturgy of image-honoring had displaced.<sup>9</sup>

Both the Pāñcarātrins and the Vaikhānasas seem originally to have been orders of forest-dwellers only and not the advocates of costly temple liturgies. The term Bhāgavata, meaning "devotee of the Lord (*bhagavān*)," was used to designate any Vaiṣṇava, but appears also to have been used to denote householder Vaiṣṇavas (as in the *Bhagavadgītā*) who adhered to the Vedic sacrificial liturgy. For at least two or three centuries before the time of the *VDhP* it would seem that the Pāñcarātrins and Bhāgavatas were content to maintain this relationship of complementarity. So it would be wrong to assume that the Pāñcarātrins had always intended to descend onto the plains of India and establish the preeminence of their way of life and disciplinary order. Indeed, one might argue on the basis of the ambiguous position of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the earliest extant text of the Pāñcarātrins in the *MBh*, that they were fortunate to have gained recognition at all.

Vajra, the royal listener of the *VDhP*, was himself the great-grandson of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, the manifestation of Viṣṇu, the cosmic overlord, who descended to earth to impel the Pāṇḍavas, the protagonists of the *MBh*, on to victory over their senior cousins and rivals, the Kauravas. The only Yādava left on earth after the events of the Epic drew to a close, Vajra was made king at Indraprastha (near Delhi), the Pāṇḍava headquarters and cadet capital of the Kuru kingdom, by Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, edited by Chinnaśwami Sastri and Pattabhirama Sastri (Varanasi: Caukhamba, 1984) XIII.6.1 uses the term Pāñcarātra to refer to a Vedic sacrificial session (*sattra*) of five nights conceived by Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa, by the performance of which one could attain superiority over all beings. It equates that sacrifice (XII.3.4) with the sacrifice of Puruṣa in the Puruṣa-sūkta, the Vedic hymn that the Pāñcarātrins considered the most important hymn of the Veda, one that in their eyes established a cosmic Personality, equated with the Pāñcarātra godhead, Nārāyaṇa, as the absolute. See F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhnyā Saṃhitā* ([1916] Madras: Adyar Library, 1973), 28–29.

<sup>10</sup>He did this after he bathed Parikṣit (grandson of Arjuna, third of the Pāṇḍava brothers, and of Subhadrā, Kṛṣṇa's sister), who was to be the only Pāṇḍava to remain on earth, into kingship. Yudhiṣṭhira installed him at Hāstinapura, the senior capital of the Kuru kingdom, bestowing on him the paramount overlordship (*rājyam sarvaṃ*) of India; *MBh*, edited by V. S. Sukthankar and others (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1927–66.) XVII.1.6–9. Afterward, he and his brothers and their wife, Draupadī, left Parikṣit and Vajra to rule the earth and set forth on a "great departure" (*muhāprasthāna*), a march into the Himalayas, where they died and ascended to heaven.

The Kauravas had earlier given the Pāṇḍavas the city of Khāṇḍavaprastha and half of the Kuru kingdom, after the latter agreed to give up the kingship as a whole. The Pāṇḍavas rebuilt this city, transforming it into a paradise, and renamed it Indraprastha, after the king of the gods, Indra, whose city, we are told, it rivaled. A demon, Maya, constructed for them a fabulous jeweled hall of pillars, attached to their new palace. Once the pillared assembly hall at Indraprastha had been completed and Yudhiṣṭhira had occupied his throne there, Nārada, greatest of the Vaiṣṇava sages, had visited his court and urged him to undertake the events narrated in the *MBh*.

On the advice of that sage, Yudhiṣṭhira dispatched his four younger brothers to Magadha, where they overpowered Jarāsandha, king of that country and wrongful paramount overlord of India. Meanwhile he prepared to perform the royal installation (*rājasūya*) to mark his rise as a "king of kings." Then, while he ruled from his throne in the glittering hall at Indraprastha, his four brothers set forth again, this time to conquer the "four quarters" of the "entire earth" and make good Yudhiṣṭhira's claim. The pillared hall at Indraprastha had thus been made into the meeting place of the paramount king of all India and his tributary kings, including the Kauravas themselves. It was the imperial capital of the earth. After



At the beginning of the very first chapter of the *VDhP*, the reciter of the text, who in the liturgical practices of the text is called just that (*vācaka*), takes the position of an unnamed person, presumably of the premier narrator, Sūta Lomahaṛṣaṇa (he who causes the hair, *loma*, to bristle, *haṛṣaṇa*).<sup>11</sup> The first thing he recites is the salutation at the head of the text. That first names Gaṇeśa, the god charged with removing the obstacles to an undertaking. Without the cooperation of this deity, the hypostatization of the circumstances of an action, the recitation will not even take place. Next the reciter names Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu in his transcendent form. The reciter then reads: "Now, then, the undertaking of the Viṣṇudharmottara." He then again names the overlord of the cosmos, Nārāyaṇa, and then that same god split into pupil and master, Nara and Nārāyaṇa, premier listener and author of the text. Next he names the goddess Sarasvatī, spouse of Brahmā, hypostatization of knowing as something to be mastered, followed by Vyāsa. The sage Vyāsa ("arranger"), also known as Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu Dvaipāyana, was the expert compiler of the Veda, the *MBh*, and the *Purāṇa*.<sup>12</sup>

What we can already see as one part of a complex author, its dramatic narrative voice, next describes the arrival of Mārkaṇḍeya at Indraprastha, now the capital and court of Vajra. Declaimed the "foremost of the best of kings," (*nṛpavaryamukhya*) or "lord among kings" (*rājendra*), and compared with Yudhiṣṭhira, Vajra is represented as a king of kings of realms all over India, if not the paramount overlord of India as a whole (*VDhP* I.1.2–8). The kings of India had assembled at the court of Vajra for the performance of his horse sacrifice, carried out ten years and one lunar fortnight after the current Age of Strife had begun (I.80.5–6).<sup>13</sup> The fourth and worst of a cycle of four ages, it was ushered in thirty-six years after the great battle of the Epic when Kṛṣṇa departed from the earth.<sup>14</sup> It was the age for which *bhakti*, which I render as "devoted participation" in Viṣṇu, as signified by *pūjā*, the honoring of images, was intended. In the earliest age, knowing the truth (*jñāna*) had alone enabled people to see the gods and had sufficed to lead them to the final goal of release. Ascetical feats (*tapas*) became necessary in the second age and sacrifice to the gods (*yajña*) in the third. Now, in the Age of Strife, the institution of images of gods (*surapraṭiṣṭhā*) was also required (I.73.20–34 and III.93.5–6). So, Mārkaṇḍeya's arrival with instructions on image-honoring was timely. The occasion chosen, a horse sacrifice, was suitable since it was apparently considered the proper setting for the recitation of the *MBh*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the

the battle of Kurukṣetra, the Pāṇḍavas returned to Hāstinapura, the older capital of Kuru, performed the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*), and resumed their rule of the earth from that city.

<sup>11</sup>Alternatively, it could be the voice of Ugraśravas Sauti, son of Lomahaṛṣaṇa, who related the *MBh* to sages at a sacrifice.

<sup>12</sup>Vaiśampāyana, his pupil, related the Epic to Janamejaya, the son of Parikṣit, in response to a question from him, and imparted that text to Ugraśravas.

<sup>13</sup>Although the *VDhP* here names the kings of Madra, the Darads, Abhisāra and Darva, the Hūṇas, and Bāhlika, all near Kashmir, it names no king of that country, perhaps because, according to one account, its minor king did not participate in the great war. The king of Kashmir does make a cameo appearance in the war that Bharata wages against Gāndhāra.

<sup>14</sup>These ages were named after dice tosses: the first, the Kṛta or four spots, which I translate as the Age of Completeness; the second, Tretā or three spots, which I translate as the Age of the Trey; the third, Dvāpara or two spots, as the Age of the Deuce; and the Kali or one spot, as the Age of Strife.

Purāṇas to royal courts.<sup>15</sup> Yet this is also disquieting, for the very knowledge that Mārkaṇḍeya brings will have the effect of displacing the horse (and other Vedic) sacrifices from the center of concern in favor of a temple liturgy.

As illustrious as the court was, it was astonished when it saw Mārkaṇḍeya and his retinue of Brāhmaṇas appear before it:

Those kings then saw sages the sight of whom was so scarce that those bearers of fame thought they must be in Brahmā's paradise. Out of attachment, they spoke these words to Vajra, the giver of many thousands [of cows to the Brāhmaṇs]: "It must be as a result of your favor (*prasāda*), O King, that Brāhmaṇs resembling Brahmā himself have appeared, as they used to do in the Ages of the Trey and Deuce, in this, the Age of Strife, that is now upon us. O King, you are of the same clan as Kṛṣṇa, that is why this court of yours is honored (*upās*) by these men, resembling Brahmā, whose lot is large and whose wealth consists of their austerities. By devotion to that Kṛṣṇa whose luminous will is infinite, even those kings of the past, unsurpassed in heroic valor but passed over/overcome by Kṛṣṇa may obtain release from Kṛṣṇa in the present. But this current Age of Strife is fierce and very violent, and since the opportunity of gazing on such men of high souls is hard to come by nowadays in a gathering of kings, be you pleased, O tiger among kings, to request of those best of the Brāhmaṇs the manifold orders of Viṣṇu (*vaiṣṇavān dharmān vividhān*) together with the esoteric teachings and abridgments (*sarahasyān sasamgrahān*).” (I.1.9–16)

As is clear from the marvelous appearance of Mārkaṇḍeya and the deferential treatment accorded him by Vajra, himself no ordinary king, this was no ordinary Brāhmaṇ. The reciter of the *VDhP* makes him resemble Brahmā, the god who is master of the Veda and of the Vedic sacrifice, the divine emanation of Viṣṇu who creates the world. Later in the narrative of the text, where Mārkaṇḍeya is himself the narrator, he reveals that he is indeed privileged, for he is the only man who survives from one grand cosmic formation (*mahākālpa*) to another. He does so by entering the mouth of a giant youth (*bāla*) who is none other than Aniruddha, one of the four major emanations of Viṣṇu (according to the Pāñcarātrins) and a homologue of Brahmā (I.78–79).<sup>16</sup> Mārkaṇḍeya is, thus, clearly an emanation of Viṣṇu himself.<sup>17</sup> Through its description of Mārkaṇḍeya, *VDhP* is clearly claiming

<sup>15</sup>R. C. Hazra, "The Aśvamedha, the Common Source of Origin of the Purāṇa, *pañca-lakṣaṇa* and the Mahābhārata," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 36 (1955), 190–203. The *VDhP* omits the frame, included in the *MBh* and some other Purāṇas, which has the sage narrator recite the text to a company of sages performing a Vedic sacrifice in the forest without royalty.

<sup>16</sup>After relating this cosmic event, Mārkaṇḍeya told Vajra: "That which happened in the past Cosmic Formation has been narrated by me, O King, to Yudhiṣṭhira, son of Dharma, in the Kāmyaka Forest" (I.81.26b–7a), a reference to his appearance in the *MBh* where he lectures the Pāṇḍavas on this event and related subjects; Mārkaṇḍeyasamasyā ("Session with Mārkaṇḍeya"), *MBh* III.179–221.

<sup>17</sup>We should not forget that many an Indian text states openly that its author was an ordinary man, not a sage, who completed his work on a date within one of the historic Indian eras. For example, Bhaṭṭotpala, a Kashmiri Brāhmaṇ, concluded his explication of the *Bṛhajjātaka* of Varāhamihira with: "This commentary is finished by me on Thursday, the fifth lunar day of the bright fortnight of the month of Caitra (March–April) in Śāka 888 (A.D. 966)"; see Avadhavihari Tripathi's introduction to Varāhamihira, *Brhatsaṃhitā* (Varanasi: Varanaseya-samskṛta-visva vidyalaya, 1968), 1:ix.

divine presence: whenever his words, the contents of the *VDhP*, are recited, the words of Viṣṇu himself are to be heard.

Mārkaṇḍeya and his disciples came to the royal capital of India from a retreat in the forest. The *VDhP* nowhere gives the location of Mārkaṇḍeya's retreat, but it does suggest that it may have been situated at Badarikāśrama (Badrināth), the retreat of Nara-Nārāyaṇa situated near Lake Bindusaras and Mount Gandhamādana and Mount Kailāsa, the source of the Gaṅgā, the premier river of India in Purāṇic geography and the point from which India was recreated at the beginning of a cosmic cycle.<sup>18</sup> According to the *Nārāyaṇīya* of the *MBh*, Nārāyaṇa was the forest-dwelling aspect of Viṣṇu especially concerned with knowledge. Nara, the "man," was his permanent pupil. Another pair of divines, Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (whose dialogues figure so prominently in the *Bhagavadgītā*) were considered the princely emanations of Nārāyaṇa and Nara. The forest-dwelling Pāñcarātrins honored Nārāyaṇa as the supreme god, whereas the Bhāgavatas, householders of the plains, honored Kṛṣṇa as the highest form of Viṣṇu.

I should add here that the forest was assumed to be the place where relatively transcendent knowledge originated, whereas mundane or immanent knowledge was to be found on the plains. Against this background we can see that the pairing of Mārkaṇḍeya and Vajra duplicates these other couplings. The descent of Mārkaṇḍeya to the royal center of the Indian plains to impart the knowledge of the forest-dwelling Pāñcarātrins at the onset of the Age of Strife signals a rearticulation: both the Pāñcarātrins and the kings of India and their subjects are going to be refashioned in the discourse of the *VDhP*. The knowledge that the sage Mārkaṇḍeya has come to Indraprastha to reveal consisted not only of a world account but also of the rules or procedures required for transforming the activity of honoring images practiced by the forest-dwelling Pāñcarātrins into a fully elaborated temple liturgy of the plains-dwelling householders, one that would displace the Vedic sacrificial liturgy still practiced by the Bhāgavatas from its position of privilege in imperial politics. The knowledge that he delivers to his royal devotee, Vajra, is, thus, not, that transcendent text, the Purāṇa as first authored by Viṣṇu. It is itself a transformation of that text, one that is delivered out of grace for his devotees at the beginning of the current Age of Strife to meet the worsening conditions that would otherwise obtain in this age. Before we turn to a consideration of the text's representation of those conditions and the way it proposed to meet them, let us see what more we can squeeze from the text itself about the humans who participated in its authorship and use.

The evidence that the *VDhP* provides about its own past would have us believe that the text was composed by a forest-dwelling sage and delivered by him to a king of kings and his court. That Vajra would "reflect" (*cint*) daily on this

<sup>18</sup>When Vajra asks Mārkaṇḍeya about his future, the latter tells him that after he, Vajra, dies, the assembly hall (*śabhā*) that had been built at Indraprastha out of precious metals taken from lake Bindusaras, in the Himalayas, will be taken back there. Bindusaras, the source of the Bhāgīrathī Gaṅgā, was, of course, the site of the retreat of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. This cryptic reply to Vajra seems to imply that just as Mārkaṇḍeya has gone back to his place of origin, so, too, would the pillared hall revert to the lake at Badarikāśrama.

Purāṇa suggests that this text was to have a privileged position among the bodies of knowledge at the disposal of the king. This evidence is confirmed by the evidence of the text concerning those who were supposed to use the *VDhP* in the present, in the time following Mārkaṇḍeya's delivery of the text.

The daily routine prescribed in the *VDhP* for a king of kings called for him to listen to histories (*itihāsa*) in the morning and to reflect on instructions (*śāstras*) in the afternoon. There can be little doubt that the major texts intended here were, in the first instance, the *MBh* and, in the second, the *VDhP* itself; for, as we shall soon see, that text saw itself as a guide to the great Epic and instructions on a variety of topics. The text does not say so explicitly, but this should not surprise us, for the *VDhP* is quite tactful in the prescriptions it lays down for the king; it does not overemphasize the Pāñcarātra aspects of the royal routine. Its position is that all kings who adhere to the Vedas are de facto Vaiṣṇavas, even if they claim to be Śaivas. The best of kings, however, is a Pāñcarātrin.

We may infer, therefore, that the king of kings was not only supposed to listen to histories from the great Epic and the *VDhP*, he was also supposed to learn the instructions of the *VDhP* sufficiently well that he could reflect on them by himself. The expectation was that the king would be a generalized master of the contents of the text as a whole. He would, in addition, have a more detailed command of those parts of the text dealing specifically with the rules for royal order (*rājadharma*). Daily rehearsal of the text's contents would, of course, have reinforced his memory of them. One might point out here that the injunction to reflect daily on the instructions, was a command to engage daily in a practice of "remembering" (*smṛti*), of rethinking the knowledge of Viṣṇu in the continually changing circumstances of one's present, and not a rote process of retrieving knowledge from a static memory (as in a computer).

The king of kings was not the only one in the royal court who was assumed to know the contents of this text. The lists of qualifications for counsellors (*mantrin*), the senior and experienced men among the ministers of the king, seem also to presuppose their knowledge of relevant parts of the *VDhP*, those portions dealing with "resources" (*artha*), "guidance" (*nīti*), and the "science of weaponry" (*dhanurveda*). I think we can safely assume that many if not most of those in the royal court who were themselves Vaiṣṇavas, including the wives of ministers and politically high-ranking Śūdras, would have had at least some acquaintance with the text or with vernacular versions of portions of it. Moving out and down from this circle around the king of kings himself, it would also be reasonable to expect that the *VDhP* might have been known, again in part, to two other categories of persons. These were the wealthier merchants of the capital and of other towns, and the better-off farmers of the countryside, those who would have formed the councils of "subject-citizens" and been in frequent contact with the imperial court and other lesser lordly courts—and even, on occasion, conjoined with it. It is much less likely that the text was known, except perhaps by reputation, to "ordinary" villagers of the countryside. If scholars are referring to the beliefs and practices of this category of the population when they use the expression "popular Hinduism," then we must reject the view that the Purāṇas were and are, by definition, the texts



of the "common man (and woman)." The *VDhP*, at least, was, during the century or so after its completion, primarily the text of an imperial king and his court.

Those who were most closely connected with the production and use of the *VDhP* were, apart from the king of kings himself, the Pāñcarātra adepts and priests connected to the court of a Vaiṣṇava king who had been persuaded to take that text as his guide to Viṣṇu's world account and the way of life that it supported. Just as Mārkaṇḍeya took the lead in the dialogues of the text, so Pāñcarātra adepts, we may assume, took the lead in the countless dialogues that contributed to the completion of the text. The *VDhP* urges its king of kings to appoint as his "palace priest" (*purohita*) a Brāhmaṇ skilled in two Vedas, the Yajur and the Atharva. He was also supposed to be learned in the "liturgical procedures" (*vidhāna*) of five Kalpas, a set of manuals associated with the Atharvaveda. The Yajurveda was the Veda most centrally connected with the performance of the grander Vedic sacrifices. It may be inferred from elsewhere in the text that a palace priest in Kashmir would have known the Black Yajurveda as redacted in the Kāṭhaka school. The Atharvaveda was, as is well known, the Veda most closely connected with the performance of a sequence of daily and annual "rites" by the king, apart from the multifire sacrifices. The palace priest that the *VDhP* calls for was thus of the sort one would have expected in a kingdom where Vedic liturgies were regularly performed.

The *VDhP*, however, complicates the situation, for it calls on the king of kings to appoint a "chronologer" (*sāmvatsara*, "he who knows the entire year," often translated too narrowly and with the implication that his knowledge consisted of "superstition," as "astrologer"), under whose command the palace priest will be placed. This chronologer was supposed to have not only the qualifications normally expected in ancient India, but some additional and unusual qualifications, as well. Virtually every liturgical act the king of kings is commanded to perform comprises, from the standpoint of procedural knowledge, two sorts of material. One of these is Vedic, the other is Purāṇic. Generally speaking, the palace priest was to perform the Vedic portions and recite appropriate Vedic mantras. The Purāṇic portions of the rites, however, were to be performed not by the palace priest, learned in the Veda, but by the royal chronologer who, it is assumed, is learned in the rules and mantras of the *VDhP*.

Curiously, the *VDhP* makes no specific mention of another specialist one would not expect to find only at the court of a Hindu king but in command of his life-transforming practices. I speak here of the "royal preceptor" (*rājaguru*). I am tempted, therefore, to conclude that the capacities of royal preceptor, high priest, and chronologer were assumed, in the *VDhP*, to be exercised by one and the same man. If my reasoning here is correct, then we may go one step further in our search for the "author" of the *VDhP*: the person who played the largest part in "remembering" the text of Mārkaṇḍeya and compiling it was probably the very chronologer to whom so much responsibility is given in the text itself. But this author does not stand outside his text. The identity of the Pāñcarātra adept who takes on the roles of chronologer, high Vaiṣṇava priest, and royal preceptor is itself rearticulated by the same process of reworking and modifying existing traditions as is the identity of the text.



The central component of the disciplinary order that made itself into the author of the *VDhP* was a complement of sixteen liturgists (*ṛtvik*) required, according to the text, to perform the highest of all Pāñcarātra royal works—the installation of the image of a god in a monumental Vaiṣṇava temple (III.97). A chief liturgist, the Sātvata (Pāñcarātrin) adept who would be the supervisor of the temple and its liturgy, performed the actual installation of the fixed image, assisted by two priests (one a Sātvata who carried the images and another a priest of the Yajurveda who held the attendances to be offered), as well as a set of four priests (one from each Veda, who recited mantras from his Veda while holding waterjars). Three other Sātvatas were in charge of making attendances at an auxilliary altar before a portable image and three priests of the Yajurveda took charge of the oblations poured at another auxilliary altar into a fire. A dancer, flutist, and instrumentalist also did their part, as did the reciter of Purāṇa (*vācaka*). The chronologer (and royal preceptor) and builder, who made their interventions, completed this complement of liturgists. The complement of this complex liturgist was, of course, the imperial celebrant, in whose presence the installation was to be performed.<sup>19</sup>

To summarize: the “author” of the text was a complex agent, one consisting of Pāñcarātra adepts, palace priest, king of kings, and counsellor, as well as the chronologer himself, each of whom participated in the process of composition from a different perspective and brought to bear a different expertise or commitment. We can see these persons transforming themselves as disciplinary order and imperial court in the course of composing the *VDhP* itself. That is, the author takes on shape in the very process of authorship. What is more, the joint author at work here most likely spanned two or more generations. The text is a large one, organized in three parts. This could well be taken as an indication that the text was completed at three successive moments. We must, therefore, allow for the possibility that the process of composition may have continued for several decades, in which case not only the ideas and practices but the very composition of this joint author doubtless changed. All those who participated in this process probably thought they were inspired by Viṣṇu, but it was probably the Pāñcarātra chronologer and preceptor who “remembered” and then composed the text of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya in its completed form.

### *Naming Texts*

The author of the *VDhP* was a complex agent, one that made and remade itself as it made and remade its text. The classic theory of the text considered the text either as an expression of an external state of affairs existing in the time and space of the author, or as the expression of an interior state of mind. The orientalist application of this notion to the Purāṇas argues that the expression in the first or empiricist instance is an inherently distorted expression of historical reality, and in the second instance is the mythological or symbolic expression of a monist, illusionist Hindu

<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of changes in the composition of priesthoods, see R. Inden, “Changes in the Vedic Priesthood,” in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: Essays in Honour of J. C. Heesterman*, edited by A. W. van den Hoek, D. H. A. Kolff, and M. S. Oort (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 556–77.

philosophy. Neither of these positions has been easy to sustain, of course, because of the absence of a unitary author who could convey such expressions and, hence, provide the *VDhP* with the unitary essential content, the "textuality" that a proper text should have. Even a cursory glance at the diverse contents of the *VDhP* lets the scholar know that he or she will have to deal with what some of today's critics call the problem of "intertextuality," the problem of a text's heterogeneity and its connections with other texts, both within a genre, itself unstable, and with other genres.

The Indologists' solution to this problem has been to label the text as encyclopedic and to operate on the assumption that the text is only an accidental whole, a mere coagulation of past "influences." What I want to suggest here is that the text need not be seen either as the unitary product of a single author whose function is to express some outer or inner reality or as a mere hodge-podge whose only principle of unity is that of a casual sectarian convenience.

Instead, I argue, we can see the *VDhP* as a series of textual wholes, as a "scale of texts" that have been articulated by its complex author acting as a reader or user of other texts. It is possible to look at the complex author and text of the *VDhP* as articulative of a tradition embodying a way of life and not as the passive recipients of it. I begin to make my case for looking at this work as a series or scale of texts with the naming of the text and its supplements.

The title of the *VDhP* itself signals the importance of differences in the constitution of this text. It disturbs any effort we might make to reduce the text to a homogeneous unity. On the other hand, the very fact that the complex author of the *VDhP* has consciously given it such a name should make us hesitate before dismissing the text as a whole. Most secondary accounts call it the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*.<sup>20</sup> Scholars have generally taken the title to mean a Purāṇa (or Mahāpurāṇa) consisting of "additions (*uttara*) to (the) Viṣṇudharma." This has led some of them to assume that the *VDhP* is appended to some other text, one containing the Dharma of Viṣṇu or entitled the Viṣṇudharma. There is textual support for this assumption, although it comes from outside the *VDhP* itself. A passage in the *Nāradyapurāṇa* makes the *VDhP* into the Second Division of that *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.<sup>21</sup> The editors of the printed text of the *VDhP* note this, citing the relevant passage from the *Nāradya* in their foreword. The colophon that they print at the

<sup>20</sup>The printed version differs slightly, labeling the text a "Mahāpurāṇa." The use of this term is based on a distinction that has been made since at least the twelfth century between "greater" (*mahā*) and "lesser" (*upa*) Purāṇas (see n. 22 below).

