Region and Religion in Retellings of the Mahābhārata

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines how regional religious traditions in premodern South Asia transformed the Mahābhārata, an epic about a catastrophic war between two sets of royal cousins, into a narrative of *bhakti* or "devotion." The two texts at the heart of this project are Villiputtūrār's fifteenth-century Tamil *Pāratam* and Sabalsingh Cauhān's seventeenth-century Bhasha (Old Hindi) *Mahābhārat*. While composed more than two hundred years apart in distinctly different regional South Asian languages, these retellings share a striking similarity. They both revolve around Krishna, a Hindu deity who became central to flourishing Tamil and Bhasha *bhakti* traditions. In this dissertation, I demonstrate how Villiputtūrār and Sabalsingh Cauhān each reframe the Mahābhārata as a *bhakti* narrative poem focused on Krishna.

"Region and Religion in Retellings of the Mahābhārata" makes two broad contributions to the study of South Asian religions. First, this dissertation offers a comparative study of *bhakti* poems in two languages from opposite ends of the Indian subcontinent. Despite the plethora of scholarship on *bhakti* literature, South Asian *bhakti* traditions have largely been examined separately in their own regional contexts. In this study of Villiputtūrār's Tamil *Pāratam* and Sabalsingh Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, I show how *bhakti* functions as a shared literary mode in these retellings while also paying careful attention to their distinct regional differences. Second, this project challenges an established position in South Asian Studies that relegates devotional literature and courtly literature to mutually exclusive worlds. The *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat* have been labeled as courtly texts based on patronage claims in each poem. Pushing back against the court/temple divide in contemporary scholarship, I analyze the devotional contexts of these Mahābhāratas and their intersections with the courtly. This dissertation reveals that the poems of Villiputtūrār and Sabalsingh Cauhān were part of a pan-South Asian development in which courtly and devotional literary cultures were closely linked.

In loving memory of three outstanding scholars:

Jaya Kothai Pillai (1926–2013),
Allison Busch (1969–2019), &
Anne Elizabeth Monius (1964–2019).

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I was immensely fortunate to have Allison Busch as my advisor for my MA in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. Allison offered her guidance and friendship to so many students of South Asian literature and history across the USA, Canada, Europe, and South Asia. Even after I graduated from Columbia in 2015 and began my PhD at UC Berkeley, Allison continued to stay in touch with me and support me. I saw her almost every year after I left Columbia at the Early Hindi and Brajbhasha workshops and various conferences and she would always make sure to treat me to a glass of wine and take the time to hear about my research and offer her advice. She also continued to share precious catalogues and rare books in Hindi and Bhasha with me. Allison passed away after a difficult struggle with cancer on October 19, 2019. I will always remember her remarkable generosity, her deep love for Hindi and Bhasha literature, and her unwavering commitment to supporting young scholars.

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NOTE ON TERMS & TRANSLITERATION

I use an italicized "*Mahābhārata*" and "*Rāmāyaṇa*" to refer to the Sanskrit epics attributed to Vyāsa and Vālmīki. I use the terms "Mahābhārata" and "Rāmāyaṇa" without italics to refer to retellings that belong to the larger Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa narrative traditions.

The early-modern North Indian vernacular language used by one of the poets I examine in this project, Sabalsingh Cauhān, is considered by many to be the ancestor of modern Hindi and hence this language is sometimes referred to as "Old Hindi," "Classical Hindi," or simply "Hindi." Many scholars also use dialect designations like "Avadhi" and "Brajbhasha" to qualify and describe texts in this language. Yet as Francesca Orsini points out, "the modern regional linguistic definitions of Braj Bhasha, Avadhi, Bhojpuri and Khari Boli are not reflected in the sources, which instead speak of a generic *bhakha* (*bhasha*) or Hindavi/Hindui/Hindi (in Persian texts)."[1] Like Gregory Clines, Shreekant Kumar Chandan, and Tyler Williams,[2] I choose to refer to this vernacular language as "Bhasha" (*bhāṣā*, literally: "language"), which is the name used by many poets in their own compositions including Cauhān, Jāyasī, Tulsīdās, and Viṣṇudās.

I have decided to use diacritics for personal names, texts, and key terms. There are two exceptions to this rule: "Krishna" (instead of "Kṛṣṇa") and "Aurangzeb" (instead of "Awrangzīb"). To make things easier for my readers, the names of Mahābhārata characters are represented according to how their names appear in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* ("Draupadī" instead of the Tamil "Tiraupati," "Bhīma" instead of the Bhasha "Bhīm"). I have compiled a glossary of names of some of the characters and deities in the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, and other South Asian narrative traditions as an appendix of this dissertation. I generally avoid diacritics for the names of places ("Vrindavan" and "Madurai" rather than "Vṛndāvana" and "Maturai"), languages ("Tamil" and "Bhasha" rather than "Tamiḻ" and "Bhāṣā"), and words that have become common in English (such as "Brahmin," "Chola," "Rajput," "Mughal," etc.).

Tamil transliteration is in accordance with the system utilized in the University of Madras's *Tamil Lexicon*. The International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration scheme has been used for both Bhasha and Sanskrit transliteration.

All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

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[1] Francesca Orsini, "How to do Multilingual Literary History: Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (2012): 228.

[2] Gregory M. Clines, "The Lotus' New Bloom: Literary Innovation in Early Modern North India," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018), 52; Shreekant Kumar Chandan, "Alam: A Poet of Many Worlds," in *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India*, ed. Tyler Williams, Anshu Malhotra, and John Stratton Hawley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 307n1; and Tyler Williams, "If the Whole World Were Paper…A History of Writing in the North Indian Vernacular," *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 56 (2018): 83n3.

INTRODUCTION

From Violence to Devotion

On April 17, 2011, *Games of Thrones*, a television show based on the *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy novel series by George R.R. Martin, premiered on the American premium television network HBO. This show, which tells the story of several noble families fighting for the control of the fictional continent of Westeros, went on to become one of the most popular television series of all time.[1] *Game of Thrones* fans include Beyoncé, Prince William, and President Barack Obama (who arranged advanced screenings of certain episodes), and the finale of the eighth and final season of the show in May of 2019 was watched by 16.9 million viewers around the world.[2]

Along with being one of the most popular shows ever on television, *Games of Thrones* is also one of the most violent. In March of 2019, Australian Red Cross volunteers analyzed the first seven seasons of *Game of Thrones* to determine which character in the series committed the most violations of international humanitarian law, such as rape, torture, and murder.[3] A 2018 study in *Injury Epidemiology* "revealed that the probability of a character dying within the first hour after first being introduced on screen was about 14%" and that "by the end of the seventh season, more than half of the important characters had died, with violent deaths being the most common by far."[4] Some of the most horrific deaths on *Game of Thrones* include a pregnant queen being stabbed repeatedly in the stomach during a wedding, a lord being eaten alive by his own pack of hunting hounds, a man having a pot of melted boiling gold poured over his face by his brother-in-law, and a prince's head exploding after a giant knight shoves his thumbs into the depths of the prince's eye-sockets. One of the most common phrases of dialogue on the show is the adage in the fictional language of High Valyrian, *valar morghulis* or "all men must die." By the end of the series, Shelly Tan of *The Washington Post* calculated that 6,887 different individuals were killed in the course of the seventy-three episodes of *Game of Thrones*.[5]

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[1] Daniel D'Addario, "*Games of Thrones:* How They Make the World's Most Popular Show," *Time*, July 10, 2017, https://time.com/game-of-thrones-2017/.

[2] Sukriti Wahi, "16 Celebrities Who Are Just As Obsessed With 'Game Of Thrones' As You Are," *Elle Australia*, April 23, 2019, https://www.elle.com.au/culture/celebrities-that-are-game-of-thrones-fans-20320; and Rick Porter, "'Game of Thrones' Series Finale Sets All-Time HBO Ratings Record," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 20, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/game-thrones-series-finale-sets-all-time-hbo-ratings-record-1212269.

[3] "Who is Game of Thrones' Worst War Criminal?" Australian Red Cross, March 2019, https://www.redcross.org.au/news-and-media/news/game-of-thrones.

For any curious *Game of Thrones* fans, the Australian Red Cross volunteers pronounced Ramsay Bolton "the worst war criminal" of the series with seventeen violations of international humanitarian law.

[4] Reidar P. Lystad and Benjamin T. Brown, "'Death is Certain, the Time is Not': Mortality and Survival in *Game of Thrones*," *Injury Epidemiology* 5, no. 44 (2018): 9.

[5] Shelly Tan, "An illustrated guide to all 6,887 deaths in 'Game of Thrones,'" *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/entertainment/game-of-thrones/.

Although Westeros is clearly based on medieval Europe, *Game of Thrones* is immensely popular in India.[6] In 2019, the first episode of the eighth season of *Game of Thrones* "was pirated 55 million times, of which India's share was a whopping 10 million."[7] Journalist Siddhant Adlakha pointed out in 2019 that "Instagram data in the days leading up to this year's eighth season premiere suggests that India is the leading Asian nation when it comes to *Thrones* buzz and online discussions, and the fourth buzziest nation globally, behind the U.S., U.K., and Brazil."[8] Adlakha added that "today, more and more Indian viewers make *Game of Thrones* a part of their Monday mornings. India is nine and half hours ahead of New York during daylight saving time, so some fans wake up at the crack of dawn to catch the show live, while others watch it during their commute to work."[9] Why was this show so beloved in India?

One possible explanation for this series' popularity in India is the striking resemblance *Game of Thrones* bears to the Mahābhārata narrative tradition. During the past two thousand years, hundreds of Mahābhāratas have been created in the forms of poems, dramas, ballads, novels, short stories, comic books, television shows, feature films, children's fantasy series, podcasts, YouTube videos, Twitter tweets, and much more.[10] The oldest and most famous Mahābhārata is the ancient Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (c. 400 BCE–400 CE), a massive epic poem fifteen times the length of the Bible that focuses on the war over the Bhārata kingdom between two sets of paternal cousins in the royal Kuru family: the five Pāṇḍavas and the one hundred Kauravas.[11] Thus, as with *Game of Thrones*, the central plot of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* revolves around a royal succession dispute. We also find very similar individuals in the large casts of characters in these two epic narratives. Both feature secret children who are the rightful heirs to the thrones of their respective kingdoms (Jon Snow and Karṇa), spoiled and sadistic

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[6] The plot of much of *Game of Thrones* is based on the fifteenth-century civil wars in England between the members of the House of Lancaster and the House of York that are now known as the "Wars of the Roses." See TED-Ed, "The wars that inspired Game of Thrones - Alex Gendler," YouTube video, 6:00, May 11, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjO55pKuBo4.

[7] Yagya Sachdeva, "India Becomes The Top Country To Illegally View Game Of Thrones," *The Quint*, April 19, 2019, https://www.thequint.com/neon/india-piracy-game-of-thrones-maximum#read-more.

[8] Siddhant Adlakha, "The 6 A.M. Scramble to Watch *Game of Thrones* in India," *Vulture*, May 13, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2019/05/watching-game-of-thrones-in-india.html.

[9] Adlakha, "6 A.M. Scramble."

Games of Thrones was legally simultaneously streamed in India by the streaming service Hotstar at the same time it was broadcast in the USA on HBO.

[10] On the diversity of the Mahābhārata tradition, see Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai, "An Introduction to the Literature of the Mahābhārata," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 1–34.

[11] I have assumed that readers are familiar with the basic plot and central characters of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. For those who are unfamiliar with the story and main players of the *Mahābhārata*, I recommend these plot summaries: James L. Fitzgerald, "The Story of the *Mahābhārata*," Brown University, last modified May 9, 2009, https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Sanskrit_in_Classics_at_Brown/Mahabharata/MBh2Story.html; Emily T. Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*: *Ethics and the Aesthetic of Suffering in the Mahābhārata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10–20; and John D. Smith, introduction to *The Mahābhārata: An Abridged Translation*, trans. John D. Smith (London: Penguin Books, 2009), xv–xviii. Also see the Appendix of this dissertation.

princes (Joffrey and Duryodhana), and headstrong heroines who literally emerge from fire (Daenerys and Draupadī). But perhaps the biggest similarity between *Games of Thrones* and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is the immense violence that permeates these epics.

Some of the most gruesome events in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* include the Brahmin warrior Rāma Jāmadagnya (also known as Paraśurāma) filling five lakes with the blood of twenty-one generations of *kṣatriya* warriors, the Pāṇḍavas and their mother Kuntī getting an innocent woman from the Nishad community and her five children drunk in a palace made of lac and then killing them by setting the lac palace on fire, the Kaurava prince Duḥśāsana viciously dragging the Pāṇḍavas' shared wife Draupadī by her hair before trying to publicly disrobe her, the strongest Pāṇḍava Bhīma pulverizing Draupadī's attempted rapist Kīcaka into an unrecognizable lump of flesh with his bare hands, and the entire Yādava clan slaughtering themselves in an intoxicated brawl.[12] The most violent and devastating event in the Sanskrit epic, however, is undoubtedly the catastrophic war waged between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas that takes places at Kurukṣetra or the "field of the Kurus." Robert Goldman explains that

> This cataclysmic struggle is an epoch-ending, mass-extinction event. For, of the many elite heroes who take part in the barely three-week clash of royal cousins, only ten are said to have survived the war. Before the epic ends, most of these survivors are slain or simply die. The casualties, which the poem itself calculates, are truly staggering. Including the (generally overlooked) rank-and-file soldiery of the war's eighteen legendarily vast armies, Yudhiṣṭhira [the eldest Pāṇḍava] reckons the combined losses of both sides come to 1,660,020,000 dead and 24,165 missing—perhaps more individuals than populated the earth at the time the epic was composed.[13]

The death toll of 6,887 characters killed during the entire eight seasons of *Game of Thrones* is almost laughable when compared to the 1.6 billion people slain in the Battle of Kurukṣetra.

Yet the pervasive violence of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* clearly did not deter premodern poets from retelling the Mahābhārata narrative. Between 800 and 1800 CE, countless Mahābhāratas were composed in Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Konkani, Malayalam, Oriya, Sindhi, and many other regional South Asian languages.[14] Notably, several of these premodern regional retellings continue to be read, recited, and performed in contemporary South Asia. The Telugu *Mahābhāratamu* is attributed to the *kavitrayamu* or "trinity of poets," Nannaya (eleventh century), Tikkana (thirteenth century), and Ĕṛṛāpragaḍa (fourteenth century), and Harshita Mruthinti Kamath notes that the "*Mahābhāratamu* still holds enormous popular appeal: its verses appear in Telugu films and are memorized by scholars and schoolchildren across South India

[12] See *MBh* 3.117.5–10, 1.136, 2.60, 4.21.55–65, and 16.5.11–25. Unless noted otherwise, all references to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*) are to the critical edition of the epic: *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*, ed. V. S. Sukthankar et al. 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–66).

[13] Robert P. Goldman, "*Ā Garbhāt*: Murderous Rage and Collective Punishment as Thematic Elements in Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 41.

[14] For an exhaustive list of Mahābhārata retellings in regional languages, see Gauri Shankar Singh, *Mahabharata-Krishnakatha and Bhagavatapurana: An International Literature Survey* (Varanasi: Bibliographical Society of India, 1990), 18–90.

today."[15] Jñāndev's thirteenth-century Marathi *Jñāneśvarī* is an expansive reworking of the most famous section of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: the *Bhagavadgītā* (Song of Bhagavān).[16] Christian Novetzke points out that around the *Jñāneśvarī* "exists a thriving world of public religious exposition, from small *pravacana* or 'lecture' sessions all around Maharashtra, India, and the world, to social clubs and semiformal reading groups that recite and discuss the text."[17] There are multiple premodern Kannada Mahābhāratas including Ranna's eleventh-century *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* (Victory of Bold Bhīma), Kumāravyāsa's fifteenth-century *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* (Essence of the Bhārata Story in Kannada), and Lakṣmīśa's fifteenth-century *Jaiminibhāratam* (Bhārata by Jaimini). Sheldon Pollock observes that "in Kannada country Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* and *Jaiminibhāratam* are still extant in hundreds of manuscripts; more important, these works were broadcast via oral performance into every village in the region."[18] In 2019, *Kurukṣētra*, a Kannada film based on the *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, was released in cinemas across South India.[19] Despite their ubiquity and continued popularity, however, premodern regional Mahābhāratas have not received the same dedicated scholarly attention that the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* has long attracted.[20]

This project began with two questions: (1) Why was the Mahābhārata retold in regional languages at specific moments in premodern South Asian history? And (2) Was the Mahābhārata retold in different regional South Asian languages for similar purposes? Based on close comparative readings of Villiputtūrār's fifteenth-century Tamil *Pāratam* and Sabalsingh Cauhān's seventeenth-century Bhasha (Old Hindi) *Mahābhārat*, I demonstrate in this dissertation how regional religious traditions transformed an exceedingly violent epic into a narrative of ardent *bhakti* or "devotion" in premodern South Asia. The texts at the center of this project were composed in two of South Asia's most vibrant regional languages which are seen as distinct in terms of their linguistic, geographic, and literary trajectories. Yet these premodern retellings share a striking similarity. They both refocus the Mahābhārata story on Krishna (Kṛṣṇa), the maternal cousin of the Pāṇḍavas and an incarnation of the Hindu deity Viṣṇu who was central to flourishing Tamil and Bhasha *bhakti* traditions in premodern South Asia.

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[15] Harshita Mruthinti Kamath, "Three Poets, Two Languages, One Translation: The Evolution of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu*," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 205.

[16] Richard H. Davis describes the *Jñāneśvarī* as "a kind of meta-*Gita*" in which "the seven hundred verses of the Sanskrit *Gita* are embedded in a nine-thousand-verse Marathi poem that translates, paraphrases, explains, expands, and extols the teachings of Krishna" (*The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015], 66).

[17] Christian Lee Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, Religion, and the Premodern Public Sphere in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 222.

[18] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 559.

[19] Manoj Kumar R., "Kurukshetra movie review: This Darshan film is a throwback to old-school mythological dramas," *The Indian Express,* August 9, 2019, https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/movie-review/kurukshetra-movie-review-rating-5891784/.

[20] For a summary of the extensive scholarship on the Sanskrit epic, see Bruce M. Sullivan, "An Overview of *Mahābhārata* Scholarship: A Perspective on the State of the Field," *Religion Compass* 10, no. 7 (2016): 165–75.

This dissertation makes two broad contributions to the study of South Asian religions. First, it offers a comparative study of *bhakti* poems in two languages from opposite ends of South Asia. Despite the plethora of scholarship on *bhakti* literature, South Asian *bhakti* traditions have largely been examined separately in their own regional contexts. In this study of the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, I reveal how *bhakti* functions as a shared literary mode in these retellings without failing to also pay careful attention to their distinct regional differences. Second, this project challenges an established position in South Asian Studies that relegates devotional/religious literature and courtly/political literature to mutually exclusive worlds. The *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat* have been labeled as courtly texts based on patronage claims in each poem. Pushing back against the court/temple divide in contemporary scholarship, I analyze the devotional contexts of these Mahābhāratas and their intersections with the courtly.

The remainder of this Introduction proceeds as follows. I first introduce Villiputtūrār's Tamil *Pāratam* and Sabalsingh Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* and explain why I use the term "retelling" rather than "translation" to describe these two Mahābhāratas in regional South Asian languages. Next, I summarize some of the major approaches that have been employed in scholarship on *bhakti* literature and share what I mean by the term "*bhakti*" in my comparative study of the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. This leads to a discussion of the court/temple divide in South Asian Studies in which I address how premodern Mahābhāratas in regional languages have recently been categorized as non-religious works of courtly literature. Finally, I provide a chapter-by-chapter summary of the trajectory of this dissertation.

The Mahābhārata Retellings of Villi and Cauhān

While Villiputtūrār's Tamil *Pāratam* and Sabalsingh Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* were composed more than two hundred years apart in two distinctly different languages at opposite ends of the Indian subcontinent, these two Mahābhāratas share much in common.

Let me first point out that there are other premodern Mahābhāratas composed in Tamil and Bhasha. Tamil Mahābhāratas include Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century *Pārataveṇpā* (Bhārata in *Veṇpā* Meter), Pukaḻēnti's thirteenth-century *Naḷaveṇpā* (Story of Nala in *Veṇpā* Meter), and Ativīrarāmaṉ's sixteenth-century *Naiṭatam* (Naiṣadha King), while Bhasha Mahābhāratas include Lakhansenī's fifteenth-century *Virāṭparv* (Book of Virāṭa's Court), Viṣṇudās's fifteenth-century *Pāṇḍavcarit* (Deeds of the Pāṇḍavas),[21] Kulapati Miśra's seventeenth-century *Śaṅgrāmsār* (Nature of War), Tursīdās's seventeenth-century *Itihās Sammucay* (Collection on History), Bhagvāndās's seventeenth-century *Jaimanī Aśvamedh* (Horse Sacrifice by Jaimini) and Bulākīdās's seventeenth-century *Pāṇḍavpurāṇ* (Legend of the Pāṇḍavas).[22]

[21] Notably, a manuscript of Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit,* which was copied in 1738 in Datia by Caturbhuj Caube, was conflated with the sixth through tenth books of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*. See Harihar Nivās Dvivedī, introduction to Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* (*Mahākavi Viṣṇudās Kṛt Mahābhārat: Pāṇḍav-carit*), ed. Harihar Nivās Dvivedī (Gwalior: Vidyā Maṃdir Prakāśan, 1973). All references to the *Pāṇḍavcarit* are to this edition.

[22] See Kamil Veith Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 143–46; David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 210–15, and 234–35; Imre Bangha, "The Emergence of Hindi Literature: From Transregional Maru-Gurjar to Madhyadeśī Narratives," in *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India*, ed. Tyler Williams, Anshu Malhotra, and John Stratton Hawley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13–14; R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 35–37 and 187, Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 174; Tyler W. Williams, "Sacred Sounds and Sacred Books: A History of Writing in Hindi," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 219–22; and Eva De

The Tamil *Pāratam* of Villiputtūrār (or Villi as he is often called)[23] and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* of Sabalsingh Cauhān (who I will henceforth refer to as Cauhān), however, are the most widely-known premodern Mahābhāratas of their respective literary cultures and these texts are mentioned in several major Tamil and Hindi literary histories.[24] The *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat* have had active lives in manuscript and print culture. During my fieldwork in the United Kingdom and India, I located thirty-three manuscripts of the *Pāratam*, forty manuscripts of the *Mahābhārat*, and multiple different printed editions of both texts. These Mahābhāratas have also each inspired living performance traditions. Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* is an important source for the Piracaṅkam Pāratam (Discourse on the Bhārata) recitations and the Terukkūttu or "street theater" plays of the Draupadī goddess cult in the northern region of Tamil Nadu in South India.[25] In Chhattisgarh in Central India, excerpts from Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* have been incorporated into the Vedmatī style of the Paṇḍvānī (Speech about the Pāṇḍavas) ballad performances of the Gond community and the chanting rituals of the Rāmnāmī religious sect.[26]

As Gregory Clines points out, "with many pre-modern South Asian authors, few hard-and-fast historical facts are available to scholars."[27] This is certainly the case with both Villi and Cauhān. Neither poet offers any detailed biographical information about themselves in their regional Mahābhāratas other than references to courtly patrons. In an introduction to the *Pāratam* attributed to Villi's son Varantaruvār, Varantaruvār describes his father being commissioned to compose a Tamil Mahābhārata by Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, the king of Tirumuṉaippāṭināṭu, which is the land surrounding the town of Tirukkovalur, which in turn is in the Viluppuram district in

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Clercq and Simon Winant, "The Fate of Kīcaka in Two Jain Apabhramsha Mahābhāratas," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 218.

[23] Villi may be named after Srivilliputtur (Śrīvilliputtūr), the town members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community in South India revere as the hometown of two of the twelve Vaiṣṇava Tamil *bhakti* poets known as the Āḻvārs: Periyāḻvār and Āṇṭāḷ. Archana Venkatesan kindly shared a story she heard in 2002 from a priest at the Āṇṭāḷ temple in Srivilliputtur that paints Villi as a former hedonist and beggar who is cured of leprosy on a rainy night in Srivilliputtur by Āṇṭāḷ in the guise of an old woman. After being saved by Āṇṭāḷ, Villi turns over a new leaf and composes his *Pāratam* to demonstrate that he is a changed man. Venkatesan told me: "I was never able to find a textual version of the story, but I am sure it exists somewhere" (personal communication, February 23, 2018).

[24] See C. Jesudasan and Hephzibah Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A Publishing House, 1961), 204–9; T.P. Meenakshisundaran, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1965), 158–59; Mu. Varadarajan, *Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972), translated by E. Sa. Visswanathan as *A History of Tamil Literature* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 195; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 144; Śivsingh Sengar, *Śivsinghsāroj*, 1878; repr. (Lucknow: Tej Kumār Book Depot, 1966), 500; George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1889), 78; Gaṇeśvihārī Miśra, Śyāmvihārī Miśra, and Śukadevvihārī Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod*, vol. 1 (Hyderabad: Gangā-Granthāgār, 1972; first published 1913, Hindī Granth Prasārak Maṇḍalī [Allahabad], 272–73; Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 9th ed. (Banaras: Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, 1942), 326; and McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[25] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī*, vol. 1, *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 137–38; and Richard Armando Frasca, *The Theatre of the Mahābhārata: Terukkūttu Performances in South India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 54–55.

[26] Niranjan Mahawar, *Folk Theatre Pandwani* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2013), 32; and Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 118–19.

[27] Clines, "Lotus' New Bloom," 5.

present-day Tamil Nadu. At four different points in the narrative of the Tamil *Pāratam*, Villi himself praises Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ. These references to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ have been used by Tamil scholars to date the *Pāratam* to the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century because Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ is also praised by a pair of Tamil authors known as the Iraṭṭaiyar or the "Twin Poets" who in turn have been dated by the reign of their supposed patron, the chieftain Rājanārāyaṇa Campuvarāyaṉ (1331–1381 CE), using epigraphical evidence.[28]

The Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, like the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, is divided into eighteen different books.[29] In the prologue of his sixteenth book, Cauhān describes himself performing his poem before a king named Mitrasen and the sixth ruler of the Mughal Empire, Aurangzeb (Awrangzīb), in Delhi.[30] He also praises Mitrasen in the prologue of the seventh book and Aurangzeb in the prologues of the sixth, eighth, ninth, and seventeenth books of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. Based on these allusions and seven of the eight different composition dates that Cauhān gives in eight prologues to his books (the earliest date being 1661 CE and the last being 1724 CE) being within the dates accepted as Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707 CE), multiple Hindi literary historians have argued that Cauhān and Mitrasen were in the service of Aurangzeb in Delhi.[31] I will discuss these patronage claims in Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in much greater detail in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

In the beginning of their compositions, Villi and Cauhān both distinctly describe themselves narrating the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in a regional South Asian language. In the author's own introduction (*taṟciṟappuppāyiram*) to the Tamil *Pāratam*, Villi presents his audience with an *avaiyaṭakkam*, a literary device that Anne Monius defines as "the author's expression of modesty regarding the faults of the composition to follow."[32] Along with lamenting his lack of poetic skills, Villi praises Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa, the grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas who is traditionally considered to be the author of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[33] Villi

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[28] M.S.H Thompson, "The Mahābhārata in Tamil," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 92, no. 3/4 (1960): 118–19; and K.V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 214–15.

[29] I should point out that while the critical edition and the vulgate recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* consist of eighteen books, many Telugu and Grantha manuscripts of the Sanskrit epic have twenty-three or twenty-four books. See Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* (New York: Anthem Press, 2018), 367.

[30] The Mughal emperors are usually referred to by their regnal names rather than their birth names (Akbar instead of Jalāl al-Dīn, Jahāngīr instead of Salīm, and Shāh Jahān instead of Khurram). The sixth Mughal emperor, however, is most frequently referred to by his birth name Aurangzeb (Awrangzīb) instead of his regnal name ʿĀlamgīr.

[31] See Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272–73; Lala Sita Ram, ed. *Other Poets with a Brief History of the Hindi Language*, vol. 6, bk. 1 of *Selections from Hindi Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1925), 236; Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 326; Nagendra, ed. *Rītikāl*, vol 7. of *Hindī Sāhitya kā Bṛhat Itihās*, ed. Sampūrānand (Banaras: Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, 1972), 371; and McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[32] Anne E. Monius, "Love, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 2/3 (2004): 139.

[33] On the complex question of Vyāsa's "authorship" of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, see Robert P. Goldman, introduction to Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 1, *Bālakāṇḍa*), trans. Robert P. Goldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 29–31.

describes Vyāsa (*viyātaṉār*) as the composer the "long story" (*neṭuṅ katai*),[34] which is a clear reference to the massive length of the Sanskrit epic. Villi then states that he is retelling Vyāsa's poem in "southern speech" (*ten col*) or Tamil.[35] This is in contrast to the *Mahābhārata*, which Villi describes as a text in the "great language" (*mā moḻi*) or Sanskrit.[36] In the first chapter of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Cauhān praises "that great sage Vyāsa" (*mahā muni jo vyāsa*) and tells us that he will "summarize" (*saṅkṣepa*) the *Mahābhārata* in Bhasha (*bhāṣā*).[37] At the very end of Cauhān's composition, we find the following declaration in the final couplet of the entire poem: "Sabalsingh says, 'I am devoid of intelligence and have said what Vyāsa has said.'"[38]

Villi and Cauhān are not the only premodern Mahābhārata poets who pay tribute to Vyāsa or describe their compositions as narrations of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in regional South Asian languages. In the beginning of his tenth-century Kannada Mahābhārata, the *Vikramārjunavijayam* (Victory of Heroic Arjuna), the Jain poet Pampa proclaims: "I will swim in the nectar ocean of rich speech of the great Sage Vyāsa, but I am not so arrogant as to say, 'I am the Poet Vyāsa.'"[39] Nannaya's portion of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu* opens with an account of the Chalukya king Rājarājanarendra (r. 1018–1061) commissioning the poet to compose the *Mahābhāratamu*. Nannaya tells his audience that Rājarājanarendra told him: "with all your learning, please compose in Tenugu [Telugu] a book that makes clear what the celebrated Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana spoke, the proven meaning bound to the *Mahābhārata* text."[40] Viṣṇudās extols the composer of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in the opening verses of his Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit*: "again I bow my head to that Vyāsa, that man who appears to have no faults or stains."[41] Viṣṇudās then states that he will "tell the Bhārata in Bhasha" (*bhāratahi bhākhaū*).[42] Rāma Sarasvatī claims in his sixteenth-century Assamese *Mahābhārata* that the last king of the Koch kingdom,

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[34] *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 6. Unless noted otherwise, all references to Villi's *Pāratam* (*VP*) are to the following edition of the text: Villiputtūrār, *Villiputtūrār Iyaṟṟiya Makāpāratam*, ed Vai. Mu. Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyār, 7 vols. (Madras: 1963–68). Citations refer to the book, chapter, and verse numbers.

[35] *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 7.

[36] *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 8.

[37] *CM* 1.2. Unless noted otherwise, all references to Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* (*CM*) are to the following edition of the text: Sabalsingh Cauhān, *Sabalsingh Cauhān-Viracit Mahābhārat* (Lucknow: Tej Kumār Book Depot, 2015). Citations refer to the book and page numbers.

[38] *sabalasiṃha mati hīna vyāsa kahata tasa kaheu hama* || *CM* 18.24 ||

[39] Pampa, *Vikramārjunavijayam* 1.14, trans. Sarah Pierce Taylor in "Digambara Jainism and the Making of Old Kannada Literary Culture," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Jainism,* ed. John E. Cort, Paul Dundas, Knut A. Jacobsen, and Kristi L. Wiley. Brill Online, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2590-2768_BEJO_COM_035073.

[40] Nannaya, *Mahābhāratamu*, trans. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman in *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 59.

[41] *puni tihi vyāsa navani kiya sīpā tā nara rogu kalaku na dīmā* || Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 1.1.34 ||

[42] Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 1.1 *dohā* 2.

Naranārāyaṇa (r. 1540–1584), sent the poet "numerous grammars and commentaries" from his palace and commanded him to "render the essence of the Bhārata into Assamese verse."[43]

Based on these excerpts, it might appear that Villi, Cauhān, Pampa, Nannaya, Viṣṇudās, and Rāma Sarasvatī are all describing processes of "translating" the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* into regional South Asian languages. In her study of the sixteenth-century *Razmnāmah* (Book of War), the Persian Mahābhārata that was commissioned by the third Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Audrey Truschke uses the term "translation" to describe the *Razmnāmah*. She explains that to create the *Razmnāmah*, Akbar gathered a group of Brahmin scholars who would read from the northern recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and then explain the narrative in Bhasha to a group of Persian literati who then wrote down what they heard in Persian.[44] This method of composing the *Razmnāmah* is one that seems to fit the Western idea of "translation" quite well. Yet as Truschke herself points out, "the Persian translation is not a line by line rendering of the Sanskrit original, and some sections are abridged, or significantly altered."[45]

This is also true of both Villi's *Pāratam* and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*. While the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is traditionally said to contain 100,000 *śloka* couplets (about 200,000 lines), the Tamil *Pāratam* is made up of roughly 4,300 *viruttam* quatrains (about 17,200 lines) and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* consists of approximately 1,800 ten-line stanzas in the *caupāī-dohā* quatrain-couplet meter (about 18,000 lines). As we will see throughout this dissertation, there are stories and episodes in each of these regional Mahābhāratas that are not found in any recension of the Sanskrit epic. Moreover, unlike with the *Razmnāmah*, there is no definitive evidence that either Villi or Cauhān read or heard a recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. These poets' exposure to the Mahābhārata tradition may primarily have been through different oral and performance traditions and other works of literature. Tamil scholars have identified Peruntēvaṉār's Tamil *Pārataveṇpā* and Agastya Paṇḍita's fourteenth-century Sanskrit *Bālabhārata* as two key sources of inspiration for Villi's *Pāratam*.[46] Some of the episodes in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* mirror those in the twelfth-century Sanskrit *Jaiminibhārata*, Kumāravyāsa's Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, Cĕṟuśśeri's fifteenth-century Malayalam *Bhāratagātha* (Song of the Bhārata), Sāraḷādāsa's fifteenth-century Oriya *Mahābhārata*, Kāśīrāmdās's seventeenth-century Bengali *Mahābhārata*, and the seventeenth-century Konkani *Bhārata*, which suggests that certain Mahābhārata stories were circulating across South Asia.[47] Neither the *Pāratam* nor the *Mahābhārat* is a line-by-line "translation" of the Sanskrit epic.

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[43] Rāma Sarasvatī, *Mahābhārata* 3935–37, trans. William L. Smith in "The Burden of the Forest: Two Apocryphal *Parvans* from Vernacular *Mahābhāratas*," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 54, no. 1 (2001): 93–94.

[44] Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 103–7.

[45] Truschke, 107.

[46] C.R. Sankaran and K. Rama Varma Raja, "On the Sources of Villiputtūrār-Bhāratam," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 5 (1943): 231; Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 121; Kambalur Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations, Perundevanar and Pampa: A Comparative Study* (Kurnool: Vyasaraja Publications, 1981), 81; Hiltebeitel*, Cult of Draupadī,* 1:15; and A.A. Manavalan, "Tamil Versions of the *Mahābhārata* and Studies on the Tamil Versions," in *Mahābhārata: The End of an Era (Yugānta)*, ed. Ajay Mitra Shastri (Shimla: India Institute of Advanced Study, 2004), 334–35.

[47] On the shared episodes between Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* and other regional Mahābhāratas, see Chapter Two.

In the past thirty years, however, some scholars of South Asian literature have called for a broadening of the understanding of the term "translation" beyond the simple replication of a text from one language into another. In his well-known essay "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" (1991), A.K. Ramanujan draws on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce and describes three different types of translation (*iconic, indexical,* and *symbolic*) using examples from other great epic narrative tradition of South Asia: the Rāmāyaṇa.

> Where Text I and Text 2 have a geometrical resemblance to each other, as one triangle to another (whatever the angles, sizes, or colors of the lines), we call such a relation *iconic*. In the West, we generally expect translations to be "faithful," i.e. iconic. Thus, when Chapman translates Homer, he not only preserves basic textual features such as characters, imagery, and order of *incidents*, but tries to reproduce a hexameter and retain the same number of lines as in the original Greek—only the language is English and the idiom Elizabethan. When Kampaṉ retells Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil, he is largely faithful in keeping to the order and sequence of episodes, the structural relations between the characters of father, son, brothers, wives, friends, and enemies. But the iconicity is limited to such structural relations. His work is much longer than Vālmīki's, for example, and it is composed in more than twenty different kinds of Tamil meters, while Vālmīki's is mostly in the *śloka* meter. Very often, although Text 2 stands in an iconic relationship to Text 1 in terms of basic elements such as plot, it is filled with local detail, folklore, poetic traditions, imagery, and so forth—as in Kampaṉ's telling or that of the Bengali Kṛttivāsa. In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma's wedding is very much a Bengali wedding, with Bengali customs and Bengali cuisine. We may call such a text *indexical*: the text is embedded in a locale, a context, refers to it, even signifies it, and would not make much sense without it… Now and then, as we have seen, Text 2 uses the plot and characters and names of Text 1 minimally and uses them to say entirely new things, often in an effort to subvert the predecessor by producing a countertext. We may call such a translation *symbolic*. The word *translation* itself here acquires a somewhat mathematical sense, of mapping a structure of relations onto another plane or another symbolic system. When this happens, the Rāma story has become almost a second language of the whole culture area, a shared core of names, characters, incidents, and motifs, with a narrative language in which Text 1 can say one thing and Text 2 something else, even the exact opposite. Vālmīki's Hindu and Vimalasūri's Jaina texts in India—or the Thai *Ramakirti* in Southeast Asia—are such symbolic translations of each other.[48]

As with the premodern regional Rāmāyaṇas of Kampaṉ and Kṛttivāsa and Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, the premodern regional Mahābhāratas of Villi and Cauhān have *iconic* relationships with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* attributed to Vyāsa in terms of plot sequence and characters. But both poems are also *indexical* in that they are "filled with local detail, folklore, poetic traditions, imagery, and so forth" from their individual regional contexts and literary cultures.

In *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (2011), Ronit Ricci also uses the term "translation" for three premodern Islamic renderings of a narrative called the *Book of One Thousand Questions* that are composed in Javanese, Malay, and Tamil. Ricci discusses a "broader" type of translation that "incorporates elements of transmission, a process which continues to occur long after a story is first introduced into new linguistic and cultural surroundings, and through which a story takes on unique local

[48] A.K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 44–45.

characteristics in addition to the elements common to it across languages."[49] Ricci also draws our attention to *moḻipeyar*, a word that is found in the ancient Tamil literary treatise, the *Tolkāppiyam*, and that "in modern Tamil has assumed the meaning 'to translate.'"[50] She explains that the focus of *moḻipeyar* is "first and foremost on making a text Tamil, in accordance with local ideas about writing; it is an interpretation, an explanation, a meaningful expression, rather than an equivalent using a different language; and it hints at a change, a move, a conversion."[51] As I will show, neither Villi nor Cauhān are creating an "equivalent" of the Sanskrit epic.

Yet while the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* certainly have *iconic* and *indexical* relationships with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the term *moḻipeyar* accurately captures many elements of the projects of Villi and Cauhān, I still resist using the word "translation" for these two premodern Mahābhāratas composed in regional South Asian languages. My avoidance of the term "translation" is largely related to what John Cort describes as "a broader cultural and academic devaluation of translation and translators" in North America and Europe in which "translation is not considered to be 'original,' and so it is often dismissed as unimportant, uncreative, and ultimately derivative and mechanical work.[52]

To circumvent these negative connotations of the term "translation," I instead choose to use the term "retelling" to describe the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. As we have seen, several authors of premodern Mahābhāratas in regional South Asian languages, including Villi, Cauhān, Pampa, Nannaya, Viṣṇudās, and Rāma Sarasvatī, all explicitly claim to be narrating a story that has already been told: Vyāsa's Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Again, it is very possible that none of these regional poets ever read or heard a recension of the Sanskrit epic. Yet it is also significant that all these Mahābhārata authors are distinctly placing their regional compositions in the lineage of Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* and therefore I use the term "retelling."

Thus far I have identified many similarities between Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān Bhasha *Mahābhārat* including their active lives in manuscript culture, print culture, and living performance traditions, their multiple allusions to courtly patrons, and their declarations of narrating Vyāsa's Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in regional South Asian languages. The most striking similarity, however, is that both Villi and Cauhān present their regional Mahābhāratas retellings as works of *bhakti* (devotion) centered on the popular Hindu deity Krishna.

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[49] Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 33–34.

For a recent use of Ricci's conceptualizations, see Ayesha A. Irani, *The Muhammad Avatāra: Salvation History, Translation, and the Making of Bengali Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 137–40.

[50] Ricci, *Islam Translated,* 56.

[51] Ricci, 56.

[52] John Cort, "Making it Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Jains," in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 64.

Approaching the "Crazy Quilt" of *Bhakti*

Until very recently, the term "*bhakti*" has been inextricably linked to a pan-South Asian "*bhakti* movement" that is said to have begun in South India around the sixth century before spreading all over the subcontinent and reaching its zenith in North India nearly one thousand years later.

In his pathbreaking *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (2015), however, John Stratton Hawley has convincingly shown that this "*bhakti* movement" narrative is a "product of history" that only "fully crystallized" in the 1900s.[53] Hawley details how multiple different texts and players—including the eighteenth-century Sanskrit work entitled the *Bhāgavatamāhātmya* (Majesty of Bhagavān), Nābhādās's seventeenth-century Bhasha hagiography of *bhakta*s (devotees) known as the *Bhaktamāl* (Garland of *Bhakta*s), the king Jaisingh II of Jaipur (r. 1699–1743), the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), the Irish linguist Sir George Abraham Grierson (1851–1941), and the Hindi scholar Hazārīprasād Dvivedī (1907–1979)—were involved in the creation of this "idea of the *bhakti* movement."

Yet it is also important to acknowledge (as Hawley does in detail in the final chapter of *A Storm of Songs*) that there are several shared images, tropes, motifs, themes, and stories in premodern *bhakti* compositions in regional languages from nearly every corner of South Asia. Take, for instance, the poetry of Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās. While Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās are both Vaiṣṇavas (devotees of Viṣṇu and his various forms), these *bhakti* poets are separated by hundreds of centuries and miles. Periyāḻvār is one of the twelve Tamil poets known as the Āḻvārs (those who are "immersed" in Viṣṇu) who likely lived between the sixth and ninth centuries. By the twelfth century, the collected poems of the Āḻvārs known as the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* (Four Thousand Divine Works) was a paramount scripture for followers of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious tradition in South India. Although the Vallabha *sampradāya* (community) in the northern and western regions of India claim the sixteenth-century Bhasha poet Sūrdās as one of their own, there is no evidence that he was a follower of Vallabha in any of the poems contained within the huge corpus of poems attributed to him known as the *Sūrsagar* (Ocean of Sūrdās).[54]

Yet as Hawley has observed, the compositions of Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās share much in common: "seven hundred years before Sūr Dās and a thousand miles away, is a remarkably comprehensive presentation of the thievish mischief of Krishna that was so to fascinate the poet of Braj…Periyāḻvār highlights the sharp give-and-take between Yaśodā and the girls of Braj that Sūr so loved."[55] Both Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās speak of multiple different forms of Viṣṇu, but these two *bhakti* poets clearly have a special fondness and preference for Krishna, specifically Krishna as a young child. Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās also both frequently adopt the persona of Krishna's adoptive mother Yaśodā and speak in her voice. Consider the first two verses of a set of ten verses in Periyāḻvār's *Tirumoḻi* (Divine Speech) in which Yaśodā calls out to the moon:

> A diadem dances on his brow as he crawls;
> Gold trinkets on his ankles tinkle in the dust.

[53] John Stratton Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8–9.

[54] See John Stratton Hawley, "Surdas" in John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 95.

[55] John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna, the Butter Thief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 42.

Lovely young moon, if the eyes in your face are real,
Come watch the frolicking of my son, Govinda.

My little fellow, as sweet as nectar to me,
My Lord waves his little hands, points to you and calls.
If you want to play with him – dark-hued as collyrium
Don't cower in the dark clouds, Moon. Come cheerfully; be quick![56]

We find a remarkably similar Bhasha poem attributed to Sūrdās in the *Sūrsagar*:

"Come here, Hari [Krishna], take hold of the moon,"
Yashoda says again and again.
"Look down a little, look down:
from the sky I brought it close and put it
in this water pitcher—quite some task.
Look Damodar, the nectar-bearing moon
is lying in this little dish!
All the way from the hard-to-reach heavens
it's come—I sent a bird to bring it here—
so whenever you like, let your lotus hands take it
and give it to whomever you wish.
Listen, my pretty son, is the moon the reason why
you've fallen into such a nasty mood?
Sur's Lord, my dear, how could such a trifling thing
make you act in such a trying way?"[57]

There are, of course, differences between these compositions by Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās, the most obvious being that in the verses in the *Tirumoḻi*, Yaśodā is addressing the moon and in the poem from the *Sūrsagar*, Yaśodā is speaking to Krishna. Yet in both works, Yaśodā is clearly using the moon to try and ensure the happiness of her beloved son Krishna. These excerpts are expressions of what sixteenth-century theologians who were members of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in North India would eventually call *vātsalya-bhāva* or the "emotional state of a parent."[58]

Examples of Yaśodā displaying *vātsalya-bhāva* are also found in one of the most famous works of *bhakti* literature: the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (Legend of Bhagavān, c. tenth century).[59] As Friedhelm Hardy has convincingly argued, the Āḻvārs' *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* was an important source of inspiration for the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which was likely composed in

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[56] Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 1.4.1–2, trans. Lynn Ate in *Yaśodā's Songs to Her Playful Son, Kṛṣṇa: Periyāḻvār's 9th Century Tamil Tirumoḻi,* trans. Lynn Ate (Woodland Hills, CA: South Asian Studies Association, 2011), 78. All references to poems in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* are to: *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, ed. P.P. Aṇṇaṅkarācāriyār (Kanchi: V.N. Tēvanātan, 1967).

[57] Sūrdās*, Sūrsagar* 81, trans. John Stratton Hawley in *Sur's Ocean: Poems from the Early Tradition,* trans. John Stratton Hawley, ed. Kenneth E. Bryant, Murty Classical Library of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) 35. All references to poems in the *Sūrsagar* are to this Murty Classical Library edition.

[58] For a detailed overview of *vātsalya-bhāva,* see Lynn Ate, "Periyāḻvār's Tirumoḻi: A Bālakṛṣṇa Text from the Devotional Period in Tamil Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978), 92–94.

[59] Ate, 89–92.

South India.[60] And while Hawley rejects the Vallabha *sampradāya*'s claim that Sūrdās was "translating" the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, he does show that Sūrdās "planned for a situation in which those who did know the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* thereby gained access to a deeper appreciation of the subtlety of his own compositions."[61] Could the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* be the link explaining these similar poems involving Krishna, Yaśodā, and the moon by Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās?

Not in this case. As Hawley points out in *A Storm of Songs*, "within the narrative world of Krishna, so fundamental to much that goes under the heading of the bhakti movement, we meet an array of particular connections that cannot be explained as vernacular transubstantiations of motifs that occur in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that admittedly omnipresent Sanskrit text, since they do not appear there."[62] Yaśodā trying to entice Krishna with the moon is one of these motifs. Hawley goes on to explain that this "moon-in-dish motif" of the poem in the *Sūrsagar* "apparently unknown in Sanskrit, corresponds closely to appeals to the moon that Tamil poets are required to make on behalf of mothers with small children as a part of the *piḷḷaitamiḻ* genre that became so fashionable in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. There are echoes in a Telugu poem attributed to Annamayya and we meet it in Gujarati with Narsī Mehtā as the author."[63]

Periyāḻvār, Sūrdās, Annamayya, and Narsī Mehtā are all Vaiṣṇava poets. But we also find shared themes in *bhakti* compositions by both Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas (devotees of the Hindu deity Śiva). As A.K. Ramanujan, Vijaya Ramaswamy, and S. Keshavmurthy have observed, multiple *bhakti* poetesses describe themselves as the brides of their chosen deity.[64] In her Tamil *Nācciyārtirumoḻi* (Divine Speech of Women), Āṇṭāḷ, the only woman among the twelve Āḻvārs, uses ten verses to describe a dream in which she weds Viṣṇu. In the second verse, she tells us:

> They decreed, "Tomorrow is the auspicious day of your wedding!"
> The proud young lion Mādhava,
> that Govinda of bull-like power entered the green canopy
> decorated with palm fronds and areca nut.
>
> Such a vision I dreamed, my friend.[65]

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[60] Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 511–26.

[61] John Stratton Hawley, introduction to Sūrdās, *The Memory of Love: Sūrdās Sings to Krishna*, trans. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15.

[62] Hawley, *Storm of Songs*, 300.

[63] Hawley, 301.

[64] A.K. Ramanujan, "On Women Saints," in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 322; Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Rebels — Conformists? Women Saints in Medieval South India," *Anthropos* 879, no. 1/3 (1992): 140–41; and S. Keshavmurthy, *Mīrābāī, Akkamahādevī, evaṃ, Āṇḍāl kā Tulanātmaka Adhyayan* (Kanpur: Annapūrṇā Prakāśan, 1996), 227–30.

[65] Āṇṭāḷ, *Nācciyārtirumoḻi* 6.2, trans. Archana Venkatesan in *The Secret Garland: Āṇṭāḷ's Tiruppāvai and Nācciyār Tirumoḻi,* trans. Archana Venkatesan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163.

Mahādevīyakkā, another female *bhakti* poet from South India, also speaks of herself as the bride of a Hindu god in her twelfth-century Kannada compositions which became part of the literary cannon of the Vīraśaiva community in Karnataka. Yet while Āṇṭāḷ's divine husband is Viṣṇu, Mahādevīyakkā's celestial spouse is Śiva in his form as Mallikārjuna or the "lord white as jasmine." In the second half of the following poem, Mahādevīyakkā announces:

> My mind is my maid:
> by her kindness, I join
> my Lord,
> my utterly beautiful Lord
> from the mountain-peaks,
> my lord white as jasmine,
> and I will make Him
> my good husband.[66]

A third example of a poetess calling herself the bride of a deity is found in this Bhasha poem attributed to the Krishna *bhakta* Mīrābāī that mirrors the verse from Āṇṭāḷ's *Nācciyārtirumoḻi*:

> *Sister, in a dream*
> *I married the Protector of the Poor*.
> Five hundred sixty million strong the wedding party,
> The beautiful Lord of Braj, the groom.
> In a dream, the wedding arch was raised,
> In a dream, He grasped my hand.
> In a dream, my wedding came to pass,
> Making me ever the auspicious bride.
> Mira obtained the Mountain Bearer—
> Her destiny of lives gone by.[67]

The *bhakti* songs of Āṇṭāḷ, Mahādevīyakkā, and Mīrābāī emerge from very different historical, regional, and sectarian contexts. Their similar themes and motifs, however, are striking.

In the final chapter of *A Storm of Songs*, Hawley identifies several other shared elements that are found in works of *bhakti* from across premodern South Asia. Commenting on the prevalence of *bhakti* poems about *viraha* or "love in separation," he notes that "perhaps the idea of a broken heart is so universal that it attracts no particular attention, but the fact that a male poet takes on the voice of a woman to ask specifically why his heart does not burst is more arresting. This happens in poems of Narsī Mehtā or Sūrdās, for example."[68] Hawley adds that "all around India" *bhaktas* "revel in the fact that they are 'number one among idiots,' as Annamayya says, or 'best of sinners,' as Sūrdās boasts. Similarly, in the genre known as *nindāstuti* they go on to lambast the Deity for failing to rescue them, as would be required if he

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[66] Mahādevīyakkā, *vacana* 328, trans. A.K. Ramanujan in *Speaking of Śiva* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), 141.

[67] Mīrābāī, *pada* 8, trans. Nancy M. Martin in "Rajasthan: Mirabai and her Poetry," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook,* ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249–50.

[68] Hawley, *Storm of Songs*, 300.

were faithful to the many names by which he is touted as Savior of the Fallen."[69] Hawley proceeds to describe multiple other connections and resonances within the wide world of premodern *bhakti* poetry in the Indian subcontinent which he aptly describes as "a crazy quilt."[70]

As Hamsa Stainton has recently pointed out, "overall, the study of *bhakti* in vernacular contexts—both as a phenomenon and as an historiographical category—has been one of the most dynamic and productive areas of scholarship on South Asian religions."[71] Yet as Stainton goes on to note (and then remedy with the rest of his monograph), *bhakti* scholarship has largely ignored the key role that Sanskrit played as a language of *bhakti* in premodern South Asia. Another major gap in scholarship on *bhakti* poetry is the lack of comparative studies of *bhakti* compositions in different regional South Asian languages. Apart from the aforementioned studies and two symposiums organized by the Regional Bhakti Scholars Network in 2016 and 2017 at the Annual Conference on South Asia, there have been very few attempts to compare the different patches and threads that make up the "crazy quilt" of *bhakti* that Hawley describes.[72]

In his work on Jain *bhakti*, John Cort asserts that "bhakti is not restricted to what scholars say it is; rather it is primarily what bhaktas have said it is, and these bhaktas include Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śāktas, Sants, Jains, Buddhists, and others. We then find that bhakti is a highly complex, multiform cultural category, which is differently understood and practiced in different times, places, and sects…bhakti is not one thing."[73] Similarly, Jon Keune argues that "the term [*bhakti*] has taken on a deceptive aura of familiarity, although its precise definition is vitally rooted in the contexts in which it is used. These contexts (inflected by language, tradition, social location, and historical period) differ significantly from one another and exhibit a wide range of socio-political dynamics."[74] Keune goes to warn us that "deploying a singular notion of bhakti on early modern history over-determines the subject, brushing over complexities and exceptions."[75]

Cort and Keune make excellent points about the importance of situating works of *bhakti* literature in their unique historical, sectarian, and regional contexts and I take care to do this with the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in this project. To further refine my comparative study of these two Mahābhāratas, I also need to clarify the type of *bhakti* that I am referring to when I use this term in my dissertation since, as Cort points out, "bhakti is not one thing."

I would categorize the *bhakti* of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* as what Hardy has called "emotional *bhakti*." In his influential *Viraha-Bhakti: The*

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[69] Hawley, 301.

[70] Hawley, 310.

[71] Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14–15.

[72] See Gil Ben-Herut and Jon Keune, "Workshops and Symposia," Regional Bhakti Scholars Network, https://www.regionalbhakti.org/workshops-and-symposia/.

[73] John E. Cort, "Bhakti in the Early Jain Tradition: Understanding Devotional Religion in South Asia," *History of Religions* 42, no.1 (2002): 62.

[74] Jon Keune, "Eknāth in Context: The Literary, Social, and Political Milieus of an Early Modern Saint-Poet," *South Asian History and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2015): 71.

[75] Keune, 71.

Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India (1983), Hardy distinguishes the philosophical, "intellectual *bhakti*" of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* from the deeply personal, "emotional *bhakti*" that pervades the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* (particularly the poems of Nammāḻvār, the most famous Āḻvār) and the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, as well as the regional compositions of Nāmdev in Marathi, Vidyāpati in Maithili, and Sūrdās, Mīrābāī, and Bihārīlāl in Bhasha.[76] Emotional *bhakti* is usually considered to be Vaiṣṇava phenomenon. Yet while Hardy traces the first instances of emotional *bhakti* to the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, Tracy Coleman argues that emotional *bhakti* "is found in Sanskrit and Pāli literature much earlier than the Āḻvārs" and that "it originates in the heterodox traditions of Buddhism and Jainism."[77] Jason Schwartz and Anne Monius have also identified multiple instances of emotional *bhakti* in Śaiva works that are likely as old or older than some of the poems in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, such as the Tamil corpus of the seventh-century Śiva devotee Appar and the eighth-century Sanskrit *Śivadharmottara* (Highest *Dharma* of Śiva).[78] But while the specific origins of emotional *bhakti* may be unclear, this term is an accurate descriptor for the *bhakti* of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* as well as other devotional texts that I discuss in this dissertation including the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Cēkkilār's twelfth-century Tamil *Periyapurāṇam* (Great Legend), and Tulsīdās's sixteenth-century Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas* (Lake of the Deeds of Rāma).

Let me also be clear that I understand *bhakti* to be a literary mode, rather than a literary genre. In his seminal *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (1987), Norman Cutler describes the Tamil poems of four of the Āḻvārs (Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār, Pēyāḻvār, and Nammāḻvār) and two prominent Śaiva poets (Kāraikkālammaiyār and Māṇikkavācakar) as members of a literary genre comparable to Sanskrit *stotra*s or Vedic hymns.[79] Along with describing these early Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva compositions as "generically unified," Cutler claims that "in order to apprehend the parameters that define bhakti poetry as a viable literary genre in Tamil, one must be prepared to think about literary form not just in terms of rhyme and meter but also as a structure of communication between author and audience."[80]

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[76] Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 36–38 and 557.

[77] Tracy Coleman, "Dharma, Yoga, and Viraha-Bhakti in Buddhacarita and Kṛṣṇacarita," in *The Archaeology of Bhakti I: Mathurā and Maturai, Back and Forth*, ed. Emmanuel Francis and Charlotte Schmid (Pondicherry: Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2014), 58.

It should be noted, however, that while Coleman calls Hardy's argument about emotional *bhakti* "unconvincing," she herself states that "I do not know Tamil, and therefore cannot evaluate all of Hardy's evidence" (35n7).

[78] Jason Schwartz, "Caught in the Net of *Śāstra*: Devotion and its Limits in an Evolving Śaiva Corpus," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 5, no. 2 (2012): 214–16; and Anne E. Monius, "Gesture and Emotion in Tamil Śaiva Devotional Poetry," in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Emotions in Classical Indian Philosophy,* ed. Maria Heim, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Roy Tzohar (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 173–87.

[79] Norman J. Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 6.

Yet while Cutler treats Tamil *bhakti* poems and Sanskrit *stotras* as separate genres, Stainton argues that "Sanskrit *stotra*s implicitly and explicitly showcase a multitude of perspectives on *bhakti*" (*Poetry as Prayer*, 291).

[80] Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 6.

While Cutler's arguments accurately describe many of the Tamil *bhakti* poems that were composed between the sixth and ninth centuries by both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva poets in South India, I suggest that it is more productive to think of *bhakti* as what John Frow calls a "mode." Frow defines "*mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification or 'coloring' of genre" and "*genre* or kind [as] a more specific organization of texts with thematic, rhetorical, and formal dimensions."[81] There are many different genres that adopt a *bhakti* mode. Across South Asia, we find short lyrical *bhakti* poems known as *pad*s/*pada*s/*padam*s/*abhang*s in Bhasha, Bengali, Maithili, Gujarati, Telugu, and Marathi. While the earliest known example of the Tamil genre known as the *kōvai* or "garland," the eighth-century *Pāṇṭikkōvai* (Pandya *Kōvai*), is in praise of a king, two subsequent *kōvai*s—Māṇikkavācakar's ninth-century *Tirukkōvaiyār* (Divine *Kōvai*) and Tirukkurukaipperumāḷ Kavirāyar's sixteenth-century *Tiruppatikkōvai* (Tirupati *Kōvai*)—are *bhakti* compositions dedicated to Śiva and Nammāḻvār respectively.

Both the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the Tamil *Periyapurāṇam* are composed in the style of a *mahākāvya* (Tamil: *peruṅkāppiyam*), an ornate multi-chapter narrative text replete with poetic figuration. Edwin Bryant notes that the tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* "fulfils the requirements" of the *mahākāvya* genre "as outlined in the fourteenth-century Sanskrit literary treatise, the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*" and Monius explains that the *Periyapurāṇam* is a *peruṅkāppiyam* "at the level of form, of poetic structure, and narrative framework."[82] Most of the scholarship on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Periyapurāṇam*, however, has focused on their devotional content and ignored their identities as *mahākāvya*s. This is likely due to the common definition of *mahākāvya*s as "court epics" and the pervasive notion in the study of premodern South Asia that courtly literature and devotional literature were on two parallel yet separate trajectories.[83]

Bridging the Court/Temple Divide

As Anne Monius points out, "often in contemporary scholarship" on premodern South Asian literature "the study of the courtly and the political proceeds independently of the religious, and vice versa." Monius describes this dichotomy between premodern courtly/political texts and devotional/religious texts in South Asian Studies as the "court/temple divide."[84]

The court/temple divide in the study of Bhasha literature can be traced back to the colonial period. In his highly influential *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (History of Hindi Literature, first published in 1929), Rāmcandra Śukla presents readers with a *kāl vibhāg* (periodization) scheme that defines a period of history based on what was supposedly the main type of Bhasha literature produced during the period.[85] I will discuss this *kāl vibhāg* system in greater detail in Chapter

[81] John Frow, *Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 67.

[82] Edwin F. Bryant, introduction to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (*Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God; Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)*, trans. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), lix; and Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 139.

[83] Just take the following monograph titles: David Smith, *Ratnākara's Haravijaya: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Court Epic* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Indira Viswanathan Peterson *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic: The Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

[84] Anne E. Monius, "Rethinking Medieval Hindu Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hindu Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[85] Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās,* 2.

Six, but for now, it is important to note that Śukla describes the years from 1318 to 1643 CE as the "*bhakti* period" and the years from 1643 to 1843 CE as the "*rīti* period." While the category of *rīti* is most often used to refer to Bhasha compositions about or infused with the principles of *alaṅkāraśāstra* (the rhetoric of poetic figuration), the word *rīti* has also been used to refer to any Bhasha text that claims to have been composed in a courtly context. Allison Busch, for instance, states that "the term '*rīti* literature' designates a diverse repertoire of courtly genres including elaborate praise addressed to royalty, political narratives, historical poems, lyrical styles, as well as a robust tradition of vernacular rhetoric."[86] Busch also explains that "the idea is only nascent in Shukla's work but a historiographical consensus grew out of it that religious literature of the *bhakti* era degenerated into a courtly style during the Mughal period."[87] Busch adds that the "bifurcation of *bhakti* and *rīti* literature" persists in both international and Indian scholarship and she remarks that "Western scholars' startling lack of interest in Hindi court literature may stem from a more insidious bias that puts religious questions at the heart of any study of Indian premodernity, reinforcing a long-enduring Orientalist topos of India as 'the spiritual East.'"[88]

Busch's concerns are also shared by Sheldon Pollock, especially in his pioneering work on vernacularization in South Asia between 1000 and 1500 CE. In his magnum opus*, The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (2006), Pollock pushes back against what he describes as the "unchallenged scholarly consensus" in South Asian Studies that "the religious movement now called devotionalism (*bhakti*) constituted the engine of the vernacular revolution."[89] Instead, Pollock argues that *rājya*, "the state of being, or function of, a king," and *kāvya* (*belles lettres*) were at the heart of vernacularization, an enterprise that took place strictly in courtly and royal settings.[90]

Mahābhārata retellings in regional languages play a critical role in Pollock's assertions about vernacularization in *The Language of the Gods*. Pollock describes the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* as "the single most important literary reflection on the problem of the political in southern Asian history and in some ways the deepest meditation in all antiquity on the desperate realities of political life."[91] He goes on to argue that "in vernacular narratives, the boundless universalizing Sanskrit tale was refitted onto the perceptible, traversable, indeed governable world of regional political practice."[92] According to Pollock, regional Mahābhāratas were literary representations of the political power of local courts. Pollock places great importance on the first work of literature (*ādikāvya*) of multiple South Asian literary cultures—such as Pampa's Kannada *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Nannaya's part of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu*, and Viṣṇudās's

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[86] Allison Busch, "Poetry in Motion: Literary Circulation in Mughal India," in *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Boston: Brill, 2014), 188.

[87] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 12.

[88] Busch, 12–13.

[89] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 28 and 423.

[90] Pollock, 6.

[91] Pollock, 18

[92] Pollock, 397.

Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit*[93]—being Mahābhāratas that proclaim to have been composed in courtly contexts.[94] Pollock calls Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Ranna's Kannada *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, and Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* "double narratives" because they all explicitly compare the poet's supposed royal patron with one of the five Pāṇḍava heroes (the Pāṇḍava warrior Arjuna in Pampa's poem and Bhīma in Ranna's and Viṣṇudās's compositions).[95]

Pollock also argues that "religion was largely irrelevant to the origins of South Asian vernacularization" because "vernacularization was a courtly project, and the court itself, as a functioning political institution, was largely unconcerned with religious differences."[96] Although Pampa and Ranna are Jain, Pollock claims that "early Kannada literature often has little or nothing to do with Jainism as such."[97] He states that "the oeuvre of Viṣṇudās evinces no particular concern with *bhakti*" and that "if any echo of *bhakti* can be said to be present, it is remarkably muted."[98] Pollock adds that the "process of vernacularization" in South India that produced Nannaya's *Mahābhāratamu* was "entirely untouched by religious concerns."[99]

Pollock's characterization of Mahābhāratas in regional languages in *The Language of the Gods* has been used by multiple other scholars in the past five years. In her study of the Persian *Razmnāmah*, Audrey Truschke repeatedly draws on Pollock's claims about the Mahābhārata tradition,[100] and she argues that the Mughals saw "immense politico-cultural potential in the *Mahābhārata* and through the text expressed themselves as an Indian dynasty."[101] Pollock's arguments about regional Mahābhāratas have also been utilized by Cynthia Talbot in her work on Cand Baradāī's *Pṛthvīrājrāso* (Story of Pṛthvīrāj), a Bhasha poem that was earlier believed to be a first-hand account of the life of the twelfth-century Rajput king Pṛthvīrāj Cauhān, but scholars now generally date to the late sixteenth century. Talbot introduces the *Pṛthvīrājrāso* as "an elite regional epic: an epic that was primarily meaningful for the political elite [Rajputs] of a

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[93] While Pollock describes Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* as the *ādikāvya* of Bhasha literature, multiple Hindi scholars have convincingly argued that Maulānā Dāūd's Sufi romance poem, the *Cāndāyan* (1379), is the *ādikāvya* of Bhasha literature. Although Pollock mentions the *Cāndāyan,* he does not entertain the possibility that this narrative poem could be Bhasha's *ādikāvya*, likely due to the overtly Sufi message of the text. See McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 26; Allison Busch, "Hindi Literary Beginnings," in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Whitney Cox, Yigal Bronner, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011), 208; Williams, "Sacred Sounds and Sacred Books," 84; and Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 393.

[94] Pollock, 356–63, 381, and 394–95.

[95] Pollock, 360, 363, and 395.

[96] Pollock, 429 and 430.

[97] Pollock, 426.

[98] Pollock, 429.

In Chapter Four, however, I will discuss an episode of Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* involving the divine monkey Hanumān that Viṣṇudās clearly presents as a *bhakti* tableau.

[99] Pollock, 429.

[100] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 104 and 140.

[101] Truschke, 140.

single region [Rajasthan] of early modern India."[102] Along with pointing out how this Bhasha text frequently makes direct references to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Talbot also observes that as with the epic attributed to Vyāsa, Cand Baradāī's *Pṛthvīrājrāso* is narrated by a character who claims to have "participated in many of the events he recorded" and ends "with a holocaust (and thus on a dark, ambivalent note)."[103] Building on Pollock's assertions, Talbot then states that "like a vernacular Mahābhārata," the *Pṛthvīrājrāso* "re-inscribed a regional world so as to give it classical epic proportions, at least in its significance for the region's inhabitants."[104] In her recent study of the *Mahābhāratamu*, Harshita Mruthinti Kamath references Pollock throughout her essay,[105] and demonstrates how this Telugu poem's "elastic relationship with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, provide us with a fruitful starting point for thinking through the complexities of the literary-cultural transformations of the vernacular world in premodern South India."[106]

Pollock's impressive and in-depth work on the vernacularization of South Asia offers the only theoretical study of premodern Mahābhārata retellings in regional languages. Some of his sweeping generalizations about the earliest regional Mahābhāratas all being non-religious, courtly expressions of political power, however, do present some concerns. As I noted earlier, Pollock's analysis of the Kannada *Vikramārjunavijayam* and the Kannada *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* does not consider the Jain identities of their authors. Pampa and Ranna have been identified as members of the Digambara sect of the Jain religious tradition because Kannada poems about the first two great Jain preceptors or Jinas (Ādinātha and Ajitanātha) are attributed to these poets: Pampa's *Ādipurāṇam* and Ranna's *Ajitapurāṇam*. Pollock's view that these Kannada Mahābhāratas have "nothing to do with Jainism" is also shared by Sarah Pierce Taylor who asserts that "by refusing to Jainize the *Mahābhārata*, Pampa stands out from other Jain authors who typically did not write outside the boundaries of Jainism even when it came to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*."[107] Taylor adds that "Pampa made it acceptable—or even unremarkable—for later Jain authors like Ranna to draw on non-Jain narratives."[108]

At first glance, the narratives of the *Vikramārjunavijayam* and the *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* do indeed seem very different from the earliest Jain Mahābhārata, Jinasena Punnāṭa's Sanskrit *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (Legend of Hari's Lineage, ca. 783) in which, as Eva De Clercq notes, the Kauravas survive the battle with the Pāṇḍavas and "all renounce the material world to go and live as ascetics."[109] Other Kannada scholars, however, have discerned some elements of both

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[102] Cynthia Talbot, *The Last Hindu Emperor: Prithviraj Chauhan and the Indian Past, 1200–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 108.

[103] Talbot, 138.

[104] Talbot, 145.

[105] Kamath, "Three Poets," 192–93, 196, 197, and 210.

[106] Kamath, 210.

[107] Pierce Taylor, "Digambara Jainism and Old Kannada."

[108] Pierce Taylor, "Digambara Jainism and Old Kannada."

[109] Eva De Clercq, "The Jaina *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata* Tradition- A Preliminary Survey," in *Parallels and Comparisons: Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Puranas, September 2005*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2009), 404.

Pampa's and Ranna's Mahābhāratas that align with the key principles of asceticism and non-violence in the Jain tradition. Kambalur Venkatesa Acharya points out that, as in Jinasena Punnāṭa's *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, in Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam* Draupadī is only married to Arjuna and not all five of the Pāṇḍavas as in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and several other retellings.[110] Jonathan Geen explains that Mahābhāratas produced by Digambara Jains "insist that Draupadī married Arjuna alone, and that the rumour of her marriage to five men must be considered absurd, scandalous, and unequivocally false."[111] D.R. Nagaraj notes that Ranna's "spiritual propensity to doubt and distrust violence led him to elevate the status of [the Kaurava leader] Duryodhana" and that since Krishna "cannot be accepted as a god by Jains," Pampa "transforms the religious associations into purely aesthetic ones."[112] Similarly, Ammel Sharon and R.V.S. Sundaram observe that both "Pampa and Ranna give little place" to Krishna in their poems.[113] And Timothy Lorndale has recently shown that "in these Kannada texts, Duryodhana regularly treats Kṛṣṇa as a 'demoted' or 'degraded' form of god, rather than the real thing."[114] This scholarship on Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam* and Ranna's *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* calls into question whether these Kannada Mahābhāratas are completely devoid of Jain ethics.

Pollock also largely ignores the earliest Mahābhārata in a regional South Asian language: Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century Tamil *Pārataveṇpā*. In his discussion of the tenth-century Kannada Mahābhārata of Pampa, Pollock asserts that "Pampa conceived of his *Vikramārjunavijayam* as the first 'complete' vernacular version of the *Mahābhārata*" before mentioning that "a version of the Sanskrit epic had been written in Tamil at the court of a Pallava king a century earlier, though we have it only in fragmentary form and it may never in fact have been completed."[115] In a footnote, Pollock then identifies this Tamil retelling as the *Pārataveṇpā*, but he also says that "the Tamil tradition is confusing."[116] Twenty-six pages later, Pollock admits that Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā* "can be placed at the Pallava court of Nandivarman III in the mid-ninth century, which would make it the first vernacularization of the epic in South Asia" yet he does not offer

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[110] Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations,* 258–59.

[111] Jonathan Geen "The Marriage of Draupadī in the Hindu and Jaina Mahābhārata," (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2001), 173.

[112] D.R. Nagaraj, "Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 346 and 345.

[113] R.V.S. Sundaram and Ammel Sharon, introduction to Ranna, *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* (*Gadāyuddham: The Duel of the Maces*), trans. R.V.S. Sundaram and Ammel Sharon, ed. Akkamahadevi (Delhi: Manohar Books, 2018), xii.

[114] Timothy Lorndale, "Avatāras, Goddesses, and Kauravas: Reading the Old Kannada *Sauptikaparvan* as an Alternative Ending to the *Mahābhārata*," *Journal of Hindu Studies,* advance online publication (June 2021): 7.

[115] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 358.

[116] Pollock, 358n63.

Pollock's treatment of Tamil literature in this monograph is quite perplexing. In the beginning of the book, he discusses Tamil and Persian alongside three "cosmopolitan," transregional languages: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha (26). Later on, however, Pollock seems to treat Tamil as a "vernacular" language with a historical trajectory similar to Kannada or Telugu and he dismissively describes the history of Tamil as "complicated" (100), "uncommonly obscure" (292), "historiographically convoluted" (304), and "complex and contested" (383).

any more information about this Tamil retelling.[117] Pollock's choice to exclude the *Pārataveṇpā* from his discussion of regional Mahābhārata retellings might be because we only have access to three out of a possible eighteen books of this text, but it might also be because Peruntēvaṉār's work is filled with *bhakti*. As I will show in much greater detail in Chapter Three, Peruntēvaṉār's Tamil *Pārataveṇpā* is a distinctly Śrīvaiṣṇava poem centered on Viṣṇu.

In the final paragraphs of his discussion of "epic vernacularization," Pollock tells us that to the list of the "vernacular epics" of Pampa, Ranna, Nannaya, and Viṣṇudās "could be added a wide array of others" including the Mahābhāratas of Haribar Bipra (c. fourteenth century) in Assamese and Sāraḷādāsa in Oriya (c. fifteenth century).[118] Neither of these poets from the eastern region of South Asia, however, fit neatly into Pollock's argument about vernacularization in South Asia being a non-religious, courtly process. Haribar Bipra is thought to have been patronized by the Chutiya king Durlabhanārāyaṇa.[119] His three Mahābhārata poems, however, the *Babhruvāhanar Yuddha* (Battle with Babhruvāhana), the *Lavakuśar Yuddha* (Battle with Lava and Kuśa), and the *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* (Battle with Tāmradhvaja), are all retellings of episodes from the Sanskrit *Jaiminibhārata*, a Mahābhārata that Petteri Koskikallio and Christophe Vielle describe as having "an explicit tendency towards Kṛṣṇa-bhakti."[120] Satyendra Nath Sarma points out that the *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* tells "the story of Mayūradhvaja, an ardent devotee of Kṛṣṇa and his heroic son Tāmradhvaja… the poet depicts the ardent devotion of Mayūradhvaja to Kṛṣṇa and his steadfastness to truth in the face of serious misfortune."[121]

Meanwhile, Sāraḷādāsa does not make any courtly patronage claims in his Oriya *Mahābhārata* and William Smith notes that "by his own account he was a farmer and was ploughing a field when commanded by the goddess [Śāraḷā] to render the *Mahābhārata* into Oriya."[122] B.N. Patnaik observes that throughout his retelling, Sāraḷādāsa describes his poem as the *purāṇa* of Biṣṇu or the "legend of Viṣṇu."[123] Bijoy Misra adds that the linking of the local deity "Jagannatha of Puri and Krishna of Dvaraka is thought to have originated" in Sāraḷādāsa's retelling and that this text has made the city of Puri "a prime center of the Vaishnava faith."[124]

Although several of the earliest regional Mahābhāratas that were composed before the end of what Pollock calls the "vernacular millennium" in 1500 CE—such as the retellings of Peruntēvaṉār, Pampa, Nannaya, Viṣṇudās, and Haribar Bipra—are associated with courtly patrons, this is not the case for the *ādikavi* or "first poet" of Oriya literature, Sāraḷādāsa.

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[117] Pollock, 384.

[118] Pollock, 396.

[119] See Maheswar Neog*, Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam: Śaṅkaradeva and His Times* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 40.

[120] Petteri Koskikallio and Christophe Vielle, "Epic and Puranic Texts Attributed to Jaimini," *Indologica Taurinensia* 27 (2001): 67.

[121] Satyendra Nath Sarma, *Assamese Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), 48.

[122] Smith "Burden of the Forest," 93.

[123] Anand Mahanand and B.N. Patnaik, "A Conversation with Professor B.N. Patnaik," *Lokaratna* 5/6 (2013): 4.

[124] Bijoy M. Misra, "Orissa: Shri Krishna Jagannatha; The *Mushali-parva* from Sarala's *Mahabharata*," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook*, ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 141 and 142.

Moreover, the premodern regional Mahābhārata retellings of Peruntēvaṉār, Haribar Bipra, and Sāraḷādāsa are all imbued with elements from local Vaiṣṇava traditions. Finally, the Tamil *Pārataveṇpā* and the Assamese *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* are clearly linked to both courtly and religious milieus. In this dissertation, I will show in detail how both Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* (like Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā* and Haribar Bipra's *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha*) have a distinct overlapping of courtly and devotional concerns.

In the past ten years, there have been a number of studies that challenge the court/temple divide in South Asian Studies. Sarah Pierce Taylor's dissertation offers a close examination of Pampa's Kannada *Ādipurāṇam* (Legend of Ādinātha), a text that Pollock only mentions in two footnotes in *The Language of the Gods*.[125] Taylor argues that Pampa's narration of the life of Ādinātha, the first of the Jinas in the Jain tradition, "proposes a connection between erotic love and religious devotion mediated through the figure of the king and the site of the court."[126] In his monograph on the two earliest works of Marathi literature, Cakradhār's *Līḷācarita* (c. 1278) and Jñāndev's *Jñāneśvarī* (c. 1290), Christian Novetzke states that he shares Pollock's "concern that 'religion,' and in particular *bhakti* or 'devotionalism,' too often functions as the epistemological limit point for all non-Western and premodern cultural context."[127] But Novetzke also complicates Pollock's vernacularization model in his book and tells us that "where Pollock examines power configured by courts, I examine power configured by publics outside (though not exclusive of) the royal court, which, in the Marathi case, involves the field of religion."[128]

Srinivas Reddy and Heidi Pauwels have both drawn attention to royal figures who composed works of *bhakti* in courtly settings. Reddy's dissertation introduces readers to the sixteenth-century Telugu *Āmuktamālyada* (Giver of the Worn Garland) of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509–1529), one of the most famous rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire. Reddy explains that this *mahākāvya* about the life of the Tamil *bhakti* poetess Āṇṭāḷ "stands out as a landmark in Telugu literary history, not only for its poetic beauty, but also because of the unique religious and political themes embedded within its central narrative."[129] Pauwels describes her monograph on the Bhasha compositions of Prince Sāvantsingh of Kishangarh (1694–1764) as a book "about movements between temples and courts, about the interconnections between the religious and the political in early modern India."[130] Pauwels demonstrates that works attributed to the poet-prince Sāvantsingh, also known by the pen name Nāgarīdās, have a distinctly Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* ethos.

Yet while each of these studies dismantle the court/temple divide in South Asian Studies, they all focus on examples from a single regional literary culture. In the spirt of Pollock's work on the vernacularization of premodern India and Ronit Ricci's study of the circulation of an Islamic narrative across South and Southeast Asia, this dissertation project goes beyond regional

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[125] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 340n18 and 426n96.

[126] Sarah Pierce Taylor, "The Aesthetics of Sovereignty: The Poetic and Material Worlds of Medieval Jainism," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2016), 240.

[127] Novetzke, *Quotidian Revolution*, 17.

[128] Novetzke, 7.

[129] Srinivas G. Reddy, "The *Āmuktamālyada* of Kṛṣṇadevarāya: Language, Power & Devotion in Sixteenth-Century South India," (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 1.

[130] Heidi R.M. Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World: The Writings of Prince Sāvant Singh of Kishangarh* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 8.

exceptionalism. My study of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* suggests that these two regional Mahābhārata retellings were part of a premodern pan-South Asian development in which courtly and devotional literary cultures were closely linked.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One provides readers with necessary background information about the epic and *bhakti* settings of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. As I noted earlier, at the start of each of their Mahābhāratas both Villi and Cauhān praise Vyāsa and describe themselves narrating the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in regional languages. Yet Villi and Cauhān also both go on to classify their retellings as *kṛṣṇacarita*s or works that relate "the deeds of Krishna." Although the divine Krishna does play a vital role in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* as the Pāṇḍavas' most trusted advisor and the bestower of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Krishna's deeds are by no means the primary focus of the Sanskrit epic. Chapter One begins with an account of the rather perplexing depiction of Krishna in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* to lay the foundation for my analysis of Krishna's character in the *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat* in Chapter Two. Next, I turn to a brief discussion of how two intellectuals writing in Sanskrit—the ninth-century Kashmiri literary theoretician Ānandavardhana and the thirteenth-century South Indian Vaiṣṇava philosopher Madhva—each assert that Krishna is the most important figure in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

Given that I describe the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* as *bhakti* narrative poems throughout my dissertation, the remainder of Chapter One offers a theorization of *bhakti* narrative poems. With examples from devotional texts from both Villi's and Cauhān's literary cultures (Cēkkilār's Tamil *Periyapurāṇam* and Tulsīdās's Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*) and one of the most influential works of Vaiṣṇava poetry in South Asia (the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*), I identify four shared features of *bhakti* narrative poems: (1) the eminence of "all along" devotees, (2) the frequency of devotees singing hymns in praise of the main deity, (3) the depiction of the main deity as a god who greatly cares about his devotees, and (4) the way in which the main deity pervades the entire text even when he is not physically present in the narrative.

In Chapter Two, I examine the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* side-by-side and reveal the shared narrative strategies that Villi and Cauhān use to reframe the tale of the war between the two factions of the Bhārata dynasty into a *bhakti* narrative poem focused on the deeds of Krishna. I demonstrate in this chapter how all four of the shared features of *bhakti* narrative poems that I discussed in Chapter One are utilized by Villi and Cauhān throughout their retellings by performing close readings of four excerpts from both texts: (1) the introduction of Krishna, (2) the prayer Draupadī delivers to Krishna during her attempted disrobing, (3) the entire fifth book (the *Book of Effort*), and (4) the departure of Krishna at the end of the story.

Chapters Three and Four investigate how Villi and Cauhān each anchor their Mahābhāratas in specific regional Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* literary cultures that speak to local audiences. Chapter Three focuses on the different invocations to Krishna and other forms of this deity that are the opening verses of thirty-seven of the fifty total chapters of the Tamil *Pāratam*. I contend that these invocations mark Villi's retelling as a poem that is grounded in the literary corpus and traditions of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community in South India in four different ways: (1) they alert audiences that the *Pāratam* is a Śrīvaiṣṇava example of the *peruṅkāppiyam*/*mahākāvya* genre, (2) they place this text in the lineage of Peruntēvaṉār's earlier Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamil Mahābhārata retelling, (3) they position Villi's poem in a markedly Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* context, and (4) they help transform the narrative of the epic into a distinctly Śrīvaiṣṇava *kṛṣṇacarita*.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the prevalence of allusions to the Rāmāyaṇa tradition throughout the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. I propose that the different Rāmāyaṇa references in this Mahābhārata retelling strongly suggest that Cauhān is a devotee of Rāma (a popular incarnation of Viṣṇu and the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa) and a connoisseur of the Rāma-centric Bhasha *bhakti* poetry of Tulsīdās. I show this by carefully examining three types of Rāmāyaṇa allusions in the *Mahābhārat*: (1) invocations to Rāma and other Rāmāyaṇa figures in the opening prologues of the different books of the Bhasha poem, (2) episodes in Cauhān's narrative in which Rāma's most beloved devotee*,* the divine monkey deity Hanumān, comes to the aid of Arjuna, and (3) passages in which Cauhān equates Krishna with his earlier incarnation of Rāma.

The final two chapters turn to the intersections of devotional and courtly spheres in Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. Drawing on the work of the intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra, I suggest that the multiple references to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the *Pāratam* and to Mitrasen and Aurangzeb in the *Mahābhārat* might not be documenting historical patronage relationships. But while I question whether Villi and Cauhān were actually patronized by royal rulers, I also demonstrate that both poets are clearly placing their Mahābhāratas in courtly milieus. Chapter Five is about how Villi presents the *Pāratam* in the style of a genre of South Asian literature that is consistently associated with courtly and royal contexts: the *peruṅkāppiyam*/*mahākāvya*. I reveal how Villi claims the *peruṅkāppiyam* genre for the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community by closely analyzing: (1) the verses in praise of the king Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ that are in the introduction to the *Pāratam* that is attributed to Villi's son Varantaruvār and in the narrative of the poem itself, (2) the seventh chapter of the first book of the *Pāratam* in which Arjuna undertakes a type of a pilgrimage known as a *tīrthayātra*, and (3) the description of Krishna's arrival in the Pāṇḍavas' capital city of Indraprastha for the eldest Pāṇḍava Yudhiṣṭhira's royal consecration ceremony in the second book of this Mahābhārata, which Villi presents in the style of a Tamil genre known as the *ulā* or "procession."

As I noted earlier, in six of the eight dated opening prologues in the different books of his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Cauhān makes references to two different courtly patrons: a (presumably) Hindu king by the name of Mitrasen and the sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Chapter Six focuses on these eight dated prologues. I begin the chapter by reviewing earlier (primarily colonial-era) scholarship on the dated prologues of Cauhān's poem and discussing the assumptions that prominent Hindi scholars have had about the courtly context of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. I then analyze each of the eight dated prologues in detail. My close readings of these prologues reveal a deep intertwining of *bhakti* and courtly concerns in Cauhān's text. While Cauhān praises Mitrasen and Aurangzeb in six of the eight dated prologues, all eight of these prologues also contain eulogies to Vaiṣṇava deities and figures and/or references to auspicious festival associated with the worship of Krishna or Rāma. This chapter also considers the significance of Cauhān repeatedly extolling Aurangzeb—a Mughal ruler who is remembered in contemporary India as a Muslim tyrant who demolished Hindu temples and brutally persecuted non-Muslims—in this overtly devotional Mahābhārata retelling.

In the Conclusion, I discuss the main insights and implications of this comparative project and show how the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* are participating in larger patterns of retelling the Mahābhārata in both premodern and modern South Asia.

CHAPTER ONE

The Epic and *Bhakti* Settings

In her study of the aesthetics of suffering in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Emily Hudson explains that this ancient poem attributed to Vyāsa "is a story about a war, a brutal, fratricidal, apocalyptic war between two sets of cousins, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, who are fighting over the kingdom of the Bhāratas—hence the title of the epic, the *Mahābhārata* or 'The Great Story of the Bhāratas.'"[1] While the fifteenth-century Tamil *Pāratam* and the seventeenth-century Bhasha *Mahābhārat* share the same name as the Sanskrit epic, neither Villi nor Cauhān describe their retellings as the story of the violent war of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas in their prologues.

Instead, both Villi and Cauhān present their Mahābhāratas as the *carita* (deeds) of Krishna, an incarnation of Viṣṇu who is the Pāṇḍavas' maternal cousin and closest advisor.[2] Quoting Monier Monier-William's definition of *carita*, Philip Lutgendorf explains that:

> The Sanskrit word *carita* (from the verbal root *car*, "to move") is a perfect participle connoting "going, moving, course as of heavenly bodies," and by extension, "acts, deeds, adventures" …Yet *carit*[*a*] is not random movement but expresses the inherent qualities of the mover; in Sanskrit literature the word has been used in the titles of biographies of religious figures and idealized kings (e.g., the *Buddhacarita* of Asvaghosa; the *Harṣacarita* of Bana).[3]

In the author's own introduction (*ta̲rci̲rappuppāyiram*) to the *Pāratam*, Villi states:

> I do not perceive the excellence of the Bhārata in the great language (Sanskrit)
> praised by the foremost, great, hidden Vedas, the sages, the gods, and others.
> But I agree to utter this out of my desire for the *carita* of the eternal Mādhava,
> who appears intermittently in it.[4]

Similarly, in the beginning of the first chapter of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Cauhān proclaims:

> I cannot comprehend any of the mysteries of the *carita* of Hari,
> but I will summarize some of it in Bhasha and thus sing
> what was told by that great sage Vyāsa,
> knower of the *carita* of illustrious Bhagavān.[5]

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[1] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 10.

[2] I should point out that the names of Krishna that Villi and Cauhān use in their opening prologues (Mādhava, Hari, and Bhagavān) are all also associated with Viṣṇu.

[3] Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 19.

[4] *mu̲n̲n̲um māma̲rai mu̲n̲ivarum tēvarum pi̲rarum*
pa̲n̲n̲um mā mo̲li pāratam perumaiyum pārē̲n̲
ma̲n̲n̲um mātava̲n̲ caritamum iṭai iṭai va̲ḷaṅkum
e̲n̲n̲um ācaiyāl yā̲n̲um ītu iyamputa̲rku icaintē̲n̲ || *VP ta̲rci̲rappuppāyiram* 8 ||

[5] *hari caritra kou bheda na pāvahiṃ kai bhāṣā saṅkṣepa kachu gāvahiṃ*
mahā muni jo vyāsa bakhānā śrībhagavanta carita jina jānā || *CM* 1.2 ||

The term *kṛṣṇacarita* or the "deeds of Krishna" is usually used to describe the detailed narratives of Krishna's infancy, adolescence, and adulthood in three Sanskrit texts that were all likely composed during the first millennium of the common era: the *Harivaṃśa* (Lineage of Hari), the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (Legend of Viṣṇu), and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (Legend of Bhagavān). The *kṛṣṇacarita* designation could also easily be applied to later Sanskrit poems, such as the *Yādavābhyudaya* (Rise of the Yādavas) by the Śrīvaiṣṇava poet-philosopher Vedāntadeśika (traditional dates: 1268–1369 CE), as well as to compositions in regional languages like the Sufi poet Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī's Bhasha *Kanhāvat* (Story of Kānha, c.1540 CE).

Yet one poem that would rarely be described as a *kṛṣṇacarita* is the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. While the *Mahābhārata* "is generally accepted as the oldest text that features Krishna on any scale," the Sanskrit epic primarily focuses on the Pāṇḍavas, not their divine advisor.[6] In fact, multiple Mahābhārata retellings bear the name *Pāṇḍavacarita* (Deeds of the Pāṇḍavas), such as the Sanskrit *Pāṇḍavacarita* (1214 CE) by the Śvetāmbara Jain mendicant Devaprabhasūri and the Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit* (1435 CE) of Viṣṇudās.[7] How then does a poet retell the story of the catastrophic war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas as the *carita* of Krishna? How does a poet retell the Mahābhārata as a *bhakti* narrative poem?

Before answering these questions, we must first delve into the epic and *bhakti* settings of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. I begin with an overview of Krishna's character in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* to lay the groundwork for my analysis of the depictions of Krishna in the *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat* in Chapter Two. I then briefly discuss how two premodern intellectuals, Ānandavardhana and Madhva, argue that Krishna is the most important character in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Finally, with examples from the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Cēkkilār's Tamil *Periyapurāṇam*, and Tulsīdās's Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*, I outline four shared features of *bhakti* narrative poems: (1) the eminence of "all along" devotees, (2) the frequency of devotees singing hymns in praise of the main deity, (3) the depiction of the main deity as a god who greatly cares about his devotees, and (4) the way in which the main deity pervades the entire text even when he is not physically present in the narrative.

Krishna in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*

Multiple scholars of Vaiṣṇava literature have pointed out that there are two very different forms of the Hindu deity Krishna.[8] The form of Krishna that is worshiped throughout South Asia is the young lovable cowherd of Vrindavan (Vṛndāvana) whose story is told in narrative texts like the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa,* as well as in the regional *bhakti* compositions of poets such as Periyāḻvār in Tamil, Eknāth in Marathi, Narsī Mehtā in Gujarati, Vidyāpati in Maithili, Caṇḍīdās in Bengali, and Sūrdās in Bhasha. The other Krishna is the

[6] Edwin F. Bryant, "Introduction," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook,* ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8. Bryant explains that there are earlier brief references to Krishna in Sanskrit texts composed before the common era, such as the *Chāndogyopaniṣad*, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, and the *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*.

[7] Commenting on the Jain Mahābhārata tradition, Eva De Clercq points out that "between the 13th and 17th century we find a tradition of texts called *Pāṇḍavacarita* or *-purāṇa*, composed by Digambaras as well as Śvetāmbaras from Gujarat and Rajasthan" ("Jaina *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata* Tradition," 413).

[8] For example, see Edwin F. Bryant, introduction to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (*Krishna: Beautiful Legend*), ix; Hawley, introduction to Sūrdās, *Memory of Love,* 3; Davis, *Bhagavad Gita: A Biography,* 43–44; and Christopher R. Austin, *Pradyumna: Lover, Magician, and Scion of the Avatāra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7.

enigmatic advisor of the Pāṇḍava princes from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[9] Popular mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik describes the first Krishna as an "adorable prankster with a butter-smeared face" and the second as "a shrewd strategist covered in blood." Pattanaik elaborates that:

> One is the winsome cowherd. The other a wise charioteer. One lives in the village, surrounded by cows, cowherds, and milkmaids. The other lives in the city, surrounded by horses, elephants, kings, and queens. One is admonished by his mother and seeks adventure. The other gives advice to friends and family and goes on missions. One submits to the demands of Radha and 16,100 gopis, a relationship bursting with clandestine eroticism. The other fulfils his husbandly obligations to his eight senior and 16,100 junior queens. One can be seen playing the flute on the banks of the Yamuna, surrounded by women dancing in joyous abandon. The other can be seen in the middle of Kurukshetra on a chariot, whip in hand, blowing the conch-shell war trumpet, surrounded by the dead bodies of hundreds and thousands of warriors. The two Krishnas could not be more different from each other.[10]

The Krishna of the *Mahābhārata* is a rather perplexing deity. Consider this passage by an unnamed critic that V.S. Sukthankar, the general editor of the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, quotes in his posthumously published work, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (1957):

> "A bizarre figure!" exclaims the critic. "A Yādava chieftain who looks and acts uncommonly like a mortal—and a very ordinary mortal at that—and who has the incredible effrontery to say that he is a god! A cynic who preaches the highest morality and stoops to practise the lowest tricks, in order to achieve his mean ends! An opportunist who teaches an honest and god-fearing man to tell a lie, the only lie he had told in his life![11] A charlatan who declares himself to be the god of gods, descended from the highest heaven for establishing righteousness on earth, and advises a hesitating archer to strike down a generous foe who is defenceless and is crying for mercy!"[12]

This unforgiving assessment of Krishna in the *Mahābhārata* reflects the opinions of several Euro-American Sanskrit scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these Sanskritists, such as E. Washburn Hopkins, Hermann Jacobi, Hermann Oldenberg, and Walter Ruben, were so baffled by Krishna's actions in the *Mahābhārata* that they believed that the earliest version of the Sanskrit epic was a Krishna-less narrative.[13] While Alf Hiltebeitel has since convincingly shown that "a Kṛṣṇaless epic gains absolutely no support from the Critical

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[9] This adult Krishna also plays an important role in the second half of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. See Robert P. Goldman, "A City of the Heart: Epic Mathurā and the Indian Imagination," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (1986): 480–83; and Neeraja Poddar, "Krishna in his Myriad Forms: Narration, Translation and Variation in Illustrated Manuscripts of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 20–26.

[10] Devdutt Pattanaik, "Butter or Blood," *First City Magazine*, December 2005, http://devdutt.com/articles/indian-mythology/butter-or-blood.html.

[11] This refers to Krishna encouraging Yudhiṣṭhira to lie to Droṇa about the death of Aśvatthāman (*MBh* 7.164).

[12] Sukthankar, *Meaning of Mahābhārata*, 95. The last sentence of this passage is a reference to Krishna convincing Arjuna to kill Karṇa when he is unarmed (*MBh* 8.67).

[13] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa and the *Mahābhārata* (A Bibliographical Essay)," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute* 60 (1979): 89–92; and John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 52–55.

