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CENTURY SOUTH ASIA

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For my father

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Abstract

At the turn of the first millennium, some Jaina thinkers raised an unprecedented question: why should one story be accepted over others? This question emerged within a social and religious environment in which various groups told and retold competing versions of popular narratives, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. While certain groups privileged specific versions, they rarely articulated the criteria by which a story should be evaluated or accepted as authoritative. This dissertation examines how a body of Jaina narrative literature called the *Investigation of Dharma* confronts this question. Focusing on its two earliest extant versions—Hariṣeṇa’s Apabhramsha *Dhammaparikkhā* (988 CE) and Amitagati’s Sanskrit *Dharmaparīkṣā* (1014 CE)—I argue that the *Investigation* models a theory of adjudicating narrative credibility and, by extension, testimonial authority. Through a close analysis of these texts, I demonstrate how their authors used narrative literature to train audiences in evaluating the credibility of stories, thereby cultivating readers capable of discerning authoritative knowledge from falsehood. These works, I argue, engage a rich premodern South Asian literary milieu—one characterized by multiple coexisting versions of shared stories—in order to offer explicit models for evaluating the truthfulness of stories and the ethical stakes of accepting or rejecting them.

Framed by the repeated appearance of two Vidyādhara protagonists—a Jaina layman and his friend—who engage in debate with Brahmins by presenting a series of implausible stories, the *Investigation* uses narrative form to stage epistemological dilemmas that mirror those faced by readers of purāṇic literature. These nested stories raise questions about what makes a story credible and what it means to evaluate its claims. In this reading, the *Investigation* functions as a literary device for cultivating epistemic virtues in its audience by immersing them in staged scenarios that demand critical evaluation and judgment of the stories they encounter. Moreover, my dissertation

demonstrates that Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati did not write in a vacuum. By situating the *Investigation* in conversation with a broader body of Jaina thinkers across languages and time, I reconstruct the ways its authors conceptualized their project in relation to their literary environment and intellectual interlocutors. Framed in this way, I suggest, the *Investigation* emerges as part of a wider Jaina discourse on reason and the evaluation of authority—one that opens further possibilities for the study of South Asian literature.

Acknowledgment

In a time when “fake news” becomes Collins Dictionary’s word of the year, the strongest person in the world constantly posts “alternative facts” on his Truth Social, and images generated by models of artificial intelligence render it impossible to distinguish between reality and imagination, it seems only fitting to write a dissertation about how, a millennium ago, judicious readers in South Asia treated the search for credible stories as an ethical imperative. In writing this dissertation, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by numerous truly trustworthy sources of knowledge—professors, colleagues, and friends—who inspired me, each in their own way, in this same process of judicious reading, and who supported me as I struggled to find some of the fruitful results such reading can produce.

First, the warmest thanks to my dissertation committee. Each of its members brought a unique form of rigor and expertise that came together in surprising harmony in this project. My chair, Whitney Cox, often liked to say that he was the least knowledgeable about my materials. And yet, he skillfully asked the most thought-provoking questions and challenged me to push my arguments further. He was complemented by my two other committee members—Andrew Ollett and Sarah Pierce Taylor. Before they were even affiliated with the University of Chicago, both generously shared their time and knowledge, teaching me how to work with the difficult languages they command. By a fortunate alignment of stars, they each joined my university soon thereafter and officially became an integral part of my dissertation committee. Together, the three formed a dynamic and intellectually generous committee, one that read, engaged with, and commented on all of my ideas. The multiple suggestions and diverse—sometimes mutually contradictory—opinions I received from my committee encouraged me, like the vigilant readers I explore, to evaluate a range of alternatives and make my own judgments accordingly. This dynamic helped

me transform the abstract set of ideas I outlined in my proposal into what (I hope) is now a coherent and convincing argument.

Many teachers I have been fortunate to learn from over the years have contributed to my intellectual development in more ways than I can express here. I thank the SALC faculty, and especially Thibaut d’Hubert and Gary Tubb. Outside of SALC, I had the privilege to be taught by many great intellectuals: Dan Arnold, Yigal Bronner, Alex Cherniak, Wendy Doniger, Yochanan Grinshpon, Ehud Halperin, Oren Hanner, Matthew Kapstein, Ronie Parciack, Galia Patt-Shamir, Rafi Peled, Dani Raveh, Genady Shlomper, David Shulman, and Roy Tzohar—all of whom helped shape my scholarly trajectory. A special thank you to Dr. Jagat Ram Bhattacharyya from the Department of Sanskrit, Pali & Prakrit at Santiniketan, who opened his house and heart, and shared his remarkable command over Prakrit grammar. Ana Bajželj, Gil Ben-Herut, Prithvi Datta Chandra Shobhi, John E. Cort, Eva De Clercq, Heleen De Jonckheere, Lynna Dhanani, Anil Mundra, Shubha Shanthamurty, Shubhachandra Jain, and R. V. S. Sundaram are among the many thinkers I was lucky enough to engage with throughout the years and who influenced my research more than they may know.

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writing I ever produced, but he was also the one who first introduced me to the *Investigation of Dharma* and encouraged me to read it with him. For this, I am eternally grateful.

Gaining access to manuscripts from various archives was an essential prerequisite for the success of this project. Shri Vighna Raj, Director of the Shri Manjunatheshvara Samskriti Samshodhana Pratishthana in Dharmasthala, Karnataka, was incredibly helpful in granting me access to the collection. Kamal Chand Sogani and Shakuntala Ji of the Amer Shastra Bhandar in Jaipur generously shared scanned manuscripts with me that made my study possible in times when the COVID lockdowns prevented me from reaching the archives myself. Contacting them became possible thanks to Sander Hens of Ghent University and Mani Sachdev of Manipal University in Jaipur. Akshara Ravishankar scanned manuscripts for me from the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur. I am truly thankful for their help. I also thank Tracy Davis, Isaac Rainey, and Irving Birkner, who helped me navigate the logistics of my department and university at times when it seemed all hope was gone. A similar acknowledgment goes to Laura Ring who helped me navigate the Regenstein Library. Over the years, my research was financially supported by the Committee on Southern Asian Studies and the Humanities Division at the University of Chicago, the American Institute of Indian Studies (and its legendary Director Elise Auerbach), and the Jaina community of the Chicagoland area. The International School for Jain Studies (a special thank you to Shugan Jain and Shrinetra Pandey) supported my studies of Prakrit in India. During my time in Shantiniketan, Asha Mukherjee from Visva-Bharati University was incredibly welcoming and made my stay there as comfortable and pleasant as possible.

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world entirely on my own. Although it doesn't happen as often as I would like, nothing makes me happier than having the three of us in the same room. To their life partners, Shir and Loai—thank you for taking care of them during very complicated times. To Anka, thank you for being chosen family and a dear, incredibly patient friend.

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Introduction:

Credible Storytelling, Judicious Readership, and the Making of Authority

Ladies and gentlemen, by way of introduction, this is a film about trickery and fraud, about lies. Tell it by the fireside or in a marketplace or in a movie, almost any story is almost certainly some kind of lie. But not this time. No, this is a promise. During the next hour, everything you'll hear from us is really true and based on solid facts.

- Orson Welles, *F for Fake* (1975)

Introduction

A Jaina episode recounts an occasion when King Śreṇika—also known as Bimbisāra, ruler of Magadha—attended the assembly of the Jina Mahāvīra. There, he raised concerns about the story of Rāma as told by Vālmīki in his *Rāmāyaṇa*. Many details, he observed, seemed implausible or contradictory, and he sought clarification. In response, Mahāvīra's disciple, Indrabhūti Gautama, told the king he was right to have doubts. To set the record straight, he offered a different account of Rāma's story—one that resolved these inconsistencies. What does this episode reveal about the cultural context in which it emerged? To begin, it highlights the concurrent presence of various adaptations of related stories shared across the premodern South Asian cultural milieu. While Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is arguably the most celebrated and referenced narration of the life story of Rāma, it is far from being the only version. Indeed, this episode of the Śreṇika-Gautama encounter is found in some Jaina versions of the Rāma narrative that diverge from Vālmīki's.¹ This episode further demonstrates that some authors who told these stories were aware of alternative renditions

¹ For instance, Vimalasūri's *Paūmacariya* (early centuries of the common era), Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa* (676 CE), and Svayambhūdeva's *Paūmacariu* (ninth/tenth century). Chapter Four of this dissertation explores the Śreṇika-Gautama episode.

of the same tales. Some of these authors even actively sought acceptance for their version over and above others as evidenced by Śreṇika's explicit dismissal of the work of other poets as false stories that contradict reason.

The concurrent presence of related stories in the premodern South Asian religious and literary ecosystem is hardly a new discovery in scholarship.² The distinctive role of Jaina literature and its authors in the production of such stories has also been previously explored.³ Romila Thapar's observation on the diversity of *Rāmāyaṇas* provides a useful framework for understanding the function of retelling such stories across different contexts: "The appropriation of the story by a multiplicity of groups meant a multiplicity of versions through which the social aspirations and ideological concerns of each group were articulated."⁴ Authors and storytellers of different backgrounds continually adapted prominent episodes from South Asian stories to articulate their own values and concerns and promote them among their audiences. Jaina authors are especially notable for situating prominent episodes from Brahminical purāṇic literature within the framework of Jaina cosmology. However, while the competition between social and religious groups within this premodern cultural context gave rise to the various retellings of similar stories, the justificatory structures that informed these retellings—the reasons authors gave for why their versions should be accepted over others—remain less explored.⁵ Whereas authors sought to position their stories as the most credible accounts of certain events and, by extension, as authoritative sources of valid knowledge, they rarely articulated the criteria that confer such status

² The essays in volumes such as *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Richman 1991a), *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas* (Richman 2000), and *Many Mahābhāratas* (Hawley and Pillai 2021), along with works like *Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative* (Appleton 2017) exemplify the extensive scholarly engagement with this issue.

³ For instance, De Clercq et al. 2025; De Clercq 2005, 2008; De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming); De Clercq and Winant 2021; Clines 2022; Geen 2006, 2009; Cort 1993; Jaini 1984, 2000b, 2000c; Kulkarni 1990; Chandra 1970; Narasimhachar 1939; Sen 1920.

⁴ Paula Richman cites Thapar in the introduction to her *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (Richman 1991b: 4).

⁵ To clarify, not every instance of retelling of a similar story necessarily indicates competition; in many other cases, shared narratives circulated across communities without clear sectarian boundaries.

or how a reader should evaluate a story accordingly.

The *Investigation of Dharma* (*Dharmaparīkṣā*) is an exceptional instance of literature that articulates such criteria. It is a widely circulated body of Jaina texts—all retelling the same story in a variety of languages—which were composed in South Asia starting at the end of the first millennium. The story is that of two friends who happen to be Vidyādharas—human beings possessed of magical powers—Manovega and Pavanavega. Following the advice of a Jaina monk, Manovega, a staunch Jaina layman, takes his friend Pavanavega—who rejects the teaching of the Jina—to Pāṭaliputra. There, the monk tells Manovega, his friend will finally give up his wrong views. In the city, they adopt peculiar disguises and repeatedly engage with groups of Brahmins. In each encounter, the friends are questioned about their puzzling appearance. They respond by narrating stories that challenge the Brahmins’ perspectives, often by echoing popular themes from South Asian literary traditions such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

This study focuses on the two earliest surviving versions of the *Investigation*, composed by Hariṣeṇa in Apabhramsha (988 CE) and Amitagati in Sanskrit (1014 CE).⁶ These texts represent the earliest formulation of the *Investigation*, before later adaptations introduced significant variations. Analyzing their shared vision, I reconstruct how and why these texts sought to train their audience in the skill of judicious reading. I argue that these versions of the *Investigation* cultivate vigilant readers/listeners capable of independently assessing the truth of different stories, thereby shaping individuals with epistemic and ethical sensitivity.⁷ This cultivated sensitivity

⁶ While both works were edited and published, I could not have conducted my research without consulting their manuscripts, especially for the Apabhramsha text, where the abundance of variants testifies to a decline in the copyists’ familiarity with the language. In cases where I introduced emendations in the text of the printed editions, the source is explicitly indicated in the footnote, along with the printed original. I am particularly indebted to Kamal Chand Sogani, who generously shared with me Hariṣeṇa’s manuscripts housed at the Āmer Śāstra Bhaṇḍār in Jaipur, and to Akshara Ravishankar, who obtained for me a manuscript of Amitagati’s from the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur.

⁷ While little is known about how these texts were consumed, it is likely that they were more often listened to than read silently. Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “reader” and “listener” interchangeably to refer to the

enables them to navigate not only stories, but also a broader landscape of diverse testimonies. In this way, these texts train their readers to make informed decisions about what constitutes valid knowledge worth shaping their lives around.⁸

Prior scholarship often perceives the *Investigation*'s main objective to be a satirical critique of popular Brahminical themes.⁹ This study reexamines this presupposition, shifting the focus from what the *Investigation* critiques to how it functions as an inquiry into textual credibility.¹⁰ It takes the name of this Jaina work as, following Erich Auerbach, a "philological starting point,"¹¹ by asking: What is the practice of investigation (*parīkṣā*) that these texts model? Why do they undertake their project in the form of narrative rather than argument? How do they understand *dharma* through the act of investigation itself? And is there anything particularly Jaina about either the *dharma* or the means of its investigation? My central argument throughout this dissertation is that these texts function as a site for investigating the epistemological principles that lead readers to accept certain texts as credible while rejecting others as non-credible. As such, I expand on previous studies that focus on what these texts investigate by shifting the emphasis to how and why they investigate: what methods they employ and what goals they seek to achieve. My analysis reveals how these works cultivate in their readers a mode of discerning reading—one that equips them to evaluate critically different types of textual and testimonial evidence, and to determine for themselves which alternatives to accept as true and to shape their lives accordingly.

audience of these works.

⁸ Leela Prasad's ethnographic work explores how individuals navigate such competing normative sources in everyday settings (Prasad 2006, 2007). See also Soni (2000) on how this problem is negotiated through the Jaina conceptualization of an authoritative person (*āpta*).

⁹ For instance, De Jonckheere 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Osier 2005; Upadhye 1944; Mironow 1903. See my discussion of prior scholarship later in this Introduction.

¹⁰ This analysis is also developed in Ramot (2024), which emerges directly from this research.

¹¹ Erich Auerbach charts the guidelines for undertaking such a philological project: "The starting point should not be a category which we ourselves impose on the material, to which the material be fitted, but a characteristic found in the subject itself, essential to its history, which, when stressed and developed, clarifies the subject matter in its particularity and other topics in relation to it" (1993: 19).

Investigating the *Investigation*

The various versions of the *Investigation* were composed in multiple languages over approximately eight centuries, all revolving around the story of the two Vidyādhara friends. The widespread circulation of the *Investigation* literature, evidenced by the existence of nearly one hundred and seventy manuscripts of these works in archives across India, highlights its significance.¹² Even this evidence, however, underestimates the *Investigation*'s impact.¹³ These texts flourished far beyond these repositories, as demonstrated by their continual recreation across languages and centuries. Building on the first, now-lost Prakrit *Investigation* attributed to a certain Jayarāma, the two Jaina authors at the center of this dissertation—Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati—composed new versions in Apabhramsha and Sanskrit, respectively.¹⁴ These works were produced in the central region of what is now India, around the turn of the first and early second millennia. A Kannada retelling was produced by Vṛttavilāsa in the southern part of the subcontinent a few centuries later. Additional renditions were re-written as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, with the composition of Nemavijaya's Gujarati *Dharmaparīkṣā Rās*, and a few versions were composed even later in modern South Asian languages.¹⁵ Taken together, these instances indicate

¹² Heleen De Jonckheere highlights the popularity of this literature by tracing its extant manuscripts in South Asian archives (2019: 4-7, 2020a: 42-49). During my fieldwork in Karnataka in August 2018, I discovered thirteen manuscripts of Vṛttavilāsa's Kannada *Investigation*, not counted in De Jonckheere's discussion, which leads me to believe that the real number of extant manuscripts is higher than previously estimated.

¹³ The relationship between the profusion of manuscripts and their significance outside archives is not always congruent. For instance, the Śrī Mañjunāthēśvara Saṃskṛti Saṃsōdhana Pratiṣṭhāna in Dharmasthala, Karnataka, holds thirteen manuscripts of the fourteenth-century Kannada version of the *Investigation*. In comparison, Pampa's highly renowned *Ādipurāṇam*—considered the first instance of Kannada poetry and celebrated extensively in Karnataka, with its author commemorated on modern street signs—has only a single manuscript preserved there. This data was collected during my visit to the archive in August 2018, facilitated by the generosity of Śrī Vighna Raj, the archive's director.

¹⁴ A few other works composed by Amitagati are available to us, including the *Subhāṣitaratnasandoha*, *Upāsakācāra*, *Ārādhana*, and *Pañcasamgraha* (De Jonckheere 2020a: 80–81). Other works attributed to a certain Amitagati may have been composed by an earlier author of the same name, whom our Amitagati alludes to in the eulogy section of his works. As for Hariṣeṇa, we have no information on other works written by him.

¹⁵ A. N. Upadhye briefly mentions a later retelling in modern Kannaḍa that was composed in 1848 and is based on the

the commitment of those who preserved, transmitted, and recreated this literature over nearly a millennium. Yet, the intellectual value of this text remains underrecognized. Why was it so popular, and what made it compelling enough to be retold and translated into so many languages? These are questions that have not been adequately addressed yet.

It is not uncommon to encounter these works in surveys of literary histories, where they are listed by name and date, sometimes accompanied by a brief and often incomplete plot synopsis.¹⁶ Apart from sporadic mentions in such lists and in the notes of early Indologists, the first extensive modern study of any *Investigation* text was conducted by Nicolaus Mironow in his doctoral research, published as a small book under the title *Die Dharmaparīkṣā des Amitagati*.¹⁷ Mironow offers a brief discussion of Amitagati's language and writing style, as well as a review of a few versions of the *Investigation* and the manuscripts he was aware of. His most significant contribution is that he gives modern scholars the opportunity, for the first time in a European language, to access a fairly comprehensive survey of the Sanskrit *Investigation*. However, it was A. N. Upadhye who first illustrated the vastness of this tradition in an article on Hariṣeṇa's *Investigation*, where he mentions nine other versions of this work.¹⁸ While his list is incomplete (and at times inaccurate, as some of the versions he mentions share nothing with Hariṣeṇa's *Investigation* but their name), Upadhye's recognition of the existence of multiple versions of this text, along with his comparison of specific verses in Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati's works, opened a path for considering the *Investigation* as a body of texts worth exploring. With his source-critical approach, he was the first to take seriously the scale of the *Investigation* tradition, highlighting its

earlier Kannaḍa version (Upadhye 1944: 49n1). K. Raghavendra Rao dates this retelling to a slightly earlier date, circa 1810 (Rao 1986: 86). Modern Hindi and Marathi translations of the Sanskrit text are also available (Upadhye 1944: 41n3).

¹⁶ For example, Rice 1915: 33; Winternitz 1977: 541-3; Warder 1992: 254-61; Narasimhacharya 1988: 21.

¹⁷ Mironow 1903. For references by early Indologists, see De Jonckheere 2020a: 3-5.

¹⁸ Upadhye 1942.

intertextual structures, shared vocabulary, and the likely influence of the lost Prakrit version on Amitagati. In doing so, even in the short span of his article, he laid the groundwork for treating these texts not just as isolated compositions but as part of a larger textual genealogy, pointing to connections that later scholars would begin to examine more fully. Further, in his critical study of an earlier literary work, Haribhadra's *Tale of the Charlatans* (*Dhuttakkhāṇa*), Upadhye identifies its connections with and influence on Amitagati's *Investigation*, both in its content and argumentative strategies.¹⁹ His analysis reveals that the objectives and vision of the *Investigation* did not emerge in a void and suggests that situating it within broader trends in Jaina literary and intellectual practices may prove to be a fruitful endeavor. Another study of a previously less-discussed *Investigation*—Vṛttavilāsa's Old Kannada *Dharmaparīkṣe* (c. 1360)—was later undertaken by K. Raghavendra Rao.²⁰ In addition to his doctoral research, which was later published as a book in modern Kannada, he also edited this text, published by Mysore University. Rao provides some discussion of Vṛttavilāsa's socio-historical context and his place within the tradition of *Investigation* retellings. A significant portion of his research is dedicated to summarizing the *Investigation*'s plot and conducting a comparative exploration of similarities and differences in plot structure and language usage across the three earlier retellings of the story, by Hariṣeṇa, Amitagati, and Vṛttavilāsa. All these studies have been crucial in shaping a better understanding of what constitutes the early versions of the *Investigation*, the relationships between the various retellings, and in increasing awareness of these texts among modern readers who lack direct access to their original languages or the manuscripts that have preserved them for

¹⁹ Upadhye 1944.

²⁰ Rao 1986. The dating of this Kannada text varies among scholars. Some place it in the mid-twelfth century, but certain grammatical forms suggest a later composition. Genealogical inquiries by Venkatasubbiah (1931: 521n1) and Rao (1986: 3-8) trace the lineage of Vṛttavilāsa's teacher, Amarakīrti, to an inscription from Śravaṇa Beḷagoḷa dated to 1373. Based on this, both scholars position him in the mid-fourteenth century.

generations.

Yet, this scholarship remained largely within the domain of textual criticism, focusing on establishing manuscript histories, tracing intertextual connections, and cataloging variations across versions. It took time for the seed planted by Upadhye—calling to contextualize this literature within broader currents of Jaina literary and intellectual thought—to sprout. This shift began when Jean-Pierre Osier revisited the *Investigation* in his comparative study of four literary works—Haribhadra’s *Tale*, its earlier iteration in the *Niśītha-cūrṇī*, and the two *Investigation* versions by Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati.²¹ Osier argues that the *Investigations* follow these earlier works in their use of irony and mockery, otherwise absent in Jaina literature, and applies satire as an analytical framework for their study.²² His research marks the first scholarly attempt to analyze, rather than merely unpack, the *Investigation* and to reconsider the literary strategies its authors employ to critique Brahminical stories.

However, the most substantial discussion of the *Investigation* to date was recently undertaken by Heleen De Jonckheere, in what has so far been the most comprehensive attempt to seriously rethink these texts as a distinct and cohesive body of literature that reflects the concrete goals and strategies of their authors. In her study, De Jonckheere examines various retellings of the *Investigation* through the lens of adaptation theory, arguing that the differing contexts and audiences of each version can be reconstructed by analyzing the adaptive choices made by their respective authors.²³ To support this argument, she examines six versions of the text in Sanskrit, Old Hindi, and Old Kannada, tracing both their idiosyncrasies and their shared features. Her study

²¹ On the earlier iteration of the *Tale* in the *Niśītha-cūrṇī*, see Upadhye 1983.

²² Osier 2005: 33-7.

²³ De Jonckheere’s most comprehensive study of the *Investigation* is found in her unpublished doctoral dissertation (2020a). She has also examined specific aspects of the text, including its manuscript circulation (2019), its stance toward Buddhists (2020b), and, more recently, its later iteration in a seventeenth-century Old Hindi text (2023).

is a rich source of information, offering a comprehensive synopsis of the *Investigation*'s plot, examining the specificities of each version and its context, and mapping the continuities and divergences between them. As De Jonckheere rightly observes, the multiple retellings of the *Investigation* in various South Asian languages present a compelling opportunity to examine how this literature transforms in response to different audiences over time and across linguistic contexts, and adaptation theory provides a valuable analytical framework for tracing its evolution.²⁴ Yet, by following this approach, the focus ultimately shifts to what sets these versions apart from one another, rather than to broader questions about their shared conceptual underpinnings.

The aim and scope of this dissertation differs: rather than tracing how the *Investigation* evolved over time, I seek to understand what it originally was. As De Jonckheere's research suggests, it is not unlikely that, over time, later authors adapted the narrative framework of the *Investigation* to reflect their own ideas and objectives, shaped by their particular historical and intellectual contexts. In doing so, they left behind some of the nuances contained in the earliest works. My underlying assumption is, therefore, that the earliest authors shared similar ideas about what the *Investigation* was meant to accomplish for its readers and the mechanisms through which it achieved that purpose. This dissertation uncovers these shared views of the early *Investigation*.

To work along these lines, I focus on the two earliest available renditions of this text: Hariṣeṇa's Apabhraṃśa *Dhammaparikkhā* and Amitagati's Sanskrit *Dharmaparīkṣā*. Vṛttavilāsa's Kannada work, the third *Investigation* to have survived, represents a watershed moment. First, it is the earliest instance of an *Investigation* composed in a vernacular language, unlike the supra-regional languages used by Hariṣeṇa, Amitagati, and the unknown Jayarāma. Second, while most versions of the *Investigation* generally align in plot, story order, and details, Vṛttavilāsa's Kannada

²⁴ The multilingual nature of much Jaina literature offers fascinating opportunities for this kind of research, as evidenced by recent scholarly works such as Clines (2022), Taylor (2016), and De Clercq (2025).

adaptation distinguishes itself by reordering events and modifying, omitting, or adding narrative elements.²⁵ For these reasons, I consider this work the first significant departure from the original vision of the *Investigation*'s early authors. As such, although it certainly merits further examination in its own right, this study does not consider it among the earliest *Investigation* texts. However, I do use it, in a few instances, as a comparative counterexample to the earlier works.²⁶

Regarding the original vision of the *Investigation*, I argue that Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati used their literary works to articulate certain criteria by which a story may be judged credible, and to instruct their audience in how to evaluate the credibility of the stories they encounter. Because the *Investigation* is a narrative, it is difficult to extract from it a single comprehensive definition of the concepts it explores (e.g., coherence, credibility, judiciousness) or the parameters it establishes, of the sort we expect to find in the more systematic genres of philosophical or scientific writing in the form of *śāstra*. In the *Investigation*, these concepts do not always cohere into a unified framework. Much of the task of the coming chapters is to trace how such concepts recur, develop, and function across the arguments and stories that appear in these early versions of the *Investigation*. Since this study focuses on the two earliest versions available to us, I do not attempt to make claims about the tradition as a whole. Any broader application of the argument would need to be made on a case-by-case basis. Accordingly, when I refer to “the *Investigation*” in the singular, unless otherwise specified, I mean only what can be inferred from the works of Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati.

While the two share the same plot and repeat similar sub-stories, it is often the case that

²⁵ Heleen De Jonckheere speculates that Vṛttavilāsa may have based his work on an earlier, now-lost source from a “southern tradition of transmission of *Dharmaparīkṣās*,” whose plot diverged from other versions (2020a: 282). For a discussion on how Vṛttavilāsa diverges from the earlier versions, see De Jonckheere 2020a: 213–249.

²⁶ My article, “Writing in Kannada, Being a Jain: Sanskrit as a Site of Contestation in a Fourteenth-Century Kannada Text,” which explores the unique aspects of this work within its socio-religious and historical contexts, is currently under review for the forthcoming *Numen* Special Issue on “Jain Resilience.” See also Shanthamurthy (2024) for further discussion on this text.

reading one version sheds light and reinforces the reading of the other. Empirically speaking, we cannot say whether the historical authors of these texts were aware of each other. We know that both belonged to the Digambara sect and lived in what is now, broadly speaking, the central region of modern-day India.²⁷ However, we have no conclusive way to know whether Amitagati read Hariṣeṇa's work or whether both of them independently based their works on Jayarāma's lost *Investigation*.²⁸ Therefore, we cannot always be certain about what details they took from their predecessors and what they came up with themselves. Nevertheless, it is plausible that at least on some occasions both authors expanded the source they based themselves on with a certain "commentarial consciousness" that intended to clarify ambiguities in the original.²⁹ Reading them side by side brings such ambiguities into relief and helps illuminate their shared strategies and ideas.

While my research focuses on these two *Investigations*, each chapter situates them in conversation with a broader body of thinkers and the literature they produced across languages and time—namely, their preceding literary influences (e.g., Haribhadra's *Dhuttakkhāṇa* and Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa*), the authors who were influenced by them (e.g., Vṛttavilāsa's *Dharmaparīkṣe*), thinkers who explored similar concepts (e.g., Guṇaratna, Dharmasāgara, and Yaśovijaya), and their intellectual rivals (e.g., Jaimini, Śābara, Patañjali, and Kumārila). By reading the texts in this way, I reconstruct the way Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati conceptualized their project in relation to their

²⁷ Hariṣeṇa tells us that he was born in Citrakūṭa, likely in the southern region of modern Rajasthan, and studied in Acalapura, in what is now northern Maharashtra. As for Amitagati, we know that he was active in Mālava (modern Madhya Pradesh) at least early in his career, as he states in his *Subhāṣitaratnasandoha*—written twenty years before his *Investigation*—that he composed it under Muṇja (r. 974–994) of the Paramāra dynasty. If we speculate that he remained in Mālava while composing his *Investigation*, it would have been under the rule of Muṇja's nephew, the legendary King Bhoja. However, this remains uncertain, since the latter work does not mention any specific patron.

²⁸ Our only reference to Jayarāma's earlier Prakrit version is Hariṣeṇa's claim to have based his own work on it. On the question of Amitagati's familiarity with the works of his two known predecessors, Hariṣeṇa and Jayarāma, see Upadhye 1942: 600-3.

²⁹ I borrow this concept from Deven Patel in his discussion of vernacular translations of the *Naiṣadhīya* (Patel 2014: 175-201).

contemporary literary environments and their interlocutors. At the same time, as I demonstrate below, the implications of this study extend beyond Jaina literature. By analyzing how the *Investigation* defines testimonial credibility and trains its readers to assess the claims of narratives, this study contributes to broader issues in the philosophy of literature, such as the ethics and epistemics of reading and the role of fiction in shaping ethical dispositions. It also speaks to larger debates in epistemology and South Asian literary traditions concerning textual authority, testimonial evaluation, and the cultivation of discernment.

Narrative about narratives

When scholars speak of the *Investigation*, they often frame it in terms of the Brahminical stories and beliefs it critiques. A. N. Upadhye asserts that it is a “satiric attack on the Purāṇic legends referring to deities and holy personalities,” an attack that aims “to scrutinize the credentials of other religions by criticizing their deities and mythology.”³⁰ H. C. Bhayani portrays Hariṣeṇa’s work as “effectively demonstrating the absurdity of the stories of the Brāhminical *Purāṇas* [...] by quoting [...] absurd incidents from the great epics and *Purāṇas*.”³¹ Edward P. Rice describes Vṛttavilāsa’s Kannada text as “expos[ing] the vices of the gods, as related in the sacred books [...], and the incredibility of such stories as that of Hanumanta [*sic*] and his monkeys.”³² Eva De Clercq and Tine Vekemans equally argue that the various *Investigations* “not only reject, but themselves also appropriate the [Brahminical] epics and *Purāṇas*.”³³ Similarly, Heleen De Jonckheere emphasizes this mode by arguing that the *Investigation* literature “makes its argument within a frame structure using stories that refer to and satirically criticize Hindu Purāṇic and epic

³⁰ Upadhye 1944: 47.

³¹ Bhayani 2000 :876.

³² Rice 1915: 33.

³³ De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming).

episodes.”³⁴ She further highlights the *Investigations*’ strategy of appropriation and argues that this genre “informs us of a specific attitude of the Jains, throughout time and space, towards other traditions and their religious texts, namely an attitude of counteractive appropriation by means of satire.”³⁵ What these scholarly perspectives share is an emphasis on the *Investigation* primarily, if not exclusively, as a satirical critique of Brahminical traditions. While this is certainly a central aspect, such a framing risks reducing the *Investigations* to a purely reactive endeavor, rather than examining the mechanisms through which these texts articulate their own positive epistemic and literary vision.

There are of course questions that the dominant source-critical approach of these texts can help answer, including questions about the circulation of certain narrative elements and motifs throughout the literatures of South Asia.³⁶ *Understanding* a text, however, requires understanding the role that various elements play within it, not just identifying their sources, as one prominent theorist of intertextuality has noted.³⁷ Furthermore, a considerable portion of the plot of the *Investigation* does not directly engage with such Brahminical stories.³⁸ For instance, Amitagati begins narrating such episodes only halfway through his text. By contrast, much of the preceding chapters focuses on who is eligible to hear the protagonists’ narrations, emphasizing various types of injudicious fools (*nirvivecaka*, *viveka-vikala*, etc.) before whom they hesitate to testify. These

³⁴ De Jonckheere 2019: 3.

³⁵ De Jonckheere 2019: 4.

³⁶ For such inquiries into the circulation and origins of independent stories that also found their way into the *Investigation* literature, e.g., Zin 2011; Brewster 1971; Brown 1922. From a different perspective, A. N. Upadhye points out such stories in his discussion of Haribhadra’s preceding *Tale of the Charlatans* (*Dhuttakkhāṇa*), to highlight its connection with the *Investigation* (1944: 47-9).

³⁷ Jonathan Culler criticizes intertextual pursuits of the source-hunting type, on account that they trace specific textual precursors but do not expose the *conventions* that enabled such texts to be composed: “to talk about the constitutive function of the experience of other texts should involve not a concentration on particular precursor texts but on conventions, systems of combination, a logic of composition” (1976: 1395).

³⁸ Jean-Pierre Osier acknowledges that, contrary to their common portrayal, these stories do not necessarily constitute even the majority of the narrative (2005: 242).

stories address not only what should be told but also to whom it should be told. By also considering those parts of the narrative that do not echo existing Brahminical purāṇic stories, I advance a reading that unpacks the mechanism through which these authors undertook their project. In this way, I wish to put forward an understanding of how the frame narrative functions as a link that comments on the different stories and brings them together into a clear argument. For it was not just the individual stories that were rewritten and adapted, and authors consistently chose to rewrite the *Investigation* as a whole.

The *Investigation of Dharma* is a narrative *about* narratives. It continually raises the question of what constitutes a credible story, one that may be considered as true and as a warranted authority in instructing one how to appropriately act in the world. The “Investigators” who wrote these works—by which I refer specifically (and only) to Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati—could have addressed the issue of stories’ credibility by using a more technical or scholastic style of inquiry. But they chose not to. What was their purpose in playing out this problem in literature rather than through a philosophical mode? Modern scholars have already argued that philosophical writing has certain inherent limitations for discussing complex subjects. Martha Nussbaum argues that the analytic language of philosophy is too “flat and lacking in wonder” to fully comprehend the complexity of many real-life dilemmas, and while some questions can be examined with such language, its characteristics render it futile for “certain truths about human life.”³⁹ Some aspects of moral life, in particular, are just too complex to be addressed with principles of analytical philosophy. It is narrative language, and specifically the form of the novel, Nussbaum argues, that has sensitivity and attentiveness sufficient to inquire into the moral dilemmas that characters face as they confront particular situations. Such nuanced appreciation is necessary for a comprehensive discussion of

³⁹ Nussbaum 1992: 3-5.

these issues; hence an investigation of moral principles should take into account literary works alongside philosophical treatises.⁴⁰

Nussbaum focuses on the modern novel, which is historically associated with the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere and early modern democracy, and is attuned to the conflicts and pressures of modern life, especially under capitalism.⁴¹ Such features make it a form of literature that expresses “a normative sense of life” through its style and its ways of approaching the readers: “It tells its readers to notice this and not this, to be active in these and not those ways. It leads them into certain postures of the mind and heart and not others.”⁴² In other words, Nussbaum argues that literature has the power to shape readers’ ethical sensibilities, not through direct instruction but by immersing them in scenarios that demand moral engagement. This capacity, however, is not limited to the modern novel but is translatable to other literary genres and historical contexts. For instance, Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen illustrate how Nussbaum’s position with regard to narratives’ impact on moral life is also applicable to the stories of the Buddha’s previous lives (*jātaka*), in the context of Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism.⁴³ Mukund Lath also raises ideas that are very similar to Nussbaum’s in relation to the *Mahābhārata*. It is the enactment of moral concepts in the living story of this epic that provides the opportunity to unravel these concepts and make them come to life. Where Nussbaum speaks of the limited nature of philosophical writing, Lath raises the limitations of moral injunctions that were articulated in the compendiums of *dharma* (*dharma-saṃhitā*). The *Mahābhārata*, he argues, is where these general injunctions are examined and interpreted in relation to particular moral dilemmas that have relevance for the concrete lives of its

⁴⁰ Nussbaum 1992: 26-7.

⁴¹ Ian Watt (1957) makes this argument in the context of the eighteenth-century English novel. Erich Auerbach traces the novel’s association with the rise of the bourgeoisie later, in what he sees as the emergence of modern realism in nineteenth century France, with Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert (2003: 454-92). For an excellent discussion on the democratic background of the novel, see Ruttenburg 2014.

⁴² Nussbaum 1995: 2.

⁴³ Hallisey and Hansen 1996.

readers. It is where general ideals are being negotiated with the constraints of human conditions that often prevent the fruitions of such ideals.⁴⁴

Gregory M. Clines has recently bemoaned scholars' reluctance to explore the ways Jaina literature functions along such lines, as an instrument for ethical edification. Rather than considering the operation mode of such literature in staging moral concepts in the living story and its examination of injunctions in light of specific scenarios, he argues, scholarship is persistent in characterizing Jaina narratives simplistically as didactic. This sentiment serves scholars to explain *what* such narratives do, that is, instruct their readers in the Jaina doctrine. However, "recourse to didacticism," Clines stresses, "fails to consider [...] the varied methods of ethical instruction that narrative might employ," leaving unanswered the important question of *how* narratives fulfill such instructive purposes.⁴⁵ By considering the *Investigation*'s narrative frame along trajectories of the kind that Nussbaum, Hallisey and Hansen, and Lath chart, I focus on this latter question of how the narrative obtains its goals: what is the mechanism through which the *Investigation* instructs its audience? Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati cast their arguments in narrative form to construct a multidimensional ideal of truthfulness, and they do so by repeatedly thematizing the notions of stories' credibility and the virtue of a vigilant reader who knows to adjudicate a story as credible. The narrative style allows the authors to unravel these normative ideals in the context of staged scenarios. While these scenarios are not necessarily as "realistic" as those discussed by Nussbaum, I argue that they evoke for the reader a more proximate experiential frame than the "mythic" mode of the Brahminical stories criticized by the Vidyādhara protagonist. By presenting situations that could plausibly occur in real life, these scenarios show that judiciousness—the virtue of a vigilant reader—is fundamentally situational (i.e., embedded in particular scenarios that each call for

⁴⁴ Lath 1990. See also Heim 2022: 653-6; Hudson 2013: 65-7.

⁴⁵ Clines 2022: 13ff.

specific ethical and epistemological considerations).

It is worth emphasizing that the lifelike quality of such scenarios should not be confused with “realism” as it is used in the modern sense. The protagonists’ ability to fly and change their forms would obviously not be accepted as realistic in the same way that the modern novel would. Nevertheless, according to Jaina cosmology, extraordinary powers—such as the ability to fly—are not at all beyond the realm of the real but are simply, as Kirsti L. Wiley puts it, “a capacity that is beyond the ability of most people.”⁴⁶ This aligns with Ellen Gough’s explanation for choosing not to refer to such capacities as supernatural, given “the belief that these powers are within the realm of the laws of nature (*dharmatā*).”⁴⁷ John E. Cort’s discussion of representations of *yogīs* in Digambara literature further supports the view that such powers, while uncommon, remain within the realm of the real and the natural and are therefore best understood not as “supernatural” but, following Wiley, as “supernormal.”⁴⁸ The realistic nature of literary depictions of scenarios in which such supernormal phenomena occur is akin to certain features of the premodern South Asian genre of *kathā* literature, which Daud Ali identifies as establishing “a kind of ‘realism’.” Such realism—

should be somewhat qualified, for supernatural beings, wondrous mechanical devices and magical transformations appear regularly in [...] the *kathā* texts. The term [i.e., realism] might not be entirely inaccurate, however, if we admit that the boundaries of the ‘real’ were different in early South Asia than we may be accustomed to assume now.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wiley 2012: 151.

⁴⁷ Gough 2021: 220n4.

⁴⁸ Cort 2022: 24n50. I am grateful to John E. Cort for drawing my attention to the place of such extraordinary phenomena in Jaina thought within the realm of the real: “According to Jain cosmology, the abilities of *vidyādhara*s are not in the least ‘supernatural,’ in fact they are quite natural, for it is in the nature of *vidyādhara*s that they can fly. While someone reading or listening to your texts might not have seen a flying *vidyādhara*, they are so ubiquitous in Jain narratives [...] that they would appear ‘natural’ and within the realm of believability” (Personal Communication, John E. Cort, July 13, 2024).

⁴⁹ Ali 2013: 244-5.

The discussion in the *Investigation* focuses on questions of the truthfulness and credibility of stories. These questions entail an exploration into the relation of stories with the real world and into the potential of events in stories to happen in real life. In order to evaluate the parameters according to which a story is regarded true, I argue, the *Investigation* forms an internal division between its fictitious scenarios, which could happen only in stories, and between realistic representations that can potentially happen in the real world. This work establishes the “realism” of such representations through specific literary and narrative devices that bring the events they depict closer to the world of the readers and their real-life experience. These devices, therefore, function similarly to the superfluous details in modern Western literature—such as in Flaubert—to establish what Roland Barthes calls the “reality effect.”⁵⁰ These details do not denote any “real” content directly, but instead signify “the real” as a category, producing an aesthetic effect of reality that is independent of whether their referent exists outside the text. Realism, as such, is as much a matter of technique as it is a matter of content. The discussion of such devices—and their role in evoking a real-life experience in the readers’ minds—is fundamental for my argument. This discussion, taken up in Chapter One, is informed both by Barthes’s distinction between the content of the real and the reality effect, and by the aforementioned observations about the context-sensitive boundaries of the real.⁵¹ This question of the boundaries of the real is central to how the Investigators conceptualize the credibility of stories.

It is with these objectives in mind that I suggest Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati tell their stories.

⁵⁰ Barthes 1989.

⁵¹ David Shulman (2012) provides an excellent example of the possibilities of such non-universalistic approach to what is real. Realism, the boundaries of the real, and its literary representation also serve a site in conversations of the premodern Indian “historical consciousness” and “traditional” forms of historical writing. The contestation of these issues by proponents from different sides is complicated on the account that “history employs the narrative techniques of literature, and [...] many forms of literature strive after realism and truthfulness” (O’Hanlon 2014: 108). E.g., see Cox (2013) or Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam’s *Textures of Time* (2001) and their following exchange with Sheldon Pollock (Pollock 2007: 373ff; Narayana Rao et al. 2007: 417-8).

They set the scene in the form of a narrative by staging an inter-religious encounter between two sides in a debate—on the one side, a Jaina layman and his friend in the form of Vidyādhara, and on the other, a group of Brahmins. Considering its title—*Investigation of Dharma*—it would be reasonable to read this narrative as a doctrinal debate, with each side representing its own tradition’s *dharma*. This concept, often glossed as “religion,” “law,” or “duty,” is a complex one, and much has been written about its elusiveness.⁵² However, I do not aim to offering another account of its historical development or change of meanings across sources. Instead, I want to consider how the authors of this text developed their particular understanding of *dharma*, in terms that are not strictly doctrinal. While the characters of the *Investigation* are a Vidyādhara Jaina (in disguise) and a group of Brahmins, I take the real protagonists of this work to be, in a sense, ideal and less-than-ideal stories. On one level—the level of Jaina and Brahminical characters—the *Investigation* discusses Jaina values in contrastive parallel with the values of the Brahminical tradition. But on another level, where the *Investigation* discusses stories and the basis on which a story is to be assessed, the real protagonists are texts. As these authors put it, a truthful and credible story is one whose various sources, ideas, and components establish a coherent representation that corresponds to what people accept to be true in their real-life experiences. My reading throughout this study demonstrates that for our authors only a story that meets such standards can produce

⁵² De Jonckheere (2020a: 2), for instance, chose to translate *dharma* as “religion.” The broad range of meanings attributed to this concept has been widely discussed and problematized in scholarship. Notable contributions from recent years include Patrick Olivelle’s *Dharma Reader* (2016), Wendy Doniger’s *Against Dharma* (2018), and Emily T. Hudson’s *Disorienting Dharma* (2013). Olivelle (2016: 13–15) foregrounds the “extensive semantic range” and “untranslatability” of *dharma*, addressing its conceptual instability by placing it in dialogue with the notion of “law.” Doniger (2018) examines how the *Kāmasāstra* and *Arthasāstra*, by offering practical instructions for the pursuit of *kāma* and *artha*, challenge the normative primacy of *dharma* as a goal of human life, rendering it susceptible to critique and subversion. Hudson (2013) explores how the *Mahābhārata* constructs an aesthetic of suffering that draws readers into a confrontation with the convoluted—and at times futile—nature of *dharma*, thereby foregrounding the tension at the heart of its ethical vision. See Qvarnström (2004) for a survey on the development of this concept in Jaina thought into three spheres: ethics based on socio-religious context, ethics related to one’s intrinsic nature, and cosmic order that regulates the ontological plurality of things. For further reading on *dharma*, see Olivelle 2009; Hiltebeitel 2010, 2011.

knowledge that a sincere and vigilant listener should take as guidelines to be followed outside of the story world context. Ultimately, what is at stake is not just which stories are credible, but the ethics (or indeed *dharma*) of the very practice of listening and evaluation.

The *Investigation* therefore enacts, in narrative form, a kind of reasoning *about* as well as *through* narrative. In this context, it would be useful to apply the distinction that the philosophy of literature scholar Sarah E. Worth establishes between “narrative reasoning” and “discursive reasoning.” While discursive reasoning happens by means of arguments that “convince one of their conclusions and possibly their truth,” narrative reasoning uses a narrative to “convince one of its lifelikeness and believability.”⁵³ As she puts it, narrative reasoning demonstrates that a matter could potentially be a certain way, but it does not prove it definitively. From that point on, individuals should make their own judgments about it. Worth builds on Nussbaum’s argument about the novel’s ability to develop its readers’ moral judgments. But she extends this idea by claiming that narratives develop in their audiences (and their authors) the “ability to retrieve information readily and to find coherence where it does not obviously exist,” since “[t]he inferencing mechanisms that are used to make sense of the everyday world are the same ones utilized during the comprehension of narratives.”⁵⁴ Put differently, she suggests that narratives develop not only one’s moral sensitivity, but one’s ability to reason and adjudicate more generally.

Worth’s observations suggest that the underlying inferential mechanisms of the story world and the real world are largely the same. Following these observations, I propose that the narrative style that these *Investigation* authors employ develops the readers’ ability to reason. However, it does so negatively, by presenting stories that fail to meet the standards of credibility that should apply across the board. These are stories that invite the reader to reflect on why, when critically

⁵³ Worth 2008: 49.

⁵⁴ Worth 2008: 54-5.

examined, they fail to make sense. Through such negative examples, the text trains its audience to recognize the parameters of credibility and to make their own judgments about it. Amitagati clearly says so himself in the concluding verses of his work:

Wake up, wise people, and grasp what I said! Now you will know by yourselves how to distinguish precisely between what is good and what is not. People can merely *know* a flavor when it is described, even hundreds of times. But they do not experience it.⁵⁵

The image here expands on an earlier metaphor, where Amitagati likens his harsh words to a bitter medicine.⁵⁶ In order for the medicine to be effective, one cannot simply read about it. Rather, one must experience (*anu/bhū*) it directly through consumption. Likewise, rather than issuing prescriptive lists of dos and don'ts, the *Investigation* engages readers by immersing them in scenarios that require particular forms of judgment. The knowledge such scenarios produce is not abstract or rule-based but situational—grasped through the act of judgment itself. This verse suggests a distinctive kind of knowledge, one that is not conveyed through formal instruction but acquired through the lived process of discernment. It is the same kind of precise knowledge that we would expect to find in the more formal and explicit teaching of, for instance, a *śāstra*: both aim to establish reliable grounds for moral and epistemic judgment, but they do so through different modes of delivery. In the *Investigation*, the narrative form—with its repetitive structure, use of frame narratives to link episodes, and demonstration through contrasting negative examples—trains the audience in certain epistemological virtues by which truth and credibility are evaluated. But those cannot be truly tested until the reader is asked to exercise them in real life. The *Investigation* is not, to borrow Tillo Detige's words from another context, *just* a story; it is an

⁵⁵ *vibudhya grhṇītha budhā mamoditaṃ śubhāśubhaṃ jñāsyatha niścitaṃ svayam | nivedyamānaṃ śataśo 'pi jānate sphuṭaṃ rasaṃ nānubhavanti taṃ janāḥ || AmDhP 21.15 ||*

⁵⁶ *vinīṣṭhuraṃ vākyam idaṃ mamoditaṃ sukhaṃ paraṃ dāsyati nūnam agrataḥ | niṣevyamānaṃ kaṭukaṃ kim auśadhaṃ sukhaṃ vipāke na dadāti kāṅkṣitaṃ || AmDhP 21.14 ||*

“epistemic technology” that functions as an “idiosyncratic mode of learning, and of learning how to learn, how to think about, and how to experience the world.”⁵⁷ The *Investigation* cultivates in its readers the ability to recognize for themselves a story’s credibility through a series of examples rather than a set of rules. Once the readers are trained, they are ready to adjudicate for themselves the truth and credibility of the different stories that they encounter and to shape their lives accordingly.

While this study’s examination of two versions of a Jaina narrative from a thousand years ago is modest in scope, its contributions extend beyond the relatively narrow field of Jaina studies. To begin, while prior scholarship on South Asian literature has explored how texts construct their own authority, little attention has been paid to how they actively shape their readers’ ability to evaluate competing claims to truth.⁵⁸ My reading, which demonstrates how a literary work advances a sophisticated model of reasoning about narrative credibility, is relevant to discussions on textual authority. In this way, it also contributes to scholarship on premodern South Asian knowledge systems, which is often limited to formal śāstric writing. Intellectual traditions from Jaina epistemology to Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics developed comprehensive frameworks for adjudicating valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Yet for all their technical sophistication, many thinkers engaged in *pramāṇa* debates were still willing to affirm, in some sense, the validity of traditional religious narratives. The *Investigation* sheds light on this problematic. Though not written as *śāstra*, it demonstrates how śāstric concerns—what counts as credible testimony, and how we distinguish truth from error—can also be explored through storytelling. By examining how the *Investigation* cultivates an ethics of reading, I show that these texts do more than simply critique

⁵⁷ Detige 2019: 96.

