An Argument with God: Bhagavannindā in the *Mahābhārata* Tradition

by Vishal Sharma

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Abstract

This thesis tells two stories—one of how the god Kṛṣṇa's humanity and divinity came to be defined in the aftermath of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition. Another is how the *Mahābhārata* itself was taken seriously as a Vaiṣṇava text in its reception history. Through a close reading of Sanskrit commentaries, polemics, and narrative texts, I examine how these texts—and the religious communities that composed them—developed a theology of a fully-divine Kṛṣṇa in late-medieval and early modern South India, and how the *Mahābhārata* became explicitly Vaiṣṇava through the reinterpretation of the god Kṛṣṇa's humanity. With the proliferation of Sanskrit commentaries and treatises on the overall meaning of the epic in the medieval and early modern period, clarifying Kṛṣṇa's role becomes an explicit part of explaining the Sanskrit epic. The theology of a fully-divine human incarnation of Viṣṇu required a justification of the conduct, censures, and diminishment of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, and a clarification of his role. This included justifying his conduct, explaining why he is rebuked constantly, and reinterpreting his 'human' death and his worship of other gods.

Through a study of late-medieval and early modern polemics, philosophical texts, and commentaries from the South Indian Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava communities (13th-17th c.), I posit that this discourse on Kṛṣṇa was important to the emergence of the *Mahābhārata* as an explicitly Vaiṣṇava text on the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Both in the *Mahābhārata* and in its reception in the early Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas and commentaries, readers sought to reconcile the humanity of the god with his divine status. For the Mādhva and Śrīvaiṣṇava communities, answering the 'Kṛṣṇa question' was a key component of articulating the *Mahābhārata* as a text that belonged to the Vaiṣṇava community, largely in contradistinction to the Śaiva polemics of Appaya Dīkṣita in the 16th century. This discourse on Kṛṣṇa gave rise to the emergence of the *Mahābhārata* as an explicitly Vaiṣṇava text on the supremacy of Viṣṇu in South India during this period. The end result is to posit a fully divine Kṛṣṇa who is less human than the *Mahābhārata* presents him and coincides with the emergence of the avatāra theology in Purāṇas.

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Introduction

"I believe in [the] Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the Gita and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. […] If it was proved to me that…the Krishna of the Mahabharata actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate."

— Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, October 1925

How did Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, especially medieval and early modern South Indians, reconcile Kṛṣṇa's humanity in the *Mahābhārata* with his divinity, and why did this question preoccupy them in their polemics and epic exegesis? These are the questions this dissertation seeks to answer.

The *Mahābhārata*, one of the earliest texts to present the story of the god Kṛṣṇa as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, remains an influential text for Vaiṣṇavas. Though the epic survives in other forms today, and has survived in poetic adaptations, vernacular retellings, and dramatic reenactments, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* was read, particularly in Vaiṣṇava circles, as a śāstra on the supremacy of Viṣṇu—that is, a text which proclaims the supremacy of Viṣṇu and retells his exploits on the earth as a human incarnation of Nārāyaṇa as he re-establishes dharma. The epic is one of the earliest texts to include the story of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva and it includes popular subtexts such as the Bhagavad Gītā (which would be later called the "Hindu Bible"), Nārāyaṇīya, and the Viṣṇusahasranāma. Vaiṣṇavas

over the past two millennia have drawn from all of these sections of the epic to craft their own texts and theologies. In arguing for the supremacy of Viṣṇu, these exegetes wrestled with the presentation of Kṛṣṇa as a human in the *Mahābhārata*: how can the god be rebuked for his conduct, seek favours from other gods, and suffer human injuries and death?

The dichotomy between the human and divine is not limited to Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. Rāma, in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa appears to be unaware of his divinity as an incarnation of Viṣṇu for much of the narrative. There remains a gap in understanding how the *Mahābhārata* remained influential in premodern India, and in what ways it shaped Vaiṣṇava theology. Sheldon Pollock (1984), Ajay Rao (2015), and Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi (2019) have drawn attention to the dichotomy between the human and divine in the figure of Rāma in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa. Rao in particular has pointed out the challenges this presents for Śrīvaiṣṇava readers, and how they construct a hermeneutic of the Rāmāyaṇa where Rāma is the Supreme God who acts like a human. Writing about the reception of Rāma, Pollock notes that the "ideal human and the divine saviour was easily accommodated" in the Indian tradition.[1] The accommodation of the 'human and divine' is less easy in the case of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* tradition.

While the study of the *Mahābhārata* has flourished, less attention has been paid to the communities that read and commented on the text in premodern India. In South India especially, there was a rise in theistic forms of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa sects, like the Śrīvaiṣṇava and Mādhva Vaiṣṇavas in the second millennia. Madhva (13th c.), the founder of the latter sect, authored a text titled the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* ("The Determination of the

[1] Pollock (1991) p.20

Mahābhārata's Meaning") which offered one of the earliest full-scale Vaiṣṇava interpretations of the epic, which remains understudied. Alongside this, other Vaiṣṇava commentaries on the epic, such as Vādirāja's *Lakṣālaṃkāra* arose alongside the polemics of Appaya Dīkṣita, which brought the epic and Kṛṣṇa's role within it into larger focus.

Through a close reading of Sanskrit commentaries, polemics, and narrative texts, my dissertation, *An Argument with God: Bhagavannindā in the Mahābhārata Tradition,* examines how these texts—and the religious communities that composed them—developed a theology of a fully-divine Kṛṣṇa during the medieval and early modern period (c.500-1800), particularly in South India. I show how medieval South Indian religious communities, both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva, used the epic to articulate their religious identities in contradistinction to one other. The theology of a fully-divine human incarnation required a justification of the conduct, censures, and diminishment of Kṛṣṇa in the epic, and a clarification Kṛṣṇa's role. This discourse on Kṛṣṇa gave rise to the emergence of the *Mahābhārata* as an explicitly Vaiṣṇava text on the supremacy of Viṣṇu in South India during this period. In tracing this evolution, this research bridges a gap in the reception history of the *Mahābhārata*, and also shows how the *Mahābhārata* became explicitly Vaiṣṇava through the reinterpretation of the god Kṛṣṇa's humanity.

I argue first that both in the *Mahābhārata* and in its reception in the early Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas and commentaries, readers sought to reconcile the humanity of the god with his divine status. This included justifying his conduct according to the aṃśāvataraṇa principle, explaining why he is rebuked constantly, and reinterpreting his 'human' death and his worship of other gods. The end result is to posit a fully divine Kṛṣṇa who is less human than the *Mahābhārata* presents him, which coincides with the emergence of the avatāra

theology in Purāṇas. With the proliferation of Sanskrit commentaries and treatises on the overall meaning of the epic in the medieval and early modern period, clarifying Kṛṣṇa's role becomes an explicit part of explaining the Sanskrit epic.

Second, I argue that for the Mādhva and Śrīvaiṣṇava communities, answering the 'Kṛṣṇa question' was a key component of articulating the *Mahābhārata* as a text that belonged to the Vaiṣṇava community, largely in contradistinction to the Śaiva polemics of Appaya Dīkṣita in the 16th century. Through a study of late-medieval and early modern polemics, philosophical texts, and commentaries from the South Indian Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava communities (13th-17th c.), I posit that this discourse on Kṛṣṇa was important to the emergence of the *Mahābhārata* as an explicitly Vaiṣṇava text on the supremacy of Viṣṇu.

Nikṛti, Nindā, and Nikarṣa

The divinity of Kṛṣṇa has been an ongoing debate since the time of early philological research on the *Mahābhārata*. Similar studies of the Rāmāyaṇa have questioned whether Rāma was always the divine being he is presented as in the extant epic, and scholars consequently suggested theories for how his identity as a human form of Viṣṇu was a later, sectarian interpolation. Questions about the divinity of the gods Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in the Sanskrit epics are inherently tied to the question of divinity itself. Pollock (1991), in his study of Rāma's divinity in the Rāmāyaṇa, warns against an ethnocentric view of divinity that presuppose other conceptions of divinity. In order to effectively answer the question of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, it is important to assess what constitutes divinity in the tradition, and look at the questions that are raised therein. In sketching a reception history of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, I distill three different ways in which his humanity and divinity attracted the

attention of the epic's audience—namely, commentators, polemicists, and Purāṇas in premodern India: his trickery (nikṛti), rebukes of him (nindā), and his diminishment (nikarṣa). In doing this, I uncover the ways in which the tradition scrutinized Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa's nikṛti, or trickery in the war, forms an important part of the first section. I examine how both the *Mahābhārata* and the reception tradition presents and problematizes the god's use of deception throughout the epic, and the challenges it presents for the community of readers and listeners. In the Śalyaparvan, for instance, Duryodhana and Bhīma engage in a final mace-battle (gadāyuddha), and when Duryodhana appears to have the advantage, Kṛṣṇa suggests that Bhīma cheat and hit Duryodhana's thighs in order to secure victory and make good on an earlier promise that Bhīma made to break Duryodhana's thighs. This follows from a series of crooked strategies (jihmopāya-s) that Kṛṣṇa has devised which break the rules of war (yuddhadharma) and eventually lead the Pāṇḍavas to victory. Texts like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* question Kṛṣṇa's role in the war and reconcile it with his divinity. In theistic Vaiṣṇava movements such as the one founded by Madhva, Viṣṇu (and Kṛṣṇa) is viewed as a completely perfect being. This occasionally presents challenges for Madhva, who must explain how Kṛṣṇa's role and conduct in the *Mahābhārata* is consistent with a perfect God. I examine the crooked strategies and their reception to understand how Kṛṣṇa's conduct was scrutinized in the tradition, and how that scrutiny is framed.

Nindā (rebuke) is the keyword for the second section of the dissertation, where I pay close attention to examples where Kṛṣṇa is rebuked in the *Mahābhārata*. In the Sabhāparvan and the Śalyaparvan, Śiśupāla and Duryodhana both rebuke Kṛṣṇa, and the former achieves union with Kṛṣṇa, while the latter receives a shower of flowers from the

gods, both directly following their censures of Kṛṣṇa. I study how the tradition interprets these episodes and develops the concept of bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti as a result. This "problem of divine reproach" leads to commentarial re-readings of these episodes, while the concept of bhagavannindā is eventually moved from the realm of narrative to the world of polemics amongst Śaivas and Vaiṣnavas in South India.

Nikarṣa (diminishment) is the theme of the final section of the dissertation. In this case, I look at the ways Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* is the subject of polemics, and study the ways in which other aspects of his humanity are used to prove his inferiority to other gods. The problem, I contend, particularly in the medieval texts and commentaries on the epic, is twofold. First, Kṛṣṇa is subject to pain and injury as his body is hit by an arrow. Second, the god appears to have a prākṛta or common human body, as the Mausala Parvan describes his cremation rites. I thus pay attention to the death of Kṛṣṇa in the Mausala Parvan and the problems it presents for medieval South Indian theologians, particularly those writing in a sectarian context. Finally, I look at instances where Kṛṣṇa worships or appeases Śiva for help, particularly in the Droṇaparvan and the Mokṣadharma- and Anuśāsana Parvans. His worship of gods becomes another point of scrutiny for Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava readers in South India, who use it in part to make competing claims about the overall meaning of the *Mahābhārata*.

In presenting these three challenges together—Kṛṣṇa's trickery (nikṛti), the censures (nindā) of him, and Kṛṣṇa's diminishment (nikarṣa)—I show the different modalities of the interplay between the human and the divine in premodern South Asia and the challenges they present for Vaiṣṇava interpreters of the *Mahābhārata*. I also present the theodicies or defences that result from this questioning of his humanity. There is no

unique theodicy that emerges, but rather many theodicies, all of which respond to a singular concern.

The Critical Edition

In this section, I present background information on the version of the *Mahābhārata* that I consult, as well as an overview of the texts that I refer to and specific writers within that tradition. I offer a definition of the *Mahābhārata* Tradition to clarify what I mean by it in my study.

The process of producing a Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* began in April 1919 under the leadership of Vishnu Sukthankar and S.K. Belvalkar, and was completed in 1966. Sukthankar's goal was to recover the earliest possible archetype of the text. This monumental project marked a major turning point in the study of the *Mahābhārata*. While this edition of the epic was and is not immune to criticism, it has become the standard text used in scholarship. It is a thesaurus of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* tradition, in that it includes every stanza from the manuscripts collated. The appendix of interpolated passages has also been a helpful tool in understanding the rich regional diversity of the *Mahābhārata* tradition. As Sheldon Pollock notes, this project revealed a key difference between the text histories of the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Mahābhārata*: "Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa display disagreements of a sort that cannot be accounted for by inevitable accidents of written transmission."[2] Indeed, despite strong regional traditions, the northern and southern recensions of the *Mahābhārata* identified by

[2] Pollock (1990), p. 84.

Sukthankar are easier to reconcile to a common ancestor than the recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa are, because it is easier to find authentic passages common to both recensions.

There is an ongoing debate, however, as to how the Critical Edition should be read. Hiltebeitel views it as the closest approximation of the earliest written autograph of the *Mahābhārata*. Following J. A. B. Van Buitenen, James Fitzgerald views it as an approximation of the Gupta-era written *Mahābhārata*. Wendy Doniger views it as a "Frankenstein" of a text, pieced together from various discrete regional manuscripts. Andreas Bigger refers to it as a "normative redaction" of the *Mahābhārata*, a "kind of screenshot, a frozen moment in a floating tradition."[3] John Dunham, in his survey of the various manuscripts collected for the Critical Edition project, suggests that there is "no 'pure' version of the *Mahābhārata*, a version that has steadfastly resisted the inclusion of new material from manuscripts or other sources, a perfect copy of the first text."[4]

This is a small sample of scholarly assessments of the Critical Edition, but there are some discernible patterns in how they approach the text. Scholars such as Bigger and Dunham view the *Mahābhārata*'s text history as fluid, open to change and accretion at any point in its development. Others, such as Simon Brodbeck, view the Critical Edition as "an integral text, intentionally produced as an artefact."[5] Scholars from the analytic and synchronic schools diverge in their methodology. As Christopher Austin has argued,[6] the former sees the accretions present in the critical apparatus and appendix as proof of the kind of growth and interpolations that must have existed before the Critical Edition. Thus,

[3] Bigger (2002), p. 20.
[4] Dunham (1991), p. 12.
[5] Brodbeck (2009), p. 7.
[6] Austin (2009), p. 72–74.

the Critical Edition is a mere screenshot in a larger history of ongoing change. The latter view the archetype as a fixed point in the epic's history, whether that fixed point represents a final redactorial effort or a single unitary composition.

There are criticisms of the Critical Edition that scholars have put forward. While the team in Pune consulted across India extensively in their manuscript search, they made little use of close to 200 manuscripts available in Europe (see Fitzgerald, 2010). Even within India, Kannaḍa and Oriyan manuscripts were not used. Dunham (1991) observed that the manuscripts used in the Critical Edition project were fairly new (the oldest manuscript is a Nepali manuscript from the sixteenth century). This does not mean, however, that the manuscript traditions recovered do not predate the sixteenth century. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee show how, using philological principles, a manuscript used could have been copied from an exemplar from the eighth century, which may have been copied from an exemplar from an even earlier time period. Commenting on the Śārada sources, they say:

> The text of this manuscript appears to be very old: it is free of almost all of the "modern" interpolations that characterize the other manuscripts; it is free of their innovations; the language is decidedly archaic. Assuming that birch-bark manuscripts last 300–400 years before they begin to deteriorate and that an upper limit for the age of palm-leaf manuscripts is 800–1000 years . . . and keeping in mind the fact that its text appears very old, the scribe of the Śāradā codex may have had access to an exemplar from the eight or ninth century CE. If that scribe in turn had access to an old exemplar, we would be looking at a text handed down from the second century CE, which puts us perhaps just one or two generations away from the autograph.[7]

While the substance of what they are proposing is hypothetical, the process they propose is plausible and compatible with the philological principles that Sukthankar himself followed when editing the *Mahābhārata*. That is, he worked under the assumptions that scribes did

[7] Adluri & Bagchee (2018), p. 32, n. 82.

not intentionally seek to introduce interpolations into their manuscripts. The relative lateness of the manuscripts does not mean that their sources in the reconstructed text were late.

Could there have been other competing traditions that have not survived? Despite the fluidity of the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition, there is little from the available manuscript evidence to prove that other archetypes with a radically different text existed. For example, the current manuscript evidence shows that despite some lengthy additions, the Southern Recension had a tendency to elaborate on names and ornament the text. While these differences may have existed before our archetype, there is nothing to prove that the differences were drastic, as is the case with the Rāmāyaṇa Critical Edition. The "Spitzer Manuscript"—a second-century CE fragment of a Sarvāstivādin Buddhist manuscript—includes a parvan list for the *Mahābhārata* that has led to some scholarly speculation on what a written *Mahābhārata* text may have looked like before a Gupta-era text, as the BORI edition supposed. Scholars have wrestled with the fact that it excludes the Virāṭaparvan and the Anuśāsanaparvan. Johannes Bronkhorst uses the Spitzer Manuscript as evidence for the existence of an altogether separate archetype that predates the archetype posited by the Critical Edition (which he refers to as the "hyper archetype"). This archetype would exclude the Anuśāsanaparvan from the *Mahābhārata*.

It is, in my view, highly speculative to posit the existence of an earlier and radically different archetype of the *Mahābhārata* from a fragment of a manuscript that contains nothing more than a parvan list. Certain questions would need to be addressed, such as why this parvan list even exists within the context of a Sarvāstivādin Buddhist manuscript, and what purpose it serves. Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are unavailable.

The state of the manuscript leaves many of these answers to speculation. With a measured approach, however, the Spitzer Manuscript is a valuable resource. For example, John Brockington uses it alongside the parvan list found in the *Harivaṃśa* and in colophons to make sense of the text- history of the *Mahābhārata*; but even he concedes that the Spitzer Manuscript is "incomplete evidence"[8] for the shape of an earlier text.

I read the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* as an approximation of the earliest recoverable archetype of the written text. It is difficult to date this archetype, but external evidence suggests that a 100,000-verse *Mahābhārata* existed in the Gupta Period (330–500 CE) at the very least. Pegging the Gupta Period as the terminus ante quem for the archetype of the Critical Edition, as J. A. B Van Buitenen does, is a reasonable hypothesis.[9] The archetype of the Critical Edition may not necessarily be a product of the Gupta Period, but given the sparse external historical evidence, it was plausibly in circulation at this time.

While the Critical Edition's reconstituted text did not recover the Ur-*Mahābhārata* that scholars have been searching for and hypothesizing about for some time, it is an important and generally reliable scholarly tool for the epics because it identifies the diachronic history of the text from the available manuscript evidence. The editorial principles of Sukthankar and his team of scholars have occasionally been questioned, but the carefully prepared stemma and apparatus allow scholars to make their own informed decisions if they disagree with the reading put forward. More importantly, I should note that the sources I use in the study of the *Mahābhārata*'s reception take for granted that it is a written text. As Hiltebeitel argues, the Pune Critical Edition shows that "for about two

[8] Brockington (2010), p.86
[9] Van Buitenen (1980), p. xxv.

millennia the work that has moved people is a book and in that sense one must speak of all of its audience—oral ones included—as readers."[10] For this reason, the work that is relevant for my study is the written *Mahābhārata* represented by the Pune Critical Edition and occasionally other editions.

The other published editions that I refer to are of the Vulgate text (known as the Bombay edition), to which Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary is often appended (primarily the version published by Chitrashala Press in 1929), and the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata* edited by P.P.S Shastri. In both cases, I refer to them primarily because of the commentaries of Nīlakaṇṭha and Vādirāja. I quote directly from this edition primarily when I refer to Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary because the edition often includes readings that are important to his exegesis. I quote occasionally from the Shastri edition because he offers some information about Vādirāja in his edition, and reproduces parts of his commentary. I will also cite verses from Shastri's edition of the Mausala Parvan.

The *Mahābhārata* Tradition: Defining the Trajectories of the *Mahābhārata*'s Reception History

A culturally influential text like the *Mahābhārata* could not remain relevant for two millennia without a community of readers and an audience. Recent work has drawn attention to the need to study the reception of monumental Sanskrit texts in premodern India. Deven Patel (2014), for instance, in his monograph on the reception of the Sanskrit kāvya *Naiṣadhīya,* defines a tradition as

> an ongoing set of self-aware text-critical and aesthetic engagements with a powerful literary object that span centuries. These engagements include, but are not limited

[10] Hiltebeitel (2005) p.9

> to, formal commentaries, narrative texts, encomia, pseudepigrapha, translations, visual representations, anonymous snatches of literary-critical discourse available from oral tradition, and modern forms of literary criticism.[1]

The *Mahābhārata* Tradition, because of its vast scope both of material and time period, cannot fruitfully be the subject of a single study, but rather is a sub-field in itself.

There are two trajectories that the premodern reception histories of the Sanskrit epics can take: one, and perhaps the more common route, is the reception of the Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* vis-a-vis their retellings and adaptations in Sanskrit and the vernaculars. The Rāmāyaṇa has benefitted from this type of work, with A.K. Rāmānujan's (1987) "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" and *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Richman 2002), among others. Pamela Lothspeich (2008) has studied the reception of the *Mahābhārata* in modern Hindi recastings of the epic in the twentieth century, looking at its influence both in the burgeoning independence movement and the development of the Khariboli dialect. *Many Mahābhāratas* (Hawley and Pillai, 2021) studies the various adaptions of the epics and charts a reception history through the vernacular and Sanskrit retellings.[11]

The other, second trajectory is the reception history charted through the medieval and early modern Sanskrit commentaries, and occasionally the Sanskrit Purāṇas and

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[11] The mahākāvyas that emerged in the first millennium adapted episodes from the *Mahābhārata*. Māgha's Śiśupālavadha (8th c.) and the Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi (7th c.), are of some interest because they adapt two episodes that bear on the subject of this dissertation—Śiśupāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna's securing of the Pāśupata weapon from Śiva respectively. I pick up on the first theme in the section on nindā, where I look at how bitextual, less harsh censures of Kṛṣṇa emerge in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and later commentaries on the epic. The second theme, on Śiva's role in the *Mahābhārata*, is used in my third section on nikarṣa, where Appaya Dīkṣita cites the Kirāta episode amongst others as proof of Śiva's supremacy and of his importance in securing victory for the Pāṇḍavas in the war. Daṇḍin refers to Bhāravi (who lived in South India) as a "Śaiva," making his work important to the history of the Śaiva reception of the *Mahābhārata*. While I reference these poems where necessary, and do not deny their theological significance, they do not form the focus of my work. I turn my attention to less-studied works in South India that pick up on threads that are established in works like the Śiśupālavadha.

related secondary texts. The second path is not divorced from the first, but it offers us a different map to chart the reception of the epics. The retellings and adaptations in the first path are afforded a certain creative license that the Sanskrit commentators of the second path are not. The former are able to alter and change plot points to fit their theology or overall poetic vision, while the latter must work with the Sanskrit text before them. The reality of the text puts some strain on the commentators, who must occasionally resort to creative glossing and other philological techniques to get themselves out of exegetical puzzles.

Earlier generations of philologists and historians have dismissed the epic commentaries as part of a larger trend to disregard the Sanskrit commentaries on ancient texts. This is largely because of a "pervasive mistrust"[12] scholars have had towards Sanskrit commentators and their abilities to recover meaning of the root texts. Of all the commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, only two have been published in their entirety.

Recent studies have called for a rethinking of attitudes towards epic commentaries and have highlighted their value not just for understanding the epics, but as valuable texts in their own right for understanding the intellectual history, history of religion and the origins of philology in South Asia (Goldman 2006, Minkowski 2005, Pollock 2015). As Robert Goldman[13] notes, "the numerous, medieval (ca. 13th-18th centuries CE) commentaries on the major Sanskrit epic and Purāṇic texts constitute a significant genre of pre-modern South Asian secondary scholarship, the study of which raises significant issues of hermeneutics, philology, theology, and translation theory." Christopher Minkowski's

[12] Olivelle (1999), p.551
[13] Goldman 2006, p.7

work on the *Bhāratabhāvadīpa,* a 17th century commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, has shown how commentaries are more than just glosses on a root text, but products of their own time that offer insights into the intellectual history of various disciplines of Indian philosophy. Ajay Rao, in a recent monograph, (Rao 2015), has shown how commentaries on the Rāmāyaṇa, when studied alongside other genres of text and material culture, can help us chart the rise of Rāma worship in medieval India. The shift in attitudes towards commentaries invites the possibility of studying *Mahābhārata* commentaries and polemics and the ways in which they shaped the interpretation of the epic.

By "tradition" then, I mean the reception of the *Mahābhārata* in circles that commented on or retold the work in Sanskrit, particularly in South Indian religious communities. The post-*Mahābhārata* 'scale of texts' to which I refer spans a wide variety of genres, from Purāṇas to commentaries, to more argumentative polemical works in the Vedānta tradition, from various periods:

- *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*;
- *Viṣṇudharma*;
- *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its commentaries, particularly that of Śrīdhara;
- *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (post-*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*);
- *Saura Purāṇa* (post-12th c.);
- *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* of Madhva (13th c.);
- *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*, *Brahmatarkastava*, and *Madhvatantramukhamardana* of Appaya Dīkṣita (16th c.);
- *Yuktimallikā*, *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya-bhāvāprakāśika*, *Lakṣālaṃkāra* of Vādirāja (16th c.);

- *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* of Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara (17th c.);
- *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* of Vedāntācārya (16th-17th c.)

Although the commentaries on the epics emerge in the second millennium, there are precursors for epic exegesis that I glean from the Purāṇas and related Vaiṣṇava texts, which I refer to as proto-commentary. For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is in many ways a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight. It offers some exposition on the epic, its role in the world, and even its shortcomings as Harikathā. The concerns about the humanity of Kṛṣṇa (and Rāma) are also found in these texts, and commentators often rely on theologies of the avatāra found in the Purāṇas in order to make sense of the epics. In this dissertation, I look at precursors to the commentaries on the *Mahābhārata* in the form of the Purāṇas in order to see continuity (and in some cases, rupture) on the issue of Kṛṣṇa's humanity. Aside from commentaries, I am locating the reception of the *Mahābhārata* in polemical texts and in other less polemical but key Vaiṣṇava texts in the first and second millennia, in order to understand how the epic was read and commented upon and to also understand what the reception history contributed to local and regional sectarian debates.

Madhva, Appaya, and Vādirāja in the *Mahābhārata* Tradition

Ron Inden argues that authors of premodern texts should be viewed as "agents" shaping their texts in relation to other agents and texts. As he writes,

> A particular text is itself one momentary effect or result of the textual practices in which agents engage. It belongs to a tradition conceived of not as something dead and complete, or as the unfolding of an original unitary idea, but conceived of, after Collingwood, as a scale of texts. Later agents and their texts overlap with those of their predecessors and contemporaries and, by engaging in a process of criticism,

> appropriation, repetition, refutation, amplification, abbreviation, and so on, position themselves in relation to them.[14]

I follow Inden in reading the *Mahābhārata* not as a text frozen in time, but as part of a dynamic tradition of agents who engaged with the work to shape their own theologies, polemics, and narratives. To that end, there are three important figures whose works I return to throughout the dissertation to understand the reception of the epic and its influence on religious identity in South India: Madhva (13th c.), Vādirāja (16th c.) and Appaya Dīkṣita (16th c.). In this section I offer a brief account of their contributions to the *Mahābhārata* Tradition.

With the exception of the Purāṇas, for which the dating and place of origin can be difficult to establish, most of the texts that I study in this dissertation are from late-medieval and early modern South India (13thc.-17thc.). To contextualize the South Indian works that I focus on, I also read Purāṇic material from the first millennia and Nīlakaṇṭha's 17thcentury commentary in North India alongside the works of Madhva, Vādirāja and Appaya Dīkṣita. Though Purāṇas are hard to date, these sources predate the 13th century, which is where I begin my study of South India with Madhva (1238-1317). Before looking at the flurry of interest in the *Mahābhārata* in South India, I study how Vaiṣṇava texts in the first millennia addressed the portrayal of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, and how the issues that the medieval exegetes address are anticipated in these works. Although the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva thinkers who penned commentaries and polemics offered their own perspectives and unique theological arguments, the concerns about Kṛṣṇa's humanity are present in the early Vaiṣṇava works in the first millennia. The other non-South Indian work that I study,

[14] Inden (2000) p.12

Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's *Mahābhārata* commentary Bhāratabhāvadīpa, was composed in North India in the 17th century. I refer to his work primarily because he is one of the last Sanskrit commentators on the *Mahābhārata*, and I want to understand to what extent his commentary was affected by conversations and debates that already existed in South India before him.

The three recurring figures that I refer to in the dissertation shaped the *Mahābhārata* tradition in South India, namely Madhva, Appaya Dīkṣita and Vādirāja. In his brief sketch of philological commentaries in Sanskrit, Sheldon Pollock notes the importance of Mahabharata exegetes.

> Whatever more systematic research may show to be the true history of the later development of the philological commentary, there is certainly no reason to think that anyone before Vallabhadeva, Devabodha, Varadaraja, and the rest had attempted to do what they did: provide rational recensions, a more or less comprehensive inventory of variant readings, verse by verse exegeses, and sometimes, coherent interpretations of entire poems (and, later, dramas) and epics.[15]

The history of this genre cannot be told without reference to the early works of Devabodha, Vimalabodha, and Madhva. Devabodha (12th c.), the earliest commentator on the Mahabharata, inaugurated a tradition of epic exegesis that involved glossing over difficult words, noting alternative readings to words (pāṭhāntaras), and explaining the purport of difficult verses (kūṭaślokas). Vimalabodha continued this tradition in his commentary on the Mahabharata, fashioning it around the interpretation of these kūṭaślokas.

[15] Pollock (2015) p.117

Madhva

Given the date of Devabodha, Madhva was writing only a century after the first surviving written commentary on the *Mahābhārata* emerged. Madhva's Mahabhāratatātparyanirṇaya ("The Determination of the *Mahābhārata*'s Meaning" or MBTN) is therefore a significant work in the history of *Mahābhārata* exegesis. Unlike Devabodha's commentary, it is not a running gloss of difficult verses, but it articulates, rather, a vision of what the *Mahābhārata* means, and offers a retelling of both the *Mahābhārata* and Rāmāyaṇa in the process. Madhva does not offer variant readings, but famously notes that various manuscripts of the epic exist with interpolations, and devised philological tools that he urged his audience to use in reading the Purāṇas and Epics. Madhva also differs from Devabodha and the early commentators in that his text is explicitly articulating a sectarian Vaiṣṇava reading of the text. The MBTN has been understudied, and was not consulted by the editors of the *Mahābhārata*'s Critical Edition. This dissertation includes the first extended study of the MBTN and situates its arguments and legacy within the larger history of the *Mahābhārata*'s reception to show how the epic emerged as an important text for polemic dispute and the articulation of religious identity.

Vādirāja

Madhva's attention to the *Mahābhārata* continued with his followers. The 16th c. Mādhva pontiff of the Ṣoḍe Maṭha, Vādirāja, composed an epic commentary of his own, along with a commentary on the MBTN. Like the MBTN, Vādirāja's epic commentary remains unstudied despite being the most widely-circulated South Indian commentary in

the early modern period. PPS Shastri, the editor of the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, was one of the first scholars to draw attention to Vādirāja's commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, the Lakṣālaṇkāra. "The *Lakṣālaṃkāra* is very valuable as it may possibly turn out to be the earliest dated commentary on the *Mahābhārata*,"[16] he wrote in the introduction to his edition of the Sabhāparvan. Although his claim about the commentary being the earliest dated commentary turned out to be incorrect, the Lakṣālaṃkāra remains a valuable and influential commentary on the epic. Most of the extant traditional commentators on the *Mahābhārata* were from North India, and so Vādirāja's commentary was invaluable for recovering a recension of the epic that circulated in the South. Vādirāja's commentary was also invaluable for Shastri's Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Lakṣālaṃkāra*—despite its influence on the "Southern Recension" of the *Mahābhārata*, has sometimes been regarded as a minor commentary on certain ślokas.. This is more than just a ṭīkā on some difficult words, however. As we will see in the coming chapters, the select verses that Vādirāja comments on have important implications beyond just explaining what a word means. His readings of these verses are often maverick and have larger implications for how we should understand the *Mahābhārata*. He often deviates greatly from other traditional commentators in his interpretations. The verses he chooses are often important to the narrative. Moreover, the Lakṣālaṃkāra and the MBTN are key texts for reconstructing the South Indian reception of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

In order to properly situate his arguments and contextualize them historically, I offer evidence to substantiate the claim that Vādirāja flourished in the 16th century. The dating of Vādirāja was, at one point, contentious. Shastri placed him in the 14th c (1330

[16] Shastri (1932) p.XI

AD), following R. G. Bhandarkar. In an article, P.K. Gode offered a more definitive dating of the Mādhva cleric. Pointing to a stone inscription in Karnataka that mentions a gift to Vādirāja that dates to 1571 CE, along with two other inscriptions at the Madhva Maṭha in Udupi that date to 1613 and 1614, Gode argued that Vādirāja was born in the late 16th c and continued to flourish in the 17th c.[5] The dating of the earliest manuscript of the commentary is not far from Vādirāja's lifetime. The manuscript of the Lakṣālaṇkāra that PPS Shastri consulted was dated by Gode to 1645—probably within his lifetime or shortly after his death. For these reasons, I take this work to be Vādirāja's authentic composition, and agree with Gode's dating.

Aside from contributions to the *Mahābhārata*'s commentarial tradition, Vādirāja was also an important scholar in the Mādhva tradition. His style of writing, particularly in his magnum opus, the Yuktimallikā, was concise yet clearly written to reach a wider audience than the works of his successful predecessors Vyāsatīrtha and Jayatīrtha did. For example, he translated the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* into Kannada, a much more popular and accessible language at the time. Reflecting on Vādirāja's legacy, some of which remains to be studied by scholars, B.N.K Sharma summarizes it thus: "the works of Jayatirtha and Vyasatirtha were too learned and stiff to be of use to general readers. It was Vādirāja who first brought the wisdom of his predecessors within the reach of all. In this respect, his work marks a new and necessary phase in the history of Dvaita Literature and breathes the spirit of a new age which produced other popular exponents of Madhva-Siddhanta, both in Sanskrit and Kannada." In this dissertation, I focus on three of his works: the Lakṣālaṇkāra, the Bhāvaprakāśika (his commentary on the MBTN), and the Yuktimallikā.

Appaya Dīkṣita

Appaya Dīkṣita is another key figure in South India whose works I focus on, because he presents one of the most notable Śaiva readings of the epic. The 16th c. Śaiva polymath authored hundreds of works on various topics ranging from literary theory to grammar. Recent scholarship (Minkowski, 2014; Rao, 2014) has raised a curious feature of Appaya Dīkṣita's scholarship. A prolific polymath, Appaya Dīkṣita's (16th c.) writing career included authoritative works on topics as varied as literary theory, grammar, and philosophy. Minkowski (2014) points to the "Appaya Problem". Appaya resists characterization, as Minkowski argues because "it is difficult to know exactly what he believed. It is not just that Appaya wrote in many scientific and literary disciplines, but that he wrote in them from many authorial positions. On religious topics he wrote as a vaidika, as a Śaiva, sometimes as a Vaisnava, and occasionally as a worshipper of other smārta deities." [6] His Śaiva works, often in the form of short polemical tracts expounding the glories of Śiva in contradistinction to Viṣṇu, often used quotes from the *Mahābhārata* and Rāmāyaṇa to build his sectarian argument.[17] His reading of the epic was often against the grain and completely contradicted Madhva's Viṣṇuite reading of the text. I am aware that in using Appaya's explicitly polemical Śaiva works, I am not representing his full literary career, including those devotional works aimed at Viṣṇu. Even in the works studied below, it is obvious that he is not denigrating Kṛṣṇa in absolute terms. Still, these works are informative because

[17] For more information on Appaya Dīkṣita's exegesis of the Rāmāyaṇa, see "A Text with a Thesis: The *Rāmāyaṇa* from Appaya Dīkṣita's Receptive End." In *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, edited by Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea, 45–63. Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011.

they provide an insight into criticisms of Kṛṣṇa that proliferate as a result of the epics, particularly from a Śaiva perspective. Appaya's polemical tracts, particularly those on the epics, were influential and garnered widespread response from the South Indian Vaiṣṇavas in the Mādhva and Śrīvaiṣṇava communities.

Although other texts and writers will be referred to, the works of these three South Indian epic exegetes will be studied closely to understand how the *Mahābhārata* Tradition in South India was shaped by the interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's role, and the ways in which it influenced their works as Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. In bringing these writers in conversation with each other, along with earlier and later texts, I investigate how the 'Kṛṣṇa question' influenced how religious groups used the *Mahābhārata* and its contents to articulate their own religious identities in the sectarian climate of late medieval and early modern South India.

Chapter Outline

Part 1: Nikṛti: The Aṃśāvataraṇa, and Defending Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata Tradition

This section is made up of three chapters. In the first chapter, I pay specific attention to Kṛṣṇa's trickery in the war, and the questions it raises about his role and divinity in the epic. I then shift to the interpolated passages in the appendices of the Critical Edition to argue that the tradition is not uncomfortable with the trickery that Kṛṣṇa engages in, but it does defend Kṛṣṇa from rebuke. In the second chapter, I study how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* not only subtly criticizes the *Mahābhārata* as "Harikathā", but also how it envisions Kṛṣṇa as an avatāra acting as a human in the world. I look at how it also ignores instances of trickery while using the aṃśāvataraṇa and the burden of the earth argument to defend the

god. Picking up on the theme of Purāṇic questioning, I look at how the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* specifically problematizes Kṛṣṇa's trickery in the *Mahābhārata* and uses it to question his divinity. In chapter 3, I shift to the 13th c. *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* by Madhva to look at how the Dvaita thinker defends Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma in the gadāyuddha, and justifies the Pāṇḍavas as correct because they follow Kṛṣṇa's trickery. Madhva uses his theology to read the Pāṇḍavas as all good and the Kauravas as doomed for hell, and to offer a defence of Kṛṣṇa. I then look at how Appaya Dīkṣita, the Śaiva polymath and polemicist, attempts an argument for Kṛṣṇa being overcome with *tamas* in response to a similar argument about Śiva, before putting forward his own theodicy.

Over the three chapters, I argue that it is the aṃśāvataraṇa that links Vāsudeva's actions in the *Mahābhārata* War to his descent onto earth to relieve her burden. The descent of partial incarnations (*aṃśāvataraṇa*) to relieve the earth of her burden (*bhārāvataraṇa*) often comes as an implicit and explicit defence of Kṛṣṇa's conduct. Although this section in the *Mahābhārata* has often been dismissed as an "inept mythification" and a late interpolation, I argue that it must be taken seriously as a part of the epic because it is an important part of how the tradition understands Kṛṣṇa's role within the Bhārata.

Part 2: Nindā: Bhagavannindā and the rise of Dveṣabhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Commentarial Tradition

In this section made up of three chapters, I take up the question of rebuking Kṛṣṇa. The *Mahābhārata* presents two episodes in particular that are given attention in the reception tradition. Śiśupāla rebukes Kṛṣṇa in the Sabhāparvan and although he is eventually beheaded by the god, he ultimately attains union (sāyujya) with him. Duryodhana harshly berates Kṛṣṇa in the Śalyaparvan for all of his trickery in the Bhārata War, and ultimately receives a shower of flowers from the gods. In both episodes, there is an unsettling imbalance that puzzles the reception tradition: how could these two figures rebuke God and be subsequently rewarded for it?

This section is made up of three chapters. In Chapter 4 that opens this section, I first look at the emergence of the concepts of dveṣabhakti and bhagavannindā, which I argue emerge in the Purāṇas. While the terms are mentioned in the earlier *Viṣṇu* and *Harivaṃśa Purāṇas*, I show that it is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that fully defines a concept of devotion-through-hatred (dveṣabhakti) and censure of Bhagavān (bhagavannindā) in its interpretation of the Śiśupāla and Vena stories.

In Chapter 5, I look at how the *Bhāgavata*'s presentation of Bhagavannindā spurs a reinterpretation of the rebukes of Kṛṣṇa. I pay particular attention to the commentaries on the epic.

In Chapter 6, I look at how the concept of bhagavannindā is eventually adapted from narrative and defined in contrast to religious identity. To be a good Vaiṣṇava, for Madhva, is to be someone who does not even listen to the rebuke of Viṣṇu. Similarly, the Śaiva *Saura Purāṇa* constructs Madhva as a Śivanindaka, accusing him of harbouring hatred for the god. I show in this section how the discussion on bhagavannindā is closely tied to how these

medieval Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva communities defined each other as "haters", blurring the line between narrative and community.

Part 3: Nikarṣa: The Inferior God Complex and Reclaiming the Mahābhārata as a Vaiṣṇava Text

In a time that is now referred to as "the Sectarian Age" (Fisher 2017), we see that various religious groups jostled for patronage in medieval and early modern South India. In the process, these groups sought to offer "authoritative" readings of various texts, including the *Mahābhārata*. In this section I look at the ways in which Mādhvas (here represented by Madhva and Vādirāja), Śaivas (Appaya Dīkṣita), and Śrīvaiṣṇavas (Vedāntācārya) waded into the debate on the gist or *tātparya* of the epic.

This section is made up of three chapters. In chapter 7, I identify how the nikarṣa, or denigration of Kṛṣṇa operates at the level of both Purāṇic and polemical discourses, particularly in South India. It is in the context of this debate that Kṛṣṇa is scrutinized. Building on sectarian arguments about Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* from other sources, Appaya samples a few criticisms of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* that betray an "Inferior God Complex": Kṛṣṇa is subject to human emotions, pain, and even death. This is in response to Madhva, who in his *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, argues that Kṛṣṇa is "perfect" and without fault (nirdoṣaka). Vādirāja and Madhva offer a complex theodicy on the body of Kṛṣṇa and his humanity, offering a stirring reading of his death and cremation. In this case, I look closely at how Kṛṣṇa's death eventually leads to a theologization that emphasizes not only Kṛṣṇa's control of the event, but also his body and his inability to be injured. Vādirāja offers a wholesale defense of other aspects of Kṛṣṇa in his *Yuktimallikā*.

The final two chapters are concerned with methodologies: namely, how do Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva exegetes read the nikarṣa of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, and how do they respond to this inferior god complex? In chapter 8, the concept of nindā returns, where I survey the 'na hi nindā nyāya'—a method of reading criticism that has its roots in Mīmāṃsa. I look at how Appaya Dīkṣita uses the maxim to read and contextualize the nikarṣa of Śiva and Viṣṇu in the *Mahābhārata*, and explain how it eventually feeds into the *Mahābhārata* commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara. For Advaitins like Appaya and Nīlakaṇṭha, this nyāya is used to read sections of the *Mahābhārata* where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva or Śiva appears to be inferior to Kṛṣṇa. For these exegetes, context matters, and diminishing Kṛṣṇa ultimately only serves the purpose of praising Śiva.

In the final chapter, I examine the Vaiṣṇava responses to Appaya, and look at the methodologies they develop for reading episodes in the *Mahābhārata* where Śiva appears to be superior to Kṛṣṇa. The nikarṣa of Kṛṣṇa cannot, for the Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas, be deployed in service of praise for another god because for these communities Viṣṇu is the highest God. To that end, I look at a hitherto unpublished Śrīvaiṣṇava rejoinder to Appaya Dīkṣita's work along with Madhva and Vādirāja's commentaries on the epic. I examine issues of religious identity in medieval South India, and argue that for these polemicists, responding to Kṛṣṇa's nikarṣa was part of a larger issue of re-claiming the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text.

Part 1: Nikṛti

Chapter 1

An Argument with God: Trickery and Rebuke in the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata* recounts a battle on the 15th day of the war between a King, Bhūriśravas, and Sātyaki, a Pāṇḍava combatant and relative of Kṛṣṇa. Battling an exhausted Sātyaki, this was Bhūriśravas' battle to lose. The battle nears its climax when Bhūriśravas brandishes his sword, and holds a fallen Sātyaki by the hair, ready to deliver the fatal blow. The death of Sātyaki would be a major victory for the Kauravas and demoralizing for the Pāṇḍavas. Instead, he is blindsided by Arjuna, who severs his arm from behind. Lying on the ground incapacitated, Bhūriśravas fixes his anger not at Arjuna, but at Kṛṣna. "Who would deliver such a low blow to someone inattentive who fights with another? Such a person cannot be anyone else but a friend of Kṛṣṇa"[18] he concludes, rightly surmising that Kṛṣṇa ordered Arjuna to intervene.

This type of reproach of Kṛṣṇa is hardly uncommon in the *Mahābhārata*. Before the *Mahābhārata*, there is some precedent for this kind of reproach of the gods. For example, in Vedic literature, Indra is criticized occasionally for slaying a Brahmin (brahmahatyā). In Vedic sacrificial rituals, there are verbal contests in which the god Prajāpati is abused.[19] Kṛṣṇa is reproached without apology on many occasions in the *Mahābhārata*. In most cases, Kṛṣṇa does not deny the charges levelled against him, but justifies the trickery as necessary. Thus, the *Mahābhārata* is unique in combining recognition of Kṛṣṇa's divinity with an unsparing criticism of his conduct. Specifically, Kṛṣṇa is described as the Ordainer

[18] MBh 7.118.14: ko hi nāma pramattāya pareṇa saha yudhyate/īdṛśaṃ vyasanaṃ dadyād yo na kṛṣṇasakho bhavet//
[19] See Heesterman (1985) p.76 on the ritual abuse of the Vedic dieties Prajāpati and Indra.

and the highest god at some moments, while at other moments, he is reproached by a variety of epic figures for his conduct in the war and for his culpability in the Kaurava and Yādava genocides. Why is Kṛṣṇa rebuked in the *Mahābhārata*? What issues does the *Mahābhārata* raise about his divinity and trickery? How does the textual tradition, here represented by the interpolated passages found in the Pune Critical Edition's Appendices, respond to these problems? These questions are at the heart of this chapter.

I begin first with an overview of Kṛṣṇa and the aṃśāvataraṇa in scholarly literature in order to situate my arguments. I argue that the aṃśāvataraṇa, though often overlooked in epic scholarship, represents an important theme in the epic and is used to understand Kṛṣṇa's role in it. The types and veracity of rebukes found in the *Mahābhārata* vary, from Śiśupāla's tirade and Duryodhana's deathbed censure of Kṛṣṇa's trickery, to the curses of Gāndhārī and Uttaṅka. I also examine the different conceptions of divinity in the *Mahābhārata* that prefigure the burgeoning avatāra doctrine and argue that while the *Mahābhārata* often uses different language to present Kṛṣṇa's divinity, they all clarify the role Kṛṣṇa plays as a human in the world. The presence of these different explanations suggests that the *Mahābhārata* itself engages with questions of Kṛṣṇa's humanity and divinity in the *Mahābhārata*, and they often influence the defence of his trickery. I then shift to the study of Śiśupāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa, and the ways in which it invites questions about Kṛṣṇa's divinity and which characters are aware of it. I then look at examples of where Kṛṣṇa is cursed in the epic to eventually study Kṛṣṇa's sermon to the sage Uttaṅka about the nature of his divinity. I then look at Duryodhana's deathbed censure of Kṛṣṇa, and the questions that Kṛṣṇa's trickery raise for his divinity.

In the final section section, I examine how examples of censure towards Kṛṣṇa and his trickery are received in the textual tradition. The *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition that was prepared by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute not only produced a "Critically Reconstituted Text" of the epic, but also a treasury of passages deemed to be interpolations. These passages were verses found only in select, but not all, manuscript textual traditions that the editors consulted. Still, Sukhthankar argued that they are integral to the tradition of the *Mahābhārata*:

> To put it in other words, the *Mahābhārata* is the whole of the Epic tradition, the entire Critical Apparatus. Its separation into the constituted text and the critical notes is only a static representation of a constantly changing epic text.[20]

Indeed, the critical apparatus and appendices represent an important but understudied portion of the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition. Interpolated passages are often elaborations on certain episodes or themes that exist in the critically constituted text. In the case of Kṛṣṇa, there are many instances where his role is enlarged, or commented on, in these interpolated passages. What can these interpolated passages reveal about various manuscript traditions? By revealing interpolations to the epic's core, we are able to see where readers expanded on the story. Though there are various types of interpolations, I am interested specifically in the type of interpolations that seek to expand, clarify, or defend the role of Kṛṣṇa in the epic.

It is in these confrontations with Kṛṣṇa, I argue, that we find suitable material to explore the issues that arise in his divinity and portrayal in the *Mahābhārata*. Śiśupāla's tirade against Kṛṣṇa is bracketed by Nārada's recollection of the divine plan, taking the

[20] Sukthankar (1944), p.128-129

audience temporarily away from the Rājasūya to remind them about the larger reasons for the impending war, and Kṛṣṇa's role in it. The Śiśupālavadha of the Sabhāparvan sets out a conflict between Bhīṣma, who knows Kṛṣṇa to be divine, and Śiśupāla, who judges Kṛṣṇa superficially. The tradition blunts Śiśupāla's tirade by further padding the episode with Bhīṣma's recollections of Kṛṣṇa's divine childhood. Duryodhana's deathbed censure of Kṛṣṇa invites questions about Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the war, and his use of trickery. It also raises larger questions about whether the god stands above the kṣatriyadharma (or more specifically, the yuddhadharma) that Duryodhana accuses him of contravening. The interpolated verses on the margins of these episodes accept trickery as part of Kṛṣṇa's play, and even offer another instance of deception on Kṛṣṇa's part in the slaying of Jayadratha. What the tradition takes more seriously, however, is not the substance of Duryodhana's accusations, but the fact of his rebuke. The appendices and prakṣipta passages offer rebuttals to many of the figures who insult Kṛṣṇa, and they often blunt the rebuke and criticism of Kṛṣṇa with praise and counter arguments.

Literature Review

The origins of the figure of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* is the subject of much scholarly debate. Before addressing how he has been viewed in early *Mahābhārata* scholarship, I turn to some early historical references to the figure that relate to and affect how we understand his role in the *Mahābhārata*, and the history of the epic itself. Aside from a curious reference to a Kṛṣṇa, son of Devaki in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, I offer a sample of stray material and other textual evidence from the period that possibly precedes the written *Mahābhārata*. Pāṇini (4^{th} c. BCE) refers to Vāsudeva and Arjuna.

Megasthenes (late 4th century BCE) refers to the worship of Herakles in Methora and Kleisobora, the former city appears to be Mathura and Herakles appears to reference either Kṛṣṇa or his brother Saṃkarṣaṇa. In the 2nd century BCE, there are more epigraphic records that mark the worship of Vāsudeva, and his followers who are known as Bhāgavatas.[21] Surveying the material and textual evidence for Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva's worship from the 4th century BCE to the 2nd century BCE, Christopher Austin notes that

> […]pre-Gupta physical and extra-epic evidence does not yet support the identification of Vāsudeva with Viṣṇu. While it is the principal theological task of the HV, and to a lesser extent the MBh, to assert and illustrate this identification, we cannot assume on the basis of physical evidence that the Vṛṣṇi hero Vāsudeva was from the earliest days of the Bhāgavata cult understood to be a form of the Vedic deity Viṣṇu specifically.Thus the evidence suggests the development of a warrior-hero cult during the fourth to second centuries BCE, following which the identity of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the Vedic Viṣṇu, and the cosmic being Nārāyaṇa were, within the venues of the MBh and HV, forged and deepened in the Kuṣāṇa period, culminating in "classical" expression during the Gupta age and particularly in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.[22]

The evidence, Austin argues, suggests that figures such as Vāsudeva and Saṃkarṣaṇa were worshipped in this period, and were not ex-nihilo inventions of the epic and Purāṇic authors. In some cases, Kṛṣna is viewed as the Supreme God, as the Besnagar Inscription proves. At the very least, the earliest material evidence suggests that Kṛṣṇa was worshipped in some capacity around the putative time of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition. The epic, then, is an important text because it strengthens or establishes the ties between the figure of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu.

[21] See Preciado Solis (1984) and more recently Austin (2019, p.22-28) for an overview of historical references and what they mean for the composition and early history of the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa and Viṣnu Purāṇa*.
[22] Austin (2019), p. 24

Early on, scholars identified contradictions and paradoxes in the way Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva is presented in the *Mahābhārata*.[23] At its core is the seeming contradiction between the 'divine' and 'human' Kṛṣṇa, the historical and mythical, the pastoral and kṣatriya. The idea that a god could be reproached, or even engage in reproachable behaviour baffled many readers of the epic, both modern scholars and traditional readers. Scholars have used various methods to resolve this problem.[24] The most common method of explaining the discrepancy was to argue that Kṛṣṇa was not originally a divine being; or at the very least he wasn't always the Supreme God in the *Mahābhārata*. A notable example of this is the inversion theory proposed by Adolf Holtzmann and his nephew in the 19th century, which argued that the original heroic epic praised the Kauravas and Duryodhana. The theory of the Holtzmann duo, though now generally discredited, endured because it provided an explanation for the moral shortcomings of this "God" Kṛṣṇa. He was initially a tribal hero who provided dishonourable advice to the original villains of the epic, the Pāṇḍavas. It was not until later Brahmin redactors identified him with the God Viṣṇu-Nārāyana that we saw the divine, all-powerful Kṛṣṇa known to the later tradition. In his work Das Mahabharata, Holtzmann wonders "what demons tormented" the Brahminical redactors to transform this disreputable Kṛṣṇa into a paragon of all virtue.[25] Edward Washburn Hopkins viewed the reproaches of Kṛṣṇa as a mark "of humanity rather than

[23] I date the earliest scholarship specifically on the *Mahābhārata* to Christian Lassen's work. In doing so, I agree with Hiltebeitel (1979). For a chronological overview of the study of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* up to the 1970s, see Hiltebeitel (1979).
[24] Numerous academics discerned more than one layer to the personality of Krishna-Vāsudeva. Brockington (1998) and Singer (1966) argued it was the norm to speak of three different Krishnas essentially merged into one figure. Sircar (1971) reported the epic and Upanishadic Krishna were probably one historic character originally. Goldman (1986) added Krishna "is a composite of at least two major and originally unrelated figures" (p. 480), Krishna-Gopala and Krishna of Dwarka.
[25] This is Hiltebeitel's (1979) p. 71 translation of Holtzmann's words.

divinity."[26] Agreeing in part with the Holtzmanns, Hopkins added that priestly revisers of the epic "blurred the picture where it was too suggestive of evil in would-be types of holiness."[27] For scholars using the analytical method,[28] Kṛṣṇa's actions in the war and the reproaches against him were contradictions that would only be resolved by positing that there were different layers to the singular character presented in the *Mahābhārata*. In some cases, the reproachable Kṛṣṇa represented the early human Kṛṣṇa before he was recognized as a god. Brahmin redactors were often given the blame for a haphazard rewriting of Kṛṣṇa to make him more palatable.

Instead of viewing Kṛṣṇa's actions as antithetical to his divine identity, some have tried to reconcile the two. Once again, this required viewing his story arc in the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, and not as discrete historical layers. Bimal Matilal wrestled with the paradox of Kṛṣṇa and offered his own explanation. Arguing "in defence of a devious divinity", Matilal says that Kṛṣṇa had to cheat in the Bhārata War because he was not omnipotent. But his lack of omnipotence did not make him any less divine. To the contrary, omnipotence was never a requirement of divinity in the epic. Matilal uses the episodes where Kṛṣṇa apparently expresses his helplessness in stopping the war,[29] along with other instances where Kṛṣṇa defends his tactics as necessary, to draw this conclusion: "…[T]he Pāṇḍava side was comparatively weaker [than the Kaurava side]. The weaker side can defeat a stronger side only with the help of a strategy, and strategies cannot always be restricted to fair and just means,"[30] he reasoned. Matilal here walks a philosophical

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[26] Hopkins (1915), p. 215.
[27] Hopkins (1889), p. 58.
[28] Their detractors often refer to this method as "atomistic". See Hiltebeitel, 1989. Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā. In Doris M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*. 92–102. New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies.
[29] He uses the Uttaṅka episode as evidence. As we will see, Kṛṣṇa's words do not actually prove this.
[30] Matilal 2002, p. 104.

tightrope that few of scholars belonging to the analytical school were willing to do: admit Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the epic was less than stellar but also reconcile it with his divinity. For Matilal, Kṛṣṇa's conduct was not evidence that he was a human figure deified over time, but an indication that, in the epics, omnipotence is not a requirement of divinity.

The analytic scholars distilled an important contradiction that is crucial to Kṛṣṇa's enigmatic characterization in the *Mahābhārata*. Matilal also questioned whether our own assumptions of divinity—i.e. omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience—match the *Mahābhārata*'s understanding of divinity. This thesis does not seek to "resolve" the paradox of Kṛṣṇa, but rather to explain how stinging critiques of his conduct can exist in the epic. I argue that the reproaches reveal a hierarchy of morals, whereby Kṛṣṇa is criticized heavily for his transgressions, but is also justified by a larger theodicy that subsumes the rules governing human conduct. Far from being used as mere belittling, the *Mahābhārata*'s charges against Kṛṣṇa are given serious consideration and often the benefit of the doubt. In each instance that Kṛṣṇa is reproached, however, the epic reminds us of the "divine plan" that necessitates his (mis)deeds. His moral shortcomings are subsumed by a "higher" dharma that requires him to do the questionable things he does, revealing the epic's basis for ethical judgment.

Reckless Interpolation or Intelligent Design? An overview of the scholarship on the "divine plan" and its place in the *Mahābhārata*

One way in which the *Mahābhārata* explicitly connects Kṛṣṇa to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is through the aṃśāvataraṇa, which explains that the former is a human aṃśa of the latter. The aṃśāvataraṇa is frequently used to justify Kṛṣṇa's troubled actions. Thus, it is

important to explain this divine plan that we will encounter in various forms throughout the epic. Tamar Reich refers to it as the metamyth of the *Mahābhārata*. The "two metamyths [that are] introduced [in the first book] suggest that a divine plan is indeed behind the battle of Kurukṣetra itself."[31] In the two myths, the reader is informed that the protagonists in the epic are partial incarnations, or aṃśas, of asuras and devas, the demons and gods. In particular, Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of the god, Nārāyaṇa, who has an important job to do. The first parva of the *Mahābhārata* explains the metamyth:

> The demons took birth on earth as various members of the armed stratum of society, the kṣatra, and impeded Brāhmaṇas and honest people generally in their performance of the meritorious lawful deeds (dharma) that would guarantee them good destinations after death. . . . Crushed under the weight of such behavior increasing all over the earth, the earth herself (Bhūdevī) sought relief from the gods. The gods there, led by lndra, agreed to go even farther up, to the very highest heaven, and there propose to Lord Nārāyaṇa that he and Indra together lead an operation to relieve the earth of this demonic burden. It was so agreed, and the two of them planned to become incarnate on earth for that purpose.[32]

This is often referred to as the secret of the gods (devaguhyam); only a handful of epic figures are aware of the larger cosmic plan. As we will see, the aṃśāvataraṇa appears in a variety of forms throughout the epic.

In the preamble to King Janamejaya's first question to the bard Vaiśampāyana where he asks him to narrate the story of the *Mahābhārata* in full (vistareṇa), Janamejaya immediately anticipates a moral question. He says that no insignificant reason (na tatkāraṇam alpaṃ)[33] could cause the righteous Pāṇḍavas to kill those who should not have been killed, or to be praised for it. Vaiśaṃpāyana responds by giving a brief overview of

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[31] Reich (2011), p. 26.
[32] Fitzgerald (2010), p. 80. Based on the Aṃśāvataraṇa section in MBh 1.58.
[33] MBh 1.56.4.

some of the origins of the characters in the epic. For his second question, Janamejaya asks him to elaborate, wanting to know more details about the origins of these warriors who fought in the war. We are then told that they are partial incarnations (aṃśas) of gods or other celestial beings. The earth was overburdened by overpopulation and demons that incarnated on the earth and these celestial beings have descended onto the earth to alleviate her burden, primarily through the Bhārata War. Janamejaya's observation that something significant must have caused this war serves as a proper prelude to the aṃśāvataraṇa section, for here the cause of the war is cosmic. In this way, the divine plan is often cited in the text as a reason for the terrible war that occurs.[34]

Is the divine plan's role in the *Mahābhārata* worth serious consideration as a form of theodicy? Scholars vary the degree of importance they accord to the role of the aṃśāvataraṇa in the epic, particularly as a cause for the war. J.A.B. Van Buitenen, in the introduction to his translation of the Ādiparvan, warns readers that the "inept mythification" of the heroes is "best ignored."[35] He speculates that this mythification was the result of a later reworking of the *Mahābhārata*, and a seemingly sloppy one, because the *Mahābhārata* rarely refers to it and because there are often no real connections between the heroes and their divine counterparts. Agreeing with Van Buitenen's point that the mythic framework is mostly ignored by the epic, Hudson finds the divine plan to be one answer "among many with respect to the war's cause."[36] On the point of the divine plan being a later reworking the epic, Angelika Malinar (2007) and Paul Hacker (1978) agree.

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[34] For example, in 2.33.11-20 by the sage Nārada; and 11.8.20-26 and 15.39.5-6 by Vyāsa himself.
[35] Van Buitenen 1974, p. xxi.
[36] Hudson (2013) p. 139 n.132. She adds that the epic does not accord the amśāvataraṇa any significant "aesthetic weight."

Viewing the mythification as, at best, a late interpolation and at worst an inept mythification has frequently shielded the divine plan from serious scholarly consideration.

If the divine plan was a later addition to the *Mahābhārata*, how 'late' is a late mythologization? Fitzgerald suggests that the mythic framework for the war was included in the anti-Mauryan "main" *Mahābhārata* text.[37] John Brockington says that the aṃśāvataraṇa was probably included in the table of contents for the *Mahābhārata* in the 1st-3rd century CE Spitzer Manuscript, the earliest fragmentary testimonial evidence of the *Mahābhārata* available. Fernando Wulff argues that the inclusion of the divine plan is a result of the interaction with the Greeks, which would push it earlier, closer to the 1st century BCE. Even if the divine plan is an interpolation, it can hardly be considered a 'late' interpolation.

Other scholars accord the divine plan more value and weight in their reading of the epic. Tamar Reich, as we have seen, refers to it as the metamyth of the *Mahābhārata*. Hiltebeitel and Biardeau, in particular, have made the case for the aṃśāvataraṇa divine plan as another example of the *Mahābhārata*'s use of bhakti. In some cases, they look at how the divine plan is represented in the epic beyond just the few times it is explicitly mentioned. They draw semantic parallels to aṃśāvataraṇa and the root ava+tṛ, which is also the base for the word avatāra.[38]

Christopher Austin, taking stock of the overall debate on the role of the divine plan in the epic, makes a point worth quoting in full:

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[37] Fitzgerald (2006) p.272. For him, the theme of reducing the earth's burden through killing corrupt kṣatriyas is closely connected to the 'deep political rage' of the brāhman composers who were the first redactors of the epic.
[38] C.f. Couture (2001).

> On the whole these scholarly attitudes towards the epic's overarching avatarana or descent-of-the-gods myth, and the structure of identifications generated by it, tend to hypothesize an earlier form of the poem, which then underwent mythologization. Implicitly or explicitly, the earlier form is typically valued as a more genuine form of the epic, while the mythologized form is devalued. It goes without saying, however, that no such pre-mythologized form of the MBh is available to us today. Consequently, I would argue, it falls to the epic scholar to propose not some former state of the text, but a hypothesis as to the significance for the epic poets of such aspects of the poem as the mythic structure of identifications, which are irretrievably part and parcel of the poem as we have it today.[39]

While it is certainly possible that the divine plan did not always exist in the *Mahābhārata*, Austin's point is important: we do not have any pre-mythologized version of the epic available to us. Thus I view the divine plan as having an intentional role in the text as it exists in the Pune Critical Edition. I work under the assumption that there is some degree of intelligent design to the inclusion of the divine plan in the larger *Mahābhārata* story. If the epic uses the amśāvataraṇa to answer moral questions that result from the *Mahābhārata* narrative, particularly as it relates to Kṛṣṇa, then it merits serious consideration.

[39] Austin (2009), 622.

The concept of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu, as it is popularized in classical Hinduism, is not present in the *Mahābhārata*. This does not mean, however, that the epic does not have a concept of god operating on the earth, or that there is no precursor in the text to the more familiar avatāra doctrine that eventually develops. In this section, I survey different sections of the *Mahābhārata* to examine to what extent Kṛṣṇa is presented as a human incarnation of god, and the different approaches the epic has to understanding that role. From a reading of the Critical Edition, there are indications that the epic presents different theories on how Kṛṣṇa operates in the world, even if the avatāra doctrine is not fully present. This question is inevitably tied to the dating of the epic, but my intention is not to distill some singular, proto-avatāra theory that was present in an earlier layer of the Bhārata. Instead, I will show that the epic in its current form grapples with the question of Kṛṣṇa's humanity by explaining his role in the world as a god and develops threads that later Vaiṣṇava theologians will adopt.

Though the *Mahābhārata* does not use the term avatāra to describe Kṛṣṇa, it occasionally fleshes out what it means for him to operate in the world as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, including the aṃśāvataraṇa section in the Ādiparvan.[40] Before the term avatāra, the *Mahābhārata* and its khila, the *Harivaṃśa*, use the term prādurbhāva to describe various manifestations of Viṣṇu. In chapters 31 of the *Harivaṃśa*, Vaiṣaṃpāyaṇa outlines the following seven "manifestations," or prādurbhāvas of Viṣṇu: Varāha the boar, Narasiṃha the man-lion, Vāmana the dwarf, Rāma Jāmadagnya, Rāma son of Daśaratha, Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva and Kālkin. The Nārāyaṇīya in the Śāntiparvan of the *Mahābhārata*

[40] Some examples include: 5.66.14; 6.26.6-8; 7.28-23-25; 12.326.61-101;14.53

includes a similar list of prādurbhāvas.[41] Both lists include and emphasize a common theme of all manifestations—the destruction of evil beings who have descended on earth. The *Harivaṃśa* emphasizes Kṛṣṇa's opponents in that text, Kaṃsa and Cānura amongst others.

A reason for Viṣṇu's descent on earth that exists alongside killing evildoers is the establishment of dharma. In the famous verse articulated in the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that when there is a decline in dharma, he manifests himself to kill the evildoers and re-establish dharma. In the Āraṇyakaparvan, Mārkaṇḍeya explains to the Pāṇavas that Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa, and that he descends on the earth to restore dharma, a variant of the Gītā passage.[42] There is no mention of avatāras here, just that Kṛṣṇa manifests himself (*tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmy aham*) on the earth for defeating opponents and also establishing dharma.

The other explanation for Vāsudeva is given throughout the war books, where Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna frequently operate as a pair. It is said in the Droṇaparvan, for instance, that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are reincarnations of two sages, Nara and Nārāyaṇa. They have descended for the betterment of the world, and the story of Nara and Nārāyaṇa is often told to members of the Kaurava contingent like Aśvatthāman, Duryodhana, and Karṇa, who occasionally doubt the prowess of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the "two Kṛṣṇas" as they are sometimes called.

In the Udyogaparvan, Vidura elaborates on the concept of Kṛṣṇa operating in the world as a human by justifying it as a kind of disguise. He describes Kṛṣṇa who acts like a powerless peasant (kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ), which explains why sometimes he appears like a

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[41] 12.326.61-101

[42] 3.187.26: yadā yadā ca dharmasya glānir bhavati sattama/ abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmy aham//

common human. This discourse sets up the arrival of Kṛṣṇa for the peace embassy, where the Kauravas attempt to tie him up.

Andre Couture (2001) has demonstrated that although avatāra does not appear as a term in the *Mahābhārata* to denote incarnations of the god Viṣṇu on earth, this concept of the avatāra, which becomes central to Vaiṣṇava theology, is prefigured in the epic. The *Mahābhārata* often uses different themes and concepts to explain Kṛṣṇa's role in the narrative, and how he operates as a human and a god.[43] The examples that I will refer to here are the aṃśāvataraṇa, the prādurbhāva, Nara-Nārāyaṇa, and the Gītā example.

Although I have presented these as discrete explanations for Kṛṣṇa's divinity, this does not mean that they are all mutually exclusive and contradictory. A recurring word in the aṃśāvataraṇa is the descent of the gods to relieve the earth of her burden (bhārāvataraṇam).[44] The Nārāyaṇīya section of the *Mahābhārata*, generally considered a very late addition to the text, uses similar language to explain the various prādurbhāvas, or manifestations of Nārayaṇa. It includes a list of incarnations[45] of Nārāyaṇa, of whom Kṛṣṇa is one. Bhārāvataraṇam is used in the same context as the aṃśāvataraṇa, to explain that Kṛṣṇa will relieve the earth of her burden. Here we have a clear attempt on the part of the Nārāyaṇiya to unify the aṃśāvataraṇa with the nascent avatāra theory. What unites these divine plans is the descent of Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes we are told that he descends to relieve the earth of her burden, and at others times we are told it is to re-establish dharma. Hudson is

[43] Some examples include 3.187; 5.66.14; 6.26.6-8; 7.28-23-25; 12.326.61-101;14.53
[44] MBh 12.326.92; 12.328.33; 12.337.31. C.f. Couture (2001) p.219: "Note that the term avatarana is also used to express a particular aim of Viṣṇu's manifestation in the human world. *Bhārāvataraṇ*a refers to the action of taking down a load, of removing a burden. As earth is said to bend under the heavy burden caused by all the kings who walk or drive on her surface, Viṣṇu manifests himself in order to remove (avatarana) her burden."
[45] The word avatāra is not used as it is used in later Puranic literature. There is a clear connection between the two uses here, however.

right to note the nuances between the divine plans, but the differences are complementary. Kṛṣṇa tells Uttaṅka that he descends to earth to protect dharma. While this plan is likely later than the divine plan that focuses on removing the earth's burden, the two are not contradictory. In the aṃśāvataraṇa section of the *Mahābhārata*, there is a mention of dharma being upheld in the earth until the demons descended as kings and burdened the earth. As Gonzalez Reimann argues, the similarities between these supposedly separate theodicies lend themselves to unification.

> …[A]n older tradition that recognizes avatāras of various gods can be transformed into the idea of the avatāras of the One Supreme God. As the alternating supremacy of one or other Vedic god gave way to the unquestionable eternal supremacy of only one god over all others, so, too, the notion of avatāras of different gods was amplified into the notion of periodic descents of the One and Only Supreme God, Viṣṇu, who appears on earth for the purpose of rescuing mankind and upholding dharma."[46]

The question of when these layers of justification were redacted into the epic is a tantalizing one, but not one that can be answered with a great degree of certainty. It is fair to say that the received text, the Pune Critical Edition, incorporates complex, sometimes conflicting explanations of Kṛṣṇa's conduct. All of them point to a higher cosmic reason behind his human actions. These are some of the conceptions of Kṛṣṇa's divinity that I will refer to throughout my thesis and look at the ways in which the tradition uses them to understand his larger role in the *Mahābhārata*.

Śiśupāla's Rebuke

[46] Gonzalez Reimann, 2010 p.155

In this section, I look at Śiśupāla's censure of Kṛṣṇa in the Sabhāparvan. I argue that the epic first raises the question of Kṛṣṇa's divinity through the Śiśupālavadha episode, and questions which characters are aware of it. There are elements of kṛṣṇabhakti in this episode—Śiśupāla does not realize Kṛṣṇa's higher status as a god and is only judging the god superficially. Bhīṣma, on the other hand, knows Kṛṣṇa. The tradition, here represented by marginal interpolated passages, enhances this episode by having Bhīṣma narrate the exploits of Kṛṣṇa's life, to further blunt the impact of Śiśupāla's harsh censure.

To briefly summarize, Yudhiṣṭhira begins the rājasūya, and he asks Bhīṣma who should be awarded the guest-gift. When Bhīṣma chooses Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla, the King of Ceḍi, objects, saying that Kṛṣṇa is unfit for the position. Bhīṣma and the Pāṇḍavas defend their decision to honour Kṛṣṇa, and Śiśupāla insults Kṛṣṇa by belittling his heroic feats.[47] He refers to Kṛṣna as a slayer of women (strīghnaḥ) and cows (goghnaḥ); a slave (dāsaḥ), and most importantly, a fraud (chadmanā). The other insults lack substance and seriousness to qualify as anything other than personal attacks. However, his criticism of Kṛṣṇa's use of trickery is justified in the epic. The story goes that in order to be king, Yudhiṣṭhira has to defeat King Jarāsaṃdha of Magadha, Kṛṣṇa's enemy and Śiśupāla's ally. Kṛṣṇa, along with Arjuna and Bhīma, disguise themselves as brāhmans in order to penetrate Jarāsaṃdha's fortress, allowing Bhīma to kill Jarāsaṃdha. Śiśupāla criticizes their disguise as trickery, singling out Kṛṣṇa and questioning why the supposed "creator of the world" does not understand himself to actually be a Brahmin, instead of disguising as one.[48] Śiśupāla challenges Kṛṣṇa to a fight, but when he mentions Kṛṣṇa's wife, Rukminī, Kṛṣṇa

[47] MBh 2.38.1–15. These tales are found in the Harivaṃśa and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s.
[48] MBh 2.39.6: yady ayaṃ jagataḥ kartā yathainaṃ mūrkha manyase/ kasmān na brāhmaṇaṃ samyag ātmānam avagacchati.

immediately beheads him.[49] With small exceptions, Śiśupāla's rebuke does not substantively criticize Kṛṣṇa's conduct.[50]

This is one of the first episodes to explicitly introduce the question of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, and probe who views him as a mere human. Śiśupāla's complaint that Kṛṣṇa does not deserve the guest gift is not without merit, especially if he is considered to be a human and not divine. Bhīṣma tells him that he does not know the highest dharma, hinting at the fact that there may be something else that justifies Kṛṣṇa's exalted status. The celestial sage Nārada provides a hint as to what Bhīṣma means. Right before Kṛṣṇa is chosen to receive the guest gift, Nārada surveys the scene and remembers (sasmāra) the story of the partial incarnation (*aṃśāvataraṇe*), specifically that the god Nārāyaṇa has taken the form of Kṛṣṇa to defeat the demonic kṣatriyas and thus relieve the Earth's burden.[51] His exalted status as Nārāyaṇa is explained in some detail. The timing of this recollection is also convenient because Śiśupāla and Jarāsaṃdha are mentioned as incarnations of demons in the amśāvataraṇa section.[52] Thus, it is part of the divine plan that they are killed. Though Śiśupāla raises criticisms of the way in which Kṛṣṇa has Jarāsaṃdha killed, and Śiśupāla himself is beheaded after his reproach, this serves as a reminder that there is a larger reason behind these events.

The Rājasūya ritual that Śiśupāla disrupts with his rebuke of Kṛṣṇa is important for the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. This is where Yudhiṣṭhira is consecrated as King, and more importantly, sets in motion a chain of events that culminate in the fateful dicing

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[49] Duryodhana views the killing of Śiśupāla as inappropriate, perhaps given the setting. 2.43.23-24, he calls it a sin (aparādham) and asks who can really forgive such an act?
[50] The only exception is his denunciation of Kṛṣṇa for the cunning killing of Jarāsaṃdha. The criticism of his "crookedness" will be addressed below, in Duryodhana's reproach.
[51] MBh 2.33.11-20
[52] MBh 1.61.4-5

match. After hearing the whole *Mahābhārata* story in full, the great-grandson of the Pāṇḍavas, King Janamejaya concludes that the Rājasūya sacrifice was the cause of the war. "Since there was this terrible destruction of Kings who are difficult to assail, I think that the Rājasūya was devised as the cause of the war," he tells Vyāsa.[53] He adds that when the god Varuṇa conducted his Rājasūya, it led to war between the gods and the demons. Vyāsa does not refute Janamejaya's conclusion. The successful completion of the Rājasūya then, with the selection of Kṛṣṇa as the recipient of the guest gift, is important as a trigger for a chain of events that will culminate in the Bhārata War.

The interpolated passages in this episode reveal more about how this particular section of the *Mahābhārata* was read, and how the censure of Kṛṣṇa was interpreted. A lengthy insertion is lodged in the middle of this episode—between Śiśupāla's initial rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma and their responses—which asserts Kṛṣṇa's divinity. This insertion, which consists of 1610 lines, is found in the Southern Recension of the epic. As Tamar Reich explains, "the unit basically expands on Bhīṣma's explicit claim [in the reconstituted text of the CE] that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme godhead, but unlike the above quoted passage from the 'reconstituted text', which is very succinct, the expansion offers a full-fledged Vaiṣṇava-Kṛṣṇaite mythology and theology, in stotra style, beginning with the incarnations of Viṣṇu and going on to tell the stories of Kṛṣṇa the child and lover."[54] Lending credence to the idea that the frame structure of the epic "is also the source of the epic's perpetual growth,"[55] the insertion of Kṛṣṇa's divine past and background is prompted by Vaiśaṃpāyana narrating a

[53] duḥsahānāṃ yathā dhvaṃso rājanyānām upaplavaḥ /
rājasūyaṃ tathā manye yuddhārtham upakalpitam // HV_115.15 //
[54] Reich, (1998) p. 73
[55] Minkowski, (1989) p. 406

conversation between Sahadeva and Bhīṣma, in which Sahadeva asks Bhīṣma more about Kṛṣṇa's divinity. There could be many reasons why this expansion would be included in this episode, but it seems to be a fitting reply that counterbalances Śiśupāla's insulting rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. This is not the first instance where the Southern Recension dilutes the rebuke or the trickery of Kṛṣṇa.

Uttaṅka and Gāndhāri

In some cases, epic figures rebuke or curse Kṛṣṇa only to receive a defence of his conduct that is rooted in his divinity. It is in response to these charges that the epic offers more details on how Kṛṣṇa operates in the world as a human. In this section, I look at how two other censures of Kṛṣṇa in the post-war books invite a theodicy whereby the *Mahābhārata* expands on the nature of Kṛṣṇa's role in the world.

The post-war portion of the *Mahābhārata* is reflective and engages in what Tamar Reich calls a metatextual discourse on the meaning of the war.[56] The best example of this is in the Āśvamedhikaparvan, when the sage Uttaṅka accuses Kṛṣṇa of allowing the Kaurava-Pāṇḍava war to happen. He holds Kṛṣṇa responsible for the carnage that results from the disastrous war, but it is preceded by Gāndhārī. This criticism is articulated first and more forcefully by the Kuru Queen after the war:

> Kṛṣṇa, the sons of Pāṇḍu and the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra hated each other. Why did you ignore them as they perished, Janārdana? You who were able to do something, who had many retainers, who stood in the midst of an extensive army, who had equal interest in both sides, who had heard all that was said? And since you neglected the destruction of the Kurus, O Slayer of Madhu, because you wanted it . . . take the result of that. Since I have come to have some ascetic

[56] Reich 2011, p.22

> power because of my obedience to my husband, I will curse you with that. . . . Since you ignored your kinsmen, the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas as they were killing each other, you shall slay your own kinsmen. Even you . . . 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.[57]

Kṛṣṇa will recall Gāndhārī's words at the time of his death thirty-six years after the war. When Kṛṣṇa hears her curse, he says, with a smile, "Good woman, no one but I will be the destroyer of the circle of Vṛṣṇis. I know this to be so. Kṣatriya woman, you are doing what has already been done. The Yādavas cannot be killed by other men, nor even by Gods or Dānavas, so they will come to their destruction at each other's hands."[58] It is notable that Kṛṣṇa smiles in his reply, as if confirming the inevitable.[59] It also suggests that Gāndhārī is ignorant of the so-called higher causes of the war. If we agree with her that he allowed the war to happen despite having the power to prevent it, is this excusable? As Simon Brodbeck points out perceptively, "we have two levels of explanation for the war, a higher and a lower."[60] The higher level represents the "cosmic perspective" that harkens back to the need to relieve the earth of its burden (which is explained in the aṃśāvataraṇa section of the Ādiparvan and is often called devaguhyam, the secret of the gods). The lower level represents the human reasons for the war: a conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas that could only be resolved by warfare. Early in the Strīparvan (11.8.20–26), Vyāsa tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra about the cosmic significance of the war, but Gāndhārī is not

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[57] MBh 11.25.36-41. Trans. by James Fitzgerald.
[58] MBh 11.25.45–47 (trans. by Fitzgerald).
[59] Hiltebeitel (2011), p. 572 argues that the *Mahābhārata* "has singular episodes that offer confirmations that things are moving along according to plan. Some are abrupt and unsettling, like Kṛṣṇa's little dance at the death of Ghaṭotkaca."
[60] Brodbeck (2009), p. 38.

present.[61] Thus, she curses Kṛṣṇa for his role in the war without any prior knowledge of the divine plan.