Edition's reconstituted text,"[14] Krishna remains a perplexing character for many *Mahābhārata* scholars.[15] As Sukthankar states, the epic Krishna is "a paradox, a riddle, to say the least."[16]

One of the main reasons why Krishna's character in the Sanskrit epic is so confounding is because the *Mahābhārata* frequently provides readers with paradoxical representations of his divinity. As Hudson points out, although Krishna is "portrayed as the omnipotent creator of the universe in some passages, in others he is depicted as possessing limited power."[17] Throughout the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, we find many scenes in which Krishna is extolled as the supreme deity of the universe.[18] For example, in the very first chapter of the first book of the critical edition, the *Book of the Beginnings* (*Ādiparvan*), in the epic's outermost frame story, the bard Ugraśravas begins his recitation of the entire *Mahābhārata* by praising Viṣṇu/Krishna:

> First, I bow to the Lord, the primeval being, invoked, and praised by many, the true, one and imperishable, eternal *brahman*, manifest and unmanifest, existent and non-existent, universal and beyond existence or non-existence, creator of high and low, ancient, supreme, and endless, Viṣṇu, who confers bliss and is bliss, lovely, pure, and immaculate, lord of the senses, preceptor of the moving and the still, Hari.[19]

Ugraśravas's invocation unequivocally presents Viṣṇu/Krishna as the most powerful god of all gods. Two other well-known passages in the Sanskrit epic that depict Krishna as the all-powerful godhead are the *Bhagavadgītā*, in which Krishna famously reveals his divinity to Arjuna right before the Battle of Kurukṣetra, and the *Nārāyaṇiya*, which is the part of the Kuru patriarch Bhīṣma's lengthy lesson to his great-nephew Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Book of Peace* (*Śāntiparvan*) in which Krishna is distinctly identified as Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu).[20] In the *Bhagavadgītā* after witnessing Krishna's omnipotence, an embarrassed Arjuna apologizes to the deity:

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[14] Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa and the *Mahābhārata*," 99.

[15] For example, see Bimal Krishna Matilal, "Kṛṣṇa: In Defense of a Devious Divinity," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 410–18; Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 258–89; Nicholas Sutton, *Religious Doctrines in the Mahābhārata* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 175–78; and Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 198–205.

[16] Sukthankar, *Meaning of Mahābhārata*, 96.

[17] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 199.

[18] To illustrate this, Sutton directs us to the following *MBh* passages: 2.33.10–20, 3.13.10–20, 3.86.21–24, 3.187.54, 5.22.10, 5.46.82, 5.88.103, 7.9.72, 7.59.8–13, 8.22.49, and 9.64.28 (*Religious Doctrines*, 144).

[19] *MBh* 1.1.20–22, trans. John D. Smith in *Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation*, 2.

[20] *MBh* 6.14–40 and 12.321–39.

While the *Bhagavadgītā* is, as Richard Davis notes, "frequently taken as the first and most representative work for those first seeking to understand Hinduism" (*Bhagavad Gita: A Biography*, 9), and the subject of multiple commentaries by premodern Hindu philosophers, including Śaṅkara, Abhinavagupta, Rāmānuja, and Madhva, it is worth remembering that the *Bhagavadgītā* makes up less than one percent of the whole Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

> I was in ignorance about your majesty when I said hastily "O Krishna of the Yadu, O Friend [*sakhā*]!" I was thinking as a friend would –in confusion, and also love. If you were badly treated, in jest, eating or sitting, lying in bed or in play, alone or even in front of others,
> I ask your pardon, Immeasurable, Unspeakable One![21]

Arjuna's admitting his ignorance of Krishna's role as the supreme being of the universe at this point in the narrative is curious given that this is not the first time Arjuna has been informed of Krishna's divinity. During Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* (royal consecration) ceremony in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* (*Sabhāparvan*), Bhīṣma tells everyone present (including Arjuna):

> For Kṛṣṇa alone is the origin of the worlds as well as their dissolution, for Kṛṣṇa's sake is all that exists here offered. He is the Unmanifest Cause and the Sempiternal Doer, higher than all creatures; it is thus that Acyuta is the eldest, Spirit, mind, and the Large One, wind, fire, water, ether, and earth, and the fourfold creation, all rest upon Kṛṣṇa. The sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the points of the compass and the intermediate points—it all rests on Kṛṣṇa.[22]

Later in the critical edition of the epic, in the *Book of the Forest* (*Āraṇyakaparvan* or *Vanaparvan*), Krishna meets with the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī three times throughout their twelve years of exile in the forest. During Krishna's first visit, Arjuna explicitly calls him Nārāyaṇa and lists his divine feats.[23] Krishna's third visit coincides with the arrival of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya and this time Krishna himself tells the Pāṇḍavas and their shared wife that he is Nārāyaṇa and the source of everything in the universe. Mārkaṇḍeya then confirms all of this and praises Krishna extensively.[24] The *Book of the Assembly Hall* and the *Book of the Forest* are the second and third books of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, while the *Bhagavadgītā* takes place at the beginning of the sixth book of the epic, the *Book of Bhīṣma* (*Bhīṣmaparvan*). Has Arjuna forgotten about all these earlier proclamations of Krishna's divinity, including his own? Even more perplexing is the fact that, as John Brockington points out, after Krishna's "self-revelation in the *Bhagavadgītā*, he continues to be treated as a human ally rather than a deity."[25]

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[21] *Bhagavadgītā* 11.41–42, trans. Laurie L. Patton in *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Laurie L. Patton (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 134.

[22] *MBh* 2.35.22–24, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen in *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, *2. The Book of the Assembly Hall, 3. The Book of the Forest*, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 95.

As Thennilapuram Mahadevan has shown, in the southern recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, there is a much more extensive version of this scene in which Bhīṣma reveals the true divine identify of Krishna ("The Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṁśa,* and Āḻvār Vaiṣṇavism," in *Ways and Reasons for Thinking about the Mahābhārata as a Whole*, ed. Vishwa Adluri [Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 2013], 63–117).

[23] *MBh* 3.13.10–36.

[24] *MBh* 3.187.

[25] Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 259.

For more on the "blindness" to Krishna's divinity in the Sanskrit epic, see David Gitomer, "King Duryodhana: The Mahābhārata Discourse on Sinning and Virtue in Epic and Drama," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 2 (1992): 224–32.

Arjuna's inconsistent awareness of Krishna's role as the absolute godhead is part of a larger trend in both Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which most of the characters in these epics are oblivious to the divine identities of Rāma and Krishna. Robert Goldman observes that "the supporters, friends, and kinsmen of these gods on earth are at best only occasionally aware of their true divinity, frequently forgetting about it immediately after a revelation or demonstration."[26] Goldman further explains that this sharply contrasts the two Sanskrit epics with later Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* narrative poems "such as the *Rāmcaritmānas*, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, [in which] all the characters including the epic antagonist are often fully aware of the divinity and salvific power of their foe."[27]

Along with Arjuna continuously forgetting about Krishna's divine identity, there are several passages of the *Mahābhārata* that depict the god Śiva as the true supreme deity of the universe.[28] In the *Book of Droṇa* (*Droṇaparvan*), for instance, Arjuna has a dream in which he and Krishna travel to heaven to obtain Śiva's Pāśupata weapon so that Arjuna can avenge the death of his son, Abhimanyu. Upon seeing Śiva, Krishna elaborately praises him:

> Śiva is the origin of the world, the creator of all things, the unborn, immutable master. He is the supreme source of the mind, he is space, he is the wind and in him all the luminaries are contained. He is the maker of the rains, the ultimate form of matter and the object of worship for gods, Dānavas, *yakṣa*s, and men. For *yogin*s he is manifest as the supreme spirit, *brahman*, and he is the very essence for those who know the Veda. He is the creator and destroyer of both moving and non-moving beings.[29]

We find a similar scene in the *Book of Instruction* (*Anuśāsanaparvan*) when Krishna tells Yudhiṣṭhira about how he once journeyed to the Himalayas and prayed to Śiva in hopes that Śiva would bless Krishna and his wife Jāmbavatī with a son.[30] Brockington notes that this episode in which Krishna describes himself ardently worshiping Śiva "may broadly be seen as a Śaiva equivalent of the *Nārāyaṇiya*."[31] Nicholas Sutton adds that in this part of the *Book of Instruction* "it is apparent that Śiva is the Supreme Deity here and he is repeatedly glorified as such in all the terms familiar from passages that praise the supremacy of Nārāyaṇa."[32] At the conclusion of an

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[26] Robert P. Goldman, "Gods in Hiding: The Mahābhārata's Virāṭa Parvan and the Divinity of the Indian Epic Hero," in *Modern Evaluation of the Mahābhārata: Prof. R.K. Sharma Felicitation Volume*, ed. S.P. Narang (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1995), 81.

[27] Goldman, 82.

[28] See Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 249–56; and Sutton, *Religious Doctrines*, 183–91.

As Sutton points out, several Sanskrit scholars, including Joseph Dahlmann, Sylvain Lévi, Jacques Scheuer, Madeleine Biardeau, and Alf Hiltebeitel, have discussed the prominence of Śiva in the *Mahābhārata* (*Religious Doctrines*, 183).

[29] *MBh* 7.57.40–42, trans. Sutton in *Religious Doctrines*, 185–86.

[30] *MBh* 13.14–18.

[31] Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 254.

[32] Sutton, *Religious Doctrines*, 187.

episode in which Arjuna wrestles with Śiva in the guise of a hunter (*kirāta*) in the *Book of the Forest*, Arjuna praises Śiva in great detail.[33] This *kirāta* episode was the source of inspiration for several premodern Śaiva *bhakti* retellings in Kannada.[34] The multiple depictions of Śiva as the supreme godhead in the Sanskrit epic also allowed the sixteenth-century South Indian poet-scholar Appayya Dīkṣita in his Sanskrit *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* (Hymn of Praise that Gathers the Meanings of the Bhārata) to create "an ingenious reading of the *Mahābhārata* that made it into a text of Śivādvaita, that is, of a soft or qualified version of non-dualism, in which Śiva was the ultimate, abstract Being (*brahman*)."[35] That Śiva is sometimes presented as more powerful than Krishna in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* highlights a major difference between the epic and the *bhakti* narrative poem, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which, as Edwin Bryant points out, "is unambiguously a Vaiṣṇavite text (that is, adhering to Viṣṇu as supreme)."[36]

There are also scenes in the *Mahābhārata* that present Krishna as a limited god who is capable of being cursed. In the *Book of the Women* (*Strīparvan*), after walking amongst the corpses of all those killed during the Kurukṣetra War, Gāndhārī angrily tells Krishna:

> Since I have come to have some ascetic power because of my obedience to my husband, I will curse you with that, O bearer of discus and club, you who are so enigmatic. Since you ignored your kinsmen, the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas, as they were killing each other, Govinda, you shall slay your own kinsmen. Even you, O Slayer of Madhu, when the thirty-sixth year is at hand, shall wander in the woods having slain your own kinsmen, having slain your own family, having slain your sons. You shall arrive at your end by ignominious means. And your wives, their sons killed, their affines and kinsmen killed, will be running around just as these Bharata women are doing.[37]

Thirty-six years later, in the *Book of the Clubs* (*Mausalaparvan*), Gāndhārī's curse comes to fruition when all the members of Krishna's clan, the Yādavas, murder each other in a drunken brawl and Krishna is accidentally killed by a hunter.[38] It should be noted that right after Gāndhārī curses Krishna, he smilingly tells Gāndhārī that he is the only one who can kill the Yādavas and that they will bring about their own destruction.[39] Yet despite this declaration by Krishna, Gāndhārī's terrible curse still distorts our perception of Krishna's divinity. As Tamara Reich remarks about this scene in the *Book of the Women,* "how to distinguish between causation, fate, and divine intention? There is obviously no such clear distinction."[40]

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[33] *MBh* 3.40.55–60.

[34] Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric*, 162.

[35] C. Minkowski, "Nīlakaṇṭha's Mahābhārata," *Seminar* 608 (2010), http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/608/608_c_minkowski.htm.

[36] Bryant, introduction to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (*Krishna: Beautiful Legend*), xiii.

[37] *MBh* 11.25.39–42, trans. James L. Fitzgerald in *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7, *11. The Book of the Women, 12. The Book of Peace, Part One*, trans. James L. Fitzgerald (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 70–71.

[38] *MBh* 16.4–5.

[39] *MBh* 11.25.43–45.

[40] Tamara C. Reich, "Ends and Closures in the *Mahābhārata*," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011): 25.

In the *Book of the Horse Sacrifice* (*Āśvamedhikaparvan*), Krishna is faced with the prospect of being cursed yet again, this time by the sage Uttaṅka when Krishna is returning to his kingdom of Dwarka (Dvārakā) after the war.[41] Uttaṅka, like Gāndhārī, believes that Krishna is responsible for not preventing the battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Krishna manages to calm Uttaṅka down and explains that he tried to reason with the one hundred Kauravas: "Being a human, I begged them piteously, but they were full of delusion and did not accept my good words."[42] Hudson explains that "the Uttaṅka episode explicitly raises the question of Kṛṣṇa's omnipotence and responds negatively. According to this passage, Kṛṣṇa did not stop the war because he lacked the power to do so. Limited by his human form, all that he could do was attempt to counsel the Kauravas."[43] After Krishna tells Uttaṅka why he was unable to stop the war, Uttaṅka asks to see Krishna's divine form and Krishna acquiesces.[44] Notably, Krishna also grants Arjuna a vision of his celestial form in the *Bhagavadgītā*.[45] Yet the juxtaposition of Krishna saying that he could not prevent the war due to his limited human powers with the magnificent theophany he then bestows upon Uttaṅka only raises more doubts about the extent of Krishna's divine abilities in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

In her analysis of the exchange between Krishna and Uttaṅka, Reich notes that a "nagging question remains: did Kṛṣṇa 'really' (within the universe of the text) try to prevent the war, or did he act deceitfully, as Uttaṅka suspects?"[46] The question of whether Krishna actually desires peace between the two rival factions of the Kuru family haunts much of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Take the first dice match in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* which is commonly regarded as the primary catalyst of the Battle at Kurukṣetra. As David Shulman explains, "memories of their defeat and humiliation in the dicing *sabhā* propel the Pāṇḍavas forward in their struggle for restoration, which ends in war."[47] In the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Krishna is noticeably absent from this episode. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two, even in the versions of the dice game in the northern and southern recensions of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which Krishna saves Draupadī from being disrobed by the Kaurava prince Duḥśāsana, the deity makes no effort to stop the gambling match in any way.

If Krishna really is the most powerful god in existence, why does he allow this crooked game of dice that leads to the horrific Bhārata War? In the *Book of the Forest*, after Draupadī describes the suffering she endured in the assembly hall, Krishna assures the Pāṇḍavas' joint wife that if he had been in Dwarka during the dice game, he would have come and stopped this

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[41] *MBh* 14.52–53.

[42] *MBh* 14.53.19, trans. Reich in "Ends and Closures," 34.

[43] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 201.

[44] *MBh* 14.54.

[45] *Bhagavadgītā* 11.

[46] Reich, "Ends and Closures," 35.

[47] D. Shulman, "Devana and Daiva," in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: Essays in Honour of J.C. Heesterman,* ed. A.W. van den Hoek, D.H.A. Kolff, and M.S. Oort (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 350.

catastrophe.[48] Yet if we turn back to the very first chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings*, we find Ugraśravas claiming that Krishna intentionally turned a blind eye to the disastrous dice match:

> Thereupon Dhṛtarāṣṭra approved the gambling match, since he loved his son; and Vāsudeva, hearing this, waxed greatly angry. Being none too pleased, he encouraged the quarrels and looked away from the lawless and ghastly events of the gaming and so forth as they increased.[49]

These conflicting statements by Ugraśravas in the *Book of the Beginnings* and Krishna in the *Book of the Forest* illustrate a larger pattern in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which we find "passages suggesting that Kṛṣṇa either actively endeavors to bring about the war or stands back and allows it to happen" as well as "episodes where we see Kṛṣṇa actively trying to bring about peace."[50] This is particularly visible in the fifth book of the epic, the *Book of Effort* (*Udyogaparvan*). The "Mission of Bhagavān" (*Bhagavadyāna*) chapter is dedicated to Krishna's peace envoy to Hastinapura (Hastināpura). In the beginning of the chapter, Yudhiṣṭhira asks Krishna for his advice about whether the Pāṇḍavas should go to war with their paternal cousins:

> At these words, Janārdana replied to King Dharma, "I myself shall go to the assembly of the Kurus in the cause of both of you. If I make peace without hurting your cause, I shall gain very great merit, king, and the action will have great consequences. I shall free the Kurus and the Sṛñjayas from the noose of death, free the Pāṇḍavas and Dhārtarāṣṭras, and all of the earth."[51]

Yet as the "Mission of Bhagavān" chapter progresses, it becomes unclear if Krishna actually wants to "free the Pāṇḍavas and Dhartarāṣṭras, and all of the earth" or whether he desires war. While Krishna occasionally describes the benefits of peace with the Kauravas,[52] he also repeatedly claims that war is inevitable.[53] Krishna's contradictory statements in the "Mission of Bhagavān" chapter contribute to a larger "sense of confusion and foreboding" that Patricia Greer describes permeating the entire *Book of Effort* in the *Mahābhārata*.[54] Greer asks if the word "effort" in this book's title refers to "Kṛṣṇa's efforts to prevent war? Why do these efforts not succeed? Does Kṛṣṇa really want peace? If not, why not? What *does* he want?"[55]

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[48] *MBh* 3.13–14.

[49] *MBh* 1.1.92–93, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen in *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 1, *The Book of the Beginning*, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 24.

[50] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 201.

[51] *MBh* 5.70.79–81, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen in *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3, *4. The Book of Virāṭa, 5. The Book of the Effort*, trans. J.A.B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 346.

[52] For example, see *MBh* 5.75.16, 5.81.5, and 5.91.19–20.

[53] For example, see *MBh* 5.71.1–25, 5.77.15, and 5.80.45.

[54] Patricia M. Greer, "Ethical Discourse in Udyogaparvan," in *The Mahābhārata: What is Not Here is Nowhere Else* (*Yannehāsti na Tadkvacit*), ed. T.S. Rukmani (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2005), 214.

[55] Greer, 212.

By the end of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, we are left with several contradictions involving Krishna. While he is depicted as the supreme being of the universes at some points in the narrative, at other points he is presented as a limited deity who is capable of being cursed and who is subordinate to Śiva. While some characters like Bhīṣma are well-aware of Krishna's celestial identity, others such as Arjuna (who is one of Krishna's closest friends) frequently forget that Krishna is an omnipotent god. While Krishna sometimes encourages peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, he also frequently pushes these two sets of cousins closer to war.

Ānandavardhana and Madhva on Krishna in the *Mahābhārata*

It is important to recognize, however, that some intellectuals in premodern South Asia did not seem to be fazed by these conflicting depictions of Krishna's divinity in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and even argued that devotion to Krishna/Viṣṇu was the main purpose of the epic.

The most well-known and only complete extant commentary on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is the seventeenth-century *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* (Light on the Inner Significance of the Bhārata) by Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara, a Brahmin scholar from present-day Maharashtra who was based in Banaras in North India. Christopher Minkowski points out that "Nīlakaṇṭha designed his commentary as a properly non-dualist or Advaitin reading of the text, but a reading in which the ultimate, abstract Being was embodied as Viṣṇu in the form of Kṛṣṇa, as an aid to the understanding of the spiritually undeveloped."[56] We also see an emphasis on Viṣṇu in the earliest extant commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, the *Jñānadīpikā* (Lamp of Knowledge) of Devabodha who likely lived in North India around the eleventh or twelfth century. Basil Leclere notes that Devabodha "undoubtedly gives preeminence to Viṣṇu" in the *Jñānadīpikā*.[57] Leclere further observes that "it is probably because he was convinced of Viṣṇu's supremacy over the other gods that Devabodha decided to comment at length on the homage to Nārāyaṇa situated at the very beginning of the *Mahābhārata*: otherwise, he would have not delayed the explanation of the epic text properly speaking by what he presented himself as an excessively detailed gloss."[58]

The earliest discussion of the role of Krishna/Viṣṇu in the Sanskrit epic was by the ninth-century Kashmiri literary theorist Ānandavardhana, who was "one of the first recorded readers and literary critics" of the *Mahābhārata*.[59] Ānanda is most remembered today for his theory of *dhvani* (poetic suggestion) that is expounded in his literary treatise, the *Dhvanyāloka* (Light on Poetic Suggestion). In the *Dhvanyāloka*, Ānanda writes that: "the ultimate meaning of the *Mahābhārata* thus appears very clearly: the two subjects intended by the author as primary are

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[56] Minkowski, "Nīlakaṇṭha's Mahābhārata."

[57] Basile Leclere, "New Light on Devabodha, the Earliest Extant Commentator on *Mahābhārata*," *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatique* 70, no. 2 (2016): 498.

[58] Leclere, 501.

The "homage to Nārāyaṇa" that Devabodha comments on is found at the very beginning of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (1.1.0) and commences every book of Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's "vulgate" version of the epic (which is generally identified with the northern recension): "Honour first Nārāyaṇa and Nara, the most excellent of men; honour too Sarasvatī the goddess; then proclaim the Tale of Victory!" (trans. Smith in *Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation*, 1).

[59] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 51.

the *rasa* of peace [*śāntarasa*] and the human goal of liberation [*mokṣa*]."[60] Ānanda then elaborates that the importance of *śāntarasa* and *mokṣa* in the *Mahābhārata* is shown by the *dhvani* of the following line from the *Book of the Beginnings*: "And the blessed Vāsudeva, the everlasting, is here glorified."[61] Naama Shalom notes that Ānanda "subsequently claims that, contrary to expectation, the main subject of this long story is not the Pāṇḍavas, or their deeds [*pāṇḍavādicaritaṃ*], or, in fact, any other theme around which the *MBh* revolves. Rather, it's real *artha* ('aim; purpose; meaning') is *mokṣa* and the removal of *avidyā* ('ignorance; nescience; illusion') by means of cultivating devotion [*bhakti*] to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva."[62]

We find something similar in the Sanskrit *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* (Determination of the Purport of the Mahābhārata), an extensive treatise by Madhva, the thirteenth-century Vaiṣṇava philosopher and proponent of Dvaita Vedānta from present-day Karnataka. Vishal Sharma explains that in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, Madhva presents his audience with a "Kṛṣṇa-centric reading of the epic's core narrative."[63] Sharma also notes that according to Madhva, the *tātparya* (purport) of the *Mahābhārata* "is the glory of Vāsudeva."[64]

Ānanda and Madhva's shared assertion that Krishna/Viṣṇu is the central figure of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* may seem surprising given the previously discussed paradoxical representations of this deity's divinity and simply because Krishna is at best a supporting character in the Sanskrit epic. While Krishna makes some sort of appearance in each of the first sixteen books of the *Mahābhārata* (recall that he dies in the sixteenth book, the *Book of the Clubs*), Hiltebeitel explains that Krishna's "prominence reaches its peak from books 5 to 11."[65] Krishna is certainly a major player in the four war books of the epic (books six–nine) with his

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[60] *Dhvanyāloka* 4.5, trans. Daniel H.H. Ingalls, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, and M.V. Patwardhan in *The Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*, trans. Daniel H.H. Ingalls, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, and M.V. Patwardhan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 691.

[61] *MBh* 1.1.193 (*Dhvanyāloka* 4.5), trans. Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan in *Dhvanyāloka*, 691.

[62] Naama Shalom, *Re-ending the Mahābhārata: The Rejection of Dharma in the Sanskrit Epic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 89. For the Sanskrit passage from the *Dhvanyāloka* that Shalom is summarizing, see *Re-ending the Mahābhārata*, 203.

Gary Tubb, on the other hand, warns us that "it is important not to misinterpret the role of God in Ānanda's interpretation of the *Mahābhārata*" and asserts that Ānanda believes that that "Vāsudeva is important in the *Mahābhārata* not primarily because of his appearance in the form of the individual incarnation known as Kṛṣṇa, whom one may worship, but because he is the impersonal, absolute Brahma[n], the reality behind this vain world, to be reached through the cultivation of dispassion" ("Śāntarasa in the *Mahābhārata*," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma [Leiden: Brill, 1991], 196–97).

[63] Vishal Sharma, "Reading the Mahābhārata as Śāstra: The Role of the 'Righteous' Pāṇḍavas and 'Villainous' Kauravas in Madhva's Dvaitavedānta," *Journal of Hindu Studies,* advance online publication (July 2021): 5.

[64] Sharma, 2.

As Srilata Raman has shown, in the very first verse of his commentary, the *Gītārthasaṃgraha*, the Śrīvaiṣṇava philosopher Yāmuna (traditional dates: 916–1036 CE) makes a very similar argument. See *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Śrīvaiṣṇavism: Tamil Cats and Sanskrit Monkeys* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 47.

[65] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Krishna in the *Mahabharata*: The Death of Karna," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook,* ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

orchestration of the deaths of several major Kaurava warriors including Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Bhūriśravas, and Duryodhana. It is thus unsurprising that Hiltebeitel describes Krishna as the "ringmaster on the text's center stage."[66] Yet, as noted earlier, the narrative of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* primarily focuses on the lives of the Pāṇḍava princes, not the life of Krishna. As Bryant states, "although Krishna's role in the epic as statesman and friend of the five Pandavas is pivotal to the development of the narrative, he is not the protagonist of the story."[67]

To convincingly argue that Krishna/Viṣṇu is the primary figure of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, both Ānanda and Madhva must rely on references to *kṛṣṇacarita*s. The *kṛṣṇacarita* that Ānanda depends on is the *Harivaṃśa*, a text about Krishna and other members of the Yādava clan that the *Mahābhārata* labels a *khila* or "appendix" in the "Summaries of the Books" (*Parvasaṃgraha*) sub-book of the *Book of the Beginnings.*[68] The *Book of Viṣṇu* (*Viṣṇuparvan*) of the *Harivaṃśa* contains the earliest detailed account of Krishna's life beginning with his birth and ending with the adult Krishna's rescue of his grandson Aniruddha from the demon Bāṇa and their subsequent return to Dwarka. In the *Dhvanyāloka*, Ānanda explains that while the *Mahābhārata*'s true sense of *śāntarasa* and *mokṣa* is hidden:

> The poet-creator Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana [Vyāsa] has made it [the sense of *śāntarasa* and *mokṣa*] perfectly clear, however, by composing the *Harivaṃśa* as a conclusion to his *Mahābhārata*. Since this sense stirs us toward an intense devotion (*bhakti*) to that other truth that lies beyond worldly life, all worldly activity appears now a preliminary goal, to be rejected.[69]

For Ānanda, "the *Harivaṃśa* brings out the *Mahābhārata*'s subtextual Kṛṣṇa-centricity."[70]

It is important to pause here and briefly discuss the lack of a consensus on whether the *Harivaṃśa* should be treated as an intrinsic component of the *Mahābhārata*. Some scholars such as Simon Brodbeck argue that "the *Mahābhārata*'s lists of contents show that whatever the nuances of the relationship, the *Harivaṃśa* is definitely part of the *Mahābhārata*."[71] Brockington adds that "in its opening verse the *Harivaṃśa* refers back to the *Mahābhārata* (*mahābhāratam ākhyānam* 1.8a) in a way that is clearly intended to place it in a direct line with it."[72]

In premodern South Asia, there were multiple intellectuals and poets like Ānanda who viewed the *Harivaṃśa* as part of the *Mahābhārata*. In the fourteenth century, Nācana Somanātha "claimed to have completed" the thirteenth-century poet Tikkana's portion of the Telugu

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[66] Hiltebeitel, 23.

[67] Bryant, "Introduction" (2007), 8.

[68] *MBh* 1.2.69.

[69] *Dhvanyāloka* 4.5, trans. Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan in *Dhvanyāloka*, 692.

[70] Hawley and Pillai, "Introduction to the Mahābhārata," 13.

[71] Simon Brodbeck, "*Harivaṃśa*" in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill Online, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1010069028. See also André Couture, *Kṛṣṇa in the Harivaṁśa*, vol. 1, *The Wonderful Play of a Cosmic Child* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2015), 12–21.

[72] Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 313.

Mahābhāratamu by composing the *Uttaraharivaṃśamu*.[73] The *Harivaṃśa* is also contained within some Mahābhāratas such as the eleventh-century Sanskrit *Bhāratamañjarī* (Essence of the Bhārata) of Kṣemendra and the Persian *Razmnāmah*.[74] Finally, Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara includes the *Harivaṃśa* in his extensive *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* commentary on the *Mahābhārata*.[75]

There were also, however, several individuals in premodern South Asia who understood the *Harivaṃśa* to be a distinct entity from the *Mahābhārata*. Multiple Mahābhārata retellings including those by Villi and Cauhān along with Agastya Paṇḍita's *Bālabhārata*, Sāraḷādāsa's *Mahābhārata*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, and Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*, do not contain a separate Harivaṃśa section.[76] Although the fourteenth-century Telugu *Harivaṃśamu* was composed by Ĕṛṛāpragaḍa, one of the authors of the *Mahābhāratamu*, the *Harivaṃśamu* is not considered part of the *Mahābhāratamu*.[77] There were many other stand-alone premodern regional Harivaṃśas such as those by Kaviśekhara Vidyācandra Bhaṭṭācharya and Bhavānanda in Assamese, Acyutānanda in Oriya, and Manbodh Jhā in Maithili.[78]

A number of modern scholars have stressed the importance of treating the *Harivaṃśa* as a separate work of literature from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[79] Daniel Ingalls suggests that the *Harivaṃśa* is distinct from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* because the *Harivaṃśa* is one of the earliest examples of the *mahākāvya* genre.[80] Freda Matchett maintains that the *Harivaṃśa* "asserts its discontinuity [from the epic] by adding something radically new: the complete story of Kṛṣṇa, from his birth at Mathurā, through his childhood and youth among the forest-dwelling cowherds, to his triumph in Dvārakā as a mature warrior and statesman."[81]

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[73] Narayana Rao and Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 112.

[74] Geen "Marriage of Draupadī," 300; and Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 107.

[75] Minkowski, "Nīlakaṇṭha's Mahābhārata."

[76] See Agastya Paṇḍita, *Bālabhārata* (*Bālabhāratam of Agastya Paṇḍita*), ed. K.S. Ramamurthi (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University Oriental Research Institute, 1983); Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* (*Kumaravyasa Mahabharata (Abridged): An English Transcreation of Kumaravyasa's Karnata Bharata Kathamanjari*), trans. D. Seshagiri Rao (Bangalore: Parijatha Publications, 1986); Mahendra K. Mishra, "Mahabharata and Regional Variations: Sarala Mahabharata in the Folklore of Odisha," in *Aesthetic Textures: Living Traditions of the Mahabharata*, ed. Molly Kaushal and Sukrita Paul Kumar (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2019), 131; and Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit*.

[77] Narayana Rao and Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 106. The same is true for Nācana Somanātha's Telugu *Uttaraharivaṃśamu* despite the poet's own claim to be completing Tikkana's *Mahābhāratamu*.

[78] Sarma, *Assamese Literature,* 68; Dipti Ray, *Prataparudradeva, the Last Great Suryavamsi King of Orissa (AD 1497 to AD 1540)* (Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2007), 141; and George Abraham Grierson, *An Introduction to the Maithili Dialect of the Bihari Language as Spoken in North Bihar* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1909), xiv.

[79] See Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 68–70; and Norvin Hein, "A Revolution in Kṛṣṇaism: the Cult of Gopāla," *History of Religions* 25, no.4 (1986): 298–99.

[80] Daniel H.H. Ingalls, "The *Harivaṃśa* as a *Mahākāvya*," in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou*, ed. Louis Renou (Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 1968), 382.

[81] Freda Matchett, *Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra; The Relationship Between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu* (New York: Routledge, 2001), loc. 7372 of 8584, Kindle.

There are convincing arguments on both sides of the modern debate about the relationship between the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The main take-away for us here, however, is that without the "radically new" *kṛṣṇacarita* contained within the *Harivaṃśa*, Ānanda is unable to make his argument about Krishna being the main purpose of the *Mahābhārata*. We see a similar process in Madhva's *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya.* In the first chapter of this treatise on the *Mahābhārata*, Madhva proclaims to his audience that: "Hari [that is, Viṣṇu] is the master for all eternity. [All] are under the control [of the] Highest [One]."[82] K.T. Pandurangi notes that in this first chapter of the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* Madhva also asserts that the "*Mahābhārata* declares the Supremacy of Nārāyaṇa emphatically, unconditionally and as the total purport of the entire scripture."[83] Yet in order to support this claim about Nārāyaṇa being the true meaning of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Madhva frequently draws from one of the most popular *kṛṣṇacarita*s in South Asia: the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

As Anusha Sudindra Rao points out, the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* "is a simultaneous narration of the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and portions of the Kṛṣṇa story from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, brought together into a single timeline as Madhva sees it."[84] For example, while parts of the twelfth chapter of the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* discuss the births of the five Pāṇḍavas, Madhva uses the rest of this chapter to describe the imprisonment of Krishna's parents, Vasudeva and Devakī, and the births of Krishna and his elder brother Balarāma.[85] The thirteenth chapter of the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* is solely dedicated to Krishna's upbringing amongst the cowherds of Vrindavan and his defeat of his wicked relative, Kaṃsa.[86] None of these episodes from Krishna's youth are discussed in detail in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* itself. As Brockington notes, apart from "brief allusions" to Krishna's childhood deeds such as the slaying of the demoness Pūtanā and the lifting of Mount Govardhana, the epic has "very little on his early life" and "just a few traces of Kṛṣṇa's pastoral background."[87]

Some of the events from Krishna's life that Madhva discusses, such as the deity's slaying of the horse demon Keśī, are found in multiple *kṛṣṇacarita*s, including the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.[88] Certain deeds of Krishna that Madhva expounds upon in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, however, such as Krishna and Arjuna traveling to heaven to retrieve the corpses of the four children of a Brahmin sage, are clearly from the

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[82] *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* 1.79, trans. Deepak Sarma in *An Introduction to Mādhva Vedānta* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers Ltd., 2003), 88–89.

[83] K.T. Pandurangi, *Philosophic Vision of Sri Mahabharata Tatparyanirnaya and Bhagavatatatparyanirnaya of Sri Anandateertha Bhagavatpadacharya's Sarvamoola Grantha* (Bangalore: Akhila Bharata Madhwa Mahamandala, 2015), 13.

[84] Anusha Sudindra Rao, "Of Deities and Demons: Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*," (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2019), 34.

[85] Pandurangi, *Philosophic Vision*, 53–59.

[86] Pandurangi, 59–61.

[87] Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 260.

[88] On the slaying of Keśī in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, see Pandurangi, *Philosophic Vision*, 61. On Keśī in the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, see Benjamín Preciado-Solís, *The Kṛṣṇa Cycle in the Purāṇas: Themes and Motifs in a Heroic Saga* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 95.

Bhāgavatapurāṇa.[89] Madhva's familiarity with this *kṛṣṇacarita* is evidenced by another of his works entitled the *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* (Determination of the Purport of the Bhāgavata).

As with Villi and Cauhān, Ānanda and Madhva both clearly think that Krishna/Viṣṇu is the most important figure in the Mahābhārata narrative. To make this case about Krishna in the *Mahābhārata*, Ānanda and Madhva need to refer to and discuss different *kṛṣṇacarita*s (the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*) in their respective treatises, the *Dhvanyāloka* and the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. Unlike these two intellectuals who extensively comment on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, however, Villi and Cauhān try to demonstrate Krishna's prominence in the epic by retelling it in a South Asian regional language as a *bhakti* narrative poem. Before closely examining how these two poets transform the Mahābhārata into a devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*, we must first understand what exactly makes a text a *bhakti* narrative poem.

Common Features of *Bhakti* Narrative Poems

Based on a skimming of *The Oxford Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (2011), a non-specialist reader might assume that all *bhakti* compositions are short poems since the majority of the selections in this collection are rarely longer than a page or two.[90] Indeed, as John Stratton Hawley astutely observes, "on the genre side, the remarkable fact with which to reckon with is the way the relatively short sung lyric known as the *pad*, *pada*, *padam*, or *abhang* came to define the field [of *bhakti* literature] more or less throughout the subcontinent by the end of the sixteenth century."[91] Several beloved *bhakti* poets, including Annamayya and Kṣetrayya in Telugu, Nāmdev, Janābāi, Tukārām, and Eknāth in Marathi, Narsī Mehtā and Dayārām in Gujarati, Vidyāpati in Maithili, Caṇḍīdās in Bengali, and Kabīr, Sūrdās, Nandadās, Hit Harivaṃś, and Mīrābāī in Bhasha, composed in the *pada* form. Hawley notes that use of the *pada* can be traced back to the *padāvalī* (a sequence of *pada*s) in Jayadeva's twelfth-century Sanskrit *Gītagovinda* (Song of Govinda), which in turn has analogues with earlier Tamil verse sets known as *patikam*s and *tirumoḻi*s that are seen in the works of Tamil *bhakti* poets such as Kāraikkālammaiyār, Cuntarar, Periyāḻvār, and Nammāḻvār.[92] Given the prevalence of the *pad/pada*/*padam*/*abhang* form across premodern South Asia, it is not surprising that most of the theoretical work on *bhakti* literature has focused on short poems, songs, and lyrics.[93]

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[89] On this story in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, see Pandurangi, 97–98. This story is found in 10.89 of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. All references to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are to: *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa: With Sanskrit Text and English Translation*, trans. C.L. Goswami, 2 vols. (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2003).

Nammāḻvār also describes Krishna and Arjuna rescuing the sons of the Brahmin in his *Tiruvāymoḻi* (3.10.5). Given the importance Madhva places on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, however, it is unlikely that he is drawing on Nammāḻvār.

[90] Andrew Schelling, ed., *The Oxford Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[91] Hawley, *Storm of Songs*, 298.

[92] Hawley, 299. See also Ate, "Periyāḻvār's Tirumoḻi," 41–61.

[93] For example, see Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 43–71; Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 19–38; and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, *Narasinha Mehta of Gujarat: A Legacy of Bhakti in Songs and Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 33–95.

There are, however, multiple lengthy narrative compositions that have also been categorized as *bhakti* texts.[94] Cēkkilār's twelfth-century Tamil *Tiruttoṇṭarpurāṇam* (Legend of the Divine Servants) or *Periyapurāṇam* (Great Legend) narrates the stories of the sixty-three Tamil Śaiva saints known as the Nāyaṉmār or "leaders" in more than 4,200 quatrain verses.[95] As Indira Peterson points out, "Cēkkilār's hagiography remains one of the great popular texts of Śaiva *bhakti* in the Tamil region."[96] Tulsīdās's sixteenth-century Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas* (Lake of the Deeds of Rāma) retells the Rāmāyaṇa in "roughly 12,800 lines divided into 1073 'stanzas.'"[97] Vasudha Paramasivan explains that the *Rāmcaritmānas* is "considered the quintessential text of Ram *bhakti* in North India, as it was the first North Indian vernacular work to place the Ram *katha* [story] within a devotional framework."[98] The most famous and lengthiest narrative text that has been labeled a *bhakti* poem is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which is comprised of more than 14,000 verse couplets.[99] Barbara Holdrege describes this text as "the consummate textual monument to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions, which is generally held to have originated in the Tamil region of South India between the eighth and tenth centuries CE."[100]

At first glance, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* appear to be three very different religious texts. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is a *purāṇa*, "a well-established genre of trans-Indic Sanskrit literature dealing with universal or cosmic time, stories of the gods and their exploits on earth, and the ritual practices of their devotees,"[101] the

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[94] My following discussion of the features of *bhakti* narrative poems is restricted to the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Cēkkilār's Tamil *Periyapurāṇam*, and Tulsīdās's Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*. There are, however, many other narrative poems that are longer than the typical *bhakti pada* but much shorter than the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, that have also been classified as works of *bhakti*. Examples of these shorter *bhakti* narrative poems include Māṇikkavācakar's ninth-century Tamil *Tirukkōvaiyār*, Jayadeva's twelfth-century Sanskrit *Gītagovinda*, and Harirāmvyās's sixteenth-century Bhasha *Rāspañcādhyāyī*.

[95] Monius notes that "estimates of its [the *Periyapurāṇam*'s] proper length ranges from 4253 quatrains to 4286" ("Love, Violence, Disgust," 119).

[96] Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Tamil Śaiva Hagiography: The Narrative of the Holy Servants (of Śiva) and the Hagiographical Project in Tamil Śaivism," in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, ed. Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1994), 192.

[97] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 13.

[98] Vasudha Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram," (PhD diss., University of California: Berkeley, 2010), 2.

[99] There are conflicting accounts of the number of verses in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Bryant states that "the Bhāgavata is said to have 18,000 verses, both in its own colophons, and in other Purāṇas. In fact it has 16,256" (introduction to [*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*] *Krishna: Beautiful Legend*, lxxn13). Ravi Gupta and Kenneth Valpey, however, describe the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as a work of "more than fourteen thousand Sanskrit verses" (introduction to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Selected Readings*, trans. Ravi M. Gupta and Kenneth R. Valpey [New York: Columbia University Press, 2017], 1).

[100] Barbara A. Holdrege, "The Dynamics of Sanskritising and Vernacularising Practices in the Social Life of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 1 (2018): 21.

[101] Anne E. Monius, "*Purāṇa/Purāṇam*: Modes of Narrative Temporality in Sanskrit and Tamil," in *Passages: Relationships between Tamil and Sanskrit*, ed. Kannan M. and Jennifer Clare (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2009), 217.

Periyapurāṇam is a hagiography,[102] and the *Rāmcaritmānas* is a Rāmāyaṇa retelling. A closer examination of these narrative poems, however, reveals that they share four distinct features.

The first of these four features is the prevalence of devotees in these three texts who, in the words of Kenneth Valpey, have been *bhakta*s "all along."[103] Monius observes that throughout the Tamil *Periyapurāṇam*, multiple members of the Nāyaṉmār are depicted as being "*born* with love of Śiva in their hearts."[104] This is illustrated clearly in the beginning of Cēkkilār's account of the life of the Tamil Śaiva saint and poetess Kāraikkālammaiyār:

> Her birth graced and enhanced the community of merchants. With time she gently grew, taking her first faltering steps and learning to speak so that she could express the love that overflowed in her heart without end and become a devotee who serves the feet of the Lord who is adorned with the snake.[105]

Yet in the stories of several other Nāyaṉmār, Cēkkilār simply introduces these characters as devotees. At the beginning of the tale of the generous merchant Iyaṟpakai, Cēkkilār tell us:

> In the city of Pumpūkār there lived a man called Ulakiyaṟpakaiyār. He was a prominent member of the merchant caste. He owned untold wealth and lived in luxury. He was a devoted servant of the Lord Siva. When any other devotee of the Lord asked him for anything, he would never say "no," but always willingly came forward to give them what they wanted.[106]

While Cēkkilār does not directly say that Iyaṟpakai was born a Śiva *bhakta*, this introduction to Iyaṟpakai strongly implies that he has been a devotee of Śiva "all along." If we turn to the Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*, we find that several of the characters that Rāma meets during his adventures are also introduced as devotees. For example, at the beginning of his fourteen-year exile, Rāma crosses paths with Guha, the king of the Nishad tribal community. While Guha is

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[102] Although the *Tiruttoṇṭarpurāṇam*/*Periyapurāṇam* has the word *purāṇa* in its title, Monius notes that this text "is not typical, either in terms of the Sanskritic versions of the genre or the later Tamil tradition of *sthalapurāṇa* (*talapurāṇam*)" (*Purāṇa/Purāṇam*, 219). Jay Ramesh, however, dedicates considerable space to a discussion of the *Periyapurāṇam* in his work on *talapurāṇam*s or "place legends" and asserts that "the *Periyapurāṇam* is the first Tamil Śaiva literary work to anchor a sense of Śaiva collective memory to individual places and to the region that they constituted" ("Abodes of Śiva: Monuments and Memory in Medieval and Early Modern South Indian Purāṇas," [PhD diss., Columbia University, 2020], 71).

[103] Kenneth R. Valpey, "The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as a *Mahābhārata* Reflection," in *Parallels and Comparisons: Proceedings of the Fourth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Puranas, September 2005*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2009), 264.

[104] Anne E. Monius, "Śiva as Heroic Father: Theology and Hagiography in Medieval South India," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2004): 188.

[105] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1719, trans. Karen Pechilis in "The Story of the Classical Tamil Woman Saint, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār: A Translation of Her Story from Cēkkiḻār's *Periya Purāṇam*," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 2 (2006): 180. All references to the *Periyapurāṇam* are to Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam Eṉṉum Tiruttoṇṭar Purāṇam*, ed. C.K. Cuppiramaṇiya Mutaliyār, 7 vols. (Coimbatore: Kōvai Tamiḻ Caṅkam, 1964–75).

[106] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 405, trans. Alastair McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* (*The History of The Holy Servants of Lord Siva: A Translation of the Periya Purāṇam of Cēkkilār*), trans. Alastair McGlashan (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2006), 53.

first described as "a friend of Rāma and precious to him as life" in Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, there is no mention of a prior friendship between Guha and Rāma in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[107] Instead, when Guha learns of the arrival of Rāma, Tulsī states that:

> When Guha of the Nishad tribe heard of this,
> he was delighted and summoned his dear kinsmen.
> With great loads of fruit and tubers as gifts,
> he went to meet Ram, his heart overjoyed.
> Laying down his gifts, he fell at Ram's feet,
> and gazed with adoration at the Lord.[108]

Even though this is their first meeting in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Guha's reaction to Rāma suggests that he has been a Rāma *bhakta* "all along." This is true of many of the characters that Rāma encounters such as the sages Atri and Sutīkṣṇa and the tribal female ascetic Śabarī.[109]

As with Kāraikkālammaiyār in the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* describes some devotees who have been *bhakta*s from a young age such as the five-year-old demon Prahlāda:

> As a child he was not interested in toys, and acted like a simpleton, on account of his mind being absorbed in God. His mind appeared possessed [as if] by the planet Kṛṣṇa, and so he did not perceive the world as it is conventionally perceived. While sitting, wandering about, eating, lying down, drinking, and eating, he was not consciously planning these [activities], as he was in the embrace of Govinda.[110]

Yet the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also introduces *bhakta*s like Iyaṟpakai in the *Periyapurāṇam* and Guha in the *Rāmcaritmānas* who are implied to have always been devotees even if the text does not state this explicitly. Valpey notes that examples of characters in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* who are "resignified by implication as having been Kṛṣṇa's devotees 'all along'" include several individuals from the Mahābhārata tradition such as the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadī, and Kuntī.[111]

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* has a complex intertextual relationship with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Wendy Doniger has shown that through its main frame story in which Śuka (the son of the *Mahābhārata*'s compiler Vyāsa) narrates the story of Krishna to Parikṣit (the grandson

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[107] Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.44.9, trans. Sheldon I. Pollock in Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 2, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, trans. Sheldon I. Pollock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 175.

[108] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 2.88.1–2, trans. Philip Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *The Epic of Ram*, vol. 3, trans. Philip Lutgendorf, Murty Classical Library of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 157 and 159. All references to the *Rāmcaritmānas* are to: Tulsīdās, *Śrirāmcaritmānas*, ed. Hanumānprasād Poddār (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1966).

[109] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.4, 3.10, and 3.34.

[110] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.4.37–38, trans. Edwin F. Bryant in *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teachings from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (New York: North Point Press, 2017), 414.

[111] Valpey, "*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as *Mahābhārata* Reflection," 264.

of Arjuna), the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* explicitly "situate[s] itself within the Epic itself."[112] Multiple other characters from the *Mahābhārata* including Ugraśravas, Vidura, and Yudhiṣṭhira also appear as narrators and interlocuters throughout the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.[113] Moreover, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* incorporates "its own shortened versions of episodes from the *Mahābhārata* into the narrative"[114] including the slaying of Śiśupāla, the death of Bhīṣma, the destruction of the Yādavas, and the final journey of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī.[115] It is no wonder that Vishal Sharma asserts that "in many ways, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight" and that Matchett argues that the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* makes an "implicit claim to be a new *Mahābhārata,* focused upon Kṛṣṇa rather than upon the Pāṇḍavas."[116]

As Angelika Malinar points out, "true to the *bhakti* reinterpretation of the epic… [in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*] all the heroes [of the *Mahābhārata*] are more or less turned into *bhaktas* of Kṛṣṇa."[117] From the first description of the Pāṇḍavas greeting Krishna in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, it is evident that the five princes are *bhakta*s who have been Krishna devotees "all along."

> Those heroes, the sons of Pṛthā, arose simultaneously when they saw Mukunda, the Lord of everything, approaching, like the five vital airs upon the return of the principal [vital air]. The heroes embraced Kṛṣṇa, and their sins were removed by contact with his body. Gazing into his face, which was smiling affectionately, they became ecstatic.[118]

Unlike in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which Arjuna frequently forgets Krishna's divine identity, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* consistently presents the Pāṇḍavas as steadfast devotees of Krishna. As we will soon see, Villi and Cauhān also both depict these five brothers as unwavering, "all along" Krishna *bhakta*s throughout their regional Mahābhārata retellings.

Of course, not all the devotees in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* have been *bhakta*s all their lives. These three texts contain some examples of characters who are either transformed into *bhakta*s in the course of the narrative or who temporarily veer off the devotional path. After being defeated by Rāma while trying to disrupt a sacred sacrifice, the demon Mārīca becomes a Rāma *bhakta* in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[119] The

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[112] Wendy Doniger, "Echoes of the *Mahābhārata*: Why is a Parrot the Narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*?" in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 35.

[113] See Valpey, "*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as *Mahābhārata* Reflection," 260.

[114] Matchett, *Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra,* loc. 3582 of 8584, Kindle.

[115] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.72–75, 1.9.43–46, 11.30, and 1.15.

[116] Vishal Sharma, "Svargakāmo Garheta: Rebuking Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata Commentaries" (paper presented at the Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 18, 2019); and Matchett, *Kṛṣṇa: Lord or Avatāra,* loc. 3597 of 8584, Kindle.

[117] Angelika Malinar, "How Purāṇas relate the *Mahābhārata*: The Case of King Parikṣit," in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures; Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Puranas, September 2002*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 481.

[118] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.58.2–3, trans. Bryant in *Krishna: Beautiful Legend*, 248.

[119] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.25.2–3.

Bhāgavatapurāṇa relates the tale of the accidental *bhakta* Ajāmila, a sinful Brahmin who attains liberation on his deathbed when he calls out the name of his son who happens to be named Nārāyaṇa.[120] In the *Periyapurāṇam*, Cēkkilār tells the stories of Śaiva devotees who used to be the followers of different divinities such as Appar, who joined a Jain monastery after the death of his parents, and Cākkiya, who once engaged in the study of Buddhist scriptures.[121]

The pervasiveness of the tales of "all along" *bhakta*s in these three narrative poems, however, is significant. The stories of life-long devotees in the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Cēkkilār's Tamil *Periyapurāṇam*, and Tulsī's Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas* show audiences the importance of unwavering *bhakti*. Despite their profound love for their god, "all along" devotees such as Kāraikkālammaiyār in the *Periyapurāṇam* and Prahlāda in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* do not necessarily lead easy lives. Kāraikkālammaiyār is abandoned by her husband and Prahlāda's father Hiraṇyakaśipu repeatedly tries to kill him. Thanks to their resolute *bhakti*, however, Kāraikkālammaiyār and Prahlāda are always protected by their chosen deity.[122] Also, while many "all along" *bhakta*s like Guha in the *Rāmcaritmānas* have multiple meetings with their divine lord, these devotees never cease to be delighted and amazed each time they encounter him.[123] The extensive renderings of the stories of "all along" *bhakta*s in these three narrative poems therefore show audiences the rewards of leading a life of constant devotion.

The second important shared feature of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* is the frequency of devotees breaking out into song and praying to the main deity. Ravi Gupta and Valpey observe that "the *Bhāgavata* takes every opportunity to burst forth in praise, pausing its narrative to describe the Lord's beauty or to offer him verses of reverence… the *Bhāgavata* takes its time to savor the words of praise spoken by devotees to their Lord."[124] The hymns of *bhakta*s in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* often take up entire chapters in the text. We see this with the elaborate prayer to Bhagavān that the elephant Gajendra recites after he finds himself in the deadly grasp of a crocodile and the detailed eulogy that the god Brahmā offers after he tests Krishna by making all his calves and cowherd friends vanish.[125] Kuntī is one of the first characters in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* to sing a lengthy hymn to Krishna. In the eighth chapter of the first book of the text after Krishna saves the unborn Parikṣit from the vengeful Aśvatthāman, Kuntī praises the god in a song of twenty-six verse couplets.[126] She begins:

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[120] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.1.29.

[121] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1303–343 and 3636–643.

[122] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1717–1781; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.4–10.

[123] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 2.88–89 and 6.121.

[124] Ravi M. Gupta and Kenneth R. Valpey, "Introduction: Churning the Ocean of *Līlā* Themes for Bhāgavata Study," in *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Sacred Text and Living Tradition*, ed. Ravi M. Gupta and Kenneth R. Valpey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 7.

[125] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.3.2–29 and 10.14.1–40.

[126] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.8.18–43.

> I shall bow down to you, the primordial supreme person, master of material nature. You exist within and outside all beings, and yet they do not recognize you. Like an actor wearing a costume, you are covered by the veil of *māyā*, imperceptible to the ignorant. You are unchanging and yet you are not recognized by the foolish observer. Your purpose is to teach bhakti yoga to the most excellent ascetics and sages with flawless character. How then can we women see you? Obeisance to Krishna, son of Vasudeva and Devakī. Obeisance to Govinda, the boy of Nanda and the cowherds (of Vṛndāvana village). Obeisance to the Lord with a lotus navel! Obeisance to him who wears a lotus garland! Obeisance to the one with lotus eyes! And obeisance to you whose feet are lotuses! Lord of the senses! You liberated (your mother) Devakī, who had been imprisoned for a long time by the cruel King Kaṁsa. Likewise, omnipresent Lord, it was you who saved me and my children from constant danger.[127]

In the beginning of her prayer, Kuntī's description of Krishna as the ultimate godhead is not very specific and could be referring to a number of different deities. After Kuntī asks Krishna how she is able to see him despite her status as a woman, however, her eulogy progressively becomes more and more personal. With her use of epithets such as Vāsudeva (son of Vasudeva) and Govinda (tender of cows), Kuntī invokes a particular image of the young Krishna of Vrindavan that is the focus of the first half of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the longest and most popular book of this text. Kuntī then directly brings herself and the Pāṇḍavas into her hymn by comparing how Krishna has protected her and her sons to how he rescued his mother Devakī. While Kuntī and Krishna have a close relationship in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*,[128] Kuntī's passionate prayer to Krishna in this scene in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* signals that in this devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*, Kuntī is not merely Krishna's maternal aunt, but his devout *bhakta*.

Tulsī frequently uses a type of meter called the *harigītikā chand* or "meter of short songs to Hari" for the prayers that devotees sing to Rāma. As Lutgendorf notes, "verses in this meter seem to be inserted at moments of heightened emotion…appropriately, it is the *chand*s among all the verses of the *Mānas* that are most often set to melodies and sung as devotional hymns."[129] Throughout the *Rāmcaritmānas*, multiple characters including both deities (like Brahmā, Indra, and Śiva) and humans (such as Ahalyā and Guha) praise Rāma using the *harigītikā chand* meter.[130] Even mere minutes before he dies from wounds he sustained while trying to save Sītā from Rāvaṇa, the divine bird Jaṭāyū directly extols Rāma with *harigītikā chand*s:

> Hail to you, Ram, of incomparable beauty, formless [*nirguṇa*]
> and with form [*saguṇa*], sole instigator of all attributes.
> You bear angry arrows to sever the mighty arms
> of ten-headed Ravan, and are earth's ornament,
> with cloud-dark body, lotus-like face,
> and eyes like larger, full blooming lotuses.
> I ever adore you, compassionate Ram,

[127] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.8.18–23, trans. Gupta and Valpey in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2017), 31–32.

[128] For example, see *MBh* 5.88 and 5.130–35.

[129] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 16.

[130] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.186.1–4, 6.113.1–8, 7.13.1–6, 1.211.1–4, and 6.121.1–2.

long-armed liberator from rebirth's dread.[131]

In this hymn, Jaṭāyū describes some of Rāma's most famous attributes such as his dark complexion, his skills as an archer, and his destiny as the slayer of the demon king Rāvaṇa. Jaṭāyū also alludes to the compatibility of Rāma's *nirguṇa* (aniconic) and *saguṇa* (iconic) forms, which is one of the central themes of Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas*.[132] The immense love that Jaṭāyū personally feels for Rāma also comes across in the above *harigītikā chand* verse as the celestial bird directly proclaims his profound adoration for Rāma with his final dying breaths. In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, we also sometimes see characters, such as the sages Atri and Sutīkṣṇa, sing Sanskrit *stuti*s or *stotra*s to Rāma.[133] Lutgendorf points out that "several of these [*stotra*s from the *Rāmcaritmānas*] are widely used in worship today."[134]

In the *Periyapurāṇam*, Cēkkilār describes the lives of several Śaiva devotees who were poets themselves including Aiyaṭikaḷ Kāṭavar Kōṉ, Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar, Kāraikkālammaiyār, and Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in the *Periyapurāṇam* Cēkkilār directly "quotes verses from the hymns"[135] of three of the most prominent Nāyaṉmār: Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar, who are known as "the 'First Three Saints' (*mūvar mutalikaḷ*) of the Tamil Śaiva sect."[136] Other hymns to Śiva in the *Periyapurāṇam* seem to be Cēkkilār's own compositions like the one in the story of the axe-wielding Śaiva saint Eṟipattar in which the elephant of the Chola king Pukaḻccōḻar attacks the pious elderly sage Civakāmiyāṇṭār and destroys the flowers Civakāmiyāṇṭār has gathered to worship Śiva. Devastated that he is too old to catch and punish the elephant, Civakāmiyāṇṭār calls out to Śiva:

Lord Siva, clothed in the elephant's skin!
Lord Siva, strength of the defenseless!
Lord Siva, wisdom of your devotees [*aṭiyār*]!
Lord Siva, nectar of the enlightened!
The flowers to adorn your matted locks,
    the elephant has scattered in the street!
Lord Siva, in your wrath
    you burnt the cities of your enemies.
When once a poor lad came to you for refuge,
    Pursed by Yamaṉ, like a thunder-cloud
Lord Siva, you saved him from his plight,

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[131] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.32.2, trans. Philip Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *The Epic of Ram*, vol. 5, trans. Philip Lutgendorf, Murty Classical Library of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 93.

Jaṭāyū's prayer continues on for two more verses in the *harigītikā chand* meter. See *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.32.3–4.

[132] See Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 36–39.

[133] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.4.1–24 and 3.11.3–16.

[134] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 17.

[135] Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

[136] Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 15.

and drove off Yamaṉ with a kick.
First of all beings, endless one,
who am I among the devotees [*aṭiyār*] that do you service?
Lord Siva, hasten to my aid![137]

In Civakāmiyāṇṭār's prayer, we see references to some of Śiva's common iconographic features, such as his dreadlocks and the hide of the elephant demon Gajāsura that he wears a cloak, as well as allusions to popular mythological stories about Śiva like his destruction of the three demonic cities. This hymn by Civakāmiyāṇṭār, however, also emphasizes Śiva's role as the protector of his *aṭiyār* (devotees) especially with the reference to the *purāṇic* story of how Śiva saves his young *bhakta* Mārkaṇḍeya from Yama, the god of death. Civakāmiyāṇṭār's impassioned praise of Śiva thus highlights the centrality of Śiva's devotees in the *Periyapurāṇam*.

What is the significance of all of these prayers and hymns in these three lengthy *bhakti* narrative poems? Karen Pechilis notes that "one of the most important commonalities" within the wide world of premodern *bhakti* literature is the use of the "first-person voice."[138] Directly addressing the divine is a very common element of the *pad*/*pada*/*padam*/*abhang* form discussed earlier and other short *bhakti* compositions. *Bhakti* poets from across premodern South Asia speak in the first-person voice to praise, petition, thank, question, reprimand, and even insult their chosen personal god in their devotional songs. While we do hear the first-person voices of Cēkkilār and Tulsī in the *Periyapurāṇam* and the *Rāmcaritmānas* (especially in the prologues of each of these texts),[139] we do not see an authorial, devotional first-person voice in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.[140] The continuous presentation of hymns and prayers by *bhakta*s within the larger narratives of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* therefore provides audiences with multiple opportunities to witness ardent personal displays of devotion in the first-person voice that are similar to those commonly seen in shorter *bhakti* poems and lyrics.

Along with devotees frequently vocalizing their *bhakti* through songs and prayers, these three narrative poems also all repeatedly emphasize that the *bhakta*s' overflowing love for their chosen god is equally matched by the deity's affection for his devotees. This is particularly evident in Cēkkilār's rendition of the tale of Caṇṭīcaṉ (also known as Vicāra), a seven-year-old Brahmin boy who slices off his father's legs after he kicks the sand *liṅga* Caṇṭīcaṉ built for worshipping Śiva. Cēkkilār describes Śiva appearing before Caṇṭīcaṉ after he attacks his father:

The one whose matted locks are crowned with a garland
of *koṉṟai* blossoms
saw and lifted up the one who had fallen in the shade
of his two feet [and said]:
"You hacked and felled your father today for my sake.
From now on I am your father."
[Thus] he blessed [Vicāra], graciously embraced him,

[137] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 566–69, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 67.

[138] Pechilis Prentiss, *Embodiment of Bhakti*, 6.

[139] See Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1–10; and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.1–43.

[140] As with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the seventeen other Sanskrit *mahāpurāṇa*s, Vyāsa is traditionally regarded as the author of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

anointed him with overflowing compassion,
kissed the top of his head,
and rejoiced.[141]

Monius has convincingly shown that "among the *Periyapurāṇam*'s most obviously favored images of Śiva is that of father figure."[142] Śiva's brimming love for Caṇṭīcaṉ in this episode is a prime example of Cēkkilār's presentation of Śiva as a doting father and protector of his devotees. The stories of Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar also showcase Śiva's fondness for his *bhakta*s. Peterson explains that "in the narratives of the three saints, Śiva unfailingly comes to the Nāyaṉār's aid when he is in need… in all these episodes Cēkkilār portrays Śiva as the poets' benefactor and protector, emphasizing Śiva's loving concern for his chosen saints."[143]

Similarly, in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* Krishna is depicted as being immensely affectionate to his devotees. Take the description of Krishna greeting Śrīdāmā,[144] an impoverished Brahmin who is a childhood friend and devotee of Krishna, in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*:

> Acyuta was seated on a couch with his beloved, but saw the *brāhmaṇa* from a distance. He immediately rose up, went towards the *brāhmaṇa* and embraced him joyfully with two arms. The delighted lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa was ecstatic from the bodily contact with his dear friend, the *brāhmaṇa* sage, and shed tears from his eyes.[145]

Bhakti poetry from all over the sub-continent is filled with descriptions of the intense bodily reactions that devotees have when they encounter or even merely think about their deity. As Krishna instructs his friend Uddhava in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*: "Where is *bhakti* without the hairs standing on end in ecstasy, without the heart melting, and without tears of joy?"[146] With Śrīdāmā, however, it is not Krishna's *bhakta* but Krishna himself who cries with happiness. Krishna's overjoyed response to seeing Śrīdāmā in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* demonstrates the immense affection this deity has for his devotees. Accordingly, the text repeatedly refers to Krishna as *bhakta vatsalaḥ*, "one who is fond of his *bhakta*s."[147]

Danuta Stasik has shown that throughout the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsī presents Rāma as "a God who is compassionate and brimming with infinite love for his devotees."[148] In Vālmīki's

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[141] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1259, trans. Monius in "Śiva Heroic Father," 173.

[142] Monius, "Śiva Heroic Father," 170.

[143] Peterson, "Tamil Śaiva Hagiography," 206.

[144] In regional retellings of this story, Śrīdāmā is often named Sudāmā. As Rupert Snell points out, "the colophon [of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*] dubs the protagonist as Śrīdāman, but the text itself is silent on the question of his name" ("Devotion Rewarded: The Sudāmā-Carit of Narottamdās," in *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, ed. Christopher Shackle and Rupert Snell [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992], 175).

[145] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.80.18–19, trans. Bryant in *Krishna: Beautiful Legend*, 339.

[146] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.14.23, trans. Bryant in *Bhakti Yoga*, 188.

[147] See *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.8.11, 1.11.10, 1.14.34, and 6.4.35.

[148] Danuta Stasik, *The Infinite Story: The Past and Present of the Rāmāyaṇas in Hindi* (Delhi: Manohar, 2009), 234.

Rāmāyaṇa, the primary reason for Rāma's human incarnation is the destruction of Rāvaṇa.[149] While Rāma also descends to the earth in order to end Rāvaṇa's tyranny in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Stasik notes that Tulsī also repeatedly states that Rāma "assumes human form and thus becomes a personal god out of his love for devotees."[150] In his Sanskrit *stotra* in the third book of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Atri begins by celebrating Rāma's fondness for his *bhakta*s: "I venerate you, who cherish your devotees [*bhakta vatsalaṃ*], who are by nature compassionate and tender."[151] When Rāma first meets Hanumān, who is one of Rāma's most beloved *bhakta*s, Rāma himself tells the monkey that he loves his devotees more than anyone else in the world:

> Then the Raghu lord lifted him into his own embrace,
> soothing him with the water of his own tears.
> "Monkey, listen: do not think yourself worthless.
> for you are twice as dear to me as Lakshman.
> Everyone declares me to be impartial,
> yet I love my servant who relies on no other."[152]

Why do the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* all emphasize the deep love that their main deity has for his devotees? As we observed earlier, the use of the first-person voice is quite common in shorter *bhakti* poems and songs. The presence of the first-person voice, however, often means that the audiences of these short devotional compositions are only able to see one side of the devotional relationship between the *bhakta* and the deity. Nearly every popular regional *bhakti* poet, including Basavaṇṇa in Kannada, Annamayya in Telugu, Tukārām in Marathi, Narsī Mehtā in Gujarati, and Sūrdās in Bhasha, speak of their intense yearning for union with the divine.[153] While some of these poets adopt the persona of a lover longing for his or her beloved, others simply vocalize the desire to see his or her chosen deity. For example, in the very first verse of the *Aṟputattiruvantāti* (Divine Linked Verses of Wonder), Kāraikkālammaiyār asks Śiva:

> Ever since I was born in this world, and learned to speak,
> with overwhelming love I have always remained at
> Your beautiful feet.
> O God of the gods, whose blue-suffused throat
> shines incandescently,
> when will You take away my sorrows?[154]

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[149] See Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14.2–21. I am following Robert Goldman's translation of Vālmīki's *Bālakāṇḍa*.

[150] Stasik, *Infinite Story,* 234. Stasik directs us to Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.116.1, 1.122.1, 1.192, and 2.219.3.

[151] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.4.1–2, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 5:9.

[152] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 4.3.3–4, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 5:137.

[153] See Basavaṇṇa *vacana* 111, trans. Ramanujan in *Speaking of Śiva*, 75; Annamayya*, God on the Hill: Temple Poems from Tirupati*, trans. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61; Tukārām, *Says Tuka: Selected Poetry of Tukaram*, trans. Dilip Chitre (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), 12; Shukla-Bhatt, *Narasinha Mehta of Gujarat*, 61; and Sūrdās*, Sūrsagar* 274.

[154] Kāraikkālammaiyār, *Aṟputattiruvantāti* 1, trans. Elaine Craddock in *Śiva's Demon Devotee: Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 115.

Unsurprisingly, we never hear Śiva's reply to Kāraikkālammaiyār in the *Aṟputattiruvantāti*. In Cēkkilār's *Periyapurāṇam*, however, we not only see Śiva speak to Kāraikkālammaiyār, but we see him grant her desire to be united with him. At the end of her story, Cēkkilār tells us:

> The Lord who is attained by those who worship him gave her his grace and said:
> "You will see our dance and you will experience bliss (*āṉantam*), forever singing to us,
> in resplendent Ālaṅkāṭu, an ancient town that is both renowned and fertile that lies in
> the brilliant southern region."[155]

Unlike several shorter *bhakti* songs and poems, especially those narrated solely in the first-person voice, lengthy *bhakti* narrative poems like the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* explicitly show that the devotional relationship between the deity and the *bhakta* is one of reciprocity. The divine lord loves his devotees just as much as they love him.

The final crucial shared feature of these three narrative poems that I will discuss is the way in which the primary deity looms over the entire text even when he is not physically present in the narrative. Consider the first half of the *Book of Childhood* (*Bālakāṇḍ*) of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Although the title of this Rāmāyaṇa means the "Lake of the Deeds of Rāma," the actual *carita* of Rāma does not begin until the one hundred and seventy-sixth stanza of the *Rāmcaritmānas* with the story of the demon king Rāvaṇa's rise to power. Yet while it takes a considerable amount of time for Tulsī to begin his narration of Rāma's life story, Rāma is by no means absent from the beginning of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. In the first forty-three stanzas of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsī provides his audience with an extensive prologue in which he proclaims his own personal devotion to Rāma. The one hundred twenty-fifth through one hundred seventy-fifth stanzas of the *Book of Childhood* consist of "tales of curses and boons that set the stage for Ram's advent."[156] The forty-fourth through one hundred and twenty-fourth stanzas of the *Book of Childhood*, however, do not tell a story associated with Rāma but with another deity: Śiva.

As with the fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* (Esoteric Rāmāyaṇa), an important source of inspiration for Tulsī that I would also describe as a *bhakti* narrative poem, the Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas* presents Śiva as the composer of the narrative and his consort Pārvatī as his audience.[157] Unlike the *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa*, however, Tulsī dedicates a solid chunk of the *Book of Childhood* to telling the popular *purāṇic* story of the suicide of Śiva's first wife Satī and her subsequent reincarnation as Pārvatī. In most versions of the tale of Satī, Satī takes her life because she cannot bear the way her father Dakṣa insults Śiva at a sacrificial ceremony, and this is certainly part of the reason why Satī kills herself in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[158] But Tulsī adds another contributing factor to Satī's depression in his poem. Following the rendering of this

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[155] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1777, trans. Pechilis in "Tamil Woman Saint," 183.

[156] Philip Lutgendorf, introduction to Tulsīdās, *The Epic of Ram*, vol. 1, trans. Philip Lutgendorf, Murty Classical Library of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), xxiii.

[157] *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* 1.1.18–20. I am following: *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, trans. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia, 2 vols. (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, 2010).

[158] See Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2009), 392–93 and 415–16; and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.64.

episode in the Sanskrit *Śivapurāṇa*,[159] Tulsī describes Śiva abandoning Satī after she takes the form of Rāma's wife Sītā in an attempt to trick Rāma right before she goes to Dakṣa's sacrificial ceremony.[160] Thus in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Rāma plays a pivotal role in the story of Satī.

Tulsī also has Rāma help bring Śiva and Pārvatī together. After hearing of Satī's death, the heartbroken Śiva roams around chanting Rāma's name. Rāma then comes and tells Śiva of Satī's rebirth as Pārvatī. Note how Tulsī describes Rāma manifesting himself before Śiva:

> A long time passed in this way,
> as he [Śiva] felt ever-fresh love for Ram's feet.
> Beholding Shankar's discipline and love
> and devotion's [*bhagati* (*bhakti*)] indelible mark on his heart,
>
> Ram appeared to him, gratified and gracious,
> treasury of beauty, virtue, and immense radiance.[161]

In the verses above, Tulsī does not present Śiva as deity but as a devout Rāma *bhakta*. In fact, throughout the entire rendering of the story of Satī/Pārvatī (and the rest of the *Rāmcaritmānas*), Tulsī emphasizes Śiva's deep love for Rāma.[162] While Rāma only makes two physical appearances in this part of the text (when Satī fails to trick him and when he appears before Śiva), his presence is felt throughout this section of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Both Śiva and Satī/Pārvatī are continuously described as meditating on Rāma, chanting his name, and expounding his virtues.[163] Tulsī also finds other subtle ways to insert references to Rāma into this episode. When Pārvatī is born to Himavat, the personification of the Himalayas, Tulsī tells us: "The mountain shone at his daughter's coming like one who has found devotion to Ram [*rāma-bhagati*]."[164] When describing the powerful display that Kāmadeva, the god of love, produces in the world to try and make Śiva break his penance and fall in love with Pārvatī, Tulsī states that: "No one held to forbearance, for the mind-born god had conquered every mind. Only those whom the Raghu hero protected remained safe during that time."[165]

Many scholars have speculated about the reason why Tulsī included the story of Śiva and Satī/Pārvatī in his devotional Rāmāyaṇa. Possible explanations include Tulsī's identity as a member of the *smārta* Brahmin community that worships Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, and Durgā and the assumption that Tulsī composed at least part of the *Rāmcaritmānas* in Śiva's city of

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[159] See chapter 24 of the *Satīkhaṇḍa* of the *Rudrasaṃhitā* in *Śivapurāṇa* (*The Śiva-Purāṇa*), trans. J.L. Shastri, 4 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1950). On the dating of the *Śivapurāṇa*, see Doniger, *The Hindus*, 370.

[160] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.52–64.

[161] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.76. 2–3, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:157.

[162] See Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 43–44.

[163] See Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.48, 51, 57, 59, 75, 82, and 89.

[164] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.66. 2, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:141.

[165] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.85 *dohā*, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:175.

Banaras.[166] While we will likely never know why Tulsī placed this Śaiva tale in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, it is clear that Tulsī imbued this Śiva-centric story with ardent Rāma *bhakti*.

As noted earlier, the *kṛṣṇacarita* contained in the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is easily one of the most famous renderings of Krishna's life story in South Asia. Yet while Krishna is introduced in the first book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* through the narration of a few episodes from the Mahābhārata tradition, the detailed account of Krishna's youth in Vrindavan and adulthood in Dwarka does not take place until the tenth of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*'s twelve books. The first nine books of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are dedicated to the stories of earlier incarnations of the "blessed lord" Bhagavān and his exemplary devotees or *bhāgavata*s.[167]

Notably, in many of the stories in the first nine books of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Bhagavān makes only one physical appearance in the narrative. We see this with the tales of the five-year-old *bhakta* Dhruva, in which the deity grants the prince a vision of his true form in the middle of the story, and the elephant Gajendra, in which Bhagavān is only seen at the end of story when he rescues his devotee.[168] Commenting on the story of Narasiṃha, the man-lion incarnation of Bhagavān, in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Valpey explains that Prahlāda takes "center stage as an ideal *bhakta* of Bhagavān, a model *bhāgavata*. As one of the text's outstanding *bhāgavatas*, Prahlāda, arguably more than Nṛsiṃha, is the hero of this episode."[169] As with the narration of Gajendra, Bhagavān in the form of Narasiṃha makes his sole physical appearance at the conclusion of the story when he comes to save Prahlāda from his father Hiraṇyakaśipu.[170]

Yet while Bhagavān may not be the hero of this section of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, his presence is felt throughout this entire episode. Prahlāda spends most of this story telling others about the glory of Bhagavān. When Hiraṇyakaśipu asks his son to share what he thinks is the highest learning, Prahlāda replies with a description of *navadhā bhakti* or "ninefold devotion":

> The nine characteristics of *bhakti* that people can offer to Viṣṇu are: hearing about Him, singing about Him, remembering Him, serving His feet, worshipping Him, glorifying Him, considering oneself His servant, considering oneself His friend, and surrendering completely to Him. When these are offered to Bhagavān, then I think this to be the highest learning.[171]

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[166] See Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 43–44; Diana L. Eck, "Following Rama, Worshipping Siva," in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India; Studies in Honor of Charlotte Vaudeville*, ed. Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 49–72; and Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text,* 46.

[167] Gupta and Valpey explain that while in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the name Bhagavān sometimes refers to "any superhuman being," it primarily refers to "the supreme divinity, identified as Krishna or one of his many forms. Unlike other texts, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which identifies Krishna as a form or 'expansion' of Vishnu, the *Bhāgavata* (specifically in 1.3.28) identifies Krishna as the origin of Vishnu, Nārāyaṇa, and all the *avatāras*" (introduction to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* [2017], 227n3).

[168] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 4.9.2 and 8.3.33.

[169] Kenneth R. Valpey, "Purāṇic Trekking Along the Path of the *Bhāgavatas*," in *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Sacred Text and Living Tradition*, ed. Ravi M. Gupta and Kenneth R. Valpey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 30–31.

[170] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.8.19.

[171] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.5.23–24, trans. Bryant in *Bhakti Yoga*, 420.

Later in this episode, Prahlāda lectures his fellow demon classmates about Bhagavān:

> A wise person should practice the *dharma* of Bhagavān from childhood. A human birth is rare, and even though it is temporary, it can bestow the true goal of life. Therefore, a person born into this world should approach the feet of Viṣṇu: He is one's Īśvara [lord], the dearest friend, and beloved of all beings.[172]

The story of Prahlāda and Narasiṃha thus illustrates how Bhagavān always remains at the center of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* even when he is not physically present in the narrative of this text.

As Monius notes, the Tamil *Periyapurāṇam* is "quite unique in its emphasis on human devotees of the lord rather than on the deeds of the god himself, as is typical of the earlier Sanskrit *Mahāpurāṇas*."[173] The *Periyapurāṇam* bears little resemblance to the Sanskrit *Śivapurāṇa*, which narrates the adventures of Śiva and his family members, or to Parañcōti's seventeenth-century Tamil *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* (Legend of the Divine Games), a *talapurāṇam* or "place legend" about Śiva's sixty-four sacred exploits in the city of Madurai (Maturai).[174]

Monius points out that, as with Bhagavān in the stories of Gajendra and Prahlāda in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa,* in the *Periyapurāṇam* "in most stories, he [Śiva] appears only in the final verses of the narrative, ready to reward the saint for his display of devotion."[175] This is seen in Cēkkilār's telling of the story of Kōṭpuli, the commander of the army of a Chola king who uses all of his money to purchase paddy for Śiva temples. Although Kōṭpuli tells all his relatives that all of his paddy is dedicated to Śiva, his family members end up using the paddy to feed themselves during a famine. The furious Kōṭpuli then massacres all his relatives not even sparing an infant. Cēkkilār uses twelve quatrain verses to describe this gruesome tale of Kōṭpuli's extreme devotion to Śiva.[176] Śiva only shows up in the penultimate verse of the story:

> In that way, the Lord Śiva stood before the devotee and said:
> "With the sword in your hand,
> you have cut away the fetters (*pācam*) of your family;
> entering into the world above the golden world [of the gods],
> they will reach us.
> Oh glorious one! You come to us even now!"
> Commanding [him thus], [the lord] graciously disappeared.[177]

In some stories, such as that of Cattiyār, Śiva does not even make a single appearance:

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[172] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.6.1–2, trans. Bryant in *Bhakti Yoga*, 420.

[173] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 120.

[174] For summaries of the contents of the *Śivapurāṇa* and the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 223–28; and William P. Harman, *The Sacred Marriage Of A Hindu Goddess* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 21–43.

[175] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 143.

[176] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 4134–45.

[177] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 4144, trans. Monius in "Love, Violence, Disgust," 158.

> The land watered by the river Kāveri was ruled by the Cōḻa kings, who extended their rule and erected columns commemorating their victories at every point of the compass. In that land was situated the town of Variñcaiyūr, where the tanks were filled with the honey that poured from the lotus plants pulled by farmers. It was at Variñcaiyūr that Cattiyār was born for the glory of the Vēḷāḷar caste. He served the feet of the Lord, which Tirumāl, Ayaṉ, and the other gods could never comprehend. He was called Cattiyār because of the force with which he would cut out the tongue of anyone who spoke of the devotees of the Lord with disrespect. He would use an implement to pull out the tongues of such slanderous miscreants, then cut them off with a sharp knife. By virtue of this loving service, he won enduring fame. He walked in the way of the Lord for many a long day, performing this violent form of service with courage and devotion in this wide world. This heroic servant of the Lord rendered his unique service without any hesitation, and finally attained the shade cast by the feet of the dancing Lord. We have paid homage to the feet of Cattiyār, who cut out the tongues of those who spoke ill of the servants of the Lord.[178]

Cēkkilār's narration of the tale of Cattiyār is one of the shorter episodes in the *Periyapurāṇam*. Yet even though Śiva does not make an appearance in this story, his presence is still felt in these seven quatrain verses. Cēkkilār alludes to two popular *purāṇic* stories about Śiva in his narration of Cattiyār's life. When Cēkkilār states that Cattiyār "served the feet of the Lord, which Tirumāl (Viṣṇu), Ayaṉ (Brahmā), and the other gods could never comprehend" he is referring to the myth in which Śiva demonstrates to Viṣṇu and Brahmā that he is the supreme deity by assuming the form of a fiery, never-ending *liṅga*.[179] The description of Śiva as the "dancing lord" is an allusion to Śiva as Naṭarāja, the lord of dance whose cosmic performance sustains the universe.

Cēkkilār draws on well-known *purāṇic* divine feats of Śiva throughout the *Periyapurāṇam*. As Elaine Craddock observes, "the four most common myths of Śiva's heroic deeds in the *Periya Purāṇam* are the destruction of the three demon cities, the flaying of the rutting elephant, the kicking of Yama, and the incineration of Kāma."[180] While the *Śivapurāṇa* use ninety-seven verses to relate the story of Śiva burning Kāmadeva to ash,[181] Cēkkilār is able to remind his audience of this same myth just with the epithet "the One who opened [the third eye in his] forehead to destroy Kāma" in his account of the life of Campantar.[182] In her discussion of Cēkkilār's presentation of Śiva as a loving father in the *Periyapurāṇam*, Monius notes that "like a good father, he spends much of his time in the background, allowing his human devotees to take center stage."[183] What we need to remember, however, is that while Śiva might be in the background for the most of the *Periyapurāṇam*, he is never truly absent from this text.

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[178] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 4039–45, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 344.

[179] On this myth, see Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, 343

[180] Craddock, *Śiva's Demon Devotee*, 80.

[181] See chapters 18–19 of the *Pārvatīkhaṇḍa* of the *Rudrasaṃhitā* in the *Śivapurāṇa*

[182] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 2307, trans. Monius in "Śiva Heroic Father," 186.

[183] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 143.

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As we saw in the Introduction, John Cort has aptly noted that "bhakti is not one single thing."[184] The same is true for *bhakti* narrative poems. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* are three extremely different compositions. Yet, as I have just demonstrated, these three lengthy narrative poems share four salient features: (1) the prominence of "all along" devotees, (2) the prevalence of devotees breaking out into song in praise of the primary deity, (3) the presentation of the primary deity as a god who cares deeply about his devotees, and (4) the way in which the primary deity looms over the entire text even when he is not physically present in the narrative. In the next chapter, I will show how both Villiputtūrār and Sabalsingh Cauhān utilize these four features of *bhakti* narrative poems in their regional Mahābhārata retellings.

[184] Cort, "Bhakti in Early Jain Tradition," 62.

CHAPTER TWO

The Story of the Bhāratas as the Deeds of Krishna: Narrative Transformation in Villi's *Pāratam* and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*

Let us remind ourselves once again of how both Villi and Cauhān categorize their Mahābhāratas as *kṛṣṇacaritas*. Villi makes the following declaration in his introduction to the *Pāratam*:

> I do not perceive the excellence of the Bhārata in the great language (Sanskrit)
> praised by the foremost, great, hidden Vedas, the sages, the gods, and others.
> But I agree to utter this out of my desire for the *carita* of the eternal Mādhava,
> who appears intermittently in it.[1]

And in the beginning of the first chapter of the *Mahābhārat*, Cauhān tells his audience:

> I cannot comprehend any of the mysteries of the *carita* of Hari,
> but I will summarize some of it in Bhasha and thus sing
> what was told by that great sage Vyāsa,
> knower of the *carita* of illustrious Bhagavān.[2]

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Villi and Cauhān transform the story of the war of the Bhāratas into a *bhakti* narrative poem centered on the deeds of Krishna. In Chapter One, I outlined four shared features of *bhakti* narrative poems: (1) the eminence of "all along" devotees, (2) the frequency of devotees singing hymns in praise of the main deity, (3) the depiction of the main deity as a god who greatly cares about his devotees, and (4) the way in which the main deity pervades the entire text even when he is not physically present in the narrative. In this chapter, I reveal how all four of these features are utilized by Villi and Cauhān throughout their devotional Mahābhāratas by carefully analyzing four examples from both narratives: (1) Krishna's introduction, (2) Draupadī's prayer to Krishna during her attempted disrobing, (3) the whole fifth book (the *Book of Effort*), and (4) the departure of Krishna at the end of the story.

Introducing Krishna

From the very beginnings of the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, both Villi and Cauhān make it abundantly clear that they are each reframing the Mahābhārata as a devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*. Krishna first appears in the narrative of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* as a spectator at Draupadī's *svayaṃvara* (self-choice) ceremony. Villi and Cauhān, however, introduce Krishna much earlier in the narratives of their respective Mahābhāratas. In the Tamil *Pāratam*, we meet Krishna right after the deaths of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī when Kuntī and

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[1] *muṉṉum māmaṟai muṉivarum tēvarum piṟarum*
paṉṉum mā moḻi pāratam perumaiyum pārēṉ
maṉṉum mātavaṉ caritamum iṭai iṭai vaḻaṅkum
eṉṉum ācaiyāl yāṉum ītu iyamputaṟku icaintēṉ || *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 8 ||

[2] *hari caritra kou bheda na pāvahiṃ kai bhāṣā saṅkṣepa kachu gāvahiṃ*
mahā muni jo vyāsa bakhānā śrībhagavanta carita jina jānā || *CM* 1.2 ||

the Pāṇḍavas return to Hastinapura, and in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Krishna makes his first appearance when he rescues Kuntī and the Pāṇḍavas from the fire in the lac palace. Yet even before each of these scenes, Krishna is constantly seen in the background of these two regional Mahābhāratas, much like Rāma in the beginning of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Bhagavān in the first nine books of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and Śiva throughout the *Periyapurāṇam*.

After the introduction to the text attributed to Villi's son Varantaruvār and Villi's own introduction, the actual narrative of the Tamil *Pāratam* commences with the first chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings* (*Ātiparuvam*), the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" (*Kurukulaccarukkam*). Notably, the very first words of the first verse of this opening chapter are *eṅkaḷ mātavaṉ*, "our Mādhava." In a display of humility similar to the *avaiyaṭakkam* in his own introduction to poem that we saw in the Introduction, Villi states in the first verse of the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" that "I will compose this great story to the best of my knowledge."[3] Yet Villi also takes care to begin this first verse of his narrative by paying homage to "our Mādhava from whose great lotus heart there appears the rising moon."[4]

Similarly, after invoking Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed remover of obstacles,[5] Cauhān dedicates the first stanza of his first chapter to a description of Krishna as the *ādipuruṣa* or "primordial being" that echoes Ugraśravas's praise of Krishna/Viṣṇu from the first chapter of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* that we examined in Chapter One.[6] Cauhān extols Krishna as the one "by whose name one is saved from the cycle of rebirth and by whose name all sorrow and grief is destroyed."[7] Cauhān also declares that "Hari and Hara (Śiva) are branches of you, Krishna," a statement that unequivocally present Krishna as the ultimate godhead.[8]

While the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" in the *Pāratam* relates the stories of the prominent ancestors of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas such as Yayāti, Bharata, Śaṃtanu, and Bhīṣma, Villi still manages to insert several references to Krishna/Viṣṇu into his first chapter. For example, in between his renderings of the stories of Hastin and Kuru, Villi uses a verse to relate the tale of Gajendra that is found in the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as well as in the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam,* the collected poems of the twelve Āḻvārs.[9] As with the Āḻvārs, who refer to Gajendra over fifty times in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*,[10] Villi (who is remembered today as Villiputtūrāḻvār or "Villiputtūrār the Āḻvār") inserts multiple allusions to Gajendra in his Tamil Mahābhārata.[11] In his third chapter, for instance, Villi compares Arjuna saving Droṇa

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[3] *mā katai yāṉ aṟi aḷavaiyiṉ camaikkēṉ* || *VP* 1.1.1 ||

[4] *eṅkaḷ mātavaṉ itayam mā malar varum utayam tiṅkaḷ* || *VP* 1.1.1 ||

[5] It should be noted that Villi also begins his *taṟciṟappuppāyiram* with an invocation to Gaṇeśa. For an analysis of this invocation, see Chapter Three.

[6] *CM* 1.1; and *MBh* 1.1.20–22.

[7] *jāke nāma tarata saṃsārā jāhi nāma dukha śoka saṃhārā* || *CM* 1.1 ||

[8] *harihara kṛṣṇa tau śākhā bhayaū* || *CM* 1.1 ||

[9] *VP* 1.1.30.

[10] Vasudha Narayanan, *The Way and the Goal: Expressions of Devotion in Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Vaishnava Studies, 1987), 163.

[11] For example, see *VP* 1.4.1, 3.5.109, 5.4.43, and 6.3.17.

from a crocodile to Neṭumāl (a particularly Tamil name of Viṣṇu) rescuing Gajendra from the crocodile who tried to kill him.[12] Other Vaiṣṇava allusions in the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" and the next chapter, the "Origins Chapter" (*Campavaccarukkam*), include Ambā saying that she will defeat Bhīṣma just as Garuḍa, the eagle mount of Viṣṇu, defeats snakes and Villi comparing the newborn Bhīma to his half-brother and Rāma's most cherished devotee, Hanumān.[13] Villi also begins the "Origins Chapter" with an elaborate invocation to the infant Krishna who slayed the demoness Pūtanā, which I will discuss in much greater detail in Chapter Three.

Similarly to Villi, Cauhān inserts several references to Krishna in the beginning of his *Mahābhārat*. The first chapter of this Bhasha composition ends with a *phalaśruti* (literally, "hearing the fruits") in which Cauhān declares the rewards of listening to his poem:

> Listen, king! Sabalsingh Cauhān says that the expanse of the auspicious fruit
> of the Bhārata story are the attributes of the infinite Govinda.[14]

While *phalaśruti*s are found in a variety of different works of South Asia literature, including the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*,[15] they are particularly prominent features of religious texts and are accordingly utilized throughout the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[16] The use of a *bhaṇitā* (signature) or *chāp* (seal)—a very common element of *bhakti* poems from across South Asia—in this *phalaśruti* makes Cauhān and his own personal devotion to Krishna a distinct component of this Mahābhārata.[17] Throughout the rest of his composition, Cauhān continues to invoke Krishna with *phalaśruti*s.[18]

Cauhān also alludes to Krishna/Viṣṇu by mentioning this deity when he introduces other characters in the first chapters of his *Mahābhārat*. In the second chapter of Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings* (*Ādiparv*), Vyāsa states that "I was born from the *māyā* of Viṣṇu."[19] As Bruce Sullivan has shown, while Vyāsa is only briefly described as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the *Book*

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[12] *VP* 1.1.30.

[13] *VP* 1.1.144 and 1.2.76.

[14] *bhārata kathā puṇya phala rājā sunu bistāra*
sabalasiṃha cauhāna kaha guṇa gobinda apārā || *CM* 1.5 ||

[15] For example, see *MBh* 1.90.96 and 5.134.18–20.

[16] For example, see *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 3.33.37, 4.31.31, and 10.81.41; Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 790, 1898, and 4281; and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.361 *soraṭhā*, 2.326 *soraṭhā*, and 5.50 *dohā*.

[17] On the use of the *bhaṇitā/chāp* in *bhakti* poems, see John Stratton Hawley, "Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (1988): 269–90.

[18] For example, see *CM* 1.9, 5.137, and 6.64.

[19] *biṣṇū māyā janma hamārā* || *CM* 1.7 ||

Māyā is usually translated as "illusion." Yet as Sally Sutherland Goldman points out, "the term *māyā,* like the vast majority of Sanskrit words, is polysemic and has a range of meanings that include but are not limited to, "fraud, deceit, trick," "witchcraft, an illusion of magic," "phantom, unreal apparition," "pseudo-" "pity," and "extraordinary power, wisdom" ("Illusory Evidence: The Construction of *Māyā* in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*," in *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History: Essays in Honor of R.P. Goldman*, ed. Sheldon Pollock [Delhi: Manohar, 2010], 210).

of Peace in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, "the Hindu tradition in the centuries after the epic's composition, has been both explicit and consistent in identifying Vyāsa as an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa."[20] When Cauhān introduces Kuntī, he says that her father Śūrasena was Krishna's grandfather.[21] After making love to the servant woman who will give birth to Vidura, Cauhān has Vyāsa tell her that her son will be "a great *bhakta* of Bhagavān" (*mahābhakta bhagavāna*).[22] This presentation of Vidura as a devotee of Krishna from birth (or an "all along" *bhakta*") corresponds with the way this character is depicted in the third book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as well as in the works of later Vaiṣṇava traditions such as the Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāya.*[23]

It is important to acknowledge that we do find allusions to other Hindu deities in the opening chapters of both the *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat*. In the first chapter of Villi's poem, when Śaṃtanu sees his grown son Bhīṣma for the first time, he wonders if this young warrior is Kumaraṉ (Murukaṉ), a distinctly Tamil deity.[24] The eighth and ninth chapters of Cauhān's retelling present an episode that is also found in Sāraḷādāsa's Oriya *Mahābhārata* and Kāśīrāmdās's Bengali *Mahābhārata*, in which Gāndhārī and Kuntī enlist their sons in a competition to determine which of these two queens has the right to worship in a certain Śiva temple.[25] The references to Krishna/Viṣṇu and other Vaiṣṇava figures and myths in both the *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat*, however, far outnumber those to other Hindu gods.

Let us now turn to the actual introductions to Krishna in the narratives of Villi's and Cauhān's texts. In the Tamil poem, Krishna makes his first appearance in the narrative directly after Kuntī brings the Pāṇḍavas to Hastinapura after the demise of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī in the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" in the *Book of the Beginnings*. Krishna does not show up in this same scene in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[26] But in the *Pāratam*, immediately following a verse about the first meeting of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas in which the two sets of cousins are compared to two different types of lotuses trying to co-exist in one pond,[27] Villi describes the arrival of Krishna's father Vasudeva to Hastinapura in a verse rich with poetic imagery:

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[20] Bruce M. Sullivan, *Seer of the Fifth Veda: Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa in the Mahābhārata* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 80.

[21] *CM* 1.15.

[22] *CM* 1.14.

[23] See Sravani Kanamarlapudi, "Vidura Speaks: A Study of the *Viduranīti* and its Reception History," (Master's thesis, University of Washington, 2019), 69–84.

[24] *VP* 1.1.83.

[25] See Pathani Patnaik, "Sarala's Oriya Mahābhārata: 'A Vox Populi' in Oriya Literature," in *Mahābhārata in the Tribal and Folk Traditions of India,* ed. K.S. Singh (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993), 175; Pradip Bhattacharya, "Variations on Vyasa: The First Bengali Mahabharata," in *Aesthetic Textures: Living Traditions of the Mahabharata*, ed. Molly Kaushal and Sukrita Paul Kumar (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2019), 96–97; and *CM* 1.27–33.

[26] *MBh* 1.117.

[27] *VP* 1.2.110.

In this way, at the time of [the Pāṇḍavas'] upbringing,
the king (Vasudeva) arrived.
He produced the hero,
he who will end the concerns (of the Earth),
grieving over the destruction of her beauty
with her loin surrounded by the blowing ocean,
her waist like lightning, her mountain breasts,
her soft bamboo shoulders, and her color like gold.[28]

While the word "hero" (*talaivaṉ*) could be used for a number of different Mahābhārata characters, the epithet "he who will end" (*muṭippāṉ*) alerts audiences versed in the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* that Villi is referring to Krishna/Viṣṇu since Kulacēkarāḻvār, Periyāḻvār, and Nammāḻvār all use this name for the deity in their compositions.[29] The story of Nārāyaṇa incarnating as Krishna in order to protect the goddess Earth is also found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, but there are some salient differences. First, in the Sanskrit epic, in order to help Earth who is being harassed by demons, not just Nārāyaṇa, but several celestial figures all use portions of themselves to take birth as humans. The Pāṇḍavas are the partial incarnations of the five Vedic gods who fathered them and Draupadī is a portion of Viṣṇu's consort Śrī.[30] In the Tamil text, Nārāyaṇa is the only divine being who comes to Earth's aid.