⁵⁸ Sheldon Pollock’s work is foundational for such discussions on textual authority in South Asia (Pollock 1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990).

rival traditions. Rather, they engage in a larger literary project that seeks to shape the very conditions of defining and evaluating truth. Finally, this study contributes to the broader understanding of South Asian literary traditions by reassessing the role of Jaina narrative literature within the intellectual landscape of premodern South Asia. Rather than reading these texts as just stories, I highlight their literary and rhetorical strategies, revealing how they construct a theory of reading and how they define and challenge competing notions of textual authority. By situating the *Investigation* within this broader context, this study offers a new framework for understanding how premodern authors used literature to structure knowledge and challenge established beliefs.

Chapter outline: from stories' credibility to models of authority

Each chapter of this study emphasizes a different aspect of the *Investigation*'s method for developing its arguments. Chapter One establishes how the *Investigation* defines the criteria for narrative credibility. Chapter Two underscores the dangers of adhering to false narratives and differentiates between valid and invalid sources of knowledge, underpinning the real-life implications of stories. Chapter Three explores the ethical and epistemic virtues needed for critically engaging with competing stories. Chapter Four situates the framework developed in the previous chapters within broader Jaina literary practices, arguing that Jaina authors strategically employ their temporal "lateness" to critique earlier narratives and redefine textual authority as rooted in contextual human temporality rather than timelessness. Taken together, these chapters develop the *Investigation*'s theory of credibility and authority through stories. A credible story is not only coherent and grounded in experience but also functions as a warranted authority in producing knowledge that promotes liberation. A judicious listener must be capable of critical evaluation, recognizing both the credibility and the implications of the stories they encounter.

Engaging with valid knowledge, in turn, is not a passive act. Rather, it requires shaping one's views and life in accordance with it. Finally, the model of authority that emerges here calls for active reevaluation rather than passive acceptance of inherited or self-claimed authority.

This study begins by establishing the *Investigation*'s criteria for making a story credible. The analysis in Chapter One ("What Makes a Good Story?") demonstrates that, according to our Investigators, credible stories must be both coherent—free of contradictions within and across texts—and correspond to what people accept as true based on their own experience of the world. To establish the conceptual category of coherence, I borrow from Phyllis Granoff's hypothesis about a distinctive characteristic among Jaina philosophers who required textual consistency, not only within a single text but across an entire corpus of orthodox literature.⁵⁹ The *Investigation*'s treatment of Viṣṇu's representations in his various *avatāras* provides an opportunity for exploring this criterion: the protagonist Manovega challenges the Brahmins about the possibility that the same figure, Viṣṇu, is characterized in different stories in ways that frequently contradict one another (*pūrvāpara-virodha*). Further, I argue that in the *Investigation*, coherence alone is not sufficient for a story's credibility. A second criterion, correspondence with real-world experience, is equally crucial. The protagonist repeatedly examines the relationship between scenarios depicted in stories and their plausibility as real-life events. I demonstrate how, to advance this criterion, the *Investigation* employs the story-within-story technique, shifting between narrative levels to establish a division between two types of representations within their narrative: on the one hand, realistic events that could happen in real life, and on the other hand, fictitious scenarios that belong only to the world of stories. This real-life dimension of stories leads us to the next chapter, which examines not only their consequences within the story world but also their tangible impact on the

⁵⁹ Granoff 2020.

Investigation's readers in the experiential world in which they live and act.

Building on these criteria for credibility, Chapter Two ("What Makes the Truth?") explores what is at stake when a story is accepted as credible. The *Investigation*, I argue, treats stories not merely as vehicles for entertainment but as claims to knowledge. Therefore, adhering to false narratives carries significant epistemic and moral consequences, with potentially dangerous results. To illustrate how these authors conceptualize the distinction between valid and invalid sources of knowledge, I analyze their rhetorical treatment of certain sources as *purāṇas*, while others are framed as *śāstras*. The *Investigation* often discredits Brahminical stories as mere *purāṇas* due to their lack of coherence and correspondence with lived experience, while framing credible sources of reliable knowledge as *śāstra*.

A key aspect of this distinction is the *Investigation*'s engagement with the concept of the "worldly" (*laukika*), which it associates with incoherent stories such as the *purāṇas*. I maintain that this concept is employed to challenge the authority of "ancient" (*purāṇa*) texts, as the Investigators present such texts as merely recounting worldly stories whose legitimacy stems from their popularity and widespread acceptance rather than from credibility and truth. In this way, the *Investigation* distinguishes between reliable authority and popular acceptance. For these authors, authority is based on a story's ability to provide a trustworthy foundation for moral and intellectual judgment. The Investigators are concerned with specific kinds of stories, those that have real-life effects on their audience, actively shaping their worldviews and influencing their decisions and ethical commitments. I argue that while the *Investigation* trains its audience to adjudicate credibility through literary representations, this training extends beyond the realm of stories. Namely, the skill it cultivates is portable. By encouraging a critical approach to narrative credibility, the text teaches readers to apply this discernment to broader domains, from religious

authority to ethical conduct. Ultimately, this capacity forms part of what it means to be a good reader, a good judge, and a good Jaina. This chapter demonstrates how the *Investigation* integrates its critique of false narratives into a broader argument about the dangers of accepting popular but unreliable accounts as authoritative truth.

Chapter Three (“What Makes a Good Listener?”) builds on this analysis of the nature of stories and the knowledge they convey, by shifting focus from stories themselves to their audiences and the capacities required to discern narrative credibility. The *Investigation* argues that recognizing a credible story requires a particular set of epistemic and ethical virtues. To illustrate how these authors perceive a good listener, I analyze their conceptualization of “judiciousness” (*viveka*, *vicāra*) as an essential virtue for properly adjudicating between competing accounts. The *Investigation* advances this idea negatively through stories of injudicious fools who fail to exercise proper judgment. These stories take place early in the narrative, serving as a protocol for proper judgment of the credibility of the stories that follow. The fools serve as negative exemplars, illustrating the dangers of injudiciousness and the harmful consequences of epistemic failure.

For the *Investigation*, judicious listening is both an epistemic and ethical practice: accepting a story as a source of reliable knowledge necessarily entails shaping one’s life in accordance with it. I argue that the text contrasts two competing conceptions of judiciousness. The Brahmins in the story assert their judiciousness through claims of systematic learning and formal erudition, presenting scholarly training as sufficient for assessing truth. The *Investigation* challenges their view by juxtaposing it with Manovega’s vision, which frames true judiciousness as requiring openness to engaging with others’ positions and critically comparing alternatives, grounded in neutrality (*mādhyaṣṭhya*) and freedom from partiality (*pakṣapāta*). In contrast to the Brahmins’ conception of judiciousness as rooted in formal erudition, these virtues cannot be formally taught.

Instead, becoming judicious in this sense is an inductive process that requires repeated engagement with stories that fail to meet the *Investigation*'s standards of credibility. Through such repetition, the *Investigation* gradually trains its readers to recognize for themselves where credibility is lacking and to be judicious about the stories they encounter. Ultimately, the willingness to revise one's views in light of stronger evidence is an essential transformative aspect of true judiciousness.

As an analytical framework, this chapter draws on Walter R. Fisher's "narrative paradigm," a model that offers a lens for understanding how people reason through non-argumentative forms of communication—namely, through stories.⁶⁰ Further, I place the *Investigation* in conversation with a set of Jaina thinkers—Haribhadra (eighth cent.), Guṇaratna (fourteenth cent.), and Yaśovijaya (seventeenth cent.)—to explore their shared ecology of argument. I argue that these thinkers, like the Investigators, approach inquiry by foregrounding comparison, emphasizing the need to weigh alternative positions and remain attentive to competing truth claims. In doing so, they develop a conceptual practice grounded in judicious evaluation rather than doctrinal authority. I also discuss Dharmasāgara (sixteenth cent.)—with whom Yaśovijaya famously disagreed—as a counter-example that underscores the extent to which these questions animated even those who held opposing views. By doing so, this chapter demonstrates that the *Investigation*'s treatment of critical evaluation extends beyond a localized critique of Brahminical authority. Instead, it forms part of a broader Jaina argument about the ethical and epistemic conditions necessary for meaningful inquiry.

Finally, Chapter Four ("What Makes Sense?") argues that the *Investigation* participates in a broader Jaina effort to challenge prevalent models of textual authority by situating it within a wider intellectual and literary context. At the heart of this chapter is a comparative analysis of the

⁶⁰ Fisher 1987.

fundamental difference in how Jaina and Brahminical thinkers conceptualize authority, deriving from their differing views on temporality as it reflects in the *purāṇas* of their respective traditions. This chapter focuses on several Jaina authors who faced an unusual challenge: they arrived too late. Alongside Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, authors who rewrote the stories of Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas in their Jaina *purāṇas* lived in a time when the stories of their rivals such as Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* or Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* were already widely circulated and commonly accepted. The challenge for these authors stemmed from the fact that the dominant Sanskrit intellectual culture—shaped by Mīmāṃsā views on the eternality of the Veda—follows what I call an eternalist model of authority. This model grounds claims for legitimacy in timelessness and transcendence, prioritizing what already exists over novelty and change. The ahistorical nature of such claims does not merely assert one's authority. It also restricts others' ability to re-evaluate or critically engage with those who claim authority on similar grounds, as such engagements would require a backward-looking approach—one that ultimately undermines their own claims of authority within this eternalist model.

Acknowledging their late temporal position, I argue, these Jaina thinkers took a different approach. They defined an alternative model of authority—one that does not rely on existence outside of history but instead situates authority within a contextual human temporality. This chapter traces this contextualist model of authority across a range of Jaina texts, including Vimalasūri's *Paṭmacariya*, Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa*, Śubhacandra's and Vādicandra's respective *Pāṇḍavapurāṇas*, Haribhadra's *Dhuttakkhāṇa*, and, of course, the works of our Investigators. These authors employ what I call a “rationale of posteriority,” a strategy that reclaims lateness as a critical vantage point rather than a disadvantage. This rationale does not merely challenge Brahminical stories but, more fundamentally, it reframes how authority is established altogether,

shifting away from adherence to claims of eternal truth toward the critical evaluation of such claims.

After offering my analysis throughout these chapters, the conclusion brings the study full circle by returning to the four guiding questions posed as a philological starting point. Drawing on the insights developed throughout this dissertation, I reengage these initial questions by reevaluating the kind of investigation these texts develop, the role of their literary mode in engaging readers, the parameters of the *dharma* they approach, and their Jaina distinctiveness. I argue that for these texts, investigation and *dharma* are not pre-given categories, but cultivated dispositions that emerge through the literary process of discernment and come to characterize the ideal Jaina reader.

In this way, this study develops as the chapters shift between various loci of inquiry. Beginning with stories and the *Investigation*'s criteria for their credibility, it explores the kind of knowledge that the *Investigation* accepts, before focusing on the virtues of a judicious reader of these stories. Finally, by looking broadly at the foundations on which authority is claimed, I demonstrate that the *Investigation* not only critiques stories but also actively constructs an alternative model of reading and engaging with claims of authority.

Chapter One:

What Makes a Good Story?

Coherence and Correspondence with the World

Based on truth.. lies..
And what actually happened
- *Lords of Chaos* (2018 film)

Tigers exist, lifeboats exist, oceans exist. Because the three have never come together in your narrow, limited experience, you refuse to believe that they might.
- Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Introduction

Two strangers enter a city. Its residents, curious, inquire about their home and identity. The strangers, afraid of the reaction of the locals, share their concerns at length. After the residents reassure them, the strangers narrate the bizarre series of events that led them to the city. Their account is like nothing that their audience has experienced before, so the locals do not believe them and accuse them of speaking nonsense. How are we to interpret this scenario?

To start, its context is significant. This story is embedded in the larger narrative frame of the *Investigation of Dharma*, where it occurs several times. Its repetitive structure provides one clue as to its interpretation. In the context of the *Investigation*, the reader knows that the strangers' stories are fictitious. The repetition of this scenario reminds the reader that people make things up. It trains the listeners to be vigilant in assessing whether a story contains contradictions (Aph. *puvvāvara-viroha*, *aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*; Skt. *pūrvāpara-virodha*, *anyonya-virodha*) and whether it may be considered credible and true.

The idea of coherence across literary corpora was recently brought up by Phyllis Granoff.

She has argued that the requirement of inter-textual coherence is a distinctive feature of some Jaina philosophers, who “regarded the entire corpus of orthodox literature as a single entity that needed to exhibit consistency.”¹ These philosophers required that a range of ideas presented in different texts—regardless of their genre, authors’ identity, or time and place of production—be in harmony with each other and form a coherent whole. This hypothesis provides a framework for exploring the *Investigation*, since this narrative demonstrates many parallels for such a requirement. But the *Investigation* does not only speak about coherence across narratives. Rather, and unlike the philosophical texts that Granoff has discussed, they are themselves narrative in form. In this work, the importance of this harmony is emphasized in a narrative way, rather than in systematic argumentation. It is about showing, rather than telling.

The *Investigation* operates on a similar set of preconceptions regarding harmony and coherence. For instance, by placing various Brahminical stories and tropes of Viṣṇu side by side, Manovega shows that such Brahminical representations are mutually contradictory. The germ of Granoff’s hypothesis is traced in the point the Vidyādhara makes: if such stories about Viṣṇu are to be taken seriously as coexisting in a shared cultural world that requires harmony and coherence throughout its various elements, then these stories must not contradict each other. In case the accumulation of such stories results in internal incoherence (*pūrvāpara-virodha*), then at least some of them cannot be accepted as credible. Without having a strong criterion to distinguish which these are, we are led to assume that all of them are invalid, until or unless proven otherwise.

My following analysis of Hariṣeṇa’s Apabhramsha and Amitagati’s Sanskrit versions of the *Investigation* shows that these texts’ standard of credibility involves both an intra- and an inter-textual coherence that exceeds the boundaries of any single text. The *Investigation* treats texts and

¹ Granoff 2020: 173.

the ideas they promote as partaking in a shared cultural world, one that requires harmony across its different components. In other words, ideas promoted in one text should be compatible with the ideas of other texts, as well as with what people accept as true in their own life. If such ideas contradict each other or do not comply to one's real-life experience, there must be something wrong with them and we cannot accept them as credible.

In what follows, I demonstrate how the earliest *Investigations* employ their narrative framework in order to build a theory of the credibility and truth of stories. In the first section, I propose the two parameters for the credibility of a story: its coherence and correspondence with real-life experience.² This coherence, I clarify, is not only within the boundaries of the single story, but should be maintained throughout a wider body of texts. Then, in the other three sections, I analyze a variety of episodes told by Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, to demonstrate how this work introduces and promotes these parameters for credibility.

Degrees of coherence across texts

Let us look into Granoff's hypothesis about Jaina philosophers' requirement of inter-textual coherence across an entire textual corpus, in order to better understand its advantages in terms of discussing the *Investigation*. These philosophers, she argues, "viewed the entire corpus of Jain writings across genre boundaries and across time as a whole" and required this corpus to be harmonious within itself.³ Committed to their own standards, they also assessed the texts of others in a similar way. Granoff shows that, in contrast to the mainstream Brahminical and Buddhist scholars who exclude non-philosophical texts from their arguments, Jaina thinkers who engage

² My conceptualization of these parameters draws significantly on Walter R. Fisher's "narrative paradigm," which I engage more fully in Chapter Three, pp. 120ff.

³ Granoff 2020: 169.

with non-Jaina traditions include in their discussion a much wider variety of texts. For instance, such Jaina scholars assert that if one accepts the authority of purāṇic stories, then one's philosophical position must stand in line with such stories. This is the case with Vidyānandi, a Digāmbara Jaina philosopher who alludes precisely to the purāṇic idea of the *avatāras*, the earthly embodiment of a god, as part of his refutation of Nyāya's inference about the existence of a creator God. Similarly, the Śvetāmbara scholar Hemacandra employs philosophical arguments about causality to refute a purāṇic verse that argues that Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are merely parts of a single God. Amṛtacandra goes even further as he employs practical ideas of tantric rituals and meditation in order to make a philosophical claim about the nature of the soul, that it is non-material and thus can never be the agent of any modification in the physical world.⁴ These examples indicate a tendency of Jaina scholars "to see the various branches of Indian culture more holistically."⁵ The holistic Jaina tendency that Granoff hypothesizes opened up for these thinkers a path to a more inclusive discourse in which non-philosophical genres (*purāṇas*, *tantras*, *dharmaśāstras*, etc.) could be a part of, serve as evidence for, and be assessed side by side with philosophical texts. Within this larger discursive field, narrative literature plays an important role.⁶ But for that very reason, it demands criteria of evaluation that had previously not been articulated.

Granoff's argument focuses on Jaina philosophers who were distinctive insofar as they required their opponents' philosophical statements to be compatible with their statements in other genres. My analysis of the *Investigation* corroborates and expands this argument. It exemplifies how such coherence was also pursued within texts that are not primarily philosophical in nature. Granoff's discussion already contains a germ of the possibility that this holistic tendency allowed

⁴ For the specific arguments of Vidyānandi and Hemacandra (as well as the latter's commentator Malliṣeṇa), see Granoff 2020: 170-3. For Amṛtacandra's, see pp. 180-3.

⁵ Granoff 2020: 168.

⁶ Seema K. Chauhan's work on Jaina *purāṇas* shows this very clearly (2021, 2023).

Jaina thinkers to discuss different types of knowledge in ways that go beyond the medium of philosophical writing. Such a possibility comes to mind in her discussion of Hemacandra's *Mahādevastotra*, a work she refers to as a “philosophical hymn,” as well as of Amṛtacandra's commentary on Kundakunda's *Samayasāra*, which the commentator stages and refers to as a drama (*nāṭaka*).⁷ However, both works are still very philosophical in their form and content. If we are to take seriously the idea that these Jaina thinkers maintained an intellectual understanding that rejects “disciplinary boundaries and the compartmentalization of learning” in favor of a holistic unity of knowledge—one that expects coherence across poetry, philosophy, practice, and doctrine—then there is no reason to limit our examination of these cross-genre and cross-text discussions only to works that were composed in a philosophical style.⁸

Once narrative genres enter the realm of rational inquiry, one major question that emerges is: to what degree and across what texts should coherence be expected? When hearing a story, spectators have certain expectations. One expectation is for the story to be coherent within itself. If a character has died, we expect not to encounter it again. Surely enough, this expectation has certain limitations. In case the story does not follow a standard linear chronology, or should a zombie apocalypse occur, a dead character might reappear. But under regular circumstances, such a reappearance would make little sense. Nevertheless, when we speak about distinct texts, things may be more flexible. Think about the Joker in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie. Although this brilliantly portrayed character did not survive, it suddenly reemerged on the screen, alive and well, two decades later in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*. The justification for the Joker's reappearance was not only the fact that this is a separate film, but also that Nolan's trilogy is a reboot that takes place in a coherent world of its own, independent of any of the previous Batman

⁷ Granoff 2020: 172, 177.

⁸ Granoff 2020: 184.

movies. That is, different textual corpora may pose different degrees of coherence—ranging from a single text to an inter-textual coherence across a vast body of distinct texts—and spectators’ expectations may be manipulated accordingly.⁹

But what happens when the degree of coherence posed by a certain body of texts does not satisfy the expectations of a group of spectators? The Investigators, who expect coherence both within and between stories in a given tradition, took as their project the identification of those texts that do not satisfy their expectations. A pair of stanzas from Hariṣeṇa’s *Apabhramsha Investigation* is instructive here:

Some say: “After taking ten births, he rejoices.”

Some say: “He is free of things such as birth.”

Even after understanding this mutual contradiction, they do not take it seriously. Those injudicious people believe that Viṣṇu has both characteristics, although he is only one.¹⁰

Hariṣeṇa identifies a fallacy of mutual contradiction (*aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*): on the one hand, some of Viṣṇu’s followers claim that he had ten different births, but on the other, some of his followers say that he is free from birth. The author gestures here towards Viṣṇu’s epithet as one who is “free from birth and death.” As evidence, he even quotes a Sanskrit verse that uses this epithet, preceded by a verse that enumerates Viṣṇu’s ten *avatāras*, both of which are taken from earlier Brahminical sources:

His ten [*avatāras*] are the fish, tortoise, boar, lion-man, dwarf, Rāma, [Paraśu]rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Kalkī.

While reflecting on Viṣṇu—who is beyond the perishable and imperishable, who had abandoned birth and death, free of fear, whose purposes have been fulfilled—one does not perish.¹¹

⁹ The fictional worlds of the Marvel Universe or DC Universe, where the different comics superheroes and villains coexist, are great examples for such coherent worlds that expand over multiple texts.

¹⁰ *ke vi bhaṇahiṃ ramāi daha-jamma levi | jammāi vivajjiu bhaṇahiṃ ke vi || iha aṇṇoṇṇa-virohu jāṇanta vi avagaṇṇahiṃ | ekku vi uhaya-sarūu gaya-viveya hari maṇṇahiṃ || HaDhP 4.1.10-ghattā ||*

¹¹ *matsyaḥ kūrmo varāhaś ca nāraśiṃho 'tha vāmanaḥ | rāmo rāmaś ca kṛṣṇaś ca buddhaḥ kalkī ca te daśa ||*

Given that the quoted statements refer to a single object, that is Viṣṇu, in order for both to be valid, they must be compatible with each other. Since a single individual cannot both be born ten times *and* be free from birth, these statements and the stories that convey them are contradictory. As Hariṣeṇa frames things, the literary world that Viṣṇu inhabits must be coherent across textual boundaries. If one text makes a certain claim about Viṣṇu, then a second text should not offer a contradictory claim.

There is thus the first question about narrative coherence across texts: the same characters, even when appearing in different stories, should not exhibit contradictory traits unless a compelling reason is given for the discontinuity. The point about such contradiction is that both claims cannot *simultaneously* be true, even if one of them is. Furthermore, for a story to be considered credible, there is also a second question, concerning the “fit” between a narrative and the real world. Literary worlds are not the final object of inquiry in the *Investigation*. These authors are not really interested in a certain diegetic world, but in the world of our intersubjective experience. Their texts are about understanding the world and the normative ways of acting in it. As such, while the *Investigation* identifies incoherencies in stories, the objectives of its authors are not much different from those of scholars such as Haribhadra who, when introducing the Jaina doctrine in his doxographic work *Compendium of the Six Doctrines* (*Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*), asserts: “Thus the summary of the Jaina doctrine—free of faults and in which there is nowhere an internal incoherence (*pūrvāpara-*

*kṣarākṣara-vinirmuktaṃ janma-mṛtyu-vivarjitaṃ | abhayaṃ satya-saṅkalpaṃ viṣṇuṃ dhyāyan na sīdati || HaDhP 4.2.1-2 || buddhaḥ conj.] budhāḥ ; daśa conj.] daśāḥ ; kṣarākṣara-vinirmuktaṃ conj.] akṣarākṣara-nirmuktaṃ ; abhayaṃ MSS. 2, 3] avyayaṃ ; viṣṇuṃ dhyāyan na conj.] viṣṇu-dhyāyān. Variations of these verses also appear in Amitagati’s work (10.58-9). Vṛttavilāsa quotes the previous Sanskrit verse verbatim (2.68), but rephrases the latter one into Kannada (2.67.vacana). These authors do not indicate the sources from which they take these verses. A verse almost identical to the first one, which enumerates Viṣṇu’s *avatāras*, appears in a variety of Brahminical sources, e.g., the *Matsya-purāṇa* 285.6-7 and the *Varāha-purāṇa* 4.2 (Joshi 1967: 400-1). With regard to the second verse, I have so far traced it only in the *Viṣṇudharma-purāṇa* 71.6.*

vighāta)—has been explained.”¹² Whether it is Haribhadra, the Investigators, or the philosophers that Granoff discusses, for all of these Jaina scholars coherence is a significant issue. For them, only a coherent account can even be considered as *potentially* true and worthy of patterning one’s life on. This is why the stakes for these Investigators are so high.

The *Investigation* trains its readers on two levels. First, it asks them to evaluate the coherence of stories within their diegetic world, the world in which these stories take place. The authors of the *Investigation* then ask their audience to assess the correspondence between these stories and their real-life experiences. In the rest of this chapter, I analyze how precisely these authors construct their arguments about stories’ coherence and correspondence with the real world, by repeatedly confronting their audiences with situations that fail to meet these standards.

Would a god act like a lecher? The coherence of stories

How does the *Investigation* show that coherence across texts is a prerequisite for establishing the credibility of those texts? Let us unpack this issue with an episode in which the Vidyādhara protagonist Manovega argues that Brahminical depictions of Viṣṇu are incoherent. It is the same episode from which Hariṣeṇa’s aforementioned stanzas about Viṣṇu are taken. Here are the events that precede these stanzas: Before the two Vidyādharas first enter the city, they take the form of simple carriers of grass and wood, who are uncommonly adorned with valuable jewelry and fancy clothing. Their arrival causes somewhat of a fuss, as the local Brahmins cannot make sense of their peculiar appearance. The Vidyādharas look like rich men or even divine beings. But their avowed occupation does not match this appearance. The townsmen think that there must be something

¹² *jaina-darśana-saṅkṣepa ity eṣa kathito ’naghaḥ | pūrvāpara-vighātas tu yatra kvāpi na vidyate* || Haribhadra’s *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* 58 || As it is brought in the edition edited by Satchidananda Murthy (1986). In Mahendra Kumar Jain’s edition of the text with Guṇaratna’s commentary (1997) the third *pada* is cited differently as *pūrvāpara-parāghāto*.

wrong with these two: why would they continue to work hard in a lowly occupation rather than simply selling their jewels and living off the profits?

In response, Manovega reprimands the townspeople: “*Purāṇas* like the *Mahābhārata* and others speak about such irregularities (*avidhi*) by the thousands. But you, sirs, do not recognize it.”¹³ In his view, the locals are blind to the fact that their own stories speak exactly about such things that they just claimed to have never encountered before.¹⁴ By pointing out such instances, Manovega builds an argument against the coherence of Brahminical depictions of Viṣṇu. This is how Hariṣeṇa lays out this exchange between Manovega and the Brahmins:

[Manovega said:] “Lakṣmī on his chest, a crown of jewels adorns his head, he subdues the poverty of the people, gods bow at his feet.—Is Viṣṇu, who is omniscient and suffused in everyone, seen in the *purāṇas*, or not?” Then a Brahmin, raising his hands above his head, said: “Yes, it is true!” Manovega heard and replied: “If Viṣṇu is described in such a way, then how could he have been a cowherd in Nanda’s cowshed, with no marks of a lord? How could he have been a messenger, sent by Pāṇḍu’s son when he conveyed his esteemed wish, and went to Duryodhana for the benefit of his own master? Why did he—lord of gods and enemy of demons, whose body is all-pervading—trick Bali into granting him the earth?”¹⁵

The arguments in this segment are based on conventional representations of Viṣṇu. Hariṣeṇa does not distort nor does he exaggerate them. The point is that the protagonist tells purāṇic stories in a

¹³ *sa prāha bhāratādyeṣu purāṇeṣu sahasraśaḥ | śrūyante na prapadyante bhavanto ‘vidhayaḥ param || AmDhP 4.3 || ‘vidhayaḥ conj.] vidhiyaḥ*

¹⁴ One might debate whether any of these things are really strange and irregular. The contradictions pointed out here are based on social codes with certain presuppositions about labor, wealth, and appearance that the authors of the *Investigation* accept, but others might not. Amitagati briefly touches upon this point by referring to such contradictions as *avidhi*, suggesting that they negate certain codes or rules of behavior (*vidhi*).

¹⁵ *lacchi-vacchu maṇi-mauḍaṅkiya-siru | jaṇa-dalidda-damaṇu paya-ṇaya-suru || hari savvaṇhu savva-jaṇa-saṁthiu | atthi ahava ṇa purāṇahi diṭṭhaū || tā sira-sihara-caḍāviya-hatthem | bhaṇiu dieṇa atthi paramatthem || ṇisuneviṇu maṇaveem bhaṇiu jā erisu hari vuttaū | to nanda-gotṭhi govālu huu kiṁ pahu-guṇahi viuttaū || paṁḍu-suem pahiu ṇiya-sāmi-hiu dūu hūu | dujjohaṇa-pāsem kaya-mahiyāsem kīsa gaū || vāvaṇa-rūveṇaṁ kaya-kavaḍeṇaṁ vali vasuha | patthiu sura-pahuṇā kiṁ daṇu-riṇṇā diṇṇa-suha || HaDhP 3.20.8-21.2 || vacchu MSS. 2, 3] vatthu ; jaṇa conj.] jaṇu ; jaṇa MSS. 3, 4] juya ; dūu MSS. 2, 3] dūu ; pāsem MSS. 3, 4] pāsaṁ ; yāsem MS. 4] pāsaṁ ; vāvaṇarūveṇaṁ MS. 4] ṇaṁ vāmaṇarūveṇaṁ ; vasuha conj.] vasu haṁ ; sura MSS. 2, 3, 4] sara ; diṇṇasuha MS. 2] diṇṇasuhaṁ.*

way that would be accepted by the people who adhere to them. It is as if the authors of the *Investigation* believe that the faults of such *purāṇas* are almost self-explanatory, and that once these depictions are presented side by side and looked into carefully, one cannot disregard their incoherence. But what exactly is incoherent here? How does mentioning Viṣṇu in relation to Lakṣmī and a jeweled crown, or in relation to Duryodhana or Bali, serve the author in establishing his argument?

Hariṣeṇa's argument here is established around two main parts. First, Manovega mentions one set of purāṇic depictions of Viṣṇu (carrying Lakṣmī, wearing a crown, etc.) and confirms with the Brahmins that such representations actually occur in their texts. Second, he questions the compatibility of this first set with another set of Viṣṇu's depictions (cowherd, messenger, etc.). To highlight what exactly Hariṣeṇa perceives as incoherent in this passage, I suggest reading it along with Amitagati's narration of the same episode. An analysis of the parallel Sanskrit retelling, which Amitagati produces in a slightly more systematic manner, clarifies the nature of this argument for both authors and assists in understanding the idea of stories' coherence.

Like the Apabhramsha version, Amitagati also opens the Sanskrit illustration of Manovega's arguments by providing descriptions of Viṣṇu that are not considered controversial among the Brahmins. Initially, Manovega lists laudatory depictions that are compatible with each other. He then confirms with the Brahmins that they indeed accept these descriptions:

In this world, the Lotus-Eyed god Viṣṇu is renowned by men as the supreme cause of creation, persistence, and destruction of the world, from whose grace people obtain the eternal state. Like the sky, he is always all-pervading, everlasting, bright, and imperishable. His hands—pillars to support the abode of the triple-world, adorned with bow, conch-shell, mace, and discus—are a forest fire against enemies. By him the wicked demons who harm people are quickly conquered, like the mass of darkness is conquered by the sun. On his body the respectable Śrī, his beloved, who gives joy to the world and destroys suffering, is laid, as the moonlight lays

in the moon. On his body the *kaustubha* jewel shines forth with pure radiance, as if a lamp that was placed by Lakṣmī in her beautiful home.—
Brahmins! Is it, or is it not, the conception that you have of Viṣṇu, who is supreme among all gods, the god in Vaiṣṇava, the highest soul?¹⁶

As in Hariṣeṇa's narration, these descriptions also correspond to widely accepted representations of Viṣṇu as they appear in a variety of purāṇic depictions. The Brahmins find nothing objectionable in them. Viṣṇu is associated with epithets such as The Lotus-Eyed and his iconography is linked with the various objects mentioned here. And indeed, the Brahmin interlocutors quickly validate Manovega's words, saying that no sensible person would deny that Viṣṇu exists as described.

Manovega then provides another series of illustrations. These illustrations too pose no issue on their own. Yet when considered alongside the previous ones, they prove incompatible:

Learned Brahmins! If Viṣṇu is endowed with such qualities, then is it the case that he stayed in Nanda's cow-house, in the form of a cowherd, protecting the cows and performing his playful dance everywhere together with the cowherds, carrying peacocks' feathers, his hair bound with a garland of *Kuṭaja* flowers? Did he quickly approach Duryodhana as a messenger, after Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna ordered him to do so as if he were a foot-soldier? Did he become Arjuna's charioteer and drive his chariot into a battlefield full of elephants, horses, carriages, and foot-soldiers? Did he take the form of a dwarf and request the earth from the evil-speaking Bali with piteous words, like a beggar? Did he—supporter of the entire world, omniscient, all-pervading, eternal—burn from all sides by the fire of separation from Sītā, like a lecher? Is it the case that such actions are appropriate for this Mahātmā, a venerable god whom only *yogīs* can reach, the teacher of the worlds?¹⁷

¹⁶ *ihāsti puṇḍarīkākṣo devo bhuvana-viśrutaḥ | sṛṣṭi-sthiti-vināśānām jagataḥ kāraṇam param ||*
yasya prasādato lokā labhante padam avyayam | vyomeva vyāpako nityo nirmalo yo 'kṣayaḥ sadā ||
dhanuḥ-śaṅkha-gadā-cakra-bhūṣitā yasya pāṇayaḥ | triloka-sadanādhāra-stambhāḥ śatru-davānalāḥ ||
dānavā yena hanyante lokopadrava-kāriṇaḥ | duṣṭā divā-kareṇeva tarasā timirotkarāḥ ||
lokānanda-karī pūjyā śrīḥ sthitā yasya vīgrahaḥ | tāpa-vicchedikā hr̥dyā jyotsneva hima-rociṣaḥ ||
kaustubho bhāsate yasya śarīre viśada-prabhāḥ | lakṣmyeva sthāpito dīpo mandire sundare nīḥ ||
kiṃ dvijā bhavatām tatra pratītiḥ vidyate na vā | sarva-devādhīke deve vaiṣṇave paramātmāni || AmDhP 10.11-7 ||

¹⁷ *bhāṭṭā yadīdṛśo viṣṇus tadā kiṃ nanda-gokule | trāyamāṇaḥ sthito dhenūr gopālī-kṛta-vīgrahaḥ ||*
śikhi-piccha-dharo baddha-jūṭaḥ kuṭaja-mālayā | gopālīḥ saha kurvāṇo rāsa-kṛdām pade pade ||
duryodhanasya sāmīpyam kiṃ gato dūta-karmaṇā | preṣitaḥ pāṇḍu-putreṇa padātī iva vegataḥ ||
hasty-aśva-ratha-pādāti-saṅkule samarājire | kiṃ ratham prerayāmāsa bhūtvā pārthasya sārathiḥ ||
kiṃ balir yācitāḥ prthivīm kṛtvā vāmana-rūpatām | uccārya vacanam dīnam daridreṇeva durvacāḥ ||

As in the first series of descriptions, here too, the descriptions in themselves derive from familiar stories about Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*: his appearance as a cowherd in the house of Nanda, his conduct as Arjuna’s charioteer in the *Mahābhārata* during the battle of Kurukṣetra (both of which relate to his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa), the trick he played on Bali as a dwarf (as Vāmana), and the suffering that he had gone through at the time of Sītā’s abduction (as Rāma). On the face of it, the Brahmins should not have much of a problem with such references either. After all, these characteristics are a part of the same repertoire of stories, and if the Brahmins accept the previous set of descriptions there should not be any reason for them to reject this one.

While Hariṣeṇa merely lays out these depictions side by side, Amitagati emphasizes the tension between these two sets even further. This tension derives from the fact that the actions described in the latter paragraph seem not to be suitable to the nature of Viṣṇu’s character as it is constructed throughout the previous one. An all-pervading and eternal god who is the cause of creation, permanence, and destruction, whose graciousness grants refuge for the people, and who causes all the harmful demons to vanish, is expected to act differently from these human *avatāras*. In order to emphasize this tension, throughout the latter passage Amitagati employs a different rhetoric than he used in the previous one. To begin, the assertions about Viṣṇu in the first paragraph turn in the second paragraph into questions. Over a series of rhetorical questions (10.20-26), Amitagati emphasizes the speaker’s doubts regarding the compatibility of the two sections and about this narrative’s coherence. That is, would a story where Viṣṇu—so described (*īdṛśa*) in the first set of depictions—acts as described in the second set, be considered a coherent story? Second, Amitagati uses comparisons to add a negative valence to the behaviors ascribed to Viṣṇu’s *avatāras*

*vahamāno ‘khīlaṃ lokaṃ kiṃ sītā-virahāgninā | kāmīva sarvatas taptaḥ sarvajño vyāpakaḥ sthiraḥ ||
 evamādīni karmāṇi kiṃ yujyante mahātmanaḥ | yogi-gamyasya devasya vandyasya jagatām guroḥ || AmDhP 10.20-6*
 ||

and to emphasize what is problematic about them. In each of the two series of Viṣṇu's descriptions, Amitagati incorporates a set of four comparisons. But the first set of comparisons is very different in nature from the second one. The first set is based on descriptions that are celestial in nature: Viṣṇu is all-pervading like the sky; he vanquishes demons like the sun vanquishes darkness; he provides a home for Lakṣmī like the moon for the moonlight; his body shines forth, like the beautiful house of the goddess. By contrast, the second set of comparisons is terrestrial, comparing this great god to common people. And this line of comparisons gradually belittles him. It starts off by describing Viṣṇu at the house of Nanda. Here, although Amitagati does not make it explicit, Viṣṇu's association with the cowherds (*gopālaiḥ saha*) serves a metonymic function similar to that of a comparison, by saying that his actions are like those of a cowherd. This, in itself, is not much of a problem. After all, in his *avatāra* as Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu was in fact a cowherd, and the chief among them nonetheless. The same happens again, when Amitagati refers to the Kurukṣetra episode. This time, he explicitly compares Viṣṇu to a foot-soldier (*padāti*). This reference is more charged, since the problem is not merely that Viṣṇu participates in battle, but that he follows the orders given by Arjuna, as if he is a simple foot-soldier and not the celebrated god described earlier. Then, the parallelism becomes even more problematic. Viṣṇu as a dwarf is compared to a piteous beggar, while his form as Rāma is likened to a lecher, due to his suffering over separation from Sītā.

Such comparisons help to understand Amitagati's argument better as they highlight the tension between the sets of depictions. Moreover, Amitagati's narration also helps us to understand Hariṣeṇa's argument better, since while the Apabhramsha author does not employ the same kind of explicit comparisons, the overarching idea is similar in both narrations: the divine depictions of Viṣṇu do not stand in line with the depictions of his human forms. This exchange between Manovega and the Brahmins reveals what the authors perceive as internal incoherencies and

contradictions (Apbh. *puvṇvāvara-viroha*; Skt. *pūrvāpara-virodha*) in the purāṇic stories of Viṣṇu.¹⁸ His actions make sense (*yujyante*) for a beggar or a lecher, but they do not make sense when they are ascribed to a divine god.

Can it really happen? The correspondence of stories with real-life experience

“All of your *purāṇas* are internally incoherent (*pūrvāpara-viruddha*). Brahmins, how can wise men who stand upon reasoning trust them?”¹⁹—The Vidyādhara Manovega raises this allegation against his Brahmin interlocutors. Earlier we saw how Hariṣeṇa points out the mutual contradiction (*aṇṇoṇṇa-viroha*) between those who claim that Viṣṇu has ten different births and those who say that he is free from birth, followed by how Amitagati makes a similar claim against Brahminical *purāṇas*. But the internal incoherence within stories is not the final goal of such arguments. The tension between the celestial and the terrestrial characteristics of Viṣṇu carries a further implication. In addition to exposing the incoherence of such claims across the world of their purāṇic stories, by referring to terrestrial images of Viṣṇu, the authors also draw the attention of their audience to the question of correspondence with the real world: do these stories conform to what the readers accept as true in their own lives?

Unlike his celestial appearances, Viṣṇu’s terrestrial forms resonate with things that people experience directly and immediately. Throughout their lives, people come across individuals such as cowherds, soldiers, beggars, and lechers, and so they have a more tangible standard of comparison for such terrestrial forms. That is, people can assess whether their own real-life experiences echo these terrestrial depictions of Viṣṇu. The reference to such forms allows people

¹⁸ This is how Manovega explains to his friend Pavanavega what he is in fact showing him throughout these episodes: “I will now describe to you yet another worldly *purāṇa*, that is internally incoherent.” *pūrvāpara-virodhāḍhyaṃ purāṇaṃ laukikaṃ tava | vadāmy anyad apīty uktvā kheṭa-vigrahaṃ atyajat || AmDhP 10.65 ||*

¹⁹ *pūrvāpara-viruddhāni purāṇāny akhilāni vaḥ | śraddhīyante kathaṃ viprā nyāya-niṣṭhair manīṣibhiḥ || AmDhP 13.87 ||*

to judge for themselves whether they have ever encountered a cowherd who is omniscient, or a dwarf who is all-pervading. This is what the authors achieve through this line of argumentation: placing together all of Viṣṇu's forms side by side helps one realize that such an accumulation is not only incoherent, but it also has no correspondence in one's experiences of the world that is external to stories.

To further evoke in the readers' minds their own experience of the world, the authors take an additional step. They make a distinction between incredible and fictitious occurrences in the *Investigation*, ones that can take place *only* within stories, and between realistic and truthful occurrences that might actually happen in the real world. Amitagati carries out such a distinction through Manovega's final sentences in the exchange, after he contrasts Viṣṇu's celestial appearances with the terrestrial forms of the same character:

If Viṣṇu, who is free of passions, acts in such a way, then what is the problem if we—sons of a poor man—sell wood? If the Lord Viṣṇu is playing in such a manner, then what's to prevent us from doing the same thing according to our nature?²⁰

With these words, the author draws an analogy between Viṣṇu's behavior and that of the protagonists. It demonstrates how the Vidyādhara's actions are no stranger than those of Viṣṇu, who is celebrated in the Brahmins' stories for acting in similar ways. But the analogy also establishes a level of distinction between Viṣṇu and the Vidyādhara. It is since, as far as the Brahmins of Pāṭaliputra experience it, the two friends are real people who show up in their city. The Brahmins experience the Vidyādhara directly through their senses and engage with them in an immediate way. By contrast, their experience of Viṣṇu is only an indirect one. The Brahmins'

²⁰ *yadīdṛśāni kṛtyāni virāgaḥ kurute hariḥ | tadā nau niḥśva-sutayoḥ ko doṣo dāru-vikraye ||
atha tasyedṛśī krīḍā murāreḥ parameṣṭhinaḥ | tadā sattvānurūpeṇa sāmākaṁ kena vāryate || AmDhP 10.27-8 ||*

conception of Viṣṇu was established in a mediated way, through the testimonies of their purāṇic stories. And while, for certain thinkers, such conceptions may potentially be warranted, it is difficult to overlook the irony in Manovega's words when, following his mentioning of Viṣṇu's celestial forms and before contrasting them with his terrestrial ones, he asks the Brahmins: "Is this, or is this not, the conception (*pratīti*) that you have of Viṣṇu?" (*AmDhP* 10.17).²¹ The irony in his tone anticipates his own opinion about the unwarranted nature of their conception.

To further evoke in the reader a more realistic experience of the protagonists than that offered by the purāṇic stories referenced by Manovega, the narrative presents the communication between the two groups through dialogues marked by first-person direct speech. It is a useful literary technique to establish a mimetic form of discourse and create in the reader a more vivid sense of the reported events.²² The dialogical setting creates for the readers the "feeling of partaking in the conversation," and incorporates them not as mere observers, but as actual participants in the exchange.²³ The form of a public dialogue brings the readers closer to the narrative setting, to experience a sort of overlapping between their own reality and the plot, intensified by a mimetic illustration of the events. This form of exchange evokes in the readers a more realistic impression of the events of which they are informed and creates the experience of real occurrences that might truly happen not only in stories, but also in their everyday real world.

Unlike the readers' proximate and realistic experience of the Vidyādhara, the readers, just

²¹ Anil Mundra (2022: 159ff) suggests that certain translations of *pratīti* into English (e.g., "faith" or "trust"), if incautiously used in modern scholarship, may reinforce what he calls the "racist trope" that Indian philosophy "is not concerned with argument" but with unwarranted beliefs. However, he shows that a careful reading of Haribhadra's *Victory Flag of Non-One-Sidedness* (*Anekāntajayapatākā*) reveals the contrary, that *pratīti* in fact refers to the "widely-shared immediate apprehension that underlies the epistemological warrants employed by systematic philosophers." This means, at least for certain thinkers, that *pratīti* "is not simply any old belief but is a logically warranted one."

²² On the varying degrees of the mimetic force of different types of speech, see Genette 1980: 169-85.

²³ Esposito 2015: 82. While in this article Anna Aurelia Esposito particularly discusses Jaina didactic dialogues in the form of sermons, her observations on the dialogue's operation are similarly applicable for other types of literary public dialogues.

as the Brahmins in Pāṭaliputra, experience Viṣṇu only through others' third-person references to his stories. And the text asserts that this Viṣṇu is a character with mutually contradictory and incoherent features. On account of that, we are encouraged to doubt the reality of such character. By comparing Viṣṇu's actions with those of Manovega, the *Investigation* underscores the tension between the fantastic and fictitious nature of this god and between the terrestrial and realistic nature of its own protagonists.²⁴ In the story, these protagonists are real people whom the Brahmins encounter in an immediate way. It is only their peculiar appearances (here they are wood traders with a fancy wardrobe, in later episodes they take other strange disguises) that raise the Brahmins' curiosity and doubts. And, the explanations that Manovega gives for their appearance are always fictitious. In this episode, he lies by saying that their father is a poor vendor and that they simply came to the city to sell wood. In later episodes, he narrates other fictitious biographical stories. In all these cases, his lies are brought forth to justify the strangers' peculiar appearance. However, these lies are aimed only at the Brahmins in the narrative. Outside of the story, the readers already know that their strange appearances and the stories that justify them are not real. The reader knows that these outfits are merely a disguise, and the biographical stories are actually made up.

In this way, the authors construct the Vidyādhara in two distinct modes. In the first one, they are constructed as literary representations of real people who communicate with the Brahmins. In the second, they are constructed as fictive characters in Manovega's own fictitious life stories. The analogy between Viṣṇu and the Vidyādhara highlights the difference between these two modes of illustration. Since the stories of Viṣṇu are comparable only with the *fictitious* stories of these protagonists, both the Brahmins and the readers are led to recognize that Viṣṇu's stories are similarly fictitious. However, when it comes to the protagonists as they truly are, as the human

²⁴ My use of "realistic" is informed by my discussion of the context-sensitive boundaries of the real and the technique-based aesthetics of the "reality effect," as outlined in the Introduction to this dissertation. See pp. 17ff.

interlocutors of Pāṭaliputra’s Brahmins, the authors depict them as *real* people, who simply tell lies. Their illustration as real people stands in opposition to the fictitious nature of Viṣṇu as a character in the story and highlights the lack of correspondence between Viṣṇu’s characteristics and what people experience as real-life phenomena.

This brings us to an important distinction that requires clarification regarding what, specifically, is the Vidyādhara’s object of critique here. The debate is not about the possible existence of some Viṣṇu, but it is about *this* particular Viṣṇu whom the Brahmins valorize. The *Investigation* makes it clear that the character of Viṣṇu to whom Manovega refers is the one outlined in the Brahmins’ stories. This becomes more explicit after the Brahmins admit their defeat in this debate, when Manovega describes to his friend an alternative Viṣṇu: the real Viṣṇu is one of the sixty-three illustrious persons of the Jaina Universal History, the last among the nine *Vāsudevas* who were born during the fourth era of our current time cycle (*HaDhP* 4.1.3-9; *AmDhP* 10.53-7).²⁵ That is, according to the *Investigation*, Viṣṇu was a real person, just as the Vidyādharas and the Brahmins are.²⁶ What our authors do not accept is the stories that the Brahmins associate with him. Just as the Vidyādharas are representations of real people who associate themselves with fictitious stories, so might purāṇic characters like Viṣṇu be real people to whom the Brahmins link false stories. In this way, the analogy between the Vidyādharas and Viṣṇu exposes both the fictitious nature of his stories, as well as the tension between such stories and the potentially real people to whom these stories refer.

Manovega’s words in Hariṣeṇa’s narration similarly establish such an analogy between the two types of characters:

²⁵ Anna Aurelia Esposito (2020) provides a useful review of Jaina Universal History and the sixty-three illustrious persons.

²⁶ We should not mistake “real” or “true” with “historical,” see Nandy 1995: 57ff.

