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For a multivocal history of the attitudes towards animals in South Asia: Concepts, ethics, practices, symbolism

edited by
Cinzia Pieruccini, Marco Franceschini,
Gianni Pellegrini and Antonio Rigopoulos

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Preface

Animal Studies, in their broadest sense, are a research field of primary importance in contemporary scholarship, since animal issues are nowadays increasingly called into question in all academic disciplines. The fundamental aims of these studies are both to rethink the boundaries between human and non-human species as well as to meet increasingly pressing ethical, ecological, and economical concerns.

In the context of South Asia, the relations between humans and animals have historically been addressed in many diverse and unique ways. Indeed, around these relations revolve some fundamental ideas that are a characteristic feature of the entire South Asian civilization and distinguish it from other cultures. Even today, special attitudes toward animals characterize the lives of millions of Indians. The peculiar and highly articulated sensitivity to animals in South Asian culture constitutes a challenge to European thought, not least by urging it to understand ethical systems as historical products rather than the expression of an assumed human 'essence.'

Some major points of the South Asian approach to the relation between human and non-human animals can be summarized as follows. To start with, a fundamental concept is represented by the round of rebirths, i.e. *saṃsāra*, which is articulated in a variety of distinct ways within Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina contexts: the alternation between human and animal incarnations is considered possible depending on the accumulated merits or demerits that make up an individual's *karman*. The concept of *saṃsāra* also provides a religious hierarchy which places man at the top of the evolutionary scale. Animals themselves are the object of detailed classifications that attribute to them different degrees of sensitivity and consciousness. Moreover, the ascription of consciousness and sentience to animals is expressed in a number of different ways in South Asian texts and practices.

Another widespread and essential concept is *ahiṃsā*, i.e. nonviolence, together with the elaboration of food codes concerning the prohibition of eating the meat of certain animals and, conversely, the various types of vegetarianism and their motivations. The genesis of *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism remains largely unclear, not least because of the chronological uncertainty of textual traditions. These ideologies, which make their first appearance around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, are preceded by the violence of the bloody Vedic sacrifices, which will continue to be practiced for a long time. To be sure, nonviolence and vegetarianism appear to be interdependent though they probably did not arise simultaneously. In their formative phase, the three great religions of South Asia—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism—interpret them in their own peculiar way. For

instance, ancient Buddhism in the Pāli Canon preaches a strict respect for living beings but does not forbid the monk to accept meat and fish in his quest for alms, provided that the food has not been prepared—i.e. 'killed'—especially for him. Jainism is the religion that most rigorously emphasizes *ahiṃsā* and the avoidance of the ingestion of even the smallest living creature.

The theriomorphic and therianthropic conceptions of divinities—patent in Viṣṇu's *avatāra*s—is a fundamental feature of Hinduism, whose genesis and meaning remain largely enigmatic. Some animals, such as the cobra, are deities themselves, and an animal is often the *vāhana* or 'vehicle' of Hindu deities. The relation between gods and animals is conceived in both contrastive and harmonious ways. Moreover, from the time of the ancient Buddhist literature up to the present, animals are the protagonists of many narratives, where they often play a broad symbolical or ideological mediating role, and are extensively portrayed in figurative arts, not only as a form of divine therianthropism but also in order to emphasize ethical, philosophical, and power-related values. It is important to stress that even though these conceptions originated in antiquity they are still very popular, particularly in the largely majoritarian Hindu communities.

On the other hand, other religions and cultures have historically overlapped and partly blended with these traditions. From the beginning of the 13th century, with the advent of Islam and especially with the Mughals, the main language became Persian. Later on, the British domination produced a cultural interaction whose effects are decisive to this day. In addition, aspects of South Asian civilization that are rooted in a remote past can only be studied in their contemporary expressions. The large subaltern strata (defined by caste or as Adivasis, i.e. 'primitive inhabitants' or 'tribals') of the Hindu social hierarchy have not had an independent voice in the great literary and artistic tradition. Yet they have determined various aspects of South Asian culture, following complex processes that have been called 'Sanskritization' and 'Deshification' by scholars. Ideas and beliefs that came 'from below' became acceptable to the culturally dominant classes and thus widely shared.

While various aspects of the relationship between human and non-human animals in South Asia have been the focus of many studies, several issues are still unsolved and need to be re-examined or studied *ex-novo* in the light of recent research paradigms and newly acquired sources.

In brief, this is the broad context in which the articles of this issue of *Kervan* are framed. They touch upon a variety of crucial topics, proposing original interpretations and providing extensive bibliographies. By addressing the South Asian context in its multifaceted complexity, we hope that this volume will provide new insights and lay some much-needed foundations for future studies.

This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU - Line M4.C2.1.1 - PRIN 2022. The project, titled "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," involved various scholars from the University of Milan (CUP G53D23004630006, national PI Cinzia Pieruccini), the *Alma Mater Studiorum* University of Bologna (CUP J53D23011210006, PI Marco Franceschini), the University of Turin (CUP D53D23012710006, PI Gianni Pellegrini), and the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (CUP H53D23005620006, PI Antonio Rigopoulos). The papers were first presented at an international conference held at the University of Milan (21-23 November 2024).

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to the success of this project, and particularly to *Kervan* for hosting this publication and to all the esteemed colleagues who acted as peer reviewers.

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Sacrifice

Sacrifices gone wrong

Precautions, consequences, damage control

Gianfranco Mormino

In many cultures, sacrifices are such an important aspect of the social life, that their ratio has been widely scrutinized and subjected to innumerable theories. In my paper I will tackle the problem from the viewpoint of the possible failure of the ritual. All human actions can go wrong, of course, but the failure of a sacrifice can be so dangerous that the rules of its performance constitute no less than an entire science; in ancient Vedic religion, in particular, the sheer amount of texts concerning the exact circumstances, modalities, instruments etc. which must be considered before undertaking the ritual is evidence of the seriousness of the issue and of the fear that something might go wrong. We find very similar concerns in ancient Greek and Latin documents, which confirm that in sacrificial cultures, in spite of their deep differences, the components of the ritual have to be carefully handled in order to avoid catastrophic consequences. In animal sacrifice, of course, a considerable part of the precautions regard how the victims must be handled and killed. As many indologists have argued, it is possible that the notion of *ahiṃsā* itself arises within this context, as a way of ensuring that, by not "really" harming the animal, its immolation will cause no harm to the sacrificer and, more generally, to the community. My paper will deal respectively with: 1) the precautions to be taken beforehand; 2) the imagined consequences of a failure; 3) the means through which these consequences can be "fixed". The analysis might give some insights about the way in which the Indian sacrificial religion has shaped the relationship between humans and animals, which is, in its turn, a relevant part of the ethical assumptions operating in that part of the world.

Keywords: failed sacrifices, sociological efficacy of sacrifices, unanimity in rites, comedy of innocence, ambivalence of blood in religion.

1. Foreword[1]

The present paper considers the problem of failed sacrifices from a sociological viewpoint; assuming with Durkheim that the only 'real' thing happening in a religious rite are the gathering of people, the material preparation of the performance and its effects on the community, I will examine how a failure can be prevented, which reasons may lead to a negative judgment about the efficacy of the rite during its performance and, finally, which remedies can be used to control the damage afterwards.

2. Sacrifice and its failure

In many cultures sacrifices are such an important aspect of the social life that their ratio has been widely scrutinized and subjected to innumerable theories. All religions devote a great deal of attention to the exceptional benefits that can be drawn from the correct performance of a sacrifice. Not only it guarantees all kinds of prosperity and good luck to the community, but it also has a cosmic role in keeping all things in the proper order; without its periodic renewal, all human activities would be at risk: pregnant women would not bear healthy children, the soil would be sterile, war actions would fail and the very own structure of society would be 'out of joint.' All the ancient cultures of the world agree on the paramount importance of this ritual, no matter the many forms it assumes. Such is the importance of sacrifices that a particular group of people (generally men, but there are exceptions) benefits from a higher social status due to their deep knowledge of the ways of sacrifices. The brahmins, notwithstanding their political and military inferiority with respect to the *kṣatriya*, succeeded in maintaining the highest position in the Indian social system because they were believed to be the only ones who could perform sacrifices in the right way; their knowledge was the result of a long period of study and was committed to written texts in order to avoid the loss of the means that keep society together.

I will tackle the problem from a particular viewpoint: the possible failure of the ritual. All human actions can go wrong, of course, but the failure of a sacrifice is considered so dangerous that in some cultures it requires no less than an entire science to get hold of the matter; the lifelong activity of a class of young men, the Vedic students, is devoted to the study of ample treatises. Those who aspired to become respected brahmins had to undergo long years of preparation, both intellectual and moral.

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The sheer amount of texts concerning the exact circumstances, modalities and instruments which must be taken into consideration before undertaking the ritual is proof of the seriousness of it all and of the fear that something might go wrong if fallen in the hand of unworthy or unprepared people. We find very similar concerns in ancient Greek and Latin documents, which confirms that in all sacrificial cultures, in spite of their deep differences, the components of the ritual have to be carefully handled in order to avoid catastrophic consequences.

Let us consider, for example, the case of a failed sacrifice in ancient Rome; Livy writes that, at the beginning of the year 176 BCE, one of the prescribed rituals went wrong: "when the consuls Cn. Cornelius and Q. Petilius were making animal sacrifice to Jupiter with an ox each, as was customary, a head was not found on the liver of the victim with which Petilius had made sacrifice. When he announced this to the senate, he was ordered to obtain *litatio* with an(other?) ox" (Livy, 41,14). As one might expect, the means through which bad consequences can be 'fixed' is the repetition of the sacrifice until *litatio* (i.e. the acceptance of the victims by the gods) is obtained. In Roman times, the signs of a successful sacrifice were obtained by "observing the behaviour of the animal while it was alive and walking towards the altar, and by examining the condition of the animal's entrails (*exta*) once it had been killed" (Driediger-Murphy 2019, para. 1). Soon after the Senate's order to repeat Petilius's sacrifice, the other consul announced that his sacrifice had failed, too: "Cornelius returned not long after with a troubled expression and explained to the senators that the liver of the *sescenaris* ox which he had sacrificed had melted away [during cooking]" (Livy, 41,14). The senators were terrified by this prodigy, but no solution was found: even at the end of the repetitions, one god at least, *Salus*, refused to accept the victims. Driediger-Murphy interprets Livy's narration as proof that Roman divinatory sacrifice was not an easy matter, as the desired outcome could not always be obtained simply by trying again and again. The gods could be stubbornly hostile, no matter how many times the officiants repeated their action in the best possible way, and the consequences were appalling. As Driediger-Murphy wittily remarks by quoting a passage from Rebecca West's *The birds fall down*, the notion that "Romans had sufficient insensibility to make them happy pagans [...]. The Greeks proved themselves greater by being wretched in their paganism" should be reconsidered. Seneca's *Oedipus* is a striking example of the horror that could come out as a result of a failed sacrifice in the Latin world; Manto's description of the killing of a bull to her blind father Tiresias heavily insists on this:

> Father, what is this? With no gentle motion, as is their wont, do the entrails shake and quiver, but my whole hand do they cause to tremble and blood spurts afresh from the veins. The heart, diseased through and through, is withered and lies deep hidden, and the reins are of livid hue. A great part of the entrails is wanting, and from the rotting liver black gall oozes forth, and see—ever fatal omen

> for sole sovereignty—two heads rise side by side with equal bulge; yet each cloven head is hidden in but thin membrane, refusing a lurking place to secret things [...]. Nature is subverted; even the womb follows not its law. Let us look close and see whence comes this stiffness in the entrails. What monstrosity is this? A foetus in an unmated heifer! nor does it lie in accustomed fashion, but fills its mother in an unnatural place. Moaning it moves its limbs, and its weak members twitch with convulsive rigors. Livid gore has stained the entrails black. The sadly mangled forms essay to move, and one disembowelled body strives to rise and menaces the priests with its horns; the entrails flee from my hand (Seneca, *Oedipus*, 353 ff.).

As far as Greeks are concerned, a tragedy like Euripides's *Heracles* abundantly shows how the benefits expected from a sacrifice can be reversed into a horrible nightmare:

> Victims to purify the house were stationed before the altar of Zeus, for Heracles had slain and cast from his halls the king of the land. There stood his group of lovely children, with his sire and Megara; and already the basket was being passed round the altar, and we were keeping holy silence. But just as Alcmena's son was bringing the torch in his right hand to dip it in the holy water, he stopped without a word. And as their father lingered, his children looked at him; and lo! he was changed; his eyes were rolling; he was distraught; his eyeballs were bloodshot and starting from their sockets, and foam was oozing down his bearded cheek. Anon he spoke, laughing the while a madman's laugh. [...] Hunting the child round and round, the column, in dreadful circles, and coming face to face with him shot him to the heart; and he fell upon his back, sprinkling the stone pillars with blood as he gasped out his life. Then did Heracles shout for joy [...]. Against a second did he aim his bow, who had crouched at the altar's foot thinking to escape unseen. But [Heracles] with savage Gorgon-scowl, as the child now stood in range of his baleful archery, smote him on the head, as smites a smith his molten iron, bringing down his club upon the fair-haired boy, and crushed the bones (Euripides, *Herakles*, 923-ff.).

Just like all human activities, there is only one thing to be done in rituals too, in case of failure: inspect the causes, try and modify the circumstances of its performance. Of course, one could end up rejecting the rules themselves, leading to a complete paradigm-shift; but, in order for this to happen, the community should have experienced a total collapse of their beliefs. Moreover, what can you do if there is no other way of solving a problem than to follow the ancient prescriptions? In order to give up a respected tradition, you should have a better substitute. When, say, a bridge crashes down, we do not renounce to architectural science altogether, but rather we try to correct the mistakes in their application which *have to be* the cause of the disaster. Ancient cultures had only very few ways of controlling their own well-being, which depended on the weather, on the appearance of a disease and so on; therefore, they generally stayed on a known path in spite of occasional failures, repeating sacrifices and checking for possible faults in their performance.

But what are the consequences of a failure, exactly? And are they only imaginary or is there a very concrete social 'fallout'? There are two possible ways of answering these questions: the first comes from the traditional beliefs or, so to say, from the 'theology' expressed in the myth and in the accepted

corpus of religious texts. What the texts suggest is simply that the prosperity of the community hangs on the acceptance of the human gifts by the gods; this is something which sacrificial cultures state as obvious and which is presented as the main reason why rituals must be performed. In the Indian culture there is also a strong emphasis on the fact that a good sacrifice ensures the sacrificer a good existence in the afterlife, rewarding him for their piety. But the expected negativity is not apparent at once; it can manifest itself after a long time, leaving the community wondering whether the gods have accepted their act of piety. The benefits can be immediately taken as real only by a community deeply settled in their beliefs. I am not going to propose a naive confutation of the efficacy of sacrifices from the standpoint of a modern, skeptical culture; I rather suggest, along the traces of Durkheim's and Girard's theories, that an instant benefit really exists, only it is not the one the religion supposes. The second way of answering the above questions, therefore, considers as only real benefit the satisfaction of social needs, such as confidence in the future, social cohesion and renewed motivation to accept the submission to all profane duties. If we follow this path, we can see that, in the end, the success or the failure of a sacrifice can be determined only by the people who attend the ritual. It is them who decide whether to expect patiently a good outcome or to put into doubt the work of the sacrificers.

The relevance of the sacrifice techniques in the ancient Vedic texts and the amount of detailed indications in that literature has made India the case-study for excellence in all theories regarding this now enigmatic institution. It is no surprise that Hubert and Mauss took the Indian religion as the principal source out of which a general theory could be sketched; of course, the comparison with ancient Greek, Latin and Hebrew rituals was widely practiced but a great amount of the main theoretical works on sacrifice rests on a solid foundation of Vedic prescriptions, tales and examples. A possible exception is René Girard, whose theory of sacrifice is developed mainly from Greek literature, though he considers Indian literature more closely in *Le sacrifice*. Differently from Hubert and Mauss, he does not consider communication with the gods the goal of the ritual; instead, he thinks that its main function is the repetition of an originary lynching which unexpectedly provided a sudden interruption of the rivalry within the group. Through the expulsion of a surrogate victim, the sacrifice channels the internal violence through institutionalized operations instead of letting it spread in the community. A few aspects are worth noticing: according to Girard (who renews Durkheim's sociological explanation of religion), the center of the religious action is not the altar or the priests but, rather, the audience. It is for them that the ritual killing is staged and it is they who are, in the end, the real judges of its performance. We shall try to apply this perspective to Vedic sacrifice in order to understand one of its most characteristic aspects, that is the extremely detailed prescriptions for its staging.

3. The role of the audience

Sacrifice is a public thing: it takes place in front of many people, who are emotionally involved in what is happening on the stage. The authority of the priests vanishes if there is no social consensus; but how can they ensure that the believers accept their superiority? A possible way is to enshrine the performance of the rites in a quite complex number of rules. Like the Athenian tragedy, whose similarity to ritual immolations has been masterly revealed by Girard's works, sacrifice has to obey exact prescriptions, which, in Vedic religion, are particularly minute. The technicalities of the ritual guarantee a certain amount of passivity in the believers, which consider the whole operation as something requiring a higher knowledge and a life-long dedication to their understanding. Its frequent repetition, though, allows the believers to know a certain number of details about what should happen; expectations are very high, if we consider that the welfare of the community itself is at stake. It is likely then that some of the people who attend are not entirely passive toward the operation; moreover, the preparation of the ritual begins many days in advance and people are not completely unaware of the ways of this crucial phase. They have opinions about the officiant, about those who assist him and about the instruments or the place where it will happen. It is reported that a ceremony taking place in an Indian community living in South America was raising eyebrows even before its performance, because the officiant would wear a Superman T-shirt during the days of the preparation (Moura Mello 2020). The ensuing failure of the ritual (the goat was not killed with a single blow) was somehow anticipated by a community already prone, in this particular case, to doubt the worthiness of the officiant. Success or failure may be the outcome of rivalries within the believers, as it happens with all kinds of staged performances; since the supposed benefits of a sacrifice cannot be evaluated the second it ends, it is obvious that the role of the audience is decisive. This is true of many other religious rites, otherwise it could not be understood why, notwithstanding their tendency to crystallization and the obvious desire of priests for continuity, rituals change in time. The brahmins themselves could not ignore any change in people's expectations, lest they risked their status. One of the reasons why sacrifice in India underwent such spectacular changes, from the ancient Vedic times to the later abstention from animal-killing, might therefore be found in a change in common people's expectations: in spite of their superior knowledge and their social rank, the work of the brahmins was under the scrutiny of many eyes.

Unanimity is paramount, since the pacification of the community is nothing else than the shared belief that all evil has been purified; just like the *katharsis* in the Greek tragedy must descend upon all the people in the theatre, the good outcome of a sacrifice rests on the absence of dissonant opinions. Of course, sacrifice does not solve all the problems of the community once and forever: it has to be

repeated, because new events can make rivalries appear once again. Sacrifices are generally classified, according to their timing, in three categories:

1. on established days of the year, in order to ensure a lasting positive effect through ritual gatherings;
2. in special occasions, like weddings, funerals, births and so on, which happen on a regular basis but that cannot be predicted in advance;
3. in very special situations, such as when a danger suddenly appears (a war, famine, drought...).

The ratio, yet, is always the same: to strengthen social cohesion when it is shaken by potentially troubling situations.

If the supposed benefits of a sacrifice cannot be immediately ascertained, the social ones can; if people leave the site of the ritual in good order, feeling a renewed confidence in the future, then the ceremony has fulfilled its real purpose: of course, the believers will think that this is the effect of the benevolence of the gods, who have accepted the offering and have appreciated the spirit in which it was given. Praise will go to the pious and skillful officiants, who have been capable of establishing once again a positive contact with the higher beings of the universe, to their own and the whole community's advantage. The only proof of a successful sacrifice is, therefore, the satisfaction of the attending people; any uneasiness will be seen as a failure, due to the insufficient moral or technical worthiness of the people who staged the ceremony.

4. The handling of the victims

In animal sacrifice, of course, a considerable part of the precautions regards how the victims must be handled and killed. As many Indologists have argued, it is possible that the notion of *ahiṃsā* itself arises within this context, as a way of ensuring that, by not 'really' harming the animal, its immolation will cause no harm to the sacrificer and, more generally, to the community. If we take the viewpoint of the audience, this means that, at a certain point in history, the believers could have not been unanimous anymore in their approval of a cruel rite: violence against animals might have been felt as something which prevents the good outcome of the ceremony.

In India, the abstention from animal killing in rites, as is well known, has been preceded by a long period of minimization of the cruelty involved in rites; the euphemistic jargon, the use of suffocation instead of cutting, the subtraction of the immolation from the eyes of the public are all part of what has been called by Karl Meuli (Burkert 1972) *Unschuldigkeitskomödie*; such ruses (often undecipherable), are present in many cultures and have always left the historians of religion puzzled: a Babylonian text

quoted by Burkert relates the sacrificer's words in front of the severed skull of a sacrificed bull: "this deed has been committed by all the gods, not by me" (Burkert 1972, ch. 10).

There are at least two quite different ways to explain them: according to Burkert, who makes ample use of Freudian notions, they display the guilt of the killers; but this merely psychological explanation fails to clarify why a pious action, performed according to all the traditional rules, should be judged as morally wrong. On the contrary, Girard, intends it as the result of fear of possible retaliations. A famous Indian text seems to support the latter position, as Pieruccini remarks:

> Un modo in cui il timore delle conseguenze si esprime è l'immagine di un 'mondo rovesciato' che attende nell'aldilà, dove gli uomini subiranno lo stesso destino che hanno inflitto; in particolare, saranno mangiati da chi hanno mangiato. Quest'idea, che affiora qui e là in testi vedici e finanche in Manu, è illustrata al meglio dalla vicenda di Bhṛgu, figlio del dio Varuṇa, il quale nell'altro mondo vede uomini uccisi e divorati da altri esseri umani che impersonano quelli che un tempo erano alberi, animali, piante e acque. Per quanto la visione di Bhṛgu, com'è in generale accettato dagli studiosi, non appaia suscitata da preoccupazioni etiche, ma si inquadri piuttosto in un arcaico tentativo di attribuire una sorta di simmetria fra questo mondo e l'aldilà, è evidente che essa apre prospettive spaventevoli, di autentico orrore (Pieruccini 2019, ch. 3).

The theology of sacrifice, *i.e.* the attribution of the violence to the gods, is essential to the promotion of social pacification, since it allows the distinction of the violence of the rite from the everyday violence. The killing of the victim is sacred, which means it is completely separated from profane life; the blood which is shed in the immolation purifies the human rivalries' 'bad blood.' But the operation is risky: if it is not performed in the excruciatingly detailed ways prescribed by the tradition, the bad blood can pollute the entire society. If the officiants don't *seem* to be obeying a superior will with absolute certainty, they would automatically be considered butchers, not holy men. Sacrifice is an institutionalized violence, apparently imposed by a higher being: "in the primitive ritual view, sacrifice fights violence not with ordinary violence [...] with a *good* violence that seems and therefore *is* mysteriously different form the *bad* violence" (Girard 1990: 214). This explains the paradoxical ambivalence of blood, good if shed in the rite, bad if shed in common life; it is exactly the very ambivalence of the sacred, of which the blood is the concrete manifestation.

As far as Indian religion is concerned, it may then be argued that the progressive abstention from animal killing is a strategy aimed at erasing any trace of responsibility in the officiants, since a violent action, if committed *by* the officiants and not merely *through* them, would compromise the good outcome of the sacrifice, already menaced by the fear of retaliation. It was relatively easy to replace living victims with surrogates, since the very nature of sacrifice is, by definition, the substitution of the originary victim with a different one. By giving well-argued reasons to explain this great turn in

the religious practice, like the respect for life, and by engraving such new prescription in the accepted texts, the brahmins managed to maintain a relative continuity to their beliefs and to avoid any confusion between bad and good blood.

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From the bellowing cow to the cow's soul

Remarks on the Old Indo-Āryan and Old Iranian animal sacrifice

Paola M. Rossi

This paper aims to draw parallels between the ancient Iranian or Avestan culture and the ancient Indo-Āryan or Vedic Sanskrit culture as regards animal sacrifices. As is well known, these two cultures share an ancient common cultural basin, that is the so-called Indo-Iranian culture located at least within the Andronovo cultural complex, during the Bronze Age, and within the Bactria-Margiana Acheological Complex (BMAC) in the first half of the second millennium BCE. However, the Iranian culture which we know from the Avestan textual *corpus* developed especially on the Iranian plateau, at least from the ninth century BCE onwards, whereas the Old Indo-Āryan culture we know from the Vedic textual *corpus* developed in the North-Western area of the Indian subcontinent, that is between Afghanistan and Pakistan earlier (1500-1300 BCE), and later in the area corresponding to today's eastern Panjab, and Uttar Pradesh (1300-900 BCE). Therefore, despite a common cultural background, for centuries the Avestan and Vedic cultures developed independently of each other, each with its own characteristics. As regards the so-called 'sacrifice,' known as *yasna* in Old Iranian and *yajña* in Old Indo-Āryan, and in light of the afore-mentioned historical premise, there are nevertheless peculiar parallels that are anything but mere cultural coincidences, nor the mere remnants of an ancient Indo-Iranian cultural unit, but the result of the development of a common cultural heritage under similar historical conditions, despite the peculiarities of each culture. This article aims to highlight such developments, especially in relation to the performance of the animal sacrifice.

Keywords: animal sacrifice, Long Liturgy, Avestan *uruuan-*, *śrauta* reform, bellowing Soma-bull.

1. The Avestan *yasna*: animal sacrifice, cow's soul (*gəuš uruuan-*) and man's soul (*narō uruuan-*)[1]

The Avestan term *yasna* denotes both a ceremony and a textual genre to be recited during the ceremony itself; in particular, the ceremony consists of nine liturgical sequences, combined with the recitation

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of all 72 Avestan *yasna*s (Kellens 2015). However, according to the scholars of the first half of the last century, the *yasna* liturgy would have consisted of prayers and the oblation of butter, milk, water and vegetables to the sacred flame (De Jong 2002: 129-130), a ceremony still performed in the Parsi community today. Any animal sacrifice and even *haoma* pressing would have been abolished by the so-called Zoroastrian reform.[2] Therefore, even though *yasna* is etymologically cognate with OIĀ *yajña*, as both are derivatives of the PIE root <*√*Hi̯eh₂ǵ* 'to honour with offerings,' corresponding respectively to Av √*yaz*- and OIĀ √*yaj*- 'to sacrifice, to worship', it seems that the Avestan term *yasna* does not convey the same conception of sacrifice as it does in the Old Indo-Āryan culture. In fact, the *yasna* would have been a mere worshipping ceremony, focusing on the fire, without any blood sacrifice, and Zoroastrianism would have mainly been a purely spiritual and ethical religion. In actual fact, the whole Avestan textual *corpus*, as definitively canonized during the Sasanian period (224-651 CE), clearly shows that the aim of a *yasna* ceremony consists in upholding the Ahura Mazdā cosmic order and preparing the heavenly path that the soul of the sacrificer has to follow to reach the supreme cosmic entity (Skjærvø 2007). It is a sort of journey of the soul, called *uruuan*-, towards Ahura Mazdā: the act expressed by the root *yaz*- allows the *uruuan*- as 'breath-soul' of the sacrificer himself to be elevated into the sphere of the divine world, beyond darkness, like an 'itinerant soul.' There, it joins with the so-called vision-soul *daēnā*-, that is its visual counterpart and thus the sacrificer achieves the otherworld. (Panaino 2004; Cantera 2016: 70-71). Therefore, the term *yasna* would not mean a sacrificial act which involves the ritual killing of living beings, but a bloodless act of worship.

However, in the last decades of the twentieth century and more recently, the question of Zoroastrian sacrifice and the correlated notion of the so-called Zoroastrian 'reform' has been reconsidered in the light of an in-depth analysis of the textual stratification of the Avestan *corpus*, attesting a complex process of canonization (cf. Panaino 2012). It has been debated whether the so-called Zoroastrian reform was a real watershed between earlier Indo-Iranian and later Iranian theological beliefs and ritual practices, due to a single historical figure called Zarathustra, or whether it was a long process of cultural development, characterized by several step changes leading to, among

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[2] As regards the historicity and dating of Zarathustra, and the so-called Zoroastrian reform, cf. *i.a.* Kellens (2002). In particular, as to the dating of Zarathustra, let us briefly say that, on the one hand, the traditional date of 258 years before Alexander the Great places him around 600 BCE while, on the other, he may have reasonably lived around 1000 BCE.

others, the Parsi customs. But above all, close connections between text and ritual have been pointed out, so that the sacrificial Long Liturgy appears to be the key interpretation of the Avestan itself (Kellens 2015; Tremblay 2016; Cantera 2020); it must be a modular liturgical system, that is a synthesis of manifold Avestan traditions (Panaino 2017), whose arrangement is likely resulting from a long revision process also correlated to the textual canonization: it is ascribable even to the pre-Sasanian era, but is definitively fixed in the Sasanian Period. And Cantera (2016: 62) goes as far as to claim that: «The Zoroastrian long liturgy continues an Indo-Iranian tradition: a sacrifice to the gods that is characterized by an initial pressing and drinking of a stimulating drink, the **saṷma-* [Av *haoma*, OIĀ *soma-*], followed by an animal sacrifice offered to the fire and completed with an office for the fire and the waters».

In actual fact, the Avestan textual layers allow us to assume that the Long Liturgy not only entailed a double *haoma* pressing and drinking, but also oblations of animal meat to the fire (Cantera 2022: 40-41): this would mean that somehow an animal was slain so that its meat could be offered ritually.

Thus, the question of the animal sacrifice in ancient Zoroastrianism has become a much debated issue. In fact, references to the killing of animals for ritual purposes are presented in the later exegetical literature, and hints at oblations of animal flesh are even found in a few Old Avestan texts-*yasna*s. Moreover, it is assumable that the ancient ritual traditions that entailed animal sacrifice as a heritage of the Indo-Iranian culture must have progressively declined, finally being abolished around the end or even after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, that is around 600-700 CE (De Jong 2002: 130; Panaino 2020: 160-163). This would mean that a form of 'animal sacrifice' was accepted at a certain time in the Avestan culture, at least inasmuch as it was combined with an extremely solemn ritual act that was symbolically and spiritually connotated.[3] In this perspective, the killed animal was conceived of as the substitute for the sacrificer himself, and in this way the breath-soul (*uruuan-*) of the animal, as a counterpart of the sacrificer's breath-soul (*uruuan-*), could ascend to Ahura Mazdā (Boyce 1996: 149; De Jong 2002: 146-147; Panaino 2004; 2020): for example, in Y 26.4 the breath-soul of the cow (*gāuš uruuan-*) is worshipped like the breath-soul of those who have upheld the Order of the Truth (*aṣa-*); it recites as follows:

> [...]
> *iδa.aṣaonąm. aṣaoninąmca.*
> *ahūmca. daēnąmca. baoδasca.uruuānəmca. frauuaṣīmca. yazamaide.*

3 Moreover, the verbal forms of the Avestan root *√yaz-* mostly denote a symbolic value, i.e., a bloodless act of worship, rather than a sacrifice *stricto sensu* (Hintze 2007: 156ff.).

yōi.aṣāi. vaonarə.
gəuš. huδå̊ŋhō. uruuanəm. yazamaide. (4)

Here we worship - of the male and female upholders of Order – the living essence (*ahu*),[4] the vision-soul (*daēna-*), the consciousness, the breath-soul (*uruuan-*), and the divine soul (*frauuaṣi*), [of those] who have ever won for Order. We worship the breath-soul of the cow that gives good gifts (Skjærvø 2007:77, slightly modified).

Similarly, in the Young Avestan *Yašts* there are a few references to two different kinds of sacrificial rite. In particular, in the 14th *Yašt*-hymn, devoted to the mythical warrior figure called Vərəθrajan, one who slays the obstacle/the demon *Vərəθra*, the rite performed by the *daēuua*-sacrificers (*daēuuaiiāza-*) is mentioned (st. 54). It is worth recalling that the Av term *daēuua-* corresponds to OIĀ *deva-*: in the parallel Vedic cultural context *deva*s are gods, but in the Avestan one *daēuua*s are demonized as rivals. The sacrifice to the *daēuua*s is a blood sacrifice, as is emphasized in st. 54:

54: *aδāṯ. uiti. frauuaṣata vərəθraγnō. ahuraδātō.*
nōiṯ. narō. yesniiō. vahmiiō. gəušca. uruua. dāmi.dātō.
yaṯ. nūrəm. viiāmbura. daēuua. maśiiāka. daēuuaiiāzō.
vohunīm. vā. tācaiieiṇti. fraṣaēkəm. vā. fraṣicaṇti

Then, Vərəθraγna, created by Ahura, proclaimed as follows:
'The man's soul (*narō. uruuan-*) is not to be worshipped nor praised, and neither the cow's soul (*gəuš. uruuan-*), created by the holder of the heavenly reins (*dāmi.dāta-*), now that the Vyāmbura *daēuua*s, [and] the men *daēuua*-sacrificers (*daēuuaiiāza-*) shed blood and pour out such liquids.'

Therefore, blood sacrifices are a matter for the *daēuua*-followers, who do not uphold *aṣa-* the 'Order of the Truth;' on the contrary, the worshippers of Ahura must care for cattle, as is specified in st. 61 of the same *yašt*:

61: *vərəθraγnəm. ahuraδātəm. yazamaide*
[...]
gauue. amәm. gauue. nәmәm.
gauue. uxδәm. gauue. vərəθrәm.
gauue. xvarәθәm. gauue. vastrәm.
gauue. vərəziiātąm. tąm. nā. xvarәθāi. fṣuiiō.

[4] As to the value of the Avestan *ahu-* cf. Kellens (2020).

> We worship Vərəθrayna, created by Ahura:
> [...]
> To the cow strength. To the cow reverence.
> To the cow speech. To the cow [winning] assault.
> To the cow nourishment. To the cow pasture (?).
> Let it be performed in honour of the cow: keep cattle for our nourishment.

Here the cow is worshipped and honoured without bloodshed, thus suggesting a symbolic form of sacrifice, correlated to the cow's soul and the man's soul mentioned above, in st. 54. This scenario would appear to be congruent with the above-mentioned *communis opinio*: the so-called Zoroastrian reform would have implied the abolition of the animal sacrifice, in opposition to the bloody *daēuua*-traditions, and textual references to such a practice are to be interpreted symbolically.

However, in the later exegetical Pahlavi text entitled *Nērangestān* (N 47; 54), attributed at least to the late Sasanian period, it is clearly reported that a flesh oblation to the fire can only be offered (*yašt pad zōhr*) in conjunction with the recitation of one of the oldest Avestan sections, that is the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* ('*yasna* of the seven chapters'), within the Long Liturgy. Domesticated animals, such as sheep and cattle, are suitable for this oblation, whereas wild animals had to be caught and domesticated before being ritually killed. The same exegetical text gives a detailed description of the slaughter of an animal as a sacrificial victim: the animal is led by the priest *pasuuāzah-* 'one who leads the sacrificial animal' (N 47. 19-24), that is the officiant in charge of killing the animal. Firstly, it is made to stand facing the fire with its legs bound together, and then its neck is broken with a log of wood, or, alternatively, it is stunned, and only then is it killed by cutting its throat with a knife.[5] Therefore, even though the killing of an animal is not compulsory, the text presents it as an act that is actually performed and not just a symbolic practice (Cantera 2022: 74). Moreover, according to Cantera's studies (2022: 75-77), two different types of *yašt pad zōhr* are pictured in the *Nērangestān*: one type foresees the slaughter of an animal and the consequent cutting out of a part of its duodenum (*gōnwad*) for the oblation, and then the *gōnwad* itself is offered to the fire. In this case Cantera (2022: 84) assumes that the animal is slaughtered outside but very close to the ritual space, and in conjunction with the ritual performance. The second kind of *yašt pad zōhr* envisages just an offering, with no slaughter: in this case

[5] As to this interpretation of *Nērangestān* passages and the correlated reconstruction of the sacrificial practices I am referring to De Jong (2002: 135-140), Panaino (2016), Cantera (2022: 73ff.). Panaino (2020: 125-126) focuses on the figure of the priest *pasuuāzah-* 'one who leads the sacrificial animal.'

the offering is the fat and flesh of an animal, which had been previously slaughtered during another ritual performance and cooked before the Long Liturgy itself (Cantera 2022: 88).

In any case, flesh oblations to the fire—with or without the actual slaughtering of the animal during the ceremony—were offered during the central phase of the Long Liturgy, in correspondence with the beginning of the recitation of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* or '*yasna* of the seven chapters' (Y 35-41), an old Avestan section in a sort of rhythmic prose: in particular, between the recitation of Y 34 that closes the first Avestan *gāthā*, and the opening of Y 35, the first of the seven chapters. Thus, in the case of the *gōnwad* offering, the ritual killing of the animal victim is expected to be performed before the recitation of Y 35. For example, according to Kellens (2013: 59), the term *miiazda-* 'solid ritual food' in the third stanza of Y 34 presents an explicit reference to the fresh oblation:

> 34.3 *aṯ. tōi. miiazdəm. ahurā. nəmaŋhā. aṣāicā. dāmā.*
> *gaēθå. vīspå. ā. xṣaθrōi. yå. vohū. θraoštā. manaŋhā.*
> *ārōi.zī. hudåŋhō. vīspāiš. mazdā. xṣmāuuasū. sauuō.*
>
> As sacrificial food (*miiazda-*) for Thee, O Ahura, and for Truth (*aṣa-*), we place in reverence all [our] herds in (Thy) power, (the herds) which one has nourished with good thought. Indeed, the benefit of a munificent one has been allotted by all among Those such as You, O Wise One (Humbach 1991: I. 140).

Here the accusative of the term *miiazda-* is correlated to the accusative *gaēθa-* 'herd, living being,' and associated with Ahurā Mazdā and the dative of Truth-*aṣa*; a similar terminological combination is mentioned in a Young Avestan text, the *Āfrīnagān ī Gāhānbār* 3.6, where the recitation of the fifth stanza of Y 35 ends with the reference to the ritual food-*miiazda-*:

> [...]
> *huxṣaθrōtəmāi. bāaṯ. xṣaθrəm. ahmaṯ. hiiaṯ. aibī.*
> *dadəmahicā.cīšmahicā. huuąnmahicā.*
> *hiiaṯ. mazdāi. ahurāi. aṣāicā. vahištāi"*
> *dātō. hē. miiazdō. ratufrīš.*
>
> As far as we are concerned, we offer, assign and impart the rule
> to the one whose rule is indeed the very best,
> namely the Wise Lord, and to the best Truth (*Aṣa Vahišta*) (Hintze 2007: 77ff.).
> For him the sacrificial food (*miiazda-*) is established,
> that satisfies the correct arrangement of the ritual (*ratus-*).

Likewise, the following formulaic expression occurs in the Young Avestan (e.g., Y 7.1 and 7.20, Y 3.1 and 3.20; Y 8.1):

aṣ̌aiia. daδąmi. xvarəθəm. miiazdəm.
hauruuata. amərətāta.
gāuš. hudā

In compliance with Truth, I offer the solid oblation as the food:
wholeness and immortality, the cow giving good gifts.

Here the solid oblation is correlated to the cow which is *hudās*, that is 'giving good gifts;' moreover, in Y 8.2 men are urged to eat the solid ritual food (*xvarata. narō. aētəm. miiazdəm.*: 'O men, eat this solid oblation'). Finally, in Y 37.1 Truth-*aṣ̌a*, the core term of Zoroastrianism, is directly associated with the cow-*gau-*:

Y. 37.1 *iθā. āṭ. yazamaidē. ahurəm. mazdąm.*
yə. gąmcā. aṣ̌əmcā. dāṭ.
apascā. dāṭ. uruuarå̊scā. vaŋuhīš.
raocå̊scā. dāṭ. būmīmcā.
vīspācā. vohū.

In this way we now worship the Wise Lord,
who has created the cow and Truth,
(who) has created the waters and the good plants,
(who) has created light and the earth
and all that is good (Hintze 2007: 155).

It is remarkable that in such a cosmogonic list we find a cow and Truth associated in a sort of hendiadys (*gąmcā. aṣ̌əmcā.* 'and cow and Truth'). Moreover, as Sadovski highlights (2023a), we can assume the existence of a common Indo-Iranian formulaic phraseology, since similar lexicon combinations are also found in the Rigvedic collection: for example in ṚV 10.70.2cd the term *miyédha-* 'ritual meal, sacrificial food,' a cognate of the Avestan *miiazda-*, is mentioned in correlation to the term *ṛtá-*'Truth,' which etymologically corresponds exactly to the Avestan *aṣ̌a-*:

ṛtásya pathā́ námasā miyédho devébhyo devátamaḥ suṣūdat

along the path of Truth, with reverence the foremost of the gods will

sweeten the ritual meal (*miyédha-*)[6] for the gods (Jamison-Brereton 2014: 1495).

Furthermore, these verses are extracted from one of the so-called Āprī hymns, which are recited at Indo-Āryan animal sacrifices (van den Bosch 1985a; namely 101-102). Therefore, a ritual meal based on the flesh of bovine and ovine victims in particular was probably quite usual in Indo-Iranian cultural phases. Later on, with the development of the Avestan culture, this would be integrated into the Long Liturgy, where it came to be performed without bloodshed in the sacred space and during the recitation; the meal with blood shed was definitively attributed to the *daēuua*-followers. And the textual references to solid oblations, consisting of meat and correlated especially to bovine animals may be remnants of earlier bloodshedding rituals.

In actual fact, in *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, namely in Y 39, we find the same expressions *narō uruuan* and *gəuš uruuan*, that is the so-called 'man's breath soul' and 'cow's breath soul:'

Y 39.1: *iϑā. āṯ.1 yazamaidē. gəuš. uruuānəmcā. taṣānəmcā.*
ahmākəŋg. āaṯ. urunō. pasukanąmcā. yōi. nå. jījiṣəṇtī. [...]

In this way we now worship (*yazamaidē*) the cow's soul and [her] maker (Ahura);
[we worship] our own souls as well as those of the domestic animals, which desire to gain our support. [...].

Y 39.2: *daitikanąmcā. aidiiūnąm. hiiaṯ. urunō. yazamaidē.*
aṣāunąm. āaṯ. urunō. yazamaidē. kudō.zātanąmcīṯ. narąmcā. nāiriną̊mcā. [...]

We worship the souls of the wild animals, insofar they are harmless.
Now we worship the souls of the truthful ones, men and women, whenever they may have been born. [...] (Hintze 2007: 39-40).

These passages attest the close correlation between the *gəuš uruuan-*'cow's breath-soul' or *pasukanąm uruuan-* 'breath-soul of the domestic animals (*pasuka-*)' and the sacrificer's breath-soul, or better, the breath-soul of those who are *aṣāuuan-*'truthful,' that is endowed with *aṣa-*'Truth,' the Zoroastrian

[6] OIĀ *miyédha-* 'meal, food' is quoted 7x in the Rigvedic collection, mostly in ritual contexts, thus meaning 'sacrificial meal/food.' As regards its etymology, it is assumable that both the Avestan and the Vedic forms are derivatives of the IIr. compound **mi(H)as-dʰHa-*, where the first constituent may be correlated to IIr. **máiHas-* 'lust, (physical) enjoyment,' so that **mi(H)as-dʰHa-* would mean 'one who/which disposes/sets/makes enjoyment.' As to further interpretations cf. Sadovski (2023a:15-17). As for the expression *ṛtásya pathā́* 'along the path of Truth,' echoing the common formulaic expression *devā́nām páthas-* 'path of the gods,' cf. Schmidt (1973: 33ff.).

founding principle. According to some scholars (Hintze 2007: 258-259) the reference to *gāuš uruuan-* 'cow's breath-soul' must be connected to the famous 'Lament of the Cow' of Y 29, where the very *gāuš uruuan-*'cow's breath-soul' complains that, as a cow, it is a victim of violence and therefore asks the Ahura Mazdā for protection. In particular, the first stanza of Y 29 seems to allude to the very immolation of the cow, according to Tremblay 2016: 79-80):

> Y 29.1: *xšmaibiiā. gāuš. uruuā. gərəždā. kahmāi. mā. θβarōždūm. kā.mā. taṣaṭ:*
> *ā.mā. aēšəmō. hazascā. rəmō. āhišāiiā. dərəšcā. təuuišcā.*
> [...].
>
> The soul of the cow complains to You: For whom did You shape me? Who fashioned me?
> Wrath and oppression, fury, spite and violence, hold me fettered [...]
> (Humbach 1991: I.120).[7]

This would confirm that, on the one hand, sacrificial violence on domestic animals was well known, particularly in relation to *daēuua*-followers: the controversial expression *gāuš jaidiiāi* 'let the ox be killed' (Y 32.14) refers to the bloody *daēuua*-ritual, and in general to those are considered as opponents of Zoroastrianism.[8] On the other hand, the followers of Zoroastrianism are told to care for their cattle and pasture lands: cowherds are the ideal Zoroastrian worshippers, as declared in other Avestan *gāθā*s, such as in Y 31.15, where *pasu-*'domestic animal' and *vīra-*'man' constitute a pair of living beings under the protection of the not-deceiving (*a-drujiianṭ-*) cowherd, that is *aṣāuuan-*'truthful:'[9]

> Y 31.15: *pərəsā. auuaṭ. yā. mainiš. yə. drəguuāitē. xšaθrəm. hunāitī.*
> *duš.šiiaoθanāi. ahurā. yə. nōiṭ. jiiōtūm. hanarə. vīnastī.*
> *vāstriiehiiā. aēnaŋhō. pasəuš. vīrāaṭcā. adrujiianṭō.*
>
> That I ask [you] what the chastisement (*maini-*) [is for him] who delegates power to the deceitful one, to the evil-doer, o Ahura, (the one) who does not find a livelihood without injury to cattle and men of the not- deceiving cowherd (*vāstriia-*) (Humbach 1991: I. 130, slightly modified).

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[7] In this sense, the key word is *rəma-*, literally meaning 'bloodlust, fury;' etymologically, it can be correlated to OIĀ *srāma-* 'lameness, sickness,' according to Humbach (1991: II. 208); Tremblay (2016: 80) suggests the meaning 'étouffement,' so referring to the death of the cow by suffocation, typical of the Vedic ritual.

[8] Humbach (1991: II. 89) explains it as "a ritual formula, or the beginning of a ritual text, which is recited by the deceitful priest at the opening of the ceremony of slaughtering the animal, performed in a way which was considered as cruel by Zarathustra." Gippert (1998) proposes a different linguistic analysis, but the interpretative context is the same.

[9] As regards the peculiar value attributed by Zoroastrianism to pastoral milieu, see Schmidt (1975).

It is therefore assumable that two different trends emerged in the ancient Iranian culture: on the one hand, sacrificial violence as such was stigmatized, and animal oblations were accepted only if the flesh used for the oblation came from outside the sacrifice itself. This is what may correspond to the so-called Zoroastrian reform, that is a long process of cultural change, which culminated in the later abolition of the animal oblation as such, which came about at the end of the Sasanian Empire. In this way, animals and human worshippers were mutually equated before Ahura Mazdā, inasmuch as they were both followers of the Truth. In fact, the animal's breath-soul is interpreted as a substitute for the human worshipper's breath-soul on the journey to the divine world (Panaino 2004). On the other hand, rites including the bloody slaughter of animals were still performed: these came to be defined as non-Zoroastrian rites, or belonging to the so-called *daēuua*-followers. However, the bloody *daēuua*-practices can refer both to rituals belonging to other cultures with which the Iranian one came into contact in the course of their history, and even to remnants of the common Indo-Iranian ancient background, preserved by the most conservative fringes of the Iranian clans. This latter hypothesis may be argued by taking into account of the parallel Indo-Āryan scenario.

2. The Brahmanical *yajña*: animal sacrifice, *śrauta* reform and *ahiṃsā*- 'non-violence'

If we consider the Avestan scenario in relation to the Indo-Āryan culture some analogous and noteworthy dynamics immediately emerge: first of all, the Vedic *corpus* results from a textual revision process, beginning with the canonization of the Rigvedic collection by the sacerdotal class, and promoted in association with the so-called *śrauta* reform, which culminated in Brahmanical ritualism during the first millennium BCE. This means that one can distinguish between pre- and post-reform rituals in the Indo-Āryan culture and, similarly we can note that the Avestan collection results from a process of liturgical revision and canonization, culminating in the so-called Long-Liturgy, which, later on, led to the stigmatization of the shedding of blood.

Also, whereas the Indo-Āryan pre-*śrauta* ritual was probably closely correlated to the ancient Indo-Iranian traditions, the *śrauta* ritual implied a Brahmanical reinterpretation of the ancient ritual heritage that emphasized the formal correctness and complexity of the liturgy: ritual orthopraxis came to be established and transmitted through *Brāhmaṇa* exegetical texts and ancillary literature. According to M. Witzel's studies (1997), such a transformation in the Indo-Āryan culture was originally set in motion by the Kuru hegemony. Taking into account the fact that this dates back to around 1300/1200-900 BCE, Skjærvø (2003-2004: 37) claims that «the transition period between Old and Young Avestan periods would coincide with the time of the crystallization and, probably, the canonization of the *Rigveda*». Therefore, around the beginning of the first millennium BCE, when the Vedic textual

revision began to be applied and a new ritual model began to develop, the Avestan *repertoire* and the ancient Iranian traditions in the Old Iranian sphere were also undergoing significant changes, which later culminated in the definition of the Long Liturgy. Moreover, it is remarkable to note that in the ritual textual tradition of both the cultures—*Brāhmaṇa* texts and sequence of the *yasna*s—ritual systematization coincides with the cosmicization of ritual itself: as Sadovski emphasises in his studies (e.g., 2024), the ritual taxonomy corresponds to the cosmic taxonomy; such a 'cosmos-rite' unfolded in conjunction with the unravelling and modular expansion of the basic somic/homic ritual, operated by the priestly category, in both the culture.

Nonetheless, in the Indo-Āryan context the term *yajña* never assumed the value of a textual category, but only meant the ritually performed action, both with animal and non-animal oblations.[10] Finally, the Brahmanical *yajña* characterized by bloodless oblations is generally correlated to the spread of the ideal of non-injury or *ahiṃsā* 'non-violence,' which, as is well known, belonged to the *śramaṇa* background and is proclaimed in the Aśokan inscriptions, even though its acceptance within the Brahmanical milieu is rather ambiguous. In fact, on the one hand, bloodshed as such is considered ritually impure and hence dangerous, while, on the other, animal oblations are not completely excluded from the *śrauta* liturgy: a sort of compromise, analogous to the Avestan one, is adopted in the late Vedic period.[11] In fact, a mechanism of sacrificial substitution was also contemplated in the *śrauta* ritual: for example, the sacrificer, Prajāpati deity, animal and vegetal oblations are inter-changeable on the basis of chains of equivalences (Smith 1989: 176ff.); in this way even animal sacrifices could be replaced by vegetable sacrifices, and a bloodless ritual form came to be established. However, in the very MDŚ 5.39d it is declared that 'within the sacrifice slaughter is not slaughter' (*yajñe vadho 'vadhaḥ*), and moreover, in 5.40 and 42, the following is claimed:

> *oṣadhyaḥ paśavo vṛkṣās tiryañcaḥ pakṣiṇas tathā* |
> *yajñārthaṃ nidhanaṃ prāptāḥ prāpnuvanty utsṛtīḥ punaḥ* || 40 ||
>
> *eṣv artheṣu paśūn hiṃsan vedatattvārthavid dvijaḥ* |
> *ātmānaṃ ca paśūṃś caiva gamayaty uttamaṃ gatim* || 42 ||
>
> When plants, domestic animals, trees, beasts, and birds die for the sake of a sacrifice, they will in turn earn superior births. [...] When a twice-born man who knows the true meaning of the Veda

[10] As regards the development of the concept of *yajna* in the Indian culture, see Colas (2006).

[11] The origin and development of *ahiṃsā*- 'non-violence' in relation to the Brahmanical culture is widely debated: cf. Tull (1996) and Houben (1999), with related bibliography.

> kills animals for these purposes, he leads himself and those animals to the highest state (Olivelle 2005: 140).

The death of sacrificial victims, especially animals, is justified or even denied in these dharmic passages, inasmuch as the sacrificed beings do not die definitively, but reach a superior state. In particular, in the second dharmic *śloka* the equivalence between victim and sacrificer is stated, or better the Self of the sacrificer is equated to the victims, who can both attain the supreme goal by means of the sacrificial action. Here the Avestan relationship between man's soul (*narō uruuan-*) and a cow's soul (*gāuš uruuan-*) appears to be echoed, even though there is no precise linguistic correspondence: *ātman-* 'Self' is not etymologically correlated to *uruuan-* 'breath-soul,' but semantically they both refer to a similar idea of vital principle.[12]

Further enhanced ambiguity regarding animal sacrifice occurs in the more ancient Vedic texts, where traces of pre-*śrauta* ritual often appear. A few references are found in the Rigvedic family books (II-VII); for example, ṚV 6.16.47c contains generic phrases such as 'let the oxen, bulls, and mated cows be yours, [o Agni]' (*té te bhavantūkṣáṇaḥ | ṛṣabhā́so vaśā́ utá*). Nonetheless phrases such as 'Let your cow-smiting, man-smiting weapon stay at a distance' (*āré gohā́ nṛhā́ vadhó vo astu*) in ṚV 7.56.17c lexically recall the expression *gāuš jaidiiāi* in Y 32.14, and semantically refer to the close relationship between men and cattle, expressed in Y 31.15. In fact, men and livestock enjoyed a close relationship in the Indo-Āryan culture, since the survival of the Indo-Āryan community depended mostly on cattle breeding: in the proto-Vedic clan-based society the chieftain had to be a good cowherd, and is often portrayed as bull.[13] On the other hand, in the later Rigvedic layers, horse sacrifice is referred to in detail: for example, in ṚV 1.162 it is clearly a bloody and truculent sacrifice.

Lastly, references to animal sacrifice are found in the so-called Āprī hymns which are ten Rigvedic hymns spread throughout different textual layers of the Rigvedic collection (1.13; 1.142; 1.188; 2.3; 3.4; 5.5; 7.2; 9.5; 10.70; 10.110). However, they all have a common structure and phraseology, and their stanzas are also mentioned in the Brahmanical text (e.g., *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* 2.4) as the accompaniment to the preliminary offerings (*prayāja*) of the animal sacrifice as a systematized *śrauta* ritual. In fact, the *śrauta* ritual implies the animal sacrifice called *paśubandha* 'domestic animal bond' within the performance of the classical somic liturgy (*agniṣṭoma*). In this case too, the victim's limbs were cut off

[12] Panaino (2004: 249ff.) proposes that a parallel with the symbolic offering of the *uruuan-* 'breath-soul' of the Avestan sacrifice can be seen in the *ātmayajña-* 'self-sacrifice' of the Vedic sacrifice.

[13] The bovine image is relevant in Vedic poetry: Vedic deities such as Indra, Agni, and Soma are recurrently equated to king-bulls.

and blood was shed only after the animal had been choked to death, an act that was carried out by a specific priest called *śamitṛ́-*: thus, there was no real bloody slaughter. The main flesh oblation was the omentum, and the sacrifice entailed cooking it raw on the *śamitra*-fire. Moreover, just as happens in the Avestan liturgy, the killing and dismembering of the victim took place outside the sacrificial place, just on the northern corner, near the *cātvāla*.[14]

However, the ritual function of the Rigvedic Āprī hymns was much debated by scholars in the last century (van den Bosch 1985a: 95-97), and more recently the issue has become even more cogent especially in the light of the definitive recognition of the ritual development from the pre- to the *śrauta* reform, that is from mere oblation into the fire up to complex liturgical system. But this does not simply indicate that these hymns are remnants of a form of pre-*śrauta* animal sacrifice and, hence, preserve traces of Indo-Iranian ritual traditions, or *śrauta* reform textual interpolations, due to the process of the Brahmanical revision. Neither does it imply that they could have been associated with the animal sacrifice *śrauta* only secondarily, given that no animal sacrifice is explicitly mentioned in their verses. In fact, Vanaspati, the cosmic tree or 'the lord of the forest' is recurrently mentioned in these stanzas, which would have led the late Vedic ritual specialists to introduce these stanzas into the section of the Brahmanical repertoire dealing with the animal sacrifice, inasmuch as the animal to be sacrificed was firstly bound to the sacrificial pole (*yūpa*), equated to the Vanaspati-cosmic tree.

In actual fact, according to Proferes (2003a and 2003b), proto-Rigvedic liturgy belonging to manifold clans was re-arranged during the Kuru hegemony in order to create an 'ecumenical' and supra-clan liturgy. This must have affected the somic liturgy and animal sacrifice, and later on sacerdotal ritualism would revive both rites as definitive *śrauta* rites. Such an 'ecumenical' liturgical revision was also combined with a similar process applied to clan textual material so that, on the one hand, clan rites involving the killing of the victim (Schmidt 1973: 35) were re-organized in the name of Kuru ecumenism while, on the other, poetic repertoires of different lineages, related to this kind of sacrifice, were distinctively integrated into the Rigvedic collection as family books. Nonetheless, a direct expression of Kuru hegemony saw the poetic re-arrangement of textual material, merged especially in the first and tenth Rigvedic books, Atharvavedic hymns and Yajurvedic mantra. The Rigvedic Āprī hymns would represent an intermediate phase that resulted from the Kuru revision applied to the ritual and textual clan traditions. They can thus mirror the ecumenical effort, while at the same time retaining traces of the earlier ritual version and preluding the later development into the *śrauta* version. For example, in these hymns the figures of the cosmic tree Vanaspati and ritual fire

[14] Cf., e.g., BŚS 4.6. As to the rite, cf. also Dumont (1962), and Schwab (1886).

Agni are frequently combined with the peculiar term: *śamitṛ́-*, which, as the *nomen agentis* of the root √*śam*^{i}- 'to become tired, to exert oneself,' literally means 'one who becomes tired, who fatigues himself' around the sacrificial victim, performing rites (Thieme 1953), and is the technical appellative for one who kills the animal, the 'butcher' (e.g., ṚV 3.4.10ab; 7.2.10ab; 10.110.10c). The same term is mentioned in the Rigvedic hymn devoted to the horse sacrifice, one of the Kuru expressions of ecumenical rituals: *śamitṛ́-* in ṚV 1.162.9c and 10c refers to the role of butcher-priest, who was responsible for cutting off the horse's limbs and offering them as oblations. Finally, it is the core term of the *paśubandha* as portrayed in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, but it also conveys a fundamental semantic shift: *śamitṛ́-* is one who is committed to making the victim come to peace with the sacrificial action, that is 'in agreement' with it. In this case the term *śamitṛ́-* euphemistically means 'one who calms, one who quiets', interpreted as *nomina agentis* of the causative meaning 'to make peaceful, to appease,' from the same root √*śam*^{i}-.[15] For example, the later *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (3.8.1.15) prescribes that the victim is suffocated by keeping close its mouth or by hanging with a noose, so that no blood was shed. In a certain way, the animal is not really dead and, furthermore, its consent is required: the Brahmanical text uses the causative form of the root *saṃ-√jñā-* 'to agree; to be in concord with:'

> ŚBM 3.8.1.15:
> *tad apigṛhya vaiva mukhaṃ tamayanti veṣkaṃ vā kurvanti tan nāha jahi mārayeti mānuṣaṃ hi tat saṃjñapayānvagann iti tad dhi devatrā sa yadāhānvagann ity etarhi hy eṣa devān anugacchati tasmād āhānvagann iti |*
>
> Then they suffocate [it], having just closed its mouth, or they make a noose; then (the sacrificer) does not say 'Slay it! Make it dead!:' in effect, it [would be suitable for] the human being. Saying as follows 'Make it concord [with us]: it has followed [the gods' path],' this [manner], in actual fact, is pertaining to the gods. When he says 'It has followed,' then, actually, that (sacrificer) has followed the gods, therefore, he says 'it has followed.'

Therefore, the animal is not led to its death, but to the gods and it substitutes the sacrificer, in a manner similar to that outlined in the Avestan liturgy (Panaino 2016: 144-147). Furthermore, choking the animal is equated to obtaining the animal's consent: here the role of the *śamitṛ́-* becomes 'calming the victim,' given that the animal emits no sound or bellow since it is being choked and its breath is not expelled from its body. In this way, a form of interiorization of the sacrifice occurs, so that both victim and sacrificer obtain heaven and immortality (cf. Thite 1970).

[15] Cf. Tichy (1995: 38, fn. 39) *contra* Thieme (1953). As to the ritual role of the *śamitṛ́-* in Yajurvedic, Brahmanical and ancillary literature, cf. Voegeli (2005).

Lastly, in *śrauta* ritualism the animal sacrifice is combined with the *agniṣṭoma*, the somic rite based on pressing and drinking *sóma* juice. This point has been especially compared with the sequence of the Avestan Long Liturgy: Tremblay (2016: 37-38; 66-68) considers the recitation of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* section equivalent to a form of *prayāja*, that is the liturgical preliminary to animal sacrifice, as the Āprī hymns are recited at the beginning of the Vedic *paśubandha*.[16] However, also the *śrauta* version of the *agniṣṭoma* develops in much the same way as we have seen for the animal sacrifice, emerging from an elaborated revision of a primordial somic rite, also frequently mentioned by the ancient textual layers of the Rigvedic collection. Nonetheless, the somic liturgy as attested in the Rigvedic family books is even further simplified in comparison to the description in the ninth Rigvedic book, which is entirely devoted to the somic *pavamāna*, the 'filtering' of the *sóma* juice. According to Proferes (2003b), this latter collection of hymns devoted to Soma, both as a deity and sacrificial juice, seems to attest an ecumenic version of the somic ritual, in compliance with the new cultural model of Kuru hegemony. This would mean that these Rigvedic somic hymns, like the Āprī ones, represent an intermediate stage in what later will be definitively assumed as the model for the *śrauta* rite. It is noteworthy that at this stage the somic plant is equated to a bovine being: for example, in ṚV 9.70.7ab the soma juice is a terrible bellowing bull:

> *ruváti bhīmó vṛṣabhás taviṣyáyā | śṛ́ṅge śíśāno háriṇī vicakṣaṇáḥ |*
>
> The fearsome bull bellows forcefully, sharpening his golden horns, wide-gazing (Jamison-Brereton 2014: 1303).

Likewise, in ṚV 9.71.9 and 9.74.5 the bellowing Soma-bull is denoted by the derivatives of the root √*rav*^{i}- / *rū*- 'to roar, to bellow' (Gotō 1987: 265-267). Interestingly, in ṚV 10.94, which is devoted to the pressing stones used to extract the somic juice, the third stanza recites as follows:

> *eté vadanty ávidann anā́ mádhu | ny ùṅkhayante ádhi pakvá ā́miṣi |*
> *vṛkṣásya śā́khām aruṇásya bápsatas | té sū́bharvā vṛṣabhā́ḥ prém arāviṣuḥ* || 3 ||
>
> They speak; in this way they found the honey. They growl over the cooked flesh. Gnawing at the branch of the reddish tree, the gluttonous bulls have bellowed out to it (Jamison-Brereton 2014: 1546).

[16] Similarly Sadovski (2023b: 166-168).

Here the soma plant is conceived of as 'cooked' (*pakvá-*) *ā́miṣ-* 'raw flesh,' thus referring to the very *miyédha-* 'ritual meal,' a cognate of the Avestan *miiazda-*, mentioned in the Āprī hymn 10.72.2. Moreover, the streams of somic juice are equated to bulls which were literally bellowing-*arāviṣuḥ*: as an aorist of the Vedic-Sanskrit root √*rav*^{i}*-* / *rū-* 'to roar, to bellow' (Gotō 1987: 265-267), it is employed to denote animal sounds, and especially, bovine sounds. This Vedic-Sanskrit root is a cognate of Gr *ὠρύομαι* 'to howl, cry,' Lat *rūmor* 'noise,' and as a derivative of the PIE root *$*h_3reu̯h$* 'to roar, to bellow' it is also attested in YA verbal forms such as the YA present participle *uruuatō* (Yt 14.19). Interestingly, the Avestan term *uruuan-*, conventionally translated as breath-soul, is the outcome of the same IIr phonetic sequence **(H)RuHV-* from which *uruuaṇt-* derives (Cantera 2001: 34-35), which leads one to wonder whether this is not a mere phonetic coincidence, but a token of a deeper etymological link. In that case the Avestan cow's breath-soul would literally be a cow bellowing, the same bellow that, during the Brahmanical animal sacrifice as standardized in the *śrauta* ritual, must be retained within the victim; for example, in the ancillary literature the following is prescribed:

> ŚŚS 4.17.11: *taṃ saṃjñapayanti prākśirasam udakpādaṃ pratyakśirasaṃ vodakpādam aravamāṇam* ||
>
> They make [the animal] consent: it is not bellowing (*a-ravamāṇa-*), with its head towards the east and its feet towards the north, or with its head towards the west and its feet towards the north.[17]

3. Etymological note

As regards the etymology of the Avestan term *uruuan-*, it has been suggested that it could be derived from PIIr **luHan-* correlated to the Gr *λύω* 'to untie, to loosen:'[18] the 'soul' is what is untied from the corpse or laces of death. However, Kellens, in his essay concerning ancient Iranian eschatology (1995), suggests that *uruuan-* may be an *-an* stem from the same PIIr root **HrauH* / *HruH-* from which the OIĀ root √*rav*^{i}*-* / *rū-* also derives: *uruuan-* < PIr **ru̯an-* may be the outcome of the root PIIr **HruH-* + *-* **en-*, so meaning 'roarer.' Such a reconstruction may be congruent with the Vedic *hapax ruvaṇyú-* 'roarer,' mentioned in ṚV 1.122.5a:

> *ā́ vo ruvaṇyúm auśijó huvádhyai | ghóṣeva śáṃsam árjunasya náṃśe |*
> *prá vaḥ pūṣṇé dāvána ā́ṁ̆ | áchā voceya vasútātim agnéḥ* || 5 ||
>
> It is for (Kakṣīvant), son of Uśij [/the fire-priest], to call the "screecher," the laud, for you as if with a shout, at the attainment of the silvery one [=*soma*?]. (Put him [=*Pūṣan*]?) forward for yourselves,

[17] Similarly, in BŚS 4.6.17.

[18] This hypothesis is by Karl Hoffmann as mentioned by Narten (1986: 248).

> for Pūṣan to give. I would call here Agni's assemblage of good ones [=gods] (Jamison-Brereton 2014: 284).

In this complex Rigvedic stanza the term *ruvaṇyú-* 'screecher, roarer, bellower,' as *-yú*-stem from the denominative formation *ruvaṇya-* meaning 'to be like **ruvan*-roarer, bellower' (cf. Wackernagel-Debrunner 1954: 845), is correlated to a terminology (*śáṃsa-* 'chanted praise,' *ghóṣā-* 'shout,' *voceya* 'I would call' [aorist optative < √*vac-* 'to call, to say']) that refers to sounding and chanting praise in honour of the gods, especially Agni, during a somic ritual. In such a context, the bovine sound, expressed through the derivatives of the root √*rav*^{i}*-* / *rū-*, is recurrently associated with somic juice and fire and, in this particular case, it is also an attribute of the chanting priest (*hótṛ-*). Similarly, in ṚV 8.96.12 the injunctive of the denominative formation *ruvaṇya-* refers to the singer (*jaritṛ́-*):

> *tád vividḍhi yát ta índro jújoṣat | stuhí suṣṭutíṃ námasā́ vivāsa |*
> *úpa bhūṣa jaritar mā́ ruvaṇyaḥ | śrāváyā vā́caṃ kuvíd aṅgá védat* || 12 ||
>
> Labor at what Indra will enjoy from you. Give as praise a good praise hymn. Seek to entice him here with reverence. Be attentive, singer. Don't screech, but make your speech heard. Surely he will take cognizance (of it)? (Jamison-Brereton 1201).

This stanza invites the singer to do more than just roar/bellow the song of praise in honour of Indra, asking him to make the sound clearly morphologically discernible as a *vā́c-* 'word.' The OIĀ root √*rav*^{i}*-* / *rū-* 'to roar, to bellow' refers both to bovine sounds and the singer's voice, inasmuch as they are both noticeably loud and audible.[19] Finally, if it is assumable that **ruvan-* is the nominal stem on which the denominative formation *ruvaṇya-* is constructed, it must be the OIĀ outcome of the PIIr * *HruH-* + *-*en-*, that is equivalent to the Avestan *uruuan-* from PIr **ruu̯an-*. This would mean that the common PIIr * *HruH-*, denoting emission of sound breath for both men and cattle, in the Vedic culture developed a meaning mostly correlated to sonority, whereas in Old Iranian the semantic spectrum related to breath became prevalent, implying the value of a bodily vital principle, that is the soul.[20]

4. Conclusions

This brief survey clearly shows that both the Avestan and the Vedic cultures follow similar parallel paths. Firstly, they are both characterized by a close connection between men and cattle, which may be inherited from an Indo-Iranian common background, since in the semi-nomadic and pastoral Indo-

[19] The derivatives of another root, √*nav*^{i}*-* / *nū-* (< PIE **neu(H)-*) 'to roar, to bellow'—which share not only the meaning but also the morphological structure of certain verb forms with √*rav*^{i}*-* /*rū-* (Gotō 1987: 198-199)—are also used to denote the 'bellowing' of the men, especially to refer to the shouting of inspired poets (e.g., ṚV 6.38.3).

[20] In this sense, the meaning of 'soul' is derived from a more literal meaning of 'breath,' just like the case of the Greek *ψυχή*; cf. Humbach (1956: 76-77).

Iranian clan-based society, herds were the most valuable possession. The Indo-Iranian chieftain himself is a sort of 'pastoral hero,' as documented by the PIE formulaic phrase *uih_xro- $pe\acute{k}u$- + *√pah_2- 'protector of men and livestock:' it is echoed in the Avestan expression *pasəuš. vīrāaṯcā* 'cattle and men' of the not-deceiving cowherd in Y 31.15; similarly, the term OIĀ *virapśín-* 'one who has men and livestock,' a derivative of *virapśá-* from **vīra-p(a)śu-* 'men and livestock,' is an epithet for Indra,[21] the chieftain warrior-cowherd. OIĀ **ruvan-* and OAv *uruuan-*, as derivatives of the PIIr root **HruH-* denoting 'to breathe soundly,' appear to be another linguistic trace of this close relationship between men and bovines: they indicate 'breath,' both cow-breath and man-breath, especially as exhalation is the loudest phase of breathing.[22]

In such an Indo-Iranian scenario, animal sacrifice, particularly of bovines, with the shedding of blood, must be part of a clan ritual of cooking and sharing food, as an auspicious practice for prosperity. Later on, around the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the first millennium BCE, the proto-Indo-Āryan and proto-Iranian cultural branches underwent ritual changes triggered almost in parallel by the Kuru hegemony on the one hand, and by the settlement of Iranian clans in the Iranian plateau, on the other. This was a response to a similar need which was to unify clans in the name of shared ethical values and ecumenical rituals. In fact, the cognates Old-Indo-Āryan *ṛtá-* and Avestan *aša-* 'Truth,' are the ideological expression of a form of ecumenism: in the former case, a multi-clan society was developed in the name of a cosmic supra-tribal sovereignty promoted by the Kuru lordship, while in the latter, the unity of a community was sought under the guidance of the supreme cosmic being Ahura Mazdā.

Moreover, during the Kuru period, bloody animal sacrifices were performed, such as the horse sacrifice, in continuity with the Indo-Iranian heritage; similarly, it is likely that the Iranian communities performed animal sacrifices, even though the later Zoroastrianism stigmatized bloodshed as a ritual peculiarity of the opponents to Ahura Mazdā's followers, that is the *daēuua*-followers.

Nonetheless, on the one hand, the development of a Vedic priestly class independent of the rulers, at the behest of the Kuru sovereignty itself, also determines the unfolding of the ritual reform in which animal sacrifice was preserved, but standardized as illustrated above. On the other hand, the Avestan liturgy did not exclude the meat oblation, albeit with the limitations described previously, meaning that the ritual meal of animal flesh is present in both the Old-Indo-Āryan and Old Iranian ritual performances: manipulation, oblation, consuming and sharing of animal flesh are in different ways

[21] E.g., ṚV 3.36.4a; 4.17.20a; 4.20.2c; 6.22.6d; 6.32.1c; 6.40.2b; etc. Cf. Watkins (1979).

[22] As regards the ritual zoomorphic relationship man-cow, cf. Spanò (2024: 179-218).

components of the Avestan Long Liturgy and the *śrauta* performance of the *paśubandha*.[23] In both cases the slaughter of the animal takes place outside the ritual space, after the animal has been stunned or choked, that is without bloodshed, as if to reduce the miasmic effects of violent death; moreover, in the Brahmanical version the victim's consent is also requested.

Furthermore, in both the Zoroastrian and the Brahmanical traditions the death of the animal is justified as a ritual substitution and associated with a process of ritual interiorization. In fact, the sacrificer comes to be equated to the sacrificed victim, inasmuch as the sacrificer's breath-voice and the animal's breath-bellowing correspond; in this way the death of the animal coincides with the death of the sacrificer, at least symbolically, and the sacrificial violence is turned into an eschatological journey for the victim-sacrificer. Such an identity is emphasized by the way in which the victim loses its life: the sounds of its breath are blocked either because the stunned animal no longer emits any sound or because the suffocated animal no longer emits breath; in both cases, the animal's sonorous breath is integrated into the sacrificer's breath and the sound of his liturgical recitation.

Lastly, it is difficult to establish the extent to which the *śramaṇa* movement influenced and increased the non-violent tendencies more or less inherent in Brahmanical ritualism, and also to evaluate the impact of such cultural tendencies on the development of the Zoroastrianism and vice versa. However, speculations on sound and breath were fundamental in the *śramaṇa* milieu.

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[23] As to this issue, cf. McClymond (2008: 53ff.).

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Ahiṃsā and vegetarianism

Utopian *ahiṃsā* and the violence inherent in food in early Buddhism

Pāli texts vis-à-vis early Upaniṣads and Aśoka edicts

Bryan De Notariis

The present contribution aims to analyse some early Buddhist tenets in the *Suttanipāta* (verses: 220-221). According to this text, the layman cannot fully practise *ahiṃsā* (non-violence / non-harmfulness) while, in contrast, the monk always protects animals; the layman never being equal to a monk due to the latter's meditative practice. The study will explore how violence is inextricably connected with food through the analysis of some of the stages presented in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*'s Buddhist path of liberation and the foundational myth in the *Aggaññasutta*. These two texts will be confronted with Upaniṣadic evidence to contextualise these ideas in a broad Indian ascetic *milieu*. Finally, we will investigate how the *Suttanipāta*'s principle, according to which the monk always protects animals, has been assimilated and utilised by King Aśoka Maurya, with a particular reference to the Rock Edict 1.

Keywords: Theravāda, *Aggaññasutta*, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, *Manomaya-kāya*, Meditation, Aśoka, Upaniṣad, Vegetarianism, *Ahiṃsā.*

1. Introduction[1]

It is apparent that the adoption of a vegetarian diet was closely interconnected with the gradual affirmation of the concept of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence / non-harmfulness) in ancient India. As Ludwig Alsdorf ([1962] 2010: 3) sagaciously highlighted, the link between the two is clearly revealed, for example, within a stanza of the *Mānava-Dharmaśastra*:[2]

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[2] These verses are often quoted in modern scholarship, see for instance Pieruccini (2019: 60; 2023: 248). It is worth noting that David Seyfort Ruegg argued that "the Mahāyānasūtras do not derive their prohibition of meat-eating directly from the

> No one can produce meat without harming living beings.[3]

The above stanza in the *Mānava-Dharmaśastra* highlights, through a cause-effect principle, how meat can only be obtained by killing an animal. Furthermore, the *Mānava-Dharmaśastra* extends this cause-effect principle to all links in the meat production chain, from those who commission the slaughter, to the butchers, the intermediaries, and ultimately the consumers:

> The ones who commissioned, the butchers, the slaughterers, the buyers and sellers, the cooks, the waiters, the diners: These are [all] killers.[4]

The above passage presents a principle of 'Collective Responsibility', according to which all agents involved in any given process are equally responsible for the outcome. This principle occurs in Buddhism within the Mahāyāna *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* among many arguments in favour of the adoption of a vegetarian diet (cf. Schmithausen 2002: 319; Ham 2019: 141). As a principle, 'Collective Responsibility' appears to also be involved in the *Abhidharmakośa*, when the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu suggests that there is Collective Responsibility even for mere participation in war, since the guilt of the individual is extended to the entire group.[5] However, in an earlier form of Buddhism represented by the Pāli texts of the Theravāda tradition, violence is rejected in all its forms,[6] albeit early Buddhists were not vegetarian.[7] Monks could accept meat as food while on almsgiving (Vin I 237-238) and even the Buddha himself was described as eating meat-based dishes.[8] Apparently, a principle such as that of the 'Collective Responsibility' was not current at that time and responsibility was probably regarded as a personal matter. This early stance is in stark contrast with later Buddhist developments, such as

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principle of *avihiṃsā* [= *ahiṃsā*]" (Ruegg 1980: 238; square brackets mine). However, in a more recent work, Ham (2019: 140) highlights how the Mahāyāna *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* does refer to a logic akin to that of the *Mānava-Dharmaśastra* (see also below).

[3] *nākṛtvā prāṇināṃ hiṃsāṃ māṃsam utpadyate kva cit* (Manu 5.48).

[4] *anumantā viśasitā nihantā krayavikrayī | saṃskartā copahartā ca khādakaś ceti ghātakāḥ* (Manu 5.51).

[5] "When there is an army etc. [though] the action is done by one [still] all are like the murderer" (*senādiṣvekakāryatvāt sarve karttṛvadanvitāḥ*; Abhidh-k 4.72). In this regard, see also Keown (2005: 69-83) and Shahar (2008: 20-22).

[6] "The earliest Buddhist texts (as represented by the Pali Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas) thus take an uncompromising stand against violence: violence in all its forms is condemned, while the advantages of such qualities as friendliness and compassion are praised and extolled repeatedly. The one who wishes to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice must renounce all forms of violence" (Gethin 2007: 62).

[7] For an overview, see Harvey (2000: 159-163).

[8] *E.g.* A III 49-51, see also McDermott (1989: 27), Stewart (2010: 124).

those established in Chinese Buddhism and, more broadly, in the Mahāyāna, where the adoption of vegetarianism was an expected feature (Green 2016).

Therefore, in this paper I will try to demonstrate that early Buddhists' approaches to the questions of meat-eating and violence are based on their worldview, one in which the human being, the cosmos, the path of liberation and food, are all interlaced with each other in a coherent picture. In so doing, we should abandon the dichotomy between *ahiṃsā*/vegetarianism to contemplate the relationship between violence and food. In my opinion, the dichotomy of violence/food is a more valuable one when we consider early Buddhism, especially because it likely shaped the final form of some Buddhist teachings. Finally, I will briefly explore some of the ways in which some Buddhist principles have become part of the ideological repertoire of Aśoka Maurya, suggesting a nuanced understanding of his political enterprise.

To start with, I shall consider a short passage from the *Suttanipāta*, one in which a clear and intrinsic difference between the monk and the layman is declared. This passage provides some early Buddhist ideas that are inextricably connected with the Buddhist worldview, which in turn is connected with the ideas circulating in ascetic circles in ancient India.

2. The early Buddhist conceits concerning violence in the *Suttanipāta*

Two *Suttanipāta* verses are of interest here:

> The two of them, with far different dwelling place and way of life, are not equal – the householder supporting a wife and the unselfish one of good vows. *The householder is not fully restrained in respect of the killing of other living creatures; the sage, being restrained, constantly protects living creatures* (220).
> As the crested [peacock] with blue neck never attains the speed of the goose [when] going through the sky, so *a householder does not equal a bhikkhu, a sage [who is] apart, meditating in the wood* (221) (transl. by Norman 2001: 27; emphasis added).[9]

These verses are part of a section of the *Suttanipāta* which is thought by some to be referenced in the Bairāṭ edict of Aśoka (cf. Olivelle 2023: 115-124 and Tieken 2023: 302), which, if true, would testify their existence at least in the middle of the third century BC, but presumably even earlier if they were important enough to be inscribed in stone. The passage discriminates between the monk (also referred

[9] *asamā ubho dūravihāravuttino | gihi dāraposī amamo ca subbato | parapāṇarodhāya gihī asaññato | niccaṃ munī rakkhati pāṇine yato || sikhī yathā nīlagīvo vihaṅgamo | haṃsassa nopeti javaṃ kudācanaṃ | evaṃ gihī nānukaroti bhikkhuno | munino vivittassa vanamhi jhāyato ti ||* (Sn 220-221).

to as 'sage,' viz. *muni*) and the layman (referred to as 'householder,' viz. *gihin*). The established distinction seems to be congenital and conveys a sense of a radical difference between the two social roles. In particular, we can infer that: 1) the layman is not able to fully practise non-violence; while in contrast, 2) the monk always protects animals; and, in summary, 3) the layman is not equal to the monk who always meditates. Therefore, in what follows, we will investigate the reasons why a layman is unable to fully embrace a non-violent lifestyle, the radical incomparability between layman and monk and the fact that this is due to the meditative practice of the latter, and, finally, the importance that the idea that monks always protect animals has had in the socio-political history of India. Starting with the first question, which concerns the layman's inability to fully adopt a non-violent behaviour, we should consider some of the issues that Buddhists had in relation to food supplies.

3. Buddhist eating habits

Food is a primary element for the sustenance of the individual, but is also the bearer of cultural traits of any given society. Therefore, how to get food, especially in a systematic manner, is not a trivial question. The most secure way for a person to obtain food in a systematic manner is for them to actively produce their own food. For a Buddhist monk, however, the production of food is always perceived to involve violence. In the case of the production of meat, the violence is self-evident. However, for a Buddhist monk, the act of cultivating the land would be problematic as well. It would be, indeed, virtually impossible for a Buddhist monk to engage in agricultural works without violating religious legislative norms, as is the case for digging the earth, a fundamental action when farming land, which involves disturbing and killing creatures: "If any bhikkhu should dig the earth or have it dug, there is an offence entailing expiation" (transl. by Norman in Pruitt and Norman 2001: 48-49).[10] Although this passage does not directly address agriculture, and its range and scope can be wider than that derived from a plain reading,[11] its implications have been considered significant in assessing the Buddhist approach to such agricultural activities.[12] The underlying idea is that the act of digging earth is

[10] *yo pana bhikkhu pathaviṃ khaṇeyya vā khaṇāpeyya vā, pācittiyaṃ* (Vin IV 32).

[11] For a broader discussion on this *pācittiya* rule, see Aono (2021: 144-147).

[12] Cf. Horner (1945: 436-437). Horner (1945: 454) eventually states that "Warfare and agriculture were, however, entirely ruled out as monastic occupations."

connected with the act of injuring living beings with one sense-faculty (*ekindriya jīva*), namely very tiny microorganisms who live in the earth.[13]

Thus, the production of food would not fit the monastic requirements to live an ethical life. Therefore, the only way to get food would be for them to gather it in some way. Theoretically, food can be gathered in nature, but this may not necessarily be a safe option for systematically obtaining food. Finding food in nature might indeed be quite a random process, which may be influenced by the geographical area, the seasons etc., and it does not seem to be an option that numerous people could adopt at the same time, due to scarcity of available foodstuffs. Therefore, a better option seems to consist of gathering food from other people, who clearly have the same food needs and, with fewer ethical qualms, could be more serenely involved in a systematic production of food. The latter option is the one adopted by monks, as they opted to wander in cities and villages for alms, begging food from laymen. The validity of this method to collect food suggests to us that the principle of 'Collective Responsibility' (see above § 1) was not accepted by early Buddhism. We may even argue that all the karmic results from producing food were only suffered by laypeople and the responsibility was regarded as personal.[14]

Therefore, from the above discussion, we can understand the reason why this *sutta* of the *Suttanipāta* states that the layman is not able to fully practise non-violence: since a layman is involved in the active production of food, they are unable to escape from causing harm to creatures.

Eventually, the Buddhist tradition conceived another way through which individuals could feed themselves, but not a way available to everybody, a way that is reserved for individuals, such as monks, who have embarked on the Buddhist path of liberation. This other way involves the creation of a new subtle body that has different nutritional needs compared to the physical body. This new way of feeding would not in any way cause harm to living beings.

[13] The Buddha's agony of seeing insects and small creatures dead due to the tilling of the soil is expressed poetically in Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (Buddha-c 5.5).

[14] The early Buddhist attitude concerning food and meat-eating is expressed in the well-known *Jīvakasutta* (M 55). According to this text, the monk must accept any food, even of animal origin, as long as he does not have even the slightest suspicion that the animal was killed specifically for him; he must eat what is offered to him without this resulting in desire, attachment, or pleasure; however, the laypeople are guilty of very serious sins if they kill and cook an animal specifically for the Buddha or his disciples.

4. Meditative outcomes in the Buddhist path of liberation: transcending physical limitations

In referencing the 'Buddhist path of liberation,' I mean in this context a stereotypical path which occurs in a variety of versions within both Nikāyas and Āgamas.[15] For the scopes of the present article, I will consider the long exposition of the path as reported in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* (D 2), which is the *locus classicus* in the Pāli canon for a version of the path that includes the creation of a body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*).[16]

Without going into great detail, we can briefly summarise some key highlights of the path, which include a prototypical monk as the main character. The possibility for a Buddhist path of liberation to come into being is due to the appearance of a Tathāgata (viz. a Buddha) in the world (*tathāgato loke uppajjati*; D I 62). Thus, a householder, having heard the doctrine, gains faith and takes up the life of a Buddhist monk. The new monk cultivates morality, practises self-restraint in various ways and lives a mindful life until he abandons the five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*). With this, he attains ever deeper meditative absorption states (*jhāna*) until the fourth level of absorption (*catutthajjhāna*). Now, according to the narrative, the monk is able to develop some meditative powers. At first, the monk is able to direct his mind (*citta*) toward 'knowing and seeing' (*ñāṇa-dassana*), that is to say, he discovers that the body is impermanent and that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is dependent on it. Later, the monk creates from the physical body another body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*) and develops psychophysical powers (*iddhi*) and higher knowledges (*abhiññā*); the latter culminate in the knowledge that all defilements are destroyed and so the monk achieves liberation, the acme of the path.

For the purpose of this paper, two stages of the process of liberation are of fundamental importance: the act of knowing and seeing (*ñāṇa-dassana*) and the creation of a body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*). Concerning the first, we can find the following description in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*:

> When the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, deprived of impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained impassibility, he directs and turns the mind for the sake of knowing and seeing (*ñāṇa-dassana*). He knows thus: "This is my body (*kāya*), which has a form, consists of the four great elements, born of mother and father, *is maintained by rice and junket*, has the inherent quality of impermanence, is subjected to erosion, abrasion, breaking, destruction, and this is my consciousness (*viññāṇa*) which leans on it, is bound to it."[17]

[15] A recent study about the differences among the various versions has been provided by Gethin (2020).

[16] In this regard, see De Notariis (2019a: 52-53).

[17] *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye ṭhite ānejjappatte ñāṇa-dassanāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti. so evaṃ pajānāti: ayaṃ kho me kāyo rūpī cātum-mahā-bhūtiko mātā-pettika-sambhavo* odana-

The above passage tells us how a cultivated mind could be directed and turned toward the physical body (*kāya*). In doing so, it seems that an awareness of the fundamental elements or parts of this body emerges. What is striking is that the text highlights how the physical body is maintained by rice and junket (*odana-kummāsupacaya*). Rice and junket, in this context, could be interpreted as a sort of quintessential solid food. Indeed, in another similar context in the *Poṭṭhapādasutta* (D 9) the physical body is clearly described as something that requires solid food to endure: "O Lord, I postulate a gross *attan* (viz. a physical embodiment)[18] which has a form, consists of the four great elements, *feeds on solid food*."[19] Bearing in mind that one of the main characteristics of the physical body is that it needs solid food, let us consider the following stage in the Buddhist path of liberation: the creation of a body made of mind. Most likely, this new mental body has been created as a sort of reaction and in opposition to the physical body.[20] The textual description of the body made of mind goes as follows:

> He directs and turns the mind (*citta*) in order to create a body made of mind (*manomaya*). He creates from this body another body which has a form, made of mind, with all limbs and [bodily] parts, without defect of any faculty.[21]

As the reader might promptly notice, the passage does not refer to the need, for this body, to take solid food. This new mental body seems, therefore, to have a similar outward appearance as that of the physical body, but the text is silent about the nutritional needs of such a mental body. As things stand, to infer that the body made of mind does not require solid food would be a sort of *argumentum ex silentio*, as it would be only based on the absence of a clear statement. Fortunately for us, however, there is a text that clearly reports the nutritional needs of beings incarnated in such a mental body. The text in question is the famous *Aggaññasutta* (D 27), whose title has been translated by Thomas W. Rhys Davids

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kummāsupacayo *anicc-ucchādana-parimaddana-bhedana-viddhaṃsana-dhammo, idañ ca pana me viññāṇaṃ ettha sitaṃ ettha paṭibaddhan ti* (D I 76).

[18] This interpretation for the term *attan* (= Sanskrit: *ātman*), usually translated as 'self' or 'soul,' is based on De Notariis (2019a). The passage we will analyse below from the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* will bolster the present interpretation.

[19] *oḷārikam kho ahaṃ bhante attānaṃ paccemi rūpiṃ cātummahābhūtikaṃ* kabaliṅkārāhāra-bhakkhan *ti* (D I 186).

[20] This can be argued not only from a conceptual level, but also from a textual level, thanks to the testimony of the Sanskrit version of the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* (= *Śrāmaṇyaphalasūtra*) survived in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*. Indeed, in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* (SBhV II 245), the stage of *ñāṇa-dassana* is assimilated within the stage of the *manomaya-kāya*, thus presenting the new mental body in sharp contrast to the physical one. In this regard, cf. De Notariis (2019a: 73 n. 50).

[21] *manomayaṃ kāyaṃ abhinimmināya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti. so imamhā kāyā aññaṃ kāyaṃ abhinimmināti rūpiṃ manomayaṃ sabbaṅga-paccaṅgiṃ ahīnindriyaṃ* (D I 77).

as 'A Book of Genesis' (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921: 77). Indeed, the text preserves a foundational myth in which food plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative.[22] Therefore, we find that during a sort of golden age there were beings who had a body made of mind (*manomaya*) and whose food needs were different from those of an ordinary human being:

> There is a time, Vaseṭṭha, when after a long lapse of time, at a certain point, this world contracts. When the world contracts beings are, as a rule, born in the Realm of Radiance. There, they are mind-made, *feeding on joy*, self-luminous, moving through the atmosphere, abiding splendidly, thus they remain for a long and lasting period of time.[23]

Some cosmological ideas are underlying within this account. Treatments on the nature of the cosmos appear fragmentary within the older canonical texts, while a more systematic treatment is provided by the Abhidhamma and post-canonical literature.[24] Generally speaking,[25] the Buddhist cosmos has neither a beginning nor an end, but alternates between periods of expansion and contraction. In the contraction phase, the world is destroyed by fire, water, and wind, yet a part of the cosmos—that is, the hierarchically highest part—is never touched by these destructive cycles. Living beings, before each apocalyptic phase, are somehow warned of the impending end of the world (in particular, of their world), so they apply themselves in the practice of morality, obtaining a rebirth in a higher realm and thus escaping destruction (cf. De Notariis 2019b: 20-21). This appears to be the situation that forms the backdrop of the *Aggañña*'s account. The beings are born in the so-called 'Realm of Radiance' (*Ābhassara*), which constitutes a heavenly realm. From the perspective of the parallels existing between the macrocosm and microcosm—*alias*, cosmos and psyche, or in other words, the idea that a particular state of existence parallels a particular state of mind (cf. Gethin 1997)—the Realm of Radiance parallels the attainment of the second meditative absorption (*jhāna*).[26] This is significant, as the second

[22] Studies on the *Aggañña* are quite numerous, but one that specifically focused on the role of food in the *Aggañña* is that of Kong (2016: 40-124).

[23] *hoti kho so, Vaseṭṭha, samayo yaṃ kadāci karahaci dīghassa addhuno accayena ayaṃ loko saṃvaṭṭati. saṃvaṭṭamāne loke yebhuyyena sattā Ābhassara-saṃvaṭṭanikā honti. te tattha honti manomayā* pīti-bhakkhā *sayaṃ-pabhā antalikkha-carā subhaṭṭhāyino, ciraṃ dīghaṃ addhānaṃ tiṭṭhanti* (D III 84).

[24] Cf. Gombrich (1975: 132-133), Gethin (1998: 115).

[25] For a general treatment of the 'Buddhist Apocalypse,' I have considered the systematic account of the post-canonical text called *Visuddhimagga* 'The Path of Purification' (cf. Vism 414-420), which, however, although a work of the fifth century AD, deals with themes and episodes that already appear in similar formulation within the canonical texts. In this regard see the *Sattasuriyasutta* (A IV 100-106) and our *Aggañña*, cf. Collins (2009: 519).

[26] Cf. the various reconstructions of the Buddhist cosmology: Gethin (1997: 195; 1998: 116-117), Collins (1998: 298-299), De Notariis (2019a: 66-67).

meditative absorption has joy and happiness born of concentration (*samādhija*; D I 74), whereas the third meditative absorption would have only happiness without joy (*nippītika*; D I 75) (cf. Harvey 2018: 8-9).

Therefore, if we combine the logic of the Buddhist path of the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* with the evidence from the *Aggaññasutta*, we can deduce that a monk can, through meditation, develop a new body made of mind, which no longer requires solid food, but can feed on more subtle energies, such as joy.[27]

Theoretically, it might be wondered whether the *Aggaññasutta*, in presenting joy as a potential food, is telling us something that Buddhists really believed in the past or whether the whole account should be interpreted as a sort of fiction, which was regarded as such by its redactors and audience. Richard Gombrich (1992), for instance, read the *Aggaññasutta* as a humorous parody by the Buddha of a Brahmanical creation story, an interpretation that was criticised by Rupert Gethin (2006: 66-67) who argued that it is not implausible that the Buddha could have genuinely believed in the myth of creation within the *Aggaññasutta*. Both positions led to valuable insights for the scholarly understanding of the text. For the sake of the present discussion, it is important to highlight how Pāli literature preserved other examples of nutritious energies and how the logics of their functioning is consistent with the Upaniṣadic thought, allowing us to assume that nutritious energies were part of a shared worldview.

5. Nutritious energies in early Buddhism and Upaniṣadic antecedents

In the *Aggaññasutta*, we have found that joy (*pīti*) can be considered food for some deities embodied in a mind-made body, and this actually seems to be (in a quite literal way) 'food for thought.' We can define joy, in this context, as a sort of 'nutritious energy,' meaning something that performs the same nutritional function as food, but without being food in our typical sense of the term. Buddhist texts in Pāli testify to the existence of nutritious energies which can compensate for food intake. A canonical example is provided by the *Mahāsaccakasutta* (M 36), a text in which we find a description of the strenuous ascetic practices (*dukkara-kārikā*) undertaken by the Buddha when he was still a Bodhisatta, that is a Buddha-to-be. Among these ascetic exercises, the practice of the total renunciation of food also occurs:

[27] "'Feeding on joy (*pītibhakkhā*)' means that the joy carries out the function of food" (*pītiyeva āhārakiccaṃ sādhetī ti pītibhakkhā*; Sv III 865).