The place in each text where Viṣṇu is described coming to assist Earth is also significant. In the *Mahābhārata*, the account of Viṣṇu and the other celestials descending as humans to save Earth is found in the "Partial Incarnations" (*Aṃśāvatāra*) sub-book of the *Book of the Beginnings* when Arjuna's grandson King Janamejaya asks the sage Vaiśampāyana to tell him about his forefathers. Vaiśampāyana's narration of the *Mahābhārata* to Janamejaya is one of the four major frame stories of the Sanskrit epic. Yet in the *Pāratam*, Villi tells us that Krishna came to Earth's aid immediately after he describes the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas meeting for the first time. Villi thus directly equates the pain of Earth with the imminent pain the Pāṇḍavas will soon endure at the hands of their one hundred malicious paternal cousins.

The *Pāratam* goes on to detail Krishna's arrival in Hastinapura alongside his brother Balarāma, his mother Devakī, and the rest of the Yādavas with three more quatrain verses:

As if many Indras came down to earth itself,
the members of the own divine clan of Kuntibhoja
approaching the son of Gaṅgā (Bhīṣma)
soaked with the excellent fragrance of *koṉṟai* flowers,
came and entered Hastinapura,
which is like never-ending heaven.[31]

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[28] *iṉṉaṇam vaḷarum kālai eṟi kaṭal uṭutta alkul*
miṉ eṉum maruṅkul koṅkai veṟpu uṭai vēykoḷ meṉtōḷ
poṉ eṉum niṟattiṉōṭum poṟpu aḻi ākulattāḷ
taṉ eṇam muṭippāṉ vanta talaivaṉai tanta kōmāṉ || *VP* 1.2.111 ||

[29] Kulacēkarāḻvār, *Perumāḷtirumoḻi* 4.8; Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 3.6.5, 4.9.9; and Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 6.10.11 and 8.7.11.

[30] *MBh* 1.58.

[31] *kuntipōcaṉ taṉ teyvam kulattu uḷōrkaḷum aṉēka*
intirar avaṉi taṉṉil eytiṉar ākum eṉṉa

The young man like the color of the white moon (Balarāma)
and the one the color of a black cloud (Krishna)
and the woman (Devakī) who gave birth from her own divine womb to the benevolent one,
approaching Kuntī with limitless joy and
reflecting on all merits and virtues,
they also recounted the manner of ruling the world.[32]

Our lord, the primordial cause,
the master of Indra and all the deities,
looked at the god Dharma brought forth by Pāṇḍu and said:
"We ourselves,
removing the suffering that comes here
in all the lands surrounded by waters,
will fulfill all wishes."[33]

The final verse is of particular importance to us. As Emily Hudson observes, the narrative of the Sanskrit epic "leaves open the question of whether or not Kṛṣṇa is actually on the side of human beings or if he is plotting against them, driving everyone toward an apocalyptic doom."[34] The proclamation about "removing the suffering" might make it seem like Villi's Krishna is indeed "driving everyone toward an apocalyptic doom." Yet this verse in which Villi intimately refers to Krishna as *empirāṉ*, "our lord," actually sets the stage for the presentation of Krishna as the steadfast protector of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Pāratam*. Recall that Krishna has entered the narrative right at the point where Villi introduces the conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. The very first thing Krishna does in this verse is look at Yudhiṣṭhira. The *nōy* or "suffering" that Krishna speaks of in this verse does not just refer to the suffering of Earth, but also the impending suffering of the Pāṇḍavas. As the narrative of the *Pāratam* progresses, it quickly becomes clear that Krishna's primary concern in this text is the Pāṇḍavas' safety.

Krishna makes his first appearance in Cauhān's narrative during the fire in the lac palace. While there is no mention of Krishna in this episode in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, Krishna's rescue of the Pāṇḍavas from the fire is found in different Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poems. In Kuntī's prayer in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* that we examined in Chapter One, Kuntī thanks Krishna for saving her and her sons from numerous dangerous situations including the fire in the lac house: "You saved us from poison, the great fire, the uncivilized assembly, from meeting with

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kantam vāṉ koṉṟai tōyum kaṅkaiyāḷ kumaraṉ vaikum
antam il cuvarkkam aṉṉa attiṉāpuri vantu uṟṟār || *VP* 1.2.112 ||

[32] *veḷ niṟam matiyam aṉṉa viṭalaiyum kariya mēkam*
vaṇṇaṉum valḷal taṉṉai tiru vayiṟu uyirtta mātum
eṇ ilā uvakaiyōṭum kuntiyai eyti ellām
puṇṇiyam nalamum eṇṇi pūmi āḷ muṟaiyum kōttār || *VP* 1.2.113 ||

[33] *empirāṉ ātimūlam intiraṉ mutalōrkku ellām*
tampirāṉ pāṇṭu īṉṟa trauma tēvaikaiya nōkki
ampu rācikaḷ ulpaṭṭa avaṉikaḷ aṉaittum nāmē
impar nōy akaṟṟi ellā eṇṇamum muṭittum eṉṟāṉ || *VP* 1.2.114 ||

[34] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 198.

cannibals, and from the travails of life in the forest."[35] Similarly, in a *pada* attributed to Sūrdās, the Bhasha poet describes multiple different instances of Krishna aiding the Pāṇḍavas in the Mahābhārata beginning with the lacquer house: "he rescued the Pandavs from the trials they bore: the house of lac, the wilderness, their enemies' armies."[36] The choice to incorporate Krishna into this episode signals that Cauhān, like the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and Sūrdās, understands the main relationship between Krishna and the Pāṇḍavas as one between deity and devotees.

In this episode in Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, upon finding himself engulfed in flames in the lacquer palace, Yudhiṣṭhira's mind instantly goes to Krishna:

> The distressed Dharmaraja called out to Krishna,
> "Hey lord of the Yadus, we are surrounded by fire.
> Protect us lord, remover of sorrow.
> We are helpless and take refuge in you."
> [Krishna] showed compassion to his *bhakta*, dispelling his fear.
> Dharmaraja was filled with courage.[37]

This is the first encounter between Yudhiṣṭhira and Krishna in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. But even though Yudhiṣṭhira has never met his divine cousin before, the Pāṇḍava is clearly aware of Krishna's power. Unlike Arjuna in the start of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Cauhān's Yudhiṣṭhira knows that Krishna is the supreme deity. Cauhān also distinctly describes Yudhiṣṭhira as Krishna's *bhakta*. Given that Yudhiṣṭhira's first impulse in this scene is to call out to Krishna, Yudhiṣṭhira is implied to have been a *bhakta* "all along." In turn, Krishna's instant response to Yudhiṣṭhira's cry for help demonstrates the deity's concern for his devotee.

As in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, the Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī proceed to escape the fire through an underground tunnel in the Bhasha poem.[38] Cauhān then tell us:

> In this way the house of lac burned,
> but Krishna saved the burning Pāṇḍavas.
> The illustrious Hari always protects his *bhakta*s
> and destroys their sins, ferrying them across to the other side.[39]

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[35] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.8.24, trans. Gupta and Valpey in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2017), 32.

[36] Sūrdās, *Sūrsagar* 380, trans. Hawley in *Sur's Ocean*, 655.

Note that in the previous *pada* of the *Sūrsagar* (379), Sūrdās also states that Krishna "saved the sons of Pandu from the burning house of lac" (trans. Hawley in *Sur's Ocean*, 653).

[37] *dharmaraja bikala kṛṣṇa ko ṭeryo he yadunātha agni se gheryo*
rakṣā karahu nātha dukha hārī hama anātha haiṃ śaraṇa tumhārī
kīnheṃ kṛpā bhakta bhayahārī dharmarāja bharosa bhayo bhārī

These three lines and six other lines are absent from this episode in the Tej Kumār edition. These lines are found in the following editions of Cauhān's text: Sabalsingh Cauhān, *Śrīsabalsingh Cauhān Kṛt Mahābhārat*: *Manmohaṇī Bhāṣā Ṭīkā Sahit*, ed. Rāmjī Śarmā (Allahabad: Śrī Durgā Pustak Bhaṇaḍār, n.d.), 1.88; and Sabalsingh Cauhān, *Śrīsabalsingh Cauhān Kṛt Mahābhārat*: *Manohāriṇī Bhāṣā Ṭīkā Sahit,* ed. Rāmlagn Pāṇḍey (Varanasi: Rupeś Ṭhākur Prasād Prakāśan, 2014), 1.87. Citations from these two editions refer to the book and stanza numbers.

[38] *MBh* 1.136.15–19; and *CM* 1.38–39.

[39] *yahi bidhi lākṣā bhavana jarāvā jarata pāṇḍavana kṛṣṇa bacāvā*

These verses affirm that as with Krishna in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Śiva in *Periyapurāṇam*, and Rāma in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the Krishna of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* cares deeply about his devotees. As in Villi's *Pāratam*, the place in the narrative where Cauhān chooses to introduce Krishna is significant. While Villi has Krishna enter the plot right after the Pāṇḍavas meet the Kauravas for the first time, Cauhān brings Krishna into the narrative during the Kauravas' first major attempt to kill all five of the Pāṇḍavas. Both choices signify that Villi and Cauhān are reframing the entire Mahābhārata as the story of how Krishna saved the Pāṇḍavas.

As noted earlier, Krishna makes his first appearance in the narrative of the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* during Draupadī's bridegroom choice ceremony. Alf Hiltebeitel calls this scene in the epic, in which Krishna recognizes the Pāṇḍavas in their disguises as Brahmins and then tells Balarāma, an "almost casual introduction" to the deity.[40] Both Villi and Cauhān, however, drastically transform this episode in their retellings and bring Krishna to the forefront. Right before Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*, Cauhān inserts a scene into his poem that is not found in the Sanskrit epic in which Krishna dispatches Garuḍa to find the Pāṇḍavas and send them to Draupadī's bridegroom choice ceremony. In both the *Mahābhārata* and Cauhān's poem, Vyāsa meets the Pāṇḍavas in the forest and urges them to take part in the competition for Draupadī's hand.[41] Why then does Cauhān add another sequence in which Krishna orders Garuḍa to give the Pāṇḍavas the same information that Vyāsa did just a few stanzas earlier?

As with Krishna's inclusion in the lac house episode, this additional scene increases Krishna's presence in the Bhasha text and gives Cauhān the chance to praise the god's magnanimity towards his *bhakta*s. Cauhān highlights Krishna's deep dedication to his devotees throughout this scene with Garuḍa which begins with Krishna thinking in Dwarka:

> The controller from within knows everything.
> For the sake of his *bhakta*s, the lord of the earth took birth.
> In this way, Bhagavān considered and described the mountain of the sins of the Kauravas:
> "If evil men take birth, then the good will always be in trouble."
> Thus the lord of Śrī contemplated the death of the wicked and the protection of saints:
> "My *bhakta*s have obtained misfortune and their hearts express anxiety."
> Then the lord of Śrī called Garuḍa and the beautiful darling of Nanda said to him:
> "The five brothers are my *bhakta*s. Go and see which forest they are in."[42]

In this passage, Cauhān repeatedly emphasizes that the Pāṇḍavas are Krishna's *bhakta*s (the word *bhakta* appears three times in these seven lines) and that the deity cares about his devotees immensely. For audiences familiar with prominent *kṛṣṇacarita*s, Krishna's choice to send

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śrīhari sadā bhakta rakhavārā nāśahiṃ pāpa utārahiṃ pārā || *CM* 1.39 ||

[40] Hiltebeitel, "Krishna in the *Mahabharata*," 23. See *MBh* 1.177–78.

[41] *MBh* 1.157; and *CM* 1.46.

[42] *saba jānata haiṃ antaryāmī bhakta hetu janme jagasvāmī*
yahi prakāra śocata bhagavānā kurudala pāpa pahāḍa bakhānā
duṣṭa manuṣya janma jo pāvaiṃ sādhuna kaṣṭa sadā manabhāvaiṃ
ese śrīpati karaiṃ bicārā mārata duṣṭa santa pratipārā
mora bhakta jana saṃkaṭa pāvai tāte mana udvega janāvai
śrīpatī tabai garuḍa haṃkārā tāsoṃ kahata su nandadulāre
bhakta mora haiṃ pāṃcau bhāī kaunau bana haiṃ dekhahu jāī || *CM* 1.48 ||

Garuḍa to the Pāṇḍavas is a salient one. When Bhagavān answers Gajendra's call for help in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, he arrives on Garuḍa's back.[43] Krishna also rides Garuḍa when he steals the magical *pārijāta* tree in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.[44] The epithet *nandadulāre* or the "darling of Nanda" also reminds us instantly of the lovable young Krishna of Vrindavan.

Cauhān then demonstrates that the love Krishna has for his *bhakta*s is matched by the Pāṇḍavas' devotion to him. Moments before Garuḍa arrives, Yudhiṣṭhira reminds his siblings:

> Brothers! The lord of Śrī is our companion, so what reason is there to worry?
> He is the savior of all the worlds. He saves saints and destroys demons.[45]

Yudhiṣṭhira's words of encouragement to his younger brothers reaffirms their identity as "all along" *bhakta*s of Krishna. After Garuḍa conveys Krishna's desire for the Pāṇḍavas to attend Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*, Cauhān tells us that "the heart of Dharmarāja became joyful."[46]

While Krishna does not direct the Pāṇḍavas to Draupadī's bridegroom choice ceremony in the Tamil *Pāratam* as he does in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, his presence is still felt throughout this episode in Villi's text. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five, Villi's *Pāratam* is a *peruṅkāppiyam* (*mahākāvya* in Sanskrit). As with many other *peruṅkāppiyam* authors, Villi takes his time to describe different landscapes and cities in his poem. When Villi details how the Pāṇḍavas enter the capital of Drupada's kingdom where Draupadī's *svayaṃvara* will be held in "Draupadī's Bridegroom Choice Ceremony Chapter" (*Tiraupatimālaiyiṭṭacarukkam*), he compares the magnificence of Drupada's capital city and its features to Māyavaṉ (Viṣṇu):

> [The Pāṇḍavas] saw a fort,
> surrounded by a moat with many noisy water birds,
> of great splendor,
> with a rare excellence for anyone to speak of,
> shining with sacrificial pots and golden pinnacles,[47]
> like the form of Māyavaṉ surrounded by his obscuring *māyā*.[48]

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[43] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.3.31–32.

[44] *Harivaṃśa* 93.2; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.59.2. For the *Harivaṃśa*, I am following: *Krishna's Lineage: The Harivamsha of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata*, trans. Simon Brodbeck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[45] *hamare śrīpati haiṃ jo sahāī kāraṇa kauna śociye bhāī*
sabai jagata ke tāraṇa hārā santa tāri dānava saṃhārā || *CM* 1.49 ||

[46] *dharmarāja harṣita mana bhayaū* || *CM* 1.49 ||

[47] This part of the verse bears a strong resemblance to the opening verse of the ten verses in Āṇṭāḷ's *Nācciyārtirumoḻi* in which she describes the dream in which she weds Viṣṇu that we saw in the Introduction. In her description of Viṣṇu's bridegroom procession, Āṇṭāḷ says "every threshold was decked with bright banners and auspicious gold pots" (Āṇṭāḷ, *Nācciyārtirumoḻi* 6.1, trans. Venkatesan in Āṇṭāḷ, *Secret Garland*, 163).

[48] *vāraṇam māyai cūḻnta māyavaṉ tōṟṟam pōla*
pēr oḷi pampi yārkkum pēcu arum ciṟappiṟṟu āki
pūraṇa kumpam poṉ kōpuraṅkaḷāl polintu tōṉṟum
āravam mikunta pal puḷ akaḻi cūḻ puricai kaṇṭā || *VP* 1.5.17 ||

Villi thus expertly weaves an allusion to Viṣṇu into this descriptive verse. We see something similar in yet another verse about the splendor of Drupada's capital city.

> That great city indeed was like the belly
> into which were compressed the entire world of beings,
> that exists by beginning and growing,
> devoid of faults,
> from that beginning
> and then is destroyed
> at the time when it enters
> the mouth of Mukunda
> with his bow in his red hand.[49]

In this verse about the splendor of Drupada's city Villi draws on a popular story that the Āḻvārs refer to over two hundred times in the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* in which during the floods of dissolution, Viṣṇu floats on banyan leaf in the form of a baby.[50] Vasudha Narayanan notes that in this myth, the infant Viṣṇu is said to have "swallowed the worlds, contained them in his stomach, and then spewed them out again."[51] The words "mouth of Mukunda" also bring to mind a scene found in both the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in which Krishna's adoptive mother Yaśodā forces her son to open his lips after she hears that he has been eating mud and then sees that the entire universe is contained in Krishna's mouth.[52] The fact that the Pāṇḍavas are reminded of Viṣṇu/Krishna as they enter the capital of Drupada's kingdom points to these characters being "all along" *bhakta*s of this deity.

We find even more allusions to Krishna right before the *svayaṃvara* ceremony begins in the *Pāratam* when Draupadī's *cevilittāy* or "foster mother" (an important figure in the ancient classical "Caṅkam" corpus of Tamil literature) tells Draupadī about the different princes and kings who have come to compete.[53] In many of the *cevilittāy*'s accounts of Draupadī's suitors, she describes the candidate for Draupadī's hand by pointing out his relationship to Krishna. When the *cevilittāy* talks about King Śiśupāla, she notes he is the "younger brother of the one with *tulsī* (basil)" (*tuḷavōṉ taṉakku iḷaval*) which is a reference to Krishna being Śiśupāla maternal cousin. She also foreshadows Śiśupāla's death when she mentions the "slander" (*puṉcol*) he directs at Kaṇṇaṉ (Krishna).[54] Similarly, in her description of King Jarāsandha, the

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[49] *toṭaṅkiyum toṭakkam toṭṭu tukaḷ aṟa vaḷarntu mīḷa*
maṭaṅkiyum cellukiṉṟa maṉ uyir ulakam ellām
muṭaṅkiya cārṅkam cem kai mukuntaṉ vāy pukunta kālattu
aṭaṅkiya utaram pōṉṟatu anta mā nakari ammā || *VP* 1.5.19 ||

[50] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 164.

[51] Narayanan, 170.

[52] See Narayanan, 159; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.8.33–39.

[53] On the role of the *cevilittāy* in the Caṅkam corpus, see Elizabeth Rani Segran, "Worlds of Desire: Gender and Sexuality in Classical Tamil Poetry" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 89–98.

[54] *VP* 1.5.40.

On the story of the slaying of Śiśupāla, see Chapter Three.

cevilittāy says that he is the one who has driven "the dark rain cloud" (*kārvaṇṇaṉ*) from Mathura (Mathurā), an allusion to the fierce enmity between Jarāsandha and Krishna.[55] The *cevilittāy*'s description of Krishna himself paints a very specific image of the deity:

> They say that this nobleman
> is the jewel of the entire Yadu clan.
> Having come, having been born,
> and having been brought up amongst herdsmen,
> he is the mischievous, magnificent Māyaṉ.
> He is the one who earlier destroyed
> the life breath of his maternal uncle Kaṃsa.[56]
> The cloud is his vehicle and the harem his pleasure garden,
> the harem his pleasure garden.[57]

With this account of Krishna as the master of *māyā* (Māyaṉ) who was raised amongst cow herders, then defeated Kaṃsa, and who now roams around romancing women, it is clear that the *cevilittāy* is not describing the shrewd diplomat of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, but the youthful and playful god who pervades the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

When we come to the actual competition portion of Draupadī's *svayaṃvara* in both the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, we find a salient similarity. In both regional retellings, Krishna has a hand in securing Arjuna's victory. After Krishna recognizes the Pāṇḍavas in their Brahmin disguises in the Tamil poem, he tells Balarāma, and other members of the Yādava clan not to participate in the competition in order to ensure that Arjuna will emerge the champion.[58] These instructions, while absent from this episode in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, are also found in Agastya Paṇḍita's Sanskrit *Bālabhārata*.[59] This fourteenth-century Mahābhārata *mahākāvya*, which may have been composed at the court of the king Pratāparudra Deva II (r. 1294–1325 CE) in present-day Telangana in South India,[60] has been identified as an important source of inspiration for Villi's *Pāratam*.[61] In the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Krishna's intervention during the competition is a bit more direct. When the kings

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[55] *VP* 1.5.41.

[56] In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Kaṃsa is the cousin of Krishna's mother, Devakī, and in the *Harivaṃśa,* Devakī is Kaṃsa's aunt. In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and many other Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* compositions, however, Devakī is Kaṃsa's sister. See Preciado-Solís, *Kṛṣṇa Cycle*, 52.

[57] *inta kuricil yatu kulattukku ellām tilakam eṉum āṟu*
vantu uṟpavittu potuvaruṭaṉ vaḷarum kaḷḷam mā māyaṉ
munta kañca māmaṉ uyir muṭittāṉ ivaṟku mukil ūrti
anta purattil ārāmam anta purattil ārāmam || *VP* 1.5.41 ||

[58] *VP* 1.5.49.

[59] K. Ghanasyamala Prasada Rao, *Agastya Paṇḍita's Bālabhārata: A Critical Study* (Amalapuram: K.S. Mahalakshmi, 1992), 93.

[60] See Shalom, *Re-ending the Mahābhārata*, 77.

[61] See C.R. Sankaran and K. Rama Varma Raja, "On the Sources of Villiputtūrār-Bhāratam," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 5 (1943): 231; and Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 121.

at the *svayaṃvara* try to take part in the archery test, Cauhān's Krishna uses his *māyā* and his discus Sudarśana to obscure the target so that they will fail.[62] Krishna also uses a similar trick in Kāśīrāmdās's Bengali *Mahābhārata*.[63] In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna wins the *svayaṃvara* competition solely based on his own skills as an archer. In Villi's *Pāratam* and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* (as well as in Agastya Paṇḍita's *Bālabhārata* and Kāśīrāmdās's *Mahābhārata*), however, Krishna is the mastermind behind Arjuna's triumph.[64]

Soon after the *svayaṃvara* ends, Cauhān describes the first meeting between the Pāṇḍavas and Krishna. Cauhān tells us that after the Pāṇḍavas brought Draupadī to Kuntī:

> Then at that time Krishna arrived.
> Then [the Pāṇḍavas] experienced multiple types of joy
> and joyfully worshipped the feet of Bhagavān.[65]

Compare this scene to its counterpart from the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic:

> Said Vāsudeva upon approaching to Kuntī's son, best bearer of Law [*dharma*].
> "I am Kṛṣṇa," and touched with his hands the feet of King Yudhiṣṭhira Ājamīḍha.[66]

The image of the Pāṇḍavas blissfully worshiping Krishna in Cauhān's Bhasha retelling stands in stark contrast to the one of Krishna respectfully touching Yudhiṣṭhira's feet in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. This scene in Cauhān's poem therefore firmly confirms that these cousins' relationship is one between the supreme being and his "all along" *bhakta*s.

As we have seen, both Villi and Cauhān ensure that their audiences know the importance of Krishna in their regional Mahābhāratas right from the start of each of their texts with frequent allusions and references to the deity. With Krishna's arrival in Hastinapura in the Tamil *Pāratam* and his intervention during the fire in the lacquer palace in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Villi and Cauhān introduce Krishna as the Pāṇḍavas' constant protector by inserting him into scenes from which he is absent in the Sanskrit epic. With their renditions of Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*, however, Villi and Cauhān take an episode from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which Krishna makes a small appearance and then transform the entire episode to bring Krishna into the spotlight. We see a similar transformation in Villi's and Cauhān's presentations of one of the most famous scenes from the Mahābhārata tradition: the attempted disrobing of Draupadī.

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[62] *CM* 1.51.

[63] Bhattacharya, "Variations on Vyasa," 96.

[64] A. Harindranath and A. Purushothaman note that in the *svayaṃvara* episode of Cĕṟuśśeri's fifteenth-century Malayalam *Bhāratagātha* "Karna fails in his attempt because of Krishna's act (no elaboration of what this act is)" ("*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam," May 22, 2005, http://mahabharata-resources.org/variations/mvm_v2.pdf).

[65] *yahi antara kṛṣṇahu taba āī*
bahuta prakāra harṣa taba mānā
pūjeu caraṇa harṣa bhagavāna || *CM* 1.55 ||

[66] *MBh* 1.183.4, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 1:359.

Reimagining Draupadī's Prayer to Krishna

The scene in which Duḥśāsana drags the menstruating Draupadī by her hair and then tries to publicly disrobe her after Yudhiṣṭhira gambles and loses her in the first crooked game of dice is one of most disturbing and popular scenes in the Mahābhārata tradition. In many Mahābhāratas, Draupadī calls out to Krishna when Duḥśāsana begins to pull at her garment and the deity answers her prayer by providing her with a never-ending stream of cloth.

For all its fame in people's minds today, however, the sequence with Draupadī's prayer and Krishna's divine intervention is noticeably absent from the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*. Multiple scholars have labeled Krishna's presence in this episode in the Sanskrit epic a late *bhakti* interpolation.[67] Wendy Doniger notes that the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* assumes that "the power of Draupadi's own dharma, her unwavering devotion to her husband(s), is what protects her when Duhshasana tries to strip her."[68] Doniger adds that "several manuscripts of this passage, as well as many texts composed after the tenth century, remove Draupadi's agency by saying that she called for help from Krishna, who arrived and performed the miracle of the expanding sari. There is a real loss of feminist ground here."[69]

We cannot ignore, however, that Draupadī's prayer to Krishna is an intrinsic part of the dice game episode in the larger Mahābhārata narrative tradition in South Asia. Draupadī's call to Krishna is found in both the northern and southern recensions of the Sanskrit epic. In Ramchandrashastri Kinjawadekar's edition of the "vulgate" *Mahābhārata* of Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara (which is generally identified with the northern recension), Draupadī alludes to the stories of Krishna's childhood amongst the cowherds of Vrindavan in her prayer:

> When her clothes were being dragged off, Draupadī thought about Hari. "O Govinda! Resident of Dvārakā! O Kṛṣṇa, beloved of the cowherdesses [*gopījanapriya*]. Don't you know that I have been abused by the Kauravas, Keśava? O Master! Master of Ramā [*ramānātha*]! Lord of Vraja [*vrajanātha*]! One who removes suffering! Rescue me as I am sunk in the ocean of the Kauravas, Janārdana! Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa! Great Yogī! Self of the world! Creator of the world! Protect [me] who has taken refuge [in you], Govinda, suffering in the midst of the Kurus" ... Having heard Yājñasenī's words, Kṛṣṇa became absorbed. He left his throne [and] with compassion, the merciful one arrived on foot.[70]

This scene in the vulgate *Mahābhārata* in which Draupadī delivers her passionate eulogy to Krishna distinctly presents the Pāṇḍavas' joint wife as an "all along" *bhakta* and Krishna as a

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[67] See Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Garments," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22, no. 2 (1980): 99; Gurcharan Das, "Draupadi's Question: Lessons for Public and Corporate Governance," in *Textuality and Inter-Textuality in the Mahabharata: Myth, Meaning and Metamorphosis*, ed. Pradeep Trikha (Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2006), 114; and Pradip Bhattacharya, "Revising the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*: An Approach through the Attempt to Strip Draupadī," *Indologica Taurinensia* 43–44 (2017–18): 17–18.

[68] Doniger, *The Hindus*, 298.

[69] Doniger, 298.

[70] *Mahābhārata* (*Mahābhāratam with the Bhāratabhāvadīpa*) 2.68.41–47 and 2.68.50–51, trans. Vishal Sharma in "The Problem of the Indifference to Suffering in the *Mahābhārata* Tradition," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 24 (2020): 193–94. For the Sanskrit text, I am following *Śrī Mahābhāratam with the Bhāratabhāvadīpa Commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha*, ed. Ramchandrashastri Kinjawadekar, 6 vols. (Poona: Chitrashala Press, 1929–36).

compassionate deity who cares deeply for his devotee. Krishna's divine intervention in the dicing game is also found in a plethora of other Mahābhārata retellings from premodern narrative texts to modern poems, novels, plays, comic books, television shows, and feature films.[71]

Several Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poets including Tukārām in Marathi, Kanakadāsa in Kannada, and Mīrābāī and Tulsīdās in Bhasha, also sing of how Krishna saves Draupadī in the assembly hall.[72] In his Tamil *Periyatirumoḻi* (Grand Divine Speech), Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār suggests that Krishna used the entire Kurukṣetra War to avenge Draupadī's humiliation:

> As the younger brother of the king of kings,
> the son of the blind one,
> went to the one with jeweled ornaments and said, "Be our slave!"
> [Krishna] removed the wedding threads obtained by the own women of the one hundred,
> giving them the sorrow of the one with hair the color of night who could not endure
> and said: "Our lord [*emperumāṉ*]! Compassion!"
> I saw him,
> the one who stood at the front of the chariot of the son of Indra,
> in Tiruvallikkeni.[73]

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[71] These Mahābhāratas include (but are by no means limited to): the twelfth-century Sanskrit *Jaiminibhārata* (2.44 in *Jaiminīya Mahābhārata: Āśvamedhika Parva; Part One*, ed. Keshoram Aggarwal [Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2007]); Kumāravyāsa's fifteenth-century Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* (2.14.109–32); Ramcarit Upādhyāy's twentieth-century Hindi poem *Devī Draupadī* (see Pamela Lothspeich, *Epic Nation: Reimagining the Mahabharata in the Age of Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 202; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's English novel *The Palace of Illusions* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 192–94; Jean-Claude Carrière's French Play *The Mahabharata: A Play; Based Upon the Indian Classic Epic*, trans. Peter Brook (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 67–68; the 1974 *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book *Draupadi: Queen of the Pandavas* (see Kamala Chandrakant and Pratap Mulick, *Draupadi: Queen of the Pandavas* [Bombay: Amar Chitra Katha, 1974], 18); episode 145 of Doordarshan's 1993–1996 Hindi *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* television serial (see Sagar World, "Shri Krishna Draupadi Vastraharan," YouTube video, 3:46:32, December 7, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrTPCWIQmyY); episode 147 of Sony Entertainment Television's 2015–2016 television show *Sūryaputra Karṇ* (see SET India, "Suryaputra Karn– Episode 147," YouTube video, 20:54, January 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2lygL3HnfM); N.T. Rama Rao's 1977 Telugu film *Dāna Vīra Śūra Karṇa* (see 1:20:53–1:25:08 of Shalimar Telugu & Hindi Movies, "Daana Veera Soora Karna Telugu Full Length Movie," YouTube video, 3:46:32, December 3, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB1_n0LtUCY); and Naganna's 2019 Kannada film *Kurukṣētra* (see T-Series Kannada, "Yelliruve Hariye Full Video," YouTube video, 3:07, October 4, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sf6wTmf5rfk).

[72] See R.D. Ranade, *Tukaram* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 64; Mattur Nandakumara, "Kṛṣṇa in Kannada Literature with special reference to Purandaradāsa and Kanakadāsa" (PhD diss., University of London: SOAS, 1983), 228); Mīrābāī, *pada* 3 in Rupert Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhāṣā Reader* (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 199); Tulsīdās, *Kavitāvalī* 7.89 in Tulsīdās, *Tulsīdās: Kavitāvalī; Translated and with a Critical Introduction*, trans. F.R. Allchin (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Tulsīdās, *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī* 60 and 61 in Tulsīdās, *Tulsīgranthāvalī*, vol. 2, ed. Rāmcandra Śukla (Banaras: Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, 1947); and Tulsīdās, *Vinayapatrikā* 213.3 in Tulsīdās, *The Petition To Rām: Hindi Devotional Hymns of the Seventeenth Century; A Translation of Vinaya-patrikā with Introduction, Notes and Glossary*, trans. F.R. Allchin (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

[73] *antakaṉ ciṟuvaṉ aracar tam aracaṟku iḻaiyavaṉ aṇi iḻaiyai ceṉṟu*
emtamakku urimai cey eṉa tariyātu emperumāṉ aruḷ eṉṉa
cantam al kuḻalāḷ alakkaṇ nūṟṟuvar tam peṇṭirum eyti nūl iḻappa
intiraṉ ciṟuvaṉ tēr muṉ niṉṟāṉai tiruvallikkēṇi kaṇṭēṉ || Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, *Periyatirumoḻi* 2.3.6 ||

While especially known for his Bhasha *pada*s about Krishna's youth, Sūrdās dedicates an entire poem to a meditation on how the adult Krishna protects Draupadī:

> 'Nothing now remains.
> Duḥśāsan has dragged me into the court
> and he's even grabbed my clothes.
> Land, wealth, happiness, palace—all lost:
> Every kind of sadness I've suffered.
> Somewhere in my heart I wore the mantle of your mercy,
> but now their stares have burned it away—
> 'Govind!' she shouted, 'Govind!
> Guard me at such a time!'
> And then, says Sūr, the sea of compassion [*karuṇā siṃdhu*] surged:
> its water, a current of cloth.[74]

Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār and Sūrdās preceded Villi and Cauhān. What happens to this scene when the latter two poets incorporate it into their *kṛṣṇacarita*s? Not at all the same thing, as we are about to see. While Villi uses this scene to illustrate the power of *prapatti* or "self-surrender," Cauhān uses Draupadī's prayer as an opportunity to praise Krishna. Yet although these emphases are somewhat divergent, both Mahābhāratas also present the entire dice game episode as a devotional story that highlights Krishna's omnipotence and compassion for his *bhakta*s.

In the "Gambling Match Chapter" (*Cūtupōrccarukkam*) in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* (*Capāparuvam*) of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*, as Duḥśāsana prepares to strip Draupadī after Yudhiṣṭhira loses her in the dice game, Draupadī joins her hands together and thinks of "our lord," *emperumāṉ*.[75] Notably, Draupadī uses this exact same epithet when she calls out to Krishna in the verse of Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār's *Periyatirumoḻi* that we just saw above. Villi then presents Draupadī's prayer to Krishna in a single quatrain verse:

> Forming a river from her
> two wide eyes with kohl,
> hot tears of water fell.
> Her hair fell.
> Her hands tired from holding that cloth fell.
> Her consciousness fell.
> Then without saying a single other word,
> she cried out "Govinda, Govinda,"
> and nectar flowed on her cooled tongue
> that had not flowed before,
> the hair on her body stood on end,
> and her whole heart completely melted.[76]

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[74] Sūrdās, *Sūrsagar* 355, trans. Hawley in Sūrdās, *Memory of Love*, 159.

[75] *VP* 2.2.246.

[76] *āṟu āki iru taṭa kaṇañcaṉam vem puṉal cōra aḻakam cōra*
vēṟu āṉa tukil takainta kai cōra mey cōra vēṟu ōr collum
kūṟāmal kōvintā kōvintā eṉṟu araṟṟi kuḻirnta nāvil
ūṟāta amiḻtu ūṟa uṭal puḷakittu uḷḷam elām urukiṉāḷē || *VP* 2.2.247 ||

Particularly when we contrast what Villi gives us in this moment to the parallel passage in Cauhān's retelling, we are likely to be amazed at its brevity. Cauhān gives us a twenty-eight line-long supplication to Kṛṣṇa at this point in the narrative, while Draupadī's prayer as recorded by Villi is a matter of just two words—in fact, a single word once repeated: Govinda. If we turn to Śrīvaiṣṇava Manipravala texts from between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, we find an explanation for the brevity of Draupadī's supplication in the *Pāratam*.[77] The single word Govinda serves to epitomize a theological perspective that has been long in the making.

For many prominent Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya*s (preceptors) and commentators, such as Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai, Piḷḷai Lokācārya, and Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi, Draupadī's call to Krishna during her attempted disrobing is a prime example of *prapatti* or *śaraṇāgati*, a paramount concept in the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious tradition in South India.[78] Srilata Raman explains that:

> The word *prapatti* is derived from *pra+pad*, meaning "to take refuge with/in" (van Buitenen 1974) and is used to refer to a soteriological path in Śrīvaiṣṇavism. A person does *prapatti* when he/she surrenders oneself at the feet of God in order to obtain liberation from the cycle of transmigration and attain *mokṣa* (defined as being part of Viṣṇu's retinue in his paradise of Vaikuṇṭha). Hence, *prapatti* is synonymous with self-surrender.[79]

Katherine Young fills out the picture, saying "the incident of Draupadī is often used by the [Śrīvaiṣṇava] *ācārya*s to suggest that *prapatti* may be performed at any time and in any place."[80] In his *Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇam*, Piḷḷai Lokācārya (traditional dates: 1264–1327 CE) states that "Draupadī was not in the state of being purified [when] performing *prapatti*," which is a reference to Draupadī still being able to partake in *prapatti* in this scene even though she has her period.[81] Piḷḷai Lokācārya also brings up Draupadī in the *Mumukṣuppati* in his discussion of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *tirumantra* (divine mantra), *om namo nārāyaṇāya* "obeisance to Nārāyaṇa," and claims that "in Draupadī's distress, it was the holy name that showered her with saris."[82] In his

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[77] Suganya Anandakichenin explains that "Maṇipravāḷa [Manipravala], or 'gems and coral,' is, broadly speaking, a technical term that can be used to describe a language or dialect that combines Sanskrit with a vernacular language. More specifically, it is used as a designation for languages or dialects that are explicitly identified by its speakers or in its literary corpus as falling under this general rubric in South India, e.g., Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamil Maṇipravāḷa, (Malayalam) Maṇipravāḷa, Kannada-Maṇipravāḷa, and Telugu-Maṇipravāḷa" ("Maṇipravāḷa" in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions*, ed. Pankaj Jain, Rita Sherma, and Madhu Khana, Springer Link, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1036-5_163-2).

[78] See Archana Venkatesan, "Commentary and Notes to the *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi*," in Āṇṭāḷ, *Secret Garland*, 213; and Katherine K. Young, "On the Vedas, and the Status of Women with Special Reference to Śrīvaiṣṇavism," in *Jewels of Authority: Women and Textual Tradition in Hindu India*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 105.

[79] Raman, *Self-Surrender*, 11. The work by J.A.B. van Buitenen that Raman in referring to is *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā: A Condensed Rendering of his Gītābhāṣya with Copious Notes* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974).

[80] Young, "On the Vedas," 120n148.

[81] Piḷḷai Lokācārya, *Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇam* 30, trans. Erin McCann in "*Ācāryābhimāna*: Agency, Ontology, and Salvation in Piḷḷai Lokācārya's *Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇam*" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2015), 155.

[82] Piḷḷai Lokācārya, *Mumukṣuppati* 16, trans. Patricia Y. Mumme in Piḷḷailokācārya, *The Mumukuṣppaṭi of Piḷḷai Lokācārya with Maṇavāḷamāmuni's Commentary*, trans. Patricia Y. Mumme (Bombay: Anantacharya Indological Research Institute, 1987), 47.

commentary on the *Mumukṣuppati*, Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi (traditional dates: 1370–1445) elaborates on this claim with three quotes from the *Mahābhārata*. While none of the lines that Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi refers to are in the critical edition, they are all found in T.R. Krishnacharya and T.R. Vyasacharya's edition of the epic that is based on manuscripts from South India:

> When Duśśāsana tried to disrobe her in the great assembly, Draupadī thought of what [the sage] Śrī Vasiṣṭha had said earlier: "When great danger strikes, Lord Hari should be remembered."[83] So in her extreme distress, Draupadī sought refuge, saying "O Acyuta who lives in Dvārakā, bearing the conch and discus in your hand, O Lotus-eyed Govinda, I seek refuge [*śaraṇāgatām*] in you. Protect me!"[84] As [Kṛṣṇa himself] said, "When [Draupadī] called out 'Govinda,' I was far away from her."[85] Even though Kṛṣṇa, the one indicated [by the name "Govinda"] was far away, it was that holy name of Govinda itself, referring to the *avatāra*, which provided her with multiple garments.[86]

As Young points out, in this passage Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi clearly "associates taking the name of God with surrendering to God."[87] For Piḷḷai Lokācārya, Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi, and Villi, the divine name "Govinda" is the only word that Draupadī needs to partake in *prapatti*.

Draupadī's bodily response in the *Pāratam* also makes it clear that she is engaging in *prapatti*. Villi shows us that Draupadī's entire being is literally surrendering to Kṛṣṇa: her tears, hair, hands, and indeed her very consciousness all fall away. After Draupadī calls out to Govinda, her body is instantly rewarded for her *prapatti*. Villi describes Draupadī entering a state of rapture in ways that would be instantly recognised by audiences familiar with *bhakti* literature across South Asia—the nectar on the tongue and the horripilation on the skin being cases in point. But Villi's particular language for what happens to Draupadi is somewhat more specific. His description of melting—what happens to the devotee's heart in the presence of the divine—would have been deeply familiar to Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamil listeners. It is repeatedly utilized in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*. In the *Tiruvāymoḻi* (Divine Utterance) alone, Nammāḻvār uses the verb *uruku*, 'to melt or soften,' at least ten times.[88] We also see this trope in the compositions of Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* poets including Kāraikkālammaiyār, Campantar, and Māṇikkavācakar.[89]

Villi continues to describe Draupadī's immersive devotional experience and Krishna's compassionate response to his devotee in the next verse of his Tamil *bhakti* narrative poem:

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[83] 2.90.43 in *Mahābhārata* (*Sriman Mahābhāratam: A New Edition Mainly Based on the South Indian Texts*), ed. T.R. Krishnacharya and T.R. Vyasacharya, 19 vols. (Bombay: Javaji Dadaji's Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1906–10).

[84] *Mahābhārata* (*Sriman Mahābhāratam*) 2.90.46.

[85] *Mahābhārata* (*Sriman Mahābhāratam*) 5.47.39.

[86] Maṇavāḷamāmuni's commentary on *Mumukṣuppati* 16, trans. Mumme in *Mumukuṣppaṭi of Piḷḷai Lokācārya*, 47.

[87] Young, "On the Vedas," 105.

[88] Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.5.2, 2.1.3, 2.4.6, 4.7.3, 5.4.9, 5.4.10, 5.8.1, 5.10.1, 5.10.4, and 5.10.10.

[89] For the image of melting in the poetry of Kāraikkālammaiyār, Campantar, and Māṇikkavācakar, see Craddock, *Śiva's Demon Devotee*, 36; Peterson, *Poems to Śiva,* 32; and Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 149.

> At that time, her speech resounded and reached the divine ears
> of the one with the red, beautiful, divine flower feet
> who is abundantly praised by the gods
> with the words of the one thousand names spoken in the rare, hidden Vedas.
> The heart of the doe with fragrant flowers in her soft hair did not tremble
> when the dark raincloud appeared and arrived in that very heart and
> without anyone else knowing, showed her compassion.[90]

In this verse, we see a reference to the *Viṣṇusahasranāmastotra* (Hymn of the Thousand Names of Viṣṇu) which Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Book of Instructions* (*Anuśāsanaparvan*) as found in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[91] The Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya* Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (traditional dates: 1123–1151) wrote an influential commentary on the *Viṣṇusahasranāmastotra*,[92] and as Anand Venkatkrishnan notes, this hymn "became extremely popular in many cultures of recitation across southern India."[93] Villi also utilizes a common image from Tamil *bhakti* poetry when he describes Krishna manifesting himself in Draupadī's heart. Norman Cutler explains that the idea that the "lord dwells within the devotee" is found in the works of many Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva poets including Pēyāḻvār, Nammāḻvār, Kāraikkālammaiyār, and Māṇikkavācakar.[94] Cutler further explains that:

> The poet-saint often affirms that the lord dwells in his heart or in his mind, or that he and the lord are inextricably intermingled. In many poems this motif appears as a kind of "personalization" of the idea that the lord is omnipresent. The lord exists everywhere, but what matters most to the devotee is that the lord is present in his own being. Śrīvaiṣṇava theologians expressed this idea in their conception of the *antaryāmin* (one who goes within) or *hārda* (one who dwells in the heart) form of Viṣṇu.[95]

With just two quatrain verses, then, Villi presents a depiction of Draupadī's prayer to Kṛṣṇa that is anchored in the embodied experience of *prapatti* and that is full of familiar images and tropes from Tamil *bhakti* poetry, especially that of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

When we turn to the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, we find something quite different. Take the first of the three extensive stanzas that Cauhān dedicates to Draupadī's plea in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* (*Sabhāparv*):

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[90] *aru maṟai colliya nāmam āyiramum urai taḻaikka amarar pōṟṟum*
tiru malar cem cīr aṭiyōṉ tiru ceviyil ivaḷ moḻi ceṉṟu icaitta kālai
maru malar meṉ kuḻal māṉiṉ maṉam naṭuṅkā vakai maṉattē vantu tōṉṟi
kariya mukil aṇaiyāṉum piṟar evarkkum teriyāmal karuṇai ceytāṉ || *VP* 2.2.248 ||

[91] *MBh* 13.135.14–20.

[92] Vasudha Narayanan, "Singing the Glory of the Divine Name: Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's Commentary on the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 2, no. 2 (1994): 85–98.

[93] Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 108.

[94] Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 198.

[95] Cutler, 198.

Seeing the evil form of the lord of the Kauravas,
her mind went to where the lord of the Yadus was.
"Rādhā's lover! Listen to my words,"
she bitterly cried and lamented.
"Just as you, the lord of the Raghus grasped the hands of Bharata
who was drowning in an ocean of separation,
just as you saved the king of monkeys Sugrīva,
protected Vibhīṣaṇa, and killed Rāvaṇa,
when Dhruva was scorned by his mother and father,
then, lord, you rescued him.
Besides you, lord, who will listen to me?"
she bitterly called out and lamented.

Lifting her arms towards the direction of Hari's city,
"Protect me! Protect me!" she repeatedly screamed.
"Krishna! Krishna! Rādhā's lover!"
she bitterly called out.[96]

Here Draupadī begins her prayer with the word *rādhāramaṇa*, "Rādhā's lover." As with *gopījanapriya*, "beloved of the cowherdesses," the epithet for Krishna that Draupadī uses in this scene in the vulgate version of the epic, the name Rādhāramaṇa does not bring to mind the enigmatic advisor to the Pāṇḍavas, but the charming cowherd of Braj. While Rādhā is markedly absent from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, she is a major figure in *bhakti* poetry from the eastern and northern regions of India as exemplified by the works of Vaiṣṇava poets such as Jayadeva in Sanskrit, Vidyāpati in Maithili, Caṇḍīdās in Bengali, and Sūrdās, Nandadās, Hit Harivaṃś, Harirāmvyās, and Haridās in Bhasha.[97] Rādhāramaṇa is the form of Krishna worshiped by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* in the Rādhāramaṇa temple in Vrindavan.[98] Krishna is also referred to as Rādhāramaṇa in the sixteenth-century Bhasha compositions of Gadādhar Bhaṭṭ,

[96] *kālarūpa lakhi kauravanāthā jāya raheu cita jahaṃ yadunāthā*
rādhāramaṇa bacana sunu mere kīna bilāpa kalāpa karere
būḍata biraha sindhu raghunāthā jimi gahilīna bharata kara hāthā
jimi kapīśa sugrīva ubārā rākhi bibhīṣaṇa rāvaṇa mārā
dhruvahi nirādara kiya pitu mātā tākahaṃ nātha bhayo tuma trātā
tuma bina nāta sunai ko merī kari bilāpa dai hāṃka karerī

bhuja uṭhāya harinagara diśi pāhi pāhi puni ṭeri
kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa rādhāramaṇa dīnhī hāṃka kareri || *CM* 2.57 ||

[97] See Tracy Coleman, "Rādhā: Lover and Beloved of Kṛṣṇa," in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: The Goddess*, ed. Mandakranta Bose (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116–46; and Heidi Pauwels, "Rādhā" in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill Online, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1030130.

[98] See Kenneth Russell Valpey, *Attending Kṛṣṇa's Image: Caitanya Vaiṣṇava mūrti-sevā as Devotional Truth* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 43–78; and John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna's Playground: Vrindavan in the 21st Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4-7.

one of the six main disciples of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* founder Caitanya, and Harirāmvyās, a Krishna devotee who was not affiliated with a particular Vaiṣṇava sectarian community.[99]

Yet despite calling out this popular name of Kṛṣṇa that is found in various North Indian devotional contexts, Draupadī begins her prayer by remembering the deeds of Rāma, not Kṛṣṇa. Draupadī commences her supplication with allusions to how Rāma comforts his brother Bharata after Rāma is exiled, how he saves the monkey king Sugrīva from being killed by his brother Vālī, how he protects Vibhīṣaṇa from the wrath of his elder brother Rāvaṇa, and finally how Rāma slays Rāvaṇa. In Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, all four of these characters are presented as Rāma's *bhakta*s.[100] Why does Draupadī start her prayer to Krishna by recounting these stories of Rāma's devotees? As I will show in greater detail in Chapter Four, Cauhān's Mahābhārata is imbued with references to Rāma and the Rāmāyaṇa tradition that anticipate an audience of Rāma devotees and connoisseurs of the *bhakti* compositions of Tulsīdās in North India.

Krishna, however, is by no means neglected in the remaining twenty-four lines of Draupadī's prayer in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. After the reference to the story of Dhruva, Draupadī brings up several well-known examples of Krishna's compassion found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and other Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* works, such as his rescue of the people of Braj from a forest fire, the wealth he bestows on Śrīdāmā, and his retrieval of the children of the Brahmin sage from heaven.[101] In her plea, Draupadī addresses Krishna as Girivardhārī and Giridhārī,[102] two names that refer to Kṛṣṇa's lifting of Mount Govardhana and that bring to mind the famous signature line of the Bhasha *bhakti* poetess Mīrābāī: *mīrāṅ ke prabhu giridhara nāgara*, "Mīrā's lord is the clever Mountain-Lifter."[103] We also find these epithets in the Bhasha poetry of the Krishna devotees Nandadās and Kevalrām.[104] Cauhān also uses some common names and references to stories of Viṣṇu that are not associated with a specific *avatāra* such as the epithets "lord of Lakṣmī" (*ramapāti/śrīpati*) and "one who pities the poor" (*dīnadayāla*) and the tale of Gajendra.[105] At the end of her prayer, Cauhān's Draupadī uses the same title for Krishna that we saw above at the conclusion of Sūrdās's Bhasha *pada*: *karuṇā siṃdhu*, "sea of compassion."[106]

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[99] See Winand M. Callewaert and Swapna Sharma, *Dictionary of Bhakti: North-Indian Bhakti Texts into Khari Boli, Hindi, and English* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2009), 1798.

[100] See Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 2.232, 4.5, 5.46, and 3.23.1–3.

In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Rāvaṇa is depicted as a practitioner of *dveṣa bhakti* (hate-devotion). We see something very similar in the *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa.* On Rāvaṇa's *dveṣa bhakti* in the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa*, see S. Shankar Raju Naidu, *A Comparative Study of Kamba Ramayanam and Tulasi Ramayan* (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), 424–27. I will discuss *dveṣa bhakti* in greater detail in Chapter Three.

[101] *CM* 2.58.

For the story of the forest fire in Braj, see *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.17.

[102] *CM* 2.57–58.

[103] Mīrābāī, trans. Hawley in "Author and Authority," 278.

[104] Callewaert and Sharma, *Dictionary of Bhakti*, 520.

[105] *CM* 2.57 and 2.58.

[106] *CM* 2.58.

I should point out that the *prapatti* that underscores this scene in the Tamil *Pāratam* is not absent from Cauhān's Bhasha text since Draupadī does at one point state: "Lord of the three worlds, I [take] refuge (*śaraṇa*) in you"[107] Also, like Villi, Cauhān tells us about how Draupadī experiences bliss after her prayer to Krishna in the assembly hall of the Kauravas:

> Seeing her garment expanding,
> Draupadī was overcome with devotional [*bhakti*] love.
> The line of hair above her navel stood on end
> and with a choked voice, she made a humble request.
> Her fears disappeared and there was joy in her heart,
> as when the *cakora* bird[108] finds the moon in the night.[109]

But then Draupadī immediately breaks into song and praises her lord all over again:

> Kṛṣṇacandra, I make this offering to you:
> Victory to Gopāla, the lifter of Govardhana.
> Victory to the one who gives refuge, victory to the foe of demons.
> Victory to the beguiler of the mind, the one who relaxes in the groves.
> Victory to Mukunda, Mādhava, the one as dark as clouds,
> the one with lotus eyes, the one who is as splendid as one hundred Kāmadevas,
> the yellow-robed one, the guardian of the earth.
> Victory to the son of Vasudeva and Devakī.
> Victory to the king of the Yadus whose hands are lotuses,
> those hands that showed me compassion.
> Victory to the lotus feet that ran for my sake
> and destroyed Duḥśāsana's pride.
> Victory to the lord, the lord of the Yadus, the one who killed Madhu.
> Victory the lord of the three worlds, the controller from within.
> Victory to the one who offers sacrifice, victory, victory to the unchanging one.
> Victory, victory, victory to the foe of Keśī and Kaṃsa.
> Victory to the one who protected my honour.
> Victory to the darling of Yaśodā and Nanda.
> Victory to the gracious one, the abode of compassion, victory to the joy of Kauśalyā.
> Victory, victory to the one with the peacock feather, the flute player, the source of joy.
> Victory to Hari, who is truth, consciousness, and bliss, Īśvara, the upholder of the world,
> the one who protects the honour of his community.
> Victory to my noble lord.[110]

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[107] *tribhuvana nātha śaraṇa maiṃ terī* || *CM* 2.57 ||

[108] Callewaert and Sharma explain that "the *cakora* is a type of red-legged partridge traditionally supposed to live on moonbeams, or on glowing coals. The connection between the two is supplied by the glowing, almost red appearance of the moon when it first rises in the sky. The *cakora* is often quoted as an example for its concentration on the moon, and as a symbol for the yearning *bhakta*, or for a lover" (*Dictionary of Bhakti*, 587).

[109] *dekhi basana kai bāḍhi bhakti prema baśa draupadī*
bhai romāvali ṭhāḍhi binaya karata gadagadagira
gayo śoca mana bhayo anandā janu cakora pāyo niśi candā || *CM* 2.58 ||

[110] *kṛṣṇacandra maiṃ taba balihārī jaya gopāla gobarddhana dhārī*
jaya śāraṃgadhara jaya asurārī jaya manamohana kuñjābahārī

This extensive hymn to Krishna is reminiscent of the elaborate songs in praise of Krishna in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Śiva in *Periyapurāṇam*, and Rāma in the *Rāmcaritmānas*. Draupadī begins by addressing Krishna as Gopāla and "the lifter of Govardhana" (*gobarddhana dhārī*).[111] She goes on to use several popular epithets of Krishna such as Mādhava, "beguiler of the mind" (*manamohana*), the "darling of Yaśodā and Nanda" (*yaśodā nandadulāre*), and the "flute bearer" (*muralidhara*). Within a sea of names for Krishna and some more general epithets of Viṣṇu like "lotus-eyed" (*kamalanayana*) and the "one who knows from within" (*antarayāmī*), Cauhān also makes sure to include a title of Rāma: *kauśalānanda* or the "joy of Kauśalyā." Clearly, the primary function of this scene is to revere and lovingly describe Draupadī's lord.

After comparing the renderings of Draupadī's prayer in these regional Mahābhāratas, we are left with two rather different devotional scenes with Villi focusing on Draupadī's physical act of *prapatti* in the Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān concentrating on her overflowing words of praise in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. If we look at the bigger picture, however, and examine Draupadī's prayer within the larger context of the dice game episode in each text, we see salient similarities.

Before the dice match even begins, both Villi and Cauhān make it clear that the Kauravas have planned this event at a time when Krishna is away from the Pāṇḍavas. The *Cūtupōrccarukkam* of the *Pāratam* opens with Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Śakuni, and Karṇa talking about how to defeat the Pāṇḍavas. The conversation quickly turns to Krishna's support of Yudhiṣṭhira[112] and feats the deity performed during his youth such as the slayings of Pūtanā and Kaṃsa.[113] Since Krishna is currently involved in a military campaign, Duryodhana suggests tricking the Pāṇḍavas when the "thief with butter in his mouth"—an image that immediately reminds us of the mischievous prankster who pervades the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*—cannot come to their rescue.[114] While Krishna's role as the Pāṇḍavas' ally is

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jaya mukunda mādhava ghanaśyāmā kamala nayana śobhā śata kāmā
pītāmbaradhara dharaṇī pālaka jaya vasudeva devakī bālaka
jaya tava kara saroja yadurāyā kīnhyo jehi kara mopara dāyā
je pada sarasija mama hita dhāye duśśāsana kara darpa naśāye
jaya madhusūdana yadupati svāmī jaya trilokapati antaryāmī
jaya aghāri jaya jaya avikārī jaya jaya jaya keśī kaṃsārī
jaya mama lajjā rākhanahāre jayati yaśodā nandadulāre
jaya kṛpālu karuṇāyatana jayati kauśalānanda
mora pakṣa dhara muralidhara jaya jaya ānaṃdakanda
jayati sacciānanda hari īśvara jagadadhāra
rākhau lajjā jāti nija jaya mama nātha udāra || *CM* 2.58–59 ||

[111] As John Stratton Hawley has shown, between 500 and 1500 CE, the Govardhana episode from Krishna's childhood was one of "the most popular motifs in the Krishna sculpture of the period" ("Krishna's Cosmic Victories," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 2 [1979]: 201).

[112] *VP* 2.2.14.

[113] *VP* 2.2.19.

[114] *veṇṇey vāy kaḷvaṉ* || *VP* 2.2.18 ||

Note that *kaḷvaṉ* can mean both "thief" and a "dark, black person." See *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "kaḷvaṉ," accessed July 13, 2019, https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=806.

mentioned in a similar scene in various recensions of the *Mahābhārata*,[115] the Kauravas do not specifically schedule the dicing at a time when Krishna will not be present in the Sanskrit epic.

In the Bhasha poem, Śakuni, Vidura, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Vikarṇa, all warn Duryodhana that it will be impossible to defeat the Pāṇḍavas with Krishna by their side.[116] Cauhān then informs us that the Kauravas deliberately wait for the "beautiful month of Dāmodara to pass" before inviting the Pāṇḍavas for the dice match.[117] In their modern commentaries on Cauhān's text, Rāmlagn Pāṇḍey and Rāmjī Śarmā[118] both understand this as a reference to Kārtik, a month associated with the worship of Viṣṇu in North India.[119] Right before Yudhiṣṭhira is summoned to play dice, we find a description of the Pāṇḍava king listening to Brahmins recite the "incomparable, melodious tale of Hari" in Hastinapura.[120] Yudhiṣṭhira being pulled away from the auspicious act of hearing Krishna's story to partake in the gambling match in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is highly significant. By foreshadowing Krishna's absence during the crooked game of dice, Villi and Cauhān illustrate the danger of being separated from Krishna.

In the northern and southern recensions of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Krishna's involvement in the dice game episode ends after he replenishes Draupadī's garment. In both the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, Krishna's presence continues to be felt long after he answers Draupadī's plea. Take Cauhān's composition. After Draupadī finishes extolling Krishna, Vidura hurries to Gāndhārī's home and tells his sister-in-law:

> Today Krishna encompassed Draupadī's body.
> Extending her garment, he established his glory.
> No harm will come to the son of Dharma
> who has that great king, the son of Yadu.
> The king of the Yadus is the destroyer
> who always helps his servants and saves their lives.
> Hari defeated the demon king[121]

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[115] See *MBh* 2.44; *Mahābhārata* (*Sriman Mahābhāratam*) 2.75; and *Mahābhārata* (*Mahābhāratam with Bhāratabhāvadīpa*) 2.48.

[116] See *CM* 2.31, 2.32, and 2.34.

[117] *sundara māsa damodara āvā* || *CM* 2.35 ||

[118] 2.76 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 2.77 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[119] See Tracy Pintchman, "Domesticating Krishna: Friendship, Marriage, and Women's Experience in a Hindu Women's Ritual Tradition," in *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, ed. Guy L. Beck (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 44.

[120] *harikī kathā rasāla anūpā* || *CM* 2.37 ||

[121] It is unclear which demon king Vidura is speaking of here since the words *niśacāra rājū*, "demon king," could refer to a number of different figures killed by an incarnation of Viṣṇu including Hiraṇyakaśipu, Rāvaṇa, and Kaṃsa. Pāṇḍey and Śarmā both think that *niśacāra rājū* refers to Kaṃsa. See 2.143 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 2.145 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā). Yet as Robert Goldman aptly pointed out to me, the term *niśacāra* is a specific kenning for *rākṣasa*s (the community Rāvaṇa belongs to) as opposed to *asura*s into which category Hiraṇyakaśipu and Kaṃsa both fall (personal communication, June 7, 2020). Also, as I will show in Chapter Four, Cauhān frequently refers to characters and episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa throughout his *Mahābhārat*.

in order to relieve the suffering of his own *bhakta*s.[122]

Vidura goes on to remind Gāndhārī of how Narasiṃha saved "Hari's unequaled *bhakta*" Prahlāda.[123] He then warns her that Krishna's discus Sudarśana may slice off the hands of Duḥśāsana that pulled Draupadī's garment.[124] Recall that Cauhān has earlier established Vidura's character as a devout "all along" *bhakta* of Krishna. Deeply distressed by Vidura's words, Gāndhārī rushes to the hall and berates Duḥśāsana.[125] Seeing this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra apologizes to Draupadī and offers her boons which she uses to restore all Yudhiṣṭhira has lost.[126] Those familiar with the Sanskrit epic will recognize this peace offering. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, however, the ominous cries of a jackal, donkeys, and birds and the terrified reactions they elicit in Vidura and Gāndhārī are what prompt Dhṛtarāṣṭra to seek Draupadī's forgiveness.[127] Gāndhārī is petrified in the Bhasha text, but it is her fear of what Krishna might do to Duḥśāsana in order to avenge his devotees, not the shrieks of animals, that causes her husband to placate Draupadī. Therefore, in Cauhān's poem, Krishna is responsible for the return of the Pāṇḍavas' freedom.

In the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, as in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the Pāṇḍavas are called back to Hastinapura and forced into exile after Yudhiṣṭhira loses a second game of dice. This takes some time. In the *Pāratam*, however, the two dice matches are combined into a single chapter. Immediately after the first game, Draupadī and her husbands are summoned back to the assembly hall, where the Kauravas and Droṇa convince the Pāṇḍavas that they should follow the example of other disgraced kings such as Rāma in the Rāmāyaṇa and live in the forest.[128] Droṇa assures the Pāṇḍavas that they can rule their kingdom after twelve years in the forest followed by one year of living incognito.[129] The Pāṇḍavas agree but Draupadī first insists that Yudhiṣṭhira play one more game of dice to ensure that they will truly be free once the thirteen years are over.[130] Before Yudhiṣṭhira rolls the dice, Draupadī gives her husband clear instructions:

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[122] *kṛṣṇa āju draupadī tana byāpe basana baḍhāi birada asthāpe*
nahiṃ hoihi suta dharma akājū jinke yadunandana maharajū
sadā dāsa kara karata sahāī praṇa tārata bhaṃjana yadurāī
je hari hanyo niśacāra rājū sahi dukha nija bhaktana ke kājū || *CM* 2.60 ||

[123] *hari bhakta ananya* || *CM* 2.60 ||

[124] *CM* 2.60.

[125] *CM* 2.60–2.61.

[126] *CM* 2.61.

[127] *MBh* 2.63.22–24.

[128] *VP* 2.2.275.

In their editions of the text, Vai. Mu. Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyār, Kē. Rājakōpālāccāriyār, and Va. Ta. Irāmacuppiramaṇiyam all gloss *muṉṉavaṉ katai* (literally: "the story of the first one/God") as the Rāmāyaṇa. See 2.2.275 of Villiputtūrār, *Villi Pāratam*, ed. Kē. Rājakōpālāccāriyār, 3 vols. (Chennai: Star Publications, 1970–84); and 2.2.275 of Villiputtūrār, *Villiputtūr Āḻvār Aruḷiya Makāpāratam*, ed. Va. Ta. Irāmacuppiramaṇiyam, 4 vols. (Chennai: Tirumakaḷ Nilaiyam, 2011).

[129] *VP* 2.2.276.

[130] *VP* 2.2.279.

To the man of truth, his own great goddess intelligently stated,
"Praise and worship the twelve names of Māyaṉ."
Śakuni taking the beaten white dice, said: "What is your wager?" and
he (Yudhiṣṭhira) also intelligently said, "I stake all my religious merit [*puṇṇiyam*]."[131]

In this verse, Draupadī tells Yudhiṣṭhira to praise the twelve names of Viṣṇu: Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara. First listed around 400 BCE in the Sanskrit *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* (Baudhāyana's *Sūtra* on *Dharma*), the twelve names hold special significance for Śrīvaiṣṇavas.[132] In Periyāḻvār's *Tirumoḻi* and Nammāḻvār*'s Tiruvāymoḻi*, these Āḻvār poets both use an entire set of ten verses to lovingly dwell on each of these names.[133] These names also play an important role in Śrīvaiṣṇava *samāśrayaṇa* initiation rituals.[134] Villi himself brings up this set of twelve names multiple times in his Tamil Mahābhārata retelling.[135] Then, in the next verse of the *Pāratam*, Villi informs us that thanks to the "compassion" (*aruḷ*) of "the one with the discus" (*nēmi uṭaiyavaṉ*), Yudhiṣṭhira emerges as the victor of the second game.[136] Thus, like Cauhān, Villi depicts Krishna restoring the Pāṇḍavas' freedom.

As Emily Hudson notes, "the depiction of Draupadī's abuse in the dicing episode [in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*] is one of the most disturbing scenes of human cruelty and affliction in Indian literature."[137] The retellings of Villi and Cauhān are if anything more explicit. The beginnings of Draupadī's disrobing in both regional Mahābhāratas are quite upsetting. In Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*, for instance, the terrified Draupadī first runs to Gāndhārī and begs the blindfolded queen for help, but the Kauravas' mother maliciously dismisses Draupadī's pleas.[138] As for the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, when Duḥśāsana drags Draupadī to the assembly hall, it is only after he had pulled her through the streets of Hastinapura. Cauhān describes the women of the city crying as they witness Draupadī being treated in such a horrific fashion.[139]

Draupadī's insistence on a second game of dice is also found in Cĕṟuśśeri's Malayalam *Bhāratagātha* and a Telugu folk retelling. In both these Mahābhāratas, Draupadī plays in the dice match herself. See Harindranath and Purushothaman, "*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam"; and Hiltebeitel, *Draupadī* 1, 238.

[131] *cattiya viratan tāṉum taṉ perum tēvi colla*
puttiyāḷ vaṇaṅki māyaṉ paṉṉiru nāmam ētti
otta veḷ kavaṟu vāṅka cakuṇi yātu oṭṭam eṉṟāṉ
puttiyāḷ avaṉum yāṉ cey puṇṇiyam aṉattum eṉṟāṉ || *VP* 2.2.280 ||

[132] Bryant, "Introduction," 4.

[133] Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 2.7.1–12; and Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 2.3.1–13.

[134] See Srilata Raman, "*Samāśrayaṇa* in Śrīvaiṣṇavism," in *Words and Deeds: Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia*, eds. Jörg Gengnagel, Ute Hüsken, and Srilata Raman (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2005), 94.

[135] For example, see *VP* 5.2.20, 6.9.1, and 8.1.6.

[136] *VP* 2.2.281.

[137] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 97.

[138] *VP* 2.2.218.

[139] *CM* 2.50.

These extended depictions of Draupadī's distress in the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, are ultimately in the service of displaying Krishna's compassion. In their *kṛṣṇacarita*s, Villi and Cauhān intensify the overall feeling of suffering that permeates the dice match in the Sanskrit epic to enable their audiences to appreciate the full force of Krishna's benevolence when he answers his "all along" *bhakta* Draupadī's prayer. As we saw in Chapter One, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* are filled with stories of the main deity saving his devotees. Not only does Krishna rescue Draupadī in the *Pāratam* and the *Mahābhārat*, but he also comes to the aid of her husbands. While their depictions of Draupadī's prayer differ considerably, both Villi and Cauhān transform the narrative of the entire dice game episode into a detailed illustration of how Krishna always protects his *bhakta*s.

Transforming the *Book of Effort*

As Villi and Cauhān go on telling their regional Mahābhāratas, these two poets continue to place Krishna at the center of their respective narratives. Both the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* contain several episodes in which Krishna saves the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī that are not found in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Some of these deeds, such as Krishna rescuing Draupadī from the wrath of the hungry sage Durvāsas in the forest and Krishna using his discus to block the sun and trick Jayadratha so that Arjuna can kill him during the Kurukṣetra War, are found in different recensions of the Sanskrit epic.[140]

In Villi's *Pāratam*, we see a scene in the *Book of Drona* that strongly resembles an incident described in two Śrīvaiṣṇava works (Nammāḻvār*'*s *Tiruvāymoḻi* and Vedāntadeśika's *Yādavābhyudaya*) in which Arjuna realizes that Śiva is just a manifestation of Krishna when he places flowers at Krishna's feet and then sees them on Śiva's head.[141] Another fascinating episode in the *Pāratam* in which Krishna helps the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī reattach a piece of fruit to a tree belonging to a sage is found in multiple premodern Mahābhāratas in regional languages including those by Kumāravyāsa in Kannada, Sāraḷādāsa in Oriya, and Kāśīrāmdās in Bengali.[142] Much of Cauhān's *Book of the Horse Sacrifice* (*Āśvamedhikparv*) follows the events of the Sanskrit *Jaiminibhārata*, which was also retold by premodern South Asian poets in regional languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Marathi, Oriya, Persian, and Telugu.[143]

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[140] For the Durvāsas episode in Villi's and Cauhān's poems, see *VP* 3.6 and *CM* 3.3. M.A. Mehendale reports that this episode is found in the vulgate edition, some Devanagari manuscripts, and one Grantha manuscript of the Sanskrit epic ("Interpolations in the *Mahābhārata*," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 82, no. 1 [2001]: 199). For Krishna's intervention in the slaying of Jayadratha in Villi's and Cauhān's texts, see *VP* 7.4.164 and *CM* 2.50. Mehendale notes that this scene is found in Telugu, Grantha, Devanagari, and Bengali manuscripts of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* ("Interpolations in the *Mahābhārata*," 197).

[141] *VP* 7.3.195; Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 2.8.6; and Vedāntadeśika, *Yādavābhyudaya* 23.8. All references to the *Yādavābhyudaya* are to: Vedāntadeśika, *Yādavābhyudayam of Vedāntadeśika: With the Commentary of Appayyadīkṣita*, trans. K.R. Padmanabhan, 3 vols. (Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2015).

[142] *VP* 3.7; Kumāravyāsa*, Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 3.3.41; Mishra, "Mahabharata and Regional Variations," 137–40; and Bhattacharya, "Variations on Vyasa," 96. Devdutt Pattanaik notes that this story is also in the Marathi folk play *Jāṃbhūḻ Ākhyān* (*Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* [Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010], 184).

[143] See Koskikallio and Vielle, "Epic and Puranic," 71; W.L. Smith, "The Jaiminibhārata and its Eastern Vernacular Versions," *Studia Orientalia* 85 (1999): 389–406; and Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 109–10.

As we saw in the Introduction, the *Jaiminibhārata* is filled with expressions of *bhakti* to Krishna. Numerous stories about Krishna coming to the aid of the Pāṇḍavas that are not in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* were undoubtedly circulating throughout premodern South Asia.

Both Villi and Cauhān, however, clearly take a cue from the Sanskrit epic when they each dedicate a considerable amount of space to the *Book of Effort* (*Udyogaparvan* in Sanskrit, *Uttiyōkaparuvam* in Tamil, and *Udyogparv* in Bhasha) in their respective regional Mahābhārata retellings.[144] With roughly 340 stanzas, the Bhasha *Book of Effort* is the longest book of the eighteen books of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* and comprises almost nineteen percent of the entire text. With 264 verses, the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" (*Kiruṭṭiṇaṉ Tūtuccarukkam*) in the Tamil *Book of Effort* is the fourth longest chapter out of the fifty total chapters in Villi's text and roughly corresponds to the "Mission of Bhagavān" (*Bhagavadyāna*) sub-book of the Sanskrit epic. Note that Krishna also plays a major role in the three longest chapters in the *Pāratam*: the "Dicing Match Chapter" (*Cūtupōrccarukkam,* 284 verses) in which Krishna saves Draupadī from being disrobed, the "Seventeenth Day of War Chapter" (*Patiṉēḻāmpōrccarukkam*, 269 verses) in which Krishna orchestrates the death of Karṇa, and the "Thirteenth Day of War Chapter" (*Patiṉmūṉṟāmpōrccarukkam,* 266 verses) in which Krishna helps Arjuna gain the tools he needs to avenge Abhimanyu's murder. The "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" is also the most popular chapter of the Tamil poem in terms of manuscript circulation history.[145]

For those familiar with the narrative of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the choice to focus on the *Book of Effort* in these two regional, self-proclaimed *kṛṣṇacarita*s will come as no surprise. As Alf Hiltebeitel observes, in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* "nowhere is Krishna more conspicuous than in the *Udyogaparvan*."[146] In the beginning of the Sanskrit *Book of Effort*, we find the pivotal scene in which both Duryodhana and Arjuna ask Krishna for his support in the upcoming Kurukṣetra War and Krishna promises his army to the Kauravas, but himself as a noncombatant to the Pāṇḍavas.[147] Later in the Sanskrit *Book of Effort*, Krishna acts as an envoy for the Pāṇḍavas and unsuccessfully tries to negotiate a peace treaty with the Kauravas.[148] During his time in Hastinapura, Krishna also meets with Vidura, Kuntī, and Karṇa.[149]

Yet while the divine Krishna certainly pervades the *Book of Effort* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, recall that Patricia Greer points out that this book about the preparations for Kurukṣetra is also filled with a "sense of confusion and foreboding [that] keeps increasing."[150]

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[144] In the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the *Udyogaparvan* is the sixth longest book of the eighteen books at 6063 verses. The *Udyogaparvan* comprises 8.2% of the critical edition (not including the *Harivaṃśa*).

[145] Out of the thirty-three different manuscripts of Villi's poem that I enumerated during my fieldwork, fifteen were manuscripts of the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter." Also, more than half of the total thirty-three manuscripts were manuscripts of some portion of Villi's *Book of Effort.*

[146] Alf Hiltebeitel*, The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), 114.

[147] *MBh* 5.7.

[148] *MBh* 5.70–129.

[149] *MBh* 5.138–44.

[150] Greer, "Ethical Discourse in Udyogaparvan," 214.

Greer claims that "one theme dominates Udyogaparvan, and just one tone: terrifying unease."[151] A careful examination of the *Book of Effort* in the Tamil and Bhasha texts, however, reveals that these two regional retellings lack the overwhelming feeling of distressing uncertainty that pervades their Sanskrit counterpart. As with the disrobing episode, Villi and Cauhān completely transform the *Book of Effort* and this book is central to Villi and Cauhān's shared project of recasting the Mahābhārata as a devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*. The primary purpose of the extensive renderings of the *Book of Effort* in the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is to showcase the intimate bond between Krishna and his beloved devotees, the Pāṇḍavas.

As we saw in Chapter One, Hiltebeitel describes Krishna as the "ringmaster" of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[152] In the *Pāratam*, Villi presents Krishna as not just a ringmaster, but a puppet master pulling the strings of several different characters to safeguard the Pāṇḍavas. Consider Villi's rendering of the scene in which Duryodhana and Arjuna seek Krishna's aid in the war. In the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, Arjuna independently makes the decision to go see Krishna and ask him for help.[153] Yet in the *Pāratam*, Krishna specifically instructs the Pāṇḍavas' priest Ulūkaṉ to send Arjuna to him in Dwarka.[154] Duryodhana reaches Dwarka before Arjuna in both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Pāratam*. The only reason why Duryodhana does not receive Krishna's full support in the impending war in the Sanskrit epic is because Krishna happens to be asleep when Duryodhana arrives, and he only wakes up after Arjuna has also reached Dwarka. Also, Arjuna respectfully places himself at Krishna's feet, while the arrogant Duryodhana is waiting at the head of the bed. Arjuna is thus in a prime position when Krishna wakes up and first casts his glance, giving Arjuna the first choice.[155] In his composition, however, Villi describes Krishna as being in a state of *yōkattuyil* (Sanskrit: *yoganidrā*) or "wakeful sleep"[156] when Duryodhana enters.[157] Villi's Krishna is only pretending to be asleep when Duryodhana arrives in Dwarka. Thus, in the *Pāratam*, Krishna does everything in his power to make sure that he is by his devotee Arjuna's side in battle.

Nowhere is Krishna's role as puppet master in the Tamil text more evident than in the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter." Throughout this chapter of the *Book of Effort* about Krishna's embassy to Hastinapura, the deity takes specific measures to guarantee that the Pāṇḍavas emerge unscathed in the Battle at Kurukṣetra. For example, as in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, in the *Pāratam*, Krishna decides to spend the night at Vidura's home when he reaches Hastinapura

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[151] Greer, 214.

[152] Hiltebeitel, "Krishna in the *Mahabharata*," 23.

[153] *MBh* 5.7.4.

[154] *VP* 5.1.21.

The priest Ulūkaṉ in the Tamil *Pāratam* is a distinctly different character from Ulūka, the son of Śakuni, who acts a messenger for the Kauravas in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (5.157–60).

[155] *MBh* 5.7.5–9.

[156] For a history of the term *yoganidrā*, see Jason Birch and Jacqueline Hargreaves "Yoganidrā: An Understanding of the History and Context," *The Luminescent*, January 6, 2015, https://www.theluminescent.org/2015/01/yoganidra.html.

[157] *VP* 5.2.8.

instead of in the accommodations the Kauravas have arranged for him.[158] Unlike in the Sanskrit epic, however, in Villi's poem Krishna deliberately stays with Vidura to make Duryodhana jealous and lash out against his uncle. As in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and Cauhān in his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Villi presents Vidura as a devout "all along" Krishna *bhakta*. The next day, after Duryodhana maliciously compares Vidura's loyalty to Krishna to the loyalty a whore has to the man who gives her the most riches, Vidura furiously breaks his bow and refuses to partake in the Battle at Kurukṣetra.[159] Thus in the Tamil Mahābhārata, Krishna protects the Pāṇḍavas by ensuring that Vidura, who possesses the "bow of Acyuta (Viṣṇu)" (*accutaṉ cantavil*) will not fight on the side of the Kauravas.[160] Similarly, in order to stop Aśvatthāman from becoming the leader of the Kaurava forces at Kurukṣetra, Krishna stages a complex tableau involving himself and an unsuspecting Aśvatthāman in front of Duryodhana that makes it seem like Aśvatthāman is making a secret deal with Krishna.[161] With this scene in the *Pāratam*, which does not take place anywhere in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Duryodhana's trust in Aśvatthāman is broken and Krishna prevents the son of Droṇa from leading the Kauravas into battle against the Pāṇḍavas.

Villi also describes Krishna going to great lengths to weaken Karṇa in this chapter. Karṇa's tragic demise in the Bhārata Battle is one of the most foreshadowed events in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: two Brahmins (one of whom is his teacher Rāma Jāmadagnya or Paraśurāma) curse him and Śalya promises Yudhiṣṭhira that he will obscure Karṇa's *tejas* or "divine energy" in battle.[162] There are two particularly poignant moments in the epic that alert the audience to Karṇa's impending death at the hands of Arjuna. The first is the episode in which Arjuna's father Indra in the disguise of a Brahmin tricks Karṇa into giving up the earrings and armor that make him invulnerable.[163] The second is the scene in which Kuntī tries to convince Karṇa to fight alongside the Pāṇḍavas in the war and Karṇa promises his mother that either he will slay Arjuna or Arjuna will slay him so that Kuntī will still have five sons by the end of the Kurukṣetra War.[164] While Indra and Kuntī each decide to approach Karṇa on their own in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, in Villi's "Krishna the Messenger Chapter," Krishna specifically instructs Kuntī and Indra to go meet with Karṇa in order to protect Arjuna.[165] In the *Pāratam*, Krishna also directs Kuntī to make Karṇa swear to use his *nāgāstra* or "serpent arrow" on Arjuna only once in battle.[166] The *nāgāstra* is actually the snake Aśvasena who has sworn to kill Arjuna because he killed Aśvasena's parent when he and Krishna burned the Khāṇḍava forest.[167] This

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[158] *MBh* 5.89.34 and *VP* 5.4.75.

[159] *VP* 5.4.128–33.

[160] *VP* 5.4.132.

[161] *VP* 5.4.224–29.

[162] *MBh* 8.29, 12.3, and 5.8.25–35. See also Hiltebeitel, "Krishna in the *Mahabharata*," 26–27.

[163] *MBh* 3.284–94.

[164] *MBh* 5.143–44.

[165] *VP* 5.4.158 and 5.4.237.

[166] *VP* 5.4.158.

[167] See *VP* 1.8.61; and *MBh* 1.218.4–12.

promise, which is absent from the Sanskrit epic, further ensures Arjuna's safety in the upcoming war: in the *Book of Karṇa* of both the Sanskrit and Tamil texts, Krishna maneuvers Arjuna's chariot so that the serpent weapon only strikes off Arjuna's crown.[168]

Right before the final confrontation between Arjuna and Karṇa in the second and final chapter of Villi's *Book of Karṇa* (*Kaṉṉaparuvam*), Krishna takes one final step to ensure Arjuna's victory. The deity disguises himself as a Brahmin (as Indra does in the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter") and asks the ever-generous Karṇa for all of his *puṇṇiyam* or "religious merit," the same thing Yudhiṣṭhira stakes during the second dice game in Villi's poem.[169] This scene bears a striking resemblance to a sequence found in a Rajasthani folk Mahābhārata, the Paṇḍvānī ballad performances of the Gond community in Chhattisgarh, the 1964 Tamil film *Karṇaṉ* (Karṇa), and the 1977 Telugu film *Dāna Vīra Śūra Karṇa* (Charitable, Brave, Son of the Sun, Karṇa) in which Karṇa gives Krishna his teeth.[170] Then, mere moments before Karṇa's death, Villi reminds his audience of the lengths Krishna went to protect Arjuna in the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" in the following two verses translated by David Shulman:

> Now Kṛṣṇa [Kaṇṇaṉ] addressed him,
> the god who had followed in the wake of the cattle
> in the fertile meadowlands,
> who had flung a calf at the demon in the *viḷā* tree,
> and he said to Karṇa: "It was I
> who sent the lord of the gods to take from you
> your armor and your earrings
> that day;
> I was the one who used Kuntī to extort your promise
> that you would shoot the serpent-weapon
> only one, single time;
> it was I who told you the truth about your birth,
> and I who diverted that serpent-weapon, Takṣaka's child,
> so that it failed to strike Dhanañjaya—
> it was all my doing, for your sake,
> out of true compassion—"
> and with these words he turned back
> and became again Vijaya's charioteer—
> that god [Māl] who is all the oceans, all the hills,
> all the worlds, all gods and men,
> and who stole from the dark-eyed young *gopī*s [*kōviyar*]
> their fine clothes, their shyness,

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[168] *MBh* 8.66.11; and *VP* 8.2.228.

[169] *VP* 8.2.239.

[170] See John D. Smith, "Worlds Apart: Orality, Literacy, and the Rajasthani Folk-*Mahābhārata*," *Oral Tradition* 5, no. 1 (1990): 14–15; and Movies Central, "Ullathil Nalla Ullam HD Song | Karan," YouTube video, 3:45, August 2, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga8_Sx-nUlY).

In Sāraḷādāsa's Oriya *Mahābhārata*, Krishna in the guise of a Brahmin visits Karṇa before the Battle of Kurukṣetra and requests that Karṇa serve him the flesh of his son for dinner. See W.L. Smith, "The Canonization of Karṇa—The Migration of a Hagiographical Motif," *Indologica Taurinensia* 17/18 (1991–1992): 346–47.

their colorful bangles, and all the innocence
of their hearts.[171]

In these two verses, Villi distinctly evokes the young Krishna of Vrindavan from the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* by describing him as the cowherd who killed the calf demon Vatsāsura and who stole the clothes of the bathing *gopī*s.[172] He also reminds his audience of Krishna's dedication to Arjuna when the god reveals to Karṇa that he was the one who sent both Indra and Kuntī to Karṇa in the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter." While the purpose of Krishna's embassy to Hastinapura in the Sanskrit "Mission of Bhagavān" sub-book is seemingly peace (yet as we saw in Chapter One, this is unclear), in Villi's poem, Krishna's mission is undoubtedly the protection of the Pāṇḍavas in the upcoming war.

It is important to note that many of these preventative measures that Krishna takes in Villi's "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" are also described in other Mahābhārata retellings that were composed in Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. All of Krishna's actions from the "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" that I have discussed above are also found in the fifth book of Peruntēvaṉār's Tamil *Pārataveṇpā*.[173] The stories of Vidura breaking his bow and Krishna directing Kuntī to go see Karṇa are both found in two Kannada retellings: the *Vikramārjunavijayam* and the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*.[174] Finally, Krishna's meeting with Aśvatthāman is described in the *Pārataveṇpā*, the *Vikramārjunavijayam*, and three Malayalam retellings: Śankaran's fifteenth-century *Bhāratamāla* (Garland of the Bhārata), Tuñcattŭ Ĕḻuttacchan's sixteenth-century *Bhāratam*, and Ayyanappiḷḷa Āśān's sixteenth-century *Bhāratam Pāṭṭu* (Song of the Bhārata).[175] Therefore, this image of Krishna as a divine puppet master doing everything in his power to make sure that the Pāṇḍavas are unharmed in battle with the Kauravas was clearly pervasive across premodern South India.

When we turn to our North Indian *Book of Effort* in Cauhān's Bhasha poem, we also find a Krishna who is deeply committed to the safety of the Pāṇḍavas. Instead of focusing on the varied ways that Krishna safeguards his devotees in the actual narrative of the *Book of Effort*, however, Cauhān's *Book of Effort* describes multiple *past* instances of Krishna rescuing the Pāṇḍavas. As with the Sanskrit *Book of Effort*, the Bhasha *Book of Effort* is filled with examples of characters telling each other stories. The Sanskrit *Book of Effort* contains many didactic sub-stories. While most of the instructive sub-stories from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, such as the tales of Dambhodbhava, Mātali, Gālava, and Ambā, are not included in the *Book of Effort* in the

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[171] *VP* 8.2.250–51, trans. David Dean Shulman in *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 395.

[172] For these stories about Krishna in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, see Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 159 and 161; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.11.41–59 and 10.22.

[173] See Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 117–233. Also see Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 81–147. I am following: Peruntēvaṉār, *Peruntēvaṉār Pāratam*, ed. Irā Iḷaṅkumaraṉ (Madras: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1973).

[174] Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 315–16 and 318; Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 5.8.64–68; and Subramanian, *Mahabharata Story*, 195 and 199.

[175] Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 317–18; Subramanian, *Mahabharata Story*, 202; and Harindranath and Purushothaman, "*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam."

regional compositions of Cauhān or Villi,[176] Cauhān does retell two stories from the Sanskrit *Book of Effort* in his Bhasha *Book of Effort*: Indra's victory over Vṛtra and Viśvarūpa and Vidurā's instruction to her son.[177] Two sub-stories from the first book of the Sanskrit epic, the tales of Śakuntalā and Tapatī, are also found in Cauhān's *Book of Effort*.[178] But an important difference between the presentations of the sub-stories of Indra's victory over Vṛtra and Viśvarūpa, Śakuntalā, and Tapatī in the Sanskrit text and Cauhān's composition is that in the Bhasha retelling, Krishna narrates all three of these sub-stories. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Janamejaya tells Vaiśampāyana the story of Śakuntalā, the *gandharva* Citraratha tells the story of Tapatī to Arjuna, and Śalya tells Yudhiṣṭhira the story of Indra's victory. Cauhān's choice to have Krishna be the narrator of these three sub-stories in his *Book of Effort* is significant.

Most of the stories in Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, however, are not didactic sub-stories but different characters' retellings of the earlier events that have led to the impending battle between the sons of Pāṇḍu and the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. For example, soon before Krishna leaves for Hastinapura as the Pāṇḍavas' ambassador, Bhīma recalls how he once ended up in the underwater *nāga* city Bhogavati (Bhogavatī) during an assassination attempt by Duryodhana.[179] While Bhīma does not visit an underwater snake kingdom in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, he does in both the northern and southern recensions of the Sanskrit *Book of the Beginnings*.[180] As in Sāraḷādāsa's *Mahābhārata*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, Cĕṟuśśeri's *Bhāratagātha*, and the Konkani *Bhārata*, Bhīma marries a snake princess in Bhogavati and lives with her for a year in Cauhān's poem.[181] Notably, the audience of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* has already encountered a version of this story in Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings*.[182] In his *Book of the Beginnings*, Cauhān narrates an incident in which Bhīma dies after drinking seven vessels of nectar in Bhogavati and Śiva has to bring the Pāṇḍava back to

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[176] *MBh* 94, 95–103, 104–121, and 170–93.

The story of Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin is found in the first book of the compositions of Villi (1.1.117–46) and Cauhān (1.9–12). An important distinction, however, between the tale of Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin in the Sanskrit epic (and most Mahābhārata retellings) and Cauhān's poem is that in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* it is Ambā's youngest sister Ambālikā who becomes Śikhaṇḍin, not Ambā.

[177] *MBh* 5.9–18 and 5.131–34; and *CM* 5.42–44 and 5.98–99.

[178] *MBh* 1.62–69 and 1.160–63; and *CM* 5.75–87 and 5.93–96

[179] *CM* 5.68–70.

[180] *MBh* lines 10–19 of Appendix 1, no.72 and lines 80–83 of Appendix 1, no.73.

[181] Satyabrata Das and Lalit Kumar Lenka, "Folk Elements in Sarala Mahabharata," *Orissa Review* 65, no. 9–10 (2009): 58; Subramanian, *Mahabharata Story*, 25; Harindranath and Purushothaman, "*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam"; and Rocky V. Miranda, "The Old Konkani *Bharata*," in *Reflections and Variations on The Mahabharata*, ed. T.R.S. Sharma (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2009), 354–55.

Alf Hiltebeitel notes that this story is also found in Mahābhāratas from Bundelkhand and Garhwal in North India (*Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 420).

[182] *CM* 1.25–26.

life.[183] In Bhīma's own account of his time in Bhogavati in Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, however, there is no mention of Śiva reviving Bhīma. Instead, Bhīma speaks of how Krishna sent his divine eagle mount Garuḍa to rescue Bhīma and the *nāga* princess while they were being attacked by several serpents. Bhīma notes that Garuḍa frightened the snakes and warned the *nāga* king that Krishna, the *śrī brajrāja* "illustrious king of Braj," is Bhīma's protector.[184]

In the next chapter of Cauhān's Bhasha *Book of Effort*, Arjuna recounts a story from the Pāṇḍavas' youth in which Krishna saved Yudhiṣṭhira. Arjuna notes that one day after failing to kill Bhīma with poisoned sweets,[185] Duryodhana sent a Brahmin with the same deadly sweets to Yudhiṣṭhira while he was in the forest hunting.[186] Yet Arjuna explains that thanks to the *kṛpā* or "compassion" of the "lord of the Yadus" (*yadunātha*) Krishna, Yudhiṣṭhira's life was spared.[187] As with Bhīma's tale of Krishna sending Garuḍa to protect him in Bhogavati, Arjuna's story of Krishna preventing Yudhiṣṭhira from being poisoned by Duryodhana is not found in the accounts of the Pāṇḍavas' childhood in the *Mahābhārata*'s or Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings*.

With his rendering of the *Book of Effort*, Cauhān also shows his audience that Krishna has been by the Pāṇḍavas' side since the very beginning. While Cauhān describes the nativities of the three sons of Kuntī in a single stanza in his Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings*,[188] Kuntī's own account of the miraculous births of her children is much more detailed. In the Bhasha *Book of Effort*, Kuntī tells Krishna that when Yudhiṣṭhira was born a voice from the heavens proclaimed that her son would be a *bhāgavata*[189] and "equal to Hari's servant Prahlāda."[190] Neither of these details about Yudhiṣṭhira's destiny as a great "all along" *bhakta* of Krishna are found in this scene in the *Mahābhārata*'s or Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings*.[191]

In the descriptions of the birth of Arjuna in the *Book of the Beginnings* in both the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, the middle Pāṇḍava is briefly compared to Viṣṇu/Krishna. In the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, the voice in the sky equates Arjuna with Viṣṇu twice: "as Aditi's joy was increased by Viṣṇu, so Arjuna, Viṣṇu's equal will increase your joy" and "[Arjuna is] the equal of Jamadagni's son Rāma, O Kuntī, as valiant as Viṣṇu."[192]

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[183] *CM* 1.26.

According to Subramanian, a very similar story involving Bhīma and Śiva in Bhogavati is found in Kumāravyāsa's Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* (*Mahabharata Story*, 25). When I consulted D. Seshagiri Rao's abridged translation of the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, however, I did not find this story.

[184] *CM* 5.70.

[185] The first book of the Sanskrit epic describes Duryodhana trying to poison Bhīma. See *MBh* 1.119.39–42.

[186] *CM* 5.72–73.

[187] *CM* 5.73.

[188] *CM* 1.22.

[189] *CM* 5.101.

[190] *hari sevaka prahlāda samānā* || *CM* 5.102 ||

[191] *MBh* 1.114.5–7; and *CM* 1.22.

[192] *MBh* 1.114.30 and 1.114.34, trans. Smith in *Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation*, 48–49.

In Cauhān's *Book of the Beginnings*, we are told that upon seeing the "dark form" (*śyāmala rūpa*) of Arjuna, Pāṇḍu gave him the "beautiful name" (*sunāma*) Krishna.[193] When Kuntī speaks of this event in the Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, however, we see a stronger connection being drawn between Arjuna and Krishna. Kuntī reveals that the heavenly voice stated that:

> This boy will be a very [talented] archer
> whose greatest *dharma* is the benevolent, illustrious Hari.
> In Braj, Krishna has incarnated in order to be his protector.[194]

A.K. Ramanujan asserts that "a certain kind of repetition" is "the central structuring principle" of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[195] In Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, the Pāṇḍavas' repetition of stories from the *Book of the Beginnings* with new details of how Krishna came to their aid showcases his role as the Pāṇḍavas' steadfast guardian and their role as his "all along" *bhaktas*. The consistent emphasis on Krishna protecting the Pāṇḍavas in the *Book of Effort* in the Tamil and Bhasha poems tempers the "terrifying unease" of the Sanskrit *Book of Effort*.[196]

The troubled tone of the Sanskrit *Book of Effort* is also considerably softened by the insertion of devotional tableaus involving Krishna and the Pāṇḍavas in the Mahābhāratas of both Villi and Cauhān. Throughout the Tamil *Book of Effort* and the Bhasha *Book of Effort*, Villi and Cauhān pause the main narrative to allow the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī to sing in praise of Krishna. Before Krishna leaves for Hastinapura in the Tamil "Krishna the Messenger Chapter," for instance, Draupadī extols the deity in three verses. In the first verse, she tells Krishna:

> Neṭumāl! When the gold-colored demon (Hiraṇyakaśipu)
> became greatly angry with his own son (Prahlāda),
> you came from within the stone pillar that he (Hiraṇyakaśipu) beat.
> You stood like a dark mountain
> for the great elephant (Gajendra) with the three-fold rut,
> right when he called out your primordial name.[197]

Draupadī begins her eulogy by recounting the stories of how Viṣṇu immediately came to the aid of two of his most famous *bhakta*s: Prahlāda and Gajendra. As Draupadī continues her prayer to Krishna in which she addresses him as Govinda and "our lord," (*emperumāṉ*), just as she did

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[193] *CM* 1.22.

Note that in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, when Arjuna is describing his ten different names to Prince Uttara, he says that his father named him Krishna. See *MBh* 4.39.

[194] *hoihi bālaka ati dhanudhārī parama dharma śrīhari hitakārī*
braja mahaṃ hoi kṛṣṇa avatārā so yāko hoihai rakhavārā || *CM* 5.104 ||

[195] A.K. Ramanujan, "Repetition in the *Mahābhārata,*" in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 421.

[196] Greer, "Ethical Discourse in Udyogaparvan," 214.