Suppose that you say: “[Viṣṇu] causes life and prevents suffering, on account of his *karma*.” [Then how is it that] you still doubt this wood of ours? And if you all say that this is just a shameless play, then you should similarly know that we carry this wood [as a play]. Or rather: *Karma* is powerful. And even Viṣṇu acts according to orders. So what would people like us, who are ruled by *karma*, do?²⁷

Viṣṇu, like all non-liberated beings, is subject to the mechanism of *karma*. If the Brahmins justify the contradiction between his representations based on the karmic mechanism that causes him to be reborn in his inconsistent form, then the Brahmins cannot reject this very mechanism as an explanation for the contradiction between the Vidyādhara’s characteristics. That is, if the stories of Viṣṇu correspond with what the Brahmins experience in the mundane world, then the Vidyādhara’s behavior should be justified on similar accounts to those that justify Viṣṇu’s behavior. Another justification that should not be rejected on the same account is the following: if the Brahmins claim that the contradiction between Viṣṇu’s representations is reconciled on account of his playful nature, then there is no reason for the Brahmins not to accept the same explanation as reconciling the tension between the Vidyādhara’s seemingly contradictory features, too.²⁸ Ultimately, Manovega’s argument is that if we want to accept certain occurrences as true and credible, then there should not be one standard to evaluate them in stories and a different standard to evaluate them in the experiential world. The same standards that apply to the stories of Viṣṇu should also

²⁷ *aha dukkha-nivāraṇi jīvaṇa-kāraṇi tāsu iṇaṃ | kammaṃ iya jaṃpahu amha viyappahu kaṭṭham iṇaṃ || taho esā kilā vajjiya-vīlā jāi bhaṇahu | āṇiya-kaṭṭhāṇaṃ tā amhāṇaṃ taha muṇahu || ahavā kammā vihu āṇae so vihu saṃcaraī | amhārisu māṇusu kamma-paravvasu kiṃ karaī || HaDhP 3.21.3*-5 || muṇahu MS. 4] muṇahum ; kammā MS. 3] kassā ; saṃcaraī MSS. 2, 3, 4] saṃcara ; kamma-paravvasu B2] kamma-parāvasu. I reconstructed the first stanza (3.21.3*) from the manuscripts, as it was omitted from Bhagchand Jain’s printed edition (1990).*

²⁸ These authors allude here to the idea of the *līlā*, the divine play, which became associated predominantly with the devotion of the *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, as it manifests in works such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where he, not unlike our protagonists, “behaves contrary to convention [...] challenge[s] the limits of human expectation, sometimes in a guise that would in normal circumstances be unequal to the task [...] and often in response to the devotee’s supplication, to vindicate the faith of those who have eyes to see” (Lipner 2022: 307).

apply to what the Brahmins encounter in their real (albeit textual) life. If the Brahmins maintain that these stories are true, then they should not blame these strangers who stand in front of them for doing anything unusual. The same logic also applies the other way around: since the reader knows that the Vidyādhara's appearance and biographical stories are entirely fictitious, the same reader should not be surprised when realizing that Viṣṇu's stories are just as fictitious.

The way in which the *Investigation* embeds the Vidyādhara's first-person narration of their fictitious biographies within the text's frame narrative further serves to establish the protagonists as representations of real people. In such episodes of story-within-story, the narrative shifts between several levels, wherein Manovega as a character at one narrative level becomes the narrator of another story, which is contained within the previous one and takes place at a higher narrative level. The shifts between the narrative levels take place through dialogues between the two friends and the Brahmins. Initially, the reader encounters the Vidyādhara as characters in the *Investigation* frame story (the extradiegetic level), when the anonymous narrator opens the narrative by introducing the world where these characters live. In this way, the reader is invited into the diegetic (or intradiegetic) level, where he follows the Vidyādhara to their encounter with another set of characters, the Brahmins. But through the exchange between the two groups, the Vidyādhara gradually turn into narrators of their own story within a story in the metadiegetic (or hypodiegetic) level, which is subordinate to the main frame narrative.²⁹

The story-within-story in the metadiegetic level has causal functions in relation to the main narrative, as it introduces the events, albeit fictitious ones, which led the two into the city where they encounter the Brahmins.³⁰ Moreover, each of these instances of a biographic story-within-

²⁹ For a discussion on narrative levels and these formal categories, see Genette 1980: 227-34; Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 87-106.

³⁰ See Genette 1980: 231ff.

story concludes with the plot's return to its diegetic present, the time and place in which Manovega tells his story to the Brahmins. The overlap between his biographical story and the act of its narration in the narrative's present produces a productive tension between these two narrative levels: while the metadiegetic level contains incredible stories of Manovega's fictitious biography, his diegetic present illustrates a realistic exchange between characters who represent real human agents. For instance, in an episode where the Vidyādhara arrive in the city wearing the red garments of Buddhist monks, they claim to be the sons of lay adherents of the Buddha. Once, they say, while watching the monks' clothes drying in the sun, two scary jackals approached them. They tried to escape by climbing on top of a *stūpa*, but the jackals easily lifted it up and flew with them in the air. Eventually, the beasts dropped the two in a distant land. Lost and having nothing but the monks' red garments, the two decided to become monks themselves and to search for alms. Manovega then concludes by bringing this narration to his own here and now: "As we wandered across the land that is adorned with many cities, we reached this place of yours, full of Brahmins."³¹ With this conclusion, the story catches up with its own narration.³² As the protagonist develops his story, the distance between his act of narration and the events he narrates—between the diegetic and the metadiegetic—gradually diminishes.³³ By concluding the story with his arrival to Pāṭaliputra, the *Investigation* ties Manovega's biography together with Manovega's recounting of this biography. As such, the characters whose fictitious story is narrated (lay adherents of the Buddha) turn out to be the same people who show up in the city and narrate these incredible stories to the Brahmins. The shift between narrative levels underscores the tension between incredible

³¹ *bhramantau dharaṇīm āvāṃ nagaṛākara-maṇḍitām | bhavadīyam idaṃ sthānam āgamāva dvijākulam || AmDhP 15.87 ||*

³² As the literary theorist Gérard Genette puts it: "[T]he temporal (and spatial) interval that until then separated the reported action from the narrating act becomes gradually smaller until it is finally reduced to zero: the narrative has reached the *here* and the *now*, the story has overtaken the narrating" (1980: 227).

³³ On how time and temporalities operate in everyday contexts of oral narration for the formation of ethical subjectivity, see Prasad 2010.

stories and the real world: the moment in which Manovega's biographical story and his act of its narration overlap at the narrative's present highlights the contrast between the fictitiousness of his story and the reality of his presence in the city as he stands in front of the Brahmins' eyes. The unification of the diegetic and the metadiegetic emphasizes for both the Brahmins in the story and the external reader the distinction between what is credible and may be true in real life and what should be considered nothing but an incredible story.³⁴

The world and the *purāṇas* are mutually contradictory

Later in the plot (the seventh *sandhi* in Hariṣeṇa's work, the fourteenth *pariccheda* in Amitagati's), Manovega takes the form of an ascetic (Apbh. *tāvasa*; Skt. *tāpasa*) and again confronts the city's Brahmins. This time, he claims to be the son of a virgin woman, impregnated by the mere touch of a man. This presentation evokes the notion of "the son of a barren woman" (*vandhyā-putra*)—a common example in Sanskrit thought referring to logical impossibility. He then proceeds to tell incredible stories about how he remained in his mother's womb for twelve years and joined a group of ascetics immediately upon his birth. As an ascetic, he concludes, wandering about on his pilgrimage, he eventually arrived at Pāṭaliputra and came across these Brahmins.

As expected, the Brahmins do not believe Manovega's story. They claim that it is so inconceivable (*asambhāvya*) that it cannot be true (*asatya*).³⁵ In return, Manovega reminds them of parallel examples from Brahminical texts. He cites, for instance, the story of Bhagīrathi, whose mother became pregnant after sleeping next to another woman, and that of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's wife, Gāndhārī, who conceived the hundred Kauravas after embracing a jackfruit tree. These stories

³⁴ This analysis of the story-within-story structure differs from much of the scholarship on this device in South Asian literature, which often interprets it as a literary reenactment of Vedic ritual structure. For instance, see Witzel 1987; Minkowski 1989, 2001; Hegarty 2012: 48-93. This common interpretation has been reconsidered recently in Hämeen-Anttila 2018.

³⁵ *AmDhP* 14.43-44.

serve as a rejoinder to the Brahmins' doubt that a woman could become pregnant through mere touch, without sexual intercourse. The Brahmins accept this analogy, but they still do not believe other incredible elements of Manovega's fictitious biography, to which he responds with additional analogous stories from the Brahminical *purāṇas*: Abhimanyu in his mother's womb; a frog that became pregnant from drinking Maya Muni's semen and gave birth to Mandodarī, who later carried Indrajit in her womb for seven thousand years; Vyāsa's undertaking of penance as soon as he was born; the pregnancy of Kuntī and Candramatī while both were still virgins.

After this exchange with the Brahmins, the two friends leave the city to the nearby park, where Manovega explains the source of the Brahmins' confusion: "The world and the *purāṇas* are mutually contradictory. Dear Friend! People who are bewildered by falsehoods never critically examine them."³⁶ The protagonist explicitly states here the requirement of a story to correspond with the real world: even when stories are internally coherent, they might still be rendered untrue and unreliable in case they contradict what people accept as true from their own real-life experience. As long as the debate exclusively focuses on coherence *within* the world of stories, there are no contradictions between Manovega's fictitious biography and the purāṇic stories he ascribes to the Brahmins. To the contrary, the Brahminical stories are in fact analogous with Manovega's fabricated biographical narration. Manovega makes this argument explicit elsewhere in the *Investigation*: an impartial person cannot simultaneously claim that such Brahminical stories are true (*satya*) but the Vidyādhara's words are not.³⁷ If one accepts the validity of the Brahminical stories, then one has to similarly accept Manovega's stories as true. But the Brahmins do not accept the protagonist's stories. In their view, Manovega must be lying on account that his stories fail to

³⁶ *aho loka-purāṇāni viruddhāni parasparam | na vicārayate ko 'pi mitra mithyāva-mohitaḥ || AmDhP 15.3 ||*

³⁷ *bhavatām āgamaḥ satyo na punar vacanaṃ mama | pakṣapātaṃ vihāyaikaṃ param atra na kāraṇam || AmDhP 13.14 ||*

comply with their own everyday experience. However, since his stories are analogous with the Brahminical *purāṇas*, the latter must similarly be rejected on account that they are also contradictory to such an experience of the world. It is a *tu quoque* strategy, in which the authors employ one false story in order to expose the faults of another. But these faults are based, first and foremost, on the fact that what the stories describe simply does not comply with what people experience as true.

Manovega provides specific examples of the contradiction between the world and the *purāṇas*:

How can women give birth to a child upon embracing a jackfruit tree?
Vines never bear fruits from the touch of a man. How can a woman become pregnant from the touch of another woman? I have never seen a cow that became pregnant from touching another cow. A frog giving birth to a human being—who can accept this? I haven’t seen Kodo millet coming out of rice. If one can produce offspring merely by eating semen, why should a woman unite with a man in order to have a child?³⁸

Manovega here revisits the purāṇic stories he drew upon in his responses to the Brahmins. This time, however, he contrasts the stories with real-life phenomena. This contradistinction highlights the tension between things that can be accepted only as part of an incredible and untruthful story and between what may actually happen in real life. By employing such strategy, the author puts forth his argument about the Brahmins’ partiality and bias. It is, he shows, since these Brahmins accept *some* stories that depict incredible incidents. For instance, they accept that Gāndhārī was

³⁸ *apatyaṃ jāyate strīṇāṃ panasāliṅgane kutaḥ | manuṣya-sparśato vallyo na phalanti kadācana || antaratnī katham nārī nārī-sparśena jāyate | go-saṅgena na gaur dṛṣṭā kvāpi garbhavatī mayā || maṇḍūkī mānuṣaṃ sūte kenedaṃ pratipadyate | na śālito mayā dṛṣṭā jāyamānā hi kodravāḥ || śukra-bhakṣaṇa-mātreṇa yady apatyam prajāyate | kiṃ kṛtyaṃ dhava-saṅgena tadāpatyāya yoṣitām || AmDhP 15.4-7 ||*

made pregnant by a jackfruit tree. But they are reluctant to accept other stories of similarly incredible incidents, as is evident from Manovega's account of how his mother became pregnant while still a virgin. Moreover, had impregnation by trees been possible, we would be compelled to accept the possibility that in the real world, just like in these stories, men would mate with vines. However, the readers know that vines cannot produce fruits just from the touch of a human. Manovega's words, stating that he has "never seen" such things before, emphasize the fact that such claims are not simply hypothetical issues based on theoretical knowledge. Rather, they are directly related to one's immediate encounter with the world. If according to one's personal experience these things cannot be accepted as true, there is no basis to accept as true such purāṇic stories, which are experienced only indirectly as verbal testimony. By restating what the readers already know from their own experience, Manovega emphasizes the faults in such purāṇic stories and exposes the Brahmins' bias in accepting them while rejecting Manovega's words.

These analyses reinforce my claim: For the authors of the *Investigation*, making arguments within the world of stories is not sufficient. The credibility of a story is determined in relation to both the diegetic world of stories (within the story, as well as with regard to other stories) and with the world of our real-life experience. Namely, to make their arguments compelling and reliable, the Investigators must take examples from both spheres. As these examples indicate, Manovega straddles the two spheres to establish his arguments, emphasizing that a story may be considered true only if it is both coherent and corresponding with one's experience of the world.

In a series of arguments, Manovega challenges the coherence of Brahminical representations of their gods, thereby manifesting the movement of his reasoning between the two spheres. He opens with a set of arguments that point out incoherencies within stories:

If Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva constitute a single body, then how could they do things such as decapitating each other? Since this master can destroy

the sins of all the gods, he should thus destroy his own faults, as the sun its mass of darkness.³⁹

Manovega begins by criticizing a purāṇic theological notion that the various gods are modifications of the single God. He challenges this notion by bringing to mind stories that describe such purāṇic gods who maltreat each other in different ways, as in the case of Śiva's decapitation of Brahmā.⁴⁰ Manovega further makes a claim that echoes the omnipotence paradox of the stone: could God be subject to a fault that even He could not overcome? Just like in the paradox of the stone (could God create a stone so heavy that even He could not lift it?), this argument points out a contradiction between the characteristics of a single character. It resonates with the aforementioned argument about the contradiction between Viṣṇu's representation as having ten births and his epithet as "free from birth and death." This time, Manovega challenges the coherence of certain representations of the purāṇic God: if, as the *purāṇas* claim, the embodiments of this God destroy all sins, then purāṇic stories about the subjugation of his embodiments to the eighteen faults (*doṣa*), e.g., birth, death, and sexual pleasure, would simply contradict such claims.⁴¹

After he carries out these arguments, Manovega explores a specific Brahminical story about the creation of the world by Brahmā, which he challenges with a series of rhetorical questions:

The cosmic egg was created from Brahmā's semen, after it dropped into the water and bubbled. When it split to two, the triple-world was created.—

³⁹ *yady eka-mūrtayaḥ santi brahma-viṣṇu-maheśvarāḥ | mithas tathāpi kurvanti śiraś chedādikaṃ katham || ete naṣṭā yato doṣā bhānor iva tamaś-cayāḥ | sa svāmī sarva-devānāṃ pāpa-nirdalana-kṣamaḥ || AmDhP 13.77-8 ||*

⁴⁰ Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati narrate the decapitation story itself elsewhere in their texts (*HaDhP* 4.13-7; *AmDhP* 11.29-59). Some Jaina thinkers, e.g., Vidyānandī and Hemacandra, challenge the purāṇic notion of a single God on other accounts (Granoft 2020: 172-3).

⁴¹ Amitagati enumerates these faults before laying out these arguments: *kṣudhā tṛṣṇā bhayaṃ dveṣo rāgo moho mado gadaḥ | cintā janma jarā mṛtyur viṣādo vismayo ratih || khedaḥ svedas tathā nidrā doṣāḥ sādharmaṇā ime | aṣṭā-daśāpi vidyante sarveṣāṃ duḥkha-hetavaḥ || AmDhP 13.52-3 ||* "The common eighteen faults that bring suffering to everyone are hunger, thirst, fear, hatred, passion, delusion, craze, disease, anxiety, birth, old age, death, grief, perplexity, sexual pleasure, exhaustion, sweat, and sleepiness." Hariṣeṇa also produces this list in *Apabhramsha*: *bhukkhā taṇhā bhau rāu dosu || moho ciṃtā jara vāhi maraṇu | seu kheu maū a raī-karaṇu || vimbhaū jammaṇu niddā visāu || HaDhP 5.17.8cd-10ab || jara MSS. 2, 3] vara.*

If this is what the scriptures claim, where was the water? If there are no causes in the ether, where would be found a cause for the creation of things such as rivers, mountains, earth, and trees? If even the cause of a single body is hardly found there, where would be the material substance that is the cause of the triple-world? How would the Creator, though he is bodiless, bring forth the creation? How would the effort of a bodiless produce a body?⁴²

According to this Brahminical story, the world was created because Brahmā dropped his semen into water. Manovega first points out an obvious problem: if, as the story claims, the world did not exist, then where could there be water into which the semen fell? There is a contradiction between two claims *within* the narrative itself: On the one hand, the world did not exist. On the other hand, some body of water existed somewhere.⁴³ But the protagonist does not end with these arguments of incoherence within the story (intra-textually), as he moves further to discuss tensions between this story and other texts (inter-textually).

To establish her argument, Granoff shows how medieval Jaina scholars wrote with “a clear expectation that poetry and philosophy, practice and doctrine must form a coherent whole.”⁴⁴ Similar to these scholars, Manovega’s following questions reveal his expectations of the creation story to align with philosophical ideas. For instance, he reminds us that if one takes the notion of causality seriously, then one’s story must comply with such causality. Nevertheless, this creation story contradicts such philosophical ideas: If the world did not exist, then nothing—not even its

⁴² *brahmaṇā yaj-jalasyāntar bījaṃ nikṣiptam ātmanaḥ | babhūva budbudas tasmād etasmā jagad-aṇḍakam || tatra dvedhā kṛte jātā loka-traya-vyavasthitiḥ | yady evam āgame proktaṃ tadā tat kva sthitaṃ jalam || nimnagā-parvata-kṣoṇī-vṛkṣādy-utpatti-kāraṇam | samasta-kāraṇābhāve labhyate kva vihāyasi || ekasyāpi śarīrasya kāraṇam yatra durlabham | tri-loka-kāraṇam mūrtaṃ dravyaṃ tatra kva labhyate || katham vidhīyate sṛṣṭir aśarīreṇa vedhasā | vidhānenāśarīreṇa śarīraṃ kriyate katham || AmDhP 13.79-83 ||*

⁴³ Wendy Doniger discusses such paradoxes in Hindu creation myths, including this one (Doniger 2007: 97).

⁴⁴ Granoff 2020: 184.

cause—could have existed. And where the cause is missing, there could be no effect.⁴⁵ It is the problem of creation *ex nihilo*.⁴⁶ if the cause for the world is missing, how can the world be created? Manovega employs similar arguments about the nature of the creator himself: If Brahmā is embodied, how could his material body exist, when even the world does not exist? Alternatively, if Brahmā has no material body, how could he produce anything that is material? This line of questions brings to mind philosophical refutations of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika’s notion of a creator God. But what the *Investigation* produces here is not an exhaustive philosophical refutation of the kind that thoroughly examines and counters all the possible responses of the philosophical rival.⁴⁷ The way Manovega lays out these philosophical positions suggests that they are not the target of the *Investigation*’s project in themselves. Amitagati employs these positions only to challenge the logic of this purāṇic story. He employs elements of philosophical discourse, but he does so predominantly to undermine the credibility of the story. These arguments clarify that the main target here is the stories, not the philosophical positions themselves. It is most vivid at Manovega’s conclusion for these arguments, wherein he utters the allegation introduced earlier: “All of your *purāṇas* are internally incoherent!”⁴⁸ The *Investigation* selectively takes elements from a different textual world—the world of philosophical discourse—to point out their incompatibility with the purāṇic story of Brahmā. If, as these authors claim, stories and philosophical arguments reside in the same world, then they must be simultaneously compatible with each other. If they are not, then they cannot be accepted as true.

However, even if such compatibility within the textual world exists, Manovega reminds us

⁴⁵ For classical Indian theories of causality, see Potter 1999: 106-16. See also Matilal 1975; Dasgupta 1951: 319-23.

⁴⁶ Doniger 2007: 88.

⁴⁷ Such a comprehensive account of a Jaina refutation of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika’s notion of a creator God is laid out, for instance, by Guṇaratna in his commentary on Haribhadra’s *Compendium* (see Van Den Bossche 1998; Dasgupta 1951: 203-6). Granoff also mentions other Jaina refutations of an embodied creator God (2020: 170-2).

⁴⁸ *pūrvāpara-viruddhāni purāṇāny akhilāni vaḥ* || *AmDhP* 13.87ab ||

that the question of compliance with the real world still stands. It is so that he brings his arguments into the world of our intersubjective experience:

It is clear that for those who are judicious, a specific god or purāṇic story, well-known as it may be, might make no sense at all. “Viṣṇu has four arms. Brahmā has four faces. Śiva has three eyes.”—How would anyone accept this? In the world, we see that everyone has one face, two hands, and two eyes. This was falsely set-up by people who are obscured by delusion.⁴⁹

The protagonist expands his inquiry beyond the world of the narrative and into the experiential world of its audience, making the claim that coherence is not limited to stories. From our own experience of the world, we know that no one has such physical attributes as those that the Brahminical stories associate with the gods: Viṣṇu has four arms, Brahmā four faces, and Śiva three eyes. This fact does not depend on coherence within stories. An author can easily create an imaginary literary world, coherent within itself, in which people are born with unusual physical features.⁵⁰ But when compared with the life experience of the reader, such a story operates on presuppositions that the audience would not accept in their day-to-day existence. Again, Manovega restates here what the readers already know: stories of such gods do not correspond with what we accept as true in our everyday lives. And, just as Amṛtacandra requires metaphysical claims about the nature of the soul to be compatible with tantric practices, so does the *Investigation* require that purāṇic representations of these characters stand in line with everyday experiences.⁵¹ Otherwise, such accounts cannot be regarded as true.

⁴⁹ *śruto deva-viśeṣo yaḥ purāṇārthaś ca yas tvayā | na vicāravatām tatra ghaṭate kiñcana sphuṭam || nārāyaṇaś catur-bāhur viriñciś caturānanaḥ | tri-netraḥ pārvatī-nāthaḥ kenedaṃ pratipadyate || ekāśyo dvi-bhujo dvy-akṣaḥ sarvo jagati dṛśyate | mithyātvākulitair lokair nythā parikalpyate || AmDhP 13.89-91 ||*

⁵⁰ Think of authors who created coherent worlds where people are only six inches tall (Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*) or two dimensional (Edwin Abbott’s *Flatland*).

⁵¹ For Amṛtacandra’s argument, see Granoff 2020: 180-3.

Conclusion

This chapter traced a set of arguments carried out in the *Investigation*, to provoke the Brahmins of Pāṭaliputra into a dilemma: they either must accept that their own stories make no sense or accept that they were mistaken to be puzzled by the Vidyādhara's fictitious life stories and uncommon appearance. With these *tu quoque* arguments, Manovega explicitly confronts the Brahmins with the fact that the stories they take to be true similarly speak about such strange things. But the Brahmins fail to recognize this fact, since “in this world, people see only the faults of others, but not of themselves.”⁵² Manovega reproaches the Brahmins for being partial, as they only see the mote in someone else's eye, but not in their own. In effect, these arguments reveal that the Brahmins' doubt about the Vidyādhara's *was* warranted—but the fact that they expressed doubt about the protagonist's stories, and none about their own texts, must be ascribed to pure partiality.

The Brahmins realized from the start that the Vidyādhara's stories and appearances make little sense. The problem with these two strangers is similar to the problem with Viṣṇu: there is an internal incoherence between their various features. According to these Brahmins' standards, a person cannot, for instance, be a simple wood seller *and* dress up with expensive garments, just as one cannot be an all-pervading god *and* a lecher. Yet, unlike their reaction towards the Vidyādhara's appearance, up until Manovega's speech they have been completely indifferent to Viṣṇu's contradictory qualities. By pointing out the contradiction between Viṣṇu's different forms, Manovega undermines the coherence of the narrative world of Viṣṇu's stories. When he next examines the correspondence between these stories and the experiential world, he finds a further affirmation for his claim. In the world that is external to these stories, people distinguish between

⁵² *kevalaṃ hi parakīyaṃ īkṣate dūṣaṇaṃ jagati nātmano janaḥ* || *AmDhP* 3.94cd ||

what makes sense and what does not based on their past experiences. The lack of correspondence between the appearance of the Vidyādhara and what the Brahmins accept from their life experience as true prompts the latter to realize that something must be wrong. Amitagati explains the Brahmins' reaction when the friends initially enter the city: "Having seen those two as described, people were astonished. Who on earth would not be amazed at the sight of something never seen before?"⁵³ What the locals perceive is unprecedented. They have never experienced anything similar to it. Like the locals, the readers of the *Investigation* also understand that the Vidyādhara's appearances and stories makes no sense. However, the readers also know that such appearances do not reflect any real state of affairs, since the authors already informed them that these are merely disguises taken to prove the fallacies of the Brahmins' stories. All this leads to the acknowledgment that such incoherencies are not limited to the world of stories. Even if someone appears as such in real life, as the Vidyādhara appear in front of the Brahmins, it does not reflect a true state of affairs, but it is the result of something else, possibly a trick or false perception. Incidents that are as surprising as those in the *purāṇas* do not prove that the *purāṇas* are true. Rather, they prove that there is some trick behind the incident in question.

Why is it important for the *Investigation* to instruct its reader in these parameters for credibility? To address this question, in the following chapter I analyze the sorts of texts and knowledge that the *Investigation* trains its reader to recognize, in order to uncover what is at stake for the Investigators in pursuing their project.

⁵³ *dr̥ṣṭvā tau tādr̥śau lokā vismayam pratipedire | adr̥ṣṭa-pūrvake dr̥ṣṭe citrīyante na ke bhuvi || AmDhP 3.54 ||*

Chapter Two:

What Makes the Truth?

Worldly *Purāṇas* and the Knowledge of *Śāstras*

It's a book of our true stories
True stories that can't be denied
It's more than true, it actually happened
- Gogol Bordello, *Immigraniada*

You want words that reflect reality?
Yes.
Words that do not contradict reality?
Exactly.
But tigers don't contradict reality.
- Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the idea that the earliest surviving *Investigations* of Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati establish a theory for assessing the credibility of stories, grounded in a particular type of consistency between ideas across the various elements of their authors' cultural world. Drawing on the work of Phyllis Granoff, I proposed that the expectation for such consistency was also shared by other Jaina thinkers, several of whom she discusses in her work. What distinguishes the authors of the *Investigation*, however, is that they explicitly engage with two main issues. First, how is this consistency defined (Chapter One)? Second, how is it to be evaluated (Chapter Three)? Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati distinguish themselves by grappling with how to define and assess consistency to properly adjudicate good and credible stories.

In the *Investigation*, this consistency is based on two main elements: coherence across the world of stories (intra- and inter-textual) and correspondence with one's real-life experience.

However, the latter requirement—that the story world correspond to the experiential world—raises a potential problem: story literature *in general* violates this principle massively, insofar as it often does not entirely conform to the audience’s real-life experience. Could the Investigators have such a principle in mind when they point out the gap between Brahminical discourse and everyday life? To address this question, we should first determine the sorts of texts these authors put under investigation. One way of proceeding, adopted here, is to ask how these authors identify the texts they discuss. What is at stake for them, I argue, is not the claims of “story literature” as such—which we can think of heuristically as serving the purposes of diversion and entertainment—but of particular stories that present themselves as authoritative. Such stories purport to provide authoritative instruction about the nature of the world and how to morally encounter it. This means that there are potentially drastic consequences for stories that do not stand up to the standards posed by the authors. In the *Investigation*, the stories that the Jaina protagonist Manovega examines are those that his Brahminical interlocutors accept. I maintain that according to the *Investigation* such stories, if accepted as authority, pose epistemic and moral dangers, i.e., they will lead those who believe in them to fall into error and deviate from moral principles.

As Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati put it, to accept certain stories as trustworthy and authoritative means, at least potentially, to yield to knowledge that opposes the teaching of the Jina. Following such knowledge is dangerous, since it hinders one’s progress on the path to liberation. To put more plainly, stories’ violation of the *Investigation*’s standards is not in itself the main issue for our authors. Rather, the Investigators wish to distance their audience from knowledge that does not stand in line with the teaching of the Jina and that prevents the attainment of liberation. These texts correlate the epistemic virtues of stories (their truthfulness and credibility) with their status as an authority for acting in the world, two aspects that are brought together in the idea of trustworthy

knowledge (*pramāṇa*). For the *Investigation*, the teaching of the criteria for the credibility of stories is not merely a theoretical project. Teaching its readers these criteria means teaching them how to recognize literature that opposes the teaching of the Jina and, importantly, how to avoid its dangerous claims.

Examining old stories, however, carries with it some difficulty. The stories that the Investigators examine are already widely known and, among many people, considered authoritative. Moreover, their popularity and authority is based in part upon their own claims to priority and antiquity. In the dominant Sanskrit culture such antiquity was valorized and associated with truth. It was against such prevailing views that these Jaina authors established themselves as an opposition. For the Investigators, I argue in what follows, pointing out the incoherence of such stories is not enough. They further need to show that priority and popularity are not signs for truth and trustworthiness, and importantly, cannot compensate for the fault of incoherence. The *Investigation* persuades its audience that even though it does not possess the same aura of authority that such old stories possess, its words are valuable nonetheless.

In this chapter, I ask how the *Investigation* labels the dangerous stories of its interlocutors and how it establishes itself in opposition to these stories. I do so by examining the literary categories that our authors ascribe to the stories that they discuss, and by asking what such categories imply about the Investigators' opinions on these stories. Specifically, I am interested in understanding whether the *Investigation* classifies sources that follow their standards of coherence and correspondence differently from other sources: is there a literary category that is presumed to be intrinsically authoritative, with which these authors label true stories?

The two main literary categories that this chapter focuses on are *purāṇa* and *śāstra*. When contemporary scholars speak of the *Investigation*, they often understand Brahminical *purāṇas* as

its main target, for good reason: purāṇic stories, along with the explicit word “*purāṇa*” itself, are encountered frequently in this work.¹ But what exactly is the problem with the *purāṇas* that the *Investigation* attacks? And how do the Investigators tackle the problem of precedence and popularity of the “old” (*purāṇa*) stories that they discuss? After examining these questions, I then turn to ask how the Investigators perceive the category of *śāstra* differently from such *purāṇas*. Both authors, I demonstrate, bring together *śāstra*, *dharma*, knowledge, and liberation under the umbrella of judiciousness, which is the skill of a good listener. Brought together as such, I argue, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati associate *śāstra* with the knowledge of *dharma* and of final liberation.² Importantly, Amitagati explicitly calls his own *Investigation* a *śāstra*. In this way, I maintain, he distinguishes his own work, which itself employs the telling of many purāṇic stories, from the category of *purāṇa* that he critiques.

Worldly *purāṇas*

Throughout the *Investigation*, its protagonist Manovega regularly employs the category of *purāṇa*, together with explicit references to the epics (*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*) and their authors (Vālmīki, Vyāsa), to label the stories that he associates with his Brahminical interlocutors. For instance, when the Vidyādhara first enter into Pāṭaliputra with the appearance of well-dressed woodsellers, and after the townsmen interrogate them about their appearance, Manovega responds that such strange things are mentioned many times in “*purāṇas* like the *Mahābhārata* and others.”³ It is only after the Brahmins persuade Manovega to tell them where “in the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the

¹ Mironow 1903; Upadhye 1942, 1944; Bhayani 1989: 36; De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming); De Jonckheere 2019, 2020a, 2020b.

² De Jonckheere correctly recognizes the significance of *śāstra* for Amitagati’s work, but overlooks the germs of its importance for Hariṣeṇa (2020a: 102-107, especially fn. 66).

³ *sa prāha bhāratādyeṣu purāṇeṣu sahasraśaḥ | śrūyante na prapadyante bhavanto ’vidhayaḥ param || AmDhP 4.3 || ’vidhayaḥ conj.] vidhiyaḥ.*

Mahābhārata” he saw such strange things before, that the exploration of the contradictions between Viṣṇu’s multiple forms (discussed in Chapter One) begins.⁴ Hariṣeṇa similarly points out the *purāṇas* as a source for these contradictory representations, in the Apabhramsha retelling of this episode. We encountered this strategy earlier: First, Manovega introduces Viṣṇu’s divine characteristics.⁵ Then, once the Brahmins confirm that this is how Viṣṇu is depicted in their *purāṇas*, Manovega contrasts these characteristics with Viṣṇu’s more humble forms. However, the Brahmins’ words that follow—spoken after they acknowledge the incoherencies in such depictions—hint at what is ultimately at stake: for them, these are not merely entertaining stories, but *purāṇas* that reveal true knowledge (*payaḍiya-nāṇa*, Skt. *prakaṭita-jñāna*).⁶

These words begin to expose the Investigators’ concerns with such sources. They confirm that the protagonists’ illustration of Viṣṇu conforms to the Brahmins’ *purāṇas* and reveals their internal incoherencies. Moreover, this statement hints towards the instructional function and value that the Brahmins find in such texts. This is the real concern that the *Investigation* wishes to tackle: people accept such stories as a source of trustworthy knowledge. However, when a source is corrupt, the knowledge it produces is also corrupt:

If your *śāstra* is endowed with such qualities, your gods and *dharma* will
be so too. If the cause is corrupt, how would the effect be pure?⁷

The danger that such stories pose is that people might accept their content as true and shape their lives accordingly. And conducting one’s life based on things such as false *dharma* raises significant ethical concerns. The goal of our authors is to prevent their reader from adopting such false

⁴ *yadi rāmāyaṇe dṛṣṭā bhārata vā tvayedṛśāḥ | pratyēṣyāmas tadā brūhi dvijenety udite ’vadat || AmDhP 4.4 ||*

⁵ *lacchi-vacchu maṇi-mauḍaṅkiya-siru | jaṇa-dalidda-damaṇu paya-ṇaya-suru || hari savvaṇhu savva-jaṇa-saṁthiu | atthi ahava ṇa purāṇahi diṭṭhaū || HaDhP 3.20.8-9 || vacchu MSS. 2, 3] vatthu ; jaṇa conj.] jaṇu ; jaṇa MSS. 3, 4] juya.*

⁶ *amhehi purāṇeṇ payaḍiya-nāṇeṇ hari suṇiu || HaDhP 3.21.7cd ||*

⁷ *yusmākam īdṛṣe śāstre deva-dharmāv apīdṛśau | kāraṇe kaśmale kāryaṃ nirmalaṃ jāyate kutaḥ || AmDhP 16.7 ||*

knowledge as true and authoritative.

The problem of truth and authority is connected with another problem: the legitimization of preexisting customs and knowledge. It is the case that people take the adherence of certain social groups to specific customs and texts as a legitimizing criterion for their truth. As I show in this chapter, this was the case for some Sanskrit grammarians and Mīmāṃsā scholars. Our authors recognize the epistemic problem of such a legitimizing criterion. Specifically, I argue that the *Investigation* uses the *Mahābhārata* and the practice of *līṅga* veneration as examples of texts and practices that are erroneously legitimized on account of already being followed by people. Moreover, texts and practices that were legitimized in this way pose serious difficulty over the project of the *Investigation*. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati understand that it should not be very difficult to discredit an insignificant story by merely pointing out its faults. However, it takes additional effort and dedication to argue against stories that were already adhered to by a substantial number of people and consequently gained the status of truth and authority in the world. It is a serious problem for the Investigators, since the objects of their critique are stories that have already been transmitted and circulated for centuries, were incorporated into multiple different texts and traditions, gained massive popularity across South Asia, and claimed their own authority from associating themselves with the prestigious “old” (*purāṇa*).

The dominant Sanskritic culture valorizes the old. What is old is considered good and prestigious, what is new is worthless.⁸ The old is perceived as true and authoritative since, to use C. Mackenzie Brown’s words, in this cultural milieu truth “is not something so much to be newly discovered as to be recovered.”⁹ In a series of essays, Sheldon Pollock reconstructs the

⁸ Taylor 2008: 313; Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb 2014: 2.

⁹ Brown 1990: 4.

development of this perspective.¹⁰ It is owing to the centrality of the Veda, he argues, and to its self-fashioning as having a transcendent (*apauruṣeya*) origin and eternal nature. Such an anti-historical claim valorizes the established over the new. It implies that there is no possibility of improvement through progression and innovation. Pollock explains the impact of this claim on the discursive thought of premodern South Asia:

When the dominant hermeneutic of the Vedas eliminated the possibility of historical referentiality, any text seeking recognition of its truth claims—any text seeking to participate in brahmanical discourse at all—was required to exclude precisely this referential sphere. Discursive texts that came to be composed under the sign of the Veda eliminated historical referentiality and with it all possibility of historiography.¹¹

In this context, to be considered as true and authoritative, a text must void of any signs of human historicity. The Hindu *purāṇas*, among the most authoritative sources of Brahminical traditions, obtain their authoritativeness, as their name suggests, by purporting to relate “ancient” stories. Further, these texts lack of any sign of a historical human author.¹² They are, as McComas Taylor stresses, “effectively anonymous.”¹³ Their self-fashioning grounds them in an immemorial past, transmitted from their divine origin up until the present by an uninterrupted human lineage.¹⁴ It is from this anti-historical perspective that the Hindu *purāṇas* acquire an aura of truth and authenticity. It is what similarly establishes the *śāstras* as true, as I elaborate later in this chapter.

By contrast, I argue, the *Investigation* stands up against the view that uncritically valorizes the old over the new. Two verses that Amitagati utters in the final section of his work exemplify

¹⁰ Pollock 1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990.

¹¹ Pollock 1989b: 610.

¹² Narayana Rao 2016: 435.

¹³ Taylor 2008: 312.

¹⁴ Doniger 1993b: 32.

his opinion about the unestablished correlation of the old with the true and the authoritative:

“An old (*purāṇa*) composition grants pleasure, not a new one.”—

Intelligent people should not utter such a statement! Is it not the case that many fruits will appear on trees, *after* they have blossomed?

“Although emerging from the *purāṇas*, it is not accepted, since it is not old (*apurāṇa*).” But isn’t its speech beautiful? Is it not that people only value gold, *after* it has been extracted from unrefined gold ore?¹⁵

These verses appear in Amitagati’s final remarks, which discuss paratextual issues such as the author’s lineage, the nature of his work, and his motivation for composing it. Amitagati’s concerns about the newness of his work are clear, as he directly defies here the idea that what is new is necessarily inferior—an objection raised by an imaginary interlocutor—by using the metaphor of pleasing fruits that can only emerge from the flowers that preceded them, and of gold that emerges from raw substance. Whereas the first stanza is straightforward, the second requires some further explanation. Specifically, we should understand that the pronominal form “it” (*idam*) refers to the *Investigation* itself. Since this work makes use of much purāṇic material, a potential reader would argue that it is derivative, secondary to the old and authoritative Hindu *purāṇas* that serve as the source of this Jaina work.¹⁶ Following the Sanskrit rationale that truth is something to be recovered and not to be newly discovered, this imaginary interlocutor considers a secondary product such as the *Investigation* to be derivative and therefore not to be trusted. The interlocutor says that the fact that the *Investigation* is secondary instantaneously places it at an inferior position,

¹⁵ *kṛtiḥ purāṇā sukhadā na nūtanā na bhāṣaṇīyaṃ vacanaṃ budhair idam |
bhavanti bhavyāni phalāni bhūriṣo na bhūruhām kiṃ prasava-prasūtitaḥ ||
purāṇa-sambhūtaṃ idam na grhyate 'purāṇam ity asya na sundarī tu gīḥ |
suvarṇa-pāṣāṇa-vinirgatam jāne na kāñcanaṃ gacchati kiṃ mahārghatām || AmDhP 21.8-9 ||
'purāṇam conj.] purāṇam ; ity conj.] aty ; sundarī tu conj.] sundareti.*

¹⁶ This was in fact the opinion of many modern scholars who wrote about the Jaina epics and *purāṇas* (see Chapter Four, pp. 152ff).

as distorted and unreliable. Nevertheless, Amitagati stresses that the beautiful words of his *Investigation* will prove to be valuable, just as raw material proves its value once gold is extracted from it.

Amitagati advances an opposite kind of rationale, which challenges the Sanskrit valorization of the old. While, on the face of it, the *Investigation* argues against the uncritical acceptance of old stories as true simply due to their antiquity, it opens a radical path for critiquing not only stories but traditionally inherited knowledge more broadly. According to the rationale it advances, posteriority—the condition of being subsequent in time—does not mean an ever-weaker and increasingly unreliable connection to an original truth. Rather, it is the separation of the wheat from the chaff, or as Amitagati puts it, the refinement of substances from potential impurities. In the rationale of these Jaina authors, it is necessary to look back at our already accepted stories. The product of this effort will not be a derivative imitation of these stories, but rather, their refined and faultless version, which wise people will find to be valuable. Furthermore, I argue, the *Investigation* advocates that just as old stories should be closely examined and refined as gold ore, so does the rest of our inherited knowledge.

Incoherence of the *Mahābhārata* 1: Manovega's argument

In what follows, I explore an episode in which our authors investigate stories from the *Mahābhārata*. I illustrate how these Investigators use this episode to voice their concerns about the status of purāṇic stories that do not abide by their standards of coherence and correspondence, but are nonetheless commonly accepted in the world. Specifically, this episode describes Manovega as he tells his friend a story about Vyāsa, the traditional composer of the *Mahābhārata* and of many Hindu *purāṇas*. This story represents Vyāsa's concerns about the incoherence of his

epic, and it serves to argue that a well-known story, popular as it may be, might nonetheless be false and should not be considered true and authoritative without a careful examination.

The protagonist narrates this story to his friend when they stand alone at the park outside the city, after he outwits the Brahmins for the fourth time. Since we already encountered the preceding debate between Manovega and the Brahmins in Chapter One, I will allude to it only briefly. It begins with the protagonist's arrival in the city dressed as an ascetic and claiming to be the son of a virgin woman. When the Brahmins contest his bizarre biography, he challenges them with analogous Brahminical stories of purāṇic characters such as Bhagīrathi, Gāndhārī, Abhimanyu, Mandodarī, Indrajit, Vyāsa, Kuntī, Candramatī, Sun (Āditya) and Uddālaka.¹⁷ When the Brahmins remain speechless after hearing this long list of similar cases, Manovega prompts his friend to leave the city: "Come, Friend! Let's go! Your head will hurt if you spend too much time thinking about worldly *purāṇas*."¹⁸ I will return shortly to the concept of "*purāṇa*" and its qualifier "worldly" (Apbh. *loiya*; Skt. *laukika*). For now, it is important to note simply that, while our authors do not explicitly define these concepts, they clearly associate them with the works that contain the stories to which Manovega has just referred. Most of the characters he has mentioned are easily traced in well-known premodern South Asian sources. Although some of these stories appear in Brahminical sources differently than how Manovega tells them, it is clear that at least as far as the *Investigation* puts it, such stories are associated with the Brahmins and with the Brahminical tradition.¹⁹ Further, the Investigators present the Brahminical narration of these

¹⁷ See Chapter One, pp. 51-2.

¹⁸ *ehi mitta jāijai | loiya-purāṇu ciraṃtaṭaḥ buddhi ciraṃtaṇu khijjai || HaDhP 8.1.2bcd || ciraṃtaṇu conj.] ciraṃtaṇa.*

¹⁹ The fact that we cannot trace the source of a story does not entail that our authors made it up themselves. For instance, in one of his references to Brahminical stories, Manovega mentions a certain Bhagīrathi (the Sanskrit editor mentions a variant that reads Bhagīratha), who was born of two women (*HaDhP* 7.9.2; *AmDhP* 14.56). In the Brahminical *Padma Purāṇa* (not to confuse with Jaina works by the same name that narrate the life story of Rāma), Bhagīratha, one of Rāma's ancestors, is the son of King Dilīpa. He is most famous for bringing Gaṅgā from heaven down to earth (*Padma Purāṇa* 6.21.7-16). Like most of the works that tell this story (e.g., the *Bālakāṇḍa* book of

stories as somewhat different from Jaina depictions of the same characters and events.

The two friends then leave the city. In the park, Manovega reveals the common denominator of the stories that he just mentioned: they were all narrated by Vyāsa in his *Mahābhārata*. It is significant since, as I will demonstrate in the next section, the authors use Vyāsa and his work as an example of a popular literary tradition that people regard as true and authoritative. The stories that Vyāsa narrates, the Investigators tell their readers, are well-known in the world and have already gained the status of commonly accepted knowledge. Notwithstanding this status, in the subsequent story, which discusses Vyāsa's concerns with regard to composing his *Mahābhārata*, the Investigators flag the relationship between popularity and truth, by discussing the danger of uncritically following commonly accepted customs. Using Vyāsa's story, I maintain, they argue that a story's popularity should not be assumed as an indication of its truthfulness.

Before Manovega starts narrating this story to his friend, he establishes a dichotomy between the stories as they were told by Vyāsa and what were, in his view, the events as they truly happened. He begins by telling the story of Karna's birth to Kuntī, established in accordance with the teaching of the Jina (*jina-śāsana-śaṃsita*). In this story, Karna was born to Kuntī and Pāṇḍu. Since they were not married, Kuntī gave birth secretly and left her baby on the river, where King Āditya of Campāpura found him (*HaDhP* 8.1-3; *AmDhP* 14.18-45). Manovega lays out this story as a "revision" to the Brahminical story about how the god Āditya (the Sun) impregnated Kuntī, who

Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, *sarga* 41-3), this source does not mention Bhagīratha's mother (Vanita 2005: 549). However, a few works in the Bengali language from the fourteenth century, as well as a recension of the Sanskrit *Padma Purāṇa* in the Bengali script, narrate it differently. These works say that Dilīpa died before bringing forth an heir and in order to continue the king's lineage, Vasiṣṭha instructed two of Dilīpa's widows on how to bring forth a child together. Bhagīratha was born to these two women (Vanita 2005: 548-550). It is clear that Amitagati does not respond to the more widespread tradition as it is told in most of the *Padma Purāṇa* recensions, but to some earlier version of this story that has survived today only in a handful of texts from fourteenth-century Bengal. Similarly, the *Investigation* identifies Uddālaka's son as Nāgaketu. I did not find any material about such story, but Brahminical sources, including the *Mahābhārata* and some *Upaniṣads*, famously identify Śvetaketu, and not Nāgaketu, as the son of Uddālaka. It is not implausible that the story of Nāgaketu existed in older oral tradition that did not survive to our days.

was still a virgin nonetheless. The Jaina version of this story is given in order to correct the details that our authors do not accept to be true: it is against the teaching of the Jina that gods (*deva*) have sex with women. An explanation of what “god” means for these authors, provided elsewhere in their works, clarifies why it is so: Gods are beings who are free from faults and from karmic matter.²⁰ They do not participate in worldly affairs, and they surely do not have sex with humans. As Amitagati lays it out explicitly in the context of this episode: “How would gods, who lack bodily fluids and who are free of filth, have sex with foul human bodies that are entirely impure?”²¹ The *Investigation*’s revised version of this story sets the record straight by clarifying that Karṇa is known as Son of Āditya (*ādityaja*) not because he was born to god Āditya, a fact that these authors cannot accept. Rather, Karṇa was awarded this epithet since he was raised by his namesake, King Āditya (*AmDhP* 15.43). Manovega further uses this strategy of revising genealogical accounts in other occasions. For instance, he explains that Karṇa’s grandfather Vyāsa was not really the son of an ascetic called Pārāśara and a fisherwoman called Satyavatī, as Vyāsa’s *Mahābhārata* claims. Rather, he was the son of a king and a king’s daughter with the same names (*AmDhP* 15.50-1).²² This is the source of such mistakes: people are confused about the true identities of these individuals, because they share the same name with others (*nāma-vimohita*). It is true here, just as it is in the case of Karṇa as Son of Āditya, as well as in the case of Viṣṇu as a “real” person, the last among the nine *Vāsudevas*.²³

²⁰ *sudeu dasaṭṭhahi dosahi cukku | sumukkhū asesa-pariggaha mukku || HaDhP 9.12.7 || sumukkhū MSS. 3, 4] sumokkha. “The true god, who is free of the eighteen faults and was liberated from any possessions, is truly liberated.” devo vidhvasta-karmā bhuvana-pati-nuto jñāta-loka-vyavastho || AmDhP 13.102a || “God is one whose karmic matter has been eradicated, who is praised as the lord of beings, whose steadiness in the world was ascertained.”*

²¹ *sarvāśuci-maye dehe mānuṣe kaśmale katham | nirdhātu-vigrahā devā ramante mala-varjitāḥ || AmDhP 15.13 ||*

²² *vyāso yojanagandhāyāḥ yaḥ putraḥ sa paro mataḥ | dhanyāyā rāja-kanyāyāḥ satyavatīyāḥ punaḥ priyaḥ || paraḥ pārāśaro rājā tāpasō ’sau punaḥ paraḥ | ekatāṃ kurvate lokāḥ tayoṛ nāma-vimohitāḥ || AmDhP 15.50-1 ||* Traditionally Vyāsa’s father is known as Parāśara, but Amitagati consistently refers to him as Pārāśara, both in Vyāsa’s version and in his own version.

²³ See Chapter One of this dissertation, p. 47.

Although we can trace such revisions in the *Investigation*, its authors do not regularly lay out these Jaina narrations as alternatives for Brahminical stories. They do so only in a handful of cases. To give one example, as we saw in this exchange between Manovega and the Brahmins, the Vidyādhara contests the details of multiple purāṇic stories of the *Mahābhārata*, such as those of Bhagīrathi and the other characters mentioned above. The fact that the Investigators revise the story of Kuntī but not of the others is connected with what I propose as their main goal: to avert the readers from accepting false knowledge by training them into recognizing it as such. I argue that the *Investigation* is not meant to produce comprehensive accounts of Jaina stories. We find such accounts in Jaina *purāṇas*: works that narrate the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇas*, *Mahābhāratas*, and other accounts of the illustrious persons (*śalākāpuruṣa*), narrated in the *Jinacaritras* and *Mahāpurāṇas*.²⁴ But comprehensive accounts of this sort do not occur in the *Investigation*. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati share much of their motivation and presuppositions in common with Jaina authors who produce “revisions” of such stories in their Jaina *purāṇas*.²⁵ However, our Investigators carry out their project very differently. Their strategy in carrying out their project is to repeatedly challenge their readers with *false* stories, until they acquire the experience necessary for adjudicating it themselves.