Though he does not respond substantively to her allegation of complicity, Vāsudeva offers a defence of his actions when Uttaṅka voices the same criticism later in the epic. When Kṛṣṇa is travelling back to Dvārakā after the war in the Āśvamedhikaparva, he meets a sage named Uttaṅka. The sage asks Kṛṣṇa if the attempts at bringing about peace and preventing war were successful, and Kṛṣṇa fills him in on the proceedings. Uttaṅka angrily blames Kṛṣṇa for overlooking[62] the carnage deceitfully (mithyācāra).[63] Kṛṣṇa urges Uttaṅka not to curse him, because a false curse would destroy the merit accrued by the sage's austerities. He then gives a Gīta-esque sermon about his divinity, and shows Uttaṅka his universal form, which satisfies the sage, who recognizes Kṛṣṇa's supreme form. In his sermon, Kṛṣṇa explains that he incarnates to establish and protect dharma. When he is born as a human, he must act like one.[64] Here, we have a markedly different response on the part of the censurer. Unlike Gāndhārī, Duryodhana, and Śiśupāla, Uttaṅka does not actually curse Kṛṣṇa, because he is convinced by his adhyātma sermon. Even though he does not follow through with cursing Kṛṣṇa, this is the second instance where Kṛṣṇa is criticized for allowing the Bhārata War to happen. Kṛṣṇa asks the sage to listen to his side of the story first and then decide whether to curse him. He tells him,

> MBh 14.53.2-21 *tamo rajaś ca sattvaṃ ca viddhi bhāvān madāśrayān/ tathā rudrān vasūṃś cāpi viddhi matprabhavān dvija//*

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[61] Vyāsa will tell Gāndhārī about the devaguhyam (15.39) long after she curses Kṛṣṇa.
[62] He uses language similar to Gāndhārī's: he says samupekṣathāḥ while she says upekṣitam. Both are clear uses of the word to indicate that he overlooked the carnage. This root is used frequently and specifically in this context.
[63] MBh 14.52.22: tvayā hi śaktena satā mithyācāreṇa mādhava/ upacīrṇāḥ kuruśreṣṭhā yas tv etān samupekṣathāḥ.
[64] MBh 14.53.13, 14.53.19.

mayi sarvāṇi bhūtāni sarvabhūteṣu cāpy aham/ sthita ity abhijānīhi mā te 'bhūd atra saṃśayaḥ//
tathā daityagaṇān sarvān yakṣarākṣasapannagān/gandharvāpsarasaś caiva viddhi matprabhavān dvija//
sad asac caiva yat prāhur avyaktaṃ vyaktam eva ca/akṣaraṃ ca kṣaraṃ caiva sarvam etan madātmakam//
ye cāśrameṣu vai dharmāś caturṣu vihitā mune/daivāni caiva karmāṇi viddhi sarvaṃ madātmakam//
asac ca sadasac caiva yad viśvaṃ sadasataḥ param/tataḥ paraṃ nāsti caiva devadevāt sanātanāt//
oṃkāraprabhavān vedān viddhi māṃ tvaṃ bhṛgūdvaha/yūpaṃ somaṃ tathaiveha tridaśāpyāyanaṃ makhe//
hotāram api havyaṃ ca viddhi māṃ bhṛgunandana/adhvaryuḥ kalpakaś cāpi haviḥ paramasaṃskṛtam//
udgātā cāpi māṃ stauti gītaghoṣair mahādhvare/prāyaścitteṣu māṃ brahmañ śāntimaṅgalavācakāḥ//
stuvanti viśvakarmāṇaṃ satataṃ dvijasattamāḥ/viddhi mahyaṃ sutaṃ dharmam agrajaṃ dvijasattama//
mānasaṃ dayitaṃ vipra sarvabhūtadayātmakam/tatrāhaṃ vartamānaiś ca nivṛttaiś caiva mānavaiḥ//
bahvīḥ saṃsaramāṇo vai yonīr hi dvijasattama/dharmasaṃrakṣaṇārthāya dharmasaṃsthāpanāya ca//
tais tair veṣaiś ca rūpaiś ca triṣu lokeṣu bhārgava/ahaṃ viṣṇur ahaṃ brahmā śakro 'tha prabhavāpyayaḥ//
bhūtagrāmasya sarvasya sraṣṭā saṃhāra eva ca/adharme vartamānānāṃ sarveṣām aham apy uta//
dharmasya setuṃ badhnāmi calite calite yuge/tās tā yonīḥ praviśyāhaṃ prajānāṃ hitakāmyayā//
yadā tv ahaṃ devayonau vartāmi bhṛgunandana/tadāhaṃ devavat sarvam ācarāmi na saṃśayaḥ//
yadā gandharvayonau tu vartāmi bhṛgunandana/ tadā gandharvavac ceṣṭāḥ sarvāś ceṣṭāmi bhārgava//
nāgayonau yadā caiva tadā vartāmi nāgavat/yakṣarākṣasayonīś ca yathāvad vicarāmy aham//
mānuṣye vartamāne tu kṛpaṇaṃ yācitā mayā/na ca te jātasaṃmohā vaco gṛhṇanti me hitam//
bhayaṃ ca mahad uddiśya trāsitāḥ kuravo mayā/kruddheva bhūtvā ca punar yathāvad anudarśitāḥ//

te 'dharmeṇeha saṃyuktāḥ parītāḥ kāladharmaṇā/dharmeṇa nihatā yuddhe gatāḥ svargaṃ na saṃśayaḥ//

> O Twice Born, know that tamas, rajas and sattva are dependent on me, just as the rudras and the vasūs are derived from me. You must understand that all beings are in me, and I also reside in all beings. There should be no doubt here. Know also that all classes of daityas, rākṣasas, pannagas, gandharvas, apsaras originate from me. What is called truth and untruth, invisible and visible, the movable and the immovable—all belong to me. O Sage! Know that the four dharmas and āśramas are ordained by me. Know that deeds of the gods and all actions belong to me…know that unborn Dharma is begotten by me, as are all the beloved minds that are made up of compassion for all beings. I remember all the lives of the men living and dead [and am remembered] by them. I am born for the establishment and protection of dharma amongst various forms and bodies in the three worlds. I am Viṣṇu, Śakra, and Brahma; the origin and the end of all beings, the creator and destroyer too. In times of adharma in the past eons, for all beings I built the bridge of dharma. I enter the wombs of any being according to my desire. When I am born amongst the gods, I undoubtedly act like a god. When I am born amongst the gandharvas, then I act like a gandharva. When I am born amongst the Yakṣas and rākṣasas, then I act like them. But when I was living in a human body, I piteously begged [the Kauravas], who were overcome with delusion, [to bring about peace]. My words did not touch them. I pointed out the danger and (tried to) frighten them but the Kurus just grew furious, even though they were properly warned. Those Kauravas engaged in adharma, overwhelmed by Time, but they were slain righteously in battle and have certainly gone to heaven.[65]

This sermon, which resembles parts of the Bhagavad Gītā, convinces Uttaṅka not to curse Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa echoes his Bhagavad Gīta sermon and says that he reincarnates to protect and establish dharma across different ages. He also adds that the Kauravas acted in accordance with adharma, which would thus necessitate his incarnation. Kṛṣṇa's speech is couched in Vaiṣṇava theology that will appear in the post-*Mahābhārata* texts, but it presents a divine plan of its own. Kṛṣṇa had to let the war happen—and even stage-manage it—so that

[65] MBh 14.53.2-21.

dharma could be established. Far from denying the lack of power in preventing the war, Kṛṣṇa makes the opposite case in his sermon to Uttaṅka: the war needed to happen to re-establish and protect dharma, since the Kauravas who died represented adharma. This explanation represents another justification for Kṛṣṇa's descent on the earth alongside the aṃśāvataraṇa. It presents a picture of Kṛṣṇa who is simultaneously divine and acts human to restore dharma.

These various theories of divinity found in the *Mahābhārata*—the aṃśāvataraṇa, Nara-Nārāyaṇa story, the Gītā sermon about descending to establish dharma, or the prādurbhāva mentioned in the Nārāyaṇīya—present Kṛṣṇa as a divine being who operates in the world as a human. Though there are similarities between these theories, and they prefigure the avatāra concept, they are important in the defence of Kṛṣṇa's trickery and his role in the war. In his sermon to Uttaṅka, Kṛṣṇa tells the sage that he operates as a human when he incarnates as one, and must act accordingly.

Duryodhana's Rebuke

The final example of reproach is by Duryodhana in the Śalyaparvan, who criticizes Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the war. The war is effectively over when Bhīma slays Duryodhana, the Kaurava prince and last remaining son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Bhīma had vowed to break the thighs of Duryodhana, and he keeps his promise in the final battle. With Kṛṣṇa's urging, he defeats Duryodhana in a mace battle by breaking his thigh, a flagrant violation of the kṣatriya code. The rules of war, which had been established at the beginning of the war, include the following: soldiers who have left the battle should not be killed; every warrior should fight an opponent of his own rank (e.g., elephant-rider against elephant-rider, horsemen with

horsemen, etc.); a warrior should never strike a soldier who is unsuspecting or in distress; and he should never strike someone who is already engaged in battle or whose back is turned.[66] As Duryodhana lay dying, struck down by dishonourable means, he reproached Kṛṣṇa for his actions in the Bhārata war in the following exchange:

> MBh 9.60.26-38: *prāṇāntakaraṇīṃ ghorāṃ vedanām avicintayan/ duryodhano vāsudevaṃ vāgbhir ugrābhir ārdayat//*
> *kaṃsadāsasya dāyāda na te lajjāsty anena vai/ adharmeṇa gadāyuddhe yad ahaṃ vinipātitaḥ//*
> *ūrū bhindhīti bhīmasya smṛtiṃ mithyā prayacchatā/ kiṃ na vijñātam etan me yad arjunam avocathāḥ//*
> *ghātayitvā mahīpālān ṛjuyuddhān sahasraśaḥ/jihmair upāyair bahubhir na te lajjā na te ghṛṇā//*
> *ahany ahani śūrāṇāṃ kurvāṇaḥ kadanaṃ mahat/ śikhaṇḍinaṃ puraskṛtya ghātitas te pitāmahaḥ//*
> *aśvatthāmnaḥ sanāmānaṃ hatvā nāgaṃ sudurmate/ ācāryo nyāsitaḥ śastraṃ kiṃ tan na viditaṃ mama//*
> *sa cānena nṛśaṃsena dhṛṣṭadyumnena vīryavān/ pātyamānas tvayā dṛṣṭo na cainaṃ tvam avārayaḥ//*
> *vadhārthaṃ pāṇḍuputrasya yācitāṃ śaktim eva ca/ghaṭotkace vyaṃsayathāḥ kas tvattaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ//*
> *chinnabāhuḥ prāyagatas tathā bhūriśravā balī/tvayā nisṛṣṭena hataḥ śaineyena durātmanā//*
> *kurvāṇaś cottamaṃ karma karṇaḥ pārthajigīṣayā/vyaṃsanenāśvasenasya pannagendrasutasya vai//*
> *punaś ca patite cakre vyasanārtaḥ parājitaḥ/pātitaḥ samare karṇaś cakravyagro 'graṇīr nṛṇām//*
> *yadi māṃ cāpi karṇaṃ ca bhīṣmadroṇau ca saṃyuge/ ṛjunā pratiyudhyethā na te syād vijayo dhruvam//*
> *tvayā punar anāryeṇa jihmamārgeṇa pārthivāḥ/svadharmam anutiṣṭhanto vayaṃ cānye ca ghātitāḥ//*
>
> Paying no attention to the terrible pain causing his death, Duryodhana afflicted Vāsudeva with these foremost words. "Have you no shame, Son of Kamsa's slave?

[66] The rules of war were established in MBh 6.1.25–33, although some are alluded to only in passing. A full list of the rules of war can be found in Allen (2006).

> I have been felled in the mace battle unjustly, because you deceitfully reminded Bhīma to 'break my legs.' Did I not hear what you told Arjuna? Having caused thousands of kings who fought honourably to be slain deviously, have you no shame? Have you no remorse, day after day, doing great damage? Having put Śikhaṇḍin in front of Arjuna, you caused Bhīṣma to be slain. O Scoundrel, you made Droṇa put down his weapons [in battle] only after slaying an elephant named Aśvatthāman. How could I not know that? Then our heroic teacher was slain by the cruel Dhṛṣṭadyumna. You saw this, yet you did not stop it from happening. You even redirected the spear that was meant for killing Arjuna towards Ghaṭotkaca. Who could be more sinful than you? When the strong Bhūriśravas whose arms were cut off was approaching death, the wicked Sātyaki killed him, yet you allowed it. You redirected the Aśvasena arrow of Indra that Karṇa obtained to kill Arjuna. When Karṇa's chariot was stuck in the earth, you killed him when he was distracted with the wheel. If you had only fought me, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa fairly in battle, you would not have [achieved] victory. You've secured victory through duplicitous means unworthy of respect, while those of us who followed our dharma were slain!"[67]

In this minor way, both Śiśupāla and Duryodhana's rebukes implicitly acknowledge the god's birth and childhood before his arrival in the *Mahābhārata*.[68] Duryodhana invokes Kṛṣṇa's backstory by referring to him as the "son of Kaṃsa's slave," of course alluding to his father Vasudeva's imprisonment at the hands of his uncle Kaṃsa. Śiśupāla, for instance, calls Kṛṣṇa a "woman-killer" (*strīghnaḥ*), a reference to his killing of Pūtana in his childhood.[69] The *Mahābhārata* consciously adapts tropes from Kṛṣṇa's childhood stories (which are told in the *Harivaṃśakhila*) and inverts them so that they are read as denigrating insults of the god. These censures are hardly traces of a hypothetical earlier layer of the epic, but are made with full knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's divine backstory.

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[67] MBh 9.60.26–38

[68] This has larger implications for those who date the rebukes specifically to earlier or later strata of the epic. John Brockington (2007) argues that the "inference is irresistible that the earlier levels of the *Mahābhārata* are largely unaware of Kṛṣṇa as child or cowherd." If this inference is true, then it would mean that both rebukes are part of a 'later strata', and not the result of some hypothetical earlier layer where Kṛṣṇa was not considered divine.

[69] Vulgate MBh 2.44.16

Hiltebeitel argues that while Kṛṣṇa's "moral reasoning is often challenged . . . he usually gets the benefit of the doubt." He adds, however, that a notable exception to this rule is Duryodhana's deathbed censure of Kṛṣṇa.[70] Kṛṣṇa, in turn, calls Duryodhana to account and criticizes his actions. It is notable that he does not refute the primary charge of using devious means to kill the key Kaurava combatants, without which victory would have been impossible. This is a point that Kṛṣṇa later reiterates to the distressed Pāṇḍavas.[71] He chides Duryodhana for his treachery, arguing that Bhīṣma and Droṇa were slain because of Duryodhana's own misdeeds.[72] Nevertheless, the Kaurava Prince has the last word. In his final reply to Kṛṣṇa, Duryodhana reminds him that he has died an honourable Kṣatriya death because he was slain in battle. According to kṣatriyadharma, he will reach heaven because of that fact. Kṛṣṇa will instead be left to deal with the fallout of the war. In fact, Duryodhana's death in battle is far more honourable than Kṛṣṇa's cursed death turns out to be.[73] Duryodhana's speech ends with a sudden shower of flowers from the heavens. The puṣpavṛṣṭi here indicates that there is merit in Duryodhana's words. This troubles the Pāṇḍavas and they become despondent.

Duryodhana's assessment of Kṛṣṇa is consistent with the *Mahābhārata*'s account of the war. These tactics that Duryodhana described in his rebuke were either encouraged or

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[70] Hiltebeitel (2011), p. 25.
[71] MBh 9.60.57–58: naiṣa śakyo 'tiśīghrāstras te ca sarve mahārathāḥ / ṛjuyuddhena vikrāntā hantuṃ yuṣmābhir āhave// upāyā vihitā hy ete mayā tasmān narādhipāḥ /anyathā pāṇḍaveyānāṃ nābhaviṣyaj jayaḥ kva cit.
[72] MBh 9.60.40: tavaiva duṣkṛtair vīrau bhīṣmadroṇau nipātitau.
[73] The point is made even more salient by Gāndhāri's words in the *Strīparva* in which she tells Kṛṣṇa that he will die by vile means (*kutsitenābhyupāyena*). This is hardly the *Mahābhārata*'s ideal death. Cf. Granoff (2007, p. 74): "There are two models of ideal death in the epic: "either the death of the warrior who voluntarily gives up the body in battle (Droṇa), or the death of the religious aspirant, who also voluntarily gives up the body, not in battle, but by renouncing all food. (Baladeva)"

devised by Kṛṣṇa, and they were not consistent with dharma.[74] He encourages Arjuna (but does not devise the plan) to hide behind another warrior to kill Bhīṣma. In the case of Droṇa's death, Kṛṣṇa acknowledges that Droṇa cannot be killed in battle (naiṣa yuddhena saṃgrāme jetuṃ śakyaḥ kathaṃ cana) because he is too powerful. Moreover, it is known that he will not fight if he thinks that his son is slain. Kṛṣṇa suggests that one of the Pāṇḍavas cast dharma aside (dharmam utsṛjya) and tell Droṇa that his son Aśvatthāman is dead.[75] It is Bhīma who kills an elephant named Aśvatthāman, and announces this death to Droṇa, who does not believe him. Yudhiṣṭhira knows from a previous conversation with Droṇa that the only path to victory involves Droṇa's death, which is only possible if he hears terrible news from someone he trusts.[76] If he experiences enough grief, he will give up battle voluntarily. Thus, when Droṇa asks Yudhiṣṭhira if his son Aśvatthāman has indeed been slain, Kṛṣṇa counsels him to lie, arguing that in this case falsehood (anṛtam) is better than the truth.[77] Yudhiṣṭhira then responds to Droṇa's question by saying that Aśvatthāman was slain, muttering "the elephant" under his breath. While this is not the complete lie that Kṛṣṇa had advised—Bhīma did, in fact, kill an elephant named Aśvatthāman—the text is clear that this action was prompted by Kṛṣṇa.

A variety of words are used to describe Kṛṣṇa's actions in the war. They are usually grouped under the umbrella term adharma. Aside from adharma, a cluster of similar words

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[74] Nonetheless, Kṛṣṇa is not always responsible for the unethical acts during the war. The combatants take Kṛṣṇa's advice beyond its ethical limits in the deaths of Droṇa, Bhūriśravas, and Duryodhana. Droṇa is held by his scalp and beheaded when Kṛṣṇa only proposes to disarm him; Bhūriśravas is killed by Sātyaki even though he had already stopped fighting; and Duryodhana is crushed by Bhīma even after he was felled in battle. Kṛṣṇa never explicitly advises any of these actions, and often discourages them. This is something that is frequently overlooked in scholarly literature on Kṛṣṇa, where he is generally held responsible for actions he does not explicitly condone. See Matilal (2002), where he says that Kṛṣṇa causes Bhūriśravas's death.

[75] MBh 7.164.68–69.

[76] MBh 6.41.61: śastraṃ cāhaṃ raṇe jahyāṃ śrutvā sumahad apriyam/ śraddheyavākyāt puruṣād etat satyaṃ bravīmi te.

[77] MBh 7.164.99.

recur throughout the war books (in order of decreasing frequency): mithyā, jihma, upāya, the verbal root *vyaṃs, nṛśaṃsa, vyasana, chadman, anyāya,* and *anārya*. While Kṛṣṇa frequently uses the more neutral term upāya (stratagem) to describe his actions, his critics are unforgiving. A central idea that informs the meaning of many of these words is the notion of deceit or crookedness. Śiśupāla also uses a similar adjective to describe Kṛṣṇa in his speech before the war. These words are also used in contradistinction with ṛju and ṛjuyuddha—fair battle. Here the contrast between ṛju as straight or upright and jihma as crooked is clear. Based on an analysis of the words used, it is fair to say that characters in the *Mahābhārata* characterize Kṛṣṇa's actions as crooked.

Kṛṣṇa agrees with Duryodhana's accusations and the puṣpavṛṣṭi signals the gods' agreement. Other important figures echo Duryodhana's sentiments. After the battle between Duryodhana and Bhīma, Balarāma criticizes[78] Bhīma's slaying of Duryodhana, and remains unconvinced by Kṛṣṇa's defence. Even Saṃjaya, who is narrating the events of the battle to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, refers to Kṛṣṇa's advice as a transgression of dharma (dharmacchalam). As we have seen, Duryodhana, Saṃjaya, Balarāma, Aśvatthāman, Karṇa, and Bhūriśravas have criticized Kṛṣṇa and/or his methods. Some of this criticism of Kṛṣṇa is indirect. When Balarāma criticizes Bhīma for hitting Duryodhana's thighs, for example, he directs his anger at Bhīma. Yet Kṛṣṇa is the mastermind behind the strategy. So, when Balarāma and others argue that his strategies were devious,[79] Kṛṣṇa is necessarily implicated.

[78] MBh 9.59.1–25.
[79] Aśvatthāman (MBh 7.166.27), Ulūpi (MBh 14.82.9–10.), Bhūriśravas (MBh 7.118.07) and Balarāma (MBh 9.59.06, 9.59.19) all criticize the stratagems of Kṛṣṇa.

In the case of Duryodhana's accusation of trickery, there is no doubt that he has a valid point. The Kaurava Prince has been felled by dishonourable means, and his death in battle secures him a place in heaven according to kṣatriyadharma. Here, there is a distinct disconnect between Kṛṣṇa's conduct and Duryodhana's honour. It is this key episode that has lead "inversion theorists" to make the argument that the Kauravas and Duryodhana were the original heroes of the epic before it was revised. At the time of his death, Duryodhana embraces kṣatriyadharma, which rewards him for dying in battle, and vilifies the cheating Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa. In his final words, he considers Kṛṣṇa's power, but asserts that he has not strayed from kṣatriyadharma and declares that he has thus bested Kṛṣṇa.[80] This is entirely consistent with his views of Kṛṣṇa and gods in general that he presents in the Udyogaparvan, where he pushes back against bhakti. As Gitomer explains,

> Duryodhana does not see himself as a player in the great divine drama of cosmic destruction directed by Krishna. . . . He knows (…) the kṣatriyadharma, the way of kings—protecting the earth, fair combat, loyalty to the end. Now that the end has arrived, he is at last able to articulate the realm of finitude and freedom that both he and the powerful Krishna belong to. This articulation is his triumph.[81]

If Gitomer is correct, this is Duryodhana's finest hour. The gods applaud him, and others agree. But the higher dharma looms large. Does the tension between these two dharmas point to a hierarchy of morals?

Indeed, Duryodhana's misdeeds, from the humiliation of Draupadi to conspiring against the Pāṇḍavas, "tend to be subsumed under a single flaw which is transethical ... opposition to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. Theologically, this has been taken to mean blindness to

[80] MBh 9.64.28–29: manyamānaḥ prabhāvaṃ ca kṛṣṇasyāmitatejasaḥ/ tena na cyāvitaś cāhaṃ kṣatradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt/ sa mayā samanuprāpto nāsmi śocyaḥ kathaṃ cana/ kṛtaṃ bhavadbhiḥ sadṛśam anurūpam ivātmanaḥ.
[81] Gitomer (1992), p. 230.

Kṛṣṇa's divinity."[82] As we have seen with Śiśupāla, Duryodhana does not recognize the higher dharma that the followers of Kṛṣṇa recognize. This higher dharma, Gitomer argues, "is the cosmic Right that the Pāṇḍavas embody, not necessarily through their actions, but because they incarnate the gods and because Kṛṣṇa is on their side."[83] This is consistent with the epic's treatment of other "absolute" values identified as the "highest" dharma: noncruelty (anṛśamsya) and nonviolence (ahimsa). In studying the role of these virtues in the *Mahābhārata*, Hiltebeitel concludes that "the highest dharma seems to be knowing the highest dharma for whatever particular situation one is in, and in recognizing that situation within an ontology that admits virtually endless variation and deferral in matters of formulating and approaching 'the highest'".[84] In fact, Duryodhana refutes this theory of divinity directly in the Udyogaparvan, arguing that the gods are petitioned by the sacrificer and must do the sacrificer's bidding. It is fitting, then, that Duryodhana's story in the *Mahābhārata* ends with a censure of Kṛṣṇa.

In Kṛṣṇa's final speech defending his jihmopāyas,[85] he makes two arguments: Pāṇḍava victory would not have been possible if there had been a fair fight, and even the gods used trickery in their fight against demons. The most important reminder of his divine role appears two chapters after Kṛṣṇa has been rebuked, when Yudhiṣṭhira praises Kṛṣṇa and reminds the readers that "just as in the war between the Devas and Asuras to kill the enemies of the gods, [Kṛṣṇa] assisted the gods; you provided the same help to us."[86] In this

[82] Gitomer (1992), p. 224.
[83] Ibid., p. 229.
[84] Hiltebeitel (2001) p. 208
[85] MBh 9.59.55–60.
[86] MBh 9.62.17-18.

passage, Yudhiṣṭhira not only compares this war with the deva-asura battle, but explains that Kṛṣṇa played the same role in both.

Kṛṣṇa never denies that his strategy is inconsistent with dharma; instead, he justifies his methods as necessary, because the Kaurava contingent would be otherwise undefeatable. Hiltebeitel argues that Kṛṣṇa plays the role of the Dhātṛ and the Vidhātṛ, the Placer and the Ordainer respectively: "Yudhiṣṭhira makes a correlation between dharma and Kṛṣṇa's knowing ability to 'set in place' and 'ordain' what will bring success in war. But Kṛṣṇa typically leaves the matter to Yudhiṣṭhira to decide."[87] Kṛṣṇa's role as the Vidhātṛ appears to be at odds with Duryodhana's embrace of kṣatriyadharma and his view of divinity. The diety Dhātṛ recurs frequently and is not always identified as Kṛṣṇa. He is sometimes identified as Brahmā, for example. Still, Hiltebeitel's point holds, Kṛṣṇa plays the role of the Dhātṛ here. After he is denounced and the Pāṇḍavas leave the slain Duryodhana, Yudhīṣṭhira thanks Kṛṣṇa and recognizes that victory was due to his favour.[88] In fact, Yudhiṣṭhira uses the same words (tava prasādāt govinda) at the conclusion of the Rājasūya, crediting him with successfully seeing its completion through.[89] Central to Kṛṣṇa's role as the Dhātṛ is securing success for the Pāṇḍavas, even if it requires resorting to crooked methods.

Reception in the Margins: Defending Kṛṣṇa in the Interpolated Verses

[87] Hiltebeitel (2011), p. 28.
[88] MBh 9.26.15 tava prasādād govinda rājyaṃ nihatakaṇṭakam
aprāpyaṃ manasāpīha prāptam asmābhir acyuta.
[89] MBh 2.42.45.

In this section, I look at what the marginal interpolated verses of the epic have to tell us about the reception of Kṛṣṇa's trickery and rebukes. Robert Goldman carefully cautions modern readers to note the "shifting moral values" in the Sanskrit epics, and to distinguish between episodes that are a) ethically problematic in the epics themselves, and b) ethically problematic after scrutiny by later readers.[90] In some cases, there are episodes that are both. In others, they are not. When looking at various episodes deemed ethically problematic in the Critical Edition, one notices that extraneous passages attempt to either explain, justify or respond to something that needs clarification. In that way, some star passages and passages from the appendices are acting as a sort of commentary, offering a window into what early readers of the epic felt they needed to elaborate on. Thus, the Pune Critical Edition's star passages and appendices are critical to studying the reception history of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

Are Kṛṣṇa's deeds and the rebukes of him that are found in the epic merely a problem for modern readers? In this section, I study the interpolated sections that either expand, comment on, or in some cases restrict Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata*. This reveals how the early readers of the epic view the rebukes and deeds of Kṛṣṇa. I argue that the starred passages and appendices show that early receivers of the epic were sometimes uncomfortable with the rebukes and criticisms of Kṛṣṇa but were also ambivalent about his trickery. In some cases, traditions were happy to add even more trickery. This study shows that in many cases, furthermore, it is the Southern Recension, represented primarily by manuscripts in Telugu, Grantha, and Malayalam scripts, that were far keener to defend Kṛṣṇa.

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[90] Goldman (1997), p.189

When looking at moral issues in the *Mahābhārata*, one may reasonably ask whether certain manuscript traditions just excised episodes from the text just to sidestep any potential problem. Sukthankar noted a consistent pattern in the *Mahābhārata*'s textual transmission: "Everything points to the fact that what the epic has suffered from is inflation and elaboration, and not depletion or curtailment,"[91] meaning that deletion was not the aim. He added that it would be a "grotesque distortion of Indian literary and religious tradition" to suggest, for example, that the redactors of the comparably short Kaśmiri recension of the *Mahābhārata* intentionally omitted passages. Omitting troubling passages was not likely to be a method for redactors to resolve morally problematic passages. Instead, they resorted to expanding the text. Franklin Edgerton, the editor of the Sabhāparvan Critical Edition, put it best:

> And it appears that no scribe, no redactor, ever knowingly sacrificed a single line which he found in the original. Not even if he found something which seemed incomprehensible, inconsistent with context, irreligious or immoral. In that case he changed the text, doubtless feeling that a mistake had been made and that he was only doing the pious work of restoring what must have been the original intention.[92]

As we have already seen, other episodes that involve notable interpolations include the Śiśupālavadha episode, where in some manuscripts Bhīṣma discourses at length about Kṛṣṇa's greatness. In the Droṇaparva, the slaying of Jayadratha is altered so as to include more trickery on the part of Kṛṣṇa. In instances of rebuke, trickery or criticism, we find notable interpolations that not only inform us about the early reception of these episodes, but also hint at the early reception of Kṛṣṇa's portrayal in the epic. In some cases, the redactors elaborated on Kṛṣṇa's role; in others they came to his defence.

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[91] Sukhthankar (1944), p.8
[92] Edgerton, (1943) p. xxxiv.

Kṛṣṇa is part of many of the notable 'expansions' that the Critical Edition records as interpolations, and his involvement in preventing Draupadī's disrobing is perhaps the most famous. The story, as told in most recensions of the text in some shape or form, has Draupadī call on Kṛṣṇa as Duḥśāsana disrobes her. Consequently, Kṛṣṇa intervenes to help her. The Critical Edition excises these verses and any intervention on the part of Kṛṣṇa. Instead of Draupaḍī praying to Kṛṣṇa and then being saved by the god providing her with unending garment, Draupaḍī is provided miraculously with an unending garment and eventually an exhausted Duḥśāsana gives up, realizing that his attempts to disrobe her are futile. Though Edgerton says that it is "entirely conclusive" that Kṛṣṇa's intervention was a late addition, he concedes that it is "not strange that later redactors felt it necessary to embroider the story."[93] In this case, it is likely that the redactors (from various manuscript traditions) felt that they were 'filling in the blanks', by explaining that it was Kṛṣṇa and not some impersonal principle of cosmic justice that prevented Draupaḍī from being disrobed. This is not the only instance of textual expansion where Kṛṣṇa's role is elaborated or explained.

Trickery and Rebuke in the Critical Apparatus

In the following sections, I look at specific instances where Kṛṣṇa is rebuked or where he cheats in order to show how interpolations function to clarify and justify the divine role of the god. These interpolations, I will argue, reveal the early reception of the *Mahābhārata* amongst its community of readers and is indicative of how they viewed Kṛṣṇa

[93] Edgerton, 1943 pp. xxvii-xxix. Hiltebeitel (2001) p.252 points out that in 5.80.23-26 of the Critical Edition, Draupadī recalls that she turned to Kṛṣṇa for help while being disrobed.

and his storyline within the larger narrative. On the margins of the Critically Reconstituted Text, I argue, are hints of how the readers of the *Mahābhārata* addressed and grappled with the rebukes of Kṛṣṇa and his trickery. While the trickery was often seen as defensible, the rebuke of Kṛṣṇa is taken much more seriously as a challenge to his divinity.

What do the interpolated passages tell us about how Kṛṣṇa's behaviour was received? Are his Machiavellian strategies of concern only to the modern reader who is appalled at his machinations? To answer this question, we must look at a sampling of his crooked strategies, especially those where there are significant insertions—viz. the deaths of Bhūriśravas, Jayadratha, Droṇa, Karṇa and Duryodhana. Kṛṣṇa is involved in the planning and execution of each of these deaths, and in some cases through cheating.

In some cases, like the Jayadratha episode, the tradition gives Kṛṣṇa another crooked strategem (jihmopāya). After the slaying of Abhimanyu, Arjuna made a vow to kill Jayadratha before the sun sets. In the Critical Edition, Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to behead Jayadratha in battle and to ensure that his head lands on his father's lap, all before the sun sets. Arjuna follows suit, and the battle ends predictably. In the Vulgate and other editions, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he will devise a stratagem to cover the sun and trick the Kauravas into thinking the day of battle is complete. As Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna:

> *7*1009.10 astaṃgatam ivādityaṃ dṛṣṭvā mohena bāliśaḥ*
> *7*1009.11 na hi śakṣyaty athātmānaṃ rakṣituṃ harṣasaṃbhavāt*
> *7*1009.12 etasminn eva kāle tu prahartavyaṃ dhanaṃjaya*
>
> Having seen the sun as having gone down, that foolish one, out of delusion, will be unable to protect himself out of joy. At that very moment, strike, Dhanaṃjaya!

The addition of another upāya to Kṛṣṇa's already populated list of crooked strategies suggests that the tradition often found Kṛṣṇa's use of trickery justified if it lead the Pāṇḍavas to victory.

Another example suggests that interpolated passages were more concerned about remedying rebuke than portraying Kṛṣṇa as an honest tactician. The death of the Kaurava combatant Bhūriśravas involves cheating because Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to intervene in a one-on-one battle between Bhūriśravas on the Kaurava side and Sātyaki on the Pāṇḍava side. Arjuna cuts off the arm of an inattentive Bhūriśravas off while the warrior is focusing on his battle with Sātyaki. In fact, we saw one of the most emotional albeit brief rebukes of Kṛṣṇa in this episode, where a fallen Bhūriśravas asks,

> MBh 7.118.14 *ko hi nāma pramattāya pareṇa saha yudhyate/ īdṛśaṃ vyasanaṃ dadyād yo na kṛṣṇasakho bhavet//*

Who would deliver such a low blow to someone inattentive who fights with another? Such a person cannot be anyone else but a friend of Kṛṣṇa.

This brief insult does not elicit a response in the constituted edition, and Arjuna does not even attempt to defend his clear and flagrant violation of the rules. The Southern recension, however, as well as various Devanagari manuscripts does not let Bhūriśravas's insult of Kṛṣṇa pass—and they have Arjuna tell Bhūriśravas in response that everything he just said was nonsense. This is the full defense of Kṛṣṇa's strategy that they have Arjuna say:

> After MBh 7.118.15, Dn2 D2.3.5.6 S. ins: % After 7.118.15, Dn2 D2.3.5.6 S ins.: 7*13.1-41: *evam ukto raṇe pārtho bhūriśravasam abravīt*
> *vyaktam eva hi jīrṇaḥ san buddhiṃ rañjayase nṛpa*
> *anarthakam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat tvayā vyāhṛtaṃ prabho*
> *hṛṣīkeśena saṃbandhaṃ garhase māṃ ca mūḍhavat*
> *raṇānām asi dharmajñaḥ sarvaśāstrārthapāragaḥ*
> *na cādharmam ahaṃ kuryāṃ jānaṃś caiva hi muhyase*
>
> Thus addressed in battle, Pārtha said to Bhūriśravas: It is clear that being old, you are gratifying your mind, King. Everything that you said was nonsense, Lord. Like a fool, you reproach me, [and my] connection with Hṛśīkeśa. You know the

dharma of battles and are fully conversant in the meaning of all the rules. I would not commit adharma, yet knowing this you are confused!

yudhyante kṣatriyāḥ śatrūn svaiḥ svaiḥ parivṛtā nṛpa
bhrātṛbhiḥ pitṛbhiḥ putrais tathā saṃbandhibāndhavaiḥ
vayasyair atha mitraiś ca svabāhubalam āśritāḥ
Kṣatriyas fight with [their] enemies, surrounded by their own brothers, fathers, sons, their kinsmen, and friends who are their contemporaries; they have recourse to their own strength.

ahaṃ hi sātyakiṃ śiṣyaṃ sukhasaṃbandhim eva ca
madarthe yudhyamānaṃ ca tyaktvā prāṇān sudustyajān
mama bāhuṃ raṇe rājan dakṣiṇaṃ yuddhadurmadam
nikṛtyamānaṃ taṃ dṛṣṭvā kathaṃ śatruvaśaṃ gatam
tvayā nikṛṣyamāṇaṃ ca dṛṣṭavān asmi niṣkriyam
I (saw) my pupil Sātyaki, that friendly kinsmen who was fighting for my sake, having cast aside (his) breaths which are difficult to give up. I saw that one who is [like] my right arm, intoxicated in battle, being tricked, and I saw that somehow he fell under control of the enemy, inactive, being dragged by you.

na cātmā rakṣitavyo hi eko raṇagatena hi
yo yasya yudhyate 'rthāya sa saṃrakṣyo narādhipa
tai rakṣyamāṇaḥ sa nṛpo rakṣitavyo mahāmṛdhe
yady ahaṃ sātyakiṃ dṛṣṭvā tūṣṇīm āsiṣya āhave
tatas tena viyogaś ca prāpyaṃ narakam eva ca
rakṣitaś ca mayā yasmāt tasmāl labdho mayā sa ca
yaśaś caiva svapakṣebhyaḥ phalaṃ mitrasya rakṣaṇāt

By someone gone into battle, one is not to protect only [themselves]. Who fights for whoever's sake, that person should be protected King of Men! In the great battle, the King should be protected by those kings who are being protected. If, I saw Sātyaki and remained silently in battle, then (I would have) reached hell because of it, separated from him (Sātyaki). Since I protected him, I obtained him and the consequence, fame for my side, due to the protection of my friend.

The interpolation draws attention to Bhūriśravas' reproach of Kṛṣna and Arjuna and offers a defence of Kṛṣṇa's strategy to make Arjuna intervene in the battle. Though Arjuna's act is universally condemned by the kings fighting nearby in the reconstituted text, here Arjuna

acknowledges no wrongdoing and reasons that any other option would have been wrong. When read alongside Bhūriśravas' protests and insult of Kṛṣṇa, this passage provides a strong counterbalance and defence of Kṛṣṇa that the reconstituted text does not have. This insertion is an example of the Southern Recension's attempts to vindicate Kṛṣṇa's crooked strategies as decidedly fair. This insertion would not have been necessary if the redactor(s) of this passage did not feel it necessary to counterbalance the prevailing view in other passages that Kṛṣṇa cheated. Furthermore, its placement right after Bhūriśravas' sharp rebuke of Kṛṣṇa is no accident.

There are minor interpolations in other war episodes that involve trickery where the redactor attempts to justify the events on moral grounds. For example, one interpolation found in Kashmiri, Bengali and some Devanāgari manuscripts (MBh 7.1375*) makes sense of Droṇa's controversial death by linking it to another controversial death in the epic Rāmāyaṇa. In that case, the treacherous felling of Droṇa which is caused in part by Kṛṣṇa is compared to the treacherous slaying of King Vālin, which is caused by Rāma. In both examples, the treacherous killing of the combatant (Vālin and Droṇa respectively) is justified because of the transgressions of the victims. Arjuna kills Karṇa in a controversial manner—striking him while he was unarmed with his head turned away. Before Arjuna shoots the arrow, Karṇa warns Arjuna to heed the kṣatriya dharma and urges him not to hit him while his back is turned and he is unarmed. This leads to a heated verbal exchange between Kṛṣṇa and Karṇa, where Kṛṣṇa tells him that it is hypocritical for him to recall the very dharma he himself broke on many occasions. He repeatedly asks Karṇa "where was your dharma?" It is this speech of Kṛṣṇa that encourages Arjuna to fire the fatal shot at the unarmed Karṇa. Kṛṣṇa's rebuttal also shows that he refuses to cede any moral authority to

Karṇa, and thus frames his death as that of someone who has breached dharma. There are many interpolated passages in Kṛṣṇa's "where was your dharma" speech where redactors list other perceived misdeeds of Karṇa to further emphasize his hypocrisy. To this list, the Southern Recension adds a sweeping statement about the good Pāṇḍavas and the bad Kauravas:

> 8.67.1 After 1ab, S (T3 missing) ins.:
> 8*1140.1-4: *dharme hi gṛddhāḥ satataṃ hi pārthāḥ/ tebhyas tato vṛddhim asau dadāti/*
> *dharmād apetāḥ paribaddhalobhāḥ/ tasmād gatā vai kuravo vināśam/*
> Dharma constantly increased for the Pāṇḍavas, who were constantly greedy for dharma, and so dharma gave them increase. The Kauravas departed from dharma because their greed was deep-rooted and so they were destroyed.

Though this is a minor interpolation, the redactors felt it necessary to add to Karṇa's long list of misdeeds by reminding the reader who it is who is morally justified before Arjuna cheats. This of course says more about how they viewed the strength Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna's relative moral positions to that of Karṇa.

The mace-battle between Bhīma and Duryodhana is another problematic episode, as Bhīma cheats on the advice of Kṛṣṇa, as we have seen earlier. The episode concludes with Duryodhana's forceful rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and his crooked methods throughout the war. Duryodhana's speech ends in a shower of flowers from the gods. We have seen that Kṛṣṇa defends himself and his decision to cheat. This episode, found in the Śalyaparvan, is subject to a significant amount of attention by redactors. Once again, we find the most vociferous defences of Kṛṣṇa in the interpolations of the Southern Recension, but not in all Malayalam and Telegu manuscripts. In Kṛṣṇa's defence to Duryodhana, the Southern recension puts these words in Kṛṣṇa's mouth:

> After 9.60.46, S (except M1; T3.4 missing) ins.:

9*4.1-18 *kurvāṇaṃ karma samare pāṇḍavānarthakāṅkṣiṇam/*
yac chikhaṇḍy avadhīd bhīṣmaṃ mitrārthe na vyatikramaḥ/
svadharmaṃ pṛṣṭhataḥ kṛtvā ācāryas tvatpriyepsayā/
pārṣatena hataḥ saṃkhye vartamāno 'satāṃ pathi/
pratijñām ātmanaḥ satyāṃ cikīrṣan samare ripum/
hatavān sātvato vidvān saumadattiṃ mahāratham/
arjunaḥ samare rājan yudhyamānaḥ kadā cana/
ninditaṃ puruṣavyāghraḥ karoti na kathaṃ cana/
labdhvāpi bahuśaś chidraṃ vīravṛttam anusmaran/
na jaghāna raṇe karṇaṃ maivaṃ vocaḥ sudurmate/
devānāṃ matam ājñāya teṣāṃ priyahitepsayā/
nārjunasya mate nāgaṃ mayā vyaṃsitam asrajam/
tvaṃ ca bhīṣmaś ca karṇaś ca droṇo drauṇis tathā kṛpaḥ/
virāṭanagare tasya ānṛśaṃsyāc ca jīvitāḥ/
smara pārthasya vikrāntaṃ gandharveṣu kṛtaṃ tadā/
adharmaṃ nātra gāndhāre pāṇḍavair yat kṛtaṃ tvayi/
svabāhubalam āsthāya svadharmeṇa paraṃtapāḥ/
jitavanto raṇe vīrāḥ pāpo 'si nidhanaṃ gataḥ/

Since Śikhaṇḍī, for the sake of his friend, killed Bhīṣma who was performing actions in battle desiring calamity for the Pāṇḍavas, there was no transgression. The teacher [Droṇa], having turned his back on dharma, out of a desire to please you, proceeding on the path of the wicked, was slain in battle by Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Wishing to keep his promise in battle, the wise Sātvata killed his enemy Saumadatta (Bhūriśravas), the great warrior. Arjuna, at no point when he was fighting in battle did anything censurable, that Man-Tiger. Having obtained many wounds, recalling the conduct of heroes, he did not kill Karṇa in battle [unfairly]. So, do not speak this way, Evil-Minded One! Recognizing the will of the gods, and with the desire to do what was helpful and pleasing to them, and not by the will of Arjuna (did Bhīma slay) the elephant, deceived by me.. You, Bhīṣma, Karṇa, Droṇa, Drauṇi and Kṛpa were kept alive in the town of Virāṭa due to his (Duryodhana's) cruelty. Recall the heroism of Pārtha, what was done for the Gandharvas. Thus, what the Pāṇḍavas did towards you was not adharma, O son of Gāndhāri. Those heroes resorted to their own strength according to their dharma and conquered [you] in battle. You, who are evil, have reached [your] end.

In this case, the Southern Recension's interpolations follow a pattern found in defending the killing of Bhūriśravas—denying any wrongdoing or cheating on the part of Kṛṣṇa. The redactors sought to justify the killings of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Bhūriśravas by either defending Kṛṣṇa's tactics as fair, or by demonizing the opponent who died dishonourably. The line is drawn at the end of this reading contradicts what Kṛṣṇa himself says earlier in his speech in the Constituted Text, where he admits that he cheated. The Southern Recension, once again, finds it necessary to expand on Kṛṣṇa's speech to Duryodhana and the Pāṇḍavas and offer a vigorous defence of his actions. The intention here is to draw a moral distinction between the honest Pāṇḍavas and the wicked Kaurava contingent.

Other interpolated defences of Kṛṣṇa take different approaches to defending Kṛṣṇa. Unlike the redactors of the Southern Recension, the redactors of the North Indian manuscripts acknowledge that Kṛṣṇa had cheated, but argue for its necessity. Here is what is added to Kṛṣṇa's speech in Bengali and Devanagari manuscripts:

> 9.60.57 After 57, B D (except D11) ins.:
> 9*372.1-6 *naiṣa śakyaḥ kadā cit tu hantuṃ dharmeṇa pārthivaḥ/*
> *te vā bhīṣmamukhāḥ sarve maheṣvāsā mahārathāḥ/*
> *mayānekair upāyais tu māyāyogena cāsakṛt/*
> *hatās te sarva evājau bhavatāṃ hitam icchatā/*
> *yadi naivaṃvidhaṃ jātu kuryāṃ jihmam ahaṃ raṇe/*
> *kuto vo vijayo bhūyaḥ kuto rājyaṃ kuto dhanam/*
>
> The King could never have been killed righteously. All of them, led by Bhīṣma, were great warriors and archers. I slew them all more than once relying on many strategies. I did it out of a desire to help you all. If I had not done this crooked [strategem] in war, whence would be your victory? Whence your kingdom? Whence your wealth?

This line of defence is consistent with what Kṛṣṇa says in the Critically Reconstituted Text. As we will see, it is also characteristically different from the kind of interpolated defences that we find in the Southern Recension.

The Southern Recension strengthens the Pāṇḍava response to Duryodhana's reproach and the shower of flowers in his favour. After the gods sprinkle flowers on Duryodhana, the Pāṇḍavas are despondent. Kṛṣṇa then offers a defence of his methods that satisfies the Pāṇḍavas, who then rejoice at the death of Duryodhana. The Southern Recension expands on that rejoicing. After hearing Kṛṣṇa's rebuttal to Duryodhana, Arjuna, Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira sound their conches in approval:

> 9.60.65 After 65b, S (except M1; T3.4 missing) ins.:
> 9*374.5-10 *teṣāṃ nādena mahatā śaṅkhānāṃ bharatarṣabha/*
> *āpupūre nabhaḥ sarvaṃ pṛthivī ca cacāla ha/*
> *tataḥ śaṅkhāś ca bheryaś ca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ/*
> *pāṇḍusainyeṣv avādyanta sa śabdas tumulo 'bhavat/*
> *astuvan pāṇḍavān anye gīrbhiś ca stutimaṅgalaiḥ/*
>
> By the great sounds of their conch-shells, the entire sky filled and the earth shook. Kettle drums, conch shells, the best of lutes and flutes sounded in the Pāṇḍava army. The sound of it was great. Others praised the Pāṇḍavas with songs full of blessings and praises.

The interpolated passage echoes the celebration at the end of the chapter, but it serves to counterbalance the puṣpavṛṣṭi on Duryodhana. The redactors, particularly in the Southern Recension, chose to expand on and defend Kṛṣṇa's "misdeeds" while also counterbalancing controversial episodes. This reveals some of the tension that Duryodhana's rebuke of the god brought for transmitters of the epic.

The Pune Critical Edition's appendices are a treasury of additional verses from the *Mahābhārata* that are found in certain manuscripts of the epic. Although they are spurious

additions to the text, they offer an informative peek into the history of the *Mahābhārata*'s reception and redaction. These interpolations have different purposes in the epic. In some cases, they specify names and locations to embroider the epic with more ornate detail. In other cases, they often seek to clarify an episode or incident, or to reflect on it. This section studied ten instances of textual expansion in the epic deemed to be interpolations.[94] These passages often serve to clarify Kṛṣṇa's role in the war, particularly when it comes to his trickery. They are often used as a counterbalance, particularly in the case of rebuke. When Bhūriśravas briefly insults Kṛṣṇa for cheating, the Southern Recension has Arjuna defend Kṛṣṇa's stratagem forcefully in a way that the Critically Reconstituted Text does not. Similarly, the Southern Recension interrupts Śiśūpāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa in order to have Bhīṣma praise the deeds of the god and remind the reader of his divine līlā. We have seen that something similar happens in the Śalyaparvan in reaction to Duryodhana's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. This is not only a response to the reproaches of Kṛṣṇa, but also to the accusations of trickery.

The redactors also tended to expand Kṛṣṇa's role in the epic, the most famous case being his intervention in the disrobing of Draupadī. In the case of the slaying of Jayadratha, many interpolated passages have Kṛṣṇa intervene and trick Arjuna's foe into thinking that the sun has set so that Arjuna could behead him treacherously. This is a curious case where the redactors do not counterbalance Kṛṣṇa's trickery but expand on it. Like the Draupadī case, however, it could represent an effort on the part of the early readers to make sense of Jayadratha's defeat. Though he is the greatest warrior of his age, how else could Arjuna

[94] Tamar Reich (1998) offers her own typology of the interpolations. They include minor variations, textual expansion and omissions.

defeat him, if not with the divine intervention of Kṛṣṇa? This "trick" is also the most superhuman of all Kṛṣṇa's strategies, making it conspicuous in a list of other jihmopāyas that are, for the most part manipulative but do not require superhuman intervention on his part. Thus this interpolation is distinct from other instances of trickery that the redactors often attempt to counterbalance.

Does the reception of Kṛṣṇa's trickery, as embedded in these additions, insertions and variants, signal readers' discomfort with Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the war? Is there a shift in values that suddenly makes his treachery troubling? The textual expansions studied in this section point to a degree of discomfort with characters who rebuke Kṛṣṇa for his cheating. Some redactors felt the need to offer a stronger defence of Kṛṣṇa's methods, either through echoing arguments already found in the text, or through offering their own defence when Kṛṣṇa offers none. Though this response is found in interpolations in Northern and Southern manuscripts, we have seen that the Southern Recension in particular responds to criticisms of Kṛṣṇa and defends him from accusations of wrongdoing. Many interpolated passages deny that what Kṛṣṇa did in the war was even trickery at all. As we will see, early readers of the *Mahābhārata* in South India, like Madhva, would be even more forceful in their defence of Kṛṣṇa. The evidence within the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition indicates that he was not the only reader of the epic who thought Kṛṣṇa needed to be defended.

Conclusion: Conduct of the Gods in the World of Men

Sages and kings—from Uttaṅka to Śiśupāla—reproach Kṛṣṇa frequently and often justifiably. This has lead Alf Hiltebeitel to aptly label the *Mahābhārata* "an argument with

God."[95] Still, the censuring of Kṛṣṇa is unique to the *Mahābhārata*. As we will see, later Purāṇic and Kṛṣṇaite literature is far less given to confronting the God. The epic simultaneously rebukes Kṛṣṇa and acknowledges his wrongdoing on a human level, while using a cosmic plan to justify it. Kṛṣṇa's many rebukes and criticism are closely tied to his divinity. To that end, I explore the different conceptions of Kṛṣṇa's divinity that emerges in the *Mahābhārata* at various critical junctures. Though the *Mahābhārata* does not use the term avatāra to describe Kṛṣṇa, it occasionally fleshes out what it means for him to operate in the world as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, including the aṃśāvataraṇa section in the Ādiparvan. The *Harivaṃśa*, an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*, and the Nārāyaṇīya, include a comparable list of prādurbhāvas, or manifestations of Viṣṇu.[96] Of course, the most popular explanation is found in the Gītā, when Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he descends onto the earth for the promotion of dharma when it declines. In the Āraṇyakaparvan, Mārkaṇḍeya explains to the Pāṇḍavas that Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa, and that he descends on the earth to restore dharma, a variant of the Gītā passage. There is no mention of avatāras here, just that Kṛṣṇa descends on the earth for defeating opponents and also establishing dharma. In the Udyogaparvan, Vidura elaborates on the concept of Kṛṣṇa operating in the world as a human by justifying it as a kind of disguise. He describes Kṛṣṇa who acts like a powerless like a peasant (kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ), which explains why sometimes he appears like a common human. This discourse sets up the arrival of Kṛṣna for the peace embassy, where the Kauravas attempt to tie him up. In all the instances of reproach discussed, however, there is either a hint or explanation that there is something more at stake. How do the aṃśāvataraṇa and other

[95] Hiltebeitel (2001) p. 214
[96] HV 32

theories of Kṛṣṇa's divinity intersect with these episodes? It is in response to these episodes that the *Mahābhārata* offers explanations for Kṛṣṇa's avataraṇa, or descent on the earth.

We have different layers of justifications in each episode. For Śiśupāla, though he is right to point out that Kṛṣṇa is not the most ideal candidate for the guest gift, what we know about the divine plan tells us that he actually is ideal. Bhīṣma echoes this by telling him that he does not really know Kṛṣṇa. In Duryodhana's case, his reproach stands as a stinging critique of Kṛṣṇa's disavowal of kṣatriya dharma as evidenced by his crooked behaviour. Yet, once again, there are hints that Kṛṣṇa was playing the role of the Dhātṛ, setting the events in motion to secure success for the Pāṇḍavas. He even points to the conduct of the gods to justify his own trickery. Finally, in the case of Uttaṅka and Gāndhārī's reproaches, we are brought back to the divine plan in two forms: one is relieving the earth of her burden, which is used to justify the bloodletting, and the other is a justification for his actions that echoes what is mentioned in the Gītā—namely that this war needed to happen so that Kṛṣṇa could re-establish and protect dharma. The reproaches of Kṛṣṇa then, are an opportunity for the epic to pronounce on its theodicy. Are these categories previously mentioned completely divorced from each other in the text? Emily Hudson argues that the divine plans do not form a coherent theodicy.[97] Sometimes Kṛṣṇa is seen as the Ordainer, setting the events in motion. At other times, the divine descent of the gods is mentioned (aṃśāvataraṇa), and in the case of the Uttaṅka episode, we are told that Kṛṣṇa descends to protect and uphold dharma and defeat the unrighteous. Still, the *Mahābhārata*

[97] She argues that each of the theodicy candidates (fate, human exertion, karma and Kṛṣṇa) "fail" to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of suffering in the epic. She suggests instead that the answer is "suggested" in the epic. See Hudson, 2013 p.205-206.

makes an effort to unite these explanations into a coherent theodicy centring on the descent (avataraṇa) of Kṛṣṇa.[98] There is a shared vocabulary amongst these various divine plans. In the Uttaṅka episode where Kṛṣṇa says he appears in order to uphold dharma, he still uses terminology that links him to the Vidhātṛ. For example, he says in 14.53.6 that the four varṇadharmas are ordained (vihitāḥ) by him. As Hiltebeitel notes, vihita "phonetically accompanies Vidhātṛ, with whom it occurs in thirteen of the *Mahābhārata*'s twenty-seven mentions of [Kṛṣṇa], more naturally than Dhātṛ, with whom it occurs in seven of seventy-seven mentions."[99] Dhātṛ can also be translated as "fate" in the epic depending on the context, which is often identified as another ontological category. While fate, (vi)dhātṛ, avatāra and amśāvataraṇa are sometimes presented as discrete forces, they do not exist in a vacuum.

[98] Gonzalez Reimann (2010) speculates that there were "obvious attempts at giving cohesion to the many disparate elements that went into the final version. When an interpolator or a later redactor adds or modifies something, he will generally attempt to give the new version cohesion and flow." (150) This is certainly plausible, but the point is that, however it came about, there is a clear attempt at cohesion in the epic when it comes to the theodicy.

[99] Hiltebeitel, 2011, ch. 12, n. 57. This verb vihitāḥ is used by Kṛṣṇa in his defence against Duryodhana, where he argues that he employed those tactics to secure victory for the Pāṇḍavas.

Chapter 2

Questioning Kṛṣṇa, Questioning the Mahābhārata: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa as a Commentary Hiding in Plain Sight

In the first chapter, we explored how the *Mahābhārata* is, in fact, an argument with Kṛṣṇa. That argument can take many forms. Some characters, like Gāndhārī and others, protest what seems to be divine injustice. Others, like Duryodhana question Kṛṣṇa's violation of yuddhadharma. Śiśupāla harshly berates Kṛṣṇa as well, and his suitability for an honourable guest-gift. In many of these examples, the burden of the earth is used as an ethical justification for Kṛṣṇa's actions. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* ("BhP")—an 8th-10th century text devoted to promulgating Kṛṣṇa as the Ultimate Reality—is considered one of the 18 canonical Purāṇas. Scholars have considered the BhP to be closely related to the *Mahābhārata*, both in content and structure. Indeed, the BhP refers to the epic by name on

many occasions. It thus occupies an important place in the *Mahābhārata*'s reception history, and has a lot to say about rebuking Kṛṣṇa. As I show in this thesis, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight.

I contend that while the BhP intentionally positions itself within the worldview of the *Mahābhārata* and the Vedas, it is ambivalent towards the *Mahābhārata* primarily as a text on dharma and about Kṛṣṇa. I argue for the BhP's ambivalence by a close reading of the first two skandhas of the text, paying particular attention to controversial episodes we have seen in the previous chapter, such as the gadāyuddha.

I look closely at how the BhP is connected to the *Mahābhārata* at the narrative "frame level." From the narrative framing, we will see how the BhP is ambivalent towards the *Mahābhārata*. In particular, the BhP views the *Mahābhārata* primarily as a text of instruction on the four aims of life for women and śūdras. These are demographics that it considers to be deficient in hierarchical standing and intelligence. Within this is a sub-criticism that the epic fails to properly elucidate the true dharma at the expense of teaching how to acquire wealth and pleasure. Not only does the epic represent a marred view of dharma, but it lacks the divine stories of Kṛṣṇa (Harikathā). The second criticism has a causal connection to the first. I then look closely at how the BhP treats certain problematic episodes of the epic such as the gadāyuddha to argue that some of that ambivalence is rooted in these episodes. Far from ignoring the war episodes in the epic, the composers of the BhP are well aware of them, and are trying to make sense of them. The BhP refashions the Kṛṣṇakathā at least partly in response to Kṛṣṇa's story as it is found in the *Mahābhārata*.

Finally, I look at how the Purāṇic tradition constructively criticizes Kṛṣṇa's conduct through the frame story. Through a study of the tenth skandha of the BhP and the fourth skandha of the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, I show how the most serious critiques of Kṛṣṇa are raised through questions raised by those listening to his story at the frame level. The BhP questions how Kṛṣṇa can simultaneously uphold dharma while also breaching it through adultery. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, meanwhile, raises serious moral questions, specifically about Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the *Mahābhārata*, and his role in bringing about mass carnage during the war. In raising these questions and looking at the Purāṇic reception of the *Mahābhārata*, I shift attention to the audience of the epic and examine the ways in which the text was received.

How Frame Stories and Backhanded Compliments Reveal the BhP's Attitude towards the Epic

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* ("BhP")—one of the mahāpurāṇas dedicated primarily to Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Absolute—is intimately connected with the *Mahābhārata*. As we will see, although the BhP draws on the narrative material and characters found in the *Mahābhārata*, it often differs in its treatment of them and its theology. The BhP situates itself in the narrative world of the *Mahābhārata*, but the relationship between the two texts is strained and characterized by differences. Indeed, the BhP is, in general, equivocal towards the epic. Much of this ambivalence hinges on its portrayal of Kṛṣṇa. It thus an important and relatively unexplored chapter in the *Mahābhārata*'s reception history.[100]

[100] Kenneth Valpey (2005) has examined the general relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to argue that the latter is a reflection of the former. I focus on the BhP's ambivalence towards the *Mahābhārata*, and what role the depiction of Kṛṣṇa has to play in it.

Early readers of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* were aware that the BhP shares a peculiar relationship with the *Mahābhārata*. Madhva, the 13th-century founder of the Dvaita school, argued in his *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* that "the determination of the meaning of the [Mahā]bhārata"[101] is in the BhP, a view that Jīva Gosvāmi cites approvingly in his own work. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the 17thc. Advaitin, appeared to be aware of not only the similarities between the two texts, but also what makes them distinct from each other. Glossing 1.1.2 of the BhP, Madhusūdana argues that the dharma promulgated in the BhP is "free from the deceit"[102] [projjhita-kaitava] that is contained in the story of Yudhiṣṭhira and the other Pāṇḍavas in the epic. "There is no such trickery here [in the BhP]," he writes.[103] The early readers were not only aware of the connection between the two texts, but also understood why one superseded the other even on matters of dharma.

The two texts are inherently connected by their frame stories. The contents of the BhP are narrated by Vyāsa's son, Śuka, to King Parikṣit—the grandson of Arjuna. When Parikṣit is cursed to die at the hands of the snake Takṣaka, he spends seven days listening to the contents of the BhP before dying. His son, Janamejaya, takes the reins as King. Janamejaya learns that his father died of a snakebite, and consequently organizes a

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[101] Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya 1.1.1 and Paramātmasandarbha 155: artho 'yam brahma-sūtrāṇāṃ bhāratārthavinirṇayaḥ/
gāyatrībhāṣyarūpoʻsau vedārthaparibrimhitah//

[102] BhP 1.1.2: dharmaḥ projjhita-kaitavo 'tra paramo nirmatsarāṇāṃ satāṃ/
vedyaṃ vāstavam atra vastu śivadaṃ tāpa-trayonmūlanam/
śrīmad-bhāgavate mahā-muni-kṛte kiṃ vā parair īśvaraḥ/
sadyo hṛdy avarudhyate 'tra kṛtibhiḥ śuśrūṣubhis tat-kṣaṇāt//

[103] Paramahaṃsapriyā of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on BhP 1.1.2.: ataḥ āha projjhitakaitavaṃ iti. kaitavamkapaṭamyudhiṣṭhirādicaritavyājaḥ. tat bhāgavatatātparyakatve'pi mahābhārate'sti. na ca atra kaścid vyājo'sti.
(uploaded by Lalitālālita: https://ia802504.us.archive.org/3/items/paramahaMsapriyA-2-shlokaH/paramahaMsapriyA-2-shlokaH.pdf)
C.f. Venkatkrishnan (2015), p.201: [According to Madhusūdana,]…[E]ven if the *Mahābhārata* lays claim to being a repository of goals of the human life, it is full of deception and trickery, unlike the BhP which is devoted primarily to the 'Bhāgavata Dharma'."

holocaust of all snakes. The Janamejaya-sponsored *sarpasattra* is mentioned in both the BhP and *Mahābhārata*. By making the frame story of the *Bhāgavata* a conversation between the son of Vyāsa and Parikṣit, the text is consciously placing itself in the same world as the *Mahābhārata*. The core of the *Mahābhārata* is told as a dialogue between Parikṣit's son Janamejaya and Vyāsa's disciple Vaiśaṃpāyana after the death of Parikṣit. Since the core of the *Bhāgavata* is a dialogue between Parikṣit, who awaits his death, and Śuka, the core conversation that encapsulates the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is thus told before the narration of the Bhārata. Parikṣit hears the *Bhāgavata*, and Janamejaya subsequently hears the *Bhārata*. The outermost frame story of the *Mahābhārata*, between the bard Ugraśravas and Śaunaka, is also present in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.1-6). It envisions their conversation after the contents of the *Mahābhārata* were narrated, whereby Ugraśravas recounts the details of Vyāsa's post-epic literary career and life.

By connecting the frame stories, the *Bhāgavata* is consciously deciding to participate in the same literary-mythological universe of the *Mahābhārata*. By doing so, and by referring to the epic directly by name, the BhP raises two questions: what is the *Mahābhārata*'s raison d'etre, and who is its intended audience? It answers these questions in the introductory skandhas of the text.

These questions that the *Bhāgavata* asks gives us some insight into how the Vaiṣṇavas who composed the text envisioned its ideal audience. In its first direct reference to the text, the BhP answers this question:

> BhP 1.4.25: *strī-śūdra-dvijabandhūnāṃ trayī na śruti-gocarā/ karma-śreyasi mūḍhānāṃ śreya evaṃ bhaved iha/*
> *iti bhāratam ākhyānaṃ kṛpayā muninā kṛtam//*

> Let there be good deeds for the dull twice-born in name only, women, and śūdras, the three who are not permitted to hear the Veda, [thinking this way] out of compassion the seer composed a story, the *Mahābhārata*, so that there may be merit for them.

To be sure, this is not a straightforward denigration of the *Mahābhārata*. The BhP makes a bold move in arguing that the epic is for those who do not have access to the Vedas, broadening its access and establishing its importance for those who cannot access the Veda. The following verse makes clear what exactly the Bhārata teaches to women and śūdras. When he expresses his discontent with his literary career thus far, Vyāsa elaborates on this:

> BhP: 1.4.28-29: *dhṛtavratena hi mayā chandāṃsi guravo 'gnayaḥ/ mānitā nirvyalīkena gṛhītaṃ cānuśāsanam//*
> *bhārata-vyapadeśena hy āmnāyārthaś ca pradarśitaḥ/ dṛśyate yatra dharmādi/ strī-śūdrādibhir apy uta//*
> With my resolve firm, I honoured the sacred fires, the teachers, and the verses [of the Veda] sincerely, and grasped [their] teachings. I showed the meaning of the sacred texts, in the guise of the [Mahā]bhārata, where women and śūdras see dharma, and so forth.

While the Bhārata contains the meaning of the sacred texts for women and śūdras it also has instructions on the four aims of human life (puruṣārthas)—dharma, artha (wealth), kāma (pleasure) and mokṣa (liberation)—for women and śūdras. This is not the first text or author to read the *Mahābhārata* primarily as an instruction on the four aims of life, and certainly not the last, as we will see. Śaṃkara and Kumārila Bhaṭṭa also viewed the epic in the same light. The major point of departure here, however, is the BhP's explicit acknowledgement that the epic is for the spiritual fulfillment of śūdras and women. An early commentary on the *Mahābhārata*'s Bhagavadgīta, composed by Bhāskara, weighs in on this topic and records the orthodox position.

> It is forbidden to impart to the Śūdra, etc knowledge of unseen things, to instruct him on dharma and the like…Since the Śūdra, etc have no release and lack qualification for the three pursuits of dharma, artha, and kāma, which are the

> goals of man, it follows that they may also not learn the doctrine of the Bhagavad Gītā.[104]

In case there is any ambiguity about who the "etcetera" is referring to, Bhāskara clarifies in his argument that this includes women. Keeping with the devotional ethos of the *Bhāgavata*, it is no surprise that the text contests this argument. Within this worldview, calling the epic a text for women and śūdras is not necessarily an insult. It merely assigns a role to the *Mahābhārata* that stands in tension with the position of orthodox brāhmans like Bhāskara who would argue that Śūdras may not learn certain parts of the epic.

The BhP may, at times, contest and question the hierarchy of brahmanical society, but it ultimately operates within it. Thus the text certainly leaves no ambiguity about the inferiority of the *Mahābhārata*'s audience relation to other sacred texts. Vyāsa composed it for those dim-witted people (mūḍhānām) who are not allowed to access the revealed Vedic texts—women and śūdras. The commentator Śrīdhara refers to the audience of the *Mahābhārata* as the lowest of the three varṇas (traivarṇikeṣv adhamāḥ). By designating the text as being suitable for those who are lower in society's hierarchy, the *Bhāgavata* inherently makes a statement on the Bhārata's inferiority, and its place in society.

The critiques of the *Mahābhārata* do not end there, however. The BhP is not completely happy with how well the epic instructs its audience on the puruṣārthas. Despite his literary achievements with the Vedas and the epic, Vyāsa tells the Sage Nārada that he isn't satisfied (nātmā parituṣyate me), and asks him why that could be. Nārada tells him that despite his literary accomplishments, something is missing: a work extolling the glory of God.[105] He sharpens his criticism of Vyāsa's previous works by telling him that

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[104] Trans. by Van Buitenen (1966) p. 32
[105] Ibid. 1.5.8: bhavatānuditaprāyaṃ yaśo bhagavato 'malam

> BhP 1.5.15: *jugupsitaṃ dharmakṛte 'nuśāsataḥ svabhāvaraktasya mahān vyatikramaḥ/ yad vākyato dharma itītaraḥ sthito na manyate tasya nivāraṇaṃ janaḥ//*
>
> A great offence belongs to you, who delights in enjoyments, and have advised censurable acts for the sake of dharma. The other, ordinary folk depending on [your] statement that [this is] dharma do not contemplate avoiding [this bad behaviour].

Though Nārada does not explicitly state what previous work of Vyāsa he is referring to, the commentarial tradition and context make clear that he is referring to the *Mahābhārata*. The epic entertains censurable acts (jugupsitaṃ) throughout the narrative in the name of dharma and the other puruṣārthas. His argument is that it leads to a hazy view on the true or highest dharma, which is nivṛttidharma. The commentators of the BhP explain what Nārada means in this verse. They argue that the *Mahābhārata* encourages and expounds pravṛttidharma, a lifestyle that encourages engagement with the world, instead of nivṛtti or renunciation of kāma and artha.[106] Once again, we see how the text describes the limitations of the *Mahābhārata* in terms of the four puruṣārthas, particularly referring to artha and kāma. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it seems, will clarify and focus on the issues that matter. The epic is traditionally considered a text on the four aims of life, as the BhP accepts. Yet, if we take the traditional commentators' reading of this verse, the BhP finds Vyāsa's epic to be lacking in that department, too. The *Mahābhārata* does a good job of expounding artha and kama and engagement with the world (pravṛttidharma), but not the highest aim of life, renunciation (nivṛttidharma) and liberation. Of course, in many of the

[106] Śrīdhara, in his commentary on this verse, contrasts the the dharma of renunciation with the path of pravṛtti, citing the śruti verse "na karmanā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛtatvam ānaśuḥ." Instead of following this śruti verse, he says: kiṃtu pravṛttimārgān adhikṛtaviṣayaṃ tad iti kalpayati.

commentaries on the BhP, nivṛttidharma is imagined as an ultimate expression of bhakti, or devotion to Viṣṇu.

The criticism, then, is that the *Mahābhārata* does a poor job of expounding the proper dharma while instead focusing on more mundane things such as artha and kāma. The BhP begins, outside the frame story described earlier, with a verse (1.1.2) promising to express the supreme (paramaḥ) dharma, and to reject the false dharma. Though it is not explicitly stated, Kenneth Valpey argues that the "implication develops through the first skandha's frame narrations that it is largely the MBh, representing a marred or at least incomplete view of dharma, that needs correction or completion by the *Bhāgavata*."[107] It is possible that the *Bhāgavata* uses this opening statement to distinguish itself from other texts. Indeed, as we have seen, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī distinguishes the BhP from the *Mahābhārata* in his commentary on this verse, further strengthening Valpey's point. The two texts tend to diverge on issues of dharma. For the *Bhāgavata*, devotion to Viṣṇu, or bhaktiyoga, is the highest dharma.[108] This is where we find the *Bhāgavata*'s most pressing criticism of the epic.

This criticism allows the BhP to juxtapose itself favourably in relation to the inferior *Mahābhārata* because it is focused on the glories and pastimes of Viṣṇu in a way that the *Mahābhārata* (and the Veda) is not. Not only does the *Bhāgavata* envision itself as distinct from the *Mahābhārata* in its focus on the glories and pastimes of Kṛṣṇa, it is also the essence of the Vedas and the Epics.[109] The *Bhāgavata* repeatedly emphasizes the importance of Harikathā, the divine story of Hari or Viṣṇu. It is Harikathā that sparks the

[107] Ibid.
[108] BhP 1.2.6
[109] Ibid. 1.3.41

narration of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and it is Harikathā that causes Vyāsa to compose the *Bhāgavata*—he is told that the only way to achieve the fulfillment he is seeking is to tell the stories of the Lord.

The *Bhāgavata* makes clear in its opening verses that this is what separates it from texts like the *Mahābhārata*. Can a text focused on mundane happiness also serve as divine Harikathā? Not according to the BhP. It is notable that the *Bhāgavata* differentiates itself from the epic as a divine story of Vāsudeva, despite Kṛṣṇa's story arc in the *Mahābhārata*. Why is Kṛṣṇa's *Mahābhārata* arc not worthy of being deemed Harikathā? In Book 3 of the BhP, Vidura elaborates on the purpose of the epic and its relation to the glories of Kṛṣṇa, telling the sage Maitreya that:

> BhP 3.5.12: *munir vivakṣur bhagavadguṇānāṃ sakhāpi te bhāratam, āha kṛṣṇaḥ/ yasmin nṛṇāṃ grāmyasukhānuvādair matir gṛhītā nu hareḥ kathāyām//*
>
> The sage Vyāsa—your friend—who wished to convey the qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa, composed the [Mahā]bhārata, in which—regarding the story of Hari—the mind of men has been captivated with illustrations of the illustrations of vulgar (sensual) pleasures (grāmyasukhānuvādair).[110]

Though the *Mahābhārata* contains the story of Hari, and traditionally includes the Harivamśa Purāṇa as an appendix, it focuses on captivating the mind with illustrations of the mundane aims of life, like artha and kāma. He argues that in the *Mahābhārata* there is a "description of artha, kāma, etc., but it is only for the purpose of entering the mind into harīkatha." Where exactly does Vyāsa describe the qualities of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*? According to Śrīdhara, it is the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Śāntiparva at the end of the

[110] It should be noted that some editions, including Madhva's 13th century commentary *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* reads the verse as *grāmyasukhānuvādair matir gṛhītā na hareḥ kathāyām*, which could change the meaning of the verse.

Mokṣadharma.[111] Harikathā, or at least a description of the Lord's qualities, exists in the *Mahābhārata*, but only alongside these other more worldly concerns.

Reflecting on and Subverting the Kṛṣṇa Story of the *Mahābhārata*

If a key feature of the *Bhāgavata*'s ambivalence towards the *Mahābhārata* is its focus on other puruṣārthas and inconsistent presentation of Harikathā, then Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata*, and how the *Bhāgavata* interprets it, merits further attention. A.K. Ramanujan argued that South Asian texts are "indissolubly plural". That is, they are often "(1) responsive, where text A responds to text B in ways that define both A and B; (2) reflexive, where text A reflects on text B, relates itself to it directly or inversely; (3) self-reflexive, where a text reflects on itself or its kind."[112] The BhP is reflexive in its relation to the *Mahābhārata*—it frequently reflects on and subverts the narrative found in the epic.

An important example of the *Bhāgavata*'s reflection on the *Mahābhārata* is in how it presents the climactic battle between Bhīma and Duryodhana. It is retold piecemeal in the BhP, but with notable omissions and changes. It is important in the *Mahābhārata* because it involves a rebuke of Bhīma's trickery—instigated by Kṛṣṇa—and a scathing criticism of Kṛṣṇa's nefarious conduct. It includes a puṣpavṛṣṭi, a shower of flowers on Duryodhana as he praises his own virtues and condemns the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa. Where does a quintessential *Mahābhārata* episode like this fit into the *Bhāgavata*, which is concerned with Harikathā? The answer is complicated, but it further illustrates the BhP's ambivalence towards the *Mahābhārata*. The BhP mentions the mace fight first in Canto 3, which picks up

[111] *muniḥ śrīkṛṣṇo vedavyāso bhagavadguṇān mokṣadharmānte nārāyanīyākhyāne vaktum icchuḥ san arthakāmādivarṇanaṃ tu harikathāyām matipraveśārtham eva.*
[112] Ramanujan (1989), p.189

the story with Vidura meeting Uddhava after the war. In this version of the tale, Vidura is exiled from the Kaurava kingdom before the war and is unaware of what happened. He asks Uddhava to chant (kīrtaya) the good tidings (vārttāṃ) of Kṛṣṇa. In response, Uddhava covers various seminal events in Kṛṣṇa's life. At some point in the narration, in the context of mentioning Kṛṣṇa's enemies who have been slain, Uddhava briefly touches on the events of the Bhārata war on the Kurukṣetra battlefield:

> BhP 3.3.12-14a: *atha te bhrātṛputrāṇāṃ pakṣayoḥ patitān nṛpān/ cacāla bhūḥ kurukṣetraṃ yeṣāṃ āpatatāṃ balaiḥ//*
> *sakarṇaduḥśāsānasaubalānāṃ kumantrapākena hataśriyāyuṣaṃ/ suyodhanaṃ sānucāraṃ śayānaṃ bhagnorum ūrvyāṃ na nananda paśyan//*
> *kiyān bhuvo'yaṃ kṣapitorubhāro yad dronabhiṣmārjunabhīmamūlaiḥ/*
>
> Then, [Kṛṣṇa caused] the fallen kings on both sides of your brothers' sons [to be slain.][113] The earth shook Kurukṣetra with the armies of your brothers and kinsmen who were attacking. Seeing Suyodhana—whose royal power and lifespan was extinguished because of the terrible advice of Karṇa, Duḥśāsana, and Śakuni—lying on the earth with his attendants, his thighs broken, Kṛṣṇa did not rejoice. How little was the Earth's burden relieved with the help of Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Arjuna and Bhīma.

The BhP in this case follows the *Bhārata* by referring to the lifting of the Earth's burden as a justification for the *Mahābhārata* war. It also makes Kṛṣṇa's role clear in killing these kings, even though he was not a combatant. It is not only the Pāṇḍavas who help Kṛṣṇa in this effort, but key Kaurava combatants (Droṇa and Bhīṣma, in this case).

What is very peculiar about this passage, however, is the level of detail it furnishes about Duryodhana's death as a result of the gadāyuddha. The details of this story are particularly relevant, because they reveal how the BhP sidesteps a controversial episode where Kṛṣṇa is criticized for his conduct. Uddhava tells Vidura that Kṛṣṇa did not rejoice at

[113] I am following Śrīdhara's interpretation of this otherwise terse pāda: nṛpān aghātayad ity anuṣaṇgaḥ.

the sight of the slain Duryodhana, with his thighs broken. This is not a detail that the *Mahābhārata* recounts in its version of the story. As we have seen, in the epic version, Kṛṣṇa encourages Bhīma to break Duryodhana's thighs, defends his decision, and gets in a heated argument with Duryodhana where they question each other's conduct. The passage above, in contrast, says that in seeing Duryodhana fallen, Kṛṣṇa did not rejoice (*na nananda*). Vijayadhvajatīrtha, the Mādhva commentator on the BhP, clarifies that this verse is about Kṛṣṇa's great favour towards Bhīma in the slaying of Duryodhana. Still, he adds, the verse means that Kṛṣṇa is not pleased with Bhīma after seeing Duryodhana's broken thighs.[114] This is a plausible reading, but there is no indication in the *Mahābhārata* that Kṛṣṇa is not pleased with Bhīma for following his directive.[115] It could also mean that Kṛṣṇa was simply unsatisfied with the death of Duryodhana, and thus planned the destruction of his own clan. Without the death of the Vṛṣṇi's the divine plan articulated in the beginning of the *Mahābhārata* for unburdening the earth would not be complete. Still, the mention of Duryodhana's broken thighs is peculiar. He is not happy at this sight of the broken thighs. I would argue that this is a classic example of what Ramanujan calls "reflexive" writing, where the BhP is repackaging and subverting a key *Mahābhārata* episode. Even if Kṛṣṇa's involvement in the battle is implied or assumed, the BhP emphasizes that Kṛṣṇa does not rejoice at the sight of the fallen Duryodhana with his broken thighs, and puts the onus for the fallen king's death on the terrible advice of Duryodhana's kinsmen, such as Śakuni, Duḥśāsana, etc. By doing this, the BhP avoids Kṛṣṇa's crooked and controversial tactics.

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[114] *śrīkṛṣṇasya duryodhanapātena bhime prasādātiśayam āha sakarṇeti. sa kṛṣṇaḥ suyodhanaṃ bhagnorum ūrvyām paśyan na nananda bhīmāya iti śeṣaḥ ity anvayaḥ.* Vijayadhvajatīrtha comm. on BhP 3.3.13

[115] Kṛṣṇa defends Bhīma's foul move to his brother, Balarāma, and only later signals his displeasure at Bhīma's decision to crush Duryodhana's head. This verse—along with the major commentaries on it—do not refer to the crushing of Duryodhana's head. Thus it is unlikely that the verse is referring to that.

Balarāma's involvement is another important element of this episode. He observes the mace-fight and is subsequently involved in a testy exchange with Kṛṣṇa on dharma, and on the crooked tactics that Kṛṣṇa urged on Bhīma. The tenth canto includes an overview of Balarāma's travels during the war and retells the gadāyuddha from his perspective. Balarāma excuses himself from the war and goes on an extensive religious pilgrimage. He returns in time for the mace battle between two of his students, Bhīma and Duryodhana, and acts as the referee. In the *Mahābhārata*, when Bhīma defeats Duryodhana by cheating, Balarāma criticizes Bhīma and even attempts to fight him. Balarāma leaves the scene after a heated exchange, remaining unconvinced by Kṛṣṇa's defense of Bhīma. Here is the BhP's telling of Balarāma's involvement in the gadādyuddha:

> BhP 10.71.22-29: *śrutvā dvijaiḥ kathyamānaṃ kuru-pāṇḍava-saṃyuge/ sarva-rājanya-nidhanaṃ bhāraṃ mene hṛtaṃ bhuvaḥ//*
> *sa bhīma-duryodhanayor gadābhyāṃ yudhyator mṛdhe/ vārayiṣyan vinaśanaṃ jagāma yadu-nandanaḥ//*
> *yudhiṣṭhiras tu taṃ dṛṣṭvā yamau kṛṣṇārjunāv api/ abhivādyābhavaṃs tuṣṇīṃ kiṃ vivakṣur ihāgataḥ//*
> *gadā-pāṇī ubhau dṛṣṭvā saṃrabdhau vijayaiṣiṇau/ maṇḍalāni vicitrāṇi carantāv idam abravīt//*
> *yuvāṃ tulya-balau vīrau he rājan he vṛkodara/ ekaṃ prāṇādhikaṃ manye utaikaṃ śikṣayādhikam//*
> *tasmād ekatarasyeha yuvayoḥ sama-vīryayoḥ/ na lakṣyate jayo 'nyo vā viramatv aphalo raṇaḥ//*
> *na tad-vākyaṃ jagṛhatur baddha-vairau nṛpārthavat/ anusmarantāv anyonyaṃ duruktaṃ duṣkṛtāni ca//*
> *diṣṭaṃ tad anumanvāno rāmo dvāravatīṃ yayau/ ugrasenādibhiḥ prītair jñātibhiḥ samupāgataḥ//*
>
> Balarāma heard about the destruction of all kṣatriyas in battle between the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas being narrated by the twice-borns, and thought: "the burden of the earth has been lifted." Wishing to stop [the battle] when Bhīma and Duryodhana were fighting with clubs in battle, the Delight of the Yadus went

> to Vinaśana. Yudhiṣṭhira, the twins, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa saw him and offered their greetings, and were silent, [wondering] "what has Balarāma come here to say?" [Balarāma] saw them both, their hands holding maces, furious. Hoping for victory, they circled one another. Balarāma then said this: King! Wolf-Belly (Bhīma)! You are heroes of equal strength. I consider one of you to have more strength and the other to have better training [on the art of mace-battle]. So, victory or the opposite is not indicated for you, whose virility is equal. Stop this fruitless battle! But, the two of them, whose enmity was too hard set for the sake of kingship, did not heed his words, O King, which were meaningful. They recalled all the insults and bad things [they did] to one another. Concluding that this is fate, [Bala]rāma went to Dvāravatī, [where] he was received by his kinsmen pleased [to see him], Ugrasena, etc.

