

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WRITING A MORE “SAṂSKṚTA” INDIA:
RELIGION, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN V. RAGHAVAN’S
TWENTIETH-CENTURY SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

SEEKING A SPACE FOR THE STUDY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY SANSKRIT

In the past three-and-a-half centuries¹ of European and American scholarship on Sanskrit, research has focused overwhelmingly on the vast troves of ancient, classical, medieval, and early-modern era works, while Euro-American scholars have, with only a handful of exceptions, utterly overlooked Sanskrit literature written during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Some scholars have even declared Sanskrit a dead language by the time of the British Raj, and others have panned more recent Sanskrit writings as unoriginal and merely nostalgic as well as compromised by colonialism. Anecdotally, over the years of working on this dissertation, mentioning “twentieth-century Sanskrit literature” to numerous scholars and to some nonacademic people who know of Sanskrit often evokes incredulity that such material even exists. It may be true that modern² Sanskrit works are often predominantly beholden to their forbearers in ways that make more recent works seem like mere derivative shadows of former greats. There is also a concern among Sanskrit writers themselves that modern Sanskrit materials just do not measure up to the ancient masters. As the well-known *subhāṣita* (poetic saying) goes: in ancient times, when recounting the best poets, Kālidāsa was counted first (on the first finger), but now because of no one being of equal quality, even the nameless (*anāmikā*, the second finger, or “ring-finger”) has become significant.³ In a similar vein, William Jones, the famous Orientalist scholar of Sanskrit, cites in his preface to his translation of *Śakuntalā* a modern verse

¹ Dating from Abraham Roger’s 1651 Dutch translation of some sayings of Bhartṛhari he learned from a Brahmin in Pulicat. See Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 7.

² It will become time to problematize the term “modern” in due course, but it is a useful shorthand for now.

³ Kālidāsa was a famous poet and playwright of the fourth/fifth-century A.D. He is often problematically deemed the “Indian Shakespeare,” although given that he was earlier, it might be better to call Shakespeare the “English Kālidāsa.” The *subhāṣita* in question: “*purā kavīnām gaṇanāprasāṅge kaniṣṭhikādhiṣṭhita kālidāsā/ adyāpi tattulyakaverabhāvādanāmikā sārthavatī babhūva/*”

heard among the pandits of late eighteenth-century Calcutta about poetry imagined as an old woman that expresses a similar decline and despondency, the last verse of which he translates as: “but now old and decrepit, her beauty faded, and her unadorned feet slipping as she walks, in whose cottage does she disdain to take shelter?”⁴

Despite the naysayers, news of Sanskrit’s decline or death is exaggerated, and there are copious examples of Sanskrit texts written during the colonial and postcolonial periods that are worthy of study as modern writings, even if derivative, nostalgic, or infected by the colonial plague. In fact, precisely because these writings are derivative and nostalgic, and especially in so far as they partake of colonial ideas, modern Sanskrit literature holds open the possibility of fruitful academic study. Even if it is true that these literary works are not on the level of the revered masters, and even if they are not considered remarkable works, not being deemed great pieces of literature by no means invalidates them as objects of research. Their authors have attempted to maintain or even modify the Sanskrit tradition in ways that might speak to the malleability of tradition as well as, for some authors, the significance of maintaining tradition. One could even suggest that these works have different meanings in the modern period just by virtue of the time of their composition. As Jorge Luis Borges illustrates in his short story of Pierre Menard’s rewriting of *Don Quixote*, even if exactly the same, (re)inscribed literature means something different merely because of the time of its writing, regardless of quality or (un)originality.⁵ But to different degrees many of the modern Sanskrit authors did amend and alter their poems and plays, adopting new styles and genres and addressing modern concerns.

Writing in Sanskrit in the colonial and postcolonial periods, whatever the content, resonates with

⁴ Cited in E.B. Cowell, “Two Modern Sanskrit ślokas” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, New Series*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Jul. 1883): 174-175. Cowell hunted down someone who could recite the verse in the original Sanskrit, and found a mostly similar verse, the last line and a half of which reads: “*seyam jarānīrasā śūnyālaṅkaraṇā skhalanmṛdupadā kaṃ vā janaṃ nāśritā.*”

⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), 36-44.

the modern political, historical, religious, and cultural contexts of India during the time of composition, and often those issues do appear quite prominently in modern Sanskrit literature.

Additionally, this modern Sanskrit material can be read for the purpose of investigating how modern Sanskrit authors approach the task of attempting to write meaningful works in this language, how they navigate the modern and the ancient, and how they blend aspects of South Asian thought with issues of colonial and postcolonial experience. Even if, as is important to note, not many people would read this material, and its circulation was fairly limited by knowledge of Sanskrit as well as by caste, these works can illustrate something important about how certain people creatively engaged the intersection of Sanskrit literature with the colonial and postcolonial worlds, merging Sanskrit literature with new ideas in a new era of history, and what they, at least in principle if not in actuality, wanted to accomplish with their writings.

This dissertation is an attempt to analyze a limited selection of modern Sanskrit literary works, primarily the works of one author, for what these creative pieces illustrate about a variety of larger issues of concern to the history of Sanskrit literature and to colonial and postcolonial studies. It is an attempt to answer the question of why and how someone would write in Sanskrit in the twentieth century. But more than why and how, it is an attempt to understand what it meant to write in Sanskrit in the twentieth-century, both in terms of the overall historical and political context and in terms of what it meant for the author who composed the works. Given that this literature is written in the “*devabhāṣā*” (divine language) of Sanskrit and frequently touches on issues of religion, particularly Hinduism, this dissertation also reads these works for what they reveal about the idea of “religion,” and its close cousin “culture,” in twentieth-century India as the employment of these terms within nationalist writings in Sanskrit might inform the larger study of the history of religions. Since the object of study is one particular author writing in an ancient language with distinct weight within his social context, this dissertation addresses

questions about Sanskrit authorship and its imagined audiences in India, and even around the globe, but it also considers Sanskrit authorship as simply a means of personal expression.

With the benefit of printing and publishing (including private publishing), the number of extant modern Sanskrit authors and works is daunting and dizzying. There are many publications that are no more than a half-century old but, though mentioned in bibliographies, are now difficult to find in libraries in India. It is certain that they circulated in small quantities among a limited group of people. Yet there are so very many modern authors of Sanskrit literature that they might as well be nameless (*anāmikā*/the ring finger). One way to approach this material could be to compile a bibliography of a wide variety of authors and their works with short summaries and appraisals. This has, by and large, been the method by which a number of scholars in India have approached modern Sanskrit, and indeed the subject has received a good deal of attention from Indian scholars. However, this method merely scratches the surface of these modern Sanskrit literary works, being data heavy rather than providing deep and incisive analysis, and seeing the modern far more in the surface content rather than the deeper meanings of the literature. By ignoring the author and focusing on the summary, this approach also would fail to answer the question of why and how someone would write in Sanskrit in the modern era, not to mention other questions about the hidden meanings of the works.

A second way to approach the material would be to choose a simple theme to trace through a variety of works; but such a project, while useful at times, again runs the risk of averting attention from the author. A third approach would be to choose one particular author of modern Sanskrit, to zero in on his works, his life, and his thinking. One might thereby reach a better understanding of him as an author of modern Sanskrit, of what Sanskrit means to him as a

literary medium, and of what messages he intended to convey in his works.⁶ Given that the audience for this material is quite small, and its impact fairly limited, it is not possible to read modern Sanskrit literature as one might study a more popular medium for the way it impacts society. Instead, the focus with such material needs to begin with the author. In what follows, I have undertaken a mixture of the last two methods: exploring the works of one author, but tracing within the bower that is his oeuvre a select few thematic creepers that the author seems most passionate about, the vines from which the flowers of literature sprout, and which constrain and delimit his desired objectives in writing Sanskrit literature within a twentieth-century milieu.

Among the many authors of Sanskrit literature in the twentieth-century, only one has the virtue of having produced not only a considerable body of original Sanskrit literary works but also a voluminous output, primarily in English, of supplementary writing wherein he speaks of how he viewed the importance of Sanskrit, describes in detail why and how he was attempting to revive Sanskrit, and addresses a variety of specific salient themes, from religion to culture to politics, that find prominence in his literary creations. Thus one can triangulate among his works, both expository and literary, to reach a better understanding of the author, his writing, and his agenda. That figure is Dr. Venkatarama Raghavan (1908-1979), late professor of Sanskrit at the University of Madras, founder of the Samskrita Ranga (Sanskrit Theater) in Chennai,⁷ founder-secretary of Kuppaswami Shastri Research Institute, and compiler of the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* (among numerous other accomplishments, posts, and accolades). As a scholar, V. Raghavan is well known and highly regarded in Euro-American scholarship for his research on

⁶ Despite the masculine pronoun here, there are some prominent female authors of original Sanskrit material in the twentieth century, although male authors are the vast majority demographic in the field.

⁷ Note to readers: Madras was the colonial name of the city, and it was changed to “Chennai” in 1996. Even now, twenty years later, locals tend to switch back and forth between the two names, although “Chennai” seems to be winning out. It might be noted that Raghavan himself was aware of its original name of Chennai or Chennapattanam, but he usually uses “Madras” in Sanskrit writings.

Sanskrit aesthetics, Sanskrit literature and drama, Carnatic music, Bharatanāṭyam dance, and Hindu religion. His expertise was remarkably wide-ranging and he published scores of books and hundreds of articles during his long and prolific career. He was also something of a public intellectual, writing numerous pieces for journals and newspapers in India (in English, Tamil, and Sanskrit) in order to spread knowledge of Sanskrit and culture as widely as possible. The published bibliography of all his publications in English, Sanskrit, and Tamil through 1968 comes to over three hundred pages.⁸ He was still actively writing for another decade, and numerous other works of his have been and are still being published posthumously. He was certainly one of the greatest Indologists of the middle of the twentieth century, influential not just in India but also around the globe.

In addition to his research, however, Raghavan also wrote many creative works in Sanskrit, particularly plays and poems. In fact, in his short autobiography, he claims to have wanted to be a playwright, but finances dictated he keep a steady job as a professor.⁹ For his creative works, the Śāṅkarāchārya of the Kanchipuram Math (at the time, Chandrasekara Sarasvatī Svāmī) awarded him the prestigious title “*Kavi-kokila*” (poet-cuckoo). Yet it is the work he did as a professor for which he is best known. In a way, he has a “name” as a scholar, but as a Sanskrit poet and dramatist, he has heretofore remained mostly nameless. As a poet, Raghavan composed so many original poems, *stuti*-s, *stotra*-s, *campū*-s, and even one *mahākāvya*, that an exact number is hard to calculate. Many were published in a variety of periodicals, and many remain unpublished. His poems range from songs of religious devotion to modern politics, to the natural world, to Sanskrit itself, and beyond. There is even one poem

⁸ A.L. Mudaliar, ed., *Bibliography of the Books, Papers, and Other Contributions of Dr. V. Raghavan*, (Ahmedabad: New Order Book Company, 1968).

⁹ V. Raghavan, “V. Raghavan’s Autobiographical Reflections,” in *The Power of the Sacred Name*, ed. William J. Jackson, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994), 323-324. Ah, the days when “professor” was a steady job!

about snuff, betel, and cigarettes satirically stylized as an Upaniṣad. As a playwright, Raghavan wrote twelve plays in Sanskrit during the course of his creative life. Some are short skits, there are two *prahasana*-s (comedies), one of which is also an allegorical play, and one, perhaps his magnum opus, is the full ten acts of a standard “*nāṭaka*.” A number of his plays are short pieces reworking and abridging Sanskrit classics (from both literary and religious texts) for a popular audience but with his own unique twists. He founded the Samskrita Ranga (“Sanskrit Theatre”) in Madras in 1958 for the purpose of reviving the tradition of Sanskrit drama, and with the Ranga he directed and performed in a number of his own original plays as well as a large number of the classics of Sanskrit dramatic tradition.

It is not only Raghavan’s creative works that make him a useful figure for further research, but also his ardent promotion of both Sanskrit and Sanskrit drama, the modern religious and nationalistic political messages he conveyed through those plays, and his pro-Sanskrit activism. His literary works were part and parcel of a larger mission to revive Sanskrit in independent India, and reading them in such a light, in conjunction with his scholarship and essays, nuances the meanings of his literary efforts. It is also significant that Raghavan was well-read not only in Sanskrit but also in Euro-American scholarship, and his thinking on a number of matters often reads as an attempt either wed to his own Indian perspective with Euro-American and colonial ideas, or to speak in favor of the value of Sanskrit and Indian thought for the rest of the world. The man stood at the confluence of the Thames and the Ganges, and attempted to speak as a global intellectual, as indeed he was. In this way, his works express postcolonial and cosmopolitan engagements and tensions that are unique in the history of Sanskrit literary thought. The man and his work are thus useful raw material for beginning an exploration that takes modern Sanskrit literature and authorship seriously and studies them critically for the sake

of a better understanding of twentieth-century Sanskrit intellectual and creative activity. Moreover, Raghavan's intellectual commitments and his literary work in Sanskrit reveal a unique response to the postcolonial situation and twentieth-century Indian and global politics, as well as to issues pertaining to ideas about religion in colonial and postcolonial South Asia, all of which make Raghavan an intriguing figure for reflection.

In what follows, one main focus is Raghavan's original Sanskrit dramatic works, primarily because they were central to his major project of reviving Sanskrit drama and making Sanskrit seem more real and alive than mere texts could do. Most of these plays were performed in Chennai, in other parts of India, and on All-India Radio. As his student, the late M. Narasimhachari, told me in an interview, and others have corroborated, Raghavan liked to say: "Don't speak about Sanskrit. Speak Sanskrit."¹⁰ In other words, Sanskrit is not just meant to be read, but to be spoken, and he felt this could be achieved most readily in drama. One or two plays themselves take the lead role in chapters 2-4. The point is not to make the plays themselves the heroes, however, but to see the plays, along with their supporting cast, as illustrating specific important ideas in Raghavan's larger project of writing and promoting Sanskrit.

Despite the emphasis on the plays, Raghavan's poems often take the stage. Poems are almost exclusively the stars of the first chapter and the conclusion. Raghavan was the editor of the Sanskrit-language journal *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, in which he published many of his original poems, and his literary works were intended also for a readership. Some of his poems in Sanskrit were printed in an English newspaper (*The Hindu*) as well as smaller weekly Sanskrit journals. The organizing principle of the chapters is that each centers around specific themes most salient to his way of thinking, thus in some instances the dramas are more salient to the subject, and in

¹⁰ Interview conducted August 28, 2011.

other chapters the poems are more relevant. In the final chapter, I look particularly at some of the more expressive poems that appear to show something of the author's subjectivity in a way that illuminates some important elements of what it meant to Raghavan to be writing Sanskrit in the twentieth century.

In the rest of this present chapter, I offer a literature review that lays out some important groundwork for thinking through Raghavan's works and also serves as a discussion of methodology. In the first chapter, I provide a brief intellectual biography of Raghavan, particularly as pertains to his life, times, thought, and political advocacy of Sanskrit for nationalist purposes in the new Indian nation. Of particular interest will be his advocacy for Sanskrit in a Tamil environment that was hostile to Sanskrit and to Brahmins, but the chapter will also attempt to nuance our understanding of Tamil Brahmins as elite "culture brokers" in twentieth-century Madras. The chapter will not be an exhaustive intellectual autobiography, but will rather detail Raghavan's understandings of the themes in the rest of the chapters, namely: history, culture, nationalism, politics, and religion. A main emphasis will be to show how he attempts to collapse these categories, particularly religion and culture, and why that is important to his project and corresponds to his advocacy for Sanskrit. The second half of the chapter discusses Raghavan's thoughts on Sanskrit as a language and literary medium, particularly in the context of postcolonial nationalism.

While the first chapter includes a few poems about Sanskrit, the remaining chapters focus more closely on Raghavan's literary works. In chapter 2, we delve more into the original literary works themselves, and the thematic focus is on the notions of heroism and history, as well as the hybrid nature of his postcolonial discourse. That chapter asks the question of who Raghavan's heroes are, and finds them to be, by and large, cultural heroes, figures who contribute to Indian

culture. It also addresses the idea of history in Raghavan's works, and tries to answer the question of what it meant for Raghavan to attempt to revive Sanskrit in the twentieth century, thereby revealing a concept of history infused with religious affect. The chapter includes a discussion of the ways in which Raghavan's advocacy of Sanskrit culture reads as a postcolonial inversion of British cultural imperialism. The third chapter focuses on the topic of aesthetics, particularly the *rasa*-s of laughter and love, in order to show how Raghavan employs these sentiments from classical Sanskrit aesthetics within the context of twentieth-century political concerns. In particular, the chapter discusses comedy and love as ways of showing India in contrast to the West in terms of ethics and spirituality. I show that many of his works appear to be premised on a rejection of the religious/secular binary and that they insist on the superior spiritual and ethical nature of India. In the fourth chapter, religion itself is the focus, particularly Raghavan's call for religious tolerance and his insistence that Sanskrit and Hinduism have a unique perspective to offer the world in light of this problem. That chapter will deal solely with Raghavan's lengthiest drama, *Anārkalī* (written in 1931, published in 1972), which combines a discussion of Akbar's Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference of religions with a reworking of the famous Mughal-era legend of Anārkalī within Sanskrit literary conventions.

In the final chapter, Raghavan's focus on the unity of religions in Anarkali will bring us around to his larger project of religious and political unity on a global scale, and will address the issue of audience more completely than previous chapters. The issue of audience, however, provides a pivot to another possibility that ignores the audience: the possibility that these literary works are expressive of Raghavan's own emotions, and the chapter will attempt to address these works, and some of his poems in particular, from a perspective that takes affect seriously as an aspect of modern Sanskrit and the postcolonial experience. The chapter as a whole attempts to

address the complexity of Raghavan’s writing in Sanskrit in the twentieth century as it took place on global, local, and personal levels, and it tries to think about how those levels of concern inform one another.

In a way, the various themes that serve as organizing foci of the chapters are always comingling, like an orchestra playing together, but in the interest of hearing each one a little more precisely, like a sound engineer checking for precision in a recorded track, the chapters raise the volume on some themes and certain sets of data from the material, while muting the volume on the others. Certainly there are places in the chapters where sounds from one part bleed into the microphone of the specific theme under investigation, and certainly the 60hz hum¹¹ of religion is inescapable, as are frequent coughs and sneezes of culture and nationalism, but the attempt will be to isolate the themes as much as possible so that each gets the close attention it deserves.

The fundamental purpose of this dissertation remains an attempt to understand how and why someone would write Sanskrit in the twentieth-century, and especially in Tamil Nadu, and to answer that question through Raghavan’s works. Another way of putting this would be to ask what it means to write Sanskrit in the twentieth century, and what new meanings and nuances arise in Raghavan’s creative writings. The answer, in short form, is that Raghavan writes Sanskrit because he feels that it has the ability to unify the nascent Indian nation, as well as the potential to uplift people given that it is, quite literally, the “refined” language. In this latter way, he mirrors the attempts by the British to “civilize” India through English literature. He believes that Sanskrit and Hinduism provide the world with the potential for unification and the power to oppose the materialist pursuit of money along with morally inferior sensualism. Further,

¹¹ The background hum of electrical currents in the US often emitted by fluorescent lights and a bane of sound engineers.

Raghavan’s efforts to unify the various categories of thought (religion, culture, history, aesthetics), to regard them as all one, and to use them together in his nationalist project, belie a strongly religious Advaita (non-dual) undercurrent. And thus, in the final analysis, there is an inner tension in his work between an ideal universality and the reality of the specificity of Sanskrit and the growing spread of secularism. Meanwhile there is also a tension between the refined register and limited reach of Sanskrit and Raghavan’s ideal of changing the world, a tension between language and audience. Despite this tension, and regardless of the audience, there is also something to be said for how writing Sanskrit made Raghavan feel as part of a tradition and nation. That dimension is also important to consider, and could be considered a deeper underlying impetus behind his larger project to revive Sanskrit and to write Sanskrit poems and plays.

Critics of Modern Sanskrit: Infection in the Sanskrit Breeds?¹²

Since this dissertation marks, to my knowledge, one of the very first attempts by a Euro-American scholar to offer a detailed and lengthy study of twentieth-century Sanskrit literature, I want to start by providing something of a literature review of the scholarship that both denigrates this material and, in some significant ways, adds to its study by providing clues as to how it might more profitably be approached. Indeed, even those scholars who consider Sanskrit a dead or diseased language do have something to offer by way of understanding such material, though I disagree with the negativity of the judgment and the implication in their work that further research ought to be foreclosed. The discussion herein should provide something of a methodological starting point for engaging with Raghavan’s works.

¹² With all due respect to Emily Dickinson’s line “infection in the sentence breeds,” from “A Word Dropped Carelessly on a Page” (1873).

In the fledgling field of study of colonial and postcolonial Sanskrit, the prospect of periodization and nomenclature is rather diverse and quite imprecise, and I should attend to that briefly before addressing larger questions about modern Sanskrit's status. The term "twentieth-century" has been used in a number of Indian publications on these works, and I have used it here in the title to at least signal that this material is relatively quite recent. This project focuses on Sanskrit works written between about 1931 and 1972 (roughly the era of Raghavan's writing activity), and thus one could say the era and region is "late colonial to early postcolonial Tamil Nadu," but that is something of a mouthful for a title even if it is the most precise descriptor of where these works fall in the time-space continuum. I have avoided the shorthand "contemporary," a word often used in describing this literature, precisely because of its imprecision: these works were written, at the latest, four decades ago and prior to my own birth. What marker or rupture then demarcates the domain of the "contemporary"? Were this dissertation to address works written in the past few years, then perhaps "contemporary" would be applicable, but Raghavan's works primarily speak within and to a historical moment almost half century ago.

There is a danger in suggesting that what is modern is marked by the new ideas and literary modes of so-called "modernity." I have used the word "modern" frequently merely as a shorthand way for signifying that something is recent, but indeed the modernity of Raghavan's works is a subject of larger investigation here. The works themselves tend to contradict such an interested descriptor as "modern": colonial and postcolonial Sanskrit texts attempt to bridge the gap between past and present in ways that speak to issues of literary modernity and national identity formation through the construction of historical imaginings in the form of continuities with a long-lost Sanskrit cosmopolis shunted into an *illo tempore* of eternity. In other words,

these texts erase their own periodization as part of their very rhetoric. To then classify them as either “modern” or “derivative” is thereby to violently instill Euro-American historical periodizations on material that itself experiences time in a heterogenous manner.¹³ Still, this rhetoric that erases historicity is a product of its time of composition and the classicist and nationalist discourses such rhetoric attempted to serve. If it would be problematic to insist on a clean break between past and modern materials, one can at least isolate works ostensibly inscribed in a certain time period, and bearing the marks of that time of inscription, yet whose composition is necessarily more historically diffuse by virtue of recycling languages and styles of the past to shape them into works that bespeak their presents.

While the mere existence of modern Sanskrit literature should indicate that it is worth studying,¹⁴ there has been something of a prejudice against this material in the Euro-American academy, and the declaration and assumption of Sanskrit’s “death” has at least served to keep attention diverted from it, if not utterly to block its study. As a result, there are precious few examples of good research on modern Sanskrit, and fewer still on literary works. Before this dissertation proceeds any further, it will prove instructive to present a frank discussion of the critiques of modern Sanskrit, the responses to those critiques, and a brief survey of the extent literature on the subject. This discussion will show how I locate my own work within these debates and scholarship, and how this dissertation marks a new course in that scholarship. I hope it will also be helpful to future scholars who might want to attempt close studies of other modern Sanskritists, a course of research I heartily invite. That said, at times the critiques are correct in

¹³ See, e.g. Partha Chatterjee, “The Nation in Heterogenous Time,” Chapter 1 of *The Politics of the Governed, Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), for a longer discussion of the multiple times of the Indian public in the postcolonial situation. See also the concluding section of Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁴ Though I realize that this very statement echoes an “encyclopedic” model of research that reflects a colonialist epistemic model, my point is not that its existence necessitates scholars merely catalogue it, and thereby dominate it, but rather that scholars engage this material and its authors through critical questioning and productive dialogue.

their assessment, and worthy of consideration from a methodological viewpoint, even if their judgmental disdain is unwarranted.

In the past decade, the question of whether or not Sanskrit is a dead language has sparked a fair amount of debate and a few essays. One scintilla of this discussion was Sheldon Pollock's "The Death of Sanskrit," in which he argues that "Sanskrit as a communicative medium in contemporary India is completely denaturalized. Its cultivation constitutes largely an exercise in nostalgia for those directly involved, and, for outsiders, a source of bemusement that such communication takes place at all. Government feeding tubes and oxygen tanks may try to preserve the language in a state of quasi-animation, but most observers would agree that, in some crucial way, Sanskrit is dead."¹⁵ Pollock posits Sanskrit as surviving merely in a persistent vegetative state, its remaining proponents and speakers merely lost in nostalgic writing for a limited audience. He cites an 1857 Gujarati poem that declares "the language of the gods has died," though I wonder if this may have more to do with the coming of the Raj than with the demise of the language itself.¹⁶ Further, he argues that Sanskrit lost the ability to "make literary newness, or as a tenth-century writer put it, 'the capacity continually to reimagine the world.'"¹⁷ Throughout this dissertation, I will be at pains to show, contrary to this tenth-century writer and Pollock, that Raghavan's project indeed succeeds at reimagining the world, and Indian history, within his Sanskrit texts, even if that reimagination was never fully communicated or effective.

Pollock's story begins in Kashmir during the heyday of twelfth-century Sanskrit works, but for Pollock that is the final hurrah. After that, he recounts numerous resurgences of Sanskrit

¹⁵ Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2001): 392-426: 393.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 414.

works, but they all fail to be “serious” or able “to create new literature.”¹⁸ His discussion of literature in Vijayanagara (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries) details the ways in which works of literature, and especially drama, were concerned with the project of promoting the empire, and due to their involvement with the political and historical time, did not reach a wide readership.¹⁹ For Pollock, the lack of readership and the emphasis on the political appear to be faults of this material. He then discusses some of the major innovations of the *navya* Sanskrit scholars of the seventeenth century, particularly those under the sway of the Mughal empire, and pays particular attention to one Jagannātha (d. ca 1670), a poet who was quite innovative. But for Pollock, Jagannātha was something of an anomaly whose death marks the end of a new experiment and the end of widely circulated new Sanskrit material. From the eighteenth century, while Sanskrit was studied and written extensively, new works were not circulated, which Pollock, somehow, decides must mean they were not very good. While many courts continued to promote Sanskrit, it was either not circulated or it consisted merely of derivative reiterations of earlier material.²⁰ For Pollock, the fact that the published texts repeat and do not renew, duplicate past realities rather than “supplement” realities, means that Sanskrit had ceased to be a language in which new thoughts were produced. It became merely a bastion of those disinterested in the political realm, uninterested in revitalization, and consumed with “prestige and exclusivity,”²¹ all of which descriptors are precisely the opposite of Raghavan’s attitude.

While I am indebted to Pollock’s work and insight on a number of points, particularly his discussions of the first millennium Sanskrit cosmopolis and other research on Sanskrit aesthetics, Pollock’s argument for Sanskrit’s demise seems to fetishize originality and ignores the

¹⁸ Ibid., 397-398.

¹⁹ Ibid., 413

²⁰ Ibid., 413-414.

²¹ Ibid., 418.

possibility that recycled old works can mean something new in new instances of utterance, like Borges's Pierre Menard. This fetish of the new ignores, too, the fact that originality is not necessarily of fundamental importance within the Sanskrit literary tradition; the anxiety of influence is not always, as in the Euro-American world according to Harold Bloom, about besting one's forefathers but often, rather, about honoring them and following within a tradition, even if also marking new paths within it. As Wendy Doniger notes, "What literary critics call the anxiety of influence works in the other direction in India. The individual artist composing a text or performing a ritual can make innovations, but she demonstrates first her knowledge of the traditions of the past and only then her ability to build upon them and even to reverse them."²² But this does not mean that all Sanskrit is merely nostalgic, and in a recent publication Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb argue convincingly that innovation has been a significant dimension of Sanskrit literary history. There have certainly been developments over time as authors have introduced new ideas and themes, and in many instances authors valorize newness itself.²³ It seems to me, then, that it is prudent to demand neither innovation nor continuity in Sanskrit literature, nor to consider the absence or presence of either quality to be determinative of the current state of the tradition. Rather, it would be best to observe how Sanskrit writers themselves consider their works, or, in the absence of explicit declarations, to see how their works partake of both oldness and newness. In this dissertation, my approach is to explore how Raghavan, through his original Sanskrit literature, navigates between the past and the present, between trying to maintain continuity and create new innovative material, and between the Euro-American world and colonial and postcolonial India.

²² Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (NY: Penguin, 2009), 26.

²³ See Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, "Introduction," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-31.

Pollock's critique of the limited impact of modern Sanskrit on the Indian population is certainly warranted, as the audience was not and could not have been terribly large. However, a major flaw of Pollock's argument is that he *does not actually cite or investigate any twentieth-century Sanskrit literature*. This is the case with almost all of the other scholars below who comment on modern Sanskrit, with a few important exceptions. This dissertation is an attempt to investigate this material, not to adjudicate the correctness of Pollock's autopsy report, since even he eventually rejects the metaphor of a language as living or dead, but rather to understand what it meant for Raghavan to write in Sanskrit, and what his writings express or attempt to communicate to his audience, real or imagined. Further, despite Pollock's concern for reception, I contend that Raghavan's dramas were performed and did speak to a limited audience of mostly, but not entirely, Tamil Brahmins, and to the extent that they were the audience, we can read the texts as circulating even within this limited milieu. Even Raghavan's poems circulated among the intelligentsia throughout India, and many Indian scholars and politicians wrote to him about these poems as well as the plays. I would also suggest that impact is an imprecise measure of the significance of work in so far as a text even if unread can reveal something valuable about patterns of thoughts and human creative engagement. Literature need not *only* communicate between author and reader, but can also *express* a particular viewpoint of an author.²⁴

Sudipta Kaviraj takes Sheldon Pollock's argument in a different direction by emphasizing the extent to which Sanskrit operated as the lingua franca of a certain knowledge-system that, while it underwent changes in the seventeenth century, it atrophied and was largely replaced by English as the language of a modern episteme under the rule of the British. Kaviraj is primarily concerned with the decline of Sanskrit as an intellectual language, but this leaves open the

²⁴ My thanks to Prof. Karen Coelho of the Madras Institute of Development Studies for pointing out this helpful distinction in her response to a paper I gave there. It is an idea that has stayed with me and influenced, in part, the conclusion chapter.

question of whether literature escapes this significant paradigm shift brought on by colonialism. On this, Kaviraj avers that: “Aesthetic theories from traditional Sanskrit texts fell into disuse, and intellectual discourse turned decisively to modern European aesthetic language.”²⁵ And yet, those aesthetic theories seem to have “continued an underground existence” in vernacular literature and remained very much alive. Certainly Raghavan as a theorist of aesthetics was quite familiar with traditional Sanskrit aesthetics, and he deploys them extensively and in novel ways within his works. Moreover, as I will attempt to show, he attempts to navigate between both Sanskrit and European aesthetic and conceptual concerns, in part as a response to colonialism and a creative engagement with it in the postcolonial era. Again, Raghavan stands at the confluence of the Ganges and the Thames and attempts to fuse the epistemes.

Kaviraj begins his essay by pointing out the significance of displays of Sanskritic virtuosity by the eighteenth-century Bengali poet Bhattachandra Ray, and suggests that Sanskrit by this time “exerts a distant, decaying, indirect influence as a high reference point, but so high that it is already becoming inaccessible.”²⁶ He further suggests that, “High Sanskrit skills are becoming more scarce, and consequently they are greatly valued but insufficiently understood and reproduced.”²⁷ While this may be the case in modern India, it needs to be said that it does not necessarily apply to all places and all groups. Within a certain group of Tamil Brahmins trained in Sanskrit and steeped in it from a young age, such as Raghavan, Sanskrit is neither scarce nor inaccessible. Again, just because Sanskrit lacked significant circulation, prominence, and comprehensibility in some circles does not mean that such was the case in all parts of India. Being rarefied does not negate the possibility of significance, as much recent theoretical writing

²⁵ Sudipta Kaviraj, “The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005): 119-142, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

of the “post” persuasion proves by its very practice. Still, the notion of this literature as having a high register is a worthwhile critique and important to keep in mind.

Kaviraj’s article points to another common means for dismissing modern Sanskrit: it has been bastardized by the influx of European scholarship and the European episteme. It has been turned into a mere “classical” language of the “other,” subjected to radical discourses of orientalism and archaism. Two scholars from the Subaltern Studies group support this notion. In a footnote in the now-classic *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes: “Sanskrit learning enjoyed a brief renaissance under British rule in the early part of the nineteenth century. But this revival of Sanskrit should not be confused with the question of survival of an intellectual tradition. Modern research and studies in Sanskrit have on the whole been undertaken within the intellectual frameworks of the European human sciences.”²⁸ This is an accurate assessment of the impact of European thought on modern Sanskrit, but Chakrabarty misses the fact, which I will be illustrating frequently, that Raghavan’s writing about and in Sanskrit within the framework of European human sciences (e.g. within the categories of religion, culture, history, etc.) forms the means and the method both of his cause of creating a nationalist culture and also of his subaltern attempt to invert and provincialize European intellectual frameworks and thereby reimagine India as a world power.

In a similar vein, in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims: “One effect of establishing a version of the British system was the development of an uneasy separation between disciplinary formation in Sanskrit studies and the native, now alternative, tradition of Sanskrit ‘high culture.’ Within the former, the cultural explanations

²⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 258, fn., 13.

generated by authoritative scholars matched the epistemic violence of the legal project.”²⁹ I will be talking further about this notion of the British system, and Raghavan’s response to it, in the Chapter 2. Spivak is correct in her assessment about the impacts of the British education system, although it is somewhat contradicted by reading of Raghavan as an “authoritative scholar” who insisted upon Sanskrit as “high culture,” precisely because he was on both sides of the demarcating line she draws between colonizer and colonized. There is certainly a way of reading Raghavan’s elitist project of Sanskrit promotion as a program of epistemic violence that simultaneously subjugated non-Brahmin ideas and was deleterious to the ancient ways of thinking about Sanskrit. But all of that is to ignore the matter from Raghavan’s perspective: he thought he was doing *good* for the country. He viewed Sanskrit as a matter of nationalist uplift and cohesion. He was, on my reading, inverting Macaulay’s civilizing project for nationalist means, which is precisely what Spivak says, in a fashion. But from Raghavan’s perspective, it was a project intended not as an elite subjugation of subalterns but rather as a means of postcolonial identity formation that championed the native over the colonial. We can read this twentieth-century promotion of Sanskrit for the nation as a problematic instance of elite hegemony, or, to allow Raghavan some agency in the matter, we could also consider it a form of creative mimicry and an attempt to reclaim and valorize one’s own tradition.

Spivak and Chakrabarty, Pollock and Kaviraj, all seem to take modern Sanskrit to be infected, plagued by the disease of the colonial project, its former purity compromised. This argument is itself nonsensical nostalgia for a lost “purity,” a nostalgia for some imagined era of Sanskrit’s virginity. Sanskrit has frequently undergone development based on interactions with other cultures and even the non-Brahmin castes. Thus there is no cause to dismiss or disqualify

²⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313: 282.

modern material for not living up to some expectation of natural purity, and instead there is good reason to explore this modern Sanskrit material for the ways in which it negotiates the (post)colonial experience. Indeed, part of the confusion might lie precisely in the fact that these scholars are thinking entirely about Sanskrit studies and Sanskrit itself, and not consulting anything written in the language. Had they done so, they might have come to very different conclusions about modern Sanskrit, as I want to suggest is possible through a study of Raghavan's creations.

Furthermore, in so far as this material is merely "nostalgic," that critique fails to acknowledge the propensity of Sanskrit itself to be communicative *of* this nostalgia and pastness that is, for some, an important dimension of Indian historicity, a means of rooting an essence in the past through literature and language for largely nationalist purposes. So it might be that modern Sanskrit merely fantasizes about continuities with an imagined past, and some supposed "authentic voice" might be muffled by the gag of the dominant Euro-American discourses of nationalism and bound by other aspects (aesthetic, educational, theoretical) of Euro-American intellectual production. But these are not reasons to write it off or handcuff inquiry, but rather to engage the material as a fruitful site for understanding colonial and postcolonial literary and knowledge production, to listen to what people were writing in the medium. Or, put another way, it is time to start thinking of modern Sanskrit not as sickeningly infected by Europe but rather as intriguingly inflected by Europe through the creative work of modern Sanskrit authors.

Toward a More Productive Study of Modern Sanskrit

I am not alone in taking issue with the notion that Sanskrit is dead. In response to Pollock's and Kaviraj's essays, Brian Hatcher suggests a useful approach to the issue. He points

out the strange fact that Pollock declares Sanskrit dead then renounces metaphor in the next breath. I concur that languages, as inanimate entities, cannot be said to “die” and rather the question is whether people are saying something or attempting to communicate in them. Languages are tools, and Raghavan certainly used Sanskrit, as do many others even today. Hatcher rightly points out that despite Pollock’s renunciation of the metaphor, his essay is shot through with a sense that Sanskrit is indeed dead and reads like a eulogy for Sanskrit’s past. Hatcher, who is often keen to note eclecticism and hybridity, rightly notes the essentialism (he calls it linguism) in Pollock’s decree when he writes: “To say that their Sanskrit is no longer living is to run the risk of appearing to advocate a normative vision for what counts as true or authentic Sanskrit.”³⁰ The language is not without extensive variation in time as well as space. However much Sanskrit may no longer be the lingua franca of India, or even the language of intellectual pursuits in India, it is still read and studied, it is still influential in literary circles, and it is still, even as a mere symbol of itself, pertinent to modern Indian thought. Whether this influence is a natural extension of the Sanskritic intellectual *paramparā* (lineage) or an extension of colonial intervention is, I think, a pointless question: it exists, and the question remains how and why people make use of it. Hatcher’s article points to the role of Sanskrit, even just Sanskrit *śāstric* language, in Bengali works of the colonial era, and rightly points out the complexity of vernacularization as even vernacular texts do cite Sanskrit works. I would add that even modern English philosophical tracts written and published in India, as well as nationalist and fundamentalist propaganda, are often riddled with Sanskrit quotes, and thus we cannot speak of a complete absence of Sanskritic learning within modern intellectual pursuits in India, even if not everyone can read Sanskrit and it often merely stands as a symbol of authority. Hatcher

³⁰ Brian Hatcher, “Sanskrit and the Morning After: The Metaphorics and Theory of Intellectual Change,” *Indian Economic Social History Review*, Vol. 44 (2007): 333-361.

convincingly argues that despite any “desuetude” (Kaviraj’s word) of Sanskrit, we cannot merely ignore those who chose to write in and with Sanskrit, and the choice of those colonials to do so is worth studying. I would aver that the same holds for postcolonial Sanskritists.

In an insightful essay that features a careful study of the *Haṃsa Sandeśa* of Vedānta Deśika (1268-1368), Yigal Bronner and David Shulman respond to Pollock’s claim of the death of Sanskrit with a blunt “we disagree.”³¹ Their essay reveals the deep and rich intertextuality and local flavor of Vedānta Deśika’s text even as it reworks Kālidāsa’s famous *Meghasandēśa*. Pollock could respond to them by pointing out that their example precedes his stated expiration date for Sanskrit poetic innovation and meaningfulness, and that he himself cites Jagannātha, who was active centuries later, as a valid example of lively Sanskrit literature. What Bronner and Shulman offer, however, is not merely a counterexample but a new set of tools for thinking about Sanskrit texts in the vernacular millennium. They show the ways that Vedānta Deśika’s poem is innovative and rich thanks to its intertextual engagement with a variety of different sources, from classical Sanskrit to local Tamil literary traditions. Without even having to take recourse to historical political conditions, they show the depth of the poem as an impressive piece of literature that is palpably of its place. They attempt also to theorize “regional Sanskrit” in the second millennium, discussing the ways in which authors worked in polyglossic environments, with various cross-fertilizations. Although this regional Sanskrit often spoke only to a limited audience, what it lacked in circulatory breadth, it made up for in intertextual and intratextual depth. Their work offers a useful rubric for thinking about and appreciating the novelty and creativity of modern Sanskrit works during and after colonialism, as well as in a Tamil milieu.

³¹ Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, “‘A Cloud Turned Goose’: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43:1 (2006): 28.

The significance of Sanskrit in modern literary pursuits is the main focus of Simona Sawhney's book *The Modernity of Sanskrit*. Despite the title, her important work does not actually address Sanskrit materials written in the modern period but rather makes some very important observations about the significance of Sanskrit literature and thought within modern Indian literature and thought. Her chapters are about modern readings of Kālidāsa by Rabindranath Tagore and Hazariprasad Dvivedi, the relationship between various modern Hindi writers and Kālidāsa, Gandhi's reading of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and a play based on the *Mahābhārata*. Despite the fact that Sawhney does not deal directly with modern works in Sanskrit, her observations about Sanskrit's valence within modern literature are certainly pertinent to the discussion at hand. For Sawhney, Sanskrit texts in modern literature are Janus-faced, given modern interpretations while at the same time harkening back to the past: "Sanskrit texts appear in our world as signs of themselves, allegories of (Hindu-Indian) antiquity. Today, when these texts elicit attention, they elicit not reading as much as passion: the love of those who are driven by fidelity to an origin, for whom Sanskrit becomes a prop in the staging of a violent drama of cultural continuity, and the hatred of all those to whom both origin and history appear as a relentless saga of injustice."³² As I will show, this affective relationship with Sanskrit and its historicity is strongly present within Raghavan's writings.

Sawhney significantly points to the idea of Sanskrit as a linguistic medium in and of itself, though she does not develop this idea explicitly. She is also primarily interested in Sanskrit's complicated historical positioning, as both past and present. She points also to the problematic place of Sanskrit as the language of orthodoxy in contrast to reformist movements within the nationalist movement, and the role of colonials in solidifying Sanskrit's position as the

³² Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 4-5.

language of both ancient knowledge and non-modernity and elitism. In terms of Sanskrit's relationship to nationalism, Sawhney rightly points out the ways in which modern literature has harkened back to Sanskrit as a means of creating a past that can generate a national historicity. But throughout her work she is interested primarily in this tension between past and present in Sanskrit. Certainly that tension is important for our understanding of modern Sanskrit, but for Raghavan Sanskrit is not merely the ancient other. For him, as a Sanskritist and a Brahmin raised with Sanskrit as part of his own heritage, living among those who regularly recited Sanskrit verses, Sanskrit is a lively and living language. Certainly he acknowledged its decline, as his attempts at revival indicate, but he saw it and experienced it as endangered but not extinct.

Other scholars have recently addressed the status of Sanskrit in the past two centuries. Brian Hatcher has written a great deal on Sanskrit in colonial Bengal. Victor A. van Biljert has an article on this as well, and there is also Corstiaan J.G. van der Burg's useful essay about Sanskrit in neo-Hindu discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³³ Adi Hastings's dissertation on the Samskrita Bharati spoken Sanskrit movement offers an instructive study of this group's efforts over the past few decades to teach and thereby revive Sanskrit in India.³⁴ His observations on modern Sanskrit linguistics and the significance of Sanskrit for the Samskrita Bharati group are insightful. Laurie Patton has embarked on an intriguing ethnographic research agenda researching women Sanskritists in modern India. Her study reveals that for older women (just a bit younger than Raghavan's generation) who lived through the era of Gandhi and

³³ See Victor van Biljert, "Sanskrit and Hindu National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," and Corstiaan van der Burg, "The Place of Sanskrit in Neo-Hindu Ideologies: From Religious Reform to National Awakening," in Jan E.M. Houben, ed. *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 347-382.

³⁴ Adi Merwan Hastings, *Past Perfect, Future Perfect: Sanskrit Revival and the Hindu Nation in Contemporary India*, PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2004. Adi Hastings also wrote a brilliant piece with Paul Manning about the importance of alterity as a component of identity formation, particularly pertaining to language. It has subtly informed my thought in this dissertation, particularly the opposition between Sanskrit and Tamil. I owe thanks to Eric Gurevitch, one of the few other young scholars working on modern Sanskrit, for this reference. Adi Hastings and Paul Manning, "Introduction: Acts of Alterity," *Language and Communication* 24 (2004): 291-311.

colonialism, Sanskrit was more of a matter of culture than a religious language, and was part of a general humanistic and nationalist movement that did not perceive Sanskrit as elite or limited. For a younger generation, Sanskrit was a “marker of Hindu identity” and was far more a “religious” or “spiritual” language.³⁵ This observation suggests that Sanskrit’s perceived religiosity is context-specific. These categories of “culture” and “religion,” while imported from Europe, were important to Raghavan’s consideration and discussion of Sanskrit, but they were also the categorical demarcation against which he attempted to struggle and formulate his own unified theory. In light of Patton’s work, it would seem Raghavan’s perspective spans across the two generational perspectives on Sanskrit, and the resulting fusion informs his literary works.

This variable understanding of Sanskrit as “culture” and/or “religion” is reflected in the efforts of the Sanskrit Commission of 1956, on which Raghavan served, to mask religion under the guise of culture in order to make Sanskrit more palatable to a heterogeneous audience. This helpful insight is one of many important contributions to this study of modern Sanskrit in Sumathi Ramaswamy’s article “Sanskrit for the Nation,” which provides a very insightful examination of the Sanskrit Commission and its proposal of Sanskrit as the national language of India. Many of her descriptions are precisely in line with some of Raghavan’s writings on Sanskrit that we will look at in the next chapter. During the Official Language Commission of 1955-1956, which occurred during the debates over the reorganization of States along linguistic lines, the commissioners of the Official Language Commission averred that Sanskrit was important for the nation and that Sanskrit literature had served as a wellspring for literary production as well as morality. The government then established the Sanskrit Commission, chaired by S.K. Chatterjee and supported by some of the twentieth century’s greatest

³⁵ Laurie Patton, “Women, the Freedom Movement, and Sanskrit: Notes on Religion and Colonialism from the Ethnographic Present,” in Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde, eds., *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*, (NY: Routledge, 2010) 79-91, 84.

Sanskritists, among them R.N. Dandekar, S.K. De, and our own V. Raghavan. The Sanskrit Commission was charged with the duty of supporting Sanskrit education and promoting Sanskrit as the national language so as to combat, as they wrote in their report, ““The growing fissiparous tendencies and linguistic parochialism which are jeopardising the political unity of the country,”” for they saw Sanskrit as ““the Supreme Unifier”” and ““the Great Unifying Force.””³⁶ This view of Sanskrit as capable of implementing national union appears very frequently in Raghavan’s English writings about Sanskrit (as does the word, “fissiparous,” representing the opposite sentiment). The Sanskrit Commission viewed Sanskrit as the glue that could hold the country together and thus they saw it as the ideal national language. On Ramaswamy’s analysis, their efforts rhetorically convert Sanskrit “into a metonym for the nation, as voiced in the formulation ‘Sanskrit is India,’” thus offering it as both a unifier and a synecdoche in which Sanskrit becomes representative of all India, thus causing an “erasure” of the parts of the whole.³⁷

In service of this nationalist project for Sanskrit, the Commission made another move to secularize Sanskrit as much as possible so as to avoid the impression that their intent was merely to institutionalize Hinduism as the national religion at the expense of other traditions.

Ramaswamy writes that the members of the commission “labored hard, at one level, to distance the language from the religion with which it had become exclusively defined over at least the past two centuries of Orientalist scholarship....Since Hinduism could not be officially privileged in the emergent national culture, and since Sanskrit had to function as the common medium of that national culture, it followed that the reputation of Sanskrit as the hegemonic scriptural language of Hinduism had to be disavowed.”³⁸ Even though in the early twentieth century, certain actors had made headway unifying the nation against the Raj by waving the flag of

³⁶ Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Sanskrit for the Nation,” *Modern Asian Studies* 33:2 (May 1999): 339-381, 344.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 341.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 363.

Hinduism, given the challenge of dealing with plural religions in India, those same actors could not outright promote Hinduism as that which could unify India and, thus “Sanskrit (re)emerges in the vacuum created by Hinduism’s retreat as a potential ‘great unifier.’”³⁹ But Hinduism did not merely disappear from the scene, instead it receded into the background and diffused into other categories: “The undertow of unmarked Hinduism is visible in every other page of the Commission’s report, even as (Hindu) ‘religion’ is resignified as ‘morality’ or ‘culture.’”⁴⁰ Once diffused into “culture,” and combined with a strongly perceived necessity of propagating that “culture” in order to build a better nation, “religion” then becomes the subject of cultural performances that claim to be “secular” but nonetheless promulgate a strongly religious message.