An examination of the different degree of their engagement with non-Jaina sources illuminates some of the differences between the *Investigation* and the Jaina *purāṇas*. All these works engage with Brahminical sources to some extent. Many Jaina *purāṇas* explicitly refer to the Brahminical *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mahābhārata* in order to point out problems in these texts. In some

²⁴ On Jaina *purāṇas*, see Cort 1993. On the Jaina Universal History and the illustrious persons (*śalākāpuruṣa*) that this history discusses, see Cort 1995a and Esposito 2020. We find these accounts in Jaina *purāṇas* such as Vimalasūri’s *Paṇḍavācariya*, Raviṣeṇa’s *Padmapurāṇa*, Svayambhūdeva’s *Paṇḍavācariya*, Jinasena Punnāṭa’s *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, and Svayambhūdeva’s *Riṭṭhanemicariya*.

²⁵ This is a claim I discuss thoroughly in Chapter Four.

cases, the story with which I opened this dissertation—the encounter between King Śreṇika and Mahāvīra’s pupil, Indrabhūti Gautama—serves as the background for discussing these Brahminical works. King Śreṇika’s doubts about the illustration of certain events in the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* trigger Indrabhūti’s narration of “revised” stories that claim to present the events as they truly happened, in accordance with the teaching of the Jina.²⁶ For the Jaina authors who use this dialogue as the framework of their plot, the “false” details of the Brahminical narrations only serve as their opening point. It is the motivation and justification of Jaina purāṇic authors for their undertaking of their own project, i.e., the narration of Jaina stories. At the same time, this is largely where their engagement with these Brahminical narrations ends.²⁷

In the *Investigation*, by contrast, the engagement with such “false” stories is central to the narrative itself. The narration of Brahminical stories makes the lion’s share of material that the Investigators use in order to explore their notions of coherence and truth. In other words, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati do not care much for telling their audience what is the “true” Jaina way in which these stories happen. Contrary to the authors of Jaina *purāṇas*, who are interested, first and foremost, in telling such “revised” Jaina stories, the Investigators are occupied in training their audience in the criteria of stories’ credibility and in understanding how to adjudicate it on their own. For this reason, the Investigators do not see their own work as a *purāṇa*.²⁸ Instead, they see it as a *śāstra*, a point I get back to later in this chapter.

²⁶ De Clercq 2005: 607; De Clercq and Winant 2021: 227-9. While the dialogical setting of King Śreṇika and Indrabhūti Gautama is commonly used as the framework for such narratives, it does not always contain explicit references to Brahminical stories. In some Jaina *purāṇas*, Śreṇika merely asks about the history of various dynasties, without explicitly pointing out inaccuracies in other stories. See De Clercq 2008 and De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming): 5.

²⁷ Seema K. Chauhan’s recent work argues convincingly that Jaina *purāṇas* engage closely with Hindu philosophical texts (2021, 2023). But it is a very different type of engagement than the explicit mentioning of Brahminical stories to which I refer.

²⁸ It is contrary to some Jaina *Rāmāyaṇas*, *Mahābhāratas*, and other works of Jaina Universal History, whose authors explicitly refer to them as a *purāṇa*. See De Clercq 2005.

Even though the authors of the *Investigation* do not produce comprehensive *purāṇas*, they still find it useful to selectively elaborate on the details of some of these Jaina stories. By laying out these “revisions,” Manovega contrasts what Vyāsa narrates in his *Mahābhārata* with what he claims to have really happened: “The *Mahābhārata* actually happened one way, but Vyāsa narrated it to the people in a different way.”²⁹ Simple as it might seem, this assertion by Hariṣeṇa, together with its equivalent by Amitagati (“The meaning of the *purāṇa* is actually one thing, but Vyāsa explained it a different way”),³⁰ hints towards some basic assumptions of our authors. First, Vyāsa’s stories refer to things that are external to them and have ontological status of their own. The *Mahābhārata*, or at least the events it depicts, exist regardless of Vyāsa, and his words are only a representation of these events. For this reason, I propose a second assumption that these authors hold: such representations vary, and not all of them should be considered equally true. Vyāsa’s work only *claims* to represent the events of the *Mahābhārata* truthfully, but in fact, it misrepresents them. Third, events and the stories that depict them are understood as historical phenomena, organized linearly according to a clear chronological order. It is not only that the *Mahābhārata* exists independently of Vyāsa; it also precedes him. The *Investigation*, in turn, is subsequent to both.

Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati establish their texts within a linear chronology, positioning them as temporally subsequent to the literature they discuss. They do it explicitly, as they reflect their own intention of looking back at a set of antecedent texts and assessing their qualities. It allows them to step out of the frame, so to speak, and to examine retrospectively these preceding stories and events from an external point of view of an independent critic. Their self-claimed posteriority validates these authors’ command over preceding materials and serves as the basis of their

²⁹ *aṇṇārisu bhārahu vittu jane aṇṇārisu vāseṃ bhaṇiu* || *HaDhP* 8.5.ghattā ||

³⁰ *ity anyathā purāṇārtho vyāseṇa kathito ’nyathā* || *AmDhP* 15.46ab ||

authoritativeness. It is a position that opposes the classicizing view that valorizes the old. However, while this temporal position grants the Investigators the privilege of examining their sources retrospectively as external critics, it also confronts them with the challenge of arguing against stories that have already gained popularity and authoritative status in the world. As the following instance reveals, this episode takes Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* as an example of such a widely accepted story. In the next section, I analyze the *Investigation*'s episode of Vyāsa and show how our authors use it to argue against the legitimization of knowledge on account of its preexisting acceptance by people.

Incoherence of the *Mahābhārata* 2: Vyāsa's reflections

Once Manovega completes introducing his friend to the revised genealogies of these *Mahābhārata* characters, he proceeds to narrate a story involving Vyāsa himself. In this story, narrated both in the Apabhramsha and Sanskrit versions, Manovega portrays Vyāsa contemplating his own composition. Here is how Hariṣeṇa depicts this story in the sixth *kaḍavaka* of his eighth *sandhi*: When Vyāsa finished composing his work, he was concerned whether his *Mahābhārata* would gain popularity in the world. He thought: “Will what I created become commonly accepted or not?”³¹ With this in mind, he went to bathe in the Gaṅgā. Before entering the water, he concealed his copper vessel in the sand. In order to easily find it later, Vyāsa piled sand on top of it and marked it with a flower. But other people imitated him by making similar piles. They called them *līngas* and venerated them. Since the bank was full of such piles of sand, Vyāsa could not find his vessel. Although it was lost, he was happy nonetheless, since this incident taught him that people are like sheep, they simply follow the conduct of others. Because people pointlessly imitate others,

³¹ *hoi pasiddhu na vā iu māi kiu* || *HaDhP* 8.6.1cd || *vā iu MS. 4*] *pāiu*.

a sandcastle that someone formed in order to mark a spot, turned into the popular custom of venerating *liṅgas*. In the same way, he knew, his *Mahābhārata* will also become popular in the world.³²

What is the link that Hariṣeṇa establishes between Vyāsa’s work and *liṅga* veneration? On its most basic level, this story brings about a critique of religious practices. Specifically, it gestures towards people who do not really understand the meaning of others’ actions but simply follow them blindly. The words “people follow the conduct of others” (*janu gayāṇugaīu*) that Hariṣeṇa employs here in Apabhramsha allude to a Sanskrit phrase, that he then quotes with the following *subhāṣita*:

People follow the conduct of others (*gatānugatiko loko*); they do not care for the truth. See the stupidity of the people [because of whom] the copper vessel was lost!³³

The Sanskrit expression *gatānugatiko loka* is a stock phrase that refers to “following the crowd,” usually (but not necessarily) unthinkingly.³⁴ For Hariṣeṇa, the verse specifically criticizes the practice of *liṅga* veneration, which he claims people do without understanding the purpose of their own actions. The second half of this verse, which explicitly refers to the story of Vyāsa and his vessel, serves as an analogy that justifies the general moral outlined in the first half of the verse.

³² *jāṇevīṇu janū gayāṇugaīu kaya raṅgāvali soḥaho | bhārahu pasiddhu phuḍu havaī jāī iya muṇevi gaī gehaho || HaDhP 8.6.ghattā ||* “Having realized that people just follow the crowd, he put the finishing touch on the Mahābhārata (literally: “put a raṅgāvalī on the house”), and now knowing whether his Mahābhārata would become famous, he went home.”

³³ *gatānugatiko loko na lokaḥ pāramārthikaḥ | paśya lokasya mūrkhataṃ hāritaṃ tāmra-bhājanam || HaDhP 8.7.śloka ||* paśya MS. 3] paśca.

³⁴ See Gurevitch (2021: 281) for an example of a non-Sanskrit scholar from eleventh-century Karnataka who uses this Sanskrit expression in his Kannada work on the erotics, to emphasize that his words stand in line with what preceding scholars argue. The expression also appears in verses of didactic works such as Viṣṇuśarma’s *Pañcatantra* (1.373) and Nārāyaṇa’s *Hitopadeśa* (1.10), as well as in *subhāṣita* collections such as *Subhāṣita-sudhā-ratna-bhāṇḍāgāra*, *Subhāṣita-ratna-bhāṇḍāgāram*, *Śrīsūktāvalī*, *Subhāṣitārṇava*, *Samayocita-padya-ratnamālikā* (Sternbach 1999: v. 12661-3).

The verse explains what causes Vyāsa to understand that his work will become famous. Had people's actions been contingent on their search for what is true, then his work would run the risk of being forgotten. However, since people simply follow inherited knowledge without caring for the truth, his work will become popular, just as the practice of *līṅga* veneration. For Hariṣeṇa, practices like *līṅga* veneration and texts like Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* are analogous because people follow them out of habit, not because they necessarily serve a legitimate purpose. But what does it mean for a particular mode of religious conduct or a literary work to be legitimate and true? What is the nature of such truth?

Whereas Hariṣeṇa does not answer this question directly, Amitagati's narration lays out Vyāsa's concerns explicitly. The Sanskrit Investigator incorporates in this story new details that put it in conversation with other themes that he discusses throughout his work. For Amitagati, the critique of religious praxis serves to emphasize a larger argument of the *Investigation*: Incoherent stories should not be regarded as true or authoritative. The audience of such stories should assess them critically and be cautious before accepting the knowledge they produce.

The first part of Amitagati's version of the story goes as follows:

After composing his *Mahābhārata*, Vyāsa saw its internal incoherence that would prevent it from becoming commonly accepted and thought to himself: "If some pointless thing I did became commonly accepted in the world, then even a meaningless *śāstra* that is full of contradictions would surely [become commonly accepted too]." He then buried his copper vessel at the bank of the Gaṅgā and gathered a tall pile of sand on top of it. All the people who strive after *dharma* but are ignorant about the highest truth saw it and gathered similar piles of sand. After bathing, he searched for his vessel, but could not find it among all these piles. Having seen the multitude of sand-piles widely scattered on the beach, he realized this worldly foolishness and recited the *śloka*:

(“People follow the conduct of others; they do not care for the truth. See the stupidity of the people [because of whom] the copper vessel was lost!”)³⁵

[Vyāsa thought:] “Those who follow what they have perceived, who are injudicious about the highest truth, cause their own affairs to be lost, just as I have lost my copper pot.”³⁶

Amitagati’s discussion on the futility of useless praxes, just as Hariṣeṇa’s, is also linked directly with the question of truth and unwarranted knowledge. People build piles of sand without a real understanding of their actions. They simply follow the steps of others, without considering these actions’ real purpose or value. While Vyāsa piles sand for a mundane, practical purpose—to mark the place of his vessel—the people who see him assume that his conduct has supra-mundane value and blindly imitate it.³⁷ Hariṣeṇa does not expand on why these people imitate him and simply says that “the group of people made [*liṅgas*] for a god.”³⁸ Amitagati, however, is more explicit about their motivations: these people strive after *dharma*. And when ignorant people strive after

³⁵ It is unclear whether this verse actually appears in Amitagati’s original work. The editor of the printed edition quotes it as a footnote, not in the body of the text, which suggests that it did not appear across all the manuscripts he consulted. I consulted manuscript no. 3648 from the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur and discovered that it quotes the verse at the body of the work itself. This being the case, it is difficult to say whether Amitagati really reproduced this verse in his work, or whether he merely alluded to it through the story, and it was only later that a certain scribe or editor recognized the reference and incorporated this *subhāṣita* into their manuscript. In any case, manuscript no. 3648 contains many errors and so I follow the text as given in the printed edition.

³⁶ *aprasiddhi-karīm dṛṣṭvā pūrvāpara-viruddhatām | bhārate nirmite vyāsaḥ pradadhyāv iti mānase || nirarthakaṃ kṛtaṃ kāryaṃ yadi loke prasidhyati | asambaddhaṃ viruddhārthaṃ tadā śāstram api sphuṭam || sa tāmra-bhājanam kṣiptvā jāhnavī-puline tataḥ | tasyopari cakāroccair vālukā-puñjam ūrjitam || tadīyaṃ sikatā-puñjam vilokya sakalair janaiḥ | paramārtham ajānānais cakrire dharma-kāṅkṣibhiḥ || yāvat snānam vidhāyāsau vīkṣate tāmra-bhājanam | tāvat tat-puñja-saṅghāte na sthānam api budhyate || pulina-vyāpakaṃ dṛṣṭvā vālukā-puñja-saṅcayam | vijñāya loka-mūḍhatvaṃ sa ślokaṃ apaṭhīd imam || [gatānugatiko loko na lokaḥ pāramārthikaḥ | paśya lokasya mūrkhataṃ hāritaṃ tāmra-bhājanam || (see previous footnote)]*

dṛṣṭānusāribhir lokaiḥ paramārthāvicāribhiḥ | tathā svaṃ hāryate kāryaṃ yathā me tāmra-bhājanam || AmDhP 15.58-64 || dṛṣṭānusāribhir conj.] dṛṣṭvānusāribhir.

³⁷ In his manual for the laity, the *Ratnakaraṇḍaka-śrāvaka-cāra* (v. 1.22), the Digambara scholar Samantabhadra (early centuries of the common era?), uses the same term as Amitagati (“worldly foolishness”) to describe practices such as the veneration of heaps of sand and stones.

³⁸ *deva-viyappiya loya-samūheṃ || HaDhP 8.6.8ab || devaviyappiya MSS. 3, 4] devaviyaṇṇiya.*

dharma, they find it everywhere they look. For these overenthusiastic seekers, even a sandcastle on the beach seems like the answer to what they aspire. Hariṣeṇa already tells us why *liṅgas* do not embody any truth: they are nothing more than an imitation of Vyāsa's landmark. Amitagati elaborates on this point, by telling us what is the problem with Vyāsa's work: it is internally incoherent (*pūrvāpara-viruddhatā*) and full of contradictions (*viruddhārtha*). Manovega's stories, narrated to the Brahmins throughout the episode, serve to illustrate this incoherence of the *Mahābhārata*. Its internal contradictions render this work meaningless (*asambaddha*), and it is thus analogous with useless (*nirarthaka*) things (*kārya*) such as *liṅga* veneration.

The story about Vyāsa is essentially about the basis of legitimacy for already established customs and knowledge. Should people accept certain practices and texts as legitimate and true, simply on the account that many people already follow them? This is, for instance, the case of language usage and grammatical rules. It was a contested issue for Sanskrit grammarians who tried to make sense of contemporary language usage that did not fit into the rules of grammar as encoded in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Madhav Deshpande shows that Sanskrit grammarians such as Kātyāyana, Patañjali, and Nāgeśabhaṭṭha, expose a historical distinction between Pāṇinian Sanskrit and standard Sanskrit usage.³⁹ It is because grammarians faced the challenge of Sanskrit forms that, even though they did not conform to the Pāṇinian rules of grammar, were used by people in practice. These grammarians could not have disregarded such common usage of language. Some of them revised their grammar accordingly, to accommodate such usage.⁴⁰ As a result, grammarians debated the question: do the rules dictate the practice, or is it the other way around, that the practice dictates the rules? In his *Mahābhāṣya*, for instance, the grammarian Patañjali

³⁹ Deshpande 1993: 21.

⁴⁰ Such revisions are the basis for some Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya objections to the science of grammar, see Chatterjee 1934.

suggests that under certain circumstances grammar can be “dependent upon the usage of social élite (*śiṣṭa*).”⁴¹ Patañjali’s statement appears in his discussion of Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, where the root text introduces irregular Sanskrit compounds that cannot be explained by the rules it encodes.⁴² Certainly, Pāṇini’s grammar serves as the benchmark for defining proper Sanskrit usage, but a descriptive grammar, as exhaustive as it may be, will never cover the entirety of possible language usage.⁴³ In such uncharted territories of language practice, we need alternative sources of authority, and Patañjali perceives the educated (*śiṣṭa*) as precisely such an authority, even regarding forms that were not taught by Pāṇini. He identifies these educated speakers as the Brahmins living in Āryāvarta, who attained great command over branches of knowledge.⁴⁴ It is the widespread usage of certain Sanskrit forms, or at least its widespread usage among those who matter (Brahmins from Āryāvarta), that validates these forms as correct.

The discussion within Mīmāṃsā regarding the sources of the knowledge of *dharma* raises a similar concern. According to Jaimini’s foundational work on Mīmāṃsā, the sole authority for matters concerning *dharma* is the Veda.⁴⁵ However, as time passed, new bodies of knowledge known as *smṛtis* (such as the epics, *purāṇas*, and *Maṇusmṛti*) emerged, along with specific practices and customs that complemented the Veda.⁴⁶ Consequently, Mīmāṃsā thinkers confronted a dilemma: by their era, certain texts and practices were considered as *dharma*, even though they were not directly endorsed by the Veda.⁴⁷ In his *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra*, Jaimini offers a solution, endorsed later by his commentator Śabara: since those who follow the *dharma* prescribed by the

⁴¹ Deshpande 1993: 18.

⁴² *pr̥ṣodarādīni yathopadiṣṭam* || Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 6.3.109 ||

⁴³ Pollock 1985: 504-5.

⁴⁴ Deshpande 1993: 28.

⁴⁵ Kataoke 2013: 241.

⁴⁶ Sheldon Pollock (2011) analyzes how the relationship between the “heard” Veda (*śruti*) and the *smṛti* texts was articulated in Sanskrit discourse, tracing the socio-historical impact of the latter.

⁴⁷ On this issue, see Jha 1964: 187-224; Pollock 1990 (especially, pp. 322-28).

Veda are the same individuals who adhere to the *smṛtis* and engage in customs not explicitly mandated by the Veda, it can be *inferred* that the foundation for these *smṛtis* and customs lies within the Veda, even if it is no longer directly accessible to us.⁴⁸ Here, similar to the debate among grammarians about language usage, we observe that practice can serve as a criterion for truth and authority, rather than the other way around. As Sheldon Pollock aptly expresses, “it is only the status and nature of these agents that legitimate or delegitimize *smṛtis*.”⁴⁹ In a manner akin to Patañjali, who associates specific language forms with correctness through the endorsement of a particular social elite, these Mīmāṃsāka thinkers establish the legitimacy of particular customs and texts based on their adherence by a social elite.

It is a chicken-and-egg problem, wherein it is challenging to determine whether popular customs gain acceptance because they are valid, or whether people consider them valid due to their widespread adoption. Both grammarians and Mīmāṃsākas grappled with this issue. Patañjali, in defining his social elite as educated Brahmins from Āryāvarta, specifically avoids categorizing them as individuals knowledgeable in grammar. This strategic choice was made to prevent falling into a circular argument, where “the correct usage of language presupposes the science of grammar” and “the science of grammar presupposes the correct usage of language.”⁵⁰ To anticipate a similar objection, Jaimini employs the idea of inference to rationalize his argument. He argues that we can infer that certain customs are in accordance with the Veda, since they are practiced by virtuous individuals who themselves follow the Veda. The inference-based approach allows him to navigate this intricate problem more effectively.

To summarize, grammarians and Mīmāṃsākas produced arguments in attempt to rationalize

⁴⁸ *api vā karṭṛ-sāmānyāt pramāṇam anumānam syāt* || Jaimini’s *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.3.2 ||

⁴⁹ Pollock 1990: 328.

⁵⁰ Deshpande 1993: 28.

certain practices and texts, and to legitimize them by criteria external to them. However, at least in some cases, it is evident that the acceptance of certain practices as true and legitimate is primarily a result of their preexisting common use, rather than the other way around. In the story of Vyāsa, Amitagati expresses his opinion about what comes first, the chicken or the egg. This story can serve as a response to an imaginary interlocutor who argues for the legitimacy of popular compositions. This interlocutor argues that once a composition (e.g., Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*) gains popularity and becomes commonly accepted (*prāśidh*) by the people who count, then it is safe to consider it as true and authoritative. It is, essentially, the same argument that those grammarians made about standard non-Pāṇinian Sanskrit usage and that those Mīmāṃsākas made about the legitimacy of *smṛtis* and customs. The *Investigation*, however, does not accept this majoritarian criterion for truth. To this objection, the Investigators reply by equating Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* with religious practices such as the construction of *liṅgas*, on the account that both of them are popularly adhered to in the world. It serves as a contrary example to this objection: The construction of *liṅgas* is like the building of sandcastles. If a useless practice of this sort becomes commonly accepted (*prasidhyati*), then nothing prevents a composition that is nonsensical and internally incoherent from similarly gaining popularity and worldly fame. But this popularity, Amitagati emphasizes here, should not be mistaken with any substantial truth. It is merely based on the force of habit. People who see the conduct of others and unreflectingly follow it by the force of habit are injudicious (*avicārin*, *nirvicāraka*), just like the fools who consider internally incoherent stories to be credible (I discuss this subject further in Chapter Three). Both Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati evoke the same Sanskrit *śloka* as an authoritative source for emphasizing the claim that blindly following others' conduct has nothing to do with real consideration of truth.⁵¹

⁵¹ Both authors clearly had this *śloka* in mind, but it is not clear whether Amitagati actually quotes it or merely alludes to it. See footnote 35 in this chapter.

Amitagati expands on this problem by attributing the following statement to Vyāsa:

If it is true that among the billions of people who are pervaded by the darkness of misconception and are injudicious, there is only one who is judicious, then I can be assured that this *śāstra* of mine, full of contradictions as it may be, will be commonly accepted.⁵²

It is a short, yet important passage, that deserves a close discussion. Amitagati speaks here in what can be read as two distinct voices, which differ in their sentiment towards Vyāsa and the complex (or, one might say, incoherent) nature of his *Mahābhārata*. One possible reading is as if the *Investigation* takes a sympathetic position towards Vyāsa's efforts. The “if” (*yadi*) clause may be taken here as constituting an aspirational statement. This way, the passage reflects the author's wish to find in this world of ignorance but a single judicious reader, who is skilled enough to appreciate his writing. In other words, the success of his work—it being “widely accepted”—depends not on the billions of benighted fools, but on the one judicious reader.

Examined through the prism of Sanskrit literary history, such reading echoes the opening statements of classical and medieval poetic works, delivered by poets who reflect on the novelty of their own compositions.⁵³ Read in this way, the meaning of Vyāsa's aspiration here resonates closely with that of the Sanskrit poet Bhavabhūti, who famously hopes (and simultaneously predicts) that his play *Mālatīmādhava* will gain the appreciation it deserves, whether in his lifetime or some day in the future.:

Those who scorn me now know what they know. My work is not for them.
Someday someone will be born who shares my nature, for time is

⁵² *mithyā-jñāna-tamo-vyāpte loke 'smin nirvicārake | ekaḥ śata-sahasrāṇām madhye yadi vicārakaḥ || viruddham api me śāstram yāsyatīdam prasiddhatām || AmDhP 15.65-66ab ||*

⁵³ On this novelty see Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb (2014), especially pp. 1-6, for analogous words of other Sanskrit poets.

boundless and the world is wide.⁵⁴

In the sympathetic reading of Vyāsa's statement in Amitagati's *Investigation*, his work is only *prima facie* incoherent, due to the scarcity of judicious readers in the world. Vyāsa wishes what Bhavabhūti is confident about: time is infinite and the world is wide enough so that one day there will be found this exceptional reader who understands the coherence beyond the seemingly contradictory nature of his work.

It is not surprising that among all the Brahminical literary works and poets that Amitagati evokes throughout his *Investigation*, he chooses to put such words in Vyāsa's mouth. In the Sanskrit literary tradition, there are none as polyvocal as Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*. Whether it was composed by a single author—a role traditionally ascribed to Vyāsa—or the product of a centuries-long composition process undertaken by multiple hands (as modern scholarship asserts), its many scenarios, moods, incidents, and characters make it a work of aggregate and polyvocal nature like no other.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, while for an outside spectator this complexity might come across as pointlessly tedious and the *Mahābhārata* as an incoherent “literary monster,” as one Orientalist scholar describes it, for scholars from within the tradition this work seems to make a lot of sense.⁵⁶ Possibly the most famous among these traditional scholars is Ānandavardhana (ninth century), who uses the *Mahābhārata* as his main example of the poetic unity of a literary composition in his

⁵⁴ *ye nāma kecid iha naḥ prathayanty avajñāṃ jānanti te kimapi tāt prati naiṣa yatnaḥ | utpatsyate tu mama ko'pi samānadharmā kālo hy ayam niravadhir vipulā ca pṛthvī* || Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava* 1.6 || Translated by Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb 2014: 4.

⁵⁵ On the symbolic and authoritative role of Vyāsa, see Sullivan 1994.

⁵⁶ The Western scholar mentioned here is Maurice Winternitz, whose words serve as an instructive example of the lack of appreciation for the complexity of this work, shared by some of the modern Orientalists who tried to explain the literary traditions of South Asia: “*For us* (emphasis in original), however, who do not look upon the *Mahābhārata* with the eyes of believing Hindus, but as critical historians of literature it is everything but a work of art; and in any case we cannot regard it as the work of *one* author, or even of a clever collector and compiler. The *Mahābhārata* as a whole is a literary monster. Never has the hand of an artist attempted the well-nigh impossible task of combining the conflicting elements into one unified poem. It is only unpoetical theologians and commentators and clumsy copyists who have succeeded in conglomerating into a heterogeneous mass parts which are actually incompatible, and which date from different centuries” (Winternitz 1977: 326).

Light on Suggestion (Dhvanyāloka), one of the most influential Sanskrit works on poetics. In his work, Ānandavardhana argues that the *Mahābhārata* is complex, but it is surely not incoherent, since its various elements, while they may seem disparate and incompatible, in fact operate together towards a single goal, that of liberation.⁵⁷ Similarly, in a sympathetic reading of Vyāsa's words in the *Investigation*, it is exactly what Amitagati refers to: the contradictions in the *Mahābhārata* are only seemingly so. One day, when a vigilant reader will show up, the truth of this work will finally find its proper audience.⁵⁸

Such interpretation and its underlying links with discussions about the unity of the *Mahābhārata*, I suggest, are intended by Amitagati to be noticed by specific audiences who are sufficiently trained in the Sanskrit poetic discourse. But this is not to say that it reflects Amitagati's own opinion about the epic. Rather, this statement is meant to create in the trained reader the expectation that this self-disparaging statement will be followed by Vyāsa's hope that his text will be appreciated by the one judicious person. This expectation, however, is inverted unexpectedly.

Although Amitagati is familiar with such a sympathetic opinion of the epic's complex unity, he does not uphold such opinion himself. His inversion of the reader's expectation reveals a different opinion, one that echoes the sentiment of the outside gaze of an Orientalist scholar more than that of Ānandavardhana: the *Mahābhārata* is not merely complex, but it is actually full of contradictions. The only explanation for how it could have ever become so popular is, in Amitagati's conception, the foolishness of people. Read in this way, we should not take this passage as an aspirational statement on behalf of Vyāsa. Rather, it is Vyāsa's sigh of relief, which is based on an entirely opposite opinion: since a judicious reader is such a statistical rarity (one in

⁵⁷ Tubb 1985; Hudson 2013: 56ff; Radhavallabh Tripathi 2014.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to Whitney Cox for pointing out this shared sentiment between Vyāsa's words (when they are read sympathetically) and Ānandavardhana.

a billion), it is highly unlikely that anyone will notice the contradictions that predominate this work. Being so, the *Mahābhārata* will surely become popular among all these simpletons who do not care for the truth, but simply follow the knowledge they inherited from others.

There are two significant effects of Amitagati’s “double voicing” of Vyāsa here. First, his manipulation of the audience’s expectations, based on their knowledge of Sanskrit literature, emphasizes the author’s real opinion about Vyāsa’s epic, which is entirely opposite to what the readers assume so far. Second, by initially speaking in this sympathetic voice, I suggest, Amitagati anticipates an educated readers’ objection, showing them that he is not a superficial reader of the *Mahābhārata*. Amitagati signals such an audience that he is aware of the problems that the complexity of this work poses and that he is familiar with sympathetic opinions about the nature of the *Mahābhārata*, of the sort that Ānandavardhana endorses.

That this is how Amitagati wants his audience to grasp Vyāsa’s words becomes clear in Manovega’s final words to his friend, at the end of this story. There, Manovega emphasizes the connection between Vyāsa’s rejoicing and his understanding of the people’s foolishness:

After reflecting in this way, seeing the stupidity of the people, [Vyāsa] was content.—Understood in this way, wise men should not make worldly *purāṇas* into trustworthy knowledge (*pramāṇa*) any more than they should the words of their enemies!⁵⁹

These words do not only expose the proper way in which Vyāsa’s statement should be taken. Moreover, Manovega’s final words reveal Amitagati’s opinion on the status of Vyāsa’s *Mahābhārata* and his concerns with literary works of this sort. Amitagati reveals his opinion through the formal categories with which the story labels the *Mahābhārata*, first in the voice of

⁵⁹ *iti dhyātvā tutośāsau dṛṣṭvā loka-vimūḍhatām || vijñāyetthaṃ purāṇāni laukikāni manīṣibhiḥ | na kāryāṇi pramāṇāni vacanānīva vairiṇām || AmDhP 15.66cd-67 ||*

Vyāsa and then in the voice of Manovega. In the voice of Vyāsa, as a character in Manovega’s sub-story, the *Mahābhārata* is labeled as a *śāstra*. Vyāsa is aware of the internal incoherence (*pūrvāpara-viruddhatā*) of his own composition and is concerned that such incoherence will impede its affirmation in the world. Had the world been vastly populated with judicious people who are examiners of coherence, then his work could have never obtained popularity. But once he realizes the stupidity of the majority of the people who follow the conducts of others without reflecting, he is content. It reassures him that even when his *Mahābhārata* is full of contradictions (*viruddha*), it will nonetheless become commonly accepted (*prasiddha*) as a *śāstra* by all these injudicious fools of the world.

By contrast, when Manovega (as the storyteller of this episode) refers to Vyāsa’s composition, he links it with “worldly (*laukika*) *purāṇas*.” For Manovega, this work is not a true *śāstra*, and it should not be considered as trustworthy knowledge (*pramāṇa*). This brings us back to the problem with which I opened this chapter: the Brahmins perceive their *purāṇas* as “manifesting knowledge” (*HaDhP* 3.21.7), whereas for the Investigators, the idea that such incoherent texts give rise to true and authoritative knowledge is unacceptable. We have already encountered Hariṣeṇa’s opinion on such worldly *purāṇas*: they cause great pain.⁶⁰ His opinion is also revealed when he describes Manovega’s promise to show his friend the “unreasonable worldly *purāṇa*, which lacks conditionally valid viewpoints and trustworthy knowledge (*ṇaya-pamāṇa*).”⁶¹ And Amitagati’s view, when he explains that “wise men should not make worldly *purāṇas* into trustworthy knowledge,” surely aligns with that of Hariṣeṇa.

⁶⁰ See footnote 18 in this chapter.

⁶¹ *avaru vi ajuttu loiya-purāṇu | tuha darisami ujjihiya-ṇaya-pamāṇu || HaDhP* 4.3.2 || On the concept of *naya* in Jaina thought and its relationship with *pramāṇa*, see Balcerowicz 2001.

Worldliness and popularity

Modern scholars often interpret the categories of “world” (*loka*) and “worldly” (*laukika*) contextually, based on their relation to counterparts such as “other-worldly” (*alaukika*, *lokottara*), “ritual-oriented” (*vaidika*), or “scriptural” (*āgamika*). Sheldon Pollock examines the meaning of these categories in the early South Asian intellectual tradition, where he recognizes the *laukika* and the *vaidika* as two distinct spheres.⁶² Specifically, Pollock looks into the application of “worldly” to characterize Sanskrit literature, predominantly in its poetic form as *kāvya*. He takes such application of the categories as evidence for his argument about the development in the usage of Sanskrit at the beginning of the common era and throughout the first millennium. Taken as such, during the first millennium, Sanskrit literature became a non-sacral phenomenon closely associated with politics and power, what he calls “this-worldly” concerns. The application of Sanskrit for such concerns diverges from its earlier application as the language of the sacral sphere—the supra-mundane and divine—predominantly associated with the Veda and the Vedic ritual. In Pollock’s reading, this-worldly (*laukika*) literature stands in contradistinction to ritual or scriptural (e.g., *vaidika* and *āgamika*) usage of Sanskrit, and it is the product of a cultural and political development after which Sanskrit ceased to be the “language of the gods” and became available for discussing human concerns.⁶³

A response to this interpretation argues that this *laukika/āgamika* opposition could easily seem to the modern reader as echoing the binary opposition between the secular and the religious, or the mundane and the divine. However, these categories may not fully align with the value system of the South Asian authors who used them. To tackle this difficulty, Sarah Pierce Taylor proposes

⁶² Pollock 1990: 318.

⁶³ In this process, Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* marks a watershed beyond which Sanskrit turns into an acceptable vehicle for such worldly poetry (Pollock 2003: 87).

an alternative reading of the relationship between these concepts, as they are used in early Kannada literary products. In the context of Kannada literary culture, which serves as a major case study for Pollock’s argument, early authors—beginning from Pampa (tenth century)—picked up the habit of composing pairs of works, which they described by two categories: worldly (*laukika*) and Jaina scriptural (*āgamika* or *jināgama*).⁶⁴ Such authors, who were almost entirely Digambara Jainas, used the Kannada language, a medium that had just become a legitimate vehicle for the production of literature, to compose works that did not deal exclusively with Jaina themes. While their *āgamika* works dealt with intra-Jaina religious issues, Pollock argues that their *laukika* counterparts had little to do with the Jaina identity of their authors and were largely dedicated to this-worldly issues of patronage and power.⁶⁵ Examining this case, Taylor argues that if we read it in the way proposed by Pollock, we are running the risk of anachronistically interpreting this pair as corresponding to the binary opposition of secular/religious, a conclusion to which “a certain type of modern secular logic” might easily reach.⁶⁶ As a response to this concern, she is interested in understanding how to read these categories in light of the conceptual frameworks of Jaina literary theory. When read on their own terms, Taylor argues, one learns that Jaina authors, even when they discuss seemingly non-worldly Jaina themes (for instance, the Jaina path to liberation), they nonetheless perceive these discussions as related to human experience and thus as belonging to the sphere of the worldly and the mundane, not to that of the sacral and divine. For this reason, the division of *laukika*/*āgamika* as constructed by these Kannada authors, should not be taken as a division between the mundane and the supra-mundane. Rather, she suggests, this division is grounded in the source of these stories: For these Jaina Kannada authors, the worldliness of their

⁶⁴ Pollock 2006: 330-79.

⁶⁵ Pollock 2006: 357, 426n96.

⁶⁶ Taylor 2020: 345.

laukika works is not based on any “conceptually inflated, secularist sense.”⁶⁷ Instead, it is based on the fact that their plots are drawn from a popular pan-Indian narrative tradition. This is in contrast with the themes of their *āgamika* works, which are taken from within the narrower Jaina tradition itself.⁶⁸

These Kannada authors’ use of “worldly” to refer to plots and themes from pan-Indian sources also echoes this concept’s appearances in early Śvetāmbara scriptures, where they similarly classify non-Jaina works. In the *Daśavaikālikasūtraniryukti*, traditionally ascribed to Bhadrabāhu (early centuries of the common era), a series of commentarial verses (*niryukti*) chart categories for classifying stories, primarily to identify stories that are useful for salvific purposes. The text classifies stories based on the human life-goals (*puruṣārtha*) that they discuss. It includes stories that are based on one of the three commonly accepted life-goals, together with a fourth one, the mixed (*mīsiya*) story: “rules and poems in which *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* are taught [together].”⁶⁹ This text divides the mixed story further into three: stories associated with worldly matters, with Vedic ritual, and with the (Jaina) community. In his commentary on this work, Haribhadra offers examples to clarify this division: By “worldly matters” (*loga*, Skt. *loka*), Haribhadra explains, the author refers to works such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*. By “the community” (*samaya*) he means stories like the *Taraṅgavatī*.⁷⁰ This latter work is a Jaina narrative in Prakrit from the beginning of the common era, which survived only in its later abridgments.⁷¹ Since the *Daśavaikālikasūtraniryukti* takes both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Taraṅgavatī* as instances of the

⁶⁷ Taylor 2020: 346.

⁶⁸ While conceptually it is framed differently, it might not be very different from how Pollock understands this division. He writes about the three prominent authors of the era, Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna: “all three continued a tradition [...] of producing work in two major literary genres, one political, *laukika* (this-worldly), based on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the other religious, *āgamika* (scriptural), based on (usually) Jain moral tales” (2006: 357).

⁶⁹ *dhammo attho kāmo uvaissaṃ jattha sutta-kavvesuṃ* || *Daśavaikālikasūtra* 207ab ||

⁷⁰ Haribhadra’s commentary on *Daśavaikālikasūtra* 207.

⁷¹ On this work, see Ollett 2018.

“mixed” story, what distinguishes the “worldly” work from its counterpart cannot be the types of human life-goals that are foregrounded in it. Similar to the *laukika/āgamika* division of early Kannada literature, here too it is the pan-Indian origin of these plots, in contrast with the Jaina source of their counterparts, that identifies them as worldly.⁷²

Such interpretation of “worldly” is further corroborated in another Śvetāmbara scripture, the *Anuyogadvāra*, through its discussion of different types of trustworthy knowledge (*pramāṇa*). This text lays out the category of knowledge obtained through scriptures (*āgama*), and further divides it into two types: worldly scriptures (*loia*, Skt. *laukika*) and other-worldly scriptures (*loguttaria*, Skt. *lokottarika*). The text explains that the former type includes works such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as the four *Vedas* with their *āṅgas* and *upāṅgas*, which were written by ignorant people (*aṇṇāṇia*, Skt. *ajñānika*) who possess false views (*micchādiṭṭhi*, Skt. *mithyādr̥ṣṭi*). The latter, by contrast, are the works that were delivered by the venerable ones (*arahaṃta*, Skt. *arhat*). These works include the twelve-limbed corpus (*duvālasaṃgaṃ gaṇipīḍagaṃ*, Skt. *dvādaśāṅgaṃ gaṇipīṭakaṃ*), from the *Ācārāṅga* (*Āyāra*) and up to the now-lost *Dr̥ṣṭivāda* (*Diṭṭhivā*), i.e., the Śvetāmbara *Āṅgas*.⁷³

A similar division of worldly/other-worldly (*laukika/lokottara*), echoing the one found in the *Anuyogadvāra*, is employed in Buddhist thought as well. It is used to distinguish between exclusively Buddhist cultural elements (gods, rituals, stories)—regarded as other-worldly—and between elements that are more widely accepted. Such widely accepted elements are approved in Buddhism only on a limited, “worldly” level. David Seyfort Ruegg suggests that even though the Buddhist tradition does not denounce the elements of the worldly level, it recognizes that these elements are intertwined with a pan-Indian cultural substratum that is simultaneously shared by

⁷² Ollett 2018: 141.

⁷³ *Anuyogadvāra*, pp. 410-12.

other traditions. Taken this way, the worldly in this context is not perceived as the dichotomous opposition of the other-worldly, but rather, it serves as a substratum shared by both Buddhists (i.e., the other-worldly) and other traditions that emerged in the South Asian context.⁷⁴ Relating to the same worldly/other-worldly distinction, Phyllis Granoff takes a different position from Ruegg. She proposes that the division represents a more binary opposition between Buddhist and non-Buddhist, predominantly Hindu, religious spheres.⁷⁵ While Ruegg and Granoff hold different opinions on whether these categories are fully dichotomous or not, the implication of both interpretations is that those who employ these categories are conscious of the wider acceptance and popularity of the worldly elements, in comparison with the more bounded nature of their own tradition's other-worldly elements.

The popularity of the worldly is not one that implies a division between elite and popular lay culture. Rather, it is based on the fact that members of the Jaina or the Buddhist groups identify other-worldly as elements that are exclusive to their own traditions.⁷⁶ Moreover, the members of these groups see themselves in a minority position, in comparison with the masses with which the worldly is linked.⁷⁷ The correlation between the worldliness of *purāṇas* and their popularity takes us back to the story of Vyāsa: The *Mahābhārata* is commonly accepted in the world. And a majoritarian criterion of legitimacy and truth would erroneously understand this popularity as an indication of true knowledge. However, the status of the *Mahābhārata*—commonly accepted as it may be—should not be confused with that of a *śāstra*, a concept which, I suggest, may be taken here as equivalent to an other-worldly element. Rather, Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* is a worldly story of

⁷⁴ Ruegg 2008.

⁷⁵ Granoff 2000: 404.

⁷⁶ “It must also to be specified that—contrary to a widespread view—the phenomena in question do not necessarily have anything directly to do with a so-called ‘popular’ or ‘lay’ Buddhism” (Ruegg 2008: 39).

⁷⁷ “While I often translate ‘*laukika*’ as ‘of the masses’ I do not mean to imply a division between elite and popular culture. Rather, I suspect that to the Jains and the Buddhists as members of a minority religion the masses represented the larger religious community around them” (Granoff 2000: 422n5).

the masses. It is popular, but its popularity should not be taken to stand for its truth. This popularity is based solely on the fact that, as Vyāsa's self-reflection reveals, judicious people constitute only a minor fraction of the population, in comparison with the myriad of injudicious people out there. Since it is full of contradictions, its popularity has nothing to do with truth, and it should not be confused with authority and true knowledge. It is just a worldly *purāṇa*, a story that claims its truth on account of its popularity and its association with the old. But the judicious reader of the *Investigation* will know not to take it as anything other than an incoherent story.

The benefits of a coherent *śāstra*

How do the Investigators distinguish a truly reliable *śāstra* from a worldly *purāṇa*? To address this question, in what follows I introduce the idea of *śāstra* in South Asia and analyze its particular conceptualization as part of the *Investigation*'s overall project.

The category of *śāstra* refers to an enormous textual corpus that was developed in the Sanskrit world from the middle of the first millennium BCE into the second millennium of the common era and purported to index and regulate the myriad facets of human behavior: from social interactions and rules of religious conduct, to practical guidelines of worldly affairs such as aesthetic production, painting, elephant-training, architecture, and, theoretically, all knowledge about any type of human activity that comes to mind. The idea of *śāstra* is thus associated with a claim for comprehensiveness and authority over the entire sphere of knowledge.⁷⁸ According to Pollock, "what counts as 'authentic' knowledge in any discipline came to be virtually co-terminus

⁷⁸ Pollock's analysis undertaken through a series of essays on this topic is still the best discussion on the sources of this genre's authority (1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990). See also Leela Prasad's (2007) review of how *śāstra* was imagined throughout history (pp. 98-117) and her ethnographic study on its legitimizing force in the everyday life of a town in modern day Karnataka (pp. 118-47).

with shastric knowledge.”⁷⁹ The claim for the truth and authority of *śāstras*, like that of the Hindu *purāṇas*, is similarly grounded in their anti-historical nature.⁸⁰ It is in fact the case that in early Sanskrit literature, the word *śāstra* simply served as a synonym of the Veda, the paradigm of transcendent and eternal knowledge.⁸¹

As for the Investigators’ view on this concept, on the face of it, their explicit articulations do not seem to disagree with the broader South Asian understanding of *śāstra*. Both of our authors explicitly state what they comprehend as a *śāstra*. For Hariṣeṇa:

The correct *śāstra* that eradicates confusion is precisely one in which no contradiction between its assertions is heard.⁸²

We already know that these authors accept a story as potentially true only insofar as it complies to certain standards of coherence and correspondences with real-life experiences. Hariṣeṇa’s articulation of what he accepts as the correct *śāstra* is rooted in standards similar to the ones the *Investigation* uses to criticize the stories of the worldly *purāṇas*: the correct *śāstra* is identified with the lack of contradictions. This assertion comes as part of a larger discussion about the correct nature of various doctrinal ideas. After he characterizes the correct *śāstra* as having no contradictions, Hariṣeṇa goes on to tie together *śāstra*, *dharma*, knowledge, and liberation. This entire discussion comes up towards the end of his work, when the Brahmins, now ultimately outwitted by the Vidyādhara, remain speechless and are convinced to accept Manovega’s words as trustworthy knowledge (*pamāṇa*).⁸³ Manovega tells them:

Having listened with good intentions to the correct *śāstra*, which possesses

⁷⁹ Pollock 1989a: 18.

⁸⁰ Lawrence McCrea (2011a) convincingly argues for an exception to this general observation, in the form of Sanskrit *śāstras* on poetics. See also Eric Gurevitch (2021, 2022a) who recognizes a turning point in the history of systemizing knowledge in South Asia, where context and experience became prominent features of the scientific discourse.

⁸¹ Pollock 1989a: 21.

⁸² *ṇa summaṁ jattha savāya-virohu | tameva susatthu viṇāsiya-mohu || HaDhP 9.12.5 || susatthu MSS. 3, 4] sasatthu.*

⁸³ *vicim̐tahim̐ eyaho vāya pamāṇa || HaDhP 9.12.2cd || vicim̐tahim̐ MSS. 3, 4] vicim̐tahi.*

the true characteristic, you all will comprehend the lauded correct *dharma* which is replete with good qualities! Performing a meditation on the true god with the fruit of correct *dharma*, you will obtain knowledge that is entirely pure! You will obtain the supreme pleasure which is the true liberation that destroys pain by the good quality of true knowledge!⁸⁴

For Hariṣeṇa, this section serves a prominent didactic function, to which he draws his audience's attention. He does so by composing it in a metrical structure that is distinctive for an Apabhramsha work of this kind. Before delving into the content of these verses, let me pay special attention to their distinctive metrical structure, which highlights their significance. In formal terms, all the stanzas in this *kaḍavaka* section possess an identical recurring pattern of light-heavy-light syllables. Unlike Sanskrit meters that are mostly based on syllabic patterns and are thus syllable-counting meters, the Apabhramsha meters are based on mora (*mātrā*) counting, which allows a greater degree of flexibility with the patterns of the syllables in use.⁸⁵ However, while the stanzas in this section still follow this regular mora-counting pattern (each quarter is divided into two *gaṇas* that consist of four moras each), at the same time it also follows a repetitive syllabic pattern. When read out loud, the repetitive light-heavy-light sequential pattern, brings to mind the cadence of a marching army ("left, right, left"). This distinctive rhythm sets this section apart from other *kaḍavakas* that adhere only to mora-counting rules but do not follow any symmetrical syllabic pattern of this sort. The intention behind this pattern is to capture the audience's attention and to flag it as especially prominent.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *sulim̐gu suhāu suṇevi susat̐hu | sudhammu muṇehu guṇaḍḍhu pasat̐hu || sudhamma-phaleṇa sudevaho jhāṇu | karevi lahehu suṇimmala ṇāṇu || suṇāṇa-guṇeṇa viṇāsiya-dukkhu | lahehu sumokkhu aṇuttara-sukku || HaDhP 9.12.8-10 || muṇehu MS. 3] muṇeha ; lahehu MSS. 3, 4] laheha ; lahehu MSS. 3, 4] laheha ; sukkhu MSS. 3, 4] sokkhu.*

⁸⁵ On *gaṇas* and *mora* counting, see Ollett 2017: 94-6. Mayrhofer's analysis (1988) reflects the relative freedom and flexibility that *mora*-counting meters in Apabhramsha provide.

⁸⁶ I thank Andrew Ollett for drawing my attention to the metrical pattern of these verses.

In terms of their content, these verses establish a direct correlation between *śāstra* and *dharma*. According to Hariṣeṇa, a true and correct *śāstra*, that is, one in which assertions do not contradict each other, brings about the comprehension of the correct *dharma*. The correct *dharma*, in turn, is a means to reflecting on the true god and to achieving true knowledge, which eventually leads to final liberation. For my concerns, most significant is the fact that the author ties here together *śāstra* and knowledge with *dharma* and liberation. Eventually, a true *śāstra*, one that is coherent and that produces no contradiction, is a practical means for producing real-life results. Hariṣeṇa explains its *phala-śruti*, the benefit of listening to it: one who follows the knowledge gained through such *śāstra* will obtain the real-world fruit of the final liberation. Hariṣeṇa contrasts it with the consequences of following an erroneous *śāstra*: “Having realized it as worthless and as inducing pain in this way, do not listen to the erroneous *śāstra* of fools! When listening to an erroneous *śāstra*, one becomes ignorant.”⁸⁷ If a correct *śāstra* leads one to knowledge and liberation, an erroneous one leads to ignorance and, by extension, prevents liberation.

Such statements about the nature and status of *śāstra*, I should emphasize, are not unusual. In fact, such assertions are fairly common among non-Jaina scholars as well. Take, for instance, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, the Kashmiri Nyāya scholar. In his *Nyāyamañjarī* (ninth century), where he distinguishes between visible and invisible human goals, he asserts that “in the sphere of the unseen, for things such as heaven and liberation, only the *śāstra* will serve as light for the people whose vision is spoiled due to the intense darkness of their innate confusion. [...] Thus, *śāstra* alone should be studied by people like us.”⁸⁸ *Śāstra* is commonly identified as the means for overcoming confusion (*moha*) and it is not unusual to see it linked with liberation and with the

⁸⁷ *īya jāñivi duhayaru appasatthu | mā ṇisunahu aṇṇāṇiya-kusatthu || ṇisunīe kusatthe dummai havei || HaDhP 9.13.1-2ab || duhayaru MSS. 3, 4] uhayaru.*

⁸⁸ *adrṣṭe tu svargāpavarga-mātre naisargika-mohāndha-tamasa-viluptālokaśya lokasya śāstram eva prakāśaḥ [...] tasmād asmadādeḥ śāstram evādhigantavyam || Jayanta Bhaṭṭa’s Nyāyamañjarī, p. 6, ll. 15-17 ||*

knowledge required for its attainment.