> O Aggivessana, I thought this: "What if I would start to stop [eating] food completely?" Then, Aggivessana, the deities approached me and said: "Sir, do not start to stop [eating] food completely; if you, Sir, start to stop [eating] food completely, we will forcefully transfuse divine [nutritive] energy (*ojā*) to you through the pores of your skin, and you will survive thanks to it."[28]

In the above passage we find that the Buddha-to-be is intent on giving up food completely. However, in doing so, he would risk dying through starvation, which is why the deities announced that if he did so they would keep him alive by injecting the nutritive energy called *ojā* through the pores of his skin. The Pāli term *ojā* is equivalent to the Sanskrit *ojas* and, therefore, we can understand it as a kind of energy endowed with substantiality,[29] and one which in Buddhism is clearly connected with food. For instance, we have a canonical example according to which food is not appealing to a man who has just finished eating while the nutritive energy (*ojā*) stays in his body, but that once this has disappeared, he once again finds food appealing (A III 396). In another example, a great tree can absorb from the earth the nutritive energy through its roots (*mūlāni* [...] *uddham ojam abhiharanti*; S II 87). However, *ojā* is not the only term that conveys the idea of 'nutritive energy or essence' in the canonical texts, as we find a case in which the word *rasa* ('essence/flavour') is used to perform the same function:

> Just as, o monks, a seed of either sugarcane, or rice, or grapes is planted in moist soil, whatever nutrients it absorbs from the soil (*paṭhavi-rasa*) and water (*āpo-rasa*), all these lead to sweetness (*madhuratta*), pleasantness and agreeableness (*asecanakattā*).[30]

It might be argued, *prima facie*, that in this context *rasa* only means 'flavour.' However, as we will soon see, the contexts of application for the word *rasa* are many and refer, in general terms, to a nutritious essence that passes from the earth to food (perhaps, the 'essence' conveyed by *rasa* was somehow

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[28] *tassa mayhaṃ Aggivessana etad ahosi: yan nūnāhaṃ sabbaso āhārupacchedāya paṭipajjeyyan ti. atha kho maṃ Aggivessana devatā upasaṅkamitvā etad avocuṃ: mā kho tvaṃ mārisa sabbaso āhārupacchedāya paṭipajji, sace kho tvaṃ mārisa sabbaso āhārupacchedāya paṭipajjissasi tassa te mayaṃ dibbaṃ ojaṃ lomakūpehi ajjhoharissāma, tāya tvaṃ yāpessasī* (M I 245). We find similar evidence in the first section of the *Jātaka* collection called *Nidānakathā* 'Introductory Story,' a prose section which recounts the life of the Buddha, including life episodes prior to the achievement of enlightenment: "The Bodhisatta [thought]: 'I will perform the uttermost strenuous ascetic practices!' He completely relied on only one sesamum seed, a rice grain and so on, he even cut out food entirely, but the gods accumulated [nutritive] energy and infused him with it through the pores of the skin" (*Bodhisatto pi kho koṭippattaṃ dukkarakārikaṃ karissāmī ti ekatilataṇḍulādīhi pi vītināmesi, sabbaso pi āhārūpacchedaṃ akāsi, devatā pi lomakūpehi ojaṃ upasaṃharamānā paṭikkhipi*; Ja I 67).

[29] In this regard, see Gonda (1952).

[30] *seyyathāpi bhikkhave ucchubījaṃ vā sālibījaṃ vā muddikābījaṃ vā allāya paṭhaviyā nikkhittaṃ yañ c' eva paṭhavirasaṃ upādiyati yañ ca āporasaṃ upādiyati sabbaṃ taṃ madhurattāya sātattāya asecanakattāya saṃvattati* (A I 32). For a discussion on this passage, see De Notariis (2023: 94-95).

'flavoured'). The very idea that there could be a substance that can pass from one thing to another may look like an Upaniṣadic trope, as we find in the so-called 'two paths theory' in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (BU 6.2.15-16) and *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (CU 5.10.1-8).[31] In particular, the latter presents a theory of rebirth based on a passage of something (let us say, the essence of the person, viz. the self/soul) from the cremated body up to the sky and, later, a kind of fall or a return (*nivartante*; CU 5.10.5) occurs along the same path. At first, the essence becomes space, from space it becomes wind, from wind to smoke, from smoke to thundercloud, from thundercloud to rain-cloud, from rain-cloud it rains and this produces fruits of the earth, which are food. When one eats it, semen flows into them and so one comes into being again (CU 5.10.5-6). The man is part of a kind of ecological cycle in which food plays a role. A similar account, though different in some details, is found within the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, an Upaniṣad that is later than the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya* but still quite early and probably pre-Buddhist.[32] This text, according to Carlos Lopez, "provides a snapshot into the unique Vedic understanding and fixation with food" (1997: 11). In particular, and compelling to our discussion, we find a clear statement that the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* considers the human physical body as constituted by food, even involving the word *rasa*, which should refer in this context to a kind of 'essence' rather than 'flavour:'

> From this very self (*ātman*) did space come into being; from space, air; from air, fire; from fire, the waters; from the waters, the earth; *from the earth, plants; from plants, food; and from food, man. Now, a man here is formed from the essence of food* [sa vā eṣa puruṣo 'nna-rasa-mayaḥ] (transl. by Olivelle 1998: 301; square brackets mine).[33]

The last part of this passage resembles the last part of the 'two paths theory' found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* and *Chāndogyopaniṣad*. Here, the man (*puruṣa*) is made of (*-maya*) the essence (*rasa*) of food (*anna*). In the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, the physical body is the first embodiment in the doctrine of five embodiments, which is often referred to as the *pañcakośa* (or *pañcakoṣa*) 'Five-sheath' doctrine in classical Vedānta.[34] This doctrine exhibits five types of *ātman*, which reside one inside the other like a Russian nesting doll and seem to come forth from the densest element to the subtlest. These five kinds of *ātman* are made (*-maya*) of different substances: food (*anna*); breath (*prāṇa*); mind (*manas*);

[31] In this regard, see Schmithausen (1993-1994), Gombrich (2009: 40-43).

[32] Following Olivelle (1998: 12-13).

[33] *tasmād vā etasmād ātmana ākāśaḥ saṃbhūtaḥ | ākāśād vāyuḥ | vāyor agniḥ | agner āpaḥ | adabhyaḥ pṛthivī |* pṛthivyā oṣadhayaḥ | oṣadhībhyonnam | annāt puruṣaḥ | sa vā eṣa puruṣo 'nnarasamayaḥ | (TU 2.1.1).

[34] See *e.g.* Nakamura (1955: 79) and van Buitenen (1979: 28 n. 2); for a critical discussion see Bhattacharya (1966: 9).

perception (*vijñāna*); and bliss (*ānanda*).[35] The *ātman* made of food, which is the first level of embodiment, is called so because the [human] progeny springs from food (*annād vai prajāḥ prajāyante*; TU 2.2.1), beings are born out of food (*annād bhūtāni jāyante*; TU 2.2.1), and following a kind of etymological explanation, we can see that it is called 'food' because it is eaten and it eats (*adyate 'tti ca bhūtāni | tasmād annaṃ tad ucyate iti*; TU 2.2.1). This means that this *ātman* is not only born out of food but is in fact food itself. Since the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* also presents a *manomaya-ātman* as a level of embodiment superior to the physical body, we are entitled to establish a connection with Buddhism.[36] The parallel with the evidence of Buddhism allows us to better understand the reason why Buddhism described the physical body by highlighting how it is composed of solid food. The *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, indeed, establishes a dichotomy: the physical body versus the mental body. Evidence provided by the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* highlights how thinking in terms of different levels of embodiment was something common in the intellectual environment that Buddhists shared with other religious groups in ancient India.

6. *Taittirīyopaniṣad* and the *Aggaññasutta*

> The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* contains some of the boldest statements regarding food and creation
>
> (Olivelle [1991] 2011: 74)

The evidence from the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* is not only significant in understanding the description of the physical body in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* and the creation of a mental one but is also relevant to properly appreciate some elements occurring in the narrative of the *Aggaññasutta*'s foundational myth.[37] Resuming the narrative, we had reached the point that during a period of contraction of the cosmos all beings were born with a body made of mind in the Realm of Radiance, during a sort of *aurea prima aetas* (first golden age). Later, the text describes the degeneration from this idyllic and primeval condition to the current human state of existence. The world, at that time, was in a sort of primordial condition, everything that existed appeared as an undifferentiated mass:

[35] As already highlighted (De Notariis 2019c: 244 n. 45), the Buddhist late exegetical literature is aware of this Upaniṣadic doctrine (Sv-pṭ I 202).

[36] A wider comparison between Buddhism and Upaniṣads on the concept of *manomaya* has been provided in De Notariis (2019a), and relevant material on the topic occurs in De Notariis (2018; 2019c: 239-245).

[37] This myth has also been discussed by Olivelle ([1991] 2011: 83-85) in a paragraph concerning the cosmic role of food in the ascetic ideology.

> All was just but water, o Vāseṭṭha, at that time, [all was] darkness, dark darkness. The moon and the sun could not be distinguished, nor stars and celestial bodies, nor night and day, nor months and half months, nor seasons and years, female and male [beings]. Beings were but called 'beings.'[38]

This passage, as highlighted by Richard Gombrich (1992: 166), resembles some Vedic cosmogonic accounts, such as that in the *Ṛgveda* in which we find "There was darkness, hidden in darkness, in the beginning. This [world] was a whole indiscriminate stream of flood" (*tama āsīt tamasā gūlham agre 'praketaṃ salilaṃ sarvam ā idam*; ṚV 10.129.3).[39] A connection with the Vedic context has been envisaged by Gombrich even for the continuation of the story in the *Aggaññasutta*: "Then, Vāseṭṭha, after a long lapse of time, at a certain point, essence-earth (*rasa-paṭhavī*) spread over the waters for these beings."[40] Gombrich contemplated a possible connection with *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, speculating that the Sanskrit term *saras*, indicating the 'milk-skin of the waters' in BU 1.2 (resembling the film on boiled milk), has "been garbled with the *rasa-paṭhavī* and so lost" (1992: 167). Gombrich tries to establish this connection, highlighting how the Pāli passage follows in some wordings the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*'s account. In my opinion, though highly interesting, all these speculations might be superfluous if we consider the Pāli *rasa-paṭhavī* as conceptually resembling the *anna-rasa* we have found in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* (TU 2.1.1).[41] In the latter, the *rasa* is clearly conceived as an essence involved in the process of rebirth. In the Pāli passages we have analysed, although *rasa* classically indicates the 'flavour', it seems to retain a conceptual connection with the idea that it is an 'essence' able to move from one thing to another.[42] The flavoured essence of the earth can be absorbed by the vine to produce sweet-tasting grapes (see above the *paṭhavi-rasa* at A I 32). Furthermore, the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* tells us that the physical body is made of the essence of food (*anna-rasa-maya*). Going backwards in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*'s narrative logic, food derives from plants, which are from the earth and the earth originates from the waters. Gombrich, when considering the comparison of the *Aggaññasutta* with *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, writes that "even those sceptical about verbal assonances will not deny the

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[38] *ekodakībhūtaṃ kho pana Vāseṭṭha tena samayena hoti andhakāro andhakāratimisā. na candimasuryā paññayanti, na nakkhattāni tārakarūpani paññayanti, na rattindivā paññayanti, na māsaddha-māsā paññayanti, na utusaṃvaccharā paññayanti, na itthipumā paññayanti. sattā sattā tv eva saṅkhyaṃ gacchanti* (D III 85).

[39] Cf. also Collins (1993: 357), who also draws attention to BU 1.2 and we may add that a cosmogony, which conceived water as a primeval element, is also AU 1.1.2. Parallelisms between ṚV 10.129 and the *Aggaññasutta* have also been discussed by Lindtner (1997-1998: 217-224).

[40] *atha kho tesaṃ Vāseṭṭha sattānaṃ kadāci karahaci dīghassa addhuno accayena rasapaṭhavī udakasmiṃ samatāni* (D III 85).

[41] On the position of *rasa* in the compound, see Collins 1993: 357-358. The compound *rasa-paṭhavī* is sometimes replaced with *paṭhavī-rasa* and in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* food (*anna*) derives from plants (*oṣadhi*), which in turn derive from the earth (*pṛthivī*).

[42] Cf. Visigalli (2016: 820), in which the double meaning of *rasa* in the *Aggaññasutta* is highlighted.

affinity of the content" (1992: 167). On the basis of the evidence of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, we are entitled to apply the same reasoning to the comparison of the *Aggañña*sutta with the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*. Perhaps, the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* could be even more significant for a proper appreciation of the Vedic background underlying the *Aggañña*sutta. Indeed, the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* links the solid food with the physical body and in the *Aggañña*sutta the mind-made beings develop craving (*taṇhā*; D III 85) and start to acquire a coarser body when they taste the essence-earth (*tesaṃ sattānaṃ kharattañ c'eva kāyasmiṃ okkami*; D III 86). Later, the *rasa-paṭhavī* disappears and a fungus (*bhūmi-pappaṭaka*; D III 87) appears, followed by the appearance of a creeper (*badālatā*; D III 87), which in turn is replaced by the appearance of rice growing without cultivation (*akaṭṭhapāko sāli*; D III 88). The act of eating this utopian rice caused the emergence of sexual attributes[43] and the consequent onset of passion led the beings to indulge in sexual activities. All this, in turn, led these beings to build houses, to hide their impure actions from the sight of others. Later, some beings, lazy in nature, had the idea to not source food when needed, but instead to accumulate it at home. This act led to a degeneration of rice and the utopian rice that grew without needing to be cultivated transformed into today's rice, which needs to be cultivated to grow. From the cultivation of rice arose the need to establish boundaries, areas of cultivable land, so that everyone could grow and enjoy their own rice. In other words, private property was born.[44] The violation of the private property of others was the cause of the rise of violence in society and the need to establish regulation. To stem the rampant violence, beings elected the best among them to govern and from this arose the warrior caste (*khattiya*) and kingship (D III 88-93).

Thus, according to the foundational myth of the *Aggañña*sutta, violence is inherently connected with food as it came into being from the cultivation and accumulation of rice. Beings acquire a physical body due to their progressive involvement in solid food consumption. Overall, the *Aggañña*sutta describes how beings fall from a paradisiacal state in which, with a body made of mind, they feed on joy, to a state in which they feed on solid food and acquire a coarse body. This entire process does not only explain why humans are embodied in a physical body, but also provides an aetiological account of how violence originated in this world and how humans have tried to contain it. Therefore, it is of some significance that the Buddhist path of liberation in the *Sāmañña*phalasutta presents us a reverse path, one in which a practitioner, starting from a coarse body, eventually reaches a mind-made body.

[43] The connection between the arising of genitals and food has been well analysed by Kong (2016: 59-68).

[44] It can be of some relevance to establish a stronger connection between the *Aggañña*sutta and the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* to note that, according to Erdosy, "Private ownership of land was recognised for the first time in a passage in the Taittiriya Samhita (2.2.1), which details the necessary rituals in case of a dispute between neighbours concerning fields" (Erdosy 1988: 93-94).

This is possible, notably, through meditation. This, implicitly, suggests that meditation is the only way to escape from the inherent violence of this world and, as meditation is basically a monastic activity (cf. Gethin 2019: 185), only the monk can reach a state in which it is possible to fully escape from violence. Hence, turning to our *Suttanipāta* verses, the above discussion provides an explanation that would justify the Buddhist tenet according to which "a householder does not equal a bhikkhu, a sage [who is] apart, *meditating* in the wood" (Sn 221).

So far, we have seen how food-related questions are involved in the attempt to analyse the reasons why a layman is not able to fully practise non-violence and why the layman still cannot equate to the monk who always meditates. Finally, we will see how the *Suttanipāta*'s principle, according to which the monk always protects animals, has been assimilated and mirrored by the king Aśoka Maurya, who governed over the largest empire of India in ancient history.

7. Aśoka's *imitatio dei* as an *instrumentum regni*

> In the various definitions of dharma, as also elsewhere in his writings,
> Ashoka presents the virtue of ahimsa—not killing living beings,
> not causing hurt and injury—as the bedrock of his moral philosophy.
> (Olivelle 2023: 162)

As has been well highlighted by recent scholarship, in understanding Aśoka we have two main sources—his inscriptions and many narratives—the latter often addressed as 'legendary' (cf. Olivelle 2023: XVII-XXXI; Ferrara 2024: 98-99). In what follows, I will only focus on the inscriptions, these being our earliest records of the king and, presumably, issued by his own will. The inscriptions could, indeed, provide an early glance into some of the actual dynamics of the Aśoka's government.

Aśoka in the Minor Rock Edict 1 (MRE 1) describes himself as an *upāsaka*, a Buddhist layman. However, Aśoka is certainly not the average Buddhist devout. If in the *Suttanipāta* we have a clear statement according to which a layman cannot equate to a monk, in the Aśoka's edict of Bairāṭ we find the king instructing the monks on the Buddhist texts to listen and to reflect on them (among which, as already noted, is a text containing the *Suttanipāta*'s verses that we are considering). This is quite a paradox, as usually it is monks who are expected to instruct laypeople. Furthermore, Aśoka in the so-called 'Schism Edict' seems to indicate to the monks how to settle their internal disputes.[45] These two elements alone would be enough to make us question how Aśoka conceived himself and in what way

[45] In this regard, see Olivelle (2012: 178-179).

he wanted to present himself to the public. Based on these two pieces of evidence, Aśoka does not relate to the monks from a subordinate position, but at least from an equal, if not a superior one. If we consider who actually addresses the monks with an attitude of superiority in the Buddhist texts, then we will notice that it is usually the Buddha who behaves like this. In his edicts, Aśoka recommends that the people adhere to the *dhaṃma*, a sort of ethical-religious law, one that, simultaneously, recommends an ethical behaviour and promises a soteriological reward. So strong was the commitment of the king that, according to the Rock Edict 8 (RE 8), he transformed 'pleasure tours' (*vihāra-yātā*),[46] which involved many pleasant activities (including hunting), into '*dhaṃma* tours' (*dhaṃma-yātā*), through which the king used to visit people of his countries to instruct and question them about his *dhaṃma*. The fact that the king himself travelled around the country to ensure the correct reception of his *dhaṃma* is not only surprising but is also arguably a symbolic statement. The fact that this conduct resembles that of the Buddha and early Buddhism can hardly go unnoticed. The very act of touring mirrors the itinerant inclination of early Buddhists and of the Buddha himself (as represented in Pāli sources). Similarly, questioning and instructing people about the *Dhamma* is precisely what the Buddha does in almost every account in which he is the protagonist. This has already been noted by Patrick Olivelle (2012: 178-179; 2023: 113), who also speaks in terms of Aśoka's "strategic ambivalence" (2023: 128) in communicating with monks and nuns through a modality that deliberately mirrors a Buddha's own instruction. Similarly, the symbols of power adopted by the king intentionally overlap with Buddhist symbols (Olivelle 2023: 92-94). Aśoka's attitude can also be conceived as a sort of *imitatio dei* (imitation of God); a royal attempt to appropriate and overlap with the religious sphere. Therefore, the policies of animal protection[47] and respect for life that emerge from Aśoka's edicts can be interpreted as a political move, perhaps necessary, to conform the figure of the sovereign to that of the ideal, typical ruler.[48] In this light, considering the statement of the two *Suttanipāta* verses discussed, perhaps already in existence at the time of Aśoka and known by him (see above § 2), the king tries to behave like a monk, who "constantly protects living creatures." By behaving like monks and protecting living creatures, Aśoka could, on a symbolical level, become their peer. From this situation, it is but a short step to become the *primus inter pares* (first among equals), one who has the right to preach his own

[46] See, for instance, the Girnar version in Hultzsch (1925: 14-15).

[47] For instance, in the Rock Edict 2 (RE 2) Aśoka establishes medical treatments for both humans and animals.

[48] A similar standpoint has been expressed by Piotr Balcerowicz, who writes that "[i]t may therefore seem justified to consider that Aśoka's appeal to nonharmfulness was rather pragmatic and declarative than genuinely moral, and various provisions introduced by him had a political, military, or economic rationale behind" (Balcerowicz 2022: 364).

doctrine (*dhaṃma*).[49] Therefore, we might wonder whether Aśoka 'was convinced' to take care of living beings or whether he intentionally adopted these ethical policies in order to legitimise himself. Recently, Timothy Lubin wrote about Aśoka, proposing that "[h]is Buddhist catechizing had instilled in him the view that killing animals was to be avoided, even for use in the royal kitchen" (2013: 35). A statement like this tacitly implies a kind of passive acceptance or an actual moral commitment.[50] Here, Lubin is referring to Aśoka's very famous Rock Edict 1 (RE 1), in which the king tells of how he worked to reduce the number of animals killed for the royal kitchens, yet still two peacocks and one deer/antelope/gazelle (*dvo morā eko mago*) are killed, albeit he goes on to promise that in the future he will stop even this type of killing:

> In the past, in the kitchen of the King Priyadasin, Beloved of the Gods, many hundreds of thousands of living beings were killed daily to prepare hotpot. But now, when this writing about the *dhaṃma* has been engraved, only three living beings were killed to prepare hotpot, two peacocks and one game animal, and the game animal not even consistently. And these three living beings will not be killed in the future either.[51]

The term *mago*, found in the Girnar version of RE 1, is equivalent to the Sanskrit *mṛga* and Pāli *miga* and can have a variety of meanings—deer, antelope, and gazelle being the most common—and, generally speaking, *mago*/*mṛga*/*miga* indicate game as a whole (cf. Pieruccini 2017-2018: 287-288), which fits the context of Aśoka's edict well.[52]

Contra Lubin, we might understand Aśoka's reduction of meat consumption as a necessary act of one who aimed to balance the image of the king as the protector of living beings with 1) the necessity to display royal power, maintaining the consumption of symbolically significant animals as they were consumed by other foreign rulers, such as the Great King of Persia; and 2) the willingness to please the actual desires of the population, who were probably very fond of this meat.

Concerning the first point, we can note how, according to Greek sources, at the table of the Great King of Persia game animals, such as deer and gazelle, were consumed. This is attested, for instance, by

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[49] As noted by Olivelle (2012: 173; 2023: 257-265), the Aśoka's *dhaṃma* can be compared with the modern concept of 'civil religion.'

[50] The fact that Aśoka's *ahiṃsā* may have been borrowed from Buddhism is a fact that Olivelle also mentions, what I will focus on are the reasons that pushed Aśoka to adopt it.

[51] (F) *purā mahānas*[*amhi*] *Devānaṃpriyasa Priy*[*a*]*dasino rāño anudivasaṃ bahūni prāṇa-sata-sahasrāni ārabhisu sūpāthāya* (G) *se aja yadā ayaṃ dha*[*ṃ*]*ma-lip*[*ī*] *likhitā tī eva prānā ārabhare sūpāthāya dvo morā eko mago so pi mago na dhruvo* (H) *ete pi trī prāṇā pachhā na ārabhisare* (Hultzsch 1925: 1-2).

[52] 'Game animal' is, indeed, the translation adopted by Olivelle (2023: 282) while Tieken (2023: 437) prefers 'deer.'

Polyaenus' *Stratagems* (4.3.32), in which gazelle are clearly mentioned.[53] Polyaenus' evidence is often discussed along with a fragment of Heraclides of Cyme preserved by Athenaeus. The latter is relevant to our discussion for at least two reasons. First, Athenaeus, just like Polyaenus, testifies that an enormous number of animals were killed daily for the royal table. Second, together with game animals, large fowls were consumed as well. It is worth citing the English translation made by Pierre Briant of the passage I am referring to (Athenaeus 4.145e):

> One thousand animals are slaughtered daily for the king; these comprise horses, camels, oxen, asses, deer, and most of the smaller animals; many birds also are consumed, including Arabian ostriches—and the creature is large—geese, and cocks ([1996] 2002: 289).

If we compare this evidence with the Aśoka RE 1, we can note that there are some elements in common. In both accounts thousands of animals were slaughtered for the royal table, albeit Aśoka claims that this was done in the past but not anymore. Furthermore, Athenaeus mentions the deer, which is a possible translation for *mago*/*mṛga*/*miga* (an umbrella term for 'game animals') and the large fowls. These parallels between the Greek sources and the Aśoka edict are particularly relevant if we consider the international relations that Aśoka had with coeval kings. This has been well highlighted by Patrick Olivelle (2023: 49-54) and, therefore, we are entitled to wonder about the existence of hidden international tropes behind Aśoka's model of royalty, which Aśoka must have taken into account, and to which he reacts, showing that he does not give up those dishes so dear to the Persian kings and known by Greeks.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, we cannot exclude that Aśoka wanted, for some reason, to please the actual desires of a population very fond of such kinds of meat. In particular, it seems that in a central area of India (*majjhimadesa*),[54] people were fond of peacock's meat—as testified, for instance, by the Pāli commentarial literature:

[53] For an English translation, see Briant ([1996] 2002: 286-287). Cf. also Briant (1989: 39-40), Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1995: 294-295), Amigues (2003: 4-9), Henkelman (2010: 685-686), Ermidoro (2015: 102). I wish to thank Claudia Antonetti for directing me to these valuable sources.

[54] On the *majjhimadesa*, see Roy (2014: 32).

> Those living in borders find even the earthworms pleasurable, while for people residing in the middle country they are considered extremely disgusting. For the latter, meats such as the peacock's is pleasurable, whereas for others these [meats] are viewed as extremely disgusting.[55]

In short, we can legitimately assume that Aśoka was not free from the practical needs of government, whether he had to respond to international standards of kingship or whether he did not want to go against widespread tastes and customs. A similar and compelling case has been discussed by James McHugh (2021: 241-242),[56] who recently problematised that Aśoka's moral precepts do not include abstention from intoxicating drinks, which were much appreciated in India.

We can legitimately ask ourselves in what terms we can speak of ideology at the service of power. Obviously, we cannot investigate Aśoka's innermost feelings and determine with certainty whether his respect for living beings arose from a sincere feeling or not. However, what we can note is that through his actions, he appeased all sides, showing both a moral commitment to higher ideals and a tolerance for worldly needs. Furthermore, by protecting living beings, he symbolically appropriated the function of the monk, participating actively rather than passively in religious discourse, as a layperson who places himself on the same level as monastic institutions, and then almost surpasses them. It is claimed he behaved in ways that resembled that of the Buddha of the Pāli canon and, funnily enough, like him he did not impose a full vegetarian diet. Therefore, although Aśoka's adoption of non-violence could be a move of symbolic appropriation of a religious function, we may argue, on the basis of our analysis of RE 1, that this was nonetheless mitigated by international standards of kingship and indigenous food tastes. Thus, Aśoka presents himself as a ruler who is able to balance his political decisions, taking into account both a local audience and an international panorama. Perhaps even more remarkably, food becomes part of the political and not just the religious discourse, in a situation where politics and religion merge and morality becomes both a symbol and a slave to power, where the watchword seems to be 'legitimacy.'

8. Conclusion

From the above discussion, we have seen how discussing the concept of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence / non-harmfulness) in ancient India involves digressions about violence, food, meditation, and political

[55] *paccantavāsīnaṃ hi gaṇḍ' uppādā pi iṭṭhā honti kantā manāpā: majjhimadesavāsīnaṃ atijegucchā. tesañ ca moramaṃsādīni iṭṭhāni honti, itaresaṃ tāni atijegucchāni* (Spk I 150, cf. Sv III 720, Vibh-a 10). Cf. also Mookerji (1928: 62), who refers to this account without providing the precise reference.

[56] On this issue, see also Olivelle (2023: 184-185).

concerns. The ancient verses of the *Suttanipāta* (220-221) present us with some tenets current in early Buddhism that were connected with Upaniṣadic ideas and that perhaps had an impact on the most influential king of ancient India: Aśoka.

What has emerged is that laypeople are unable to adopt a totally non-violent regime because of their involvement in the systematic production of food, the impossibility for them to fully apply ethical values turning out to be a social necessity. Therefore, the layman cannot equate to the monk. This is not only due to his social role in the production of food, but also to the fact that the monk is the only one able to emancipate himself from the need to feed himself with solid food, through obtaining a new level of embodiment that does not require solid food. One abandons a solid food diet not through renunciation, but through obtaining a new existential state, which is not really new, as it was something that belonged to us in a remote past.

In an intellectual environment in which a regime of total non-violence could be the prerogative of monks alone, we see the emergence of King Aśoka, a lay Buddhist who aspires to equate to monks, *de facto* calling into question the division between laypeople and monks, and especially the superiority of the latter. With my analysis, I have tried to challenge the view that would see Aśoka sincerely involved in a mass awareness campaign for the respect for life.[57] We are entitled to ask ourselves how it is possible, from a psychological point of view, that the same person who is guilty of the war in Kalinga, which was a massacre that, as Olivelle (2023: 27) reminds us, by today's standards would be defined as genocide, later becomes a sincere promoter of peace. Examples of genocides in the recent past and, alas, in the present, show us that their perpetrators have never repented in ways even comparatively similar to Aśoka. Therefore, the adoption of non-violence by Aśoka as an *instrumentum regni*, that is, as an ideological tool at the service of the crown, can be an interpretative line that is not only valid, but also provides us with a particular nuance, that is, the paradoxical adoption of non-violence by the power which is, by definition, the only one legitimised to use violence.

> [W]e must say that the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory.
>
> (Weber 2004: 33)

[57] On the modalities through which the stereotyped image of Aśoka flowed into the collective imaginary, see Squarcini (2019).

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All Pāli citations are from Pali Text Society (PTS) editions, unless otherwise noted.

A	*Aṅguttaranikāya* (PTS)
Abhid-k	*Abhidharmakośa* (Pradhan 1967)
AU	*Aitareyopaniṣad* (Olivelle 1998)
BU	*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (Olivelle 1998)
Buddha-c	*Buddhacarita* (Johnston 1936)
CU	*Chāndogyopaniṣad* (Olivelle 1998)
D	*Dīghanikāya* (PTS)
Ja	*Jātaka* (PTS)
M	*Majjhimanikāya* (PTS)
Manu	*Mānava-Dharmaśastra* (*Manusmṛti*) (Olivelle 2005)
MRE	Minor Rock Edict
RE	Rock Edict
ṚV	*Ṛgveda* (Aufrecht 1877)
S	*Saṃyuttanikāya* (PTS)
SBhV	*Saṅghabhedavastu* (Gnoli 1977-1978)
Sn	*Suttanipāta* (PTS)
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī* (*Saṃyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā*) (PTS)
Sv	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (*Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā*) (PTS)
Sv-pṭ	*Purāṇaṭīkā* on *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (*Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā-ṭīkā*) (PTS)
TU	*Taittirīyopaniṣad* (Olivelle 1998)
Vibh-a	*Sammohavinodanī* (*Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā*) (PTS)
Vin	*Vinaya* (PTS)
Visum	*Visuddhimagga* (PTS)

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Jaina attitudes towards animals

Ahiṃsā, *lāñchana* symbols and zoomorphic sculptures

Julia A. B. Hegewald

In this article, I examine attitudes towards animals in a Jaina religious context in India. The Jainas practice strict vegetarianism and with their core concept of *ahiṃsā* (not harming others), they go even further. They are not only meant to avoid doing violence to animals, but are also encouraged to actively care for them. As this is seen as a religious act, many of their temple complexes have bird-houses adjacent to shrines as well as shelters and animal hospitals close by.

- We also encounter animal depictions in the areas of art and architecture. In Jaina iconography, there are theriomorphic symbols associated with most of the twenty-four Jinas, the human but enlightened teachers and main objects of veneration in Jainism. As the fully-liberated Jinas all look the same, individual identifying symbols (*lāñchana*s) were introduced during the Gupta period. In addition to the Jinas, there are also Jaina gods and goddesses. Many of these, too, ride on beasts or even have part-zoomorphic forms themselves.
- A number of animal depictions also recur in the architecture of the Jaina temple. We typically find lion thrones (*siṁhāsana*s), which are either heavy stone-built altars—or in a Jaina context also lighter metal stands—on which statues are placed for veneration. The employment of the mythical and usually hybrid sea animal of the *makara*, for instance, is widespread in the design of arches (*makaratoraṇa*s) decorating the inside and outside of temple structures. Similarly composite creatures, known as *yāḷi*s, adorn the balustrades flanking temple structures. *Makara* or cow depictions also adorn water spouts found in Jaina sacred contexts. In addition, elephant depictions recur in the iconography of the goddess Lakṣmī (Gajalakṣmī) and prominent elephant sculptures are connected with the entrance gateways and porches of Jaina temple edifices and larger complexes.
- This shows that Jainas regard animals with great respect and invest many of them with particular sacred meanings. This gives them a prominent place in their philosophy as well as in the context of figural representations and temple settings.

Keywords: Jaina, Jainism, *ahiṃsā*, *lāñchana*, *siṁhāsana*, *makara*, *yakṣa*, *yakṣī*, Jaina temple, *kṣetrapāla*.

1. Introduction[1]

In South Asian art, depictions of animals are present from the earliest preserved remnants on decorated pottery, seals from the Indus Valley Civilization and in sgraffitos and wall paintings preserved in early rock-shelters. They form an essential part of human life as providers of food stuffs such as milk and eggs, and of materials for human protection (e.g. wool, feathers and skins) and for the production of tools (e.g. horn and ivory). Beasts also provide protection and companionship to humans. This chapter examines attitudes towards animals in a Jaina religious context. I shall refer to philosophical ideas, concepts of ethical behaviour, and as an art historian, I shall pay particular attention to visual material from the fields of Jaina sculpture and temple architecture.

The use of the word 'animal' as opposed to 'human,' drawing a clear line between the two and privileging one above the other, is nowadays viewed critically. In actual fact, one can argue that a separation between humans and animals has no ontological basis (Vallely 2014: 38-39). Similarly, the Jainas maintain that with respect to their souls and their ability to feel pain and suffering, all forms of life are essentially the same (Babb 2015: 121). However, the Jaina tradition, on which I focus in this article, also insists on a clear divide between human and nonhuman animals and places humans in a place superior to animals. This is based on the conviction that although animals can show moral awareness and perform ascetic practices, final enlightenment can only be attained from within a human body (Babb 2015: 49; 2020: 473). For this reason, I will hold on to a differentiation, separating humans from animals, in this article. Whilst there is a distinction to be made between the two, animals, as will be shown in the discussion below, should be protected and they play an important role in Jaina religious thought, literature, artistic and architectural practice.

In order to protect zoomorphic beings, the Jainas practise strict vegetarianism and follow the principle of nonviolence, *ahiṃsā*. They even construct animal feeding stations and hospitals close to temple precincts, to offer beasts protection and care. Furthermore, most of the twenty-four Jinas are connected with theriomorphic symbols, known as *lāñchana*s. In connection with the iconography of the two Jinas, Pārśvanātha and Supārśvanātha, depictions of snakes add a further dimension to the topic of zoological imagery in association with the enlightened saints. However, the gods and goddesses, the *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s of Jainism, also ride on theriomorphic mounts and some have hybrid forms, combining zoic with human body parts. Moreover, animal representations play a prominent

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role in other areas throughout the temple. I will explore the significance of lion thrones, *siṁhāsana*s, ornaments involving mythical sea creatures, the *makara*s, conduits in the form of *makara* and cow heads, and large elephant statues made of stone.

My discussion will illustrate the fact that, on the basis of their religious tenets, Jainas regard animals with great respect and invest many of them with a particular sacred significance. In consequence, they have been given an important place in Jaina philosophy, literature, and religious practice as well as in artistic representations and temple architecture.

2. Jaina philosophy and practice: *Ahiṃsā* and animal shelters

It is a general feature of many Indian religious movements, including, for instance, Buddhism and the classical yoga schools, that practitioners are supposed to avoid harming living beings (*jīva*), both human and animal.[2] However, no other faith group has taken this concept to such extremes as have the Jainas.[3]

2.1. Ahiṃsā in Jainism

The principle of nonviolence is in fact the core virtue of Jainism, to which all other vows and restraints (*vrata*) relate (Jaini 1990: 167; Chapple 2008: 516; Zydenbos 2020: 399). Instead of doing harm (*hiṃsā*) to oneself or to others, Jainas attempt to follow the tenet of *ahiṃsā*, noninjury, which is the first vow (*ahiṃsāvrata*), which initiates take on their ascetic path. This conviction is captured in the phrase '*ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*,' meaning 'nonviolence is the highest religious duty' (Wiley 2006: 438; Tuminello III 2018: 93). The Jaina belief is that people harm their own spiritual well-being when they injure others. Besides this self-interest, the issue of compassion (*karuṇā*) also plays an important role (Babb 2020: 471). In practice, this has led to the adherence to a stringent vegetarianism on the part of the Jainas.[4] However, the Jaina concept involves not only physical injury but also the avoidance of violence in thought and speech.

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[2] The category of *jīva* also includes stones, mountains, water bodies, such as lakes, and trees, as they all have what is described as "life force" and should correspondingly not be harmed (Chapple 1993: 11). This makes Jainas important players in environmental ethics. On Buddhism and nonviolence, refer to Chapple (1993: 21-47). By *jīva*, we also understand the eternal soul of a human being, which can reach liberation (Tuminello III 2018: 92).

[3] On this issue, see Jaini (1990: 167, 169) and Tuminello III (2018: 91). Refer also to the discussion of *ahiṃsā* in Jainism by Chapple (1993: 10).

[4] Followers of other Indian religious groups also observe at least selective forms of vegetarianism.

2.2. Rules of practice and diet

As part of their nonviolence ethics, Jaina monks and nuns carry a peacock brush to sweep the path in front of them to avoid harming small creatures (Plate 1). According to both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras, *ahiṃsā* must be applied to all living creatures, also to microscopic single-sense organisms, which in Jainism are referred to as *nigoda*s (Jaini 1990: 109, 168), which can be water- or airborne.[5] In order to protect these, Jaina ascetics filter water before they drink it and the mendicants of some subgroups cover their mouths with a shield (*muhpatti, muhapaṭṭikā*).[6]

Plate 1. Practising *ahiṃsā*, Jaina ascetics of both sexes carry a peacock brush to sweep the ground in front of them to avoid stepping on small insects.

[5] In terms of states of existence (*gati*), animals and plants make up the highest category of beings, the *tiryañca*. Below these are earth, water, fire and air bodies, whilst the *nigoda*s form the lowest group of beings (Chapple 1993: 11-12; Tatia 2002: 3, De Clercq 2013: 142). In terms of senses, however, animals (both human and nonhuman) have five senses and form the top level, whilst plants have only one sense, the sense of touch, and form the bottom tier of this hierarchy based on the number of senses (Tuminello III 2018: 92). On the same page Tuminello III points out that humans and nonhuman animals are capable of understanding the teachings of the Jinas although it is rare or even impossible for nonhuman animals to attain liberation. See also Babb (2020: 472). Due to this fact, humans are rated higher in this order than non-human animals (Vallely 2014: 38, 39).

[6] This is applied to stop the breath of the wearer from injuring minute life forms in the air (Babb 1994: 15), and prevent the person from swallowing tiny creatures in the atmosphere, spitting on sacred objects or harming others through negative words. Such mouth shields are worn on a daily basis by ascetic followers of the Śvetāmbara Sthānakvāsī sect. However, lay worshippers also cover their mouths when coming in close contact with sanctified icons, other objects of veneration and sacred scripture.

As *nigoda*s are present in especially large numbers in sweet and fermenting substances, Jainas generally discourage the consumption of alcohol and sweet ingredients, such as honey or ripe fruits (Jaini 1990: 168; Chapple 1993: 10). Jaina householders are also deterred from eating root vegetables, as pulling them out of the ground disturbs the earth and those beings living in it.[7] Furthermore, dietary restrictions indicate that Jainas should refrain from eating eggs as well as heavily seed-filled fruit and vegetables, such as figs, tomatoes, aubergines, courgettes and others, as these are seen as harbouring the potential for life (Chapple 1993: 10; Hegewald 2009: 27). In order to further protect *nigoda*s, Jainas are encouraged to eat in daylight (Chapple 1993: 10). Moreover, it is considered right conduct for Jaina laypeople to refrain from taking up professions in which injury to living beings can easily occur. This includes not only butchery or work with hides or dead bodies, but also occupations involving excessive heat, fire or water, which can all consume small living beings.[8] This has led to large sections of the Jaina community working as bankers and merchants, although there is also a significant number of Jaina jewellers and diamond cutters, whose work involves the generation of high temperatures.[9]

This emphasis on *ahiṃsā* in Jainism can be interpreted as a response to the Vedic and later Brahmanical practice of offering sacrificial animals in religious rituals (Jaini 1990: 169; Chapple 1993: 11; Babb 2020: 470, 473). The Jainas, however, developed this further into an outright ban on killing, even outside a religious or ritual context. The concept of nonharm developed into a specific Jaina ethic, relating to physical and mental injury caused to others, which should all be prevented (Chapple 2008: 516; Zydenbos 2020: 399-400). The emphasis on ethical behaviour and nonviolence practised by the large Jaina community in Gujarat, where Mahatma Gandhi grew up in a Vaiṣṇava Hindu context, led Gandhi to develop his approach of a peaceful civil disobedience and the nonviolent noncooperation resistance movement (Chapple 1993: 53-57).

[7] Another rationale provided by Tuminello III for abstaining from eating root vegetables is that these vegetables can sprout a vast number of new plants so that eating one of them is equated with killing multiple potential plants (2018: 94).

[8] Chapple emphasises that earth, water, fire and air need to be managed carefully as life particles are considered to be present in all of them (2008: 516).

[9] Jainism is not without internal contradictions. Probably the strongest inconsistency is that although *ahiṃsā* also means not harming oneself (Wiley 2006: 438), the rite of religiously observed self-starvation (*sallekhanā*) is one of the highest goals of the faith. Babb has also commented on this (1994: 15). Tuminello III turns the argument round and identifies *sallekhanā* as 'ritually fasting to death to achieve total avoidance of harm' (2018: 93)—harm, however, done to others. This is correct in so far as when individuals totally cease all actions and starve themselves to death, no harm will ever be done by them to any other being.

2.3. Visual representations of noninjury

In visual terms, the practice of nonharming is today represented by the symbol of the raised open palm of a hand, demonstrating the gesture of peace and fearlessness (*abhayamudrā*) (Donaldson and Bajželj 2021: 44). Often, an open lotus flower, seen from above, is superimposed onto the palm and the sign is complemented by a *svāstika* above, three dots and a further superimposed dot, which is enclosed from below by a semicircle. All these elements are surrounded by the outline of the hour-glass-shaped Jaina cosmos.[10] However, there are other ways of representing this theoretical concept in art. More complex figural representations show one of the Jinas, seated in deep meditation, who is being attacked by a tiger or lion but refrains from defending himself in a perfect gesture of noninjury. Furthermore, a representation of a cow on one side and a carnivorous creature, such as a lion or tiger on the other, peacefully drinking water from a joint trough and feeding each other's young is another poignant visual image symbolising the concept of *ahiṃsā* (Plate 2).

Plate 2. Representations of a cow and a lion drinking water from a joint trough and feeding each other's young are representative of the concept of *ahiṃsā*.

[10] This combined symbol was embraced by many Jainas in 1975 as an emblem of their religion (Donaldson and Bajželj 2021: 45). The hand symbolises *ahiṃsā*, the *svāstika* stands for the four states of existence within the cycle of rebirths (heavenly, human, hellish and subhuman), the three dots denote the "three jewels" of right view, knowledge and conduct, and the single dot in the crescent shape symbolises the *siddhaśīlā*, the place of the blissful souls.

2.4. Medical care and animal hospices

In addition to refraining from doing violence to other living beings, Jainas are also encouraged to treat them humanely and to actively nurture them by exercising active compassion (*jīvadayā*) (Babb 2020: 472). In this context, free medical care is available to humans at the Śrī Digambara Pārśvanātha Jaina Temple and Cikitsālay (hospital) in Jaipur, or at a free community health post in Delhi.[11] Allegedly, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Faxian (399-414 CE) noticed and commented on the provision of free medical care by the Jainas as early as the start of the fifth century CE (Titze 1998: 213). Animal hospitals (*pāñjarāpol, pāñjrāpol, piñjrāpol*) are also very common, especially those catering for sick birds. They are widespread, especially in larger cities, where pigeons in particular are regularly hurt in the traffic.[12] One example is the Jaina Bird Hospital in Old Delhi, which is attached to the Digambara Jaina Lāl Mandir.[13] It has an upper floor from which the animals are released into freedom after recovering from their ailments. Also common are shelters for sick cows and hospices for old and dying cattle. This is due to the fact that in India, when a cow is too old to give milk, she is normally set free and not fed or cared for any longer. These starving cows are regularly collected by Jainas and their care and food are paid for by donations.[14]

As this is seen as a religious act, many Jaina temple complexes have feeding stations for animals in their compounds. Especially widespread are small birdhouses, traditionally made of wood, which are frequently set up immediately adjacent to shrines, as can be seen at Bakhara Road in Rajasthan. They are often decorated and painted in bright colours (Plate 3). Alternatively, the aviaries can also be made of stone or concrete and take the form of quite complex architectural constructions, as, for example, at the Supārśvanātha Temple at Mandu, Madhya Pradesh. The importance of these structures becomes clear when temples are constructed in the diaspora which also have such bird feeding stations, as is

[11] For a photograph of the sign boards of the temple-cum-clinic establishments, refer to Titze (1998: 134 Plate 196, 140 Plate 205). Titze describes also a Digambara Jaina eye camp for tribal people paid for by Jaina donations at Sironji in Uttar Pradesh and an eye hospital run by a Sthānakvāsī nun at Rajgir in Bihar (1998: 214-217).

[12] In accordance with the Jaina ethic of nonviolence, carnivorous animals, such as birds of prey, are not cared for in such shelters (Vallely 2014: 48).

[13] For further information, access the webpage of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University (https://pluralism.org/a-hospital-for-birds, last accessed: 12.08.2024). Titze has written on the same bird hospital (1998: 134, 212, Plate 303) as has Babb (2015: 120-121; 2020: 473).

[14] Titze has written on this with reference to a particular shelter (1998: 227). Laidlaw and Tuminello have also written on the common Jaina practice of making charitable donations in support of animal shelters and medical facilities (Laidlaw 1995: 100; Tuminello III 2018: 94).

the case at the Jaina temple at Wilrijk near Antwerp in Belgium, where a wooden birdhouse is immediately adjacent to the temple.

Plate 3. The Jaina Temple at Bakhara Road, Rajasthan, has a painted wooden aviary, providing food to wild birds, erected close to its entrance.

3. Iconography: animal symbols and mounts for Jinas and divinities

Jainas are not only strict vegetarians who also advocate caring for animals. Jaina religious literature describes animals as being present when a Jina, after having reached full enlightenment, offers his first formalised teachings in the structure (*samavasaraṇa*) built for this purpose by the gods.[15] We also find many representations of various kinds of animals in Jaina art and architecture. Some of these will be discussed below.

3.1. Animal symbols of the Jinas

If we start with the area of Jaina iconography, it is the Jinas (victors) or Tīrthaṅkaras (fordmakers), the human but fully enlightened teachers of the Jaina religion, who form the main focus of adoration at home and in temple settings. In each world age, a set of twenty-four Jinas is born, preaches the path to enlightenment and finally passes into the bodyless state of *siddha*-hood. All twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras lead the same prototypical life and gain an identical understanding about the correct path to salvation. By the time of their liberation, they have burnt away all bad *karma*, which, as Jainas argue, clings to the

[15] That is, animals are present, alongside humans and gods (Babb 2020: 472).

body like a physical substance and gives it individuality. Therefore, enlightened Jinas all look identical (Hegewald 2009: 68).[16] In order still to be able to differentiate between them, identifying symbols, *lāñchana*s, were introduced during the Gupta period (ca. fourth – sixth CE), and gained in popularity from the fifth century in particular (Shah 1987: 83-85; Hegewald 2005: 71; Plate 4).[17] When focusing on attitudes towards animals in Jainism, it is striking how many of these symbols are theriomorphic in nature.[18] Whilst the Śvetāmbara and Digambara forms of Jainism do not always agree as to which animal is associated with a particular Tīrthaṅkara, there exists a surprising uniformity.

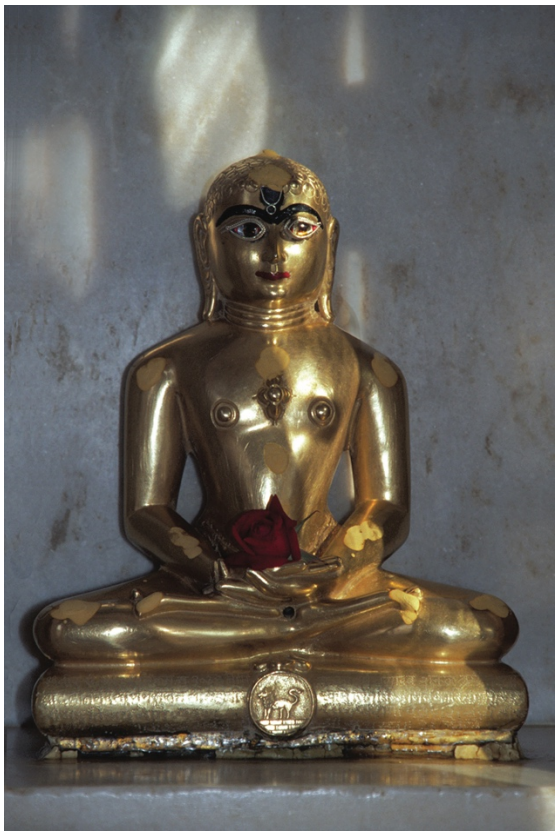

Plate 4. From the Gupta period, Jaina icons were provided with a small identifying symbol below the statues, such as the lion associated with Mahāvīra.

[16] On the issue of *karma* as a physical, sticky entity, which weighs the soul down and prevents it from reaching *siddha*-hood and floating up to the *siddhaloka*, the place of the liberated souls, refer to Chapple (1993: 13).

[17] For an overview of these *lāñchana* symbols, refer to various lists provided by Shah (1985: 84), Nagar (1999, Vol. II: 409) Hegewald (2009: 595) and De Clercq (2013: 146).

[18] Others take the form of different kinds of lotuses (*padma*; Padmaprabhu and Naminātha), a *svāstika* (Supārśvanātha), a crescent moon (*candra*; Candraprabhu), a *śrīvatsa* symbol amongst the Śvetāmbaras and a wishing tree (*kalpavṛkṣa*) amongst the Digambaras (Śītalanātha), a thunderbolt (*vajra*; Dharmanātha), a *nandyāvarta* symbol (Aranatha, in Śvetāmbara Jainism), a water pot or vase (*kalaśa*; Mallinātha) and a conch (*śaṅkha*; Neminātha).

In this context, it is fascinating to observe that we encounter some creatures which are quite uncommon. They are not widely invested with a particular holiness nor regularly depicted in a sacred Jaina context more generally. Amongst these are, for instance, a monkey (*kapi*; associated with Abhinandanātha),[19] a crocodile (Puṣpadanta), a curlew or heron (*krauñca*; Sumatinātha),[20] a rhinoceros (*gaṇḍaka*; Śreyāṃsanātha), a buffalo (*mahiṣā*; Vāsupūjyasvāmī),[21] a falcon, kite (*śyena*) or hawk amongst the Śvetāmbaras and a bear in Digambara Jainism (Anantanātha) as well as a male goat (Kunthunātha).[22]

Other animals are well known from iconographic forms in a Hindu religious context, such as a single or a pair of fish (*matsya*; in Digambara Jainism Aranātha), a tortoise (*kūrma*; Munisuvrata), a boar (*sūkara*; Vimalnātha) and a horse (*aśva*; Sambhavanātha). Although I do not wish to allude to some direct connection, it is worth noticing that all these beasts are also closely associated with the Hindu god Viṣṇu as part of his ten incarnations (*avatāra*s). More generally, horses are considered auspicious and have been linked with good fortune (Nagar 1999 Vol. I: 95). A deer and a stag (*mṛga*) or antelope (Śāntinātha), are also known from Śaiva imagery in the south as well as from Buddhist iconography.

Other creatures employed as *lāñchana* symbols are very typical of a South Asian religious environment more generally. Amongst these are a bull (*vṛṣa*), who is associated with the first Jina Ṛṣabha, also known as Ādinātha. After his conception, Ṛṣabha's mother, Marudevī, had fourteen (in Śvetāmbara Jainism) or sixteen (in Digambara Jainism) dreams. In the first dream, a bull appeared to her. When the baby was born, he allegedly had the mark of a bull on his chest or thigh, leading to Marudevī naming her son Ṛṣabha as well as to his later association with the identifying symbol of the bull (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 73; De Clercq 2013: 147). A similar story has been preserved in association with Ajitanātha, the second Jina, whose mother repeatedly saw elephants (*gaja*) in dreams before giving birth. For this reason, the elephant became the sign associated with this Jina (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 91). Although the animal to appear first in the dream of the mothers can vary, all texts mention an elephant, a lion and a bull as the first set to emerge (De Clercq 2013: 144-145). These three animals are all very popular in Indic culture and closely associated with royalty, power and the *kṣatriya* caste in particular.

[19] Nagar points out that according to some texts, the *lāñchana* of Abhinandanātha is a lion (1999, Vol. I: 97), but this is very unusual.

[20] Alternatively, Sumatinātha is associated with a goose, which is a much more common animal in Indian mythology and art. The goose is usually associated with intelligence (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 98).

[21] According to Nagar, buffaloes are associated with wealth (1999, Vol. I: 110).

[22] It is interesting that, as Kadgaonkar points out, drawings of rhinoceroses and herons, as well as of other animals, adorn the walls of pre-historic cave shelters in India. He also reminds us of depictions of monkeys and other beasts from the Indus Valley Culture (2008-2009: 163).

The full set of dreams plays an important role during the celebrations of the five auspicious events in the life of a Jina, the *pañcakalyāṇa*, and they have regularly been depicted in Jaina art and architecture (Hegewald 2009: 115-116). The mythical *makara*, too, figures as a *lāñchana* symbol of Puṣpadanta (alternatively known as Suvidhinātha) (Nagar 1999, vol I: 71, 106-107). We will return to the *makara* in more detail below.

Two additional sacred animals which we encounter frequently in the context of the *lāñchana* symbols are the serpent or cobra (*naga*, *phaṇi*; Pārśvanātha) and the lion (*siṁha*; Mahāvīra). Pārśvanātha is associated with the identifying symbol of the snake because his mother, while pregnant with her son, saw in a dream a black cobra passing by her side (Shah 1970: 303). The connection between Mahāvīra and the lion is explained in a story that gives further weight to the ideas of *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism. In his last animal life prior to his human birth, Mahāvīra is said to have lived as a lion. Hearing a sermon on *ahiṃsā*, he was allegedly so impressed that he became a vegetarian lion, resulting in his speedy death and rebirth as a human, a form of existence which enabled him to gain deliverance (Chapple 1993: 12; Babb 2020: 472).[23] In fact there are many Jaina narratives which idealise the heroic and compassionate behaviour of animals (De Clercq 2013: 148-150; Vallely 2014: 46-47). In the context of attitudes towards nature more generally, it should also be pointed out that each Jina is associated with a particular enlightenment tree.[24]

In connection with the iconography of the two Jinas, Pārśvanātha and Supārśvanātha, depictions of snakes protecting the Jinas with their flared hoods from behind add a further dimension to the topic of theomorphic imagery in association with the enlightened saints. In addition to Pārśvanātha's snake *lāñchana*, both Jinas can be shown with a canopy-like hood of a multi-headed cobra behind their heads. Sometimes, the long, coiled body of the snake is also visible at the front or the back of the sculptures (Plate 5). According to various iconographic texts, Pārśvanātha is usually shown sheltered by seven snake heads, whilst the canopy behind Supārśvanātha takes the form of a one-, three-, five- or nine-

[23] De Clercq refers to a number of similar Jaina narratives that elaborate on the influence which the teachings of the Jinas can have on animals (2013: 150-153). Babb, too, stresses the fact that animals are capable of understanding the Jaina teachings, even if they are able to follow them only to a very limited extent, which, however, can lead to a rebirth in a human body (2020: 472). Even more interesting, in a world view where humans are clearly placed hierarchically above nonhuman animals, De Clercq also refers to literature illustrating the moral influence which animals and their behaviour can have on the Tīrthaṅkaras (2013: 153-154).

[24] For a list of the enlightenment trees (*caitya* trees) of the twenty-four Jinas, refer to Shah (1955: 76). Sambhavanātha, for instance, is associated with the Śāla tree, whilst Vimalanātha is connected with the Jambū tree. On *caitya vṛkṣa*s, see also Hegewald (2009: 71, 76, 178, 180-181).

hooded snake, with five heads being the most frequent form.[25] The narrative surrounding this specific iconographic feature in connection with Pārśvanātha further illustrates the rejection of sacrifices which Jainas propagate. According to the legend, Pārśvanātha, then still in an earlier human life as a *brāhmaṇ* called Marubhūti, saved two snakes, Dhāraṇendra and Padmāvatī, from being offered by his brother Kamaṭha in a sacrificial fire. In his subsequent life, Pārśvanātha in turn was saved by these snakes, who sheltered him under their flared hoods when Kamaṭha, reincarnated as Meghamālin, Kaṭha (Śvetāmbara) or Saṃvara (Digambara), attacked the meditating Pārśvanātha (Shah 1970: 303-304). For this reason, Pārśvanātha's attendants and protector divinities, his *yakṣa* and *yakṣī*, are the snake-beings Dhāraṇendra and Padmāvatī. The earliest preserved representations of Pārśvanātha with a protective hood of snakeheads can be seen in the Jaina cave at Aihole and on the rock boulders at Tirrakkol in Tamil Nadu. After this, the theme is repeated at a number of other early cave sites, such as Badami, Karnataka (Plate 6), and Kalugumalai, Tamil Nadu.[26] The connection between snakes and Supārśvanātha is explained by his mother having conceived him on a bed of snakes (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 101). Whilst Pārśvanātha has the snake hood and also carries the symbol of a snake below his statues, the *lāñchana* symbol of Supārśvanātha is the *svāstika*.

[25] For Supārśvanātha, depictions with one or nine serpent hoods are very rare (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 101-102). For Pārśvanātha, refer to Nagar (1999, Vol. I: 136).

[26] Shah has outlined the evolution of this theme in early Jaina art (1970: 306).

Plate 5. Statues of Pārśvanātha have a snake symbol, are usually sheltered by a hooded snake and at times, as here at Anjaneri, Maharashtra, display its coiled body.

Plate 6. Large-scale carved representation of Pārśvanātha with a protective hood of snakeheads behind his head, from cave number four at Badami, Karnataka.

3.2. Animal connections of Jaina gods and goddesses

In terms of iconography, many of the gods and goddesses of Jainism, the *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s, also have animal symbols, or ride on zoomorphic mounts (*vāhana*s), while some even have hybrid forms themselves, combining theriomorphic with human body parts. As all of the twenty-four Jinas are each associated with a *yakṣa* and with a *yakṣī* and as there is much diversity between the different traditions with regards to their names, their *lāñchana*s, their *vāhana*s and their own forms of representation, I will discuss only a small number of representative examples.[27]

There are many guardian divinities associated with zoological mounts. The *yakṣa* of Sumatinātha known as Tuṁburu, for instance, is associated with an eagle (*garuḍa*) and his *yakṣī*, Mahākālī (amongst the Digambaras: Puruṣadattā), with a goose (*haṁsa*; at least amongst Digambaras) (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 99; Hegewald 2009: 598). The mount of Kumāra, the *yakṣa* of the twelfth Jina Śreyāṃsanātha, is a goose or peacock whilst his *yakṣī* Caṇḍa rides a horse amongst Śvetāmbaras and a *makara* or snake in Digambara iconography (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 110). The *yakṣī* of Neminātha, who is called Aṁbikā amongst the Śvetāmbaras and Kuṣamāṇḍinī by the Digambaras, rides on a lion (Plate 7).

Plate 7. Kuṣamāṇḍinī Devī, the *yakṣī* of Neminātha, is iconographically shown riding on a lion, as in this sculpture from Shravanabelgola, Karnataka.

[27] For a comprehensive list of all the *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s with their associated symbols, refer to Hegewald (2009: 598).

Other divinities are part theriomorphic themselves. The *yakṣa* of the first Jina Ṛṣabha is known as Vṛṣabha Yakṣa or Gomukha Yakṣa (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 74). Gomukha means 'cattle' or 'cow-faced' and there are depictions of this attendant with a bull's head. A further animal connection is shown in his riding an elephant (Plate 8) or a bull and there are variants in which he has been provided with an elephant's head as well (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 196-197). Pārśvanātha's associated *yakṣa*, Dhāraṇendra, also has an elephant head, but rides on a tortoise (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 236). His *yakṣī*, Padmāvatī, is shown sometimes in the composite form of half rooster and half snake, and at other times in human form, with a rooster as her mount (Nagar 1999, Vol. I: 301).

Plate 8. This statue from Narlai, Rajasthan, shows Vṛṣabha or Gomukha Yakṣa, with a bull's head and an elephant as his *vāhana*.

There are other Jaina divinities which display strong animal connections. For instance, Sarasvatī—one of the Śrutadevīs or Vidyādevīs, the goddesses of knowledge and learning—rides a goose or swan. Similarly, several Jaina *kṣetrapāla*s, the guardians of the temple compound, have animal connections. Especially prominent in south Indian Digambara Jainism is the *yakṣa* and *kṣetrapāla* Brahmadeva, who rides a horse. As such, he can be represented seated on a horse; on the famous Brahmadeva *stambha*s, where an openair statue of him sits at the top of the tall pillars, a high relief representation of his horse usually adorns one of the sides of the pillar towards the bottom. Alternatively, Brahmadeva can also be seen riding an elephant. Likewise, the *kṣetrapāla* Bhairava is associated with a dog.

4. Animal depictions in temple architecture

Some of these more typical sacred animals not only appear in close association with figural icons but also recur in other areas of the architecture of the Jaina temple, indicating a further sacred significance, separate from the Jinas.

4.1. Lion thrones, *makaratoraṇas* and zoomorphic waterspouts

Lion thrones (*siṁhāsana*s), which are usually heavy stone-built altars on which statues are placed for veneration in a temple setting, are found across all of South Asia. In a Jaina context, a *siṁhāsana* can also be a lighter metal stand. Whilst the laity generally has no direct access to the main sacred icon (*mūlanāyaka*)—normally a fixed (*sthāvara*) stone sculpture in the main shrine (*garbhagṛha*) or several representations housed in multiple sanctums—lay worshippers are often permitted to conduct rituals on smaller metal icons (*vidhināyaka*s). These are placed on low tables or on metal stands for veneration (Hegewald 2005: 491-499; 2007: 132-146).

A practice that is very widespread in a Jaina temple context is the employment of the mythical and usually hybrid sea animal known as the *makara*. In most cases, it combines elements of a crocodile, a fish and an elephant. In later representations, its tail can also be reminiscent of that of a bird (Ranasinghe 1991/1992: 136). All the animals which can make up a composite *makara* are closely connected with water and illustrate its aspects of auspiciousness, purity and fertility. The latter quality is further emphasised by the emergence of vegetation, sometimes lotus flowers, from the *makara*'s mouth (Ranasinghe 1991/1992: 135, 137). Two facing *makara* figures frequently recur in the design of arches (*makaratoraṇa*s) decorating the outside and inside of temple structures (Plate 9). In this context, the pair of creatures usually bridge openings, such as niches, windows or doorways. According to

Ranasinghe, the *makaratoraṇa* marks the gate to the sacred area of the temple and the gateway to heaven (Ranasinghe 1991/1992: 133-134).

Plate 9. In a temple at Shravanabelgola, Karnataka, two sea creatures with vegetation emerging from their mouths face each other to form an arch (*makaratoraṇa*).

Mythical composite animals, such as *makara*s and also *yāḷi*s, which combine a lion body with an elephant head, also adorn the balustrades flanking the entrance to temple structures. Especially beautiful examples can be seen throughout South India and in structures dating from the Hoysaḷa period (11th till 14th century CE) in Karnataka in particular.

The mythical *makara* can also adorn water spouts in a Jaina temple context. Such conduits can either be part of water structures found adjacent to temples, or they can lead excess water off temple roofs or channel water out of shrines. Such channels are usually positioned on the north side of the main sanctum and lead off the liquids, largely a mixture of water and milk, which have been poured over the main sacred object of veneration inside the *garbhagṛha*. Alternatively, the conduit can also take the shape of a cow's head (*gomukh praṇālī*s, *praṇāla*s). In Hindu temples, the choice of a cow's head as funnel relates to the glacier mouth, the Gangotri glacier, out of which the Ganges emerges at its source in the Garhwal Himal in Uttarakhand. In a Hindu context, the presence of the cow-mouth funnel equates the sacred elixir (*tīrtha*) issuing out of the sanctum of the temples with Ganges water. For this reason, a sculptural depiction of the sage Bhagīratha, who is credited with bringing down the Ganges from heaven, is often found holding up the water channels from below (Hegewald 2002: 16-19). As the Ganges has no particular sacred significance in Jainism, the employment of cow-head spouts might

indicate a participation in a more general shared cultural South Asian milieu. It appears to relate to the auspiciousness connected with cows and other bovine creatures more generally, also in Jainism.

4.2. Elephant statues in Jaina temples

Another animal which can be found adorning the lintels of Jaina temples is the elephant (*gaja*). Just as in the case of the *makaratoraṇa*s, we find two elephants in these depictions, flanking and pouring water over a central representation of the goddess Lakṣmī seated on a lotus. Such depictions of Lakṣmī, who holds an important place in Jaina ritual, are known as Gajalakṣmī. Depictions of Gajalakṣmī or of elephants more generally are also widespread in a Hindu sacred context,[28] although the Jainas appear to have even more representations of this particular animal in their temple complexes. In a Jaina context, the prominent positioning of elephant sculptures in connection with entrance gateways and porches that provide access to sacred complexes and temple edifices is very widespread. They are found in Jaina temple architecture all over the subcontinent and also in the diaspora. Prominent examples are the large elephant statues flanking the entrance doors to many of the walled compounds on Mount Śatruñjaya in Gujarat (Plate 10). However, they are also found at the actual entrance to temple buildings. Many of these have elephant statues flanking the access stairs, as at the Maṅgāyi Basadi at Shravanabelgola (1325 CE). It is noteworthy that this feature was considered so typically Jaina that many temples constructed in the diaspora also have flanking elephant statues at their entrances, as can be seen in the Śaṅkheśvar Pārśvanātha Jaina temple at Wilrijk close to Antwerp in Belgium. A set of especially large and beautifully carved elephant statues, which appear to emerge from the walls of the porch flanking the entrance to the temple, can be seen in the former Jaina temple at Pattadakal in Karnataka, dating from the 8th or 9th century CE.

[28] Elephants are not exclusively important to the Jainas. For instance, the Hindu god of rain, Indra, also rides on an elephant, which in its own body shape is reminiscent of a cloud. Beautiful sculptural representations of the god seated on his elephant can be seen in the Hoysaḷa temples of the Deccan. The elephant is also associated with the Hindu divinity of fire, Agni (Schmaus 2019: 115). The best-known example is probably the god Gaṇeśa, Śiva's son, who has the head of an elephant. Many south Indian Hindu temples still own live temple elephants.

Plate 10. Large carved elephant statues adorn the walls flanking the entrance gateway to one of the walled compounds on Mount Śatruñjaya, Gujarat.

Statues of elephants probably reflect the fact that visitors had to dismount from them at the gates of temples. In addition, elephants act as guardians and their presence might also allude to the royal nature of the Jinas enshrined within. References to the special nature of elephants go back to the *Ṛg Veda*, investing the animal with the virtues of strength, assertiveness, luck, wealth and success, wisdom and also ferocity (Schmaus 2019: 115, 124). At least from the time of the Mauryan period, they had been employed in battles and served as symbols of the power and prosperity of a ruler (Kulke und Rothermund 2006: 16). As guardians, according to Schmaus, elephants were believed to be able to switch between the inner ordered sacred sphere of the temple and the chaos of the mundane world outside. They were thus seen as mediators, who could help devotees make this change to a sacred ordered world as well.[29]

5. Concluding thoughts

The Jainas have developed a religious system which places the concept of nonviolence at the highest level of its principles of morality and ethical behaviour. *Ahiṃsā* is seen as the solution for all suffering and the main tool on the path to spiritual release, as it prevents negative *karma* from being

[29] In the same context, see also comments on the presence of icons of Gaṇeśa close to the entrances of Śaiva temples (Schmaus 2019: 122).

accumulated, binding the soul to the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Not only was the Jaina moral logic of *ahiṃsā* adopted by Mahatma Gandhi in his peaceful fight for independence, but it is propagated today as ideal ethical behaviour by animal rights activists and forms the basis for movements for the protection of animals and the environment worldwide.[30] Within animal or environmental ethics, Jainas living in the diaspora generally intervene more actively when harm is done to animals.[31] As such, Jaina ideals play an important role in animal activism in the West. The Jaina belief in minute life particles, present in everything, has been proven by modern molecular biology to be correct.

Nevertheless, Jainas draw a clear and definite line between human and nonhuman animals. They characterise the ideal behaviour of religious humans as exhibiting restraint and detachment, which represent the Jaina ideal, and place them in a separate category, superior to all. By contrast, Jainas portray animals as lacking self-awareness, mindfulness and control. They are regarded as inferior in so far as they participate in the struggle of survival without reflecting on the violence they inflict on others (Vallely 2014: 49). In the Jaina religious view, absolute cessation of *karma* can only be achieved by human beings (Jaini 2009: 82). Nevertheless, there are stories of exceptional, heroic animals, who managed to overcome their animalistic nature to such an extent that they succeeded in being reborn as humans.

Due to their respect and admiration for the special traits of certain animals, the Jainas have associated most of their fully enlightened saintly teachers with zoomorphic symbols. In addition, Jaina gods and goddesses ride on theriomorphic mounts and some even have partial animal features. Not just in the area of iconography, but also in Jaina temple complexes, real and mythical beasts are omnipresent. They are believed to protect the sacred environment and their presence integrates mythological and heavenly imagery into the architecture of temple complexes. Although Jainas draw a qualitative line of distinction between human and nonhuman animals, they regard animals with great respect and invest many of them with particular sacred meanings, giving them a prominent place in their philosophy as well as in sculptural representations and temple architecture.

[30] For further details on Jaina animal protectionism and environmentalism, refer to Tuminello III (2018: 91) and Chapple (2002: xxxiii-xxxvii).

[31] This has been outlined by Tuminello III, who draws a contrast between Jainas living in India, whom he sees as more 'liberation-centric,' focused on achieving their own release through the cessation of action and active intervention, and Jainas living in the diaspora, whom he describes as more 'socio-centric,' meaning willing to intervene in a non-violent way out of a concern for the misery of the animals, while accepting that any action will incidentally accumulate *karma* on their side (Tuminello III 2018: 94-96). On this issue, refer also to Babb (2020: 473).

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Philosophical and linguistic views

Animal-oriented *laukikanyāyas*

On some uses of analogical maxims concerning animals in selected Vedāntic contexts

Gianni Pellegrini

This contribution analyses some common uses of illustrations and analogical maxims related to the animal kingdom in general and some animals in particular. Indeed, Sanskrit philosophical texts occasionally resort to everyday life scenarios that are readily accessible to human experience in order to clarify sophisticated theories, doctrines or complex theoretical disquisitions. The maxims that portray specific natural and cultural situations and analogise them with specific theoretical contexts are called *laukikanyāya*s. These *laukikanyāya*s, which are usually built upon the observation of nature, are frequently modelled after animals, taking into account certain physical or behavioural traits that may be either tangible or cultural. A well-known example found in the *Adhyāsabhāṣya* (Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda's introduction to his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*) will serve as a methodological starting point for the analysis.

Keywords: non-human animals, analogical maxims, *laukika-nyāya*, *lūtā* "spider," *cakora* "eastern partridge."

1. Introduction[1]

Indeed, Sanskrit philosophical texts occasionally draw on everyday life situations that are immediately accessible to human experience in order to elucidate intricated theories, doctrinal positions, or complex textual argumentations. A distinctive form of such illustrative strategies and reasonings is found in *laukikanyāya*s: maxims that capture specific natural or cultural scenarios and apply them analogically to abstract theoretical contexts.

This essay examines the use of illustrations, metaphors and analogical maxims involving animals, both in general and with reference to particular species. To that end, I begin with a set of general

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reflections on the ancient cultural and intellectual presupposition that gave rise to *laukikanyāya*s. I then follow a sort of methodological and epistemological path outlined by Śaṅkara's reflections on humans and animals in the *Adhyāsabhāṣya.*

The term *nyāya* has been employed with a range of meanings over time. In what follows, I shall briefly address those nuances most pertinent to the investigation of *laukikanyāya*s (variously translated as 'proverbial analogical maxims, popular maxims, analogical reasonings'), while also attempting to sketch the historical development of this particular textual device.

Many of these maxims are grounded in close observation of the natural world, with a significant number modelled after animals, drawing upon their physical characteristics, behavioural patterns, or culturally ascribed traits. These *laukikanyāya*s, often shaped by a form of zoological scrutiny as well as mythological resonances, serve to clarify complex textual contexts. In the central part of this essay, I shall concentrate on two examples concerning causality and agency developed within the Advaita Vedānta tradition, tracing their textual foundations and briefly considering the theoretical contexts in which they are deployed. Finally, I shall situate the hermeneutic device of animal-oriented-*laukikanyāya*s within broader a global philosophical perspective.

To do so, the analysis must be framed within a broader context, one that stems from an attitude characteristic of the archaic layers of Sanskrit literature.

As a matter of fact, since the earliest Vedic tradition, the unique quality of vision has established the distinct and superior ontological status of the primordial seers: *ṛṣir darśanāt* 'Is seer because of [his] sight,' as Yāska (5th cent. BCE) states in the *Nirukta* 2.11 (Sarup 1984: 29 and 50).

The exalted ontological status of poet-seers in relation to ordinary human beings is determined by one of their primary and distinctive characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*), namely sight, observation, and vision (Gonda 1963).[2] Their ability to perceive the connective tissue of the cosmos entails a penetrating and integrative form of observation. Inspired by this *in-sight*, Vedic poets unveil various forms of homologies and correspondences (*bandhu*, *nidāna*) across manifold domains of existence (Ganeri 2018: 173-181; Brereton 1990, 118; Gonda 1965: 1-29).[3]

[2] See the *Padārthadharmasaṃgraha* (1994: 57) and Torella (2011: 98) on the passage.

[3] The earliest Indian use of animals in literature was probably as similes. As Stephanie Jamison (2009 and 2013: 76) has pointed out, such similes abound already in the *Ṛg Veda*. A god is compared to a bull or a horse; tenderness is like a cow lowing for her calf. There are other metaphors like *narasiṃha* 'man-lion,' *puṃgava* 'man-bull,' *siṃhadaṃṣṭra* 'lion-toothed,' *rājasiṃha* 'king-lion,' etc. What is significant in these metaphors is that a particular characteristic is singled out as defining a specific animal and constituting its very nature (*svabhāva*). The association of a particular species with a set of physical, moral and intellectual qualities with personality traits plays a central role in animal usages in later texts (Olivelle 2013: 4-6).

Nature and its elements have been central to the meticulous observation of poet-seers. Therefore, Vedic seers' vision integrates both external and internal dimensions, encompassing their own being, the surrounding world, and all living entities, including humans and non-human animals.[4] This inquiry specifically examines the physical, psychological, and environmental analogies (*sādharmya, lit.* 'homogeneousness') and differences (*vaidharmya*) between humans and non-human animals, seeking to bridge seemingly incompatible domains (Pellegrini 2011: 106–107; Halbfass 1991: 268–272). As a result, texts addressing metaphysics often depict the state of a realized sage as one who perceives a fundamental sameness (*sama*) everywhere.[5] Thus, despite superficial distinctions rooted in the psycho-physical sphere, a focus on the metaphysical essence of the self (*ātman*) reveals profound analogies, assimilations, and even instances of identification (Nelson 2006: 189-190).

2. Human and non-human animals

When considered solely in its corporeal and cognitive aspects, the human being possesses nothing fundamentally distinct from other creatures (see Pinotti 1994: 103–121). In a brief passage of the *Adhyāsabhāṣya* ('Commentary on Superimposition'),[6] Śaṅkara's observation of a multi-level correspondence between non-human animals and human animals serves as the foundation for a series of the analogical reflections of this essay.

According to Śaṅkara there is a fundamental error that causes a confusion common to both humans and non-human animals. This misconception, technically referred to as *adhyāsa*—typically translated as 'superimposition'—results in a shared epistemic limitation. Consequently, through the metaphysical analysis of humans, we can counterintuitively identify certain epistemic characteristics of non-human animals as well, since both are equally confined within their psycho-physical aggregates. Indeed, similar reactions in discerning individuals—possessing a higher degree of intelligence—and

[4] Hadot (2004: 210-216) points out that since the dawn of antiquity, it has been believed that the poet is the true interpreter of nature, possessing knowledge of all its secrets. This stems from the notion that nature itself acts as a poet and that its creation is a kind of poem. Although Hadot (2004: 210–211) focuses specifically on Plato's *Timaeus*, nonetheless he mentions also the relevant Stoic theme of the 'Poet of the universe.'

[5] As pointed out by Nelson (2006: 179-182) see for example *Bhagavadgītā* (BG 5.18: *vidyāvinayasapanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini | śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ* || "The wise perceive the same essence in a learned and humble Brahmin, in a cow, in an elephant, even in a dog and in a man of the lowest rank"), but in the Upaniṣads there are plenty of examples.

[6] The *Adhyāsabhāṣya* (AB) serves as the preface to the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (BSBh or *Śārīrakamīmāṃsābhāṣya* 'The Commentary on the Investigation of the Embodied Self'), Śaṅkara Bhagavadpāda's commentary (8th century) on the *Brahmasūtra* (BS 'Thread of Statements about *brahman*').

instinct-driven animals in comparable situations involving pleasant (*anukūla*) or unpleasant (*pratikūla*) stimuli demonstrate that both are subject to the same superimposition:

> *paśvādibhiś cāviśeṣāt | yathā hi paśvādayaḥ śabdādibhiḥ śrotrādīnāṃ saṃbandhe sati śabdādivijñāne pratikūle jāte tato nivartante anukūle ca pravartante | yathā daṇḍodyatakaraṃ puruṣam abhimukham upalabhya māṃ hantum ayam icchatīti palāyitum ārabhante, haritatṛṇapūrṇapāṇim upalabhya taṃ pratyabhimukhībhavanti | evaṃ puruṣā api vyutpannacittāḥ krūradṛṣṭīn ākrośataḥ khaḍgodyatakarān balavata upalabhya tato nivartante, tadviparītān prati pravartante | ataḥ samānaḥ paśvādibhiḥ puruṣāṇāṃ pramāṇaprameyavyavahāraḥ | [...]*
>
> Also because [in regards to empirical behavior], there is no difference [of human beings] from the animals. In fact, animals turn away from a sound or other [stimuli] when it appears to be unpleasant once it has come in contact with hearing, while they move towards when it appears pleasant. For example, by noticing a man approaching with a raised stick [they consider] "He wants to beat me" and start to run away. [On the contrary,] they approach upon noticing a [man] holding some green grass in his hand. Similarly, intelligent human beings, upon noticing fierce-looking strong persons yelling with upraised swords, turn away, but draw near to those who appear friendly. Thus, the empirical behavior of human beings with respect to means of knowledge and [their] objects is similar to that of animals [...].

Drawing on the reactions of humans and animals, this passage highlights analogies—both positive and negative[7]—that invite deeper metaphysical and methodological reflections. In Śaṅkara's time (8th cent.), such analogies were part of a widely shared perspective, having already taken the well-structured form of proverbs, analogical reasoning, and maxims. These formulas served to clarify and convey complex abstract concepts and theories through vivid illustrations and metaphors. In this manner, the true essence of abstraction is revealed within a framework of what might be termed 'concrete metaphysics' (Cacciari 2023).[8]

[7] It is worth highlighting a well-known stanza from the introduction of the *Hitopadeśa* (1.25, see Pellegrini 2011: 106-108): *āhāranidrā bhayaṃ maithunaṃ ca sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām | dharmo hi teṣām adhiko viśeṣo dharmeṇa hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ* || "These are the shared characteristics of humans and animals: feeding, sleeping, fearing, and mating. However, *dharma* is the added value and distinguishing feature of humans. Deprived of *dharma* [humans] are similar to animals." The *Śrīsūktāvalī* 21 (Lindtner 1993: 215) presents a significant variant: instead of *dharmo hi teṣām ... dharmeṇa...*, it substitutes *jñānaṃ narāṇām... jñānena*, emphasizing knowledge (*jñāna*) as the distinguishing factor. See also *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (2.3.2, Keith 1909: 112 and 216-217; Halbfass 1991: 269-271).

[8] One of the traditional Sanskrit renderings of the word 'metaphysics' is *tattvajñāna*, meaning 'knowledge of the principle(s),' where the compound is interpreted as a *ṣaṣṭhītatpuruṣa*. Alternatively, less conventionally—though contextually significant, particularly when linked to knowledge gained through the observation of nature—the compound may be read as a *pañcamītatpuruṣa*, signifying 'knowledge [derived] from the principles [or elements].'

2. *Laukikanyāya*s

The doctrines of Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, which associate immanent with the transcendent, unify seemingly disparate domains through the invisible *fil rouge* of homologies (*bandhu*). These homologies, in turn, rest upon the unique underlying rhizome of the entire phenomenal universe: the *brahman*, the principle articulated within the Upaniṣasic episteme (*aupaniṣadapuruṣa*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.26) as the solid foundation of all phenomena (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.3).[9]

The Brāhmaṇa-Upaniṣad contexts, characterized by macro-microcosmic homologies, provide an ideal cultural background for the gradual development of analogical, proverbial, or interpretative maxims known as *nyāya*s. These maxims, derived predominantly from the observation of the world, are aptly termed *laukika*, meaning 'worldly,' 'common, popular,' or 'general.' Consequently, *laukika-nyāya* means 'practical maxim' or 'analogical principle/maxim.' These *nyāya*s emerge from meticulous empirical observations of daily life, microcosmic human experience, the natural world, and the richly diverse Indian cultural milieu. Simultaneously, due to their intrinsic connection to the macrocosm through homologies, they serve as potent tools for exemplifying universal principles and concepts.

The term *nyāya* has various uses, and while a full account would be too broad,[10] its meaning in this context is often associated with analogy, illustration, simile, reasoning, or proverb. Although the emic tradition and the titles of collections explicitly use the compound *laukika-nyāya*, this term rarely appears in the texts themselves.[11] Rather, when such maxims are employed, the term *nyāya* is often

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[9] *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.5, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1 and 7.24.2, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.2.15.

[10] For the strictly logical and epistemological connotations of the term *nyāya*, see the *Nyāyakośa* (Jhalakīkar 1967: 409–412; see also Kaul 2020: 163-164). Indeed, it may be hypothesized that the use of the term *nyāya* to denote analogical or interpretative maxims ultimately originates within the domain of logical-inferential thought, given that one of its meanings is 'five-membered syllogism' (*pañcāvayavavākya*, Jhalakīkar 1967: 410). A *laukikanyāya*, in fact, refers to a regularly occurring (*niyata*) natural event, thereby granting empirical accessibility and offering a tangible exemplar of more subtle cognitive processes. Within the structure of inference (*anumāna*), the example (*udāharaṇa* or *dṛṣṭānta*) functions as the instance in which the presence of the probandum (*sādhya*) is definitively established (*siddha*) through repeated observation (*bhūyodarśana*) of the invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between the probans (*hetu*) and the probandum (*sādhya*). This very regularity—whereby an imperceptible entity (*parokṣa*) is corroborated through empirical observation (*pratyakṣa*)—may, by extension, account for the use of the word *nyāya* in the designation l*aukikanyāya*.

[11] In his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.5 (BSBh 2000: 836-837), Śaṅkara briefly reflects on a specific *laukikanyāya* (*utkṛṣṭadṛṣṭir hi nikṛṣṭe 'dhyasitavyeti laukiko nyāyaḥ* "the analogical maxim that the superior perspective should be ascribed to the inferior element") and its utility, broadly generalizing its application within a debate. An objector argues that a *laukikanyāya* is not appropriate for guiding or resolving textual matters (*na ca laukikanyāyena śāstrīyā dṛṣṭir niyantuṃ yukteti*), whereas Śaṅkara contends the opposite: *nirdhārite śāstrārtha etad evaṃ syāt | sandigdhe tu tasmiṃs tanirṇayaṃ prati laukiko 'pi nyāya āśrīyamāṇo na virudhyate |* "Once the meaning of the scriptural passage has been established, it is as it is. But when it is in doubt, even an analogical maxim invoked to determine that [meaning] is not in contradiction." To this, numerous commentaries add further insights: *Bhāmatī* by Vācaspati Miśra (10th cent.), the *Nyāyanirṇaya* by Ānandagiri (13th cent.), and the brief reflections in

omitted (particularly in ancient texts, whereas its usage becomes more frequent in later works; see Rastogi 1984: 28-41, Kaul 2020: 163-164), while its specific sense of 'analogy' or 'resemblance' is conveyed through the affix *-vat* ('as, like, likewise, in the manner of').

However, in order to outline the path of the word *nyāya* it could be worth noting that numerous Sanskrit philosophical texts—primarily independent treatises from the medieval or early modern periods—feature the term *nyāya* in their titles. Indeed, in many instances, the term's meaning seems to bear no direct connection to its more widely known logical or epistemological connotations. For example, within the context of Advaita Vedānta, two significant texts stand out: *Śārīrakanyāyasaṃgraha* by Prakāśātman Yati (10th cent.) and the *Vaiyāsikyanyāyamālā*, alternatively attributed to Bhāratī Tīrtha, Mādhava, or Vidyāraṇya (14th cent.). In the first example, within the framework of the *Vivaraṇa* tradition, Prakāśātman provides a concise yet comprehensive exposition of the *Brahmasūtra*s (*BS*), organizing the text into sections and thematic units (*adhikaraṇa or nyāya*, Uskokov 2022: 33*).*[12] Conversely, the *Vaiyāsikyanyāyamālā* serves as a metrical compendium rooted in the *Vivaraṇa* tradition, exclusively focusing on the headings shaped as interpretative rules and principles (*nyāya*) articulated in the *BS* and the *BSBh*. Preceding the *Vaiyāsikyanyāyamālā* is a parallel compendium on the *nyāya*s of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, composed by Mādhavācārya and titled *Jaiminīyanyāyamālā*.[13] Thus, the titles of these texts suggest that the term *nyāya* refers to interpretative principles, reasoning, analogies, or maxims (Pellegrini 2018: 602-603).

Among these *nyāya*s are the traditional *laukikanyāya*s—proverbial analogical maxims distinctive of the Indian cultural milieu. They employ metaphors, similes, and correspondences to convey philosophical or technical insights rooted in everyday empirical observation (Jacob 2004: i–iv; Sharma 1989: 1–3). It is also worth noting that in its endeavor to reflect on and analyze the ritualistic statements of the Vedas, the intellectual tradition of *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* developed a set of interpretative principles, commonly referred to as *nyāya*s *(or paribhāṣā)*. These *nyāya*s represent a significant contribution of the *mīmāṃsaka*s to the hermeneutic methodology of South Asian intellectual traditions. In the course of this interpretative work, they also addressed epistemological and metaphysical issues, such as those

Bhāṣyaratnaprabhā by Govindānanda (c. 1550–1650). Govindānanda describes the *laukikanyāya* as a 'systematizer, regulator' (*niyāmaka*), highlighting the utility of its meaning as being non-contradictory (*laukikanyāyāviruddhārtha*) to the message that Śaṅkara seeks to convey.

[12] Within the framework of the three canonical sources of Vedānta, known as the *prasthānatrayī* ('three points of departure'), the *Brahmasūtra* embodies the logical and axiomatic foundation (*nyāyaprasthāna* 'argument departure point;' Uskokov 2022: 11).

[13] This text, closely aligned with Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, was further elucidated by Mādhavācārya himself through the commentary *Jaiminīyanyāyamālāvistara.*

concerning the nature and validity of knowledge (Solomon 1969: 389-390). Notably, these *nyāya*s, which originated as concise *sūtra*s, evolved into formulations that synthesized and explicated various outcomes in a systematic manner.[14]

In this perspective, *laukikanyāya*s are analogical maxims grounded in natural and cultural foundations, possessing such profound hermeneutic cogency and efficacy that they can elucidate intricate textual doctrines and complex passages, particularly in philosophical, rhetorical, and linguistic contexts (Jacob 2004: i).[15] They achieve this by drawing on illustrations of both common and uncommon situations that individuals might encounter in life (Lanata 1994: 38–41).

As a matter of fact, *laukikanyāya*s are extraordinarily pervasive, appearing across an extensive range of texts spanning diverse genres and origins. Numerous examples are already present in foundational early works, such as Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (2nd cent. BCE), where their application appears to have been a well-established practice. In the *Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali elucidates (*vyākhyāna*) certain *sūtras* accompanied by *vārttika*s, employing a dialogical style characterized by a series of components: questions (*praśna*), illustrations (*dṛṣṭānta*), examples (*udāharaṇa*), counter-examples (*pratyudāharaṇa*), answers (*uttara*), objections (*ākṣepa*), doubts (*saṃdeha*), and their resolutions (*samādhāna*). This methodical progression guides the reader step by step toward the final and definitive conclusion (*siddhānta*). As Sharma aptly notes (2017: 32):

> His [= Patañjali's] discussion of *utsarga* (general), *viśeṣa* (exception), *śeṣa* (residual), *pratiṣedha* (negation), *atideśa* (extension), *niyama* (restriction) and *asiddha* (suspension) rules regularly draw parallels from the outside world. Devadatta, Yajñadatta, Viṣṇumitra and Kauṇḍinya are the most famously cited individuals when it comes to illustrations focusing on folk maxims (*laukika-nyāya*s) and injunctions.[16]

[14] For example, when Madhusūdana Sarasvatī cites *sūtra*s from the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* or the *BS*, he frequently concludes them with expressions such as *iti nyāyāt*, *iti nyāyasiddhaḥ*, or similar formulations (Pellegrini 2018: 609-610). In contrast, when Madhusūdana discusses passages from the *Yogasūtra* and the *Sāṃkhyapravacanabhāṣya* (usually called *Vyāsabhāṣya*), he refrains from employing the term *nyāya* (see also Staal 1975).

[15] See Jacob's preface to the second edition (1910), as included in Jacob (2004).

[16] Abhyankar (1961: 212) cites numerous *nyāya*s from the *Mahābhāṣya* and observes: "Maxim, a familiar or patent instance quoted to explain similar cases... The word came to be used in the general sense of Paribhāṣās or rules of interpretation many of which were based upon popular maxims as stated in the word laukikanyāyasiddha by Nāgeśa. Hemacandra has used the word *nyāya* for Paribhāṣā-vacana. The word is also used in the sense of general rule which has got some exceptions..." See also Renou (1942: 184-185), Kane (1977[v2]: 1339-1351) and the *Vācaspatyam* (Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4155-4158). Also relevant is the list of fifteen *nyāya*s employed by Abhinavagupta, as presented by Rastogi (1984). In his essay, Rastogi (1984: 27-28) classifies the use of the maxims into two categories: basic *nyāya*s and ordinary *nyāya*s. The former are employed "to convey or clarify the logical or metaphysical standpoint of the system on a particular issue," whereas the latter "have purely illustrative function and are resorted to exemplify a situation or fact."

Thus, in this context, in addition to listing some intriguing and pertinent examples, we will focus on two case-studies of *laukikanyāya*, aiming to explain their meaning, trace their textual origins, and demonstrate their significant utility within their respective contexts of application. It is also worth mentioning that Jacob (2004: ii) organizes his collection into three sections, each dedicated to a semantic macro-area encompassed by *laukikanyāyas*:[17]

1. illustrations (*dṛṣṭānta*),
2. interpretive rules (including *paribhāṣā* 'meta-rules,' *niyama* 'restrictive rules,' and *vyavasthā* 'systematization, disposition, and limitation of use'), and
3. topical or thematic divisions (*adhikaraṇa*).

It is worth noting, however, that despite the significance of *laukikanyāya*s, to the best of my knowledge, there is not a single text that systematically addresses their theoretical framework or functions: they are merely employed and collected. Nevertheless, owing to their distinct hermeneutic importance, numerous collections of *laukikanyāya*s have been compiled over time. Aufrecht's *Catalogus Catalogorum* (Aufrecht 2001: 5471 and 1292) references the *Laukikanyāyamuktāvalī*, a collection and explanation of proverbial expressions as employed in philosophical and related works, attributed to a certain Prakāśātman (likely different from the Advaita author of the 10th century). Additionally, Aufrecht mentions the *Laukikanyāyaratnākara* by Raghunātha Varman, along with its abridged version, the *Laukikanyāyasaṃgraha* (16th century), by the same author. Lastly, it cites the *Laukikabhānavādarahasya*, possibly compiled by Laiṅgika (date unspecified).[18]

In 1873, Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati included 151 *nyāya*s in his lexicon, the *Vācaspatyam* (Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4158-4170). Additionally, a highly useful list of *laukikanyāya*s with explanations is found in an appendix to Vaman Shrivram Apte's *Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Apte 1957: 52–76).[19] The list of the *Vācaspatyam* and Apte's appendix may have served as the

[17] Jacob (2004: ii) further observes that, although many of his esteemed predecessors have rendered the term *nyāya* as 'maxim,' he disagrees. This stance arises from the term's extensive range of applicability, even when restricted to *laukikanyāya*. Accordingly, he suggests leaving it untranslated.

[18] The *New Catalogus Catalogorum* (Dash 2013: 319-320), by listing only seven collections of *laukikanyāya*s, does not contribute any substantial additions to the list provided in the *Catalogus Catalogorum* (2001).

[19] See Jacob (2004: i): "In Târânâth Tarkavâchaspati's *Vâchaspatyam* we have a list of 151 *nyâya*s, popular and technical; but references to works where they are to be found are few and far between, and this considerably lessens their value. Thirty of these were reproduced in V.S. Âpte's dictionary, in 1890, but with the same defect. Again, in 1875, Paṇḍit Satyavrata

foundation for G. A. Jacob's pioneering work, the *Laukikanyāyāñjali: A Handful of Popular Maxims* (Jacob 2004), originally published in 1893 and revised in subsequent enlarged editions (1904, 1907, 1910). Jacob's collection remains one of the two primary collections frequently consulted today. The second collection I have examined is the well-known *Bhuvaneśa Laukikanyāyasāhasrī* (Sharma 1989², I ed. 1962–63).[20] These two works represent a significant basis for my own analysis.