[197] *cāla kaṉakaṉ taṉ taṉi maintaṉai muṉinta*
kālattu avaṉ aṟainta kal tūṇ iṭai vantāy
mūlam pēr iṭṭu aḻaitta mummatam māl yāṉaikkum
nīlam kiri pōl muṉ niṉṟa neṭumālē || *VP* 5.4.43 ||

during the disrobing scene, it is clear that Villi is drawing a direct comparison between the stories of Prahlāda and Gajendra and that of Draupadī and her husbands.[198] There is no doubt that just as Viṣṇu saved Gajendra from the crocodile and Prahlāda from Hiraṇyakaśipu, Krishna will save the Pāṇḍavas from the Kauravas. As Villi's "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" continues, we also see Vidura in his home and all those present when Krishna visits the court in Hastinapura sing songs in praise of Krishna.[199] In Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, Yudhiṣṭhira offers two multi-stanzaic hymns to Krishna that we will examine in greater detail in Chapter Four.[200]

Along with these multiple songs in praise of Krishna in the *Book of Effort* in both the Tamil and Bhasha Mahābhāratas, Villi and Cauhān also present their audiences with tender moments of *bhakti* between the deity and his devotees. After the famous scene in which Krishna promises his army to Duryodhana, but himself as a noncombatant to Arjuna,[201] Cauhān describes an intimate encounter between Arjuna, Krishna, and Devakī in Dwarka. Following a description of a meal lovingly served to Arjuna and Krishna by Krishna's eight wives,[202] Cauhān tell us:

> Having learned [of Arjuna's arrival], Devakī came.
> Seeing the pair, she was filled with joy.
> Hari and Arjuna rose and greeted her.
> She blessed them to her heart's desire.
> Over and over, the mother embraced them.
> Her eyes filled with tears as she said these words:
> "Without you, my heart has remained replete with sorrow.
> I am seeing you after thirteen years.
> Krishna, listen to these instructions:
> he is more precious to me than my life.
> No one knows why you abandoned him.
> Protect him, Bhagavān."
> Queen Devakī, having said such words,
> grabbed Arjuna's hands and handed them over.[203]

Devakī's extremely emotional reaction to seeing Arjuna and Krishna together is a clear *vātsalya-bhāva.* Yet, unlike most examples of *vātsalya-bhāva*, such as those that pervade the devotional poems of Periyāḻvār and Sūrdās who (as we saw in the Introduction) both frequently adopt the

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[198] *VP* 5.4.44–45.

[199] *VP* 5.4.80–85 and 5.4.209–12.

[200] *CM* 5.34–35 and 5.66–67.

[201] For this scene in the Sanskrit epic, the *Pāratam*, and the *Mahābhārat*, see *MBh* 5.7; *VP* 5.2; and *CM* 5.27–29.

[202] *CM* 5.30–31.

[203] *so sudhi pāi devakī aī dekhi yugalatana ananda chāī*
hari arjuna uṭhi kīnha praṇāmā dīnha aśīśa hoi manakāmā
mātā puni puni kaṇaṭha lagāī bolī bacana nayana jala chāī
tuma bina raheu hiye ati śokā teraha barṣa bādi avalokā
sunahu kṛṣṇa jo mantra hamārā praṇahu te mohiṃ adhika piyārā
tumahiṃ tyāgi kahiṃ aura na jānā rakṣā tuma kījai bhagavānā
kahi asa bacana devakī rānī arjuna kahaṃ sauṃpyo gahi pānī || *CM* 5.31 ||

persona of Krishna's adoptive mother Yaśodā, the primary recipient of this maternal *bhakti* is not Krishna, but Arjuna. By emphasizing Devakī's overflowing affection for Arjuna, Cauhān highlights the immense closeness of Krishna and Arjuna's relationship. Here Krishna's mother seems to love Arjuna as much (if not more so) than her own son.

A particularly moving devotional scene in Villi's "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" is one between Krishna and the Pāṇḍava prince Sahadeva. As John Smith notes, in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* Sahadeva and his twin brother Nakula "are only lightly sketched" and "there is little to say about them."[204] This is not the case, however, in the regional retellings of Villi and Cauhān. In the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Sahadeva is the product of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī's fatal moment of passion, instead of being Nakula's twin and the son of the Aśvins and Mādrī as he is in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[205] We see something similar in the Pāṇḍavlīlā or the "divine play of the Pāṇḍavas" living performance tradition of the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand in which Nakula is "the sole biological son of Pandu, the human son of a human father."[206] Villi and Cauhān both present Nakula and Sahadeva as devout "all along" Krishna *bhakta*s. For instance, in the Bhasha *Book of Effort*, Cauhān presents a touching sequence in which Nakula begs Krishna and his friend Sātyaki to let him accompany the two Yādava warriors to Hastinapura.[207] In the first chapter of the Tamil *Book of Virāṭa's Court* (*Virāṭaparuvam*), when the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī are preparing to live incognito for a year in King Virāṭa's kingdom, Villi explicitly compares Sahadeva in his cowherd disguise to "the son of Nandagopa" (*nantakōpaṉ maintaṉ*), Krishna.[208]

Yet the encounter between Krishna and Sahadeva in Villi's "Krishna the Messenger Chapter" is especially poignant. In this scene, Krishna takes on sixteen thousand forms in front of Sahadeva and the youngest Pāṇḍava then binds the deity with just his mind.[209] Similar renderings of this divine display are also found in the Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā*, an episode of Sun TV's Tamil *Makāpāratam* serial (2013–2016), and the Terukkūttu plays of the Draupadī goddess cult in northern Tamil Nadu.[210] As Hiltebeitel notes, "Sahadeva's binding and subsequent release of Kṛṣṇa are among the favorite scenes of the Terukkūttu."[211]

I should acknowledge that Krishna also displays his celestial form in the Sanskrit *Book of Effort* in the court in Hastinapura during his peace embassy.[212] Unlike this "terrible form of noble

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[204] Smith, introduction to *Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation*, xxix.

[205] *CM* 1.23.

[206] William Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.

[207] *CM* 5.74–75.

[208] *VP* 4.1.26.

[209] *VP* 5.4.30–40.

[210] See Peruntēvaṉār*, Pārataveṇpā* 129–35*;* Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 97–98; Ettapan Velu, "Makāpāratam 124," YouTube video, 40:10, March 11, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2LlNNYGmr0; and Hiltebeitel, *Cult of Draupadī*, 1:312–14.

[211] Hiltebeitel, 313.

[212] *MBh* 5.129.1–20. For similar scenes in the poems of Villi and Cauhān, see *VP* 5.4.191–217; and *CM* 5.90.

Keśava" in the Sanskrit epic which makes the Kauravas close "their eyes in their fear," [213] however, the theophany in the Tamil *Book of Effort* reveals the mutal affection that Krishna and Sahadeva have for each other. Villi begins by noting that Sahadeva's words "melt the heart" (*maṉam uruka*) of Mukunda, a reversal of the trope we saw earlier during Draupadī's disrobing in which the devotee's heart melts in the presence of the deity.[214] Villi then tells us:

> That man who is like God (Sahadeva) said:
> "You are the one with the fresh *tulsī* wreath dripping with honey,
> who that time sucked milk from the demoness,
> passed in between the *maruta* trees,
> killed the tall Śakaṭa such that he fell,
> and grew up a family of herdsmen.
> Māl! No one understands your *māyā* here.
> But I know it as it is.
> In fact, the views that are in your divine heart,
> those are also mine."[215]

In this verse in which Sahadeva alludes to incidents from Krishna's childhood in Vrindavan that are described in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, such as his slaying of Pūtanā, his splitting of two trees with a mortar, and his defeat of the cart demon Śakaṭa, the Pāṇḍava prince describes an intimate bond between himself and Krishna.[216] The strength of Sahadeva's *bhakti* is further displayed later on in this scene when he binds the sixteen thousand forms of Krishna simply with his "affection" (*aṉpu*) for the deity in his mind.[217]

The consistent emphasis on Krishna protecting the Pāṇḍavas as well as the insertion of tender moments of *bhakti* between the deity and his devotees in both the Tamil *Book of Effort* and the Bhasha *Book of Effort* substantially reduces the "terrifying unease" of the Sanskrit *Book of Effort* that Greer describes.[218] Instead, audiences of these regional Mahābhāratas are left with extensive renderings of the *Book of Effort* with a distinctly devotional ethos.

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[213] *MBh* 129.12, trans. Smith in *Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation*, 337.

[214] *VP* 5.4.30.

[215] *muruku aviḻkkum pacuntuḷapam muṭiyōṉē aṉṟu alakai mulai pāl uṇṭu*
marutu iṭai ceṉṟu uyar cakaṭam viḻa utaittu potuvar maṉai vaḷarnta mālē
oruvarukkum teriyātu iṅku uṉ māyai yāṉ aṟivēṉ uṇmaiyāka
tiru uḷattu karuttu etuvō atu eṉakkum karuttu eṉṟāṉ teyvam aṉṉāṉ || *VP* 5.4.32 ||

[216] For these stories about Krishna in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, see Narayanan, *Way and the Goal*, 159–60; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.6, 10.10, and 10.7.

[217] *VP* 5.4.39.

[218] Greer, "Ethical Discourse in Udyogaparvan," 214.

Concluding with Krishna

Just as the beginnings of the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* alert readers to Villi and Cauhān's shared project of reframing the Mahābhārata as a *kṛṣṇacarita*, the conclusions of these poems make it very clear that Krishna is the most important figure in these narratives.

In the final verses of Villi's *Book of the Night Massacre* (*Cauptikaparuvam*), Krishna persuades the Pāṇḍavas not to seek further vengeance against Aśvatthāman after he mistakenly beheads the five sons of Draupadī instead of the five Pāṇḍavas.[219] Villi then briefly describes Krishna saving Bhīma's life by placing an iron pillar before Dhṛtarāṣṭra who crushes it, thinking he is hugging Bhīma.[220] The Tamil poem culminates with Krishna blessing the Pāṇḍavas and returning to Dwarka.[221] As with multiple other Mahābhārata regional retellings, such as Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, and Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*, Villi's *Pāratam* thus ends soon after the Battle at Kurukṣetra and does not deal with the aftermath of the war that forms the contents of the eight final books of the eighteen total books of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. We see something very similar with several Rāmāyaṇa retellings, including the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa*, which do not cover many of the events described in the seventh book of Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Book of Epilogue* (*Uttarakāṇḍa*). Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman assert that the reason for the absence of certain *Book of Epilogue* episodes from the conclusions of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and the *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa* is "because the *kāṇḍa*'s contents, most particularly its account of the abandonment of Sītā and her being made to give a public oath of fidelity to Rāma, were felt to be out of keeping with the emerging devotional representations of Rāma and Sītā."[222]

M.S.H. Thompson makes a similar argument about why the *Pāratam* ends right after the war that is based on the verse in his author's introduction in which Villi says he is retelling the Mahābhārata because of his "desire for the *carita* of the eternal Mādhava."[223] Thompson claims

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[219] *VP* 10.41–44.

Note that Krishna's compassion towards Aśvatthāman in the *Pāratam* is a departure from the Sanskrit epic in which Krishna curses Aśvatthāman after he kills Draupadī's siblings, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Śikhaṇḍin, her sons (known as the Draupadeyas), and tries to abort the unborn Parikṣit (*MBh* 10.16). The reason why Villi has Krishna spare Aśvatthāman may be related to the way this character was revered in premodern Tamil Nadu. David Shulman explains that "Pallava genealogies identify the dynastic founder as the *Mahābhārata* Brahmin hero Aśvatthāman, wandering the world forever because of a curse; his union with a Nāginī princess is the moment of origin, probably hinted at in the great royal relief at Mahabalipuram known either as 'Arjuna's Penance' or the 'Descent of the Ganges'" (*Tamil*, 142). It is also noteworthy that unlike in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (10.9.48) in which Aśvatthāman clearly tells Duryodhana he has killed the Draupadeyas, in the Tamil poem, Duryodhana is devastated when Aśvatthāman brings him the heads of the Draupadeyas thinking that he has killed the Pāṇḍavas (*VP* 10.22).

[220] *VP* 10.45.

We see a similar scene in the *Book of the Women* in the Sanskrit epic in which Krishna places an iron statue of Bhīma in front of the blind king (*MBh* 11.11.15–30).

[221] *VP* 10.46.

[222] Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, "Introduction" in Vālmīki*, The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 7, *Uttarakāṇḍa*, trans. Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 70.

[223] *VP ta̲rci̲rappuppāyiram* 8.

that this verse "is taken to imply that it would have been a most painful experience to him to describe the death of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which he would have been obliged to do if he had gone on with the story."[224] Thompson's theory that Villi ends his Mahābhārata with the conclusion of the Battle at Kurukṣetra to avoid describing Krishna's death is supported by the fact that the demise of Krishna is not a popular story in Śrīvaiṣṇava literature. The Āḻvārs in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and Vedāntadeśika in his Sanskrit *mahākāvya* on Krishna's life, the *Yādavābhyudaya*, refer to several of Krishna's actions from the Mahābhārata tradition, such as his slaying of Śiśupāla, his rescue of Draupadī during her disrobing, and his embassy to Hastinapura.[225] None of the Āḻvārs nor Vedāntadeśika, however, speak of Krishna's death. As Steven Hopkins observes, the final chapter of the *Yādavābhyudaya* ends with an "auspicious description of Krishna with his innumerable wives at home in Dvaraka, stopping short before his legendary ignominious death at the hands of a hunter in the epic *Mahabharata* account."[226]

Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* also ends with an auspicious account of Krishna blessing the Pāṇḍavas in Hastinapura and then returning to his home in Dwarka in the text's final verse:

> Saying, "Henceforth, you will prosper for eons,"
> the one with fresh *tulsī*
> establishing the son of Dharma and his younger brothers,
> saying, "I must return,"
> surrounded by Sātyaki and Halāyudha,
> and looking in the direction of the city of Dwarka,
> he returned.
> They too (the Pāṇḍavas) with great renown,
> protecting the earth surrounded by the resounding sea,
> lived in that city,
> reflecting solely on the way of *dharma*.[227]

I should point out that at least two Tamil poets were unsatisfied with this ending to the *Pāratam*. In the eighteenth century, Nallāpiḷḷai and Araṅkanāta Kavirāyar both picked up where Villi leaves off at the end of the *Book of the Night Massacre* and each wrote eight more books that cover the events of the final books of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* to "finish" Villi's poem.[228]

Yet when we consider the trajectory of the narrative of Villi's *Pāratam*, which begins with the words "our Mādhava" and goes on to detail how Krishna protects the Pāṇḍavas from their arrival in Hastinapura as children up until the end of the Kurukṣetra War, it is evident that

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[224] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 118.

[225] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 162; and Vedāntadeśika, *Yādavābhyudaya* 23.7–9, 15.1–135, and 23.15–20.

[226] Steven P. Hopkins, "Sanskrit from Tamil Nadu: At Play in the Forests of the Lord; The *Gopalavimshati* of Vedantadeshika," in *Krishna: A Sourcebook,* ed. Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 292–93.290.

[227] *iṉi ūḻi vāḻkir eṉa iḷaiñar oru nālvarōṭu aṟattiṉmaintaṉ*
taṉai irutti mīḷval eṉa cāttakiyum alāyutaṉum taṉṉai cūḻa
viṉai akaṟṟum pacuntuḷavōṉ tuvarai nakar ticai nōkki mīṇṭāṉ cīrtti
kaṉai kaṭal pār aḷittu avarum a nakariṉ aṟam neṟiyē karuti vāḻntā || *VP* 10.46 ||

[228] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 122–23.

the above verse is a fitting conclusion to this *kṛṣṇacarita*. As Villi has made abundantly clear throughout his composition, this Mahābhārata is not the story of how the Pāṇḍavas defeated the Kauravas, but rather the story of how Krishna saved the Pāṇḍavas from the Kauravas.

Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* also presents the epic as the tale of how Krishna rescued the Pāṇḍavas from their malevolent cousins. Yet, unlike Villi, Cauhān does not conclude his Mahābhārata with the end of the war and does not avoid describing the death of Krishna. As in the sixteenth book of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the eleventh book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Krishna is killed by a hunter after the Yādavas drunkenly slaughter each other in Cauhān's *Book of the Clubs* (*Muśalparv*).[229] As Cauhān's Krishna ascends to heaven, he tells his charioteer Dāruka to tell Arjuna to "keep the wisdom of the *Bhagavadgītā* in his heart."[230]

In a rather bizarre twist, however, in the subsequent and final book of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* (*Svargārohaṇparv*), we see Krishna alive and well in Dwarka. Cauhān's *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* begins with Yudhiṣṭhira asking Vyāsa how he can go to "Hari's world" (*hari loka).* [231] After Vyāsa tells Yudhiṣṭhira to do penance in the Himalayas, Sahadeva suggests that the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī go to Dwarka and ask Krishna his opinion on the matter. Remarkably, none of the Pāṇḍavas or Draupadī seem to remember that Krishna has died, and they happily prepare for the journey.[232] Upon arriving in Dwarka and seeing Krishna, Yudhiṣṭhira sings a *stotra* in a mixture of Sanskrit and Bhasha:

> I bow to the upholder of the mountain,[233] savior of the cowherds of Gokula,
> the slayer of the arrogance of Indra. I bow to the lord, Janārdana.
> I bow to the slayer of Kaṃsa, the destroyer of the pride of Cānūra,
> the delighter of the life breath of the elephant, the destroyer of the pride of the crocodile,
> the protector of the life breath of Prahlāda, Narasiṃha: the consumer of the wicked,
> the hero of the daughter of the ocean, the giver of joy to Brahmins,
> the savior of the burden of the earth, the slayer of the arrogance of the king of snakes.
> Taking on the forms of the fish and the tortoise, he [protected] the evidence of the Vedas.
> Assuming the body of Varāha, he killed the wicked Hiraṇyākṣa.
> I bow to the form of Vāmana, whose feet covered the universe.
> I bow to the one whose mount is Garuḍa, the refuge of the burning Kāmadeva.
> I bow to the grasper of the discus, the remover of the sorrow of the gods and Earth.
> Victory to the universal form of the lord, the compassionate one, the controller from within.
> Victory to the remover of different worlds, who comes assuming the bodies of men,
> Mukunda, the guardian of the world, Govinda, the destroyer of demons.
> Victory, victory to the one who rests on water. Victory to the one who comes from all virtues.
> I bow to the one I come to for refuge, the illustrious Krishna whose sight I obtain.[234]

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[229] *MBh* 16.6; and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.30–31.

[230] *gītā jñānahiṃ rākhi hiya* || *CM* 17.14 ||

[231] *CM* 18.3.

[232] *CM* 18.5.

[233] Note that as with Draupadī's eulogy in praise of Krishna after he saves her from being disrobes in the Bhasha text (*CM* 2.58–59), Yudhiṣṭhira begins this prayer by alluding to the story of Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana.

[234] *namāmi śikhara dhāraṇaṃ gokulā gopa tāraṇaṃ*
sureśa māna mardanaṃ namāmi prabhu janārdanaṃ

This whole beginning of the Bhasha *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* is rather perplexing. Has Cauhān forgotten that he described the death of Krishna in the previous book of his text? This major discrepancy could be used to support R.S. McGregor's claim that Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* "was contributed to and brought to completion by others."[235] It is also noteworthy that Yudhiṣṭhira's *stotra* is the first time in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* where Sanskrit is used. As the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* continues, Yudhiṣṭhira recites two more *stotra*s (to Śiva and to the sage Nārada) in a similar mix of Sanskrit and Bhasha.[236] Could this new use of Sanskrit in the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* also support McGregor's collective authorship theory?

While this is certainly a possibility, we should also recall that Sanskrit *stotra*s are also occasionally used in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, a major source of inspiration for Cauhān. The Bhasha *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* also features two more hymns (to Śiva and to Krishna), this time in the *harigītikā chand* meter, which (as we saw in Chapter One) is also utilized for songs of praise in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[237] In fact, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, the entire metrical structure of Cauhān's poem is undoubtedly inspired by the specific metrical format of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[238] The use of Sanskrit and the *harigītikā chand* meter in the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* could thus be another way Cauhān is emulating the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

Moreover, while Krishna dying in one book and then being alive in the next is certainly strange, the overall devotional ethos of Cauhān's *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* matches that of the first seventeen books in this composition. As we have seen throughout the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, Krishna remains at the center of the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* even when he is not physically present in the narrative. After Yudhiṣṭhira offers his *stotra* to Krishna in which he draws on several well-known stories of Krishna and other incarnations of Viṣṇu, the deity confirms that the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī should travel to the Himalayas and perform penance.[239] Even though Krishna does not accompany the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī on their arduous journey

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namāmi kaṃsa mardanaṃ cāṇūra garba gañjanaṃ
gayanda prāṇa rañjanaṃ graha garba bhañjanaṃ
prahalāda prāṇa rakṣakaṃ nṛsiṃha duṣṭa bhakṣakaṃ
sindhu sutā nāyakaṃ bipra sukha dāyakaṃ
mahī bhāra ṭāraṇaṃ phaṇīśa māna māraṇaṃ
maccha kaccha rūpa rākhī tāke saba beda sākhī
bārāha bapuṣa dhārī hiraṇyākṣa duṣṭa mārī
namāmi rūpa bāvanaṃ brahmāṇḍa kiyo pāvanaṃ
namāmi garuḍa bāhanaṃ tava śaraṇa kāma dāhaṃ
namāmi cakra dhāraṇaṃ sura dhenu duḥkha hāraṇaṃ
jaya biśvarūpa svāmī kṛpālu antarayāmī
jaya jakta haraṇa nyāre nara deha āya dhāre
mukunda jakta pālakaṃ gobinda danuja ghālakaṃ
jaya jaya jalaśāyanaṃ jaya sarva guṇa āyanaṃ
namāmi śaraṇa āyoṃ śrīkṛṣṇa daraśa pāyoṃ || *CM* 18.6 ||

[235] McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[236] *CM* 18.11 and 18.17.

[237] *CM* 18.10–11 and 18.15–16.

[238] On the metrical structure of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text,* 14–17.

[239] *CM* 18.8.

into the mountains, his presence is continuously felt throughout their pilgrimage as his devotees think of him and praise him.[240] While the four younger Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī slowly freeze to death, Yudhiṣṭhira sustains himself by chanting different names of Krishna, including Vāsudeva, Bhagavān, Hari, Gopāla, Govinda, and Janārdana.[241] We see something very similar in the final book of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's seventeenth-century Sanskrit *Bhārataprabandha*, a Mahābhārata retelling in which Naama Shalom asserts that "a strong influence of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* is felt throughout."[242] Shalom points out that the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī "carry on with their journey while they 'perform dance in their minds in devotion to Viṣṇu'" and that they are described as the "knowers of the sweetness emerging from the adoration of Hari's feet."[243] Cauhān's *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* concludes, as the Sanskrit epic does, with the Pāṇḍavas together again in heaven. Yet unlike in the *Mahābhārata*, the paradise where the Pāṇḍavas end up in the *Mahābhārat* is not simply Svarga (heaven), but Vaikuntha, Viṣṇu's abode.[244]

As we have just seen, the endings of both Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* differ significantly from the conclusion of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. But there are some other premodern regional compositions featuring characters from the Mahābhārata tradition that have even more drastically different endings. Bhīm Kavi's Bhasha poem *Ḍaṅgvaikathā* (Story of Ḍaṅgvai, 1493 CE), Carigoṇḍa Dharmanna's Telugu poem *Citrabhāratamu* (Peculiar Bhārata, ca. 1500), Haḷēmakki Rāma's Kannada Yakṣagāna play *Kṛṣṇārjuna Kāḷaga* (Battle of Krishna and Arjuna, ca. 1618), and the Tamil ballad poems *Pañcapāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam* (Residence of the Five Pāṇḍavas in the Forest, ca. 1600) and *Kurukṣēttira Mālai* (Garland of Kurukṣēttiraṉ) all tell a remarkably similar story in which a local king or *gandharva* (a celestial musician) accidentally insults Krishna and begs either Bhīma or Arjuna to save him from Krishna's wrath.[245] Encouraged by Subhadrā (Krishna's sister and Arjuna's wife), the Pāṇḍavas decide to protect the king/*gandharva* and together with the Kauravas they wage war against Krishna and his entire army. All the versions of this story end with Krishna forgiving the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Francesca Orsini notes that the

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[240] For example, see *CM* 18.15–16 and 18.17.

[241] *CM* 18.19–20.

[242] Shalom, *Re-ending the Mahābhārata*, 158.

[243] Shalom, 159.

[244] *MBh* 18.3; and *CM* 18.23.

[245] See Francesca Orsini, "Texts and Tellings: *Kathas* in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 337–46; E. Vasumati, *Telugu Literature in the Qutub Shahi Period* (Hyderabad: Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, n.d., ca. 1960), 19–53; K. Shivarama Karantha, *Yakṣagāna* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1997), 245–46; Martha Bush Ashton and Bruce Christie, *Yakṣagāna: A Dance Drama of India* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977), 76–78; and M. Arunachalam, *Ballad Poetry* (Thanjavur: Saraswati Mahal Library, 1976), 100–9.

Modern renditions of this same story include Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham's Telegu play *Gayōpākhyānaṃ* (1890), K.V. Reddy's Telugu film *Śrīkṛṣṇārjuna Yuddhamu* (1963), and Babubhai Mistri's Hindi film *Śrīkṛṣṇārjun Yuddh* (1971).

Ḍaṅgvaikathā concludes "when Duryodhana grasps one of his feet, Karna grasps the other, and Arjun pleads with him, [and then] Krishna lifts them all up in an embrace."[246]

Can we call this fascinating and strange story that has characters from the Mahābhārata tradition but that also avoids the central conflict of the Sanskrit epic—the devastating war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas—a "Mahābhārata"? Orsini observes that "while drawing upon the familiar set of *Mahābhārata* characters," Bhīm Kavi composed "a gripping tale that turned the epic tale upside down."[247] Notably, in his extensive study of Tamil ballad poetry M. Arunachalam discusses the *Pañcapāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam* and the *Kurukṣēttira Mālai* in his section entitled "The Romantic Ballads" instead of in his section called "Ballads from the Ithihasas" in which he examines Tamil ballads based on the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa narrative traditions.[248] The title of Carigoṇḍa Dharmanna's Telegu poem, the *Citrabhāratamu* or "Peculiar Bhārata," is particularly telling: this Mahābhārata is immensely unusual.[249]

The conclusions of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* are just some of the numerous ways in which each of these texts differs considerably from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Yet both regional poems are still recognizable as "Mahābhāratas" in a way that the *Ḍaṅgvaikathā*, the *Citrabhāratamu,* the *Kṛṣṇārjuna Kāḷaga*, the *Pañcapāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam*, and the *Kurukṣēttira Mālai* are not. The Battle at Kurukṣetra between the "great Bhāratas" remains a vital component of both the Tamil *Pāratam* and Bhasha *Mahābhārat* albeit with Krishna playing an even more important role in the war than he does in the Sanskrit epic. Again, instead of telling the story of how the Pāṇḍavas defeated the Kauravas, Villi and Cauhān are both narrating the story of how Krishna saved the Pāṇḍavas from the Kauravas.

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In this chapter, I have shown how both Villi and Cauhān reframe the Mahābhārata as a *bhakti* narrative poem focused on the deeds of Krishna. Both the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* present the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī as "all along" devotees of Krishna who frequently break out into song in praise of him. Both Mahābhāratas also depict Krishna as a deity who cares deeply about his *bhakta*s. And even when Krishna is not physically present in the narratives of the poems of Villi and Cauhān, he looms over the entireties of both texts.

I have also demonstrated in this chapter that Villi and Cauhān transform four of the same sections of the Mahābhārata: Krishna's introduction in the narrative, Draupadī's prayer to Krishna in the assembly hall, the *Book of Effort*, and the departure of Krishna at the end of the story. Each of these four narrative transformations allow Villi and Cauhān to successfully recast the tale of the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas as a devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*. But I have also revealed that while Villi and Cauhān often reimagine the same section from the Mahābhārata tradition, their individual reimaginings are often quite different from each other. For instance, while the renderings of the *Book of Effort* in both the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* present Krishna as the steadfast protector of the Pāṇḍavas, Villi

[246] Orsini, "Texts and Tellings," 345.

[247] Orsini, 345–46.

[248] Arunachalam, *Ballad Poetry*, 109–15.

[249] I thank Mrunalini Chunduri for introducing me to the *Citrabhāratamu* and discussing the text's title with me.

concentrates on the varied ways that Krishna safeguards his devotees in the actual narrative of his *Book of Effort*, while Cauhān's *Book of Effort* describes multiple past instances of Krishna rescuing the Pāṇḍavas. Similarly, although both Villi and Cauhān recast the entire dicing episode as a devotional story that emphasizes Krishna's compassion for Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas, Villi's rendering of Draupadī's prayer to Krishna exemplifies the power of *prapatti*, while Cauhān use Draupadī's prayer as an opportunity to extol the deity in detail.

There is no doubt that Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* are both devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*s. It is critical, however, to also recognize the different methods that Villi and Cauhān each use to reframe the Mahābhārata as works of *bhakti* that speak to local audiences. In the next two chapters, I will reveal how Villi and Cauhān each anchor their retellings in specific regional Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* literary cultures: the South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition for Villi and Tulsīdās's Bhasha corpus of poems dedicated to Rāma for Cauhān.

CHAPTER THREE

Beginning with *Bhakti*:
The Use of Invocations in Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*

How does one begin a work of literature? For many premodern South Asian literary cultures, the answer to this question is: with an invocation. Bhāsa's Sanskrit drama the *Karṇabhāra* (Karṇa's Burden, ca. 200 CE), for example, commences with the *sūtradhāra* (director) reciting the following *maṅgala* (auspicious verse) in praise of Narasiṃha, the man-lion form of Viṣṇu:

> Teeming with women and men,
> with demons and gods,
> this world and the netherworld reel
> at the sight of his man-lion form;
> the breast of the demon king
> is cut by his axe-blade nails;
> he destroys all foes of the gods—
> may the glory of Viṣṇu,
> Lord of Goddess Śrī, shine for you![1]

Or take the Sufi poet Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī who begins his Bhasha *Padmāvat* (Story of Padmāvatī, 1540 CE) with a *ḥamd*, a verse in praise of Allah:

> In the beginning I remember the Creator,
> Who gave us life and made the universe.
> He made the first light shine out.
> For love of the Prophet, He made the heavens.
> He made fire, air, water, and earth.
> He made all the colors that are.
> He made earth, heaven, and the nether world.
> He made all the kinds of living beings.
> He made the seven continents and the cosmos.
> He made the fourteen divisions of creation.
> He made the day and the sun, the night and the moon.
> He made the constellations and their lines of stars.
> He made the sunshine, the cold, and the shade.
> He made the clouds and the lightning in them.
> The One who made this entire creation, and whose sole glory it is:
> Such a Name do I first invoke, and then I start my tale.[2]

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[1] Bhāsa, *Karṇabhāra* 1, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller in "*Karṇabhāra*: The Trial of Karṇa" in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 61.

[2] Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, *Padmāvat* 1, trans. Aditya Behl in *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition*, ed. Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

Yet while countless works of South Asian literature begin with some sort of invocation, the role that these auspicious opening verses play within their larger texts has received little attention.[3]

This chapter examines the different invocations to various forms of Krishna that commence thirty-seven of the fifty chapters of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*.[4] I show how these multiple invocations mark the *Pāratam* as a composition grounded in the literature and traditions of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community in South India in four different ways: (1) they signal that the *Pāratam* is a Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam* (*mahākāvya*), (2) they place Villi's poem in the lineage of an earlier Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamil Mahābhārata: Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century *Pārataveṇpā*, (3) they anchor this text in a distinctly Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* milieu, and (4) they help reframe the narrative of the epic as a Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*.

Marking the *Pāratam* as a Śrīvaiṣṇava *Peruṅkāppiyam*

In the *taṟciṟappuppāyiram* (author's own introduction) to the fifteenth-century Tamil *Pāratam*, Villi describes his poem as a *peruṅkāppiyam* (Sanskrit: *mahākāvya*), an ornate multi-chapter narrative text replete with poetic figuration.[5] Notably, three of the most famous Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s—Bhāravi's sixth-century *Kirātārjunīya* (Arjuna and the Hunter), Māgha's seventh-century *Śiśupālavadha* (Slaying of Śiśupāla), and Śrīharṣa's twelfth-century *Naiṣadhīyacarita* (Deeds of the Naiṣadha King)—retell Mahābhārata episodes.[6] By the fifteenth century, the *peruṅkāppiyam* was a well-established Tamil literary genre with examples including Tiruttakkatēvar's ninth-century *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (Cīvakaṉ the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel), Nātakuttaṉār's tenth-century *Kuṇṭalakēci*, Tōlāmoḻittēvar's tenth-century *Cūḷāmaṇi* (Crest Jewel), the tenth-century *Vaḷaiyāpati*, the tenth-century *Nīlakēci*, Cēkkiḻār's twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam*, and Kampaṉ's twelfth-century *Irāmāvatāram* (Descent of Rāma).

As Anne Monius notes, the first definition of a *peruṅkāppiyam* is found in the twelfth-century *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* (Poetic Figuration of Daṇḍin), a Tamil reimagining of Daṇḍin's seventh-century Sanskrit literary treatise, the *Kāvyādarśa* (Mirror of *Kāvya*).[7] The description of the *peruṅkāppiyam* in the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* is clearly inspired by that of the *mahākāvya* in the *Kāvyādarśa*. According to Daṇḍin, a *mahākāvya* is a *sargabandha* (a composition divided into

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[3] Exceptions include Christopher Minkowski, "Why Should We Read the Maṅgala Verses?" in *Śāstrārambha: Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit*, ed. Walter Slaje (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2008), 1–24; Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*, 30–58; and Herman Tieken, "On Beginnings: Introductions and Prefaces in Kāvya" in *Innovations and Turning Points: Towards a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86–108.

[4] *VP* 1.2.1, 1.3.1, 1.4.1, 1.6.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 3.3.1, 3.4.1, 3.8.1, 4.1.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 5.1.1, 5.2.1, 5.3.1, 5.4.1, 5.5.1, 5.6.1, 5.7.1, 6.1.1, 6.2.1, 6.3.1, 6.4.1, 6.5.1, 6.6.1, 6.7.1, 6.8.1, 6.9.1, 6.10.1, 7.1.1, 7.2.1, 7.3.1, 7.4.1, 7.5.1, 8.1.1, 8.2.1, and 9.1.1.

[5] *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 7.

[6] Since around the fourteenth century, these three Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s along with Kālidāsa's fourth or fifth-century *Raghuvaṃśa* (Lineage of Raghu) and *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of Kumāra) have been referred to as the *pañcamahākāvya* or the "five *mahākāvya*s." See Deven M. Patel, *Text to Tradition: The Naiṣadhīyacarita and Literary Community in South Asia* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2014), 59.

[7] Anne E. Monius, "The Many Lives of Daṇḍin: The *Kāvyādarśa* in Sanskrit and Tamil," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001): 15.

*sarga*s or "chapters") that is composed in multiple different sonorous meters, imbued with *rasa*,[8] based on *itihāsa* or "other good material,"[9] concerned with the four *puruṣārtha*s,[10] and centered around a hero who is "a great and generous person."[11] Daṇḍin goes on to list a number of different things that should be described in a *mahākāvya*, including cities, oceans, the seasons, water play, drinking scenes, festivals, weddings, the separation of lovers, the birth of princes, meetings with ministers, army processions, war, and the victory of the hero.[12]

The part of the *mahākāvya* definition in the *Kāvyādarśa* that concerns us most here is the account of how a *mahākāvya* should begin. Daṇḍin tells us that the first verse of a *mahākāvya* should be a benediction (*āśīs*), a salutation (*namaskriyā*), or an indication of the poem's subject (*vastunirdeśa*).[13] Christopher Minkowski elaborates that an *āśīs* is a verse "in which a deity is called upon to bless the reader and the author" and that a *namaskriyā* is a verse of "obeisance" that "is made to a deity or a similarly exalted being."[14] Similarly, in the Tamil *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* we are informed of three suitable opening verses for a *peruṅkāppiyam*: a benediction (*vāḻttu*), a salutation (*vaṇakkam*), or an indication of the poem's subject (*varuporuḷ*).[15] The first verses of several prominent *peruṅkāppiyam*s—including the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Kuṇṭalakēci*, the *Nīlakēci*, the *Vaḷaiyāpati*, the *Cūḷāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, Ativīrarāmaṉ's sixteenth-century *Naiṭatam* (Naiṣadha King), Vaṇṇapparimaḷappulavar's sixteenth-century *Āyiramacalā* (One Thousand Questions), Umaṟuppulavar's seventeenth-century *Cīṟāppurāṇam* (Legend of the Prophet), and Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi's eighteenth-century *Tēmpāvaṇi* (Unfading Jewel)—are indeed benedictions or salutations.[16]

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[8] *Rasa* means "essence" or "flavor." The eight primary *rasa*s are *śṛṅgāra* (the erotic), *hāsya* (the comic), *bībhatsa* (the disgusting), *raudra* (the violent), *karuṇa* (the compassionate), *vīra* (the heroic), *bhayānaka* (the fearsome), and *adbhuta* (the amazing). Sometimes *śānta* (the peaceful) and *bhakti* are also considered *rasa*s.

[9] *Itihāsa* (which is often translated as "history") is a genre that is frequently used to describe the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

[10] The four *puruṣārtha*s (aims of human life) are *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth or power), *kāma* (desire), and *mokṣa* (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).

[11] Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.15, trans. V.V. Sastrulu in *Kāvyādarśaḥ of Daṇḍin: Text with the Commentary Jibānand Vidyāsāgar,* trans. V.V. Sastrulu, ed. R.K. Panda (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2008), 8. See also *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* 8. I am following: *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram Cuppiramaṇiyatēcikar Uraiyuṭaṉ*, ed. K. Irāmaliṅkat Tampirāṉ (Tirunelveli: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1963).

[12] Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.16–19. See also *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* 8.

[13] Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.14.

[14] Minkowski, "Why Should We Read," 5.

[15] *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* 8.

[16] See the opening verses of Tiruttakkatēvar, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi: The Hero Cīvakaṉ; The Gem that Fulfills All Wishes. Verses 1–1165*), trans. James D. Ryan (Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing Company, 2005); Tōlāmoḻittēvar, *Cūḷāmaṇi*, vol. 1, trans. P. Pandian (Chennai: Research Foundation for Jainology, 2002); *Nīlakēci: Camayativākaravāmaṇa Muṉivar Uraiyuṭaṉ*, ed. A. Charkavarti (Kumbakonam: 1936); Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam*; Kampaṉ, *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, ed. Vai. Mu. Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyār, 6 vols. (Madras: 1926–71); Ativīrarāmaṉ, *Naiṭatam* (Tirunelveli: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1962); Umaṟuppulavar, *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, ed. Em. Ceyyitu Muhammatu Hasaṉ (Chennai: Maraikkāyar Patippakam: 1987); and Costanzo

Let me make it clear, however, that I am not suggesting that Ativīrarāmaṉ, Beschi, Cēkkiḻār, Kampaṉ, Nātakuttaṉār, Tiruttakkatēvar, Tōlāmoḻittēvar, Umaṟuppulavar, and Vaṇṇapparimaḷappulavar all had palm leaf copies of the Sanskrit *Kāvyādarśa* or the Tamil *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* in front of them while they were composing their various *peruṅkāppiyam*s. Admittedly, multiple Sanskrit scholars have suggested that literary theory in premodern South Asia was proscriptive rather than descriptive. Daniel Ingalls, for instance, claims that the various elements of Daṇḍin's *mahākāvya* definition in the *Kāvyādarśa* are "not random suggestions but specific requirements. Every complete *mahākāvya* that has come down to us from the time of Kālidāsa contains the whole list."[17] Sheldon Pollock similarly asserts that "in its earliest embodiment the discourse on *kāvya* was intended not to explain it but to help produce it."[18]

Yet this view is not shared by all scholars. Tracing the development of the *mahākāvya* genre over time, Deven Patel observes that each *mahākāvya* "represents a poetic practice that consistently outpaces the theory" and he argues that "thus, in the seventh century Daṇḍin formulated a preliminary description of the *mahākāvya*, very probably with Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* or perhaps Bhāravi's sixth-century *Kirātārjunīya* as his model poem."[19] Indira Peterson also advises against over-relying on literary theory to study *mahākāvya*s. Noting that "*mahākāvya* poets cultivated generic strategies of their own," she convincingly demonstrates that "not the poeticians, but the poems themselves, are our best clues to these processes."[20]

Notably, the two earliest Tamil narrative poems, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ's *Cilappatikāram* (Tale of the Anklet, c. fourth or fifth century) and Cāttaṉār's *Maṇimēkalai* (c. sixth century), do not begin with invocations.[21] Although these two texts along with the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Vaḷaiyāpati*, and the *Kuṇṭalakēci* are classified as the *aimperuṅkāppiyam* or "five *peruṅkāppiyam*s" in Kantappaiyar's late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth-century *Tiruttaṇikaiyulā* (*Ulā* on Tiruttaṇikai),[22] Jennifer Clare explains that both the *Cilappatikāram* and the *Maṇimēkalai* "lack

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Giuseppe Beschi, *Tēmpāvaṇi*, ed. Na. Cēturakunātaṉ (Tirunelveli: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1965).

On the invocations in the *Kuṇṭalakēci*, the *Vaḷaiyāpati*, and the *Āyiramacalā*, see Anne E. Monius, "Sanskrit is the Mother of All Tamil Words: Further Thoughts on the *Vīracōliyam* and its Commentary," in *Buddhism among Tamils in Tamiḻakam and Īḻam: Part Three; Extensions and Conclusions*, ed. Peter Schalk and Astrid van Nahl (Uppsala : Uppsala University Library, 2013), 119; Jennifer Steele Clare "Canons, Conventions and Creativity: Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India," (PhD diss., University of California: Berkeley, 2011), 112; and Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 100.

[17] Daniel H.H. Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry from Vidyākara's Treasury* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 34.

[18] Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 43.

[19] Patel, *Text to Tradition*, 19.

[20] Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric*, 17.

[21] Clare "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 114 n381.

[22] While the term *aimperuṅkāppiyam* (which is likely derived from the Sanskrit *pañcamahākāvya* or "five *mahākāvya*s") is first found in Mayilainātar's fourteenth-century commentary on the Tamil grammatical treatise, the *Naṉṉūl*, the identification of the *Cilappatikāram*, the *Maṇimēkalai*, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Vaḷaiyāpati*, and the *Kuṇṭalakēci* as the *aimperuṅkāppiyam* only takes place in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century in

key features associated with '*kāvya*' and are only categorized as such by later theoreticians."[23] The first two Tamil narrative poems to begin with invocations are Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā* and Tiruttakkatēvar's *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, which were both composed around the ninth century. As Monius points out, "at the level of form, of poetic structure, and narrative frame, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* establishes a set of conventions for long 'epic' narratives [*peruṅkāppiyam*s] that all subsequent medieval Tamil narrative works, from the *Periyapurāṇam* to Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*, follow."[24] Just as Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* is a model for later Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s, so is Tiruttakkatēvar's *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* for Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*s. One of the conventions the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* establishes is beginning a *peruṅkāppiyam* with an invocation.

In several *peruṅkāppiyam*s, the opening invocation alerts readers to the religious content of the rest of the poem. Take the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, a *peruṅkāppiyam* that narrates the adventures of Cīvakaṉ, a prince who eventually renounces the world and becomes a Jain ascetic. By using the first three benediction verses of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* to pay tribute to the Jain *siddha*s or "perfected beings" and Mahāvīra, the twenty-fourth *tīrthaṅkara* (Jain spiritual teacher), Tiruttakkatēvar immediately alerts his audience that this *peruṅkāppiyam* is a work of Jain literature.[25] Clare notes that the invocations of the *Nīlakēci* and the *Cūḷāmaṇi* similarly mark these *peruṅkāppiyam*s as Jain compositions.[26] Although Nātakuttaṉār's *Kuṇṭalakēci*—a *peruṅkāppiyam* about a woman who becomes a Buddhist nun after she kills her husband—is now lost, we still have access to the text's benediction through Peruntēvaṉār's eleventh or twelfth-century commentary on the eleventh-century Buddhist Tamil poetic treatise, the *Vīracōliyam*.[27] Monius observes that this verse "refers to Buddha's constant efforts on behalf of others," therefore signaling to readers that the *Kuṇṭalakēci* is a Buddhist *peruṅkāppiyam*.[28]

As we have seen in Chapter One, the *Periyapurāṇam* is a Śaiva *bhakti* narrative poem about the lives of the sixty-three Nāyaṉmār saints. Accordingly, Cēkkiḻār begins his *peruṅkāppiyam* with a salutation to Śiva in which he describes some of the deity's most famous attributes, such as his cosmic dancing and his matted tresses that hold the Gaṅgā:

> Let us worship and adore the flower-ankleted feet
> of the One who dances in the hall
> of the One whose light is beyond measure

Kantappaiyar's *Tiruttaṇikaiyulā*. See Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

[23] Clare "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 65.

Monius adds that Daṇḍin's "standard features" for *mahākāvya*s "are not all found in the *Maṇimēkalai*, a text concerned primarily with virtue (dharma) and the preparations necessary for undertaking the ascetic life that leads ultimately to liberation" (*Imagining a Place*, 15).

[24] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 139.

[25] Tiruttakkatēvar, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1–3.

[26] Clare "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 106.

[27] Note that this Peruntēvaṉār is a different individual than the author of the ninth-century Tamil *Pārataveṇpā.*

[28] Monius, "Sanskrit is Mother," 119.

of the One in whose matted locks rest
the abundant waters
of the One difficult to speak of, even if known
to all the world.[29]

Ronit Ricci notes that Vaṇṇapparimaḷappulavar's sixteenth-century *Āyiramacalā* "is widely considered the earliest complete Muslim Tamil text extant."[30] She adds that this *peruṅkāppiyam* commences with an "invocatory *kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu* [benediction to god] in which praise is offered to God, the Prophet, the four caliphs, the Prophet's companions, his grandsons Acaṉ and Ucaiṉ, the prophets, the saints (*avuliyā*), the religious scholars, and the imams that founded the four schools of law."[31] The first chapter of Umaṟuppulavar's *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, a *peruṅkāppiyam* about the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, is actually titled the "Benediction to God Chapter" (*Kaṭavuḷ Vāḻttu Paṭalam*) and, as with the *Āyiramacalā*, it begins with a verse in praise of Allah.[32]

All six books of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*—a retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa and one of the most beloved examples of the *peruṅkāppiyam* genre—begin with an invocation.[33] In some of the invocations, it is evident that Rāma is the deity being praised. In the salutation that opens the *Book of Beauty* (*Sundarakāṇḍam*), for example, Kampaṉ extols the *ilaṅkaiyil porutār* or "destroyer of Lanka," which is an epithet that clearly refers to Rāma's defeat of Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Lanka (Laṅkā).[34] In other invocations, however, the identity of the deity being lauded is not as obvious. Consider the first verse of the *Book of the Forest* (*Āraṇiyakāṇṭam*):

Under every different form he is the same. Though they branch out,
in him they are one. And only through him do men finally understand
words they have recited over and over. He is the primal lord whom no [Vedas,]
no Brahmins or gods have comprehended! O knowledge for our [knowing!][35]

Unlike the invocation in Kampaṉ's *Book of Beauty*, this verse does not refer to any well-known attributes of Rāma. The motif of the divine being unfathomable that permeates this verse is found in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Tamil *bhakti* traditions.[36] The epithet "primal lord" (*mutalōr*) that Kampaṉ uses in this opening verse could easily refer to Viṣṇu or Śiva or another deity. Editors

[29] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 1, trans. Monius in "Śiva Heroic Father," 165.

[30] Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 98.

[31] Ricci, 100.

[32] Umaṟuppulavar, *Cīṟāppurāṇam* 1. Also see Vasudha Narayanan, "Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cirappuranam* ('Life of the Prophet')" in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 398.

[33] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram pāyiram* 1, 2.1.1, 3.1.1, 4.1.1, 5.1.1, and 6.1.1.

[34] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 5.1.1.

[35] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 3.1.1, trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz in *The Forest Book of the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampaṉ*, trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 37.

[36] See Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 199.

and translators have assumed that all the invocations in the *Irāmāvatāram* are in praise of Rāma because this *peruṅkāppiyam* is a Rāmāyaṇa retelling.[37]

It is important to pause here and take some time to discuss the religious orientation of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram.* Multiple prominent scholars of Tamil literature have described the *Irāmāvatāram* as a work of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.[38] One reason for this is the consistent presentation of Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu throughout the *Irāmāvatāram*. As A.K. Ramanujan notes:

> In Vālmīki, Rāma's character is that not of a god but of a god-man who has to live within the limits of a human form with all its vicissitudes. Some argue that the references to Rāma's divinity and his incarnation for the purpose of destroying Rāvaṇa, and the first and last books of the epic, in which Rāma is clearly described as a god with such a mission, are later additions. Be that as it may, in Kampaṉ he is clearly a god.[39]

Throughout the *Irāmāvatāram*, different characters acknowledge Rāma's divinity. For example, in the *Book of the Forest*, the demon Virādha praises Rāma in a lengthy prayer that is absent from Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*.[40] Virādha begins his eulogy with the following verse:

> You whose feet cover the world,
> whose anklets resound like the Vedas,
> how many forms are there for you
> to have, you who are everywhere!
> Between destruction and creation of a universe
> you lie on the cool ocean of milk
> and still you enter into all the disparate
> elements! How can they possibly contain you?[41]

In this verse, Virādha describes different attributes of Viṣṇu including his incarnation as Vāmana, the dwarf who spans the earth, heavens, and netherworld in just three steps, and the iconic image of the deity reclining on the celestial serpent Śeṣanāga in the middle of the *kṣīrasāgara* (ocean of milk). Virādha's prayer to Rāma—which bears a close resemblance to the hymns that permeate *bhakti* narrative poems such as the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the Tamil *Periyapurāṇam*, and the Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*—continues for another fourteen verses.[42]

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[37] For example, see Hart and Heifetz, *Forest Book*, 301.

[38] For example, see Jesudasan and Jesudasan, *Tamil Literature*, 162; Meenakshisundaran, *Tamil Literature*, 105; Varadarajan, *Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu*, 164–66; Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 147–48; George L. Hart, *The Relation Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), 360; Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*, 32; and David Shulman, "Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sītā in Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*" in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 90.

[39] Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*," 32.

[40] See Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.3. I am following: *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 3, *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, trans. Sheldon I. Pollock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[41] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 3.1.47, trans. Hart and Heifetz in *Forest Book*, 47.

[42] Recall that in Chapter One, I argue that the frequency of devotees singing hymns in praise of the main deity is one of the four central features of *bhakti* narrative poems.

Another reason why the *Irāmāvatāram* has been labeled a Vaiṣṇava text is that Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographical tradition identifies Kampaṉ as the student and devotee of Nammāḻvār, the most famous of the twelve Āḻvār poets.[43] As David Shulman notes, in the *Vinōtaracamañcari* (1876), Vīrācāmi Ceṭṭiyār describes a story in which Kampaṉ desires to have the first public recitation (*araṅkēṟṟam*) of the *Irāmāvatāram* at the Raṅganātha temple in Srirangam (Śrīraṅgam), which is one of the most sacred temples for Śrīvaiṣṇavas.[44] In the course of this story, Kampaṉ composes a poem entitled the *Caṭakōparantāti* (Linked Verses about Nammāḻvār).[45] While John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan point out that the *Caṭakōparantāti* "is well known in the Śrīvaiṣṇava community and is sometimes published in editions of the Sacred Collect [the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, the collected poems of the Āḻvārs]," [46] Norman Cutler observes that "some scholars question his [Kampaṉ's] authorship of this work."[47]

T.P. Meenakshisundaran and Mu. Varadarajan both argue that Kampaṉ was familiar with the compositions of the Āḻvārs based on a comparison of verses in the *Irāmāvatāram* and Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār's ninth-century *Periyatirumoḻi* (Grand Divine Speech) in which Rāma describes Guha, the king of the Nishad tribal community, as his fifth brother.[48] Similarly, in her work on Kulacēkarāḻvār's eighth or ninth-century *Perumāḷtirumoḻi* (Divine Speech by the Perumāḷ King), Suganya Anandakichenin identifies some salient similarities between Kampaṉ's and Kulacēkarāḻvār's accounts of Daśaratha lamenting the exile of his son Rāma.[49]

Yet while Kampaṉ may have been partly inspired by the poetry of the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, the *Irāmāvatāram* did not achieve the same status that the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* did within the Śrīvaiṣṇava community. Vasudha Narayanan explains that "although Tamil Vaishnava poetry composed by the alvars became part of domestic and Vishnu temple liturgies, and Shaiva poems were used in Shiva temples and Shaivite homes, the Tamil Ramayana was never pressed into devotional use."[50] This differentiates the *Irāmāvatāram* from Tulsīdās's sixteenth-century Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*, which has been called the "Bible of

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[43] Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*," 32.

[44] David Shulman, "From Author to Non-Author in Tamil Literary Legend" in *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113–20.

[45] Shulman, 117.

[46] John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷaṉ's Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḻi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19.

[47] Norman Cutler, "Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 304.

[48] T.P. Meenakshisundaran, *Collected Papers of Prof. T. P. Meenakshisundaran* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1961), 47; and Varadarajan, *Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu*, 165–66. Also see Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār *Periyatirumoḻi*, 5.8.1; and Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 2.6.73–76.

[49] Suganya Anandakichenin, "Kulacēkara Āḻvār's 'The Lament of Daśaratha,'" *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 22, no. 2 (2014): 180–87.

[50] Vasudha Narayanan, "The Ramayana and its Muslim Interpreters," in *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas: A South Asian Tradition,* ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 280.

North India" due to its religious significance in the region,[51] and which in the nineteenth century was directly adopted into the religious practices of two North Indian sectarian communities: the Rāmānandīs and the Rāmnāmīs.[52] As Patricia Mumme, Vasudha Narayanan, and Ajay Rao have all shown, the Rāmāyaṇa (especially Vālmīki's Sanskrit epic) was an immensely important narrative for the Śrīvaiṣṇava community in premodern South India.[53] Rao explains that:

> Śrīvaiṣṇava engagement with the Rāma story occurred in three phases: (1) references in Tamil Āḻvār poetry (sixth to ninth centuries) interspersing specifically Tamil folk traditions and devotional veneration of Rāma with the basic outline of Vālmīki's telling; (2) the inscription of esoteric Maṇipravāla (mixed Tamil and Sanskrit) oral commentary on the Āḻvār poems and independent esoteric (*rahasya*) works (eleventh through fourteenth centuries); and (3) the composition of Sanskrit Rāma poems and full-length Sanskrit commentaries on the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* (thirteenth through sixteenth centuries).[54]

Thus, as Rao notes, "it is curious that the *Irāmāvatāram* is almost completely without significance for Śrīvaiṣṇavas…the *Irāmāvatāram* spawned no Śrīvaiṣṇava commentarial tradition; moreover, the *Irāmāvatāram* is rarely, if ever, cited in the *rahasya* literature."[55]

In a recent presentation, Anne Monius convincingly argued that "a close reading of Kampaṉ's text itself suggests a more complex project at work, that of a Śaiva poet ('Kampaṉ' is also a name of Śiva) seeking to understand the workings of the divine on earth in *avatāra* or incarnational form."[56] Śiva is a key character in multiple Rāmāyaṇas including the fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, and the seventeenth-century Bhasha *Ādirāmāyaṇ* (Primordial Rāmāyaṇa) of Harjī, a leader of the Mīṇā sectarian Sikh community.[57] But Śiva's prominence in the *Irāmāvatāram* is unprecedented. Monius notes that

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[51] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 1.

[52] See Paramasivan, "Text and Sect"; and Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*.

[53] Patricia Y. Mumme, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Exegesis in Teṉkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavism," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 202–16; Vasudha Narayan, "The Rāmāyaṇa in the Theology and Experience of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Community," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 2, no. 4 (1994): 55–90; and Ajay K. Rao, *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa as Theology: A History of Reception in Premodern India* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[54] Rao, *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.

[55] Rao, 7.

[56] Anne E. Monius, "Rāma and Sītā in a Śaiva Literary Key? Rethinking the Literary and Religious Orientation of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*" (paper presented at the Institute for South Asia Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, May 3, 2018).

As Yigal Bronner has shown, the sixteenth-century South Indian poet-scholar Appayyadīkṣita argues that Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* is a Śaiva text. See "A Text with a Thesis: The Rāmāyaṇa from Appayya Dīkṣita's Receptive End," in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Whitney Cox, Yigal Bronner, and Lawrence McCrea, (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011), 45–63.

[57] On Śiva's role in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Chapter One. On Śiva in the *Ādirāmāyaṇ*, see Hardip Singh Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth-Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 163–64.

in Kampaṉ's poem Śiva's name appears more times than that of Rāma. This is in stark contrast to the overtly Vaiṣṇava Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās which stress the potency of Rāma's name.[58]

The reason why I have taken the time to discuss the religious orientation of the *Irāmāvatāram* and questioned its categorization as a Śrīvaiṣṇava text is because in Chapter Five, I will propose that Villi's overall project with the *Pāratam* is to create the first Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*. I should point out that the *Pāratam* is not the first Śrīvaiṣṇava *mahākāvya*. The *Yādavābhyudaya* is a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* about the life of Krishna by the Śrīvaiṣṇava poet-philosopher Vedāntadeśika (traditional dates: 1268–1369 CE). Vedāntadeśika begins the *Yādavābhyudaya* with an invocation that also happens to be the first verse of his Sanskrit *stotra* to Krishna, the *Gopālaviṃśati* (Twenty Verses to Gopāla):

> His shining body lights up the woods
> of Vrindavan;
> cherished lover of the simple
> cowherd girls,
> he was born on Jayanti
> when Rohini touches,
> on the eighth day,
> the waning moon
> in *Avani*:
> this luminous power
> that wears Vaijayanti
> the long garland of victory,
> I praise Him![59]

In this invocation, Vedāntadeśika is clearly paying tribute to Krishna with allusions to several aspects of the deity's youth such as his birth, his childhood home of Vrindavan, and his role as the lover of the *gopī*s.[60] As with several *peruṅkāppiyam*s, such as the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Āyiramacalā*, the very first verse of Vedāntadeśika's *Yādavābhyudaya*, alerts readers to the religious content of this South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava *mahākāvya*.

While Kampaṉ opens each of the six books of his *peruṅkāppiyam* with an invocation, not all of these invocations are clear indicators of the sectarian identity of *Irāmāvatāram*. As we will soon see, unlike the ambiguous salutation in the *Book of the Forest* of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* that may or may not be addressed to Rāma, the thirty-seven different invocations in the *Pāratam* all make it abundantly clear that Villi's poem is a Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*.

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[58] On the importance of Rāma's name in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, see Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 39–43.

[59] Vedāntadeśika, *Yādavābhyudaya* 1.1, trans. Steven P. Hopkins in "Sanskrit from Tamil Nadu,"292–93. This is Hopkin's translation of the first verse of the *Gopālaviṃśati*.

[60] I should also point out that Vedāntadeśika begins each of the thirty-two chapters of his Manipravala *Rahasyatrayasāra* (Essence of the Three Secret Teachings) with a Sanskrit invocation. See Manasicha Akeyipapornchai, "Translation in a Multilingual Context: The Mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil Languages in Medieval South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava Religious Tradition," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 2 (2020): 157.

Paying Homage to the Śrīvaiṣṇava *Pārataveṇpā*

Along with marking his composition as a Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*, Villi's use of invocations is a clear nod to the multiple invocations scattered throughout an earlier Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava Mahābhārata: Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century *Pārataveṇpā* (Bhārata in *Veṇpā* Meter).

As I noted in the Introduction, the *Pārataveṇpā* is the earliest extant Mahābhārata in a regional South Asian language. The only surviving portions of the *Pārataveṇpā* are the *Book of Effort* (*Uttiyōkaparuvam*), the *Book of Bhīṣma* (*Vīṭṭumaparuvam*), and part of the *Book of Droṇa* (*Turōṇaparuvam*). Kamil Zvelebil notes that the existing version of the Tamil *Pārataveṇpā* only has around "800 stanzas of an estimated 12,000."[61] Peruntēvaṉār's composition has been described as a *campū*, a mixed prose-poem.[62] As Srilata Raman points out, in the *Pārataveṇpā* "the poetry was in classical Tamil (= *centamiḻ*) while the prose sections were in *maṇipravāḷa* or a heavily sanskritized Tamil."[63] Raman also describes Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā* as "the first literary work with what might be called passages of Tamil *maṇipravāḷa*."[64] Peruntēvaṉār's use of Manipravala in the *Pārataveṇpā* predates the extensive use of Manipravala in the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentarial tradition between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.[65]

The patron of the *Pārataveṇpā* is usually understood to be the Pallava king Nandivarman III (r. 846–869) because of the poem's fourth verse, which describes Peruntēvaṉār's patron as the one who was triumphant at the river Teḷḷāṟu.[66] Emmanuel Francis notes that fifteen verses of a ninth-century Tamil poem in praise of Nandivarman III, the *Nantikkalampakam* (*Kalampakam* to Nandivarman), describe Nandivarman III "as a Pallava victorious in Teḷḷāṟu" and that Nandivarman III "bore a specific epithet invoking this deed in local Tamil inscriptions."[67] The Mahābhārata narrative was at the center of the religious and courtly life of the Pallavas who claimed Droṇa's son Aśvatthāman as their "dynastic founder."[68] The *Nantikkalampakam* also describes Nandivarman III as a member of the Candravaṃśa or "lunar dynasty," the clan of the

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[61] Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (New York: Brill, 1992), 66.

[62] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 116; and Venkatesa Acharya*, Mahabharata and Variations*, 72

[63] Raman, *Self-Surrender*, 63.

[64] Raman, 63.

[65] See Raman, 62–65; and Suganya Anandakichenin and Erin McCann, "Towards Understanding the Śrīvaiṣṇava Commentary on the *Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam*: The Blending of Two Worlds and Two Languages," in *The Commentary Idioms of the Tamil Learned Traditions*, ed. Suganya Anandakichenin and Victor B. D'Avella (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2020), 392–94.

[66] *Pārataveṇpā* 4. Also see Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 116; Venkatesa Acharya*, Mahabharata and Variations*, 61; and Zvelebil, *Companion Studies*, 66–67.

[67] Emmanuel Francis, "Praising the King in Tamil during the Pallava Period" in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India*, ed. Whitney Cox and Vincenzo Vergiani (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2013), 387–388. Also see *Nantikkalampakam* 32, 33, 37, 42, 53, 56, 57, 68, 75, 79, 82, 84, 85, 90, and 91. I am following: *Nantikkalampakam*, ed. Pu. Ci. Punnaivanata Mutaliyar (Tirunelveli: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1961).

[68] Shulman, *Tamil,* 142.

Pāṇḍavas.[69] Temple and land endowments reveal that the Pallavas sponsored the recitation of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in temples starting in the seventh century.[70] Finally, many of the rock reliefs depicting scenes from the Mahābhārata in the town of Mahabalipuram (Māmallapuram) in present-day Tamil Nadu were produced under the patronage of King Narasiṃhavarman I (r. 630–688).[71] That Nandivarman III might have patronized a Tamil retelling of an epic so strongly engrained in the courtly milieu of the Pallavas is thus not surprising.

As with Villi, we know very little about Peruntēvaṉār's life. Since the *Nantikkalampakam* and the *Pāratavеṇpā* both claim Nandivarman III as their patron, Kambalur Venkatesa Acharya has suggested that Peruntēvaṉār also composed the *Nantikkalampakam*.[72] Shulman and Clare have both speculated that the author of the *Pāratavеṇpā* may be Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār or "Peruntēvaṉār Who Sang the Bhārata," the poet credited with writing the invocations found in the beginning of five of the eight Caṅkam anthologies: the *Akaṉāṉūṟu*, the *Aiṅkuṟuṉūṟu*, the *Kuṟuntokai*, the *Naṟṟiṇai*, and the *Puṟanāṉūṟu*.[73] There is a general consensus that the invocations of the five Caṅkam anthologies are late additions to these ancient Tamil texts.[74] Not all scholars, however, think that the composer of the *Pāratavеṇpā* also wrote the invocations of the Caṅkam anthologies. M.S.H. Thompson argues that Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār was the author of an "early Sangam Pāratam" that is cited in Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's fourteenth-century commentary on the ancient Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam*.[75] Zvelebil also claims that the verses in Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's commentary are by Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār, but says that his text "may probably be dated into the middle of the eighth century."[76] Zvelebil, like Thompson, discusses tenth-century copper plates from Cinnamanur that refer to "an early Pāṇḍya ruler who established a Maturai *caṅkam* [academy]" that "Tamilised the *Mahābhārata*."[77] But unlike Thompson who thinks this is a reference to Pāratam Pāṭiya Peruntēvaṉār's Caṅkam Mahābhārata, Zvelebil says that the text referred to in the plates "is not available today, and the

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[69] *Nantikkalampakam* 43; and Kesevan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012), 77.

[70] C. Minakshi, *Administration and Social Life Under the Pallavas* (Madras: University of Madras, 1931), 196 and 237; and Hiltebeitel, *Cult of Draupadi* 1, 14.

[71] Hiltebeitel, 14.

[72] Venkatesa Acharya*, Mahabharata and Variations*, 62.

[73] Clare, "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 107; and Shulman, *Tamil,* 146.

[74] Eva Maria Wilden, for example, suggests that these invocations were composed in the late sixth or early seventh century. Wilden's main two pieces of evidence for this claim are that 1) in this time period the memory of the structure of the old *āciriyappā* meter "is still intact" and 2) the way these opening verses each "directly approach" a deity is a reflection of a time "when the institution of the temple is already in existence (as is shown by the early Vaiṣṇava canonical poems of the 6th century), but not yet the exclusive matrix for personal devotion" (*Manuscript, Print and Memory: Relics of the Caṅkam in Tamilnadu* [Boston: De Gruyter, 2014], 31–32).

[75] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 115.

[76] Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 30.

[77] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 115; and Zvelebil, *Companion Studies*, 66.

name of its Tamil author remains unknown."[78] To make matters even more confusing, Alf Hiltebeitel states that there is "inscriptional and literary evidence" of a Mahābhārata "by a certain Peruntēvaṉār in the Caṅkam period of the early Pandyas in Madurai" and that Shulman (via personal communication) "suggests a date of about A.D. 300."[79]

What we can say with certainty about the author of the *Pāratavеṇpā* is that he is deeply familiar with the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious tradition. Hiltebeitel describes Peruntēvaṉār as "a Vaiṣṇava poet steeped in the idioms of the Āḻvārs"[80] and as Venkatesa Acharya demonstrates in his detailed study of the *Pāratavеṇpā*, Peruntēvaṉār presents his Mahābhārata as "a drama of the ubiquity of Tirumāl [the Tamil form of Viṣṇu]."[81] One prominent example of Peruntēvaṉār's devotion to Viṣṇu/Krishna is the 150 lines in *akaval* meter that Peruntēvaṉār uses to describe Krishna's display of his celestial form to the Kaurava court in Hastinapura during his peace embassy in the *Book of Effort* of the *Pāratavеṇpā*.[82] Twenty-nine of these lines all end with the word *pōṟṟi* which means "praise" or "hail."[83] Here is a short excerpt from this section:

> We praise the lord who sucked the breast of the goblin.
> We praise the name of Māl who measured the worlds.
> We praise the *māyā* of the one who crawled between the *maruta* trees.
> We praise the great god who churned the great ocean.
> We praise the lord who lifted the large mountain.[84]

These lines bring to mind the first six lines of the twenty-fourth verse of the Tamil *Tiruppāvai* (Divine Vow) of the Āḻvār poetess (and Peruntēvaṉār's possible contemporary), Āṇṭāḷ:

> That time long ago you measured these worlds
> We praise your feet.
>
> You went there and razed southern Laṅka
> We praise your strength.
>
> You kicked Śakaṭa and killed him
> We praise your fame.

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[78] Thompson, 115; and Zvelebil, 66.

[79] Hiltebeitel, *Cult of Draupadi* 1:13.

[80] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Non-Violence in the Mahābhārata: Śiva's Summa on Ṛṣidharmā and the Gleaners of Kurukṣetra* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 148.

[81] Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 71.

[82] Peruntēvaṉār, *Pāratavеṇpā* 212.1–150.

[83] Peruntēvaṉār, *Pāratavеṇpā* 212.111–139. Also see Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 109–11.

[84] *pēy mulai uṇṭa pirāṉē pōṟṟi*
pēr ulaka aḷanta mālē pōṟṟi
maruta iṭai tavaḷnta māyā pōṟṟi
mā kaṭal kaṭainta makēcā pōṟṟi
peru varai eṭutta pirāṉē pōṟṟi || Peruntēvaṉār, *Pāratavеṇpā* 212.119–23 ||

You threw that calf, broke him like a twig
We praise your anklets.

You lifted the mountain as an umbrella
We praise your virtue.

We praise the triumphant spear held in your hand
that ravages your enemies.[85]

Steven Hopkins explains that in the Śrīvaiṣṇava literature of the Āḻvārs and the *ācārya*s (preceptors) "Krishna comes, as it were, layered with other forms (*avatāra*s or 'incarnations') of Vishnu."[86] We encounter a layered Krishna in both of these excerpts from the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Tiruppāvai*. In the lines from the *Pārataveṇpā*, Peruntēvaṉār describes three well-known tales from Krishna's childhood: Krishna nursing at the breasts of the demoness Pūtanā, Krishna splitting two *maruta/arjuna* trees while being tied to a mortar, and Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana. Yet Peruntēvaṉār also layers this Krishna with two other incarnations of Viṣṇu: Vāmana, the dwarf who measured the three worlds, and Kūrma, the tortoise who supported Mount Mandāra on his back during the churning of the ocean of milk. In the twenty-fourth verse of the *Tiruppāvai*, Krishna is layered with Vāmana and Rāma. Also, as with the twenty-nine lines in the *Pārataveṇpā*, the first six lines of the *Tiruppāvai* verse all end with the word *pōṟṟi*.[87]

As I noted in Chapter Two, Villi inserts a number of episodes into his rendering of the *Book of Effort* that are not found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which Krishna takes specific measures to ensure that the Pāṇḍavas emerge victorious in the battle with the Kauravas.[88] Each of these episodes are also found in Peruntēvaṉār's *Book of Effort*.[89] Some of these sequences, such as Krishna directing Kuntī to go see Karṇa, are found in other premodern South Indian Mahābhāratas like Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam* and Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*.[90] Others episodes, however, like Krishna pretending to be asleep when Duryodhana comes seeking help in the war and Krishna sending Indra to Karṇa, are only found in the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam*. Based on these and other shared scenes in the

[85] Āṇṭāḷ, *Tiruppāvai* 24, trans. Venkatesan in Āṇṭāḷ, *Secret Garland*, 74.

[86] Hopkins, "Sanskrit from Tamil Nadu," 287.

[87] The word *pōṟṟi* is also found at the end of 139 lines of the *Pōṟṟi Tiruvakaval* or "Divine Hymn of Praise" in the *Tiruvācakam* of the ninth-century Śaiva *bhakti* poet, Māṇikkavācakar. See Māṇikkavācakar, *Pōṟṟi Tiruvakaval* 87–225 of the *Tiruvācakam*. I am following: *The Tiruvāçagam, Or, Sacred Utterances of the Tamil Poet, Saint, and Sage Māṇikka-Vāçagar*, trans. G.U. Pope (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1900), 35–43.

[88] *VP* 5.4.1– 264.

[89] Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 117–233.

[90] Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 318; Kumāravyāsa*, Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 5.8.64–68; and Subramanian, *Mahabharata Story*, 199

Pārataveṇpā and the *Pāratam*, multiple Tamil scholars have argued that Villi must have been familiar with Peruntēvaṉār's earlier Tamil Mahābhārata.[91]

Another striking similarity between the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam* is the number of invocations in both Tamil Mahābhāratas. Commenting on the *Pārataveṇpā*, Zvelebil explains that "at the beginning of every new portion of his book, the poet has an introductory stanza praising Tirumāl (Viṣṇu). If the entire text would have survived, we would have more than 100 such stanzas—in other words, a whole *stotraprabandha* [collection of *stotra*s] on Viṣṇu."[92] There are a total of seventeen invocations in the surviving version of the *Pārataveṇpā*.[93] Notably, Villi frequently places an invocation in the same place in the narrative of the *Pāratam* that Peruntēvaṉār does in the *Pārataveṇpā*. For example, both Peruntēvaṉār and Villi begin their accounts of each day of the Battle of Kurukṣetra with an invocation.[94] Both Tamil poets also commence their poems with a verse in praise of the elephant-headed deity, Gaṇeśa. Peruntēvaṉār opens the *Pārataveṇpā* with the following benediction:

> When I recite [and praise] the feet of the elephant
> with the single tusk that inscribes the battle of the Bhārata
> on top of the great mountain with the peak covered with cold snow,
> sins vanish, rising praise overflows
> and as desire is fulfilled,
> everything will come into my hands.[95]

Villi's *taṟciṟappuppāyiram* begins with this invocation to Gaṇeśa:

> Let us declare our love,
> having worshiped the god
> who wrote with his own tusk as his beautiful sharp stylus
> and with Mount Meru of the North as his palm leaf
> that day when the king of sages (Vyāsa)
> with his everlasting penance and truthfulness
> recited the Mahābhārata so that it may endure
> as the fifth along with the four Vedas
> in the world with the deep seas.[96]

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[91] See Sankaran and Raja, "Sources of Villiputtūrār," 231; Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 121; Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 105; Hiltebeitel, *Cult of Draupadī* 1:15; and Manavalan, "Tamil Versions of *Mahābhārata*," 334–35.

[92] Zvelebil, *Companion Studies,* 68

[93] Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 1, 2, 3, 387, 484, 514, 532, 546, 559, 571, 583, 590, 618, 629, 678, 711, and 771.

[94] Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 484, 514, 532, 546, 559, 571, 583, 590, 618, 629, 678, 711, and 771; and *VP* 6.1.1, 6.2.1, 6.3.1, 6.4.1, 6.5.1, 6.6.1, 6.7.1, 6.8.1, 6.9.1, 6.10.1, 7.1.1, 7.2.1, 7.3.1, 7.4.1, 7.5.1, 8.1.1, 8.2.1, and 9.1.1.

[95] *ōta viṇai akalum ōṅku pukaḻ perukum*
kātal poruḷa aṉaittum kai kūṭum cīta
paṉi kōṭṭu māl varai mēl pāratam pōr tīṭṭum
taṉi kōṭṭu vāraṇattiṉ tāḷ || Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 1 ||

[96] *nīṭu āḻi ulakattu maṟai nāloṭu aintu eṉṟu nilai niṟkavē*
vāṭāta tava vāymai muṉirācaṉ māpāratam coṉṉa nāḷ ēṭu

While many works of South Asian literature begin by paying homage to Gaṇeśa because of his role as the remover of obstacles, Gaṇeśa plays an especially important role in the Mahābhārata tradition since he is frequently regarded as the original scribe of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[97] Although the story of Vyāsa dictating the *Mahābhārata* to Gaṇeśa is absent from the critical edition of the epic, James Fitzgerald notes that "the vision of a chubby boy with the elephant's head sitting amid stacks of palm leaves at Vyāsa's feet in the latter's remote forest retreat, breathlessly running his pen over leaf after leaf, must have charmed Indian audiences through the ages."[98] By describing Gaṇeśa transcribing the *Mahābhārata*, Peruntēvaṉār and Villi place themselves in the lineage of individuals who have transmitted this epic tradition.

Yet, although both Peruntēvaṉār and Villi begin their poems by invoking Gaṇeśa in his role as the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*'s first stenographer, the individual invocations to Krishna and other forms of the deity throughout the rest of the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam* are quite different from each other. Consider, for example, each of the invocations that Peruntēvaṉār and Villi use to commence their accounts of the first day of the Battle at Kurukṣetra in their respective renderings of the *Book of Bhīṣma*. First, Peruntēvaṉār's salutation in the *Pārataveṇpā*:

> Is there suffering for those who have spoken of
> Tiruvēṅkaṭam with its sweet, rising groves,
> the hill with groves reaching the sky,
> Teṉṉaraṅkam,
> and Tiruvattiyūr?[99]

This verse is in praise of four locations that Archana Venkatesan describes as "the four important pilgrimage sites" for Śrīvaiṣṇavas in South India:[100] the Veṅkaṭeśvara temple in Tirupati (Tiruvēṅkaṭam), the Kaḷḷaḻakar temple in Vanagiri ("the hill with groves reaching the sky"), the Raṅganātha temple in Teṉṉaraṅkam (Srirangam), and the Varadarājasvāmī temple (Tiruvattiyūr) in Kanchipuram (Kāñcipuram). As Narayanan points out, "the Lord enshrined in the temple is the focus of many Āḻvār hymns…the Āḻvārs celebrate several holy places in their songs, and later the number of these places were given as 108, a holy number in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions."[101] All four of the sites listed in Peruntēvaṉār's verse are included in the 108

āka vaṭa mēru veṟpu āka am kūr eḻuttāṇi taṉ
kōṭu āka eḻutum pirāṉai paṇintu aṉpu kūrvām arō || *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 1 ||

[97] Paul B. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 151–53.

[98] James L. Fitzgerald, "India's Fifth Veda: The *Mahābhārata*'s Presentation of Itself," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 151.

[99] *tēṉ ōṅku cōlai tiruvēṅkaṭam eṉṟum*
vāṉ ōṅku cōlai malai eṉṟum tāṉ ōṅku
teṉṉaraṅkam eṉṟum tiruvattiyūr eṉṟum
coṉṉavarkkum uṇṭō tuyar || Peruntēvaṉār, *Pārataveṇpā* 484 ||

[100] Archana Venkatesan, "Annotations to Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi*" in Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* (*Endless Song: Tiruvāymoḻi*), trans. Archana Venkatesan (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2020), 355.

[101] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 33.

Śrīvaiṣṇava *divyadeśam*s or "divine places." Note that Peruntēvaṉār never actually gives the name of any of the local forms of Viṣṇu (Veṅkaṭeśvara, Aḻakar, Raṅganātha, and Varadarājasvāmī) in these South Indian temples in this invocation in the *Pārataveṇpā*. Yet as Narayanan explains in her analysis of a verse from Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* in praise of Aḻakar in Vanagiri, "just saying the name Tirumāliruñcōlai [Vanagiri] ("The grove where the Lord abides") is enough for the Lord to fill the heart of the poet."[102] It is also important to recognize that this verse is not in praise of Viṣṇu per se, but Viṣṇu's devotees.

Let us now turn to the verse that Villi uses to begin his "First Day of War Chapter" (*Mutalpōrcarukkam*) in the *Book of Bhīṣma* of the *Pāratam*:

> Our king indeed is
> the difficult to reach flood
> of overflowing wisdom and joy,
> the three starting with the creator,
> the foremost among those three,
> everyone and everything,
> the many gods for worshipers to worship,
> Māl with red, lovely eyes.[103]

In this invocation, Villi draws on multiple Śrīvaiṣṇava tropes and images. One of these tropes is the idea that Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, the trinity of three great Hindu deities known as the *trimūrti*, are all one. Cutler notes that in the *Tiruvāymoḻi*:

> Nammāḻvār more often speaks of the three *mūrti*s as aspects of one supreme god. Sometimes he does not name Viṣṇu in the poem, but merely states that "the lord" or "he" became Brahmā and Śiva, or that he contains Brahmā and Śiva. In some of his poems Nammāḻvār implies that Viṣṇu is prior to or superior to the other *mūrti*s, but in others the three great gods are grouped together as three manifestations of one supreme being.[104]

In this invocation in the *Pāratam*, Villi first tells us that Viṣṇu contains Brahmā and Śiva before proclaiming that Viṣṇu is the "foremost" among the *trimūrti*. Villi also describes Viṣṇu as "our king" (*eṅkaḷ kō*) in this verse. As Cutler observes, "the heroic, kingly nature of the lord comes through plainly in the Tamil *bhakti* poems, and this aspect of the lord's character is the central theme of several poetic genres included in the *bhakti* corpus."[105] Finally, in this verse Villi speaks of Māl, the distinctly Tamil form of Viṣṇu also known as Māyaṉ, Māyavaṉ, and Māyōṉ.

The multiple shared episodes and the similar placement of invocations in the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam* strongly suggest that Villi had access to Peruntēvaṉār's composition. The vastly different themes of the salutations that Peruntēvaṉār and Villi each use

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[102] Narayanan, 38. The verse Narayanan is analyzing is Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 10.8.1.

[103] *mēvu aru ñāṉam āṉantam veḷḷam āy vitittōṉ āti*
mūvarum āki anta mūvarkkuḷ mutalvaṉ āki
yāvarum yāvum āki iṟaiñcuvār iṟaiñca pal pal
tēvarum āki niṉṟa cemkaṇ māl eṅkaḷ kōvē || *VP* 6.1.1 ||

[104] Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 197.

[105] Cutler, 202.

to begin their narratives of the first day of the Battle at Kurukṣetra, however, make it clear that Villi is not simply copying or even putting his own spin on Peruntēvaṉār's invocation. The same is true for the rest of the invocations to Krishna in the *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam*. Villi is certainly paying tribute to Peruntēvaṉār's practice of using multiple invocations that speak to Śrīvaiṣṇavas, but he is not attempting to replicate each one of Peruntēvaṉār's invocatory verses.

Establishing a Śrīvaiṣṇava *Bhakti* Milieu

Let us now take a closer look at how the various invocations in Villi's *Pāratam* firmly place this Tamil Mahābhārata retelling in a distinctly Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional setting. The first of the thirty-seven invocations to different forms of Krishna is in the second chapter of Villi's *Book of the Beginnings*, the "Origins Chapter" (*Campavaccarukkam*):

> In utter darkness, becoming a respected woman,
> transforming her own form into that of a mother,
> overflowing with love, coming and picking him up,
> embracing him, her heart rejoicing
> and caressing him with affection,
> the demoness with great breasts of milk melted.
> The red lotus feet
> of the youthful, beautiful body
> of the dark Gopāla who sucked life from her
> never leave my mind.[106]

This invocation tells the story of Pūtanā, the child-slaughtering demoness who is sent by Krishna's maternal uncle Kaṃsa to kill the infant Krishna. While Krishna's encounter with Pūtanā is briefly alluded to in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*,[107] one of the earliest detailed accounts of this story is found in the Sanskrit *Harivaṃśa*, the text about Krishna and his family that the *Mahābhārata* labels a *khila* or "appendix":

> Later, at the appointed hour of midnight, Kamsa the Bhoja's wet-nurse, the famous Pūtanā, appeared in the form of a bird. Chirping again and again in a voice as deep as a tiger's, she perched on the cart's axle and sprayed out a squirted stream. That night, while everyone was asleep, she offered Krishna her breast. Krishna drained her breast, and with it her life, and he roared. The bird fell to the ground immediately, her breast in tatters.[108]

While Pūtanā takes the form of a bird in the *Harivaṃśa*, John Stratton Hawley points out that "in other puranic versions of the Pūtanā story, however, she is merely said to be a female who preys

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[106] *ariya kaṅkuliṉ aṉṉai taṉ vaṭivu koṇṭu alakai ākiya naṅkai*
parivu poṅka vantu eṭuttu aṇaittu uvantu uḷam parintu uṭaṉ pārāṭṭa
urukum mā mulai pāluṭaṉ avaḷ uyir uṇṭu aḻum muruku ār mey
kariya kōvalaṉ ceyya tāḷ malarkaḷ eṉ karuttai viṭṭu akalāvē || *VP* 1.2.1 ||

[107] *MBh* 2.38.4 and 5.128.45.

[108] *Harivaṃśa* 50.20–22, trans. Brodbeck in *Krishna's Lineage*, 162.

upon children."[109] Perhaps the most famous version of the tale of Pūtanā is the one found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. In this text, Pūtanā adopts the form of a beautiful woman:

> The *gopīs,* the cowherd women, saw a shapely, attractively dressed woman with flowers entwined in her braid. Her waist was heavy with voluptuous hips and breasts, and her face and hair were bright with shining ear-ornaments. The male residents of Vraj, their minds bewitched by her sideways glances and beautiful smiles, thought that she was like Śrī, the goddess of fortune, coming to her husband with a lotus flower in her hand.[110]

This account of Pūtanā transforming herself into an attractive woman in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* brings to mind descriptions of other demonesses adopting the forms of enchanting maidens, such as Hiḍimbā in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Śūrpaṇakhā in Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* and Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*.[111] Yet in Villi's invocation in the "Origins Chapter," Pūtanā does not disguise herself as a bird or as a beautiful temptress, but as a mother (*aṉṉai*).

The image of Pūtanā taking on the form of a mother is a familiar one in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. In a verse in the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, for instance, Nammāḻvār tells his audience that:

> She came disguised as a perfect mother
> with a pure heart,
> but you a small child with great wisdom
> suckled at her poisoned breast
> supreme Puruṣaṉ with shoulders vast as mountains,
> asleep on a serpent
> My beauty is useless
> if it can't enchant the great lord of mystery.[112]

In the fourth chapter of the Sanskrit *Yādavābhyudaya*, Vedāntadeśika explicitly describes Pūtanā disguising herself as Krishna's adoptive mother Yaśodā when she arrives in Vrindavan.[113] Later on in the Tamil *Pāratam*, Krishna's cousin Śiśupāla brings up the story of Pūtanā when he is insulting Krishna during Yudhiṣṭhira's royal consecration ceremony. As in Villi's invocation in the "Origins Chapter," Villi's Śiśupāla describes Pūtanā taking on the form of a mother. But unlike Vedāntadeśika who says that Pūtanā became Yaśodā, Villi (through Śiśupāla) states that Pūtanā adopted the form of Krishna's birth mother, Devakī:

> Did he not drink Pūtanā's life or was it her flowing breast milk
> when she assuming the form of his birth mother
> and holding him at her two breasts
> with her heart melting
> gave him the milk that was like nectar?

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[109] John Stratton Hawley, "Krishna and the Birds," *Ars Orientalis* 17 (1987): 138.

[110] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.6.5–6, trans. Bryant in *Krishna: Beautiful Legend*, 32.

[111] *MBh* 1.139; Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 3.7; and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 3.17.

[112] Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 4.8.3, trans. Venkatesan in Nammāḻvār, *Endless Song*, 151.

[113] Vedāntadeśika, *Yādavābhyudaya* 4.3.

He cried, having been tied to the mortar with the rope
because his excellent mother (Yaśodā)
had seen him eat with the help of the great mortar
the milk, fragrant ghee, and the curds
in pots hanging on ropes that could not be reached.[114]

Regardless of whether Pūtanā takes on the appearance of Devakī, Yaśodā, or simply a generic mother in the invocation in the "Origins Chapter," what is clear is that Villi is utilizing *vātsalya-bhāva* or the "emotional state of a parent." Kulacēkarāḻvār, Periyāḻvār, and Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār all use the idiom of the relationship between a mother and a child to express their love for Krishna in an intimate and familiar way in their compositions.[115] As I pointed out in the Introduction, Periyāḻvār, the first poet readers encounter in the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, frequently adopts the persona of Yaśodā. In one particularly lovely set of ten verses in Periyāḻvār's *Tirumoḻi*, Yaśodā is overcome with the urge to nurse Kṛṣṇa, and each verse ends with her begging the baby to eat.[116] In the first verse in this set, Yaśodā tells her foster son:

Bull of the cowherds who sleeps on a serpent,
    wake up now to suck my breast.
You went to sleep without eating last night
    and now it's nearly noon, is it not?
I don't see you coming, your tummy must be grumbling.
    Drops of milk trickle from my breast.
Come cling close to me, kicking up your feet
    and drink, sucking with your blessed lips.[117]

Villi is clearly playing with the emotion of parental love in this invocation. Although she has been sent to murder Krishna by Kaṃsa, Pūtanā is completely enchanted by the irresistible infant, and the immensely affectionate physical reaction she has to Kṛṣṇa mirrors that of Yaśodā in Periyāḻvār's *Tirumoḻi*. In both the *Tirumoḻi* and the *Pāratam*, the love that Villi's Pūtanā and Periyāḻvār's Yaśodā have for the adorable Krishna causes their breasts to overflow with milk. Pūtanā thus almost seems to be a Krishna devotee herself in Villi's invocation.[118]

With this introductory invocation in the "Origins Chapter," Villi reminds his South Indian audience of the lovable Krishna of Vrindavan who exists primarily outside of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and who pervades the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and other South Indian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* compositions, such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and Vedāntadeśika's *Gopālaviṃśati* and

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[114] *īṉṟa tāy vaṭivam koṇṭu uḷam uruki iṇai mulai taṭattu aṇaittu amutam*
pōṉṟa pāl koṭuppa poḻi mulai pālō pūtaṇai uyir kolō nukarntāṉ
cāṉṟa pēr uralāl uṟi toṟum eṭṭā tayiruṭaṉ naṟu ney pāl arunti
āṉṟa tāy kaṇṭu vaṭattiṉil piṇippa aṇi uraluṭaṉ iruntu aḻutāṉ || *VP* 2.1.118 ||

[115] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 31–33.

[116] Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 2.2.1–10.

[117] Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 2.2.1, trans. Ate in Periyāḻvār, *Yaśodā's Songs,* 101.

[118] I should point out that the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (10.6.35) depicts Pūtanā as a participant in *dveṣa bhakti* or "hate-devotion," a concept that I will discuss shortly.

Yādavābhyudaya. While some of Villi's invocations are solely in praise of the adult Krishna of the Mahābhārata tradition,[119] others exclusively retell episodes featuring the child Krishna, including his splitting of the *maruta* trees with the mortar, his antics with the local *gopī*s, and his victory over Kaṃsa.[120] By beginning different chapters of the *Pāratam* with these invocations, Villi ensures that his readers do not forget the first half of Krishna's *carita*.

It is important to recognize, however, that as in earlier Śrīvaiṣṇava compositions, such as the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Pārataveṇpā*, the Krishna of several of the invocations in Villi's *Pāratam* is a "layered" Krishna. The image of a layered Krishna can be traced back to the *Mutaltiruvantāti* (First Divine Linked Verses) of Poykaiyāḻvār, one of the earliest Āḻvār poets. In the following verse, Poykaiyāḻvār identifies Krishna with Vāmana:

> My mouth praises no one but the lord,
> my hands worship no one but the lord
> who bounded over the world,
> my ears hear no name, my eyes see no form
> but the name and form of the lord
> who made a meal of the poison he sucked
> from the she-devil's breast.[121]

Villi continues the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition of presenting a layered Krishna with many of his invocatory verses. While some of Villi's invocations only describe two forms of Viṣṇu, such as Krishna and Rāma, or Krishna and Vāmana,[122] others layer Krishna with several other forms of Viṣṇu. In the invocation to the first chapter of the *Book of Effort*, for instance, Villi speaks of Viṣṇu's first seven incarnations: Matsya (the fish), Kūrma, Varāha (the boar), Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, and Rāma.[123] The final invocation in the *Pāratam* (which we will look at in more detail shortly) is in praise of the *daśāvatāra* (ten primary incarnations) cycle of Viṣṇu.

One particularly striking invocation in which Villi layers Krishna is the one in the *Book of Bhīṣma*'s fourth chapter, the "Third Day of War Chapter" (*Mūṉṟāmpōrccarukkam*):

> The feet ended the curse placed on the searched for Ahalyā.
> The extensive feet measured all of the expansive worlds.
> The red feet kicked and killed the swift cart and danced on top of the snake.
> The feet ruled me.[124]

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[119] *VP* 2.1.1, 5.5.1, 6.2.1, and 7.4.1.

[120] *VP* 6.7.1, 5.2.1, and 8.1.1.

[121] Poykaiyāḻvār*, Mutaltiruvantāti* 11*,* trans. Cutler in *Songs of Experience*, 125.

[122] *VP* 5.7.1. and 8.2.1.

[123] *VP* 5.1.1.

[124] *tēṭiya akalikai cāpam tīrtta tāḷ*
nīṭiya ulaku elām aḷantu nīṇṭa tāḷ
oṭiya cakaṭu iṟa utaittu pāmpiṉ mēl
āṭi um civanta tāḷ eṉṉai āṇṭa tāḷ || *VP* 6.4.1 ||

As with the very first invocation in the *Pāratam* about Pūtanā, the end of this verse in the "Third Day of War Chapter" praises the child Krishna of Vrindavan with references to his defeat of the cart-demon Śakaṭa and his dance on the head of the poisonous serpent Kāliya. With the opening lines of this invocation, however, Villi is also layering Krishna with Rāma, the prince whose touch releases the ascetic woman Ahalyā from a terrible curse, and with Vāmana.

Villi cleverly layers Krishna with Rāma and Vāmana in this invocation by describing different stories that involve the feet of these three forms of Viṣṇu. In his work on Nammāḻvār, A.K. Ramanujan explains that in the Tamil literary tradition, feet "receive a great deal of attention in bhakti. Devotees are called *aṭiyār*, 'men at the feet'; the Vaiṣṇava word for the first person pronoun is '*aṭiyēṉ*' meaning 'I, at your feet.'"[125] The Āḻvārs constantly praise and describe themselves surrendering to Viṣṇu's feet. In the very first verse of the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*, which is the opening verse of Periyāḻvār's *Tiruppallāṇṭu* (Divine Many Years), Periyāḻvār addresses Viṣṇu and says, "may the beauty of your feet be protected."[126] Similarly, in the first verse of the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, Nammāḻvār addresses his mind and tells it to "worship his [Viṣṇu's] radiant feet that destroy all sorrow and rise."[127]

Villi's invocation in the "Third Day of War Chapter" also strongly resembles the opening invocation of the seventh-century collection of Tamil didactic poems, the *Tirikaṭukam* (Three Spices), of Nallātaṉār, a poet who may also have been a member of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community:

> Those which measured the expansive space of cosmos,
> those which uprooted the *kuruntha* tree
> of excellently attractive, cool, fragrant flowers,
> those which kicked to pieces the charmed cart
> that neared to kill,—
> these three
> are the feet of the Lord of *kayambu* complexion.[128]

Of course, this focus on feet is not unique to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. As Daud Ali observes, there was a "truly remarkable and perhaps unparalleled obsession with feet in the religious and courtly culture of medieval India."[129] If we look at *bhakti* poetry from the other end of the Indian subcontinent, we find a remarkably similar Bhasha *pad* to Villi's invocation that is attributed to Sūrdās. Here are the poem's final six lines:

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[125] A.K. Ramanujan, "Afterword" in Nammāḻvār, *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Viṣṇu by Nammāḻvār*, trans. A.K. Ramanujan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 144.

[126] Periyāḻvār, *Tiruppallāṇṭu* 1, trans. Ate in Periyāḻvār, *Yaśodā's Songs*, 63.

[127] Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 1.1.1, trans. Carman and Narayanan in *The Tamil Veda*.

[128] Nallātaṉār, *kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu* of *Tirikaṭukam*, trans. S. Raman, T. N. Ramachandran, and R. Balakrishna Mudaliyar in *Tirikaṭukam*: *Text, Transliteration and Translations in English Verse and Prose*, ed. T.N. Ramachandran, trans. S. Raman, T.N. Ramachandran, and R. Balakrishna Mudaliyar (Chennai: Central Institute of Classical Tamil, 2013), 30.

[129] Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125.

Those peerless feet—by merely touching a stone
they freed the sage's wife whose body that stone had become;
Those peerless feet—in their compassion to Prahlād
they rescued him from the terror of having an enemy father;
Those peerless feet—they caused the women of Braj
to give up body and soul,
forgetting husbands, sons, and homes;
Those peerless feet—through Brindavan they wandered,
settling on the cobra's head, killing countless foes.
Those peerless feet—they approached the Kauravas' house
and made themselves messengers, saving the fate of us all.
These peerless feet—these joyful feet, says Sūr—
let them steal away our pain, our threefold suffering.[130]

Indeed, if we disregard the signature line at the end of the *pad*, Villi's Tamil invocation in the "Third Day of War Chapter" and Sūrdās's Bhasha poem seem like the could have been composed by the same *bhakti* poet. Other invocations in the *Pāratam*, however, firmly mark this Tamil Mahābhārata as a Śrīvaiṣṇava composition. Two clear examples of this are two invocations that mention the poets Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār and Nammāḻvār. As Venkatesan points out, Nammāḻvār and Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār are considered the "two most important of the *āḻvār* poets" because Nammāḻvār is "the tradition's first teacher" and Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār is "the one who began the process of institutionalizing the Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions."[131]

In the final chapter of the *Book of Bhīṣma*, the "Tenth Day of War Chapter" (*Pattāmpōrccarukkam*) Villi speaks of Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār in an invocation celebrating the power of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *tirumantra* (divine mantra) *om namo nārāyaṇāya* "obeisance to Nārāyaṇa."