Once again, the *Bhāgavata* reframes an important element in the episode and thus skirts the more unsavoury details of Kṛṣṇa's story. In the *Mahābhārata*'s version of the story, Balarāma does not attempt to stop the battle, but instead wishes to view it. In this case, he leaves before the battle ends, freeing the *Bhāgavata* from narrating the details of the battle and the subsequent fallout from it, particularly Balarāma's anger at Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*'s version. In this version, Balarāma understands the war and the destruction of lives around the burden of the earth. This episode is reworked in the BhP to exclude the controversial dialogues on Kṛṣṇa's conduct.[116] Though the text continues some of the themes that the *Mahābhārata* introduces, namely relieving the earth of her burden as a justification for the atrocities of war, it also deviates in its retelling of this important piece of Kṛṣṇa's story in the *Mahābhārata*.

Though the BhP retells and at times ignores some *Mahābhārata* stories, it does not mean that the BhP is not interested in Kṛṣṇa's epic storyline. In its own way, the Purāṇa often addresses the vexed question of the god's role in the slaughter in the war described in

[116] This is one of many *Mahābhārata* narratives that the BhP reimagines. The end of the epic, which includes Yudhiṣṭhira's ascent to heaven and final tests on the nature of dharma, are also reworked in the BhP.

the *Mahābhārata*. One type of reproach of Kṛṣṇa in the epic involved questioning divine injustice, namely how such suffering could exist while Kṛṣṇa sat idly by. This passage of the BhP weighs in on that topic as well, reconciling the Kṛṣṇa found in the epic with notions of divinity expounded in the text. While Vidura is inquiring about the Bhārata War, he tells Uddhava that:

> BhP 3.1.43: *nūnaṃ nṛpāṇāṃ tri-madotpathānāṃ mahīṃ muhuś cālayatāṃ camūbhiḥ/ vadhāt prapannārti-jihīrṣayeśo 'py upaikṣatāghaṃ bhagavān kurūṇām//*
>
> The Illustrious Lord, although wishing to take away the affliction of those who have surrendered to him, overlooked the offences of the Kurus due to the slaying of those kings, who, off-track due to triple folly, made their armies shake the earth repeatedly.

The concern that Kṛṣṇa overlooked the suffering the Pāṇḍavas endured at the hands of the Kauravas is also voiced in the *Mahābhārata*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, various epic characters question Kṛṣṇa's decision to allow the kind of mass carnage that the Bhārata war brings about. This concern, which is ultimately centered on Kṛṣṇa's role in the war, is addressed in the verse of the BhP. The problem, and Kṛṣṇa's role in the war, is framed here with the bhakti lens, namely that the Lord wishes to relieve the misery of those who are devoted to him, as the Pāṇḍavas are. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* here must reconcile its theology with the narrative presented in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Bhāgavata*'s commentarial tradition specifies the concern that the verse raises. According to the commentator Śrīdhara, the verse is an answer to the question of why Kṛṣṇa allowed his own devotees—the Pāṇḍavas—to suffer at the hands of the Kauravas and why he allowed them to show disrespect Kṛṣṇa himself at various junctures of the epic narrative. The answer that Śrīdhara and others in the commentarial tradition provide is that if Kṛṣṇa killed the

Kauravas before the war (and he was certainly capable of doing so), the destruction of all the terrible kings would not have been possible.[117] The war brought about not only the death of Duryodhana and his brothers, but also other bad kings. The *Bhāgavata* deploys the aṃśāvataraṇa to both defend Kṛṣṇa and conceptualize his role as a god involved in the war of the Bhāratas.

Of course, the BhP also takes a different approach to addressing the question of divine injustice. Unlike Gāndhārī in the *Mahābhārata*, who curses and reproaches Kṛṣṇa for overlooking the mass carnage in the war, Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas, praises Kṛṣṇa in the BhP and even prays for more suffering so that the Pāṇḍavas may see him. Kunti thanks Kṛṣṇa for saving them during the various trials and tribulations they encounter—from the burning of the wax house to the actual war. Hence, while the type of censure that points out Kṛṣṇa's divine injustice is absent in the BhP, the text still answers the same questions. It uses the narrative from the epic to provide its own answers and theodicy. Vidura continues his sermon about Kṛṣṇa by tying the unburdening of the earth to Kṛṣṇa's incarnation:

> BhP 3.1.44: *ajasya janmotpatha-nāśanāya karmāṇy akartur grahaṇāya puṃsāṃ/ nanv anyathā ko 'rhati deha-yogaṃ paro guṇānām uta karma-tantram//*
>
> The birth of the unborn [Kṛṣṇa], happened for the destruction of those who are astray. The actions of the non-actor are for making people [engage in pravṛtti]. Otherwise, who would merit connection to a body and enmeshment in karma, if he were beyond the guṇas?[118]

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[117] Śrīdhara's commentary on this verse*: nanu hareḥ kim evaṃ līlayā yena svabhaktānām vanavāsādikleśā bhavanti svasya ca dautye baṇdhanodyamādiparābhavas tad varaṃ teṣām aparādhānaṇtaram eva hananaṃ nāparādhopekṣety ata āha...prapannānām ārtijihīrṣayeśo'ghasamaya eva hantuṃ samartho'pi kurūṇām agham upaikṣata. tadānīm eva teṣām vadhe sarvaduṣṭarājavadho na syād ity āśayenety arthaḥ.*
[118] Śrīdhara, in his commentary on this verse, adds "pravṛttaye karmasu" to grahaṇāya puṃsāṃ.

Vidura clarifies Kṛṣṇa's role as an avatāra and thus justifies his role in the war and the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas. Though the *Bhāgavata* uses Sāṃkhya terminology, describing Kṛṣṇa as a non-agent, akartṛ who is unborn, ajaḥ, it maintains the purpose of the avatāra is to kill the evil people, including those kings who perished in the war. As we have seen already, the *Bhāgavata* explicitly says that Kṛṣṇa caused the death of the kings during the war even though other warriors were the direct killers, perhaps echoing the Bhagavad Gītā. Though Bhīṣma warns Yudhiṣṭhira that nobody—even poets—can really understand or know Kṛṣṇa's designs,[119] these verses attempt to elaborate on the purpose of his avatāra. Though the BhP does not spend much time on the issue, it is aware of some of the questions that the *Mahābhārata* raises about Kṛṣṇa and his role in the war. Unlike in the *Mahābhārata*, the avatāra doctrine is here unambiguous and well-developed. The BhP depicts Kṛṣṇa's role in the epic in terms of its own version of the avatāra doctrine.

Janamejaya's Endless Questions: How *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Devībhāgavata Purāṇa Question Kṛṣṇa and the *Mahābhārata*

Though the BhP explains Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata*, and contextualizes his divinity, by using the aṃśāvataraṇa, and although it occasionally subverts controversial episodes like the gadāyuddha, it still questions the god's conduct, and whether he is subject to the same rules as humans. In Book 10, which deals primarily with the life of Kṛṣṇa, Parikṣit raises some questions in the frame story:

> BhP 10.33.27-29: *saṃsthāpanāya dharmasya praśamāyetarasya ca/ avatīrṇo hi bhagavān amśena jagadīśvaraḥ//*

[119] BhP 1.9.16: na hi karhicid rājan pumān veda vidhitsitam/

> *sa kathaṃ dharmasetūnāṃ vaktā kartābhirakṣitā/ pratīpam ācarad brahman paradārābhimarśanam//*
> *āptakāmo yadupatiḥ kṛtavān vai jugupsitam/ kimabhiprāya etaṃ naḥ saṃśayaṃ chindhi suvrata//*
>
> Parikṣit Said: The Lord of the World descended with [his] partial [incarnation] for the establishment of dharma and for the cessation of adharma. O Brahman, how can the expounder, performer, and protector of the bulwark of dharma touch the wives of others, which is contrary [to dharma]? The Lord of the Yadus, who has fulfilled all of his desires, performed a censurable act. What was his intention? Remove our doubts, O Suvrata!

Parikṣit is listening to the *Bhāgavata* kathā, which Śuka is narrating to him. His interruption is timely, because he raises a question about Kṛṣṇa after hearing about his dalliances with the married cowherd girls. In contrast to Śiśupāla, Parikṣit ponders Kṛṣṇa's conduct and actions, and measures them against his words on dharma. This is Śuka's reply:

> BhP 10.33.30-34: *dharmavyatikramo dṛṣṭa īśvarāṇāṃ ca sāhasam/ tejīyasāṃ na doṣāya vahneḥ sarvabhujo yathā//*
> *naitat samācarej jātu manasāpi hy anīśvaraḥ/ vinaśyaty ācaran mauḍhyād yathā rudro'bdhijaṃ viṣam//*
> *īśvarāṇāṃ vacaḥ satyaṃ tathaivācaritaṃ kvacit/ teṣāṃ yat svavacoyuktaṃ buddhimāṃs tat samācaret//*
> *kuśalācaritenaiṣām iha svārtho na vidyate/ viparyayeṇa vānartho nirahaṅkāriṇāṃ prabho//*
> *kim utākhilasattvānāṃ tiryaṅmartyadivaukasām/ īśituś ceśitavyānāṃ kuśalākuśalānvayaḥ//*
>
> The transgressions of dharma, along with the violence of the mighty-minded gods do not cause a taint, just as fire devours all. The one who is not Īśvara should never act in this way, even in thought. Just as someone who is not Rudra, acting out of foolishness, [would be] destroyed [if] he [drank] poison [churned] from the ocean [of milk]. Their words are right, and sometimes their deeds. Whatever is in keeping with what they say, the wise should behave in that way. There is no self-interest of the gods through their good deeds. O Lord! Nor is there anything harmful [gained] through opposite [acts] of the ones without

> ahaṃkāra. How much less is there connection of the Ruler to the happiness and unhappiness of the ruled, viz. all the creatures, animals, humans and gods?

Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the gopīs is a source of criticism and reproach in later texts, particularly outside the tradition, as in the Jaina *Harivaṃśa*. The BhP recognizes this concern about Kṛṣṇa's conduct and addresses it in this verse. The word jugupsitam, used to describe the censurable deeds of Kṛṣṇa, is also used in an earlier verse that describes the dharma propounded in the *Mahābhārata*. Though this does not concern his conduct in the *Mahābhārata*, the question is framed similarly around the transgressions (vyatikramaḥ) of dharma. Namely, is Kṛṣṇa subject to or above dharma? The *Bhāgavata*'s response, through Śuka, is that these are not really faults when it comes to Īśvara, or the Lord. One should not imitate all the actions of the gods, such as Śiva's drinking of poison, because it would not end well for them. Follow Kṛṣṇa's teachings, not necessarily his actions. Although this is an answer to a question about Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the gopīs, one could imagine a similar response to questions about his trickery in the *Mahābhārata*, or his subversion of kṣatriyadharma in the war. The same logic applies: Kṛṣṇa is not tainted in any way by adharma and is ultimately above categories of dharma and adharma.

The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* is a minor purāṇa (upapurāṇa) that borrows from and reflects on themes found in the BhP. Like other Sanskrit texts, the DBhP is difficult to date with any degree of certainty. Sathaye (2009) pegs the date of the DBhP between the 11th and 12th centuries. R.C. Hazra suggests that it was composed by a Smārta-Śākta Brahmin in Bengal. In C. Mackenzie Brown's monograph on the DBhP, she identifies other theories of the Purāṇa's composition and offers her own.[120] One scholar she mentions, Nirmal Sanyal

[120] Brown (1990), p.220

dates the DBhP between the 7th-10th centuries. As Brown rightfully notes, this Purāṇa is certainly a reaction to the spate of Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, including the BhP: "Sanyal's dating of the Devi Bhagavata seems much too early. It is far more likely that the Devi Bhagavata was a product of the troubled times of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that the main Maha-Purana it was responding to was the Vaisnava Bhagavata."[121] In responding to the Vaiṣnava Purāṇas, the DBhP is generous in its criticism of Viṣṇu and his incarnations, including Kṛṣṇa. There is plenty of criticism and mockery of the gods in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (DBhP).

As a Purāṇa, the DBhP touches on many of the same topics that the *Bhāgavata* and *Mahābhārata* do. In fact, the DBhP links itself to the BhP and the *Mahābhārata* through the frame story. In an opening that is similar to the *Mahābhārata*, the seer Śaunaka asks the Sūta (bard) to narrate the DBhP. The first two skandhas of the DBhP cover material found in the Ādiparvan of the epic, from the story of Āstika to the fall of King Vasu. In the DBhP, Parikṣit's son, Janamejaya, is unable to accept his father's death and holds a snake sacrifice. The sacrifice is interrupted when the seer Vaiśampāyana tells him the story of the *Mahābhārata*. In the DBhP, the bard narrates the story of Parikṣit and his efforts to avoid the fatal snake bite. In this version, however, Parikṣit succumbs reluctantly to the snakebite and enters hell, as he does in the epic version. Janamejaya conducts the snake sacrifice and is interrupted by the telling of the *Mahābhārata*, as he was in the epic. The DBhP diverges from the epic at this point. The bard tells Śaunaka that:

> DBhP: 2.11.61-63ab: *homaṃ nivartayāmāsa sarpāṇāṃ munivākyataḥ/ bhārataṃ śrāvayāmāsa vaiśaṃpāyana vistarāt//*

[121] Ibid. p.221-222

> *śrutvāpi nṛpatiḥ kāmaṃ na śāntim abhijagmivān/ vyāsaṃ papraccha bhūpālo mama śāntiḥ katham bhavet//*
> *mano 'tidahyate kāmaṃ kim karomi vadasva me/*
>
> Following the words of the Muni, [Janamejaya] stopped the sacrifice of snakes. Vaiṣampāyaṇa recited the [Mahā]bhārata in a long version to him. But having heard the *Mahābhārata* as he liked, Janamejaya did not feel any peace. The Protector of the Earth asked Vyāsa "how can I be at peace? My mind is greatly distressed. What desire should I pursuedone? Please tell me!"

This question leads to the telling of the DBhP, primarily in the form of a conversation between Janamejaya and Vyāsa. Both the BhP and the DBhP begin from a position of discontent with the *Mahābhārata*. In the BhP, Vyāsa is not satisfied after composing the *Mahābhārata*, and Janamejaya is not at peace with what happened to his father, despite hearing the *Mahābhārata*.

Much of the DBhP is a conversation between Vyāsa and Janamejaya, which the bard is relaying to Śaunaka. The *Mahābhārata* plays a major role, as we have seen, in the frame story of this text. The fourth skandha of the DBhP opens with some piercing questions that Janamejaya has about Kṛṣṇa:

> DBhP: 4.1.1-11 *vāsaveya muniśreṣṭha sarvajñānanidhe 'nagha/ praṣṭum icchāmy ahaṃ svāminn asmākaṃ kulavardhana// 4.1.1*
> *śūrasenasutaḥ śrīmān vasudevaḥ pratāpavān/ śrutaṃ mayā harir yasya putrabhāvam avāptavān// 4.1.2*
> *devānām api pūjyo 'bhūn nāmnā cānakadundubhiḥ/ kārāgare kathaṃ baddhaḥ kaṃsasya dharmatatparaḥ// 4.1.3*
> *devakyā bhāryayā sārdhaṃ kim āgaḥ kṛtavān asau/ devakyā bālaṣaṭkasya vināśaś ca kṛtaḥ punaḥ// 4.1.4*
> *tena kaṃsena kasmād vai yayātikulajena ca/ kārāgāre kathaṃ janma vāsudevasya vai hareḥ// 4.1.5*
> *gokule ca kathaṃ nīto bhagavān sātvatāṃ patiḥ/ gato janmāntaraṃ kasmāt pitarau nigaḍe sthitau// 4.1.6*
> *devakīvasudevau ca kṛṣṇasyāmitatejasaḥ/ kathaṃ na mocitau vṛddhau pitarau hariṇāmunā// 4.1.7*

jagatkartuṃ samarthena sthitena janakodare/ prāktanaṃ kiṃ tayoḥ karma durvijñeyam mahātmabhiḥ// 4.1.8
janma vai vāsudevasya yatrāsīt paramātmanaḥ/ ke te putrāś ca kā bālā yā kaṃsena vipothitā// 4.1.9
śilāyāṃ nirgatā vyomni jātā tv aṣṭabhujā punaḥ/
gārhasthyaṃ ca harer brūhi bahubhāryasya cānagha//4.1.10
kāryāṇi tatra tāny eva dehatyāgaṃ ca tasya vai/ kiṃvadantyā śrutaṃ yat tan mano mohayatīva me//
caritam vāsudevasya tvam ākhyāhi yathātathaṃ/ 4.1.11a

O Vāsaveya, Best of Munis! Repository of all knowledge! O Faultless One! [There is a question] of mine that I wish to ask, O Master. O one who is propagating our family! The son of Śūrasena is the blessed powerful Vasudeva, of whom, I have heard, Hari became the son. Amongst the devas, he was revered by name as Ānakadundubhi. How was he, who was totally devoted to dharma, tied up by Kaṃsa in confinement? What was the sin he commited, accompanied by his wife Devakī? She gave birth to and subsequently killed her six sons. Why were [they killed] by the Kaṃsa who born in the family of Yayāti? How could Vāsudeva be born in a jail? How was the Lord of the Sātvatas brought to Gokula? After he was born, why were the parents of Kṛṣṇa, whose tejas is powerful, still chained? Why didn't Hari—who is able to create the world yet remained in a womb— free his aged parents? What were the past actions of those two, that are difficult to comprehend even by great-souled ones? At that time there was the birth of Vāsudeva, the great souled one, [there were other children]. Who were the sons and who was the daughter that was shattered on the stone [floor of the dungeon] by Kaṃsa but departed to the sky [and] became once again (i.e. resumed) her eight-armed form? Tell me about the household life of Hari, the one who has so many wives. Tell me about both his actions and his death. Whatever I've heard through the grapevine really perplexes my mind. Tell me the story of Vāsudeva as it happened.

This is another example of Pūrāṇic questioning, which is also found in the BhP, where criticisms or doubts about stories and Kṛṣṇa are effectively raised through the framing dialogue. Vyāsa can answer some of these queries by referring to the Kṛṣna story, but many of these questions are criticisms of the "received" Kṛṣṇa story (kimvadantyā śrutaṃ yat). Janamejaya has suspicions about Kṛṣṇa's powers and omnipotence. In the BhP, Parikṣit

raises concerns about Kṛṣṇa's adherence to dharma given his dalliance with the gopīs, which is easily answered. In this case, however, Janamejaya has more pressing queries that do not always have easy answers. Before giving Vyāsa the opportunity to answer his initial set of questions, Janamejaya continues to raise more doubts about Kṛṣṇa and his role in the *Mahābhārata*, and the narrative of the Pāṇḍavas that he has just heard from Vaiṣampāyana:

> DBhP 4.1.27-42: 27: *viṣṇor aṃśaḥ samudbhūtaḥ śaurir bhūbhārahārakṛt/ sa kathaṃ mathurārājyaṃ bhayāt tyaktvā janārdanaḥ//*
> *dvāravatyāṃ gataḥ sādho sasainyaḥ sasuhṛdgaṇaḥ/ avatāro hareḥ prokto bhūbhāraharaṇāya vai// 4.1.28*
> *pāpātmanāṃ vināśāya dharmasaṃsthāpanāya ca/ tat kathaṃ vāsudevena caurās te na nipātitāḥ// 4.1.29*
> *yair hṛtā vāsudevasya patnyaḥ saṃluṃṭhitāś cā tāḥ/ stenās te kiṃ na vijñātāḥ sarvajñena satā punaḥ// 4.1.30*
> *bhīṣṃadroṇavadhaḥ kāmaṃ bhūbhāraharaṇe mataḥ/ arcitāś ca mahātmānaḥ pāṇḍavā dharmatatparāḥ// 4.1.31*
> *kṛṣṇabhaktāḥ sadācārā yudhiṣṭhirapurogamāḥ/ te kṛtvā rājasūyaṃ ca yajñarājyaṃ vidhānataḥ// 4.1.32*
> *dakṣiṇā vividhā dattvā brāhmaṇebhyo 'tibhāvataḥ/ pāṇḍuputrāsya devāṃśā vāsudevāśritā mune// 4.1.33*
> *ghoraṃ duḥkhaṃ kathaṃ prāptāḥ kva gataṃ sukṛtaṃ ca tat/ kiṃ yat pāpaṃ mahāraudraṃ yena te pīḍitāḥ sadā// 4.1.34*
> *draupadī ca mahābhāgā vedīmadhyāt samutthitā/ ramāṃśajā ca sādhvī ca kṛṣṇabhaktiyutā tathā// 4.1.35*
> *sā kathaṃ duḥkham atulaṃ prāpa ghoraṃ punaḥ punaḥ/ duḥśāsanena keśe gṛhītā pīḍitā bhṛśam// 4.1.36*
> *rajasvalā sabhāyāṃ tu nītā bhītaikavāsasā/ virāṭanagare dāsī jātā matsyasya sā punaḥ// 4.1.37*
> *dharṣitā kīcakenātha rudatī kurarī yathā/ hṛtā jayadrathenātha kraṃdamānā 'tiduḥkhitā// 4.1.38*
> *mocitā paṇḍavaiḥ paścād balavadbhir mahātmabhiḥ/ pūrvajanmakṛtam pāpaṃ kiṃ tad yena ca pīḍitāḥ// 4.1.39*
> *duḥkhāny anekāny āptās te kathayādya mahāmate/ rājasūyam kratuvaraṃ kṛtva te mama pūrvajāḥ// 4.1.40*
> *duḥkhaṃ mahattaraṃ prāptāḥ pūrvajanmakṛtena vai/ devāṃśānām kathaṃ teṣāṃ saṃśayo'yam mahān hi me// 4.1.41*

sadācārais tu kaunteyair bhīṣmadroṇadayo hatāḥ/ chalena dhanalābhārthaṃ jānanair naśvaraṃ jagat// 4.1.42
preratā vāsudevena pāpe ghore mahātmanā/ kulaṃ kṣayitavaṃtas te hariṇā paramātmanā// 4.1.43

Śauri was born as a portion of Viṣṇu [to] relieve the earth's burden. How did he just abandon Mathurā out of fear and go to Dvāraka, O Excellent One, along with his clan and army? This manifestation of Hari was announced to relieve the Earth of her burden, after all, and to destroy sinners and establish dharma. So why weren't the thieves [in Dvāraka] slain by Vāsudeva, by whom his wives were captured and looted? He is [supposedly] All-Knowing, why didn't he recognize these robbers? The slayings of Bhīṣma and Droṇa are considered [Kṛṣṇa's] desire, in service of relieving the Earth's burden. And yet, the Great-Souled Pāṇḍavas are revered, they are devoted to dharma. All of them, whose leader is Yudhiṣṭhira were devotees of Kṛṣṇa and virtuous. They performed the rājasūya, the foremost of sacrifices, according to the prescriptions. They gave various gifts to the Brāhmaṇas beyond what is expected. O Muni! The sons of Pāṇḍu were portions of gods, depending on Vāsudeva. How could they have experienced such terrible suffering? What became of [their] righteous deeds? What was this terrible sin by which they were always tormented? As for the highly fortunate Draupadī, she arose from the midst of a sacrifice. The virtuous woman was a portion of Ramā (Sītā) and was also filled with devotion to Kṛṣṇa. How did she again and again suffer such terrible and incomparable pain? She suffered greatly [when] Duḥśāsana grabbed her hair. She was menstruating [when she was] led into the assembly fearfully, with only one garment on. She became a slave of the Matsya [kingdom] in Virāṭa. Kīcaka violated her, and she cried like a female osprey. She was abducted by Jayadratha, very unhappy and calling out for help. She was freed afterwards by the strong and great Pāṇḍavas. What was the sin committed in the previous life that afflicted them? They suffered many miseries, tell me [why]! They, my ancestors, performed the best sacrifice, the rājasūya! Yet they experienced so much misery, due to whatever they did in their previous lives. How could there be previous actions of those who are portions of the gods? This is a great doubt I have! Bhīṣma, Droṇa, etc were slain by the virtuous sons of Kunti using deception out of their greeds for riches, (all the while) knowing that the world is temporary. They were instigated in this terrible sin by that Supreme Being Vāsudeva who led them to destroy their family.

Janamejaya poses these questions to Vyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata*, after hearing the epic and remaining unsatisfied. The DBhP presents this as a series of unanswered questions that the attentive King has about the *Mahābhārata* that not only pertain to Kṛṣṇa, but also to his own ancestors. The trials and tribulations of the Pāṇḍavas along with Draupaḍī are framed in the context of divine justice, putting the onus on Kṛṣṇa. How can the divine Kṛṣṇa not prevent the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas, and why did he instigate the killings of the Kauravas through means of deceit? Janamejaya also attempts to poke holes in the aṃśāvatarāṇa doctrine by drawing attention to the painful consequences of the gods' descent. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, then, is probing the divinity of Kṛṣṇa, and how it affects his role in the *Mahābhārata*.

While Śuka answers Parikṣit's questions about Kṛṣṇa directly and clearly in the BhP, Vyāsa does no such thing here in response to the DBhP questions. His immediate response is to point to the supremacy of karma, and to argue that Kṛṣṇa (as Viṣṇu) is subject to karma, pain, pleasure, hatred, death, etc. This is part of the DBhP's larger strategy of positioning the Goddess as the (only) Supreme Being who is above these limits. Aside from this, Vyāsa does not answer all Janamejaya's specific questions. Instead, he tells him the story of sage Kaśyapa to explain the reason for the birth of the gods on Earth (aṃśāvataraṇa). In particular, the story accounts for the births of Kṛṣṇa's parents. The story only leaves more questions for the ever-inquisitive Janamejaya.

> *2.4.5-7: pitāmahā me saṃgrāme kurukṣetre 'tidāruṇam/ kṛtavantas tathā 'ścaryaṃ duṣṭaṃ karma jagadguro// 2.4.5.*
> *bhīṣmo droṇaḥ kṛpaḥ karṇo dharmāṃśo'pi yudhiṣṭhiraḥ/ sarve viruddhadharmeṇa vāsudevena noditāḥ// 2.4.6*
> *asāratāṃ vijānantaḥ saṃsārasya sumedhasaḥ/ devāṃśāś ca kathaṃ cakrur ninditaṃ dharmatatparāḥ// 2.4.7*

> My grandfathers did terribly cruel things in battle at Kurukṣetra. O Teacher! Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Karṇa, and even the partial incarnation of Dharma—Yudhiṣṭhira—[did terrible things.] They were all encouraged in these acts by Vāsudeva, who was acting against dharma. How could these "wise" partial incarnations of the gods—who know all about the transitory nature of the world—do such reproachable things [when] they are totally devoted to dharma?

Janamejaya once again frames the moral questions about the *Mahābhārata* narrative around the aṃśāvataraṇa. The figures who acted dishonourably were incarnations of gods. He does not shy away from reminding the audience that the terrible actions of both the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava warriors were encouraged by Kṛṣṇa. The DBhP states precise questions about the *Mahābhārata*, but offers imprecise answers. Vyāsa's response is to pivot back to the argument that gods like Kṛṣṇa are also subject to the three guṇas—sattva, rajas and tamas—that colour their actions. They are all under the control of Māyā, which here represents the Goddess Devī. The DBhP's critique of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* is used as a partisan argument for the supremacy of the Goddess. As we will see in a later chapter, this is also a strategy used by Śaivas to discredit Viṣṇu. Given the story told of him and his conduct in the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa is an easy target for sectarian attacks.

More importantly, however, is the placement of the critique in the DBhP. As we have seen in the BhP, the serious critiques and questions that the texts have about Kṛṣna are not raised through reproach, but through questions placed in the frame story and at the outset. Janamejaya and Parikṣit represent the audience. They are listening to the DBhP and BhP as it is narrated to them by Vyāsa and Śuka, and raise these questions based on what they have heard.

Conclusion

The Purāṇas are frequently shaped by the *Mahābhārata*. They are framed with the same characters from the epic, and are often situated as conversations that result from questions listeners have about the *Mahābhārata*, and details of the story. They often retell stories from the *Mahābhārata* which inevitably involve Kṛṣṇa. In focusing on Kṛṣṇa, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* offers much comment, implicitly and explicitly, on Kṛṣṇa and the *Mahābhārata* itself. By connecting its authorship to Vyāsa, and presenting the contents of the text primarily as a recitation between a descendent of the Pāṇḍavas and a student of Vyāsa, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* situates itself as a successor to the *Mahābhārata*. Vyāsa's composition of the BhP is a direct result of his dissatisfaction with his compositions up to that point, including the Bhārata. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* treats the *Mahābhārata* as a written composition, and offers its opinion on the epic's intended audience (primarily women and śūdras who are ineligible for the study of the Veda) and its purpose (primarily dharma, artha and kāma). Embedded in the BhP's presentation of the *Mahābhārata* is some ambivalence of the text as both a śāstra on liberation or mokṣa, and a source of Harikathā, stories about Hari.

Harikathā is incomplete without tales of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. As a result, the BhP retells and often raises questions about key episodes in the *Mahābhārata*. There is a recurring questioning of Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* War, and his role in the carnage and suffering that is brought about from the war. As a result, the BhP explains how the avatāra operates in the war, and overlooks the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas. The bhārāvataraṇa, the unburdening of the earth, is seen as key to Kṛṣṇa's mission in the *Mahābhārata*, and his divinity. The avatāra doctrine, which by the time of the *Bhāgavata* was well-developed, is connected to the meta myth that Kṛṣṇa and others must descend on

the earth and unburden it through the mass carnage of the war. The text also retells key episodes from the war, like the gadāyuddha, differently so that many of the controversial acts of Kṛṣṇa are not addressed.

In these ways, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight. It offers a retelling and questioning of the epic and develops key themes about Kṛṣṇa's divinity. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, much like the BhP, situates itself in relation to the *Mahābhārata* and offers even more pointed questioning of Kṛṣṇa. Specifically, it questions the degree of the god's divinity, and ties it to his conduct in the epic. How does the god's incarnation on the earth allow for so much suffering on the part of the Pāṇḍavas, and why does he achieve victory through means of trickery? Although the answers to these questions turn to the aṃśāvataraṇa, and reveal its importance for the epic's reception, the questions are more telling than the answers. The *Mahābhārata*, and Kṛṣṇa's role within it, raises a series of questions about the degree of the gods divinity and humanity.

Criticism does not always have to be confrontational. This chapter has primarily been about criticism and questioning— to what extent the BhP criticizes the epic, and to what extent it questions Kṛṣṇa. The most serious criticisms of and questions about the Mahabharata and Kṛṣṇa are found not in the form of outright censures—though these have some utility in the BhP—but in the frame stories of these Purāṇas. The questions that the audience raise in the text itself, and comments found at the same place contain some of the most serious critiques. The most powerful examples of the censure of Kṛṣṇa in the epic are those that also critique his conduct. Having asked to what extent the BhP criticizes the epic, and to what extent it entertains criticism of Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the form of reproach or questioning, the answer is now clear: criticism is possible with certain terms and

conditions. With regards to criticizing the *Mahābhārata*, the BhP questions whether the epic presents a complete picture of dharma because of its narrative, and even questions its suitability as an instruction on the four ends of humans (puruṣārthas). The treatment of Kṛṣṇa's story is an important fault line for the epic's reception history. The *Mahābhārata* is a text concerned with grāmyasukhānuvāda and other such worldly pursuits, which makes it an imperfect text.

Chapter 3

If the Thighs are Not Hit, You Must Acquit

The aim of this chapter is to understand how Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva readers of the *Mahābhārata* scrutinize and defend Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the epic. I draw from two examples in medieval and early modern South India: Madhva's *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* ("The Determination of the *Mahābhārata*'s Meaning") (13th c.) and Appaya Dīkṣita's *Brahmatarkastava* ("Praise of Reasoning [about Śiva as] Brahman") (16th c). The previous chapters have looked at how Kṛṣṇa is criticized for trickery amongst other things in the *Mahābhārata*, and how later Purāṇas such as the *Bhāgavata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*s

actively question Kṛṣṇa's role in the war, explicitly asking how the god could preside over the genocidal war, and the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas. These questions are inherently tied to the nature of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, and his role in the bhārāvataraṇa, or the unburdening of the earth, is important in this respect. Both Madhva and Appaya offer readings of Kṛṣṇa's role in the epic, and a justification for his trickery. Appaya's brief attention to the issue is part of his wider polemical project of defending Śaivism, where he responds to the criticism that Śiva is overcome with darkness (tamobhibhūta) and cruelty (krauryam) because he is engaged in the cyclical act of destruction. Part of Appaya's defence is a pivot to Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, before offering his own defence of Kṛṣṇa. Madhva's reading of the *Mahābhārata*, and the gadāyuddha especially, is more extensive and thus requires more attention.

Madhva's complex defence of Kṛṣna must be situated in relation to his own theology. Central to his understanding of Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* is the bhārāvataraṇa, the story that Kṛṣṇa incarnated on earth along with other divine beings in order to rid the world of demonic beings, particularly the corrupt kṣatriyas. In his defence of Kṛṣṇa, Madhva presents a consequentialist argument whereby any action in service of this end is justified. The MBTN also presents a bhakti-centric moral philosophy that absolves the Pāṇḍavas of any sin because Kṛṣṇa guides them. As a result of this, Madhva strengthens the moral demarcation between the Pāṇḍavas as "good" and the Kauravas as "evil" and displays no tolerance for characters that blaspheme Kṛṣṇa. This chapter considers how Madhva uses his theology to understand, and in some cases reinterpret, some problematic episodes of the *Mahābhārata* that involve Kṛṣṇa. There will also be some implications to draw for the *Mahābhārata*'s reception history.

I begin first with an assessment of the *Mahābhārata*'s importance and relevance to Madhva's work and theology, where I suggest that its status as sadāgama (lit. true scripture) is cemented by what the thinker sees as its Vaiṣṇava orientation and its inclusion of Bhīma's story (of whom Madhva claimed to be an reincarnation). I also trace a history of the MBTN in Mādhva thought and exegesis, looking at what an early hagiographical text on the life of Madhva tells us about the importance of this work for the maverick theologian and his school.

I then look at Madhva's retelling of controversial episodes involving nikṛti, such as Rāma's killing of Vālin and the slayings of Droṇa and Karṇa (which were instigated by Kṛṣṇa). While he offers an explanation for the former, in the case of the latter, Madhva accepts the role of Kṛṣṇa in engineering their deaths through trickery. This faithful retelling of two key episodes from the war makes Madhva's interpretation of the gadāyuddha notable. I look at how Madhva offers a novel defense of both Bhīma's controversial actions, his decision to strike Duryodhana's thighs and crush his head. His novel defense of Bhīma reveals that although Madhva does not generally take issue with trickery, he does not want to mar Bhīma's character or reputation as a warrior in any way.

Madhva's exegesis and assessment of Kṛṣṇa's trickery emerges in his retelling of the fallout from the gadāyuddha, and Duryodhana's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. It is here that I study how both the bhārāvataraṇa and the theory of tārātamya allow Madhva to justify the actions of the Pāṇḍavas while also morally demarcating them from the Kauravas like Duryodhana, who are destined for hell. In his analysis, I argue, Madhva presents a bhakti-centric moral paradigm of the epic, whereby the highest good is what Kṛṣṇa ordains. Thus, his trickery is

a means to relieve the earth's burden, and the Pāṇḍavas are ultimately right in breaking any rules because they are following Kṛṣṇa's orders.

The *Mahābhārata* and the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* in Mādhva Thought

The *Mahābhārata* occupies an esteemed position in Mādhva Vaiṣṇavism. Along with the Vedas and āgamas, Madhva lists the *Mahābhārata* as part of the corpus of sacred literature known as sadāgama, the literature by which a devotee can know Nārāyana.[122] Following tradition, Madhva considers the Vedas to be within the realm of śruti, or revealed literature, but he also includes the Pañcarātra (Vaiṣṇava tantric texts), the *Mahābhārata* and the Mūlarāmāyaṇa. He does not accord the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa the same status that he does the Vyāsa *Mahābhārata*, because he believes the original Rāmāyaṇa to be another text, the Mūlarāmāyaṇa. Though Madhva maintains that only the Vedas are eternal,[123] he also argues that the *Mahābhārata* contains the gist of all śāstras.[124] He treats the *Mahābhārata* not simply as an itihāsa, but as a śāstra.[125] It is not unprecedented for the Mādhva school to use the *Mahābhārata* in this way. Recent studies have revealed that other texts traditionally considered to be Smṛti—such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—play authoritative roles in other Vaiṣṇava schools in India.[126] The Śrivaiṣṇavas, for

[122] Viṣṇutattvānirṇaya 3: ṛgādyā bhārataṃ caiva pañcarātram athākhilam/ mūlarāmāyaṇaṃ caiva purāṇam caitadātmakam// ye cānuyāyinas teṣāṃ sarve te ca sadāgamāḥ/ durgamās tadanye ye tair na jñeyo janārdanaḥ//
[123] Whereas the Purāṇas are 'nitya-anitya.' He is certainly aware that the *Mahābhārata* is subject to changes. C.f. MBTN 2.3-5
[124] Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya 2.9: *nirṇayaḥ sarvaśāstrāṇāṃ bhārataṃ parikīrtitam*//
[125] Though the *Mahābhārata* occasionally refers to itself as the "fifth Veda," it was obvious "that the Great Bharata was a Veda only metaphorically. The Great Bharata was a very different sort of text from the Veda in many more ways than the two were substantively similar." (Fitzgerald 1984, p.130).
[126] C.f. Ajay Rao (2015) Refiguring the Ramayana as Theology reveals the importance of the Rāmāyaṇa for the Śrīvaiṣṇava sect, as does Patricia Mumme's study of how the Rāmāyaṇa is used to justify different tenets of Tenkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavism. See also Sucharita Adluri (2015) Textual Authority in Classical Indian Thought:

example, generally paid more attention to the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and made it a foundational text for their sect.

Madhva held that Viṣṇu is absolutely sovereign, but also free from faults (nirdoṣaka).[127] He rejects the possibility of an Impersonal Absolute and instead affirms the opposite, a personified Absolute who is Viṣṇu and in whom every virtue is at its best. Nowhere else does this doctrine need to be defended more than in the epics, where both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are accused of having moral shortcomings. BNK Sharma best describes the dilemma that Madhva faces in applying his theology to the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative, where

> …the theoretical perfection of the deity is often belied by the imperfections and weaknesses betrayed by the avatārs of the deity in their earthly careers said to be undertaken for the edification of humanity. The Hindu philosopher has thus a difficult task of trying to 'justify the ways of god to man'; ways, which, in some cases, human logic and ethical standards find difficult to reconcile with its ideas of godliness…[Madhva] has been the *only* Indian thinker [emphasis in the original] who has given his special attention to this important problem of theology and shown the necessary boldness and resourcefulness in tackling it.[128]

In the *Mahābhārata*'s after-life, Madhva is one of the earliest commentators to explicitly address these moral questions and to try to reconcile them with his theology. In his reading of the *Mahābhārata*, we find a fairly cohesive defence of Kṛṣṇa's trickery. One episode of the *Mahābhārata* is of particular importance to him because it implicates Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa in wrongdoing. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Bhīma cheats in his mace battle with Duryodhana by hitting him 'below the belt' and subsequently crushing his head. Both

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Ramanuja and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Venkatkrishnan (2015) has also studied how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* influenced the Advaita Vedānta tradition.

[127] MBTN 2.56 *nirdoṣakaḥ sṛtivihīna udārapūrṇasaṃvidguṇaḥ prathamakṛt sakalātmaśaktiḥ/ mokṣaikahetur asurūpasuraiś ca muktair vandyaḥ sa eka iti coktam athottarārdhe//* It is no coincidence that Madhva's Anuvyākhyāna (commentary on the Brahmasūtra in verse form) includes a reference to God's moral perfection in both the introductory and closing verses.

[128] BNK Sharma *History of Dvaita Vedanta*, pp.133-134.

Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma are held responsible and criticized for cheating and foul play. This gives Madhva the opportunity to explain it against his doctrine of Viṣṇu's moral perfection. It also implicates Madhva in the epic's troubling events because he is a reincarnation of Bhīma.

Madhva's *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, is an important text in the *Mahābhārata*'s reception history because it is one of the earliest extant commentary-cum-retellings of the text and pays significant attention to Kṛṣṇa's role within the epic. As we will see, Madhva's maverick exegesis occasionally involves altering the narrative or reading his theology into the text. It is through these narrative innovations and explanations that we find a commentary on the controversial gadāyuddha episode. His treatment of this episode represents a major, and I would argue, conscious departure from the *Mahābhārata* tradition.

The *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* and Madhva

The MBTN provides valuable clues about the transmission of the written *Mahābhārata* in 13th century South India. Yet scholars have not accorded it much attention, perhaps due to what Patrick Olivelle calls the "pervasive mistrust of ancient Indian commentators as reliable guides to understanding ancient Indian texts."[129] Though the scholars who prepared the Pune Critical Edition of the epic consulted various commentaries and retellings to arrive at a clearer understanding of what regional variants existed in the *Mahābhārata* tradition, they completely neglected the MBTN. As I intend to

[129] Olivelle (1999), p.551. Madhva's penchant for citing scriptural passages that cannot be found elsewhere has undoubtedly furthered this mistrust. C.f. Mesquita (2003).

show, the MBTN could have served fruitfully[130] for the project, because of its ample detail.[131]

Perhaps the biggest clue as to what role the *Mahābhārata* plays in Madhva's theology lies in his own works.[132] The MBTN stands as one of his lengthiest works, and includes summaries of various Rāmāyaṇa episodes as well. This work has attracted significant attention within the Mādhva tradition. Respected figures in the tradition, from Vyāsatīrtha to Rāghavendratīrtha and Vādirājatīrtha, have written commentaries on the MBTN.

There are two reasons why the *Mahābhārata* is highly regarded by Madhva and his school. The Sadāgamas in general and the *Mahābhārata* in particular, according to Madhva, teach a truth that is central to his theology: the absolute sovereignty of Viṣṇu (viṣṇusarvottamatvam). This concept is the measure of true scripture (sadāgama) in the Dvaita tradition. As Madhva says in the MBTN:

> MBTN 2.136: *tasmād yo mahimā viṣṇoḥ sarvaśāstroditaḥ sa hi/ nānyad ity eṣa sāstrāṇāṃ nirṇayaḥ samudāhṛtaḥ//*
> That which is referred to in all Śāstras is indeed the greatness of Viṣṇu. This is the conclusion uttered by the śāstras, nothing else.

The *Mahābhārata* is a text that, in his view, unequivocally expresses the greatness of Viṣṇu at the epic's highest level of meaning. It has also been composed by Vyāsa, whom Madhva considers to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu. This alone cannot explain his interest in the epic. For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also expresses devotion to Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu in no

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[130] Despite claiming to consult various manuscripts, Madhva's quotes from the *Mahābhārata* are by and large from the Southern recension.
[131] The Pune Critical Edition scholars used Kṣemendra's Bhāratamañjari (10th c.) extensively for testimonia to understand the text's form in Kashmir. The MBTN, written roughly 300 years later, is as valuable as testimonia and often provides more detail than Kṣemendra's epitome.
[132] He also composed the Yamakabhārata, a poetic retelling of the epic.

uncertain terms. Though Madhva wrote a brief treatise on this text as well (*Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya*), it does not compare in length or status to his commentary on the *Mahābhārata*.[133]

Another reason why Madhva pays close attention to the *Mahābhārata*, and perhaps the decisive one, is the role of the wind god Vāyu in the narrative. Madhva claimed to be an incarnation of Vāyu, following two previous incarnations (Hanumān and Bhīma, characters in the Rāmāyana and *Mahābhārata* respectively).[134] Madhva holds the *Mahābhārata* in high regard because it expounds the virtues of Viṣṇu but also of Vāyu. In Mādhva thought, Kṛṣṇa is sarvottama (the best of all) and Vāyu is jīvottama (the best of all jīvas). Some hagiographical texts say that Madhva's father was a professional reciter of the Purāṇas, so knowledge of, and an appreciation for, the epics were possibly inherited. Madhva sees the exploits of Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata* as his own. Not only can he expound the greatness of Viṣṇu in the MBTN, but he can also establish the hierarchy of the gods in relation to Vāyu. Madhva's theology is broadly Viṣṇu-centric, but there are hints that Kṛṣṇa is an important figure for him. The first temple he built in Udupi was devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Even though Kṛṣṇa is one of many incarnations of Viṣṇu recognized by the Mādhvas, Kṛṣṇa also plays a particular role in the Mādhva ritual.[135] It is no surprise, then, that these two figures—Bhīma

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[133] C.f. Venkatkrishnan (2015, p.35), who argues that the *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* was "less a work of exegesis than a series of extracted verses deployed to support his maverick theological vision." He also argues that the *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* had very little impact on the Sanskrit intellectual world beyond his own school and the Gauḍīya tradition much later.

[134] MBTN 2.124 There are three manifestations of Vāyu who are the primary supporters of Viṣṇu. The first is Hanumān, the second is Bhīma, and the third is Pūrṇaprajña (Madhva), who accomplishes the work of the Lord. Although he establishes them as manifestations of Vāyu, the MBh refers to them as the sons of Vāyu. C.f. Mesquita (2003, p.110)

[135] C.f. Sarma, 2003 p. 70.

and Kṛṣṇa (the jīvottama and sarvottama, respectively)—would be given particular attention in the MBTN.

The Sumadhvavijaya, one of the earliest biographies of Madhva,[136] explains why Madhva wrote a commentary on the *Mahābhārata*. According to this explanation, he was commissioned by Vyāsa to write a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* on his second northern tour.[137] He then continued to Kurukṣetra and Hastināpura, key cities in the MBh's narrative, and upon returning laid "the permanent foundations for his community of Dvaitins."[138] The MBTN—and the circumstances that led to its composition—play an important role in Madhva's hagiography, and this is tied to his status as an incarnation of Vāyu. According to the Sūmadhvavijaya, Madhva composed the MBTN early in his career. During his second trip to Badarikāśrama, Madhva met with Vyāsa, and it is there that he learned the essence of the *Mahābhārata*. As the tenth canto of the Sumadhvavijaya says:

> Sūmadhva Vijaya 10.24-25: *pārāśaryaḥ paratattvaprasiddhyai tātparyārthaṃ paramaṃ bhāratasya/ vyaktaṃ vaktuṃ niyunakti sma sākṣād enam dhanyaṃ bhuvane manyamanaḥ//*
>
> The son of Parāśara [Vyāsa] appointed [Madhva] to broadcast the supreme meaning of the purport of the *Mahābhārata*, considering him to be fortunate on the earth.

Though the Sumadhvavijaya is not an historical record, it reveals how the early followers of the Mādhva tradition understood the MBTN. This biography thus offers hints not only as to why Madhva composed the MBTN,[139] but also to the importance of the epic for Madhva's

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[136] The biography, written by Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya, is important because Paṇḍitācārya was the son of one of Madhva's original followers, and the texts were composed soon after Madhva's death. C.f. "Madhva" in Brill Encyclopedia Vol 4., ed. Knut Jacobsen. Daniel Sheridan, pp. 281

[137] "Madhva" in Brill Encyclopedia Vol 4., ed. Knut Jacobsen. Daniel Sheridan Ibid. pp. 282

[138] Ibid. pp.282

[139] Sūmadhva Vijaya 10.24-25.

tradition. Though the MBTN is not a commentary in the formal sense,[140] Madhva offers comment on the *Mahābhārata* in this text, explaining what he understands to be the essence of the epic. The MBTN has a pedagogical dimension even within the Mādhva tradition, as the Sumadhvavijaya says that Vyāsa instructs Madhva to communicate (vakṭum niyunakti) the purport of the *Mahābhārata*, which he does in the MBTN. Madhva's MBTN, then, is indeed a product of public philology. It is an attempt to make sense of a text that Madhva acknowledges is difficult to understand, even for the gods.

The (Im)perfect Avatāras: Rāma's killing of Vālin and Kṛṣṇa's Jihmopāyas

The MBTN is a commentary on, and a retelling of the *Mahābhārata* and Rāmāyaṇa. This is particularly true when it comes to the war books of the *Mahābhārata*. The retellings are relevant because, as Phyllis Granoff writes, "in many ways the later retellings of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* act as commentaries on the root text."[141] Kṛṣṇa's numerous reproachable actions in the *Mahābhārata* are well-documented, and more common than those of Rāma. How does Madhva address, for example, his many crooked tactics (jihmopāyas) in the war? How does Madhva explain episodes that further exhibit the avatāra's human shortcomings? Before addressing the gadāyuddha, this section looks briefly at how Madhva treats other episodes in the epics like the killing of Vālin in the Rāmāyaṇa, and the deaths of Droṇa and Karna in the *Mahābhārata*.

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[140] C.f. Rao (2015) Rao, using Rājaśekhara's taxonomy, establishes six genres of commentary. "Vṛtti (explicating the essence of the source text), paddhati (a sub commentary), bhāṣya (a polemical commentary), ṭīkā (occasional comments), pañjikā (grammatical gloss on difficult words), vārttika (supplements or corrects the source texts)"

[141] P. Granoff, "Karma, Curse, or Divine Illusion: The Destruction of Buddha's Clan and the Slaughter of the Yadavas," in Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History: Essays in Honour of Robert P. Goldman, ed. S. Pollock (Delhi: Manohar, 2010), 77.

In certain problematic episodes from the epics—which portray Kṛṣṇa or Rāma in an unflattering light—the notion of Viṣṇu's faultlessness is put to the test. Scholars and traditional readers have pointed to a passage from the MBTN where Madhva recognizes that in the case of the *Mahābhārata*, some verses have been interpolated and corrupted.[142] In the MBTN, he promises to sift through the existing *Mahābhārata* and identify the true verses and their meanings.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma kills the monkey Vālin by shooting him while hiding behind a bush. This is one of the few times that Rāma is reproached in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa for breaching dharma, in this case for intervening in battle unfairly. In the MBTN, Madhva accepts that Rāma shot Vālin from behind, but provides a defence not found in the critical edition of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. In chapter 6 of the MBTN, Madhva provides an insight into Rāma's thinking:

> MBTN 6.19-20: *bhakto mamaiṣa yadi mām abhipaśyatīha pādau dhruvaṃ mama sameṣyati nirvicāraḥ/*
> *yogyo vadho na hi janasya padānatasya rājyārthinā ravisutena vadho 'rthitaś ca//*
> *kāryaṃ hy abhīṣṭam api tat praṇatasya pūrvaṃ śasto vadho na padayoḥ praṇatasya caiva/*
> *tasmād adṛśyatanur eva nihanmi śakraputraṃ tv iti sma tam adṛṣṭatayā jaghāna//*
>
> '[Vālin] is a devotee of mine; if he spots me, he will certainly, without hesitation, approach my feet. Killing someone who has bowed down to [my] feet is not appropriate, and yet the son of the Sun [Sugrīva], who desires the kingship, requested the killing [of Vālin]. Though one should honour requests, the killing

[142] MBTN 2.3-5: *kvacid granthān prakṣipanti kvacid antaritān api/*
kuryuḥ kvacic ca vyatyāsaṃ pramādāt kvacid anyathā//
anutsannā api granthā vyākulā iti sarvaśaḥ/
utsannāḥ prāyaśaḥ sarve koṭyaṃśo' pi na vartate//
grantho' py evaṃ vilulitaḥ kim v artho devadurgamaḥ/
kalāv evaṃ vyākulite nirṇayāya pracoditaḥ//

> of one who is bent towards [my] feet is not laudable. Thus, even though I will not be visible, I [shall] kill the son of Śakra.' [Thinking in this way], he struck him from hiding [lit. by way of being invisible].

Here the MBTN accepts that Rāma hit Vālin while in hiding—a reprehensible act—but provides a novel defence: it is better to kill someone from a position of hiding than while the person is bowing down to your feet. Madhva is aware that the act is prima facie wrong and could taint Rāma's character. Nonetheless he provides justification for the act in the MBTN.

What the MBTN chooses to include in its retelling is therefore relevant. Though Madhva is accused of quoting from texts unknown to other authors, his treatment of the *Mahābhārata* war is faithful to the source material, sometimes down to its minute details. It is often the small details that matter in this case, because that is where we find Kṛṣṇa's trickery. In particular, Kṛṣṇa uses trickery and deception in the deaths of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Ghaṭotkaca, Bhūriśravas, Karṇa and Duryodhana, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. We will briefly focus on the deaths of Droṇa and Karṇa in the MBTN to show how Madhva provides little comment on Kṛṣṇa's trickery and stays faithful to the narrative. As we will see, the death of Duryodhana provides substantial comment on Kṛṣṇa's trickery and allows Madhva to address certain theological issues.

As the first chapter has demonstrated, the death of Droṇa is controversial for two reasons. First, Yudhiṣṭhira (known as the dharmarāja) exploits his teacher's trust by tricking him into believing that his son was dead so that he would renounce battle. Second, once Droṇa renounces battle out of grief for his son, the commander of the Pāṇḍava army illegally beheads him. In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa's role in this episode is subtle but important—he encourages the Pāṇḍavas to lie in order to disarm Droṇa. The MBTN

retelling does not stray from its source, and makes Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma's role in this episode clear:

> MBTN 26.274-277: *tatra bhīmo gajānīkaṃ jayatsenaṃ ca māgadham/ jaghāna subahūṃś caiva māgadhānāṃ rathavrajān//*
> *atha mālavarājasya tv aśvatthāmābhidhaṃ gajam/ bhīmasenahataṃ dṛṣṭvā vāsudevapracoditaḥ/*
> *aśvatthāmā hata iti prāha rājā yudhiṣṭhiraḥ//*
> *aśvatthāmavadhaṃ śrutvā nāhaṃ yotsya iti svayam/ puroktaṃ dharmajāyaiva tena droṇo yudhiṣṭhiram//*
> *brūhi satyam iti prāha satyam ity eva so'bravīt/ upāṃśu kuñjaraś ceti droṇo 'to vyathito 'bhavat//*
>
> Bhīma then killed Jayatsena, the King of Magadha along with most of the Māgadha chariot-warriors, and a retinue of elephants. Then Yudhiṣṭhira saw the elephant called Aśvatthāman belonging to the king of Mālava killed by Bhīma, and encouraged by Vāsudeva, Yudhiṣṭhira said that "Aśvatthāman is slain!" "When I have heard that Aśvatthāman is slain, I do not wish to fight," [Droṇa] himself previously said this. Therefore, Droṇa said to Yudhiṣṭhira the Conqueror of Dharma, "tell me, is it true?" Yudhiṣṭhira replied "yes, it is true," then in a low voice "and it is the elephant" Droṇa was grief-stricken.

Here Yudhiṣṭhira is impelled by Vāsudeva (*vāsudevapracoditaḥ*) to utter the lie. By using this compound, Madhva follows the *Mahābhārata*'s version of events and chooses not to ignore Kṛṣṇa's role in it. Madhva also includes another seemingly minor detail in his retelling of this episode, which further demonstrates his faithful rendering of the original. When Arjuna rebuked Dhṛṣṭadyumna for beheading Droṇa, Dhṛṣṭadyumna reminded Arjuna of his own misdeeds, specifically, his intervening illegally in a battle and chopping off the arm of the Kaurava warrior Bhūriśravas. This action of Arjuna's was the result of Kṛṣṇa's strategies. The MBTN includes this detail, thereby reminding the reader of another questionable killing associated with Kṛṣṇa.

In the six verses that describe Karṇa's final moments, Madhva succinctly retells Kṛṣṇa's role in that death.

> MBTN 27.179-181 *punaś ca pārthena mahāstrayuddhaṃ prakurvataḥ sūryasutasya cakram/ rathasya bhūmir grasati sma śāpād astrāṇi divyāni ca vismṛtiṃ yayuḥ//*
> *uddhartukāmo rathacakram eva pārthaṃ yayāce 'vasaraṃ pradātum/ nety āha kṛṣṇo 'ñjalikaṃ sughoraṃ triṇetradattaṃ jagṛhe ca pārthaḥ//*
> *satyena dharmeṇa ca sanniyojya mumoca karṇasya vadhāya bāṇam/ ciccheda tenaiva ca tasya śīrṣaṃ sandhitsato bāṇavaraṃ sughoram//*
>
> And then while carrying on a fight with the great missiles with Arjuna, the Earth swallowed Karṇa's wheel, and due to a [prior] curse, Karṇa forgot the invocation for the divine weapons. Karṇa, desirous of retrieving the wheel of his chariot [from the earth] begged Pārtha to give him some time. "No", Kṛṣṇa said, and Pārtha grasped the terrible Añjalika weapon given to him by the three-eyed one. Arjuna aimed the arrow honestly and righteously and released it to kill Karṇa. Arjuna cut the head of Karṇa, who was trying to nock a terrible arrow.

Though it is dealt with briefly in the MBTN, Karṇa pleads with Arjuna to follow the rules of battle and not hit him when he is unarmed. Indeed, in the *Mahābhārata*, it is Kṛṣṇa who mocks this proposition and encourages Arjuna to kill him when he is unarmed.

It may appear, through a sampling of these episodes, that Madhva is unconcerned with Kṛṣṇa's ethics in the war and has nothing to say about it. Madhva explicitly addresses the question of Kṛṣṇa's conduct, however, when he retells the death of Duryodhana. This final act of Kṛṣṇa's trickery also implicates Bhīma. As we will see, Madhva's treatment of this episode is distinctly different from the others.

If the Thighs Are Not Hit, You Must Acquit: Madhva's Reading of the Gadāyuddha

Madhva extensively retells the battle between Duryodhana and Bhīma, and the subsequent fallout from the incident and from Duryodhana's death. It is clear from the amount of attention he pays to this episode (compared to his treatment of the previous ones) that this is important to him, and it is in this retelling that we find a lot of commentary. This section examines how Madhva defends Bhīma against accusations of wrongdoing in his battle with Duryodhana, specifically when Bhīma breaks Duryodhana's thighs and steps on his head.

The basic points of the episode as told in the Pune Critical Edition have been narrated in the previous chapter. The MBTN retelling provides clues to other source material from which Madhva might have drawn. For example, we are told at the beginning of the episode in the MBTN that Duryodhana and Bhīma

> MBTN 28.69-70a: *darśayantau gadāmārgaṃ citraṃ tau praviceratuḥ/ balabhadro 'py ājagāma tadā tau prativāritum// vāritāv api tenobhau naivaṃ yuddhaṃ pramuñcatām/ tato dadarśa tad yuddhaṃ mānitaḥ kṛṣṇapūrvakaiḥ/ tau śikṣābalasaṃyuktau maṇḍalāni viceratuḥ//*
>
> …proceeded [to fight each other], showing the varieties of mace battle. Balabhadra also returned to stop them [from fighting]. Even though Balarama restrained them, they did not give up battle. Honoured by all of those accompanied by Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma watched the battle. Bhīma and Duryodhana, who were both endowed with strength and training [in mace battle] circled each other.

Unlike the MBTN's faithful treatment of the other episodes of trickery, its retelling of the mace-battle includes two points of departure from the *Mahābhārata*, one minor and one major. The minor departure is Balarāma's desire to stop the battle. The Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* tradition, as it is preserved in the Pune Critical Edition, does not record any attempt by Balarāma to stop the battle. It is found neither in the constituted text nor in the

variant readings or apparatus. In the *Mahābhārata*, Balarāma finds Bhīma and Duryodhana and decides merely to preside over the battle. From where does Madhva find this minor detail? It is found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s abridged account of the battle, where it says that Balarāma goes to the Sarasvatī River (vinaśanaṃ jagāma) "intending to stop" the battle.[143] In the *Bhāgavata*'s version of events, Balarāma tries to convince the two warriors of the futility of battle, to no avail. This is at odds with the *Mahābhārata*'s version, where Balarāma embarks on a tīrthayātra and after completing it "wishes to see" the battle between the two warriors.[144] The following verse in the *Bhāgavata* matches MBTN's retelling, remarking on how Bhīma and Duryodhana "circled each other."[145] Though the departure is minor, it is notable because it reveals that Madhva consulted not only the *Mahābhārata*, but the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as well. In some cases, he incorporated the *Bhāgavata*'s version of the events into his retelling.

The other departure from the *Mahābhārata* is the major one because it exonerates Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma of wrongdoing. In the MBTN, Madhva ignores the stalemate that the battle between Bhīma and Duryodhana initially produces, and focuses on the famous fatal blow that Bhīma dealt his opponent:

> MBTN 28.71-73: *tato bhīmaṃ vañcayituṃ dhārtarāṣṭraḥ śiraḥ kṣitau/ nyadhād ucchritasakthīkas tadā kṛṣṇābhyanujñayā/*
> *pṛṣṭhamūle 'hanad bhīmo bhinnasakthiś ca so 'patat//*
> *pratijñāpālanārthāya nābher nopary adhas tadā/ gadāyuddhasya maryādāṃ yaśaś cāpy abhirakṣitum//*
> *nādhastān madhya evāsau nijaghne taṃ vṛkodaraḥ/ evaṃ pratijñāyugmārthaṃ bhagnaṃ sakthiyugaṃ raṇe//*

[143] BhP 10.79.23: sa bhīma-duryodhanayor gadābhyāṃ yudhyator mṛdhe/
vārayiṣyan vinaśanaṃ jagāma yadu-nandanaḥ//
[144] MBh 9.33.5 śiṣyayor vai gadāyuddhaṃ draṣṭukāmo 'smi mādhava
[145] Cf. BhP 10.79.25: gadā-pāṇī ubhau dṛṣṭvā saṃrabdhau vijayaiṣiṇau/
maṇḍalāni vicitrāṇi carantāv idam abravīt and MBTN 28.70: tau śikṣābalasaṃyuktau maṇḍalāni viceratuḥ

> Then, to trick Bhīma, Duryodhana placed his head down on the earth. His thighs were elevated, and then on Kṛṣṇa's orders, Bhīma hit him at the base of his spine. With his thighs broken, Duryodhana fell [on the ground]. In order to keep his word, [he did] not [hit] above the navel, and [in order to] protect the norms of mace-battle and [his] reputation, he did not hit below. Wolf-Belly [Bhīma] hit him in the middle instead. Thus both thighs were broken in battle in accordance with the promises [he made].

Madhva makes Kṛṣṇa's involvement in Bhīma's decision to cheat clear with the word *kṛṣṇābhyanujñayā*. There is no precedent for Duryodhana's headstand in the Pune Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*—neither in the constituted text nor its variants. The headstand is an important detail because we are told that Duryodhana's thighs are upright (*ucchritasakthīkas*) as a result of this manoeuvre. Thus, he performed a headstand to trick Bhīma into striking his thighs (which would be within striking distance from Bhīma's swinging mace). Madhva does follow the *Mahābhārata* up to a point here. In the epic's version of the events, Duryodhana attempted to deceive Bhīma by performing the *avasthāna* move, which requires jumping up in the air.[146] Nowhere does the epic state that Duryodhana performed a headstand. It could be that Madhva is extrapolating from the word "chalayiṣyan" and its variants found in MBh 9.57.41, which clearly describe Duryodhana's intent to deceive Bhīma by jumping into the air to avoid the blow of his mace, but the avasthāna move is not against the rules of battle. It is unclear whether Madhva is drawing from a variant of the story unknown to us or extrapolating and providing his own explanation. The mace battle between Duryodhana and Bhīma was popularized by courtly retellings of the epic in Kannada a few hundred years before Madhva, so the episode was

[146] MBh 9.57.41 *avasthāne matiṃ kṛtvā putras tava mahāmanāḥ/ iyeṣotpatituṃ rājaṃś chalayiṣyan vṛkodaraṃ//* In fact, some Telegu and Malayalam manuscripts of the MBh use *vañcayiṣyan*, while Madhva uses vañcayitum. C.f. Meiland 2005, p.408. Nīlakaṇṭha describes the avasthāna differently, as standing steady.

popular in his region. There is a duryodhanāsana known to a text on yoga written by the Jain cleric Hemācandra, which involves a headstand.[147] It is not clear that Hemācandra is aware of this telling of the mace-battle, however.[148] Whatever the source of this "headstand," it marks a serious and notable innovation for Madhva, who, as we have seen before, generally follows the *Mahābhārata* in his retelling of the war episodes.

The MBTN further explains that Bhīma does not precisely hit Duryodhana's thighs but instead hits elsewhere. There is no grounding for this claim in the *Mahābhārata* either, where Bhīma anticipated Duryodhana's jump and still hit Duryodhana's thighs (*urūbhyāṃ gadāṃ prāhiṇot*).[149] Madhva wrote in the MBTN that, "in order to keep his word, [he did] not [hit] above the navel, and [in order to] protect the norms of battle he did not hit below. Vṛkodara hit him in the middle instead. Thus both thighs were broken in battle in accordance with the promises [he had made]."[150] He argued that Bhīma hit the root of his back (*pṛṣṭhamule*) presumably due to Duryodhana's headstand. This fulfills his promise of breaking Duryodhana's thighs but does not break the rules of battle. There is no precedent for this in the *Mahābhārata*, where it is clear that Bhīma broke the rules of war by hitting Duryodhana's thighs. Kṛṣṇa, who publicly defends Bhīma's actions in the *Mahābhārata*, does not supply such a technical and legalistic defence. In the MBTN, however, Kṛṣṇa tied these narrative points together to defend Bhīma. When an outraged Balarāma protests Bhīma's foul move, Kṛṣna rushes to his defence, arguing that

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[147] Jaina cleric Hemacandra's Svopajñavṛtti to Yogaśāstra 3.133. I thank James Mallinson for the reference.
[148] Hemācandra refers to this āsana, but in his own brief retelling of the battle between Duryodhana and Bhīma in the Triśaṣtiśalākapuruṣacarita he makes no mention of a headstand. He instead follows the *Mahābhārata* tradition as it is presented in the Critical Edition.
[149] MBh 9.57.43: *sṛtyā vañcayato rājan punar evotpatiṣyataḥ/*
ūrubhyāṃ prāhiṇod rājan gadāṃ vegena pāṇḍavaḥ//
[150] MBTN 28.72-73

> MBTN 28.80-81: *na maṇḍale 'bhisāre vā nāpasāre ca nābhitaḥ/ adho hanyād vañcayantam adho hatvā na duṣyati//*
> *kṛtā pratijñā ca vṛkodareṇa bhetsye tavorū iti yuktipūrvakam/ saṃśrāvayānena tad eṣa dharmato jaghāna duryodhanam agryakarmā//*
>
> One should not strike below the navel when circling, attacking or retreating. But killing someone who is cheating (standing upside down) is not a crime. Bhīma, having a reason, made a vow to break [his] thighs because of what [Duryodhana] did [in the sabhā]. Promising this, Bhīma, whose actions are foremost, lawfully killed Duryodhana.

Kṛṣṇa makes two arguments here, that a) Duryodhana was cheating by performing a headstand and thus the Bhīma's strike was not against the rules and b) Bhīma vowed to break his thighs and was merely keeping his promise. The second defence will be addressed in the next section. The first argument is not made in the *Mahābhārata* because Duryodhana does not stand on his head to deceive Bhīma. Duryodhana's headstand allows Kṛṣṇa to defend Bhīma's actions that were otherwise clearly in violation of the rules of battle. According to the rules of battle, striking someone below the navel when retreating, circling, or attacking in mace battle is illegal. Since Duryodhana cheated by standing on his head, he thus remained culpable for what followed, and was not shielded by the rules governing fighting. Madhva appears to be following a line of reasoning that Kṛṣṇa articulates in the *Mahābhārata*'s Śalyaparvan: a cheater should be killed by means of cheating.[151]

It is difficult for Madhva to defend the actions of Bhīma in what follows. After felling Duryodhana in battle by breaking his thighs, Bhīma stomped on Duryodhana's head—a dishonourable act that is universally condemned in the *Mahābhārata*.[152] It is clear in the

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[151] MBh 9.30.6: *māyāvina imāṃ māyāṃ māyayā jahi bhārata/ māyāvī māyayā vadhyaḥ satyam etad yudhiṣṭhira//*
[152] Even Kṛṣna condemns the move in the epic, asking Yudhiṣṭhira in private why he condoned such a thing.

Mahābhārata's *Śalyaparvan* that Kṛṣṇa is specifically defending Bhīma's vow to break Duryodhana's thighs, but not his decision to crush his head.[153] The MBTN's rendering of this episode is also steeped in Vedic authority, adding another dimension to Madhva's complex and legalistic defence of Bhīma. The Mādhvas hold the Ṛṣabhasūktam, found in the Ṛg Veda (RV 10.166.1), in high regard. As Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton explain in their translation of the hymn, "the extremely aggressive 1st-person speaker of this hymn proclaims his triumph over his rivals and their utter humiliation…he repeatedly emphasizes the spatial (and thus conceptual) position of his defeated enemies, who are literally beneath his feet."[154] The hymn evokes imagery of a triumphant warrior, but Madhva is interested in some of the details:

> Make me bull over my equals, widely victorious over my rivals, smiter of my rivals, wide-ruling cattle-lord of cattle.
>
> I am a smiter of rivals, like Indra, unharmable, invulnerable. Beneath my feet are my rivals: all these here have been stood upon.
>
> Right here I bind you, like the two ends of a bow with a bowstring. O Lord of Speech, drive these down, so that they will speak lower than me.
>
> I have come here on top with Viśvakarman as my foundation. I Take for myself your cognition, your commandment, and your assembled company.
>
> Having taken for myself your yoking up [=war] and your peace, might I become the highest. I have trampled on your head. From beneath my feet, lift up your speech to me, like frogs from the water.[155]

Madhva maintains that, in crushing Duryodhana's head, Bhīma saw the Vedic Ṛṣabhasūkta. The relevant portions of the Ṛṣabhasūkta that Madhva is referring to says that "make me bull over my equals" and "I have trampled on your head." He further emphasizes that the

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[153] MBh 9.59.14 *pratijñāpālaṇaṃ dharmaḥ kṣatriyasyeti vettha ha suyodhanasya gadayā bhaṅktāsmy ūrū/ mahāhave iti pūrvaṃ pratijñātaṃ bhīmena hi sabhātale//*
9.59.15 *maitreyeṇābhiśaptaś ca pūrvam eva maharṣiṇā/*
ūrū bhetsyati te bhīmo gadayeti paraṃtapa/
ato doṣaṃ na paśyāmi mā krudhas tvaṃ pralambahan//
[154] Jamison and Brereton (2014), p.1647
[155] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

conquered enemy lies under the feet of the victor. Madhva cloaks Bhīma's action in this literal reading of a poetic Vedic verse. He presents an example of an authoritative scriptural passage that glorifies a warrior crushing the head of his enemy. In doing so, he defends Bhīma against the criticism that his actions were unbecoming of a warrior. The ṛṣabha hymn provides context for Bhīma's actions and a reminder that crushing an opponent's head can be part of the language of victory, not shame. Using a hymn from an authoritative source like the Veda, gives Madhva the authoritative heft necessary to defend Bhīma. This hermeneutic strategy of using Vedic passages to justify a reading of an episode in the epic is rare in the time of Madhva. In fact, there is little evidence of "vedicizing" the *Mahābhārata* until the time of Nīlakaṇṭha.[156]

In the mace-battle episode, Madhva not only departs significantly from the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* in the Critical Edition, but provides his own innovative explanations to defend Bhīma. As we have seen, there are discrepancies between the MBTN's telling of the episode and the *Mahābhārata*'s rendering. After this innovative theological defence of Bhīma's actions, however, Madhva returns to following the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative more closely. He explains that Balarāma attempts to attack Bhīma out of anger at his misconduct, referring to Kṛṣṇa's defence of Bhīma as a false semblance of dharma (dharmācchalam).[157] By using this exact word specifically, Madhva alludes to Saṃjaya's narration of the same events in the Śalyaparvan.[158]

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[156] C.f. Minkowski (2005) Nīlakaṇṭha's vedicizing is very different from Madhva's method.
[157] MBTN 28.82: *vāsudevavacaḥ śrutvā dharmacchalam iti bruvan/*
rauhiṇeyo jagāmāśu svapurīm eva sānugaḥ//
[158] MBh 9.59.22: *dharmacchalam api śrutvā keśavāt sa viśāṃ pate/*
naiva prītamanā rāmo vacanaṃ prāha saṃsadi//

Coalition of the Willing and the Axis of Evil: Using Tāratamya to Understand the Kaurava-Pāṇḍava Dichotomy

Thus far, we have established that Madhva accepts Kṛṣṇa's jihmopāyas in his retelling of the epic. He signals some resistance to accusations that Bhīma cheated in the mace-battle, and thus defends the Pāṇḍava by reinterpreting the details of the gadāyuddha, and sharpening Kṛṣṇa's defence of Bhīma. In this section, I ask two questions: what makes the Pāṇḍavas justified in their trickery, according to Madhva, and why are the Kauravas deserving of such deaths? Madhva answers these questions and offers one of the earliest interpretations of what makes the Pāṇḍavas "good" and the Kauravas "bad". In the process, we see that his argument in favour of Kṛṣṇa's trickery is based on a paradigm shift: Kṛṣṇa is not subject to the rules of yuddhadharma, and he masterminds the upāyas. Thus the Pāṇḍavas are right because, in their utmost devotion to Kṛṣṇa, they are following his orders. In order to make his case, Madhva makes use of two concepts: the aṃśāvataraṇa and the theory of tāratamya, or gradation of souls. In order to answer the question of what morally demarcates the Pāṇḍavas from the Kauravas. I first turn to the tāratamya-based defense.

The moral demarcation between the Kaurava and Pāṇḍavas is rigid in Madhva's MBTN. The Pāṇḍavas are justified because of their devotion to and confidence in Kṛṣna, but what makes the Kauravas the opposite? To answer this question, it is important to return to Bhīma's decision to step on Duryodhana's head. According to Madhva, Bhīma sent Duryodhana to hell by stepping on his head. He argues in the MBTN that

> MBTN 28.75: *teṣāṃ puṇyāni vidyāś ca samādāyaiva sarvaśaḥ/ tāṃś cakāra tamogantṝns tasya mūrdhni padā 'kraman//*
> Bhīma took all of their merit and knowledge. Stepping on Duryodhana's head, he sent them to hell.

The act of stepping on Duryodhana's head is, according to Dvaita scholar Vyasanakere Prabhañjācārya, a "precursor to sending him to andhatamas."[159] The act that is universally condemned in the *Mahābhārata*—crushing the head of one's opponent—is here given a new theological meaning and necessity. Bhīma is not only keeping his vow of killing anyone who reproaches Kṛṣṇa, but he is also crushing Duryodhana's head so that he could be sent to hell. In both the Śalyaparvan and the MBTN, Duryodhana maintains that he will reach heaven since he died in battle like a good kṣatriya.[160] In the Śalyaparvan, the gods shower flowers on Duryodhana after his final rebuttal to Kṛṣṇa. This is a controversial plot point in the *Mahābhārata* because it troubles the Pāṇḍavas, who must have thought that they were in the right. The MBTN does not ignore the puṣpavṛṣṭi, but provides its own explanation.

> MBTN 28.101-103: *ity uktavaty eva nṛpe sureśaiḥ prasūnavṛṣṭir vihitā papāta/*
> *tām eva buddhiṃ dhṛtarāṣṭrasūnoḥ kṛtvā dṛḍhāṃ pātayituṃ tamondhe//*
> *sambhāvayata ātmānaṃ vāsudevaṃ vinindataḥ/ tatparāṃś ca kathaṃ na syāt tamo'nte ca viśeṣataḥ//*
> *yadaikaikamalaṃ tatra duḥkhādhikyaṃ samuccayāt/ iti tat kārayitveśa āha moghaṃ tavākhilam//*
>
> When the King said that, a shower of flowers rained down, ordained by the gods. This was done to make the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's mind firm to send him to hell. The one who praises himself and reproaches Kṛṣṇa and his followers, how could there not be darkness [for him] at the end? Since each and every [fault] is sufficient for [suffering], then, due to an accumulation [of faults], there is an abundance of suffering there [in darkness]. The Lord, having caused that, told Duryodhana "all your [efforts] are frustrated."

It is easy to understand why Madhva pauses the narrative to offer comment and explanation for the puṣpavṛṣṭi. The showering of flowers is often used in the epic as a

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[159] Prabhañjācarya, p.134

[160] MBTN 28.98-100. Madhva appears to be closely reading and reproducing the speech of Duryodhana in the Śalyaparvan 9.60.47.
MBTN: svantottamo nāma ka eva mattaḥ cf. MBh 9.60.47: ko nu svantataro mayā

literary device for the gods to show their support for someone's speech or actions. Do the gods support Duryodhana's deathbed predictions that he will go to heaven and the Pāṇḍavas will live in misery? Madhva's view is that Duryodhana will instead be going to hell, and that the gods merely did this to trick Duryodhana (or "make his mind firm") in order to ensure that he goes to hell, where he is fit to reside (tamoyogya). Madhva retains the hubris of Duryodhana's voice but strips his rebuke of any value as a powerful critique of the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa. Instead, Madhva envisions the rebuke as a mere tool that seals Duryodhana's fate.

Here we have, at another critical juncture of the text, a moment where Madhva's theology intersects with the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative. In this case, it is Madhva's doctrine of gradation, or tāratamya. One of Madhva's most unique and memorable contributions to Vedanta is his hierarchy of embodied beings, which is tied closely to his reading of the *Mahābhārata* and its characters. Valerie Stoker (2016) refers to this as one of the "most controversial doctrines in Dvaita philosophy."[161] There are three basic types of souls in the world, according to Madhva:

> MBTN 30.50-51: *ye tasyānādisadbhaktā muktiyogyā hi te smṛtāḥ/ anādidveṣiṇo ye 'smins tamoyogyāḥ supāpinaḥ//*
> *miśrā madhyā iti jñeyāḥ saṃsāraparivartinaḥ/ evaṃ jīvās tridhā proktā bhavanty ete na cānyathā//*
>
> Those eternally true devotees of Him are thought of as capable of liberation [muktiyogyā]. Those great sinners who have always hated him are destined for hell (tamoyogyā). Those who are a mixture of both remain [forever] in saṃsāra are known as the "middling". In this way the jīvas are declared to be threefold, not otherwise.

[161] Stoker (2016), p. 274

Madhva expands upon this basic enumeration of the hierarchy in his *Tattvasaṃkhyāna* ("Enumeration of Reality"). Sentient beings are either situated in grief or unaffected by it (the goddess Śrī is the only being who is untouched by grief). Of those who are spṛṣṭaduḥkha (the "sorrow-touched") there are two subsets: those situated in grief (duḥkhasaṃsthāḥ) and those who are liberated (vimuktāḥ).[162] To further complicate this already hierarchical system, there are two types of people who are duḥkhasaṃsthā: those eligible for liberation (muktiyogyāḥ, mentioned earlier in the MBTN reference) and those ineligible for liberation (muktyayogyāḥ). Souls who are ineligible for liberation are either destined for hell (andhatamas) or eternal rebirth.[163]

Where does Duryodhana fall in this deterministic system of tāratamya? In the beginning of the MBTN, Madhva warns his audience that asuras are fit for hell (tamogāḥ)[164] and that the list of asuras ends with the demon Kali (kaliparyantāḥ), who is eternally miserable.[165] He is eternally miserable because as a daitya, it is in his nature to hate Kṛṣṇa. According to the MBTN, the daityas are thrown into hell due to their hatred of God.[166] By insulting Kṛṣṇa, Madhva argues that Duryodhana is acting in a way that is consistent with his nature as a tamoyogya.

Madhva views the epic figures—from the Kauravas to the Pāṇḍavas—through a unique lens of tāratamya. If each jīva is classified according to their nature, their fate is

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[162] TS 4: *spṛṣṭhaduḥkhā vimuktāś ca duḥkhasaṃsthā iti dvidhā/ duḥkhasaṃsthāḥ muktiyogyā ayogyā iti ca dvidhā//* TS 9*: duḥkhasaṃsthā muktiyogyā ayogyā iti ca dvidhā/*

[163] Madhva hardly presented a uniform system of gradation in all of his texts. The Tattvasaṃkhyana seems to offer a more refined—and more complex—hierarchy of souls, which is not presented the same way in the MBTN.

[164] MBTN 1.18: *evaṃ narottamaparās tu vimuktiyogyā anye ca saṃsṛtiparā asurās tamogāḥ/*
evaṃ sadaiva niyamaḥ kvacid anyathā na yāvan na pūrtir uta saṃsṛtigāḥ samastāḥ//

[165] MBTN 1.132: *asurāḥ kaliparyantā evaṃ duḥkhottarottarāḥ/*
kalir duḥkhādhikas teṣu te 'py evaṃ brahmavad gaṇāḥ//

[166] MBTN 1.109: *anādidveṣiṇo daityā viṣṇau dveṣo vivardhitaḥ/*
tamasy andhe pātayati daityān ante viniścayāt//

predetermined, as are their actions. As David Buchta explains, in Madhva's system of tāratamya, "[…]moral responsibility, virtue and vice, are not questions of choice but of inherent identity. People simply are good or bad."[167] Of course, those identified as mixed (miśrāḥ) have a mix of good and bad qualities, but mixture is not applicable to the primary epic figures we encounter in the MBTN. As we have seen earlier, Madhva explicitly identifies Duryodhana with the demon Kali, and elevates him to the status of an arch nemesis. This, coupled with reading his theological doctrine of tāratamya into the narrative, ensures that Duryodhana is simply a foil to Kṛṣṇa. His nature renders him incapable of liberation, and his actions follow accordingly. The nuances to Duryodhana's character that are found in the *Mahābhārata* (and other works) is absent here. This episode reveals how Madhva morally distinguishes the "axis of evil", the Kauravas led by Duryodhana, from the "coalition of the willing"—the Pāṇḍavas led by Kṛṣṇa.