3. *Laukikanyāya*s focused on non-human animals

In addition to the aforementioned general considerations, it is worth noting that the above-mentioned collections include several *laukikanyāya*s pertaining directly or indirectly to non-human animals. These *laukikanyāya*s are referenced across a remarkably diverse range of texts and contexts.[21] Their empirical, cultural, and textual foundations are readily accessible, enabling readers to uncover deeper meanings within certain textual issues through an analogical process.

Below follows a concise selection of particularly widespread and thought-provoking *laukikanyāyas.* As is evident, this list is by no means exhaustive but rather indicative. The *laukikanyāya*s presented here, along with many others, portray coherent natural scenarios and can be applied to almost all doctrinal and technical śāstric contexts. This versatility not only serves distinctly different purposes but also accommodates a range of interpretative nuances.

1. *ajagaravṛttinyāya* 'the maxim of acting like a python' (Sharma 1989: 311 n. 958) refers to an individual who is content with whatever fate provides. It specifically characterizes a distinct mode of procuring sustenance (*vṛtti*) practiced by ascetics of the highest order. These ascetics, akin to boas or pythons, make no active effort to obtain food but instead wait impassively for sustenance

Sâmaśramī published a small pamphlet of 36 popular maxims together with a large number of purely technical ones, and professed to give a reference for each of them..." I thank my friend and colleague Antonio Rigopoulos for this suggestion.

[20] Refer to the extract from the preface to the first edition in Jacob (2004: v–vi). The foundational references for this essay are Jacob (2004) and Sharma (1989). *En passant*, there is an older tool (1927), but still useful for our purpose. It is a collection from various sources of gnomic and free verses, proverbs, *subhāṣita*, striking verses, and *laukikanyāya*s, translated by Pavolini (1991).

[21] Regarding the two collections under examination, Jacob (2004) ensembles a total of 493 *laukikanyāya*s, out of which 86 mention animals. In comparison, Sharma (1989) records 1000 *laukikanyāya*s, 136 of which include animals in their phrasing. Another list of 166 *laukikanyāya*s—specifically relevant to Dharmaśāstra and largely drawn from the Pūrvamīmāṃsā—is provided by Kane (1977: 1339-1351). At the beginning of this list, Kane notes: "It would be helpful to the students of Pūrvamīmāṃsā and of Dharmaśāstra, if some of the important and frequently cited maxims (*nyāya*s) of the former, are brought together in one place... Kumārila particularly, is very fond of employing Nyāyas in the Tātravārtika e.g.... (on Jai. II.1.8) he employs five different nyāyas..."

to come before them, relying entirely on divine grace (see *Mānavadharmaśāstra* 4.196 in Olivelle 2008: 78-79, 97).

2. *kākatālīyanyāya* 'the maxim of the crow and the palmyra fruit' (Apte 1957: 58; Jacob 2004: 17[1]; Sharma 1989: 30-31 n. 55; Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4161)[22] illustrates a scenario in which a palmyra fruit falls upon a crow's head, symbolizing two events occurring simultaneously without any causal connection. This maxim is used to signify an unexpected and purely coincidental occurrence.
3. *kākadadhighātakanyāya* 'the maxim of the crow ruining the curd' (Apte 1957: 58; Jacob 2004: 34[3]; Kane 1977: 1342; Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4161) conveys the idea that if someone is tasked with protecting yogurt from crows, it does not imply that other animals capable of spoiling it are free to do so. Here, the term 'crow' (*kāka*) serves as a representative symbol, encompassing not only crows but also other creatures capable of compromising the yogurt.
4. *kuñjarasnānanyāya* 'the maxim of the bath of the elephant' (Sharma 1989: 296 n. 894) illustrates a useless action through a moment in the lives of elephants, who, upon emerging from water with a freshly cleansed body, immediately use their trunks to sprinkle dust or soil onto their bodies.
5. *kūpamaṇḍūkanyāya* 'the maxim of the frog in the well' (Apte 1957: 59; Jacob 2004: 19-20[1]; Sharma 1989: 38-39 n. 74; Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4162) illustrates, on the one hand, a frog living in a well, convinced that the well constitutes the entire world. On the other hand, it serves as a metaphor for a person of limited knowledge and intellect who, despite his/her narrow perspective and lack of initiative, arrogantly believes he/she possesses a comprehensive understanding.
6. *kīṭabhṛṅganyāya* "the maxim of the warm and the wasp" or *kīṭabhramaranyāya* "the maxim of the warm and the hornet" (or even *bhramakīṭaranyāya*) "the maxim of insect and the hornet" (Sharma 1989: 50 n. 110) illustrates a scenario in which an insect, caught by a hornet, becomes so overwhelmed by the hornet's buzzing that it begins to perceive the sound as originating from itself. In this state, the insect loses the sense of distinction from its predator and, consequently, all fear. This analogy is employed to describe a person who, through constant meditation on an object, ultimately identifies entirely with the object of contemplation (see *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.1.27-32 in Sharma 2024: 270 and 276).
7. *maṇḍūkaplutinyāya* 'the maxim of the frog leap' (Apte 1957: 69; Jacob 2004: 41[1]) draws on the imagery of a frog jumping from one point to another, touching only discontinuous spots along the way. This analogy is employed by commentators on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* to describe a type of recurrence or percolation (*anuvṛtti*), where a word metaphorically 'leaps' over an intermediate rule to connect

[22] Analogous to the *kākatalīyanyāya*, there is also the *ajākṛpāṇīnyāya* 'the maxim of the she-goat and the sword' (Jacob 2004: 11).

with another. It serves to elucidate the discontinuity in the scope of a rule within grammatical analysis (D'Avella 2018: 139).

8. *mātsyanyāya* 'the maxim of the fish' (Apte 1957: 69; Jacob 2004: 57[2]; Sharma 1989: 94 n. 230) is based on the natural observation that a small and weak fish is eaten by a larger and stronger one, thus illustrating how the strong dominates over the weak.[23]
9. *varam adya kapotaḥ śvo mayūrād iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim of better a pigeon today than a peacock tomorrow' (Apte 1957: 71; Sharma 1989: 234 n. 677), like the English proverb 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' advises seizing something concrete and immediate, albeit more modest, rather than pursuing something better that may perhaps come in the future.
10. *simhāvalokananyāya* 'the maxim of the lion's glance' (Apte 1957: 75; Jacob 2004: 52[1]; Tarkavācaspati 2006: 4169) is grounded in the lion's habit of surveying all sides, or scanning back and forth, when bringing down prey to ensure that no antagonist approaches. Similarly, the lion's gaze in a text signifies a careful overview of both the previous and following sections.

In addition to these *laukikanyāya*s, which explicitly include animal names in their formulation, there are others that focus on animals without explicitly mentioning their names:

1. *nityacikitsādhiṣṭhātṛ* lit. 'the overseeing [principle] of daily medical therapy,' which I am about to analyze.
2. *nīrakṣīranyāya* or *nīrakṣīravivekanyāya* 'the maxim of the discrimination between water and milk' (Apte 1957: 59 and 65-66; Sharma 1989: 56 n. 125) alludes to a popular Indian belief according to which the wild goose or swan (*haṃsa*) possesses a distinctive tract: from a mixture of water and milk, it is able to drink only the milk, leaving the water aside. This analogy exemplifies acute discernment (*viveka*).
3. *śṛṅgagrāhikānyāya* 'the maxim of the [action] which seize the horn' (Apte 1957: 73; Sharma 1989: 252-253 n. 748), without directly mentioning an animal but only a part of its body, is employed as a synecdoche, when a single limb is defined to represent the whole body, much like when a cowherd is asked to identify his cow from a heard and seizes the horn of that cow to show it to the owner (see *Mahābhārata* 5.45.9).

[23] This is a very well-known *laukikanyāya* mentioned in the Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* 1.4.13-14 (*aprāṇītaḥ tu mātsyanyāyam udbhāvayati | balīyān abalaṃ hi grasate daṇḍadharābhāve ||* "13. If not used at all, it gives rise to the law of the fishes. 14. For, the stronger swallows the weak in the absence of the wielder of the Rod," Kangle 1986: 6[1] and 10[2]). There is also a *mahāmatsyatīranyāya* 'the maxim of the big fish and the bank' (Sharma 1989: 298 n. 897), taken from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.3.18).

4. *sthāvarajaṅgamaviṣanyāya* 'the maxim of the poison [respectively] of static and dynamic entities' (Sharma 1989: 92 n. 226), distinguishes the poison of plants and metals, which is the *sthāvaraviṣa* 'the poison of the static,' and the poison of animals, which is the *jaṅgamaviṣa* 'the poison of the dynamic.' Both are fatal, but it is said that the *sthāvaraviṣa* nullifies the effects of *jaṅgamaviṣa*, and vice versa.[24]

Having previously presented only a few insightful *laukikanyāya*s among the innumerable possibilities, I will now proceed to a more detailed analysis of only two specific examples: one direct and one indirect. This will allow me to illustrate their textual application and development, as well as their cultural foundation. Although the analysis of the following examples is centered on Advaita Vedānta, precisely because both are employed with specific purposes within that *śāstra*, I wish to confirm that *laukikanyāya*s are, in fact, used across several technical *śāstra*s, while their poetic origins and reverberations are found in Vedic hymns, epics, and poetry (*kāvya*).

4.1. *Lūtatantunyāya*: the spider and its threads

In Western attempts to prove God's existence through reason, analogies between the world and human-made artifacts were widely employed. The order, complexity, and harmony of the machine-like-world seemed to imply not chance, but the design of an intelligent being superior to humans. Yet within this framework, David Hume (1711–1776) argued that the world resembles not a machine, but rather an animal or a plant. Accordingly, in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, he asserts (Hume 1779[2]: 141-142; see Eltschinger-Ratié 2023: 285-286):

> The Brahmins assert, that the world arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels, and annihilates afterwards the whole or any part of it, by absorbing it again, and resolving it into his own essence. Here is a species of cosmogony, which appears to us ridiculous; because a spider is a little contemptible animal, whose operations we are never likely to take for a model of the whole universe. But still here is a new species of analogy, even in our globe. And were there a planet wholly inhabited by spiders, (which is very possible) this inference would there appear as natural and irrefragable as that which in our planet ascribes the origin of all things to design and intelligence [...].

[24] The *Mahābhārata* (1.55) narrates a tale that aligns closely with this theme. Bhīma, having consumed food laced with poison by Duryodhana, is cast into a river and eventually descends to the underworld. There, he is bitten by snakes, whose venom neutralizes the poison from the food. As a result, Bhīma regains consciousness and emerges unharmed.

The spider to which Hume refers is indeed mentioned by a widely known *laukikanyāya*: the *lūtatantunyāya* 'the maxim of the spider and its threads' (Sharma 1989: 181 n. 502) or *ūrṇanābhinyāya* 'the maxim of the spider' (Sharma 1989: 258-259 n. 767).[25]

The analogy arises from zoological observation: spiders (*lūta, ūrṇanābhi* or *ūrṇanābha* 'from whose navel comes the wool') both spin and retract threads from their own bodies; these very threads are produced and withdrawn through the deliberate will of the spiders themselves. Philosophically, the spider's body serves as the material cause (*upādānakāraṇa*) of the web, while its conscious will acts as the efficient cause (*nimittakāraṇa*). This implies that, within a single organism, both the psychic-conscious and physical-unconscious dimensions together embody the two distinct forms of causality. Indeed, Advaita Vedānta draws upon the *lūtatantunyāya* to demonstrate that *brahman* is inseparably (*abhinna*) both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Thus, in the non-dualistic (*advaita*) Vedānta, this *laukikanyāya* is frequently invoked to elucidate the important doctrine of the inseparability of material and efficient causality of *brahman*.

All in all, the textual origins of the *lūtatantunyāya* can be traced back to the Upaniṣads, specifically to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.1.20):

> *yathorṇanābhis tantunoccared yathāgneḥ kṣudrā visphuliṅgā vyuccaranty evam evāsmād ātmanaḥ sarve prāṇāḥ sarve lokāḥ sarve devāḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni vyuccaranti | tasyopaniṣat satyasya satyam iti | prāṇā vai teṣām eṣa satyam ||*
>
> As a spider sends forth its thread, and as tiny sparks spring forth a fire, so indeed do all the vital functions (*prāṇa*), all the worlds, all the gods, and all beings spring from this self (*ātman*). Its hidden name is "The real behind the real," for the real consists of the vital functions, and the self is the real behind the vital functions (Olivelle 1998: 62-65).

To demonstrate that the self, namely the unalterable *brahman*, is responsible for the manifestation of all things, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* presents various examples drawn from nature, the first of which is precisely that of the spider (*ūrṇanābhi*). Śaṅkara's commentary on this passage is notably extensive, ranging well beyond the hermeneutics of *brahman/ātman* causality (*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 1986: 157-175).

Following the structure of the radical text, Śaṅkara explains the examples, beginning with the spider (*ūrṇanābhiḥ = lūṭākīṭaḥ*). As a unique entity, the spider emits (*uccaret*) and moves (*udgacchet*)

[25] The *lūtatantunyāya* is absent from Jacob 2004. For references to the spider in Indian mythology, see De Gubernatis (1987: 171-174).

through its web (*tantunā*), which is not distinct from itself (*svātmāpravibhaktena*). There is no other agent (*kārakāntaram*) responsible for the emission of the web (*tasyodgamane*) apart from the spider itself (*svato 'tiriktam*). In the same way, everything, all beings (*bhūtāni brahmādistambaparyantāni prāṇijātāni*) are originated from the self (*sarva eva ātmānaḥ*).

Thus, as with the sparks that develop from fire (*agniviphuliṅgavat*), from the self (*yasmād ātmanaḥ*) arises this phenomenal universe (*jagad idam*), composed of both movable and immovable beings (*sthāvarajaṅgamam*), which, in that very self (*yasmin*), dissolve (*pralīyate*) like bubbles of water and, during the period of preservation (*sthitikāle*), remain as that same substance (*yadātmakam*). Here lies the secret teaching (*upaniṣat*)[26] concerning the self, which is nothing other than *brahman* (*tasya asya ātmano brahmaṇaḥ*).

In addition to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, there are two other *loci classici* for the *lūtatantunyāya*. The first is the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.7:

> *yathorṇanābhiḥ sṛjate gṛhṇate ca yathā pṛthivyām oṣadhayaḥ saṃbhavanti |*
> *yathā sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni tathākṣatāt saṃbhavatīha viśvam ||*
>
> As a spider spins out threads, then draws them into itself; as plants sprout out from the earth; as head and body hair grows from a living man; so from the imperishable all things here spring (Olivelle 1998: 436-437).

and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.10:

> *yas tūrṇanābheva tantubhiḥ pradhānajaiḥ svabhāvataḥ |*
> *deva ekaḥ svam āvṛṇot sa no dadhāt brahmāpyayam ||*
>
> The one God who covers himself with things issuing from the primal source, from his own inherent nature, as a spider, with the threads—may he procure us dissolution in *brahman* (Olivelle 1998: 430-431).

Although the example of the spider in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.10 refers not only to the manifestation of all things but also to their reintegration into *brahman*, the commentary attributed to Śaṅkara on this

[26] As in the beginning of the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* (1986: 1-4) and the *Kaṭhopaniṣadbhāṣya* (*Upaniṣad* 2002: 174-175), Śaṅkara here also offers an explanation of the term *upaniṣad* (Pellegrini 2010: 145-149).

passage is not relevant.[27] In contrast, the gloss on *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.7 is worth quoting more thoroughly:

> *bhūtayonir akṣaram ity uktam | tat kathaṃ bhūtayonitvam ity ucyate dṛṣṭāntaiḥ—yathā loke prasiddhaḥ ūrṇanābhiḥ lūṭākīṭaḥ kiñcit kāraṇāntaram anapekṣya svayam eva sṛjate svaśarīrāvyatiriktān eva tantūn bahiḥ prasārayati punas tān gṛhṇate ca gṛhṇāti svātmabhāvam evāpādayati | [...] yathaite dṛṣṭāntāḥ, tathā vilakṣaṇaṃ salakṣaṇaṃ ca nimittāntarānapekṣād yathoktalakṣaṇāt akṣarāt sambhavati samutpadyate iha saṃsāramaṇḍale viśvaṃ samastaṃ jagat | anekadṛṣṭāntopādānaṃ tu sukhāvabodhārtham ||`
>
> As stated, [in the preceding verse],[28] the imperishable [*brahman*] is "the source of beings" (*bhūtayoni*). [But] how can it be the source of beings? This is explained through illustrations. Just as in everyday experience the *ūrṇanābhiḥ*, the invertebrate[29] [named] spider, without any cause other than itself, creates threads clearly distinct from its body, it [then] spreads them (*sṛjate*) outside and [eventually] reabsorbs them (*gṛhṇate*), [that is] takes them back [into itself], it makes them one with itself [= reabsorbs them into himself] or, in other words, returns them to the very condition of itself [...] Just as these illustrations [suggest], from the imperishable thus defined, without the need of any other efficient cause, *sambhavati* arises here (*iha*) in this circle of becoming *viśvam*—the whole universe— whether different or analogous. Whereas, the inclusion of multiple illustrations serves the purpose of facilitating an easy understanding.

Moreover, in addition to the Upaniṣads and their glosses, this specific theory, technically called *abhinnanimittopādānakāraṇatva* 'the inseparable efficient and material causation' of *brahman*, is defended in Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* (BSBh) *ad* 1.4.23: *prakṛtiś ca pratijñādṛṣṭāntānurodhāt* "Therefore, following (*anurodha*) the thesis (*pratijñā*) [expressed in *Chāndogya*

[27] Here is the specific passage of the commentary on *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.10 (*Upaniṣad* 2002: 1294): *yas tantunābha iti | yathorṇanābhir ātmaprabhavais tantubhir ātmānam eva samāvṛṇoti tathā pradhānajair avyaktaprabhavair nāmarūpakarmabhis tantusthānīyaiḥ svam ātmānam āvṛṇot sañchāditavān sa no mahyaṃ brahmaṇi apyayaṃ brahmāpyayam ekībhāvaṃ dadhād dadātv ity arthaḥ ||* "*yas tantunābha*, he who concealed (*āvṛṇot*) himself (*svam*), just as a spider covers itself with threads emerging from itself—so too, with the effects of the primal source (*pradhānajaiḥ*), namely names, forms and actions arising from the unmanifest, which are comparable to threads—may he (*sa no*) grant (*dadhād* = *dadātu*) me *brahmāpyayam*, the merger into *brahman*, that is, union [with *brahman*]. This is the meaning."

[28] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.6: *yat tad adreśyam agrāhyam agotram avarṇam acakṣuḥśrotraṃ tadapāṇipādam | nityaṃ vibhuṃ sarvagataṃ susukṣaṃ tad avyayaṃ yad bhūtayoniṃ paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ ||* "What cannot be seen, what cannot be grasped, without colour, without sight and hearing, without hands and feet; What is eternal and all pervading, extremely minute, present everywhere—That is the immutable, which the wise fully perceive." See Olivelle (1998: 436-437) with slight variations. Olivelle seems to overlook the translation of *bhūtayoni* 'source of beings' (Olivelle 1998: 629), which Śaṅkara glosses as *bhūtānāṃ kāraṇam* "the cause of beings."

[29] Although the term *kīṭa* denotes an 'insect' or a 'worm,' strictly speaking, the spider is not specifically an insect but an arthropod, a type of invertebrate characterized by an exoskeleton composed of a chitinous cuticle, a segmented body, and paired jointed appendages (Pollard 2024).

Upaniṣad 6.1.3][30] and the illustration (*dṛṣṭāntā*) [quoted later in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.4],[31] [*brahman*] is [both] the material (*upādāna*) cause (*prakṛti* 'the original matter') and (*ca*) the efficient cause (*nimitta*) [of the universe]." (BSBh 2000: 337; Uskokov 2022: 11-12).[32]

Indeed, the object of Vedānta's soteriological inquiry is *brahman* as defined in BS 1.1.2. However, this raises a further question: what kind of causality befits the absolute (*kim ātmakaṃ punar brahmaṇaḥ kāraṇatvaṃ syāt*): material causation (*prakṛtitve = upādānakāraṇatve*), as in the case of clay or gold (*mṛtsuvarṇādivat*) used for vessels or jewelry (*ghaṭarucakādīnām*), or efficient causation (*nimittatve = nimittakāraṇatve*), as in the case of the potter or the goldsmith (*kulālasuvarṇakārādivat*)? For the opponent, it is correct to regard the supreme *īśvara* solely as an efficient cause, with its effect being the insentient (*acetana*) and impure (*aśuddha*) phenomenal universe. Conversely, we observe that the material cause and the effect are uniform (*kāryakāraṇayoḥ sārūpyadarśanāt*), and thus, the material cause of the universe, characterized by impurity, must be something different than the supremely pure *brahman* (*pariśyeṣād brahmaṇo 'nyad upādānakāraṇam aśuddhyādiguṇakam*, BSBh 2000: 339; see also BS 2.1.4-6).

At this point, Śaṅkara replies: *prakṛtiś copādānakāraṇaṃ ca brahmāvagantavyaṃ nimittakāraṇaṃ ca* "*Brahman* is to be considered the source, that is, both the material cause and the efficient cause" (BSBh 2000: 339), and not just the efficient cause. All in all, in many passages of *śruti*—such as the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.1.2-6) and others—the initial thesis (*pratijñā*)[33] and the illustration (*dṛṣṭānta*)[34] are aimed not only at proving *īśvara*'s material causation but also its efficient causation. For, beyond *īśvara*,

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[30] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.3: [...] *yenāśrutaṃ śrutaṃ bhavaty amataṃ matam avijñātaṃ vijñātam iti* [...], "[... so you must have surely asked about that rule of substitution] by which one hears what has not been heard of before, thinks of what has not been thought of before, and perceives what has not been perceived before?" (Olivelle 1998: 246-247). The chapter of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* goes on to present Being (*sat*) as that thing from which everything else originates, so if *sat* is not the material cause then both the thesis and the illustration of the text would be meaningless (Uskokov 2022: 75).

[31] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.4: *yathā saumyenaikena mṛtpiṇḍena sarvaṃ mṛṇmayaṃ vijñātaṃ syāt | vācāraṃbhaṇaṃ vikāro nāmadheyaṃ mṛttikety eva satyam* | "It is like this, son. By means of just one lump of clay one would perceive everything made of clay—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: 'It's clay.'" (Olivelle 1998: 246-247).

[32] The causality of *brahman* is discussed in general in the BSBh *ad* 1.1.2 (2000: 45-55), with the well-known definition (*lakṣaṇa*) *janmādy asya yataḥ* ("That from which [comes] the emergence, etc., of this [phenomenal universe]"), based on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (3.1.1-6). Furthermore, in the BSBh 2.1.1-10, 2.1.14-20 and 2.1.21-22 another non-dualistic model is presented, along with a discussion on it, where *brahman* itself is the cause. See also Uskokov (2022: 63-87).

[33] Various other passages from the Upaniṣads, such as *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.2 and 1.1.7, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.5.6–8, and *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1.1 (already quoted in BSBh 1.1.2), are interpreted by Śaṅkara with the aid of *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.30 (*janikartuḥ prakṛtiḥ*). According to this rule, the *prakṛti*, or *upādānakāraṇa*, is syntactically indicated by an ablative of origin (*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante* "That from which these beings arise...").

[34] See the long discussion in BSBh 2.1.14 and, on the issues, Timalsina (2014: 193-197).

no other superintending principle (*nimittatvaṃ tv adhiṣṭhātrantarābhāvād adhigantavyam*) is found (BSBh 2000: 340).

Without delving further into the debates that have unfolded over the centuries, I would like to conclude this analysis by mentioning the well-known Advaita-primer, the *Vedāntasāra* (2001: 14-15) by Sadānanda Yogīndra (15th cent.). Although the *Vedāntasāra* is brief and clearly intended for beginners in Advaita Vedānta, it does not fail to reference the *lūtatantunyāya*, with Sadānanda being well aware that this analogy can effectively illustrate the doctrine of *abhinnanimittopādānakāraṇatva*, aiding in its precise comprehension.

The *Vedāntasāra*'s gloss *Vidvanmanorañjanī* by Rāmatīrtha (17th cent.) allows us to contextualize the discussion. The preceding sections present the two powers (*śaktidvayam*) by which ignorance (*ajñāna*) is manifested: veiling (*āvaraṇa*) and projection (*vikṣepa*). Conditioned by such an ignorance, *īśvara* (that is, the consciousness presenting itself as the supreme deity, *īśvaracaitanya*) becomes the cause (*kāraṇa*) of the phenomenal universe (*jagat*). At this point an objector raises the question: what kind of cause? Is it a material cause (*upādāna*), that is, the substance from which the universe is made? Or an efficient cause (*nimitta*), the instrumental, conscious cause capable of acting on substance? Or is it both causal possibilities (*ubhayam*, Jacob 2000: 13-14)? To this question, Sadānanda's root-text responds (Jacob 2000: 14-15):

> *śaktidvayavadajñānopahitaṃ caitanyaṃ svapradhānatayā nimittaṃ svopādhipradhānatayopādānaṃ ca bhavati | yathā lūtā tantukāryaṃ prati svapradhānatayā nimittaṃ svaśarīrapradhānatayopādānaṃ ca bhavati |*
>
> The consciousness conditioned by ignorance, characterized by the two powers, becomes the efficient [cause] by its own prevalence and the material [cause] by the prevalence of its own accidental condition (*upādhi*) [that is its body]. Just as a spider, by its own prevalence, becomes the efficient [cause] of the web-effect and the material [cause] due to the prevalence of its own body.[35]

Therefore, in *īśvara*, both causations of the effect-universe are indistinctly found—the material and the efficient causes (*abhinnanimittopadānākāraṇatva*)—just as a spider (*lūtā* = *ūrṇanābhi*) is both material and

[35] The two key terms are *svapradhānatayā* and *svopādhipradhānatayā*, glossed by the *Vidvanmanorañjanī* (Jacob 2000: 16) as *kūṭasthacaitanyasvarūpāvabhāsitayā* "as illuminated by the intrinsic nature of the unalterable [= immovable] consciousness" and *upādhyuparaktasattāsphūrtirūpatayā* "as a form of appearance of reality tinged by [= reflected on] an accidental condition." The *lūtatantunyāya* in also mentioned in the *Sarvavedāntasiddhāntasārasaṃgraha* 334.

efficient cause of the web.[36] Consequently, the *Vidvanmanorañjanī* concludes the explanation by further elaborating on the classical example of the spider (Jacob 2000: 16):

> *yathā lūtā tantunirmāṇe prasiddhakārpāsatūlakāṣṭhayantrādisahāyam anapekṣyaiva tantūn ātānavitānātmakaṃ ca tatkāryaṃ jālarūpaṃ sṛjaty evam īśvaraḥ prāk sṛṣṭer eka evādvitīyo 'sahāya eva svamāyāśaktyāveśamātreṇa liṅgādibrahmāṇḍāntaṃ jagat srjed iti bhāvaḥ |*
>
> In the same way that a spider certainly does not require the aid of well-known [substances such as] the cotton tree, the cotton [itself], the yardstick, the loom, and so on to create the threads, but rather extends them as its own effect (*tatkāryam*), forming a web composed of interconnected threads, similarly, prior to manifestation, the lord—truly one without a second—manifests the universe, from the subtle body to [all] the worlds, without relying on any [other] aid, by merely penetrating in his own creative power. This is the [intended] meaning.

Indeed, the *lūtatantunyāya* provides a valuable empirical example for upholding the Advaita Vedānta's central principle of non-duality. There is, in fact, only one cause, not many, and that is *brahman*, which manifests itself as itself, by itself in itself. As a result, effects are merely apparent modifications (*vivarta* = *vikāra*) of that same cause, which is *brahman*, and thus cannot be truly separate from it. If this were not the case, non-duality would suffer fatal consequences.

In conclusion, due to its evocative, metaphorical, and synthetizing capacity, the empirical observation encapsulated in the *lūtatantunyāya* acts as a wise and clear illustration of a highly complex and debated theory, with numerous metaphysical and ontological implications.

4.2. Agency, medicine, and the partridge: the *cikitsādhiṣṭhātṛ* as a hidden *laukikanyāya*

Noteworthy and of singular import is the dual commentary on the *Kena Upaniṣad*, the attribution of which to Śaṅkara appears incontrovertibly established (Mayeda 1967: 33–55).

The *Padabhāṣya* constitutes a more elementary and didactic exegesis, whereas the *Vākyabhāṣya* exhibits a higher degree of linguistic sophistication and intellectual refinement.[37]

At the very outset of the *Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* (*ad* 1.1; 1997: 3-17), one encounters an example of an indirect *laukikanyāya*, as frequently occurs, signaled solely by the indeclinable comparative suffix *-vat*. This particular instance is absent from the collections consulted and, to the best of my

[36] See also Solomon (1969: 122 and 280), who includes the ensuing Vedāntic discussion of *pariṇāmopādāna* 'material cause of a real transformation' and *vivartopādāna* 'material cause of an apparent transformation.'

[37] The individual words in this expression are: *nitya* 'daily,' *cikitsā* 'medicine' or 'medical therapeutics, therapy, prevention' and *adhiṣṭhātṛ* 'overseeing, ruler, superintending, presiding, governing, tutelary.'

research, appears unattested in other texts as well. Consequently, the analysis will rely exclusively on *Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya*'s textual occurrence. The expression under scrutiny is *nityacikitsādhiṣṭhātṛvat*, which, if rendered literally as 'like the overseeing [principle] of daily medical therapy,' proves to hold neither a literal nor a contextual sense.

To grasp the precise import of this analogy and the doctrinal framework within which it is deployed, it is imperative to engage in a reflective analysis that situates it within the discourse articulated by Śaṅkara. Faithful to his non-dualistic orientation, Śaṅkara elucidates the opening passage of the Upaniṣad with meticulous consistency.

In *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.1, a student, driven by an earnest desire to comprehend the nature of the inner self (*pratyagātmaviṣayajijñāsuḥ*), poses the following inquiries to the teacher with the aim of attaining precise knowledge of the intrinsic essence/nature of the self (*ātmasvarūpatattvavijñānāya*): Who compels the mind to engage with its objects? What governs the vital force (*prāṇa*) at its inception? Who impels speech? Which deity directs vision and hearing?[38] At the very outset of his commentary, Śaṅkara emphasizes that it is through the realization of *ātman* that ignorance—the realm of death—can be eradicated (*tena ca mṛtyupadam ajñānam ucchettavyam*), as the cycle of becoming (*saṃsāra*) is contingent upon it (*tattantro hi saṃsāro yataḥ*). Accordingly, given that the true nature of the *ātman* remains unknown, the student's inquiry to discern it is entirely justified (*anadhigatatvād ātmano yuktā tadadhigamāya tadviṣayā jijñāsā*). Indeed, the Upaniṣad commences precisely with the intention of revealing the *ātman*, which is of the nature of the absolute *brahman (Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 3 and 5*)*.

The attainment of knowledge concerning a given and perfect principle such as the *aupaniṣada ātman* is inherently unattainable through means like ritualistic or contemplative practices (*nahi svabhāvasiddha vastu siṣādhayiṣyato sādhanaiḥ svabhāvasiddhaś cātmā tathā nāpipayiṣitaḥ*). This is because the self, as the innermost essence, is perpetually realized (*ātmatve sati nityāptatvāt*). Moreover, a given and perfect entity like *ātman* cannot even be subjected to a desire for transformation, as it is, by its very nature, eternal, immutable, non-objective, and formless (*nāpi 'vicikārayiṣitaḥ, ātmatve sati nityatvād avikāritvād aviṣayatvād amūrtatvāc ca, Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 11 and 13).

Moreover, the *ātman* is not something that can be purified (*na ca saṃcikīrṣitaḥ*), as it is fundamentally without a second (*ananyatvāc ca*), there is no one else who can purify it. Liberation is

[38] *keneṣitaṃ patati preṣita manaḥ kena prāṇaḥ prathamaḥ praiti yuktaḥ | keneṣitāṃ vācam imāṃ vadanti cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ ka u devo yunakti ||* "By whom impelled, by whom compelled, does the mind soar forth? By whom enjoined does the breath, march on as the first? By whom is this speech impelled, with which people speak? And who is the god that joins the sight and hearing?" (Olivelle 1998: 364-365).

nothing but a permanent and ever-existing state (*nityatvaṃ ceṣṭaṃ mokṣasya*), that is the realization of one's timeless nature. Indeed, any attribution of distinct characteristics to the self cannot be enduring, nor can the acquisition of something external be eternal (*na ca vastvantarādhānaṃ nityam, prāptir vā vastvantarasya nityā*). Consequently, for one in whom knowledge has dawned, the undertaking of any action becomes inconceivable (*ata utpannavidyasya karmārambho 'nupapannaḥ*). For this reason, from its very opening verse, the Upaniṣad imparts a precise teaching on the nature of the self to those whose intellect has turned away from external objects (*ato vyāvṛttabāhyabuddher ātmavijñānāya*). This serves as Śaṅkara's doctrinal prelude (*Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 13).

Śaṅkara's commentary on this verse, which is notably elaborate, opens with a succinct statement (*saṃgrahavākya*) elucidating the necessity and appropriateness of the question. The inquiry presupposes a specific inferential mark (*liṅga*): for any non-sentient and inert object or entity to move or engage in action, the supervision of a conscious agent is indispensable (*pravṛttiliṅgād viśeṣārthaḥ praśna upapannaḥ*).[39] Indeed, it is evident that the motion of chariots, for example, is governed by a conscious individual and not by inert entities (*rathādīnāṃ hi cetanāvadadhiṣṭhitānāṃ pravṛttir dṛṣṭā, nānadhiṣṭhitānām*). Similarly, activity is observed in all inert components of the psycho-physical aggregate, beginning with the mind (*manaādīnāṃ cācetanānāṃ pravṛttir dṛśyate*). This observation, therefore, serves as compelling evidence for the existence of a supervising conscious principle (*tad dhi liṅgaṃ cetanāvato 'dhiṣṭhātur astitve*). Indeed, the mind, along with other sensory faculties, is invariably set into motion (*karaṇāni manaādīni niyamena pravartante*); yet such activity is inconceivable in absence of an overseeing conscious principle (*tan nāsati cetanāvaty adhiṣṭhātary upapadyate*) that governs and sustains it. In the present context, however, this conscious principle is invoked in a broad sense, without a precise delineation of its nature. Thus, the inquiry posed by the Upaniṣad—aimed at discerning such a specific nature and render it intelligible—is entirely appropriate and logically coherent (*tadviśeṣasya cānadhigamāc cetanāvatsāmānye cādhigate viśeṣārthaḥ praśna upapadyate, Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 13 and 15).

Śaṅkara proceeds with his exegetical analysis by concentrating specifically on the mental apparatus, or the internal organ, which is mentioned first in the verse. Indeed, without the activation of the mind, any other specific perception becomes indistinct or even impossible.

By whose mere will (*kasyecchāmātreṇa*), then, does the mind direct itself toward its objects—engaging with them (*mana patati gacchati*)—and invariably activate itself in relation to them (*svaviṣaye*

[39] Compare with BSBh *ad* 2.2.18-22, where Śaṅkara emphasizes the necessity of a conscious entity, asserting that without it, an inert object cannot fulfill even the slightest instrumental function.

niyamena vyāpriyata ity arthaḥ)? At this juncture, Śaṅkara affirms that the analogy with inert objects reaches its conclusion in the clarification that the phrase "[By whom] the mind... is impelled" refers to the entirety of internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇam*), that is, the psycho-cognitive apparatus, namely the instrument through which thought arises and which, as such, functions as the instrumental cause of all cognitions (*manute 'neneti vijñānanimittam antaḥkaraṇaṃ manaḥ preṣitam ivety upamārthaḥ, Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 15).

Śaṅkara clarifies that, in this context, the participles *iṣita* 'directed' and *preṣita* 'impelled' cannot be interpreted in their literal sense (*na tv iṣitapreṣitaśabdayor arthāv iha saṃbhavataḥ*). This is because the self does not direct the mind and other faculties toward their respective objects in the manner a teacher guides his/her students (*na hi śiṣyān iva manaādīni viṣayebhyaḥ preṣayaty ātmā*). Rather, being of the nature of consciousness—eternally distinct and separate from all phenomena—the *ātman* acts solely as the instrumental cause of the activity of the mind and other faculties, comparable to "the overseeing [principle] of daily medical therapy" (*viviktanityacitsvarūpatayā tu nimittamātraṃ pravṛttau nityacikitsādhiṣṭhātṛvat, Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 15 and 17).

In this instance, the typically Śaṅkarian discourse unfolds smoothly, without significant issues, until the example, whose literal translation neither aids in contextual understanding nor proves intelligible on its own. Fortunately, Ānanda Giri acknowledges the peculiar nature of the expression and, to elucidate its true meaning, provides the following gloss (*Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 15 and 17):

> *viṣayagrahaṇārthaṃ nityacikitsāyām adhiṣṭhātuś cakorasya saṃnidhimātreṇa yathā rājabhojanādipravṛttinimittatvaṃ tadvad ity arthaḥ |*
>
> This is the meaning [of Śaṅkara's statement, which recalls that] this occurs precisely in the same manner as the [action of the] eastern partridge (*cakora*),[40] which, overseeing [the king's] daily medical therapy, serves as the instrument by which the king turns to his food, solely due to its proximity.[41]

[40] It concerns the chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), or the eastern partridge also found in Asia, in some respects similar to the red-legged partridge (*Alectoris* or *Perdix rufa*), as identified by Monier-Williams (1995: 380), but which, unlike the former, is not widespread in Asia (Johnsgard and Wright 1988).

[41] One of the consulted editions of the *Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya*, published by Kailāśāśram in Hṛṣikeś, includes highly valuable contemporary annotations (the *Govindaprasādinī ṭippaṇī*, 1963) authored by Svāmin Viṣṇudevānanda Giri (*Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* 1997: 15): *nityacikitsā kṣudvyādhipratīkārarūpā bhuktis tatra pravṛttyapravṛttiniyāmakatvād adhiṣṭhātā cakoraḥ | sa hi bhuktisamaye saṃnihitaḥ saviṣānnopasthitimātreṇa netre nimīlayati nānyatheti tena parīkṣya rājño bhojane pravṛttir ity āśayena vyācaṣṭe – nityetyādinā |* "Daily therapeutic care consists in nourishment, which takes the form of counteracting hunger and illnesses. Since it governs the inclination towards or the withdrawal from this sphere [of nourishment], the entity overseeing

Thus, Ānanda Giri uncovers the identity behind Śaṅkara's enigmatic simile: it is the well-known *cakora bird*, the 'eastern partridge,' specifically the chukar partridge which frequently features in Sanskrit literature due to its various distinctive traits.[42]

Indeed, as can be inferred from numerous passages, the *cakora* is culturally believed to possess an intrinsic characteristic, a kind of unconditional reflex. In the presence of poison or a substance mixed with poison, it exhibits a spontaneous reaction: its eyes close, becomes pale (*akṣivairāgya,* see *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya Sūtrasthāna* 7.16: *cakorasyākṣivairāgyam*), or, according to some accounts, turns red when exposed to the poison.[43]

In the context of the *Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* under discussion, the emphasis lies on the instrumental or accessory nature (*nimittatva*) of the agency of *ātman* in relation to the internal and external sensory faculties.

In many statements concerning manifestation (*sṛṣṭivākya*) in the Upaniṣads, causality is generally attributed to *brahman*/*ātman* (Uskokov 2022: 121-123).[44] In this context, specific causality has also been previously observed (see § 4.1). In that instance, within the framework of a temporary attribution (*adhyāropa*), a conventional and empirical (*vyāvahārika*) aspect of *ātman* is demonstrated.

Here, however, the focus shifts to the subsequent negation of those attributions (*apavāda*), as Śaṅkara himself regards the sections from 1.1 to 2.3 as explicitly non-dualistic (*advaitaśruti*), wherein

it is the eastern partridge (*cakora*). Indeed, when it is present at the time of the meal, it [= the partridge] closes its eyes at the mere presence of food mixed with poison but not otherwise. Through this [faculty], the king is guided in the act of partaking of the meal after [such an] examination has been conducted. Based on this implicit purport, [the commentator] elucidates [the verse] beginning with *nitya*."

[42] In certain instances, the attributes of the *cakora* overlap with those of the *cātaka/caṭaka* (*Clamator jacobinus*), to which poetic literature ascribes a distinctive trait: it is said to subsist solely on raindrops that fall when the moon occupies the constellation (*nakṣatra*) of Svātī. In other texts (*Kathāsaritsāgara* 5.3.246, 7.8.148, 8.6.211, 9.1.154, 12.9.11, 12.10.50, 12.19.78, 12.22.41, 12.26.45), the *cakora* is depicted as a bird that feeds exclusively on moonbeams. For example, consider the verse cited by Rājaśekhara (10th cent.) in the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* 17 (2000: 267-268): [...] *jyotsnāpānamadālasena vapuṣā mattāś cakorāṅganāḥ* "The female *cakoras*, intoxicated and frenzied, with their bodies languid with the madness of feeding on moonbeams." Another remarkable feature of the *cakora* is its melodious song, alongside its highly praised flesh, has earned it frequent acclaim in literary and cultural traditions. See also De Gubernatis (1987: 238-242).

[43] Further insights into the *cakora* may be glanced from its appearances in literary texts, which underscore its multifaced significance, symbolic, poetic, and practical. Notable examples include its mention in the *Mahābhārata* (1.94.14, 3.112.2, 7.102.36) and the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (6.5.45, 6.8.102, 15.2.211, 17.1.22). See Monier-Williams (1995: 380).

[44] For example: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.1-7, 1.4.1-8, 4.11-17, 5.5.1-4; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 2.23.2-3, 6.2.3*; Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1-12*; Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1, 3.1.1; *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.7-8; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.2, 5-6, 9-10, 16-18; Uskokov (2022: 89-103).

causality of any kind is denied as the ultimate teaching regarding the true nature of *brahman*/*ātman*. Within this framework, it becomes imperative to evaluate the nature of *brahman*/*ātman*'s agency.[45]

The entire passage of the *Kenopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya* is elucidated through the analogical illustration of the *nityacikitsādhiṣṭhātṛ*. What, then, characterizes the agency of *ātman* (Timalsina 2014: 191)?

The illustration of the *cakora* serves as a particularly apt metaphor to illustrate the type of agency referenced in the Upaniṣads with regard to *ātman*. Just as the eastern partridge (*cakora*) engages in no activity, intention, or involvement concerning the king's meal, yet, by its very nature, involuntarily signals—through a simple innate reflex—whether the food is poisoned or not, its agency is merely instrumental (*nimitta*) in relation to the following king's actions.

Similarly, *ātman* assumes a purely *nimitta* 'instrumental' or 'accessory' role.[46] While remaining non-agentive (*akartṛ*), its inactive presence is both sufficient and essential for the activation of any faculty, without actual involvement, will, or intention toward the act, and without ever assuming real agency (*kartṛtva*).

5. Conclusion: towards an AOO

In this preliminary survey, *laukikanyāya*s were briefly introduced, and two cases related to non-human animals were selected and analyzed. Throughout the survey we observed that recent collections of *laukikanyāya*s include within the category of *nyāya*s a number of topics found in core *śāstra*s (Vyākaraṇa, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, Kāvya, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Vaiśeśika), such as *sūtra*s, verse excerpts, 'systematizations,' dispositions and limitations of use (*vyavasthā*), metaphors, examples, and interpretive meta-rules (*paribhāṣā*). Thus, while many *nyāya*s are indeed *laukika*, others are entirely *śāstrīya*, which implies that they lie somewhat outside the scope of straightforward empirical observation.

Moreover, as far as we have seen, Upaniṣads (along with the Vedic Saṃhitās and epics, see Jamison 2009 and 2013; Olivelle 2013) are replete with examples, metaphors, reasonings, similes, and analogies

[45] In the Advaita Vedānta, the *adhyāropāpavādanyāya* traces its bases in Śaṅkara's *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya ad* 13.13 (BGBh 1936: 554) and Maṇḍana Miśra's *Brahmasiddhi* (1937: 26). See also Sharma (1989: 25-27, n. 47) and Jacob (2004[2]: 2-3).

[46] The well-known admonition of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā* (11.33) reads: "Be a mere instrument, O Arjuna" (*nimittamātraṃ bhava savyasācin*). A similar notion of instrumentality is invoked by Śaṅkara himself in the introduction to his commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10: "Then, the glorious Vāsudeva, desiring to teach precisely this [truth], having taken Arjuna as an instrument for the benefit of all humanity, begins his teaching with verse 2.10" (*arjunaṃ nimittīkṛtya sarvalokānugrahārtham*). This parallel highlights the theme of selfless action and the subordination of personal agency to a higher, universal purpose—a central motif in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Commentaries on BG 11.33 do not add anything relevant.

that are either directly or indirectly related to animals. Consequently, hundreds of *laukikanyāya*s have been created based on these. These *laukikanyāya*s become valuable interpretive tools, bridging the often-separate domains of *śāstra* and *loka*. Therefore, the immediate capacity of *laukikanyāya*s to explain *śāstra* by exemplifying it with *loka* grants them effective, operative, and significant hermeneutic validity.[47] Indeed, these *laukikanyāya*s serve a dual hermeneutical and explanatory function: not only do they help the reader grasp the complexities of abstract theories, but they also assist the author in making those theories comprehensible.

We have seen that non-human animals are privileged subjects of observation, as they provide enlightening analogies and interpretative examples. Indeed, their naked lives (Agamben 1995) embody a higher degree of adherence to nature and its rhythms,[48] which is precisely the domain of the observation of Vedic seers. Consequently, my focus on animals is based on a strong presupposition: this ontological and metaphysical inquiry draws on the macro-micro-cosmic homologies that underpin the Upaniṣadic reflection on unity,[49] as well as the ensuing contemplative practices (*upāsana*).

Furthermore, in order to situate animal-oriented-*laukikanyāya*s within a global perspective, I may recall one of the most recent developments in contemporary ontology, clearly influenced by Heidegger's metaphysics, which was first proposed by Harman (2002) and later reused and reshaped by Bryant (2011). Although my viewpoint diverges significantly from the ultra-reductionist tendencies of the two authors, their methodological and theoretical approaches interestingly reject the notion of a privileged position of human existence in the world and broaden their scope to include the existence of non-human objects (Harman 2002: 16). This anti-anthropocentric trend is referred to as Object-

[47] It is worth briefly mentioning some of the most well-known and widely applicable *laukikanyāya*s in the *śāstra*s. For example, Jacob cites *yat kṛtakaṃ tad anityam* "Anything that is artificial is non-eternal" (1904: 62[1]); *ubhayataḥ pāśā rajjuḥ* "A rope that binds at both ends" (1904: 28[3]); *viśvajinnyāya* 'the logic behind the *viśvajit* sacrifice' (1904: 127-128[3]). Additionally, Sharma (1989) provides several examples, listed by their numbering in the text: *ekasaṃbandhidarśanam aparasaṃbandhismārakam iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim [stating that] the vision of one related thing is the reminder of another related thing' (11); *lakṣaṇapramāṇābhyāṃ vastusiddhir iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim [stating that] through definition and means of knowledge, an entity is indeed established' (72); *kaimutikanyāyaḥ* 'the maxim of the "how much more?"'(108); *vīcitaraṅganyāyaḥ* 'the maxim of [the spread like] a sequence of waves' (228); *prayojanam anuddiśya na mando 'pi pravartata iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim of [stating that] even a fool does not act without a motive' (359); *rāhoś śīra iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim of Rāhu's head' (460): *na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛd iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxim [stating that] no one can remain inactive even for a moment' (725); *duḥkham eva sarvvaṃ vivekina iti nyāyaḥ* 'the maxims [stating that] everything is nothing but sorrow for one who discriminates' (870). Of course, many others could be cited.

[48] For discussions on animal raw knowledge, see Mills (2021: 301-302), Phillips (2012: 5), and Anrò in this issue of the Journal.

[49] Explicit references to cosmic equations and homologies are already found in the dialectical debates and enigmatic riddles of the *brahmodya* (Ganeri 2018; Gonda 1969; Thomson 1997).

Oriented Ontology (OOO). According to OOO, objects are not ontologically exhausted by their relationships with humans, as they exist independently of human perception.[50]

Mutatis mutandis, OOO may serve as a starting point for new perspectives. Indeed, we can hypothesize and develop an Animal-Oriented Ontology (AOO) by utilizing animal-oriented *laukikanyāya*s as efficacious and incisive multilayered hermeneutical tools. Through these tools, animal behavior and animality *tout court* may assert its own independent theoretical dignity (Cimatti 2013, 2018), guiding us towards unexpected horizons.

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Minimal inference

An inquiry into Navya-Nyāya in quest of nonhuman logic

Alberto Anrò

Philosophical inquiry has historically centered on human experiences, including cognition. This focus has often led to the assumption that language, specifically human adult language (hL), is a prerequisite for complex reasoning. However, growing evidence suggests that non-human animals (NHAs) and non-linguistic humans exhibit significant inferential abilities, challenging this assumption. This paper explores the implications of these findings by examining the concept of 'minimal inference'—reasoning that may occur independently of hL. It argues that a critical re-evaluation of the relationship between language and thought is necessary. The paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining philosophical analysis with insights from the South Asian Nyāya tradition. While Navya-Nyāya philosophy, with its emphasis on human experience and language, might initially seem anthropocentric, its focus on 'relational logic' and the primacy of perception offers a framework for understanding non-human cognition. By expanding Navya-Nyāya in this direction and examining its technicalities through the lens of contemporary research on NHAs' cognition, this paper aims to contribute to a broader understanding of inference, exploring the possibility of non-linguistic or differently linguistic forms of reasoning. This includes investigating the role of counterfactuality, perception-based concepts, and the potential existence of a 'minimal grammar' in NHAs' cognition.

Keywords: Nonhuman inference, relational logic, perception-based configurational concepts, counterfactuality, Navya-Nyāya.

1. Introduction[1]

Philosophical inquiry has, in its history, primarily focused on the experiences and capacities of human adults across all domains. This accent extends to the study of cognition, abstraction, and reasoning, often considered the hallmark abilities of the human adult: rational and endowed with language. A

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long-standing and influential tradition has indeed argued for the direct equivalence of thought and language.

> Aren't thought (*diánoia*) and speech (*lógos*) the same, except that what we call thought is speech that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in conversation (*diálogos*) with itself?[2]

Since the lack of language was straightforwardly equated with the absence or severe limitation of thought, this widely held belief has resulted in the neglect of reasoning abilities in nonhuman animals (NHAs) and non-linguistic humans (such as newborns). Nevertheless, compelling scientific evidence now shows that both NHAs and non-linguistic humans exhibit clear logical reasoning abilities, suggesting that language, if conceived as human adult language (hL), may not be a necessary condition (Kaufman 2021). This field of contemporary research is vast and complex. Given the ongoing nature of the debate, even providing a mere glimpse would be beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this contribution aims to explore the significant implications of these emerging insights through the lens of logic, philosophy, and textual analysis. In the opening, I will attempt to synthesize the issue in a three-sentence inference, a construction that is both verbal and, in this case, self-referential too:

> Making inferences requires language, namely, hL.
> NHAs do not have hL.
> Therefore, NHAs do not make inferences.

Still, as said, NHAs do exhibit inferential abilities. Based on the uncritical acceptance of the equation between language and thought, this syllogism succinctly exposes the flaw inherent in this assumption when the context shifts. Formally valid and previously taken for granted, this syllogism is now undermined because its conclusion (that NHAs lack reasoning) has been widely disproven. It remains to be seen where the error lies. Two logical possibilities exist, though interconnected. (a) The major premise is false: language (as hL) may not be an absolute prerequisite for making inferences, and nonlinguistic inferences are indeed possible. (b) The minor premise is not entirely accurate: NHAs may possess forms of representation that constitute a type of language, albeit different from hL.[3] Clearly,

[2] SP 263e (1997: 287). All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[3] Specifically, this inference is a *modus Camestres* syllogism, where a negative universal is inferred from an affirmative and a negative one; viz., All *x* are *y*; No *z* is *y*; Thus, no *z* is *x*. In Nyāya terminology, this equates to 'Language pervades inferential capacity.' Consequently, the fallacies (*hetvābhāsa*) involved are: (a) *sādhārāṇa-savyabhicāra-hetu* (overly broad deviating *probans*), where the reason (here, inferential capacity) is present where the *probandum* (here, language) is absent; (b)

this logical possibility does not grant NHAs the ability to speak. Even consciousness itself is another issue entirely. This is not the case of the Houyhnhnms, the savant talking horses in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The temptation to resist is, nonetheless, exactly that: clinging to an undue anthropomorphism leading to an overly simplistic 'all-or-nothing' dichotomy. This has historically often resulted in either attributing human-like prerogatives to NHAs or, conversely, reducing them to mere automatons, devoid of any genuine cognitive abilities, as in the case of the Cartesian *bête-machine*.

> Et on ne doit pas confondre les paroles avec les mouvements naturels, qui [...] peuvent être imités par des machines aussi bien que par les animaux (Descartes 1637: *5e Partie*).

On the contrary, these two interconnected possibilities could suggest the existence at least of an alternative, basic, or minimal grammar (mG) in NHAs. A sort of representational structure that, while yet to be defined, would likely differ significantly from the fully developed language observed in human adults (e.g., mG ⊂ hL). Indeed, experimental evidence on NHAs suggests that, even in the absence of hL, complex cognitive processes such as pattern detection, concept formation (despite the intricacies of defining what a concept is), generalization, abstraction, and the recognition of identity, sameness, and difference are evident (cf. *infra*). A possibility that I have elsewhere already tentatively called 'perception-based configurational concepts' (see fn. 4). Consider, for a moment, this passage from Plato about humans.

> Aren't we going to say that it takes expertise in dialectic to divide things by kinds and not to think that the same form is a different one or that a different form is the same? [...] So, if a person can do that, he'll be capable of adequately discriminating a single form spread out all through a lot of other things, each of which stands separate from the others (SP 253d, 1997: 276).

However, for many decades already, it has been recognized that generalization of imprinting responses, to cite an example, allows young birds to recognize their social partners despite individual differences and changing appearances (Bateson 1973). Recent studies have been delving even deeper, for instance, assessing the spontaneous capacity of chicks of the domestic fowl to generalize

vyāptitvāsiddha (unestablished pervasion), as an intervening variable (*upādhi*) is active (e.g., a different form of representation). With respect to the following, it may be useful to recall that: *modus ponens*: $p \rightarrow q, p \vdash q$; *modus tollens*: $p \rightarrow q, \sim q \vdash \sim p$.

multimodal patterns to novel objects, possibly indicating "an ability to learn an abstract pattern, i.e., a pattern independent of the particular stimuli by which it is instantiated" (Versace *et al.* 2017: 522).[4]

As said, the study of logical inference has been closely intertwined with the analysis of language, often to the extent that the two have been considered essentially the same (namely, inference within and through hL). Despite this historical focus on language, other forms of reasoning that are either non-linguistic or significantly different from those mediated by hL have to be addressed (possibly inference within and through mG). How then to articulate and analyze these nonlinguistic, or differently linguistic, processes? And what could be the implications of this challenge for our understanding of both logic and cognition? This methodological approach will combine philosophical and textual analysis, with a particular focus on the reciprocal illumination between South Asian texts and contemporary philosophical concerns. The choice of texts from the South Asian tradition is not accidental. In the rich and influential tradition that followed in the footsteps of Aristotle and the Stoics, the equivalence between logical and linguistic analysis has been consistently affirmed. Analyzing an inference has traditionally meant resolving the internal structure of an assertion or proposition, as well as the composition of a series of interrelated assertions. The case of the South Asian logicians of the Navya-Nyāya schools is substantially different. Despite its intellectual depth and potential for comprehensiveness, the explicit focus of the Naiyāyikas remains avowedly anthropocentric, yet not inherently so. Navya-Nyāya non-naïve realism is a radical "relational logic" (Guha 1979: 56), strictly non-predictive and grounded in the primacy of perceptual experience. This theoretical account might therefore offer a fruitful lens for understanding and describing non-human, non-verbal inferential processes. This paper thus attempts an exploration into a topic with which Navya-Nyāya texts do not directly and explicitly engage in detail. Nevertheless, their overall theoretical framework may offer unsuspected insights if systematically questioned regarding NHAs' cognition.

2. Perceptive premises

Inference presupposes a qualified form of perception, one that involves the recognition and processing of structured perceptual information. Experimental evidence of reasoning in NHAs, therefore, suggests that this definite perception of properties, patterns, or configurations must be processed in a manner that is either nonverbal or independent of the linguistic frameworks typical of adult human cognition.

[4] Regarding the concept of *svarūpa*, which I translate as 'pattern,' 'configuration,' or 'self-configuration,' consider Praśastapāda (ca. 6th c.) and Śrīdhara's subcommentary (10th c.; PB 1984: 189). A more in-depth discussion of this delicate matter, including perception-based concepts and minimal grammar, can be found in Anrò (forth. 1).

In the words of Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya, leading figure of the Navya-Nyāya and author of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, "inference (*anumāna*), as a [reliable] source of knowledge, is to be described after perception (*pratyakṣa*), due to its reliance on perception."[5] But this has much older roots in the school. The *Nyāyasūtra*, attributed to Gautama Akṣapāda, records how "inference has perception as antecedent".[6] In the commentary *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya*, this role of epistemic antecedent is described as the direct "vision of [both] the inferential mark itself and the relation between this mark and what bears it [i.e., the inferential subject]."[7]

It thus appears that perception is a primary, foundational process. Clearly, its accuracy cannot always be guaranteed, as perceptual errors are always lurking. Nevertheless, perception remains the primary opening of 'presentational experience' (*anubhava*; Phillips 2012: 163). Not only does it not need further and earlier processes to ground it; on the contrary, it itself grounds any subsequent epistemic act. Says Gaṅgeśa:

> We [hold that perception is] a cognition not having [another] cognition as its trigger (*karaṇa*). In a qualified perception, the cognition of the qualifier is not the trigger, as there is no operation (*vyāpāra*) [qualifying the qualifier]. The cognition of the qualifier [e.g., blue] is a cause [only] in the case of the perception of a *qualificandum* [already] qualified [e.g., a pot]. But the cognition of the qualifier of the qualifier [e.g., Blueness qualifying that blue] does not [operate] as a trigger by means of the cognition of that [second-level] qualifier too, since there is no proof [of that].[8]

A blue color qualifies a pot, with blue being the property that qualifies it. But the perception of that shade of color does not depend on another cognition—for example, on a previous categorization according to which to perceive blue, one must first understand the concept of Blueness (that is, the property that defines what it means to be blue). The qualifying function of blue in the perception of a blue pot is, so to speak, direct. Strictly speaking, it is 'non-constructed' or 'indeterminate' (*nirvikalpaka*).

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[5] Navya-Nyāya can be rendered in English as 'New procedure' or 'New logic;' Gaṅgeśa's text, *Tattvacintāmaṇi* (14th c.), as 'Gem of Reflection on the Truth.' The quote is from TCM (1990: 1): *pratyakṣopajīvakatvāt pratyakṣānantaraṃ* [...] *anumānaṃ nirūpyate*.

[6] The *Nyāyasūtra* (2nd-4th c.), 'Procedural' or 'Logical Strings,' is the founding text of classical Nyāya. The quote is from NS 1.1.5 (1997: 12): *atha tat-*[*pratyakṣa*]*-pūrvakam* [...] *anumānam*.

[7] *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya* (5th c.) or 'Commentary on the NS' by Vātsyāyana. The quote is from NSB (1997: 12): *liṅgaliṅginaḥ sambandhadarśanaṃ liṅgadarśanaṃ ca*.

[8] TCM (2009: 334): *jñānākaraṇakam jñānam iti tu vayam | viśiṣṭapratyakṣe ca viśeṣaṇajñānaṃ na karaṇaṃ vyāpārābhāvāt | viśiṣṭavaiśiṣṭyapratyakṣe ca viśeṣaṇajñānaṃ hetur na tu viśeṣaṇaviśeṣaṇadhīr api viśeṣaṇadhīdvārā karaṇam, mānābhāvat |*. Regarding *karaṇa*, consider also the following translational choices: 'trigger, chief instrumental cause' (Phillips 2012: 166); 'instrumental cause' (Jha 2001: 129). Regarding *vyāpāra*: "operation, employment in causal operation, which is said to be required of 'triggers' in relation to effects" (Phillips 2012: 171); 'intermediate causal link' (Jha 2001: 375). Consider the abstract *vaiśiṣṭya*: 'the condition of possessing a qualification' or 'the property of being qualified'—thus, *qualificandum* in my translation.

This is not due to vagueness, but because, in the process of determination—termed 'determinate cognition' (*viśiṣṭa-jñāna*) in Navya-Nyāya, involving a qualified subject (*viśeṣya*) and a qualifying property (*viśeṣaṇa*)—it occupies the role of the qualifier, not of the qualified. In other words, in this context, indeterminate refers to 'that which determines by qualifying, while itself remaining unqualified.' Thus, it is a 'pure' or 'primary qualifier.' In a blue pot, the blue is not cognized as the intentional object (*viṣaya*) to be qualified (*viśeṣya*); only 'Pot' is intentionally cognized, and this as blue. Consequently, the blue qualifying a pot is grasped without Blueness, qualifying that blue, being grasped. If, and only if, we were discussing 'Blue' (as we indeed are, in this moment), it would be cognized as an intentional object (*viṣaya*) to be qualified (*viśeṣya*). The epistemic subject cognizes a singly qualified percept—a 'pattern' or a 'self-referential configuration' (*svarūpa*; cf. fn. 4)—with no need to attribute any second-level qualifier to it. To phrase it differently, there is a sort of direct 'cognitive availability' (cf. Phillips in TCM 2009: 628) of the qualifying percept within the context of the determined cognition it helps to constitute. As Gaṅgeśa states, 'Cow' is cognized without the cognition of Cow-ness, and even less so of Cow-ness-hood qualifying Cow-ness.

> Perception is twofold: indeterminate and determinate. In this regard, indeterminate [perception] is never associated with names, classes, etc. It lacks built-in distinctions, and it is devoid of presentation modality [as it would have if it were defined by any qualifier].[9]

> [When a cow has never been seen before], the very first perceptual [qualified] cognition 'Cow' is produced through an [indeterminate] cognition of the qualifier. [This is a cognition that must itself] be formed, since a qualified cognition, like an inference, must be generated [through the attribution of a property to a subject: e.g., 'This is a cow' or 'This is qualified by Cow-ness']. In this case, memory is not involved [by definition], due to the [perceiver's] lack of experience with Cow-ness in his life.[10]

Regarding the highly problematic and widely debated question of the possibility and mutual roles of determinate and indeterminate perceptions, Gaṅgeśa argues the latter serves a crucial epistemic function, the purpose of which is primarily causal, effectively interrupting a potential infinite regress

[9] TCM (2009: 609): *tac ca pratyakṣaṃ dvividhaṃ nirvikalpakaṃ savikalpakañ ceti | tatra nāmajātyādiyojanārahitaṃ vaiśiṣṭyānavagāhi niṣprakārakaṃ nirvikalpakam |*. Regarding *prakāra:* 'predication content, way' (Phillips 2012: 167). Consider also Banjeree (1972: 96): "Indian thinkers [i.e., Nyāya exponents] did not consider knowledge as a case of predication, and their concepts of *viśeṣa* and *prakāra* do not correspond to the Western concepts of subject and predicate." I conceive of *prakāra* accordingly as the 'presentation' or 'appearing modality' of a content in the context of its cognition. Regarding *vaiśiṣṭyānavagāhin*: "not grasping a qualificative relationality" (Phillips in TCM 2009: 609). Note that the term, through the prefix *an-*, negates *ava√gāh* 'to plunge into.'

[10] TCM (2009: 627): *prāthamikaṃ gaur iti pratyakṣaṃ jñānaṃ janyaviśeṣaṇajñānajanyaṃ janyaviśiṣṭajñānatvāt anumitivat | na ca smaraṇaṃ tatra saṃbhavati | tajjanmani tena gotvasyānanubhavāt |*.

(from Cow to Cow-ness, to Cow-ness-hood, etc.). Actual epistemic acts consist of nothing but determinate cognitions. What determines cognition about an object is the attribution of a qualifier to that object, for example, the qualifying color with respect to the pot. Thus, this is no longer just a pot; it is also blue. But this qualifier in turn derives from what? Necessarily, the determinate perception 'Blue pot' (i.e., 'A pot qualified as blue') must arise from an indeterminate one—that is, the perception of a qualifier whose own qualification is not considered within that specific cognitive act, lest infinite regress. In sum, to perceive blue, it is not necessary to know what the being blue of blue means.

But this is not all. Beyond the crucial immediate availability of primary qualifiers, even determinate cognition itself does not appear to be reliant on hL but may be grounded in more fundamental forms of epistemic frames (which I have tentatively called 'minimal grammar'). Recognizing color in an object, the specific individuality of social partners in birds (cf. *supra*, Bateson 1973), or, in general, complex patterns of stimuli do not seem to depend on linguistic faculties in the manner of hL. Fowl chicks not only recognize identities and differences but also generalize them multimodally (cf. *supra*, Versace *et al.* 2017).

3. One example among many

Setting aside the cognitive abilities of complex organisms such as cetaceans, primates, and even fowl chicks, a much simpler model, the *Polistes* paper wasp, could prove more useful in this context. Considering the range of cognitive abilities within the phylogenetic differentiation of the species, its cognitive capacities may represent a point sufficiently distinct from those of a verbally competent adult human. Nonetheless, with a brain volume of approximately 0.125 cubic millimeters (cf. Gandia 2022), this invertebrate demonstrates logical reasoning abilities in transitive inference.

Transitive Inference (TI) is a complex form of reasoning previously thought to be limited to vertebrates. It involves the ability of "animals to use known relationships to deduce unknown relationships" (Vasconcelos 2008). In their experiments with wasps, Tibbetts and colleagues (2019) metaphorically describe TI through the relation of "greater than"—that is, TI = $(A>B) \wedge (B>C) \rightarrow (A>C)$ (If A is greater than B and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C). The study shows that paper wasps perform TI by their ability to learn to discriminate between elements within a series and then successfully apply this knowledge to novel, untrained items. In particular, wasps were first trained to discriminate pairs of colors (here labeled with a letter) in association with an adverse stimulus, according to the following pattern: A_0B_1, B_0C_1, C_0D_1, and D_0E_1, where '1' means the association of the color with an electric shock, whereas '0' its absence. Then, individuals were tested on novel pairs without training (viz., B versus D, A versus E). Tested individuals choose B more frequently than D and

A more frequently than E, showing they organize the trained stimuli into the implicit hierarchy A > B > C > D > E and use TI to choose between untrained pairs. The outcome clearly shows that Polistes wasps consistently avoid the element that is logically 'greater,' so to speak, demonstrating their ability to form a mental hierarchy while applying TI proficiently.

4. How could a non-language-based inference look like?

The stock example used in Navya-Nyāya to describe inference evokes the image of smoke and fire, according to what could be expressed through *modus ponens* (cf. fn. 3) as:

> [1] Smoke → Fire, Smoke ⊢ Fire
> If Smoke, then Fire; and Smoke, then Fire

In its simplest expression: *yatra yatra dhūmas tatra tatra vahniḥ* 'Wherever there is smoke, there is fire.' The reliability of this relation is more than robust, and its significance offers even deeper insights.[11]

Confirming its essentially non-predicative and non-hL-based nature, Navya-Nyāya logic is not formalistic, although potentially formalizable. The validity of the inference is not derivable from its internal structure (as in the case of the syllogism, for example) but from the exogenous relation of the properties involved. Indeed, Navya-Nyāya analyzes "the process of inference as a process of knowing and is invariably talking about objects of knowledge and not about words or sentences" (Bhattacharyya 2001: 169). In the inference 'If smoke, then fire,' nothing grounds the conclusion except for the actual observed relation between smoke and fire. This inference is first founded upon the relation 'Fire is the locus of smoke.' Although smoke is associated with fire loci, there can be fire without smoke, as exemplified by a glowing metal lump (*tapta-ayaḥpiṇḍa*). Consequently, for reasons of quantification, it is necessary to define the inverse relation of 'Being the locus of,' namely, 'Smoke is the *superstratum* with respect to fire' (cf. Anrò 2022: 18-20). In the jargon of Navya-Nyāya, which, while rooted in natural language, develops into a highly structured technical language (Bhattacharya 2007), this relationship between smoke and fire could then be described as: *yā dhūmatva-avacchedaka-avacchinna-ādheyatā sā vahnitva-nirūpitā*, or '*Superstratumness*, limited by the limitor *smoke-hood*, is conditioned by *fire-hood*,' that is, 'Every smoke is on some fire.' Nonetheless, fire too has a locus. Hence, observing smoke in the distance on a mountain allows for the inference of an underlying fire. The inferential subject (*pakṣa*)

[11] Regarding the relation between fire (as combustion, that is, rapid oxidation) and smoke (as the eventual colloidal dispersion of particulate matter produced by combustion), see Anrò (forth. 2) and Turns (2000: 3-6).

exhibits one property that is invariably connected with another. The former is thus the inferential reason or *probans* (*hetu*) whereby the latter can be inferred as *probandum* (*sādhya*). The mountain exhibits smoke, which invariably co-occurs with fire. Within the theoretical framework of Navya-Nyāya, the logical structure of formula [1] can thus be rephrased in general terms as:

> [2] *yadi sahetupakṣaḥ sādhyavyāpyahetuś ca, tarhi sādhyavatpakṣaḥ*
> If the inferential subject exhibits the *probans* and the *probans* is pervaded by the *probandum*, then the inferential subject possesses the *probandum*

In light of [2], the theory of inference in Navya-Nyāya appears as a "theory of substitution, where one property, by virtue of its logical relation with another property, forces the substitution of the latter in its place" (Matilal 1998: 22–24). The entire inferential process is grounded on *vyāpti*, an 'invariable concomitance' (Goekoop 1967) or 'pervasion' (Ingalls 1951), a relationship between two properties whereby one is never found without the other and is therefore 'pervaded' by it, but not necessarily vice versa. Gaṅgeśa wonders:

> Regarding the cognition of pervasion as the *reason* (*hetu*) for inferential knowledge, what is this pervasion?[12]

His answer is not immediate. In a first approximation, it can be said that:

> [Pervasion] is a non-deviation, being the non-occurrence [of the *probans*] in what possesses the absence of the *probandum*.[13]

However, as reasonable as this may sound, this is still an insufficient formulation for quantification reasons. It has to be noted that "instead of quantification, Naiyāyikas use double negatives and abstract substantives to accomplish the same result" (Matilal 1964: 88). The highly technical, and at first sight even convoluted, 'conclusive definition of pervasion' (*vyāpti-siddhānta-lakṣaṇa*) can be thus articulated as follows:

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[12] TCM (1990: 27): *nanv anumiti-hetu-vyāpti-jñāne kā vyāptiḥ?* Consequently, freely rearranging this question, we can get the positive definition: *hetu-vyāpti-jñānam ity anumitiḥ*; 'Inferential knowledge is the cognition of the pervasion of the *probans* [by the *probandum*].'

[13] TCM (1990: 27): *... (na) avyabhicaritatvaṃ, tad dhi (na) sādhyābhāvavad-avṛttitvaṃ*. I provisionally omit here the negations (*na*) present in the original text. This passage is part of the so-called *vyāpti-pañcaka-lakṣaṇī*, Gaṅgeśa's refutation of five insufficient definitions of *vyāpti*. Subsequent paragraphs will clarify that these definitions are not entirely false, but rather useful provisional approximations that will ultimately be refuted—hence, Gaṅgeśa's *na*.

> Pervasion is the coreference of that [property in the role of pervaded *probans*] with what is [never] defined as the limitor of the counterpositivity of a constant absence in [that] coreference with that [*probans*] that is not coreferred with the counterpositive [of that absence].[14]

The pervaded property cannot coexist with the absence of the pervading property, for this latter is itself precluded under those conditions. In other words, "pervasion of *x* [e.g., smoke] with *y* [fire] is *x*'s concurrence with such a *y* as is not the counterpositive of an absence that occurs in the locus of *x*" (Matilal 1968: 80). Notably, in this form of inference, no separate middle term is necessary. The key point is instead to combine the two premises into a comprehensive *parāmarśa*, a 'complex judgment,' a 'consideration,' or a sort of 'cognitive putting together.'[15] What is essential is cognizing 'The mountain possessing smoke as pervaded by fire.' In general terms, and as an abridged form of [2], [2a] follows:

> [2a] *sādhyavyāpyahetumān pakṣaḥ*
> The inferential subject [*pakṣa*] possesses the *probans* [*hetu*] as pervaded by the *probandum* [*sādhya*] (cf. also Bhattacharya 2001: 22).

5. Nonlinguistic grasps

In order to possibly describe nonhuman inference, it becomes crucial at this point to better define the cognitive processes underlying that complex consideration that apprehends the pervasion between two properties. The author of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* devotes a section to the 'means of apprehending pervasion' (*vyāpti-grahopāya*), beginning with a series of critical remarks:

> Repeated observation is doubtful. Suppositional reasoning is flawed by infinite regress. Then, how is pervasion grasped?[16]

From Russell's turkey to black swans and red herrings, induction fallacies prevent us from concluding with certainty. Gaṅgeśa seems to be aware that repeated observation is insufficient. Moreover, repeated exposure to stimuli, their retention, association, and composition in complex architectures

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[14] TCM (1990: 100): *pratiyogy-asamānādhikaraṇa-yat-samānādhikaraṇa-atyantābhāva-pratiyogitā-avacchedaka-avacchinnaṃ yan na bhavati tena samaṃ tasya sāmānādhikaraṇyaṃ vyāptiḥ*. Cf. Goekoop (1967: 109-111): "Pervasion is the fact that that which constant absence shares a locus with, without sharing the locus with its counterpositive, shares a locus with that which is not what is determined by a limitor of the counterpositiveness to that absence."

[15] Quotes are respectively from: Bhattacharyya (2001: 178-182), Jha (2001: 257), and Phillips (2012: 167).

[16] TCM (1990: 209): *evaṃ bhūyodarśanam api saṃśāyakam, tarkas tv anavasthāgrasta eveti kathaṃ vyāptigrahaḥ?*

of reflexes appears to be exactly what contemporary experimental evidence is overcoming in nonhuman cognition. Secondly, 'hypothetical' or 'suppositional reasoning' (*tarka*) is also logically flawed in grounding pervasion. It suffers from 'infinite regress, for *tarka* itself is rooted in a grasp of pervasion.'[17] In light of the above, Gaṅgeśa argues that:

> Pervasion grasping is the observation of co-occurrence [of pervaded and pervader], together with no cognition of any deviation.[18]

In other terms, it consists of perceptual observation plus a cognitive surplus that cannot be reduced to the mere association of stimuli. Inference is different from mere association or simple belief because it is characterized by the certainty of its conclusion. The question concerning that cognitive surplus that underpins inferential certainty has thus evolved into the 'doubt of *non sequitur*' (*aprayojaka-śaṅkā*), which can be summarized in the stock formula: *hetur astu sādhyam māstu*, 'Given the *probans*, *probandum* could not be.'

> Doubt can arise from the suspicion regarding [the intervention of] additional conditions (*upādhi*) or from the observation of common properties accompanied by non-observed particulars. This [doubt] can sometimes be dispelled through suppositional reasoning that obliterates counter-instances; sometimes, [its resolution] can be self-evident. If [it is argued that] the rooting of pervasion appraisal in suppositional reasoning [implies] infinite regress, it is not so insofar as suppositional reasoning follows doubting. When doubt does not appear, due to [patent] contradiction, pervasion is grasped without suppositional reasoning.[19]

One type of compelling evidence—that likely does not occasion the arising of any doubt and, hence, no suppositional reasoning—could involve the systematic administration of adverse stimuli (AS). Typically, AS lead individuals to consistent avoidance behavior. This constitutes a form of 'if–then' so

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[17] TCM (1990: 212): *tarka-vyāptigraha-mūlakatvena anavastheti*. Note *mūla-ka-tva*: the 'condition of having roots in.'

[18] TCM (1990: 210): *vyabhicāra-jñāna-viraha-sahakṛtaṃ sahacāradarśanaṃ vyāptigrāhakam*.

[19] TCM (1990: 211–2): [*śaṅkā*] *kvacid upādhisaṃdehāt kvacid viśeṣādarśana-sahita-sādhāraṇa-dharma-darśanāt | tadvirahaś ca kvacid vipakṣa-bādhaka-tarkāt, kvacit svataḥ siddha eva | tarkasya vyāptigrahamūlakatvānavastheti cen na yāvad āśaṅkāṃ tarkānusaraṇāt | yatra ca vyāghātena śaṅkaiva nāvatarati tatra tarkaṃ vinaiva vyāptigrahaḥ |*. Regarding *upādhi*, consider also the following translation choices: 'imposed property' (Ingalls 1951: 140; Matilal 1968: 33; Jha 2001: 127); 'condition' (Sarma in MK 1960: 37; Matilal 1968: 84); 'accident' (Goekoop 1967: 14); 'inferential undercutting condition' (Phillips 2002); 'additional condition' (Phillips 2022). See also TCM (1990: 293–294), where *upādhi* is defined as pervading the *probandum*, but not the *probans*. For example, while 'There is fire, because there is smoke' is true, the inverse inference, 'There is smoke, because there is fire,' is false. This is because the intervening condition 'wet fuel' (*ārdra-indhana*) pervades the *probandum* (here, smoke), but not the *probans* (here, fire). For a concise overview of Gaṅgeśa's contributions to *tarka*, refer to Bagchi (1953: 32–38). Consider also Anrò (forth. 2).

direct and immediate as to risk being mistaken as a simple conditioning, unless specifically investigated through experimental protocols, such as those employed by Tibbetts and colleagues (cf. *supra*). This is an issue that I will return to shortly. For the time being, if there is no such compelling evidence, doubt arises. According to Gaṅgeśa, this doubt can only be dispelled through hypothetical reasoning and never by the mere repetition of experience. Then, what constitutes hypothetical reasoning? To a first approximation, *tarka* is neither knowledge (*pramā*) nor an independent means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in the proper sense, but a useful, sometimes necessary, auxiliary process. *Nyāyasūtra* states in this regard:

> [Applied] to an object whose features [remain] undiscerned, hypothetical reasoning [involves] postulating a potential cause in order to know those features.[20]

In the same vein, the anonymous *Gem Sliver* (*Maṇikaṇa*; ca. 16th c.), a widely circulated compendium of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, describes in summary the technicalities of *tarka* as follows:

> Hypothetical reasoning is the assumption of the pervader through the assumption of the pervaded. [...] It is performed through the conjecture named 'accessory assumption of the pervaded' and through the 'ascertainment of the deviation of what is [supposed] to occur.'[21]

For the sake of clarity, let us recall the *modus ponens* inference already expressed in [1]:

> [1] Smoke → Fire, Smoke ⊢ Fire
> If Smoke (as pervaded), then Fire (as pervader). And Smoke, then Fire

This certainty is now undermined by a lingering doubt: Is it not the case that smoke can exist even in the absence of fire? If applying *tarka* entails assuming by hypothesis the conclusion to be proved through the inversion of pervaded and pervader, then formula [2] is derived (in this case, assuming the

[20] NS 1.1.40 (1997: 36): *avijñātatattve 'rthe kāraṇopapattitas tattvajñānārtham ūhas tarkaḥ*. I translate *ūha* with 'postulating' or assuming a possibility as a basis of reasoning. While translating *tarka* and *ūha* respectively as 'deliberation' and 'reflection,' Kang (2010: 3, 5) notes along similar lines: "*ūha*, taken as the content of *tarka*, is generated by consideration of the reasons postulated for each possibility. [Thus], the reason for each assumption is, at least epistemologically, furnished before the *tarka* process begins, and, secondly, that the reasons (*kāraṇa*) relating to any concrete case are considered only after dealing with hypothetical cases. In this way we come to understand Jhā's translation for *tarka* as 'hypothetical reasoning' [cf. Gaṅgānāṭha Jhā's English translations of the *Nyāya-sūtra*, 1912-1919]."

[21] MK (1960: 34–35): *tarko nāma vyāpyāropeṇa vyāpakāropaḥ | [...] tarke vyāpyasyāhāryāropo nāma tarkaṇam āpādya-vyātireka-nirṇayaś ca kāraṇam iti dik ||*. Regarding *āpādya-vyātireka-nirṇaya*: 'accomplishment of what is not to be caused' (Jha 2001: 88); 'decisive knowledge of the opposite of the deduced' (Sarma in MK 1960: 37).

absence of smoke by assuming the absence of fire). This formula is perfectly equivalent to [1], through *modus tollens* (cf. fn. 3).

> [2] ~Fire → ~Smoke, ~~Smoke ⊢ ~~Fire
> If there is no fire (as pervaded), then there is no smoke (as pervader). Yet, it is false that there is no smoke (since there is). Thus, it is false that there is no fire (since there is).

But doubt arises precisely about the certainty of formula [2]. May there be instances where smoke is produced even in the absence of fire? To express this doubt, formula [2] is modified into a new, hypothetical pervasion:

> [3] ~Fire → Smoke
> If there is no fire, then there is smoke.

The second step of *tarka* involves identifying a possible 'deviation of what is supposed to occur' (here, the presence of smoke in the absence of fire). Empirical evidence must therefore be gathered to support or refute this new hypothesis. Identifying a relation of pervasion involves observing the co-occurrence of the two properties in question while also accounting for potential deviations (cf. fn. 19). Stock Navya-Nyāya counterexamples, such as those involving the kitchen hearth and the lake, respectively, illustrate the actual presence and absence of smoke under the conditions imposed by [3]. Counterfactual formulae [4] and [5] then follow, along with their confutations.

> [4] ((~Fire → Smoke, ~Fire ⊢ Smoke) ∧ Lake) ⊢ ~ (~Fire → Smoke)
> If there is no fire, then there is smoke. There is no fire. Thus, by *modus ponens*, there is smoke.
> BUT, in the case of a lake, both smoke and fire are absent. Consequently, the lake counterexample falsifies the pervasion stated in [3].

> [5] ((~Fire → Smoke, ~Smoke ⊢ ~~Fire) ∧ Hearth) ⊢ ~(~Fire → Smoke)
> If there is no fire, then there is smoke. There is no smoke. Thus, by *modus tollens*, the absence of fire is absent.
> BUT, in the case of the kitchen hearth, while fire is present (or its absence is absent), smoke is also present. Therefore, the hearth counterexample falsifies the pervasion stated in [3], which, under the conditions outlined in [5], erroneously allows for the inference of fire from the absence of smoke.

In the wasp experiment—since *yatra yatra kramottararūpaṃ tatra tatra duḥkham* 'Wherever, in a sequence, there is a higher-ranked color (HRC), there is pain'—the color rank functions as the inferential mark (*hetu*), being the property pervaded by the aversive stimulus (AS). AS, in turn, is the

pervader (*vyāpaka*) to be deduced (*sādhya*) and so avoided. To see that rank implies the anticipation of pain, achieved through transitive inference rather than mere association, as definitively established by Tibbetts et al. Formally:

[6] HRC → AS, HRC ⊢ AS
If HRC (as pervaded), then AS (as pervader). And HRC, then AS

In this instance, applying suppositional reasoning and questioning the occurrence of HRC without AS will initially generate the equivalent formula [7], followed by the derivation of the two contradictions [8] and [9], erroneously suggesting the possibility of HRC without AS.

[7] ~AS → ~HRC, ~~HRC ⊢ ~~AS
If there is no AS (as pervaded), then there is no HRC (as pervader). Yet, it is false that there is no HRC (since there is). Thus, it is false that there is no AS (since there is).

[8] ((~AS → HRC, ~AS ⊢ HRC) ∧ ~HRC) ⊢ ~ (~AS → HRC)
If there is no AS, then there is HRC. There is no AS. Thus, by *modus ponens*, there is HRC.
BUT, in the experimental setting, the absence of AS always corresponds to the absence of HRC. Consequently, the generated contradiction falsifies the claims made in [8] and its underlying assumption.

[9] ((~AS → HRC, ~HRC ⊢ ~~AS) ∧ ~AS) ⊢ ~(~AS → HRC)
If there is no AS, then there is HRC. There is no HRC. Thus, by *modus tollens*, the absence of AS is absent.
BUT, there is no case of HRC absence and AS presence. Consequently, this contradiction falsifies [9] and its assumption.

Given the experimental constraints, which limit behavior to rigid patterns ('Choose and move toward one of the two colors'), formulae [8] and [9] exemplify an otiose *tarka*, generating what Gaṅgeśa would consider a 'patent contradiction' (cf. fn. 19), rather than a genuine suppositional reasoning in the presence of a doubt. From a logical perspective and disregarding the practical challenges (or even the impossibility) of implementing such an experiment with wasps, testing *tarka* would have required breaking dull repetitions while concealing the colors and allowing subjects to counterprove or disprove their rank based on the presence or absence of the painful stimuli. In this event, formula [8] would describe the previous experience of AS absence and confirm the subsequent HRC absence, disproving the counterfactual hypothesis of its presence. The same holds true for formula [9], where the presence of AS in covered colors would predict the absence of HRC, thereby refuting the contrary doubt.

While pragmatically unfeasible within this experimental setting, this application of *tarka* nonetheless retains significant logical value. Indeed, it not only has falsified the dubious hypothesis ~AS → HRC but has also revealed the genuine pervasion HRC → AS to be in truth a 'mutual pervasion' (*samavyāptitva*), as expressed by the biconditional HRC ↔ AS. Indeed, the counterevidence now ensures that there is no HRC without AS, and conversely, no AS without HRC, within a previously unassessed epistemic increment.

6. A three-step pyramid

In the words of the *Gem Sliver*, "Inferential knowledge is a cognition produced by the assessment of a property in the inferential subject, as qualified by a pervasion."[22] Still, further insights can be gleaned: three epistemic levels take shape within this inferential account.

As said, inference is grounded in pervasion. In turn, this latter necessitates prior and iterated empirical observations (*bhūyodarśana*) of co-occurrences (*sahacāra-darśana*). It is thus a matter involving stimuli assessment, retention, and recognition, which are all epistemic acts far from trivial but appear to be qualified by complex pattern discrimination (which I connect to the notion of *svarūpa-ālocana*; cf. Anrò, forth.1). The significance of perception in these processes cannot be overstated. Discriminating implies the ability to manage identity and difference (*tādātmya* and *bheda*, or *anyonyābhāva*), generality and particularity (*sāmānya* and *viśeṣa*) in a manner that exhibits some of the key features of concept formation, although not hL-like. This onset level of appraisal can, furthermore, be considered analogous to logical conjunction ('And') and closely aligned with psychological association ('This and that,' roughly speaking).[23]

Building upon that, a second phase emerges. Characterized by a deeper level of cognitive processing, this phase involves the formulation of relations that approach the sophistication of fully-fledged inference. The second step thus suggests a cognitive increment, as expressed by the material implication 'If–Then.' Co-occurrence observation is now defined as the 'non-deviation' (*avyabhicāra*) between two properties. This leads to the emergence of an implicit inductive pseudo-rule, analogous to a generalized 'That's so' statement, if that were expressed linguistically. However, at this stage of refinement, mere non-deviation can be an inexhaustible source of biases, susceptible to undue generalizations and to the influence of parasite intervening variables (*upādhi*).

[22] MK (1960: 30): *vyāptiviśiṣṭapakṣadharmatājñānajanyaṃ jñānam anumitiḥ.*

[23] For a critical rethinking of classical conditioning, emphasizing its functional role in an ecological perspective and its capacity to represent the environment as event relations, see Rescorla (1988) and Honey *et al.* (2020, 2022).

A third step contrasts the pair of co-occurrence and non-deviation with the doubt of *non sequitur* (*aprayojaka-śaṅkā*), prompting critical examination: 'This and that. Then, that's so. But what if not?' The counterproving procedure, through suppositional reasoning (*tarka*), modulates logical quantification and incorporates multiple refutations, as in formulae [2] to [5]. The material conditional 'If Smoke, then Fire' is reformulated as the double negation 'Fire can never be the counterpositive of an absence where Smoke occurs.' This signifies a transition from an inductive pseudo-rule to a counterfactual proper rule, linguistically expressible as 'It can't be different.' At this juncture, the inferential process unfolds incrementally in three stages: perceptual co-occurrence, non-deviation, and hypothetical counterproof. According to Gaṅgeśa, only the third stage, involving the grasping of pervasion through hypothetical counterproof, constitutes a rigorous inference. This signifies that inference acquires its distinctive characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) through this hypothetical turn, which inherently involves negation and counterfactuality.

7. Conundrum of mice and men, rethought

Inference hinges on the assessment of a property's pervasiveness. This procedurally reduces to a unique cognitive act, *parāmarśa* (cf. §4): 'a cognitive putting together' that simultaneously perceives a property and apprehends its inherent link with another. In the case of *Polistes* wasps, the aversive stimulus (AS) is not directly associated with a particular color. Instead, AS pervades all colors 'greater' in the hierarchy (according to Navya-Nyāya jargon and Tibbetts *et al.*'s metaphor). According to that specific transitive inference, seeing a higher-ranked color (HRC) within the series implies seeing it as pervaded (*vyāpya*) by the pervading (*vyāpaka*) AS. This experiment constructs the inferential rule from the straightforward material conditional HRC → AS, without puzzling variables, detours, or risks of undue generalization. Under this condition, wasps exhibit a proficient grasp of that pervasion (*vyāpti*) at the second level of the inferential pyramid (as outlined in my interpretation of Gaṅgeśa's texts). As mentioned, the second level involves the repeated (*bhūyas*) observation of a co-occurrence (*sahacāra-darśana*) plus its 'non-deviation' (*avyabhicāra*), without entertaining any *non sequitur* doubt (*aprayojaka-śaṅkā*). In other words, perception-based pervasion entails non-deviation between properties, essentially being conceived as consistent co-occurrence. Still, there is no evidence suggesting they can reach even the third one, involving negation and counterfactuality.

In wasp experiments, tests are repeatable *ad libitum* without significant changes: selecting the HRC results in a shock, while selecting the other color avoids it. Due to the contingent constraints imposed by the experimental design, the pseudo-rule at the second level (HRC → AS) *de facto* overlaps with the genuine rule at the third level (HRC ↔ AS; cf. §5). Given Gaṅgeśa's analytical framework, the

pervasiveness is evident and renders any doubt of spurious correlation pragmatically superfluous. In general, a second-level pseudo-rule is fallacious not because it fails in practice, but rather due to its inherent logical imperfection: the potential for erroneous conclusions in specific instances, if any. Introducing counterfactual reasoning in wasps' second-level deduction refines the inference, logically securing its conclusion, yet without any practical effect (cf. [8]-[9]). If NHAs can perform transitive inferences, as paper wasps demonstrate, one might be tempted to conclude that at least the third level of the inferential pyramid is a uniquely human capacity. This would require the ability to deal not only with perception-based configurational concepts in a minimal grammar but also with hypothetical and counterfactual states of affairs, involving suppositions, negations, and absences, supposedly only manageable in hL. This is an angle of observation that may open up some avenues for further insights.

First, what if a group of humans were subjected to an experiment similar to that conducted with *Polistes*? Human counterfactual abilities would not emerge. In hostile environments, prioritizing self-preservation over adherence to strict logical truth by adopting broad pseudo-rules to avoid adverse stimuli might be a prudent solution, even for proven counterfactual intelligences. Moreover, counterfactual validation was not even feasible in that specific experimental setting, as only a straightforward answer was possible. While it remains uncertain whether NHAs possess a full capacity for counterfactual reasoning, explicitly testing them to determine the presence, extent, and nature of their potential counterfactual abilities could reveal unexpected cognitive resources. Experimental design is crucial, as experimenters are well aware.[24]

Furthermore, it is a well-established fact that humans exhibit behaviors that significantly deviate from strictly rational and optimal decision-making, especially when faced with challenging situations or limited epistemic foundations (cf., e.g., Bicchieri 2016 and Spiegelhalter 2024). Humans do not prove themselves to be impeccable reasoners even in controlled environments with epistemically favorable conditions if only the variables involved are less readily apparent. In a now-classic experiment, cognitive psychologist Peter Wason showed that people often struggle with logical thinking, leaning towards confirmation biases and 'positive tests' over counterfactual validation. In Wason's selection task (1966, 1968), participants were presented with four cards, each displaying a letter on one side and a number on the other. The visible sides of the cards showed, for example, 'A,' 'K,' '4,' and '7,' while the rule to be tested was 'If Vowel, then Even.' When asked to tell which cards they must turn over to definitively test the rule, participants tried to confirm the condition and tended to choose the cards with 'A' and '4.' In Navya-Nyāya jargon, most subjects thus demonstrated reasoning at the level of

[24] As a mere title of reference, consider, among the many, Bohn *et al.* (2020) and Dautriche *et al.* (2022).

sahacāra plus *avyabhicāra*, while neglecting *tarka*. Only a small minority made use of the falsification tool and chose the right cards, namely, 'A' and '7.' Results underscore that card '7' is the source of the issue. If individuals who failed the test had applied *tarka*, the hypothetical state of affairs 'If not Even, then Vowel' would have been generated through the 'accessory assumption of the pervaded' (*vyāpyasya āhāryāropa*). At this point, selecting the card with '7' would have been evident, with a counterfactual expectation of a vowel. The 'ascertainment of the deviation of what is supposed to occur' (*āpādya-vyātireka-nirṇaya*) would have ultimately disproven this hypothetical expectation (see formulae [2] to [5], discussed above in section 5). Counterfactuals prove to be challenging, while humans do not seem to inherently exercise this capacity in all circumstances. Facing outcomes of this sort, a more dialectical approach is needed to redefine the boundaries of human and nonhuman inferential capabilities within a spectrum, rather than relying on rigid yes-or-no dichotomies.

In light of the above tentative exploration, the Navya-Nyāya epistemological account of inference proves to be a potentially powerful heuristic tool for inquiring into logical reasoning, especially from a nonlinguistic or differently linguistic perspective. As described, inference, conceived as perceiving the pervasiveness of a property, can be effectively modeled using perception-based configurational concepts within a minimal grammar. When reinterpreted as the perceptual grasp of interrelated complex patterns, the complexity of the inferential process can consequently be seen as a capacity potentially shared by both humans and non-humans. This initial investigation into non-human inference, grounded in the Navya-Nyāya framework, clearly necessitates in-depth analysis of relevant texts and further interdisciplinary inquiry, encompassing scientific, philosophical, and philological approaches. Contemporary evidence offers a novel perspective on classical texts, illuminating them from a different angle. Rigorous philological investigation remains crucial when texts are viewed through the new lens of non-linguistic or differently linguistic cognition. Nonetheless, shifts in context can unlock revived avenues for understanding within established philosophical traditions while remaining faithful to the originals. In contrast, these classical texts, with their highly sophisticated theoretical frameworks, might contribute to illuminating both contemporary experimental and philosophical inquiry.