We see the same thing when we shift back to Amitagati. His *Investigation* similarly gives special attention to discussing *śāstra* with its audience. On this concept, Amitagati says:

The efficacious *śāstra* is one that skillfully points out, in accordance with reason, the principles that one should pursue or avoid (*heyopādeya-tattva*).⁸⁹

These authors do not produce a comprehensive definition of what constitutes a *śāstra*.⁹⁰ Rather, they tie certain themes discussed throughout their works in relation to the question of a good story and its assessment, together with the knowledge of a specific type of text, the *śāstra*. Where Hariṣeṇa correlates *śāstra* with coherence and the lack of contradictions, Amitagati now identifies the teaching of *śāstra* with reason. Like with Hariṣeṇa's statements, Amitagati's words regarding such knowledge similarly resonate common assertions about *śāstra*. His terminology regarding its purpose, for one, can be traced back to the Buddhist scholar Dharmakīrti (seventh century) and to his discussion on the means of trustworthy knowledge in the *Pramāṇavārttika*: "One who knows the principles that one should pursue or avoid (*heyopādeya-tattva*), together with their means, is the efficacious trustworthy knowledge."⁹¹ This *heyopādeya-tattva* formulation is found in numerous śāstric sources and might even have earlier origins.⁹² Amitagati's statement here about the purpose of *śāstra* also aligns with preceding definitions of this concept, as articulated by the seventh-century Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila ("śāstra is that which teaches people what they should and should not do") or asserted in the *Bhagavadgītā* ("let *śāstra* be your guide in deciding what to do

⁸⁹ *heyopādeya-tattva-prakaṭana-nipuṇaṃ yuktitaḥ śāstram iṣṭaṃ* || *AmDhP* 13.102c ||

⁹⁰ Cf. Balbir (1987) on a detailed Jaina definition of what would be considered a faultless textual statement.

⁹¹ *heyopādeya-tattvasya sābhyupāyasya vedakaḥ | yaḥ pramāṇam asāv iṣṭo* || Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.34abd ||

⁹² For the formulation as it is used by the Buddhist philosophers Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, see McClintock 2010: 128n332, 247-8. See also Gurevitch (2022a: 135-6) on how the Jaina philosopher Vādirāja disputes Dharmakīrti's argument.

and what not to do”).⁹³

We further learn of Amitagati’s conceptualization of *śāstra* from the concluding paratextual section of his work, where he shares some of his thoughts about literature, textuality, and the functions they exercise in this project. There he lays out his view of *śāstra* and emphasizes its efficacy in producing real-life results:

He who is absorbed in and devotedly speaks about, reads, and listens to the pure *śāstra* that communicates the truth with regard to its own doctrine and those of others, who understands the entire truth, who directs his eyes towards the lamp of supreme knowledge, whose feet are revered by the gods, this person will accomplish liberation.⁹⁴

Amitagati ties here *śāstra*, truth, and knowledge together with the real-life result of liberation. Like Hariṣeṇa, but also like Jayanta Bhaṭṭa and others, he points out liberation as the benefit of studying the pure *śāstra*. This beneficial result, however, does not arrive instantaneously upon hearing it. It is only through the process of engaging closely with the *śāstra* that one obtains its favorable outcomes. In order to obtain liberation, one cannot simply read a *śāstra*. Instead, one has to be critical and judicious about it. Amitagati then expresses the hope that his composition will persist in the world: “Let this faultless *śāstra* remain on the surface of the earth, while daily being interpreted with joy by learned people who are judicious about *dharma* and *adharma*.”⁹⁵ In order for a *śāstra* to be fruitful, one’s encounter with it should be comprehensive and recur regularly.⁹⁶ Just as the repetitive structure of the *Investigation*’s narrative challenges its readers with

⁹³ Pollock 1985: 501, 510. See Chauhan (2023) for a revised proposal concerning Kumārila’s dates.

⁹⁴ *vadati paṭhati bhaktiā yaḥ śṛṇoty eka-cittaḥ sva-para-samaya-tattvāvedī śāstram pavitram | vidita-sakala-tattvaḥ kevalāloka-netras tridaśa-mahita-pādo yāty asau mokṣa-lakṣmīm || AmDhP 21.17 ||*

⁹⁵ *tāvat tiṣṭhatu śāstram etad anaghaṁ kṣaṇī-tale kovidair dharmādharma-vicāraḥ anudinaṁ vyākhyāyamānaṁ mudā || AmDhP 21.19cd ||*

⁹⁶ This brings to mind Paul J. Griffiths’s analysis of the reading practices of a “religious reader” for whom the text is a “stable and vastly rich resource, one that yields meaning, suggestions (or imperatives) for action, [and] matter for aesthetic wonder” and, thus, its reading and re-reading may never be exhausted (1999: 41-2).

problematic stories time and again until they become trained in adjudicating such stories on their own, so are the beneficial results of a *śāstra* obtained only through close and repeated engagements with it.

Importantly, I maintain, Amitagati reveals here that when he speaks about *śāstra*, he primarily has his own work in mind, not the works of others. For him, his own work is itself a *śāstra*, and he repeats it in the following stanza, the very final one of this work, where he provides us with the year in which he completes “this *śāstra* that is united with the nectar of Lord Jina’s *dharma* and that defeats the doctrines of others.”⁹⁷ Although the *Investigation* tells stories, this author does not perceive it as simply a collection of stories in the same way that he perceives the popular *purāṇas* of the Brahmins. Rather, he thinks of it as a *śāstra* which, by closely engaging with it, one is in fact closely engaging with the teaching of the Jina’s *dharma* that leads to liberation. As a *śāstra* that claims to be true and to lead to liberation, it must align with the same standards that these authors lay out in their definition of *śāstra*, cited above (*HaDhP* 9.12.5; *AmDhP* 13.102): a *śāstra* should not contain any contradictions and it should accurately manifest the truth in accordance with reason. Most importantly, it is a work that teaches true knowledge that entails real-life implications.

But earlier we saw that Vyāsa also claims that his work is a *śāstra*. How, in this case, should one adjudicate between conflicting claims for śāstric authority? The answer—once again centered on the training of judicious readers—marks the final step the authors take in linking their discussion of *śāstra* and its trustworthy knowledge with the *Investigation*’s broader project of defining and assessing good stories. Hariṣeṇa points it out in the same discussion where he correlates *śāstra* with *dharma*:

⁹⁷ *idaṃ niśiddhānya-mataṃ samāptaṃ jinendra-dharmāmṛta-yukta-śāstram* || *AmDhP* 21.20cd ||

Whoever is not judicious about *śāstra*, *dharma*, teacher, and god, betrays himself. He sinks in *saṃsāra*, suffers pain, and does not even know what sets true pleasure apart.⁹⁸

This concluding stanza brings together the various doctrinal ideas that Hariṣeṇa discusses throughout this section, under the umbrella of judiciousness. In doing so, I argue, it reveals that the proper way for knowing the correct *śāstra* is a specific instance of the same method that these authors promote to answer their larger questions about a vigilant listener, a good story, and trustworthy knowledge.

Amitagati further corroborates this sentiment:

In a world covered with bad roads that descend into the ocean of existence, how, without a judicious examination (*vicāra*), can a fool advance on the path to liberation up until the abode of ultimate bliss? [...] Those who investigate (*parīkṣya*) divinities, scriptures, conducts, and ascetics, and resort only to the pure [among them], will break the chain of frivolous actions and approach the everlasting abode that emancipates from sins.⁹⁹

Like Hariṣeṇa, Amitagati also ties here explicitly judiciousness together with liberation. Only those people who critically examine the variety of options they face can adjudicate the correct path to liberation among the myriad of wrong paths that are prevalent in the world. And again, the lack of judiciousness submerges one in the ocean of existence and suffering, while liberation and ultimate bliss are obtained through the ability to discern the pure divinity, scripture, conduct, and ascetic, from their false counterparts.

⁹⁸ *appaū pattāraī jo ṇa viyāraī satthu dhammu guru deu vi | saṃsāri ṇimajjai dukkheṃ khijjai susuhaho muṇaī ṇa bheu vi || HaDhP 9.12 ghattā || pattārai MSS. 3, 4] paruttāraī.*

⁹⁹ *kāpathair bhava-samudra-pātibhiś chādite jagati mukti-vartmani | yaḥ karoti na vicāram asta-dhīḥ sa prayāti śiva-mandiraṃ katham || [...] || devatāgama-caritra-liṅgino ye parīkṣya vimalān upāsate | te nikartya laghu-karma-śṛṅkhalaṃ yānti pāvanam anaśvaraṃ padam || AmDhP 13.98-100 ||*

Throughout their discussion, these authors tie the teaching of the *Investigation* together with the salvific benefits of *śāstras*. We already established that the *Investigation* trains its audience to recognize the criteria for a credible story by repeatedly introducing specific scenarios that highlight the lack of consistency in the stories of popular *purāṇas*. Now, we learn what would be the motivation for undertaking this training. In their discussion on *śāstra*, the authors provide us with an answer, by adding two significant points to what I argued so far. First, being skilled at adjudicating such credibility is not simply an intellectual quality whose consequences are limited to the diegetic worlds of stories. It has very pragmatic consequences in the experiential world external to these stories. This skill is in fact a crucial component in determining whether one reaches liberation or sinks in *saṃsāra*. Secondly, and not unrelated, is that while the *Investigation* trains its audience by the means of stories and literary representations, the skill that it promotes has wider applications. Once its readers are trained into being judicious, they can, and even should, apply this skill onto a variety of issues, such as divinities, scriptures, conducts, and ascetics. The ability to adjudicate all of these is based on the same skill that one obtains through listening to the *Investigation*.

Conclusion

Throughout their works, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati conceptualize the sorts of literary sources that may be considered true. The main concern for these authors is texts that claim to be authoritative but, in fact, do not align with the standards advocated in the *Investigation*. These are texts that are not only false but also dangerous. False, since they are internally contradictory or do not correlate with one's real-life experience. Dangerous, since they oppose the words of the Jina and following them prevents the attainment of liberation and perpetuates one's suffering.

By analyzing the story of Vyāsa, I suggested that the distinction between what the authors define as worldly *purāṇas* and what they understand as *śāstra* is based on the extent that each of these sources should be accepted as the teaching of trustworthy knowledge. For these authors, a *śāstra* has no internal contradictions, it instructs one with regard to truth, and, ultimately, it leads one to liberation. The popular *purāṇas*, on the other hand, are simply stories, and incoherent ones at that. Nevertheless, I maintain, *purāṇas* and purāṇic stories, as such, do not pose the major problem for the *Investigation*. To the contrary. *Purāṇas* that conform to the Investigators' standards may be considered as true. Many Jaina *purāṇas*, one assumes, would be accepted by them as such. In this sense, *purāṇas* and *śāstras* are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories: purāṇic stories can, at least potentially, convey the true knowledge that leads to liberation. Not only that, purāṇic stories, and incoherent ones nonetheless, turn out to be an effective instrument in the Investigators' hands for training their reader in judiciousness. What becomes a threat for our authors is the association of incoherent purāṇic stories with true and authoritative knowledge. In the story, when Vyāsa reflects on his *Mahābhārata*, this mythic author refers to his own work—which he admits being full of contradictions—as a *śāstra*. This is where the *Mahābhārata* becomes a threat, since a *śāstra* that is internally contradictory prevents liberation. In fact, a *śāstra* that is internally contradictory is not a *śāstra* at all. It might be a popular *purāṇa*, but it should be regarded as nothing more than a pseudo-*śāstra*. The judicious readers know how to not let such false claims for true knowledge lead them astray.

But who exactly is a judicious reader? And how is it that the Brahmins, who pride themselves on learning and reason, accept a set of stories that, in Manovega's analysis, cannot be accepted as warranted means of knowledge? To answer these questions, we must look into the intellectual virtues—and the lack thereof—modeled in the *Investigations*.

Chapter Three:
What Makes a Good Listener?
A Genealogy of Comparative Evaluation

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty...
- Wendell Phillips, Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society meeting (1852)

I know what you want. You want a story that won't surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won't make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality.
- Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I argued that the *Investigation* defines two key parameters to explore the credibility of stories: coherence within the world of stories and correspondence of stories with their audiences' real-life experiences. Literature that follows these parameters is deemed credible and the knowledge it conveys a warranted means on the path to liberation. Nevertheless, I argue in this chapter that our authors do not simply introduce these parameters, but explore the ability of good listeners to discern and adjudicate stories as credible and trustworthy. The narrative style of the *Investigation* trains its readers in the required skills of good listeners by repeatedly confronting them with characters who struggle to examine and evaluate stories according to these standards.

As I demonstrate in what follows, our authors label the ability to properly evaluate stories as “judiciousness.” The *Investigation* introduces this skill negatively, through recurrent stories about fools who act injudiciously. The repetitive structure of these stories goes as follows: First, the Brahmins of Pāṭaliputra ask the Vidyādhara protagonists what brings them to the city and inquire

about their identity. In response, Manovega says that they are afraid to answer, because they are concerned that one of the Brahmins is an injudicious fool and so the locals might not believe their story and harm them. After Manovega illustrates in a story what he means by speaking about injudicious fools, the Brahmins reassure him that no one among them is as such and again encourage the Vidyādhara to reveal their identity. Such prompting leads Manovega to tell additional stories about other types of “injudicious fools.”

This repetitive structure allows the *Investigation* to illustrate various sorts of injudicious behavior. In most of its retellings—Hariṣeṇa’s Apabhramsha and Amitagati’s Sanskrit versions are no different in this respect—these stories appear as a sequence, forming a closed section early in the narrative that is entirely dedicated to illustrating the nature of these fools.¹ Amitagati, for instance, narrates these stories consecutively across the first half of his twenty-chapter work, between chapters four to ten. In Hariṣeṇa’s text, these stories take a slightly shorter section, less than two chapters—two and three—out of a total of eleven. Formed as such, these stories set the terms for the entire *Investigation* project.² What I argue is that the place of these stories in the earlier part of the narrative and their repetitive form establish the protocols of reading the *Investigation* properly as a narrative about narratives. Repeatedly told as part of the Jaina-Brahmin dialogic framework, these stories instruct their reader about the significance of judiciousness necessary for the kind of inquiry and argumentation about credibility that the *Investigation* later makes.³ For these authors, judiciousness is both an epistemic and ethical disposition: it is

¹ Vṛttavilāsa’s Kannada retelling (c. 1360) is unusual in that it separates these stories and interweaves them in between various purāṇic stories. A different Sanskrit *Investigation* that was ascribed by Balachandra Shastri in his edition of Amitagati’s text (1998) to a certain Pārśvakīrti follows Vṛttavilāsa’s unusual order of the stories. Based on her research on the manuscripts of this text, Heleen De Jonckheere proposes that attributing this work to Pārśvakīrti is erroneous and that its real author is a certain Rāmacandra (2020a: 271-2). Her research provides a discussion on the characteristics that this retelling shares in common with Vṛttavilāsa’s work (2020a: 272ff).

² Jean-Pierre Osier discusses the significance of placing these stories early in the *Investigation*’s plot (2005: 254-55).

³ Jonathan Geen proposes that the dialogical form in narrative “came to be associated with authoritative and persuasive teachings” especially through Jaina and Buddhist scriptures and that the “repeated use of such dialogues may have

epistemological in nature, while also being founded on ethical characteristics. It is defined by both an openness to hearing alternative positions and a willingness to give up any behavior based on false premises. The project of the *Investigation* is, thus, an ethical one, with *dharma* being its goal. But its trajectory is an epistemological one, with an investigation serving as its means. The *Investigation of Dharma* weaves in ethical and epistemic questions to induce in its reader such an ethical experience.

In this chapter, I explore an audience's ability to make such an investigation as it is theorized by Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, by asking: What makes a good or a bad listener? What kind of judiciousness enables one to recognize the credibility of a story? And what causes one's blindness to narrative incoherence or a story's lack of correspondence with real-life experience? The first part of this chapter outlines the *Investigation*'s notion of judiciousness as introduced by Manovega in the stories of the fools. To clarify what exactly being judicious means, I turn in parts two and three to analyzing two distinct notions of this skill—first, envisioned by the Brahmins, and second, by the Jaina protagonist. I argue that only the latter notion is what the narrative promotes as the skill required for good listeners. Throughout the narrative, I demonstrate, the *Investigation* constructs Pāṭaliputra and its Brahmins as the epitome of a specific type of erudition, one that involves systematic ritual knowledge and formal philosophical discourse. My claim is that the Brahmins' vision of judiciousness is established in correlation with this Brahminical characteristic of erudition and their expertise in those specific types of knowledge. In opposition to the Brahmins' vision, I assert, the Investigators challenge the notion that such expertise alone is sufficient for properly evaluating stories. To expose Manovega's alternative vision of judiciousness, in the fourth part I introduce three figures who fail to evaluate between alternative options and act accordingly:

trained audiences to pay as close attention to what was being said as to who was saying it" (Geen 2015: 198).

a frog in a well, a person who pretends not to hear, and a servant tortured by his master. Manovega points out these figures to highlight their incapacity to carry out proper judgments. By exploring these instances, I argue that the *Investigation* theorizes a method of evaluation that is comparative in nature and necessarily requires familiarity with multiple competing alternatives. In this context, what distinguishes the Brahmins and the Vidyādhara is their respective understanding of the skills that enable the evaluation of competing stories. The Brahmins, I suggest, treat stories in the same way they treat argumentative forms of communication and consider the skills employed in the process of evaluating stories to be similar to those needed for systematic philosophical discourse and formal debates. The Vidyādhara, by contrast, advances a comparative evaluation more suitable for non-argumentative narration. Further, I maintain that such comparative method is a fundamental principle not only for the Investigators and it similarly guides other Jaina thinkers in their inquiries. To demonstrate how it is shared by other thinkers, in the final part of this chapter I focus on two new concepts: impartiality and neutrality. First, I demonstrate how Amitagati employs these concepts to characterize people who make proper judgments. Then, I unpack the way other Jaina scholars similarly used them. My analysis in this section contextualizes the *Investigation*'s comparative method as part of a shared ecology of argument that ties together Jaina thinkers across space and time. It demonstrates that even though other scholars—Haribhadra (eighth cent.) and his commentator Guṇaratna (fourteenth cent.), Dharmasāgara (sixteenth cent.), and Yaśovijaya (seventeenth cent.)—flourished in disparate times and places, their concerns and conceptual tools were not very different from those of our Investigators.

Who is an injudicious fool?

Notions of judgment, examination, and discrimination run as a thread throughout the *Investigation*.

Starting from its title (*parīkṣā*), they connect its various stories together with its frame narrative.⁴ Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati establish judiciousness as a skill of those who can properly evaluate stories. Manovega, the Jaina Vidyādhara protagonist, is explicit about this: only a judicious listener (e.g., *viyāria*, *vivei*, *vicāraka*, *vivecaka*) can ascertain which stories are coherent and which simply make no sense. When listeners are not real *vicārakas*, they do not properly distinguish between truth and lie. And when people think that they are being lied to, things can get messy, as the protagonists explain to the Brahmins when they first meet at the Brahminical college (*brahmaśālā*) in the city: “Inferior and injudicious (*avicāraka*) men, even when they hear a true statement, believe that it is untrue and thus instantiate the principle of the ‘Sixteen Punches’.”⁵ The story of the Sixteen Punches begins with a man from the South Indian land of Malaya, a place abundant with peppercorn. He travels to the land of Ābhīra, where he is surprised to see large piles of chickpeas. When the locals ask him about the cause of his astonishment (*āścarya*), he tells them that in his homeland only pepper is found in such large piles. Since the people of Ābhīra have never seen so much pepper before, they do not believe him and think that he is mocking them and their country. The injudicious people (*aviveya*) of Ābhīra punish him with eight punches to his head and send him away. When he returns to his home country, he shares with his people the incredible thing (*citra*) that he saw earlier in Ābhīra. However, since they have also never seen so many chickpeas before, they similarly punish him with additional eight punches.⁶

Amitagati draws an immediate moral from this story: “A wise man speaks [only] in front of someone who, being judicious (*vicāraka*) about coherence (*pūrvāpara*), makes critical judgments

⁴ The Sanskrit words for these terms (excluding *parīkṣā*) mostly derive from the roots *vi√car* and *vi√vic* (e.g., Skt. *vicāra*, *viveka*; Apbh. *viyāra*, *viveya*). There seems to be no substantial distinction between them in these authors’ usage and in my translation I use these English terms interchangeably. The exchangeability of these Sanskrit terms is testified in, e.g., Malliṣeṇa’s commentary on Hemacandra’s *Anyayoga-vyavacchedikā* (v. 31), where he glosses *vivektum* with *vicārayitum* (Malliṣeṇa, *Syādvādamañjarī* 31.9).

⁵ *khalāḥ satyam api proktam ādāyāsatyabuddhitāḥ | muṣṭi-ṣoḍaśaka-nyāyaṃ racayanty avicārakāḥ || AmDhP 4.6 ||*

⁶ *HaDhP 2.7-8; AmDhP 4.8-26.*

(*vicārayati*); not in front of anyone else.”⁷ Or, to put more plainly, people should be cautious when they consider what they say and in front of whom, since even when someone speaks about a true thing that they had experienced directly, people might regard it as unbelievable. And these same people might consider a false thing as true. In this story, people do not believe the true testimony of the traveler due to what the recipients of this testimony—first the people of Ābhīra and later the people of Malaya—understand as a lack of correspondence with their own experience. They have never seen piles of peppercorn or chickpeas of the sort that the traveler speaks about, and so his account does not conform to what they know to be true in real life. Even if the traveler’s story is internally coherent, they cannot accept it since it does not align with their experience of the world.

Does that mean that the residents of Malaya or Ābhīra are injudicious? Have we not already seen in Chapter One that testing a story against one’s own experience of the world is in fact a mark of judiciousness? The Sixteen Punches is a story about the limits of such a conservative approach to judgment: it is not actually judicious to reject anything that one has not seen with one’s own eyes. The authors of the *Investigation* suggest with this story that a different criterion of correspondence with real-life experience is necessary. If strict correspondence with one’s own experiences is a self-defeating criterion for accepting true testimonies as such, we are back to square one: in what circumstances should we believe the words of others, when we do not have experiences of our own to either confirm or deny them?⁸

As a response to this problem, the *Investigation* develops the concept of “judiciousness.” This skill is associated with one who is a good listener, and it assists in bridging the gap between

⁷ *vicārayati yaḥ kaścit pūrvāpara-vicārakaḥ | ucyate purataḥ tasya na parasya paṭīyasā || AmDhP 4.33 ||*

⁸ Compare with Steven Shapin, who explores the same problem in seventeenth-century England. He suggests that this problem, which, as we see, is by no means exclusive to England, was treated in that particular context by shifting conventions and practices of gentility and the character of the gentleman, who was recognized as a reliable truth-teller, into the field of natural philosophy and science (Shapin 1994). Shapin offers one local treatment of this global problem. The Investigators offer another one.

unprecedented experiences and the correspondence of stories with the real world. Manovega attributes the Brahmins's failure to acknowledge the similarity between their stories and his own to the absence of this skill: "I can see no reason other than the lack of judiciousness for why yours is true but mine is not."⁹ To negatively illustrate this point, he goes on to tell his Brahminical interlocutors a series of stories about various types of injudicious fools (*nirvivecaka*, *viveka-vikala*, *avicāraka*, etc.).

The theme of the injudicious fool is illustrated well by the story of the village-chief Bahudhānyaka ("Mr. Moneybags"), who tires of his old wife and takes a new young one.¹⁰ Although the young wife, Kuraṅgī, cheats on Bahudhānyaka and spends all of his wealth on her lovers, his passions obstruct him from seeing the reality of the situation:

Even while looking at his house emptied of its wealth, grains, and other things—like a sky without clouds, like an excellent city with no inhabitants—he was so deluded by his mind absorbed in perceiving Kuraṅgī's lotus face that the house seemed to him as greater than an imperial palace.¹¹

Here, the point is that the husband is so passionate about his wife that whatever does not conform to his idealization of her is invisible to him. Later on, this fool is so blind to the truth that as his young wife feeds him cow feces—or, we might say, literal bullshit—he happily consumes it. However, his blindness to the wife's cheating is not where the story ends. When his friend confronts him with the harsh reality of his wife's infidelity, rather than accepting the friend's words, this fool dismisses him, reluctant to acknowledge the truth. Amitagati concludes the story with another moral about judiciousness:

⁹ *bhavadīyam idaṃ satyaṃ madīyaṃ nātra dṛśyate | vicāra-śūnyatām hitvā kāraṇaṃ na paraṃ mayā || AmDhP 16.6*

||

¹⁰ *HaDhP 2.9.6-16.4; AmDhP 4.47-5.75.*

¹¹ *balāhakair iva vyoma pauraiv iva purottamam | dhana-dhānyādibhir hīnam īkṣamāṇo 'pi mandiram || kuraṅgī-mukha-rājīva-darśanākula-mānasaḥ | adrākṣīd eṣa mūḍhātmā cakravartī-grhādhikam || AmDhP 5.2-3 ||*

True words spoken to injudicious (*avicāra*) men bring about a disaster, like healthy milk given to snakes. Even when a beneficial thing is said, others who are like this village-chief—injudicious (*nirvicāraka*) and blind due to passions—certainly perceive it to be fault.¹²

The immediate implication of the story and its moral is, like the moral of the Sixteen Punches, that wise people should be cautious about what they say and in front of whom. It is a normative statement with regard to how one should act. When speaking in front of someone who is blind to the truth like Bahudhānyaka, one should be prepared to be dismissed, just as it happened to his friend. For this reason, when facing such injudicious people, the story advocates that it is better to maintain silence. However, in addition to this immediate moral, the story has a second-order implication: by listening to these stories and becoming aware of the injudiciousness of these fools, I argue, the audience of the *Investigation* themselves infer, negatively, what it means to become judicious. This significant segment of the text, dedicated to the stories of injudicious fools, precedes the discussion of Brahminical purāṇic stories. Its place in the plot suggests that its lesson is relevant to the way we should read and interpret what follows. That is, it serves as a protocol for reading the narrative's discussion of these stories' credibility.

Judiciousness is not formal erudition: Pāṭaliputra and its learned Brahmins

The stories about fools participate in the *Investigation*'s discourse about the virtues of a good and vigilant listener. Hariṣeṇa is explicit about the relation between judiciousness and the ability to adjudicate stories' credibility, as we saw in Chapter One about the mutual contradiction between Viṣṇu's representations: injudicious people (*gaya-viveya*) do not take seriously the mutual contradiction between the claim that Viṣṇu had taken ten births and the claim that Viṣṇu is free of

¹² *sad-vākyaṃ avicārāṇāṃ dattaṃ datte mahā-bhayaṃ | dvijihvānāṃ ivāhīnāṃ kṣīra-pānaṃ hitāvaham || hite 'pi bhāṣite doṣo dīyate nirvicārakaiḥ | parair apīha rāgāndhair grāma-kūṭa-samaiḥ sphuṭam || AmDhP 5.73-4 ||*

birth and death (4.1.10-*ghattā*).¹³ However, throughout the exchange between the protagonist and the Brahmins, the latter repeatedly argue that they themselves possess the quality of judiciousness. They make this claim for the first time when Manovega concludes his narration of the Sixteen Punches and conveys his concern about the presence of such injudicious fools among the Brahmins. The Brahmins then respond:

Excellent Man, do not speak in this way! There is no one here who is injudicious (*avivecaka*). Do not think that these judicious men (*vicārin*) possess the fault of those lacking judgment (*avicāra*)! In no way whatsoever does the *dharma* of animals arise among men. Do not think that we are foolish-minded like the Ābhīra people—just as geese cannot be compared with crows! Good Man, all of us here are Brahmins who are apt in reasoning (*nyāya*) and judicious (*vicārin*) about what is reasonable and unreasonable (*yuktāyukta*)! Don't worry, speak your mind! Good Man, fearlessly tell us words that are accompanied with reason (*yukti*) and are understood by good people! We will apprehend them through judgment (*vicāra*).¹⁴

One way of interpreting this passage would be to suggest that this response reveals how the Jaina author of this text sees Brahmins' self-perception. According to this view, the Brahmins perceive themselves as ones who truly possess the skill of judiciousness. Their self-perception as such is, first and foremost, based on their birth as Brahmins. The Brahmins believe that just as there are superior and inferior species of animals—geese and crows, respectively—so too do men have such hierarchical differentiation among various groups of the same genus.¹⁵ In their worldview,

¹³ See Chapter One, p. 35.

¹⁴ *maivam sādho gadīr nāsti kaścid atrāvivecakaḥ || mā jñāsīr avicārāṇām doṣam eṣu vicāriṣu | paśūnām jāyate dharmo mānuṣeṣu na sarvathā || ābhīra-saḍṣāṇ asmān mā budho mugdha-cetasah | vāyasaiḥ saḍṣāḥ santi na haṃsā hi kadācana || atra nyāya-paṭīyāṃso yuktāyukta-vicāriṇaḥ | sarve 'pi brāhmaṇā bhadra mā śaṅkiṣṭhā vadeṣitam || yad yuktyā ghaṭate vākyam sādhubhir yac ca budhyate | tad brūhi bhadra niḥsaṅko grahīṣyāmo vicārataḥ || AmDhP 4.34cd-38 ||*

¹⁵ Such Brahminical view on social classes as natural categories, attributed to Mīmāṃsā, was opposed by Jaina philosophers roughly contemporaneous with Amitagati: Anantavīrya, Vādirāja, and Prabhācandra. They challenged the reality of caste, borrowing Buddhist arguments to assert that different classes of human beings are distinguished by convention, and not on account of any distinction between real natural categories (Gurevitch 2022b). There is a further historical connection here, since one of these philosophers, Prabhācandra, was likely a colleague of Amitagati

Brahmins are superior to the injudicious fools of Malaya and Ābhīra and cannot be compared with them. Further, as educated Brahmins, they are also properly trained in principles of reasoning and in distinguishing between what is reasonable and unreasonable. For this reason, they are apt to examine words and grasp them, if they are based on reason (*yukti*).

The Brahmins in the story set themselves up as paragons of judiciousness, but a judiciousness of a very particular kind. Their claim to judiciousness, I argue, is based on mastery over ritual knowledge and formal expertise in a variety of philosophical discourses that define their conceptions of judgment and reason. This vision of judiciousness is acquired through the process of formal training in systematic rules. The *Investigation* constructs the literary character of their Brahmins to embody this type of erudition by focusing on their expertise on specific ritual and philosophical literature, their inclination towards debates and towards mastering their rules, and their affiliation with institutes of Vedic learning.¹⁶ However, the idea of judiciousness that the *Investigation* promotes through Manovega's voice is rather different from what the Brahmins mean by this word. I argue that his constant return to the topic of injudiciousness, illustrated through the figures of the fools, suggests that he is actively trying to destroy the validity of the Brahmins' vision of judiciousness.

The description of Pāṭaliputra exposes the *Investigation*'s view on the skills of these Brahmins. Both authors depict this city to serve as a kind of metonymy for the notion of "learned Brahmins." Manovega describes this place to tempt his friend Pavanavega to join his visit. As Amitagati narrates in a series of twelve verses (3.21-32), Manovega describes Pāṭaliputra as a

in the Paramāra court and, as Eric Gurevitch (2022a: 201-4) demonstrates, the latter summarized in his *Investigation* the same kinds of arguments advanced by his colleague.

¹⁶ Much of the terminology that the Investigators employ to describe the Brahmins is commonly used by classical Sanskrit scholars. With regard to some of these terms, Halbfass explains that: "Yukti, nyāya, etc., may express, in a general sense, the claim of sound argumentation, of intelligibility and concordance with established rules and criteria, as opposed to blind "faith" (*śraddhā*)" (Halbfass 1991: 135).

scholarly center and its inhabitants as properly trained in formal systems of knowledge: it is where people constantly recite and deliberate the *vedas* (3.22) and the *purāṇas* (3.31); learn the meaning of the Veda through the *smṛtis* composed by authors such as Vasiṣṭha, Vyāsa, Vālmīki, Manu, and Brahmā (3.23); the locals engage in disputes, for the sake of pure argumentation and with no personal animosity (3.25); scholars are cherished and followed by their disciples (3.26); mendicants are always absorbed in study and contemplation (3.27); the sciences of logic, grammar, poetics, and politics are taught everywhere (3.32); Brahmins who are judicious (*vicārin*) with respect to the *śāstras* study the interpretation of the Veda (*mīmāṃsā*) (3.30); the students appear to be sons of Sarasvatī, the goddess of speech and learning (3.24); even the women in Pāṭaliputra are superb disputants of whom rivals are afraid (3.28).¹⁷ In the earlier *Investigation*, Hariṣeṇa similarly depicts these Brahmins in his Apabhramsha description of Pāṭaliputra based on their erudition (1.17.*ghattā*-1.18.10). Like Amitagati less than three decades later, Hariṣeṇa also associates the Brahmins with various types of formal scholarly training in logic (*nyāya*)—as the Brahmins’ knowledge of debate (*vāya*), sophistry (*jappa*), and captious objection (*vaītaṃḍa*), suggests (1.18.3)¹⁸—as well as in expounding texts including the *purāṇas* (1.18.4), the *samhitas*, and astrology (1.18.6), and the study of the philosophical schools of Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā (1.18.5),

¹⁷ *gagane prasaran yatra yajña-dhūmaḥ sadekṣyate | cañcarīka-kula-śyāmaḥ keśa-pāśa iva śriyaḥ ||*
catur-veda-dhvanim śrutvā badhirīkṛta-puṣkaram | nṛtyanti kekino yatra nīradārava-śaṅkinaḥ ||
vasiṣṭha-vyāsa-vālmīki-manu-brahmādibhiḥ kṛtāḥ | śrūyante smṛtayo yatra vedārtha-pratipādakāḥ ||
drśyante paritāś chātrāḥ samcaranto viśāradāḥ | grhīta-pustakā yatra bhāratī-tanayā iva ||
vacobhir vādino 'nyonyam kurvate marma-bhedibhiḥ | yatra vādam gata-kṣobhā yuddham yodhāḥ śarair iva ||
sarvato yatra drśyante paṇḍitāḥ kala-bhāṣibhiḥ | śiṣyair anuvṛtā hṛdyāḥ padma-khaṇḍā ivālibhiḥ ||
dhyānādhyayana-tan-niṣṭhā yatra muṇḍita-mastakāḥ | gaṇḍa-taṭe vilokyante bhavyā maskariṇo 'bhītaḥ ||
yatrāmbuvāhinīḥ śrutvā kurvatīḥ śāstra-niścayam | vāda-kaṇḍv-āgatāḥ kṣipram palāyante 'nya-vādināḥ ||
agnihotrādi-karmāṇi kurvanto yatra bhūriśaḥ | vasanti brāhmaṇā dakṣā vedā iva savigrahāḥ ||
mīmāṃsām yatra sarvatra mīmāṃsante 'niśam dvijāḥ | vibhramā iva bhāratyāḥ sarva-śāstra-vicāriṇāḥ ||
aṣṭā-daśa-purāṇāni vyākhyāyante sahasraśaḥ | yatra khyāpayitum dharmam duḥkha-dāru-hutāśanam ||
tarkam vyākaraṇam kāvyam nīti-śāstram pade pade | vyācakṣāṇair yad-ālīḍham vāg-devyā iva mandīram || *AmDhP*
3.21-32 ||

¹⁸ These are Nyāya-specific terms (*vāda*, *jalpa*, *vitaṇḍā*) that refer to the three types of dispute. See Gautama’s *Nyāyasūtram* 1.2.1-3.

and Saṅkhyā (1.18.6).¹⁹ These descriptions illustrate Pāṭaliputra as the hub of Brahminical study and its Brahmins are constructed as an ideal embodiment of erudition.

It is worth keeping in mind the breadth and divergence of these descriptions of the city and its inhabitants. They do not focus only on one school of thought or religious practice associated with Brahminism. Rather, they present an accumulation of various practices and institutions whose common feature is, I posit, their overlap with what these Jaina authors perceive as a Brahminical identity. There is a cohabitation of *brahmacārins* with householders and mendicants who perform Brahminical practices. The fire sacrifice of householders is described next to the recitation and purification performed by renunciants. The examination of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* by Vaiṣṇava devotees (Apbh. *bhayava*; Skt. *bhagavat*) is mentioned along with the study of *vedas* and astrology. While such depictions of a Brahminical environment encompass a diverse array of components that, prima facie, seem to belong to distinct, sometimes contradictory, worldviews, we might still accept them as echoing Brahminical discourse. For instance, the wedding together of the ascetic and the householder refers to a perennial problem that occupied Brahminical texts since circa the middle of the first millennium BCE.²⁰ In a similar vein, we may consider the melange of various texts, from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to astrology and the Veda, as deriving from an acceptable practice within Brahminical syllabi. Less probable as a representation of real Brahminical discourse or practices

¹⁹ *jahi caṭi-veya-ṇighosu diya-varimda-uccariu | hippai vaḍuya-saehi jaṇṇa-kamma uvayāriu ||*
jahiṃ gaṃgā-yaḍi muṃḍiya-muṃḍā | dhariya-kamaṃḍal'abhisīya-ti-damḍā ||
hari hari hari uccaraṇa-samatthā | ṇhāhiṃ ṇicca vahu ṇhāya-pasatthā ||
vambha-sāla-uvaiṭṭha-pahāṇā | vāya-jappa-vaiṭamḍa-viyāṇā ||
viṇhu-purāṇu bhayava vakkhāṇahi | jaṇṇa-vihāṇu ke vi diya jāṇahi ||
bujjhahi ke vi tetthu vaṭsesiū | mīmaṃsā diya-guru-uvaesiū ||
sāhiya ke vi ke vi gaha-joisu | ke vi bhaṇaṃti kavila-maṭi-haya-pasu ||
pūjjiya garihivatta āhavaṇiya | dakkhiṇaggi-huya ṇāṇā-havaṇiya ||
aggi-pariggaha dīsahi hottiya | ghaḍa-vañṇiya ṇāṇāviha sottiya ||
jattha ke vi diya cha-kkamma-raya | aṇṇe vambhayāri tiya-viraya ||
akkha māla-dālaṇa-ṇiyamiya maṇa | kaya-kamalāsaṇa ṇaṃ kamalāsaṇa || HaDhP 1.17.ghattā-1.18.10 ||

²⁰ On this problem and strategies for negotiating it see, e.g., Olivelle 1993, 1995, 2011; McGovern 2018; Heesterman 1985.

is the coexistence of various schools of thought (*darśana*). The lack of any substantial distinction between the various components of the Brahminical identity is particularly vivid when Hariṣeṇa mentions the teaching of Vedic hermeneutics in the city: “There, some understand Vaiśeṣika, instructed by Brahminical teachers of Mīmāṃsā.”²¹ Namely, it is not only that people in this city study both Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā—not implausible on its own—but rather, that teachers of the latter instruct students with the former, belying the fact that these are two distinct schools of thought with their own premises and presuppositions. These authors envision a “Brahminical world” where the practices associated with all kinds of different philosophical discourses (Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Vaiśeṣika, etc.) find their place alongside each other. For them, Brahminical character and identity is constructed through the accumulation of all these features, with no defining order. Moreover, a significant feature of these Brahminical characteristics is their being distinct from and in exclusion to any characteristic of a Jaina identity.²²

These authors describe the Brahminical residents of Pāṭaliputra in the context in which, I presume, an audience familiar with the conventions of Sanskrit literature would expect to hear an account of the city’s physical aspects. While this kind of geographical and architectural account is absent from their descriptions of Pāṭaliputra, they use this trope to describe other places. Amitagati provides such a description for Ujjayinī with its ramparts and bright-jeweled peaks, its uncrossable moat, and palaces with sky-scraping peaks (1.58-63). In Hariṣeṇa’s work, this trope is deployed for Vaijayantī, whose beauty is illustrated with its trees, a moat filled with birds, and white ramparts, houses, and temples (1.4.1-*ghattā*). I maintain that the *Investigation* reserves such routinized descriptions for cities associated with Jaina characters. Vaijayantī is Manovega’s

²¹ *bujjhahi ke vi tetthu vaīsesiū | mīmāṃsā-diya-guru-uvaesiū || HaDhP 1.18.5 ||*

²² See Seema K. Chauhan’s research on the role that such Jaina homogenizing views on Brahminism played in the early construction of a shared Hindu identity (2021).

hometown. Ujjayinī's garden is where he encounters the Jaina ascetic who instructs him to take his friend to Pāṭaliputra. When it comes to the Brahminical city, the Investigators subvert this convention by disrupting what a reader familiar with it expects such a description to be. By narrowing down the description of the city to the identity of its residents, these authors direct the readers' attention to something else about it, namely, the erudition that characterizes its Brahmin residents.

Both authors develop the description of Pāṭaliputra with a relative-correlative structure, not an uncommon style for the description of cities in Sanskrit literature. In Amitagati's text, Manovega starts off by telling his friend that while wandering about he reached the wonderful Pāṭaliputra (3.20). However, instead of describing the beauty of this city, Manovega provides only a description of its residents, formed as an extended twelve-verse relative clause describing them. In each of the first eleven verses, the relative indeclinable *yatra* ("in which") relates to one or more of the aforementioned aspects of Brahminical identity that governs that place. Pavanavega's curiosity builds through this repetition in which the plot is suspended. In the twelfth verse, Manovega breaks this series of relative indeclinable forms in favor of the relative pronoun *yat* ("which"). A reader might think that the author is finally done with describing the residents that live *in* the city and is about to describe its physical characteristics. Such expectation is met, but only partially, with the verse: "[The city] which (*yat*) is frequented on each and every step by the reciters of logic, grammar, poetry, and political science, as if it was the house of the Goddess of Speech."²³ Technically speaking, the author is now describing the city itself, which turns for the first time into the grammatical subject of this sentence. Manovega provides here a conceptual description of Pāṭaliputra's terrain that is compared to Sarasvatī's temple and its inhabitants are

²³ *tarkaṃ vyākaraṇaṃ kāvyam nīti-śāstraṃ pade pade | vyācakṣāṇair yad ālīḍham vāg-devyā iva mandiram || AmDhP 3.32 ||*

likened to those who attend it to worship her. Still, the collapse between the city and the knowledge of those who occupy it reveals more about the learnedness of its residents than about its appearance. Once this verse is over, Amitagati concludes the extended clause in the following verse, where he finally provides the correlative pronoun *tat*: “Much time passed as I was looking all over that place (*tat*). Good Man! My mind was distracted, so I did not notice the passage of time.”²⁴ Manovega stimulates his friend’s curiosity about the wonderful things that captivate the mind in that place. However, once he reaches the point where Pavanavega expects to learn about these things, Manovega ends his description, stating that such wonders cannot be described with words (3.34-5). By now, Pavanavega’s curiosity (*kutūhala*) about the city has reached its apex (3.39). But instead of satisfying it, Manovega merely provides a description of its Brahminical residents and of the formal learnedness that defines their Brahminical identity, leaving his friend with no choice but to visit the place himself.

Amitagati’s Sanskrit version follows the same path as the Apabhramsha, avoiding any aesthetic description of the city’s architecture or environmental beauty by focusing solely on its residents. Hariṣeṇa similarly begins by mentioning how great and charming Pāṭaliputra is (1.17.10) only to switch, as Amitagati does, to a series of verses made up of relative clauses (*jahi, jattha*) with which he describes the Brahmins in the city. This series of Apabhramsha verses similarly culminates here with the correlative pronoun (*tahiṃ*) in the *ghattā* stanza that concludes this *kaḍavaka* section, in which Manovega states that he saw many beautiful wonders in that city with no further elaboration.

The audience enjoys a description of the city in neither Hariṣeṇa nor Amitagati, but only learns about the Brahmins who live there. In comparison, the later Kannada *Investigation* (c. 1360)

²⁴ *velā me mahatī yātā paśyatas tat samantataḥ | vyākṣipta-cetasā bhadra gataḥ kālo na budhyate || AmDhP 3.33 ||*

by Vṛttavilāsa diverges from these earlier versions and reinforces my reading of Hariṣeṇa's and Amitagati's descriptions of the city as a metonymy for learned Brahmins.²⁵ To begin, the Kannada work provides a significantly shorter and limited description of Pāṭaliputra. Instead of the series of more than ten verses laid out in the earlier versions, Vṛttavilāsa narrows this description down to merely a part of a prose section (*vacana*) of his mixed prose and verse composition (*campū*). The description of the city takes about three lines, a third of the entire prose section.²⁶ Further, only half of this already truncated description is dedicated to the Brahmins. Unlike the descriptions discussed above, Vṛttavilāsa does not portray the residents of this city as separate from the beauty of its physical features. In this version, Manovega first describes the city as rumbling from the recitation of the Veda carried out by various types of Brahmins who are marked with things such as sandalwood.²⁷ Although this description echoes the parallel section as it is illustrated by the earlier authors, this parallelism ends here. There is no further deliberation on the Brahminical residents of the city other than merely enumerating their five types, thus signaling them out as ascetics, in contrast with the preceding *Investigations*, where the residents are a mixture of ascetics and householders.²⁸ Indeed, from now on, Vṛttavilāsa's description focuses on the appearance of the city: its mansions with peaks that are inlaid with a great variety of gems and the temples for Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahma, which shine forth in this place.²⁹

The choice of Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati to focus on the scholarly characteristics of its

²⁵ For the different views about the dating of this text, see footnote 20 in the Introduction of this dissertation (p. 7).

²⁶ This is the length of the section as it appears in the printed editions I consulted (edited by Rao 1982, 2009).

²⁷ ...*ēkadaṇḍi-dvidaṇḍi-tridaṇḍi-haṃsa-paramahaṃsa-bhūtikādi-līṅga-prakaṭa-brāhmaṇa-vēda-ghōṣa-ghūrṇāyamānam āda pāṭalīputra-puramaṇi nōḍi-koṇḍu...* || *VṛDhP* 2.2.vacana ||

²⁸ According to Nabanjan Maitra's dissertation, at the same period there was a consolidation of the power of such ascetics, through an institutionalization of their monastic power in the Kannada speaking region. He particularly emphasizes the place of the Śrīgeri *maṭha* and the virtuosi Brahmin ascetics (*paramahaṃsa*) who were affiliated with it (Maitra 2021). Vṛttavilāsa's exclusive focus on ascetics might reflect the same social, political, and religious transformations that Maitra exposes.

²⁹ ...*palavum teṛada maṇi-khacita-māṭa-kūṭa-prāsādadind' oppaṃ betta hari-hara-hiraṇyagarbhālayaṅgaḷind' alli...* || *VṛDhP* 2.2.vacana ||

Brahminical residents, I suggest, indicates motivations that were common to these two but may have shifted over time, when later authors like Vṛttavilāsa continued to retell the *Investigation* in other contexts.³⁰ What defines the Brahminical identity for these two are institutions of Vedic learning, mastery of specific corpora of ritual and philosophical texts, and a strong interest in debate and its rules. These features of Brahminical identity define the site of contestation between them and their Jaina rivals. This is why the disruption of the routinized description of a city in Hariṣeṇa's and Amitagati's works is important: it emphasizes the characteristics of the Brahmins' identity that underpin their claim to judiciousness. For the Brahmins, the ability to make judgments in a judicious manner is based on the same formal processes of systematic learning and rationale that are taught in their Brahminical college. On the battle over what defines judiciousness, I argue, the formal learnedness that characterizes the Brahminical identity offers one possibility.

To identify what Manovega establishes as an alternative possibility, I would draw on what the scholar Walter R. Fisher calls the “narrative paradigm.” It is a model for explaining how people reason and shape their worldviews by adjudicating between competing sets of stories. In using the term “story” he does not refer specifically to “fiction” or any particular literary genre. For Fisher, a story applies to almost all human communication, whether written or oral, as he clarifies that his “narrative paradigm” is “an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication—assuming that all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories.”³¹ In a nutshell, what he argues is that reason and rationality are not limited to argumentative forms of communication. We may just as well consider in terms of reason the persuasive qualities of non-argumentative narration. Rationality, Fisher explains—

³⁰ Similarly compare with De Jonckheere (2023: 194ff) who suggests that the seventeenth-century Old Hindi version of the *Investigation* by Manohardās describes the city as a center of devotion (*bhakti*) rather than a center of learnedness.

³¹ Fisher 1989: 57.

is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives. [emphasis in original]³²

It is a particularly productive point for my argument, as Fisher identifies the capacity to evaluate the rationality of non-argumentative narration based on two key norms that align what I argue are the *Investigation*'s criteria for stories' credibility: coherence within the world of stories and correspondence with the real world.³³

Fisher proposes the “narrative paradigm” to challenge the idea that “the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic.”³⁴ He associates this idea with what he labels the “rational world paradigm,” which recognizes reason exclusively in “discourse that features clear-cut inferential or implicative structures.”³⁵ The assumptions that Fisher challenges are akin to what I identify as the *Investigation*'s vision of Brahminical judiciousness, which is based on systematic learning and formal rationale. His “narrative paradigm” provides an alternative explanation of how people adjudicate between conflicting narratives. Similarly, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati challenge the Brahmins' assumptions with their own idea of what constitutes judiciousness. Contrary to that of the Brahmins, I argue that Manovega's vision of judiciousness is founded on the openness to hearing others' stories and the ability to evaluate them based on what Fisher calls “narrative

³² Fisher 1987:64.