The name that came to the son that time when his father strongly raged
The name that removes all afflictions
The name that shines with the twice-four (eight) syllables
The name that illuminates the meaning that is said in the Vedas
It is that name which Kaliyaṉ, our Maṅkai, and others understood.[132]

Although the word "Nārāyaṇa" does not appear in this verse, we know that this is the "name" (*nāmam*) that Villi keeps on referring to because he describes this name as having eight syllables. While Villi begins this invocation with the story of how the uttering of this name saves Prahlāda from his father Hiraṇyakaśipu, he ends with a reference to Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār. Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār refers to himself in the twentieth verse of his *Tirukkuṟuntāṇṭakam* (Divine Short Verse in

[130] Sūrdās, trans. John Stratton Hawley in *Sūrdās: Poet, Singer, Saint*, rev. ed (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984; Delhi: Primus Books, 2018), 252–53.

[131] Archana Venkatesan, "Speared through the Heart: The Sound of God in the Worlds of Tirumaṅkai," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 3 (2017): 276.

[132] *valiyil aṉṟu tantai ceṟṟa maintaṉukku vanta pēr*
nalivu elām akaṟṟum nāmam nāl iraṇṭu eḻuttuṭaṉ
poliyum nāmam maṟaikaḷ coṉṉa poruḷ viḷakkum nāmam
muṉ kaliyaṉ eṅkaḷ maṅkai āti kaṇṭu koṇṭa nāmamē || *VP* 6.10.1 ||

Tāṇṭakam Meter) by the name Kaliyaṉ.[133] The first ten verses of Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār's massive work, the *Periyatirumoḻi*, all end with the phrase *nārāyaṇā eṉṉum nāmam*, "the name of Nārāyaṇa."[134] In this opening set of verses Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār speaks of how Nārāyaṇa's name saved him from a hedonist lifestyle. In the first verse of the *Periyatirumoḻi*, he says:

> I withered. My mind withered, I despaired
> Born into this world of pain and suffering
> Wedded to the seductions of young women
> I pursued them. And then, even as I ran
> That singular one turned my mind
> to the singular goal
> I sought, in seeking
> found Nārāyaṇa's name.[135]

With the concluding line of the invocation in the "Tenth Day of War Chapter" ("it is that name which Kaliyaṉ, our Maṅkai, and others understood"), Villi is clearly gesturing to the opening decad of the *Periyatirumoḻi* in praise of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *tirumantra*. Villi reminds his Śrīvaiṣṇava readers that just as Prahlāda was saved from Hiraṇyakaśipu by remembering Nārāyaṇa's name, Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār was rescued from a life of depravity by turning to the name of Nārāyaṇa.

In the invocation in the final chapter of the *Book of Droṇa*, the "Fifteenth Day of War Chapter" (*Patiṉaintāmpōrccarukkam*), we find an allusion to Nammāḻvār.

> That priest of the four Vedas
> that have seen the end of the three *tattva*s
> which are spoken of as sentient, non-sentient, and the lord,
> that king of liberation
> placed in the heart such as that of the one in Kurukūr
> with its many groves of overhanging flower gardens,
> other than him
> who is first among the gods?[136]

This invocation is teaming with Śrīvaiṣṇava concepts. In the beginning of the verse, Villi speaks of the three *tattva*s (realities) in Śrīvaiṣṇava theology: the sentient (*cit*), the non-sentient (*acit*), and the lord (*īśvara*).[137] The image of the divine being "placed in the heart" of the devotee is a reference to the Śrīvaiṣṇava "conception of the *antaryāmin* (one who goes within) or *hārda* (one

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[133] Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, *Tirukkuṟuntāṇṭakam* 20.

[134] Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, *Periyatirumoḻi* 1.1.1–10.

[135] Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, *Periyatirumoḻi* 1.1.1, trans. Venkatesan in "Speared through the Heart," 290.

[136] *cittu acittoṭu īcaṉ eṉṟu ceppukiṉṟa mūvakai*
tattuvattiṉ muṭivu kaṇṭa catur maṟaipurōkitaṉ
kottu aviḻtta cōlai maṉṉu kurukai āti neñcilē
vaitta mutti nātaṉ aṉṟi vāṉanāṭar mutalvar yār || *VP* 7.5.1 ||

[137] See Patricia Y. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute: Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi and Vedānta Deśika* (Madras: New Era, 1988), 29.

who dwells in the heart) form of Viṣṇu."[138] Finally, Villi incorporates Nammāḻvār into the invocation by referring to the Āḻvār's hometown of Kurukūr (Kurukur or Alvar Tirunagari in present-day Tamil Nadu). In several of the *phalaśruti*s found after each set of ten verses in the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, Nammāḻvār identifies himself as "Caṭakōpaṉ" or "Māṟaṉ of Kurukūr."[139]

With the allusion to Nammāḻvār in the "Fifteenth Day of War Chapter," Villi places himself in the lineage of other Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava poets who have sung Nammāḻvār's praise such as Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi in his fourteenth-century *Upatēcarattiṉamālai* (Garland of the Jewels of Instruction) and Tirukkurukaipperumāḷ Kavirāyar in his sixteenth-century *Māṟaṉakapporuḷ* (Treatise on *Akam* Poetry of Māṟaṉ), which contains the *Tiruppatikkōvai*. Most importantly, Villi places himself in the lineage of Maturakaviyāḻvār, the Āḻvār who composed the *Kaṇṇinuṉciṟuttāmpu* (Knotted, Fine, Small Rope), a short poem of ten verses in honor of Nammāḻvār. Maturakaviyāḻvār begins the *Kaṇṇinuṉciṟuttāmpu* by proclaiming:

> Sweet it will be, my tongue will fill with nectar
> in saying, "Nampi of South Kurukūr"
> after nearing him through my Lord,
> the Great Māyaṉ, who allowed himself to be tied
> by the knotted, fine, small rope.[140]

By emulating the poetry of the Tamil *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and directly paying tribute to the Āḻvārs themselves, Villi's invocations speak to a distinctly Śrīvaiṣṇava audience.

Reframing the *Pāratam* as a Śrīvaiṣṇava *Kṛṣṇacarita*

It is also important to recognize that the subject of each of Villi's thirty-seven invocations is informed by the narrative content of the chapter it commences and each invocation helps Villi reframe the entire Mahābhārata epic as a Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*.

As we saw earlier, the first invocation to a form of Krishna in the *Pāratam* is the one to the baby Krishna who killed Pūtanā in the "Origins Chapter." The "Origins Chapter" narrates the miraculous conceptions of the five Pāṇḍavas, Karṇa, and the one hundred Kauravas. Starting the chapter that describe the births of these major characters from the Mahābhārata tradition with an episode from Krishna's own infancy is no accident. As I pointed out in Chapter One, Madhva discusses the births of the Pāṇḍavas alongside the births of Krishna and Balarāma in the same chapter of his Sanskrit treatise, the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. Although Villi does not directly describe the birth of Krishna in the "Origins Chapter," by beginning this chapter with the story of Pūtanā, he incorporates the infant Krishna into his Mahābhārata retelling. Recall that the "Origins Chapter" is also the chapter in which Krishna makes his first actual appearance in the narrative of the *Pāratam* when he comes with his family to Hastinapura to meet Kuntī and the

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[138] Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 198.

[139] See Venkatesan, introduction to Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* (*Endless Song*), 6.

[140] Maturakaviyāḻvār, *Kaṇṇinuṉciṟuttāmpu* 1, trans. Srilata Raman in "Reflections on the King of Ascetics (*Yatirāja*): Rāmānuja in the Devotional Poetry of Vedānta Deśika," in *Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions: Essays in Honour of Alexis G.J.S. Sanderson*, ed. Dominic Goodall, Shaman Hatley, Harunaga Isaacson, and Srilata Raman (Boston: Brill, 2020), 197.

Pāṇḍavas soon after the deaths of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī.[141] It is thus fitting that Villi starts this chapter of his Tamil Mahābhārata with an invocation that focuses solely on Krishna.

The final invocation in the *Pāratam*, however, is in praise of a thoroughly "layered" form of Krishna. Villi begins the "Eighteenth Day of War Chapter" (*Patiṉeṭṭāmpōrccarukkam*) in the *Book of Śalya* (*Calliyaparuvam*) with an invocation to Viṣṇu's ten forms in the *daśāvatāra* cycle:

> The one who shows compassion
> takes on different forms
> as the fish, the tortoise, the boar, the great Narasiṃha, and
> the short one who measured the earth with his trickery,
> as those with the red hands bearing
> the boundless raging axe (Paraśurāma),
> the powerful bow (Rāma), and
> the victorious sharp plow (Balarāma),
> as someone who took on this form (Krishna)
> in order to kill all of the kings of earth
> while the gods came and worshiped him,
> and as the man on the horse (Kalki).
> Salutations to Nārāyaṇa![142]

As S. Ganeshram points out, in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* Tirumaḻicaiyāḻvār, Nammāḻvār, Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, and Periyāḻvār all make references to Viṣṇu's *daśāvatāra* cycle.[143] In his *Tirumoḻi*, for instance, Periyāḻvār tells us his audience that:

> The temple of him who was a divine fish and turtle,
> a boar, a lion and a dwarf
> Who became three Rāmas and Kaṇṇaṉ
> and who will conclude with Kalki,
> Is Śrīrangam of the river where a swan plays
> Swinging on the red lotus blossoms,
> Embracing her mate on a flower bed,
> Besmearing their bodies with red pollen.[144]

While the *daśāvatāra* cycle is a part of multiple different Vaiṣṇava traditions, both Periyāḻvār's verse in the *Tirumoḻi* and Villi's invocation in the "Eighteenth Day of War Chapter" are markedly Śrīvaiṣṇava. Although several of the prominent Sanskrit *purāṇa*s (including the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*) list Krishna and the Buddha as the eighth and ninth incarnations of Viṣṇu in

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[141] *VP* 1.2.110–14.

[142] *mīṉ āmai kōlam neṭu naraciṅkam āki mā nilam virakāl aḷanta kuṟaḷāy*
āṉātu cīṟum maḻu val villum vellum muṉai alam uṟṟa cem kaiyavar āy
vāṉ nāṭar vantu toḻa maṇ nāṭar yāvaraiyum maṭivikka vanta vaṭivāy
nāṉā vitam koḷ pari āḷ niṉṟu aruḷum nārāyaṇāya namavē || *VP* 9.1.1 ||

[143] S. Ganeshram, "Daśāvatāras in Tamil Bhakti Literature and Programme of Sculptures in Vijayanagara-Nāyaka Art," *Acta Orientalia* 73 (2012): 3.

[144] Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 4.9.9, trans. Ate in Periyāḻvār, *Yaśodā's Songs*, 200.

the *daśāvatāra* cycle,[145] Śrīvaiṣṇavas consider Balarāma and Krishna to be Viṣṇu's eighth and ninth incarnations and this is reflected in the *Tirumoḻi* and the *Pāratam*.[146] Both Periyāḻvār and Villi also connect the ten incarnations in the *daśāvatāra* cycle to a Śrīvaiṣṇava form of Viṣṇu. In the *Tirumoḻi*, Periyāḻvār is praising Raṅganātha in Srirangam, one of the most important Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage sites. In the invocation in the "Eighteenth Day of War Chapter," Villi concludes the verse with the words *nārāyaṇāya namavē* "salutations to Nārāyaṇa!" which is a phrase that immediately brings to mind the Śrīvaiṣṇava *tirumantra*: *om namo nārāyaṇāya*.

The "Eighteenth Day of War Chapter" narrates the final day of the Kurukṣetra War, and this is the chapter in which the last general of the Kaurava forces (Śalya) and the last of the one hundred Kaurava brothers (Duryodhana) are defeated by the Pāṇḍavas with the help of Krishna. By having this *daśāvatāra* verse be the final invocation in the *Pāratam*, Villi reminds his Śrīvaiṣṇava audience of the multiplicity and limitlessness of Krishna and his other nine major forms. Villi's first invocation in the "Origins Chapter" focuses on the adorable yet powerful baby Krishna. Villi's final invocation not only speaks of how the adult Krishna will eradicate the Kauravas, but it also describes Krishna's past/current incarnations (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Balarāma) as well as his future incarnation (Kalki).[147]

Several of Villi's invocations foreshadow the narrative content of their chapters. Consider the invocatory verse that opens the second chapter of the *Book of the Assembly Hall* (*Capāparuvam*), the "Gambling Match Chapter" (*Cūtupōrccarukkam*):

> As the supreme nectar that is wisdom,
> as the *māyā* that is not debased,
> as the sky and with it the wind,
> as fire and water,
> as the earth,
> as the different moving and still things,
> according to the rules of the great Vedas that are himself
> as the one who lifted all of these things as the boar,
> he protects me.[148]

In this invocation, Villi equates Viṣṇu with multiple different aspects of the universe such as the sky, fire, water, and the earth. The phrase *navir aṟu mayakku* "the *māyā* that is not debased" refers to the description of *prakṛti* (gross mater) in the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*.[149]

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[145] See *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.3.24; and Bradley S. Clough, "Buddha as Avatāra in Vaiṣṇava Theology: Historical and Interpretive Issues," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 26, no 1 (2017): 163.

[146] See John B. Carman, *Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 211.

[147] I use the words "past/current" here because both Paraśurāma and Balarāma co-exist with Krishna.

[148] *ñāṉam ākiya param param amiḻtam āy navir aṟu mayakku āki*
vāṉam āy uṭaṉ vāyu āy tēyu āy vaṉamum āy maṇ āki
tāṉam ām maṟai muṟaimaiyiṉ pal pal cara acaraṅkaḷum āki
ēṉam āy ivai aṉaittaiyum maruppiṉāl ēntiṉāṉ eṉai āṇṭōṉ || *VP* 2.2.1 ||

[149] See *Bhagavadgītā* 7.4–5.

I thank Srilata Raman for directing me to this reference.

As Raman explains, in the *Gītābhāṣya* (Commentary on the Bhagavadgītā) of the foundational Śrīvaiṣṇava philosopher Rāmānuja (traditional dates: 1011–1137 CE), "*prakṛti* is described as that which obscures (*tirodhānakarī*) the essential nature of God and as a *māyā* consisting of the *guṇa*s (*guṇamayīmāyā*)."[150] At the end of this invocation, however, Villi brings up a specific incarnation of Viṣṇu: Varāha, the boar who carries the earth goddess Bhūdevī on his tusks after the demon Hiraṇyākṣa abducts her and carries her into the depths of the ocean. The "Gambling Match Chapter" is the chapter in the *Pāratam* in which Duḥśāsana attempts to strip Draupadī in the Kaurava court after Yudhiṣṭhira gambles and loses her in the dice game. The story of Varāha saving Bhūdevī from being destroyed by Hiraṇyākṣa in this invocation foreshadows Krishna shielding Draupadī from Duḥśāsana and the Kauravas later in this chapter. The final two words of this verse, *eṉai āṇṭōṉ* "protects me," also emphasize this theme of safeguarding.

The invocation that opens the first chapter of the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, the "Royal Consecration Chapter" (*Irāyacūyaccarukkam*) not only foreshadows, but recaps as well:

> Those who praise our great one—
> who is adorned with compassion
> and who in order to save them
> incarnated and became the fruit of the penance of the Pāṇḍavas
> and took on their enemies as his own,
> and fiercely destroyed the heaped up ever-increasing sins in all the battles
> and caused the belly of the fire to taste the Khāṇḍava Forest
> as the blaze was extinguished so that it does not enter the skies—
> they indeed change the seven births.[151]

In its description of Krishna, this invocation clearly foreshadows his involvement in the Battle of Kurukṣetra which Villi will narrate in the *Book of Bhīṣma*, the *Book of Droṇa*, the *Book of Karṇa*, and the *Book of Śalya*. Yet towards the end of the verse, Villi describes an event that took place in the previous chapter of his Mahābhārata, the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter" (*Kāṇṭavatakaṉaccarukkam*). The "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter" is the final chapter of Villi's *Book of the Beginnings* and as the name of the chapter suggests, it focuses on how Krishna and Arjuna set the Khāṇḍava Forest ablaze and kill the vast majority of the living creatures who reside there in order to satisfy Agni, the Vedic god of fire. With this invocation in the "Royal Consecration Chapter," Villi therefore recaps what just transpired in the previous chapter of the *Pāratam*. Villi also reminds his audience in this invocation that Krishna incarnated for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, a point which Villi makes very clear during Krishna's first appearance in the "Origins Chapter" when he arrives in Hastinapura and meets Kuntī and her children for the first time in the *Pāratam*. As we saw in Chapter One, the depiction of the main deity as a god who greatly cares about his devotees is a main feature of *bhakti* narrative poems.

Krishna is at the center of the "Royal Consecration Chapter" with Villi using more than half of the chapter to describe the conflict between Krishna and his cousin Śiśupāla at

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[150] Raman, *Self-Surrender*, 50.

[151] *pāṇṭavarkaḷ purinta tavam payaṉ āki avatarittu, pakaittu mēl mēl*
mūṇṭa viṉai muḻuvatuvum muṉaitōṟum muraṇ muṟukki mukil pukāmal
kāṇṭavamum kaṉal vayiṟu kaṉal taṇiya nukaruvittu kākkum āṟē
pūṇṭarul em perumāṉai pōṟṟuvār eḻu piṟappum māṟṟuvārē || *VP* 2.1.1 ||

Yudhiṣṭhira's consecration ceremony. In the Mahābhārata tradition, Krishna makes a promise to Śiśupāla's mother that he will forgive one hundred insults by Śiśupāla. But after Śiśupāla offends Krishna one hundred times during Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* ceremony, the deity beheads Śiśupāla, an act the grants Śiśupāla salvation.[152] Śiśupāla is depicted as a practitioner of *dveṣa bhakti* (hate-devotion). The idea behind *dveṣa bhakti* is that *any* sort of interaction with a god, even an action motivated by hate, can lead to salvation.[153]As in the southern recension of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*, Villi takes his time to describe how Śiśupāla is an incarnation of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa, two demons who were defeated by Krishna's past incarnations of Narasiṃha and Rāma.[154] Villi's lengthy account of the death of Śiśupāla is unsurprising given the popularity of this story in the South Indian Vaiṣṇava tradition. Āṇṭāḷ, Nammāḻvār, and Periyāḻvār all refer to Śiśupāla and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (a South Indian text that draws heavily from the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*) and Vedāntadeśika's *Yādavābhyudaya* each dedicate an entire chapter to this episode.[155] Villi chooses to begin the chapter that narrates the story of Krishna slaying Śiśupāla by praising Krishna's past deeds as well as his future ones.

While several of the invocations in Villi's *Pāratam* are addressed to Krishna or a layered form of Krishna, some invocations only speak of Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa narrative tradition. Take the first verse of the third chapter of the *Book of the Forest* (*Āraṇiyaparuvam*), the "Journey for the Flower Chapter" (*Puṭpayāttiraiccarukkam*):

> Valiant Rāma
> with strong shoulders
> like mountain summits made of pure strength
> caused the death of the cruel demon with his clan
> by stringing his bow and arrow
> and ended the grief of the gods of flawless wisdom.
> The ones who cut the attachments of seven births
> are only those who praise with words,
> rise up and leap,
> and daily worship
> those lotus feet
> that gave back the own form of Ahalyā
> who had taken the form of stone
> so that she became beautiful again.[156]

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[152] For different tellings of this episode, see *MBh* 2.42; *VP* 2.1.113–48; and *CM* 2.2–30. Note that like Villi, Cauhān dedicates a considerable amount of space to the slaying of Śiśupāla in his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*.

[153] See Clifford George Hospital, "The Enemy Transformed: Opponents of the Lord in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no.2 (1978): 199–215

[154] See *VP* 2.1.141–48; and Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea, "To Be or Not to Be Śiśupāla: Which Version of the Key Speech in Māgha's Great Poem Did He Really Write?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132, no. 3 (2012): 429–30.

[155] See Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 162; *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.74; and *Yādavābhyudaya* 15.1–135.

[156] *mal koṇṭu varuttatu aṉaiya cikaram tiṇ tōḷ vāḷ arakkaṉ kulattōṭum muṭiya muṉṉam*
vil koṇṭu caram toṭuttu purai il kēḷvi viṇṇavartam tuyar tīrtta vīrāmaṉ
kal koṇṭa akaliyai taṉ uruvam mīḷa kaviṉ koḷḷa koṭutta tiru kamalam pātam
col koṇṭu tutittu eḻuntu tuḷḷi nāḷum toḻum avarē eḻu piṟavi tuvakku aṟṟārē || *VP* 3.3.1 ||

As with Villi's first verse in the "Royal Consecration Chapter," this invocation in the "Journey for the Flower Chapter" is technically in praise of the deity's devotees rather than the deity himself. In both invocations in the "Royal Consecration Chapter" and the "Journey for the Flower Chapter," Villi mentions the "seven births." Narayanan explains that:

> In Tamil one frequently speaks of "seven births" or "seven generations" to indicate infinite continuity; thus the merit of worship seems to pass on for the "seven generations." The Āḻvārs speak of themselves as hailing from seven generations of devotees, or declare that seven generations of people before and after them are saved because of their association with the Lord.[157]

The invocation in the "Journey for the Flower Chapter," which praises Rāma as the slayer of Rāvaṇa and the savior of Ahalyā, opens the chapter of the *Book of the Forest* in which Draupadī sends Bhīma on a hunt for the fragrant *saugandhika* flower. During his journey, Bhīma comes across the divine monkey Hanumān. Along with being Bhīma's elder half-brother through their shared father Vāyu (the wind deity), Hanumān is also Rāma's greatest devotee and a major character in the Rāmāyaṇa tradition. Given the prominent role Hanumān plays in this chapter of the *Pāratam*, it is appropriate that Villi chooses to begin the "Journey for the Flower Chapter" with an invocation that focuses on the actions of Rāma instead of those of Krishna.

The invocations that open chapters in which Krishna plays a major role often emphasize the fact that the Krishna of the *Pāratam* is a Tamil deity. As we saw earlier, the invocation in the first chapter of Villi's *Book of Bhīṣma*, the "First Day of War Chapter" is not addressed to Krishna, but to Māl, the distinctly Tamil form of Viṣṇu. This invocation comes right before Villi's rendering of the Bhagavadgītā. By inserting this verse in praise of the thoroughly Tamil god Māl right before his version of what is easily the most famous episode involving Krishna in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Villi firmly places the Krishna of the *Pāratam* in a markedly Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava religious milieu. The invocations that extol Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār in the "Tenth Day of War Chapter" and Nammāḻvār in the "Fifteenth Day of War" commence the chapters of the *Pāratam* in which Bhīṣma and Droṇa are defeated by the Pāṇḍavas and their allies. In Villi's poem (as in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*), Krishna orchestrates the deaths of both these powerful generals.[158] By beginning these chapters that showcase Krishna's involvement in the Battle at Kurukṣetra with invocations to the two most important Āḻvārs, Villi once again positions his version of Krishna in a distinctly Tamil-speaking, Śrīvaiṣṇava devotional world.

Villi also strategically places invocations at the beginning of chapters in which Krishna is absent from the narrative. As we saw in Chapter Two, both Villi and Cauhān insert several scenes highlighting Krishna's divinity into their retellings that are not found in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*. There are some episodes in the Mahābhāratas of Villi and Cauhān, however, such as those in which Bhīma murders the demons Hiḍimba and Bakāsura in the *Book of the Beginnings* in which Krishna does not make an appearance. Yet by starting his chapter on the deaths of Hiḍimba and Bakāsura, the "Vetrakīya Chapter" (*Vēttirakīyaccarukkam*), with an invocation, Villi provides his audience with an example of Viṣṇu's compassion for his devotees.

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[157] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 53.

[158] *MBh* 6.103 and 7.164; and *VP* 6.10.9–10 and 7.5.19–20.

Let us worship the feet of
the lord of Śrī
who resides in the divine place
which is the cool lotus of day,
the lord of the gods,
the lord of the Vedas,
the lord of living beings,
the lord of vows,
the lord of sages,
the primordial lord
who came before the king of elephants
who in the mouth of the crocodile,
his strength growing weak,
meditated and in front of everyone called out
"Primordial Cause!"[159]

At the end of this invocation, Villi recounts the famous story in which Viṣṇu grants salvation to the elephant king Gajendra. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, both the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and the *Pāratam* are full of allusions to Gajendra.[160] Hopkins explains that "the elephant-king is a common trope in the Āḻvār and Śrīvaiṣṇava literature for the devotee in dire trouble from sins who surrenders to the lord."[161] As with the story of Draupadī praying to Krishna to save her from being disrobed by Duḥśāsana, the tale of Gajendra calling out to Viṣṇu to protect him from the crocodile is a prime example of *prapatti* (self-surrender), a vital concept for Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Also note that Villi begins this invocation by praising Viṣṇu as *tiruviṉ nāyakaṉ* or the "the lord of Śrī." As Nancy Ann Nayar observes, "among Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the salience of Viṣṇu's iconic incarnations, both theologically and devotionally, is nearly equalled by the preeminence of His Supreme Consort Śrī-Lakṣmī. The prominent position accorded to the Goddess is one of the distinguishing features of Śrīvaiṣṇavas theology as compared with other Vaiṣṇava traditions."[162] Although Krishna does not make a physical appearance in the "Vetrakīya Chapter," by using the invocation above, Villi ensures that his audience begins the chapter by thinking of an unequivocally Śrīvaiṣṇava form of Viṣṇu.

I should point out that there are thirteen chapters out of fifty total chapters of the Tamil *Pāratam* that do not begin with an invocation. These invocation-less chapters clearly concerned some copyists and scribes because certain manuscripts of Villi's text contain additional invocations beyond the thirty-seven invocations that are found in the majority of the manuscripts of the *Pāratam*. Some manuscripts of the *Book of the Beginnings*, for example, have invocations

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[159] *cītam nāḷ malar kōyil mēvu cem tiruviṉ nāyakaṉ tēva nāyakaṉ*
vētam nāyakaṉ pūtam nāyakaṉ viratam nāyakaṉ viputa nāyakaṉ
pōtaka atipaṉ mutalai vāyiṭai poṟai taḻarntu muṉ potuvilē niṉaintu
aṭi mūlamē eṉṉa muṉ varum āti nāyakaṉ aṭi vaṇaṅkuvām || *VP* 1.4.1||

[160] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 163; and *VP* 1.1.30, 3.5.109, 5.4.43, and 6.3.17.

[161] Steven P. Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedāntadeśika in their South Indian Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277n114.

[162] Nancy Ann Nayar, *Poetry as Theology: The Śrīvaiṣṇava Stotra in the Age of Rāmānuja* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 221.

in the "Draupadī's Bridegroom Choice Ceremony Chapter" (*Tiraupatimālaiyiṭṭacarukkam*) and in the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" (*Aruccuṉaṉṟīrttayāttiraiccarukkam*).[163]

As we saw in Chapter Two, Villi begins the very first chapter of his narrative, the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter" (*Kurukulaccarukkam*) with a verse in which Villi basically informs his readers that he is retelling the Mahābhārata in Tamil. The author of the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* might have called this verse a *varuporuḷ* (Sanskrit: *vastunirdeśa*) or an "indication of the subject" of the poem. But recall that this *varuporuḷ* verse begins with Villi praising "our Mādhava from whose great lotus heart there appears the rising moon."[164] It is thus impossible for Villi's readers to not think of Krishna when they begin the Tamil *Pāratam*.

When we turn to the remaining twelve chapters that do not commence with an invocation, we find that Krishna plays a prominent role in most of these chapters. For instance, as I noted in Chapter Two, Krishna permeates Villi's "Draupadī's Bridegroom Choice Ceremony Chapter." Krishna also is a major figure in the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," which is the chapter in which Krishna helps Arjuna marry Krishna's sister Subhadrā. While there is no invocation in the beginning of the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter," this chapter revolves around Arjuna and Krishna setting the Khāṇḍava Forest on fire. Two chapters in the *Book of the Forest* that narrate episodes in which Krishna saves the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī lack opening invocations. In the "Sage Durvāsas Chapter" (*Turuvācamuṉiccarukkam*), Krishna quells the hunger of the irascible sage Durvāsas when Draupadī runs out of food to serve him. Krishna once again protects Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas from the wrath of a sage by helping the brothers and their wife reattach a fruit that they had mistakenly plucked from the sage's garden in the "Uniting of the Fruit Chapter" (*Paḻamporuntucarukkam*). Given that Krishna is already at the heart of these chapters, Villi likely does not feel the need to commence them with invocations.

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By inserting thirty-seven intricate invocations throughout the Tamil *Pāratam*, Villi guarantees that his audience is constantly thinking of Krishna. The Krishna on display in Villi's salutations and benedictions is a Krishna who is frequently "layered" with other forms of Viṣṇu who would be immensely familiar to members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community in fifteenth-century South India. As we will see in the next chapter, Sabalsingh Cauhān also uses invocations throughout his Mahābhārata retelling. In the seventeenth-century Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, it is not Krishna who Cauhān primarily praises in his invocations, but Rāma.

[163] See pages 371 and 507 of Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyar's edition of the *Ātiparuvam* of the *VP*.

[164] *eṅkaḷ mātavaṉ itayam mā malar varum utayam tiṅkaḷ* || *VP* 1.1.1 ||

CHAPTER FOUR

Remembering Rāma:
The Role of the Rāmāyaṇa in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*

The tale of the warrior-prince Rāma and his journey to rescue his beloved wife Sītā from the demon king Rāvaṇa has come to be known as the "Rāmāyaṇa" in reference to the name of the ancient Sanskrit poem attributed to Vālmīki. The Rāmāyaṇa is integrated into several Mahābhāratas. In the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya tells the story of Rāma to Yudhiṣṭhira during the Pāṇḍavas' exile. This 728-verse-long rendition of the Rāmāyaṇa in the *Book of the Forest* in the epic is known as the *Rāmopākhyāna*.[1] The Sanskrit *Book of the Forest* also contains an episode in which Bhīma meets one of the main characters from the Rāmāyaṇa, the divine monkey and Bhīma's elder half-brother Hanumān.[2] Finally, there are multiple references to the events of the Rāmāyaṇa throughout the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[3] For example, as Yigal Bronner points out, in the *Book of Virāṭa's Court* (*Virāṭaparvan*) "when Draupadī approaches Bhīma and demands that he kill Kīcaka, Bhīma first counsels patience, citing, among other precedents, Sītā's behavior in Rāvaṇa's captivity."[4]

When we turn to premodern retellings in regional languages, we find that many of these Mahābhāratas incorporate the Rāmāyaṇa into their narratives in ways similar to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Sāraḷādāsa's Oriya *Mahābhārata*, for instance, features an abridged version of the *Rāmopākhyāna*.[5] Multiple regional Mahābhāratas, including Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*, Viṣṇudās's Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit*, and Kumāravyāsa's Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, narrate the encounter between Bhīma and Hanumān.[6] And both Peruntēvaṉār's Tamil *Pārataveṇpā* and the *Pāratam* make several references to the Rāmāyaṇa and its major figures.[7] In the third chapter of Villi's *Book of the Beginnings* alone, three comparisons are drawn between Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa characters: Bhīma is compared to Rāma's younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, Arjuna is described as having equal archery skills to Rāma, and Draupadī is likened to Sītā.[8]

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[1] *MBh* 3.258–75.

On the relationship between the *Rāmopākhyāna* and Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 473–78; and Robert P. Goldman, "On the Upatva of Upākhyānas: Is the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa an Upākhyāna of the Mahābhārata?" in *Argument and Design: The Unity of the Mahābhārata*, ed. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (Boston: Brill, 2016), 69–82.

[2] *MBh* 3.146–50.

[3] See Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*, 479–81.

[4] Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 152. See *MBh* 4.20.9–10.

[5] William L. Smith, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Lore in the *Mahābhārata* of Saraḷā Dāsa," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 12, no.2 (2004): 137–39.

[6] *VP* 3.3; Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 3.3; and Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 3.10.

[7] For the references in the *Pārataveṇpā*, see Venkatesa Acharya, *Mahabharata and Variations*, 94.

[8] *VP* 1.3.7, 1.3.49, and 1.3.91.

The way that Sabalsingh Cauhān weaves several different aspects of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition into his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, is unprecedented. In this chapter, I contend that the allusions to the Rāmāyaṇa strongly suggest that Cauhān is a devotee of Rāma who is deeply familiar with the Bhasha compositions dedicated to Rāma by the *bhakti* poet Tulsīdās. I demonstrate this through close examinations of three different types of Rāmāyaṇa allusions that Cauhān uses throughout his *Mahābhārat*: (1) invocations in the opening prologues of the different books of the Bhasha poem, (2) episodes in the narrative in which Hanumān comes to the aid of Arjuna, and (3) passages in which Krishna is equated with Rāma.

Invoking Rāma, the Rāmāyaṇa, and Tulsīdās

Eleven of the eighteen books of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* begin with prologues that include invocatory (*maṅgalācaraṇ*) verses to different Hindu deities and sages.[9] In the first of these prologues in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, Cauhān claims that he began this book on a paramount festival for devotees of Rāma in North India:

> Meditating on Vyāsa, the feet of Gaṇapati (Gaṇeśa),
> Girijā (Pārvatī), Hara (Śiva), and Bhagavān (Krishna),[10]
> Sabalsingh Cauhān tells the *Book of the Assembly Hall* in Bhasha.
> In Vikram Saṃvat 1727 (1670 CE),[11] in the auspicious month of Caitra, the ninth day,
> Thursday, in the light half of the lunar month, this story was illuminated.[12]

The ninth day of the month of Caitra in the Hindu lunar calendar, known as Rāmnavamī, is celebrated throughout North India as Rāma's birthday. This date also aligns Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* with Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*. In the opening prologue to his poem, Tulsī states:

> With respect, I bow my head to the lord Śiva and begin to sing of Rāma's pure attributes.
> In Vikram Saṃvat 1631 (1574 CE), I begin this story, placing my head at Hari's feet.
> On the ninth day, Tuesday, in the month of Caitra,
> these deeds were illuminated in the city of Ayodhya (Ayodhyā).
> On this day of Rāma's birth, all sing the Vedas and leave and go there for pilgrimage.[13]

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[9] *CM* 1.1–2, 2.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, 8.1, 9.1, 15.1, 16.1, 17.1, and 18.1.

It should be noted that in both Pāṇḍey's and Śarmā's editions of the text, the fourteenth book, the *Book of Peace* (*Śāntiparv*), begins with an invocatory couplet in which Cauhān invokes Krishna, Govinda, Vyāsa, and Bhagavān. See 14.1 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 14.1 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[10] Pāṇḍey states that Bhagavān modifies Hara. See 2.1 in Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey). I think it is more likely, however, that Bhagavān refers to Krishna given the way this title has been used in seminal Vaiṣṇava texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

[11] The Vikram Saṃvat calendar system, which was used extensively in premodern North India, has a zero point of approximately 57 BCE.

[12] *sumiri vyāsa gaṇapati caraṇa girijā hara bhagavāna*
sabhāparva bhāṣā bhanata sabalasiṃha cauhāna
satrah sau sattāisai saṃvata śubha madhu māsa
navamī aru guru pakṣa sita bhai yaha kathā prakāsa || *CM* 2.1 ||

[13] *sādara sivahi nāi aba māthā baranauṃ bisada rāma guna gāthā*

Cauhān's claim that he started the *Book of the Assembly Hall* on the same auspicious festival in honor of Rāma that Tulsī says he began his Rāmāyaṇa retelling is not a coincidence. By stating that he began the *Book of the Assembly Hall* on Rāmnavamī, Cauhān firmly places his *Mahābhārat* in the same religious milieu as Tulsī's beloved *bhakti* narrative poem.

Throughout his *Mahābhārat*, Cauhān makes it clear that he is emulating the *Rāmcaritmānas.* One prominent example of this is the metrical structure of Cauhān's *bhakti* text. Several lengthy Bhasha narrative poems—including the *Rāmcaritmānas* and four of the most well-known examples of the Sufi *premkathā* (love story) genre: Dāūd's *Cāndāyan* (1379), Quṭban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* (1540), and Mañjhan's *Madhumālatī* (1545)—are composed in the *caupāī-dohā* (quatrain-couplet) meter. Some scholars have used the fact that the *Rāmcaritmānas* and these four *premkathā*s are all composed in *caupāī-dohā* meter and in the Avadhi dialect of Bhasha as evidence of an intertextual relationship between these Sufi romances and Tulsī's *bhakti* composition. Aditya Behl remarks that the Sufi poets "shape the poetical, metrical, and narrative conventions that Tulasī uses so skillfully for his purpose, the glorification of Rāma."[14] Thomas de Bruijn adds that "Tulsidas did not choose for his work the language of Braj with its distinct association with devotion to Vishnu, but the literary format of the Avadhi epic, a genre that was until then exclusively developed by Indian Sufis."[15]

The close intertextual relationship that de Bruijn and Behl see between the Sufi *premkathā*s and the *Rāmcaritmānas* seems to be driven by an impulse to present premodern Bhasha texts as participants in an inclusive and dialogic literary culture in which Hindu and Muslim poets were inspired by one another. What Behl and de Bruijn fail to consider, however, is that the *Cāndāyan*, the *Mirigāvatī,* the *Padmāvat,* and the *Madhumālatī* were by no means the only Bhasha texts composed in *caupāī-dohā* meter. The *caupāī-dohā* stanza, which has distinct analogues in Apabhramsha literature, is found in multiple non-Sufi Bhasha narrative poems that proclaim to have been composed before or around the same time as the *Rāmcaritmānas*, including Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* (1435) and *Rāmāyaṇkathā* (Story of the Rāmāyaṇa, 1442), Bhīm Kavi's *Ḍaṅgvaikathā* (1493), Nārāyaṇdās's *Chitāīcarit* (Deeds of Chitāī, ca. 1520), and Nandadās's *Dasamskandh* (Tenth Book, ca. 1570). Moreover, some of these narrative poems are also composed in Avadhi, such as Īśvardās's *Satyavatīkathā* (Story of Satyavatī, 1501), Lālac's *Haricarit* (Deeds of Hari, 1530), and Sadhan's *Mainās*at (Truthfulness of Mainā, ca. 1567). How do we know that Tulsī modeled the *Rāmcaritmānas* on one of the four Sufi *premkathā*s and not on an Avadhi narrative in *caupāī-dohā* meter based on a "Hindu" story from the Sanskrit *itihāsa-purāṇa* corpus like the *Satyavatīkathā* or the *Haricarit*?[16]

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saṃbata soraha sai ekatīsā karauṃ kathā hari pada dhari sīsā
naumī bhauma bāra madhu māsā avadhapurīṃ yaha carita prakāsā
jehi dina rāma janama śruti gāvahiṃ tīratha sakala tahāṃ cali āvahiṃ || Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.34.2–3 ||

[14] Aditya Behl, "Presence and Absence in Bhakti: An Afterword," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 320.

[15] Thomas de Bruijn, "Many Roads Lead to Lanka: The Intercultural Semantics of Rama's Quest," *Contemporary South Asia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 45. De Bruijn also states that "there is no evidence of a similar use of the Avadhi/Hindavi genre by 'Hindu' authors before Tulsidas composed his *Rāmcaritmānas* in this format" ("Dialogism in a Medieval Genre: The Case of the Avadhi Epics," in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture,* ed. Francesca Orsini [Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010], 126).

[16] The other evidence Behl and de Bruijn give for Tulsī deliberately "choosing" to compose the *Rāmcaritmānas* in the same genre as the *premkathā*s is weak. Both Behl and de Bruijn note similarities between the descriptions of

The *caupāī-dohā* stanza units of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, however, which contain four to five *caupāī*s followed by a *dohā* or its variant, the *soraṭhā,* occasionally interspersed with verses in a meter called *harigītikā-chand* or "the meter of short songs to Hari," are undoubtedly inspired by the specific metrical format of the Bhasha *Rāmcaritmānas*.[17] Based on these shared stanza units as well as the fact that Cauhān's "language contains some eastern [i.e. Avadhi] features," R.S. McGregor describes the *Mahābhārat* as an "imitation" of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[18] This view is shared by other scholars. In the *Miśrabandhuvinod* (Delight of the Miśra Brothers, 1913) Gaṇeśvihārī, Śyāmvihārī, and Śukadevvihārī Miśra make the following observations about Cauhān: "his language style (*praṇālī*) is in the manner (*ḍhaṃg*) of that of Śrīgosvāmī Tulsīdāsjī and he is also a follower (*anuyāyī*) of the poet."[19] Lala Sita Ram writes that Cauhān "is evidently a follower and imitator of Tulsidas."[20] Even the title pages of recent editions of the *Mahābhārat* describe this Bhasha poem as being written in "the style of the Rāmāyaṇa created by the illustrious Gosvāmī Tulsīdās" (*śrīgosvāmī tulsīdās kṛt rāmāyaṇ kī rīti*).[21]

As Vasudha Paramasivan notes, the *Rāmcaritmānas* is often described as "the most widely known text in North India before the advent of print."[22] While Philip Lutgendorf reports that "a great surge in the royal and aristocratic patronage" of the *Rāmcaritmānas* only started in the second half of the eighteenth century,[23] at least six manuscripts of the *Rāmcaritmānas* were produced in the seventeenth century around the time when Cauhān claims to have composed his *Mahābhārat*.[24] There are also seventeenth-century manuscripts of other compositions attributed to Tulsī including the *Rāmlalānahachū* (Rāma's Nail-Paring Ceremony) and the *Kavitāvalī*

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sacred Mānasarovar lakes in the *Padmāvat* and the *Rāmcaritmānas* (Behl, "Presence and Absence," 322–24; de Bruijn, "Dialogism Medieval Genre," 136–40). Yet accounts of a Mānasarovar lake are also found in multiple works of South Asian literature, including the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* [New York: Three Rivers Press, 2012], 167). De Bruijn does convincingly show that the *Padmāvat* draws extensively from the larger Rāmāyaṇa tradition ("Many Roads," 46–50; and *Ruby in the Dust: Poetry and History in Padmāvat by the South Asian Sufi Poet Muḥammad Jāyasī* [Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012], 132–42). He does not, however, demonstrate that Tulsī is familiar with the specific allusions to the Rāmāyaṇa narrative in the *Padmāvat*. Finally, de Bruijn's argument that Tulsī is "aware of the Sufi paradigm" based solely on a few instances of the terms "*sāhab*" (master) and "*garībnewaj*," which is "the sobriquet of the founder of the Chishti saint Muinuddin Chishti," in his text, is unconvincing ("Dialogism Medieval Genre," 135). Philip Lutgendorf also has made very similar arguments to those of Behl and de Bruijn during a recent presentation ("The Clue in the Lake: Tulsidas and the Sufis of Avadh" [paper presented at Court, Sampradāya and Beyond: A Workshop on Hindi Literary Traditions from the 16th to 19th Centuries, Berkeley, CA, April 13, 2018]).

[17] See Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text,* 14–17; and McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[18] McGregor, 195.

[19] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:273.

[20] Sita Ram, *Other Poets,* 236.

[21] See the title page of the 2015 Tej Kumār Book Depot edition.

[22] Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 10.

[23] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 135.

[24] Imre Bangha, "History of a Text: The Early Manuscripts and the Modern Editions of the *Rāmčaritmānas*" (paper presented at the International Conference on Early Modern Literatures in North India, Warsaw, Poland, July 18, 2018).

(Garland of Verses).[25] Further evidence of the circulation of Tulsī's *bhakti* poems in the seventeenth century is the inclusion of Tulsī in the influential seventeenth-century Bhasha hagiography: the *Bhaktamāl.*[26] In his *Bhaktamāl,* Nābhādās, who is generally considered to have been a member of the Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* and a contemporary of Tulsī,[27] writes that "to help individuals surmount the ordeals of the Kali age, Valmiki took the form of Tulsi."[28] This description of Tulsīdās as the incarnation of Vālmīki, the *ādikavi* and author of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, suggests that Tulsī's poetry to Rāma was popular in seventeenth-century North India.

While Cauhān does not directly pay tribute to Tulsīdās as Villi does to Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār and Nammāḻvār in the Tamil *Pāratam*, there is a stanza in the *Book of Peace* (*Śāntiparv*) of the *Mahābhārat* that may be a veiled homage to the author of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[29] As part of his counsel to Yudhiṣṭhira in the Bhasha *Book of Peace*, the dying Bhīṣma uses an entire stanza to tell Yudhiṣṭhira about the virtues of *tulsī*, a sacred plant for Vaiṣṇavas and Tulsīdās's namesake. The word *tulsī* is repeated eleven times in the twelve lines of this stanza.[30] In some of these lines when Cauhān refers to "garlands of *tulsī*" (*tulasīmālā*) or "leaves of *tulsī*" (*tulasīdala*), it is clear that he is speaking about the properties of the *tulsī* plant.[31] Other lines, however, are more ambiguous. Consider the concluding couplet of the stanza:

> Listen Dharmarāja with your ears about the spoken greatness of *tulsī*.
> The one who shows *bhakti* to *tulsī* is the one who is dear to Bhagavān.[32]

While Cauhān could be referring to *tulsī* the plant here, he could also be referring to Tulsī the poet. It is noteworthy that Tulsī creates puns using the word *tulsī* in his own poems. In the beginning of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, for instance, Tulsī states that:

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[25] Danuta Stasik, "Text and Context: Two Versions of Tulsidas's *Rām-lalā-nahachū*," in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan languages (Seattle 1994)*, ed. Alan Entwistle, Carol Salomon, Heidi Pauwels, and Michael C. Shapiro (Manohar: Delhi 1999), 382; and Imre Bangha, "Writing Devotion: Dynamics of Textual Transmission in the *Kavitāvalī* of Tulsīdās," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 146.

[26] It is important to remember that, as James Hare points out, "the author of the *Bhaktamāl* does not identify himself as Nābhādās but rather as Nārāyandās, in the final verse. It is Priyādās, the influential first commentator on the *Bhaktamāl*, who refers to Nābhādās as the sole author of the *Bhaktamāl*" ("Garland of Devotees*:* Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Modern Hinduism*"* [PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011], 28).

[27] Hare, 37–45.

[28] Nābhādās*, Bhaktamāl* 129, trans. Paramasivan in "Text and Sect," 10.

[29] *VP* 6.10.1 and 7.5.1. For more on these verses, see Chapter Three.

[30] *CM* 14.16–17

[31] *CM* 14.16.

[32] *tulasī mahimā bhāṣyaū dharmarāja sunu kāna*
tulasī bhaktī karata jo tāhi prīti bhagavāna || *CM* 14.17 ||

> Ram's name is a wish-granting tree
> and an abode of blessing in this dark age.
> Recalling it, Tulsidas was transformed from mere hemp
> into tulsi, purest of herbs.[33]

Similarly, in another of his compositions, the *Vinayapatrikā* (Letter of Petition), Tulsī plays with the word *tulsī* when he addresses Śiva and asks for protection from the deity's devotees:

> Call them, then, quickly, and censure their harsh deeds,
> For these wicked ones wish to smother this Tulsī plant
> among thick thorn bushes.[34]

Given the ways that Tulsī uses the multiple meanings of the word *tulsī* in his own poetic works, it is possible that Cauhān is not simply talking about *tulsī* the plant in the *Book of Peace.* Cauhān's claim to have begun his *Book of the Assembly Hall* on Rāmnavamī is thus just one of many different allusions to Tulsīdās and his compositions in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat.*

Cauhān goes on to describe himself composing multiple books of his *Mahābhārat* on other Vaiṣṇava festivals. As we will see in Chapter Six, Cauhān claims that he wrote the *Book of Śalya* (*Śalyparv*) and the *Book of Clubs* on festivals distinctly associated with Krishna. The dates in the prologues of the *Book of Droṇa* (*Droṇparv*) and the *Book of Karṇa* (*Karṇparv*), however, like the date in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, are associated with Rāma. Cauhān states that he started the *Book of Droṇa* in 1670 CE on the tenth day of the month of Āśvin, "that day Rāma left Lanka."[35] This is a clear reference to Vijayādaśamī, the day Rāma defeats Rāvaṇa. Vijayādaśamī also marks the end of Navarātri, the nine-day festival during which Rāmlīlā performances based on the *Rāmcaritmānas* are enacted throughout North India.[36] In the prologue of the *Book of Karṇa*, Cauhān says that he began this book in 1667 CE on the fifth day of Āśvin, which is the fifth day of Navarātri.[37] Yet, it is not Rāma but Krishna who plays a major role in the actual narratives of Cauhān's *Book of the Assembly Hall*, *Book of Droṇa,* and *Book of Karṇa*. In the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, Krishna slays Śiśupāla and saves Draupadī from being disrobed.[38] In the *Book of Droṇa* and the *Book of Karṇa,* Krishna tells the Pāṇḍavas exactly how to defeat these two Kaurava generals.[39] The references to Rāmnavamī, Vijayādaśamī, and Navarātri in these books thus explicitly incorporate the worship of Rāma into this Mahābhārata.

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[33] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.26 *dohā*, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:63.

[34] Tulsīdās, *Vinayapatrikā* 8.4, trans. Allchin in Tulsīdās, *Petition to Rām*, 86.

[35] *jā dina laṅkā rāma payāne || CM* 7.1 ||

[36] Multiple legends identify Tulsīdās as the founder of the Rāmlīlā tradition. See Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 255–58. I should point out, however, that there are some Rāmlīlā performances, such as the famous Rāmlīlā of Ramnagar in Uttar Pradesh, that last for more than ten days.

[37] *CM* 8.1.

[38] *CM* 2.23 and 2.58.

[39] *CM* 7.51 and 8.22.

As seen in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, Cauhān often invokes multiple different Hindu deities and sages in the opening verses of a single prologue. All eleven prologues refer to some form of Viṣṇu. In contrast to the multiple episodes that focus on Krishna in the narrative of the *Mahābhārat*, however, Cauhān's invocations barely mention this deity. Although the epithet Govinda, the "master of cows," is found twice in the prologues,[40] unlike Villi's invocations or the Bhasha poems of Krishna devotees such as Sūrdās or Nandadās, Cauhān's invocations make no allusions to the stories of the cowherd of Vrindavan or praise the god in any detail.

Instead, the form of Viṣṇu that receives the most frequent and the most elaborate praise in these invocations is Rāma. The first line of the *Book of Hermitage* (*Āśramavāsikparv*) is:

> Victory, victory to the best of the Raghus, the illustrious Rāma
> who fulfills all the desires of his *bhakta*s.[41]

While other deities and sages are usually extolled in less than half a line, Cauhān frequently dedicates entire quatrains to Rāma and other figures from the Rāmāyaṇa tradition. For example, in the prologue to the *Book of Bhīṣma* (*Bhīṣmparv*), he writes:

> I salute the feet of the lord of the Raghus
> whose attributes are sung of in the four Vedas,
> the beautiful protector of Ayodhya, the lord of Sītā,
> the friend of the poor, the Indra of the Raghu clan.[42]

Soon after this quatrain celebrating Rāma, Cauhān commends Vālmīki:

> Vālmīki creates the *Rāmāyaṇa*:
> the deeds of Rāma that destroy sin.[43]

Although this verse speaks of Vālmīki and his Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, the reference to the *carita* or "deeds" of Rāma in this line immediately reminds aficionados of Tulsīdās's most famous Bhasha Rāmāyaṇa retelling of its own title: the *Rāmcaritmānas* (Lake of the Deeds of Rāma).

Cauhān continues to praise Rāma in the prologue to the *Book of Droṇa*:

> I worship the feet of Rāma, the delight of the Raghus,
> the great hero, the destruction of the ten-necked one (Rāvaṇa),

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[40] *CM* 6.1 and 17.1.

In both Pāṇḍey's and Śarmā's editions of the text, however, in the opening prologue of the fourteenth book (which is absent from the Tej Kumār Book Depot edition) Cauhān pays tribute to Krishna, Govinda, Vyāsa, and Bhagavān. See 14.1 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 14.1 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[41] *jayati jayati raghubara śrīrāmā bhakta janana ko pūraṇakāmā* || *CM* 16.1 ||

[42] *kai praṇāma raghupati ke pāyana cāri veda jāke guṇa gāyana*
avadhanātha sītāpati sundara dīnabandhu raghuvaṃśa puraṃdara || *CM* 6.1 ||

While Puraṃdara (fortress destroyer) is a common epithet of the Vedic god Indra, the title can also refer to Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. See Callewaert and Sharma, *Dictionary of Bhakti*, 1243.

[43] *bālmīki rāmāyaṇa karatā rāma caritra pāpa ko haratā* || *CM* 6.1 ||

the one with long arms and lotus-petal eyes,
the liberation of the prostitute (Jīvantī), the hunter (Vālmīki), and Ahalyā.[44]

In the second line of this quatrain, Cauhān mentions Jīvantī and Vālmīki, two individuals whose lowly lives are redeemed after they chant *rāmnām* (the name of Rāma). David Lorenzen notes that in North Indian *bhakti* traditions, Jīvantī is a prostitute who "bought a parrot to whom she recited 'Ram, Ram' every morning. The day both she and the parrot died, Vishnu's messenger took them to heaven."[45] Paula Richman explains that according to different Rāmāyaṇa narratives, Vālmīki was "born into a robber family and, due to his low birth, he was judged unqualified to chant Rama's name directly. Instead, his religious preceptor taught him the mantra 'mara mara.' When Valmiki uttered the phrase repeatedly, the syllables blended into '(ma)rama rama(ra),' thereby accruing the meritorious karmic fruits of chanting Rama's name."[46] The power of *rāmnām* is a major component of Tulsī's theology in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[47] Tulsī dedicates ten stanzas to the supremacy of Rāma's name in the opening prologue of the first book of the *Rāmcaritmānas*,[48] in which he uses the stories of Vālmīki and Jīvantī to illustrate the omnipotence of *rāmnām*.[49] Julia Leslie points out that Tulsī also refers to the tales of Jīvantī and Vālmīki being saved by the name of Rāma in at least two more of his Bhasha *bhakti* compositions: the *Kavitāvalī* and the *Vinayapatrikā*.[50] By bringing up Jīvantī and Vālmīki in this invocation praising Rāma, Cauhān alludes to the potency of *rāmnām*.

The prologues to the *Book of Droṇa* and the *Book of Karṇa* also both conclude with couplets in which Cauhān describes himself "worshiping the feet of the lord of the Raghus."[51] Recall that Cauhān claims that he began these two books during Vijayādaśamī and Navarātri. In an earlier quatrain in the prologue to the *Book of Karṇa*, Cauhān venerates Rāma alongside the prince of Ayodhya's most dedicated and famous devotee: Hanumān.

I worship Rāmacandra, the ocean of attributes,
the lord of Sītā, the splendor of the Raghu clan.
No one understands his unfathomable magnificence.
[Only] his greatest *bhakta* Hanumān understands.[52]

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[44] *bandauṃ rāma caraṇa raghunandana mahābīra daśakandha nikandana*
dīragha bāhu kamaladala locana gaṇikā byādha ahalyā mocana || *CM* 7.1 ||

[45] David N. Lorenzen, *Praises to a Formless God: Nirguṇī Texts from North India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 268.

[46] Paula Richman, "Introduction: Whose Ramayana Is It?" in *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology*, ed. Paula Richman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 7.

[47] For a detailed discussion of the use of *rāmnām* in this text, see Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 39–42.

[48] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.19–28.

[49] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.19.3 and 1.26.4.

[50] Julia Leslie, *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions: Hinduism and the Case of Vālmīki* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 166.

[51] *raghupati caraṇa manāikai* || *CM* 7.1 and 8.1 ||

[52] *bandauṃ rāmacandra guṇa sāgara sītāpati raghubaṃśa ujāgara*

This is one of five invocations to Hanumān in the prologues of the *Mahābhārat*.[53] In the *Book of Hermitage*, for example, Cauhān extols Hanumān as the one who is "well-versed in knowledge"[54] and in the prologue in the *Book of Clubs*, he praises Hanumān as the one who is "bound with *bhakti*."[55] As we will soon see, Hanumān has a significant presence in this poem.

The eleven prologues in the *Mahābhārat* help ensure that Rāma's story is part of Cauhān's narration of the deeds of Krishna. By announcing the composition dates of Rāmnavamī, Vijayādaśamī, and Navarātri, and inserting numerous invocatory verses dedicated to Rāma and other Rāmāyaṇa figures like Hanumān and Vālmīki, Cauhān creates prologues that resonate with audiences of Rāma devotees and Tulsīdās connoisseurs in North India.

Honoring Hanumān

As I noted earlier, Rāma's monkey companion Hanumān appears in an episode in the *Book of the Forest* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which he meets his younger half-brother Bhīma. In the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, Hanumān permeates the *entire* narrative of Cauhān's poem. And as we will soon see, Hanumān is a particularly important deity for Tulsīdās.

We first meet Hanumān in the final chapter of the first book of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of the Beginnings*.[56] The chapter begins with the traveling sage and trickster Nārada arriving in Dwarka and stirring up trouble between two of Krishna's wives, Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, by giving Rukmiṇī a beautiful, divine flower.[57] In order to placate Satyabhāmā, Krishna dispatches Arjuna to the Kadalī Forest to retrieve another flower. The Kadalī Forest, which Lutgendorf describes as "a 'plantain forest,' often said to be situated in the Himalayas, where immortal beings reside," is the abode of Hanumān, and when he sees Arjuna plucking flowers, the divine monkey becomes furious.[58] Hanumān informs Arjuna that "these flowers are for worshiping the king of the Raghus."[59] The Pāṇḍava prince and Hanumān proceed to have an argument over whether Rāma or Arjuna is the superior archer. The boastful Arjuna insults the bridge that Hanumān and his monkey companions built out of stones that allowed Rāma to cross the ocean to Lanka. Arjuna goes on to brag to Hanumān that he can create a superior bridge just out of arrows. But then Hanumān assumes a massive size and Arjuna becomes scared:

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mahimā agama aura nahiṃ jānā parama bhakta jānata hanumānā || *CM* 8.1 ||

[53] *CM* 6.1, 8.1, 16.1, 17.1, and 18.1.

[54] *hanūmāna ko jñāna biśārada* || *CM* 16.1 ||

[55] *bandi bhakti hanumāna* || *CM* 17.1 ||

[56] *CM* 1.65–67.

[57] This is very similar to the beginning of the *Pārijātaharaṇa* (theft of the Pārijāta tree) episode in an appendix of the *Harivaṃśa*. See Christopher Austin, "The Fructification of the Tale of a Tree: The *Pārijātaharaṇa* in the *Harivaṃśa* and Its Appendices," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 33, no. 2 (2013): 252.

[58] Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 404.

[59] *yahī puhupa pūjata raghurāī* || *CM* 1.66 ||

Pārtha (Arjuna) saw [Hanumān] and forgot his knowledge.
Then he thought of the feet of Bhagavān.
In his heart, the lord of Śrī knew about
the fight between Pārtha and Hanumān.
"Who in the world could bear the weight of Hanumān?
If he wants, he can flip over the three worlds."
Thinking this, the hero of the Yadus
transformed his body into the form of a tortoise.
Pārtha made his arrows into a bridge.
Hari went to its center and placed it on his back.
He bore the weight of Hanumān on his back and
blood flowed and his body cracked.

Then, seeing the color of the blood, Hanumān thought:
"Who in the universe can come to the world and bear my weight?"

Meditating, he realized this was the illustrious Krishna.
Jumping up, Hanumān came to the shore.
Seeing his own blood, the forest one (Krishna)
thoroughly praised Pārtha and Hanumān.
The lord of Śrī said: "Pārtha and Hanumān,
you two heroes are alike!"
In this way, having displayed the extent of his love,
the lord of Śrī then disappeared.
Hanumān became the friend (*sakhā*) of Pārtha.
This is the way the sages describe it.[60]

This story of Arjuna, Hanumān, Krishna, and the bridge of arrows can be traced back to the fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Ānandarāmāyaṇa* (Joyful Rāmāyaṇa), although in the *Ānandarāmāyaṇa* instead of taking the form of a tortoise, Krishna uses his discus to support the weight of Hanumān on the bridge.[61] Philip Lutgendorf reports that this story is included in

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[60] *pāratha dekhata bhūleu jñānā sumireu tabahiṃ caraṇa bhagavānā*
apane mana meṃ śrīpati jānā bhayo bivāda pārtha hanumānā
hanū bhāra ko jagameṃ sahai tīni loka ko ulaṭana cahai
yahai bicāra karaiṃ yadubīrā kayaṭha rūpa taba dhareu śarīrā
śarako bodhi pārtha pula kīnhā tehi madhi jāi pīṭhi hari dīnhā
hanū bhāra pīṭhi para dhārā rakta bahāyo badana so phārā

rakta barṇa taba dekhyo kari bicāra hanumāna
mora bhāra saṃbhāra ko ko hai meṃ āna

dhareu dhyāna śrīkṛṣṇa ko pāye kūdi hanū taṭa ūpara āye
nija rudhirai dekheu banavārī pāratha hanu tau astuti sārī
śrīpati kaha dou eka samānā pāratha bīra aura hanumānā
yāhi prakāra prīti paramānā śrīpati taba bhe antarddhānā
pāratha sakhā bhaye hanumānā yahi prakāra te ṛṣihi bakhānā || *CM* 1.66–67 ||

[61] As Lutgendorf notes, Krishna taking the form of a tortoise is a nod to "Vishnu's *kūrma* avatara, which supported the cosmic mountain during the churning of the milk-ocean" (*Hanuman's Tale*, 231).

several twentieth-century Hindi texts focused on the life and deeds of Hanumān.[62] In the Paṇḍvānī ballad performance tradition of the Gond community in Chhattisgarh, proponents of the Kapālik style, such as Teejan Bai and Chetan Dewangan, as well as the Vedmatī style (which is based on Cauhān's Bhasha text), like Prabha Yadav, frequently and enthusiastically recount the meeting of Arjuna and Hanumān.[63] We also find various versions of this encounter between Hanumān and Arjuna in different Mahābhāratas composed in regional languages including those by Sāraḷādāsa in Oriya and Kabi Sañjay and Kāśīrāmdās in Bengali and the Konkani *Bhārata*.[64]

Unlike these other premodern regional Mahābhārata retellings, however, Cauhān narrates this story with Arjuna and Hanumān on two separate occasions in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. In the *Book of Bhīṣma* during the Kurukṣetra War, Yudhiṣṭhira reveals to Arjuna that he is feeling worried about facing Bhīṣma in battle. Arjuna reassures his elder brother by reminding him that they have Krishna on their side. Arjuna tells Yudhiṣṭhira that "the lord protects my life every day" and then begins to describe his first meeting with Hanumān.[65] Notably, this episode is one of the thirty-four scenes in an illustrated manuscript of the war books of Cauhān's poem that was transcribed in 1758.[66] In an illustration done in the Rajput style of painting, the artist of this manuscript depicts Arjuna with his bow raised and Hanumān about to cross a body of water.[67]

For the most part, Arjuna's account of the story of Hanumān and the bridge of arrows follows the one in the *Book of the Beginnings*. The version in the *Book of Bhīṣma* is two stanzas longer than the one in the *Book of the Beginnings* and we hear a bit more of Hanumān's voice. In the *Book of Bhīṣma* after Arjuna first insults the bridge that Rāma built to Lanka, Hanumān reprimands the Pāṇḍava prince and describes some of Rāma's most impressive deeds:

> Hanumān spoke in this manner:
> "Wretched hunter, do you not know Rāma?
> That archer who killed the ten-necked Rāvaṇa,
> slew Kumbhakarṇa,
> killed Vālī, and showed kindness to Sugrīva,
> and made Vibhīṣaṇa the king of Lanka?[68]

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[62] Lutgendorf, 230–31.

[63] See Sundrani, "Hanuman Bhim Milap- Dr. Tijan Bai," YouTube video, 30:21, December 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ctv91WM6D8; Artist 440, "Pandvani | Artist440 Folkbox | Chetan Dewangan | Chhattisgarh Folk Song | Indian Epic Mahabharata," YouTube video, 6:31, September 21, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iigwx3sRTuU; and 1:37:00–1:53:28 of Sahapedia, "Pandavani: Adi Parv- Prabha Yadav & Mandali," YouTube video, 1:53:28, March 10, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyRYsOkWYJY.

[64] Smith, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Lore," 143; Bhattacharya, "Variations on Vyasa," 91 and 96; Miranda, "Old Konkani *Bharata*," 356.

[65] *saba dina prabhu mero praṇa rākhyo* || *CM* 6.41 ||

[66] Sabalsingh Cauhān, *Mahābhārat*, British Library, London: Or.13180.

[67] While the paintings in this manuscript are not indicative of a specific school of Rajput painting, such as Kishangarh or Mewar, they are clearly in the Rajput style. I thank Shivani Sud for examining this illustrated manuscript in the British Library and sharing her observations with me.

[68] *hanūmāna yahi bhāṃti bakhānata adhama kirāta rāma nahiṃ jānata*
jina mārau rāvaṇa daśakandhara kumbhakaraṇa jina badhyo dhanurdhdara

While Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* does not have a version of the *Rāmopākhyāna* (the retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa in the *Book of the Forest* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*), with these three lines Hanumān provides readers with a mini recap of some of the major events of the Rāmāyaṇa.

Arjuna's own narration of his first meeting with Hanumān in the *Book of Bhīṣma* also emphasizes Hanumān's and Arjuna's roles as *bhakta*s. In the *Book of Bhīṣma* when Krishna realizes in his heart that Hanumān and Arjuna are quarrelling, he describes them as his "two greatest *bhakta*s" (*parama bhakta doū*).[69] Several Vaiṣṇava traditions consider Hanumān and Arjuna to be exemplary *bhakta*s. As we saw in Chapter One, the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* describes a ninefold (*navadhā*) *bhakti*.[70] In his *Bhaktamāl,* Nābhādās lists Hanumān and Arjuna as two of the nine masters of ninefold *bhakti*: Hanumān is the master of the "servitor's splendor" (*dāsa dīpati*) and Arjuna is the master of "friendship" (*sakhyatva*).[71] By calling Arjuna and Hanuman his "two greatest *bhakta*s," Cauhān's Krishna makes it clear that he values both the *bhakti* of servitude as well as friendship.[72] The concluding couplet of this episode states:

> Sabalsingh Cauhān says:
> the one who worships Hari
> in their heart, with their words, and through their actions,
> and abandons other desires—
> that *bhakta* will never be destroyed.[73]

This couplet about the qualities of an ideal *bhakta* is a fitting conclusion to this episode in the *Book of Bhīṣma* about the first meeting of two of the most celebrated Vaiṣṇava *bhakta*s. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, Cauhān often retells stories from the *Book of the Beginnings* in subsequent books of his *Mahābhārat* with new details about how Krishna helped the Pāṇḍavas. In the *Book of Bhīṣma*'s retelling of the Arjuna and Hanumān encounter that was first told in the *Book of the Beginnings*, we do not get any new details about how Krishna came to Arjuna's aid, but we do see a new emphasis on Arjuna's and Hanumān's roles as *bhakta*s.

After the first account of the story of Arjuna, Hanumān, and the bridge of arrows in the *Book of the Beginnings*, the next place we see Hanumān in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is in the first chapter of the *Book of the Forest* (*Vanparv*). Cauhān's *Book of the Forest* begins with an account of Bhīma slaying the demon Kirmīra, an episode we also find in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[74] Yet unlike its Sanskrit counterpart, this scene in the Bhasha text ends with Hanumān arriving in

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bāli māri sugrīva nevājā laṃkā kiyo bibhīṣaṇa rājā || *CM* 6.42 ||

[69] *CM* 6.43.

[70] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.5.23–24.

[71] Nābhādās*, Bhaktamāl* 14, trans. Gilbert Pollet in "Studies in the Bhakta Māla of Nābhā Dāsa," (PhD diss., University of London: SOAS, 1963), 60 and 154.

[72] In the next verse of his text (15), Nābhādās also describes Hanumān and Arjuna as *bhakta*s "who are witnesses of the flavor [*rasa*] and taste of the Lord's [Hari's] blessings" (trans. Pollet in "Bhakta Māla," 61 and 155).

[73] *mana baca krama jo hari bhajai tajai aura kī āśa*
sabalasiṃha cauhāna kaha nāhiṃna bhakta bināśa || *CM* 6.44 ||

[74] *MBh* 3.12.

the forest right after Bhīma kills Kirmīra.[75] Cauhān states in his *Mahābhārat* that both Hanumān and the Pāṇḍavas are filled with "delight" (*harṣa*) when they meet each other.[76]

Hanumān makes a second appearance in the *Book of the Forest* in Cauhān's retelling of the famous meeting of Bhīma and Hanumān during Bhīma's journey to retrieve the *saugandhika* flower for Draupadī.[77] As noted earlier, this episode is found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* as well as in many regional Mahābhārata retellings. This encounter between Bhīma and Hanumān has also been the subject of multiple independent works including Nīlakaṇṭha's tenth-century Sanskrit play *Kalyāṇasaugandhikavyāyoga* (which is now enacted as part of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition), the Kathakaḷi dance-drama *Kalyāṇasaugandhikam* by Kōṭṭayam Tampurān (ca. 1675–1725), and the *Amar Chitra Katha* English comic book *Bheema and Hanuman* (1980).[78]

In Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, this episode begins with Bhīma setting off to procure the fragrant *saugandhika* flower for Draupadī. When Bhīma reaches the forest in which the flower is located, he begins to uproot trees and roar. Hearing this commotion, Hanumān becomes furious, assumes a gigantic form, and tells Bhīma: "Your death is in my hands."[79] Hanumān then warns Bhīma that this forest belongs to Kubera (the god of wealth) and that it is protected by a group of demons. Bhīma, however, ignores Hanumān and begins to kill the demons. Hanumān reports this to Kubera who surmises that Bhīma cannot be a normal human. Going back to Bhīma, Hanumān describes himself as the one who went to Lanka for the "sake of Rāma" (*rāma kāja*), burned Lanka, and defeated Mahirāvaṇa.[80] Hanumān then tells Bhīma that if he can lift up his tail, Bhīma will be allowed to pluck the *saugandhika* flower. When Bhīma fails to do so, he realizes in his heart that this monkey must be Hanumān. Bhīma goes to describe his family's conflict with the Kauravas and requests his half-brother to help the Pāṇḍavas in the same way that he

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[75] *CM* 3.3.

Cauhān refers to Hanumān as *pavanakumārā* ("son of the wind"). While this epithet could technically refer to Bhīma since he is also the son of Vāyu, this is a very common epithet for Hanumān. In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, for example, Tulsī uses this name (and the variants *pavanasuta* and *pavanatanaya*) for Hanumān over thirty times. See Winand M. Callewaert and Philip Lutgendorf, *Rāmcaritmānas Word Index* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997), 176.

[76] *CM* 3.3.

[77] *CM* 3.26–29.

[78] See Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 103–17; Nīlakaṇṭha, *Kalyāṇasaugandhikavyāyoga* (*Bhīma in Search of Celestial Flower: Nīlakaṇṭhakavi Kalyāṇasaugandhikavyāyoga*), trans. K.G. Paulose (Delhi: Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2000); and Lopamudra and M.N. Nangare, *Bheema and Hanuman* (Bombay: Amar Chitra Katha, 1980).

[79] *more hāthahi maraṇa tuva* || *CM* 3.27 ||

[80] *CM* 3.28.

Lutgendorf explains that "Ahiravana (and/or Mahiravana) [is] a subterranean son, double, or brother (or pair of brothers) of the king of Lanka, who comes to the latter's aid during the final days of his battle with Rama and the monkeys…Though absent from most recensions of Valmiki, this is a very popular and today virtually pan-Indian tale … Already alluded to in the ca. eighth century *Śatarudrasṃahitā* of the *Śivapurāṇa* (3.20.34), it was greatly elaborated on in Bengali, Oriya, and Assamese Ramayanas composed from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, as well as in the ca. fourteenth-fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Ānandarāmāyaṇa* and the sixteenth–century Marathi *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* of Eknath" (*Hanuman's Tale,* 53).

once helped Rāma. Hanumān promises Bhīma that he will be in Arjuna's chariot and protect him from weapons. Kubera is pleased and Bhīma happily returns to Draupadī with the flower.

There are several differences between Cauhān's rendering of this episode and the one found in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. In the *Mahābhārata*, for example, the encounter between Bhīma and Hanumān takes place before Bhīma even reaches Kubera's abode.[81] While Hanumān teaches Bhīma about the four eons (*yuga*s) and the proper conduct for warriors (*kṣatriya dharma*) in the Sanskrit epic, these discourses are not found in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*.[82] The most significant difference, however, is the absence of Bhīma's worship of Hanumān after the divine monkey reveals his massive celestial form to Bhīma in Cauhān's text. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, after Bhīma realizes he has been conversing with Hanumān, he requests his half-brother to display "your unequal form when you leaped across the sea."[83] Hanumān reluctantly agrees to do so and upon seeing his gigantic form, Bhīma kneels before Hanumān with folded hands and begs the monkey to resume his normal size.[84]

David Gitomer, James Laine, Arshia Sattar, John Brockington, Philip Lutgendorf, Danielle Feller, and Bruce Sullivan have all noted the striking similarities between this moment and Krishna's theophany to Arjuna during the *Bhagavadgītā*.[85] Alf Hiltebeitel asserts that the narrative of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* "builds up to and works around a series" of "'*bhakti* tableaux,' scenes which present images that hold themselves before the hearer's mind."[86] He adds that these *bhakti* tableaux "present ways of seeing the divine through the stories that are akin to the contemporaneous development of temple iconography," and that the "most obvious such tableau" is Arjuna's reaction to Krishna's awe-inspiring display of his divine form in the *Bhagavadgītā*.[87] Indira Viswanathan Peterson identifies Arjuna's worship of Śiva after the deity reveals himself at the conclusion of the *kirāta* episode in the *Book of the Forest* in the Sanskrit

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[81] *MBh* 3.146–50.

[82] *MBh* 3.148–49.

[83] *MBh* 3.148.3, trans. John L. Brockington in "Hanumān in the *Mahābhārata*," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004): 130.

[84] *MBh* 3.149.12

[85] David L. Gitomer, "The 'Veṇīsaṃhāra' of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa: The Great Epic as Drama," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1988), 320–23; James W. Laine, *Visions of God: Narratives of Theophany in the Mahābhārata* (Vienna: De Nobili Research Library, 1989), 40–42; Arshia Sattar, "Hanumān in the 'Rāmāyaṇa' of Vālmīki: A Study in Ambiguity" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1990), 190–93; John Brockington, "Hanumān in *Mahābhārata*," 130; Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 282; Danielle Feller, "Bhīma's Quest for the Golden Lotuses (*Mahābhārata* 3.146–153 and 3.157– 59)," in *Battle, Bards and Brāhmins*. *Papers of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference, Volume II*, ed. John L. Brockington (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012), 91; and Bruce M. Sullivan, "The Tale of an Old Monkey and a Fragrant Flower: What the Mahābhārata's Rāmāyaṇa May Tell Us about the Mahābhārata," in *Argument and Design: The Unity of the Mahābhārata*, ed. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (Boston: Brill, 2016), 198–99. Also see *Bhagavadgītā* 11.1–51.

[86] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Two Kṛṣṇas on One Chariot: Upaniṣadic Imagery and Epic Mythology," *History of Religions* 24, no. 1 (1984): 2.

[87] Hiltebeitel, 2.

epic as another *bhakti* tableau.[88] In her work on Bhāravi's sixth-century *Kirātārjunīya*, Peterson shows how Bhāravi's "vision of *bhakti*" is in a "symbiotic relationship" with the heroic (*vīra*) *rasa* that pervades this Sanskrit *mahākāvya*.[89] She also describes how the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata* and later Kannada retellings from the Vīraśaiva community offer a different presentation of this episode by adding a scene in which Arjuna builds and worships an altar to Śiva in order "to make Arjuna's deeds more compatible with the behavior of the ideal *bhakta*" and with "the later accounts of divine revelation in the lives of *bhakti* saints."[90]

The image of Bhīma kneeling with his hands folded in front of the gigantic Hanumān in the *Mahābhārata* clearly mirrors those of Arjuna bowing to Śiva and Krishna in the *kirāta* episode and the *Bhagavadgītā.* It is thus surprising that Cauhān does not take advantage of this *bhakti* tableau in his own devotional Mahābhārata retelling. While Hanumān does grow to a massive size when he hears Bhīma destroying the forest in the Bhasha poem, the scene in which Bhīma begs to see Hanumān's huge form and then becomes terrified is absent from Cauhān's text. We do, however, see this scene in the oldest extant Bhasha Mahābhārata: Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*. After Bhīma asks Hanumān to display his celestial form, Viṣṇudās tells us:

> The pitiful, impotent one turned his back away from Bhīma.
> His body became bigger and was the whole universe.
> Bhīma trembled and his heart was frightened.
> He moved restlessly like Sītā, the daughter of Janaka, when she was abducted.
> Bhīma's eyes were quite agitated.
> [Hanumān] then assumed his previous form with his small body
> and the red face of his adorable body.
> In that way, Bhīma saw the hero Hanumān.
>
> In this way, Hanumān and Bhīma became bound to each other by a promise.
> The storehouse of compassion entered the heart of that descendent of Bharata.[91]

Modern scholarship has categorized the *Pāṇḍavcarit* as a text that is outside the peripheries of Bhasha *bhakti* poetry. Allison Busch remarks that Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* and *Rāmāyaṇkathā* both "lack the type of religiosity that defines *bhakti* literature."[92] As we saw in the Introduction,

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[88] Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Arjuna's Combat with the *Kirāta: Rasa* and *Bhakti* in Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya,*" in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 215–16.

[89] Peterson, "Arjuna's Combat," 250.

[90] Peterson, 245–46.

[91] *dīnīṃ pīṭhi bhīṃu balibaṃḍā bagḍhi sarīru gayau brahmaṃḍā*
kāṃpyau bhīṃu manahu bhahabhītū kalamali gayau janaku hayau sītū
bhīṃu āṃkhi mihacīṃ akulāī bāhuri thorī deha dikhāī
mukha rātau pīyarau sarīrū aisau dekhyau hanivatu bīrū

hanimatu soṃ aru bhīma soṃ bhayau bacana baṃdhāna
bhārata mājha padhārabī jau hiya kṛpā nidhāna || Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 3.3.23–24 and *dohrā* 3.3.1 ||

[92] Allison Busch, "Questioning the Tropes about '*Bhakti*' and '*Rīti*' in Hindi Literary Historiography," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 2001–2003*, ed. Monika Horstmann (Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 43.

Sheldon Pollock claims that "the oeuvre of Viṣṇudās evinces no particular concern with *bhakti*" and that "if any echo of *bhakti* can be said to be present, it is remarkably muted."[93] Commenting on the ten line-long rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the *Pāṇḍavcarit*, McGregor notes that "of devotion (*bhakti*) or the philosophical implications of Kṛṣṇa's teaching, there is nothing here."[94]

Yet as the passage above demonstrates, Viṣṇudās is clearly presenting this moment as a *bhakti* tableau. Bhīma's reaction to seeing Hanumān's divine form in the Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit* is very similar to Arjuna's response to witnessing Krishna's theophany in the *Bhagavadgītā* in the Sanskrit epic. Viṣṇudās also uses certain terms and images that permeate Vaiṣṇava literature. For instance, Viṣṇudās refers to Hanumān as the "storehouse of compassion" (*kṛpānidhāna*), a term that Tulsīdās uses for describing deities over twenty times in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[95] The image of Hanumān entering Bhīma's heart is a reference to the Vaiṣṇava concept of *antaryāmin* or *hārda* that we saw in the Śrīvaiṣṇava context in Chapters Two and Three. The idea of Hanumān residing in Bhīma's heart is also a fascinating inversion of a popular story in which Hanumān rips open his chest to reveal Rāma, Rāma's name, or Rāma and Sītā.[96]

The special attention Viṣṇudās gives to this *bhakti* tableau, however, is likely not related to the deity being worshiped, but to the man who is worshiping the deity. In the prologue of the *Pāṇḍavcarit*, Viṣṇudās tells us that Dūṅgarsingh, the Tomar Rajput king of Gwalior (r. ca. 1429–1459) and Viṣṇudās's patron, is of "Pāṇḍu's clan" (*paṇḍuvaṃsa*) and given his "arm-strength" (*bhujabala*), he is Bhīma himself.[97] As several scholars have pointed out, Bhīma is the central hero of the *Pāṇḍavcarit*.[98] Episodes that feature Bhīma prominently in Viṣṇudās's retelling—such as his marriage to Hiḍimbā and his slayings of Jarāsandha and Kīcaka—are given greater importance than others involving Arjuna or Yudhiṣṭhira.[99] Unlike *bhakti* tableaux that feature Arjuna, such as Krishna's theophany in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Bhīma's encounter with Hanumān is one that Viṣṇudās cannot afford to ignore in his Bhīma-centric Bhasha Mahābhārata.

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[93] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 429.

[94] McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 36–37.

[95] Callewaert and Lutgendorf, *Rāmcaritmānas Word Index,* 70.

[96] Philip Lutgendorf notes that "this story occurs in the fifteenth-century Bengali Ramayana attributed to Krittibasa, and it may have originated in Bengal" ("Ally, Devotee, and Friend" in *The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe*, ed. Forrest McGill [San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016], 159).

[97] Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 1.1.36–37.

Vidya Prakash Tyagi points out the Tomar Rajputs claimed to be the descendants of Arjuna (*Martial Races of Undivided India* [Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2009], 150).

[98] See R.S. McGregor, "A Narrative Poet's View of his Material: Viṣṇudās's Introduction to his Brajbhāṣā *Pāṇḍav-carit* (AD 1435)," in *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages,* ed. Mariola Offredi (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 341; Pollock, *Language of Gods*, 395; Imre Bangha, "Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the Rāmāyan of Vishnudas," in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 372; and Heidi Pauwels, "The Power-Politics of Desire and Revenge: A Classical Hindi *Kīcakavadha* Performance at the Tomar Court of Gwalior," in *Many Mahābhāratas,* ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 245.

[99] Pauwels, "Power-Politics of Revenge," 245n35.

While the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* contains a version of the story of Bhīma, Hanumān, and the search for the *saugandhika* flower, Cauhān dedicates much more space to his two renderings of the story of Arjuna, Hanumān, and the bridge of arrows. These two tales of Hanumān meeting one of the Pāṇḍava brothers are actually quite similar. They both begin with a quest for a flower to appease a queen, they both involve a Pāṇḍava angering Hanumān, and they both feature Hanumān adopting a gigantic form. In both of Cauhān's versions of the encounter between Hanumān and Arjuna, Arjuna has a terrified reaction to Hanumān's awe-inspiring vision that is reminiscent of Bhīma's reaction to the monkey's theophany in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Viṣṇudās's Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit*. Although Bhīma is Hanumān's half-brother, Cauhān is far more concerned with the relationship between Arjuna and Hanumān. As the narrative of the *Mahābhārat* progresses, Cauhān presents his audience with several more episodes that showcase the bond between Arjuna and Hanumān and that emphasize their shared role as *bhakta*s.

In the next book of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of Virāṭa's Court* (*Virāṭparv*), Hanumān plays an important role during the episode in which Arjuna and Virāṭa's son Uttara ride off into battle to protect Virāṭa's cattle from a Kaurava raid. This takes place during the Pāṇḍavas' thirteenth year of exile when they are living in disguise in Virāṭa's court and Arjuna has taken on the identity of Bṛhannalā, the dance teacher of Virāṭa's daughter Uttarā.[100] As Arjuna-as-Bṛhannalā and Uttara prepare to face the Kauravas, Cauhān tells us that Hanumān is sitting atop of the chariot's flag.[101] In the search for the *saugandhika* flower episode in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* (and in the Sanskrit epic and the *Pāṇḍavcarit*), Hanumān promises Bhīma that he will reside in Arjuna's flag in battle.[102] Yigal Bronner notes that during the cattle raid battle in the *Book of Virāṭa's Court* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, "Arjuna closes his revelation to the Kauravas by hoisting his flag with its simian ensign. The ape on the flag then takes an active role in the fighting: it petrifies the enemy with its roars and is even hurt in the action."[103] Bronner also points out that while this monkey is never named in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, "later versions of the *Mahābhārata* leave no question about the identity of Hanumān as the monkey on the banner."[104] These later Mahābhāratas include Villi's *Pāratam*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī,* Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*, and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*.[105]

As in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, when Uttara realizes that Bṛhannalā is Arjuna in Cauhān's poem, the young prince asks to hear the middle Pāṇḍava's ten names. In the Sanskrit epic, the ten names Arjuna recites are: Arjuna, Phalguna, Jiṣṇu, Kirīṭin, Śvetavāhana, Bībhatsu, Vijaya, Krishna (Kṛṣṇa), Savyasācin, and Dhanañjaya.[106] But in

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[100] Note that in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic, Arjuna's name is Bṛhannaḍā. For an analysis of Arjuna's role as Bṛhannaḍā in the *Mahābhārata* and as Bṛhannalā in the Sanskrit drama, the *Pañcarātra*, see Nell Shapiro Hawley, "The Remembered Self: Arjuna as Bṛhannalā in the *Pañcarātra*," in *Many Mahābhāratas,* ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 89–116.

[101] *CM* 4.35.

[102] *CM* 3.28; *MBh* 3.150.15; and Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 3.3.25.

[103] Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 152.

[104] Bronner, 152.

[105] *VP* 4.4.61; Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 4.6.50; Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 4.5.26; and *CM* 4.35.

[106] *MBh* 4.39.8.

Cauhān's composition, we get a slightly different list of names: Arjuna, Pārtha, Bijayi (Vijaya), Kirīṭa (Kirīṭin), Vibhatsa (Bībhatsu), Dhanañjaya,[107] Sabyasācī (Savyasācin), Śvetabāji (Śvetavāhana), Kapidhvaja, and Śabdabheda (Sanskrit: Śabdavedhin).[108] While seven names are found in both lists in the Sanskrit and Bhasha texts, Phalguna, Jiṣṇu, and Krishna are unique to the *Mahābhārata*'s list and Pārtha, Kapidhvaja, and Śabdabheda are only part of Cauhān's list. Cauhān's choice to give Kapidhvaja or "the monkey-bannered" as one of Arjuna's ten names is significant because it reinforces the importance of Arjuna and Hanumān's friendship.[109]

During the cattle raid battle in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Book of Virāṭa's Court*, the unnamed monkey on Arjuna's banner is described roaring and being wounded by one of Bhīṣma's arrows.[110] In the Bhasha poem, Hanumān is also injured but he is hurt by the Kaurava prince Vikarṇa, not Bhīṣma.[111] Also, while the critical edition of the epic does not describe Arjuna's reaction to Bhīṣma shooting the monkey on his flag, Cauhān states that Arjuna is furious when he sees Hanumān get struck by Vikarṇa's arrow.[112] Another major difference between these episodes in the Sanskrit and Bhasha texts is that while the *Mahābhārata*'s monkey simply screeches at the Kauravas and frightens them, Cauhān's Hanumān actually participates in the battle by shooting arrows at the Kauravas.[113] The Bhasha *Mahābhārat* also describes Hanumān protecting Arjuna during this episode. At one point while Arjuna is fighting his former teacher Droṇa, the Pāṇḍava prince realizes that his death is eminent. Cauhān then tells us:

> Pārtha knew that now he would die,
> and remembered the feet of the god Krishna.
> When Droṇa released the arrow,
> Hanumān expanded his mouth and took it.[114]

For Cauhān's readers who are familiar with stories of Hanumān's childhood, the image of this divine monkey widening his mouth in order to consume Droṇa's arrow and protect Arjuna might remind them of the tale of the infant Hanumān mistaking the sun for a fruit and then trying to

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[107] While in the Sanskrit epic, Arjuna says "They call me Dhanaṃjaya because I stand in the midst of booty after conquering all the countrysides and plundering their entire wealth" (*MBh* 4.39.11, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 3:88), in Cauhān's text, Arjuna tells Uttara that "Krishna calls me by the name Dhanañjaya" (*nāma dhanañjaya kṛṣṇa bakhānā*, *CM* 4.36). This is thus another example of Cauhān highlighting Krishna in his poem.

[108] *CM* 4.36.

[109] I should point out that while Kapidhvaja is not one of the ten names of Arjuna in the Sanskrit epic, in other parts of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna is referred to as Kapidhvaja. For example, see *Bhagavadgītā* 1.1.20.

[110] See *MBh* 4.48.5, 4.48.21–22, and 4.59.7.

[111] *CM* 4.39.

[112] *CM* 4.39.

[113] *CM* 4.51–52.

I will discuss the significance of depicting Hanumān as an archer shortly.

[114] *jānyo pārtha bhayo aba maraṇā sumire kṛṣṇadeva ke caraṇā*
chūṭo jabahiṃ droṇa ko bānā mukha pasārī līnhoṃ hanumānā || *CM* 4.44 ||

swallow it.[115] This scene in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* also has parallels with the episode in the Sanskrit *Book of Droṇa* in which Bhagadatta, the ruler of the Pragjyotisha kingdom and an ally of the Kauravas, launches the *vaiṣṇavāstra* or the "weapon of Viṣṇu" at Arjuna during the Kurukṣetra War. Before the *vaiṣṇavāstra* can strike Arjuna, Krishna steps in front of the weapon and the *vaiṣṇavāstra* transforms into a garland of flowers.[116] As we saw in Chapter Two, both Villi's *Pāratam* and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* are filled with instances of the Pāṇḍavas or Draupadī thinking of Krishna during a moment of distress and the deity instantly coming to their side. In the passage above, however, when Arjuna remembers Krishna it is not Krishna but Hanumān who comes to his aid. By having Rāma's greatest *bhakta* respond to Arjuna's remembrance of Krishna, Cauhān blurs the distinctions between Viṣṇu's two most prominent incarnations.

As I pointed out in Chapter Two, much of the fifth book of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of Effort*, is dedicated to different characters' retellings of the earlier events that have led to the impending war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. In these recaps of stories Cauhān has already shared with his audience in the first four books of his Mahābhārata, several characters bring up Hanumān and his bond with Arjuna. For example, in Kuntī's account of the deeds of her children to Krishna, the Pāṇḍavas' mother tells the deity that Arjuna was able to tie up the ocean with his bridge of arrows because of Hanumān.[117] Similarly, while describing the lineage of the Pāṇḍavas from Bhīṣma to Sahadeva, Krishna briefly mentions the bridge of arrows that resulted in Hanumān becoming Arjuna's friend *sakhā* or "friend."[118] Cauhān's choice to describe Hanumān as Arjuna's *sakhā* in his poem is significant. Throughout the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna and Krishna refer to each other as *sakhā* with one of the most prominent examples of this being the two verses from the *Bhagavadgītā* that we saw in Chapter One in which Arjuna apologizes to Krishna for not realizing his omnipotence and constantly calling him his *sakhā*.[119] Also recall that in his account of the nine masters of ninefold *bhakti* in the *Bhaktamāl,* Nābhādās describes Arjuna as the master of *sakhyatva* or "friendship" *bhakti*.[120] Cauhān is thus presenting Hanumān as the *sakhā* of the exemplar of *sakhyatva bhakti*.

Some of the Kauravas' advisors in the *Book of Effort* also bring up Arjuna and Hanumān's friendship in their attempts to deter Duryodhana from going to war with his cousins. When Aśvatthāman is recounting the lives of his father Droṇa and his students, he reminds the Kauravas that Arjuna defeated Hanumān when they first met.[121] After failed peace negotiations with the Pāṇḍavas, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's charioteer Sañjaya warns the Kauravas that:

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[115] For this story and its many variants, see Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 186–89.

[116] *MBh* 7.28.

[117] *CM* 5.104.

[118] *CM* 5.11.

[119] *Bhagavadgītā* 11.41–42.

[120] Pollet, "Bhakta Māla," 60 and 154.

[121] *CM* 5.17.

Hanumān became the *sakhā* of Arjuna.
The entire world knows about his victory in Lanka.[122]

Vidura cautions his one hundred nephews against fighting with Arjuna by telling them:

That one who no one can defeat, the son of the wind
who is known in the universe, became his [Arjuna's] *sakhā*.[123]

Once the great Kurukṣetra War begins in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, it quickly becomes evident that the Kauravas should have heeded these warnings about facing Arjuna and Hanumān in battle.

As noted earlier, although Hanumān promises Bhīma in the *Book of the Forest* in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic that "perching on the flagstaff of Vijaya, I shall utter fearful roars that will rob your enemies of their lives," the name of the monkey on Arjuna's banner in the Battle of Kurukṣetra is never mentioned in the war books of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata.*[124] Yet in several retellings in regional languages, not only is the monkey identified as Hanumān, but this monkey is a key player in the war. In Ranna's eleventh-century Kannada *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, Duryodhana takes the time to insult "Raghava's beloved aide" on Arjuna's flag and says that "it is in a monkey's nature to fickle!"[125] Rocky Miranda points out that in the Konkani *Bhārata*, Hanumān appears in all of the war books and that he is shown "destroying a yajna performed by Duryodhana in order to win the war."[126] William Smith observes that in Sāraḷādāsa's Oriya retelling, Hanumān advises Krishna and saves Arjuna's life twice by adopting his gigantic form and using "his great strength to press the chariot down into the underworld" while weapons are being fired at the Pāṇḍava prince.[127] We find a similar scene in the *Book of Karṇa* of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* when Indra appears and instructs Hanumān to protect Arjuna by using his weight to sink the chariot into *pātāla*, the netherworld.[128]

What sets Cauhān's depiction of Hanumān in the Kurukṣetra War apart from other retellings, however, is the Bhasha poet's presentation of Hanumān as an archer fighting alongside Arjuna. In Cauhān's *Book of Bhīṣma*, while Arjuna is engaged in combat against Bhagadatta and Bhagadatta's particularly intimidating war elephant Supratīka, Krishna says:

"Along with Pārtha and the chariot,
you must protect us, Hanumān!"

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[122] *arjuna kīna sakhā hanumānā laṅkā bijaya sakala jaga jānā* || *CM* 5.58 ||

Note that later on in the Bhasha *Book of Effort*, Krishna praises Vidura by likening him to the "incomparable" (*ananya*) *bhakta* Hanumān (*CM* 5.89).

[123] *sake jīti nahiṃ pavanakumārā kīnhe sakhā bidita saṃsārā* || *CM* 5.63 ||

[124] *MBh* 3.150.16, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 2:509.

[125] Ranna, *Sāhasabhīmavijayam* 3.41, trans. Sundaram and Sharon in Ranna, *Gadāyuddham,* 83.

[126] Miranda, "Old Konkani *Bharata*," 356.

[127] Smith, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Lore," 146.

[128] *CM* 8.13.

Saying this for the sake of his *bhakta*,
Bhagavān became enchanted.[129]

Immediately after this receiving this command, Hanumān engages in combat with Supratīka. In their visual representation of this episode, the artist of the 1758 illustrated manuscript of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* depicts Hanumān in his giant celestial form charging Supratīka with a mace or club,[130] which as Lutgendorf points out, is the "distinctive weapon" of Hanumān.[131]

But then Cauhān goes on to describe Hanumān launching one hundred thousand arrows (*lakṣa bāṇa*) at Bhagadatta.[132] This is a rather unusual and unique depiction of Hanumān as a warrior. As noted above, like his half-brother Bhīma, Hanumān's weapon of choice within the Rāmāyaṇa tradition is usually the *gadā*, a mace or club. By having Hanumān fight with a bow and arrow, Cauhān implicitly likens Hanumān to two of the greatest archers in the South Asian epics: Rāma and Arjuna. Throughout his account of the Battle at Kurukṣetra, Cauhān describes Hanumān firing arrows at Bhīṣma, Jayadratha, Droṇa, and Karṇa.[133] Cauhān also depicts Bhīṣma, Karṇa, and Śalya trying to shoot Hanumān down with arrows.[134] Clearly, these powerful Kaurava generals all see Hanumān as a formidable archer and a distinct threat.