In my analysis of Raghavan’s literary works, I will provide evidence of how this subsuming of religion within “culture” takes place, but I will also argue that for Raghavan it was not so much a matter of hiding religion behind the mask of culture but rather demanding their fusion together, rejecting European categorizations and insisting that Sanskrit could assist not just India but also the whole world. He sought not just unity through Sanskrit for a newborn Indian nation but also unity for the human sciences and humanity through Sanskrit. Thus religion, especially in his efforts to promote both Indian and global religious unity, is never hidden at all in his expository and literary writings. Yet, despite this image of unity, in some places in his work suggestions of Hindu superiority do hide below the surface, including, as I will argue, in his longest play, *Anārkālī*.

For all these attempts to push back against Pollock et. al.’s decree of Sanskrit’s death, not a single one of these works looks at Sanskrit *literature* written in the past century. This is not to say that literature has some privileged position, but it is to argue that we can get a better picture

³⁹ Ibid., 377.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 363.

of Sanskrit's status in modern India if we look at what people are actually *writing* in the language and not only what they say about it. Within the Euro-American academic world, I am familiar with one recently published book chapter by V. Narayana Rao that attempts such a feat.⁴¹ The essay looks at the famous Telugu author Viswanatha Satyanarayana's Sanskrit play *Amṛta-śarmiṣṭham*, written in 1950 (but published in 1975). Narayana Rao writes that Satyanarayana rejected some of the aesthetic demands of his day (many under the influence of Western ideals, particularly ideals of love as a human phenomenon) and instead revived many aspects of traditional Telugu and Sanskrit literature, but he was nonetheless innovative in Sanskrit. In *Amṛta-śarmiṣṭham*, Satyanarayana reimagines the story of Yayāti from the *Mahābhārata*, but injects it with his own take on the sentiment of love, fusing traditional forms and styles with a modern aesthetics that yet rejects colonial modernity. He uses the example of Satyanarayana to show that, "Sanskrit can be and is used to express modern sensibilities,"⁴² and he shows how Satyanarayana's "imagination creates a modernity on the foundation of tradition."⁴³ In this short essay, Narayana Rao provides a useful model of how a scholar might mine a modern Sanskrit text that might appear "traditional," searching for subtle and interesting signs of modernity and for voices in Sanskrit that respond critically to the modern world.

In another useful and perceptive essay, David Mason studies Krishnamachari's colonial-era translation of *Midsummer Night's Dream* into Sanskrit. Although the work is a translation and not an original Sanskrit work, Mason shows how the translator refashioned Shakespeare's play into the style of Kālidāsa. By doing so, the translator subsumes the Bard, and by extension Englishness, to Sanskrit cultural superiority. As Mason argues convincingly, the translation is

⁴¹ Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Modernity in Sanskrit?: Viswanatha Satyanarayana's *Amṛta-śarmiṣṭham*" in Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, eds. *Innovation and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 714-738.

⁴² Ibid., 719.

⁴³ Ibid., 729.

“less concerned with writing back to the empire than with exploiting imperial culture in order to aggrandize the tradition of Kalidasa.”⁴⁴ Krishnamacari’s text presents a helpful example of how modern Sanskrit does not merely bow to European superiority, nor become fully infected by it, but can actually respond to it in meaningful ways.

While Narayana Rao and David Mason are two of only a handful of scholars in Euro-American circles who, to my knowledge, have written about modern Sanskrit texts, Sanskrit scholars in India have studiously researched, commented, and catalogued much of the Sanskrit literature written during the twentieth century, and there have been numerous publications in India of books and volumes addressing everything from modern dramas to modern messenger poems. This research, while certainly valuable, is often cursory and in the form of broad surveys or catalogs. Of the numerous scholastic works on modern Sanskrit literature that I have read, I have yet to find one that takes seriously the political and historical environments in which this literature was produced. For example, studies on modern Sanskrit dramas will mention some surface changes – such as the absence of Prakrit or the lack of standard *nāndī* and *bharatavākya* verses – or new themes such as “modern society,” and then go on to offer a grand survey of numerous works and brief summaries. Indeed, this lack of critical socio-cultural analysis, and the accompanying tendency toward superficial philological studies, has often been bemoaned by Euro-American scholars as the status quo within Indian scholarship on Sanskrit today.⁴⁵ For these reasons, I have largely left most of those sources out of this dissertation, although I have certainly perused them. They do at times mention Raghavan’s plays in a cursory fashion, and Usha Satyavrat’s *Sanskrit Dramas of the Twentieth Century* does give satisfyingly lengthy

⁴⁴ David V. Mason, “Who Is the Indian Shakespeare? Appropriations of Authority in a Sanskrit “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” *New Literary History* 33:4 (Autumn, 2003): 639-658, 640.

⁴⁵ Sheldon Pollock being chief among them. See, e.g., Sheldon Pollock, “Crisis in the Classics,” *Social Research* Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring 2011): 21-48.

descriptions of some of Raghavan plays.⁴⁶ However, in her brief analytical sections her questions are about content and literary quality, and she does not ask, as I will try to do, how the works display critical responses to the conditions of colonial and postcolonial modernity or ideations of culture and religion in a post-European, nationalist Indian episteme.

Further, for these scholars of modern Sanskrit, the question of why someone would write in Sanskrit in the modern era, and what it might mean, do not arise, as the answers seem to be presupposed: it is still a living and evolving language and it is the best of all languages. These presuppositions foreclose probing critical questions of historical and political contexts, not to mention inquiring about the personal perspectives of the authors. More problematically, the extant secondary sources from India about modern Sanskrit literature have a strikingly laudatory flavor – seldom is heard a discouraging word. The respect displayed toward recent writers of Sanskrit literature (as to their forbearers) is borderline hagiographical. Since much of this research seems intended to be supportive of the enterprise of modern Sanskrit literary composition, it lacks a critical distance from which one might pose analytical questions about the authors' and works' ideological underpinnings and their associations with contemporary culture, religion, and politics. In fact, the lack of such an analytical approach leaves open the possibility that these texts can be considered by Indian scholars/*sahṛdayas* as both of the present and entirely continuous with an ancient literary tradition. Yet historical criticism need not pull off the mask of ancientness entirely, and a nuanced approach can historicize while recognizing the significance of the historicity of the literary. It can address literature's place within a chain of imagined iterables that impinge upon the meaning of a work's content and form without merely reducing modern Sanskrit to a contrived creation of contemporary conditions or a simple

⁴⁶ Usha Satyavrat, *Sanskrit Dramas of the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Meharchand Lachmandas, 1971).

continuity. In short, the extant secondary sources on the subject from Indian scholars have not been able to answer the questions that seem important to me. Perhaps my questions presuppose that modern Sanskrit is an incongruity or oddity, but it is better to ask questions than presume to know the answer, and it is better to probe rather than to perpetuate propaganda that praises modern Sanskrit literature without much nuance or insight.

Nevertheless, if this dissertation is going to attempt to offer a study of modern Sanskrit that is constantly conscious of contexts, and if it laments the tendency in contemporary indigenous scholarship not to do so, I run the risk of implying that my work offers a *better* approach that the Indian scholarship somehow *lacks*. In short, I run the risk of reiterating Orientalist conceits. In response, it is not enough to claim that, like Lady Macbeth who cannot unsex herself, I cannot unwhite myself, nor un-Euro-American myself, nor un-History of Religions myself. I am always already infected by the discourses in which and for which I work. Nor can I negate the fact that my work, in so far as it serves to inform theoretical concerns about religion and literature, necessarily renders Raghavan and Sanskrit literature transparent, co-opting them for an “imperialist” project of knowledge production for a Hyde Park metropole. Despite these concerns, I would hope that my work might serve as a point of departure for a more fruitful exchange of modes of knowledge production between myself and Indian scholars, offering up the possibility of a Gadamerian fusion of horizons. Indeed, I am already conscious that I am complicit in Indian scholars’ attempts to prove Sanskrit alive and to give voice to this material. At the same time, I would hope that I might offer Indian scholars a more nuanced understanding of Raghavan and his project through a study of his works in their political, religious, and historical situatedness. If my study can reveal some of the deeper nuances of his works hidden beneath the veneers of mere “revival” and “continuity of tradition,” and beneath the mere surface level of the text itself, and thus show Indian scholars the deeper political and

religious messages that I see in Raghavan's works as products of their time and place, the result might be useful to Indian scholars of modern Sanskrit literature. Idealistic as this might be, I will endeavor to direct my work in such a way as to make such an exchange possible.

A word of caution is warranted, however, if I anticipate a future audience in India. In the present political climate in India, highlighting the significance of Sanskrit is a notably right-wing position associated with the Hindutva camp of the RSS, BJP, and VHP. Lest my project be viewed as complicit with right-wing ideology, it is important to clarify that the argument here is *not* about the significance of Sanskrit itself, nor does this dissertation offer a judgment, positive or negative, about the quality or significance of modern Sanskrit literature. The goal is not to promote Sanskrit, but to read through it to answer questions about what was said about it, in favor of it, and through it as a linguistic medium within a certain historical period. It is not to declare it alive or revived, or dead and gone, but rather to see what a particular prominent thinker tried to communicate through it. The task at hand is both to analyze this material for a better understanding of the history of Sanskrit but also to provide a more nuanced picture of globalized concepts of history, culture, aesthetics, nationalism, writing, literature, and religion in twentieth-century India. On a related note, it would be not only anachronistic but also careless to lump Raghavan in with the current Hindutva right-wing movement that has come to greater prominence over the past three and a half decades (roughly since Raghavan's death). He was neither a fanatic nor an ideologue.⁴⁷ Instead, as I will argue in the next chapter, it would be far more accurate to call Raghavan an example of a centrist Hindu voice, a conservative intellectual, the kind of voice that a number of current commentators say is, to their chagrin, lacking in

⁴⁷ At least his eldest son, R. Kalidas, insisted he was no fanatic during an interview (conducted 4/14/14), and my readings of Raghavan's work concur with this assessment.

modern India.⁴⁸ In the original formulation of this project, I did not intend to address such matters, but as Indian scholars have called for both tolerance and a place for non-right-wing Hindus in the public intellectual sphere, I have increasingly been able to see Raghavan as an example, albeit imperfect in some ways, of just such a voice from the past that is both traditional and modern, both Hindu and centrist, and perhaps even comparatively liberal. In more idealistic, less scholastic moments, I would like to think that my dissertation could add at least a mere peep to these important concerns about the lack of conservative intellectuals and the marginality of liberal Hindus, concerns that are presently circulating in Indian political commentaries.

(Un)theorizing Agency and Other Methodological Matters

Before continuing with this endeavor, I want to mention a few brief points of methodology not already mentioned in the previous section. The first pertains to matters of geographical nomenclature: since Raghavan wrote both before and after independence in 1947, standing with one foot in both colonial and postcolonial periods, he also stands with one foot in both South Asia and India. Since “India” did not exist except as an idea prior to 1947, it becomes very tricky to talk about his work and thought, particularly because he himself would posit that India, as Bharata, existed long before Independence as a distinct geographical and culture unity (united, according to him, by Sanskrit). In this dissertation, I have tried to be careful about nomenclature, referring, for example, to South Asian history when I mean it in a general sense and Indian history when I mean it from Raghavan’s perspective or after 1947. Slips may have occurred as the distinction itself is blurry, but it is important to note the difference at the outset.

⁴⁸ See e.g., Gurcharan Das, “The Dilemma of the Liberal Hindu,” in Wendy Doniger and Martha Nussbaum, eds. *Pluralism and Democracy in India: Debating the Hindu Right* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2015) 207-219; and Ramachandra Guha, “In Absentia: Where are India’s Conservative Intellectuals?” *Caravan Magazine*, March 1, 2015 (<http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/absentia-ramachandra-guha-indian-conservatives>).

A second matter of methodology concerns the question of what standards are necessary to consider a Sanskrit text to be modern. Must it merely have been written in the twentieth century, or does it have to contain elements that are identifiably “new”? Given the blurriness between past and present in these texts, trying to recognize newness in twentieth-century Sanskrit can be a difficult task. Some authors deliberately attempt new forms and styles, while others merely make minor changes. In the case of Raghavan, we are dealing with an extremely learned scholar who was familiar with the whole range of Sanskrit literary, religious, and philosophical sources, and his works most certainly build from the work of his predecessors. Many of his plays and their ideas have precedents in the Sanskrit and even Tamil traditions, however he does not always make these clear, nor are they always clear to me. Certainly his knowledge of the tradition far exceeds mine. At times, he claims to be doing something new in the tradition (such as writing a drama on a Muslim theme) when he is not necessarily innovative. In this dissertation, I have pointed out precedents where I recognize them and where pointing them out might illuminate the study. When I am not aware of precedents, or when I have deemed acknowledging or addressing at length precedents that are not critical to my argument, I have left them out of the discussion. From a theoretical standpoint, my method takes its cue from Borges’s story of Pierre Menard rewriting Don Quixote: even if Raghavan’s Sanskrit literary works have precedents, those elements take on new meanings when interpreted as written within and speaking to their twentieth-century context. Rather than a search for origins or a historical chronicle of Sanskrit history, this dissertation is concerned exclusively with the meanings of Raghavan’s works within the contexts of twentieth-century Indian and Euro-American thought, history, and authorship.

Essential to this dissertation's argument is a notion that Raghavan has some degree, however minimal, of creative agency. After decades of poststructuralist theory denying agency to authors, something of a pushback has surfaced in recent research and thought, and I hope that the observations here might contribute to that endeavor. A number of authors have argued against the hegemony of the creative agent over the meaning of the text: they have declared the author dead, deemed the author mere construction, or theorized creativity as the agency-less process of writing through the author.⁴⁹ Others have even claimed that agency is merely an illusion that provides a sense of empowerment.⁵⁰ There is value in knocking down "the author" a peg or two from the elevated pedestal of the divine creator conferred upon the author during the Enlightenment and Romantic literary eras. The idea of the purely sovereign subject, completely self sufficient and fully capable of any and all activity, is a fiction worthy of casting aside, especially if we are to take the impact of historical context at all seriously. Yet at a certain point, this correction appears to go too far, as some have noted.⁵¹

In one example of pushback against these denials of agency, and an example that is pertinent for this dissertation, Saba Mahmood's study of Muslim women in Egypt attempts to delink discourses on agency from their normally progressive and liberal foundations within a world of subversion of regimes of power in order to understand the actions of women who maintain pious behavior. Mahmood finds such feminist discourse to be overly consumed by discussions of the subversion of hegemony and the fight for freedom. One might find a similar issue within the discourses of subaltern studies that would tend to discredit modern Sanskrit as

⁴⁹ On this matter, see: Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148; Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (NY: Pantheon, 1984), 101-120; and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), esp., 52-65.

⁵⁰ This is Catherine Bell's notion of "redemptive hegemony." See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 84.

⁵¹ See, e.g.: William H. Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98, issue 1 (July 1992).

merely reiterative of hegemony. In this line of thinking, modern Sanskrit writers fall short of the benchmark for true agency predicated on a progressive model. That said, Mahmood is careful to avoid reaffirming the sense of the sovereign self and instead insists that the agency of the women she studies is “a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located.”⁵² This again makes agents into mechanisms. Still, I find useful her suggestion of thinking about agency outside of the bounds of a poststructuralist discourse and recuperating some sense of agency for those whom the Euro-American world regards as merely docile or authoritarian in their attempts to maintain traditions of the past. She also usefully notes that modernity does not represent a positive break with the past but rather the fractured realm of the present era allows for the recuperation and reinstatement of old ways of being and acting in through the agency of modern actors.⁵³ Indeed, one thesis of this dissertation is that modernity does not prevent the practice of writing modern Sanskrit from being a meaningful language for some to try to revive within a fractured world, and that modern creative agents are not necessarily deluded in their attempts to revive the past or to maintain tradition according to their sense of what that might mean within a modern world.

Yet much of this material that revives some sense of agency focuses on ritual, not literature, and while the literary practice itself is an act, it is a different sort of act than practices such as wearing hijab or offering gifts. Literature is different primarily because it is usually the action of one single agent. While an exchange with other people does occur upon publication, and by virtue of systems of publication and distribution, there is still the initial *act* of writing a text that is fundamentally new and is, or at least appears as, the work of a sovereign subject. How then might we conceive of the author, or perhaps “literary agent,” along lines of thought that

⁵² Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117

avoid the Scylla of the humanist sovereign subject and the Charybdis of the mere cultural action working through the individual? In a work focused on one particular author, such as this dissertation, it is impossible to avoid the notion that Raghavan, as a subject or self (however conditioned that “self” might be), had some impact on the materials he produced, that they are the product of his thought and abilities. On the other hand, we must be conscious of his existence within political structures, his classical and Orientalist training in Sanskrit, and the fact that he works with materials already given to him through colonial encounters and Sanskrit and Indian literary history.

There are numerous possible theories of authorship that might offer a path. One course between the two poles is a Romantic perspective that posits the author as a sort of middle figure who somehow channels nature.⁵⁴ But while overly emphasizing the political and contextual leads to mechanistic perspectives on authorship, imagining the author as an amanuensis for nature falls too far in the fantastical direction. In a different way, we might think of the author like Lévi-Strauss’s bricoleur, who takes bits and pieces from culturally significant paradigms and sorts them into syntagms.⁵⁵ Such a mechanistic model, with author as more of a sorter for no real reason, offers a useful contrast to the more Romantic perspective.⁵⁶

The problem with many of these theories, however, is that by positing authorship as a certain type of act that proceeds in a certain fashion, a model applicable in all cases, they reduce authorship to a theorem. Instead of trying to define Raghavan’s mode of composition as an answer to the question of *how* he writes Sanskrit, or how it is possible for him to write in an

⁵⁴ Such a theory is advocated by Northrop Frye: “But the poet, who writes creatively rather than deliberately, is not the father of his poem; he is at best a midwife, or, more accurately still, the womb of Mother Nature herself; her privates he, so to speak.” Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1957), 98.

⁵⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, translated from the French (Chicago: University Press, 1966), 150.

⁵⁶ Much of the foregoing analysis is a development of my undergraduate B.A. thesis’s conclusion’s attempt to understand the *ṛṣis* of the Rig Veda as bricoleurs and ultimately finding that and other theories of agency to be helpful but inadequate. This dissertation is something of an extension of that earlier concern for agency in Sanskrit but with new insight through a more focused approach on one far more recent author. See Charles S. Preston, *Weaving the Ṛṣis’ Minds; Unraveling the Bricoleur in Vedic India*. B.A. Thesis. Pomona College, 2003.

ancient language, I want to take two different approaches here. First, I suggest there might be some use in granting a loose sense of agency not in terms of some explanation of the process of authorship but rather as a heuristic device for understanding Raghavan. That approach has the advantage of avoiding foreclosure of the creative possibilities, and, instead, freeing up the process of analysis to proceed in multiple directions: toward either Romantic humanism or mechanistic contextualism, when the materials suggest different readings. My methodology generally conceives of Raghavan as an author whose life, historical and political contexts, Sanskrit medium, and knowledge of Sanskrit and other intellectual traditions are all part of a larger but looser web of interaction. My intent is to regard Raghavan neither as a genius of literary activity, nor as a mere product of his times, but to cycle among different readings of him as an author and advocate of Sanskrit as his poems and plays themselves suggest.

Secondly, rather than ask the question of *how* Raghavan wrote in Sanskrit in the twentieth century, I want to put more emphasis on the question of what it *meant for* Raghavan to write Sanskrit. Meaning is a vague concept, yes, but by “meant,” I mean not only the meanings in the texts and the meanings conveyed to an audience (which could be different), but also the meaning that writing in Sanskrit has for the person who engages in it. What it meant for Raghavan to write Sanskrit must include a discussion of his own sense of himself as creatively engaged in the Sanskrit tradition and living in the modern world. One possible answer to this dissertation’s primary question, then, is that writing Sanskrit was a matter of not just writing, and thereby imagining, a more perfect India rooted in Sanskrit, but also writing a Sanskritized self into existence. Further, in so far as his works were published and performed, writing Sanskrit fashioned something intermediary between self and the world: an imagined sense of belonging and community, the appearance of a home.

Methodologically speaking, my study avoids a general theory of agency but rather

supplies a case study of authorship that I hope might prove instructive for future research. I contend that literary agency is neither a figment of humanist dreams nor an ideal necessity for liberation from structure; nor are historical context and discursive tradition traps to be broken out of, or wonderlands of possibility for artistic creation or violent rule. Instead, literary agency is a practice that appears to incorporate many of these elements, to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the author and, I would argue, the scholar writing about the author. Further, I want to argue for a move away from thinking about agency and authorship in purely socio-political and mechanistic terms, though without receding into a discussion of Romanticist emotionality. Raghavan's work, it seems to me, was an exercise in incorporating elements of both politics and emotion, both structure and agency, both past and present, both repetition and innovation, both the world and the self. Moreover, Raghavan's act of writing Sanskrit appears as an attempt to imagine the political world and the agential self in it, however unreal those imaginations of agency and a Sanskritized India might be. These factors must be coordinated with political realities and the simple fact that authors do write new, although not always unprecedented, material. In short, there is some reality in imaginations, and some imaginations in reality, and an attempt to consider Raghavan as either deluded or mechanistic, a free agent or trapped in structure, are going to miss the mark. A more relaxed theoretical approach guided by evidence might supply a window on the work and thoughts of an author that is, counterintuitively, more fragmented but less distorted.

CHAPTER 1

RENAISSANCE MAN: V. RAGHAVAN'S REVIVAL OF SANSKRIT IN MODERN MADRAS

Since I maintain that an author has some degree of agency in the production of literature, and my method is going to be to triangulate among Raghavan's Sanskrit creations, some of his other writings, his historical context, and his biography, we need to begin this journey with a better understanding of just who the man was and what he thought. In this chapter, I set out to answer four questions in order to lay the groundwork for later chapters: 1) Who was Dr. V. Raghavan who wrote the Sanskrit plays and poems I will be studying? 2) Why and how did Raghavan attempt to revive Sanskrit, especially Sanskrit drama, in the twentieth century? 3) What were Raghavan's views on a number of recurrent and important themes in his literary works and general thinking? And 4) What did Raghavan think about Sanskrit? Not every detail of his thinking can be covered in one chapter, and in many instances certain details of his thought fit better within later chapters where they receive closer attention. This chapter endeavors to offer an overview of Raghavan's thought and context, with particular emphasis on his views of Sanskrit along with some initial insight into his writings in Sanskrit.

In terms of answering the first question about who Raghavan was, there is a vast amount of data in short biographies and obituaries about the man's life, and there is a vast amount of data to draw from in what he wrote over the course of an extremely prolific five-decade career (from the 1930's to 1970's) as a scholar and public intellectual. But there is little need to rehash here every minute detail of his life, or even major life milestones, committees on which he served, or awards received, etc. I provide a short biographical statement in Appendix B, along with a chronology. Nor will this be an intellectual biography of him as a scholar of aesthetics and

philosophy, or as a commentator on dance and music, or in terms of any of his various other activities. An exhaustive intellectual bibliography of the man is almost impossible given how prolific and well-read he was: it would take a lifetime just to read everything he read, and another lifetime to read everything he published in Sanskrit, English, and Tamil, let alone the numerous other unpublished works his daughter, Nandini Ramani, has in her possession: many more manuscripts, bits and pieces of poems, even an English movie script. Some of his writings are lost, such as the movie scripts he wrote in the early 1930's for Tamil movies that are no longer available. Likewise, the tapes from the radio plays and speeches he gave frequently at the AIR appear to be missing. However, through my reading of vast portions of his scholarship, newspaper articles, some letters, sources written by others, and extensive interviews with his family and a few friends who are still alive, I have attempted to cobble together a portrait of the man that, although a fragmentary reflection, at least portrays him with a degree of fidelity to the original. But the purpose of this portrait is primarily how it might help us understand his efforts to revive Sanskrit, his literary work, his historical and political context, and his worldview. While it is necessary to answer the first question in order to continue in this study, the other three questions are of more importance in order to understand this dissertation's major question of what it meant for Raghavan to write literary works in Sanskrit in the twentieth century.

Portrait of a Post/Colonial Tamil Brahmin Scholar and Writer

It is the fragmentary nature of the man himself that makes the task of depiction unwieldy. A verse from one of Raghavan's poems perhaps best exemplifies him, and shows how an illustration of his thought might need to proceed:

There is a forest path lush with fruits,¹ the path leads to the river.
I will take this path – No, no, first I will perform a ritual bath.
I follow this path for a little while – Suddenly I am drawn by other paths.
In this way I am very sentimental – Or, my broad mind is to blame.²

Raghavan gives us here something of a glimpse into his own mind, particularly the mind of a renaissance man, a man of many interests and abilities, drawn in different directions, ever searching for new emotions and knowledge. The sense of *bhavuka*, the sentimental person, in the last line, not only means that he was a poet and lover of dance and music, but also connotes a scholar, someone who appreciates knowledge. And yet, as the second line shows, he is also a man grounded in traditional religious values. Lest anyone get the impression of a man with scholastic attention deficit issues, Raghavan’s wide-ranging scholarship was conducted in a regimented manner, as it would have to be for someone who produced so much.

The subjectivity of the poem, the view that it gives us of a man’s thoughts, also betrays something of a sentiment new to Sanskrit, namely a romanticist flavor with its idealized emphasis on the natural world, along with a glimpse of the author’s subjectivity, and his sense of both appreciation and apprehension. Raghavan read extensively from the English Romantic poets, and he even translated some of their works into Sanskrit. Thus we have another dimension of the man here, namely that his reading of Euro-American scholarship and literature, another path that he was drawn towards, influenced him deeply. Still, the full poem, of which this verse

¹ Raghavan’s writings in Sanskrit frequently use foreign punctuation marks adopted from Europe. I have often reproduced them in translations. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In transliterations, I have followed the printed text as precisely as possible and have not divided words combined through *sandhi*.

² V. Raghavan, “*Ucchvasitāni*,” *Samskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1979): 122-3, verse 1.

*astyatraiva vanīpatho bahuphalah, panthā nadīm pratyayam
yāmyetena pathā – na na, prathamataḥ snānam vidhāsyē vidhim/
mārgam kiñcidimaṃ vrajāmi – sahasā kṛṣṭo ’smi māgāntaraiḥ (sic)
evam vā bahubhāvuko ’ham – athavā śatruviśālam manah!.*

Raghavan’s printed Sanskrit and English texts are notable for their small number of typographical errors, but here the last word of the third line should be “*mārgāntaraiḥ*.” It could be a Xerox error. The hyphens and commas are in the original untransliterated text.

is only the first, concludes on a notion of giving up received knowledge and the exploratory sense in favor of seeking the nectar of knowledge within the self:³

Give up the desire to go, by your toil there is
Nothing to be gained. You are your own goatherd.
Shut your eyes, pursue the inner heart,
In that darkness, heap up your own nectar.

The final verse suggests quelling these impulses toward exploration and implies the superiority of an Advaita Vedanta philosophical outlook focusing on giving up the sensual and external to focus on internal cultivation of the self. The poem's final line appears to be Raghavan counseling himself that the solution to life's vicissitudes can be found through introspective meditation.

Thus the first verse conveys, in retrospect, a struggle between outer and inner knowledge, and also a conflict between ritual and sentimentality. Raghavan himself would not admit there to be any conflict between religion and emotion, nor would he ultimately deny the importance of hard work. He practiced assiduously both scholastic work and meditation practices. What this last verse and first verse appear to suggest, when read together, is a conflict between his inner and outer worlds, between working for the self and for others.

Yet there is little evidence in Raghavan's life that he was interested only in the inner life, and there is no question that his activities, despite the criticism of his own broad mind, were many and various in the fields of academia and the arts. While the first verse conveys a sense of regret at this many-pathed mind, at least others never saw him as anything but a man with many interests who pursued them tirelessly. As his eldest son told me, Raghavan regarded doing other work as taking breaks, for example working on an original Sanskrit composition after a few

³ Ibid., 123, verse 8.

*gantavyabuddhimayi muñca, viceṣṭitena
nāpyaṃ kimaypaja ihāsti tavāṃsa eva/
netre nimīlaya, guhāgahanaṃ bhujasva
dhvānte tadetadupacinvamṛtaṃ svameva//*

hours of editing a dense philosophical work,⁴ and he not consumed by leisurely pursuits.⁵ Yet it should be noted that he gives considerable weight to leisure in so far as it allows time for cultural enjoyment and the creative arts in the face of what he felt to be the overwhelming mechanization of modern life.⁶ Even here, leisure for him was ultimately a means to the end of self-betterment.

A corollary to this wide-ranging interest, however, is Raghavan's tendency to collapse categories, to insist on the religious nature of Sanskrit, and the cultural nature of Sanskrit, and the unity of culture and religion, or religion and aesthetics, or aesthetics and philosophy, etc., not to mention suggesting that Sanskrit is a potential unifier not only of India but also of the world. He saw everything as not only interconnected, but also, at an abstract level, unified. He might have pursued different paths, but for him they all lead to a singular goal, which is also his perspective on religious traditions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this strategic mixing of categories was typical among those in the Sanskrit Commission, and I would like to suggest it also betrays a certain Advaitin or non-dualistic tendency mixed with a twentieth-century obsession with global unification. The trouble with such a tendency to blur any and all lines between what Euro-American thought considers distinct concepts is that it becomes quite difficult to present Raghavan's ideas on those concepts in any clear-cut fashion. It is a tricky task to disentangle his web of notions, and doing so does violence to his objectives. But as "analysis" literally means a "cutting up" of one's subject, some harm is unavoidable, and the reader will, I hope, be patient as there might be some bleeding between the segments of the rest of this chapter, as with the dissertation in general. In this chapter at least, I attempt to delineate

⁴ Interview with R. Kalidas, 4/14/2014. The same was said by his daughter, Nandini Ramini during one of our first interviews, 3/16/2014.

⁵ Although, according to various interviews, he was a fan of cricket and went to movies with his children. Still, he slept very few hours per night, consumed as he was by his work (and rather dependent on his coffee).

⁶ Raghavan, "Culture and Independence," in *The Radhakrishnan Number*, ed. Vuppuluri Kalidas, (Madras: Vyasa Publications, 1962), 187.

Raghavan’s thoughts on four main subjects: religion, culture, nationalism and politics, and Sanskrit.

Raghavan used various categories from Euro-American scholarship and attempted to mix them. While we can argue *ad nauseam* whether religion, culture, morality, history, politics, and language are worthwhile trans-cultural categories, or whether the appearance of these categories of European human sciences, in conjunction with nationalism, exerts a sort of epistemic violence on South Asian thought, the fact of the matter is that Raghavan knew and used these terms but also wrote about the ways they did not apply in India and attempted to overcome their insufficiency through the language of unification. I want to argue in this dissertation that Raghavan’s Sanskrit writing and advocacy for Sanskrit involve an insistence on the overlapping nature of these categories, and in some instances appear as a critique of Western categorizations, especially the secular/religious binary. As he speaks with and against these categories, speaking as someone “infected” by European human sciences at the same time as he wants to replace them with an Indian perspective, they are still pertinent to our discussion. They are not constitutive of Raghavan’s discourse – we are not deciding if his Sanskrit works are “cultural” or “religious” – but they do impinge upon how we might most profitably read his works as products of a twentieth-century semi-European-trained Indian Sanskritist.

Despite his wide-ranging perspective, and the fact that he wrote in English and Tamil as well, it was Sanskrit that served as the center pole, as his son described it to me,⁷ of all Raghavan’s activities. Since Sanskrit overlaps with all of the other aspects of his life and thought, it would be unwieldy to approach the *axis mundi* first, and thus I am going to attempt to move toward his views on Sanskrit, and thus his creative engagement with Sanskrit, from the

⁷ Interview with R. Kalidas, 4/14/2014.

outside in, beginning with a picture of him as an author and moving on to delineate his views on religion, culture, and politics.

Raghavan the Writer

In an autobiographical note, Raghavan remarks that he had always had proclivities toward creative writing. Here it is best to let him speak:

Although engrossed in academic research and scientific study, edition of texts and scrutiny of manuscripts and the pursuit of logic and philosophy, there had been a persistent urge almost from the very beginning towards original literary activity which started expressing itself through Sanskrit verses, prose, plays, skits, essays, *stotras*, etc., in Tamil and English. However, considering the domestic circumstances, a career was not possible without permanent employment in this country...If I had been otherwise placed in private life, I wonder whether I would have become at all a research scholar or a University man, and whether I would not have gone away to the field of free lance writings or of journalism. I had actively cultivated the associations of the leading writers in all the languages of India and had been fairly intimate with several of them occupying the front ranks in their own languages. In the young days of consuming energy and overflowing enthusiasm, when one was bursting with ideas, I had written out for several friends film scenarios of *stotras* from epics, *purāṇas* and Sanskrit classics, of course without any business knowledge or inclination to make money out of them.⁸

Here we get an image of Raghavan as a budding writer who, but for the need to earn a living, could have gone on in that direction, possibly in any number of languages other than Sanskrit.

Also we have a picture of a young idealist seeking to make it in the world of creative writing, but realizing that a career was essential. We thus have two sides of this man: one as scholar, the other as writer, and he wore these hats in different ways over the course of his life. Many of these early writings did not see the light of day until years after their composition, and indeed it is often difficult to know whether some of his fictional works were written in response to conditions at the time of publication or some earlier time.

Raghavan wrote three of his Sanskrit plays in 1931, at the age of 22, while in between his

⁸ V. Raghavan, "V. Raghavan's Autobiographical Reflections," in *The Power of the Sacred Name*, ed. William J. Jackson (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994), 317-327, 323-4.

undergraduate and graduate research. Those three plays are his lengthiest and some of the most intriguing for study: *Anārkalī*, *Vimukti*, and *Pratāprudra-Vijaya*. They were published, however, almost 40 years after their initial composition: *Vimukti* in 1968, *Pratāprudra-Vijaya* in 1969, and *Anārkalī* in 1972, all either self-published or published by his Samskrita Ranga. It is unclear exactly why he wrote them all in the same time period in May 1931, and in the preface to *Vimukti* he only mentions “several circumstances responsible for the numerous pieces of reflective writing which I did in Sanskrit at that time.”⁹ In his preface to *Anārkalī*, he comments that he wrote it in “the same ‘season’ in my creative writing which gave birth also to the *Vimukti* and the *Pratāprudra-Vijaya* ...It was written under an urge and enthusiasm which had possessed me, so to say, and completed in two or three days.”¹⁰ What exactly such an urge might have been, other than the broiling heat of a Madras May, I cannot say, nor could I gather from his children, all of whom were born later. But it is sufficient to note that at this young age Raghavan experienced a sudden creative burst. Other plays and a variety of poems were written later, and as he notes, “Composing of Sanskrit poems, long and short, went on continuously all through my literary career.”¹¹ Further, in interviews I conducted with his children, I heard that Raghavan would frequently jot down Sanskrit original verses at various times when the creative inspiration struck him. In the following pages, I will try to correlate some of his writings to the times in which they were published or written, but often the vicissitudes and exigencies of publication and Raghavan’s own tendency to delay publication preclude a precise analysis. What I want to establish at this juncture, and will illustrate throughout the rest of this dissertation, is that in

⁹ V. Raghavan, *Vimukti (A Two-Act Philosophical Farce with a Sanskrit Commentary)*, (Madras: Punarvasu [Author’s Imprint, 1968], xi. See also V. Raghavan, *Pratāprudra-Vijaya (or Vidyānātha-Viḍambana)* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1969), xv.

¹⁰ V. Raghavan, *Anārkalī: A New Sanskrit Play in Ten Acts* (Madras: The Samskrita Ranga, 1972), ix.

¹¹ Raghavan, *Vimukti*, xi.

addition to Raghavan's prodigious academic achievements he also had a fertile mind and was eager to produce creative writings in Sanskrit, as well as in English and Tamil.

Whether Raghavan was a different thinker and writer in the three different languages in which he wrote is a difficult question to answer with any surety. For one thing, some of his writings were works he translated from English to Sanskrit, or from Tamil to English, or Tamil to Sanskrit, or English to Tamil, or Sanskrit to Tamil. Thus it is unclear if he meant to send different messages in the different languages or merely to convey the same information to different audiences. Another problem is that Raghavan was incredibly prolific, in part because early in his career, when money was difficult to come by, he began spinning off numerous short articles for journals and newspapers, and so he wrote in whatever language on whatever subject was required or appealed to him. A perusal through his bibliography shows short stints of essays, poems, or stories for one Tamil magazine or another for a few months at a time. This was also the case with some Sanskrit journals other than his own *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, for example the few poems published in *Samskṛta Bhavitavyam* over a few months in 1970. His English newspaper writings for *The Hindu* all begin in the early 1950's, and a considerable number of them were published within several years. Further, many publications are earlier writings taken out at various later times for publication when convenient. His writings appear to be driven as much by his own creativity and agenda as they are by opportunities for publication in various journals, possibly through invitations from publishers.

A brief perusal of Raghavan's Tamil, English, and Sanskrit writings side by side reveals few thematic differences. In all languages, he sticks to his general project of spreading knowledge of culture, Indian history, Sanskrit, and religion. In terms of register and style, his Sanskrit plays and poems hew more closely to established conventions in Sanskrit, while his

Tamil appears less beholden to classical conventions and feels somewhat more freeform and lighthearted in places. That said, some of his shorter Sanskrit plays resemble his Tamil plays in having a lighthearted mood. His English research articles conform to the expectations of international scholastic publication and use numerous citations. It is worth noting, too, that many of Raghavan's longer Sanskrit plays and the majority of his poems include footnote commentary, which is rare among the modern Sanskrit works I have surveyed. Surely some scholarly habits have a tendency to bleed over into other genres of writing.

Raghavan tended to write in certain genres for one language and other genres for another. His Sanskrit works are primarily plays, poems, some traditional commentaries, translations of English literature, and short expository works printed in Sanskrit magazines. His Sanskrit hews closely to the established modes and styles, although the expository work and translations of English poetry, Tagore's dramas, and Nehru's speeches (among other translations into Sanskrit) are certainly more modern. Indeed, that Raghavan would translate English into Sanskrit reveals his insistence that Sanskrit can convey ideas similar to those found in English sources (as well as works in other languages that he found translated into English and then translated into Sanskrit), for a limited Sanskrit reading audience, and that such an audience might be in need of such translations. In a way, given that his audience would certainly know English as well as Sanskrit, these translations into Sanskrit appear as attempts to show Sanskrit's latitude and flexibility, rather than to convey knowledge to some nonexistent Sanskrit-only reading audience. It is unfortunate that Raghavan leaves us no record of why he translated texts into Sanskrit, but there does seem to be a sense of recovery and redeployment in rendering not just Tagore and Nehru, but also English Romantic poets, Tolstoy, and various others whose thoughts Raghavan seemed to deem amenable to a Sanskrit rendition and worthy of notice.

Most of Raghavan's writings in English are research articles, which is unsurprising given that English was and remains the major language of academic research in India. But he was also crafting short articles for numerous English-language journals and newspapers throughout India. The subjects of these English essays are predominantly Sanskrit, music, dance, and religion. Mary Hancock has noted that Raghavan spoke in different ways to different audiences in English: "Raghavan defined India as the product of textualized Hindu values. For area studies audiences, he did so in a language of scholarly detachment, but for national audiences his voice was one of self-conscious political engagement."¹² In a way, she is absolutely correct, but there is also a scholarly detachment in his writings for an Indian audience, and a political dimension to some of his writings for a Euro-American audience, particularly when he defends Hinduism. He did write some poetry and fiction in English, although none of these is published, and I was only able to get a fleeting glimpse of some of them in the collection of his daughter, Nandini. These writings included some simple short freeform poems for his daughter when she was quite young, and a screenplay for a movie about an Anglo-Indian detective. While I cannot provide a detailed account of these works based on a cursory glance, they at least suggest that Raghavan was given to creative experimentation and certainly had a lighter side to him and could be either serious or light-hearted in both English and Sanskrit.

Raghavan wrote original plays and short stories in Tamil, as well as some expository research articles on the arts and religion.¹³ In 1950, well before he began the *Samskrita Ranga*,

¹² Mary Hancock, "Unmaking the Great Tradition: Ethnography, National Culture and Area Studies," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* Vol. 4, No. 3-4 (1998): 343-388, 348.

¹³ This information was culled from perusing A.L. Mudaliar, ed. *Bibliography of the Books, Papers, and Other Contributions of Dr. V. Raghavan* (Ahmedabad: The New Order Book Co.: 1968). A full review of Raghavan's Tamil writings awaits further research and digging through old journals.

he published a collection of short stories in Tamil.¹⁴ His first book, in fact, was a short biography of Mutthuswāmī Dīkṣitar in Tamil and English.¹⁵ A perusal through the bibliography of his early years shows a variety of translations into Tamil, including the *Devī Māhātmyam*, stories from Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgara*, Bhāsa’s *Bhagavadajjukiyam* and *Dūtavākya*, and English stories by Manjeri S. Isvaran, a friend of his from his days at Madras Presidency College. He also published research material in Tamil, including articles on Bharatanāṭyam with T. Balasaraswati, a piece on Dipāvali and other light festivals around the world, Indian civilization in Burma, and some of his own English publications translated into Tamil. In general, bracketing off the concern for money, which was really itself a matter of staying alive, Raghavan’s agenda seems to have been one of getting as much information to the public as possible, especially publicizing whatever he considered worth knowing about artists, culture, matters of religion, and Sanskrit texts in particular.

A recently published collection of his Tamil short stories and plays provides some insight into his Tamil fiction.¹⁶ In general, the collection reveals a lighter tone than that of his Sanskrit works, with less of a philosophical bent. In Tamil as in Sanskrit, Raghavan has a tendency to write pieces adapted from classical Sanskrit or based on historical sources. On the lighter side, the story called “*Jāṭi*” (“Jars”) is about a lawyer in Madras who is forced to wear *khadi* not because he had joined the Congress Party, as his colleagues assumed, but because his suit had been destroyed during a fight with his wife over her collection of glass jars.¹⁷ Among the plays, one that also displays a lighter side is *Pāryā Vijayam*, in which a wife, frustrated with her lazy

¹⁴ V. Raghavan, *Varalakshmi-vratam and Other Stories*, (S. Visvanathan: Madras, 1950). Unfortunately, I have not found this text, but it was mentioned in the bibliography.

¹⁵ V. Raghavan, *Mutthuswāmī Dīkṣitar*, (Triplicane Culb: Madras, 1935). This text was also mentioned in the bibliography but I have not found a physical copy.

¹⁶ V. Raghavan, *Vaṅṅa Malarkaḷ*, ed. Nandini Ramini (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2008).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-74.

husband, pretends to be possessed by a god in order to get her husband to listen to her demands.¹⁸ Other plays are more historically based, such as one on the city Gangaikondacōlam; one about Martanda Varman, the King of Travancore; or another based on the story of Queen Padmini, wife of Ratan Singh of Chittoor, and the attempt of Sultan Alauddin to woo her. These plays and poems seem to have been an outlet for Raghavan's creative side but also a means of conveying to his readership some knowledge of the Indian past and classics of Sanskrit literature.

Despite the general similarities among his creative and expository writings in different languages, Raghavan gradually focused much more on Sanskrit than on Tamil as the years progressed. To some degree, this was partly a matter of opportunity, as he was able to publish his works in the two journals he edited, *Samskrita Ranga Annual* and *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, and he likely had more connections to Sanskrit journals. Thus as he had more opportunities to publish in Sanskrit, he had less need to publish short pieces in Tamil in various outlets. But it is also the case that the advent of pro-Tamil and anti-Sanskrit movements in Tamil Nadu in the 1960's likely pushed him further away from Tamil and more toward Sanskrit and a national and international audience that he must have felt to be more receptive to Sanskrit than his own native region. I will have more to say about this political situation in a section below. But it is at least significant to note that his publications in Sanskrit did seem to increase as his publications in Tamil decreased during his last two decades. This shift coincides not only with his establishment as a promoter of Sanskrit and publisher of Sanskrit journals, but also with a changing political situation in his native Madras in which Sanskrit was under threat from groups that were pro-Tamil, anti-Brahmin, anti-Sanskrit, and even anti-religious. Meanwhile developments on the national level continued to include the problem of religious conflict in secular India. All of these

¹⁸ Ibid., 304-315.

political matters, including international politics, were of concern to Raghavan, and there are subtle ways in which his creative writings reflect the historical context. As I will argue in the conclusion, however, while his writing responded to the modern world around him by addressing it and trying to change it, there is another way in which his writings served to provide him with a creative outlet and a sense of belonging within the Sanskrit literary tradition.

Raghavan on Religion

V. Raghavan was born on August 22, 1908 into a Sāmavedin Smārta Brahmin family in the town of Tiravārūr, which is approximately 165 miles (265 km) south from Madras as the crow flies. The town's main temple is to Śiva as Tyāgarāja (or Tyāgeśa), and the city is known for being the birthplace of all members of the so-called trinity of founders of Carnatic music: Mutthuswāmī Dīkṣitar, Tyāgarāja, and Śyāma Śāstrī. In the middle of the vast temple tank (known as Kamalālayam and measuring about 25 acres) is a shrine to which Raghavan as a boy used to swim using only one hand, the other holding the oil for the lamp.¹⁹ While he was an ardent devotee of Tyāgeśa, Raghavan's religious practices were many and varied. He was most certainly a devotee of Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa Pārāyaṇa* (reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) was part of his daily routine.²⁰ In fact, Raghavan died on April 5, 1979, which was Rāma Navamī (the holiday celebrating Rāma's birth), after having just attended a talk about the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute.²¹ The *Bhagavad Gītā* was also an important part of his life, as was the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (much of which he memorized early in his life). He did *Gāyatrī* recitation and *Sandhyāvandana* (evening rituals), and also a daily *śiras āsana* (a headstand meditation pose). He was also a practitioner of *nāmasiddhānta* (reciting the names of

¹⁹ Interview with Nandini Ramani, 3/17/2014.

²⁰ Nandini Ramini, *V. Raghavan*, Makers of Indian Literature Series (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2014), 20.

²¹ Ibid.

god), and frequented *Harikathā*-s (Vaiṣṇavite religious discourses) and various *bhajan* meetings (where religious songs are sung). He was very closely associated with the Paramācārya Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvatī, the Śāṅkarāchārya of the Kanchipuram Maṭha who was the foremost authority among the Tamil Smārta Brahmins. They met regularly and spoke Sanskrit together. It was the Śāṅkarāchārya who conferred upon Raghavan the title *Kavi-kokila* (poet-cuckoo). Raghavan was assiduous in his practice of *śrāddha* (annual funereal rituals) for his parents, who died when he was only 7, under what circumstances I have not been able to ascertain. He also upheld various rules pertaining to female ritual pollution and the pollution accrued from travelling abroad.

Despite such an active religious life, Raghavan did not wholly self-identify as an “orthodox” person. In a mailed letter located in the Milton Singer Files at the University of Chicago Library, Raghavan comments in reply to Singer’s statement: “Dr. Raghavan represents an orthodox position,” which Singer had written in a first draft of his *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* that he sent to Raghavan for comments. Intriguingly, Raghavan sought to nuance that claim:

The really orthodox would not accept me as one of them or a conformist. My orthodoxy is as it emerged to my own cultural consciousness as a result of my historical and comparative study of the tradition. If you like you may say “a more or less orthodox position.” I think this will square with what you say two lines below about my ‘self definition.’”²²

Singer did use the term “more or less orthodox” in the published version of the book. The “self-definition” refers to Raghavan’s self-definition of “Sanskritic Hinduism in terms of his matha, temple, domestic and temple priest, astrologer, and so forth.”²³ The passage in question is the

²² Milton Singer Papers, Box 23, Folder 5, University of Chicago Library Special Collections.