³³ “Narration implies [...] that the ‘people’ judge the stories that are told for and about them and that they have a rational capacity to make such judgments” (Fisher 1987: 67).

³⁴ Fisher 1984: 2.

³⁵ Fisher 1987: 59-62. The “rational world paradigm” can be compared with the principles of Sarah E. Worth's “discursive reasoning,” which she bases on Jerome Bruner's “paradigmatic reasoning” (Worth 2008: 56n10). See my discussion of Worth in the Introduction to this dissertation (p. 20).

probability” (coherence) and “narrative fidelity” (correspondence with one’s own experiences). This means that while the Vidyādharaś accept standards of reason that can be theorized in the terms of Fisher’s “narrative paradigm,” the Brahmins’ standards of reason evaluate statements only through the prism of the “rational world paradigm.” However, the Brahminical prism is challenged when they face discourse with less systematic and formal argumentative structures, in the form of purāṇic stories. For, if these Brahmins were truly judicious, then they would not have adhered to the incoherent and incredible stories that Manovega repeatedly points out. How does the Jaina protagonist put forth his alternative vision?

Comparison as investigative method: frog, deaf man, and servant

I suggest that Manovega’s alternative view of what it means to be a judicious listener, capable of evaluating and making judgments about the credibility of stories, is reflected through a series of three short examples that the protagonist presents. By depicting three figures—a frog who knows nothing but its well, a man who closes his ears to the words of others, and a servant who sticks with his abusive master—Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati negatively construct an image of what it means to be judicious about the different alternatives that one encounters. Specifically, these authors promote the idea that a good listener is one who is open to hearing and to comparatively evaluating different alternatives without adhering to prior opinions. But this is not all there is to it. To be truly a good listener, I argue, the *Investigation* maintains that hearing and evaluating different positions should have a tangible impact on one’s life. The critical judgment that a good listener carries out should entail an actual transformation such that they actively fashion their life according to the conclusions they reach. That is to say, what at first seems like an epistemological problem, turns out to be an ethical one.

Manovega depicts the three figures when he confront the Brahmins for the second time (*HaDhP* 4.3-6; *AmDhP* 10.66-100). This time disguised as a tribal man, Manovega offers a cat in a pot for sale to the Brahmins with the pitch that the cat eliminates all mice at a great distance. These injudicious (*aviyāra*) Brahmins agree and pay him without even examining it. However, they quickly discover that the cat in the pot is a pig in a poke: the cat's ears were bitten off by the mice it was claimed to scare off. The Brahmins feel cheated and accuse Manovega of lying, since his words are mutually contradictory: how else would one explain that a cat whose mere odor scares off mice, loses its ears to these rodents?³⁶

As he regularly does throughout the *Investigation*, Manovega responds to this contradiction by pointing out analogous instances from Brahminical *purāṇas*, of the sort I have previously discussed. Before he turns to these analogies, the disguised protagonist introduces the three figures. He does so to convey his concerns about speaking among the Brahmins. If they behave like the figures in these examples, Manovega explains, he is afraid that they will not believe his true words. Like the aforementioned instances of injudicious fools in the Sixteen Punches or the story of Bahudhānyaka, these three figures too serve to warn the readers about the repercussions of speaking the truth in the presence of such fools. But the authors depict these figures later in the narrative, and they explicitly group them separately from the stories of the ten fools.³⁷ By depicting these three figures, the *Investigation* points out specific behaviors that entail one's failure to truly be judicious about stories, deriving from one's inability to openly hear and evaluate others' positions. I maintain that the Investigators promote the cultivation of the opposite attitude, one that

³⁶ *virudhyate śaṭha sphuṭaṃ paraspamaṃ vacas tava || yadīya-gandha-mātrato dviṣaṭka-yojanāntare | vrajanti tasya mūṣakair vikṛtyate kathaṃ śrutiḥ || AmDhP* 10.85cd-86 ||

³⁷ Hariṣeṇa assigns these stories into separate groups with distinct titles: "After he showed them the three men, told the story of the Sixteen Punches, and narrated the ten [fools]—starting with the Passionate one—[Manovega] smiled and addressed the assembly of great Brahmins." *iya te tiṇṇi vi purisa payāsevi | solaha-muṭṭhi-kahāṇaū bhāsivi || rattāi ya daha puṇu vi bhaṇevīṇu | diyavara-saha bhaṇiya vi hasevīṇu || HaDhP* 4.7.1-2 || te MSS. 2, 4] tem ; payāsevi MSS. 2, 4] pasāsevi.

allows the listeners to give up their old views and adopt a better and more beneficial position.

This is how Hariṣeṇa depicts these figures:

When a goose from the seashore arrives at the edge of its well, a frog asks where it came from, to which it replies: “From the ocean.” The frog asks: “How big is the ocean?” and the goose answers: “Friend, you must know! It is very big.” The frog stretches its arms and asks: “Is it that big?” [and the goose] replies: “Bigger.” The frog further asks: “Like my well?” and the goose says: “Who knows how big it is!” It asks: “Is it even bigger than my well?” The goose says: “A frog that always stays in a well, will never know the nature of the ocean!” and takes off.—To conclude, a person who is like the Frog in a Well, who thinks that what it previously experienced is big, even if it is actually small, doesn’t believe a great thing, even when it is manifested.

Because he is afraid of bad omens, a man pretends not to hear and travels at night with the noise of a drum. Just as he doesn’t see any bad omen, he similarly doesn’t know a good omen, even though it is beneficial. A person who—out of fear of the inauspicious—dismisses what is auspicious in this way, is the Feigned Deaf Man.

Further, a fool who knows that his lord is evil but, considering his long service, doesn’t leave him, is known as the Tortured Servant.³⁸

Like the prisoners in Plato’s cave, the Frog in a Well knows only its narrow world. It does not have the capacity to imagine anything greater than the well. Since its world is so limited, it cannot conceptualize even the possibility that greater things exist out there, despite hearing the testimony

³⁸ *to savaru bhaṇai samudda-taḍaho | taḍi āyaū haṃsu jāma aḍaho ||*
maṇḍuēṃ pucchiu āgamaṇu | rayāṇāyarāu teṃ kahiu puṇu ||
bheeṇa vuttu kevaṭṭu uvahi | teṃ bhaṇiu muṇahi aī bahu sahi ||
kara-pasaru kareviṇu daddureṇa | evaḍḍu hoi kiṃ bhaṇiu teṇa ||
teṇ’ uttu garuu puṇu maṇḍueṇa | vuccaī kiṃ sarisaū mahu aḍeṇa ||
haṃseṃ bhāsiu ko muṇaī māṇu | teṃ vuttu aḍāu vi kiṃ mahāṇu ||
jo kūvi vasaī dadduru sayā vi | so sāyara-guṇu ṇa muṇaī kayā vi ||
evaṃ bhaṇevi uḍḍiṇu haṃsu | avaru vi so ṇaru aḍa-bheya-sarisu ||
guru gaṇai lahu vi jo puvva-diṭṭhu | saddahai ṇa payaḍiu guṇa-gariṭṭhu ||
kaiyava-vahiru vi asaṇiṇa-bhaeṇa | rattihe gacchai turaha-raveṇa ||
duṇimittu ṇa picchai jema kiṃ pi | suṇimittu ṇa yāṇai tiha hiyaṃ pi ||
iya asuha-bhū jo suhu caei | avaru vi so kaiyava-vahiru hoi ||
duṭṭhu vi pahu jāṇevi cira-seviu maṇṇamtaū | jo parihaṇai ṇa mūḍhu kiṭṭha-bhiccu so vuttaū || *HaDhP 4.6.1-ghattā ||*
maṇḍuēṃ MS. 4] meḍuē ; bheeṇa MSS. 2, 3, 4] bhaeṇa ; sahi MS. 3] suhi ; evaḍḍu MSS. 2, 4] evahu ; vuccaī MSS. 2, 4] kaccai ; haṃseṃ MSS. 2, 4] haṃse ; dadduru MSS. 3, 4] dadaduru ; sāyaraḡuṇu MSS. 3, 4] sāyaraḡuṇa ; gaṇai MSS. 2, 4] gaṇaiṃ ; payaḍiu MSS. 3, 4] payāḍiu ; caei MSS. 3, 4] cavei.

of others. The problem with people who are like the Frog is that they are not experienced enough to extrapolate out from their personal experiences. It is the same problem that prevents the people of Ābhīra from believing the abundance of peppercorn in Malaya. The lack of experience prevents people from inferring inductively about things that they have not directly experienced.³⁹ This is how Amitagati introduces this problem:

One who—without seeing the size of other objects—doesn’t accept the reported truth and claims the greatness of some trivial thing of his own, even though it is inferior, is said to be like the Frog in a Well.⁴⁰

A person who is like the Frog, Manovega says, does not even consider the alternatives that others provide but simply disregards them altogether. These people’s lack of experience drives them to valorize the little that they experienced over the claims of others. In this verse, Amitagati stresses that the sense of ownership is significant for people who are like a frog in a well. They privilege what belongs to them (*nija*) and make their judgments without examining their own against others’.

The depiction of the Feigned Deaf Man also embodies the lack of openness to others’ claims. This figure serves the *Investigation* to criticize those who actively choose not to listen to their opponents’ claims. Out of fear of harmful words, this person is utterly reluctant to hear what others say and so, Amitagati clarifies, he obstructs them with the noise of a drum.⁴¹ By doing so, he also obstructs what could potentially be beneficial. The Frog’s failure is passive in that such person is

³⁹ This issue is a major criticism directed towards the notion of “narrative fidelity” (i.e., a story’s correspondence with the real-life experience of its audience) in Fisher’s paradigm: “Fisher’s explication of the narrative paradigm and how individuals evaluate narratives seems to preclude new narratives from gaining a strong adherence from the audience [...]. Here the important factor is the self-referential faculty of judgment exercised by the audience; the narrative is judged as being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ based upon what they believe is the case; hence, new possibilities and values may be screened *a priori* from adoption by the audience due to this *de facto* criterion of held beliefs” (Stroud 2002: 372).

⁴⁰ *śrutaṃ na satyaṃ pratipadyate yo brūte laghīyo ’pi nijaṃ garīyaḥ | anikṣamāṇo para-vastu-mānaṃ taṃ kūpa-maṇḍūka-samaṃ vadanti || AmDhP 10.94 ||*

⁴¹ *svajana-śakuna-śabdair vāryamāṇo ’pi kāryaṃ viracayati kudhīr yas tān anākārya lubdhaḥ | paṭupaṭaha-ninādaiś chādayitvānya-śabdaṃ kṛtaka-badhira-nāmā bhaṇyate ’sau nikṛṣṭaḥ || AmDhP 10.98 ||* “A foolish and greedy person who—because he obstructs the words of others with the noise of a drum—carries out his affairs despite being warded off by ominous warnings of his relatives, is the contemptible Feigned Deaf Man.”

not experienced enough to consider the possibility of any better alternatives. The failure of the Deaf Man is active: he knows that other alternatives might be preferable, but he refuses to explore them out of concern about failing to adjudicate properly between different options. Nevertheless, the failure of the two figures derives from a shared cause, that is, their inability to take what they already know and objectively examine it side by side with the new things that they encounter, directly or through testimony.

Ultimately, I argue, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati suggest that good listeners should be willing to abandon their old erroneous positions and actively pursue the ethical life that follows from their critical examinations. The openness of good listeners to hearing other alternatives must lead to transformative changes in their lives and worldviews. The last of the three figures, the Tortured Servant, embodies this sentiment. This figure too, like the Frog and the Deaf Man, emphasizes one's recourse to the old and familiar. For the servant, there is no advantage in staying with his master. Amitagati highlights it in his Sanskrit illustration, clarifying that even when the servant sees the long-standing suffering (*cira-kleśa*) inflicted by his lord, he continues to serve him.⁴² Such person is neither ignorant nor blind to the truth. He already recognized his master's nature. How is it, then, that such a person, who knows that adhering to his long-standing position brings about suffering, sticks with it nonetheless?

The servant's mistake is based on habit: he sticks with what he is already used to. This person served his master for so long (*cira-sevia*) that even upon acknowledging his faults, he cannot bring himself to act by giving up old habits and cultivating new ones. The Brahmins, too, acknowledge that they follow faulty beliefs. In each round of debate, when they are left with no proper response, these Brahmins are compelled to accept Manovega's claim about the incredibility of their stories.

⁴² *adāyakaṃ duṣṭa-matiṃ satṛṣṇaṃ vibudhyamāno 'pi jahāti bhūpam | na yaś cira-kleśam avekṣamāṇaḥ sa kliṣṭa-bhṛtyo 'kathi garhaṇīyaḥ || AmDhP 10.99 ||*

This is how the Brahmins accept their defeat at the end of the first debate:

Now the doubt arises even in our minds: how could the superior Viṣṇu act in this way? Good Man, you convinced us, ignorant as we are. Without light, even one with eyes cannot see what is visible.⁴³

Good Man, we will deliberate the case! We—examiners of coherence—have strong and complete devotion to your words. How would those who cannot even remove their own doubts, reply to supreme disputants? [...] Leave now, adorned with the victory you gained! We will look for a god who is free of all faults.⁴⁴

There is only one way to understand these words: the Brahmins accept that Manovega's arguments against their *purāṇas*' illustration of Viṣṇu are valid. Nevertheless, their doubts are short-lived ones. Each time Manovega reenters the city, the Brahmins have returned to their erroneous positions and resort to the same purāṇic stories. It is Pavanavega, not the Brahmins, who gradually becomes judicious and eventually abandons his faulty views in favor of the Jaina teachings. Once again, the comparison with Vṛttavilāsa's work emphasizes this aspect, since only in that version the Brahmins also end up giving up their wrong beliefs and adopt the words of the Jina.⁴⁵ In Hariṣeṇa's and Amitagati's versions, these Brahmins are like tortured servants; they stick with their positions even after they acknowledge their faults. Their adherence to what they are already familiar with serves as the *Investigation*'s justification to repeatedly introduce its reader with such stories. When hearing the truth, I claim, some listeners transform immediately. But for others who are already used to their old ways of living, it may be a longer process. I maintain that for the *Investigation*, this second group, like the Brahmins, should be persistently confronted with the

⁴³ *idānīm mānase bhrāntir asmākam api jāyate | karotīdṛśa-kāryāṇi parameṣṭhī katham hariḥ || prabodhitās tvayā bhadra vimūḍha-manaso vāyam | dīpakena vinā rūpaṃ sacakṣur api nekṣate || AmDhP 10.30-1 ||*

⁴⁴ *bhadra cintayatām itthaṃ pūrvāpara-vicāriṇām | tvadīya-vacane bhaktiḥ sampannāsmākam ūrjitā || ātmano 'pi na yaḥ śaktaḥ sandeḥa-vyapanodane | uttaram sa katham datte pareṣāṃ hetu-vādinām || khalūktvā tvam tato gaccha jaya-lābha-vibhūṣaṇaḥ | mārgayāmo vāyam devaṃ nirastākhila-dūṣaṇam || AmDhP 10.46-8 ||*

⁴⁵ De Jonckheere 2020a: 223.

harsh truth until they acknowledge the futility of their prior positions and transform their lives accordingly. The Investigators craft their stories in a repetitive form to confront these individuals and train them to become good listeners of this sort.

The *Investigation* uses these examples to posit that in order to obtain beneficial and transformative results, people must be open to encountering a variety of opinions. Through openness to new experiences and alternative positions, the texts suggest, people cultivate the ability to assess such positions against their own and to discern which ones to follow and which ones to dismiss. This key point is persistently found in the background of each of the interactions between Manovega and the Brahmins. It is also a position that the text explicitly advocates, as Amitagati's statement testifies:

Illustrious-minded people who desire to attain what is useful, should give up arrogance and investigate a god with a god, a *śāstra* with a *śāstra*, a *dharma* with a *dharma*, and an ascetic with an ascetic.⁴⁶

Manovega makes this statement as part of the *Investigation*'s discussion on the distinction between what is the correct and true *śāstra* and what is its erroneous and false counterpart, as I explored in Chapter Two. The verse provides a guide to the *Investigation*'s method for investigating and discerning between true and false alternatives. To adjudicate properly, it proposes, an investigation should be comparative: a god is examined in comparison with another god, a *śāstra* with a *śāstra*, a *dharma* with a *dharma*, an ascetic with an ascetic. Hariṣeṇa shares this position, stating that “a man should investigate with great intention a god with a god, the essence of *dharma* with a *dharma*, an ascetic with an ascetic, and an *āgama* with an *āgama*.”⁴⁷ Both authors, I argue, assert here that

⁴⁶ *devena devo hitam āptu-kāmaiḥ śāstreṇa śāstram parimucya darpam | parīkṣaṇīyaṃ mahānīya-bodhair dharmeṇa dharmo yatinā yatiś ca || AmDhP 13.101 ||*

⁴⁷ *deveṃ deu ṇaru parikkhevaū || dhammeṃ dhamma-sāru jaī jaīṇā | āyamu āyameṇa vahu-maiṇā || HaDhP 5.18.7cd-8 || deu ṇaru conj.] deu nareṃ ṇaru ; jaī MSS. 3, 4] jaha.*

the recognition of falseness does not occur in a void. Rather, they claim that falseness reveals itself only when it faces its counterpart. If everything one knows is one's own position, like the Frog in a Well and the Deaf Man, one cannot truly assert whether something is true or false. Comparison is an essential point for understanding the *Investigation*'s views on evaluating the claims that stories put forth and the knowledge these stories produce. Moreover, this position is not exclusive to the Investigators. An examination of the practices of different Jaina thinkers, carried out in the final section of this chapter, suggests that these thinkers shared with the Investigators a similar comparative attitude towards knowledge.

Jaina ecology of argument: impartiality, neutrality, and reason of good listeners

The point about the necessity of knowledge outside of oneself is not only significant for our authors but is exemplary of Jaina intellectual practices more broadly. To begin, Jaina institutions had an indispensable role in preserving the texts of other religions and Jaina thinkers are famous for closely and seriously engaging with texts and ideas of other religious traditions.⁴⁸ Even though modern scholars are divided about the purpose and meaning of such Jaina engagements with others, it is clear that such engagements expose more than just a superficial familiarity. Many Jaina thinkers did not simply name-drop others' sources but familiarized themselves with the texts of their interlocutors.⁴⁹ They explored such texts as well as the ideas they promote, and even cited them on multiple occasions, a case to which the *Investigation* itself serves as evidence.

A paradigmatic instance of comparative engagements with the ideas of other traditions is

⁴⁸ Pollock 2003: 78; Jaini 2000b: 375. It is thanks to Jaina libraries that many manuscripts of various traditions have survived up to our times (Johnson 1993: 190). On the significance of these institutions for manuscript preservation, see Cort 1995b; Flügel 1999.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Cort 2000; Tubb 1998; Qvarnström 1998; Chauhan 2021, 2023.

found in Jaina doxographies.⁵⁰ Haribhadra serves here as an instructive example and, as Olle Qvarnström notes, his body of work indicates that for this prolific scholar “the study of different philosophical schools was not just allowed, but constituted an integral part of the theoretical (*jñāna*) and practical (*karma*) aspects of Jainism.”⁵¹ In his *Compendium of the Six Doctrines* (*Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*), for instance, he goes out of his way to establish categories for comparison between the different doctrines: “The wise ones should comprehend [the six doctrines] in accordance with their difference in terms of gods and true principles.”⁵² Scholars already challenged the applicability of these two categories—*devatā* and *tattva*—to each of the doctrines that Haribhadra introduces.⁵³ “The problem with this way of classifying schools,” Andrew Nicholson asserts with regard to the *Compendium*, “is that it imposes an extrinsic set of issues on each of the schools and then searches within each school for a teaching that will fit this problematic.”⁵⁴ Anil Mundra proposes a justification for the *Compendium*’s employment of these categories, in cases where they might seem as extrinsically imposed on certain doctrines. These categories, which Haribhadra assigns as criteria to distinguish the various doctrines from each other, serve him as a means for “conceptualizing [the doctrines of] others and juxtaposing them with one’s own upon a common taxonomical ground.”⁵⁵ Just as the investigation of our authors is necessarily a comparative process (a god with a god, a *śāstra* with a *śāstra*, etc.), it is similarly so in the *Compendium*’s presentation of the six doctrines: the categories of “god” and “true principle” serve Haribhadra as the common ground on which his comparison is undertaken. Likewise, the same comparative rationale that governs Haribhadra’s *Compendium* persists with regard to stories,

⁵⁰ For an excellent discussion on Sanskrit doxographies, see Halbfass 1988. See also Mundra’s discussion on citational practices in Haribhadra’s *Compendium* (2022: 62-72).

⁵¹ Qvarnström 1999: 179.

⁵² *devatā-tattva-bhedena jñātavyāni manīṣibhiḥ* || Haribhadra’s *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* 2cd ||

⁵³ Folkert 1993: 123-27; Nicholson 2010: 154-58; Mundra 2022: 55-61; Qvarnström 1999: 181-82.

⁵⁴ Nicholson 2010: 157.

⁵⁵ Mundra 2022: 28.

as part of the ongoing project of the *Investigation*: As long as the Brahmins of Pāṭaliputra stay within the echo chamber of their Brahminical college and do not face others' stories—just like the Frog and the Deaf Man—they are firm in the belief that their own stories are true. It is only once a stranger, the Jaina Vidyādhara, arrives and challenges them with his stories, that they begin to reconsider whether what they accept as true is trustworthy or not. In other words, the question of a story's correspondence with what one accepts as true in real life should be qualified. To be capable of properly examining stories against this parameter, people must broaden what they accept to be true. One way to do so is by directly experiencing the various facets of the world. Obviously, no such experience can ever be entirely comprehensive through our ordinary faculties of perception.⁵⁶ To reach further beyond what they immediately encounter, people can imaginatively expand their experience of the world, so that they become open to the possibility of things that they have not experienced directly.⁵⁷ The way to do it is by listening to the stories that others tell and evaluating them comparatively. It is with such stories that we acquire the experiences of others and learn to imagine them as real.

This is where the Brahmins in the *Investigation* fall short. If they set themselves up as paragons of judiciousness, then how is it that they repeatedly fail to recognize their stories' lack of credibility? Manovega proposes an explanation: “There can be no reason at all, apart from partiality (*pakṣapāta*), for why your *āgamas* are true while my words are false.”⁵⁸ It is on account

⁵⁶ An exception to this would be one who has attained omniscience, a quality traditionally attributed to the Jina and the Buddha. For more on this notion and its significance, see Jaini 1974; Fujinaga 2006. For the Mīmāṃsā critique of the possibility of an omniscient being, see Kataoka 2003. For Haribhadra's presentation of the Jaina-Mīmāṃsā debate on the topic, see Qvarnström 2006.

⁵⁷ It is the same challenge that scientific knowledge in Europe had to face during the Enlightenment and that was settled in modernity with the shift towards fostering trust in systems and invisible experts rather than only in individuals: “we are obliged to trust in impersonal systems, for the cost of doing otherwise is unbearable. [...] We board a plane trusting it to get us safely to our destination not because we have familiarity with the design engineer or the pilot but because we trust that reliable *systems of expertise* were brought to bear in constructing the plane and will be devoted to flying it” [emphasis in original] (Shapin 1994: 15).

⁵⁸ *bhavatām āgamaḥ satyo na punar vacanam mama | pakṣapātaṃ vihāyaikaṃ param atra na kāraṇam || AmDhP*

of partiality, Amitagati asserts, that the Brahmins are unable to discern the similarity between their own stories and the incredible stories that Manovega tells them. Amitagati also emphasizes their partiality elsewhere, with a double entendre based on a different meaning of *pakṣapāta*, to compare them—so absorbed in partiality—to the mythical Śarabhas as they are engaged in flying (*pakṣapāta*). While here partiality serves as an explanation for the behavior of the characters in the narrative, elsewhere the text suggests that partiality also influences its author’s judgments in the world outside his narrative.

A verse from the final section of this work highlights the crucial role of partiality as an impediment to judiciousness. After he eulogizes the predecessors in his intellectual lineage, Amitagati provides some information about himself and his project. On this occasion, he offers the reader a glimpse into what leads him in the process of composing his work:

I judiciously examine (*vivecana*) the meaning of the *śāstras* of others without intellectual arrogance and partiality (*pakṣapāta*). My effort arises solely in order to investigate (*parīkṣitum*) the *dharma* that grants wellbeing and protection.⁵⁹

This stanza touches upon concepts that I have previously highlighted in relation to the characters in the *Investigation* such as judiciousness, investigation, and partiality. Here, however, they are correlated with the author’s motivation for and process of carrying out his own project, rather than with his fictional characters. Put in a different way, the characters in the narrative discuss the truth and credibility of stories using parameters similar to those Amitagati himself adheres to outside the narrative world. In composing the *Investigation*, Amitagati explains that he examines the authoritative texts of other traditions with a skill similar to what Manovega posits for good listeners

13.14 ||

⁵⁹ *na buddhi-garveṇa na pakṣapātato mayānya-śāstrārtha-vivecanam kṛtam | mamaṣa dharmam śiva-śarma-dāyakam parīkṣitum kevalam utthitaḥ śramaḥ || AmDhP 21.10 ||*

when evaluating stories: namely, judiciousness. As we have seen, judiciousness revolves around questions of truth and credibility. The author reveals here, I maintain, that the mechanisms for examining stories and for examining *śāstras* are based on similar principles. In doing so, he corroborates a larger argument I made throughout this dissertation: the *Investigation* is not really interested in the worlds of stories, but it is about understanding the normative ways of acting in the experiential world. A person who is experienced in examining stories will also excel as a vigilant examiner of doctrines. To make good judgments, Amitagati emphasizes here, one must not be motivated by partiality. It is only the wellbeing and protection granted by *dharma* that serves as his motivation for composing the *Investigation*. What does it mean to be partial? How does it fit in the *Investigation*'s theory of good listening?

As Amitagati begins introducing the ten types of injudicious fools, he offers a clue about how impartiality characterizes a good listener. He links impartiality and its closely related concept of neutrality—which I will turn to shortly—to the ideas of judiciousness and coherence:

The neutral people who know to make judgments with regard to coherence, who strive toward *dharma*, and are free of partiality, those civilized people are proclaimed to have the capacity for liberation.⁶⁰

In Jaina cosmology, a living being (*jīva*) is innately characterized by one of the mutually exclusive dispositions of either having or lacking the capacity for liberation (*bhavya* and *abhavya*, respectively).⁶¹ Amitagati correlates here epistemological questions with Jaina ideas of liberation by establishing a binary opposition. Those who know to make the right judgments are *bhavyas* and, by implication, those who fail to do so, like these Brahmins, do not have the capacity to be liberated. As the text models, to properly adjudicate the coherence of stories and their

⁶⁰ *pūrvāpara-vicāra-jñā madhyasthā dharma-kāṅkṣiṇaḥ | pakṣapāta-vinirmuktā bhavyāḥ sabhyāḥ prakīrtitāḥ || AmDhP 4.43 ||*

⁶¹ Jaini 2000a: 96.

correspondence with real life, one has to undertake an investigation through a comparative method (à la god with a god, *śāstra* with a *śāstra*, etc.). That is, to evaluate one's own stories, people have to be open to hearing alternative stories so that they can adjudicate them comparatively. For Amitagati, judiciousness is the skill of a good listener who is open to hearing and evaluating alternative stories. The openness of such person, I argue, is characterized through the ideas of impartiality and neutrality.

The *Investigation* is not the only Jaina text concerned with these ideas; we see similar concerns in the ways other thinkers employ this terminology to discuss the appropriate attitudes towards their interlocutors. The remainder of this chapter introduces two case studies against which I examine the Investigators' terminology and unfold its functions. First, partiality as theorized by Haribhadra (eighth cent.) and his commentator Guṇaratna (fourteenth cent.). Second, neutrality as employed in a controversy between Dharmasāgara (sixteenth cent.) and Yaśovijaya (seventeenth cent.). Exploring these cases, separated by place and time, highlights the ideas that guide the *Investigation* in establishing what makes good listeners. I suggest that the concepts used by the Investigators for this purpose were part of a conceptual tool box available for other Jaina thinkers who employed them to negotiate similar concerns in different types of discourse. As such, I argue, these case studies indicate a shared ecology of argument that unites different Jaina thinkers across various times, places, and argumentative contexts.

Case 1: Impartiality according to Haribhadra and Guṇaratna

Guṇaratna's fourteenth-century commentary on Haribhadra's *Compendium* entitled *Lamp for the Mysteries of Logic* (*Tarkarahasyadīpikā*) serves as an entry point into exploring how Jaina thinkers employ the ideas of impartiality and neutrality. Like Amitagati, Guṇaratna also connects ideas of

judiciousness, coherence, impartiality, and neutrality, and ties them together with the process of reasoning. The commentator explains that—

One should judiciously examine (*vicāraṇīya*) all doctrines thoroughly by the means of hundreds of reasonings (*yukti-śata*) and in a purely neutral manner (*mādhyasthya*), after completely giving up partiality (*pakṣapāta*) towards one's own doctrine. Among them, the wise ones should pay attention only to the doctrine that clearly conforms to reason (*yukti-yukta*) and in which even the scent of internal incoherence (*pūrvāpara-virodha*) is not to be found, and not to any other one.⁶²

Guṇaratna articulates this explanation in his commentary at the point where Haribhadra's root text concludes his chapter on the doctrine of the Sāṅkhya and moves on to his fourth chapter, dedicated to Jaina teachings. In this passage, the commentator already foreshadows what Haribhadra comes to in the final verse of the fourth chapter: namely, the Jaina doctrine is completely free of internal incoherencies (*pūrvāpara-vighāta*).⁶³ As such, Guṇaratna clarifies here, it is this doctrine that those who make judgments only in accordance with reason should follow.

For the commentator, this passage indicates, the coherence of doctrines goes hand in hand with their compliance with rules of reason. Just like Amitagati, he flags neutrality and impartiality as foundational to the critical examination of such coherence. However, this commentarial passage on the *Compendium*'s discussion about Jaina doctrine develops ideas that do not appear in Haribhadra's root text. The commentator borrows the ideas of partiality and reason from a different work by the same scholar, the *Determination of Popular Truths* (*Lokatattvanirṇaya*). Guṇaratna makes this extra-textual reference clear for the reader, as he immediately cites a famous verse of Haribhadra's *Determination*:

I have no partiality for the Mahāvīra. I have no aversion to [teachers] such

⁶² *sarvathā sva-darśana-pakṣapātaṃ parityajya mādhyasthyenaiva yukti-śataiḥ sarva-darśanāni punaḥ punar vicāraṇīyāni, teṣu ca yad eva darśanaṃ yukti-yuktatayāvabhāṣate yatra ca pūrvāpara-virodha-gandho 'pi nekṣyate, tad eva viśāradaḥ ādaraṇīyaṃ nāparam iti* || Guṇaratna's *Tarkarahasyadīpikā* §38 ||

⁶³ Haribhadra's *Śaḍdarśanasamuccaya* 58. See Chapter One, footnote 12 (p. 36).

as Kapila and others. One should only take the side of someone whose words are reasonable.⁶⁴

We learn here that for Haribhadra and his commentator Guṇaratna the objects of partiality and impartiality are one's doctrine (*sva-darśana*) and the teachers who introduce it. The problem, as the commentator puts it, is that people who are not impartial cannot be judicious. When people are partial to a certain doctrine, they adhere to its claims in a way that prevents them from properly adjudicating which amongst the various teachings are coherent and reasonable and which are not.

Haribhadra further develops his idea of partiality in his *Determination*. For this scholar, Anil Mundra argues, partiality is the “uncritical adoption of conventional opinion.”⁶⁵ It is the acceptance of something as credible and true without the critical process of examination and judgment. As Mundra notes, partiality is not just any allegiance to one's own position, but an “*uncritical* allegiance” (emphasis in original). Haribhadra explains how to avoid partiality for one's doctrine: “Matters should be accepted only once they are fully comprehended after being investigated, like gold, in accordance with tradition (*āgama*) and reason. What is the use of falling into the grips of partiality?”⁶⁶ For a matter to be truly impartial, it has to be established properly through an investigation (*parīkṣā*) that involves both tradition and reason. However, how can an impartial investigation involve tradition? Is impartiality not the sole purview of reason?

In Haribhadra's conceptualization, tradition does not define the criterion for accepting the validity of matters, at least not in the same way that reason does. Rather, for such an investigation, the tradition only “supplies the content of doctrinal options to be adjudicated by *yukti*.”⁶⁷ To put it

⁶⁴ *pakṣapāto na me vīre na dveṣaḥ kapilādiṣu | yuktimaḍ vacanaṁ yasya tasya kāryaḥ parigrahaḥ ||* Haribhadra's *Lokatattvanirṇaya* 1.38 ||

⁶⁵ Mundra 2022: 91.

⁶⁶ *āgamena ca yuktyā ca yo 'rthaḥ samabhigamyate | parīkṣya hemavad grāhyaḥ pakṣapātāgrahaṇa kim ||* Haribhadra's *Lokatattvanirṇaya* 1.18 ||

⁶⁷ Mundra 2022: 93.

simply, in Haribhadra’s *Determination*, tradition and reason play different roles in the course of an impartial investigation. Reason defines the process of investigation, while tradition supplies the content of the positions that are investigated in this process. For Haribhadra, an impartial attitude is defined by the same kind of openness to hearing alternative views that the *Investigation* advocates in its critique of the Frog and the Deaf: an openness to the content of different *āgamas* facilitates and enables an impartial investigation according to reason. In this manner, as Mundra notes, for Haribhadra it is impartiality that enables “one’s reason to dictate one’s doctrinal allegiances, rather than the other way around.”⁶⁸ Similarly, I argue, the *Investigation* posits that listeners must be open to hearing others’ positions, before making judgments about them. In other words, according to the Investigators—just as for Haribhadra and his commentator—people who are impartial do not adhere uncritically to their own claims and do not reject unilaterally the claims of others, merely on account of differing religious affiliations. It is only through the critical examination of these claims, examination rooted in reason, that one should accept or reject such claims.⁶⁹

Whereas a frog knows only its well, the goose, with its panoramic view from the sky, can critically examine and impartially compare various alternatives. Our authors liken Pāṭaliputra’s Brahmins to the frog and Manovega to the goose. When Manovega confronts them, he repeatedly confirms that the stories he illustrates truly stand in line with how the Brahmins accept them. To verify that he really quotes their stories, the Vidyādhara challenges them time and again with questions such as: “Tell me, is your *āgama* like this, or is it not?”⁷⁰ In this way, he affirms that the content that he examines agrees with what is told in these Brahmins’ tradition. Through his

⁶⁸ Mundra 2022: 86.

⁶⁹ Mundra 2022: 270.

⁷⁰ *kiṃ bho yuṣmākaṃ āgamaḥ | īdṛśo ’sti na vā brūta || AmDhP 13.11bc ||*

arguments about the incoherence of these stories, Manovega makes it clear that the Brahmins do not take reason here as a standard for critically adjudicating their own tradition. The problem in these stories is a problem of contradiction (*virodha*), essentially a flagrant violation of reason. If partiality, as Haribhadra thematizes it, is the uncritical allegiance to one's own position, then in the case of a partial investigation, one's tradition precedes and defines what one accepts as reasonable. In such a case, rather than reason being employed to examine the content of one's authoritative stories, it is the stories themselves that define the standard for what one considers reasonable. Despite the similarity in the nature of their respective contradictions, the Brahmins see incoherencies in Manovega's words but not in their own stories. The explanation must be that they are, like the Frog or the Deaf Man, partial to their already established positions. When the object of examination is their own tradition, these Brahmins valorize their stories over reason. Although they claim to be judicious, their partiality (i.e., their uncritical allegiance towards their tradition), prevents them from being good listeners who succeed in making good judgments.

Case 2: Neutrality according to Dharmasāgara and Yaśovijaya

Yaśovijaya, a seventeenth-century monk affiliated with the Tapā Gaccha branch of the Śvetāmbara, promoted in his *Essence of Knowledge (Jñānasāra)* a position similar to Haribhadra:

One whose heart is neutral should remain fair-minded. He should give up infantile uncertainty by getting rid of the stones of fallacious arguments. For the neutral person, the calf of mind follows the cow of reason. But the ape of mind that is attached to what is worthless, pulls [the cow] by its tail.⁷¹

⁷¹ *sthīyatām anupālambhaṃ madhyasthenāntarātmanā | kutarka-karkara-kṣepais tyajyatām bāla-cāpalam || mano-vatso yukti-gavīm madhyasthasyānudhāvati | tām ākarṣati pucchena tucchāgraha-maṇaḥ-kapīḥ ||* Yaśovijaya's *Jñānasāra* 16.1-2 || The second stanza of this passage was reproduced verbatim in the same author's *Ādhyātmopaniṣatprakaraṇam* v. 6.

In this verse, Yaśovijaya suggests that a neutral person makes conclusions based on reason rather than on irrelevant considerations. This person acts neither with attachment nor with aversion.⁷² In discussing Yaśovijaya's position on neutrality, Jonardon Ganeri explains: "A person who embodies this virtue follows wherever reason leads, rather than using reason only to defend prior opinions to which they have already been attracted."⁷³ For this Jaina thinker, neutrality is a virtue associated with the lack of attachment to previously established views and with loyalty to plain reason. It should not come as a surprise that this position is very close to Haribhadra's, since Yaśovijaya saw himself as the successor of this eminent scholar.⁷⁴ However, whereas Haribhadra associates this position with one's impartiality, the latter articulates it in terms of neutrality.

Yaśovijaya develops his view on neutrality as part of a heated intra-sectarian dispute that took place within his sect in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This conflict arose from a disagreement about whether or not a follower of the Tapā Gaccha should openly listen to and evaluate the doctrines of others. Articulating how one should interact with alternative views, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, is a significant theme in the *Investigation* as well as in the writing of Haribhadra and his commentator. The controversy in which Yaśovijaya participated further highlights the acuteness of this topic in various Jaina discourses. Thoroughly explored by Paul Dundas, the debate centered on the appropriate attitude of a Tapā Gaccha follower toward the doctrines and practices of rival Jaina sects, predominantly the Kharatara Gaccha.⁷⁵ One side in the conflict was a sixteenth-century Tapā Gaccha monk called Dharmasāgara, who advocated an extremely exclusivist sectarian position that fully rebuked not only the teaching of non-Jaina traditions but even those of rival Śvetāmbara sects. This monk utterly opposed legitimizing any

⁷² *na rāgaṃ nāpi ca dveṣaṃ madhyasthas teṣu gacchati* || Yaśovijaya's *Jñānasāra* 16.4cd ||

⁷³ Ganeri 2011: 33.

⁷⁴ Akamatsu 2017: 165; Dundas 2002a: 97.

⁷⁵ Dundas 2002a, 2007: 103-167.

doctrine of other sects, even when its principles are morally praised by his own (e.g., non-violence). A century later, Yaśovijaya pushed back against this exclusivist view by promoting the opposite position. For him, legitimizing the teachings of others is not only acceptable but also reasonable if they do not contradict fundamental Jaina principles.

Both scholars considered the notion of neutrality (*mādhyaṣṭhya*) and the person who possesses it as central to their views. While each of them developed this concept differently, I maintain that both employed neutrality to tackle the problem of evaluating and adjudicating between various doctrinal alternatives.⁷⁶ Dharmasāgara, the earlier of the two, interpreted the Sanskrit term for “neutral” (*madhyastha*), which literally reads as “being in the middle,” as akin to what in English we might call “sitting on the fence” (borrowing Dundas’s words) with regard to truth and falsehood (*tattvātattva*).⁷⁷ This interpretation closely links the state of neutrality with doubt, since it is the inability to adjudicate between what is true and what is not, which results in the uncritical acceptance of both. Dharmasāgara utilized this interpretation to argue that neutrality leads to “intellectual fuzziness concerning the status of alternative doctrinal positions.”⁷⁸ It is this attitude, he explains, that causes the followers of rival Digambara and Śvetāmbara sects to indecisively follow true beliefs (i.e., only ones that are in agreement with Dharmasāgara’s sect) together with false ones (that is, all the rest). To abstain from such confusion, Dharmasāgara advocates for the categorical disapproval of any doctrine of rival Jaina sects, even if it morally agrees with his own. As he perceived it, there is no such thing as accepting a doctrine only partially: “partial praise of the true path or rejection of some aspects of it [...] is tantamount both to rejection of Jainism and acceptance of other paths as being true.”⁷⁹ In this all-or-nothing position, people

⁷⁶ The debate over “neutrality” is discussed by Dundas (2007) especially in pp. 105-122, 150-9.

⁷⁷ Dundas 2007: 106-7.

⁷⁸ Dundas 2007: 120.

⁷⁹ Dundas 2007: 122.

must dogmatically follow everything prescribed by their tradition, with no room for questioning its components. A position that opposes the consideration of any alternative, not even through an impartial examination such as advocated by Haribhadra, resembles the behavior depicted in the stories of the Frog and the Deaf. It adamantly rejects the consideration of any alternative being deemed acceptable.

This exclusivist position was far from a consensus. To the contrary, it caused somewhat of a controversy even among Dharmasāgara's contemporary peers, to the extent that he had to choose between publicly tempering his statements or running the risk of expulsion from his sect. In response to this controversial position, Yaśovijaya reiterated in his *Essence* the same logic that governed Haribhadra's position about partiality. Yaśovijaya promoted this position by substituting impartiality with neutrality—a concept that Dharmasāgara had employed a century earlier—and reinterpreting it to suit his needs. Moreover, just as Haribhadra tied together impartiality with the rational investigation of various traditions,⁸⁰ Yaśovijaya correlated neutrality with investigating *dharma* in agreement with the same principle of reason. In his work—similarly bearing the now-familiar title *Investigation of Dharma* (*Dharmaparīkṣā*) but very different from the *Investigations* that form the subject of this dissertation both in style and content⁸¹—he argues that—

The Jina stated that neutrality is the basis for investigating the *dharma* that carries the living being who falls into the ocean of worldly existence.⁸²

Earlier we saw Yaśovijaya explain in his *Essence* that the neutral person follows reason rather than being attached to prior views. Now, he correlates neutrality with the investigation of *dharma*. The result is that such investigation should be grounded in reason and be detached from one's own

⁸⁰ Haribhadra's *Lokatattvanirṇaya* 1.18 (see footnote 66 in this chapter).

⁸¹ The name of Yaśovijaya's work was possibly meant to evoke a chapter from a work of Haribhadra that discusses this topic (Dundas 2007: 152).

⁸² *so dhammo jo jīvaṃ dhārei bhavaṇṇave nivaḍamāṇaṃ | tassa parikkhā-mūlaṃ majjhatthattaṃ ciya jīṇuttaṃ ||* Yaśovijaya's *Investigation* v. 2 ||

doctrinal affiliation, just as Haribhadra advocates about impartiality.

Yaśovijaya's ultimate stance is that any doctrine, when examined with a neutral mind and found to be in harmony with Jaina teachings, can be safely adopted. For the person who pursues what is beneficial (*hita*), it is acceptable to follow more than one doctrine.⁸³ As he sees it, a person who is neutral is affected only by reason, not by predilection for any specific position. For this person, the reasonable thing is to openly hear others' doctrines. After evaluating them in a neutral and impartial manner, and after concluding that they do not violate the core principles taught by the Jina, one may follow their moral principles.⁸⁴

* * *

What does this genealogy of concepts across time and place teach us? We saw how Haribhadra and his commentator explain that those who are impartial to their own doctrines and their teachers privilege reason over their tradition. Yaśovijaya similarly privileges reason over the attachment to prior views, and he associates it with the virtue of neutrality. Yaśovijaya promoted this position in response to Dharmasāgara's exclusivism, which embodies everything that these conceptualizations of impartiality and neutrality defy. If we return to the *Investigation*, I maintain that the examples of the Frog and the Deaf emphasize the limitations of such an exclusivist position through their reluctance to consider anything other than what they already know. Such people stay in their zone of comfort and do not attempt to examine by themselves any alternative. When others' claims do not stand in line with what they already accept in their tradition, such people disregard them altogether, whether true or not. In the eyes of such people, their doctrines are always preferable.

What is common to all of these instances, from Haribhadra and Guṇaratna to Dharmasāgara, Yaśovijaya, and the Investigators, is their attention to the impact that others' positions might have

⁸³ Ganeri 2011: 33.

⁸⁴ Dundas 2007: 163-5.

on one's own worldview. I suggest that these figures, and presumably other Jaina thinkers whose scholarship is beyond the scope of this research, are united by a shared ecology of argument that compels them to seriously acknowledge their interlocutors and incentivizes them to conceptualize the proper attitude towards them. Since an impartial openness to others' positions could potentially affect one's worldview, Dharmasāgara resisted it altogether. In contrast, Yaśovijaya, who disagreed with him, strongly advocated for such openness. It also led Haribhadra and his commentator to explore different doctrines and to articulate the criteria of reason and impartiality that such a comparative investigation requires. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati similarly hold this view and conceptualize it in terms of judiciousness: judicious people are those whose openness and familiarity with competing alternatives enable them to adjudicate properly what is credible and what is not. However, as the Tortured Servant teaches us, a good listener is not defined solely by the ability to make neutral and impartial judgments. After adjudicating between different positions, the *Investigation* adds, good listeners should transform their worldviews and act in the world accordingly.

Conclusion

This chapter shifted focus from how the *Investigation* identifies the credibility of stories to how it characterizes a vigilant recipient of those stories. My analysis shows that the method for evaluating stories effectively must be a comparative one. The *Investigation* shows that this kind of comparative evaluation does not necessarily confront a false object (e.g., a false story) with its true counterpart (a true story). What makes the Brahmins understand that their stories do not conform to the proper standards of coherence and correspondence with real-life experience is the Vidyādhara's own fabricated life stories, which themselves do not conform to such standards. The

Brahmins' recognition of the faults of others' stories sheds light on the faults of their own stories. When happens repeatedly, it entails a profound shift in understanding that is carried out through a process of inductive reasoning. After engaging with such stories exhaustively, this transformation is rendered irreversible. It is likened to an epiphany, which cannot be reduced to a clear set of formal guiding rules. Once it emerges, like recognizing the faces on both sides of Rubin's vase, one cannot disregard it anymore.

Exposing the falseness of one's positions by introducing others' (similarly false) positions is actually what triggers the *Investigation*'s narrative in the first place, when Manovega is advised to expose Pavanavega to the "harmful and internally incoherent" beliefs of the Brahmins in order to cure him of his false ways.⁸⁵ This scene, early in the narrative, encapsulates the *Investigation*'s comparative method: It does not aim to convince one in the credibility of a specific story. Rather, it fosters doubt and trains its readers on how to be judicious about the stories they encounter, by repeatedly introducing them with episodes that violate the standards according to which a true story should be adjudicated. It teaches readers to recognize problematic stories, paving the way for them to identify non-problematic stories and accept them as true.

Ultimately, the *Investigation* uses stories as an instrument for training readers to be judicious examiners. It shows how a comparative examination reveals the faults of such stories. But this judiciousness applies to domains of knowledge that transcend the literary contexts of stories. A judicious investigation of topics such as *śāstra*, *dharma*, god, and ascetic, similarly exposes the faults of some of their alternatives. The *Investigation* is a cry out for all the frogs out there to leave their wells and to challenge what they uncritically consider as true. Recognizing the falsehood in

⁸⁵ *pratyakṣataḥ para-matāni vilokamānaḥ pūrvāparādi-bahu-dūṣaṇa-dūṣitāni | mithyāndhakāraṁ apahāya sa bhūri-doṣaṁ jñāna-prakāśam upayāsyati tatra sadyaḥ || AmDhP 2.92 ||* "In that place, directly perceiving the very harmful and internally incoherent beliefs of others, [Pavanavega] will immediately abandon the darkness of ignorance that abounds with faults and approach the illuminating knowledge."

one set of beliefs opens a path for those servants who are tortured by their old beliefs to accept their true alternative and to shape their lives accordingly.

Chapter Four:

What Makes Sense?

Competing Models of Textual Authority

And it has already been said that a chisel and a
tombstone are enough for the truly important details
of life: one name and two dates. Time and person.
His beginning and his end.

- Meir Shalev, *Esau*

Introduction

So far, I have explored how the *Investigation of Dharma* theorizes the problem of the credibility of stories and, by extension, for adjudicating the authority of texts as sources of knowledge. Chapter One outlined the *Investigation*'s criteria for narrative credibility. Chapter Two then clarified what is at stake for our Investigators—Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati—by distinguishing between valid means of knowledge and their false counterparts, highlighting the moral dangers of adhering to false narratives. Chapter Three shifted the focus from stories to their reception, exploring how the *Investigation* conceptualizes judiciousness by defining the ethical and epistemic virtues necessary for critically evaluating competing narratives. Through my analysis, this dissertation has argued that the *Investigation* trains its audience to be both judicious readers of conflicting stories and also judicious evaluators of competing alternative positions across broader issues. Taken together, these chapters outline a comprehensive theory developed by the *Investigation* for evaluating the credibility of stories and engaging with them effectively as authoritative means of knowledge to shape one's life.

This chapter explores the broader implications of this research. It puts my reading of the *Investigation* into conversation with methods employed by other Jaina authors who critique and redefine textual authority. By taking together a number of cases in which Jaina authors engage

with the stories of others, this chapter offers fresh insights into Jaina thought and its self-fashioning within the context of its competition with rival traditions over claims of authority. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how Jaina authors establish a context-based model of authority—contrasting with the Veda-oriented eternalist model of Mīmāṃsā—by using their temporal “lateness” as a strategic vantage point for critiquing earlier Brahminical narratives. It elucidates how these authors employ a deliberate acknowledgment of their late temporal position—what I call a “rationale of posteriority”—to redefine textual authority within a human-centered framework. This pivot from the *Investigation*’s specific framework to broader Jaina literary practices allows us to hypothesize a shared rationale that informs Jaina thought and its engagement with claims of authority.