<sup>21</sup>It describes a "great" (*mahat*) Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa as comprising two major divisions (*bhāga*). The first division is said to consist of six "books" (*aṃśa*). The second, we are told, contains texts called the Viṣṇudharmottaras, narrated with care by Sūta, Śaunaka (the sage to whom Sauti, son of Sūta, imparted the *MBh*), and others. It includes a variety of legends on Order; vows (*vrata*); major and minor observances (*yama, niyama*); instruction in the way of life leading to Order (*dharma*), and in the acquisition and distribution of resources (*artha*), on Vedānta (the end of the Veda or goal of Vedic liturgical action and learning), and on astronomy (*jyotiṣa*); tales of royal dynasties (*vaṃśākhyaṇa*); lauds or eulogies of the gods (*stotra*); descriptions of the epochs of Manu; and various other learnings (*vidyā*) "helpful to everyone"; *Nāradyapurāṇa* (Bombay: Śrīveṅkateśvara Steam Press, 1905) I.94.1–20. From the detailed description of the contents of the first division, it is clear that the text published and translated as the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is meant.

end of the last chapter of each of the three parts (*khaṇḍa*) of the texts states, in accord with the information given in the foreword, that the chapter stands in the appropriate part of the second division of the Viṣṇu Mahāpurāṇa. Hazra rejects this view in favor of his own, namely, that the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is the latter part of an unpublished Purāṇa called the *Viṣṇudharma*.<sup>22</sup> He also adds, without explanation, that both of these works were originally called Śāstras.<sup>23</sup>

The internal evidence of the *VDhP* itself, however, asks us to reject the view that the complex author of the *VDhP* attached its text as an appendix to either the *Viṣṇudharma* or *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. What is the nature of this evidence? Let us begin with the term "Purāṇa" and its variants. Although the text certainly presents itself by way of its contents and organization as a Purāṇa, it is not fond of naming itself as a Purāṇa. There is, however, one important exception to this general reticence. The very last verses of the text, cited above, relate that king Vajra "continued to reflect daily on the Purāṇa narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya" (III.355.5). This crucial passage leaves no doubt that the text saw itself as a Purāṇa, an ordinary account. We should also take this to embrace history (*itihāsa*), as the two are almost indistinguishable.<sup>24</sup> That is not, however, the only kind of text it claimed to be.

Mārkaṇḍeya, the "author" of the text, several times describes the text he relates as the *Viṣṇudharma*- ("together with additions") *sottara*. The text to which the first part of this name, *Viṣṇudharma*, "the Order [that is, ordered way of life] of Viṣṇu," refers was one of the instructional manuals on Order (*Dharmaśāstra*), in verse. This is possibly what Hazra has in mind when he somewhat misleadingly states that the text has been referred to as an instructional manual (*śāstra*).<sup>25</sup> If so, then *VDhP* appears to be claiming that it is the instructional manual on Order of the Vaiṣṇavas.

The suggestion of the *VDhP* that it is an instructional manual on Order would certainly seem to be justified, for it incorporates or paraphrases a large number of verses from the two texts of this class generally recognized as most important, the *Mānava* and *Yājñavalkya*.<sup>26</sup> But these two texts are peripheral to the *Dharmaśāstra* that the *VDhP* has appropriated under the name *Viṣṇudharma*. That text is

<sup>22</sup>Kane, in his criticism of Hazra's views, *HD* 5 (1962-74), 874, rightly rejects the idea that the *VDhP* is an appendix to a *Viṣṇudharmapurāṇa*, but he is prepared to see it as an addition to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.

<sup>23</sup>Hazra, furthermore, considers the *VDhP*, like the *Viṣṇudharma*, to be an *Upapurāṇa*. Many of the extant texts of the Purāṇas distinguish a set of eighteen named "greater" Purāṇas from a set, not fixed in name and number, of "lesser" Purāṇas. A passage in the *Dānasāgara*, a text composed by (or under) the king of Bengal, Vallālasena (c. 1158-1178), edited by Bhabatosh Bhattacharya (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1956), p. 3, would seem to support the view that the *VDhP* was considered an *Upapurāṇa*. It clearly distinguishes between greater and lesser Purāṇas and classes a Purāṇa "called the *Viṣṇudharmottara* composed by Mārkaṇḍeya" as one of eight *Upapurāṇas* that it lists. Immediately after naming the *VDhP*, it lists a text called the *Viṣṇudharma*. It does not, however, refer to this text as an *Upapurāṇa* but as a Śāstra.

<sup>24</sup>The text seems also to have been unaware of any distinction between Mahāpurāṇas and *Upapurāṇas*. Either no such distinction existed at the time when the *VDhP* was closed or (less likely in my view) the text chose to ignore the distinction for fear that it would either have to accept its inferior standing as a "lesser" Purāṇa or lie in claiming to be a "greater" one.

<sup>25</sup>R. C. Hazra, "The *Upapurāṇas*," in *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958-1986), 2: 277.

<sup>26</sup>R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas* (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1958), 1: 198-99.



the *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra*, also known as the *Viṣṇusmṛti*. This is a peculiar text. Its opening (and closing) chapters consist of dialogues between Viṣṇu and his consort Śrī, exactly as one would expect in a Purāṇa. Indeed, the opening twelve verses of the *Viṣṇusmṛti* are to be found, with some variations, in the *VDhP* (I.3) and constitute the whole of that chapter, striking evidence of the closeness of the two texts. Moreover, when Śrī requests knowledge of Viṣṇu, she does so in language very much like that used by the major interlocutor of the *VDhP*, King Vajra. She desires to hear "the eternal rules for an ordered way of life (*dharma*) together with the esoteric teachings and abridgments (*sarhasyān sasamgrahān*)."<sup>27</sup>

The *Viṣṇusmṛti* is also peculiar in another respect. The learned designated this and other Dharmaśāstras as "the remembered" (*smṛti*) texts in relation to earlier texts on the same topic but in prose, the Dharmasūtras. The other Dharmaśāstras consist of fully versified elaborations and reworkings of the Dharmasūtras. Most of the text between the opening and closing chapters of the *Viṣṇusmṛti*, however, consists of a prose Dharmasūtra.

Now, the Dharmasūtras, aphoristic manuals (*Sūtra*, literally, "thread") on Order (*dharma*) for the estates and lifestages complement the *Gr̥hyasūtras*, post-Buddhist guides that reposition the Vedic liturgy as a householder's practice (whence the term *gr̥hya*, "pertaining to the household"). Together they formed the *Smṛtasūtras*, that is, the *Sūtras* concerned with "remembered" practices—as distinct from the manuals on the "grand" or "multifire" sacrifices of the Vedic liturgy, those practices "deriving from the heard" (*śruti*), the utterances of the Veda itself, which make up the topic of the *Śrautasūtras*. Together with the *Smṛtasūtras*, these texts made up the set of texts known as the *Kalpasūtras*, aphoristic manuals on "liturgical procedures." Tied directly to separate Vedic disciplinary orders (the so-called schools), these sets of texts were the ones most immediately concerned with the performance of the Vedic sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> It is quite clear that the Dharmasūtra contained in the *Viṣṇusmṛti* is none other than the "missing" Dharmasūtra of the Kāthaka order or school of the Black Yajurveda,<sup>29</sup> for which only the *Gr̥hya* text of its *Kalpasūtra* is extant.<sup>30</sup> The Kāthaka or "northern" school of the Black Yajurveda has long been associated with Kashmir and environs, the "northern" country or quarter of India, just as others have been linked with western, eastern, and southern or peninsular

<sup>27</sup> *Viṣṇusmṛti*, edited with the commentary, *Keśavavaijayanī*, of Nandapaṇḍita, by Pandita V. Krishnamacharya (Madras: Adyar Library, 1964), I.62.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Gonda, "Ritual Sūtras," in *Vedas and Upanishads*, vol. 1.2 of *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1977), pp. 467–68. Although the learned considered the Dharmaśāstras as "remembered" in relation to the Dharmasūtras, they considered the *Kalpasūtra*s as "remembered" in relation to the Veda.

<sup>29</sup> Nandapaṇḍita, commentator on the text indicates this; see also Kane, *HD* 1 (1968–75), 112–27.

<sup>30</sup> Gonda, "Ritual Sūtras," *Vedas and Upanishads*, pp. 490, 527. The *Kāthaka Gr̥hyasūtra*, also known as the *Gr̥hyasūtra* of Laugākṣi, is still in use today in Kashmir (as reported to me in personal correspondence by the anthropologist, T. N. Madan). See Laugākṣi, *Kāthaka Gr̥hyasūtra, with Extracts from Three Commentaries [Devapāla, Brāhmaṇabala, Ādityadarśana], Appendix, and Indexes*, edited by Wilhelm Caland (Lahore: Research Department, D. A. V. College, 1925) and *Laugākṣigr̥hyasūtras, with Bhāṣyam of Devapāla*, edited with preface and introduction by Madhusudan Kaul Shastri, 2 vols., Kashmir Series, 49, 55 (Bombay: Nirnay-sagar Press, 1928–34).

India.<sup>31</sup> The *VDhP* itself is also implicitly affiliated with this disciplinary order, not just by virtue of its appropriation of the *Viṣṇusmṛti* but because it also appropriates parts of the *Kāṭhaka Kalpasūtra* (see below). Before Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇs succeeded in embedding the prose portion of the *Viṣṇusmṛti* in its Purāṇic frame, it had no doubt constituted a *Kāṭhaka Dharmasūtra*, a prose text on Order explicitly attached to the *Kāṭhaka* order. Hence, if the term *Viṣṇudharma* is taken to mean a text by that name to which the *VDhP* is attached or affiliated, it is most assuredly the *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra* and not the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* or the *Viṣṇudharmapurāṇa*, to which the *VDhP* has no such close links.<sup>32</sup>

Like its antecedent, the *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra*, the *VDhP*, thus, styles itself both a Purāṇa and a Dharmaśāstra, only much greater in scope and length than its ancestor. Let us now consider of what the “additions” indicated in the second part of its name consisted. The earlier Dharmaśāstras also claimed to be comprehensive. The *Smṛti* of Yājñavalkya (I.3), from which the *VDhP* takes much material, lists fourteen “sciences” (*vidyā*), ending with the Vedas themselves, which it considers the highest authority, and explicitly states that they are “receptacles” (*sthāna*) or “causes” (*hetu*) of *dharma*.<sup>33</sup>

The *VDhP* lists the very same sciences, with the difference that it ends with the two sciences which it considers the highest: “The four Vedas and [their six] ancillaries (*aṅga*), exegesis (*mīmāṃsā*) and logic (*nyāya*), Dharmaśāstra and the Purāṇa are the fourteen sciences” (I.74.32).<sup>34</sup> It then tells us what the ancillary sciences of the Veda were: phonetics (*śikṣā*), life-transforming practices (*kalpa*), grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), etymology (*nirukta*), astronomy (*jyotiṣa*), and meter (*chandās*) (I.74.33). These sciences, of course, implied still others, either by way of attachment or inclusion. The *VDhP* linked four minor (*upa*) Vedas to the four major ones—history (*itihāsa*), to the Ṛgveda, weaponry (*dhanurveda*), to the Yajurveda, music (*gāndharvaveda*), to the Sāmaveda, and last, health (*āyurveda*), to the Atharvaveda (II.22.129-30). The foremost of these was, of course, history, inseparable from the Purāṇas. The *VDhP* assumed that all of these knowledges had to do with the attainment of the goal of an “ordered way of life” (*dharma*) in the world as conceived by the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas, and it certainly does contain extracts or abridgments from virtually all of these sciences. These would have to be considered among the “additions” to the *Viṣṇudharma* in the *VDhP*. But these were not the only additions, or even the most important.

After naming the fourteen sciences, the *VDhP* then names another five sciences that it refers to as “bringing to an end” (*kṛtānta*), that is, as leading to the goal that is higher than and contrasted with ordered life in the world, namely, the goal of

<sup>31</sup> Louis Renou, “The Vedic Schools and the Epigraphy,” in *Siddha Bharati*, edited by Vishva Bandhu (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1950), 2: 218–19. For evidence on the Vedic affiliation of the Brāhmaṇs of Kashmir, and on the general state of their learning in the nineteenth century, consult Bühler’s “Detailed Report of a Tour in Search of Sanskrit MSS. Made in Kashmir, Rajputana, and Central India,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch* 34, extra number (1877), 19–27.

<sup>32</sup> We may also conclude that the *Dānasāgara* classed both of these texts as *Upapurāṇas*.

<sup>33</sup> Kane, *HD* I (1968–75), 408–9.

<sup>34</sup> Atomism (*vaiśeṣika*), often paired with Logic, is apparently included here.



“release” or “liberation” (*mokṣa*) from life in the world. Four of these sciences are more or less distinct from the Veda: “Recognize Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pāñcarātra, the Vedas, and Pāśupata as the five soteriologies (*kṛtāntapañcaka*) for the attainment of the Absolute (*brahman*), for calm living in the world of flux, and for assistance in mental well-being” (I.74.34–35a). This is a reiteration of the same set given in the *Nārāyaṇīya* text within the *MBh* (XII.337.59–63).<sup>35</sup> A section of the Mokṣadharma (rules for release) of the Śāntiparvan of the *MBh*, the *Nārāyaṇīya* is the oldest extant text on Pāñcarātra theology and its version of the science of liberation. It names the authors of these five sciences.

Sāṃkhya, founded by the sage Kapila, a manifestation of Viṣṇu, was concerned with the “enumeration of” or “discrimination among” (*saṃkhyā*) the twenty-five constituents (*tattva*) of the universe. Yoga, divulged by Hiraṇyagarbha (elsewhere, Patañjali), another form of Viṣṇu, was concerned with the “techniques” (*yoga*) by which one obtained release from the world. Many treated the two as complements, as did the Pāñcarātrins. They included their version of Sāṃkhya cosmogony in their own, and made the practice of yoga part of their daily liturgy. The Vedas, authored by Apāntaratamas, identified with Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, here comprise not only the portion of the Vedas concerned with the sacrificial liturgy (*karmakāṇḍa*) and its exegesis, but the Upaniṣads, the portion of the Veda concerned with the attainment of release by knowing the truth (*jñānakāṇḍa*). The “definitive” supplement to these texts, often classed as exegesis of the latter part (*uttaramūlāsā*), was the *Vedāntasūtra* or *Brahmasūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa. This goal, together with the means for reaching it, was certainly approved of in Pāñcarātra, but it was displaced onto a former age by the goal of devoted participation (*bhakti*) in Viṣṇu, considered appropriate for the present Age of Strife and central to both the Pāñcarātrins and Pāśupatas.

Pāśupata and Pāñcarātra belong together in the sense that both were sciences advocating theism. The Pāśupata here consists broadly of the texts of the Theists who took Śiva, one of whose names is Paśupati (“lord of animals”), as the overlord of the cosmos, and performed a liturgy in his honor differing from that in the Veda. It designated not only those more narrowly calling themselves Pāśupata but also others such as the Śaiva Siddhāntins and the Kālamukhas (see Ali’s chapter in this volume). They focused their liturgy on a five-faced representation of Śiva.<sup>36</sup> Śiva was the author of Pāśupata. The Pāñcarātrins of the *VDhP* considered Śiva to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu. They treated Śiva as Vāsudeva’s instrument and, including his iconography within their own, condoned his path to liberation.

The Pāñcarātra itself consisted of the texts of the Theists who took Viṣṇu as overlord of the cosmos and who performed a liturgy that centered on an image of that god, called Vaikuṇṭha, consisting of the “four emanations” (*caturvyūha*) of Viṣṇu advocated by the Pāñcarātrins. Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, himself the author of Pāñcarātra and carved as a benevolent face, the eastern, was the highest. Saṃkarṣaṇa, elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, and represented as Narasiṃha, the Man-Lion,

<sup>35</sup> Kane, *HD* 5 (1962-74), 954.

<sup>36</sup> Sadyojāta Mahādeva (eastern), Vāmadeva (Bhairava) (southern), Aghora (Nandivaktra) (western), Tatpuruṣa (Umāvaktra) (northern), and Īśāna (Sadāśiva) (zenith) (*VDhP* III.48).

a descent of Viṣṇu who destroyed demons, was the next highest face, the southern, to be recognized as that of Śiva Paśupati. Pradyumna, son of Kṛṣṇa, was the third and western face, represented as fierce (*raudra*) and malevolent; he was also to be known as the sage Kapila, master of Sāṃkhya (and Yoga). The fourth face, to the north, was that of Aniruddha, son of Pradyumna, represented as Varāha, the cosmic Boar, the descent of Viṣṇu who rescued the Earth at the beginning of a cosmic formation, to be recognized as that of Brahmā, the embodiment of the Vedas.

The *Nārāyaṇīya* states that Nārāyaṇa is the goal (*niṣṭhā*) for all these sciences, whatever the tradition or the science.<sup>37</sup> Clearly it and the *VDhP* accord places to all five of the soteriologies listed. Yet there can be no doubt that it gives preeminence to the Pāñcarātra.

We are now in a position to name the “supplements” to the Vaiṣṇavadharmas in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. The additions par excellence to which the term *uttara* referred were the chapters on Pāñcarātra theology and liturgy, the installation of images in Pāñcarātra temples, and the rules for performing vows with which the *VDhP* supplements the *Viṣṇudharma*. These constituted the very *raison d’être* for the text itself. It is none other than the Pāñcarātra to which it refers when, after naming the fourteen sciences dealing with life in the world and the five concerned with liberation from it, the *VDhP* turns, finally, to itself: “This, the Vaiṣṇava dharmas together with additions, is celebrated as the epitome (*sāra*) [of those sciences]. The whole of science/knowledge is thus declared to you; approved sciences by the hundreds and thousands [have originated] from them” (I.35b–36).

What were these texts that made up the Pāñcarātra? The Theists of early medieval India, the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas and those sometimes called Pāśupatas but calling themselves Śaivas, claimed to have texts generally called Āgamas (“that which has come [down to one]”), which they claimed to be another Veda or the essence of the Veda, authored by Viṣṇu or Śiva. Pāñcarātrins referred more specifically to their texts as *Samhitās* (the same term used to label the “collections” of Vedic hymns). Composed in metrical Sanskrit, there are supposed to be 108 texts in all. The Śaivas made similar claims about their Āgamas (or Tantras), 28 in number.<sup>38</sup> The Pāñcarātra chapters on theology and liturgy in the *VDhP* are very likely parallel to or even taken from the earliest Āgamas, possibly with some abridgment.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *MBh* XII.337.63b–4a.

<sup>38</sup> Texts generally list four orders of Pāśupatas: Pāśupatas proper; Kālāmukhas, an order that separates from the Pāśupatas; Śaivas or Śaiva Siddhāntins; and Kāpālikas; see David Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 1–12.

<sup>39</sup> I have not seen any *Samhitā* that approximates that of the *VDhP*. The reason for this, most likely, is that the Pāñcarātrins periodically elaborated on and reworked these texts. Nearly all of the *Samhitās* and Āgamas that have come into scholarly hands seem to have been reworked in south India, but we should not infer from this that they were essentially and always south Indian texts. The Kashmiri commentator, Utpala, a Vaiṣṇava, names several of the *Samhitās* that the south Indian Pāñcarātrins name and possess; Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, pp. 51–52. We must thus assume that the Pāñcarātrins and the Śaiva Siddhāntins were pan-Indian disciplinary orders in early medieval India whose adherents followed

### Supplementation: *Purāṇa* as a Scale of Texts

There can be little doubt that the *VDhP* was the product of the process of "augmentation" or supplementation that V. S. Agrawala has indicated (see appendix at n. 128). Let me now do what he neglected to do—bring out the metaphysics that was at work here. The post-Buddhist ways of life (including "schools" of philosophy) that claimed the Vedas as authoritative generally classed the Vedas (including the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads) as "the heard" (*śruti*). They classed other texts such as the Sūtras, "the remembered" (*smṛti*), as utterances that were not continually heard and (hence) remembered but were less reliably represented in the mind. Adherents of the Vedist way of life, those Brāhmaṇas whose voices are to be found in certain of the Smārtasūtras and their commentaries, called themselves Smārta. They emphasized this distinction and saw it as one between the more authoritative, self-existent words of the Veda, without author (*apauruṣeya*) either human or divine, and the less authoritative traditions of Smṛti, those "merely" remembered by sages and men. This was the position of the Mīmāṃsakas, exegetes among the Vedist disciplinary orders who made a fetish of the Veda and its sacrifice, denying the existence of any god and hence of the world as ordered by him in successive formations, epochs, and ages. A *Purāṇa*, as an account of the origin and ordered succession of the lives of the world, was clearly unnecessary here.

The Vedists also assumed that the Veda existed in higher and lower forms. The Veda in its higher form was "true knowledge" (*jñāna*) or "logos" (*vāc*, *śabda*). It was the unitary, transcendent, and unchanging knowledge on which the world was founded, but was knowable only by a person no longer subject to change, that is, one who had attained release. The Veda in its lower form was an ordered collection of actual utterances or statements. The Vedists claimed that the relationship between meanings and words in the Veda is fixed, and that the preservation of the particular word order in the text is both the sign of this permanence and its guarantee.<sup>40</sup>

The Theist perspective in the *Purāṇas* differed. It held that the Vedas did have an author, the supreme god, Viṣṇu (or some other form of the "divine personality," *puruṣa*). Although that god was eternal and unchanging, the cosmos—which, like the Veda, he also authored—was not. On the contrary, god caused the world and the people who inhabited it to undergo periodic changes described as the birth, growth (preservation), and decay of a living organism. The Veda in its higher form may have consisted of an eternal essence. The Veda in its lower form, however, was subject to the changes of everyday life. A single text at the beginning of a grand cosmic formation, the Veda's division into four "collections" (*saṃhitā*) of hymns was part of the life-process of the cosmos. The *Purāṇas* attributed it to Vedavyāsa, the "divider of the Veda." As one age gave way to another, sages divided the four Vedas further into "branches" (*śākhā*), disciplinary orders or schools, one of which

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somewhat different procedures at different temples. After the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, these orders underwent major disruption and or transformation, having a continuous history only in south India.

<sup>40</sup>M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), pp. 307–13.



was the Kāṭhaka order of Kashmir.<sup>41</sup> The idea here, nonetheless, was that the actual speech, the literal utterances of the Vedas as constituted in those branches, would continue to be transmitted without alteration by teachers and pupils (*guru-śiṣya*) and without interruption, "one after the other" (*paramparā*) down into the present. They were to be recited and transmitted "as heard" (*śruta*).

The Veda was, however, not the only text that Viṣṇu authored. That same Vyāsa, also known as Viṣṇu (or Kṛṣṇa) Dvaipāyana, is also said to have composed the Bhārata (the great Epic) and the Purāṇa, and transmitted these orally to their narrator, Sūta Lomahaṣaṇa (*VDhP* 1.73.25–27; 74.24–31). As texts, the four Vedas and the Bhārata and Purāṇa, sometimes referring to themselves as the "fifth Veda," were, thus, coeval.<sup>42</sup> Texts classed as Remembered were not, as Indologists might think of them, subsequent in time to the Veda in the minds of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas. The two were ultimately authored by Viṣṇu and both were, as texts, compiled at the same time by the same sage, Vyāsa. The difference was this: although the Veda as utterance remained fixed, eternally present in the world regardless of the capacity of people to know and understand it, Viṣṇu presented himself and the knowledge by which one could attain to union with him, in the form of Itihāsa, histories (of sages and princes) and Purāṇa, originary accounts (of the divine ordering of the world), which were tailored to the changing capacities of his devotees (compare Veda and Purāṇa with the narrower and wider notions of "instructions of the Buddha," *buddhavacana* in Walter's chapter in this volume). Pāñcarātrins and Pāśupatas apparently held the same view with respect to their Āgamas.

The written or fixed text that a man or men compiled on a given occasion was, of course, not the original unitary Purāṇa (or Āgama) that came into existence at the beginning of a cosmic formation and knowable only by a person who had attained liberation from the changing world, but one of the many Purāṇas made manifest on earth by Viṣṇu, through sages or adepts, on later occasions. Even here, however, we must not assume that the Pāñcarātrins thought that this version of a Purāṇa was remembered on their own, as was the case from the Vedist standpoint. The Theists would have held that the men who did this had the assistance of Viṣṇu and that their knowledge was, therefore, superior to that remembered by human agency alone. The Dharmaśāstras, the instructional manuals on Order, which they and the Vedists classed as the Remembered in relation to the Dharmasūtras, were, for this reason, to be read not as remembered by Vedist Brāhmaṇas alone but as remembered with the aid of Viṣṇu by the Pāñcarātra Brāhmaṇas.

The human authors of the *VDhP* and other Purāṇas thus more or less explicitly revalued the category of the Remembered. For them, it did not consist simply of what sages and men had recollected about the meaning of the Veda in words that remained outside of it. They permitted the Vedists to keep the Veda as

<sup>41</sup> When Vyāsa divided the Veda into four parts, he taught one of the resulting Vedas, the Yajurveda (along with the Bhārata), to Vaiśampāyana, who taught it in turn to his pupils, one of whom was Kāṭha, after whom this recension and its order of adepts were named.

<sup>42</sup> Some Purāṇas, for example the *Nāradya*, go even further and claim that the Purāṇa is prior to the Veda. See Kane, *HD* 5 (1962–74), 915.

fixed signs retained in the minds and mouths of the Brāhmaṇas. At the same time, however, they made histories and originary accounts into the more immediate and accessible manifestations of a divine author. They supplemented the Veda by surrounding it in a shifting text revealed at critical moments by Viṣṇu himself in one of his manifestations to privileged sages and, through them, to kings and their subjects. Since Viṣṇu was omniscient and eternal, none of his knowledges could, of course, be said to be new. They could, however, be knowledges newly divulged. We thus find Mārkaṇḍeya explaining that some supplementary knowledges, to wit, the knowledges of the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās, had been kept "secret" (*rahasya, guhya*) either by Viṣṇu or by his sage devotees until circumstances called for their divulgence. On other occasions, the sage tells us that a supplement in his text consists of knowledges that had once been revealed but had disappeared.