After the conclusion of the Kurukṣetra War, the next time we see Hanumān in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is in an episode in the *Book of the Horse Sacrifice*.[135] Cauhān begins this book with Vyāsa encouraging Yudhiṣṭhira to perform the *aśvamedha* or "horse sacrifice"[136] on the basis that "Rāmacandra, the son of Daśaratha, who destroyed the clan of Rāvaṇa" also completed this ritual.[137] Krishna further advises Yudhiṣṭhira that a certain type of gold that is only available in Lanka, which is currently ruled by Rāvaṇa's younger brother Vibhīṣaṇa, is necessary for the horse sacrifice. Arjuna volunteers to retrieve the gold from Vibhīṣaṇa and heads to Lanka.[138] While there are accounts of Sahadeva sending envoys to Lanka to meet with Vibhīṣaṇa as part of

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[129] *hama pāratha aru ratha sahita tuma rakṣaka hanumānā*
yaha kaha ke mohite bhaye bhakta hetu bhagavāna || *CM* 6.25 ||

[130] Cauhān, *Mahābhārat*, Or.13180.

[131] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 257.

[132] *CM* 6.25.

[133] *CM* 6.52, 7.29, 7.46, 7.49, 8.17, and 8.20.

[134] *CM* 6.30, 8.19, and 9.4.

[135] *CM* 15.13–19.

[136] John Smith explains that "in the horse sacrifice, a horse is released to wander at will for a year, and the sacrificing king claims for himself all of the territory over which it travels. This necessarily involves doing battle with the rulers of the lands in question" (*Mahābhārata: Abridged Translation,* 715n1).

[137] *rāmacandra daśaratha kumārā rāvaṇa baṃśa kiyo saṃhārā* || *CM* 15.1 ||

Note that the fact that Rāma completed the *aśvamedha* ritual is not brought up in the corresponding passage of the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic. See *MBh* 14.13.

[138] *CM* 15.13–14.

Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* ceremony in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, Villi's *Pāratam*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, and the Malayalam retellings of Śankaran, Cĕṟuśśeri, Tuñcattŭ Ĕḻuttacchan, and Ayyanappiḷḷa Āśān, the story of Arjuna traveling to Lanka seems to be unique to Cauhān's Bhasha composition.[139]

In the Bhasha *Book of the Horse Sacrifice*, when Arjuna approaches Lanka he attacks a demon in the service of Vibhīṣaṇa. The demon retreats to Lanka where he meets Hanumān and describes his attacker saying, "I thought that it was Rāma or that Lakṣmaṇa had arrived."[140] The delighted Hanumān goes to investigate but is disappointed to see that the intruder is neither Rāma nor Lakṣmaṇa. Arjuna identifies himself but he does not seem to recognize his *sakhā* Hanumān and he gives the divine monkey a lengthy recap of the events of the Rāmāyaṇa that lasts for more than twenty lines.[141] After Arjuna tells Hanumān that he has come to retrieve the gold from Lanka, Hanumān admonishes Arjuna and says that the Pāṇḍava has become arrogant since Kurukṣetra. And then just as in the episode in the *Book of the Beginnings*, we see Arjuna and Hanumān get into an argument about the bridge that Hanumān and his monkey companions built to Lanka for Rāma. Once again, Arjuna begins to construct a bridge of arrows that he claims can support the weight of Hanumān. But before Hanumān can step on the bridge, Krishna provides the monkey with a divine vision and wherever Hanumān looks, all he sees is Krishna's body. Deeply ashamed, Hanumān runs to Arjuna and apologizes. Hanumān then crosses the ocean to Lanka and obtains the gold that Arjuna needs for the horse sacrifice. When Hanumān gives the gold to Arjuna, Cauhān concludes the episode by telling us:

> Then Hanumān told Arjuna:
> "Now I am your servant.
> Whenever you think of me, I will come to your side."
> And Hanumān illuminated these words.[142]

With this episode, we see a shift in Arjuna and Hanumān's relationship with Hanumān treating Arjuna with the same deferential respect that he has previously reserved for Rāma and Krishna in Cauhān's Bhasha poem. Instead of simply being Arjuna's *sakhā*, Hanumān now seems to be Arjuna's *bhakta* as well. Hanumān's description of himself as Arjuna's "servant" (*sevaka*) also brings to mind Nābhādās's characterization of Hanumān as the master of the "servitor's splendor" (*dāsa dīpati*) in his account of the nine masters of ninefold *bhakti* in the *Bhaktamāl*.[143]

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[139] See *MBh* 2.28.50–55; *VP* 2.1.61–65; Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* 2.21–50; *CM* 5.11; and Harindranath and Purushothaman, "*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam."

In this episode in all of the Mahābhārata retellings that were composed in South Indian regional languages, the messenger that Sahadeva sends to Vibhīṣaṇa is Bhīma's half-demon son, Ghaṭotkaca.

[140] *maiṃ jānata hauṃ rāmahahiṃ kī tau lakṣmaṇa āhi* || *CM* 15.14 ||

[141] *CM* 15.15–16.

[142] *taba hanumata arjuna sana kaheū hama sevaka aba rāura aheū*
jahaṃ sumirahu āveṃ tohiṃ pāsā aru hanumata yaha bacana prakāsā || *CM* 15.19 ||

[143] Pollet, "Bhakta Māla," 60 and 154.

When the *aśvamedha* ritual actually begins in Cauhān's text and Arjuna starts to follow the sacrificial horse across various lands, we see much more of Hanumān. Towards the beginning of Arjuna's journey, Krishna once again instructs Hanumān to protect Arjuna.[144] While passing through Bengal, Arjuna is attacked by a group of demons. Cauhān then tells us:

> One demoness saw Hanumān
> and she called out: "Run! Run!
> Brothers, I know this monkey,
> he burned the city of Lanka in an instant."[145]

In this scene, Hanumān's mere presence in Arjuna's chariot protects the Pāṇḍava prince.

As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the *Book of the Horse Sacrifice* in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat,* like several other premodern Mahābhārata retellings, follows the events of the twelfth-century Sanskrit *Jaiminibhārata*. In a scene in Cauhān's poem that is clearly drawn from the *Jaiminibhārata*, Arjuna engages in combat with a king named Vīravarma.[146] During the battle, Hanumān pulls Vīravarma's chariot into the sky in order to save Arjuna.[147] After recovering, Vīravarma is delighted to meet Hanumān who then blesses the king.[148]

Why does Hanumān play such a prominent role in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*? One possible explanation is the increasing popularity of Hanumān throughout early-modern South Asia. Lutgendorf notes that beginning in the fifteenth century, there was an "iconographic boom" of depictions of Hanumān throughout the Indian subcontinent that "roughly coincides with the elaboration of Hanuman's deeds in later Puranas and regional Ramayanas."[149] As we have seen, the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is not the only regional retelling of the epic to increase Hanumān's presence in the narrative. Smith points out that in his Oriya poem, Sāraḷādāsa "tells the story of Hanumān's birth and background, not once but three different times."[150] Miranda describes an episode in the *Book of the Horse Sacrifice* in the Konkani *Bhārata* in which Arjuna and Hanumān have to rescue a kidnapped princess from the monkey army of Sugrīva.[151] The consistent presence of Hanumān in Cauhān's poem, however, is unique. Hanumān permeates the *Mahābhārat* from the first rendering of the bridge of arrows story in the *Book of the Beginnings* all the way up to the invocation of the text's final book, the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*:

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[144] *CM* 15.46.

[145] *daityani eka dīkha hanumānā bhāgu bhāgu so karai bakhānā*
vaha bandar ke jānā bhāī pala mahaṃ laṅkāpurī jarāī || *CM* 15.51 ||

[146] On the *Jaiminibhārata* scene, see Satyabrata Das and U.N. Sahu, "Aswamedha Episode and Jaimini Bharata in the Tradition of Mahabharata: Bengali, Assamese and Oriya Version," *Orissa Review* 66, no. 9 (2010): 76.

[147] This scene is depicted in an illustrated manuscript of the Persian *Razmnāmah* (ca. 1582) that was copied around 1598. See *Razmnāmah*, British Library, London: Or.12076, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_12076_f080v.

[148] *CM* 15.79.

[149] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 60.

[150] Smith, "*Rāmāyaṇa* Lore," 144.

[151] Miranda, "Old Konkani *Bharata*," 357.

In my heart, I think of and place my trust in that one:
Hanumān who removes innumerable obstacles.[152]

Another possible explanation for Hanumān's prominence in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is that Cauhān might have been a member of the Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* in North India. Patton Burchett has recently observed that Hanumān was an important figure in the Rāmānandī tradition. He notes that the Rāmānandīs of Galta in present-day Rajasthan chose to "dedicate the very first temple they constructed to Hanumān."[153] Burchett adds that "potentially adding to the evidence that Hanumān played a key role in the early Rāmānandī community, R.S. McGregor notes that two early seventeenth-century Brajbhasha adaptations of the Sanskrit drama the *Hanumān-nāṭaka* (a version of the Rām story centered on the deeds of Hanumān) indicate a separate Hanumān-focused strand of early Rāmānandī literature."[154] These two Bhasha retellings were composed by Prāṇcand Cauhān in 1610 and Hṛdayrām in 1623.[155] Along with its poet sharing the same family name as the author of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, the 1610 Bhasha *Hanumānnāṭaka* also shares the same primary meter of Sabalsingh Cauhān's Mahābhārata retelling: the *caupāī*.[156] Monika Horstmann describes a third Bhasha retelling of the *Hanumānnāṭaka* by another Rāmānandī poet: Govindānand's *Rāmcaritraratnāvalī* (Garland of Jewels of the Deeds of Rāma, 1793).[157] Notably, in the invocations in the beginning of his *Book of Bhīṣma*, Cauhān speaks of "singing the attributes of the drama (*nāṭaka*) of Hanumān."[158]

Some scholars might see the intertextual relationship between Tulsīdās's sixteenth-century *Rāmcaritmānas* and Cauhān's seventeenth-century *Mahābhārat* as further evidence that Sabalsingh Cauhān is a Rāmānandī poet. As Vasudha Paramasivan points out, modern scholarship has assumed that the *Rāmcaritmānas* is "the theological core of the Ramanandi *sampraday*."[159] Yet Paramasivan has also convincingly shown that the *Rāmcaritmānas* only became an important scripture for the Rāmānandīs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, coinciding with the production of two of the earliest and most prominent commentaries on the *Rāmcaritmānas* by members of the Rāmānandī Rasika ascetic community: Mahant Rāmcaraṇdās's *Ānandlaharī* (1808) and Śivlāl Pāthak's *Mānasmayaṅk* (1818). While acknowledging that Tulsīdās is present in the seventeenth-century *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhādās, who is "generally considered a Ramanandi within the tradition," Paramasivan also states that it is telling that "Nabhadas does not include Tulsidas within any of the lineages of the Ramanandi

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[152] *agaṇit bighana haraṇa hanumānā so bharosa maiṃ mana anumānā* || *CM* 18.1 ||

[153] Patton E. Burchett, *A Genealogy of Devotion: Bhakti, Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism in North India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 165.

[154] Burchett, 166.

[155] McGregor, *Hindi Literature,* 109.

[156] McGregor, 109.

[157] Monika Horstmann, "Power and Status: Rāmānandī Warrior Ascetics in 18th-Century Jaipur" in *Asceticism and Power in South and South East Asia*, ed. Peter Flügel and Gustaaf Houtmann (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

[158] *hanumāna gāvaiṃ guṇa nāṭaka* || *CM* 6.1 ||

[159] Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 108.

religious community" in the *Bhaktamāl.*[160] She further explains that "in the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the *rasik*s produced several works of poetry and theology and there is little evidence that the *Rāmcaritmānas* figured either in the literature or the religious practices of the *sampraday*."[161] If Cauhān was an active member of the Rāmānandī *sampradāya*, it is unlikely that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was an important theological work for him.

I strongly suspect that Hanumān's prominence in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is another reflection of the influence of Tulsīdās's poetry on Cauhān. While Lutgendorf describes Hanumān's role in Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas* as "muted" and "subdued,"[162] he also notes that the divine monkey is a key figure in Tulsī's *Vinayapatrikā* and *Kavitāvalī*.[163] Imre Bangha adds that "certain editions give the forty-four *kabitt*s of the vulgate *Hanumānbāhuk*, the ailing Tulsī's prayers to Hanuman, as an appendix to the *Kavitāvalī*."[164] Lutgendorf observes that in the songs of the *Hanumānbāhuk* (Arms of Hanumān) "for the first time, the poet sometimes refers to Hanuman, not Rama, as 'Tulsi's Lord.'"[165] In one verse in the *Hanumānbāhuk*, Tulsīdās specifically celebrates Hanumān's role during the Battle of Kurukṣetra:

> In the Bhārata war, the king of the monkeys on the flag of the chariot of Pārtha roared
> and hearing this, the army of the king of the Kurus scurried in confusion.
> Droṇa and Bhīṣma said: "The son of the wind is the great hero.
> His strength is the water of the ocean of the *rasa* of heroism.
> That beautiful monkey in child's play reached out to the sun from the earth.
> He leaped in less than a leap to the surface of the sky."
> Bowing and bowing their heads and joining and joining their hands, the warriors looked.
> Seeing Hanumān, all the lives in the world obtain fruit.[166]

The descriptions of Hanumān on the "back of the tortoise" (*kamaṭha kī pīṭhi*) in the *Hanumānbāhuk* and as the "breaker of the pride of Bhima, Arjuna, and Garuda, protective banner

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[160] Paramasivan, 9 and 11.

[161] Paramasivan, 108.

[162] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 94.

[163] Lutgendorf, 95.

[164] Bangha, "Writing Devotion," 146.

[165] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 98.

The immensely popular praise poem, the *Hanumāncālīsā* (Forty Verses to Hanumān), is also attributed to Tulsī, although as Lutgendorf notes, this text was likely only composed "sometime in the eighteenth century" (100).

[166] *bhārata meṃ pāratha ke rathaketu kapirāja gājyo suni kurūrāja dala halabala bho*
kahyo drona bhīṣama samīrasuta mahābīra bīra rasa bārinidhi jāko bala jala bho
bānara subhāya bālakeli bhūmi bhānu lāgi phalaṃga phalāṃga hūṃ teṃ ghāṭi nabha tala bho
nāi nāi mātha jori jori hātha jodhā johaiṃ hanumāna dekhe jaga jīvana ko phala bho|| Tulsīdās, *Hanumānbāhuk* 5 ||
I am following: Tulsīdās, *Hanumānbāhuk* (*Hanumānbāhuk Saṭīk*), ed. Mahāvīrprasād Mālvīya Vaidya (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1994).

of Dhananjaya's chariot" in the *Vinayapatrikā* also suggest that Tulsī is familiar with the bridge of arrows story that Cauhān keeps on returning to in his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*.[167]

We also find hagiographical links between Tulsīdās and Hanumān in Bhasha literature as early as 1712. In his Bhasha commentary on the *Bhaktamāl,* the *Bhaktirasabodhinī (Awakening of the Rasa of Bhakti),* Priyādās, a member of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*, describes a series of meetings between Tulsī and Hanumān in which Hanumān teaches the poet how to recognize Rāma.[168] In the modern context, Lutgendorf remarks that Tulsī "is hailed today as the great preceptor of Hanuman worship in the densely populated Hindi-speaking regions of northern and central India."[169] Given how much Cauhān draws on other elements of Tulsīdās's poetry throughout his text, I contend that the increased presence of Hanumān in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is another way in which Cauhān pay tributes to Tulsīdās.

Equating Krishna with Rāma

The final type of Rāmāyaṇa allusion that Cauhān uses throughout his *Mahābhārat* is passages in which characters describe or identify Krishna with his earlier incarnation of Rāma. I suggest that this equating of Krishna with Rāma is yet another way in which Cauhān emulates Tulsīdās.

As we saw in Chapter Two, while Draupadī begins her extensive prayer to Krishna during her attempted disrobing in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* by addressing the deity as "Rādhā's lover" (*rādhāramaṇa*), in the very next line of her plea she calls him "lord of the Raghus" (*raghunāthā*) and describes how he came to the aid of Bharata, Sugrīva, and Vibhīṣaṇa, and then killed Rāvaṇa.[170] The fact that Cauhān starts his account of this paramount *bhakti* tableau (to borrow Hiltebeitel's term) with Draupadī calling Krishna by a distinct epithet for Rāma and then recounting some of Rāma's most famous deeds is highly significant. Cauhān is making it abundantly clear to his audience that Krishna is Rāma and Rāma is Krishna.

As the narrative of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* continues, Cauhān frequently equates Krishna with Rāma. In the *Book of Virāṭa's Court*, for instance, when Krishna comes to the Matsya kingdom to attend the wedding of his nephew Abhimanyu and Virāṭa's daughter Uttarā, the Pāṇḍavas are delighted and Yudhiṣṭhira breaks into song and begins to lavishly praise Krishna. While Yudhiṣṭhira uses several epithets that are distinct titles for Krishna, such as "son of Yadu" (*yadunandana*), "shelter of Braj" (*brajachāvan*), and the "lord of Rādhā" (*rādhāvara*), the Pāṇḍava also addresses the deity as the "ornament of the daughter of Janaka" (*janakasutā bhūṣaṇa*), which is a reference to Rāma's identity as Sītā's husband.[171]

Yudhiṣṭhira goes on to praise Krishna in detail on several other occasions in Cauhān's text and he always alludes in some way to Rāma and his deeds. As I pointed out in Chapter Two,

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[167] Tulsīdās, *Hanumānbāhuk* 7; and Tulsīdās, *Vinayapatrikā* 28.3, trans. Lutgendorf in *Hanuman's Tale*, 96.

[168] For detailed accounts of this story, see John Stratton Hawley, "Tulsidas" in *Songs of the Saints*, 149–50; and Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 13.

[169] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 92.

[170] *rādhāramaṇa bacana sunu mere kīna bilāpa kalāpa karere*
būḍata biraha sindhu raghunāthā jimi gahilīna bharata kara hāthā
jimi kapīśa sugrīva ubārā rākhi bibhīṣaṇa rāvaṇa mārā || *CM* 2.57 ||

[171] *CM* 4.59.

Yudhiṣṭhira offers two long multi-stanzaic hymns to Krishna in the Bhasha *Book of Effort*.[172] Yudhiṣṭhira begins the first of these prayers by stating:

> The Vedas speak of you as *nirguṇa*,
> but for the sake of your people, Bhagavān, you are *saguṇa*.[173]

This reference to Krishna being both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* immediately brings to mind the multiple accounts of the compatibility of Rāma's iconic and aniconic forms in Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas*.[174] For example, in the first book of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Śiva tells Pārvatī:

> There is no difference in God, with [*sagunahi*] or without attributes [*agunahi*]—
> so sages, *purāṇas,* scholars and Veda all declare.
> That One, without attributes [*aguna*] and form, indivisible and unborn,
> acquires qualities [*saguna*] by the power of devotees'[*bhagata*] love.[175]

As the first prayer in the *Book of Effort* continues, Yudhiṣṭhira (like Cauhān's Draupadī in her plea to Krishna during her disrobing) repeatedly refers to the deeds of both Rāma, such as his rule over Ayodhya and his slaying of Rāvaṇa and his brother Kumbhakarṇa, and Krishna, such as his generosity towards Śrīdāmā and the vanquishing of Pūtanā, Tṛṇāvarta, and Śiśupāla.[176]

Yudhiṣṭhira commences his second lengthy prayer to Krishna in the *Book of Effort* by proclaiming "victory" (*jaya*) to "Rukmiṇī's lover" (*rukmiṇīramaṇa*) and the one who lived in the "forest grove of the illustrious Vrindavan" *(śrībṛndābipina*).[177] He then, however, proceeds to describe several well-known Vaiṣṇava *bhakta*s who are not associated with Krishna including Gajendra, Prahlāda, and Dhruva. Moreover, more than half of these *bhakta*s are devotees of Rāma. Yudhiṣṭhira speaks of the "impure woman named Śabarī" (*śabarī nāma apāvana nārī*), the Nishad king (*niṣādarāja*) Guha, the "lord of bears" (*bhālukīśa*) Jāmbavān, and "Rāvaṇa's brother named Vibhīṣaṇa" (*rāvaṇabandhu bibhīṣaṇa nāmā*).[178] The first stanza of this hymn ends with the following couplet about Vālmīki and the name of Rāma:

> Sabalsingh Cauhān says:
> Even though Vālmīki chanted backwards,

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[172] *CM* 5.34–35 and 5.66–67.

[173] *yadyapi nirguṇa beda bakhānā janahita saguṇa hota bhagavān* || *CM* 5.34 ||

[174] See Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 36–39.

[175] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.116.1–2, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:239.

For another example of this, see Jaṭāyū's praise of Rāma in the *Rāmcaritmānas* which I discuss in Chapter One.

[176] *CM* 5.35.

[177] *CM* 5.66.

[178] *CM* 5.66–67.

only saying half of the name,
he still was granted that immovable abode.[179]

This is a clear reference to the story we saw earlier in which Vālmīki is still saved by the power of *rāmnām* even though he is taught to chant "*marā, marā*" instead of "*rāma, rāma*." Recall that the supremacy of the name of Rāma is a major theological component of Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas*. As Yudhiṣṭhira continues to praise Krishna, he refers to the deity by names that remind us of Krishna's youth in Vrindavan, such as "lord of the *gopī*s" (*gopīpati*) and Girivardhārī.[180] The references to Rāma's *bhakta*s and the potency of *rāmnām* in this prayer, however, make it apparent that Cauhān is muddling the distinctions between Krishna and Rāma.

Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira are not the only characters to equate Krishna with Rāma. At another point in Cauhān's *Book of Effort*, Gāndhārī tries to convince Duryodhana to not wage war against the Pāṇḍavas because they have Krishna on their side.[181] As evidence of Krishna's prowess, Gāndhārī lists a number of demons and formidable men who Krishna has defeated or killed. While Gāndhārī gives the names of many enemies Krishna overpowered as an adolescent, including Keśī, Kaṃsa, Aghāsura, Bakāsura, Cāṇūra, Tṛṇāvarta, and Pūtanā, she begins her list with Rāma's most famous foe Rāvaṇa and his brother Kumbhakarṇa. She also lists several other demons Rāma vanquished such as Subāhu, Tāṭakā, Mārīca, Khara, Dūṣaṇa, Trisirā, Kabandha, and Virādha. Gāndhārī concludes her warning to her eldest son by asking:

Who can defeat the lord of the Raghus
who became the companion of the Pāṇḍavas?[182]

In the *Book of Bhīṣma* in both the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, there is a scene during the Battle of Kurukṣetra in which Krishna almost breaks his promise to not partake in the war and charges at Bhīṣma with his discus.[183] In both texts, Bhīṣma worships Krishna before Arjuna manages to restrain the deity.[184] Unlike his eulogy in the Sanskrit epic, however, in the Bhasha poem Bhīṣma concludes his ode by praising Rāma:

You killed Rāvaṇa along with his clan
and gave Vibhīṣaṇa the kingdom of Lanka.

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[179] *bālamīki ulaṭā jape kahyo ādhahī nāma*
sabalasiṃha cauhāna kahi dīnhoṃ avicala ṭhāma || *CM* 5.67 ||

[180] *CM* 5.67.

[181] *CM* 5.50–51.

[182] *te pāṇḍava ke bhayo sahāyaka jīte ko sakai tāta raghunāyaka* || *CM* 5.51 ||

[183] *MBh* 6.102 and *CM* 6.52–53.

[184] I should point out that Bhīṣma's praise of Krishna in this episode receives significant attention in devotional Mahābhārata retellings including the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (1.9.32–36), Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā* (539–41), Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* (6.6.37–48), and Villi's *Pāratam* (6.3.14–23). This scene is also the subject of at least two Bhasha *pada*s attributed to Sūrdās (*Sūrsagar* 356–57).

With the touch of your foot, you saved Ahalyā
the women of Gautama who was cursed to be stone.[185]

Gāndhārī's and Bhīṣma's words reveal that the identification of Krishna with Rāma is not just restricted to the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. We also see Cauhān use his own authorial voice to link Krishna to Rāma. The *Book of Bhīṣma*, for instance, concludes with the following couplet:

Sabalsingh Cauhān says:
Speaking entirely of
Rāma, the lion,[186] Govinda, and Hari,
I have told the *Book of Bhīṣma*.[187]

Bhīṣma once again stresses that Krishna is Rāma in the *Book of Peace* of Cauhān's poem when he teaches Yudhiṣṭhira about the one thousand names of Viṣṇu.[188] As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the *Viṣṇusahasranāmastotra* (Hymn of the Thousand Names of Viṣṇu) is found in the *Book of Instructions* of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[189] Although Cauhān's Bhīṣma does not list all one thousand names of Viṣṇu like his counterpart in the Sanskrit epic, he does describe the benefits of chanting these names. He tells Yudhiṣṭhira that when the one thousand names are recited "sin cannot survive" (*pāpa na rāhai*) and "glory arrives" (*mahimā ānā*).[190] Yet Bhīṣma also explicitly states that the name of Rāma is equal to the one thousand names of Viṣṇu:

rāma ramahi rāme rama rāmā rāma sahastrana nāma samānā. [191]

This line seems to be a Bhasha translation of the final verse of Budhakauśika's Sanskrit *Rāmarakṣāstotra* (*Stotra* to Rāma for his Protection):

rāma rāmeti rāmeti rame rāme manorame sahasranāma tattulyaṃ rāmanāma varānane.[192]

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[185] *rāvaṇa kula sameta badha kīnhyo laṅkā rājya bibhīṣaṇa dīnhyo*
śāpa śilā gautama kī nārī parasata caraṇa ahalyā tārī || *CM* 6.53 ||

[186] Note that in their editions of the text, both Pāṇḍey and Śarmā have *rāma kṛṣṇa* instead of *rāma siṃha*. See 6.134 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 6.134 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[187] *rāma siṃha gobinda hari kījai sadā bakhāna*
bhāṣā bhīṣmaparba kaha sabalasiṃha cauhāna || *CM* 6.64 ||

[188] *CM* 14.7–8.

[189] *MBh* 13.135.14–20.

[190] *CM* 14.7–8.

[191] *CM* 14.7.

In their editions, both Pāṇḍey and Śarmā have *sukhadhāmā* ("storehouse of happiness") instead of *samānā* ("equal to"). See 14.16 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 14.16 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[192] Budhakauśika, *Rāmarakṣāstotra* 38. This is from what Gudrun Bühnemann describes as the "modern" version of the *stotra* in *Budha-Kauśika's Rāmarakṣāstotra: A Contribution to the Study of Sanskrit Devotional Poetry* (Vienna: Indologisches Institut der Universität Wien, 1983), 29.

> Beautiful faced-one, I delight in the handsome Rāma by uttering (the name) 'Rāma, Rāma, Rāma.' Rāma's name is equal to the one thousand names (of Viṣṇu).[193]

Versions of the *Rāmarakṣāstotra* are found in the Sanskrit *Padmapurāṇa* (Legend of Padma) as well as in the *Ānandarāmāyaṇa*.[194] Ramdas Lamb points out that the above verse is one of the "most popular verses from the *stotra*, presented as a teaching by Shiva to Parvati" and that it is "frequently recited by North Indian Ram *bhakta*s today. It expresses the supremacy of *Ramnam* over all other names."[195] Tulsī also alludes to this *Rāmarakṣāstotra* verse in his *Rāmcaritmānas*:

> Valmiki, first poet, learned its [Rāma's name's] might,
> for he became pure saying it backward.
> Hearing Shiva declare it equal to a thousand names,[196]
> Bhavani repeats it with her beloved.[197]

This line in Bhīṣma's discourse on the one thousand names of Viṣṇu in the Bhasha *Book of Peace* is therefore another example of Cauhān emphasizing the power of *rāmnām.* Bhīṣma concludes his lesson on the one thousand names with the following three couplets:

> Rāma, Krishna, the lord of the Raghus,
> Hari, the descendant of Raghu, Rādhā's lover,
> the all-pervasive one, Gopāla, the bearer of the Śāraṅga bow,
> and the bearer of Mount Govardhana that time.[198]
>
> The enemy of Rāvaṇa, the enemy of Kaṃsa, Hari,
> the friend of *bhakta*s, and Bhagavān,
> carefully hold and know [these names] in your heart
> and this knowledge in your thoughts and words.
>
> King! Listen and give your ears:
> that lord of the world who is the essence of everything,
> just say his names.
> Worshiping these names destroys hell.[199]

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[193] Budhakauśika, *Rāmarakṣāstotra* 38, trans. Bühnemann in *Budha-Kauśika's Rāmarakṣāstotra*, 33.

[194] Bühnemann, *Budha-Kauśika's Rāmarakṣāstotra*, 14–15.

[195] Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*, 187.

[196] While Lutgendorf translates *sahasa nāma sama* as "equal to *a* thousand names," I would translate these words as "equal to *the* thousand names." See also Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 42.

[197] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.19.3, trans. Lutgendorf in Tulsīdās, *Epic of Ram* 1:51.

[198] In their editions, both Pāṇḍey and Śarmā have *giridhārī bhagavanta* instead of *gobarddhanadhara javana*. See 14.16 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Pāṇḍey); and 14.16 of Cauhān, *Mahābhārat* (Śarmā).

[199] *rāma kṛṣṇa raghupati harī rāghava rādhāravana*
bibhu gopāla śāraṃgadhara gobarddhanadhara javana

rāvaṇāri kaṃsāri hari bhakta bandhu bhagavāna
dhyāna karau mana jāni dhari manasā bācā jāna

While Bhīṣma gives Krishna's name and four other distinct titles of this deity ("Rādhā's lover," Gopāla, "the bearer of Mount Govardhana," and "the enemy of Kaṃsa"), he begins this list with the name of Rāma and then states three other epithets of Rāma: "the lord of the Raghus" (*raghupati*), "the descendant of Raghu" (*rāghava*), and "the enemy of Rāvaṇa" (*rāvaṇāri*). The translated line from the *Rāmarakṣāstotra* and these different names of Rāma in this passage all make it impossible for Cauhān's readers to disassociate Krishna from Rāma.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the final book of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*, concludes with Yudhiṣṭhira being reunited with his family in Vaikuntha, the abode of Viṣṇu.[200] This is in contrast to the end of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in which the Pāṇḍavas and their family and friends are described as simply being in Svarga (heaven).[201] But in an even greater departure from the Sanskrit epic, Cauhān describes Yudhiṣṭhira being greeted by Rāma when he comes to Vaikuntha. Cauhān first tells us about Yudhiṣṭhira's arrival:

> In this way, Viṣṇu's attendants brought the king
> to the abode in an instant.
> Those who abandon and lose deceit and only worship,
> Rāma grants them the path.[202]

The Bhasha poet then describes Yudhiṣṭhira greeting his lord in Vaikuntha:

> "Victory to Saccidānanda, the one dark as clouds!"
> Hearing this, the illustrious Rāma himself stood up.[203]

Yudhiṣṭhira addresses the deity he sees in Vaikuntha by two different names. The first, Saccidānanda, which literally means "existence, consciousness, and bliss," is a term that is often equated with Brahman, the ultimate reality of the universe, in several schools of Hindu philosophy.[204] If we turn to Bhasha *bhakti* traditions, however, we find that Tulsī addresses Rāma as Saccidānanda ten different times in the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[205] The second name, "the one as dark as clouds" (*ghanaśyāmā*), is a title that can refer to either Krishna or Rāma.[206] But there are no absolutely no doubts that the "the illustrious Rāma" (*śrīrāmā*) in the second part of the

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sarva sāra je jagapatī itanā nāma bakhāna
nāma bhaje pātaka harata bhūpa sunau dai kāna || *CM* 14.8 ||

[200] *CM* 18.23.

[201] *MBh* 18.3.

[202] *yahi bidhi nṛpahiṃ biṣṇugaṇa kṣaṇa mahaṃ laige dhāma*
je chala chāṃḍi bhajahiṃ hara tinahiṃ deta gati rāma || *CM* 18.23 ||

[203] *jaya saccidānanda ghanaśyāmā yaha suni āpu uṭhe śrīrāmā* || *CM* 18.23 ||

[204] John A. Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 260.

[205] Callewaert and Lutgendorf, *Rāmcaritmānas Word Index,* 290–91.

[206] Callewaert and Sharma, *Dictionary of Bhakti*, 560.

above verse refers to the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition. Cauhān's choice to describe the deity who welcomes Yudhiṣṭhira to Vaikuntha as Rāma is striking. As Paramasivan notes, "Although Ram is considered an incarnation or avatar of Vishnu in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, he supersedes Vishnu as the Supreme God or Brahman."[207] By stating that the deity in Vaikuntha is Rāma rather than Viṣṇu or Krishna, Cauhān also seems to be implying that Rāma is Brahman.

I should point out that the identification of Krishna with Rāma is something that happens in *bhakti* poetry from all over South Asia. As we saw in Chapter Three, the Āḻvārs (and Villi) frequently layer Krishna with other forms of Viṣṇu in their Tamil *bhakti* compositions. For instance, consider the following verse from Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi*:

> Lord, great blazing flame,
> who conquered seven bulls
> and turned splendid Laṅkā to ashes,
>
> don't trust me!
>
> When you take me to your feet of gold
> don't ever let me run off again.[208]

In this *Tiruvāymoḻi* verse, Nammāḻvār is layering Krishna, the deity who killed seven bulls in order to win the Tamil cowherdess Piṉṉai as his bride, with Rāma, the god who demolished Rāvaṇa's kingdom of Lanka. It is also worth noting that even in the compositions of Periyāḻvār (who frequently speaks in the voice of Yaśodā) and Kulacēkarāḻvār (who uses the last ten verses of his *Perumāḷtirumoḻi* to retell the Rāmāyaṇa) we find Krishna being identified as Rāma and vice-versa. Vasudha Narayanan observes that the "alternation between Rāma and Kṛṣṇa is sharply seen in one set of verses" in Periyāḻvār's *Tirumoḻi* that "take the form of a folk song that was sung while girls played a game resembling badminton."[209] She explains that this set of verses "alternately praises Rāma and then Kṛṣṇa, thus resembling the ball tossed from side to side, with each team singing the glories of one manifestation."[210] Narayanan also notes that "the same Kulacēkara who talks in the guise of Kauśalyā and of Daśaratha (*Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi* 8.1–11 and 9.1–11) also sings as Devakī, the biological mother of Kṛṣṇa, who missed his childhood entirely (*Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi* 7.1–10)."[211] She thus concludes that "it would be quite misleading, then, to ask if the Āḻvārs were devotees of Kṛṣṇa or of Rāma."[212]

Narayanan is certainly justified in anticipating this question. In the world of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* literature, poets are frequently associated with a single incarnation or form of Viṣṇu. For instance, the Sanskrit poet Jayadeva, the Gujarati poet Narsī Mehtā, and the Bhasha poetess

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[207] Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 47.

[208] Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* 2.9.10, trans. Cutler in *Songs of Experience*, 145.

[209] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 25. See Periyāḻvār, *Tirumoḻi* 3.9.1–11.

[210] Narayanan, 25.

[211] Narayanan, 33.

[212] Narayanan, 33.

Mīrābāī are all considered to be Krishna *bhakta*s, while the Telugu poet Rāmadāsu and the Marathi poet Rāmdās are thought of as devotees of Rāma. Yet even in the works of *bhakti* poets who are labeled as "Krishna *bhakta*s" or "Rāma *bhakta*s," we find instances where these two different incarnations of Viṣṇu are identified with each other. In the Sanskrit *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* (Nectar for Krishna's Ears, c. 1300), for example, Bilvamaṅgala presents us with a poem in which after hearing a bedtime story from Yaśodā, Krishna remembers his past life as Rāma:

> "Once there was a man named Rāma." "Yes." "His
> wife was called Sītā." "Yes." "Rāvaṇa
> abducted her from Rāma during his stay in the
> Pañcavaṭī forest in obedience to his father's command."
> Hari indicating with yeses that he was listening to
> his mother's bedtime story, said,
> "My bow, my bow, where is my bow, Lakṣmaṇa?"
> May these alarmed words protect us.[213]

Although the title of Bilvamaṅgala's collection suggests that this work will solely be dedicated to expressing devotion to Krishna, the poem above clearly equates Krishna with Rāma.

When we turn to the realm of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetry in Bhasha, John Stratton Hawley points out that Sūrdās and Mīrābāī "are primarily devotees of Krishna," while Tulsī "is more closely identified with Ram."[214] Yet Hawley also notes that "Sur, the Krishna devotee, also composed poetry to Ram; and Tulsi, the poet of Ram, dedicated an entire collection of poetry to Krishna."[215] Indeed, while the majority of Tulsī's Bhasha compositions, including the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Vinayapatrikā*, and the *Kavitāvalī*, are centered on Rāma, Tulsī is also the attributed author of the *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī* (Garland of Songs to the Illustrious Krishna).

The *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī* is comprised of sixty-one *pada*s in praise of Krishna. Except for the final two poems in the collection which focus on how Krishna saved Draupadī during her attempted disrobing, the majority of the *pada*s narrate stories from the deity's youth in Vrindavan.[216] In his study of the *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī*, R.S. McGregor observes that in the eighteenth *pada* both Krishna and Rāma are called to come to lift Mount Govardhana. While McGregor does admit that the Rāma of this verse might refer to Krishna's elder brother Balarāma rather than the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, he also points out that in the Mount Govardhana episodes in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the Bhasha *pada*s of Sūrdās, Balarāma "appears strictly as an attendant of

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[213] Bilvamaṅgala, *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* 72, trans. Frances Wilson in Bilvamaṅgala, *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* (*The Love of Krishna: The Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta of Līlāśuka Bilvamaṅgala*), trans. Frances Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 166.

A very similar poem is attributed to Sūrdās. See Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God*, 53–57; and Hawley, *Krishna, the Butter Thief*, 46.

[214] John Stratton Hawley, introduction to Hawley and Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints*, 5.

[215] Hawley, 5.

For Sūrdās's Rāmāyaṇa poems, see Sūrdās, *Sūrsagar* 364–77.

[216] See Tulsīdās, *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī* 60 and 61 in Tulsīdās, *Tulsīgranthāvalī*.

Kṛṣṇa and as dependent on Kṛṣṇa in the crisis, not as a participant in Kṛṣṇa's action."[217] He goes on to postulate that Tulsī "is taking advantage here of the ambiguous designation and role of this 'Rām' to insinuate the idea of the function of his own Rām along with those of the Kṛṣṇa of his subject matter."[218] Thus Tulsī finds a way to incorporate Rāma into the *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī*.

Krishna also finds a place in Tulsī's Rāma-centric *bhakti* compositions. In his discourse on the supremacy of *rāmnām* in the opening prologue of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsī tells his audience that the two syllables in the word Rāma, *rā* and *ma*, are like:

> Bees on the lotus of the hearts of the people and
> Hari and Haladhara of the tongue's Yaśodā.[219]

While Tulsī often uses the name Hari as a synonym for Rāma, in this line of the *Rāmcaritmānas* Hari clearly refers to younger brother of Balarāma (Haladhara) and Yaśodā's foster-son Krishna.

In the *Vinayapatrikā* and the *Kavitāvalī*, Tulsī makes the identification of Rāma with Krishna more explicit. In the two hundred and fourteenth verse of the *Vinayapatrikā*, Tulsī describe Krishna's dalliances with the *gopī*s, his slaying of Pūtanā and Śiśupāla, and his death at the hands of the hunter who thought Krishna's foot was a deer.[220] Yet in the very next verse, Tulsī describes several interactions between Rāma and some of his most well-known *bhakta*s including Guha, Jaṭāyū, Śabarī, and Vibhīṣaṇa.[221] This alternation between praising the deeds of Krishna and the deeds of Rāma blurs the lines between these two incarnations. In the final book of the *Kavitāvalī*, Tulsī turns to a discussion of the glories of *rāmnām* that is very similar to the one found in the first book of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.[222] In the first line of a verse in this section of the *Kavitāvalī*, Tulsī recounts the story of Vālmīki attainting salvation by chanting "*marā marā*" instead of "*rāma rāma*." But in the third line of this same verse, Tulsī tells us that "the splendor of that Name" also protected Draupadī from being disrobed.[223] By juxtaposing the tale of Vālmīki reciting "*marā, marā*" and Draupadī calling out to Krishna in the assembly hall, Tulsī implies that it is Rāma's name that saves Draupadī from Duḥśāsana.

It is also worth pointing out that Tulsī's identification of Krishna with Rāma is also reflected in Bhasha hagiographies. In his *Bhaktirasabodhinī* commentary on the *Bhaktamāl,* Priyādās tells a story in which Tulsī visits the Madanagopāla shrine in Vrindavan, a Krishna temple that was paramount to members of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. When Tulsī comes before the image of Krishna as Madanagopāla he requests the deity to take the form of Rāma and Tulsī's wish is granted for a brief moment.[224] The *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (Stories of

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[217] R.S. McGregor, "Tulsīdās' *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96, no. 4 (1976): 525.

[218] McGregor, 526.

[219] *jana mana maṃju kaṃju madhukara se jīha jasomati hari haladhara se* || Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.20.4 ||

[220] Tulsīdās, *Vinayapatrikā* 214.3–5.

[221] Tulsīdās, *Vinayapatrikā* 215.2–5.

[222] Compare Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.19–28 and Tulsīdās, *Kavitāvalī* 7.56–109.

[223] Tulsīdās, *Kavitāvalī* 7.89, trans. Allchin in Tulsīdās, *Kavitāvalī*, 166.

[224] See Hawley, "Tulsidas" in *Songs of the Saints*, 151–51; and Paramasivan, "Text and Sect," 13.

the Fifty-Two Vaiṣṇava*s)* is attributed to Gokulnāth (traditional dates: 1551–1640), a leader of the Vallabha *sampradāya*, but as Shandip Saha explains, this work was likely "still in the process of being redacted between the late seventeenth and early decades of the eighteenth centuries."[225] The *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* identifies Tulsīdās as the elder brother of Nandadās, a sixteenth-century Krishna *bhakti* poet whose compositions were adopted into the literary traditions of the Vallabha *sampradāya*. While it is quite unlikely that Tulsīdās and Nandadās were actually brothers, it is still significant that this Bhasha hagiography is drawing such a strong connection between a devotee of Rāma and a devotee of Krishna.[226]

The examples from the *Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī*, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Vinayapatrikā*, and the *Kavitāvalī* all reveal how Tulsīdās brings together the worlds of Rāma and Krishna in his Bhasha *bhakti* compositions. Although the multiple references to Rāma in Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* far outnumber the allusions to Krishna in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Vinayapatrikā*, or the *Kavitāvalī*, it is certainly possible that Cauhān was inspired by the ways that Tulsī weaves Krishna into his different Bhasha *bhakti* compositions dedicated to the deeds of Rāma.

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As we saw in Chapter Three, Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* is undoubtedly the work of a poet who is intimately familiar with the literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community in South India. While we cannot say with much confidence that Sabalsingh Cauhān was the member of a specific Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* in North India, such as the Rāmānandīs or the Gauḍīyas, the evidence I have presented in this chapter clearly points to Cauhān being a devout Rāma *bhakta*, specifically one who is well-versed in the Bhasha *bhakti* compositions of Tulsīdās.

It is also significant that in contemporary South Asia, the prevalence of Rāma in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* of Cauhān has led a sectarian community that views the *Rāmcaritmānas* as their primary deity to adopt verses from this Mahābhārata into their daily religious practice.[227] While the *Rāmcaritmānas* is at the core of the Rāmnāmī sect in Central India, Ramdas Lamb notes that Rāmnāmīs have adopted verses from other texts into their chanting practices as long as these verses are in *caupāī-dohā* meter and "generally pertain to Ram, Ramnam, wisdom, or devotion."[228] Clearly, many verses of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* meet these criteria since verses from Cauhān's Mahābhārata retelling are recited by Rāmnāmīs in modern India.

This chapter and the previous chapter have revealed how Villi and Cauhān each anchor their Mahābhāratas in specific regional Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* contexts. In the next two chapters, I will turn to the intersection and overlapping of devotional and courtly concerns in these two poems.

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[225] Shandip Saha, "Muslims as Devotees and Outsiders: Attitudes toward Muslims in the *Vārtā* Literature of the Vallabha Sampradāya," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 324.

[226] See R.S. McGregor, "Nanddās," in Nandadās, *The Round Dance of Krishna and Uddhav's Message,* trans. R.S. McGregor (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1973), 33–34.

[227] Lamb, *Rapt in the Name*, 119.

[228] Lamb, 118.

CHAPTER FIVE

The *Pāratam* as a *Peruṅkāppiyam*: Presenting Villi's Poem as a Courtly Narrative

Despite the fact that *mahākāvya* and *peruṅkāppiyam* literally mean "long poem" or "great poem," today *mahākāvya* is frequently termed "court epic" or "court poem."[1] As Deven Patel points out, the *mahākāvya* "was the genre most closely tied to the culture of the royal court, both in its emphasis on political and ethical themes and its absorption with crafting a sophisticated language to correspond to the poet's refined aesthetic intentions."[2] Similarly, Lawrence McCrea states that the *mahākāvya* genre "is generally presumed to have been connected with the arena of royal power and self-presentation, and to have been produced and consumed mainly within royal or court settings."[3] Commenting on Māgha's seventh-century *Śiśupālavadha*, Paul Dundas notes:

> The conventional rendering of *mahākāvya* as "court poem" is hardly precise, since connections between any of the early *mahākāvya*s and specific courtly locations can only be made in approximate terms. Nonetheless, it can be conjectured with reasonable confidence that one of the main functions of a *mahākāvya* such as Magha's was to mirror the cultural ambiance and concerns of a royal court and to depict the idealized actions of mythical protagonists in light of the various emotional and social codes that governed the behavior of aristocrats and courtiers who peopled such surroundings.[4]

In Chapter Three, I discussed how the Tamil version of the *mahākāvya*, the *peruṅkāppiyam*, was an extremely productive genre in premodern South India with some of the most famous examples including Tiruttakkatēvar's ninth-century *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, Cēkkiḻār's twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam*, and Kampaṉ's twelfth-century *Irāmāvatāram*. As we will soon see, all three of these *peruṅkāppiyam*s contain royal patronage claims and/or feature detailed descriptions of courtly life. In Chapter Three, I also pointed out that several *peruṅkāppiyam*s are associated with specific religious traditions. The *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* is about a prince who becomes a Jain ascetic, the *Periyapurāṇam* narrates the deeds of the sixty-three Śaiva Nāyaṉmār, Umaṟuppulavar's seventeenth-century *Cīṟāppurāṇam* tells the story of the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi's *Tēmpāvaṇi* (1726) focuses on Joseph, the husband of Mary.

In this chapter, I show how Villi claims the Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam* genre for the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community and presents his *bhakti* narrative poem as a work of courtly literature through close readings of (1) the patronage claims in the *Pāratam*, (2) the seventh

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[1] Again, as I noted in the Introduction, just take the titles of David Smith's 1985 monograph, *Ratnākara's Haravijaya: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Court Epic*, and Indira Viswanathan Peterson's 2003 monograph, *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic: The Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi*.

[2] Patel, *Text to Tradition*, 18.

[3] Lawrence McCrea, "The Lord of Glory and the Lord of Men: Power and Partiality in Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 117.

[4] Paul Dundas, introduction to Māgha, *Śiśupālavadha* (*The Killing of Shishupala*), trans. Paul Dundas, Murty Classical Library of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), xiv–xv.

chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings* in which Arjuna embarks on a *tīrthayātra* pilgrimage throughout South Asia, and (3) the arrival of Krishna for Yudhiṣṭhira's royal consecration in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, which Villi presents in the Tamil genre known as the *ulā*.

Pronouncements of Patronage

In Chapter Three, I discussed how Villi's opening invocations to various forms of Krishna in thirty-seven of the poem's chapters mark the *Pāratam* as a Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*. Yet before the first of these invocations in the "Origins Chapter" of Villi's *Book of the Beginnings*, readers find another indication that this poem is a *peruṅkāppiyam* in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* or "special introduction" to the *Pāratam* attributed to Villi's son Varantaruvār. In this *ciṟappuppāyiram*, Varantaruvār states that the *Pāratam* was commissioned by a royal patron.

Multiple Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*s make courtly patronage claims. Anne Monius explains that "Cēkkiḻār names his royal patron, Anapāyaṉ, eleven times in the text of the *Periyapurāṇam*," and she adds that most Tamil scholars believe Anapāyaṉ to be the twelfth-century Chola king Kulōttuṅka II (r. 1133–1150).[5] Roughly after every thousandth verse of the *Irāmāvatāram*, Kampaṉ extols his patron, Caṭaiyappaṉ of Tiruvenneynallur (Tiruveṇṇeynallūr). David Shulman notes that Caṭaiyappaṉ was "probably a wealthy local noble."[6] While the earliest extant Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, does not contain any patronage claims within the actual narrative of the poem, Monius does point out that later traditions assert that the Jain monk Tiruttakkatēvar composed this *peruṅkāppiyam* in a courtly context:

> Tradition holds that that the text was composed on a dare of sorts. The poets of Maturai challenged Tiruttakkatēvar, saying that while Jains were skilled in the poetics expressive of renunciation, none knew how to praise the sentiments of love; convinced he could master the poetic art of love, the young Jain monk composed the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* and presented it in the court of Maturai, much to the delight of the king.[7]

As I noted in the Introduction, in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* of the *Pāratam*, Varantaruvār tells us that his father's patron was Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, the king of Tirumuṉaippāṭināṭu, which is the land surrounding the town of Tirukkovalur, and Villi himself praises Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ at four different points in the actual narrative of the *Pāratam*. The reign of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ has been used to date Villi to the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century by Tamil scholars.[8]

In his seminal essay "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" (1983), Dominick LaCapra asserts that the "predominance of a documentary approach in historiography is one crucial reason why complex texts—especially 'literary' texts—are either excluded from the relevant historical record or read in an extremely reduced way."[9] This approach to reading is

[5] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 117.

[6] Shulman, *Tamil*, 166.

[7] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 128.

[8] Thompson, "Mahābhārata in Tamil," 118–19; and Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 214–15.

[9] Dominick LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Context, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30.

solely concerned with what are perceived to be the "documentary" aspects of a text. LaCapra explains that "the documentary situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it."[10]

While LaCapra is an intellectual historian of European history, his point about the prevalence of a documentary approach to reading texts holds very true for the study of premodern South Asian history. As Rama Mantena points out, "one of the enduring consequences of the archival projects of the colonial state [in South Asia] … was the emphasis on the recovery of history through the search for raw information or 'facts.'"[11] Since the late eighteenth century, countless historians of South Asia have treated certain types of medieval texts, especially Indo-Persian chronicles, as "straightforward reports on an objective reality"[12] and mined more "literary" or "mythic" texts, such as the Sanskrit *purāṇa*s, for historical facts.

In the same essay, LaCapra maintains that every text has "documentary" aspects and "worklike" aspects and that the worklike "supplements empirical reality by adding to it and subtracting from it."[13] He adds: "With deceptive simplicity, one might say that while the documentary marks a difference, the worklike makes a difference—one that engages the reader in recreative dialogue with the text and the problems it raises."[14] Many scholars of South Asian literature and history have assumed that the praise of kings and emperors and the descriptions of poets performing their compositions at royal courts in premodern literary works are documentary aspects of texts that reflect historical patronage relationships. Yet few academics have entertained the idea that many of these patronage claims may primarily be worklike. In what follows, I will consider the consider the possibility that that the references to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram* and the four allusions to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the actual narrative of Villi's *Pāratam* are worklike aspects of this Tamil text. Based on comparisons of the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, and the *Pāratam,* I will suggest that Villi understands praise of courtly patrons as a poetic topos of the *peruṅkāppiyam* genre.

As noted above, the first mention of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the *Pāratam* is found in Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram*. In her work on the *Periyapurāṇam*, Monius notes that there are many similarities between Cēkkiḻār's work and the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* that we can see right from the outset of each poem: "just as the Jain author begins his long story with elegant descriptions of the bounty of the Tamil countryside, the grandeur of the royal city, and the virtue of the ruling monarch, so, too, does Cēkkiḻār preface his long set of hagiographical narratives with the same glorious praise of the Cōḻa country, the capital city, and his royal patron."[15] Vasudha Narayanan points out that two other *peruṅkāppiyam*s, Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* and Umaṟuppulavar's *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, also both begin with descriptions of a luscious countryside and a prosperous city. Narayanan explains that the *Irāmāvatāram* was a major source of inspiration for Umaṟuppulavar's poem about the life of Muḥammad: "Never having travelled to Arabia, Umaru

[10] LaCapra, 30.

[11] Rama Mantena, "The Question of History in Pre-Colonial India," *History and Theory* 46, no.3 (2007): 403.

[12] Talbot, *Last Hindu Emperor*, 31.

[13] LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History," 30.

[14] LaCapra, 30.

[15] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 117.

gives a description of Tamilnadu transposed to Arabia. In this method, too, he has a predecessor. Kampan, the author of the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, transposes the Tamil landscape to Ayodhya in north India, as when descriptions of the Kaveri river are transferred to the river Sarayu."[16] Narayanan adds that these descriptions of nature in the opening chapters of the *Irāmāvatāram* and the *Cīr̲āppurāṇam* are drawn from the five *tiṇai* or "landscape" systems found in the Caṅkam *akam* poetic anthologies about love and domestic life: the "mountainous (*kuriñci*), seaside (*neytal*), arid (*pālai*), pastoral (*mullai*), and agricultural (*marutam*) landscapes."[17]

As with Kampaṉ, Villi "transposes the Tamil landscape" to North India when he describes Yudhiṣṭhira traveling from the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom of Indraprastha to Hastinapura in the second chapter of the *Book of the Assembly Hall*. Yudhiṣṭhira first makes his way across the fields of *marutam*, before moving through the forests of *mullai*, then the mountains of *kuriñci*, and finally the shores of *neytal* before reaching Hastinapura.[18] This markedly Tamil account of the landscapes between Indraprastha and Hastinapura, however, is only found in the second book of Villi's poem. Unlike the opening chapters of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, and the *Cīr̲āppurāṇam*, the first chapter of the actual narrative of the *Pāratam*, the "Lineage of the Kurus Chapter," jumps right into a description of the Pāṇḍavas' ancestors. In this first chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings*, there is no account of the landscape of the kingdom of the Bhāratas over which the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas will wage war.

Yet while the actual narrative of the *Pāratam* does not commence with landscape descriptions, Varantaruvār's *cir̲appuppāyiram* certainly does. Varantaruvār's prologue to his father's poem begins with a detailed account of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu. As with Cēkkiḻār with the Kāvēri River in the *Periyapurāṇam* and Kampaṉ with the Sarayū River in the *Irāmāvatāram*, Varantaruvār takes his time to describe the Peṇṇai River that flows through Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu. Cēkkiḻār's verses on the Kāvēri River are unsurprisingly filled with references to Śiva:

> Flowing from the mountain peaks crowned with the crescent moon, with its waves clashing and foaming like an old man's hair, the ever-virgin Kāveri resembles the Ganges which descends upon the head of our master. Or it can be likened to the grace that flowers in the heart of our mistress, who forms part of the great Lord. For she too took her origin in the mountains, and is the source of countless benefits. Or again the cool Kāveri is like the devotees of the Lord, for it too worships the supreme Lord with offerings of fragrant flowers and water at countless Siva temples built upon the golden sand along its banks.[19]

Similarly, the first of Varantaruvār's verses that describes the Peṇṇai River in the *cir̲appuppāyiram* incorporates several images of Krishna/Viṣṇu. Varantaruvār tells us that:

> The immaculate one
> has butter smeared on his red coral mouth
> and his body is darkened
> like the dark eyes indeed of slim women.

[16] Narayanan, "Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity," 398–99.

[17] Narayanan, 401.

[18] *VP* 2.2.90–111.

[19] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 55–57, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 24.

Māl is the name of the great one,
that raincloud who drawing up the deep ocean,
swallowing the sky and the directions,
and surrounding the paddy fields
with the incomparable Peṇṇai alone,
ensures the prosperity and happiness
of the entire ancient land of Tirumuṉaippāṭi.[20]

It is clear that the "immaculate one" (*vimalaṉ*) Varantaruvār is speaking of in the beginning of this verse is the loveable, young Krishna who steals curds and butter from the women of Vrindavan. This form of Krishna would instantly be recognized by Śrīvaiṣṇava audiences who are familiar with compositions such as the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and Vedāntadeśika's *Gopālaviṃśati* and *Yādavābhyudaya*. As the verse continues, Varantaruvār describes this same deity using the name Māl, which, as we have seen earlier, is a distinctly Tamil name for Viṣṇu. While Varantaruvār is describing the landscape of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāḍu and the Peṇṇai River, a markedly Śrīvaiṣṇava Krishna/Māl clearly permeates this entire verse.

In the next verse of the *ciṟappuppāyiram*, Varantaruvār goes on to compare the Peṇṇai River to a beautiful, voluptuous woman, which is something that Tiruttakkatēvar also does with the Carai River in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* as does Kampaṉ with the Sarayū River in the *Irāmāvatāram*.[21] Just a few verses later, however, Varantaruvār makes another distinct reference to the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition by paying homage to three of the Āḻvār poets:

In this good land, Mukunda was worshiped
and lifted by the lamp of the words of the three
who were squeezed together for a night and half a day,
those poets who greatly brought forth literature
through verses of precious Tamil.
This good land is the birthplace
of two of the unique three
who are respected by all people in the place
of the god with red, matted hair (Śiva)
who even the gods and Vedas cannot see.[22]

In the first half of this verse, Varantaruvār is referring to a story about Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār, and Pēyāḻvār that is found in multiple Śrīvaiṣṇava compositions including Garuḍavāhana's twelfth-century Sanskrit hagiography, the *Divyasūricaritam* (Deeds of the Divine Sages), and

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[20] *veṇṇeyē kamaḻum pavaḷavāy vimalaṉ mey eṉa karuki melliyalār*
kaṇṇaiyē aṉaiya neṭuṅkaṭal mukantu kakaṉamum ticaikaḻum viḻuṅki
paṇṇai cūḻntu ilakum tirumuṉaippāṭi paḻaiya nāṭu aṉaittaiyum orutaṉ
peṇṇaiyē koṇṭu pōkam uyttiṭu māl puyal eṉum peyaruṭai periyōṉ || *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 6 ||

[21] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 7; Tiruttakkatēvar, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 39; and Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 1.1.17.

[22] *pā arum tamiḻāl pēr peṟum paṉuval pāvalar pāti nāḷ iravil*
mūvarum nerukki moḻi viḻakku ēṟṟi mukuntaṉai toḻuta naṉṉāṭu
tēvarum maṟaiyum iṉṉamum kāṇā ceñcaṭai kaṭavuḷai pāṭi
yāvarum matittōr mūvaril iruvar piṟanta nāṭu inta naṉṉāṭu || *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 9 ||

Vedāntadeśika's Sanskrit *stotra*, the *Dehalīśastuti* (Praise of the Lord on the Porch). As Steven Hopkins explains, this story describes the first meeting of these three Āḻvār poets:

> According to a local legend (*sthalapurāṇa*), it was at Tirukkōvalūr that the first three Āḻvārs of the southern Vaiṣṇava tradition received a revelation from Vishnu. While huddled on the temple porch (*iṭaikaḻi*) in a rainstorm, the three poets suddenly felt another presence among them; each felt an uncanny force that pressed them in, squeezing them together in the small space of the porch. With their "lamp of knowledge" they perceived that it was Vishnu himself who had entered the porch, and expanding his size, had begun to squeeze them tight. This experience inspired in all three simultaneously an ecstatic outpouring of song. They are "squeezed" into song, each singing the Tamil poems attributed to them in the *Divyaprabandham*.[23]

The reference to the "lamp of the words" (*moḻi viḷakku*) and the three Āḻvārs being "squeezed" (*nerukki*) together indicate that Varantaruvār is alluding to the same story of Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār, and Pēyāḻvār on the porch in Tirukkovalur that the Śrīvaiṣṇava preceptors Garuḍavāhana and Vedāntadeśika are describing in their Sanskrit compositions.

The second half of this verse, however, mentions two Tamil Śaiva poets. As we saw in Chapter One, the Nāyaṉmār poets Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar, are known as the *mūvar mutalikaḷ* or the "first three saints." In the *Periyapurāṇam*, Cēkkiḻār tells us that both Cuntarar and Appar were born in Tirumuṉaippāṭināḍu.[24] Thus Varantaruvār uses references to both Āḻvār and Nāyaṉmār poets to describe the glories of the land surrounding Tirukkovalur. Yet it is important to recognize the different ways that Varantaruvār describes the Śrīvaiṣṇava and the Śaiva poets. Varantaruvār does reverentially say that Cuntarar and Appar are "respected by all people" in the above verse. But he also takes care to call Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār, and Pēyāḻvār "those poets (*pāvalar*) who greatly brought forth literature (*paṉuval*) through verses of precious (*arum*) Tamil." Cuntarar and Appar are two of the most well-known Tamil Śaiva poets, yet Varantaruvār makes no mention of their beloved *bhakti* compositions in the *Tirumuṟai*. There are also noticeable differences in the ways that Varantaruvār describes the religiosity of these two different sets of poets. Varantaruvār does not describe Cuntarar and Appar actually worshiping Śiva. He just says that these two members of the *mūvar mutalikaḷ* are respected by other Śaiva devotees. With the first three Āḻvārs, however, Varantaruvār points out that Viṣṇu "was worshiped (*toḻuta*) and lifted (*ēṟṟi*) by the lamp of the words" of Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār, and Pēyāḻvār. Not only is Varantaruvār describing these Āḻvārs as exemplary poets in this verse of the *ciṟappuppāyiram*, but he is also describing them as exemplary devotees.

After his accounts of the landscape, wealth, and women of Tirumuṉaippāṭināḍu, which once again resemble those in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Irāmāvatāram*, Varantaruvār turns to his father, Villi. Varantaruvār describes Villi as a skilled poet who praised "the supreme being with a crown of *tulsī*" (*paintuḻāy muṭi paramaṉ*) or Viṣṇu, who was well-versed in *muttamiḻ* or "the three types of Tamil,"[25] and who was lifted up by the praise of the kings from the three great Tamil empires: the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas.[26] These three

[23] Hopkins, *Singing the Body*, 171.

[24] Cēkkiḻār, *Periyapurāṇam* 147 and 1267.

[25] The three types of Tamil are "*iyal* (verse and prose, meant for recitation); *icai* (musical composition, song); and *nāṭakam* (drama)" (Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, 40n72).

[26] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 15–16.

kings known as the *mūvēntar* are a fixture of Tamil literature. Norman Cutler explains that "Caṅkam poems of the *puṟam* type sketch a political landscape in which rulers of these three dynasties frequently waged war against one another, as well as against lesser chieftains whose spheres of influence were confined to the more remote areas of the Tamil country."[27] The *mūvēntar* also play an important role in the lauded Tamil narrative poem, Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ's *Cilappatikāram*. Cutler notes that "the story of *Cilappatikāram* moves through the domains of all three kings, and the text accordingly is divided into three sections (*kāṇṭam*), named after the capital cities of the three kingdoms— Pukār (Cōḻa), Maturai (Pāṇṭiya), and Vañci (Cēra)."[28]

Although Villi's Mahābhārata retelling is primarily set in North India, the *mūvēntar* make an extended appearance in the seventeenth day of the Kurukṣetra War in the *Pāratam*. Villi describes the Chera, Chola, and Pandya kings all fighting against Aśvatthāman during the battle.[29] As we will soon see, Villi presents the Pandya king as Arjuna's father-in-law through his marriage to the princess Citrāṅgadā in the *Book of the Beginnings*, so it is not surprising to see the Pandya king being depicted as an ally of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Pāratam*. Two much older works of Tamil literature, the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (Four Hundred *Puṟam* Poems) and the *Cilappatikāram*, both present the Chera king as an ally of both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. In the second poem of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* addressed to Cēramāṉ Peruñcōṟṟutiyañcēralātaṉ that is attributed to Murañciyūr Muṭināka ṉār, the poet praises the Chera king as the one "who gave heaps of food without stinting, of the finest rice, till the time came when the hundred who were wearing their flower garlands of golden tumpai and had seized the land perished in the field, fighting furiously against the five whose horses wore waving plumes."[30] Similarly, in the book of the *Cilappatikāram* set in the Chera capital, the women there praise "the Cēral king, Poṟaiyaṉ, who offered an enormous amount of food in the war between the five Pāṇḍavas and the one hundred Kauravas."[31] Villi, however, depicts the Chera king as only being loyal to the Pāṇḍavas. Moreover, the *Pāratam* presents the Chera, Chola, and Pandya kings (who are usually at war with each other) uniting to support the Pāṇḍavas and their armies during the Kurukṣetra War. Just as Villi depicts the Pāṇḍavas as being worthy of alliances with the *mūvēntar*, Varantaruvār presents his father as being worthy of praise from the three great Tamil kings.

Varantaruvār then goes on to begin to tell the story of how Villi was commissioned to compose the *Pāratam* by the king of Tirumuṉaippāṭināḍu, Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ:

> At the time when this one (Villi)
> was spreading his music everywhere
> in this land I have spoken of
> a generous benefactor,

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[27] Cutler, "Three Moments," 297.

[28] Cutler, 297.

[29] *VP* 8.2.107–34.

[30] *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 2, trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (*The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom: An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil*), trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4.

[31] Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ, *Cilappatikāram* 29.24, trans. R. Parthasarathy in Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ, *The Cilappatikāram: The Tale of an Anklet*, trans. R. Parthasarathy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 265–66.

> Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ of the Koṅkar clan,[32] appeared.
> He was a leader who did not drown in those cruel sounds
> and did not sink in the great flood of Kannada
> that is not to be mixed with
> the knowledge of the cool Tamil of the three Caṅkams,
> and instead he established a fourth Caṅkam.[33]

In this verse, Varantaruvār introduces his father's supposed patron, Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, as a king who "established a fourth Caṅkam." Varantaruvār also refers to the famous story of the "three Caṅkams" (*muccaṅka*) or "three assemblies" of Tamil literature. Jennifer Clare explains that:

> In this well-known story, the Tamil literary tradition originates in three great literary schools, or Caṅkams, populated by a collection of divine and semi-divine scholars. After a seven-year famine forced literary scholars into other kingdoms, the knowledge of the old tradition was lost, only to be recovered through divine intervention. Beginning with Nakkīrar's eighth-century commentary on the poetic treatise *Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ*, a commentary which implicates the Caṅkam poems and the poetic treatise *Tolkāppiyam* in the story of the divine origin of Tamil literature, the Caṅkam tradition emerges as an identifiable and authoritative canon in Tamil scholarship.[34]

By describing Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as the king responsible for creating a "fourth Caṅkam," Varantaruvār presents Villi's patron as a great admirer and benefactor of Tamil literature. Varantaruvār also tells us that Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ "did not sink in the great flood of Kannada." We find a very similar description of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in Kārmēka Kaviñar's seventeenth-century Tamil chronicle, the *Koṅkumaṇṭala Catakam* (One Hundred Stanzas on the Koṅku Region), in which Kārmēka describes Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as a "powerful man" (*valiyaṉ*) who sponsored the creation of a Tamil Mahābhārata that vanquished those who speak Kannada (*kaṉṉaṭar*).[35]

As I pointed out earlier, Tamil scholars have dated Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ to the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century. Notably, this was the time during which the presence and power of the Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1646) was beginning to grow throughout South India. The royal capital of Vijayanagara (or Hampi as it is more commonly known today) is located in the present-day state of Karnataka, the home of the regional language of Kannada. By the middle of the fifteenth century, a number of Kannada Mahābhāratas had been composed including the *Vikramārjunavijayam*, the *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, and the *Jaiminibhāratam*. As we have seen in Chapter Two, there are several shared episodes in

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[32] Koṅkar refers to Koṅku Nāṭu, a region in the western part of present-day Tamil Nadu.

[33] *eṅkum ivaṉ icai parappi varum nāḷil yām uraitta inta nāṭṭil*
koṅkar kula varapatiyaṭkoṇṭāṉ eṉṟu oru vaṇmai kuricil tōṉṟi
veṅkaliyiṉ mūḻkāmal karu naṭa pēr veḷḷattu viḻāmal nāṉkām
caṅkam eṉa muccaṅka taṇṭamiḻ nūl kalaṅkāmal talakaṇṭāṉē || *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 18 ||

[34] Clare, "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 8–9.

[35] Kārmēka Kaviñar, *Koṅkumaṇṭala Catakam* 32. I am following: Kārmēka Kaviñar, *Koṅkumaṇṭala Catakam* (*Koṅkumaṇṭala Catakaṅkaḷ*), ed. I. Cuntaramūrtti, Na. Irā. Ceṉṉiyappaṉ, and Ai. Irāmacāmi (Chennai: Kiṭaikkumiṭam Aintiṇai Patippakam, 1986).

I thank Srilata Raman for directing me to this reference.

Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpā*, Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Kumāravyāsa's *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, and Villi's *Pāratam*, which suggest that certain Mahābhārata stories were circulating between Tamil and Kannada literary cultures. It is also possible, however, that the *Pāratam* was composed in response to the influx of Kannada Mahābhāratas.

In the opening prologue to the *Periyapurāṇam*, Cēkkiḻār tells his readers that "the Cōḻa king, Anapāyaṉ, won enduring fame by decorating with pure red gold the holy court of the red Lord. Now, it is said, his royal court wishes to receive this book of mine."[36] Cēkkiḻār's story of the commissioning of the *Periyapurāṇam* is much shorter and simpler than the account Varantaruvār gives of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ approaching Villi in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* of the *Pāratam*. Monius, however, points out that in Umāpati's fourteenth-century Tamil *Cēkkiḻārpurāṇam* (Legend of Cēkkiḻār), there is a much more detailed tale of how the *Periyapurāṇam* came into being. She explains that in this text, "Umāpati maintains that Cēkkiḻār composed the *Periyapurāṇam* in order to lure his royal patron, Anapāyaṉ, away from a profound interest in the Tamil Jain narrative known as the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*."[37] Perhaps Varantaruvār is positing Villi's *Pāratam* as a Tamil response to Kannada Mahābhāratas (such as the *Vikramārjunavijayam*, the *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, and the *Jaiminibhāratam*) in a way similar to how Umāpati describes Cēkkiḻār's Śaiva *Periyapurāṇam* as a response to Tiruttakkatēvar's Jain *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* in the *Cēkkiḻārpurāṇam*.

In the next two verses of the *ciṟappuppāyiram*, Varantaruvār tells his readers that Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ defeated the Pandya king (*vaḻutitteva*) on behalf of Āṭkoṇṭāṉ's Chola overlord and that Āṭkoṇṭāṉ hoisted the tiger banner, which was the royal emblem of the Chola Empire.[38] For those familiar with South Indian history, Varantaruvār's claim that Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ was in the service of the Cholas may come as a surprise given that the reign of the last Chola emperor, Rājendra III, was from 1246 to 1279 CE. If Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ ruled during the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century, how could he have had a Chola overlord when the Chola Empire ended in the late-thirteenth century? A likely explanation for this is that Varantaruvār is invoking the memory of the Cholas as a source of political legitimacy. The Chola Dynasty was one of the most powerful political empires in the history of South Asia, especially from the ninth century to the thirteenth century. During this period, the might of the Cholas was not only felt in the entirety of South India, but in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Southeast Asia as well. As Richard Eaton and Philip Wagoner have shown in their study of the Deccan cities of Kalyana, Raichur, and Warangal between 1300 to 1600, "the memory of earlier sovereign domains exerted such a profound influence on the Deccan's subsequent politics."[39] To use the terminology of LaCapra, Varantaruvār's claim about Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ is not "documenting" a historical or factual relationship between Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ and a Chola king. Instead, this is a "worklike" claim. By describing Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as a supporter of the Cholas, Varantaruvār presents his father's supposed patron as an ally of one of the last great powerful Tamil empires. It is also worth noting that David Shulman asserts that literary presentations of Chola kingship are very much present in Villi's poem. He explains that "the symbolic and conceptual orders that had crystallized under

[36] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 8, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 20.

[37] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 126.

[38] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 19–20.

[39] Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300–1600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxii.

the Cholas survived to a large extent intact. They are, for example, still apparent in a major work such as Villiputtūrār's *Pāratam* (c. 1400, over a century after the Chola fall)."[40]

As the *ciṟappuppāyiram* comes to a close, Varantaruvār states that Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ ruled from a fort known as Vakkapākai and that he was the protector of the Tamil language.[41] In the penultimate verse, Varantaruvār describes Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ instructing Villi to "tell the great tale of the *Bhārata* in Tamil verse, ambrosia to the ears of the great, so that the land where you and I were born will be celebrated forever."[42] And in the last verse, Varantaruvār identifies himself as the son of the author of the Tamil *Pāratam.*[43] By the end of this *ciṟappuppāyiram*, Varantaruvār has firmly placed the story of the *Pāratam*'s composition in a courtly setting. Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ is presented as a great Tamil king who supports the Cholas and who protects Tamil literature from the influx of Kannada literature that is likely connected to the rise of the Vijayanagara Empire. But the Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* ethos that pervades the rest of his father's poem is certainly not absent from Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram*. As we have seen, in his account of the landscape of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu, Varantaruvār draws on Śrīvaiṣṇava images and figures, and he later goes on to describe his father as a devotee of Viṣṇu. Varantaruvār's opening *ciṟappuppāyiram* thus introduces Villi's *Pāratam* as a courtly Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*.

Yet while more than twenty percent of Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram* is dedicated to describing Villi's patron, Villi himself only pays tribute to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ four times in the actual narrative of his poem consisting of roughly 4,300 verses. The first reference to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the *Pāratam* takes places in the eighth and final chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings*, the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter." Towards the end of this chapter in which Arjuna and Krishna destroy the Khāṇḍava Forest, Villi alludes to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ:

> Like those who do not seek refuge
> with the golden feet of
> the Koṅkar lord of the earth
> who pours showers of gold
> on top of poets who
> pour showers of praise
> with their praise poems
> about the strength of his shoulders,
> like them—
> the dark, great rainclouds too
> as the showers of arrows poured
> down from the hands
> of the conqueror of the gods (Arjuna)
> their showers of hailstones were pulverized,
> their bodies were whitened,

[40] Shulman, *King and Clown*, 11.

[41] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 21.

[42] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 22, trans. David Shulman in "Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend," in *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

[43] *VP ciṟappuppāyiram* 23.

and they retreated.[44]

This verse is a detailed simile (Tamil: *uvamai*, Sanskrit: *upamā*) comparing the enemies of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ to the rainclouds that retreat when Arjuna shoots them during the burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest. As I noted in Chapter Three, the *peruṅkāppiyam* genre is first defined in the Tamil *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, which in turn is a reimagining of Daṇḍin's Sanskrit *Kāvyādarśa*. In both the *Kāvyādarśa* and the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, *alaṅkāra* (poetic figuration) is key to the *mahākāvya/peruṅkāppiyam* and simile is identified as one of the main types of *alaṅkāra*.[45]

Praise is at the heart of the first half of this verse which describes Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ. Not only does Villi praise Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as "the Koṅkar lord of the earth" with "golden feet," Villi also speaks of poets lavishing the king with "showers of praise" and Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ rewarding these poets for their "praise poems" (*tuti,* Sanskrit: *stuti*). In fact, this verse in the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter" is basically a mini-*stuti* itself. While the items being compared (Tamil: *poruḷ*, Sanskrit: *upameya*) in this simile are the rainclouds and the standards of comparison (Tamil: *uvamum*, Sanskrit: *upāmana*) are the enemies of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, a comparison is also being drawn between Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ and Arjuna in this verse. Both the Koṅkar king and the Pāṇḍava prince are being presented as formidable warriors.

Alliteration also permeates this verse with the word "showers" (*maḻai*) and different forms of the verb "to pour" (*poḻi*) being repeated in all four lines of the verse. This verse features what Tamil grammarians call *etukai* or "second-syllable rhyme." In Sanskrit, this is known as *dvitīyākṣaraprāsa*.[46] Indira Peterson defines *etukai* as a convention in Tamil poetry "in which the second consonant, syllable, and sometimes a cluster of syllables of two or more lines are identical."[47] Clare adds that this "technique is also a standard feature of the long narrative poem in Tamil, beginning with the early Buddhist poem *Maṇimēkalai* and becoming more prominent in the epics (*kāppiyam*, Skrt. *kāvya*) *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* (900 CE) and the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*."[48]

The second allusion to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the narrative of the *Pāratam* takes place in the fourth chapter of the *Book of Virāṭa's Court*, the "Recovering the Cattle Seized by One's Enemy Chapter" (*Niraimīṭciccarukkam*), in which Arjuna and Uttara face off with the Kauravas:

> Like the Koṅkar king,
> that king of Vakkapākai with its bannered forts,
> who with the feet of his horse
> [kicked down]
> the crown with great jewels
> of the king from the Northern direction,

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[44] *col maḻai poḻintu nāḷ toṟum taṉatu tōḷ vali tutikkum nāvalarkku*
poṉ maḻai poḻiyum koṅkar pūpati taṉ poṉ patam poruntalar pōla
kal maḻai poḻiyum kāḻam mā mukilum kaṭavuḷar turantavaṉ karattil
viṉ maḻai poḻiya kaṟkaḻum tukaḻāy mēṉiyum veḷiṟi mīṇṭatuvē || *VP* 1.8.69 ||

[45] *Kāvyādarśa* 2.14; and *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* 31.

[46] Clare, "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 48.

[47] Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, 80.

[48] Clare, "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 48.

Vijaya with his strength
went again and shattered
with one arrow
the crown of the king
with the rising serpent banner.[49]

As with the verse in the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter," this verse mentioning Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the "Recovering the Cattle Seized by One's Enemy Chapter" is another simile. Here Arjuna defeating Duryodhana is being compared to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ defeating a king "from the Northern direction" (*vaṭa ticai*). Who is this king in the North? While Varantaruvār describes Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ subduing the Pandya king on behalf of Āṭkoṇṭāṉ's Chola overlord in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* of the *Pāratam*, the Pandya's capital city of Madurai is south of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāḍu and thus it is unlikely Villi is referring to the Pandya king here. Recall, however, that Varantaruvār also speaks of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as a king who "did not sink in the great flood of Kannada," which might be a reference to the rise of the Vijayanagara Empire. Perhaps Villi is speaking of a conflict between a ruler of Vijayanagara and Āṭkoṇṭāṉ.

In this verse, the crown of the king "from the Northern direction" is also being compared to the crown of the "king with the rising serpent banner" (*paṭam aravu uyartta kōvai*). A.A. Manavalan points out that in the ninth-century Tamil *Pārataveṇpā*, "Peruntēvaṉār calls Duryodhana as '*aravuyarttōn*' meaning 'serpent-bannered.' Vyāsa's work clearly tells us that Duryodhana had an elephant as the emblem of his banner (*Droṇaparvan* 125–26).'"[50] In the *Periyatirumoḻi* of Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār (who may have been a contemporary of Peruntēvaṉār), Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār also refers to Duryodhana as the one with an "expansive serpent banner" (*aravu nīḷ koṭiyōṉ*).[51] In fact, Kambalur Venkatesa Acharya observes that several premodern South Indian poets writing in Kannada (Pampa, Ranna, and Kumāravyāsa), Telugu (Tikkana), and Sanskrit (Anantabhaṭṭa, the author of the eleventh-century *Bhāratacampū*), have described Duryodhana as the one with a snake banner.[52] Villi thus uses a markedly South Indian epithet for Duryodhana in this verse in the "Recovering the Cattle Seized by One's Enemy Chapter."

With this verse in the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter," Villi once again draws a connection between his supposed patron, Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, and the greatest warrior among the five Pāṇḍavas, Arjuna. The likening of a courtly patron to one of the Pāṇḍavas takes place in multiple regional Mahābhāratas in South Asia. As I noted in the Introduction, Sheldon Pollock places great importance on Arjuna being compared to Arikēsari II (r. ca. 930–955) of the Chalukya Empire in Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Bhīma being compared to Satyāśraya (r. ca. 997–1008 CE) of the Chalukya Empire in Ranna's *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, and Bhīma being

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[49] *koṭi mukil pākai vēntaṉ koṅkar kōṉ puravi kālāl*
vaṭa ticai aracar taṅkaḷ māmaṇi mukuṭam pōla
aṭal uṭai vicayaṉ oṟṟai ampiṉāl mīṇṭum ceṉṟu
paṭam aravu uyartta kōvai paṇṇiṉāṉ makuṭa paṅkam || *VP* 4.4.104 ||

[50] Manavalan, "Tamil Versions of *Mahābhārata*," 333.

Note that *nāga* can mean both "elephant" and "snake" in Sanskrit.

[51] Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār, *Periyatirumoḻi* 9.1.8.

[52] Venkatesa Acharya*, Mahabharata and Variations*, 176.

compared to Dūṅgarsingh in Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*.[53] As we are about to see, however, Villi does not continue to compare Arjuna to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as his poem progresses.

After the allusion to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the "Recovering the Cattle Seized by One's Enemy Chapter," which is in the fourth book of the *Pāratam*, the *Book of Virāṭa's Court*, readers do not encounter another reference to this king until the eighth book of Villi's poem, the *Book of Karṇa*. In the "Sixteenth Day of War Chapter" (*Patiṉāṟāmpōrccarukkam*), Villi tells us:

> Those in the army of Yudhiṣṭhira
> who returned,
> elated with joy in their hearts
> were like those who obtained gifts
> from the lovely, red hands of
> the one with fame that is
> unreached by tongues or hands,
> the man from the land of the Peṇṇai River
> that flows with abundance,
> the one with the strong, expansive, victorious shoulders,
> the Koṅkar king of Mākatam (Tirumuṉaippāṭināṭu),
> Āṭkoṇṭāṉ of Vakkapākai.[54]

In this verse, Villi presents his readers with yet another simile. Yet unlike the previous two verses, Arjuna is completely absent from this verse. Here Yudhiṣṭhira's soldiers are being compared to the people Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ rewards with gifts. As with the previous two verses, the above verse depicts Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as a powerful and generous king who is worthy of praise. This is also the penultimate verse of the "Sixteenth Day of War Chapter." In Villi's rendering of the sixteenth day of the Battle of Kurukṣetra, the Kaurava forces struggle to keep up with the Pāṇḍavas. In fact, at one point in this chapter while Arjuna is fighting Karṇa, Arjuna notices that Karṇa seems exhausted and the Pāṇḍava tells the Kaurava general: "go today and come back tomorrow."[55] At the end of this day of the Kurukṣetra War in Villi's poem, the soldiers fighting for the Pāṇḍavas are beginning to feel hope and even joy.

The final verse that refers to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the Tamil *Pāratam* is found in the next chapter of Villi's *Book of Karṇa*, the "Seventeenth Day of War Chapter":

> The hands of the protector Karṇa,
> who stood on his own in the hot battlefield
> without discriminating between enemies or friends
> and who poured forth showers of gold,
> are like the red, lovely lotus hands
> of the man from the land of Tirukkovalur
> surrounded by the Peṇṇai,

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[53] Pollock, *Language of the Gods,* 360, 363, and 395.

[54] *nā kaiyā pukaḻāṉ peṇṇai nati vaḷam curakkum nāṭaṉ*
vākaiyāl poli tiṇ tōḷaṉ mākatam koṅkar kōmāṉ
pākai āṭkoṇṭaṉ cem kai paricu perṟavar neñcu eṉṉa
ōkaiyāl cerukki mīṇṭār utiṭṭiraṉ cēṉai uḷḷār || *VP* 8.1.90 ||

[55] *iṉṟu pōy iṉi nāḷai vā* || *VP* 8.1.38 ||

the Koṅkar king of Vakkapākai,
the one who upholds the honor of poets.[56]

With this final verse about Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ, Villi once again uses a simile comparing the hands of Karṇa to the hands of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ. But in a marked departure from the verses in the "Burning of Khāṇḍava Chapter" and the "Recovering the Cattle Seized by One's Enemy Chapter," which both draw connections between Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ and Arjuna, this verse in the "Seventeenth Day of War Chapter" directly compares Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ to Karṇa, the closest friend of Duryodhana and the secret elder brother of the five Pāṇḍavas.

Villi's decision to liken Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ to Karṇa is likely related to this Mahābhārata character's immense popularity in South India. As Shulman notes, "South Indian folk traditions glorify Karṇa in various ways: he is said to have been reborn as Ciṟuttōṇṭar, the famous 'Little Devotee' who served his own son as the main course of a meal for Śiva, at the latter's request; and one finds many hints of a clandestine love between Karṇa and Draupadī."[57] Throughout the *Pāratam*, Villi presents Karṇa in an immensely sympathetic manner. In fact, when the Pāṇḍavas discover that Karṇa is their elder brother and learn about the role Krishna played in orchestrating his death (which I discussed in Chapter Two), the five brothers lash out against Krishna. Shulman points out that Sahadeva engages in the act of *nindāstuti* (praise by blame) and "angrily lists Kṛṣṇa's various acts of cruelty: he killed the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu by means of his, the demon's, son; he used Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa's brother, to destroy Rāvaṇa; now he has caused Karṇa's death in battle with his brother, Arjuna. 'Who can fathom the gods' cunning ways?'"[58] Arjuna is even more upset than Sahadeva and Villi tells us that "the young king himself (Arjuna), Bhīma's brother, hated Kṛṣṇa, who causes hate by his deceitful tricks."[59] This is the only moment in Villi's devotional retelling of the Mahābhārata in which Krishna is treated with such harsh animosity by his devotees. Clearly, Karṇa is an important character for Villi if his death results in Krishna's *bhakta*s expressing such extreme anger towards their chosen deity.

One of the reasons why Karṇa is such a beloved figure in South India is because of his extreme generosity. Consider the *Karṇabhāra*, one of the six Mahābhārata Sanskrit dramas attributed to Bhāsa that were discovered in Kerala in 1910. This play is entirely dedicated to the story in which Karṇa gives his earrings and armor that make him invulnerable to Indra (who is disguised as a Brahmin). As Barbara Stoler Miller explains, "Karṇa's identity is defined by his earrings and his armor, but his nature is determined by his great generosity, which sets up an inevitable conflict between his immortality and ability for self-sacrifice."[60] Note that in the above verse, Villi describes Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as "the one who protects the honor of poets" and in earlier verses he presents Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ as a charitable benefactor. By comparing the hands

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[56] *kōval cūḻ peṇṇai nāṭaṉ koṅkar kōṉ pākai vēntaṉ*
pāvalar māṉam kāttāṉ paṅkayam cem kai eṉṉa
mēvalar emar eṉ eṉṉāmal vem kaḷam taṉṉil niṉṟa
kāvalaṉ kaṉṉaṉ kaiyum poḻintatu kaṉakam māri || *VP* 8.2.33 ||

[57] Shulman, *King and Clown*, 380.

[58] Shulman, 398. See *VP* 8.2.268.

[59] *VP* 9.12, trans. Shulman in *King and Clown*, 398.

[60] Stoler Miller, introduction to Bhāsa*, Karṇabhāra*, 60.

of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ to the hands of Karṇa, Villi draws a potent connection between his supposed patron and a Mahābhārata character who is famed for his generosity.

All four of the allusions to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the narrative of Villi's *Pāratam* are in the forms of similes. The majority of the eleven verses that speak of Anapāyaṉ in the *Periyapurāṇam* are straightforward declarations of praise. Monius notes that Cēkkiḻār describes Anapāyaṉ as "the Cōḻa king who covered in gold the roof of Śiva's temple at Citamparam (vv. 8, 1218), as a fearless king of righteous scepter (v. 22), as a great protector of his Tamil realm (v. 85), and as the privileged inheritor of a glorious Cōḻa lineage (v.1218)."[61] There are, however, a few verses in the *Periyapurāṇam* that use similes to extol Anapāyaṉ. Take, for example, the full version of the twenty-second verse of Cēkkiḻār's text that Monius mentions above:

> The mountain is great beyond all telling, a place of light and purity and truth. It is the place where the Lord holds court, with a deer and a battle axe in his hands, the Ganges and the crescent moon in his matted hair, and a fragrant garland round his neck. It rises high like the spirit of the fearless Cōḻa king, Anapāyaṉ, who bore the scepter of justice and the white parasol of victory.[62]

In this verse, Cēkkiḻār is comparing Śiva's abode of Mount Kailāsa to the "spirit of the fearless Cōḻa king, Anapāyaṉ." Later in the poem, when describing a hymn that Campantar composed, Cēkkiḻār compares the cured hunchback of a Pandya king to the scepter of Anapāyaṉ:

> The gist of the hymn inscribed on the leaf was that our Lord Siva is all in all. By his grace, Campantar included in the hymn the prayer that the king might flourish. By virtue of that prayer, the king of the South was cured of his hunchback and stood up as straight as the scepter of Anapāyaṉ, the famous Cōḻa king.[63]

Yet while just two of the eleven patron verses in the *Periyapurāṇam* are similes, the same is not true for the *Irāmāvatāram*. Shulman notes that in this Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, Kampaṉ's patron Caṭaiyappaṉ of Tiruvenneynallur "is praised only obliquely, through the metaphors that the poet brings to his main narration."[64] Shulman also provides us with some examples:

> Viśvāmitra gives Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa weapons unerring as 'the word of Caṭaiyaṉ, lord of Vēṇṇey, the healing medicine for the disease of poverty for all inhabitants of the world' (1.4.12). Or the moon rises, spreading its silvery rays 'like the fame (*pukaḻ*) of Caṭaiyaṉ from Vēṇṇey with its well-watered fields, that seemed to devour heaven and earth and all the quarters of space' (1.6.28).[65]

The patronage claims in the narrative of Villi's poem thus more closely resemble those found in Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* than those in Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam*. A major difference between the patronage verses in the *Pāratam* and the patronage verses in both the *Irāmāvatāram*

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[61] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 117.

[62] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 22, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 21–22.

[63] Cēkkilār, *Periyapurāṇam* 2745, trans. McGlashan in Cēkkilār, *History of Holy Servants*, 239.

[64] Shulman, "Poets and Patrons," 78.

[65] Shulman, 78.

and the *Periyapurāṇam*, however, is the number of times the patron is referred to in the text itself. Cēkkiḻār speaks of Anapāyaṉ eleven times in the *Periyapurāṇam* and Kampaṉ praises Caṭaiyappaṉ ten times throughout the *Irāmāvatāram*. Yet Villi only extols Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ four times in the entire narrative of the *Pāratam*. Recall that the detailed story of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ commissioning Villi to compose a Tamil Mahābhārata in Tirumuṉaippāṭināṭu is only found in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* that is attributed to Villi's son Varantaruvār. Given that the *Pāratam* has less than half the number of patronage claims found in other prominent *peruṅkāppiyam*s, such as the *Irāmāvatāram* and the *Periyapurāṇam*, I suspect that Villi understands the praise of courtly patrons as a poetic topos of the Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam* genre.

A close reading of the *Pāratam* strongly suggests that Villi was familiar with older *peruṅkāppiyam*s, especially Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*. There are multiple scenes in the *Pāratam* that directly mirror scenes in the *Irāmāvatāram*. For instance, we just saw that in the "Sixteenth Day of War Chapter" in the *Book of Karṇa*, Arjuna tells an exhausted Karṇa to "go today and come back tomorrow" (*iṉṟu pōy iṉi nāḷai vā*). As M.V. Subramanian observes, Arjuna's command to Karṇa in the *Pāratam* is almost identical to a line from the final book of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* in which Rāma tells a tired Rāvaṇa during the battle in Lanka to "go today and come back tomorrow for battle" (*iṉṟu pōy pōrkku nāḷai vā*).[66] Both Karṇa and Rāvaṇa are treated as tragic heroes in the *peruṅkāppiyam*s of Villi and Kampaṉ and thus it makes sense for Arjuna to deliver a line to Karṇa in the *Pāratam* that mirrors one that Rāma says to Rāvaṇa in the *Irāmāvatāram*.[67] We also see parallels between scenes that depict encounters with demonesses in the *Irāmāvatāram* and the *Pāratam*. After Rāvaṇa's sister Śūrpaṇakhā unsuccessfully tries to seduce Rāma in the *Irāmāvatāram*, Rāma tells her that "the wise always have said it is not fitting for human men to marry a woman from the Rākṣasas [demons] who live at ease."[68] When Bhīma is sexually propositioned by the demoness Hiḍimbā in the *Pāratam*, Bhīma tells her what Rāma said about marrying "demon women" (*akakkar pavai*), which is a clear reference to the meeting of Rāma and Śūrpaṇakhā in the *Irāmāvatāram*.[69] Multiple Tamil scholars have also observed several similarities between the *Irāmāvatāram* and the *Pāratam,* with Kamil Zvelebil noting that "the influence of Kampaṉ [on Villi] is very strong," and C. Jesudasan and Hephzibah Jesudasan (rather harshly) declaring that the *Pāratam* is "almost a parody of Kampaṉ."[70]

As we have just seen above, another similarity between the *Irāmāvatāram* and the *Pāratam* is that both poets indirectly praise patrons with similes embedded in the narratives of their poems. Since the *Pāratam* has less than half the number of patronage verses of the *Irāmāvatāram*, I believe that Villi's four simile verses in praise of Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ may be a tribute to Kampaṉ's ten simile verses in praise of Caṭaiyappaṉ. I have noted above that Kampaṉ is an important source of inspiration for Villi. While the allusions to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ might not document an actual historical patronage relationship between the author of the *Pāratam* and the

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[66] Subramanian, *Mahabharata Story*, 262; and Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 6.14.255.

[67] See Hart and Heifetz, introduction to Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* (*Forest Book*), 22–23; and Shulman, *King and Clown*, 380–98.

[68] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 3.5.51, trans. Hart and Heifetz in Kampaṉ, *Forest Book*, 95.

[69] *VP* 1.4.21.

[70] Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974)*,* 142; and Jesudasan and Jesudasan, *History of Tamil Literature*, 209.

Koṅkar king of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu, these verses perform critical work on Villi's audience. The four references to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ place the *Pāratam* is a courtly context and remind readers who are familiar with the *Irāmāvatāram* of Kampaṉ's praise of Caṭaiyappaṉ.

I also suspect that the story of Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ instructing Villi to compose the *Pāratam* in Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram* is another worklike aspect of this Tamil Mahābhārata. Recall that while the opening chapters of multiple *peruṅkāppiyam*s, such as the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, and the *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, all begin with detailed landscape descriptions, this is not the case for the first chapter of the narrative of the *Pāratam*, which starts with an account of the Bhārata lineage. Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram*, however, opens with a lengthy description of the land of Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu that mirrors the landscape descriptions in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, and the *Irāmāvatāram*. By inserting these opening verses about Tirumuṉaippāṭiṉāṭu into his *ciṟappuppāyiram*, Varantaruvār ensures that his father's poem begins in a similar way to other prominent *peruṅkāppiyam*s. Similarly, the tale of Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ commissioning the *Pāratam* in the *ciṟappuppāyiram* places this Mahābhārata in a courtly Tamil world that is also inhabited by other well-known *peruṅkāppiyam*s such as Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* and Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam*.

While it may be impossible to ever know whether the references to the Koṅkar king in the *Pāratam* are documenting an actual historical patronage relationship between Villi and Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ or not, what is clear is that both Varantaruvār and Villi are positioning this overtly devotional Śrīvaiṣṇava Mahābhārata retelling in a distinctly courtly milieu.

Reframing Arjuna's *Tīrthayātra*

Throughout the *Pāratam*, Villi simultaneously presents his text as *bhakti* narrative poem and a *peruṅkāppiyam*. One of the most prominent examples of this is the seventh chapter of the *Book of the Beginnings*, the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" (*Aruccuṉaṉṟīrttayāttiraiccarukkam*).