At the heart of this chapter lies a comparative exploration of how Brahminical and Jaina *purāṇas* conceptualize their textual authority, establishing it in correspondence with their respective temporalities. Brahminical *purāṇas* often claim their authority through a self-attested link to the Veda, tracing their legitimacy to an eternal, transcendent origin. In contrast, I argue, Jaina *purāṇas* ground their authority in the context of human temporality. One aspect of this context is the Jaina *purāṇas*’ acknowledgment of their individual human authors. Another is their focus on human subjects as their protagonists. Moreover, some Jaina *purāṇas*, and these are the ones my analysis focuses on, trace their origin to a particular human interaction: the encounter between King Śreṇika and Indrabhūti Gautama at Mahāvīra’s assembly. This chapter unfolds these contrasts between Brahminical and Jaina ideas of purāṇic temporality to define the model of textual authority that guides the authors of Jaina *purāṇas*. I argue that these authors adopt a rationale of posteriority, an approach that pays attention to the temporal context of these authors and of their sources. Their approach responds to Mīmāṃsā’s emphasis on the timelessness of the Veda and the resulting anti-historical tendencies that dominated mainstream Sanskrit culture. It is a backward-

looking approach that finds expression in Jaina authors' deliberate use of rhetoric that emphasizes their subsequent temporal position to critically evaluate earlier narratives. Their "lateness" allows them to challenge the claims to truth of earlier works that fashion their source of authority as eternal. With this method, Jaina authors reclaim their place within history and human experience as a source of authoritative power. It not only challenges Brahminical claims of authority grounded in timelessness but also redefines the foundations for such claims of authority.

The Investigators, I suggest, adopt a similar approach. They deliberately situate themselves within a linear chronology where earlier stories become the focus of their scrutiny. For these Jaina authors, as I argued in Chapter Two, the relative lateness of texts is not a sign of weakened or unreliable connection to an original truth. Instead, it is a vantage point that allows them to evaluate these established stories critically and refine them. In this chapter, I explore how earlier works such as Haribhadra's *Dhuttakkhāṇa* and Jaina retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*—Vimalasūri's *Paūmacariya* and Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa*—reflect this approach. While these Jaina authors execute their projects in different ways, I argue that they share a perspective that views their later temporal position as a means of critiquing earlier narratives and therefore asserting their own interpretative frameworks as more credible and trustworthy.

I begin this chapter by examining how the engagement of these authors with earlier texts is rooted in a retrospective critique. In the first section, I also address a misconception of some early Indologists that the works of such authors are merely derivative, arguing that such a misconception arises from the Indologists' misunderstanding of the outspoken nature of the authors' rhetoric. I then turn to the concept of *purāṇa*, discussing varying conceptualizations of purāṇic temporality as a lens for understanding how contrasting temporal frameworks inform notions of textual authority in Jaina and Brahminical traditions. Next, I consider the framework narrative Jaina

purāṇas employ to openly critique their Brahminical counterparts, showing how their reinterpretations reflect an alternative model of context-based authority, and arguing that this framework directly influenced Amitagati's model of authority. In the final part, I explore Amitagati's refutation of the Veda's validity and his challenges to claims of transcendental authority. I argue that the *Investigation* rejects the acceptance of textual authority that is based on certain traditional claims, in the absence of observable evidence to support them. In such cases, judicious readers should critically evaluate these texts themselves. By examining the common threads between the *Investigation* and works of other Jaina authors, this chapter seeks to define a distinctive feature of the ways these Jaina authors thought and wrote. It aims to illuminate what sets apart these authors from their Brahminical interlocutors, particularly in the ability of the former to assert a human-centered and temporally grounded model of authority. These Jaina authors embrace their position as chronologically late and take pride in this lateness—an unprecedented stance in an environment that prioritizes what has always existed.

Engaging earlier texts: a backward-oriented critique

The *Investigation* is a narrative about narratives, one that strategically employs a narrative form to ask what makes stories credible. However, the exploration of criteria for evaluating stories through narrative literature did not appear out of nowhere with this literature. One instance of such earlier Jaina exploration is that of the Prakrit *Tale of the Charlatans* (*Dhuttakkhāṇa*) composed by Haribhadra, probably around the eighth century CE. It narrates the story of five charlatans caught in the rain outside of Ujjayinī, each followed by a retinue of five hundred men and women. As the days pass and their hunger grows, one of them—a con-artist called Mūladeva—proposes a challenge:

Let each one recount, in entirety, something that they had heard or experienced, to these gathered charlatans. Whoever does not believe, crying: “False words!” must give food and drinks to the entire band of tricksters. However, whoever corroborates these claims through citations drawn from the *purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, or *śruti*, and convinces the majority, this person—a master of fraudsters, clever, well versed in the *śāstras*—doesn’t need to give anything to anyone else!¹

Mūladeva proposes a game in which each conman recounts an outlandish tale, claiming it to be something they have heard (*suyam*) or experienced (*samañubhūyam*) personally. The story may as well be untrue, as some of the other tricksters would claim. However, it is not a regular game of Two Truths and a Lie but, rather, a competition between con-artists who have perfected the art of deception. The challenge is not merely to share an unbelievable story but to substantiate its plausibility by referencing Brahminical texts like the *purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*, or *śruti*. The game rewards the ability to convince others of the tales’ validity using scriptural evidence. In essence, the contest relies on two skills: crafting an exaggerated narrative and corroborating it through citations from Brahminical literature. For the charlatans, the goal is not to expose falsehoods but to validate their fictitious stories by juxtaposing them with equally far-fetched stories from these authoritative texts. In the world of the narrative, the winner is whoever makes their audience believe these stories by the means of scriptural evidence. However, when viewed from the perspective of the reader external to the *Tale*, this exchange operates differently. Since the external reader knows that these are all fraudulent conmen who should not be trusted, their validating evidence does the opposite; for the reader, it ironically functions as an invalidation of the scriptures themselves.

¹ *aha bhaṇāi mūladevo jaṃ jeṇa suyam va samañubhūyam vā | so taṃ kaheu savvaṃ miliyāṇ’ eyāṇa dhuttāṇaṃ ||*
jo taṃ na pattiejjā asacca-vayaṇaṃ ti teṇa savvesiṃ | dhuttāṇa samuiyāṇaṃ dāyavvaṃ bhatta-pāṇaṃ ti ||
jo puṇa purāṇa-bhāraha-rāmāyaṇa-sui-samuttha-vayaṇehiṃ | taṃ vayaṇaṃ samatthittā mahāyaṇaṃ pattiyaṇeja ||
so dhuttāṇa ahivaī mahāmaī atthi sattha-ṇimmāo | mā deu kiṃci kassa vi iya bhaṇe mūladeveṇa || Haribhadra’s *Dhuttakkhāṇa* 1.12-15 ||

The competition involves the speaker's own fictitious life story and the stories from the Hindu scriptures that would render such fictitious events plausible. Each episode displays a fictitious story told by one of the charlatans. This story is then followed by evidence for its validity in the form of an analogous story from these already existing scriptures. The reader of this dissertation can easily recognize this strategy from the *Investigation*. The contestation of Brahminical episodes with the narration of fabricated biographical stories is a strategy that Manovega employs repeatedly. As A. N. Upadhye has argued based on such shared themes and argumentative strategies that he identified between the two works, the *Tale* likely served as a source for the author of the earliest *Investigation* (possibly the lost Prakrit work of Jayarāma mentioned only by Hariṣeṇa).² The Investigators borrowed this strategy from the *Tale* and further developed it to explore the criteria for the credibility of stories. Haribhadra clarifies the purpose of his work in the concluding stanzas of his *Tale*, where he frames it as an inquiry into such Brahminical stories:

These fabricated compositions in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are like alloyed (*jutti-kaya*) gold³; they fail to endure when agitated. Such popular (*loiya*, Skt. *laukika*) *śāstra* is like donkey shit: smooth on the outside, but when examined closer, it is filled with chaff and husk residue.⁴

Haribhadra is interested in examining and undermining popular Brahminical stories. His statement resembles the Investigators' claim that Brahminical *purāṇas* cannot withstand a judicious examination, likening such stories to an old cloth: "Dear Friend! If the *purāṇas* of others were

² Upadhye 1944: 46ff. Haribhadra's work is an expansion of a simplified version of the story from Jinadāsa's seventh-century *Niśītha-cūrṇī* (Upadhye 1983). For an analysis of the *Niśītha-cūrṇī*, see Osier 2005: 41-90. De Clercq and Vekemans (forthcoming: 1-3) mention a number of additional versions of this story.

³ The meaning of *jutti-kaya* (Skt. *yukti-kṛta*) is not straightforward. An early eighteenth-century Old Gujarati version of the *Tale* reads it as "fake" (*kūṭ*) gold. My translation here takes *jutti* (Skt. *yukti*) in the meaning of "alloying of metal" (see the Sanskrit-English dictionaries of Monier-Williams, Apte, and the *Śabdasaṅgraha*). For the Old Gujarati glossing, provided in Jina Vijaya Muni's printed edition of Haribhadra's *Dhuttakkhāṇa*, see p. 68, ll. 20-21.

⁴ *eyāiṃ capphalāiṃ bhāraka-rāmāyaṇe nibaddhāiṃ | saṃcālāṇaṃ asaḥaṃtā jaha jutti-kayaṃ suvaṇṇa vva ||*
eyam loiya-sattham gaddaha-liṇḍa vva bāhire maṭṭham | jāv' aṃtam joijjai tusa-bhusa-busa-mīsiyam savvam ||
 Haribhadra's *Dhuttakkhāṇa* 5.119-120 ||

critically examined, they would unravel—like an old rag—into a hundred little pieces.”⁵ The metaphors these authors employ—donkey feces for Haribhadra and a worn-out cloth for the Investigators—reflect a shared critique, aimed at exposing these texts’ false cohesion, which fails under critical scrutiny. Together, they indicate a shared strategy of these authors: to challenge the authority of competing traditions by exposing the internal contradictions in the stories of these traditions, while simultaneously promoting the virtue of critical reading as essential to discerning credible knowledge.

Such critical interest in the stories of the Brahmins has its origins even earlier, in the endeavors of authors of Jaina *purāṇas*. Padmanabh S. Jaini has labeled the Jaina *purāṇas* as a “counter tradition,” whose authors—

knew the Hindu Epics and Purāṇas well, studied them with the attention worthy of a board of censors examining the offensive portions of a story, and finally decided to rewrite the script in conformity with their own doctrines and sensibilities.⁶

Jaini refers here to Jaina authors whose efforts to align purāṇic narratives with the teachings of the Jina led them to compose their own versions of these stories. He appears to appreciate the meticulousness with which these authors engaged with the narratives of their rivals. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indologists, however, viewed these efforts less favorably. V. M. Kulkarni refers to some of these early Indologists who considered Jaina literature as “derivative.”⁷ One of them, Maurice Winternitz, provides an apt example of this sentiment, where he asserts that “the Jainas were at pains to appropriate to themselves all the favourite popular

⁵ *ṇisuṇiṇu parahu purāṇu mitta viyārijjamtaū | nāi purāṇaū cīru lahu-saya-sakkaru jamtaū || HaDhP 4.2.ghattā || ṇisuṇevi MS. 4] ṇisuṇiṇu ; nāi MSS. 2, 3] nāha. Amitagati puts a similar statement in the mouth of the Brahmins: “Our purāṇas shatter into a hundred pieces, like a worn-out cloth, when critically examined. Good Man, what can we do in this misfortune?” (śatadhā no viśīryante purāṇāni vicāraṇe | vasanānīva jīrṇāni kiṃ kurmo bhadra duḥśake || AmDhP 12.16 ||)*

⁶ Jaini 2000b: 375.

⁷ Kulkarni 1990: 3; Taylor 2021: 5.

themes from Brahmanical and general Indian literature... [In some cases,] they completely changed and spoilt them, in order to give them a Jinistic appearance.”⁸ Some later scholarship, while not as dismissive as Winternitz’s, often continues to approach this literature through a comparative paradigm, focusing on how Jaina authors follow or diverge from their Brahminical counterparts.⁹

Obviously certain genres of Jaina literature *do* include narrative elements familiar from Brahmanical traditions. However, framing Jaina purāṇic literature as borrowing and appropriating Brahminical narratives is reductive. First, it falsely implies that it was only Jainas who borrowed from other traditions, ignoring the abundance of recensions of stories such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, told across South and Southeast Asia by groups such as Dalits, women, and Buddhists, many of which significantly diverge from Vālmīki’s version.¹⁰ Second, as Seema K. Chauhan argues, this framing reduces Jaina purāṇic literature to a passive relationship with Hindu *purāṇas*, essentializing both traditions and ignoring the historical processes that shaped their development.¹¹ In doing so, it disregards the fact that purāṇic and epic traditions, Jaina and Brahminical alike, are historical artifacts shaped by centuries of oral storytelling and mutual influence across traditions.¹² While much Jaina literature foregrounds comparisons with parallel Hindu stories, dismissing it as simply derivative fails to recognize the deliberate and critical role such comparisons play in its narrative

⁸ Winternitz [1927] 1977: 486.

⁹ E.g., Shaktidhar Jha’s work follows the same approach by focusing on Brahminical elements that were “incorporated into the corpus of the Jaina Purāṇic literature under the pressing influences of the Brāhmanical epic-Purāṇic tradition” (Jha 1978: 13). B. N. Sumitra Bai states that the “typical attitude” of Jaina authors was to incorporate appealing elements from other religious traditions into their own, even as she fully acknowledges the early existence of Jaina versions of the *Mahābhārata* (Sumitra Bai and Zydenbos 1991: 260). In criticizing such approach, Jonathan Geen notes that such scholars consider Jainas to be the “perennial borrowers” of mythology (Geen 2009: 93).

¹⁰ The essays in Paula Richman’s edited volumes on the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition demonstrate it well (Richman 1991a, 2000). See also Hawley and Pillai 2021; Beck 2005.

¹¹ Chauhan 2021: 22

¹² Some scholars suggest (though substantive evidence is somewhat scarce) that Jaina and Brahminical *purāṇas* both drew on earlier, non-sectarian oral traditions and influenced one another, challenging the notion of one-sided borrowing. See Cort 1993: 190; Chandra 1970: 619; Jaini 2000b: 376; Geen 2009: 97.

and rhetorics.

What remains to be asked is how Jaina literature gained its reputation for unoriginality. One answer is found in the bias and misrepresentation of modern scholarship that privileges certain texts while sidelining many others.¹³ However, I propose an additional explanation that emerges from the rhetoric employed by Jaina authors themselves. Unlike their Brahminical counterparts, some of the earlier Jaina authors who wrote about purāṇic themes did not obscure their engagement with existing stories. On the contrary, they were explicit about their efforts to reevaluate and critique these stories, openly positioning their works as deliberate responses to and refinements of existing accounts. I suggest reading this rhetoric of transparency as a significant aspect of their strategy for evaluating and expounding texts. At the same time, this transparency may have fostered the false impression that these authors were solely borrowing the stories of others rather than actively engaging in the practice of critical evaluation of these stories in accordance with predefined parameters and evaluative methods.

Such early practices for critical reading have recently regained attention in scholarly discussions on the relevance of philology in academia.¹⁴ In numerous essays from recent years, Sheldon Pollock has delineated a framework for understanding philology as a global phenomenon and for examining its role in precolonial and early modern South Asia.¹⁵ He defines philology as “the discipline of making sense of texts,” which focuses on “the theory of textuality as well as the history of textualized meaning.”¹⁶ The practices employed by the Investigators, I suggest, align with this definition of philology, reflecting similar concerns with interpreting and evaluating texts.

¹³ See Christoph Emmrich’s discussion on Indologists’ early conception of Jainism and its instrumentalization for the study of other traditions (Emmrich 2005).

¹⁴ Pollock et al. 2015; Lönnroth 2017; Helle 2022.

¹⁵ E.g., Pollock 2009, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2024.

¹⁶ Pollock 2009: 934.

Throughout the *Investigation*, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati train their audience to critically engage with stories, equipping them with tools for textual evaluation and interpretation. Surely, their literary methods are not formally commentarial, nor do they encompass the entire scope of conventional philological practices we expect to find in more scholastic literature. Moreover, they specifically focus on stories and are interested in such stories as a whole rather than in adjudicating variants or specific grammatical ambiguities. However, by consistently engaging with stories in the ways outlined in the previous chapters, they reveal a deep commitment to evaluating and interpreting texts whose meanings would otherwise remain nonsensical to them.

Taking Pollock's definition as his starting point, Whitney Cox recognizes that a great deal of the modern scholarship that participates, sometimes more loosely than others, in exploring early instances of Indian philology, focuses its attention almost entirely on the genre of commentary. To broaden the scope of this conversation beyond the boundaries of commentarial literature, he examines the sorts of non-commentarial methods of philology that were involved in the production of medieval South Indian works that fashioned themselves as *tantras* and *purāṇas*. In order to tackle the problem that "[a]ny literate is in some sense committed to the pragmatic project of 'making sense' of a given text," Cox sharpens Pollock's definition of philology to emphasize the philologists' concerns both in a delimited corpus of *preexisting* texts and in the *public* aspect of their own reading practices, which are methodical, self-aware, and self-reflexive.¹⁷

Building on Cox's nuanced expansions on the definition and locus of philological practices, I propose that the Investigators participated in an enterprise of publicly making sense of preexisting texts on their own terms. And they were not alone in this endeavor. Haribhadra demonstrates a similar interest in his *Tale*, while Jaina authors such as Vimalasūri, Raviṣeṇa, and others—who

¹⁷ Cox 2017: 4-6.

created their versions for the stories of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and the Pāṇḍavas in their Jaina *purāṇas*—likewise participated in such enterprise. The narratives these Jaina authors composed demonstrate that they were self-aware and self-reflexive about their deep interest in examining a corpus of preexisting stories and in publicly making sense of them in conformity with their own views. Moreover, their literary methods illustrate that “making sense of texts” was never confined to specific genres of formal writing or commentarial practices.

Cox’s claim about the philologists’ focus on preexisting texts might seem to be a truism, as he himself seems to admit. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of articulating it explicitly: “It is only in light of some preexisting set of texts that philology can, properly speaking, operate.”¹⁸ That is to say, philology—the discipline of making sense of texts—is a backward-oriented approach. To clarify this point, Cox refers to Mīmāṃsā, noting that Mīmāṃsakas’ deliberate choice to limit their focus to the preexisting Veda is precisely what enables their interpretative vision. While, on the face of it, the philologists’ orientation toward prior texts may seem to imply a historicist vision, Cox uses the same case of Mīmāṃsā to challenge the assumption of a necessary correlation between an interest in earlier texts and a historicist perspective. Mīmāṃsā thinkers view the preexisting Veda as beginningless and eternal, transcending history and devoid of any historical referentiality. This perspective leads precisely to an outcome that opposes such a historicist vision: the emergence of an anti-historical tendency within the dominant Sanskrit culture, deriving from what I identify as an “eternalist” model of authority grounded in the timeless Veda.¹⁹

My contention is that certain Jaina authors—Hariṣeṇa, Amitagati, and others who will be discussed here—pursue the opposite approach in reaction to this anti-historical tendency: they

¹⁸ Cox 2017: 4.

¹⁹ The anti-historical tendency of Sanskrit culture was discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation (pp. 66ff).

challenge their opponents' eternalist model of authority by reclaiming their own place within history and human experience. They do it in response to such actors who eliminate contextual and referential markers from their records in order to embed themselves within the anti-historical presuppositions of mainstream Brahmanical Sanskrit culture. The naturalizing force of this anti-historical discourse and its decontextualization strategy, Johannes Bronkhorst stresses, served Brahminical ideology in rendering itself beginningless and eternal, by "denying that the past had been different from the present in any essential manner."²⁰ As a response, I argue, these Jaina authors employ the contrary strategy to establish a different—"contextualist"—model of authority. They use a rhetoric that anchors them and their works within a defined, contextualized, temporal position, necessarily subsequent to the stories they discuss. By claiming this posterior temporal position, they assert their knowledge and authority over such earlier texts.

This takes us to Cox's additional point: the public aspect of philology. The public aspect of these Jaina works is twofold. First, their transparency. As Jaini notices, their authors "did not accomplish this project by any surreptitious means but instead... [they] achieved their goal by declaring openly that they were setting the record straight."²¹ These authors did not simply write alternative versions of existing stories. Such naturalizing efforts, as Bronkhorst's point—along with Pollock's work to which it is indebted—suggests, are more common among Brahminical texts, which present their versions as the sole eternal and ultimate truth, disregarding their opponents or the possibility that they may have adhered to a different story.²² By contrast, the *Investigation*, the *Tale*, as well as some Jaina *purāṇas* are upfront about their critique of their rivals,

²⁰ Bronkhorst 2016: 113.

²¹ Jaini 2000b: 375.

²² Bronkhorst's argument seems to be built on Sheldon Pollock's work on Mīmāṃsā and the Veda. For instance: "the living, social, historical, contingent tradition is naturalized, becoming as much a part of the order of things as the laws of nature themselves: [...] the social dimension and historicity of all cultural practices are eliminated in the shastric paradigm" (Pollock 1985: 516).

making public their efforts to set these records straight. The second public feature of the Jaina authors was their contextualizing framework, which staged the narration as a public dialogue. In the case of the *Investigation*, it is Manovega's debate with the Brahmins. For Haribhadra's *Tale*, it is the assembly of charlatans competing with each other outside of Ujjayinī. In the case of these Jaina *purāṇas*, it is the episode that opened this dissertation that best exemplifies this dynamic: King Śreṇika attends the assembly of Mahāvīra and voices his doubts to Indrabhūti Gautama, Mahāvīra's chief disciple, about the Brahminical illustration of events in the life stories of Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas. Whether it is a band of conmen, Śreṇika with his retinue at Mahāvīra's assembly, or Manovega and his friend debating the denizens of a Brahminical college in Pāṭaliputra, public settings and rhetoric of transparency frame these characters' practices of reading stories and their attempts of making sense of them as acts of public performance.

The public and backward-oriented approach of philology offers an explanatory framework for understanding the Jaina authors' strategy of engaging with earlier Brahminical narratives. In positioning themselves this way, the Jaina authors do more than critique Brahminical accounts. Rather, they advance an alternative standard of authority—one that redefines the grounds of credibility through a Jaina perspective. The rationale of posteriority on which their rhetoric hinges thus serves a dual purpose: it enables a backward-oriented mode of critique while simultaneously establishing interpretive principles that assert their narratives as credible, shaping an intellectual space distinct from the timeless eternalism of their Brahminical predecessors.

To understand fully the implications of this strategy for asserting authority, in the following section I examine the contrasting ways in which Brahminical and Jaina *purāṇas* conceptualize their temporality and legitimacy. Their contrasting approaches to temporality—Brahminical *purāṇas*' claim to an eternal, mythic origin versus Jaina *purāṇas*' rootedness in human context—

highlight fundamentally different conceptions of textual authority. While Brahminical authors emphasize the transcendence of their *purāṇas*, the Jaina authors shift the authority of their works toward the realm of contextual human experience. This next exploration will clarify the distinctive ways in which these traditions conceptualize the past, further illuminating the common rationale of posteriority that underpins the practices of these Jaina authors.

Purāṇic temporalities: competing visions of authority

To determine the implications of these authors' commitment to such rationale, we must clarify certain aspects of purāṇic literature. Specifically, I ask how the *purāṇas* define their own temporality and what is the role of such temporality in establishing purāṇic authority. To this end, in what follows I identify some key differences in how this literature is perceived within Brahminical or Hindu context compared to its Jaina counterpart, emphasizing the distinct conceptualizations of the past that each tradition purports to depict in its *purāṇas*.

The massive body of literature that we classify as the Brahminical/Hindu *purāṇas*—including its major subcategories (e.g., *mahāpurāṇa*, *upapurāṇa*), as well as less known texts of local traditions—discusses an exceptionally vast array of themes. It is an encyclopedic store-house of knowledge that covers everything from philosophy to theology, cosmology, science, and arts; namely, it preserves the entirety of Hindu cultural and civilizational elements.²³ Wendy Doniger highlights this diversity in her introduction to the volume *Purāṇa Perennis*, where she describes the challenge of tracing common threads across these texts: “The essays in this collection,” she graphically articulates, “constitute a kind of Venn diagram of intersecting concerns of authors attempting to trace general patterns within a set of most unruly texts.”²⁴ Moreover, these highly

²³ Rocher 1986: 12.

²⁴ Doniger 1993a: x.

heterogeneous and inclusive texts not only preserve information but also organize, harmonize, and prioritize different values, ideas, and experiences, exhaustively integrating them into a unified and all-encompassing worldview.²⁵

The diversity of these texts applies not only to the topics they discuss but also to the various contexts from which they emerged. The problem of uncovering the specific historical context of their development is a significant one, as many *purāṇas* are the products of a continuous process of integrating new materials into older ones. The content of many of these texts was accumulated over a span of more than 1500 years, first circulating through oral traditions before being collected and written down.²⁶ Modern scholars, driven by a romanticist desire to distinguish between early “original” material and later interpolations, have made philological attempts to assign specific dates to these works. However, the task of assigning conclusive dates to entire *purāṇas*, or even parts of them, proves to be a futile endeavor and, for the most part, there is little scholarly consensus on which parts are earlier and which are later.²⁷

A major feature of these texts pertains to the anonymity of those who created and circulated them: whereas their crystallization occurred through a centuries-long dynamic and accumulative process that, naturally, involved the participation of multiple creators and narrators, we know practically nothing about the historical actors who took part in it. It is because the actual authors relinquished their personal recognition as the narrators of these texts, attributing it to gods and mythical sages. These texts root themselves in an immemorial past, claiming transmission from a divine origin through an unbroken lineage of mythic sages, from which they derive their

²⁵ Shulman 1993: 125.

²⁶ Dimmitt and Van Buitenen 1978: 7-8.

²⁷ Rocher (1986) provides a comprehensive synthesis of secondary literature on possible timelines of the *purāṇas* and the debates surrounding the priority of certain materials over others (especially pp. 18-48, 100-3). See Ronald Inden’s critique of the presuppositions underlying various strands of such philological attempts (2000: 91-8).

legitimacy. For instance, the *Brahma Purāṇa* is presented as a story told by the sage Lomaharṣaṇa. But it is framed as having been originally told by the god Brahmā to the sage Vyāsa, who then conveyed it to Lomaharṣaṇa, and only afterwards does the latter recount it to the inhabitants of the Naimiṣa Forest (and the audience of the *purāṇa*).²⁸

Although the Hindu *purāṇas* are not considered part of the four *vedas*, they often claim their authority by linking themselves to the authorless Veda. The conception of the Veda as eternal, along with its associated anti-historical implications, often fostered a self-referential rhetoric that strategically disregarded perspectives misaligned with Brahminical ideology. According to this ideology, the eternal Veda serves as the ultimate source of cosmic and social order. Its claims to transcend historical and geographical bounds strategically insulate it from engaging with other religious traditions, for acknowledging such traditions would have meant confronting temporal and pluralistic phenomena that challenge the Veda's claims to timelessness and universality. Consequently, other texts that emerged from the Brahminical Sanskrit milieu—such as the *dharmaśāstras*, *purāṇas*, and the epics—and sought legitimacy, employed a rhetoric of self-fashioning through their proclaimed connection to the Veda. Such rhetoric involved a similar elimination of historical referentiality. Among the more prescriptive texts, e.g., the *dharmaśāstras*, it was fairly straightforward; this inward-looking strategy allowed their authors and compilers to construct a self-centered social hierarchy that reinforces Brahminical authority while marginalizing rival traditions. Among other texts, however, it was more complicated. For example, the *Mahābhārata*—a paradigmatic instance of the genre of *itihāsa*—which contains epic narratives with predominantly human concerns, presents itself as a “fifth Veda” that came forth from Vyāsa. This identification of *itihāsa* with the Veda appears already in the late Vedic literature itself, where

²⁸ Taylor 2008: 312. This framing was itself borrowed from the *Mahābhārata* (Fitzgerald 1991: 163).

the *Chāndogya Upāniṣad* enumerates the four *vedas*, followed by *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* as a fifth one.²⁹ The metaphor for the *Mahābhārata* as the “fifth Veda” served to endow it with the Vedic authority among the small and important group of its imaginary intended audiences, that is, kings.³⁰

The conceptual tension in framing this genre as a timeless “fifth Veda” is evident, given that its very name—“thus it has been” (*itihāsa*)—implies a historical reference. A similar problem pertains to the *purāṇa*, a category that gestures toward something that is “old.” The “fifth Veda” metaphor was just one of several strategies these texts used to assert their authority through association with the Veda, in what Pollock describes as a kind of “formal convention”: they also claim to follow the teaching of the Veda, derive from a lost Veda, present themselves as a simplified version of the Veda, or even assert that they serve as the very foundation upon which the Veda itself is established.³¹ Their self-attested link to the eternal Veda, situated outside of human history, constitutes a direct manifestation of the “eternalist” model of legitimacy in the dominant Brahminical Sanskrit culture. Namely, these texts obscure their integrative and harmonizing efforts, instead presenting themselves as preservers of a natural order purportedly existing since time immemorial, as evidenced in the Veda. Broadly speaking, they conceal historical realities that do not conform to Brahminical ideology, often recasting their rivals in mythological terms such as “demons” (e.g., *asura*, *rākṣasa*).³² However, the descriptive nature of much of these works posed some difficulty to the paradigm of authority granted by association with the eternal Veda, a problem that Brahminical scholars addressed in creative ways. For instance, the Mīmāṃsaka

²⁹ *ṛgveda yajurvedaḥ sāmaveda ātharvaṇaś caturtha itihāsa-purāṇaḥ pañcamo vedānām vedaḥ* || *Chāndogya Upāniṣad* 7.1.4 (as cited in Bronkhorst 1989: 131) || For other instances of “fifth Veda,” see Bronkhorst 1989: 129ff.

³⁰ Fitzgerald 1991: 168-69. For the majority of Indian listeners, Fitzgerald further suggests here, the *Mahābhārata*’s association with Brahṁā was a much more potent means of legitimacy than the Veda, from which they were largely excluded.

³¹ Pollock 1989b: 609; Smith 1987: 46-49. For examples of how such texts establish their transcendent origin and link themselves with the Veda, see Pollock 1985: 512-16.

³² For some unusual exceptions to this general tendency, see Jaini 2000c, 2000b: 413-18. This trend does not apply to philosophical treatises, which often engage directly with the arguments of their rivals.

Kumārila (seventh century CE) tackled this issue by arguing that the narrative parts of these texts merely function *rhetorically*. Such descriptive sentences (*arthavāda*), he stresses, should not be regarded as representations of historical truth. Instead, they simply serve to praise the authority of the injunctive (*vidhi*) parts of the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas*.³³ And indeed, later thinkers such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva, regularly cited from the *Mahābhārata* as an authority.

The ad hoc nature of such explanations, I argue, did not escape the notice of Jaina authors, who rejected such eternalist model of authority. For them, such Brahminical accounts of an eternal origin were a rhetorical sleight-of-hand trick that failed to obscure the texts’ actual contextual temporalities, evident in the very real (albeit mythic) figures of their authors (e.g., Vyāsa, Vālmīki), compilers (e.g., Manu), or divine creators (e.g., Brahmā). Such Jaina authors composed their own *purāṇas*, which differ significantly from their Brahminical counterparts. In light of this stark contrast, the observations about the Brahminical conceptualization of *purāṇas* become particularly noteworthy. To begin, while Hindu *purāṇas* primarily focus on transcendent events related to gods’ activities, Jaina *purāṇas* are biographical (or hagiographical) in nature. These biographical accounts do not conform to a single literary genre but, as John E. Cort asserts, they appear in hundreds of works recognized as Jaina *purāṇas*, marked by four distinct categories: *Jinacaritra* (stories of the Jinas), Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa* (stories of Rāma), Jaina *Harivaṃśa* (stories of Kṛṣṇa and his lineage, including the Pāṇḍavas), and *Mahāpurāṇa* (encompassing all three categories).³⁴ Excluding the last one, these categories already embed in their names a reference to human subjects—Rāma, Hari, and the Jinas—anticipating the human hagiographical focus of these works. Though “human” here does not necessarily align with conventional historiographical frameworks (as some of these humans are described as towering over mountains and living for millions of

³³ Fitzgerald 1991: 167.

³⁴ Cort 1993: 188-93.

years), these texts are readily contextualized within the human-based framework of Jaina Universal History.³⁵ On account of this human focus, Jaina *purāṇas* may be considered closer to the Brahminical category of *itihāsa*, notably absent from Jaina literary classifications.³⁶ However, whereas the Brahminical *itihāsa* adopted the eternalist Veda-oriented model as its source of authority, these Jaina *purāṇas* claimed their authority from a contextualized human origin, as Svayambhūdeva exemplifies in the opening of his version for the story of Rāma: “This story of Rāma, transmitted through lineage, flowed forth from the cavern of the Mahāvira’s mouth.”³⁷ The authoritative origin of this text lies not in an eternal scripture or a divine being, but in a human figure—the Jina Mahāvīra. Furthermore, it should be noted here that while the Brahminical framework associates Rāma and Hari with the deity Viṣṇu, in the Jaina context, such figures—including the Jinas themselves—are regarded as human beings who, although venerated, have never undergone the same process of full deification.³⁸

Another point of difference between the two traditions is that while Hindu *purāṇas* were composed over the course of centuries by incorporating multiple stories from different sources and attributing them to mythical creators and narrators, their Jaina counterparts acknowledge their own known individual authors. Many of these authors even specify the place or time of their composition, a practice also followed by other Jaina authors—including Haribhadra, Hariṣeṇa, and Amitagati—but otherwise fairly uncommon among South Asian writers of the period.³⁹ As the

³⁵ Cort 1993: 186-7. John E. Cort also notices that Jaina writers adopted the term *purāṇa* for such texts to indicate that just as the Hindu *purāṇas* tell the Hindu universal history, these texts contain the Jaina universal history (1995a: 478). See also Esposito (2020) for a detailed discussion on Jaina Universal History and the illustrious persons (*śalākāpuruṣa*) that it portrays.

³⁶ Jaini 2000b: 376-77. Although *itihāsa* was not explicitly theorized within Jaina classifications, there are instances where Jaina authors, such as Puṣpadanta and Jinasena, reference this genre in relation to their works, either positively or negatively (Plau 2019: 18).

³⁷ *vaddhamāṇa-muḥa-kuhara-viṇiggaya | rāma-kahāṇai eha kamāgaya || Svayambhūdeva’s Paṭimacariu 2.1 ||*

³⁸ On the Jaina *pūjā*, see Humphrey 1984

³⁹ Narayana Rao 2016: 435; Cort 1993: 185.

category of *purāṇa* (literally meaning “old” or “ancient”) implies, all these texts—whether Jaina or Hindu—relate to past times. In the case of the Brahminical *purāṇas*, this characteristic situates them within a realm of eternal, mythic temporality that exists beyond human history, blending divine origins—bordering on the ahistorical—with narratives of figures like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, who are notionally historical yet ultimately mythical. However, I maintain, in the case of the Jaina *purāṇas*, their antiquity is rooted in a specific human framework, contextualized both by the particular historical time of an individual author and by its anchoring within the broader framework of Jaina Universal History, where the human protagonists of these works operate. We may, thus, think of two distinct pasts that the category of *purāṇa* evokes: In its Brahminical/Hindu sense, it gestures to an eternal mythologized temporality—a divine past outside of human experience. In the Jaina context, it refers to a contextualized human past.

Lastly, the grounding of Jaina *purāṇas* in human temporality and experience allows these texts to engage directly with historical phenomena, including religious rivals and the stories they promote. In his assessment of the Prakrit retellings of narratives such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* in Jaina *purāṇas*, Andrew Ollett argues that these adaptations represent an effort to establish a new literary tradition that challenges the mainstream Sanskrit literary tradition, dominated by Brahminical discourse. This challenge is evident both in this new tradition’s embrace of Prakrit (as seen in early Jaina *purāṇas* like Vimalasūri’s) and in the dominance of Jaina authors within it.⁴⁰ Extending Ollett’s argument, I propose that this emerging Prakrit literary tradition also established a new model of authority—one that would later extend into other Jaina literature across different languages. Unlike Brahminical *purāṇas*, which claim legitimacy through an eternalist model of authority rooted in the beginningless Veda, Jaina *purāṇas* are not bound by such claims

⁴⁰ Ollett 2017: 74-5.

of timelessness that insulate them from external realities. Instead, they operate within what I term the “contextualist” model—a framework that enables these authors to actively engage with competing traditions and ideologies rather than naturalizing their authority, in the way the adherents of the “eternalist” model would do. By anchoring their narratives in specific human contexts, Jaina *purāṇas* do more than just acknowledging competing worldviews. They situate rival traditions and their stories within a shared chronological framework, making them subject to critical engagement. This approach does not only manifest in the Jaina *purāṇas*’ acknowledgment of competing worldviews. It also, I argue, serves as the foundation for the Investigators’ ability to evaluate critically and engage meaningfully with alternative stories.

Telling stories to make sense of stories

Some Jaina *purāṇas* offer early evidence of their authors’ interest in exploring the credibility of earlier stories. The framework of such *purāṇas*, the Śreṇika-Gautama exchange mentioned before, is a good starting point. In this frame narrative, the king approaches Indrabhūti Gautama with some questions about preexisting Brahminical stories. In response, Gautama narrates alternative versions of these stories, claiming that they are the true representations of these events, in accordance with the teaching of the Jina. The first author who outlined this framework to produce his version of the story of Rāma is Vimalasūri in his *Paūmacariya (VPC)*, a Prakrit work that stands as the earliest available Jaina retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (early centuries of the common era). It opens with the depiction of King Śreṇika who, after paying homage to the Jina Mahāvīra, contemplates the story of Rāma. He voices a series of concerns about instances mentioned in popular *śāstras (loya-sattha)* such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which do not make sense to him: Monkeys killing *rākṣasas*, Rāvaṇa eating flesh, Kumbhakarna sleeping for six months at a time, the king of the gods Indra defeated by Rāvaṇa (*VPC* 2.105cd-114). Śreṇika questions the credibility of these

matters and, realizing that the stories depicted as such in preceding Brahminical works make no sense, he returns to Mahāvīra's assembly for clarification. There, he presents Indrabhūti Gautama with a series of questions in a format that would later be adopted by other Jaina authors:

Celebrated Man! I wish to hear the complete account of Padma (*paūmacariya*). Disputants of false *śāstras* have raised falsehood to fame. Celebrated Man, if the night-walking Rāvaṇa is as vigorous as a great god, how could monkeys, who are mere animals, overpower him in battle? In the forest, [how could] Rāma pierce a golden-bodied deer with an arrow and kill Vālī by stealth, for the sake of Sugrīva and the beautiful Tāra? After going to the celestial abode and vanquishing the lord of the gods in battle, [how could Rāvaṇa] throw him into prison, bound in firm and sturdy shackles? And [how could] Kumbhakarna—skilled in all the *śāstras*—sleep for six months? Furthermore, how could monkeys build a bridge across the waters of the ocean? Venerable One, graciously tell me what is rooted in true grounds and reason. Dispel the darkness of doubt with the light of knowledge!⁴¹

These questions pertain to episodes depicted in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴² These are accounts that, as Śreṇika realizes, no credible *śāstra* would ever claim to be true: animals cannot defeat mighty demons; an illustrious figure like Rāma would never behave cowardly and dishonorably; the notion that the king of gods could be defeated and bound is inconceivable.

Śreṇika has his own speculations about these depictions. He suspects that—

Poets thus composed a *Rāmāyaṇa* that is uttered distortedly. It is utterly false, filled with convictions that contradict reason, and in the world, wise men do not believe it.⁴³

⁴¹ *paūmacariyaṃ mahāyasa ahayaṃ icchāmi pariphuḍaṃ souṃ | uppāiṃyā pasiddhī kusattha-vāḍḍhi vivarīyā || jaī rāvaṇo mahāyasa nisāyaro suravaro vva aivirio | kaha so parihūo cciya vāṇara-tirīehi raṇamajjhe || rāmeṇa kaṇaya-deho sareṇa bhinnno mao araṇṇammi | suggīva-sutāratthaṃ chiddēṇa vivāio vālī || gantūṇa deva-nilayaṃ sura-vāi jiniūṇa samara-majjhammi | daḍḍha-kaḍḍhiṇa-niyala-baddho pavesio cāra-gehammi || savvattha-sattha-kusalo chammāsam suyaī kumbhakaṇṇo vi | kaha vāṇarehi baddho seu cciya sāyara-jalammi || bhayavaṃ kuṇaha pasāyaṃ kaheha taccattha-hetusañjuttam | sandeḥa-andhayāraṃ nāṇujjoeṇa nāseha || VPC 3.8-13 ||*

⁴² Although he does not directly reference Vālmīki here, K. R. Chandra demonstrates that Vimalasūri was undoubtedly familiar with his work (Chandra 1970: 234-51).

⁴³ *taha vivarīya-payatthaṃ kaīhi rāmāyaṇaṃ raīyaṃ || aliyaṃ pi savvam eyaṃ uvavatti-viruddha-paccaya-guṇehiṃ | na ya saddahanti purisā havanti je paṇḍiyā loe || VPC 2.116cd-17 ||*

To confirm his suspicions, he poses these questions to Indrabhūti Gautama, who validates the king's concerns about the credibility of these popular stories. He explains that inferior poets fabricated them without any true foundation, rendering them entirely false:

All of this, claimed by the foolish poetasters, is false. Whatever is spoken without a basis yields no meaning. King, these words are defective and baseless.⁴⁴

Once Gautama affirms the king's concerns about these stories, he proceeds to set the record straight by depicting the stories in a different way. The remainder of the text constitutes Vimalasūri's attempt to make sense of this story through an alternative version of Rāma's account—a Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa*—narrated to Śreṇika by Gautama.

Vimalasūri uses this episode to frame his work in relation with his Brahminical literary predecessors. The message that his statements carry is more substantial than may initially appear. At first glance, his critique might seem like a trivial attack—almost a straw-man—against fantastic elements in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, I contend that it also hints towards an acknowledgment in Vālmīki's pivotal role in South Asian literary culture as the “first poet” (*ādikavi*). This role carries high prestige and authority, both as narrating true events and producing normative statements with regulative force.⁴⁵ Vimalasūri's statement, I maintain, reflects a thoughtful consideration and a clear vision of how to challenge such “firstness” in a literary environment that prioritizes precedence. It is precisely Vimalasūri's self-claimed posteriority—his “lateness,” so to speak—that allows him to look back at these stories. When he looks back at his predecessor, he does not give in to some anxiety of influence.⁴⁶ Rather, he looks back at Vālmīki

⁴⁴ *aliyaṃ ti savvam eyaṃ bhaṇanti jaṃ kukāiṇo mūḍhā || na ya pīḍha-bandha-rahiyaṃ kahijjamāṇaṃ pi dei bhāvatthaṃ | patthiva hīṇaṃ ca puṇo vayaṇaṃ iṇaṃ chinna-mūlaṃ ca || VPC 3.15cd-16 ||*

⁴⁵ Sheldon Pollock theorizes the significant role that Vālmīki's status as the “first poet” and his *Rāmāyaṇa* as the “first poem” hold in South Asian literary culture (2003: 80ff; 2006: 77-9).

⁴⁶ On such anxiety among late poets and their struggle with their literary predecessors, see Bloom 1997.

through the lens of a meticulous critic who, indifferent to his predecessor's prestige, does not hesitate to challenge him.

Vimalasūri establishes this position in response to the challenge of his lateness in comparison with Vālmīki. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati face a similar issue: How to challenge the legitimacy of texts already embraced by a substantial audience? We encountered this point earlier, through Manovega's story of Vyāsa and his copper vessel (Chapter Two):⁴⁷ Before taking a bath in the Gaṅgā, Vyāsa buried his vessel at the bank of the river and marked it with a pile of sand. Other people saw it and imitated him, piling sand and venerating it as *liṅgas*. Seeing them, Vyāsa understood that if a futile practice as constructing *liṅgas* can gain popularity in the world, there is no reason an incoherent story like his *Mahābhārata* would not achieve similar acclaim. Just as people who venerate *liṅgas* follow the conduct of others (*gatānugatiko lokah*) without caring for the truth, in the same way people will accept his *Mahābhārata*, even though it is internally incoherent. By analyzing this episode, I argued that the Investigators challenge the erroneous correlation between popularity and truth: They maintain that although the status of Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* is widely acknowledged by people, it is simply a "worldly" (*laukika*) or popular story of the masses. As they put it, the popularity of earlier works such as the *Mahābhārata* should not be mistaken as an indication of their truth and trustworthiness. In order to debunk Vyāsa's work, these authors challenge the dominant Sanskrit view that valorizes the old by locating themselves in a position of relative lateness compared to works such as the *Mahābhārata*. What I proposed is that the rationale informing this rhetoric is linked with a number of basic assumptions: 1) works such as Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* are literary representations of earlier stories or events that exist independently of them; 2) there may be multiple depictions of the same story/event, some of

⁴⁷ See pp. 76ff.

which are true representations while others only misrepresent it; 3) such depictions look back at what they claim to represent, and newer depictions look back at the older ones. The Investigators position themselves late in this linear chronology, subsequent both to the Brahminical depictions they explore and to their alternative Jaina depictions. It is the temporal posteriority of these Jaina works that allows them to look back at preceding stories and evaluate them through a comparative method. Vimalasūri, by framing his work through the Śreṇika episode, sets the foundation for such rationale. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, who assert that even an ancient work that gained popularity over the years may ultimately be merely an incoherent collection of purāṇic stories, align themselves with his position. Although such an ancient work claims to promote trustworthy knowledge, it should in fact be regarded as nothing more than a pseudo-*śāstra*. The Investigators thus follow, perhaps deliberately, the model set by Vimalasūri centuries earlier, as Manovega's words indicate: wise people should not say that only old compositions are acceptable (*AmDhP* 21.8-9).⁴⁸

While Vālmīki's designation as the "first poet" implies historical referentiality, his work came to be regarded as authoritative precisely because it was culturally imagined as linked to the Veda—much like the *Mahābhārata*. This is reflected in premodern Sanskrit discourse where the *Rāmāyaṇa* is described as expounding the Veda or as its equal.⁴⁹ Therefore, these "thus it has been" works—the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*—are granted an ambivalent status. On the one hand, they were perceived as the products of real (mythic) authors who authoritatively recount these stories as events that truly happened. On the other hand, thinkers like Kumārila sought to subsume them within the eternalist model of authority, dismissing their narrative elements as secondary to their timeless injunctions. For *itihāsa* to attain the status of an authoritative means of knowledge

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two, footnote 15 (p. 68).

⁴⁹ See Pollock (2003: 60n49) for such statements of premodern readers about Vālmīki's status.

under the Vedic paradigm of Brahminical discourse, it had to abandon its connection to historical specificity, what Pollock calls “the contingent, the localized, the individual”—in other words, the contextual.⁵⁰ Both Vimalasūri and the Investigators, I argue, recognized this tension as an opportunity: by situating themselves after the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and their respective authors Vyāsa and Vālmīki, they imposed on their predecessors a position within the same linear chronology as well. In doing so, they striped them of their timelessness, rendering them subject to the same contextualized model that these Jaina authors themselves endorsed.

The Śreṇika framework, first introduced by Vimalasūri, was later adopted by other Jaina authors. For example, Jaina versions of the *Mahābhārata*, such as Śubhacandra’s *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* (1552 CE) and Vādicandra’s work of the same name (1598 CE), similarly frame their narratives through the public exchange between Śreṇika and Gautama at Mahāvīra’s assembly. By casting Brahminical accounts of the *Mahābhārata*’s protagonists—the sons of Pāṇḍu and their cousins, the Kauravas—as objects of scrutiny, they employ the same backward-oriented comparative method grounded in this framework. Śubhacandra portrays Śreṇika as he likens the *Mahābhārata* stories told by others to the impossibility of a barren woman’s son (2.30).⁵¹ In Vādicandra’s work, the king expresses skepticism about such alternative accounts that he has heard from people with false views (1.73).⁵² The latter author further reinforces the backward-oriented approach by having Śreṇika declare: “I will narrate to you the [story of] *Bhārata* in the same way as I heard it before. It is still worth listening to, even if it is already known.”⁵³ Although the stories Vyāsa told in his

⁵⁰ Pollock 1989: 610.

⁵¹ *nāthātra śrūyate śāstre parakīye kathāntaram | tad-vandhyāsuta-saurūpya-varṇanābhaṃ vibhāti me ||* Śubhacandra’s *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* 2.30 || “Lord! An alternative story was heard in the *śāstra* of others. But to me, it appears similar in description and form to the son of a barren woman.”

⁵² *yathā kathaṇcic chrī-nātha mithyā-dṛṣṭi-mukhān mayā | śrūyate tena mac-cetaḥ satataṃ saṃśayāyate ||* Vādicandra’s *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* 1.73 || “Venerable Lord! Since I have heard it, in some way or another, from the mouths of those with false views, my mind remains constantly in doubt.”