Roland Barthes, the French poststructuralist, provides one way of formulating the relationship that the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas create between the Purāṇa (or Āgama) and Veda. The Purāṇas were related to the Veda as, in Barthes's term, a second-order sign system. The Purāṇa as a whole was the framing signifier of the Vedic signified. It was a transforming, shifting signifier that denoted what the Veda was in differing circumstances. Each of the Purāṇic texts, in each of its redactions, was put forward by its advocates as a claim to be that knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The *VDhP* was one of those texts. This is a useful perspective, but Barthes still relies on binary opposition and in other respects finds himself unable to leave behind the structuralists' theory of language and culture as an abstracted, fixed system. As a result, his scheme does not address the dialogical process that goes on in the text as much as did Collingwood's idea of a scale of forms.<sup>44</sup>

I take a scale of forms to consist of overlapping classes. The notion of overlapping classes is important because it permits us to see the contents of texts, or more subtly, the discourses in them, as connected by relations not only of opposition but also of distinction, by differences not only of kind but of degree. It starts from the assumption, as far as texts are concerned, of a text's intertextuality, with the idea that a text is invariably related to other texts in a variety of ways. That is, a text is not created *ex nihilo* but from heterogeneous and overlapping portions of other texts. The author, as reader, may try to reduce this heterogeneity to a coherence. Any unity that might result, however, comes from a process of reworking his material and not from the unity of time, space, and author presupposed in the doctrine of expressive realism.

What, then, is the process by which such unities are produced? It is a dialectical process. This point needs some amplification. I do not want to say that texts are dialectically related in the senses usually attributed to a Marxian or Hegelian notion of dialectic, that is, as a series of oppositions that are negated. Collingwood's notion of dialectic is simpler and more permissive. He sees it as a process whereby two agents who are in a relation of nonagreement come to agreement through a process

<sup>43</sup>Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, translated by A. Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), pp. 89–94.

<sup>44</sup>R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 54–91.



of discussion, argument, debate, and so on. To some extent, the relations between agents and the texts that they produce may also be thought of as eristical. This, according to Collingwood, is a situation in which two parties disagree and in which one tries to gain victory over the other through the use of lies, threats, deceptions, misstatements, and so on. More often than not, the relationship between agents is lopsided. One of the agents has or is accorded, or takes for himself, more authority than the other. I should also add, following Vološinov/Bakhtin, that dialogues take place among people speaking out of different discourses. Indeed, one of the main virtues of a scale of forms is that it recognizes explicitly what scholars of Bakhtin refer to as heteroglossia, the fact that people are commonly speaking from different positions and not communicating, getting or sending a message across—trying, in other words, to approximate the workings of a frictionless machine.<sup>45</sup>

If the activity of articulating unities and distinctions, additions and exclusions, in a scale of forms never starts from scratch, it also never finishes. As the circumstances in which agents find themselves repeatedly outstrips their capacity to know and act in the world, the work of constructing a scale of textual forms and traditions itself never ends. A text (or tradition) that an author (or disciplinary order) declares to be complete in one situation will have to be reworked in another. Texts at each level in the scale supplement and comment on the levels below. A text, whether in the form of a redaction or of a reading, is, hence, only momentarily and provisionally complete.

Using this idea, it is also possible to see the *VDhP* as occupying the apex of a scale of texts that its complex author has constructed and that includes the other texts that claim to belong to its tradition (Table 2.1). The texts are ordered vertically according to period or imperial formation and horizontally by the goal of the text—*dharma* or *mokṣa*—and then by genre of text. Texts in bold are explicitly related to or included in the *VDhP*, the other texts or genres of texts, only implicitly. At the bottom of the scale of texts are the Vedas themselves, not as they are or as Indologists read them, but as read by the composite Pāñcarātra agent who compiled the *VDhP*. If we pay attention to usage in the *VDhP*, we find that its agent privileges the mantras in the collection of hymns of the Kāthaka order over the other collections of the Yajurveda; and above all other hymns, it privileges the famous Puruṣasūkta, a hymn to and about Puruṣa as Nārāyaṇa, the forest-dwelling Pāñcarātrins' construct of god in his transcendent form. The effect of this particular dialogue is to turn the opposition of Vedists and Pāñcarātrins into a distinction: the impersonal absolute of the one is made into a distinct, anthropomorphic form of Viṣṇu. At the same time it also converts a difference of kind over the authorship of the Vedas into one simply of degree: Vedas and Purāṇas are both authoritative, one being only a lesser form of the other. Overall, the result of this dialectic process is to transform the Veda into a collection of hymns to the Pāñcarātra godhead. The *VDhP* also privileges the theist Upaniṣad of the Kāthaka order, the *Kaṭha*, in its view of the Upaniṣads and in its cosmology—for example, when it enumerates and names the constituents

<sup>45</sup>Michael J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor—A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language," in his *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 284–324.

Table 2.1. The *VDhP* as the Apex in a Scale of Texts

DHARMA		MOKṢA	
<i>Kārkoṭa Nāga Mukatāpīḍa Lalitāditya</i> (c. 724/5–760/1)		<b>Pratiṣṭhākalpa</b> and <b>Śaṅkaragītā</b>	
<b>Viṣṇudharmōttarāḥ:</b>			
<i>Cālukya-Pallava</i> (550–750)			
	<b>Nīlamata</b>	<b>PĀÑCARĀTRA</b> <b>Samhitās</b>	<b>PĀŚUPATA</b> <b>Āgamas</b>
<i>Gupta-Vākātaka</i> (320–550)			
<b>DHARMAŚĀSTRA</b>	<b>PURĀṆA</b> and <b>ITIHĀSA</b>		
<b>Viṣṇusmṛti(-dharma)</b>	<b>Rāmāyaṇa</b>		
	<b>Mahābhārata</b>	<b>Nārāyaṇīya</b> <b>Bhagavadgītā</b>	
<i>Post-Aśoka to Kuṣāṇa-Śātavāhana</i> (2nd Century B.C. to 3rd A.D.)			
<b>Manusmṛti</b> and <b>Yājñavalkyasmṛti</b>		<b>VEDĀNTA</b> [Bādarāyaṇa] <b>SĀMKHYA</b>	<b>YOGA</b>
<i>Post-Buddha to Aśoka</i> (c. 268–39 B.C.)		<b>MĪMĀMSĀ</b>	<b>NYĀYA</b>
<b>VEDĀNGAS:</b> Kalpasūtras <b>Kāthaka:</b> Dharma-, <b>Grhya-</b> , Śrautasūtras			
<i>Buddha</i> (480/430–400/350 B.C.) and <i>Pre-Buddha</i>			
<b>VEDAS:</b> Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads			
		<b>Kāthopaniṣad</b>	
<b>Kāthakasamhitā</b> (Black Yajurveda)	<b>Puruṣasūkta</b> (Rgveda)		

of the universe.<sup>46</sup> Once again, this has the effect of making the Upaniṣads overlap with and anticipate the Pāñcarātra texts.

Next up the scale, we see the *VDhP*'s rendering of the Sūtras, manuals on the performance of the Vedic sacrifice and the attainment of release. So far as the former is concerned, it takes the position—enunciated in the *Bhagavadgītā* but quite at odds with that of the Vedists in the Kalpasūtras and their exegesis, the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* of Jaimini (read through its commentaries)—that the sacrifice is anact in

<sup>46</sup> *Kāthopaniṣat*, with Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya and Prakāśikā of Rāmānuja, edited and introduced by Śrīdharaśāstrī Pāthaka (Poona: Oriental Book-Supplying Agency, 1919), I.3.9–11.

honor of Viṣṇu. With respect to the science of release, the Pāñcarātrins appear to have read the text that explains the Upaniṣads, the *Vedāntasūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa, as a text advocating the ontological position of the early Pāñcarātrins, *bhedābheda*, “identity-in-difference,” and not *advaita*, “non-dualism,” as constituting the relationship of god and man.

Still higher in the scale of texts is the *Viṣṇusmṛti*, itself a transformation of the earlier Kāthaka Dharmasūtra. That transformation, which enclosed the earlier prose text into a versified Śāstra, was not simply a formal change. Involved in it was a crucial move: making the honoring of an image of Vāsudeva with attendances (*pūjā*) the centerpiece of the daily liturgy to be carried out by a Vaiṣṇava who also adhered to the Veda. Here, too, we can see that a crucial overlap is created: image-honoring and fire sacrifice are made to seem continuous with one another by making the texts in which they appear into one text. Here, too, are the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, the texts in the *MBh* that provide the rationales for history, the narratives of gods, sages, and kings related in the Epics and Purāṇas. Of particular importance, of course, is the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the oldest Pāñcarātra text.

Finally, at the top of this Pāñcarātra scale of texts is situated the definitive or determining supplement, that of the *VDhP* itself. This consisted of its representation of the science of Pāñcarātra. Its proponents advocate the radical step of substituting its Pāñcarātra temple liturgy for the Vedic sacrifice, from which it appropriates dozens of Vedic mantras. So although the *VDhP* respectfully includes the earlier Smārta and Śrauta practices in its own world vision, it makes what they enjoined a weak option in it.

The Pāñcarātra of the *VDhP*, however, differs from the earlier Pāñcarātra of the *Nārāyaṇīya*. It closely resembles what I reconstruct as the project of the early versions of the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās. The Āgamas in general are supposed to have four “legs” (*pāda*) or topics. The second and most important, that of liturgical undertaking (*kriyā*), has to do with the procedures for the construction of a temple and the installation in it of a permanently enlivened image. The Pratiṣṭhākalpa or procedure for installation (and the chapters leading up to it) in the *VDhP* corresponds to this topic; another part, the Śaṅkaragītā or song of Śiva, takes up the other three topics: the first “leg”, on metaphysics, theology, and cosmology (*jñāna* or *vidyā*); the third on the procedures for initiation and the carrying out of the daily, monthly, and annual liturgy (*caryā*); and the fourth, on procedures for union with the godhead (*yoga*).

Even in their most reduced forms, the liturgies of these texts and their closest Saṃhitās presuppose a division of labor and a quantity of economic support that rules out the idea that these texts contained the liturgies performed either in the forest retreats or by adepts at small shrines without permanent images. These liturgies, furthermore, envisage a situation in which the older Vedic multifire sacrifices are no longer performed. Indeed, these texts position their temple liturgies (replete with procedures for their own fire oblations) as replacements for those Vedic sacrifices. The textualized procedures for temple construction and image installation replace those for the performance of multifire sacrifices, the *Śrautasūtra*, while those for periodic liturgical practices replace the *Smārtasūtra* (both *Gṛhya* and *Dharma*).



That is, just as the authors of these texts define themselves and their traditions as autonomous with respect to the Veda, so they also construe the liturgies they contain as autonomous with respect to the older Vedic multifire liturgy, just as the Pāñcarātra texts in the *VDhP* do. The earliest versions of these texts must, thus, be placed in the sixth to eighth centuries, and probably later rather than earlier, when brick and stone temples of the scale and complexity required by the Āgamic liturgy were first built.

So far I have talked about how the *VDhP* explicitly positions itself at the apex of a textual scale of forms. But the task of recovering the scale of textual forms that a text makes for itself cannot stop here. It is possible to show that there are exclusions or silences in almost any scale of texts—contexts not mentioned because the authors were unaware of them or because they wished for some reason to suppress them. I have already shown that the *VDhP* is attached to the Kāṭha order of the Black Yajurveda, but the *VDhP* makes no explicit mention of this. The reason for this is, of course, the imperial desire of the *VDhP*. It wishes to present its Pāñcarātra-oriented knowledge as universal and not as confined to one or another Vedic orders or schools. Besides, having displaced the Vedic liturgy with a universal one of its own making, Vedic affiliation did not matter as much as it otherwise might have.

There are two other examples of silences that are worth mentioning: Buddhism and locality. The relationship of the *VDhP* to Buddhism appears to have been more critical than dialectical. The Buddhists were very powerful in the world of the *VDhP*, as we shall see. I would argue that the silence of its appropriation and rejection of Buddhist ideas and practices was a strategy, and neither unconscious nor a mere oversight. One example of this is the attempt to take command of the rainy season from the Buddhists by making it into a period of fasting and renewal that accompanied the season-long sleep of Viṣṇu. Unlike the Buddha, whose period of recline was the end of his life, Viṣṇu awakens after his period of “nirvāṇa” and resumes command of the world. Another is the appropriation of the form of the Buddhist monastery, a quadrangle with monk’s cells along the sides facing onto a courtyard, for the Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava temple. Within these structures, worshipers saw the images of Hindu gods in occupation of cells reduced to the size of niches.<sup>47</sup>

The other example of silence concerns locality. The *VDhP* has a close relationship to the *Nilamata* (*NP*), a Purāṇa that is about the Theist and royal wish to make Kashmir into an imperial kingdom. It proudly displays its regional markings and uses them to position itself in relation to India as a whole. It is likely that the earliest redaction of the text antedates the *VDhP*. Here again, I would suggest, the *VDhP* makes no allusion to this text because the author of the *VDhP* claims to articulate a world wish both for the order of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas and for their king of kings and his subjects, one that transcends the regional wish of the *NP*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Ram Chandra Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir* (London: India Society, 1933), pp. 61–62.

<sup>48</sup>Ved Kumari Ghai, *The Nilamata Purāṇa: Cultural and Literary Study; Text with English Translation* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1968–73; Ph. D. Thesis, Banaras Hindu University, 1960), 2 vols. The first volume is based on the *Nilamata or Teachings of Nila*, edited by K. S. J. M. de Vreese (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936; Ph. D. dissertation, Leiden, 1936). Compilers

To sum up: the *VDhP* was supposed to be used (in varying ways) by a king and his associates—by his preceptor, chronologer, and chief priest, as well as his ministers and soldiers, and their wives. That text claimed not only to comprise the “epitome” of all knowledge, and especially of instructions on order and ordinary accounts (including History), but to do so from the perspective of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism. In its capacity as reader of these and other texts, the compound author of the *VDhP* has dialectically fashioned a scale of texts out of them. It has drawn into that scale the contents of those texts with whose discourses it was not in agreement so as to create agreement with its own position.<sup>49</sup> That is, all of the sciences to which it provided access, including the Veda, were not simply made available as separate, isolated bodies of knowledge that might somehow be useful. They were articulated in relation to one another and, either directly or indirectly, were made to appear as parts of the ontology and theology of the Pāñcarātrins. If the *VDhP* was an encyclopedia, it was one that placed a Pāñcarātra interpretation on every science, every tale, every practice that it included.

### *Purāṇa as Narrative*

The *VDhP* was, I argue, both a narrative and discursive text. To a large extent, its narrative aspect was a function of the text as history (*itihāsa*), whereas its discursive aspect was a function of the text as instruction (*śāstra*). Yet these were very closely intertwined: narratives are used to prove discursive points by illustration, and discourses are made to serve as rationales of and guides to the narratives of the text. Since the narrative aspect predominates slightly over the discursive in the *VDhP*, I begin with that.

To a much greater degree than narratives about the change from the medieval (or traditional) to modern would allow, Purāṇic narratives were actively complicit in the shaping and transformation of polities and the disciplinary orders that sought their recognition and adherence. Because they were supposed to be the texts that told the history of the world, many of them were sites where the claimants of different ways of life, as practiced in disciplinary orders, translated their claims into the world accounts or imaginaries of local, regional, and imperial courts. As I have already indicated, I would not claim that people have used Purāṇas as a genre uniformly. I do think it plausible, however, that some people, namely, the Kashmir court of the eighth century, read the *VDhP* as a single narrative, a story which plots the activities leading to the hegemony of a four-faced image of Viṣṇu and its adherents, the adepts of the Pāñcarātra disciplinary or soteriological order, in an imperial formation embracing the “entire earth.” The major device of this narrative is the descent or avatar of Viṣṇu prompted by events on earth, especially by acts

of one version of the *Brahmapurāṇa* directly appropriate this text: Ved Kumari Ghai, *Nilamata*, 1: 11–14. The *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Lakṣmīdhara (1104–1154), in turn, uses large portions of that, especially in its *Niyatakālakāṇḍa*. See also, Yasuke Ikari, ed., *A Study of the Nilamata: Aspects of Hinduism in Ancient Kashmir* (Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1994).

<sup>49</sup>One might argue that the complex author of the *VDhP* is itself a scale of authors with the chronologer/preceptor at its apex.

of humans—both men and women, high and low, rich and poor—signaling their devoted participation in that lord. (Compare this with the idea of the manifestation of post-Gautama forms of the Buddha, especially the Bodhisattva, in Walter's essay in this volume). These events are recursive and synergistic, bringing Viṣṇu's descent as divine favor inspiring still greater acts of devotion.<sup>50</sup>

The *VDhP* is divided into three parts (*khaṇḍas*), the first of which contains 269 Chapters (*adhyaṅgas*). The narrative of part 1 begins, as already noted, with the appearance of Mārkaṇḍeya and his acolytes at the court of Vajra, on the occasion of a horse sacrifice at the beginning of the Age of Strife. He took the lead in welcoming these extraordinary guests whose knowledge would be vital for the age. On behalf of his court, he asked them to impart this knowledge: "We kings, resorted to by your lordships, O Brāhmaṇas, have a request to make: be pleased, your lordships, as a favor (*anugraha*) to kings and out of a desire for the welfare for the world, to narrate the eternal orders (*sanātanān vaiṣṇavadharmān*); for after this there will be no further chance for kings to gaze on your lordships in this the Age of Strife" (I.1.19–20a). The sages agreed to do this not in the form of a monologue but through a process of dialogue in which Mārkaṇḍeya, we are told, "will allay all your uncertainties (*saṁśaya*), O Vajra" (I.1.21). The kings of the plains and the Brāhmaṇ forest-dwellers then sat down and began their discourse.

Holding to the Purāṇic form, Mārkaṇḍeya, the narrator, first relates how Viṣṇu caused the world to originate, beginning with the topic of cosmogony and ending with a description of Bhāratavarṣa or India (Chapters 2–11).<sup>51</sup> At every turn, the author reworks this material from a Pāñcarātra point of view. After several chapters on geography, Mārkaṇḍeya turns to the fourth Purāṇic topic, the genealogical succession of kings, giving an account of the Solar (*sūrya*) dynasty, in which the hero, Rāma Dāśarathi, one of the major manifestations of Viṣṇu, was born.

Mārkaṇḍeya tells Vajra, his royal pupil (chapters 23–71) of Bhārgava Rāma, the Brāhmaṇ who cleared the earth twenty-one times of Kṣatriyas. As Adalbert Gail correctly argues, the *VDhP* transforms Bhārgava Rāma, also called Paraśurāma, Rāma of the Axe, into a descent of Viṣṇu to lighten the earth of its burden.<sup>52</sup> As in so many of the histories in the Purāṇas, it is a retelling from a new point of view, that of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas. Like other heroic manifestations of the cosmic overlord, Viṣṇu is supplied with a special weapon, a "jewel among bows" (*cāparatna*). The image of an archer is important not only in the saga of Bhārgava Rāma, but throughout this text, which is why I mention this detail here.

To return, this cycle of legends has an embedded section in which Viṣṇu reveals the most crucial knowledge of part 1, knowledge that he had kept a "secret"

<sup>50</sup>For the uses of narrative in forming "modern" politics, see *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>51</sup>Cosmogony (chapter 2), regeneration (chapter 3), the first two defining topics of a Purāṇa. The wording of these chapters does not, by the way, correspond to that of the two text groups that which Kirfel discovers in his critical edition (see appendix, n. 117).

<sup>52</sup>Adalbert J. Gail, *Paraśurāma: Brahmane und Krieger. Untersuchung über Ursprung und Entwicklung eines Avatāra Viṣṇus und Bhāktas Śivas in der Indischer Literatur* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1977), pp. 54–101, for the *VDhP*. According to Gail, the first extended treatment of the legend is in the *VDhP*. Curiously, Gail makes no mention of the Paraśurāma episode as treated in *NP*, I: 1165–1226.



(*rahasya*). This is a series of dialogues, called the Śaṅkaragītā, the “Song of Śiva” (chapters 51–65). In them, Śiva, second only to Viṣṇu in the divine hierarchy of the text, is made to divulge to Bhārgava Rāma the rule or procedure for the five-part honoring (*pañcakālavidhāna*) of Vāsudeva. This was the highest life-transforming practice men were commanded to perform, according to the Pāñcarātrins, and comprised the daily liturgy in honor of Viṣṇu. The fifth part of it, the practice of yoga (*yogakāla*), was said to be the bow and arrow with which the Pāñcarātra adept reached the target of the transcendent Viṣṇu by piercing through the moon and the sun. This text is, of course, just what we would find in one of the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās.

Now, as Gail points out, Rāma is not unproblematic as a descent of Viṣṇu. It would seem that the earliest Bhārgava Rāma preserved in the Epics was represented as a Vedist sage. Already in the *MBh*, though, he appears as a Śaiva ascetic and devotee of Śiva. This is probably the reason why the author of the *VDhP* makes Śiva the author of the Pāñcarātra liturgy and Śiva’s prime devotee, Bhārgava Rāma, its first recipient on earth. Pāśupata Śaivism was probably predominant in Kashmir before the contents of the *VDhP* were disclosed to humanity.

Here we have the first major example in the *VDhP* of the deployment of historical narrative as an “illustrative proof” (*pramāṇa*). Viṣṇu was, in Pāñcarātra theology, the master of “deceptive appearances” (*māyā*). The authors of the *VDhP* wanted to show that Śiva was in reality Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, and that his preeminent devotee, Bhārgava Rāma, was actually the foremost Pāñcarātrin. Hence, when he cleverly asks the ascetic Śaṅkara—whom his followers continually depict, eyes closed and concentrated, as mentally representing someone—on just whom it is that the supposed overlord of the cosmos is meditating, he replies that it is none other than Vāsudeva, the one he considers the actual overlord.

Mārkaṇḍeya next conveys to Vajra the knowledge of the units of time made over to Bhārgava Rāma by Varuṇa, the lord of waters and regulator of the seasons (chapters 72–73). He follows this with an account of India’s condition at the end of each cosmic period, including the end of an entire grand cosmic formation (*mahākālpa*) (chapters 74–81).

Still speaking to Vajra (chapters 82–105), Mārkaṇḍeya imparts to him the true knowledge of how the realm of the sky is distributed among a hierarchy of heavenly lords, foremost among whom are the planets (*graha*) and lunar mansions or asterisms (*nakṣatras*). He then proceeds to lay down the rules for honoring the images of these celestial lords. The procedure for this practice, one of the major “additions” to the *Viṣṇudharma*, includes as one part of itself the procedure for making oblations into a fire based on the short sacrifice (*pākayajña*) of the *Kāthaka Gr̥hyasūtra*. Mārkaṇḍeya takes this procedure as the one to be followed on the occasion of every liturgical practice in the *VDhP* that calls for fire offerings.

The text returns (chapters 106–36) to another of the topics of a Purāṇa, *vaṃśa*: Brahmā’s successive creation and population of the earth with various beings, the most important of which are kings and sages.

Mārkaṇḍeya next instructs his eager pupil on how the reverential offerings to the forefathers is to be carried out by a Pāñcarātra householder (chapters 137–47).

Here is but one instance in which the *VDhP* retains the practice of the *Grhya-sūtras*, but prescribes the addition of Pāñcarātra elements. For example, the ball of rice for the great-grandfather is identified with Vāsudeva, the highest manifestation of Viṣṇu; that for the grandfather, with Saṃkarṣaṇa; that for the father, with Pradyumna; and for oneself, with Aniruddha. Mārkaṇḍeya also states that the honoring of forefathers is not possible without the “luminous will” (*tejas*) of Viṣṇu (I.139.20–2).

The next section (chapters 148–200) is largely given over to stories of heroic devotees who, in accord with the Pāñcarātra prescriptions, performed certain vows (*vrata*) to Vāsudeva. Each of these histories is not only a retelling of preexisting stories, it is also a proof of the power of devoted participation in Viṣṇu to effect the outcome of events. Virtually all of these exemplary devotional events take place at sites in Kashmir and its hinterland that the *VDhP* singles out as especially propitious for the worship of Viṣṇu: the Vitastā (Jhelum), the major river of Kashmir, referred to here as Vaitasta, “the place where the Vitastā flows”; the confluence of the Candrabhagā (Chenab) and Tausi (Tawi) rivers, near Śākala (Sialkot), the capital of Madra (between the Ravi and Chenab rivers); Nṛsiṃhatīrtha on the banks of the Devikā (Degh); and a temple of Varāha (the giant-boar emanation of Viṣṇu) on the Sindhu (Indus).

The fourteen epochs of Manu, the remaining topic of a Purāṇa, form part of this section (chapters 175–91), each Manu being explained as a manifestation of Viṣṇu.

The last section of part 1 (chapters 201–69), is an extended retelling of a story from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>53</sup> Rāma sends his younger brother, Bharata, in response to the request of Yudhājita, the king of Kekaya and their mother’s brother, to chastise the immoral Gandharvas of the neighboring country of Gandhāra. While Bharata marches, Nāḍāyana, the royal priest of the king of the Gandharvas, Sailuṣa, warns him in a series of hortatory tales (chapters 212–53) of the fates suffered by several villains. Bharata defeats the Gandharvas, and at the onset of the next rainy season institutes the performance of a Four-month Sleep (*cāturmāsya*), a liturgical practice celebrating the annual sleep of Viṣṇu, which lasts for the four months of the rainy season and begins and ends with five-day festivals. Once he completes the festival that marked the end of its performance, Bharata has the cities of Puṣkarāvati (Charsadda in western Gandhāra) and Takṣaśilā (Taxila in eastern Gandhāra) built for his two sons, Puṣkara and Takṣa, and himself returns to Ayodhyā.