Abbreviations and symbols

AS	aversive stimulus	→	if, then
hL	human language	↔	if and only if, then
HRC	higher-ranked color	⊢	therefore

NHA	nonhuman animal	~	not
TI	transitive inference	Λ	and

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Animal names in the history of the Indo-Aryan languages

Hereditary traits and innovative trends

Andrea Drocco

Animal names represent a privileged field of research for the study of the lexicon of both ancient and modern Indo-Aryan languages. This is particularly true with regard to lexical enrichment strategies, as certain animals, occupying a prominent position in Indian culture (*i.e.* cow, elephant, monkey, etc.), acted as true centers of synonymic attraction. The main goal of the paper is therefore to explain one specific lexical enrichment strategy of Indo-Aryan starting by showing the difference, in this respect, between Vedic and Sanskrit and then highlighting the role of Middle Indo-Aryan in shaping the lexicon of New-Indo-Aryan. It will thus be possible to observe how alongside borrowings from the alloglot element there are other means in the inception of new words or new meanings of ancient words. Can these means be considered "areal trends" (i.e. concerning not only Indo-Aryan languages, but also Dravidian and Munda languages in particular), thus providing further evidence of South Asia as a "linguistic area"? An attempt to answer such a question will be also considered in this paper.

Keywords: taboo, linguistic avoidance, animal names, Indo-Aryan lexicology, Indo-European.

1. Introduction[1]

It is, perhaps, obvious that the Indian Subcontinent is a paradise for research on animals, especially on the relationship between humans and animals. However, it is not so obvious that this is also true for how this relationship has been represented over the centuries through the various figurative arts and, particularly, for what we can find in the huge textual production composed in the various, especially ancient, South-Asian literary languages. Within the context of the present collection of essays, the aim of this paper is to advance some observations on specific Indo-Aryan (hereafter IA) words relating to animals in order to search the possible trends/lexical strategies in the use, evolution or construction

[1] This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU – Line M4.C2.1.1 – PRIN 2022, project "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-Human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," CUP H53D23005620006.

of this particular kind of words. It is common knowledge that IA is a privileged group of languages to make such an analysis, because we are in possession of an unbroken textual tradition for more than 3000 years. Therefore, I decided to focus my attention in the comparison of the earliest strata of Indo-European (hereafter IE) South-Asian languages represented by the language of the *Ṛgveda*, and the subsequent means found especially in what we know about Sanskrit, Middle Indo-Aryan (hereafter MIA) and New Indo-Aryan (hereafter NIA) languages. In pursuing such an analysis, I chose the words for 'bear,' thanks especially to its low number of synonyms in IA languages (see below). My idea is that a similar analysis can be done for a good part of words relating to animals. This is why, the present research can be replicated for future studies on other animal names.

The paper is structured as follows. In the second section, after a brief introduction to the richness of Sanskrit and Prakrit lexicon, I advance some preliminary methodological observations necessary in considering Vedic, Sanskrit and MIA texts. Then, starting from these observations and from Burrow's remarks (1955), I offer some examples of Old Indo-Aryan (hereafter OIA) animal names, with the purpose of showing the lexical difference and enrichment of Sanskrit compared to Vedic (section 3). Taking into consideration the words for 'bear' in IA, the evolution of these words in MIA and NIA is the focus of section 4, whereas in section 5, following previous scholars' works, I briefly outline their etymology. In section 6 a conspectus of the reasons behind the choice to replace the typical old, and original IE word for 'bear' with a new one which is more descriptive and/or attenuated is provided. Section 7 is devoted to the conclusions of the study.

2. The mutual relationship between OIA, Vedic, Sanskrit and MIA literary varieties

In order to show how words to name the various animals play an extraordinary role in ancient Indian literature, it is quite natural to start with OIA. For this reason, I would like to begin by showing how in the Sanskrit lexicon some animal names represent true 'centers of synonymic attraction.'[2] Taking Monier-Williams English-Sanskrit dictionary (1851) as a starting point of my analysis,[3] it is possible to see that 'elephant,' for example, has more than 150 synonyms in Sanskrit. The same is true for 'cow,'

[2] The concept of 'centers of synonymic attraction' was first used by Ullmann (1962) to define those concepts/objects, referents in general, that in a language attract a large number of synonyms, because in the respective culture these concepts have the greatest importance. Cf. also Balandina (2009: 52).

[3] For the search I used the online version of the dictionary:
https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWEScan/2020/web/webtc2/index.php

whereas 'horse' has more than 80 synonyms and so on. The following list gives a more precise picture of the amount of synonyms available for some animal names:

elephant = more than 150 words
horse = more than 80 words
cow = more than 150 words
donkey, ass = 5 words
tiger = approximately 30 words
lion = approximately 50 words
monkey = more than 50 words
dog = more than 50 words
jackal = approximately 50 words
fox = approximately 20 words

A similar abundance of synonyms is probably found in the literary varieties of MIA. For instance, a situation similar to that of Sanskrit can be seen if we refer to Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā*, the unique traditional and today available dictionary of regional words (i.e. *deśī*)[4] used in Prakrit literature. If we take, as an example, the group of *jarāyuja* animals,[5] this is the current state of affairs:[6]

jackal = 11 words
tiger = 9 words
elephant = 8 words
deer = 8 words
mongoose = 7 words
lion = 6 words
monkey = 3 words
rhinoceros = 3 words

[4] The meaning of the technical term *deśī* in the context of Indian grammatical tradition is strictly linked with the meaning of two other terms, *tatsama* and *tadbhava*. These three terms form what is normally known as the tripartite classification of Prakrit words (and grammatical features), that, as Pollock (2006: 93) says, "emerge as a cornerstone of Indian philological thought." Its aim was to describe words mentioned in literary works written in Prakrit by a comparison with words attested in Sanskrit works. *Tatsama* ('the same as that', i.e. Sanskrit) words are Prakrit words with the same Sanskrit form and meaning, whereas *tadbhava* ('of the nature of that', i.e. Sanskrit) are Prakrit words the corresponding Sanskrit word of which can be found out with implementation of specific transforming rules described in traditional Prakrit grammars. *Deśya* / *deśī* words are local, regional words used in Prakrit literature. The heterogeneous class of *deśī* words can include: i) words of ancient IA or even IE origin which, although not used in the OIA literary works (i.e. Vedic and/or Sanskrit)—because regarded, for example, as too vulgar—were later inherited or borrowed by some MIA literary language varieties, and thus perhaps also by Prakrit; ii) genuine loanwords from South-Asian non-IA languages; iii) loanwords from non-South-Asian languages; iv) all those words that can be classified as Prakrit neologisms which, though corresponding to Sanskrit forms in their constituent parts, nevertheless do not have a corresponding complex Sanskrit form; v) words that are phonologically linked to a corresponding Sanskrit form according to the 'transformation phonological rules' (see above) explained in the principal Prakrit grammars, but whose Prakrit meaning is not attested in Sanskrit. For all the problems connected with the correct interpretation of the tripartite classification of Prakrit words see Kahrs (1992), Drocco (2012), Ollett (2017) and to some degree also Pollock (2006). For the typology of the group of *deśī* Prakrit words see Drocco (2006, 2024).

[5] The Sanskrit term *jarāyuja* has different meanings according to the Indian religious tradition. In Hinduism signifies 'viviparous beings' (Monier-Williams 1899: 414), specifically animals born from the womb, like humans and cows.

[6] In Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* approximately 5000 words are reported. For my search I used Ramanujaswamy's second edition (Ramanujaswamy ed. 1938) of this text.

antelope = 3 words
porcupine = 2 words
hare = 1 word
wild boar = 1 word
cow = 14 words
ox = 7 words
bull = 16 words
buffalo = 15 words
horse = 11 words
pig = 9 words
goat = 7 words
dog = 6 words
donkey = 3 words
mouse = 2 words
ram = 3 words
camel = 1 word

Starting from this simple analysis, one can already note the tendency of some nouns to be more represented than others. It is quite obvious that the high number of synonyms of these centers of synonymic attraction represents a rich field of research for the study of words for animals. It is instead not obvious that, with respect to Sanskrit for example, they can be used for searching the various lexical layers of this language. In this regard, as it is now well known, when we speak of Sanskrit, in many cases we tend to understand it as a monolithic entity,[7] fixed in time, space and genres and/or understood according to a panchronic approach (Deshpande 1993). However, already in 1955, Thomas Burrow wrote in his well-known *The Sanskrit Language* (Burrow 1955: 42):

> A number of old IE words which are currently in the Veda are no longer used in the classical period. In contrast to the losses of the old vocabulary, classical Sanskrit has acquired a large number of 'new' words from various sources.

For this reason, taking into account Burrow's words and other more recent linguistic studies on OIA (i.e., among many others, Witzel 1986, 1995; Hock 2016, 2021; Kulikov 2012, 2013), we can say that Vedic is not Sanskrit, because these two OIA literary varieties are characterized by their own history. As a result, within both these languages we must distinguish between different diachronic and diatopic varieties (see Renou 1956; Witzel 1986 for Vedic; Burrow 1955, Salomon 1986, and Houben 1996 for Sanskrit). Moreover, Vedic and/or Sanskrit are not equal to OIA (Burrow 1955, but see, interestingly, the position of Chatterji 1960, 1983: 99). Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the possible influence of those non-Sanskritic varieties (using a definition dear to Burrow (1955: 44-47); cf. also

[7] In particular, some scholars use the name "Sanskrit" for various forms of Vedic as well, cf. Thieme (1994), Wezler (1996: 346, note n. 73), and Pollock (2006). Not all scholars agree with this usage (for example, Mayrhofer, 1986-). Cf. also Aklujkar (1996: 70, note n. 18).

Katre 1943), and thus a marked variability within OIA (Emeneau 1966; Witzel 1989; Norman 1989, 1992a: 225-243, 1992b: 115-125, 1995). In the majority of cases, such variability is especially visible in:

i. MIA forms and uses as the result of original unattested OIA forms (cf. Burrow 1955; Pischel 1965) and/or

ii. in particular non-sanskritic forms and uses attested in Sanskrit as borrowing from MIA, for example, the various MIA features attested in the so-called Epic Sanskrit (cf. Oberlies 2003). In fact, it is important to remember that Sanskrit works were written during the MIA stage of IA evolution, a period in which this language shared the literary domain with other IA varieties, namely Pāli, Ardhamāgadhī, Prakrit (alongside its main varieties, i.e. Śaurasenī, Māgadhī, and Paiśācī) and Apabhraṃśa (cf. Pollock 2006; Ollett 2017); in the majority of cases these varieties served as vehicles for the mediation of popular IA and non-IA forms (Bubenik 1998, 2001; Drocco 2024).

3. Vedic and Sanskrit lexicon in comparison: The example of some animal names

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks, it is worth mentioning that many words for animals attested in the *Ṛgveda*, typically of IE origin and frequently present also in other ancient and modern IE languages, are still used in Sanskrit (see below). However, if we consult a Sanskrit dictionary such as the above-mentioned Monier-Williams (1851),[8] it would seem that they are stand side by side with other words, the latter, in the majority of cases, not attested in the *Ṛgveda* or even Vedic. To illustrate this point, let me start by mentioning the following examples:

- Bear

Ṛgveda and other Vedic and/or Sanskrit texts	Attested especially in Sanskrit and possibly in other Vedic texts, except the *Ṛgveda*	
	Texts	Lexicons
ṛkṣa m. 'bear' (*Ṛgveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 224)	*ṛkṣī* f. (*Mahābhārata*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 224)	*accha* m. (Monier-Williams 1899: 9)
	bhalla m. 'bear' (*Hitopadeśa*)	*bhallūka* m.

[8] Thanks to the digitalization of the majority Sanskrit dictionaries, the same analysis can be done using the following links for a faster searching:
Monier-Williams (1899): https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWScan/2020/web/index.php
Monier-Williams (1851): https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWEScan/2020/web/index.php

	(Monier-Williams 1899: 748), *bhallaka* (*Pancarātra*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 748), *bhallūka* m. 'bear' (*Mahābhārata, Bhagavata Purāṇa*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 748).	(Monier-Williams 1899: 748), *bhallāṭa* m. (Monier-Williams 1899: 748), *bhāllūka/bhālluka* m. (Monier-Williams 1899: 754), *bhālŭka-* m. (Monier-Williams 1899: 754).

- Horse

Ṛgveda and other Vedic and/or Sanskrit texts	Attested especially in Sanskrit and possibly in other Vedic texts except the *Ṛgveda*	
	Texts	Lexicons
aśva m. 'horse', *aśvā* f. (*Ṛgveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 114)	*aśvaka* m. 'small horse' (*Vājasaney-Saṁhitā*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 115), *aśvikā* f. 'small mare' (Pāṇini) (Monier-Williams 1899: 115)	
	ghōṭa m. 'horse' (*Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 379), *ghōṭī* f. (*Aśvad*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 379), *ghōṭaka* m. (*Pañcatantra*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 379)	*ghōṭikā* f. (Monier-Williams 1899: 379)

- Dog

Ṛgveda and other Vedic and/or Sanskrit texts	Attested especially in Sanskrit and possibly in other Vedic texts except the *Ṛgveda*	
	Texts	Lexicons
śván m. 'dog' (*Ṛgveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 1105)	*kurkurá* m. 'dog' (*Atharvaveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 294), *kukkurá* m. (*Mṛcchakaṭikā*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 287), *kurkurī* f. (Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 294)	

- Goat / Sheep

Ṛgveda and other Vedic and/or Sanskrit texts	Attested especially in Sanskrit and possibly in other Vedic texts except the *Ṛgveda*

	Texts	Lexicons
aja m. 'he-goat, ram' (*Ṛgveda*) *ajā-* f. (Monier-Williams 1899: 9)	*ajakā*, *ajikā* f. 'small or young goat' (Pāṇini) (Monier-Williams 1899: 9)	
avi m. f. 'sheep' (*Ṛgveda*), *avikā* f. (*Ṛgveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 107)	*avika* m. (Pāṇini) (Monier-Williams 1899: 107), *avíkā* f. (*Atharvaveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 107)	*avilā* f. (Monier-Williams 1899: 110)
	uraṇa m. 'ram, sheep, young ram' (*Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 217)	
	ēḍa m. 'a kind of sheep' (*Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 231), *ēḍī* f. (Monier-Williams 1899: 231), *ēḍaka* m. 'a sheep or goat', *aiḍa* 'coming from the sheep *ēḍa*' (*Mahābhārata*), *aiḍaka* m. 'a kind of sheep' (*Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 233).	*iḍikka* f. 'wild goat' (Monier-Williams 1899: 164)
	chagala m. 'goat' (*Taittirīya-Saṁhitā*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 404).	*chagalaka* m. 'goat,' *chagalalikā* f. (*Divyāvadāna*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 404)
	barkara m. 'kid, lamb' (*Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 722)	*barkara* m. 'goat' (Monier-Williams 1899: 722)
		bhēḍa, bhēḍra-, *bhēṇḍa-* m. 'ram' (Monier-Williams 1899: 766) *bhēḍi* f. 'ewe' (Monier-Williams 1899: 766)
		mēṇḍha m., *mēṇḍhaka* m. 'ram' (Monier-Williams 1899: 832)

mēṣa m. 'ram', *mēṣī* f. 'ewe' (*Ṛgveda*) (Monier-Williams 1899: 833)		*mēha* m. 'ram' (Monier-Williams 1899: 834)

From these few examples it is already possible to advance the following observations:

- As already said, there are words attested in Sanskrit, but not in the *Ṛgveda* and in general in the Vedic *corpus*; this is the case, for example, of *bhalla*, *bhallaka*, *bhallūka* 'bear,' *kukkura* 'dog,' *ghōṭaka-* m. 'horse,' etc.
- If it is true that from the Sanskrit dictionaries we possess is possible to say if a word is attested in Sanskrit, but not in Vedic, it is also true that using the same sources it is not clear the real occurrence of the old and new word in all Vedic and Sanskrit texts and their respective frequency. Consequently, we cannot understand if in Sanskrit or in a Sanskrit text the new word is more used comparing to the old one or even if the new word replaces the old one.
- Quite interestingly a good part of the new words attested in Sanskrit, but not in Vedic, are merely mentioned in lexicons. For this reason, it can be inferred that they recur on rare occasions in Sanskrit literature and/or they recur in Sanskrit texts unimportant and/or little known. I am quite sure that these 'rare' Sanskrit words are borrowings from Prakrit or other attested/unattested MIA languages, although the counting of such words from modern Sanskrit dictionaries is yet to be done as well as a detailed study of even a portion of them.

While, as anticipated, starting from Sanskrit data we cannot clearly understand if ancient words are already replaced in Sanskrit by new words, taking into account MIA and NIA languages, however, we can make safer conclusions in this respect. This can help us to advance other interesting observations. For instance, it can help us understand whether the innovation started with Sanskrit or with MIA/NIA languages. This is in part the goal of the present paper and can form, in my opinion and as I said at the beginning, the starting point for the analysis of other words.

4. The names for 'bear' in Indo-Aryan

As I have shown, *ṛkṣa* and *bhallūka* are two words used in literature referring to the 'bear.' From the dictionaries we can infer that *ṛkṣa* is an ancient term, whereas *bhalla*, *bhallaka* and *bhallūka* are more recent terms, since *ṛkṣa* is attested in the *Ṛgveda* and then in other Vedic and Sanskrit texts, whereas the other words are attested in Sanskrit texts such as the *Hitopadeśa*, the *Mahābhārata*, etc., but not in

Vedic and in particular not in the *Ṛgveda*. Similar observations can be advanced taking into consideration Mayrhofer's works (1986-: Volume I, 247-248, 1958-: Volume II, 485, respectively).

With respect to the origin of the word *ṛkṣa*, according to the most important IE linguistic studies this term has a clear IE origin; we can compare it with Avestan *arša*, Latin *ursus*, Ancient Greek *ἄρκτος* (*árktos*), Lithuanian *iršt̃và*, etc. (Meillet 1926; Pokorny 2007; Monier-Williams 1899; Mayrhofer 1986-; Höfler 2024).

What about the evolution, in modern IE languages, of this original IE word? Modern European IE languages testify two paths of lexical development as for to name the 'bear:'

- The exclusive continuation of the original IE word, obviously with the appropriate diachronic formal changes. For instance, the source of the all words for 'bear' in Romance languages is the Latin word *ursus* (Italian *orso*, Portuguese *urso*, Romanian *urs*, Franco-Provencal *ourse*, etc.; see Gottlieb 1931 and Blazek's 2017 recent summary).
- The total replacement of this word in favor of a lexical innovation (even in this case see Gottlieb 1931 and Blazek's recent summary 2017):
    - For example, the Germanic languages show words deriving from a Proto-Germanic form **beran-*, perhaps with the original meaning of 'the brown one' (English *bear*, German *Bär*, Dutch *beer*, Norwegian *bære*, see Kroonen 2013: 60-61; see also below),
    - The same is true for Slavic languages where we have Russian *medvéd'*, Czech *medvd*, Ukrainian *vedmid'*, all deriving from a Proto-Balto-Slavic form **medwḗ?d* is equivalent to **medъ* ('honey') + **(j)ěsti* ('to eat'), hence literally the epithet 'honey-eater.'

Understanding the reasons underlying this lexical replacement with a more descriptive word is the aim of section 6, in which I will discuss the same kind of substitution that occurred, however, in IA languages.

As for the situation found in ancient and modern IE South Asian languages, in what follows I provide an account of the evolution of *ṛkṣa* and *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* (the first one derived from Vedic). The data are taken from Turner's *Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages* (Turner 1966).[9]

The list below shows the attested MIA and NIA words evolved from Sanskrit *ṛkṣa* (Turner 1966: 117), therefore IA words deriving from the IE noun for 'bear.'

MIA literary languages:

[9] If not stated differently, the meaning of the words listed is 'bear.'

Pāli: *accha*, *acchaka*, *ikka* m.

Prakrit: *accha*, *riccha*, *riṁcha*, *rikkha* m.

Romani languages:[10]

Asiatic: *hirč* (Pers. *xirs*?), *rič*

European (Germany): *rič* m.

Russian: *ryč* 'wolf', (Sofia) *ričhiní* f.

Nuristani languages:

Ashkun: *īċ*, Kati: *īċ*, *iċ*, Waigali: *ōċ*, Dameli: *ẽ̄ç*, *ẽ̄ṣ* m., *ẽ̄çi* f.

Dardic languages:

Pashai: Darrai-I Nur: *ẽ̄č*, Chilasi: *ēċ*, Areti: *yã̄ič*, *žã̄ič*, Uzbini: *ōç* (Laurowani: *āç* < *ārkṣa-*)

Shumashti, Gawar-bati: *ĩ̄ç*

Kalasha: Urtsun: *īç*, Rumbur: *īċ*

Khowar: *orċ*

Bashkarik: *iċh* m.

Torwali: *īṣ* m.

Savi: *ĩ̄ç*

Phalura: *ĩ̄ç*, *ĩ̄ṣ* m., *inçí* f.

Shina: Gilgiti dialect: *ĩ̄ç* m., Guresi dialect: *īċh*, Jijelut dialect: *iċhíni* f.

Kashmiri: Dodi dialect: *icch* m.

NIA languages (other than Romani, Nuristani and Dardic):

Sindhi: *richu* m.

Lahnda: Awankari dialect: *rich*

Panjabi: *ricch* m., Bhateali dialect: *rikkh*

Western Pahari languages: Bhadrawahi: *iċh* m. 'black bear,' Bhalesi: *iċh* m., *eċhɛ̃̄ṇ* f., Pangwali, Curahi, Khashali: *rikkh* m.

Garhwali: *rīkh*

[10] In mentioning the name of the various NIA languages, I use the most common form found in literature, hence without any diacritics.

Kumaoni: *rīkh*

Maithili: *ricch*

Hindi: *rīch* m., *rīchin*, *rīchnī* f.

Gujarati: *rĩch* m.

Marathi: *rīs*, *rĩs*

We now turn to the other group of IA words for 'bear' taken into analysis, i.e., those related to Sanskrit *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka*. As for the word *ṛkṣa*, the data given below are taken from Turner's *Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages* (Turner 1966: 536):

Prakrit: *bhalla* m., *bhallū*

Kumaoni: *bhālū*

Nepali: *bhālu*

Oriya: *bhālu*

Bihari: *bhāul*

Maithili: *bhālu*

Bhojpuri: *bhālu*

Old Awadhi: *bhālŭ*

Hindi: *bhālū* m.

Marathi: *bhālū* m.

Hindi: *bhāl* m.

Garhwali: *bhāllu̇*

Assamese: *bhāluk*

Bihari: *bhāluk*

Hindi: *bhālŭk* m.

Marathi: *bhālūk* m.

If we present the same data in a table entering:

- in the first column the languages in which there is the exclusive evolution of the ancient word (*group 1*),
- in the second main column the languages in which the ancient word is used together with the other word, which should be considered a lexical innovation (*group 2*),
- in the third column the languages displaying the exclusive use of this lexical innovation (*group 3*)

we get the following situation:

Group 1	*Group 2*		*Group 3*
ṛkṣa related words	*ṛkṣa* related words	*bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* related words	*bhalla/ bhallaka/ bhallūka* related words
Pali: *accha*, *acchaka*, *ikka* m. Romani languages: Asiatic: *hirč* (X Pers. *xirs*?), *rič* European german: *rič* m. Russian: *ryč* 'wolf' (Sofia), *ričhiní* f. 'bear' Nuristani languages: Ashkun: *īċ*, Kati: *īċ*, *iċ*, Waigali: *ōċ* Dameli: *ẽ̄ç*, *ẽ̄ṣ* m., *ẽ̄ḉi* f. Dardic languages: Pashai: Darrai-I Nur: *ẽ̄č* Chilasi: *ēċ*, Areti: *yə̃̄ič*, *žə̃̄ič* Uzbini: *ōç* (Laurowani: *āç* < *ā rkṣa-*) Shumashti, Gawar-bati: *ĩ̄ç* Kalasha: Urtsun dialect *īç*, Rumbur dialect *īċ* Khowar: *orċ* Bashkarik: *iċh* m. Torwali: *īṣ* m. Savi: *ĩ̄ç* Phalura: *ĩç*, *ĩṣ* m., *inḉi* f.	Prakrit. *accha*, *riccha*, *riṁch*, *rikkha* m. Garhwali: *rīkh* Kumaoni: *rīkh* Maithili: *ricch* Hindi: *rīch* m., *rīchin*, *rīchnī* f. Marathi: *rīs*, *rĩ̄s*	Prakrit: *bhalla* m., *bhallū* Kumaoni: *bhālū* Maithili: *bhālu* Hindi: *bhālū* m. Marathi: *bhālū* m. Hindi: *bhālŭk* m. Marathi: *bhālūk* m. Hindi: *bhāl* m. Garhwali: *bhāllu̇*	Nepali: *bhālu* Oriya: *bhālu* Bihari: *bhāul* Bhojpuri: *bhālu* Old Awadhi: *bhālŭ* Assamese: *bhāluk* Bihari: *bhāluk*

Shina: Gilgiti dialect: *ĩ̆ç* m., Guresi dialect: *īch* Jijelu dialect t: *içhĩ́ni* f. Kashmiri: Dodi dialect: *icch* m. Western Pahari languages: Bhadrawahi: *iċh* m. 'black bear' Bhalesi: *iċh* m., *eċhẽ̆ṇ* f. Pangwali, Curahi, Khashali: *rikkh* m. Other NIA languages: Sindhi: *richu* m. Lahnda: Awankari dialect: *rich* Panjabi: *ricch* m., Bhateali dialect: *rikkh* Gujarati: *rĩ̆ch* m.			

As the table shows, the situation offered by the words for 'bear' in IA languages is in part similar to the one found in other IE languages. Indeed, in IA there is a new word for 'bear,' beside the IE one. Notably, this word is found not only in MIA, but also in OIA, as attested by Sanskrit, and MIA, as attested by Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa, but not by Pāli. However, the situation found in IA is only in part similar to the one of other European languages because among the latter we find either i) languages testifying only the evolution of the ancient word or ii) languages testifying only the evolution of the lexical innovation. On the contrary, in IA, besides these two groups of languages analogous to the two groups of European languages seen above, another group is present (see Group 2 in the Table above). In the languages belonging to this group the ancient word is used together with the lexical innovation; the latter is the same found in the third group of languages.

To put it more precisely:

1. As for the *first group*, OIA is represented by Vedic, whereas MIA by Pāli, because only forms deriving from *ṛkṣa* are attested in this language; these are *accha*, *acchaka*, and *ikka* m. With respect to NIA, it

is noteworthy that especially North-Western languages show the exclusive evolution of the ancient word. Therefore, this is the case of the Dardic languages (i.e. Kashmiri, Shina, etc.), but also of the various so-called Nuristani languages and of some Romani languages. Quite interestingly, also in Gujarati, in Panjabi, in Lahnda (i.e. Western Panjabi) and in Sindhi only words connected with *ṛkṣa* are attested. Consequently, this group is made up by Western and North-Western NIA, as well as by some Romani languages and by the group of the Nuristani languages.

2. The *second group* of languages show a quite different situation. If in Vedic only *ṛkṣa* is attested, in Sanskrit beside *ṛkṣa*, *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* are also attested.[11] Similarly, in Prakrit beside *accha*, *riccha*, *riṁcha*, *rikkha* m., all deriving from *ṛkṣa*,[12] *bhalla* and *bhallū* m. (the latter only in Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā*) are attested (see above). The situation found in Sanskrit and Prakrit is also true for some modern IA languages. In particular, Hindi, Marathi, Maithili and also Central Pahari languages (Garhwali and Kumaoni) display both a form deriving from Sanskrit *ṛkṣa* and/or Prakrit *riccha/rikkha* and a form deriving from Sanskrit *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* and/or Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū*.[13] In conclusion, the second group is made up by Central NIA.
3. Languages of the *third group* display only words connected with Sanskrit *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* and/or Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū*. Interestingly these are only Eastern IA languages or Eastern Hindi linguistic varieties; the only exception is Nepali. This means that in these languages no words derived from *ṛkṣa* are attested. As a result, the third group is made up especially, if not only, by Eastern NIA.

5. On the possible etymology of Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū* 'bear'

Given how widespread in NIA the evolution of Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū* as a lexical substitution is, let me now move on to understand its etymology and the possible reason behind the choice to use it as a new word for 'bear' in place of the original IE word reflected by Vedic and Sanskrit *ṛkṣa*.

The Prakrit *deśī* word *bhallū* 'bear,' reported in Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā*, and the Prakrit word *bhalla* 'bear' are undoubtedly linked with the Sanskrit words *bhallūka* and *bhalla* both meaning 'bear;'

[11] It is possible to find in Sanskrit also the words *accha* 'bear' and *acchabhalla* 'bear,' both attested in the *Bālarāmāyaṇa* (Monier-Williams 1899: 9). *Acchabhalla* 'bear' is also attested in Prakrit alongside *ricchabhalla* and *acchahalla* both meaning 'bear' (cf. Turner 1966: 117). Sanskrit *accha/acchabhalla* 'bear' are clear prakritism (cf. Monier-Williams 1899: 9; Mayrhofer 1986-). For a discussion on the reasons behind the needs of combining two words with the same meaning see Chatterji (1983).

[12] As regards *accha* see also Setha (1923-28: 21), whereas for *riṃcha*, *rikkha*, *riccha* see Setha (1923-28: 711-712).

[13] In Hindi also *ṛkṣa* is attested (cf. McGregor 1993: 139), but this is clearly a Sanskrit loanword.

the former, as already said, is attested in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, the latter in the *Hitopadeśa* (cf. Monier-Williams 1899: 748), and perhaps only there. I think that in this case we are facing a typical borrowing from Prakrit or from some other MIA literary language. Nevertheless, it is not easy to understand conclusively if, even in this case, Prakrit is the donor or the recipient language (but see what reported in footnote 11).

Be that as it may, as for the origin of Sanskrit *bhalla/bhallaka/bhallūka* and/or Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū* 'bear' two hypothesis have been put forward so far.

The first one, advanced by Mayrhofer (1956-: 485), suggests the probable derivation of this Prakrit/Sanskrit word from a PIE form **bher-/*bher-u* 'brown' (cf. also Pokorny 2007: 417-418).

The second hypothesis considers *bhalla* 'bear' as a semantic evolution of Prakrit *bhalla* 'good,' 'excellent,' 'best' (Setha 1923-38: 646; Turner 1966: 535).[14] According to this hypothesis, the latter probably derives from an OIA form **bhadla*, understood by Mayrhofer (1956-: 483-484) as a vulgar, corrupted variant of the correct and widely attested Vedic and Sanskrit form *bhadra* 'blessed,' 'auspicious,' 'fortunate,' 'prosperous,' 'happy,' 'friendly,' 'kind,' 'gracious' (see Monier-Williams 1899: 745). The unattested OIA word **bhadla* is considered corrupted, because showing the consonant group *-dl-* in the place of *-dr-*, therefore a variant of this Sanskrit consonant group, according to the well-known *-r-/-l-* alternation present in IA.[15]

Although it is not possible to come to a definitive conclusion—this is quite usual in doing etymological research—as to which of the above two hypotheses is at least the more plausible, what is interesting to note here is that in both cases the meaning 'bear' for *bhalla* seems to be a secondary

[14] As for the meaning 'good', the variant *bhallaya* is also reported. The word *bhalla* with the meaning 'auspicious,' 'favorable' is also attested in Sanskrit, but only in lexicons (Monier-Williams 1899: 748). Even in this case, it is quite difficult to understand if Sanskrit is the donor or the recipient language.

[15] In the ancient verses of the *Ṛgveda*, the use of *-r-* is almost exclusive; in this text, there are very few words that contain the liquid *-l-*. In classical Sanskrit, *-r-* is still dominant, although in a less exclusive way than in (Early) Vedic; as a consequence, both *-r-* and *-l-* are present in Sanskrit. The same phenomenon occurs also in Pāli and in the various varieties of Prakrit and of scholarly MIA, where the change of *-r-* into *-l-* is very common. Sometimes, both in Pāli and in Sanskrit, there is the presence of double forms (e.g. Pāli *lohita*, *rohita* 'red'): in some cases, the classical Sanskrit used different meanings for these duplicates. Eastern MIA varieties show the predominance of *-l-*, and, contrary to the Western varieties, have totally absorbed the *-r-*. This fact is documented by the epigraphy. In particular, the Aśoka inscriptions found in the Ganges basin and on the Odisha coast show almost exclusively *-l-*. The fact that in classical Sanskrit and in Pāli there is the presence of both liquids, and that in the Eastern varieties there is the presence of only *-l-*, with the complete exclusion of *-r-*, suggests that the liquid *-l-* did not disappear in OIA only to reappear later, but rather, that it survived only at the spoken dialect level. Its extreme rarity in *Ṛgveda* is an index of style with respect to dialects, while its rare use in classical Sanskrit clearly shows a distinction from the spoken language, as desired by the Brahmanic tradition. For an in-depth discussion of this question, see, among others, Bloch (1934), Chatterji (1960: 51, 1983: 67-69), Pischel (1965: 210-212) and Geiger (1969: 88-89).

semantic evolution, quite certainly originally to Prakrit/MIA, from the primary meaning 'brown' (in the case of < PIE **bheru*) or 'good' (in the case of < OIA **bhadla*, as a variant of the Vedic/Sanskrit word *bhadra*). As a consequence, it seems quite evident that also in Prakrit/MIA and in some NIA languages—similarly to what we have seen for European IE languages—the 'bear' is named through a substitute word—descriptive in the case of < **bheru*, even a euphemism in the case of < **bhadla*—formed and used in order to avoid mentioning the ancient word. However, why the necessity to call the bear 'the brown (one)' or 'the good (one)?' Answering this question, as well as understanding the reasons why some European languages have chosen to avoid/interdict an ancient term and consequently to use a new descriptive (attenuate) term or a euphemism is the purpose of the next section.

6. Linguistic avoidance/interdiction as a cause for lexical substitution

Linguistic avoidance/interdiction usually refers to the phenomenon whereby certain words or names were avoided/interdicted and replaced with other expressions for magical-religious, social or decency reasons. This phenomenon, known also as 'taboo replacement,' is present in many if not all languages and is manifested through various types of linguistic and lexical substitutions, such as the use of euphemisms, circumlocutions, metaphors, litotes, and other expedients (see, among many others, Meillet 1926; De' Paratesi 1969; Hock 2023: 380-383). In particular, euphemism, namely the use of more attenuated or less direct word compared to the original one, is very common, especially in the history of the IE languages (Meillet 1926; Bonfante 1939). The use of this means, along with the other aforementioned, reflects deep-seated beliefs and fears of ancient peoples towards referents considered dangerous, sacred or unpleasant, which means it could involve names of deities, animals, body parts, natural phenomena, and concepts related to death and illness (Farrell 1911; De' Paratesi 1969).

With reference to the linguistic interdiction of words for specific animals (Meillet 1926; Emeneau 1948; Tuite and Schulze 1998; Blench 2007; Wacewicz-Chorosz 2023), there has been a great deal of discussion regarding the reasons behind this phenomenon. Over time three hypotheses have been advanced on the subject. The first is that of Meillet (1926),[16] later shared by Frazer (1911). It is interesting to point out that exactly the lexical substitution put in place by the Germanic and Balto-Slavic languages and related to the original Indo-European name for 'bear' underlies Meillet's hypothesis (1926) that some words in the languages of this linguistic family, and more generally in all languages, were replaced by other words for reasons linked to taboo replacement. According to Meillet

[16] As mentioned in the References, Meillet's paper was published privately in 1906.

and Frazer, one could not pronounce the names of the animals one was hunting because they, on hearing their name pronounced, would be able to get to safety. Emeneau (1948), in contrast to Meillet and Frazer, supported another hypothesis according to which all these animals, in addition to being animals to be hunted, would also and especially be animals connected with some cult or even god-animals, and thus it is their religious/symbolic power at the foundation of the replacement of their original name. Smal-Stocki (1950) proposes a third hypothesis, focusing more on the linguistic customs and taboos of a modern society, that of Carpathian communities, rather than on the analysis of ancient languages. In this society, the names of the bear, wolf and all other animals for which a lexical replacement is implemented at a very ancient stage due to linguistic interdiction, continue to be employed in present-day languages. However, in these communities, these animals are not feared for religious reasons, but because of their ferocity and because they are a danger to the herd. As a matter of fact, although Smal-Stocki's remarks concern modern Ukrainian hunters, his hypothesis is based on the magical power of words in evoking or disturbing animals—roughly analogous to what was advanced by Meillet—that are considered dangerous, but also endowed with power and a force that is certainly feared, but also respected.

Given that, as I just mentioned, underlying the three above-mentioned hypotheses seems to be the symbolic value of a certain type of animal within a specific culture, in what follows I take into account Emeneau's assumption (1948), because it is interesting for at least two reasons.

First, Emeneau tried to explain the reason why some languages, but not others, have felt the need to avoid certain words by introducing lexical substitutions accordingly. As claimed by this author, this would not be related only to hunting, because at this point we would have to think that languages such as Latin or Sanskrit were spoken in environments where the bear was not present, i.e. where this animal was not hunted and/or where there were no opportunities for encounters/clashes between this animal and humans. According to Emeneau this is not conceivable and for this reason he suggests that, on the contrary, the contact of some IE populations with other populations on the fringes of IE expansion where the bear had ritual, symbolic value would have led the former to substitute the word because of the influence of the latter. As a matter of fact, many references to the symbolic/religious power of the bear can be found in various cultures of the world (cf. Hallowell 1926; Barbeau 1946; Kitagawa 1961; Black 1998; Kwon 1999; Berres *et al.* 2004), and such power may be responsible for the necessity to avoid using or pronouncing the original name for taboo reasons (cf. Frazer 1911).

Second, starting from the name of the bear, and in particular from Frazer's material collected from some South-Asian languages, Emeneau tried to corroborate his hypothesis concerning the underpinnings of the lexical substitution of the original IE word for 'bear' by showing that, as in the

case of this animal, even for the 'tiger' in South-Asia there are some sort of lexical displacement or confusion, and this is the result of the symbolic and religious value of this beast of prey. Frazer's statement is reported below for completeness:

> While the Malayalies of the Shervaray Hills are hunting the tiger, they speak of the beast only as 'the dog.' The Canarese of southern India call the tiger either 'the dog' or 'the jackal;' they think that if they called him by his proper name, he would be sure to carry off one of them. The jungle people of northern India, who meet the tiger in his native haunts, will not pronounce his name, but speak of him as the 'jackal' (*gídar*), or 'the beast' (*janwar*), or use some other euphemistic term. In some places they treat the wolf and the bear in the same fashion... The Kols, a Dravidian (sic!) race of northern India, will not speak of death or beasts of prey by their proper names in the morning. Their name for the tiger at that time of day is 'he with the claws,' and for the elephant 'he with the teeth.' The forest of the Sundarbans [...] are full of man-eating tigers [...] Here accordingly the ferocious animal is not called a tiger but a jackal (*śial*)' (Frazer 1911: 402-403, quoted in Emeneau 1948: 61).

Therefore, it is interesting to note that in many cases the word used in some South-Asian languages to name the 'tiger' can serve to identify other beasts of prey and vice versa. This seems to be especially true for Dravidian languages, because among the speakers of these languages the tiger has a religious power[17] and, for this reason, together with the meaning of 'tiger,' 'lion' and 'hyena,' the meaning of 'jackal' is also attested for those words, even in this case as a sort of linguistic interdiction. In fact, following Frazer's statement, Emeneau (1948: 61-63) noted that while in Dravidian the typical word for 'tiger' is stable in all languages,[18] sometimes this animal is named with a word originally used for 'jackal' and 'fox.' As an example, Emeneau mentions the Dravidian words for 'jackal' (Tamil *nari*, Kolami *nayr*, Toda *nary*, Kannada *nari*, the latter also meaning 'fox,' Tulu *nari*, also 'fox'), pointing out that if the corresponding Tamil word (i.e. *nari*) means normally 'jackal,' its meaning in this language is also 'tiger' (cf. also Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 318). Moreover, he adds, in Kodava, a Dravidian language spoken in the Kodagu district of Southern Karnataka, the name of the 'tiger' is the same word that the neighboring languages used for the 'jackal,' i.e. *nari*.

As for the IA languages, it is not possible to make definite judgments on the lexical interdiction concerning the words typically used for some beasts of prey. For example, the word *siṃha*, already attested in the *Ṛgveda* and frequently used in other Vedic texts and in Sanskrit, has almost always the

[17] For other Asian, especially South-Asian, ethnolinguistic groups in which the tiger has a religious and symbolic value see Beggiora (2013), Hammond (1992/93), Kharmawphlang (2000/2001), Lingdom (2016) and Aiyadurai (2016).

[18] Tamil *puli*, *pul* 'tiger', Malayalam *puli* 'tiger,' Kannada *puli* 'tiger,' Telugu *puli* 'tiger,' Naiki *pul* 'tiger,' Gondi *pullī* 'tiger' (Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 380).

meaning of 'lion' (Monier Williams 1899: 1213). The evolution of this word in modern IA languages displays the meanings of 'lion,' 'tiger' and 'leopard' depending on the language (Turner 1966: 772).

With respect to the commonest words for 'tiger' in NIA, those developed from Vedic and Sanskrit *vyāghra* (Monier-Williams 1899: 1036), the meaning of 'tiger' is quite constant in OIA literary languages, and this also applies to MIA and NIA (Turner 1966: 706).[19]

Other IA words can identify in the same language the 'tiger,' the 'lion,' the 'leopard,' and also the 'hyena' (marginally the 'bear'). This is the case of the OIA literary word *tarakṣu* m. used in the majority of Vedic and Sanskrit works with the meaning 'hyena' (cf. Monier-Williams 1899: 439), but, according to Turner (1966: 324), in the *Śukasaptati*, with the meaning 'tiger.' The same meaning for *tarakṣu* is attested, according to Apte (1957-1959: 753), in the *Mahābhārata*. While Pāli, Prakrit, and almost all NIA words developed from OIA *tarakṣu* preserve the meaning 'hyena,' curiously in Oriya the same word is used to name the 'leopard' and 'a small tiger' (Turner 1966: 324).

To sum up, it seems that IA languages do not display, as I have already said, definite cases of linguistic interdiction for the 'tiger.' However, quite interestingly, if we look at Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* there are words that, borrowed from non-IA languages, are connected with original words that can be considered clear examples of this lexical phenomenon. For example, for the Prakrit *deśī* word *karaḍa*, Hemacandra gives the meanings of 'tiger' (*Deśīnāmamālā* II, 5). According to Burrow and Emeneau (1984: 106) this word is derived from Dravidian; in some languages the meaning given for the related words is 'tiger' (Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 106):

Kui *kṛāḍi*, *krānḍi* 'tiger,' 'leopard,' 'hyena'

Kolami *keḍiak* 'tiger'

Naiki *khaṛeyak* 'panther'

Gondi *khaṛyal* 'tiger,' *kariyāl* 'panther'

In other Dravidian languages the related words are used to name the 'bear' (Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 117):

Tamil *karaṭi* 'indian black bear'

Malayalam *karaṭi* 'bear'

[19] The only exception is represented by some Western Pahari and Panjabi dialects, where we find 'leopard' as a new meaning (cf. Turner 1966: 706). As far as *vyāghra* NIA related words are concerned, it is interesting to note that in Hindi the word *bagherā* m. is attested; its meaning, according to the *Hindī Śabda Sāgara* (Dasa 1965-1975: 3351), is 'hyena,' whereas according Ronald Stuart McGregor's Hindi-English dictionary the meaning of the same word is 'tiger cub,' 'leopard,' 'hyena' (McGregor 1993: 697).

Kannada *karaḍi*, *kaḍḍi* 'bear'

In addition, in Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* two other words, certainly related to each other, show the alternation of the two meanings 'tiger' and 'jackal,' namely the Prakrit *deśī* words *bheruṃḍa* 'tiger' (*Deśīnāmamālā* VI, 108) and *bhuruṃḍiā* 'jackal' (*Deśīnāmamālā* VI, 101). It is worth mentioning that if in Sanskrit and in the various MIA and NIA languages the various related words linked with these two *deśī* words are attested almost quite exclusively with the meaning of 'jackal' (cf. Turner 1966: 513), Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* is the unique primary source where it is possible to see a change of meaning similar to the change of meaning described by Farrell (1911) and Emeneau (1948) in discussing Dravidian languages. This is also true for the *deśī* word *pullī*, also attested in Hemacandra's *Deśīnāmamālā* (VI, 79) and clearly derived from Dravidian languages (Ramanujaswami ed. 1938: glossary: 63; Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 380; cf. Tamil *puli, pul*, Malayalam *puli*, Kannada *puli*, Telugu *puli*, Naiki pul, Gondi *pullī*, Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 380), but contrary to these languages where the meaning is fixed (see footnote 18), in Hemacandra's dictionary of *deśī* words is reported with the meanings 'tiger' and 'lion.'

7. Conclusion

Starting from the analysis given in the previous sections, we had the opportunity to see different layers and trends at work in the history of the two words for the 'bear' used in IA in the course of its evolution. It is not quite obvious to understand and explain the dynamics of these trends, namely how the different layers relate to each other. This is particularly true for the history of the OIA and MIA starting from the literary languages we know related to these diachronic stages of IA evolution. Quite surprisingly, the same also applies to NIA. In fact, even though in this case we are dealing with more recent languages, it is a fact that even today we do not possess an up-to-date comprehensive history of Hindi, as well as of Bengali, etc. In the same way, the relation of these languages with each other during NIA, i.e., throughout the 2nd millennium CE, is far from clear.

Starting from these premises, if we look at a Sanskrit dictionary, it would seems that *ṛkṣa* 'bear' (a Vedic word with cognates in other IE languages) was paired in the history of Sanskrit with *bhallūka*, a word that, although quite certainly etymologically connected with the Sanskrit word *bhadra* 'good,' derives from an unattested OIA form **bhadla* via MIA or from a PIE form **bheru* via popular OIA/MIA, in both cases as a result of a change of meaning occurred, perhaps, in MIA ('bear' < 'brown' or 'bear' < 'good'). At this point, the question arises as to whether the term now attested in contemporary IA languages is the result of the spread of the Sanskrit word or the MIA word. Are the Sanskrit/Prakrit *bhalla/bhallū/bhallūka* related words attested today in modern languages the result of diffusion from

Sanskrit, from Prakrit, or from colloquial languages? Unfortunately, we don't know the real frequency of *ṛkṣa* and *bhallūka* in every known Vedic and/or Sanskrit text, in order to understand if was Sanskrit, i.e., some particularly widespread Sanskrit texts, the language which plays a role in the diffusion of *bhalla/bhallū/bhallūka* related words in NIA, or if these words in contemporary IA languages derived through and thanks to Prakrit and/or a vulgar channel. What it would seem quite sure is the fact that beside Sanskrit, popular languages play a very important role, perhaps a major role, in shaping words for animals starting from their features and symbolism. And in suggesting a major role of IA popular languages, I have in mind not only the role of IA not attested Vedic/Sanskrit popular/regional varieties developed and used during throughout IA, but also non-IA languages, and, especially, non-Vedic/Sanskrit IA languages. This entire stock of linguistic/language varieties, which has constituted and must be considered the true repertoire of IA across its history and evolution, had the force to offer, in the OIA period, old popular IE and/or non-IA features, words and particular semantic association still present in modern IA languages, despite the prestige and thus the role of Sanskrit in shaping IA lexicon.

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Sentience and *Rasa*

Love and sorrow

On the sentience of 'common' animals in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*

Cinzia Pieruccini

From the very beginning with the episode of the *krauñcavadha*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* shows in many passages the awareness that animals, or rather some of their species, love and suffer both mentally and physically, and that many animals can feel emotions. This paper is intended above all to be a review of passages in which these attitudes of the poem appear to be expressed. Of course, we are not dealing here in any way with the *vānara*s, the monkeys, or the great anthropomorphized vultures, but with some of the *common* animals mentioned by the poem. The identification of the sentience of animals we wish to highlight clearly derives from observation and empathy, and not from processes of anthropomorphization. This sentience is often expressed by similes, *upamā*s, some of which are consolidated into recurring images, and in some cases are on the verge of becoming, or have already become, conventional expressions, without necessarily losing their strength. These similes directly relate human beings to the animals that form the second terms of comparison. In this way, the sensations, emotions and feelings of the animals involved are placed on the same level as those of humans. More generally, the greater or lesser elaboration of these associations reflects the different level of relationships and closeness, which may also be affective, for certain animals compared to others.

Keywords: *Rāmāyaṇa*, *krauñcavadha*, non-human animals, sentience, *upamā*s.

1. The *krauñca* birds[1]

The episode of the *krauñcavadha*, *i.e.* the killing of a *krauñca* bird, recounted almost right at the beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (I.2),[2] is probably the most famous passage in the entire poem, and, indeed, one of the most renowned passages in the whole of Sanskrit literature. Suffice here to recall it very briefly. While on his way to bathe in the Tamasā river, the sage Vālmīki, the mythical author of the poem, hears the singing of a couple of *krauñca* birds in love—presumably, while they are making love or courting. But a cruel *niṣāda* hunter, *i.e.* one of a tribe of forest dwellers, kills the male with an arrow. On hearing the desperate lament of the female for the loss of her mate, Vālmīki bursts out into a curse, only to be immediately surprised by the elegant form his words have assumed. And thus, according to the paretymology proposed by the text, this sorrow, *śoka*, engenders the *śloka*, the metre that will become the basis of the narration of Rāma's vicissitudes and of endless Sanskrit literature.

As is well known, Book One of the poem, the *Bālakāṇḍa*, together with its final Book Seven, are universally acknowledged as later additions to what is considered the original core of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But, whatever dating is attributed to the *krauñcavadha* passage, this episode has long been considered crucial in the interpretation of the entire poem. For Ānandavardhana (9th century), this passage heralds what will be the dominant *rasa* of the entire *Rāmāyaṇa*, namely the *karuṇarasa*, the *rasa* of compassion and sorrow (*Dhvanyāloka* IV.5, *vṛtti*). However, for Ānandavardhana, and Abhinavagupta's *Locana* (10th-11th century), the hunter kills the female and not the male (see, in particular, Masson 1968-1969). Therefore, if in the tale recounted in the *Bālakāṇḍa* the pain of the *krauñcī*, *i. e.* the female bird, can be considered emblematic of Sītā's sad vicissitudes, the two Kashmiri authors bring Rāma's suffering into focus. But this is obviously not Vālmīki's position.

Several contemporary scholars have specifically dealt with this passage, and the *krauñcī*'s pain has been amply analysed as an image and symbol of Sītā's sufferance. Along with the already quoted work by Jeffrey Masson, let us mention here a few other relevant studies. Charlotte Vaudeville's

[1] This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU – Line M4.C2.1.1 – PRIN 2022, project "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-Human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," CUP G53D23004630006.

[2] All references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* in these pages are to the Critical Edition and, when not otherwise specified, translations are by the present author. The quoted translations by other scholars reproduce those of the single Princeton volumes. In the revised complete Princeton translation that was published more recently (Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 2021) the revision also involved some animal names, and at some points we take this into account.

meticulous textual analysis hypothesises that the roots of the episode lie in a popular motif, expressed in songs or ballads, in which a *krauñcī* symbolises a bride who pathetically voices the pain of separation from her beloved (Vaudeville1963). Very important is Julia Leslie's research (Leslie 1998), which mainly focuses on the identification of the *krauñca* birds based on the characteristics expressed by the text—with the addition of a stanza expunged from the Critical Edition—and the relevant ornithological literature. Her very convincing conclusion is that Vālmīki's *krauñca* bird is the Indian Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone antigone* Linn.). This is a majestic bird with an elaborate courtship ritual and one that maintains a tenacious and exclusive pair bond; for Leslie, "it is quite clear that Vālmīki's usage is informed by ornithological knowledge rather than by mythology or convention" (Leslie 1998: 469). In turn, Niels Hammer expands on the theme of *karuṇarasa*, adding some findings from neuroscience; he brings out the genuine capacity for emotional suffering on the part of Sarus Cranes and the appropriateness of the choice of these birds to express the universality of pain (Hammer 2009). More recently, Simon Brodbeck has analysed the possible agency veiled by the episode and, more widely, the various dynamics lying behind Sītā's long-lasting sorrows (Brodbeck 2022, with an ample bibliography on the episode).

In any case, and even in Ānandavardhana's rather distorted interpretation, the love and pain of non-human animals [3] have been considered worthy of reverberating and representing those of 'humans.' Animal sentience is currently the focus of much research that involves neurosciences, biology, and ethology. The topic we wish to address is exactly this, namely how such sentience is expressed by the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The awareness that animals, or rather some of their species, love and suffer both mentally and physically and that many animals do feel emotions is not only masterfully highlighted from the very beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the episode of the *krauñcavadha*, but also clearly visible in several other passages in the poem. The following pages mainly intend to provide a review of such passages. We will consider significant stanzas scattered throughout the poem, regardless of its supposed different layers of composition, which is irrelevant as far as our theme is concerned.

Obviously, we are not dealing here in any way with the *vānara*s, the monkeys, or the great anthropomorphized vultures, although the creation of such central figures in the *Rāmāyaṇa* may possibly have some of its remote origins in a similar form of recognition. With one exception, we shall refer to passages mentioning common animals, and not mythical ones or ones that act as human

[3] To avoid prolixity, instead of 'non-human animals,' here we will simply use 'animals,' which however should be intended in the former meaning.

characters. As has been very convincingly established for the *krauñca*s, the identification of the sentience of animals we wish to highlight derives from observation and empathy, and not from processes of anthropomorphization. Of course, this does not mean that the text necessarily expresses observations that are 'correct' from the point of view of modern biology, a correctness that even today would belong to scientists and not to ordinary people. Rather, the hermeneutic tools deployed are based on human sensibilities, and sometimes perhaps even human social stereotypes. This, in any case, is something quite different from any anthropomorphization process.

In fact, the overall picture that emerges can be defined, using the words of Amber D. Carpenter, as "a lack of recognition of a significant gulf between animals and humans" (Carpenter 2018: 17).[4] The very proof of this lack of recognition is that, as we shall see, animal sentience is often expressed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* by similes, *upamā*s, which directly relate human beings to the animals that form the second terms of comparison. In this way the sensations, emotions, and feelings of the animals involved are placed on the same level as those of humans. In some cases, the images conveyed by these *upamā*s appear on the verge of belonging, or even already belong to a sort of repertoire. But, in our opinion, most of these *upamā*s are not yet really *conventional*, because, in the passages where they do occur, they retain their strength, emotional significance, and straightforward appropriateness, and display a remarkable formal variety. Furthermore, the greater or lesser elaboration of the associations expressed by these similes reflects the different level of relationships and even affective closeness for certain animals compared to others.

2. A landscape of beings: enchantment, fear, and empathy towards humans

A great number of passages in the *Rāmāyaṇa* mention an extraordinary amount of animals of the most varied types, bringing into play an extremely wide range of conceptual and formal facets that perhaps, until now, have yet to be fully studied and to which in any case it would be impossible to do justice in a few pages.[5] This abundance already expresses a great contiguity of life between humans and animals, a contiguity that is further defined by several details, notwithstanding the fact that one of the characteristic features of the poem is undoubtedly the "relative lack of emphasis on animal husbandry

[4] Here, Carpenter is actually referring specifically to animal fables, but her remark can be given a much broader application without contradicting her analysis.

[5] Some studies dealing with animals in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are Brockington (1984: 88-98), Brockington (1998: 417-419), Lee (2000), Roy (2005); also: Amirthalingam (2013), though to be considered with caution; on some large mammals (rhinoceroses, tigers, elephants) Bose (2020: 103-104; 165-169; 264-272).

and agriculture" (Brockington 1984: 98), and this mainly because the narrative is set in the world of the *kṣatriya*s. Animals may be mentioned in more or less standard formulas, such as elephants and horses as forces in the army or as elements of the cities' prosperity; for instance, the extensive description of Ayodhyā in Book One tells us that the city is 'filled with horses, elephants, cows, camels, and donkeys' (*vājivāraṇasaṃpūrṇāṃ gobhir uṣṭraiḥ kharais tathā* ||, I.5.13, transl. Goldman 1984). Mighty horses are harnessed to chariots, and in particular cows and elephants are donated as sumptuous gifts. Bulls, lions, tigers, and elephants occur countless times in epithets, which can be repeated almost obsessively, qualifying the power of the characters, a usage that already indicates in a certain way a sort of homologation between humans and animals, but which is common, however, in many literatures. The similes between humans and animals may be recurrent and almost proverbial, or more elaborate or unusual;[6] they are based on physical characteristics or, for some animals, also on their sentience, the aspect we will try to highlight here.

The descriptions of the forest offer us a broad picture, which necessarily involves not only animals but also vegetation and 'nature' in general. These passages often mention both animals and plants in lists, which are, as is well known, a characteristic of Indian epic poetry. As has been widely acknowledged, the forest with its animals has shifting qualities in the *Rāmāyaṇa*: it may be presented as terrifying or as an Edenic place, a source of enchantment. Thus, for example, Rāma exclaims to Viśvāmitra:

> *aho vanam idaṃ durgaṃ jhillikāgaṇanāditam | bhairavaiḥ śvāpadaiḥ kīrṇaṃ śakuntair dāruṇārutaiḥ* || 12 ||
> *nānāprakāraiḥ śakunair vāśyadbhir bhairavasvanaiḥ | siṃhavyāghravarāhaiś ca vāraṇaiś cāpi śobhitam* || 13 || *dhavāśvakarṇakakubhair bilvatindukapāṭalaiḥ | saṃkīrṇaṃ badarībhiś ca kiṃ nv idaṃ dāruṇaṃ vanam* || 14 ||
>
> What a forbidding forest this is! Echoing with swarms of crickets, it is full of fearsome beasts of prey and harsh-voiced vultures.
> It is filled with all sorts of birds, screeching fearsome cries, as well as lions, tigers, boars, and elephants.
> It is full of *dhava*, *aśvakarṇa*, *kakubha*, *bilva*, *tinduka*, *pāṭala*, and *badarī* trees. What dreadful forest is this?
> (I.23.12-14, transl. Goldman 1984, slightly modified).

Instead, here follows a description of the idyllic forest:

[6] For a statistical and stylistic examination of similes and more generally of the figures of speech in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Brockington (1977).

tau paśyamānau vividhāñ śailaprasthān vanāni ca | nadīś ca vividhā ramyā jagmatuḥ saha sītayā || 2 ||
sārasāṃś cakravākāṃś ca nadīpulinacāriṇaḥ | sarāṃsi ca sapadmāni yutāni jalajaiḥ khagaiḥ || 3 ||
yūthabaddhāṃś ca pṛṣatān madonmattān viṣāṇinaḥ | mahiṣāṃś ca varāhāṃś ca gajāṃś ca drumavairiṇaḥ ||
4 || *te gatvā dūram adhvānaṃ lambamāne divākare | dadṛśuḥ sahitā ramyaṃ taṭākaṃ yojanāyatam* || 5 ||
padmapuṣkarasaṃbādhaṃ gajayūthair alaṃkṛtam | sārasair haṃsakādambaiḥ saṃkulaṃ jalacāribhiḥ || 6 ||

As they traveled on with Sītā, they saw varied mountain landscapes, forests, lovely rivers with cranes and sheldrakes upon the sandbanks, ponds covered with lotuses and thronged with water birds, dappled antelopes massed in herds, rutting horned buffaloes and boars, and elephants butting at trees.

They had traveled a long distance and the sun was hanging low when all at once they spied a lovely pond one league across. It was blanketed with white lotuses and blue water lilies, adorned with herds of elephants, and filled with waterfowl, cranes and white and gray geese.

(III.10.2-6, transl. Pollock 1991).

In fact, our analysis of Books Two to Four in an earlier article (Pieruccini 2006) unequivocally showed that the forest in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is essentially never presented in a neutral manner. In short, and somewhat schematically, by depicting the natural environment in disturbing terms, the poet prepares the audience for a dramatic episode, typically the encounter with *rākṣasa*s, whereas a dazzling and pacified nature is largely connected with the presence of *āśrama*s. Moreover, and most importantly, the features with which the wilderness is presented can either reflect or be in contrast with the feelings of the characters. As a rule, the natural elements are presented as remaining impassive before the characters' feelings; an exemplary passage in this sense is Rāma's lament at Lake Pampā (IV.1), whose springtime luxuriance depicts an indifferent backdrop to the hero's grief. Sometimes, however, we can discern some traces of empathy.

But, before reflecting further on this last aspect, namely that of empathy between the creatures of the forest and human beings (obviously, considering Rāma and Sītā as such), let us briefly return to the subject of fear. This, in fact, does not only affect humans. In the opposite direction, even the most ferocious animals can be terrorised by human beings, as happens when an army crosses the forest:

sā bhūmir bahubhir yānaiḥ khuranemisamāhatā | mumoca tumulaṃ śabdaṃ dyaur ivābhrasamāgame || 40
|| *tena vitrāsitā nāgāḥ kareṇuparivāritāḥ | āvāsayanto gandhena jagmur anyad vanaṃ tataḥ* || 41 ||
varāhamṛgasiṃhāś ca mahiṣāḥ sarkṣavānarāḥ | vyāghra gokarṇagavayā vitreṣuḥ pṛṣataiḥ saha || 42 ||
rathāṅgasāhvā natyūhā haṃsāḥ kāraṇḍavāḥ plavāḥ | tathā puṃskokilāḥ krauñcā visaṃjñā bhejire diśaḥ ||
43 || *tena śabdena vitrastair ākāśaṃ pakṣibhir vṛtam | manuṣyair āvṛtā bhūmir ubhayaṃ prababhau tadā* ||
44 ||

Struck by the hooves and wheels of the many vehicles, the earth gave off a tumultuous sound, like the heavens when stormclouds gather.

> The sound frightened the bull elephants and the cows in their train, and they ran off to another part of the forest, perfuming the way with their scent.
>
> Boars, deer, lions, buffaloes, apes, monkeys, tigers, *nilgai*, and *gayal* were terrified, as well as the dappled antelopes.
>
> Sheldrakes, moorhens, geese, ducks, plovers, cuckoos, and curlews took the horizons in a blind rush.
>
> The sky appeared to be as covered with birds frightened at the sound as did the earth with men.
>
> (II.95.40-44, transl. Pollock 1986, slightly modified; cf. also, in particular, II.86.35-36; II.87.1-2; VI.30.14-17).

Of course, this passage is primarily meant to extol the power and majesty of an army; however, it paints a picture that is anything but unreal. The emotion of fear in animals is now widely studied, including the amply widespread awareness of the risk of becoming prey; and, most importantly, it has emerged that for wild animals the greatest fear is generated by humans, to the extent that it is triggered just by hearing their voices.[7] We will return to the emotion of fear later.

Let us now enter the rather ambiguous territory of empathy. Now, it happens that at some crucial moments of the poem, nature is depicted as suffering along with the protagonists, with various unusual manifestations and events. Animals also find space in these pictures of general sorrow or despair. In II.36, upon Rāma's leaving for exile, the stars darken, the planets assume fearful positions, the inhabitants of Ayodhyā are overwhelmed by despondency to the point of neglecting family duties, and 'the elephants dropped their food, the cows did not suckle their calves' (*vyasṛjan kavalān nāgā gāvo vatsān na pāyayan* ||, II.36.9). In the words of the brahmans who try to dissuade Rāma from leaving, the trees, unable to follow him because they are held back by their roots, are 'as if lamenting' (*vikrośantīva*, II.40.28), while, forgetful of food and motionless on the trees, the birds also appear to make an appeal to him (II.40.29).

But 'nature's' greatest involvement seems to unfold, as might be expected, around Sītā's abduction. Rāvaṇa terrifies the forest deities (*vanadevatāḥ*, III.47.17) and puts them to flight; when Sītā is seized by the *rākṣasa*, she makes a desperate plea to the site—the Janasthāna—and Mount Prasravaṇa with all their vegetation, to the Godāvarī with her birds, to the tree deities, and finally to all the beings inhabiting the forest, 'all the multitude of birds and beasts' (*sarvāṇi [...] mṛgapakṣigaṇān*, III.47.33) invoking them all to inform Rāma. Having defeated the vulture Jaṭāyus, Rāvaṇa finally succeeds in his purpose; and this is where we find the most significant passage, which is worth quoting in full:

[7] The bibliography on the subject is vast and constantly growing; for a summary article, see Murphy (2022).

utpāta vātābhihatā nānādvija gaṇāyutāḥ | mā bhair iti vidhūtāgrā vyājahrur iva pādapāḥ || 32 || *nalinyo dhvastakamalās trastamīnajale carāḥ | sakhīm iva gatotsāhāṃ śocantīva sma maithilīm* || 33 || *samantād abhisaṃpatya siṃhavyāghramṛgadvijāḥ | anvadhāvaṃs tadā roṣāt sītācchāyānugāminaḥ* || 34 || *jalaprapātāsramukhāḥ śṛṅgair ucchritabāhavaḥ | sītāyāṃ hriyamāṇāyāṃ vikrośantīva parvatāḥ* || 35 || *hriyamāṇāṃ tu vaidehīṃ dṛṣṭvā dīno divākaraḥ | pravidhvastaprabhaḥ śrīmān āsīt pāṇḍuramaṇḍalaḥ* || 36 || *nāsti dharmaḥ kutaḥ satyaṃ nārjavaṃ nānṛśaṃsatā | yatra rāmasya vaidehīṃ bhāryāṃ harati rāvaṇaḥ* || 37 || *iti sarvāṇi bhūtāni gaṇaśaḥ paryadevayan | vitrastakā dīnamukhā rurudur mṛgapotakāḥ* || 38 || *udvīkṣyodvīkṣya nayanair āsrapātāvilekṣaṇāḥ | supravepitagātrāś ca babhūvur vanadevatāḥ* || 39 || *vikrośantīṃ dṛḍhaṃ sītāṃ dṛṣṭvā duḥkhaṃ tathā gatām* | 40ab

It was only a gust of wind as Rāvaṇa flew up that shook the trees with their flocks of different birds, but it seemed (*iva*) they were waving their arms and crying, "Do not be afraid!"

With lotuses overturned, fish and water creatures frightened, sighs rising from their vaporous waters, the lotus ponds seemed (*iva*) to be grieving for Maithilī as for a friend.

From every side lions, tigers, deer, and birds swarmed together and went running after them in a fury, following Sītā's shadow.

As Sītā was being carried off, the mountains also seemed (*iva*) to wail, their craggy arms outstretched and waterfalls staining their faces with tears.

At the sight of Vaidehī being carried off the majestic sun that brings the day was overcome with gloom, and his glowing disk faded to pale white.

"There is no such thing as righteousness, much less truth, uprightness, or kindliness, if Rāvaṇa can carry off Vaidehī, the wife of Rāma." So all the creatures grieved, and the grieving spread from group to group.

Their young looked desolate and began to weep, and though their eyes were clouded by falling tears, the frightened little creatures kept looking up.

The spirits of the forest were seized with violent trembling in every limb, to see the wretched plight of Sītā, to hear her wild screams.

(III.50.32-40ab, transl. Pollock 1991, slightly modified, and with additions in brackets).

Note the repetition in this passage of *iva*, 'seemed', 'as if', an important hint of how the text presents some of the reactions of the elements of the forest substantially and consciously in terms of poetic fantasy; see also the *vikrośantīva* of II.40.28 quoted above.

In a famous passage (III.58.12-22) that will inspire Kālidāsa's wonderful Act Four of the *Vikramorvaśīya*,[8] Rāma, who is distraught over Sītā's disappearance, turns passionately but uselessly—he will receive no reply—to a series of plants and animals, asking them to give him news of his beloved. Then, increasingly in the grip of mad despair, he descends to the banks of the Godāvarī:

[8] For a detailed analysis of the motif and its subsequent developments, see Pieruccini (2023).

sa tām upasthito rāmaḥ kva sītety evam abravīt || 6 || *bhūtāni rākṣasendreṇa vadhārheṇa hṛtām api* | *na tāṃ śaśaṃsū rāmāya tathā godāvarī nadī* || 7 || *tataḥ pracoditā bhūtaiḥ śaṃsāsmai tāṃ priyām iti* | *na ca sābhyavadat sītāṃ pṛṣṭā rāmeṇa śocitā* || 8 || *rāvaṇasya ca tad rūpaṃ karmāṇi ca durātmanaḥ* | *dhyātvā bhayāt tu vaidehīṃ sā nadī na śaśaṃsa tām* || 9 ||

He stood at the shore and cried, "Oh, where is Sītā?"

But the creatures would not tell Rāma, nor would the Godāvarī river, that it was the lord of *rākṣasas* who had taken her and thereby condemned himself to death.

The creatures then urged the river, "Tell him about his love." But she refused to reveal Sītā's fate, no matter how piteously Rāma asked.

For the river was thinking about the evil Rāvaṇa—how he looked, what he could do—and was too afraid to tell what had happened to Vaidehī.

(III.60.6-9, transl. Pollock 1991, slightly modified).[9]

Like Rāma's desperate plea to the animals and vegetation, Sītā's prayers also remain unanswered. In all these passages that revolve around Sītā's abduction, the silence of the forest is of course instrumental in the unfolding of the events. But, above all, it greatly contributes to the poetic appeal of the text, just as the silence of the cloud does in Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*. Clearly, here the poet (or poets) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* does (do) not fully succumb to the temptation of 'humanising' the elements of wild nature. On the other hand, this silence reaffirms the existence of a kind of substantial barrier between human beings and the forest as a whole. It is an incommunicability which, as we can only briefly recall here (see, again, Pieruccini 2006), seems to be a widely recurring feature of the poem.

But, if the suffering of animals for the human vicissitudes appears to be largely the outcome of poetic imagination (and see below for the weeping horses), this does not detract from the fact that the *Rāmāyaṇa* recognises that certain categories of animals are capable of emotions and feelings for *their own* vicissitudes; and this recognition is unequivocally the result of direct observation, because, as we said before, it appears to be related to the greater or lesser intimacy of human beings with the different categories of animals.

3. Closer to humans: elephants, cows and bulls, and horses

In ancient India and also often today, the lives of humans were and are deeply intertwined with certain animals. Let us start with elephants, whose domestication, including their massive use in the army, was

[9] Other examples of the effects on the forest and its animals caused by the events associated with the exile and Sītā's abduction include II.41.3, III.58.6, III.59.5.

a decisive historical feature for South Asia (see, in particular, Trautmann 2015). In recent decades, a very large number of studies have highlighted the intelligence and sensibility of these animals and described the ways in which such traits are manifested.[10] Alongside purely physical images, based for instance on their strength and power, the *Rāmāyaṇa* presents us with their social life, affectivity, and capacity for both physical and mental suffering.[11] This regularly happens through similes that, as mentioned above, place human beings and animals on the same level. Here are some examples.

Characters surrounded by their harem are compared to bull elephants surrounded by their circle of elephant cows (e.g. V.9.9; VII.32.3; VII.32.16; VII.32.24). The most poignant image of conjugal affection between elephants is the following, which is a comparison with Daśaratha who tries to console Kaikeyī, even though he does not understand the reason for her distress:

> *kareṇum iva digdhena viddhāṃ mṛgayuṇā vane | mahāgaja ivāraṇye snehāt parimamarśa tām ||*
>
> He began to caress her affectionately, as a great bull elephant in the wilderness might caress his cow wounded by the poisoned arrow of a hunter lurking in the forest.
> (II.10.4, transl. Pollock 1986).[12]

Women are said to weep and wail at tragic events just as elephant cows do when the herd leader is captured or killed; this is said when Rāma leaves Ayodhyā (II.35.25), and also for the *rākṣasī*s at the killing of Rāvaṇa (VI.98.5). Sītā's grief and terror are like those of an elephant cow separated from her lord in the forest (V.19.17) or captured by a lion and separated from her herd (V.15.22; see also V.26.1).[13]

> *gṛhītāmālitāṃ stambhe yūthapena vinākṛtām | niḥśvasantīṃ suduḥkhārtāṃ gajarājavadhūm iva ||*
>
> She was like an elephant lord's captured mate who, bound fast to a post and cut off from that leader of the herd, heaves deep sighs in her profound misery.
> (V.17.17, transl. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996).

[10] There is a very extensive bibliography on the subject; scholars of the utmost importance in this field are Iain Douglas-Hamilton and Joyce Poole.

[11] On elephants in general in the poem see the already cited Bose (2020: 264-272).

[12] The bull elephant's love for his mate is an important poetic motif in the 'long' version of Act Four of the *Vikramorvaśīya*. For a summary of the textual problems of this play and the pertinent bibliography, see the already quoted Pieruccini (2023).

[13] These last two passages elaborate in an emotional sense the frequent similes derived from the image of the elephant being attacked by a lion (cf. e.g. II.8.25; VII.7.11; VII.7.45; VII.32.65).

It is interesting to note that, in actual fact, the most majestic and important elephant in the herd is often an old female, a matriarch.[14] The images where emphasis is placed on the male are perhaps evidence of a misunderstanding that reflects the human patriarchal society.

The physical suffering inflicted by the use of the goad is amply recognised. There are frequent comparisons between what causes pain to the characters and the torment of the goad (e.g. II.35.31; II.42.5). After hearing Guha's words, it is said of Bharata that 'in profound distress he suddenly collapsed, like an elephant pierced near the heart by goads' (*paramadurmanāḥ | papāta sahasā totrair hṛdi viddha iva dvipaḥ* ||, II.81.3, transl. Pollock 1986). Moreover, a wild elephant suffers deep distress if it is captured, as we have already seen in a comparison with Sītā:

> *vṛddhaṃ paramasaṃtaptaṃ navagraham iva dvipam | viniḥśvasantaṃ dhyāyantam asvastham iva kuñjaram || 2 || rājā tu rajasā sūtaṃ dhvastāṅgaṃ samupasthitam | aśrupūrṇamukhaṃ dīnam uvāca paramārtavat || 3 ||*
>
> The charioteer approached in desolation, his body coated with dust, his face bathed in tears—an old man deeply suffering like an elephant newly captured, and like the elephant heaving sighs, pensive and beside himself with grief. [...]
>
> (II.52.2-3, transl. Pollock 1986; cf. II.68.28).

Let us remember that breeding elephants in captivity is very expensive, because the animal has to reach the age of around fifteen years before it can be used for work. Thus, common practice has always been to capture wild elephants to be tamed and trained (van der Geer 2008: 194).

Now, let us consider cows and bulls. The generous love and care the cow shows for her offspring is paradigmatic already in the *Ṛgveda* (Srinivasan 1979). The *Rāmāyaṇa* is undoubtedly decisive in consolidating the image of the mutual affection between cow and calf, which, as we know, will forever be extremely popular, to such an extent that the Sanskrit term *vatsala*, 'affectionate', is derived from *vatsa*, 'calf.' The actual special relationship between cow and calf has always had important implications for the rearing of these animals, and the topic can nowadays count on an immense bibliography, largely oriented towards highlighting the productive and economic advantages of the various separation procedures.[15]

[14] I owe this remark to Alexandra van der Geer (personal communication), to whom I express my gratitude.

[15] Marino and Allen (2017) is a rich summary essay on the rather recent state of research which, on the contrary, directly considers the profound cognitive, emotional and social capabilities of these animals.

The comparison of a mother with the cow deprived of her offspring is recurrent when Rāma is about to face exile. As he prepares to depart, a distraught Kausalyā tells her son 'without you I am just like a cow without her calf' (*vinā tvayā dhenur ivātmajena vai,* II.17.32), and bursts into laments, 'like a cow who has seen her son fettered' (*sutam iva baddham avekṣya saurabhī*, II.17.33).[16] She says she wants to follow him: 'How would a cow not follow her calf if it wanders off?' (*kathaṃ hi dhenuḥ svaṃ vatsaṃ gacchantaṃ nānugacchati* |, II.21.6, transl. Pollock 1986). All the queens are in despair, 'as cows deprived of their calves' (*vivatsā iva dhenavaḥ*, II.36.7). Kausalyā says she has been rendered without offspring by Kaikeyī as a cow is stripped of her calf by a lion (II.38.17). But, even in her misery, she is equally affectionate with Bharata, who has fallen to the ground in despondency: 'Distraught, Kausalyā embraced him, as a loving cow presses her calf to her bosom' (*kausalyā* [...] *enaṃ* [...] *pariṣasvaje* || 6 || *vatsalā svaṃ yathā vatsam upagūhya tapasvinī* |, II.81.6-7). As for Kausalyā, cf. also VI.23.11.

The image also returns in other contexts. Upon hearing that Rāvaṇa has been killed, the women of the *rākṣasa*s roll on the ground with their hair loose, 'afflicted by grief as cows whose calves have been slain' (*duḥkhārtā gāvo vatsahatā yathā*, VI.98.2). The simile can also be used for a male character, so that Śatrughna implores Rāma: 'I cannot live without you, as a calf deprived of his mother' (*mātṛhīno yathā vatsas tvāṃ vinā pravasāmy aham* ||, VII.63.8). A rarer image of joy occurs when, on seeing the hair ornament that Sītā has handed over to Hanumān as a pledge and token of recognition, Rāma says in tears:

> *yathaiva dhenuḥ sravati snehād vatsasya vatsalā | tathā mamāpi hṛdayaṃ maṇiratnasya darśanāt ||*
>
> Just as a cow in her maternal affection overflows with love for her calf, so does my heart overflow at the sight of this magnificent gem.
> (V.64.3, transl. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996).

Let us now make an exception by mentioning a cow that belongs to the realm of myth, namely Surabhi. An irate Bharata narrates a short episode about Surabhi to his mother Kaikeyī, to extol the love between mother and son, in this case Rāma and Kausalyā. In the story (II.68.15-23), Surabhi is distraught on seeing the conditions in which two of her—extremely numerous, as the myth claims—sons are made to plough the land. When Indra questions her about why she is so sad, the cow explains:

[16] I replace *kiṃnarī* with *saurabhī* according to Pollock's suggestion (Pollock 1986: 360).

etau dṛṣṭvā kṛṣau dīnau sūryaraśmipratāpinau | vadhyamānau balīvardau karṣakeṇa surādhipa || 22 ||
mama kāyāt prasūtau hi duḥkhitau bhāra pīḍitau | yau dṛṣṭvā paritapye 'haṃ nāsti putrasamaḥ priyaḥ || 23 ||

I see how haggard and desolate these two bullocks are, how the rays of the sun are burning them, and how the ploughman beats them, overlord of the gods.
They were born of my body, and for me to see them sorrowful and oppressed by burdens is agony. There is nothing so dear as a son.
(II.68.22-23, transl. Pollock 1986, slightly modified).

Apart from this display of maternal affection, the passage is quite interesting because it expresses the recognition of the hardship and pain that humans can impose on these animals (see also II.12.9).[17]

The image of the bull surrounded by cows can also be used to extol the magnificence of a great lord like Rāvaṇa surrounded by his harem (V.9.8).[18] In contrast, cows without the bull conjure up images of sorrow. Ayodhyā abandoned by Rāma is said to be

goṣṭhamadhye sthitām ārtām acarantīṃ navaṃ tṛṇam | govṛṣeṇa parityaktāṃ gavāṃ paṅktim ivotsukām ||

[l]ike a herd of cows in the middle of a pasture when their bull has left them, and they no longer graze the new grass but are anguished and wistful [.]
(II.106.9, transl. Pollock 1986).[19]

When Vālin is killed, the *vānara*s are saddened, 'like forest-dwelling cattle in a great forest full of lions, when their bull has been struck down' (*vanecarāḥ siṃhayute mahāvane yathā hi gāvo nihate gavāṃ patau ||*, IV.22.25, transl. Lefeber 1994). Vālin's bride Tāra declares that, although he is dead, she wants to stay by his side with her son, 'just as a cow with her calf stays by her bull when he is suddenly struck down by a lion' (*siṃhena nihataṃ sadyo gauḥ savatseva govṛṣam ||*, IV.23.26, transl. Lefeber 1994).

The images that relate human affectivity or pain to those of horses are limited, but nonetheless significant. In part they belong to the same conceptual sphere as those concerning cows, appearing in the same *sarga*s. When Kausalyā sees her son arrive, 'she approached him in delight, as a mare might her colt' (*abhicakrāma saṃhṛṣṭā kiśoraṃ vaḍavā yathā ||*, II.17.9, transl. Pollock 1986; cf. above, II.17.32 and II.17.33). Here too, physical fatigue is mentioned. In the same passage, Kausalyā is distressed on hearing

[17] With some variations, Surabhi's grief at the treatment of her offspring is also narrated in *Mahābhārata* III.10. See Feller (2024: 8-12).

[18] In the next verse, mentioned above, the comparison is with a large elephant surrounded by cow elephants.

[19] I have replaced the incongruous *patnīm* of the Critical Edition with *paṅktim*, following Pollock's suggestion (Pollock 1986: 521).

news of the exile, 'like a mare forced to draw a heavy load' (*vaḍavām iva vāhitām*, II.17.18, transl. Pollock 1986).[20] Ayodhyā abandoned by Rāma is

> *sahasā yuddhaśauṇḍena hayāroheṇa vāhitām | nikṣiptabhāṇḍām utsṛṣṭāṃ kiśorīm iva durbalām ||*
>
> [l]ike a filly wildly whipped on by a battle-drunk rider, a weak filly, one that should be stripped of all her trappings and still running free[.]
> (II.106.17, transl. Pollock 1986, modified; for *utsṛṣṭāṃ*, cf. note, Pollock 1986: 521).

When the charioteer Sumantra returns after accompanying Rāma into exile, he tells Daśaratha that his horses refused to start and shed tears (II.53.1). The motif of the weeping horses is shared both by Indian and various other ancient literatures. As is well known, Siddhārtha leaves his father's house on the horse Kanthaka, and when Siddhārtha dismisses him and the charioteer Chandaka, Kanthaka sheds tears (cf. e.g. *Buddhacarita* VI.53) and, according to various sources, he immediately dies of grief. Outside India, the most famous example is undoubtedly that of Achilles' immortal horses who weep at Patroclus' death (*Iliad* XVII.426-440). The origins of this motif may lie in the very deep empathic bond known to develop between the riders and their horse of choice. Here we come across an anthropomorphization of animal behaviour. Indeed, many species of animals can shed tears, but, despite traditions and accounts of various kinds and epochs, according to the current state of research biologists generally agree that it is impossible to prove that animals weep because of an emotional response; rather, emotional weeping seems to be a uniquely human prerogative.[21]

4. In the margins: *mṛga*s, and birds

Let us now turn to animals that we can consider more distant from the everyday life of human beings. As can also be deduced from the translations proposed above, the term *mṛga* can be understood as a general designation for all forest animals; however, together with some more specific terms, it is often

[20] Pollock remarks in a note: "Observe how the simile here nicely takes up and advances the one in verse 9" (Pollock 1986: 358).

[21] Animals are said to be weeping at Sītā's abduction; see above. In other passages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* horses' tears are an omen of defeat, associated with other omens (e.g. VI.65.18; VI.94.26). For a broader review of comparable passages, also from the *Mahābhārata*, see Goldman, Sutherland Goldman and van Nooten (2009: 1355). On Kanthaka, see Ohnuma (2016) and Ohnuma (2017: 101-128) in particular. Among other examples of horses weeping for the destiny of their masters, we may recall the episodes concerning Julius Caesar (Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, *Caesar*, 81), the Celtic hero Cú Chulainn (see e.g. MacKillop 1998, s.v. Liath Macha and related entries), and Husain at the battle of Karbala, 680 CE (for some texts and Indian traditions, Pinault 2001). For a clarification of the biological-behavioural issue, see e.g. Gračanin, Bylsma and Vingerhoets (2018).

used to refer instead only to wild herbivores such as gazelles, antelopes, and deer, as a hyperonym for all these different animals. The most famous *mṛga* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is, of course, the 'magic deer,' *māyāmayo mṛgaḥ* (III.40.31, etc.) into which the *rākṣasa* Mārīca is transformed. Now, as we have argued elsewhere (Pieruccini forthcoming), the treatment reserved for these animals in the myths and narratives of ancient India constitutes a kind of marker: their killing highlights moments of crisis of great conceptual and narrative importance, as in the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s 'magic deer,' while their protected and safe presence is emblematic of a full pacification between human beings and the environment. This pacification is highlighted in the context of Brahmanical hermitages and places connected with Buddhism, where a kind of coexistence with these animals is implied.

Such myths and narratives are hinged, both negatively and positively, on the fact that these *mṛga*s are par excellence the victims of hunting, the favourite activity of *kṣatriya*s—and which Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa also practise during their exile. But apart from humans, these animals are also easy prey for the beasts of the forest; in general, they are regarded as defenceless, timid, and quickly frightened: 'fear [is the characteristic] of *mṛga*s' (*mṛgāṇāṃ tu bhayaṃ*, IV.58.9). If we consider that—in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as in the subsequent *kāvya*—the various lexical formulations of the '*mṛga*'s eyes' constitute a common epithet to define a woman's beauty, it is obvious that, in the Indian conception, such beauty and vulnerability combine perfectly to define a female condition, which of course in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is applied to Sītā. For example:

> *priyaṃ janam apaśyantīṃ paśyantīṃ rākṣasīgaṇam | svagaṇena mṛgīṃ hīnāṃ śvagaṇābhivṛtām iva ||*
>
> No longer seeing the people dear to her but only the hosts of *rākṣasa* women, she was like a doe cut off from her herd and surrounded by a pack of hounds.
> (V.13.23, transl. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996).
>
> *tāṃ dṛṣṭvā hanumān sītāṃ mṛgaśāvanibhekṣaṇām | mṛgakanyām iva trastāṃ vīkṣamāṇāṃ samantataḥ ||*
>
> Hanumān watched fawn-eyed Sītā as she glanced around in all directions like a frightened fawn.
> (V.15.28, transl. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996).

On the other hand, besides the passages referring to Sītā, where we also find more specific obviously feminine gender terms to refer to these animals,[22] the fear considered characteristic of *mṛga*s is also

[22] Cf. III.43.9; II.33.9, where Sītā is frightened as a doe (*pṛṣatī*) seeing a trap; III.54.31 and V.56.52, where, among the *rākṣasa* women, she is compared to a doe (*hariṇī*) surrounded by tigresses.

employed for similes involving male characters. In Kaikeyī's words, Daśaratha shakes like a *mṛga* at the sight of a tiger (II.10.30); overpowered fighters are like *mṛga*s frightened by a tiger or a lion (III.26.19; VI.59.42). But different nuances are also possible: for example, the sight of male and female *mṛga*s living together may be an image of serenity, contrasting with Rāma's unhappiness when he is separated from Sītā (IV.1.46).

As for birds, they can be captured, and here we have the unhappiness of being encaged. Manthārā, distraught at Śatrughna's wrath, is said to be 'staring like a caged *krauñcī*' (*krauñcīṃ vilagnām iva vīkṣamāṇām*, II.72.25). Hanumān imagines Sītā locked up in Rāvaṇa's palace 'softly moaning like a caged mynah bird' (*nūnaṃ lālapyate mandaṃ pañjarastheva śārikā* ||, V.11.15, transl. Goldman and Sutherland Goldman 1996). But the most frequent reference seems to be, or clearly is, to birds which are living free. Here we once again come across the *krauñcī*, and the female of the *kurara*, *kurarī*, a word usually translated as osprey. Some passages compare their cries with those of grieving and distraught women: thus, Daśaratha's wives lament like *krauñcī*s (II.34.35), Vālin's bride laments like a *kurarī* (IV.19.28), and so also it is supposed Sumitrā will be lamenting at the news that Lakṣmaṇa might be dead (VI.39.9).[23] The comparison appears to be based on the particular sound that the calls of these birds have.[24]

However, whether they are referred to generically or by more specific names, birds are very often mentioned by relating their song, or behaviour, to being full of passionate love. This is, obviously, an interpretation that projects human emotionality on these animals. A recurring term that is used to qualify them is *matta* (e.g. IV.66.36; V.1.42; V.7.23; VII.31.19), which is exactly the same term that defines elephants in rut. Canonical images of *kāvya* are the pair of *cakravāka* in love (IV.27.16; V.14.30; cf. Pieruccini 2002), or the dance of peacocks:[25]

> *śikhinībhiḥ parivṛtā mayūrā girisānuṣu | manmathābhiparītasya mama manmathavardhanāḥ* || 17 || *paśya lakṣmaṇa nṛtyantaṃ mayūram upanṛtyati | śikhinī manmathārtaiṣā bhartāraṃ girisānuṣu* || 18 || *mayūrasya vane nūnaṃ rakṣasā na hṛtā priyā | mama tv ayaṃ vinā vāsaḥ puṣpamāse suduḥsahaḥ* || 19 ||
>
> The peacocks circled by peahens on the mountain ridges heighten my desire, though I am already filled with desire.
>
> See, Lakṣmaṇa, how this peahen sick with love dances before her dancing peacock mate on the mountain ridges.

[23] Cf. also VI.23.3 and VI.98.26. In the *Mahābhārata*, *kāvya* and so on, the cry of a *kurarī* is a common term of comparison for female laments: see Karttunen (2020: 205).

[24] A good starting point for listening to the calls of these birds is the website https://xeno-canto.org/.

[25] For extensive sources on the peacock dance, see Karttunen (2000: 263-264).

> Surely the peacock's beloved was not carried off by a *rākṣasa* in the forest. But for me, living without Sītā in this month of flowers is unbearable.
>
> (IV.1.17-19, transl. Lefeber 1994).

These lines appear in the famous passage in which Rāma contemplates and describes the beauty of Lake Pampā in springtime, which we have already quoted above. It should be emphasised that in this passage, while the whole of nature forms a contrast to Rāma's grief on his separation from Sītā and numerous animals are mentioned, it is almost exclusively the birds that fuel his burning passion.[26]

5. Distance, and some conclusions

The remarks we make now may seem rather obvious, but they assume importance when considered in the context of our discourse. Other animals are mentioned very frequently in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; among the most prominent from a quantitative point of view are snakes, and they are involved in an abundance of similes.[27] The feeling, if we can call it that, attributed to these animals is anger: 'acute anger [is the characteristic] of serpents' (*tīkṣṇakopā bhujaṃgamāḥ*, IV.58.9). The meaning is obvious: these are poisonous and dangerous animals, and this aspect recurs frequently in the various images and often proverbial-like expressions that are based on them.

As for similes, Kaikeyī, for example, is compared to a poisonous snake by Kausalyā (II.38.2-3); or, again for example, the pugnacious *vānara*s are said to be 'like venomous serpents inflamed with anger' (*jvalitāśīviṣopamāḥ*, VI.18.37, transl. Goldman, Sutherland Goldman and van Nooten 2009). But, whether their noxiousness is implied or not, or not openly, the references to these animals occur with great regularity in similes connected with *physical* characteristics or acts: in particular, characters hiss like snakes or emit sighs similar to their hissing,[28] they writhe like snakes,[29] have arms like snakes,[30] the

[26] Here it is essential to recall that, alongside *cakravāka*s and peacocks, several other birds are connected, with varying nuances, to love and passion in the literatures of classical India: see the already mentioned Karttunen (2000, 2020) and Trynkowska (2022) on pigeons and doves.

[27] Obviously here too we are not considering semi-divine or otherwise mythical snakes; even if, at times, the text may be rather ambiguous when mentioning such animals.

[28] A very frequent comparison: e.g. II.19.1; II.20.2; II.68.28; II.86.26; III.2.20; IV.6.16; IV.16.11; V.8.10; V.8.26; V.13.30; V.20.28; V.36.22; V.65.7; VI.36.5; VI.39.1; VI.41.18; VI.48.22; VI.57.81; VI.76.1; VI.87.42.

[29] E.g. III.20.4; III.47.21; VI.89.2; VII.77.3.

[30] E.g. V.1.52; V.8.19; V.47.8; VI.48.49; VI.55.99; VI.55.115; VI.61.47.

shedding of skin is mentioned,[31] or again Sītā's long black braid is similar to a snake.[32] In addition, the evidently already stereotyped equation of snakes with weapons and, in particular, lethal arrows, *i.e.* note well, inanimate objects, is frequent, and indeed becomes almost obsessive in Book Six.[33]

Now, in India, encounters with snakes can be considered a common occurrence; the discourse becomes even more schematic for other dangerous animals, which are to be avoided, but whose habitat is essentially the forest. The tiger, for instance, besides being mentioned in the lists of animals living in the forest, appears—as we said above—in epithets expressing the power of a character, or in passages emphasising its aggressiveness and ferocity (cf. Bose 2020: 165-169). But there is no hint at a possible *sentience* of this animal—how, indeed, could there be any? The acknowledgement of the sentience of animals discussed above is essentially based on their frequentation by humans and, crucially, on the possibility and—this must be emphasised—the willingness and ability to observe them directly. The textual situation is proof that what emerges originates from concrete observation; it is also the demonstration of some genuine concern for animals that live closer to humans, or at least have the possibility of some articulate relationship with them. The recognition of their affectivity, and of their physical and moral suffering, is also an act of empathy towards them, and the fact that this recognition can take the form of recurring images, a great reservoir for the subsequent *kāvya*, does not detract from its value. On the other hand, that this suffering may be matched by the expression of a possible remedy is not something we can expect from a work like the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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[31] E.g. II.38.2; III.4.31; VI.24.33.

[32] Cf. V.13.24; V.23.9.

[33] In Book Six, the arrows with which, on his first attack, Indrajit totally covers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, bringing them close to death, are in fact snakes that thanks to his magical powers the *rākṣasa* has turned into arrows (VI.35.8); these snake-arrows flee upon the arrival of Garuḍa, the great enemy of snakes (*sarga* VI.40).

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Can animal characters be 'receptacles of *rasa*'?

An overview of the positions held on this issue in classical Indian treatises on poetics

Marco Franceschini

In classical Indian aesthetics, the ultimate goal of *kāvya* (dramatic and literary art) is the arousal of aesthetic experience, called *rasa* ('juice') in Sanskrit. A fundamental role in this process is played by the characters in the works, as some theorists place in them the locus of manifestation of *rasa*, while others consider them the necessary medium through which *rasa* is aroused in the spectator/reader. As a rule, Indian theory admits only human characters to this process, sometimes also semi-divine or divine characters; however, there are cases in which it seems clear that the role of receptacle of *rasa* is played by characters in animal form. This article presents an overview of the views of leading premodern Indian theorists on the admissibility of an animal character being the locus of *rasa*.

Keywords: Indian poetics, Indian aesthetics, animal studies, *kāvya*, Sanskrit literature.