²³ Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 82. Raghavan was one of Singer’s primary informants during his research trips to Madras, and Singer quotes him frequently.

scene of Singer's growing awareness that he would not find a homogenous "orthodoxy" in Madras, somewhat to the detriment of the "Great Traditions" project.²⁴

And truly, Raghavan was not some *vaidika* Brahmin pandit; instead, Raghavan was a *laukika* (secular) scholar at a research university, and as he himself notes, his understanding of the tradition came through years of scholastic research on both traditional texts and a wide reading of Sanskrit literature, as well as aspects of Hinduism in a very broad sense. Although his understanding of Hinduism did emphasize certain particular aspects (the *puruṣārtha*-s and especially the importance of *dharma*, but without neglecting *kāma*, *artha*, and *mokṣa*; the practice of yoga; the paths of *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti*), Raghavan was also quite aware of the wide variety of religious expression throughout India (from Tamil forms to the modern Sant tradition) and the wide variety of both Sanskrit and other literary traditions (including different versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) that he saw as constitutive of India's inclusive but variegated culture. In short, his approach to "orthodoxy" was as a scholar foremost, one who was an expert on South Asian history and literature, not to mention having considerable knowledge of intellectual traditions in Europe and the United States. Additionally, when I asked Raghavan's daughter what he might have meant by "more or less orthodox," she responded that while Raghavan would observe various rites in an orthodox manner, there was almost always a Euro-American visitor at their dining table for festivals, and this was much to the annoyance of Raghavan's more orthodox sisters.²⁵ Indeed, Raghavan was no traditional pandit despite his learning in Sanskrit; rather he tried to have his feet in both the traditional Indian Hindu world and the modern academic and cosmopolitan worlds.

²⁴ As Mary Hancock notes, quoting Milton Singer, there was a "convergence between" Raghavan's view of Sanskrit and the Hindu tradition and that of the Redfield "Great Traditions" project. While Raghavan did influence Singer's perspectives, on this point of great and little traditions they were already mostly aligned before meeting. See Hancock, "Unmaking the Great Tradition," 356-363.

²⁵ Interview with Nandini Ramini, 3/17/2014.

Despite the “self-definition” that Singer mentions above, a different “self definition” that Raghavan gave of his religious practice, and that Singer recorded in his book, seems somewhat more accurate: “I am a museum.”²⁶ Indeed his objects of worship mentioned above are both Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite, despite the fact that he was a devotee of Śiva as Tyāgarāja, and it is his own original *suprabhātam* (morning prayer) that is sung at the main Rāmeśwaram temple.²⁷ Raghavan was also very active within the Rāmākṛṣṇa Mission, the Advaita movement founded by Vivekananda in Bengal at the end of the nineteenth century, and visited mission sites all over the globe.²⁸ He wrote a poem in honor of Vivekananda, and was also active in the group that established the Vivekānanda Rock Memorial.²⁹ That said, he also had great respect for Aurobindo, another Vedanta movement leader of the early twentieth century, whom he mentions on occasion.³⁰ The Raghavan museum certainly included religions outside of the Hindu fold. He did not write very much about Buddhism and Jainism other than to remark that their ideas are beholden to Sanskrit and that many of their texts are also in Sanskrit. He certainly encountered Christianity, and he quoted from the Bible on occasion in various works. According to Singer, such a pluralistic approach is typical of Smārta Brahmins.³¹ However, on my analysis, it is also typical of an Advaita Vedanta perspective, and it is in line with global conversations regarding interreligious harmony that were popular during the twentieth century.

²⁶ Ibid., 138. This idea of being a museum is also a matter of being eclectic, on which subject, see Brian Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). His discussion of “inclusivistic eclecticism” nicely dovetails with Andrew Nicholson’s discussion, more on which in Chapter 5.

²⁷ Dr. V. Raghavan, “Sri Ramanatha Suprabhatam.” My copy of this is a xerox, and I have been unable to locate its publication information. In a footnote to the text (of 40 verses), Raghavan says he composed part of it on his own initiative, then expanded it by request of an officer of the Ramanatha temple in Rameshwaram. The singer in the recording is apparently by M.S. Subbalakshmi.

²⁸ V. Raghavan, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 325.

²⁹ The group was somewhat associated with the RSS, however, contra Mary Hancock, I do not see this (and the few essays in *The Organiser*, on which more below) as evidence of Raghavan being an RSS member or Hindutva ideologue.

³⁰ See, e.g. V. Raghavan, “Sri Aurobindo’s Aesthetics” in *Sri Aurobindo: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1974), 118-28.

³¹ Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, 138.

As an example, I might point out one particularly interesting moment where Raghavan displays an irenic outlook. Oddly enough, it occurs in a short article he wrote for the RSS journal, *The Organiser*, one of only four that he wrote for their Diwali Special issues in the mid 1960's. In the article he discusses Hindu ideas about the importance of the child tracing them from the Vedas through various other texts, especially the works of Kālidāsa and other literary classics in Sanskrit and Tamil. The fundamental argument of the piece is the importance of the child in cementing the relationship of the parents, but in the end he also highlights the importance of worshipping god as a child (e.g. Kṛṣṇa). He then turns this around to mention an Upaniṣadic idea³² of living like a child in the face of Brahman. But without skipping a beat, he then draws in Matthew 18:3: “*Cf. Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*”³³ This reference is not something that a modern Hindutvavadi would be writing in *The Organiser*. Further, for a journal that elsewhere condemns Christian missionary work, and is written for an Indian Hindutva audience, this reference to Matthew, seems downright subversive, particularly considering Raghavan's noted passion for religious harmony. Given that he appended it to the article without even a citation and thus somewhat under the cover of a general religious truth, one might even say that it puts a new spin on Homi Bhabha's term “sly civility.”³⁴

As for Raghavan's interactions with Islam, his family likes to relate a small anecdote about how as a child he learned the art of origami from an elderly Muslim in Tiravārūr. Later, when his family celebrated Navarātri and decorated the house, Raghavan would incorporate his

³² He does not cite the verse, but mentions *bālyena*, which likely refers to *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1, and the phrase: “*pāṇḍityam nirvidya bālyena tiṣṭhāset*”: “(a Brahmin) having despaired of being a pandit should try to live like a child.”

³³ V. Raghavan, “The Child in Ancient Sanskrit Literature,” *The Organiser*, Diwali Special Edition, November 11, 1966: 34. Italics in original.

³⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 132-144.

origami skills into the decorations. While the skill and the ritual practice are certainly separate, and it could be a coincidence, his family members mentioned this to me as an example of his friendliness with Muslims and willingness to blend an Islamic craft form with Navarātri. He was also a close associate with a variety of Muslim friends who visited the house regularly, and he associated with Muslim scholars and dignitaries with no known friction. Raghavan was quite enthusiastic about the ways that Muslims in the past had been great sponsors of Sanskrit learning and religion, particularly Akbar (as evidenced in Raghavan’s play, *Anārkali*), but also Dara Shikoh, great-grandson of Akbar, and claimant to the Mughal throne who was defeated by the far less tolerant Aurangzeb. In a short essay originally written in Tamil and later translated and republished in English, Raghavan favorably discusses Dara Shikoh’s *Samudra-Saṅgama-Grantha* (*Majma ‘al-Baḥrayn*) and its call for a Hindu-Muslim spiritual synthesis.³⁵ He also wrote a book about a treatise on love written within the Sanskrit tradition by a seventeenth-century Hyderabad Muslim scholar and saint, Akbar Shah.³⁶ Thus Raghavan held in high regard Muslims who were actively seeking religious harmony and who engaged with the Sanskrit tradition in a favorable and scholarly manner.

In order to continue discussing Raghavan’s views on religion, it is imperative to ascertain what he exactly understood the term “religion” to mean, or whether he used other terms. I have yet to find an instance in his English works when Raghavan explicitly defines the term “religion,” and thus any attempt to excavate his sense of the term must be indirect. To further complicate matters, Raghavan frequently calls for not only religious harmony around the globe,

³⁵ V. Raghavan, “Dara Shikoh’s *Majma-ul-Bahrain* (*Samudra-Saṅgama-Grantha*)” *Journal of Oriental Research* XV (1946): 150-157. The Tamil piece was shorter and aimed more at addressing Hindu-Muslim strife in 1947, the time of its composition. V. Raghavan, “Dārā Kaṇḍa Oṟṟumai (The Unity that Dārā Saw),” *Anandavikaṭan*, Deepāvali Issue, (1947): 36-38.

³⁶ V. Raghavan, ed., *Śṛṅgāramañjarī of Saint Akbar Shah*, (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Archaeological Dept., 1951). This text was recently revised and expanded with some of Raghavan’s notes in Nandini Ramini’s files. V. Raghavan, ed., *Śṛṅgāramañjarī of Saint Akbar Shah*, Revised Edition, (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2012).

but the harmony of “religion” with various other subjects, such as literature. Yet from his various writings in English, it seems that Raghavan’s sense of “religion” was not notably unlike a Euro-American sense of the term. He considered it according to a “world religions” model of ossified discrete religions, thus he cites Hinduism as a “religion” along the lines of Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, etc. in his articles on religious tolerance. In one place, I noted that he used “our religion” for Hinduism.³⁷ He mentioned “religion and philosophy” as a set phrase in numerous instances, and in some places “religion *or* philosophy,” which seems to indicate that he saw little difference between those terms. In some places in his English works, he used “faith” instead of “religion.” For Raghavan, what was important in Hinduism was not so much the rituals (although he did observe them) but the paths to the supreme: *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna*.³⁸ He was familiar with modern English-language scholarship on religion, and he frequently quoted William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, along with works by Aldous Huxley, Lord Northbourne, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Matthew Arnold, Alfred North Whitehead, Robert Slater (of the Harvard Centre for the Study of Great Religions) and numerous other scholars on religion. He was also a great devotee of Gandhi and quoted his thoughts on religion frequently, and he highly revered Tagore and frequently mentioned his work *Religion of Man*. It does not seem possible to trace forward from these myriad sources the precise origin of Raghavan’s idea of “religion,” but it seems appropriate to suggest that by the middle of the twentieth century, the notion of religion as a matter of belief in a deity and a concomitant ethical system had largely become global, and Raghavan operated on those terms.

³⁷ V. Raghavan, “Hinduism and Conversion,” in *An Anthology on Aspects of Indian Culture*, ed. Nandini Ramani (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2002), 83-6.

³⁸ For a full encapsulation of Raghavan’s idea of Hinduism, see a reprint of his short essay on the subject in Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 83-84.

We can also approach Raghavan’s opinion of “religion” from its opposite: his critique of secularism, which comes up in a few instances. In an essay written in honor of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan when he became President of India, Raghavan rails against the “secularists and modernists” who oppose cultural renaissance and see it as “an atavistic tendency.” He also critiques materialists “who consider culture, like religion as a bar to progress.”³⁹ I will have more to say about his views on culture in a moment, but here we see a strong opposition between material matters on the one hand and culture and religion on the other. This contrast is evident in his own self-description, written toward the end of his life: “A firm believer in God and in spiritual values, material affairs and mundane considerations had played a minimal role in my life.”⁴⁰ We might also look to his Sanskrit poetry, in particular a humorous poem entitled “*Dambha Vibhūti*,” about hypocrites, where he writes: “Those eager for the worship of the people made gods of themselves. The national leaders propagate secularism and atheism.”⁴¹ Here he uses *nāstika*, atheism, but he also glosses it with “*dharmātītā*,” the abandonment of *dharma*. Thus we can conclude at least in a preliminary way that religion for Raghavan meant belief in god, a concern for the supramundane, and adherence to a divinely-ordained code of law.

This mention of *dharma* brings up the question of what word Raghavan would use for religion in a Sanskrit text itself. His play *Anārkalī* has a lengthy discussion of Akbar’s conference on religions, as well as some discussion of religion in the prologue, and in the text he uses a number of terms that could be translated as “religion.” Most frequent is the term “*mata*” which is suffixed to “Hindu” and “Islam,” among other religions, throughout the text. Terms

³⁹ Raghavan, “Culture and Independence,” 186.

⁴⁰ N. Ramini, *V. Raghavan*, 84.

⁴¹ V. Raghavan, “*Dambha Vibhūti*,” *Śaṅkṛta-Bhavitavyam*, Vol. 19 (May 24, 1969): 4, verse 56.

*svāneva daivatīkartum prajopāsyatvalolupāḥ/
pracārayanti nāstikyadarśanaṃ rāṣṭranāyakāḥ//*

He adds a Sanskrit and English gloss in a footnote after the penultimate compound: “*dharmātītā nītiḥ* (Secularism and atheism)”. He also provides a footnote gloss of “*rāṣṭranāyakāḥ*” as “*deśanētāraḥ* (‘National leaders’).”

such as “*dharma*,” *āgama*,” “*mārga*” (literally, path), “*prasthāna*” (more properly “sect” than “religion”), and “*sampradāya*” (more properly “tradition”) make cameos. In a few places, Raghavan also uses the term *adhyātma*, which is often translated as “spiritual”; he refers to the Dīn-i-Ilāhī as *adhyātmāsabhā*.⁴² But by and large the term “*mata*” appears most frequently and is, I think, best translated as “religion.” Given that “*mata*” is from the past participle of the verb “*man*,” and means “that which is thought,” it is interesting to note that the Sanskrit perspective on religion, at least Raghavan’s Sanskrit, holds religion as primarily a philosophical or theological matter, and not quite as much merely an matter of ritual. Raghavan’s concept of religion thus seems to borrow much from the European models of intellectualized religion that highlight text, belief, and philosophy.⁴³

Despite the intellectual flavor of Raghavan’s “religion,” he would also strongly rebut the description of Hinduism as merely philosophical or theological, or indeed “other-worldly.” In one essay, he tackles this question head on. Beginning by typifying the Orientalist perception of the mystic East, of Indian thought that is “other-worldly, over occupied with meditation, pessimistic, ascetic...” and consumed with the world’s illusoriness, Raghavan goes on to describe how Sanskrit and Hindu literature have indeed touched on worldly matters. As he says, rightly, “to generalize from a part of a nation’s literature is not correct.”⁴⁴ Aside from mentioning examples of texts that deal with worldly, “secular” matters, he also highlights the significance of texts that deal with morality, issues of *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*, and the home life. This is an important matter to note, for while I certainly see Raghavan rejecting the religious/secular binary in some places, and I certainly read him as working in opposition to that

⁴² V. Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 19.

⁴³ See Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1990), 91.

⁴⁴ V. Raghavan, “Is Hindu Culture Other-Worldly” in *An Anthology on Aspects of Indian Culture*, ed. Nandini Ramani (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2002), 289, 290.

binary in his Sanskrit writings, nevertheless to insist that he is overly philosophical or religious in his literature would be to commit the same Orientalist errors to which he vehemently objected.

Given the lack of an explicit statement, in interviews with his children I tried to elicit a sense of what Raghavan thought “religion” was. His eldest son insisted that Raghavan used the word “dharma,” although somewhat at my prompting, and there are rare places where Raghavan does use “dharma” where “religion” might also have worked. His youngest daughter suggested that for Raghavan, “Worshipping work was religion, and sharing knowledge, that was another aspect of dharma...everything emerges only from the religious discipline. So generally when he says religion he definitely refers to the different sects of belief (Vaishnavite, Shaivite.) ...Religion also meant devotion for him.”⁴⁵ It is difficult at times to disentangle what Raghavan really thought and what his children think he thought, but based on what I have mentioned previously, their impression seems to be accurate here. Religion for Raghavan was a matter of three “d’s”: deity, devotion, and discipline. Further, he regarded Hinduism as a religion, along with the other major “religions” of the world. It is this general sense of “religion” that I will employ in the rest of this dissertation: as a system or tradition of belief and practice with respect to the supreme (deity or deities) with a concomitant philosophical component. But it is also important to note that the opposite of religion for Raghavan is secularism and the material/materialistic world. For now, that should be a sufficient delineation of Raghavan’s engagement with and perspective on religion, although I will significantly nuance these ideas over the course of this dissertation.

⁴⁵ Interview with Nandini Ramani, August 2015.

Raghavan's idea of "culture" is only somewhat clearer than his idea of "religion," even though we have the benefit of an actual definition in his piece "Culture and Independence": "Culture is a maturity of spirit, a way of reacting to a situation, or of relation to a fellow being, a delicateness of being, a fineness of feeling and perception, a regard for human dignity; a sweetness of temper even against incitement....in fine, a grace of life and behaviour."⁴⁶ It is patently evident here that his notion of "culture" extends from a nineteenth-century European notion of what it means to be "cultured" and betrays some influence of British thought: culture is a matter of moral and spiritual refinement. Raghavan goes on in the article to decry mere involvement in cultural events, or the "cultural business," without actual understanding or enjoyment. Indeed, the Sanskrit word translated as culture is *samksṛti*, the same as the word for the language itself, and thus in line with Raghavan's perception of it as the refined language. I will go into more depth on this matter in the later section on Sanskrit. But it is also important to note that for Raghavan, "culture" is a matter not just of refinement but also of morality: the two go together for him.

Despite this definition of culture as refinement, it is apparent from much of Raghavan's works that "culture" includes a great many subjects under its umbrella, including religion, and he will often speak of Indian thought and culture, or Hindu culture, and the like. This is a secondary sense of culture, not just as refinement, but in the anthropological sense of a nation's culture, or indeed Sanskrit culture, a term which he uses quite a bit. At other times, however, it is clear that for him culture includes the arts and literature, especially Sanskrit, and indeed he contends that,

⁴⁶ Raghavan, "Culture and Independence," 187.

“This culture has its bedrock in Sanskrit literature,”⁴⁷ and he writes at length of the significance of arts, poetry, and drama for building the national culture of India. Culture is a broad and value-laden category for him, and the arts are not merely a subset of it but actually a means toward it. The following quote, which I will return to later in the dissertation, is emblematic of Raghavan’s tendency to insist on the conjoined nature of the arts and “culture,” along with religion.

The aim of art and poetry in India is to reinforce spiritual truth and to help to its realization; and the purely artistic end of aesthetic bliss was one of two ends, the other being the cultural refinement of man. Thus to adopt Indian scholastic terminology, there is to be ‘*eka-vākyatā*’ [unity of the meanings of sentences] between Śāstra [scientific and ethical treatises] and Kāvya [poetry], i.e., the ultimate suggestions of poetry and drama should be in harmony with the findings of philosophy.⁴⁸

The ensuing conversation then brings up “Hinduism” as well. The reader will note that Raghavan’s terminology here is rather imprecise and his categories blurry. He fades from spiritual truth to ethics to philosophy to Hinduism, and he juxtaposes these to the arts while insisting on their concomitance. There is a general divide here between what we might broadly term “the cultural arts” and “religion” but Raghavan is intentionally collapsing these categories at the same time as he points them out. I will write at greater length on this matter in chapter 3, but for now it suffices to point out that religion and culture are separate categories of experience in Raghavan’s thinking, but ultimately he wishes for their combination as a means of educating people and inculcating culture.

It is worth taking some space to describe Raghavan’s strong advocacy for the arts and involvement in arts production in Madras. I have already mentioned that he was a supporter and scholar of Carnatic music and Bharatanāṭyam dance, and his interest was far more than just a passing fancy. He was for many years a secretary of the elite Madras Music Academy, and wrote

⁴⁷ V. Raghavan, *Sanskrit: Essays on the Value of the Language and the Literature*, (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1972), 65.

⁴⁸ V. Raghavan, *Love in the Poems and Plays of Kalidasa*, Transaction No. 22 (Basavangudi, Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1967 [2nd impression]), 4.

papers for their journal on various aspects of Carnatic Music. Despite not being musically talented himself (he apparently wanted to learn veena, but never quite did), he certainly knew music, and, according to his autobiographical note, he grew up in a house where musicians frequently stayed.⁴⁹ He also wrote an extensive essay on the musician Tyāgarāja and a lengthy *mahākāvya* on Mutthuswāmī Dīkṣitar.⁵⁰ When writing songs and poems he often noted the *rāga* (musical mode). In fact, his play *Rāsalīlā* is described as an opera, and while written for stage it is primarily in verse.⁵¹ Raghavan worked closely with the great Carnatic singer, M.S. Subbalakshmi. Further, in his Sanskrit plays, he even included professional musicians and playback singers (often B. Krishnamurti and R. Vedavalli, who are still alive today) who would sit behind the stage and sing verses, even if those verses were supposed to be the voices of the characters on stage.⁵² Not only was “culture” a matter of refinement for him, but he demanded perfection in all things, and everything had to be the best in dramatic performances he directed, hence the professional singers.

As for dance, Raghavan was closely associated with the great Bharatanāṭyam dancer T. Balasaraswati, and both of his daughters trained with her. The fact that he was a Brahmin and she was a low caste devadāsī, who were presumed by many to be prostitutes, add to the notion that he was only “more or less” orthodox, as his close association with and strong support for her was somewhat stigmatized within more orthodox circles in Madras.⁵³ Beyond his support for Balasaraswati, Raghavan actively researched the art form and wrote voluminously about it. As Avanthi Meduri notes, Raghavan was largely responsible for Bharatanāṭyam’s revival (or reinvention) within bourgeois Madrasi culture in the early twentieth century, and by giving it that

⁴⁹ V. Raghavan, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 318-320.

⁵⁰ V. Raghavan, *Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitacaritam Mahakavyam* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1980). The work was published posthumously and released on Raghavan’s first death anniversary.

⁵¹ V. Raghavan, “*Rāsalīlā*,” *Samsrkita Ranga Annual* Vol. III (1963): 71-78.

⁵² Interview with R. Vedavalli, 3/30/2014.

⁵³ Interview with Nandini Ramini, 3/16/2014.

name, he gave this dance tradition a past by “inscribing Bharatanāṭyam in a teleological Sanskrit history that referred the dance to Bharata’s Sanskrit treatise known as *Nāṭyaśāstra*.”⁵⁴ What was once the dance tradition of temple prostitutes became a dance tradition for bourgeois culture, divorced from the temple, projected as an image of Indian cultural arts, and given a past that stretched back to the antique golden era of Sanskrit literary achievement. Additionally, his interests in dance were not limited to Bharatanāṭyam, as he also researched other styles and was instrumental in bringing significant attention to Kūḍiyāṭṭam, a Sanskrit dance-drama form practiced in Kerala.

On the subject of Raghavan’s involvement with drama, much information can and should be provided given this dissertation’s focus on his plays. I do not intend to offer a fully detailed history of the activities of his Samskrita Ranga, and instead I just touch on the highlights. Apparently his love of drama started with performing in plays during his college years, and steadily grew. He was closely associated with a number of eminent personalities within the Tamil stage scene, and even wrote a number of dramas himself in Tamil (although it is not clear if any of them were ever performed). He was active in the Madras Natya Sangh, a chapter of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, and for some time served as its president. But it was the Samskrita Ranga that received much of his theatrical energies.

Raghavan founded the Samskrita Ranga in 1958 for the “revival” (*projjīvanāya*)⁵⁵ of Sanskrit Drama, as he noted in the alternate prologue of *Anārkalī* (performed in 1972 at the World Sanskrit Conference). After Raghavan’s death in 1979, his student S.S. Janaki maintained the Samskrita Ranga for many years. Now Nandini Ramini has been continuing the tradition, and

⁵⁴Avanthi Meduri, “Temple Stage as Historical Allegory: Rukmini Devi as Dancer-Historian,” in *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India*, edited by Indira Visvanathan Peterson and Daves Soneji, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 133-64: 134.

⁵⁵ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 88

as recently as November 2015 they performed Kālidāsa’s *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam* in Chennai. Their first performance was Kālidāsa’s *Mālavikāgnimitra* in 1958 at the First All-India Kālidāsa festival in Ujjain, and they later performed other Kālidāsa plays there. In addition to the classics of Kālidāsa, the Samskrita Ranga also performed classics such as works by Bhavabhūti (*Mālati Mādhava*), plays usually ascribed to Bhāsa (including *Avimāarakam* performed with an all female cast), and more modern works, such as *Snusāvijaya* of Sundararāja (late nineteenth century), and two Rabindranath Tagore plays that Raghavan translated into Sanskrit.⁵⁶ They even performed the now well-known *Āgamaḍambara* of Jayanta Bhatta (tenth century) when it had not yet been published but only recently discovered in manuscript form by none other than Raghavan himself. Some of the Samskrita Ranga’s performances were on the proscenium stage, others on All India Radio. They were also responsible for performing all of Raghavan’s original dramas both on the stage and on All India Radio.



Image 1: Raghavan as *sūtradhāra* (director) for a Samskrita Ranga production of Kālidāsa’s *Mālavikāgnimitra*. Photo courtesy of the Samskrita Ranga and the Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts.

⁵⁶ V. Raghavan, trans., “*Vālmīkipratibhā*” and “*Naṭīpūjā*,” *Samskrta Pratibhā*, Vol. 6 (1966): 238-251, 252-304. Published in separate book form (with pagination from the original) by the author, with prefatory material in 1967.

In their performances, along with extensive use of costumes and sets, the Samskrita Ranga also provided the audience with some assistance in understanding the plays. Their playbills often begin with a description of the Ranga, followed by a list of *dramatis personae* and a detailed summary of the scenes and plot of the play, all in English. Some playbills included a guide to the music score, listing the song, the occasion of its being sung, the *rāga* (set by Raghavan himself), and instrumentation. The purpose of such playbills was to ensure that the audience knew what was going on, even if they did not know Sanskrit. Later playbills also included lengthy lists of all the Ranga's productions, as if to tell the audience of their accomplishments, but also to imply, against assertions to the contrary, that Sanskrit theater is alive and kicking. In order to supplement the theater performances themselves, the Ranga also published an English-language journal, which continued after Raghavan's death. The *Samskrita Ranga Annual* promoted research on Sanskrit theater and published a number of Raghavan's plays, even some of his translations of classical dramas into Tamil. The goal of the Ranga was not just to revive the tradition, but also to ensure that the revival was true to its original form (made possible through Raghavan's extensive research), and to disseminate knowledge of the tradition as widely as possible.

It would be wonderful to have some sense of the audience at these performances, to take their temperature and assess how Raghavan was changing opinions, or making the Indian populace more culturally refined, as he thought he was. Unfortunately, despite the fact that these plays were performed only a half century or so ago, such data was difficult to acquire from eyewitness accounts. Those few with whom I spoke in my interviews (at the direction of Nandini Ramini) were mostly performers or musicians, and many were quite old and their memories hazy. What they said was predominantly praise for Raghavan's efforts. As for the audience of his

AIR programs, that is even more difficult to assess. But there were numerous write-ups in various newspapers about his performances with the Ranga, and while most of these reports merely state that the performance was held, a number do make an assessment, almost always positively so far as I have found.

While it is true that Raghavan directed these Sanskrit dramas, and supported dance and music in Madras where there is a considerable population of mostly Tamil Brahmin aesthetes familiar with both Sanskrit as well as dance and music, it is also the case that his audience was limited, since it would be difficult for those not well-versed in Sanskrit to gain much access to the material. While he would have felt that even a little bit of culture is helpful, the fact of the matter was that his insistence on perfection and unwillingness to compromise what he regarded to be the “ancient” traditions meant that he had some difficulty reaching out to audiences. As his daughter Nandini put it to me, “His one fault was that he thought everyone was a *sahrdaya* like he was.” In other words, he presupposed that everyone had his depth and breadth of knowledge, and his sense of appreciation as a *bhāvuka*. He figured that everyone was as cultured as he was.

From my reading of his works, he does seem to have high expectations, but he is also realistic about the fact that the ideal of cultural refinement was not a given but rather a process, of education that faced much adversity. Yet Raghavan, I think, would have replied to the problem that it is adversity itself through which refinement can be wrought. He wrote at length about the prospect for love-in-separation, that poetic convention of Sanskrit literature, to achieve a refinement of love, turning it sublime and spiritual. Also as a young student of twenty-one in 1929 he wrote an award-winning essay in Sanskrit on the subject of the uses of adversity.⁵⁷

Already at that young age he seems to have had a broad mind as he incorporates quotes from a

⁵⁷ V. Raghavan, *Essay on the Uses of Adversity*, ed. Nandini Ramini, with a translation into English by M. Narasimhachary (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2011).

few Tamil sources, and an extremely wide variety of Sanskrit and English sources.⁵⁸ In the opening lines of the essay, he imagines adversity (*vipad*) to be a goddess who “purifies the character of a person” or “a subterranean fire that tests the gold of one’s character.”⁵⁹ Through a series of mostly eclectic citations, Raghavan makes the argument that adversity is useful as a means of human betterment. His citations frequently mix Euro-American sources (from Bacon to Emerson to Shakespeare, and quite a bit of Oliver Goldsmith) with corroborating quotes from the Sanskrit tradition. Whether or not this continued to be his view, it is clear that it resonates with his later understanding of “culture” as a matter of perpetually facing adversity and seeking to work through it to something better. This sort of liberatory perspective fits, then, not only with his view of culture but with a sense of *mokṣa*, or liberation from this world’s adversities, albeit not through death but rather through better understanding and appreciation.

The notion of Raghavan as facing adversity brings up another important point I want to make that might nuance a naïve understanding of Raghavan as a typical Smārta Brahmin cultural elite. It is true that in twentieth-century Madras, Smārta Brahmins, such as Raghavan, were extremely supportive of the arts, and made themselves out to be “cultural brokers”⁶⁰ in order to maintain their cultural hegemony as their more explicit religious hegemony waned in Tamil Nadu during the anti-Brahmin Dravidian movements. Not only did they want to revive and support the arts in India, but they pointed foreigners, such as Milton Singer, toward “cultural performances” as evidence of the Great Tradition of Sanskrit in India.⁶¹ In her insightful article on the impact of Raghavan on Singer’s work, Mary Hancock heavily critiques Raghavan’s

⁵⁸He translates a number of English sayings and quotes into Sanskrit, including Shakespeare’s famous line “sweet are the uses of adversity” from *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 1, line 12: “*ruciraṃ vipadaḥ prayojanam.*” Ibid., 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 49 (Narasimhachary’s translation).

⁶⁰ Mary Hancock, “Unmaking the ‘Great Tradition’: Ethnography, National Culture, and Area Studies, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 4:3-4 (1998): 343-388; 359-61.

⁶¹Ibid.

nationalism as cultural elitism, but in this dissertation I am attempting to study Raghavan's literary works and activities in a way that is still critical but also more sympathetic. My goal is to understand his perspective on Sanskrit and cultural nationalism and its meaning for his original literary works, not to berate him. In their recent ethnography on Tamil Brahmins, C.J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan also discuss the image of Tamil Brahmins as the elitist exponents of culture, and mention Raghavan on occasion in this role.⁶² While there is no doubt that Raghavan was an exponent of elite culture, and in this way one could consider him a typical Tamil Brahmin, this argument needs to be nuanced. According to my interviews, Raghavan began his life very poor, and while he did earn a decent living, he was never rich. He never owned his own home, always rented his house, and his money went into supporting not just his family but his cultural endeavors. Indeed, though the monetary support for his publications and dramatic activities came in part from a few small supporters, a number of his works were self-published (under the imprint "Punarvasu," his birth star), and he himself spent the money to support most of the printing and promotion of his plays. He certainly had connections to politicians and movers and shakers in the arts world, but he was by no means elite in the way some Brahmins in twentieth-century Madras were.

Because Raghavan was not consumed by the pursuit of money, he was not closely associated with the powerful and rich Brahmins of Mylapore, and in fact, according to one interviewee, there was some friction between them. Raghavan was the workhorse of the arts and Sanskrit worlds, willing and more than able to do the work to serve the ends that the cultural exponents were funding, but never feeling sufficiently recognized by the financially well-to-do

⁶² See C.J.Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmins: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 183-210.

Brahmins of Mylapore. Nor did he appreciate the ways of these royal Mylaporeans.⁶³ In fact, his rented house was not in Mylapore but just north in Royapettah, a largely Muslim area in between Mylapore and another Brahmin stronghold: Triplicane. In a way, then, Raghavan was something of a marginal Brahmin: neither a pundit nor a bigwig, but rather a scholar devoted to a cause of Sanskrit and earning what he considered a good living based on his studies and research in Sanskrit and other fields. He was certainly elite, and at times elitist, but not in the ways of money and power; rather in terms of his own perceived sense of cultural capital. As I will point out in some of the examples of his literary works, he appears to chastise commercial pursuits and pretensions to royalty, and I see in these works, presented in Sanskrit to a predominantly Brahmin audience, a subtle needling of these more powerful Brahmins, and an insistence not on the pandits' way but on a path devoted to traditional knowledge and the traditional arts rather than money and modernity.

Raghavan and Politics

There is a natural progression from the discussion of culture to the discussion of politics, particularly nationalism, in Raghavan's rhetoric. His advocacy of the arts was a matter of creating a national culture in independent India. After the Sanskrit Commission and the establishment of other Commissions to foster the arts in India (such as the Sangita Nataka Akademi and Sahitya Akademi), and just before he founded the Ranga, Raghavan wrote an article in *The Hindu* entitled "Fine Arts in Free India: New Surge of Growth: Importance of Tradition"⁶⁴ in which he begins by expressing the continuity of the tradition but goes on to describe the work being done toward maintaining the arts, from central government boards, to

⁶³ This data concerning Raghavan's relation to other Mylaporeans is based on interviews with his family members.

⁶⁴ V. Raghavan, "Fine Arts in Free India: New Surge of Growth: Importance of Tradition" *The Hindu*, January 26, 1958, Section 15, Pages A and G. The essay appears to have three headlines, each below the previous, hence the lengthy title.

the radio (he was particularly optimistic about this modern medium's potential), to the role of research. He stresses, however, the need for devoted attention to maintaining the authenticity of the arts, and decries the faddishness of Bharatanāṭyam even then, as well as the tendency for architectural works to be built in imitation of European styles rather than Indian styles. Overall, his discourse of authenticity in such a piece suggests an underlying metanarrative of the need for a return to some imagined pre-colonial era of artistic glory.

On drama, his remarks provide an early hint of what he wanted to achieve through the Ranga, as he mentions that Indian drama is really an integrated form (with dance and music) and he remarks of Indian drama, in contrast to the Western styles, "It is this technique which is truly Indian and what is more intrinsically more artistic which it is worthwhile to resurrect to-day if an authentic Indian stage is to be rebuilt."⁶⁵ He is not thinking of the many modern theatre movements in India but of Sanskrit theater as the "authentic Indian stage," which he thinks ought to be rebuilt as a matter of national pride. The nationalist meaning is even more poignant if one considers that it was published on Republic Day. Further, *The Hindu* is a newspaper that tends to cater to the English-speaking elite of Madras, precisely those elites who might be charged with the task of supporting the arts through funding and would later attend his Samskrita Ranga performances.

Raghavan's interest in reviving Sanskrit drama was coterminous with a larger uprising of interest in drama in newly independent India for the purpose of generating a "national culture." Space does not allow a thorough investigation of the prolific and active theater movements within India during the colonial and postcolonial periods, but a few broad notes will suffice. Inheriting from nineteenth-century European nationalism an already established notion of

⁶⁵ Ibid., page G, column 2.

nationality as based on language and cultural performances, what Loren Kruger calls “theatrical nationhood,”⁶⁶ Indians sought to construct their own national theatrical movements to, in essence, represent themselves to themselves as a unified body. Prior to independence, theater in India often had an anti-colonial bent, but in the wake of independence, Indian dramatists found themselves in a new situation wherein they registered a need to create a national tradition. The prodigious number of dramatists and dramatic movements active during the postcolonial period, all in various vernaculars and with varying styles, was felt by some to threaten the possible establishment of a sense of unity and thus nationalistic feeling. In the same year as the Sanskrit Commission (1956), there was a Drama Seminar at the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Delhi to assess the status of drama in India and its capacity to provide a cultural backbone for the incipient nation.⁶⁷ The goal was to develop out of the cacophony of traditions a singular category, “Indian drama,” that could serve as a medium in and through which to represent the singularity of the nation. Raghavan argued that Sanskrit, and specifically Sanskrit drama, could supply such a unity if Sanskrit dramas were performed in independent India. It was shortly thereafter that he founded the Samskrita Ranga to attempt to foster this sense of nationalism.

If the Samskrita Ranga’s ideals were not merely cultural but nationalistic as well, we might read the performance of even the classical dramas the Ranga staged as taking on new meanings due to the time of their performance, similar to Pierre Menard’s *Don Quixote* in the story by Borges. A Kālidāsa play performed in independent India does not mean what it would have meant in the court of Ujjain, or any other place of performance. It becomes a symbol of Sanskrit cultural tradition, of Sanskrit hegemony, of the past glories of literary achievement, and of Indian cultural refinement and achievement, among many other possible meanings. Even

⁶⁶ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 3.

⁶⁷ Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 23.

specific aspects of a play could take on new meanings. Many of the people I interviewed recalled fondly the very emotional moment when Śakuntalā leaves the forest hermitage. I cannot say if this early moment in the play would be relished so strongly in other times, but I can suggest that their reaction is part and parcel of an anxiety over the abandonment of traditional ways in modern India, and especially the move from villages to the big city in modern India. In short, the audience that the Ranga performed for is not the audience that the plays were written for, and thus new meanings are always possible. It would be interesting to plumb the depths of classical Sanskrit texts for new meanings in newer performances, however I have not found much supporting evidence for such a reading, and rather it is the active performance of the plays, in Sanskrit in independent India, that appears to suggest not only the liveliness of the Sanskrit theater tradition, but also an image of a unified culture through the display of this art form.

From drama, we might make a natural leap to literature, and in a magazine article entitled “Nationalism in Sanskrit Literature,” in the popular *Illustrated Weekly*, Raghavan provides a history of expressions of India as a nation within Sanskrit texts beginning with the Vedas and leading up to modern times. His story begins with Vedic expressions of success in battle and a general love of land in the Vedas, which he reads as nationalist, and continues on to “democratic” notions in the “more secular Atharvaveda.” Aware of the image of Bhāratamātā in modern thought of Bankim Chandra and Bharati, Raghavan nevertheless situates this notion in earlier expressions of worshipping the earth as Bhūmidevi. He reads descriptions of the land in the Purāṇas as prescient of the present: “By a farsighted and highminded process of assimilation the Puranic culture welded the whole of this vast country into one great integration, in which a unity was achieved without detriment to the variety. If the pith and core of patriotism is the

feeling for a concretised image of one's native land, we had all that given to us in the Puranas.”⁶⁸ Not only does this suggest that India is an essentialized, natural entity since it is so described in mythological texts, but it insists on the unity of the nation in opposition to the creation of Pakistan and various fissiparous tendencies, not to mention linguistic tensions especially in Tamil Nadu. At the same time, Raghavan is also making the claim that *Sanskrit* literature is fully capable of expressing nationalist feelings. Indeed, it bears mentioning that Raghavan's nationalism could also be expressed through the nationalism of others, as he translated into Sanskrit the famous nationalist poem “Último Adiós (Last Farewell)” of José Rizal, the celebrated nationalist author from the Philippines.⁶⁹ Here he considers nationalism to be a cross-cultural notion, as indeed it has become thanks to its modern exportation from Europe, but he naturalizes it into Sanskrit.

Beyond his nationalist leanings, which are to be expected of a figure in India during his time period, Raghavan's involvement with actual politics was minimal. In fact, in his “Culture and Independence” essay, he bemoans the fact that “there is too much emphasis today on politics,” by which he meant the drive for political power, as opposed to the drive for cultural development. In a way, he posits political maneuvering as antithetical to the promotion of culture, which hides the fact that cultural promotion is itself a form of elitist politics. Raghavan was well connected politically, but not particularly active, at least in his later years. In his early college student days, he was closely associated with the fiery freedom fighter S. Satyamurti in Madras, and was frequently at his house and within his circles of conversations. About this aspect and era of his life, there are few further details. At the very least, we might say that ending colonial rule was important to him. And yet, it is not the case that he was against Europeans or

⁶⁸ V. Raghavan, “Nationalism in Sanskrit Literature,” *Illustrated Weekly*, (April 21, 1963): 45, 47. This article was later translated into Sanskrit by Ashok Aklujkar as “*Saṃskṛtavanīmaye rāṣṭriyabhāvanā*,” *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 5, no. 1 (1965): 30-35.

⁶⁹ Raghavan, trans., “*Antimam Āmantraṇam*,” *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 1960): 148-52.

even the British, and he was frequently grateful for their work to support Sanskrit. In the 1950's and 60's, as I have noted, he was very much involved with various commissions and central government agencies promoting Sanskrit and the arts. In these years, he was a supporter of the Congress Party and a follower of Gandhi and Nehru. In fact, he translated two of Nehru's speeches on Sanskrit and Kālidāsa into Sanskrit for his journal *Samskṛta Pratibhā*.⁷⁰ He was quite close with the philosopher and statesman Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, at whose request he wrote a play on the revival of the arts and literature in India (see chapter 2). He was something of a supporter of Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari), and wrote a poem in his honor published in *Samskṛta Pratibhā*.⁷¹ On the other hand, I have no evidence that Raghavan was ever a member of Rajaji's conservative Swatantra Party, although Raghavan's own more conservative outlook would have coincided with theirs.

On the touchy subject of caste, one would expect a Brahmin such as Raghavan to be in favor of it, but that is not entirely what my sources tell me, and it seems his position depended somewhat on his audience. It is a subject, however, on which he does not have very much to say at all, forcing any conclusions to be somewhat tentative. In Rāghavan's passion for and research on Bharatanāṭyam, he worked closely with the devadāsī dancer T. Balasaraswati and did not appear to see any problems with doing so, although he had to be careful about seeming to be overly friendly with such non-Brahmins in the eyes of his Tamil Brahmin community and would meet with her only in public.⁷² His daughter reports to me that caste was no matter to him, but one did have to keep up appearances.⁷³ While the issue of the elimination of caste was not typically promoted by Tamil Brahmins, even among some of the freedom fighters and Congress

⁷⁰ V. Raghavan, trans, "*Samskṛtam*" and "*Kālidāsaḥ*," *Samskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1959): 123-4.

⁷¹ V. Raghavan, "*Rājājī*," *Samskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 10, no. 1 (1973): unnumbered prefatory pages.

⁷² Interview with Nandini Ramini, August 2015.

⁷³ Ibid.

Party folk with whom Raghavan would have associated, it is clear in some of his Sanskrit writings, as I will detail in the chapters that follow, that he tacitly calls for an end to strict caste endogamy rules. That Raghavan would not have been entirely like other Tamil Brahmins in the Congress Party who wanted to maintain caste is not entirely unsurprising since he was an ardent admirer of S. Satyamurthi and the great poet Sumbramania Bharati, both fellow Smārta Brahmins who favored the elimination of caste. For Satyamurthi, though, it was primarily an opposition to caste-based political parties and their impediment to independence.⁷⁴ But in general both were against a nationalism that emphasized divisions. He was also a voracious reader of the works of Rabindranath Tagore, whom he praises highly, and who also was against caste. It would be hard to imagine such views not influencing him.

At the same time, it is notable that when speaking to a global audience, Raghavan refers to caste as a matter of ethical social organization and decidedly not as a matter of dominance, in effect sweeping hierarchy under the rug.⁷⁵ In an essay entitled “The Relevance of Hinduism,” given at a global conference of religions (and later published in the Netherlands under the auspices of a group in the United States that promoted religious harmony), Raghavan amalgamates caste to *varṇa* (itself a slight inaccuracy given that caste would usually gloss *jati*) and then again to the general concept of *svadharma* reinterpreted in a democratic fashion as “performing one’s duties.” To him, “The *varṇa* is comparable to an orchestra in which, irrespective of the nature of the instrument one plays, all contribute to a common end of a rich and perfect sympathy.”⁷⁶ This rosy picture of structural-functional society, with each individual

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 286-89.

⁷⁵ This redefinition of caste is a common move made by those who favor Hindutva ideas, even today, and particularly, as of late, among diaspora Hindus.

⁷⁶ V. Raghavan, “The Relevance of Hinduism,” in *The World Religions on “The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World,”* edited by Finley P. Dunne, Jr. (The Hague: Dr. W. Junk N.V. Publishers, 1970), 12-23, 18.

doing his or her duty, completely negates the fact that caste involves domination. Yet we could also read those words as a defense of his own tradition, however skewed. The fact remains that in the precious few other places where Raghavan mentions caste, particularly in poems such as those about Gandhi and Vivekananda, his approach appears more progressive.

While he was an early supporter of the Congress Party, Raghavan was quick to insist that he was against secularism in so far as it meant atheism, and indeed that is how he defined the term, despite the common understanding of secularism in India as the respect and support for all religions. Raghavan's thought on the matter would have been closer to Gandhi's opinion of secularism as not negating religion.⁷⁷ If called upon to categorize Raghavan, I would suggest that he fits the mold of the more conservative wing of the Congress Party, or what Christophe Jaffrelot would call a "hindu traditionalist," a position that lacked outright hindu nationalism's xenophobia and tendency toward creating ideologues, and is rather "manifested simply by the promotion of culture."⁷⁸ That said, Raghavan did associate from time to time with K.M. Munshi,⁷⁹ whom Manu Bhavagan describes as a member of the "Hindutva Underground," working within the Congress but forwarding patently Hindutva ideas.⁸⁰ In fact, much of Munshi's writing about Hinduism as constitutive of the Indian nation, and his concern for the "foreignness" of Muslims (with the exceptions of Akbar and his immediate successors) reads as rather similar to what I will show is Raghavan's interpretation of the place of Muslims in India. Further, Raghavan published his book *Universal Love and World Unity* with Munshi's Bharatiya

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Ajay Skaria, "'No Politics without Religion': Of Secularism and Gandhi," in *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres*, edited by Vinay Lal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173-210.

⁷⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 83.

⁷⁹ In a note sent to Raghavan reviewing his original poem about Gandhi, Munshi wrote that, "A thing in Sanskrit looks doubly more interesting." Raghavan, "Select Opinions" in *Prekṣaṅkatrayī* (Madras: Sri Ramacandra Printworks, 1956), 8.

⁸⁰ Manu Bhavagan, "The Hindutva Underground: Hindu Nationalism and the Indian National Congress in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial India" in Steven E. Lindquist, ed. *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle* (New York: Anthem Press, 2013), 321-45.

Vidya Bhavan Press, and wrote a few pieces for the BVB Bulletin. So there is something to be said for a Hindutva-like quality to Raghavan's work. The important thing to note is that Hindutva in the middle of the twentieth century was not nearly as extreme as the Hindutva of today.

Further, I see no evidence aside from a few stray associations and publications that would thrust Raghavan firmly into the "Hindutva" camp. Despite the three essays he published in Diwali Special Issues in the RSS magazine *The Organiser*, I know of no other connection between Raghavan and the RSS. He did serve on the committee that worked to put together the Vivekananda Rock memorial, and the Vivekananda Kendra did have RSS connections, and that might have been how he ended up writing for *The Organiser*, but those are tenuous connections, and I thus contest Mary Hancock's facile description of Raghavan as a Hindutva supporter based only on that evidence. I do not think that three articles over the course of a few years make Raghavan an RSS apparatchik, and in fact I have never seen him use the term "Hindutva," or mention Sarvarkar or Golwalkar, or even the RSS in any publication. No, Raghavan was far more a centrist and too much a scholar and devotee of religious harmony for the RSS, although it is still the case that some of his ideas do line up with an RSS agenda, and his religious nationalism is of a Hindutva sort. Still, there is a hesitance with regard to exclusion in his rhetoric when compared to modern Hindutva propaganda. His advocacy of Hinduism and Sanskrit do not arise from a concern to shut out the other entirely, but rather from a desire to give Hinduism a revered place on the global stage and revive Sanskrit in a way that he considered would be best for the formation of the national identity and cultivation. In some way, such ideas do lay the groundwork for later Hindutva by popularizing such notions. What I at least want to argue in this space is that to discard Raghavan because of a Hindutva agenda appears to me not only overly hasty, but precludes the kind of close study that might serve to better understand

such positions and how they are articulated and conveyed, particularly through Sanskrit literature.