Now, Kekaya is one of the regions of the Panjab (beyond the Jhelum), next to Madra, and its capital was Rājagṛha. Gandhāra (note the resemblance to Gandharva) is the country just northwest of Kekaya. It is bisected by the Sindhu River, with one capital in either moiety. All three of these countries are, of course, on the periphery of Kashmir. Bharata and his three brothers are, it is disclosed, none other than the four emanations of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, the cosmic overlord of the Pāñcarātrins. The celebration of Viṣṇu’s sleep that Bharata performs in Gandhāra

<sup>53</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* VII.90–91. See the “critical” edition, edited by G. H. Bhatt et al. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–75) in 7 volumes.

is the major annual liturgical work that a Pāñcarātra king is ordered to perform in honor of Viṣṇu. With this "proof," we come to realize the true "subject" of this narrative: the overlord of the cosmos, as seen by the Pāñcarātrins, has manifested himself on earth as Rāma and his three brothers. One of them, Bharata, comes to save Kekaya, a Vaiṣṇava kingdom threatened by the offensive Gandharvas. After defeating them in a terrible battle, he transforms their country into a new Pāñcarātra kingdom by constructing two new capitals there and instituting Viṣṇu's four-month sleep which had been performed previously only by the forest-dwelling Pāñcarātra adepts and not by householders in the plains.

There are at least two ways of reading this story and part 1 as a whole. We may read it as a harbinger of events to come, a reading that is thrust on us by the contents of part 2. If, however, we think of part 1 as forming a complete text, we can read the text as content to institute Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism among householder Brāhmaṇs in an imperial Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava kingdom with no wish to go beyond that.

Part 2 of the *VDhP*, comprising 183 chapters, has as its topic rules for royal Order (*rājadharmā*), itself a topic of instructions on Order (*dharma*) more generally.<sup>54</sup> In this text, of course, rules for royal Order means the instructions to be followed by a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava king. Puṣkara, the son of Varuṇa, who had learned these orders from Indra, king of the gods, relates them to Bhārgava Rāma, the Śaiva devotee earlier revealed to be a descent of Viṣṇu. The text thus continues with the dialogical form of a Purāṇa even though the emphasis in parts 2 and 3 will be much more on instruction than on history.

The first instructions Puṣkara gives Rāma (chapters 2–23) have to do with the procedure for the shower bath into kingship (*rājyābhiṣeka*) of a Vaiṣṇava king of kings whose intention it is to make the other kings of India submit to his rule. It is the replacement for the Vedic royal installation. Puṣkara next relates to Bhārgava Rāma the instructions a Vaiṣṇava king requires (chapters 24–131) so that he might govern, and all of the categories of people, animals, and things that make up the constituents of a Vaiṣṇava kingdom, successfully articulating their relationships. Included here are instructions on royal dependents and ministers, royal forts, the countryside, and revenue; householders, wives, and procreation; the care and feeding of cattle, horses, and elephants; rules for the estates and life-stages; a penal code; and rules on penances.

The next section (chapters 132–44) is concerned with the interpretation of omens and the pacification of their divine agents.<sup>55</sup>

Mārkaṇḍeya turns for the first time (chapters 145–50) to the relations a king should have with other kings. He then lays down the daily routine to be followed by a Vaiṣṇava king (chapter 151).

<sup>54</sup>Priyabala Shah has translated these chapters: *Pauranic Ritualism of the Fifth Century* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993).

<sup>55</sup>These consist of extracts from the Samhitā of Garga the Elder. See R. Inden, "Kings and Omens," in *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*, edited by John Carman and Frédérique Apfel Marglin, issue of *Journal of Developing Societies* 2 (1986), 30–40.



Mārkaṇḍeya commends (chapter 152) a sequence of monthly and annual liturgical works that a Pāñcarātra king should perform, and details the procedures for these (chapters 153–62). The most encompassing of these works is Viṣṇu's four-month sleep. The same liturgical practice Bharata had instituted after his conquest of the Gandharvas, it is, as presented here, intended as a prelude to the beginning of a military expedition having as its purpose the triumph over the quarters by a Vaiṣṇava king of kings.

The last twenty chapters of part 2 of the *VDhP* are, accordingly, devoted to the topic of war:<sup>56</sup> the omens to watch for,<sup>57</sup> the times and circumstances for mounting a campaign, the procedures for beginning the march and for the day preceding the battle, the code of conduct to be followed in combat and afterward, and, finally, a condensed treatise on Dhanurveda, the science of weaponry and war vehicles.

Among the things a king successful in battle was supposed to do was to build temples. Once again, if we assume that the text ended with part 2, we could read the text as leaving the Pāñcarātra king who would be the paramount king of kings in India immersed in diplomatic and military activities and only thinking in vague terms of the temples he would build were he somehow to succeed. If, however, we read it with the instructions of part 3 in mind, we would be justified in reaching a stronger conclusion. Part 3 has the construction of large and elaborate temples and the institution of a complex Pāñcarātra temple liturgy as its unifying theme. Reading part 2 from this perspective, we would attribute to the Pāñcarātrins and their king, successful in his conquest of the quarters of India, the desire to replace the old horse sacrifice with the installation of images (*surapraṭiṣṭhā*) in a monumental Pāñcarātra temple, an act that would make Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism preeminent, for the moment, among India's ways of life. This is, of course, the world wish that was central to the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās. Those texts, however, because their readers were not in a position to neutralize the Vedic liturgy, were reluctant to specify the imperial coagent of this wish.

Part 3 of the *VDhP*, comprising 355 chapters, has just this complex of activities as its major concern. Mārkaṇḍeya tells Vajra (chapter 1) that the construction of temples is to be carried out by men who desire the highest welfare in this world and the next, and that this is especially so for the Age of Strife which, it will be remembered, had just begun before Mārkaṇḍeya appeared. The first 117 chapters, paralleling the contents of the main part of an Āgama—temple construction and image installation (*kriyāpāda*)—provide the procedures for this as if they were integral to the Vedic or Smārta tradition.

After preliminary chapters on the topics of semantics, meter, poetics, singing, and instrumental music, all to be parts of the temple liturgy, Mārkaṇḍeya delivers a

<sup>56</sup> Chapters 166–174 comprise a text, in prose, called the *Paitāmahasiddhānta*, of which chapters 168–74 have been translated by David Pingree, "The *Paitāmahasiddhānta* of the *Vishnudharmottarapurana*," *Brahmavidya: The Adyar Library Bulletin* (Dr. V. Raghavan Felicitation Volume) 31–32 (1967–68), 472–510.

<sup>57</sup> Chapter 163 of the 1912 edition is lacking the text from the *Matsyapurāṇa*, edited by Hari Narayan Apte, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, 3 (Poona: Anandasrama, 1907) CCXL.13–27 to CCXLIII.8, which thus adds three chapters to the text.

treatise on dancing, also an element of the temple celebrations (chapters 20–34). He next lays down to Vajra the rules for artistic representation in a text well known to art historians, the *Citrāsūtra* (chapters 35–43). Mārkaṇḍeya then proceeds to describe the characteristics that sculpted images of the gods in the Pāñcarātra pantheon are to exhibit, in the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* (chapters 44–85). The most important of the icons to be fashioned is that of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa called Vaikuṇṭha, the image having four faces, and the major object of Pāñcarātra worship in the text.

Next comes an account (chapter 86) of the forms, in very general terms, of one hundred temples, replete with directions on which images are to be placed in which of them. Mārkaṇḍeya then describes (chapter 87) the characteristics that the temple referred to as Sarvatobhadra or “auspiciously open on four sides,” the massive shrine housing the four-faced image of Viṣṇu, is supposed to be displayed. This is the summa of all temples, the temple that the Pāñcarātra king of kings is supposed to build after his conquest of the earth.

Our sage narrator details the elaborate rules for construction and installation that its builder, the paramount king of India, is to carry out. The treatises on this most important topic are grouped loosely (chapters 88 or 93–116) under the title *Pratiṣṭhākalpa*. Every day, the fivefold Pāñcarātra liturgy is to be performed in this temple. Every month, the procedure for the installation, without the elements peculiar to the installation itself, but including the daily liturgy, is to be undertaken by the Pāñcarātra king of kings. And at least once a year, on the day when Viṣṇu awakens from his slumber at the end of the rainy season, his image is to be given a grand shower bath (*bṛhatsnapana*) and taken through the streets of the capital in a procession of the god (*devayātrā*) (chapter 117). The leader of this triumphal procession carries a bow and arrow, a sign that the entire earth, ruled by a Pāñcarātra king of kings, has as its aim union with the overlord of the cosmos, Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa.

The institution of this temple is the culmination of the narrative and of the career of its royal builder as a descent of Viṣṇu. With it, he completes both his kingdom and himself. But this is not the conclusion of the text.<sup>58</sup>

There follows a text called the *Haṃsagītā* or, the “Song of the Gander,” in which Viṣṇu, taking the form of a gander, divulges instructions, that had become lost at the end of the Age of Completeness (first and best of the four ages), to a group of Brāhmaṇ sages for the benefit of the world.<sup>59</sup> In the last chapter of this colloquy, the gander shows himself to the sages as Viśvarūpa, the high god Viṣṇu, in “the visible form of everything,” the ultimate proof Vaiṣṇavas offer of the cosmic overlordship of Viṣṇu (the first one of which appears in the *Bhagavadgītā*).

The *VDhP*, turning back to history from instruction, draws to an end with a cycle of dialogues extending the stories of the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Pāñcarātrins could

<sup>58</sup>Chapters 118–225 recommend Pāñcarātra vows (*vrata*) that devotees may undertake in order to obtain their desires.

<sup>59</sup>This is an omnibus condensation of Dharmaśāstra, including verses from both Manu and Yājñavalkya, as well as others. Although this *gītā* wanders over a wide range of topics, it focuses on three not treated extensively at an earlier point in the *VDhP*. One is the adjudication of disputes (*vyavahāra*) (chapters 324–38). The other two, closely related to each other, are the making of gifts of valuable things to qualified Brāhmaṇs (chapters 299–319), and the making of donations to Viṣṇu, the penultimate chapter (341) of the *Haṃsagītā*.



take the *Nārāyaṇīya* as their point of departure for understanding the Epic, just as Bhāgavatas could take the *Bhagavadgītā* as theirs. So it is hardly surprising that the *VDhP* goes over this ground. The dialogues of the reiterated *Nārāyaṇīya* concern the "highest favor" (*prasādam paramam*) shown by Viṣṇu to his devotees. Among these are Vasu Uparicara, a king rescued by Viṣṇu's mount, the eagle Garuḍa; and two Brāhmaṇs, Nārada and Viśvakṣena, treated as exemplary Pāñcarātra devotees. With the powers of divine sight (*divyacakṣus*) granted to them because of their devotion, they are able to see Viṣṇu as Viśvarūpa and as Narasiṃha, the Man-Lion. In the course of these dialogues, the narrator reveals protective mantras not given in the *Nārāyaṇīya*; by employing these, the devotees of Viṣṇu will, we are told, be able to attain to the highest goal, release from the world and union with Viṣṇu himself.

At last, we return to the court of Vajra, where the king of kings honors Mārkaṇḍeya after he has completed his delivery of the text and sees him off to his retreat in the Himalayas: "After the sage with the power of divine sight had finished speaking, the lord of kings did obeisance at the feet of the sage, as did his retainers and the other kings, circumambulated him, and entered his personal apartments (*svapura*). The sages themselves, dismissed by the wise Mārkaṇḍeya, did obeisance to the god Hari (Viṣṇu) and departed for their ashram"(III.355.3–4). Mārkaṇḍeya has brought Vajra into agreement with his position, so "the king Vajra, moreover, soul of Dharma whose highest goal was Nārāyaṇa, continued to reflect daily on the Purāṇa narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya and continued to enjoy his kingdom, protecting his subjects in accord with Dharma" (III.355.5). The Dharma that the text names of course is not Dharma in some general sense but life in the world as ordered by Viṣṇu and handed down through Mārkaṇḍeya.

I have argued that the *VDhP* embodies a self-conscious narrative. It begins with the arrival of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava preceptor, Mārkaṇḍeya, depicted as a manifestation of Viṣṇu, at the court of Vajra, a descendant of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, and it ends with his departure for his retreat in the Himalayas. What is the "story" of the *VDhP* about? It is about the progressive manifestation of the Pāñcarātra godhead and concomitantly of those knowledges, previously withheld or misunderstood, that prove the validity of claims for divine truth. That narrative is totalizing (although not exclusivist) in its scope, involving a retelling of the origin and history of the world. It can, if one wishes, be seen as a "philosophy of history" or "universal history" in a quasi-Hegelian sense, that is, as a "master narrative" of humankind in which a divine plan is not only revealed but also realized in the course of the events narrated. It is the working out of a Vaiṣṇava world vision that is also a Kashmiri imperial wish (See Ali's chapter in this volume for the Śaiva world wish and Cōḷa imperial wish, and Walter's for the Buddhist vision and Okkāka imperial wish). The author and reader of the *VDhP* could even have taken this story on its first telling as a prediction: Viṣṇu will descend to earth in the Age of Strife and institute image-honoring. He will inspire a king of Kashmir with his "luminous will" (*tejas*), and that king, acting as Viṣṇu's willing instrument, his co-agent, will make India into a Vaiṣṇava kingdom. The reading of the completed text makes this sequence of events seem like the natural unfolding of some divine intention. That



plan seems much more tentative, however, when we read the *VDhP* as complete at the end of parts I and 2. We shall see just how tentative the realization of these plans were when I turn to the historical situatedness of the *VDhP*.

The importance of this Purāṇa as master narrative also makes it possible for us to answer another question: why did Indian soteriological orders use the Purāṇas or dialogically related genres such as the *Vaṃsa* in the case of Sinhala Buddhists (see Walters) to make claims to hegemony? The reason is that such claims could not be sustained unless their authors could take command of history, of instructions in Order and of cosmogony, the three major topics of the Purāṇas apart from life-transforming practices themselves. Especially important was cosmogony. We have to remind ourselves that Indian ways of life were cosmological as well as existential and moral; they did not give up cosmology to a “secular” science, as most post-enlightenment European “religions” have done. Any disciplinary order that wished to claim preeminence in the world had to give an account of the world both in its cosmic and human respects. It also had to give an account of other accounts and demonstrate why its was the best.

The knowledges that intervene in the master narrative of the *VDhP* are not mere interpolations. They themselves often embrace as their “proofs” further narratives of events in which Pāñcarātra emanations, including devotees of the Pāñcarātra god, progressively remake the world into a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava world. The knowledges that are so revealed and enacted are often explicitly didactic, instructing the devotee to perform certain acts in preference to others. Although these didactic chapters interrupt the flow of the narrative that some might wish the text to have, the knowledges they impart can be taken as integral to the narrative in the sense that without them, the listener would not always know why or how he or she should conduct himself or herself in the present and future as the persons of the narrated episodes did in the past.

It is important to emphasize the constitutive aspect of the narrative in the *VDhP*. The events presented are not to be taken as timeless exemplifications of universal norms that have always existed. The Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas in the course of this narrative show themselves remaking their own knowledge of Vaiṣṇavism under the rubric of “remembering” it with Viṣṇu’s inspiration. This rethinking itself has a close recursive relationship to acts that actually remake the world. When we start out, forest-dwelling Pāñcarātra Brāhmaṇas have come to the court of a Bhāgavata king, a Vaiṣṇava householder who performs the Vedic liturgy. Part 1 of the text has a Śaṅkaragītā as its guiding section. Unlike the earlier *Bhagavadgītā* which, offering no distinct liturgy for the honoring of images, leaves Vaiṣṇavas as performers of the Vedic liturgy, this Gītā constitutes Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava householder devotees so that they may institute the image-honoring of Viṣṇu on the plains of India in the Age of Strife. That part ends by revealing, in an extension of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, that one of the heroes of that epic had established an imperial kingdom in which Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism was the hegemonic way of life.

Having done this, kings in part 2, are enabled, through the performance of liturgical and other practices revealed in that part, to constitute in full a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava kingdom in India, and make it into the paramount polity within the Indian

imperial formation by carrying out the practices related in the rules for royal Order with which part 2 is concerned. Finally, in part 3, organized around a Pratiṣṭhākalpa, a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava imperial polity, having gained command of the world, rearticulates it as a Pāñcarātra scale of soteriological orders with a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava temple liturgy at its apex; in it, the Pāñcarātra devotees of Viṣṇu attain an ultimate state. By the end of this narrative, then, major transformations have occurred. The way of life of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas, confined at the beginning of the narrative to forest-dwelling Brāhmaṇas, becomes the hegemonic way of life for the "entire earth." The adherents of that disciplinary order do not do this, however, simply by causing a pre-given set of life-transforming practices to spread. They do it by transforming those practices in the process. Integral to this process was a discursive mode of knowledge embedded in this text, both in the formally narrative portions and in the didactic. Let me now attend to this argument.

### *Purāṇa as Discourse*

People do not simply discover things and register them in texts. They discursively constitute them to some degree, that is, they make propositions about things that entail certain assumptions and presuppositions about the reality of the world. If a master narrative that pretends to remake the world is to convince, it must also, therefore, bring to bear existing discourses and deploy a discourse of its own. The text of the *VDhP* did not, thus, simply narrate the story of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava triumph in the world. It claimed to offer a truer vision of the world, of how people should conduct themselves in it and of how they might attain to an ultimate state. It made arguments about the world as a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava world, about cause and effect as well as about the significance of events in it. This discursive aspect was an integral aspect of the Purāṇic narrative. It was not a superficial and sectarian "interpretation" imposed by Brāhmaṇas on a more or less universal everyman's Hinduism. As I have already said, many of the narratives were themselves to be taken as "illustrative proofs" of Viṣṇu's presence, of his superiority to other divinities, of the efficacy of the Pāñcarātra devotional liturgy, and so on. Hence, if I wish to understand the narrative portions of the text as I think a medieval Indian listener would have, as well as within the frame of my own metaphysics, it is necessary for me to attend to a historical reconstruction of the discursive aspects of the text.

There are many examples of discursive practice that I could present here. Let me, however, discuss just one. It is the argument the *VDhP* makes for changing the relationship of the Pāñcarātra liturgy to the Vedic sacrifice. I have chosen this example not only because it is of great importance for the shifting objective that the complex author of the text wished to realize but because it has a great deal to do with the way in which that author has constituted the contents of its own text and related itself to other, earlier texts.

The disciplinary order of the Veda with which the *VDhP* was substantively connected was the Kaṭha "branch" (*śākhā*) of the Black Yajurveda. Yet the *VDhP* has refused, despite its profuse praise of the Veda and its acceptance of that text's validity, to attach itself to that branch or, for that matter, to any branch of the Veda. It

has instead tried to attach the Veda and other bodies of knowledge to itself in a scale of texts by constituting itself as a guide to those sciences from the Pāñcarātra point of view. The reason for this is that the *VDhP* wished to bring about major changes in the relationship of image-honoring, in the form of the Pāñcarātra liturgy, to the fire sacrifice of the Veda. It desired to replace the Bhāgavata liturgy in Vaiṣṇavism with a Pāñcarātra liturgy that so far existed only in the autonomous Samhitās of the Pāñcarātrins, an order outside the Veda according to Smārtas. If the Pāñcarātrins succeeded, they would make the life-transforming practices of the Pāñcarātrins hegemonic among the ways of life of the imperial formation of eighth-century India.

The place of previous Smārta or Vedic discourse on the image or temple worship of Viṣṇu and Śiva was homologous with the place accorded to image-honoring in the Vedic liturgy itself. Just as the practice of image-honoring was classed with the lesser household sacrifices and made to be performed “outside the sacrificial terrain” (*bahirvedi*) of the Vedic multifire liturgy, so the texts on image-honoring were themselves classed with the Smārta- or Gr̥hyasūtras, the texts advocating a householder liturgy, and added to them. Some of these texts, the precursors of the *VDhP*, actually presented themselves as “appendices.”<sup>60</sup> Others more boldly represented these texts as parts of the larger Vedic textual ensembles, and presumed that the acts which they prescribed or recommended were to be added to the ongoing performance of the Vedic liturgy. The *Viṣṇusmṛti* to which the *VDhP* claimed to be an addition—just such an expansion of the textual material that had once formed the Dharmasūtra of the Kāthaka order of the Black Yajurveda—is an example of this.

The *VDhP*, highly conscious of its discursive antecedents, proposes to change all this. Before the appearance of Mārkaṇḍeya and his associates in the court of Vajra, a Pāñcarātra liturgy seems to have been performed only by Vaiṣṇavas who had left the householder (*gr̥hastha*) stage and become forest-dwelling adepts (*vānaprastha*). They lived in small groups in retreats (*āśrama*) outside the plains of India, such as the famous Badarikāśrama near Mount Kailāsa and Mount Gandhamādāna (now Badrināth) and Lake Bindusaras, source of the Gaṅgā in India. There, these Brāhmaṇas, who were “monotheists” (*ekāntabhāvin*), carried out their daily and annual liturgy centered on the honoring of an image (*pūjā*) of Viṣṇu with attendances of wild flowers and other relatively simple offerings. Vaiṣṇava householders—those designated by the more general term of Bhāgavata—continued to be the celebrants (*yajamāna*) of the Vedic sacrifices, supplemented by a relatively simple liturgy in honor of Viṣṇu’s image. The idea was that Viṣṇu was the ultimate or true recipient of all those Vedic sacrifices. Earlier texts of the Bhāgavatas, the *Bhagavadgītā* of the *MBh* and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, consistently take this position.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Such, for example, were the *Pariśiṣṭa* of the *Atharvaveda* (or, more precisely, of the *Gr̥hyasūtra* of Kauśika attached to that Veda) and the *Śeṣa* of the *Gr̥hyasūtra* of Baudhāyana in the Taittirīya school of the Black Yajurveda. The *Pariśiṣṭa* has been edited by George Melville Bolling and Julius von Negelein (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1909–10); the *Śeṣa* is contained in R. Shama Sastri’s edition of Baudhāyana’s *Gr̥hyasūtra* (Mysore: Government Branch Press, 1920), pp. 178–376.

<sup>61</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 9.14–27; *Viṣṇupurāṇa* III.8.



Some Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇs and their wealthy household supporters had, however, begun to elaborate on these simpler liturgies, converting them into the lavish temple liturgies whose descendants continue to be performed at some temples today. They inscribed their procedures, which they claimed to have been directly divulged by Viṣṇu and to be independent of the Smārta and Śrauta rules, in their Saṃhitās. This move of some Pāñcarātrins, paralleled by Śaivas in their Āgamas, threatened to dislocate the relation between Pāñcarātrin and Bhāgavata, between Vedist and Theist.

Mārkaṇḍeya intervenes at this point. He would collapse the distinction between Pāñcarātra forest-dweller and Bhāgavata householder, and Theist and Vedist, with the knowledge he provides in the *VDhP*. This he would do in two ways. He would attach the capacity of celebrant for a Pāñcarātra liturgy to the king and his householder-subjects, while simultaneously expanding the scope of the Pāñcarātra liturgy itself as called for in the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās. He accomplishes this suture by representing the Pāñcarātra liturgy he appropriates from the Saṃhitās as a newly disclosed practice appropriate to the Age of Strife for *both* Pāñcarātra adepts and householders living in the plains. This Pāñcarātra liturgy is largely to replace the older Vedic sacrifice. The centerpiece of this new royal and imperial "whole" is the image-honoring of Viṣṇu, conducted in a huge, elaborately adorned temple. The mantras of the Vedas are detached from the Vedic liturgy and made to reappear, in homologous places, as parts of the Pāñcarātra liturgy. Here, however, they must share the limelight with the newly revealed mantras of the Purāṇa. At this point, however, Mārkaṇḍeya departs from the program of the Saṃhitās. The householder liturgy of the Vedic ensemble, especially the so-called life-cycle rites, is retained intact—Vaiṣṇava householders are instructed to perform them in accord with the rules of the particular disciplinary order (*svakalpa*) of the Veda to which they are attached—but with certain Vaiṣṇava additions. The Śrauta, the grand or multifire liturgy from which the *VDhP* takes so many mantras, may be performed in the Age of Strife, but need not be. There is no choice, however, with respect to the honoring of Viṣṇu: it is obligatory in the Age of Strife for any person who would attain to the ultimate state.

One place where the *VDhP* presents the argument for this change is a chapter entitled "Account of the the Householder Way of Life" (*grhasthadharmavaraṇana*). The impartor of knowledge here is Puṣkara, son of Varuṇa, god of waters, and his listener is Bhārgava Rāma, that Brāhmaṇ emanation of Viṣṇu who had earlier received the procedure for the Pāñcarātra liturgy. The householder to whom the argument in this chapter is especially directed is the Brāhmaṇ. The chapter begins with Puṣkara urging the householder, assumed to be a Bhāgavata, to perform the traditional household and multifire sacrifices, reiterating the well-known idea that the householder has three debts to discharge (II.95.1–3a). According to the *VDhP*, "He becomes free of debt to the gods by sacrifices of animals, O bestower of honor, and if of little wealth, by honoring images (*pūjā*), fasts (*upavāsa*), and the keeping of vows (*vrata*); and by reverential offerings (*śrāddha*) and honorings (*pūjā*) he becomes free of debt to the forefathers. By abstinence as a student (*brahmacharya*), learning the Veda (*śruta*), and austerities (*tapas*), he becomes free of debt



to the sages" (II.95.3b–5a). Here, into what is otherwise a standard passage from Dharmaśāstra, the *VDhP* has inserted the honoring of images and its attendant practices, but apparently only as an option for the householder of little wealth, one who cannot afford to make the expensive sacrifices of animals called for in the Śrauta liturgy. Without further elaboration at this point, the text rehearses the different daily sacrifices a householder should make (II.95.5b–11). Here the text says nothing to which either Smārta or Bhāgavata adherents would object.