1. Introduction[1]

Already from the earliest treatise that has come down to us, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* attributed to Bharata, Indian aesthetics ascribes to *rasa* 'juice,' an essential role in the definition of the work of art (at first theatrical, later also literary) and its enjoyment by the users. Over the centuries, Indian aesthetics confirmed and emphasised the crucial role of *rasa*, which was eventually interpreted as the very essence and, at the same time, the goal of art. A key role in the theory of *rasa* is played by the characters in the work, because, according to some theorists, *rasa* itself is placed in them, or because, according to others, the characters (or their representation) are attributed the fundamental role of arousing *rasa* in the viewer. According to some theorists, the characters that can act as locus of the *rasa* are gods, demigods or men; according to others, however, since the arousal of *rasa* requires the representation

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of a human-like emotional experience that the audience can relate to and appreciate, *rasa* can only manifest itself in human characters, usually the noblest ones, *i.e.* the protagonists. However, there are cases in which it seems clear that this role is performed by animal characters instead. By way of illustration, let us look at the following two stanzas from *Kumārasambhava* (Kum). Short contextualisation: Indra has just assigned Kāma the task of diverting Śiva from the yogic meditation in which he is immersed, in order to make him fall in love with Pārvatī. Kāma recklessly accepts the assignment and sets off towards Himālaya, accompanied by his bride Rati and his trusted friend and assistant Vasanta 'Spring.' The latter, advancing through the forests covering the mountain slopes, takes on his manifest form, i.e. causes the advent (out of time) of the spring season. This, in turn, spreads amorous passion in the forest, inducing voluptuous behaviour in all its inhabitants: animals, semi-divine beings, and even plants. The two stanzas that follow feature animals (bees, antelopes, elephants, birds) and are taken from a series of fourteen stanzas (Kum 3.26-39), in which Kālidāsa assigns non-human inhabitants of the forest roles that are usually played by human characters in the depiction of conventional love-poetry motifs, in a highly erotic or eroticised context.

madhu dvirephaḥ kusumaikapātre
papau priyāṃ svām anuvartamānaḥ |
śṛṅgeṇa ca sparśanimīlitākṣīṃ
mṛgīm akaṇḍūyata kṛṣṇaśāraḥ || Kum 3.36 ||
dadau rasāt paṅkajareṇugandhi
gajāya gaṇḍūṣajalaṃ kareṇuḥ |
ardhopabhuktena bisena jāyāṃ
saṃbhāvayām āsa rathāṅganāmā || Kum 3.37 || (Smith 2005: 106)

Keeping close to his beloved,
the bee drank honey
from the same flower cup,
and the black antelope
scratched his doe with his horn,
she closing her eyes at his touch.
The cow elephant lovingly gave
her mate a trunkful of water
fragrant with lily pollen;
the cakravāka bird favored his mate
with a half-eaten lotus stem (Smith 2005: 107).

In the light of the enormous prestige Kālidāsa has always enjoyed among Indian theorists, a reading of these stanzas leads one to conclude that characters in animal form can also serve as receptacles of *rasa*: but is this really the case?[2] The purpose of this article is to investigate how Indian theorists of poetics have interpreted the use of characters in animal form to represent conventional *kāvya* motifs and, more generally, to represent emotions normally attributed to human beings: is it considered as a mere ornament, a virtuosic *alaṃkāra*, as a metaphor (*rūpaka*), an allegory (*anyāpadeśa* or *anyokti*) or a double entendre (*śleṣa*)? Or is it more than a rhetorical embellishment, an instance in which animals can replace humans in the role of receptacles of *rasa*?

This research was inspired by a passage from *A Rasa Reader* (Pollock 2016: 248-249), in which the author summarises, in a few lines and in broad strokes, the general terms of the problem and the attitude towards it on the part of some Indian theorists. That short passage provided not only the starting idea for this research, but also an initial outline for its realisation: this initial outline was later expanded and enriched and took the form of the present article.

The following pages present, in chronological order, the positions held by some of the leading pre-modern Indian scholars on poetics on the admissibility of animal characters as loci of *rasa* elicitation. The survey makes no claim to exhaustiveness and has been carried out within the boundaries drawn by the following three limitations. The first concerns the literary typology of the works considered: in this regard, only works of aesthetic theory that are generally subsumed under the categories called *alaṃkāraśāstra* and *kāvyaśāstra* were examined. Texts of other types, although potentially useful, such as, for instance, commentaries on the aforementioned treatises and commentaries on *kāvya* works (theatrical or literary), have been excluded from this study (the only exception being Kuntaka's autocommentary on his *Vakroktijīvita*), as research on these texts would require time that would far exceed the duration of the project wherein this paper is framed. Secondly, only those theorists who, in their works, have dealt with this topic explicitly have been taken into account. Consequently, thinkers whose position on the relationship between animal characters and *rasa* can only be deduced from the general framework of their theoretical attitudes have been left out—with the sole exception of Abhinavagupta. Although he does not explicitly address the problem, Abhinavagupta was included in the study for two reasons: on the one hand because, as is well known, the theory he elaborated played a crucial role in the development of Indian aesthetics, representing a turning point; on the other, because, at the beginning of the exposition of his new theoretical edifice,

[2] One could ask the same question about plants, since creepers and trees are the protagonists of the scene, also in an erotic vein, described in Kum 3.39. But this topic is beyond the scope of this research.

Abhinavagupta quotes a famous stanza in which *rasa* is aroused by the fear felt by an animal character, in this case a deer terrified by King Duṣyanta who is chasing it, described in the opening of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. Finally, the third limitation is purely chronological: reasons also related to the present writer's specific expertise have suggested considering only works composed up to the end of the 14th century.

2. Theorists' opinions

2.1. Kuntaka: *Vakroktijīvita* (second half of the 10th century)

To the best of my knowledge, the first theorist to specifically deal with the topic of the relationship between animal characters and *rasa* is Kuntaka, active in Kashmir presumably in the second half of the 10th century (Pollock 2016: 98), author of the *Vakroktijīvita* (VJ) as well as the (auto)commentary on it (VJ comm; references to it are given by stanza number or, where in prose, by page and line number). Before presenting the passages in which Kuntaka addresses the topic of the present research, it is necessary to make some general remarks.

The framework within which Kuntaka elaborates his theory is eminently analytical, so his focus is primarily on the literary fabric of the work. According to him, the distinctive feature that characterises artistic language and distinguishes it from ordinary—or, at any rate, non-artistic—language is (as suggested by the very title of his treatise) *vakrokti*, 'crooked utterance,' understood, however, not with its common meaning of indirect or evasive expression, but as 'unexpected/startling' use of the language—or 'striking usage,' as Pollock (2016: 98) puts it. In this context, what, then, is the role of the *rasa*? As is clear from the following excerpt, Kuntaka rejects the idea that *rasa* is an ornament of the text, as had been argued by his predecessors, notably Udbhaṭa. On the other hand, the analytical approach of his theoretical edifice prevents him from identifying *rasa* with the essence of the poetic work (let alone its end): although it is 'the very thing we are apprehending in a poem,' *rasa* is nothing but the result of the enhancement (*paripoṣa*) of stable emotions.[3]

> *idānīṃ rasātmanaḥ pradhānacetanaparispandavarṇyamānavṛtter alaṃkārakārāntarābhimatām alaṃkāratāṃ nirākaroti –*
>
> *alaṃkāro na rasavat parasyāpratibhāsanāt |*
>
> [...] || VJ Comm 3.11 || (VJ Comm p. 143 ll. 23-24 and VJ 3.11ab)

[3] In his autocommentary to VJ 3.7, Kuntaka states that '*rasa* is nothing but the stable emotion' (*sthāyy eva tu raso bhaved*, VJ Comm, p. 138 l. 17); see below.

> The author now refutes the view of other poeticians who hold that when the subject of the narrative is the activity of the primarily sentient beings, which consists essentially in their rasa, the subject can indeed function as an ornament.
>
> The '*rasa*-laden' cannot be an ornament, first because it constitutes the very thing we are apprehending in a poem [...] (Pollock 2016: 102)

> *mṛteti pretya saṅgantuṃ yayā me maraṇaṃ smṛtam* |
>
> [...] || VJ Comm 3.36 ||
>
> *atra ratiparipoṣalakṣaṇavarṇanīyaśarīrabhūtāyāś cittavṛtter atiriktam anyad vibhaktaṃ vastu na kiṃcid vibhāvyate* | (VJ Comm p. 146 ll. 3-4)

> For in the poem adduced, "The woman I thought was dead and hoped / to rejoin by taking my own life [...]," there is no separate thing to be apprehended beyond the mental state itself that constitutes the narrative content, which is nothing other than the enhancement of the stable emotion of desire (Pollock 2016: 102).

In this passage, Kuntaka takes a stance on a crucial aspect in assessing the possibility of an animal character eliciting *rasa*: the identification of the locus of *rasa*, *i.e.* its placement within the work (that is, in the characters) or, instead, in its recipients (that is, in the audience). Asserting that in a poem 'there is no separate thing to be apprehended beyond the mental state itself that constitutes the narrative content, which is nothing other than the enhancement of the stable emotion of desire,' Kuntaka makes it clear that, with regard to the location of the locus of *rasa*, his theoretical framework aligns with that of the tradition that preceded him, according to whom *rasa* is 'a phenomenon internal to the literary work, whether textual or performative' (Pollock 2010: 145, 170 n. 8), it is in the work of art, be it a poem or a play: therefore, the receptacle of *rasa,* i.e. the place where *rasa* manifests itself, is the character in the work. According to him, *rasa* is experienced by the audience secondarily, actualising the feeling experienced by the literary character through a process that can be cognitive, inferential or based on memories: therefore, the evaluation of the authenticity of the experience of *rasa* on the part of the audience depends on the capacity of the character in the work to experience *rasa*. Since in our case the character in question—the receptacle—is an animal, the final judgement depends on the evaluation of the emotional potential of animals (Pollock 2010: 145; Pollock 2016: 98-99, 248-249). Thus, within this framework, the question can be rephrased in these terms: can an animal experience *rasa*, thus enabling the audience to actualise it in themselves and experience *rasa* in turn? As one might expect, Kuntaka's answer is negative.

In the *Vakroktijīvita*, the passage devoted to this topic consists of four stanzas (VJ 3.5-3.8), accompanied by the corresponding autocommentary by Kuntaka himself.

First (VJ 3.5), in line with the formalist approach of his theoretical framework, Kuntaka categorises entities into two groups: sentient beings and inanimate entities. Then (VJ 3.6), among the sentient beings that make up the first group, he identifies two distinct types or classes (*prakāra*): the primary type is represented by gods, demigods and men, the secondary type by animals.

> *bhāvānām aparimlānasvabhāvaucityasundaram* |
> *cetanānāṃ jaḍānāṃ ca svarūpaṃ dvividhaṃ smṛtam* || VJ 3.5 ||
> *tatra pūrvaṃ prakārābhyāṃ dvābhyām eva vibhidyate* |
> *surādisiṃhaprabhṛtiprādhānyetarayogataḥ* || VJ 3.6 ||
>
> It is said that the nature of entities (*bhāva*),[4] whose beauty derives from their full-blown intrinsic appropriateness, is of two kinds: that of sentient beings and that of inanimate entities.
> In this regard, the first [kind of entities] is divided into two classes: that of gods etc. and that of lions and so forth [i.e. animals], which are [respectively] the main class and the other [i.e. the subordinate][5] class, in accordance with the order of enunciation.[6]

In his autocommentary, Kuntaka makes it clear that the main class consists of gods, anti-gods, various semi-divine beings, men and so forth (*surādayaḥ tridaśaprabhṛtayo ye cetanāḥ surāsurasiddhavidyādharagandharvanaraprabhṛtayaḥ,* VJ Comm, p. 138 ll. 4-5).[7]

Next (VJ 3.7) Kuntaka argues that beings of the higher category can, by their very nature, experience emotions such as passion, whereas animals can only experience instincts or urges.

> *mukhyam akliṣṭaratyādiparipoṣamanoharam* |
> *svajātyucitahevākasamullekhojjvalaṃ param* || VJ 3.7 ||
>
> The "primary" category is made beautiful by the enhancement of their unaffected desire and the like; the other becomes adorned when reference is made to the impulses appropriate to their particular species (Pollock 2016: 99).

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[4] As explained in the opening of the autocommentary to VJ 3.5 (*bhāvānāṃ varṇyamānavṛttīnāṃ*), the term *bhāva*, 'entity', is here to be understood with the meaning of *varṇyamānavṛtti*, 'object of the poem' (lit. 'whose acting/being is described [in the poem]'). The *Vakroktijīvita* is a work of literary aesthetics, indeed 'the only work in Sanskrit tradition that can be likened to what today we would regard as literary criticism' (Pollock 2016: 98): consistently, here Kuntaka does not intend to categorise the entities of the world, but rather those that can appear as characters in a *kāvya* work.

[5] The autocommentary reads *itarad aprādhānyaṃ* (VJ Comm, p. 138 l. 6).

[6] Translations without attribution are the work of the present writer.

[7] In one manuscript the word *nara*, 'men', is omitted (Krishnamoorthy 1977: 138 note 3).

In his autocommentary to this stanza, Kuntaka explains that beings belonging to both classes, main and subordinate, can become subjects of poets' description, albeit with one important difference: the nature of beings of the main class has the capacity to develop *sthāyibhāva* and, from them, *rasa*, whereas the nature of beings of the subordinate class, *i.e.* animals, only lends itself to the description of the instinctive behaviour of the different species—with the obvious consequence that animal characters cannot develop *rasa*. Although Kuntaka does not state this explicitly, this limitation stems from the fact that animals do not have an emotional apparatus that allows them to experience emotions such as passion.

> *mukhyaṃ yat pradhānaṃ cetanasurāsurādisaṃbandhi svarūpaṃ tad evaṃvidhaṃ sat kavīnāṃ varṇanāspadaṃ bhavati svavyāpāragocaratāṃ pratipadyate | kīdṛśam – akliṣṭaratyādiparipoṣamanoharam | akliṣṭaḥ kadarthanāvirahitaḥ pratyagratāmanoharo yo ratyādiḥ sthāyibhāvas tasya paripoṣaḥ śṛṅgāraprabhṛtirasatvāpādanam, sthāyy eva tu raso bhaved iti nyāyāt | tena manoharaṃ hṛdayahāri |* (VJ Comm p. 138 ll. 13-18)
>
> [...][8]
>
> *evaṃ dvitīyam apradhānacetanasiṃhādisaṃbandhi yat svarūpaṃ tad itthaṃ kavīnāṃ varṇanāspadaṃ saṃpadyate | kīdṛśam – svajātyucitahevākasamullekhojjvalam | svā pratyekam ātmīyā sāmānyalakṣaṇavastusvarūpā yā jātis tasyāḥ samucito yo hevākaḥ svabhāvānusārī parispandas tasya samullekhaḥ samyagullekhanaṃ vāstavena rūpeṇopanibandhas tenojjvalaṃ bhrājiṣṇu, tad vidāhlādakārīti yāvat |* (VJ Comm p. 140 ll. 20-23, p. 141 ll. 1-2)

> The nature of the "primary," that is, principally sentient, category of beings – gods, antigods, and the like—becomes fit subject matter for poets, or in other words, enters the field of their proper literary creativity, when they are "made beautiful by the enhancement of their unaffected desire and the like." Desire and so on are the stable emotions, which are "unaffected" when they are free from any constraint, that is, beautiful thanks to their naturalness. They are said to be "enhanced" when they come to exist as the erotic and the other *rasa*s, according to the axiom that *rasa* is nothing but the stable emotion. This makes the category of beings "beautiful," that is, enchanting' (Pollock 2016: 99-100).
>
> [...]
>
> By contrast, the nature of the second, or secondary, category—those sentient beings that are animals, such as lions and so on—becomes fit subject matter for poets only when reference is made to the urges appropriate to their particular species (Pollock 2016: 101).

In order to exemplify the function that can be played by animal characters in *kāvya*, Kuntaka quotes two stanzas. The first stanza, by an unknown author, is a naturalistic description of a lion sleeping in a

[8] Here Kuntaka quotes five stanzas from Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya* to clarify the role played by beings belonging to the main class.

cave; the second example, given below, is the famous opening stanza of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (AŚ), in which the deer hunted by King Duṣyanta looks back at him in terror.

> *grīvābhaṅgābhirāmaṃ muhur anupatati syandane dattadṛṣṭiḥ*
> *paścārdhena praviṣṭaḥ śarapatanabhayād bhūyasā pūrvakāyam |*
> *darbhair ardhāvalīḍhaiḥ śramavivṛtamukhabhraṃśibhiḥ kīrṇavartmā*
> *paśyodagraplutatvād viyati bahutaraṃ stokam urvyāṃ prayāti* || VJ Comm 3.31 || (= AŚ 1.7)
>
> Repeatedly darts a glance at the pursuing chariot,
> gracefully twisting his neck,
> with his haunches drawn acutely forward
> into his forebody
> out of fear of the arrow's strike,
> scattering the path with grass half-chewed,
> dropping from his mouth
> gaping with exhaustion.
> Look! With his lofty leaps he moves
> more through the sky
> and hardly touches the ground (Vasudeva 2006: 58).[9]

This stanza occupies a central position in the debate on the relationship between animal characters and the arousal of *rasa* that will develop in the centuries following Kuntaka, as will be discussed in the next pages and, more extensively and in depth, in Luigi Singh's article published in this same volume. Finally (VJ 3.8), Kuntaka concedes that animals (and inanimate entities) can at least enhance literary beauty by 'illuminating the *rasa*' (*rasoddīpana*):

> *rasoddīpanasāmarthyavinibandhanabandhuram |*
> *cetanānām amukhyānāṃ jaḍānāṃ cāpi bhūyasā* || VJ 3.8 ||
>
> As a rule, [the nature] of secondary sentient beings and inanimate entities is beautiful because it is imbued with the ability to illuminate *rasa*.

As for the meaning of *uddīpana*, in the autocommentary the term is glossed with *ullāsana* and *paripoṣa* (*rasāḥ śṛṅgārādayas teṣām uddīpanam ullāsanaṃ paripoṣas tasmin sāmarthyaṃ śaktis* [...]). Furthermore, it

[9] The differences between the text translated by Vasudeva and that in Kuntaka's autocommentary (reproduced here) are minor: *śaṣpair* in place of *darbhair*, °*vitata*° for °*vivṛta*°, *plutitvād* for *plutatvād*.

should be noted that Kuntaka, in closing the autocommentary to VJ 3.8, illustrates the action of *rasoddīpana* performed by animals[10] by quoting a stanza from the *Kumārasambhava* taken from the sequence mentioned at the opening of this article:

> *cūtāṅkurāsvādakaṣāyakaṇṭhaḥ*
> *puṃskokilo yan madhuraṃ cukūja* |
> *manasvinīmānavighātadakṣaṃ*
> *tad eva jātaṃ vacanaṃ smarasya* || VJ Comm 3.32 || (= Kum 3.32)
>
> His throat tawny from tasting mango shoots,
> the sweet call the male *kokil* made
> became indeed the voice of Kāma
> skilled in breaking proud women's pride (Smith 2005: 105).

In the light of the gloss in the autocommentary and the example brought to illustrate it, the name *uddīpana* seems to convey the meaning 'causing to shine forth,' 'to enhance,' 'to bring to full development.' The action performed by the characters of the secondary category, i.e. secondary sentient beings and inanimate entities, would therefore be ancillary, aimed at emphasising or intensifying the *rasa*, which can only arise in a character of the primary category, as was explained in the previous verse (VJ 3.7).

2.2. Abhinavagupta: *Abhinavabhāratī* (10th-11th century)

A few decades after Kuntaka, in the late 10th and early 11th century, the great Kashmiri thinker Abhinavagupta synthesises and systematises earlier theories of poetics, particularly the *rasa* theory introduced by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*: by marrying *rasa* with *dhvani* and philosophy, he provided a unified framework that influenced both theory and artistic practice profoundly and enduringly. There are two aspects of his theoretical framework that are most relevant to the object of this research. Firstly, with Abhinavagupta, *rasa* becomes the central principle of Indian aesthetics, the distinctive element of *kāvya*, its very essence: therefore, its elicitation is the goal of any work that aspires to be artistic. Secondly, regarding the locus of the *rasa*, Abhinavagupta makes very different assumptions from those of his predecessors, and comes to opposite conclusions to those of Kuntaka. In fact, for him

[10] The other quoted stanza, taken from the *Vikramorvaśīya* (II.6), illustrates the *rasoddīpana* performed by plants.

the locus of *rasa* is no longer internal to the poem (or the play), but is the audience.[11] In this perspective, the emotional faculties of the characters are no longer of crucial importance, and—with regard to the role of characters in animal form in arousing *rasa*—it is entirely reasonable for the audience to experience *rasa* by enjoying the depiction of a scene in which the protagonist is an animal.

As has already been mentioned, Abhinavagupta does not express himself explicitly about the permissibility of characters in animal form being receptacles for *rasa*: but his position on this point is nevertheless very clear. In fact, at the very opening of the *Abhinavabhāratī* (ABh), his magnificent and revolutionary commentary on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Abhinavagupta quotes, as an exemplification of the theory he is about to illustrate, the opening stanza of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* in which a deer flees in terror from King Duṣyanta who is hunting it. This same stanza had already been quoted by Kuntaka in the *Vakroktijīvita*, but with opposite intentions to those of Abhinavagupta. Kuntaka wanted to show that an animal can only have instinctive reactions and that, consequently, the fear of the deer described in the stanza cannot give rise to a stable emotion and, therefore, arouse *rasa*; at most, it can have the function of enhancing (*uddīpana*) the *rasa* aroused by a character belonging to the primary category (gods, anti-gods, semi-divine beings, men). According to Abhinavagupta, on the contrary, the stanza arouses the fearful *rasa* (*bhayānaka*) through the *sthāyibhāva* of fear (*bhaya*) felt by the deer.

> *tarhy ucyatām pariśuddhatattvam* | [...] *adhikārī cātra vimalapratibhānaśālihṛdayaḥ* | *tasya ca "grīvābhaṅgābhirāmam" iti "umāpi nīlālaka" iti "haras tu kiṃcit" ityādivākyebhyo vākyārthapratipatter anantaraṃ mānasī sākṣātkārātmikā apahastitatattadvākyopāttakālādivibhāgā tāvat pratītir upajāyate* | *tasyāṃ ca yo mṛgapotakādir bhāti tasya viśeṣarūpatvābhāvād bhīta iti trāsakasyāpāramārthikatvād bhayam eva paraṃ deśakālādyanāliṅgitam, tata eva bhīto 'haṃ bhīto 'yam śatrur vayasyo madhyastho vetyādipratyayebhyo duḥkhasukhādikṛtahānādibuddhyantarodayaniyamavattayā vighnabahulebhyo vilakṣaṇaṃ nirvighnapratītigrāhyaṃ sākṣād iva hṛdaye niviśamānaṃ cakṣuṣor iva viparivartamānaṃ bhayānako rasaḥ* | *tathāvidhe hi bhaye nātmātyantatiraskṛto na viśeṣata ullikhitaḥ* | *evaṃ paro 'pi* | *tata eva na parimitam eva sādhāraṇyam api tu vitatam, [...] sa eva sādhāraṇībhāvaḥ sutarāṃ puṣyati* | *ata eva sarvasāmājikānām ekaghanatayaiva pratipatteḥ sutarāṃ rasaparipoṣāya sarveṣām anādivāsanāvicitrīkṛtacetasāṃ vāsanāsaṃvādāt* | (ABh p. 12 l. 20, p. 13 ll. 4-17, 21-22, p. 14 ll. 1-2)

> Let us then state what is the true nature of Rasa purified of previous mistakes. [...] The qualified person is in this case any person whose heart possesses a spotless power of intuition (*pratibhāna*). In such a person hearing the following phrases, "There he (scil., the deer) is now, gracefully by the bending of his neck ...," "Even Umā, dropping the golden *karṇikāra* ...," "The firmness of Hara ...,"[12]

[11] For this, as for other aspects of his thought, Abhinavagupta is most likely indebted to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, who first proposed this revolutionary paradigm shift in his *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*, a work that was lost a couple of centuries after its composition (Pollock 2010: 143-146).

[12] The first *pratīka* is that of the initial stanza of *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (AŚ 1.7); the following ones refer to Kum. 3.62 and 3.67.

> there appears, immediately after the perception of their literal sense, a perception of a different order, (an inner [*mānasī*] perception, consisting in a direct experience [*sāksātkāra*]) which completely eliminates the temporal distinction, etc., assumed by these sentences. The young deer, etc., which appears in this perception is devoid of its particularity (*viśeṣa*), and at the same time, the actor, who [playing the role of the deer], frightens [the spectators] (*trāsaka*) showing to be afraid, is unreal (*apāramārthika*). As a result, what there appears is simply and solely fear—fear in itself, uncircumscribed by time, space, etc. [...] This perception of fear is of a different order from the ordinary perceptions ("I am afraid, he—my enemy, my friend, anybody—is afraid"); for these are necessarily affected by the appearance of fresh mental movements (of shunning, etc.), consisting of pleasure, pain, etc., and just for this reason are full of obstacles (*vighna*). The sensation of the fear above mentioned, may be said to enter directly into our hearts, to dance before our eyes: this is the terrible Rasa. In such a fear, one's own self is neither completely immersed (*tiraskṛ*) nor in a state of particular emergence (*ullikh*), and the same thing happens with the other selves. As a result of this, the state of generality involved is not limited (*parimita*), but extended (*vitata*) [...]. The afore-mentioned state of generality is readily nourished; so that by virtue of the very uniformity (*ekaghanatā*) of the spectator's perception, it [i.e. the state of generality, *sādhāraṇya*] being so nourished, readily nourishes the Rasa in all of them: and this occurs, because the latent impressions of their minds concord with each other, the minds being varied by beginningless latent impressions (Gnoli 1968: 52-58).

Regarding the ability of characters in animal form to arouse *rasa*, the last sentence of the quoted passage is particularly relevant. By resorting to the argument of the eternity of *saṃsāra*, of the infinity of the life forms assumed by each being and of the latent impressions impressed in the consciousness (*vāsanā*), Abhinavagupta justifies the emotional attunement between animal (characters) and human (spectators) and justifies the possibility that, in the work of art, the emotions felt by the former can arouse *rasa* in the latter. With reference to these points made by Abhinavagupta, Gnoli adds:

> Abhinavagupta replies with this argument to the objection of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, according to whom the spectator can identify himself only with a person similar to himself but not with a being of a non-ordinary nature, as Rāma, deity, etc. The identification and therefore the state of generality required for the aesthetic experience postulates an affinity of nature (latent impressions, tendencies, instincts, etc.) between the spectator and the person represented. Abhinavagupta replies to this objection saying that no being (animal or deity) exists with which man has no affinity of nature. The *saṃsāra* is beginningless and every man, before being that which he actually is, has been all the other beings as well. The consciousness of the spectator thus possesses (in other words, is varied by ...) the latent impressions of all the possible beings and he is therefore susceptible of identifying himself with each of them (Gnoli 1986: 58 n. 2).

Abhinavagupta is, therefore, the first theorist to recognise the possibility that animal characters may constitute the receptacle of *rasa*. Yet, as will be shown in the following pages, despite the unquestionable influence that Abhinavagupta's thought exerted on later Indian aesthetics, in the following four centuries the main theorists who directly addressed the question at hand ignored or

rejected the perspective he proposed, remaining anchored to the traditional positions of the formalist theorists of the previous era.

2.3. Bhoja: *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa* and *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (first half of the 11th century)

A few decades after Abhinavagupta, in the first half of the 11th century, the topic of the relationship between animal characters and the arousal of *rasa* was addressed by Bhoja, the learned ruler of the Paramāra dynasty of Malwa, in both of his works: the *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa* (SKĀ) and the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (ŚP).

For Bhoja, *rasa* is one of the four basic principles of the 'unity' (*sāhitya*) of aspects of language and its use that are necessary for literature of art (*kāvya*) to exist: 'it is the presence of *rasa* that makes literature beautiful' (Pollock 2016: 115; *rasa* [...] *yo 'rthas tasyānvayāt kāvyaṃ kamanīyatvam aśnute*, SKĀ 5.1). On the other hand, for him, as it was also for Kuntaka, *rasa* is in the character: 'Rasa is located in the character who is the subject of the work, Rama for example.' (Pollock 2016: 115, quoting Bhaṭṭa Narasiṃha's commentary to SKĀ 5.1). Given this assumption, it is not surprising that Bhoja rejects the idea that animal characters can arouse *rasa*. In the *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*, the first of his two works of poetics, in one of his typically 'ubiquitous and seemingly arbitrary lists' (Pollock 2016: 111), Bhoja asserts that only a 'semblance of *rasa*' (*rasābhāsa*) can be engendered in animal characters, thereby tacitly excluding that *rasa* can fully develop in them. The category of *rasābhāsa* dates back to Udbhaṭa (8th-9th century; Pollock 2016: 66, 72-73, 315), but Bhoja is the first theorist to use it to define the kind of *rasa* that can arise from characters in animal form (Pollock 2016: 354 n. 297); his example will be followed by other thinkers in later centuries (see below).

> *hīnapātreṣu tiryakṣu nāyakapratiyogiṣu* |
> *gauṇeṣv eva padārtheṣu tam ābhāsaṃ vijānate* || SKĀ 5.30 ||
>
> We understand "semblance" to be the presence of *rasa* in characters of low status, animals, antagonists, or entities referenced in a merely metaphorical manner (Pollock 2016: 117).

Later in the same work, Bhoja quotes the following stanza from Hāla's *Sattasaī* as an illustrative example of the *rasābhāsa* that can be present in animal characters:

pāaḍiaṃ sohaggaṃ taṃvāe uaha goṭṭhamajjhammi |
duṭṭhavasahassa siṅge acchiuḍaṃ kaṇḍuantīe || SKĀ 5.138.12 || (= Sattasaī 460)[13]

See how the young cow makes plain her favored position:
In the middle of the pen
She rubs her eyelid
Against the horn of the vicious bull (Khoroche and Tieken 2009: 93).

Bhoja does not elaborate on the concept of *rasābhāsa* applied to animal characters, but since he ascribes it not only to animal characters but also to anti-gods, abject beings and inanimate entities described metaphorically as if they were conscious, it is obvious that he intended to define an inferior, imperfect and not fully developed form of *rasa* in this way. This hypothesis is confirmed in a passage from the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, Bhoja's second (and main) poetic work. First, in a long and interesting premise, Bhoja argues that *rasa* does not manifest itself in all characters, regardless of their emotional faculties: in fact, only characters with a sufficiently developed emotional apparatus are able to savour *rasa*.

tatra kecin āhuḥ – nāyaṃ rasaḥ śṛṅgārākhyo ratyādibhir abhivyajyate apitvālambanavibhāvād utpanno ratyādir evoddīpanavibhāvādbhiḥ paraṃ prakarṣam āropyamāṇo rasībhavan śṛṅgārādisaṃjñāṃ labhata iti | ta evaṃ praṣṭavyāḥ – kim ete ratyādayaḥ svebhyaḥ ālambanebhyaḥ utpadyamānāḥ sarvasyāpy utpadyante uta kasyacid eveti | yady tāvat sarvasya tadā sarvaṃ jagad rasikaṃ syāt | na caitad asti | yataḥ kaścid rasikaḥ kaścit tu nīraso dṛśyate | na ca dṛṣṭaviparītaṃ śakyam anujñātum | ato na sarvasya ratyādayo jāyante | [...] (ŚP p. 616 ll. 4-11)

With respect to this point, some have argued that the *rasa* called the erotic is not something brought to manifestation by desire and the other emotions; they claim instead that desire (and this would hold true for the other stable emotions), having first arisen through the foundational factor and reached intensification through the physical setting and other auxiliary causes, itself turns into *rasa* and so acquires the name "the erotic." But those who hold this view may be asked the following: Do these stable emotions, each of them arising by reason of its specific foundational factor, arise the same for everyone, or only for some? If for everyone, then the whole world[14] would be *rasikas*—able to experience *rasa*—which is patently not the case, since we can see for ourselves that some individuals are able to experience *rasa* and some are not. And no postulate that is contradicted by perception is admissible. So desire and the other stable emotions do not come into play for everyone, but only for some (Pollock 2016: 126).

[13] Weber's critical edition of the *Sattasaī* (1882: 196) reads *duṭṭhavusahassa* and records *duṭṭhava°* among the variant readings collected in the critical apparatus.

[14] Since in the following section Bhoja argues that stable emotions are aroused by an aesthetic factor, and not by an actual person, the 'whole world' mentioned here is most likely the world of the narrative, not that of the audience (Pollock 2016: 361 n. 114).

At the end of this premise, Bhoja defines three different forms of *rasa*, orders them hierarchically according to the emotional fullness of the character in which they occur (and, consequently, their degree of development), assigning the *rasābhāsa* the lowest position on the scale.

> [...] *śṛṅgāriṇām eva svadata iti | tad upādhiś cāyam upajāyamāno rasas tridhā vikhyāyate | prakṛṣṭo bhāvarūpa ābhāsaś ca | tatra – yaḥ kathāśarīravyāpina uttamanāyakasya tathāvidha eva viṣaye jāyate sa prakṛṣṭaḥ | madhyamasya ya upajāto (jāyate) na prakarṣam āsādayati sa bhāvarūpaḥ | yaś ca tiraścāṃ pratināyakādīnāṃ copajāyate sa śṛṅgārābhāsaḥ |* (ŚP p. 616 ll. 18-23)

> And it is only those persons endowed with passion who can savor this *rasa* when it comes to be manifested by the fully developed stable emotions. [...] Rasa, which arises through such conditioning factors, is of three sorts: "developed," "in the form of an emotion," and "semblance of *rasa*." A developed *rasa* is what the leading character, the protagonist who dominates the narrative, experiences in reference to a commensurate object of affect. Rasa that remains in the form of an emotion is what a supporting character experiences and is not fully developed. Semblance of *rasa* is what the antagonist experiences, or what is ascribed to an animal (Pollock 2016: 126-127).

2.4. Vidyādhara: *Ekāvalī* (13th-14th century)

After Bhoja, the question of the admissibility of animal characters as the locus of *rasa* is addressed again by Vidyādhara in his *Ekāvalī* (EV), composed in Kalinga, at the court of King Narasiṃha, between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century.[15]

Regarding *rasa*, Vidyādhara aligns himself with the theoretical framework elaborated by Abhinavagupta. More specifically, with regard to the place of its arousal, Vidyādhara, referring to the dramatic art, explicitly states that *rasa* cannot come into being in the character nor in the actor who performs it, but only in the spectator of the work:

> *tatra rasasvarūpam eva prathamaṃ nirūpyate || vibhāvair lalanādibhir ālambanakāraṇair aṅkuritaḥ* [...] *uddīpanakāraṇaiḥ kandalito 'nubhāvair* [...] *pratītipaddhatimadhyāropito vyabhicāribhiś* [...] *pallavitaḥ* [...] *dhvananābhidhānābhinavavyāpāraparirambhanirbharatayānukāryānukartṛgatatvaparihāreṇa sāmājikānāṃ vāsanātmatayā sthitaḥ sthāyī ratyādiko bhāva eva* [...] *śṛṅgārādiko raso 'bhidhīyate* (EV, p. 86 ll. 6-10, p. 87 ll. 1, 5-7, p. 88 l. 3)

> First we shall describe the essential nature of *rasa*. When a stable emotion like desire and so on starts to sprout thanks to the foundational factors [...]; branches out owing to the stimulant factors

[15] A century after its composition, the famous Mallinātha composed a commentary on the *Ekāvalī* entitled *Taralāṭīkā*, which is included in the edition consulted for this article (Krishnamoorthy 1903). Although important, Mallinātha's commentary does not add anything significant to the passages of Vidyādhara's text given here and has, therefore, been ignored.

> […]; becomes apprehensible because of the reactions […]; begins to blossom with the transitory emotions […]; existing in the tight embrace of a unique function called implicature, as a predisposition in the audience, having nothing to do with character or actor: when the stable emotion achieves this state, it is termed the erotic or other *rasa* (Pollock 2016: 249-250).

Vidyādhara's considerations regarding the possibility of *rasa* being aroused through the representation of an animal character contain two points of considerable interest. Firstly, after defining semblance of *rasa* (*rasābhāsa*) as the form of *rasa* that arises from a stable emotion operating through impropriety (*anaucityena*), Vidyādhara excludes the possibility that an animal character can only engender such a *rasābhāsa*, with an obvious critical reference to Bhoja's earlier thesis. Secondly, Vidyādhara goes so far as to assert that 'even animals have *rasa*' (*tiraścām apy asty eva rasaḥ*), a statement so bold that it seems to go beyond the assumptions he himself made earlier, according to which *rasa* can only exist in spectators, not in characters. As shown below, this position will attract him the caustic criticism of another theorist, Siṃhabhūpāla.

> […] *sthāyino 'naucityena pravṛttatvāt tad ābhāsa eva | apare tu rasābhāsaṃ tiryakṣu pracakṣate tan na parīkṣākṣamam | teṣv api vibhāvādisaṃbhavāt | vibhāvādijñānaśūnyas tiryañco na bhājanaṃ bhavitum arhanti rasasyeti cen na | manuṣyeṣv api keṣucit tathābhūteṣu rasaviṣayabhāvābhāvaprasaṅgāt | vibhāvādisaṃbhavo hi rasaṃ prati prayojako na vibhāvādijñānam | tataś ca tiraścām apy asty eva rasaḥ |* (EV p. 106 ll. 4-9)

> […] where the stable emotion is operating through impropriety, we have semblance of *rasa*. Some assert that in the case of animals there can only be semblance of *rasa*, but that position cannot withstand scrutiny, since the aesthetic elements can function in the case of animals too. It is wrong to argue that since animals are devoid of awareness of the foundational factor and other aesthetic elements they are not an appropriate receptacle of *rasa*. For some human beings can be equally unaware, and we would then be forced to deny that they too can be loci of *rasa*. Here again, it is the sheer presence of the aesthetic elements that actuates the *rasa*, not awareness of them as aesthetic elements. So animals can indeed have *rasa* (Pollock 2016: 254-255).

As an illustration of this, Vidyādhara concludes the passage by once again giving as an example a stanza from *Kumārasambhava*, precisely one of the two stanzas quoted at the opening of this article (Kum 3.37, see above),[16] commenting on it as follows:

[16] The text quoted in the *Ekāvalī* (Krishnamoorthy 1903: 106) differs from that presented at the beginning of this article (Smith 2005: 106) only in a minor detail, where it reads *saraḥpaṅkajareṇugandhi* instead of *sarāt paṅkaja°*.

> *atra gajenālambanavibhāvena janitā vasantādibhir uddīpanavibhāvair uddīpitā surabhigaṇḍūṣajala-dānānubhāvaprakāśitā irṣādibhir vyabhicāribhir upacitā kareṇoḥ saṃbhogaśṛṅgāritāṃ pratipannaiva ratiḥ* | (EV p. 107 ll. 1-3)
>
> Here the bull elephant is the foundational factor that engenders the stable emotion desire; the springtime and so on are the stimulant factors that stimulate it; the giving of the fragrant water from the cow elephant's trunk is the reaction that manifests it; the joy and so on are the transitory emotions that enhance it. Thereby the desire achieves the state of the erotic *rasa* enjoyed (Pollock 2016, 254-255).

2.5. Vidyānātha: *Pratāparudrīya* (first half of the 14th century)

In the first half of the 14th century, Vidyānātha composed his *Pratāparudrayaśobhūṣaṇa*, more commonly known as *Pratāparudrīya* (PR), in honour of Pratāpa, king of Warangal (Andhra Pradesh), at whose court he worked. Vidyānātha's speculation on the *rasa* is not particularly fruitful: reconnecting with the viewpoints that had been expressed by Kuntaka and Bhoja centuries earlier, he (again) unhesitatingly locates the locus of the *rasa* in the character**:**

> *atra raso nāyakāśraya eva | yadiparaṃ nipuṇanaṭaceṣṭayā tathāvidhakāvyaśravaṇabalena ca sāmājikaiḥ sākṣād bhāvyate tadā paragatasyāpi rasasya samyagbhāvanayā paratra niratiśayānandajananam aviruddham* | (PR p. 205 ll. 1-3)
>
> Here we would note that the substratum of *rasa* is the character and the character alone. There is nothing contradictory, however, about the fact that *rasa* should be visibly "actualized" for the audience by the actions of a talented actor or from listening to a great work of poetry; and that accordingly *rasa*, albeit located in one person (the character), might generate pure bliss in another (the viewer/reader) through proper "actualization" (Pollock 2016: 257).

Vidyānātha's contribution to the debate on the role of animals in the arousal of *rasa* is also modest. In the section devoted to *rasa* (*rasaprakaraṇa*), Vidyānātha retrieves the concept of *rasābhāsa* from Bhoja, distinguishes three types, and assigns that which arises from animal characters (and lowly human beings, *mleccha*) to the third type:

> *śṛṅgāravīraraudrādbhutānāṃ lokottaranāyakāśrayatvena paripoṣātiśayaḥ | ata eva śṛṅgārasya mlecchādi-viṣayatve tv ābhāsatvam | tathā coktam —*
> *ekatraivānurāgaś cet tiryaṅmlecchagato 'pi vā |*
> *yoṣito bahusaktiś ced rasābhāsas tridhā mataḥ ||* (PR p. 160 ll. 7-10)
>
> In the case of the sentiments like love, heroic, terrific and marvellous etc., there will be the full development (of sentiment or *rasa*) as they are connected with the heroes (heroines also) of

> exceptional merit. That is (the reason) why in the case of the sentiment love it is called semblance (*ābhāsa*) if love is depicted with regard to an outcaste. This is said:
>
> "The *rasābhāsa* is said to be of three types 1) if love is only one sided, 2) if it is depicted in connection with animals and lowcaste people and 3) if a woman loves many men" (Ramamurthi, Matha 1993: 131-132).

Further on, as an illustrative example of *rasābhāsa* originating in animal characters, Vidyānātha quotes the following stanza, by an unknown author:

> *prasādagarbhavalabhīṣu kapotapālyāṃ*
> *pārāvatīṃ ramaṇacumbitacañcukoṭim* |
> *āvirbhavatsuratakūjitaraktakaṇṭhīm*
> *ālokya kākativibhuḥ smitam ātanoti* || 129 || (PR p. 200 ll. 11-14)
>
> The lord of the Kakati, having noticed the female pigeon whose beak was kissed by its beloved and who possessed a pleasant throat due to warblings of the rising dalliances, is smiling (Ramamurthi, Matha 1993: 169).

2.6. Siṃhabhūpāla: *Rasārṇavasudhākara* (second half of the 14th century)

The review of theorists presented in this article ends with the work of another ruler, Siṃhabhūpāla, who, in the second half of the 14th century, reigned over a small principality in today's Andhra Pradesh. Siṃhabhūpāla is the author of a treatise entitled *Rasārṇavasudhākara* (RAS), in which the issue of the relationship between animal characters and *rasa* is addressed directly and in some detail. Like Bhoja before him, Siṃhabhūpāla assigns the *rasa* aroused by animal characters to the category of *rasābhāsa* 'semblance of *rasa*.'

> *atra śṛṅgārarasasya arāgāt anekarāgāt tiryagrāgāt mlecchārāgāc ceti caturvidham ābhāsabhūyastvam* | (RAS p. 293 ll. 8-9)
>
> The erotic *rasa*, to take that case, becomes predominantly a semblance in four different ways: from unrequited passion; from passion for more than one person; from passion being represented between animals; or from its being represented between the uncultured (Pollock 2016: 271).
>
> *tiryagrāgād yathā –*
> *madhu dvirephaḥ kusumaikapātre papau priyāṃ svām anuvartamānaḥ* |
> *śṛṅgeṇa saṃsparśanimīlitākṣīṃ mṛgīm akaṇḍūyata kṛṣṇasāraḥ* || (RAS p. 297 ll. 4-6 [= Kum 3.36])
>
> Here is an example of semblance of the erotic *rasa* when passion is represented between animals:

> A bee drank honey from a flower cup, after his beloved had drunk, and with his horn a black buck scratched his mate, who closed her eyes at his touch (Pollock 2016: 273).

To exemplify the *rasābhāsa* that arises from animal characters, Siṃhabhūpāla quotes stanza 3.36 of the *Kumārasambhava*: in Kālidāsa's poem, this stanza immediately precedes the one that was quoted by Vidyādhara in the *Ekāvalī* (Kum 3.37) to demonstrate that, through the representation of animal characters, 'the desire achieves the state of the erotic *rasa* enjoyed' (see above). This contiguity is not accidental: in fact, in the following passages of the *Rasārṇavasudhākara*, Siṃhabhūpāla proceeds to emphatically reject Vidyādhara's viewpoint, lashing out at him and his theories with direct attacks, sometimes aimed at ridiculing him.

> *nanu tiryaṅmlecchagatayor ābhāsatvaṃ na yujyate | tayor vibhāvādisaṃbhavāt | āsvādayogyatāpratīter iti cet na | bho mlecchārasavādin utkalādhipateḥ śṛṅgārarasābhimānino narasiṃhadevasya cittam anuvartamānena vidyādhareṇa kavinā bāḍham abhyantarīkṛto 'si | evaṃ khalu samarthitam ekāvalyām anena* – [...][17] (RAS p. 297 ll. 17-19, p. 298 ll. 1-2)

> The proponent of the view that *rasa* does indeed exist in the uncultured might here object: passion in animals or the uncultured should not be classified as semblance, "since the aesthetic elements can function in the case of animals too," and we apprehend their capacity for savoring *rasa*. Poor fellow, I can see you are an intimate of the poet Vidyadhara, that obsequious attendant of Narasimhadeva, King of Utkala, self-styled master of the literary erotic. Here is how Vidyadhara has justified his view in the Single Strand: [...]' (Pollock 2016: 273).

Although Pollock informs us that the passage may be less derisive in tone than his translation would lead one to think (2016: 406 n. 192), Siṃhabhūpāla's open disapproval of Vidyādhara's thinking on this point remains unaffected. Generally speaking, one of the most interesting and innovative aspects of the *Rasārṇavasudhākara* is precisely the treatment of the concept of *rasābhāsa*, on which Siṃhabhūpāla reflects at length and of which he proposes a new and more articulate definition than that which had been provided by Bhoja. At least in those cases in which *rasābhāsa* arises from unrequited love (the first of the four ways in which it can be aroused, see above), Siṃhabhūpāla's reflection does not seem to imply a judgement of value on the work that contains it: after all, the narrative core of *Rāmāyaṇa* itself revolves around the description of Rāvaṇa's unrequited love for Sītā, but it would be unthinkable to question the poetic greatness of Vālmīki's poem (Pollock 2016: 269-270). Confining the present

[17] Here Siṃhabhūpāla quotes the passage from the Ekāvalī quoted above, from *apare tu* to *tiraścām apy asty eva rasaḥ* (RAS, p. 298 ll. 3-7 = EV, p. 106 ll. 4-9).

considerations to the *rasābhāsa* arising from animal characters, it is interesting to follow the thread of the arguments through which Siṃhabhūpāla challenges Vidyādhara's viewpoint:

> *na tāvat tiraścāṃ vibhāvatvam upapadyate | śṛṅgāre hi samujjvalasya śucino darśanīyasyaiva vastuno muninā vibhāvatvenāmnānāt | tiraścām udvartanamajjanākalparacanādyabhāvāt ujjvalaśuci-darśanīyatvānām asaṃbhāvanā prasiddhaiva | atha svajātiyogyair dharmaiḥ kariṇāṃ kariṇīṃ prati vibhāvatvam iti cet na | tasyāṃ kakṣyāyāṃ kariṇāṃ kariṇīrāgaṃ prati kāraṇatvaṃ na punar vibhāvatvam | kiṃ ca jātiyogyair dharmair vastuno na vibhāvatvam | api tu bhāvakacittollāsahetubhiḥ rativiśiṣṭair eva | [...] kiṃ ca vibhāvādisaṃbhavo hi rasaṃ prati prayojako na vibhāvādijñānam*[18] *ity etad na yujyate |* (RAS p. 298 ll. 9-16, p. 299 ll. 2-3)

> In response [to Vidyādhara],[19] first of all, it makes no sense that animals can be foundational factors. The sage has decreed that, in the case of the erotic *rasa*, a foundational factor can only be something brilliant, pure, and beautiful, and it is, as everyone knows, completely inconceivable for animals to be thus, since they engage in none of the requisite practices: lathering their bodies with fragrant unguents, performing ablutions, decorating themselves with ornaments, and so on. And it is mistaken to argue that a bull elephant can be a foundational factor for a cow elephant by virtue of properties innate to the species, because on that argument the bull would be functioning as an actual *cause* of the cow's passion, not as a foundational *factor*.[20] Moreover, something becomes a foundational factor thanks not to the properties specific to its species, but to things that expand the mind of the viewer/reader who "actualizes" the experience, properties that have something desirable about them. [...] Furthermore, it is false to claim that "it is the sheer presence of the aesthetic elements that actuates the *rasa*, not awareness of them as aesthetic elements" (Pollock 2016: 273-274).

According to Siṃhabhūpāla, the erotic passion of an animal character can at most be the cause (*kāraṇa*) of a response from its animal counterpart (in the work of art), but it cannot constitute the foundational factor (*vibhāva*) necessary for the arousal of the *rasa* in the audience, since the reader (or spectator) cannot actualise that passion in himself. Looking at things from Siṃhabhūpāla's point of view, then, Vidyādhara's opinion is (the erroneous) consequence of a reflection confined to the world of the characters, whereas Siṃhabhūpāla's arises from shifting the focus of enquiry to the experience of the recipient.

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[18] *kiṃ ca* [...] *vibhāvādijñānam* is a direct quotation from the *Ekāvalī* (EV p. 106 ll. 8-9).

[19] Siṃhabhūpāla replies here to Vidyādhara, who, in turn, is refuting the *rasābhāsa* theory elaborated by Bhoja (see above): *apare tu rasābhāsaṃ tiryakṣu pracakṣate tan na parīkṣākṣamam* [...] (EV p. 106 ll. 4-9), 'Some assert that in the case of animals there can only be semblance of *rasa* [...]' (Pollock 2016: 254-255).

[20] Siṃhabhūpāla refers here to Kum 3.37, cited by Vidyādhara in support of his hypothesis.

3. Conclusions

This paper provides an overview of the views of leading Indian theorists active between 10th and 14th century on the question of whether animal characters can represent the locus of *rasa*. From the analysis of the data collected in the preceding pages, four interesting aspects emerge.

Firstly, this survey provides us with confirmation that a debate among pre-modern Indian theorists concerning the relationship between animal characters and *rasa* arousal did indeed take place, and that this debate gave rise to a dense web of mutual quotations, cross-references, reciprocal approvals and refutations – both allusive and overt.

The second aspect that emerges is that this debate lasted for the entire span of the four centuries examined here, from the second half of the 10th century to the end of the 14th century – but we know that it continued even later, at least until Bhīmasena Dīkṣita (first half of the 18th century; Pollock 2001: 226 no. 33, Pollock 2016: 395 no. 318).

The third element brought out by this article is the fact that this long debate did not polarise into the opposition between two parties entrenched in crystallised positions, but instead gave rise to a variety of opinions and views. In this regard, it seems to me particularly significant that, in order to define the *rasa* aroused by animal characters, several thinkers have agreed on the category of 'semblance of *rasa*,' but have at the same time felt the need to re-signify this concept, providing different interpretations of it.

Finally, the fourth and last consideration concerns the figure of Abhinavagupta. On the one hand, this study confirms the revolutionary scope and crucial importance of the theoretical framework he elaborated for the subsequent development of Indian thought on literary art, even in relation to such a rather peripheral aspect as the one dealt with here. His thought is a watershed: there is a before and an after. Indeed, this is also what may be gathered from the present study: he is the first to concede that *rasa* can be fully aroused also by characters in animal form—in opposition to Kuntaka's negative judgement, which, presumably, was the dominant belief until then. After Abhinavagupta, his viewpoint will be taken up by other thinkers, who follow in his footsteps (e.g. Vidyādhara). At the same time, however, the overview presented in this article shows how Abhinavagupta's thought on the role played by animal characters in the arousal of *rasa* never became exclusively dominant; on the contrary, most of the theorists presented in the preceding pages expressed divergent, sometimes antithetical, opinions to his inclusivist standpoint.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this article will be the starting point for more comprehensive future studies. The first steps in this direction could be taken simply by transcending the limits that were imposed on the present study: the chronological ones, in order to allow the investigation of treatises

composed after the end of the 14th century, and the typological ones, which would open up the investigation to other literary genres besides treatises on poetics, starting with commentaries on the very treatises examined here and commentaries on *kāvya* works.

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The flight of the antelope

Outlining two different perspectives on the aesthetic reception of a verse from Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala*

Luigi Hari Tehel Singh

This article will explore the aesthetic reception of a verse from the first act of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala* as evidenced by the works of Kuntaka, Abhinavagupta and Rāghavabhaṭṭa. In doing so, this research critically examines the problem of how this one verse, which describes an antelope fleeing from Duṣyanta during his hunt, was employed as an example to illustrate two very different models of aesthetics: one which implicitly accepted that animal characters could evoke *rasa* and another which aimed to explicitly exclude animals from such a possibility.

Keywords: Indian aesthetics, theory of *rasa*, *kāvya*, *nāṭaka*, Sanskrit literature, Sanskrit theatre, South Asian studies, animal studies.

1. Introduction[1]

udghātinī bhūmir iti mayā raśmisaṃyamanād rathasya mandīkṛto vegaḥ.

'The terrain is uneven, by curbing in the reins I have reduced the chariot's speed'

(Somadeva 2006: 59)

In a similar spirit, the metaphorical path before us is difficult to tread and requires a bit of attention. The antelope's lucky escape from Duṣyanta's arrows has somehow left readers of Kālidāsa's (c. fourth to fifth century) masterful play, the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, in a dazzling cloud of dust. As chance would have it, by exploring the various positions taken by the participants in the debate on whether or not animal characters in literary works can evoke an aesthetic experience or are themselves receptacles of *rasa*, has led me to follow the tracks left by Duṣyanta 's chase and realise that this exemplary scene from the history of Sanskrit literature was subject to very different understandings. The scope of this paper

[1] This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU – Line M4.C2.1.1 – PRIN 2022, project "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-Human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," CUP J53D23011210006.

is to invite the attentive reader to slow down and ponder the reasons behind their personal response to this scene, for we will attempt to unravel the different threads of interpretation spun by three illustrious authors: Kuntaka (c. tenth century), Abhinavagupta (c. late tenth to early eleventh century) and Rāghavabhaṭṭa (c. fifteenth to sixteenth century). The first two are famous for their works on aesthetics, building on the observations found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and occupy opposing sides of the debate on the aesthetic potential of animals. Rāghavabhaṭṭa, on the other hand, while not technically a theorist of aesthetics is a well-known commentator of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. What brings these three personages together on this occasion is that each of them has interesting things to say about the same verse from Kālidāsa's play:

> *grīvābhaṅgābhirāmaṃ muhur anupatati syandane baddhadṛṣṭiḥ*
> *paścārdhena praviṣṭaḥ śarapatanabhayād bhūyasā pūrvakāyam |*
> *darbhair ardhāvalīḍhaiḥ śramavivṛtamukhabhraṃśibhiḥ kīrṇavartmā*
> *paśyodagraplutatvād viyati bahutaraṃ stokam urvyāṃ prayāti* || 1.7 ||
>
> Gracefully twisting its neck, darting its eyes repeatedly towards the ensuing chariot,
> With its haunches forcefully drawn into its forebody out of fear of the falling arrows,
> The path scattered with half chewed *darbha* grass, falling from its mouth gaping from exhaustion,
> Look! With its lofty leaps [the antelope] moves more through the sky and hardly on the ground.

The verse describes the antelope in the midst of its flight as Duṣyanta follows in pursuit. The four *pada*s of the verse elegantly isolate four images of the antelope's flight. The first describes its vigilance, as it repeatedly glances back to the chariot following it. The second describes the urgency and forcefulness of its effort to escape, drawing its hind legs into the front of the body as it darts away. The third *pada* paints an image of its desperation as the path it has traversed is left littered by the half-eaten grass left to fall from its gaping mouth. Finally, the fourth *pada* widens the view and describes its great leaps which make it appear to be flying through the sky rather than running on the ground. Besides the physical description of the antelope, the verse also gives us two psychological cues of its emotional state: it is fatigued (*śrama*) and fearful (*bhaya*) of being struck by Duṣyanta 's arrows.

Kālidāsa's retelling of Śakuntalā's story begins with the description of Duṣyanta in the middle of a hunting campaign. Previous versions of the story (Thapar (2011: 18) describe the hunt as a grand and bloody event: Duṣyanta sets out in the company of a large party of soldiers and generals, and the animals that perish by their hand are numerous. While this description is not present in the play, the audience would have probably been aware of this context. Kālidāsa picks up the story after the hunt has already begun and focuses the attention of the audience solely on Duṣyanta and his charioteer after they have left the rest of their hunting party behind in pursuit of a graceful antelope. The grandeur of

the scene is portrayed by Duṣyanta's might as he is likened to Pināki̇n,[2] the name given to Śiva when he takes on the role of a hunter and brandishes his bow, Pināka, while the dramatic tension and violence is encapsulated within Kālidāsa's masterful description of the antelope.

Subsequent commentators have focused their attention for the most part on the above verse. This holds true both for authors of aesthetic treatises and commentators. For all, it seems, the description of the antelope's flight held particular importance. Before drawing any distinctions in the interpretation and uses made of this verse by the three authors discussed here, it should be made clear that all three of them recognise the literary value of this verse and hold it in high regard. The distinctions that will emerge in the subsequent paragraphs will allow us to observe how different authors characterised the importance of the verse and understood the aesthetic relevance of the antelope described in it.

2. The common view: *Abhinavagupta āha*

One of the most important voices to have made use of this verse in their work is undoubtedly Abhinavagupta in the *Abhinavabhāratī.* Having expounded and criticised the theories of previous thinkers, Abhinavagupta presents his own account of what *rasa* is and how it comes about. In this portion of the text, Abhinavagupta provides three examples of verses that he considered to be particularly evocative. The first one is precisely this verse from Kālidāsa's play and it is subsequently used as the basis for his explanation of the transformation of a *sthāyibhāva* into its corresponding *rasa.* The scheme elaborated by Abhinavagupta highlights the supermundane nature of the emotion perceived in the representation, be it literary or dramatic. However, an aspect that is easily overlooked is the fact that in choosing to use this verse as a paradigmatic example, Abhinavagupta admits not only that the verse engenders *rasa* in the spectator/reader, but also that the character to which the specific *rasa* is associated is the antelope. Abhinavagupta makes no special mention of it, nor does he seem aware of the fact that other authors might not have agreed with his reading. For him, the verse is an obvious example of the frightening (*bhayānaka*) *rasa.*

Essentially, what Abhinavagupta points out is that the emotion encountered in the context of reading a *kāvya* or watching a *nāṭaka* differs from the ordinary emotions which present themselves to concrete subjects in their everyday lives. Ordinary or worldly emotions such as 'I am scared' (*bhīto 'haṃ*) or 'he is scared' (*bhīto 'yaṃ*) when experienced within a given context and associated with the

[2] *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.6: *kṛṣṇasāre dadac cakṣus tvayi cādhijyakārmuke | mṛgānusāriṇaṃ sākṣāt paśyāmīva pināki̇nam ||*

specifically characterised individuals give rise to a series of subsequent impulses to action driven either by desire, aversion or indifference. This, Abhinavagupta states, is precisely not the case when we experience the emotions evoked from a representation. To better highlight the point made by Abhinavagupta, it would be best to turn directly to the specific passage of the *Abhinavabhāratī* where he discusses this problem. The passage was famously edited and translated by Raniero Gnoli in his *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (1968) and more recently also by Sheldon Pollock in his *Rasa Reader* (2016). Gnoli's edition is still by far the most reliable and is the basis for this discussion. However, upon closer examination, both translations appear to have misunderstood a small detail in the text which emerged as problematic in the context of this present study.

The problem has to do with the term *trāsaka* in the sentence: *tasyāṃ ca yo mṛgapotakādir bhāti tasya viśeṣarūpatvābhāvād bhīta iti trāsakasyāpāramārthikatvād bhayam eva paraṃ*. A *nomen agentis* of the word *trāsa,* another word for fear, the word *trāsaka* indicates the one who is responsible for causing fear. The error that appears to have been made is to overcomplicate the meaning of this word in this context, a tendency that is easy to fall into given the initial ambiguity of its role in this sentence. Without a clear referent in sight, there arise at least three different possible ways of understanding this term. Gnoli's (1968: 55) translation renders *trāsaka* as follows: "the actor, who [playing the role of the deer], frightens [the spectators]."[3] This translation attempts to make sense of the ambiguous construction of the sentence and the unclear referent of the word trāsaka by supplying information which seems at first sight to respect the general idea of Abhinavagupta's theory of aesthetic reception. As the fear is being perceived by an audience, it seems plausible that the one causing the emotion of fear to arise must be the actor playing the character that is experiencing it, *i.e.* the antelope. This solution, however, raises important problems both with regards to the history and practice of theatre in South Asia,[4] and with regards to the structure of Abhinavagupta's sentence. The more pertinent point here is that this translation does not follow the point being made by Abhinavagupta. It is a little hard to see, but the main sentence should be *tasyāṃ yo bhāti tasya bhīta iti bhayam eva param* 'in this [perception], the-being-afraid of the one that appears is nothing more than fear itself.' In other words, this sentence concerns the production of the *sthāyibhāva*, of a generalised notion, of fear (*bhaya*), from the concrete representation of a character that is afraid. Everything else present in the sentence is either circumstantial or explains the conditions for this process of generalisation: the one that is afraid must

[3] Pollock's translation skips over this ambiguity and simplifies the sentence. See Pollock (2016: 194).

[4] This point will be discussed in greater detail in the section dealing with Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary on *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7.

be devoid of particularity and the one causing the fear must be unreal. Such a generalisation can only ever happen in the context of a literary and dramatic representation of such a scene. This process will later be juxtaposed and contrasted with real-world instances when we perceive someone who is afraid being terrorised by a real cause. Consequently, the most appropriate way to understand *trāsaka* in this context is simply as the 'the one causing fear,' but not to the audience and instead to the character that is represented as being afraid. In the specific case of A*bhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7, this would apply to the character of Duṣyanta who is the cause of the antelope's fright.[5]

Having discussed these problems, I present here the relevant portion of the Abhinavabhāratī drawn from Gnoli's edition and a modified version of his translation with my changes indicated in italics.

> *tasya ca "grīvābhaṅgābhirāmam" iti "umāpi nīlālaka" iti "haras tu kiṃcit" ityādivākyebhyo vākyārthapratipatter anantaraṃ mānasī sākṣātkārātmikāpahastitatattadvākyopāttakālādivibhāgā tāvat pratītir upajāyate | tasyāṃ ca yo mṛgapotakādir bhāti tasya viśeṣarūpatvābhāvād bhīta iti trāsakasyāpāramārthikatvād bhayam eva paraṃ deśakālādyanāliṅgitam, tata eva bhīto 'haṃ bhīto 'yaṃ śatrur vayasyo madhyastho vetyādipratyayebhyo duḥkhasukhādikṛtahānādibuddhyantarodayaniyamavattayā vighnabahulebhyo vilakṣaṇaṃ nirvighnapratītigrāhyaṃ sākṣād iva hṛdaye niviśamānaṃ cakṣuṣor iva viparivartamānaṃ bhayānako rasaḥ* (Gnoli 1968: 13).

> In such a person hearing phrases such as, "Gracefully bending his neck...," "Even Umā, dropping the golden *karṇikāra*...," "The firmness of Hara...," there appears, immediately after the perception of their literal sense, a perception of a different order, a mental perception consisting in a direct experience which completely eliminates the temporal distinction, etc. assumed by these sentences. *Besides, due to the absence of particularity* (viśeṣarūpatva) *of the young antelope, etc. which appears in this [perception], [and] since the one causing fear* (trāsaka) *is ultimately unreal* (apāramārthika)*, [its] "being afraid"* (bhīta iti) *is simply and solely fear—fear in itself* (bhayam eva param)*, uncircumscribed by time, space, etc.* This perception of fear is of a different order from the [ordinary] perceptions "I am afraid, he—my enemy, my friend, anybody—is afraid"; for these are necessarily affected by the appearance of fresh mental movements (of shunning, etc.), consisting of pleasure, pain, etc. and just for this reason are full of obstacles (*vighna*). The sensation of the fear above mentioned, on the contrary, is the matter of cognition by a perception devoid of obstacles (*nirvighna*), and may be said to enter directly (*niviś*) into our hearts, to dance (*viparivṛt*) before our eyes: this is the terrible *Rasa*.[6]

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[5] This solution was arrived at after much reasoning and help from my mentors and colleagues. I must especially thank Saverio Marchignoli with whom I had the pleasure of reading through the *Abhinavabhāratī's* section on *rasa* and who pointed me towards a solution to this problem. I must also thank Daniele Cuneo, who was generous enough to take the time to give his feedback on this solution and who later informed me that he had arrived at a similar translation when working on his doctoral dissertation. If there is any merit to this proposed reading, it is all due to their generosity in sharing their knowledge, any defects are the fruit of my own misunderstandings.

[6] Translation adapted from the one present in Gnoli (1968: 55-56).

One problem that Abhinavagupta does tackle is whether it is possible for the process of identification to take place even with dissimilar classes of beings. The objection presented in the text is framed around the question of a human audience being able to identify with the emotions of divine characters.[7] This problem was discussed elsewhere in the *Abhinavabhāratī* and more extensively in the *Locana*, his commentary to Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* II.4. The problem is an interesting one and it probably played an important role in determining whether non-human animals can be considered to produce *rasa*. Abhinavagupta resolves the problem by appealing to the theory of *vāsanā*s or latent impressions that each being carries from an infinite number of preceding rebirths. He argues that since in our infinite past lives we have lived as all possible types of being, even though we are currently human we carry in us the latent impressions necessary for us to identify with any type of character represented in a literary work.[8] The recourse to the theory of *vāsanā*s presented in *Yogasūtra* IV 9 and 10 raises the question of why the possibility of identifying with dissimilar classes of beings was not more widely accepted by theorists.

Having said this, it is all the more relevant that this debate does not emerge when referring to the verse from the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. This can probably be seen as indicating the lack of contention surrounding the interpretation of verse 1.7 of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, at least in Abhinavagupta's immediate cultural and intellectual surroundings. Furthermore, the use of this verse as the principal example in delineating his own position could be an indication that it would not have been the subject of any significant interpretative disagreements. From this lack of contention, we can tentatively conclude that Abhinavagupta was not aware of other differing interpretations of this verse, specifically, or objections to idea that *rasa* can also be evoked from non-human animal characters.

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[7] *bhaṭṭanāyakas tv āha | raso na pratīyate, notpadyate, nābhivyajyate | svagatena hi pratītau karuṇe duḥkhitatvaṃ syāt | na ca sā pratītir yuktā sītāder avubhāvātvāt, svakāntāsmṛtyasaṃvedanāt, devatādau sādhāraṇīkaraṇayogyatvāt, samudrollaṅghanāder asādhāraṇyāt |* (ed. Gnoli 1968, 10). "Again, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka says :—Rasa is neither perceived (*pratī*), nor produced (*utpad*), nor manifested (*abhivyaj*). For if it were perceived by the spectator as really present in himself, in the pathetic Rasa he would necessarily experience pain. Again, such a perception does not stand to reason, because Sītā, etc., does not play the role of a determinant [as regards the spectator]; because no memory of his own beloved one does arise in the spectator's consciousness (while he looks at Sītā); because [the representation of] deities, etc., cannot logically arouse (in the spectator) the state of generality (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*) [required for the aesthetic experience]; because ocean-crossings, etc., [are extraordinary undertakings, and thus] fall short of generality (*sādhāraṇya*)" (trans. Gnoli 1968: 43-44).

[8] "Everybody's mind is indeed characterized by the most various latent impressions; for as it has been said, 'As the desire is permanent, these are beginningless (*Yogasūtra* IV 10),' and, 'On the ground that the remembrances and the impressions are homogenous there is an uninterrupted succession of latent impressions, even if they are separated by birth, space, and time (*Yogasūtra* IV 9).' Therefore, it is established that Rasa is perceived. This perception, in its turn, presents himself in the form of relishing." (Gnoli 1968, 112). The same passage has also been translated in Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan (1990: 225).

3. Uncovering an uncommon view: following the antelope through Kuntaka's eyes

Kuntaka's views on aesthetics are decidedly different from the ones held by Abhinavagupta. While Abhinavagupta can be understood as reformulating the *rasa* theory into a theory of aesthetic reception, *rasa* being considered as synonymous with *rasanā*, the act of savouring a spectator engages in, Kuntaka holds a diametrically opposite externalist and maybe even substantialist[9] view of *rasa* as something that inheres in the literary/theatrical character.[10] Consequently, Kuntaka's examination of the origination of *rasa* is centred on the appropriateness of the receptacle in which *rasa* is situated in a given work. The receptacle in Kuntaka's case is the character in a work, or rather, more generally the object of a capable poet's creation and description. Ultimately, the aesthetic value of a work is determined by the poet's capacity to render the material of their work in good taste.

The focus placed on the object of description leads Kuntaka to enumerate all that can be described by the poet; an enumeration that categorises the various objects in two basic types: sentient beings and insentient objects. Sentient beings are further divided into two classes: the primarily sentient, which include human beings, *deva*s and *asura*s; and beings with a second-grade sentience, which include animals and presumably other beings of a lower rebirth.

> *tatra pūrvaṃ prakārābhyāṃ dvābhyām eva vibhidyate |*
> *surādisiṃhaprabhṛtiprādhānyetarayogataḥ || Vakroktijīvita* 3.6 ||
>
> In this regard, the first [kind of entities] is divided into two classes:
> that of gods etc. and that of lions and so forth [i.e. animals], which
> are [respectively] the main class and the other [i.e. the subordinate]
> class, in accordance with the order of enunciation (Franceschini 2025).
>
> *mukhyam akliṣṭaratyādiparipoṣamanoharam |*
> *svajātyucitahevākasamullekhojjvalaṃ param || Vakroktijīvita* 3.7 ||

[9] I borrow these terms from the field of contemporary Buddhist logico-epistemological studies as they seem to accurately highlight the distinction at play in this context. The disagreement over the status of *rasa*s has precisely to do with its status as an object of perception. Abhinavagupta holds that the perception at play is of a unique type as its object is not situated in a determinate time and space. Nevertheless, he stresses that aesthetic experience is first and foremost something that occurs in the perceiver and does not exist a priori. *Rasa* seems to be conceived very differently by Kuntaka and many other theorists who speak of it as a substantial object of perception which needs to inhere in a defined *āśraya*. Understood as a debate on the nature of perception, it can be seen as following similar lines to the general internalist-externalist divide in most debates in Indian epistemology.

[10] A more detailed account of Kuntaka's views can be found in Marco Franceschini's article in this same publication.

> The "primary" category is made beautiful by the enhancement of their unaffected desire and the like; the other becomes adorned when reference is made to the impulses appropriate to their particular species (Pollock 2016: 99).

This division of sentient beings into two qualitatively different classes based on the presumed psychological faculties of either class is the criterion adduced by Kuntaka to determine which characters produce *rasa* and which cannot.

Kuntaka understands *rasa* to be the transformation of a basic *bhāva* and requires that the characters themselves have the capacity to experience both the *bhāva* and the consequent *rasa*. This criterion restricts the possible possessors of *rasa* to those beings belonging to the primary class as they are considered as possessing a greater and better defined psychological depth, in other words they are considered capable of experiencing emotions and *rasa*s. The secondary class, on the other hand, appears to be considered incapable of truly experiencing emotions, reducing their capacity as aesthetically efficacious objects of poetic description. That being said, Kuntaka does discuss the function of these secondary beings within poetic and dramatic works.

In *Vakroktijīvita* 3.7, Kuntaka describes the manner in which a poet is to treat these beings within their work. Having implicitly denied any psychological depth to animals beyond a very basic sentience, their representation in *kāvya* can occur solely on the basis of instincts which are considered appropriate to their species (*svajātyucitahevāka*), and it is these that the poet endeavours to depict. Commenting on this verse, Kuntaka provides two examples to illustrate his point with regard to animals: in the first he quotes a verse describing a lion sitting majestically, emblematic of the calm authority exuded by the animal in question;[11] however, to our surprise, the second example he presents is the very verse from Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānśākuntala* discussed previously. Unfortunately, Kuntaka does not comment on the verses he quotes as examples in much detail and does not provide us with an explanation of his interpretation of the verse from the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. For his purposes, it seems, there was no need to provide a detailed exegesis of these verses.

[11] *kadācid etena ca pāriyātraguhāgṛhe mīlitalocanena | vyatyastahastadvitayopaviṣṭadaṃṣṭrāṅkurāñcaccibukam prasuptam* || 30 || "Once this lion on mount Pāriyātra was asleep in home-den with eyes closed; His jaws resting on the two crossed legs and his chin spread out by the pressure" (Krishnamoorthy 1977: 427).

3.1. The fearful antelope

The problem, in Kuntaka's eyes, is not the sentience of animals per se, but whether they are considered to be capable of experiencing stable emotions (*sthāyibhāva*). Kuntaka determines that the sentience of animals is fundamentally of a different kind, and while animals may feel emotions they are incapable of actually identifying them. The emotions felt by animals do not go beyond the spontaneous, instinctual response to a situation. When Kuntaka asserts that the description of the antelope fleeing in fright is nothing more than an instinctive action, the fear felt by the antelope is understood to be an expression of its instincts. In other words, animals are not capable of being aware of the emotion they are experiencing. In order to better understand this idea, one must look beyond the confines of this discussion and into the way in which certain animals were perceived in the literature of the time.

Just as we today have stock literary associations between certain animals and states of mind or qualities, some animals served a similar purpose in the literary culture of South Asia. One such association is the idea that the antelope's instinct is to be fearful and timid, an association that can be clearly found at a very early date in passages of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[12] This goes hand in hand with the characterisation of antelopes as the ideal prey: an elusive animal, that is constantly alert and flees at the slightest disturbance. This same characteristic is also employed when the shyness of a lover is compared to the timidity of an antelope.[13]

In Kuntaka's view, Kālidāsa's representation of the antelope in the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* is nothing more than a continuation of this very trope. The explicit mention of the fear (*bhaya*) felt by the animal does not pose a problem in his theory, as fear is commonly attested as being the instinctive behaviour of the antelope. What the animal lacks is the ability to be aware of the emotion it feels and to conceptualise it, thereby elevating it to the status of a *sthāyibhāva*. This step is one that the primary sentient beings are able to accomplish, allowing them to become receptacles of a *rasa*.

3.2. An alternative path for the antelope?

Kuntaka does not say much about *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7, but it is not all he says about the literary and aesthetic function of animals. The discussion is continued in the next verse of his work, *Vakroktijīvita* 3.8, in which he adds a further detail that momentarily complicates our understanding of Kuntaka's interpretation of the scene from Kālidāsa's play. In this verse, he adds that while animals and insentient

[12] *mṛgāṇāṃ tu bhayaṃ*. *Rāmāyaṇa* IV.58.9.

[13] See the work by Pieruccini in this same publication for a more detailed discussion of these associations.

objects like plants, cannot themselves be receptacles of *rasa*, they do serve the function of *rasoddīpana*. The term *rasoddīpana* is often used in aesthetic literature, but at present it is difficult to say whether there is any uniformity in the use of this term. Even in this case, Kuntaka's self-commentary does not come to our aid, but it is possible to gain an overall understanding of what he is trying to say from the examples he lists. Kuntaka has in mind all those instances where natural features, plants and animals are used by a poet to highlight or intensify the expression of a *rasa*. In other words, this verse discusses the allegorical use of naturalistic imagery to express and highlight an emotion being felt by one or more human characters.

The text can initially seem a little ambiguous and may lead one to believe that even animals in the previous examples can serve a similar function. However, upon further examination it becomes clear that the examples adduced for the verses, *Vakroktijīvita* 3.7 and 3.8, are quite different and do not point to any overlap in function[14]. Furthermore, trying to read the antelope from *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7 as an example of *rasoddīpaṇa* leads one to the very basic question regarding which other *rasa* is being highlighted by the antelope's fear and, more crucially, to whom does it pertain. The only other prominent character in the scene is the antelope's pursuer, King Duṣyanta , and a possible alternative to the *rasa* of fear (*bhayānaka*) could be the *rasa* of heroism (*vīrya*)[15], expressed by his prowess in the hunt. Unfortunately, such a hypothesis stumbles into more problems the longer it is stretched; not least due to the fact that it would force us to supply too many elements not directly present in the verse itself. Reasoning through this hypothesis did, however, lead to a couple of insights into the narrative structure and references of Kālidāsa's text, which will be touched upon in a later section.

[14] The examples Kuntaka presents when discussing verse 3.8 do not portray the emotions of autonomous animals. Instead, they focus on the emotion of a human or divine character that is intensified by the actions of an animal or other non-sentient natural phenomena. The examples include *Kumārasambhava* 3.2

'With a throat clear by tasting the mango-shoots,
When the he-cuckoo started his sweet song,
It turned out to be the order of Cupid
To break the rising pride of beloveds" (Krishnamoorthy 1977: 428),

which focuses on the love felt by humans and intensified by Kāma's influence on the natural world surrounding them.

[15] As stated by Boccali (Boccali, Sacha and Torella 2023: 260-261) and corroborated by the description of *vīrya* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *rasa* of heroism can also be expressed through the bravery, ferocity or cruelty of a character. This could, in principle, make it possible to consider the description of a hunting scene the locus for the *rasa* of heroism.

4. Rāghavabhaṭṭa, saviour of antelopes

Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* is fairly late, being written sometime between the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Its uniqueness stems from the detailed explanations it provides of various aspects of Kālidāsa's work, delving into both linguistic features of the work itself, but also providing explanations of the stylistic conventions of *nāṭaka*s and *kāvya* more generally. Of all the commentators on the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, Rāghavabhaṭṭa delves very systematically into an aesthetic analysis of verse 1.7 and I have attempted here to provide a first translation of this passage.

> *atra bhayānako raso vyaṅgyaḥ | tasya mṛgagataṃ bhayaṃ sthāyibhāvaḥ | duṣyantādhiṣṭhitasyandanālokanam ālambanavibhāvaḥ | tadanupatanaśarapatanautsukyādīny uddīpanavibhāvaḥ |*
>
> *grīvābhaṅgārdhabhakṣitatṛṇaskhalanaśuṣkoṣṭhakaṇṭhatvamukhavaivarṇyaśarīrasaṃkocāś cañcalādayo 'nubhāvāḥ | trāsaśramaśaṅkāvegādayo vyabhicāriṇaḥ | kampādayaḥ sātvikāḥ | etai raso vyajyate |*
>
> Here, the fearful *rasa* is made manifest. Its stable emotion is the fear belonging to the antelope. The sight of the chariot on which Duṣyanta is seated is the *ālambanavibhāva*. The anxiety, etc. caused by their pursuit and the falling arrows is the *uddīpanavibhāva*. Movements, etc. [such as] the bending of the neck, the falling half-eaten grass, the dryness of the lips and throat, the pallor of the face and the trembling body are the *anubhāva*s. Fear, fatigue, doubt, hurry, etc. are the *vyabhicārin*s. Trembling and the rest are the *sātvika*s. By means of these [factors] is *rasa* manifested.

This passage is very clearly aligned with Abhinavagupta's general view of the aesthetic quality of the verse, but is written in such a way that it can be seen to emphasise the production of *rasa* more clearly. Rāghavabhaṭṭa does not take the fact that verse 1.7 of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* produces a specific *rasa* for granted. This is evidenced by the way in which he structures this passage, emphasising the production of *rasa* through the repeated affirmation, both at the beginning and the end: *atra bhayānako rasaḥ vyaṅgayaḥ... etai raso vyajyate*. Furthermore, unlike the *Abhinavabhāratī*, this passage tries to provide the reader with evidence for the aesthetic quality of the verse by attempting to compile an exhaustive list of the aesthetic factors present within it. These two rhetorical elements can be seen to point to an understanding on the part of the author that this interpretation of the verse is not unanimously accepted by other scholars of *kāvya* and *alaṃkāraśāstra*. Rāghavabhaṭṭa is out to make a point, although the reason is not clear since he then moves to subsequent portions of the text, but unlike Abhinavagupta's use of the verse which takes the production of *rasa* for granted by utilising it as an example to illustrate his aesthetic theory more generally, Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary is almost an attempt to justify Abhinavagupta's reading of the verse by providing evidence in its support.

While Rāghavabhaṭṭa does not mention Abhinavagupta by name in the context of this passage, he does mention him positively in other parts of the text.[16] We can thus be fairly certain that his reading of this verse is influenced in large part by a commentarial tradition that was in line with Abhinavagupta's theory of *rasa*. That being said, Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary to this verse presents one clear oddity which is not easily explained if not read in light of the *Abhinavabhāratī*.

4.1. The case of an overzealous commentator

As was stated in the section dedicated to Abhinavagupta, the *Abhinavabhāratī* is not a commentary on the verse of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. It uses the verse as an example to elaborate a particular theory of what *rasa* is. In order to do so, it clearly formulates the discussion following the specificities found in the verse, and so begins by citing the antelope, and referencing its fear and the circumstances that caused it, leading up to the manner in which the emotion portrayed can then give rise to its corresponding *rasa*: *bhayānaka*. However, the way in which all these elements are discussed in this passage point to a general analysis that should, in theory, be applicable to all cases in which a *rasa* is evoked. Reading any of this passage as an explanation of what is occurring in Kālidāsa's work would be misleading.

Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary presents a couple of very specific assertions that are difficult to explain given the contents of the verse and its context. Both assertions have to do with the portrayal of the antelope in the scene in two closely related analytical categories applied by Rāghavabhaṭṭa: the *anubhāva*s and the *sāttvikabhāva*s. The *anubhāva*s are the consequent physical manifestations of a stable emotion that evidence its presence in a character. The list of *anubhāva*s follows the description of the scene portrayed by Kālidāsa quite closely, but deviates from it in a couple of important instances. It begins by listing elements which are very clearly present in the text, the bending of the neck and the falling half eaten grass, but then adds other elements which are not present in the scene, the dryness

[16] The extent to which Rāghavabhaṭṭa knew the *Abhinavabhārati* is something that will need to be further explored. At this point it is unclear whether Rāghavabhaṭṭa knew of Abhinavagupta's work solely through citations in the works of other authors, such as Hemacandra, or whether he had access to his work directly. What is certain for now is that every time he mentions Abhinavagupta, he mentions him as the author of the *Abhinavabhārati* or as the commentator on Bharata's work. Despite being few in number, Abhinavagupta does stand out from all the other authors mentioned by Rāghavabhaṭṭa as he is always mentioned with great veneration. See for example, *sūtramūlabharataṭīkākārābhinavaguptapādācārya...* (Kāvyatīrtha 1958: 6), or *abhinavabhāratyāṃ bharataṭīkāyām abhinavaguptācāryair...* (Kāvyatīrtha 1958: 20). Both of these mentions occur in the commentary to the First Act and so far one other mention has been found in the commentary to the Second Act (Kāvyatīrtha 1958: 64). It was not possible to undertake a careful examination of these mentions in their respective contexts as they were not directly related to the topic at hand.

of the lips and throat, the pallor of the face and the trembling body. The first of these, namely the dryness of the lips and throat, can be derived from the description of the gaping mouth of the antelope from which the half-eaten grass falls to the ground. Nonetheless, isolating it and including the, logically coherent, dryness of the mouth and throat resulting from the mouth being open, begin to deviate from the simple analysis of elements found in the text. The final two elements are peculiar in that they are not only absent from the verse, but also describe two features which are logically incoherent given the description of the antelope. Ascribing pallor to the face of an antelope, however frightened it may be, deviates considerably from the naturalistic description we find in Kālidāsa's text, and the act of trembling would be in sharp contrast with the description of the antelope leaping energetically as it flees. Both of these last two *anubhāva*s go against the contents of the text, but integrate a more general description of the *anubhāva*s associated with the *rasa* of fear. This list of stock *anubhāva*s seems to be drawn word for word from a series of verses that Rāghavabhaṭṭa cites at the end of his commentary on *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7.[17] The addition of these two elements can be seen as an attempt at strengthening the claim that this verse is evocative of the *rasa* of fear, but it also has a secondary function of anthropomorphising the antelope to a considerable degree.

Anthropomorphising the display of the antelope's fear becomes necessary when one considers the final aesthetic factor included by Rāghavabhaṭṭa in his commentary, the *sāttvikabhāva*s. Unlike the first three types of factor listed (*vibhāva*s, *anubhāva*s and *vyabhicāribhāva*s), *sāttvikabhāva*s are not essential for the production of an aesthetic experience, but are necessary in the context of the enactment of an emotion by an actor. The inclusion of a *sāttvikabhāva* is unexpected when considering the verse, as we have no indication that the character of the fleeing antelope was meant to be portrayed

[17] *taduktam —*
rakṣaḥpiśācādidhanuṣpāṇyāder bhīṣaṇākṛteḥ |
darśanaṃ śravaṇaṃ śūnyāgārāraṇyapraveśayoḥ ||
śravaṇaṃ cānusaṃdhānaṃ bandhūnāṃ vadhabandhayoḥ |
evamādyā vibhāvāḥ syur atha netrakarāṅghriṇaḥ ||
madhye madhye stambhakampau romāñcānāṃ cayas tathā |
śuṣkoṣṭhatālutā kamprahṛdayatvaṃ vivarṇatā ||
mukhasyātha parāvṛtya vīkṣaṇaṃ svāṅgagopanaṃ |
palāyanaṃ svare bhedo gātrastambho vilakṣatā ||
kāṃdiśīkatvayugdṛṣṭir anubhāvā bhavanty amī |
stambhādayo 'śrutatyaktā dainyam āvegacāpale ||
śaṅkāmohāv api trāsāpasmāramaraṇādayaḥ |
yatra saṃcāriṇaḥ sthāyi bhayaṃ syāt sa bhayānakaḥ iti || (Kāvyatīrtha 1958: 17).

on stage by an actor. While it is important to bear in mind the limited information we possess of how these *nāṭaka*s were meant to be performed, it seems to be well accepted that animals were not portrayed directly on stage and were at most alluded to by the actors or the narrator. However, leaving aside this question, the idea that the antelope was meant to be portrayed on the stage by an actor is contradicted by the stage direction at the beginning of the first act. In the available recensions of the play, the indication is always very clear and calls for the entry of only two characters onto the stage, King Duṣyanta and the Charioteer, in the act of pursuing an antelope.[18] This makes it all the more implausible that an actor physically portrayed the antelope.[19]

At this point it would not be farfetched to see Rāghavabhaṭṭa as over-interpreting verse 1.7 of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, though it is not yet clear what led him to make these interpretative leaps. The inclusion of trembling (*kampa*) in the aesthetic analysis of the verse is particularly curious. It is hard to know what exactly went on in Rāghavabhaṭṭa's mind as he wrote this part of the commentary, but one could reason through the evidence available and make an informed guess. Rāghavabhaṭṭa knew the *Abhinavabhāratī* and refers to it in his commentary, though not in this particular section. There are other authors he mentions often when it comes to the conventions of theatrical works and *alaṅkāraśāstra*, but it was not possible for me to find these works and study them. Limiting ourselves to the *Abhinavabhāratī* allows us to pick up a small detail, which might have been instrumental in shaping Rāghavabhaṭṭa's understanding of the verse. Shortly after Abhinavagupta delineates his theory of the production of *rasa*, he continues to describe what it means for an emotion to be generalised and not entirely personal. The technicalities of Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory are not within the scope of this article, but the following line should allow us to shed some light on what Rāghavabhaṭṭa might have misinterpreted:

> *tata eva na parimitam eva sādhāraṇyam api tu vitatam, vyāptigraha iva dhūmāgnyor* bhayakampayor *eva va* |

[18] Both the Devanāgarī recension and the Kashmiri recension, while differing in form, present the same direction. The Devanāgarī reads: *tataḥ praviṣati mṛgānusārī saśaracāpahasto rājā rathena sūtaś ca.* While the Kashmiri one reads: *tataḥ praviśati rathayātakena mṛgānusārī cāpahasto Duṣyantaḥ sūtaś ca.*

[19] The present analysis has not developed the possibility that Rāghavabhaṭṭa's slightly odd comments could be evidence of a variant theatrical practice, because there is a lack of historical evidence that animals were portrayed by actors. This being said, Rāghavabhaṭṭa's statements might be recording a theatrical practice in which actors enacted certain animal characters, or portrayed specific aspects of them. One could imagine the actor generically portraying fear when the verse is being sung, perhaps by trembling and looking over his shoulder with eyes aghast. Read in this light, Rāghavabhaṭṭa's explanation could serve as a window into theatrical practices that diverged from textual prescriptions. One can only hope that more traces of such practices emerge in other sources, allowing us to move beyond mere speculation towards a well-grounded hypothesis.

> As a result of this, the state of generality involved is not limited (*parimita*), but extended (*vitata*)—as happens at the moment in which is formed the idea of the invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between smoke and fire or, in fact, between *trembling and fear* (Gnoli 1968: 56).

The mention of trembling (*kampa*) in connection to fear, just after the discussion of *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7, may have led Rāghavabhaṭṭa to believe that the trembling being referred to here had to have some connection with the aesthetic analysis of the verse. Furthermore, the way in which *kampa* and *bhaya* are used in the above explanation is akin to the way in which *sāttvikabhāva*s are understood to function. One sees an involuntary corporeal movement and infers something that cannot be seen: its corresponding emotion. Thus, in the case of fear, upon seeing a person trembling one infers that they are afraid. As *sāttvikabhāva*s are an essential element in the theatrical representation of an emotion, it is not implausible that Rāghavabhaṭṭa read this sentence, or even had it at the back of his mind, and might have inferred that the antelope is not only meant to tremble in fear but also to be represented on stage.

4.2. Other commentators and the problem of visual representation

A recent article by Daniele Cuneo and Elisa Ganser, has shed some light on a couple of other commentators of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, specifically on the interpretation of verse 1.7.[20] While these two later commentaries are not as detail-oriented as Rāghavabhaṭṭa's in their analysis of the verse, the voices of these commentators constitute important evidence of the debate enduring long after Rāghavabhaṭṭa's time, and the relative marginality of Abhinavagupta's theories within the broader history of Indian aesthetics.

It is interesting to note that the first commentator they discuss, Abhirāma Bhaṭṭa (17th c.), expounds a view very similar to the one held by Kuntaka, though formulated using a slightly different term. He states that the representation of the antelope is a simple case of a *svabhāvokti*, an expression of one's own nature, which is a widely attested *alaṅkāra* and is essentially a synonym of the term *svajātyucitahevāka* employed by Kuntaka. The existence of this commentator is so far the only other evidence of the continued presence of an interpretation of the scene broadly in line with Kuntaka's aesthetic theory. Surprisingly, Abhirāma Bhaṭṭa seems to raise the same objection to Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary outlined a moment ago, against his inclusion of a *sāttvikabhāva*. Abhirāma holds a strong position against the aesthetic relevance of characters that do not appear physically on stage, making

[20] For a more detailed discussion, see Cuneo and Ganser (2022).

it very clear that the role of the antelope is not, in fact, portrayed by an actor. This final point seems to be the crucial problem in the eyes of this first commentator, offering us an interesting perspective on the perceived importance of the visual representation of characters in a play.

The second commentary examined by Cuneo and Ganser is an anonymous work titled *Abhijñānaśākuntalacarcā* that very clearly responds to the objection raised by Abhirāma Bhaṭṭa. Highlighting the relevance of those portions of *nāṭaka*s which are not meant to be enacted on stage and only recited, he quotes a famous line from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which states that, "the goddess Sarasvatī has granted audibility to what is visible."[21] In this one line the commentator makes it clear, very logically, that the aesthetic fruition of a literary work does not necessarily need to be mediated through its visual representation, but can also occur merely through reading or hearing it. This statement is also an appropriate objection to Rāghavabhaṭṭa's overzealous attempt at compiling a complete list of aesthetic factors for the verse, including those which refer to the role of an actor. The flight of the antelope need only be evoked orally, without the need for it to be physically portrayed by an actor for the spectators to clearly perceive the antelope's desperation and fright.

5. Reconsidering the scene of the hunt in its own context

This paper has attempted to shed light on the debate among Indian authors of aesthetics regarding the capacity of a non-human animal character to produce an aesthetic experience. The unique case of the flight of the antelope described in *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7 functions almost as a case study for the different ways in which one and the same text can be read and appreciated in different ways and from different points of view. From Kuntaka's appreciation of the verse for its naturalistic portrayal of an animal and no more, to Abhinavagupta's focus and valorisation of the aesthetic portrayal of fear, this one verse has allowed us to focus on two very different ways of understanding the role of non-human animals in *kāvya*. Furthermore, a look at the commentarial tradition on the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* brings to light further questions regarding the portrayal of animal characters on stage and the curious case of an overzealous commentary written by Rāghavabhaṭṭa. A final point that caught our attention is the lack of a live debate in the works of Kuntaka and Abhinavagupta. As was observed, their interpretations of *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 1.7 are stated without justification or particular emphasis. By contrast, the various commentaries, beginning with that of Rāghavabhaṭṭa, show signs of disagreement in the

[21] *śrāvatvaṃ prekṣaṇīyasya dadau devī sarasvatī* || *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.61cd (Kavi 1926: 27).

interpretation of the verse, and each commentator appears to be more interested in defending or demonstrating the validity of a particular interpretation.

As is often the case, this investigation is far from complete. There are many more avenues to be explored and greater care needs to be taken when reading these works of literature. If we were to ask who among these authors offers the right interpretation of the verse, the answer might still sway in Abhinavagupta's favour, for the simple reason that Kuntaka's denial of the aesthetic potential of the antelope to produce *rasa*, while certainly grounded in a long literary tradition, ends up being ideologically incapable of considering the fear of the antelope as nothing more than a conventional literary image. However, it is also the case that any attempt at theorising on aesthetics in such a narrow fashion, by focusing solely on a single verse inevitably leads one to lose sight of the context within which it is embedded.

If we were to broaden our view it would become apparent that the first scene of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, from the entry of Duṣyanta to the interruption of his hunt by the ascetics, is an intricate web of clever contrasts and subtle references that weave together moments of growing tension and release. In the midst of all this, the figure of the antelope necessarily occupies a central place in the narrative as it brings together the conflicting desires of the hunter and the innocent prey. Furthermore, the reading of verse 1.7 is made more interesting when read together with the list of benefits of hunting enumerated in the *Arthaśāstra,*[22] which was certainly known to Kālidāsa. In doing so, it becomes clear that Kālidāsa constructed this verse to include some very specific elements which are understood to be important goals of hunting as a sport. The result being an intriguing mix of perspectives woven together within a single moment, that imbue the verse with a moral ambivalence capable of simultaneously describing both the excitement in Duṣyanta's eyes and the terror reflected in those of the graceful antelope. A more thorough exploration of these elements will have to be reserved for a future discussion. Suffice it to say that any essentialising reading of a work as rich as the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* risks ignoring features of the text and its context that complicate its reading but render it all the more rewarding.

[22] "In the case of hunting, on the other hand, we have exercise; the elimination of phlegm, bile, fat, and perspiration; practice in hitting moving and still bodies; and discerning the minds of animals when they are angry, afraid, and at ease; as well as travel that is not constant," *Arthaśāstra* 8.3.46 (Olivelle 2013: 338).