Trust in Kṛṣṇa: The Bhakti-Centric Moral Paradigm of the MBTN

The aṃśāvatarana metamyth plays an important role in Madhva's reading of the *Mahābhārata*. The story, retold many times in the epic, explains that the gods and various divine beings descended upon the earth to defeat the demonic beings and thus to rid the earth of its burden. The metamyth is retold in chapters 11 and 12 of the MBTN. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the story serves as one of many explanations for the war. The *Mahābhārata* uses it as a theodicy to justify Kṛṣṇa's actions. Madhva establishes the divine identities of each of the major players in the *Mahābhārata* and situates them as reincarnations of characters in the Rāmāyana. It is fitting, then, that the MBTN includes a

[167] Buchta 2014, p.269

retelling of the Rāmāyana because it reads the epics as interrelated. The divine identities of the epic characters are what connect the two epics, according to Madhva. For example, Arjuna and Vālin are connected because they are both considered aṃśas of Indra.[168] Madhva offers an explanation for why their roles are not identical in the epics:

> MBTN 2.45: *rāmakāryaṃ tu yaiḥ samyak svayogyaṃ na kṛtaṃ purā /taiḥ pūritam tat kṛṣṇāya bībhatsvādyaiḥ samantataḥ//*
> Those, like Arjuna and others, who did not complete the work they were capable of for Rāma before [viz. in the Rāmāyaṇa], finished the work for Kṛṣṇa."

Whereas Vālin had a lesser role to play in completing the work of Rāma, Indra's other manifestation, Arjuna, played a major role in helping Kṛṣṇa. Madhva thus uses the divine identities (aṃśas) of the epic figures to create a shared moral universe, and to judge them in accordance with how much they helped Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

Madhva is not only concerned with the divine identities of the heroes, but with the demonic identities of the villains. In this case, the demon Kali looms large over his reading of the epic. In the *Mahābhārata*, Kali descends on earth as Duryodhana. In post-*Mahābhārata* texts, there is an emphasis on the rivalry between Kṛṣṇa and Kaṃsa, and Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsaṃdha or Śiṣupāla, but it is clear that in the MBTN, Kali—as his incarnation Duryodhana—is the arch nemesis of the god. Madhva mentions, for example, that in contrast to teachers and ordinary humans who have varying degrees of good and bad features (lakṣaṇas) the demon Kali has only bad features (durlakṣaṇa).[169] In Madhva's retelling of the aṃśāvataraṇa in Chapter 12 of the MBTN, he explains that the evil daityas overheard the gods planning to descend on the earth. Worried about their fate, the daityas

[168] In 2.33, however, Madhva distinguishes between how much each of these figures are possessed of (āveśin) Hari. While Vāli possesses some of Hari, Arjuna possesses much more.
[169] MBTN 1.126

prayed to Śiva for an adversary to the gods (devakaṇṭaka) who could not be killed. By Śiva's wish, Kali was born as Duryodhana for this very purpose.[170] Madhva's rendering of this episode is peculiar. He holds Śiva responsible for the birth of Duryodhana. This elevates Kali above all other demons who are born in the *Mahābhārata*. This sectarian colouring of the aṃśāvataraṇa is unique, even though the epic does make a connection between Jarāsaṃdha and Śiva. Nevertheless, the status of Duryodhana as the primary antagonist to the *Mahābhārata*'s Kṛṣṇa clear in the MBTN.

The work of Rāma (rāmakāryam) and Kṛṣṇa that the MBTN refers to is the lessening of the earth's burden, or ridding the earth of evil people. Madhva adds that Kṛṣṇa is sent forth specifically to kill evil people (duṣṭanidhane).[171] In the incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, their work often requires supporting strength. Bhīma is praised for his role as a primary support of Kṛṣṇa in lessening the earth's burden:

> MBTN 2.13: *bhūbhārahariṇo viṣṇoḥ pradhānāṇgaṃ hi*
> *mārutiḥ/māgadhādivadhād eva duryodhanavadhād api//*
> Māruti is the primary support of Viṣṇu who lessens the Earth's burden through the slaying of Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana.

Bhīma is responsible for the deaths of both Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana. Thus he has helped Kṛṣna immensely in relieving the Earth of her burden. It is through the bhārāvataraṇa that Bhīma's (and by extension, Vāyu's) importance is measured in the MBTN.

After Balarāma's departure, Kṛṣṇa is obliged to defend Bhīma's actions to a skeptical Yudhiṣṭhira. It is here that Madhva offers a multi-layered defence not only of Bhīma's misconduct, but of the strategies that Kṛṣṇa masterminds as well. In the MBTN, after his

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[170] MBTN 12.39-12.41
[171] 2.22-23.

brother has left, Kṛṣṇa advises the Pāṇḍavas that what Bhīma did (and what in part he had advised) was not in accordance with dharma, but that this is how sinners are to be killed. Kṛṣṇa echoes arguments made in the *Mahābhārata*, arguing that in the past the gods committed similar treacheries in killing the demons, and thus that there is no problem with what Bhīma did to Duryodhana:

> MBTN 28.83-89: *tasmin gate vāsudevaṃ samapṛcchad yudhiṣṭhiraḥ/ dharmo 'yam athavādharma iti taṃ prāha keśavaḥ*
> *na sākṣād dharmato vadhyā ye tu pāpatamā narāḥ/ devair hi vañcayitvaiva hatāḥ pūrvaṃ surārayaḥ/*
> *ato 'yam apy adharmeṇa hato nātrāsti dūṣaṇam //*
> *bhīṣmadroṇau ca karṇaś ca yadaivopādhinā hatāḥ/ ko nu duryodhane pāpe hate doṣaḥ kathañcana//*
> *pratijñāpālanāyāpi bibhedorū vṛkodaraḥ/ dharmataś ca pratijñeyaṃ kṛtā tenānurūpataḥ//*
> *lokato 'pi na dharmasya hānir atra kathañcana/ ye bhīmasyāprabhāvajñā āpaddharmaṃ ca manvate//*
> *avadhyatve śivavarād gadāśikṣābalād api/jarāsandhopamo yasmād dhārtarāṣṭraḥ suviśrutaḥ//*
> *tasmāt saddharma evāyaṃ bhīmacīrṇa iti bruvan/ api saṃśayinaṃ cakre dharmarājaṃ jagatpatiḥ//*
>
> When [Balarāma] left, Yudhiṣṭhira asked Kṛṣṇa whether this was dharma or adharma. Keśava replied: "The most sinful men should not be straightforwardly killed according to Dharma. The enemies of the gods have been slain before by the gods by cheating. Thus, even though he was slain unrighteously, it is not a sin. When Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa were slain by stratagem, what fault, pray tell, is there when the sinful Duryodhana is killed [in the same way]. He broke his thighs to keep a promise. He rightly made this promise (and broke his thighs) in accordance with that. Even according to custom, this is in no way an abandonment of dharma. Those who aren't aware of Bhīma's prowess consider this to be the dharma of special circumstances. Duryodhana was well known as the equal of Jarāsaṃdha because of his strengths and training in mace-fighting, he being un-slayable due to Śiva's wish-granting,[172] therefore, this conduct of Bhīma is the true dharma." Saying this, the Lord of the Earth made Yudhiṣṭhira doubtful.

[172] He was also killed through trickery.

The arguments about the conduct of the gods closely match the argument Kṛṣṇa makes to placate the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*'s Śalyaparvan after the gods shower flowers onto Duryodhana.[173] Madhva further sharpens this argument by placing these words in the mind of Kṛṣṇa:

> MBTN 28.90: *bhūbhārakṣatijo dharmo macchuśrūṣātmakas tu yaḥ/ bhīmasyaiva bhavet samyag iti buddhyā paraḥ prabhuḥ//*
> That dharma of Bhīma which arose for the removal of the earth's burden, which takes the form of serving me should properly be Bhīma's, the Supreme Lord thought."

He reminds the reader that the Pāṇḍavas, Kauravas and related epic figures were born for the removal of the earth's burden (bhūbhārakṣatija). Madhva uses it to reframe the argument about whether Kṛṣṇa's strategies were in accordance with dharma. The consequentialist line of reasoning that Madhva presents here relies not only on the conduct of the gods, but on the divine plan as well. These strategies are excusable not only because the gods used them in vanquishing the demons, but because relieving the earth of her burden—viz. killing Duryodhana and the corrupt kṣatriyas—is the highest dharma. Thus the actions that Balarāma had argued were improper were allowable because sinners should be punished in this way. This is because Madhva subsumes it under a more important dharma of killing the evil people. Madhva adopts the type of moral reasoning found in the *Mahābhārata* to forcefully defend Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa, whereby the burden of the earth is used as an ethical justification for the events in the war, and for his tactics.

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[173] MBh 9.60.61-62c mithyāvadhyās tathopāyair bahavaḥ śatravo 'dhikāḥ/
pūrvair anugato mārgo devair asuraghātibhiḥ/
sadbhiś cānugataḥ panthāḥ sa sarvair anugamyate/

Kṛṣṇa's consequentialist defence of the Pāṇḍavas in the MBTN explains why the Pāṇḍavas are ultimately justified in breaking any rules of yuddhadharma, and also why Kṛṣṇa is above those rules. In the final verbal joust between Kṛṣṇa and Duryodhana, the MTBN does not reproduce Duryodhana's extensive critique of Kṛṣṇa that we find in the *Mahābhārata*. Instead Madhva simply says that:

> MBTN 28.93: *punaḥ punar dharmata eva bhīmo jaghāna rājānam iti bruvantam/ jagāda kṛṣṇaṃ sphuritādharoṣṭhaḥ krodhāt supāpo dhṛtarāṣṭrasūnuḥ/ tvayaiva pāpe nihitā hi pārthāḥ pāpādhikas tvaṃ hi sadaika eva//*
>
> Duryodhana, ever sinful, with his lips trembling out of anger, shouted at Kṛṣṇa—who was saying over and over again that Bhīma felled him in accordance with Dharma, "these Pāṇḍavas committed sin only because of you. You alone are more sinful!"

When it comes to defending the misconduct of the Pāṇḍavas throughout the war, however, the MBTN adopts a different strategy. The defence that is given the most weight in Madhva's text is bhakti-centric. In reply to Duryodhana, Kṛṣṇa defends the Pāṇḍavas in no uncertain terms:

> MBTN 28.94-96: *ity ūcivāṃsaṃ prajagāda kṛṣṇo na tvatsamaḥ pāpatamaḥ kadācit/ bhīṣmādihatyā 'pi tavaiva pāpaṃ yad anvayus tvām atipāpaniścayam/ pāpaṃ ca pāpānugataṃ ca hatvā kathaṃ canāpy asti na caiva pāpam //*
> *na pāṇḍaveṣv asti tato hi kiñcit pāpaṃ prayatnāc ca nisargato 'pi/ guṇādhikās te madupāśrayāc ca ko nāma teṣv aṇvāpi pāpam āha//*
> *nisargataḥ pāpatamas tvam anyān dharmasthitān pāpapathe nidhāya/svayaṃ ca pāpe niratāḥ sadaiva pāpāt supāpāṃ gatim eva yāsi//*
>
> There has never been anybody more vile than you. The slaying of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, etc is your sin in that they followed you who resolved to do great sins. Killing those who are wicked and those who follow the wicked is not wicked. There is no sin on the Pāṇḍavas from their efforts in the war or according to their nature. They rely on me; thus they are more virtuous. Who could identify a tiny (aṇu) sin in them? You are the foremost of sinners by nature, having lead those righteous men on the path of sin. You yourself always engaged in evil acts. Because of [your] sins, you shall go to a wicked place.

According to Kṛṣṇa, there is no sin at all (*na hi kiñcit pāpam*) attached to the Pāṇḍavas for their actions because they are Kṛṣṇa's followers. Of course, even the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative shows that they accrue some sin for their actions in the war—Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna are both punished (temporarily) for their roles in the death of Droṇa and Bhīṣma, respectively. David Gitomer argues that this Pāṇḍava association with Kṛṣṇa is a "trans-ethical" one, where Kṛṣṇa's followers are virtuous and his enemies are sinners. It is trans-ethical because the Pāṇḍavas transcend the kṣatriya standards of morality due to their devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In other words, the Pāṇḍavas and Bhīma are right because they follow Kṛṣṇa. Recent work on Indian ethics has proposed that bhakti yoga itself is a type of moral philosophy, whereby devotion to a regulative ideal, in this case Kṛṣṇa, is what determines the right outcome.[174] The regulative ideal can either be a person or a concept. As Shyam Ranganathan argues in relation to the Gītā, "Bhakti yoga, in turn, is Bhakti ethics: endorsing the right and the ethical as defined by devotion to a regulative ideal that results in one's subsumption by the regulative ideal (Gītā 9.27-33). How this begins, the Gītā prescribes, is by devotion to the ideal regardless of the moral valence of one's actions (Gītā 9.30)."[175] A similar concept is found in the first chapter of the MBTN. Madhva says:

> MBTN 1.107: *dharmo bhavaty adharmo 'pi kṛto bhaktais tavācyuta/ pāpaṃ bhavati dharmo 'pi yo na bhaktaiḥ kṛto hare//*
>
> O Acyuta! It is said that [an act of] adharma, performed by devotees of yours, becomes dharma, and dharma performed by those who are not devoted, Oh Hari, becomes sin.

Thus, even if the acts of the Pāṇḍavas are not prima facie dharmic, they are right because they are devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Those who follow the rules of war, like Duryodhana, are still

[174] Ranganathan (2016) p.26-27
[175] Ibid p.261

wrong because they are not devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Madhva is one of the earliest readers of the *Mahābhārata* to use a bhakti-centric moral philosophy to defend the Pāṇḍavas against accusations of wrongdoing during the war.

There are two sides to this: one is free from sin regardless of behaviour because one is devoted to Kṛṣṇa; on the other hand, one can perform a righteous act and still be a sinner because of a lack of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The notion that Duryodhana's enmity towards Kṛṣṇa is the source of his villainy is entertained in the *Mahābhārata*, but in the epic there is more emphasis on Duryodhana's mistreatment of Draupadi and her husbands. As we have seen in the section on the metamyth, Madhva elevates Kṛṣṇa's rivalry with Duryodhana. This, coupled with Madhva's theory of predestination, makes it clear why Duryodhana is the villain. The MBTN explicitly refuses to eulogize Duryodhana for dying the death of a kṣatriya, according to his dharma. For:

> MBTN 1.106: *niḥśeṣadharmakartā 'py abhaktas te narake hare/ sadā tiṣṭhati bhaktaś ced brahmahā'pi vimucyate//*
>
> Even if one performs his complete [prescribed] dharma, if he is not a devotee of yours, O Hari, he [shall] always remain in hell. If he is always devoted, then even if he is a killer of a Brāhmaṇa, he is liberated.

The MBTN gives Duryodhana little credit for performing his kṣatriyadharma. Instead, his harsh words toward Kṛṣṇa send him to hell, and his head is crushed by Bhīma as a punishment for insulting Kṛṣṇa. In Madhva's system, asuras have fixed qualities and destinies, and Duryodhana's status as a hater of Kṛṣṇa puts him ethically in contradistinction to the Pāṇḍavas. Madhva uses a consequentialist line of defence coupled with a bhakti-centric moral philosophy to justify the perceived misdeeds of Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas.

Is Kṛṣṇa Tāmasik? Appaya Dīkṣita and Reading Divinity in South Indian Epic Exegesis

Implicit in Madhva's argument in defence of the Pāṇḍavas is the notion that Kṛṣṇa is beyond reproach and criticism. The god sets the moral standard for the Pāṇḍavas to follow, and he sets the plans for them to execute. Trickery, though somewhat controversial for some characters like Bhīma, is not a problem of Kṛṣṇa's divinity for Madhva that needs correcting. Still, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Kṛṣṇa's trickery is often used as a point of criticism in explicitly non-Vaiṣṇava texts like the Devībhāgavata Purāṇa. It is in these texts that we find a close scrutiny of Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the epic, and an understanding of what challenge, if any, it presents for his divinity. In this section, I look at how Kṛṣṇa's role and conduct in the *Mahābhārata* is scrutinized and theorized in another polemical work, the Śaiva *Brahmatarkastava* ["Praise of Reasoning (for Śiva as) Brahman"] and its auto commentary by the polymath Appaya Dīkṣita. Writing in South India in the 16th century, Appaya defends Śiva as the Supreme Being in this stotra, and often pivots to Viṣṇu's vulnerabilities, and the justifications for them. Through a study of Appaya's criticism and eventual defense of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, I argue that these exegetes still scrutinize the actions of the gods, and present them as problems to the extent that they see those faults as signs of human vulnerabilities. It is the language of "līlā," or divine sport encoded in Vaiṣṇava vernacular, that is important to reconciling the humanity and divinity of the gods.

Appaya opens his autocommentary on verse 21 of the *Brahmatarkastava* with an honest assessment of Śiva: arguing that the god can sometimes be perceived as cruel. As Appaya puts it, is Śiva overcome with tamas that leads to confusion, grief, and cruelty, like a common person (*prākṛtajanavad tadabhibhūtatvam*)? He explains in his autocommentary

that Śiva is occasionally accused of cruelty (krauryam), like when he cut off the fifth head of Brahma, as a result of his tamas (darkness). Tamas is one of the three guṇas (qualities), the other two being sattva (goodness) and rajas (passion). In traditional Vaiṣṇava lore, found especially in the *Nāradīya Purāṇa,* Mahāviṣṇu divides himself into three forms, each characterized by a particular *guṇa*.[176] Brahma, who performs the primordial act of creation, is characterized by rajas; Śiva, who performs the act of destruction, is characterized by tamas; and Viṣṇu is characterized by sattva. If Śiva is overcome by tamas, his actions would be fueled by that darkness. He would act out of "sleepiness" or nidrā, which results in misconduct. Is Śiva overcome by darkness? Verse 21 of the *Brahmatarkastava* says:

> *Brahmatarkastava* vs. 21: *nidrālutā na tava śaṃkara śakyaśaṅkā krauryaṃ kimapy anucite viṣaye na dṛṣṭam/ nānyo'pi kaścana guṇas tamaso vikāraḥ śaṇkyā kathaṃ tava budhais tamasābhibhūtiḥ//*
>
> O Śaṃkara! It is impossible to suppose that you are sleepy. Your cruelty is not seen [to happen] with regard to any improper object. There is also no other transformation of tamas [in you]. How then, can sages imagine that you are overcome with tamas?

In his auto commentary on this verse, Appaya maintains that Śiva is not cruel in any improper context (anucitaviṣaya). It is here that Appaya scrutinizes Śiva's conduct and defends him. In response to this argument, Appaya offers a justification for select acts of Śiva that seem cruel:

> Autocommentary on *Brahmatarkastava* vs. 21*: nigrahas tāvad dvividhaḥ—anugrahoddeśyakas tadanuddeśyakaś ca. ādyo' py trividhaḥ anugrāhyānugrahoddeśyakas taditarānugrahoddeśyaka ubhayānugrahoddeśyakaś ca. tatrādyaḥ sadācārānuvartanādyarthaḥ putraśiṣyādinigrahaḥ. sa tu guṇa eva. dvitīyo bahvitarānugrahoddeśyakaś cen na doṣaḥ, "ekasmin yatra nidhanam prāpite duṣṭacāriṇi. bahūnām bhavati kṣemaṃ tatra puṇyaprado vadhaḥ" iti vacanāt. sa yathā mṛgayayā vyāghrādivadhaḥ. coravadha ubhayānugrahārthaḥ, "rājabhir*

[176] Nāradīya Purāṇa 1.3.3-4

> *dhṛṭadaṇḍās tu kṛtvā pāpāni mānavāḥ/ nirmalāḥ svargam āyānti santaḥ sukṛtino yathā" iti vacanāt.*
>
> First of all, there are two types of punishment thus far (nigrahas tāvad dvividhaḥ)--(the first punishment) is aimed at the favour of those who ought to be favoured; and [the second] does not. (As for first,) it is threefold: it is aimed at favouring those who should be favoured; [the second] is aimed at favouring others [who you don't intend to favour]; and [the third] is aimed at favouring both. Among these three, the first one is [punishment] for the purpose of making someone follow good conduct, like the punishment of a son or pupil. This [type of punishment] is a virtue. If the second [form] is aimed at favouring many [people other than the punished], then it is not a fault. Because it is said that "when a bad person is put an end to, the killing is meritorious because there is welfare for many [others.]" It is like the killing of tigers etc. through hunting. The killing of a thief has as its purpose both punishing and rewarding [ubhayānugrahārtha] since it is said "just as the virtuous who do good works go to heaven, people who have sinned but are punished by kings are made pure."

It is not a doṣa, or a reflection of nidrā, to burn the fifth head of Brahmā or disrupt a sacrifice, as Śiva did. Appaya offers his own type of theodicy here, arguing that when one frames the action of god as a punishment, then it can be understood as a virtue. If punishing or killing someone helps many other people, it is not a defect. If Śiva occasionally punishes someone, it is not out of hatred. Instead, Appaya likens it to a father punishing a son.

This defense of Śiva's conduct is not enough, however. Predictably, Appaya pivots to Viṣṇu. "If you suppose that Śiva is overcome by darkness on the basis of seeing his deeds, then the same can be said of Viṣṇu," he writes.[177] There are numerous instances where the avatāras are overcome with delusion and grief (śokamohādivikalpam) which influence their actions—like the killings of Ṭāṭaka and Vālin. Appaya saves his most elaborate example of Viṣṇu's inappropriate cruelty for last—Kṛṣṇa's trickery in the *Mahābhārata*. Appaya cites Duryodhana's reproach of the god in the Śalyaparvan to make his case.

> Autocommentary on *Brahmatarkastava* vs. 21*: bhāratayuddhe śrīkṛṣṇasya tattadvadhopāyāś chadmavyāpārarūpāḥ śalyaparvaṇi duryodhanena parigaṇitāḥ. tatra hi bhagavantaṃ vāsudevaṃ praty evātikruddhasya duryodhanasyemāni*

[177] *kāryadarśanena tadabhibhūtatvam kalpyate cet, tarhi viṣṇor eva kalpyeta.*

> *vacanāni… bhīmasenasyāpy apahāse kṛte, divi devatābhiḥ kṛtāṃ duryodhanasya praśaṃsāṃ tasyopari puṣpavṛṣṭyādikaṃ ca varṇayitvā tato vāsudevādīnām anucitaśāṭhyakaraṇimittavrīḍācintādikam apy uktam.*
>
> In the Bhārata War, Kṛṣṇa's various methods of killing the Kauravas, which took the shape of deceitful acts, were enumerated in the Śalyaparvan by Duryodhana. These are the words of the enraged Duryodhana directed at Lord Vāsudeva….Even when [Duryodhana] ridicules Bhīma, the [*Mahābhārata*] describes the shower of flowers on Duryodhana, and the praise of him by the gods, then [it] describes the [reaction] of Vāsudeva, etc, beginning with thoughts of shame whose cause was acting in a way that was deceitful and improper [in war].

The *Brahmatarkastava* cites the *Mahābhārata* at length, including Duryodhana's reproach and also the puṣpavṛṣṭi. He points to this episode to show that Kṛṣṇa could be subject to the same *tamas*. If one can judge Śiva based on his deeds, the same can be done to Kṛṣṇa. This is not the only episode that Appaya pulls from the *Mahābhārata* to show how Kṛṣṇa can be accused of being tāmasic. He also refers to Uttaṅka's brief reproach of Kṛṣṇa in the Āśvamedhikaparva.

> Autocommentary on *Brahmatarkastava* vs. 21*: āśvamedhike 'pi udaṅko munir āyayau iti prastutya tasya śrīkṛṣṇaṃ prati śaṭhyena duryodhanādayo nihatā iti kopaḥ kṛta iti varṇitam 'āyāntam etya govindaṃ samanyur munir abravīt. sarvāṃṣ tvaṃ dhārtarāṣṭrādīñ śāṭhyenānāśayo nṛpān// ataḥ śapeyaṃ tvāṃ kṛṣṇety uktas taṃ harir āha saḥ.*
>
> Even in the Āśvamedhika[parva], having begun with [the verse] "the Sage Udaṇka came", describes the anger of [the sage] towards Kṛṣṇa when [he hears that] Duryodhana etc were slain through deceit. "The Muni was angry with Govinda and said this, filled with anger. "You killed all those Dhārṭarāṣtras and kings deceitfully. Thus, O Kṛṣṇa, I should curse you!" When he said this, Kṛṣṇa replied to him.

This exact passage is not extant in any existing version of the *Mahābhārata*. In chapter 1, the existing Uttaṅka story is explained. Nonetheless, Appayas retelling of the story generally agrees with the *Mahābhārata*'s. Appaya uses these two episodes, where Kṛṣṇa is reproached by Uttaṅka and Duryodhana, to build his hypothetical case that Kṛṣṇa is overcome by darkness.

Although the *Brahmatarkastava* frequently resorts to passages that diminish or reproach Kṛṣṇa, it is only to show how he can be subject to the same criticisms that Śiva is subjected to. In some cases, Appaya shows how Purānic and epic sources make a stronger case for Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa's faults than Śiva's. After presenting this argument based on Kṛṣṇa's deeds in the *Mahābhārata*, Appaya offers his own defense of the god:

> Autocommentary on *Brahmatarkastava* vs. 21: *evaṃ ca nārāyaṇe tamaḥkāryatayā śaṅkyamānaṃ nidrādikam itthaṃ pariharaṇīyam — tasya nidrā nayane nimīlya svātmatattvānucintarūpā, śokamohādir abhinayamātram, anucitaviṣayaṃ krauryaṃ sarvaṃ tattadvadhyaduṣkarmaviśeṣāyattam iti. itthaṃ eva tatra tatra purāneṣu rāmāyaṇabhāratayoś ca parihāraḥ kṛto dṛśyate tad evam yathā nārāyaṇasya tamobhibhūtvaśaṅkā yatnataḥ pariharaṇīyāsīn naivam śive kiyaty api śaṅkā prasaraṃ labhate. tadetat sarvam vyatirekam udrayānena ślokena darśitam.*
>
> Thus, the sleep and other [faults] attributed to Nārāyaṇa as being by-products of [his] tamas are to be removed (i.e. rejected) as follows (itthaṃ): his nidrā, having shut his eyes, reflects on the truth of his own self. Grief, delusion etc are only acting on his part. All his cruelty, toward an improper subject [actually] depends on the particular wrongdoing of this on that [criminal] worthy of execution. This is the type of justification seen in the Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* and in the Purāṇas. Just as supposing that Nārāyaṇa is ruled by darkness was refuted, there was not in the same way even a bit of doubt that found scope in the case of Śiva. All this was shown in the śḷoka.

Appaya raises the possibility of interpreting Kṛṣṇa's actions as tāmasic, or as a reflection of his nidrā, but eventually ends by offering his own defense of the god. His defense of Kṛṣṇa closely resembles Madhva's defense of Kṛṣṇa against accusations of having fault. Appaya, like Madhva, emphasizes that these human acts of grief, delusion are just play. Even if Kṛṣṇa seems to act improperly, it is to kill demons.

The defence of Kṛṣṇa's divinity proposed by both Appaya (and, as we will see in later chapters, by Madhva) rests in the līlā of Viṣṇu, since the polymath insists that much of what Viṣṇu displays in his avatāras is a ploy designed to fool asuras and instruct humans. Appaya's arguments in the *Brahmatarkastava* are examples of how gods like Śiva and Kṛṣṇa undergo scrutiny and defense in the tradition. Kṛṣṇa's trickery or Śiva's cruelty leave open

the possibility for theodicies by theologians like Appaya primarily because he does not see the gods as subject to human limitations. The theological question of whether these avatāras are both fully human and divine, or partially human, or completely divine in a human form, emerged in polemical conversations and texts like the *Brahmatarkastava*.

The MBTN is one of earliest attempts to comment on the epic as a whole, and to pay significant attention to the narrative and Kṛṣṇa's role within it. In undertaking such a project, Madhva paid close attention to the moral questions that both the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Mahābhārata* are known to raise. In particular, Madhva is acutely aware of criticisms of Kṛṣṇa and of the Pāṇḍavas and uses this work to respond and offer a moral paradigm that is Kṛṣṇa-centric. Trickery, in this process, is merely instrumental to the larger goal of relieving the earth's burden.

The *Mahābhārata* has attracted sectarian attention throughout its history. As an argument, the MBTN asserts that the *Mahābhārata* is at its highest level a work devoted to conveying the glories of Viṣṇu. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this sets the stage for competing sectarian appropriation of the *Mahābhārata*—a debate that reaches its heights at the time of Appaya Dīkṣita and Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara in the early modern period. Part of Appaya Dīkṣita's polemical Śaiva works includes an assessment of Kṛṣṇa's use of trickery in the *Mahābhārata*.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* viewed the *Mahābhārata* as a less authoritative and occasionally inferior text. In contrast, Madhva accorded the *Mahābhārata* a great deal of regard and respect. He viewed it and a select few other texts as equal to the Vedas in authority. If the highest aim of scripture is to reveal the supreme sovereignty of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, as Madhva contends, then the *Mahābhārata* plays

an important role alongside the Vedas and other texts. The MBTN is his argument for reading the Great Bhārata not just as a text of instruction for those who have no access to the Vedas, but as an authoritative text in its own right. More importantly, he is the first thinker to use passages from the Vedas, particularly the Ṛṣabhasūkta of the Ṛgveda, to make sense of the *Mahābhārata* and its characters. The MBTN thus holds an important position in the scale of post-*Mahābhārata* texts that receive and interpret the meaning of the epic.

Throughout this chapter we have seen how Madhva's theology on the perfection of God collides with the narratives of the epics that provide ample evidence of wrongdoing on the part of Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Rāma. Madhva is one of the earliest recorded readers of the *Mahābhārata* to be concerned with the discrepancy between the narrative and Kṛṣṇa's exalted status, a discrepancy which produces moral questions. The maverick theologian rose to the occasion, creatively defending Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma's actions in the *Mahābhārata*.

Much of Madhva's exegesis of the *Mahābhārata* consists in making sense of Kṛṣṇa's (and to a lesser extent, Bhīma's) actions. According to Madhva's theology, Viṣṇu represents the perfection of all qualities and is without fault. Madhva pays close attention to the question of Viṣṇu's perfection. Though the MBTN follows the narrative of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* faithfully during the war episodes, we find lengthy and corrective commentary on Bhīma's actions (and Kṛṣṇa's strategies) in the final fight between Duryodhana and Bhīma. Madhva gives these episodes additional importance because Bhīma is accused of wrongdoing, and according to the Mādhva tradition, their leader is a reincarnation of Bhīma. It is during the gadāyuddha that Madhva finds a divine revelation—

through the Ṛṣabhasūktam—of Vāyu's prowess, a revelation that justifies Bhīma's wrongdoing.

The ethical arguments that Madhva presents in Kṛṣṇa's defence are consequentialist. Though the MBTN recognizes that there are conflicting dharmas in the *Mahābhārata*, it makes clear that the dharma that allows for the removal of the earth's burden (bhūbhārakṣapaṇa) is the highest. Kṛṣṇa's and Bhīma's actions are in the service of removing this burden. Therefore their actions are not only justifiable but also correct. The aṃśāvataraṇa is important to Madhva, for he establishes in the beginning of the MBTN that the characters' divine identities underpin the story and their role in the narrative.

Appaya Dīkṣita's supposed criticism of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* turns out to be an elaborate defence of the god that resembles Madhva's. Although he raises the supposed misdeeds of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in order to rebut Vaiṣṇava criticisms of Śiva's cruelty, Appaya ultimately says that Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the *Mahābhārata* is not a reflection of tamas, or darkness. Instead, as an avatāra, killing the villainous Kauravas is part of his līlā.

In both works, this argument leads to a clear moral distinction between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, with little ambiguity left about Duryodhana's character. According to Madhva, Duryodhana is tamoyogya, fit for hell, and is thus destined to go to there. Unlike works such as the Bhīmasāhasavijaya, the Urubhaṅgam, and the Veṇisaṃhāra which Madhva may have read, the MBTN is decidedly unsympathetic towards Duryodhana. His deathbed triumph praising the values of kṣatriyadharma in the *Mahābhārata* is given little credence here. Thus the MBTN radically rereads Duryodhana's death episode. The MBTN focuses on his opposition to Kṛṣṇa, and is critical of any reproach of the Lord.

Part 2: Nindā

Chapter 4

Rebuking Kṛṣṇa: Bhagavannindā and the Rise of Dveṣabhakti

The last section looked at the *Mahābhārata*'s arguments with Kṛṣṇa, and traced a reception of it through the appendices and interpolated passages of the epic itself, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Madhva's MBTN and Appaya Dīkṣita's *Brahmatarkastava*. While the epic presents a complicated theology of Kṛṣṇa's descent on the earth at various junctures, the tradition finds ways to defend Kṛṣṇa and understand his role in the narrative. I argue that the bhārāvataraṇa— namely the story that Kṛṣṇa (and other divine beings) descend to unburden the earth through the war, play an important role in the tradition's understanding of the god's role and the questions that arise from it. Episodes like the gadāyuddha are often reinterpreted to fit a vision of a perfect, flawless Viṣṇu. Although interpolations show that there is a willingness for the tradition to accommodate Kṛṣṇa's trickery, the notion that it is for a greater cause, namely the unburdening of the earth, that underpins most theologies of the epics that develop in Vaiṣṇava circles. This section reveals the ways in which the *Mahābhārata* tradition interprets the rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and develops a theology in response to accommodate his humanity in the epic.

In both scholarship and popular media, blasphemy is often situated within an Abrahamic religious discourse. This is due primarily to the term's history and relevance today to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. There is, however, very little work on the conceptual equivalent of blasphemy in premodern South Asia.[178] This is primarily because scholars have argued that the problem of divine profanity or impiety is only relevant to the monotheistic traditions. Wendy Doniger (2015), for instance, writes that "the ancient, polytheistic Hindus had no concept of blasphemy in the sense of [a] 'profane speaking of

[178] While the term nāstika has been occasionally translated as blasphemous, its cognate term is actually "heretic," as Andrew Nicholson (2010) has argued in his study of the conceptual equivalents of heresiology in premodern Indian thought.

God,' which is primarily a problem for monotheism." The rebukes of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* and their reception is missing from this discussion of blasphemy and Hinduism. To this end, I trace the term "bhagavannindā" throughout this chapter and articulate the problem of divine reproach that inevitably arises. Although insulting a god such as Kṛṣṇa may not be considered profane for the same reasons as it would be in the monotheistic traditions, the conceptual equivalent of impious speech is found in premodern Sanskrit sources. In this period of the epic's afterlife, we find a broader definition of the divine reproach that is synonymous with the term blasphemy.

In the following three chapters, I look at how the *Mahābhārata*'s "arguments with God" were received in the Purāṇas and epic commentaries and study the ways in which they affected polemics and eventually developed a concept of divine rebuke. The stories of Śiśupāla and Duryodhana rebuking Kṛṣṇa raise a question for Vaiṣṇava theologians: how can someone insult Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu like a common human and be rewarded? In this chapter specifically, I argue that the concepts of dveṣabhakti (devotion by means of hatred), and bhagavannindā (the censure of God), arise in response to this essential question. While it is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that reinterprets the story of Śiśupāla and others to fully develop these concepts, it is echoing the earlier *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

I begin by looking at the first usage of the term bhagavannindā as a prohibitory term in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and argue that it is from there, specifically in the stories of Vena and Śiśupāla, that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* builds its own conceptual framework for divine rebuke. I then shift to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s telling of Śiśupāla's rebuke, and how it reconciles it with a concept of bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti. A sampling of *Bhāgavata* commentaries reveal that the concept of dveṣabhakti is controversial. These texts explore

the ways in which Kṛṣṇa could be subject to the rebuke of a human, and the cases where it is appropriate and inappropriate.

The Origins of the Vena Myth, Bhagavannindā and Dveṣabhakti

Dating of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is difficult; scholars assign dates from as early as the 1st century to the 9th century CE.[179] Like other Purāṇas, it is difficult to date more accurately, and it is hard to determine where the text was composed. Later theologians in South India, such as Śankara (8th c.) and Rāmānuja (11th c.) refer to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* in their works and occasionally quote from it. Although the date and place of composition is uncertain, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* certainly predates the later *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Whatever the date of the Purāṇa, it is aware of the *Mahābhārata* and episodes from the Anuśāsanaparvan, so it postdates the epic and predates the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

I begin with a study of how the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* addresses the rebuke of Śiśupala and frames it in terms of devotion and dveṣa. I then look at how the issue of bhagavannindā is raised in the Vena story retold in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. I argue that while the *Bhāgavata* offers its own innovations in its telling of these stories and in the development of bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti as theological concepts, they are prefigured in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. The VP is the earliest text to problematize Śiśupāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and his eventual union with the god. It also appears to be the earliest use of the term bhagavannindā that the *Bhāgavata* will eventually go on to develop in more detail. Two narratives in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the Śiśupāla and Vena stories, make use of dveṣabhakti and bhagavannindā respectively. I begin

[179] See Rocher (1986) p. 249 for an overview of all dates provided by scholars.

first with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s questions about the Śiśupāla story, and then move to the narrative of Vena.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is one of the earliest texts to explicitly interpret Śiśupāla's rebuke as an act of devotion towards Kṛṣṇa, and appears to be the first to present a backstory that connects the blasphemer with Rāvaṇa and Hiraṇyakaśipu. Though it does not use or conceptualize of bhagavannindā as a term, it suggests that Śiśupāla constantly remembered the names of Kṛṣṇa due to his hatred (dveṣa) for him, and this eventually lead to a union with the god. The VP is also the first text to raise the problem of divine reproach. In chapter 15 of the 4th aṃśa, the sage Maitreya asks Parāśara how Śiśupāla attains sāyujya with Kṛṣṇa while in his previous lives as Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa, he received no such reward:

> VP 4.15-1-2: *hiraṇyakaśiputve ca rāvaṇatve ca viṣṇunā / avāpa nihato bhogān aprāpyān amarair api //*
> *na layaṃ tatra tenaiva nihataḥ sa kathaṃ punaḥ / saṃprāptaḥ śiśupālatve sāyujyaṃ śāśvate harau //*
>
> Slain by Viṣṇu as Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa, [they] obtained pleasures unreachable by even the gods. There was no union there. Yet how though, as Śiśupāla, was he slain by the same Viṣṇu, did he attain union [sāyujya] with the eternal Hari?

This is the earliest articulation of the 'problem of divine reproach' that emerges in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and later Vaiṣṇava texts that interpret the Śiśupāla episode: how can Śiśūpāla's rebuke entitle him to union with Kṛṣṇa unlike Rāvaṇa and Hiraṇyakaśipu? The answer that Parāśara provides is that due to the excessive hatred of Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla was always engaged in reciting the names of Kṛṣṇa. This hatred was indirectly a form of devotion, and the concept anticipates the notion of dveṣabhakti (the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* uses *dveṣānubandha*) that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* develops.

King Vena is mentioned in some of the earliest Sanskrit literature, including the Ṛgveda. The Purāṇas develop the story of Vena as a king who is corrupted and sees himself as more powerful than the gods. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* develops the Vena story into one about bhagavannindā, and it is in this text that we first see traces of the Vena narrative transformed into one about divine rebuke. It is there that the term "*bhagavannindā*" is used, the only time in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. While the VP is the first text to use this term, it does not recognize it as a special concept or flesh it out in the way that the later *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* does. In the Purāṇic version of the tale, the haughty King Vena denies the power and existence of Viṣṇu and all other gods, and instead views himself as the highest being. The story in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* takes on an explicitly devotional tone—and it is explicitly connected to rebuking Viṣṇu.

Vena, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, rejects the supremacy of Viṣṇu and the power of the other gods. His rejection of Viṣṇu is rooted in his own hubris. In a speech to his twice-born subjects, Vena slanders the gods:

> VP 1.13.20-23: *mattaḥ ko 'bhyadhiko 'nyo 'sti kaś cārādhyo mamāparaḥ / ko 'yaṃ harir iti khyāto yo vai yajñeśvaro mataḥ //*
> *brahmā janārdanaḥ śaṃbhur indro vāyur yamo raviḥ / hutabhug varuṇo dhātā pūṣā bhūmir niśākaraḥ //*
> *ete cānye ca ye devāḥ śāpānugrahakāriṇaḥ / nṛpasyaite śarīrasthāḥ sarvadevamayo nṛpaḥ //*
> *etaj jñātvā mayājñaptaṃ yad yathā kriyatāṃ tathā / na dātavyaṃ na hotavyaṃ na yaṣṭavyaṃ ca bho dvijāḥ //*
>
> Who else is greater than I? Is there anyone else other than I who should be worshipped? Who is this famous Hari that is remembered as the Lord of the Sacrifice? Brahmā Janārdana Śaṃbhu, Indra, Vāyu, Yama, Ravi, the Oblation-Eater, Varuṇa, the Ordainer, Pūṣan, the Earth, the Moon—these other gods that bring about favour and curse, they remain in the body of the King. The King is

> constituted of all gods. Having known that, do as I command! Dear Twice-Born, do not worship, do not sacrifice, and do not donate!

In the earlier versions of the Vena story found in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Mahābhārata*, the King does not insult Viṣṇu; he only censures the Veda and prohibits sacrifice. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Vena still denigrates Vedic sacrifice, but he also frames his speech around the rejection of Viṣṇu as Yajñeśvara. This is how the Munis respond to Venas absolute assertion of sovereignty, and denial of Viṣṇu's divinity:

> VP 1.13.28-29: *yo yajñapuruṣaṃ viṣṇum anādinidhanaṃ prabhum /vinindaty adhamacāro na sa yogyo bhuvaḥ patiḥ //*
> *ity uktvā mantrapūtais taiḥ kuśair munigaṇā nṛpam / nijaghnur nihataṃ pūrvaṃ bhagavannindanādinā //*
>
> "He who insults the Lord of the Sacrifice, that Viṣṇu whose has neither a beginning nor end, the lord; that unrighteous actor is not eligible [to be] the king of the earth." Thus said, the class of munis conquered the king with kuśa grass purified by mantras, who was slain earlier by his slander of the Bhagavān etc.

This is the first time the Vena story is coloured with an anti-Vaiṣṇava hue. The Vena story as told in the *Harivaṃśa* is of a King who initially establishes the maryāda or standards for conduct and dharma as a good King, but then eventually lets the power get to his head. He transgresses the dharma of the Veda, as opposed to Viṣṇu specifically, and insists that worship be done unto him instead of Vedic sacrifices. As a result, we have one of the first instances of the term 'bhagavannindā'.

Scribes and readers, particularly in South India, insert the previous verse which first uses the term *bhagavannindā* into the older *Harivaṃśa* version of the Vena story. The intent of this is clear: to ensure that the story of Vena as a rebuker of Viṣṇu, a bhagavannindaka, is normative in all stories of the king. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* transforms this story of an

unrighteous King into a narrative of a rebuker of Viṣṇu who is punished accordingly by twice-born men for his blasphemy.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, in its retellings of the Vena story and its engagement with the Śiśupāla story, explains the concepts of bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti that will be important to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* The sage Maitreya questions how Śiśupāla can attain union with Kṛṣṇa despite insulting and hating him as much as Hiranyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa. The Viṣnu Purāṇa, in response, situates Śiśupāla within other famous 'haters' by making him a reincarnation of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa. It also argues that Śiśupāla, unlike his predecessors, connected with Kṛṣṇa through hatred, setting the stage for the *Bhāgavata*'s presentation of dveṣabhakti. In its telling of the Vena story, the term bhagavannindā is used to describe the King's rejection of Viṣnu and the gods. This isolated use of the term eventually colours later tellings of the Vena story, and even leads some to insert this verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* into the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*.

Śiśupāla in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Though the BhP avoids the "divine injustice" reproaches of Kṛṣṇa and even skirts some of the more controversial episodes where his conduct comes under scrutiny, the text does not avoid divine censure altogether. This section examines various instances where Kṛṣṇa is censured, in order to understand how the *Bhāgavata* treats the issue of reproach. Given its stance on Kṛṣṇa, how does it cope with rebuking and critiquing the Lord? The *Mahābhārata* only occasionally points out the dangers of hating Nārāyaṇa or of censuring the Ordainer. In its cautious approach to confronting and questioning Kṛṣṇa, the BhP marks a shift. As we will see, the BhP is acutely aware of various reproaches, and finds a way to

accommodate them within its own worldview. Śiśupāla's famous rebuke of Kṛṣṇa is an ideal episode to consider in exploring the BhP's treatment of reproach and criticism.

Śiśupāla is most famous in Sanskrit literature for his opposition to, and hatred for, Kṛṣṇa. His hatred of Kṛṣṇa makes him an unsympathetic figure. His censure of Kṛṣṇa differs from that of Gāndhārī in the Strīparvan, in that he does not protest divine injustice. In fact, Śiśupāla disputes whether Kṛṣṇa is worthy of the honour he receives and trivializes the god's early exploits killing demons. Śiśupāla appears in the *Mahābhārata* as an opponent of Kṛṣṇa who is destined to be killed by him. His story, and his rebuke of Kṛṣṇa is retold most extensively in Māgha's poem Śiśupālavadha ("the Slaying of Śiśupāla"). His story is also retold throughout the BhP. In the *Mahābhārata*, Śiśupāla's speech amounts to a personal tirade against Kṛṣṇa's status and character. Kṛṣṇa endures the tirade because he had promised to allow Śiśupāla to make 100 insults. The enmity between the two is pronounced because Kṛṣṇa had abducted and wed Rukminī as she was to wed Śiśupāla. The episode ends abruptly when Kṛṣṇa beheads Śiśupāla, and the blasphemer then merges into the god's body. This final detail is explained in the *Mahābhārata* 2.41, where Kṛṣṇa clarifies to Śiśupāla's mother that he hopes to reclaim his fiery energy (tejas) from her son. Śiśupāla then merges with Kṛṣṇa. The beheading leads to a reward—union with the God, Kṛṣṇa.

In the BhP's version of these events, Śiśupāla criticizes the choice of Kṛṣṇa as the guest of honour, as well, but his speech differs from the *Mahābhārata* version because it was written carefully to make the nindā double as stuti:

> BhP 10.74.35: *varṇāśramakulāpetaḥ sarvadharmabahiṣkṛtaḥ/ svairarvartī guṇair hīnaḥ saparyāṃ katham arhati//*

> [Kṛṣṇa] has withdrawn from his family, stage of life and varṇa. Destitute of all dharma and acting as he pleases, without any virtues, how is he worthy of worship?

The rebuke stuns the Kings who are assembled in the sabhā:

> BhP 10.74.39-40: *bhagavannindanaṃ śrutvā duḥsahaṃ tat sabhāsadaḥ/*
> *karṇau pidhāya nirjagmuḥ śapantaś cedipaṃ ruṣā//*
> *nindāṃ bhagavataḥ śṛṇvaṃs tatparasya janasya vā/*
> *tato nāpaiti yaḥ so 'pi yāty adhaḥ sukṛtāc cyutaḥ//*
> BhP 10.74.46: *janmatrayānuguṇitavairasaṃrabdhayā dhiyā/*
> *dhyāyaṃs tanmayatāṃ yāto bhāvo hi bhavakāraṇaṃ//*
>
> Having heard this unbearable censure of the Lord, the kings at the assembly covered their ears and left, angrily cursing the King of Cedi. Someone who hears the reproach of God, or of his devotees and does not leave, also goes to hell, fallen from [his] good deeds…Meditating on [Kṛṣṇa] with thoughts that are agitated by hatred suitable for three births, Śiśupāla attained oneness with the Lord. For his disposition was the cause of his [continued] existence.

The BhP is cautious in its reproach of Kṛṣṇa and warns the readers of its dangers. This type of careful reproach differs from the *Mahābhārata*'s version because it serves as reproach, but also as praise.[180] Kṛṣṇa is above the brahmanical institutions of āśrama and varṇa. The term sarvadharmabahiṣkṛtaḥ can also be seen as a praise of Kṛṣṇa, for he is also beyond any attributes (dharma). Similarly, Śiśupāla says that he is without qualities (guṇair). In Māgha's 8th century poem, Śiśupālavadha, Śiśupāla uses the term in a similar way to blaspheme Kṛṣṇa. As Bronner and McCrea (2012) argue,

> In the Sāṃkhya tradition, a prominent branch of Indian philosophical thought in the first millennium, the supreme person who is in effect the soul of the world is precisely described as lacking all qualities (nirguṇa). So in certain contexts the fact that Kṛṣṇa…is described as "bereft of every single quality" could actually be read as a form of praise and even as a confirmation of his divinity.[181]

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[180] This is also the case in some versions of Māgha's Śiśupālavadha c.f. McCrea and Bronner, To Be or Not To Be Śiśupāla

[181] C.f. Bronner and McCrea (2012), p.432: Particularly notable is the triple repetition of the word "quality" (guṇa), a pregnant term in Sanskrit. Reproach of Śiva also includes a similar type of double-meaning rebuke.

The composer of the BhP is either adapting the nindā-stuti found in some interpolated versions of Māgha's poem, or it is setting the standard for vyājastuti that poets who rework the *Śiśupālavadha* eventually adopt. The strategy involves a judicious choice of words, whereby Śiśupāla's speech holds a double meaning, as both reproach and praise.

The cautiousness of Śiśupāla's tirade against Kṛṣṇa is magnified by the warnings that follow shortly after his speech. As mentioned earlier, those who willingly hear blasphemous speech against the Lord will be punished. This hardline approach to reproach and criticism of God is also framed in terms of bhakti and sāṃkhya. In the BhP telling of the story, Śiśupāla merges with Kṛṣṇa, but it is explained here as sāyujya, a form of liberation where he attains oneness with him. In other words, Śiśupāla is liberated and reaches Kṛṣṇa through his hatred for and reproach of him. This is a controversial idea in the commentarial tradition, and even Parikṣit, who is listening to the Bhagavadkathā, raises questions about how Śiśupāla can be rewarded for censuring the Lord.

Bhagavannindā and Dveṣabhakti in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Before moving to the *Bhāgavata*'s exposition of the Śiśupāla story, I revisit the story of king Vena, whom the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* associates with bhagavannindā for the first time. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4.14, Vena is presented as a King who ascends to the throne and is eventually corrupted by power. He becomes prideful, and as a results feels that nobody is above him. As a result, he bans Vedic rituals and transgresses dharma. The sages try to pacify the King and advise him to mend his ways, and outline the benefits of worshipping

See, for instance, in Eck (2013) for an example of how in Purāṇic stories Dakṣa's censure of Śiva is in fact coded praise along similar lines.

Viṣṇu. In keeping with the ethos of the *Bhāgavata*, Vena's opposition is as much to Viṣṇu as it is to Vedic rituals. Vena, in response, is astonished and proceeds to insult Viṣṇu as the Lord of Sacrifice (Yajñapuruṣa):

> BhP 4.14.25: *ko yajñapuruṣo nāma yatra vo bhaktir īdṛśī/*
> *bhartṛ-sneha-vidūrāṇāṃ yathā jāre kuyoṣitām//*
>
> Who is this Lord of Sacrifice by name, for whom there is such devotion amongst you all, which is like (devotion) to the lover of terrible wives who are removed from the love for their husbands?

In his formulation, Vena sees that all gods, including Viṣṇu are inferior to him and part of him. Therefore, instead of worshipping them, the citizens should worship him. The sages, in response, are enraged that Vena has insulted Viṣṇu (viṣṇuṃ vinindati) and kill him as a result.

> BhP 4.14.32: *nāyam arhaty asad-vṛtto naradeva-varāsanam/*
> *yo 'dhiyajña-patiṃ viṣṇuṃ vinindaty anapatrapaḥ//*
>
> Following evil practices, the shameless one who insults Viṣṇu, the lord of the highest sacrifice does not deserve that throne of the king.

In the seventh skandha, this story will be drawn together thematically with other narratives as an instance of bhagavannindā.

The seventh book of the BhP deals thematically with the 'haters' of Kṛṣṇa and of other incarnations. It includes the story of Prahlāda, the devotee of Viṣṇu, and his father Hiraṇyakaśipu, a hater of Viṣṇu. As the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* establishes, Hiraṇyakaśipu is a part of a trio which includes Rāvaṇa and Śiśupāla. The three of them are haters of Viṣṇu, and the latter two are sequential incarnations of the first. In this chapter of the seventh book, Śuka describes Kṛṣṇa in terms relevant to the Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedanta schools and reframes reproach in this context. He then explains how reproach is even applicable to a

quality-less Brahman who is beyond the three guṇas by recalling the Śiśupāla episode, and narrating a conversation between the seer, Nārada and Yudhiṣṭhira. After hearing Śiśupāla berate Kṛṣṇa and seeing his subsequent fate, Yudhiṣṭhira poses a question to the seer.

> BhP 7.1.15-16: *aho aty-adbhutaṃ hy etad durlabhaikāntināṃ api/ vāsudeve pare tattve prāptiś caidyasya vidviṣaḥ//*
> *etad veditum icchāmaḥ sarva eva vayaṃ mune/ bhagavan-nindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ//*
>
> BhP 7.1.18-20: *śapator asakṛd viṣṇuṃ yad brahma param avyayam/ śvitro na jāto jihvāyāṃ nāndhaṃ viviśatus tamaḥ//*
> *kathaṃ tasmin bhagavati duravagrāhya-dhāmani/ paśyatāṃ sarva-lokānāṃ layam īyatur añjasā//*
> *etad bhrāmyati me buddhir dīpārcir iva vāyunā/ brūhy etad adbhutatamaṃ bhagavān hy atra kāraṇam//*
>
> (Yudhiṣṭhira said:) Ah, this is really extraordinary, even for those rare single-minded ones, that union of the King of Cedi, who hated him, with Vāsudeva, the highest essence. O Sage! We all wish to know about this. [Previously], the King Vena was sent to hell by the twice borns for reproaching the Lord. Though Viṣṇu, who is the Supreme Brahman and unchangeable, was repeatedly cursed [by Śiśupāla and Dantavakra], no white leprosy emerged on [their] tongues, nor did they fall into dark hell. How can it be that they united with the Lord straight away, whose domain is difficult to reach, with everyone [lit. the whole world] watching? My mind whirls due to this, as the flame of a lamp [is shaken] by the wind. Explain this most wondrous thing. Surely the Lord is the cause.

The *Bhāgavata*—through Yudhiṣṭhira—raises a question, namely, how can Śiśupāla reproach Kṛṣṇa and be rewarded with liberation? This question is similar to the one posed to Maitreya in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, where the central point of contention is Śiśupāla's sāyujya with Kṛṣṇa. In this skandha of the *Bhāgavata*, Yudhiṣṭhira cites the precedent of Vena, who was quickly killed by the sages when he suggested that they worship him instead of the gods. The lesson in the Vena story that the *Bhāgavata* tells is that senseless censure of God will lead one to hell, yet Śiśupāla seems to be exempt from this. Instead of falling into hell,

he attains sāyujya with Kṛṣṇa. The *Mahābhārata* justifies Śiśūpāla's reproach and fate through his backstory—he was destined to be killed by Kṛṣṇa. The BhP wants an explanation for this as well, but explicitly presents it as a question about *bhagavannindā*, the reproach of the Lord. Nārada, in reply to his question, explains why Śiśupāla attained oneness with Kṛṣṇa despite his actions, and introduces the concept of *vairānubandha*, a relation of enmity with God:

> BhP 7.1.22-24: *nindanastavasatkāranyakkārārthaṃ kalevaram/pradhāna-parayo rājann avivekena kalpitam//*
> *hiṃsā tad-abhimānena daṇḍa-pāruṣyayor yathā/ vaiṣamyam iha bhūtānāṃ mamāham iti pārthiva//*
> *yan-nibaddho 'bhimāno 'yaṃ tad-vadhāt prāṇināṃ vadhaḥ/ tathā na yasya kaivalyād abhimāno 'khilātmanaḥ/*
> *parasya dama-kartur hi hiṃsā kenāsya kalpyate//*
>
> (Nārada said:) O King! The body is conceived as an object of praise and blame, honour and insult, due to not distinguishing between Puruṣa and Prakṛti. Harm (to the body) as from beatings and cruelty, is due to imagining (one's true self) to be that body. There is a difference amongst creatures (in how much they think of the body as) I and mine. This misconception is bound to [the body] and when that body dies, the creatures (who imagine that's what they are) die. That does not apply when one identifies oneself as the Self of all, due to un-attachment. For what instrument of harm could one imagine that could injure the Ruler?

The *Bhāgavata* reframes the censure of Kṛṣṇa using Sāṃkhya terminology. Namely, how can the Puruṣa (Kṛṣṇa) experience pain and pleasure as a result of abuse or insult? Earlier in the chapter, the narrator explains that the Puruṣa is free from the guṇas. He is free from any pain that may result from harsh words because of his absolute un-attachment (kaivalyāt). Simply put, Śiśupāla cannot hurt Kṛṣṇa with his harsh words, because Kṛṣṇa is unaffected by pain or pleasure. Reproach is framed here in terms of violence, or hiṃsā. Nārada then proceeds to show how reproach can fruitfully lead someone to union with Kṛṣṇa:

> BhP 7.1.25-30: *tasmād vairānubandhena nirvaireṇa bhayena va/*
> *snehāt kāmena vā yuñjyāt kathañcin nekṣate pṛthak//*
> *yathā vairānubandhena martyas tanmayatām iyāt/*
> *na tathā bhaktiyogena iti me niścitā matiḥ//*
> *kīṭaḥ peśaskṛtā ruddhaḥ kuḍyāyāṃ tam anusmaran/*
> *saṃrambhayayogena vindate tatsarūpatāṃ//*
> *evam kṛṣṇe bhagavati māyāmanuja īśvare/*
> *vairena pūtapāpmānas tam āpur anucintayā//*
> *gopyāḥ kāmād bhayāt kaṁso dveṣāc caidyādayo nṛpāḥ/*
> *sambandhād vṛṣṇayaḥ snehād yūyaṁ bhaktyā vayaṁ vibho//*
>
> Thus, one may unite [with Kṛṣṇa] through a relation of enmity, friendship [lit. non-enmity], fear, love or pleasure. He does not see any distinction at all. The way in which one attains union with Kṛṣṇa through enmity, one cannot [do that] even through bhaktiyoga in this same way. This is my firm conclusion. Just as a worm, concealed in a wall by a bee, remembers the bee with a combination of fear and anger, becomes a bee, in the same way are those whose sins are purified by their enmity towards Kṛṣṇa the illusory man, with thoughts filled with him obtain him. […] The Gopīs attained him through pleasure, Kaṃsa by fear, Śiśupāla and other kings through hatred, the Vṛṣṇi's through kinship, you [Pāṇḍavas] through love, and us through devotion.

The second point in Nārada's response is more controversial. To set up the story of Hiranyakaśipu, one of Viṣṇu's famous haters, the seer uses the example of Śiśupāla to argue that one may reach the Lord through enmity (vaira). The BhP makes this suggestion in other passages, particularly with reference to asuras who are fixed in their hatred towards Kṛṣṇa. One can, therefore, reproach Kṛṣṇa and be rewarded for it. In this light, what do we make of the other statements in the BhP that condemn not only the reproacher, but those hearing the reproach? The classic case of Vena, who was summarily executed, is frequently cited. Nārada adds that Vena did not approach the Lord through fear, enmity, or any of the five means mentioned.[182] Hiraṇyakaśipu, like Vena, was about to enter hell for abusing God,

[182] BhP 7.1.32 katamo'pi na venaḥ syāt pañcānāṃ puruṣaṃ prati/tasmāt kenāpy upāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet//

but is ultimately saved by the pleading of his son, the devoted Prahlāda.[183] Thus, although the BhP accommodates reproach of the Lord, viewing it as an expression of vairabhakti that could lead to some form of liberation, the text does not hesitate to add that reproach may not always be fruitful.

These ideas are not well-received by some of the medieval commentators on the *Bhāgavata*. Some of Nārada's statements equate the vaira of Śiśupāla with the love of the Pāṇḍavas or the bhakti of others. The conclusion is that one can reach Kṛṣṇa and liberation just as Śiśupāla did, and in some cases enmity can be even stronger than bhaktiyoga. This is not a conclusion that the commentarial tradition would like to draw, however. Madhva, the thirteenth century founder of Dvaita Vedanta, takes issue with this argument in his *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya*, one of the oldest extant commentaries on the BhP. He goes to great lengths to explain that equating vaira with devotion as one of many paths to God, as some of the above passages appear to do, is not at all a rule.[184] Commenting on verse 32, which describes Vena's fate, Madhva quotes from a text called the Śabdanirṇaya, which purportedly says: "devotion is mentioned as a means [to attain liberation]. Hatred, etc., are all useless means."[185] He also explains that Śiśupāla was an incarnation of the celestial gatekeeper Jaya, and thus Kṛṣṇa spared him only for that reason. Vaṃśīdhara, whose commentary on the BhP postdates Śrīdhara's, is also wary of drawing any general conclusions from these verses. He first divides true reproach (satyanindā) into two kinds: friendly (ānukūlya) and hostile (prātikūlya). An example of the former, he says, is the Gopīs'

[183] BhP 4.21.47 *hiraṇyakaśipuś cāpi bhagavannindayā tamaḥ/vivikṣur atyagāt sūnoḥ prahlādasyānubhāvataḥ//*
[184] Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya 7.1.26: *vairādīnām ekatamenāpi yo yuñjyāt sa nekṣate iti svabhāvakathanam, na vidhiḥ.*
[185] Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya 7.1.32: *upāyo bhaktir uddiṣṭo dveṣādyā anupāyakāḥ/*

playful rebuke of Kṛṣṇa when they realize he is not returning to Vraja to be with them. They say:

> His disposition is cruel, like a hunter's—he shot a monkey with his bow. Because he was dominated by a female, he disfigured a woman who lusted after him. After consuming his charity like a crow, he bound Bali. Enough of friendship with that dark-complexioned one. But the treasured stories about him are so hard to give up.[186]

On the surface, this rebuke is far harsher than Śiśupāla's. It is not couched in any hidden language expressing Kṛṣṇa's supremacy, and it criticizes his conduct in previous incarnations, namely Vāmana and Rāma. Yet, as the last pāda of the verse indicates, the rebuke is done out of love, and thus it is an example of ānukūlya.[187] Śiśupāla's reproach, according to Vaṃśīdhara, is an example of a hostile reproach. A hostile (prātikūlya) reproach is also twofold—that which indicates longing for God (bhagavadabhiniveśa) and that which does not (bhagavadanabhiniveśa). The commentator has a warning about Śiśupāla's situation, however.

> Vaṃśīdhara commentary on 7.1.25: *śiśupālādidṛṣṭyānteṣv evaiṣa vidhir ity api na śakyate vyākhyātuṃ bhagavatprātikūlyasya vidhānānarhatvāt. yad uktaṃ 'ānukūlyasya grahaṇaṃ prātikūlyasya varjanam' iti. na ca śiśupālādibhyo' nyeṣu janeṣu vihito 'pi vairānubandho bhagavadabhiniveśaṃ janayati 'tān ahaṃ dviṣataḥ krūrān saṃsāreṣu narādhamān/ kṣipāmy ajasram aśubhān āsurīśv eva yoniṣu//' ityādiparasahasravacanavirodhāt.*
>
> It cannot be said, based on the example of Śiśupāla and others, [that hatred of Kṛṣṇa leads to liberation] must be a rule, because that behaviour is not desirable. It is said that "the accepting of friendliness and the rejection of hostility [should be practiced]". Nor is it the case that a relation of enmity, even if it were ordained for people other than Śiśupāla et. al would generate devotion to the Blessed Lord, because that contradicts the testimony of a thousand others

[186] Trans. by Edwin Francis Bryant, BhP 10.47.17

[187] Vaṃśīdhara commentary on 7.1.25: satyanindā hi dvidhā ānukūlyamayī prātikūlyamayī ca. tatra prathamā premavilāsarūpaiva: [BhP 10.47.17] iti yā sā tu puruṣārthacūḍāmaṇimarīcimañjarīva tāṃ vinā na kair api labhyā.

> viz. "I perpetually throw the lowest of men, cruel inasupicious haters, into saṃsāra, in to wombs belonging to Asuras." (BhG 16.19)

The lesson that the commentators are adamantly drawing from these passages is that one should not follow the example of Śiśupāla. Though the BhP accommodates reproach as a method of connecting with Kṛṣṇa, some commentators are wary of making an example of Śiśupāla.

The BhP tests the limits of this discussion by exploring the theme of reproaching God (bhagavannindā), and reworks certain episodes from the *Mahābhārata* in the process. In particular, it reworks the story of Śiśupāla, the famous blasphemer who had the audacity to reproach Kṛṣṇa. In this version, Śiśupāla attains sāyujya liberation immediately after being killed by Kṛṣṇa. This invites the Purāṇa's primary listener, Parikṣit, to ask how a hater can be rewarded for insulting Kṛṣṇa. In answering this question, the BhP reimagines this episode within the context of dveṣabhakti, providing an explanation for how blasphemers may sometimes be rewarded for their behaviour.

The "arguments with God" that the *Mahābhārata* raises, particularly those of Śiśupāla with Kṛṣṇa, open a controversy in the epic's reception: how can Kṛṣṇa be subject to reproach like a common human, and how could figures like Śiśupāla be rewarded for that? This second question is the heart of the "problem of divine reproach" which will be explored in the next chapter, but this chapter answers the first question. Building on the concept of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a proto-commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, I argue that the BhP builds on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to rethink the Śiśupāla episode. In the process, it offers new concepts to understand divine reproach and problematizes the idea that Kṛṣṇa can be insulted with impunity.

Two important concepts emerge in this process, bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti. Bhagavannindā is a prohibitory concept of rebuking Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, similar to the concept of blasphemy that emerges in an Abrahamic context. The second concept is dveṣabhakti, or devotion to Kṛṣṇa by means of hatred. Bhagavannindā has a specifically Vaiṣṇava provenance and origin, with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* first coining the term. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa's* analysis of the Śiśupāla episode, it offers a backstory for the rebuker of God that makes his act and subsequent sāyujya acceptable by introducing the concept of devotion by hatred. Śiśupāla is now explicitly a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavata* builds from these terms, and the stories of Śiśupāla and Vena, to further develop the concepts that will be influential in the medieval and early modern commentaries on the epic.

Where does a text whose main purport is devotion to Kṛṣṇa stand on the issue of reproaching him? Looking at this question, this chapter shows that though the actual censures of Kṛṣṇa in the BhP offer little substantive rebuke of god and his narrative, the text includes stories where characters personally insult Kṛṣṇa. There is room for only limited reproach. One of the famous arguments with Kṛṣṇa is found in the Śiśupāla episode of the *Mahābhārata*. It is expanded upon in the BhP but reinterpreted in terms of dveṣabhakti. This does not mean that these texts shied away from or were uninterested in questioning Kṛṣṇa's conduct. As we have seen, the most substantive questioning of Kṛṣṇa's conduct and of divine injustice in the BhP and the DBhP occurs in the "frame story" of the text, where the chief listeners raise moral questions about him after hearing his deeds. Thus, this chapter reveals how the *Mahābhārata* is received in the Purāṇic tradition, and to what extent it encourages or allows reproach and criticism of Kṛṣṇa.

In some passages, the BhP says that those who even hear reproach of the Lord will be punished. In other passages, it seems to leave open the possibility of reproaching God by creating theological space for it. The BhP allows for a 'cautious' reproach of Kṛṣṇa, where the actual language of the reproach doubles as praise of him as the Ultimate Reality. The story of Śiśupāla berating Kṛṣṇa, and Śiśupāla's subsequent death at the hands of God allows the BhP to introduce a new theological space, whereby reproach becomes acceptable. Dveṣabhakti is a form of devotion to Kṛṣṇa where his 'haters' connect with him through rebuke and hatred towards him. Reproach of Kṛṣṇa then, can be an outlet for this form of bhakti. As we will see, this is a controversial topic in the BhP's commentarial tradition. Many commentators are careful to add that hatred of Kṛṣṇa is not the moral of the Śiśupāla episode. Though the BhP creates a safe space for reproach of Kṛṣṇa, the fine print stipulates both that it must be based on a form of devotion to him, and that actual reproach cannot have any effect on him.

Chapter 5

Svargakāmo Garheta: Reading Rebuke in the Mahābhārata Tradition

If there is an uncontroversial way of censuring the divine—the type that does not ruffle the theological feathers that we will see in this chapter—it can be found in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. In the epic, Rāma commits a rare act of treachery when he kills the Monkey-King Vālin by shooting him while in hiding. In response, the dying Vālin minces no words and censures Rāma for denying him a fair chance in battle and killing him in such a way. The King mocks the moral rectitude that Rāma prides himself in, arguing that he has now compromised it. This type of deceptive conduct on the part of Rāma, and this type of rebuke of him in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* are uncommon. While Vālin's harsh rebuke of Rāma stands out in an epic that does not otherwise frequently entertain critiques of its central hero, Vālmīki ensures that the moral order he built in the epic is not upended. Rāma rebuts Vālin's charge of treachery and upbraids the King for his own past misconduct. In response, Vālin sees the errors of his ways, apologizes to Rāma and takes refuge in him. All is well that ends well.[188]

Conversely, there is something peculiar about the two famous rebukes of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. The censurers appear to be rewarded for censuring Kṛṣṇa. Śiśupāla rebukes Kṛṣṇa as unworthy to be the guest of honour at Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūya. After being slain by Kṛṣṇa, however, Śiśupāla attains sāyujya with the god. In the Śalyaparvan, moreover, Duryodhana harshly rebukes Kṛṣṇa for his trickery during the war even as he simultaneously defends his own honour and conduct. After this, the gods shower flowers on Duryodhana.

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[188] Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa 4.18.41-42

In this chapter, I study the use and interpretation of nindā, particularly as it applies to the divine. As I have shown in chapter 1, reproach of Kṛṣṇa, or bhagavannindā as it is eventually called, is found in the *Mahābhārata* on a recurring basis. Texts of various genres composed in the *Mahābhārata*'s afterlife reflect on the epic's arguments with Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as we have seen, interprets the Śiśupāla episode through the prism of bhagavannindā, establishing parameters for "acceptable" reproach and explaining why, in general, rebuking Kṛṣṇa is inadvisable. In that text, we find a fully developed account of *bhagavannindā*, or reproach of the divine.

The previous section has looked at how nikṛti affected the interpretation of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. In fact, as we have seen from the interpolated passages in the *Mahābhārata*, the tradition is more likely to take corrective measures to dull the rebuke of Kṛṣṇa more than his trickery. In this section, I turn to another aspect of Kṛṣṇa's humanity that troubles commentators more than his trickery: the penchant for epic figures to insult him. To insult someone or criticize their conduct is to subject them to the standards of the world. Furthermore, Śiśupāla and Duryodhana seem to be rewarded for their insults. The former attains sāyujya and the latter receives a shower of flowers from the gods after challenging Kṛṣṇa. As a result of this, the problem of divine reproach arises for the epic commentators Nīlakaṇṭha and Vādirāja: do the shower of flowers on Duryodhana and the sāyujya of Śiśupāla mean that these blasphemers were rewarded for rebuking Vāsudeva? More importantly, the question that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* raises—and the subsequent works of Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha seek to answer in their own exegesis of the epic—is whether this peculiar type of hatred (dveṣabhakti) is a legitimate means to reach Kṛṣṇa. If we cannot explain divine reproach as a legitimate expression of dveṣabhakti, then what is

the purpose of the divine reproach we find in the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas? In this chapter, I look at the ways in which the epic commentators attempted to rescue the Śiśupāla and Duryodhana episodes from their offensive potential. I look specifically at the works of Vādirāja, Madhva and Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara and consider their proposals for reading bhagavannindā.

I begin first with some examples of how commentators on the *Mahābhārata* read the Śiśupāla episode, specifically his rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. Nīlakaṇṭha, the 17th century author of the Bhāratabhāvadīpa, reads Śiśupāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa through the prism of bhagavannindā as presented in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In an effort to reconcile the harsh censure of Śiśupāla with his ultimate union with Kṛṣṇa, Nīlakaṇṭha rejects reading the episode in the *Mahābhārata* as some sort of exaggerated meditation on Vāsudeva, and instead offers a secondary interpretation of the literal rebuke. In this secondary parsing of Śiśupāla's words, Nīlakaṇṭha sees the story of Śiśūpāla and his insults towards Kṛṣṇa as an advaitic story of a jīva longing for union with Brahman (Kṛṣṇa).

The Mādhvas also offered their own reading of the Śiśupāla episode. Following from discourse introduced in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Madhva, Jayatīrtha, and Vādirāja wrestle with the question of whether Śiśupāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa means that one can insult God and achieve liberation.

Finally, I look at another episode where Kṛṣṇa is rebuked by Duryodhana. The issue of the gods showering flowers on the fallen Kaurava prince after his criticism of Kṛṣṇa's trickery troubles Madhva and Vādirāja. In this section, I look at how Madhva reinterprets this shower of flowers, and how Vādirāja problematizes the episode around both sectarian concerns and the presentation of bhagavannindā in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

How Can Blasphemers Attain Sāyujya? The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Vena Precedent in Nīlakaṇṭha's Commentary

In this section, I focus on episodes of bhagavannindā found in the *Mahābhārata*, and their interpretations in the commentaries of Nīlakaṇṭha and Vādirāja. Nīlakaṇṭha pays attention to the Arghābhiharaṇa and Śiśūpālavadha sections of the Sabhāparvan in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, and interprets the episode through the lens of Advaita Vedanta, as is clear in Nīlakaṇtha's commentary on the opening of the Śiśupālavadha section.

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 2.36.1: *ityādikā śiśupālavadhāntā daśādhyayī nānāvidhamatabhedopanyāsapūrvakaṃ kṛṣṇaśiśupālarūpakeṇa brahmaṇi jīvasya mahākāśamaṭhākāśanyāyena layaṃ darśayati*
>
> These 10 chapters show the dissolving of the jīva in brahman in the form of Kṛṣṇa and Śiśupāla, according to the nyāya of the the "mahākāśa and maṭhākāśa," accompanied by different opinions.

He notes that from the perspective of the story, the received meaning is understood. But he is explaining the meaning from the Adhyātmic point of view. The destruction of Śiśupāla and his union with Kṛṣṇa represents the union of the jīva with brahman. Framing the Śiśupāla-Kṛṣṇa relationship in this way, Nīlakaṇṭha chalks the blasphemer's decision not to worship Kṛṣṇa as a product of his own ignorance. In this part, the commentator explains Śiśupāla's thinking in refusing to worship (and eventually rebuke) Kṛṣṇa:

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 2.37.1: *kartṛtvādikaṃ kṛṣṇe vāstavam eva na tu māyikam āvidyakaṃ vā. śarīramātrasya karmajanyatvaniyamāt. mithyābhūtasyāpi vāstavārthakriyākāritve śuktirajatāder api rajatocitadravībhāvāpatteś cety abhisaṃdadhāno jaiminimatānusārī śiśupālo varṇāśramavayastapovidyādibhir eva puṃsāṃ śraiṣṭhyāśraiṣṭhyavibhāgaṃ bahumanyamāno nṛpāntarasādhāraṇyena kṛṣṇam apūjyam karoti.*

> Agency and so forth in Kṛṣṇa is real, it is not illusory and not a product of ignorance because karma's generation is restricted to only the body (i.e. the embodied) and also because if illusory bodies could cause real results, then there would be the undesirable consequence that illusory silver in the nacre of a conch would have to be capable of liquification." Having this in mind, Śiśūpāla, the follower of the school of Jaimini [Mīṃāṃsa], carefully considering the division into best and worst amongst the men according to their varṇa, āśrama, age, tapas, and avidya, he [did] not honour Kṛṣṇa because of his commonality with other kings.

Śiśupāla, according to Nīlakaṇṭha, cannot see the difference between Kṛṣṇa and the other kings present at the rājasūya, so he decides not to honour the god. The root of Śiśupāla's ignorance towards Kṛṣṇa lies in his mīmāṃsaka view towards agency. Nīlakaṇṭha explains this by glossing pārthivān in this verse as *dehābhimānayuktān*. As we have seen in the *Bhāgavata*'s explanation of this episode, this fatal error leads people to reproach Viṣṇu.

Even in Nīlakaṇṭha's monistic interpretation of the Śiśupāla episode, the problem of divine reproach rears its head. If Śiśupāla's story really is about the dissolution of the jīva in Brahman, as Nīlakaṇṭha puts it, what role does Śiśupāla's rebuke play in that? In order to answer this question, Nīlakaṇṭha turns to a Mīmāṃsa-inspired understanding of the text. Mīmāṃsakas such as Kumārīla Bhaṭṭa have argued that while there are parts of the epic that include direct injunctions, or vidhis, the actions of good characters in the epic serve as arthavādas for the reader, as it encourages them to follow suit. Nīlakaṇṭha imagines the challenges this raises for an episode like the Śiśupālavadha, and addresses it in his commentary on *Mahābhārata* 2.38.1. Here is the reading of Śiśupāla's rebuke that Nīlakaṇṭha seeks to refute:

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 2.41.1: *nanu "vibhīṣikābhir bahvībhir" ityādigrantho bhagavannindāparatvān na bhūtārthavādaḥ, kiṃ tu dhyānamātraṃ dhyeyasārūpyaprāpakaṃ tac ca dveṣeṇāpi kartavyam ity atiśayoktimātraṃ dhyānavidhe(ḥ) stāvakaṃ.*

> It may be said, that this chapter is not a bhūtarthavāda because it emphasizes the reproach of the Lord. It is, rather, only a meditation that brings about union with the one to be meditated on and that meditation can be done even by means of hatred. So is that exaggerated praising of dhyāna-vidhi.

A bhūtārthavāda is a type of arthavāda, or statement of meaning, that describes something that has actually happened. What are the implications if Śiśupāla actually reproached Kṛṣṇa and attained sārūpya? One method to address the problem of divine reproach that Nīlakaṇṭha proposes here, but ultimately rejects, is to treat the episode as if it did not actually happen. Instead, we could read Śiśupāla's rebuke as just an injunction to meditate. Elaborating on this reading that he ultimately rejects, Nīlakaṇṭha proceeds to explain why taking any other purport from Śiśupāla's reproach would present a problem:

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 2.41.1: *anyathā bhagavannindākṛtāṃ venādīnām 'bhagavannindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ' (BhP 7.1.16) ityādidoṣasmaraṇam anupapannaṃ syād bṛhadāraṇyākapañcame ca brahmavidaṃ yājñavalkyaṃ dviṣataḥ śākalyasya sadyo mṛtyur ukto 'sthnāṃ ca saṃskārālābhena durgatiś ca sūcitā. sākṣād brahmadviṣas tu tato 'py adhikaṃ duḥkhaṃ vaktavyam syāt. atra ca dviṣato' pi śiśupālasyāparadhaśataṃ kṣāntvā tasmai bhagavatsāyujyaṃ dattam ity ucyate tasmān nindāgranthaḥ prakaraṇāsaṃgater bhagavaty asamavetatvāc cābhūtārthavāda eva.*
>
> Otherwise, the recording of faults on the part of Vena and others who reproached God [in passages such as] "through the reproach of Bhagavān, the twice-borns sent Vena to hell" would not make sense. And in the fifth [chapter] of the Bṛhadaranyaka, for Śākalya who was hating Yājñavalkya, the knower of Brahman, his instant death is stated, and a bad outcome (after death) is suggested by his bones not receiving the sanctifying ceremony. A grief even greater than this for an enemy of Brahman himself would have to be granted. But, it is said in this passage, having forgiven the hundred faults of Śiśupāla, despite his hating [Kṛṣṇa], union with Bhagavān was given to [him]. Thus, the section on reproach must not be a bhūtarthavāda because such a chapter on reproach would be incongruous and incoherent regarding God.

By the time of Nīlakaṇṭha's writing, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its take on the reproach of Viṣṇu has spread and influenced attitudes about bhagavannindā. The *Bhāgavata*, which Nīlakaṇṭha quotes above, says that rebukers of Kṛṣṇa go to hell, and this affected the exegesis of later *Mahābhārata* commentators. The passage that Nīlakaṇṭha cites is from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (7.1.16) which states the Vena goes to hell for his rebuke of God. I refer to this verse as the "Vena precedent" because it explicitly links the act of nindā to punishment. This becomes the normative way of understanding bhagavnnindā as a prohibitory act. The Vena precedent dictates that a blasphemer should be punished, not rewarded. As we will see, Vādirāja also cites the Vena precedent to explain his confusion with the shower of flowers on Duryodhana. How do Duryodhana and Śiśupāla not suffer the same fate as Vena, who fell into darkness? In order to avoid answering such a question, one can say that Śiśupāla's censure of Kṛṣṇa did not actually occur, that is, it is not a bhūtārthavāda.

Nīlakaṇṭha rejects this as a solution, however, because it would mean that the entire *Mahābhārata* would not be a bhūtārthavāda. Instead, Nīlakaṇṭha proposes a solution to the problem of divine reproach that agrees with the one proposed by Śrīdhara in his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (particularly 10.74.34-35). Divine reproach must actually convey the supremacy of brahman, through its secondary [gauṇa] sense.[189] The commentator gives credit for this idea where its due:

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 2.41.1: *ata eva śrīmadbhāgavate pi harinindāgranthaḥ stutiparatvenaiva vyākhyātaḥ śrīdharasvāmibhiḥ evaṃ bhīṣmeṇa bodhitaḥ śiśupālaḥ svabodham āviścikīrṣur bhīṣmaṃ tāvan mahīkaroti.*

[189] *ananyagatiprakaraṇabādhāpatteś cānarthakyapratihatānāṃ viparītaṃ balābalam iti nyāyenākāśādiśrutivan nindāśrutir api gauṇyāvṛttyā brahmaparatayā neyeti yuktam utpaśyāmaḥ.*

> The section on reproaching Hari in the Bhāgavata [Purāṇa] is explicated as being about praise [of Hari] by Śrīdhara and others. Similarly, Śiśupāla, intent on manifesting his own enlightenment and awakened by Bhīṣma (about Kṛṣṇa's greatness), magnifies Bhīṣma [through reproach].