Puṣkara next turns to the seasonal, annual, and occasional sacrifices, including the elixir of immortality (*soma*) sacrifice, horse sacrifice, and royal installation, all of which, it declares, are optional (12–18). By announcing that Viṣṇu is the recipient of these Śrauta works, the *VDhP* is setting forth the Bhāgavata doctrine of Viṣṇu's identification with the Vedic sacrifice, upon which it thus elaborates: "The sacrifice is Viṣṇu, whose luminous will is great, and he indeed is the sacrificer and the vessels of sacrifice and the materials of sacrifice, as well. One should sacrifice to that Hari, who consists of all the gods, every day, O Rāma; certainly, he should sacrifice to that god every year" (19–20).

Puṣkara then returns to the question of the householder's economic capacity to perform the multifire sacrifices. After entering into a number of complications in that regard and several legalisms regarding sacrificial fees—all of them, by the way, taken from earlier Dharmaśāstras—he leaves his listener in some confusion (21b–25a).

Puṣkara exploits this bewilderment by proceeding then to this declaration:

Viṣṇu contains all of the gods; the daily (*pratyaha*) honoring (*pūjana*) of him in an image (*pratimā*) is obligatory (*kartavya*), O best of Bhṛgu, even though the Brāhmaṇs recognize Viṣṇu [as the recipient] in all sacrifices. Moreover, when he is "sacrificed" to with milk products and flowers as prescribed [i.e., in an image], the satisfaction of multitudes of various gods automatically (*svayam*) takes place [without the necessity of performing the Vedic sacrifices]. So the honoring of an image is to be performed with confidence (*śraddhā*), O scion of Bhṛgu, outside the sacrificial enclosure (*bahirvedi*). Since one must never sacrifice to Viṣṇu through the multitude of gods with reduced fees, O destroyer of enemies, the man of little wealth may/should, in accord with his faith, honor [Viṣṇu] every day with asceticism (*tapas*) [e.g., fasting]. When he fully honors (*saṃpūj*) the god with superior food (*paramāṇna*), perfumes (*gandha*), and incense (*dhūpa*), with sweet fragrances (*sugandha*) and excellent fruits, he obtains [the rewards of] all of the sacrifices. Therefore, is the noble-souled one to honor him every day. (II.95.25b–30)

At last, the author of the *VDhP* has revealed its Pāñcarātra position. What is that?

Earlier, the *VDhP* had made the argument that since Viṣṇu contains all the gods, sacrifices made to the gods other than Viṣṇu are really sacrifices made to him. This was the reason for continuing to perform Vedic sacrifices in a Bhāgavata environment. Now, however, Puṣkara turns that argument on its head. When Viṣṇu is honored in an image, all of the other gods are automatically honored. Worshiping the multitude of gods with the sacrifices in fire prescribed in the Vedas is, thus, rendered theologically obsolete. One may perform them if one wishes, but there

is no theological reason for doing so. This is an "economic" argument in a double sense. The Pāñcarātrins are arguing that a person should be able to honor Viṣṇu, the god of devotion, in accord with his life-wishes, and should not be prohibited from doing so simply because he does not have enough wealth to pay the stipulated fee. Recourse to image-honoring permits a devotee of Viṣṇu to make his devotions when he does not have enough wealth to perform a Vedic sacrifice. As the *VDhP* text will point out in later chapters, every devotee of Viṣṇu, be he a Pāñcarātra adept, a king of kings at the top of the Vaiṣṇava chain of human beings or a poor Śūdra servant or his wife at the bottom, can participate in the temple liturgy in accord with his or her standing. The other sense in which Puṣkara makes an economic argument is from the standpoint of liturgical action. Why should a devotee of Viṣṇu dissipate his resources on the performance of a bewildering array of Vedic sacrifices aimed at the myriad gods when honoring the image of the overlord of all those gods is itself sufficient?

Implicit in this argument of economy is a deeper criticism of the Vedic sacrifice. The *VDhP* does not wish to do away with the Vedas, nor does it wish to dispense with fire sacrifices altogether. What it does desire to do as a discursive text is to replace an ensemble of liturgical practices in which the element of fire predominates with one in which the element of water is dominant. It wants to construct and institute a complex of practices in which the bathing of the sacrificer takes precedence over the offering of valued goods into a fire. The reason for wanting to make this shift is complex, and this is not the place for a full exposition of it. Let me just say that the centering of fire presupposed a cosmos in that the goods of men were transformed by that medium into the food which the gods needed, and that they returned in the form of rain, which men needed in order to grow food crops. The centering of water presupposed a cosmos in which an infinitely powerful and self-sufficient god could directly infuse his devotees with his will. This idea is central to the whole notion that Viṣṇu descends to earth at critical moments, for it is the "luminous will of Viṣṇu" (*vaiṣṇavatejas*) through which that god makes himself manifest in the world. It is by his will that he descends into his major avatars as well as into his devotees and the images they honor. Arguments about Viṣṇu's will are presented both explicitly and directly in certain parts of the text. They also appear, however, in implicit and oblique fashion, throughout much of the entire text. It is not accidental, for example, that the master and narrator of part 2, that on rules for royal Order, is the son of Varuṇa, the god of waters, and bears the name, Puṣkara, of the lake (in Rajasthan) conventionally placed first on the list of *tīrthas* or pilgrimage places, where the primary act to be done was a bath. Nor was it without purpose that the first twenty-three chapters of part 2 are given over to the disclosure of a rule for the shower bath into kingship of a Vaiṣṇava king of kings. But we need not go even this far afield to see the *VDhP* make this argument. All we need do is turn to the very next chapter of the text.

This begins the description of the procedure to be followed for a number of "optional" (*kāmya*) shower baths (*snāna*). Just as the purpose of the shower bath into kingship was to strengthen the will of a king to rule as a Vaiṣṇava by infusing him, through the medium of water containing fire, with the "luminous

will" of Viṣṇu, so these more modest baths had as their purpose the infusion of the recipient of Viṣṇu's will for a variety of lesser purposes similar to those for which one might also have undertaken to perform the Śrauta sacrifices. Before one could perform any of the multifire Vedic sacrifices, one had to complete the setting up of the fires (*agnyādhāna*), a procedure to be carried out when the moon was in the lunar asterism called Kṛttikā (whose lord was Agni, god of fire). The first of the optional baths commended by the *VDhP* is called a Kṛttikāsnāna and is to include a fire sacrifice. It contains not a Vedic fire sacrifice but a more modest pouring of oblations into a fire (*homa*) as a preliminary part of itself. The claim made for this work leaves little doubt that the Pāñcarātrins saw this shower bath of water as supplanting the entire ensemble of sacrifices into fire: "He who periodically performs this work obtains the [result of having performed] the setting up of the fires. This work, as ordained, destroys enemies and bestows the prosperity of *every work of fire* (*sarvāgnikarman*). It bestows wealth as well as fame when performed optionally or regularly by those who know Dharma" (II.96.10; emphasis added).

Other arguments about the reasons for changing from a liturgy of sacrifice into fire to one calling for honoring images of gods with attendances are also to be adduced from the *VDhP*. I could, for example, point to the importance of the uses of the body. Making attendances in the procedure of honoring images purposely directed the senses and the desires and will of the worshiper onto the deity. They were supposed to have the effect of transforming the intellect, mind, and sensations into *bhakti*, that complicated mental condition I translate as "devoted participation."

What answer did the Bhāgavatas and the Vedists, especially the adherents of the Mīmāṃsaka interpretation of sacrificial action, give to the Pāñcarātrins? Whatever their response, it does not seem to have been persuasive. From the eighth century onward, the kings of India did, indeed, stop acting as celebrants of the multifire sacrifices. The fact that no manuscript of a Kāṭhaka Śrautasūtra has seen the light may be explained in part by the hierarchization of the Śrauta liturgy by the *VDhP*. Two of those sacrifices had been constitutive of Vedic kingship and, with supplements consisting of great gifts (*mahādāna*) to "qualified" Brāhmins, of Bhāgavata kingship as well. These were the royal installation and the horse sacrifice. The one was supposed to empower an independent king to conquer his neighbors and become a king of kings, the other was supposed to enable a king of kings to rule successfully after he had so done.<sup>62</sup> The *VDhP* provides kings with replacements for these two life-transforming practices. One of these is the shower bath into kingship with which Puṣkara begins part 2 of the text. This practice incorporates elements from the older royal installation, including the major formula (*mantra*) of that rite. The replacement for the horse sacrifice is the installation of images, the placing and enlivening of an image of Viṣṇu in a spired, stone temple open on all four sides. Although this liturgical work, too, contained dozens of reapplied mantras from the Vedas, it is otherwise new, a rearticulation of Vedic speech and Pāñcarātra practice from the excluded Saṃhitās.

<sup>62</sup>R. Inden, "The Ceremony of the Great Gift (Mahadana): Structure and Historical Context in Indian Ritual and Society," in *Asie du Sud, traditions et changements*, edited by Marc Gaborieau and Alice Thorner. Colloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S. 582 (Paris, 1979), 131–36.



The *VDhP* has thus, in its completed form, boldly seized what Michel Foucault refers to as the “enunciative function” among the ways of life that people followed in “early medieval” India.<sup>63</sup> For the next few centuries, the Theist temple liturgy became hegemonic in India, displacing both the older Vedic fire sacrifices and the Buddhist monastery from their privileged positions in imperial polities. Yet it is well to keep in mind that the appearance of a master plan for establishing the hegemony of a Pāñcarātra liturgy that the completed *VDhP* gives needs to be seriously qualified. If, as I believe likely, the text was completed at three successive moments in time, the “divine plan” in the text can be read as more tentative than it appears on first sight. Part 1 is content to institute a Pāñcarātra liturgy of image-honoring—doubtless the appropriation of a Pāñcarātra liturgy from the *Samhitās*, itself a reworking of the liturgy once confined to forest-dwelling Pāñcarātrins—for the Brāhmaṇ householder. The elaboration of this liturgy performable by a king and a king of kings appears in part 2, but nothing is said there about the temple liturgy that part 3 of the *VDhP* constructs. There is, thus, no reason to assume that this totality existed before part 1 of the *VDhP*. We could just as easily see it as a whole that emerges in the course of the text’s composition, as the flow of events in which that process was itself situated.

To sum up: whichever assumption we make, by the time part 3 is complete, the complex author of the *VDhP* has thoroughly reworked the scale of worshipers and the liturgical forms with which it had started. The soteriological order of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas had previously consisted of forest-dwellers who carried out a simple liturgy of image-honoring at retreats above the plains of India. The Bhāgavata order, by contrast, consisted of householders and kings of the plains who dedicated their performances of the older Vedic liturgy to Viṣṇu, remaining content to append a simple work of image-honoring to the older Smārta sequence. Procedures for an elaborate Pāñcarātra temple liturgy had come into existence, but its proponents had remained apart from the old Smārta liturgy. The effect of the dialectical reworking of the older and newer Pāñcarātra orders and the Bhāgavata was to articulate a single order out of them that could gain imperial support. Householders emerge as Pāñcarātrins, replete with a household liturgy centered on the worship of the four-faced image of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa; the king of kings, with a Pāñcarātra liturgy to perform for the welfare of his kingdom, which displaces the older Vedic liturgy, appears as a devotee of Vāsudeva; and finally, that king, as conqueror of the entire earth, is made into the builder of an elaborate temple and the celebrant of a complex liturgy in honor of the four-faced image of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, styled the overlord of the cosmos.

## Text and Historical Situatedness

I have argued that the *VDhP* can be seen as a narrative and discursive text, one that dialectically articulates itself and its intertexts as a scale of knowledges. Throughout

<sup>63</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. Sheridan (New York: Harper, 1976), pp. 88–105.



the discussion I have implied that a text is not merely a passive expression of the world in which it was situated; it was, I argue, agentive of that world. I have also implied that this was not a one-way process. Neither the author of the *VDhP* nor the text impressed itself on the world of shapeless matter from some transcendent perch outside it. The *VDhP* and its complex author were themselves part of their world. That world, seen as a complex tangle of agents and practices, also in part articulated the contents of the *VDhP* and its author. I now want to turn to this question in more detail.

I want to argue that a text's configuration cannot be separated from the historical circumstances in which the composite author of that text was situated. At the same time, I also want to show that a text may be seen as articulative of the historical situation in which it emerges. I would make this argument, of course, about any text, but here in the *VDhP*, as in many of the *Purāṇas*, we are talking about texts that claim to contain knowledge of cosmology and history and rules of conduct that are extraordinarily agentive, bristling as they do with eventful divine and human encounters and directions for action.

### *Time and Homology*

For the purpose of prompting its readers and listeners to action, the text uses a device of *partial resemblance*. Through an active process of resemblance making, the user of the text comes to participate in the activities, and hence the agents, of the past and the future. Yet because the resemblances are partial, never total, neither the users nor those whom they resemble lose their several identities. The user of the text, its composite author/reader, may see itself as resembling agents of the past who provide the (previously unknown) rules for action which, if followed, will bring about a desired state of affairs that will resemble that of the past—only it will exist in the changed circumstances of the future. The chronologer/preceptor of the present who follows the orders of Viṣṇu delivered by Mārkaṇḍeya becomes like him, and becomes a Pāñcarātra devotee who spends his entire adult life honoring Nārāyaṇa and participating in him. The king who realizes the rules laid down for a Vaiṣṇava king likewise comes to resemble Vajra; he becomes a universal monarch. Both eventually attain to a permanent condition of participation in Viṣṇu in future lives.

In order to make my case credible, I must first deal with another assumption about the relationship of texts to historical events, one that is closely associated with—if not entailed—in both the idealist and structuralist approaches. Here I have in mind the assumption, brought to my attention elsewhere by the work of Foucault, that the text was concerned with transcendent knowledge as opposed to immanent power, and that it was consequently only marginally infected with the surface details of “sectarianism” and largely indifferent to the political constitution of India.

It is possible to read this dichotomous metaphysics into the *VDhP* (and other *Purāṇas*), but to do so does violence to the metaphysics of the text itself. The text certainly asserts that it constitutes a whole coming ultimately from the mind of a

single Absolute, Viṣṇu. That mind in its highest, transcendent state was unchanging and unitary. The world it had created was, however, a world of change, of birth, growth, and death. As that world underwent its series of ontological changes, so too it underwent epistemological transformations. The way men came to know Viṣṇu in one age was not and could not be the way of knowing him in another. This metaphysics, which links epistemology to a changing ontology, does not therefore simply justify or rationalize the reframing of Smṛti texts; it requires it.

We could get around this "problem" by assuming, in the manner of the Advaita Vedānta ascribed to a classical or Purāṇic Hinduism, that the actual texts, like the visible world, are mere illusions or appearances distorting or imperfectly expressing the ideal original. To do this, however, we must dismiss the ontology of the Pāñcarātrins. As they present themselves here and in their Saṃhitās, the Pāñcarātrins do not occupy what they would consider the extremes of the Indian ontological spectrum. They adhere neither to the *advaita* or "non-dualist" position at one end nor to the *dvaita* or "dualist" position at the other. Rather the relationship they posit to exist between god and the world is one that resembles the *bhedābheda*, "identity-in-difference," stance of Bhāskara (eighth century) or the *viśiṣṭādvaita* "qualified non-dualist," position of the later Rāmānuja (1056–1137).<sup>64</sup> The Pāñcarātrins were, thus, not idealists but realists. Their purpose in the *VDhP* was not to avoid or ignore kings and their subjects. On the contrary, they wished to persuade them to transform the entire earth into a theophany, to rearticulate an imperial formation dominated by a Pāñcarātra temple and a Pāñcarātra king of kings.

This ontology of identity-in-difference makes the strategy of participation by resemblance possible. At work almost everywhere in the *MBh* and the *Purāṇas* is the idea that persons, situations, and events of the "present" are, and can be, homologous with those of the "past." I say "homologous" rather than "analogous" advisedly. For I am attributing to the Pāñcarātrins the belief that the persons of the present do, by correct thought, speech, and deed, come to participate in the beings of the past and the future. They do not simply become similar to them, they come to partake of their essence. The whole point of following the Pāñcarātra soteriology was, after all, to "make" *bhakti*, to participate in Viṣṇu, the Cosmic overlord who is at once both beyond time and time as process itself. Thus, far from assuming that the text and historical situation are opposed to one another, that the one expresses an ideal model of order "up there" and in the past whereas the other is an amorphous, empirical reality "down here" and in the present, they assume that the two are continuous with one another, overlapping realms that continually reconstitute one another.

<sup>64</sup>Eric J. Lott, *God and the Universe in the Vedantic Theology of Ramanuja* (Madras: Ramanuja Research Society, 1976), pp. 20, 36–37, and P. N. Srinivasachari, *The Philosophy of Bhedābheda* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1934), pp. 32–33. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* ([1922] Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975) 3: 105, comments that, "The *bhedābheda* interpretation of the *Brahma-sūtras* is in all probability earlier than the monistic interpretation introduced by Śaṅkara. The *Bhagavadgītā*, which is regarded as the essence of the Upaniṣads, the older *Purāṇas*, and the *Pāñcarātra*...are more or less on the line of *bhedābheda*."

We have already seen that the *VDhP* acts as a “metatext,” as a textual whole that transforms earlier texts into parts of itself. It construes the Pāñcarātra as a science situated in its present that tells its listeners how to know the sciences from the past. Here it exemplifies what Barthes refers to as the *denotative* aspect of a text that contains two levels of signs.<sup>65</sup> The text as a whole is a signifier in relations to its parts, which are taken as signifieds. A text can also have, argues Barthes, a *connotative* aspect. Here the text (or any part of the text) acts as a system of connotative signifiers for a second-order system of signs, which may lie outside the text itself. This is how, I submit, the users of the Epics and Purāṇas “read” these texts. They took the “histories” (*ītiḥāsa*), the signs consisting of narratives of events in the distant past, as signifiers having events in the more or less immediate present as their signifieds. Or, to look at it from a dialogical standpoint, people conversed with the signs composing these texts; they treated them as living, as undergoing an active process of change in the present, as making things happen and not just as signifying them. One example of this in the *VDhP* that I have already mentioned is the war of Bharata against the Gandharvas of Gāndhāra. Given the long-standing rivalry of Gāndhāra and Kashmir, readers of the *VDhP* most likely took the Śāhis, the Turko-Iranians on the other side of the Indus (or the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas, before them), as homologues of those Gandharvas. They could also have seen the king of Kashmir (or one of the earlier Gupta monarchs) as resembling Bharata (denoted as the Pradyumna emanation of Viṣṇu). The fact that we are dealing here with signifiers that are, by definition, connotative rather than denotative makes it impossible to make an exact determination. But it is precisely this underdetermination of signifier by signified that has made it possible for the Epics and many of the Purāṇas to be used in so many different historical circumstances.

Having cleared the ontological ground, I will try in the remainder of this chapter to show how the complex author and reader of the *VDhP* and its text, whom Indologists have left floating above Kashmir (or the Panjab) between A.D. 600 and 1000, were historically situated, and sketch in how that situation was not only articulative of author and text but also how they articulated that situation.

### *Textual, Political Shifts*

Kashmir of the sixth century was positioned at the intersection of three imperial formations. The Guptas (and their allies, the Vākātakas, in the Deccan), to the east and south of Kashmir, had represented themselves as the paramount kings of the world and as devotees of Viṣṇu from their Indic capitals in the Gangetic plains (though they also appear to have been indirectly supportive of Buddhism at the center of Nālāndā, in Bihar). The Kuṣāṇas, to the west and north of Kashmir, had claimed the title of Śāh or Śāhānsāh, taken from the Iranians, and most of them depicted themselves on their coins as devotees of Śiva from their capitals in Turkestan, Afghanistan, and Panjab (although some of them and many of their subject kings were devotees of Sarvāstivādin Buddhism, the “realist” position that

<sup>65</sup>Barthes, *Elements*, pp. 89–94



predominated among most orders in the northwest). Earlier kings of this dynasty (Kaniṣka, A.D. 78–102) had caused kings in India to submit.<sup>66</sup> The Guptas later caused their successors, the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas, to submit to them. The Sasanians, who also succeeded in contesting the rule of the Kuṣāṇas, and hence occasionally impinged on Kashmir, represented themselves as overlords of the world and as devotees of the Sun from their capital in Iran. A fourth imperial formation, to the north and east of the Himalayas, that of the Chinese, though only indirectly connected with Kashmir, would become closely involved before long.

During the sixth century, the Gupta-Vākāṭaka imperial formation met its demise. The Hūṇas, who had entered India from the northwest, had been among the more important agents of that decline, representing themselves as successors of the Iranian, Kuṣāṇa, and Indic overlords.<sup>67</sup> After the collapse of the Guptas, together with their Hūṇa Other, a new imperial formation appeared in India. The Sasanian polity regained its preeminence in eastern Iran, and Turks supplanted the Hūṇas not only in Turkestan (whence that name) but at Kapiśa (Kābul) and Jahuṇḍara or Zābul (Ghazni) in present-day Afghanistan, where they represented themselves as Śāhis. Kashmir, which had submitted to them as it had to the Hūṇas, became independent and a rival of the Śāhi imperial kingdom. The major claimants as successors of the Guptas to the east of Kashmir were the Puṣpabhūti of Sthāṇviṣvara (Thanesar), in the old Kuru country.

The king who emerged out of the struggle for paramouncy that ensued in north India was the Puṣpabhūti, Harṣavardhana (606–47).<sup>68</sup> He attempted to make his new capital, Kānyakubja (Kanauj) on the Gaṅgā in Pāñcāla, the premier city of Āryāvarta (India north of the Vindhyas). Harṣa's main foes for the paramount overlordship of all India were the Cālukyas of the Deccan and the Pallavas of south India. Harṣa caused the kings of Jālandhara or Trigarta (Kangra), between the Śatadru (Satlej) and the Vipāśā (Beas), and (arguably) of Madra (Ṭakka), between the Vipāśā and the Vitastā, in the Panjab plains and hills, to become tributary kings. He could not, however, make the king of Kashmir submit.

The agent of Kashmir's political success was the first king, Durlabhavardhana (c. 626/7–662/3), of a new dynasty.<sup>69</sup> According to Kalhaṇa, poet-historian of

<sup>66</sup>B. N. Mukherjee argues provisionally for these dates in *The Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Empire* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1988), pp. 70–71.

<sup>67</sup>They had defeated the Sasanian emperor of Iran in 484 and established their predominance over a wide area, including Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Panjab, and Rajasthan. One of the Hūṇa lords, Mihirakula, may have headquartered for a while at Śākala (Sialkot) in Madra (Ṭakka). Their raids apparently caused severe dislocations throughout large parts of this region. The "heroic" efforts of Narasiṃha Gupta (c. 500–535), entitled Bālāditya ("rising sun"), to repel or disperse the Hūṇas, although successful, did not bring a reverse in the misfortune of the Guptas for long; R. C. Majumdar, "The Disintegration of the Empire" and "The Fall of the Gupta Empire," in *History and Culture of the Indian People (HCIP)* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951–77) 3 (1954), 34–43; Upendra Thakur, *The Hūṇas in India* (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, 1967).

<sup>68</sup>Majumdar, "Northern India during A.D. 650–750," in *HCIP* 3 (1954), 131–32, and K. S. Saxena, *Political History of Kashmir (B.C. 300–A.D. 1200)* (Aminabad, Lucknow: Upper India Publishing House, 1974), pp. 38–45.

<sup>69</sup>If one adds twenty-five years to Kalhaṇa's dates for the Kārkoṭa Nāgas, in order to match the Chinese dates for Candrāpīḍa, the reign of the last king of the dynasty, Utpalāpīḍa, 853–855 (old reckoning)

Kashmir, this new dynasty, named Kārkoṭa Nāga after its serpentine founder, a Nāga, replaced the family that had ruled in Kashmir since the formation of that country and its permanent settlement by humans.<sup>70</sup> Kalhaṇa begins his narrative proper of Kashmir's past with a brief summary of the *Nīlamata* (RT I.25–27), showing that history was assumed to be an extension of a Purāṇa, an account of the divine origin and ordering of the world, and in this case, the country of Kashmir. For the bulk of his narrative of kings, however, Kalhaṇa draws on the inscribed eulogies and donative orders: "As a result of the donative orders of kings of the past [recording gifts of land for] installations [of images] and of movable goods and the plates of eulogies and the [colophons of] instructional manuals I have examined, the fatigue caused by endless errors has been stilled."<sup>71</sup>

Kalhaṇa reports that Durlabhavardhana received the shower bath into kingship, in accord with the rule, with the waters of pilgrimage places poured out of golden jars, a statement to be read as a declaration that this king intended to establish an imperial kingdom (RT III.528). Durlabhavardhana seems to have made good his claim. Historians have inferred from the *Xiyouji*, the account of the Chinese Buddhist scholar and pilgrim Xuanzang (Hsüan Tsang), who visited Kashmir from 631 to 633, during Harṣa's reign, that Durlabhavardhana had forced the Śāhi monarch to cede the eastern province of Gāndhāra, Takṣaśilā (Taxila, Attock, and Rawalpindi districts), to him, as well as Kekaya (Siṃhapura) on the west bank of the Jhelum, south of Gāndhāra and southwest of Kashmir; Uraśā (the valleys of the Kishen Ganga and Kunhar rivers) to the west; Dārvābhisāra (Parṇotsa and Rajapurī) to the south; and possibly Brahmapura (Chamba) to the east.<sup>72</sup> He may have caused Madra to submit as Harṣa's polity collapsed. He is reported to have built a temple in the capital of Śrīnagara, presumably to mark his victory in establishing an imperial polity. The name of that temple, Durlabhasvāmin, "lord of Durlabha," indicates both that the temple was dedicated to Viṣṇu and that the king took Viṣṇu

ends in 880, overlapping the kings datable from other evidence of the next dynasty. We thus have to assume that some reigns are recorded as too long; Sunil Chandra Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir* (Calcutta: U. N. Dhaur and Sons, 1957).