Raghavan did not write a significant amount on local Tamil politics, but he did have a few things to say about the Dravidian movement, mostly in opposition to its opposition to Sanskrit. There is little need in this space to rehash details of the Dravidian pro-Tamil movement, but some background is certainly necessary.⁸¹ In the early twentieth century in Tamil Nadu there began a strong political movement opposed to Brahmin hegemony and in favor of bolstering a Tamil identity. The Brahmins of Tamil Nadu were a powerful minority, and they were also the upholders of the Sanskrit tradition. Those in favor of Tamil and who supported non-Brahmin causes viewed Brahmins and Sanskrit as northern invaders who threatened Tamil identity and prevented non-Brahmins from obtaining social and economic advancement. Thus their opposition to Brahmins and support of Tamil meant a virulent opposition to Sanskrit. There were a variety of wings of this movement with different emphases at different times, but most prominent was the more atheistic Self-Respect movement lead by Periyar, and later the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), which came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1967. This rise to power occurred on the heels of the anti-Hindi riots of 1965, during which many Tamilians protested, often violently, against demands that they learn Hindi as the national language. For his part, Raghavan represented the opposite standpoint not only as a Brahmin, but also because he explicitly argued for Hindi as the national language at least as a precursor to Sanskrit eventually

⁸¹ On this, see e.g. Sumathi Ramswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

taking that role. In a note to Milton Singer, he speaks of the 1965 anti-Hindi agitations, which he said had been “taken over by anti-social elements.”⁸²

As for the Dravidian movement itself, Raghavan corrects one of Singer’s assertions that they promote “ a purely Dravidian” culture by changing it to “a more supposedly pure Dravidian, etc....They themselves do not have a clear idea of what is Aryan and what is Dravidian in the cultural milieu.”⁸³ In short, Raghavan doubts that those in the Dravidian movement are real scholars or can really disentangle the admixture. For Raghavan, even Tamil has precursors, at some point, in Sanskrit, and so does much of Tamil culture. Further, Raghavan would say that the Hindu tendency is to accept others into its fold, and this Dravidian movement is against such tolerance.

Raghavan’s real opposition to the DMK and the Dravidian movement was that they threatened to derail his efforts to advance Sanskrit, and in fact in 1971 they were successful at least in getting Tamil to be used in temples in Tamil Nadu. Raghavan did not feel, however, that there was any real conflict between Sanskrit and Tamil, except in so far as the Tamil movement was anti-Sanskrit. In a footnote to an essay for the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Bulletin, he declares (with some exaggeration) that the DMK government’s two language educational policy that eliminated Sanskrit “dealt the final death-blow”.⁸⁴ Later in the same essay he writes that “So far as Tamil is concerned, there is now a sweeping and burning zeal among all sections, the lay as well as the scholarly, to advance the cause of Tamil at all costs. There can never be any quarrel with movements for the promotion of any language or literature, but the exhibition of that zeal as

⁸² Milton Singer Files, Box 23, Folder 5, Letter dated 12/2/65.

⁸³ Ibid. Letter dated 11/1/79.

⁸⁴ V. Raghavan, *Sanskrit: Essays on the Value of the Language and the Literature* (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1972), 106.

hate towards another literature is reprehensible.”⁸⁵ While one might contest that he is still being elitist in arguing against a comparatively subaltern movement, the comment strikes me as rather even-keeled and in line with his dislike of any extremism or violence. It is important to mention again that Raghavan was not in any way opposed to Tamil, that he wrote essays, poems, and plays in it, and was familiar with and respected the Tamil classics from *Tolkappiyar* to the nationalist poetry of Bharati. Yet, he regrets the Tamil movements attempt at “linguicide”,⁸⁶ and insists that Sanskrit is the root of the culture, and has the most potential for developing the nation. Directly taking on the Tamil movement, he writes in 1948 in a Madras newspaper: “The adverse attitude towards Sanskrit is really based on ill-conceived notions and false theories. Sanskrit is not the monopoly of one class or group of people, and its knowledge is going to be of infinite assistance for the growth of Tamil.”⁸⁷ He thereby insists that Sanskrit is not limited to Brahmins but is important for Tamil. He further resents the fact that “fanatical regional and linguistic loyalties are giving growth to fissiparous movements.”⁸⁸ In short, it is the unity of the nation that is most important to him, and he finds that Sanskrit best offers this unity not only because it has that potential in the future but because in his estimation Sanskrit has achieved this unity of the nation in the past.

Studying Sanskrit, Promoting Sanskrit, Worshipping Sanskrit

It has been nearly impossible thus far to discuss Raghavan’s religious, cultural, and political views without somehow bringing up Sanskrit, and since the focus of this dissertation is on Raghavan’s creative writings in Sanskrit, it is worth devoting some considerable space to that

⁸⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 19.

subject, from his early experiences to his later writings about Sanskrit. My discussion also includes a number of poems in Sanskrit that are *about* Sanskrit and reveal quite a bit about his perception of the language.

Although Raghavan studied Sanskrit at the British-founded University of Madras, he also grew up learning Sanskrit in a traditional manner. Both of his parents died when he was seven, and his father's sister, "who was devoted to traditional learning and in the old world way," had him and his sister study with a Sanskrit Pandit, Sengalipuram Appaswami Shastrigal.⁸⁹ He also studied Sanskrit as a second language in school. Some various female relatives who were rather competent Sanskritists also apparently influenced him to maintain an interest in Sanskrit.⁹⁰ Although he wished to study Botany at Presidency College, Madras,⁹¹ the allocation of seats was not in his favor,⁹² and he fell into the field of "Ancient History (Greek and Roman), Logic and Sanskrit."⁹³ It seems he took to Sanskrit like a fish to water, and a variety of family members and their acquaintances spurred him along in his memorizing texts, writing stotras, etc. His family also had significant connections to various musicians, and travelling musicians always seemed to be staying with his family in Tiravārūr. It was at the main temple in Tiravārūr that, according to his younger sister, he wrote his first Sanskrit verse as early as age nine.⁹⁴ But his was not an easy path to becoming a scholar and writer. An interesting point to note, oft reported to me, is his poverty as a student but also his resilience: unable to buy books or proper paper, he

⁸⁹ V. Raghavan, "Autobiographical Reflections," 320.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁹¹ His son R. Charudattan is currently an emeritus professor of Botany at the University of Florida and still doing research. There is a story, told to me often, of an occasion when Raghavan introduced his son as fulfilling his dream of studying botany. The person to whom he said this replied that if this were the case, we would never have heard of Raghavan the great Sanskrit scholar. Raghavan replied with a straight face: "Oh, you would have heard of me."

⁹² My sources say that this allocation was not directly a caste issue but rather a racial issue: most seats in Botany at that time went to the British and Christians studying at Presidency College.

⁹³ The department itself indicates an antiquarian approach to the study of Sanskrit, against which he protests in some of his writings on Sanskrit. It is possible that this juxtaposition between the two presentations of Sanskrit that he experienced impacted his own project.

⁹⁴ Ramani, *V. Raghavan*, 53.

would transcribe entire library books onto old notebooks leftover from the railways.⁹⁵ Early on he worked at the Saraswati Mahal Library in Thanjavur, before returning to do graduate work, then after completing the Ph.D. he did research at the University of Madras, and later became a professor there and eventually head of the Sanskrit Department. And thus, by way of a family tradition steeped in Sanskrit and music, and by way of some precipitous accidents, fate brought the world one of the foremost Sanskrit scholars of the mid-twentieth century.

My point in rehashing this narrative of Raghavan's life is to suggest that while he was certainly fluent in Tamil and English (his mastery of English is quite exceptional and his books in English have far fewer typos than almost any book published in India I have ever seen), and educated in British schools, his abilities in Sanskrit were fostered not only in universities like a Euro-American's (such as my own knowledge of Sanskrit) but also through his family upbringing. It would be difficult, therefore, to say that Sanskritists and speakers of Sanskrit in India in the twentieth century came by their knowledge entirely in a traditional manner. Nor is it possible to suggest that Sanskrit knowledge had been fostered in an entirely artificial manner under colonial support and education. While Sanskrit may be largely relegated to the University, for some Sanskritists such as Raghavan, the language is still part of a living tradition of people who are, if not speakers (in the sense of those who have it as their main language), at least readers, memorizers, and writers. If Sanskrit is not the mother tongue of many in India (and likely never was), I would argue that, at least for Raghavan, it remains a formidable aunt-tongue.

To say a few words about Raghavan's writing in Sanskrit itself, I might note that Raghavan's Sanskrit tends to be quite clear and precise, although not without poetic fancy. Raghavan's works tend to be comprehensible to someone with an intermediate knowledge of

⁹⁵ Interview with Nandini Ramini, 3/17/2014.

Sanskrit. His works are not in what might be called “simple Sanskrit” with minimal grammatical forms and separated *sandhi*, but he does on occasion use punctuation borrowed from English printing, and he does sometimes separate compounds with hyphens. His compounds are generally not tediously long, and some sentences and verse lines are straightforward and simple. Unlike those favoring an extreme simplification of Sanskrit, he does not bring it to an infantile level, but unlike some contemporaries, his texts are not bogged down in their own flights of linguistic fancy such that they become almost untranslatable into English. Rarely have I seen his poetry carry a syntactically distinct sentence beyond the limit of one verse or even beyond two lines of a longer verse, rarely do compounds extend for very long, and rarely does he choose words that are terribly rare. He seems to intend his works to be understood by those with a degree of knowledge of Sanskrit.

As for the influence of other languages on his own Sanskrit, Raghavan generally translates modern English words into Sanskrit equivalents (even the word for “divorce” in a play we will discuss later) but on rare occasions he will use the English word, such as “hippy” in one instance intended for humor and a worldwide audience. When discussing Islam and other religions, he transliterates words for non-Hindu names and concepts into Sanskrit without translation. In a few instances I have detected some hint of a Tamil sense in his Sanskrit. Some of his plays incorporate a number of Tamil colloquialisms translated into Sanskrit. In a more minor way, sometimes he will end a sentence with a gerund immediately followed by the main verb, which betrays a syntactical model of Tamil as well as other vernacular Indian languages.

His Sanskrit writing shows quite plainly that he was extremely well-versed in the Sanskrit classics, both classical literature and philosophy as well as religious texts from the Vedas to the Purāṇas, and easily able to imitate their styles in a clear way that would be

accessible to many who knew at least something of the language. His longer plays are traditional in having a *prastāvanā* (prologue) conversation between the *sūtradhāra* (director) and someone else (usually a friend or colleague), a *nāndī* opening verse, and *bharatavākya* final verse. Shorter plays, particularly the short plays written for All India Radio, do not include these features. I would not call him terribly experimental in terms of form. He was not, unlike some of his contemporary authors, experimenting with the novel or haiku in Sanskrit. His innovations are generally a matter of subject and message more than style or form. One notable change in Raghavan’s Sanskrit plays when compared to classical Sanskrit dramas is the absence of Prakrit. All characters – high and low, male and female – speak Sanskrit, and this is consistent with almost all the modern Sanskrit plays I have encountered.⁹⁶ The switch to all Sanskrit might be interpreted as supporting the Sanskritization of independent India, and the lack of distinction might point to Sanskrit’s supposed integrative tendency (on which, see below), which would be in meaningful opposition to the separation imposed upon social groups by the division between Sanskrit and Prakrit in older Sanskrit dramas. Despite such a rich potential interpretation, I think the absence of Prakrit has a simpler and more pragmatic reason: people in India, particularly those who have been educated in Sanskrit in the universities and modern *pāṭhaśālā*-s, or even have some familiarity with Sanskrit from attending temples and recitations, are far more likely to know Sanskrit than Prakrit. Though very few, there are some Brahmins in Madras who did then, and still do, know something of Sanskrit, often more than they will admit.⁹⁷ I have been told that Raghavan’s plays were performed for full houses at the famed Music Academy and the Museum

⁹⁶ I have seen a few that use Hindi as the “prakrit,” but it is quite rare. Most are entirely in Sanskrit.

⁹⁷ Anecdotally, in 2014 in Mandavelli (just south of Mylapore), I attended a visit of pandits from Mattur, known as the only Sanskrit speaking village in the world. It was apparent that many of the hundred or so people in the room, particularly the older generation, were able to follow the discussion in Sanskrit just fine. A gentleman seated next to me claimed to have almost no knowledge of the language, but even he seemed able to follow along with the discussion. This is not to say that Sanskrit is still alive, or that it can and should be the national language, but it is to say that, based on a rough ethnographic observation, it is not the case that Sanskrit is completely unknown even in 2014. Sources tell me that it was more well-known some decades ago, but this could also be nostalgia.

Theater in Madras, and there is still to this day an audience for the Samskrita Ranga's yearly productions, although it is dwindling.

One of the most notable aspects of Raghavan's Sanskrit plays and poems, seen within the longer tradition of Sanskrit literature, is their insistence on referring to themselves as being in Sanskrit. This self-referential language appears, for example in prologues wherein the director notes explicitly that the play is a "Sanskrit drama." Earlier plays in the tradition need not signal their own language, but in the modern period that becomes an important part of the message itself. With Marshall McLuhan, we might say that the linguistic medium is the message, or at least a part of the message. Certainly there is some history within Sanskrit literature that make a self-referential comment; in the Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hanumān says that he will not speak to Sītā in Sanskrit, or in a refined tongue that is the language of the Brahmins, in order to ensure that she knows he is not Rāvaṇa in disguise.⁹⁸ There, however, Sanskrit is a register rather than a discrete language. In the vernacular millennium, and especially in the twentieth century after colonialism, Sanskrit cannot be merely a high register, but rather becomes a delimited language that signifies the identity of a group of speakers. While Sanskrit may have been the language of aesthetic authority for royalty, as Sheldon Pollock has described,⁹⁹ Sanskrit promoters influenced by colonial-era identity politics reify it into a symbol not only of authority but also of identity, trying to turn it into a language equivalent to (and yet also superior to) all the vernaculars. For Raghavan and those on the Sanskrit Commission, Sanskrit and its literature are the identity markers of India. It is the "great unifier" but also the foundational root of the nation, naturalized and historicized to become an image of the nation's trans-historical essence.

⁹⁸ *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.28.18-19. See Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006), 45.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

Sanskrit the Goddess

Another development that language undergoes in twentieth-century India is the creation of languages as goddesses to whom one offers devotion. Sumathi Ramaswamy discusses this with relation to Tamil, and the creation in the twentieth century of both *Tamīḷttāy* (mother Tamil) and practices of loving devotion toward her.¹⁰⁰ Lisa Mitchell discusses a similar development, although with weaker bhakti overtones, in Telugu with the creation of *Telugu Talli*.¹⁰¹ The apotheosis of both of these languages into mother goddesses is a distinct feature of twentieth-century devotional language politics in India. It also coincides with the divinization of mother India. In a few of his poems, Raghavan fashions a similar apotheosis of Sanskrit, but for him the language is the essence not just of a particular place (e.g. India), or of a particular people, but rather he posits Sanskrit as the divine linguistic mother of the whole unified world. There is not, as in the Tamil and Telugu movements, a sense of devotion to “our” language as goddess, but rather an emphasis on devotion to mother Sanskrit as a goddess who can heal the world, a belief that she is everyone’s goddess and merely needs revival and expansion in the world to spread India’s spiritual message to everyone.

An example of Raghavan’s poetry in praise of Sanskrit is his “*Samṣkr̥ta Maṅgalam*,” written for Sanskrit Day celebrations in Madras on August 14, 1973. It is only eight lines in length, and each line begins with “*maṅgalam tava*” or “your blessing.” It praises Sanskrit as a maternal goddess, echoing in a fashion the similar praise of mother Tamil in the contemporary pro-Tamil movement. The poem also shows both a nationalist element and a religious element in addition to the linguistic subject.

¹⁰⁰ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*, 79-134.

¹⁰¹ Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 69, 91-95.

Your blessing, O Mother Sanskrit, may you be victorious in all places.
Your blessing, O Sarasvatī, who is the root of the greatness of India.
Your blessing, O Mother of all beautiful songs that have a sense of what is best.
Your blessing, O Great mine, giver of all science (*śāstra*), enjoyment, and liberation.
Your blessing, Be victorious in the minds of all the world's people in speech and action.
Your blessing, O Beautiful one shining forth with ever new glimmerings and wonders.
Your blessing, O Mother Sanskrit. Be victorious, O Ageless Mother, O Undying Mother.
Your blessing, O Divine Bhāratī, O Omnipresent Bhāratī, O Bhāratī.¹⁰²

This notion of “mother Sanskrit” is new in Sanskrit thought, and it seems to coincide with a general amalgamation of language to a maternal figure and to India itself as a mother. In fact, while Bhāratī in the last line means “speech” and is another name for the goddess Sarasvatī, the goddess of speech, it is undeniable that there is a certain implied affiliation between this name for Sarasvatī and the name of India itself, Bharata. The second line refers to that which is “Indian” as *bhāratīya*, thus the demonym “Indian” and Sanskrit speech are essentially the same word. The poem in effect collapses the goddess with both the Sanskrit language and the nation. The first line calls for Sanskrit to be victorious in all places, and the second line suggests that Sarasvatī is the great root of all India, but there is a further sentiment of Sanskrit's universal appeal. The poem combines a fairly typical verse offering worship to Sarasvatī with a much more nationalistic flare, and makes the object not merely language but specifically the Sanskrit language. The poem elevates Sanskrit to the level of being a divine language not as the language of the gods but rather as the language that *is* a goddess. A final significant element of the poem insists on the notion that Sanskrit is not a “dead language” but rather ageless and immortal; thus

¹⁰² V. Raghavan, “*Samṣkṛta Maṅgalam*,” in *Kavikokila Mañjari*, Vol. 1, compiled by Nandini Ramini (Madras: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2007), 39.

maṅgalaṃ tava saṃskṛtāmba jayo 'stu te sakalāvanau
maṅgalaṃ tava bhāratīyamahattvamūlasarasvatī
maṅgalaṃ tava māturakhilagirāṃ śriyāṃ śubhasaṃvidām
maṅgalaṃ tava bhuktimuktidasarvaśāstramahākhanē
maṅgalaṃ tava jaya jagajjanamānase vacane kṛtau
maṅgalaṃ tava navanavollasitādbhutadyutisundari
maṅgalaṃ tava saṃskṛtāmba jayājarāmba jayāmarā
maṅgalaṃ tava devabhāratī viśvabhāratī bhāratī.

the language is divine not only in being itself a goddess, but also in partaking in the divine ability to live forever. Indeed, if a language is deemed divinely immortal, how can it be a dead language? There is then only the need to offer worship to the deity/language in order to appease her, support her, maintain her power, and request her intercession, particularly in the promotion of Sanskrit and, implicitly, for the unity of the nation and world.

In another poem of six verses written for the first World Sanskrit Conference in Delhi in 1972 and read during their *Samskṛta Kavi Sammelana*, Raghavan waxes more poetic about Sanskrit and emphasizes slightly more its potential for forging world peace. Indeed, on this more international stage, Raghavan's focus is far more the world, although he was no less sanguine or global when writing for a far more local audience, as in the last poem. Both the importance of poetry and the global focus emerge clearly in the opening line, which exhorts the audience at the World Sanskrit conference, and by extension the world in general, to look to the East, i.e. India as a salve for global wounds. Here is the poem:

1. Revive yourself, undying goddess Bhāratī! Look to the East!
Damn, it shines brilliantly granting unprecedented splendor.
Rising with the power of the sun, of all the world
It opens the consciousness. Hark! Darkness perishes!
2. Your foremost song shines forth from the praise hymns of the birds,¹⁰³
Vālmīki the cuckoo coos calling you here.
Vyāsa arrives bearing your entire burden.
Sweet-voiced Kālidāsa offers you salutation.
3. Wishing to tell the whole world your true Upaniṣad,
O! Thus the whole teaching is harmony.
Having descended from Kailāsa, and looked around,
Visibly wandering here, the embodiment of Śaṅkara (Śiva).
4. This buzzing herd of bees who are the connoisseurs of sweet nectar,
Produced by the flowers in your garden of literature,
From all corners of the world both East and West,
Here they lovingly discuss you, O undying ageless Mother.

¹⁰³ The Sanskrit here is *dvija*, and birds makes more sense, but it can also mean Brahmins in this context.

5. Get up, O Queen, Gatherer of Treasure! Daybreak shines forth!
Shine with new strength and with new pleasures,
Manifest your new beautiful forms, O Mother!
What is to be done now is your great deed.
6. Due to people's afflictions of envy, siege, and war
The earth (*mahī*), your sister, suffers now, torn.
Stand up, O undying goddess Bhārati! With a message of peace,
A curative juice, grant wellness and welfare.^{104 105}

While the poem is literally about the goddess of speech, it is evident from the setting and the title that Raghavan blurs the line between addressing the goddess and addressing Sanskrit. Further, the poem concerns the revival of Sanskrit (“Get up, O Queen”) as a curative force for the problems of the world. The setting here was the World Sanskrit conference, which reinforces Raghavan’s notion that Sanskrit not only has a starring role on the world stage, but can do important work from that position. He insists that Sanskrit has the potential to raise the consciousness not just of India but of all the world. He imagines the attendees of the conference

¹⁰⁴ The Sanskrit is “*śamaṃ ca śaṃ*,” hence “wellness and welfare” to preserve some semblance of alliteration.

¹⁰⁵ V. Raghavan, “*Saṃskṛtasuprabhātam*,” *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 10, No. 1 (1973): 1.

*budhyasva devyamarabhārati! paśya pūrvā
dik jājvalīti dadhatī suśamāmapūrvām/
sāvitrāmoja udditam jagato 'khilasya
caitanya munmiṣati hanta! tamo vilīnam//1
amryā girastava ṛco dvijataḥ sphuranti
vālmīkīkoka upāhvayatīha kūjan/
vyāso 'tra te nikhilabhārasahassametaḥ
kālyāstavaiva madhuvān namatīha dāsaḥ//2
tattvaṃ tavaupaniṣadam jagato vivakṣu-
raddhā tathā nikhilāśāsanāmarasyam/
kailāsataḥ samavatīrya vilokayeha
sākṣāt parivrajati śaṅkaramūrtireṣā//3
tvaddvānmayopavanacitrabāhuprasūna-
mādhvīrasajñamadhupavraja eṣa guñjan/
prācyapratīcyasakalāvanikoṇato 'tra
vyākyāti kāmamajarāmaratām tavāmba//4
uttiṣṭha rāṣṭri! vasuāṅgamani! prabhāta-
mābhāti; nūtanabalena navairvilāsaiḥ/
dīvyā; prakāśaya navāstava rūpalakṣmīḥ
kartavyamadya mahadasti tavāmba! kāryam//5
sparadhā-parākramaṇa-yudha-janopadyātair-
dīrṇādya sīdati mahī tava sodarīyam/
uttiṣṭha devyamarabhārati! dehi śānti-
sandeśabhesajarasena śamaṃ ca śaṃ ca//6*

not as scholars but as bees come from all over to drink the nectar of Sanskrit literature. Raghavan suggests in line 3 that Sanskrit's "true Upaniṣad," here perhaps meant as "secret message," is nothing but harmony, and this notion of the significance of peace reappears in the last line which again imagines the Sanskrit language as a salve for the world's ills. Further, in a bit of imaginative mythology, he posits the earth itself as the sister of the goddess Sarasvatī, who is also collapsed here with Sanskrit and India. Thus the poem weaves together ideas and figures specific to Sanskrit literature and mythology with notions of world peace and harmony, not to mention nationalism, that bespeak a very modern mindset.

Continuing this notion of bridging the old with the new, the first part of line 5 is, with some variation, the third verse of Ṛg Veda 10.125, the Vāk Sūkta: "*ahaṃ rāṣṭrī saṃgamanī vasūnām.*"¹⁰⁶ Raghavan changes it from the first person to the vocative, thus adding a sense of exhortation and renewal, and implies a revival not just of Sanskrit but also of Vedic knowledge. The verse itself here does not merely call for a revival of this Vedic queen goddess in her original form, but insists on the pursuit of newness. In fact, Raghavan's reworking of the Vedic phrase is itself an example of the "newness" that he calls for in the next line: thus newness is a reworking of the old. Sanskrit might be ageless and immortal, but it can take new forms, and this for Raghavan appears to be the ideal sense of the revival of Sanskrit that he calls for in his English essays on the matter and tried to put into practice in his own Sanskrit literary works.

In another short piece entitled "In Praise of Sanskrit" (title printed in English), published and recorded in a compilation compact disc posthumously arranged by Nandini Ramini, Raghavan deals more explicitly with the concept of culture that the other hymns to Sanskrit do not fully address.

¹⁰⁶ My thanks to Prof. T.V. Vasudeva for pointing this out to me.

1. The speech in which accumulated *rasa* was made immortal by great ṛṣis,
In which what is supreme is harmony that is the true vision of this world and the next.
She who declares the philosophy¹⁰⁷ that the whole earth is one family,
May this Goddess Sanskrit¹⁰⁸ be successful and though old may it be new.
2. The intellect which is close to the fulfillment of the evolution of humanity
Brings about the opening of the eyes to the distinction between beauty
And the ineffable reality, which is the unrestrained play (*līlā*).
She is speech (*vāk*) who by the succession of the three times¹⁰⁹ is the peace and
security¹¹⁰ of the world.
May this Sanskrit flourish, which is a treasury of success and a reflection of our
culture.¹¹¹

The verse ends on the punning notion that Sanskrit (*saṃskṛtam*) is also culture (*saṃskṛti*), as the line ends “*pratīnidhirnaḥ saṃskṛteḥ saṃskṛtam.*” This is more than a mere play on words as it reinforces the notion that the language and the culture are just variations on a theme, specifically the theme of refinement, which is what culture is for Raghavan. The importance of harmony reappears, but here it is both a divine vision and a philosophy (*darśana*). As in the previous poem, it appears that Raghavan’s advocacy for Sanskrit is actually advocacy for worldwide Sanskrit hegemony. There is also a strong Advaita sense in the beginning of the second verse in stressing the divine play (*līlā*) of the world and the impossibility of understanding it. Yet here, Advaita views are cast as the ultimate understanding of human evolution. Again, though, both verses end in benedictions for Sanskrit’s revival and sustenance, immortality and grandeur.

A final short example of Raghavan writing in Sanskrit about Sanskrit occurs in a short

¹⁰⁷ *Darśana*, thus both “philosophy” or literally viewpoint, but also a divine vision.

¹⁰⁸ *Saṃskṛta Bhāratī*, also the name of the spoken Sanskrit movement, which began after Raghavan’s death.

¹⁰⁹ Past, present, and future.

¹¹⁰ This is a common set phrase in Sanskrit: “*kṣema ca yoga ca.*”

¹¹¹ V. Raghavan, “In Praise of Sanskrit” in *Kavīkoka Mañjari*, Vol. 1, compiled by Nandini Ramini (Madras: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2007), 37.

*yasyāṃ vāci maharṣibhistadamarīkāri rasah saṃbhṛtaḥ
yasyāmaihikapāralaukikadr̥ṣossatsāmarasyaṃ param/
sarvaikaṃ vasudhā kuṭumbakamiti vyākurvati darśanam
seyaṃ saṃskṛtabhāratī vijayatāṃ pratnāpi nūnā sadā//
mānuṣyapṛavikāsapūrtimabhito nīryantraṇām śemuṣī
līlāṃ vastudurūhasundaraviśeṣonmīlanaprābhavam/
yā kālatritayānvayena jagataḥ kṣemaṃ ca yogaṃ ca vāk
puṣṇantī jaytānidhiḥ pratīnidhirnaḥ saṃskṛteḥ saṃskṛtam//*

poem published in a Sanskrit periodical.¹¹² There he imagines Sanskrit speech (*vāk*) as having three forms, a “*trimūrti*,” but he presents the feminine nature of language as three different types of women. As is not unusual for Raghavan, he provides footnotes as a sort of autocommentary lest he be misunderstood. First, as a mother, Sanskrit is “*śāsti*” or “command” but he glosses this as meaning that she is in the form of the *śāstra*-s, and prior to that the Vedas. In the next image, she is a friend who spins out¹¹³ stories (*kathāḥ*), which (the footnote explains) means *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* (history and ancient tales). In the third form, however, she is a lover (*dayitā*) whispering in the ear without even words, and the footnote explains that it is through suggestion (*vyañjanā*) that she conveys poetry and drama. The last notion reinforces Raghavan’s conviction that even just by seeing a play, even without understanding the words, allows one to grasp something of the meaning and the *rasa*, and can thereby become more cultured.

Sanskrit literary and religious works have a lengthy history of paeans to language, from Bṛhaspati to Vāk, but such poems praise language and the power of speech in general. Rather than signaling Sanskrit as their object of praise and devotion, Sanskrit is the medium. In the vernacular millennium, while other languages came to the fore and Sanskrit receded, even as it was a language of prestige and polity, its defenders were not given to poems in praise of Sanskrit itself. However, in the twentieth-century, Sanskrit itself becomes an object of veneration, specified not just as language but as the best language, not just the language of the gods, but a language that *is* a goddess.

¹¹² V. Raghavan, “*Trimūrti Saṃskṛtā Vāk*,” *Saṃskṛtā Prakāśikā*, Vol. 1, No. 2-3 (Aug/Sep 1972): 6.

¹¹³ This is my slightly imperfect idiomatic translation of “*vitanoṭi*” in this instance.

Sanskrit and National Integration

It is of little surprise that Raghavan called for Sanskrit to be the national language in the years after independence. What is interesting, however, is his reasoning behind that stance. In a collection of essays and newspaper articles that he published in 1972, Raghavan outlines his views on Sanskrit as a language in general and as a national language. In the preface he wrote for the collection, he declares that Sanskrit should be the national language because, “[Sanskrit is] the language and literature in which the national culture heritage was enshrined, which was so intimately connected with all the spoken languages of the country...”¹¹⁴ His reasoning is that Sanskrit is not only the language of culture, but also the font of all the other languages of the country. Sanskrit is, as he says in a speech given in 1948 at Darbangha, the “linguistic G.C.M.” (greatest common multiple) of the country.¹¹⁵ In the same speech, he admits to seconding the motion to make Hindi the national language, but he is specific in saying it should be “Sanskritized Hindi.”¹¹⁶ He made the same argument in an earlier piece in *The Sunday Herald* (in Madras in 1948). There he calls English the “language of international contact,” but Hindi “our means of interprovincial relations.”¹¹⁷ Certainly Raghavan did not know Hindustani, but he felt he could understand a Sanskritized Hindi. He was concerned that Sanskrit not become a mere vernacular, like Hindi, but thought that it was shielded from that fate because it is so beautiful and rich. He also argued that because in the vernaculars higher concepts are expressed in Sanskrit, if more people spoke Sanskrit, even a simplified version, they would have better access

¹¹⁴ Raghavan, *Sanskrit Essays*, vii.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16. This is an intriguing and somewhat odd use of mathematics as a metaphor and evidentiary paradigm for language politics. It appears to be an attempt to trade upon mathematics as itself an authoritative language by which to establish an authoritative language.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

to these “higher” conceptualizations.¹¹⁸ In short, Sanskrit is the highway that leads to culture. The end goal of the process for him was reviving and nationalizing Sanskrit to unify the country in contrast to internal divisive political tendencies, such as the Dravidian movement and Muslim nationalism (although that is less explicit), that threatened to dismantle the new nation.

For Raghavan, Sanskrit in the postcolonial moment was now a classical language with its own nation, which afforded India a special status and unique opportunity. Raghavan argues that Sanskrit is not a classical language like Greek and Latin because unlike those languages, Sanskrit is being used for “modern terminology in science and administration,” giving the nation its important values and influencing its leaders.¹¹⁹ The extent to which that was true is minimal, although there are attempts being made to that end presently in India. Interestingly, this notion of Sanskrit as a living language in contrast to Greek and Latin ignores the considerable way in which Greek and Latin literature, especially after the Enlightenment, had a considerable influence on modern European ideas, and there is no denying the use of Greek and Latinate terms in Euro-American law and science. Given Raghavan’s wide-ranging knowledge of history, particularly since he was educated in a British system, it is hard to imagine he was unfamiliar with these influences of Greek and Latin. But I think his argument is that those languages have gone by the wayside, replaced by modern vernaculars, while Sanskrit still lives, and that it has its own nation since it obtained independence in 1947. Further, he felt that Sanskrit was the only way to unify a nation of multiple vernaculars that, unlike the Europe, required unification to survive as a single nation.

In his essay “Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture,” Raghavan argues that Sanskrit had the capacity to integrate the land of India previously and might have this

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., viii.

capacity again for the new nation. I find most instructive the final paragraph of this essay, published in a Euro-American journal, quoted here in its entirety:

From the above survey the following characteristics of the process of sanskritization and assimilation into the main body of the great tradition are evident. First, this great tradition was not a destructive force; it constantly absorbed and conserved existing practices and customs, and was helped in this by its own genius for tolerance and comprehension. Second, the process reduced a bewildering mass of cultural elements to some homogeneity and synthesis. Third, systematization and incorporation into the greater tradition resulted in refinement; lower practices were given an esoteric significance and right-minded votaries helped toward a higher evolution; in some cases, the objectionable practices were totally eliminated and a complete reform was effected, as in the case of Shākta worship in South India, which is remembered as a service by Śaṅkara. Under the over-all Vedāntic synthesis in which all divinities were but different forms of the one Supreme Being, all pursuits were paths to one and the same goal, and all practices were *sadhanas* thereto, a higher philosophy and a cultural background were provided. The incorporation of all these into the main body of the great tradition was an act of national consolidation for which Sanskrit had always been an effective instrument. It has always had in it the genius to maintain at once an infinite variety and an unmistakable unity.¹²⁰

Raghavan's argument here immediately suggests a hierarchy between "great" and an implied collection of "little" traditions, and is unabashedly in favor of the great tradition's capacity to swallow up and unify the vast and implicitly inferior little traditions. Raghavan elsewhere tempers this narrative of consumption: "Sanskrit went about its consolidating activity by a wise policy of give and take,"¹²¹ but Sanskrit still comes out as a sort of benevolent monarch. This description of the Sanskrit tradition's history strikingly mirrors British colonialism not only in its accommodative capacity, but also in its presumption of moral superiority and outright domination.

These images of Sanskrit as active and as dominating bring up two important points. First, that Sanskrit, a language, can *do* something is a conceit that betrays a belief in its metaphorical liveliness. This is an essential conceptualization to make if one believes the premise that Sanskrit has the inner capacity to bring together the postcolonial Indian nation. The

¹²⁰ V. Raghavan, "Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15:4 (Aug. 1956): 497-505; 505.

¹²¹ Raghavan, *Sanskrit Essays*, 31.

fiction that Sanskrit might somehow have agency and be alive runs directly counter to declarations of Sanskrit's death. Interestingly, Sheldon Pollock's assertion of Sanskrit's death makes the same metaphorical move but in an opposite manner. If we accept that Sanskrit is dead, then we have to accept that it used to be alive, and therefore, agential, which runs up against the problem of substantialized agency critiqued by Ronald Inden. Still Pollock's arguments are more historically responsible, particularly when showing how Sanskrit was used by various kings and officials to solidify sovereignty. The Sanskrit commission seems to have been up to essentially the same trick as the kings of ancient India that Pollock describes.¹²² In short, I think it is important to counter these discourses of Sanskrit as an agent with a consideration of it as a medium through which Raghavan and others attempt to convey their thoughts.

Second, it is striking to compare the excerpt from Raghavan's essay above to Bruce Lincoln's definition of dominance: "the attempt (never entirely successful) of a given group (*A*) to absorb other groups (*B,C*, etc.) within a higher level of social integration (*I*) in which the members of *A* occupy a position of hierarchic, material, and sociopolitical supremacy. Domination is thus the imposition of an unwanted and exploitative fusion on groups that are converted into subordinate segments of the new social aggregate."¹²³ A nation is just such a social aggregate, especially a new nation, and Raghavan could become elite in a new nation where Sanskrit has supremacy. Certainly he spoke of the moral and cultural benefits of a civilized nation, civilized through Sanskrit, but from a cold Marxist perspective, his promotion of Sanskrit was self-serving, even as it might appear otherwise. There is no need here to judge Raghavan for his Sanskrit advocacy, but rather to understand it. What Lincoln's description of "domination" does point out is the necessary incompleteness of the stated goal of the project. If

¹²² See Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit"; Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*; and Inden, *Imagining India*, 9-22.

¹²³ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 73.

asked, Raghavan might reply that his objective, at least as he saw it, was to uplift the whole nation, not just himself, to the higher level of Sanskrit culture and thought.

Raghavan’s model of Sanskritization is rather like Reid Locklin’s description of “conversion up” as the model by which various Vedanta groups in modern India (the Rāmākṣṇa Mission among them) reconcile a diverse group of people from various religions yet insist on moving “beyond” to a higher, Vedāntic level of integration.¹²⁴ Raghavan here suggests the unique “tolerance” of the great tradition, yet then suggests that the smaller traditions were “refined” by their absorption into something more “esoteric” and “right-minded” and “higher” (as opposed to mundane, wrong minded, and lower). As the above excerpt also illustrates, the Vedāntic and Sanskritic traditions are so intertwined in Raghavan’s formulation that they become synonymous. That joint tradition, as Raghavan imagines it, made India “*samskṛta*” in that word’s sense of “refined.” This sense of refinement is also evident in the Vedāntic model of “conversion up,” to borrow again Locklin’s felicitous phrase. For Raghavan, higher order philosophical thought is always Sanskritic, and higher thought can bring up the masses. Further, it is not just philosophy but culture in general (the arts and literature) that, on this model, might create cultural refinement. In this, Raghavan follows Vivekānanda who says: “The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition is to study Sanskrit.”¹²⁵ While I have no evidence of Raghavan speaking directly to the lower castes, there is a general conviction in his rhetoric that Sanskrit is the “highest” language, and that making Sanskrit the national language and cultivating culture are complimentary projects for the creation of an elevated India.

¹²⁴ Reid Locklin, "Sanskritization, (Re-)Conversion, Conquest? Redescribing Hindu Missions in Contemporary India and North America," Marty Center Senior Research Fellow Symposium, May 12, 2011.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Corstiaan J.G. van der Burg “The Place of Sanskrit in Neo-Hindu Ideologies: From Religious Reform to National Awakening,” in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 374.

Since Raghavan was a Smārtha Brahmin and thus an exponent of the Sanskrit tradition, his essay betrays a slight sense of guilt about overtaking the little traditions. Yet the accommodations made to retain the individuality of the little traditions, to be “tolerant,” might not be caused entirely by guilt but by a response to the virulent Dravidian movement which pitted itself against Brahmins and the Sanskrit religious tradition. Thus Raghavan, I think, felt the need to protect the Brahmanical/Sanskrit tradition from the charge that it was destructive and so he claims that it is the opposite: integrative. Nevertheless, he still runs up against the inherent problem of elitism. As Ramaswamy notes, the Sanskrit commission “had to perforce rescue Sanskrit from the stigma of exclusivity, privilege, and arcaneness with which it had come to be burdened, and demonstrate that it was truly a language of and for all Indians regardless of caste, class, religion, ethnic, regional, or linguistic affiliations.”¹²⁶ Thus instead of aligning Sanskrit with Brahmanism, Raghavan aligns it with culture: literature, the arts, morality, etc. Further, by suggesting that Sanskritic unification is also non-violent, Raghavan aligns it tacitly with Gandhi. As I will suggest in later chapters through a study of some of his plays, this unification wrought by Sanskrit also stands in opposition to the epistemic and physical violence of British unification as well as the sectarian violence of Islam.

Raghavan’s depiction of Sanskrit’s unificatory power, however, is by no means limited to India, and his promotion of Sanskrit sometimes becomes not only nationalist but internationalist in ways that do appear to be in some lights anti-colonial, while appearing from other angles as not quite chauvinist but at least attempting to claim some sort of cultural or even political hegemony for India in the brave new world of the post-World War II twentieth century. First, he saw Sanskrit as the foundation of *all* Asian Civilization. Thus for him, Sanskrit operates in ways not unlike those of Greek and Latin in their former influence on European civilization (although

¹²⁶ Ramaswamy, “Sanskrit for the Nation,” 361.

he discounts their continuing influence), and he sees it continuing to have a major impact across the “East.” He knows that there once was, to use Sheldon Pollock’s terminology, a Sanskrit cosmopolis that ranged through Southeast Asia. However, he also considers that through Buddhism, Sanskrit also spread throughout China and Japan. In fact, he laments the fact that Sanskrit culture is upheld in other countries, but not in India, writing that “it is left to countries like Thailand to have a Garuda as the symbol of their airways and on their stamps and Indonesia to have Vasudhara on their currency notes!”¹²⁷ Here he seems to be rather in the Hindutva camp, since he is arguing for national recognition of Hinduism, and his argument is against secularists who harbor “fear of repercussions among some sections of the people,” implicitly referring to Muslims. Raghavan does not explicitly justify these statements, but his argument might be that these symbols are part of an Indian culture that is naturally inclusive, and there is little reason for Muslims to be opposed, especially in so far as such symbols of culture could be helpful to the overall uplift and patriotism of the new country.

In another essay, Raghavan finds in the discovery of Sanskrit’s relation to Indo-European languages the unique ability to unite not just India but the whole world: “Sanskrit has been, from the most ancient times, a symbol and means of unity among the peoples of the world. The discovery of Sanskrit in India by Western savants in modern times was a re-discovery of this unity.”¹²⁸ Sanskrit thus holds out the possibility of bringing together a fractured world, not merely by linguistics, but by study and religious expression. I will discuss in conclusion Raghavan’s ideas about the prospects of Hinduism and Hindu tolerance to heal a shattered world divided on religious lines. But for now, we might consider a few instances in which he expresses excitement about Sanskrit’s global reach. He writes, “The Vedanta philosophy imbedded in it is

¹²⁷ Raghavan, “Culture and Independence,” 186.

¹²⁸ Raghavan, *Sanskrit Essays*, 143.

now universally understood and is even claiming numerous adherents in the West. Its poetry and drama can stand up in quality to any that is held high in the West. In it lies the key to the culture of the entire East and Far-East, and in its intense cultivation lies the means to the recovery of the old cultural hegemony of India.”¹²⁹ He viewed Vedanta as not merely written in Sanskrit but inherent within it, and thus extending into those countries in which Buddhism thrives. In another essay for *The Hindu* published on Republic Day 1950, Raghavan writes of Sanskrit that, “Today its gospels are as devoutly chanted in far-off Los Angeles (*sic*).”¹³⁰ Sanskrit, for Raghavan, is the revenant geist in the machine that can create a unity of traditions, a unity that is in fact a return to an imagined era of Sanskritic political and religious hegemony, not only in India, but in the world at large. In a way, Raghavan’s project is an extension of Vivekananda’s mission: not only to bring up Indians through Sanskrit, but to bring up the whole world through Sanskrit.

While Raghavan’s formulation of the unificatory power of Sanskrit does highlight the tolerant role of Vedanta and the ability of Sanskrit to refine and improve religious practices, the passage above, written for an international audience, foregrounds Sanskrit while, mostly, pushing religion to the backburner. This would also be in line with the Sanskrit Commission, who tried in their writings to secularize Sanskrit as much as possible so as to avoid the impression that their intent was merely to institutionalize Hinduism, the “great tradition,” as the national religion at the expense of the “little” traditions as well as at the expense of Islam and other religions in India. Still, there is a religious undertone to the language of Sanskrit itself in Raghavan’s rhetoric about it. Certainly we might argue that Sanskrit includes numerous texts that are of a nonreligious character, that Sanskrit is not merely the language of the gods. But for Raghavan, and many others, Sanskrit is a deeply religious language, and it behooves any study of

¹²⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10.

his Sanskrit works to take into account that presupposition. Raghavan never said so blatantly, but it is not difficult to deduce. For example, in the introduction to his UNESCO-sponsored anthology of religious works in India, *The Indian Heritage*, Raghavan, having cited the various luminaries of Western philosophy and literature influenced by the Upanishads, writes: “One can truly claim for Sanskrit culture a world significance at the present time. It is in fact this spiritual culture that has gained for Sanskrit today a world-wide vogue.”¹³¹ Notice how he pivots seamlessly from “Sanskrit culture” to “this spiritual culture,” clearly implying that Sanskrit is spiritual. One could then raise the objection that “spiritual” is not equal to “religious,” but there is a slipperiness between “spiritual” and “religious” in Raghavan’s writing. He suggests that “Egyptian, Jewish, in fact all ancient literature and art are religious, but the special feature of Indian culture is that this quality has endured to this day as its essential characteristic.”¹³² Hence, there is a religious dimension to Sanskrit literature, and this is still the case, ergo modern Sanskrit literature is also “religious.” Thus, Indian culture=spiritual culture=religious culture=Sanskrit culture, and this equation holds true throughout history. If we take the common referent “culture” out of the mix and leave just the qualifiers, we get the very simple equation that Sanskrit is religious is India *in aeternum*.

Writing the Nation Together: Literature and Nationalism

Not only is the Sanskrit language itself important for Indian unification and moral uplift, according to Raghavan, but Sanskrit *literature* has a unique role to play in this process. As he said in his 1968 inaugural address at the “Seminar on Sanskrit Learning through the Ages,” in Mysore, “This culture has its bedrock in Sanskrit literature....it is while reading the Sanskrit literature that you have the sense of belonging to one country and one pan-Indian culture. The

¹³¹ V. Raghavan, ed., *The Indian Heritage: An Anthology of Sanskrit Literature*, UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, (Bangalore: The Indian Institute of Culture, 1956), xix. The very title of his collection, which assumes that an anthology of Sanskrit literature would encapsulate the “Indian” heritage, betrays his assumptions.

¹³² *Ibid.*, xix-xx (footnote).

key to India's past lies in this literature and it is in it that we see the image of the country."¹³³ Raghavan seems, anachronistically, to have taken a page here from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* by suggesting the efficiency of print-culture for providing a mass-mediated image of the nation. For Raghavan, rather than there being a need for creating a new nationalist literature, India already *has* a common literary source: Sanskrit literature. In short, Indian culture is Sanskrit culture, the Indian nation is Sanskritic, and the modern Indian nation can find itself by looking to its past literary self. Raghavan's extensive work on Sanskrit aesthetics is part and parcel of his view that such knowledge can be conducive to reunifying the country: "Indology has done the basic service to the nation of recovering the national image and the image of the national tradition to which Indians belong."¹³⁴ This sentence provides an example of how colonial Indological scholarship unwittingly provided the materials for postcolonial identity construction and nationalism through literature. Raghavan's work thus served as a continuation of that project of scholastic recovery geared not toward colonial domination but elite cultural nationalism.¹³⁵

Yet Raghavan wanted to show how this national tradition was not merely encased in moldy palm manuscripts or written on the page but was rather a living and performative tradition. As Jean Filliozat, one of those in attendance at the 1972 performance of *Anārkalī*, wrote in the preface to the printed edition, *Anārkalī* "has given a [*sic*] clear evidence of the capacity of Sanskrit to be adapted to any kind of dramatic expression."¹³⁶ That event, Raghavan writes in the preface to *Anārkalī*, was a "gathering at which scholars from every part of the world

¹³³ Raghavan, *Sanskrit Essays*, 65

¹³⁴ V. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators: The Saint-Singers of India*, Patel Memorial Lectures (Delhi: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1966), 15. The bell of "belonging" as an element of nationalist affective politics is clanging loudly here.

¹³⁵ For further discussion of this matter, see the conclusion portion of chapter 2, below.

¹³⁶ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, vii.

had assembled to place flowers at the altar of the supreme integrator, Sanskrit.”¹³⁷ Thus writing Sanskrit dramas constituted for Raghavan a means of showing, in the very acts of writing and performing, the liveliness and integrative potential of Sanskrit for nation and world.

Raghavan mentions Sanskrit in a few suggestive instances in his play, *Anārkalī*, that are particularly revealing of his perspective. Most tellingly, the play refers to itself in the *prastāvanā* as a “Sanskrit drama,” which ancient dramas certainly would and do not bother to specify. This mention of the language puts the “Sanskrit-*tva*” of the drama front and center, and places it in what the Raghavan calls “the uninterrupted tradition of Sanskrit drama,”¹³⁸ which the play itself is, by its production, supposed to manifest. While it may be the case that this conceit of an uninterrupted tradition is contradicted by the idea that the Samskrita Ranga was established for the “revival” (*projjīvanāya*)¹³⁹ of Sanskrit drama, Raghavan is of the opinion that Sanskrit merely waned but never died out. In the alternate *prastāvanā* for the 1972 World Sanskrit Conference, Raghavan describes Sanskrit is “not only a very ancient language, but even now it is alive and fit for the activity of new situations; to show that, we will perform a new drama.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, the very act of performing a Sanskrit play constitutes the liveliness of the tradition; Raghavan wants to show by doing. As his student, M. Narasimhachari, recalls, Raghavan used to say “Don’t speak *about* Sanskrit; Speak Sanskrit.”¹⁴¹ For Raghavan, the act of speaking Sanskrit effects and demonstrates its penetration into the modern world; and its resurgence, given the integrative qualities Raghavan ascribes to it, holds the promise of a unified India that is supposedly achievable through performing dramas in Sanskrit.

¹³⁷ Ibid., xi.