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Saints and mystics

Nourishing the body and food for soul

The role of animals in the South Asian Sufi environment

Thomas W.P. Dähnhardt

This article investigates some aspects concerning the consumption of meat for food in Islam in general and in the South Asian cultural environment in particular. Starting out from a look at the primary sources of authority in Islam, i.e. the Koran and the prophetic Traditions (*hadith*), concerning legal prescriptions with regard to feeding on meat, the focus moves on to describe how muslims, especially Sufis, in the Indian subcontinent have adapted to the local culture and developed a particular attitude towards eating or refraining from eating meat in their daily diet and/or in the specific circumstances of their initiatory discipline. It argues in favor of a common stance among practitioners in different spiritual traditions, thereby creating a common understanding and attitude characteristic of the multi-cultural environment of India and Pakistan.

Key words: Islam, Sufism, meat, spiritual discipline.

1. Introduction[1]

Wandering around the market areas and *mahalla*s of South Asian cities, towns and villages, one becomes immediately aware of entering a muslim neighborhood by the presence of numerous butcher's (urdū: قصائی *qasā'ī*) lined up along its lanes and alleys. The consumption, and therefore the buying and selling, of meat is one of the most obvious signs of Muslim presence in the Subcontinent's public and social environment, even more so as it contrasts with similar human environs among Hindu and other communities in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, whose food customs are often based on a meatless, i.e. vegetarian diet. In fact, it is a common perception to think of Muslims as heavy meat-eaters, something whoever has ever been invited for a meal in a muslim household anywhere in the Subcontinent (and elsewhere in the Islamic world) would easily agree with. As followers of a religion that owes its specifics to the nomadic-pastoral traditions of tribes relying on animals for food and sustenance in the barren

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landscape of the Arabian peninsula, muslims throughout space and time have considered meat as a natural food resource, the consumption of which has been explicitly sanctioned by Divine order. Allāh, the One and All-mighty Divine Sovereign who reveals Himself in the World through His 99 names (*asmā al-ḥusn*),[2] is known among others as *al-Muqīt* (the All-Nourisher) and *al-Razzāq* (the Provider of Sustenance), the Bestower of all means of nourishment and provision for His creatures. In the sixth Chapter of the Qur'ān, titled Chapter of the Cattle (Sūrat al-an'ām) and so called because it discusses different matters with regard to the role of livestock for humans, God decrees the general permissibility of consuming animal meat, except for a few limitations:

قُل لَّآ أَجِدُ فِى مَآ أُوحِىَ إِلَىَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَىٰ طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُهُۥٓ إِلَّآ أَن يَكُونَ مَيْتَةً أَوْ دَمًا مَّسْفُوحًا أَوْ لَحْمَ خِنزِيرٍ فَإِنَّهُۥ رِجْسٌ أَوْ فِسْقًا أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ بِهِۦ ۚ فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ١٤٥

> Say: 'In all that has been revealed unto me, I do not find anything forbidden to eat, if one wants to eat thereof, unless it be carrion, or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine for that, behold, is loathsome or a sinful offering over which any name other than God's has been invoked. But if one is driven by necessity neither coveting it nor exceeding his immediate need, then, behold, thy Sustainer is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (Cor.:VI:145)

In a similar perspective, in the Chapter of the Table Spread (Sūrat al-Mā'idah), Allāh explicitly allows for the consumption of animals for food, He nevertheless exhorts His believers to refrain from actively pursuing any act of violence implied by killing an animal for food while in the state of purity (*iḥrām*) upon crossing the boundaries of the sacred territories (*ḥaramain*) while on ritual pilgrimage (*ḥajj*):

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ أَوْفُوا۟ بِٱلْعُقُودِ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُم بَهِيمَةُ ٱلْأَنْعَـٰمِ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ غَيْرَ مُحِلِّى ٱلصَّيْدِ وَأَنتُمْ حُرُمٌ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ

> Honour your bonds! All grazing beasts of the flock are permitted to you ..., but you are not allowed to hunt in the state of iḥrām. Indeed Allāh decrees as He wills. (Cor.:V:1)[3]

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[2] According to a well-known tradition (*ḥadīth*), the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Allāh has ninety-nine names, i.e. one-hundred minus one, and whoever knows them will go to Paradise." (*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* 54:23).

[3] The term *iḥrām* derives from the same Arabic verbal root as the word *ḥarām* (ح ر م *ḥā-rā-mīm*, i.e. "what is forbidden or deemed unlawful" by God), as opposed to *ḥalāl* (حَلَّ *ḥalla* "to be allowed or lawful"), i.e. what is lawful or permissible; it indicates the state of ritual purity and sacredness of a Muslim which is a requirement for approaching and entering the sacred territory of the *ḥaram* (lit.: inviolate, sacred space), in order to perform the *ḥajj* (major pilgrimage) or the *'umrah* (minor pilgrimage). It is forbidden for any person in the state of *iḥrām* to hunt, shoot, kill, sacrifice, capture, confine, destroy or abuse any animal. This prohibition applies to all land animals, birds, and insects other than marine animals. If a person accidentally steps on or kills small animals or insects, such as small black ants, grasshoppers, etc., he is not considered guilty, but he must pay a fine according to the value of the insects killed. It is, however, allowed to kill animals and insects that may harm them or other pilgrims, such as mosquitoes, snakes, scorpions, and spiders. However, driving away the insect or animal first is preferable if possible.

Further on in the same Chapter, there follow further specifications:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيْرِ وَمَا اُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ اللّٰهِ بِهٖ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوْذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيْحَةُ وَمَآ اَكَلَ السَّبُعُ اِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَاَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوْا بِالْاَزْلَامِ ۗ ذٰلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ ۗ اَلْيَوْمَ يَىِٕسَ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا مِنْ دِيْنِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ ۗ اَلْيَوْمَ اَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِيْنَكُمْ وَاَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِيْ وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْاِسْلَامَ دِيْنًا ۗ فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِيْ مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرَ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِّاِثْمٍ ۙ فَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ

Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, and swine; what is slaughtered in the name of any other than Allāh; what is killed by strangling, beating, a fall, or by being gored to death; what is partly eaten by a predator unless you slaughter it;...but whoever is compelled by extreme hunger then surely Allāh is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Cor.:V:3)

If with a few exceptions the Qur'ān grants the believers the license for consuming the meat of animals living on both Land and in the Sea, this license is nevertheless conditional on the premise that the slaughtering of an animal must be performed in the name and for the sake of Allāh alone. This becomes evident by the invitation to invoke the sacred formula known as *tasmiya* or *basmala* (i.e. *Bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate) and the *takbīr* (i.e. the formula *Allāhu akbar, i.e.* God is Greatest) at the time of killing an animal and again before consuming it as part of a meal, for by doing so implies the honoring of the Divine Nourisher in His essential quality of being Compassionate and Merciful.[4] The invoking of both formulas must be intended, hence, as acts of remembrance meant to enhance the awareness of the intimate relationship that subsists between the believer and the Divine (*dhikr*). Moreover, the slaughtering of an animal in order to be lawful requires specific conditions and techniques (*dhabīḥah*), so as to make its meat permissible for consumption (*ḥalāl*).[5]

There is more to it: the concept of slaughtering an animal culminates in the Sacrifice performed on the occasion of 'Īd al-aẓḥā (عيد الأضحى', lit.: feast of sacrifice'), one of the two great religious festivals of Islam, known in South Asia as Baqar 'Īd (the festival of [the slaughtering of] the cow), which as in other Semitic religions, re-enacts the willingness of the prophet Ibrāhīm (=Abraham) to offer God what

[4]" *Eat not, oh believers, of that (meat) on which Allāh's name has not been pronounced* (at the time of the slaughtering of the animal)" (Cor.: 6:121) However, according to some legal schools (*madhhab*), the pronouncing of the *tasmiya* and the *takbīr* are not obligatory (*farḍ*), but *mustaḥabb* (recommended and laudable actions).

[5] The person slaughtering the animal should be a muslim who is mentally sound and knowledgeable of the correct procedure; the animal to be slaughtered should be lawful according to Islamic law, it should be alive at the time of slaughtering, the formula *Bismillāh* (In the Name of God) should be invoked immediately before the slaughter of each animal, the device used for slaughtering should be sharp and should not be lifted off the animal during the act of slaughter; in the latter, the trachea, oesophagus and main arteries and veins of the neck region should be severed, so that all blood can naturally drain from the carcass; the animal must face the *qibla* when being slaughtered, it must be slaughtered with something made of iron and a normal amount of blood must drain out of the animal's body

he holds most dear, i.e. his son, as a token of loyalty and obedience to His command. Significantly, it is in response to his total surrender to the will of Allāh that Hadrat Ibrāhīm achieves perfection and thereby transcends the condition of Muslim (lit.: 'he who submits to the will of God thereby attaining to the state of inner peace") that leads Allāh to reverse His compassion (*raḥīm*) and mercy (*raḥmān*) upon those who show Him to be His true servants.[6] The act of offering this sacrifice further enforced by the invocation of the sacred formula by a human thus leads to an instant reaction of mercy and compassion from the Transcendent whereby the living creature on the altar is transformed into an animal, thus sparing the life of Hadrat Ismā'īl, Abraham's son.

In imitation of this ancient pledge of alliance, this sacrifice is reiterated by muslims every year as the highlight of the month of pilgrimage (*Dhū'l-ḥijja*) to the sacred sites of Mecca and surroundings, offered to seek the pleasure of and to gain closeness to Allāh. This latter meaning is conveyed by the term *qurbān* (قربان) used for this sacrifice. Derived from the Semitic verbal root (q-r-b ق ر ب) meaning 'to become close', it intends any act of fostering the state of closeness to God (*qurbiyat*); interestingly, this same word is used in Sufi terminology to indicate the stage of spiritual perfection when the soul has reached the state of utmost intimacy with the Divine Beholder of Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*).

It is evident that the normative framework provided by the *sharī'a*, derived in the first place from the Holy Book, not only allows, but actively promotes the use of meat not only as a resource for the nourishment of the body, but also as means to enhance the mutual relationship between the Creator and the most perfect among His creatures, Man, instilling and nourishing the faith in his soul and mind.

Complementing the statements made in the Qur'ān concerning the legislation for the community of believers at large (*umma*), there are additional specifications with regard to the issue of meat for food found in numerous sayings attributed to Muḥammad, the prophet of Islām, which lend themselves to more nuanced interpretations. These sayings, known as (*aḥādīth*, pl. of *ḥadīth*), constitute the second important source of legal authority in Islām; they are often quoted by Sufis, for they integrate the Qur'ānic message with indications concerning an inner attitude and discipline, addressed to a more restricted circle of followers (*al-khawāṣṣ*):

[6] In some Sufi doctrines, such as that formulated by the renowned Indian Sufi master Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) known as *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unicity of witnessing), this state of Supreme obedience ('*ubūdiyat* corresponds to the highest degree of spiritual realization, hence it arises out of the awareness of the total identity between the intention of the individual creature and the Divine will (*irāda*).

> A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being.
>
> Imām al-Tabrīzī: *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ*; Book 6; chapter 7, 8:178.

This statement invites humans to extend mercy and compassion to animals, as they too are integral part of Allāh's creation. Even more specifically, as with regard to the use of meat for food, the Prophet cautions his followers against the unrestricted use of meat as part of the daily diet:

> Beware of meat, for meat can be as addictive as wine...
>
> Imām Malik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭā'* 1742.

And with even stronger connotations, he appears to have expressed genuine concerns with regard to the use of meat as an integral part of a daily diet. As what sounds almost an anticipation of slogans which much later would be pronounced by animal rightists or healthy food partisans, he exhorts his followers:

> O sons of wisdom, do not turn your stomachs into graveyards for animals!
>
> (Daif Hadith, *Fayd al-Qadīr Sharḥ al-Jami' al-Ṣaghīr* 2:52)

Notwithstanding these commendations that can be traced back to the primary sources of muslim identity, ethical or medical concerns with regard to the use of animals as a food resource have never found much attention in the legal literature of classical Islām. Even among contemporary Muslims, any serious discourse on the viability or desirability of vegetarianism is rarely discussed. Nevertheless, throughout history, some Muslims have been abstaining from eating meat, in many cases for reasons of piety, in others as part of a more articulate spiritual discipline.[7] It is in this perspective that renouncing the use of meat assumes a different significance that aligns Islam and those who follow and practice it, and more precisely its esoteric aspect (*al-bāṭin*), with other religious and spiritual Traditions, in South Asia and elsewhere.

The choice of renouncing (or at least strongly reducing) the use of meat by those focusing on an interiorized vision of life and the world was dictated by a combined attitude of mercy and compassion (*raḥmān* and *rahīm*) for living creatures at large and the requirement of purifying the inner states of the soul (*taḏhkiya al-nafs*) as an integral part of the Sufi discipline (*ṭarīqa*). Both are intimately interconnected: whereas the former reflects on a human plane one of the most essential attributes

[7] For an overview of dietary customs among Sufis of the early Islamic period, see: Qudsi, Arin Salamah (2019).

through which God relates Himself to the world (*ṣifāt-i ilāhī*), the latter implies the reverse process of a human being gradually transforming or rather, sublimating, their individual attributes into those of Allāh. This process of spiritual refinement naturally results in the practitioner's soul and mind being pervaded by an attitude of compassion towards his fellow creatures, something contemplated also in other spiritual traditions, such as Mahāyana Buddhism which personifies the notion of compassion (*karuṇā*) in the figure of the bodhisattva. Although Muḥammad, considered by Sufis the fountainhead of the God's spiritual presence in the realm of creation (*al-khalq*), did not recommend total abstention from the consumption of meat, he repeatedly emphasized that it should be considered a rare delicacy rather than a staple in an individual's diet. He himself would abstain from meat for extended periods, opting instead for a meal consisting of dates, water, fruits and vegetables, thereby illustrating through his example (Sunna) that meat was not an essential component for his daily sustenance.[8] Thus, we may argue, the nuanced attitude towards the consumption of meat from the very outset reflects the particular nature of Islam as a Tradition that distinguishes between an outer, exoteric aspect projected towards the world and all deeds intended for it, resumed by God's name (and function) as al-Ẓāhir (the Apparent), and an inner, esoteric dimension contemplating the domain of the transcendent, subsumed in the Divine name al-Bāṭin (the Hidden).

Reports about muslim spiritual practitioners can be found from early times. In his hagiographic account of 96 saints titled *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* ('Memories of the intimate friends of God'), the Sufi poet Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār (1145-1221) reports that Rābī'a al-'Adawiya, an 8th century woman saint from Basra, in Iraq, who was renowned for her strict ascetic practices (*zuhd*), abstained from eating meat as dictated by her attitude of love (*'ishq*) for all animals. She rebuked her contemporary Sufi companion Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that he should not wonder if animals were shunning him after he had eaten a meal prepared with animal fat (Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār 2011: 64).

More to the East, the renowned Persian poet Mawlānā Jamāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273), whose spiritual poetry is still very popular also among South Asian Sufis, is accredited with renouncing the pleasure of eating meat during his spiritual exercises. That such abstention from meat was part of his spiritual discipline described by him becomes evident from a quatrain in his Mathnawī, frequently quoted in the Sufi hospices of Northern India:

[8] Sufis practicing a meatless diet often quote the following verse from the Qur'ān to explain their attitude: *There is not an animal on earth or a two-winged flying creature, but they are communities like you...* (Cor.:6:38). The importance of being compassionate towards other creatures such as animals also finds expression in the prophetic Tradition: "He who takes pity [even] on a sparrow and spares its life, Allāh will be merciful on him on the Day of Judgement."(*ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Umāmah, a companion of the Prophet, transmitted by al-Ṭabarānī in his work *Al-mu'jam al-kabīr*).

پاکت پلید شود معده در چونکی
کلید و پنهان کن نه بر حلق قفل
لقمه شد نور جلال هرکه دروی
هر چه خواهد تا خورد او را حلال

Chūnki dar ma'da shūd pākat palīd,
qafal na bar halaq o panhān kun kalīd,
har ki dar wī laqmā shūd nūr-i jalāl,
harchi khwāhid tā khwūrd-i ū rā ḥalāl.

Since pure food turns foul in your stomach,
lock your throat and hide the key;
for him in whom that morsel is transformed into the light of God,
whatever he likes to eat, all is lawful to him.
(*Mathnawī-i ma'nawī* Vol. II, 105)

The subtle word-play used in these verses reverts around the transformation of what is *ḥarām* or unlawful from an outward perspective into something *ḥalāl* or permissible, achieved through the alchemy of sublimation of the soul. The double sense of intending food for nourishing the body and food for soul is here contemplated as well as providing a subtle hint at the possibility for those endowed by spiritual insight to be capable of discriminating the underlying sense of the dual categories of *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl* pertaining to the immanent world of creation synthesized in the unitary vision of the Transcendent (*tawḥīd*).

In fact, all around the muslim world one comes across Sufi orders prohibiting or discouraging the consumption of meat during the periods of spiritual retreats *(khalwa*). In Istanbul's Fatih district there is a neighborhood known as Etyemez ('Non-meat-eater') which derives its name from the vegetarian practices of the Sünbüli Sufis, a local branch of the Central-Asian Khalwatī Sufi order residing in a tekke in that area (Foltz 2001). And the renowned 14th century Qādiri shaikh 'Abd al Karīm al-Jīlī (1365-1424), commenting on his master Ibn 'Arabī's advice to avoid meat and animal fat during retreats, stressed that "meat and animal fat strengthen animality and its principles will dominate the spiritual principles."

Besides such tendencies among Sufis all around the muslim world from early times, in South Asia ordinary muslims as well as Sufis came into contact with peoples and traditions that had since long been practicing and cultivating the abstinence from meat. In the process of assimilating the cultural, social and spiritual environment in which they decided to spread their call for Islam (*da'wat*), many of them adopted the way of life of their homeland of choice identifying and refining elements conducive to their way of life and spiritual practice. From the historical sources we learn that since the period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526), many Sufis in India have in fact been vegetarian relying exclusively on very simple, vegetarian food. Commonly they adopted dishes that since long had been the diet of Indian ascetics and spiritual practitioners, such as *khichṛī*, a mash of boiled rice and pulses enriched with a little amount of clarified butter (*ghī*). Throughout their century-long presence on the Subcontinent, many authorities of the Chishtiyya, the most Indian of all Sufi orders, kept emphasizing the importance of maintaining a diet void of meat. Prominent among these was Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāgaurī (1192-1274 AD), a disciple of Khwāja Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, who led a very ascetic life based on self-sustained agriculture in a remote place of Rajasthan's Marwār region, adopting a meatless diet and exhorting his disciples to keep in line with his example (Maksud 1991). His refusal to consider animals as a resource for food result not only from the advocated ascetic lifestyle typical for affiliates to the Chishtiyya that requires detachments from all kinds of sophistication and luxury, but appears to be influenced by the local environment in which Jaina and Vaishnava attitudes prevailed among local ascetics and spiritual practitioners as well as the common folk. Amīr Khusrau, accredited for being the first true Indo-Persian poet and disciple of Shaikh Niẓām al-Din Awliyā, praises in his Persian poem titled *Nuh-Sipihr* ('The Nine Planetary Spheres') the taste of South Asian fruits and vegetables, stressing that they make for a perfect diet suitable for enhancing spiritual progress. According to the Moroccan traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1377) who visited India during the reign of Muḥammad ibn Tughlaq (r. 1325-1351), the renowned Sufi shaikh and patron saint of Delhi, Niẓām al-Din Awliyā (1238-1325) used to offer his disciples simple flat bread (*roṭī*) with cooked beans (*rājmā dāl*). A communal kitchen (*langar*) offered simple vegetarian dishes to everyone who visited his hospice (*khānaqāh*) twice a day. (Ibn Battuta 653-4) Besides, Sufis diets included *pukhta* (simply cooked rice), *shīr viranj* (milk rice), *yugast* (curd), *nān* bread, *ḥalwa* and dry fruits. In the *Khair al-majālis* ('Virtues of spiritual meetings'), the recorded oral teachings (*malfūẓāt*) of Shaikh Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Chirāgh-i Dihlawī' (d.1356), one of the main successors (*khulafā*) of Sh. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā (d. 1325), the shaikh is described as usually breaking his daily fasts after sunset with nothing but a piece of *qurs* (round stuffed bread).

Similar to Hindu ascetics (*sādhu*), the wandering Sufis (*malang*) affiliated to the Qalandariyya commonly encountered in the Indus Valley in Pakistan's southernmost Sindh region, rely exclusively

on a diet consisting of bread, pulses and raw vegetables. They carry small bags of flour (*āṭā*) with them, which they use to mix with water, milk, or oil, turning it into a frugal, meatless meal. Occasionally accompanied by dates and raisins these simple ingredients are in line with the performance of their devotional exercises based on detachment from worldly ties and the subjugation of the human soul's lower, animal instincts. From what they told me during my stays in Sindh and Southern Panjāb, they refrain from the use of meat except for special occasions, such as the festival of the annual death anniversary (*'urs*) of their patron saint Kh. Lāl Shahbāz Qalandar at Sehwan and when part of unsolicited offerings (*futūḥāt*) received in their begging bowl (*kashkul*).

Muḥammad ibn Mubārak aka Mīr Khūrd Kirmānī (d. 770/1368–9), author of the *Siyar al-awliyā* ('The virtuous conduct of the friends of God,' ca. 1351-1368), a well-known mid-14th century biographical work (*tadhkira*) describing the lives of the saints of the Chishti order during the Sultanate period, quotes numerous Sufi masters teaching that the consumption of meat is a hindrance in the process of transmuting the uncultivated soul subject to lower, animal instincts (*nafs-i ammāra*) into the pacified soul (*nafs al-mutma'inna*) of an intimate friend of God (*walī Allāh*). As Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, he mentions *khichṛī* as the principal diet among spiritual practitioners. Likewise, Sh. Jamālī Kamboh al-Dihlawī (d.1536), the author of the *Siyar al-'ārifīn* ('The path of those endowed with spiritual knowledge'), an account of the sufis of the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders during the early Mughal period, also mentions *khichṛī* as a staple diet in Sufi khānaqāhs, which sometimes was prepared as a sweet dish cooked with milk and sugar, while the consumption of meat was limited to special occasions, such as the end of the holy month of Ramadhān or the *'Īd al-adhḥā* festival. Dārā Shikoh (1615-1659), the spiritually inclined Mughal crown-prince and son of emperor Shāh Jahān, was reportedly a staunch vegetarian. Influenced by the Upanishadic dictum *Pratyekam anshatah virajit devottam* 'every living and non-living being has the essence of the cosmos and divinity,' Dārā Shikoh reportedly became vegetarian at the age of 16 and completely gave up on meat, fish and even eggs; he never even touched the *gosht-i qurbānī*, sacrificial meat (Dara Shikoh 2022).

Further north, in the Kashmir Valley, inhabited by a largely muslim population but with ancient roots steeped in the spiritual culture of pre-Islamic India, thousands of Kashmiri Muslims abstain from eating meat as they are devotees of the so-called Rishi Sufi masters claiming descent from Nūr al-Dīn Walī, also known as Nund Rishi (1377-1438) and revered all over Kashmir as *Sheikh al-'ālam* ('Master of the world'). Legends claim that he grew up breastfed by the 14th century Shaiva poet-saint Lal Ded also known as *Laleshvarī* and that since then he nourished himself exclusively on milk and water, claiming that *Ann poshī telī yelī van poshī*, which roughly translates as: 'Food will thrive only as long as the woods survive' (Hilal 2021). Faithful to the ascetic discipline of this unique devotional tradition, which brings

together the spiritual ancestry of Lal Ded and authorities affiliated to the already mentioned Khalwatiyya, a Central-Asian Sufi order whose ascetic traditions prescribe abstinence from meat as integral part of their initiatory method, the purpose is that of extirpating arrogance, haste and anger through the elimination of meat from the practitioner's diet. It reiterates the restrictions on meat in the context of the process of sublimating the initiates' inner states with the intention of subduing the lower instincts rooted in the uncultivated soul of the profane. Even lay affiliates or simple devotees of the Rishi Sufi order rely predominantly on eggs, lentils and dried turnips for their daily diet, excluding meat and avoiding the related killing of animals from their life routine. In this case too, it is an integral part of the order's teachings that consumption of meat promotes the development of animalistic qualities, whereas consumption of plant and dairy products promotes peaceful qualities.

In a reverse but important complimentary perspective, the act of *serving food* to fellow creatures is connected to generosity, a virtue that is central in Islamic spiritual traditions, since it is considered a quality of the soul which Allāh bestows on those He loves, those who are not attached to material wealth and instead use what they are given to please God and, in the process, show mercy and compassion to fellow creatures. The institution of *langar*, the practice of serving food to all those who are needy, has been a long-established custom in South Asia's Sufi shrines, where (mostly meat-free) food is prepared in huge cauldrons, called *degh*, and subsequently served to those who visit the grave of the defunct Sufi master, as part of his spiritual endowment. This implies that it is not the generous person itself that possesses the attribute of generosity, but its God who, because of His love for that person, causes them to be generous thereby turning him into His agent. Further extending this concept, complimentary to the act of feeding on animals (or the avoidance of it) described so far, is the act of feeding animals, especially those living inside or near the precincts of a sanctuary. It bears great importance in the South Asian Sufi tradition, both on the popular and on a more elitist level, since the feeding of animals is considered an act of mercy and compassion, even more so when the animals are considered as living vehicles of the *baraka*, the spiritual influence attached to and transmitted by a Sufi saint. The *baraka*, which nourishes the inner states of spiritual adepts, constitutes the essential element for spiritual initiation (urdū: *bai'at*) by which a Sufi master establishes the insoluble bond between himself, the neophyte and the spiritual chain consisting of all preceding generations of saints of the order (*silsila*) back to the prophet Muhammad and from there to the transcendent realm of the Divine. The animal, as a living being, becomes then the vehicle of the defunct shaikh's spiritual influence and the feeding of it enacts a reciprocal relationship of mercy and compassion, if only passively perpetuated by the animal.

Animals associated with Sufi saints are found in a number of shrines all over the Subcontinent. One of the most important *dargāh*s in Bengal is that of the 14th-century Sufi saint Shāh Jalāl Mujarrad al-Yamanī, presumably of Central-Asian origin, who on his way from Delhi eastwards is said to have carried with him a pair of wild blue rock pigeons (*Columba livia*) which he had received as a gift from Sh. Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ (d. 725/1325) during his visit to Delhi. Shāh Jalāl brought the pigeons to Sylhet, a town in modern Bangladesh, where he eventually settled down. The descendants of these pigeons, known as Jalālī *kabutār*, are still to be found today in his *mazār*, one of the country's most important pilgrimage sites. As part of the ritual pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) to Shāh Jalāl's *mazār* devotees offer food to the sacred pigeons, as these birds are said to carry the spiritual influence of the Sufi saint which, as long as they thrive, spread and bestow the spiritual power inherited from the shaikh (animal *silsila*; Kuehn 2023).

On the other end of the Subcontinent, marsh crocodiles (*Crocodylus palustris*) are the chief attraction at the *dargāh* of the 13th-century Sufi saint Ḥājī Sakhī Sulṭān, aka Mangho Pīr, in the north-western part of Karachi, in Pakistan. According to the *sajjāda-nishīn* at the shrine, Khalīfa Sajjād, these animals are thought to have been carried as lice in the hair of the saint and miraculously transformed by the *baraka* of the saint into crocodiles after being dropped into the waters of the pond. Pilgrims who pay their respects there offer sacrificial food to these animals revered as disciples (*murīdīn*) of Pīr Mangho himself. As such, they embody the spiritual power of the saint and play a vital role in dispensing his compassion and mercy to those seeking aid and assistance in both worldly and spiritual matters. Being the former birds, they are fed on plant seeds, whereas the latter, being reptiles, are naturally fed on meat! (reptile = *magar*).

In conclusion, notwithstanding the widespread abstinence from meat recommended either during specific moments of the spiritual discipline and as a token of modesty and detachment among Sufis, there are numerous references to meat associated with food in South Asian Sufi literature, where it is used as an allegory describing the sublimation of the heart (*taṣfiya al-qalb*) considered the spiritual organ in the human organism through the all-pervading power of love. It is common in the vernacular literature, for instance, to refer to the burning heart of the lover as a *kabāb*, where the burning heat caused by love transforms the heart into a tasteful delicacy enchanting mind and palate. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Bābā Momand (1042/1632-1118/1706), a famous 17th century Sufi poet from Peshawar who composed verses in the language of the Pakhtunkhwa, describes himself as suffering from a long-lasting heartburn cultivated in intimacy and therefore ignored by the outside world, in the following terms:

زمانئ د رحمان زړه دئ کباب کړئ
له احوال ءئ څوک نه دئ خبر دار

Zamānī da Raḥmān zarah dī kabāb karī
la aḥwāl'ī khawk na dī khabardār.

Time has turned Raḥmān's heart into a kabāb,
nobody has any awareness of its innermost states.

The image of the heart metaphorically transformed into food finds also expression in the verses of the renowned urdu poet Mīr Taqī Mīr (1722-1803), the acclaimed master of love poetry (*ghazal*), who exclaims:

دیکھا کباب کو دل دیکھا کو جی بتاب
دیکھا عذاب ہم جو یہ کیوں تھے رہے جیتے

Be-tāb jī ko dekhā, dil ko kabāb dekhā,
jīte rahe the kyoñ ham jo yeh 'adhāb dekhā.

Restless have I witnessed my soul,
roasted like a kebab appears to me my heart,
why have we been kept alive,
only to witness this chastisement.

The image of the burning heart turned into a piece of roasted meat or *kabāb* is used once and again as a metaphor for describing the burning feeling of sorrow born out of unrequited love and the pain caused by any worldly attachment, as in this *shi'r*:

آتش غم میں دل بھنا شاید
دیر سے بو کباب کی سی ہے

Ātish-i gham men dil bhunā shāyad,
der se bū kabāb kī sī hai.[9]

In the fire of sorrow the heart has perhaps been roasted,
since long the smell of kabāb has been pervading the air.

[9] Mir Taqi Mir 204.

And finally, stressing the vital importance of that piece of flesh which through the heat generated by unconditional love and surrender becomes the receptacle of Divine compassion and mercy, thereby being turned into a delicious food item:

> Ever since the dawn of eternity, hearts have been roasted like kebabs
> it's not just today that love's fire has been burning, my friends.[10]

Or, to put it through the words of the Panjabi Sufi poet Bullhe Shāh (1758-1680) in this double verse (*dohrā* or *qāfī*):

Pī shar āb te khākabāb, heth bāl haddān d īag,
Bullehābhan ghar rab dā, ais thuggān de thag nu thag.

Drink wine and enjoy the taste of roasted meat,
cooking in a fire nourished by bones;
oh Bulleha, break into the house of God
and swindle the robber of all robbers11.

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[10] Mir Taqi Mir 153.

[11] Bullhe Shah 67.

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Animals in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*

Antonio Rigopoulos

This essay documents the symbolic use of animals in one of the most popular Hindu hagiographies of modern times, *i.e.* the *Shri Sai Satcharita* or 'The True Life of Lord Sai' written by Govind Raghunath Dabholkar (1859–1929) and dedicated to the famous saint Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918). Divided into fifty-one chapters (plus two additional ones, *i.e.* an epilogue and an epitome), the *Shri Sai Satcharita* is written in traditional *ovī* verse form and comprises more than 9,300 verses. Special attention is paid to those animals that recur most often and with whom Sai Baba and his devotees are identified. The significance of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* lies in the fact that it is a Hindu appropriation of an eclectic Sufi ascetic, part and parcel of Maharashtra's integrative culture. This peculiar feature reflects itself even in its choice of animal symbolism. The essay is divided into six paragraphs: Introduction; Fundamental presuppositions in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* with regard to animals; Auspicious and inauspicious animals; Animals that are symbolically ambivalent; Identification of Sai Baba and his devotees with particular animals; The Islāmic element. Appendix 1 offers the complete list of animals present in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, and Appendix 2 the number of their occurrences in descending order. Animal deities (such as Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow) and all deities and their animal vehicles (such as Sarasvati and her 'swan,' Ganesh and his mouse, etc.) have purposefully been omitted.

Key words: Sai Baba of Shirdi, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, animals, Hindu modern hagiography.

After noon *ārtī*, when Baba took his food,
he would be surrounded by lots of animals
that would partake of his food:
dogs, cats, crows, etcetera.
Baba called them lovingly.
(Balaji Pilaji Gurav, villager of Shirdi; Rigopoulos 2020: 81)

1. Introduction[1]

Nowadays Sai Baba (Sāī Bābā) of Shirdi (d. October 15, 1918) is no doubt the most popular saint of India, mirroring the archetype of the holy man (Satpathy 2024; Rigopoulos 1993). His temples and shrines are found throughout the country, and Shirdi in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra (Rigopoulos 2009; Feldhaus 2003) has become a national pilgrimage center. Venerated as a wondrous miracle worker by millions across the subcontinent, his tomb is visited by crowds of people from all walks of life, primarily Hindus but also Muslims, especially at festival times and on the anniversary of his death. Sai Baba was an eclectic Sufi ascetic, a *faqīr* (lit. 'poor'), part and parcel of the pluralistic religious landscape of the Deccan. He lived most of his life in a dilapidated mosque (*masjid*), advocating a spirituality accommodating Sufism and Hindu devotionalism (*bhakti*), above and beyond caste strictures and the orthodoxies of institutionalized religions. During an interrogation by a legal officer, he is reported to have said that his creed or religion was Kabīr, the famous 15th-century Sant of Benares (Aher 2024: 87-90; Satpathy 2024: 174-177). As other integrative mystics, Sai Baba viewed Kabīr as his model and more than once identified himself with him, even saying that Kabīr was his *guru*.

The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (*Śrī Sāī Saccarita*) or 'The True Life of Lord Sai,' is regarded by Hindus as the most authoritative repository of his life and deeds. This hagiography is revered as a sacred book (*pothī*) by all devotees, who read its chapters as part of their daily worship (Dabholkar 1999).[2] It was composed in Marāṭhī by Govind Raghunath Dabholkar (1859–1929), a Brahmin who Sai Baba nicknamed Hemadpant. He started working on it while the saint was still alive, having obtained his permission and blessings (Aher 2024: 371-376; Satpathy 2024: 269-271; Shepherd 2017: 72-75; Shepherd 2015: 59-67). Divided into fifty-one chapters (plus two additional ones, *i.e.* an epilogue and an epitome), the *Shri Sai Satcharita* is written in traditional *ovī* verse form and comprises more than 9,300 verses.[3] Dabholkar

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[2] On Indira Kher's English translation, see "Indira Kher: Translation of *Sai Satcharita*;"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg-X5XVt6PM. For the original Marāṭhī text, see Dabholkar (1982).

[3] The term *ovī* comes from the Marāṭhī verb *ovaṇē* 'to wreathe.' The *ovī* meter consists of either six or eight syllables, the quantity as a rule being that of a long syllable. The origin of the *ovī* is found in folk-songs, as indicated by the famous line: 'In Maharashtra the *ovī* is sung while pounding [the corn]' (*mahārāṣṭreṣu yoṣidbhiḥ ovī geyā tu kaṇḍane*).

conceived his work in the trail of the Maharashtrian *Vārkarī Sampradāya*,[4] explicitly linking Sai Baba to it and praising Shirdi as a modern Pandharpur.[5]

The actual model of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* is the Marāṭhī *Gurucaritra* ('Life of the Master') written by Sarasvatī Gaṅgādhar around the mid-16th century, the gospel for all devotees of the god Dattatreya. Indeed, Dabholkar viewed Sai Baba as a manifestation of Dattatreya, a synthetic deity popular all across the Deccan that is revered as an immortal *guru*, *yogī* and *avatāra*, even accommodating Islāmic tenets (Rigopoulos 2024).

In order to assess the types of animals that are present in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, I have scrutinized each of its 51 + 2 chapters and a summary of these findings is detailed in Appendices 1 and 2. As is typical of Purāṇic tradition, the hagiography attaches a symbolic value to many of the animals it mentions, whether they figure in the deeds and utterances attributed to Sai Baba—the stories of his life and miracles along with his tales and parables—or in Dabholkar's own comments. Animals are thought to teach a lesson (Satpathy 2014: 97-99) and function as a moral and religious symbol, be it positive or negative, and the audience of listeners/readers of the text are perfectly aware of the meaning that is attached to them. With the aim of focusing on animals qua living beings, I have not taken into consideration deities and their animal vehicles.

On the whole, the significance of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* lies in the fact that it is one of the most popular hagiographies of modern times and that it is a Hindu appropriation of an eclectic Sufi saint. This is its peculiar feature, which reflects itself even in its choice of animal symbolism.

2. Fundamental presuppositions in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* with regard to animals

What strikes the reader of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* is the frequency with which it refers to animals—only chapter 2 does not mention any—and also their variety since it makes reference to more than fifty of them. Furthermore, the hagiography refers to animals in general more than a hundred times. The leitmotif that runs throughout the *Shri Sai Satcharita* is that Sai Baba (who is identical with God, the *guru*, the Absolute *Brahman* and the Self or *ātman*) abides in all creatures, from the biggest to the

[4] The tradition of those who regularly go on a pilgrimage (*vārī*) to Pandharpur on the banks of the Bhimā River, the most popular *bhakti* tradition of the Marāṭhī speaking area. Pandharpur is the seat of the god Vitthal/Vithoba, who is identified as Krishna. The originator of the Vārkarī movement was the poet-saint Jnaneshvar (d. 1296), a Brahmin who was possibly born in Alandi in Pune district, and the *Shri Sai Satcharita* recalls one of his famous miracles, *i.e.* when he made a buffalo recite the *Vedas*; Dabholkar 1999: 330. On the *Shri Sai Satcharita* and the *Jñāneśvarī*, Jnaneshvar's *magnum opus*, see Kher (2001: 151-157).

[5] As is daily sung during the noon *ārtī*: 'Shirdi is my Pandharpur and Sai Baba is my God' (Briz-Kishore 2000: 98).

smallest, being present in all animate beings as well as in inanimate reality (Satpathy 2024: 296-298; Munsiff 1991: 57; Narasimhaswami 1942: 31; Bharadwaja 1983: 46-49).[6] There is a thorough recognition that nonhuman forms of life are expressions of the one divine principle.[7] To quote a few examples:

> Sometimes I am a dog and sometimes a pig; sometimes I am a cow, sometimes a cat, and sometimes an ant, a fly, an aquatic creature—in such various forms do I move about in this world. Know, that I like only him who sees me in all the living beings. So give up the sense of differentiation. This is the way to worship me (Dabholkar 1999: 143).
>
> An insect, an ant, creatures living in water or moving in the sky, or animals on the land—a dog or a pig, I pervade them all, most truly and always (Dabholkar 1999: 243).
>
> Sai is not confined to one place; Sai dwells in all things—living and non-living. Right from Brahmadev, down to the insects as tiny as an ant or a fly, he pervades them all and everywhere (Dabholkar 1999: 451).
>
> He fills everything totally—animate and inanimate. What then, is coming and going, to him? (Dabholkar 1999: 662).

The text implicitly recognizes that human beings are also animals and that there is a continuum among the different species which are nonetheless hierarchically organized—from invertebrates such as insects and spiders to reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds and mammals—with humans at the top of the evolutionary scale.[8] Along these lines and adhering to the belief in rebirth (*ṛṇānubandha*; Chitluri 2007), Sai Baba revealed details about the previous lives of various creatures stating for instance that a frog and a snake had been humans in their past birth, while one of his devotees had been 'a well-fed cow' in one of her former births (Dabholkar 1999: 446, 769-779). Therefore, he recommended:

> [D]o not repulse or reject anyone contemptuously—be it then a dog, a pig, or a common fly. For, without some special bond from the previous birth, no one comes to us (Dabholkar 1999: 42)[9]

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[6] A Brahmin devotee, Raghuvir B. Purandhare, recalls that Sai Baba said that he was 'inside animals' (Narasimhaswami 2006: 79 n.).

[7] This awareness is attested already in the early *Upaniṣad*s. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.16: "Now, this Self (*ātman*) is a world for all beings.... When creatures, from wild animals and birds down to the very ants, find shelter in his houses, he becomes thereby a world for them" (Olivelle 1998: 17); *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.10.2: "No matter what they are in this world—whether it is a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a moth, a gnat, or a mosquito—they all merge into that [Existent]" (Olivelle 1998: 153). See also *Bhagavadgītā* 5.18.

[8] In the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, noteworthy is the absence of the monkey—given its liminal nature—and also of the sheep and the mouse.

[9] See also Chitluri (2008: 4-5); Narasimhaswami (2006: 195); Narasimhaswami (1942: 212).

In keeping with its nondual (*advaita*) Vedānta orientation and with what Sai Baba used to say, i.e. that one must demolish the 'wall,' the sense of differentiation that separates himself/herself from God and all creatures (Satpathy 2024: 304), another basic presupposition of the text is that if all animals including humans are prey to beginningless ignorance (*avidyā*) and the obnubilating power of illusion (*māyā*), yet only humans can develop discrimination (*viveka*) and achieve liberating knowledge (*vidyā*) and thus freedom (*mokṣa*) from the painful cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). This is the reason why human life is extolled as being the most precious of all existences. Significantly, in various places Dabholkar cites the traditional Vedānta examples of illusory perception, *i.e.* of seeing silver in an oyster shell and a serpent where there is only a rope or a garland (Dabholkar 1999: 258, 269, 418, 703, 829-830).

The idea is that only through unconditional devotion to Sai Baba and by acknowledging his omnipresence will humans free themselves from delusion and ignorance since the *guru* will undoubtedly shower his grace on those who surrender to him. The bond of love between the *faqīr* and his devotees is so strong that the *Shri Sai Satcharita* states:

> Full of compassion for his devotees, Baba said, with utmost humility, 'A slave of slaves that I am, I am indebted to you and have set out to have your darshan. It is indeed by your great kindness that I have met you. I am but a worm in your faeces, by virtue of which position, I am most blessed in this universe' (Dabholkar 1999: 156)[10]

In Hindu texts on renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*), it is said that ascetics should wander about the earth like worms, going about unnoticed and despised (Olivelle 1992: 107). The *Shri Sai Satcharita* emphasizes Sai Baba's love toward all creatures and, as a consequence, his strict adherence to the ascetic vow of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*; Nimbalkar 2006: 82-86; Rigopoulos 1993: 342-343) that his devotees are also instructed to follow.[11] We read:

> All living beings, he [= Sai Baba] said, are equal and therefore, nonviolence towards all, is the one common rule. Whether it be a scorpion or snake, God dwells in all alike. And so, when He does not will it so, can they harm anyone? .... Baba had only one thing to say, whether it is a snake or a scorpion, God dwells in all of them. So love them all (Dabholkar 1999: 365, 369).

[10] A sanitized version of this statement is as follows: "This worm of consciousness which resides in your body with faeces, which causes your actions, is myself. I am the controller of your inner being. As a result of your coming to me, you have become one with me through your *bhakti* or devotion and I consider myself blessed by the *darshan* of God residing in your heart'" (Dabholkar 1999: 164 n. 9).

[11] Yet every now and then Sai Baba used to eat meat. He even allowed animal sacrifice, as per the Islāmic law: 'Baba also sent for the *Mullah* to recite *Fatiah* or *mantra*s according to the Islāmic scriptures (Quran) and, with proper rites, got the she-goat to be slaughtered' (Dabholkar 1999: 629).

3. Auspicious and inauspicious animals

Following the Hindu tradition, there are animals in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* that are always portrayed positively, being symbolical of a host of moral and spiritual values. Thus, the cow together with its five products (milk, curds, butter, dung and urine) is mentioned a dozen times and is regarded as supremely sacred and a symbol of purity and prosperity, of goodness and motherly love, being a selfless provider (Jacobsen 2009: 713-716). The *guru* is glorified as the divine cow greater than Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow (Dabholkar 1999: 251).

Another animal that is consistently regarded in positive terms is the bee, particularly the black bee.[12] Devotees are said to be absorbed at Sai Baba's feet as a bee in a lotus, hovering around the physical form of their *guru* (Dabholkar 1999: 166, 457, 509, 874, 880).

The 'swan' or bar-headed goose (*haṃsa*), symbol of the *ātman* and of liberation, is also extolled as the emblem of the steadfast devotee. In particular, the *haṃsa* is praised for its discriminative knowledge as it is said to have the ability to filter water from milk with its beak, i.e. falsehood from truth (Lanman 1898). Sai Baba himself is venerated as the supreme *haṃsa* that swims in the lake that is God, eager to feed on its pearls, i.e. *Brahman* (Dabholkar 1999: 267, 324, 589).

The *Shri Sai Satcharita* honors even the tiny ant since when it is intent on the sweetness of the jaggery it will not let go of it: one should surrender to Sai Baba with the same one-pointed concentration (Dabholkar 1999: 447).[13]

On the other hand, in our text there are several animals that are portrayed negatively either because of their symbolism or because they are dangerous to humans, though the saint required that none of them should be harmed let alone killed.[14]

Thus the scorpion is threatening because of its venomous bite (Dabholkar 1999: 366-367, 536, 872, 874; Frembgen 2004) and so is the tiger due to its ferocity, though the *Shri Sai Satcharita* tells a story of

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[12] The one exception is in *Shri Sai Satcharita* 39.92, where the black bee gets trapped in a lotus being beguiled by its fragrance, proving the danger of running after sense objects (Dabholkar 1999: 651).

[13] The virtues of resoluteness and detachment are frequently ascribed to the ant; see *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 43.48-53.

[14] In Narasimhaswami's *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* we read:

> Hari Sitaram Dixit: 'The serpent kills people; so, when one sees a serpent, should he not kill it?'
>
> Baba: 'No. We should never kill it. Because it will never kill us unless it is ordered by God to kill us. If God has so ordered, we cannot avoid it' (Narasimhaswami 1942: 118).

For a similar utterance of Sai Baba with reference to a tiger, see *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* n.d.: 83.

an ill tiger that was taken to Shirdi just a week before the saint's demise where it died a peaceful death at Sai Baba's feet,[15] proving the latter's power of taming even the fiercest animal (Dabholkar 1999: 498, 500, 510-513, 515, 874; Aher 2024: 191-192).[16]

Similarly, the alligator is linked to great worry, the crocodile is synonymous with arrogance and envy, and the *timiṅgil* fish, a huge creature that according to the epic of the *Mahābhārata* (3.166.3) can swallow a whale in one bite, is identified with various diseases (Dabholkar 1999: 222, 273, 278).

The frog that wallows in mud represents the person who doesn't believe in Sai Baba, and the frog that lives in a well is portrayed negatively since it ignores the pleasure of freedom, which is symbolical of *mokṣa*. In a tale narrated by the saint, two men are said to have been reborn as a frog and a snake as a consequence of their greed for money (Dabholkar 1999: 158, 373, 687, 769-779, 822).

The elephant, the donkey and the leech are also depicted negatively: the elephant being identified with wealth and worldly life (Dabholkar 1999: 651, 759, 783), the donkey being identified with sensual pleasures (Dabholkar 1999: 606), and the leech being always searching for 'impure blood' (Dabholkar 1999: 687, 822).

The moth that is attracted to the light of a lamp is compared to a pseudo-sage who is incapable of discriminating between good and bad (Dabholkar 1999: 825)[17] and even the chameleon is referred to disapprovingly, since it is said to symbolize someone who never had a keen desire to reach God (Dabholkar 1999: 801).

4. Animals that are symbolically ambivalent

Most interesting are those animals that are symbolical of both positive and negative features, depending upon circumstances. Thus, the horse, the animal that is most frequently mentioned in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*—thirty times—is said to be symbolical of the sense organs which, being wild and potentially destructive, need to be placed under the control of the intellect through the reins of firm resolution. At the same time, in one of Sai Baba's tales a horse is said to represent God's grace and the

[15] Sai Baba is said to have given a buffalo a good death or *sadgati*, liberation, after instructing a devotee to nourish it with a sweet flatbread (*puraṇ polī*) with plenty of ghee; Narasimhaswami (1942: 142-143).

[16] For a similar story of an old lion that breathed its last in Sai Baba's presence, see Satpathy (2024: 170). In the 20th century, various ascetics used to surround themselves with wild animals: in 1936, one Swami Krishnananda went to the Kumbh Mela festival of Allahabad together with a lioness that he claimed was tamed and vegetarian; Yogananda (1958: 397).

[17] On the other hand, in Sufism the moth and flame metaphor represents the mystical journey of the soul toward God, symbolizing the annihilation of the self in the divine.

animal's nine lumps of dung are equated with the nine types of devotion (Dabholkar 1999: 345-346).[18] Moreover, the first miracle of the saint was the retrieval of the lost mare (Kher: 2001: 21-28) of one Chand Patil, a Muslim, and we know that starting from 1911 he had a horse called Shyamsundar/ Shyamkarna of whom he was very fond of. The animal would bow its head at Sai Baba's feet (Karve 1988: 160-161) at the time of congregational worship (*ārtī*) and would accompany him during processions.[19] This horse had a black ear (*śyāmakarṇa*; hence its name) and had been offered to him by a breeder as a token of gratitude (Dabholkar 1999: 73-74, 270, 345-346, 616-617, 650, 811, 853; Aher 2024: 81-82).

The snake is a dangerous creature and is generally viewed negatively in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* that mentions it twenty-nine times. There are stories in which snakes threaten and even bite devotees and Sai Baba intervenes and cures them by 'scolding' the venom. The snake is also said to symbolize *māyā*, that 'coils' herself round her pray, and the saint is extolled as he who destroys the snake of the fear of worldly life (Dabholkar 1999: 273, 355, 357-358, 364, 374-376, 871-872, 882). On the other hand, Sai Baba is identified by devotees with the divine *nāga*, *i.e.* the cobra—mentioned six times in the text—whom they worship with milk offerings (Jacobsen 2009: 711-713; Rigopoulos 2017; Rigopoulos 2014).[20] The Śeṣanāga or the thousand-headed cobra, king of serpents, is said to praise Sai Baba with all his mouths though he is ultimately unable to understand his real nature (Dabholkar 1999: 351, 568, 570, 586-587). It is noteworthy that in March 1912 the *faqīr* narrated a tale in which he was metamorphosed into a cobra (*Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* n.d.: 103): defying species boundaries, Sufi as well as Hindu ascetics are believed to be capable of effecting bodily transformation from one category of being to another, as from human to nonhuman animal.

The parrot is a symbol of a variety of conflicting characteristics: wisdom and detachment as well as ignorance and lust (it being the vehicle of Kama, the god of love; Doniger 1993). In the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, the parrot that holds fast to the perch within the cage is akin to the frog in the well and represents man who is held captive due to his/her identification with the body. As a symbol of the

[18] Listening to scriptures/holy talks (*śravaṇa*), singing devotional songs (*kīrtana*), recollection of the divine name (*smaraṇa*), homage to the feet of the *guru*/deity (*pādasevana*), ritual worship (*arcanā*), reverential bowing (*vandana*), service to the *guru*/deity as his/her slave (*dāsya*), friendship with the *guru*/deity (*sakhya*), and the total offering of oneself to the *guru*/deity (*ātmanivedana*); see *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23 ff.

[19] Having pet animals is a characteristic of ascetics who reside in hermitages (*āśramas*). See the case of Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950); *Sri Ramana, Friend of Animals: The Life of Lakshmi the Cow* (2004).

[20] The *nāga*'s forehead is said to be adorned with a beatiful gem that will eventually destroy him; Dabholkar (1999: 773). Cobras are believed to live in subterranean worlds and to be the guardians of all sorts of wonderful gems and riches.

imprisoned soul (*jīvātman*), the parrot is called to free itself from the cage of the body and fly up in the sky (Dabholkar 1999: 278-279, 373). Sai Baba loved to gaze at parrots, admiring their size and colors (*Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* n.d.: 95; Narasimhaswami 1942: 74). In one of his autobiographic tales, he pointed out that he once exchanged 'the lower part of his body' with that of a parrot and that later 'a great serpent woke up,' which seems to imply that though he had been prone to lust (*kāma*) he was able to subdue it and eventually achieve the highest spiritual state, 'waking up' to his divine *nāga* nature (*Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* n.d.: 8-9).

The bird in general is symbolically ambivalent in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*. On the one hand, Sai Baba compares it to the mind that is caught in the bewilderment of *māyā*, and on the other the *guru* himself is compared to a mother bird that clasps her young ones under her protective wings (Dabholkar 1999: 521, 529).[21]

5. Identification of Sai Baba and his devotees with particular animals

I already mentioned how the saint purposefully identified himself with all types of animals. Not only did he often refer to animals in his tales—delightful is that of a lizard that had come to Shirdi from Aurangabad to visit her sister (Dabholkar 1999: 244-246, 870; Frembgen 1996)—but he also liked to surround himself with them. Indeed, many modern and contemporary Sufis are well-known for their love of animals (Kuehn 2024). Sai Baba's devotee Shantabai Joshi recalls:

> The Dwarka Mai[22] was a place of refuge for the stray animals of Shirdi. Often he [= Sai Baba] would place a kid (young goat) on his lap and caress it. If it bleated he would give it a drink of water with his own hands. Dogs and cats sought refuge at his feet, and Baba had a special fondness for dogs. Then there was a black cow with white stripes; she and her calf had literally made the Dwarka Mai their home, and Baba would feed the cow and pat her on her back (Chitluri 2014: 30).

I now focus attention on a few cases of the saint's identification with animals. In what appears to be one of the rare autobiographical statements of his, Sai Baba compares his *guru* to the mother tortoise, who 'feeds her little ones on her loving glance.' This glance is said to 'nourish and fatten the offspring'

[21] Jesus' saying in *Luke* 13:34 comes to mind: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.' On the symbolism of birds within Sufism, see "When Birds Speak, Mystics Listen: Decoding Nature's Hidden Language in Sufi Tradition;" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oksvF5mgEDs.

[22] Lit. 'many-gated mother.' The Hindu name that Sai Baba gave to his mosque.

and thus the little ones, *i.e.* the *guru*'s disciples—among whom was Sai Baba—'need do nothing else.' The hatchlings are nurtured on the loving glance of their mother who is 'their sole nourishment,' *i.e.* 'the nourishment of Self-rejoicing.' The gaze filled with love of the tortoise/master, which is 'a shower of nectar,' is reciprocated by the hatchlings/pupils that are 'always intent on the mother' and results in the oneness between the *guru* and his disciples (Dabholkar 1999: 305, 309, 570). Here Sai Baba emphasizes the supreme value of *guru-bhakti*: if such intensity of pure love is present—in which the initiative lies with the *guru*, *i.e.* is an act of grace—the disciple doesn't need to do anything else but to reciprocate his love in order to achieve divine communion (Dabholkar 1999: 521-522).[23] It is a fact that tortoises, unlike other reptiles, have very good vision. Moreover, they are popularly believed to express their affection by staring.

Sai Baba had lustrous eyes and his piercing gaze was most powerful, bringing about ecstatic trances in whomever it transfixed (*Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* n.d.: 46-47). In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* we read that his eyes "shone in the daylight, like those of a cat in darkness" (Dabholkar 1999: 402).[24] The transforming power of a saint's look is well-documented in Sufism and it is known as *naẓar*.[25] The *faqīr* would gaze at people and even at animals and inanimate objects such as his portrait or photo, 'enlivening' them by his glance. Mrs. Tarkhad offers the following testimony:

> There was such power and penetration in the glance that none could continue to look at his eyes. One felt that Sai Baba was reading him or her through and through. Soon one lowered one's eyes and bowed down. One felt that he was not only in one's heart but in every atom of one's body .... He was the *Antaryami* [Inner Ruler], call him God or Satpurusha [Perfect One] .... In his presence, no doubts, no fears, no questioning had any place, and one resigned oneself and found that was the only course, the safest and best course (Narasimhaswami 2006: 67).

Sai Baba used to beg his food from five households of Shirdi every day (Satpathy 2024: 110-111, 115; Olivelle 2005). The *Shri Sai Satcharita* defines his way of requesting alms as *mādhūkarī*, meaning 'to beg like a bee,' which in Hindu asceticism is regarded as the ideal method of begging (Dabholkar 1999: 130, 379, 632). As a bee gathers nectar a little at a time from different flowers, so an ascetic begs a little food at a time from several houses. And as a bee does not injure the flowers, so the ascetic obtains just a

[23] Sai Baba insisted on the need of a *guru*: 'The guide will take you straight to your destination, avoiding wolves, tigers and ditches etc. on the way;' Rigopoulos (1993: 172-173). See also Narasimhaswami (1942: 60).

[24] The mother cat and the kittens that suckle at her teats are extolled in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* as the celebration of a mother's love; Dabholkar (1999: 238-239).

[25] The saint's *naẓar* is daily celebrated when his morning (*kākaḍ*) *ārtī* is sung; Briz-Kishore (2000: 93).

mouthful from each householder, without becoming a burden on any of them (Olivelle 1992: 104, 304).[26] Sai Baba maintained his *mādhūkarī* begging habits all his life, until his very last day.

Another insect with which the *Shri Sai Satcharita* identifies the saint is the *kātīṇ* that is similar to a spider and makes a hard and bright-shining cocoon: it spreads no web for flies, has long legs and a little black body. The *kātīṇ* is assimilated to Sai Baba due to its proverbial industriousness. Thus, Dabholkar writes that even after his *niryāṇ* or passing away "Sai Baba's *leela*[27] knows no rest, even for a moment, like the insect *Kateen*" (Dabholkar 1999: 739). On several occasions, the *faqīr* assured his devotees that he would be active and vigorous from the tomb also (Rigopoulos 1993: 243, 376). Furthermore, the *kātīṇ*'s cocoon is a symbol of death and resurrection, *i.e.* of Sai Baba's immortality.

Especially meaningful is the *faqīr*'s identification with dogs since these animals are considered utterly impure by Hindus. When a devotee of the saint who was preparing food at her home saw a dog coming near her she flung burning fuel at it, perceiving the dog to be unclean and polluting, and was later scolded by Sai Baba since she had been cruel and had not recognized his presence in the dog (Narasimhaswami 1942: 155). The mention of the dog is frequent in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* where it recurs twenty-one times. The *faqīr* would often highlight his oneness with dogs, emphasizing how feeding a hungry dog amounted to feeding him. He himself gave the example by feeding them, as all living creatures experience the same hunger.[28] It is even reported that he cured a devotee of malaria by ordering him to feed rice and curds to a black dog near the local temple of goddess Lakshmi (Dabholkar 1999: 142-143, 206, 216, 698-699, 870). Once Sai Baba gave a spectacular proof of his oneness with a dog. As I was told by Uddhavrao Madhavrao Deshpande, an old villager of Shirdi whom I interviewed back in October 1985:

> One day, when ... Mhalsapati was taking his lunch meal, a dog came to his house, waiting and crying. But Mhalsapati didn't feed the dog; instead he beat it with a stick, wounding it on its head and mouth. The same day, in the evening, devotees went to the *masjid* to meet Baba and saw he was wounded. They asked him what had happened. Mhalsapati was present and Baba told him: 'I came to your house today to beg and you beat me like this.' Mhalsapati protested: 'But when did you

[26] Hindu texts on renunciation specify that the food should be begged from five or seven houses at random. Sai Baba, however, used to beg his food from the same households of Shirdi.

[27] Lit. 'sport,' 'play,' *i.e.* his miraculous deeds.

[28] If people brought to Sai Baba things to eat and flies and ants ate them, he would say that he had eaten them; Narasimhaswami (1982: Vol. 4, 163). See also Narasimhaswami (1942: 73-74, 125, 262).

> come? I didn't see you.' Then Baba said: 'Didn't that dog come to your door?' Thus Mhalsapati understood the lesson (Rigopoulos 2020: 183).[29]

For what concerns Sai Baba's devotees, the *Shri Sai Satcharita* identifies them particularly with the Chatak (*caṭak*) and Chakor (*cakor*) birds. The Chatak, which is mentioned ten times, is said to eagerly wait for the monsoon rains to quench its thirst and it is a symbol of spiritual longing. It is associated with the Jacobin cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*), a partially migratory bird that is viewed as a harbinger of the monsoon rains due to the timing of its arrival. Dabholkar identifies all devotees and listeners/readers of his opus as thirsty Chataks who wait for the 'cloud of compassion,' *i.e.* Sai Baba, to rain the pure water of grace/bliss upon them (Dabholkar 1999: 234, 244, 289, 432, 540, 673, 713, 784, 817, 842). The Chakor, which is mentioned eight times, is said to slake its thirst on the nectarine beams of the moon. It is identified with the Chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), the national bird of Pakistan. Thus, the Chakor, *i.e.* the devotee, is happy only when it can gaze at the moon, *i.e.* the shining face of Sai Baba, who showers his blissful nectar upon him/her (Dabholkar 1999: 303, 406, 474, 542, 648, 814, 817, 842).

Sai Baba used a charming simile to refer to his devotees: he said they were like sparrows that even if they flew far away, beyond the seven seas, he would bring to him by tying a rope to their legs and pulling it (Dabholkar 1999: 452, 459, 836).[30] He also referred to his Muslim disciple Abdul,[31] who served him for thirty years, as a 'crow' since he 'pecked,' *i.e.* inadvertently but providentially stepped on a devotee's swollen leg, and in this way caused the rupture of his abscesses curing him from his painful illness (Dabholkar 1999: 560-561). Sai Baba's calling his servant Abdul a crow may be symbolic of the latter's humility and detachment (*vairāgya*).[32] As pointed out by Shankara (c. 700 CE), the major exponent of Advaita Vedānta, one should look at everything, good or bad, with detachment, as no better than the excreta of a crow (verse 4 of the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, 'The Direct Experience [of *Brahman*]').

The saint would ask his devotees to always be gentle and never 'bark' at people (Dabholkar 1999: 312). When he 'left the body' on 15 October 1918, the *Shri Sai Satcharita* describes the desperation of the

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[29] See also Narasimhaswami (1942: 117-118); Chitluri (2008: 4). When the horse Shyamsundar was beaten up by his trainer it is said that the wounds instantly appeared on Sai Baba's back; Williams (2004: 54-55). Similarly, when a devotee beat a cat who drank his curds, the saint showed a weal on his shoulder, corresponding to the stroke on the cat's shoulder; Narasimhaswami (2006: 179-180); Narasimhaswami (1982: Vol. 4, 164).

[30] Jesus mentions the sparrows as an example of how God values all creatures in creation. As we read in *Luke* 12:6: 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.'

[31] He arrived in Shirdi in 1889 and wrote a notebook in Deccani Urdu recording the saint's utterances (Warren 1999: 261-333).

[32] On the intelligence of this bird, see Heinrich (1999).

people of Shirdi by saying that they were like fish that toss and turn in agony when the water in a pond dries up, and like the calves of a cow that have lost their way (Dabholkar 1999: 713).

Ironically, Dabholkar writes that when confronted with *Brahman* even great scholars are just like "glow worms before the sun," and that once *Brahman* is attained "the web of empty words fades away" (Dabholkar 1999: 831).[33] And yet, though scholars are portrayed negatively, Sai Baba is said to have been one of them at least on one occasion—albeit having the capacity to reject their merciless behavior. In a tale in which he figures as one of the protagonists, the saint pointed out:

> We, the learned, the scholarly, knew no kindness nor pity. Being rich (but miserly), nobody bothered to shoo away the crow with the unwashed hand. But this Vanjari,[34] without any learning or authority, of a lower *varna* [social category] and a Vanjari by caste—and yet, how much natural affection he had in his heart, that he should say, 'eat some bread and vegetable!' He who loves in this way, without any expectation, only he is a true Jnani [sage] and I felt that to show him respect is the most exquisite way of gaining supreme Knowledge. Therefore with great respect I ate the quarter piece of bread that the Vanjari gave me and drank some water. And lo! What a wonderful thing happened! Quite unexpectedly, Gururaj[35] appeared.... (Dabholkar 1999: 520-521).

6. The Islāmic element

If Dabholkar repeatedly states that Sai Baba was 'neither Hindu nor Muslim' (Dabholkar 1999: 75, 105, 159, 692, 720), he is nonetheless forced to acknowledge his Muslim identity when quoting his words:

> Dada, remember, his *guru* is a Brahmin, and I, a Muslim. Yet, regarding me to be the same as his own *guru*, he offered me *guru-puja* [*guru* worship].[36] Not once did the doubt arise in his mind that "I am a Brahmin, pure and holy and he, an impure Muslim. How can I worship him?" (Dabholkar 1999: 171).

To be sure, our *faqīr* was constantly engrossed in the recollection (*dhikr*) of Allāh and his sovereignty: the name Allāh Mālik, one of Allāh's beautiful ninety-nine names, was always on his lips. It is noteworthy that Dabholkar narrates that the saint would eat mutton on occasions, provocatively

[33] Analogously, the firefly is symbolic of worldly life: in the 'light of the sun' of Sai Baba's grace it 'fades away and is completely lost;' Dabholkar (1999: 764).

[34] A trader and carrier of grain, salt, etc. The Vanjaris appear to have originated in Rajasthan.

[35] Lit. 'the king of *gurus*,' Sai Baba's own *guru*. The meaning seems to be that he recognized that the Vanjari was none other than his *guru*.

[36] This ritual worship involves the presentation of vegetarian and other offerings, and their return to the worshipper in the form of consecrated food (*prasāda*).

asking one of his Brahmin devotees to purchase the meat, and that he himself 'poured the pieces of mutton' into the cooking vessel (Dabholkar 1999: 630-631).[37]

Though Dabholkar states that Sai Baba needed no animal to sacrifice (Dabholkar 1999: 176), yet he writes that he once put to the test his devotees by asking them to kill in one stroke a goat that was on the verge of death and to offer it in sacrifice, as is customary in Islām. While several of them refused to do so, the Brahmin Hari Sitaram Dixit took courage and was about to execute the saint's command when at the last moment the saint stopped him, preventing him from cutting the throat of the goat that soon after died a natural death (Dabholkar 1999: 380, 382-385, 388, 872; Satpathy 2024: 106).

In the Marāṭhī milieu, at least from the 16th century onward, Hinduism has tended to integrate saintly figures of Sufi background through the synthetic icon of Dattatreya, accommodating Islāmic mysticism with nondual Vedānta. For instance, in Marāṭhī sources the *guru* of the poet-saint Eknath (1533-1599), *i.e.* Janardan Svami/ Chand Bodhle, appears as a *faqīr* of Muslim background and is understood to be an *avatāra* of Dattatreya. In modern iconography, Dattatreya is represented standing with three heads (*trimukhī*) since he incorporates the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. In his six arms he holds the emblems of the *trimūrti*: the water pot and prayer beads of Brahma, the mace and conch of Vishnu—his focal identity—the drum and trident of Shiva. He is surrounded by three or four dogs, symbols of extreme impurity but nevertheless said to represent the *Veda*s, as well as by a cow, symbol of Kamadhenu and of Brahmanical purity. Dattatreya's connection with dogs is old, dating back to the 13th century in Mahānubhāv literature (Rigopoulos 2011; Tulpule 1991).

In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* Sai Baba's oneness with Dattatreya is repeatedly stressed (Dabholkar 1999: 6, 57, 539, 866, 868, 877, 882), and there is no question that the saint's frequent link and identification with the 'impure' dog resonates with the belief that he is an *avatāra* of Dattatreya, the supreme ascetic (*avadhūta*) who is beyond *dharma* and *adharma*, pure and impure (Rigopoulos 2021: 226-228). There are echoes in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* of Purāṇic references to Dattatreya and his twenty-four teachers (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11.7-9, corresponding to *Uddhavagītā* 2-4)—among whom are several animals—as when Dabholkar states that the meditator becomes one with the object he/she meditates upon, as it happens to the insect that becomes the black bee,[38] and as when Sai Baba is reported saying that the

[37] From time to time, Sai Baba would distribute food with meat in it; see Dabholkar (1999: 630).

[38] The idea is that one can assume the form of another by focusing one's mind on it. In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11.9.22-23 we read: "On whatever a man focuses his entire mind through love, hate, or fear, he attains its form. A worm, contemplating the wasp who has brought him to his hive, O King, becomes like a wasp without losing its former shape" (Olivelle 1992: 185 n. 36).

deer,[39] the elephant, the moth, the fish and the black bee find their ruin due to their strong attraction to sense objects (Dabholkar 1999: 500, 651, 741, 773).[40]

Last but not least, our hagiography associates the pig with the dog. The pig is regarded as filthy and ritually impure by Hindus and Muslims alike,[41] and it is well-known that the consumption of its meat is *haram*, *i.e.* prohibited by the Quran. The pig (together with the sow) is mentioned twelve times in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, and the fact that our *faqīr* identified himself with it saying that feeding a hungry pig smeared with mud was tantamount to feeding him (Dabholkar 1999: 143, 698) proves that he had no taboos and made no differences whatsoever. Through his life and teachings, Sai Baba communicated the mystical recognition of the unity of being, of reality as a unified whole (*waḥdat al-wujūd*, *advaita*):

> To experience the oneness of the Self in all beings is the utmost limit of all Knowledge. Emancipation and Bliss are really born from such Knowledge (Dabholkar 1999: 311).

> I am formless and everywhere. I am in everything. I am in everything and beyond. I fill all space. All that you see taken together is Myself. I do not shake or move.
>
> All that is seen is my form: ant, fly, prince, pauper.
>
> I am in the water, in dry places, in woods, amidst crowds, and in the solitary wilderness. I am in the fire and in ether. I am not limited to any place.
>
> Feeding the hungry bitch is feeding me. I have the feeling of my hunger being satisfied, when hers is satisfied.
>
> I am still belching with the heavy feeding you gave the dog this morning. I am also in the mire besmirched pig (that you did not feed, though it came to you). To serve me, give up differentiation.
>
> Sometimes I come as dog, sometimes as pig. The devotee who recognizes me in each form and treats me adequately is blessed (Narasimhaswami 1942: 11-12).

[39] In Hinduism, the deer (*mṛga*) is the animal most associated with the ascetic lifestyle; see Olivelle (2008: 94).

[40] Even the episode of the ill tiger that died a peaceful death at Sai Baba's feet can be interpreted in the light of Dattatreya. In the literature of the Mahānubhāvs, Dattatreya is reported to have manifested himself to Changdev Raul in the guise of a tigress.

[41] On the symbolic use of pigs in contemporary South India by the Hindu right as well as the Dalit right, see Narayanan (2023).

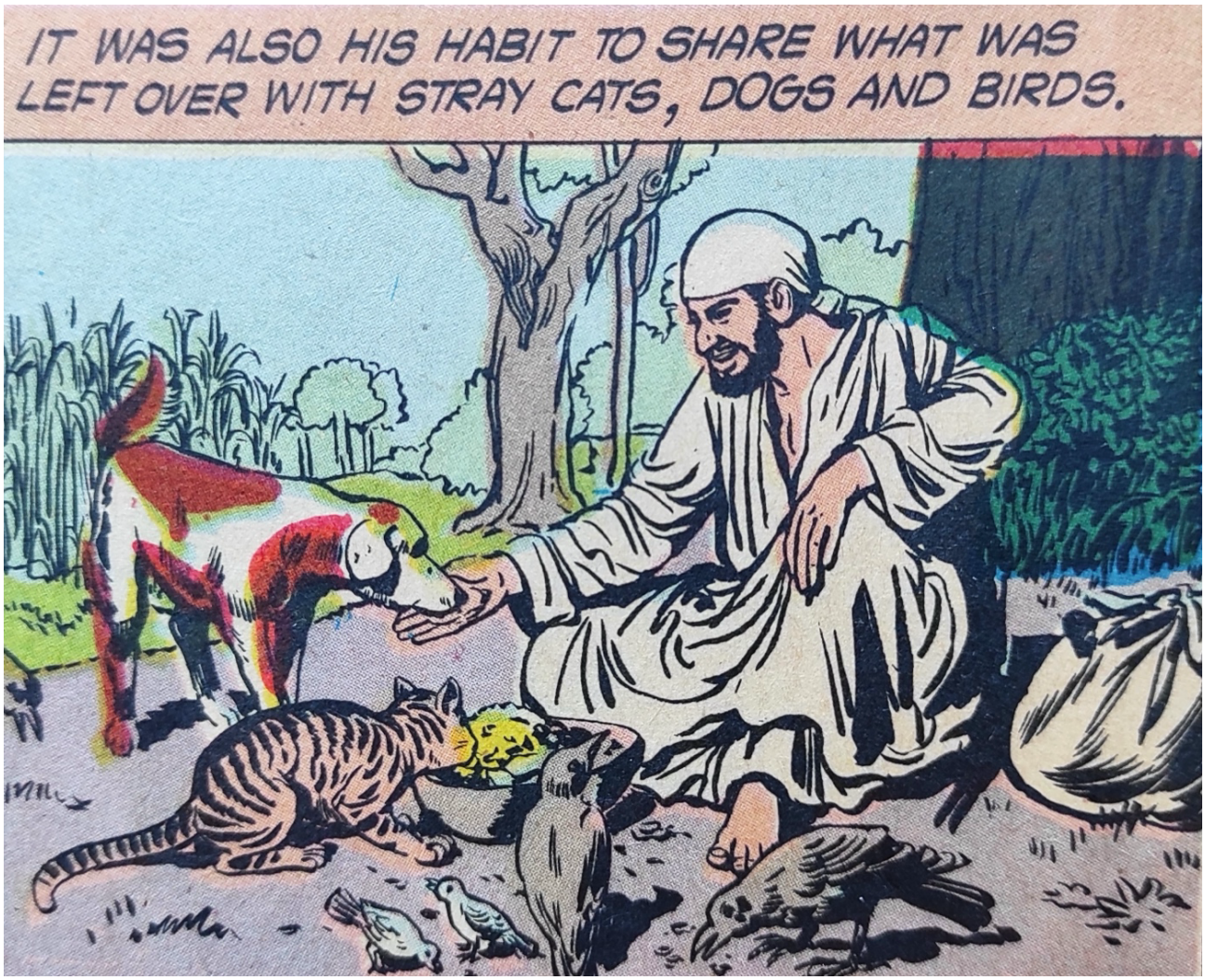

Figure 1. Excerpt from *Sai Baba. Amar Chitra Katha*, n. 225, edited by Anant Pai. Script: Shobha Gangolli; Artworks: C. M. Vitankar. Bombay: India Book House, n.d., 6.

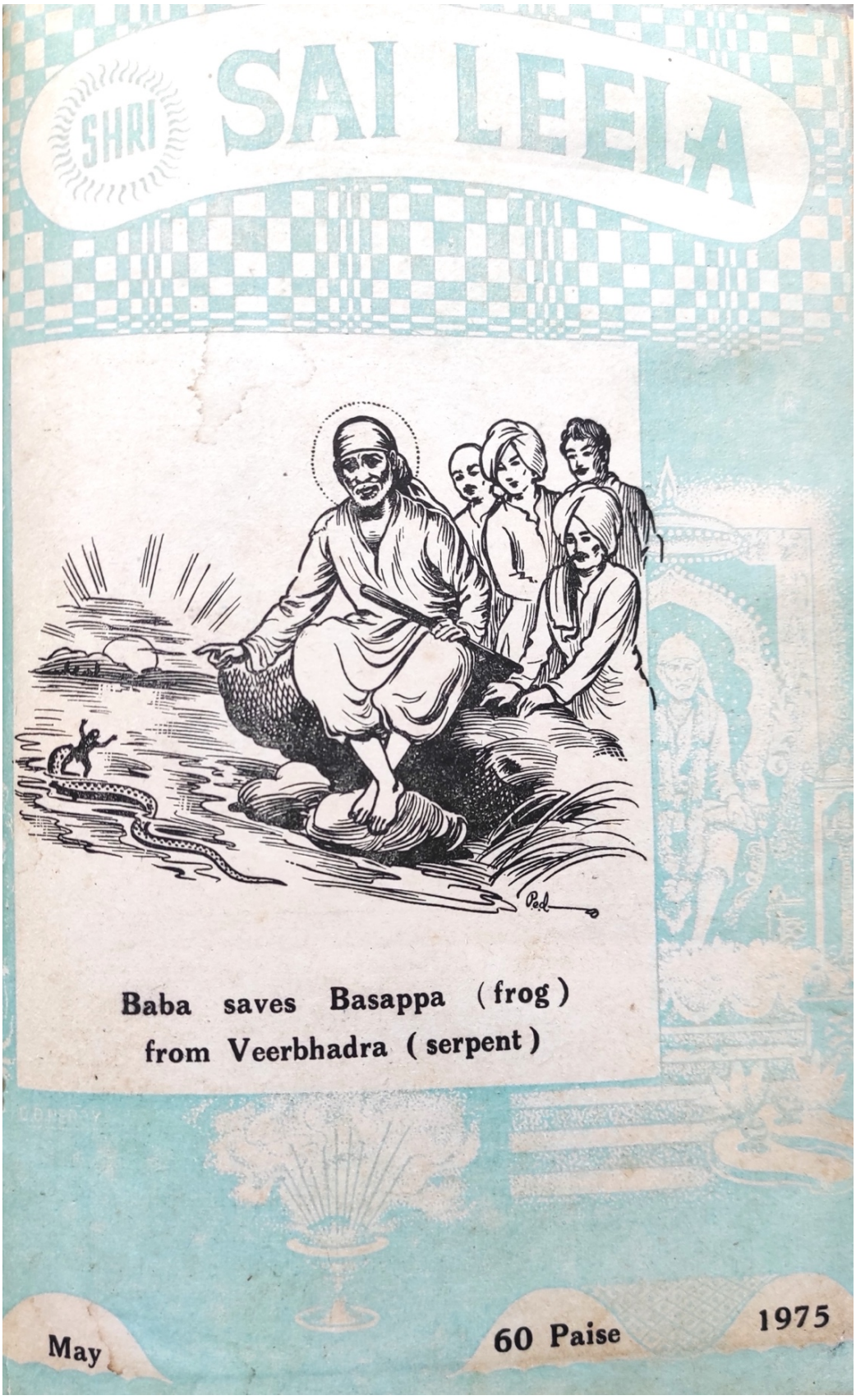

Figure 2. Sai Baba's story of the frog and the snake; *Shri Sai Satcharita* 47.66-194 (Dabholkar 1999: 769-779). Cover of monthly magazine *Shri Sai Leela*. Official Organ of Shirdi Sansthan, May 1975.

A darvesh had tamed a tiger who used to do certain tricks and thus maintain himself and his master. As the tiger grew old, he could no longer play his tricks. Naturally, he and his master both had to face starvation. Ultimately, the tiger became mad and uncontrol-

lable. As he was approaching his end, the darvesh brought him to Baba for a last grace. Baba asked the darvesh to release the animal who at once became quiet. Approaching Baba he prostrated himself at Baba's feet and as Baba was stroking his back, the tiger opened his jaw and breathed his last. Baba said, "This was a great bhakta of Lord Shiva. He has gone to Kailasa. Now bury his mortal remains in front of Shiva".

It was done. Today his tomb can be seen in Shirdi.

Figure 3. Sai Baba and the tiger; *Shri Sai Satcharita* 31.125-166 (Dabholkar 1999: 510-513). Excerpt from D. D. Parchure, *Children's Sai Baba*. Paintings: Shri G. D. Pednekar; Blocks: D. D. Neroy. Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1983, 25.

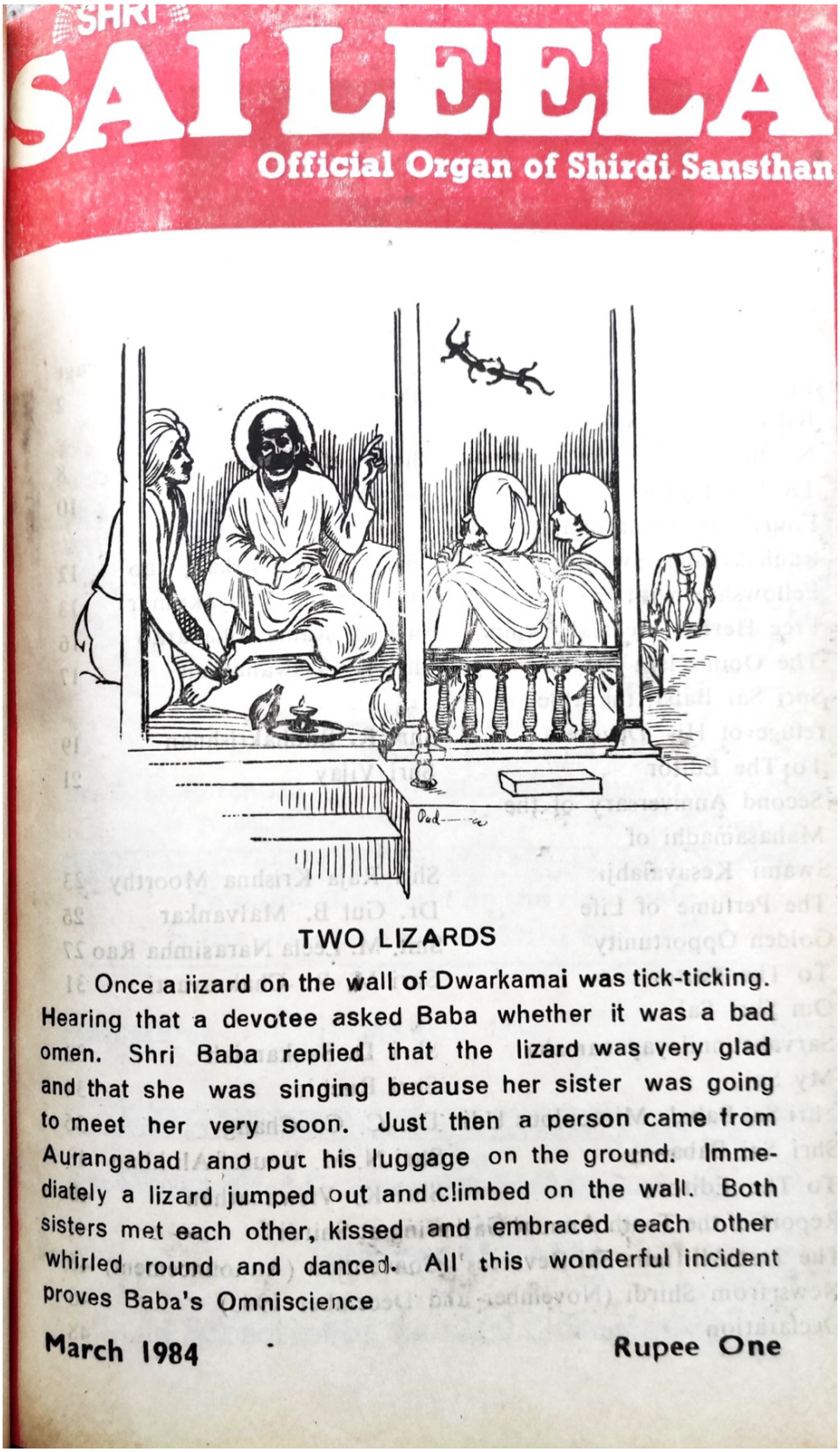

Figure 4. Sai Baba's story of the lizard; *Shri Sai Satcharita* 15.82-104 (Dabholkar 1999: 244-246). Cover of monthly magazine *Shri Sai Leela*. Official Organ of Shirdi Sansthan, March 1984.

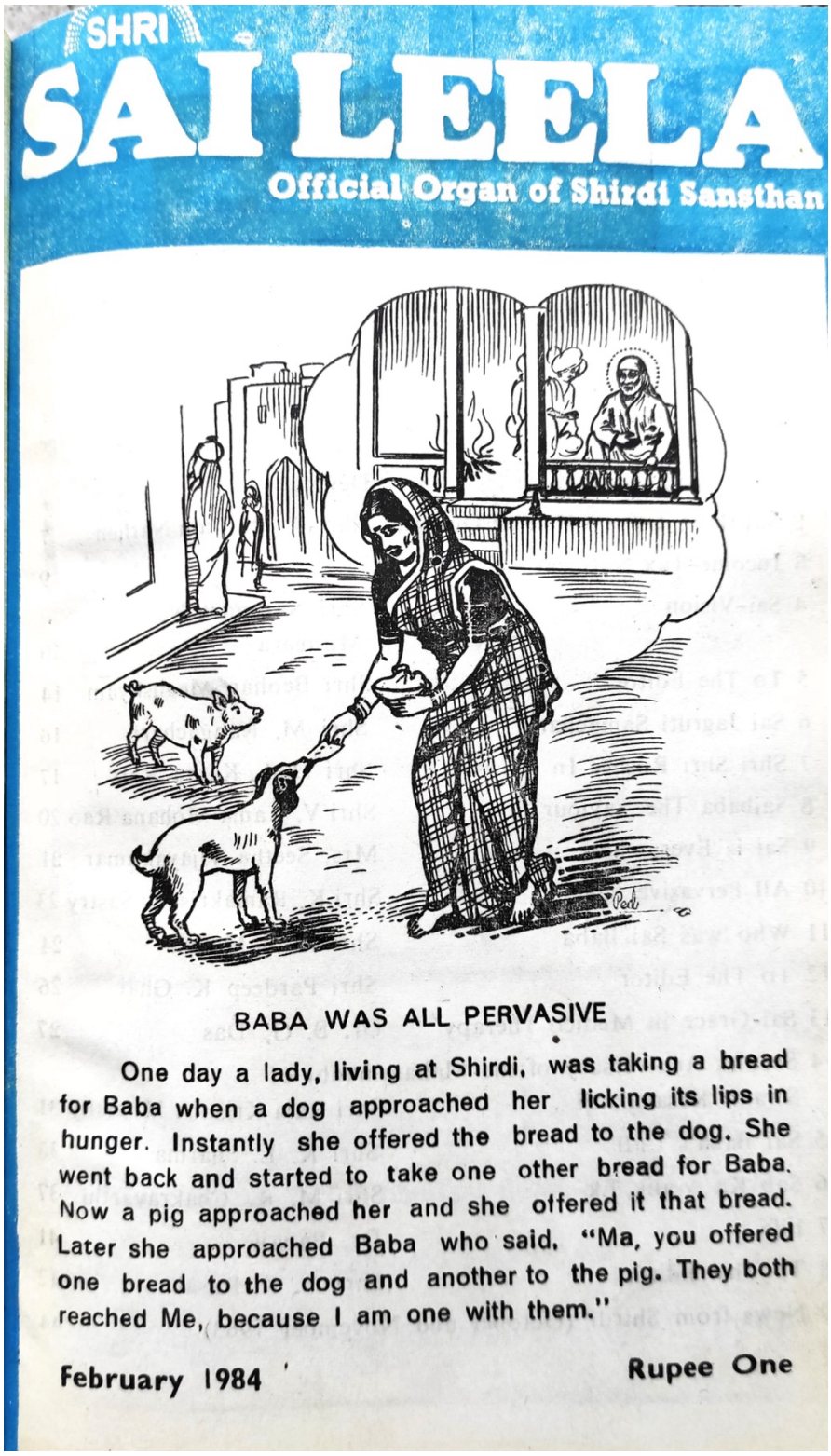

Figure 5. Mrs. Tarkhad, a lady devotee, feeds a hungry dog and a hungry pig. Sai Baba praises her compassion and tells her that by feeding them she has fed him; *Shri Sai Satcharita* 9:116-131 (Dabholkar 1999: 142-143). Cover of monthly magazine *Shri Sai Leela*. Official Organ of Shirdi Sansthan, February 1984.

Appendix 1

Complete list of animals in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*[*]

- 1.76 (creatures)
- 3.81 (never reject dog, pig or fly: without some special bond from previous birth, no one comes to us), 3.85, 3.106 (worm, black bee), 3.110 (Rohilla compared to buffalo), 3.145-146, 3.148 (worm, ant), 3.149, 3.164-165 (animate and inanimate creation)
- 4.40 (animate universe), 4.76 (donkey)
- 5.7-14 (story of lost mare), 5.28 (bullocks)
- 6.26 (variety of moving creatures)
- 7.9 (horses), 7.21 (fish, dog), 7.29 (deerskin), 7.49 (cow's milk), 7.57 (goat)
- 8.10 (dogs, pigs), 8.11, 13 (dogs), 8.14 (bees, dogs), 8.21 (worms, insects), 8.31 (every living being), 8.40 (fish), 8.45 (mobile creatures, immobile beings), 8.50 (varied species of created beings), 8.51 (other species), 8.55 (birds, animals, worms, insects), 8.57 (creature), 8.89 (all beings), 8.100 (crows, dogs), 8.102 (cats, dogs), 8.148 (Sai Baba's *mādhūkarī* practice; *pañcasūnā*, i.e. five things in a house by which animal life may be accidentally destroyed: fireplace, slab for grinding condiments, broom, pestle and mortar, waterpot)
- 9.2 (*pañcasūnā*), 9.3 (all beings), 9.14-15, 17-19, 31-32, 37 (horses), 9.54-62 (*pañcasūnā*, cow-dung), 9.116-117 (hungry dog), 9.117 (hungry pig), 9.126-127 (feeding hungry dog and pig is feeding Sai Baba), 9.128 (dogs, pigs, cats), 9.129 (dog, pig, cow, cat, ant, fly, aquatic creature), 9.130 (all beings), 9.158 (all creatures)
- 10.13 (tiger, goat; Sai Baba is a trusted refuge), 10.19 (fly, worm, ant: Sai Baba assumes their forms), 10.20 (fly), 10.22 (worms, ants, pigs, dogs, birds: Sai Baba looks at them equally), 10.72 (Sai Baba saw *Brahman* in all creatures), 10.91 (Sai Baba is a worm in the faeces of devotees), 10.101 (goat), 10.112 (those who don't believe in Sai Baba are like frogs)
- 11.12 (bee hovers around the *guru*), 11.46 (flies), 11.101-104 (killing of goat), 11.115 (birds and animals stricken with fear), 11.118-119 (cattle, calves), 11.124 (Sai Baba needed no animal sacrifice, of goat or cock), 11.136 (birds and animals took heart), 11.137 (cattle, calves, birds), 11.138 (cattle)
- 12.9 (compassion of Sai Baba for all creatures), 12.163 (Sajan killed animals for a livelihood)
- 13.85, 91-97 (black dog fed on rice and curds), 13.156 (Sai Baba is well-disposed toward all creatures), 13.166 (snake's head)

[*] All deities and their animal vehicles have purposefully been omitted.