<sup>70</sup>Kalhaṇa, *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, ("River of Kings") (RT) III.528–30 and IV.1–38. See Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, a *Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, edited by Marc Aurel Stein (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1892) and *Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, a *Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, translated with introduction, commentary, and appendices by Marc Aurel Stein (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1900; reprint, Delhi: M. Banarsidass, 1979). A more recent "critical" edition is *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, edited by Vishva Bandhu; Woolner Indological Series, 5,6 (Hoshiarpur: Visvesvraananda-Sanathanam, 1963–65) in 2 volumes. For empiricist textual criticism see Bernhard Kölver, *Textkritische und Philologische Untersuchungen zur Rājatarāṅgiṇī des Kalhaṇa* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1971). We should be careful not to treat this text as a "source," as a more or less realistic account of what happened; it is a poetical work whose author had a Śaiva outlook, and deserves further analysis from those points of view.

<sup>71</sup>*dr̥ṣṭaiśca pūrvabhūhartpratiṣṭhāvastuśāsanaiḥ/praśastipaṭṭaiḥ śāstraiśca śānto 'śeṣabhramaklamah//* (RT I.15); my translation; I rely in part on Kölver, *Textkritische*, reproducing a passage from Bühler, "Detailed Report," p. 7.

<sup>72</sup>D. Devahuti, *Harsha, a Political Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 72–73. Xuanzang, *Si-Yu-Ki [Xiyouji]: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, translated by Samuel Beal (London: Trübner, 1884), I: 148–64; and Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, 629–645 A.D.*, edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and S. W. Bushell, 2 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1904–5), I: 258–85.

as overlord of the cosmos (*RT* IV.6). Noting his serpentine origin, the Kashmiri chronicler says that he supported the earth on his arm just as Śeṣa, the infinite cobra manifestation of Viṣṇu, supports the cosmos on his hooded head (*RT* III.529). The chief queen of Durlabhavardhana, Anaṅgalekhā—daughter, we are told, of the last (and sonless) king of the previous dynasty, whose kings were virtually all Śaivas, according to Kalhaṇa—had a Buddhist monastery, constructed and named after her, the Anaṅgabhavana (location unknown), reiterating the subhegemonic position of Buddhism in Kashmir (*RT* IV.3).

Harṣa, who took the Śiva of the Pāśupata order of Theists as the overlord of the cosmos (he also had leanings toward the Buddha) can hardly have provided the venue for the composition of the *VDhP*. Indeed, it is likely that his court was responsible for a Purāṇa of the Pāśupatas, the major Theist rivals of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>73</sup> Gāndhāra, which the *VDhP* represents as a country with a wicked way of life, could hardly have given rise to that text. It is also unlikely that Madra, which figures favorably in the *VDhP*, was the site of its composition, once it was conquered by Kashmir. I would not, however, want to rule out the possibility that part I of the *VDhP* could have been composed there and later been appropriated by a Kashmiri king.

Durlabhavardhana, the king of Kashmir, seems to have done some of the things one would expect the first royal recipient of the *VDhP* to have exhibited. He constructed an imperial polity in which Vaiṣṇavism displaced Śaivism as the preeminent form of Theism. Indeed, it is possible to see the Kārkoṭa Nāgas as reworking the Vaiṣṇava imperial kingship of the Guptas. Compelled around 635 to relinquish a tooth relic of the Buddha to Harṣa, however, Durlabha was far from being able to claim himself as paramount overlord of even north India.<sup>74</sup> He was in the position of an imperial king who was confined in his activities to the frontier of an imperial formation in which Harṣa and his overlord, Śiva or the Buddha, were supreme. Given the peripheral geographical position of Kashmir as well, it seems implausible that the wish of conquering the earth” would have seemed practicable to Durlabhavardhana.

Durlabhavardhana may not have seen the *VDhP* completed at his court, but it is quite likely that the Purāṇa of Kashmir to which the *VDhP* was closely related, the *Nilamata Purāṇa*, was completed at his court. That text, the regional and royal antecedent of the universal and imperial *VDhP*, also claimed to have been delivered to a king by a Brāhmaṇ sage.<sup>75</sup> The author of the *NP* made Kashmir the center of an

<sup>73</sup>V. S. Agrawala makes this case for the *Vāmanapurāṇa* in *Vāmana Purāṇa, a Study* (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1964), pp. i–iv.

<sup>74</sup>Devahuti, *Harsha*, pp. 111–13.

<sup>75</sup>He was named Brhadaśva. The name of his royal interlocutor was Gonanda, the king considered to have been the founder of the ruling dynasty of Kashmir that lasted until Durlabhavardhana established his dynasty, the Kārkoṭa Nāga. Brhadaśva tells Gonanda about the Brāhmaṇ Candradeva, who had received the liturgical procedures from Nīla, the king of Kashmir's serpents (whence the text's name), at the end of an earlier cycle of ages and related them to his king, Vīryodaya. The text as a whole presents itself as an extension of the *MBh*. King Janamejaya, great-grandson of Arjuna and son of Parikṣit (who was, remember, a contemporary of Vajra), asks Vaiśampāyana, the pupil of Vyāsa, composer of the Vedas, Epics, and Purāṇas, who had recited the *MBh*, why no king of Kashmir participated in the battle.



imperial Theist kingdom consisting of the countries of the northern quarter of India. That text enjoined the performance of a shower bath into kingship for the kings of Kashmir (*NP* 834–65), the rule for which the author of the *VDhP* transforms and adopts for its own. Even more interesting, the *NP* called for him to perform a four-monthly sleep in honor of Viṣṇu, in accord with the liturgical procedure of the Pāñcarātrins (*NP* 421–27, 729–33), to be found in full in their *Saṃhitās*. Here we have evidence that people in Kashmir were attempting to rearticulate an Indian polity as a Pāñcarātra theophany, but not one that incorporates the Vedic liturgy and the whole of India.

I think one can infer that this text reworks earlier discursive material (which may or may not have constituted a formal, written narrative). According to that, people took Kaśmīrā to be an incarnation of Umā, the spouse of Śiva, and held that her king and master was a portion of Hara, a move that itself seems to be a Śaiva response to the Vaiṣṇava notion that equates the kingdom with Bhū (“earth”) and Lakṣmī (“mobile wealth”), or Śrī (“radiant prosperity”), and makes the king a portion of Viṣṇu (*NP* 245–46). The main river of Kashmir, the Vitastā, was also considered an incarnation of the spouse of Śiva in this earlier discourse about Kashmir (*NP* 247–74). The *NP* does not deny this, but frames this text in a narrative that makes the main feeder of the Vitastā, the Viśokā, an emanation of Lakṣmī, whose waters strengthen the otherwise hesitant Vitastā and purify them (*NP* 275–97). It also subordinates the king and his subjects to the Nāgas, a term used to denote the serpents who were the original inhabitants of Kashmir when it was a large lake, and also to name the many springs and smaller lakes and pools that punctuate the landscape of Kashmir after that lake is drained. Nīla is the king of these serpents of Kashmir and it is he who issues the orders that its human inhabitants, starting with its kings, are to follow if they wish to bring prosperity and avoid ruin. The *NP* represents this Nīla as virtually an emanation of Viṣṇu himself, and a great devotee of that god (*NP* 351–69). So by elevating the Nāgas over the early kings of Kashmir, the text also makes its Śaiva kings the instruments of Viṣṇu.<sup>76</sup> Even so, these kings do not come off well. Gonanda, founder of the

Gonanda was. Vaiśampāyana replies, too young, thus “explaining” the absence of a king of Kashmir in that text’s account: Bühler, “Detailed Report,” pp. 37–41. What the *NP* does not say is that the *MBh* considers the Kashmiris to be northern barbarians: VI.10.63–66. Arjuna defeats them in his conquest of the quarters: II.24.16. The Kashmiris, along with other “barbarians,” attended Yudhiṣṭhira’s royal installation and offered tribute: II.31.12; II.48.13.

<sup>76</sup>Xuanzang reports a Buddhist version of Kashmir’s origin and history in which a Buddhist adept gets the Nāga lord of the lake to drain it and permit 500 Buddhist monks, served by poor people he purchased, to settle there. This is a retelling of a story in the *Mūlasarvāstivādaśāstra*, second of the “three baskets” (*tripiṭaka*), the “canon” of Buddhism. This particular text is the Kashmiri reworking from about the third century of the first-century *Sarvāstivādaśāstra* of Gandhāra: Jean Przyluski, “Le Nord-ouest de l’Inde dans le vinaya des Mūla-sarvāstivādin et les textes apparentés,” *Journal Asiatique* 1914 (November–December), 493–568, esp. “La conversion du Cachemere,” pp. 522–37. The story of the *Mūlasarvāstivādaśāstra* appears to be a retelling of an “exploit” (*avadāna*) from the *Aśokāvadāna*, a Sanskrit Buddhist text of Mathurā: Jean Przyluski, “*Avadāna de Madhyāntika*” in *La Légende de l’empereur Aśoka (Aśoka-avadāna)* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1923), pp. 340–42. It is extant only in the Chinese translation, *Ayuwangzhuan*, of the Parthian Faqin, around 300. Saṃghabhara, alias Saṃghavarman, a monk of Funan, translates a different recension of it in 512; Przyluski, *Légende*, pp. xi–xii. According to Xuanzang, Buddhism became predominant in Kashmir under Aśoka and

earlier dynasty, comes in for criticism. Vāsudeva had killed his father in a row, and Balabhadra of Mathurā (Saṃkarṣaṇa, equated with Ananta, the serpent on which Nārāyaṇa sleeps) slaughtered Gonanda himself after he only partially implemented the liturgical procedure laid down by Nīla (*NP* 7–9; 909–11). The successor of these Śaiva kings, the Vaiṣṇava Durlabhavardhana, by claiming to be of Nāga descent and, even in Kalhaṇa's account, a manifestation of Viṣṇu, implicitly claimed to inaugurate a new and better life in Kashmir, of which the *NP*, divulged by his serpentine counterpart Nīla, was articulative.

The effect of these discursive reworkings of the *NP* is, then, to transform Kashmir, previously a Śaiva kingdom subject to other kings—some of them Buddhist—into an imperial Vaiṣṇava kingdom. The *NP* did not, however, go so far as the *VDhP* in promoting Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism. Although it placed Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism in a position of primacy it also placed Viṣṇu and Śiva in a complementary relationship, and did so to the extent that it sometimes difficult to tell which is superior. For example, it included a rule for the main liturgical work of the Śaivas, the Śivarātri, but also told its listener to perform it in accord with the procedure declared for Viṣṇu's four-monthly sleep (*NP* 527–33). It also accorded open recognition to the Buddhists of Kashmir, which the *VDhP* did not (*NP* 709–15). The complex author of the *NP*, Durlabhavardhana and his court, had thus made Kashmir into the platform for a world vision (a social and political imaginary) from which the program of the *VDhP*, in which Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism was unambiguously preminent, could be launched.

### *Kashmir between Imperial Formations*

The son and successor of Durlabhavardhana, Durlabhaka (662/3–712/3), entitled Pratāpāditya ("blazing sun"), was also independent. Like his father, he struck his own coins. Kalhaṇa reports that he constructed a new capital, named after himself, Pratāpapura.<sup>77</sup> It is, in my view, very likely that the composition of an early version of the *VDhP* was in process during the reign of this king.

The reason for this is that the political circumstances that had obtained during much of his father's reign had changed dramatically. Around 650, after the death of Harṣa, events were under way that were to bring about major changes in the

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especially Kaniṣka, who held the third council of Buddhist monks there in order to fix the canon of the Sarvāstivādins. The servile Kashmiris and their kings, however, repeatedly abandoned Buddhism; Xuanzang, *Xiyouji*, I: 149–58.

<sup>77</sup>In 1942, archeologists excavated a temple at Tāpar (identified with Pratāpapura). Its remains consist of a central sanctum and four ancillary shrines, all on a raised platform. Though not as large or complex as the Sarvatobhadra in the *VDhP*, it has the same basic design and was dedicated to Viṣṇu (fragments of two images of Viṣṇu Vaikuṇṭha were found). It is one of the largest temples in Kashmir, measuring 300 feet east to west and 250 feet north to south. Originally, scholars attributed this temple to Durlabhaka; G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashir* (Lahore: University of the Panjab, 1948), 1: 51 and facing plate. More recently, however, architectural historians have attributed it to Muktāpīda Lalitāditya, apparently on the grounds that Kalhaṇa does not say Durlabhaka built a temple in that town; *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture; North India: Foundations of North Indian Style, c. 250 B.C.–A.D. 1100*, edited by Michael W. Meister, M. A. Dhaky, and Krishna Deva (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), part 1: 368; part 2, plate 739.

imperial formations of Asia—the Chinese, Turkish, and Iranian, as well as the Indian. The first two Tang emperors, Taizong (627–649) and Gaozong (649–683), had extended their command over the Buddhist oasis towns of Kashgaria or eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang/Sinkiang) during the reigns of Durlabhavardhana and Harṣa.<sup>78</sup> The annals of the Tang report that the Śāhis, the Turkish(?) kings of Kapiśa or Kābul, across the Indus from Kashmir, were their tributaries.<sup>79</sup> Harṣa himself is reported to have been enfeoffed by an ambassador of Taizong.

At the same time, around A.D. 650, the Arabs, claiming to be inspired by their new way of life, Islām, had completed their conquest of the Sasanian empire of Iran. The domains of that empire then included parts of western Afghanistan. It touched on the old kingdoms of Tokharistan (centered on Balkh) and of Kapiśa, ruled by the Śāhis, the western rivals of the kings of Kashmir. The scholars of medieval India, armed with the historian's hindsight, have paid great attention to the arrival of the Arabs on the Indic scene. To the rulers of this period, however, the rise of another nation was, if anything, more important than the replacement of the Sasanian empire with the Caliphate of the Arabs. I speak of the rise to imperial standing of the Tibetans, India's northern neighbors.<sup>80</sup>

During the second half of the seventh century, Tibetan armies greatly extended the area of Tibetan influence, making attacks along their southern borders.<sup>81</sup> The Chinese reported that in 678 the Tibetan armies had penetrated the Middle Region (Poluomen, equivalent to Brāhmaṇ in Chinese, *madhyadeśa* in the Purāṇas.), the upper and middle Gangetic plains of India. The major countries were Kuru (Haryana) and Pañcāla (western Uttar Pradesh); Kāśī and Kosala (western U.P.); and Magadha (Bihar). Tibetan sources state that they took command of Zhang-zhung (also Guge), the area called Suvarṇagotra (land of gold) or Strīrājya (kingdom of women) in 653.<sup>82</sup> It is identified as the valley of the upper Satlej, the region

<sup>78</sup>Edouard Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kie (Turcs) occidentaux* (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1900), pp. 259–79, and Howard J. Wechsler, "T'ai-tsung (reign 626–49) the Consolidator," in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978–91) 3 (1979), 219–30.

<sup>79</sup>So, too, was the minor kingdom of Udyāna (Swat), just above and between Kapiśa and Kashmir. The kingdoms beyond them, Bāhlika or Tokharistan (Balkh or Bactria) below the Amu Darya (Oxus), and Sogdiana (capital of Samarkand) above it, both sent envoys and presents to the Chinese court.

<sup>80</sup>The Tibetan monarch, Slon-brtsan-sgam-po (c. 608–650), constituted the larger part of the Tibetan region as an imperial kingdom. He obtained a Chinese princess (and, arguably, a Nepali princess, too) in recognition of his new standing, and is supposed to have introduced Buddhism and caused the Tibetan alphabet to be fashioned; R. A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 56–64; and Turrell V. Wylie, "Some Political Factors in the Early History of Tibetan Buddhism," in *Studies in History of Buddhism*, edited by A. K. Narain (Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1980), pp. 365–72.

<sup>81</sup>They posed a severe threat to the area on their northeast, near the Chinese capital of Zhangan. After 670 they took command of the "four garrisons," the Buddhist oasis principalities of Kashgar (Kashī), Yarkand (Shache), Kucha (Kuqa), and Khotan (Hotan), to the northwest, cutting the Chinese off from western Turkestan and Iran; Paul Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* (Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1961), p. 9.

<sup>82</sup>Luciano Petech, *The Kingdom of Ladakh, c. 950–1842 A.D.* (Rome: Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977), pp. 8–9.



around the Tibetan Mount Kailāsa.<sup>83</sup> I think we may infer from this that Tibetan armies had descended onto the Gangetic plains along routes that came through the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, tributary to Tibet, and, from the newly acquired territory of Zhang-zhung, through Kumaon and Garhwal, along the Alaknandā and the Gaṅgā. It is likely that the Tibetans (who would at this time been seen simply as cruel barbarians and not as Buddhists) despoiled Badarikāśrama, the most important retreat in India of the forest-dwelling order of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas. They would also have been in a position to threaten Kanauj and to demand tribute from the lords of India's Middle Region. Vaiṣṇavas considered the area around Badrināth to be the source of the Gaṅgā and the ontological center of India, and many thought of Kanauj, in the plains below, as the political center of northern India or Āryāvarta. Hence the Tibetan presence must have had serious consequences. At the very least their raids and exactions can be seen as enough of an intervention in the political affairs of northern India to keep any of the contenders for supremacy there from reconstituting an empire before the first quarter of the eighth century.

The Tibetan armies seem to have devoted relatively little attention to the countries southwest of Kashgaria and Zhang-zhung, that is, to the north of Kashmir along the trans-Himalayan valleys of the Indus.<sup>84</sup> Although the Tibetans attempted conquests in this area, they do not seem to have constituted a serious threat to it or to Kashmir.

The circumstances that arose as a result of the political and military maneuvering I have described in brief can be summed up as follows from the standpoint of Durlabhaka, the king of Kashmir. The rulers of the Turkish kingdoms immediately to the west of Kashmir were in disarray as a result of Chinese aggression from the north and Arab assaults from their west. They were, therefore, hardly in a position to threaten Kashmir. Neither, for the moment, were the Arabs, caught up in internal quarrels, nor the Chinese, cut off by the Tibetans.<sup>85</sup> These latter had, to be sure, caused great mischief in the Gangetic plains. Partly as a result of their dominance, the political center of India as a whole had shifted to the south. The donative orders of the Cālukyas of Vātāpī (Badami) claimed they had become the paramount kings not only of the Deccan but of the entire subcontinent after king Pulakeśin defeated Harṣa. The Tibetans had not, however, been very successful in establishing their presence in the area north and east of Kashmir. So the damage they had done in the Middle Region of India actually worked to the relative advantage of the Kashmiri

<sup>83</sup>This is not to be confused with Suvarṇabhūmi, identified in Theravādin Buddhist discourse with Burma.

<sup>84</sup>The countries at issue here were, from west to east, Gilgit (Little Polū/Bolor), Baltistan (Great Polū/Bolor), and Ladakh (Mar-yul). The latter two regions are today inhabited by Tibetan speakers. Kalhaṇa calls them Sūkṣmabhūṭa and Bṛhadbhūṭa, Little Tibet and Great Tibet. There is, however, evidence that in the seventh and eighth centuries the peoples of this region (or at least their rulers), like those of Kashgaria, were Indo-Iranian speakers and that they (or, once again, their rulers) were Buddhists or, possibly, Śaivas: Luciano Petech, *A Study on the Chronicles of Ladakh* (Calcutta: n.p., 1939), pp. 97–105.

<sup>85</sup>H. A. R. Gibb, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia* ([1923] New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 15–28; M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), I (A.D. 600–750 [A.H. 132]), 173–75.

monarch. He was also able—and this is the major point—not only to strengthen his regional kingdom; he was able to see the situation as one in which Viṣṇu was urging him to think of making Kashmir the center of a pan-Indian imperial formation.

Toward the end of Durlabhaka's reign, the political circumstances again changed, giving further impetus to the world and imperial wish I am imputing to the Kashmiri court. The eldest son and designated successor of Durlabhaka was Candrāpīḍa. The Chinese had regained their command over the oasis towns of Kashgaria in 692, and had begun to jockey for position with the Arabs and Turks against the Tibetans.<sup>86</sup> The Arabs under Qutaybah bin Muslim (705–715), once again pressed eastward, executing the Śāhi, Nezak Śāh, in 709.<sup>87</sup> The same year that Candrāpīḍa took the throne, 712/13, Arab armies conquered Sind, taking the city of Mūlasthāna (Multan), south of the Madra country.<sup>88</sup> The Tang Annals record for that year a mission sent by Candrāpīḍa, followed seven years later by an imperial decree granting him the title of king of Kashmir.<sup>89</sup> Changes had also taken place in the Middle Region of India. The kings of Nepal (the Bagmati Valley) and of the Gangetic plains to the south had, in 703/4, successfully revolted against their Tibetan overlords.<sup>90</sup> It is possible that the king of the Middle Region reported to have overthrown Tibetan rule was Yaśovarman of Kanauj.<sup>91</sup> This king later attempted to conquer the quarters and rearticulate the Middle Region as an imperial kingdom. He then allied himself with the king of Kashmir and the Tang emperor, to counter a renewed Tibetan and Arab threat.

As for Candrāpīḍa himself, he apparently wished an alliance with the Chinese emperor. This would help him against the Tibetans and the Arabs, who were again threatening the Indo-Iranian world with which Kashmir was conterminous. Candrāpīḍa appears thus to have been laying the groundwork for a military campaign against his more immediate rivals, the first step one would take in a conquest of the quarters. One of the rivals Candrāpīḍa had in mind was almost certainly the Śāhi king of Kapiśa and western Gāndhāra. He was, I would contend, the homologue of the wicked Gandharva king against whom that past emanation of Viṣṇu, Bharata, had fought. The other potential rival of whom Candrāpīḍa might have been thinking was the king of Kanauj.

If the political circumstances of Candrāpīḍa's reign favored the disclosure of a Pāñcarātra text placing the king of Kashmir at the center of a kingdom embracing the entire subcontinent, so did the immediate circumstances with regard to ways of life. Candrāpīḍa was a Vaiṣṇava, as his dynastic predecessors had been. He seems,

<sup>86</sup>Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne*, pp. 10–11; Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 287–92; and Denis Twitchett and H. J. Wechsler, "Kao-tsung (reign 649–83) and the Empress Wu: the Inheritor and the Usurper," in *The Cambridge History of China* 3 (1979), 286.

<sup>87</sup>Gibb, *Arab Conquests*, pp. 29–58.

<sup>88</sup>H. C. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India (Early Mediaeval Period)* ([1931–36] New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973), 1: 6–11.

<sup>89</sup>Narayan Chandra Sen, *Accounts of India and Kashmir in the Dynastic Histories of the Tang Period* (Santiniketan: Visva-bharati, 1968), pp. 17, 31; and Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 209, 293.

<sup>90</sup>Don Y. Lee, *The History of Early Relations between China and Tibet, from Chiu t'ung-shu, a Documentary Survey* (Bloomington: Eastern Press, 1981), p. 28.

<sup>91</sup>Majumdar, "Northern India during A.D. 650–750," in *HCIP* 3 (1954), 128–31.

however, to have had a Vaiṣṇava guru of special importance. This man, Mihiradatta, is the only preceptor of a Kārkoṭa Nāga king mentioned by Kalhaṇa (*RT* IV.80). Further evidence of the high esteem in which Mihiradatta was held is the fact that he himself was able to build a temple to Viṣṇu (*RT* IV.80). Finally, there is the evidence of royal names. The king who first hears the *VDhP* is named Vajra, the "Adamantine One." The kings of Kashmir, like many of the kings of India, took titles ending with the word *āditya* or "sun." Now it just so happens that the royal title taken by Candrāpīḍa was Vajrāditya, the "Adamantine Sun" or "Diamond Sun." It is thus quite likely that Vajrāditya, homologous with the Vajra whom the author of the *VDhP* made the recipient of that text at the beginning of the Age of Strife, was intended as the historic recipient of the very same text. Nor is it implausible to think that Mihiradatta, his soteriological preceptor and the homologue of Mārkaṇḍeya, was the historic Pāñcarātra adept who completed the last redaction of the *VDhP* and revealed it at the Kashmiri court. Such a textual event had probably occurred before in Kashmir's history when (as I earlier suggested) Durlabhavardhana, the grandfather of Candrāpīḍa, received the *NP*, a text rearticulating the Theist and predominantly Śaiva kingdom of Kashmir as one predominantly Vaiṣṇava. Part 2 of the *VDhP* ends with chapters on warfare. I am tempted to think that the complex author of the *VDhP* had completed part 2 of the text before Candrāpīḍa's death, at that moment when the Kashmiri court was itself preparing for a protracted military campaign.