The exegesis by Nīlakaṇṭha that has been cited so far has been extracted from his introductory commentary on Śiśūpāla's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. In what follows, Nīlakaṇṭha explains how Śiśupāla's otherwise base insults are actually praises of Kṛṣṇa. This method of interpreting reproach is explained in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as the commentator rightly notes. This is how Nīlakaṇṭha interprets Śiśupāla's reproach of Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma:

> 2.38.4 *pūtanāghātapūrvāṇi karmāṇy asya viśeṣataḥ/*
> *tvayā kīrtayatāsmākaṃ bhūyaḥ pracyāvitaṃ manaḥ//*
>
> (My) mind is pained by you repeatedly praising his deeds, especially his slaying of Pūtanā.
>
> Bhāratabhāvadīpa: *pūtaneti asya saguṇabrahmaṇaḥ pravyathitaṃ nirguṇe 'pi guṇāropeṇa vastutattvagopanād duḥkhitam ity arthaḥ.*
>
> Of him, (means) of saguṇa brahman. (Śiśupāla's mind) is aggrieved by the concealing of the truth due to the imposition of qualities on [Brahman] which is actually without qualities.
>
> 2.38.6 *yatra kutsā prayoktavyā bhīṣma bālatarair naraiḥ/*
> *tam imaṃ jñānavṛddhaḥ san gopaṃ saṃstotum icchasi//*
>
> Even though being the advanced in knowledge, you wish to praise this cowherd, when reprehensible things are uttered [about him] by even younger men!
>
> Bhāratabhāvadīpa: *yatra, saguṇe. kutsā, nindā. bālataraiḥ, āpātata upaniṣanmātrādhyetṛbhir baṭubhiḥ. bālatarair iti pāṭhe vṛddhair api. "yan manasā na manute yenāhur mano mataṃ tad eva brahma tvaṃ viddhi nedaṃ yad idam upāsate." ity abrahmatve kutsā prayoktavyā.*
>
> yatra means saguṇa, kutsā means nindā. "By younger ones" means those callow youths who study only on the Upaṇiṣads instantly reproach the Qualified form

> of Brahman. [Passages in the Kenopaniṣad such as]: "that which the mind cannot measure, by that means that they say the mind considers, know that to be the very brahman, is not the one that they worship. This is [an example] of reproach that should be uttered about something not being brahman.

In this sampling of Nīlakaṇtha's commentary on nindā verses, we see that the commentator resists the literal meaning provided to show us the true praise of Kṛṣṇa inherent in Śiśupāla's criticism. Kṛṣṇa, in 2.38.4, is actually Saguṇa Brahman. The source of Śiśupāla's distress, then, is not Bhīṣma is praising Kṛṣṇa, but the imposition of qualities ("killer of Pūtanā) on a quality-less Brahman. He takes Śiśupāla as the one who wishes to praise Keśava in the second verse. In 2.38.6, Śiśupāla notes the terrible things that people younger than Bhīṣma say about Kṛṣṇa, who hails from a family of cowherds. In this interpretation, however, the reprehensible gossip is not about the details of Kṛṣṇa's life and upbringing, as Śiśupāla will soon get into, but the type of reproach found in the Kena Upaniṣad which distinguishes the Qualified from the Unqualified version of Brahman.

Sandwiched between these two verses is another where Śiśupāla berates Bhīṣma for praising Kṛṣṇa. In order to give a sense of how Nīlakaṇṭha accomplishes this type of reading, I include both the literal translation, and Nīlakaṇṭha's suggested interpretation of the verse:

> 2.38.5 *avaliptasya mūrkhasya keśavaṃ stotum icchataḥ/*
> *kathaṃ bhīṣma na te jihvā śatadheyaṃ vidīryate//*
>
> How, Bhīṣma, has your tongue not been split hundredfold, you being an arrogant fool who wishes to praise Keśava?
>
> Secondary meaning: [With your good counsel,] protect me, the one who is stupefied and addicted to sensual objects, as I wish to praise Keśava. O Bhīṣma! How does your tongue not elevate a hundredfold, [impelled by the many ways to propound the truth to me].

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa: *aveti. liptasya mūrkhasya icchata iti karṃaṇi ṣaṣthyaḥ. liptaṃ viṣayasaṅginaṃ mūrkhaṃ mūḍham mām keśavaṃ stotum icchantam ava tuccham api bhagavadbhaktam mām pālaya. hitopadeśeneti bhāvaḥ. atyāścaryam etad ity āha katham iti. he bhīṣma he vit he vidvan nate namre mādṛśe 'pi upanate śiṣya iyaṃ jihvā tvadīyā tvayā śatadhā kathaṃ na īryate preryate 'nekaiḥ prakārais tattvaṃ pratipādayitum iti śeṣaḥ.*
>
> "[protect] this arrogant fool who desires..." the sixth case is in the sense of the object. Arrogant, as in addicted to sensual objects, fool, bewildered; protect (ava) me who wishes to praise Keśava, though I am insignificant (tuccham api), I am a devotee of the Lord. [Protect me] through your good counsel, this is the sense. He says "how" [in the sense of] "this is miraculous!" O Bhīṣma! Learned One! this tongue which belongs to you, how does it not raise a hundredfold, "impelled by many ways to propound the truth that is sent forward to a disciple of my sort, who is bowed down," it is supplied.

Through some creative glossing, Nīlakaṇṭha is able to fit this verse within his larger interpretive vision. This is not the only time that Nīlakaṇṭha comments on the *Mahābhārata* in this way.[190] For example, the Sanskrit word *avaliptasya*, meaning proud or haughty, and used to derisively describe Bhīṣma, is now divided into ava (meaning "protect") and liptasya, which he glosses as attached to worldly objected. When interpreted this way, the verse is actually a call for help by Śiśupāla, who Nīlakaṇṭha notes is a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. The commentator is aware that this meaning is starkly different from the literal rendering, because he earlier notes that this is the secondary meaning (gauṇa) that he is bringing forth to the reader. This would hardly be an unprecedented way to read divine rebuke.[191] Of course, the censure of Kṛṣṇa that Śiśupāla delivers in the *Mahābhārata* is not written in a similar manner as the censure found in the BhP, for instance, so it requires creativity on the part of the commentator.

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[190] See, for instance, Goldman (1992).
[191] See Chapter 3. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Śiśupāla's rebuke is clearly written in such a way that it can also serve as a praise of Kṛṣṇa.

Most tracts on nindā, by Nīlakaṇṭha's time, are influenced by the *Bhāgavata*'s presentation of bhagavannindā as a serious offence. This reading reconciles Śiśupāla's base reproach with his eventual union with Kṛṣṇa by pointing to the deeper, and hardly profane, meaning of Śiśupāla's rebuke. This is a meaning that Nīlakaṇṭha himself accepts is secondary (gauṇa). In acknowledging the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its commentator Śrīdhara, Nīlakaṇṭha finds his own monistic interpretation of the Śiśūpāla episode through a secondary interpretation of the literal rebuke.

Dveṣabhakti and the Śiśupāla Episode in Mādhva Thought

Madhva's *MBTN* is strongly against *bhagavannindā* of any kind, and looks harshly upon Duryodhana, Śiśupāla and others who engage in this type of behaviour in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other texts frame divine reproach (*bhagavannindā*) as a manifestation of hate (*dveṣa*). The various figures accused of blasphemy, in both epic and Purāṇic sources, include Śiśupāla who attains sāyujya with Kṛṣṇa after insulting him, and Vena, who is sent to hell after reproaching God. This raises a series of questions that commentators have sought to answer. Namely, is censure to be rewarded and understood as a perverse form of bhakti (*dveṣabhakti*), or is it a tool of hatred that can only have dire consequences?

For all of their philosophical differences, the Advaitin Nīlakaṇṭha and the Dvaitin Vādirāja would have probably agreed that the takeaway from the Śiśupāla episode was not the effectiveness of devotion through hatred. Nīlakaṇṭha raises the point that the Śiśupāla episode would be incongruous (*asaṃgati*) if we understood that a hater of Brahman attained union with him. The incongruity between Śiśupāla's status as a hater of Kṛṣṇa and

his final fate prompts Nīlakaṇṭha to provide another reading. It is this nexus of divine reproach, hatred, and Śiśupāla's eventual liberation that complicates the episode and makes this type of divine censure a recurring issue for commentators. In the *Phalasaurabham* section of his *Yuktimallikā*, Vādirāja addresses the contentious issue of whether one can reach Kṛṣṇa through hatred and reproach, as Śiśupāla seems to have done in the *Mahābhārata*. For him, reproach is indeed an instrument of hatred for Kṛṣṇa; it is decidedly not a form of devotion.

Vādirāja begins, first, by acknowledging the famous verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (7.1.30) on dveṣabhakti, or devotion through hatred.

> Yuktimallikā 5.78: *gopyaḥ kāmād bhayāt kaṃso dveṣāc caidyādayo nṛpāḥ/ sambandhād vṛṣṇayas snehād yūyaṃ bhaktyā vayaṃ prabho/ iti bhāgavate proktaṃ kāmadveṣādisādhanam//*
>
> 5.78: "The Gopīs attained him through pleasure, Kaṃsa by fear, Śiśupāla and other kings through hatred, the Vṛṣṇi's through kinship, you [Pāṇḍavas] through love, and us through devotion." The means [to reach Viṣṇu] through pleasure and hatred, etc, is proclaimed in the Bhāgavata [Purāṇa].

As we have seen earlier, the *Bhāgavata* verse appears to suggest that hatred is a legitimate type of devotion, but the commentarial tradition makes the opposite argument. Vādirāja, like Madhva before him, is not ready to endorse such an interpretation of dveṣabhakti. He dispenses quickly with the notion that Śiśupāla attained liberation by pure hatred:

> YM 5.79-80: *dvāri dvāri harer loke sadā sarvatra seviṣu/ anādyanantakāleṣv apy evaṃ kaiṅkaryakarmasu/*
> *nibiḍajñānavairāgyabhaktyādiguṇasaṃpadā/śāpādyupādhimūlo 'sāv īśaddveṣo jayādiṣū//*
>
> 5.79-80: While Jaya and others were serving at the door [of Hari] in each and every way in the world of Hari with a wealth of qualities such as dense devotion, detachment, and knowledge always and everywhere for beginningless or

> endless time, this slight (īṣat) hatred [of theirs] had as its root the guise of a curse.
>
> YM 5.81: *asvābhāvikadoṣatvān naiva mokṣanirodhakṛt/ ity eva muktidatvena kīrtyate nāradādibhiḥ//*
>
> 5.81: Because the fault [of reproaching/hating Kṛṣṇa] was against their inherent nature, this was no hindrance to their liberation. That is why [Kṛṣṇa] is praised by Nārada and others for giving liberation [to them, despite everything].
>
> YM 5.82: *bhṛtyāparādhasahanaśīlatvastutaye hareḥ/ kevaladveṣato mokṣa iti narṣer manogatam//*
>
> 5.82: [This is told in the story] in order to praise Hari as being patient with the faults of his servants. That through hatred did [they achieve] mokṣa—this is not the thought of the Ṛṣi [Nārada].

For Vādirāja, the Vena precedent applies to blasphemers who explicitly hate Kṛṣṇa. The story of Vena, the blasphemer, who is punished for reproaching Viṣṇu, is also narrated at length in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. If we reject hatred as a form of bhakti, and reject that haters of Kṛṣṇa can attain liberation, the problem of incongruity raised by Nīlakaṇṭha returns. The solution that Vādirāja proposes is that when we consider his backstory, Śiśupāla is not fuelled *purely* by hatred for Kṛṣṇa.[192] If Śiśupāla attained sāyujya, he cannot be possibly be a hater like Vena:

> YM 5.83: *"katamo 'pi na venasya" (BhP 7.1.31) pañcānāṃ puruṣam prati/ ityuttaraśloka eva vene sādhanapañcakam/*
> *yannety āha tato dveṣo dveṣamātraṃ kathaṃ bhavet//*
>
> 5.83: "Anyone except for Vena [may adopt one] of the five [ways enumerated earlier] to reach the Puruṣa." In the subsequent śloka about Vena [it describes] the five types of bhakti. Since it says "no", how can "hatred" mean pure hate?

[192] This position is influenced by Madhva on the issue of dveṣabhakti. Madhva clarifies that those kings were haters, beginning with the king of Cedi (*caidyādayo nṛpāḥ*) were actually devotees of Kṛṣṇa, not true haters. In his commentary on the Bhagavad G*ītā* 9.12, Madhva elaborates on this.

> 5.84: *pūrṇo hi bhagavaddveṣo vene tenaiva kīrtitaḥ/ kathaṃ punar niṣedho hi tasyaiva syād vido muneḥ//*
>
> 5.84: The hatred for God in Vena as described by Nārada was complete. How could it be an exception of the muni?
>
> 5.85: *'bhagavannindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ' (BhP 7.1.16)/ iti nindākhyavidveṣas tamohetur udīritaḥ//*
>
> 5.85: "For his reproach of God, the twice born men sent Vena to hell." Thus, this type of enmity called reproach is said to be a cause for hell.
>
> 5.91: *ityādivākyasandarbhais tamohetur yatas sphuṭam/ nirṇīto bhagavaddveṣas tato 'py ukto 'artha eva hi//*
>
> 5.91: Since it is clearly determined by these passages that hatred of Bhagavān is the cause of hell, therefore the sense (I'm getting at) is stated here.

Reproach of Kṛṣṇa, for Vādirāja, is a punishable offence, not a form of devotion. The Vena precedent that he cites in support of his point is also used by Nīlakaṇṭha in his commentary on the Śiśupālavadha section of the *Mahābhārata*. Vādirāja raises the same problem that Nīlakaṇṭha raises about this story, which was clearly common amongst exegetes. This is what I have earlier referred to as the problem of divine reproach, reconciling Śiśupāla's rebuke with his union with Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavata*'s rendering of the same episode, along with its other pronouncements on bhagavannindā and dveṣabhakti, further complicate matters. While both of them agree that Śiśupāla is not fuelled by pure hatred, they differ in the way they make that case. Vādirāja offers no secondary reading of Śiśupāla's base insults, he instead points to the blasphemer's backstory to make the point that he is not an *actual* hater of Kṛṣṇa.

The Shower of Flowers on Duryodhana

The Vena precedent in the *Bhāgavata*, and the attitude it bears towards divine rebuke, does not only complicate Vādirāja's reading of the Śiśupāla episode in the *Mahābhārata*. Kṛṣṇa is also rebuked in the *Śalyaparvan* by Duryodhana. Once again, the issue of incongruity arises. In this case, it is harder to dismiss Duryodhana as some sort of pseudo-hater. Duryodhana rarely accords Kṛṣṇa the respect that the Pāṇḍavas give him. On his deathbed, the Kaurava's true feelings for Kṛṣṇa are made clear, again in the form of rebuke. Duryodhana criticizes Kṛṣṇa's trickery during the war and is subsequently rewarded with a shower of flowers by the gods. This episode, at least when read conventionally, unsettles Vādirāja. Part of the discomfort seems to be that the gods appear to show any hint of favour to Duryodhana, since they themselves are Vaiṣṇavas. Nothing in Duryodhana's rebuke can be dressed up as secret praise of Kṛṣṇa, and nothing in the Kaurava's backstory attests to his past as a devotee. This episode of bhagavannindā is harder for Vādirāja to interpret.

Before turning to Vādirāja's interpretation of the puṣpavṛṣṭi, it is important to understand how he is indebted to Madhva's reading of the same episode. Madhva offers a unique explanation for the shower of flowers that ensures that it is not read as a gesture of support from the gods. The details of Duryodhana's final speech in the MBTN correspond closely to his final words to Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. In the MBTN, Duryodhana concludes by telling Kṛṣṇa that,

> MBTN 28.98-100: *(iti bruvantaṃ punar āha kṛṣṇaṃ duryodhanaḥ pāpakṛtāṃ pradhānaḥ)/*
> *svantottamo nāma ka eva mattaḥ ko nāma doṣo'sti mayā kṛto'tra//*
> *iṣṭaṃ ca yajñaiś caritaṃ ca pūrtaiḥ padaṃ ripūṇāṃ nihitaṃ hi mūrdhni/*
> *mṛtyuś ca saṅgrāmaśirasya vāpto raṇonmukhenaiva mayā kim anyat //*

> *iṣṭā bhogā mayā bhuktāḥ prāptā ca paramā gatiḥ/*
> *duḥkhino duḥkham āpsyanti pārthās te kūṭayodhinaḥ//*
> *candrasūryanibhaiḥ śūrair dhārmikaiḥ sadbhir ujjhitā/*
> *kevalā ratnahīneyaṃ pāṇḍavair bhujyatāṃ mahī//*
>
> What greater death [for a kṣatriya] is there? Who is better than me? What transgression have I committed? I have sacrificed and performed charitable acts; I have put my foot on the head of my enemies. I have obtained immortality through my death in battle. What else do I need? Facing my enemy, I have enjoyed the human pleasures, and I [shall] reach the supreme heaven. The Pārthas will meanwhile only grieve, those treacherous warriors. Let the Pandavas enjoy the earth without any jewels, alone, abandoned by those honourable heroes who were like the moon and sun.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Duryodhana mentions that he has sacrificed, stood on the head of his enemies, and will go to heaven because he died in battle like an honourable kṣatriya.[193] Madhva appears to be closely reading and reproducing this speech. Even the choice of words and language mirror each other.[194] In the Śalyaparvan, the gods shower flowers on Duryodhana when he makes this final speech. This is a controversial plot point in the *Mahābhārata* because it troubles the Pāṇḍavas, who must have thought that they were in the right. The MBTN does not ignore the puṣpavṛṣṭi, but provides its own explanation.

> MBTN 28.101-103: *ity uktavaty eva nṛpe sureśaiḥ prasūnavṛṣṭir vihitā papāta/*
> *tām eva buddhiṃ dhṛtarāṣṭrasūnoḥ kṛtvā dṛḍhāṃ pātayituṃ tamo'ndhe//*
> *sambhāvayata ātmānaṃ vāsudevaṃ vinindataḥ/ tatparāṃś ca kathaṃ na syāt tamo'nte ca viśeṣataḥ//*
> *yadaikaikamalaṃ tatra duḥkhādhikyaṃ samuccayāt/ iti tat kārayitveśa āha moghaṃ tavākhilam//*
>
> When the King said that, a shower of flowers rained down, ordained by the gods. This was done to make his mind firm to send him to hell. The one who praises himself and reproaches Kṛṣṇa and his followers, how could there not be darkness [for him] at the end? Since each and every [fault] is sufficient for

[193] MBh 9.60.47
[194] MBTN: svantottamo nāma ka eva mattaḥ cf. MBh 9.60.47: ko nu svantataro mayā

> [suffering], then, due to an accumulation [of faults], there is an abundance of suffering there [in darkness]. The Lord, having caused that, told Duryodhana "all your [efforts] are frustrated."

It is easy to understand why Madhva pauses the narrative to offer comment and explanation for the puṣpavṛṣṭi. The showering of flowers is often used in the epic as a literary device for the gods to show their support for someone's speech or actions. Do the gods support Duryodhana's deathbed predictions that he will go to heaven and the Pāṇḍavas will live in misery? Madhva's view is that Duryodhana will instead be going to hell, and that the gods merely did this to trick Duryodhana (or "make his mind firm") in order to ensure that he goes to hell, where he is fit to reside (tamoyogya). Madhva retains the hubris of Duryodhana's voice, but strips his rebuke of any value as a powerful critique of the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa. Instead, Madhva envisions the rebuke as a mere tool that seals Duryodhana's fate.

Commenting on this series of verses from the *MBTN*, Vādirāja tries to reconcile his views on divine reproach with that interpretation:

> MBTN 28.101: *ity uktavaty eva nṛpe sureśaiḥ prasūnavṛṣṭir vihitā papāta/*
> *tām eva buddhiṃ dhṛtarāṣṭrasūnoḥ kṛtvā dṛḍhaṃ pātayituṃ tamo'ndhe//*
>
> Vādirāja's comm. on MBTN 28.101: *bhagavānnindāṃ kurvati mriyamāṇe duryodhane puṣpavṛṣṭir abhūd iti paurāṇikī prathāsti. asyās tātparyam āha-- ity uktavaty eva. katham anyathā 'bhagavan nindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ' 'nindāṃ bhagavataḥ śṛṇvan yāty adhas sukṛtāc cyutaḥ' ityādismṛtiviruddhāṃ bhūbhārabhūtasya sakalasurāṇām ādivairiṇaḥ sākṣād bhagavantaṃ bahudhā nindato duryodhanasya śirasi duryodhanādidurjanahananāyaiva kṛtāvatārāḥ adyāpi duryodhanaparābhavam arthyamānāḥ pāṇḍavapakṣapātena duryodhanapakṣapātino daityān prati kalahaṃ kurvāṇāḥ paramavaiṣṇavā devā smṛtiyuktiviruddhāṃ puṣpavṛṣṭiṃ ca kuryuḥ.*
> *kathaṃ ca śaivamatapravartakeṣu viṣṇuvaiṣṇavadveṣiṇāṃ agrasāreṣu śiśupālajarāsandhakaṃsaduśśāsanādiṣu mriyamāṇeṣu satsu kadācit kvacidapy akṛtāṃ puṣpavṛṣṭiṃ tatsamānayogakṣeme duryodhane ca kuryuḥ.*

> *tasmāt sarvajñaśikhāmaṇinā yauktikāgrasāreṇa tātparyakāreṇoktam eva tātparyaṃ yuktam ity arthaḥ.*
>
> There was a shower of flowers when Duryodhana was censuring Kṛṣṇa as he was dying. This is the purāṇic story. [Madhva] stated the purport [with the verse] "ity uktavaty eva"
>
> [If this interpretation of Madhva is not accepted] How otherwise could the gods, these supreme followers of Viṣṇu—battling [kalaham kurvāṇaḥ] the daityas that are on the side of Duryodhana— who on this very day (adyāpi) are being implored to cause the slaying of Duryodhana due to their partiality to the Pāṇḍava side, who took avatāras only in order to kill the bad people like Duryodhana— now shower flowers on the head of Duryodhana, the first enemy of all the gods, who exists as the burden of the earth, even though he repeatedly reproached the lord? This shower of flowers is a contradiction of both reason and smṛti passages such as "Vena was sent to hell by the twice-born men due to the reproach of God" (BhP 7.1.16) and "One who, hearing the censure of God, falls from above." (BhP 10.74.40)
>
> And how then could [the gods] not at any time (kvacit kvacit) shower flowers on Śiśupāla, Jarāsaṃdha, Kaṃsa, Duḥśāsana etc, who were the foremost haters of Viṣṇu and his followers, who propagated Śaiva doctrines, when they were dying, though they have the same value (tatsamānayogakṣeme) as Duryodhana? Therefore, the meaning stated by the interpreter (Madhva), the best among logicians, the crest-jewel among omniscients is appropriate.

This shower of flowers alarms Vādirāja for understandable reasons. First, he points out that the gods, who are supreme followers of Viṣṇu (*paramavaiṣṇavas*), are showering flowers on Duryodhana, the supreme enemy of all gods, the man who *is* the burden of the earth (*bhūbhārabhūta*). As we have seen already, this is not the first time that Vādirāja looks to the "metamyth" of the epic—the story that the Bhārata war is being waged by gods against demonic kings in order to relieve the earth of her burden—to make sense of ethical questions that arise during the war, especially during the gadāyuddha. Ultimately, Duryodhana is the demon Kali, who is at war with the incarnation of the gods. From this

perspective, Vādirāja's moral vision of the epic collides violently with the shower of flowers on Duryodhana. Why would the gods, followers of Viṣṇu, shower flowers on Duryodhana if they seek to kill Duryodhana and other bad people like him?

(*duryodhanādidurjanahananāyaiva*)

His second objection to this puṣpavṛṣṭi is that it contradicts various other scriptural sources on the issue of blasphemy. Vādirāja cites two passages from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, both of which we have examined previously. The first verse is from the 7th skandha of the *Bhāgavata*, where Yudhiṣṭhira has trouble making sense of Śiśupāla receiving union with Kṛṣṇa after insulting him. Yudhiṣṭhira reminds Nārada that even Vena was sent to hell for blaspheming the Lord, so why did Śiśupāla attain sāyujya?[195] Vādirāja, like Yudhiṣṭhira, is puzzled about the shower of flowers on Duryodhana, and is citing the Vena example for the same reason. Like Duryodhana, Vena was a blasphemer of Viṣṇu. Yet, Vena was sent to hell (tamasi pātitaḥ) for rebuking God and Duryodhana was seemingly rewarded. The other passage is from the 10th skandha of the Bhāgavata, and occurs in the text's telling of the Śiśupāla story, to explain why those who were around Śiśupāla cover their ears so that they do not hear blasphemy:

> BhP 10.74.40: *nindāṃ bhagavataḥ śṛṇvaṃs tatparasya janasya vā/ tato nāpaiti yaḥ so 'pi yāty adhaḥ sukṛtāc cyutaḥ//*
>
> Someone who hears the reproach of God, or of his devotee and does not leave, also goes to hell, fallen from [his] good deeds.

A similar verse is found in Manusmṛti, instructing students not to hear reproach of their gurus.[196] Once again, Vādirāja uses this passage to cite what he views is orthodox

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[195] BhP 7.1.16: etad veditum icchāmaḥ sarva eva vayaṃ mune/
bhagavan-nindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ//

[196] MS 200: *guror yatra parivādo nindā vā 'pi pravartate/*

understandings of *bhagavannindā*. Why would they shower flowers on a person like Duryodhana when he is reproaching Kṛṣṇa? Without Madhva's explanation, the passage does not make sense to Vādirāja.

A shower of flowers designed to praise Duryodhana would also, according to Vādirāja, contradict a previous passage in the *Mahābhārata* itself. In his commentary on the Śalyaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*, right after the gods shower flowers on Duryodhana, Vādirāja also reiterates the points he makes in his commentary on the MBTN, and adds this additional objection:

> Comm. on MBh 9.60.51
> *duryodhane kṛṣṇaṃ bahudhā nindati sati devaiḥ kṛtaṃ puṣpavarṣādikaṃ punar api tasya kṛṣṇadveṣātiśayaṃ dṛḍhīkartum eva, na tu duryodhane prītyā. tathā sati 'atha śoṇitavarṣam ca pāṃsuvarṣaṃ ca bhārata. vavarṣa maghavān devas tava putre nipātite' ity atroktendrakṛtaśoṇitapāṃsuvarṣāder virodhāt, bhūbhārabhūtaduryodhanaharaṇāya śvetadvīpaṃ gatvā kṛṣṇāvatārāya kṛtaprayatnānāṃ duryodhane mahādveṣavatāṃ devānām punas tasminn eva prīter asambhāvitatvāc ca.*
>
> When Duryodhana rebuked Kṛṣṇa repeatedly, the gods made a shower of flowers again only in order to further strengthen the excess of his hatred for Kṛṣṇa, not out of affection for Duryodhana. If that was the case [that the showers of flowers represent the gods praising Duryodhana,] then what is said here would contradict the shower of blood and dust that Indra [rains down] described right in the Śalyaparvan, viz. "Then, the god Indra rained a shower of blood and dust on your son who was slain." Also, because of the impossibility of the gods' affection for him (Duryodhana) when they possess great hatred for Duryodhana (and) having gone to Śvetadvīpa to make an effort (to petition) for the descent of Kṛṣṇa who would seize Duryodhana, the one who burdens the earth.

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karṇau *tatra pidhātavyau gantavyaṃ vā tato 'nyataḥ//*

That Vādirāja chooses to comment on the shower of flowers as it is presented both in the *MBTN* and also in the *Mahābhārata* itself underscores the importance of this episode for him.

Vādirāja's final concern is centred on religious identities, another topic the commentator is preoccupied with in his commentary on the MBTN. Part of what makes this episode confusing is that it collides with Vādirāja's sectarian understandings of the key figures involved. Like him, the gods who are showering flowers are followers of Viṣṇu. On the other end of this spectrum are the haters of Viṣṇu and his followers (viṣṇuvaiṣṇavadveṣiṇāṃ), a club of which Duryodhana is the chief member. These two groups are far removed from each other, but one is showering flowers on the other. He identifies these haters along sectarian lines. According to Vādirāja, Śiśupāla, Jarāsaṃdha, Kaṃsa and Duḥśāsana (among others) propagated Śaiva doctrines (*śaivamatapravartakeṣu*). This follows a tendency, possibly initiated by Madhva, to mark the identities of key *Mahābhārata* figures as Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas. In some cases, e.g. that of Jarāsaṃdha, there is some precedent for this in the epic. Naming these figures as those who are bringing forth Śaiva doctrines is inherently connected to their fate in the epic. The haters of Kṛṣṇa are also Śaiva and they have been defeated. Fundamentally, Vādirāja argues, these maligned figures are cut from the same cloth as Duryodhana. How, then could the gods shower flowers upon Duryodhana, but not on these other haters who have tried to take on Kṛṣṇa in various ways?

The three questions that summarize Vādirāja's concerns about the shower of flowers as its presented in the epic are bracketed by Madhva's interpretation of the event. Vādirāja raises these concerns carefully, but ultimately puts his faith in Madhva's reading to rescue

this episode from all its potential shortcomings from a Vaiṣṇava perspective. Madhva and Vādirāja's concerns about the gods showering flowers on Duryodhana are rooted in the profanity of Duryodhana's blasphemy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have continued to look at how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s concept of bhagavannindā and the "Vena precedent" complicates the interpretation of certain episodes in the *Mahābhārata* for exegetes such as Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha. To understand why these writers were interested in commenting on these episodes, I introduced what I call the "problem of divine reproach." The problem arises when the *Mahābhārata* presents us with two blasphemers of Kṛṣṇa whose acts of rebuke and subsequent fates are discordant. Śiśupāla insults Kṛṣṇa's status, his upbringing, and even his wife, and attains union with Kṛṣṇa afterwards. Duryodhana harshly rebukes Kṛṣṇa, upbraiding him for his trickery during the war, while simultaneously presenting himself as an honourable man perishing by dishonourable circumstances. Immediately after, Duryodhana is showered with flowers by the gods. This cluster of exegetical issues, in a nutshell, is what I refer to as the problem of divine reproach. If 'svargakāmo yajeta' enjoins someone desiring heaven to sacrifice, one may say that these episodes are saying svargakāmo garheta: those desiring heaven (or union with Kṛṣṇa, in the case of Śiśupāla), should reproach Kṛṣṇa. The problem of divine reproach, then, is a problem of incongruency between the deed and the result.

These two episodes have been accorded a significant amount of attention by different audiences. The Śiśupāla episode, for instance, was retold as a seminal great poem

(mahākāvya) in the 8th century, Māgha's Śiśupālavadha.[197] It is also retold in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The *Bhāgavata* introduces the concept of dveṣabhakti, or devotion by means of hatred, to explain the Śiśupāla's rebuke. The shower of flowers upon Duryodhana, by contrast, was accorded significant attention by the early Indologists who were perplexed at how it presented Kṛṣṇa. Duryodhana's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa has often been used to argue that Kṛṣṇa must not have originally been a god in the epic.

Since any criticism of Bhagavān (bhagavannindā) came, in these later texts, to constitute a transgressive act, with dire consequences foretold for the one making the criticism, commentators were led to rethink the examples of Śiśupāla and Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata*. The exegetes studied in this chapter take their cues from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This is because it is the *Bhāgavata*, not the *Mahābhārata*, that fully elaborates on the concept of bhagavannindā and includes in this regard the story of Vena, the blasphemer. The most commonly cited verse that we have seen in this chapter is about Vena's punishment for insulting Viṣṇu: "due to his rebuke of the Lord, the twice born men sent Vena to hell" (bhagavannindayā veno dvijais tamasi pātitaḥ). The Purāṇa simultaneously associates dveṣabhakti (devotion by means of hatred) with the figure of Śiśupāla in order to justify his fate. Nīlakaṇṭha, for example, follows the *Bhāgavata*'s lead in problematizing a literal reading of the Śiśupāla episode as an authority on divine censure. That Nīlakaṇṭha quotes from Śrīdhara and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* shows that he is following that tradition's engagement with the epic. The development of a fully-fledged concept of blasphemy would not have been complete without the intervention of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It overshadows

[197] As McCrea and Bronner show, the textual history of Māgha's Śiśupālavadha is also beset with questions of divine reproach. The tradition even alters Māgha's rebuke of Kṛṣṇa. Redactors of this mahākāvya were evidently reacting to the same issues that Nīlakaṇṭha and Vādirāja were.

the work of Madhva, Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha on the topic, and influences the medieval and early modern commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*.

Chapter 6

Bhīma the Vaiṣṇava, Śiśupāla the Śaiva, and Madhva the Śivanindaka: Nindā and Religious Identity in Medieval India

In this chapter, I look at how narratives about rebuking God, and the discourse on *bhagavannindā* more generally, were exported to larger discussions on sectarian identity. Vaiṣṇava texts such as the *Viṣṇudharma* and the *MBTN* expound what it means to be a good Vaiṣṇava, and uses stories of rebukers who hate the god to contrast the two. The narratives are coupled with discourses on what constitutes nindā and its philosophical underpinnings. This is not exclusively a Vaiṣṇava practise, however. In the Śaiva text that I study in this chapter, the *Saura Purāṇa*, something similar happens. Madhva is presented as a Śivanindaka alongside stories of good Śaivas like Upamanyu who lecture others on the ills of insulting Śiva. The relationship works both ways—epic figures such as Bhīma are presented as ideal Vaiṣṇavas, while Śiśupāla and the other epic blasphemers are treated as anti-Vaiṣṇavas.

I take the study of nindā in the *Mahābhārata* tradition a step further by looking at how narrative is weaponized for polemical ends. The concept of bhagavannindā challenges the prevailing argument by Doniger (2015) that the Hindus had no conception of blasphemy in the sense of a profane way of speaking about God.[198] It shows that in premodern India, Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas adapted this concept to demarcate their communities and situate their narratives in contradistinction to one another. In showing

[198] Evidence that this argument has prevailed can be found in scholarship on India's "anti-blasphemy law" which treats it merely as a colonial hangover. By arguing that the concept of blasphemy in India predates the colonial occupation, I provide another normative framework with which to understand the problem of blasphemy and religious offence in India, beyond the colonial and secular.

how these stories of nindā were used to construct a sectarian identity in premodern India, I call attention to a conception of religious offence, that has otherwise thought to have been an Abrahamic religious and colonial import in South Asia. I argue that this conception of a rebuker of God is built from the stories of these "haters," and thus we must understand the sectarian construction of bhagavannindā through the narratives.

The use of the term 'sectarian' in the context of South Asia has recently undergone more scrutiny, where it has often been used to describe Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava as 'sects' or offshoots of a unified Hindu church. This formulation has obvious historical problems. Despite these issues, Elaine Fisher argues that there are ways to use sectarianism constructively:

> Speaking constructively about sectarianism, then in a manner that seeks to denude the term of its Orientalist overtones requires us to resituate Hindu communities in their social and cultural context. Indeed, to be a Śaiva or a Vaiṣṇava in early modern South India was not simply to believe in the supremacy of Śiva or Viṣṇu but to belong to a socially embedded community, and to mark one's religious identity as a member of a particular religious public.[199]

In these narratives that we encounter in the *Viṣṇudharma*, the MBTN and the *Saura Purāṇa*, one's identity as a rebuker is inherently connected to one's religious identity. The use of narratives are important in understanding what it means to be a good Vaiṣṇava who does not tolerate insults of fellow Vaiṣṇavas or Kṛṣṇa. To be censurer of Kṛṣṇa also means, in late medieval and early modern South India, that one must be an anti-Vaiṣṇava and in some cases be a Śaiva.

[199] Fisher (2017), p,13

I begin by looking at the *Viṣṇudharma*, a Vaiṣṇava ritual and narrative text that is likely to have been composed in the first millennium that reveres and borrows heavily from the *Mahābhārata*. Specifically, I show how narratives of nindā are tied to the polemics of the text. The *Viṣṇudharma* use narratives where people scrutinize Vāsudeva's divinity and criticize him to explain what it means to be a Vaiṣṇava. The concept of bhagavannindā is used in Madhva's MBTN in order to read his followers as Vaiṣṇavas and opponents of Kṛṣṇa as Śaivas and denigrate key elements of the Śaiva public. Specifically, in presenting Bhīma as the ideal Vaiṣṇava who never stands for or hears rebuke of Kṛṣṇa, Madhva constructs religious identity around the concept of nindā while presenting Śaivas as censurers of God. Vādirāja, the 17th c. Mādhva, uses the concept of bhagavannindā to denigrate Advaitins and the key tenets of their philosophy. Finally, I look at a medieval Śaiva text, the *Saura Purāṇa*, that adapts this primarily Vaiṣṇava conception of divine rebuke to denigrate Madhva as a Śivanindaka. In doing this, I locate a premodern concept of divine denigration and religious offence within a nexus of narrative and polemics. Many of the narratives in which Kṛṣṇa is rebuked have been used for polemical ends in these post-*Mahābhārata* texts, not only to define what it means to be a Vaiṣṇava, but also to denigrate other communities. It is in this construction of religious identity and community that we find a unique conception of religious offence which relates to blasphemy.

The Polemics of the Viṣṇudharma: Vasu the Vaiṣṇava and the Hetusaṃśrayas

The *Viṣṇudharma* ("the Precepts of Viṣṇu") is a surviving Vaiṣṇava text on the rituals and narratives of Vāsudeva. Its status as a minor Purāṇa, and as a prequel to the more popular Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, has been contested. As a text, the *Viṣṇudharma*

transcends the usual genres of ritual and narrative texts: it does not have all five lakṣaṇas traditionally present in a Purāṇa. Though it was first deemed a Purāṇa in 1884 by R.L. Mitra, Hazra (1958) classified the text as a minor or upapurāṇa, but also acknowledged that the text never refers to itself as a Purāṇa or Smṛti.[200] Instead, the *Viṣṇudharma* refers to itself as a "śāstra", and along with recent work on the Śivadharma Śāstra, the *Viṣṇudharma* is now understood as part of that category of sectarian śāstra literature.[201]

Dating, as always, is tricky, but the oldest surviving physical copy is an 11th century Nepali palm-leaf manuscript. It is likely, however, that the text is older than that, and can be placed in the first millennium. Hazra pegs the earliest date of the text to the 3rd century CE. This is an important, if overlooked, text for studying the early Vaiṣnava practises in both Nepal and India, given that manuscripts exist of the text both in North and South Indian libraries. Śaṃkara quotes from the extant *Viṣṇudharma* in his commentary on the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (although his authorship of this commentary is disputed). Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, a student of Rāmānuja, quotes from the text in his commentary on the Viṣṇusahasranāma.[202]

Aside from Hazra's attention to the work, the *Viṣṇudharma* remained unstudied until recently, when it began receiving more attention. Reinhold Grünendahl prepared a critical edition of the text, and now a group of scholars are studying the relationship of the *Viṣṇu* and *Śivadharma*-śāstras. Niranjan Kalfle (2017) has noted the *Viṣṇudharma*'s relationship

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[200] "The extant Viṣṇudharma also gives itself out to be a 'Śāstra' in two places and not a 'Purāṇa', Upapurāṇa, or 'Smṛti' even once." (Hazra, 1958) p.114-115

[201] More recently, the Viṣṇudharma has been studied in relation to the Śivadharma by Mirnig, et al. (2017).

[202] Grünendahl doubts that it was an important text for Śrīvaiṣṇavas, but this is cannot be the case. There is a correct reference to the Viṣṇudharma in the introduction to Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's commentary to Viṣṇusahasranāma.
VDh 67.35ab: sahasraśubhanāmānam ādidevam ajaṃ

with and reverence for the *Mahābhārata*, both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, the text, and its composers, were admirers of the *Mahābhārata*, as the Viṣnudharma opens with a praise of the epic. Implicitly, it often borrows from the theology of the Nārāyaṇīya. Like the Purāṇas, it links itself to the *Mahābhārata* by its framing story. The Vaiṣṇava community that produced and circulated this text evidently held the *Mahābhārata*, and specifically the Nārāyaṇīya, in high esteem. The *Viṣṇudharma* is an important work for the study of the *Mahābhārata* tradition because it provides insight into the rituals and theology of one of the devotional communities responsible for the transmission of the epic in the first millennium.

The *Viṣṇudharma* has polemical undertones, frequently referring to Pāṣaṇḍas (heretics) and is often preoccupied with those who deny Viṣṇu's divinity.[203] Unlike other texts referred to in this chapter, the *Viṣṇudharma* is concerned with the Jains and Buddhists as heretics and anti-Vaiṣṇavas, not Śaivas. This may have to do with the circumstances of its composition, suggesting that the author(s) were defining what it meant to be a Vaiṣṇava in a sectarian atmosphere, responding to these groups. It is in the cultivation of a specifically Vaiṣṇava religious identity that we find discussion on rebuke (nindā) and on the denials of Vāsudeva's divinity. The *Viṣṇudharma* does not focus on the Śiśūpāla story, but focuses on a predecessor of Śiśupāla in the Ceḍi Kingdom—Vasu. The story of Vasu is told and retold in the *Mahābhārata* itself (in the Ādiparvan and Nārāyaṇīya sections), and in the *Viṣṇudharma*, Vasu is the Vaiṣṇava king whose faith in Viṣṇu is tested by those who doubt his existence.

[203] Bisschop (2018, p. 408) notes that the Viṣṇudharma is full of denouncements of both Buddhists and Jains.

The *Viṣṇudharma* alludes to various theories of avatāras. More so than Viṣṇu, it is Vāsudeva that is worshipped as the highest form of God. In the 66th chapter, Śaunaka lists fourteen incarnations of Viṣṇu, repurposing a verse from the Bhagavad Gītā to explain the necessity of the avatāra when dharma declines (66.32). The necessity of the avatāra in times of distress closely resembles Kṛṣṇa's sermon to Uttaṅka in the Āśvamedhikaparvan. Aside from this, there is also a Pāñcarātra-style enumeration of the four Vyūhas, where Vāsudeva is the highest and from him emanates Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha. Another concept that is clearly borrowed from the *Mahābhārata* is that of four manifestations of Viṣṇu who are listed as the sons of Dharma, namely as Hari, Kṛṣṇa, Nara and Nārāyaṇa. The *Viṣṇudharma* is thus acutely aware of various theories of Vāsudeva operating in the world, in some cases as Kṛṣṇa who descends to rid the earth of evil. The text is sensitive to suggestions that Kṛṣna could be merely human, or that an avatāra of Viṣṇu could be merely an animal, as we will see.

In this section, I will look firstly at how nindā plays a role in the narrative of Vasu Uparicara, and then look at the subsequent discussion of divine rebuke. I argue that the narrative of denying Vāsudeva's divinity is inherently connected to how the *Viṣṇudharma* defines nindā and situates it within the polemics of the text. By framing Vasu and others as ideal Vaiṣṇavas who embody the values and follow the rituals that the text advocates, the *Viṣṇudharma* is inherently using these stories to define the narrative of the "good Vaiṣṇava."

Who is this Hari? Where is Your Vāsudeva? Understanding Nindā in the Viṣṇudharma

The *Viṣṇudharma*, like the other post-*Mahābhārata* Vaiṣṇava text studied here, is preoccupied with stories of those who insult Kṛṣṇa. Nindā, in this text, is best defined as 'blame' or 'insult'. Various classes of beings, from asuras to kings, are accused of mocking the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. In contrast, there are good Vaiṣṇavas in this story who do not entertain *nindā* and remain steadfast in their devotion.

Chapter 72 of the *Viṣṇudharma* prescribes the qualities of a Vaiṣṇava, here defined as one who keeps Govinda in their heart (govinde hṛdaya-sthite 72.27). In this version of the story, Vasu is cursed by a Brāhmaṇa to fall from the skies and is forced to roam the earth. In the *Viṣṇudharma*, the "fallen" Uparicara devotes his mind to Vāsudeva while daityas attempt to distract him from his penance and devotion. The daityas' method is peculiar: they criticize Vāsudeva. When Śukra sends the daityas to distract Vasu from his penance, they find Vasu deep in meditation, and try to interrupt him.

> VDh 72.24: *prasādaṃ kuru bhadraṃ vo bhagavān jagataḥ patiḥ/*
> *vāsudevo bhavān prāpto mām ānugrahakāmyayā//*
>
> May the Bhagavān, Lord of the World, show your grace to me.
> Bless you, Vāsudeva has come as you with a desire to offer me favour.
>
> VDh 72.25: *ity evaṃ cedirājo 'sāv ekaikasya ca dānavān/*
> *pūjayām āsa pādyādi nivedya vacasā tathā//*
>
> In this way the King of Ceḍi, after offering them water for the feet of each and every Dānava, worshipped them with that speech.
>
> VDh 72.26: *te 'pi taṃ cedirājānaṃ papracchur asurās tadā/*
> *kva vāsudevo 'tra vayaṃ prāptā dākṣāyaṇīsutāḥ//*
> Then those Asuras asked the King of Cedi "We, the sons of Dākṣāyaṇī, have arrived now but where is (your) Vāsudeva?"

Vasu replies by praising Viṣṇu and noting his omnipresence in all things movable and immovable, including the gods and dānavas. The dānavas eventually realize that they would not be able to kill Vasu and return to Śukra to report their failed mission. Śukra realizes that the only way to defeat Vasu is by distracting him from his concentrated meditation on Kṛṣṇa. He urges the Dānavas to disguise themselves as Brāhmaṇas and lead Vasu astray from his worship. The Dānavas return to the earth as Brāhmaṇas in disguise, and find Vasu praising Vāsudeva. They once again approach the devotee:

> VDh 72.75: *kva vāsudevaḥ kva bhavān imām antyāṃ daśāṃ gataḥ/*
> *yo bhavān vipraśāpena rasātalatalāśrayaḥ//*
> You are the one who, due to the curse of a Brāhmaṇa, has taken recourse to the lowest of the low worlds. Where is your Vāsudeva when you who have gone to this miserable state (antyāṃ daśām)?
>
> VDh 72.76: *bhaviṣyati smṛto devas trātā kila tavācyutaḥ/*
> *yo 'sāv āpyāyyate viprair adhvareṣu haviḥsravaiḥ//*
> This god Acyuta will be remembered as your protector. He is the one who is pleased (lit. swollen up) by sages through the trickling of oblations in sacrifices!
>
> VDh 72.77: *yo 'nyatras trāṇakāmo vā yajñabhāgam abhīpsate/*
> *sa trātā tava govindo bhaviṣyaty ativismayaḥ//*
> The one who elsewhere is in need of protection, or who wishes for a share of the sacrifice—that's your protector, Govinda! He will be extremely prideful.
>
> VDh 72.78 *yadā tvaṃ bhagavadbhakto vipraśāpān nipātitaḥ/*
> *tadā sa vāsudevas te kva gato 'lpaśruto 'vyayaḥ//*
> When you, a devotee of the Bhagavān (Vāsudeva), have fallen due to the curse of sages, where did that Vāsudeva, of little learning, go, the imperishable one?
>
> VDh 72.79: *na vāsudevo na harir na govindo na keśavaḥ/*
> *śāpaṃ dadatsu vipreṣu paritrāṇaparo bhavet//*
> Not Vāsudeva, not Hari, not Govinda, nor Keśava, could be intent on the protection from a curse when the sages were giving it.

> VDh 72.80: *sa tvam ārtapralāpebhyo viramādya yadīcchasi/*
> *kubuddhim etāṃ saṃtyajya svapauruṣaparo bhava//*
> You are the one who, if you wanted to, could abandon this stupidity at once and cease from the prattle about your suffering, and depend on your own manliness! (Lit. be one who is dependent on your own capability)

The strategy of the Daityas is to denigrate Vāsudeva by pointing out the futility in Vasu's devotion to him and the god's inability to help rescue him from that curse. If Vāsudeva is all-powerful as Vasu claims, then how can he not rescue his devotee who has fallen due to a curse? They ridicule not only Vasu's continual and uninterrupted worship of Viṣṇu but the powerlessness of the god, and urge the troubled king to abandon his own poor understanding of things (kubuddhim) and reject the god. Despite their urging, and their criticism of Viṣṇu, Vasu is unwavering in his devotion to the God and once again propounds his greatness to the Daityas. The story ends when Daityas themselves are convinced to become devotees of Vāsudeva, or Vaiṣṇavas.

By telling stories such as these, the composer(s) of the *Viṣṇudharma* are constructing a Vaiṣṇava identity in contradistinction to these other mythological figures who deny or question Kṛṣṇa's divinity. Vasu Uparicara is not the only example of a Vaiṣṇava who is inundated with anti-Vaiṣṇavas who doubt the existence of Vāsudeva. These narratives of devotion to Vāsudeva are inherently connected to the polemics of the *Viṣṇudharma*, which are articulated clearly in the chapter following the Vasu Uparicara story (adhyāya 72). As part of its overall project of defining a Vaiṣṇava, and othering those who are not, the *Viṣṇudharma* also explains what nindā actually is, and why it is futile. Timothy Lubin has drawn attention the *Viṣṇudharma*'s pointed attacks against heretics (pāṣaṇḍas) who embrace hetuvāda and reject Vāsudeva, and deem him to be a human, and

noted that this polemical tone is uniquely characteristic of the *Viṣṇudharma*, while being absent in the Śivadharma.

After telling the story of the good King Vasu, who does not waver when confronted with criticisms of Vāsudeva, the narrator Śaunaka begins the 73rd chapter by describing the qualities of a good Vaiṣṇava. In contradistinction to Vasu, Śaunaka notes those attitudes that are antithetical to Vaiṣṇavism. He then notes that fools think of Vāsudeva as a human or animal, referring implicitly to his worldly incarnations, and that they criticize (nindanti) his actions as a human. This type of nindā—treating Vāsudeva as merely a human, and criticizing his actions—also applies to the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. Given the *Viṣṇudharma*'s implicit and explicit connections and references to the *Mahābhārata*, it is not a surprise that they would view a certain characterization of Kṛṣṇa as human as nindā.

> VDh 73.36: *ye dāmbhikā bhinnavṛttā ye ca dharmadhvajocchrayāḥ/*
> *durlabho bhagavān devas teṣāṃ suyatatām api//*
>
> Those deceitful ones, their conduct deviant, and those who raise the banner of dharma (hypocrites)—the Bhagavān, the god, is difficult to obtain for them, even if they strive diligently.
>
> VDh 73.37: *kāmalobhāśritaṃ yeṣāṃ cittaṃ krodhādidūṣitam/*
> *teṣāṃ janmasahasre 'pi na matiḥ keśavāśrayā//*
>
> Of those who are attached to pleasure and greed, whose minds are afflicted by anger, the mind, even in a thousand births, is not dedicated to Keśava.
>
> VDh 73.38: *heyāṃ kṛṣṇāśrayāṃ vṛttiṃ manyante hetusaṃśritāḥ/*
> *avidyopahatajñānā ye 'jñāne jñānamāninaḥ//*

"Actions that are dedicated to Kṛṣṇa should be abandoned." Those who cling to reason, (and who) regard ignorance to be knowledge, think this, their knowledge damaged by ignorance.

VDh 73.39: *vedavādavirodhena kūṭayuktim apāśritāḥ/*
ye keśavas taddhṛdaye na kadācit priyātithiḥ//

They resort to false reasoning in contradiction with the words of the Veda. Never, in their hearts, is Keśava a welcome guest.

VDh 73.40-45: *mānuṣaṃ taṃ manuṣyatve manyamānāḥ kubuddhayaḥ/*
karmāṇi ye 'sya nindanti na teṣāṃ niṣkṛtir nṛṇām//

kecid vadanti taṃ devaṃ manuṣyaṃ cālpamedhasaḥ/
tiryaktvaṃ cāpare viṣṇuṃ māyayā tasya mohitāḥ//

devatvam api kṛṣṇasya yasya nindā mahātmanaḥ/
stutiṃ tasya kathaṃ śaktāḥ kartum īśasya mānavāḥ//

vyāpitvaṃ śāśvatatvaṃ ca janmabhāvavivarjitam/
yadāsya procyate kāsya stutir arthe tathā sthitau//

sarveśvareśvaraḥ kṛṣṇaḥ procyate yadi paṇḍitaiḥ/
tathāpi svalpam evoktaṃ bhūtārthe katamā stutiḥ//

ābrahmastambaparyante saṃsāre yasya saṃsthitiḥ/
nindāpi tasya na nṛbhiḥ kartum īśasya śakyate//

Those fools, thinking [Kṛṣṇa] to be a human when he took a human form, criticize his actions. There is no atonement (niṣkṛtiḥ) for these men. Some of limited understanding say that this god is human, others say that Viṣṇu is an animal. They are deluded by his māyā. How can men praise the Lord Kṛṣṇa, that great soul [when] there is also reproach of his divinity? When his extensiveness, his eternity and his absence of birth is described, what further praise can there be of him, the reality thus established? If the learned say that "Krṣna is the Lord of the overlord" even then only something minute has been said. Which of many praises is this about something that has happened in the past? The rebuke of

> the Lord whose abode is in saṃsāra—from a blade of grass up to Brahma— is not possible by men.
>
> VDh 73.49: *sarvakāraṇabhūtasya tasyeśasya mahātmanaḥ/*
> *kaḥ karoti stutiṃ viṣṇor nindāṃ vā pṛthivīpate//*
>
> Who, King, praises or rebukes that great-souled Lord, the one who is the cause of all?

Ultimately, according to the *Viṣṇudharma*, God is not subject to the rules of the world. To berate him like a common human as the Daityas do in their pitch to Vasu, or to even praise him as Vasu does, is to assume that this God is subject to the standards of humans. As Ram-Prasad notes (2019) Christian theodicies "assume that God is part of a community of criticism and counter-criticism."[204] In this section, the *Viṣṇudharma* evokes the imagery of Vāsudeva's expansiveness to rebut the argument that he can be limited to such a community of discourse. Vāsudeva is beyond both criticism and praise, and is not injured by criticism. One, however, is done by the good Vaiṣṇava, and one is done by the fool.

The positioning of this section in the *Viṣṇudharma* provide clues as to its intended audience and its polemical nature. After talking about the qualities of a devotee, the *Viṣṇudharma* pivots swiftly to the enemy of Vāsudeva who resorts to reason (hetusaṃśraya), and instead sees Kṛṣṇa as a human or just an animal in his incarnations. The use of "hetusaṃśraya" is often used polemically to describe different types of Buddhists. In other parts of the texts, the *Viṣṇudharma* refers to these people as pāṣaṇḍas, hetuvādins, and also ones who embrace the discourse of the mleccha.[205] In framing the discussion of divine rebuke in polemical terms, the *Viṣṇudharma* is extrapolating from the

[204] Ram-Prasad (2019), p.239
[205] See Tim Lubin (2017) and Peter Bisschop (2018) for more on this.

story of Vasu that it has just told in the previous chapter, and situates it into the world of the author (of the text). The pāṣaṇḍas, like the dānavas in the Vasu story, question god. The criticism of Kṛṣṇa's humanity is not fit for those followers of Vāsudeva that this text is targeted towards. The polemics of this text, then, is not only to attack those who argue that Kṛṣṇa is merely human, but to also define who the good Vaiṣṇava is in contrast to that.

Vaiṣṇavas and Anti-Vaiṣṇavas in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*

In the *MBTN*, Madhva frames some of Kṛṣṇa's opponents as worshippers of Śiva. This preoccupation with branding opponents of Viṣṇu as Śaivas is a unique feature of the MBTN that I would like to explore here to show how Madhva interprets the *Mahābhārata* in a way that treats Śiva as a god that is inferior to Viṣṇu, the Supreme God. Of course, aside from Mādhva readings of the epics, there is some precedent for seeing opponents of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* as Śaivas. This is partly tied to the tendency to read sectarian Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava squabbling into the text-history of the *Bhārata*. In the case of Śiśupāla, Brian Collins (2014) sees the birth of Śiśupāla with three eyes and four arms in the *Mahābhārata* as an allusion to Śiva. This would add a sectarian angle to Śiśupāla's rivalry with Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, before Madhva's commentary. If Śiśupāla has Śaiva connections, the Purāṇic tradition does not always pick up on this thread.[206] The Viṣnu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s, for instance, suggest that Śiśupāla was formerly the doorkeeper of Viṣṇu (and thus not a Śaiva), and a reincarnation of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa. The Śaiva allusions in *Mahābhārata* for Jarāsaṃdha, another opponent of Kṛṣṇa, are more explicit. The

[206] Although some Purāṇas note Śaiva leanings of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Rāvaṇa. The Uttarakāṇḍa portrays a friendly relationship between Rāvaṇa and Śiva, (7.16) and documents Rāvaṇa's worship of Śiva (7.31). I thank Robert Goldman for this reference.

Sabhāparva notes that the King is performing a human sacrifice to the Mahādeva, or great god, an epithet for Śiva. Madhva expands on this, and views these defeated haters of Kṛṣṇa, as worshippers of Śiva. For example, in chapter 22 of the MBTN, Kṛṣṇa is challenged by one Sudakṣiṇa to a fight. In preparation for battle, Sudakṣiṇa worships Śiva and seeks his help to destroy Kṛṣṇa. Śiva obliges, but Kṛṣṇa still prevails in battle. According to Madhva, the cakra that Kṛṣṇa employs in battle with Sudakṣiṇa burns Vārāṇasi, a city dedicated to Śiva. Sudakṣina is then sent to hell for his hatred of Kṛṣṇa (kṛṣṇadveṣāt).[207]

In the MBTN, two figures in particular—Duryodhana and Jarāsaṃdha— are known for their connections to Śiva and opposition to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa notes in the MBTN that Jarāsaṃdha is an asura who is just a step below the demon Kali (who incarnates as Duryodhana) in strength.[208] This statement sets Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana as the two most dangerous opponents of Kṛṣṇa. It is not coincidental to Madhva that these two were also defeated by Bhīma. Madhva's retelling of their defeat at the hands of Bhīma is instructive because it links the concept of rebuking Kṛṣṇa with their own statuses as anti-Vaiṣnavas. Bhīma's encounters and victory over Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana are seen as the victory of a Vaiṣṇava over an anti-Vaiṣṇava. To be an anti-Vaiṣṇava, as Madhva defines it, would be to insult and hate Kṛṣṇa, which both Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana are guilty of. Madhva takes care to emphasize the sectarian rivalry between Jarāsaṃdha and Bhīṃa, as devotees of Śiva and Viṣṇu respectively, in his *MBTN*.

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[207] MBTN 22.212: dagdhvā purīṃ vāraṇasīṃ sudarśanaḥ punaḥ pārśvaṃ vāsudevasya cā'gāt/ sudakṣiṇo'sau tama eva jagmivān kṛṣṇadveṣāt sānubandhaḥ supāpaḥ/

[208] MBTN 21.93: sa eka eva pūruṣo jarāsuto 'dya vartate/ samastasadvirodhināṃ balaṃ kaler anantaraḥ// There is one man alive today, Jarāsuta. (His) strength, among all real opponents, is next (only) to that of Kali.

Jarāsaṃdha's first major entry into Madhva's work is in chapter 20 of the MBTN. There we are told that Bhīma attends the svayaṃvara of the Princess of Kāśi. Kings assemble from across the country, and the Princess Kālī chooses Bhīma. The reaction amongst the other kings, especially Jarāsaṃdha is swift:

> MBTN 20.14 *teṣāṃ madhye bhīmasenāṃsa eṣā mālām adhāt tatra jarāsutādyāḥ/ kruddhā viṣṇor āśritān ākṣipanta āsedur uccaiḥ śivam āstuvantaḥ//*[209]
>
> In their midst, she placed the garland on the neck of Bhīmasena. The angry Jarāsamdha and others, praising Śiva loudly, insulted the followers of Viṣṇu and attacked them.

The implication here is that Bhīma is one of the Vaiṣṇavas that the Śaivas insult. Before physically fighting, Bhīma debates the Śaivas (including Jarāsaṃdha) by arguing that in the Veda, Viṣṇu is supreme. This sectarian verbal joust culminates in a physical fight where Bhīma prevails over all kings and throws Jarāsaṃdha into the Ganges. Bhīma not only defends his wedding to the princess, but rebuts the rebuke of Vaiṣṇavas that Jarāsaṃdha engages in.

Bhīma and Jarāsaṃdha cross paths again in the following chapter of the MBTN, where Madhva retells the death of Jarāsaṃdha (based on the story from the Sabhāparvan). Jarāsaṃdha is sacrificing humans to Śiva, and must be killed before Yudhiṣṭhira performs the Rājasūya. The sectarian dimensions of Jarāsaṃdha are added again when Kṛṣṇa says this:

> MBTN 21.97: *nihanti śaivanāyakaṃ ya eva vaiṣṇavāgraṇīḥ/ iti sma bhāvasaṃyute vadaty aje 'bibhen nṛpaḥ//*
> "The one who kills this hero of the Śaivas would be the best of the Vaiṣṇavas"
> When the Unborn One (Kṛṣṇa), full of sense, spoke thus, the King [Yudhiṣṭhira] was scared.

[209] Commentators such as Janārdanabhaṭṭa gloss this as "śivam śaivāṃś ca stuvantaḥ". Prabhañjācārya, in his edition of the MBTN, notes a variant in some manuscripts: śivam eva stuvantaḥ.

Bhīma accepts the challenge, and joins Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in their trek to confront Jarāsaṃdha. To further reinforce Jarāsaṃdha's Śaiva connections, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, and Arjuna remove a Śivaliṅga that Jarāsaṃdha had erected in his Kingdom. Upon arrival, Jarāsaṃdha again insults Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd, and Bhīma defeats him in battle. Although some have found sectarian overtones present already in the story of Jarāsaṃdha in the *Mahābhārata*, Madhva explicitly ties Jarāsaṃdha's Śaiva identity to his insults of, and opposition to, Kṛṣṇa and Vaiṣṇavas generally.

Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana fit the criteria that Madhva has designed for quintessential *Mahābhārata* villains—they insult Kṛṣna and his followers, and they have Śaiva connections. As an incarnation of the demon Kali, Duryodhana also engages in nindā when he insults Kṛṣṇa after the mace-battle, and thus the Kaurava Prince is a perfect candidate for defeat at the hands of the ideal Vaiṣṇava, Bhīma. As we have seen already, Bhīma's mace-battle with Duryodhana and his killing of him is controversial even for Madhva. After defeating him through trickery, Bhīma further humiliates his opponent by crushing his head. In the *Mahābhārata*, this move is against the rules of battle, and frowned upon even by Kṛṣṇa. The MBTN provides some justification for this move:

> MBTN 28.74: *kṛṣṇaṃ dyūte nidhehīti yad avādīt suyodhanaḥ/*
> *tatpratijñānusāreṇa bhīmo mūrddhānam akramīt//*
>
> Bhīma— in keeping with a promise that he made to Duryodhana [when] Duryodhana told [the Pāṇḍavas] to 'stake Kṛṣṇa,' in the dicing match— trampled his head.[210]

Here, Madhva makes the case that Bhīma trampled on Duryodhana's head as the result of Duryodhana's disrespectful remark towards Kṛṣṇa. By "Kṛṣṇa," Madhva is not referring to

[210] In the MBTN 21.337, Duryodhana tells Bhīma to stake or wager Kṛṣṇa in the dicing match.

Kṛṣṇā Draupadī but to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. Thus, the act of crushing his thighs and head are based on two different vows Bhīma made. In the MBTN, Bhīma vows to crush the thighs of Duryodhana to punish him for showing Draupadī his thighs, and vows to crush his head for suggesting they stake Kṛṣṇa in the dicing match. In response to this, Bhīma specifically indicates that he will trample on Duryodhana's head. Madhva ties this decision back to Bhīma's strict adherence to Bhāgavatadharma: one who would insult Hari (yo harim vinindayet) should be killed by Bhīma.[211] This does not strictly match the *Mahābhārata*'s version of events as we have them in the critical edition.[212] In fact, in the Sabhāparvan of the *Mahābhārata* Duryodhana never suggests that the Pāṇḍavas stake Kṛṣṇa. In Madhva's version of events, Bhīma crushes Duryodhana's head as a result of his insulting remark about Kṛṣṇa. It is not clear from where Madhva derived this plot point, or if he invented it, but it fits neatly with a thread that runs through the MBTN: a good Vaiṣṇava never forgets or tolerates insults of Kṛṣṇa. In this case, the vow, and Bhīma's controversial crushing of his opponent's head, hold special weight because they are retribution for Duryodhana's nindā.

Duryodhana is a rebuker of Kṛṣna and ultimately pays the price for it, and he is also connected to Śiva. Madhva explains that Kali incarnates as Duryodhana only with the permission of Śiva. Returning to the controversial victory of Bhīma in the mace-battle with Duryodhana, Madhva refers to Duryodhana's Śaiva connections. In the passage below, Kṛṣṇa invokes Śiva's role in Duryodhana's incarnation to justify Bhīma's trickery in the

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[211] MBTN 21.339: sa vadhya eva me sadā parokṣato 'pi yo hariṃ/ vinindayed iti dhruvaṃ pratiśrutaṃ hi mārutеḥ//

[212] In the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīma vowed (MBh 2.63.14-15) to break Duryodhana's thighs. He also vowed after the gambling match to crush the head of Duryodhana (2.68.28), but not for insulting Kṛṣṇa.

gadāyuddha. In his commentary on this verse, Vādirāja not only defends Bhīma, but amplifies the sectarian dimension of this verse.

> MBTN 28.87-89a: *lokato'pi na dharmasya hānir atra kathañcana/*
> *ye bhīmasyāprabhāvajñā āpaddharmaṃ ca manvate//*
> *avadhyatve śivavarād gadāśikṣābalād api/ jarāsandhopamo yasmād*
> *dhārtarāṣṭraḥ suviśrutaḥ//*
> *tasmāt saddharma evāyaṃ bhīmacīrṇa iti bruvan/*
>
> Even according to custom, this is in no way an abandonment of dharma. Those who aren't aware of Bhīma's prowess consider this to be the dharma of special circumstances. Since Duryodhana was well known to be the equal of Jarāsaṃdha because of his strengths and training in mace-fighting, he being un-slayable [avadhyam] due to Śiva's wish-granting [śivavarād], therefore, this conduct of Bhīma is the true dharma.
>
> Bhāvaprakāśika on MBTN 28.87: *ye bhīmasya aprabhāvajñā iti vadatā bhagavatā prāk kiñcid vyājena saṃyuta iti svavacanaṃ lokānām āpaddharmaṃ darśayitum evoktam. na tu bhīme kiñcidvyājasadbhāvābhiprāyeṇeti spaṣṭīkṛtam. jarāsaṃdhopama iti vadatā vipracchadmanā gatvā jarāsandhe hate sati adharmaśaṅkām akurvan tvaṃ kuta idānīṃ śaṅkase iti sūcitam. bhasmana tripuṇḍradhāraṇādikam akurvann apy ayam kalirūpatvāt svabhāvena jarāsandhād apy adhamādhamaḥ, ato 'py atrādharmaśaṅkā na kāryeti sūcanāya ca śivavarād avadhyatvam ityādikam uktam.*
>
> The Blessed One, who is saying "they who do not know Bhīma's power" has previously said "making use of a ruse" in order to show the people that Āpaddharma rules applied. It is not explained with the intention of [showing] the existence of some actual deceit in Bhīma. By Kṛṣṇa saying "jarāsaṇdhopama", what is implied is that when Jarāsandha was killed [by Bhīma] who was in disguise as a Brahmin, you [i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira] had no doubt about dharma; whence can you now doubt? Though Duryodhana does not wear the tripuṇḍra mark [of] ashes [on his forehead], and other (Śaiva signs), he is the lowest of the low, even in comparison to Jarāsandha, due to being a form of Kali by nature. Thus there shouldn't be any doubt about adharma here, and in order to hint at that, "śivavarād avadhyatvam" etc is said.

Unsurprisingly, Vādirāja finds no fault in Bhīma felling Duryodhana illegally in the mace-battle. He points out that Jarāsaṃdha's death at the hands of Bhīma was equally sneaky, but there was no uproar over it. Vādirāja explains that even though Duryodhana was granted a boon from Śiva, he had no public markings of a Śaiva, such as three three lines of "ashes" on his forehead. According to Madhva and Vādirāja, Duryodhana is *śivavara* because Kali is born on earth thanks to a boon of Śiva. His connection to Śiva, then, is unmistakable. These stories of the physical battle between Bhīma and his opponents take on a new sectarian dimension in the MBTN. Not only are these opponents haters of Kṛṣṇa, but they (Jarāsaṃdha, Duryodhana, Sudakṣiṇa, and Maṇiman) are also Śaivas. Branding Jarāsaṃdha as a Śaiva, and identifying him by his public markings, is a way of vilifying him.

The strongest villains of the *Mahābhārata*, according to Madhva, are those who insult Kṛṣṇa and also have some Śaiva connections. Madhva refers to this group as anti-Vaiṣṇavas, or avaiṣṇava. The story of the defeat of the anti-Vaiṣṇava is not just confined to the world of the epic. Madhva comments on these narratives to draw larger conclusions about religious identity in his own time. He uses the *Mahābhārata* and narratives of devotees and haters to ask what it means to be a Vaiṣṇava. In most of those examples, it is Bhīma who defeats the Śaiva, and this choice is not accidental. In chapter 18 of the MBTN, Madhva gives the example of the perfect devotee of Kṛṣṇa. He opens the chapter by arguing that Bhīma was always engaged in the Bhāgavatadharma (*śuddhe bhāgavate dharme nirato yad vṛkodaraḥ*). This is how he presents Bhīma as the ideal Vaiṣṇava:

> MBTN 18.5: *na kāmyakarmakṛt tasmān nāyācad devamānuṣān/ na hariś cārthitas tena kadācit kāmalipsayā//*
>
> Not one to perform a selfish deed, he therefore did not beg men or gods. He never solicited Hari with some desire to gain what he wanted.

MBTN 18.6: *bhikṣām aṭaṃś ca huṅkārāt karavad vaiśyato 'grahīt/ nānyadevā natās tena vāsudevān na pūjitāḥ//*

Wandering about for alms, due to (his) roar he takes from Vaiśyas as though (recieving) tax. He did not bow to or worship any other god except for Vāsudeva.

MBTN 18.7: *na pratīpaṃ hareḥ kvāpi sa karoti kathañcana/anupaskariṇo yuddhe nābhiyāti hy upaskarī/ nāpayāti yudhaḥ kvāpi na kvacic chadma cācaret//*

He never does anything unfavourable to Hari anywhere in any way. Armed, he never approached unarmed ones in battle. He has never fled from a battle, and he would never act deceitfully.

MBTN 18.8: *naivordhvadaihikānujñām avaiṣṇavakṛte 'karot/ na karoti svayaṃ naiṣāṃ priyam apy ācaret kvacit//*

He did not consent to (rituals for) the deceased for anti-Vaiṣṇavas. He neither does [the rituals] himself nor would ever he act in a way that was favourable (to the anti-Vaiṣṇava).

MBTN 18.9*: sakhyaṃ nāvaiṣṇavaiś cakre pratīpaṃ vaiṣṇave na ca/parokṣe'pi harer nindākṛto jihvāṃ chinatti ca//*

He never made friends with anti-Vaiṣṇavas and did not create hostility to Vaiṣṇavas. He would cut the tongue of one who rebuked Hari, even in private.

MBTN 18.10: *pratīpakāriṇo hanti viṣṇor vaitān ajīghanat/na saṃśayaṃ kadā 'py eṣa dharme jñāne 'pi vā 'karot//*

He killed those who were opposed to Viṣṇu or had them killed. He never had any doubt in dharma or jñāna.

Bhīma is the ideal Vaiṣṇava because he never listens to any rebuke of Kṛṣṇa, never offends Kṛṣṇa, and never associates with those who are against Vaiṣṇavas. Madhva subsequently goes further than this by listing in detail why other epic characters are not perfect

followers of Viṣṇu.[213] Yudhiṣṭhira once doubted Kṛṣṇa's capability to organize the defeat of Jarāsaṃdha, thereby treating him as a human. Sahadeva, according to Madhva, once rebuked Kṛṣṇa for the carnage of the war. Droṇa, Kṛpa and others plotted to kill Kṛṣṇa during the war. Bhīma (and Draupadī) are the ideal devotees because they do not insult Kṛṣṇa or disrespect him in any way. These narratives of victory that Madhva finds in the *Mahābhārata* are more than just exegesis or explication, they are used to construct the notion of the ideal Vaiṣṇava against the nindaka of Kṛṣṇa.

Is Īśvara a Bastard? Vādirāja's use of Bhagavannindā

Stepping away from narrative, the concept of nindā as a marker of sectarian identity had relevance to polemical arguments in other genres of text. Is Īśvara, or God, a bastard? According to Vādirāja, proponents of the opposing Advaita school would have to answer this outrageous question in the affirmative. For the Mādhvas, divine reproach is not merely a hypothetical found in the Purāṇic and epic accounts of Śiśupāla and other haters. Exponents of Advaita Vedanta are (perhaps unintentionally) engaging in blasphemy. Vādirāja's use of nindā in this polemic context displays his resistance to slandering the Supreme, in this case Viṣṇu, in any context. As we will see, he argues that Advaitavāda may be most damning because it would lead to censuring God.

In his Yuktimallikā, Vādirāja focuses on three topics where the Advaitin argument can lead to *bhagavannindā*—the oneness of the jīva with Brahman (*jivaikyavāda*); the formlessness of Brahman (*nirākāravāda*); and lack of attributes of Brahman (*nirguṇatva*). The effect of the Advaita philosophy, according to Vādirāja, would be the slandering of God

[213] MBTN 18.18-28

in at least three ways. If we accept the oneness of the jīvas (*jīvaikyavāda*), that means that God could be subject to demeaning insults. Viṣṇu could be identified by the same epithets we might apply to some jīvas, since Viṣṇu and jīvas share an indistinguishable unity of being.

> 1.12: *tvaṃ caṇḍālaḥ paśur mlecchaś coro jāraḥ kharaḥ kapiḥ/*
> *kuṇḍo golaka ityādyā yā nindā lokasaṃmatāḥ/*
> *tās sarvās sarvajīvaikyavāde syur hi parātmani//*
>
> Yuktimallikā 1.12: "You are an untouchable, an animal, a foreigner, a thief, a womanizer, a love child, a donkey, a monkey, a bastard," all these insults that are well-known to everyone would apply to the Great Soul according to the theory of oneness of jīvas [that the Advaitins proclaim].

Similarly, if the *nirākāravāda* is accepted, Vādirāja argues that this would mean that God could also be in the form of a disabled body, and thus be labelled a blind, dumb, lame impotent, noseless or deaf.[214] The existence of an Attribute-less (*nirguṇa*) Brahman would also mean that God lacks all good attributes. If he lacks good attributes, that means he is without compassion, etc.[215] *Bhagavannindā* here means name-calling or insulting the sacred with profane titles and attributes. When responding to the theory of non-difference between brahman and ātman, Vādirāja argues in the *Yuktimallikā* that this would necessarily imply that Brahman is the locus, or āśraya, of ignorance (avidyā).

> 1.19 *ajño 'sīti tu yā nindā sā māyāśrayoktitaḥ/ bhagavaty ucyate*
> *karmabaddhatvoktyā ca pāpitā//*
>
> 1.19: The rebuke of saying "you are ignorant" would be said about Bhagavān from crediting the māyā[vāda]. And since it says that God is subject to karma, it amounts to being sinful.

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[214] *Yuktimallikā 1.14: andho badhiro mūkaḥ paṅguḥ paṇḍo vināsikaḥ/ ityādyā vyaṅgatāhetor yā nindā lokasaṃmatāḥ/ tās sarvāś ca nirākāravāde kiṃ na syur īśvare//*

[215] *Yuktimallikā 1.16-17: vidyāvinayahīnas tvaṃ nirdayo nirvrato 'śuciḥ/ audāryadhairyaśauryādyair hīna ityādikāś ca yāḥ//*
sadguṇābhāvato nindās tāstu nairguṇyavādinām/ mate syur brahmaṇi pare sarvās sarvasya saṃmatāḥ//

> 1.20: *itthaṃ vicāryamāṇo 'bhūd yasmān māyāvināṃ matam/ sarvaṃ ca lokasaṃmatyā bhagavannindanātmakam//*
>
> 1.20: Since (God) was reflected on in this way, the thought of those who espouse Māyā[vāda] (Advaitins), all of it, consists of Bhagavannindā, as the world agrees.

Those who are proponents of the Advaita perspective are, therefore, blasphemers because they imply that Brahman is the locus of ignorance. By branding his philosophical opponents as blasphemers, Vādirāja uses divine rebuke as a line of attack against his philosophical opponents in the same way that Madhva does with Śaivas.

Bhagavannindā, in whatever form it may take, is a non-starter for Vādirāja. That the Dualist writer makes an argument that Advaita philosophy has the potential to be blasphemous is itself a testament to how serious divine reproach is as an offence. This series of verses from the *Yuktimallikā* serves not necessarily as his most detailed anti-Advaita argument, but as an indication of what consists of divine censure. If the basis for reproach is insinuating that Viṣṇu is deficient in some manner—morally, intellectually, or otherwise— this is offensive because it runs contrary to the Mādhva understanding that Viṣṇu is absolutely perfect and free from drawbacks. In the Advaita framework, he argues, there is potential for the Ultimate Reality to be called a thief, or to be imagined as one with a body whose organs are not functioning. There is also potential for moral and intellectual profanity, with allegations that an attribute-less God lacks everything, including vaunted virtues, and has ignorance. The concept of Bhagavannindā, by the 17th century, had evolved in Mādhva Vaiṣṇava texts to be used as a term to vilify their opponents.

Madhva, the Pracchanna Vaiṣṇava and the Śivanindaka in the *Saura Purāṇa*

Mādhvas were not the only group to use stories of nindā to make sectarian points about contemporary religious identity. In this section, I look at how the *Saura Purāṇa* uses Madhva's tactics against him. The *Saura Purāṇa* ("SP") is referenced by Hemādri, and he quotes from parts of the extant text, so it dates to as early as the 13th century. It is also referenced in a list of upapurāṇas in the Revākhaṇḍa and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*. Though it claims to be an addition to the Brahma Purāṇa, it is a Śaiva Purāṇa. Its contents—the narratives, the praises, the rituals—are entirely dedicated to Śiva.

The *Saura Purāṇa* denigrates those who preach the diminishment of Śiva. It is through the word 'nindā' that the economy of offence was expressed. At various points in the text, nindā of Śiva is forbidden. For example, in the 18th chapter, the SP enumerates various legal offences. The bard explains that one should not make any unkind speech (apriyaṃ vākyam), false speech, or injure someone. He then follows with this piece of advice:

> SP 18.2: *īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ sākṣī yaḥ sarvakarmaṇāṃ/*
> *smaraṇān mokṣadaḥ śaṃbhus tasya nindām vivarjayet//*
>
> He who is the master of all beings, the witness to all actions, that Śambhu who gives liberation from remembering him—one ought to refrain from censuring him.
>
> SP 18.3: *śāstreṣu dṛśyate śuddhir mahāpātikinām api/*
> *nindakānāṃ maheśasya śuddhir khalu na dṛśyate//*
>
> Expiation from mortal sins is seen in the scriptures, but expiation for the rebukers of Śiva is definitely not seen.

Censuring Śiva is arguably more serious than the other offences that the bard enumerates. In fact, the *Saura Purāṇa* takes *Śivanindā* as seriously as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes *Harinindā*. The SP raises the topic in a narrative context as well. In the 35th chapter, the god

Indra tempts Upamanyu to abandon his asceticism for Śiva and instead worship *him* exclusively. Upamanyu is famous in purāṇic lore for being an ardent devotee of Śiva. Upamanyu is angry that his peace is disturbed, and opts to punish Indra by killing him. The primary offence of the god (who is actually a rākṣasa in disguise), is slandering Śiva by pretending to be superior.

> SP 35.32: *tasmād asau nihantavyaḥ śivanindākaro yataḥ/*
> *tannindāśravaṇād pāpād adhikaṃ tadupekṣaṇāt//*
>
> Since (Śakra) slandered Śiva, he must be killed, for ignoring it would be a greater sin than hearing the rebuke of (Śiva.)
>
> SP 35.33: *śivanindākaraṃ dṛṣṭvā ghātayitvā prayatnataḥ/*
> *hatvātmānaṃ punar yas tu sa yāti paramāṃ gatim//*
>
> Having seen one who rebukes Śiva, and taking pains to have him killed, the one who then kills themselves goes to the highest abode.

Upamanyu seems to suggest here that someone who rebukes Śiva should be killed, and even listening to nindā of Śiva is a sin. This idea that listening to nindā of the divine is as offensive as insulting a god is present in Vaiṣṇava texts, such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and MBTN as well. In short, Upamanyu follows through with his promise. He burns Śakra as promised, and is about to burn his own body when Śiva appears in the nick of time to stop him. Śiva is impressed with his penance and devotion and blesses him with the ocean of milk (kṣīrasāgara) he had desired. The story of the good devotee who refuses to *listen* to someone else reproach their god has been particularized in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva narratives. The SP follows the lead of other Purāṇas in reinforcing the orthodox attitude towards bhagavannindā.