¹³⁸ Ibid., “...*saṃskṛtanāṭyaparamparāyā avicchinnatā*...”

¹³⁹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 88-89. “*saṃskṛtaṃ na kevalamatiprācīnā bhāṣā, kintu saṃpratyapi sajjīvā navanirmāṇakāryopayukā iti nirūpayituṃ nūtanam rūpakam kimapi prayokṣyāmahe.*”

¹⁴¹ Interview, August 28, 2011.

Raghavan's work to revive Sanskrit drama was part of a larger movement of theatrical nationhood. After independence, Indians sought to construct their own national theatrical movements to, in essence, represent themselves to themselves as a unified body. Prior to independence, theater in India often had an anti-colonial bent, but in the wake of independence, some Indian dramatists of a more nationalist bent found themselves in a new situation wherein they registered a need to create a national tradition out of the various dramatic movements in various languages active during the colonial period and carried on through the beginning of the postcolonial period. In the same year as the Sanskrit Commission, there was a Drama Seminar at the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Delhi to assess the status of drama in India and its capacity to provide a cultural backbone for the incipient nation.¹⁴² The goal was to develop out of the cacophony of traditions a singular category, "Indian drama," that could serve as a medium in and through which to represent the singularity of the nation.

Raghavan sought a solution to this problem by finding a Sanskritic root, particularly in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, that could unify the nation's vast cultural traditions. Raghavan sees Sanskritic origins in all indigenous traditional theater practices throughout the country, and believes that Sanskrit plays performed in the modern era can help recapture this essence in the traditional theaters, thus bringing about a refinement and re-Sanskritization of theater in India.¹⁴³ As he argues: "Sanskrit drama and its derivative vernacular forms had played a very significant role in the history of Indian culture; they have been continuously effective through the centuries as a force for consolidation of spiritual, religious and moral culture among the people."¹⁴⁴ His view of Sanskrit drama thus coincides with his projects of Sanskrit revival and the opening of the "inclusive" Vedāntic umbrella and civilizing people up through Sanskrit.

¹⁴² Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁴³ V. Raghavan, *Sanskrit Drama: Its Aesthetics and Production* (Madras: Publication by Author's Estate, 1993), 48.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

The problem of unification for Raghavan was not just one of multiple languages and religions, but also of multiple levels of caste and knowledge. Raghavan thought of Sanskrit drama as an element of the “high culture” of the nation that has the potential to serve in the creation of a unified, nationalistic discourse that brings people “up.” To learn Sanskrit is literally to be more refined. In thinking thus, Raghavan mimics an elitist model of theatrical nationality borrowed from nineteenth-century Europe.¹⁴⁵ The Sanskritic cultural idiom is elitist not only in so far as it is the language of the minute few, but also in being predominantly the language of the Brahmins. Raghavan’s project to promote social cohesion through Sanskrit drama has therefore an inner tension. On the one hand he wants to revitalize the long Sanskrit tradition. As Milton Singer said of Raghavan, “From my association with him, I believe that what really mattered to him as a creative participant in a great living Sanskritic tradition was to keep that tradition alive in the face of hostile movements to suppress or obliterate it.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, this description seems apt, and one for which this dissertation is meant to provide further evidence by delving into Raghavan’s creative works themselves. It is an idea I will return to and flesh out in the conclusion chapter. At the same time, Raghavan wanted to reach out to morally uplift the people (even those ignorant of Sanskrit). He considered drama the highest art form, and thus the best in which to convey these messages, but also one that could reach the “cultured and uncultured” alike: “Everybody is infected with the emotions when a play is acted but he who can relish it by reading alone must be highly cultured.”¹⁴⁷ That is how he solved the problem of drama’s inner tension for himself, yet behind this notion is a conviction that if more people were exposed to Sanskrit drama, it would uplift even the uncultured to share in the national Sanskritic “high culture”; it is a teleological perspective of “conversion up” to Sanskrit-ism.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. Kruger, *The National Stage*.

¹⁴⁶ Milton Singer, “Dr. V. Raghavan, A Personal Reminiscence,” in Jackson, *The Power of the Sacred Name*, 340.

¹⁴⁷ V. Raghavan, *Bhoja’s Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1963), 78-79.

Despite the message of breaking down class barriers, the notion that national integration could be wrought through Sanskritic and dramatic media betrays a significant elitism. That elitism played a significant role in early Indian nationalism has not gone without comment. Partha Chatterjee discusses how nationalism, imbued with the conceptualizations of knowledge provided by the colonizers, leads to “an elitism of the intelligentsia, rooted in the vision of a radical regeneration of national culture.”¹⁴⁸ This tendency was certainly fed by foreign scholars whose high respect for Sanskrit and Sanskrit drama fueled a feedback effect in which Indians saw Sanskrit and Sanskrit drama as fit objects for their own cultural veneration and as the foundation for India’s regeneration as a nation on the European model; these elite imagined a time in which Sanskrit reigned supreme and sought a regeneration of that Sanskrit cosmopolis.¹⁴⁹

Judith Butler sums up nicely, albeit in the context of a discussion of hate speech, precisely what I think is at stake in Raghavan’s use of Sanskrit in the postcolonial context: “The historical loss of the sovereign organization of power appears to occasion the fantasy of its return – a return, I want to argue, that takes place in language, in the figure of the performative. The emphasis on the performative phantasmatically resurrects the performative in language, establishing language as a displaced site of politics and specifying that displacement as driven by a wish to return to a simpler and more reassuring map of power, one in which the assumption of sovereignty remains secure.”¹⁵⁰ For Raghavan, the loss of the sovereign power of empires left open the possibility of a return to Sanskritic sovereignty. But there was also the threat to the sovereignty of Brahmin cultural elitism in the new world of Tamil movements and secularism, and the possibility of a return to a simpler time of Sanskrit hegemony could remove Raghavan from those concerns of the day, creating a safe space for him amidst the turmoil. Further, it is in

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ The idea of a Sanskrit cosmopolis is discussed in Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 78.

performing in and speaking Sanskrit, not just talking *about* Sanskrit, that there is a promise of a return to an imagined time of a unified Sanskrit hegemony and cosmopolis wherein Sanskrit culture reigns supreme. Certainly Raghavan can write about Sanskrit and attempt to promote it as much as possible through magazine and newspaper articles read by a popular audience, but actually performing and writing Sanskrit is what creates an image of survival. Through the performance of the dramas, and through the performative act of writing dramas and poetry, he attempts both to forge an essentialized reification of Sanskrit as a sign of hegemony and the past, and to bring about an apotheosis of Sanskrit. Such an apotheosis would operate like an avatar that (he seems to imagine) could descend from a storied and heavenly past into the tumultuous earthly present to present divine words with salutary properties for the nation's painful postcolonial progress. Still, in this fantasy, it is Raghavan, along with other Sanskritists, who through advocacy and literary activity, remain the real divinities who wield the power of projecting a revival.

CHAPTER 2

HEROISM, HISTORY, AND HYBRIDITY: SANSKRIT CULTURE IN THE MODERN NATION

Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead.

–“Harper” in *Angles in America*¹

If Raghavan's original Sanskrit literary works were intended as part of a revival of Sanskrit culture, it is natural that this theme of revival would appear in his dramas and poems. This chapter addresses some of Raghavan's literary creations that clearly address how such a revival of Sanskrit might occur in the context of modern nationalism. In particular, I address this notion of revival with a focus on Raghavan's plays' main characters and the subjects of his poems, who are often what might be called cultural heroes. I use that term to indicate men and women who are skilled in the arts and literature and show by example the survival and revival of culture through their dramatic portrayals or who become part of the cultural tradition through Raghavan's incorporation of his heroes and heroines into Sanskrit literature. Some of his heroes are more properly political or religious leaders, and they signal a desire for a form of religious nationalism and leadership based on religious principles.

While South Asian history and Sanskrit literary tradition are full of such political, religious, and cultural icons, there is something uniquely different about their instantiation in Raghavan's twentieth-century Sanskrit literature. Sheldon Pollock has pointed out how in first-millennium South Asia there was a “Sanskrit cosmopolis [that] consisted of precisely this

¹ Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, (New York: Theater Communication Group, 1996), 142. This quote epitomizes both my perspective on modern Sanskrit as well as the process of writing a dissertation (particularly the “painful progress” part).

common aesthetics of political culture, a kind of poetry of polity in the service of what was in some measure an aesthetic state,”² and surely these modern works of Sanskrit appear as a continuation of that culture in trading on a perceived notion of Sanskrit’s high register as a means of authority. Yet these works do not imagine a monarchical kingdom, but rather a nation-state democracy founded on an idea of nationalism and rooted in new anthropological ideas of “culture,” and thus they owe something of their rationale to European models of nationalism and European Orientalism. Partha Chatterjee usefully chides us that Indian anticolonial nationalism is not entirely an import, and the Indian nationalists had some degree of agency in forging their ideas of nationalism, particularly by resorting to interiorized spirituality in opposition to the external materialist hegemony of the colonizers.³ But the fact is that the cultural nationalism espoused in Raghavan’s works closely mirrors cultural nationalism in Europe even as it emphasizes the spiritual dimension. Raghavan’s heroes are exemplars of culture and thus exemplars of what it means to be a good Indian supporting Sanskrit and the arts in modern India, and this marks a unique development within the Sanskrit literary tradition. These heroes and the idea of culture they symbolize suggest that Raghavan’s cultural nationalism in Sanskrit is a refashioning of British Raj-era policies of civilizing India through literature and the arts, but flipped so that India’s great men and women and great texts and serve as role models and nationalist ideals.

Some of Raghavan’s heroes are of the recent present, while others are evoked from India’s past, but the general project to extract characters from the archive of Indian history and to depict modern characters as well within the idiom of Sanskrit language and literature is underlined by a conception that Sanskrit is an eternal language and Indian culture, too, is eternal.

² Sheldon Pollock, *Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 14.

³ See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 1-34.

In suggesting a revival, Raghavan goes beyond a historicist British model to suggest the eternity of the Sanskrit tradition, the timelessness of it and the possibility of cyclical rejuvenation. The plays and poems of Raghavan's studied in this chapter, in terms of both content and medium, pose a question for squaring ideas of nationalism as a discourse based in positivist history with nationalism as a discourse based in religiously-charged imaginations of eternity. The answer to this problem, as I will endeavor to show in this chapter, is that Raghavan's works, while they appear to be based in nationalist ideas of history, at another level trade upon religious notions of time that read as a rejection of Euro-American notions of secular homogenous time as a measure of history. Further, I point out that this idea of religious time is necessary for the imagination of a revival of Sanskrit, imagined as a divine and eternal language that can be simultaneously old and new, that Raghavan wants to depict in and through these literary works.

Raghavan to the Rescue⁴

I begin my exploration of heroism in Raghavan's plays with the suggestion that Raghavan *himself* is something of a hero, and not just of this present text, but rather in various places in his own creative works. In many works of literature, excluding autobiography, the author seems to exact a sort of godlike and apostrophic authority over the text. In Sanskrit drama, however, it is customary for the author to mention himself and provide a *curriculum vitae* in the prologue of the play, and Raghavan's plays, at least the longer ones, are no exception. I have

⁴ During his career, Raghavan wrote on almost every topic imaginable related to Sanskrit. During an interview, his daughter lamented that given his prolific research there is little left for a young scholar to do. Fortunately, there is still more Sanskrit to study, but young scholars do find Raghavan's work to be a magnificent source. A number of younger scholars in Sanskrit studies I have spoken with will often, when in a jam, find that Raghavan has if not solved their problem he has at least written on the subject and provided some useful information. Hence "Raghavan to the rescue" is a phrase I have heard my colleagues say in a somewhat joking manner. I use it here as a subtitle with a slightly different meaning.

already discussed biographical matters about Raghavan at length in the previous chapter, and even included information from his short autobiography, but saved for this moment the discussion of how Raghavan himself appears in his plays. Not only does Raghavan refer to himself in his plays, but he often took roles in them that uniquely matched his own views. For example, his character Āgantuka in *Punarunmeṣa* is so obviously autobiographical that it might as well be a play about himself, even as he makes a character within the play the author of its most important final verse about Mother India. That play and its nationalist message will be the focus a little later in the chapter, and it displays quite clearly how Raghavan imagined himself as a hero of nationalist cultural development. Before getting to that play, however, this section discusses Raghavan’s imagination of himself as a hero of the revival of Sanskrit.

In the three plays with prologues, Raghavan usually describes himself as the author fairly briefly and in humble tones. In *Vimukti*, Raghavan describes himself only after some coaxing by his partner on stage, a friend, who says that those gathered for the play would be curious to know the poet. The *sūtradhāra* responds by describing the poet (i.e. Raghavan) as intelligent (*pratibhā*), and expert (*naipuṇika*) in writing new works, mentioning by name the plays *Kāmaśuddhi*, *Rāsalīlā*, and *Prekṣaṇakatravī*. But Raghavan quickly laughs off this line of discussion, saying “enough with this ridiculous acting as if making known what’s already known.”⁵ Here he is both humble and confident, not wanting to draw further attention to himself but sure that the audience knows who he is.

Raghavan’s disdain for self-flattery also appears in his prologue for *Pratāprudra-vijaya*, but there such disdain is part of the message of the play. Since the play was never performed, it cannot be said with complete certitude that the *sūtradhāra* is supposed to be Raghavan, but it can

⁵ Raghavan, *Vimukti (A Two-Act Philosophical Farce)* with a Sanskrit Commentary, (Madras: Punarvasu, 1969), 128. “*alaṃ jñātajñāpanaviḍambanena.*”

be assumed. The *sūtradhāra* announces that the play is by a contemporary (*asmatsavayas*), but when asked the author's name and the title, he is dismissive, calls the other person a "fool" (*mugdha*) and asks what is to be gained by mentioning the name and accomplishments. He goes on to recite a verse:

Flattery is praised by the assembly of vile people from thinking that there is distinction among men;
Rather the real cause of shining merit is from the flattery of the assembly of connoisseurs.⁶

Raghavan is not making some socialist statement about there being no distinction among men; rather he is deflecting praise from himself to the audience. He does not want vain flattery or sycophancy from the audience, but rather wishes to praise the audience. This, as I will show in the next chapter in more detail, is in contradistinction to the theme of the play, which is the overdone flattery of the patron King Vīrarudra by the overly verbose and sycophantic poet Vidyānātha. Raghavan does go on to describe himself briefly, however, as a "poet who is a jewel among our friends (*kavirayamasmatsuhrnmaṇiḥ*)" with the following verse:

Named Raghavan, he is eager for composing and spends his time
Gleaning the drops of compassion from the feet of our teachers.⁷

Thus he positions himself as both a composer and a follower of tradition and the knowledge of predecessors. While derived from the work of Vidyānātha, the play is Raghavan's own invention that trenchantly pokes fun at the famous text of aesthetic theory. At least in that verse, there is not much self-praise, and in fact more of an understanding of himself as part of a longer tradition and heir to the knowledge of past teachers.

⁶ V. Raghavan, *Pratāparudra-Vijaya or Vidyānātha-Viḍambana*, (Madras, Punarvasu, 1969), 2 (verse 4).

*puruṣaviśeṣajñānāt pāmarasamajena kīrtyate ślāghā/
rasikasamājasya paraṃ ślāghāyā ujjvalo guṇo hetuḥ//*

⁷ Ibid., verse 5. "*rāghavo nāma yaḥkaścit sandarbhaṇakutūhalī/ svācāryapādakāruṇyakaṇikoṅchena vartayan//*"

But as the prologue continues, Raghavan adds a rather curious episode describing his prayer to the goddess of wisdom and learning, Sarasvatī, and her bestowal of poetic ability upon him to write this play. The Sanskrit prose portion says “He once described how glorious Sarasvatī appeared to him.”⁸ Then follows what appears to be another poem or play, although the origin is unclear, in which he tells Sarasvatī (appearing here by the name of Bhāratī) that he wishes to praise King Rudra, and that he wishes such a hero to increase his own fame.⁹

Poet: Mother Bhāratī: My mind is eager for a *stotra* of king Rudra. Indeed by your strength may such a hero increase my fame. Grant that to me, O Mother.¹⁰

The line “grant that to me, O mother” is actually the first part of the next line of the verse, which continues:

Bhāratī: Child! May your speech expand like the uproar of the ocean waves on which the sea foam is upraised by the comforting white light of the full moon.”¹¹

This interlude introduces the idea that the hero of the play is Vīrarudra (Rudra), which the director’s conversation partner quickly realizes based on hints, and the play begins just thereafter. On the surface, it might appear that this is a moment where Raghavan describes his poetry as indeed divinely given, as was the case for so many poets before him, and thus the “fame” he requests is at the behest of Sarasvatī. There is nothing terribly strange about this moment, other than the fact that nowhere else does Raghavan discuss his poetic abilities in this manner. It appears to be a mere stock description. Still, the idea that he would wish for fame seems odd given what we have seen before. Sarasvatī’s granting him oceanic speech could be read as a typical hyperbolic self description of poetic prowess. But put in the context of the rest of the play,

⁸ Ibid. “*sa ca kadācīdevaṃ varṇayāmāsa svasminbhāratīsamavatāravaibhavam.*”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, verse 6. “*(kaviḥ) — mātarabhāratī! vīrarudranṛptistotrotsukaṃ me manaḥ
nanvetādrśanāyakastavavaśāt kīrtimamaivaidhate/
tanmayyamba dayasva.*”

¹¹ Ibid.

“(bhāratī) — *vatsaka! vacaste pūrṇamāsīsudhā-
bhānūttālītapheṇilābdhilaharīkolāhalaṃ jṛmbhām//*”

hyperbolic praise is precisely the target of his mockery. Again, the entire play is meant to mock the overdone praise of Vīrarudra in Vidyānātha's *Pratāparudrīya*. Raghavan's play's subtitle is *Vidyānātha-Viḍambana* (the parody of Vidyānātha). In that sense, Raghavan's verse about his own speech can be read as in fact mocking his own overdone self-praise, and is yet another instance of his humility.

In *Anārkalī*, however, Raghavan's self-description is much more grandiose. There he finally gives himself a good deal of credit, and the line between himself as Raghavan the scholar and as the *sūtradhāra* is far thinner. This self-praise is fairly standard fare for prologues in Sanskrit, but the way in which he describes his exploits appears to show him not as an accomplished poet so much as an accomplished reviver of Sanskrit. As the printed version of *Anārkalī* has two versions, I will take the official one first, followed by the special one for the 1972 World Sanskrit Conference. The *sūtradhāra* begins by mentioning that the play at hand is supported by the Samskrita Ranga in Madras, and asks if a student or the secretary of the Samskrita Ranga might be nearby. The secretary (likely C.S. Sundaram) enters and asks the *sūtradhāra* what might be happening today. The two deflect the question back and forth, the *sūtradhāra* saying that the secretary should think of something, and the secretary saying that the Samskrita Ranga has done all sorts of courageous things already. To the *sūtradhāra*'s skepticism that the Ranga has done everything, the secretary lists the Ranga's accomplishments: putting on at Ujjain Kālidāsa plays that won awards, staging *Mālatīmādhava* as the first play of the Ranga, "bringing out and making shiny previously unheard of jewels from the mine of Sanskrit" plays such as Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Āgamaḍambara*, "and revealing them in the world."¹² He continues

¹² Raghavan, *Anārkalī: A New Sanskrit Play in Ten Acts*, (Madras: The Samskrita Ranga, 1972) 2. "samskr̥tarūpakākarādaśrutacarāṇi...ratnānyuddhṛtya ujjvalīkṛtya loke prakāśitāni."

that: “Those who have a taste for the new stage¹³ are made to wonder at the presentation of light one-act comedies and the diversity of the Samskrita Ranga.” Raghavan as *sūtradhāra* here interjects that not only with these older dramas but also “by our showing the work of new writers, we show the splendor of the uninterrupted tradition of Sanskrit drama.”¹⁴ Thus he depicts himself as a proponent of Sanskrit drama and culture, and particularly claims its continuity. But here, we might take this a step further to suggest that it is precisely in this work of his to promote Sanskrit that he considers himself to be doing something heroic. At the end of this discussion of the Ranga’s achievements, the secretary expresses some curiosity about whether Raghavan has written a longer play, and that indeed is the ten-act *Anārkalī*. The secretary suggests that the play might be a “crown on your head,” and praises Raghavan’s directorial prowess. This discussion makes Raghavan out to be a hero of Sanskrit revival efforts.

In the shortened prologue for *Anārkalī* written for the Delhi World Sanskrit Conference, Raghavan imagines himself presenting Sanskrit to the world, but also admits that the project is far from complete. The *sūtradhāra* first spies a man whom the stage directions say is wearing Muslim clothing (and we later learn that he is Muslim), but about whom Raghavan wonders aloud whether he is some sort of irreligious person (*amatam*) or a hippie (transliterated into *nāgarī as हिप्पी*). The student praises the *sūtradhāra* saying that, “Due to depravity, a student places a burden on a worthy person.”¹⁵ Raghavan waves off this praise, and says “we are not pleased or moved by praise or censure. What is to be done, that we do, and also what is difficult, that we do.”¹⁶ Again, he seems to be taking a page from the Bhagavad Gītā’s notion of duty and

¹³ Ibid. “*ādhunika-raṅga-rasiko.*”

¹⁴ Ibid. “...*ādhunikānām kṛtinām kṛtīḥ pradarśitavadbhirasmābhīḥ adyatve ’pi saṃskṛtanāṭyaparamparāyā avicchinatā sattā sphurattā ca nirūpitā.*”

¹⁵ Ibid., 88. “*guṇān āmeva daurātmyād dhuri dhuryo niyujyate.*”

¹⁶ Ibid. “*yatkāyaṃ tatkurmahe, durbharamapi kurmahe eva.*”

without consequence for the laudable fruits. The *sūtradhāra* continues to mention the Samskrita Ranga founded for the revival (*projīvanāya*) of Sanskrit drama, and the student responds that the Ranga has achieved some fame from its performances. Raghavan counters by calling into question the use of the past tense: “Who says that fame has been achieved?”¹⁷ He continues to say that fame “is to be achieved,” using the future passive tense, here at the World Sanskrit conference in the presence of various Sanskrit scholars from India and overseas.

While there is not much in *Anārkalī* that depicts Raghavan himself as a “hero” per se, he does inscribe within the two prologues something of his achievements and his continued efforts to revive Sanskrit. While humble, he certainly makes of himself an exemplary character precisely in so far as he has done a great deal to revive Sanskrit and both direct and perform in a number of plays. Certainly others in their laudations make him quite the hero, as can be seen in any number of honorary volumes many of which continue to come out even now thirty-seven years after his death, along with the new hagiography/biography of him written by his daughter and published two years ago. But in the texts themselves, we do see emerging a sense of a man who holds himself up as a hero, though not of valiant exploits, nor of creative poesy, nor of governmental or academic accomplishments. He was certainly an accomplished scholar but does not mention this side of his work at all. Instead, he paints himself as a hero of the revival of Indian culture, specifically Sanskrit drama.

That he would do so means little in and of itself: as noted, the plays are the primary medium through which he was attempting to achieve that very revival of Sanskrit, and there is little cause to mention his academic work. The point, however, is that by making himself a hero of the revival of Sanskrit and Indian culture he puts himself on a level with many of the heroes

¹⁷ Ibid., 89. “*kimucyate kīrtissampādīti? nanu asminnavasare khalu kīrtiḥ sampadyā...*”

and heroines in his plays who also attempt to do the very same work of promoting culture. His heroes are by and large figures who played a role in preserving, forwarding, or reviving Sanskrit culture. Some other heroes worked for nationalist causes, religious pluralism, or even served didactic purposes, but as I have argued previously, these goals were all of a piece for Raghavan's agenda within the postcolonial Indian milieu. Perhaps no culture hero in Raghavan's plays is more closely a chip off the block of its author than Āgantuka in *Punarunmeṣa*. The play is explicitly about the revival of Sanskrit culture, and the hero reflects Raghavan so exactly that it can almost be taken as another instance wherein the author can be deemed the hero. And, adding a metahero to go with our later discussions of metahistories, Raghavan in fact took the role of the hero, Āgantuka, in the Ranga's single performance of the play.

Springtime for Sanskrit (and India): Reviving Sanskrit for the Nation

In the introduction to Raghavan's essay entitled "Sanskrit Literature" in the Sahitya Akademi's volume *Contemporary Indian Literature*, the second sentence claims, "The antiquity of Sanskrit is well known, but its continuity is not less remarkable."¹⁸ A brief glance through the long passage from his essay "Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture," quoted at length above, reveals numerous instances of the word "constant" and "always," thus depicting Sanskrit and Sanskrit culture as an eternal tradition, ever growing and assimilating, but essentially singular in nature and timeless. Despite these images of continuity from a scholastic perspective, Raghavan's work of both writing in Sanskrit and performing Sanskrit dramas served his endeavor to *revive* Sanskrit and Indian culture in independent India. Raghavan's play on the theme of cultural rejuvenation is entitled *Punarunmeṣa*, literally a re-blossoming (of a flower) or

¹⁸ V. Raghavan, "Sanskrit Literature" in *Contemporary Indian Literature: A Symposium*, 2nd Edition (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1959), 201.

reopening (usually of the eyes), and can be translated with only minimal loss of meaning as “renaissance.” Performed in Delhi at a Summer Drama Festival at Talkatora Gardens in May 1960, the play was written to accompany Raghavan’s Samskrita Ranga’s performance of Kālidāsa’s *Malavikāgnimitra*, a play which gives primacy of place to dance, as does the end of *Punarunmeṣa*, although with a very different meaning. President Radhakrishnan wanted Raghavan to write a play on the revival of arts in newly independent India.¹⁹ The short ten-page play depicts the decline of Sanskrit and cultural practices in a formerly learned village, followed by their revival thanks to the work of a visitor to the village. The play and the scholarship seem to suggest an impossible opposition: how can something that is continuous be at risk of disappearance *and* be revived?

The same *aporia* surfaces in two prologues for Raghavan’s play *Anārkalī*. In the official prologue, the director suggests that Raghavan’s Samskrita Ranga has helped show “the uninterrupted tradition of Sanskrit drama”²⁰ which the play itself is supposed to manifest by its production. In the alternate prologue for the 1972 World Sanskrit Conference in Delhi, the director describes Sanskrit as “not only a very ancient language, but even today it is alive and fit for creating new compositions.”²¹ Yet just before that, the director declares that the Samskrita Ranga was established in Madras for the “revival” (*projjīvanāya*)²² of Sanskrit drama. If something is alive, why would it need revival?

An easy solution to this problem would be to posit that Raghavan holds Sanskrit to have waned but not died out entirely. Like Westley in *The Princess Bride*, Sanskrit is “only mostly

¹⁹ “In the 50’s...India became a republic...arts were starting to revive and all that. President Radhakirshnan wanted Raghavan to focus on something where he could talk about the renaissance of arts in free India. So father wrote this drama, *Punarunmeṣa*....” (Interview with Nandini Ramini, March 13, 2014).

²⁰ V. Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 2. “*saṃskṛtanātyaparamparāyā avicchinnatā*.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89. “*saṃskṛtaṃ na kevalamatiprācīnā bhāṣā, kintu saṃpratyapi sajjīvā navanirmāṇakāryopayutkā*.”

²² *Ibid.*

dead,” but not “all dead.”²³ Thus the problem posed above is a false problem. Such an interpretation fits nicely with a notion that native Sanskrit withered under the authoritarian control and anti-Hindu policies of the Muslim conquerors and British colonialists. But Raghavan would be quick to note that Sanskrit maintained itself well during the Muslim period, especially under leaders such as Akbar. And as for the British, he argues that the European “discovery of Sanskrit had a two-fold effect: on the one hand, Indians who received a modern education woke into a new realisation of the values of their cultural heritage, and the work of the western orientalist produced a literary and cultural revival in India; on the other the impact of western modes of thought and ways of life led to a process of change in the traditional institutions and learning. The pursuit of Sanskrit itself bifurcated into the modern and traditional methods.” He continues to say that “Sanskrit literature entered on a new phase with the rise of modern European influence.”²⁴ While noting thereafter that Sanskrit became increasingly “archaeological” and Brahmins felt the “insignificance into which Sanskrit as a live medium of expression gradually fell,” there is still the strong sense that orientalism supported Sanskrit literary production, feeding it new life. Indeed, as we saw in the quote earlier from Raghavan’s piece on the variety and integration of Sanskrit culture, Sanskrit has “always” gone about this process of assimilation, and thus the impact of English education posed no real threat. Sanskrit, the eternal language of the gods, was thus continuous despite foreign rule. The depiction, however, is Janus-faced: simultaneously championing Sanskrit’s continuity and lamenting the pathetic condition into which it had fallen. The notion of revival which presumes a lack or sickness of Sanskrit and culture in the present, but is spoken of in the same breath as notions of healthy continuity, as if willing it alive by merely saying it is alive.

²³ Although, as discussed in the introduction, such an organic metaphor for a language is inadequate.

²⁴ Raghavan, “Sanskrit Literature,” 205.

Punarunmeṣa, as we will see, attributes the loss of Sanskrit and culture to the impact of European ways, particularly capitalism and the lure of urban jobs. Yet the play also insists that certain figures can promote culture and revive it in modern independent India. Āgantuka, the main character of the play, is just such an elite patron of the arts, as was Raghavan himself (as noted in the previous chapter). In what follows, I provide an analysis of *Punarunmeṣa*, followed by a discussion of how Āgantuka /Raghavan as elite patron exemplifies descriptions of elite Tamil Brahmins as “cultural brokers” in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu. The reader should keep in mind, however, that this notion of Raghavan as an exponent of culture should be framed as part of a critique of capitalist Brahmins. While this play was intended for a broader audience of government rulers (it was not performed in Madras, but in Delhi), the message is one of cultural revival, and stands in contrast to a capitalist and also a Nehruvian socialist/scientific revival based on advancement. My analysis will further show how this discourse of “culture” works within the rhetoric of Indian nationalism. Once I have placed the discussion within the context of “the nation,” an answer to the earlier impasse may perhaps be found. Scholarship on nationalism frequently speaks of the issue of secular time versus heterogeneous time, and in a final move, I will attempt to make sense of the *aporia* of the revival of a continuous tradition with recourse to postcolonial theory on cultural nationalism and the heterogeneity of time. In short, I will contend that Raghavan’s conception of history is religious, but that it nevertheless countenances and responds to the existence of European secular homogenous time. The performances of his Sanskrit plays become rituals of the regeneration of time without complete fear of the present, and *Punarunmeṣa* is about both revival and attempts to perform revival.

Cultivating Culture in “Punarunmeṣa”

In *Punarunmeṣa*, Āgantuka, whose name means “ “stranger” or “accidental” or “arriviste” (from the verb root *āgam*, “to arrive”) wanders into a village known for its cultural treasures and finds that arts and letters have been nearly abandoned by its inhabitants due to the pressures of money and modernity. Despite this sorry state of affairs (or the sorry affair in the new nation-state), Āgantuka nevertheless endeavors to inculcate in the few people he meets a desire to revive the arts and letters. In this, Āgantuka’s actions are highly reminiscent of the work of Raghavan himself. For example, when Āgantuka meets a Brahmin about to destroy some old manuscripts and sell others to an antiquities dealer from the West, Āgantuka not only dissuades this poor Brahmin but encourages him to begin writing Sanskrit prosody again, which he does in the final scene of the play. Raghavan himself wandered all over Kerala and Tamil Nadu knocking on doors looking for forgotten manuscripts. He also toured Europe and the U.S. looking for manuscripts, all of which were compiled in the monumental *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, a vast bibliography of Sanskrit manuscripts on which he worked tirelessly. When the Brahmin returns in the final moment of the play with his new poem on Bhārata Māta (Mother India), Raghavan’s identity splits: he is both the stranger and the Brahmin poet. But given that Raghavan, through the *Samskṛta Pratibhā* journal especially, also encouraged (and edited) numerous Sanskrit poets other than himself, it is not a complete split of personality but rather a symptom of his project of nurturing the revival of Sanskrit.

This Āgantuka is both a scholar and a connoisseur of the arts, as was Raghavan. At the end of the play, the Brahmin calls Āgantuka a “connoisseur of knowledge” or a “*vidyārasika*.”²⁵ While there may be some precedent for the use of this term, it strikes me as an odd combination

²⁵ V. Raghavan, “*Punarunmeṣaḥ*” *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*, Vol. II (1961): 63-72, 70.

of the notion of an artistic connoisseur (*rasika*) with the concept of knowledge, and indeed this seems to indicate Raghavan's overriding desire to fuse culture and aesthetics with scholarship and religion.

Raghavan's nurturing of Indian culture was not limited to literature, as we have seen, and in later scenes of *Punarunmeṣa*, Āgantuka encourages a musician to return to playing the *vīna* and a young girl to take up Bharatanāṭyam dancing. Raghavan was instrumental in the activities of the Madras Music Academy and the revival of Carnatic (South Indian) music, and from the late 1930's he was also closely associated with the institutionalization and popularization of Bharatanāṭyam. Indeed, as a promoter of the arts, Āgantuka is no stranger at all, but a literary *avatāra* of Raghavan himself: in the play, Raghavan is coming to the rescue of these neglected arts. Heroism here is not necessarily being an artist or writer per se, but nurturing art and literature, particularly as a patriotic enterprise for independent India. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this effort here to revive culture in the village echoes colonial Orientalists' attempts to study and salvage traditional arts and literature in India both as part of their own research and as a means of cultural hegemony and control of the colony.

While only a short ten pages, *Punarunmeṣa* epitomizes Raghavan's ideas about the revival of Indian culture and its importance for the nascent Indian nation. The five small scenes generally follow a predictable pattern: Āgantuka meets various villagers in his search for arts and literature, he finds that each villager neglects the arts and literature and is consumed by more material concerns, but he calls for the revival of culture for nationalist purposes while pledging money to help, and the villagers respond positively. The only exception to this disinterest in culture is the young girl (in the performance, played by his eldest daughter, Priyamvada) who wants to be a dancer, and this symbolizes a hope for a new generation. While presented in the

text as a series of dialogues, each instance appears loosely based on a traditional mode of argument in Sanskrit philosophy wherein someone provides an opposing view, called the *pūrvapakṣa*, which the author of the text counters with the “correct” view, called the *siddhānta*. This might be a rather short and pithy play, but it encapsulates an argument in a strongly philosophical manner, promoting its perspective while denying the validity of its opponent’s views. The *pūrvapakṣa* in each instance is that there is no money in the arts and literature and that no one cares about such old things in modern India. Raghavan’s response is that art and literature, as well as objects from South Asian history such as temples, ought to be revived and protected as part of India’s cultural heritage and to grant a feeling of national pride. And yet, despite his efforts to the contrary in this argument, money seems to talk about as much as the main philosopher since money is still imperative for the process of preservation: it just depends on how the money is spent, and Raghavan wants government officials to spend it on culture. In what follows, I have attempted to delineate the arguments of the various villagers (the *pūrvapakṣins*) and Raghavan/Āgantuka (the *siddhāntin*). In the end, the villagers come to agree with Raghavan’s point, and the play concludes with a celebration of India.

Āgantuka foreshadows the *pūrvapakṣa* argument as he first steps on stage and into the village. At first he calls the village a “celebrated place of learning, where pandits and those knowledgeable in the arts shine in every house.” But he notes quickly that houses are not shining, in fact they are mostly run down and dilapidated, and no one is to be seen. Still, Āgantuka is ever the optimist. The city, we learn, is called Vidyārāma, the pleasure garden of knowledge, and Āgantuka refers to it as a “center of learning” (*vidyāsthāna*) and “the stage of the dancer who is knowledge which is the forehead mark of the South.”²⁶ This description puts the village on a

²⁶ Ibid., 63. “*dakṣiṇāpathasyaiva lalāmbhūtaḥ vidyānaṭīraṅgasthalaṃ.*”

pedestal as an emblem of south Indian prowess, calling attention to South Indian Brahmins' assertion of their superior learning and purity. It also claims this high status for a village, not one of the big cities such as Madras, from which Raghavan (and by extension, Āgantuka) hails. The villages have been overtaken in prominence by the cities in modern India, and that forms the main *pūrvapakṣa* argument given by the villagers.

The Brahmin, whom Āgantuka meets first, expresses a sense of the city as a place of immorality whose tradition has been lost. When Āgantuka inquires where he might find Vedic recitation, debates of *śāstra*, or eloquent poetry, the Brahmin responds, with an indifferent laugh, that not only is he the last one in the village who is literate in Sanskrit²⁷ but also that everyone has “abandoned knowledge.”²⁸ He claims that the villagers have gone to seek modern jobs in the city,²⁹ and no one wishes to stay in the village. Later, he says that, “The village folk are drawn by the city as if it were a magnet, and the villages have turned into a desert.”³⁰ The physical abandonment of the village is tied to an intellectual abandonment. The Brahmin’s son has no interest in his father’s collection of palm leaf manuscripts or anything in Sanskrit at all, and has gone off to the city to engage in “worldly activities” (*lokayātr[ā]*).³¹ This is in interesting contrast to *alaukika* activities, in short, religious activities, that have also, by implication, been abandoned. The Brahmin considers the manuscripts (which would be a gold mine to a collector like Raghavan) worn out and unimportant, and plans either to throw them in the river or use them for kindling. For him, these texts no longer have much value, and he sees Āgantuka as out of place, deeming his interest in the village “odd” (*vicitra*) and saying he is talking with his eyes

²⁷ Ibid., “*ahamatra eka evādhyavaśiṣṭo akṣarajñāḥ.*”

²⁸ Ibid., “*vidyām vihyāya.*”

²⁹ Ibid., “*nagaram vividhām ādhunikīm vṛttimanivṣyan gataḥ.*”

³⁰ Ibid., 64. “*nagarairayaskāntairiva grāmajanā ākrṣṭāḥ, grāmāśca jūrṇāraṇyībhūtāḥ.*”

³¹ Ibid.

closed.³² The Brahmin argues not only that capitalist endeavors and modernity have consumed the minds of the next generation, but also that the young have no need for the past that has become useless. If anything, he considers these manuscripts useful only for firewood or possibly selling to a foreigner, foreigners being the only people left who seem to have any interest in Indian antiquities, albeit not as sources of knowledge but as antiquities for museums. According to this Brahmin, literary knowledge, and, even though it is not mentioned explicitly, *Sanskrit* materials are of no importance in this modern world; they are merely old etchings on palm leaves that might help cook his dinner or earn him some cash.

In response to the Brahmin's bemoaning of the lack of interest in learning and the flight to the city, Āgantuka replies that India is a country made up of villages (*grāmamayo 'yaṃ bhāratadeśaḥ*), and that, "Our culture (*asmākaṃ saṃskṛtiḥ*) was born and developed only in the village (*grame eva*)."³³ The notion of India as made of up villages is reminiscent of Gandhi's own rhetoric about India. These comments valorize the village as a locus of cultural and national identity. They set up an opposition between the city as modern and foreign in contrast with the village as traditional and authentic. In this instance, space is mapped on to a division of time that is itself mapped on to a division between foreign and native. Further, we see here the religious time of a supposedly eternal tradition pitted against the modern secular time of the West and its supposed march toward progress. The modern city exists in the linear time of the now and the future, which is, by extension, secular homogenous time. The village exists in an eternal time of

³² Ibid. This is a Sanskritization of a Tamil saying. Skt: "mīlitacakṣuṣā bhavatā...pralapyate." Tamil: "kaṇṇamūṭida edeyavade sollāde."

³³ Ibid.

religious traditions at risk of decay (as in this fictional village) due to the intrusion of the modern. The modern time of progress threatens the traditional time of eternity.³⁴

With the Brahmin threatening to turn these old manuscripts into kindling, Āgantuka intercedes and asserts that there is still interest in such manuscripts. But more than just the manuscripts is at stake, and it is not merely an archaeological matter. Āgantuka adds that, “Now, after independence has been achieved (*svātantryalābhānantaram*), wisdom (*vidyā*) and language (*bhāṣa*) which are the foundation of our Indian culture are re-blossoming (*punarvikāsam*).”³⁵ And with that, Āgantuka takes the manuscripts away to be preserved. Āgantuka calls them “treasures of our culture,”³⁶ and “not appropriate to give away to a foreigner, a river, or a fire.”³⁷ Indian independence, then, is the necessary condition for this reblossoming. With Indians (Hindus) in control of the government, and not Muslims or the British, independent India becomes an occasion not only for progress, but for a return to a golden era of literary production that had been, according to an unspoken part of the narrative, stifled by foreign rule and the impositions of foreign knowledge and language. Not only can Indian knowledge rebound in such an amenable environment as independence, but so also can language, which in Raghavan’s case certainly means Sanskrit as the foundation of Indian culture, and wisdom and culture which are the province of the Brahmin from whom Āgantuka takes the manuscripts. Like a good classical king, Āgantuka serves as a patron of the arts, yet not as royalty or the government but as an interested party or connoisseur. He is the elite Brahmin scholar/curator of the museum of Indian culture. Yet the fact that this play’s performance was a government-sponsored production

³⁴ In a manuscript under preparation, presently entitled “Tamil Brahmins’ Imagined Geographies: Village and City in Some Twentieth-Century Sanskrit Dramas,” I discuss the urban/village and modern/traditional dichotomies in terms of not just time and space but also the distribution of “knowledge.” The paper analyzes this play in comparison with two plays by two other twentieth-century Tamilian Sanskrit playwrights.

³⁵ Ibid., 65. “*adya svātantryalābhānantaram bhāratīyasamskṛteḥ mūlabhūteyaṃ vidyā bhāṣa ca punarvikāsam.*”

³⁶ Ibid. “*asmākaṃ samskṛteḥ nidhibhūtāḥ.*”

³⁷ Ibid. “*naitā videśam, nadīm, vahniṃ vā prāpayitumucitam.*”

reinforces the notion that the cultural arts and knowledge in India require a new form of patronage under the new format of democratic authority.

Knowledge and language might be the foundation of a nationalist imagination of culture and the responsibilities of Brahmins, but there are other people involved in the cultural arts that the play also depicts in a perilous position. Āgantuka wanders on looking for the house of a famous musician, but finds there a man whose fingers have given up the *vīna* string and are instead engaged in clerical work.³⁸ The musician says that his lineage is celebrated for its musical ability, but now the kings whose assemblies musicians might have adorned have been destroyed³⁹ and so he works as a clerk. Not only are the kings gone, but he mocks Āgantuka's apparent lack of knowledge of the time.⁴⁰ The musician asks, "Where are the nourishers of the arts or connoisseurs who know the tradition?"⁴¹ The musician reiterates the myth of decline in which the expert practitioners have abandoned their cultural activities, no one has any interest in the arts, there is no state support, and worldly concerns have to take precedence. Even the next generation, the musician's son, is not learning music since, "His movable mind moves to the movies."⁴² The modern arts of the city are viewed as a detriment to the continuity of the arts in the villages. Modern arts threaten to interrupt the continual reproduction of the traditional artistic *paramparā*.

In his *siddhānta* response to the musician, Āgantuka persuades him that there is still interest in music and he should continue playing. He adds that, "This country would become

³⁸ Ibid., 66. "*tantrīḥ muktṛvā gaṇanalekyoḥ aṅgulyo vyāpṛtā dṛśyante.*" Later in their conversation, the musician poetically describes his unused *vīna*: "it hangs on a peg on the wall like a criminal fixed on stake" "*śulāropita iva aparādhi bhittigataśaṅkau lambate.*" Ibid., 67.

³⁹ Ibid., 66. "*rājāno 'dya naṣṭāḥ.*"

⁴⁰ Ibid. "*alokajña! akārajña!*" ("You don't know the present world or the time!")

⁴¹ Ibid. "*api tu samprati kutra te kalāpoṣayitāraḥ, sampradāyasaṣṭhavaṃ vā kalāyāṃ jānānto rasikāḥ ?*"

⁴² Ibid. "*calaṃ cittaṃ calacitramevābhidhāvati.*" Despite this criticism of movies, Raghavan did write movies for the early Tamil screen and was quite sanguine about their potential as vehicles for the revival of traditional culture.

poor from the destruction of the treasure comprised of such arts, and the proper arrangements have been made in independent India for the nourishing of the arts of music, etc.”⁴³ Like the earlier remark about manuscripts considered as the country’s cultural treasures, this comment is a rejection of capitalist values and a valorization of the arts over mere earnings. Yet here Raghavan/Āgantuka additionally points out that there are schemes in place to uphold and nourish the arts. Implicitly there is an argument that the government can support the arts because it is a government run by Indians who, now having independence, can do a better job of protecting their own culture.

In the third minor scene, Āgantuka advocates for the preservation of traditional monuments and objects. As was the case with the manuscripts above, this scene suggests that it is not just culture and knowledge that need preservation, but culturally significant objects themselves. Wandering further in the village, Āgantuka comes upon an old Cōla era temple that he makes a mental note to mention to the officials of the archaeological survey.⁴⁴ He notes in his short monologue that the temple has been treated with “carelessness” (*pramāda*) and is littered with trash. He laments that the walls are covered with drying cow dung to such an extent that the inscriptions are illegible.⁴⁵ While Āgantuka studies the temple, he is interrupted by a thief, whom he catches in the act of looting images from the temple. Upon questioning, the thief admits that he sells these objects to foreigners.⁴⁶ Like the Brahmin earlier, Raghavan depicts foreigners as having more interest in these antiquities (not to mention cash) than Indians themselves.

⁴³ Ibid., 67. “*deśa eva etādrśakalāmayanidhernāsād daridrībhaviśyati. gūṭādikalāpoṣaṇārthamucitāḥ samvidhāḥ svatantrabhārate āracitā eva.*”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 68. “*...purātattvapariṣālanavibhāgādhikṛtebyho nivedya..*”

⁴⁵ A traditional technique for drying cow dung for fuel is to throw it against a wall to let it dry.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Āgantuka calls this act of theft an offense against the gods (*devāpacāra*) and also, in a tip of the hat toward nationalism, an offense to the country (*deśāpacāra*).⁴⁷ The text here collapses offense to the gods with offense to the nation, thus making the nation into an object worthy of worship itself. This seems to corroborate Peter van der Veer’s comment that, “Durkheim’s view that, in religion, the community worships itself, is nowhere as firmly shown as in religious nationalism.”⁴⁸ Further, this moment in the play imagines the nation as a divine entity to be worshipped through the *mūrtis* of ancient ruins. The materiality of culture metonymically becomes an abstract symbol of the eternal and omnipresent nation.

In this scene with the thief, Raghavan paints an image of utter depravity and the forsaking of religion and history for the sake of utilitarian ends. The village no longer has any power as a locus of knowledge and tradition; instead its inhabitants are in the thrall of the city (and implicitly the colonial metropole to which it belongs most closely) and beholden to its wealth. No one is taking care of these treasures of cultural history, Raghavan’s play implies, and instead of preserving them for the knowledge they can provide of the past, or merely because they are sacred objects from the temple, here in the poor village knowledge, tradition, and history are in jeopardy due to more mundane necessities of life, such as money and dried cow dung. Āgantuka ends the exchange by offering the thief an honest job that “properly supports the country.”⁴⁹ In this moment, Āgantuka comes to the rescue of antiquity, the nation, and the poor all at the same time. In a sense, he encourages an ideal in which every citizen by necessity must endeavor to support the nation. This is one moment where it appears that the nation imagined is a democracy and not a monarchy since common people can support it even if the government has to help. Yet

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1994), 152.

⁴⁹ Raghavan, *Punarunmeṣaḥ*, 68. “*ahaṃ kamapi aduṣṭaṃ jīvanopāyaṃ deśakṣemaupayikaṃ te kalpayiṣyāmi.*”

as the play's hero is an elite scholar and promoter of the arts and culture, on whom the villagers rely for support and encouragement, these cultured elites fill, or rather assume, the role of a modern royal patron.