It is highly probable that Candrāpīḍa, entitled Vajrāditya, was the king of Kashmir who became the historic recipient of the *VDhP*, a text remembered by his preceptor, with the aid of Viṣṇu, which was supposed to inspire him to world conquest. There is a problem here, however. Candrāpīḍa may have been the first king of Kashmir to hear the *VDhP*, but since he ruled for only eight years and eight months (c. 712/13–720/1), he could not have completed the sequence of tasks called for by that text. Nor could his younger brother, Tārāpīḍa (c. 720/1–724/5), his elder brother's murderer and successor, whose reign was an even shorter four years and twenty-four days (*RT* IV.39–125). His younger brother, Muktāpīḍa Lalitāditya (c. 724/5–760/1), who succeeded him, is reported to have ruled for thirty-six years, seven months, and eleven days, and it was he who completed what his eldest brother had only begun. After a successful campaign against the Tibetans in conjunction with Yaśovarman of Kanauj, he renewed his dynasty's relationship (in 733) with the Tang emperor.<sup>92</sup> He then broke his alliance with Yaśovarman, defeated him, and took command of Kanauj. Thence he proceeded on a conquest of the quarters, of which Kalhaṇa gives an ornate account (*RT* IV.126–80). Probably accompanied by the defeated Yaśovarman, Lalitāditya campaigned in eastern India in 735–736 and then in the Deccan and south India in 736–737.<sup>93</sup> What made possible Lalitāditya's successful conquest of the quarters beyond north India was the

<sup>92</sup>Chavannes, *Documents*, notes, p. 53.

<sup>93</sup>The most engaging reconstruction of this conquest of the quarters is that of Hermann Goetz, "The Conquest of Northern and Western India by Lalitāditya-Muktāpīḍa of Kashmir," in his *Studies in the Art and History of Kashmir and the Indian Himalaya* ([1952] Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969), pp. 8–22.



failure of the Cālukyas' will as the paramount overlords of the Indian imperial formation. Weakened by a war of position with their rivals in south India, the Pallavas, the Cālukya court had apparently not been able to prevent first Yaśovarman and then Lalitāditya from undertaking the conquest of the quarters. Furthermore, preoccupation with the Pallavas left the Cālukya polity unattended in the north Deccan, which was under the command of underlords who called themselves Rāṣṭrakūṭa. The eulogies in their donative orders report that a Rāṣṭrakūṭa underlord of the Cālukya, Vijayāditya (696–733), Indra I, abducted the princess, Bhavagaṇā, possibly the daughter of Maṅgalarāja Satyāśraya or his younger brother, Pulakeśin Avanijanāśraya, who had recently become underlords of Lāṭa (Gujarat), after 722. The son of this marriage was Dantidurga (c. 733–757), who successfully supplanted the Cālukya, Kīrtivarman II (744/5–757), as paramount overlord (c. 750–752).<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, Kalhaṇa represents Mukṭāpīḍa as receiving homage from a Raṭṭā of Karṇāṭa who was acting as king of the Deccan. Most likely this was Bhavagaṇā, acting for her son who would have been a minor in 736–737.<sup>95</sup> Lalitāditya returned to Kashmir for the last time, to deal with a Tibetan threat in 747, about the same time that the grown Dantidurga began his active career, at which point the reach of the will of Lalitāditya's polity greatly diminished. His interventions in the Deccan and south India were nonetheless consequential. Quite possibly Mukṭāpīḍa's maneuvering strengthened the position of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas at a critical point in their career, and helped them support the claim of their protégé, Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (c. 731/2–796), a Vaiṣṇava, to the Pallava throne, on which he had been placed (at the age of twelve), apparently against the wishes of the Cālukyas.<sup>96</sup> Pāñcarātrins may have begun to displace the older Bhāgavatas in south India with his support. To conclude, if this admittedly speculative account of the *VDhP*'s historic debut is correct, if Vajrāditya was the first historic king to receive the text but his youngest brother, Lalitāditya, was in fact the first to fulfill its world vision, it explains why the text of the *VDhP* bears the homological signature of the one, Vajrāditya, while the earth herself came to be marked by the other, Lalitāditya.

Whether the first historic recipient of the *VDhP* was Candrāpīḍa or not, Kalhaṇa's account of the victories he achieved and of the temples he built, combined with the archeological evidence of these, leaves no doubt that Lalitāditya, and not Vajrāditya, was the first king of Kashmir who was able to carry out the orders of Viṣṇu issued in the *VDhP*. No subsequent ruler of Kashmir was as renowned as Mukṭāpīḍa Lalitāditya, for no other king of that country could claim to have conquered all of India, and no other monarch undertook there the construction of

<sup>94</sup>A. S. Altekar, "The Rāṣṭrakūṭa Empire," in *HCIP* (1955) 4, 1–3.

<sup>95</sup>Goetz, "Conquest," pp. 16–17.

<sup>96</sup>Under their crown prince, Vikramāditya (733/4–744/5), they invaded the Pallava capital, Kāñcīpuram, and installed their own candidate, Skandaśiṣya Citramāya (c. 731/2–744/5), whereupon Nandivarman took refuge with Dantidurga, aiding him in his exploits. Dantidurga reinstated him in 744/5, the year of Vikramāditya's death: T. V. Mahalingam, *Kāñcīpuram in Early South Indian History* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 137–85. If the Kayya mentioned in Kalhaṇa as the king of Lāṭa is to be identified with Karka II, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa whom, Altekar infers, Dantidurga placed in command of Lāṭa, then this would tend to confirm the guess that Lalitāditya and Dantidurga were allied, for Kayya is named as one of the Kashmiri king's court; *RT* IV.209–10.

as many permanent structures for the housing of different disciplinary orders as he did.<sup>97</sup> Here again I am tempted to think that the complex author of the *VDhP* completed part 3 of the *VDhP*, the largest of the three, and the one so elaborately concerned with enumerating temple types and the construction of a Sarvatobhadra temple for the image of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, in conjunction with the “conquest of the quarters” by which Lalitāditya made India into his imperial formation.

### *Text Composition and Empire Building as Mutually Articulative*

Lalitāditya did not simply claim to be the ruler of the earth. He and his court set out to prove it. This proof consisted of a concerted effort to make Kashmir the center of the Indic earth, and the centerpiece of that project was the construction of a Sarvatobhadra temple that displayed Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism as the preeminent way of life in the Indian imperial formation. The *VDhP* was, I shall argue, as much involved in this project as the imperial project was involved in the composition of the *VDhP* itself.

The rulers of India had had a strong inclination in the past to consider the region called the Middle Region the center of India, an Āryāvarta. Any imperial kingdom that wished to establish paramountcy within the entire Indian imperial formation had to take this into account if it wished its claims to be taken seriously. Chinese and Tibetan incursions had already damaged the credibility of Āryāvarta's claims, and the Cālukyas of the Deccan had challenged its presumption of centrality—(as would their successors, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, who were to rearticulate themselves as imperial rulers, with their Middle Region in Kaṇṇāṭaka, after Lalitāditya's sun in Kashmir had set).<sup>98</sup> Clearly if Lalitāditya wished to establish his supremacy over India, he would have also to meet the challenge of making Kashmir the Middle Region of India. I have already shown that the *NP* and its royal readers had represented Kashmir as an imperial kingdom by telling stories about the origin and landscape of Kashmir and the countries around it, and by instituting a complex liturgy that turned Kashmir into a regionally triumphant theophany. My reading of Kalhaṇa, the *VDhP*, and the archeological evidence shows that Lalitāditya, supplementing these discursive and liturgical practices with the more radical program of the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās, went one step further.

Indian kings made or remade their kingdoms by building new capitals, in the course of which they necessarily displayed the nature and extent of their claims to hegemony. Here is how Muktāpīḍa Lalitāditya deployed a strategy of city building

<sup>97</sup>Jayāpīḍa (c. 770–801), the grandson of Muktāpīḍa and a Pāñcarātrin, was said to have emulated his grandfather; he twice attempted to conquer the quarters, but did not enjoy great success: D. C. Ganguly, “Central and Western India,” *HCIP* IV (1955), 114–15. The only other kings before 1000 who could even be compared in power with Muktāpīḍa are Avantivarman (c. 855–83) and Śaṅkaravarman (c. 883–902); but both of these kings were, at least publicly, Śaivas: Ray, *Dynastic History* I: 115, 117, 121. The more expansionist of the two, Śaṅkaravarman, had himself to contend with a king named Bhoja, the most powerful of the Pratihāras. He was the first king since the rise of imperial Tibet to succeed in reestablishing Kanauj as the capital of northern India and claimed, in that regard, the title of “Overlord of Aryavarta”; Majumdar, “Rise and fall of the Pratihara Empire,” in *HCIP* 4 (1955), 28–32.

<sup>98</sup>R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), chapter 6.

so as to instantiate his claims. The Purāṇas generally defined the Middle Region as that region drained by the Gaṅgā, premier river of the whole of India, and its tributary, the Yamunā. From a cosmogonic standpoint, the center of this region was Prayāga. Located at the confluence of these two streams, it was the pilgrimage place where Viṣṇu reclined on his serpent-couch, the only place that escaped inundation when the deluge came. It was the plains homologue of the other major Vaiṣṇava place of pilgrimage, Badarikāśrama. The political center of this Middle Region was Kānyakubja. Kalhaṇa depicts Lalitāditya as taking command of that center (which, with the historian's hindsight, he probably made more important than it was).<sup>99</sup> He says of Lalitāditya that "The land of Kānyakubja from the bank of the Yamunā to that of the Kālikā was as much in his power as the courtyard of his palace" (RT IV.145, tr. Stein) and that "swelled with pride, the king granted the land of Kānyakubja with its villages to the [shrine of] Āditya [which he erected] at that [town of] Lalitapura" (built by his architect while Lalitāditya was away) (RT IV.187, tr. Stein); but that was not all that Lalitāditya did. He located the new capital of Parihāsapura that he built in Kashmir near the confluence of the Vitastā (Jhelum) and Sindhu (Sind) rivers.<sup>100</sup> The reason for this choice of location was that Lalitāditya and other Kashmiris, having listened to the discourse of the NP, had come to consider the Vitastā and Sindhu to be homologous with the Yamunā and the Gaṅgā, respectively, and that the confluence of the two was a Prayāga.<sup>101</sup> Lalitāditya and his court filled out this homology by making Parihāsapura a new Kanauj.

The archeological evidence indicates that this was not just an idle thought. Stein and later scholars have described the remains of six major structures on the plateaus at this site, corresponding to six that Kalhaṇa describes in his chronicle.<sup>102</sup> The three (A–C) on the lower of the two plateaus were Buddhist: a stupa or pagoda built not by the king but by a minister, Cankuna; a "royal monastery" (*rājavihāra*); and a meeting hall with a giant (*bṛhat*) image of the Buddha, facing east.<sup>103</sup> The three (D–F) on the higher of the two plateaus were probably Vaiṣṇava. One housed the (presumably four-faced) image of Viṣṇu that Kalhaṇa calls Parihāsakeśava, after the new capital Muktāpīḍa built. Another had installed in it the image named after himself, Muktākeśava. The third apparently contained an image of Viṣṇu as the "giant boar." Standing high above this ensemble was a pillar mounted by Viṣṇu's vehicle, the eagle.<sup>104</sup> At least two of these temples appear to have been larger than

<sup>99</sup>Its position, tentative after the death of Harṣa, was not secured until the rule of the Pratihāras in the ninth century: D. C. Sircar, *The Kānyakubja-Gauda Struggle from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century A.D.* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1985), pp. 20–21.

<sup>100</sup>Not to be confused with the Indus River.

<sup>101</sup>Ved Kumari Ghai, *Nilamata Purāṇa, Cultural Study*, pp. 29–30, 45.

<sup>102</sup>M. A. Stein in note F on RT IV.194–204 in 2: 300–3; Ram Chandra Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir* (London: India Society, 1933), pp. 146–49.

<sup>103</sup>A [Cankuna's stupa] on a platform 127'6" square surrounded by a wall 400' x 300'; B [Rājavihāra], with 26 cells, about 170' square; C [Caitya], 27' square on a double platform about 160' square]

<sup>104</sup>D [Muktākeśava], Peristyle = 258' x 209' (Sahni); E [Parihāsakeśava], 295' x 247' (Sahni); F [Mahāvarāha]; and Govardhanadhara = Garuḍadhvaja, 54 cubits high.



the other large temple of Lalitāditya that remains standing in Kashmir, the temple of the Sun at Martand.<sup>105</sup>

The *VDhP*, we recall, describes a Sarvatobhadra temple.<sup>106</sup> The text clearly places this temple, to be used for the installation of the main liturgical image of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas, the Vaikuṇṭha, peculiar to the Kārkoṭa Nāgas, at the apex of this scale of temple forms.<sup>107</sup> It was to be the site for an elaborate liturgy that demonstrated the superiority of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism. Unfortunately the ruinous condition of the remains at Parihāsapura does not permit us to ascertain whether the two large temples of Viṣṇu that Lalitāditya erected there were built along lines recommended for a Sarvatobhadra temple, as was his other temple at Pratāpapura and that of the later Avantivarman.<sup>108</sup> The evidence leaves little doubt, however, that Lalitāditya built monumental temples in the course of demonstrating his and the Pāñcarātrins' claim to universal precedence. The author of the *VDhP* faced a difficulty in doing this, however, one that was closely coordinated with the problem of making Kashmir itself into a Middle Region. We may suppose that Lalitāditya attempted to build temples in accord with the Sarvatobhadra plans of the *VDhP*, for that text addresses this problem. In the course of doing so, he provides us with an excellent example of how the *VDhP* and its historical circumstances were articulative of one another.

The Kashmiri style of temple building, which used a hipped or pyramidal roof (*kūṭa*) and trefoil arched doorways (*candraśālā*) instead of porticos, was not only distinct from other styles, it was apparently one that even the *VDhP* recognized as regional rather than universal or imperial—good enough to be followed in Kashmir's imperial kingdom, but hardly sufficient for a Kashmiri court and a Pāñcarātra disciplinary order that wished to make claims to hegemony over all of India, the "entire earth," for its way of life. The style that the *VDhP* recognized as emblematic of a claim to universal rule was the style associated with the Gangetic plains, and especially the Middle Region of India in the sixth and seventh centuries. This style included a curvilinear spire (topped with an *āmalasāraka*, myrobalan), commonly called a *śikhara*, as its roof.<sup>109</sup> Examples of temples built in this style can be found near Kashmir in Kangra (Masrur) and Rajasthan (Osian), and in the Panjab (Kafir Kot) from the eighth century.<sup>110</sup>

Here is what the complex author of the *VDhP* did to solve this problem. It began the chapter on temple types, named after mountains, with a description of

<sup>105</sup> The enclosure wall of Martand measures 220' x 142'; the shrine has three distinct chambers: the outer (*ardhamanḍapa*) is 18' 10" sq.; the middle (*antarāla*) is 18' x 4' 6"; and the innermost (*garbhagrha*) is 18' 5" x 13' 10". The height was about 70'; Kak, *Ancient Monuments*, pp. 131–33, Plates 53, 73.

<sup>106</sup> R. Inden, "The Temple and the Hindu Chain of Being," in *L'Espace du temple: Espaces, itinéraires, médiations*, edited by Jean-Claude Galey, Collection Purusartha, 8 (Paris: EHESS, 1985), pp. 53–73.

<sup>107</sup> T. S. Maxwell gives a brief but critical review of the literature on this image, of which numerous examples have come to light; in *Viśvarūpa* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 125–30.

<sup>108</sup> For the Avantisvāmin temple at Avantīpur, see Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Periods)* (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons, 1971), plates 137 and 138.

<sup>109</sup> Later texts refer to this temple style as Nāgara: M. A. Dhaky, *The Indian Temple Forms in Karṇāṭa Inscriptions and Architecture* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1977), pp. 7–8.

<sup>110</sup> The superstructures of the latter are of particular importance; Maurizio Taddei, *India* (Geneva: Nagel, 1970), p. 99, plates 144, 147–49; see also Brown, *Indian Architecture*, plate 82.

the temple called Himavān, which I read as an elaboration of the stone temples extant in Kashmir. The *VDhP* actually describes these under the name of the Śveta temple. Nowhere, however, does the text say that the Himavān and its variants are particular to Kashmir. As the text proceeds, permuting and varying temple features, types that are quite different from this first group appear. All of this prepares the way for the description of the Sarvatobhadra in the next chapter. The main shrine of that temple, the one that was to house the four-faced image of Vāsudeva and his eight consorts, was to have porticos (*maṇḍapa*) and to be built with curvilinear towers (*śikhara*) surmounted by cogged ringstones (*āmalaśāraka*) provided with tracery work (*jāla*) and dormer windows (*gavākṣa*). At the same time, however, the text calls for smaller ancillary shrines to be built around this one in the Himavān style.

Some might consider this mixing yet another product of Hinduism's inherently wandering, dreamy mind. I prefer to see it as an example of how historical circumstances acted to articulate the text. The author of the *VDhP* constructed a new composite temple type because it envisioned the prospect of transforming the Kashmiri imperial kingship into the paramount kingship of India. In order to accomplish this, the complex author of the text thought it desirable to appropriate the temple style that princes recognized as emblematic of universal rule, that of the Gangetic plains, and combine it with an elaboration of the local Kashmiri style—the latter clearly in a peripheral position yet also clearly acting to distinguish the Sarvatobhadra from temples built in this general style elsewhere in India. The distinctive style that emerged from this rearticulation would have the effect of marking Kashmir as the universal center. It is a great pity that the archeological evidence is not good enough to show whether or not Lalitāditya's Pāñcarātra temples were full realizations of the Sarvatobhadra plan.<sup>111</sup>

Squaring the Kashmiri style with the universal style of northern India was not the only problem Lalitāditya and his Pāñcarātra preceptor had to confront in their drive to constitute a Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava kingship as the paramount kingship of India. Just as important was the problem of how to relate Theism (whether Pāñcarātra or Pāśupata) as the hegemonic way of life in India to Buddhism. As already noted, Vaiṣṇavas appropriated various Buddhist forms and combined them with their own to fashion new Vaiṣṇava forms. Although Buddhism was subhegemonic in seventh and eighth century Kashmir, it had exercised hegemony there, especially when Kashmir was a part of the Kuṣāṇa-Śātavāhana imperial formation of the first and second centuries A.D.. Next door, however, in the rival kingdom of the Śāhis and among the Turkish and Indo-Iranian rulers to the north and west of Kashmir, Buddhism continued to prevail over Theism.<sup>112</sup> Lalitāditya apparently

<sup>111</sup>Although Martand had a semi-portico (*ardhamāṇḍapa*) rather than four full porticos, it appears to have had a hipped roof, but the claim being made on its behalf was not the same as for the Pāñcarātra temples.

<sup>112</sup>Of Kapiśa, center of the Śāhi imperial kingdom before Turks took it, Xuanzang says: "The king is a Kṣatriya by caste. He is of a shrewd character (nature), and being brave and determined, he has brought into subjection the neighbouring countires, some ten of which he rules. He cherishes his people with affection, and reverences much the three precious objects of worship. Every year [periodically] he

met this challenge by making a Buddhist and a Turk, Cankuna, one of his major ministers and giving him permission to build a large stupa on a site at Parihāsapura, the new capital. Moreover, Kalhaṇa records the king himself as having built a royal monastery and stūpa at the same place. These structures were even larger than the Vaiṣṇava temples Lalitāditya built.

On first sight this would seem to contradict the notion of Theism as the hegemonic way of life of the imperial formation that Muktāpīḍa articulated; and, indeed, Buddhists could claim that their way of life was or remained hegemonic in that formation. A closer look, however, at Kalhaṇa and the *VDhP* tells us otherwise. In the first place, by the seventh and eighth centuries many of the Buddhist structures and images that kings had erected were gigantic.<sup>113</sup> It would hardly have done for Lalitāditya, as overlord of the earth, to support the erection of Buddhist structures that were smaller than those of his predecessors if he was to outshine them. Contemporary Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples were, however, smaller affairs. So Lalitāditya could outbuild his Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva rivals without resorting to gigantism. But then how would he manage to persuade people that Theism and not Buddhism was the hegemonic way of life of the world?

Kalhaṇa's text lets me argue that Lalitāditya adopted a two-pronged strategy. First, he used a distinction between quality and quantity to get around the problem of Buddhist gigantism. Lalitāditya, we are told, spent the same amount of money on each of the five structures that he himself built at Parihāsapura. He also spent equivalent amounts for the images erected in four of them, 84,000 measures of metal. The catch was that he did not use the same metal for those images. He caused the image of the Buddha to be made of copper, and had the three Vaiṣṇava images made of (or decked with) the more precious metals: Parihāsakeśava and Garuḍa of silver, Muktākeśava and Mahāvarāha of gold. As a result, the images in the lower shrines would have been larger than in the higher shrines, but consist of an inferior form of metal.<sup>114</sup>

We can detect a second strategy in the *VDhP*. The way in which that text represented the Buddhist "reliquary" monuments (*stūpa*) made it possible for Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas of the time to see these monuments as Vaiṣṇava structures. The text devotes a chapter (III.84.1–15) to the design for erecting what it refers to as an *aīḍūka*. This is none other than a tall pagoda (or dagoba) corresponding in most details with at least one miniature stūpa represented in a Kashmiri bronze of the period.<sup>115</sup> After saying how the structure is to be constructed, it then tells what each of the elements signifies within a Theist cosmology. The round pole that sticks up through the top is Brahṁā, the rounded part of the structure, which it calls a phallic sign (*liṅga*), is Śiva, and the base is Viṣṇu. Nowhere does the *VDhP* directly label the structure as

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makes a silver figure of Buddha eighteen feet high and at the same time he convokes an assembly called the Mokṣa Mahāpariṣad where he gives alms to the poor and wretched, and relieves the bereaved." *Xiyouji* 1: 54–55.

<sup>113</sup>For example, the temple at Nālandā and the image of the Buddha at Bāmiyān.

<sup>114</sup>We would also expect the larger Buddhist buildings to be less ornate and the smaller Vaiṣṇava ones more ornately and delicately carved.

<sup>115</sup>The so-called Rockefeller bronze sits between two of these stūpas; Pratapaditya Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir* (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1975) pp. 106–7, plates 30a, 30b.



Buddhist, but it clearly indicates this in two ways. First, it gives Buddhist names for the four guardians of the directions it places in the sides of the rounded structure, where people would expect to see images of the Buddha. Moreover, all of them are to be garbed like the Sun, that is, in the dress of Indo-Iranians and Turks, the major devotees (in Pāñcarātra Kashmiri eyes) of the Buddha, rather than of Kashmiris and other Āryas. This iconographic placement has the effect of making the Buddhas into guardian deities of Viṣṇu's world (returning a favor which Buddhists had long ago extended to Indra, Brahmā, and other Vedic deities). Second, the name it gives to the structure is a term that the *MBh* used to denote buildings that Śūdra kings would build at the end of the Age of Strife when the world was turned upside down.<sup>116</sup> People used the term *aiḍūka* (or *eḍūka*) itself to designate a wall or other structure that contained bones and other rubble. To call a stūpa a refined rubbish heap was hardly flattering, but also accurate if we remember that it was supposed to contain "relics" of the Buddha, and that a Theist temple would not incorporate any human remains.<sup>117</sup> So the *VDhP* accommodates the large and distinctively Buddhist stupas that any imperial ruler of its time would have had to build or to allow to be constructed.<sup>118</sup> The text provides it with a denigrating name while describing it in honorific terms as a building that should be built; it indicates that it is somehow foreign, yet shows how it can be homologized with and placed in a Theist cosmological framework.

To sum up: true knowing for people living in the world was, in the epistemology of the *VDhP*, a question of being able to recognize homologies, of being able to see the resemblances of one's present situation with those of the past. To do this, however, was not simply a matter of "imitating" the fixed knowledge of a remote, dead past. People lived in a world that was seen to be changing. True knowledge in an ultimate sense was permanent and eternal, but only Viṣṇu and those who had become permanently like him had this perfect knowledge. People, situated in a changing world could not have such knowledge. They had to "remember" (*smṛ*) knowledge of Viṣṇu, with his help in one of his sagely manifestations, in their own present circumstances. This was a gradual, ongoing process, one that a person could come even close to completing only after a long period of time encompassing several lives. It was also a changing process. Different persons in changed circumstances had to use differing modes of knowledge and perform different acts in order to attain to full participation in Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa.

My own attempt to "determine" the human, historic composer and listener of the *VDhP* by showing homologies is "speculative," but then there is no way, given the process by which such a text came to be composed, that we could ever establish its authorship and provenance in such a way as to satisfy conventional

<sup>116</sup>III.188.64–66.

<sup>117</sup>The term pagoda, from the Portuguese *pagode* is apparently a "corruption" of the Sinhala term *dāgāba* (whence *dagoba* in English). This term is derived from the Pāli term *dhātugabbha* (Skt., *dhātugarbha*), "container of constituent ingredients (of the Buddha)."

<sup>118</sup>Pratapaditya Pal, "The *Aiḍūka* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* and Certain Aspects of Stūpa Symbolism," *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*. New Series 4 (1971–72), 49–62, takes the most sensible approach to this interesting structure, and I largely follow his lead.

empiricist criteria. Nonetheless, this approach does allow us to reconstruct the actual practices of the Vaiṣṇavas of the period, something that the older authorist and contextualist approaches to the Purāṇas do not permit. We do not, however, simply see the practices of eighth-century Indians through the *VDhP*. Instead of treating the *VDhP* as a document, as a more or less accurate “source,” we look upon the practices of text making and text use as an integral part of this new cultural history.