This chapter of the *Pāratam* covers many of the same events described in the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" (*Arjunavanavasa*) sub-book of the *Book of the Beginnings* in the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, after Arjuna is forced to violate a previously-agreed-upon rule among the Pāṇḍavas that their shared wife Draupadī will only spend one year at a time with each of the five brothers and the Pāṇḍavas should never interrupt each other's private meetings with Draupadī, the middle Pāṇḍava prince departs to live in exile as a celibate renunciant for a year. Yet as Ruth Katz points out, "the striking point often raised regarding this year of exile is that Arjuna is not, after all, celibate during it; rather he marries three times."[71] Indeed, in the course of the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book, Arjuna weds three princesses (Ulūpī, Citrāṅgadā, and Subhadrā) and has sons with each of them (Irāvān, Babhruvāhana, and Abhimanyu) who all go on to play important roles in the *Mahābhārata*. Katz notes that Arjuna's three unions in the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book "may be viewed as being of central importance to the epic structure, for they set up the alignment of forces for the Kurukshetra War."[72] She also observes that "in some sense, one may view Arjuna's exilic journey as a

[71] Ruth Cecily Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There is Victory* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 61.

[72] Katz, 61.

preliminary 'conquest of the world,' since he travels in all directions during it, and has an adventure with some female, usually a conquest, at each cardinal point."[73]

But while the title of this section of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* describes Arjuna's journey as a *vanavasa*, a term which literally means "forest residence" but often refers to a period of exile in the forest, the title of the corresponding section of the Tamil *Pāratam* uses the word *tīrthayātra*. Knut Jacobsen explains that "the Sanskrit word *tīrtha* (Hind. *tīrth*) can be translated as 'sacred space,' 'pilgrimage place,' and 'salvific space.' *Tīrthayātrā* means pilgrimage or travel to a sacred place."[74] Jacobsen goes on to point out that first descriptions of the undertakings of *tīrthayātrā*s in South Asian literature are found in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*:

> The earliest text to contain *tīrtha* sections is the *Mahābhārata*. The *Tīrthayātrāparvan* constitutes chapters 78–148 of the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. In addition, *Śalyaparvan* contains 20 chapters on *tīrtha*s (35–54), and *Anuśāsanaparvan* 2 chapters (15–16). These parts of the *Mahābhārata* contain more than 3,900 verses. In the *Vanaparvan*, an extensive pilgrimage around India is described, and numerous *tīrtha*s are portrayed... these *tīrtha* sections are goldmines of stories and rich sources of information about the religion of the time in a wide geographical area.[75]

While Jacobsen does not mention the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book in his account of *tīrtha*s in the epic, this section of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* does contain twelve verses describing Arjuna visiting various *tīrtha*s after he marries Ulūpī and right before he weds Citrāṅgadā:

> The son of the Thunderbolt-Wielder [Arjuna] told it all to the brahmins, O Bhārata, and thereupon went forth to the slope of the Himālaya. Kuntī's son reached the Banyan Tree of Agastya and the Mountain of Vasiṣṭha and he made his ablutions on the Peak of Bhṛgu. The chief of the Kurus made donations of thousands of cows at the fords [*tīrtha*s] and sanctuaries, and gave dwellings to the brahmins. The eminent man bathed at the Ford [*tīrtha*] of the Drop of Gold and beheld the great mountain and holy sanctuaries. Then the best of men descended with the brahmins, and the bull of the Bharatas went on, for he wished to reach the region of the East. Many a ford [*tīrtha*] did he see in succession. and the lovely river Utpalinī by the Naimiṣa Forest, the rivers Nandā and Upanandā, and the glorious Kauśikī, the great river Gayā as well as the Ganges. Thus seeing all the fords [*tīrtha*s] and hermitages, and hallowing himself with the sight, he gave wealth to the brahmins. In the lands of Anga, Vanga [Bengal], and Kalinga [Odisha] he visited all the fords [*tīrtha*s] and sanctuaries found there, and having visited them in the proper fashion he gave away largess. At the gates of the kingdom of Kalinga the brahmins who had followed him took their leave from the Pāṇḍava and returned. With their consent, however, Dhanaṃjaya Kaunteya the champion went on with very few companions as far as the ocean.[76]

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[73] Katz, 61.

[74] Knut A. Jacobsen, "*Tīrtha* and *Tīrthayātra:* Salvific Space and Pilgrimage," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill Online, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1020010.

[75] Jacobsen, "*Tīrtha* and *Tīrthayātra*."

[76] *MBh* 1.208.1–12, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 1:359.

In this portion of the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, we see Arjuna traveling to several *tīrtha*s across the Indian sub-continent and performing religious rituals and distributing wealth to Brahmins. These twelve verses, however, are just a small section of the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book. As Katz observes, "Arjuna's journey is, in fact, a traditional pilgrimage to pilgrimage places in the various directions, but this fact is not stressed by the epic."[77] As we are about to see, Villi presents his "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" as both a journey in which key political alliances are forged as well as a devotional pilgrimage.

In the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book in the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna is forced to interrupt a personal meeting between Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī because he needs to retrieve the stolen cows of a Brahmin, and Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī are in the room where the Pāṇḍavas store their weapons.[78] Villi sets up this scene a bit differently in his Tamil retelling. In the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" of the *Pāratam*, Arjuna encounters Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī sporting in a "pleasure garden" (*poḻil*) on his way to get his weapons to help the Brahmin.[79] In the *Kāvyādarśa*, one of the several different things that Daṇḍin says should be described in a *mahākāvya* is "sporting in gardens or water" (*udyānasalilakrīḍā*).[80] As I pointed out in Chapter Three, I contend that both the *Kāvyādarśa* and its Tamil retelling, the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, are descriptive rather than proscriptive accounts of the *mahākāvya*/*peruṅkāppiyam* genre. Descriptions of romantic "sporting" (*krīḍā*) in nature abound in Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s, including the *Raghuvaṃśa* and the *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa and Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya*, as well as in some Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*s, such as Tiruttakkatēvar's *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*.[81] In his study of gardens in courtly life in premodern South Asia, Daud Ali points out that the garden is a "constant and ubiquitous theme of courtly poetry, and the presumed content of much of the floral and botanical imagery which pervaded the literature of the court."[82] He also notes that "garden scenes in the literary corpus are typically full of uncertainty and secrecy, a theme constantly enacted in Sanskrit dramas."[83] By having Arjuna interrupt Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī while they are privately playing together in a pleasure garden rather than in the weapons storeroom as in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Villi marks his retelling as a *mahākāvya*/*peruṅkāppiyam*.

As in the *Mahābhārata*, the first woman who Arjuna marries during his year of exile in the *Pāratam* is the snake princess Ulūpī. David Gitomer describes the meeting of Arjuna and Ulūpī in the Sanskrit epic noting that "while Arjuna bathes in the Gaṅgā, she [Ulūpī] pulls him underwater and asserts that while dharma may require that Arjuna remain in exile for a year from Draupadī, this particular dharma has nothing to do with her. In fact, she explains, dharma

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[77] Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata*, 68n25.

[78] *MBh* 1.205.1–20.

[79] *VP* 1.7.4.

[80] Daṇḍin*, Kāvyādarśa* 1.16.

[81] See Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric*, 90 and 249n9; and Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 129–30.

[82] Daud Ali, "Gardens in Early Indian Court Life," *Studies in History* 19, no. 2 (2003): 239.

[83] Ali, 238

demands that Arjuna satisfy her lust. So, of course, he does."[84] Although the Sanskrit epic does not offer any details into how exactly Arjuna satisfies Ulūpī's lust other than that he "did as she desired," this is not the case in the Tamil poem.[85] Villi presents his readers with a vivid description of Arjuna and Ulūpī making love for several days on a bed of flowers.[86] As we will soon see, the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" is filled with detailed verses about Arjuna's sexual trysts with the three princesses he marries. These accounts of Arjuna having sexual intercourse with his three wives are reminiscent of those of the prince Cīvakaṉ and his seven wives in the oldest extant Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Monius explains that in this poem, which is also known as the *Maṇanūl* (Book of Marriages), "love-making is vigorously and pointedly described with gusto, the poetry full of sly humor and hidden meaning."[87]

The next verse of the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," which is about the birth of Irāvān, is filled with word play and Villi repeatedly uses the phrase *nākam atipaṉ*.[88] *Atipaṉ* or "lord" is derived from the Sanskrit word *adhipa*.[89] The Tamil word *nākam*, however, can correspond to the Sanskrit term *nāka*, which can mean "heaven" or Indra's paradise," as well as to the Sanskrit words *nāga*, which has multiple meanings including, "serpent" and "elephant," and *naga*, which means "mountain."[90] Thus in a single verse, Villi uses the phrase *nākam atipaṉ* four times to refer to Ulūpī's father ("the lord of serpents"), Arjuna's father Indra ("the lord of Indra's paradise" and "the lord of the elephant," which is an allusion to Indra's elephant Airāvata), and Himavat ("the lord of the mountains"). The different uses of *nākam* is an example of the *alaṅkāra* known as *yamaka* "or 'twinning,' where phonetically identical duplicates are repeated, each time with a different meaning."[91] Several well-known Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s, including the *Raghuvaṃśa*, the *Kirātārjunīya*, the *Śiśupālavadha*, and Bhaṭṭi's seventh-century *Rāvaṇavadha* (Slaying of Rāvaṇa), are filled with examples of *yamaka*.[92] It is thus no surprise that Daṇḍin dedicates seventy-seven verses of the third book of the Sanskrit *Kāvyādarśa* to a discussion of *yamaka*s.[93] Gary Tubb adds that in another Sanskrit literary treatise, the ninth-century

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[84] David Gitomer, "The Invention of Irāvān," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 57.

[85] *MBh* 1.206.33, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 1:401.

[86] *VP* 1.7.9.

[87] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 129.

[88] *VP* 1.7.10.

[89] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "atipaṉ," accessed June 3, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=75.

[90] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, "nākam," accessed June 3, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=2197.

[91] Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 21.

[92] Gary Tubb, "*Kāvya* with Bells On: *Yamaka* in the *Śiśupālavadha*: Or, 'What's a flashy verse like you doing in a great poem like this?'" in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 159–92.

[93] Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 3.1–77.

Kāvyālaṅkāra (Ornaments of Poetry), "Rudraṭa says, in his closing verse on *yamaka*s, that *yamaka* verses should be used thoughtfully, in ways that are accessible to the reader, and that the proper setting for them is primarily the *sargabandha*, that is, the *mahākāvya* genre."[94]

This *yamaka*-filled verse describes the birth of Arjuna's son, Irāvān (who is also known in Tamil Nadu as Aravāṉ). While Irāvān only appears in a single chapter of the *Book of Bhīṣma* in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, he is much more visible in Tamil Mahābhārata traditions. Drawing on work by Alf Hiltebeitel and David Shulman, Gitomer explains that:

> In several Tamil Mahābhārata traditions, Aravāṉ is the son of Arjuna who willingly offers himself to the Pāṇḍavas for a human sacrifice to the goddess Kālī before the battle at Kurukṣetra. In certain tellings of this story, Aravāṉ is married to Mohinī (Kṛṣṇa in female form) before he is sacrificed. Because of his marriage to Mohinī, Aravāṉ has become an important figure for the transgender community in Tamil Nadu.[95]

In the *Book of Effort* of the *Pāratam*, Villi uses a chapter of eight verses called the "Battlefield Sacrifice to the Goddess Chapter" (*Kaḷappaliyūṭṭucarukkam*) to tell the story of Irāvān volunteering to sacrifice himself in order to ensure his father's victory in battle.[96] Given Irāvān's extended role in the *Pāratam* and his popularity in Tamil-speaking South India, it is fitting for Villi to use an intricate verse replete with *yamaka* to describe the birth of this son of Arjuna.

After marrying Ulūpī in the *Pāratam*, Arjuna begins his *tīrthayātra* in earnest and proceeds to visit multiple different sacred spaces. Villi tells his readers:

> He who is the measure of *bhakti*,
> Pārtha, after bathing in many *tīrtha*s
> that one can exclaim about in each and every direction,
> approaching the land of the South
> which is a seed for success,
> reached the hills in the form of the serpent
> with its flowing rivers which one can leap over.[97]

Note that Villi describes Arjuna here as the one "who is the measure of *bhakti*" (*pattikku varampu ākiya*), thus emphasizing Arjuna's role as Krishna's devout *bhakta*. While the first part of this verse is rather vague with no clear indicators of which *tīrtha*s Arjuna visits, the second half tells us that Arjuna turns south and goes to "the hills in the form of the serpent" (*aravakkiri*). This is a clear reference to the Seshachalam (Śeṣācalam) Hills in the Eastern Ghats in the

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[94] Tubb, "*Kāvya* with Bells On," 157.

[95] Gitomer, "Invention of Irāvān," 55n5. See also David Shulman, "The Serpent and the Sacrifice: An Anthill Myth from Tiruvārūr," *History of Religions* 18, no. 2 (1978): 107–37; and Alf Hiltebeitel, "Dying Before the *Mahābhārata* War: Martial and Transsexual Body-building for Aravāṉ," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 2 (1995): 447–73.

[96] *VP* 5.7.1–8.

[97] *pattikku varampu ākiya pārttaṉ pala tīrttam*
a tikkiṉum e tikkiṉum ām eṉṟavai āṭi
cittikku oru vitai ākiya teṉ nāṭṭiṉai aṇuki
tatti cori aru taṭa aravakkiri cārntāṉ || *VP* 1.7.12 ||

modern-day state of Andhra Pradesh. In Śrīvaiṣṇava mythology, the seven peaks of the Seshachalam Hills represent the seven hoods of the celestial serpent Śeṣanāga upon whom Viṣṇu reclines.[98] The Seshachalam Hills are also the home of the Veṅkaṭeśvara temple in Tirupati, which as we saw in Chapter Three is one of the four most important sacred sites for Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Ajay Rao notes that in Vedāntadeśika's Sanskrit *Haṃsasandeśa* (Message of the Swan), in which Rāma sends a message to the captive Sītā via a swan, the swan's "route proper begins at Tirupati."[99] Vedāntadeśika also alludes to the mythology of the Seshachalam Hills:

> Just ahead the Añjanādri Mountain (Tirupati)
> will please your eyes.
> People rightly consider it to be serpent Śeṣa himself.
> It is where Viṣṇu resides,
> it bears the earth,
> it has jewels inlaid in its peaks/hoods,
> and it is joined with large clouds
> appearing like skin just cast off.[100]

Just as his fellow Śrīvaiṣṇava poet Vedāntadeśika has the swan in the *Haṃsasandeśa* begin his journey through South India by flying over Tirupati, Villi has Arjuna begin his *tīrthayātra* in South India with a trip to Tirupati. That both Vedāntadeśika and Villi commence their mappings of sacred spaces in South India with the paramount Śrīvaiṣṇava shrine of Tirupati is significant.

Villi goes on to describe Arjuna visiting multiple different temples throughout South India. While some of these temples are dedicated to a form of Viṣṇu such as the Varadarājasvāmī temple in Kanchipuram and the Dehalīśa shrine in Tirukkovalur,[101] others are Śiva temples, like the Aṇṇāmalaiyār temple in Tiruvannamali and the famous Tillai Naṭarāja temple in Chidambaram (Citamparam).[102] As with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the Tamil *Pāratam* is by no means devoid of allusions to Śiva. Some Tamil scholars, however, have interpreted the various references to Śiva within the *Pāratam* through the lens of a hagiographical story involving the fifteenth-century Tamil poet and devotee of Śiva's son Murukaṉ, Aruṇakirinātar.

There are multiple different variants of this story, but according to one version that has been immortalized in T.R. Ramanna's devotional Tamil film *Aruṇakirinātar* (1964), Villi is a skilled but arrogant Śrīvaiṣṇava poet who roams around South India cutting off the ears of inferior poets after defeating them in poetry competitions.[103] This barbaric practice ends when Villi is unable to decipher the meaning of a verse of Aruṇakirinātar's *Kantarantāti* (Linked Verses about Skanda) and Aruṇakirinātar kindly refrains from chopping off Villi's ears. In

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[98] Eck, *India: Sacred Geography,* 317–22.

[99] Rao, *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa*, 37.

[100] Vedāntadeśika, *Haṃsasandeśa* 1.21, trans. Rao in *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa*, 37.

[101] *VP* 1.7.14 and 1.7.16.

[102] *VP* 1.7.15 and 1.7.18.

[103] See 1:44:49–1:50:58 of Tamil Cinema, "Arunagirinathar Full Movie" YouTube video, 2:24:52, May 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRse_eI09TY.

another version of this story described by Kamil Zvelebil, Aruṇakirinātar blinds Villi after the Śrīvaiṣṇava poet loses the competition and tells his "followers to avoid even the sight of a Śiva temple."[104] After Villi begs for a lesser punishment, Aruṇakirinātar orders him "to compose a poem in praise of Śiva" and "Villi chose a compromise solution and undertook the composition of the *Pāratam* which is intermingled with the legends of Śiva."[105] Zvelebil then suggests an alternative reading of the line from Villi's own introduction (*taṟciṟappuppāyiram*) to the *Pāratam* that we saw in Chapters One and Two in which the poet states that he is retelling the Mahābhārata out of his "desire for the *carita* of the eternal Mādhava."[106] Zvelebil asserts that the words *maṉṉum mātavaṉ*, "eternal Mādhava," is an example of the *alaṅkāra* known as *śleṣa*. *Śleṣa*, also known as "simultaneous narration" or "*double entendre*" is an *alaṅkāra* "in which a single phonemic sequence yields numerous meanings."[107] Zvelebil argues that *maṉṉum mātavaṉ* could be read as *maṉ umā tavaṉ*, thus referring to Śiva as "the ascetic (with) the eternal Umā" and he says that this "would be quite in accordance with Villi's learned, sophisticated manner to use a pun like this."[108] Agreeing with Zvelebil's *śleṣa* reading of this verse, Shulman notes that the phrase *maṉṉum mātavaṉ* "is ambiguous: it could refer either to Viṣṇu or to Śiva. The deliberate pun is wholly characteristic of Villiputtūrār's ornate, complex style."[109]

Villi certainly is a master of different *alaṅkāra*s, including *śleṣa*, but the sectarian hagiographical story about Aruṇakirinātar forcing Villi to compose a poem in honor of Śiva is clearly impacting Zvelebil's reading of this verse from the *taṟciṟappuppāyiram*. While Śiva does pop up several times in the narrative of this Tamil Mahābhārata and Villi does allude to different Śiva temples and poets in his text, the *Pāratam* is undoubedtly a Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* narrative poem. The Śrīvaiṣṇava ethos of Villi's composition is reaffirmed with the sacred site Arjuna visits right before he arrives in Madurai, the home of his future Tamil wife Citrāṅgadā:

> He worshiped at the site of Araṅkam in the South,
> that is a bestowed adornment
> to the lady Earth
> as the beautiful Kāvēri flowed on both sides
> and where on two occasions
> the one who earlier destroyed the capital city of Lanka
> worshiped the golden feet
> of the one who is conscious of the universe while asleep
> on the bed made by the shining, dancing serpent.[110]

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[104] Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 214n65.

[105] Zvelebil, 215n65.

[106] *VP taṟciṟappuppāyiram* 8.

[107] Rao, *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa*, 72.

[108] Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1975), 215n65.

[109] Shulman, "From Author to Non-Author," 113n28.

[110] *ilaṅkāpuri muṉ ceṟṟavaṉ iru pōtum vaṇaṅka*
tulaṅku āṭu aravu aṇai mēl aṟituyil koṇṭavar poṉ tāḷ
polam kāviri irupālum vara pūtalam maṅkaikku
alaṅkāram aḷikkum teṉ araṅkattiṭai toḻutāṉ || *VP* 1.7.19 ||

In the above verse, Villi describes Arjuna visiting Srirangam (Araṅkam). As we saw in Chapter Three, there are 108 Śrīvaiṣṇava *divyadeśam*s or "divine places." Vasudha Narayanan observes that "the most popular of the 108 sacred places is Śrī-raṅgam, near the modern city of Tiruchirapalli. All the Āḻvārs (except Maturakavi) sang in praise of the Lord in this temple. The most verses on any subject are addressed to this deity. Indeed, 247 verses are written in praise of Śrī-raṅgam and the Lord there."[111] In Srirangam, Śrīvaiṣṇavas worship Viṣṇu in his form of Raṅganātha sleeping on top of Śeṣanāga. This verse not only speaks of Raṅganātha, "the one who is conscious of the universe while asleep" (*aṟituyil koṇṭavar*), but also of the destroyer of Lanka, Rāma. Therefore Villi praises two different forms of Viṣṇu in this verse. As Rao points out, "the mythic origin of the Raṅganātha icon at Śrīraṅgam is for Śrīvaiṣṇavas the strongest and oldest material link with the epic narrative [of the Rāmāyaṇa]. From the early Āḻvār poetry, the Raṅganātha icon was identified with the family heirloom (*kuladhana*) Rāma gave to Vibhīṣaṇa as recompense for his assistance in ousting Rāvaṇa."[112] By having Arjuna begin his *tīrthayātra* in Tirupati and come to Srirangam right before he marries the Tamil princess Citrāṅgadā in Madurai, Villi clearly maps out a sacred Śrīvaiṣṇava geography.

While the most famous temple in Madurai is without question the Mīnākṣī Sundareśvara temple dedicated to the Pandya princess/goddess Mīnākṣī along with her consort Sundareśvara (a form of Śiva), Madurai is also a sacred destination for followers of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. Viṣṇu in the form of Aḻakar, "the beautiful one," is considered to be the brother of Mīnākṣī and both the Kūṭalaḻakar temple within the city and the Kaḷḷaḻakar temple in Vanagiri, which is about eight miles north-west of Madurai, are among the 108 Śrīvaiṣṇava *divyadeśam*s. Archana Venkatesan adds that the Kaḷḷaḻakar temple "is praised by six of the twelve Āḻvār poets, for a total of 128 verses, placing it third on the list, after Srirangam and Tiruvenkatam [Tirupati]."[113] While Villi's verse on Madurai refers to a story in Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam* about Campantar in Madurai in which "8,000 Jain monks impale themselves on metal stakes to atone for their sins against the young Śaiva devotee,"[114] Villi also describes Arjuna bathing in tanks of *tulsī* (*tuḷavam*), a plant distinctly associated with the worship of Viṣṇu.[115] This suggests that Arjuna is visiting the Kūṭalaḻakar temple during his trip to the city of Madurai.

Madurai is also the capital of the Pandya kingdom; this is where Arjuna falls in love with Citrāṅgadā, the only child of the Pandya king. In the *Book of the Beginnings* in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna meets Citrāṅgadā in a kingdom called Maṇalūra.[116] Yet in the critical edition of the *Book of the Horse Sacrifice*, when Arjuna meets Babhruvāhana

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[111] Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 34.

[112] Rao, *Re-figuring the Rāmāyaṇa*, 39–40.

[113] Venkatesan, "Annotations to Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi*," in Nammāḻvār, *Tiruvāymoḻi* (*Endless Song*), 355.

[114] Anne E. Monius, "From Foolish Ascetics to Enemies of Śiva: The Fate of Jains as Religious Others in Tamil Śaiva Literature," in *Regional Communities of Devotion in South Asia: Insiders, Outsiders, and Interlopers*, ed. Gil Ben-Herut, Jon Keune, and Anne E. Monius (New York: Routledge, 2019), 12. Also see Cēkkiḻār, *Periyapurāṇam* 2693–2750.

[115] *VP* 1.7.20.

[116] *MBh* 1.207.14.

(his son with Citrāṅgadā) after the great war, Citrāṅgadā's kingdom is referred to as Maṇipūra.[117] One of the most famous retellings of the story of the romance of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā, Rabindranath Tagore's English play *Chitra* (1914), identifies Maṇipūra as Manipur, a state in present-day northeastern India.[118] Pradeep Bhattacharya, however, points out that "Southern manuscripts [of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*] locate Maṇalūra near Madurai and make Citrāṅgadā a Pāṇḍyan princess."[119] C.R. Sankaran and K. Rama Varma Raja add that "this happy alliance between the Pāṇḍavas and the Pāṇḍyas" is also described in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's fourteenth-century commentary on the *Tolkāppiyam*, and Agastya Paṇḍita's Sanskrit *Bālabhārata*.[120] There also several Tamil ballad traditions that center around the powerful Pandya warrior-queen of Madurai named Alli who is seduced by Arjuna. Vijaya Ramaswamy notes that the tale of Citrāṅgadā "has amazing parallels with the Alli legend."[121]

Villi describes Citrāṅgadā's father as a great Pandya king who has defeated the other two members of the *mūvēntar*: the Chera king and the Chola king. Arjuna meets the Pandya king in the guise of a Brahmin sage, and he tells Citrāṅgadā's father *kaṉṉiyai kaṇṭu āṭa vantaṉam*.[122] This phrase is an example of *śleṣa* that plays with different meanings of the noun *kaṉṉi* and the verb *āṭu*. One of the most common meanings of *kaṉṉi* is "virgin," but Kaṉṉi is also another name of the Kumari River.[123] The verb *āṭu* can mean "to sport" or "to play," but it can also mean "to bathe."[124] Therefore the phrase *kaṉṉiyai kaṇṭu āṭa vantaṉam* can be translated as "I have come to see and bathe in the Kaṉṉi River" or "I have come to see and sport with the virgin." This line from the *Pāratam* bears a striking resemblance to a line from the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Monius elaborates: "in describing the love games of the hero with his wife Curamañcari, for example, Tiruttakkatēvar plays on the phrase *kumari āṭa*, which can mean both 'to bathe in the Kumari River' and 'to lie down [sexually] with a virgin' (v.2020)."[125] For Villi's readers who are familiar with Tiruttakkatēvar's *peruṅkāppiyam*, this line from the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" will immediately remind them of Cīvakaṉ's rendezvous with Curamañcari.

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[117] *MBh* 14.77.46.

[118] Rabindranath Tagore, *Chitra: A Play in One Act* (London: Macmillan Company, 1914), xi.

[119] Bhattacharya, "Revising the Critical Edition," 15.

[120] Sankaran and Raja, "On the Sources of Villiputtūrār," 262–63.

[121] Vijaya Ramaswamy, The Taming of Alli: Mythic Images and Tamil Women," *Journal of the Inter-University Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no .2 (1998): 80.

It should be noted, however, that in the Draupadī goddess cult in Tamil Nadu (which draws much inspiration from Villi's poem), Alli and Citrāṅgadā are two different wives of Arjuna. See Hiltebeitel, *Cult of Draupadī* 1:216–17.

[122] *VP* 1.7.22.

[123] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "kaṉṉi," accessed June 6, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=832.

[124] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "āṭu-tal," accessed June 6, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=219.

[125] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 129.

While the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* narrates the story of the courtship of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā with just ten *śloka* couplets, the Tamil *Pāratam* dedicates twenty-two quatrains in *viruttam* meter to the romance of the Pāṇḍava prince and the Pandya princess.[126] Villi takes his time to describe the first meeting of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā which ends with the couple partaking in a secret *gandharva* marriage (a ceremony with no rituals or witnesses) and then making love. As soon as she is separated from Arjuna, Citrāṅgadā begins to suffer from what is known in Sanskrit as *viraha* or "longing in separation." Different characters that familiar from Caṅkam corpus of Tamil literature, such as Citrāṅgadā's female friends (*tōḻi*s) and foster mother (*cevilittāy*), try to console the princess but nothing works. The Pandya king is told of his daughter's love for Arjuna (who is also burning with *viraha*) and Citrāṅgadā's father happily arranges a grand formal wedding for the two lovers which is attended by various deities as well as the Chera and the Chola kings. Villi goes on to vividly describe the honeymoon of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā, which results in the birth of the future Pandya king, Babhruvāhana. The love story of Citrāṅgadā and Arjuna in the *Pāratam* features many of the typical events of the *mahākāvya*/*peruṅkāppiyam* genre, including a wedding, lovemaking, and the birth of a prince. Throughout this sequence, however, Villi does not let his audience forget that his composition is a Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*. When Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā first see each other, Villi compares them to Tirumāl and Śrī.[127] And among the celestial guests invited to the wedding of the Pandya king's daughter are "our lord" (*empirāṉ*) and the "lovely Śrī."[128]

As soon as Arjuna leaves the city of Madurai, Villi describes him visiting the "divine mountain" (*tirumalai*), which is a reference to the Kaḷḷaḻakar temple in the Vanagiri hills outside of the city.[129] Arjuna then heads to the same place in the Kiṣkindhā Forest in South India (now believed to near present-day Hampi) where in the Rāmāyaṇa tradition, Rāma shot seven trees with a single arrow to convince Sugrīva of his archery skills. While this story is found in Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, it also referred to twenty-two times by the Āḻvārs in the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam*.[130] Notably, none of the South Indian shrines and cities that Arjuna visits in the *Pāratam*, such as Tirupati, Kanchipuram, Tirukkovalur, Srirangam, Madurai, and Vanagiri, are mentioned in the "Forest Exile of Arjuna" sub-book of the critical edition of the Sanskrit epic. With the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," Villi thus brings his own regional, devotional space into the much larger geographical world of the Mahābhārata tradition.

The final stop on Arjuna's *tīrthayātra* in the Tamil *Pāratam* is Krishna's kingdom of Dwarka where Arjuna marries Krishna's sister Subhadrā. As in multiple Mahābhāratas from South India (including the southern recension of the Sanskrit epic, Kulaśekhara's twelfth-century Sanskrit drama *Subhadrādhanañjaya*, and Agastya Paṇḍita's *Bālabhārata*), Arjuna disguises

[126] *MBh* 1.207.13–23; and *VP* 1.7.21–43.

[127] *VP* 1.7.29.

[128] *VP* 1.7.41.

[129] *VP* 1.7.44.

[130] See Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa* 4.12.1–5 (I am following Vālmīki, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 4, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, trans. Rosalind Lefeber [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994]); and Narayanan, *Way and Goal*, 157.

himself as a wandering ascetic when he arrives in Dwarka in Villi's poem.[131] In all of these South Indian renderings of the love story of Subhadrā and Arjuna, Krishna is well-aware that the ascetic is actually Arjuna and the deity plays a much more active role in bringing the two lovers together than he does in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[132]

When Arjuna arrives in Dwarka, the rainy season is beginning. As Rosalind Lefeber explains, "it is a convention observed in Indian poetry, music, and art that the rains are the season for love, a time for separated lovers to be reunited, and for all couples to profit from the necessary restriction of outdoor activities."[133] Friedhelm Hardy notes that the association of the experience of *viraha* with the rainy season is seen in works belonging to the Caṅkam corpus as well as works from Sanskrit and Prakrit literary traditions: "the monsoon made it necessary for travelers, monks, or warriors to return home at the beginning of the rainy season. Thus, it is not surprising that this season is connected with the waiting wife, as we find also in Prakrit and Sanskrit lyrics. This season, promising the imminent return of the husband, was particularly loaded with emotions for the lonely wife."[134] In his rendering of the tale of Arjuna and Subhadrā's romance, Villi utilizes the setting of the rainy season to describe Arjuna burning uncontrollably with *viraha* after meeting Krishna's sister for the first time and being unable to cool himself despite the refreshing rains of the monsoon.[135] Villi's first description of the rainy season in the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," however, is not focused on the concept of *viraha* but on the arrival of Krishna to Arjuna's camp on the outskirts of Dwarka:

> The king of the Yādavas
> reflected on the marriage of Indra's divine child
> who had reached that prosperous place.
> The clouds of the rainy season
> tying up the sky in a blue canopy
> as the drums of thunder of heaven roared and roared,
> approaching and placing ornamental hangings
> representing *makara* fishes of five colors
> that were made up of twinned colorful rainbows,
> and lighting rising lamps of dazzling lightning,
> they split an entire cascade of pearls of rain.[136]

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[131] See *Mahābhārata* (*Sriman Mahābhāratam*) 1.217–20; Sudha Gopalakrishnan, "What Are the Goals of Life? The *Vidūṣaka*'s Interpretation of the *Puruṣārtha*s in Kulaśekhara's *Subhadrādhanañjaya*," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 137; and Sankaran and Raja, "On the Sources of Villiputtūrār," 263–64.

[132] For this episode in the critical edition, see *MBh* 1.211–13.

[133] Lefeber, "Notes" to Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa:*4, 269n13.

[134] Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 161.

[135] *VP* 1.7.60–62.

[136] *intiraṟku tiru matalai maṉṟal eṇṇi yātavar kōṉ vaḷam patiyil eytiṉāṉ eṉṟu*
antarattai nīlattāl vitāṉam ākki aṇṭam uṟa iṭi muracam ārppa ārppa
vantu iraṭṭai vari cilaiyāl pañca vaṇṇam makaratōraṇam nāṭṭi vayaṅkum miṉṉāl
muntuṟa tīpam eṭuttu tārai muttāl muḻu pori cintiṉ kāla mukilkaḷ ammā || *VP* 1.7.51 ||

In this verse full of poetic imagery, the arrival of Krishna at Arjuna's camp is clearly being compared to the arrival of the monsoon in Dwarka. In Villi's description of this scene, it is almost as if the rainy season is coming out to welcome Krishna. While there have been multiple allusions to various forms of Viṣṇu up to this point in the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," this verse is Krishna's first physical appearance in the narrative of this chapter in the *Pāratam*. It is thus fitting that Villi uses a verse celebrating the arrival of the monsoon to introduce Krishna in this chapter. Also note that Krishna approaches Arjuna while contemplating the marriage of the Pāṇḍava prince to Krishna's sister. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, Villi depicts Krishna as the puppet master of the *Pāratam* who pulls the strings of several different characters. With this verse, Krishna is setting everything in motion in order for Arjuna and Subhadrā to fall in love, wed, and produce the great warrior Abhimanyu, who will play a pivotal role in the great war.

After warmly greeting Arjuna, Krishna tells him that he will come back the next day.[137] When Krishna returns in the morning, he brings along an entourage which includes his older brother Balarāma.[138] Arjuna greets his guests by blessing them like an ascetic and he proceeds to give them a lecture on the *daśāvatāra* or "ten incarnations" cycle of Viṣṇu.[139] As we saw in Chapter Three, unlike many other Vaiṣṇava communities who regard Krishna and the Buddha as Viṣṇu's eighth and ninth incarnations, Śrīvaiṣṇavas consider Balarāma and Krishna to be Viṣṇu's eighth and ninth incarnations in the *daśāvatāra* cycle. Therefore, Śrīvaiṣṇava audiences will see the humor in this scene of Arjuna pretending to be an ascetic and lecturing two of Viṣṇu's incarnations on the different forms of Viṣṇu in the *daśāvatāra* cycle.

Following this comical moment, Villi describes Arjuna seeing Krishna and Balarama's beautiful sister Subhadrā for the first time as she approaches the disguised Pāṇḍava prince:

> The two (Arjuna and Krishna) were close to each other
> and together at that time, they saw
> Subhadrā on that path of the mountain
> on one side of the hill:
> like lightning in a fresh cloud
> or a line of beauty.
> The one who appeared
> caused the hairs of the body to rise in joy all over.
> Without blinking,
> Arjuna beheld with his eyes
> the virgin who was like
> the blossoming of the young, unique *kaṭampu* flower.
> Witnessing this first sight (*kāṭci*) of the
> esteemed one of great penance (Arjuna),
> Mādhava gave a gentle smile,
> abundantly rejoicing in the
> relationship of his cousin/brother-in-law.[140]

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[137] *VP* 1.7.53.

[138] *VP* 1.7.54.

[139] *VP* 1.7.55.

[140] *tuṉṉi iruvarum oruppaṭṭu irunta kālai cupattirai a taṭam kuṉṟiṉ cūḻal ōr cār miṉṉiya paim puyaliṉ eḻil irēkai pōla veḷippaṭalum mey puḷakam mēl mēl ēṟi*

In his commentary on the second verse of the *Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ* (Study of Stolen Love), a treatise on the poetics of the *akam* tradition of Tamil poetry, Nakkīrar describes a series of different scenes (*tuṟai*) that take place when two people fall in love. The first of these scenes is *kāṭci* or "first sight," which Nakkīrar defines as "when the eyes of those two people meet."[141] Premodern Tamil literature is full of examples of *kāṭci*. Just take the following verse about Rāma and Sītā from the first book of Kampaṉ's Rāmāyaṇa *peruṅkāppiyam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*:

> Far beyond thought she stood: their eyes
> Met and gorged each other; their souls
> No longer theirs became as one —
> The hero gazed, and so did she![142]

Rāma and Sītā and the powerful love they feel when they see each other for the first time is at the heart of this verse from the *Irāmāvatāram*. In the *kāṭci* verse about Arjuna and Subhadrā in the *Pāratam*, however, Krishna is as prominent a character as the two lovers (if not more so). The verse begins with both Arjuna and Krishna seeing Subhadrā make her way down the mountain. Villi goes on to describe Subhadrā using rather conventional similes comparing her to lightning and the blossoming of a flower and he makes it clear that Arjuna is enamored with her by describing the prince's horripilation and unblinking eyes. Yet the final part of the verse is all about Krishna and his reaction to witnessing the *kāṭci* of Arjuna and Subhadrā.

Villi tells us that "Mādhava gave a gentle smile, abundantly rejoicing in the relationship of his cousin/brother-in-law." The term *maittuṉamai* means "the relationship with one's *maittuṉaṉ*."[143] While *maittuṉaṉ* can mean the "son of one's maternal uncle or paternal aunt," it can also mean "sister's husband."[144] Kuntī is the sister of Krishna's father Vasudeva, thus making Arjuna the son of Krishna's paternal aunt and Krishna's *maittuṉaṉ*. But since Krishna knows that Arjuna will soon wed Subhadrā, he is also viewing Arjuna as his *maittuṉaṉ* in the sense of a brother-in-law. Arjuna is Krishna's paternal cousin and brother-in-law in the Sanskrit epic as well, but the prevalence of cross-cousin marriage in Tamil culture gives Villi the opportunity for some fun wordplay that is not possible in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[145] The double meaning of *maittuṉamai* in this verse also illustrates Krishna's playful nature.

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kaṉṉi iḷam taṉi kaṭampu malarnta eṉṉa kaṇṭa viḷi imaiyāta kāṭci kāṇā
maṉṉiya mātavattōṉai mantam mūral mātavaṉ maittuṉamaiyiṉāl makiḻcci kūrntē || *VP* 1.7.56 ||

[141] Nakkīrar's commentary on *Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ* 2, trans. David C. Buck and K. Paramasivam in *The Study of Stolen Love: A Translation of Kaḷaviyal eṉṟa Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ with Commentary by Nakkīraṉār*, trans. David C. Buck and K. Paramasivam (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). 35.

[142] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 1.10.35, trans. P.S. Sundaram in Kampaṉ, *Kamba Ramayanam*, vol 1, *Balakandam*, trans. P.S. Sundaram (Tanjavur: Tamil University Press and Department of Tamil Development-Culture, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1989), 99.

[143] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "maittuṉamai," accessed April 10, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=3368.

[144] *University of Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. "maittuṉaṉ," accessed April 10, 2021, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tamil-lex_query.py?page=3368.

[145] Isabelle Clark-Decès explains that in Tamil culture "cross-cousin marriage permits three prescriptive or preferential modalities: (1) marriage (from a man's point of view) to the patrilateral female cousin, the father's

As he does with the account of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā's romance, Villi takes his time to describe the courtship of Arjuna and Subhadrā.[146] After the *kāṭci* verse, Krishna mischievously instructs Subhadrā to take good care of their ascetic guest. Subhadrā dutifully obeys her brother's command and finds Arjuna a bed for the night. Villi then goes on to describe how the intense heat of Arjuna's *viraha* for Subhadrā prevents him from sleeping (despite the coolness of the monsoon) and how Subhadrā begins to suspect that this mendicant is Arjuna. Once Arjuna reveals himself to Subhadrā, the marriage of these two lovers is finally arranged. Villi describes Krishna bringing several deities and celestial beings to bless his sister's marriage, including the famous Vedic sage Vasiṣṭha and his wife Arundhatī:

> Through the compassion of the especially skilled one (Krishna)
> who had stolen and eaten the milk, special curds, and the best ghee in town,
> the excellent Arundhatī along with her husband who brought forth superiority
> and many fine sages came at the suitable time and uttered blessings.[147]

Although Krishna is escorting a divine sage and his wife to Subhadrā's wedding in Dwarka, Villi uses this verse to remind his audiences of the young Krishna of Vrindavan. The description of the god as the one "who had stolen and eaten the milk, special curds, and the best ghee in town" draws on stories of Krishna's childhood in Braj found in the Tamil verses of the *Nālāyirativiyappirapantam* and other South Indian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* texts, including the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and Vedāntadeśika's *Gopālaviṃśati* and *Yādavābhyudaya*. As we have seen, throughout the *Pāratam* Villi ensures that his readers do not forget that the Pāṇḍavas' advisor was once the loveable prankster and cowherd who pervades the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* corpus.

After the wedding is complete and Arjuna and Subhadrā begin the journey back to Indraprastha, Villi gives an account of the furious Balarāma (who disapproved of the marriage and did not know it had taken place) along with his entire army chasing after his sister and her new husband and then engaging in battle with Arjuna. Upon being defeated by Arjuna and placated by Krishna, however, Balarāma allows Subhadrā to travel to her new home.[148] In the final verse of the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter," Villi describes Arjuna and Krishna as Nara and Nārāyaṇa.[149] As Katz notes, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* identifies Nara and Nārāyaṇa as "two seers, whose godlike power derived from a tremendously long course of austerities."[150]

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sister's daughter; (2) marriage (again from a man's point of view) to the matrilateral female cousin, the mother's brother's daughter; and (3) bilateral marriage to either the patrilateral or matrilateral cousin" (*The Right Spouse: Preferential Marriages in Tamil Nadu* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014], 6). Arjuna's marriage to Subhadrā is an example of the second preferential modality.

[146] *VP* 1.7.57–75.

[147] *pāl aruntati naṟuney āy pāṭiyil kaḷḷattāl*
aruntu ati virakaṉatu aruḷiṉāl viraivil
cāl aruntati talaivaṉum talai peṟum pala nuṇ
nūlarum tati uṟa pukuntu ācikaḷ nuvaṉṟār || *VP* 1.7.76 ||

[148] *VP* 1.7.79–89.

[149] *VP* 1.7.90.

[150] Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata*, 215.

Throughout the Sanskrit epic, Arjuna and Krishna are said to be incarnations of these two sages.[151] Katz adds that "it is clear that the source of the Nara-Narayana pair's omnipotence is actually Narayana, for it is he who is identified with Vishnu, that is, the supreme Godhead; this identity is reiterated throughout the extant *Mahabharata*, which regards 'Narayana' as a name of Vishnu, and Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu/Narayana."[152]

As evidenced by its title and its contents, the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" of the *Pāratam* centers on Arjuna and his adventures during his year of exile. Many distinctive features of the *peruṅkāppiyam/mahākāvya* genre are on display in this chapter of Villi's poem, such as different types of poetic figuration and descriptions of scenes associated with courtly life, including sporting in gardens, lovemaking, weddings, and the birth of princes. Yet as we have seen, the "*Tīrthayātra* of Arjuna Chapter" also clearly maps out a sacred Śrīvaiṣṇava geography of South India and features Krishna in a prominent role. This chapter may seem to be all about Arjuna, but Krishna and other forms of Viṣṇu are always in the background, which (as we saw in Chapter One) is a primary feature of *bhakti* narrative poems. Villi's choice to end this Arjuna-centric chapter of his *peruṅkāppiyam* with a reflection on Arjuna and Krishna's relationship and their past lives as the divine pair Nara and Nārāyaṇa is no accident.

The *Ulā* of Krishna

Another excerpt from the *Pāratam* that shows a distinct overlapping of religious and courtly concerns is the description of Krishna's entrance into Indraprastha for Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* (royal consecration) ceremony in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*. Using twelve verses, Villi describes the women of Indraprastha watching Krishna and his entourage enter the city.

While this sequence in the *Pāratam* is absent from the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, it does have a *mahākāvya* precedent in Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*. Lawrence McCrea points out that when Krishna enters Indraprastha in the *Śiśupālavadha*, he is viewed by the citizens of "Yudhiṣṭhira's country as he arrives and enters the city, with love, with wonder, and (in the case of the female observers) with sexual desire."[153] Māgha dedicates nineteen verses of the thirteenth chapter of his *mahākāvya* to the reactions that the women of Indraprastha have upon seeing Krishna process through the city's streets.[154] Here is a small excerpt:

> Women on every roof pelted their adored Krishna with
> parched rice grain and flowers from hands like lotus
> buds, as if with powdered pearls released from oyster
> shells pried open.

[151] Katz, 213–21.

[152] Katz, 215.

[153] Lawrence McCrea, "The Conquest of Cool: Theology and Aesthetics in Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Towards a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 131.

[154] Māgha, *Śiśupālavadha* 13.30–48.

> Krishna was a constant source of delight to the women,
> like the spring season, beautified by the moon freed
> from winter, with lotuses blossoming everywhere,
> charming the birds and stimulating love, the time
> when wine is at its best.[155]

It is impossible to say with any confidence whether Villi's account of Krishna entering Indraprastha in the Tamil *Pāratam* is directly inspired by the one in Māgha's Sanskrit *Śiśupālavadha*. It is worth noting, however, that David Shulman and Blake Wentworth have documented processions in which women observe a deity or a king and are then filled with desire in multiple other famous Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s including Aśvaghoṣa's second-century *Buddhacarita* (Deeds of the Buddha) and Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Kumārasambhava*.[156]

Also, by the time of the composition of the *Pāratam*, a genre focused on women watching the procession of a deity or king was well-established in Tamil literature. This type of poem is known as an *ulā.* The first definitions of *ulā*s are found in Tamil literary treatises known as *pāṭṭiyal*s, with the earliest two *pāṭṭiyal*s being the eleventh- or twelfth-century *Paṉṉirupāṭṭiyal* and the twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Veṇpāppāṭṭiyal*. Jennifer Clare explains that "*pāṭṭiyal*s claim praise of a royal patron as a central condition of what constitutes the literary."[157] Kamil Zvelebil provides a definition of the *ulā* that is clearly based on those in the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises:

> *Ulā* 'Procession.' A very interesting and productive genre: A poem in *kaliveṇpā* which describes the patron (or god) going in procession around the streets of a city, while women of varying ages (*makaḷirparuvam*) fall in love with him; their love is not returned. The women belong to the classes of *pētai* (5–7 years of age), *petumpai* (8–11 years), *maṅkai* (12–13 years), *maṭantai* (14–19 years), *arivai* (19–25 years), *terivai* (26–31 years), and *pēriḷampeṇ* (31–40 years).[158]

The earliest example of the *ulā* genre is the eighth-century *Tirukkayilāyañāṉavulā* (*Ulā* of the Wisdom of Divine Kailāsa) of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, one of the Nāyaṉmār poets. As with the *mahākāvya* genre, the *ulā* is frequently associated with courtly contexts. Shulman notes that "the genre as a whole reflects the symbolic quality of South Indian kingship: the king is there in order to be perceived, and to perceive himself, in highly formalized and emotionally powerful ways."[159] Anne Monius points out that "Oṭṭakkūttar, author of the *Takkayākapparaṇi* and court-poet to three successive Cōḻa kings (Vikkiramaṉ, Kulōttuṅka II [Cēkkiḻār's patron], Rājarāja II),

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[155] Māgha, *Śiśupālavadha* 13.37–38, trans. Dundas in Māgha, *Killing of Shishupala*, 429.

[156] Shulman, *King and Clown*, 313; and Blake Tucker Wentworth, "Yearning for a Dreamed Real: The Procession of the Lord in Tamil *Ulā*s," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011), 74–88.

See also Sam Levin, "UC Berkeley professor fired nearly two years after sexual harassment claims substantiated," *The Guardian*, May 24, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/24/sexual-harassment-university-california-berkeley-blake-wentworth.

[157] Clare, "Canons, Conventions, Creativity," 59.

[158] Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 197.

[159] Shulman, *King and Clown*, 312.

composed the most famous of these processional studies in the psychology of female love, the *Mūvarulā* or '*Ulā* of the Three,' referring to each of his royal patrons."[160]

In his study of Tamil *ulā* poems, Wentworth asserts that "the *ulā* genre was almost totally a Śaiva phenomenon."[161] He goes on to support this claim with the following evidence:

> Of the ninety or so *ulā*s known to scholarship, three were written on Viṣṇu: the *Tiruvēṅkata Nātar Ulā*, the *Ciṟupuliyū Ulā*, and the *Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi Aḻakiya Nampi Ulā*. None are to my knowledge extant, and nothing is known of their dates and authors, all fairly clear suggestions that these poems did not gain any lasting currency. We know of a Jain *ulā*, and modern *ulā*s have been written on a variety of figures, as I noted in my mention of the twentieth-century political instances of the genre. But these are outliers which have never defined the genre's trajectory. *Ulā*s are texts written over centuries about the god Śiva and about Śaiva kings.[162]

Yet while the three Vaiṣṇava *ulā*s that Wentworth describes above may no longer be extant, there are certainly other *ulā*s to Viṣṇu in premodern Tami literature. In fact, Wentworth analyzes and provides a complete translation of one of these *ulā*s: the "Chapter on the *Ulā*" (*Ulāviyalpaṭalam*) in the first book of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*, which describes Rāma processing through the streets of Mithila (Mithilā) on his way to his wedding to Sītā.[163] Building on the work of Anne Monius, I have suggested in Chapter Three that the *Irāmāvatāram* is <u>not</u> a Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* narrative poem. But while the central project of the *Irāmāvatāram* is not expressing devotion to Rāma, this incarnation of Viṣṇu is undoubedtly at the center of the "Chapter on the *Ulā*" in Kampaṉ's *peruṅkāppiyam*.[164] Consider this verse from the chapter:

> Those who flocked to see the foot
> Which released Ahalya's rose-red body,
> And the shoulders which shot up like hills
> To break the bow for the dark-haired girl
> Were on the streets like a swarm of bees
> Humming around a pot of honey.[165]

This verse of the "Chapter on the *Ulā*" celebrates Rāma's role as the savior of Ahalyā and the winner of the competition for Sītā's hand in marriage during which Rāma successfully breaks the bow of Śiva. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, the *Irāmāvatāram* is a major source of inspiration for the *Pāratam*. Just as Kampaṉ embeds an *ulā* about Rāma into his Rāmāyaṇa *peruṅkāppiyam*, Villi embeds an *ulā* about Krishna into his Mahābhārata *peruṅkāppiyam.*

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[160] Monius, "Love, Violence, Disgust," 138.

[161] Wentworth, "Yearning for Dreamed Real," 10.

[162] Wentworth, 10.

[163] Wentworth, 172–76, and 409–22.

[164] Note that Shulman identifies another second "greatly telescoped *ulā* by Kampaṉ: the passage describing Rāma's ride through the streets of Ayodhyā on his way to his father's palace" in the second book of the *Irāmāvatāram* (*King and Clown*, 315). See Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 2.1.55–59.

[165] Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvatāram* 1.19.5, trans. Sundaram in Kampaṉ, *Kamba Ramayanam* 1:207–8.

And Villi is not the only *peruṅkāppiyam* poet who may have been inspired by Kampaṉ's *ulā* in the *Irāmāvatāram*. Vasudha Narayanan points out that in Umaṟuppulavar's *Cīṟāppurāṇam* "the long chapter on the wedding of 'Ali to the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima (*Pāttimā tirumaṇap paṭalam*), contains a beautiful description of 'Ali's procession through the city of Medina, paralleling Kampan's description of Rama's procession through Mithila in his *Rāmāyaṇam*."[166] Narayanan adds that "the young women of Medina, wearing bejeweled anklets and waist-belts like Tamil women, overflow from balconies trying to catch a glimpse of 'Ali, the handsome bridegroom. And when they see him, they are filled with longing and wonder."[167]

In her study of the thirteenth-century *Tirucciṉṉamālai* (Garland of the Brass Bugle), Srilata Raman convincingly demonstrates that this Tamil poem by the Śrīvaiṣṇava poet-philosopher Vedāntadeśika "might have been generally considered a *ulā*-like composition."[168] Raman notes that the *Tirucciṉṉamālai* "speaks with the voice of a bugle, calling the devotee to praise, wonder at, and pray to the deity, Varadarājasvāmī (a form of Viṣṇu displaying the *varada-mudrā*, as seen in a number of Tamil temples), in the context of his procession from his temple through the streets of the temple city of Kāñcipuram."[169] She goes on to show how "both in terms of the constant oscillation between the remoteness and proximity of God, and in terms of how his divine location is the central and entire focus of *The Brass Bugle*, we can understand the latter as a form of a truncated *ulā*, consisting of the essence of its formal features."[170]

The eighth and ninth verses of the *Tirucciṉṉamālai* are in praise of some of Krishna's most well-known deeds from both the stories of his childhood as well as from the Mahābhārata:

> He who-
> went as messenger at Dharma's behest,
> averted the unbearable burden of the Earth,
> spread around all the meaning of the rare Vedas,
> said, "You who are afraid, come to me,"
> stood, having become all of Dharma,
> himself will avert all sins,
> said, "The burden is mine. Why do you grieve?"
> He has come.
> He himself, who drove the chariot of Pārtha, has come.
>
> He who –
> killed the deceitful Pūtanā,
> fought the wrestlers and the maddened elephant,
> ended, with fiery anger, the war with Kaṃsa,
> reduced the shoulders of Bāṇa, before the blink of an eye,
> was pleased to give salvation to those of harsh words,

[166] Narayanan, "Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity," 403.

[167] Narayanan, 403.

[168] Srilata Raman, "The Garland of The Brass Bugle of Mantras: Vedānta Deśika's *Tirucciṉṉamālai*," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 24, no 2 (2016): 168.

[169] Raman, 164.

[170] Raman, 168.

hastened, to put us on our unhindered path,
guarded the five in myriad ways,
He has come.
He himself, who bound up the tresses of Pāñcālī, has come.[171]

In these two verses of the *Tirucciṉṉamālai*, Vedāntadeśika alludes to the Krishna of Vrindavan with references to the deity slaying Pūtanā, the wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, the elephant Kuvalayāpīḍa, Krishna's maternal uncle Kaṃsa, and the demon Bāṇa. Yet Vedāntadeśika also clearly praises the Krishna of the Mahābhārata tradition by mentioning his role as Yudhiṣṭhira's messenger, Arjuna's charioteer, the guardian of the five Pāṇḍavas, and the protector of Draupadī. Thus, with these two verses of the eleven-verse *Tirucciṉṉamālai*, Vedāntadeśika layers Varadarājasvāmī with Krishna, which as we saw in Chapter Three, is something that takes place in many works of Śrīvaiṣṇava literature, including Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*.

The "Chapter on the *Ulā*" in Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* and Vedāntadeśika's *Tirucciṉṉamālai* are two Tamil compositions about the procession of a form of Viṣṇu that are very reminiscent of other Tamil poems that bear the name *ulā* in their titles. I should note that the *ulā*-like compositions of Kampaṉ and Vedāntadeśika do lack some of the defining features of the *ulā* genre as described in the *pāṭṭiyal* treatises. For example, Kampaṉ's "Chapter on the *Ulā*" is not in *kaliveṇpā* meter and Vedāntadeśika's *Tirucciṉṉamālai* does not specifically describe the reactions of women to the procession. Yet it is important to remember that these *pāṭṭiyal* definitions of the *ulā* genre are likely descriptive (rather than proscriptive) reflections of well-known *ulā*s such as Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ's *Tirukkayilāyañāṉavulā* and Oṭṭakkūttar's *Mūvarulā*.

Villi uses twelve verses to describe the women of Indraprastha watching Krishna process through the streets of Indraprastha on his way to the consecration ceremony. The first six verses of Villi's *ulā* are quatrains in *viruttam* meter. Indira Peterson notes that "from the tenth century on, the term *viruttam* has been specifically applied to a particular type of meter that became the standard vehicle for narrative poetry, especially epics and Purāṇas, in Tamil."[172] Indeed, nearly all *peruṅkāppiyam*s—including the *Paratam,* the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, the *Nīlakēci*, the *Vaḷaiyāpati*, the *Cūḷāmaṇi*, the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, the *Naiṭatam*, the *Āyiramacalā*, the *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, and the *Tēmpāvaṇi*—are primarily composed in different forms of *viruttam*.

The remaining six verses of Villi's *ulā*, however, are in *koccakakkalippā* meter. Kamil Zvelebil points out that *koccakakkalippā* and *kaliveṇpā*, which is the meter of most *ulā*s, are two of the seven different types of *kalippā* meter.[173] We will turn to these six *koccakakkalippā* verses shortly, but I first want to point out that in the verse right before these final six verses, Villi mentions "the seven types of women" (*eḻu vakai paruva mātar*), which is a clear reference to how *ulā*s usually feature women from the seven different stages of life (*makaḷirparuvam*). Let us now examine the final six *koccakakkalippā* verses of Krishna's procession in the Tamil *Pāratam*:

[171] Vedāntadeśika, *Tirucciṉṉamālai* 8–9, trans. Raman in "Garland of Brass Bugle," 172.

[172] Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, 65.

[173] Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (1974), 100.

In the streets with jewels and festoons of flowers close together,
their wide kohl-lined eyes pressed together and unsettled
thinking about that extravagant one who is like a rain cloud from head to toe,
some women worshiped him. [174]

So that their breasts like flower buds
would dissolve against the jeweled chest
of the one with the golden anklets given by Gaṅgā
and in order to embrace his body without fear,
with their red, lovely hands like flowers
more agitated than they themselves,
some women went.[175]

As if seeing the one with bees, flowers, and sugarcane as his colorful weapons (Kāmadeva),
as if drinking the unique nectar from the red coral [lips] of
that one who bears the bouquet of flowers
and is the color of the *kāyā* flower who fills the eyes,
some women rejoiced in their hearts.[176]

Seeing the one who with his feet kicked and killed the strong Kaṃsa
and slew the demon Śakaṭa who practiced cruelty with his sword,
with their bodies pierced by the five arrows from the one without a body (Kāmadeva),
with their five senses exhausted and their hearts unsettled,
some women stood.[177]

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[174] *māṭam payilum maṇi tōraṇam vīti*
nīṭu añcaṉam kaṇ neruṅki taṭumāṟa
āṭamparam koṇṭal aṉṉāṉai āpāta
cūṭam karuti toḻutār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.78 ||

[175] *kaṅkai taru poṉ kaḻalāṉ maṇi mārpil*
koṅkai mukuḻam kuḻaiyumpaṭi āka
caṅkai aṟa mey taḻuvutaṟku tammiṉum tam
ceṅkai malar pataṟa ceṉṟār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.79 ||

[176] *vaṇṭu malar karumpu ām vaṇṇam paṭaiyāṉai*
kaṇṭu aṉaiya kaṇ niṟainta kāyāmalar vaṇṇaṉ
ceṇṭu tarittōṉ tiru pavaḻattu ār amutam
uṇṭu maṉattiṉāl uyntār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.80 ||

[177] *vañcam payil cakaṭa vāḻ acuraṉ māḻa viṟal*
kañcaṉ paṭa utaitta kālāṉai kaṇṭu uruki
añcu ampu mey uruva aimpulaṉum cōkam uṟa
neñcam taṭumāṟa niṉṟār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.81 ||

In the courtyard of their houses,
beholding the body of the one who came
before the cruel elephant with three types of flowing rut,
with water shining in their eyes,
with their beautiful arched eyebrows raised,
and with perspiration dripping from their moon-like foreheads
some women ran and stood.[178]

Becoming dark rows of bees
with eyes like swords,
for the scent of the garland of fragrant *tulsī* on the jewel bedecked chest
of the divine form of the lord who is like the dark cloud and the *kāyā* flower,
some women stood.[179]

All six of these *koccakakkalippā* verses end with the words "some women" (*cila mātar*). The repetition of this phrase at the conclusion of each of these verses is reminiscent of the way Vedāntadeśika finishes most of the verses of his *Tirucciṉṉamālai*. Raman points out that "almost every line of each verse ends with the word "*vantār*" meaning "He has come/He came."[180]

Shulman points out that "commentators from Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar on (fourteenth century) have claimed that the women described in the *ulā* belong to the category of 'common women' (*pōtu makaḷir*) or prostitutes. There is an obvious reluctance to imagine chaste, married women in the passionate poses depicted here."[181] The women watching Krishna in these six *koccakakkalippā* of Villi's *ulā* are certainly filled with passion for the deity. The second *koccakakkalippā* verse describes some women fantasizing about pressing their "breasts like flower buds" up against Krishna while embracing him. Both the third and fourth *koccakakkalippā* verses allude to Kāmadeva, the god of love, in their descriptions of women yearning for union with Krishna. Half of these *koccakakkalippā* verses make it clear that the powerful love of these women for Krishna is making them physically uncomfortable with Villi telling us that they are "unsettled" (*taṭumāṟa*), "agitated" (*pataṟa*), and "exhausted" (*cōkam uṟa*). Shulman asserts that "the mode of the *ulā*" is "*viraha* celebrated in a display of passion directed toward a largely inaccessible object."[182] Some of the women of Indraprastha in Villi's poem are clearly suffering as they behold the unattainable Krishna make his way through their city.

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[178] *taṅkaḷ kulam muṉṟil talai āya mummatattu*
veṅkaṇ matamā micai varuvōṉ mey nōkki
am kaṇ miḷira arum puruvam vil muriya
tiṅkaḷ nutal vērvu ōṭa niṉṟār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.82 ||

[179] *kālam mukilum malar kāyāvum aṉṉa tiru*
kōlam uṭaiyāṉ kulavu maṇi pūṇ mārpiṉ
mālai naṟuntuḷapa maṉṟalukku vāḷ nayaṉam
nīlam vari vaṇṭu āki niṉṟār cila mātar || *VP* 2.1.83 ||

[180] Raman, "Garland of Brass Bugle," 175n19.

[181] Shulman, *King and Clown*, 312–13.

[182] Shulman, 322.

As Friedhelm Hardy has shown, the trope of the devotee pining with *viraha* for Viṣṇu or Krishna pervades Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* compositions from all over the Indian subcontinent.[183] Villi is thus not only following in the footsteps of the authors of *ulā*s, but also in the footsteps of the Āḻvārs, Vedāntadeśika, and countless other Vaiṣṇava poets. Each of the six *koccakakkalippā* verses mention a familiar from of Krishna or Viṣṇu. For example, the first and the last of the *koccakakkalippā* verses refer to the *kaustubha* jewel on Viṣṇu's chest. The fourth *koccakakkalippā* verse alludes to two different stories from Krishna's youth in Vrindavan: the slaying of Kaṃsa and the slaying of the cart-demon Śakaṭa. Villi brings up Kuvalayāpīḍa, a mad elephant that Krishna kills in Mathura, in the fifth *koccakakkalippā* verse. Several of these *koccakakkalippā* verses celebrate Krishna's dark complexion with familiar similes and metaphors that compare the deity to a raincloud or the *kāyā* flower.

With this account of the women of Indraprastha gazing upon Krishna as he makes his way through the streets of city, Villi presents his readers with a passage that not only resembles similar sections of other *mahākāvya*s and *peruṅkāppiyam*s, including the *Buddhacarita*, the *Raghuvaṃśa,* the *Kumārasambhava*, the *Śiśupālavadha*, the *Irāmāvatāram*, and the *Cīṟāppurāṇam*, but that is also inspired by the Tamil genre of the *ulā*, which, like the *mahākāvya/peruṅkāppiyam* genre, is often associated with courtly life. Yet Krishna is also clearly at the center of Villi's *ulā* and this passage is steeped with Vaiṣṇava imagery.

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Before turning to the intersection of religious and courtly concerns in Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in Chapter Six, I want to clarify that not all *mahākāvyas* and *peruṅkāppiyam*s place themselves in courtly contexts. As Deven Patel points out, the *mahākāvya* genre's "range of themes and linguistic forms often exceeds what is usually thought of as 'courtly.'"[184] While some *peruṅkāppiyam*s, such as the *Periyapurāṇam* and the *Irāmāvatāram*, make courtly patronage claims, others, such as the *Nīlakēci* and the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, do not.

Villi's Mahābhārata *peruṅkāppiyam*, however, is clearly presented as a courtly narrative. In the first section of this chapter, I suggested that the allusions to Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ may not be documenting an actual historical patronage relationship between Villi and this Koṅkar king. Nonetheless, the references to Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in Varantaruvār's *ciṟappuppāyiram* and the narrative of the *Pāratam* still place this composition in a courtly world. The *Pāratam* is also filled with descriptions of courtly life, such as the courting of princesses (and the political alliances that are forged in the process), vibrant lovemaking, the birth of princes, and royal processions. But while constantly marking his composition as a courtly *peruṅkāppiyam*, Villi never lets his audience forget that his Mahābhārata is also a Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* narrative poem focused on the deeds of Krishna. As I have shown in this chapter, the categories of "devotional" and "courtly" in Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* are deeply intertwined and by no means incompatible.

[183] Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 555–69.

[184] Patel, *Text to Tradition*, 18.

CHAPTER SIX

A Mahābhārata for the Mughals: Praising Aurangzeb in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*

Between the late sixteenth century and the early eighteenth century, several South Asian poets composed Persian retellings of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa narratives that were either commissioned by or dedicated to one of the rulers of the Mughal Empire.

As I noted in the Introduction, the first of these retellings was the *Razmnāmah* (ca. 1582), the Persian "translation" of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* commissioned by the third Mughal emperor Akbar.[1] The *Razmnāmah* was reworked in the late 1580s by Akbar's poet laureate Fayẓī and abridged in 1602 in the universal history *Rawẓat al-Ṭāhirīn* by Ṭāhir Muḥammad Sabzvārī, a historian in Akbar's court.[2] In 1594, Fayẓī also composed a Persian *maṣnavī* (a lengthy narrative poem in rhymed couplets) based on the story of Nala and Damayantī from the Mahābhārata tradition entitled *Naldaman*.[3] Along with the *Razmnāmah*, Akbar commissioned a Persian translation of Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*.[4] One of the manuscripts of the *Akbarī Rāmāyan* was owned by both Akbar's mother, Ḥamīda Banū Begum (d. 1604), and Akbar's son and the fourth Mughal emperor, Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627).[5] Gauḍa Abhinanda's tenth-century Sanskrit *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* is a Rāmāyaṇa retelling that was repeatedly translated into Persian under the patronage of multiple members of the Mughal royal family including Akbar, Jahāngīr, and Jahāngīr's grandson Dārā Shikūh (1615–1659).[6] Supriya Gandhi observes that Dārā Shikūh is also credited with being the patron of a Persian translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*.[7]

There are two different early seventeenth-century Persian Rāmāyaṇa retellings that are dedicated to Jahāngīr: Masīḥ Pānīpatī's *Maṣnavī-yi Rām va Sītā* (Tale of Rāma and Sītā) and

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[1] For more on the *Razmnāmah*, see Najaf Haider, "Translating Texts and Straddling Worlds: Intercultural Communication in Mughal India," in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 118–23; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 101–33; and Audrey Truschke, "A Padshah Like Manu: Political Advice for Akbar in the Persian *Mahābhārata*," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 2 (2020): 112–33.

[2] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 133–41.

For more on this text, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Cultures and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 97–114.

[3] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "An Indo-Persian Retelling of Nala and Damayanti," in *Damayanti and Nala: The Many Lives of a Story*, ed. Susan S. Wadley (Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2011), 38–81.

[4] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 204–14.

[5] Audrey Truschke, "The Persian Text of the Doha Ramayana," in *The Ramayana of Hamida Banu Begum: Queen Mother of Mughal India*, ed. Marika Sardar, John Seyller, and Audrey Truschke (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2020), 28.

[6] Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 30–55; and Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 194–97.

[7] Gandhi, 199.

Giridhardās's *Rāmnāmah* (Book of Rāma).[8] While Truschke describes the *Rāmnāmah* of Giridhardās (who was a member of the Hindu Kāyasth scribe community) as a Rāmāyaṇa retelling that "follows Vālmīki's version quite closely," Prashant Keshavmurthy points out that in the *Maṯnavī-yi Rām va Sītā*, Masīḥ identifies "himself as a Sufi master or *pīr*" and that he invokes "the conventions of the *'ishqiyyah* trope, the trope of amorous love between symmetrically paired lovers canonical in Persian and Indic narrative traditions."[9] And finally, there are two more Persian retellings of the Rāmāyaṇa that are dedicated to Dārā Shikūh's younger brother and the sixth Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb: Candraman Bedil's *Nargisistān* (Narcissus Garden, 1692) and Amar Singh's *Amar Prakāsh* (Illumination of Amar, 1705).[10]

Yet in this ocean of Rāmāyaṇas and Mahābhāratas that were commissioned by or dedicated to one of the Mughals, only one is composed in Bhasha: Sabalsingh Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*. As we saw in Chapter Four, eleven of the eighteen books of this poem begin with prologues. These prologues have caught the interest of multiple Hindi scholars. Eight of the prologues contain dates ranging between 1661 and 1724 CE.[11] Four of these dated prologues praise the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, one praises a king by the name of Mitrasen, and another praises both Aurangzeb and Mitrasen. Given that seven out of the eight dates in the prologues are within the dates accepted as Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707), many prominent Hindi literary historians have asserted that the prologues document Aurangzeb and Mitrasen's patronage of Cauhān and have thus firmly categorized the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* as a "courtly" text.[12]

A closer look at each of the eight dated prologues, however, seriously complicates this designation. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the prologues of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* present a distinct overlapping of devotional and political spheres. Through close readings of these eight different prologues, I show how Cauhān uses the opening verses of the different books in the *Mahābhārat* to present his poem as an unequivocally Vaiṣṇava text that is sanctioned by two powerful rulers from different religious and cultural backgrounds. One of these two rulers is the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. As Truschke notes, today Aurangzeb is remembered by many Indians as a "zealous bigot who ruled by sword and left behind a trail of Hindu tears."[13] In recent

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[8] Robert Lowell Phillips, "Garden of Endless Blossoms: Urdu *Rāmāyans* of the 19th and Early 20th Century," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), 76–84; Supriya Gandhi, "Retelling the Rāma Story in Persian Verse: Masīḥ Pānīpatī's Masṉavī-yi Rām va Sitā," in *No Tapping Around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 309–24; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 214–17; and Prashant Keshavmurthy, "Translating Rāma as a Proto-Muḥammadan Prophet: Masīḥ's *Maṯnavī-i Rām va Sītā*," *Numen* 65 (2018): 1–27.

[9] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 140; and Keshavmurthy, "Translating Rāma," 10 and 4–5.

[10] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2017), 60; and Phillips, "Garden of Endless Blossoms," 76.

[11] Yet while most printed editions of Cauhān's text state that the eighteenth book was composed in 1724, one manuscript gives the composition year as 1677. See Rai Bahadur Hiralal, *The Twelfth Report on the Search of Hindi Manuscripts for the Years 1923, 1924 and 1925* (Banaras: Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, 1944), 1276.

[12] See Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272–73; Sita Ram, *Other Poets,* 236; Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 326; Nagendra, *Rītikāl*, 371; and McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[13] Truschke, *Aurangzeb*, 3.

years, however, scholarship has begun to complicate this picture of Aurangzeb.[14] My analysis of the praise of Aurangzeb in Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in this chapter contributes to this body of scholarship that challenges monolithic representations of this Mughal ruler.

Earlier Scholarship on Cauhān's Dated Prologues

Before carefully examining each of the eight dated prologues in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, it is first necessary to examine earlier scholarship on these prologues.

While Cauhān is mentioned in two of the most influential studies of Bhasha literature from the late-nineteenth century, Śivsingh Sengar's *Śivsinghsāroj* (Lotus of Śivsingh, 1878) and George Abraham Grierson's *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (1889), neither Sengar nor Grierson seem to have actually read any of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*. Sengar tells us:

> Sabalsingh Cauhān, born in the Vikram Saṃvat year of 1727 [1670 CE]. Twenty-four thousand *śloka*s of the *Mahābhārata* have been translated (*ulathā*) with a lot of summary in *dohā-caupāī* meter. Some say this poet was the king (*rājā*) of Chandagarh, others say of Sabalgarh. Members of his lineage (*vaṃśvāle*) till date are in the Hardoi district. But I do not accept this. I say, no, this poet was a landowner (*zamīndār*) in some village in the Etawah district [of present-day Uttar Pradesh], and he translated ten books himself.[15]

Apart from speculating that Cauhān may have also been the author of two other texts listed in the *Śivsinghsāroj*, Grierson's account is essentially the same as Sengar's.[16] Since Sengar only describes ten books of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* and both Sengar and Grierson say that Cauhān was born in 1670 CE, I suspect that neither of these scholars had access to manuscripts of this text.[17] As we will soon see, Cauhān informs us that he composed eight books of his Mahābhārata between 1661 and 1724. If Sengar or Grierson had seen these dates in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat,* it is unlikely they would have still given Cauhān's birth year as 1670.[18]

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[14] See Katherine Butler Brown, "Did Aurangzeb ban music? Questions for the historiography of his reign," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 77–120; Munis D. Faruqui, "Awrangzīb," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, Brill Online, 2011; https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/awrangzib-COM_23859; Truschke, *Aurangzeb*; Anne Murphy and Heidi Pauwels, eds. "From Outside the Persianate Centre: Vernacular Views on Ālamgīr," special issue, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 3 (2018); and Richard M. Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age 1000–1765* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 327–39. Munis Faruqui is also currently working on a monograph on Aurangzeb.

[15] Sengar, *Śivsinghsāroj*, 500.

[16] Grierson, *Vernacular Literature of Hindustan,* 78.

Grierson states that he is "indebted" to "the very useful" *Śivsinghsāroj* on the first page of his introduction.

[17] Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* was first published in 1881 by the Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow (Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* [Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007], 321). It is thus possible that Grierson could have read this edition of the text. I suspect, however, that Grierson's account of Cauhān's poem comes directly from the *Śivsinghsāroj*.

[18] The Miśra Brothers, Sita Ram, and Nagendra all comment on this. See Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272; Sita Ram, *Other Poets*, 236; and Nagendra, *Rītikāl*, 371.

Sengar notes that "some say this poet was the king (*rājā*) of Chandagarh, others say of Sabalgarh," but Sengar himself asserts that Cauhān "was a landowner (*zamīndār*)." These assumptions that Cauhān was either a king or a *zamīndār* are likely based on the surname of this poet. The last name of the author of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* suggests that this poet was a member of the Cauhān Rajput clan. Allison Busch notes that that during the period of Mughal rule in South Asia, the term "Rajput" can "mean the rulers from today's Rajasthan but also the subimperial kings, from across northern and eastern India as well as the Deccan, who served as Mughal *manṣabdār*s [high-ranking Mughal officials] and contributed to the forging of new styles of kingly self-presentation in this period."[19] The most famous ruler to bear the surname Cauhān was the twelfth-century Rajput king Pṛthvīrāj Cauhān, who the colonial scholar James Tod famously labeled "the last Hindu emperor" in his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829–1832).[20] Pṛthvīrāj Cauhān is immortalized in Cand Baradāī's sixteenth-century Bhasha narrative poem, the *Pṛthvīrājrāso*.[21] Several premodern North Indian literary texts, including Jayanka's twelfth century Sanskrit *Pṛthvīrājavijaya* (Victory of Pṛthvīrāj Cauhān), Nayacandra Sūri's fifteenth-century Sanskrit *Hammīramahākāvya* (*Mahākāvya* on Hammira Cauhān), Candraśekhara's seventeenth-century *Surjanacarita* (Deeds of Surjan), and Cand Baradāī's Bhasha *Pṛthvīrājrāso*, present kings of the Cauhān clan as heroic Rajput warriors.[22]

A much more detailed account of Sabalsingh Cauhān and his text is found in the formative Bhasha anthology, the *Miśrabandhuvinod* (1913) of Gaṇeśvihārī, Śyāmvihārī, and Śukadevvihārī Miśra. The Miśra Brothers begin by pointing out that the "majority" (*adhikāṃś*) of the books contain a date in the Vikram Saṃvat calendar.[23] They have a doubt about the reliability of the date in the final book because the names of Aurangzeb and Mitrasen are found frequently in the poem but Aurangzeb was not alive in 1724 and "maybe" Mitrasen was not either.[24] These remarks make it clear that the Miśra Brothers are reading the dates and references to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen as "documenting" facts to once again use the language of LaCapra.

The Miśra Brothers then list the eight dated books according to the chronological order in which the text claims they were composed: the *Book of Bhīṣma* (1661), the *Book of Karṇa* (1667), the *Book of Śalya* (1667), the *Book of the Assembly Hall* (1670), the *Book of Droṇa* (1670), the *Book of Clubs* (1673), the *Book of Hermitage* (1694), and the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* (1724). Based on this dated list, the Miśra Brothers claim that Sabalsingh Cauhān could

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[19] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 167.

[20] See Talbot, *Last Hindu Emperor*, 3.

[21] Talbot, 223–36.

[22] See Talbot, 37–43 and 107–45; Sander Hens, "Beyond Power and Praise: Nayacandra Sūri's Tragic-historical Epic Hammīra-mahākāvya as a Subversive Response to Hero Glorification in Early Tomar Gwalior," *South Asian History and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2020): 40–59; and Audrey Truschke, *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Indo-Muslim Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 44–65, 89–96, and 168–72.

[23] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272.

Note that in reality, only eight of the eighteen books are dated.

[24] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, 1:272.

not have begun this poem with the intention of telling the "entire" Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and that writing poetry must have not been his "occupation" (*peśā*) but only a "hobby" (*śauq*).[25]

The Miśra Brothers also place great importance on the following verses from the prologue to the *Book of Hermitage* of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*:

> King Aurangzeb, lord of Delhi, rules
> and there Mitrasen, lord of the earth, is delighted.
> Before these kings of men, Sabalsingh Cauhān sang and counted.[26]

The authors of the *Miśrabandhuvinod* then declare:

> From this, the inference is that our respected poet had a brotherly relationship (*bhāīcārā*) with Mitrasen, and he was in the service of Emperor Aurangzeb, otherwise what business did he have "being delighted" in Delhi? It seems that for this reason the respected poet has often written Aurangzeb's name at fixed intervals along with words of praise.[27]

The Miśra Brothers also entertain the possibility that Cauhān himself was in the service of Aurangzeb along with Mitrasen and that perhaps they were allies in "battle" (*yuddha*) and this is why Cauhān decided to begin his Bhasha *Mahābhārat* with the *Book of Bhīṣma*, which is the first of the four books describing the Kurukṣetra War in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[28]

The influence of the Miśra Brothers' documentary reading of the dates and allusions to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* is evident in the subsequent scholarship of Lala Sita Ram, Rāmcandra Śukla, and Nagendra. Sita Ram states that Mitrasen was Cauhān's "relative," Śukla claims that Cauhān lived at the court of Aurangzeb with "some King Mitrasen," and Nagendra calls Mitrasen a "courtly" (*darbārī*) king.[29] The Miśra Brothers' influence is also seen in the much more recent *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (1984) by R.S. McGregor. McGregor mentions Cauhān's "connection with a member of Aurangzeb's court" and argues that based on the late date of 1724 in the eighteenth and final book, the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*, "it is thus likely (quite apart from the extent of the work) that this was contributed to and brought to completion by others."[30]

Multiple Hindi scholars also classify Cauhān as a poet belonging to the *rītikāl* or "*rīti* period" of Bhasha literature. As we saw in the Introduction, Rāmcandra Śukla puts forth a *kāl vibhāg* (periodization) scheme in *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*.[31] Much like Grierson, Śukla conflates

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[25] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, 1:272–73.

[26] *auraṃgaśāha dilīpati rājata mitraseni bhūpati tahaṃ gājata*
ye nṛpa ke puruṣana mahaṃ gāe sabalasiṃha cauhāna ganāe || *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272 ||

The Tej Kumār edition of the text has a slightly different version of these verses. See *CM* 16.1.

[27] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272.

[28] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, 1:272.

[29] Sitaram, *Other Poets*, 236; Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās,* 326; and Nagendra, *Rītikāl*, 371.

[30] McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 195.

[31] Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās,* 2.

periodization with categorization. According to Śukla, the "beginning period" (*ādikāl*) from 993 to 1318 CE was the "heroic songs period" (*vīrgāthākāl*), the "early medieval period" (*purvmadhyakāl*) from 1318 to 1643 was the "*bhakti* period" (*bhaktikāl*), the "late medieval period" (*uttarmadhyakāl*) from 1643 to 1843 was the "*rīti* period" (*rītikāl*), and the "modern period" (*ādhunik-kāl*) from 1843 to 1927 was the "prose period" (*gadyakāl*). The *bhaktikāl* is then split into *saguṇa* (iconic) and *nirguṇa* (aniconic) "streams" (*dhārā*). The *saguṇa* stream is divided even further into "Rāma *bhakti*" and "Krishna *bhakti*." Sufi romance narratives, which Śukla calls "*premkathā*s," such as the *Mirigāvatī,* the *Madhumālatī*, and the *Padmāvat* are described as belonging to a branch of the *nirguṇa* stream.[32] In his literary history, Śukla displays a distinct preference for the literature of the *bhaktikāl*, especially that of the Rāma *bhakti* tradition as exemplified by Tulsīdās's distinctly "Indian" (*bhāratiya*) *Rāmcaritmānas*.[33] Śukla appreciates that the *Rāmcaritmānas* is not steeped in the expressions of *śṛṅgāra* (erotic love) seen in the poetry of Krishna *bhakta*s like Sūrdās and Mīrābāī.[34] He also values the way the Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* is untouched by the influence of the "Muslims," unlike the *nirguṇa* poems of the *sant*s (saints) Kabīr and Guru Nānak.[35] Śukla's bitter disappointment in *rītikāl* poetry, which he sees as imitative and convoluted, is evident right from his introduction in which he admits that he spent very little time working on this section of his literary history.[36]

As Dalpat Rajpurohit explains, "scholars have rightly questioned the rigidity of this timeframe and the assumptions of nationalist historians in evaluating the literature of this era on the grounds that such a schematic classification hampers our understanding of the Hindi past."[37] Busch, for example, attributes Śukla's negative depiction of *rīti* poetry and his overt preference for *bhakti* poetry for the way *rīti* texts have been neglected by modern academics.[38] Aditya Behl strongly objects to Śukla's classification of the Sufi *premkathā*s as a branch of the "Hindu" *nirguṇa* tradition.[39] Tyler Williams has challenged Śukla's assumption that all *nirguṇa* poets were illiterate.[40] Yet, as Vasudha Dalmia and Munis Faruqui have pointed out, Śukla's "ideas continue to resonate in academic as much as popular discourses."[41]

Cauhān's classification as a *rītikāl* poet is another reason why he is frequently described as a courtly poet. Both Śukla and the well-known *rīti* scholar Nagendra place Cauhān in the

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[32] Śukla, 94.

[33] Śukla, 124–46.

[34] Śukla, 166 and 184.

[35] Śukla, 78 and 84.

[36] Śukla, 6.

[37] Dalpat S. Rajpurohit, "*Bhakti* versus *Rīti*? The *Sants*' Perspective," *Bulletin of SOAS* 84, no.1 (2021): 96.

[38] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 226–37.

[39] Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*, 11–12.

[40] Williams, "Sacred Sounds and Sacred Books," 36–40.

[41] Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui, "Introduction," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), xii.

rītikāl in their respective literary histories.[42] In the preface of his comparatively recent literary history of Bhasha literature, McGregor makes a point of stating that his periodization model is different from that of Śukla.[43] Yet, when we actually examine McGregor's three periods—"The Rise of New Traditions in Literature and Religion: 1200–c.1450," "The Years of Maturity: the 15th and 16th Centuries," and "The Waning of An Era: from the 17th to the 19th Centuries"—we find that McGregor's model closely mirrors the one in Śukla's *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*. In his literary history, McGregor discusses Cauhān in a subsection called "Poets dealing chiefly with other subject matter" in the "Other court poets" section of the "Waning of An Era" period.[44]

If we were to accept that the dates and lines praising Aurangzeb and Mitrasen are in fact documenting historical facts (as suggested by the Miśra Brothers, Sita Ram, Śukla, Nagendra, and McGregor), the next step would be to search for other texts that establish connections between Cauhān, Aurangzeb, and Mitrasen. According to Muḥammad Kāẓim's seventeenth-century Persian chronicle, the *ʿĀlamgīrnāmah* (Book of Aurangzeb), there was a Bundela Rajput prince by the name of Mitrasen in the service of Aurangzeb who was sent to battle the Maratha king Śivājī (r. 1674–1680) and then later sent to the Deccan.[45] Raṇchoḍ Bhaṭṭ's *Rājapraśasti* (Praise of Rājsingh), a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* dedicated to the seventeenth-century Sisodiya Rajput king Rājsingh of Mewar (r. 1629–1680), mentions a "King Sabalsingh Cauhān" who was a "general" (*senapati*), and his brother "King Kesarīsingh" fighting alongside Rājsingh's son, Jaisingh, against Aurangzeb in is now known as the "Rajput Rebellion" of 1679–81. The poem then describes the eventual peace treaty reached between Jaisingh and Aurangzeb in 1680.[46]

In what follows, however, I will once again draw on LaCapra's theorization of documentary aspects and worklike aspects of texts and suggest that the allusions to Mitrasen and Aurangzeb in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* are primarily worklike aspects of this Bhasha text.[47]

The Eight Dated Prologues

As noted earlier, eight out of the eighteen books of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* contain dated prologues. Cauhān is not the first Bhasha poet to include a date in the body of his poem.

For instance, in the *Cāndāyan*, a Sufi *premkathā* considered to be one of the oldest works of Bhasha literature, Maulānā Dāūd states: "It was the [Hijri] year seven hundred and eighty-one

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[42] Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās,* 326; and Nagendra, *Rītikāl*, 371.

[43] McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, vii.

[44] McGregor, 195.

[45] See Ahmad Amir, "Bundela Nobility and Chieftaincy Under the Mughals," (PhD diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 2000), 101; and Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 142.

[46] Raṇchoḍ Bhaṭṭ, *Rājapraśasti* 22.30–35 and 23.34–62. I am following: Raṇchoḍ Bhaṭṭ, *Rājapraśasti* (*Mahākavi Raṇchoḍa Bhaṭṭa Praṇitam Rājapraśastiḥ Mahākāvyam*), ed. Motilal Menariya (Udaipur: Sahitya Sansthan, Rajasthan Vidyapeeth, 1973).

On the "Rajput Rebellion," see Robert C. Hallissey, *The Rajput Rebellion Against Aurangzeb: A Study of the Mughal Empire in Seventeenth-Century India* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977).

[47] LaCapra, "Reading Intellectual History," 30.

[1379 CE] when I proclaimed this poem endowed with *rasa*."[48] In the prologue of the *Pāṇḍavcarit*, Viṣṇudās tells his audience he began his Mahābhārata retelling in the Hindu lunar month of Kārtik in the Vikram Saṃvat year of 1492 (1435 CE).[49] Similar statements are also found in many other Bhasha narrative poems including Quṭban's *Mirigāvatī*, Jāyasī's *Padmāvat,* Mañjhan's *Madhumālatī*, Lālac's *Haricarit*, and Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*.[50]

Yet while the dates mentioned in the *Cāndāyan*, the *Pāṇḍavcarit,* the *Mirigāvatī*, the *Padmāvat,* the *Madhumālatī*, the *Haricarit*, and the *Rāmcaritmānas* are all found in the opening prologues of these Bhasha texts, the first date encountered in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* is not in the prologue to the first book of his poem, but to the second. As we saw in Chapter Four, Cauhān begins his second book, the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, with the following invocation:

> Meditating on Vyāsa, the feet of Gaṇapati, Girijā, Hara, and Bhagavān,
> Sabalsingh Cauhān tells the *Book of the Assembly Hall* in Bhasha.
> In Vikram Saṃvat 1727 (1670 CE), in the auspicious month of Caitra, the ninth day,
> Thursday, in the light half of the lunar month, this story was illuminated.[51]

As I revealed in Chapter Four, the ninth day of Caitra in 1670 CE is not simply a random composition date but Rāmnavamī, the birthday of Rāma. This is also a clear nod to the opening prologue of Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas* in which he states that he began his Rāmāyaṇa retelling on the ninth day of Caitra in 1574 CE.[52] This first dated prologue in the *Book of the Assembly Hall* places the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in a distinctly North Indian Rāma *bhakti* milieu.

The next dated book of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* is the sixth book: the *Book of Bhīṣma*. After a series of invocations to Cauhān's teacher, Krishna, Rāma, Śiva, Sanaka, Śuka, Nārada, Hanumān, Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Gaṇeśa, Sarasvatī, and Śeṣanāga (a group of deities and sages of which the majority are primarily associated with Viṣṇu or his incarnations), Cauhān states:

> In Vikram Saṃvat 1718 (1661 CE), on the full moon date, Tuesday,
> that occasion, in the month of Māgha, this story was described and
> Shah Aurang was the great lord of Delhi.[53]

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[48] Dāūd, *Cāndāyan* 17, trans. Behl in *Love's Subtle Magic*, 53.

[49] Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 1.1.34–35.

[50] See Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*, 30–58; Francesca Orsini, "Inflected *Kathas: Sufis and Krishna Bhaktas in Awadh*," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206; and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.34.2–3.

[51] *sumiri vyāsa gaṇapati caraṇa girijā hara bhagavāna*
sabhāparva bhāṣā bhanata sabalasiṃha cauhāna
satrah sau sattāisai saṃvata śubha madhu māsa
navamī aru guru pakṣa sita bhai yaha kathā prakāsa || *CM* 2.1 ||

[52] Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.34.2–3.

[53] *saṃbata satraha sai aṭṭhārahi punivā tithi maṃgala ke bārahi*
māgha māsa meṃ kathā bicārī auraṃgaśāha dilīpati bhārī || *CM* 6.1 ||

Māgha Pūrṇimā (the full moon of Māgha), the date Cauhān claims to have begun his *Book of Bhīṣma*, is an auspicious day for many Hindus, but unlike Rāmnavamī, Māgha Pūrṇimā does not hold any particular significance for Vaiṣṇavas. Nonetheless, the date Cauhān provides his readers with here still performs important work. If Cauhān's audience, like the Miśra Brothers, create a list of all the dated books in the text, they will quickly realize that the year in the date of the *Book of Bhīṣma* is the earliest year Cauhān presents his readers. Here Cauhān clearly wants his audience to think that he composed the *Book of Bhīṣma* before the seven other dated books in his retelling. Since the ten remaining books in his *Mahābhārat* are undated, Cauhān may even be implying that he began his entire poem with the *Book of Bhīṣma*.

As I have already noted, the authors of many other Bhasha narrative poems give the composition dates of their texts in the opening prologues of their poems, thus suggesting that they began at the "beginning." Why then does Cauhān claim to have commenced his Mahābhārata by first telling the sixth book of this epic? As shown earlier, the Miśra Brothers suggest that Cauhān begins his retelling with the *Book of Bhīṣma* because this is the first war book of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Cauhān may have been an ally of Aurangzeb and Mitrasen and fought in battle with them.[54] But while the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is undoubtedly, as Emily Hudson puts it, "a story about a war, a brutal, fratricidal, apocalyptic war," Cauhān clearly envisions his own Bhasha Mahābhārata as the *carita* of Krishna not the Pāṇḍavas.[55]

Given the importance Cauhān places on Krishna, Viṣṇu, and Rāma throughout his retelling, I suspect that Cauhān wants his audience to think he started with the *Book of Bhīṣma*, not because it is the first book of the Bhārata War, but because this book contains one of Krishna's most famous episodes in the epic tradition: the *Bhagavadgītā*. As with a number of other premodern Mahābhārata retellings—including Peruntēvaṉār's Tamil *Pāratavеṇpā*, Pampa's Kannada *Vikramārjunavijayam*, Villi's Tamil *Pāratam*, Viṣṇudās's Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit*, Sāraḷādāsa's Oriya *Mahābhārata*, the Persian *Razmnāmah*, and Śubhacandra's sixteenth-century Sanskrit *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*—Cauhān's six stanza-long iteration of the legendry dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna is rather short when compared to the seven hundred verse-long *Bhagavadgītā* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[56] Just because Cauhān presents an abbreviated Bhagavadgītā, however, does not mean that he is unaware of the episode's religious significance.[57] The implication of Cauhān beginning to compose his *Mahābhārat* with the book

[54] Miśra, Miśra, and Miśra, *Miśrabandhuvinod* 1:272.

[55] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 10.

[56] See Peruntēvaṉār, *Pāratavеṇpā* 146; B.N. Sumitra Bai and Robert Z. Zydenbos, "The Jaina *Mahābhārata*" in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 264; *VP* 6.1.2–7; Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 6.31–35; Patnaik, "Sarala's Oriya Mahābhārata," 174; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 116; and Padmanabh S. Jaini, "'Mahābhārata' Motifs in the Jaina 'Pāṇḍava-Purāṇa,'" *Bulletin of SOAS* 47, no. 1 (1984): 109–10.

[57] McGregor and Truschke assert that the *Bhagavadgītā* is shortened in the *Pāṇḍavcarit* and the *Razmnāmah* because of its "Hindu" content. McGregor argues that the truncated Bhagavadgītā in Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit* "suggests a dependence on Jain Apabhraṃśa treatments of Mahābhārata materials, in which the subject matter of the Bhagavadgītā (nothing if not a Hindu topic) would likely to have been passed over" (*Hindi Literature*, 37). Indeed, multiple Jain Mahābhāratas, including Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam* and Śubhacandra's *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*, either condense or completely do away with the *Bhagavadgītā*. On the Bhagavadgītā in the Persian *Razmnāmah*, Truschke claims that "while for the most part Islamic and Hindu traditions comfortably coexist in the *Razmnāmah*, the Mughals indicate discomfort with the perceived Hindu message of the *Bhagavadgītā* by drastically shortening and altering this section" (*Culture of Encounters*, 116). Yet as we have seen, Peruntēvaṉār's *Pāratavеṇpā*, Villi's *Pāratam*, and Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, are all markedly Hindu Vaiṣṇava Mahābhārata retellings that also have

in which Krishna reveals that he is the Supreme Being of the universe and lectures on the primacy of the path of *bhakti* is not lost on a Vaiṣṇava audience.

When the contents of Cauhān's *Book of Bhīṣma* are carefully examined, one finds a number of other episodes that focus on Krishna or Rāma. Along with the death of Bhīṣma (an event orchestrated by Krishna), the *Book of Bhīṣma* of this Mahābhārata features an episode in which Krishna saves Arjuna from the "weapon of Viṣṇu" (*vaiṣṇavāstra*) being used by Bhagadatta, another in which Krishna prevents the entire Pāṇḍava army from being slaughtered by the "weapon of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu)" (*nārāyaṇāstra*) deployed by Aśvatthāman, and the bridge of arrows episode involving Arjuna and Hanumān that we saw in Chapter Four. In the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, both the *vaiṣṇavāstra* and *nārāyaṇāstra* episodes are found in the seventh book, the *Book of Droṇa*, rather than in the *Book of Bhīṣma*.[58] The fight between Arjuna and Hanumān is nowhere to be found in the Sanskrit epic. By inserting these episodes into the narrative of his *Book of Bhīṣma*, Cauhān is informing his audience that he began his Bhasha *Mahābhārat* with a book in which Krishna/Rāma is paramount.

After the long list of mostly Vaiṣṇava deities and sages in the sixth book's prologue, Cauhān also states that when he told this story in 1661, Aurangzeb was "the great lord of Delhi." As Thomas de Bruijn has shown, Jāyasī praises the ruler of Delhi in three *premkathā*s: the first Mughal emperor Bābur (r. 1526–1530) in the *Ākhiri Kalām* (Discourse on the Last Day, 1530), Bābur's son Humāyūn (r. 1530–1540 and 1555–1556) in the *Kanhāvat*, and Sher Shāh Sūrī (r. 1540–1545) of the Sur Dynasty in the *Padmāvat*.[59] The date Jāyasī gives in the prologues of each of these *premkathā*s corresponds to the reign of the emperor praised in the poem. De Bruijn asserts that since there is no external evidence that Jāyasī was patronized by any of these emperors, "praise to the ruler in Delhi should therefore be seen as a poetical topos."[60] Is the mention of Aurangzeb in Cauhān's *Book of Bhīṣma* also an example of a "poetical topos"? Is Cauhān merely documenting that Aurangzeb was ruling in Delhi when he began his poem? These questions concerning this reference to Aurangzeb can only be addressed once this line praising Aurangzeb is put in dialogue with the other allusions to the Mughal emperor in the text.