While the thief threatened the sanctity of the temple, the fourth scene depicts the younger generation still idealistically connected to the temple and temple practices. There is thus still some hope for the future. Āgantuka overhears a quarrel between an old devadāsī (temple prostitute dancer) and her daughter.⁵⁰ The devadāsī asks her daughter what she is doing in the temple, implying that it is an odd place for her to be. The devadāsī then insists that they go to the nearest city since they are unable to make a living. Here again we see the opposition between the old world of the temple in the traditional village and the new world of money and the city. But we also see a contrast between the devadāsī serving in the temple and the devadāsī as performer in the big city as part of bourgeois national culture.⁵¹ The daughter expresses a keen interest in learning the art of Bharatanāṭyam (the art of the devadāsīs), and says she has even located a teacher in the village who very much wishes for a student. But the devadāsī will have none of that and has set her sights on the rich city. She predicts that there will be young *rāsikas* (connoisseurs, but possibly also ogling men) in the city who will appreciate her beauty that is merely decaying in the dead and “uncivil” village.⁵² The devadāsī further claims that not even the gods want knowledge of Bharatanāṭyam, and she notes that the dance has been removed from

⁵⁰Ibid., 69. He overhears and then stands aside quietly to listen, but this last bit of the Sanskrit, where he says “I will stand and listen” follows a somewhat Tamilized (or Dravidian, generally speaking) verbal pattern of present participle-verb: *tiṣṭhan śroyṣyāmi*: literally, “standing, I will listen.”

⁵¹ See, e.g. Pallabi Chakravorty, “The Limits of Orientalism: Classical Indian Dance and the Discourse of Heritage,” in Chandreyee Niyogi (ed), *Reorienting Orientalism* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006): 89-101; and Vinayak Purohit “Sociology of Indian Dance” in *Sociology of Art and Politics* (Bombay: Indian Institute of Social Research, 1987-8).

⁵² The word I have translated as uncivil here is “*anāgarika*,” literally not belonging to the city. My reasoning is that “civil” is from the Latin “*civis*” for city, and there does seem to be a mapping of courtly and civilized behavior onto the city as opposed to simple innocence of the rural village. The village nonetheless serves as a beacon of traditional “civilization” here.

the temple while teachers and dancers have left behind the traditional temple arts. Instead, the devadāsī suggests that a beautiful young girl might find “fortune in making movies.”⁵³ Again, the city shines as a beacon for those in the village who seek fortunes, a symbol of modern rather than traditional cultural forms.

As expected, Āgantuka enters the scene to take the side of the young girl and rescue culture, but not without a considerable fight with the mother, who seems to have thoroughly imbibed capitalist values. Āgantuka even says as much, albeit with a Vedic ritual metaphor, saying that this lousy mother has made her daughter into a sacrificial animal tied to the rich people’s *yūpa* pole (the pole on which the sacrificial animal is to be tied).⁵⁴ The sacrifice here is not just the daughter but symbolically culture itself that is presumably to be sacrificed at the altar of the almighty dollar. Also implied here is that the devadāsī is going to prostitute her daughter while Āgantuka is sanitizing the Bharatanāṭyam tradition by insisting on it as an art form rather than anything associated with temple prostitutes. The mother retorts that Āgantuka “speaks like an idiot,” echoing the Brahmin’s earlier criticism of our hero.⁵⁵ The problem, she says, is that today there is neglect (*anādara*) of the art and indifference (*virakta*) on the part of the performers. This then is the *pūrvapakṣa* argument to which Āgantuka replies that the art of dance is the treasure of the southern region, greatly praised all over India and in foreign lands.⁵⁶ On the other hand, he fails to mention that this popularity is largely in the very cities to which the devadāsī wants to take her daughter. Even if it has mostly died out in the villages due to neglect, Āgantuka responds to the contrary that this art of dance (*nāṭyakālā*) is pure and beautiful and part of an

⁵³ Raghavan, *Punarunmeṣaḥ*, “*calacitraprapaṅce mahānasti sambhavo bhāgyodayāya*.”

⁵⁴ Ibid., 70. “*kā vā putryāḥ śreyahkāṅkṣiṇī jananī evaṃ sutāṃ dhanikyūpeṣu paśūkartumutsaheta*.”

⁵⁵ Here, the Sanskrit spoken appears to copy a common Tamil phrase. Skt: “*ajānanniva bhāṣase*.” Tam: “*teriyāma pēsurīnga*”.

⁵⁶ Ibid. “*dakṣiṇadiśo nidhibhūtā nāṭyakālā. sā samprati sarvasminnapi bhārata videṣeṣu ca nikāmamabhinandit(ā)*.”

uninterrupted tradition.⁵⁷ In short, Āgantuka/Raghavan suggests that Indian culture is continuous and only requires the outside assistance of someone like himself, who promises to either provide the money for the teacher or even to establish a dance school in the village itself. While Āgantuka makes this promise in the play, however, in real life it is Raghavan who supported the activities of T. Balasaraswati, the famous devadāsī dancer who choreographed the dance that the young girl performs in the end; and Raghavan’s eldest daughter, Priyamvada, who was a student of T. Balasaraswati, played the role of the girl.

In the final scene of the play, Āgantuka’s work of instigating a *Punarunmeṣa* appears to bear fruit, and the characters (excluding the thief) come together in a performance of poetry, song, and dance. Āgantuka has not even spent a *paisā* yet, but his interest itself appears to revive interest in the others. The Brahmin returns to the stage, describes his meeting with Āgantuka as like “rain on salty soil,”⁵⁸ and announces that he has written a poem about “Bhārata Mātā and Indian culture”⁵⁹ that the musician and his brother have set to music. After the initial recitation of the song, the young girl offers to dance to it, and the group performs the song again accompanied by her dance performance, but after Āgantuka offers a final benediction: “Let this nourishing literature be a proper offering for independent mother India, and similarly let every village perfumed with knowledge and the arts be an offering to the feet of Mother India.”⁶⁰ What might be called “culture” here becomes constitutive not only of the national identity, but also of something offered in worship. Religion and culture become inextricable, but they are always somehow both separate and combined, interwoven and distinct. This combination of religion and

⁵⁷ Ibid. “*avacchinnaḥ...saṃpradāyakraṃaḥ.*” Note that he is using a very similar phrasing to that used in his discussion of the uninterrupted tradition of Sanskrit, mentioned in the alternate prologue for *Anārkaḷī*.

⁵⁸ Ibid. “*ūṣare vṛṣṭiriva.*”

⁵⁹ Ibid. “*bhāratamātaraṃ bhāratīyāṃ saṃskṛtiṃ.*”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 72. “*puṣṇadetat sāhityaṃ bhavatu svatantryabhāratamāturucita upahāraḥ | evameva vidyākalāparimalitaḥ ekaika grāmaḥ bhāratamātuścaraṇayoḥ upahāro bhavatu.*”

culture is apparent in the song itself, as is the the coincidence of continuity and novelty. Here is that final song:

1. O Goddess Mother India, who is both old and new in the world,
You shine forth because of your wealth of arts, etc, which are your inner virtues.
2. You are preserved by great ṛṣis and sage kings,
And you are well-nourished by Kālidāsa the best poet, and Śaṅkara the best guide.
3. You are respected by the people who are dutiful towards the song and dance of temples,
And you are luminous with the renewals of Mahātma Gāndhi and Rāmakṛṣṇa,
4. And by successive new plans for giving up the eclipse of servitude.
Homage to you O Mother, let your ageless culture be resplendent.
5. Homage to you, O Mother, friend to all nations, who has taken the vow of *pañcaśīla*,⁶¹
Who is a messenger of truth, reconciliation, peace, and non-violence.⁶²

An analysis of this piece of original poetry praising Mother India in Sanskrit could go in numerous directions. Most obviously to those who know modern Indian history and culture, the praise of Bhārata Mātā echoes the discourse of India as a woman and a mother, and echoes Bankimchandra's *Vande Mātaram* nationalist ode to Durgā in *Anandamath* (1882). In a subsequent section, I will discuss the image of the woman as the carrier of culture, but here, this image is almost taken for granted.⁶³ For the present analysis, the important features in Raghavan's song are notions of culture and religion, as well as revival. Further, in the song, the

⁶¹ Here, *pañcaśīla* does not refer to the five precepts of Buddhism, but rather Nehru's 1954 Panchsheel Treaty between India and China. Raghavan brings this up on occasion in some of his political writings.

⁶² Ibid., 71. The song also appears on a compilation CD of Raghavan's original Sanskrit compositions. The song is set to the Ragamalika *rāga* and Misra Chapu *tāla*: Music by Mudicondan Sri. Venkatarama Iyer, Performed by V. Sumithra et. al., "Devi Bharata Janani," Track 8 of *Kavikokila Mañjari*, vol. 1., compiled by Nandini Ramini (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2007). Here is the Sanskrit text:

*devi bhāratajanani jagati purānyathāpi ca nūtanā
dīvyase tvamudāramātmaguṇaiḥ kalādisamṛddhibhiḥ/1
bhāvitā hi maharṣibhiḥ paripālītā ca nṛparṣibhiḥ
kālidāsakavīndrasaṅkaradeśikendrasupoṣitā/2
devamandiragītānāṭakavaśyalokajanāḍṛtā
rāmakṛṣṇamahātmagāndhipunarnavīkaraṇojjvalā/3
dāsyarāhuvimokanūtananirmatikramayojanaiḥ
saṃskṛtistava rājatāmajarāmarāmba namo 'stu te/4
sarvadeśasuhṛttame śubhapañcaśīlamahāvrate
satyasāntvanaśāntyahimsanadūtike 'mba namo 'stu te//5*

⁶³ See Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Duke University Press, 2010).

arts (*kalā*) are not only part of culture, but an aspect of morality as well (a theme which we will return to in the next chapter). They are the inner virtues of the country itself. In this regard, culture quickly blends with religion: they are always mentioned separately but in the same breath in what seems to be a rhetorical move to bring them together. What I have translated as “inner virtues” is really “*ātmaguṇa*,” the inner virtues of the soul mentioned by Gautama in his *Dharmaśāstra*, and also discussed by Raghavan’s close religious associate the Śaṅkarāchārya of the Kanchipuram Muth, Chandreśakarendra Sarasvatī. Those virtues (*guṇas*) are *dāya* (kindness), *kṣānti* (forbearance), *anasūyā* (free of jealousy), *śauca* (purity), *anāyāsa* (lightness of effort/lack of exertion), *maṅgala* (auspiciousness), *akārpanya* (liberality), and *asprha* (lack of desire).⁶⁴ None of these has any direct relation to the arts per se, but Raghavan suggests that India’s arts are like these moral values. While the play has praised the revival of the cultural arts, this poem stresses that these cultural arts are what gives India its values, and promotes the “fineness of feeling” and “maturity” that Raghavan sees as quintessential to the ideal of culture as the height of human achievement. We see here again that culture for Raghavan is a matter of not just maintaining the arts but of uplift for the Indian populace: culture is what will make India return to its proper role as an upright and moral civilization leading the world, and it is a civilization that for Raghavan is shot through with spirituality as well.

Subsequent lines of the poem further reinforce this fusion of culture, religion, and politics. The first line of the third verse mentions the song and dance of the temples in unspoken (but presumed) opposition to non-religiously affiliated music and dance (e.g. Bollywood and imports from Hollywood). The second line of the second verse joins the poet Kālidāsa and the religious leader Ramakrishna in the same breath. The previous line mentions religious figures (*ṛṣis*) along

⁶⁴ Chandreśakarendra Sarasvatī Swāmī, *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life*, Fifth Edition (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2008), 514-516.

with kings, who are charged with the duty of preservation, not unlike the work of Āgantuka himself. Culture, indeed, is shown to be in need of a government that nourishes it, and cannot rely only on poets and religious leaders. In the final verse, India is depicted at the table with other countries, playing on the stage of international politics. More than that, India is imagined as playing the role of the messenger (*dūtikā*) of these virtues (cultural and moral), becoming a beacon for universal morality. As I have shown earlier, and will mention again later, Raghavan's nationalism also posits Indian culture as speaking in a universal language for the salvation of a global audience.

Casting a wider net through the song, there is a thread of combining the old and traditional with the new and modern. The first line deems mother India to be “both old and new in the world.” She is new because recently founded, yet it is unclear, and I think intentionally vague, whether it is her territory, people, or culture (or all) that are ancient. The second line of the fourth verse declares her culture to be “ageless” (*ajara*). While this is not the same as the term “continuous” (*avacchinna*) that Raghavan uses elsewhere, the idea of something that does not grow old or decay seems virtually identical. Raghavan here asserts that India's culture does not decay and remains continuous; yet at the same time, the line just prior mentions, albeit in a rather circumlocutory way, liberation (*vimoka*) from caste, which is unquestionably a novel transformation in the tradition. The previous line, too, mentions the renewal (*punarnavīkaraṇa*) of Gāndhi and Rāmakṛṣṇa. Although one could easily deem their movements to be reformations, there is no hint in the Sanskrit that Raghavan views the developments of these two reformers as actual changes that result in discontinuity; rather they are renewals and thus in line with his overall insistence on continuity.

Further, renewal itself is a fraught term, especially in the Sanskrit here, which literally

reads “making new again,” with the term *punar* of the title carrying the weight of both “again” but also a return back, i.e. to a past. What is old becomes new, but remains the same, as the new becomes, in a sense, old. Linear secular homogenous history collapses completely. At the conclusion of the song Āgantuka praises Indian culture thus: “Old and modern Indian culture shine here like freshly gathered butter.”⁶⁵ If this combination of old and new is fresh butter, is independence the churning stick? Or is Āgantuka the churning stick, or at least the reviver? He goes on to declare that the Brahmin is now awakened (*udbuddha*), and one can only awaken if one has been asleep, just as there can only be a *Punarusmeṣa* of the eyes if there has been a *nimeṣaṇa* (closing of the eyes). The sleeper might be the site of continuity, but anyone who has read the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* knows that the sleeper’s identity can be rather discontinuous. If that should be a dubious rebuttal, it remains the case that Raghavan wants to insist on a narrative of changeless continuity while also insisting on a narrative of newness and modernity. At the same time as he insists on culture’s permanence, he exhorts a return to a past golden era of culture, and a renewal of it in the present. He wants to connect the dots between past and present, not necessarily to bring the past dot into the present, but to insist on a line always already connecting past and present.

Sanskrit-ing the Nation: Raghavan’s Nationalist Sanskrit Literature

In addition to the song at the end of *Punarusmeṣa*, there are other short nationalist poems in Raghavan’s oeuvre that are worth mentioning. These poems seem to exude a new sentiment of nationalism within Sanskrit literature. I will argue that there is such a sense of nationalism throughout much of Raghavan’s literary works in Sanskrit, but in these selections it is blatantly obvious. In different times and places, Raghavan appears to have been of two minds about the

⁶⁵ Raghavan, *Punarusmeṣaḥ*, 71. “*prācīna-ādhunika-bhāratīyasamskṛtiratra navanītamiva saṅgrhītā bhāti.*” The original text utilizes hyphens to separate the words “old” and “new.”

possibility of nationalism in Sanskrit literature. In the previous chapter, I mentioned his essay “Nationalism in Sanskrit Literature” in which he was quite positive that Sanskrit literary history is full of ideas of nationalism. Even earlier than that, in an essay written for *Sound and Shadow* under a pseudonym, he writes of Indian dance that, “So vast is the world of symbols given by Bharata that anything can be gestured by Abhinaya [the hand gestures of Indian dance]. As for instance, a patriot can have national songs rendered in Abhinaya.”⁶⁶ Indeed, this is precisely what he has his daughter display in the final scene of *Punaranmeṣa*. That said, in one of the last pieces he published, he seems to be skeptical of this possibility. Writing in 1978, he cites Einstein’s famous quote about nationalism as an “infantile disease” and Goethe’s description of it as “the lowest stages of culture.” He goes on to express little faith in the United Nations and its bureaucracy, and even appears to sense that despite the end of colonialism, the U.N. is but another reiteration of empire. Most importantly, he notes that “nationalism or patriotism in a narrow sense figures but rarely in Sanskrit literature, on the other hand universalism (*sarve janāḥ and lokāḥ samastāḥ*) figures prominently.”⁶⁷ I will return to this issue of universalism, the topic of the book in which he writes this, in the final chapter of this dissertation. Despite this late turn toward the universal, in his earlier years, Raghavan was quite certain of the historical nature of nationalism in Sanskrit and was sanguine about its potential for nationalist literary production in Sanskrit. To that end, he wrote not only *Punaranmeṣa*, but a number of other short poems, and it is certainly the case that nationalism in general permeates throughout much of his early Sanskrit literary work even when it is not entirely explicit.

Another striking example of Raghavan’s nationalist Sanskrit literary endeavors is a poem

⁶⁶ V. Raghavan (Bhava Raga Tala), “Bharata Natya,” *Sound and Shadow* (July 1933): 60-63, 61. This piece is interesting because in it Raghavan is highly critical of T. Balasaraswati, the dancer he would later come to consider the epitome of Bharatanatyam dancers. I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. A.R. Venkatachalapathy for giving me his collection of Raghavan’s articles in *Sound and Shadow*.

⁶⁷ V. Raghavan, *Universal Love and World Unity* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978), 85-86.

written in honor of the national flag published just over a week after official independence in 1947.⁶⁸ The poem, entitled “*Svarājya-Ketu*,” published in *The Hindu*, praises the nation’s flag, independence, and India in general. On the one hand, it lacks any reference to Muslims, and instead paints the flag as entirely a matter of Indian philosophical ideas (the white is *sattva*, the green is *śakti*, and the yellow is *tyāgam*). A year later, Raghavan offered a translation in *Triveni* where he includes some parenthetical comments; for example he explains that the wheel is “the embodiment of the three Vedas,” although in later verses he also connects it with the Solar and Lunar races and with Aśoka.⁶⁹ Still, he is quick to call for unity, and for the flag to “prompt our intellects for a united deliberation, for a united thought and united effort.”⁷⁰ This notion of unity is repeated in the penultimate line: “Mother, that supreme power which was yours of yore, which, like that of the ocean made everything merge and become one with it, with that power, unifying into one this country gone manifold (*nānāgatam*), swell forth again, O, Goddess.”⁷¹ Not only does this express a need for unity, but insists that the unity of India has existed previously. The last verse has a nice poetic image comparing new India to the newly formed Himālaya: “Even as the youngest of the world’s mountains, this our Himalayas, is the greatest, even so, may this latest-born republic of India be yet the biggest in all the world.”⁷² As C. Rajagopalachari writes in a note to Raghavan reviewing the poem, “I suppose this is the first time the geological theory that the Himalayas are a more recent range than other mountains finds expression in Sanskrit.”⁷³

⁶⁸ V. Raghavan, “*Svarājya-Ketu*,” *The Hindu*, Sunday Supplement, August 24, 1947, p. 12. Also published with a translation as “*Svarājya-Ketu/The Banner (Light) of Freedom*,” *Triveni* XX, Vol. I, August 1948, 6-7. All subsequent citations are from the *Triveni* source.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, verses 3, 5, and 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, verse 3, Raghavan’s translation.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, verse 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, verse 11, Raghavan’s translation.

⁷³ This note was found in a typed form among the collected papers of the Samskrita Ranga and Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for the Performing Arts. Within the collection are a variety of such reviews of Raghavan’s work, some of which were later printed in Raghavan’s self-published works. This note was published in the back of V. Raghavan, “Other Sanskrit Compositions of V. Raghavan: Select Opinions” in *Vijayanka, Vikatanitamba, Avantisundari: Three Sanskrit Prekshanakas* (also, *Prekṣaṇakatrayī*), (Madras: Sri Ramachandra Printing Works, 1956), 9.

The penultimate verse suggests ancient power, while the last verse suggests the possibility of new things being great. The poem does not merely revere the nation in Sanskrit verse, but expresses the significance of new independence in this ancient language the register of which immediately places it both as elite and within a longer tradition. Further, by expressing reverence for a national symbol in a language that the author uses as if it were a national symbol, the poem blurs the line between the two, and the poem appears as a paean to its own medium.

Another of Raghavan's poems that stresses the idea of renewal, published much later, is entitled, "What is Your Secret Medicine for Revival?"⁷⁴ and a note indicates he wrote it after completing a journey across India. In the first verse he tells of seeing India from Kanyākumārī to the Himālayas, and seeing crores of children playing in India's broad lap. The second verse imagines the high and low in India hitting each other and crying due to immaturity, while Mother India stands by patiently. We get another sense here of Raghavan's disdain for antipathy between castes. This concern to prevent division is one we will see appearing in other works of his, and was a general theme of many freedom fighters and the Congress platform in the mid-twentieth century. The poem further describes India's image as split, and a footnote explains he means the split between India and Pakistan, thus it highlights another wound in India's history that it had to survive. The third line is perhaps the most intriguing in its emphasis on continuity: "The wise who study the story of the creation of the country, an ancient story resembling the bubbling up of the ocean of time, having pondered you continuously, they are so amazed that they will not cease. What is your secret recipe for revival?"⁷⁵ One line in the final verse also suggests this same notion: "your blazing beauty fully cooked in the heat of time."⁷⁶ The last line gives us something

⁷⁴ V. Raghavan, "Kim tannavīkṛtirahasyaparasāyanam te," *Samskṛta-Bhavitavyam* Vol. 20 (October 3, 1970): 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid. *kālābdhi—budbudasadṛkṣapurāṇa tattaddeśaprajācaritaśīlanaśālivijñāh/
tvām vīkṣya vīkṣya viramanti na vismayāt te kim tannavīkṛtirahasyaparasāyanam te//* (verse 3).

⁷⁶ Ibid. *kālapratāpa—paripaktrima—dīptalakṣmīh.* (verse 4)

of an answer to the poem's question of India's recipe for self-revivification: an internal spirituality, which has blossomed inside India's extensive depth and history, is displayed externally.⁷⁷ According to Raghavan, it is India's internal spirituality, the religion inside the culture, as well as Sanskrit and its poetic beauty, that is its energizing force, that maintains its survival over the centuries.

Of Politicians and Poets: Cultural History, Cultural Heroes

Returning to the theme of culture, *Punarunmeṣa* is one of many Raghavan plays that champion the arts, but it is unique in explicitly depicting the revival of arts in contemporary India. Many of his other works highlight poets, musicians, and scholars from Indian history. As I will suggest, these depictions of the long history of Indian culture operate in Raghavan's oeuvre as an argument for the continuous tradition of both the arts and Sanskrit, and the heroes and heroines serve as ideals for an independent India. The continuous tradition of Sanskrit culture that Raghavan imagines, however, has often relied on royal patrons and, in order to reblossom, requires a return of authority to Indian hands. As *Punarunmeṣa* argued explicitly, it is now in independent India that structures are in place for this revival, and that situation is the fruit of political operatives who worked for independence. It is the duty, then, of the citizenry to model themselves after these great heroes and heroines of culture and politics. In this section, we return to look at some of the cultural heroes along with the political heroes in Raghavan's plays and a few stray poems. The initial argument here is that for Raghavan cultural revival and political independence work hand in hand, and while native political authority operates within linear historical time, Indian culture operates as an eternal continuity in non-secular time.

⁷⁷ Ibid. "yasyāṃudāragahanaṃ smitametadantaradhyātmacitsukhabahirlasitaṃ tavāmba."

Among political leaders in twentieth-century India, no name is so grand as Gandhi, and of course Raghavan wrote a twenty-one verse poem honoring Mahatma Gandhi upon his death. A full translation of this poem can be found in Appendix A, below. After many verses praising Gandhi’s leadership, asceticism, philosophy of nonviolence, and social activism for uplifting castes and eliminating caste differences, the poem takes an intriguing turn toward apotheosizing Gandhi. Raghavan writes that like Buddha and Jesus Christ, Gandhi who spoke of peace was killed.⁷⁸ In an earlier verse (verse 5), he also compares Gandhi to Vasudeva himself. The last line’s benediction then equates Gandhi with the hero Rāma: “Let there be Ramraj on earth by the grace of Gandhi who is Rām.”⁷⁹ Calling upon Rāma as an image of the superior leader is nothing new in South Asian political rhetoric over the past centuries,⁸⁰ but what is significant about this amalgamation of Gandhi with Ram is the mythologization of a modern political figure, putting Gandhi into a historical sense that is no longer homogenous empty time but mythological deep time, combining past and present into an eternal. Gandhi becomes merely an iteration of an ideal type of leader. After verses specifying the uniqueness of Gandhi and his message, his historical specificity and his messages of social activism for harijans that no Rām would ever have espoused, Raghavan reverses course from modernity to mythology. The poem itself attempts to overcome the sorrow of Gandhi’s death by putting his life into mythological time of eternity. A verse with some nice alliteration begins with all words beginning with “G” that are essential parts of India: “Where there is the Gītā, the Ganges, and the Great Himalaya, Gandhi is

⁷⁸ V. Raghavan, “*Mahātmā*,” *Śaṃskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1970): 5-6. Verse 16, line 1:
buddha babhūva sa babhūva ca jesukṛstuḥ
gāndhyapyabhūtsa śamameva vadan hataśca/

⁷⁹ Ibid., verse 21: “*rāmṛājyaṃ jagatyastu rāmagāndhiprasādataḥ*”.

⁸⁰ See Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 52:2 (May 1993): 261-297.

not the last of the causes of the elevation of India.”⁸¹ Raghavan thus makes Gandhi into almost a natural feature of the greatness of India, ensconced not just in literature or history but naturalized as part of the eternal land itself. As I will continue to suggest throughout the rest of this analysis, such a move is part and parcel of Raghavan’s inscription of these modern political figures into the Sanskrit literary tradition.

One leader Raghavan lionizes and commemorates in poetry is his friend and contemporary C. Rajagopalachari, the independence activist and later political leader and founder of the conservative Swatantra Party. The poem in his honor, published prominently in an issue of *Samskrta Pratibhā* mentions Rajaji’s exploits, leadership, and even his imprisonment and torture during the fight for independence, despite which he supposedly bore no ill will toward the British.⁸² But Raghavan’s Rajaji is not merely a hero for India, but also for the world: “Even among skilled people is there such wisdom and heroism? It is as if these qualities have settled in him for the sake of lifting up the world.”⁸³ But Raghavan’s ideal hero is no mere political operative, but is also, like Gandhi, a religious leader, and he praises Rajaji for his belief in god, highest dharma, devotion, and inclination toward spirituality.⁸⁴ In a final verse, Raghavan again makes Rajaji out to be a model politician for all the world, but he makes a distinct critique against the Dravidian movements, against which Rajaji also was opposed: “The Dravidian area, the land of India, other countries, are all one whole. May those devoted to peace prosper by means of truth, self-purification, and compassion.”⁸⁵ By suggesting peaceful

⁸¹ V. Raghavan, “*Mahātmā*,” verse 6. “*gītā gaṅgā tathā gaurīguruścetyatra ye punaḥ/hetavo bhāratonnatyayi teṣu gāndhyapyanantimaḥ*.”

⁸² V. Raghavan ““*Rājājī*,”” *Samskrta Pratibhā* Vol. 10, No. 1 (1973): unnumbered prefatory pages. Verse 3:
sannyasya sarvamiha bhāratamātṛbandha-
mokṣājīnāyakamahātmabahiṣcarātmā/
bandhīkṛto ’pi bahuśo, bahu pīḍito ’pi
vairam videśajanamabhyavahanna kiñcit//

⁸³ Ibid., verse 8. “*karmaṭheṣvapi ko ’pyeva medhāvīro ’sti tādrśaḥ/ yasmin lokodayārthāya guṇāḥ sañketitā iva//*”

⁸⁴ Ibid., verse 10. “*āstikyam dharmaparatā bhaktiradhyātmavāsanaḥ*”

⁸⁵ Ibid., verse 15. *drāviḍo bhārato deśaḥ videśā akhilāstathā/ satyātmaśodhakāruṇyairvardhantāḥ sāntitatparāḥ//*

coordination among the Dravidian land and India (let alone the other countries), Raghavan appears to suggest here that peace is the opposite of the path of separation chosen by the Dravidian movement.

Another leader who receives Raghavan’s praise in a Sanskrit poem is far more patently religious: Swami Vivekananda. In the introduction, I discussed Raghavan’s close association with the Ramakrishna Mission and his involvement with the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. In a poem published in various locations, Raghavan praises this “foremost of men” in twelve verses of different meters, and the version published in *Vedanta Kesari*⁸⁶ includes a translation presumably by the author himself (there is no translator specified). The poem praises Vivekananda’s attempts to spread Vedanta, and includes quotes from the *Gītā*, *Upaniṣads*, and Vivekananda himself. Here again, Raghavan mythologizes Vivekananda, first likening his journey overseas to Hanuman’s leap to Lanka (verse 1), later comparing him to Kṛṣṇa uttering the *Gītā* (verse 6), and then comparing him to Śaṅkara, who “with only a few years of life here, shook the world like a tempest, and making everybody wonderstruck with his torrential eloquence, resurrected the Vedanta again and thereby the spiritual sense in the people.”⁸⁷ Some of these moments, such as comparing Vivekananda to Hanuman, seem mostly poetic. But comparing the modern figure Vivekananda to the eighth-century figure Śaṅkara involves the notion of the resurrection of Vedanta, akin to Raghavan’s own project of resurrecting Sanskrit. Vivekananda becomes both of the present and the past, poetically compared but also projected. I would argue that the rhetoric of resurrection or revival partakes of the same historical push and pull, a simultaneous appeal to continuity and loss. At the end of the poem, the editors or possibly Raghavan have included a quote from Vivekananda, the first line of which asserts: “Religion is

⁸⁶ A journal of the Ramakrishna Mutt, in which Raghavan published frequently.

⁸⁷ V. Raghavan, “Vivekananda the Foremost among Men,” *Vedanta Kesari*, L., IV. (Aug 1963): 136-8, verse 9. Raghavan’s translation.

not and never can be in the field of intellect.” I might then suggest that the rhetoric of revival is not and never can be in the realm of homogenous secular time, and to grasp the rhetoric one needs to understand that it operates in mythological time. To imagine a revival requires that we not think in terms of progress but, the opposite, to think of time in terms of a return to a past imagined as glorious that somehow can live again.

Of primary interest in his poem on Vivekananda is a verse where Raghavan directly describes him as a hero: “He who shone as a hero of Knowledge, a hero of action, a hero of the country (as patriot-monk)...”⁸⁸ The word Raghavan translates as “hero” is “*vīra*.” This is a word one would associate far more with a king than a spiritual leader. Certainly Vivekananda’s heroism does not extend from any battles won, although he certainly journeyed far in his spiritual attempt to conquer hearts and minds. Nor is the emphasis on his knowledge alone; Raghavan mentions him as also a hero of *karma* (action) and *rāṣṭra* (country). Action here seems to refer far more to Vivekānanda’s active role in the Ramakrishna movement, rather than any sort of social activism and uplift, or even wisdom. Further, it is interesting to note that the form of heroism here is not dharma or *daya* or other various forms of heroism that might be attributed to religious work, but rather *karmavīra*, the heroism of action. It indicates that Vivekananda as a sage was not merely content to practice asceticism but actively spread the teachings of Ramakrishna and worked on India’s behalf. More interesting is the notion of him as a hero of the country. Raghavan seems to mean this not so much in the sense that Vivekananda was a popular hero for people in the country, but that he was a patriot. The parenthetical “patriot monk” is Raghavan’s addition, and he suggests in an annotation (in Sanskrit) that Vivekananda was called

⁸⁸ Ibid., verse 11: *jñānavīrah, karmavīro rāṣṭravīraśca...*”

this “because of his public patriotism (*svaprakāṭadeśabhaktyā*).”⁸⁹ This suturing of religious figure and patriot is only possible in an age of nationalism.

Raghavan’s heroes, however, are not limited to religious figures; more overtly political figures and politicians do figure in his poetry, and considerable reverence is given to leaders of the independence movement and resistance. One poem, published in 1947, the year of independence, glorifies Gopa Hampaṇṇa, a herdsman (Kuruba caste) in Guntukal, Andhra Pradesh during the Raj.⁹⁰ A full translation of this poem can be found in Appendix A, below. According to Raghavan’s poetic rendition of the story, some drunken English soldiers lusted after a young recently pubescent Lingayat caste woman who was walking home with an older Kuruba woman. Noticing that they were being chased, the women ran off and happened upon Hampaṇṇa who hid them in his hut and tried to fend off the soldiers. When finally he wielded a bamboo stick against them, they fled, but one soldier had a revolver and shot Hampaṇṇa.⁹¹ Hampaṇṇa, because he was dying, could not identify the perpetrator in the identification parade.⁹² The populace viewed him as a martyr, recognizing his heroism (*vīrya*), and attempted to pursue charges against the British soldier. But the soldier defended himself by asserting that the girl was a harlot and Hampaṇṇa her pimp who was haggling about her fees. He claims to have killed in “self-defense.”⁹³ The judge agreed with this depiction of the young girl as a prostitute. Apparently, in nearby Gooty there is a monument to Hampaṇṇa bearing the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 138, footnote 14.

⁹⁰ I do not have an exact date for the events, and Raghavan does not provide one even in his English-language introduction. Based on the fact he mentions Justice Collins as the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, the events must have transpired between 1895 and 1899. Guntukal is located about halfway between Hyderabad and Bangalore. V. Raghavan, “*Gopa Hampaṇṇaḥ*,” (Bangalore: *Āmṛtavāṇyām*, 1947).

⁹¹ Raghavan invents the word “*nalikāṃ tanuṃ*” and indicates “revolver” in the notes. Ibid., 4 (verse 18).

⁹² Ibid., verse 21. Raghavan translates “*pratyabhijñākriyāyām*” as “identification parade” in a footnote.

⁹³ Ibid., 5, verse 26. Raghavan translates “*ātmābhirakṣaṇa*,” as “self-defense” in a footnote.

inscription: “Here rest the ashes of Hampañña who was killed intervening in the attack of a white soldier on a Hindu lady.”⁹⁴

The importance of this poem for my analysis should be quite plain. Published in 1947, the year of Indian Independence, the poem says some disparaging things about the British while lionizing the heroism of an Indian man.⁹⁵ What is more, the poem implies that Indians are capable of protecting their own people and do not need the interference and paternalism of the British to administer their country. More specifically, it is the women of the country that the poem suggests can and must be protected by Indians against outside influences, thus maintaining women’s purity. In fact, the young girl could be regarded as a symbol of not only women in general, but due to the connection of women to the image of India and maintenance of the arts, Gopa Hampañña gave his life for the protection of nation and culture. Beyond its obvious nationalism, the poem also puts this instance of resistance into the idiom of Sanskrit poetry. The verses are in various classical meters (*śloka*, *vasantatilaka*), although there is no trace I see of any sort of *kavi-samaya-s* (poetic tropes), and the poem is rather a metrical rendition of a factual account with few flourishes. Despite the absence of much poetic imagination, beyond the mere imagination of depicting such matters in Sanskrit and a somewhat unorthodox depiction of the death of the hero, the poem illustrates a confluence of modern history with an ancient lineage of poetic depiction. It is, after all, in metrical Sanskrit. Further, the weight of the meaning of Sanskrit itself makes this poem mean something more than if it were in, say, Tamil or Telugu (likely the language of Gopa Hampañña himself). It effectively places recent history into a

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6, verse 32. My translation.

atra śvetabhaṭābhīyogavipadaḥ
kāñcittu hindustriyaṃ
hampaññaḥ parirakṣya tairabhihataḥ,
tad bhasma śete mahat.

⁹⁵ It is unclear whether Raghavan wrote it before or after actual independence. In a brief English introduction he says the poem was inspired by an account of the event published in *The Hindu* in 1928.

mythical time of an ancient cultural tradition by means of the linguistic medium itself. It melds Sanskrit with the rejection of the Raj and creation of independent India.

Moving further back in time from this critique of lustful British rulers, and moving back to the plays, in *Anārkalī*, Raghavan gives get a rather favorable picture of a Muslim as Akbar appears in those pages as a good leader of unified India, a protector of Hinduism, and a formidable patron of the arts. I will discuss this play in much more depth in chapter 4, but here I want to note that Akbar’s patronage of the arts, dance, and Sanskrit literature mirrors Raghavan’s role as a Tamil Brahman elite exponent of culture. On a more abstract level, the fact that *Anārkalī* is a “Sanskrit play on a Muslim theme,” as the prologue makes explicit, suggests that the play is intended to incorporate Muslim history into the general fold of Sanskrit literary history. The play is in fact an example of Raghavan’s contention that Sanskrit naturally goes about bringing into its lap any number of smaller traditions. That it inscribes Muslims within the ambit of Sanskrit and Hinduism will be dealt with in Chapter 4. Here, however, it is worth noting that writing such a history of Mughal India in Sanskrit does not reflect a mere restatement of history as such, but rather participates in the project of having Sanskrit swallow up all of Indian history – and thus Sanskrit and India appear continuous.

While Akbar and Āgantuka might figure as the epitome of patrons, there is no shortage of dancers, singers, and poets featured in Raghavan’s original Sanskrit writings. We saw in *Punarunmeṣa* the Brahmin poet, the musicians, and the dancing girl; meanwhile, *Anārkalī* features the singer Tansena, the musician and choreographer Pundarika Vittala, and the eponymous heroine herself as a dancer. Raghavan’s other Sanskrit writings feature numerous such performers and artists. There is a short poem in which several of *Kālidāsa*’s various fictional characters vie to be his favorite. Raghavan also wrote a lengthy *mahākāvya* on the saint-

singer Mutthuswāmī Dīkṣitar. He also translated into Sanskrit a play by Tagore that narrates the story of Vālmīki's conversion from a king of forest rogues, to a follower of *ahimsā* (nonviolence), and later into a poet. The play gives a dramatic new rendition of the famous scene from the *Rāmāyaṇa* wherein Vālmīki fails in his attempt to stop the hunter from killing the *krauñca* bird, and proceeds to utter the first *śloka* and receive the boon of poetry and song from the goddess Sarasvatī. Another play of Tagore's that Raghavan translated is *Natir Puja* (Skt: Naṭīpūjā), a play that features a dancing girl as its heroine and was thus well-suited to Raghavan's attempt to highlight the arts.⁹⁶ Yet the example of *Natir Puja* further suggests another type of lead character worthy of further discussion: the heroine.

Heroines of Sanskrit

While male poets and artists feature significantly in Raghavan's work, a number of his works feature women as artists and scholars. As noted in the previous chapter, Raghavan was a promoter of Bharatanāṭyam and was closely associated with the dancer T. Balasaraswati. He also worked with the famous female Carnatic vocalist M.S. Subbalakshmi, and another female vocalist, R. Vedavalli, performed as a sort of on-stage playback singer in the productions of the Samskrita Ranga. But women were not merely artists in this period; as Partha Chatterjee has noted, women in twentieth-century India were imagined as idealized repositories of the national culture.⁹⁷ One of Raghavan's first publications, published while he was still a Ph.D. student, is a study of various Sanskrit and Prakrit poetesses.⁹⁸ It is not an analytical piece but rather more a survey of the different poetesses, and it does show his broad knowledge of South Asian literature

⁹⁶ V. Raghavan, trans., "Vālmīkipratibhā" and "Naṭīpūjā," *Samskr̥ta Pratibhā*, Vol. 6 (1966):238-251, 252-304.

Published in separate book form (with pagination from the original) by the author, with prefatory material in 1967.

⁹⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993), 116-134.

⁹⁸ V. Raghavan, "Sanskrit and Prakṛt Poetesses," *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Bangalore, Volume XXV, (1934-5): 49-74.

in his mid 20's, and even reveals his awareness of the "religious poetry of the vernaculars," e.g. Mira Bai, et. al. who would figure in his later Patel Memorial Lectures on the so-called "Saint-Singers" of India. In the preface to his collection of three original Sanskrit plays about three of these women Sanskritists, he refers to this essay as "the earliest full account on the subject of the contribution of women to Sanskrit literature."⁹⁹ It would seem, then, that making these women known was something of importance to him. Further, at the conclusion of his short preface, he remarks that the plays were written (prior to the formation of the Samskrita Ranga, it should be noted), for performance by college students and on AIR. Thus these plays were meant to draw attention to the fact that great women have been Sanskritists, and to further cement the notion of women as potential leaders of a cultural revival in modern India.

There appears to be a strong interest in this theme of female heroines and artists in Raghavan's earliest work from the 1930's. At around the same time that Raghavan wrote the piece on Sanskrit poetesses, he was also putting himself through graduate school writing scripts and dialogue for early Indian movies, among them *Sītā Kalyāṇam*, *Cāndrasenā*, and *Jalajā*. There is one feature common to all three of these films: lead female heroines. The first is about Sītā's *svayaṃvara* and the second is about the sister-in-law of Rāvaṇa who assists Rāma in defeating her brother-in-law's army. The story of *Jalajā* is not clear to me (I have found no corroborating evidence, or even the movie), but Nandini Ramani describes it as being about the revival of Bharatanāṭyam.¹⁰⁰ Also around the same time, Raghavan published essays in the local English film and arts journal *Sound and Shadow* on various themes relating to Indian dance and drama, but particularly on Bharatanāṭyam. In one essay, while debating the issue of whether the

⁹⁹ V. Raghavan, *Vijayanka, Vikatanitamba, Avantisundari: Three Sanskrit Prekshanakas* (also, *Prekṣaṇakatrayī*), (Madras: Sri Ramachandra Printing Works, 1956). Bibliographical note: Sri Ramachandra is just a physical printer, and no actual publishing company is mentioned, but it could be Raghavan's own imprint, Punarvasu. It is also important to note that the pagination for this compilation is not continuous and each play is paginated separately.

¹⁰⁰ Nandini Ramini, *V. Raghavan*, 18.

devadāsīs were prostitutes, Raghavan declares that only a small percentage participate in prostitution, and that it is more important to him that it is a community in which women can “devote themselves wholesale to fine arts.” This is a rather rosy picture, and he ignores the problem of who might patronize these devadāsīs’ arts. Money has to come from somewhere, even from strangers rooting about looking for culture. But for Raghavan, devadāsīs must be supported because the arts must be supported, and other women are incapable of doing the job: “It is impractical and extremely unreal to talk of family women developing into the future repositories of Bharata Natya.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the art of Bharatanāṭyam had to be the realm of women who were not chained to the need for chastity and housework, i.e. in conjugal marriages. Those family women, he felt, could adopt some of the folk arts and maintain those traditions, rather than Bharatanāṭyam, not because of the issue of sensuality but merely because Bharatanāṭyam required more time for training. Still, Raghavan’s implied notion, albeit tucked away in a corner of the article, is that women need to support the arts in some fashion for nationalist purposes.

The Sanskrit plays Raghavan later wrote about women poetesses were designed precisely to exhort women to play roles within this project of supporting the cultural arts. The plays display something of the prowess of previous Sanskrit poetesses, as well as the potential for other women to engage with Sanskrit. While it would be anachronistic and problematic to call Raghavan a full feminist by our standards, it is the case that he was committed to the possibility of women engaging with and studying Sanskrit. Mention must be made here of one of his closest students, S.S. Janaki, who took over the Samskrita Ranga after Raghavan’s death. In fact, in 1976, his Samskrita Ranga performed Bhāsa’s play *Āvimāarakam* with an all female cast, apparently for “International Women’s Year.” While the play itself is a light courtly love story

¹⁰¹ Bhava Raga Tala (pseudonym for V. Raghavan), “Bharata Natya-Classic Indian Dance, The South Indian Sadr-Nautch, The Recent Controversy over the Art,” *Sound and Shadow* (June 1933): 56.

with some intrigue and disguise, having an all-female cast is something that even a modern feminist would appreciate. In short, there is something in Raghavan's Sanskrit works and in his project of Sanskrit promotion that is distinctly nationalist and that attempts to cast women in important roles within Sanskrit and national culture.

The three plays about women Sanskritists are concise skits that incorporate the few surviving stray verses attributed to these women Sanskritists, and the verses are woven by Raghavan's imagination into small plots. Raghavan regards Vijayānkā (also known as Vijjikā) as the best of these poetesses. In his English expository essay, Raghavan considers Vijayānkā and Vijjikā separately, but suggests that they might have been one and the same. Raghavan identifies her as the Queen of King Chandrāditya of the Chalukyan dynasty in the Deccan, thus dating her to the late seventh century A.D. The play imagines a conversation in a study hall that takes place among her, the king, and a teacher. During the course of the play, she recites a number of the verses attributed to her as examples of her poetic prowess, but the play begins with her critique of the opening verse of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaadarśa*. The teacher recites Daṇḍin's verse which imagines Sarasvatī as all white, but Vijjikā laughs out loud and retorts that Daṇḍin must not know of her because she is dark like the petals of a blue lotus. In other words, she herself is Sarasvatī due to her poetic prowess.

The second play, *Vikiṭānitambā* is based on a poetess also mentioned by Rājasekhara and has a humorous bent. The play imagines a conversation among the heroine, a friend, and her guru (known from sources as Govindaswāmī). Since she is timid, her friend recites her original verses for the teacher. Thus Raghavan includes her poetic verses within a fairly thin plot for representation on the stage. In Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, there is a verse discussing

Vikiṭānitambā's unfortunate marriage to a man who does not know Sanskrit.¹⁰² That verse concludes the play, but not before a humorous scene in which the poetess laments such a fate, and her friends mercilessly tease the ill-speaking husband-to-be.¹⁰³ Here, Sanskrit knowledge is shown to be legitimately the province of women, and the man is humiliated for his stupidity.

The last playlet is about Avantisundarī, apparently a Kṣatriya woman married to the celebrated Brahmin litterateur Rājasekhara.¹⁰⁴ In this play there is more of a plot, although the entire play is a conversation between husband and wife. There is a humorous incident in which Rājasekhara comes upon Avantisundarī reading his Prakrit play *Karpūramañjarī*, and when he says he has written it for her, she becomes angry presuming that he has done so since she is a woman and only knows Prakrit (meanwhile, this entire conversation in the play is in Sanskrit). He assuages her anger by declaring that he has written a play in Prakrit to show his mastery of other languages and prove himself a proper “Kavirāja.”¹⁰⁵ After deciding to stage the play, they then embark on a discussion of poetry in preparation for Rājasekhara's *Kāvyaṁmāmsā*, a text which quotes her verses a few times, and those verses appear in the play. It is somewhat difficult to follow along with the play if one is not well-versed in such aesthetic discussions. Yet in an interesting prose portion, in the midst of a discussion of the meaning of poetry (specifically the unrestrained potential meanings of words), Avantisundarī seems to break the fourth wall of the play itself: “In this great stream of the lineage of poets, there is no poet who is not dependent in some way on a much earlier poet. And in stolen poetry there are evident subtle, slight, and

¹⁰² *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* Vol. IV, 562, cited in Raghavan, “Sanskrit Poetesses,” 57 fn. 25.

¹⁰³ Raghavan, *Vikiṭānitambā*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Raghavan, “Sanskrit Poetesses,” 64. This at least shows something of a suggestion that Raghavan was not of the mind that Sanskrit was limited by caste.

¹⁰⁵ Raghavan, *Avantisundarī*, 5.

significant divisions and distinctions.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, she expresses exactly what Raghavan is doing in the play by weaving bits of her poetry into a drama. However, in these plays about women Sanskritists, Raghavan is doing more than just steal poetry and make small innovations: he is holding up a mirror to the past in order to reflect the idea that women have played and can continue to play an important role in the revival of Sanskrit literature in independent India.

Another example of a similar borrowing of older material to highlight an example of female artistic expertise occurs in Raghavan’s short playlet *Mahāśvetā*, which dramatizes the classic scene from Bāṇa’s *Kādambarī* in which Candrāpīḍa meets the nymph Mahāśvetā.¹⁰⁷ Performed on AIR (no date specified), the play begins when Candrāpīḍa overhears the nymph singing beautifully and playing her veena, investigates the origin of the heavenly sound, and then strikes up a conversation with Mahāśvetā. For the most part, the wording is significantly simplified from the original, but a few times Raghavan retains exact words and phrases. The play is written in a manner adapted for a listening rather than a reading and highly literate audience, and it thus reads fairly easily. The play features a female chanteuse and veena player, thus continuing Raghavan’s series of depictions of women as artists. The play ends while Mahāśvetā is telling the story of how she became an ascetic in the grove, and her monologue trails off (in the printed edition, indicated with a series of asterisks) as she describes falling in love with Puṇḍarīka. We merely hear her say that she stood transfixed staring at him, and her speech ends there, followed only by a poem about infatuation from another part of the original. There is a possibility that Raghavan’s intent in the play is to incite interest in this classical literature, to give just part of the story in the hopes that someone might wish to know the rest. One might assume

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10-11. “bhavatu, atimahatyasmin kaviparamparāpravāhe nāstyeva sa kaviḥ yo yayā kayāpi vidhayā nopajīvati param pūrvatanaṃ vā kavim | tatra ca parakāvvyaharāṇe prakāṣṣūḥsmāśca laghavo mahāntāśca bhedaviśeṣā bhavanti.”