## Conclusion

The first person to have the *VDhP* recited by a bard in his king’s court was undoubtedly a Pāñcarātra Brāhmaṇ who saw himself as a homologue of the great sage Mārkaṇḍeya; and his royal listener, the man who was supposed to carry out the orders of Viṣṇu revealed in the text, surely thought of himself as a homologue of Vajra, if not of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa himself. I have looked at the *VDhP* as a text both articulative of and articulated by a complex author. I have shown how that author, through a dialogical process, articulated not only itself but the intertexts of Indian traditions as a scale of texts from a Pāñcarātra perspective. Finally, I have shown how the text was both articulative of and articulated by its historical circumstances. Both the discursive focus and the narrative ordering of the contents of the text can be made sense of in detail by seeing them as a dialogical response to the political and soteriological situation that obtained in the seventh and eighth centuries, in Kashmir and, more widely, in India. The text was not, however, just a passive response to events. It was also an intervention. It called on an imperial court to articulate the kingdoms of India in an imperial formation that would appear as a manifestation of the Pāñcarātra representation of Viṣṇu. At the same time, it also called for the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas (albeit without naming them as such), an order of householders that performed the Vedic liturgy but dedicated it to Viṣṇu, to accept the leadership of the Pāñcarātrins. Once an order of forest-dwellers who dedicated themselves exclusively to honoring images of Viṣṇu, some had descended to the plains to establish their liturgy in houses and temples, albeit without Vedic mantras and fires. The result of this double articulation was to be an imperial formation centered on Kashmir, one in which the Theism of the Pāñcarātrins and Pāśupatas, with its liturgy of images and temples displacing the older Vedic orders’ sacrificialism, would be instituted as hegemonic. The textualized knowledge that had advocated the repositioning of these orders through the deployment of temple liturgies had been a new genre of texts, the Āgamas (in the wider sense). By suturing these texts to the older Vedic and Bhāgavata textual traditions in texts such as the *VDhP* and transforming themselves into temple liturgists, Theists in the eighth to tenth centuries made it possible for themselves and the imperial courts who followed this Theism to secure their hegemony over both the Vedic and Buddhist ways of life.

Kashmir’s day in the sun lasted for perhaps twenty-five years. Kashmir continued to be an imperial kingdom, but under a new dynasty it opted for a Śaiva

order as the preeminent form of Theism. As the Middle Region of India, however, it gave way to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of the Deccan, who retained their paramouncy for some two centuries. Many later orders of Vaiṣṇavas claimed descent, directly or indirectly, from these Pācarātrins of Kashmir. At each turn, however, these orders reworked themselves in dialogue with other orders and with the politics of the imperial formation in which they were situated. The texts in which they inscribed their practices and represented their tradition also changed. It would seem, for example, that the imperial formation to which that of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas finally yielded, the Cōḷa, had relatively little use for Purāṇas such as the *VDhP*. Under the Cōḷas and their major rivals and allies, the Āgamas came into their own as the definitive supplements to the Veda over much of imperial India.

As a result of my treatment of the *VDhP* as a text, I have been able to create new historiographic possibilities. By using the *VDhP*, the *NP*, and Kalhaṇa's *River of Kings* to read each other, we are better able to reconstruct the practices the two Purāṇas recount and the historical poem presupposes. I have thus shown, through a detailed analysis of the *VDhP*, that, if we alter our notion of a text as monological (and the authorist and contextualist assumptions that notion carries with it), a very different view of the Purāṇas is possible. We can then see them as dialogical, as both articulative of and articulated by the realities in which they are situated. We can see a Purāṇa as the claims of a complex and shifting author and reader to rework Indian textual traditions, supplementing them and transforming them into a scale of texts from the point of view of one or the other of India's soteriological or disciplinary orders, the so-called sects.

## Appendix: Authorism and Contextualism, Empiricism and Idealism in the Study of Purāṇas

Trained to believe that the essences of different genres can become blurred and overlaid in the course of time, philologists have attempted, since the time of H. H. Wilson, to cure these "perversions" through the comparison and editing of manuscripts. This enterprise has been dominated by an incoherent mixture of contextualism and authorism inflected by empiricist (or positivist) and idealist assumptions. Assuming that there was indeed an original Purāṇa, embodied in an ur-text that conformed to the norms of the genre, philologists have beavered away.<sup>119</sup> They have inventoried the Purāṇas, scoured other texts for references to them,

<sup>119</sup>H. H. Wilson, whose annotated translation of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, published in 1840, continues to be read today, criticized the earlier investigations into the "mythology and traditions" of the Hindus from the empiricist standpoint of a nineteenth-century philologist. His predecessors were erroneous because they had not adhered to the methods of "inductive philosophy" which, said Wilson, "draws its conclusions from the careful observation and accumulation of facts"; *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, Translated from the Original Sanskrit and Illustrated by Notes Derived Chiefly from Other Purāṇas*, translated by H. H. Wilson, introduced by R. C. Hazra (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1972), pp. lxx, lxxi. Wilson hoped that his translation of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, which he thought conformed most fully to the generic definition of a Purāṇa, would help to inaugurate a "sound and comprehensive survey of the Hindu system."



and prepared "critical" editions and translations of them.<sup>120</sup> The most recent of the attempts to survey Purāṇic texts and the scholarship on them is the excellent monograph of Ludo Rocher.<sup>121</sup>

Contextualist and empiricist Indologists' treatment of the *VDhP* does not differ from these more general treatments of the Purāṇas. One has attempted a critical edition of the chapters assumed to contain one essence of the text, the rules of kingship;<sup>122</sup> another has attempted a more extensive edition of that other essence of the *VDhP*, information on iconography and architecture.<sup>123</sup> Still others

<sup>120</sup>Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, translated by S. Ketkar (Calcutta: University of Calcutta) 1 (1927), 517–86; Hazra, "The Purāṇas," 240–70 and Hazra, "The Upapurāṇas," in *The Cultural Heritage of India* ([1937] Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958–86) 2 (1962), 271–86. Wilson based his own translation of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* on his critical reading of seven manuscripts of that text: *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, p. lxxi. A German philologist, Willibald Kiefel, extended this project when he published his critical edition of the chapters from the printed texts of some dozen Purāṇas in 1927. His object was to discover the extent to which there was an original text corresponding to the generic essence of a Purāṇa. He concluded that there most probably was no ur-text, at least not one that is presently recoverable: *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa, Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder/Verlag, 1927), p. xlviii. Haraprasad Shastri raised serious doubts about this generic essentialism, but to little avail; "The Maha-Puranas," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 14 (1928), 323–40.

The same year that Kiefel published his study also saw the publication of the first fascicle of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*), edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar et al. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1927–59) in 19 volumes. Philological scholarship on the Purāṇas has, since Independence, taken its cue from that effort. A Purāṇa Committee was established by the All India Kashiraj Trust at Varanasi in 1959; Suniti Kumar Chatterji, "The Purāṇas: Projected Critical Editions by the Kasiraja Trust of Varanasi," *Purāṇa* 1.1 (July 1959), 12–15; Anand Swarup Gupta, "A Brief Account of the Works of the Purāṇa-Department of the All India Kasiraja Trust," *Purāṇa* 1.1 (July 1959), 16–20. The Trust began the publication in that same year of a journal, *Purāṇa*, and to date has published, under Gupta, critical editions along with English translations of three Purāṇas—*Vāmana* (1967 and 1968), *Kārma* (1971 and 1972), and *Varāha* (1981), with the *Matsya* to follow soon. It purports to follow roughly the principles laid down by Sukthankar in his "Prolegomena" for the *MBh* 1: i–civ. He took a manuscript in the Śāradā script from Kashmir as the "norm" because "it contains relatively little matter that is not found, at the same time, in all other versions of both recensions" (p. xlvii, emphasis his). The oldest dated manuscript (A.D. 1511) was in Nepali (p. lix). The Devanāgarī manuscripts are based on the southern, eastern, or northern traditions (p. lxii). That is, there is no text preserved from the so-called Aryan heartland (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar).

<sup>121</sup>Ludo Rocher, "The Purāṇas," in *Epics and Sanskrit Religious Literature*, vol. 2.3 of *A History of Indian Literature*, edited by Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1986), 3. Also worthy of mention is the detailed and helpful *Epic and Purāṇic Bibliography (up to 1985) annotated and with indexes*, compiled under the direction of Heinrich von Stietencron (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1992), part 1 (A–R); part 2 (S–Z, Indexes).

<sup>122</sup>A pupil of Kiefel, Hans Losch, in *Rajadharma: Einsetzung und Aufgabenkreis des Königs im Lichte des Purāṇa's* (Bonn: Universität Bonn, 1959), has edited 21 chapters of part 2, collating them with similar or identical passages in the *Matsya* and *Agni* Purāṇas and using those passages that appear in later digests to provide alternate readings. Although a useful compilation, this effort does not yield a common, prior text. The *Matsya* includes many of the chapters on statecraft contained in the *VDhP*, but does not contain those on the royal liturgy that the latter text includes. The compilers of the *Agni* employ a different principle: they include abridged versions of both kinds of chapters. My own view is that the text of the *VDhP*, longer than both the others (instead of shorter, as a proper ur-text ought to be), is the earliest of the three.

<sup>123</sup>Priyabala Shah has produced a critical edition of these chapters, III.1–118, in *Viṣṇudharmottara: Third Khanda* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1958). There is a separate edition of the *Citrāsātra*, III.35–43, edited by Asoke Chatterjee (Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1971), and the earlier

have analyzed the contents of the text in order to place it in time and space. The more modest efforts from this empiricist angle have reached the following conclusion. Most of the manuscripts collected are from Kashmir and in the Śārādā script of that region, or are based on a Kashmir manuscript.<sup>124</sup> The text itself, moreover, exhibits a greater familiarity with the rivers and pilgrimage places (*tīrthas*) of Kashmir and of the adjacent Panjab region.<sup>125</sup> The *VDhP* incorporates verses from the *Bṛhat-saṃhitā* of Varāhamihira, who wrote in Malwa in the sixth century.<sup>126</sup> Abu Riḥān Alberūnī, the Arab savant who stayed in India (A.D. 1017–30) appears to have had a manuscript of the text in his possession and includes numerous excerpts from it in his *Kitāb-u'l-Hind*.<sup>127</sup> The *VDhP* is, thus a text composed in Kashmir or the adjacent Panjab sometime between A.D. 600 and 1000.

Although no ur-text true to the Purāṇic genre has emerged from these labors, some of the scholarship that has resulted is certainly useful. Rocher is, therefore, correct in the rather skeptical position that he takes with respect to the methods of text criticism.<sup>128</sup> We can infer from his doubts that authorism and empiricism might prepare a scholar to make sense of his own textual tradition, where to a certain extent this metaphysics has been made to come true, but it has not served him well in the Indian case, especially when dealing with the Purāṇas and Epics. Insofar as one remains committed, whether implicitly or explicitly, to this notion of

translation by Stella Kramrisch, *The Viṣṇudharmottara* (part 3): *A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image-Making* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1928).

<sup>124</sup>Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas*, 1: 155–57, and Shah's introduction to her edition, *Viṣṇudharmottara: Third Khaṇḍa*, 1: xv–xviii. The only "complete" printed version of the text is the one edited by Madhusūdana and Mādhavaprasāda Śarmā and printed at the Śrīveṅkaṭeśvara Steam Press at Bombay in 1912. Like other Sanskrit works printed there, it takes the form of an ancient manuscript with elongated pages. Reprinted with a preface (*bhūmikā*) consisting of a summary of the contents in Sanskrit, by Cārudeva Śāstrī, and a second volume, an alphabetical index of verses by Nag Sharan Singh (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1985).

<sup>125</sup>Hazra, *Studies*, 1: 214–16. Although Hazra is correct about the prominence given to places in the Panjab, he is on less firm ground regarding Kashmir. There is only one story about a site in Kashmir itself. But at I.139.9–16, in connection with reverential offerings to the forefathers (*śrāddha*), the *VDhP* states that Nṛvarāha, after rescuing the Earth at the beginning of a cosmic formation, becomes a stone image at Vārāhaparvata (Baramula in Kashmir), and gives the rule for offering balls of rice (*piṇḍas*) there.

<sup>126</sup>Kane, *HD*, 5 (1962–74), 876–78, 910, who thus disposes of attempts to place the text in the "classical" Gupta period. Hazra had placed the text between A.D. 400 and 500, claiming that it did not refer to or utilize the works of Varāhamihira; *Studies*, 1: 205–12. P. Shah placed it between 450 and 650, *Viṣṇudharmottara: Third Khaṇḍa*, 1: xxvi. Much earlier, Georg Bühler, in his review of *Alberuni's India*, had opted for A.D. 500 as the latest date for the composition of the *VDhP* on the grounds that Brahmagupta, who completed his astronomical work, *Brahmasphuṭasiddhānta*, at Bhinmal, Rajasthan, in A.D. 628, is said by later commentators to have based it on the *Paitāmahasiddhānta*, a text that he found in the *VDhP*; *Indian Antiquary* 19 (1890), 408. But the only inference that can safely be drawn from this statement is that by the time of these commentators, an independent text of the *Paitāmahasiddhānta* no longer existed. For the date of Varāhamihira, see R. C. Majumdar, "Astronomy," in *HCIP*, 3 (1954), 323.

<sup>127</sup>Bühler's review of Edward C. Sachau's English translation of *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India, about A.D. 1030* (London: Trübner, 1888) in 2 volumes; *Indian Antiquary* 19 (1890), 381–410.

<sup>128</sup>Note also the controversy that Madeleine Biardeau started regarding the value of "critical editions": "Some More Considerations about Textual Criticism," *Purāṇa* 10.2 (July 1968), 115–23; A. S. Gupta, "A Problem of Puranic Text-Reconstruction," *Purāṇa* 12.2 (July 1970), 304–21, replies.

author and text, one will continue to confront insurmountable obstacles in coming to grips with texts that have been rewritten several times over.

Some Indologists, confronted with the persistent failure to come up with discretely authored texts, have lapsed into philological formalism, content to display their methods for the dissection of dead texts. Others, however, were tempted by other forms of contextualism. Many, for example, believed that the Epics and Purāṇas were originally the expressions of a warrior class, the Kṣatriyas, when India was, presumably, in a "heroic" or "barbaric" stage of development that ended with the great war of the *MBh*. Later, a class of priests appropriated these texts, vastly distorting and overlaying the historic, bardic kernel of the text with religious and mythological material. The whole point of textual criticism here has been to recover this heroic order in its pristine historic representation.<sup>129</sup>

Efforts to reconstruct the political chronology of an "ancient" India after the great war, using the Epics and Purāṇas as "sources" are similar. And social historians have attempted to discern what was going on in Indian society.<sup>130</sup> The Protestant or secularist outlook regarding the generic authors of the Purāṇas, the Brāhmaṇs, is a psychological reductionism of the utilitarian variety: they made additions to the Purāṇas with an eye on their own household budgets, foisting innumerable superstitious practices, virtually all of which brought economic benefit to themselves, onto a credulous populace. Not surprisingly, the empiricists have tended to see the Hinduism of the Purāṇas as symptomatic of India's decline from a more heroic or secular condition to one of increasing religion and superstition, especially after the "classical age" of the Guptas and the onset of the "middle ages." Needless to say, few empiricists have been prepared to take these texts seriously as expounding different ways of life.

The result of strict adherence to the authorist and empiricist approach to the Purāṇas has, of course, almost invariably entailed the atomization of the texts as transmitted in manuscript form. Subjected to the withering gaze of the philologist, the Purāṇic corpus disintegrates. Some scholars have objected to this approach from the perspective of a philosophical idealism that can be traced to the romantic, mostly German, response to the rise of a cosmology of science. Responding to the scholars who want to disintegrate a Purāṇa and date its separate parts, Vasudeva Sharana Agrawala says:

But the problem of the Purāṇa literature is not in the hands of chronology, for it should be clearly understood that in almost all the Purāṇas the process

<sup>129</sup>F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* ([1922] Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972). U. N. Ghoshal summarizes the attempts to reconstruct political history before the Bharata battle out of the Purāṇic genealogies in *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1965), pp. 37-48.

<sup>130</sup>The most important work done under this heading is probably that of Rajendra Chandra Hazra. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1936 and published in 1940, remains the most ambitious and detailed attempt to write a history of Hinduism out of the Purāṇas. Like those before and after him, Hazra held that the critical analysis of the Purāṇas was necessary if scholars were to be able to use them as sources for religious and social history; see "The Purāṇas," in *The Cultural Heritage of India* 2 (1962), 266; and his *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Dacca: University of Dacca, Bulletin no. 20, 1940).



of *Upabriṃhaṇa* [or augmenting] was operative from the very beginning and upto later times. It is pejorative to speak of it as interpolation. It is legitimate to understand *Upabriṃhaṇa* as a sacred obligation of authorship to keep the text up to date by revising its contents as often as necessary—an approved method applicable to our Encyclopaedias in modern times. The hand of editing or redacting is visible in all the Purāṇas. It should therefore be accepted that the existing Puranic texts have gained in size and scope by the deliberate technique of *Upabriṃhaṇa*.<sup>131</sup>

This view, which appears to be grounded in an Indian cultural distinction, seems on first sight to be a definite improvement on the empiricist idea of authorship. Rocher, himself an empiricist, emphasizes the importance of the Purāṇas as “oral” texts, pointing to the role of the bard (*sūta*, the later *bhāṭ*) and, like Agrawala, questions the validity of attempts to treat them as closed texts attributable to historically locatable authors. Yet Agrawala’s view is not without difficulties, for he and those who concur do not provide an explanation from within any Indian metaphysics of the “sacred obligation” to augment the Purāṇas. On the contrary, his comparison with modern encyclopedias suggests that ancient Indians had a theory of knowledge that was progressing, like modern science, toward the truth. Elsewhere, Agrawala implies just the opposite, that the varying Purāṇas express the unchanging metaphysical truths of the Vedas.<sup>132</sup> Rocher’s invocation of an oral tradition does not really solve anything, either; it simply defers the difficulties encountered in coming to terms with texts that existed in *both* oral and written forms to the problem of understanding the formation and use of oral texts. He also seems momentarily to have forgotten that some of the most important texts in ancient India were transmitted orally.<sup>133</sup>

As we might expect, idealists have been prepared to see the Purāṇas as religious texts, and many studies interpreting their religious contents have appeared. At last, perhaps, we are on the right track.<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, however, the idealists are just as essentialist and antihistorical as the empiricists. The difference is that the essence that the idealists presuppose, religious rather than linguistic, is a classical Brahmanism or Hinduism expressed by the religious leader or philosopher. That religion consists of the sacrificial “cult” of the Brāhmaṇas and “pantheist mysticism” of the Upaniṣads. Its highest, most authentic flowering was that of

<sup>131</sup> Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study* (Ramnagar, Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust, 1963), pp. iii–iv.

<sup>132</sup> Agrawala, “Editorial,” *Purāṇa* 1.2 (1960), 118–19.

<sup>133</sup> This deferral runs into problems when, for example, Stuart H. Blackburn reports that for the bow tradition of singers among the low-caste Nadars, “palm-leaf manuscripts are considered the most authentic form of a story”; *Singing of Birth and Death: Texts in Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 28. Frits Staal would seem to oppose Rocher’s link of orality with instability in a tradition in his argument about the precise oral transmission of the Veda: *The Fidelity of Oral Tradition and the Origins of Science* Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie von Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, 49.8 (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 23–29; Staal goes too far, though, in implying that orality was the essence of Indian high tradition. David Pingree criticizes him in a review for downgrading the importance of writing and manuscripts in Indian traditions, reminding us that more manuscripts have been recovered from India than from any other comparable area; *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108.4 (1988), 637–78.

<sup>134</sup> Most notable here are the monographs of V. S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa—A Study* and *Vāmana Purāṇa, a Study* (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1964).

Smārta or "traditional" Brahmanism, as interpreted in Mīmāṃsā ("exegesis" of the sacrificial texts), and especially in the Advaita ("non-dualist") Vedānta of the philosopher Śaṅkara, the creative genius held up here. Consistent with this assumption, the idealist strain of scholarship considers the "religious" rather than the "historical" portions of the Purāṇas as their essence, and the scholars who have taken this approach have tended to be historians of religion first and philologists second.

The idealist stance, like the estheticist tendency of authorism, sees the Purāṇas as texts that are expressive of mind—not of the individual geniuses of their authors but of the spiritual genius of the Hindu mind. Idealists consider the Hinduism of the Purāṇas as the historical outcome of the progressive (or, perhaps, degenerative) "influence" of an elite, Aryan, pantheist, and spiritualist religion on a folk, popular, or mass religion that is non-Aryan, polytheistic, and materialist. They suture the "sectarian" religions of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism to the elite Brāhmaṇic subject of classical Hinduism by treating their devotionism as lower, popularized forms of the ideal, unitary religious essence of India. The Purāṇas are texts that are both indexical of that influence and, at the same time, the instruments of it. Or, couched in more relational terms, the Purāṇas are expressions of a great religious tradition that has clothed its abstract, elite philosophy in mythological and symbolic language so that everyone, even Śūdras and women, can understand it. As for the authors, the idealists tend to see the Brāhmaṇs who composed and transmitted the Purāṇas and the bards who recited them not as self-seeking, but as the imperfect instruments of their transcendent religion. That religion itself is the true, unchanging and unitary Author of these texts. The result of this approach is to elide over differences because, it is assumed, they are inherently divisive. They are to be tolerated only if some underlying (and inevitably banal) unity can be teased out of them. Since, in my estimate, the problematic of most of the Purāṇas is that of differences among disciplinary orders, study of the contents of these texts remains perennially postponed.<sup>135</sup>

Roland Barthes, the French structuralist, distinguishes "works" from "texts." A "work," briefly, is the closed expression of a particular "author." A "text," by contrast, is open and "authorless." The reader is the one who determines its meaning, and since there are many readers there are many significations.<sup>136</sup> It would seem that the Purāṇas are nearly perfect exemplifications of the Barthean text. That being the case, the direction scholarship on such texts would want to take is to look at the way in which different Indian users of the Purāṇas, situated in different circumstances, have understood these texts. Alas, this has not been the direction of more recent scholarship. Rocher's criticisms of previous and ongoing efforts to edit and analyze the Purāṇas are, in my view, largely correct. One cannot, however, agree with the major reason for his criticisms and with the "consequences" he thinks

<sup>135</sup>Studies attempting uncritically to combine both empiricist and idealist approaches in a formulaic way abound; see for example Siddheswar Jena, *The Narasimha Purāṇam: A Study*, "Foreword," by H. V. Stietencron (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1987), the first in a Purāṇa Vidyā Series.

<sup>136</sup>Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, edited by J. V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 73–81.

should follow for future research. His argument that the Purāṇas are essentially oral texts and that the manuscript versions of these texts are "accidental" compilations leads him to conclude that we should abandon dealing with the written Purāṇas as whole works, for no such things exist or ever have existed. What we should do instead is to take up the study of what Rocher refers to as mini-Purāṇas, the stories, legends, and other parts of the written Purāṇas, because these are more "basic" than the "conglomerations" in which they have been transmitted.<sup>137</sup> He argues that the comparison of these smaller texts will not lead us back to their originals, but will give us "at least some idea of the vast richness with which certain themes have been treated." He shows that some scholars have already, in effect, done this. The difficulty that I have with this is that it brings us full circle; was it not the very richness of these texts that we were trying to account for and reduce in the first place?

Certainly Rocher's point about mini-Purāṇas is not without basis. Many present-day Hindus probably do know the Purāṇas in the form of extracts rather than as integrated wholes. Indian religious practices have not escaped the process of commodification and the atomization of knowledge accompanying it that has occurred in India over the last two centuries. There are also good reasons to believe that people in India have always made use of extracts and condensations in a range of circumstances. There is no reason, however, why we should assume that oral texts must necessarily be fragmentary. More importantly, it does not follow that using extracts from the Purāṇas precludes the use of the written Purāṇas as wholes.<sup>138</sup> Finally, the impression that this approach leaves—that popular, orally transmitted knowledge is presumed to be an almost pointless flux of stories and that Purāṇic texts, in Sanskrit, virtually nobody's mother tongue, are arbitrary, unconscious accumulations—brings us back to the orientalist notion of an Indian mind unable to escape from its dreamlike imagination.<sup>139</sup> We are also close to the postmodernist's infinite play of signifiers or the "magical realism" that supposedly characterizes (Third) World literature.

The predominant use that Western scholars have made of the Epics and Purāṇas in recent decades rests squarely on the orientalist idea of a prerational Indian mind. Sidestepping the problems both of philology and of looking at Purāṇas

<sup>137</sup>Rocher, "Purāṇas," p. 98.

<sup>138</sup>Paul Hacker has tried to combine, in a thoughtful way, both empiricist and "history of ideas" approaches in "Zur Methode der geschichtlichen Erforschung der anonymen Sanskritliteratur des Hinduismus" [1961] in his *Kleine Schriften*, edited by Lambert Schmithausen (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978), pp. 8–17, and "Purāṇen und Geschichte des Hinduismus: methodologische, programmatische und geistesgeschichtliche Bemerkungen" [1957] in his *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 1–7. Carrying on Kierke's project in "The Sāṅkhyization of the Emanation Doctrine Shown in a Critical Analysis of Texts," in *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 167–204, he argues that the core of the *Mārkaṇḍeya* is the oldest of the Purāṇa texts (c. A.D. 300), followed by the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* nucleus (c. A.D. 335), that of the *Padma*, then the *Viṣṇu* (c. A.D. 500), and, finally, the *Kūrma* (7–8th century). In at least one respect, his willingness to take seriously the later parts of these texts as intellectual projects, Hacker anticipates what I urge in this essay—looking at a text as a scale of forms.

<sup>139</sup>R. Inden, *Imagining India*, chapters 1 and 2.



as textual wholes, Indianists have produced numerous studies of selected parts of them—for example, of cycles of “myths” about a god or goddess or some other topic—that are psychoanalytic, cultural, or structuralist in approach.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>The book by the Jungian scholar Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, edited by his student Joseph Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1946), whose own *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* ([1962] London: Penguin, 1976) carries on this tradition, can be taken as one of the founders of this selective approach. Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988–91) and Madeleine Biardeau, “Études de mythologie hindoue,” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 54 (1968), 19–45, 55 (1969), 97–105, 58 (1971), 17–83 published under the same title (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1982); 63 (1976), 111–263, 65 (1978), 87–237, partly follow Georges Dumézil. Wendy Doniger, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), partly follows Claude Lévi-Strauss. For criticisms, see R. Inden, *Imagining India*, pp. 122–27.