The concern about Śivanindā and those who insult him is not an abstract or purely narrative concern. In chapters 38-40, there is an extended meditation on what it means to be a censurer of Śiva, which particular religious groups engage in this practice, and how they should be treated. This section (ch.38-40) is not present in all manuscripts of the *Saura Purāṇa*. The majority of the manuscripts that the Ānandāśrama Press consulted for their edition included this section (5 of 9 manuscripts). Of those 5, two are dated to the 19th century, however. Only three of the manuscripts omitted these chapters. The fourth manuscript omits it but the editors noted a peculiar feature—in the margins the scribes noted that there was a spurious addition to the Purāṇa that they have omitted, meaning that the scribes of those manuscripts made an editorial decision to exclude this section. These chapters are also absent from the manuscript of the text included in Eggling's Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the India Office Library (vol VI, p.1188), though the folios of that manuscript date from 1550-1750 or later. Moris Winternitz suspects that it is "more probable" that these chapters are interpolations, and that the SP as a work predates the time of Madhva.[216] Though it is ultimately difficult to say if and when this section was interpolated, the manuscript evidence reveals that it was an important component of the text's history. Given that Purāṇas frequently contain an amalgamation of material from various periods, it is not surprising that this section may have been interpolated. Still, it ultimately picks up on themes, particularly those surrounding the supremacy of Śiva and the offence of slandering him, that recur throughout the text.

[216] Winternitz (1927) p.527 n.2, see also Sharma (1932) An Attack on Śrīmadhvācārya in the Saura Purāṇa (JABORI vol. XIII p.59-76)

In chapter 39, the SP narrates who the haters of Śiva are in the world, and why they roam amongst us. The story begins as many incarnation stories do. The gods rush to Bṛhaspati to urge him to devise a scheme (upāya) to fool derelicts and protect the earth from them. Bṛhaspati proposes that some god descend on the earth as a dishonest Vaiṣṇava (kapaṭī vaiṣṇavaḥ). Here is how he describes this 'fake Vaiṣṇava' that will fool the rākṣasas and daityas:

> SP 39.62 *śaṅkhacakrāṅkitatanus tulasīkāṣṭhabhūṣitaḥ/*
> *ūrdhvapuṇḍraṃ ca bibhrāṇo harināmākṣaram japan//*
> His body is branded with a conch and discus and decorated with tulasī-wood; bearing the ūrdhvapuṇdra and chanting the name 'Hari'.
>
> SP 39.63 *devatāmātranindī ca akṛtvā matim īśvare/*
> *śivadveṣṭā mahāpāpaprerakaḥ śivanindakaḥ//*
> Having not committed his mind to Īśvara, insulting the deity in general, he is a hater of Śiva who commits serious offence, he reproaches Śiva.

The reproacher of Śiva has the undeniable external markings of a Vaiṣṇava, such as the ūrdhvapuṇḍra tilaka on his head. This 'false Vaiṣṇava' is described as an untouchable, who preaches that Śiva is equal to Viṣṇu (sādhāraṇyena viṣṇunā), but that Viṣṇu alone should be worshipped. From this, the insulter of Śiva creates a movement of fake Vaiṣṇavas (vaiṣṇavābhāsa).

The SP deems the views of these pseudo-Vaiṣṇavas to be an insult towards Śiva, and many of the views are espoused by Mādhvas. The Vaiṣṇavābhāsas argue that Śiva is a slave of Viṣṇu, and that Śiva is not to be respected. They accept the authority of the Veda but assert that it expresses the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Aside from challenging the supremacy of Śiva, they also question the use of public Śaiva markings of faith, such as wearing the rosary (rudrākṣa) and donning ashes on one's limbs (bhasmāṅgadhāraṇa). The composers of the SP, particularly this section, are concerned with how the defamers of Śiva affect the lives of

Śaivas. They situate divine reproach in a public sectarian context, between those Vaiṣṇavas that don the ūrdhvapuṇḍra mark on their forehead, against the Śaivas who wear rudrākṣa and smear ashes on their body. In this case, to insult Śiva is to insult a Śaiva.

The SP also implicates the kingship in this sectarian battle between the two groups. Eventually, the doctrines of these fake Vaiṣṇavas reach the King, Pratardana. The King is perplexed, and notes that from what he knows, the eternal Veda proclaims only Śiva's greatness, so how could Viṣṇu be greater? The Vaiṣṇavas respond by insulting Śiva. How can the King serve a god who lives in a crematorium (śmaśānavāsin), who holds a snake, and who holds poison in his throat? These questions trouble the King, and upon further investigation, he realizes that this group was devised by the gods to distract people from Śiva. The angry King punishes these Vaiṣṇavas for defaming Śiva by beheading them all and giving them horses' heads.[217] Like Upamanyu, the King ultimately kills those who censure God. Through this story, the SP defines nindā within the context of the public lives of Vaiṣṇava and Śaivas. A slanderer is no longer simply a god or well-known character, but instead a member of a religious group pushing specific ideas about Viṣṇu's superiority. The text also advocates the use of state power to punish, in this case violently, the offenders.

The SP notes that the god of Spring, Vasanta, incarnates on the earth as Madhva to act on the goddess Rati's desire for revenge against Śiva. Śiva had killed her husband, and she seeks vengeance by convincing Vasanta to incarnate on earth to encourage humans to hate Śiva. This reviler of Śiva is born in South India[218] as "Madhu Śarmā" or "Madhvācārya".

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[217] This is probably a mockery of the incarnation of Viṣṇu hayagrīva, or hayaśiras, the horse-headed one. Coincidentally, Hayagrīva is the iṣṭadevatā of Vādirāja, who is often pictured with the god.

[218] One verse says he was born in Andhra Pradesh, and another says (accurately) that he was born in Karnataka. tadā vasantaḥ karṇāṭatilaṅgādikadūṣakaḥ madhunāmā ca vidhavākṣetre viprād bhaviṣyati// 33

Madhva studies under a guru, Padmapāda, who is immediately suspicious of him. The student questions why sacrifices such as agnihotra should be performed, leading Padmapāda to conclude that Madhva must not be a true brāhmaṇa.[219] He then curses him to never know the authoritative conclusion of śāstra; he will only know the "prior position" or the pūrvapakṣa. From this, the SP says that Madhva propagates a religion based on the "straw man" pūrvapakṣa arguments he learned.[220] More importantly, his followers are equally devious and even more sinful, spreading this misleading doctrine. Here is how the SP sums up Madhva's brand of Vaiṣṇavism:

> SP 40.61: *pracchanno 'sau mahāduṣṭaś cārvāko madhusaṃjñakaḥ/*
> *bhaviṣyati kalau vipraḥ śivanindāpravartakaḥ//*
>
> Oh Sages! This hidden, extremely corrupt Cārvāka known as Madhu will be born in Kali (Yuga), bringing forth censure of Śiva.

The Vaiṣṇavas reproaching Śiva in the earlier chapter of the *Saura Purāṇa* intentionally mirror Madhva and his group. The Śivanindakas are not an imagined group of people—they are (probably amongst other types of Vaiṣṇavas), Mādhvas who proclaim that Viṣṇu is greater than Śiva.

The *Saura Purāṇa* identifies the censurers of Śiva in historical terms and suggests how they should be punished. An important part of censuring Śiva is arguing that he is inferior to other gods, such as Viṣṇu. The SP not only defends Śiva against his blasphemers, but also engages in some nindā of its own. In various stories told throughout the text, Viṣṇu is intentionally portrayed as inferior to Śiva. He is inferior either because he obtained his powers from Śiva (and is therefore dependent on him), and because he prays to Śiva.

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[219] *śāstraṃ pūrṇaṃ tato 'dhītya sthita āhnikavarjitaḥ/ kim agnihotraṃ ko yāgo hetum evaṃ kariṣyati//*
gurur ākarṇya tad vākyaṃ brāhmano na bhaved ayam/ iti niścitya taṃ duṣṭaṃ vakṣyati śrutatadvacāḥ//

[220] *kapaṭeṇa yataḥ śāstraṃ matto 'dhītaṃ durātmanā/ tena siddhāntamaryādā kadācin mā sphurītv ayam// 41*
andhatā tava siddhānte pūrvapakṣe ca paṭavam/ bhavaty eva paraṃ tv ekaṃ pāpāḥ śiṣyā bhavantu te// 43

The word nindā, and the term bhagavannindā, are some of many cognate concepts that correspond to blasphemy in the sense of a profane way of speaking about or to the divine. This connection between the modern term blasphemy, with its roots in the Abrahamic religious traditions, is not without problems. Still, the concept of an offensive way of speaking about and to God is articulated in the texts mentioned in this chapter. In the preceding two chapters in this section, I have looked at how the *Mahābhārata* tradition births the concept of bhagavannindā primarily in response to the recurring censure of Kṛṣṇa in the epic. Bhagavannindā is fleshed out for the first time in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8^{th}-9^{th} c.), which rethinks the Śiśupāla episode, and also offers fresh readings of the Pṛthu and Vena myth. The early Vaiṣṇava readers of the *Mahābhārata* presented the rebuke of Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu as a prohibitory concept, while also accounting for Śiśūpāla's harsh insults. This eventually led to medieval commentaries to reinterpret the Śiśupāla and Duryodhana episodes through what I call 'the problem of divine reproach'.

Why was the term nindā and bhagavannindā so important to polemical literature, and what relevance did this narrative concept have for sectarian identity? In this chapter, I have shown that stories about kings and enemies questioning the divinity of Viṣṇu and insulting him were not abstract theological issues for epic exegetes like Madhva, Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha to sort out. These narratives, and the budding concept of bhagavannindā had implications for defining the Vaiṣṇava identity and their sectarian polemics. The discourse on the haters and rebukers of Viṣṇu who appear in epic and Purāṇic narrative is eventually exported to the world of medieval South India. In his MBTN, Madhva constructs Bhīma as the ideal Vaiṣṇava who will never listen to the rebuke of Kṛṣṇa, and Duryodhana, Śiśūpāla and Jarāsaṃdha as Śaivas. The narrative of their defeat is the narrative of the

Vaiṣnava's victory (who never listens to bhagavannindā) over the Śaiva. Madhva and Vādirāja also use this narrative to denigrate key aspects of the Śaiva public, including their practices and external markings. I look at how the *Saura Purāṇa*, in response, presents Madhva as a fake Vaiṣnava because he is a "śivanindaka." Anne Monius (2001) has shown how poets (especially in South India) use narrative and literature to express polemics and form religious identities. The discussion on bhagavannindā is closely tied to how these medieval Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva communities defined each other as "haters", blurring the line between narrative and community. In defining what it takes to be a true Vaiṣṇava, texts like the *Viṣṇudharma* and the MBTN explicitly use the stories of these exemplary figures like Bhīma and Vasu to show traits that the audience of these texts should emulate. A central aspect of this Vaiṣṇava ethic is an unwavering faith in Vāsudeva and an unwillingness to listen to nindā of him. Conversely, these same texts note that other communities—be they heretical hetuvādins or Śaivas—regularly insult Kṛṣṇa in their actions. Madhva thus models the opponents of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* as followers of Śiva to that end. The *Saura Purāṇa* adapts this motif of not tolerating nindā from Vaiṣṇava texts to define Upamanyu as the ideal Śaiva. In its interpolated verses, it explicitly defines Madhva as a Śivanindaka for his own views.

The story of Vasu and the daityas who insult Vāsudeva is immediately followed by a polemic against certain Pāṣaṇḍas who deny the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and insult him. The narrative in Madhva's MBTN of Bhīma's defeat of Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana is not far removed from the world in which Madhva writes—Bhīma defeats them physically and in some cases intellectually by refuting their anti-Vaiṣṇava views on the Veda and the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Bhīma also punishes these largely Śaiva figures for their insults of

Kṛṣṇa, cementing his status as the ideal Vaiṣṇava. Vādirāja, in 16th c. Karnataka, imports the term bhagavannindā from narrative into his polemical text to make the case that his Advaitin opponents are censurers of God by virtue of their own arguments. Finally, in the *Saura Purāṇa*, we see Śaiva narratives of the Śivanindaka that are modelled on the earlier Vaiṣṇava narratives. The Purāṇa tells stories of gods like Indra who insult Śiva and are judiciously punished. These narratives are adapted in the *Saura Purāṇa* to cast a contemporary community of Mādhvas, and their founder Madhva, simultaneously as Śivanindakas and fake Vaiṣṇavas.

Stories from the *Mahābhārata*—particularly those of Śiśupāla, Vasu Uparicara, Bhīma, Jarāsaṃdha and Duryodhana—would play an important role in the second millennium in not only developing a concept and theory of religious offence and rebuke of God, but also promoting the ideal Vaiṣṇava who never listens to or entertains insults of Kṛṣṇa. To broadly chart a partial history of divine rebuke in South Asia, the concept of bhagavannindā developed in a uniquely Vaiṣṇava context amongst readers of the *Mahābhārata*, and this narrative and theological concern about rebuking Kṛṣṇa was eventually transformed into a larger sectarian concern, particularly in medieval and early modern South India, about what it means to be a good Vaiṣnava and a bad Śaiva or vice versa.

Part 3: Nikarṣa

Chapter 7

"Powerless like a Peasant": The Problem of Kṛṣṇa's Embodiment in the Mahābhārata Tradition

"Where was the strength of Hari, who tore apart Kansa and split the jaw of the horse-king? Jaras struck him down with a single arrow, just as old age strikes down even the rarest beauty."[221]

- Saundarānanda 9.17

The *Mahābhārata* presents Kṛṣṇa simultaneously as a god (or even the Supreme God) who acts human, one who only appears to be powerless like a peasant (kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ) as the Udyogaparvan puts it.[222] This portrayal presents unique challenges for the Vaiṣṇava interpreters of the epic: how does one make sense of Kṛṣṇa's humanity and divinity simultaneously? If, for instance, he is simply acting as a human, why does he die at the hands of a hunter who pierces his foot? Although these seem to be pedantic questions, they were important to both Vaiṣṇava and non-Vaiṣṇava polemicists who sought to defend or to refute the perfection of the god. In the later Purāṇas, and eventually commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, we find a sustained effort to spell out how a divine being takes on a human form as an avatāra, and to defend it from criticisms. One challenge that emerges in the *Mahābhārata*'s reception for the medieval Vaiṣṇava readers is to conceptualize and understand how Kṛṣṇa operates in the world as a human. The theology of the avatāra develops around this sensitivity for clarifying where, if at all, the divinity begins and the humanity of the god ends.

The humanity of Kṛṣṇa, for instance, could be located in his perceived faults, physical and otherwise. A central problem of embodiment is the physical form of Kṛṣṇa and of other

[221] Saundarānanda 9.17, trans. by Covill, 2007.
[222] MBh 5.66.14

human avatāras, such as Rāma. Both incarnations appear to succumb to wounds, and in the *Mahābhārata* especially, Kṛṣṇa's death is tied to his bodily injury. The narratives in the epics that portray a human avatāra often raised the eyebrows of Vaiṣṇava exegetes who would not accept their god as inferior to another god.

Polemicists and sectarian texts often exploited the humanity of the avatāra to argue that Viṣṇu in his incarnations was inferior to other gods. Criticism of gods of the rival movements proliferated in the polemical context. This largely amounted to finding faults, both moral and physical. This type of fault-finding, which consists in identifying human faults of avatāras like Kṛṣṇa is a popular form of criticism, and predates the medieval period. Fault-finding of this sort has sectarian roots, particularly in Jain and Buddhist sources. One Jain text derides the gods Kṛṣṇa and Śiva for their human conduct.

> Look at these authorities on salvation! One whose conduct is no better than that of a householder, One whose conduct is inferior even to that of an ordinary mendicant. If such a one be a god, surely, there would be no dearth of gods![223]

Early Buddhist texts, notably those of Aśvaghoṣa (1st c. CE) criticized the human bodies of these putative divine beings, as the opening quote shows. Polemics that survive in Tibetan also record harsh attacks on the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata*, likely from Brāhmaṇas who converted to Buddhism and were thus accquainted with the literature.

Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin, in a text now surviving in Tibetan, writes that "Krishna has undertaken to harm Karna, Duryodhana, and the others, but you [the Buddha], who is seeking to benefit sentient beings, have even given your life for them."[224] In his poem *Saundarānanda*, Aśvaghoṣa refers to the death of Kṛṣṇa at the hands of Jarā in order to

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[223] Jaini (2000), p.270

[224] Stanza 34, Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin, Viśeṣastava & Viśeṣastavaṭīkā (Tib., ed. Johannes Schneider 1993: Lobpreis der Vorzuglichkeit des Buddha). I thank Dr. Ulrike Roesler for the reference and translation.

argue for the futility of the human body. The most common point of criticism for Kṛṣṇa is his body, as the Aśvaghoṣa passage above shows. Not only does his body seem to be subject to physical pain and injury, but Kṛṣṇa is also killed by a hunter.

What does it mean for an avatāra to be divine and perfectly human in Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva theological exegesis and polemics, and what do episodes such as Kṛṣṇa's death in the *Mausalaparvan* tell us about the nikarṣa of the god? These are the questions that this chapter asks. I begin by looking at how Madhva and Vādirāja understand the concept of the avatāra and embodiment in light of their theological position that Viṣṇu is completely without fault (nirdoṣaka). I argue that for them, traces of human vulnerabilities in Rāma and Kṛṣna are considered signs of faults or doṣas. I pay attention specifically to chapter two of Madhva's MBTN, where he argues that Viṣṇu and his avatāras are without fault. This argument for the faultlessness of Viṣṇu rests on a few examples, particularly from the epics. To be perfect or without fault means, in part, that Kṛṣṇa does not have a common (prākṛta) body capable of death or injury, and that he is not swayed by delusion or confusion in any way. Birth and death are signs of humanity, and for gods signs of their weakness. In short, Madhva's argument for the perfection of Kṛṣṇa rests on his lack of humanity. Madhva proposes that Kṛṣṇa is a god who acts like a human. I then turn to examples from Vādirāja's Yuktimallikā, to see how he turns to similar examples from the epics to argue for Viṣṇu's perfection. Both understandings of Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata*, and his embodiment specifically, rest on the notion that all signs of his humanity are *līlā*.

After contextualizing the debate around the nature of Kṛṣṇa's body within this theological discussion of Viṣṇu's perfection, I turn specifically to an episode that *Mahābhārata* commentators pay close attention to: Kṛṣṇa's death and cremation. The Viṣṇu

and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s retell the death of Kṛṣṇa. Implicit in this retelling, I argue, is an engagement with the *Mahābhārata*'s version of Kṛṣṇa's death and a fleshing out of the rules of Kṛṣṇa's descent and embodiment. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which posits Kṛṣṇa as Brahman, already has an ontology of the divine body that is ultimately different from the ontology of the human body.

I then look at how two *Mahābhārata* commentators, Nīlakaṇṭha and Vādirāja, use the epics to argue for the perfection and faultlessness of Viṣṇu. Writing from an Advaitin perspective, Nīlakaṇṭha takes issue with the notion that Kṛṣṇa's body is destructible, and returns to this issue on a recurring basis in his commentary. Specifically, I argue that Vādirāja justifies certain incidents in the epic in order to make his case that Viṣṇu is perfect. It is the details in the narrative of the Mahābḥārata that often conflict with Vādirāja's (and by extension, Madhva's) belief that Viṣṇu is without fault. To that end, I look at how this "inferior god complex" affects his reading of Kṛṣṇa's death in the *Mahābhārata*.

Finally, I contextualize the discussion on the nature of the divine body in classical Indian thought in order to understand why Kṛṣṇa's body was weaponized for polemics of offence and defence. I contrast the positions of the Vaiṣṇavas Vādirāja and Madhva with the Śaiva Appaya Dīkṣita's argument in his polemical *Brahmatarkastava*. By defending Śiva from accusations of imperfection, Appaya suggests instead that it is Rāma and Kṛṣṇa that are subject as avatāras to the human trappings of birth, death, and injury. The Śaiva polymath eventually accepts the explanation that Madhva puts forth about Kṛṣṇa's death and body, but not before reminding his audience that this is a criticism unique to Viṣṇu and Vaiṣṇavas—there is no such question of embodiment and all the theological justifications that come with that, for Śiva.

God as "Without Fault:" The Doctrine of Faultlessness in Mādhva Thought

Madhva's exegesis of the *Mahābhārata* often involves defending his view that Viṣṇu is full of faultless qualities (nirdoṣaguṇapūrṇam). The importance of this concept is further proven by its mention in the benedictory verses of Madhva's Brahmasūtrabhāṣyam, Anuvyākhyāna, Viṣṇutattvavinirṇaya, and MBTN.[225] The MBTN even declares that any scripture which contradicts this theological tenet (along with the concept of tāratamya) exists purely for the delusion of people.[226] Despite this, most monographs and scholarly studies of Madhva's philosophy have not paid significant attention to the concept.[227] As we will see, this theological issue has practical consequences in his exegesis of the *Mahābhārata*, particularly when he addresses the conduct of Viṣṇu's avatāras.

One of Madhva's fundamental disagreements with Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta is over the very possibility of Nirguṇa Brahman, or an Impersonal Absolute. The disagreement with Śaṅkara could be summarized in this way:

> The implication of Śaṅkara's non-dualist reading of the Upaniṣads was that God was only a lesser form of brahman, or the initial stage of ignorance that creates the mundane world. This posed problems for worshippers of personified dieties, especially for worshippers of Viṣṇu, a supreme deity with an imaginable form, who…as Madhva put[s] it, [is] the unique possessor of all perfect attributes.[228]

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[225] The benedictory verses in the Anuvyākhyāna describe Viṣṇu as "nikhilaguṇapūrṇaikadehaṃ" and "nirdoṣam"; in the Brahmasūtrabhāṣyam as "guṇaiḥ sarvair udīrnaṃ doṣavarjitaṃ"; in the Viṣṇutattvavinirnaya as "nirdoṣāśeṣasadguṇaṃ" and in the MBTN as "paripūrṇaguṇārṇavāya".

[226] *nirdoṣatvaṃ tāratamyaṃ muktānām api cocyate/*
etadviruddhaṃ yat sarvaṃ tan mohāyeti nirṇayaḥ// 1.51

[227] Siauve (1968) and Narain (1962) touch on the concept incidentally, in relation to Madhva's arguments against Nirguṇa Brahman. Sarma (2003) does not address it in his introductory book on Mādhva Vedānta. Roque Mesquita (2016), in his study of Madhva's Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya, barely addresses the concept despite its presence in the VTN. As we will see, David Buchta (2014) engages critically with the concept.

[228] Minkowski (2016), p.96-97:

Madhva opposes the traditional Advaitin position that the Qualified (Saguṇa) Brahman is lower (apara) and the Nirguṇa Brahman is highest (para). For him, the existence of Nirguṇa Brahman would mean the denial of Viṣṇu's perfection.[229] Madhva argues that absence of virtue (guṇa) in Brahman would make him an asura.[230] He also found little to distinguish the Advaitin Nirguṇa Brahman from the Buddhist concept of Śūnya.[231] His many objections to the Unqualified Brahman are detailed in the Anuvyākhyāna, a versified commentary on the Brahmasūtra. In the context of these debates, Madhva critiques the concept of an impersonal God and defends his view that God possesses qualities (guṇa).

If Viṣṇu is not Nirguṇa but Saguṇa, then what qualities does he possess? In the beginning of the MBTN, Madhva raises the importance of the Brahmasūtras for understanding the purport of scriptures and settling any doubts.

> MBTN 1.42: *nirṇayāyaiva yat proktaṃ brahmasūtraṃ tu viṣṇunā/*
> *vyāsarūpeṇa tad grāhyaṃ tatroktāḥ sarvanirṇayāḥ//*
>
> What has been declared as the Brahmasūtra by Viṣṇu, in the form of Vyāsa, for the sake of clear conclusions, that should be accepted. All conclusions are stated there.

The topics discussed in the Brahmasūtras, according to Madhva, include the perfection of Viṣṇu and his absence of any defects. These two concepts arise in his commentaries on the Brahmasūtras, particularly 2.1.35-37 which deals primarily with the question of the partiality and cruelty of God (*vaiṣamyanairghṛṇyādhikaraṇam*).

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[229] Or as Siuave (1968) explains Madhva's line of reasoning: "Si la fin du Veda était de nous faire connaitre le nirguṇa, ce terme devrait être pris en son sens le plus fort, il devrait signifier l'absence totale de guṇa, de qualités, donc de perfections."
[230] nirguṇatvaṃ tadā ca syād āsuratvaṃ na cānyathā| Anuvyākhyāna 1.1.103a
[231] nirviśeṣatvato naiva viśeṣo brahmaśūnyayoḥ| Anuvyākhyāna 4.2.45b

Madhva takes Brahmasūtra 2.1.37 'sarvadharmopapatteś ca', to prove that Viṣṇu has all virtues and is without fault (nirdoṣa). In the Anuvyākhyāna, he says as much, first raising the objection: "All virtues are dependent [on him] along with all faults. How could he not have virtues? How, again, could he not have faults?" Madhva argues, in response, that "through such statements about [the sūtra] 'sarvadharmopapatteḥ,' it is decided that Bhagavān Hari is full of virtues and without fault."[232]

Of course, Madhva's view of nirdoṣatvam raises questions about Viṣṇu's relation to human morals. In his prose commentary on the sūtra, he quotes a text known as the Caturvedaśikhā to make a point about whether Viṣṇu condones evil or suffering:

> Brahmasūtrabhāṣya: *īśo yato guṇadoṣādisattve svayaṃ paro'nādir ādiḥ prajānām iti caturvedaśikhāyām*
>
> Since, regarding the existence of virtues and vices, the Lord is beyond them [paraḥ], the beginning-less beginning of all beings, according to the *Caturvedaśikhā*.

According to Madhva, Viṣṇu causes souls to perform good or bad acts based on their past deeds.[233] As David Buchta explains,

> Madhva's priority here is clearly to protect the independence of the Lord and his control over everything, even at the cost of acknowledging the Lord's partiality and the lack of freedom on the part of the individual. The problem is that this seems to shift the burden of moral responsibility from the individual to God, the very problem other Vedāntins try to address in their commentaries on this section. Madhva's response is simply to assert that the Lord is above morality: morality is subject to the Lord, not vice versa.[234]

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[232] yadadhīnā guṇāś caiva doṣā api hi sarvaśaḥ /
guṇās tasya kathaṃ na syuḥ syur doṣāś ca kathaṃ punaḥ // MAnuv_2,1.111 //
sarvadharmopapattes tadvākyair api hi tādṛśaiḥ /
nirdoṣāśeṣaguṇako nirṇīto bhagavān hariḥ // MAnuv_2,1.112 //

[233] Ibid. puṇyapāpādikaṃ viṣṇuḥ kārayet pūrvakarmaṇā (he attributes this to a quote from the Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa.)

[234] Buchta 2014, p.10

This produces a paradox in Madhva's portrayal of Viṣṇu, as Buchta notes. He is simultaneously partial while also without fault.

The challenge that Madhva faces, and that the MBTN explicitly addresses, is to explain the blemishes in the lives of Viṣṇu's avatāras. In the second chapter of the MBTN, Madhva elaborates on this topic as it relates to Viṣṇu's avatāras, particularly regarding Kṛṣṇa and Rāma:

> MBTN 2.73: *ko hi taṃ vedituṃ śakto nārāyaṇam anāmayam |*
> *ṛte satyavatīsūnoḥ kṛṣṇād vā devakīsutāt//*
>
> Who could know that Nārāyaṇa who is free from any disease, except for Vyāsa, the son of Satyavatī or Kṛṣṇa the son of Devakī?
>
> *MBTN 2.76-83: vasudevasuto nāyaṃ nāyaṃ garbhe 'vasat prabhuḥ/*
> *nāyaṃ daśarathāj jāto na cāpi jamadagnitaḥ//*
> *jāyate naiva kutrāpi mriyate kuta eva tu/*
> *na vedhyo muhyate nāyaṃ badhyate naiva kenacit/*
> *kuto duḥkhaṃ svatantrasya nityānandaikarūpiṇaḥ//*
> *īśann api hi deveśaḥ sarvasya jagato hariḥ/*
> *karmāṇi kurute nityaṃ kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ//*
> *nātmānaṃ veda mugdho'yaṃ duḥkhī sītāṃ ca mārgate/*
> *baddhaḥ śakrajitetyādi līlaiṣā 'suramohinī//*
> *muhyate śastrapātena bhinnatvag rudhirasravaḥ/*
> *ajānan pṛcchati smānyāṃs tanuṃ tyaktvā divaṃ gataḥ//*
> *ityādy asuramohāya darśayāmāsa nāṭyavat/*
> *avidyamānam eveśaḥ kuhakaṃ tad viduḥ surāḥ//*
> *prādurbhāvā hareḥ sarve naiva prakṛtidehinaḥ/*
> *nirdoṣā guṇasampūrṇā darśayanty anyathaiva tu//*
> *duṣṭānāṃ mohanārthāya satām api tu kutra cit/*
> *yathāyogyaphalaprāptyai līlaiṣā paramātmanaḥ//*
>
> Neither is he the son of Vasudeva, nor did the Lord reside in a womb. He was not born from Daśaratha, and not from Jamadagni. He is not born anywhere, so how does he die? He cannot be pierced, deceived or bound by anyone, so how can there be grief of the Independent Being whose form is just bliss? Even though he is the Lord of the gods ruling the entire world, [Kṛṣṇa] always performs actions like a powerless peasant."[235] "This Foolish One (Rāma) does not know himself; aggrieved, he searches for Sītā; he was bound by Indrajit [the son of Rāvana,] etc." This is all the play [of Viṣṇu], bewildering the demons. The avatāra bleeds

[235] This is a direct quote from the MBh 5.66.14.

> when his skin is pierced and he is stunned by the blow of weapons. Not knowing things, he asks others questions; having discarded his body, he went to heaven. The lord displayed all of this for the delusion of demons, like an actor. The gods knew [his] trickery. All the manifestations of Hari possess bodies that are not made of matter; they [possess] all virtues and [are] without fault, but display themselves otherwise for the delusion of wicked and sometimes of good people. This is the sport of the Supreme Soul, which is for the attainment of appropriate results.

The nature of Kṛṣṇa's body and his "death" is a recurring concern not only for Madhva, but other *Mahābhārata* commentators and retellings. The central theme in this cluster of issues is the nature and humanity of the avatāra. Are avatāras subject to the same pain, suffering, mortal limits and morals as other humans, or does their divine identity mean that they are actually free from the above? Following Madhva's theology on the guṇapūrṇatvam of Viṣṇu, the MBTN argues that Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are without fault and not actually subject to human limits and standards. Of course, the epic stories are replete with incidents where Rāma and Kṛṣṇa seem human and are subject to some flaws. Though Madhva explains above that this is just his divine play designed to deceive the asuras, the MBTN elaborates on some episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* that appear at odds with his stance on the perfection of Viṣṇu.[236] This is the same argument for the perfection and flawlessness of Viṣṇu that Madhva presents in the Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya, in the form of a conversation between Nārada and Brahmā.[237] As we have seen, the incidents where Rāma and Kṛṣṇa appear to be morally compromised loom large over the MBTN and his reading of the epics.

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[236] Madhva occasionally interprets episodes in order to explain how Viṣṇu's actions fit within the norms of conventional morality (lokadharma). For example, in order to excuse Kṛṣṇa from the sin (aparādha) of killing his uncle Kaṃsa, Madhva explains that the god Vāyu sowed discord between Kaṃsa and Kṛṣṇa's father Vasudeva. This discord made it acceptable for Kṛṣṇa to kill his uncle according to conventional morality:
vinā'parādhaṃ na tato garīyaso na mātulo vadhyatām eti viṣṇoḥ |
lokasya dharmān anuvartato'taḥ pitror virodhārtham uvāca vāyuḥ | 12.4 |

[237] VTN, 3 Pariccheda, p.225: tathāpy asuramohāya pareṣāṃ ca kvacit kvacit/ duḥkhājñānaśramādīn saḥ darśayet śuddhasadguṇaḥ/ kva vraṇādi kva cājñānaṃ svatantrācintyasadguṇe/….

Rāma and Kṛṣna display pain and faults, according to Madhva, to deceive the asuras. He further notes that these supposed flaws have pedagogical value for Vaiṣṇavas as well. The killing of rākṣasas is not the only purpose of the incarnations. Madhva quotes from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to make his case.

> MBTN 2.131-133: *tathā bhāgavate'py uktaṃ hanūmadvacanaṃ param/*
> *"martyāvatāras tv iha martyaśikṣaṇaṃ rakṣovadhāyaiva na kevalaṃ vibhoḥ/*
> *kuto'sya hi syū ramataḥ sva ātmanaḥ sītākṛtāni vyasanānīśvarasya//*
> *na vai sa ātmātmavatām adhīśvaro bhuṅkte hi duḥkhaṃ bhagavān vāsudevaḥ/*
> *na strīkṛtaṃ kaśmalam aśnuvīta na lakṣmaṇaṃ cāpi jahāti karhi cit"//*
> *yatpādapaṅkajaparāganiṣevakāṇāṃ duḥkhāni sarvāṇi layaṃ prayānti/*
> *sa brahmavandyacaraṇo janamohanāya strīsaṅginām iti ratiṃ prathayaṃś*
> *cacāra//* C.f. BhP 5.19.5
>
> Hanumān says this in the Bhāgavata: "The human incarnation of Viṣṇu here is not merely for the killing of rākṣasas, but is an instruction for men." Why else would the misery of Rāma, viz. what happened to Sītā, [arise] when he delights in his own self? Bhagavān Vāsudeva who is the Self, the Overlord of all souls, does not experience suffering. He could not have any taint caused by women nor does he abandon Lakṣmaṇa.[238]" All the miseries disappear for those who enjoy the pollen of the flower that is His feet disappear. He, whose feet are praised by Brahmā, wanders, displaying his pleasure with all the women for the delusion of the people who are attached to women.

Madhva is aware that incarnations appear to be subject to human attributes—they grieve and suffer, for example. Aside from removing the earth's burden, the incarnation's purpose is to instruct humans by instructing them through their seemingly human lives.

Birth, Death, and Other Divine Imperfections in Vādirāja's Yuktimallikā

In this section, I show the philosophical underpinnings of Vādirāja's concerns about Kṛṣṇa, whom he equates with Viṣṇu. The Vaiṣṇava exegete offers a spirited argument for Kṛṣṇa's perfection, and looks at the practical consequences of such an argument for a

[238] This is Madhva's quotation from BhP 5.19.5-6. Rāma exiles Lakṣmaṇa at the end of the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa for disobeying his order. Lakṣmaṇa ends his life in the Sārayu River shortly thereafter. This was a problematic episode in the epic's afterlife.

consistent reading of the *Mahābhārata*. Vādirāja ultimately defends Kṛṣṇa by suggesting that the human behaviour of the avatāra is nothing more than a drama designed to fool people and rākṣasas. The faults attributed to Kṛṣṇa that Vādirāja tackles explored in this section are threefold: the birth, the death, and the ability of the avatāra to grieve and feel confusion. Ultimately, Vādirāja sees these as "faults" because they are features of the human experience.

Vādirāja's *Yuktimallikā*, his magnum opus, covers topics dealt with in Madhva's, Jayatīrtha's and Vyāsatīrtha's commentaries on the Brahmasūtra. Written in verse form, the text mounts a vigorous defense of the Mādhva positions on epistemology, metaphysics, and theology, while also refuting and criticizing rival schools. The Advaitin, Jaina and Bauddha schools are especially targeted. The Yuktimallikā is divided into four books: Guṇasaurabha, Śuddhisaurabha, Viśvasaurabha, and Phalasaurabha. In the Śuddhisaurabha, Vādirāja focuses on proving and justifying the absolute perfection of Viṣṇu and his incarnations. He opens the text with a question, and then states the position he seeks to defend.

> *YM* 2.1: *mahatsu guṇasāreṣu doṣāṇveṣaṇadhīr mudhā/ anantaguṇahṛdyo 'pi niravadyo na kiṃ hareḥ//*
> Although Hari is agreeable because of his unending good qualities, is he not blameless? The one whose mind searches for [his] faults (does so) in vain amongst [his] great virtues.

> *YM* 2.2: *yo 'sau laghīyaso doṣo nāsau doṣo garīyasaḥ/ api saṃhṛtya nikhilam apavādī kim acyutaḥ//*
> What would be a fault in a lesser [being] is not a fault in a greater being. Having collected the entire world together [at the end of time,] is Acyuta culpable (lit. blameworthy)?

It is clear that he is defending Hari against accusations of having a faulty nature. But what exactly are those faults (doṣa-s)? First and foremost is the problem of embodiment.

We have seen in the *Nikṛti* section of this dissertation that the Mādhvas and other Vaiṣṇava texts like the BhP understand Kṛṣṇa to be beyond the judgment of human standards, be it *kṣatriyadharma* or others. His conduct cannot be judged according to the standards of humans. If Kṛṣṇa were subject to human birth and death, his body would be subject to the same imperfections as others. Following the lead of others, Vādirāja maintains that Kṛṣṇa could not have been "born" nor does he actually die.

> *YM* 2.4: *kṛtir na kāraṇe yasya tasya kāryaṃ kuto bhavet/ laye sataḥ prāgabhāvābhāvān na hi harer bhavaḥ//*
> Since he does not act with respect to cause, how can there be effect [as in birth] for him? Because Hari exists during the dissolution [of the world] due to the absence of prior absence (prāgabhāva), there is no birth of Hari. [na hi hareṛ bhavaḥ].

> *YM* 2.5: *nābhijanmā vidhis tasya krodhāj jātas trilocanaḥ/ nārāyaṇo mūlarūpī jātaḥ kasmād vicāryatām//*
> Brahmā is born from his navel, and the Three-Eyed One is born from [Viṣṇu's] anger, how can Nārāyaṇa who takes the form of their source, be born? Consider this!

Acknowledging that Kṛṣṇa was born and died would be akin to accepting imperfection in him because it would mean that Kṛṣṇa's body was constituted of matter (prākṛta) and thus subject to the three guṇas. In his commentary on the *Mahābhārata* and the MBTN, Vādirāja elaborates on the death of Kṛṣṇa in more detail to defend this position, which I will explain in the next section. The reference to Brahma and Śiva taking birth from Viṣṇu himself is drawn from a famous verse in the Mokṣadharma of the *Mahābhārata*.[239] The *Yuktimallikā* uses the verse, which shows the subordination of Brahma and Śiva to Viṣṇu, to make the

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[239] 12.328.17:etau dvau vibudhaśreṣṭhau prasādakrodhajau smr̥tau
tadādeśitapanthānau sr̥ṣṭisaṃhārakārakau

Appaya Dīkṣita refutes the Vaiṣṇava interpretation of the passage in his BhSSS. In his Vedārthasaṃgraha, Rāmānuja quotes the same source to argue that the gods Brahma and Śiva carry out Viṣṇu's orders.

point that Viṣṇu is unborn. There is no fault here, according to Vādirāja, because Viṣṇu is unborn and does not die. After refuting the idea of Kṛṣṇa's "birth," Vādirāja rebuts the notion that Kṛṣṇa dies in the *Mahābhārata*.

> YM 2.18-2:19: *kukṣau yasyākhilā lokā lakṣyante sma śiśoḥ kila/ jananaṃ maraṇaṃ cāsya na yuktaṃ yuktivanmate//*
> *na hi kalpāntasamayo yas svargārohaṇakṣaṇaḥ/ na ca kalpādikālo 'sau yatrāvātarad acyutaḥ//*
> In the belly of that child all the worlds were certainly perceived. His birth and death are not possible, in the thinking of [any] reasonable [person.] The time of the dissolution [of the universe] at the end of the eon was not the moment [Kṛṣṇa's] of ascending to heaven. Nor was the beginning of eon the time when Acyuta descended.

In his characteristic style of writing, Vādirāja uses analogies and questions to explain the supposed birth and death of Kṛṣṇa, whom he equates with Viṣṇu as the all-powerful God. If Kṛṣṇa was actually "born" in Devaki's womb, how could the Brahṃāṇḍa—which exists in his stomach during the night of the cosmos when all is dissolved—pre-exist that? If Kṛṣṇa's death in the *Mausalaparvan* was actually his death, then the whole world would have died with him. His ascent to heaven in the *Mahābhārata* did not take place at the end of the world. The world did not end; hence he did not die. The Yuktimallikā continues by arguing that the person born to Devakī—Kṛṣṇa—is, in fact, Viṣṇu by saying that he carries the same mark that Viṣṇu does.[240] Kṛṣṇa's death is not a literal death in the sense of a permanent end, but an act of concealing his form from the sight of the world.[241]

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[240] 2.20: yad viprāṃghryaṅkanaṃ vaikuṇṭhasthamūrter hi vakṣasi/ tad eva devakīgarbhajātasya kila vakṣasi//
On the chest of the body of the one who resides in Vaikuṇṭha is the branding of a Brāhman's foot. On the chest of the one born from the womb of Devakī is that very [mark].
2.21: atas tad eva hi bhaved idaṃ rūpaṃ na cāparaṃ/ na cet kupyanti yodhānāṃ kalākuśalamantriṇaḥ//
Thus that [baby from Devakī] must be the form [of Viṣṇu], not any other. [Just as] ministers who are well-versed in battle marks are not confused [about identifying them] on a warrior's [chest].
[241] 2.22: pradarśyātaptaptatapasāṃ vitṛptasadṛśāṃ nṛṇām/ ādāyāntaradhādyas tu svabimbaṃ lokalocanam//

Evidence that Kṛṣṇa's body was injured would be another topic that would require reconciliation with the theology that Vādirāja is proposing. The Yuktimallikā pays attention to this problem, and proposes a workaround:

> YM 2.24-28: *ye pārtharathasūtasya viśvarūpe raṇāt purā/ vilagnā daśanāgreṣu cūrṇībhūtāś ca sarvaśaḥ/ dṛṣṭās tac charavegena chedo vedhaḥ kathaṃ prabhoḥ//*
> *piśācāviṣṭadehe 'pi prāyaś chedo na dṛṣyate/ mantreṇa kuṇṭhitā dhārā na cchinatti narān hi yat/ hareś chedaś śrutiproktasārvajñaccheda eva tat//*
> *brahmāṇḍakharparacchede yan nakhāgracchidāpi na/ ko yuktimāṃṣ tasya viṣṇoś chedaṃ sambhāvayec charaiḥ//*
> *romacchedo jagacchedo yadromṇi nikhilaṃ jagat/ niyantā yo 'khilacchettuḥ sa cchedyaḥ kena vā vada//*
> *svāhārasya hi vicchede dakṣaṃ paśupater api/ acchedyam akarod yas tu yasya cchedaṃ karoti kaḥ//*
>
> 2.24: Before the war, when the Universal Form of Arjuna's charioteer [was revealed], Pārtha saw all of them [Bhīṣma, etc] stuck on the tips of Kṛṣṇa's teeth, and pulverized. How could the Lord be pierced by the impact of their arrows?
> 2.25: Bodies possessed by piśācas do not get wounded. The arrow's edge is blunted by the mantra (that brings its possessions) and does not cut a man. The cutting of Kṛṣṇa is the cutting of the omniscients foretold in the śruti.
> 2.26: Even when he cut the dome of the Brahmāṇḍa, there was no breaking of the tip of his nail, what reasonable person could imagine wounding of such a Viṣṇu with arrows?
> 2.27: The cutting of his body hair would amount to cutting the world, for whom the entire world is in a single body hair [of God]. He who is the controller, the cutter of all, by whom can he be cut? Pray tell.
> 2.28: At the interruption of his own meal [i.e. Dakṣa's sacrifice] the one who made Dakṣa impervious even to Paśupati, who can cut that [Viṣṇu]?
>
> 2.34: *sandhyārthaṃ hastināpurīṃ praviṣṭaṃ kila kauravāḥ/ na baddhum api yaṃ śekuḥ kaś chindyāt taṃ mahāprabhum//*

Having revealed [himself/his body] to those men who had not completed their asceticism and whose eyes were unsated, having taken himself [up], he concealed his own form [from the] sight of the world.

> The Kauravas were not able to bind him [when] he came to Hastinapura for peace. Who can really injure the great Lord?

As with other instances of faults, Vādirāja must acknowledge that there are obvious examples of Kṛṣṇa appearing to be injured in the *Mahābhārata*, and accordingly offer a theodicy that reconciles the humanity with the divinity of the avatāra. This follows a general trend in the exegesis of both epics where Vaiṣṇava commentators explain away any injury of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

The next criticism of Viṣṇu is that he is subject to grief, confusion, and karma. Once again, the epics become a source for examples that reveal Viṣṇu's humanity. In the Rāmāyana, for instance, Rāma grieves over, and is seemingly bewildered by the disappearance of Sītā.

> YM 2.8-2.10: *sukhasyānantaraṃ duḥkhaṃ bhramo na pramayā saha/ na hi pūrṇasukhajñāno duḥkhabhrāntyavakāśavān//*
> *prāgjanmārjitaduṣkarma duḥkhamūlaṃ dhruvaṃ nṛṇāṃ/ na karmaṇā vardhate yo no kanīyān kuto 'sya tat// kṣutpipāsādi martyānām apy āmukter na sarvadā/ bṛhaccharīraḥ kiṃ bhuṇkte brahmāṇḍaṃ yasya romasu//*
>
> [Just as] there is no grief, which follows immediately after happiness, [and] no confusion alongside true knowledge. For one who is possessed of the knowledge of full bliss, there is no occasion for sorrow or confusion. Bad karma acquired in previous births are certainly the source of grief for humans. He who does not increase by means of karma nor become smaller, from where could [bad karma] arise for that one? Hunger, thirst, etc is for mortals only until liberation, not always. What then does the one with the vast body consume, in whose pores the Brahmāṇḍa [resides]?

Vādirāja compares the avatāras to humans to prove that they are free from these human imperfections. For humans, grief is caused by the karma accumulated by previous actions, and since Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have none, accusations that they experience grief are baseless. He also uses imagery to contrast the supremacy of Viṣṇu with a liberated being. If someone

who attains liberation no longer experiences the human trappings of hunger and thirst, what about someone like Viṣṇu? The comparisons with the liberated and un-liberated humans are a helpful tool for Vādirāja to juxtapose the supremacy of Viṣṇu and defend him from accusations that he has human defects.

Some of these divine defects, such as birth, death, displaying delusion and other human emotions, are well-known by the time of Vādirāja. Appaya deploys these arguments in a polemic context in his *Brahmatarkastava*. Madhva defended the avatāras of Viṣṇu from these accusations, and Rāmānuja and Śaṅkara also reiterate that in the *Mahābhārata* Kṛṣṇa is not born and does not possess a common human body.[242] Vādirāja then veers from these well-known faults to more practical ones. If Garuda carries Kṛṣṇa as his mount, when he flies, does that make him weak? (No, he says, for how could Garuḍa actually "hold someone who was Varāha, the upholder of the earth?").[243] What about Rāma? He grieves for Sītā, and also acquires the sin of killing a Brahmin, Rāvaṇa. Vādirāja spends some time refuting the argument that Rāma's loss of Sītā and killing of Rāvana were defects by adopting to a well-known explanation: the avatāras act in this way for pedagogical purposes:

> *YM 2.12: mahānto hi kathām kartuṃ sañcaranti tathā tathā/*
> *anantāsanataḥ putrānetā nītābalaḥ kila//*
> *YM 2.13: mūlaṃ yo vetti kas tasya patraṃ sandarśayet taroḥ/ yas sarvago na so 'yogī tasya duḥkhaprathā vṛthā//*
> *YM 2.15: yatpañcamaśiraśchedo babādhe 'pi kapālinam/ tadvadhe 'py anagho yo 'nte sa kiṃ rakṣovadhe 'ghavān//*

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[242] In the Vedārthasaṃgraha, Rāmānuja quotes from various Śruti sources to argue the same position that Vādirāja is arguing. Kṛṣṇa is not a kārya, an effect of creation, and does not have a cause. He also quotes from the *Mahābhārata* to argue that Kṛṣṇa's body is not prākṛta. In the introduction to his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā , Śaṅkara says that it is "as if" Viṣṇu is born, jataḥ iva and embodied, dehavān iva.

[243] 2.11: mahān hi rakṣako 'lpasya mahāntaṃ sa na rakṣati/ uddhāra mahīmādau varāhas taṃ dadhāra kaḥ// The great [Kṛṣṇa is a] protector of lesser [beings], [the lesser being, like Garuḍa] does not protect the great one. Varāha upholds the world, etc, who could hold him?

YM 2.16: śakto 'pi rājā bhṛtyasya hastaṃ saṅgṛhya gacchati/
svarnītagardabhaśvāder laṅkā śaṅkāspadaṃ kila//

2.12: The great ones behave in this or that way to tell a tale [ie to instruct]. He [was] the leader of the sons [of the Brāhman] from śeṣa's couch, (reference to BhP 10.89) How can his woman (Sītā) be led away?
2.13: [If] someone knows the root, who would show him the leaf of the tree? One who is omnipresent is not separated [from Sītā]. His reputation for sorrow is untrue.
2.15: The cutting off of the 5th head of [Brahmā] tormented even Śiva who had to carry around [his] skull. How can the one who [i.e. Viṣṇu] acquires no sin even in killing [Brahmā] at the end [of time, in the Pralaya] can acquire sin in killing a rākṣasa?[244]
2.16: The King [Rāma], though capable [of going to Laṅkā without it], took the help of his subject and [went] [to Laṅkā.] For one who has led donkeys, dogs, etc to heaven what is the source of the doubt [about his leading people to] Laṅkā?

The Bhāgavata (10.89) records an incident where Kṛṣṇa leads Arjuna to the realm of Mahā-Viṣṇu to find the dead and missing sons of a Brāhmana. Arjuna had promised to save these babies who were disappearing after birth, but Kṛṣṇa revealed that they were with Mahā-Viṣṇu the whole time. If Viṣṇu is capable of this, Vādirāja asks, how can he not be capable of finding Sītā? On the issue of brahmahatyā, the sin of killing a Brāhmin, Vādirāja maintains that there is no sin for killing a Rākṣasa and draws a distinction between Rāma's act and that of Śiva.

The Śuddhisaurabham section of the Yuktimallikā presents the avatāras as faultless beings and offers arguments that reject traces of their humanity in the epics, with specific examples. Appaya Dīkṣita, among others, was aware how these faults could be deployed in a polemical context to discredit the supremacy of Viṣṇu. In this section, I have presented a survey of what exactly were viewed as the faults of Kṛṣṇa and other avatāras by Vādirāja.

[244] According to Pandurangi, the verse says that Rāma built a liṅgam at Rāmeśvara to atone for Śiva's brahmahatyadoṣa, not his own.

They range from the physical—being subject to the injury of the body, to birth, and to death—to the emotional. Vādirāja mounts a defense with his characteristic style of writing, juxtaposing what he views as the supremacy of Viṣṇu alongside Brahma and Śiva. The *Mahābhārata*, especially, describes Kṛṣṇa being injured and details the end of his life. The Rāmāyana shows Rāma being overcome with grief and delusion occasionally. In his conclusion to this section, Vādirāja offers a reconciliation of what is found in the epics with what should be understood about these forms of Viṣṇu. I quote from the parts of his conclusion that are relevant:

> *YM* 2.35: *ato 'jñajanamohāya naṭavad darśayet param/ sudhādṛṣṭyā mṛtāśeṣasvasainyojjīvanaikadaḥ//*
> 2.36*: naṭo nāṭyakṛte nārī nāry evājñasya kiṃ dṛśā//*
> 2.47: *tasmāt svamūlarūpe ca svāvatāreṣu ca prabhuḥ/ avadyagandhavidhura iti sarvaṃ manoramam//*
> 2.35: Thus, in order to deceive ignorant people, like an actor, [he] displays [these "faults"], through his nectar-like gaze, he was the sole giver of resurrection to his entire army who were dead.
> 2.36: In acting, an actor [will play] a woman. [Yet], from the sight of an ignorant, will they say "this [actor] is actually a woman"?
> 2.47: Thus, whether in original form or avatāras, the Lord is free from even the whiff of censure. And so, all is well.

This argument about the play of Kṛṣṇa has been found previously in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the MBTN. Whether it's the birth, the death, or the injury of Kṛṣṇa, or any untoward display of human failings, Vādirāja urges the reader to consider it his divine play. The Yuktimallikā enumerates the problems of embodiment and proposes its own explanations that ultimately rest on the notion of līlā.

The Death of Kṛṣṇa in the Viṣṇu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s

The embodiment of the avatāra Kṛṣṇa involves him taking on a human form, or a physical form that resembles a human. The previous section established two things: first, that the Mādhvas consider Viṣṇu's avatāras, like Kṛṣṇa, to be perfect. Second, to be perfect, or to be without flaws or defects (nirdoṣa) means that one is without grief, pain, and injury—signs of humanity. The usual traces of humanity that we see in the avatāras, especially in the epics, are an illusion. The most pressing example of Kṛṣṇa's humanity in the *Mahābhārata* for the epic commentators and Vaiṣṇava theologians is his death and subsequent cremation. As I argue in this section, the Purāṇas that are written in the centuries after the composition of the *Mahābhārata* further theologize the death of Kṛṣṇa and situate it within a discussion of embodiment, and the nature of the god's body. Commentators such as Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha pick up on this discourse and apply it to their own readings of the epic, where Kṛṣṇa not only appears to be wounded fatally by the arrow of Jarā, but his body is cremated. I first pick up on the ways in which the Purāṇic retellings of Kṛṣṇa's death differ from and adapt the Bhārata's telling in the Mausalaparvan, and then I turn to the commentators' reading of the episode in the epic.

The three main sources for the story of Kṛṣṇa's death that I refer to are found in the *Mahābhārata*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The story of Kṛṣṇa's death brings certain theological issues to the forefront, and most of those issues are related to the nature of his body. In traditional Vaiṣṇava iconography, Kṛṣṇa is said to possess the śrīvatsa mark on his chest, and also four arms (caturbhujam). Is this divine form of god injured by the hunter Jarā at the time of his death? The second issue is related to the first, but more broadly concerned with the inviolability of Kṛṣṇa's body. If Kṛṣṇa is not made of matter, or his form is merely sāttvika, how can his body be injured and subsequently cremated? There

is also a noticeable shift in the language of telling and retelling Kṛṣṇa's death. The third issue is the level of control that Kṛṣṇa has over his death. In the Mausala Parvan, Kṛṣṇa's death is a result of a series of curses, fate, as well as his own doing. The commentaries on this account of Kṛṣṇa's death, particularly Vādirāja's, are drawing from a vast repository of theological engagements with the topic that already exist in the Purāṇas.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa's death takes place 36 years after the Bhārata War. His son, Sāmba, accompanied by other male family members, decides to play a trick on some visiting Brāhmaṇas. Sāmba poses as a pregnant woman and asks the Brāhmaṇas whether he will give birth to a boy or a girl. The Brāhmaṇas, well-aware that he is posing as a pregnant female, reply in kind. They tell the Vṛṣṇis that Sāmba will give birth to an iron rod (musalam) that will kill their whole race, save for Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa. They add that a hunter Jarā will shoot Kṛṣna when he is lying down. The Yādava men eventually kill each other in a drunken brawl, as predicted. They use *eraka* grass to fight with one another, some of which turn into iron clubs. Kṛṣṇa wanders into the forest and sits down under a tree where the hunter Jarā mistakes him for a deer, and pierces his foot with an arrow. When Jarā realizes that he has killed Kṛṣna, he thinks that he has committed a crime, and touches his feet. Kṛṣṇa consoles Jarā and ascends to heaven, where he is heartily welcomed by gods and other celestial beings. Arjuna and Vasudeva later cremate the remains of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.

The nature of Kṛṣṇa's body in the *Mahābhārata* is a debated topic, primarily because it is unclear whether the epic considers Kṛṣṇa's body to be impervious to injury, fatal or otherwise. There are certainly examples during the war where Kṛṣṇa is hit by arrows, and Jarā's arrow pierces Kṛṣṇa's foot. In a study on the topic of embodiment in the epic, Kendall

Busse (2016) notes that the words mūrti and vigraha are primarily the terms used to talk about the bodies of the gods. In some cases, they are temporary bodies that the gods assume through their *māyā.* In other cases, gods reveal their divine form to humans. The term vigraha, Busse argues, is used in the epic to denote the "human-like" body that the gods take on.[245] In Kṛṣṇa's case, he reveals a divine form at key junctures in the epic to his followers, but this appears to be distinct from his human body. His human body appears to be violable in the *Mahābhārata*. In the Anuśāsanaparva[246], the sage Durvāsas visits Kṛṣṇa and orders him and Rukminī to smear pāyasam, a sweet rice dish, on their bodies. Kṛṣṇa rubs the sweet rice all over his body, but neglects to put any on the sole of his feet. From this, Durvāsas notes that all other parts of his body will be inviolable, with the exception of his sole. Although it is considered to be a late addition, this story is included in the Critical Edition, and it is likely that it served as a justification for Kṛṣṇa's subsequent injury at the hands of Jarā. Durvāsas' statement also presumes that Kṛṣṇa's body was human and subject to injury before he smeared pāyasam on it. The composer(s) of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are certainly aware of the Durvāsas story in the *Mahābhārata*, as they refer to it.

While the question of Kṛṣṇa's body is tied to his status as a god in the epic, there are hints that parts of the Bhārata has already developed a theory of embodiment for the gods. There are examples in the *Harivaṃśa* that the human forms of divine bodies were considered temporary. Couture (2001) shows that embodiment according to the *Harivaṃśa* presumes that the gods take on a human form through their tejas, and they discard it after,

[245] Busse (2016), p. 179
[246] 13.144.38: *yāvad etat praliptaṁ te gātreṣu madhusūdana/ato mṛtyubhayaṁ nāsti yāvadicchā tavācyuta//*
13.144.39: *na tu pādatale lipte kasmāt te putrakādya vai/ naitan me priyam ity eva sa māṁ prīto 'bravīt tadā ity ukto 'haṁ śarīraṁ svam apaśyaṁ śrīsamāyutam//*

like actors do with costumes. He notes that Kṛṣna notes the difference between the kṛtrima rūpa and svarūpa of Balarāma in the HV.[247] If we read the death of Kṛṣna through the ontology that the HV presents, then, the cremation of Kṛṣṇa's body is simply the burning of that temporary false form.

The language used to explain Kṛṣṇa's death in the classical sources hint at what the text means by his "death." In many cases, the texts will not simply say that Kṛṣṇa has died. In the Purāṇas especially, as we will see, it will explicitly say that Kṛṣṇa 'abandons his body' or returns to heaven, instead of saying that he dies. An important and recurring term around death in the *Mahābhārata* is 'yogayukta.' At the time of his death, the *Mahābhārata* describes Kṛṣṇa as "yogayukta" or engaged in yoga. This is a term that scholars[248] have noted is used in connection with Kṣatriyas at the time of death, which denotes accepting death in a state of equanimity. The god's death and eventual cremation suggests that he abandons a human, violable body that is pierced by Jarā.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* Narrative

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (5.37) briefly narrates the death of Kṛṣṇa. The main plot points remain the same as those from the *Mahābhārata* version: the Brāhmaṇas curse the Vṛṣṇis to die; they kill themselves in a drunken brawl; and Kṛṣṇa is killed by a hunter named Jarā. The curse of Durvāsas that Kṛṣṇa's feet can be injured is also referred to in the same way that it is mentioned in the Mausala Parvan. When Kṛṣṇa is seated in the forest, he recalls

[247] Couture (2001) p. 322
[248] Brockington (2010, p.30) in an article surveying exemplary deaths in the epic, notes this term and its recurring usage in this very specific way.

"what Durvāsa said to him," which is one of the few times that the VP telling exhibits an awareness of the epic's curses and foreshadowings.

There are other important elements in the *Mahābhārata* narrative that are present in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* retelling. It is made clear that Kṛṣṇa "descended to remove the burden of the earth"[249] (*bhārāvataraṇarthāya*), again using the burden of the earth to frame the god's story. This echoes Vyāsa's explanation of Kṛṣṇa's death in the Mausala Parva.[250] The text does introduce elements not found in the *Mahābhārata* version that will be elaborated on and included in the Bhāgavata retelling of the story. Before Kṛṣṇa dies, for example, he is visited by a host of gods who ask him to return to the heavens if he desires.[251]

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s telling, Kṛṣṇa's role in the death of his clan is unambigious—he is the cause. The Purāṇa also frames his death in a different language. It says that the god abandoned his human body *(mānuṣaṃ deham utsasarja*)[252], which already signals a subtle distinction between the human and divine body of Kṛṣṇa. There is, however, no mention of a cremation.

The actual death of Kṛṣṇa in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* offers some new details about his body that are not found in the *Mahābhārata*, and it retains some aspects of the *Mahābhārata*'s telling:

> VP 5.37.66-67: *bhagavān api govindo vāsudevātmakaṃ param/ brahmātmani samāropya sarvabhūteṣv adhārayat /*
> *niṣprapañce mahābhāga saṃyojyātmānam ātmani turyāvasthasalīlaṃ ca śete sma puruṣottamaḥ //*
> *saṃmānayan dvijavaco durvāsā yad uvāca ha /yogayukto 'bhavat pādaṃ kṛtvā jānuni sattama //*
>
> The Lord himself, Govinda, having superimposed the supreme Brahman, consisting of Vāsudeva upon himself (= his (human) body) he placed himself in

[249] ViP 5.37.2
[250] see especially 16.9.29ab:*kṛtvā bhārāvataraṇaṃ pṛthivyāḥ pṛthulocanaḥ/*
[251] Ibid. 5.37.20 *idānīṃ gamyatāṃ svargo bhavatā yadi rocate*
[252] *ViP 5.37.5: sa vipraśāpavyājena saṃjahre svakulaṃ/ kathaṃ ca mānuṣaṃ deham utsasarja janārdanaḥ //*

> all beings. Most Illustrious One, he, the Supreme Spirit fixed himself into his Self which is without expansion, and lay down, playfully, in a state of pure spirit. Recalling the words that the twice-born Durvāsā said, he became engaged in Yoga, having put a foot on his knee, Excellent One.

The passage refers to Durvāsā's words about Kṛṣṇa's feet being subject to injury, which suggests that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* agrees that Kṛṣṇa's feet will be pierced by Jarā. It also retains the 'yogayukta' term that the *Mahābhārata* uses to describe Kṛṣṇa in his last moments, but it adds more explanation to it. Kṛṣṇa here meditates on himself as the Supreme Vāsudeva, and find oneness with all beings. Jarā eventually hits Kṛṣṇa as foretold, and the god is described as having four arms (caturbāhudharam). The final verses leave no ambiguity that Kṛṣṇa abandons a body and merges with eternal Vāsudeva, and again reiterates that he does so by merging with Brahman.[253] It adds in the final verse that Kṛṣṇa abandoned his human body (mānuṣaṃ deham) which is beyond the three guṇas (of sattva, rajas and tamas). This suggests in the theology of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa's mortal body can be wounded, but it is simultaneously not subject to the three guṇas as the common human body is.

Kṛṣṇa's Māya in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s version of the story combines elements from both of the tellings described above. Kṛṣṇa decides that after freeing the Earth of her many burdens in the form of demons and corrupt kings, he must now destroy his own clan—the last remaining burden. The curse of the Brāhmaṇas is a pretext for his own desire. The Vṛṣṇis are worried about the possibility of their deaths, and rush towards Prabhāsa to perform

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[253] *ViP 5.37.4: gate tasmin sa bhagavān saṃyojyātmānam ātmani /brahmabhūte 'vyaye 'cintye vāsudevamaye 'male //*
ViP 5.37.75: ajanmanyamare viṣṇavāprameye 'khilātmani / tatyāja mānuṣaṃ dehamatītya trividhāṃ gatim//

rituals that will expiate them from the curse. Under the influence of the *māyā* of Kṛṣṇa, they get into a brawl and kill each other. Kṛṣṇa wanders into the forest and sits under a tree. Jarā, also under the influence of Kṛṣṇa's *māyā*, mistakes Kṛṣṇa for a deer and shoots him. Upon realizing that he has shot Kṛṣṇa, Jarā repents and begs for Kṛṣṇa's forgiveness. Kṛṣṇa reassures him that this was his plan all along, and promises him liberation. Kṛṣṇa then ascends to Vaikuṇṭha.

As I have argued in chapter 2, The Bhāgavata is clearly aware of its differences with the *Mahābhārata*. Vyāsa composes the text to satisfy a need to glorify God in a way that his previous literary works did not. The distinctness of the two texts is evident in their treatment of Kṛṣṇa. As Edwin Bryant argues, "in terms of theology, in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, there is no doubt that Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu the transcendent Supreme Being. The roles, for the most part, have been somewhat reversed in the Bhāgavata."[254] In particular, the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents Kṛṣṇa as Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. The killing and death of Kṛṣṇa must accordingly take on a new meaning and a different interpretation.

In many ways, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is preoccupied with the theme of death. The bulk of the text is narrated to Parikṣit as he awaits and comes to term with his impending death at the hands of the snake Takṣaka. Different characters retell and mention the death of Kṛṣṇa throughout the text. In some cases, the departure of Kṛṣṇa from the earth triggers the justification for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself. Book One, Chapter 3 of the *Bhāgavata* tells us that Kṛṣṇa's death has created a problem. When Kṛṣṇa had departed the world for his

[254] Bryant, 2009 p. 113

own abode (*kṛṣṇe svadhāmopagate*),[255] the age of Kali—and all the signs of moral and religious decay that come with it—arrived. In the absence of Kṛṣṇa, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* suggests that it is now the 'ancient sun' that has now arisen (purāṇārko' adhunodita)[256] to provide direction to those who are lost in Kali Yuga. Kṛṣṇa's death marks the beginning of the Kali Yuga, an age where the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* sees itself as playing a central role. Thus, his death must necessarily be addressed and retold. Retelling Kṛṣṇa's death requires taking it out of the epic context and adjusting it to the tone and language of the Bhāgavata. Whereas the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* includes some points of reference drawn from the *Mahābhārata* story (Durvāsas' story, for example), the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* retells the death of Kṛṣṇa in a manner that is completely independent of the curses of Gāndhāri and Durvāsas.

When outlining all of the various avatāras, aṃśāvatāras, and kalāvatāras in the first skandha, the Bhāgavata notes that while various manifestations have different gradations of Bhagavāṇ, Kṛṣṇa is the Lord himself (kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam). The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God, not simply a manifestation of Viṣṇu. As Phyllis Granoff argues, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*:

> Kṛṣṇa is the active agent of the events that transpire, rather than the passive observer that he was in the Sanskrit epic. Moreover, those events are not quite what they seem. All of this is part of Kṛṣṇa's māy*ā*, his power to make things appear to be one thing or the other and that both deludes us and teaches us at the same time. This gives Kṛṣṇa's failure or unwillingness to avert the curse, and his death, a different implication. Kṛṣṇa is not intentionally cruel here, nor is he morally reprehensible. It is God's nature to perform the drama of creation and destruction, remaining Himself untouched in the process.[257]

[255] BhP. 1.3.43
[256] Ibid.
[257] Granoff 2008, p.52

Kṛṣṇa's death, and the killing of his clansmen, is a display of his māya. He deludes the Vṛṣṇis into killing each other, and tricks Jarā into killing him. This is perfectly consistent with the Kṛṣṇa of the Bhāgavata who engages in playful sport. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s conception of Kṛṣṇa's divinity accounts for the major differences in its portrayal of his death. Kṛṣṇa is not just a player in some larger divine plan; he is the executor of the plan.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Jarā pierces Kṛṣṇa's foot with his arrow, following the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. The BhP notes the peculiarities of Kṛṣṇa's body that are not mentioned explicitly in the Mausala episode—that it is marked with the Śrīvatsa and that he has four arms (caturbhujam). Kṛṣṇa is referred to as the *icchāśarīrin*, the one who takes on embodiment according to his desire. Śrīdhara, in his commentary, clarifies that this means that Kṛṣṇa conceals his body that is pure sattva and the use of this "injured" body is just a deception (viḍambanam).[258]

Though inherently formless, and pure consciousness, Kṛṣṇa assumes a form that is visible to all. The Bhāgavata emphasizes in various parts of the text that the physical form of Kṛṣṇa is unique and different from that of other humans. For instance, the devotee Uddhava explains in the third skandha that Kṛṣṇa revealed his image, or bimba, to people when he descended, and then retracted it upon leaving the earth.

> BhP 3.2.11: *pradarśyātapta-tapasām avitṛpta-dṛśāṃ nṛṇām/ ādāyāntar adhād yas tu sva-bimbaṃ loka-locanam//*
> BhP 3.2.12: *yan martya-līlaupayikaṃ sva-yoga- māyā-balaṃ darśayatā gṛhītam/ vismāpanaṃ svasya ca saubhagarddheḥ paraṃ padaṃ bhūṣaṇa-bhūṣaṇāṅgam//*
>
> Having shown his own form that is visible to the world to men who had not done austerities, their sight unsatisfied, he took (it) and disappeared. (That form) suited to his līlā among mortals, which he took to show the strength of his yoga-

[258] *icchāśarīriṇety asyāyaṃ bhāvaḥ. śuddhasattvamayīṃ nijāṃ mūrtim antardhāya tatprakṛtyaivaṃ viḍambanamātram iti.*

> māyā, was amazing even to his own (understanding), the highest level of fortunate prosperity, a body that decorated with ornaments.

The cremation of Kṛṣṇa that is recounted in the *Mahābhārata* is not mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*, which prefers to use the language of appearance and disappearance (antaradhāt) to frame his death. The *Bhāgavata* explains at various instances that Kṛṣṇa himself as Brahman is without form (arūpa), but that he takes a form through his powers of yogamāyā.[259] The yoga-māyā that Kṛṣṇa uses to manifest his body is different from the yoga of equanimity that the *Mahābhārata* says that Kṛṣṇa resorts to at the end of his life (mahāyogam upetya 16.5.19c).

When discussing the end of Kṛṣṇa's life, the *Bhāgavata* dispenses with any language of death that would indicate finality. Whereas the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* prefers to use the language of abandoning the body (māṇuṣadeham utsasarja), the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* prefers to use the term "return to his abode (svadhāma)" when talking about the demise of Kṛṣṇa. In Book 3, it instead says that Kṛṣṇa "abandoned his bodily form" (*ākṛtiṃ tatyāja BhP 3.4.28*), or that he retired from the world ("when he retired from the world" *asmāl lokāt uparate*). At this time, Kṛṣṇa is said to have four arms and yellow garments, and his form is said to be pure (*dorbhis caturbhiḥ*, *pītakauśāmbareṇa*, *virajam*, 3.4.7). The four-arms descriptor is sparingly used in the *Mahābhārata* but will play an important role in the commentarial reading of Kṛṣṇa's death, and it also influences later interpolations in the Southern Recension of the Mausala Parvan, which elaborate on the form of Kṛṣṇa that rises to heaven.

To summarize, in the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas, there is an awareness of the different types of divine and human bodies, and in some cases, of a specific human form that Viṣṇu possesses as Kṛṣṇa. This does not always form a singular, coherent, theology.

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[259] See, for example, 10.2.6.

Such a theology develops in the retellings of Kṛṣṇa's death in both the Viṣṇu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s. His death at the hands of Jarā's arrow and his cremation are two details in the *Mahābhārata* that show that in that telling, his body is human. Like other warriors, he engages in yoga and abandons the human body he has taken on after being hit. The *Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*s ignore the cremation, and instead focus on the nature of Kṛṣṇa's body.

Commentaries on the Death of Kṛṣṇa: The Nature of Kṛṣṇa's Body in the Works of Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha

It may seem that epic commentators in the medieval period were splitting hairs by worrying about the nature of Kṛṣṇa's (and Rāma's) body and death in the epic, or even worrying about their levels of grief and confusion. Epic commentators in the early modern period often authored treatises on Vedānta and other śāstras along with their respective epic commentaries, which influenced their readings of the epics. In this section, I examine the early modern epic commentaries of Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara, written roughly a century apart from each other. Although Nīlakaṇṭha was writing in Banaras from a committed Advaitin perspective and Vādirāja was a religious leader of a Dvaita Maṭha in Sode, they were both concerned about the nature of Kṛṣṇa's body in the *Mahābhārata* and addressed the issue in Vedāntic terms.

Nīlakaṇṭha returns to this issue occasionally in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata* in peculiar places—usually when Kṛṣṇa is making a dramatic intervention in the narrative (as in Draupadī's disrobing) to argue that the god does not actually have a body that is

subject to destruction. He acknowledges and is aware that the cremation of the god that is mentioned in the Mausala Parvan requires some reinterpretation.

In both his commentaries and other original verse compositions, Vādirāja explores the theme of Viṣṇu's embodiment as Kṛṣṇa. One way is through the death of Kṛṣṇa. If Kṛṣṇa is slain in the *Mahābhārata*, does he die? Is his body slain? I have already shown what Vādirāja has to say about this in the Yuktimallikā, but this is a topic that he devotes some attention to in his writings on the *Mahābhārata* as well. The birth and death of the avatāra are examples of doṣa-s for Vādirāja, as we have seen in his Yuktimallikā, because they further humanize Kṛṣṇa and thus render him imperfect. In his commentary on the Mausala Parvan's telling of Kṛṣṇa's death, in order to rebut any hint of imperfection on the part of Kṛṣṇa, Vādirāja makes two claims: First, Jarā neither injures nor kills Kṛṣṇa. Vādirāja reframes the killing of Kṛṣṇa and denies that the hunter Jarā was culpable. Jarā, he argues, did not pierce the foot of Kṛṣṇa when he discharged the arrow. It is as if the hunter was worshipping Kṛṣṇa with iron arrows as one traditionally worships god with golden flowers.[260] Second, the commentator argues that Kṛṣṇa's death is different from a human death because he does not leave his body when he ascends to heaven. He has a harder time defending this second claim in his commentary.

The Body of Kṛṣṇa

Although the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* have some brief explanations about the nature of the divine bodies, and it is ultimately tied to the aṃśāvataraṇa, by the

[260] Commentary on MBTN: kṛṣṇacaraṇasyeṣad api vedhābhāvena suvarṇapuṣpapūjāvat ayomayapuṣpapūjopamatvena īṣad api doṣo nāstīti sūcitam

medieval and early-modern period, the question of Kṛṣṇa's embodiment took on new theological significance. In his commentary on 1.1.22-23 of the Epic, Nīlakaṇṭha discusses the nature of Kṛṣṇa's body. He maintains that there are two types of bodies—those that arise from karman (*karmottha*) and those that do not (*akarmaja*). Bodies that are *karmottha* are destroyed once the karman is exhausted. Bodies that are *akarmaja*, however do not die (*na naśyati*). Where does Kṛṣṇa stand within this schema? Nīlakaṇṭha makes clear that Kṛṣṇa's body is *akarmaja*, and thus cannot be destroyed.[261]

> *Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 1.1.22-23: ghṛtaval līyate suptau vāsanāmātradehakaḥ. bodhe sa hanyate caiva punaḥ punar ahaṃbhramaḥ. ahaṃtadvāsanādhārā nājñāne sati śāmyati. saṅgakriyādehacakre nānaṣṭe 'ham vinaśyati. rajjujnānād bhayaṃ naśyen na tu pātodbhavaṃ kṣatam. ātmajñānāt tathā saṅgo na tu karmodbhavaṃ vapuḥ. yāvat karma vapus tāvad yāvad dehaś ca tiṣṭhati. tāvat karmāhaṃ bhramaśca vartate dagdhavastravat. tatraivam sati karmotthaṃ karmanāśāt praṇaśyati. akarmajam tu bodhena bādhyate na tu naśyati. evaṃ śṛīkṛṣṇadeho 'yam akarmottho na naśyati. bodhena bādhyate caiva svapne dṛṣṭa iveśvaraḥ. anyonyabādhakau jāgatsvapnāv ātmani kalpitau. notpadyete na naśyete rajjvām sarpasrajāv iva.*
>
> The one who has a body of only impressions (vāsana), when asleep, dissolves like ghee. When enlightened, the error of egotism is destroyed again and again. The stream of "I" (sense) and its impressions does not subside so long as there is ignorance. So long as the cycle of attachment, action, and "I" (sense) does not cease. Due to knowledge of the rope, the fear would be destroyed, but not the wound that is brought about by a fall (caused by that fear). In the same way, due to knowledge of the Self, attachment (is destroyed,) but not the body produced by karma. The body remains as long as there is karma. And as long as the body exists, for that long the error of "I am my actions" exist, like burnt clothes. This being the case, (the body) brought about by karma is destroyed due to the destruction of karma, but (a body) that is not born from karma is sublated

[261] According to R.K. Sharma, Nīlakaṇṭha makes the argument that the akarmaja body "does not perish at all; it just vanishes after the attainment of knowledge. So the body of Śrīkṛṣṇa arising out of non karman (grace) [never perishes] See (Sharma, "Salient Features of Nīlakaṇṭha's Commentary", p.98 and earlier footnote on this.See (Sharma, "Salient Features of Nīlakaṇṭha's Commentary", p.98.

> through enlightenment. It does not perish. In this way, the body of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is born from non-action, and is not destroyed. And the Lord is sublated by enlightenment as if seen in a dream. Waking and dreaming are mutually sublating, imagined in the Self. They do not arise nor cease, like the snake and the garland imagined in the rope.

According to Nīlakaṇṭha, Kṛṣṇa cannot be killed because he is not bound by *karman*. This raises further questions of what utility Gāndhārī's and Durvāsas' curses have on Kṛṣṇa if his body does not perish. The implication, for the Advaitin is, furthermore that even Kṛṣṇa vanishes like a dream in enlightenment.

The episode of Duryodhana's attempt to capture Kṛṣṇa in the Udyoga Parvan also allows space for comment on Kṛṣṇa's body. Nīlakaṇṭha refers to this episode in his versified summary of the *Mahābhārata* (sarvaparvasaṃgraha), and explains that even though Duryodhana sees the form of Kṛṣṇa that is pure power (aīśvarya) and the form of the universe (viśvarūpa), he still refuses to heed Kṛṣṇa's advice.[262] Nīlakaṇṭha here refers to Kṛṣṇa's "peace mission" in Hastināpura, where the Kauravas attempt to capture him. The commentator is thus aware of the power and uniqueness of Kṛṣṇa's body particularly at key junctures of the epic's story.

The idea of Kṛṣṇa not being subject to karma, and thus not limited by a perishable human body returns in Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary on the Udyogaparvan, when Sañjaya explains the greatness of Kṛṣṇa to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Sañjaya tells the blind king that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were not born out of pleasure (kāmād anyatra sambhūtau). On this point, Nīlakaṇṭha notes that both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are special.

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[262] *jñātvāpi paramāhātmyaṃ na khalaḥ khalatāṃ tyajet/*
dṛṣṭvāpi kṛṣṇamāhātymaṃ naivāśāmyat suyodhanaḥ// [*Bhāratabhāvadīpa* on 1.2.139 vulgate]

> Bhāratabhāvadīpa on MBh 5.60.1 (vulgate): *kāmād iti kāmapūrvakaṃ karmocyate. akarmajam tayor janma lokānugrahārtham sūryavad āvirbhāvamātram ity arthaḥ.*
>
> (In saying) "desire" (kāmāt) what is being said is desirous action. The meaning is that their birth is not due to karma (akarmajam), but is merely a manifestation, for the betterment of the world, as the sun manifests.

Nīlakaṇṭha likens the Kṛṣṇa's body to the sun, it is merely a manifestation to help the world. This would mean that his "birth" is an appearance, and his death is merely a disappearance instead of an actual death. The ontology of Kṛṣṇa's body is intimately tied to Kṛṣṇa's death and subsequent cremation because it has the potential to upend this view of the divine body.

S.K. Belvalkar, the Editor of the BORI Edition of the Mausala Parvan notes that Vādirāja and PPS Shastri (who published the "Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*") add spurious verses that did not merit inclusion even in the critical apparatus: "the P.P.S. Shastri edition and [Vādirāja's commentary] here give much additional matter emphasizing Kṛṣṇa's divine nature. This is not supported by most of the N[orthern] MSS. used for our Critical Apparatus."[263] The "additional matter" that he refers to are 4 verses where the narrative of the story reverts to the narrator (Vaiṣampāyana), who explains how the gods welcome Kṛṣna. The verses partially match what is found in the Mausala Parvan's Critical Apparatus, but as we will see, there are differences.[264] In any case, the editor's remarks overestimate the level of difference between the passages he finds in all Telugu, Malayalam, and certain Grantha manuscripts and the passages that we find in PPS Shastri's edition of the epic. In these interpolated passages, the gods all praise Kṛṣṇa for relieving the earth's

[263] Belvalkar (1959) p.48, Note 5.21
[264] MBh 16. App 1

burden, and Kṛṣṇa explicitly states that, even after his "death" at the hands of Jarā he has not abandoned his physical divine form:

> *Mahābhārata* 16.4.33 (Southern Recension, P.P.S. Shastri) or 16*1.13-16: *bhujaiś caturbhis samupetam mamedaṃ rūpaṃ viśiṣṭaṃ divi vai saṃsthitaṃ ca/ bhūmau gataṃ pūjayatāprameyaṃ sadā hi tasmin nivasāmi devāḥ//*[265]
>
> Worship this, my special form, endowed with four arms, established in heaven, inconceivable, and gone to earth. For I always reside in it, Gods!

This is the version of the verse that in the *Mahābhārata* that Vādirāja comments on. The motif of the gods praising Kṛṣṇa upon his arrival in heaven appears to be taken from the Purāṇic variants. Though the Mausala Parvan describes the gods welcoming him, it is in the Viṣṇu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s that the gods actively petition Kṛṣṇa to leave the earth, and welcome him to heaven upon his arrival. In this interpolated verse, Kṛṣṇa mandates that the gods worship this four-armed form of his. In both cases, the commentators treat Kṛṣṇa's physical body as something that is special, either because it is *akarmaja* in Nīlakaṇṭha's case, or because his eternal form is that of an imperishable, four-armed form.

The Death and Cremation of Kṛṣṇa in the Mausalaparvan

If Kṛṣṇa's body is special and is not subject to destruction, what does Nīlakaṇṭha make of the god's cremation in the Mausalaparvan? He returns to the issue in his commentary on the Sabhāparvan, when, in the Vulgate edition, Kṛṣṇa appears during Draupadī's disrobing to present her with infinite clothing.[266] Draupadī calls out to Kṛṣṇa in

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[265] Compare to the version that is recovered in the Critical Apparatus (16. App 1.1.13-16):
bhujaiś caturbhiḥ samupetaṃ mamedaṃ/rūpaṃ viśiṣṭaṃ divi saṃsthitaṃ ca/bhūmau gataṃ pūjayatāprameyaṃ/ sadā hi tasmin nivasāmi devāḥ/

[266] I refer to the Vulgate here because it is often printed with the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha, but more importantly because the verses upon which Nīlakaṇṭha comments here are excised from the Critical Edition.

help, referring to him as the "resident of Dvāraka" (dvārakāvāsin). It is here that he elaborates on the form of Kṛṣṇa that we find in the *Mahābhārata*.