¹⁰⁷ V. Raghavan, “Mahāśvetā,” *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*, Vol. II (1961): 60-62.

that someone who knows Sanskrit would already be familiar with the story, but likely not, and perhaps having put the story into an approachable form (unlike the original, although that particular section of Bāṇa's text is less dense than others), he could have thought of himself as doing a service by encouraging others (women and men) to maintain an interest in Sanskrit literature for the purpose of its revival. How else to explain such an unorthodox conclusion of a Sanskrit play without a satisfying and complete ending?

Shades of Colonialism and Religious Time in Sanskrit's Revival

Having detailed the ways in which Raghavan's original literary works in Sanskrit provide cultural heroes and heroines, imagining them to be role models for a new India with a revived cultural scene that has Sanskrit at the fore, I turn now to some general historical and theoretical concerns that extend from this idea of a cultural revival. First, I will show how this revival that Raghavan envisages emerges from the shadow of colonial era cultural dominance, and how it mimics colonial-era educational models. Second, I will continue to try to make sense of such a cultural revival in the context of the contrasting notions of continuity and decay in Raghavan's rhetoric. I will also explain more fully why I interpret his sense of time as religious. These two strands, Raghavan's religious sense of time and his project of cultural hegemony, intersect in complex ways that I want to sort out in the rest of this chapter.

In the previous chapter, I discussed Raghavan's perception of culture as a matter of refinement. His definition closely matches the definition of culture in nineteenth-century British cultural critic Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, a text noted for its promotion of Christian and conservative elitism. Take for example Arnold's prefatory definition: "Culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most

concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.”¹⁰⁸ Although I cannot say that Raghavan’s understanding came directly from this text, which he read, or from earlier developments in Sanskrit thought that made the term “*samskṛti*” (“refined”) mean “culture,” there is something in the air in India in the colonial and postcolonial periods and a convergence of ideas about what culture means.¹⁰⁹ More significantly, while Arnold was focused on the cultural uplift of England, not India, his voice was contemporary with a movement to “civilize” Indians through a project of English literary education that must have rubbed off on Raghavan.

This history of English literature deployed in colonial-era promotion of culture has been nicely detailed in Gauri Viswanathan’s book *Masks of Conquest*.¹¹⁰ From the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth century, during the “Orientalist” phase of British educational policy, South Asian literature was valued even though it was part of a project to maintain British rule. Against this, the “Anglicist” position, espoused by Thomas Macaulay and John Stuart Mill, advocated for the Indian elite to receive an intensive education program in English literature and European knowledge and science in general. In 1835, Governor-General William Bentinck, on the heels of Macaulay’s infamous “Minute on Education”¹¹¹ passed the English Education Act, which made English language learning compulsory within the Indian education system. Contemporaneously, there was a growing conviction in England that education needed to be a combination of the classics, which taught social and historical subjects, and Romantic poetry, which was intended to inculcate an affective understanding of nature and the soul and to

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Cambridge University Press 1932 [1869]), 6.

¹⁰⁹ An excellent discussion on this is to be found in Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹¹⁰ See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

¹¹¹ In which he, who admits no knowledge of Sanskrit or Arabic, and only knowledge of translations, avers that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

cultivate Christian values: the Victorian ideal: “godliness and good learning.”¹¹² This model of education was imitated in educational institutions for elite Indians at the time, and despite official secularism in colonial rule, literature that implicitly advanced notions of Christian preeminence and credibility crept into the curriculum.

It should be fairly clear how closely this model of an education in European classics as a means of civilizing resembles Raghavan’s project to revive Sanskrit in the postcolonial era. While Raghavan frequently praises the Orientalists, he does so because he considers them to have given the impetus to the rediscovery of India’s cultural heritage, and once unveiled, it could then be deployed in an aggressive project of cultural nationalism couched in a metanarrative of revival. The Orientalists researched, edited, collected, and translated the “great books” of India’s heritage, and had a fervent attraction to Sanskrit texts given their own antiquarian tendencies and attempts to show connections with Europe. They thus supplied India with the raw material for such a project as Raghavan and the Sanskrit commission envisaged. Further, the notion that Sanskrit might be compulsory, as Raghavan and others wanted (and some still want today and have made some headway in achieving under the current NDA government) appears modeled on the same Anglicist project of making English compulsory: it aims to exert Sanskrit hegemony while excluding the vernaculars and any language associated with Muslims (e.g. Arabic and Urdu). Yet this project is not merely a matter of linguistic training since it also means to inculcate the cultural values that Raghavan felt were ensconced within the Sanskrit sources, namely dharmic codes of behavior. Further, facts and language ability alone do not suffice for this goal. Rather it is through the supposedly affective nature of Sanskrit that people could, as Raghavan says, “feel” as if part of one nation when hearing Sanskrit or watching a Sanskrit play.

¹¹² Qtd. in Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 56.

Underlying this project is a belief in an affective political dimension of culture wherein romantic nationalist poetry in Sanskrit, for example poems to the flag, might propagate national affection.

I read Raghavan's project of cultural renewal as a not-so-subtle mimicry of exactly the sort of cultural imperialism through literature that the British tried to achieve. The project depends on similar notions of culture, and Raghavan tried to implement it through both the classics and new literature. But therein lies a switch, since according to Raghavan the ancient Greek and Latin classics were dead in Europe, while Sanskrit was decidedly alive, even if in the villages it was decaying and needed governmental life support. Raghavan's project thus implies a superiority over Europe by insisting that Sanskrit is still alive and flexible, able to unite India and provide cultural knowledge, whereas Latin and Greek are dead and merely trapped in dusty books. Raghavan's project is not sly mimicry intended to make fun of Europe, but rather a full-blown project of Sanskritic hegemony. It is not for nothing that he frequently cites the worldwide influence and interest in Sanskrit and the basis of all Asian thought in Sanskrit. Raghavan's is a project of cultural imperialism turned inwards, setting its sights on India first, but he sees enough evidence to be confident about Sanskrit's future expansion.

I have mentioned that Raghavan's efforts to revive Sanskrit and Sanskritic culture were also implicitly a way of reviving religion, and forwarding the place of Hinduism in India under the shadow of "culture." In this way as well, Raghavan inverts the British system's implicit Christian missionary efforts. The affective dimension of literature in British thought about literary education incorporated a religious sentiment: a conviction that by educating Indians in English literature, the colonized would implicitly be learning Christian values and gaining a sense of the sacred through Christian eyes. Raghavan's insistence on the religious nature of Sanskrit literature seems to borrow this basic theory, but he flips it to suggest that Sanskrit

literature is conducive to a moral education. Certainly this notion is there in older Sanskrit literature, but here his ideal has moral teaching backed by the modern nation state and transmitted through a project of cultural education. Further, in so far as Sanskrit religiosity is predominantly Hindu, despite Raghavan's insistence on its importance for Buddhism and Jainism, there is in Raghavan's advocacy a tendency toward a disavowal of the "Hindu" nature of Sanskrit in favor of "culture." Interestingly, such a disavowal of religion was part of the British colonial education system's strategy: officially they did not acknowledge the literary curriculum's Christian undercurrent.¹¹³ Likewise Raghavan can be somewhat cagey on the subject, insisting that culture and religion are really the same notion of achieving the height of human thought (Matthew Arnold again). Thus he sounds as if he is trying to promote culture and Sanskrit when really it is a means of inculcating Hindu hegemony, with elite Hindus as the leaders of the new/old culture. Further, in the pieces we have seen, Raghavan rarely mentions "Hinduism" explicitly; instead the political and cultural heroes are in the foreground as the models for the new nationalistic dharma.

The British disavowal of religion in colonial education coincided with an increasing emphasis on classical literary pedagogy, thereby "establishing language rather than belief and tradition as a source of value and culture."¹¹⁴ In other words, learning English became paramount, and the language itself came to symbolize a sort of civility. It became a high register not unlike Sanskrit itself. Raghavan's switching Sanskrit into this model of culture is almost too easy given its ready historical status as the language of dignified register. However, Sanskrit being the "*devabhāṣa*" (language of the gods), such a separation of language from belief is not possible for Raghavan, thus for him it is the religious nature of the language that amplifies the

¹¹³ Ibid., 95-97.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 114.

culture and its values. But another dimension of this British separation of language is a predecessor of the general sense of language politics in India: when language itself, in an officially “secular” environment, becomes the source of value and culture, it thus feeds identity formation such that language is given a greater significance than a mere medium of communication, and a reified sense of language conjoined to the idea of community can be co-opted by nationalism and state-based identity politics. Still, we again see in the prospects of modern Sanskrit a reversal of the British system: pedagogy in language covers for pedagogy in culture and religion. Teaching Sanskrit is never just teaching Sanskrit. Nor is reviving Sanskrit just reviving a language out of mere curiosity, as if it were a dinosaur in a movie. Such a project involves other agendas of power and affect, strength and community, and dominance and alterity.

Up until this juncture, I have been talking about Raghavan’s cultural revival project somewhat divorced from its nationalist context, but this is the most important aspect of his mimicry of the British system: he is borrowing colonial era notions of education and culture and reformulating them for postcolonial nationalist purposes. The cultural revival is not merely a matter of forwarding the cause of Hinduism, or for raising the register of the populace, but most importantly it is a means of creating a national identity. Certainly this identity is elitist, and it borrows again something from the British model. As J.S. Mill saw it, the British education system in India was designed to create unification, but it also encapsulated a distinction between the common people and the leisurely elite, the latter of which had more time to imbibe culture and were supplied with culture by the British education system with the expectation that it would trickle down to those of lower rank in Indian society.¹¹⁵ It was a supply-side cultural system that envisioned trickle down literature as the potential means of both territorial unification and

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 149.

dominance. But Raghavan reenlists this same trickle-down cultural model for nationalism, presuming that a healthy dose of Sanskrit (and music, dance, literature, etc.) can create a unified Indian culture despite the present state of cultural decline.

This notion of the present state of cultural decline in post-independence India, however, brings us back to the troublesome question of time. We cannot fully understand how Raghavan envisioned a cultural revival unless we have some handle on his sense of time. As he blasts figures out of the past of South Asian history to serve as models for the Indian present, he also presumes that these figures can have meaning for the present in part because of a continuity of culture. While a revival, or a “*punarunmeṣa*,” implies bringing something from the past into the present, Raghavan’s insistence on the immortality of Sanskrit and the indispensability to and infusion of Sanskrit in Indian culture demands that there be little to no sense of Sanskrit culture’s demise, descent, or departure. Raghavan offers two solutions to this problem. In some instances, he creates a past for the nation that he insists continues into the present. In other cases, he outright denies the importance of history altogether. There are ways in which the two answers seem contradictory. The former model is typical of nationalist thinking, while the latter, I want to argue, is not only anti-European, but also religious and in contrast to the secular/religious divide.

We have seen how Raghavan thought of Sanskrit as an eternal language that still has relevance for the present. But in some of his poems and plays, Raghavan actually *creates* a tradition reinscribed in Sanskrit. He retells in Sanskrit language and idiom events of the past (such as “Gopa Hampāṇṇa” and a number of other short historical poems) and events that could also be of the present (such as *Punarunmeṣa*), thus forging an image of a continuous history for the nation, and conveying a weighty Sanskritic historicity for the present based on a notion of a storied past heritage. It is in a similar vein that Raghavan work to revive Bharatanāṭyam. As

Chatterjee writes bluntly in contemplating this “classicization of tradition”: “A nation, or so at least the nationalist believes, must have a past.”¹¹⁶ Raghavan’s promotion of “classical” culture is thus just such a creation of an image of a classical past, one in which Sanskrit is spoken and written with great fervor. Peterson and Soneji expand on this notion with reference to the arts: “Music and dance...could be recuperated as being essentially sacred and as having a special and continuous relationship with a high cultural past.”¹¹⁷ Even when taking into account variations, the image of continuity has to be maintained, a unity made of diversity, and then projected into an endless eternity. As Raghavan notes, showing us his hand as it were: “continuity is a central requisite in the evolving of our cultural mosaic.”¹¹⁸ Thus as he writes that all that is old is new and vice versa, and the differences in practices between Northern and Southern styles (as he says in *Anārkalī*) are mere illusions since both can be traced back to Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Despite this historical sense, in other moments Raghavan completely negates positivist history. His introduction to his essay “Love in the Poems and Plays of Kalidasa” mentions the debates about the date of the poet and playwright Kālidāsa (probably *flourit* in the fourth/fifth century A.D.), but then pivots quickly away from those debates, writing: “The historical point at which a genius like him flourished hardly matters to the Indian mind which has its own way of assimilating the contributions of the makers and enrichers of its cultural inheritance, like our poet.”¹¹⁹ This might be read as auto-orientalizing, particularly the point about “the Indian mind,” and it also positions Raghavan in opposition to the antiquarian tendencies of positivist historians, particularly the Europeans. It corroborates a notion that the anxiety of influence works the other

¹¹⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 73.

¹¹⁷ Indira Visvanathan Peterson and Davesh Soneji, “Introduction” in *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India* (Delhi: Oxford, 2008) 5-6.

¹¹⁸ V. Raghavan, “Culture and Independence,” in *The Radhakrishnan Number*, ed. Vuppuluri Kalidas, (Madras: Vyasa Publications, 1962), 186.

¹¹⁹ V. Raghavan, *Love in the Poems and Plays of Kalidasa*, Transaction No. 22 (Basavangudi, Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1967 [2nd impression]), 1.

way around in South Asia: Kālidāsa is thus ever-present in modern literature. As Raghavan continues, “At any rate, we are not less conscious of his presence in and permeation of our literature and imagination for our not having been able to preserve his date of birth or a lock of his hair.”¹²⁰ Again, utterly rejecting the materialist conception of historicism, Raghavan prefers the notion of cultural continuity and a perennial philosophy.¹²¹ In a final salvo, he argues that we have very little information and much controversy over Shakespeare’s biography, and are thus “not very much worse off,” in essence pointing out that Europeans have no problem pointing to the influence of Shakespeare without knowing certain fine points of history. Raghavan’s efforts at denying history, then, also read as a denial of presuppositions of European superiority. To deny historicism is to deny the necessity of material history for Indian nationalism: Raghavan is provincializing Europe by insisting that tradition trumps historicism.

And yet, despite this rejection of historicism, Raghavan is still a nationalist, and as Nicholas Dirks notes, history and the nation are inextricable.¹²² How then can Raghavan be a nationalist and reject history? We have seen that Raghavan’s nationalism insists on the permanence of India, the quasi-eternal quality of its geography as well as its culture. Further, it is not clear that he rejects history outright, rather that he is suspicious of history’s potential to implicate discontinuities and the decay of culture. Even though he uses history like a nationalist, it might be best to consider that Raghavan’s sense of history is not the same as a European historicist sense, in no small part because his sense of nationalism is not traditional European

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ As he says elsewhere of Hinduism itself, “Hinduism, the most ancient among the living religions of the world, is also most modern...putting forth new forms, new interpretations, and new expressions...it is this vitality that imparts to Hinduism the character of Sanantana Dharma, perennial religion or philosophy.” V. Raghavan, writing on Hinduism, dated February 25, 1967. Document found in the Milton Singer Files, Special Collections, University of Chicago, Box 23, Folder 5. Incidentally, that folder includes a request in a letter to Singer for Karl Popper’s book *The Poverty of Historicism*.

¹²² Nicholas B. Dirks, “History as a Sign of the Modern” *Public Culture* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1990): 25-32.

nationalism. We might obtain a helpful grasp on the matter by differentiating different views of history drawn from the colonial-era perspectives used to study South Asian history. Dirks draws a distinction between the historicist perspective of Orientalist history (an approach later picked up by Nehru) and an anthropological approach that focused more on issues such as caste and custom and that essentially denied historicity.¹²³ The anthropological approach was more interested in religion and culture, and is far closer to Raghavan's perspective on the eternal nature of Sanskrit tradition. Certainly anthropology and history of South Asia are products of the colonial gaze, and tradition as a homogenous entity is itself a colonial construction. However, I would contest the notion that these discourses might be somehow inauthentic because borrowed from Europe by South Asians in their struggle for independence and identity formation. What matters is how these discourses are repurposed. Raghavan appears to subscribe to and employ the anthropological perspective primarily, but he does not completely deny that history exists, that culture is waning and needs a revival. Raghavan's approach is both historical and anthropological. He recognizes the passage of time, the simultaneous existence of what is old and what is new, what is prior and what is current, but it is in the realm of the anthropological focus on culture that he erases the difference between them. What is more, Raghavan's project of staging Sanskrit dramas recognizes the discontinuity, and functions as a deliberate attempt to paper over the divide. A Sanskrit play today, in short, *performs* history in the present by way of the presumed timelessness of anthropology. The acting of *Punarumneṣa* functions as a ritual of regeneration. The aporia is bridged not in the play's text, but in its performance.

¹²³ Ibid., 27.

Here we might then turn to J.Z. Smith’s formulation of ritual as “a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are.”¹²⁴ Raghavan’s dramas, especially the historical ones, not only perform the way things *ought* to be, in an imaginary future or an alternative present, but the way they *were*, albeit in an equally imaginary past. It is this imaginary past that is essential for nationalism, as Sudipto Kaviraj notes incisively, “an imaginary community can only have an imaginary history.”¹²⁵ But it always requires a performance, as Homi Bhabha suggests: “The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.”¹²⁶ We have here again the coexistence of the continuity of culture and the notion of renewal, the year and the springtime, but here it is a matter not of the reality of time but rather of the creation of the nation through discursive strategies, particularly literature and performance. There is a pedagogical need to insist on a continuity, but a recognition that performance creates and presupposes difference (of performers, of audiences, of the iterability of action and otherness of others). Raghavan’s Sanskrit is located firmly within the realm of the pedagogical; it is cumulative and continuous, and it must co-opt not just daily life but all of history, including Muslim history, in order to become a sign of a “coherent national culture.” The performance of these Sanskrit plays, however, if imagined to be onstage before of all India, meets with an

¹²⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63 (original quote in italics).

¹²⁵ Sudipto Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chatterjee and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131. Although I do not think Kaviraj develops the full implications of this idea for theories of nationalism more generally.

¹²⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 209 (italics in original).

audience that does not precisely match the “India” therein depicted, especially not an audience that bows to Sanskrit’s sovereignty, much less knows it. It is an audience firmly placed within the realm of the modern and its exigencies. Thus the *Punarunmeṣa* Raghavan imagines takes place not in historical time nor in modern time but in the act of the performance itself. This notion usefully harkens back to his admonition that we should not “speak about Sanskrit” but rather “speak Sanskrit.” It is the performance that creates the renewal.

And yet, despite the explanatory power of Bhabha’s thoughts on the performative, there is still something about Raghavan’s notion of renaissance that escapes this sharp dichotomy of the repetition of continuity and the iterability of performance. It also escapes the sharp dichotomy of anthropological and historicist history. Raghavan’s project of a Sanskrit revival involves a Romanticist hope for a return to an imagined golden era of Sanskrit literary production, a turning back the clock to the Gupta period, and his writing trades upon a metanarrative of ancient Sanskrit glory in comparison with current Sanskrit desuetude and matches another narrative of Indian history that occurs frequently in both European and Indian nationalist historiography: that of “classic glory, medieval decline, and modern renaissance.”¹²⁷ His rhetoric of renewal gives credence to an imaginary history, even if much of that history has been made known through the work of Orientalist scholars. Nevertheless, he understands this renewal not as a full return, but rather as itself an iteration of the past in the modern nation. He is conscious of the fact that full return is impossible, and that history moves forward.

And yet he is not fully comfortable with the sense that return is impossible, or that there might be discontinuity in the history of Sanskrit. I have already suggested that Raghavan blasts out of the continuity of history bits and pieces of literary material and political events so as to

¹²⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 102.

create a history for the modern nation. In using such phrasing, I am consciously riffing on a notion of history derived from Walter Benjamin. Thus Raghavan's denial of history reads as a denial of homogenous empty time, and his insistence on continuity reads not just as messianic time that would befit a newly independent nation, but also as religious time. Benedict Anderson deems homogenous empty time to be "secular" and essential for nationalist literature. Its opposite is messianic time filled with the spiritual prospects of the immediate present, and formed by blasting bits out of homogenous time. Further I contend that these bits of the past are not meaningless detritus but rather have significance within a cultural tradition by being considered part of the history of that tradition. They cement identity within a history by virtue of being imbued with sentimental attachment and religious significance. Benedict Anderson considers messianic time inadequate for nationalism. Yet for Raghavan's religious nationalism, the opposite is the case: his insistence on the eternity of Sanskrit holds open the possibility of the imminent return of Sanskrit, his view of time rejects secular homogenous time in which historicism holds sway and instead insists on the ever-present possibility of Sanskrit's presence. It is not an opposition between revival in political history and divine eternity that we need to contend with in Raghavan's Sanskrit project, but rather an opposition between secular and religious time that his Sanskrit literary works endeavor to paper over, imagining the nation as existent in an eternal time where revival is always possible.

Another way to read this notion of revival might be to posit that Raghavan is much like the archaic man of Eliade, attempting to partake of the regeneration of time "to annul past time, to abolish history by a continuous return *in illo tempore*, by the repetition of the cosmogonic act."¹²⁸ His plays attempt to recreate the golden era in the new era, since independence creates

¹²⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: UP, 2005), 81.

the possibility that “a new reign” could be “regarded as a regeneration of the history of the people.”¹²⁹ This amounts to “archaic man’s refusal to accept himself as a historical being”¹³⁰ an ontology that raises the possibility of an eternal return since linear time does not apply. One might counter that any idea of a “return” implies a history and sense of time, but this sense of time is not our secular homogenous time that is irreversible, linear, and regular. It is rather a continuity that merely has pockets of denseness, moments of importance, and allows for imaginary time travel. In short, the problem of the contrast between continuity and renewal disappears when observed from a religious perspective. Bhabha’s “double time of the nation” is really the “double time” of the secularist trying to make sense of what the religious person perceives as singular. Indeed, as Chatterjee elsewhere notes, “People can only imagine themselves in empty homogenous time; they do not live in it.”¹³¹ Instead they live in heterogeneous time, time that is sometimes secular, sometimes messianic, sometimes linear and other times continuous. What matters is the way they interact with those senses of time to find ways to live in the world, especially when, like Raghavan, the world they idealize and the world they see do not match. And thus I might amend both Chatterjee’s and Bhabha’s thoughts by suggesting that this heterogeneous time is not merely Bhabha’s double time of the nation, split between continuity and renewal; instead this heterogeneous time is an intermixture of the religious or mythical time of Eliade that is both continuous and holds open the possibility of renewal. It is this kind of time of the nation that makes possible the salience of the religious nationalist perspective for some such as Raghavan who wish to live simultaneously in a modern nation and a nation of Sanskrit. His ideal Saṃskṛta India is a European-style nation with its own high culture that now has the opportunity to imagine and revive itself in opposition to Europe’s

¹²⁹ Ibid. 80.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 85

¹³¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed, Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 6.

secular model even as it borrows the means of national identity formation through linguistic and literary education.

A final notion ties the entirety of this chapter with the next: the emotional affect of this literature. The nationalist integration that Raghavan wanted to achieve was not merely one of knowledge wrought through books and plays, but an “emotional integration.”¹³² As he makes the point, “It is while reading the Sanskrit literature that you have the *sense* of belonging to one country and one pan-Indian culture.”¹³³ As he says with regard to Sanskrit itself, “A great deal of fervor and a feeling of adoration should gather round a thing which is to be the common vehicle of communication for this great country.”¹³⁴ This quote then dovetails with the earlier poems in praise of Sanskrit as a goddess deserving worship. In Chapter 4, I will speak at greater length about the prospect of an emotional nationalism based on love, and certainly love is the basis of divine devotion in *bhakti*. Here, I want to suggest that what Raghavan gives us in these plays and poems is not merely a *rasa* of heroism, or of patriotism, but also a *rasa*-like appreciation for the arts and for the past as a means toward realizing that emotional integration. It is an integration that is thus both spatial and chronological, an emotional integration of the present with the past. That emotional connection to the past, as a new variety of postcolonial nationalist *rasa*, is a matter not merely of knowledge, although knowledge certainly helps provide the raw materials, but also of religious devotional attachment, as it certainly was for Raghavan himself.

¹³² V. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators: The Saint-Singers of India*, 15.

¹³³ Raghavan, *Sanskrit Essays*, 65. Emphasis added.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

CHAPTER 3

LAUGHTER, LOVE, AND LIBERATION:

POSTCOLONIAL RELIGIOUS AND MORAL AESTHETICS

At the beginning of the last chapter, I mentioned Partha Chatterjee's notion that nationalism in colonial and postcolonial India seized upon spirituality as a domain of authority over and against the material dominance of the colonizers. As the chapter proceeded, the discussion of culture and religion remained at a fairly macroscopic level, and religion factored in the context of questions of historicity. In this chapter, I wade deeper into the aesthetics of Raghavan's literature to address the concomitance of spirituality and aesthetics in his writing. There is a strain of thought, to which Raghavan subscribed, that argues for the perennial cohesion of artistic culture and spirituality in "Indian thought." Indeed, one frequently hears, so much so that citation is rendered meaningless, that India's culture is fundamentally religious. As an initial example, we might recall Raghavan's words quoted in Chapter 1: "The aim of art and poetry in India is to reinforce spiritual truth and to help to its realization; and the purely artistic end of aesthetic bliss was one of two ends, the other being the cultural refinement of man....the ultimate suggestions of poetry and drama should be in harmony with the findings of philosophy."¹ In other words, while art for art's sake was one purpose of art, the other purpose was the pursuit of culturally refined religious truth. His literary works, as I will show, take up this task of trying to reveal religious meanings through the established categories of aesthetics in Sanskrit literature. In particular, his works that involve the sentiments, or *rasa*-s, of comedy and

¹ V. Raghavan, *Love in the Poems and Plays of Kalidasa*, Transaction No. 22 (Basavangudi, Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1967 [2nd impression]), 4.

love are not merely comedies and romances but contain messages of spirituality and the need for ethics in postcolonial India.

That Raghavan read the classical sentiments of Sanskrit aesthetics, the *rasa*-s, as fundamentally religious in nature and given to religious expression is not unprecedented in the intellectual history of South Asian literature and religion. That being said, the question of whether *rasa* is an aspect of religion or of secular literary culture must necessarily sound absurd to a critical ear. *Rasa* is a category within South Asian thought, and “religion,” “culture,” and “secularism” grew up on an entirely different continent, albeit during a time of contact between Europe and India. Nevertheless, there is evidence for a similar sort of divide between what we might roughly call religion and the secular within the Sanskrit and Hindu scholastic traditions, as well as attempts to bridge the gap. In fact, South Asian intellectual history contains more attempts to unify *rasa* with religion than any explicit arguments to the contrary. There is a long history of differentiating between what is *laukika* (worldly) and *vaidika* (religious) in South Asian thought, and that binary still has significant meaning within Tamil Brahmin circles today.² Raghavan himself translates this key term “*laukika*” as “secular.”³ There were also intellectual arguments to maintain a separation between *kāvya* (poetry) and *śāstra* (religious and scientific knowledge),⁴ which Raghavan argued should be combined. But these categories, if defined as mutually exclusive and bounded, ignore numerous instances of religious literature in Sanskrit

² Fuller and Narasimhan note that the opposition was not one that most Tamil Brahmins particularly felt posed a serious problem, and thus there was little problem with abandoning the old ways and priestly *vaidika* practices and taking on *laukika* jobs. But it was still a binary with which Brahmins and Raghavan would be familiar. However, as I hope I showed in the previous chapter in discussing the issue of Raghavan’s nostalgia concerning the abandonment of the village ways, he himself stood in a sort of ambivalent place between what is *laukika* (as a scholar) and what is *vaidika* (in so far as he was nostalgic for a conservative past, and because he relied on many a traditional pandit for his work). See C.J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmins: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 56-57.

³ See V. Raghavan, *The Concept of the Beautiful in Sanskrit Literature* (Chennai: Kuppaswami Shastri Research Institute, 2008), 23.

⁴ Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

history and the developments of religious aesthetics during the second millennium in the writings of Abhinavagupta and Rūpa Goswāmī, among others.⁵ Thus the way in which Raghavan gives spiritual re-readings of classical texts and imbues his comedic and romantic literary creations with religious affect is nothing novel within Sanskrit literary history.

What is rather unique about Raghavan's spiritualized sense of aesthetics, however, is its implicit opposition to Euro-American ideas of the secular/religious binary and the instantiation of this religious aesthetics as part and parcel of a literary religious nationalism.⁶ Raghavan's plays and poems that feature comedic and romantic themes, and even those with just a taste of those *rasa*-s, not only couch these sentiments within religion and philosophy, but they mobilize spirituality and orthodox ethics as counterarguments to a perception of Euro-American culture imagined as devoid of religion, consumed by materialism, and given to sensual debauchery. We saw a hint of this opposition in the discussion of *Punarunmeṣa*. But in the plays and poems below, Raghavan employs the sentiments of comedy and love to criticize materialisms and to put forward a message of Indian cultural and religious superiority via Hindu thought rooted in Sanskrit aesthetics. His plays thus construct identities for the observers as orthodox Hindus, in contrast to the unorthodox and modern ways of others, and they attempt also to inculcate orthodox Hindu belief and behavior among the presumed viewing populace by showing what is good and shaming what is not.

⁵ See e.g. Gerald James Larson, "The Aesthetic (Rasāvadā) and the Religious (Brahmāsvadā) in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Śaivism," *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1976), pp. 371-387; Edwin Gerow, "Abhinavagupta's Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (Apr-Jun 1994) pp. 186-208; Donna M. Wulff, "Religion in a New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 1986), pp. 673-688. For a newer study on the role of religion in Kālidāsa's works, see Gary Tubb, "Baking Umā" in *Innovations and Turning Points: A History of Kāvya Literature*, edited by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71-85.

⁶ On the religious/secular binary and its rejection in postcolonial situations, see e.g.: Nilüfer Göle, "Manifestations of the Religious-Secular Divide: Self, State, and the Public Sphere," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, edited by Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shankman Hurd (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41-53.

Raghavan's project to revive Sanskrit culture and construct a national identity trades on a belief in Sanskrit as being able to impart ethics based on spiritual values, but also implicit throughout Raghavan's Sanskrit literary works *as* Sanskrit texts, and in his dramatic performances of Sanskrit plays, is an ethical call to support and study Sanskrit. The language itself, on stage and in journals, suggests to its audience a moral imperative, a nationalistic dharma, to support and revive it. Meanwhile, Sanskrit as the language of religion conveys to an audience a message dripping with a *bhakti rasa* (the sentiment of religious devotion) that is self-directed toward the language itself. As a result, the project of Sanskrit's revival, which the plays make their audience a party to, appears as both an ethical mandate and an act of religious devotion in service of language and nation, which are components of distinctly modern and partially-European notions of culture and identity.

Comedy, Colonialism, and Capitalism

The early European scholars of Sanskrit often panned Sanskrit literature for its supposed lack of the comic element.⁷ Certainly this is a misreading since Sanskrit aesthetics includes the comic "*hāsya*" as one of the eight major sentiments, and there are numerous plays labeled *prahasanas* (comedies or farces). While it is often quite difficult for someone of a different culture to comprehend another culture's jokes, early Orientalists generally viewed Sanskrit literature as overly philosophical and rule-bound, and only a few even saw any hint of aesthetic value in it at all. It was partially against this denial of the "comic" in Sanskrit that Lee Siegel wrote his book *Laughing Matters* wherein he uncovers numerous examples of the comic in Hindu mythology. But long before Siegel, Raghavan also made a case for the existence of the comic in Sanskrit in lectures given in 1953 at Oxford University and in 1964 at the University of

⁷ Lee Siegel, "Bibliographical Essay" in *Laughing Matters: Comic Tradition in India* (Chicago: U of C Press, 1987) 465-66.

Chicago.⁸ Raghavan's lectures indicate an intention to overturn this Orientalist tendency, but in doing so, to agree with another Orientalist tendency: "Because the Indian mind had been predominantly philosophical, it is not correct to deny it the perception of the comic; for to do so is to deny its very prominent characteristic of the philosophical outlook."⁹ Here Raghavan reveals not only his acceptance of the Orientalist conceit that Indians were wrapped up in philosophical rather than practical concerns, but also his perspective on the comic as not merely just for laughs. Raghavan's lectures on the comic point not only to that sentiment's philosophical potential but also its importance as a means of moral directive. While his lectures on the comic were given approximately 30 years after he wrote two of the major plays I will discuss below (*Pratāparudra-vijaya* and *Vimukti*), he does mention them in the final footnote of the published version of those lectures.

Raghavan clearly spells out part of his philosophy of the comic sentiment at the beginning of his lectures. First he suggests, following Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, that while imitation can be part of the comic, the real soul of the comic is inappropriateness (*anaucitya*). Thus love between two people who should not love each other can be comic, as in the case of Rāvaṇa loving Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹⁰ The quietistic sentiment (*śānta*) becomes comic in the case of pseudo-ascetics,¹¹ and here I might give the famous example of the cat who promises mice that he is a yogi in order to trick them into trusting him. For an example of heroism as comedy, Raghavan gives the example of Don Quixote, as well as other examples from Sanskrit. Raghavan

⁸ V. Raghavan, *The Comic Element in Sanskrit Literature* (Madras: The Samskrita Ranga, 1989). Siegel's book was published in 1987, two years before Raghavan's student S.S. Janaki published his essays as in 1989. Siegel therefore does not mention Raghavan's work at all, and one wonders how his book might have been different had he had access to Raghavan's lectures. As I will note in a bit, the two men had something of the same sense of the comic.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. Reading Rāvaṇa's love for Sītā as comic is not at all in keeping with usual interpretations of this famous text, and the idea is itself somewhat comic, or at least quite odd. It is hard to know if Raghavan sincerely read the *Rāmāyaṇa* in this strange way, or if he merely used the example to illustrate a point.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

extrapolates this “inappropriateness” further to give it a moral sense. He begins by discussing inappropriate imitation, citing Bergson’s idea of high culture performed in a low language and extends this to the phenomenon of the clown in Kūḍiyāṭṭam (Keralan Sanskrit drama) who mixes Sanskrit and Malayalam in his comedic performance. Raghavan asserts that the comic begins with an “incongruity with reference to an accepted norm,” and then that, “Man alone is able to laugh because he is able to distinguish between things as they are and things as they ought to be.”¹² Thus comedy can have a certain moral component, showing us what is proper. He cites a verse from Kṣemendra that suggests that, “By being laughed at, people become struck with shame and refrain from absurdities.”¹³ We will see that Raghavan’s plays exude this sense of optimism for reform.

Not only does comedy show morality through incongruity, but the actor on stage, the other who is the object of derisive laughter, allows the audience to feel morally superior, reinforcing its correctness. Drawing on Freud’s work, Raghavan adds that the verbal form of comedy, wit, relies on a view of the world as absurd from a certain perspective.¹⁴ He develops this notion to suggest that this imbalance allows one to see oneself as more eminent, that laughter provides one with a sense of superiority over the absurd and immoral other. Comedy serves to reify a sense of elitism.

This notion of comic absurdity also functions in Raghavan’s estimation as a philosophical perspective on the entire world. Raghavan writes “that the whole world of human

¹² Ibid., 12. He cites here Bergson and Hazlitt. Compare with J.Z. Smith on ritual as a conscious tension between “things as they are and things as they ought to be.” Taking the two assertions together gives credence to certain theories of ritual as the Bhaktinian carnivalesque, which would be in contrast to rituals that rely on the more tragic side of the divide.

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ “The comic found in the mental and physical attributes of another person is apparently again the result of a comparison of him and my ego. It cannot be denied that in both cases our laughing is the expression of a pleasurable perceived *superiority*.” Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, English Ed., (London: A.A. Brill, Kegan Paul [no date given], qtd. in Raghavan, *The Comic Element*, 14.

activity...appears ridiculous and turns into a huge comedy for those who view it disinterestedly from a higher pedestal, is an idea that we meet with commonly in Vedānta.”¹⁵ For another example, he cites a verse from the *Yogavasiṣṭha* (approx. tenth century CE) to the effect that the man at peace views humanity’s foibles with laughter.¹⁶ He also mentions Ballaṭa’s verse about the man who mistakes a water droplet for a pearl and becomes upset when it drops off the leaf.¹⁷ The example is supposed to indicate the foolishness of human endeavors to pursue trifles, and it appears, fittingly, in the prologue of *Vimukti*. It is precisely this Vedānta-infused comic worldview that, as we will soon see, Raghavan offers in *Vimukti*, and it forms a higher stage of the comic viewpoint than the mere moralizing and critical comic outlook in the lower level reading of his philosophical farce, *Vimukti*.

Before addressing the two plays that form the major focus of this chapter, I might mention a few instances of the comic scattered throughout Raghavan’s works as these instances also exemplify the idea of the comic as a means of moral instruction. In the short *Rāsalīlā*, one of the *gopi*-s (cowherdresses) stands on one leg looking bewildered because Kṛṣṇa had suggested she climb on his back only to disappear while she was mid-mount. The reason for his sudden disappearance was the *gopi*’s pride, and her humiliation serves as a pedagogical punishment for her arrogance.¹⁸ In *Anārkalī*, the action opens with two Muslims pulling on each other’s beards in a manner that imitates the idea of fighting Brahmins who are said to argue by pulling on each others’ topknots.¹⁹ This is but one of many moments in the play that mock Muslim discord, an idea I will explore in the following chapter which takes a closer look at *Anārkalī* as a text about

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18

¹⁷ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁸ V. Raghavan, “*Rāsalīlā*,” *Samskrita Ranga Annual* Vol. III (1963): 71-78.

¹⁹ V. Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, (Madras: Samskrita Ranga, 1972), 7. “*saṁbhavati tu mithaḥ śmaśrugrahayuddham.*”

religious pluralism in independent India. For now it is sufficient to point out that this depiction of Muslims indicates a certain pride mixed with absurdity over which Raghavan stands in judgment.

In the elitist vein, Raghavan pokes fun at ignorance of Sanskrit in *Vikaṭanitamba*, the second of his three plays about famous Sanskrit poetesses. In the final scene, the eponymous poetess meets with the boy to whom her father has given her in marriage, but in contrast to the heroine, the bridegroom can barely speak a word of Sanskrit and instead speaks Prakrit.²⁰ This scene humorously overturns the classical Sanskrit dramatic rule whereby the heroes and various religious adepts speak Sanskrit while most women (with some important exceptions) and all lower class people speak Prakrit. In Raghavan's play, the heroine's friends ask the youth to pronounce simple Sanskrit words, and he utterly butchers them.²¹ One can easily imagine that if performed in front of those who know Sanskrit, this final scene of the play would be rollicking good fun. But again, only for those who know Sanskrit, which reinforces the sense that while the play praises the accomplishments of the heroine, it simultaneously shames those ignorant of Sanskrit, thus bolstering Raghavan's implicit call for reviving Sanskrit.

I have rarely seen much of the comic sentiment in Raghavan's original poetry, but it appears in a concentrated form in one poem about cigarettes, snuff, betel nut, and other tobacco-related products. The poem, in twenty verses in *śloka* meter, is a satire stylized in mimicry of an Upaniṣad, although entitled a Purāṇa. A full translation appears below in Appendix A.²² He begins by turning the tobacco leaf into a sacred object, calling it, "That which is sung by all the lofty Upaniṣads and which is praised as matchless nectar of superior joy and has transcended the

²⁰ Raghavan, "Vikaṭanitambā" in *Prekṣaṇakatrayī* (Madras: Sri Ramacandra Printworks, 1956), 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²² Raghavan, "Brahmapatravaivartapurāṇam," *Samskṛta-Bhavitavyam*, Vol. 19 (April 12, 1969): 3.

ultimate.”²³ He proceeds to mock the partaking of tobacco as a yogic activity, describing taking brahmapatra leaf with betel thus: “Having successfully achieved inactivity, there is disregard for bathing and eating, and in this manner one sits motionless as if in simple Parabrahma.”²⁴ He then describes those taking snuff as having their breathing restricted, speaks of snuff as being twofold, with or without sound, just like chanting in worship, and suggests that when snuff reaches the chakra at the top of the head, “a leakage occurs,” though here it means not a philosophical notion of the leaking out of the soul as a form of spiritual liberation, but rather a runny nose.

His description of cigarettes is even funnier, and more pertinent to my discussion, as it critiques modern Westernized Indians. As Raghavan tells the story, cigarettes were considered immoral and were banned from the villages only to wind up in the cities.²⁵ Almost as if his own voice irrupts into the poem, he says in addressing cigarettes (verses 14-16):

Nonbelievers, because their Brahmanical hair is cut and their Brahminhood fallen,
They are of low castes, and damn you whom they worship.²⁶

Your devotees, fire-breathing ghosts, make smoke rings with their mouths and noses.
You are a rolled thing burning the belief in God.²⁷

Thus having been reviled in the villages, and beaten with clay and wood
Those ascetic (*tapasvinī*) cigarettes go to the city for refuge.²⁸

²³ Ibid., verse 1. *vedāntairakhilairuccaiḥ gīyate yacca ghuṣyate/
advitīyaṃ parānandamamṛtaṃ yatparātparam//*

²⁴ Ibid., verse 8. *naiṣkarmyasiddhimāpannaḥ snānāhārādyanādaraḥ/
tathaiṅvāspandamāste hi parabrahmaiva kevalam//*

²⁵ For an interesting study of the social history of tobacco in Tamil Nadu, including a Tamil poem about it that includes a similar mythological register, see A.R. Venkatachalapathy, “Triumph of Tobacco: The Tamil Experience” in *In Those Days There Was No Coffee: Writings in Cultural History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006), 32-41.

²⁶ Raghavan, “*Brahmapatravaivartapurāṇam*, verse 14:

*nāstikā kṛttakeśāśca brāhmaṇyātpatitāśca ye/
jātayo ’pyavarā yāśca dhik tvaṃ taireva sevyase//*

²⁷ Ibid., verse 15. *tvadbhaktā nāsayāsyena sṛjanto meghamaṇḍalam/
ulkāmukhapiśācāḥ; tvaṃ vartirāstikyadāhikā//”*

The cigarettes are depicted both as things containing heat and as female religious ascetics through a pun on the word *tapasvinī*. The worshippers of these cigarettes, though, are depicted as immoral and godless, precisely the opposite of the cultured people Raghavan would honor. But in a switch that is obviously ironic, Raghavan says that smokers of cigarettes in the city are civilized: “The foremost who are very civilized and have social manners smoke cigarettes and pass them around.” In a final salvo, Raghavan, again satirically, asks why cigarettes should be considered immoral; after all a cigarette is a burning of something with fire, which in Hinduism would be considered a means of purification, and he stylizes cigarettes as an “*agnihoma* adapted for the modern day” (*kālānugāgnihoma ’yam*), and those who smoke as like the orthodox who are “continually with fire” (*nityāgnayo*).²⁹

The poem may be amusing on one level, but it is also biting critical. Here, Raghavan condemns modern morals, particularly the modern morals of overly Westernized Brahmins. He puts together religion and modern practice, particularly materialist pleasure-seeking, in a comic way in order to highlight their incongruity (*anaucitya*). The same poem in English would lose something of the air of a mock religious text. That the poem is in Sanskrit itself highlights the incongruity, emphasizing Raghavan’s moral lesson through the comic sentiment.

The Emperor’s Poet’s New Clothes

The comic is not the main sentiment in those plays mentioned above, but it is the main sentiment of both *Vimukti* and *Prataparudravijaya*, both of which Raghavan mentions in the final footnote of his lectures on the comic. The philosophical dimension of the comic emerges most plainly in *Vimukti*, which is overall much more humorous and didactic. As noted in Chapter

²⁸ Ibid., verse 16. *iti grāmeṣu dhikkṛtya loṣṭakāṣṭhādītāditā/
tapasvinī dhūmavartih nagaram śaraṇam gatā//*

²⁹ Ibid., verses 19-20.

1, the two plays were written around the same time in 1931, along with an early version of *Anārkalī*. While this was 30 years prior to the lectures, the plays themselves were not published until after the lectures were given. It is thus, again, difficult based on the available evidence to provide an account with perfect historical precision, but there is a high degree of resonance between the plays and Raghavan’s writings that speaks to a continuity of perspective over the decades.

Thus I will attend to *Prataparudravijaya* first and briefly. As mentioned, the alternative title for *Pratāprudra-Vijaya* is *Vidyānātha-Viḍambana*, or “A Parody of Vidyānātha,” and since that is a far easier title for an English-speaking audience, I will continue to use it henceforth. Vidyānātha was a poet active in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries CE in the court of the Kākatīya king Pratāparudra (also called Vīrarudra, which is the name Raghavan uses in the play) located in Warangal (once called Ekaśīla) in what is now the newly formed state of Telangana (formerly part of Andhra Pradesh). Vidyānātha’s work on poetry and drama, entitled *Pratāparudīya*, was assigned to Raghavan during his Sanskrit M.A. Honours course at Presidency College in Madras. Normally classical South Asian scholars of aesthetics (*alaṃkāra*) would quote from prior sources and supplement with their own verses, but Vidyānātha wrote all of his own example verses to illustrate his points in *Pratāparudīya*. In addition, all of the verses in *Pratāparudīya* are obsequious praises of his patron, king Pratāparudra, using extreme hyperbole. Most of these images are standard tropes in Sanskrit literature that Vidyānātha overextends.³⁰ Raghavan mentions a few of these in his preface to the play (in English): the military expedition (the “*vijaya*” of the title of the play) that produces colossal clouds of dust, the

³⁰ A simple example of this hyperbolic description in English might be an instance where someone is described as having “tons of money,” and then is shown to possess money that *physically* weighs in the tons.

pure white of his fame, the deafening war-drums, etc.³¹ Finding this material nauseating, Raghavan as a student “even while sitting in the class and listening to the lessons...composed and jotted down verses parodying those in the text.”³² He eventually worked those verses up into the play. While the play itself is not laugh-out-loud humorous, it is a biting satire. And while it seems to have evolved from his distaste for this material as a student, there are subtle ways in which play speaks to larger issues pertaining to morality and the arts in contemporary India.

At a moment when the theme of the play seems to appear plainly in the text, one character (a friend of a forest deity in Act II) describes King Vīrarudra as:

One in whom ‘poetic ornamentation describing his eminence loses its significance,
All comparison leads to the diminishment of the thing compared to,’ and reality cannot
be discerned.³³

On the surface, what Raghavan appears to be deriding is not courtly decadence itself, but merely a transgression of proper poetic practice. But Raghavan felt that this was a problem that “could be driven home more forcefully by a regular play parodying these characteristics.”³⁴ A play could be an efficient means of conveying an idea, but what message and to whom? Is the intended audience modern Sanskrit poets? The “decadent” poetry he attacks is largely a product of a courtly poetry milieu long since expired. The play, it should be noted, was never actually staged, and it may have served for Raghavan merely as a creative outlet. Yet on my reading poetic practice is not all that is at stake in Raghavan’s critique: his words speak to the broader theme of humility as well as to contemporary concerns about the dangerous admixture of the aesthetic arts with the realm of commerce.

³¹ V. Raghavan, *Pratāprudra-Vijaya* or *Vidyānātha-Viḍambana: A Parody in Four Acts* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1969), XV.

³² Ibid.

³³ Raghavan, *Pratāprudra-Vijaya*, 9. “*tasmin ‘jahātyatiśayoktiralāṅkṛtitvam nyūnopamātvamupayātyupamāpi sarvā’/vastusthitiprakalanaṃ ca na sādya meva...*” Single quotes are in the original.

³⁴ Ibid., XV.

As the play's plot begins, Vīrarudra's army has set out to conquer the world and it kicks up such an enormous upwelling of dust that it blots out the sun, thereby precipitating some absurd consequences that ensue throughout the four acts of the play. At first, we see small signs that the dust is making people believe twilight has come. The courtesans think night approaches and hasten to do their makeup and set out for their lovers' homes. Birds return to their nests and owls and bats take flight into the sky. Brahmins lazily wake from their naps to do evening service and eat.³⁵ Meanwhile, in heaven, the god Indra and his wife, Śaci, are amorously sporting beneath a mango tree when it suddenly seems as if evening has fallen in heaven. Indra attempts to speak sweetly as nightfall indicates that the time for lovemaking is nigh, but Śaci is too alarmed by the unexpected advance of twilight. Suddenly, the dust lands in her eye and afflicts her greatly. Soon the dust also irritates Indra's thousand eyes. Indra complains that he had just been thinking his curse of a thousand eyes to be a boon, for it allowed him to see all the heavenly damsels at once. As Indra and Śaci bemoan their state, Śaci falls into a pool but the pool itself becomes solid from the dust. In this depiction, Vīrarudra is such a mighty warrior and his army's dust is so absurdly pervasive that it invades heaven and afflicts even the gods.