The next book of Cauhān's poem, the *Book of Droṇa*, begins with invocations to Cauhān's unnamed teacher, Rāma, and Vyāsa. As we saw in Chapter Four, in the lines addressed to Rāma, Cauhān describes how the deity destroyed the demon king Rāvaṇa and freed the cursed woman Ahalyā. Cauhān's decision to praise these celebrated actions of Rāma in the opening of this book becomes clear once he tells his audience the date he began his *Book of Droṇa*:

> Calculated and known to be Vikram Saṃvat 1727 (1670 CE),
> in this way this story was told.
> Known to be Wednesday, on the auspicious occasion
> of that day Rāma left Lanka,
> in the light half of the lunar month of Āśvin,

truncated Bhagavadgītās. I suspect that Cauhān's Bhagavadgītā is emblematic of a much larger trend throughout premodern South Asia in which poets shortened the Bhagavadgītā in their Mahābhārata retellings to avoid the largely philosophical content of this dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna.

[58] *MBh* 7.28 and 7.171–172.

[59] De Bruijn, *Ruby in the Dust*, 45.

[60] De Bruijn, 45.

on the tenth day, this book was made and illuminated.
In the best city that was protected and made beautiful,
there Mitrasen, lord of the earth, was king.

Worshipping the feet of the lord of the Raghu lineage and meditating on the lord Vyāsa,
Sabalsingh Cauhān created the *Book of Drona* in Bhasha.[61]

As I explained in Chapter Four, the tenth day of the lunar month of Āśvin is another auspicious date associated with Rāma: Vijayādaśamī, the day Rāma killed Rāvaṇa. As with Rāmnavamī in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, Vijayādaśamī performs critical work on Cauhān's audience members who are immersed in Rāma devotional traditions in North India. Once again, Cauhān is using a specific date to anchor his Mahābhārata retelling in a distinctly Rāma *bhakti* context.

1670 CE, the year Cauhān claims he started the *Book of Droṇa*, is also significant. Returning to the prologue of the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, we see that Cauhān states that he "illuminated" his *Book of the Assembly Hall* and *Book of Droṇa* in the same year on two of the most important dates in the Hindu lunar calendar involving Rāma. The year 1670 also works on Cauhān's readers by causing them to connect the composition of the *Book of the Assembly Hall* and the *Book of Droṇa* with the king mentioned in the above verses from the *Book of Droṇa*.

The line praising Mitrasen in the *Book of Droṇa* is the first of two references to this king in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*. In the previous book, there is a mention of Aurangzeb, a Mughal emperor remembered today as a remarkably pious Muslim. In this book, however, Cauhān describes a king with a distinctly Sanskritic and Hindu-sounding name ruling "in the best city that was protected and made beautiful." Moreover, Mitrasen's name in the prologue above is sandwiched between two references to Rāma, a Hindu deity considered by many to be the ideal king. Sheldon Pollock argues that the narrative of Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* allowed Hindu kings in premodern South Asia to "demonize" and "Otherize" Muslim rulers who threatened their sovereignty.[62] One of the examples he provides is the seventeenth-century poet Rāmdās composing a Marathi Rāmāyaṇa retelling for Śivājī that presents Aurangzeb as Rāvaṇa.[63]

As Cauhān's audience makes their way through the rest of his Mahābhārata retelling, it quickly becomes clear that the poet is in no way trying to demonize Aurangzeb. The link between Mitrasen and Rāma, however, is significant. Allison Busch has shown that a number of Bhasha poets, such as Keśavdās, Cintamaṇī Tripāṭhī, and Vṛnd, align themselves with multiple rulers in their compositions.[64] Busch also points out that Keśavdās compares different kings and emperors to Rāma. For example, in his *Ratnabāvanī* (Fifty-Two Verse on Ratnasen), Keśavdās

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[61] *satraha śata sattāisa jāne gani sambata yahi bhāṃti bakhāne*
puni budhabāra gharī śubha jāne jā dina laṅkā rāma payāne
śukla pakṣa āśvina ko māsā daśamī tithi kari grantha prakāsā
uttama nagara suracanā chājā bhūpati mitrasena tahaṃ rājā

raghupati caraṇa manāikai byāsadeva dhari dhyāna
droṇaparba bhāṣā raceu sabalasiṃha cauhāna || *CM* 7.1 ||

[62] Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no.2 (1993): 264.

[63] Pollock, 287.

[64] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, *passim*.

has the hero of the text, the Rajput Bundela prince Ratnasen, declare: "Lord Rama, the deity revered by my lineage, killed Ravana. Now his glories are sung in the world. I am Ratnasena, junior prince of the [Orchha] clan—why should I do what others do and flee the battlefield?"[65] Similarly, in his *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (Moonlight of the Fame of Jahāngīr, 1612), Keśavdās praises Aurangzeb's grandfather Jahāngīr saying: "Seeing the moonlight of his deeds, the generals of other emperors lose their courage. The dread of Akbar's invincible son Emperor Jahangir terrifies even Ravana."[66] Truschke notes that Aurangzeb's great-grandfather Akbar is compared to Rāma in the Persian *Akbarī Rāmāyan*. She explains that "Akbar idealized Rama, an avatar of Vishnu's and the hero of the epic, as a model Indian monarch. Imperially illustrated manuscripts of the [*Akbarī Rāmāyan*] translation overtly parallel the two men and suggest what other Sanskrit texts state explicitly: Akbar was another incarnation of Vishnu."[67]

In contemporary North India among followers of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* in Vrindavan, Aurangzeb is actually remembered as the patron of a Rāma temple. Summarizing a discourse by the Gauḍīya *ācārya* Shrivatsa Goswami, John Stratton Hawley notes:

> Shrivatsa goes on to remind his hearers that later, when Aurangzeb faced the last and most difficult battle of his rule, far to the south in the Deccan, he suspended that crucial confrontation with the Marathas and took nine months off to go to Chitrakut, where another threatened ruler, Ram, had bivouacked in the course of his own exile. There Aurangzeb constructed a temple for Ram, providing both the land and the funds. What kind of rabid Muslim fanatic would do that? If he was not personally a worshiper of Ram, he was at least his patron and someone who venerated Ram's role as righteous warrior in a long battle that took him far to the south. As Shrivatsa spins out this revisionist history, he rehabilitates the most hated of Mughal emperors …and he shows how Aurangzeb had a special respect for Ram.[68]

Is it possible that Cauhān in the seventeenth century was aware of this story that Shrivatsa Goswami told his Gauḍīya followers in Vrindavan in the twenty-first century?

Regardless of whether there is any historical veracity to Shrivatsa Goswami's story about Aurangzeb patronizing a Rāma temple, the references to Aurangzeb in the previous book, the *Book of Bhīṣma*, and now Mitrasen in the *Book of Droṇa* perform vital work on Cauhān's readers who are familiar with Bhasha poets such as Jāyasī, Keśavdās, Cintamaṇī, and Vṛnd who all praise multiple different kings in their various texts. While I am not suggesting these allusions to these two rulers in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* document actual historical relationships of patronage, it is clear that Cauhān wants his readers to start to draw connections between his poem and a Hindu king and a Mughal emperor. By linking the composition of the *Book of Droṇa* on Vijayādaśamī and the *Book of the Assembly Hall* on Rāmnavamī to Mitrasen and then worshiping Rāma right after he describes Mitrasen ruling in the "best city," Cauhān begins to make his audience associate this king with the poet's markedly Vaiṣṇava project.

The next book of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat,* the *Book of Karṇa* (which is the eighth book of the composition), begins with the following invocatory verses:

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[65] Keśavdās, *Ratnabāvanī* 17, trans. Busch in *Poetry of Kings*, 31.

[66] Keśavdās, *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* 32, trans. Busch in *Poetry of Kings*, 59.

[67] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 204–5.

[68] Hawley, *Krishna's Playground*, 240.

> First, I salute the feet of my teacher, who does all perfected actions.
> I worship Rāmacandra, who is an ocean of attributes,
> the husband of Sītā, and the splendor of the Raghu clan.
> No one understands his unfathomable greatness,
> only his best devotee Hanumān understands.
> In the light half of the lunar month of Āśvin, on the fifth day,
> this story was illuminated in Vikram Saṃvat 1724 (1667 CE)
> and Shah Aurang, the lord of Delhi, was ruler.
>
> Worshipping the feet of the lord of the Raghu lineage and meditating on the lord Vyāsa,
> Sabalsingh Cauhān creates the *Book of Karṇa* in Bhasha.[69]

As in the prologue to the previous book, these verses that open the *Book of Karṇa* are replete with images of Rāma. After paying homage to his nameless preceptor, readers witness Cauhān showering praise on Rāma and his beloved *bhakta* Hanumān. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, the date in this prologue is the fifth of day of Āśvin, which is the fifth day of Navarātri and just a few days before Vijayādaśamī. Again, it is worth recalling the prevalence of Rāmlīlā performances during the first ten days of Āśvin throughout contemporary North India.

The reference to the fifth of day of Āśvin is followed by the second mention of Aurangzeb in the text. In the last book, the *Book of Droṇa*, Mitrasen's name is placed between two references to Rāma. This is also found here in the *Book of Karṇa*, except now it is the name of a Muslim emperor instead of a Hindu king. Positioning Aurangzeb's name between allusions to Rāma performs the same work on Cauhān's audience that the placement of Mitrasen's name in the previous book does. Cauhān is not only associating Mitrasen and Aurangzeb with Rāma, the model of perfect Hindu kingship, but he is also connecting these rulers from two different cultural and religious backgrounds to his explicitly *bhakti* Mahābhārata retelling.

As in the prologue to the *Book of Droṇa*, Cauhān calls Aurangzeb "Shah Aurang" in this prologue to the *Book of Karṇa*. In another seventeenth-century Bhasha poem, the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to King Śivājī, 1673) of Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, we also see Aurangzeb being referred to as "Aurang." Busch notes that Bhūṣaṇ's composition in praise of the Maratha king Śivājī is filled with multilingual puns and that it "trenchantly articulates Shivaji's disillusionment with the Mughal political establishment under Emperor Aurangzeb."[70] Busch elaborates that:

> Another powerful instance of Bhushan's derisive multilingual wordplay is his thematically brilliant but etymologically corrupt handling of Emperor Aurangzeb's name. In Persian, the word *aurangzīb* is a flattering title, meaning "adorning the throne." In Bhushan's hands, the first part of the compound "*aurang*" (throne), is transformed into "*avaraṅga*." According to Braj phonetics, this is a plausible enough pronunciation of the emperor's name, but it is also invokes the

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[69] *prathamahiṃ kari guru caraṇa praṇāmā jāte hohiṃ siddha saba kāmā*
bandauṃ rāmacandra guṇa sāgara sītāpati raghubaṃśa ujāgara
mahimā agama aura nahiṃ jānā parama bhakta jānata hanumānā
śukla pakṣa āśvina ko māsā tithipañcami yaha kathā prakāsā/
sambata satraha śata caubīśā nauraṃgaśāha dilīpati īśā

raghupati caraṇa manāikai byāsadeva dhari dhyāna
karṇaparva bhāṣā racata sabalasiṃha cauhāna || *CM* 8.1 ||

[70] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 96.

> combination of the Sanskrit lexemes *ava* and *raṅga*, which together mean something like "sickly pale"—a point that would have been immediately apparent to a Sanskrit-trained Brahman like Bhushan or to members of the Maratha court. This deliberate Sanskritization of the emperor's Persian name suggests Aurangzeb's overwhelming trepidation in the face of Shivaji, transforming his exalted title into a source of derision.[71]

Notably, in this same poem Bhūṣaṇ compares Aurangzeb to the eldest Kaurava brother Duryodhana and Śivājī to the five Pāṇḍava princes fleeing the house of lac when he describes how Śivājī escaped house arrest in Aurangzeb's court in Agra in May of 1666.[72]

> Bhushan says, Aurangzeb, who is twice as cruel as Duryodhana, has deceived the world.
> Ghazi Shivaji has exhibited prowess even greater than that of the Pandavas.
> He mobilized the moral courage of Yudhishthira, the strength of Bhima, the fortitude of Arjuna, the intelligence of Nakula, and the power of Sahadeva.
> The five of them snuck out from a wax house in the dark of night—
> Shivaji on his own escaped from 100,000 watchmen in broad daylight.[73]

Yet while Bhūṣaṇ cleverly satirizes Aurangzeb by calling him *avaraṅga* and likens him to the villain of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Cauhān praises Aurangzeb and associates him with Rāma.

The next prologue in the *Book of Śalya*, the eighth book of the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* begins with the praise of Cauhān's teacher, Rāma, Sarasvatī, and Vālmīki. Cauhān then states:

> When it was known in the world as Vikram Saṃvat 1724 (1667 CE), this was told.
> In the light half of the lunar month of Kārtik on the tenth day, this story was uttered.
> Shah Aurang was the sultan of Delhi. The whole world knew of his mighty prowess.[74]

Cauhān claims to have begun his *Book of Śalya* on the tenth day of Kārtik. Tracy Pintchman points out that the month of Kārtik "is principally concerned with the worship of Vishnu and therefore is most meaningful to Vaishnavas."[75] She adds that in some parts of North India, including Mathura (the birthplace of Krishna according to Vaiṣṇava traditions), the tenth day of Kārtik is celebrated as the day Krishna killed his maternal uncle Kaṃsa.[76]

Up until this point, most of the dates that the readers of this Bhasha Mahabharata have encountered have been associated with Rāma. Unlike Rāmnavamī or Vijayādaśamī, however, the

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[71] Busch, 96–97.

[72] See Truschke, *Aurangzeb*, 79–79.

[73] Bhūṣaṇ, *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* 144, trans. Allison Busch in "Introduction to the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* by Bhushan Tripathi (fl. 1673)," Annual Hindi-Urdu Workshop at Columbia University, April 12, 2008, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urduhindilinks/workshop2008/WorkshopBhushanTranslation.pdf.

[74] *sambata satraha sai jaga jānā tyahi ūpara caubīsa bakhānā*
kārtika māsa pakṣa ujiyārā daśamī tithi ko kathā ucārā
nauraṃgaśāha dilī sultānā prabala pratāpa jagata saba jānā || *CM* 9.1 ||

[75] Tracy Pintchman, *Guests at God's Wedding: Celebrating Kartik among the Women of Benares* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 16.

[76] Pintchman, 76.

tenth day of Kārtik places the *Book of Śalya* in a specifically Krishna-centric context. Why does Cauhān want his audience to think that he began the *Book of Śalya* on the anniversary of Krishna's victory over Kaṃsa? While certainly alluded to at different points in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the slaying of Kaṃsa plays a much more prominent role in narratives of Krishna's early life, such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and other Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* compositions.[77] Why does Cauhān associate this particular book of his Bhasha epic retelling with one of the most important deeds from Krishna's adolescence?

Unlike the previous two books, Krishna is basically absent from Cauhān's *Book of Śalya*. While Krishna plays a crucial part in the deaths of Jayadratha and Droṇa in the *Book of Droṇa* and Karṇa in the *Book of Karṇa* of Cauhān's text, Krishna does not do much in the *Book of Śalya* of this Bhasha Mahābhārata retelling. Although Krishna helps orchestrate the murder Duryodhana in the Sanskrit *Book of Śalya*, in Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* Duryodhana is killed in a different book dedicated solely to his demise: the *Book of Maces* (*Gadāparv*).[78]

The overall absence of Krishna in Cauhān's *Book of Śalya*, however, may be the reason why Cauhān tells his readers that he began this book on this key day in Krishna's life. In Cauhān's *Book of Śalya,* the Pāṇḍavas slay two of their maternal uncles: Śakuni, the brother of their aunt Gāndhārī, and Śalya, the brother of their mother Mādrī. By stating that he started his *Book of Śalya* on the tenth day of Kārtik, Cauhān is reminding his Vaiṣṇava readers of the day Krishna killed his own maternal uncle: Kaṃsa. Even though Krishna is not a major player in the events of this *Book of Śalya*, Cauhān invokes this deity in his preface with this specific date.

The line praising Aurangzeb in the *Book of Śalya* also signals the readers of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* to the importance the poet places on the Mughal emperor. This is not just the third time Cauhān has praised Aurangzeb in his text, it is also the most powerful and positive description of Aurangzeb that Cauhān's audience has encountered so far. While Cauhān states in earlier prologues that Aurangzeb, the "lord of Delhi" (*dilīpati*), was "great" (*bhārī*) and "ruler" (*īśā*), here he proclaims that "the whole world knew of his mighty prowess."

As illustrated by the examples we saw earlier from Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī's *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, Aurangzeb is not a universally adored figure in the world of premodern Bhasha literature. Several of Cauhān's contemporaries present Aurangzeb as the enemy of Hindus in their Bhasha compositions. For instance, Busch points out that in the *Chatraprakāś* (Light of Chatrasāl, c. 1710), a poem in praise of the Bundela Rajput king Chatrasāl (r. 1675–1731), Lāl Kavi writes that "when Aurangzeb came to power he began to wipe out Hindu *dharma*."[79] Cynthia Talbot has shown that in the *Rājvilās* (Adventures of Rājsingh, c. 1680), Mān Kavi explicitly compares Aurangzeb to Rāma's nemesis Rāvaṇa and Rājsingh of Mewar to Viṣṇu.[80]

But there are also other seventeenth-century Bhasha texts that dismantle the image of Aurangzeb as the tormentor of Hindus. Busch has revealed that in Maheśdās's *Binhairāso* (Tale of the Two, c. 1660), which narrates the war of succession that broke out amongst the sons of the

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[77] See *MBh* 2.13, 5.126, and 14.68.

[78] *MBh* 9.57.

[79] Allison Busch, "Unhitching the Oxcart of Delhi: A Mughal-Period Hindi Account of Political Insurgency," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 3 (2018): 434.

[80] Cynthia Talbot, "A Poetic Record of the Rajput Rebellion, c. 1680." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 3 (2018): 462 and 469.

fifth Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–1658), "Aurangzeb emerges as a consummate leader and orders that the Hindus are to be burned, the Muslims buried," thus honoring the religious sentiments of those who had died in the war.[81] As Heidi Pauwels and Emilia Bachrach have shown, in the *Śrināthjī ki Prākaṭya Vārtā* (Story of the Appearance of Śrināthjī) attributed to Harirāy (traditional dates: 1590–1715), Aurangzeb is even presented as a "secret ardent devotee" of Śrināthjī, a form of Krishna who is paramount to the Vallabha *sampradāya*.[82]

The diversity of representations of Aurangzeb in Bhasha texts composed during his reign reaffirms recent scholarship on this Mughal emperor's complicated relationships with different religious communities. As Munis Faruqui points out, while Aurangzeb "made his commitment and ability to uphold Islam's centrality in the life of the Mughal Empire a keystone of his own political legitimacy," his overall actions as emperor "suggest an awareness that he ruled a religiously diverse empire."[83] Faruqui goes on to challenge the image of Aurangzeb as the demolisher of Hindu idols and temples by noting that while Aurangzeb "occasionally ordered the destruction of Hindu temples," he also patronized "certain temples with cash and land grants."[84]

Busch notes that "the stereotype that he [Aurangzeb] was antagonistic towards Hindus, which in the nationalist imagination also means he was antagonistic toward Hindi, is a misconception."[85] While Busch states that "the extent of Emperor Aurangzeb's own patronage of Braj poets is not easy to establish," she also observes that Aurangzeb "was known to cite Hindi verse and, as reported in the *Ma'āsir-i ālamgīrī*, he took an interest in Hindi orthography, consulting Khan Mir Hadi, the diwan of his son Azam Shah, about the matter. Some scholars have also attributed original Braj compositions to Aurangzeb."[86] Busch draws attention to the famed Bhasha poet Vṛnd describing this Mughal emperor using the adjectives "powerful, compassionate, praiseworthy (*mahābalī, mehrbān, ṣubiḥān*)" in the beginning of his *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* (Instruction in Passion, 1691).[87] She also discusses the Bhasha praise poems of Mirzā Raushan Ẓamīr 'Nehī' on "*Śāha Ālamgīra ko dāna barnana* and *pratāpa barnana* (Descriptions of Emperor Alamgir's generosity and valour, respectively)" and asserts that the introduction to these poems "strongly suggests some kind of patronage from Aurangzeb."[88]

Unlike Busch, I do not believe that praise of Aurangzeb in the beginning of a poem automatically documents actual conditions of patronage. I do, however, think that the admiration that Vṛnd, Nehī, and Cauhān all express for Aurangzeb is performing meaningful work on the

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[81] Allison Busch, "The Poetry of History in Early Modern India," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 207 (2017): 178.

[82] Heidi Pauwels and Emilia Bachrach, "Aurangzeb as Iconoclast? Vaishnava Accounts of the Krishna Images' Exodus from Braj," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 3 (2018): 494.

[83] Faruqui, "Awrangzīb."

[84] Faruqui, "Awrangzīb."

[85] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 156.

[86] Busch, 156 and 157.

[87] Vṛnd, *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* 4, trans. Busch in *Poetry of Kings*, 160.

[88] Allison Busch, "Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 296.

readers of these Bhasha compositions. Aurangzeb was one of the most powerful men in seventeenth-century South Asia. By continuously praising Aurangzeb throughout his epic retelling in the sections of the poem in which he pays homage to predominantly Vaiṣṇava deities and sages and declares the auspicious dates on which he related his Bhasha narrative, Cauhān creates a potent connection between his *bhakti* Mahābhārata and Aurangzeb.

After the prologue to the *Book of Śalya*, Cauhān's readers do not encounter another dated preface until the sixteenth book of the Bhasha poem: the *Book of Hermitage*. The lines in which Cauhān describes the date and conditions of the composition of this book are placed between a set of salutations to Rāma, Cauhān's teacher, Krishna, Cauhān's parents, Indra, Śiva, Lakṣmī, Durgā, Sarasvatī, Vyāsa, Nārada, and Hanumān, and two couplets in which Cauhān praises Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. The verses in the middle of these invocations are as follows:

> Sabalsingh told this Bhārata in Bhasha
> about when the lord of Śrī descended and gave protection.
> Shah Aurang, lord of Delhi, rules and there Mitrasen, lord of the earth, is delighted.
> Before these kings of men, Sabalsingh Cauhān sang and composed
> In Vikram Saṃvat 1751 (1694 CE) on the day of Wednesday,
> on the tenth day in the light half of the lunar month of Śrāvaṇ,
> then I began this story and meditated on lord Vyāsa.[89]

I noted earlier how the Miśra Brothers read the references to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen in the *Book of Hermitage* as documenting patronage relationships amongst Cauhān, Mitrasen, and Aurangzeb. In this preface to the Bhasha *Book of Hermitage*, Cauhān explicitly states that Mitrasen is "delighted" by Aurangzeb's rule and that both kings are in Delhi. For readers familiar with Mughal politics, this might suggest that Mitrasen is a Rajput king who is a *manṣabdār* in Aurangzeb's service. Cauhān also says that he "sang and composed" his Bhasha Mahabharata before Aurangzeb and Mitrasen, who are "kings of men."

Countless South Asian poets describe themselves presenting their poems at the courts of patrons. For example, in his *Pāṇḍavcarit*, Viṣṇudās describes Dūṅgarsingh, the Tomar Rajput king of Gwalior, placing a betel leaf (a sign of a challenge) in the poet's hand and asking him how just five Pāṇḍava brothers were able to defeat one hundred Kauravas.[90] Truschke notes in the sixteenth-century Jain poet Śānticandra's Sanskrit poem about the life of Akbar, the *Kṛpārasakośa* (Nectar of Compassion), that "Śānticandra identifies Akbar as the chief recipient of his *Kṛpārasakośa* and identifies several times that the Mughal king heard and understood the Sanskrit text."[91] As with many scholars of South Asian literature and history, Truschke discusses a documentary reading of her text and states it is possible that Śānticandra performed his composition at the court of Akbar. Yet she also points out that since Śānticandra also addresses a Jain audience in his poem, "it is tempting, then, to postulate that it was more important for

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[89] *sabalasiṃha yaha bhārata bhākhā śrīprabhu jaba arake dai rākhā*
auraṃgaśāha dilīpati rājata mitraseni bhūpati tahaṃ gājata
ye nṛpa ke puruṣana mahaṃ gāye sabalasiṃha cauhāna banāye
sambata satraha sai ikyāvana śukla pakṣa daśāmī budha sāvana
taba maiṃ kathā arambhana kīnhā byāsadeva ko sumiraṇa kīnhā || *CM* 16.1 ||

[90] Viṣṇudās, *Pāṇḍavcarit* 1.1.38–39.

[91] Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 79.

Śānticandra to represent himself to his own community as writing a text for Akbar than to actually speak to the Mughal emperor in Sanskrit."[92] I contend that Cauhān is doing something similar to this with Vaiṣṇava communities in his Mahābhārata retelling.

Cauhān's statement that he performed his Bhasha Mahābhārat at Aurangzeb's court brings to mind several hagiographical narratives, such as Gokulnāth's *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (Stories of the Eighty-Four Vaiṣṇavas), Priyādās's *Bhaktirasabodhinī* commentary on Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl,* and Mahīpati's Marathi *Bhaktavijay* (Victory of the *Bhakta*s, 1762), in which famous North Indian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poets, including Mīrābāī, Sūrdās, and Tulsīdās, meet with Akbar.[93] In Hindu *bhakti* traditions throughout South Asia, the legends of the lives of the devotional poets are often just as important and famous as their poetry. In these hagiographies, either Akbar invites the *bhakti* poet to his court or Akbar himself seeks out the poet in their own home. While some of these stories were only committed to writing in eighteenth-century hagiographies, such as the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* and the *Bhaktavijay*, it is possible that the tales of these *bhakta*s and Akbar were circulating in the seventeenth century when Cauhān says he performed his *Mahābhārat*. By claiming Aurangzeb as his courtly patron, Cauhān is placing himself in the lineage of earlier *bhakti* poets such as Mīrābāī, Sūrdās, and Tulsīdās, who are said to have performed their devotional compositions before a Mughal emperor. It is worth noting, however, that all of the hagiographical stories mentioned above are about Akbar, who is celebrated in India today for respecting different religious traditions, and not his great-grandson Aurangzeb, who is remembered as an orthodox Muslim ruler.

Another possible explanation for the multiple allusions to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* is that Cauhān is using them to create a frame story. Both the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* (which, as we have seen, are two very important texts for Cauhān) each contain four frame stories. As Brian Black points out, in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* "significantly, a king features as the primary listener in three of these frames, all of which connect the content of what the king hears to his role as king, thus making the stories and teachings part of his ability to rule and part of his claim to regal power."[94] The three frame stories with kings as listeners are (1) the sage Vaiśampāyana reciting the *Mahābhārata* to Arjuna's great-grandson King Janamejaya, (2) Dhṛtarāṣṭra's charioteer Sañjaya describing the Kurukṣetra War to the blind king, and (3) Bhīṣma counseling Yudhiṣṭhira and sharing many stories about kingship on his deathbed. Black elaborates on these three frames:

> In the three conversational frames that feature kings, the dialogues are addressed to the specific situations that face their auditors as kings. For Janamejaya, he learns about his ancestors; for Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he hears accounts of his army on the battlefield; and for Yudhiṣṭhira, his role as a listener is in preparation for his duties as a dharma king. In these cases, neither Janamejaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra nor Yudhiṣṭhira are listening to stories or receiving instructions merely for their

[92] Truschke, 80.

[93] See Kumkum Sangari, "Tracing Akbar: Hagiographies, Popular Narrative Traditions and the Subject of Conversion," in *Mapping Histories: Essays Presented to Ravinder Kumar*, ed. Neera Chandhoke (Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 62–69; and John Stratton Hawley, "Last Seen with Akbar," in *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Times and Ours* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 181–93.

[94] Brian Black, "Eavesdropping on the Epic: Female Listeners in the *Mahābhārata*," in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (New York: Routledge 2007), 58.

> amusement. All of them have something very personal at stake in their role as listeners, and for all of them what they hear is indelibly connected to their position as king.[95]

The frame of Vaiśampāyana narrating the Mahābhārata to Janamejaya, is also present in Cauhān's poem. As in the Sanskrit epic, we occasionally see the phrase "Vaiśampāyana said" (*vaiśampāyana uvāca*) in the beginning of different sections of the Bhasha retelling.[96] But Cauhān begins other sections of the poem by simply saying "listen, king" (*rājā sunau*).[97] While some might assume that the king being addressed in these instances is Janamejaya, the multiple references to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen in the poem suggest that one of these two rulers might be the king to whom Cauhān is speaking. Philip Lutgendorf notes that one of the four frames of the *Rāmcaritmānas* is Tulsīdās himself "relating the story and commenting on it to his listeners."[98] With the frequent allusions to Aurangzeb and Mitrasen throughout his poem, Cauhān forms a frame story of himself narrating the Mahābhārata to two different kings

What about the date that Cauhān gives in the prologue to the sixteenth book? As evidenced in many works of South Asian literature, the month of Śrāvaṇ (roughly around July and August in the Gregorian calendar) is a time when soldiers and kings are expected to stay at home as since one cannot wage war during the monsoon. The reference to composing the sixteenth book in the month of Śrāvaṇ seems to support Cauhān's statement that he performed this book during a month in which Aurangzeb and Mitrasen would likely have been at court. The work that the year presented in the *Book of Hermitage* performs, however, is a bit more complex.

In the five earlier books, Cauhān often jumps around between different dates. He first gives 1670 in the *Book of the Assembly Hall*, then jumps backwards to 1661 in the *Book of Bhīṣma*, then returns to 1670 in the *Book of Droṇa,* and then backwards to 1667 with the *Book of Karṇa* and the *Book of Śalya*. With the *Book of Hermitage*, however, Cauhān leaps forward twenty-seven years to 1694. Cauhān will go back in time to 1673 in the next book, the *Book of Clubs*, and in the final book, the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*, Cauhān will take another massive leap forward to 1724. Why does Cauhān give his readers the impression he is constantly traveling backwards and forwards in time with these different dates in these eight prologues?

I suggest that the way Cauhān manipulates time with these different years in his prologues is a tribute to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. As Hudson points out, the Sanskrit epic constantly moves "backward[s] and forward[s] in time; stories merge into other stories with deliberate disregard for temporal boundaries."[99] Cauhān creates this same effect with the different years in the prologues of these books. Readers of Cauhān's text who are familiar with the *Mahābhārata* therefore may not find these different dates disconcerting.

The penultimate book of the *Mahābhārat*, the *Book of Clubs*, begins with salutations to the following group of Hindu deities and sages: Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa, Cauhān's preceptor, Krishna, Rāma, Nārada, Sarasvatī, Vālmīki, Agastya, Rāma (again), and Śiva. Cauhān then declares:

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[95] Black, 59.

[96] For example, see *CM* 1.6 and 1.12

[97] For example, see *CM* 1.9 and 1.24.

[98] Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 26.

[99] Hudson, *Disorienting Dharma*, 166.

In Vikram Saṃvat 1730 (1673 CE)
in the month of Bhādrapad, on the seventh moon,
when Shah Aurang, the lord of Delhi, was leader,
then Sabalsingh was the singer of the attributes of Hari.[100]

The seventh moon of Bhādrapad is the night before Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, the birthday of Krishna.[101] Cauhān's choice to bring up the eve of Krishna's birth in this prologue may be related to the fact that it is in the *Book of Clubs* in which Krishna dies. As with the *Book of Clubs* of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the *Book of Clubs* of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* describes the tragic destruction of Krishna's entire Yadu clan in his kingdom of Dwarka. With this date in the *Book of Clubs,* Cauhān is thus foreshadowing the tragic demise of Krishna and his family by bringing up the eve of the much happier occasion of Krishna's birth.

The juxtaposition of Aurangzeb's name with Cauhān's here strongly suggests that the "ruler" of the Mughal Empire and the "singer of the attributes of Krishna" are equally important roles. This reference to Aurangzeb in this prologue of the *Book of Clubs* is the last allusion to the Mughal emperor in the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. As I noted earlier, Cauhān's composition is not the only epic retelling with references to Aurangzeb. Two Persian retellings of the Rāmāyaṇa, Candraman Bedil's *Nargisistān* and Amar Singh's *Amar Prakāsh*, are dedicated to Aurangzeb. An important distinction between these two Persian Rāmāyaṇas and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, however, is that while Candraman Bedil and Amar Singh pay homage to Aurangzeb at the start of their epic retellings, Cauhān repeatedly extols Aurangzeb throughout his text. Unlike the Tamil *peruṅkāppiyam*s of Cēkkiḻār, Kampaṉ, and Villi, most Bhasha narrative poems that extol royal patrons only do so once in their opening prologues. As Busch, Thomas de Bruijn, and Francesca Orsini have all shown, while there are a number of Bhasha poems that praise Mughal emperors, this praise is usually only found in the very beginning of the works.[102] In fact, with the exception of *praśasti* praise poems and texts about the lives of kings, such as Keśavdās's *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś*, and Mān Kavi's *Rājvilās*, the repetitive praise of any ruler (Mughal or otherwise) within a Bhasha poem is quite unusual.[103]

Cauhān commences the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*, the final book of the *Mahābhārat*, with invocations to his unnamed teacher, Śiva, Lakṣmī, and Durgā. The poet then calls out "Mother!" and asks for help to write the *līlā* of Hari. After praising Hanumān, Cauhān informs his audience that God (*prabhu*) has given him the "command" (presumably to narrate this story). The poet proceeds to pay homage to Gaṇeśa and his teacher again before proclaiming:

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[100] *sambata śubha satraha sai tīśā bhādramāsa saptami rajanīśā*
auraṃgaśāha dilīpati nāyaka sabalasiṃha taba hari guṇa gāyaka || *CM* 17.1 ||

[101] John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 62. Hawley also notes that some Vaiṣṇavas celebrate Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī in Śrāvaṇ.

[102] Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 144 and 160; De Bruijn, *Ruby in Dust*, 56 and 59; and Francesca Orsini, "The Social History of a Genre: Kathas across Languages in Early Modern North India," *Medieval History Journal* 20, no.1 (2017): 16 and 19.

[103] I am very grateful to Allison Busch for sharing this observation with me in the summer of 2017.

In the pure and beautiful month of Agrahāyaṇ,
on the day of Wednesday, at the auspicious feet of Hari,
in Vikram Saṃvat 1781 (1724 CE),[104] at that time, the story of Hari was illuminated.
The entire world knows the form of Hari and all prostrate before him as if planks.[105]

Cauhān does not tell his audience the specific day in Agrahāyaṇ (also known as Mārgaśirṣa) on which he composed the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven* of his Bhasha *Mahābhārat*. For those readers familiar with the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, however, the mention of this month may remind them of a verse in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* in which Krishna tells Arjuna on the battlefield: "Among the months, I am Mārgaśirṣa."[106] Mārgaśirṣa is also the month in which Gītā Jayantī, the birthday of the *Bhagavadgītā*, is celebrated in contemporary North India.

As we saw in Chapter One, in the *Book of the Beginnings* of his text, Cauhān defines his epic retelling as the "deeds of Hari" (*haricaritra*). With this preface to the *Book of the Ascent to Heaven*, in which Cauhān tells his readers that he "illuminated" this "story of Hari" (*harikathā*) during the month that is Krishna himself according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, it is clear that Cauhān's definition for his Mahābhārata has not changed. By calling out for help to write his *līlā* of Hari, describing himself at Hari's feet, and stating that the entire world bows before Hari in this final prologue of his text, Cauhān emphasizes his own personal *bhakti* for this deity.

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By the end of these eight dated prologues of Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*, we are left with an immensely complex picture. Six of these eight prologues praise a royal patron, but in all eight of these prologues Cauhān also profusely worships Krishna or Rāma or claims to have composed this book on an auspicious day associated with the worship of Krishna or Rāma. Each of these eight prologues reaffirm Cauhān's statement in the very beginning of his poem in which Cauhān says that he is retelling the Mahābhārata as the deeds of Krishna. We may never know if Aurangzeb actually patronized Cauhān or not. But what is clear is that Cauhān is distinctly placing his *Mahābhārat* in a Mughal courtly milieu. As Munis Faruqui notes, today Aurangzeb is "mostly reviled in India as a fratricide and religious fanatic."[107] Yet here we have a seventeenth-century Bhasha poet continuously praising this so-called Muslim "fanatic" and claiming to have performed his overtly *bhakti* retelling of the Mahābhārata at this Mughal emperor's court.

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[104] Again, one manuscript gives the composition year as 1677. See Hiralal, *Twelfth Report*, 1276.

[105] *agahana māsa punīta suhāvā budhabāra hari tithi śubha pāvā*
sambata satrahasai ikyāsī tāhi samaya harikathā prakāsī
hari ko rūpa sakala jaga jānā kari sabahina kahaṃ daṇḍa praṇāmā || *CM* 18.1 ||

[106] *māsānāṃ mārgaśhīrṣho 'ham* || *Bhagavadgītā* 10.35 ||

[107] Faruqui, "Awrangzīb."

CONCLUSION

Larger Patterns of Retelling the Mahābhārata

In "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*," A.K. Ramanujan notes that Kumāravyāsa states in his Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* that he "chose to write a *Mahābhārata*, because he heard the cosmic serpent which upholds the earth groaning under the burden of *Rāmāyaṇa* poets."[1]

There are certainly many premodern Rāmāyaṇa retellings in regional South Asian languages. It is worth noting, however, that in the course of this single dissertation I have referenced or discussed at least thirty different regional Mahābhāratas that were composed between 800 and 1800 CE (not including Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat*).[2] Moreover, there are many other premodern regional Mahābhārata retellings that I have not yet had the chance to mention, including Bhālaṇ's fifteenth-century Gujarati *Nalākhyān* (Tale of Nala), which draws on versions of the famous story of Nala and Damayantī from both the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Śrīharṣa's Sanskrit *Naiṣadhīyacarita*; Piṅgaḷi Sūranna's seventeenth-century Telugu *Rāghavapāṇḍavīyamu* (On Rāghava and the Pāṇḍavas), which narrates episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata simultaneously; the seventeenth-century Marathi *Mahābhārata* of Mukteśvar, who was the grandson of the renowned *bhakti* poet Eknāth; and the eighteenth-century *Giān Prabodh* (Awakening of Knowledge), a composition contained within the Bhasha *Dasam Granth* attributed to the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), that relates several stories involving Yudhiṣṭhira and other Mahābhārata figures.[3] By the end of the eighteenth century, the celestial serpent Śeṣanāga would certainly have been groaning under the burden of many Mahābhāratas in regional South Asian languages.

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[1] Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*," 24. Also see Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, 1.17.

[2] Let me list them again here in roughly chronological order: (1) Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century Tamil *Pāratavenpā*, (2) Pampa's tenth-century Kannada *Vikramārjunavijayam,* (3) Ranna's eleventh-century *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, (4) Nannaya's eleventh-century portion of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu*, (5) Tikkana's thirteenth-century portion of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu*, (6) Pukaḻēnti's thirteenth-century Tamil *Naḷaveṇpā,* (7–8) Haribar Bipra's fourteenth-century Assamese *Babhruvāhanar Yuddha* and *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha*, (9) Ĕṛṛāpragaḍa's fourteenth-century portion of the Telugu *Mahābhāratamu*, (10) Cĕṟuśśeri's fifteenth-century Malayalam *Bhāratagātha*, (11) Śankaran's fifteenth-century Malayalam *Bhāratamāla*, (12) Kumāravyāsa's Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, (13) Lakṣmīśa's fifteenth-century Kannada *Jaiminibhāratam*, (14) Kabi Sañjay's fifteenth-century Bengali *Mahābhārata*, (15) Sāraḷādāsa's fifteenth-century Oriya *Mahābhārata*, (16) Lakhansenī's fifteenth-century Bhasha *Virāṭparv*, (17) Viṣṇudās's fifteenth-century Bhasha *Pāṇḍavcarit,* (18) Bhīm Kavi's fifteenth-century Bhasha *Ḍaṅgvaikathā*, (19) Carigoṇḍa Dharmanna's sixteenth-century Telugu *Citrabhāratamu*, (20) Ativīrarāmaṉ's sixteenth-century Tamil *Naiṭatam,* (21) Ayyanappiḷḷa Āśān's sixteenth-century *Bhāratam Pāṭṭu*, (22) Tuñcattŭ Ĕḻuttacchan's sixteenth-century *Bhāratam*, (23) Rāma Sarasvatī's sixteenth-century Assamese *Mahābhārata*, (24) the seventeenth-century Tamil *Pañcapāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam*, (25) the seventeenth-century Konkani *Bhārata*, (26) Kāśīrāmdās's seventeenth-century Bengali *Mahābhārata*, (27) Kulapati Miśra's seventeenth-century Bhasha *Śaṅgrāmsār*, (28) Tursīdās's seventeenth-century Bhasha *Itihās Sammucay*, (29) Bhagvāndās's seventeenth-century Bhasha *Jaimanī Aśvamedh,* and (30) Bulākīdās's seventeenth-century Bhasha *Pāṇḍavpurāṇ*.

[3] See Deven M. Patel, "Source, Exegesis, and Translation: Sanskrit Commentary and Regional Language Translation in South Asia," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 2 (2011): 247; Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*, 134; Jon Milton Keune, "Eknāth Remembered and Reformed: Bhakti, Brahmans, and Untouchables in Marathi Historiography," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011), 66; and Robin Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

In the Introduction, I noted that this project began with two questions: (1) Why was the Mahābhārata retold in regional languages at specific moments in premodern South Asian history? And (2) Was the Mahābhārata retold in different regional South Asian languages for similar purposes? My comparative study of Villi's Tamil *Pāratam* and Cauhān's Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in this dissertation has provided us with one (but not the only) answer to these questions: at various points in premodern South Asian history, the Mahābhārata epic narrative was retold in different regional South Asian languages in order to express *bhakti* or "devotion."

In Chapter One, I demonstrated that the Krishna of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is a confounding character who is clearly not the protagonist of this ancient epic. Yet I also detailed how two premodern Sanskrit intellectuals from opposite ends of South Asia—the ninth-century Kashmiri literary theoretician Ānandavardhana and the thirteenth-century South Indian Vaiṣṇava philosopher Madhva—each argue that Krishna is at the heart of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* by drawing on the representations of this deity in other Sanskrit *kṛṣṇacarita*s or works that relate "the deeds of Krishna." Chapter Two revealed the shared narrative strategies that both Villi and Cauhān use to transform the overwhelmingly violent story of the Sanskrit epic into a devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*. But while the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* are both *bhakti* narrative poems that revolve around Krishna, each of these regional Mahābhārata retellings also speak to specific local audiences. Chapters Three and Four focused on how Villi and Cauhān each anchor their Mahābhāratas in specific regional Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* literary cultures: the South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition for Villi and Tulsīdās's Bhasha corpus of Rāmāyaṇa poems for Cauhān.

Let me pause here and point out that Villi and Cauhān are not the only premodern poets to reframe their Mahābhārata retellings in regional languages as devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*s. In the Introduction, I noted that Krishna is a key figure in Haribar Bipra's fourteenth-century Assamese *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* and Sāraḷādāsa's fifteenth-century Oriya *Mahābhārata*, and I described in detail in Chapter Three how the earliest regional Mahābhārata, Peruntēvaṉār's ninth-century Tamil *Pārataveṇpa*, is a Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* poem that centers around Māl, the distinctly Tamil form of Viṣṇu. A regional form of Viṣṇu is also the focus of another premodern South Indian Mahābhārata: Kumāravyāsa's fifteenth-century Kannada *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī.* Ten verses before describing Śeṣanāga "groaning under the burden" of poets who retell the Rāmāyaṇa, Kumāravyāsa informs us that the "bard" of his retelling is Vīranārāyaṇa and Kumāravyāsa is only the "scribe."[4] Sheldon Pollock explains that "the hero" of the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī* "is the god Viṣṇu himself, though now Viṣṇu in a localized form––Vīranārāyaṇa of Gadag, the poet's native town in northern Karnataka."[5] Visitors to the Vīranārāyaṇa Temple in Gadag today can view the Kumāravyāsa *stambhā* or "pillar" which supposedly marks the spot where the poet composed the *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī.*[6] Kumāravyāsa goes on to state that his Mahābhārata will "narrate the story of Krishna."[7]

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[4] Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, 1.7.

[5] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 363.

[6] Shrinivas Ritti, "*Mahābhārata* in Early Kannada Literature," in *Mahābhārata: The End of an Era (Yugānta)*, ed. Ajay Mitra Shastri (Shimla: India Institute of Advanced Study, 2004), 361.

[7] Kumāravyāsa, *Karṇāṭabhāratakathāmañjarī*, 1.13, trans. D. Seshagiri Rao in *Kumaravyasa Mahabharata*, 4.

As Rich Freeman notes, Tuñcattŭ Ĕḻuttacchan, the composer of the sixteenth-century *Bhāratam*, is often referred to as the "father of Malayalam."[8] A. Harindranath and A. Purushothaman point out that throughout the *Bhāratam* "every time the poet hears Kṛṣṇa's name, he enters into a trance and an overflow of hymns to Kṛṣṇa follows."[9] Pradip Bhattacharya describes Kāśīrāmdās's seventeenth-century poem as "the most popular Bengali" retelling of the Mahābhārata and a text in which "the influence of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism is prominent."[10] Elements of the theology of Caitanya and the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* abound in Kāśīrāmdās's composition. Ayesha Irani explains that in the Gauḍīya *sampradāya* "the chanting of Hari's name was a powerful mobilizing force" and "for Caitanya, the collective singing of Hari's name was the preeminent means of salvation."[11] Kāśīrāmdās's Mahābhārata opens with a meditation on the power of the name of Hari. The Bengali poet explains that all the important scriptures (*śāstra*), such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, commence with Hari's name and he describes the potency of the two syllables (*ha* and *ri*) that comprise the word Hari.[12] The premodern regional Mahābhārata retellings of Peruntēvaṉār, Haribar Bipra, Sāraḷādāsa, Kumāravyāsa, Villi, Tuñcattŭ Ĕḻuttacchan, Kāśīrāmdās, and Cauhān all reveal that there was a continuous centering of this epic narrative around Krishna throughout the Indian subcontinent.

My study of the Tamil *Pāratam* and the Bhasha *Mahābhārat* in this dissertation, however, also showed that both Villi and Cauhān claim courtly patrons in their Mahābhārata retellings. Drawing on the theoretical conceptualizations of Dominick LaCapra, I suggested that the references to Varapati Āṭkoṇṭāṉ in the *Pāratam* and Mitrasen and Aurangzeb in the *Mahābhārat* might not be documenting historical patronage relationships. But whether Villi and Cauhān were actually patronized by royal rulers or not, what is clear is that both of these poets are placing their Mahābhāratas in courtly milieus. Chapter Five demonstrated that Villi's *Pāratam* is a markedly Śrīvaiṣṇava *peruṅkāppiyam*/*mahākāvya*, a genre that is frequently associated with courtly life. In Chapter Six, I discussed the distinct intersection of courtly and devotional worlds in the eight dated prologues of Cauhān's *Mahābhārat* in which the praise of Mitrasen and Aurangzeb is juxtaposed with the worship of Krishna and Rāma.

As I noted in the Introduction, Sheldon Pollock has argued in his influential and remarkable work, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (2006), that several of the earliest Mahābhāratas in regional languages are non-religious texts that claim to have been composed in courtly contexts. These Mahābhāratas include Pampa's *Vikramārjunavijayam,* Ranna's *Sāhasabhīmavijayam*, Nannaya's portion of the *Mahābhāratamu*, and Viṣṇudās's *Pāṇḍavcarit*. In this dissertation, I introduced readers to two more premodern regional Mahābhāratas that make courtly patronage claims. But I also showed

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[8] Rich Freeman, The Literature of Hinduism in Malayalam," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism,* ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), 173.

[9] Harindranath and Purushothaman, "*Mahābhārata* Variations in Malayalam."

[10] Bhattacharya, "Variations on Vyasa," 95.

[11] Irani, *The Muhammad Avatāra*, 253.

[12] Kāśīrāmdās, *Mahābhārata* 1.14–16. I am following: Kāśīrāmdās, *Ādiparba*, ed. Haraprasād Śāstrī (Calcutta: Aryan Press, 1929).

I am grateful to Christopher Diamond for examining this section of Kāśīrāmdās's text and sharing his thoughts.

that while Villi and Cauhān place their Mahābhāratas in courtly settings, both poets also make it abundantly clear that their retellings are steeped in local Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions.

And once again, the retellings of Villi and Cauhān are not the only regional Mahābhāratas that exhibit a clear overlapping of courtly and devotional concerns. In the Introduction, I noted that both Peruntēvaṉār's *Pārataveṇpa* and Haribar Bipra's *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* are *bhakti* Mahābhāratas that are thought to have been composed in courtly milieus. I also mentioned Rāma Sarasvatī's sixteenth-century Assamese *Mahābhārata*, a retelling that Rāma Sarasvatī states was commissioned by the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa. He tells us:

> Hail Naranārāyaṇa, the crest-jewel of kings,
> great friend of the Vaiṣṇavas, a fire to his enemies.
> With the greatest affection he gave me a command, [saying],
> "Render the essence of the Bhārata into Assamese verse.
> In my palace there are numerous grammars and commentaries,
> I give them all to you, take them to your home."
> When king said this, bullocks were yoked
> and he had all the books sent to my place.[13]

Note that Rāma Sarasvatī describes Naranārāyaṇa as a "great friend of the Vaiṣṇavas." In his study of Rāma Sarasvatī's *Book of the Forest* (*Banaparba*), William Smith explains that this Assamese Mahābhārata retelling is filled with local expressions of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti:*

> Rāma Sarasvatī refers to the Pāṇḍavas as (*parama*) Vaiṣṇavas and saints (*santa*) and calls his *Bana parba* a tale of saints, *santara caritra*. He continually reminds his listeners of the unending travail and dangers the Pāṇḍavas face in the "terrible forest" (*ghora bana*) and the suffering which they are only able to endure because of their profound faith in Kṛṣṇa. As Vaiṣṇavas they have nothing to fear, since Yama has no power over them and anyone foolish enough to harm a Vaiṣṇava would soon suffer the consequences.[14]

When we turn to premodern retellings that were composed in Sanskrit, we find that *bhakti* also plays an important role in multiple Sanskrit Mahābhāratas that are associated with courtly contexts. Consider Kṣemendra's eleventh-century poem, the *Bhāratamañjarī* (Essence of the Bhārata). Jonathan Geen points out that Kṣemendra "studied under the polymath and genius Abhinavagupta, and served in the royal court of King Ananta of Kashmir (1029–1064 CE). It is said that Kṣemendra was a devotee of Śiva, but later became a Vaiṣṇava Bhāgavata under the influence of the teachings of Somācārya."[15] Ashutosh Dayal Mathur observes that in the *Bhāratamañjarī*, Kṣemendra describes his Mahābhārata as the "story of Viṣṇu" (*viṣṇukathā*).[16]

In Chapter Three, I noted that three of the most famous examples of the Sanskrit *mahākāvya* genre (Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya,* Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*, and Śrīharṣa's

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[13] Rāma Sarasvatī, *Mahābhārata* 3935–37, trans. Smith in "Burden of the Forest," 93.

[14] Smith, 104.

[15] Geen "Marriage of Draupadī," 300.

[16] Ashutosh Dayal Mathur, "The Mahabharata in the Sanskrit Poetry Tradition" (paper presented at the International Meet on the Mahabharata, Tirur, Kerala, India, December 20, 2018).

Naiṣadhīyacarita) are retellings of Mahābhārata episodes. Recall that the term *mahākāvya* is frequently translated as "court epic" or "court poem." Indira Viswanathan Peterson describes the author of the *Kirātārjunīya* as a "court poet" and notes that "Bhāravi is named as a great classical poet in an inscription of 634 A.D. of the Chalukya king Pulakesin II, who ruled in the Deccan region of South India."[17] Yet while Peter Khoroche claims that the *Kirātārjunīya* "is not primarily a religious hymn," Peterson demonstrates that the climax of Bhāravi's *mahākāvya* "shares motifs and images with early *bhakti* devotional literature," specifically the works of the "Tamil Śaiva authors of the *Tēvāram* hymns."[18] Peterson informs us that in the final scene of the *Kirātārjunīya* "the heroic-devotional tableau of Arjuna grasping Śiva's feet in midair is an apt metaphor for Bhāravi's approach to *rasa* and *bhakti* in his poem: in this visual double-entendre (*śleṣa*) the poet achieves a classical suspension of the two values and themes."[19] In his study of the intertextual relationship between Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya* and Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*, Hermann Jacobi suggests that Bhāravi's *mahākāvya*, which tells the story of Krishna slaying Śiśupāla, may be a response to the overtly Śaiva content of the earlier *Kirātārjunīya*.[20] Although Paul Dundas asserts that the *Śiśupālavadha* "is not a 'religious' poem as such," Lawrence McCrea states that "Māgha's Kṛṣṇa is both unambiguously the protagonist of his work" and "fully aware of his own divinity."[21] McCrea does admit that "given his central and dominating presence in the *Śiśupālavadha*, it is extraordinary how little Kṛṣṇa actually says and does in the course of the poem," but he also points out that the sixth and seventh chapters of the Māgha's Sanskrit *mahākāvya* "are explicitly framed as a devotional episode."[22]

Thus, when we survey the many Mahābhāratas of premodern South Asia that were composed by poets working in regional languages as well as in Sanskrit, we find several retellings of the epic—including those by Villi, Cauhān, Peruntēvaṉār, Haribar Bipra, Rāma Sarasvatī, Kṣemendra, Bhāravi, and Māgha—that all seriously challenge the current systematic separating of religious literature and courtly literature in the field of South Asian Studies.

With the rise of the British Raj in the nineteenth century, courtly institutions came to hold much less political power in modern South Asia than they once did. Modern Mahābhārata retellings, however, continued to (and still continue to) display both religious and political concerns. In her study of Hindi Mahābhāratas composed prior to India's independence, Pamela Lothspeich argues that the Mahābhārata tradition underwent a major transformation towards the end of the colonial era in South Asia in which the epic was "reimagined as the primordial textbook of Indian *national* history and repository of *national* culture. The main story of the epic, an all-out battle between mostly good cousin brothers (with God on their side) and mostly evil cousin brothers so conveniently captured the essence of the struggle between Indian nationalists

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[17] Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric*, 3.

[18] Peter Khoroche, "Pace and Pattern in the *Kirātārjunīya,*" in *Innovations and Turning Points: Towards a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 122: and Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric*, 171.

[19] Peterson, 184.

[20] Hermann Jacobi, "Bhāravi and Māgha," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 3 (1889): 135.

[21] Dundas, introduction to Māgha, *Killing of Shishupala*, xxv; and McCrea, "Conquest of Cool," 125.

[22] McCrea, 130 and 136.

and the colonial regime."[23] Some of the depictions of Krishna in the late colonial period in South Asia do not resemble those we find in premodern *bhakti* poems. As Ahona Panda has recently shown, in the *Kṛṣṇacaritra* (Deeds of Krishna, 1886) of the Bengali litterateur Baṅkimcandra Cattopadhyāy, "Bankim's characterization of Kṛṣṇa differs significantly from that which we find in the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions of the Bengal countryside."[24] Panda explains that throughout the *Kṛṣṇacaritra*, Baṅkim is focused on "humanizing Kṛṣṇa by situating him historically" and analyzing his character in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.[25] Lothspeich adds that some Hindi poets, such as Ayodhyāsingh Upādhyāy "Hairaudh" in his *Priyapravās* (Absence of the Beloved, 1914), "followed suit in appropriating the 'historical' Kṛṣṇa of the epic."[26]

In some anti-colonial Mahābhāratas, however, we find expressions of *bhakti* to Krishna alongside allegorical messages about the oppression of the British Raj. Take Maithilīśaraṇ Gupt's Hindi poem *Jayadrath Vadh* (Slaying of Jayadratha, 1910), a retelling of the story from the Mahābhārata in which Arjuna seeks revenge against Jayadratha for the role he played in killing Arjuna's son Abhimanyu during the Battle of Kurukṣetra. Lothspeich notes that in *Jayadrath Vadh*, Gupt casts "Abhimanyu as an ideal Hindu character to inspire India's male youth both to reform Indian society and to engage in the struggle for independence in some capacity."[27] But Lothspeich also shows that "although *vir ras* (the sentiment of heroism) is the predominant *ras* of *Jayadrath-vadh*, at times *bhakti ras* (the sentiment of devotion) takes center stage."[28] She directs us to Gupt's presentation of the scene in which Arjuna expresses his gratitude to Krishna for taking him to Śiva to obtain the weapons he needs to defeat Jayadratha:

> Then Pārtha, moved and brimming with devotion, spoke these words,
> 'O omniscient Hari, your divine magic [*līlā*] is amazing!
> Who besides you could deliver me from this misfortune?
> Who besides you could reveal everything and remove all of my suffering?
> I will never forget what you showed me today.
> Will such a vision ever appear before my eyes again?'
> Saying this, Pārtha fell at Hari's feet.
> Then the Lord showed him ever-new expressions of love [*prem bhav*].[29]

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[23] Lothspeich, *Epic Nation*, 213.

[24] Ahona Panda, "How to Be Political without Being Polemical: The Debate between Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore over the *Kṛṣṇacaritra*," in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 283.

[25] Panda, 285.

[26] Pamela Lothspeich, "The Mahābhārat in Hindi Literature (1910–1940) and Hindu National Identity," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003), 23.

[27] Pamela Lothspeich, "The Mahābhārata as National History and Allegory in Modern Tales of Abhimanyu," *Bulletin of SOAS* 71, no.2 (2008): 294.

[28] Lothspeich, "Mahābhārat in Hindi," 149.

[29] Maithilīśaraṇ Gupt, *Jayadrath Vadh* 56, trans. Lothspeich in "Mahābhārat in Hindi," 151. For the Hindi text, I am following: Maithilīśaraṇ Gupt, *Jayadrath-vadh: Khaṇḍa Kāvya* (Ciragamv: Sāhitya-Sadana, 1966).

Two years after the publication of *Jayadrath Vadh*, the Tamil poet Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati, more commonly known as Pāratiyār, composed another anti-colonial Mahābhārata poem: *Pāñcāli Capatam* (Pāñcālī's Vow, 1912). As Richard Frasca notes, in Pāratiyār's Tamil retelling of the disrobing of Draupadī "the victimized Draupadi is the symbol of India and Duryodhana and his brothers the symbol of their colonial oppressor."[30] Pāratiyār makes it clear that Draupadī is a representation of Mother India and after Duḥśāsana fails to disrobe her, Pāratiyār describes the gods in heaven raining flowers down on her and proclaiming "Victory! Victory to the power of Bhārata!" (*jeya jeya pārata cakti*).[31] While the word "Bhārata" can refer to the Mahābhārata or a member of the Bhārata clan, in modern South Asia Bhārata is a common synonym for India. But despite its strong anti-British agenda, *Pāñcāli Capatam* is not devoid of *bhakti*. In Chapter Two I explained that while Draupadī's prayer to Krishna is not found in the disrobing scene in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the plea that the Pāṇḍavas' wife addresses to Krishna is an integral part of the dice game episode in many Mahābhāratas across South Asia. Pāratiyār dedicates seven verses to Draupadī's prayer, and each verse is filled with familiar images of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Just take the first two verses of Draupadī's prayer:

> 'Hari, Hari, Hari!' she called. 'Kanna!
> Refuge, refuge! I seek refuge in you!
> You showed grace on the elephant and
> Killed the crocodile in the lake that day!
> Oh you, the dark hued one who once
> Danced on the hood of the fearsome Kaliya!
> You who are the Absolute Being, Kanna!
> You are the essence beyond the sacred texts!
>
> You who bears the whirling disc, Kanna!
> With the matchless Sarang bow in hand
> You are the meaning in words, Kanna!
> You, the child so fond of sweetened rice!
> You will dispel all sorrow, merciful Kanna!
> Wipe the tears from your devotees' eyes!
> You who provides succor to the faithful,
> Who created the four-faced reciter of the Vedas.'[32]

If we turn to more recent Mahābhāratas, we continue to see retellings of this narrative with strong political messages and vivid presentations of *bhakti*. One of the most popular post-independence Mahābhāratas is undoubedtly the Hindi *Mahābhārat* television serial that was broadcast from 1988 to 1990 on Doordarshan, the national television network of India. In her ethnographic study of the viewing of Doordarshan television programs among middle-class women in Delhi, Purnima Mankekar discusses "the Indian nation-state's attempts to use

[30] Richard A. Frasca, "*Pāñcāli Capatam* (The Vow of Draupadi): Images of Ritual and Political Liberation in Tamil Theatre," *The Drama Review* 38, no.2 (1994): 99.

[31] Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati, *Pāñcāli Capatam* 302. This is my own translation. I am following: Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati, *Pāñcāli Capatam* (*Panchali's Pledge*, trans. Usha Rajagopalan (Gurgaon: Hachette India, 2012).

[32] Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati, *Pāñcāli Capatam* 293–94, trans. Rajagopalan in Pārati, *Panchali's Pledge*, 255.

Doordarshan to construct a hegemonic, pan-Indian 'national culture.'"[33] Based on interviews with her ethnographic subjects as well as with B.R. Chopra, Rahi Masoom Raza, and Satish Bhatnagar (the director, script writer, and researcher of the serial) about the depiction of Draupadī's disrobing in the forty-seventh episode of the television show, Mankekar demonstrates "how the creators and Hindu viewers of Doordarshan's *Mahabharat* participated through their divergent readings in the reconstitution of Draupadi as a symbol of Indian Womanhood."[34]

But Mankekar's description of the disrobing episode of the television show also makes it clear that the Hindi *Mahābhārat* is presenting Draupadī's prayer to Krishna as a *bhakt* tableau:

> She struggles, then pauses with her sari between her teeth and, with her hands folded, starts to pray to Lord Krishna … Dushasana, to the loud, contemptuous laughter of Duryodhana and his supporters, continues to pull her sari. But the sounds of their laughter are soon drowned by the ringing of temple bells and the blowing of conches. Lord Krishna has intervened: we see his face in the upper left corner of the frame. He smiles down at Draupadi beatifically, reassuringly; saris begin to flow from his palm, which he raises in blessing. As Dushasana pulls off one sari, another drapes Draupadi's body… All we hear for a while is Draupadi's voice praying to Krishna and the music of temple bells, conches, and drums.[35]

In his work on Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*, Chinmay Sharma has observed that this television serial incorporates several iconic stories about Krishna's youth from well-known devotional *kṛṣṇacarita*s. These stories are absent from the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

> Episode[s] 10 to 18 break completely with the modern critical edition in order to narrate episodes of Krishna's birth and childhood, including the incarceration of Krishna's parents by his uncle Kansa, Krishna's father miraculously smuggling the baby out of the prison, Krishna's childhood mischief and exploits with demons and village girls, and Krishna finally defeating Kansa. Episode[s] 18 to 31 show the Pandavas and their cousins [the] Kauravas growing up in the royal household of Hastinapur, interspersing those scenes with shots of Krishna growing up as well.[36]

In the decades since the first airing of Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat* serial, there have been many other Mahābhārata television shows including 9X's *Kahānī Hamāre Mahābhārat Kī* (Our Story of the Mahābhārata, 2008), Star Plus's *Mahābhārat* (2013–2014), and Epic TV's *Dharmakṣetra* (Field of *Dharma*, 2014–2015) in Hindi, and Sun TV's *Makāpāratam* (2013–2016) in Tamil. Reed Burnam notes that as with Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*, *Kahānī Hamāre Mahābhārat Kī* devotes several episodes to Krishna's childhood: "much as in Chopra's earlier serial, the large amount of focus on Krishna's earlier life weaves scenes from the *Bhagavata Purana* and *Harivamsha* texts into the main narrative early on, and serves to bring an elevated

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[33] Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 255.

[34] Mankekar, 224.

[35] Mankekar, 231–32.

[36] Chinmay Sharma, "Many Mahabharatas: Linking Mythic Re-Tellings in Contemporary India," (PhD diss., University of London: SOAS, 2017), 69.

Vaishnava focus to the story at large."[37] This is also true for Sun TV's Tamil *Makāpāratam* and Star Plus's Hindi *Mahābhārat*, which both use multiple episodes to narrate Krishna's adolescence.[38] As I pointed out in Chapter Two, *Makāpāratam* also incorporates a devotional story about Krishna found in many Tamil Mahābhāratas (including Villi's) in which Krishna takes on sixteen thousand forms and Sahadeva binds the deity with just his mind.

It is also worth noting that Star Plus's Hindi *Mahābhārat* begins and ends with Krishna. The first episode of the television serial opens with the meeting of the Pāṇḍavas' ancestor Śaṃtanu and his second wife Satyavatī. At the end of this encounter, we see a peacock feather (the traditional adornment of Krishna's crown) on the riverbank where Śaṃtanu and Satyavatī are sitting being picked up by the wind and carried to a luscious forest grove in which Krishna is playing his flute. We then hear the following lyrics in Bhasha being sung in the background:

> Krishna, beguiler of the mind, my Kānha, my Krishna.
> The one who lifted Mount Govardhana, Krishna, Krishna.
> The one with a peacock feather on his crown, Krishna, Krishna.
> Krishna, Krishna, he is Krishna, Krishna.[39]

Krishna goes on to introduce the Mahābhārata to the viewers and throughout the show's other episodes, he appears as a narrator offering commentary on the events of the epic.[40] The final shot in the last episode is of Krishna smiling serenely at the camera after Yudhiṣṭhira's coronation.[41]

We find something very similar in *Dharmakṣetra*, a television serial in which all of the main characters of the Mahābhārata appear in Dharmakṣetra, the celestial court of Citragupta who is the record keeper of Yama, the god of death. All the characters are put on trial and must explain why they think they deserve a spot in heaven based on their actions during their time on earth. The first episode is the trial of Draupadī, but in the beginning of the episode she is absent from Citragupta's court.[42] Instead we see her standing by a river looking distressed until she

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[37] Reed Ethan Burnam, "Not Simply for Entertainment: The Failure of *Kahani Hamare Mahabharat Ki* and its Place in a New Generation of Televised Indian Mythology," (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 54.

[38] In Sun TV's *Makāpāratam*, these episodes are the seventeenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, and twenty-fifth episodes. In Star Plus's *Mahābhārat*, these episodes are the thirteenth episode of season seventeen, the first through sixth episodes of season eighteen, and the first episode of season nine.

[39] *kṛṣṇa manamohana more kānha more kṛṣṇa*
govardhana giridhārī kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa
mora mukuṭa siradhārī kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa
kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa vo haiṃ kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa

Mahābhārat, "Season 1, Episode 1," aired September 16, 2013, on Star Plus, *Hotstar,* https://www.hotstar.com/us/tv/mahabharat/435/shantanu-accepts-bhishma-as-son/1000011769.

[40] For examples of this, see Star Plus, "Krishna Seekh," *Hotstar*, https://www.hotstar.com/us/tv/mahabharat/435/list/krishna-seekh/t-2154.

[41] *Mahābhārat*, "Season 28, Episode 3," aired August 16, 2014, on Star Plus, *Hotstar,* https://www.hotstar.com/us/tv/mahabharat/435/gandhari-curses-krishna/1000012035.

[42] *Dharmakṣetra*, "Episode 1," aired November 18, 2014, on Epic TV, *Amazon Prime Video*, https://www.amazon.com.

hears a flute and turns around to see Krishna. The deity assuages Draupadī's fears and escorts her to Dharmakṣetra. The final episode is the trial of Krishna, and the god is accused of many transgressions including his role in the deaths of Droṇa and Duryodhana and his inability to prevent the massive carnage of the Battle of Kurukṣetra.[43] Yet Krishna is easily able to address each of the accusations and Citragupta and all those present at Dharmakṣetra are satisfied. The final image of the show is of all the characters gathered around Krishna with their hands joined together in prayer while Krishna lifts his right hand up in blessing.

The increased presence of Krishna in Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*, 9X's *Kahānī Hamāre Mahābhārat Kī*, Star Plus's *Mahābhārat*, Epic TV's *Dharmakṣetra*, and Sun TV's *Makāpāratam* all indicate that Krishna is seen as an integral part of the Mahābhārata tradition across contemporary India. Therefore, when we encounter modern Mahābhāratas in which Krishna is missing, his absence is felt quite heavily. But sometimes Krishna's absence is used by the creators of modern Mahābhārata to send specific political and social messages.

As with Doordarshan's first *Mahābhārat* serial, Doordarshan Kisan's Hindi television serial *Draupadī* (2016) presents the heroine of the epic praying to Krishna during her attempted disrobing.[44] In a marked departure from the earlier iconic Hindi serial, however, Krishna does not appear in the upper left corner of the screen with saris flowing from his hand in Doordarshan Kisan's *Draupadī* as he does in Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*. In the more recent show, when Draupadī closes her eyes and begins to chant Krishna's name, we see all the women of the Kuru clan who have been watching the dice game from a balcony in the assembly hall close their eyes as well.[45] Then, for a fleeting second, images of Krishna appear over the hearts of these royal women. When Duḥśāsana begins to pull at Draupadī's sari, Satyavatī, the Kauravas' mother Gāndhārī, Duryodhana's wife Bhānumatī, and all the Kauravas' wives pull off their own saris and fling them over the balcony to Draupadī who uses them to cover herself. When the Kaurava women run out of saris and are left standing only in their petticoats and blouses, Bhānumatī runs to her bedroom and grabs a yellow sari that Krishna had given her as a wedding gift. Bhānumatī throws the sari over the balcony and the sight of Draupadī draped in this garment in Krishna's signature color deters Duḥśāsana from trying to disrobe her further. While the words *rādhe kṛṣṇa gopāla kṛṣṇa* "Rādhā's Krishna, Gopāla Krishna," are chanted repeatedly in the background during this sequence, the audience of this serial cannot help but ask if is it Krishna who has saved Draupadī or is it the combined effort of all the Kaurava women? Are the creators of *Draupadī* presenting this scene as an example of Draupadī's *bhakti* for Krishna or as an example of women coming together to protect each other from sexual assault?

Krishna is also noticeably absent from a recent political cartoon depicting Draupadī's disrobing that was shared over two thousand times on Twitter in March of this year.[46] The artist of this political cartoon is clearly inspired by the presentation of this scene in Doordarshan's

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[43] *Dharmakṣetra*, "Episode 26," aired May 11, 2015, on Epic TV, *Amazon Prime Video*, https://www.amazon.com.

[44] Doordarshan Kisan is one of Doordarshan's multiple national channels. The target audience of this Doordarshan channel is supposedly farmers in India, hence the name Kisan (*kisān*) or "farmer."

[45] DD Kisan, "Draupadi - Vastra Haran, Mahabharat Stories, Episode 93" YouTube video, 23:44, July 13, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoII5PP_HzY&t=82s.

[46] PenPencilDraw, Twitter post, March 2, 2021, 4:07 AM, https://twitter.com/penpencildraw/status/1366676463924224000.

Mahābhārat. Draupadī is wearing a yellow sari that mirrors the one her counterpart wears in the serial and Duḥśāsana is sporting the same gaudy, giant, golden crown that he wears in Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*.[47] Although this episode first aired over thirty years ago in 1989, the show was re-broadcast during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. 22.9 million viewers watched the finale of the show on the Doordarshan Bharati network during the pandemic.[48] Thus it is not surprising that the artist of this political cartoon draws inspiration from Doordarshan's *Mahābhārat*. Draupadī's hands are joined in prayer in the political cartoon as Duḥśāsana tugs at her sari, but Krishna is nowhere to be seen. Instead, in the upper right corner we see a judge in black robes sitting on a raised bench with a gavel asking Duḥśāsana, "So will you marry her?"

This political cartoon is a response to the comments of Chief Justice Sharad Bobde, a member of the Indian Supreme Court. In the beginning of March of this year, thousands of people in India demanded that Justice Bobde resign after he told a man who raped a sixteen-year-old-girl "If you want to marry (her) we can help you. If not, you lose your job and go to jail."[49] The survivor and her family had initially not gone to the police because the rapist's mother promised that her son would marry the survivor. As journalist Gita Pandey points out, "in a country where victims are often blamed for rape, and sexual assault carries lifelong stigma, her family agreed to the arrangement."[50] The rapist, however, married someone else, the survivor went to the police, and they appeared before Justice Bobde. This political cartoon brings up several important questions. Draupadī is clearly praying in this political cartoon, but who is she praying to? Is Krishna choosing not to answer Draupadī's plea? Is Krishna Justice Bobde? Is having survivors marry their attackers the only way to save modern Draupadīs in India today?

In the first chapter of the first book of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the bard Ugraśravas describes the epic he is about to narrate by saying: "poets have told it before, poets are telling it now, other poets shall tell this history on earth in the future."[51] For two thousand years, people have been retelling the Mahābhārata using nearly every South Asian language and artistic genre. This epic has sometimes been retold for religious purposes, sometimes for political purposes, and sometimes for religious-and-political purposes. The Mahābhārata has an immensely potent ascribable power and it will clearly continue to have this power in centuries to come.

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[47] Pen Bhakti, "Draupadī kā Vastraharaṇ, Mahabharat Stories, B.R. Chopra, Ep- 47," YouTube video, 41:40, December 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RajCJUdEDH8.

[48] Shweta Keshri, "Mahabharat becomes the most-watched show," *India Today*, May 22, 2020, https://www.indiatoday.in/television/top-stories/story/mahabharat-becomes-the-most-watched-show-doordarshan-witnesses-major-dip-in-ratings-1680680-2020-05-22.

[49] Gita Pandey, "India Supreme Court: Calls for Justice Sharad Bobde to quit over rape remarks," *BBC*, March 4, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56263990.

[50] Pandey, "India Supreme Court."

[51] *MBh* 1.1.24, trans. van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 1:21.

APPENDIX:

Glossary of Names

What follows is a glossary of the names of some of the characters and deities in the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, and other South Asian narrative traditions.

Abhimanyu– the son of Arjuna and Subhadrā, the husband of Uttarā, the father of Parikṣit
Acyuta– a name of Viṣṇu/Krishna
Aditi– a Vedic goddess
Agastya– a sage
Aghāsura– a demon slain by Krishna
Agni– the Vedic deity of fire
Ahalyā– a woman Rāma liberates from a terrible curse, the wife of Gautama
Airāvata– the elephant of Indra
Ajamīḍha– a descendant of Bharata, an ancestor of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas
Ājamīḍhas– the descendants of Ajamīḍha
Ajāmila– a Brahmin who became a devotee of Viṣṇu on his deathbed
Aḻakar– a form of Viṣṇu worshipped in Madurai, the brother of Mīnākṣī
Alli– a Pandya warrior-queen of Madurai, a wife of Arjuna
Ambā– a princess who is reborn as Śikhaṇḍinī before transforming into Śikhaṇḍin, the sister of Ambālikā and Ambikā[1]
Ambālikā– the wife of Vicitravīrya, the mother of Pāṇḍu, the sister of Ambā and Ambikā[2]
Ambikā– the wife of Vicitravīrya, the mother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the sister of Ambā and Ambālikā[3]
Aniruddha– a grandson of Krishna
Aṇṇāmalaiyār– a form of Śiva worshipped in Tiruvannamali
Aravāṉ– the Tamil name of Irāvān
Arjuna– the third Pāṇḍava brother, the biological son of Indra and Kuntī
Arundhatī– the wife of Vasiṣṭha
Aśvasena– the son of the serpent king Takṣaka, an enemy of Arjuna
Aśvatthāman– the son of Droṇa, an ally of the Kauravas
Aśvins– the twin Vedic deities of healing, the fathers of Nakula and Sahadeva
Atri– a sage
Ayaṉ– a Tamil name of Brahmā
Babhruvāhana– the son of Arjuna and Citrāṅgadā
Bakāsura– (I) a demon slain by Bhīma
(II) a demon slain by Krishna
Balarāma– an incarnation of Viṣṇu, the older brother of Krishna and Subhadrā
Bāṇa– a demon slain by Krishna

[1] In Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, Ambā is the wife of Vicitravīrya and the mother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. See *CM* 1.9–12.

[2] In Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, Ambālikā (not Ambā) is reborn as Śikhaṇḍinī. See *CM* 1.9–12.

[3] In Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, Ambikā is the wife of Citrāṅgada (not Vicitravīrya) and the mother of Pāṇḍu. Ambālikā (not Ambikā) is Pāṇḍu's mother in most retellings of the epic. See *CM* 1.9–12.

Bhagadatta– the king of Pragjyotisha, an ally of the Kauravas
Bhagavān– "the blessed lord," a name often used for Krishna/Viṣṇu[4]
Bhānumatī– a wife of Duryodhana
Bharata– (I) the son of Śakuntalā and Duḥṣanta, the founder of the Bhārata Empire
(II) a brother of Rāma
Bhāratas– the descendants of Bharata (the founder of the Bhārata Empire)
Bhavānī– a name of Pārvatī
Bhīma– the second Pāṇḍava brother, the biological son of Vāyu and Kuntī
Bhīṣma– the son of Gaṅgā and Śaṃtanu, the great-uncle of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas
Bhūdevī– the goddess of the earth
Bībhatsu– a name of Arjuna (Vibhatsa in Bhasha)
Bijayi– *see* Vijaya
Brahmā– the deity of creation
Brahman– the ultimate reality of the universe, the Supreme God
Cānūra– a wrestler slain by Krishna
Citragupta– the record keeper of Yama
Citrāṅgada– the eldest son of Śaṃtanu and Satyavatī
Citrāṅgadā– a wife of Arjuna, the mother of Babhruvāhana
Citraratha– a *gandharva* (celestial musician)
Dakṣa– the father of Satī
Damayantī– a queen whose story is told in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the wife of Nala
Dambhodbhava– a king whose story is told in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*
Dāmodara– a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Dāruka– the charioteer of Krishna
Daśaratha– the father of Rāma
Dehalīśa– "lord on the porch," a form of Viṣṇu worshipped in Tirukkovalur
Devakī– the biological mother of Krishna, the wife of Vasudeva
Dhanañjaya– a name of Arjuna
Dharma– **(I)** the Vedic deity of *dharma*, the father of Yudhiṣṭhira
(II) a name of Yudhiṣṭhira
Dharmarāja– "king of *dharma*," a name of Yudhiṣṭhira
Dhārtarāṣṭras– the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, the brothers of Duḥśalā and Yuyutsu
Dhṛṣṭadyumna– the brother of Draupadī and Śikhaṇḍin, a son of Drupada
Dhṛtarāṣṭra– the blind father of the one hundred Kauravas, Duḥśalā, and Yuyutsu, the husband of Gāndhārī, the brother of Pāṇḍu and Vidura, the son of Vyāsa and Ambikā
Dhruva– a devotee of Viṣṇu
Draupadeyas– the five sons of Draupadī
Draupadī– the shared wife of the Pāṇḍavas, a daughter of Drupada, the sister of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Śikhaṇḍin
Droṇa– the teacher of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, the father of Aśvatthāman
Drupada– the king of the Pāñcālas, the father of Draupadī, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Śikhaṇḍin
Duḥśalā– the daughter of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, the sister of the one hundred Kauravas and Yuyutsu, the wife of Jayadratha

[4] See footnote 167 on page 154.

Duḥśāsana– the second-eldest of the one hundred Kaurava brothers
Durgā– a goddess of war, a consort of Śiva
Durvāsas– a sage with a terrible temper
Duryodhana– the eldest of the one hundred Kaurava brothers
Dūṣaṇa– a demon slain by Rāma
Gajendra– an elephant king who Viṣṇu saves from a crocodile
Gālava– a student of Viśvāmitra
Gaṇapati– a name of Gaṇeśa
Gāndhārī– the wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the mother of the one hundred Kauravas and Duḥśalā
Gaṇeśa– the elephant-headed remover of the obstacles, the first scribe of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the son of Śiva and Pārvatī, the brother of Kārttikeya
Gaṅgā– the goddess of the Ganges River, the mother of Bhīṣma, the first wife of Śaṃtanu
Garuḍa– the divine eagle mount of Viṣṇu
Gautama– a sage, the husband of Ahalyā
Ghaṭotkaca– the half-demon son of Bhīma and Hiḍimbā
Giridhārī/Girivardhārī– "mountain lifter," a name of Krishna
Girijā– a name of Pārvatī
Gopāla– "protector of cows," a name of Krishna
Gopīs– the cowherdesses of Vrindavan
Govinda– "tender of cows," a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Guha– the king of the Nishad community, a devotee of Rāma
Haladhara– a name of Balarāma
Halāyudha– a name of Balarāma
Hanumān– a monkey deity, the most famous and dedicated devotee of Rāma, the son of Vāyu, the brother of Bhīma
Hara– a name of Śiva
Hari– a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu/Rāma
Hastin– an ancestor of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas
Hiḍimba– a demon slain by Bhīma, the brother of Hiḍimbā
Hiḍimbā– a demoness, the sister of Hiḍimba, a wife of Bhīma, the mother of Ghaṭotkaca
Himavat– the personification of the Himalayas, the father of Pārvatī and Gaṅgā
Hiraṇyakaśipu– a demon slain by Narasiṃha, the father of Prahlāda, the brother of Hiraṇyākṣa
Hiraṇyākṣa– a demon slain by Varāha, the brother of Hiraṇyakaśipu
Hṛṣīkeśa– a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Indra– the leader of the Vedic deities, the father of Arjuna
Irāvān– the half-serpent son of Arjuna and Ulūpī
Īśvara– a synonym for God which is used for both Śiva and Viṣṇu
Jagannātha– a deity worshiped in Puri who is sometimes identified with Krishna/Viṣṇu
Jamadagni– the father of Paraśurāma/Rāma Jāmadagnya
Jāmbavān– the king of the bears, an ally of Rāma, the father of Jāmbavatī
Jāmbavatī– a wife of Krishna, the daughter of Jāmbavān
Janaka– the father of Sītā
Janamejaya– the son of Parikṣit
Janārdana– a name of Viṣṇu/Krishna
Jarāsandha– the king of Magadha, an enemy of Krishna and the Pāṇḍavas
Jaṭāyū– a divine bird, an ally of Rāma

Jayadratha– the husband of Duḥśalā, the brother-in-law of the one hundred Kauravas
Jiṣṇu– a name of Arjuna
Jīvantī– a prostitute who attained salvation by teaching her parrot to recite the name of Rāma
Kabandha– a demon slain by Rāma
Kālī– a fearsome goddess, a consort of Śiva
Kalki– the final incarnation of Viṣṇu who is yet to come
Kāmadeva– the god of love
Kaṃsa– Krishna's relative (often identified as the brother of Devakī)[5]
Kānha– a name of Krishna that is often used in Bhasha and other regional languages
Kaṇṇaṉ– a distinctly Tamil name of Krishna
Kapidhvaja– "monkey-bannered," a name of Arjuna
Karṇa– the biological son of Sūrya and Kuntī, the closest friend of Duryodhana
Kārttikeya– the god of war, the son of Śiva and Pārvatī, the brother of Gaṇeśa
Kauravas[6]– the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, also known as the Dhārtarāṣṭras, the brothers of Duḥśalā and Yuyutsu
Kauśalyā– the mother of Rāma
Keśava– a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Keśī– a horse demon slain by Krishna
Khara– a demon slain by Rāma
Kīcaka– the brother-in-law of Virāṭa
Kirīṭa– *see* Kirīṭin
Kirīṭin– a name of Arjuna (Kirīṭin in Bhasha)
Kirmīra– a demon slain by Bhīma
Krishna (Kṛṣṇa)– (I) an incarnation of Viṣṇu, the maternal cousin and advisor of the Pāṇḍavas **(II)** a name of Arjuna
Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa— *see* Vyāsa
Kubera– the god of wealth
Kuvalayāpīḍa– an elephant slain by Krishna
Kumaraṉ– a name of Murukaṉ
Kumbhakarṇa– a demon slain by Rāma, a younger brother of Rāvaṇa
Kuntī– the first wife of Pāṇḍu, the biological mother of Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and Arjuna, the sister of Vasudeva, the paternal aunt of Krishna
Kuntibhoja– the adoptive father of Kuntī
Kūrma– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a tortoise
Kuru– a descendant of Bharata, an ancestor of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas
Kurus– the descendants of Kuru
Kuśa– a son of Rāma and Sītā, the brother of Lava
Lakṣmaṇa– a brother of Rāma
Lakṣmī– the goddess of wealth and beauty, the consort of Viṣṇu, also known as Śrī
Lava– a son of Rāma and Sītā, the brother of Kuśa
Madanagopāla– a form of Krishna worshiped in Vrindavan

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[5] See footnote 57 on page 68.

[6] Although the term "Kaurava" literally means "descendent of Kuru" and can thus technically refer to the Pāṇḍavas as well, the name "Kaurava" usually refers to the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī.

Mādhava– "descendant of Madhu," a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Madhu– (I) an ancestor of Krishna
(II) a demon slain by Viṣṇu
Madhusūdana– "destroyer of Madhu," a name of Viṣṇu
Mādrī– the second wife of Pāṇḍu, the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva
Mahirāvaṇa– a demon defeated by Hanumān, a relative of Rāvaṇa[7]
Māl– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māyaṉ, Māyavaṉ, Māyōṉ, Neṭumāl, and Tirumāl
Mallikārjuna– "lord white as Jasmine," a Kannada name of Śiva
Mārīca– a demon slain by Rāma
Mārkaṇḍeya– a sage, a devotee of Śiva
Mātali– the charioteer of Indra
Matsya– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a fish
Māyaṉ– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māl, Māyavaṉ, Māyōṉ, Neṭumāl, and Tirumāl
Māyavaṉ– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māl, Māyaṉ, Māyōṉ, Neṭumāl, and Tirumāl
Māyōṉ– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māl, Māyavaṉ, Māyaṉ, Neṭumāl, and Tirumāl
Mayūradhvaja– a devotee of Krishna, the father of Tāmradhvaja
Mīnākṣī– a Pandya princess, a goddess worshiped in Madurai, the consort of Sundareśvara, the sister of Aḻakar
Mohinī– a female form of Viṣṇu/Krishna, the wife of Aravāṉ in some Tamil traditions
Mukunda– a name of Krishna/Viṣṇu
Murukaṉ– an ancient and distinctly Tamil god, often equated with Kārttikeya
Nakula– the second youngest Pāṇḍava brother, the twin of Sahadeva, the biological son of the Aśvins and Mādrī
Nala– a king whose story is told in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the husband of Damayantī
Nanda/Nandagopa– the adoptive father of Krishna and Balarāma, Yaśodā's husband
Nara– a sage and the companion of Nārāyaṇa
Nārada– a mischievous traveling sage, a devotee of Viṣṇu
Narasiṃha– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes on the form of a man-lion
Nārāyaṇa– (I) a name of Viṣṇu
(II) a sage and the companion of Nara
Naṭarāja– "lord of dance," a form of Śiva
Neṭumāl– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māl, Māyaṉ, Māyavaṉ, Māyōṉ, and Tirumāl
Padmanābha– a name of Viṣṇu
Pāñcālas– the people of Drupada
Pāñcālī– a name of Draupadī
Pāṇḍu– the "father" of the five Pāṇḍavas (in name only), the husband of Kuntī and Mādrī, the brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura, the son of Vyāsa and Ambālikā
Pāṇḍavas– the five "sons" of Pāṇḍu who have actually been fathered by different Vedic gods
Parāśara– a sage, the father of Vyāsa, the grandson of Vasiṣṭha

[7] See footnote 80 on page 146.

Paraśurāma– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a Brahmin sage and warrior,[8] the teacher of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa, also known as Rāma Jāmadagnya
Parikṣit– the son of Abhimanyu and Uttarā, the father of Janamejaya
Pārtha– "son of Pṛthā," a name that could technically be used for Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, or Arjuna but that is frequently used for Arjuna
Pārvatī– a consort of Śiva, the daughter of Himavat, the reincarnation of Satī, the mother of Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa
Phalguna– a name of Arjuna
Piṉṉai– the Tamil cowherdess wife of Krishna
Prahlāda– the son of Hiraṇyakaśipu, a devotee of Viṣṇu
Pṛthā– a name of Kuntī
Puruṣaṉ– a Tamil name of Viṣṇu
Pūtanā– a demoness slain by Krishna
Rādhā– a *gopī* and Krishna's most famous and beloved consort
Rādhāramaṇa– "Rādhā's lover," a form of Krishna worshiped in Vrindavan
Raghava– "descendant of Raghu," a name of Rāma
Raghu– an ancestor of Rāma, the founder of the Raghu lineage
Raghus– the descendants of Raghu
Ramā– a name of Śrī
Rāma/Rāmacandra– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a warrior-prince, the husband of Sītā, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa narrative tradition
Rāma Jāmadagnya– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a Brahmin sage and warrior, the teacher of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa, also known as Paraśurāma
Raṅganātha– a form of Viṣṇu worshiped in Srirangam
Rāvaṇa– the demon king of Lanka who is slain by Rāma
Rukmiṇī– a wife of Krishna
Śabarī– a female ascetic, a devotee of Rāma
Śabdabheda– *see* Śabdavedhin
Śabdavedhin– a name of Arjuna (Śabdabheda in Bhasha)
Sabyasācī– *see* Savyasācin
Saccidānanda– "existence, consciousness, and bliss," a synonym for Brahman
Sahadeva– the youngest Pāṇḍava brother, the twin of Nakula, the biological son of the Aśvins and Mādrī[9]
Śakaṭa– a cart demon slain by Krishna
Śakuni– the brother of Gāndhārī, the maternal uncle of the one hundred Kauravas
Śakuntalā– the mother of Bharata, the wife of Duḥṣanta, the daughter of Viśvāmitra
Śalya– the brother of Mādrī, the maternal uncle of Nakula and Sahadeva
Śaṃtanu– the father of Bhīṣma, Citrāṅgada, and Vicitravīrya, the husband of Gaṅgā and Satyavatī

[8] Note that while Paraśurāma/Rāma Jāmadagnya is not described as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the critical edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, multiple different Vaiṣṇava traditions list him as the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu in the *daśāvatāra* (ten primary incarnations) cycle of Viṣṇu.

[9] In Cauhān's *Mahābhārat*, Sahadeva is the biological son of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī. See page 93 and *CM* 1.23.

Sanaka– one of the four child sages known as the Kumāras who are described as incarnations of Viṣṇu in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*
Sañjaya– the charioteer of Dhṛtarāṣṭra who narrates the events of the Bhārata War to him
Sarasvatī– the goddess of knowledge and the arts
Satī– the first wife of Śiva who was reborn as Pārvatī, the daughter of Dakṣa
Satyabhāmā– a wife of Krishna
Sātyaki– a member of the Yādava clan, a close friend of Krishna, an ally of the Pāṇḍavas
Satyavatī– the second wife of Śaṃtanu, the mother of Vyāsa, Citrāṅgada, and Vicitravīrya
Savyasācin– a name of Arjuna (Sabyasācī in Bhasha)
Śeṣa/Śeṣanāga– the celestial serpent Viṣṇu reclines on
Śikhaṇḍin– the reincarnation of Ambā who was born as Śikhaṇḍinī before transforming into Śikhaṇḍin, a son of Drupada, the brother of Draupadī and Dhṛṣṭadyumna
Śikhaṇḍinī– the reincarnation of Ambā, a daughter of Drupada, the sister of Draupadī and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, transforms into Śikhaṇḍin
Śiśupāla– the king of Chedi, a maternal cousin of Krishna
Sītā– the wife of Rāma, the mother of Lava and Kuśa, the daughter of Janaka
Śiva– a major Hindu deity
Skanda– a name of Kārttikeya
Śrī– the goddess of wealth and beauty, the consort of Viṣṇu, also known as Lakṣmī
Śrīdāmā– a Brahmin, a childhood friend of Krishna, also known as Sudāmā
Śrīdhara– a name of Viṣṇu
Sṛñjayas– a sub-group of the Pāñcālas
Subāhu– a demon slain by Rāma
Subhadrā– the sister of Krishna and Balarāma, a wife of Arjuna, the mother of Abhimanyu
Sudāmā– *see* Śrīdāmā
Sugrīva– a monkey king, an ally and devotee of Rāma, the brother of Vālī
Śuka– a son of Vyāsa, one of the narrators of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*
Sundareśvara– a form of Śiva worshipped in Madurai, the consort of Mīnākṣī
Supratīka– the elephant of Bhagadatta
Śūrpaṇakhā– a demoness, the sister of Rāvaṇa
Sūrya– the Vedic god of the sun, the biological father of Karṇa
Sutīkṣṇa– a sage
Śvetabāji– *see* Śvetavāhana
Śvetavāhana– a name of Arjuna (Śvetabāji in Bhasha)
Takṣaka– a serpent king, the father of Aśvasena
Tāmradhvaja– the son of Mayūradhvaja
Tapatī– the mother of Kuru
Tāṭakā– a demoness slain by Rāma
Tirumāl– the Tamil form of Viṣṇu, also known as Māl, Māyaṉ, Māyavaṉ, Māyōṉ, and Neṭumāl
Trisirā– a demon slain by Rāma
Trivikrama– a name of Vāmana/Viṣṇu
Tṛṇāvarta– a demon slain by Krishna
Ugraśravas– a bard and one of the primary narrators of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*
Ulūka– the son of Śakuni in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*
Ulūkaṉ– the priest of the Pāṇḍavas in the Tamil *Pāratam*
Ulūpī– a serpent princess, a wife of Arjuna, the mother of Irāvān

Umā– a name of Pārvatī
Uttaṅka– a sage
Uttara– the son of Virāṭa
Uttarā– the daughter of Virāṭa, the wife of Abhimanyu, the mother of Parikṣit
Vaiśampāyana– a sage and one of the primary narrators of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*
Vālī– the brother of Sugrīva who is slain by Rāma
Vālmīki– the author of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*
Vāmana– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a dwarf
Varadarājasvāmī– a form of Viṣṇu worshipped in Kanchipuram
Varāha– an incarnation of Viṣṇu who takes the form of a boar
Vasiṣṭha– a sage, the husband of Arundhatī
Vasudeva– the biological father of Krishna, Balarāma, and Subhadrā, the husband of Devakī, the brother of Kuntī
Vāsudeva– "the son of Vasudeva," a name of Krishna
Vatsāsura– a calf demon slain by Krishna
Vāyu– the Vedic deity of the wind, the father of Bhīma and Hanumān
Veṅkaṭeśvara– a form of Viṣṇu worshipped in Tirupati
Vibhatsa– *see* Bībhatsu
Vibhīṣaṇa– a demon, a brother of Rāvaṇa, a devotee of Rāma, the king of Lanka
Vicitravīrya– the younger son of Śaṃtanu and Satyavatī, the husband of Ambikā and Ambālikā
Vidura– the illegitimate son of Vyāsa and Ambikā's maid, the brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, often considered a devotee of Krishna
Vijaya– a name of Arjuna (Bijayi in Bhasha)
Vikarṇa– one of the one hundred Kaurava brothers
Virādha– a demon slain by Rāma
Vīranārāyaṇa– a form of Viṣṇu worshipped in Gadag
Virāṭa– the king of Matsya, the father of Uttara and Uttarā, an ally of the Pāṇḍavas
Vīravarma– a king who Arjuna battles
Viṣṇu– a major Hindu deity
Viśvāmitra– a sage, the father of Śakuntalā, the preceptor of Rāma
Viśvarūpa– a three-headed beast slain by Indra
Vṛtra– a formidable beast slain by Indra
Vyāsa– the traditional "author" of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the eighteen *mahāpurāṇa*s, the compiler of the Vedas, the biological father of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, Vidura, and Śuka, the son of Satyavatī and Parāśara, often considered to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu
Yādavas– the descendants of Yadu, the clan of Krishna
Yadu– the founder of the Yādava lineage, the son of Yayāti
Yājñasenī– a name of Draupadī
Yama– the Vedic deity of death, sometimes equated with Dharma
Yaśodā– the adoptive mother of Krishna and Balarāma, Nanda's wife
Yayāti– an ancestor of the Kauravas, the Pāṇḍavas, and the Yādavas, the father of Yadu
Yudhiṣṭhira– the eldest Pāṇḍava brother, the biological son of Dharma and Kuntī
Yuyutsu– the illegitimate son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī's maid, the brother of the one hundred Kauravas and Duḥśalā, an ally of the Pāṇḍavas

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