> *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* on MBh 2.79.23ab (vulgate): *dvārakāvāsini upādhimati utpattināśayor nirākaraṇaṃ. anupādhau kāraṇopādhau vā tayor agrasakteḥ. ata eva utpattau caturbhujaṃ rūpam eva vasudevena dṛṣṭaṃ. yat tu "śarīraṃ vāsudevasya rāmasya ca mahātmanaḥ. arjuno dāhayāmāsa puruṣair āptakāribhiḥ" iti śarīradāhavacanaṃ, tad anutpattivacanavirodhāt tirobhāvamātrābhiprāyam.*
>
> In the (verse where Draupadī refers to Kṛṣṇa as) "resident of Dvāraka", which is to say, the form of brahman that includes an attribute, there is a refutation of [Kṛṣṇa's] origin and destruction, because there is no entailment (prasakti) of either (arising or perishing) in a form of a brahman without attribute, or whose attribute is the causal body. Hence, at birth only, the four-armed form [of Kṛṣṇa] was seen by Vasudeva. Now as to that statement about the cremation of the body, viz. "Arjuna had competent men cremate the body of Vāsudeva and [Bala]rāma, the great-souled one." (1.2.225), it has as its intention merely the disappearance of [Kṛṣṇa's] body, because otherwise it would contradict statements about his lack of a birth.

Nīlakaṇṭha is forced to explain and make sense of the cremation, which is narrated in the Mausalaparvan and retold in the Ādiparvan, in order to make it harmonize with his own ontology of Kṛṣṇa's body. In Draupadī's prayer, found in the Vulgate, she refers to Kṛṣṇa as the "resident of Dvāraka" and one who is "beginningless and endless" (anādinidhanam). Commenting on that epithet, Nīlakaṇṭha sees a confirmation of what he says in his introductory essay in the Ādiparvan—that Kṛṣṇa is not subject to birth and death. The immediate challenge this raises for any commentator on the *Mahābhārata* is that they must reconcile this idea with the reality of his cremation in the Mausalaparvan.

Returning to the moment of Kṛṣna's death, the god ascends upwards when he is struck by the hunter . It is here that Vādirāja first clarifies that Kṛṣṇa does not abandon his

body. This is how Vādirāja interprets a verse that describes what happens after Kṛṣṇa's injury:

> *Mahābhārata* 16*28.3: *guṇair munīnāṃ pūjitas tatra kṛṣṇo/*
> *ūrdhvaṃ gacchan vyāpya lokān svalakṣmyā//*
> Kṛṣṇa, praised by the sages for his qualities, rising upwards having covered the worlds with his splendour.
>
> *Lakṣālaṃkāra*. on MBh 16.5.28: *ūrdhvam gacchan ity atra svalakṣmyā saha ūrdhvam. rukmiṇyāḥ svasya ca ūrdhvaṃ gamanam eva, na tu dehatyāga iti sūcitam.*
> "going upwards" is to be construed with "svalakṣmyā". Only his own ascension and that of Rukmiṇī is revealed [in this verse], not the abandonment of their bodies.

Vādirāja uses the verse as an opportunity to clarify that Kṛṣṇa ascends after death without leaving his body, and that he ascends with his wife Rukminī. Thus far, Vādirāja uses his commentary to argue that Kṛṣṇa does not abandon his body. In Chapter 8, however, the epic explicitly states that Vasudeva cremates the remains of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Whereas Nīlakaṇṭha says that the form "disappeared," Vādirāja suggests that Vasudeva cremated a false form (kṛtrima):

> MBh 16.8.31 *tataḥ śarīre rāmasya vāsudevasya cobhayoḥ/*
> *anviṣya dāhayām āsa puruṣair āptakāribhiḥ//*
> Then having sought out the body of both (Bala)rāma and Vāsudeva, [Arjuna] had the bodies cremated by competent people.
>
> Vādirāja's comm. *tataḥ śarīram rāmasya vāsudevasya cobhayoḥ ity atra vāsudevasya śarīram svargārohanasamaye janamohanārtham kṛtam kṛtrimam śarīram, sahajaviśvarūpadehasya dāhāyogāt. anyathā '…bhujaiś caturbhiḥ samupetam mamedaṃ rūpaṃ divi saṃsthitaṃ ca/ bhūmau gataṃ pūjyatāprameyam (MBh Southern Recension 16.4.32-33)" iti prāguktakṛṣṇavacanavirodhāt, tatra hi sūryamaṇḍale caturbhujam mama rūpam asti bhūmāv api aprameyam caturbhujam mama rūpam astīti kṛṣṇenaiva kathyate.*

> In this passage, "then having sought out etc" the body of Vāsudeva referred to is the body of Vāsudeva that, at the time of his ascent to heaven, was falsely created for the purpose of deluding people. Because it is impossible to burn the body, whose form is by nature Viśvarūpa. Otherwise it (would) contradict the speech of Kṛṣṇa that was just uttered viz., "Worship my special form, established in heaven, endowed with four arms, inconceivable, and present on earth, unbounded and to be worshipped." For in saying that, Kṛṣṇa himself has said that "my four-armed manifestation is in the orb of the sun, my four-armed manifestation that is inconceivable is also on the earth."

The Mausala Parvan's verse clearly describes a cremation of Kṛṣṇa's body, but Vāidrāja suggests that this cremation was of a fictitious form (kṛtrimam śarīram) that only existed to fool people on earth. He makes his case based on two arguments: that Kṛṣṇa's body cannot be burned, and that a cremation of the "real" body of Kṛṣṇa would contradict what Kṛṣṇa says upon his arrival to heaven. If Kṛṣṇa says that he enters heaven (or as Vādirāja suggests, the sūryamaṇdala) with a divine form that has four arms, then a cremation of that form would be contradictory. The verses that Vādirāja uses to support his case, from the point of view of modern Indology, are spurious additions, of which the the editors of the critical edition of the Mausala Parvan are suspicious. Indeed, many of these verses that Vādirāja uses to build his argument are found primarily in the Southern manuscripts, so whoever added them may have had similar concerns about Kṛṣṇa's "death" as Vādirāja did.

Vādirāja argues in both the *Yuktimallikā* and his *Lakṣālaṃkāra* commentary that Kṛṣṇa's body is not subject to pain, injury or cremation. This is a theme that both the *Bhāgavata* and Madhva's MBTN explore as well. Vādirāja was writing in a time when the epics were being interpreted and used in a polemic context, and thus doṣas were important to refute if he wanted to defend the flawlessness of Viṣṇu. His arguments establish that Kṛṣṇa does not have a common body. This of course leads the commentator to make a number of practical sub-arguments that arise from this. He uses his commentaries on the

MBTN and *Mahābhārata* to argue that Kṛṣṇa does not die when Jarā strikes him with an arrow, that he ascends to svarga but does not die, and that his actual body was not cremated.

Appaya Dīkṣita on the Body of Viṣṇu

In the final section, I look at how this discourse and interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's body and death in the *Mahābhārata* affected polemical debates, particularly in South India. The *Brahmatarkastava* also addresses issues of doṣa or "faults" in Śiva that mirrors Madhva's spirited defense of Viṣṇu's faultlessness by arguing that he never actually dies and only displays human frailties to delude his enemies. In a series of verses, Appaya shields Śiva from accusations of having faults, often by comparing him favourably to Viṣṇu.

> *Brahmatarkastava* vss. 16: *kalpādiṣu druhiṇakeśavarudrarūpais tvattas tvam eva bhagavan pravibhāgam āptaḥ/ tair eva teṣu viṣamākṣa parasparasmād āvirbhavann anukaroṣi jayaiṣivṛttim// deva tvam eva niṭalād yadi dhātṛviṣṇvor āvirbabhūvitha tatas tava ko nikarṣaḥ/ nāsāpuṭān na hi vidher na ca tasya pautrāj jāto 'si viṣṇur iva nāpi manuṣyamātrāt// 17*
> *nāsty eva te puruṣavīryakaṇānuṣaktir na straiṇagarbhavasatir na ca yonijatvam/ vyaktyā paraṃ kvacana te śiva yady avadyam etaiḥ kiyat khalu vibho na bhaven murāreḥ// 18*
>
> In [every] kalpa etc, you become distributed in the forms of Druhiṇa, Keśava and Rudra, [emanating] from you alone. Creating one another (parasparasmād) in kalpas, you perform the function of seeking victory. O God of the odd numbered eyes! What is your defect if you manifested from the forehead, etc of Brahma and Viṣṇu? You are not born from Brahmā's nostril, or his grandson (i.e. Kaśyapa), or from a mere man, like Viṣṇu. You are not even clinging to a speck of human seed. You did not reside in any woman's womb and not born from any womb. If, however, somewhere through your manifestations, Śiva, there was [any] defect, then how many [defects] wouldn't there be of Viṣṇu?

Evidence of human limitations are signs of doṣas, or defects, of gods. There are three important defects he seeks to address about Śiva. First is the defect of birth. Second is the

idea that Śiva, born from Brahma, is subject to his will and not self-sufficient. The third defect is the issue of death and the mortality of Śiva's body.

How does Appaya Dīkṣita respond to the view that Śiva has the defect of birth because he was born from the forehead of Brahma? Unlike Viṣṇu, he says, Śiva is never born from a human. As he elaborates in his commentary on these verses:

> *Brahmatarkastava* comm. on vss. 17-19: *śivasya prādurbhāve kvacid api nārāyaṇasyeva na puruṣavīryānupraveśo na strīgarbhavāso na ca tadyoniprabhavatvam. kvacit kvacid abhivyaktimātreṇa yady avadyam āpadyeta tadoktaiḥ ṣaḍbhir hetubhir nārāyaṇasya kiyad avadyam nāpadyeta? yataḥ śivasyābhivyaktimātram jananadoṣatvenodghāṭayadbhir bāliśair nārāyaṇasyaiva tad atitarām udghāṭitaṃ syāt. rāmakṛṣṇāvatārayor mukhyabhūtasya śokamohabhītyādipāravaśyasya tatra tatra prapañcitatayā tenāpi tadupodbaḷitaṃ syāt.*
>
> In the manifestation of Śiva, in no way at all like [the manifestations] of Nārāyaṇa, is there a reliance on the semen of men, residing in the womb of a woman, and no birth from their womb. If a defect would appear merely through [his] manifesting here and there, then how much of a defect would there be for Nārāyaṇa for the six reasons that have been stated? If foolish people raise the mere manifestation of Śiva as being the defect of being generated then they would have raised even more [defects] about Nārāyaṇa. Since it is shown here and there (in the epics) that the avatāras Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are under the sway of sorrow, delusion, grief, and so on, as their chief feature—just by virtue of that the (having of defects) is confirmed.

In responding to potential faults of Śiva, Appaya takes a curious strategy. He asks that if we are to judge Śiva for any of these potential faults or defects, what would we say about Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in the epics? He then provides various textual examples from the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata* that describe the births of the avatāras, and contrasts it with quotes from the Kūrma Purāṇa and the *Mahābhārata* to show that Śiva was born from Brahma's

forehead by his own will, and never from the womb of a woman.[267] Though he does not explicitly state it, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are the avatāras of Viṣṇu that are born from humans.

Finally, Appaya addresses the issue of the human body and death of Viṣṇu. We have already seen how readers of the *Mahābhārata*, such as Madhva, Vādirāja and Nīlakaṇṭha, make elaborate arguments about Kṛṣṇa's body and his ability to die. Appaya says that unlike the cases of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, there is no instance of Śiva dying. Appaya cites passages from the Kirātarjunīya section of the *Mahābhārata* that explicitly state that Śiva is never injured in his "battle" with Arjuna. What about the avatāras of Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa? Appaya says in his auto commentary on these verses (17-19) that there are numerous examples of their bodies being injured, for example in battles with Indrajit and Śālva.

Although Appaya acknowledges the human vulnerabilities of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa that are present in the epics and Purāṇas, his strategy is not to defend Śiva by attacking Viṣṇu as inferior. Appaya acknowledges the defences of Viṣṇu that Madhva puts forth by quoting a Purāṇic passage that Madhva uses in his other works.[268] In this passage that the *Brahmatarkastava* cites, Nārada asks how Viṣṇu could be faultless (nirdoṣa) and still be subject to anxiety, weariness, physical wounds, ignorance and sorrow? In response, Brahmā says that Kṛṣṇa and Rāma display these human vulnerabilities, but they only do so to fool their adversaries:

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[267] Granoff (2004) argues that the story of Śarabha, a form of Śiva, defeating Narasiṃha in early Purāṇas such as the Skandapurāṇa signifies the Śaiva discomfort with the concept of the avatāra. Specifically, Granoff suggests that the Śaiva authors of the early Purāṇas were uncomfortable with the concept of Viṣṇu taking the human or animal form—the embodiment being a cornerstone of the avatāra concept.

[268] The verses that Appaya quotes cannot be found in the extant Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, but Madhva references it in his Viṣṇutattvavinirṇaya to explain Viṣṇu's perfection and his lack of flaws. Roque Mesquita (p.116-117) identifies this passage as one of Madhva's famous untraceable sources.

> *Brahmatarkastava comm. on vss.17-19: nirdoṣaś cet kathaṃ viṣṇur mānuṣeṣūpapadyate/ cintāśramavraṇājñānaduḥkhayug rūpyate katham//*
> *eṣa me saṃśayo brahman hṛdi śalya ivārpitaḥ/ anirdhārayo 'parair martyair sūktiśaktyā tam uddhara//*
>
> If Vishnu is free from all defects, how is it that he is born among men? How is it that in his incarnations he is depicted as suffering from anxiety, weariness, wounds, ignorance and sorrow? This is my doubt, O Brahmā, that has lodged itself in my heart like a dart. That cannot be pulled out by other mortals. By the power of your holy speech please pull it out.

Appaya attributes this verse to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, which directly addresses concerns about what one may consider the faults of Viṣṇu as his human incarnations, particularly Kṛṣṇa and Rāma. Appaya acknowledges the defences of Viṣṇu that Madhva puts forth by quoting a Purāṇic passage that Madhva uses in his other works. Brahmā's reply is as follows:

> *Brahmatarkastava comm. on vss. 17-19: "strīpuṃmalānuṣaṅgātmā deho 'sya na vijāyate/ kiṃ tu nirdoṣacaitanyasukhām nityāṃ svakāṃ tanum/ prakāśayati saiveyaṃ janir viṣṇor na cāparā//*
> *tathāpy asuramohanārthaṃ pareṣām ca kvacit kvacit/ duḥkhājñānaśramādīṃś ca darśayec chuddhasadguṇaḥ//*
> *kva vraṇādiḥ kva cājñānaṃ svatantre 'cintyasadguṇe/ daurlabhyāyaiva mokṣasya darśayet tāny ajo hariḥ/ kṛṣṇo hy atyaktadeho 'pi tyaktadehasya dehavat/ lokānāṃ darśayamāsa svarūpasadṛśākṛtim//"*
> *ityādi vacanajātaṃ pradarśya yatnena pariharaṇīyam. śivasya tu dehatyāgaḥ kvacid api na śrutaḥ.*
>
> Lord Vishnu's body is not born of the union of man and woman, but, this birth of Viṣṇu alone manifests his own eternal form—which is faultless consciousness and bliss—as none other does. Nevertheless, for the purpose of fooling asuras, as well as others occasionally, the one who has pure and good qualities shows grief, ignorance, and fatigue etc. Where is wound and such things, where is the ignorance in someone who is independent, whose good qualities are incomprehensible? The unborn Hari, for the difficulty of liberation, shows these [flaws]. Kṛṣṇa, who did not abandon his body, showed the world a form appropriate to his nature, which was like the body of someone who abandons a

> body." Having shown this collection of statements, it [viz. Kṛṣṇa having a human body] would be difficult to refute. The abandonment of Śiva's body, however, is unheard of even occasionally (kvacid api).

Vaiṣṇavas need passages like the ones above from the Purāṇas to repudiate concerns about the birth of Viṣṇu in his avatāras, or the human bodies that Viṣṇu assumes which eventually subject him to human traits of pain and death. Appaya's strategy here is to show that Vaiṣṇavas rely on such textual passages for theodicies, even if ultimately Kṛṣṇa's human body is part of his act. In comparison, he argues, there is no story about the death of Śiva. It is the humanity of Vaiṣnava avatāras, and the stories of their humanity as recorded in the epics, that lead to such questions and criticisms. Appaya argues in Śiva's favour by pivoting to Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣṇavas. Should those who live in a glass temple throw stones?

Conclusion

Medieval Vaiṣṇava theologians in South India, particularly Madhva and Vādirāja, make the case that Viṣṇu and his incarnations are without fault (nirdoṣaka). This claim has implications for their reading of the *Mahābhārata*, which presents the god "acting" like a human. The death of Kṛṣṇa at the hands of the hunter Jarā, and his subsequent cremation, is an example of Kṛṣṇa's humanity that requires the theologians' reinterpretation. I situate the debate on Kṛṣṇa's humanity and divinity within a sectarian context, looking at how the Śaiva, Appaya Dīkṣita, uses these human "faults"to make polemical arguments against Vaiṣṇavas who criticize Śiva.

The death of Kṛṣṇa is one of the many ways that polemicists exploit what one might call the inferior god complex. More broadly, Vādirāja's Yuktimallikā shows that Vaiṣṇavas were defensive about Kṛṣṇa (and Rāma's) abilities to experience pain and grief, both

physical and psychological. These concerns were rooted in the stories of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in the epics.

I argue that as the avatāra doctrine developed, particularly in the Purāṇas, this lead to a reexamination of Kṛṣṇa as a human character. A central aspect of his embodiment that theologians paid attention to was his physical form, and its capability for injury and death. Kṛṣṇa's human body is as much an issue for commentators as his conduct. It is this trace of his humanity that troubles some of the theologians because of how the body is viewed in traditional metaphysics. If Kṛṣṇa's body is purely sāttvika, then how can he suffer a fatal blow to his foot? The *Mahābhārata* seems to offer more than one reason for this, even explaining that his sole is vulnerable because of a curse by the irascible sage Durvāsas, but this did not completely satisfy the Vaiṣṇava readers. Later reworkings of the story in the *Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*s not only emphasized Kṛṣṇa's control over his own death, but also pay close attention to the nature of his body, and his divine form. The Purāṇas, texts written after the *Mahābhārata*, ignore the cremation of Kṛṣṇa that the *Mahābhārata* includes. In some cases, commentaries on the *Bhāgavata* go to great lengths to illustrate that the arrow does not injure Kṛṣṇa, and in some cases that it is all his māyā.

It is in these works—the Purāṇas, epic commentaries, and polemics—that we find a conception of divinity against which the Vaiṣṇavas read the *Mahābhārata*. What constitutes divinity? These texts—Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and everything in-between—decidedly explain what is not divine—human vulnerabilities. A perfect God, who is without flaws, is not obvious in the human embodiment that Viṣṇu undertakes as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. This presents challenges for Vaiṣṇavas who not only want to clarify how Viṣṇu operates in the world but who also want to defend themselves against polemics. Vādirāja's commentary reimagines

Kṛṣṇa's death and subsequent cremation. Specifically, it makes it seem as if his "death" was not actually his death, and his cremation was not possible because his body is not the same as the common humans. Vādirāja pays close attention to the episode because the death and cremation of the god requires re-interpretation to fit with the Mādhva concept of a perfect god whose body is not human. I situate Vādirāja's reading of the Mausalaparvan within the larger *Mahābhārata* tradition, particularly the Viṣṇu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s, in order to show that the commentary is participating in an older Vaiṣṇava rethinking of this episode. When epic commentaries are situated within a tradition of the older Vaiṣṇava reading tradition that includes the Purāṇas, we can appreciate their contributions to the exegesis while also historically contextualizing their work.

Chapter 8

The Inferior God Complex

"To rebuke magnificently is one of the duties of a great polemical writer." —C.S. Lewis[269]

Like an arena for a gaming match, the Purāṇas became a heated site of (mostly petty) partisan rebuking. "Sectarian" Purāṇas were clearly affiliated with the supremacy of either Devī, Viṣṇu or Śiva, and were often products of those devotional communities. The Purāṇas have always been considered sectarian in nature. Horace Hayman Wilson (1846) argued that the Purāṇas not only "taught their followers to assert the unapproachable superiority of the gods they worshipped but inspired them with feelings of animosity towards" other gods.[270] The type of denigration found there can be called "nikarṣa." We have already seen instances of this nikarṣa, or denigration, from the *Devībhāgavata* and *Saura Purāṇa*s. These purāṇas exploit a divine inferiority complex that seems to have angered followers of the gods, particularly Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, and Śāktas.

The Purāṇas were not the only source of denigration. Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, particularly in medieval and early modern South India, participated explicitly in this debate with polemic works of their own. After the composition of Madhva's MBTN, we see a proliferation of sectarian readings of the *Mahābhārata* by Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. The evidence of this rise in sectarian readings of the epic can be found in polemical tracts traced back to this period. As Elaine Fisher notes,

> among the popular themes of these polemical treatises, we find both abstract considerations of textual meanings, such as analyses of the tātparya—or general purport—of the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bhāgavata*, and other texts popular across sectarian lines, as well as adjudications of the fine points of etymology and hermeneutics.[271]

[269] English Literature in the 16th Century (p. 175)
[270] Wilson (1846) p.2
[271] Fischer (2017), p.126-127

Since they were ultimately narrative texts, the epic (itihāsa) and purāṇa genre provided more fodder for petty posturing amongst the followers of Śiva and Viṣṇu especially. In some Śaiva Purāṇas and narratives, Viṣṇu (or Kṛṣṇa) is often portrayed either as a charlatan, fooling others, or as a god with limited powers who is ultimately dependent on Śiva. A partisan of either god could either use extensive hermeneutics to argue that philosophical or ritual passages of Śruti are referring exclusively to Śiva or Viṣṇu as a Supreme Being, or they could sketch this concept out narratively in the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata*. This type of nikarṣa, could take one of two forms: explicitly criticizing Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the *Mahābhārata* through questioning; or reworking famous stories about the gods to make one a supplicant of the other.

This is the first of two chapters that focus on methodology, or how Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas read these seemingly problematic passages in authoritative texts like the *Mahābhārata*. In this chapter, I look at a specific type of divine denigration that developed in a sectarian context. Whereas the profanity of Duryodhana and Śiśupāla's speeches are self-evident in the *Mahābhārata*, this type of divine diminishment is more complicated. The impiety lies not just in a specific speech of a character, but in the overall portrayal or interpretation of a god as inferior. One could question what the stakes were, if there were any, in petty debates such as these. The Inferior God Complex perpetuated defences of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* and pointed attacks against Śaivas, and vice-versa. Appaya Dīkṣita, who dabbles in this practice of nikarṣa himself, offers his own view on how to read reproach. In his Madhvatantramukhamardana, Appaya proposes a pluralistic solution to the Inferior God Complex. The type of nindā he is referring to are inferiority statements (nikarṣagīḥ) about one god, to promote another god. Appaya argues that we should read

nindā not as an insult of a god but as a praise of another. What he is proposing is a peculiar way of reading textual passages that is context-sensitive and not intending to offend. The general approach that these writers take is to take a verse and read another, sometimes contradictory, meaning into it. This is not necessarily a novel or unorthodox exegetical technique, but it is one that is pronounced when discussing issues of divine rebuke. Appaya proposes, via the "na hi nindā" maxim, that Advaitins take reproach of the divine, especially passages that make one god seem inferior, with a proverbial grain of salt. This method proposes that we contextualize rebuke and diminishment and not read it literally.

I argue in this chapter that for many of the polemicists, the diminishment of one god in this type of polemical discourse was not always rebuke in absolute terms. The use of the 'na hi nindā' nyāya by Appaya shows that it is possible for him to simultaneously promote Śiva as the Supreme and still not be a hater of Viṣṇu. If the "inferior god complex" explored in the previous chapter offers a theory of polemics in Purāṇic discourse, this na hi nindā nyāya offers a response to it. This method of reading rebuke, I argue, is important to the *Mahābhārata* at the time as evidenced by the discussion and inclusion of the maxim in Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's Bhāratabhāvadīpa. His commentary, and call for unity, is a sign of how far the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava debate on the *Mahābhārata* that has thus far been traced extended beyond South India.

No Offence Intended: The Na Hi Nindā Nyāya

The "na hi nindā" maxim has its roots in the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*, in the context of understanding the same ritual mentioned in different recensions of texts. The maxim is first invoked by Śabara in the *Śābarabhāṣya*. This topic begins in sūtra 2.4.8, which raises a

counterargument: if the same rituals are mentioned in different recensions, they should be taken as different for various reasons—one of which includes censure. The maxim says that "censure is not to rebuke that which should be rebuked, but to praise something [else] which is to be done."[272] In his commentary on this sūtra, Śabara gives an example of the role reproach plays in the context of rituals. He quotes a passage from one Vedic text which is seemingly critical of those who perform the agnihotra before sunrise (anuditahoma): "they utter falsehood daily, [when] they perform the agnihotra before sunrise. Since they are chanting at night what should be chanted during the day, [when there is] no sun and light, then the light is not for them." In another recension, Śabara notes that there are passages equally critical of those performing the agnihotra ritual after sunrise (*uditahomam*). The conclusion one may draw from these two rebukes are that the uditahoma (agnihotra after sunrise) and anuditahoma (agnihotra before sunrise) are two different rituals. In his commentary on a later sūtra, Śabara explains why these passages rebuking the performing of the ritual before/after sunrise does not mean that the rituals are different:

> *na hi nindā nindyaṃ nindituṃ prayujyate kiṃ tarhi praśaṃsitum. tatra na ninditasya pratiṣedho gamyate, kintv itarasya vidhiḥ. tatra ekasminn agnihotre dvau kālau vihitau vikalpyete, ato na kaścid virodha.*
>
> Censure is not to rebuke the one who should be rebuked, but to praise someone/something other than that which is rebuked. Thus, it is not a prohibition of the rebuked [ritual] that is understood, but an injunction [to perform] another [ritual]. So even though the agnihotra is a single ritual, one may choose two times that are enjoined [for it to be performed.] There is no contradiction.

Rebuke, especially in the ritual context, is only an instrument to promote something else.

[272] na hi nindā nindyaṃ nindituṃ pravartate kimtu stotum vidheyam iti nyāya. Mīmāṃsāsūtra 2.4.8.

This maxim has been used historically in a similar context to adjudicate between the supposed differences, inferiorities and superiorities of the gods. In his commentary on a *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaṇiṣad* passage that describes Prajāpati creating all the gods, Śaṅkara alludes to the logic of the maxim without actually naming it. One might, from a simple reading of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaṇiṣad* passage (1.4.6), conclude that Prajāpati is higher than or superior to the other gods because he created them. Śaṅkara, however, warns against this kind of interpretation:

> Śaṅkarabhāṣya on Br. Up. 1.4.6: *yatheyaṃ śrutir vyavasthitā tathā prajāpatir eva sarve devā iti niścito 'rthaḥ, sraṣṭur ananyatvāt sṛṣṭānām prajāpatinaiva tu sṛṣṭatvād devānām. athaivaṃ prakaraṇārthe vyavasthite tatstutyabhiprāyeṇāvidvanmatāntaranindopanyāsaḥ, anyanindā anyastutaye.*
>
> Similarly, just as this Śruti has established that the meaning is that all gods are Prajāpati, because the creator is not different from the created, even though the gods are created by Prajāpati. When the meaning of the chapter is determined in this way, then there is a setting forth of a criticism of another view of the ignorant, even though its intention is praise. Censure (of one idea) is for the purpose of praising another (idea).

The criticism of the ignorant that Śaṅkara refers to is the idea that the gods are different since some say "sacrifice to this god" "sacrifice to that god." In fact, all gods are Prajāpati. This type of thinking has implications beyond the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* for Śaṅkara. Taking this as reproach of a god, he posits, has its source in the notion that the gods are different. Some, thinking that the gods such as agni, etc. are each distinct (*ekaikaṃ bhinnam*) due to the different rituals, praises, śastra, and names [of these gods], say this. This is the point. But one should not understand it in this way.[273]

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[273] Śankarabhāṣya on Br. Up. 1.4.6. *tat tatra karmaprakaraṇe kevalayajñikā yāgakāle, yad idaṃ vaca āhuḥ: 'amum agniṃ yajāmum indraṃ yaja' ityādināmaśastrastotrakarmādibhinnatvād bhinnam evāgnyādidevam ekaikaṃ manyamānā āhur ity abhiprāyaḥ tan na vidyāt.*

This interpretation of divine reproach as contextual and not absolute has its source in mīmāṃsā exegesis when talking about censuring specific rituals, but it quickly crept into understanding passages that seem to censure or diminish one god or group of gods. In both cases, context matter.

Is There an Indian Way of Rebuking? The "Statements of Inferiority" in the *Madhvatantramukhamardana*

In his essay "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?", A.K. Ramanujan argues that Indian cultures tend to prefer "context-sensitive kind of rules."[274] To make his case, Ramanujan contrasts Kant's universalism, "do not kill" for instance, with the Manu Smṛti's particularism, where universal precepts are hard to find because they are defined according to one's station in life. The point Ramanujan is making is that context matters, especially when it comes to discussions on ethics in "Indian culture." Appaya similarly pays close attention to context when analyzing nindā in texts such as the *Mahābhārata*. In his *Madhvatantramukhamardana ("MTMM")*, Appaya vigorously challenges and repudiates Madhva's system of thought. It is there that Appaya raises the issue of scriptural passages that censure or denigrate one god in particular. By the time of Appaya, this specific type of nindā, which I will explain later, was a popular tool deployed in sectarian arguments to prove the superiority of one god over the other. That Appaya opens his MTMM with a nod to nindā is a testament to how, by that time, the competition between Śiva's and Viṣṇu's superiority became a faultline for engaging with the Mādhvas. In the MTMM, Appaya

[274] Ramanujan (1989), p.47

offered his own views on this strategy of sectarian mud-slinging, and on the concept of nindā in particular. In fact, this is how he opens the text:

> *MTMM 1: śivaṃ viṣṇuṃ vā yady abhidadhāti śāstrasya viṣayaṃ tad iṣṭaṃ grāhyaṃ naḥ saguṇam api tad brahmabhajatām. virodho nātīva sphurati na hi nindā nyāyavidāṃ na sūtrāṇām arthāntaram api bhavadvāryam ucitam.*
>
> If one denotes that Śiva or Viṣṇu is the subject of [Vedānta] Śāstra, it is respected and can be accepted by us who worship that brahman even if it is saguṇa. For those of us who know the 'na hi nindā' maxim, no contradiction really springs forth. The alternative meaning of the Brahmasūtras preferred by you is not right.

Appaya imports this 'na hi nindā' maxim in to his argument to show how he differs from the Mādhvas in understanding the sectarian debate over Viṣṇu's and Śiva's supremacy. In the opening verse of the MTMM, Appaya establishes that the na hi nindā maxim apples not only to criticizing one type of ritual. The logic of the nyāya extends to one's choice of god for worship, and even a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava reading of key Vedanta texts. In his auto commentary of the first verse of the MTMM, Appaya explains why it does not ultimately matter if one worships Viṣṇu or Śiva:

> *Autocommentary on MTMM 1: vastuto nirviśeṣabrahmaṇi pratiṣṭhitasyāpi śārīrakamīmāṃsaśāstrasya kecana śivaṃ viṣṇuṃ vā viṣayaṃ vadanti cet tad iṣṭam eva. yatas tacchivarūpaṃ viṣṇurūpaṃ vā saguṇaṃ brahmopāsīnānām asmākam advaitavādināṃ upāsyasvarūpaguṇamahimāvadharaṇāya tatpratipādanapravṛttaṃ tadīyaṃ śāstrasya yojanam grāhyam. apekṣitaṃ khalv asmākam api nididhyāsanopayogi cittavaśīkaraṇakailāsavaikuṇṭhādisthānagatadivyabhogānubhavakramamuktisva rūpaphalāpekṣiṇāṃ tayor upāsanam.*
>
> If some say that Viṣṇu or Śiva is the subject of Śārīrikamīmāṃsā texts [viz. Brahmasūtras] even though it is about unqualified Brahman, that is valid. For we, exponents of Advaita who are worshipping qualified brahman—be it Śiva or Viṣṇu—find acceptable this very interpretation (yojana) of scripture as

> undertaken to propound Brahman to specify the greatness and inherent qualities of the worshipped. As is well known (khalu), their adoration which is expected for meditation, is expected for us who control our mind, a certain experience of enjoying the divine which we find in (gata) places like Kailāśa and Vaikuṇṭha, we need the fruit whose form is mukti.

From a committed Advaitin perspective, Appaya contends that there is no harm in exclusively worshipping one qualified form of Brahman and argues that this has its own benefits. This is, in part, a response to the Mādhva claim that Viṣṇu alone is the Supreme God, and that, at the highest level, God has attributes (saguṇa). From a philosophical perspective, it would also explain Appaya's penchant for writing works that extol the greatness of both Viṣṇu and Śiva.[275] The na hi nindā maxim reminds the reader to read passages in this way. Divine rebuke and diminishment, broadly defined, only serve to praise another god and establish devotion to him.

How can passages and episodes in these sacred sources be rescued from their profane potential? In his *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*, Appaya presents an example of how this works. In his *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* ("BhSSS") and *Brahmatarkastava*, Appaya is aware of passages and stories that potentially demean Kṛṣṇa. Both of these texts and their accompanying auto commentaries are part of a larger corpus of polemical texts Appaya composed to defend and promote Śaivism.[276] In the BhSSS, Appaya is aware that there are also verses in the epic that can portray Śiva as inferior to Viṣṇu. Aside from arguing that the *Mahābhārata* reveals Śiva's supremacy, he also sets out to defend Śiva from any accusations of inferiority based on what is written in the epic. "A statement of inferiority (*nikarṣagīḥ*)

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[275] Aside from accusations of internal contradictions amongst scriptural works, the same claim can be made about Appaya's work. For example, after looking at Appaya's two Vaiṣṇava works alongside his well-known Śaiva polemics, Rao (2016, p.44) says that "these two sets of texts raise an obvious question of conceptual consistency: Can Śiva and Viṣṇu be paramount at the same time? The question is especially pointed given the circumstances in which Appaya wrote: a period when the social boundaries between Saivas and Vaisnavas were hardening, as is evident from a number of conflicts in Appaya's near vicinity."

[276] See, for example, the Journal of Indian Philosophy (2016) vol. 44, Issue 1.

cannot touch you who are lord of the world," he writes in the BhSSS.[277] He then gives an example of an offending passage, or "*nikarṣagīḥ*" as he calls it: "The wise do not worship Brahmā, Śitikaṇṭha [i.e., Śiva] and all others who are regarded as deities because the fruit [that accrues from their worship] is limited."[278] Hence, for these sages, this statement applies. It does not mean that there are limited fruits for anyone who worships Śiva. Still, Appaya maintains, this verse is ultimately intended to generate interest in serving Nārāyaṇa.[279]

In another verse found in a popular interpolated section of the *Mahābhārata* known as the *Vaiṣṇavadharma*, Kṛṣṇa claims that he does not take refuge in any god.[280] The first verse is the subject of both Appaya's and Vādirāja's attention, for different reasons. For a Mādhva like Vādirāja, the literal meaning of the verse proves Viṣṇu's supremacy. How, then, can Appaya make sense of verses that seem to denigrate Śiva and also exclude the possibility of Kṛṣṇa worshipping him? By following the exegetical techniques described earlier, Appaya argues in the BhSSS that the purpose of those verses is context-specific.

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[277] BhSSS v.9: *yatredṛśaṃ nāsti vibhūtirudratāvijñāpakaṃ nātha viśeṣakaṃ padam/*
sāpi svadharmagrahamānavaiśasāt sarveśvaraṃ tvāṃ na nikarṣagīḥ spṛśet//
All translations of the *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* are from Minkowski, Christopher, ed. Forthcoming. *Appaya's Summary of the Mahābhārata's Meaning (Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*). Oxford Research Archive.

[278] Ibid. The verse is a slightly modified version of the Pune Critical Edition's MBh:
12.328.32 *brahmāṇaṃ śitikaṇṭhaṃ ca yāś cānyā devatāḥ smṛtāḥ/ prabuddhavaryāḥ sevante mām evaiṣyanti yat param/ bhaktaṃ prati viśeṣas te eṣa pārthānukīrtitaḥ//*

In BhSSS auto commentary to vs. 19, Appaya writes: "As for the statement beginning with "*brahmāṇaṃ nīlakaṇṭhaṃ ca,*" it concerns sages who are intent on the meditation [by which one strives to] grasp the [deity] as the self, because: 1. [this statement] has the same purpose as the statement beginning with "The image is for those of small intellect" (?); and because 2. the worship involving the recollection of something that involves a part contradicts [the worship involving] the recollection of unity."

[279] Comm. on BhSSS vs.19: *evaṃvidha bhūyovacanānugrahāt 'brahmāṇaṃ nīlakaṇṭham ca' iti vacanasyāpy ukta evābhiprāyo 'nveṣṭavyaḥ. tasya nārāyaṇātiriktadevatābhajanaṃ parimitaphalam iti jñātāras tān na sevanta ity arthakatve 'pi nārāyaṇasevāprarocanārtham tad iti netavyam.*

[280] MBh App_14.4.3382 *anāśrityocchrayaṃ nāsti mukhyam āśrayam āśrayet/*
App_14.4.3383 *rudraṃ samāśritā devā rudro brāhmaṇam āśritaḥ/*
App_14.4.3384 *brahmā mām āśrito rājan nāhaṃ kaṃ cid upāśritaḥ/*

> The statement by Kṛṣṇa, [namely] "I do not seek refuge in anyone," is certainly heard at the time when the Vaiṣṇavadharmaśāstra is delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira—who had asked, being a long-standing devotee of [Kṛṣṇa], about the Vaiṣṇava religious practices that must be carried out by Vaiṣṇavas—precisely in order to describe the religious practices [of Vaiṣṇavas]. Therefore, by the principle that "One should not create a division in the understanding [of the ignorant who is attached to his work]," the statement "I do not seek refuge in anyone" is [made by Kṛṣṇa] in order to generate [Yudhiṣṭhira's] interest towards increasing in himself the devotion established earlier.[281]

Appaya first situates the statement "I do not take refuge in anyone" in its narrative context and justifies it as a necessary statement to develop Yudhiṣṭhira's devotion. Kṛṣṇa's statement will only further Yudhiṣṭḥira's devotion to him and his desire to perform Vaiṣṇava rituals. As we will see in the MTMM, Appaya does not consider this to be a problem. This is not a slight to Śiva, but an encouragement to Yudhiṣṭḥira who, in this section, is asking about Vaiṣṇava rituals. Appaya later elaborates on the Vaiṣṇavadharma section and argues that Śiva's superiority is ultimately hinted at by Kṛṣṇa.

In defence of this position, Appaya explains in the BhSSS how this could lead to a misreading of epic passages about Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Once again, Appaya turns to examples of doṣa: death and confusion. Appaya points to passages in the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Mahābhārata* that talk about Rāma's death on the Sarayu River, and Kṛṣṇa's confusion in his battle with Śālva. He also points to the Śālva episode of the *Mahābhārata*, where Kṛṣṇa is momentarily confused in a battle with his foe and drops his bow. Without any proper context, one might conclude that Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are merely particular individual souls (jīvaviśeṣa), instead of God. The method to Appaya's exegesis in these examples is not to take a passage literally as an insult of a god, even when it appears to directly denigrate Śiva

[281] BhSSS auto commentary on vs. 19.

or Viṣṇu. Instead, the passage should be contextualized to its audience and seen as a praise of something else.

In his autocommentary on verse 1 of the *MTMM*, Appaya adds that in verse 54, he will have more to say on the topic of nindā. It is here that he makes the case for reading reproach in context. In this verse, he explains his broadened definition of nindā, and why such passages found in the Purāṇas and other scriptures do not have to be a source of sectarian wrangling.

> Verse 54ab: *sphārāt tatpurāṇāgamavacanaśataprāpitā yā 'nyanindā/*
>
> *tattadbhaktyādisiddhyai stavanaviracane sā bhaved dvāramātram//*
>
> The blame of other [deities] is presented to us in hundreds of statements in Purāṇas and Āgamas loudly. That [blame] is merely a means in the composition of praise [for a god]. This would be done in order to establish devotion for this on that deity (respectively).

In his auto commentary of this verse, Appaya notes that there are many verses in sectarian texts, "statements of inferiority," as he calls them, that show one god worshipping, creating or destroying another. The scope of the term 'nindā' here is broad enough to include statements that do not directly appear to be rebukes of god. The Itihāsa and Purāṇas are littered with such nindā passages, like the previous two *Mahābhārata* verses discussed. The point of divine denigration and censure, Appaya argues, is not to insult one god but to establish unflinching devotion towards another god.[282] This pluralist understanding of

[282] parasparanindāvacanāni 'na hi nindā nindyaṃ nindituṃ pravartate 'pi tu stutyaṃ stotum" iti nyāyenoditānudtahomanindādiṣu
dṛṣṭena tat taddevatāviṣayaniścalabhaktisiddhiprayojane stutiviracane dvāramātratvenopapannāni.

divine denigration and censure runs counter to the Mādhva understanding of the term. If Viṣṇu is the Supreme Being, and the only one, then denigrating or insulting Viṣṇu as a means to promote devotion towards a lesser god, Śiva, for example, would not be productive.[283]

The Case of Renunciation versus Householdership in MTMM 54

Must censure always mean the universal disavowing of something or someone? In order to put forward his understanding of divine censure in vs. 54 of the MTMM, Appaya takes the example of another peculiar type of reproach or contradiction in śāstra. In the Āpastamba Dharmasūtras, the āśrama system is encouraged, sometimes at the expense of renunciation. Does the Āpastamba's rejection of renunciation mean that renunciation should not be pursued *at all*? This is not a question that is only limited to the Āpastamba. Appaya notes a similar aversion towards renunciation in certain sections of the *Mahābhārata*.

> Autocommentary *on MTMM 54: tathā mahābhārate 'pi śāntiparvaṇi jñātivadhanirvedāt saṃnyāsodyuktam yudhiṣṭhiraṃ prati tadbhrātṛṇāṃ maharṣīṇām bhagavataḥ kṛṣṇasya ca vacaneṣu bhūyasī saṃnyāsanindā dṛśyate. evaṃ saty api saṃnyāsasyāśramāntarato na kācana hānis tava mate.*
>
> Similarly, in the Śāntiparvan of the *Mahābhārata*, many rebukes of renunciate life are seen in the speeches of Kṛṣṇa, the Ṛṣis and his brothers towards Yudhiṣṭḥira who wishes to renounce due to the disgust from the killing his own

[283] There were other Mādhva objections to this use of the 'na hi nindā' principle. Take, for example, the Mādhva scholar Nārāyaṇācārya's criticism of this issue, as summarized by Elaine Fisher: Nārāyaṇācārya not only maintains that Appaya's particular uses of Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics are inapplicable as a critique of Madhva's doctrine of dualism, or as a means to determine the identity of or difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu, but he also goes much further and throws into question the more general validity of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā itself as an approach to textual interpretation outside of the narrow confines of Vedic ritual procedure." (Fisher, 2016 p.118).

> family. Even though this is the case, there is no rejection in your (Mādhva) system of saṃnyāsa in comparison to another āśrama.[284]

Appaya notes that even though parts of the *Mahābhārata* advocate against renunciation, in Madhva's Brahmasūtrabhāṣya 3.4.1, the author argues for the superiority of renunciation. Although it would appear that Madhva contradicts the *Mahābhārata*, Appaya's point is that when we actually understand the context of the rebuke of renunciation, there is no actual contradiction.

The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, like the *Mahābhārata* passage just discussed, when read in context, is encouraging its audience to perform rituals appropriate to the requirements of their caste and stage of life. The rebuke of renunciation found therein must be read in that context instead of universalized. After explaining the point of the *Mahābhārata* example, Appaya makes salient his point about reading rebuke:

> Autocommentary *on MTMM 54: mahābhārate… yudhiṣṭhiraṃ saṃnyāsodyogān nivārayitukāmais tasya bhrātṛbhir gārhiṣṭhyaprarocanārthaṃ saṃnyāsaṃ dūṣayitvā gārhasthyotkarṣo varṇita ity evaṃ gatir vaktavyā. evaṃ purāṇāgameṣu tat- taddevatārādhanopāsanādyanuṣṭhāpanārthaṃ pravṛtteṣu tatprarocanārthaṃ devatāntaranikarṣo varṇita iti.*
>
> In the *Mahābhārata*, the brothers of Yudhiṣṭhira--desirous of stopping Yudhiṣṭhira from undertaking renunciation—praise the virtues of householdership after condemning renunciation for the purpose of encouraging him to remain a householder. This is how the course of action should be explained. In the same way, in the Purāṇas and Āgamas, which exist to cause (people) to perform ārādhana and upāsana of this and that deity, the denigration of a god is described in order to stimulate that.

[284] If context-sensitive rules are native to an "Indian" way of thinking, then even Madhva would read texts in a similar way. Appaya rightfully notes that in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 3.4.1., Madhva argues for the superiority of renunciation over householder life for men. Madhva further notes that the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* concludes with a praise of householders, but adds the caveat that the praise found in the conclusion of the Ch*ā*ndogya is actually a praise of gods who live as householders.

The *Mahābhārata* denigrates renunciation in order to encourage *Yudhiṣṭhira* to take up an engaged life, not to reject of renunciation in general. It should be framed in the context of the narrative, where figures are assuring Yudhiṣṭhira that renunciation is not the right path for *him*. With these textual examples, Appaya shows that sometimes censure does not always mean a blanket disavowal, and thus we must contextualize these acts of rebuke. When understood this way, this type of rebuke is not as profane as it may seem at first glance. Once censure is contextualized, these examples show that the point is not a denigration of any god in absolute terms. True to Ramanujan's observation about context-sensitivity, Appaya is urging us against universalizing rebuke. Instead, he is arguing that we contextualize rebuke in complex texts like the *Mahābhārata*.

Appaya's Reading of Madhva's Exegesis

Appaya notes that although they may not admit it, Mādhvas are not exempt from this "Indian" way of reading rebuke. Appaya extends his argument in the MTMM to make this specific point, drawing a parallel between the use of the na hi nindā nyāya and the way the Mādhvas read the Śiśupālavadha section of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In order to understand Appaya's point, it is important to briefly return to the Mādhva exegesis of the Śiśupāla episode. The Mādhvas have a long history of engagement with this story, beginning with Madhva himself. The issue for them is found in verses such as BhP 7.1.30, where Nārada tells Yudhiṣṭhira: "The Gopīs attained him through pleasure, Kaṃsa by fear, Śiśupāla and other kings through hatred, the Vṛṣṇi's through kinship, you [Pāṇḍavas] through love, and us through devotion." As we have seen in an earlier chapter, this verse is a source of contention for Madhva and other commentators who would like to argue that

hatred is *not* a legitimate means to liberation. Madhva's comments on this verse can be found in his *Gītabhāṣya*, the *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya*, and the *Aṇuvyākhyāna.* In the *Aṇuvyākhyāna*, he addresses the issue of whether hatred (through reproach) can ever be a means to liberation. I quote from Madhva's text and the famous commentary by Jayatīrtha, which Appaya references in his *Madhvatantramukhamardana*:

> *Aṇuvyākhyāna 3.4.208 yadi dveṣeṇa muktiḥ syād vaktavyo doṣasañcayaḥ /smartavyo bhagavān nityam ity arthenaiva hi kvacit / dveṣād iva guṇān āha purāṇe kruddhavākyavat//*
>
> If there could be liberation by means of hate, a cluster of faults would be communicated. "The Lord is to be remembered always," with this meaning only it occasionally describes virtues as hate in the Purāṇas, like words of anger.
>
> *Nyāyasudhā* of Jayatīrtha: *nanu dveṣāc caidyādayo nṛpā ityādīni dveṣasyāpi mokṣasādhanatāṃ pratipādayanti vākyāni santi /tatkathaṃ dveṣasya muktisādhanatvābhāva ityata āha- smartavya iti //*
>
> [Objection]: There are verses such as these "through hatred, the kings beginning with Śiśupāla [King of Ceḍi]" which also consider hatred a means to liberation. How, then, would there be a nonexistence of hatred as a means to liberation? The response is "to be remembered" etc.
>
> *purāṇavākyaṃ dveṣasya muktisādhanatvaṃ pratipādayad ivāpātato yady api pratīyateta /tathāpi tanna tadabhiprāyam /kintu mumukṣuṇā bhagavansarvadā smartavya iti tasyābhiprāyaḥ / […] caidyādīnāṃ dveṣato muktiṃ pratipādayadvākyaṃ bhagavataḥ kṛpālutvādīn guṇān āheti / śāpādinā dveṣiṇo 'pi caidyādyās tātkālikadveṣam anirūpya pūrvatanīṃ bhaktim evāpekṣya bhagavatā mocitāḥ /*
>
> One may respond that at first glance, it seems as if the verse from the [*Bhāgavata*] *Purāṇa* is expressing that hatred is a means to liberation, but that is not the intention of the verse. The intention of the verse instead is that "the Lord is to be remembered always by those who desire liberation."[…]If the verse is expressing the liberation of Śiśupāla etc. due to hatred, it propounds the virtues of the Lord, such as his compassion. Having not considered the hate specific to

> that moment of the King of Ceḍi etc, even though he was a hater due to the curse; and having only considered his prior devotion, the Lord liberates them.

According to Madhva, the point of passages in the *Bhāgavata* that say that Śiśupāla reached Kṛṣṇa through hatred is not to present hatred and insult as legitimate means for a devotee to attain liberation. It is instead to show how these specific devotees, born to be haters, expressed their devotion. Madhva views Śiśupāla as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Appaya argues that in this reading of such textual passages, Madhva is endorsing this proposed method for understanding reproach and divine diminishment.

> MTMM 55: *aṅgikṛtaṃ ca tvayā 'pi 'dveṣāc caidyādayo nṛpāḥ' ityādau bhagavataḥ kṛpālutvātiśayatātparyeṇa dveṣān muktivarṇanaṃ, na tu narakasādhanena bhagavaddveṣeṇa muktir astīti vadatā purāṇeṣv anyārthatātparyeṇāsadarthakathanam.*
>
> Even you [Madhva] accept that in Purāṇas etc, something that is untrue is stated (*asadkathana*) with the underlying sense of another thing, like when you are saying that in passages such as "caidyādayo nṛpāḥ" the explanation of hatred through liberation is praising the excellence of the Lord's compassion. There is no liberation through hatred, which is actually a means to hell.

Madhva does not take the *Bhāgavata* passages literally, and instead suggests an underlying meaning after considering the context of Śiśupāla's backstory (he is a reincarnation of a devotee). The same methodology, Appaya argues, ought to be applied to the reading of rebuke more generally. Those passages need not be read literally and narrowly. In fact, Jayatīrtha states that the literal meaning of the verse is not its real purport (*abhiprāya*). How can we understand that texts like the Purāṇas convey a meaning that is the opposite of the literal meaning? Appaya pulls a verse from Madhva's *Anuvyākhyāna* as an example to illustrate this. According to this verse, the Purāṇas speak just like an angry father, who after

reproaching his son, says something harsh to him.[285] One cannot take that insult literally, but as a way to incite the son to act. In the same way, rebuke should not be understood literally and out of its context using methodologies of reading that are not foreign to Madhva.

Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara on the Na Hi Nindā Nyāya

The discourse around reading rebuke of one god over an other spilled out explicitly into the exegesis of the *Mahābhārata* in the seventeenth century. If there is any doubt that the concern about divine censure is not relevant to the *Mahābhārata*, the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara (17th c.) dispels that. When it comes to reading passages that appear to denigrate one god at the expense of another, Nīlakaṇṭha endorses the textual strategy that Appaya advocates.[286] Early in Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, he addresses concerns about sectarian ways of reading the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata*. By the time he composed his *Bhāratabhāvadīpa*, another related controversy had already emerged. Specifically, there was an ongoing debate about the authenticity of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and whether it was actually authored by Vyāsa. One writer, for example, not only argued that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was a forgery, but that the true *Bhāgavata* was the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*.[287] This debate, as Minkowski (2010) notes, had polemic overtones and the rhetoric was heated. Accusations of forgeries were not limited to the *Bhāgavata*

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[285] Anuvyākhyāna 3.4.209: *yathā kruddhaḥ pitā putraṃ maretyākṣepapūrvakam / proktasyānyasya kṛtyarthaṃ vadaty evaṃ purāṇagam //* Just as an angry father, after censuring his son, [says] *"die!", he* speaks in order to do some another thing [that was asked,] *the reciter of the Purāṇ*as speaks similarly.

[286] In fact, there is evidence in Nīlakaṇṭha's work that he is aware of Appaya's reading of the *Mahābhārata*. On this, see Christopher Minkowski (2017) "Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara and Appaya's Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra" Journal of Oriental Research Madras LXXXVII-XC, p.188-198.

[287] (Minkowski, 2010, p.121)

Purāṇa. Nīlakaṇṭha is aware of mutual accusations between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas that their texts, the *Sūtasaṃhita* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, were forgeries.

Of course, neither the Śaiva nor the Vaiṣṇava approached the *Mahābhārata* with any such accusations. By the time Nīlakaṇṭha was writing his commentary, there had been numerous polemic attempts to claim the Bhārata, as a whole or in parts, as a text proclaiming Śiva or Viṣṇu as the Supreme. This fit within the larger polemic debates about the supremacy of Viṣṇu and Śiva, a theme which will be explored further in the next chapter.

Writing after Appaya's *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* and numerous Vaiṣṇava rejoinders to Śaiva claims on the Bhārata, Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary on the epic offers a snapshot of *Mahābhārata* exegesis by the 17th century. He appears to be frustrated with the sectarian debate on the epics, and offers his own take. The problem, as Nīlakaṇṭha diagnoses it, is one of methodology, or a standard of reading these "inferiority statements" about Viṣṇu or Śiva. He frames this topic of divine rebuke in the larger context of the Advaitin understanding of a nirguṇa, or quality-free Brahman. For example, he quotes from Vidyāraṇya's *Vārttikasāra* to argue that whether one worships the Saguṇa by Vināyaka, Durgā or any other name, the worshipper is merely superimposing these names and qualities on the nirdhārmika Brahman. As he says in his commentary on 1.1.23 of the *Mahābhārata*:

> These mangey lowlife Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas do not understand the language of variety used in the Purāṇas. The (lowlifes) are unaware of the Vedic statements about non-difference which point out the fault that lies in seeing difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu and that is described in the Smṛti literature as follows: "those who have been misled by Hindu imposters are bewildered by the impression of difference when they see Brahmā, Kṛṣṇa, Rudra, and do not see them as one." They

> do not know the truth of the Śāstra that the one root cause gives rise to all effects, just as an actor takes on different forms. And accepting only one or other of the forms they criticize each other, making a great mutual ruckus, and hence as a result of the injury they do to the masters they are readying themselves only for hell.[288]

His strategy here is to show, for an Advaitin, how low the stakes really are when a Śaiva quibbles with a Vaiṣṇava about whose god is better. This practise of insulting one god over another amounts to petty gamesmanship. Nīlakaṇṭha underscored how futile this debate was, particularly for exponents of Advaita Vedanta.

As for the issue of mutual reproach of the gods Viṣṇu or Śiva, Nīlakaṇṭha follows Appaya in invoking the na hi nindā nyāya.

> *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* on MBh 1.1.23: *yat tu śaivavaiṣṇavapurāṇeṣu itaranindāsmaraṇaṃ tan 'na hi nindā ninditum pravartate api tu vidheyaṃ stotum' iti nyāyena vidheyastutyartham "[Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 5.31 on udita/anuditahoma]." yathātithaye pradrutāya śūnyāyāv avasathāya hāryaṃ haranti tādṛg eva tad iti uditānuditahomayoḥ prakaraṇe itaranindāvidheyastutyarthavatadvat na tu tatra nindyāyāṃ tātparyam asti*.
>
> That recalling of mutual reproach [found] in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, according to the maxim "reproach is not to censure [something] but to praise something that should be done," has as its purpose the praise of something that should be done. [Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 5.31 quote which censures the homa performed before sunrise]. Thus, just as in the context of the sacrifice before and after sunrise, where in order to praise what should be done there is mutual reproach, there is no intention here to censure.

Nīlakaṇṭha likens reproach of a deity to the ritualistic insult of the sunrise homa ritual, which is the canonical example that Śabara cites when discussing the na hi nindā nyāya. Context tells us that this rebuke is not absolute, and only has as its intent the desire to promote something else. He follows Appaya's use of the nyāya while emphasizing that the

[288] Translation by Minkowski (2010) p. 132

differences in deities do not, in ultimate terms, matter for Advaitins, who consider Brahman to be without qualities. It is possible for Advaitins, who advocate this type of abheda, to read divine rebuke in this way.

This textual strategy that Nīlakaṇṭha and Appaya advocate cannot please everyone, however. For Mādhvas, there is a difference between these deities and the differences matter. This peculiar type of insult, which involves denigrating a specific god and/or their worshippers, can be easily resolved for Nīlakantha, but not for Dvaita readers such as Vādirāja. Nīlakaṇṭha intentionally includes these remarks in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata* because is also making a point to those who read the epic with a sectarian lens and treat certain verses as insulting a specific god. For those who view the Ultimate Reality with an Advaitin lens, as Nīlakaṇṭha does, there is no issue here. In fact, Nīlakaṇṭha reads these Śiva-friendly passages in the Mokṣadharma as examples of Hari-Hara *abheda,* the oneness of the two deities. The issue, he notes is with the standards, or maryādā, of reading texts such as the *Mahābhārata*.[289]

Conclusion

Earlier chapters have looked at the ways in which narrative—Purāṇic, epic or otherwise—intersect with commentaries and exegesis to form polemics and make arguments about Kṛṣṇa that feature in sectarian debate. A major component of this sectarian polemics is the denigration of one god in favour of another, and a criticism of Kṛṣṇa's humanity in the *Mahābhārata*. This chapter looks at some of the scholastic features of this debate, and how some of the writers of the late-medieval and early modern periods

[289] "śāstramaryādānavabodhamūlam" see Minkowski (2010), p.126.

offered to read passages of nikarṣa or inferiority in the *Mahābhārata*. Specifically, how and why is a maxim imported primarily from Mīmāṃsa exegesis used to make a larger methodological point about reading the *Mahābhārata* and other such texts that were appropriated by Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava communities in the South? Although Appaya Dīkṣita offers a stirring reading of the Sanskrit epics in his *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* and his *Brahmatarkastava*, his intention is not to denigrate Viṣṇu by promoting Śiva, nor does he characterize his project in that way.

The Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas discussed thus far trade barbs in different ways, narratively, scholastically and otherwise, but to what end? This chapter demonstrates that for some, like Appaya and Nīlakaṇṭha, the diminishment of one god only served to praise another, because Brahman is ultimately Nirguṇa. The adoption of the 'na hi nindā nyāya' was important for Appaya to rebut the Mādhvas and their brand of polemics, but also to show how passages in texts like the *Mahābhārata* need not be considered problematic for one specific community because it praises Śiva over Kṛṣṇa, or vice versa. While this methodology would suffice for some, it would not satisfy the Śrīvaiṣṇava and Mādhva readers of the epics who were inflamed by Śaiva efforts at appropriation of the *Mahābhārata*, as we will see in the following chapter.

Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's Bhāratabhāvadīpa is one of the latest Sanskrit commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, and perhaps the most well-circulated one. Although he does not hail from South India, his use of the same 'na hi nindā nyāya' and his comment about disputes between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas shows that much of the discourse about the *Mahābhārata* in South India affected the interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* outside the region in the early modern period.

Chapter 9

Polemic Philology: (Re)claiming the Mahābhārata as a Vaiṣṇava Text

vede rāmāyaṇe caiva purāṇe bhārate tathā/

ādāv ānte ca madhye ca hariḥ sarvatra gīyate//[290]

In the Veda, Ramayana, the Purāṇa and the [Mahā]bhārata

In the beginning, middle, and end

Everywhere

Hari is Praised.

At the conclusion of the Droṇaparvan, the Kaurava warrior and ardent Śiva-devotee Aśvatthāman seeks to kill Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Holding the duo responsible for the humiliating death of his father, Aśvatthāman deploys his most powerful weapon gifted by Śiva—the Nārāyaṇāstra—against the duo, to no avail. Frustrated at the turn of events, the warrior probes Vyāsa about the missile's failure. Vyāsa explains to him that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had previously worshipped Śiva for 60,000 years. Aśvatthāman is told that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna's invincibility from the missile is a direct result of their penance towards Śiva. This may not be a typical example of nikarṣa or seem like denigration at all. After all, there is not any explicit rebuke of Kṛṣṇa by any figure in these episodes. So why do exegetes such

[290] This verse appears in many *Mahābhārata* exegetical works, beginning with Madhvācārya's *Gītābhāṣya*. Madhva ascribes it to the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*. Vedāntācārya quotes the verse, and also ascribes it to the *Harivaṃśa*; as does Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in his *Brahimasūtrabhāṣya*; and Sadānanda Vyāsa in his *Mahābhāratatātparyaprakāśa*. Mesquita cites this as one of the "untraceable" quotes of Madhva, but its history and transmission is far more complicated.

as Vādirāja pay close attention to these episodes? For them, the act of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva, or relying on Śiva, can be easily interpreted as a sign of his inferiority to Śiva.

Thus far in this section, I have traced a history of how epic commentaries and polemical works in South India, particularly by Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, converged on the issue of Kṛṣṇa's (and Rāma's) embodiment. If the avatāra is a perfect embodiment of Viṣṇu, what does it mean for him to be divine? Is he subject to vulnerabilities? Exegetes answered these questions, worrying about the inferiority (nikarṣa) of their god. As I have shown, the defense of Kṛṣṇa's perfection is simultaneously a defense of his superiority. It is in these texts that we find a conception of divinity and a close theological interpretation of Kṛṣṇa that makes him less vulnerable, and thus less human. Thus, Kṛṣṇa's death and cremation raises practical questions about his ability to be injured and the nature of his body. The other way in which this argument for the perfection (and superiority) of Kṛṣṇa reared its head was in his relationship to Śiva. It would be a denigration of Kṛṣṇa (for these Vaiṣṇavas) to suggest that the god actually seeks favours from Śiva and worships him. This chapter looks at this particular concern about Kṛṣṇa's humanity: does he worship Śiva, and what does it mean for the overall meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. We have seen already how Advaitins like Appaya and Nīlakaṇṭha propose we read verses that seem to denigrate a god (nikarṣagīḥ).

In this chapter, I look at how Mādhvas, represented by Madhva and Vādiraja, and Śrīvaiṣṇavas such as Vedantācārya, respond to the challenge of a Śaiva reading of the *Mahābhārata*. In studying the strategies of the Vaiṣṇavas, I am looking specifically at the methods they use to interpret these problematic passages of the *Mahābhārata*. I argue that a theodicy, or defense of Kṛṣṇa, developed around the specific issue of his worship of Śiva,

and that rebutting claims of Śiva's superiority was central to reclaiming the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text. The Vaiṣṇavas discussed in this chapter presented their own textual practices for reading the text. Alongside convenient glossing and arguments for interpolations, there were methodologies that rivalled Appaya's way of reading the *Mahābhārata*. In some cases, like Vedāntācārya's Upakrama-Upasaṃhāra debate, these methods also borrowed from other disciplines like Mimāṃsā. In other cases, like that of Madhva's Tribhāṣā, new and innovative methodologies were proposed.

I uncover two related questions that troubled Vaiṣṇava readers of the *Mahābhārata* in the South about Kṛṣṇa: why does Kṛṣṇa worship Śiva, and what does this praise of Śiva in the epic mean for the overall meaning of the *Mahābhārata*? In asking this question, the exegetes are undoubtedly fueled by a kind of "inferior god complex" discussed in earlier chapters. Kṛṣna supplicating Śiva is more troubling for these readers than his conduct during the war. Passages that praise Śiva as the supreme God in the *Mahābhārata* complement this problem and complicate any vision of the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text.

In the first part of this chapter, I study a hitherto unpublished Śrīvaiṣṇava polemical rejoinder to Appaya's *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*, Vedāntācārya's *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* and Vādirāja's *Lakṣālaṃkāra*. I pay attention to how they respond to these questions. Vādirāja offers his answer to this question in his commentary on 13.14.1 of the *Mahābhārata*. Chapters 14-18 of the Anuśāsanaparvan have often been billed as the Śaiva equivalent of the Nārāyaṇīya in the *Mahābhārata*, and with good reason. In it, Kṛṣṇa extols the glories of Śiva. Eventually, the sage Upamanyu, who is famous in narrative for being a devotee of Śiva, tells the Pāṇḍavas a story about how Kṛṣṇa himself once worshipped Śiva for a son, Sāmba. Instead of rebutting every point in this section of

the Anuśāsanaparvan in his commentary, Vādirāja instead writes an essay in the opening of this chapter 14 detailing how this section should be read, and what it means for the overall purport of the Bhārata. He adopts the tribhāṣā theory developed by Madhva, which we will look at first, to argue that this section is inconsistent with the opening, middle, and closing of the epic which clearly convey Viṣṇu's supremacy.

I then shift to a second answer to these questions offered in the Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā. In this work, Vedāntācārya comments on an episode in the Droṇaparvan, where the epic's author, Vyāsa, explains to an angry Aśvatthāman why Kṛṣna and Arjuna are unharmed by his seemingly infallible weapon. Vyāsa tells Aśvatthāman, who is a devotee of Śiva, that previously Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had performed severe penance to Śiva as the sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa. It is due to this penance that Śiva granted them inviolability in war. In his commentary on this episode, Vedāntācārya uses Mimāṃsā principles to argue that we cannot use this episode to draw larger conclusions about the Bhārata's overall meaning. He frames the interpretation of this episode as a conflict between the initial (upakrama) and concluding (upasaṃhāra) statements. He further argues that Vyāsa is not praising Śiva as the "supreme" God, and only tells this story to placate an angry Aśvatthāman.

Aside from the answers that these thinkers provide, I am also interested in the process they use to answer the above questions. To that end, I note the different philological methods that Vādirāja and Vedāntācārya use to read these controversial passages, at both the macro and micro levels. On a microlevel, I look at the tendency to creatively gloss words in specific verses of the *Mahābhārata* in order to service their overall argument. On a larger scale, I examine the commentaries on the Upamanyukathā of the

Anuśāsanaparvan and argue that both exegetes interpret the episode as a discrete textual unit and try to reconcile it with the overall broader meaning of the text. I situate these textual practices within the larger history of *Mahābhārata* exegesis, and also within the sectarianism of premodern South India.

In the Nārāyaṇīya, Kṛṣṇa offers an explanation (or what I argue is a defence) of his Śiva-worship. Kṛṣṇa's defence is that since he and Śiva were originally one, Kṛṣṇa is merely worshipping himself as Śiva. This argument suggests his ultimate non-difference with Śiva. In the concluding portion of this chapter, I argue that reclaiming the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text meant not only rebutting Śiva's supremacy over Viṣṇu, but also the abheda or non-difference of the two gods. I show, through a reading of exegesis on the Nārāyaṇīya, how the two commentators went through great lengths to re-interpret this section of the *Mahābhārata* that seems to argue for the abheda of the two gods.

Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā: **An Overview**

Thus far, I have studied Mādhva works, but Śrīvaiṣṇavas were equally invested in the Kṛṣṇa question. A key response to Appaya's *Bhāratasārasaṃgraha* (and also the *Brahmatarkastava*) is Vedāntācārya's *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*. The author of this work hailed from a Śrīvaiṣṇava family. The author of this work is Paravastu Vedāntācārya. In the opening verses of his MBTR, he hails his teacher (*paravastuguru*) and the son of his teacher (*paravastuguroḥ sutān*) who is Ādivarāhācārya. Very little is known about this Śrīvatsa Śrīvaiṣṇava family, with the exception of some of their writings which are extant in manuscript form. Veṅkatadeśika composed a *Siddhāntacandrika*; Ādivarāha composed a *Nyāyaratnāvali*; and Paravastu Vedāntācārya composed the *Vedāntakaustubha*. All of these

works are polemical in nature, making the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* a natural fit for their library. Ādivarāha's *Nyāyaratnāvali* is a critique of the Mādhva's system of tāratamya, for instance, while Paravastu Vedāntācārya's *Vedāntakaustuba* sets out to prove that all authoritative scriptural passages denote Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Brahman.

After praising Rāmānuja (Śrīlakṣmaṇamiśra) and Vedānta Deśika, the author of the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* inserts these maṅgala ślokas:

> *yam āhur nigamāntāryam avatīrṇam amum bhuvi/ taṃ maṅgalaguṇopetaṃ paravastuguruṃ bhaje//*
> That very *nigamāntārya* (Vedānta Deśika) whom they say descended on the earth,[291] is the Paravastuguru that I praise, endowed with auspicious qualities.
>
> *śrīmadādivarāhāryān paravastuguros sutān/*
> *vande yeṣāṃ padāmbhojaṃ śaraṇaṃ mama niḥsamam//*
> I praise the noble Ādivarāhārya, the son of Paravastuguru, whose lotus feet are my unequalled refuge.

According to Raghavan's New Catalogus Catalogoroum,[292] Veṅkatadeśika was the grandfather of Paravastu Vedāntācārya, and Veṅkatadeśika's son was Ādivarāha. Thus, it is likely that the "Paravastu Guru" referenced in the maṅgala śloka is Veṅkatadeśika, which would correctly make "paravastuguroḥ sutān ādivarahācāryān" Ādivarāha.

The date of Vedāntācārya is uncertain but he must be either a contemporary of Appaya Dīkṣita, who flourished in the 16th century, or writing after that period, given that his work is a rejoinder to Appaya's Bhāratasārasaṅgrahastotra and the *Brahmatarkastava*. One of the challenges to dating him accurately is that very little scholarly attention has been paid to his works and the works of his lineage. Most of these works, including the

[291] I take nigamāntāryam here to be an epithet of Vedānta Deśika. Here the author suggests that the Paravastuguru is a reincarnation of Deśika. I thank Prof. Diwakar Acharya for this suggestion.
[292] vol 31 p.73

Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā, remain unpublished. The MBTR is available at several manuscript libraries in South India, and appears to have been widely circulated in that region.

The *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* is split into three parts. In the first section, Vedāntācārya rebuts some of Appaya's interpretation of various episodes in the *Mahābhārata* and responds to some of Appaya's arguments in the BhSSS. In the second portion of the work, Vedāntācārya details the 'nikarṣa' of Śiva, responding to arguments that Appaya makes in his *Brahmatarkastava* about Śiva and Kṛṣṇa. In the final section of the MBTR, Vedāntācārya rebuts Appaya's maverick reading of the Bhagavad Gītā.

It is rare to find a scholar who opens his work with an honest admission that what he is about to say is redundant, but Vedāntācārya does just that. In order to demonstrate how Vedāntācārya sees his work fitting into a debate that was ongoing, as well as why his work was necessary, I will quote from his introduction to the MBTR. The introduction is useful because it provides a hint into the nature of *Mahābhārata* exegesis at the time of the MBTR. Vedāntācārya begins his work with a recognition that the point he seeks to make, that Viṣṇu is the purport of the *Mahābhārata*, is obvious.

> *nanu piṣṭapeṣaṇavad ayam ārambho niṣphalaḥ, bhagavato māhābhāratatātparyaviṣayatvasyācāryavākyaśatasiddhatvāt.*
>
> This undertaking, like grounding flour, is useless (without any fruit), because it is demonstrated by a hundred statements of the Ācārya that the subject of the purport of the *Mahābhārata* is the Lord [Viṣṇu].

There are a number of verses in the *Mahābhārata*, found in the beginning, middle and end of the text, that prove Viṣṇu's supremacy and that he is the purport of the epic. Vedāntācārya provides these quotes but then adds:

> *tad evam ācāryavakyair eva bhagavataḥ mahābhāratapratipādyatvasiddhe vyartho 'yam ārambhaḥ.*
>
> And therefore, this introduction is useless, when it is proven that the Lord is the subject of the *Mahābhārata* by the verses of Ācārya himself.

He justifies the need for the MBTR by placing it in context to "recent" works, and the interpretations of the epic that they propose:

> *arvācināḥ khalv evam āhuḥ: sarvatrāpi mahābhārate śrīkṛṣṇasya śivapūjāniṣṭhatvaṃ tatprasādalabdhasakalaprabhāvavatvaṃ ca varṇyate.*
>
> Recent (writers) say this: Śrīkṛṣṇa depends on the worship of Śiva everywhere in the *Mahābhārata*, [the text] explains that all [Kṛṣṇa's] might (prabhāva) is obtained as a favour from Śiva.

Of course, the recent writer that we can specifically identify is none other than Appaya Dīkṣita. Throughout the MBTR, Vedāntācārya quotes almost verbatim from the BhSSS and the *Brahmatarkastava* before responding to it. The statement that a recent (arvācināḥ) work arguing that Kṛṣṇa is dependent on Śiva's favour necessitated the MBTR is proof of how disruptive Appaya's work on the epics actually was. Before this, Vedāntācārya finds that a work such as his would be redundant at best and at worst, useless. After summarizing Appaya's argument in the BhSSS and specifically noting that Śiva's supremacy is suggested through *vyañjana*, Vedāntācārya writes:

> *tad eva śrīmahābhāratasya vācyaśrīnārāyaṇacaritadvārā vyajyamānaṃ śrīmahābhāratasya pradhānaṃ pratipādyam iti tad idaṃ prākṛtajanavyasanaṃ mahābhārataparišramaśālinas santaḥ parihasanti yat tāvat paravāsudevarūpeṇa bhagavatā śivārādhanaṃ kṛtam iti "yatra viṣṇuḥ prasādārthaṃ rudram ārādhayat purā" iti bhāṣitaṃ tat pratijñāmātram. anena vacanena paravāsudevasya anupāttatvāt kṛṣṇādyavatāreṣu bhagavatā śivārādhanaṃ kṛtam ity avaśiṣyate.*

> This alone (tad eva= Śiva's supremacy) should be explained as the predominant meaning [of the *Mahābhārata*] that is being suggested through the story of Nārāyaṇa explicitly stated in the *Mahābhārata*.
>
> The careful readers of the *Mahābhārata* ridicule this pursuit of simple folk, namely (yat tāvad) that there is worship of Śiva done by the Lord Supreme Vāsudeva. What is said [in the *Āraṇyakaparvan*] viz. "where Viṣṇu earlier worshipped Rudra for his favour" is just a statement. With this statement, the Supreme Vāsudeva is impossible, so the worship of Śiva is done "by the Lord in avatāras like Kṛṣṇa and so forth" remains.

With this strong statement, the text begins to set out its goal, that is, to protect the true meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. In this introduction to the MBTR, and at multiple critical junctures in his argument, Vedāntācārya refers to a specific group of readers to which he presumably belongs: those who are engaged in a close or exhaustive study of the *Mahābhārata* (*mahābhārataparišramaśālinaḥ*). He frequently says that these types of readers would ridicule (*parihasanti*) the notion that Śiva is the Supreme God of the *Mahābhārata*, and Appaya's reading of the *Mahābhārata* generally. He returns to this trope not only as a line of attack, but to constantly reiterate how unorthodox Appaya's arguments are about Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*. The MBTR, is an important text because it provides insights into what exegesis of the *Mahābhārata* looked like at the time of its composition. By using terms such as arvācīnāḥ (recent) readers and contrasting said readers with the careful readers of the *Mahābhārata*, Vedāntācārya is making a statement about what the customs were for epic exegesis, and how it changed with the "recent" arrival of Appaya on the scene. Although there are pre-Appaya Śaiva attempts to claim the Bhārata, his *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra* and *Brahmatarkastava* seem to have set off a series of reactions in Vaiṣṇava circles because of his claim that Śiva is the Supreme God expressed in the epic. The opening of the MBTR suggests that Appaya's work on the epics changed the

conversation in epic commentaries, shifting Vaiṣṇavas into a more defensive mode of writing.

Though his appearance in the *Mahābhārata* is not always readily apparent, Śiva has a role in the *Mahābhārata*—both in the narrative and didactic portions like the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Anuśāsanaparvan*. In Appaya's *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*, he makes use of these references to Śiva to make the case that Śiva is the Supreme God in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Droṇaparvan*, for example, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna worship Śiva. In the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, Kṛṣṇa narrates the glories of Śiva, and mentions that he worships the god. Even before Appaya, there was a growing tendency for Śaivas to claim and rework *Mahābhārata* material and recast it in a way that portrays Śiva as Supreme. Peter Bisschop, in his introduction to the fourth volume of the critical edition of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, notes that the Purāṇa aims "to take control of the *Bhāgavata* dominated orientation of the great epic."[293] The authors of the Skanda Purāṇa accomplish this by, for example, recasting Vyāsa (the purported author of the Purāṇa) as a student of the Śaiva Sanatkumāra. Though Śiva's role in the *Mahābhārata* is generally thought to be ancillary, Śaivas were claiming the epic in part by pointing to select episodes where Kṛṣṇa worships the god, and by recasting certain epic figures as followers of Śaiva doctrines.

Why Does Kṛṣṇa Worship Śiva? The Case of the Upamanyukathā (13.14-18) and Vyāsa's Sermon to Aśvatthāman (7.172)

In this section, I look at how Vādirāja and Vedāntācārya reconcile Śiva-friendly textual units, such as upākhyānas, with the larger meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. They use

[293] Bisschop (2018)

broader, theoretical textual practices grounded in śāstra to interpret episodes in the *Mahābhārata* where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva. Appaya, for instance, uses the 'na hi nindā nyāya' from Mimāṃsā to argue for a pluralistic textual practice. First, I look at how the Mādhvas adopt the tribhāṣā theory for reading śruti and smṛti, and argue that there are three levels of meaning in any text. Then I show how Vādirāja uses this tribhāṣā model to interpret the Upamanyukathā. I will then shift to the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*, where Vedāntācārya uses a debate on whether the opening or concluding passages of a textual unit should take interpretive precedence to re-read a famous episode from the Droṇaparvan where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva. Both Vedāntācārya and Vādirāja use these methods to answer a simple question: Why does the *Mahābhārata* include passages that prove Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva, and what do those passages mean for the overall purport of the text?

Tribhāṣā Theory

Before explaining how Vādirāja deploys the tribhāṣā, I will explain what the tribhāṣā is, and its roots. Madhva devises this tribhāṣā in his *MBTN*, and intends for it to be used to explain Śiva-friendly passages in scripture. He is aware of Śaiva attempts to claim the text, in part by promoting Śiva and his followers as superior to Vyāsa and Kṛṣṇa. The portions of the *Mahābhārata* that show Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva contradicts what Madhva views as the central purport of the epic. In his MBTN, he argues that all authoritative scriptures prove the supremacy of Viṣṇu.[294] He notes that certain episodes in the *Mahābhārata* could mislead a careless reader into thinking otherwise. Hence, before Madhva makes the claim that Viṣṇu is supreme in scripture, he says:

[294] tasmād yo mahimā viṣṇoḥ sarvaśāstroditaḥ sa hi/ nānyad ity eṣa śāstrāṇāṃ nirṇayaḥ samudāhṛtaḥ//

MBTN 2.127-128:
kvacic chivaṃ kvacid ṛṣīn kvacid devān kvacin narān/
namaty arcayati stauti varān arthayate 'pi ca//
liṅgaṃ pratiṣṭhāpayati vṛṇoty asurato varān/
sarveśvaraḥ svatantro 'pi sarvaśaktiś ca sarvadā/
sarvajño 'pi vimohāya janānāṃ puruṣottamaḥ//

> Sometimes, [Viṣṇu] worships Śiva, praises the gods, and bows to the seers and sometimes humans. He establishes a liṅga and selects boons from asuras. The Lord of All, is yet Independent, and always possesses all powers. The Supreme Spirit, though all knowing, [does this] for tricking people.

We see, once again, that Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva is an example of his humanity. The stock justification is that Kṛṣṇa does this to trick people. With the invention of the tribhāṣā, and its inclusion in the MBTN, Madhva rebuts any potential Śaiva reading of the epics. More importantly, the tribhāṣā, coupled with other tools that Madhva presents in his MBTN, articulates a specific way that one should read and understand the *Mahābhārata*. Madhva is writing a few centuries before Appaya's *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra*, but he seems to anticipate its arguments. This is because the Purāṇas and epics are rife with stories that show Viṣṇu worshipping the liṅga and granting boons to asuras. The commentators on the MBTN, such as Vādirāja, note that when Madhva says Viṣṇu "selects boons from asuras" (vṛṇoty asurato varān), Madhva is referring to the Madhu-Kaiṭabha episode. In one variant of the story, Viṣṇu seeks a boon from them in order to defeat the two powerful asuras.[295] In this verse, then, Madhva is referring in general to a series of plot points—Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva, selecting boons from demons—found in the epics and Purāṇas that do not automatically convey Viṣṇu's *sarvottamatva*.

[295] In the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa telling of the story, the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha are born from Viṣṇu's earwax, and the god grants them a boon to kill Brahmā.

The tribhāṣā applies to all authoritative texts, but in most cases, the narrative examples of nikarṣa that Madhva alludes to are from the *Mahābhārata* itself. Vādirāja, in his commentary on the MBTN, confirms this and adds that Madhva also alludes to episodes where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva:

> *"yo viṣṇor mahimā sa eva sarvaśāstroditaḥ" (MBTN 2.117) anyat naraviḍambanāyāsuramohanārthaṃ ca kṛtam. yat svamahimavirodhi kailāsayātrādicaritraṃ tat śāstratātparyaviṣayatayoditaṃ na. hariṇā kṛtatvāt tad api śāstre kvacit kvacit śāstrakṛto varṇayanti. tathā 'py asau viṣṇor mahimavirodhitvāt śāstratātparyaviṣayabhūto neti bhāvaḥ.*
>
> "Viṣṇu's greatness alone is described [as the meaning] of all scriptures." Other (non-Vaiṣṇava) meanings are made just to play with men and fool demons. Stories such as [Kṛṣṇa's] trip to Kailāsa that contradict his own greatness are not stated as having as their subject the meaning of śāstra. Because Kṛṣṇa did that, the authors of the Śāstras describe it sometimes in the text. Still, because it contradicts Viṣṇu's greatness, it cannot form the subject of the śāstra's meaning.