⁵³ *bhārataṃ yan mayāśrāvi yādṛk tādṛk tavāgrataḥ | pūrvam hi procyate tac ca śrāvyam vijñātam apy alam ||* Vādicandra’s *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* 1.74 ||

Mahābhārata had long gained popularity, Vādicandra suggests, they must still be reevaluated. Indeed, these authors proceed to portraying Śreṇika as he narrates episodes about characters from the *Mahābhārata*, concluding each episode with a series of critical questions that highlight implausible events. This format closely parallels the same interrogative structure we encounter in Vimalasūri's retelling of Rāma's story, in Haribhadra's *Tale*, and in the *Investigation*. The authors of these Jaina *purāṇas*, like the Investigators, first raise doubt in well-known Brahminical stories, only to later reinterpret them through their Jaina lens. By presenting the *Mahābhārata* as something that remains worth retelling despite its familiarity, Vādicandra underscores the necessity of revisiting already established narratives. And he similarly traces the flaws in these narratives to specific earlier sources, as the concluding sentence of his opening chapter reveals: it was thus taught in the *Śiva Purāṇa*. His attribution of these flaws to a specific source—Śaiva teachings (*śiva-śāsana*) and their scriptures (*śiva-śāstra*)—further demonstrates the backward-oriented strategy characteristic of Jaina *purāṇas* in their engagement with rival traditions.⁵⁴

Such authors of Jaina *purāṇas*—Vimalasūri, Śubhacandra, and Vādicandra, as well as Raviṣeṇa (*Padmapurāṇa*, 676 CE), and Svayambhūdeva (*Paūmacariu* and *Riṭṭhaṇemicariu*, ninth-tenth cent. CE)—used this framework to introduce their versions for the stories of Rāma (known by them as Padma) or of Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas.⁵⁵ For these authors, stories of monkeys vanquishing *rākṣasas* or of pious men like Rāma committing violence could not be considered true. Their narratives omit such elements, presenting their own explanations or interpretations that align with their authors' values and doctrinal concerns.⁵⁶ For example, in such Jaina versions,

⁵⁴ Padmanabh S. Jaini's analysis concludes that most of the episodes Vādicandra attributes to the *Śiva Purāṇa* do not at all appear in this text. Instead, he asserts that the attributions of such stories to the Śaivas by Vādicandra teach us about the social and communal rivalries between Jainas and Śaivas in that period (Jaini 1984: 113ff).

⁵⁵ De Clercq and Vekemans note that while the dialogical setting of King Śreṇika and Indrabhūti Gautama is commonly used as the framework for such narratives, in some Jaina *purāṇas* Śreṇika merely wishes to hear these stories, without explicitly doubting them (forthcoming: 5).

⁵⁶ Some scholars perceive it as a Jaina tendency to rationalize fantastic elements (e.g., Ramanujan 1991: 34-5; Kulkarni

Rāvana is known as the Ten-Headed Demon not on account of having ten heads, a popular Brahminical depiction of him, but because, as a child, he wore a necklace in which his face was reflected on each of its nine rubies. Likewise, Gautama explains that the monkeys and *rākṣasas* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are actually human beings, referred to as such only because they used monkeys and demons as their symbols. With regard to Rāma's acts of violence, they are either eliminated or attributed to his brother Lakṣmaṇa, maintaining his pious characterization.

It is important to emphasize that there is no such thing as “the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa*” or “the Jaina *Mahābhārata*.” There is no single definitive Jaina version of these stories, as the plots of some retellings by Jaina authors vary greatly, with certain versions aligning more closely with their Brahminical counterparts than with other Jaina retellings.⁵⁷ However, I argue that there is a commonality among those authors who, following Vimalasūri, employ Śreṇika's episode in such a way. They do it as a way to raise doubts about how other people depicted these stories before them. The Śreṇika framework demonstrates their motivation and justifies their undertaking the project of narrating their versions of these stories. Like the Investigators, the authors of these Jaina *purāṇas* employ a comparative method to discuss the different versions of their stories. First, they use the Śreṇika story to point out problematic issues in preceding Brahminical versions. Then, they narrate a Jaina alternative that would make sense of their flawed predecessors, in accordance with their worldviews. These authors are explicit in their critique, referring directly to their earlier non-Jaina opponents and the literary works they criticize. They use their temporal posteriority to assess critically these earlier narratives and make their judgements about them. Embracing their position

1990: 223-24; Bhayani 1983: 80-1).

⁵⁷ By examining later versions of the Rāma story, which exhibit different focalizations compared to the earlier ones, Adrian Plau (2019) highlights the problematics in disregarding the diversity within the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. More on Jaina *Rāmāyaṇas*, see Clines 2022; De Clercq 2005; Kulkarni 1990; Chandra 1970; Narasimhachar 1939. On Jaina *Mahābhāratas*, see De Clercq 2008; De Clercq and Winant 2021 (for the Śreṇika episode, pp. 227-29); Sumitra Bai and Zydenbos 1991. For a typology of Jaina *purāṇas*, see Cort 1993.

as later authors not only allows them to challenge claims of their predecessors' authority but also to redefine the framework for authority within the horizon of contextual temporality.

Like Haribhadra's *Tāle*, the Śreṇika episode depicted in such Jaina versions of the epics also served as a source for the authors of the *Investigation*. Amitagati acknowledges his reception of the episode by referencing directly the Śreṇika-Gautama exchange. It occurs in the section where Manovega and his friend enter the city dressed as Buddhist monks.⁵⁸ The protagonist recounts to the Brahmins how they were abducted by two jackals who lifted them, along with a *stūpa* they were hiding on, into the air and carried them a great distance before dropping them in a remote territory. As the readers quickly learn, Manovega's purpose in telling this fantastical and fictitious story is to evoke a parallel image taken from the Brahminical repertoire. It is the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode where an army of flying monkeys helps Rāma rescue Sītā by lifting enormous rocks into the air and placing them in the ocean as a bridge to Laṅkā. When the Brahmins doubt the credibility of Manovega's fabricated biographical account of flying jackals, he challenges them: "Does the *śāstra* known as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, composed by the sage Vālmīki, narrate such an account of Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, or not?"⁵⁹ Like Vimalasūri and his followers, who strategically position themselves after Vālmīki as a way to question their Brahminical predecessor, Amitagati similarly looks back at the earlier text of this first poet to demonstrate familiarity with its content. He demonstrates this familiarity by enumerating for his friend instances where Vālmīki's story cannot be accepted, due to its violation of the criteria for making a story credible:

You have heard the *śāstra* of others, whose entire meaning is inconceivable. Whoever carries out its prescribed observances will not attain the desired result. Can one possibly obtain oil by pressing sand? How could monkeys ever kill *rākṣasas*? How can gods, endowed with eight great qualities, be equated with thoughtless animals? How could

⁵⁸ I mentioned this episode in Chapter One, p. 50.

⁵⁹ *rāmāyaṇābhidhe śāstre vālmīki-muninā kṛte | kiṃ bho dāśarather vṛttam īdrkṣaṃ kathyate na vā || AmDhP 16.2 ||*

monkeys toss mountains of such weight? How could these mountains stand in the ocean whose waters are boundless and bottomless? If Rāvaṇa became indestructible by the gods due to a boon, then how could he be killed by anyone in human form? [One might argue:] “The gods turned into monkeys and killed the lord of *rākṣasas*.”—But this statement also makes no sense, since it fails to guarantee the protection he desired. And how could the omniscient Śiva grant such an irrepressible boon that would distress the worlds, even that of the gods? No sense is found upon investigating the *purāṇas* of others, just as fresh butter can never be churned from water.⁶⁰

This series of questions is structurally similar to other lines of inquiry carried out by Manovega. For instance, it is reminiscent of the questions employed to highlight the incoherent nature of Viṣṇu (e.g., “If Viṣṇu is described in such a way, then how could he have been a cowherd in Nanda’s cowshed, with no marks of a lord?”).⁶¹ At the same time, it clearly echoes the format used by Vimalasūri in his depiction of the Śreṇika episode, which was later adopted by other authors of Jaina *purāṇas*. Specifically, Amitagati appears to follow not Vimalasūri, but a later rendition of the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa*: the seventh-century Sanskrit *Padmapurāṇa* of Raviṣeṇa. Amitagati subtly points to this earlier source by retaining the original simile at the opening and conclusion of this passage, underscoring the futility of searching for truth in the stories of his Brahminical predecessors. Amitagati compares it to looking for oil in sand or churning water for butter, just as Raviṣeṇa did a few centuries earlier:

It is said that all the sins of those who hear the story of this kind, called the *Rāmāyaṇa* [of the poetasters], are immediately destroyed. [But in fact,] it is like approaching fire for someone seeking relief from heat, or like the

⁶⁰ *sarvāsambhāvanīyārthaṃ para-śāstraṃ śrutaṃ tvayā || etad uktam anuṣṭhānam kurvāṇo nāśnute phalam | sikatā pīḍane tailaṃ kadā kenopalabhyate || vānarai rākṣasā hantuṃ śakyante na kathaṅcana | kva mahāṣṭa-guṇā devāḥ kva tiryāṅco vicetasah || utkṣipyante katham śailā garīyāṃsah plavaṅgamaḥ | katham tiṣṭhanty akūpāre ’gādha-nirmukta-pāthasi || vara-prasādato jāto yady avadhyo divaukasām | tadāsau mānavībhūya hanyate kena rāvaṇaḥ || amarā vānarībhūya nirjaghnū rākṣasādhipam | naiṣāpi yujyate bhāṣā nepsitā labhyate gatih || sarva-vedī katham datte śaṅkaro varam īdṛśam | devānām api durvāraṃ bhuvanopadravo yataḥ || nārthaḥ para-purāṇeṣu cintyamāneṣu dṛśyate | navaṇītaṃ kadā toye mathyamāne hi labhyate || AmDhP 16.9cd-16 ||*

⁶¹ For the full discussion of Viṣṇu’s incoherent nature, see Chapter One in this dissertation.

touch of frosty wind for someone wishing to banish cold. [It is as futile as] churning water for one desiring fresh butter, or pressing sand for one wishing to extract oil.⁶²

Although Amitagati follows Raviṣeṇa, he does not mention this poet, or any other poet of the Jaina *purāṇas*, by name. Instead, he associates the Jaina story of Rāma directly to Indrabhūti Gautama. For Amitagati, the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa* as Gautama recounted it to Śreṇika is a representation of the account of Rāma's life story, in the same way that Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is such a representation. And just as he explicitly refers to the sage Vālmīki as the narrator of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he is similarly explicit about his acknowledgment of Gautama as the narrator of an alternative story of Rāma, one that sets the record straight:

My Friend! Those who follow Sugrīva are not really monkeys, and Rāvaṇa and the others are not *rākṣasas*, as some people imagine. They are all humans who possess the powers of magical skills, devoted to the *dharma* of the Jina, virtuous, well-conducted, and extremely powerful. Because their banners depicted a monkey, they were called “Monkeys.” Because their banners depicted a *rākṣasa*, they were called “*Rākṣasas*.” [However, in reality they are humans] endowed with many great magic powers.— Those capable of liberation, whose gaze shines like the moon, should honor it, as Gautama, chief among the disciples, taught to Śreṇika.⁶³

In attributing this version of the story to Gautama, Amitagati places two of his predecessors side by side: on the one hand, the first poet Vālmīki, and on the other, Mahāvīra's chief disciple. His posteriority to both of them allows him to perform a comparative evaluation of the stories they told, of the same kind we already saw: First, he confronts one false story (Manovega's fabricated

⁶² *evaṃvidhaṃ kila granthaṃ rāmāyaṇaṃ udāhṛtaṃ | śṛṇvatāṃ sakalaṃ pāpaṃ kṣayaṃ ātāti tat-kṣaṇāt || tāpa-tyajana-cittasya so 'yam agni-samāgamah | śītāpanoda-kāmasya tuṣārāṇila-saṅgamah || haiyaṅgavīna-kāṅkṣasya tadidaṃ jala-manthanam | sikatā-pīḍanam tailam avāṣṭum abhivāṇchataḥ ||* Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa* 2.238-40 ||

⁶³ *śākā-mṛgā bhavanti ete na sugrīva-puraḥsarāḥ | na loka-kalpitā mitra rākṣasā rāvaṇādayaḥ || vidyā-vibhava-sampannā jina-dharma-parāyaṇāḥ | śucayo mānavāḥ sarve sadācārā mahaujasah || tataḥ śākhā-mṛgāḥ proktā yataḥ śākhā-mṛga-dhvajāḥ | siddhāneka-mahā-vidyā rākṣasā rākṣasa-dhvajāḥ || gautamena yathā proktāḥ śreṇikāya gaṇeśinā | śraddhātavyās tathā bhavyaiḥ śaśāṅkojjvala-dṛṣṭibhiḥ ||* *AmDhP* 16.17-20 ||

encounter with flying jackals) with another false story (Vālmīki's account of flying monkeys). When this comparison reveals the problems of the latter, he brings into the equation an alternative representation of these events, told by Gautama. This latter representation serves to make sense of the non-credible issues that came about in his predecessor's version of these events.

Moreover, Amitagati challenges his Brahminical predecessors by considering the context of the human authors of these texts. In doing so, he highlights the very basis on which the claim of authority in Jaina *purāṇas* diverges from its Brahminical counterpart: the role of human agency within a contextualized human framework. Amitagati, like poets such as Vimalasūri and Raviṣeṇa before him, explicitly acknowledges the earlier poets that he critiques and reinterprets. With his acknowledgment of the precedence of his Brahminical interlocutors he detaches their earlier texts from their purportedly flawless mythic origins, anchoring them instead within the realm of potentially flawed human experience. And in order to challenge the Brahminical Vedic basis for their eternalist model of authority, Amitagati also engages directly with Mīmāṃsā claims for the Veda's timelessness.

Against timelessness: Amitagati's refutation of the Veda

The claim of a transcendent origin for the Veda and, by extension, the Hindu *purāṇas* is rooted in a Mīmāṃsa idea, initially outlined by Jaimini in the *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra* and by his commentator Śabara, but fully articulated by Kumārila. Human perception, they stress, is inherently limited and potentially flawed. Due to these imperfections, texts produced by human agents are similarly flawed and cannot serve as authoritative sources. Namely, true authority on what is proper can only come from that which is not subject to human agency.⁶⁴ Following Jaimini's foundational

⁶⁴ McCrea 2011b: 651.

work on Mīmāṃsā, Kumārila locates the authority on *dharma* in the Veda. It is free from any authorial flaws, he claims, on account of its being eternal (*anādi*) and not man-made (*apauruṣeya*). The Veda's monopoly over *dharma* relies both on its timelessness and on the finitude of human perception.⁶⁵ Since the consequences of following the Vedic injunctions manifest only after one's demise—beyond the realm of ordinary perception—no one can justifiably claim that acting according to the Veda does not yield the promised results.⁶⁶ The only ones capable of making such arguments valid are those with access to knowledge beyond this realm. The traditional claim of the Jina's omniscience (as well as that of the Buddha) challenges the Veda's monopoly, as these figures are believed to possess such knowledge. Therefore, together with establishing the Veda as the authorless and eternal authority over *dharma*, Kumārila also argues against the existence of any omniscient person who would challenge it, instigating a debate with other schools of thought on omniscience, authority, and the nature of the Veda.⁶⁷

Whereas this debate was predominantly carried out by professional philosophers, some Jaina authors used narratives as venues for addressing these issues, lending specific sections of their writing the appearance of systematic philosophical discourse. Among this narrative literature, we can identify Jaina *purāṇas* that not only disregard their Hindu interlocutors' claim of a transcendent origin, but even actively challenge the very possibility of the Veda being authorless and deriving from a divine source. Seema K. Chauhan comprehensively demonstrates in her discussion of Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa* how this Jaina story of Rāma provides an instructive example for this type of engagement with these questions, indicating an intimate familiarity with Kumārila's

⁶⁵ Kataoka 2003: 36-7.

⁶⁶ This is based on the idea of "intrinsic validity" (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*), according to which, what presents itself as true should be regarded as such unless and until there is positive evidence to challenge it as false. On this idea, see the discussion in Taber 1992.

⁶⁷ Qvarnström 2006. On the various notions of omniscience in the Jaina and the Buddhist traditions, see Jaini 1974. On the role of the omniscient being in Jaina soteriology, see Fujinaga 2006.

writing.⁶⁸ Amitagati similarly, though in a significantly less comprehensive manner, employs the form of a philosophical discourse embedded within a dialogue between Manovega and Pavanavega to challenge the notion of the Veda as eternal and transcendent in origin. The dialogue takes place in the seventeenth chapter of his *Investigation*, presented in a more argumentative form than appears anywhere else in the narrative. It is a chapter dedicated entirely to Manovega's explanation to Pavanavega about the distinctive characteristics (*viśeṣa*) of the teachings of various traditions and schools of thought. And one of Manovega's targets in this section is Mīmāṃsā's claims on the authority of the Veda.⁶⁹

Manovega begins by reiterating Mīmāṃsā's foundational position: the Veda was not created by men (*akṛtrima*) and, therefore, the Brahmins accept it as faultless and as trustworthy knowledge (*pramāṇa*) of *dharma* (*AmDhP* 17.4). However, the Investigators cannot accept this position and Manovega provides a short series of arguments against the idea of the Veda's transcendent origin:

How can the Veda, which depends on causes, [for instance, the places of verbal articulation in the mouth] such as the palate, be considered not man-made? No one claims that a palace, constructed through the labor of carpenters, is not man-made. [It may be claimed in response:] Causes like the palate are [merely] the means of manifestation, not the creators. [Therefore,] no definite causal factor is identified as the reason. [To this response, we may reply that] just as pots and other objects can be revealed without manifesting agents such as lamps, why can't sounds similarly be discerned without means [of manifestation] like the palate?⁷⁰

Manovega aims to refute Mīmāṃsā's position on the authorless Veda by highlighting the role of human participation in its delivery. He suggests that since the Veda is perceptible to people

⁶⁸ Chauhan 2023, 2021: 42-87.

⁶⁹ This chapter has no parallel in Hariṣeṇa's work. For an overview of the main points of this segment, see De Jonckheere 2020a: 87-102.

⁷⁰ *akṛtrimāḥ katham vedaḥ kṛtas tālvādi-kāraṇaiḥ | prāsādo 'kṛtrima noktas takṣa-vyāpāra-nirmitaḥ || tālvādi-kāraṇam tasya vyañjakam na tu kārakam | nātrāvalokyate hetuḥ ko 'pi niścaya-kāraṇam || yathā kumbhādayo vyañjyā dīpakair vyañjakair vinā | vijñāyante tathā śabdā vinā tālvādibhir na kim || AmDhP 17.8-10 ||*

sonically, it must depend on a cause other than itself that makes it audible. This cause—for example, the palate—pushes air to produce the phonemes that constitute the Veda. Therefore, just as we agree that a palace built by the hands of carpenters is man-made, we may similarly argue that the Veda, whose cause is the human palate, was created by a human agent. In response, Amitagati depicts an imagined interlocutor who maintains that a palate does not create the Veda in the same way hands build a palace. The palate merely manifests (*vyañjaka*) what already exists independently, just as a lamp does when illuminating other objects. Although light makes these objects visible, they exist regardless of their visibility at a given moment. No one would argue that such light is the cause of these objects in the same way that hands are for a palace.

Clearly, Amitagati does not accept the position of such an interlocutor, and he establishes his objection on the fact that while material objects may reveal themselves without an external manifesting agent, sounds will appear only along with an external means such as the palate. The explanation of his interlocutor hinges on Mīmāṃsā ideas on the reliance on external means for the manifestation of words, which are themselves eternal. For instance, in a discussion in his *Śloka-vārttika*, Kumāṛila similarly identifies the sonic delivery of words with the act of manifestation rather than creation, thereby arguing that human utterance of the Veda does not compromise its authorless origin:

Just as things such as lamps are considered the manifesters of objects like pots due to their assisting the eye, similarly, [an uttered] sound would be [considered a manifesters of words], through the [production of] impressions on the organ of hearing.⁷¹

⁷¹ *yathā ghaṭāder dīpādir abhivyañjaka iṣyate | cakṣuṣo 'nugrahād evaṃ dhvaniḥ syāc chrotra-saṃskṛteḥ ||* Kumāṛila's *Śloka-vārttika* 6.42 || My translation considers the explanation of Kumāṛila's eleventh-century commentator Pārthasārathi Miśra: "Just as a lamp is the manifesters of visible objects like pots, by lending a full form to the [potentially] visible object through its light, similarly, sounds, by creating impressions for the ear, will serve as manifesters of words." *tejasas cākṣuṣasyāpyāyanānugrahaṃ kurvan pradīpo yathā cākṣuṣānām ghaṭādīnām vyañjako bhavati tathā dhvanayo 'pi śrotra-saṃskāra kurvantaḥ śabdasyābhivyañjakā bhaviṣyanti ||* Kumāṛila's *Śloka-vārttika*, p. 524, ll. 21-24 ||

Since only the eternality of words permits an eternal, non-man-made Veda, Kumāṛila must establish that the utterance of sounds (*dhvani*) does not create words (*śabda*). Just like a lamp that manifests (*abhivyañjaka*) material objects, an utterance merely aids in manifesting words to the organ of hearing. These words were not created by any human agent who recites them; rather, they are eternal and exist both before and after their manifestation.

In his *Tantravārttika*, Kumāṛila also explores the impact of human effort—specifically in conveying Vedic statements—on Vedic authority, as part of his discussion on the status of *smṛti*. Unlike the “heard” Veda (*śruti*) which, according to tradition, has come down to us without human intervention, many “remembered” Vedic texts (*smṛti*) are attributed to individual human compilers.⁷² At the same time, regardless of the involvement of these individuals, Mīmāṃsakas still accept them as repositories of Vedic knowledge and an authority on issues of *dharma*.⁷³ However, because they do not preserve the sequence of original phonemes of the Veda as *śruti* does, one of the key challenges Mīmāṃsā thinkers grappled with was justifying the authority of these texts. An opponent might argue that *smṛtis* are not the Veda but merely man-made mediations shaped by the efforts of their human compilers. If this is the case, the efforts of these mediating agents would undermine any claim to authority based on a transcendent origin. For Mīmāṃsā, the challenge lies in establishing *smṛti* texts not merely as mediations of Vedic knowledge shaped by human agency—thereby making their authority subject to debate—but as texts that, like *śruti*, derive their authority from an eternal, authorless source. Kumāṛila addresses this issue by comparing the compilers of *smṛti* texts to teachers of Vedic recitation:

Students accept what has been stated—namely, “this [Vedic statement] is taught here”—from their reliance on a trustworthy [teacher], whether he

⁷² For a discussion on the relationship between the Veda as *śruti* and the parallel category known as *smṛti*, which includes authoritative texts such as the *purāṇas*, see Pollock 2011.

⁷³ Pollock 2011: 53.

pronounces it [explicitly] or not. In the same way, the words of the authors of *sūtras*—standing in place of the words of a teacher—after merely delivering the Vedic statements in accordance with their character, it is said that their function has ceased, [and therefore] they should not be dismissed as merely man-made, just as the stimulation of sounds in the articulatory organs, such as the palate, [does not render *śruti* man-made].⁷⁴

Kumārila relates to the problem that not all the Vedic texts are extant, nor is the entire body of Vedic knowledge on particular topics easily accessible. That is, even the “heard” Veda, is not perceptible on its own; students require the mediation of a teacher to instruct them. Just as teachers recite or merely gesture toward Vedic statements for their students, the compilers of *smṛti* texts communicate such statements to make them accessible to others. The participation of these human compilers, Kumārila maintains, is in no way different from that of trustworthy teachers.

Nevertheless, teachers and the authors of *sūtras* are still human. How does such human involvement affect the authority of the knowledge these actors convey? Kumārila explains that neither the participation of such teachers, nor the efforts of these compilers, make the knowledge they transmit the product of human creation. The purpose of these authors’ words is to transmit Vedic statements, and once this purpose is fulfilled, their function ends. Therefore, their *smṛti* texts should not be regarded as products of human creation any more than *śruti* itself. Rather, they serve as conduits through which the statements of the authorless Veda, which are not immediately accessible, become available to others. Put simply, in establishing *smṛti* as authoritative, Kumārila argues that human participation in the transmission of Vedic knowledge does not contradict the

⁷⁴ *tatra yathaivāpta-pratyayād idam iha paṭhyata iti kathitam uccāritam anuccāritam vā śiṣyāḥ pratipadyante tathaiva sūtrakāra-vacanāny adhyāpaka-vacana-sthānīyāni svānurūpa-vedavākya-samarpaṇa-mātram kṛtvā nivṛtta-vyāpārāṇīti na tālvādi-dhvani-preraṇavat pauruṣeyatvena paribhavitavyāni* || Kumārila’s *Tantravārttika* 1.3.3.4 (p.104, ll. 18-21) || Sheldon Pollock’s translation of this segment assisted me in recognizing the parallelism in the argument between the words of the *Sūtrakāras* and the stimulation of sounds in the palate: “They are consequently not to be devalued as mere human creations, being no more human creations than [*śruti* texts themselves, which require for manifestation the human effort of] the expulsion of palatal and the rest of the articulatory sounds” [brackets in original] (Pollock 2011: 54). This parallelism is made explicit through my addition—following Pollock—of the bracketed “*śruti*.”

Mīmāṃsā position that the Veda is not man-made. Similarly, when a teacher’s vocal organs render the eternal Vedic sounds audible, this does not undermine the claim that the Veda itself is eternal and uncreated. These articulatory organs are merely conduits through which the eternal Vedic words become perceptible. In other words, a *smṛti* serves as a means by which its compiler manifests the Vedic statements, just as the palate is the means by which a teacher manifests the Vedic statements through recitation. Kumāṛila thus preserves the Mīmāṃsā stance on the Veda’s transcendent status while acknowledging the human role in its transmission.

Kumāṛila’s defense of the Veda’s transcendent status despite the involvement of human effort in its transmission, and Manovega’s engagement with such position, demonstrate these thinkers’ shared interest in a key point of disagreement between Brahminical and Jaina *purāṇas*’ models of authority: whether or not human involvement undermines textual authority. The Hindu *purāṇas*’ self-proclaimed connection to the Veda aligns them, like the Veda itself, with an eternalist model of authority that prioritizes claims of transcendence over contextual human temporality, thereby granting them legitimacy. By contrast, I argue, the individual authors of Jaina *purāṇas* establish their authority while remaining firmly contextualized within terrestrial and historical human experience. To begin, many of them include contextual or autobiographical anecdotes, often specifying the time of their work’s completion, allowing both the authors and their texts to be situated within a specific historical timeframe. Further, they do not attribute their texts to gods or mythical sages but instead present themselves—the authors of these works—as human transmitters of a story that traces its origin back to the words that flowed forth, like a river, from the mouth of the Jina Mahāvīra. The proximity and direct connection of their *purāṇas* to Mahāvīra and Indrabhūti Gautama lends these stories their trustworthiness, and the authors trace their transmission through a lineage of monks, from the Śreṇika-Gautama exchange all the way to their

own narration, as evidence for their authenticity (e.g., Vimalasūri's *Paūmacariya* 1.90; Raviṣeṇa's *Padmapurāṇa* 1.41-42; Svayambhūdeva's *Paūmacariu* 1.2). The recording of such lineages of transmission mirrors a broader practice for claiming authority throughout Jaina history: the documentation of monastic lineages, which have played a significant role in establishing legitimacy both among competing sects and within various Jaina "localized histories," demonstrating another manifestation of the contextualist model of authority.⁷⁵

The relationship between the claims of authority in Brahminical and Jaina *purāṇas* parallels the respective positions of Kumāṛila and Amitagati on textual authority, as both of them grapple with the same fundamental question: what makes a text trustworthy? For the Mīmāṃsā thinker, the eternality of the Veda and its freedom from potential human flaws, granted by its timelessness and independence from human authorship, ensures its authority on *dharma*. By contrast, Amitagati's rejection of the Veda's non-human origin encapsulates a contestation similar to that between the frameworks of Brahminical and Jaina *purāṇas*: the role of contextual human agents in defining or undermining textual authority.

But how can we adjudicate competing claims of textual authority based solely on traditional assertions about a text's origin? A story, the Investigators establish throughout their works, can be accepted as a source of trustworthy knowledge only if its content aligns with certain criteria for credibility. Such credibility is determined by a judicious reader who assesses the text impartially and neutrally, using a comparative method. The Veda, Amitagati's argument suggests, does not meet the standards of such an investigation by a judicious reader. His following stanza highlights the lack of observable basis for distinguishing between the Veda and human-authored texts:

There is no observable distinction between the Veda and man-made

⁷⁵ On the place of *paṭṭāvalīs*, records of monastic lineages, among medieval Śvetāmbara sects, see Dundas 2007: 17-52. For Jaina localized histories, see Cort 1995a: 480ff

śāstras. How, then, can the Vedic scholars claim that it is not man-made?⁷⁶

Even if we accept the possibility that a text can exist without a human creator, Amitagati suggests, the challenge remains in determining its nature as such. The focus here is on the epistemological domain: how can one ascertain whether the Veda was created by a human or not? By extension, Amitagati questions how the authority of the Veda can be adjudicated on the grounds that it is not man-made if, *prima facie*, it appears no different from other man-made texts.⁷⁷ This epistemological critique not only challenges the Veda’s authority but also aligns with the Investigators’ broader project of using a comparative and evaluative framework to assess textual credibility and authority. Amitagati reminds us that any claim to authoritative origin—whether eternalist or contextualist—holds little weight without observable evidence to support it. Ultimately, as Amitagati reminds us, there is no observable distinction between the Veda (whether “heard” or “remembered”) and man-made texts (such as the *Investigation* or Jaina *purāṇas*), even those claiming a direct transmission from the Mahāvīra and Gautama. The temporal posteriority of Jaina authors enables them to reflect on preceding texts, evaluate them, and engage critically with those whose teachings they reject. Truly judicious readers should not rely solely on authors’ claims of authoritative origin (neither the Veda, nor the Jina) but should evaluate critically the credibility of their texts and adjudicate for themselves. When a text appears indistinguishable from another, what truly matters is whether it withstands the critical examination of a judicious reader or, like an old rag, falls apart into a hundred pieces.

⁷⁶ *kṛtrimebhyo na śāstrebyo viśeṣaḥ ko ’pi dr̥śyate | apauruṣeyatā tasya vaidikaiḥ kathyate katham || AmDhP 17.11*

||

⁷⁷ Kumārila may have objected to such an argument on the account that: “the transcendent character of the Veda is revealed in part by its lexical and semantic uniqueness [...] which no human being could ever have invented” (Pollock 2016: 56n36).

Conclusion

Returning to the point that philology, the discipline of making sense of texts, must engage with a body of prior texts, we find that the critique of Brahminical narratives promoted in these Jaina works reflects the same backward-oriented approach. Though not philologists in the conventional sense, authors like Vimalasūri, Raviṣeṇa, and the Investigators undertake a parallel task: their retrospective examination of established accounts allows them to publicly challenge the credibility of these stories and to make sense of them. This is not to suggest that all these Jaina authors follow the same methods, nor do I argue that they hold identical views on how to adjudicate one story over its alternative versions. Unlike the authors of Jaina *purāṇas*, the Investigators were not concerned with narrating alternative versions of stories. Instead, they sought to expose their readers to the criteria for evaluating and adjudicating a story as credible or non-credible through their own acts of novel story-making. Nevertheless, I maintain that these authors shared a common goal: to make sense of these earlier texts in alignment with a set of predefined, though not always explicitly outlined, criteria. And they all follow similar rhetoric and rationale to undertake their projects.

This approach underscores the contrasting conceptions of textual authority and temporality in Brahminical and Jaina traditions. While Brahminical *purāṇas* self-proclaim legitimacy grounded in an eternalist model of authority inspired by the timeless Veda, Jaina *purāṇas* ground themselves in human-centered frameworks, offering a competing model of credibility and legitimacy. The backward-oriented perspective of Jaina narratives does not merely critique Brahminical stories but redefines a contextualist model of authority embedded within a temporal framework of human experience. This context-based vision equipped Jaina authors with innovative strategies to navigate their position of “lateness” in a landscape where “firstness” was already claimed by their Brahminical opponents. By embracing their position as subsequent to

these Brahminical narratives, Jaina authors reclaimed the authority to critique stories that had gained widespread acceptance among audiences who only rarely questioned their claims to truth or legitimacy. For Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, this rationale served as a methodological tool, training their audience in judicious reading and critical evaluation, and reshaping their readers' engagement with the textual traditions that surround them. Overall, these Investigators demonstrate that attributing the origin of stories to human figures like Mahāvīra and Gautama, authoritative as they may be, is not sufficient. Ultimately, a reader must make their own assessment and decision based on the skills cultivated through the *Investigation*'s training.

Conclusion:

Investigation of Dharma, Investigation as Dharma

Be reasonable. I have shown you a body, cold to the touch, and blue in the face. I have seen this body with my own eyes. Her death is a fact. What you are giving me are words. This “wife,” who is “alive,” a “different last name.” This is called “a story.” And we are not here to tell stories. We are here to tell the truth.

- East Berlin Officer, *Fargo*
(season 3, episode 1)

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the *Investigation of Dharma* is more than a critique of Brahminical stories. The project of the *Investigation* is inseparable from its literary form, since it is through stories—staged as a dialogue, shaped by repetition, and shifting across narrative layers—that the text trains its audience in the ethics and epistemics of reading. Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati use narrative to model and enact the very process of judgment they seek to cultivate in their readers. Through close readings of the earliest available versions of the *Investigation* composed by these Jaina authors in Apabhramsha and Sanskrit, I argue that this text offers a method for investigating competing claims. This method relies on openness to repeated encounters with alternative viewpoints as a means of cultivating the evaluative capacities required of its audience.

Here I will now return to the objectives I laid out in the Introduction. The title *Investigation of Dharma*, considered as a “philological starting point” in Auerbach’s sense, prompted a set of seemingly straightforward questions that guided my inquiry throughout: what do these texts reveal about the practice of investigation, about narrative as a mode of exploration, about the nature of

dharma, and about the distinctiveness—if it exists—of the Jaina voice that animates this project?¹ Rather than assuming that the *dharma* and the *parīkṣā* in the title referred straightforwardly to an object and a method, respectively, that existed outside the text, I have instead treated them as placeholders whose content would need to emerge from the mechanisms and commitments of the text itself. What initially appears to be a narrative critique of Brahminical stories gradually reveals itself in the chapters of the dissertation to be something more: an exploration of how narrative can function as a form of philosophical practice, one that reasons through storytelling and cultivates the ethical orientation of its readers.

How, then, might we answer these questions? To begin, let me return to the first question about the kind of investigation these texts develop. The *Investigation of Dharma* offers no systematic definition of what is meant by “investigation.” Rather, it models this in narrative through the interactions of its characters, their fictitious life stories, and the criteria they invoke to justify their judgments. Both versions I examine present investigation as a practice of discerning between competing truth claims. This discernment entails the application of specific criteria of credibility. Yet such discernment is not merely a discrete act that can be performed at will; it is a cultivated capacity, one that must be trained over time through repeated encounters with competing claims. In the *Investigation*, this capacity unfolds within specific narrative situations in alignment with the particularities of what is at stake, and does not function as a fixed method that applies across all situations. Namely, it depends on concrete scenarios in which characters evaluate competing stories in real time and in relation to situations that carry ethical and epistemic consequences. The *Investigation*’s attention to these consequences suggests that poor judgment is not simply an intellectual failure. Rather, it leads to ethical failure and dangerous real-life results,

¹ See p. 4 in this dissertation.

since endorsing unreliable stories can result in misguided and harmful actions.

As I argued in Chapter One, the text sets out criteria for the credibility of stories that do not rely on appeals to external authority. What makes a story credible is its internal coherence and its alignment with what rings true in lived experience. I further argued in Chapter Two that these criteria serve a practical function: to help readers guard themselves against unreliable stories that present themselves as sources of authoritative knowledge. In other words, an investigation is not just about which story is true, but about which claims can be responsibly endorsed as guides for action. To this end, Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati enact an investigation that takes shape through the literary practice of storytelling, with its dialogic exchanges and embedded narratives. Such investigation is, therefore, more than a systematic method demonstrated through narrative but ultimately reducible to a checklist. Rather, it is a capacity that becomes visible through the reader's ongoing engagement with competing stories and the judgments they entail.

This brings me to the second question, on the *Investigation's* mode of engaging readers through narrative rather than systematic argument. The text does not simply tell its readers to compare stories; it draws them into that process through the way it is written. The story-within-story structure is an important device for attaining this goal. This structure creates layers of narrative knowledge that entail differential access to information. For instance, as I demonstrated in Chapter One, the Brahminical characters at the intradiegetic level of the narrative, unlike the reader, do not know that the story-within-story (the hypodiegetic level) is utterly fictitious. This asymmetry sharpens the readers' role as critical evaluators, whose task goes beyond following the conclusions of the characters and involves assessing the validity of the stories for themselves. These literary features are central to the work of investigation; they shape how the text engages its audience and influence both reading practices and decision-making in the world.

The *Investigation* trains its audience by enacting the very process of evaluation it seeks to cultivate. It models a form of sustained attentiveness to competing claims, one that unfolds through layered storytelling rather than abstract instruction. The Investigators do not offer a single authoritative story or position to accept. Instead, it repeatedly introduces different stories, each one prompting an evaluation of its credibility.² In the narrative, this process begins with the characters in Pāṭaliputra, who weigh the credibility of different accounts. But as the narrative progresses, it gradually shifts the burden of judgment to the audience. The text stages debates, it does not settle them. It invites the reader to return to stories with increasing attentiveness to their claims and contradictions. As I argued in Chapters Three and Four, this cultivates a reader who is equipped to engage with authority critically, rather than receiving it passively. To follow the *Investigation* is to participate in the very kind of reading it describes. In this sense, the literary form of the *Investigation* is inseparable from its project: it is through narrative that the text forms judicious readers, who can weigh competing stories and discern which claims are worth trusting.

In terms of the third question—what is the *dharma* that stands as the object of investigation—the answer is even less straightforward. At first glance, the title of the text suggests that *dharma*, the object of investigation, is a stable category awaiting clarification. However, the text hardly discusses *dharma* as a specific body of doctrine or set of teachings. Rather, it foregrounds stories as the object of its investigation; it explores the credibility of stories and, by extension, the truth value of testimony more broadly. In this light, I argue, the *dharma* that Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati fix in their title is not a doctrinal object waiting to be confirmed, but a situational and cultivated disposition that emerges through critical investigation. *Dharma* takes shape through the process of critical inquiry. It does not precede the act of investigation, but is constituted by it. *Dharma* is

² Although not discussed in these terms in this dissertation, the *Investigation*'s avoidance of any single authoritative story is suggestive of the Jaina doctrine of non-one-sidedness (*anekāntavāda*).

cultivated through attentive engagement, not passively observed.

This reframing allows us to see that our authors are less concerned with offering a singular answer to the question of *dharma* than with modeling the dispositions required to engage that question meaningfully. Judiciousness is a skill that enables both discernment and ethical orientation: to investigate properly is, therefore, a form of ethical life. It involves not only knowing what is right but acting accordingly. A judicious person, who knows how to critically and carefully evaluate claims, is already enacting a version of *dharma*. In this sense, unpacking the compound in the title of this literature as “Investigation of Dharma” may fall short of capturing the objective these authors pursue. Since its answer to the question of *dharma* is the cultivation of a reader capable of assessing different alternatives and living accordingly, a rendering such as “Investigation *as* Dharma” may better reflect the vision of inquiry the *Investigation* itself models.

This is the novelty our authors offer: *dharma* is a cultivated disposition, not a fixed content. As I have demonstrated, the Investigators resist yielding to stories that claim authority merely by being old or popular (Chapter Two), and their stance resonates with a broader Jaina tendency to ground authority contextually (Chapter Four). In the *Investigation*, authority is something readers ascribe through a mode of critical evaluation. Whereas for Mīmāṃsā, authority is rooted in the timelessness and authorlessness of the Veda, for our authors, authority emerges through the reader’s judicious discernment of which claims can responsibly be trusted. This is not to say that authority is dismissed altogether. Rather, the *Investigation* shifts the grounds of authority from a source presumed to be beyond human error to the evaluative capacity—the judiciousness—of a human listener. To be sure, the text does gesture toward an ideal of omniscient knowledge, as embodied by the Jina and his teachings. But even this ideal is presented less as a fixed doctrinal position than as the culmination of an evaluative disposition: one learns to recognize reliable

authority not through assumed trust, but through discernment. In this view, *dharma* does not descend from a transcendent source; it emerges through the ability to listen carefully, compare critically, and adjudicate between competing claims.³

In this sense, the text offers less an investigation of an external object than a reflection on the very conditions that make investigation possible. The real subject of the *Investigation of Dharma* is not Viṣṇu, the Brahmins, or even Manovega and Pavanavega. Its subject is *investigation itself*. Just as the text is a narrative about narratives, it is also an investigation of investigations—a literary inquiry into what it means to examine, to compare, and to adjudicate. Therefore, the object of its investigation is *dharma* as a mode of discernment—a way of making judgments and living according to them. Rather than treating *dharma* in terms of doctrinal propositions or prescriptive injunctions, the *Investigation* models a form of inquiry that aligns epistemic rigor with ethical orientation. A judicious reader who evaluates competing alternatives with neutrality and impartiality is, by that very disposition, a dharmic person. In this light, investigation is not just a means to reach *dharma*, it is *dharma*. To investigate properly is to live properly.

Having reframed *dharma* as a mode of epistemic discernment, we now arrive at the final question: in what sense is this mode of inquiry, and the disposition it cultivates, particularly Jaina? The answer is not immediately obvious, as the *Investigation* offers no comprehensive account of Jaina doctrine, and the moments in which it presents what seem to be systematic doctrinal claims are few, brief, and largely incidental.⁴ Still, my answer derives directly from the preceding discussion of the *dharma* that this text investigates. What marks it as Jaina, I suggest, is not any

³ The Investigators' attempt to establish criteria of credibility independent of external authority may reflect a broader shift in Jaina thought that Marie-Hélène Gorisse identifies in the post-Dharmakīrti period, when Jaina philosophers sought to articulate "an epistemic perspective independent from devotion and tradition" (Gorisse 2022: 847).

⁴ Although it lies beyond the scope of this study, one might note clear resonances between the epistemic rigor, judicious discernment, and ethical orientation inseparable from the mode of inquiry delineated here and the Three Jewels (*ratna-traya*) of Jaina doctrine: right view (*samyag-darśana*), right knowledge (*samyag-jñāna*), and right conduct (*samyak-cāritra*). For a preliminary discussion of these notions, see Dundas 2002b: 86-88.

fixed doctrinal content, but the disposition it cultivates. The *Investigation* aligns itself with the view that knowledge must always be evaluated. The ideal reader, characterized by a particular kind of judiciousness, evaluates competing claims critically and adjudicates which among them are worth trusting. Namely, such a judicious reader does not simply adhere to a predetermined set of beliefs. As argued in Chapter Three, the text models this judiciousness by contrast with the mere learnedness of Pāṭaliputra's Brahmins. Manovega, the ideal Jaina layman, is distinguished from the Brahmins not on doctrinal grounds, but on account of his epistemic capacities. I maintain that the text thus constructs an exemplar of Jaina laity defined by these capacities. To be sure, being a Jaina layman entails the fulfillment of ritual observances and doctrinal commitments, a duty that both Pavanavega and Manovega ultimately fulfill upon returning home at the end of the narrative. But for the *Investigation*, being Jaina is first and foremost a disposition, one whose attainment requires an epistemic shift. In other words, before one converts to Jainism as a set of doctrinal rules, one converts to Jainism epistemically.⁵ The text's Jaina character emerges from its effort to cultivate a particular kind of reader, one capable of adjudicating the credibility of testimonies and living accordingly, rather than from commitment to particular sectarian doctrine.⁶

To be clear, I do not argue that the *Investigation* disregards sectarian commitments altogether. As we have seen throughout, these texts investigate *dharma* through stories that rigorously distinguish between Brahminical and Jaina positions. Further, they consistently privilege Jaina versions of stories over Brahminical ones. Yet this sectarianism is not expressed through doctrinal assertion or dogmatic refutation. Instead, it is enacted through the cultivation of a reader trained to

⁵ Tillo Detige's notion of "epistemic conversion," in his discussion on the operation of Jaina and Buddhist narratives on their readers, helps articulate a process already at work in these texts: "Epistemically becoming or being Jain or Buddhist, then, is not as much a matter of converting in the sense of intellectually accepting some set of doctrines, adhering to or believing them, but of listening to its stories and being able to learn through them" (Detige 2019: 116).

⁶ The problem of how to adjudicate the credibility of testimonies is central to many influential works in Jaina philosophy. See Gorisse 2020, 2022.

reject stories that fail under critical examination. This tendency to ground authority in judicious evaluation rather than in inherited tradition echoes broader trends in Jaina thinking that I introduced throughout this study, evident also in doxographical works, in the writings of figures such as Haribhadra and Yaśovijaya, and in certain Jaina versions for the stories of Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas. While this tendency should not be taken as a totalizing principle that defines Jaina thinking as such, it nonetheless marks the writing of several influential Jaina thinkers. In this model, to be epistemically Jaina is first to engage with texts as sites where truth claims are tested, before accepting any defined set of inherited truths. If *dharma* in this text is the practice of judicious investigation, then what makes that *dharma* Jaina is the conviction that one acts correctly not by following predetermined beliefs, but by cultivating the right kind of attention to different claims. In this sense, although it is by no means a defining feature of all existing Jaina thought, it is nonetheless a compelling example of what being Jaina means in the *Investigation*: it is a way of knowing and acting grounded in the critical and comparative examination of diverse sets of competing claims.

* * *

Throughout this dissertation, authority served as an overarching theme. As the work approached its conclusion, this theme took on a more concrete form in Chapter Four, where it was articulated through two contrasting approaches to establishing authority: the Mīmāṃsā “eternalist” model and the Jaina “contextualist” one. But is either of these more neutral, objective, or legitimate than the other? If we follow Steven Shapin, who demonstrates how any model of authority ultimately hinges on social and cultural presuppositions, the answer would have to be no. In his analysis of the social conditions in seventeenth-century England which enabled the development of modern scientific practice, Shapin shows that what we understand as scientific objectivity depends less on

universal standards than on the socially sustained trust placed in particular witnesses.⁷ Like the eternalist and contextualist models of authority, this modern scientific model is anchored in culturally specific norms and historically situated judgments. Scientific procedures, Shapin stresses, are not categorically different from the procedures by which we assess truth in other domains. Ultimately, when evaluating a claim—whether scientific, legal, or religious—one must decide which, among a potentially unlimited set of evaluative considerations, to valorize.⁸ Modern scientists valorize experimental protocols and the testimony of trained researchers. Mīmāṃsakas valorize the authorless and eternal Veda. The Jaina Investigators valorize comparative evaluation that affirms specific criteria for credibility. Each model is anchored in its own socially sustained norms and evaluative priorities, and must be understood within its specific historical and cultural context. Each is built on its own assumptions and is accepted by a specific type of “judicious reader.”

But what is the point of reading? This dissertation has shown how narrative, in the hands of Hariṣeṇa and Amitagati, becomes a space for testing the credibility of different claims and modeling the dispositions required for such testing. While my methodology led me to begin with a text, by the end of this study it is clear that the text is only one part of the picture. Equally central is the reader: the text trains a judicious reader, and a judicious reader evaluates the text. What joins the two—text and reader—is reading itself. While premodern South Asian traditions often emphasized literary production and taste, fewer articulated a theory of reading and readership. The *Investigation* opens a path for addressing that gap. It offers a vision of reading that is instrumental—not in the sense of transmitting information, but in cultivating a disposition. The ideal reader it presents is not a passive consumer of texts, but an active participant in judgment. To

⁷ Shapin 1994.

⁸ Shapin 1995: 259-61.

read well, in this framework, is to weigh alternatives, test claims against experience, and attend both to a story's content and to its consequences. Reading becomes a means of ethical formation; for the *Investigation*, good readership renders one epistemically Jaina—or, one might say in more traditional terms, it cultivates one's right view (*samyag-darśana*). Although modeled within a Jaina framework, this vision of reading is not limited to Jainism. As Paul J. Griffiths has noted in more general terms: "If indeed being religious [...] is a dispositional skill, then, [...] it will have to be inculcated, which is to say that those who have (or come to have) the skill will have to be trained. Reading of a certain kind will be an important part of this training."⁹ For Griffiths, as for the Jaina authors of the *Investigation*, reading is not merely informative—it is formative and transformative. To be religious, like being judicious, is a skill. And reading is how one acquires and perfects it.

In the early 2000s, Michael Vander Weele returned to a deceptively simple question: "What is reading for?" Writing in the wake of anxieties over new technologies that seemed to be replacing the book, Vander Weele sought to recover what biblical and theological reflection might reveal about the purpose of reading. Reviewing a variety of academic studies in the field, he is led to acknowledge that the purposes of reading change across time and place. Yet he concludes on a more affirmative note: at its core, reading is "an exchange between people," one that reminds us of our limitations and of the enrichment made possible through fellowship with others.¹⁰ If, as Shapin's analysis entails, no model of authority is truly neutral—if all are anchored in historical and cultural norms—then how does a group of individuals come to share the same criteria for evaluating claims? How do collectives cohere around shared standards of authority? Reading, understood as a mode of interpersonal exchange, offers one possible answer. It is through reading—and the habits it instills—that interpretive textual communities are formed. The value of

⁹ Griffiths 1999: 16.

¹⁰ Vander Weele 2002: 81.

the *Investigation* lies in its vivid illustration of such a theory of reading: one in which a model of authority is not simply inherited, but becomes intelligible and actionable within a collective that has learned to read a certain way.¹¹ Other theories of reading, and the models of authority they entail, remain available for further excavation.

¹¹ In forming his model of “textual communities,” Brian Stock made a point particularly relevant here: the individuals who gather into such textual communities “must make the hermeneutic leap from what the text says to what they think it means; the common understanding provides the foundation for changing thought and behaviour” (Stock 1983: 522).

Abbreviations

<i>AmDhP</i>	Amitagati's <i>Dharmaparīksā</i>
<i>HaDhP</i>	Hariṣeṇa's <i>Dhammaparikkhā</i>
<i>VṛDhP</i>	Vṛttavilāsa's <i>Dharmaparīkse</i>
<i>VPC</i>	Vimalasūri's <i>Paūmacariya</i>

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