- 14.6 (black dog fed on rice and curds), 14.18-19 (animal: derogatory for man who does not make the best of this opportunity of human life), 14.21 (serpent of death), 14.55 (the *ātman* dwells in all creatures), 14.65 (horses), 14.66 (alligator of great worry), 14.74 (living beings), 14.186 (oneness of all beings), 14.201 (whole creation, animate and inanimate, is pervaded by Sai Baba), 14.208 (listeners as thirsty Chatak birds)
- 15.12-17 (cat and kittens that suckle at her teats), 15.70 (Sai Baba abides in the hearts of all creatures), 15.72 (insect, ant and creatures living in water and moving in the sky, land animals, dog, pig: Sai Baba pervades them all), 15.77 (Chatak bird), 15.82-104 (story of the lizard)
- 16.20 (greater than Kamadhenu is the *guru*, the divine cow), 16.84-85 (delusion and disappearance of oyster shell), 16.99 (silver of the oyster shell and serpent in the rope are optical illusions), 16.134 (the *ātman* dwells in all creatures), 16.151 (nonduality between God and creatures)
- 17.6 ('swans' of the Manas lake), 17.8 (seeking of animals by dull-witted people), 17.11 ('swan' separating milk from water), 17.19 (illusion of silver in oyster shell), 17.31-33 (ten sense organs as wild horses), 17.62 (*māyā* as snake), 17.67 (mind engrossed with animals), 17.68 (crocodiles of arrogance and envy), 17.122 (crocodiles of passions; *timiṅgil* fish), 17.124, 127 (parrot that holds fast to the perch within the cage)
- 18.61 (Chatak bird)
- 19.13 (oyster shell as scintillating silver, coiled rope as serpent: these are illusory perceptions), 19.14 (illusion of seeing a rope as a snake), 19.44 (Sai Baba, the 'cloud of knowledge,' rained to quench the thirst of the Chakor birds, i.e. his devotees), 19.68, 70-71 (as a mother tortoise feeds her little ones on her loving glance, so was the way of Sai Baba's *guru*), 19.111-113 (loving glances of mother tortoise nourish the offspring), 19.130 (the *guru* dwells in all beings), 19.133 (recognition of the *ātman* in all beings is the outmost limit of all knowledge), 19.134-136 (description of an elephant to a blind man: an impossible task), 19.139 (Sai Baba dwells in all beings), 19.141 (due to the tie of previous birth, one should not shoo away a man, beast or bird), 19.143 (one should never 'bark' at people), 19.151 (creatures live so long as they breathe), 19.204-205 (village sow feasting on excrements), 19.254 (goddess Sarasvati compared to black bee), 19.256 (Dabholkar bows humbly at the feet of living creatures)
- 20.1 (steadfast devotees compared to 'swans'), 20.75 (Jnaneshvar made a buffalo recite the *Veda*s), 20.114 (God dwells in the hearts of all beings), 20.116 (God fills both the living and non-living realms), 20.119 (creation made up of living and non-living creatures is insignificant in itself, i.e. is *māyā*; God alone is One without a second)

- 21.37 (buffalo as sole means of transport), 21.38 (horses, buffalo), 21.39-41, 62 (buffalo), 21.87 (allegorical tale of a horse), 21.91, 94, 100 (horse is God's grace and the nine lumps of its dung are the nine types of devotion)
- 22.3-7 (rope in semi-darkness mistaken for a snake), 22.8 (the thousand-headed cobra, king of serpents, praises Sai Baba with all his mouths and yet cannot understand his real nature), 22.25 (one must give up the ego and bow before all beings), 22.30 (spirit in all beings is one and the same), 22.52-53, 78, 80, 82-87, 99-100, 102-103, 164, 168-171 (story of snake), 22.172 (snakes, scorpions), 22.175 (all beings are equal: nonviolence toward all is the one common rule), 22.176 (scorpion, snake), 22.178-180 (scorpions), 22.195-206 (story of scorpion), 22.207 (snakes, scorpions, other venomous creatures), 22.209-231 (story of snake), 22.231-232 (snake, scorpion), 22.233 (one must love all creatures), 22.235 (goat)
- 23.7 (Sai Baba saw in all creatures God's presence), 23.22 (pig), 23.23-30 (story of parrot in cage), 23.24 (frog in a well similar to parrot), 23.33 (long snake), 23.36-66 (story of snake that bit Shyama's little finger, with Sai Baba 'scolding' the venom), 23.74 (goat), 23.98 (Sai Baba's *mādhūkarī* way of requesting alms), 23.108-111 (story of the goat that Sai Baba asked his devotees to kill and offer in sacrifice), 23.126 (loss of animals), 23.128-169 (story of goat continued), 23.156 (beast), 23.197-199 (story of goat concluded)
- 24.129 (eyes of Sai Baba shone in daylight like those of a cat in darkness), 24.142 (may devotees savour the sweetness of the story, as a bee savours the sweetness of the flower)
- 25.12 (devotees are like the thirsty Chakor bird), 25.67 (Sai Baba knew the secret desires of every creature)
- 26.1-2 (this whole creation is an illusory scene created by *māyā* and exists only in the mind), 26.8 (rope mistaken for snake), 26.74 (cow fearing tiger runs away only to meet a butcher), 26.124 (bullock cart)
- 27.4 (Chatak bird awaits eagerly the raindrops from the cloud, as devotees await this nectar-sweet story), 27.13 (only one who sees God in all created things can overcome *māyā*), 27.159 (Mrs. Khaparde was a well-fed cow in a previous birth), 27.171 (an ant intent on the sweetness of the jaggery will not let go of it)
- 28.1 (Sai Baba dwells in all things, even in insects as tiny as an ant or fly), 28.15 (Sai Baba compares devotees to sparrows), 28.62, 69 (devotees absorbed at Sai Baba's lotus-feet as bees in a lotus), 28.99-100 (devotee as a little sparrow, pulled by the string and brought to Shirdi by Sai Baba)
- 29.34 (as the peacock dances at the sight of clouds and as the Chakor bird is happy on seeing the moon, so was the devotee in her love for Sai Baba)

- 30.100 (horse is useful for visiting Sai Baba with a *ṭoṅgā*, a two-wheeled cart drawn by a horse), 30.123 (ferocious tiger was given refuge at Sai Baba's feet)
- 31.4 (ferocious tiger was given refuge at Sai Baba's feet), 31.6 (insects become bees; Jadabharata in his next life became a deer out of his love for the young one of a deer), 31.115 (devotee compared to a buzzing bee hovering around the pollen), 31.125-166 (ill tiger at Sai Baba's feet), 31.127 (bullock cart), 31.143 (worm, insect, tiger)
- 32.3 (tiger), 32.26 (the creatures of the two sexes are the branches of the tree of life), 32.42 (Sai Baba pervades this entire universe), 32.62 (crow), 32.75 (*guru* as mother bird that clasps her young ones under her wings), 32.166 (bird compared to the mind caught in the bewilderment of *māyā*)
- 33.45 (scorpion bite), 33.82 (*ārtī* of Sai Baba: he is the giver of happiness to creatures; meek Chatak bird wishes only for the pure water of bliss), 33.95, 97-98, 102-103, 105 (good horses of a *ṭoṅgā*), 33.112 (nectar before a thirsty Chakor bird), 33.130 (Sai Baba pervades this creation, animate and inanimate), 33.175 (horses of *ṭoṅgā* are ill)
- 34.48-90 (Doctor Pillai, infected with guinea worms, is cured by Sai Baba), 34.73, 82-85 (Sai Baba's servant Abdul identified with a crow), 34.164 (cobra fed with milk by devotee)
- 35.14 (cobra regarded as Sai Baba), 35.17 (the little ones of a tortoise are nurtured on the loving glances of their mother), 35.54-58 (sparrows, one alive that flew away and two dead), 35.201-215 (story of cattle and cobra; Mr. Nevaskar identifies a cobra with Sai Baba and offers it milk)
- 36.7 (Sai Baba as 'swan')
- 37.8 (ability to see God in all creatures), 37.15 (creatures move about fearlessly when there is no fear of death and there are no restrictions), 37.16 (the same divine principle fills everything, both animate and inanimate), 37.22-23 (donkey associated to sensual pleasure), 37.31 (ties of sons, animals, etc. are due to *māyā*), 37.33 (oneness between God and creatures), 37.77 (as a calf does not want to leave the mother so our mind should be fastened to the *guru*'s feet), 37.87 (dogs and pigs roll in mire, feeding on excrements), 37.127, 140, 146 (behavior and ornaments of Sai Baba's horse Shyamkarna during processions), 37.139 (banners with eagle pictures)
- 38.16 (all creatures are born out of food), 38.29 (animal sacrifice sanctioned by *Shastras*; even Brahmins eat the leftover meat), 38.30 (Sai Baba got a goat to be slaughtered, as per the Quran), 38.53 (Sai Baba asks his Brahmin devotee Dada Kelkar to get him some mutton from Korhala to eat), 38.63 (mutton), 38.65 (Sai Baba poured pieces of mutton in cooking vessel), 38.70 (Sai Baba's *mādhūkarī* practice)
- 39.9 (story of the lost mare of Chand Patil), 39.53 (devotees as Chakor bird, gazing on Sai Baba's face as if it were the moon), 39.72 (illusion of snake in a rope), 39.84 (as horses are harnessed to a chariot

so are the sense organs to the body), 39.90-93 (story of animals who are attracted to sense objects and find their ruin: deer to word, elephant to touch, moth to form, fish to taste, black bee to fragrance)

- 40.32 (Sai Baba is omnipresent and needs no horses or carriages), 40.39, 41 (Sai pervades everything, animate and inanimate), 40.43 (a propagator for *gośāla*, a shelter for cows), 40.47 (horse), 40.51-53 (cow protection), 40.100 (cow protection, feeding of cows), 40.171 (Chatak bird entreats the cloud for its selfish purpose)
- 41.33 (Sai Baba's oneness with all beings), 41.154 (cow with milk-filled teats; leech that clings to the teat obtains impure blood), 41.155 (whereas the frog is left with mud and mire the bee drinks the lotus' nectar)
- 42.39 (peacock feathers; flags with eagle pictures), 42.95 (Sai Baba's oneness with dogs and pigs), 42.100-104 (Sai Baba feeds a hungry dog; all creatures experience the same hunger; he who feeds any creature feeds Sai Baba), 42.115 (Sai Baba fills everything, the animate and the inanimate), 42.149 (superimposing silver on oyster shell)
- 43.73 (Sai Baba pervades the whole creation), 43.94, 98 (fish that toss and turn in distress when the water in a pond dries up), 43.97 (Chatak bird), 43.99 (calf of a cow that has lost its way)
- 44.101, 107, 109, 114, 176 (Sai Baba pervades the whole creation), 44.168-169 (all creatures are one with the *guru* who is all-pervasive)
- 45.17 (the insect *kātīṇ*: Sai Baba's *līlā* knows no rest), 45.37 (presence of God is felt in all creatures), 45.38 (meditator becomes one with object meditated upon, as happens to the insect that becomes the black bee), 45.41 (God is seen in all beings by repeating the *guru*'s name), 45.55 (God dwells in the hearts of all creatures)
- 46.40, 43 (bullock cart), 46.87 (elephants as a symbol of wealth), 46.91 (Sai Baba looks upon all creatures as equal and is one with them), 46.92-135 (herd of goats met by Sai Baba: story of two goats and of Sai Baba's compassion for them who had been greedy men in their past lives), 46.109 (Sai Baba sees God in all creatures)
- 47.3 (firefly of worldly life), 47.14 (story of goats), 47.24 (rebirth in movable and immovable realms), 47.39 (bullock carts), 47.41-42, 48-49, 52-53, 56, 58-59 (frog), 47.53, 56-57, 60, 63-64 (snake), 47.66-194 (story of Basappa, reborn as frog, and of Veerabhadrappa, reborn as snake), 47.122 (deer, cobra, moth)
- 48.22 (elephant as worldly life), 48.37 (Chatak bird), 48.139-140 (Sai Baba is the whole creation)

- 49.35, 96 (*ṭoṅgā*), 49.68 (chameleon), 49.114-15 (horse), 49.143 (God fills the universe), 49.156 (Sai Baba as the indweller of all hearts), 49.178, 181 (sense organs as horses), 49.185 (the *sadguru* or supreme *guru* runs this creation)
- 50.1 (intestinal worm: fortunate not to be born as one), 50.9 (the *guru* is all-pervading), 50.10 (devotees as Chakor birds), 50.30 (oyster shell and its pearl), 50.51 (Chakor and Chatak birds, *i.e.* Sai Baba devotees), 50.70 (pure consciousness is present in all creatures), 50.83 (the multitude of beings is full of ignorance), 50.86 (God dwells in the heart of creatures), 50.98 (all animate beings are enveloped by beginningless ignorance), 50.100 (leeches fond of impure blood), 50.101 (frog feasts on mire, black bee flits amid the fragrant pollen), 50.120 (God is in all beings), 50.121 (the sacrificial animal represents the separateness between God and his creatures), 50.131 (as a moth is attracted to a lamp so a psudo-sage forgets to discriminate between good and bad), 50.137 (desire and anger swallow up creatures), 50.138 (the coils of *kālasarpa*, the 'serpent that is time,' *i.e.* deadly ignorance, is at the root of the sandalwood tree, *i.e.* knowledge), 50.140-141 (the serpent of death/ignorance must be destroyed), 50.164 (a rope appears to be a snake, an oyster shell seems to contain silver: this is caused by ignorance), 50.183 (a garland appears as a snake due to the fading light of the evening, *i.e.* ignorance), 50.191-192 (a rope appears as a snake due to dim light, i.*e.* ignorance), 50.200 (great scholars as glow worms before the sun)
- 51.28 (devotees as sparrows that Sai Baba draws to him), 51.43, 70 (exhibition of horses), 51.56, 89 (*ṭoṅgā*), 51.98, 100 (Chakor birds long for the moon; Chatak birds long for the cloud), 51.102 (death puts an end to the life of every creature), 51.233-234 (the horse Shyamsundar/Shyamkarna)
- Epilogue. 52.25 (Sai Baba fills this whole creation), 52.33-34 (crocodiles of anger, envy, etc.), 52.34 (aquatic creatures of censure, jealousy, scorn, etc.), 52.39 (may Sai Baba's presence be seen in all creatures), 52.77 (can a fly ever lift the Meru mountain or a lapwing suck the ocean?)
- Epitome. 53.20 (Sai Baba can make even a fly lift the Meru mountain), 53.53 (feeding rice and curd to a black dog), 53.60 (story of the lizard), 53.72 (Baba averted the calamity of snakebites), 53.73 (Sai Baba averted the danger of a scorpion bite and of snakebites), 53.74 (Sai Baba's cure of a snakebite; story of the killing of a goat), 53.96 (upliftment of a devotee, who is like a black bee in Sai Baba's lotus feet; upliftment of the cruel tiger), 53.99 (friend of Narayan Jani bitten by scorpion), 53.103 (Doctor Pillai afflicted by guinea worms), 53.131 (previous birth of two goats), 53.132 (past lives of a frog and a snake), 53.173 (Dabholkar as black bee hovering around Sai Baba's lotus feet), 53.195 (Sai Baba destroys the snake of the fear of worldly life)

Appendix 2

Number of occurrences

Total number – 423

Animal / Animate being / Beast / Creature (general term) – 106

Horse / Mare – 30

Snake – 29

Dog – 21

Goat – 13

Cow – 12

Pig / Sow – 12

Chatak bird – 10

Scorpion – 9

Worm – 9

Bird – 8

Chakor bird – 8

Fly – 8

Insect – 8

Tiger – 8

Ant – 7

Bee – 7

Black bee – 7

Fish / Aquatic creature – 7

Frog – 7

Oyster (shell of) – 7

Buffalo – 6

Cat / Kitten – 6

Cobra – 6

Bullocks – 5

Deer – 5

Elephant – 5

'Swan' (Bar-headed goose) – 5

Calf – 4

Cattle – 4

Parrot – 4

Sparrow – 4

Crocodile – 3

Crow – 3

Moth – 3

Mutton – 3

Tortoise – 3

Donkey – 2

Eagle – 2

Guinea worm – 2

Leech – 2

Lizard – 2

Peacock – 2

Alligator – 1

Chameleon – 1

Cock – 1

Firefly – 1

Glow worm – 1

Intestinal worm – 1

kātīṇ insect – 1

Lapwing – 1

timiṅgil fish – 1

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Tigers, snakes, and the forest

R. K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi*

An Indian view on non-human animals

Alessandro Vescovi

This article examines R. K. Narayan's novella *A Tiger for Malgudi* through the lens of animal studies, arguing that a purely Western critical framework overlooks the significance of Hindu philosophy in understanding the novel's portrayal of animal consciousness. While postcolonial literature has brought non-Western narratives to the attention of the whole wide world, interpreting paradigms have often remained rooted in Western thought. Likewise, animal studies predominantly draws upon Western philosophical traditions, potentially limiting its applicability to non-Western texts. By analysing Narayan's text, particularly the tiger protagonist's first-person perspective and his spiritual journey, the article argues that Hindu concepts like metempsychosis and the figure of the *sannyasin* offer crucial insights into the novel's exploration of animal subjectivity, human exceptionalism, and the interconnectedness of beings. Ultimately, the article calls for a more culturally sensitive approach within ecocriticism and animal studies, urging a move beyond Western epistemologies to fully appreciate the nuances of non-Western literary representations of animals.

Keywords: R.K. Narayan, animal studies, Tiger for Malgudi, Indian epistemology, non-human animals.

1. The Western origin of animal studies[1]

In the late Twentieth century, writers from former colonies revolutionised the old Western genre of the novel. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, for the first time, new narrative voices, folklore, oral literature have found their way into novelistic narratives, making themselves heard all around the world. Thus, works like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* incorporated local materials hitherto unknown to European and American novels. Western readers were delighted to deal

[1] This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU – Line M4.C2.1.1 – PRIN 2022, project "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-Human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," CUP G53D23004630006.

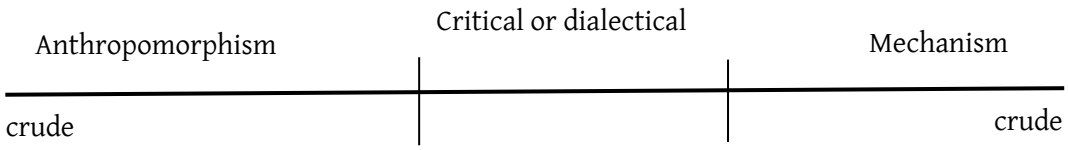
with non-Western stories, deities, narrators, idioms, mindsets. Literary criticism has therefore developed a set of interpretive paradigms that go by the name of postcolonial studies. The latter were developed by major scholars, often of non-European descent, like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, or Gayatri Spivak. However, while postcolonial literature was rooted in indigenous myths and lore, interpretive paradigms remained rooted in Western philosophy. Most postcolonial critical theory is based on the works of philosophers like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, or Antonio Gramsci, not to mention French Deconstructionism. It is no accident that the most prominent postcolonial thinkers write primarily in European languages and are often based in the USA. The decolonial movement has now started to change all this, and possibly the next generation will see literary criticism based on Confucius, Shankara, and Al-Ghazali, but that has not happened yet.

Likewise, animal studies applied to literary studies are mainly based on Western philosophers like Peter Singer (1975)—who devotes quite a few pages to Jeremy Bentham and René Descartes—Mary Midgley, Jaques Derrida, Donna Haraway… While their contribution to the reflection on non-human related ethics is beyond dispute, their applicability to cultures and literary works other than Western may be problematic. In his very perceptive essay entitled 'Why Looking at Animals?,' John Berger (2015) points out that the perception of non-human animals has changed dramatically since the end of WW2, particularly in urban contexts. Formerly, the philosopher argues, the contiguity between humans and non-humans was such that animals were considered essentially different from humans. Every animal used to be both an individual and a metonym for its species; as such, it often retained a connection to the cosmic order that modern man fails to see. Eight out of twelve signs of the Zodiac are animals, Berger points out, and humans never had any problems identifying with them or with a totemic animal. Industrial farming has hidden animals from the human view and perfected the mechanisation of non-human animals theorised by René Descartes.

Berger is indeed very persuasive, but he fails to take into account non-Western views of animals. Descartes's huge importance in shaping the perception of animals and reducing them to mere mechanical objects is deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian dualism. Only humans are endowed with a soul, as the Book of Genesis maintains, and *therefore* animals do not participate in the divine substance of Man. Despite his secular language—the opposition between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* developed in his *Discours de la methode* (1637)—Descartes is deeply indebted to St. Paul. Consequently, according to Descartes, there is no essential difference between a cat, a pine tree, and a stone. None of them has a soul, nor real agency. The cat is compelled by nature to react as it does, exactly like the pine tree is eventually obliged to shed its cones or needles. The only difference between the three, Descartes concedes, is a difference in complexity, the mechanism regulating the cat being much subtler than

those regulating the stone. Industrial farming, Berger maintains, is just an extension of the idea that animals are mere mechanisms.

When it comes to the literary representation of animals, a writer traditionally faces two opposite choices: either ignore animals and describe them simply as background props, or anthropomorphise them in order to adapt them to the established literary techniques employed to portray humans. Both techniques may reflect human exceptionalism without troubling human identity. On the whole, animal representation stretches in a continuum that goes from anthropomorphisation to mechanisation. Greg Garrard (2023) justly opines that these forms can be crude or critical, i.e. they can take into account the contiguity between human and animal beings, or totally obliterate it. Thus, the continuum may be thought of as in the following diagram.



Crude anthropomorphism in literature may correspond to what some sociologists call Disneyfication, namely a kind of cultural appropriation that brings everything that is different within the comfort zone of a theme park, where nothing is really different from what is expected.[2] Thus some animal traits are appropriated by the narrative, while most others are substituted by human qualities. On the other end, crude mechanism may correspond to any story in which animals are considered as commodities, which includes most realistic literature, especially from the past. Even when it does not use these words, most literary animal studies-based criticism relies on a similar distinction. Mostly, however, critics are partial to stories which remain within the critical area. Herman Melville's description of Moby Dick is a case in point; the sperm whale is granted agency and determination, but it is never anthropomorphised by the author; quite on the contrary it is Ahab who anthropomorphises the whale thinking it has a personal grudge against himself. The novelist never succumbs to the temptation of describing the world from the viewpoint of the cetacean, and yet he offers such an amount of information about the whale that Northrop Frye (1957) considered *Moby Dick* as a quintessential anatomy.

[2] According to Merriam-Webster Disneyfication is the transformation (as of something real or unsettling) into carefully controlled and safe entertainment or an environment with similar qualities.

Another novel often praised for its treatment of non-human animals is Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), where dolphins are described as beloved animals, with typical non-human behaviours. On the other hand, *The Hungry Tide* focuses on the cultural encounter between the Western attitude of Piya, the American scientist, and the local fishermen. Ghosh does not omit to include a few characters to whom dolphins are supernatural creatures, Bon Bibi's messengers, thus introducing two equally critical (in Garrard's sense) attitudes towards dolphins: the Western secular ecological and conservationist view, and the religious supernatural perception of animals. Ghosh does not overtly endorse either view, and lets both play against each other as the novel unfolds. Reading *The Hungry Tide* alerts us to an obvious difference, which is often overlooked: in the words of Steve Baker, "Culture shapes our reading of animals just as much as animals shape our reading of culture" (Baker 1993: 4). This insight is particularly relevant in a novel that explores the boundaries between nature and culture in the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans.

Baker stands out for his study of the perception of animals in popular culture. He claims that our understanding of human nature reflects the way in which popular culture depicts animals, no matter how absurd or fantastic. It follows that, when it comes to literary interpretation, animals cannot always be compared to human characters, but must be considered within the cultural framework of the author.

R. K. Narayan's novella *A Tiger for Malgudi* and its reception may illustrate an interesting critical misunderstanding, as readers tend to forget that the tiger protagonist is the product of a Hindu novelist. The book was written in 1983, when Narayan was long established as a best-seller author of realistic social comedies. However, if one considers Narayan's career, the author began writing in a challenging context, where finding a publisher was very difficult and, once established as an ironical 'painter of modern India' (Pousse 1995), he had little reason to deviate from the path of success. John Thieme (2007) convincingly argues that Narayan's American experience changed his perception of his reading public and encouraged him to be more experimental. According to Thieme, his finest novels, *The Guide* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, are the result of this newly-found perception of his audience, which led him to experiment. Elsewhere, I argue that this experimentation led Narayan to write in a less secular way (Vescovi 2024), which means that he overtly included more Hindu elements than he did in the past. Indeed, the first international audience Narayan had in mind as a young writer was made by the few English colonials he had met in his school days. Over time, however, his international audience came to comprehend young Americans, hippies, and, more generally, people genuinely interested in Indian lore.

2. *A Tiger for Malgudi*

A Tiger for Malgudi takes Narayan's new confidence a step forward in that he writes his story in the first person and from the point of view of a tiger. While talking animals are a typical feature of fables, Narayan insists on the realistic plausibility of his narrative. In his Introduction to the story, he recounts how he came to think of it:

> During the Kumbh Mela festival [...] arrives a hermit with his companion, a tiger. He does not hold the animal on a leash since he claims they were brothers in previous lives. The tiger freely moves about without hurting or scaring anyone. Such a combination seemed incredible when I read reports of it and saw the photographs. But as I got used to the idea, I began to speculate on its possibilities for a novel. Also I came across a few other instances of enduring friendship between tigers and human beings (Narayan 1982: 7).

These few lines at the onset of the narrative offer an interpreting key. The story of the tiger is not just another animal fable, like the Panchatantra, the animal Jatakas, or—in Narayan's line of business—Kipling's *Jungle Books*. Narayan lays two claims: first, that stereotypes about the dangerousness of tigers can be gainsaid, and second, that Indian epistemology can be used as a basis for a realistic tale as much as the Western one. By citing newspaper reports and photography, Narayan vindicates the realistic quality of his story: it may sound strange elsewhere, but in India a tiger can be tame if he realises that he once was a relative of a human. Of course, this event is not unexceptional, else it would not be reported in a newspaper, but still, it is counted as possible. To further prove this point, in the same Introduction, Narayan devotes a page to describe the characteristics of a *sannyasi*:

> [...] During certain yogic practices, eight kinds of supernatural powers may be roused; one could become invisible, levitate, transmute metals, travel in space, control animals and men, live on air, and so on and so forth. But such magical powers are considered to be stages in one's evolution, incidental powers acquired on the way, to be ignored and not exercised for profit or self-promotion, except to mitigate pain or suffering in others.
>
> Now, in my story the 'Tiger Hermit' employs his powers to save the tiger and transform it inwardly–working on the basis that, deep within, the core of personality is the same in spite of differing appearances and categories, and with the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being (Narayan 1982: 9).

The Introduction makes therefore three relevant statements:

1. the story that follows is an invention but it is based on real facts;
2. countless people believe in the transmigration of the soul and their belief must be taken into serious consideration, so much so that a modern realistic tale can be based on it;

3. it is well known that *sannyasin*s may acquire supernatural powers and therefore this story is perfectly plausible within an Indian framework.

The novella is recounted as a monologue that unfolds within the head of the old tiger, now 'retired' in a zoo, as he watches visitors and fancies talking to them. The tiger does not actually speak in human language, but is able to think in Tamil since his Master taught him the language along with religious wisdom. The storyline is not without some unexpected twists and turns. Raja, once a fierce and proud tiger, narrates his life journey from being a wild, uncontrollable animal to finding inner peace and enlightenment. The story begins with Raja's birth in the jungle where, once grown up, he rules with ferocity and strength. However, his fate changes when he is captured and sold to a circus owner named Captain, who trains him to perform tricks for human amusement. Life in captivity brings Raja face-to-face with human cruelty and kindness. He eventually escapes and meets a spiritual guru who teaches him the ways of compassion and understanding. Under the guidance of the hermit, Raja is transformed from a beast driven by instinct to a wise being capable of introspection and empathy.

The tiger's life is described in retrospection, with a subtle difference between the pre-enlightenment days and the days spent under the guidance of the *sannyasin*. The protagonist clearly perceives this as the major watershed of his life. While experiences in the first part of the tiger's life are remembered as emotions and translated into words with the benefit of hindsight, the latter part is rather similar to a human life in that emotions are immediately known through language and conceptualisation. Yet, even after learning the language, Raja retains a certain naïve perplexity in front of human affairs.

Possibly Narayan did not mean to make a point for animal rights, and his prime inspiration was the possibility of writing from an unusual perspective. However, in the Introduction, he seems to advocate that animals have an equal claim to appear in literature as humans.

> It also occurred to me that with a few exceptions here and there, humans have monopolised the attention of fiction writers. Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate, though they may be incapable of audible speech. Man assumes he is all-important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment (Narayan 1982: 6-7).

These words, written in the early eighties, before Peter Singer's book garnered circulation and international attention may resonate with a memory of the Raj and the colonial past. The 'smug' attitude of humans referred to by Narayan largely coincides with the attitude of urban dwellers and the middle class, which was—and still is—the most westernised part of Indian society. Following this

line of interpretation, one may argue that the novel juxtaposes the tiger's transformation with the human condition, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, spiritual growth, and the quest for a higher purpose. However, in the Twenty-first century, it is impossible not to see how Narayan earnestly engages with a non-human viewpoint. His reference to other creatures' 'values, ego, outlook' appears extremely modern in defending animal dignity along with the Hindu belief in metempsychosis. Indeed, the idea that 'all else in creation exists for [man's] sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment' sounds like a subtle critique of the Judeo-Christian notions expounded in the Book of Genesis—where God tells Adam that he is master of Eden—especially when it is used to justify the exploitation of so-called natural resources.

Animal studies, as developed by Anglophone critics, is a discipline not incompatible with the idea of metempsychosis as long as the latter recognises the existence of different approaches to non-human life, the scientific one and the religious one—in fact, what we see in *The Hungry Tide*. Recently, Angshuman Kar (2008) published a scathing critique of the novella, which, in my opinion, reveals the limits of Western paradigms when applied to animal perception in India—that the author is Indian is scarcely relevant as all his bibliography and outlook are Western. Along with interesting critical insights, Kar argues that Narayan was unable to overcome the temptation of anthropocentrism. Besides, Narayan did not do his homework well, as he did not know enough about the subject he was talking about, viz. tigers' life, which Lawrence Buell (1995) considers an indispensable prerequisite for anyone who wants to write about animals. Going back to *The Hungry Tide*, it is like saying that Piya has a stronger claim to speak about dolphins than Fokir.

Buell is right when he says that one must know what he talks about, but there is not only one knowledge. In fact the very notion of anthropomorphisation should be revised in order to adapt it to a plurality of cultures. For Kar, anthropomorphising consists in making animals similar to humans and appreciating them the more similar to humans they are. However, while endowing a tiger with human values may be absurd for an American ethologist who watched Tom and Jerry as a kid and has long left it behind, it may be absolutely natural for a Buddhist nature conservationist who read the Jatakas as a boy and has never denied their inner truth. If we accept the notion that human and non-human animals differ in how they can express themselves but not necessarily in their spirit, then the criticism of excessive anthropomorphism ceases to make sense. Narayan is conscious that, at the end of his spiritual journey, the tiger has completely subdued his nature. Master says that the old feline now is "a sensitive soul" and "a tiger only in appearance" (Narayan 1982: 151). The author is well conscious that he is narrating a unique phenomenon and does not pretend that the way Raja has eventually come to think reflects the point of view of any wild animal.

The animal viewpoint is best taken up when Raja remembers his pre-enlightenment days and translates his remembrances into actual concepts, i.e. for all practical purposes in English. As a tiger cub, Raja thought that his life would never change, while he soon must have his first trauma:

> I had no doubt whatever that [my mother] would live for ever to look after me: a natural delusion which afflicts all creatures, including human beings. However, she just vanished from my world one evening. I was seized with panic and hid myself in the cave (Narayan 1982: 12).

This is the first natural emotion translated into language. Another follows suit as the tiger's instinct asserts itself. With hindsight, Raja admits that he wanted to become "king of the forest" (Narayan 1982: 13). Apparently, instinct is not really nobilitating. However, his self very much depends on a very strong body and little spirituality. Thus, the tiger here treats other animals as food or subaltern, not really recognising the notion of species, which Narayan seems to say is a cultural and, therefore, human construction. Here Narayan's irony sets in, as he shows that the spiritual weakness of the brute is in fact that of many humans. Later he will expound Raja's theology, who envisages God as an "enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky, with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook on the clouds, and teeth that could grind the mountain, and possessing, of course, immeasurable strength to match" (Narayan 1982: 136). While Raja's aggressivity and, later, his religious views are brought about by his shape and animal constraints, they are not necessarily anthropomorphic. All animals, including humans, are conditioned by their own bodies and instincts. Their grasp of truth is severely limited by these natural constraints.

Little by little Raja builds a family of which he is justly proud. One day, however, poachers kill his mate and his cubs. Following this second and much less natural trauma, he feels a "blind impossible anger" (Narayan 1982: 22) and wishes only to kill and take revenge. He resorts to eating cattle instead of jungle animals, partly because it is easier, partly because he is seeking revenge on humans (Narayan 1982: 24). In this case, Raja too assumes a kind of mechanic view of other species, as sheep is considered even by the tiger as simply food; this is the nadir of his consciousness, as he abandons even the natural law of the jungle.

With hindsight, he recognised that he had chosen an easy path, an act for which he is ultimately punished:

> Looking back, I feel that I should not have chosen the easy path of raiding villages. Stepping into human society was a thoughtless act. Instead of living the rest of my life majestically as an honest-to-god tiger going in and out of his cave, eating and sleeping, performing no act except what he wished, Lord of the Jungle, before whom other creatures from a squirrel to a bear quaked in fear, I

> had let myself in for ultimate slavery. I had thought that there could never be any creature stronger than a tiger. I was mistaken (Narayan 1982: 25-26).

What follows is the capture of the tiger and his training to become a circus attraction. The circus owner, called Captain, considers the tiger mechanically and trains him to go against his nature "by sheer doggedness" (Narayan 1982: 55). The ultimate trick that the man devises is putting a goat in front of the tiger and having the wild animal drink milk instead of attacking the ruminant. The Captain manages to subdue the tiger by means of a whip and a chair. The latter, in particular, seems to cow the tiger, who recalls his fear of the chair: "I felt infuriated at the lashing and felt like jumping on him; but he held that terrible chair" (Narayan 1982: 47). Eventually, the tiger's instinct prevails and Raja kills the abusive Captain without any notion of what he is doing: as the Captain hits the animal with a hook, the tiger, trying to protect himself, hits the man and breaks his neck. The tiger does not plan it and does not even realise what happened. The laconic commentary is, "It was surprising that such a flimsy creature, no better than a membrane stretched over some thin framework, with so little stuff inside, should have held me in fear so long" (Narayan 1982: 100).

At this point the tiger is ready for its transformation. The Master first of all presents himself as a *sannyasin*, who, as a consequence of his spiritual achievement, loves and respects animals. A partly comical situation ensues when the tiger is locked up in a headmaster's office and the school staff does not know how to get it out of the room.

> 'Now that this brute is safely locked up, we must decide'— began a teacher.
>
> At this moment my Master pushed his way through the crowds and admonished, 'Never use the words beast or brute. They're ugly words coined by man in his arrogance. The human being thinks all other creatures are "beasts". Awful word!'
>
> 'Is this the occasion to discuss problems of vocabulary?' asked someone. 'Why not?' retorted my Master. At which they looked outraged. Someone said, 'What a reckless man you are! Who are you?'
>
> 'You are asking a profound question. I've no idea who I am! All my life I have been trying to find the answer. Are you sure you know who you are?' (Narayan 1982: 103).

The newly arrived holy man flouts the ordinary perception of the tiger by posing him in the broader perspective of the universe, or, one could say, in a Hindu perspective. The whole parable of the tiger's life takes on a new meaning. The remains of the story actually resettle the animal within the cosmic order. Humans like the Captain and even school teachers—the book seems to say—are egocentric and hardly know their place in the universe. This condition severely undermines their liberty. Likewise, initially Raja does not enjoy total freedom because he is a slave to his tigerish nature; however, as he later abandons even his tiger's *swadharma* by preying on cattle, he becomes ever less free until he

actually falls prey to humans at the circus. Here, he is completely deprived of any freedom and even pretence thereof; he cannot follow either his dharma or even his animal instinct. However, Raja is not less conscious than most humans, which is ironic. Indeed, the Captain has brought ruin onto himself precisely because he was unable to see the other in his animals; he is the man described in the Introduction: One who "never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate" (Narayan 1982: 6).

The figure of the Master deserves a comment, too. *Sannyasin*s do not always fare well in Narayan's stories; more often than not, they are impostors, as he warns even in his Introduction to this novella. Such is the case with the self-declared *sannyasin* in *The Bachelor of Arts*, *Mr Sampath—The Printer of Malgudi*, *The Painter of Signs*, while in *The Guide* the position of the *sannyasin* is debatable but hardly established. In the novella, one is tempted to consider the Master as the author's spokesman, or a kind of ideal (Atkinson 1987). He is wise, is in control of everything, and treats with irony the shortcomings of other humans. Narayan must have felt the incongruity of making a man the real hero of a novel dedicated to the tiger, and therefore, he endows the Master with a past. This is all the more curious as Narayan writes in the Introduction that one should never enquire about a *sannyasin*'s past, nor his name and former whereabouts.

When the tiger is learning to live in the hermitage, eating as little as he possibly can and feeling ashamed for the suffering inflicted on the creatures he hunts, he often entertains discussions with the Master and learns about dharma and religion. Sometimes, the faithful come to ask for the Master's blessings, and the tiger hides in a corner so as not to scare them off. One day, a woman comes who claims to be the wife of the Master, whom he abandoned to pursue his spiritual path. In fact it turns out that the man was a comparatively wealthy clerk before he left his family and left them well provided for, so he cannot really be blamed for failing in his domestic duties. However, the Master, although deeply troubled by the woman's visit, never acknowledges her and never admits his former identity. Indeed, he is rather cold with his former wife, who has come from far away through a dangerous forest road. Eventually, he sends her away without a minimal hint of human sympathy for a woman who has long lost her husband.

The *sannyasin*'s behaviour with his wife casts a shadow on his sanctity. He may well be wise and know the right words and paths to moksha, but he lacks human sympathy; his freedom comes at a price, and he is not the only one who pays for it. According to Atkinson, the Teacher allows Narayan to represent an ideal condition while simultaneously rejecting the human personality cult, which is a part of the Hindu religion. Eventually, there is no human perfection in this novel; the only perfect being is the tiger, even though he, too, has a troubled past. However, the tiger's perfection is possible only

thanks to his apparent naivety. The story develops as a kind of *Bildungsroman* in which the tiger slowly becomes conscious of his self. He learns to distinguish his natural restraints and eventually lets his mind roam freely. Even though he had been a violent animal in the past, his innocence is preserved as he passes from an utter lack of self-awareness to spiritual development. In the former state, his non-anthropomorphic self helps the tiger preserve his innocence. Even his hatred for the Captain and the poachers who exterminate his family is a natural reaction that does not hinder his later development. Even as an enlightened being, the tiger does not really understand the nuances of human behaviour; he reflects on his own past as a wild animal and never judges human behaviour. This complete lack of malice keeps his thoughts pure and ensures his moral standing in the novel.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, Narayan envisages a non-human self as the encounter of a soul with the restraints of the animal condition, just like a human self would be the encounter of a soul with the body and constraints of the human condition. Thus, the novelist imagines the basic emotions and stimuli to which the tiger responded without being able to make sense of them, as he does with hindsight at the moment of telling. In order to recount this particular self, the author imagines that the tiger has been enlightened so as to learn human speech and spiritual values. While this enlightenment would be fabulous for a secular writer, Narayan goes to great lengths to introduce it as exceptional but acceptable in an Indian context. Once endowed with a language and the values that it brings with itself, the tiger can recall his past and translate it for the benefit of the reader, even though he simply imagines telling the story, being unable to actually utter human speech. To make justice to Narayan's novella, ecocriticism and animal studies must take non-Western philosophies into their stride and avoid the essentialist temptation of relying solely on Western epistemology.

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Illicit devotion

Priests for a day, snake charmers for a lifetime

Maria Angelillo

The Kalbeliya caste is closely and, in many ways, associated with the snake, specifically the cobra. The social, economic, cultural, and religious profile of the caste, also known by the names Sapera and Nath, is defined, in part or whole, by its relationship with the cobra. Although other forms of employment have greatly replaced the traditional profession of snake charmers associated with the caste, the connection with the snake remains strong. Even in its new configuration as a caste of musicians and dancers, the community has retained its connection to the cobra, which is present in many aspects of Kalbeliyas' artistic performance. Moreover, although Indian law has made snake charming illegal, the traditional profession of snake charmers is still part of the caste's economic strategies and socio-cultural profile. Generally associated with mendicancy, snake charmers' profession also involves ritual skills, which are typically required at the *Nāg-pañcamī* (Snake's Fifth) festival, a minor festival celebrated throughout North India on the fifth day of the light half of the Hindu month Sāvan (Śrāvaña). In this paper, after discussing the role of the cobra in defining the past and present socio-cultural profile of the caste, I will attempt to outline the role of the Kalbeliyas in *Nāg-pañcamī* celebration in Rajasthan.

Keywords: Kalbeliyas; *Nāg-pañcamī*; cobra; snake charmers.

1. Introduction[1]

In the present paper, I wish to consider some aspects of the relationship between the members of a North Indian caste and a non-human animal species to show to what extent such a relationship affects the human community's social, economic, and cultural profile. By examining an interspecies

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relationship, I will argue that the human community's identity is embedded in the processes of being affected by and responding to the non-human animal.

Although I am aware of its analytical limitations and its unsuitability to serve properly the demands of social analysis (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), I am using the term identity to refer to what human animals are in social terms. As Clinton Sanders explains, "when one has identity, he is situated, that is, cast in the shape of a social object by acknowledgment of his participation or membership in social relations" (Sanders 2003: 409). Identities, far from being fixed and steady, arise and take shape in specific situations, making sense of social actors and their interactions. Through the word identity, I will refer to social actors' roles, statuses, and group memberships as results of social interactions. Identity will be considered both what establishes and the results of social interactions: it is the ever-changing configuration social connections are based on and result in. Through the case study, it will be argued that non-human animals materially affect human animals' lives and discursively construct their social and cultural identities.

Interspecies relationship fuels cultural practices and social transformation. Several studies (Wolch 1996; Wolch and Emel 1998; Shepard 1996; Hamilton and Taylor 2013; Govindrajan 2018) have shown that non-human animals materially affect the lives of human animals and discursively construct human animals' social and cultural identities. Accordingly, I argue that the human community's social identity depends on its relationship with a non-human animal species: its distinctiveness as a group and collectivity depends on its connection to the non-human animal species.

The human community derives from its relationship with the non-human animal species economic support, professional placement, definition of its function within society, social status, but, above all, its community nature, the element on which being and belonging to a community is based. In my opinion, awareness and a sense of belonging to a community, despite changing historical and social circumstances and the group's response to the changing socio-cultural context, are influenced by the relationship with non-human animal species.

The group is defined as a collective by its relationship with the non-human animal. This relationship, however, has changed over time, linking human and non-human animals for different reasons and purposes. I will state that the most recent form of the relationship is mimetic and based on human imitation of some of the features of the non-human animal.

The humans and animals involved in the interspecies relationship that will be investigated in the following pages are the members of the Kalbeliya caste and the snakes, respectively.

Before addressing the key issues of this contribution, it is necessary to point out that the observations and assertions in this essay are based upon my interaction with the Kalbeliya community

living in a camp on the outskirts of the holy town of Pushkar (Ajmer district, Rajasthan). Consulting studies (Dutt 2004; Robertson 2002; Gold and Gold 1984; Ranwa 2021) relating to the Kalbeliya caste but conducted mainly with communities from the Jaipur and Jodhpur districts, I noticed that the Pushkar community's features are not comparable to either the Kalbeliya living in the urban centres of Rajasthan or the Kalbeliya settled in the villages of the region. As has been explained elsewhere (Angelillo 2018), the Pushkar community is deeply influenced by the socio-religious characteristics and economic profile of the holy town of Pushkar. Some of the features of the Pushkar community that are not shared in full by either the urban Kalbeliyas or the rural ones are: the economic dependence on foreign tourists, the almost total lack of literacy even among the youngest members of the community, the increasing, both male and female, abuse of alcohol, and the location in a camp without running water and electricity separate from both Pushkar and the nearest village of Ganaheda.

I conducted the research primarily through overt participant observation during repeated stays of between two and six months on an annual basis in situ from 2007 to 2014. Several aspects of the community's socio-cultural profile and present-day status were investigated over time, and the content of this contribution is a product of the research methodology adopted. I used participant observation in an open-ended manner to explore and examine research questions that emerged with investigation rather than preconceived hypotheses. The issue I refer to in the following pages emerged thanks to the new questions and directions the participant observation generated. Overt participant observation was supplemented by unstructured interviews, guiding ordinarily occurring conversations toward topics of interest. I consciously chose never to resort to the help of translators and interpreters, and I preferred to communicate directly with the community members using the languages they know, first Hindī, which I already knew from my early fieldwork periods, Mārvāṛī and the so-called *gupt bhāṣā*, spoken and known exclusively by the members of the caste, which I learnt later. Key informants were of utmost importance, both as guides for me in the role of participant observer and as means of vouching for my legitimacy within the setting, providing an insider's stamp of approval.

2. The human animals: Kalbeliyas

Even if the Kalbeliyas are said to be the original settlers of Delhi and its neighbourhood, today they are mainly concentrated in the north-western Indian state of Rajasthan. Due in part to their past nomadic lifestyle, Kalbeliya communities are scattered all over Rajasthan, but the largest communities are found in Pali, Ajmer, Chittorgarh, and Udaipur districts.

Kalbeliyas' social and cultural profile is the outcome of multiple affiliations and ways they have externally been perceived, recognized, and named by the different social actors with whom they interact. According to a process known as accretive, the Kalbeliyas have retained multiple identities, between which they can switch as circumstances or context require. Teresa Morgan invokes the notion of code-switching to illuminate this phenomenon (Horrell 2018: 8).

Taking shape in and through temporally and spatially situated relationships, Kalbeliyas' social and cultural features can be traced to their several names, ethnonyms, exonyms, and endonyms. According to the Rājasthānī system of multiple naming (Bharucha 2003: 57), the Kalbeliyas are labelled and identified by different caste names, each of them suggests not only the role and the status played in and accorded by the local society but it also evokes the several points of view the group can be looked through and understood by. The Kalbeliyas are also known as Saperas, Naths, Jogis, and Gypsies.

The Kalbeliyas, claiming descent from Kanipāv, one of the nine Nāths, the semi-divine masters of the practice of haṭha-yoga that inspired the *nātha-yogin* movement, are considered a caste of householder Nāths.

As such, the male members of the caste place the word Nāth immediately after their name, using it as a surname. Kanipāv (also spelt Kāniphā, Kānipā or Kānhapā), besides being listed as one of the renowned Nine *Nāth*s, is one of the foremost masters of the Kānphaṭā ("split-eared") *jogī*s and, as Briggs has noted (1938: 69), there is a tradition that traces the origins of the *vāmmārg* to Kanipāv, in turn disciple of Jālandhar Nāth, who was himself one of the original Nāths. According to Briggs, while Jālandharipā was confined in the well at Ujjain, from which he was finally rescued through the help of Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth, his disciple Kānipā occupied his teacher's place as *mahant*. He afterwards founded a panth and from this line came Gopicand who is considered a disciple both of Kānipā and Jālandharipā (Briggs 1938: 69).

It is not unlikely that the Kalbeliyas have preserved several traditions and customs connected with their Tantric lineage (Sila Khan 2000: 288). Many social and cultural characteristics of the caste descend from its belonging to the Nātha *sampradāya*: its funerary rites and burial practices (Gold and Grodzins Gold 1984: 119, 121-122), its relationship with the supernatural world, its therapeutic expertise, the traditional roles and functions played by its members within Rājasthānī society as snake charmers, *devătā*s, singers and composers and ritual specialists warding off hail and pestilence. Besides placing them within the complex, articulated, stratified Hindu world, their belonging to the Nāth *sampradāya* explains their long and deep relationship with the cobra, whom they are regarded as the priest (Bharucha 2003: 53).

The Kalbeliyas believe their traditional craft of snake-charming derives precisely from a curse they received from their guru, Kanipāv Nāth. The versions of the story that merited Kanipāv Nāth and his disciples confinement outside the village space differ in some points, but they converge in arguing how Kanipāv Nāth, unlike Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth, was immune to the effects of snake venom. In one version, told by Bheelnath (Kalbeliya *ḍerā*, Ganaheda, September 2024), Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth issued a challenge as to who could drink a bowl of snake venom. Kanipāv Nāth, without any hesitation, drank it all, while Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth hesitated to gobble up. In another version of the story (Sarvannath, Kalbeliya *ḍerā*, Ganaheda, September 2024), it was Kanipāv Nāth's imprudent offering of a bowl of poison, as the only good he possessed, to Gorakhnāth, Matsyendranāth, and the other *Nāth*s that caused Gorakhnāth's irate reaction. Whatever it was that triggered Gorakhnāth's anger, the result was that by accusing Kanipāv Nāth of eating and drinking anything and of wanting other Nāths to die, the Kalbeliya guru was doomed to keep far from human society. The Kalbeliyas inherited from their guru both the ability to handle poisonous snakes, particularly the cobra, and to make a living out of it, and the confinement in the space of the so-called *jaṅgal*. According to the caste's members, the word *kālbeliya* suggests dominion over poisonous snakes and the fear of death, *kāl* glossing as death. The word *sañperā*, rarely used by Kalbeliyas to refer to themselves, denotes all over India snake handlers.

The word *jaṅgal*, as it is commonly used in Rajasthan, describes any place devoid of anthropic activity, untouched by human presence, and "any area that is not included in fixed and permanent settlements of villages or towns" (Rao 2003: 187). The term designates a space defined by socio-cultural rather than ecological characteristics. A *jaṅgal* is defined as any territory that lies outside any inhabited centre and is neither permanently nor occasionally characterised by the presence of human settlements. The term has undergone a long evolutionary history in the course of which it has been endowed with markedly different and even opposing connotations and meanings. As Zimmerman (1999) has explained, the positive connotation of the Sanskrit word *jāṅgala* has completely disappeared in the Hindi word *jaṅgal*, which, besides being burdened with negative valences, alludes to an environment with opposite characteristics to that designated by the Sanskrit word *jāṅgala*. While, in ancient India, "all the values of civilization lay on the side of the jungle" (Zimmerman 1999: 18) and the *jāṅgala* incorporated land that was cultivated, healthy, and open to Aryan colonization, today, the *jaṅgal* is characterized by the distance, physical and ideological, from the village, the precipitate of purity and civilization. The space referred to as *jaṅgal*, in addition to harbouring those who are not of society, harbours those who are not of this life: the *jaṅgal* is thought to be the abode of spirits, *bhūt*, and *jinn* (Dove 1992: 239). Originally inhabitants of the *jaṅgal*, the Kalbeliyas are still considered to be able to

deal with and tame the primordial powers hills, deserts, jungles, forests, and wilderness are believed to be full of (Deliège 1992: 170, Deliège 1993: 535).

As *jaṅgal* residents, the Kalbeliyas are conceived as people of disorder who can tame the disorder and the primordial powers that threaten villagers, making them disorganized, unlucky, confused, enraged, and impoverished. Kalbeliyas-Naths are considered able to rule the disorder and deal with it without succumbing to its forces. The Kalbeliyas are therefore likened to hyphens "who live on the fringes of society and act as intermediaries between the human world and the wilderness that surrounds it" (Deliège 1993: 535).

Since space not only reflects the social universe, representing its structures and the logics that govern its functioning, but also determines its form and content, the contiguity with the environment of the *jaṅgal* has, in my opinion, largely contributed to the low social status accorded to Kalbeliya caste. On the other hand, "the concept of pollution attaches not only to groups and individuals but also to places" (Béteille 1965: 20), and the permeability between different dimensions of manifestation is such that the impurity of individuals penetrates spaces and vice versa. The Kalbeliyas derive from the connection with the *jaṅgal* the impurity and subsequent low social status that defines their social profile and caste membership. The Kalbeliyas, who until recently traced their living space of choice precisely in the spaces considered *jaṅgal*, belong to a Scheduled Caste, a legal category also gathering those who in the past were assimilated to untouchables. Their association with the *jaṅgal* is not, in my opinion, an outcome of their status, but its cause. The placement in the space of the *jaṅgal* is functional for the snake-charming craft, which primarily involves catching snakes.

Although at present the Kalbeliyas are no longer confined to the space of the *jaṅgal* and many communities live permanently in built-up areas, the community I conduct my research with still lives on the fringes of village society. Its members, even the youngest, are all illiterate, and none benefit from the schooling opportunities that are present in the area. This implies that all the community's members of working age fall back on the caste's characteristic forms of earning, including, first and foremost, snake charming, begging, and performing as dancers, singers, and musicians. In all three activities, the relationship with snakes is decisive.

3. The non-human animals: snakes

Snakes (*Serpentes*) are known to play a key role in the creation and maintenance of ecosystems, and their absence can destabilise critical ecological cycles (Narayanan and Bindumadhav 2019: 403). Snakes are common throughout India: being cold-blooded, they adapt easily to challenging conditions to source food. Snakes have adapted to fill niches in multiple different ecosystems, including marine,

arboreal, and subterranean environments. Subsequently they are as comfortable on land as they are in water and in tree canopies, vastly expanding the horizon of their habitable locations to diverse ecologies. Therefore, human encounters with snakes are no longer restricted to areas regarded as wild or forested (Narayanan and Bindumadhav 2019: 404). According to the Million Death Study, the most comprehensive study on snakebites in India, India has one of the highest rates of deadly venomous snake bites globally, with an estimated 45,900 human deaths annually (Mohapatra *et al.* 2011: 2). Recognized as life-threatening animals, snakes are greatly feared even though of the 285 breeds of snakes in India, only about 50 are venomous enough to deliver a harmful or fatal bite to humans. Of these, only 15 are medically important, that is, responsible for human fatalities, of which only four are widely distributed and responsible for most fatal snakebites in India (Narayanan and Bindumadhav 2019: 404). According to Komal Kothari, 90 percent of snakes are non-poisonous, but people bitten by snakes are afraid of dying, not realizing that the snake bite probably won't kill them (Bharucha 2003: 125). Fear of snakes undoubtedly permeates the daily lives of people. Nevertheless, far from being limited to fear, the Indian perception of snakes is particularly complex and driven by many contradictory feelings. Besides playing vital roles in rural and urban ecologies, snakes, in India, have been the recipients of manifold cultural interest since ancient times.

Serpent depictions in art pre-date the presence of the Indo-Aryan culture in South Asia, where the "earliest evidences of the topic of snakes are to be found in the pictorial representations from Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Lothal, that is from the time of about 2000 BC" (Härtel 1976: 664).

As for religious-cultural narratives, references to snakes are both old and widespread, dating back to Vedic literature and epic myths. *Atharvaveda* already provides a spell against the snakes' deadly bite, simultaneously praising and threatening the snakes. Already in this earliest phase, the attitude towards snakes is characterised by a fundamental ambivalence: snakes are feared and worshipped at the same time. The danger of encountering them is averted, but their blessings are sought and coveted.

The epic poem *Mahābhārata* is the first text to treat snakes extensively as a class of beings collectively known as *nāga*s and to dwell extensively on the stories of many of them (Lange 2019). I do not deem it necessary to go over the presence of snakes and their status in Indian literature here, being the subject beyond the scope of this contribution. Besides, the theme has already been brilliantly dealt with by several scholars: it is worth recalling Vogel's exhaustive study on the presence of the snake in Sanskrit literature and folklore (Vogel 1926).

Rather, the ambiguous and even contradictory character of the Hindu perception of snakes will be highlighted, being probably conducive to the snakes' worship. Hindu literature presents the image of an animal that is as sacred as it is dangerous, an object of devotion and, at the same time, of terror.

Hindu religious imaginations of this non-human animal consequently contribute to fear, uncertainty, and tolerance of snakes.

Narayanan and Bindumadhav (2019) show that human-snake relations in India are manifested through contradictory feelings towards snakes as pests/victims, as killable/nurturable, and to be revered/to be demonized. These dualities are a result of the tolerance that human societies develop due to the influence of religion and culture on the one hand, and intolerance due to the purported fearsome and repulsive nature of the animal on the other (Singh *et al.* 2024: 606). In the Rājasthānī context, and especially in Pushkar, the simultaneous awareness of the life-threatening nature of snakes and their holiness is palpable. This double and opposing notion dominates the common perception of people and gives sense and scope to the snake-charming profession. The human attitude towards snakes in India has been described as "at the crossroads of danger and devotion" (Yuan *et al.* 2020: 112), which are the two opposites snake charmers move between.

4. Snake charming

Even if the fear inspired by snakes may be the principal motive behind the worshipping of snakes (Allocco 2009: 29), according to my experience in Rajasthan it is generally not conducive to their killing by human communities. In the Pushkar setting, it is the shared tendency to allow snakes to live to make sense of the role of the Kalbeliyas as snake charmers. As snake charmers, the Kalbeliyas are still commonly asked to free private and public spaces, such as restaurants, hotels, houses, shops, etc., from the presence of snakes. Their function as snake charmers is based on two basic assumptions: the first concerns a society in which humans and snakes can coexist with minimal detriment to the latter. The second assumption concerns the polarized human feeling toward snakes, feared and revered simultaneously. In snake charming, there is a lay component, consisting of removing on-request snakes from human spaces, and a devotional side. As snake charmers, the Kalbeliyas can attract donations with a creature that, as explained, is full of religious symbolism, mystery, and danger to Hindus.

Even though snake charming is de facto illegal, the Kalbeliyas have not sacrificed their traditional profession even to partial secrecy. The Indian Wildlife Protection Act, enacted in 1972, effectively made snake charming illegal (Dutt 2004).

The Indian Wildlife Protection Act was made possible by the Former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who took a personal interest in wildlife conservation (Rangarajan 2009: 300). The Act was inspired by the rapid deterioration of India's tiger population and it also acted to exhibit India's scientific expertise and ecological responsibility to save tigers from extinction (Aiyadurai 2016: 310). In the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm, in 1972, Indira Gandhi

pointed out the risk caused by international inequalities for failed global commitments to protect nature. She also spoke of the necessity of redressing social inequalities for securing the integrity of the environment. She argued that vulnerable environments could not be pitted against vulnerable people. The poor people, dependent on forest produce and shifting cultivation, could not be expected to pay for the protection of wildlife by the loss of their livelihood. As it has been argued, "Gandhi's environmental legacy is a mixed one, as it involves the unsolved contradiction, on the one hand, of her conservation initiatives and commitment to ease the consequences for the rural and tribal poor and, on the other, her increasingly autocratic exercise of state power and centralised framework" (Cederlöf and Rangarajan 2009: 222). Indira Gandhi's concerns were both ecological and nationalist, and she believed that nationalistic politics and environmental concerns strengthened each other. Since the Seventies, there has been a global rise in protected areas and a proliferation of treaties that led to India's commitment to global wildlife conservation, and by 1980 the sequestration of forest estate for conservation took up a central place. Nevertheless, forest policies have been contested spaces throughout the formation of the modern Indian nation, and wildlife policies throughout India are replete with contradictions. Rao and Casimir (2003: 151) provide many examples of how Indian national forest policies, pleading national interest, have debarred local communities from managing local forest resources and benefiting from these, being forests considered national assets, but not also local resources. Similarly, the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and the 1991 amendment to it are certainly measures aimed at promoting and protecting biodiversity but, at the same time, indifferent to the customary hunting, gathering, and trapping rights of nomadic communities. Recent bans in India on the use of performing animals, while being essential legal measures, are deeply affecting a variety of foraging and peripatetic communities, further impoverishing them.

Implicit in the enactment of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act is a conflict between groups who aim to protect natural resources and those who suffer from their protection. For the former, nature is an entity that needs to be saved, while for the latter, *i.e.* local communities, nature is a source of livelihood (Aiyadurai 2016: 306).

The Kalbeliyas are aware of the existence of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act and the prohibition of catching, selling, possessing, and displaying all types of snakes[2] commonly used by them, including, first and foremost, the cobra (*Naja Naja*).

[2] The Kalbeliyas usually resort to common cobras (*Naja Naja*), rat snakes (*Ptyas Mucosa*), and black-headed royal snake (*Spalerosophis Atriceps*).

Nevertheless, the Kalbeliyas continue to respond to requests from those who call on them to rid their homes, restaurants, hotels, etc. of snakes, to catch snakes, preferably cobras, and keep them in their homes, and to beg in the traditional guise of snake charmers.

Even if over the past twenty years the Kalbeliyas have actively espoused and promoted identification with a community of musicians and dancers, the members of Kalbeliya community living in a camp (*ḍerā*) near the village of Ganaheda, not far from the holy town of Pushkar, still work also as snake charmers. The way they act as snake charmers didn't change much from the description given by Briggs in 1938:

> They go about in the cities and villages in the neighbourhood of their camps taking their snakes with them. These they charm with the music of their queer, gourd pipes (bīn). One of the first things that the Jogīs did, when the visitors reached their camp, was to show their snakes. They brought out their round, flat baskets, took off the covers and prodded the snakes with their fingers to drive them out. They had a good many black cobras, all very large and splendid specimens. One had been caught only the day before in the jungle. Soon after snakes are captured, they are drugged, and their fangs are removed. (...) These Jogis are an unclean and ignorant people despised by almost every class of Indians but feared and dreaded by many (Briggs 1938: 59-61).

The description given by Briggs is generally accurate, reflecting the practice still followed today by members of the Ganaheda/Pushkar community. What differs from my experience in the field and accounts gathered among community members is the removal of the fangs and the narcotization of the freshly caught snake. Fangs are not removed but, as soon as the snake is caught, the venom is squeezed out of the animal. The venom is not stored and is dropped on the ground. According to the Kalbeliyas, although the venom is in great demand and has considerable commercial value, the danger involved in both its sale and storage is too great to take. I believe that snakes are not narcotized after being caught having seen several times freshly caught snakes, I can say that, in most cases, the animals are particularly aggressive. In September 2024, while I was conducting unstructured interviews at the camp (*ḍerā*) regarding the celebration of *Nāg-pañcamī*, Madan Nath, a gentleman of about forty years of age who is active both in snake charming and as a musician in dance performances, arrived, carrying two round baskets. He showed everyone two cobras (*Naja Naja*) he had just caught, each in its basket: both were lively and aggressive and kept leaning rather menacingly towards me.

Generally, adult Kalbeliyas, nowadays both men and women,[3] leave the camp early in the morning and, wearing the typical orange *sādhu* robes, go to Pushkar with their cobras enclosed in the characteristic round baskets.

The Kalbeliyas play the part of *sādhu*s when they leave the camp to go begging with their snakes: when begging with pipes and cobras they usually wear the ochre colour of renouncers (Robertson 2002: 107) and the characteristic clothes of the *sādhu*. Some of them still wear the earrings that are the distinctive mark of Nāth yogis. However, this is a disguise reflecting the understanding of peripatetics that different styles of public posturing may be profitably used to manipulate client perceptions about the efficacy of their goods and services.

With characteristic insistence, they chase the Indian pilgrims and tourists promising blessings or curses depending on the generosity of their offerings. On local festivals, such as, for instance, the Sāvitrī *melā*, the Kalbeliyas arrange themselves along the route to be travelled by devotees visiting the temple and, uncovering their baskets, solicit offerings in exchange for blessings.

Sometimes the request for alms involves, in addition to ascetic clothing and the display of snakes, the accompaniment of the sound of *pūṅgī*. However, the musical instrument, which once permanently characterized the snake charmers' performances, is nowadays preferably used in dance performances.

As snake charmers, the Kalbeliyas are primarily secular beggars: even if the cobra is considered in rural Rajasthan as the embodiment of God (Bharucha 2003: 53) and the presence of the snake permeates so much of Hindu religious tradition, donors nearly always give the alms the Kalbeliyas receive in a non-ritual context. The alms received by the Kalbeliyas are not regarded as *dān*, are not held to transfer sin or inauspiciousness, and are not seen by the Kalbeliyas as constituting a moral peril. The Kalbeliyas have a reputation as practitioners of black magic and possibly some people give fearing they may suffer effects of a curse if they do not (Robertson 2002: 101).

Personally, I do not find that there is any substantial difference between the quest conducted with the snake exhibition, the one in which the Kalbeliyas merely dress up in the characteristic *sādhu* robes, and the one in which the accompanying animal is a cow with five legs, the fifth being on its back, next to the characteristic hump of the zebu. In all cases, the Kalbeliyas act as secular beggars and what they receive can hardly be assimilated to *dān*.

However, one occasion when the Kalbeliyas may be considered the priests of the snake is the festival of *Nāg-pañcamī*.

[3] In the past, snake charming was a male occupation.

5. *Nāg-Pañcamī*

The tradition of snake worship is both old and widespread in India, with roots stretching back to Vedic mantras and epic myths (Allocco 2009: 29). According to Biswajit Pradhan (2001: 149), snake worship is one of the most ancient forms of worship in India. The scholar argues that the earliest evidence of the snake cult in the country has been reported from the archaeological excavation at Chirand, a Neolithic site in Bihar. The terracotta figurine of a snake found at Chirand has been identified as the earliest representation of the serpent cult dating back to the early part of the 3rd millennium B.C. The antiquities dating back to the first century A.D. and the literary references amply testify to the fact that snake worship was prevalent throughout the length and breadth of India. Although *nāga* worship is still ubiquitous in India today, *nāga* traditions are characterized by a diverse array of ritual practices and they are inflected very differently in their varied regional contexts. As missionaries, British civil servants, folklorists, and other scholars have noticed, in most parts of north and central India *nāga*s are regarded as male deities, while across south India and in parts of eastern India, *nāga*s are imaged and worshipped as snake goddesses. Interestingly, Joseph Alter (1992: 143), considering that in Hindu mythology and folklore, snakes are often regarded as the deities of ponds and rivers, argues that snakes represent two aspects of water: masculine rain as semen and feminine water as nurturing essence. The snakes, both falling from the sky and gushing from the earth, must not be strictly associated with either feminine or masculine attributes. According to Alter (1992: 143), they represent both male and female sexual energy, symbolizing a powerful form of androgynous sexuality which is apparent in the reconciliation of male rain with female water.

Alter's analysis gives meaning and significance to the different gender attribution of snakes-deities by different regions of India.

Common elements to the wide and diversified Indian tradition of snake worship are its close association with fertility and anthills, its leading to conception, a safe delivery, progeny, healing, and sustained health. Besides, *nāga*s are described as having a range of powers and abilities, which always include the capacity both to bless and curse. While their blessings lead to conception and progeny, their anger is commonly thought to result in barrenness, miscarriage, stillbirth, illness, and untimely death. Numerous studies mention and/or consider the connection between *nāga* worship and fertility, an association which stands at the center of the contemporary South Indian beliefs and practices (Allocco 2009).

It is possible that the fear of snakes and their poison was an early motivation for their worship, or that some of the snakes' unique characteristics, such as their rejuvenating themselves by sloughing off their skin (Zimmer 1946: 75), led to their being ascribed magical powers and eventually being deified.

Whatever initially catalysed religious and ritual interest in snakes as a class of beings, Indian traditions have long regarded them as divinities linked with water, fertility, and anthills (Allocco 2009: 29). The perception of snakes' life-giving powers is perhaps rooted in their association with water. *Nāga*s also symbolize human fertility and childbirth, as a reflection of the forest's productivity (Yuan *et al.* 2020: 112).

Tough the great variety and heterogeneity of practices and rituals worshipping the snake in India, the only pan-Indian festival dedicated to the snake is *Nāg-pañcamī*. Beyond this minor festival, celebrated in markedly distinct ways in various parts of India, few ritual features or narrative elements unify *nāga* worship traditions across the country. *Nāg-pañcamī* is celebrated throughout North India on the fifth day of the light half of the Hindu month *Sāvan* (*Śrāvaña*). *Nāg-pañcamī* is observed coincident with the rainy season, a period in which snake bites are more likely since snakes are often displaced from their subterranean homes during the monsoon.

In many parts of India this festival is celebrated in commemoration of the day on which the *nāga*s were born to Kadru. Allocco (2009: 344) states that according to some scholars *Nāg-pañcamī* may be the only portion of the extended *sarpabali* rite, or snake sacrifice, a four-month series of rites that coincides with the rainy season, that continues to be practiced in contemporary India. The range of benefits that accrue from the *pūjā* celebrated on *Nāg-pañcamī* is explicated in Sanskrit ritual digests, such as Bhatta Lakṣmīdhara's *Kṛtyakalpataru* (Aiyangar 1953). This text describes the procedures for invoking and worshipping divine snakes on this festival day and lists prosperity, freedom from the fear of snakes, and immunity to snake bites among the fruits of worshipping snakes. This text is not alone in discussing the benefits of performing a *nāga pūjā* on the fifth lunar day (*pañcami*): chapter 180 of the *Agni Purāṇa*, for example, describes how the worship of eight great *nāga*s (Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Kālīya, Maṇibhadraka, Airāvata, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Karkoṭaka, and Dhanañjaya) on this occasion confers health, heaven, emancipation, protection from fear, longevity, learning, fame, and wealth (*Agni Purāṇa* 180: 1-2).

The main ritual event of *Nāg-pañcamī* is to offer milk and crystallized sugar to a cobra: in rural areas people often go to anthills or other places where snakes are thought to live. They make their offerings by lighting incense in front of the snake's hole. Milk is placed in a bowl to entice the snake out and is later poured down the hole as a libation (Alter 1992: 137). *Nāg-pañcamī* is a festival which functions on a symbolic plane to subvert any possible danger of being poisoned. Taking ritual action to avoid being poisoned is translated into a general condition which insures auspicious health and longevity. *Nāg-pañcamī* is celebrated in various ways throughout India. However, the basic practice of propitiating snakes by offering them milk is almost certainly a universal aspect of the festival throughout India. In all the Indian worshipping traditions of snakes, milk works as a symbol of love and

devotion, representing maternity, purity, nourishment, and embodying the lovely relationship between worshippers and the worshipped (Lange 2019).

Nevertheless, the symbolic relationship between snakes and milk, stands in contradiction to biological and biomedical conditions and the fondness for milk traditionally attributed to snakes is therefore defined as 'impossible biology' (Ermacora 2017: 59). Snake mythology and symbolism show a widespread belief in the fondness of snakes for milk in different continents and ethnological contexts. Throughout South Asia, depicted and living serpents are given milk offerings to placate them, to lure them to one's side, and, of course, to prevent them from killing humans. Nevertheless, scholars have remarked how the snake's digestive system does not permit the digestion of lactose: reptiles, of course, lack the lactase enzyme (Ermacora 2017: 62). So, even if snakes are fed with milk, their anatomy making it impossible for them to suck, milk proves to be almost deadly for them.

In the past, about 20 years before, on the day of *Nāg-pañcamī*, the Kalbeliyas used to line the streets of towns and cities displaying an array of snakes. They also knocked on the doors of houses to offer their inhabitants the chance to pay their respects to a snake in the flesh. In return, they received clothes, blankets, food, and, sometimes, money offerings (Kamela Devi, Pushkar, August 2024). Nowadays, they no longer line the streets of towns and villages with their living *mūrti*, but one aspect of the Kalbeliyas' services as snake charmers remains. It is a less obvious aspect and, indeed, invisible to the outside observer: the snake charmer is hired by a family or individual, who may belong to any caste, but is generally of higher status than the Kalbeliya, and is asked, at the end of a particular ceremony, to release the snake into the *jaṅgal*. The person commissioning the *pūjā* must procure all the normal necessities for the *pūjā*[4] in addition to a golden statuette depicting a *nāgin*. After the snake charmer has conducted the *pūjā* for the pair consisting of the *nāga* and the *nāgin*, the customer and the Kalbeliya go to a space that can be considered a *jaṅgal* and the snake charmer releases the snake. In return, he receives an offering decided by the person who turned to his services.

The Kalbeliyas I have spoken to agree on certain aspects of their profession as snake charmers: first, their association with snakes and cobras is the result of their descent from Kanipāv. As disciples of Kanipāv, unanimously recognized as their guru, they are supposed to catch and keep snakes. Secondly, catching snakes is tantamount to keeping them in prison: it is a fault they refer to through the Hindī word *doṣ*. The person who, on *Nāg-pañcamī*, entrusts them with the *pūjā* at the end of which the snake will be freed and returned to the *jaṅgal* gets merit, *puṇyă.* Usually, Kalbeliyas talk freely and

[4] The elements necessary for the *pūjā* indicated by the Kalbeliyas I spoke to are: two incense sticks (*agarbattī*), a red thread (*maulī*), saffron powder (*kuṁkum*), milk, flowers (*khule phūl*), one coconut, rice, *ārtī kapūr*, *kaccī supārī.*

openly about their money transactions but in this case, when I asked how much they charge for the *pūjā* and the freeing of the snake, they told me that they don't ask for any payment: people give as much as they feel to give.

Considering the many studies carried out on the concept and practice of *dān*, I think that the amount of money that the Kalbeliya receives due to his releasing the snake in the *jaṅgal*, may be considered *dān*.

Dān has been a highly theorized subject of discussion in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain textual traditions of medieval India for several hundred years (Eck 2013: 361). Inspired by the classic Indological works of Trautmann (1981) and Heesterman (1959), anthropologists Jonathan Parry (1986) and Gloria Raheja (1988, 1989) have demonstrated that Indian concepts of *dān* are by no means mere relics confined to ancient Hindu texts, but instead, they continue to be an important part of religious ethics and practice throughout India today (Copeman 2011: 1053). *Dān* constitutes a vital contemporary category of exchange that is saturated with associations connected with kinship, sacrifice, sinfulness, asceticism, merit, and caste identity.

Since it has already been discussed, it is not necessary to examine here the prominent and sometimes controversial debates that have framed the question of *dān* in recent years. Besides the classical Indological works on the subject, more recent anthropological studies of exchange practices have attempted to refine various aspects of the earlier theorizations (Copeman 2011: 1053).

It is quite clear from the extensive and articulate academic literature about *dān* that there is no single logic of *dān* shared by all participants and present throughout the whole of Indian society.

However, the persistence and prevalence of particular themes in the practice of *dān* are equally evident. *Dān* is not part of a web of reciprocity and obligation: it flows from the giver, usually a householder, to a worthy recipient, with no expectation whatsoever of return. Indeed, any such expectation is said to taint the act of giving (Eck 2013: 361). No return of any earthly kind is countenanced, and even an increment to the prestige of the donor weakens the gift, which should therefore be made in secret (Parry 1986: 461). *Dān* is equally never solicited: it is given without any expectation, and it is received equally without any demand. Besides, worthiness remains central in the logic of *dān*: the recipient of the unreciprocated gift has to be worthy.

So, *dān* is a voluntary and disinterested donation made to a worthy recipient without ostentation or expectation of any kind of this worldly return, whether material or immaterial.

It could be considered that the Kalbeliyas are given gifts because of the religiosity they represent, acting as the priests of the snakes, and, therefore, connecting to their Nāth identity. However, I think

that they are worthy recipients of the gift because they are intrinsically unworthy: thanks to their *doṣ,* they enable others to gain the merit associated with and consequent to freeing the snake.

As Trautmann (1981: 279) defined it, *dān* is based on a soteriology of reciprocity. *Dān* is expected to bring its own reward, by an entirely impersonal process over which no one has any influence: it does indeed return to the donor, but one cannot know when or in what manner (Laidlaw 2000: 624). It is this unseen fruit (*adṛṣṭaphala*) that withers on the branch if any return is accrued in the here and now. The return is deferred, probably to another existence, and the recipient is merely a vessel (*pātra*) or conduit for the flow of merit (Parry 1986: 462).

The Kalbeliyas performing the *pūjā* on *Nāg-pañcamī* do not assure that the devotional act will bring wealth, health, longevity, fertility, and any of the benefits previously listed. They argue that it will bring merit. A merit people can obtain thanks to the fault the Kalbeliyas, disciples of Kanipāv, blessed and condemned to live with and by the snakes, are tied to. As captors of the serpent who will be freed, the Kalbeliyas are the bearers of a guilt that is what allows the person who commissioned the *pūjā* to gain merit.

6. Beyond snake charming

However, the Kalbeliyas' relationship with snakes does not end in the functions of secular beggar and ritual specialist, but, with the changed conditions under which the caste found itself living in Rajasthan, it also survives in the new caste identity adopted by the caste and, specifically, in the dancer's body's reproduction of the snake's movements. The Kalbeliya dance, an original product of the caste's resilience and vibrancy, establishes a mimetic relationship between the dancers and the snake. The movements of the dancers' body reproduce the movements of the snake, not only through the hand gestures that mimic the movement of the snake's head, but through the sinuosity of the dance. According to Bhānāvat (2004: 40),

> कालबेलिया महिलाएँ नृत्य करने में बड़ी प्रवीण होती हैं। जैसे सांप हड्डियां विहीन होते हैं और द्रुतगति से मुड़ी खाते हुए चलते हैं वैसे ही कालबेलिया महिलाएँ अपने नृत्यों में बड़ी स्फूर्ति और लोच लिये जो अदाएँ प्रस्तुत करती हैं वे देखते ही बनती हैं। ऐसे लगता है जैसे उनके शरीर में हड्डियाँ ही नहीं हैं।

> Kalbeliya women are very skilled in dancing. Just as snakes have no bones, and with quick movements they walk twisting and bending, so the Kalbeliya women in their dances are admired for the vigour and suppleness their performances are praised. It seems as if there are no bones in their body.

Despite its inscription in 2010 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2010), Kalbeliya dance style was far from being a component of the caste's cultural heritage. As has been explained elsewhere (Angelillo 2012), Kalbeliya dance constitutes an eloquent case of invented tradition. It belongs, in fact, to those many traditions that we think of as very ancient in their origins but were in fact invented comparatively recently (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Even if today Kalbeliya dance style is considered a significant part of Rājasthānī folklore, an authentic Rājasthānī tradition, a distinguishing mark of Rajasthan's peculiar culture, this dance style in its present shape is a relatively new dance form. In the past of the caste, dance was performed only during the celebration of some Hindu festivals, and it was bound to an inter-communitarian and inter-caste fruition. Until the recent past, it was a spontaneous display, not codified, open to the free expressivity of the members of the caste, inspired by sheer devotion and free from any commercial purposes. Apart from snake charming and begging (Robertson 2002), the Kalbeliyas have always had several economic strategies, some of cyclical nature, *e.g.* agriculture, others sporadic, such as construction labor, but they have never been and cannot be considered a caste of hereditary professional folk musicians and dancers. They enjoyed the patronage of neither royal courts nor common people as dancers and musicians. Their past spatial mobility was meant to exploit both natural resources, through the capture of poisonous snakes, and social ones, in the form of people needing their services and expertise as snake charmers. The dance style today embodying the specificity of Kalbeliya caste has acquired in the last forty years its present artistic and commercial shape, becoming a recognizable and codified product of Rājasthānī folklore (Bhānāvat 2004), thanks to the intertwining of a series of social, political, cultural and biographical (Robin and Guillien 2000) circumstances.

While reiterating that Kalbeliya dance is a cultural product of recent codification, and its continuity with a historic past is largely factitious, since it is a response to novel socio-cultural situations, I want to suggest that more than an invented tradition it is a reworked tradition. Observing how so many fundamental aspects of the Kalbeliyas' socio-cultural profile converge in the caste's dance style, e.g. snake-charming, devotion to the Mātā Jī, the sound of the *pūṅgī,* the song repertoire accompanying dance performances, etc. We can speak of a reworked, rather than invented, tradition. All the material that went into the dance is pre-existing and has been re-proposed in a new and novel language. In the classic study of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) it was not discussed how far invented traditions can use old materials, "how far they may be forced to invent new languages or devices or extend the old symbolic vocabulary beyond its established limits" (Hobsbawm 1983: 7). I think that in Kalbeliya dance, a new and unprecedented language expresses ancient contents and meanings, related to the socio-cultural identity of the caste. The relationship between the caste and the cobra and the

evolution of snake enchantment have also been handed over to the dance: the snake has been replaced by the dancer's body, imprisoned as well in the logic and dynamics of the caste.

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The riddle of the crane

Multispecies coexistence and the case of Dhanauri (Uttar Pradesh, India)

Stefano Beggiora

Metaphor of unconditional love, devotion, empathy and compassion, the giant Indian crane, or Sarus Crane, is a topos of Indian literature: its song is capable of evoking the plots of an aesthetic, lyrical and spiritual search. Sung in epic and myth, this animal today stands as a symbol of Environmental Humanities in India, despite its increasingly threatened conservation status. This article focuses on the case of Dhanauri Wetlands, illustrating the complexity of multispecies coexistence between endangered animals and a human society in full transformation. The Dhanauri oasis, not yet officially recognized as a protected 'Ramsar' site, stands as a bastion of environmentalism in a paradigmatic struggle for resilience against the rampant urbanization and industrialization of the Indian *doab*.

Keywords: Sarus Crane, Krauñca, Antigone antigone, Dhanauri, Wetlands, Environmental Humanities, Multispecies Studies.

1. Brief introduction to Environmental Humanities and Multispecies Studies in India[1]

Environmental Humanities is a multifaceted, relatively new and rapidly evolving field of study, integrating theories and approaches from various disciplines: anthropology, art, communications, cultural studies, philosophy and ecology, to history, and literature. The so-called Anthropocene concerns of climate change, urban sustainability, biodiversity conservation, species decline, energy policy, environmental activism, and indigenous justice are the major issues emerging in this remarkably integrative and wide-ranging discipline. In this context the scholar becomes a creative, almost an artist, more frequently an activist, engaged in the wide gap of intersectional dynamics between man and nature in all its declinations. It should be noted, however, that the Environmental

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Humanities, as a distinct field, emerged largely in the context of Anglo-Saxon academic institutions, in the States, in Australia, certainly largely in Europe; furthermore, although converging in the historical-geographical and anthropological fields, the discipline took its first steps in English literature or at most in the perspective of comparative literatures. It is interesting to note that in the recent ecocritical debate the component of Eastern cultures, such as voices from the Arab world or South Asia, seems to have played a minority role, even though environmental humanities are asserting themselves everywhere today with renewed vigor. The reasons may be disparate, such as the language barrier or some regional specificities. However, in India, in the palpable and growing momentum towards transdisciplinary approaches to ecology and sustainability, an attempt emerges to find an indigenous root of the discipline, as opposed to a Western debate perceived as increasingly self-referential (Biswas and Ryan 2025).

It is undeniable that there are intellectuals and writers of fiction and non-fiction from South Asia who today enjoy international fame, such as Amitav Ghosh, or Ramachandra Guha etc. However, they are authors who generally address an English-speaking audience. It is also interesting to note how many Indian academies today tend to emphasize a 'traditional' perspective in the Environmental Humanities, which therefore draws from classical literature, from Sanskrit or Hindi, from the history of Indian religions and philosophies, from the peculiarity of an aboriginal cultural kaleidoscope (Beggiora 2021: 199-218). Even the corpus of *itihāsa*, or Indian epics, can be elected as a global paradigm of ecocritical investigation for its effective importance on world literature in terms of content, complexity and doctrinal richness. The most frequented themes are, not by chance, the doctrinal concepts that have always structured the backbone of Indian metaphysics, such as the theme of *ahiṃsā*, vegetarianism, compassion, empathy and consubstantiality between beings. The so-called relationships between 'humans, non-humans and other-than-humans' are crucial in the ecocritical debate, but it is probably possible to affirm that the dimension of interaction and coexistence between human and non-human *animals* prevails in this context. A fluid relationship of identity exchange, a dynamic of mating, shapeshifting, is metaphorically translated into the epic: in the non-time of myth, in paradisiacal places, anthropomorphic speaking Sanskrit beasts are the key characters in events involving deities, who in turn appear conceiving offspring with human and animal partners (Fisher 2018: 56). Even before the emergence of Environmental Humanities, the sacredness of the animal world was accepted where a transmigration or multispecies rebirth was contemplated. Animals were venerated as hypostases of the deities or as a metaphor in *kāvya* poetry and in the Purāṇas of a state of universal suffering dictated by their transitory condition in the impermanence of manifestation. But it is precisely the theme of suffering, doctrinally underlying the exercise of compassion in Indian

disciplines, that is most debated today. The horse Kaṇṭhaka cries at the departure of the Buddha, the elephants in the Jātaka are moved, the animals of the Pañchatantra suffer (Pandey 2016: 220-227; Kumaravelu and Christopher 2023: 100-106). But the most interesting element is the concept according to which men and animals substantially share the same passions, the same emotions. In this sense, Indian myth is a kaleidoscope of examples, but for the purposes of our study, the emblematic episode that opens the epic of the Rāmāyaṇa is useful to us. The first three chapters of Vālmīki's work form the prologue to this epic and tell the story of how the poet came to write it. It is said that when he went down to the Tamasā river to bathe, while he was walking, a short distance away in the forest he saw two birds completely absorbed in a love game. But even as he watched, a Niṣāda [forest-dweller] hunter, filled with malice and intent on mischief, struck down the male of the pair. Seeing him struck down and writhing on the ground, his body covered with blood, his mate uttered a piteous cry. And the pious seer... was filled with pity... [and] uttered these words: "Since, Niṣāda, you killed one of this pair of *krauñcas*, distracted at the height of passion, you shall not live for very long" (Goldman 2021: 54).

Grief-stricken at that vision, Vālmīki pronounced a curse that will be the subject of study for millennia, as well as the fact that the death of a bird would seem to be the main reason for the birth of India's first epic. On the one hand, the sage later realized that his grief or compassion (*śoka*) had spontaneously created the meter (*śloka*). But on the other hand, the demonstration of how animals share human emotions is the basis of a sense of personal empathy with wild animals—this sort of consecutio will be virtuous in the Brahmanic teaching to come.

2. The crane mystery in the Rāmāyaṇa

The episode we have just narrated appears in the *sarga* 2 of the Bālakāṇḍa of Vālmīki's work. However, it is a topos in Indian tradition being mentioned in Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, Kālidāsa's Raghuvaṃśa and in the works of Kashmiri poets, but the latter seem to have understood that it was the female bird that was killed by the Niṣāda and that it was the male bird that lamented his loss. The issue is not indifferent since some scholars, such as Charlotte Vaudeville (1918-2006), connect the episode to the bardic oral tradition. The topos suggests the pre-existence of popular songs or ballads on the theme of love in separation, which here perhaps takes on an archetypal function in Indian literature. Here a female songbird of the *krauñca* type, symbolizing a wife, cries out all her pain at the separation from her partner and the pathos thus expressed, reiterated, refined through the very song of bards and poets rises to lyrical expression. Besides pointing to folk poetry as the main source of inspiration for the Rāmāyaṇa, the prologue to the poem suggests that Indian rhapsodes perceived an analogy between the female *krauñca* bird and the heroine of Vālmīki's poem, Sītā, a faithful wife tormented by the pain of

separation (Vaudeville 1963: 327-335). In short, we could say that the couple of birds is a clear metaphor for the divine couple of Rāma and Sītā, who throughout the history of Indian literature have expressed different metaphors of complementary and opposing principles, such as masculine and feminine, essence and power, Puruṣa and Prakṛti. In aesthetic terms, the primary feeling (*rasa*) is that of grief or compassion (*karuṇa*) due to the separation of the lovers which becomes the dominant theme and teaching of the epic.

At this point it will be clear how establishing which bird corresponds to the Sanskrit *krauñca* has become a sort of search for the holy grail of Indian literature. The exegetical question on the recensions of the epic is too complex to be treated here in summary. In this volume literary details are analyzed and explored in the article by Cinzia Pieruccini. In summary we can say that Sanskritists have spilled a river of ink on the question and although this is not yet definitively concluded, it has been resolved that the bird in question is the giant "Sarus" crane (*Antigone antigone;* Linnaeus, 1758). First suggested by K.N. Dave (1884-1983) in his book on birds in Sanskrit literature (1985: 314), this idea of the *krauñca* as Sarus crane was later substantially developed by Julia Leslie (1948-2004). To arrive at the same conclusion, she focuses on ornithological data and an important verse from the Southern Recension of the Rāmāyaṇa (Leslie 1998: 455-487). Her example is then followed by Niels Hammer who places emphasis on the ancient veneration for Sarus[2] cranes, as well as on the intimate and detailed knowledge of the species and their habitats that shepherds and communities of hunters and gatherers had inevitably acquired day by day, from ancient times to the composition of epic poems (Hammer 2009: 187-211; 2015: 81-99).

Whatever the reasons, now hardly debatable, for the choice of the *Antigone* crane as the emblem of a spiritual and literary research of the ancient poets, what is important is that the animal has become an archetypal symbol. Moreover, in addition to the undisputed religious and mythical value of the epic, today in the Environmental Humanities the Rāmāyaṇa acquires new value and new meanings in an ecocritical perspective. To give an example, the dissertation of the heroes' deeds is intertwined with the discussion of a sacred geography that has engaged scholars (Sinha 1999) in an effort to effectively localize the historical-geographical locations of the mythical places, evocatively structuring a sort of real map of the Subcontinent. But what is interesting is that this geography is alive: even before being rich in animals, there is a description of about two hundred names of plants, which, although they have not yet been effectively all identified, have been considered by some commentators worthy of being

[2] This term instead derives from the Sanskrit *saras* referring to the lake (in different meanings depending on the context), therefore it indicates a marsh, lake or river animal.

considered as a very first botanical catalogue (Sikarwar 2024: 187-199). In fact, from the island of Sri Lanka to the Himalayas, along the sacred rivers, a universe of lilies, lotuses, lianas, well-known and mysterious herbs, aquatic plants, shrubs, edible and inedible fruits comes to life. This abundance develops in different types of ecologically identifiable biosystems such as the dry or humid tropical deciduous forest, to which are added landscapes described as heavenly, such as evergreen jungles and Himalayan alpine reliefs: here the forest crossed by Rāma in his wandering is clearly a metaphor for a journey of spiritual transcendence (Roy 2005: 9-29). Indeed, it is interesting to note that the archetypal Indian forest reflects those states of mind that we were inclined to attribute mainly to humans, but that we then extended to the entirety of *non-human* animals. These are calm (*śānta*), sweet (*madhura*), angry (*raudra*) or fearful (*vībhatsa*) depending on whether it is an idyllic, pleasant place or rather harsh and wild, inhabited by different entities such as saints, ascetics, wild animals or even demons.

The complex set of these agencies - of which man is only one element and not even that central - and their moods, from an anthropological perspective, is subsumed in the empathic song of pain and compassion of the Sarus crane. It is important to note here that the animal chosen by Vālmīki is a wild animal, in this case theoretically a prey, since it is hunted by the Niṣāda. So strictly speaking it is a so-called *mṛga*, that is, not so much in the etymological sense of deer or gazelle, but rather sharing the same nature of "wild" beast. The detail is important because the concept, now hackneyed in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1962; Descola 2005) of the antithetical principles of the tamed and the wild (or domesticated/not domesticated) also recurs predominantly in ancient Hindu cosmologies. The village (*grāma*) and the wild nature (*araṇya*) were for traditional Indian thought two examples of those complementary and juxtaposed principles that I mentioned earlier, and which constitute the common thread of the epic and of a certain good part of Indian metaphysics. Nonetheless, in a broadly understood doctrinal perspective, there is not only opposition but also a certain correspondence between the wild and the domesticated, some elements of the former falling into the latter and vice versa. The village, the city, the sacred place (see the Sanskrit *kṣetra* 'field'), when its sacredness exhausts, recursively returns to draw it from the depths of the forest. The images of the gods, the sacredness of the relics, the updating of doctrinal questions, seem in some way to reside in the ancestral nature of the woods surrounding the human dimension.

Thus the mythical flurry of the episodes and deeds of the heroes, in the various recensions and regional versions that the epic has had in the history of Indian literature, presents itself each time as a complex mechanism of aesthetic and soteriological gears of which the key is the wild and ancestral sacredness of the song of the Sarus crane. Standing almost two meters tall in an upright position and with a wingspan of approximately two and a half metres, this majestic and regal wild bird, which has

populated the Indian wetlands since ancient times, rises up to a symbol of Environmental Humanities in India. Without taking anything away from the undeniable paradigmatic sacredness and semiotic power of the cow, the tiger, the elephant, and many other symbolic animals in India, the *Antigone* crane had become the quintessence of the search for a perfect, salvific lyric according to traditional aesthetic canons. However today, precisely in the debate on Environmental Humanities, this animal, due to its characteristics, embodies the very ancient root of an indigenous concept of man-nature consubstantiality, of an eco-cosmological empathy, implying notions of environmental sustainability and above all of a complex inter-/infra-species relationship and dialogue (Kumar and Kanaujia 2017: 465-470).

3. An ethological approach

Like all large birds, the Sarus crane appears awkward on takeoff, flapping its wings to gain speed and lift off the ground. But it is when it perceives and intercepts the currents that it hovers majestically over the Indian wetlands. The spectacle is of rare beauty and seems like an authentic miracle of nature. During flight, in fact, this type of crane uses to keep its long neck straight (unlike the heron, which bends it backwards) while stretching its black-tipped wings well. Similarly, the long pink legs are in line with the body and neck, offering the bird a very distinctive balanced profile. When I arrived for the first time at the Dhanauri Wetlands in Greater Noida, a few kilometers from Delhi, accompanied by colleagues from Bennett University, I almost had the impression of taking a journey back in time. Seemingly motionless in the dawn air with their powerful build, yet suspended in the wind thanks to their wide wingspan, the gigantic cranes seemed to defy the laws of physics, almost like pterosaurs in a prehistoric landscape. The *Antigone antigone* is in fact the tallest and most imposing crane species in the world, characterized by light gray plumage, long legs and a redhead, devoid of feathers. Its majestic stature and particular behavior have made it the object of study in various regions of the world. And it is precisely in India that the species is present in a more significant way. The distribution of the Sarus crane includes the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and some regions of Australia. Sources such as the WWF and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimate (as the calculation of the distribution in the wild is still problematic today) a total population ranging from 19,000 to 21,800 individuals, of which 13,000/15,000 would be mature individuals (IUCN 2024-2; WWF India, accessed Jan. 2025). Specific estimates are also available on a macro-regional level: India, Nepal and Pakistan: 8,000/10,000 cranes; Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam: 800/1,000 cranes; Myanmar: 500/800 cranes; and less than 10,000 breeding adults in Australia. This species is currently classified as Vulnerable (VU) as its numbers are progressively decreasing. On these assumptions and amounting to about 10,000

individuals, the population of Sarus cranes in India is nevertheless of crucial importance, both for the numerical data itself, and for the paradigmatic vulnerability that the species is facing due to environmental and anthropic factors. The heart of northern India, indeed in full economic, demographic, urbanistic boom, is certainly a non-negligible observatory (Rahmani 2019).

Figure 1. Sarus cranes duet (source: Wikimedia Commons).

For the purposes of our study, perhaps the most relevant biological and behavioral aspect of the Sarus crane is that it is a monogamous species, forming stable pairs for life. This is a relatively rare behavior among birds. Furthermore, Sarus crane pairs are known to perform elaborate dances, which represent both a ritual behavior and a form of communication between the members of the pair. These dances, which include leaping, wing extensions, and synchronized steps, are a form of social bonding and courtship. Sarus cranes are also known for their ability to emit loud cries that can be heard over long distances, another means of communication between members of the same population. These cries have a territorial function, marking the boundary of an area of competence of the pair or group (Verma 2018: 123-126). And it is incredibly interesting to observe how every characteristic observable from a zoological-ornithological perspective can be perfectly expressed in what is punctually and poignantly

described in Indian classical epics and poetry. For bards and poets of ancient India, the taxonomic, ecological and ethological notions relating to this bird seem to be an implicit acquisition, evidently the fruit of long observations, as well as a prerequisite for any subsequent creative speculation in the lyrical or philosophical field.

In terms of habitat and specific distribution, although part of a genus of migratory birds, Sarus cranes do not necessarily migrate over long distances. In India, some populations are year-round residents, while others migrate seasonally between agricultural plains and marshy areas. During the breeding season, which usually occurs between April and August, they choose to nest in humid environments, such as lakes, marshes and swamps, where dense vegetation provides shelter and protection from predators. The nest, usually built by the pair, is a relatively simple structure that is placed in isolated areas near water (Sundar and Choudhury 2003: 41). Sarus Cranes, like most other cranes, normally lay one or two eggs per clutch. In some cases, it can lay up to three eggs. The chicks are nidifugous and become self-sufficient after about 70-75 days.

The Gangetic plain and the regions of northern India, especially Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, record the highest concentration of the *Antigone* crane, as they provide ideal habitat for the species, such as wet and marshy environments, but also agricultural lands. Indeed in India, Sarus cranes are frequently observed in cultivated lands, where by feeding on a variety of crop seeds, they can supplement the diet of insects, invertebrates and aquatic plants, also taking advantage of large open spaces. However, habitat loss due to agricultural expansion and urbanization is a growing threat to the Sarus Crane and many other bird species. As we will see below, wetlands, essential for nesting and feeding, are rapidly declining, significantly reducing the resources available to the species. Agricultural lands in particular are a source of conflict, since cranes, venturing sometimes into these areas to forage, can be perceived by farmers as damaging crops (Kale *et al.* 2012: 49-62; Austin *et al.* 2018).

The *Antigone antigone* is classified as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and its global population is estimated to be declining. In India, although the species is protected by law, pressures from habitat loss, climate change and conflict with agriculture are threatening its survival. The increasing use of pesticides (Arya *et al.* 2024: 29-31) in agricultural practices and unsustainable water management have made it even more difficult for cranes to remain in many traditional ranges. Hunting, although less widespread than in other regions, is another threat along with the collection of eggs and chicks that the species has had to face in the past (WWF Nepal 2016). In response to these threats, various conservation programs have been initiated to protect such avifaunal populations in India. These programs focus on preserving nesting sites, educating local

communities about wildlife conservation, and promoting more sustainable agricultural practices. The creation of protected areas for cranes and monitoring their numbers through research projects are undoubtedly key elements in the conservation strategy. But it is essentially a general environmental awareness, encompassing the commitment to water management, of which wetlands are an integral part, that today seems to be the keystone for the protection not only of cranes but also of many other species (Prakash and Verma 2016: 1-5).

In fact—and this seems to me to be a central point of the matter—the Sarus crane, together with other types of aquatic birds, plays a crucial ecological role in the ecosystems in which it lives. In addition to being important for the control of some species of insects and weed plants, it contributes to the dispersal of seeds and the maintenance of biodiversity. Its presence in agricultural areas can therefore also have beneficial effects, as it helps to control insect populations that could irreparably damage crops. Furthermore, as predators of small invertebrates and aquatic plants, Sarus cranes can contribute to the balance of aquatic ecosystems, maintaining the good health of their habitats. However, the conservation of this species is complicated by the fact that the areas where these cranes reside are often in contexts of high anthropogenic pressure, such as intensive agriculture, fishing activities and urbanization. In contrast, land management approaches have been developed in some northern regions of the Subcontinent, seeking to balance human and wildlife needs, aiming to reduce conflicts between crane protection and agricultural practices (Borad *et al.* 2001: 89-96). I think it is fair to establish the Sarus Crane as an iconic species of Indian wetlands, playing a crucial ecological role in these environments (it is also the national animal of the U.P.). Given the wide range of beneficial impacts of its presence, continued and collaborative efforts between researchers, conservationists and local communities are crucial to counteract existential threats and ensure the future of this majestic crane. In conclusion, what seems striking to me is that the two parallel perspectives of the environmental humanities and of a bio/zoological approach, more closely related to the hard sciences, as I have illustrated here in these last two paragraphs, can be perfectly superimposable, intersecting, as well as reaching similar conclusions. This correlation deserves for sure a more in-depth analysis.