Instead, Madhva urges, we must take seriously the parts of the *Mahābhārata* that display Viṣṇu's greatness. Madhva says that Vyāsa himself makes this claim in the Bhaviṣyatparva:

> *MBTN 2.112-113: bhaviṣyatparvagaṃ cāpi vaco vyāsasya sādaram/*
> *vāsudevasya mahimā bhārate nirṇayoditaḥ//*
> *tadarthās tu kathāḥ sarvā nānyārthaṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ yaśaḥ/*
> *tatpratīpaṃ tu yad dṛśyen na tan mama manīṣitam//*
>
> The respectful words of Vyāsa, found in the Bhaviṣyat Parva, [are that] "the glories of Vāsudeva are referred to as the determination [of the meaning] in the Bhārata. All of the stories [found in the *Mahābhārata*] have this meaning [which includes] the glory related to Viṣṇu, and not any other meaning. [Any story] which is seen to contradict this meaning is not acceptable to me."

With this in mind, Madhva urges the reader of the *Mahābhārata* (and other texts) to focus on the text as it elucidates the glories of Viṣṇu, and not the opposite. The tribhāṣā, then, is designed to explain how a text like the *Mahābhārata* can include stories of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva and still be an authoritative text about Viṣṇu's supremacy.

Madhva offers a method of reading śāstra in general, and episodes where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva in particular. The method is designed to resist any Śaiva interpretation of the *Mahābhārata*. In his *MBTN*, *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya*, and *Ṛgbhāṣya*, Madhva notes that there are different types of registers in śruti and smṛti texts: guhya, darśana, and samādhi. All passages within authoritative texts are written in these registers. In his *MBTN*, he introduces the topic by maintaining that while the overarching meaning of the *Mahābhārata* (and other sadāgama) is the supremacy of Viṣṇu, there are passages in the epic that are written in different registers:

> *MBTN* 2.114-117:
>
> *tribhāṣās tu tridhās tatra mayā vai sampradarśitāḥ/*
> *ukto yo mahimā viṣṇoḥ sa tūkto hi samādhinā//*
> *śaivadarśanam ālambya kvacic chaivī kathoditā/*
> *samādhibhāṣayoktaṃ yat tat sarvaṃ grāhyam eva hi//*
> *aviruddhaṃ samādhes tu darśanoktaṃ ca gṛhyate/*
> *ādyantayor viruddhaṃ yad darśanaṃ tad udāhṛtam//*
> *darśanāntarasiddhaṃ ca guhyabhāṣānyathā bhavet/*
> *tasmād viṣṇor hi mahimā bhāratoktā yathārthataḥ//*
>
> I have shown the threefold languages that are there. That (language) which describes the greatness of Viṣṇu is called 'Samādhi.' At times, a story related to Śiva is relayed, relying on a Śaiva viewpoint. What is described in Samādhibhāṣā should be accepted as such. And what is said by Darśana [bhāṣā] may be accepted as long as it does not contradict the Samādhi meaning. That [darśanabhāṣā] which is opposed to the beginning and the ending [of a text] and is established as an alternative viewpoint [cannot be accepted]. Guhyabhāṣa would be other than [darśana and samādhi]. Thus, the glory of Viṣṇu is correctly described by the Bhārata.

I will first explain what each bhāṣā or register means and provide examples. Verses composed in the Samādhi register plainly describe the highest meaning intended of any passage in scripture, which Madhva says is the supremacy of Viṣṇu. An example of this

would be a passage from the *Mahābhārata* that Madhva cites, viz. "never was there, is there, nor will there be someone equal to Nārāyaṇa."[296]

The Guhya register describes verses whose conventional or literal meanings are divorced from its actual esoteric meaning. A literal reading of a passage written in the Guhya bhāṣā would not elicit its true meaning. An example of this that Madhva cites is from the Taittiriya Āraṇyaka 1.11.5, which says "the blind found the jewel" (andho maṇim avindat). A blind person cannot literally find a jewel. Metaphorically, what this passage really means is that when a blind person (one who is ignorant) finds a jewel (gains knowledge), he is no longer blind (ignorant).

The darśana bhāṣā is the register in which passages that seem to contradict the glories of Nārāyaṇa are written. Madhva specifies that those passages that explain some philosophy as a pūrvapakṣa, or expound Śaiva philosophy such as śivasarvottamatva, should be understood as darśanabhāṣā. He also adds another important marker of darśana language: it contradicts the beginning and end of the text. Madhva quotes from the beginning of the epic (in the Ādiparvan), and the end of the epic (in the *Harivaṃśa*) to make his case that the text praises Viṣṇu alone. Thus, any passages that contradict Viṣṇu's supremacy are effectively unauthoritative. In this case, the beginning and the end proclaim the supremacy of Viṣṇu.[297]

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[296] *nāsti nārāyaṇasamaṃ na bhūtaṃ na bhaviṣyati* MBh 1*21.5-6

[297] The tribhāṣā, as Madhva expounds it, also applies to the Veda and other sadāgamas. It is one tool amongst many that one must make use of before undertaking textual analysis of authoritative texts such as the *Mahābhārata* and the Vedas. In Chapter 9 of the MBTN, Madhva concludes his Rāmāyaṇa retelling with a remark about why such a nirṇaya, or determination, of the true meaning of the epics is necessary. For example, there are seven bhedas or types of variants found in the itihāsas that, if one does not understand them, one may not be able to understand the true meaning of the text. Madhva provides a warning to those who seek to interpret the Vedas without these textual tools:
Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya 9.133-134: *uktaṃ lakṣaṇaśāstre ca kṛṣṇadvaipāyanodite/ tribhāṣāṃ yo na jānāti rītīnāṃ śatam eva ca vyatyāsādīn saptabhedān vedādyarthaṃ tathā vadet// sa yāti nirayaṃ ghoram anyathājñānasambhavam/ ity anyeṣu ca śāstreṣu tatra tatroditaṃ bahu//*

The tribhāṣā is a philological tool for the Mādhvas. Though Madhva refers to these three languages in his *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* as well, he fleshes them out primarily in his *MBTN* with the point of promoting viṣṇusarvottamatva and refuting a pro-Śiva reading of the epic Vādirāja, as we will see, took these tools and applied them to his reading of the *Mahābhārata* and any statements of inferiority therein.

Vādirāja and the Tribhāṣā

More than any other Mādhva thinker, it is Vādirāja who uses the tribhāṣā to defend what he sees as the correct reading of scripture. He refers to the three languages in his own works to prove that the *Mahābhārata*'s highest meaning is the greatness of Viṣṇu. Vādirāja further understands that the tribhāṣā method can be used to explain portions of the *Mahābhārata* where Śiva is praised, particularly those verses where Kṛṣṇa worships him. In his commentary on the MBTN, Vādirāja argues that when Madhva says that darśana bhāṣā is used to "prove another philosophy" (darśanāntarasiddham), he is referring to Pāśupata (Śaiva) philosophy that clearly contradicts the Vaiṣṇava position (vaiṣnavadarśanaviruddhapāśupatadarśanāntarasiddhaṃ). To provide an example of how this works, Vādirāja gives an example of how the darśana register is used. He returns again to the episode of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva in the Droṇaparvan, which vexes Vaiṣṇava exegetes of the *Mahābhārata*. Vādirāja argues that when, in the middle of the *Bhārata*, Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva, this is told through the darśana register to deceive the ignorant.[298]

It is said in the *lakṣaṇa* text dictated by Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana that "he who doesn't know the three languages, or the hundred rītis, or the 7 bhedas beginning with vyatyāsa, and expounds the meaning of the Veda etc, he goes to a terrible hell, created by their incorrect knowledge." It is also said here and there in other śāstras as well.

[298] Vādirāja comm: *ādyantayor viruddham ity asyādāv uktakṛṣṇamahimākhyaprameyasyānte vakṣyamāṇakṛṣṇotkarṣākhyaprameyasya ca viruddhaṃ darśanāntarasiddhaṃ*

The tribhāṣā is important for Vādirāja, who finds mention of it in the *Mahābhārata* itself.[299] In multiple compositions, Vādirāja repeatedly defends the supremacy of Viṣṇu in the epic. In his *Yuktimallikā*, Vādirāja seeks to prove that the greatness of the *Mahābhārata* is the glory of Viṣṇu that it propounds. Thus, he pulls from a series of verses to argue that in the beginning, middle, and end, the epic prove the greatness of Viṣṇu over other gods, including Śiva.

Vādirāja, in his commentary on MBTN 2.119,[300] notes that all the major epic plotlines, from the Rājasūya to the war, are really praising Viṣṇu. It is due to Viṣṇu (as Kṛṣṇa) that the Pāṇḍavas performed the Rājasūya, and due to Viṣṇu that the Pāṇḍavas successfully survived their exile and won the war. This point of Vādirāja's follows what the *Bhāgavata* says about the *Mahābhārata* being a means to enter Kṛṣṇakathā. Vādirāja then explains what Vyāsa is thinking when he says in the verse that parts of the epic contradicting Viṣṇu's greatness are not dear to him (*tadarthās tu kathāḥ sarvā nānyārthaṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ yaśaḥ/ tatpratīpaṃ tu yad dṛśyen na tan mama manīṣitam//*)

> Vādirāja comm. on MBTN 2.119: *tatpratīpaṃ viṣṇumahimapratīpaṃ yadvacanaṃ kvacit dṛśyet tat mama manīṣitaṃ na mayā manaḥpūrvakam uktaṃ na, kintu paradarśanasthā evaṃ vadantīti darśanabhāṣayā paramatānuvāda eva kṛtaḥ na tu tan mama matam iti*

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vaiṣṇavadarśanaviruddhapāśupatadarśanāntarasiddhaṃ yat kṛṣṇasya śivārcakatvādiprameyaṃ madhye kvacid ajñajanamohanāya kathyate tad darśanaṃ darśanabhāṣayoktam ity arthaḥ.

[299] In his commentary on MBh 1.1.51, Vādirāja notes that the word *vividhaṃ* in the verse, meaning manifold, here really means threefold (*uktavidhayā trividhaṃ*), such as darśanabhāṣā and others.

[300] Vādirāja comm. *sarvāḥ kathāḥ rājasūyavanavāsayuddhādivarṇanakathāḥ tadarthāḥ vāsudevamahimanirṇayāya kathitāḥ. viṣṇau bhaktibharitatvāt pāṇḍavaiḥ rājasūyayāgaḥ kṛtaḥ, vanavāse yuddhe ca sarve śatravaḥ parājitāḥ, dharmeṇa rājyam kṛtam ityādikathāvarṇane viṣṇor eva mahiṃā nirṇīto bhavatīti bhāvaḥ. vaiṣṇavaṃ viṣṇusambhandhi yaśaḥ. viṣṇumahimotkīrtanam iti yāvat. anyārthaṃ neti yojanā. tatpratīpaṃ viṣṇumahimapratīpaṃ yadvacanaṃ kvacit dṛśyet tat mama manīṣitaṃ na mayā manaḥpūrvakam uktaṃ na, kintu paradarśanasthā evaṃ vadantīti darśanabhāṣayā paramatānuvāda eva kṛtaḥ na tu tan mama matam iti vyāsaḥ svābhisandhiṃ svayam evodghāṭitavān ity arthaḥ.*

> Someone may occasionally see those passages which contradict the glories of Viṣṇu, "those are not dear to me (ie Vyāsa)," they were not said based on what was on my mind, but were said merely to establish another viewpoint. Hence it was merely paraphrasing the thought of someone else through the Darśanabhāṣā. It was not (Vyāsa's) opinion.

As Vādirāja understands it, Vyāsa uses the darśana register to present the viewpoint of rivals. He later gives an obvious example of this: the story of Kṛṣṇa performing austerities unto Śiva in the Śāntiparvan, which we will explore later. Though this story is told in the *Mahābhārata*, we are to understand from Madhva and Vādirāja that it does not represent the view of Vyāsa, the author.

Using the Tribhāṣā to Read the Upamanyukathā

Now that I have explained the tribhāṣā, and the importance of it for Vādirāja, I will show how he uses it in his commentary. A key "Śaiva section" that both Vedāntācarya and Vādirāja pay attention to is the Upamanyukathā. The term Upamanyukathā is used to refer to a particular section of the Anuśāsanaparvan, 13.14-18, in which Vāsudeva praises Śiva effusively, strongly suggesting that Śiva is more supreme than Kṛṣṇa. The *Upamanyukathā* begins with a request from Yudhiṣṭhira to Bhīṣma, to tell him more about the glories of Śiva (13.14.1). Bhīṣma replies that he is incapable of doing so, and suggests that it is only Kṛṣṇa, who is also present, who can effectively recite the glories of Śiva. What follows is praise of Śiva, from the mouth of Kṛṣṇa. Throughout this section, Kṛṣṇa worships and appeases Śiva.[301]

[301] Kṛṣṇa praises Śiva in the opening of this chapter once Bhīma defers to him, for example. It is in this chapter that Kṛṣṇa describes his austerities to Śiva for the purpose of a son.

This chapter understandably attracted the attention of Vādirāja in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, the *Lakṣālaṃkāra*. Not only does the section praise Śiva, sometimes in ultimate terms such as "lord of the world", but the praise comes from Kṛṣṇa himself.[302] Vādirāja argues that Bhīṣma's deferral to Kṛṣṇa to tell the story of Śiva is an indication that the story is told in darśana register. He argues that Bhīṣma is ashamed to relay a story of Śiva on his deathbed and that this story of Śiva relies solely on the *darśanabhāṣā*. To support his point, Vādirāja notes that Bhīṣma refers to Kṛṣṇa as the "Teacher of the Gods and Demons" (*surāsuraguru*), to make the case that this section of the epic is written in the darśana register and, like other pāśupata śāstra, is intended to distract asuras. Instead of refuting the details of this section, he explains why this section should be read broadly as just darśanabhāṣā. Vādirāja demonstrates, once again, why the tribhāṣā is crucial for reading episodes of the *Mahābhārata* that praise Śiva, particularly at the expense of Kṛṣṇa.

> *Lakṣālaṃkāra* on MBh 13.14.1: *nanv astu bhāratasya tribhāṣābharitvatvam. vakṣyamāṇaśaivīkathā śaivadarśanam ālambya pravṛtteti kathaṃ jñeyam iti cet. ittham 'ādyantayor viruddhaṃ yad darśanaṃ tad udāhṛtam' (MBTN 2.24) iti vacanāt 'nāsti nārāyaṇasamaṃ na bhūtaṃ na bhaviṣyati' (MBh 1*21.5-6) ityādyavacanasya 'na he me kenacid deyo varaḥ pāṇḍavanandana..(12.328.25)' ...'na hi viṣṇuḥ praṇamati kasmaicid vibudhāya tu/ ṛta ātmānam eveti tato rudraṃ namāmy aham' (12.328.26) 'na sa śakyas tvayā draṣṭuṃ mayānyair api sattama/ saguṇo nirguṇo viśvo jñānadṛśyo hy asau smṛtaḥ/ (12.339.2) ahaṃ brahma ādya īśaḥ prajānāṃ tasmāj jātas tvaṃ ca mattaḥ prasūtaḥ' (12.339.19)... iti ca madhyabhāgagatavacanānām... 'vedaśāstrat paraṃ nāsti na daivaṃ keśavāt param' iti antimavacanasya ca viruddham idaṃ prameyaṃ darśanāntaram āśrityaivoktam iti prekṣāvadbhir utprekṣitum śakyatvāt.*
>
> Now, someone might object: We concdede that the *Mahābhārata* is full of tribhāṣā. But how is one to know that the story of Śiva that is about to be described resorts to the darśana language?

[302] The editors of the Critical Edition of the Anuśāsanaparvan found that Vādirāja's introductory comments on this particular chapter (13.14.1) "deserved to be reproduced" in the Critical Notes, due to its novelty. They also quote from Vādirāja's commentary on the Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya 9.138.

> In this way [from the MBTN]: "Whatever contradicts the beginning and ending [of the epic], that is said to be a darśanabhāṣā. Hence, from the passage from the beginning "there is none equal to Nārāyaṇa, nor was there, nor will there be"; "There is no boon to be granted to me by anyone, joy of the Pāṇḍavas!.." "Viṣṇu does not bow down to any god other than myself (i.e. Viṣṇu), so I praise you, Rudra." "he [Nārāyaṇa] is unable to be seen by you or us, Bṛhaspati! I wish to see the one whom I am worshipping. He is remembered as the sight of knowledge, quality-less and with qualities, the world itself!" "I am the Primordial Brahmā, hence all beings come from me and you were born from me. From me everything--the vedas and its secrets, the movable and immovable, the world--come."... these are all from the middle of the text. And at the end of the text [in the *Harivaṃśa*]: There is none greater than Keśava. Hence, the claim under consideration, contradicts the beginning, middle and ending of the *Mahābhārata*. [This section on Śiva] is uttered taking recourse to another darśana. This the discerning is able to imagine. [Emphasis Mine].

The proof that this section of Anuśāsanaparvan is written in darśanabhāṣā is that its contents contradict what is claimed in the beginning, middle and end of the epic. Vādirāja contextualizes the Śiva section by situating it in relation to the passages that claim Viṣṇu is Supreme.

In order to maintain the Vaiṣṇava meaning of the *Mahābhārata*, Vādirāja concludes his analysis with a call for readers to adopt this method of reading the epic as the standard way. After noting examples from the Veda where Rudra is diminished, Vādirāja concludes that Vyāsa would not disagree with Śruti and praise Śiva in the way that he does in this section. He then offers other reasons to support the argument that this is written in Darśanabhāṣā:

> *Lakṣālaṃkāra on MBh 13.14.1: ato 'pi śaivadarśanabhāṣayaivedam anuvarṇitam iti kathaṃ na vimarśān vimṛśīta. vedavacaneṣu nīcīkṛtyasya rudrasya uccatā na vedavyāsasyābhimatā. ato' pīdaṃ prameyaṃ darśanabhāṣayoktam. kiñca 'agnir vai devānām avamo viṣṇuḥ paramaḥ tadanantare sarvā anyā devatā' (Aitareya Āraṇyaka 1.1.1) iti śrutau agnim avamīkṛtya itarān sarvān devān madhyamīkṛtya viṣṇor evottamatvapratipādanāt niravakāśaitacchrutiviruddhasmṛtiśatasyāpi 'virodhe tv anapekṣaṃ syād' (Jaimini Sūtra 1.1.3) iti sūtramaryādayā aprāmāṇyāvaśyambhāvāt. sarvathāpramāṇyasya ca 'itihāsapurāṇaḥ pañcamo vedānāṃ veda' (Chāndogya Upaṇiṣad 7.1.4) iti chāndoygopaṇiṣadi pañcamavedatvenoktabhārate 'sambhavāc ca darśanānantarānuvāda eveti*

> *vijñāyate. yadyapy antaryāmiviṣayatayā yojayituṃ śakyate, tathāpi bhārate jñeyam eva maryādeti sakalam avadātam.*
>
> As to the claim that "this is recounted (in the epic) in the Śaivadarśana register," how could one not carry out examinations? The elevation of Rudra, who is made low in many passages in the Veda is not desired by Vyāsa. Instead, the topic under consideration (Upamanyukathā) is to be understood as expressed (by Vyāsa) in the Darśana register. But also because in the śruti passage "Agni is the lowest of the gods, Viṣṇu the highest, and in the space between them all other gods" the greatness of Viṣṇu is propounded, having put the other gods in the middle and made Agni the lowest. Hence the hundred smṛti-s that are contradictory to this śruti and therefore without scope are necessarily without authority because of the maryāda of the sūtra "if there is a contradiction [the smṛti] is irrelevant."And because of the complete impossibility of (the *Bhārata* being) unauthoritative since the Chāndogya Upaniṣad says "know that Itihāsa-Purāṇa is the fifth of the Vedas" and the Bhārata is described as the fifth Veda, (this section) is to be known as an anuvāda (repetition) of another philosophy. Even though it can be construed as having the Inner-Controller as its subject, nevertheless it must be known that in the Bhārata this is the normative practice, so everything is excellent.

In order to argue for the viability of the tribhāṣā as a method for reading texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, Vādirāja points to the Vedas. He notes that in the Vedas, there are many passages that diminish Śiva, and perhaps even insult him, so Vyāsa could not disagree with the Vedas and praise Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*. Like Vedāntācārya in the Mahāhāratatātparyarakṣā, Vādirāja also pulls from the Mīmāmṣa Sūtra (1.3.3). The sūtra says, in part, that any smṛti source that contradicts the Vedas should be rejected. Praising Śiva as Supreme, and in turn demoting Viṣṇu, would not only be an insult but it would render the *Mahābhārata apramāṇika*. The tribhāṣā saves the reader from having to draw such conclusions. The method of reading that Vādirāja refers to is important for rescuing these episodes where Kṛṣṇa appears inferior and human from its offensive potential. The darśanabhāṣā explains and justifies Kṛṣṇa singing the praises of Śiva in this section, but it does more than that. The tribhāṣā method of reading the *Mahābhārata* is concerned with

taking control of the epic's meaning and ensuring that an authentic meaning survives in its reading.

The *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* on the Upamanyukathā

Vedāntācarya adopts a different strategy for reading the Upamanyu story. Whereas Vādirāja integrates the section and accounts for the epic's inclusion of this pro-Śiva story using the tribhāṣā, Vedāntācārya deems it to be a spurious addition. He first mentions the Upamanyu section at the beginning of his text, where he argues against the notion that there is non-difference (abheda) between Śiva and Viṣṇu. That argument for non-difference turns partly to the sections known as the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* and *Śivasahasranāma*. The *Viṣṇusahasranāma* is found in the *Anuśāsanaparvan (13.135)*. Both sahasranāma-s, praises of the thousand names of each gods, include names traditionally ascribed to Viṣṇu and Śiva. The inclusion of Viṣṇu's name in the Śivasahasranāma, and vice versa, may lead one to conclude that Vyāsa is arguing for their non-difference. Vedāntācārya notes that this argument cannot be possible for a number of reasons, one of which is that the Śivasahasranāma is an interpolation:

> *atha yadi sahasranāmādhyāye mahādevādiśabdānāṃ bhagavannāmatayā parigaṇanāt tannāmatvam tadānuśāsanike upamanyuvyākhyāne śivasahasranāmādhyāye viṣṇvādiśabdānāṃ śivanāmatayā parigaṇanāt tannāmatvaṃ syād iti cet- na. upamanyūpākhyānasya kalpitatayā bhāratāntarabhāvasya ca vakṣyamāṇatvāt tasmād "ahaṃ tvam sarvaga" ityādinā hariharayor nābheda upadiśyate iti draṣṭavyam.*
>
> Now if [the opponent argues that] in the Viṣṇusahasranāma chapter, if one takes words such as 'Mahādeva' to be among the enumerated names of the Lord [Viṣṇu], then in the Upamanyu story in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, in the *Śivasahasranāma*, words such as 'Viṣṇu' etc is enumerated as Śiva, [we say] no. Because the Upamanyu story is fabricated, and because as we shall demonstrate it is not part of the *Mahābhārata*. Therefore one should understand that the [Bhārata] does not teach the non-difference of Hari and Hara with expressors like "I am you, all-pervading."

Vedāntācārya refers to the Śivasahasranāma in the Anuśāsanaparvan's Upamanyukathā (13.14-17). Although the Critical Edition includes the Upamanyu story, Vedāntācārya finds it to be spurious for reasons that are not exclusively text-critical.

> *upamanyor upākhyānam prakṣiptam iti gṛhyatām/ harivaṃśaviruddhatvāt prācīnair aparigrahāt/ pūrvottaraviruddhatvāt kvacid evopalambhataḥ/ ata etad upākhyānaṃ prakṣiptam iti nirṇayaḥ//*
>
> The Tale of Upamanyu [in the *Mahābhārata*] is spurious, it is to be accepted! Because [its story is] contradictory [to what is told in the] *Harivaṃśa*, and because it is not accepted by older [commentaries]. At times, due to the recognition that there is contrariety in places between the former and latter [sections of the *Mahābhārata*], thus this substory is interpolated. This is the conclusion.

The MBTR, in this case, uses philology for polemical ends. Vedāntācārya argues that there is a clear contradiction between the story as it is relayed in the Upamanyūkathā and in the *Harivaṃśa*. In the Upamanyukathā, the two half-brothers were born 12 years apart. Kṛṣṇa and his wife Rukmiṇī worshipped Śiva to beget Pradyumna, and Jāmbavatī, Kṛṣṇa's other wife, later urges Kṛṣṇa to perform austerities so that she can beget a son as well. In the *Harivaṃśa* version of events, Sāmba (the son of Kṛṣṇa) was born from Jāmbavatī in the same month that Pradyumna (Kṛṣṇa's other son) killed Śambara, rather than 12 years later as relayed in the Upamanyukathā. This is no small philological quibble, because the differences have sectarian implications. In the Upamanyukathā version, Sāmba is born long after Pradyumnā because in the intermediary period, Kṛṣṇa worshipped Śiva in order to beget Sāmba. This detail is also related in the Nārāyaṇīya, as we will see, and is a point that Śaivas turn to in order to prove Śiva's supremacy over Kṛṣṇa. Vedāntācārya is not only making the case that this section is interpolated, but he builds his case on a plot point that involves Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva. This explains why Vedāntācārya wants to argue that the sub-story is spurious.

The contradiction with the *Harivaṃśa* is not the only argument Vedāntācārya makes to bolster his case. He is aware of other commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, as well as summaries (saṅgraha-s), including one attributed to Vidyāraṇya. If we cannot accept that the *Upamanyukathā* is a spurious addition to the Anuśāsanaparvan based purely on its contradiction with the *Harivaṃśa*, he urges us to consider how it contradicts the larger tātparya of the *Mahābhārata*:

> *mahābhārate sarvatra nārāyaṇapāramyasyaiva prapañcitatvāt. atra śivapāramyasya kathitatvāt. prācīnā anuśāsanikavyākhyātāraś ca bahuṣu kośeṣv anupalambhād idam upākhyānaṃ prakṣiptam iti menire.*
> *idānīm api bahuṣu kośeṣu nopalambhāmahe. nārāyaṇīyasya kvacid anupalaṃbhe 'pi mahābhāratāntarbhāvaḥ śaṅkarādiparigrahād iti siddhāntacandrikāyām asmābhiḥ prapañcitam. tatraiva draṣṭavyam. ata idam prakṣiptam iti sādhūktam.*
>
> Because Nārāyaṇa's supremacy is clear throughout the *Mahābhārata*, and because here, [in this upākhyāna], Śiva's supremacy is articulated, and because older commentators on the Anuśāsana[parvan] thought this substory was spurious because it in many manuscripts it is not found. Even today, we do not find it in many manuscripts. Even though the Nārāyaṇīya is missing (in some manuscripts), it is in the *Mahābhārata* because Śaṅkara and others accepted it, as I have argued in the *Siddhāntacandrikā*, which should be seen there. "Thus this is interpolated," it is said by the good.

This argument is similar to the one Vādirāja and Madhva make, and it is plausible that Vedāntācārya is aware of the methodology they propose. The supremacy of Śiva here is contradicted by the supremacy of Viṣṇu related in the *Mahābhārata* generally. The difference between his approach and Vādirāja's, of course, is that he uses this basis to argue that the Upamanyukathā is an interpolation. He also pulls from the *Mahābhārata* tradition available to him at the time, particularly older commentaries, that support his argument.

The Upakramanyāya, Vedopakramādhikaraṇa and the Droṇaparvan: The Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā on the Worship of Śiva

Madhva and Vādirāja use the tribhāṣā as a guiding principle to read the *Mahābhārata* writ-large, and offer textual tools to prove Viṣṇu's supremacy in it. They argue that in the beginning, middle and end of the text, Viṣṇu is plainly praised. Furthermore, the Pāṇḍava narrative moves forward because of Kṛṣṇa so it is ultimately a praise of his greatness. The tribhāṣā is but one tool that was used to read the *Mahābhārata*. In the late medieval and early modern period, epic exegetes were looking at other śāstraic techniques to interpret the *Mahābhārata* and its ultimate meaning. The Upamanyukathā is an example of nikarṣa because Kṛṣṇa praises and worships Śiva, but it is not the only example of such behaviour in the *Mahābhārata*. I want to focus on how Vedāntācārya defends Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva on the Maināka Mountain in his *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*. Specifically, I look at how he uses mimāṃsā principles to interpret the epic.

Although it may seem straightforward to argue that the *Mahābhārata* propounds Viṣṇu's supremacy, there are certain episodes that would feed the Vaiṣṇava 'inferior god complex'. In the Droṇaparvan (7.172), Vyāsa appears in the narrative and describes in detail how Nārāyaṇa once performed austerities on Maināka Mountain for over 60000 years towards Śiva (hoping for his intervention), and praised him in no uncertain terms. Nārāyaṇa tells Śiva, among other things, that "the creators of all things are produced from you, Most Excellent One!"[303] As a result of Nārāyaṇa's austerities and praise, Śiva grants him power, especially invincibility in battle. Vyāsa uses this story to explain why Kṛṣṇa (and Arjuna) could not be slain by Aśvatthāman's weapon—it is only through Śiva's favour that they were saved.

[303] 7.172.66a tvatsaṃbhūtā bhūtakṛto vareṇya

In his Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra, Appaya seizes on this episode to draw larger conclusions about the overall meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. Vyāsa says in this *Mahābhārata* section that due to Nārāyaṇa's austerities he "became brahma" (*sa tena tapasā tāta brahmabhūto yathābhavat)*. Focusing on the peculiar word brahmabhūta, Appaya argues that it means that Kṛṣṇa as the sage Nārāyaṇa cultivated the identity of the self with Śiva (śivohambhāva):

> *Bhāratasārasaṃgrahastotra autocommentary on vs. 5: atra tapaścaryākāle śivaṃ dhyāyato nārāyaṇasya śivo'haṃbhāvabhāvanā bhāvitaḥ śivabhāva eva brahmabhūta ity anenoktaḥ | tato 'nyasya tena prāpyasya brahmabhāvasyābhāvāt | ata eva tapasā prasanne śive pratyakṣe sati nārāyaṇena bahudhā parabrahmadharmaiḥ stavaḥ kṛtaḥ.*
>
> In this passage, [the compound] ''brahmabhūta'' shows that it is the state of Śiva that is cultivated in Nārāyaṇa by means of contemplating the state ''I am Śiva'' while he meditates on Śiva at the time of practicing tapas. Because there is no state of Brahman other than [the state of Śiva] to be attained by him [Nārāyaṇa]. This is exactly why, when [Nārāyaṇa] saw Śiva, who was pleased by tapas, he made the following praise with a variety of properties of the supreme Brahman.

Appaya uses this passage to argue for Śiva's supremacy in the *Mahābhārata* more generally, and specifically for Śiva's supremacy over Kṛṣṇa. In his appearance as Nārāyaṇa (son of Dharma), Kṛṣṇa appears to be a devotee of Śiva.

The *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* takes Appaya's argument seriously, but is aware that the Droṇaparvan plainly states that in his former form, Kṛṣṇa worshipped Śiva, praised him, and received powers from him. Vedāntācārya notes, however, that before Vyāsa begins to explain how Nārāyaṇa previously worshipped Śiva, there is an explicit praise of Kṛṣṇa. This passage is added into the *Mahābhārata*, and only found in Telugu manuscripts. After Vyāsa says that: "He is named Nārāyaṇa, born first amongst amongst the ancient ones. The

creator of the World was born as the son of Dharma for some particular purpose,"[304] some Telugu manuscripts add this:

> *7*1428.1 ādidevo jagannātho lokakartā svayaṃ prabhuḥ*
> *7*1428.2 rakṣitā sarvasya lokasya anādinidhano 'cyutaḥ*
> *7*1428.3 vyākurvate yasya tattvaṃ śrutayo munayaś ca ha*
> *7*1428.4 ato 'jetavyaḥ sarvabhūtair manasāpi jagatpatiḥ*
> *7*1428.5 tasmād imaṃ jetukāmo ajñānatamasā vṛtaḥ*
> *7*1428.6 mā śucaḥ puruṣavyāghra viddhi tadvad ihārjunam*
> *7*1428.7 tasya śaktir asau pārthas tasmāc chokam imaṃ tyaja*
> *7*1428.8 viśveśvaro 'tha lokādiḥ paramātmā hy adhokṣajaḥ*
> *7*1428.9 sahasrasaṃmitād aṃśād ekāṃśo 'yam ajāyata*
> *7*1428.10 devānāṃ hitakāmārthaṃ lokānāṃ caiva sattama*
>
> The Primordial God, Lord of the World, the Creator of the World, the Lord himself, Protector of the whole world, who is without beginning or end, that Acyuta whose truth the sages and śrutis expound, The Lord of the World cannot be conquered by any being even in their thoughts. Hence, [Aśvatthāman], in wishing to conquer [Kṛṣṇa], was covered with darkness and ignorance [he did this]. Do not grieve, Tiger amongst Men, know Arjuna to be similar. Pārtha is the power of Nārāyaṇa, hence let go of this grief. *Adhokṣaja* is the lord of the Earth, first in the world, the Supreme Self. From one who consists of a thousand portions, this one (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) was born as one for the benefit of the the gods and the world, O Foremost One.
>
> Vedāntācārya's commentary on this passage*: atra hi lokakartā rakṣitā sarvalokasyety ābhyām viśeṣaṇābhyāṃ janmādy asya yata (BS 1.1.2) iti sūtritam brahmalakṣaṇaṃ bhagavati darśitam. vyākurvate yasya tattvam ityādinā tu sarvavedavedyatvam upapāditam. upakramabalīyastvaṃ ca "śruter jātādhikāraḥ syād" (Mimāṃsā sūtra 3.3.1) iti tṛtīyādhikāreṇa vyavasitam.*
>
> Here (in this passage) the lakṣaṇa (definition) of Brahman expressed as "from whom all is born" (BSB 1.1.2) is shown for the Bhagavān by these two descriptions viz. *lokakartā* and *rakṣitā sarvalokasya*. But by "whose truth they propound" etc, [Viṣṇu] is described as the one to be known by all Vedas. And it is settled by the third adhikaraṇa "śruter jātādhikāraḥ syāt" (MS 3.3.1) that the opening [verse] is stronger.

This interpolated passage that Vedāntācārya cites was probably added by a Vaiṣṇava reader troubled at the Śaiva import of this episode. Vedāntācārya takes advantage of this passage, which he considers to be authentic, to say that in the beginning (upakrama) of this episode,

[304] 7.172.51

there is an unequivocal praise of Kṛṣṇa. He uses principles of Mīmāṃsā to argue that this praise of Nārāyaṇa outweighs and informs the interpretation of what happens after—Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna's worship of Śiva as Nara and Nārāyaṇa.

The MBTR elaborates on a crucial issue that originates in a discussion in the Mimāṃsāsūtras 3.3.1-8 and its commentary by Śabara—if there is a contradiction, does the upakrama or upasaṃhāra, the initial or the concluding statement, of a text take interpretive precedence?

The MBTR paraphrases Śabara's commentary on the Mimāṃsā Sūtras, which is where the debate originated. Śabara quotes from the *Maitrāyaṇī 3.6.5:*

> *tatra hītthaṃ cintitaṃ jyotiṣṭome prajāpatir akāmayata prajās sṛjeyeti satapo 'tapyata tasmāt tapas te pānāt trayo devā asṛjyanta agnir vāyur ādityas te tapo tebhyas tepānebhyaḥ trayo vedā asṛjyanta. agne ṛgvedaḥ vāyor yajurvedaḥ ādityāt sāmaveda ity upakramya nigamana idaṃ śrūyate. tasmād "uccair ṛcā kriyate upāṃśu yajuṣā uccaiḥ sāmneti." (Maitrāyaṇī 3.6.5)*
>
> This is how it was deliberated [in the comm. on the mimāṃsāsūtra] regarding the Jyotiṣṭoma, [where] Prajāpati desired "I should create offspring" and he did tapas. From him who was observing tapas, the three gods who were trembling—Agni, Vāyu and Āditya—were created. They had performed tapas, and from those who had been observing tapas the three Vedas were created. The Ṛgveda was created from Agni; the Yajurveda by Vāyu; and from Āditya the Sāmaveda. Having begun thus, in the conclusion this is heard: The ṛc is recited loudly, the yajus in a whisper [and] the sāman loudly.

There are two ways to read this Maitrāyaṇī injunction: either the words "ṛc, yajur, and sāman" refer to books of the Veda (Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, and Sāmaveda), or they refer to different types of compositions that should be recited accordingly: verse, prose, and musical (Ṛg, Yajus, and Sāman respectively). Śabara notes that this vidhi is preceded by an arthavāda statement that the gods created the three Vedas. This explicitly describes the

words in questions as books of the Veda and not types of compositions. As Jonathan Duquette (2017) summarizes the debate:

> The pūrvapakṣa (MS 3.3.1: śruter jātādhikāraḥ syāt) presented by Śabara in his bhāṣya is that these words refer to the ‘‘types’’ of composition (jāti, i.e., hymns, prose passages, etc.) because it is taught so in the śruti. In other words, we understand that the type is meant merely by hearing the words ṛc, yajus and sāman in the Maitrāyaṇī sentence. In his first siddhānta (MS 3.3.2: vedo vā prāyadarśanāt), Śabara explains that the three words—ṛc, yajus and sāman—must refer to the corresponding Vedas because the entire ‘‘passage’’ (vākya) in which those words are found deals chiefly (prāya) with the Vedas. This is obviously a statement about what is the main theme or intention of a textual passage. In order to prove his point, Śabara has recourse to the upakramanyāya. The sentence from the Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā (‘‘uccair ṛcā kriyate, upāṃśu yajuṣā, uccaiḥ sāmnā’’) occurs at the end of the passage in question, which makes it the final statement (upasaṃhāra). Śabara traces the actual beginning (upakrama) of the passage to an earlier statement declaring that the Ṛgveda, the Sāmaveda and the Yajurveda originate from Agni, Āditya and Vāyu respectively ([tebhyas] trayo vedā asṛjyanta—agner ṛgvedo, vāyor yajurveda, ādityāt sāmaveda). On this basis, he then argues that since these three words denote the Vedas at the beginning of the passage, then it must be the case that the three words in the concluding portion also refer to the three Vedas.[305]

The debate on the interpretive force of the upakraṃa and the upasaṃhāra is one that Appaya engaged in, particularly with Mādhvas such as Vyāsatīrtha.[306] Vedāntacārya reproduces the contours of Śabara's discussion in his discussion of Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva in the Droṇaparvan. As we will see, he will use this to make his own argument about how to read chapter 172 of the Droṇaparvan.

As Vedāntācārya sees it, this is ultimately a question of whether the vidhi (in this case represented by the upasaṃhāra statement from Maitrāyaṇī 3.6.5) and the arthavāda (represented by the upakrama statement) takes interpretive precedence. They should both

[305] Duquette (2017), p.6
[306] For more on this, see Duquette (2017).

form a single textual unit, so which interpretation of the Ṛg, Yajus, and Sāman should prevail? The pūrvapakṣa would maintain that since the vidhi is primary (which is in the upasaṃhāra), the upasaṃhāra statement must prevail.

> *siddhāntas tv alabdhātmatvāt pradhāno 'pi vidhyuddeśo na labdhātmānam arthavādaṃ bādhate. tathā hi, vedaśabda upakramagato saṃjātapratipakṣatvāt yathāśrutapara evāvadhāryate.*
>
> This is the siddhānta: Though that which indicates the injunction (i.e. the conclusion) is primary, because its sense is not yet known it does not contradict the praise (i.e. the opening), whose sense is known. Hence, the word 'veda' found in the opening, should be understood to be dedicated to what is known, because (otherwise) there would be hostility that arises (between the upakrama and upasaṃhāra).

The only way that this potential conflict can be resolved is if the later statement conforms to the meaning that the former statement has already made.[307] So, we must accept, bringing this back to the *Mahābhārata* verse in question, the MBTR concludes that the preference must be given to the prior statement. Vedāntācārya says:

> *evam ihāpi bhagavatpāramyaparopakramavirodhād upasaṃhāragataśivaparatvāvedakavacanāni anyaparatayā neyāni.*
>
> Because it would contradict the opening [verse of the section] dedicated to the supremacy of Bhagavān [Kṛṣṇa], the statements [which appear to] express the supremacy of Śiva in the conclusion [of this section] should be understood as being concerned with something else.

In the episode found in the Droṇaparvan, Vyāsa appears to tell Aśvatthāman that Kṛṣṇa worshipped Śiva and thus his attacks against the god are futile. Vedāntācārya notes the potential for contradiction, namely a verse before Vyāsa's statement which praises Kṛṣṇa as Supreme. In doing so, Vedāntācārya resorts to a debate on the upasaṃhāra-upakrama to resolve what he believes to be a contradiction between Viṣṇu's supremacy, stated before,

[307] tasmiṃś cāvadhārite sati upasaṃhārapadam ṛgādipadaṃ samjātapratipakṣavijñānatvāt yathāśrutārthaṃ sat tad ekavākyatām alabhamānāṃ tad anugunavedaparatayaivātmānaṃ labhate. nānyathā.

and Śiva's supremacy, seemingly stated after. In this case, we must accept that the episode does not convey Śiva's supremacy because of the opening verse.

The argument does not end there, however. The objector raises another hypothetical response, and again invokes Mimāṃsā.

> *syād etat. śivaparatvāvedakānāṃ vacanānām upasaṃhāragatatve 'py [u]pakramagatebhyo bhagavatpāramyaparebhyo vacanebhyo balīyastvam eva. vipratiṣiddhadharmāṇāṃ samavāye bhūyasāṃ syāt. svadharmatvam iti dvādaśādhyāyādhikaraṇanyāyāt.*
>
> This may be so. But, even if those verses communicating Śiva's supremacy are found in the concluding [statements], they are stronger than the verses found in the opening which are committed to the supremacy of Bhagavān (Viṣṇu) because of the maxim in the twelfth chapter [of the Mimāṃsā sūtras 12.2.22].
>
> "If there is a connection of characteristics that are mutually exclusive, the svadharmatva of the the majority will prevail."
>
> *tatra hītthaṃ vicāritam: pañcadaśarātre 'gniṣṭut prathamam ahaḥ. tatraikāhāgniṣṭutdharmā nāmadheyena prāpyante. nāgneyī tatra subrahmaṇyā tato jyotir gaur āyur iti tryaḥ.*
>
> Concerning this matter, it has been thought about in this way: in the fifteen nights [ritual], the agniṣtut is (the ritual for) the first day. For the one day qualities of the agniṣṭut present themselves as the default (actions) by the Mīmāṃsā principle of "name designation." The Subrahmaṇya (mantra is named), not the Āgneyi. Then the Jyoti, then the Gau, and Āyur—this is the 3-day sacrifice (that follows the first day).

In this Sūtra, the author draws attention to the possible conflict between the Āgneyī Subrahmaṇyā and the Aindrī Subrahmaṇya. On the first day of the 15-night ritual, the officiant is to perform the Agniṣṭut by inviting the god to the soma sacrifice and names Agni (Āgneyi Subrahmaṇya), and on the remaining days he names Indra (the Āindri Subrahmaṇya). Which one should be read? The response, according to Śabara's interpretation of this sūtra, is that the largest number of utterances that the passages refer to should win out.

> *tatrāpi jyotirādināmadheyaiḥ ekāhānāṃ jyotirādīnāṃ dharmāḥ prāpyante. tathā ca teṣv aindrīsubhramaṇyāpariśiṣṭāny ekādaśāhāni, teṣv apy aindryeva. evaṃ sthite vicāryate, kiṃ tatra bhūtāyām upasatkālasubrahmaṇyāyām aniyamaḥ. utāgneyī grāhyā. athavaindrīti. tatra aniyame mukhyatvāc ca. agniṣṭuddharmānugrahe prāpte 'tyajed ekaṃ kulasyārtha' iti nyāyāt bhūyasām evānugraho yuktaḥ. ata aindryeva grāhyeti siddhāntitam. bhūyāṃsi ca śivapāramyabodhakāni vacanāni upasaṃhāre paṭhyante. tasmāt katham anyaparatvam iti.*
>
> On that day (tatrāpi) the characteristics of the days, beginning with the jyoti etc are reached by naming the jyoti etc. Moreover, amongst these are 11 days where the Subrahmaṇya and the Aindri remain, amongst them the Aindrī alone (is to be named). When this is established, a deliberation goes as follows (about the Subrahmaṇya): is there no restriction regarding the Aindrīsubrahmaṇya at the upasat time? By the maxim "one should abandon one (member of the family) for the sake of the family (as a whole and abandon the family for the purpose of the town)" the favouring when there is a majority is reasonable, since there is no specific restriction, and it is primary. Thus the Aindri should be accepted, this is the conclusion. The majority of passages which communicate the supremacy of Śiva are read in the conclusion. So how can they be devoted to another (god)?

On this basis, the hypothetical objector in the MBTR asks how passages found in the uprakrama can be taken as being dedicated to another god like Viṣṇu when the majority of them (bhūyasām) clearly pertain to Śiva. Indeed, the objector has a point: there are a number of passages in the *Mahābhārata* which portray Śiva as the superior God, if not *the* Superior God. This principle of Mimāṃsā can be used to argue that if there is a conflict in interpretation, the one that applies to the most should take precedence. Therefore, these upasaṃhāra passages should be taken seriously. This is how Vedāntācārya responds to this objection that invokes the bhūyastva principle:

> *atrocyante. "sarvarūpaṃ bhavaṃ jñātvā liṅge 'rcayati taṃ prabhum" (7.172.90) ity upasaṃhāragatācāryavākyair brahmaputraśivavācakabhavaśabdāṅkitaiḥ prastutasya śīvasya brahmaputratvapratīteḥ. tasya paratvāsaṃbhave sthite tvadudāhṛtaśivotkarṣavācanāny aparāṇy eva. tathā hy 'pakrame bhagavato naisargikaniratiśāyaprabhāvaśālitvāt (a)jetavyatvam[308] aśvatthāmānaṃ pratyuktavān ācāryaḥ.*

[308] Although the paper manuscripts reads jetavyatvam, I take it as a scribal error and read it is a-jetavyatvam. It says that the Ācārya (Vyāsa), in the opening (upakrama) of the episode, tells Aśvatthāman that he (Kṛṣṇa) is unconquerable due to his inherent power. This makes more sense, given that in the episode to which

> They reply thus: There is clear knowledge of Śiva as being the son of Brahmā, Śiva already mentioned as marked by the word 'bhava' that designates him as the son of Brahmā in statements of Vyāsa found at the beginning of the passage, viz. "having recognized Bhava, the form of all, he worships the lord on the Liṅga." Since there is this clear recognition that Śiva is the son of Brahmā, it therefore being the case that Śiva cannot be the highest (deity), the statements about Śiva being supreme that you have cited must be lesser statements. In the opening, the Ācārya [Vyāsa] replies to Aśvatthāman that he is unconquerable because the Bhagavān is endowed with unprecedented innate power.
>
> *asitamanasaḥ śivabhaktasya aśvatthāmnaḥ svopadeśena āśvāsaṃ dṛṣṭvā 'tuṣyatu durjana' iti nyāyena śivasya niratiśayaprabhāvapratipādanapūrvakaṃ bhavagataḥ śivārādhanalabdhaṃ (a?)jetavyatvam uttaratrācacakṣe. aśvathāmnaḥ śivabhaktatvaṃ ca vyāsavacanair avagamyate.*
> Through his instruction, having seen Aśvatthāman, whose mind is dark and is a devotee of Śiva, consoled, per the 'let the villain be content'[309] maxim, (Vyāsa) subsequently explained that the the Lord's (un)conquerability was obtained through worship of Śiva, preceded by granting the endless power of Śiva. We understand from Vyāsa's statements that Aśvatthāman was (only) a bhakta of Śiva.

Vedāntācārya raises the hypothetical objection of a *pūrvapakṣin*: According to the Mimāṃsāsūtras, if there is a conflict of two rites, it should be resolved by deducing which rite recurs more. By extension, if the majority of the verses in this section of the *Bhārata* praise Śiva, all should be taken as praising Śiva alone. His response is that in this episode of the Droṇaparvan, by using the word "*bhava*," Vyāsa is indicating that Śiva is the son of Brahma. Hence, he is demoting him not praising him.[310] Vedāntācārya further suggests that

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Vedāntācārya refers, Kṛṣṇa (and Arjuna) are unaffected by Aśvatthāman's weapon. Context makes it clear, therefore, that this must be a scribal error.

[309] This maxim, according to Apte (2007, p.52), says that the opponent's argument is fallacious, but the siddhāntin accepts it seriously for the sake of argument, and eventually demolishes it. This, once again, raises the problem of jetavyatvam. The implied subject of this sentence, the Ācārya (Vyāsa), tells Aśvatthāman that Kṛṣṇa cannot be conquered, hence ajetavyatvam is more appropriate. The nyāya here must mean that Vyāsa sees that the villain (Aśvatthāman) is a Śaiva and indulges him in a fallacious argument that Kṛṣṇa's invincibility is a result of his worship of Śiva.

[310] *atrocyante. sarvarūpaṃ bhavaṃ jñātvā liñge 'rcayati taṃ prabhum" ity upasaṃhāragatācāryavākyair brahmaputraśivavācakabhavaśabdāṅkitaiḥ prastutasya śīvasya brahmaputratvapratīteḥ. tasya paratvāsaṃbhave sthite tvadudāhṛtaśivotkarṣavācanāny aparāṇy eva. tathā hi 'pakrame bhagavato naisargikaniratiśāyaprabhāvaśālitvāt jetavyatvam aśvatthāmānaṃ pratyuktavān ācāryaḥ.*

Vyāsa's praise of Śiva at the expense of Kṛṣṇa here is to calm the Śaiva Aśvatthāman, so he tells him a story where Śiva appears to be more supreme.

I only worship myself (through Śiva): Explaining Nārāyaṇīya 12.328

I want to conclude by looking at the justification for Śiva-worship provided within the *Mahābhārata* itself, by Kṛṣna himself. An important episode of relevance that both Vādirāja and Vedāntācārya address on the topic of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva is found the Nārāyaṇīya section of the *Mahābhārata*. This chapter of the Nārāyaṇīya anticipates Vaiṣṇava objections to various instances where Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva, because Kṛṣṇa not only acknowledges that he has worshipped Śiva in the past, but also justifies the practise. In the Nārāyaṇīya, Kṛṣna offers a defense, pointing to the unity of himself and Śiva. If they were indeed one, Kṛṣṇa reasons, then he had not worshipped another god but he was merely worshipping himself. The inclusion of this defence in the *Mahābhārata* is a testament to the relevance of this debate even at the time of the Nārāyaṇīya's composition.

> 12.328.21-28: *aham ātmā hi lokānāṃ viśvānāṃ pāṇḍunandana*
> *tasmād ātmānam evāgre rudraṃ saṃpūjayāmy aham//*
> *yady ahaṃ nārcayeyaṃ vai īśānaṃ varadaṃ śivam*
> *ātmānaṃ nārcayet kaś cid iti me bhāvitaṃ manaḥ//*
> *mayā pramāṇaṃ hi kṛtaṃ lokaḥ samanuvartate*
> *pramāṇāni hi pūjyāni tatas taṃ pūjayāmy aham*
> *yas taṃ vetti sa māṃ vetti yo 'nu taṃ sa hi mām anu//*
> *rudro nārāyaṇaś caiva sattvam ekaṃ dvidhākṛtam*
> *loke carati kaunteya vyaktisthaṃ sarvakarmasu//*
> *na hi me kena cid deyo varaḥ pāṇḍavanandana*
> *iti saṃcintya manasā purāṇaṃ viśvam īśvaram//*
> *putrārtham ārādhitavān ātmānam aham ātmanā*
> *na hi viṣṇuḥ praṇamati kasmai cid vibudhāya tu//*
> *ṛta ātmānam eveti tato rudraṃ bhajāmy aham*
> *sabrahmakāḥ sarudrāś ca sendrā devāḥ saharṣibhiḥ*

arcayanti suraśreṣṭhaṃ devaṃ nārāyaṇaṃ harim//
bhaviṣyatāṃ vartatāṃ ca bhūtānāṃ caiva bhārata
sarveṣām agraṇīr viṣṇuḥ sevyaḥ pūjyaś ca nityaśaḥ//

> I am the self of all worlds, son of Pāṇdu. Hence, I worshipped myself alone as Rudra. If I had not worshipped Śiva, the wish-fulfilling Īśāna, then nobody would worship me [as him], in my opinion. I set the standard and the world follows it. Those standards are to be venerated; therefore I worship him. The one who knows [Śiva] also knows me, the one who follows him also follows me. Rudra and Nārāyaṇa are truly one being (sattva) divided into two, act in the world, present in manifestation in all deeds. There is no favour that can be given to me by anyone, Delight of the Pāṇḍavas. Thinking this, with my mind I worshipped the ancient Īśvara for a son, I worshipped myself by myself. "Viṣṇu does not worship any god, except for myself," (thinking this) I worship Rudra. Therefore, the gods, along with Brahma, Rudra, Indra and Ṛsis worship the best of gods, Nārayaṇa Hari. Viṣṇu is the leader of all beings, future, present, and past and is to be served and worshipped always.

The narration of this story is spurred by Arjuna asking Kṛṣṇa about the meaning of Kṛṣṇa's various names, and in his reply, Kṛṣṇa even notes that Rudra is born from a manifestation (vyūha) of him, Aniruddha. The Nārāyaṇīya is aware of the Upamanyu story, and possibly other instances of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva (for example, in the Droṇaparvan), and frames it around the theme of the god acting as a human. This section of the Nārāyaṇīya marshals an argument that Kṛṣṇa is one with Śiva, while maintaining the distinctive nature of Nārāyaṇa. For example, he says to Arjuna that "Rudra and Nārāyaṇa are really one, made into two."[311] Both of these points, the oneness of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva, and Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva, require comment from Vādirāja.

First, on the issue of worshipping Rudra, Vādirāja argues that Kṛṣṇa worshipped "Rudra" for instructional purposes. We have seen other examples where the *Mahābhārata*

[311] *rudro nārāyaṇaś caiva sattvam ekam dvidhā kṛtam/*

tradition argues that some of Kṛṣṇa's seemingly human drawbacks are only pedagogical, designed to teach other humans. Kṛṣṇa here offers a similar defence, where he adds that he set a standard for others to follow by worshipping Śiva. Vādirāja adds that if Kṛṣṇa had not worshipped Śiva, then those who cannot and should not worship Kṛṣṇa—daityas, piśācas, and others ineligible for liberation—would worship him. He adds that Kṛṣṇa engaging in worship has educational value for Vaiṣṇavas as well, because it reminds them to perform devapūjā and worship him. Hence, when Kṛṣṇa says "I set the standard for the world to follow" (mayā pramāṇaṃ hi kṛtaṃ lokaḥ samanuvartate), he means that he created the pramāṇa, the Vedaśāstra which enjoins things like deity and guest worship. Others should follow Kṛṣṇa's lead in performing pūjā.[312] The pedagogical value to worshipping Śiva then is not only to fool asuras and others who are ineligible for Kṛṣṇa-worship, but to also teach people the importance of devapūjā.

At multiple junctures in this episode, Kṛṣṇa says that "I worship Rudra" (rudram sampūjayāmy aham). Vādirāja presents other possible ways of reading this episode that would not demean Kṛṣṇa by having him worship Śiva. First, Vādirāja argues that Kṛṣṇa worshipped Rudra for instructional purposes. Kṛṣṇa intended to fool daityas and other beings ineligible for liberation. If Kṛṣṇa did not do this, those terrible beings would worship Kṛṣṇa instead of Rudra. Vādirāja also says that some humans would not worship the gods, Kṛṣṇa included, if he did not perform pūja. The worship of Rudra thus had pedagogical value. Furthermore, Kṛṣṇa did not worship the well-known Rudra that is associated with and often seen as an epithet of Śiva. Instead, this Rudra means the antaryāmin, the inner

[312] *"mayā pramāṇam" ity atra mayā pramāṇaṃ vedaśāstrākhyaṃ pramāṇaṃ devātithipūjanārthaṃ kṛtam. tāni pramāṇāni pūjyāni mānyāni. tataḥ mānuṣeṣūtpannair devātithipūjā kartavyeti pratipādakapramāṇarakṣaṇārthaṃ taṃ rudraṃ pūjayāmi.*

controller. Vādirāja here claims that Rudra means Kṛṣṇa in the sense of "one who removes all sicknesses" (rugdrāvaṇahetutvāt rudranāmakaṃ mām). The verse, which we have already encountered, reads "hence I worship Rudra" (*tato rudraṃ bhajāmy aham 12.328.26cd).* The verse explains why Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva for a son is not a problem at all, since it is like worshipping himself (Kṛṣṇa). In his commentary on this verse, Vādirāja reads "rudra", a common epithet of Śiva, for "arudra." That is, his reading of *tato rudraṃ* is *tataḥ arudram* before sandhi. This type of glossing has been noted by Robert Goldman and the translators of the Princeton Rāmāyaṇa Consortium, who show how commentators on the Rāmāyaṇa use similar strategies for similar results.[313] He notes that this Rudra that Kṛṣṇa claims to worship is different from the well-known Rudra (prasiddharudrabhinnam). For Vādirāja, it is not possible—even with the caveat that worshipping Rudra means ultimately worshipping Kṛṣṇa—that Kṛṣṇa would worship Śiva in the form of Rudra.

Vedāntācārya agrees with Vādirāja and also maintains that stories of Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva have some pedagogical value. In his *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*, Vedāntācārya mounts a defense of Viṣṇu's superiority, particularly in contradistinction to Śiva. Writing after and in response to Appaya, he acknowledges that Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva on many occasions, but does not cede that this means that Śiva is superior. Instead, he follows a line of defense that we have seen before regarding Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. The author quotes Kṛṣṇa's defense in the Uttaṅka episode, which I studied in the first chapter. Uttaṅka had accused Kṛṣṇa of indifference in the Mahabharata war and questioned his behavior in that context. In response, Kṛṣṇa provides a sermon on his divine nature, saying that when

[313] See, for example, their introduction to the Yuddhakāṇḍa (Goldman 2009, p.101-103) where they describe in detail how specific commentators use different strategies, including sandhi, to interpret verses in the epic to say that the heroes, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, are not injured in their battles with Rāvaṇa's army.

he incarnates in the womb of a human, he acts like one. This means living in accordance with their nature and limitations. Vedāntācārya adopts this defense to explain why Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva. Vedāntācārya introduces chapter 328 of the Nārāyaṇīya in this way:

> *tasmāl līlāmānuṣasya tacceṣṭāsu pravṛttasya bhagavataḥ śivārādhanādyanuṣṭhānam api līlāmatram iti na tataḥ śivapāramyavyaktiḥ sudhiyām upajāyate. mokṣadharme ca bhagavatā svānuṣṭhitaṃ śivārādhanaṃ lokānugrahārtham.*
>
> Bhagavān, whose humanity is [just a] sport, engaged in his (a-līlā) behavior, this Lord's worship of Śiva etc is just his sport. And so, no evidence of the supremacy of Śiva arises for the wise. In the Mokṣadharma, the worship of Śiva correctly performed by the Lord is for the good of the world.

Vedāntācārya does not go as far as Vādirāja does to claim that the "Rudra" mentioned here is merely another epithet for Viṣṇu; he appears to be comfortable with the argument that when Kṛṣṇa worships Rudra, he is actually worshipping himself since Kṛṣṇa is the Self of all worlds and beings. He also argues that although the worship of Śiva is a sport, līlā, it is for the benefit of the world (lokānugraha). As a human incarnation, Kṛṣṇa has some responsibilities. According to the Nārāyaṇīya, he sets the standards that others follow. He not only appears human to fool people, but he sets the standard (pramāṇa) when it comes to worship in order to encourage others to follow. As someone who appears human, he must worship Śiva to lead the way for humans to follow. Vedāntācārya explains Kṛṣṇa's thinking, and justifies it as for the betterment of the world:

> *tathāvidharudrārādhanasya prayojanam āha, "yady aham" ityādinā. aham sarvadharmapravartanārthaṃ avatīrṇo. yadi rudran nārcayeyaṃ tadātmānaṃ rudraśarīrakaṃ na ko 'pi arcayed ity arthaḥ. evam ślokadvayena vyatirekamukhena anvayamukhena ca lokānugraha eva etatphalam iti pratipāditam."*

> In the passage that begins "if I", he states the purpose of such sort of worship of Rudra: I have descended for the purpose of setting in motion all dharmas. "If I would not worship Rudra, then nobody would worship me in the body of Rudra." This is the meaning. Thus through these 2 verses, one stating it in the negative, and the other in the positive, what is set forth is that the result of this (worship) is the betterment of the world only."

Vedāntācārya was not the only person to interpret these verses in such a manner.[314] The Nārāyaṇīya section can be read as an attempt to explain and justify Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva (both in the Droṇaparvan and the Anuśāsanaparvan). In commenting on 12.328, both Vedāntācārya and Vādirāja offer a theodicy of Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva. The humanity of Kṛṣṇa is simultaneously an issue that these Vaiṣṇava exegetes are defensive of, and this becomes an example of it, alongside the death, injury and rebuke of Vāsudeva. By saying that Kṛṣṇa worships Śiva for pedagogical reasons (to instruct others), and that it part of his human act, they maintain that this is just part of his sport as a human.

The relationship between Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu and Śiva could be interpreted in one of three ways: Kṛṣṇa is Supreme; Śiva is Supreme; or they are one. Vedāntācārya and Vādirāja accept the first option and reject the second option. The third option is the supposed "oneness" or abheda of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva. In fact, Kṛṣṇa says that Rudra and Nārāyaṇa are one, but their reality was made twofold. In the larger context of this section, Kṛṣṇa is saying that worshipping Śiva is the same as worshipping himself because there is no difference between Kṛṣṇa and Śiva. One may conclude from a casual reading of this passage that Kṛṣṇa is alluding to the non-difference (abheda) between him and Rudra. The Vaiṣṇavas, particularly the Śrīvaiṣṇava and Mādhva thinkers in this chapter, sought to refute the non-difference of Hari-Hara as much as they rebutted the śivapāramya argument. Referring

[314] Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara makes the same argument to justify Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva. (Minkowski, 2017 p.192)

specifically to the Nārāyaṇīya passage, Vedāntācārya argues that such a reading of the episode would contradict what Kṛṣṇa says about Śiva earlier in the chapter. Before saying that he is within Rudra, Kṛṣṇa says that: the two best among the gods (Brahma and Rudra), are remembered to be from my favour and anger. Thus they follow the indicated paths…"[315] This passage clearly demotes Rudra in relation to Kṛṣṇa, and sets his role within a hierarchy that places Nārāyaṇa at the top. Given that this is found in the same Nārāyaṇīya section, it cannot be that Kṛṣṇa is arguing for his equality with Rudra.

The Hari-Hara abheda reading would not satisfy Vādirāja and would actually contradict his point about Śiva's inferiority to Viṣṇu. In his commentary on *Mahābhārata* 12.328.24, Vādirāja proposes another reading.

> *rudro nārāyaṇaś caiva sattvam ekaṃ dvidhākr̥tam*
> *loke carati kaunteya vyaktisthaṃ sarvakarmasu//*
> Rudra and Nārāyaṇa as truly one being (sattva) divided into two, act in the world, present in manifestation in all deeds.
>
> *Lakṣālaṃkāra* on 12.328.24: *sattvaṃ tāvat dvividham. ekaṃ mama svarūpabhūtaṃ mukhaṃ ca sāmarthyākhyaṃ sattvam. ekam matto bhinnaṃ. sattvaṃ sattvaguṇākhyaṃ [sattvaguṇākhyaḥ] sāmarthyaṃ cet[y] ubhayam api matpriyatvāt matsvarūpatvāc ca mama sattvam ity evocyate.*
>
> (This) "sattvam" is twofold (dvidhā kṛtam): one (sattva) is my primary inherent form and is called "sāmarthya" i.e. my capacity. One sattva is different from me and called sattva-guṇa. Both are beloved to me and my inherent nature, and thus called my sattva. This is said.

He notes that the first, innate form is called Nārāyaṇa, and the sattvaguṇa is designated as Rudra. In this explanation, Vādirāja resists any possibility of seeing non-difference of

[315] "*kṣaye lalāṭāc ca suto devasya vai tathā/ krodhāviṣṭasya samjajñe rudras saṃhārakārakaḥ/etau dvau vibudhaśreṣṭhau prasādakrodhajau smr̥tau//*

Nārāyaṇa and Rudra, because he takes the verse to mean that the sattvam, or reality, is of two kinds, the quality of sattva found in the gods, and the reality which is his innate form.[316]

Upholding the supremacy of Viṣṇu in the *Mahābhārata* was not simply a facile intellectual exercise in proving that he is superior to Śiva. For Dvaitins, like Vādirāja, proving Viṣṇu's supremacy in the epics and purāṇas was also important to proving that Viṣṇu is unlike any other human or god. In Vādirāja's Nyāyaratnāvali, a condensed refutation of Advaitavāda, he explains why it is important to use smṛti sources to argue that Viṣṇu is different from other gods and humans:

> Moreover, Kṛṣṇa is well known as 'superior in intelligence to Brahmā, Śiva (Rudra), and the rest.' And since Brahmā and the rest are for that very reason proven to be inferior in intelligence, then the intelligence of souls and the Supreme (Lord) was, to say the least, different! […] Therefore the difference between a soul and the Lord is eternal.[317]

The objective in these debates was not only to prove that Viṣṇu is Supreme, but that his glories as explained in sources such as the *Mahābhārata* prove that he is not identical with any other being. Of course, like Vādirāja, Vedantācārya addresses the question of whether the Mokṣadharma passage, and others like it, mean that Viṣṇu is identical to Śiva. In the *Harivaṃśa*, Śiva praises Kṛṣṇa and tells him that his names are also Śiva's. In the Śivasahasranāma and the Viṣṇusahasranāma sections of the epic, epithets for both gods are found in each other's catalogue. Does this mean that they are identical to each other, and equal? Vedāntācārya acknowledges that a cursory glance at these passages might result in a mistaken conclusion that there is no difference (abheda) between the two deities. He also

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[316] tatra svarūpabhūtasattvaṃ nārāyaṇetyākhyayā tiṣṭhati. sattvaguṇākhyaṃ sattvaṃ tu rudretyākhyayā. (upalakṣaṇam etat). brahmendrādidevatārupeṇa sarvatra tiṣṭhati. ataḥ devānām api tatpriyasattvaguṇātmakatvāt tadanukūlo 'pi madanukūla evety arthaḥ.
[317] Nyāyaratnāvali v.47-49 trans. by Betty (1978) p. 19

notes that other figures, such as Prahalāda (in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) and the Pāṇḍavas (in the Udyogaparvan) are praised in similar terms, but this does not mean that they are also non-different with and equal to Kṛṣṇa. Hari-hara abheda is just as problematic for the Vaiṣṇava readers of the *Mahābhārata* as the superiority of Śiva. Defending Viṣṇu's superiority, and his supremacy in the *Mahābhārata*, meant refuting both arguments.

Who Speaks for the *Mahābhārata*?

Confrontation with the divine has taken many forms thus far in the dissertation. From bhagavannindā, the explicit rebuke of Kṛṣṇa found in the *Mahābhārata*, to the nikarṣa of Kṛṣṇa—a type of critique or reading of the *Mahābhārata* by later interpreters that demotes the god as inferior. This type of reading feeds into an "inferior god complex" that forces Vaiṣṇavas to offer a defensive reading of the *Mahābhārata*. Unlike the censures of Duryodhana and Śiśupāla, the insult that the Vaiṣṇava interlocutors respond to is implicit. Why would Viṣṇu, the supreme God, need to worship Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*?

Appaya Dīkṣita's suggestion to adopt the 'na hi nindā' principle to read and contextualize this problem was one solution. It was certainly acceptable to Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara, who adopts the maxim in his *Mahābhārata* commentary who alludes to the sectarian quibbling of his time. Adopting this maxim meant reading rebuke of one god not as profane censure, but as sacred praise of another god. One way to rescue a passage in the *Mahābhārata* from insulting a god and his followers would be to say that both Hari and Hara are ultimately one (which Nīlakaṇṭha advocates in his epic commentary). This method of reading nindā involves not only contextualizing it within its larger textual unit, but also not taking it literally. Appaya makes this argument directly to the Mādhvas (it is found in his

Madhvatantramukhamardana), while Nīlakaṇṭha, in his Bhāratabhāvadīpa, points fingers at certain Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas for engaging in this kind of partisan bickering. This position—Advaitic to the core—would not suffice for the Mādhvas. One reason that the nindā of Kṛṣṇa cannot be taken this way is because for the Mādhvas, the *Mahābhārata* is a Vaiṣṇava text that expresses the supremacy of Viṣṇu.

This chapter has looked at the new defences of Kṛṣṇa that emerged in the late medieval period, particularly in South India. In earlier chapters, I have looked at how some readers and exegetes sought to explicitly or implicitly defend Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the *Mahābhārata*, particularly the trickery that Duryodhana rebukes him for. As I show here, a novel problem with Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* emerged for these Vaiṣṇava readers. In this case, it is about passages in universally accepted texts that depict Kṛṣṇa worshipping Śiva. The novel defences of Kṛṣṇa's conduct in the *Mahābhārata* that I study throughout the thesis fall are responses to a wider problem—his humanity. There is a trend in the *Mahābhārata*'s reception to scrutinize Kṛṣṇa's story in the epic—his worship of Śiva for help; his trickery; his ability to be rebuked with relative impunity—against a Vaiṣṇava theology that depicts him as a human incarnation of Viṣṇu, the Supreme God. What emerges from this rethinking of Kṛṣṇa, particularly amongst the Vaiṣṇavas of South India, is a reading of the *Mahābhārata* that justifies his actions, such as Śiva-worship, as either pedagogical or part of his human "drama." This type of defence is explicitly clear in the commentaries on the Nārāyaṇīya. In short, whether it is Kṛṣṇa's death and cremation, or his worship of Śiva, the commentators and polemicists offer a less vulnerable and human Kṛṣṇa in service of a perfect God.

Defending his worship of Śiva as lokānugraha, or even as his sportive play, is one strategy that Vādirāja and Vedāntācārya use. I have shown in this chapter how the Vaiṣṇavas use philological tools of various kinds to re-read verses and episodes that implicitly denigrate Kṛṣṇa. Another strategy, which at the time is widespread in the interpretation of the Upaniṣads especially, is to creatively read (or even dismiss as interpolations) problematic verses that contradict the overall Vaiṣṇava bent of the *Mahābhārata*, as we have seen in the case of Vedāntācārya's commentary on the Upamanyu story. Although these methods are used increasingly in the late medieval period to interpret the Brahmasūtras and Upaniṣads (leading to what scholars call the "Age of Vedānta"), these methods and concerns were not limited to those texts.

I note also how in defending Viṣṇu's supremacy in the *Mahābhārata*, these works pay close attention to the architecture of the epic. They look at where exactly these stories and arguments are placed within the superstructure of the text, and use that as a way to argue that they are not conveying Śiva's supremacy. Vādirāja says that the beginning, middle and end of the *Mahābhārata* convey Viṣṇu's glories and supremacy over Śiva. He notes that viṣṇupāramya is built into the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, and one cannot be divorced from the other. The beginning and ending of the *Mahābhārata* are important markers. The *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* takes its cues from Mimāṃsā and Vedānta debates and frames some of these episodes as ones where there is a disagreement between the upakrama (intial statement) and the upsaṃhāra (concluding statement) of an episode within the Bhārata. It asks how a reader of the *Mahābhārata* should diligently resolve such conflicts, and eventually uses it to argue against Śiva's supremacy.

For the Vaiṣṇavas mentioned in this chapter, this is a battle of interpretation over the 'true' meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. The exegetes discussed sought to re-claim the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text. I use the word 're-claim' because each of these figures—Madhva, Vādirāja, and Vedāntācārya—view the *Mahābhārata* as a text whose meaning and argument has been misinterpreted and requires clarification. They each envision their exegetical projects, in part or in whole, as attempts to assert that the *Mahābhārata* proves Viṣṇu's supremacy. Defending Kṛṣṇa is central to reclaiming the *Mahābhārata*. The Mādhva project for the *Mahābhārata*, represented by the MBTN and the works of Vādirāja in particular, is to uphold the true meaning of the epic as a text devoted to Viṣṇu. Vedāntācārya, writing a few hundred years after Madhva, claims that this thesis is so well-known because of internal evidence in the epic that it would not need restating if his contemporaries were not arguing against it. In devising his tribhāṣā, Madhva acknowledges that texts as complex as the *Mahābhārata* may seem to communicate many things but holds that the highest meaning is one that expresses Viṣṇu's greatness. It was on this basis that the polemic battle is waged. One way that this battle rears its head was in the interpretation of the meaning of verses or episodes where Kṛṣṇa worshipped Śiva. Of course, this project of 'claiming' the Sanskrit epics for a particular community, and interpreting its authoritative and authentic meaning, is one that continues today.

Conclusion

kasmān mānuṣatāṃ prāpto nirguṇo 'pi janārdanaḥ /
vāsudevo jagatsūti-sthiti-saṃyamakāraṇam //
Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 1.13

Why did Janārdana, although devoid of qualities, that Vāsudeva, who is the cause of the creation, preservation and destruction of the world, obtain humanity?

The verse above, from the opening chapter of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, is posed as a question by Jaimini to the sage Mārkaṇḍeya. Jaimini, a student of Vyāsa, raises this query after learning the Bhārata himself. The question contrasts the Vāsudeva that is devoid of qualities, the divine source of creation, preservation and destruction, with his humanity (mānuṣatāṃ). In many ways, this dissertation poses a similar question, and looks at the ways it has been answered in the *Mahābhārata* tradition.

Alf Hiltebeitel has termed the *Mahābhārata* "an argument with God"[2] because of the many times epic characters question, curse, or insult Kṛṣṇa. Inherent in these episodes is one of the questions I raise, namely, to what extent is questioning, cursing or insulting Kṛṣṇa challenging his divinity? Inherent in this question is what the nature of divinity was for the early audience of the epic. Being both human and divine presents exegetical

challenges in interpreting the *Mahābhārata*, and I outline the ways in which this manifests for readers.

The themes of the nikṛti, nindā, and nikarṣa of Kṛṣṇa organize this dissertation. I map them onto the general issue of Kṛṣṇa's humanity in the reception of the epic. In the first section, I looked at Kṛṣṇa's use of trickery (**nikṛti**) in the war, and other instances where he is rebuked, and unpacked how the Purāṇas (particularly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*) and exegetes such as Madhva (13th c.) and Appaya Dīkṣita (16th c.) understood and explained this issue. I argued that in the reception of the *Mahābhārata* it is the aṃśāvataraṇa, a section that is often dismissed in scholarship as a late interpolation, that is used to make sense of Kṛṣṇa's role in the text as a human descent of Nārāyaṇa. In the second section, I look at the rebukes (**nindā**) of Kṛṣṇa present in the *Mahābhārata* uttered by its characters, and how the tradition develops a 'problem of divine reproach' in its wake. The *Bhāgavata* offers a variety of examples of divine rebuke and fleshes out a concept of *bhagavannindā* as a prohibitory concept that is punishable. It formulates the problem of incongruence between Śiśupāla's rebuke and his ultimate fate, and offers a reading of the episode to account for that. This reading of the Śiśūpāla episode, along with the concept of bhagavannindā, affects how later *Mahābhārata* commentators read the reproach of Kṛṣṇa in the epic. In the third section, I looked at the diminishment (**nikarṣa**) of Kṛṣṇa in polemical medieval and early modern sources, primarily focusing on his supposed faults (doṣas) and his worship of Śiva.

Together, I take the three sections on defending Kṛṣṇa, rebuking Kṛṣṇa, and diminishing Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* tradition as subsets of a larger issue on the humanity of Kṛṣṇa, and the challenges it poses for the reception of the Sanskrit epic from the 5th-17th centuries

in South Asia. The rise of the avatāra theology in this period lead to such questioning, defending and arguing. The result is a fully fleshed out theory of how Kṛṣṇa operates in the world as a human.

These themes that recur in the Vaiṣṇava commentaries and polemics are not theologizing the epic. I do not use the word "theologizing" to describe the process of understanding and reinterpreting Kṛṣṇa's role in the epic here because many of the questions raised about Kṛṣṇa are anticipated in texts that predate the medieval commentaries, like the Purāṇas. Furthermore, the *Mahābhārata* itself anticipates many of these concerns, as we have seen. For instance, there are more than a few instances where the epic defines what it means for Kṛṣṇa to be an aṃśa of Nārāyaṇa operating in the world. The Āśvamedhikaparvan's Uttaṅka discourse explains and elaborates on a theology of how Kṛṣṇa operates in the world while simultaneously being Supreme. The Nārāyaṇīya section actively questions and accounts for Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva.

This is one strand that the reception of the *Mahābhārata* could take— a reception through the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Sanskrit texts in the first and second millennia. In many ways, I open the possibility of looking at Purāṇic texts as commentaries on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight, and because the proper commentaries do not arrive until the second millennia, I present works like the *Viṣṇudharma* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as proto-commentaries or proto-exegesis.

Future directions for research include closer studies of the unpublished commentaries on the epic that survive in manuscript libraries across India and Europe. Understanding the nature of these commentaries and their relative dating would not only help us understand the larger history of commentarial practises in South Asia, but also understand how the

Mahābhārata was transmitted and interpreted in the second millenium. The study of these works have implications also for the history of religion and philosophy in South Asia, due to the importance of the *Mahābhārata*.

Another avenue for research is bringing these commentaries within the *Mahābhārata* tradition into conversation with commentaries on the Rāmāyaṇa. These commentaries and polemics, particularly in South India, emerged together and not in a vacuum. The epics were often read together as partners in the canon of Itihāsa. The issues that present themselves in the reception of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* are not isolated, and are tied to the interpretation of Rāma as an avatāra.

How Did We Get Here? From Determining the *Mahābhārata*'s Meaning to the Protection of the Meaning

Exegesis, or textual engagement with the *Mahābhārata*'s meaning has taken many forms historically, especially in Sanskrit. The early Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, especially the Viṣṇu and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*s, engage with the *Mahābhārata* and often question its presentation of Kṛṣṇa. In many ways, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* especially, because of its development of the principles of bhagavannindā, dveṣabhakti, and its reinterpretation of key events of the epic, is a commentary on the *Mahābhārata* hiding in plain sight. In Kashmir from the 9th century, works on alaṃkāraśāstra, like those of Ānandavardhana and others, have offered a reading of the Bhārata as a whole as part of their aesthetic projects. A few centuries later, the first written commentaries of Devabodha and Vimalabodha on the epic emerge, offering glosses of difficult verses and noting variant readings. Soon thereafter, Madhva composes his treatise that seeks to determine the meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. All of these exegetical

works take the *Mahābhārata* seriously as a text and some of them offer a vision for the text as a whole.

The story of the South Indian reception of the *Mahābhārata* cannot be told without Madhva's intervention, and his shaping of the text and tradition. He is one of the earliest writers to offer a vision of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, and argues for its Viṣṇu-centric nature at an early period. The rest of the writers and polemicists explored here—Vādirāja, Appaya, Vedāntācārya—follow suit.

The term *tātparya*, which I choose to translate as 'meaning' was important for these works. This dissertation has examined the rise of understudied exegetical works, alongside works that implicitly offer an insight and commentary on the *Mahābhārata*. The journey from the *Mahābhāratātparyanirṇaya* (Determination of the *Mahābhārata*'s Meaning) of Madhva (13th c.) to the Bhāratatātparyasaṇgrahastotra[3] (The Hymn Summarizing the Meaning of the *Bhārata*) of Appaya Dīkṣita (16th c.) to eventually the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* (The Protection of the *Mahābhārata*'s Meaning) by Vedāntācārya (17th c.?) is an important part of the dissertation. This journey charts the rise of secondary exegetical works offering the *tātparya* of the epic in South India, and the debates included therein. These are by no means the only three texts that are participating in this regional micro history, but they represent important contours.

Madhva offers a reading of a perfect, flawless Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* who is not subject to rebuke, and whose actions are without any taint. He also offers a defensive reading of the epic that shields it from any Śaiva (mis)appropriations. The exegete groups Kṛṣṇa's apparent worship of Śiva under the umbrella of his līlā, and says that it is just play, and he further argues that the structure of the text reveals the supremacy of Viṣṇu alone.

Appaya Dīkṣita, writing after Madhva's insistence that the *Mahābhārata* is an exclusively Vaiṣṇava text, argues for the opposite in his provocative essay that reveals the ways in which the *Mahābhārata* displays Śiva's supremacy. Vedāntācārya, the early modern Śrīvaiṣṇava theologian, writes in direct response to Appaya's polemical works, and offers what he calls the "protection" (rakṣā) of the *Mahābhārata*'s meaning. Of course, there are numerous texts sandwiched in between these three texts, and key issues about Kṛṣṇa's embodiment, worship of Śiva, trickery and rebuke are fleshed out in the process. Still, they are part of this journey from determining the meaning of the *Mahābhārata* to protecting it from non-Vaiṣṇava appropriations. In South India, these works mark the inevitable struggle of presenting the *Mahābhārata* as a Vaiṣṇava text exclusively.

In many ways, these three works trace the trajectory of this investigation. In looking at the ways in which the *Mahābhārata* was read, commented on, and retold as a Vaiṣṇava text, and the theological issues this presented for the god Kṛṣṇa, this dissertation looks at how an influential text influenced polemics and sharpened religious identities in South India. In focusing on these texts, I shift attention from the epic itself to the religious communities that engaged with it in premodern India.

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