4. Case Study in Dhanauri Wetlands

The Dhanauri Wetlands, located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, serves as an essential habitat and refuge for a variety of Indian bird species, in particular this protected area plays a crucial role in the survival and reproduction of the Sarus crane, which is facing increasing ecological threats due to habitat loss and environmental degradation. To be precise, the 98-hectare area, now a birdwatching sanctuary (Ansari *et al.* 2018: 161-171), is in the Gautam Buddha Nagar district (coordinates: 28.3359,

77.6180) and is estimated to contain 217 species of birds including around 120 specimens of the *Antigone antigone*. At the same time, the set of factors and changes due to modernity and in particular to the expansion of nearby urban centers have triggered an intricate series of conflicts and paradoxes, today involving not only environmental associations and government directives, but also a complex web of agencies such as the rights and interests of local farmers, water management, the development of new infrastructures and areas for real estate capable of satisfying the demographic pressure of this area of India. All these driving forces gravitate vortically and dangerously around the emblematic figure of the *Antigone* crane, so much so as to blur the contours of its very importance both as a symbol and as an endangered animal.

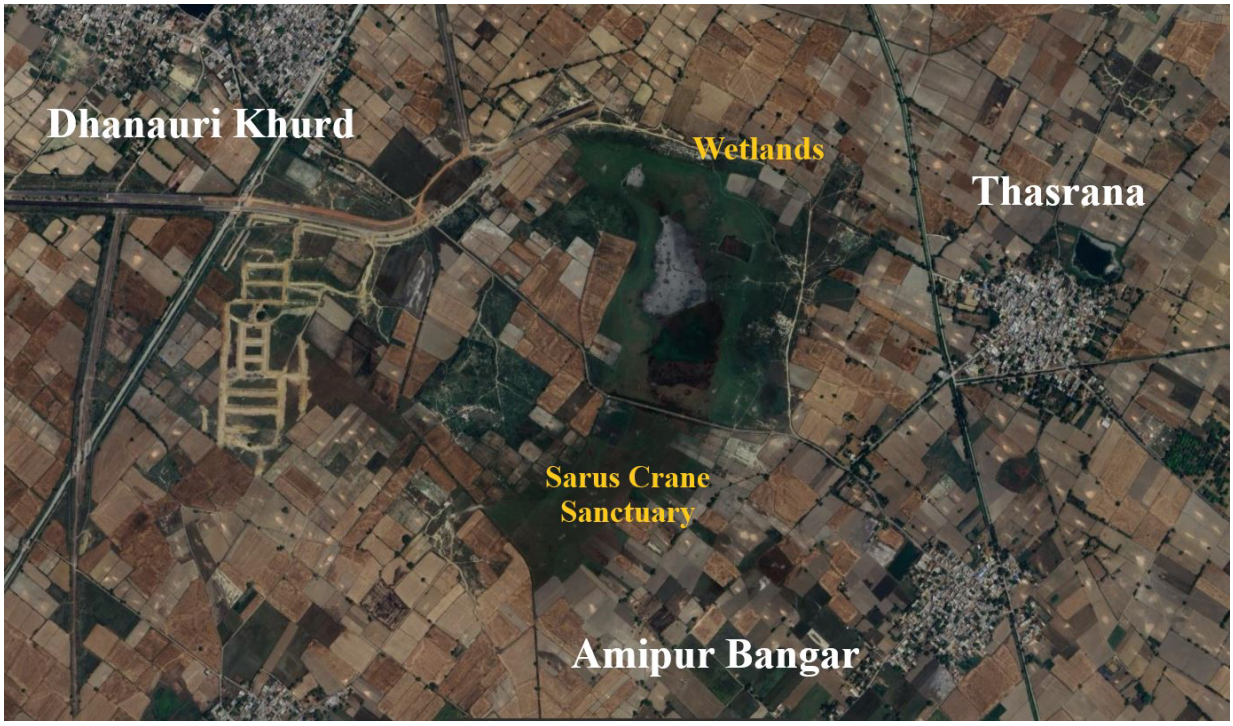

Figure 2. Dhanauri Wetlands satellite photo (source: Google Earth; modified).

Before going into the details of the ongoing controversies, I think it is necessary to mention that the Dhanauri wetland offers a unique ecosystem that combines both aquatic and terrestrial environments, making it an ideal place for several species of animals. The wide open spaces, wetlands and shallow water bodies of the wetland provide the necessary resources for feeding, nesting and breeding of cranes. As mentioned, they feed primarily in the grasslands and shallow ponds of the wetland, feeding on a variety of plant materials, small invertebrates and amphibians, and here the availability of these resources is critical to their survival and reproductive success. Sarus cranes are also known for their

peculiar social habits: pairs often return to the same breeding grounds year after year. In Dhanauri, cranes have established regular mating patterns that are closely linked to the seasonal cycles of the wetland, particularly the availability of water and food. During the monsoon season, flooded areas of the wetland provide an abundance of aquatic vegetation and prey, allowing cranes to thrive (Gulati and Rana 2021a: 37-42).

Interestingly, while the Sarus Crane has been classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List due to increasing habitat loss, agricultural encroachment and climate change, the Dhanauri Wetland stands out as one of the last strongholds of this species. The wetland is integral to their survival, providing not only a safe haven for nesting and feeding, but also a buffer against the pressures of human development. The presence of Sarus cranes in this wetland is often seen as an indicator of the overall health of the ecosystem. The breeding success and population/distribution trends of these birds are essential data and indicators for conservationists monitoring wetland biodiversity. In other words, the interconnection between cranes and the territory—exemplified by the aforementioned interaction with seeds, insects and more—becomes a tool for well-being and monitoring of the general ecological balance, that is, of the multispecies relationships within the delicate ecosystem of Dhanauri (Gulati and Rana 2021b: 205-210).

Recognizing the importance of this natural area, safeguarding initiatives have been initiated to protect the Sarus crane and its habitat. These include habitat restoration projects, anti-poaching measures, and community-based conservation programs aimed at raising awareness and promoting coexistence between wildlife and human populations. Local conservation groups, in collaboration with government agencies, have worked to mitigate the impact of agriculture and promote wetland conservation. In particular, the establishment of buffer zones around critical breeding areas and the promotion of environmentally friendly farming techniques have shown promise in ensuring that the wetland remains a safe habitat for the crane (Bhatnagar *et al.* 2019). These efforts are crucial to maintaining the ecological integrity of the Dhanauri Wetland and providing a model for wetland conservation across the region. Perhaps the most notable development in recent years has been the application for the area to be listed as a Ramsar site. Also known as *The Convention on Wetlands*, it is an international environmental treaty signed on February 2, 1971 in Ramsar (Iran), under the auspices of UNESCO, which entered into force in 1975 upon reaching a quorum of participating countries. In short, the Convention aims to internationally protect wetlands through their identification or delimitation, the study of their characteristic aspects (in particular birdlife), and the implementation of programs that allow the conservation of habitats, including flora and fauna. At a global level, marshes, peat bogs, swamps, artificial (such as fishponds, rice paddies, reservoirs) or natural water basins, permanent or

transitory, with stagnant or flowing, fresh, salt or brackish water, are monitored, including marine expanses where the depth does not exceed six meters during low tide. This limit may be exceeded for islands, oases, mangroves, deltas of riparian zones, provided that they are included in wetlands of recognized importance for the breeding of aquatic bird species, in particular dependent on such habitats. To give an example, the first site to be registered in the Ramsar Convention in India was, way back in 1981, the famous brackish water lagoon of Chilika Lake (116,500ha): proposed by the government of Odisha as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is today a natural sanctuary as well as an aquapelago rich in history and culture (Finlayson *et al.* 2020).

The Convention proposes a grid of nine main inclusion requirements that would be long-winded to analyze here, but suffice it to point out for now that Dhanauri has at least two of them, namely: the area serves as an aggregation site for over 20,000 waterbirds and various other species, and coincidentally in the case of the Sarus crane, it hosts over 1% of the biogeographic population of one species or subspecies of waterbird. Despite having the requirements to be included in the internationally recognized special protection areas and considering that the first surveys by environmentalists date back to 2014, Dhanauri seems to have sunk into a real swamp of legal quibbles and lethargic bureaucracy (Dixit 2021).

The National Green Tribunal (NGT), a statutory body in India dealing with the speedy disposal of cases related to the protection of the environment and other natural resources, after having ordered the Uttar Pradesh government to cleanse the area of water hyacinth (a invasive species in wetlands), has instituted an inquiry in 2024 in an attempt to understand why the state authorities have not yet actually submitted the notification of the wetland as a Ramsar site. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Gautam Buddha Nagar said that the area surrounding Dhanauri with its hundred hectares is extremely complex, since it mostly develops on private land. In addition to surveys of the actual size of the territory and remote sensing images,[3] the authorities had to engage with stakeholders, particularly landowners and local farmers (Ghanekar 2024). The difficulty of the consultations and obtaining the authorization to proceed would therefore be the main cause of the delays in this process, which would particularly involve the villages of Dhanauri Kalan, Thasrana and Amipur Bangar, surrounding the area in question and which I had the opportunity to visit, collecting several interviews.

[3] The surrounding countryside does indeed have its own complexity, but it is paradoxical to think that the area of wetlands is still quite small. The smallest Ramsar site in India is Renuka Lake (HP) with only 20ha, while the largest is the Sundarbans (WB) with 423,000ha, although 1/3 is in India, the rest in Bangladesh (RSIS 2005, 2019).

5. Voices from the Wetlands

It is interesting to note that the current debate on the formal creation of a protected natural area with special status must be framed in a previous context that is substantially anything but idyllic, and this can only add complexity to the current difficulties. It is no secret that in India the agricultural sector has always been mostly neglected and left behind in the national development plans. Since the years following independence, Prime Minister Nehru managed to uplift the nation, but mainly by implementing heavy industry and the steel sector. In the years following the rupee crisis of 1990-1991 and the opening of the domestic market to foreign direct investment, which in turn was a prelude to the economic boom, the leading sectors were the tertiary sector and services. The giant strides that India was able to make were, according to the farmers in particular, thanks to the sacrifices and mortification of the agricultural sector. Even when there were interventions in this area, in particular I am referring to the various historical declinations of the so-called Green revolution, the results were so poor and the controversies so broad that it would be reductive even to attempt to summarize them here (Siegel 2018). However, it is enough to move away a few dozen or hundreds of kilometers from Delhi to realize the level of backwardness of many rural villages: from the lack of infrastructure, to the work in the fields still carried out by hand or with the help of animals. Dhanauri is no exception with its herds of buffalo, rotational crops of rice and wheat, and collection of fodder.

Thus, the historical and frequent conflict between wetlands and anthropogenic zones, which I mentioned above, in which multispecies coexistence is problematic, finds in Dhanauri a perfect paradigm: however, to fully understand it, it is necessary to insert the case study into a broader socio-economic scenario. From what I have been able to gather from interviews with activists and farmers (who I will keep anonymous here for privacy reasons), despite recent positive interventions, coexistence between birds and humans has long been difficult. In short, birds are responsible for the devastation of crops and rice farmers in particular say that enormous damage is caused by the incessant trampling of the ground with their large legs, by the rummaging of their beaks especially after sowing. The ban on hunting them by any means, especially aimed at protected species such as cranes, is therefore a problem for those who have invested funds and energy in seeds, irrigation, crops. An elderly farmer from Dhanauri said that recently the Indian government proposed a certain amount of rupees as compensation to farmers or landowners on whose land the cranes had nested. This was supposed to be a way to protect the species and at the same time calm the discontent of the local workers. But at that time, estimates and fictitious sightings of nesting sites began to multiply beyond measure, so much so that it became necessary to catalogue the sites and mark them with a sort of flag or signal. The farmer said he was personally involved in the counting operation, but as soon as he

approached the nests with the eggs, the cranes became aggressive, not letting the intruder get closer. The fact that some specimens of Sarus crane can reach almost two meters in an erect posture, and therefore, although it is a normally harmless animal, it can become quite threatening, was described by the informant with a lively and amusing pantomime. On the other hand, some have noted that mostly other birds, especially peacocks, are damaging crops, not so much the cranes, which are proportionally less numerous. And in any case, in recent years, human behaviors equally damaging to the animals' habitat have been recorded: such as the use of agricultural pesticides, and the use of drainage pumps that absorb water from wetlands pouring it through irrigation onto agricultural land. The presence of water is fundamental especially as a result of climatic distortions that are altering the timing and distribution of monsoon rains in the area; in this latitude it is essential mostly to implement the double harvest of *rabi* and *kharif*, typical of subtropical countries. Some products, such as rice, can in fact give a double annual harvest in the monsoon area; therefore the constancy of an abundant water supply can double the farmers' earnings. To do this, motor pumps have been installed in several areas, which however the government has declared illegal and subject to sanctions.

The inclusion of Dhanauri in the sites catalogued in the Ramsar Convention and the related projects for the protection of the natural area could in fact act as a peacemaker in a situation of multispecies coexistence that today would seem to be anything but sustainable. But since the mapping of the protected area actually affects the agricultural properties of the villages, the State has offered to purchase the fields and agricultural lands around the villages, providing compensation to the owners. Despite this guarantee, the families of the settlements say they are worried about the future of their children, at least in the sense that the hard profession of the farmer was still passed down from generation to generation and had provided the means of subsistence to the local families. Lacking agricultural land, the new generations will have nothing to live on. I personally objected that in a future perspective of creating a natural park, the new generations of local citizens are expected to have the right of pre-emption to be employed in all management jobs of the project, such as the work of rangers or forest guards. One of the farmers' spokesmen reported that in fact the institutions had offered this opportunity to the local community, but he also said that this had not been welcomed with enthusiasm due to the low level of *sarkāri*, or state, wages. Alternatively, the right of pre-emption was mooted in the hiring of young people as local clerical workers in a Chinese telephone company that intended to establish a branch in the area.

The issue of the implementation of real estate around the wetlands actually seems to be the first real big threat to the process of creating the natural area. Plans in hand, the leaders of the Dhanauri communities showed a copy of the master plan of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development

Authority (YEIDA) which envisages the reduction of the Wetlands to just over fifty hectares for the natural park by 2031, divided into approximately 17 hectares of wetland and 39 hectares of green belt around it: substantially it is almost half compared to the original project of the area that can be included as sites cataloged in the Ramsar Convention. YEIDA has allocated the land for housing, and in some areas construction and urbanisation projects have already begun (Dev 2022). The YEIDA CEO said that equivalent land could be allocated to the natural reserve on the other side of the wetland where there is currently no construction underway; however there are rumors among the villages that the government intends to allow the development of a luxury real estate ring that will completely surround what remains of the wetland. So the deed of sale of some plots begins to reveal a different agenda for the future (Rajput 2023).

The second dark shadow hanging over the future of the nature reserve project is the construction, already started, of the so-called Jewar airport a short distance away. Known as Noida International Airport, once completed, it will be an alternative to Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi by relieving its high and rising traffic load, and is planned to be India's and Asia's largest airport. Faced with a project of such enormous scope, every element of risk—such as habitat degradation, the impossibility of nesting for cranes, the risk of bird strike accidents—increases the paradox of the general scenario (Mishra 2024). In fact, a condition imposed by the Indian Ministry of Environment while granting environmental clearance to the airport was the compilation of a bird and fauna conservation plan, in consultation with the Wildlife Institute of India. This request has been ignored by the Uttar Pradesh government, which has not even made any proposal to designate Dhanauri as a Ramsar site for the above-mentioned reasons, thus preventing the National Green Tribunal (NGT) from proceeding in this direction (Mahapatra *et al.* 2024: 96-104). Thus far the redness of the sunset in the wetlands ignites an idyllic landscape: as in the literary *braj* the countryside is alive of the people inhabiting it; the herds return slowly from the pasture, flocks of birds hover above a jagged body of water fading into the horizon. But on that same horizon, scorched by the sun, the first asphalt landing strip of the new airport looms black and interminable.

6. Conclusions

In a farming village near Amethi, also in Uttar Pradesh, but about six hundred kilometers from Dhanauri, the story of a farmer who found an injured Sarus crane on his way home caused a sensation in 2023. After caring for her, the two became good friends, so much so that even if left free, the crane wanted to stay with her human companion. When the news reached the newspapers, the Forest Department immediately confiscated the animal to reintroduce it into the wild. The case became

political, allowing the opposition spokesperson to criticize the Uttar Pradesh government for its lack of empathy in understanding the possible depths of human-animal relationships (Rehman 2023). The event is very interesting because, politics aside, it is paradigmatic of two opposing perspectives on environmentalism. On one side there are the advocates of *ahiṃsā*, as a universal feeling of compassion and empathy between all beings, including human and non-human animals, which I described in the introduction. There is no greater driving force than this love. Also expressed in Environmental Humanities, it is a transcendental principle that hinges on the backbone of Indian metaphysics. On the other hand, especially from the Hard Sciences, but not only (as in the integrated holistic perspective of the One Health model), there are those who accuse the nonviolent advocates of Gandhian compassion of being impractical, that is, of not taking into account the global scenario in which we live. Human and animal health are closely interconnected with each other, and with the common territory in which they live: it makes no sense to pet, feed, save an animal if the environment in which it is forced to survive is not in line with its well-being. Especially if man himself is a contributory cause of this impoverishment. Similarly, it seems pointless to befriend a crane if the concepts of environmental protection and species conservation are missing.

This is therefore why the Dhanauri Wetlands are crucial. There are many other animals at risk across India, to be precise more than 950 are listed by the IUCN Red List (updated to 2024) as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable (IUCN *cit*). Likewise, the Indian sites included in the Ramsar list are 89 in 2025 (UPSC 2025). I could therefore have discussed many different topics and scenarios here. However, Dhanauri combines a unique set of factors, making the case a symbol of environmental controversies in South Asia and around the world. In general terms, the Sarus crane was already a model of a lyrical development in classical literature; as expression of spiritual power, it subsumes within itself principles of cosmic order, expressed according to the aesthetic canons of the emotion transmitted by its song. The reinterpretation of these elements in an ecocritical way has made it an icon of Environmental Humanities in India. But then around, in contrast, there is Delhi. Not just any place, but the world's largest urban agglomeration (after Tokyo), comprising the satellite cities of Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Noida, Greater Noida, YEIDA, with an estimated population of over 28 million. Although Delhi is an extraordinary place rich in history and culture, its ever-expanding urban area is now ranked first in the world (or among the first according to the latest updates) for air pollution (WHO 2025). This monster that is rapidly devouring the plain and the Indian *doab* metaphorically embodies all the worst concerns of the Anthropocene. Here, within it, the crane stronghold becomes a symbol of extraordinary strength placed within an exceptional observatory.

What is regrettable in conclusion is that, considering all the forces at play, the paradigmatic value of the Sarus crane does not seem to be taken into consideration as it deserves, suffocated by the demands of each of the parties. Even the environmentalist faction seems to be more attentive to the number of specimens, to what the bird actually is, rather than to the ethical and spiritual battle that this amazing beast represents. Furthermore, when I asked the farmers if they were not fond of cranes as sacred animals, sung in epics and literature, they seemed aware, but all in all detached, more than anything else worried about the concrete future of their children. Only a few elders said they had a clear idea that that animal was the inspiring incipit of the saga of the Rāmāyaṇa and yet not an incisive fact for contingent reality. Indeed, the urban and technological development of their villages was seen as something inevitable and ultimately right. That is, the abandonment of a hard, archaic and at times unfair lifestyle in favor of modernity is acceptable, to the extent that at least this time in history the peasants are not marginalized or excluded. So the set of many small stories of resilience, survival, multi-species coexistence between humans and non-human animals seem to be absorbed, crushed, annihilated by global development policies and large investments. On this front, there is no longer time or space for opposing perspectives on environmental issues: in the heart of Dhanauri there is a crane that can teach us the meaning of our existence and our role on the planet.

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Emblematic animals and visual arts

The musk deer and its musk in classical Indian literature

Klaus Karttunen

The musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster* Hodgson) is a small hornless animal, only 40–60 cm high. It lives in the Himalayas and Tibet between 2100 and 3300 m. The caudal musk gland of the adult male provides the famous aromatic black substance known as musk which is traditionally much used in perfumery.

After a short introduction about the animal and its habits, its role in Indian classical literature is discussed. It is missing in the Veda and epics (except one short mention in the *Mahābhārata*), but since the early first millennium it it rather often mentioned. It is variously called *karāla*, *kastūrīmṛga,* and *mṛganābhi*. Part of the accounts are rather fanciful.

The second part of the article concentrates on musk itself, Sankrit *kastūrikā*, also *mṛgamada and kuraṅgamada*. It was variously used perfuming the body, clothes, and even as a condiment added to drinks. Physicians mixed it in various medicines.

Finally, the role of musk in ancient international trade is discussed. In the Graeco-Roman world it became known in the fourth and fifth century and later on it was also much appreciated in the Islamic world. Its name, Greek μόσχος, Latin *muscus*, is probably borrowed from Persian (Middle and New Persian *mušk* 'musk') as *muṣka* in Sanskrit means 'testicle.' However, it seems that also in India the musk gland was occasionally confused with testicles.

Keywords: musk, perfumes, Himalayan nature, international trade.

Musk deer live in the Himalayas and Tibet between 2100 and 3300 m. It is known as *Moschus chrysogaster* Hodgson, with the traditional name *Moschus moschiferus* L. now only being used for the related Siberian species (there are altogether seven species of musk deer). The archiater Linnaeus himself coined the name *Moschus moschiferus* in the 18th century. He had little access to Himalayan nature but was actively corresponding with several colleagues who were studying nature in Siberia. The animal was still rather poorly known in Linnaeus' time and only later was it understood that in fact there are several closely related species. Brian Houghton Hodgson gave the name *Moschus chrysogaster* to the Himalayan species which he studied for many years in Nepal. Apart from his studies on nature, he also carried out research

on local ethnography, languages, and religion and he is therefore also well-known in the history of Indology.[1]

The musk deer is a small animal, only 40–60 cm high, and instead of horns, it has long upper canines (which in the male can be even as long as 7 cm). It lives singly or in pairs, mainly in the birch forests above the pine zone, but sometimes also descends to lower levels searching for food. Its diet consists of grass, lichens, leaves, and flowers. The caudal musk gland of the adult male provides the famous aromatic black substance known as musk which is traditionally much used in perfumery. A single male secretes c. 28 g musk. When fresh it "has an unpleasant, pungent, urinary odour, the aroma of musk appears when it is dried"(Prater 1971: 295).[2] Because of illegal hunting and habitat loss the species is nowadays on the endangered list.

Musk deer and musk are not mentioned in Vedic and epic texts,[3] but appear quite often in classical Sanskrit literature. In Sanskrit the animal is known as *karāla*, *kastūrīmṛga,* and *mṛganābhi*; sometimes also *gandhahariṇa* and other rare terms (*puṣkalaka*). The *Suśrutasaṃhitā* lists *karāla* among the different kinds of deer flesh in the *jaṅghala* group, and Ḍalhaṇa confirms that the word means *kastūrimṛga*.[4] The texts rightly locate it in the Himalayas[5] (and of course in Kailāśa). Thus, according to Bāṇa, in the Kailāśa the slope was lined by the hoofs of yaks and female musk-deer sank in the sand [6] and it was covered with the hair of other cervids and antelopes (*rallaka*s and *raṅku*s). Here we meet the rather common tendency to put together various species of deer, even as part of the same herd. Our texts were written by urban people and Brahmans, often vegetarians, who had little knowledge of the animal world. Hunters knew better, but they did not write books.

A common idea is that of the musk deer spreading its smell around—to stones, the leaves of trees, even to the air (the north wind smells of musk). Thus, in the *Meghadūta* Himalayan stones retain the

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[2] The preceding account is also founded on Prater (1971).

[3] An exception is perhaps the list of things that one should keep at home for good luck described in the *Mahābhārata* 5, 40, 9. After a goat, a bullock, sandalwood, a lute, a mirror, honey and butter, iron, copper, a conch shell, and gold it ends with musk (*nābhi*) and *rocanā* pigment.

[4] *Suśruta* Sūtra 20, 5 and 4, 54 and Ḍalhaṇa on both, cf. Meulenbeld (2002: IB, 341, note 517).

[5] E.g. Ḍalhaṇa on *Suśruta* Sūtra 4, 54 *karālaḥ adhonikāntadantaḥ himavadādiparvateṣu kastūrimṛgaḥ iti loke*.

[6] *Kādambarī* p. 243 *sikatā-nimagna-camaramṛga-kastūrikāmṛgī-khara-paṅktinā*. See further *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 4, 6, 20 listing animals found in Kailāśa (my text reads *vṛkanābhibhiḥ*, but perhaps musk-deer as *mṛganābhi* is meant).

scent of the musk deer who had sat on them.[7] In another description of the Himalayas we read that in the shade of the *nameru* trees (*Elaeocarpus serratus*), the surfaces of stones have been perfumed by the musk-deer (*mṛganābhi*) reclining on them (*Raghuvaṃśa* 4, 74). According to Jayadeva, the fresh leaves of the *tamāla* trees absorb the strong scents of deer musk in the spring.[8] In the *Harṣacarita* the list of royal presents includes musk deer (*kastūrikākuraṅgān*) which spread their scent in the space all round them.[9] For Rājaśekhara the north wind is made fragrant through the favour of the musk deer (*kastūrikaiṇa*).[10] Elsewhere the same author claims that the musk deer (*gandhahariṇa*) likes to circle around the sprigs of the tender rosebay, but takes no delight in a wormwood meadow.[11] Bāṇa states that in the happy country great men are its bulwarks, clad, like the feet of the Himalayas, with the hair of deer bearing the fragrance of musk.[12]

As this gland secretion was highly appreciated, musk deer was also eagerly hunted. Thus e.g. in the *Kāśikā* on P. 2, 3, 36 the musk deer is hunted because of its musk gland (*somni puṣkalako hataḥ*).[13] In the *Kādambarī* p. 64 (NSP) the Śabara king hunted many kinds of animals (peacocks, deer) and followed the musk deer (*gandha-anusāriṇam*). When the deer had been killed, the hunter removed the entire musk gland as this was an easy way to preserve the valuable substance in good condition. In one source kings also tame deer to procure musk and also to keep them for their amusement.[14]

Musk (Sanskrit *kastūrikā*, also *mṛgamada*, *kuraṅgamada*)[15] was highly appreciated and popular as a perfume and it is therefore also often mentioned in texts. According to Hooper (1910: 520) "Bhāvaprakāśa describes three variants of musk: Kamrupa, the best; Nepala, of intermediate quality; and Kashmiri, inferior." Other sources also confirm that the best sort comes from the east (McHugh 2015: 172f.). Musk was famous for its strong and penetrating smell. In a Subhāṣita we learn that like

[7] *Meghadūta* 52 *āsīnānāṃ surabhitaśilaṃ nābhigandhair mṛgāṇām*; Mallinātha explains *nābhigandhaiḥ kasturīgandhaiḥ*, etc.

[8] Jayadeva: *Gītagovinda* 1, 29 *mṛgamadasaurabhasavaśaṃvadanavadalamālatamāle*.

[9] Bāṇa: *Harṣacarita* 7 (Kane 1986: 117; Cowell and Thomas 1993: 214).

[10] Rājaśekhara: *Bālarāmāyaṇa* 5, 33 (5, 35 of Warder 1988: 471).

[11] Rājaśekhara: *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* 3, 5+.

[12] Bāṇa: *Harṣacarita* 3 (Kane 1986: 43) *mṛgamadaparimalavāhimṛgaromācchāditair*. Note that Cowell and Thomas 1993: 81 mistakenly render *mṛgamada* as 'civet'.

[13] A similar idea without musk deer is found in *Jātaka* (Fausbøll 1991: 6, 61, verse 269): an elephant is killed for ivory, a leopard for its skin.

[14] *Yuktikalpataru* p. 211 v. 82 quoted by Gopal (1989: 118).

[15] To these McHugh 2015: 174 adds some less common names: *mārjārī* 'cat-related,' *mṛgāṇḍaja* 'produced from deer testicles,' *mṛgadarpa* 'deer-pride,' and *mṛgodbhava* 'deer-arisen.'

musk, fondness can never be concealed; even though it is concealed, its scent goes everywhere.[16] Musk was used as such or mixed in various preparations, e.g. in sandal paste.[17]

Different methods for testing musk are described in the *Mānasollāsa* (3, 5, 992ff.)—this was important, because musk could also be falsified, often by mixing a small amount of real musk with inferior substances (McHugh 2015: 196). McHugh (2015: 190 with note 35) indicates a short text, *Kastūriparīkṣā*, devoted to such testing.

Musk was applied directly onto the skin or on clothes. At his coronation the young king had his body smeared with sandal paste mixed with fragrant musk.[18] In another passage from Kālidāsa celebrating women drink wine and smear their breasts with sandal paste mixed with musk.[19] In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* the wife of the Bhilla chief has her garments perfumed with musk (*mṛgamada*).[20]

Besides actual perfumes, musk was also used for drawing cosmetic designs, for perfuming clothes, and even as a condiment added to drinks. A number of examples are found e.g. in Murāri's *Anargharāghava*. He tells how in the morning a maiden rubs off the design of a *makara* (representing Kāma's mount) drawn with musk (*kastūri*) on her breasts.[21] In another passage the Yamunā is compared to an ink-black musk mark decorating the goddess Earth.[22] Jayadeva mentions leaf designs drawn with musk (*kastūrikāpātrakam*) decorating women's breasts (*Gītagovinda* 11, 11).

Jayadeva seems to be fond of musk drawings. Thus, in *Gītagovinda* 4, 6, the dejected Rādhā secretly uses deer musk to draw Kṛṣṇa (*kuraṅgamadena*) in the likeness of the love god and then worships him. In 7, 22 Kṛṣṇa uses deer musk to draw the form of a stag on the moon (*mṛgamadatilakam likhati sapulakaṃ mṛgam iva rajanīkare*) and then (24) also smears the domes of Rādhā's swelling breasts with shining musk; in 12, 12 Rādhā says to Kṛṣṇa: 'paint a leaf design on my breast with deer musk (*mṛgamadatilakam*)' and again in 16 'make a mark with liquid deer musk (*mṛgamadarasa*) on my moonlight brow.'

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[16] *Indische Sprüche* 7597: *mṛganābhisamā prītir na tu gopāyyate kvacit, āvṛtāpi punas tasya gandhaḥ sarvatra gacchati.*

[17] E.g. *Ṛtusaṃhāra* 6, 12, and *Raghuvaṃśa* 17, 24 both quoted below; Bilhaṇa 8 (Northern recension) *adyāpi tāṃ masṛṇacandana-paṅkamiśrakastūrikāparimalotthavisarpigandhām* [...] *smarāmi.*

[18] Kālidāsa, *Raghuvaṃśa* 17, 24 *mṛganābhisugandhinā.*

[19] Kālidāsa, *Ṛtusaṃhāra* 6, 12 *priyaṅgukāliyakakuṅkumāni stanāṅgarāgeṣu vicarcitāni / āsevyate candanam aṅganābhir madālasābhir mṛganābhiyuktam.*

[20] Somadeva, *Kathāsaritsāgara* 18, 4 (123), 51 (Tawney 1992: 2, 595).

[21] *Anargharāghava* 4, 3 (Törzsök 2006: 232f.), also in Vidyākara: *Subhāṣitaratnakośa* 633. Lines drawn with musk also in 2, 22 (Törzsök 2006: 130f. the lines formed by ants collecting millet and rice grains resemble the lines drawn with musk), in 1, 2+ (p. 48f. drawn by Viṣṇu on Lakṣmī's breasts), in 7, 107 (p. 522f. musk design on women's cheeks washed away by sweat falling from their foreheads).

[22] *Anargharāghava* 7, 116 (Törzsök 2006: 528f.) *devyā bhūmer mṛgamadamaṣīmaṇḍanaṃ.*

Karpūramañjarī wrote a love letter on the leaf of a *ketaka* flower with reddish-yellow ink made of musk.[23]

As a highly appreciated perfume, musk was naturally present in many royal enjoyments. It is thus mentioned at least half a dozen times in this connection in the *Mānasollāsa* (as *kastūrī, kastūrikā*). We find it applied on the faces of the ladies of the harem (3, 11, 1176), also on the king's eyes (5, 6, 304), among the condiments added to *tāmbūla* (3, 4, 963), in the water used for sprinkling (5, 4, 214 and 224), and among other things to give a nice smell to incense (3, 19, 1698). A king enjoying his free time has a *kastūritilaka* on his forehead (5, 8, 354). Much earlier Varāhamihira included it, together with camphor, as a perfume ingredient.[24]

There were also some medical uses. Among the early sources, both Caraka and Vāgbhaṭa use musk (*kastūri*) as one of the ingredients in a paste that alleviated the problems caused by *vāta* such as e.g. dyspnoea, coughing, fever, hiccups and vomiting.[25]

The musk gland (*kastūrikākośa*) was often given as a royal present. The above-mentioned list in the *Harṣacarita* also contains musk glands. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the Bhilla chief, as she gives away her daughter, presented the bridegroom with a hundred camels laden with pearls and musk.[26]

Naturally there were also some purely literary ideas connected with musk and its strong smell, usually in an erotic context. Quite often it is said to attract bees, who then harassed the women using musk perfume. Thus e.g. in Maṅkha, *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* 12, 90 (translation in Warder 2004: 89): 'That cosmetic which you put on, produced from paste of musk (*kastūripaṅkajanma*), was certainly a mistake, since your every frail limb is full of wounds caused by the stings of bees attached to the fragrance' (with an allusion to the bites of love-making).

In later literature we find a nice piece of poetical imagination. In this case, the musk deer himself supposedly does not understand that the smell is his own and looks for its source in vain. Kabīr used this as a comparison: musk lies in the musk deer's own navel, but it roams in the forest hoping to find it, just as God pervades every heart, but men of the world do not conceive this.[27] The same idea is then

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[23] Rājaśekhara, *Karpūramañjarī* 2, 7 with *eṇanāhī* 'antelope's nave' = *kastūrikā*.

[24] Varāhamihira, *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 77, 13 *kastūrikayā deyaḥ karpūrasaṃyutayā*. In two other passages (77, 12 and 17) just *mṛgakarpūra* indicates the same.

[25] *Carakasaṃhitā* Cikitsā 28, 152 and *Aṣṭāṅgasaṃgraha* Cikitsā 23, 45. Also in *Aṣṭāṅgasaṃgraha* Cikitsā 2, 95 in a paste applied to the body to ward off chills. According to Meulenbeld 2002: IB 703 (note 726) the *Carakasaṃhitā* passage is probably the earliest mention of musk.

[26] Somadeva, *Kathāsaritsāgara* 18, 4 (123), 77 (Tawney 1992: 2, 597) *muktākastūrikābhārabhṛtoṣṭraśata*.

[27] Kabīr no. 45 v. 1f. (Karki 2001: 90) *kastūrī kuṃḍil*[a] *basai, mṛg*[a] *ḍhūṃḍhai van*[a] *māṃhi / aise ghaṭi ghaṭi rām*[a] *haiṃ, duniyāṃ* [...].

also found in a poem by Ravidās: with the scent in its body the musk deer searches, but does not find the secret.[28]

Despite the quite large number of references to musk deer in texts, according to van der Geer (2008: 425), it seems to be completely absent in Indian art.

Musk became an item of international trade early on. In ancient times it was exported from India to Rome, where it is mentioned in some texts of late antiquity, first by Jerome on a list of odoriferous substances.[29] It was known in Greek as μόσχος, in Latin as *muscus*. The name corresponds to the Indian *muṣka*, which in Sanskrit means 'testicle', but in Middle and New Persian the probably related word *mušk* means 'musk.' It thus seems that μόσχος was borrowed from Persian. But it also seems that musk glands were sometimes confused with testicles even in India.[30]

In the 6th century, Cosmas Indicopleustes (11, 6) gave a short description of the musk deer as an Indian animal and he knew its Indian name (as καστοῦρι).[31] Like some Indian sources, he locates the musk gland in the navel; the hunter takes it from the animal he had killed with an arrow.

Musk was brought from India to the Islamic world in the Middle Ages[32] and part of it then travelled further to Europe. In most European languages, its name was borrowed from the Graeco-Latin word, thus e.g. English *musk*, but Portuguese *almiscar* betrays its Arabic origin. In Europe the word was also applied to other animals that smell (muskrat,[33] muskox) and plants.

Nowadays musk is commonly substituted with synthetic products.

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[28] Ravidās 110, 2 (Callewaert and Friedlander 1992; from *Ādi Granth* 37, 1, 1196) *jaise kuraṃkª nahī pāio bhedu, tani sugaṃdhª ḍhūḍhai pradesu*.

[29] Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* 2, 8 (337A, Bickel 1915: 405).

[30] Note the rare *mṛgāṇḍaja* mentioned above.

[31] Note that Greek καστόριον (Latin *castor*) is a different fragrant substance, namely, the secretion obtained from a beaver. Mayrhofer (1997: 79) suggests that Sanskrit *kastūri* is borrowed from this, but I am rather inclined to accept Kirfel's suggestion ("vielleicht stammen beide Wörter aus einer dritten Quelle," quoted by Mayrhofer).

[32] In the 9th century Ibn Masāwaih's (777–857 CE) treatise on aromatic substances mentioned musk as one of the primary aromatics, together with ambergris, aloeswood, camphor, and saffron (McHugh 2015: 165).

[33] According to Yule and Burnell (1903: 600), the first uses of the word *muskrat* are from the late 16th century. In the passage from Jerome cited earlier, *peregrini muris pellicula*, mentioned immediately after *muscus*, may refer to the muskrat.

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*Vāhana*s on the Bharhut *stūpa*

Remarks on animal and hybrid figures between art and texts

Chiara Policardi

Through animals, both real and imaginary, something new can be said about human cultural and historical dynamics. As is well known, an animal, be it real or imaginary (hybrid), is associated with most of the Hindu deities as their *vāhana.* Such a distinctive feature of Hindu divine representations is a phenomenon whose genesis or matrix remains a yet unsolved Indological knot. To shed some light on the issue, a valid research direction seems to be the investigation of attestations relating to the formative phase of the divine 'vehicles.'

This paper analyses a series of life-size sculptures of *yakṣa*s, *yakṣī*s, and '*devatā*s' standing on animal, hybrid, and anthropomorphic figures on pillars of the *vedikā* of the Bharhut *stūpa*. Many are identified by proper names thanks to the accompanying Brāhmī inscriptions. This undoubtedly reflects their ongoing presence and power in local cults. The monument, constructed *suganaṃ raje* 'during the Śuṅga reign' according to an inscription (CII II/II: 11-12 [A1]), is only partially preserved. Nonetheless, thanks to the richness of its iconographic and epigraphic fabric, it weaves a vivid glimpse into the world of beliefs of the centuries around the turn of the Common Era. These lithic documents are indeed an expression of a tradition that is presumably more ancient than the extant Pāli Canon.

The Bharhut *stūpa* assumes importance far beyond the domain of ancient Buddhism. It has been argued that this is probably the earliest firm visual evidence of an association between deities and vehicles (van der Geer 2008: 37; Dallapiccola 2012), which, from then on, will be common in South Asian visual arts across regional and religious contexts. While this monument has been the object of several studies, research that systematically investigates these *vāhana* figures in the light of the iconographic and literary vocabulary of ancient India remains a *desideratum*. Through the examination of a few textual passages from both Buddhist and Hindu literature, this paper advances some remarks on the formative phase of the *vāhana* phenomenon.

Keywords: *vāhana*s, symbolic animals, *yakṣa*s, *yakṣī*s, early Buddhism, Bharhut *stūpa, Āṭānāṭiyasutta*.

1. Introduction[1]

Through animals, both real and imaginary, something new can be said about human cultural and historical dynamics. As is well known, an animal, be it real or imaginary (*i.e.* hybrid), is associated with most of the Hindu deities as their *vāhana*. Such a distinctive feature of Hindu divine representations is a phenomenon whose genesis or matrix remains a yet unsolved Indological knot (Zimmer 1955: 42-48; Gonda 1965: 71-114; Ganguli 1966; Pelissero 1996; van der Geer 2008: 37-40; Jacobsen 2009; Dallapiccola 2012).

Scholars quite unanimously deem that the mount manifests the deity's sphere of influence, symbolising her or his nature or function. A play of reflections occurs between a deity and her/his vehicle, which at the same time expands the divine personality and vividly expresses her/his distinguishing features. As a rule, in mythic narratives and in iconography, a *vāhana* allows a deity to be identified, but there are cases where the same vehicle is shared by different divine figures (Dallapiccola 2012). For each deity, the association with the respective mount is attested from a different date—for example, while Indra already rides the four-tusked white elephant Airāvata in the Vedic literature after the *Ṛgveda*, Gaṇeśa appears to be only consistently associated with the bandicoot or the mouse from the 6th century CE onwards.

To shed some light on the issue of the genesis of the *vāhana* phenomenon, a valid research direction seems to be the investigation of attestations relating to the formative phase of the divine vehicles. It has been argued (van der Geer 2008: 37; Dallapiccola 2012) that the earliest firm visual evidence of an association between deities and mounts is represented in the sculptures that ornate the Bharhut *stūpa*. Based on paleography and style, this monument has been dated to about the mid 2nd century – beginning of the 1st century BCE (Barua 1934: I, 29-36; Lüders 1963: xxx-xxxiii; Hawkes 2008: 12, n. 3). From then on, the association with symbolic animals or hybrids became common in South Asian visual arts across regional and religious contexts. That is to say, *vāhana*s become eloquent elements of the South Asian visual semiotic code.[2]

[1] This research was made possible thanks to the financial support of Next Generation EU – Line M4.C2.1.1 – PRIN 2022, project "For a Multivocal History of the Attitudes Towards Non-Human Animals in South Asia. Ethics, Practices, Symbolism. Investigating New and Unsolved Issues," CUP G53D23004630006.

[2] It goes without saying that, when assessing the first appearance of new forms and expressions in South Asian visual arts, we are referring to the earliest surviving appearance in the medium of stone. Before the Gupta period, construction and decoration was prevalently in brick and wood (Dehejia 2009: 75). Hence, the images on the *stūpa* of Bharhut were probably not the first attempt to express the idea of animal symbols associated with divine figures in a visual form.

While the remains of the Bharhut *stūpa* have long been the object of several studies,[3] research that systematically investigates such *vāhana* figures in the light of the iconographic and literary vocabulary of ancient South Asia remains a *desideratum*. In what follows, I analyse a series of life-size figures of *yakṣa*s, *yakṣī*s, and '*devatā*s' carved standing upon animal, hybrid, and anthropomorphic mounts on the *vedikā* pillars of this *stūpa*. As will be discussed, this is a key monument for understanding early Buddhist imagery, which quite often reflects popular beliefs and pre-Buddhist visions. Through the examination of a few relevant textual passages from both Buddhist and Hindu literature, some remarks on the formative phase of the *vāhana* phenomenon will be advanced.

2. The Bharhut *stūpa* and the *yakṣa* cults

For present purposes, let us recall some essential lineaments relating to the Buddhist *stūpa* of Bharhut before moving onto the heart of the discourse. In November 1873, in the Tons River valley, in northeastern Madhya Pradesh (dist. Satna), Alexander Cunningham and Joseph D. Beglar encountered the fragmentary remains of a *stūpa*. Made from the dark red sandstone of Central India, excavated from the Kaimur Hills, the structure measured about twenty meters in diameter (Cunningham 1879: vi-vii; Ghosh 1978: 1). Only the eastern gateway and a portion of the railing (approximately one third of the original) still exist today; most of the remaining material is preserved in the Indian Museum of Kolkata as Cunningham required (Fig. 1).

[3] To mention the fundamental ones: Cunningham (1879), Barua (1934-1937), Coomaraswamy (1956), Lüders (1963), Bajpai (1967), Ghosh (1978), Dehejia (1998). More recently, Brancaccio (2005, 2022) and Hawkes (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). For a thorough review of the studies on Bharhut, see Hawkes (2008: 1-3).

Figure 1. View of the Bharhut Gallery at the Indian Museum, Kolkata, with the eastern *toraṇa* at the centre. Mid 2nd century BCE (Image: courtesy of Benoy K. Behl).

A part of the Bharhut findings was shipped from Calcutta to London on the SS Indus, but never reached its destination since the liner sank in the waters north of the Sri Lankan coast in 1885. The site of the shipwreck has been identified, but the remains of the ship have yet to be recovered (Brancaccio 2022: 674, and n. 14). Some other important pieces from the Bharhut *stūpa* are housed in the Allahabad Museum, while some fragments are scattered in several other museum collections in India and the USA (Hawkes 2008: 8, Table 1). At the original site, all that can be seen today is the circular shape of the *stūpa* foundations (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The site of the Bharhut *stūpa* today (2019), Satna district, Madhya Pradesh (Image: Chiara Policardi).

Even though it is only partially preserved, this *stūpa* is one of South Asia's earliest large-scale stone structures and one of the earliest surviving monuments of Buddhism. Its visual programme is surprisingly rich and sophisticated for being one of the earliest realisations of this kind. Also, this monument represents a unique case as its iconography is interwoven with a rich epigraphic fabric. It has yielded 229 Brāhmī inscriptions, of which 145 are donative, while the remaining 84 are descriptive or label inscriptions (Hawkes 2008: 7).[4] The descriptive inscriptions were (and, to a certain extent, still are) "links to banks of data. [...] They label or map the rich iconographic programs of the *stūpa*, giving the names of the beings that inhabit the narrative and ritual landscape" (Skilling 2009: 65). Carved in stone in the 2nd century BCE, these lithic documents are an expression of a tradition that is presumably more ancient than the extant Pāli Canon. As Skilling (2009: 66) remarks, several names appearing in the Bharhut corpus appear untraceable in surviving texts (be they in Pāli, Sanskrit, or Chinese). The language of these inscriptions is a Prakrit suffused with mainly Western dialectal characteristics, influenced by the Pāli diction.[5]

An inscription on the surviving gateway claims that it was made *suganaṃ raje* 'during the Śuṅga reign' (CII II/II: 11-12 [A1])[6]—reign which ended around 80 BCE. This inscription is valuable for the (apparently unique) epigraphic mention of this dynastic name (Salomon 1998: 141); however, it has

[4] Cfr. Salomon (1998: 141)—the number of known inscriptions has slightly increased in the last decades.

[5] For a thorough phonological and morphological analysis of the language of Bharhut inscriptions see Lüders (1963: xiii-xxix).

[6] I refer to Bharhut inscriptions following Lüders' system (1963).

been widely demonstrated that the role of royals was marginal in the overall construction and expansion of this and other *stūpa*s (Thapar 1987: 20). The monument was built up thanks to the patronage of monks and nuns from the Buddhist community—who evidently had private property despite prohibitions against this—and especially through donations from people from the non-élite laity (two third of the donors were private individuals, Hawkes 2008: 6). Votive inscriptions reveal donors from different walks of life—traders, artisans, landowners—coming "from Pāṭalipura, Kauśāmbī, Vidiśā, Nāsik, Karhāḍ, and other cities in northern and central India" (Neelis 2011: 206).

As Thapar (1987: 20) stresses,

> Community patronage, which is what distinguishes the particular *stūpa* architecture discussed here, was largely a collection of individual gifts brought together through a religious identity and a more loosely defined social identity. The gift was made initially for personal reasons and not because of requirements of status or function.

The Bharhut *stūpa* is located at the crossroads of both interregional travel routes and the religious-cultural landscapes of ancient South Asia. The site was placed within a network of arteries of commercial and cultural exchange, particularly on an intermediate itinerary between the 'Northern Route' (Uttarāpatha) and the 'Southern Route' (Dakṣiṇāpatha) across the Vindhya Hills (Neelis 2011: 211-212). Presumably, such a strategic position was carefully chosen by the monastic community. Both the inscriptions and the iconographies suggest a cosmopolitan environment (Hawkes 2009: 161; Basu 2023: 199).

Furthermore, the *stūpa* rose at the base of a large hill, Lal Pahar, which is considered to be sacred by the local population. Modern shrines feature at the summit of the hill and along its slopes (Hawkes 2010: 135). *Yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s whose cults were based in diverse localities throughout the Subcontinent seem to have been gathered at Bharhut and featured on the railing (DeCaroli 2004: 71-74). These semi-divine, life-size carved figures were a prominent presence and immediately visible to visitors. Located on the outer, middle, and inner faces of the railing pillars, they interacted with the community of monks and nuns, with those who lived around the religious building, and with pilgrims. Most of them are depicted holding their hands in *añjalimudrā*, paying homage to the Buddha and the relics. All of them are portrayed as undoubtedly sensuous figures, and reconciling them with the most common idea of ancient Buddhism is not immediate. They apparently contradict, to some extent, the early Buddhist vision, at the level of both doctrinal precepts and monastic life, marked essentially by ethical, philosophical, and intellectual austerity. But they must have been vital for the society of that time, to the point that—I suppose—most of the people who frequented the Bharhut site, both monks and lay-

folk, presumably never even paused to ask themselves why images of semi-divine, sensually evocative, beings were portrayed on a sacred Buddhist structure (Skilling 2001: 265-266; Dehejia 2009: 75-81).

One of the oldest attested forms of South Asian religious practice is the worship of such divine figures which, as proposed by Robert DeCaroli (2004: 8-20), can be labelled under the umbrella-term of 'spirit-deities.' *Yakṣī*s and *yakṣa*s, and likewise *nāga*s, were part of early South Asian cults which, to a certain extent, were eventually incorporated into the folds of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. The world was presumably imagined as filled with these spirit-deities, who could be both supportive and malevolent and who could be involved in human lives. They were probably not only essential to popular devotion, but also, in varying degrees, important to the literate laity, the élite classes, and the Buddhist monastic community itself. As far as we know, these cults did not find expression in texts of their own, so we are able to reconstruct aspects of beliefs and ritual interactions only through the writings, and hence through the filters, of other religious and philosophical traditions (DeCaroli 2004: 9-10).

At Bharhut, these deities are identified by proper names thanks to the inscriptions. Hence, not only are *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s depicted on a Buddhist monument, but their identities are also preserved: this undoubtedly reflects their ongoing presence and power in local cults. In the context of the *stūpa*, they are presumably performing the duty of watching over the entrances to the sacral building and of marking the boundaries of the sacred space. They embody powerful forces that, if harnessed, are protective. At the same time, they honour the Buddha and the *saṃgha*.

A transactional ritual with a tree-spirit appears to be represented in a relief found on the coping stone of the Bharhut *vedikā* (Fig. 3): in this scene, a man is sitting in front of a tree, from which human arms emerge. The spirit of the tree is holding a bowl of food in one hand, while its other hand pours water over the man's hands. The image vividly represents the belief in tree-spirits and their worship (DeCaroli 2004: 27).

Figure 3. Scene of ritual interaction with a tree spirit. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* coping section. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (image: John C. Huntington, Courtesy of the John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art).

3. Figures standing on aquatic hybrids

Let us first consider a group of *yakṣa* figures that are depicted standing upon hybrid beings. The components of these hybrids can be variously interpreted, but they are undoubtedly aquatic beings, as they all have a fishtail.

"One of the masterpieces of Bharhut" (Huntington 1985: 70) is the figure labelled 'Cadā yakhi' (CII II/II: 74 [B2]), *i.e.* Candrā *yakṣī* (Fig. 4). She graces the middle face of a terminus corner pillar once flanking the northern *toraṇa* (western quadrant). This masterfully crafted sculpture is the quite perfect representation of the *śālabhañjikā* motif, as she grasps the branch of a tree, while her arm and leg are entwined round its trunk. Moreover, her left hand, held at the level of her genitalia, holds a flowering stem from the tree, and could be evocative of the flourishing of both the female body and the tree (Dehejia 2009: 77). She is standing on a hybrid animal, one foot resting on its head and the other on its curled tail. The animal has been described as a "horse-faced *makara*" (Barua 1934: II, 70) and as "a sheep or ram with the hind-part of a fish" (Lüders 1963: 70). According to my analysis, it is a hybrid with an equine head and a fishtail, which has been designated as *jalaturaga* by Coomaraswamy ([1931] 2001: II,

82, Plate 43, Fig. 2), a term thereafter uncritically repeated in secondary literature (e.g. Krishna Murthy 1985: 48)—we will return to this later on.

Figure 4. 'Cadā yakhi,' *i.e.* Candrā *yakṣī*, upon a fish-tailed horse. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: © Regents of the University of Michigan).

On the inner face of the pillar on which the *yakṣī* is portrayed a donative inscription is found. It states that the pillar was donated by 'the reverend Budharakhita who has abandoned attachment' (CII II/II: 37-38 [A58]): hence the donor was a monk who was quite advanced on the spiritual path and who chose the image of this female semi-deity for the *stūpa*, along with those of Kubera and Ajakālaka *yakṣa*, whom we are going to discuss below.

The name of this *yakṣī* begs the question as to whether there are any connections between this figure and Cundā, the Mahāyana goddess whose name is found in different forms, such as Candrā, Cundrā, and Cundī (Niyogi 1977: 299; Misra 1981: 116; Donaldson 2001: 282). This deity was the focus of

an important cultic worship that flourished in the 8th century CE in the Bengal and Odisha regions, where she was the tutelary deity of the Pāla dynasty and where her iconography became increasingly sophisticated (Niyogi 1977: 308; Donaldson 2001: 282; Buswell and Lopez 2014: 204); the cult then spread to other areas of Asia. Cundā's early history remains problematic: according to Conze (1967: 254), "Cundā has up to now remained a rather mysterious deity. Literary documents concerning her are scarce, and we know next to nothing about [...] her origin." Her cult has been attested since at least the 3rd century CE as she is named Candrā in the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Donaldson 2001: 283). Buswell–Lopez (2014: 204) postulate that she is the divinised form of a prominent local *yakṣī*. While hypothesising a connection between the Bharhut *yakṣī* and the Mahāyana goddess is certainly tantalising, at the present stage of research the only attested link lies in their name. Hence the question remains open.[7]

At Bharhut, the fish-tailed equine *vāhana* is also found beneath the feet of another *yakṣī* who is not accompanied by an inscription (Fig. 5). She is depicted holding a mirror to herself in one hand. Ghosh (1978: 63) has interpreted her mount as a *sindhu-siṃha*, a 'sea-lion,' but it clearly does not have feline paws, but hoofs. So, in my view it could likewise be a water-horse. Note that, once again, the *yakṣī*'s upraised right foot is on the head of her *vāhana*.

[7] Biswas (1987: 88) refers to a possible connection between Cadā *yakhi* and the god Candra, often identified with Soma, who rides a chariot drawn by ten horses according to the *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, and *Śilparatna* (cfr. Rao 1914-: vol I, Part II, 319). However, a chariot drawn by horses is a kind of *vāhana* quite different from a hybrid horse.

Figure 5. Female figure upon a fish-tailed horse. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: John C. Huntington, Courtesy of the John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art).

This mount is also found in other early Buddhist contexts, such as in a relief from the site of Jaggayyapeta, in Andhra Pradesh (Fig. 6; see also Viennot 1958a, Fig. 14). Centuries later, in the late 5th century CE, this hybrid equine appears as part of the exuberant painted decorations at Ajanta, particularly on the ceiling of the hall of Cave 17 (Fig. 7). Its tail is made of big waves, suggesting an association with water (Sharma 2015: 50-51).

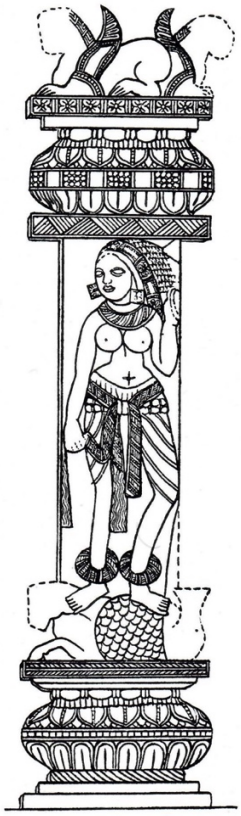

Figure 6. Pillar with a female figure upon a fish-tailed horse. Jaggayyapeta, 2nd century BCE. Chennai Museum (drawing after Coomaraswamy 2001, Vol. II, Pl. 42, 2).

Figure 7. Fish-tailed horse painted on the ceiling of the hall of Cave 17, Ajanta. Late 5th century CE. (Image after Yazdani 1955, Plate LXXIV, a).

The fish-tailed horse was thus presumably part of the early South Asian imagery which found expression also in the Buddhist domain. Such an idea of a hybrid figure with equine and fish components is found not only in early art, but also in texts. The above-mentioned term *jalaturaga* is found in Hemacandra's *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* (1355) lexicon (12th century).[8]

Interestingly, the *Mahābhārata* (III.173.50d-51b) contains a reference to this kind of hybrid. According to the story in the *Āraṇyakaparvan,* Arjuna has just shot the Raudra weapon to kill the demons, and thousands of shapes have appeared on the battlefield. These include animals and composite creatures such as *jhaṣa- gajavaktra-* 'elephant-faced large fishes,' owls, and *mīnavājisarūpa-* 'creatures in the shape of fish and horses.'[9] It is noteworthy that *jhaṣa- gajavaktra-* might be a reference to the *makara.*

A third *yakṣī* found at Bharhut, named 'yakhini Sudasana' in the inscription (CII II/II: 80 [B10]), *i.e.* Sudarśanā *yakṣī*, is depicted standing upon a *makara* (Fig. 8). As is well known, the *makara* is a mythical, composite creature, whose essential nature, according to various studies,[10] appears to draw on that of the crocodile: according to Vogel (1929-1930: 146) the prototype should be seen in the saltwater crocodile, the *Crocodilus porosus*, a species of South Asian crocodile living in both rivers and the ocean. Another source of inspiration might have been the South Asian river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), which once populated the South Asia's major rivers and is now an endangered species (Guy 2023: 45). The figure associated with Sudasana has sharp crocodilian teeth, and an elephantine trunk curled upwards.

[8] To be precise, the term occurs in the *Svopajñaṭīkā* (Hemacandra's auto-commentary) ad 1355. See *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* edited by Boehtlingk–Rieu (1847: 407).

[9] *jhaṣāṇāṃ gajavaktrāṇām ulūkānāṃ tathaiva ca* || 50 ||

mīnavājisarūpāṇāṃ nānāśastrāsipāṇinām |

'[Shapes] of elephant-faced large fishes, of owls,

of creatures having the shape of fish and horses, and brandishing all kinds of weapons and swords.'

Sanskrit text according to the Calcutta edition reproduced by Parimal Publications 2008, II: 489. In the critical edition of the MBh (III.170.45d-46b) these verses are identical except for the compound *mīnavājisarūpāṇāṃ,* substituted by the reading *mīnakūrmasamūhānāṃ.*

[10] The concept, forms, and distribution of the *makara* have been the object of several works, among which mention should be made of Coomaraswamy (2001 [1928-1931] II: 47-56), Vogel (1929-1930), Viennot (1954, 1958a, 1958b) and Darian (1976).

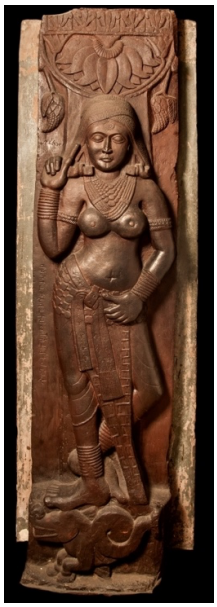

Figure 8. 'Yakhini Sudasana' *i.e.* Sudarśanā *yakṣī*, upon a *makara.* Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: © Regents of the University of Michigan).

The *makara* appears several times in the reliefs of the *stūpa*, and not in the role of *vāhana* but as an independent figure, which is very artistically rendered for example in the side projection from one of the three architraves of the eastern gateway (Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Makara in the side projection from one of the three architraves of the eastern gateway. Bharhut *stūpa*. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: Courtesy of Thierry Ollivier).

The *makara* becomes *the* most common aquatic animal in subsequent South Asian art. From around the Gupta period, it will become the distinctive mark of the goddess Gaṅgā, the personification of the river Ganges. The most recurrent representation of this goddess is found at the entrances to Hindu temple buildings or to the cella therein, but she is possibly found in the Buddhist context of Ajanta as well, for example at the entrance to Cave 17 (Fig. 10). Only possibly, as it is uncertain as to whether this female figure on a *makara* can be identified as the goddess Gaṅgā *tout court* or whether she was still an undifferentiated river deity (Stietencron 2010: 13).

Figure 10. Female figure (goddess Gaṅgā?) at the entrance of Cave 17, Ajanta. Late 5th century (Image: Anandajoti Bhikkhu. Public domain, available at https://photodharma.net/India/Ajanta-Caves-2/index.htm).

In this light, it seems interesting that in the *Mahābhārata* (XIII.2.19-35) a character by the name of Sudarśanā is the daughter of king Duryodhana of the Ikṣvāku dynasty and of the river goddess Narmadā. The story goes that so beautiful a woman as Sudarśanā had never been born. The god Agni fell in love with her and married her. Can this Sudarśanā featuring in the epic be identified with the *yakṣī* represented in the Bharhut sculpture? The daughter of a king and a river goddess might have been considered as a semi-divine figure, and her *vāhana*, the *makara*, might indicate that she was indeed related to a river goddess and perhaps intended as a *nadīdevatā* herself. So, Sudarśanā may possibly have been a local deity, and is for this reason represented on the Bharhut *stūpa* railing (Lüders 1963: 71; Misra 1981: 118).

My hypothesis is that, in the early historic period, namely around the turn of the Common Era, different hybrid aquatic animals were represented as *vāhana*s. However, starting presumably in the Kuṣāṇa period, the *makara* was gradually selected as the quintessential water symbol, associated in particular with flowing or moving water (Coomaraswamy 2001 [1928-1931]: II, 50; Stietencron 2010: 16 n 9; Guy 2023: 44).

On the same terminus corner pillar on which Cadā *yakṣī* is depicted, on the outer face, we find the carving of a *yakṣa* named in the accompanying inscription as 'Ajakālako yakho' (CII II/II: 74 [B3]), that is *yakṣa* Ajakālaka (Fig. 11). He is represented standing, while his left leg bent so that his toes touch the *vāhana* beneath his feet, probably its head. The upper part of this mount is heavily eroded, and the remaining portion seems to represent a hybrid figure, with the body and the tail of a fish, but with human hands thrust into its mouth—a peculiar pose we will return to later on.

Figure 11. 'Ajakālako yakho,' i.e. *yakṣa* Ajakālaka, upon a fish-tailed human figure. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: after Coomaraswamy 1956, Planche VII, Fig. 22).

A *yakṣa* by a slightly different name, that is Ajakālapaka, appears as one of the Buddha's interlocutors in the *Udāna* (1.7), the third book of the *Khuddakanikāya*:

> *evam me sutaṃ. ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā Pāṭaliyaṃ [Pāvayaṃ] viharati Ajakalāpake cetiye Ajakalāpakassa yakkhassa bhavane. tena kho pana samayena bhagavā rattandhakāratimisāyaṃ abbhokāse nisinno hoti, devo ca ekamekaṃ phusāyati. atha kho Ajakalāpako yakkho bhagavato bhayaṃ chambhitattaṃ lomahaṃsaṃ uppādetukamo yena bhagavā ten'upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavato avidūre tikkhattuṃ akkulopakkulo ti akkulapakkulikaṃ akāsi: eso e samaṇa pisāco 'ti. Atha kho bhagavā etam atthaṃ viditvā tāyaṃ velāyaṃ imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi:*
>
> *yadā sakesu dhammesu pāragū hoti brāhmaṇo,*
>
> *atha etam pisācañ ca bakkulañ c'ātivattatī 'ti.* || 7 ||
>
> (Steinthal, ed. 1885: 4-5)

> So was there heard by me on one occasion when the Lord was staying at Pāvā,[11] at the Ajakalāpaka Shrine within the realm of the yakkha Ajakalāpaka. And on that occasion, the Lord was seated in the open air, at night, in the dimness, in the darkness; and the (sky-)deva was spotting one by one. Then the yakkha Ajakalāpaka, desiring to give rise to fear, stupefaction and horripilation in the Lord, approached the Lord and, having approached, three times performed his akkula-pakkula saying: 'Akkula-pakkula!' not far from the Lord, (adding:) 'This goblin is for you, recluse!'
>
> Then the Lord, fathoming this matter, gave rise at that time to this Udāna:
>
> 'It is when, with respect to dhammas that are one's own, one be gone to the other shore, that one becomes the brahmin; then does one proceed beyond this goblin and pakkula.'
>
> (transl. Masefield 1997: 6)

According to this short prose tale from the *Udāna* collection and to the related commentary by Dhammapāla (Masefield 1994: 100-108), the *yakṣa* grew so furious when he saw the Buddha sitting inside his mansion that he tried three times to frighten the Enlightened One. He raised violent storms, uttered horrid cries, shook the earth, and so on, but, *ça va sans dire*, everything was in vain in the face of the Buddha's firmness of mind. Ajakālapaka ended up becoming one of the Buddha's disciples. The tale reveals that this *yakṣa* had great power over the place, be it Pāvā or Pāṭali, and that he was of a frightful nature.

The identification between the Bharhut *yakṣa*, named Ajakālaka in the inscription, and the *Udāna yakṣa* Ajakālapaka with his slightly different name has been debated (Barua 1934: II, 60; Lüders 1963: 75; Misra 1981: 114-115; DeCaroli 2004: 73). But it is likely that the two characters are one and the same.

The portrait at Bharhut depicts a figure in an elegant, I would say pacific, pose, holding a lotus: if this particular *yakṣa* were known to monks and pilgrims of the time, this iconography was presumably intended to remind them how this character, this *yakṣa*, had been converted by the Buddha. But it is possible that the frightening nature of this *yakṣa* has been retained in the figure of his *vāhana*, which, although now incomplete, clearly has a monstrous aspect with the peculiar pose of its human hands that enlarge its mouth, a gesture which may possibly allude uttering horrid cries.

[11] Peter Masefield reads 'Pāvāyaṃ' following the Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana edition and the Siamese edition, but the Pāli Text Society's edition reads 'Pāṭaliyaṃ'. See Masefield 1997: 15, n. 38; cfr. Gnoli (ed.) 2001: 714, n. 14. Hence, the Buddha was staying at Pāvā or at Pāṭali. Pāvā was an important city of the Malla principality in ancient India, identified with the village of Padaraona in the present-day state of Uttar Pradesh (Singh 2009: 263). Pāṭali, which was a Magadha village, called Pāṭaligrāma, was located in the area where the renowned city of Pāṭaliputra later emerged (Singh 2009: 272).

4. Figures standing on anthropomorphic *vāhana*s

Let us now consider three figures accompanied by anthropomorphic *vāhana*s. According to the inscription, the inner face of the three-sided terminus corner pillar of the north-western quadrant (featuring Cadā and Ajakālako on the other faces) portrays 'Kupiro yakho' (CII II/II: 73 [B1], Fig. 12), that is to say Kubera, the well-known regent of the northern quarter of the world. His northern placement in the original iconographic scheme of the *stūpa* was undoubtedly meaningful. In early South Asia, he was a very popular god, portrayed and worshipped not only as the king of the northern direction, but especially as the god of wealth and opulence, in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions alike. In particular, he was (and still is) considered as the lord of precious stones and other valuable assets from the mountains and of the treasures hidden in the earth (Bedeker 1969; Raven 1988; Wessels-Mevissen 2001: 103-105). This Bharhut portrayal is one of the oldest surviving depictions of this deity, if not the oldest.

Figure 12. 'Kupiro yakho,' *i.e.* Kubera, upon a *guhyaka*. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: © Regents of the University of Michigan).

He is represented standing upon an anthropomorphic, stocky figure who supports himself on his feet and hands, in a crouching posture. This dwarfish being has slanting eyes, pointed ears, and a grinning expression on his face. In Sanskrit literature, a quite common epithet for Kubera is *naravāhana*, 'having

a *nara*-vehicle.'[12] Who are these dwarf-like creatures, these *nara*s, with which Kubera evidently was associated? Ellen Raven (1988) has already suggested that these supporting figures are *guhyaka*s, literally 'the hidden ones,' a group of the Lord of Riches' close attendants who were different from *yakṣa*s. In textual sources they are described as creatures associated with the earth, who inhabit the caves (*guha*s) of the mountainous regions of Kubera's northern realm. They guard his enormous terrestrial treasures of gold and precious goods. Kubera is defined as *guhyakeśvara* in the *Amarakośa* (1.1.68-69).

One of the most illustrative textual passages of the task performed by the *guhyaka*s is found in the *Mahābhārata* (II.10.1-4):

sabhā vaiśravaṇī rājañ śatayojanam āyatā |
vistīrṇā saptatiś caiva yojanāni sitaprabhā // 1 ||
tapasā nirmitā rājan svayaṃ vaiśravaṇena sā |
śaśiprabhā khecarīṇāṃ kailāsaśikharopamā || 2 ||
guhyakair uhyamānā sā khe viṣakteva dṛśyate |
divyā hemamayair uccaiḥ pādapair upaśobhitā || 3 ||
raśmivatī bhāsvarā ca divyagandhā manoramā |
sitābhraśikharākārā plavamāneva dṛśyate || 4 ||

Kubera Vaiśravaṇa lustrously white hall, O king, is one hundred leagues long and seventy wide. Vaiśravaṇa built it himself with the power of his austerities, prince. It is luminous like the moon, floating in the sky, like a peak of Mount Kailasa. Carried by the Guhyakas, the celestial hall seems as though fastened to the sky, and tall trees of gold adorn it. Irradiating rays, effulgent, redolent with divine fragrances, charming and shaped like a white cloud or mountain peak, it appears as though it is floating in space.
(transl. van Buitenen 1975, II: 49-50)

It vividly describes how the *guhyaka*s support Kubera's *sabhā*, a heavenly audience hall which their efforts keep floating in the sky. They are thus characterised as very strong creatures. The solid anthropomorphic being who lifts up Kubera at Bharhut seems to correspond to the textual descriptions of *guhyaka*s.

Another of the Bharhut *stūpa* railing pillars represents a richly adorned female figure in the *śālabhañjikā* pose, supported by a short-statured, pot-bellied male (Fig. 13). This image only came to light relatively recently since the sculpture was not found at the site of the *stūpa* when it was discovered

[12] See e.*g.* MBh III.156.25; III.259.14; III.229.3; *Amarakośa* 1.1,70; *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* III.53,1-7.

by Cunningham, but in a private house, worshipped as the tutelary deity of the family (Cunningham 1879: 22, n. 4). Later, it was stolen and smuggled out of India, only to unexpectedly resurface in the USA in 2012. The photos of the sculpture were published for the first time in 2016 by the archaeologist Kirit Mankodi (see Mankodi 2016). The inscription identifies the figure as 'Mahakoka devata' (CII II/II: 81 [B2]):[13] hence, not a *yakṣī*, but a deity, called 'Great Kokā.'

Figure 13. 'Mahakoka devata,' upon a *guhyaka*. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE (Image: Courtesy of Kirit Mankodi).

[13] In this case, Lüders (1963: 81, n. 4) records the inscription from Cunningham's eye-copy.

Interestingly, only three figures at Bharhut are labelled 'devatā.' These are Mahakoka, Culakokā, whom we are going to discuss in a moment, and Sirimā *devatā*. If in the inscription they are defined with a different term than *yakṣī*, they were perhaps supernatural beings who enjoyed a slightly different status, albeit akin to the semi-divine nature of *yakṣī*s (Sutherland 1991: 106; DeCaroli 2004: 12; Dehejia 2009: 216, n. 4). Needless to say, we do not know exactly where Mahakoka was collocated along the *stūpa* railing, but evidently her *vāhana* is similar to Kubera's. My working hypothesis is that she can be considered equal in rank to Kubera and perhaps interpreted as his queen, as the close resemblance of their *vāhana*s is undoubtedly meaningful.

Another pillar from the Bharhut railing was found in the village of Batanmara. It portrays a richly bejeweled female figure who is being lifted by a dwarfish being similar to Mahakoka's (Coomaraswamy [1928-1931] 2001: I, Plate 4, Fig. 1). In the absence of an inscription label, it is even more difficult to put forward any kind of hypothesis concerning her identity. As Misra (1981: 119) surmises, the rocky landscape behind her *vāhana* might allude to the mountainous kingdom of Uttarakuru. Hence, while she might well be another candidate for Kubera's queen, the fact that the inscription identifies Mahakoka with a proper name suggests that she could have been a well-known and recognisable figure in the mythological landscape of that time. Also in the case of the Batanmara lady, now held in the Ramvan Museum (dist. Satna), the similarity of her *vāhana* makes a connection with Kubera plausible: we can hypothesise that the sculpture was placed in the northern quadrant of the *stūpa* and that she represents a member of Kubera's royal entourage.

5. Figures standing on elephants

It is most likely that Mahakoka was also intended as the counterpart of another sculpture, labelled as 'Culakokā devatā' (CII II/II: 80 [B11]), that is Kṣudrakokā, 'Little Kokā' (now in the Kolkata Museum, Fig. 14). According to Cunningham's reconstruction, this sculpture was situated on a corner pillar flanking the southern gateway, near the image of Virūḍhaka, the regent of the south direction. So, this might be another hint that points towards placing Mahakoka on the northern side, near Kubera.

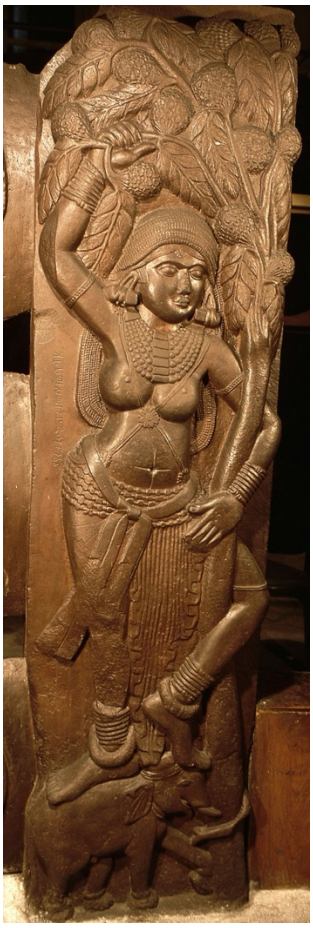

Figure 14. 'Culakokā devatā,' i.e. Kṣudrakokā, upon an elephant. Bharhut *stūpa*, *vedikā* pillar. Mid 2nd century BCE. Indian Museum, Kolkata (Image: © Regents of the University of Michigan).

Culakokā stands upon an elephant: her left foot rests on the head of the animal, while the elephant's proboscis embraces the trunk of the tree, mirroring the posture of Culakokā's left leg. A possible textual parallel is with two female deities who appear in the in the *Devatāsaṃyutta* (*Saṃyuttanikāya* 1.1,4.9-10): Kokanadā and Cūḷa-Kokanadā, the daughters of the rain god Pajjunna. They visited the Buddha at the Kūṭāgārasālā at Vesālī and spoke verses in praise of the Buddha and the Dhamma. Since at Bharhut both Mahakoka and Culakokā are portrayed as they embrace a flourishing tree, the connection with the rainy waters might be meaningful; interestingly, in the *Āṭānāṭiyasutta* (to be discussed below), Pajjunna is mentioned as one of the *mahāyakkha*s to be invoked in time of need (DN 32.10.204).

Other two Bharhut figures portrayed standing upon elephants are 'Gamgito yakho' (CII II/II: 76 [B5]; Coomaraswamy 1956: Planche VI, Fig. 19) and 'Supāvaso yakho' (CII II/II: 77 [B7]; Coomaraswamy 1956: Planche XVII, Fig. 41).

6. Interpretative remarks

Given the complexity of the issues at stake and the incompleteness of the sources, providing any kind of interpretative remarks inevitably involves a degree of simplification. Also, some questions will have to be left open. The Bharhut *stūpa* is a monument erected for the glorification of Buddhism; at the same time, its visual imagery is suffused with the world of pre-Buddhist beliefs.

6.1. Figures standing upon their mounts—not seated

The semi-divine figures, as illustrated above, are portrayed standing upon their mounts. The representation of gods and goddesses seated on their vehicles as a visual formula that shows their association seems to become common in the Gupta period (Raven 2020: 261). Why does the reciprocal positioning of the deity and her/his vehicle vary over time? This is a complex issue, which would require an investigation in its own right. Here, I will limit myself to articulating the question. As Trautmann (2015: 99-100) aptly highlights:

> [...] the gods of the *Ṛg Veda* all ride chariots and neither elephants nor other animals, as do the gods of later Hinduism. [...] The Hindu gods of a succeeding period each have a particular *vāhana* or animal mount, and this development constitutes an important difference of historic Hinduism from the Vedic religion from which it descended. Indra, in particular, the king of the gods and their leader in war, always and only rides a chariot in the *Ṛg Veda* [...]. But in the later Vedic texts and ever after Indra is associated with his own *vāhana*, the celestial elephant Airāvata or Airāvaṇa. How exactly this development came about is far from clear, but Gonda is surely right to connect it with the rising dignity of riding horseback in the ancient chariot-using civilizations of western Asia and southern Europe generally. The point to be made here is that horseback riding was known in Vedic India and was not first introduced in later times. The salient fact is that horseback riding was of low status in the warrior culture of Vedic times, while chariot riding was of the highest status. It is possible that the invention of the war elephant contributed to improving the status of riding on the back of an animal, relative to riding a chariot.

A few pages later (Trautmann 2015: 119-121), he maintains: "Conveyance is highly visible and highly differentiated, a sign of social status, a way of publicly displaying one's place in the social hierarchy."

Hence, let us reformulate the previous question: why, in the pre-Gupta period, does the visual language predominantly choose the formula of divine figures depicted standing rather than sitting on their emblematic mounts? Structural or technical reasons—the need to represent these images vertically on the pillars of the railing at Bharhut—can hardly suffice as an explanation. The discussed semi-divine figures, indeed, are not an isolated case: for example, the South Asian warrior goddess is represented standing upon a lion in pre-Gupta sculptures (and also subsequently, alongside sitting

portraits; see Policardi 2024), and the *nadīdevatā*s Gaṅgā and Yamunā are always portrayed standing upon their mounts, a *makara* and a tortoise respectively (Viennot 1964).

A possible line of inquiry could be subsumed by the question: does the standing position reflect the highest status expressed by chariot riding? In iconography, associating a figure with a vehicle is a way to express her/his divine status. Is it possible that the importance of the chariot in early south Asian society not only found expression in Vedic religiosity, but also, consciously or unconsciously, still underlies divine representations of the centuries straddling the Common Era? Undoubtedly, as Sparreboom (1985: 6) demonstrates, at the end of the first millennium BCE the chariot was perceived as an artifact belonging to the past. Whether its significance and values indirectly reverberated in the standing positions of deities on their mounts in early visual language remains a possibility which requires investigation.

6.2. Three main typologies of *vāhana*s at Bharhut

At Bharhut, the mounts may be classified into three main categories: aquatic hybrid beings; anthropomorphic beings; elephants. In my interpretation, each typology may express the same three main valences, but differently declined.

The aquatic hybrids seem to be *in primis* a symbolic representation of the deity's function or sphere of action, in this case they may express the dominion of the semi-divine figure over the aquatic realm. Second, as remarked above, the *yakṣa* or *yakṣī* invariably places one of her/his feet on the head of her/his mount. In South Asian culture this act expresses the power of the character who is standing on or trampling someone or something; indeed, it shows that the figure trodden upon has been subjugated (Huntington 1985: 68; Bühnemann 2023). In this case it may symbolise the control over the potentially dangerous forces of the watery realm. Third, the function of aquatic hybrids in the literal sense of vehicles, that is as a means of transportation for the deity, might be present, but appears to be the least prominent.

The second typology is represented by anthropomorphic figures, in particular *guhyaka*s. They seem to mainly express the idea of dominion: as illustrated previously, the *guhyaka*s are subjects, servants of Kubera and presumably also of other members of his royal entourage. Second, they are a symbolic representation of the deity's role or function, in this case they seem to be an expression of the deity's royal status—a king is usually accompanied by servants. Moreover, they perform this symbolic function by literally being vehicles in the sense of a means of transportation: mythically, they transport Kubera's hall, and hence the king himself, and perhaps his queen.

The third typology concerns in elephants. Culakokā *devatā*, but also Gamgito *yakho* and Supāvaso *yakho*, are depicted standing upon elephants. In the first place, elephant *vāhana*s may express the idea that the deity is connected with clouds and rains: the association of elephants with rain-making clouds is a well-known motif found throughout South Asian culture and literature. As Courtright (1985: 22-23) outlines:

> The relationship of clouds and rain to elephants reflects more than the fact that elephants are round and grey and massive, like the grey monsoon clouds, and can spray water out of their trunks, like rain. The monsoon clouds bring both nourishing water and the possibility of destructive floods; the elephant symbol is equally ambivalent. This ambivalence springs from the opposition of wild and tame. The tame elephant, the paradigm of power domesticated, clears the wild jungles so that human habitations may be built. He carries the king in battle and ceremonial procession; he is, in short, the symbol of order. [...] The wild elephant, however, driven by heat of sexual desire or burning fever of disease, can create awesome destruction. This ambivalence of wild and tame in the behavior of elephants is reflected in a number of myths from both Hindu and Buddhist sources.

Second, elephant mounts seem to be the expression of the figure's high social status, as the elephant ranked at the top of the hierarchy of conveyances (Trautmann 2015: 121). Third, they are undoubtedly vehicles in the literal sense of means of transportation.

6.3. The Bharhut *stūpa* as a translation in stone of the cosmological map?

The location of the sculptures in each of the cardinal directions seems anything but casual. But a *caveat* is in order. As mentioned, we rely on Cunningham's reconstruction of the *stūpa*, which is particularly determinant, and unavoidable, as far as the topography of the monument is concerned. He found the site in an advanced state of ruin, with only parts of the religious building preserved. Hence, we must consider a margin of uncertainty in his reading of the loose pieces and of the whole picture. Consequently, the remarks that follow inevitably fall into the realm of speculation. Furthermore, both relevant texts and contemporaneous art-historical records seem to offer no unequivocal evidence concerning a comparable ensemble of figures related to early (or pre-)Buddhist cosmology. We are undoubtedly venturing onto uneven ground. Nonetheless, the question regarding a possible rationale behind the disposition of the semi-divine figures around the core of the *stūpa*, and hence around the Buddha, is a significant one. As for the location of the sculpted pillars, I refer to the useful outline by Lüders (1963: xxxvii-xxxviii).

Thanks to the accompanying inscriptions, it is possible to identify two world-regents (*lokapāla*s): Kupiro, illustrated above, and 'Viruḍako yakho,' who, not surprisingly, are depicted on corner pillars

of the northern and southern *toraṇa*s respectively. According to early Buddhist cosmology, Kubera is the king of the northern realm, the Uttarakuru, while Virūḍhaka (Virūḷhaka in Pāli) is the regent of the southern direction (Wessels-Mevissen 2001: 18; Buswell-Lopez 2014: 480; Shaw 2021: 97, 102-103, 228-231). The group of the *cāturmahārāja* is completed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Pāli Dhattaraṭṭha) for the East and Virūpākṣa (Pāli Virūpakkha) for the West, but their images appear to be missing at Bharhut (Cunningham 1879: 20).[14] While the four directional guardians find quite frequent mention in Buddhist literature as a group,[15] no art-historical evidence for the complete ensemble appears to survive from pre-modern South Asia (Wessels-Mevissen 2001: 18).[16]

Interestingly, the other *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s found in the same quadrant of the railing appear to have *vāhana*s similar to one another. In some cases, the sculptures located in the northern quadrant appear to have hybrid aquatic beings as mounts: this is the case of Cadā *yakhi* (fish-tailed horse), *yakhini* Sudasana (*makara*), and Ajakālako *yakho* (fish-tailed human figure). Instead, Kupiro *yakho*, as illustrated above, stands on a *guhyaka*, and Mahakoka *devata* similarly has a *guhyaka* as her mount—she was perhaps located in the northern section of the *stūpa*, opposite to Culakokā located to the South. Can these two typologies of mounts allude to waters (the hybrid aquatic beings) and caves, stone, and mountains (the *guhyaka*s) as elements characteristic of the kingdom of Uttarakuru?

Interesting allusions to the prosperity of this northern realm are found in the *Āṭānāṭiyasutta*, the thirty-second *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. This text belongs to the genre of *paritta*, as it mainly contains protective verses: indeed, the *sutta* describes itself as a *rakkhā* (Skt. *rakṣā*). The recitation of this kind of texts was believed (and still is, in present day Sri Lanka) to confer protection against psychic and physical harm. These *paritta*s "have historically been very popular: as early as *Milinda's Questions* (circa 100 B.C.E. to circa 200 C.E.), many, including the *Āṭānāṭīya-sutta*, are mentioned as particularly powerful" (Shaw 2021: 224). The *Āṭānāṭiyasutta* presumably belongs to the earliest stratum of the Pāli Canon, and can be found throughout the Asian regions of early Buddhist dissemination (Skilling 1997: II, 66-69).

The frame story starts by describing how the Four Great Kings (Cattāro Mahārājā) and the four classes of powerful supernatural beings presented as their subjects (namely *yakkha*s, *gandhabba*s,

[14] Waddell (1912: 137-144) posits that, at the time of the Bharhut *stūpa*, the conception of the four directional regents had yet to be fully developed, and argues that two other figures on the southern corner pillar, namely Gamgito *yakho* and Cakavāko Nāgarāja, are to be identified as the eastern and western guardians. This remains an unsubstantiated conjecture.

[15] E.g. DN 18.12.207; DN 20.9.257. See Haldar (1977: 23-24, 80-81) and Agrawala (1989: 67 and notes) for further references.

[16] Instead, depictions of the Four Great Kings are frequent at the base of *stūpa*s in other regions of Asia, particularly Central Asia, China, Japan and Tibet (Snodgrass 1985: 135; Sutherland 1991: 66-67).

*kumbhaṇḍa*s, and *nāga*s) come to visit the Buddha on a mountain peak. King Vessavaṇa, the regent of the North, tells the Buddha that while many supernatural beings have faith in the Dhamma, the majority of *yakkha*s have no faith, as their nature is incompatible with a code of refraining from killing, stealing, promiscuity, lying, and the consumption of alcohol and drugs (DN 32.2.195). Many of them live in lonely and remote recesses in the forest, places frequented by disciples of the Buddha, as they are ideal for meditation. Hence, Vessavaṇa personally gives the Buddha the Āṭānāṭā protective verses, so that he can teach them to monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen in order to ward off dangerous spirit-deities. Most of this *sutta* is made up of such *paritta*s, which essentially detail the supernatural beings present in each direction, with the Four Great Kings heading the list. At the end, they pay homage in unison to the Buddha. Vessavaṇa states that if this text is recited, any *yakkha* or other supernatural being who threatens the Buddha's followers will be severely dealt with by *yakkha* leaders (*mahāyakkha*s, DN 32.10.205).

This text evokes and invokes forces that occupy the space around the Buddha, conjuring up an "organised cosmos of beings witnessing or singing praises to the Buddha" (Shaw 2021: 225). In outlining the fabulous kingdom of Uttarukuru, the *sutta* mentions the presence of waters, first in connection with the rains:

> *Rahado pi tattha Dharanī nāma*
> *yato meghā pavassanti,*
> *Vassā yato patāyanti.*
>
> There's the mighty water Dharaṇī,
> Source of rain-clouds which pour down
> When the rainy season comes.
> (DN 32.7.201; transl. Walshe 1987: 475)

Then, in the conclusion of the description of the realm, after mentioning different species of birds:

> *sobhati sabba-kālaṃ sā*
> *Kuvera-nalinī sadā.*
>
> And there for ever beauteous lies
> Fair Kuvera's lotus-lake.
> (DN 32.7.202; transl. Walshe 1987: 476)

Moreover, when describing the men, 'possessionless, not owning wives' (*amamā apariggahā*, DN 32.7.199) who inhabit Uttarakuru, the text mentions the vehicles (*vāhana*s) they use: besides riding on oxen, elephants and horses, they use women, men, maidens, and boys as mounts (*itthīvāhanaṃ, purisavāhanaṃ, kumārivāhanaṃ, kumāravāhanaṃ*, DN 32.7.200). Walshe (1987: 615, n. 1004) comments: "This trait, which spoils the otherwise idyllic picture, remains an unexplained curiosity." While at first glance the four terms seem to refer to actual human beings, it is possible that, in a similar way to the *naravāhana* epithet discussed above, they designate beings belonging to the class of *guhyaka*s. As is known, protective invocations prefer to enumerate all the parts that form a totality rather than mentioning the totality itself in a synthetic form; in other words, charm texts seek completeness and exactness.

In the subsequent Hindu tradition, the *makara* is considered as one of the nine treasures of Kubera (*navanidhi*s).[17] Hence, there is no unequivocal evidence that the aquatic hybrids and anthropomorphic beings appearing as *vāhana*s on the Bharhut *stūpa* are also evocative of the mythological Uttarakuru kingdom, but it is undoubtedly worth considering that this could have been one of their layers of meaning.

Instead, the sculptures located in the southern quadrant appear to have mainly caparisoned or apparently wild elephants as vehicles: this is the case of Culakokā *devatā*, Gamgito *yakho*, and Supavāso *yakho*. However, the king, Viruḍako *yakho*, is represented standing on a figuration of rocks with caves inhabited by wild animals (Coomaraswamy 1956: Planche VI, Fig. 18). As Agrawala remarks (1989: 69-70):

> It is interesting and a bit curious that Virūḍhaka here [...] does not specifically bear any of the peculiar traits of the Kumbhāṇḍa iconography. Without the contemporary label his identity would have been altogether unknown in the sculptural scheme of this religious building.

It is noteworthy that both Virūḍhaka and Kubera are defined as *yakṣa*s in the accompanying inscriptions. Whether there is a reason why the semi-divine figures located to the south in the Bharhut iconographic programme are mainly associated with elephants is a matter that remains to be resolved.

This tradition of the Four Great Kings and the mythical land of Uttarakuru is undoubtedly of pre-Buddhist origin (Walshe 1987: 614-615, n. 1000; Sutherland 1991: 66).[18] As Shulman (2019: 221) remarks, the *Āṭānāṭiyasutta* is an expression of

[17] *E.g. Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 68.5 and 68.17-20; see Sharma (2019: 43). See also Mani (1975: 544).

[18] The only figure in common with the Brāhmaṇical tradition of the eight Dikpālas is Kubera (Wessels-Mevissen 2001).

> the cosmological map—a *maṇḍala*—with the Buddha at its hub, which is at work in Buddhist protective magic. The Buddha is placed in the middle of the four quarters, and supernatural beings, powerful and potentially hazardous agents, turn to him, acknowledge his pre-eminence, and worship him in adoration.

The *stūpa* of Bharhut, to some extent, appears to be a translation in stone, or a monumentalisation, of such a vision. That is to say, the well-established interpretation of the *stūpa* as a cosmogram (Snodgrass 1985) in the case of Bharhut might include the supernatural beings that inhabit the cosmos.

As already remarked, the iconography of a *stūpa* does not respond to the unitary project of a ruler or a single patron, as will happen later for Hindu temples, but it is built, so to speak, by accretion, through donations from the monastic community and lay people. Hence, reliefs and sculptures reflect the beliefs and imagery with which people were imbued at that time, but which in some cases seem to recede into the distance in later religio-historical developments, thus becoming difficult for us to read.

Interestingly, the same three types of *vāhana*s found at Bharhut appear on *toraṇa* fragments recovered from the site of Kankali Tila in Mathura, dated to ca. 100 BCE, and held at the museum of Lucknow (Vogel 1925, Pl. 57; Quintanilla 2007, Figs. 39-41). Three curved brackets depict three female figures standing respectively on an anthropomorphic dwarfish figure, a *makara*, and the protome of an elephant. While the figure standing on the *makara* is preserved only from the waist down, the other two are almost entirely readable and they are undoubtedly in the *śālabhañjikā* pose, as they are grasping the branch of a tree. According to Quintanilla (2007: 52), the two *śālabhañjikā*s are so similar in style that we can assume they were produced by the same artistic workshop. They were probably part of a *toraṇa* from a Jaina sanctuary, insofar as Kankali Tila has yielded mostly, if not exclusively, Jaina findings. Presumably, also the figure on the *makara* belonged to the same complex. The fragmentary nature of these pieces and the impossibility of reconstructing the *stūpa*(s) to which they belonged make the parallels with the three *vāhana* types of Bharhut undoubtedly more suggestive than conclusive. Nonetheless, the coincidence is worth noticing.

7. Conclusion

Tracing the development of the *vāhana* phenomenon back to Buddhist art in the *stūpa* of Bharhut shows that the conception of animal and hybrid vehicles associated with divine figures was gradually shaped,

and that it emerged over time in the cultural and religious landscape of ancient South Asia. It appears significant that, in visual arts, the earliest attestations of this association concern such semi-divine beings as *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s, who belong to pre-Brāhmaṇical and pre-Buddhist religiosity. They were believed to inhabit a space between the human and divine realms of existence.

When considered together and analysed more closely, these Bharhut *vāhana* figures appear to subsume various layers of meaning. *Vāhana*s are clearly symbolic representations, and, just as all symbols do, they express an array of valences. In Hindu traditions, *vāhana*s are a way to materialise the power of the deity with which they are associated. The lion mount of the South Asian warrior goddess is emblematic in this sense: since the early history (pre-Kuṣāṇa) of this divine figure, the feline symbolises wild ferociousness and war on the one hand and regal power and prestige on the other (Policardi 2024). We may hypothesise that the vehicles accompanying these semi-divine figures who encircle the *stūpa* are intended to symbolise the forces inhabiting the cosmos. Control over these creatures denoting waters, earth, and clouds perhaps meant control over the environment, which was something central in the thought of ancient societies. In the last centuries before the Common Era, this vision was called upon to co-exist with the Buddhist doctrine. Representing these semi-divine beings on *vāhana*s at the periphery of the *stūpa*, while the center was reserved for the Buddha, might have been a way to visually—and spatially—represent the Buddha's mastery and superiority over all cosmic forces. But it is at the same time a way to recognise the existence and power of those divine forces.

Some of the *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s were believed to live in the mythological kingdoms ruled over by the four *lokapāla*s, but many were imagined as inhabiting the forests, caves, mountains, lakes, and rivers in the world around humans (Haldar 1977: 146-149; Shaw 2021: 228-231). By allowing them a space in the Buddhist religious building, under the dominion of two (presumably four) directional guardians, they were not denied but acknowledged.

Many other semi-divine figures must have graced the now lost portions of the railing. Furthermore, according to a reassessment of the wider site of Bharhut and its archaeological landscape by Jason D. Hawkes (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011), the monument excavated by Cunningham appears "to have been one of at least three *stūpa*s that were part of a wider complex of contemporary buildings" (Hawkes 2008: 6). Hence, we cannot exclude the possibility that new archaeological findings from the wider Bharhut area might be recovered, opening up new perspectives.

This contribution is an initial attempt to employ the Bharhut *stūpa* as a case study for investigating the formative phase of the *vāhana* phenomenon. I hope that further research, based on both art-historical records and texts, will allow other steps towards an understanding of the thought-world that

imagined the animal and hybrid companions of divine figures, emblems of the rich and multifaceted tension between humans and animals, between humans and the worlds around humans.

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