Act II continues the absurd consequences of the dust and the army's onslaught. A king and his retinue are in hiding in a forest for fear of Vīrarudra, and the ascetics and forest deities there are disturbed. In a slightly humorous but poetic moment, the sylvan deities are worried that the heat of the sighs of the wives of the conquered kings (a common trope in Sanskrit poetry) will create winds that will break down the jails, and the prisoners will escape and infest the forest.³⁶ Meanwhile in heaven, it becomes apparent that Śaci has been abducted by *rākṣasas*

³⁵ Raghavan is well aware of common humorous trope of the hungry Brahmin.

³⁶ Ibid., 10.

(demons) who were able to sneak about under the cover of the darkness.³⁷ As one character puts it, “In no time, heaven will become hell.”³⁸ Act II ends with the demons taking over heaven.³⁹ In another humorous moment, three gods hear each other creeping about, and as each thinks the others are demons, they all begin hollering “demon” with fright only then to realize by their common cry that they are all in fact gods.⁴⁰ The dust has caused even the gods to rely solely on language to prove their identities.

The solution to this problem caused by Vīrarudra is Vīrarudra himself. The sage Nārada advises Mātali, Indra’s charioteer, to find king Vīrarudra who is resting near Mount Kailāsa. Mātali brings Vīrarudra to heaven and his fame itself spreads a whiteness that returns light to heaven.⁴¹ Fame is often stylized as “white” in Sanskrit poetry, but here that whiteness takes on real-world ramifications; hence there is more comic hyperbole. Unfortunately, this whiteness also manages to blind some of Indra’s eyes that were already irritated by the dust.⁴² The whiteness of Vīrarudra’s fame is so pervasive and enveloping that a *siddha* enters in a tizzy declaring that the ocean of milk (well known from Hindu mythology) is rising and threatens to deluge and dissolve the whole world. When they declare that Vīrarudra is just like the gods, a vast redness begins to envelope the world, which some fear is blood, while others think is just the twilight. Śiva, laughing, corrects their mistakes and declares that the redness is the passionate love of the various nymphs of the world for Vīrarudra.⁴³ Here the hyperbole is based on a pun

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ Ibid. “*acireṇa svargaloko ’pi pātālaṃ bahviṣyati.*”

³⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁴¹ Ibid., 24. Nārada compares this to the burning of Kāma with a beam from his third eye by Rudra the god, and suggests that Vīrarudra, the king, is Rudra himself. Shortly thereafter, they wonder whether Vīrarudra is an avatar of the god of war, Kārtikeya.

⁴² Ibid., 25.

⁴³ Ibid., 28-9. At first, in the stage notes, the word for redness is “*aruṇimā*,” but in Śiva’s description he says “*anurāga*” and “*raktimā*,” two words that mean *both* redness and passion. The image is based on puns.

on the linguistic level, but as the redness spreads throughout the world it is also hyperbolically and comically actualized in the world beyond mere poetic convention.

As the play ends, the focus shifts from the exaggerated praise of Vīrarudra to mock praise of his poet, Vidyānātha. Śiva anoints Vīrarudra as a supreme god (*paramēśvara*), but when Bṛhaspati, the head poet of the gods, attempts to give a speech in praise of Vīrarudra, he hiccups,⁴⁴ and loses the ability to speak. Brahmā cannot speak either because he is separated from Sarasvatī due to family strife. At last, there appears before them none other than the poet Vidyānātha himself whom Śiva describes as one who has subdued the pride of Bṛhaspati, who is a Brahmā with his own Sarasvatī, and who is a “*bhakta*” (devotee) of Vīrarudra whose poetry constantly expresses the glories of his patron. Since the title of the play is “The Parody of Vidyānātha,” it would appear that Raghavan is being sarcastic here. His opinion of Vidyānātha is the opposite of Śiva’s words of praise: this poet is an insufferable sycophant. Further, by establishing a king as a god and the poet as his devotee, Raghavan criticizes such elevated and quasi-religious praise for a mortal. While there are numerous South Asian precedents for the idea of the divine king and even the devotional attitude toward mortals, here Raghavan is making a mockery of this overblown poet-patron relationship.

In contrast to Vidyānātha’s exaggerated praise, Vīrarudra himself is extremely humble in the very few lines he speaks in the play when he willingly offers to follow the commands of the gods and sages. When he bows to the command of Nārada, that sage describes him as “excelling in humility” (*vinaya utkarṣaḥ*).⁴⁵ Certainly humility is one of the traits that Raghavan often praises in his plays, but just as Vīrarudra could not possibly dispel the darkness merely with the

⁴⁴ In a wonderful example of onomatopoeia, the Sanskrit verb root for “hiccup” is “*hikk*.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22. Scholars of Buddhism might note that this word for humility, *vinaya*, is usually used in terms of rules and orders. In the context however, the alternate definition of humility is a better translation.

whiteness of his fame, he cannot be really humble if he employs in his court a sycophantic poet like Vidyānātha. This conflict is corroborated in the final verse of the play, the *bharatavākya*, which is not sung by a character in the play but is rather indicated as the words of the play's author, and which provides a clear indication of Raghavan's message:

Having abandoned inferiority, may the wise men of earth, by examining self-knowledge,
Worship once again that ancient glory suitable to the nature of the soul.
Let the speech of sages never be dependent on wealth.
Let there be on earth the future upwelling of splendor
Which is the coordinated effort only of a poet and patron who are aesthetes.⁴⁶

On a very basic level, the verse appears to insist that poets should avoid selling out. The play is a critique not of Vīrarudra but of his poet, Vidyānātha. The last line, however, seems to fault Vīrarudra as well for employing or perhaps even encouraging such an obsequious poet. The word I have translated as “aesthetes” is “*sarasayor*” in the dual, and the only way the dual makes sense in this verse and play is in the context of the combination of a poet and patron. The last line is therefore a critique of Vīrarudra and Vidyānātha's lack of humility and taste. It is the combination of royal narcissism and sycophantic poetry that Raghavan attacks in this play.

The first two lines of this last verse also suggest a solution to this problem, namely that good poetry that has a spiritual dimension can be found in the older materials, and that ancient cultural and religious material is what ought to be praised. The sense of “having abandoned inferiority” suggests that poets must avoid all lowly poetry, and indeed all lowly art forms, by which Raghavan certainly means art forms that are not properly civilized and cultivated. The underlying message here is very much in line with Raghavan's project to civilize the Indian cultural world through Sanskrit literature, to appropriate and Sanskritize the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 31. *tyaktvā naicyaṃ dharaṇivibudhaḥ svātmavidyāvicāraiḥ
prācyāṃ khyātiṃ bhajatu punarapyātmanāmānurūpām/
vāṇī sūrerna bhavatu kadāpyāśravā kāñcanānām/
yogo bhūyāt bhuvi sarasayoreva bhavyodayaśrīḥ//*

Macaulayan/Arnoldian discourse of “civilizing” the Indian populace, as was discussed at length in chapter 2. Finally, on a critical reading of the message, humility seems elided and elitism emphasized here as the leaders of such a cultural development are to be the wise people of the earth, such as the Tamil Brahmin leaders of cultural nationalism.

Furthermore, these wise men who might direct this renaissance and purification of poetry are described not as cultural heroes but as those who are engaged in spiritual practices. It is the religious leader or sage, a Vivekananda or Aurobindo or Gandhi, or perhaps a Raghavan, who can properly undo this materialist and palpably secular admixture of the arts with the affairs of the world. If Raghavan is to make the arts over into an entirely religious affair, allowing them to muck about in the world of global capitalism, the realm of materialism, would only sully them. One must liberate the arts not just from bad poetry but from the realm of materialism. In other words, the arts require liberation from the endless cycle of global commerce, and entry into the spiritual realm. Not only is this a nationalistic colonial valorization of the spiritual over the material, it is also couched in Vedantic philosophy. Raghavan’s negative assesment of the arts mired in the material world resonates precisely with Sāṃkhya philosophy’s ideal of the liberation of the spirit (*puruṣa*) from matter (*prakṛti*). In its theological Advaita incarnation, this Sāṃkhyan liberation can be sped along by the grace of a deity. While Raghavan merely gestures toward this philosophy in *Pratāparurda-Vijaya*, it is the philosophical foundation of his other comic play, *Vimukti*.

Deconstructing Ātmanātha

In *Vimukti*’s *prastāvanā* (prologue), the director says to his friend that he will stage a comedy, but the ensuing conversation is far from comical; instead it provides significant insight

into the philosophical dimension of the play.⁴⁷ The friend enthusiastically replies that everyone likes a comedy, even if just in small doses, but the director's response switches gears abruptly toward the critical. Here Raghavan/the director laments that people's love of comedy and disdain for culture is a matter of a short attention span and the impact of capitalism: "Time is to be blamed. Everywhere, in the thriving world and sensual path of action, there is no time to breathe among the modern diligent businessmen who have no time for quietly reading a poem properly or seeing a play."⁴⁸ In other words, the material world precludes the peaceful study of the arts and the enjoyment of drama. As in "A Parody of Vidyānātha," and further corroborating the discussion in the previous chapter concerning Raghavan's effort to revive Indian culture, the author here expresses his exasperation with the conflict of interest between money and art in modern India. At the same time, he subtly hints at a philosophical dimension as well: the word for "world" (*prāpañcika*) has an additional meaning of being a deceitful or false creation. While Sanskrit may be notoriously polysemic, the fact that Raghavan uses this word rather than a generic word for "world" (e.g. *loka*) indicates his negative assessment of materiality and points to the importance not just of aesthetics over materiality, but of the liberation (*vimukti*) attainable through understanding the physical world as a false illusion.

The prologue continues to lament the modern state of the world. The director's friend remarks that people have become like machines, do not read the newspaper, and are interested only in comic books and amusing news.⁴⁹ The director adds that modern humor is merely

⁴⁷ V. Raghavan, *Vimuktiḥ (A Two-Act Philosophical Farce with a Sanskrit Commentary)* (Madras: Punarvasu [Author's Imprint], 1968). Originally published as "Vimukti Prahasanam," *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1964): 127-60. The version published as a stand-alone book in 1968 retained the pagination of the original *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā* publication

⁴⁸ Ibid., 127. "nanu kāla evātra aparādhyati. viśvato 'pi pravardhamāne prāpañcike vaiṣayike karmayoge, nirucchvāsāvakāśaṃ vyavasāyināmādhunikānām karmaṭhānām sarvathā nāstyeva avakāśaḥ mahat kāvyam nāṭakam vā visrabdhamupaviśya paṭhitum, prekṣitum vā."

⁴⁹ Ibid. "...hāsyapatrikāsu vinodavārtāsu ca kutukī..."

shallow mocking due to mutual stupidity.⁵⁰ When the friend asks if the director means to produce such shallowness on the stage, the director replies affirmatively, but insists that is not the whole truth, and that he has in mind a comedy that is “*alaukika*,” in other words, religious and not secular or mundane. In Raghavan’s own words in the English synopsis, the play is an “underlying philosophical allegory...woven outwardly as a realistic farce.”⁵¹ Certainly, this is not the only example of a philosophical allegory in Sanskrit, as Kṛṣṇmīśra’s eleventh-century *The Rise of Wisdom Moon (Prabodhacandrodaya)* predates *Vimukti* by almost a millennium. Unlike that early play, however, Raghavan stages *Vimukti* very much in and as a response to the modern desacralized world. The demons he skewers with the sword of comedy are very modern ones: capitalist materialism, European secularism, and Western sexual freedoms. He presents liberation from the material world not merely as a religious matter, but also as a divorce from the West, its economics, and its sexuality, in exchange for a marriage with Indian philosophical truth.

There are other moments in the prologue, as well as the introductory verse, that indicate Raghavan’s philosophies of the comic sentiment and of liberation, but their meanings will become clearer once we have discussed the play itself. One can only achieve liberating abstraction from the materiality of the text by seeing the text as a constructed comical illusion. In Act I, we meet with the main characters: the Brahmin Ātmanātha, his six sons, his overbearing wife Trivarṇinī, and his wife’s three sisters. The sons are completely unruly, each in a different way, and they and their father verbally abuse each other harshly. The wife constantly criticizes her husband and defends her miscreant sons. Sick of it all, the Brahmin threatens to leave the house for somewhere peaceful and take up the ascetic life of a renouncer. When the wife’s sisters

⁵⁰ For “shallow,” Raghavan uses the word *gādhā*, which literally means shallow in the context of a river. He explains in the included autocommentary that he means *asāra*, “useless” or “sapless.” Hence I suspect that he has borrowed the English nonliteral sense of “shallow,” a rather interesting linguistic cross-pollination, unless this is a possible meaning of “*gādhā*” not known to the available Sanskrit-English dictionaries I have consulted.

⁵¹ “Synopsis.” *Ibid.*, xiii.

arrive, they make the household's finances even more unbearable than they already were. The eldest son offers to take over running the household, and the sons then propose to take up various jobs befitting their errant proclivities, but their mother intercedes promising to take care of all their material needs. Unfortunately, they then discover that their house is utterly dilapidated and liable to collapse at any moment.

Act II opens with the Brahmin Ātmanātha performing his evening worship but thinking about his wife's sister, Candrikā, with whom he has always been in love. She comes on stage and he speaks to her briefly, but then he hears his hated wife approach and sends his secret lover to hide in a nearby abbey (*maṭha*). While the husband and wife proceed to squabble, with the belittled husband receiving some sympathy from passersby, the dark and threatening character Daṃṣṭrī comes on stage to declare that, by order of the lord of the city, the dilapidated house is to be torn down, and so the Brahmin and his wife ought to flee. A conversation ensues between the wife and some citizens about whether or not there really is a lord of the city. Ātmanātha is understandably upset, and threatens again to run away, although some passing city folk suggest he will be provided a new house. Soon the sons and the two remaining aunts/sisters-in-law come on stage bickering, but just then Daṃṣṭrī arrives and, on the order of the lord of the city, arrests the sons and has the police chief throw the two aunts in the river. Ātmanātha, still confused and about to commit suicide, then meets an old man from the *maṭha* who dissuades him and tells him that his ills are the result of his evil mother-in-law, the witch Māyāvātī. The man gives Ātmanātha a mantra that kills his mother-in-law and makes his wife suddenly submissive and repentant for her ill-mannered ways. The old man, it turns out, is the lord of the city himself, who is also the supreme deity. The lord says that he is pleased by Trivarṇinī's newfound peacefulness and renames her Prasannā (gracious). Finally, both the lord and the newly renamed wife consent

to Ātmanātha's marriage to Candrikā. The play's final verse, spoken by Ātmanātha, explicitly reveals all the parts of the allegory and its comic element, which he exhorts the audience to understand.

The basic level of the play's humor is apparent through the characters' actions and speech. The theme of bickering families is a favorite for illustrating the comic sense in Sanskrit *prahasanas*. The play sets a comic tone in the first few lines when the lascivious son Ūlūkākṣa ("owl eye")⁵² announces that he has come from the tank where he was flirting with a woman. His father asks him if he bathed (*snātam tvayā*), to which he responds, changing merely one letter, that he was bathed by her (*snātam tayā*), and he asks deviously if his father knows who she is and if she might be someone's wife.⁵³ The little word play and Ātmanātha's criticism of such sexual behavior (the father curses him as a playboy) indicates both the comic sentiment and the moralizing tone of the play. Later, this same character offers to take a job as a curtain puller in a movie theater. Another instance of comedy and "modernity" in *Vimukti* occurs during a fight between Ātmanātha and Trivarṇinī when she mentions that "as in the Western world divorce is newly possible in India."⁵⁴ For an orthodox audience, divorce is forbidden, so there is an anxious humor in this moment. These comic moments locate the play in the Westernized present, unique in and of itself for a Sanskrit play, but also express a certain concern for the influx of Western morals, a theme which I will take up in the next section. Even for an audience that might understand only a small portion of the Sanskrit dialogue, the constant bickering between the family members is readily apparent. Depicting the internal squabbles of family life is a

⁵² In the 1987 staging, of which I have a video copy, my professor in Chennai, T.V. Vasudeva, ably played this role.

⁵³ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 133. "nādyāvadhi bhārate loke pāścātye iva yathecchaṃ yadā kadāpi vivāhatantuvicchedaḥ..."

common component in later Sanskrit comedies.⁵⁵ In fact, in the 1987 video recording of the play, the majority of the lines that the audience found funny were these moments of fighting among husband, wife, and the children.⁵⁶

Raghavan also indicates a comic sensibility through the use of Tamil phrases translated into Sanskrit. Unfortunately, in the 1987 performance these bits elicited nary a chuckle, but it is unclear if the audience just did not understand the Sanskrit or did not find them particularly funny. In general, I read these moments as contributing to comedy of the squabbling family. In Sanskrit dramatic arts, as Raghavan himself notes in his lectures on the comic element, non-Sanskrit languages can be used as a medium and a means of the comic sentiment. As mentioned earlier, there are subtle ways in which Raghavan's Sanskrit appears slightly inflected by Tamil, but this happens only occasionally, as if by a minor slip of the tongue. In *Vimukti*, however, Tamil colloquialisms translated into Sanskrit appear with great frequency, and especially Tamil idioms that either express general exasperation with misbehavior or function as insults lobbed between the characters.⁵⁷ For one example of a Tamil saying translated into Sanskrit, a particular character who is always hungry is described as going about like a dog from house to house at meal times and acting like a crow.⁵⁸ Another food-related retort in the same conversation is the common Tamil expression, "Strike me on the back, not on the belly" (i.e. punish me, but do not deny me food),⁵⁹ which Ātmanātha says to his wife when she incorrectly

⁵⁵ This theme of a animosity between a mother and daughter-in-law is the theme of an eighteenth-century play that Raghavan's Samskrita Ranga staged and that he edited and published. See V. Raghavan, ed. *Snuṣāvijaya: An (sic) One-Act Play*, by Sundararāja, Second Edition (Madras: Samskrita Ranga, 1977).

⁵⁶ My thanks to the Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for the Performing Arts for providing me with this video.

⁵⁷ I owe a debt of thanks to Prof. T.V. Vasudeva and Mrs. Lalitha at KSRI for their assistance in both noticing that these phrases in the Sanskrit were Tamil sayings, and helping me find the Tamil originals. In some instances, they insisted that certain other phrases, not mentioned, were Sanskritized Tamil sayings, but we could not come up with equivalents in Tamil.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 136. Sanskrit: "etadaparyāptamiva gehaṃ gehaṃ śveva praviśya bhojanavelāsu kākāyase tvam." Tamil: "viṭu viṭu pōy sāpāṭṭu vēllai illa kākāk mādiri paṛakkīra."

⁵⁹ Ibid. Sanskrit: "prṣṭhe tāḍayata, mā mā udare." Tamil: "muṭihā aṭi, vaiṭil āṭikāṭe kūṭāṭu."

declares that that day is an Ekādaśī fasting day.⁶⁰ Raghavan explicitly says in the autocommentary that this is a translation of a Tamil idiom.⁶¹ Elsewhere, the eldest son chastises his ever-hungry brother, Calaprotha, by saying, “You are an elephant bound in a house and fit for feeding.”⁶² There also appear the curses, “May your eye be like a *paṭola* flower,” and “May your mouth be fit for worms,” both of which Raghavan mentions in his autocommentary as common Tamil ways of cursing someone.⁶³ Later, the eldest son dismissively tells his father to “just be in some corner somewhere.”⁶⁴ Finally, a personal favorite: Ātmanātha’s wife asks him, as he seems to be threatening to leave her, if his “feet are boiling,”⁶⁵ a Tamil idiom that conceptually translates well to the Yiddish word “shpilkes.”

These instances of Tamil phrases do more than just give the play a humorous sense of the reality of social relations: they use Tamil-origin instances of verbal abuse to indicate the lowliness of such interpersonal strife, making it comic in much the same way as a Kūḍiyāṭṭam Vidūṣaka (jester) will harass the audience members in Malayalam during a Kūḍiyāṭṭam performance. Yet here, they are more than instances of comedy: they serve to indicate improper behavior, to mock it as lowly and common, thus simultaneously castigating as “lowly” the Tamil language itself. Tamil-origin phrases are thus used primarily for abuse in this play. Unlike in Kūḍiyāṭṭam, Raghavan translates these comedic moments into Sanskrit, thus complicating this picture of Tamil lowliness. One reason for the translation is that he intends this play to be understandable for all Sanskrit speakers, beyond the Tamil country, hence his specification in the autocommentary that these are Tamil idioms. Another reason, I think, is to prove that Sanskrit is

⁶⁰ This is the eleventh day of a lunar fortnight on which orthodox Brahmin men would fast.

⁶¹ Ibid., commentary, p. IV. “*dramiḍābhānakānuvādaḥ*.”

⁶² Ibid., 142. Sanskrit: “*ko vā tvāṃ hastinaṃ grhe nibadhya bhojayitum prabhavet!*” Tamil: “*yānai kaṭṭi yār tīnī pōṭṭu*.” Raghavan also says this is a translation of a Tamil saying in the commentary (p. V.)

⁶³ Ibid., commentary, ii.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 141. Sanskrit: “*yatra kutra koṇe bhava*.” Tamil: “*ora mūlayile keṭa*.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 148. Sanskrit: “*kiṃ budbuditaḥ caraṇaḥ?*” Tamil: “*kāla vennīr koṭṭana mādiri?*”

preeminently capable of conveying all sorts of linguistic communication, be it high or low, even while it provides a path for elevation by its very nature, for cultural refinement as well as more specifically religious refinement, or liberation.



Image 2: Scene from the 1987 performance of *Vimukti*. From left to right: Daṃṣṭrī, Ātmanātha, Trivarṇinī, Latakeśvara (the eldest son), Kaṇḍūla, Calaprotha, Ulūkākṣa, and Śuṇḍāla. Photo courtesy of the Samskrita Ranga and the Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts.

Allegorizing Vedanta, Laughing at the West

The comic element in *Vimukti* arises also from the strange names of some of the characters, particularly the sons of Ātmanātha, but the names also provide a window into the allegorical dimension of the play. Each son represents one of the senses according to classical philosophy. The eldest is the wily Latakeśvara (king of thieves), who represents the mind. The others are the leering and lascivious Ulūkākṣa (owl eye), who is sight; the ever hungry and gossiping Calaprotha (moving snout), who represents the sense of taste; then Śuṇḍāla (elephant,

or one with a proboscis), who represents the sense of smell;⁶⁶ next Kaṇḍūla (itchy), who is touch; and finally Dirghaśravas (long ears), who represents hearing. This delineation of the self, the mind, and the senses is a common theme in Vedānta thought extending back to the Upaniṣads. The sons are unruly and enmeshed in this-worldly materialistic activity from which the self wants to escape. Ātmanātha, our lead character whose name means “lord of the self,” represents the individual soul, or *jīvātman*, that seeks liberation. The wife’s name, Trivarṇinī, which means tri-colored, is an extension of the idea that the three *guṇas* of Sāṃkhya philosophy – *sattva* (truth), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness) – are represented by three colors: white, red, and black. Actually, however, her sisters represent these *guṇa*-s. The beloved Candrikā is the one good *guṇa*, *sattva* (truth), while the play explicitly refers to the other two as “Red” and “Dark.”⁶⁷ Finally, the sisters’ mother, Ātmanātha’s mother-in-law, is Māyāvātī, who is *māyā*, the philosophical concept of the universe’s illusoriness.

At this point, we need to take a step back and examine how all these characters and the notions they represent fit into a philosophical system. Without wading too deep into Sāṃkhya philosophy, suffice it to say that the school postulates two realms, that of matter (*prakṛti*) and that of the universal and real (*puruṣa*), and the goal of an individual is to achieve liberation (*mokṣa*, or *vimukti*) by realizing the enmeshment of the soul in *prakṛti*, and thus mentally disconnecting oneself from that embodied and material state. One way this can be achieved is through mentally understanding that one is enmeshed through the senses and the mind. It is

⁶⁶ In one funny moment, Ātmanātha angrily tells this son “because your nose takes up your entire face, there is no space between your ears.” Ibid., 129. “*iyatyā bṛhatyā nāsayaiva svīkṛtasarvavadanābhogasya te satyaṃ nāstyeva śrotrāvakāśaḥ*.” Later this son offers to be a perfume vendor (*gāndhika*), but another suggests he should deal snuff (*nāsācūrṇāpanasthāpanam*). Ibid., 143. There is thus an implicit criticism of snuff that corresponds with the tobacco poem mentioned above.

⁶⁷ Candrikā means “moonlight” which signifies the white *guṇa*. The red sister is Śonita (literally “red” or “blood.”) The third sister is Hastinī, which means a female elephant, and she is derisively described as not just dark but also overweight.

crucial to note here that the traditional mind/body duality with which we are accustomed in Euro-American philosophy does not hold in South Asian thought. South Asian philosophy views the mind, the eldest brother in the allegory here, as firmly part of the body. Ultimate knowledge separate from the embodied mind has its locus at the deeper level of the “self” or Atman, but it does not come automatically to this Ātman (e.g. our main character, Ātmanātha). Vedānta, and particularly the Advaita (nondualist) Vedānta to which Raghavan subscribed, borrows these basic ideas from Sāṃkhya, but, among other differentiations, focuses not on a duality but on an essential unity in which God reigns supreme. Thus the liberation one might achieve does not therefore necessitate complete abandonment of the body and the realm of *prakṛti*. Rather, matter can be subdued, and the liberated soul approaches the world with a certain detachment, standing above it from an enlightened distance.

Raghavan indicates the philosophical dimension of the play not only through the allegory but also through frequent uses of quotation. These quotations reflect the importance, to him, of past masters and religious sources. He is maintaining the tradition not only by reviving Sanskrit drama, but also through incessant citation, turning his modern texts into literary patchwork quilts. In *Vimukti*, he quotes from Kālidāsa a few times, but the preponderance of quotes is from philosophical texts. At times, the play feels like philosophical “quote salad” (not unlike a bad undergrad paper). There are frequent quotes from the Upaniṣads, Patañjali’s Yoga Sutras (on which the Sāṃkhya philosophy expounded is based in part), the works of Śankara, and other classical texts of philosophy. Sometimes the quote is just a small notion barely recognizable as a quote without the autocommentary, as when Ātmanātha says that “the path ahead is difficult,” which Raghavan notes in the commentary is from verse 3.14 of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. At other times, Raghavan’s characters quote religious texts in ways that have nothing to do with the

meaning of the original: sitting in the dark of night waiting for his house to be torn down, Ātmanātha quotes Rig Veda 10.129.3: “darkness is hidden by darkness.”⁶⁸ These minor quotations give the text a historical and spiritual depth, further blurring the line between comedy and philosophy. As they are in quotation marks, they also mark the text as directed toward readers and not just for staging.

At the same time, Raghavan is also critical of citation in *Vimukti*. When Ātmanātha rebukes his eldest son for bringing the hated aunts to their house, he asks if even one woman is not enough to fear hell,⁶⁹ to which the son retorts citing lines directly from the Upaniṣads supporting the value of women. He especially points out the importance of the kick of a beautiful woman to bring about flowers. Supporting his own hedonistic perspective, he quotes Manu’s insistence in *Dharmaśāstra* that what is proper includes what satisfies oneself.⁷⁰ In response Ātmanātha declares that, “For the worthless confusion of everything, modern folks recite Sanskrit.”⁷¹ To which the son suggests that the old folks have forgotten the real meanings and merely recite like frogs,⁷² thus suggesting the famous Rig Veda verse describing Brahmins as sounding like frogs.⁷³ This last exchange is not merely about the usefulness of quotes, but more strongly suggests the foibles of using Sanskrit to support new ideas alien to tradition. Certainly one can use the *Dharmaśāstra* to support the Euro-American hedonistic view (just as the Raj oddly tried to enlist the *Dharmaśāstra* to govern the country), but this takes it out of context. Likewise, the son critiques the rote memorization and meaninglessness of croaking Vedic recitation by imbecilic Brahmins. Raghavan’s ideal is neither path.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 157. “*tama āste tamasā gūḍhamarge.*”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 139. “*apyanalam ekā strī rauravāya?*”

⁷⁰ Ibid., 140 “*āmatuṣṭistathaiva ca.*” (*Manavadharmaśāstra* 2.6).

⁷¹ Ibid. “*anarthāya sarvaviplavāyaiva ādhunikaiḥ saṃskṛtaṃ paṭhayate.*”

⁷² Ibid. “*kevalaṃ bhekā iva paṭhantaḥ*”

⁷³ Rig Veda 8.103. While many take this as humorous, Raghavan insists following various scholars who read the verse as a rain-spell. Raghavan suggests that the Veda had no sense of mockery, or “*nyūnopamā.*” Raghavan, *Comic Element*, 30.

Quotation cuts both ways in this text, however, when modern attempts to quote the classics go horribly wrong and completely twist the original meanings, thereby adding to the comic sentiment. There was much laughter at the 1987 performance when Ātmanātha attempts to appease his wife by quoting a verse usually used to appeal to and praise the goddess Lakṣmī.⁷⁴ In another instance that aroused a good deal of laughter, he calls his son stupid, but does so directly changing the words of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Bṛhadarānyaka Upaniṣad*.⁷⁵ In another instance (skipped in the 1987 performance), Trivarṇinī’s sisters try to quote from the Upaniṣads to comedic effect. First they change the famous adage *tat tvam asi* (“you are that”) into *yatte tat asmākampi* (“what is yours is ours”), said with reference to their sister’s belongings: they make themselves right at home in their brother-in-law’s house despite the financial burden caused. They refer to the Upaniṣads but change the first parts of texts’ names so that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* becomes the *Śaṭha* and the *Cāndogya Upaniṣad* becomes the *Māndhyayogya*.⁷⁶ But this is not mere malapropism since “*śaṭha*” means “deceit” and “*māndhya*” means “sickness.” Essentially, Raghavan has the deceitful sisters saying that their view of the world is utterly wrong, reinforcing the play’s critique of materialism and exhorting a departure from being mired in the *guṇas* such as *rajas* and *tamas* (passion and darkness, the two sisters who misspeak here). In the same conversation, Trivarṇinī misquotes the *Mahānarāyaṇa Upaniṣad*’s verse (11.6) that the lord Narāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) pervades all, saying instead, “the wife works pervading everything.”⁷⁷ At the level of the allegory, she thus identifies as *prakṛti* and daughter of Māyā, that which

⁷⁴ He recites the *Lakṣmī Stotra*. In the 1987 performance of which I have a video, the performer adds another dimension of humor by reciting something that sounds vaguely like the *stotra*, but the words are all wrong.

⁷⁵ He says “*maudhyānmaudhyāt saṃbhavasi!*” *maudhyam vai putra nāmāsi*” You are born from stupidity, and I bow to you as the son in the form of stupidity.”

⁷⁶ This is slightly reminiscent of Lee Siegel’s fake quotes from the nonexistent Blue and Red Yajur Vedas in his novel *Love in a Dead Language*. The Yajurveda exists in two recensions known as the Black Yajur Veda and the White Yajur Veda, but not blue or red.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 138. “...*tat sarvaṃ vyāpya bhāryā viceṣṭate...*” In the original text: “*vyāpya narayāṇa sthitaḥ.*”

animates the entire material world but is separate from the supreme deity. On another level, this misquote also functions as a critique of strong women, a topic that I expand upon below.

Vimukti also includes a humorous philosophical debate in which atheist materialists have some of the last words, but Raghavan, through the play's overall narrative arch, ultimately makes fun of the atheist position. The exchange occurs just after Daṃṣṭrī has condemned Ātmanātha's house to fall. Trivarṇinī asks whether or not there even is a landlord, to which Ātmanātha affirms there is such a person.⁷⁸ Trivarṇinī thinks him utterly mad or possessed, and declares that Ātmanātha could not possibly know.⁷⁹ It is apparent from the context that Trivarṇinī is questioning the existence of god and presenting knowledge of god as an epistemological impossibility. As she proceeds to question a group of townsfolk who have gathered, a philosophical debate ensues.

The first person Trivarṇinī questions replies angrily, "Damn you! Who cares about you, or your house, or knows the lord of the house?"⁸⁰ Raghavan does not supply a footnote explaining what this position might be, but in its sense of the insignificance of all things, it could be a quasi-Buddhist response. A second person remarks that Daṃṣṭrī has been going around saying that various houses will fall, and no one believed him, but since a few have begun to fall, "I infer that there must be some lord of the houses."⁸¹ The commentary mentions the *Brahma Sūtra* here,⁸² a reference to Vedānta, although the use of *anumā* (inference) hints slightly at Nyāya. The third debater suggests that: "If that should be so, then the lord has a very cruel heart,

⁷⁸ Raghavan, *Vimukti*, 149. "Triv.: 'ko 'yam asmad-grhasvāmī?' Brā: 'priye! āmasti kaścit asmadgrhasvāmī, nagarasvāmī ca.'"

⁷⁹ Ibid., 149-150. "...satyaṃ matto vā āviṣṭo vāsi...na kimapi tvayā jñātuṃ sambhāvyate."

⁸⁰ Ibid., 150. "dhik tvām! ko vā tvām, tvadgrhaṃ vā, tvadgrhasvāminaṃ vā jānāti?"

⁸¹ Ibid. "...manyē, ko 'pi asmadgrhāṇām svāmī vartata iti, tādrśena kenāpi bhavitavyamityanuminomi."

⁸² Ibid., viii.

in my opinion.”⁸³ In the commentary, Raghavan suggests that this is a *pūrvapakṣa* argument, but does not equate it to a particular position.⁸⁴ To the possibility of a cruel god, a fourth debater replies, “I see it differently. He is not cruel, but is following some rule, and it is only because of that rule that he casts us from the houses. In no way at all is this lord unjust or pitiless.”⁸⁵ The commentary here again refers to the *Brahma Sūtra*,⁸⁶ but the exact position, that god is just following the rules, is not clearly associated with a school. The sixth person to speak represents a purely Vedānta position in saying, “They see his garden, but do not see him,”⁸⁷ thus quoting from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.14.⁸⁸ Except for the first respondent, all the others are at least theists of various sorts trying to wrestle with the issue of theodicy.

The fifth and seventh debaters, however, clearly represent Cārvāka *nāstika* (atheist) position, and while humorous, they also appear to suggest that the Vedānta answer is correct by virtue of their materialism and the fact that in the end of the play they are proven wrong. Of the two atheists, the fifth debater presents a clearer rebuttal based on reason:⁸⁹

Damn you, damn all of you clamoring about dancing in the sky.⁹⁰ The very existence of the lord isn’t known now, but you all debate his qualities. If you follow reason, then there isn’t any lord of our town. If he were to exist, why don’t we see him in the streets or festivals?⁹¹

His argument is fairly simple: there is little point in debating the qualities of god if no one has yet proven his existence, and further, he is never plainly visible. It is to this that the sixth debater

⁸³ Ibid. “*yadyevaṃ syāt, tadā sa svāmī paramakrūrahrdaya iti me tarkaḥ.*”

⁸⁴ Ibid., viii.

⁸⁵ Ibid. “*ahaṃ punarutprekṣe- na sa krūraḥ, sa kamapi karmavidhimanusṛtya naḥ grhebhyaḥ niyamenaiiva prakṣipatūti. sarvathā yasmin kasminnapi svāmīni nopapadyate khalu vaiṣamyam nairghṛṇyam vā.*”

⁸⁶ There appears to be a typo here, as Raghavan refers to *Brahma Sūtra* 1.1.38, which does not exist.

⁸⁷ Ibid. “*ārāmasya paśyanti na taṃ paśyati kaścana.*”

⁸⁸ The source is mentioned in the autocommentary, Ibid., viii.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Raghavan explicitly notes in the autocommentary that this is the Cārvāka position.

⁹⁰ In terms of classical arguments, this would make more sense as “sky flower” but that is not what is in the text.

⁹¹ Ibid. “*dhik tvām dhik vaḥ sarvān ākāśatāṇḍavāḍambarāṇiḥ. adhya svāmīnaḥ sattaiva na jñāyate. bhavantastu tadīyaguṇānadhikṛtya vivadadhve. yuktiranusāryate cet, naivāsti ko ’pyasmatpattanasvāmī. yadi syāt katham nalokyate asmābhiḥ rathyāsu yātrāsu.*”

replies, “They see his garden, but they do not see him,” implying that the world is the visible creation of god, and thus one can deduce the existence of a creator from this illusory garden of delights. The response of the sixth debater is the *siddhānta* argument, matching the play’s message of the illusoriness of the world from a Vedānta perspective, although, in the end, the play declares that *māyā* maliciously creates the illusion and god benevolently provides a way to destroy it.

The seventh debater, however, has the last word, and he is a slightly different type of Cārvāka from the classical Cārvāka, and much closer to what we might call a Euro-American Cārvāka. He is utterly unconcerned by the question, rather interested in enjoying the world, and particularly swimming with women:

Let it be. Come, this is a very pleasing river with warm water. Let’s bathe, let’s play. Otherwise this bathing place is joyless. We will descend there in the section full of bathing village women.⁹²

As Raghavan notes in the autocommentary, this person is a certain type of Cārvāka who is a sensualist or enjoyer of pleasures.⁹³ We might call his position the classical Epicurean. This Cārvāka is ruled entirely by the senses, and his interest in bathing women echoes the beginning of the play and the lascivious nature of Ātmanātha’s son, Ūlūkākṣa. Thus Raghavan establishes a connection between secularists and sensualists, and another connection between religious and moral folks, and then he establishes a distinction between those two types of people. Further, by combining sensualism with secularism, the play once again marks the Indian and religious in contrast to the Euro-American and materialist. The audience is meant to laugh at the

⁹² Ibid., 151. “*bhavatu. āgacchata, sāyaṃ koṣṇimnā atīva subhageyaṃ nadī. snāsyāmaḥ, vihariṣyāmaḥ. athavā śrotṛiyāvātāraghaṭṭo ’yaṃ paramanīrasaḥ. tatra majjantībhiḥ grāmapramadābhiḥ saṃkule bhāge avatāramāḥ.*”

⁹³ Ibid., viii. “*saptamaḥ cārvākasyaiva rūpāntaram, yo vaiṣayikasukharasikaḥ.*”

philosophical debate ending in “let’s go swimming with the girls,” but at the same time to disdain such a sinking of the philosophical and theological into the realm of mere senses.

Returning then to the allegorical dimension of the play, Ātmanātha’s house represents the physical body that houses the individual self, and this house is infirm and mortal. Various conversations make this connection quite apparent in a fairly humorous manner. Toward the end of Act I, Trivarṇinī says that the unstable house could fall at any moment, even if afflicted by rain or wind, but the word used for “affliction of rain,” is “*jāladoṣa*,” which is the Tamil word for the common cold.⁹⁴ Raghavan here uses a nice pun to make a critical allegorical point. When Trivarṇinī complains that her husband refuses to fix the dilapidated house, she quotes him (in absentia) saying that all houses are falling down a little (i.e. all bodies are decaying), but that we have had previous houses (past lives), yet this is the best house (a human birth).⁹⁵ This last comment refers to the idea that the human birth is the best birth from which to achieve liberation, and liberation can be accomplished during life, not after death. The character of Daṃṣṭrī in the play represents death, and thus the threat that Ātmanātha’s house will be torn down symbolizes his impending death. After Ātmanātha receives this news, a friend informs him that not only can he not escape his wife (*prakṛti*, materiality), but that the lord will arrange another house,⁹⁶ meaning that he will be reborn with a reborn version of the same wife.⁹⁷ As expected, Ātmanātha, wishing for complete liberation, declares that he is afflicted by the daughter of Māyā (illusion), and that if he has a say in the matter, he does not want any new house, or a new wife. In other words, he wishes for *vimukti*.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 151-152.

⁹⁷ See below for a discussion of the idea in each life we marry the reincarnation of our past spouse.

The issue of divorce, indicated earlier as a means of adding comedy, also has a significant allegorical meaning in the context of the play's philosophy of liberation. Later in the argument between Trivarṇinī and Ātmanātha, after they have fought about a divorce, Trivarṇinī declares that she is doing everything, but Ātmanātha should be active in the world, implying that she is doing the housework but he needs to get a job. But the allegorical reading is that she projects the illusion of this world, and he should participate in this illusion through the senses and through action. The husband responds that he wishes to be free, and this second stage of life (the householder stage) is too painful. His wife replies that "effort alone is this stage of life,"⁹⁸ and that in the land of India everyone seems to have this mental illness deriding the second stage of life and going off to become sages.⁹⁹ This is the fundamental question of choosing between the life of a householder and the life of an ascetic.¹⁰⁰

But there is a further issue at stake in this text: the question of whether it is better to live or to die, and whether dying is the only path by which to achieve liberation. It is this fundamental question within the tradition that led many Orientalist scholars to think of Hinduism, erroneously, as negating the importance of life and the world. The final message of the play is that one can achieve liberation in this life and world, but there are hints of this perspective along the way, as well as other moments where the question and possibility of suicide reappears. Even Trivarṇinī declares, "The living man sees a hundred blessings." Later, a depressed Ātmanātha declines the offer when a certain Brahmin offers him a path toward another city full of pleasures, e.g. a path to heaven. Yet elsewhere Ātmanātha is on the verge of suicide and declares that there is no other path to take but to depart this world, and his dialogue directly quotes but misconstrues the sense

⁹⁸ Raghavan employs some nifty word play here: "*satyam śrama evāyam āśramaḥ!*" Ibid., 134.

⁹⁹ Ibid. "*kathamevaṃ viśvajanīno 'yaṃ bhāratadeśe manovyādhiḥ? dvitīyāśramaṃ sarve nindītvā jñānibhūtamātmānaṃ manyante.*"

¹⁰⁰ See the beginning of the section "Love in an Immortal Language" below for more discussion of this opposition.

of “there is no other path” in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*.¹⁰¹ The old man, whom we soon learn is the supreme deity, counsels the nearly suicidal Ātmanātha, declaring that the living man sees a hundred blessings, and the embodied form is best for pursuing dharma.¹⁰² The liberation in *Vimukti* is thus a this-worldly liberation achieved through knowledge, not death.

In short, the play’s allegory works from Vedāntic notions (borrowed from Sāṅkhya philosophy) of the soul (*puruṣa*) trapped in the world of matter (*prakṛti*) deluded by the illusion (*māyā*) of this world, but it supplements this philosophy with a notion of the world as comic. Ātmanātha’s name literally means “lord of the soul,” his sons represent the senses, and his wife is both the material world and the daughter of Māyāvātī, “illusion.” By destroying the illusion and taming the material world in the play’s denouement, Ātmanātha is liberated. The sisters are the *guṇa*-s, the qualities of passion, darkness, and truth. Candrikā, the sister he wants to marry, represents truth. The house condemned to be demolished is his body, while Daṃṣṭrī represents death. The play itself dramatizes a variety of different possibilities and paths other than liberation, but in the end, Ātmanātha realizes the allegory, and thus this final verse:

You are the lord, I am *puruṣa*, the house here is my body, that Daṃṣṭrī is death,
 This wife is *prakṛti*, her sisters are the *guṇa*-s, and her mother is *māyā*.
 The six sons are the senses of the mind, the city is the world.
 Thus for the sake of release, *prakṛti* becomes Good-natured,¹⁰³
 Therefore, having seen this comedy, people ought to know.¹⁰⁴

This last line leads us back to the idea of comedy. Raghavan’s character does not merely refer to the comedy in the play: he gestures toward the comedy that *is* the whole world. Ātmanātha has

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 155. “*nānyaḥ panthā vidyate ’yanāya.*” Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 3.8.

¹⁰² Ibid., 157. The old man corroborates his point with quotes from the Kumārasambhava and the Rāmāyaṇa.

¹⁰³ Literally, *prakṛti*, just identified as the wife, becomes “*sattvasthā*,” that which has the nature of truth or goodness, *sattva*, which is the *guṇa* that Candrikā represents.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 160. *tīśāstvam, puruṣo ’smi, gehamiha me dehaṃ, sa daṃṣṭrī yamaḥ
 sā bhāryā prakṛtiḥ, guṇā bhagīnikāḥ, māyā ca tāsāṃ prasūḥ/
 ṣaṭ putrā mana indriyāṇi, nagaraṃ lokaḥ, vimuktyai tataḥ
 sattvasthā prakṛtiḥ, tathā prahasanaṃ drṣṭvā janā jānatām//*

achieved liberation by seeing the allegorical nature of the comedy in the events of the play, but also by seeing the world *as* a comedy, and it is a view that the play, at least as Raghavan intends it, makes available to its audience.

The *nāndī* verse that opens the play clarifies the last line of the last verse (and is clarified by it). In the *nāndī*, Raghavan criticizes the tendency to be overly involved in the material world, and he further valorizes a detached perspective from which the world appears comical:

Having hastened down illusory paths eager for banal things, we fight.
Because of the loss of trivial things desired, our throats burst crying,
Having seen us restless heroic actors in the great comedy of the world,
The liberated lotus-faced soul laughs at us with compassion.¹⁰⁵

The first two lines echo Raghavan’s frequent critiques of materialism. The last two lines, however, provide a very different perspective: he depicts the entire world as itself a comedy, and humans as heroic actors. We soon see, however, that this description of humans as “heroic” actors was ironic. The director/Raghavan cites the verse of Ballaṭa, mentioned above, about the fool who mistakes a drop of water for a pearl. We laugh at this fool, but the pearl/drop simile reveals the illusoriness of value and materiality. In response to the director’s comment, the friend says, “All these who appear as heroes are just clowns.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, those who take themselves too seriously fail to see the illusion of this world. We are all, on this account, clowning around on the stage of life.

The *nāndī* verse also mentions those liberated souls, those *jīvanmuktis*, who can see the world for the comedy it is, and who laugh compassionately at human foibles. Those words are balanced precariously between compassion and laughing with derision, but Raghavan seems to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 127. *tucchebyaḥ sprhayā prapañcasaraṇiṣvāpatya samyudhyataḥ
tuccālābhavināśato pyavirataṃ dīryadgalaṃ kradataḥ/
asmān vīkṣya jaganmahāprahasane sañceṣṭino nāyakān
jīvanmuktamukhāmbuje vijayate hāso dayāpyadbhutam//*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 128, “*evaṃ ca sarve pyete nāyakaṃmanyā vidūṣakā eva.*”

think that one can laugh with gentle compassion for foolish folk caught up in vain desires. Such a laughing *jīvanmukti* is precisely what Ātmanātha becomes when he achieves liberation and understands both the allegory and the comedy of it all. Further, the perception that Ātmanātha is afforded in liberation is available to the spectators as well, in so far as they can see the same comic stage that he sees when he reveals the allegory at the end of the play. Raghavan would insist they reach a higher cultural and spiritual level just by observing a Sanskrit drama, but they get even higher, or more liberated, through an understanding of the allegory. The last lines of the first and final verses, when brought together, suggest that the objective is to relay such a perspective to the audience through the eyes of the allegorical main character.

Finally, this comic vision operates at an even higher level, for the liberated soul's perspective is that of the supreme deity himself for whom the whole world is a comic stage. To some degree this notion comprises Raghavan's theodicy, and it is apparent in scattered bits throughout his work. Akbar's Hindu minister Birbal, in the play *Anārkālī*, says that, "God plays with me like a ball."¹⁰⁷ In *Vimukti*, Daṃṣṭrī declares, "The lord plays chess."¹⁰⁸ In the autocommentary for *Vimukti*, Raghavan explains that one is to understand here the concept of *līlā* or the divine play of God, thus incorporating a Bengali Vaiṣṇava perspective of the *Rāsalīlā*. At the end of the autocommentary, he gives a second set of "final" verses wherein he describes the whole world as a stage and the supreme lord as a stage director and spectator that makes us engage in different roles: "The sutradhāra [director of the play] is the lord of the world (Śiva) who is the witness and makes us engage in different roles. May the supreme lord be pleased by

¹⁰⁷ Raghavan, *Anārkālī*, 9, "devo mayā kandukeneva tattatkurvan krīḍati."

¹⁰⁸ Raghavan, *Vimukti*, 154, "caturāṅgaṃ svāminā krīḍyate."

our roles.”¹⁰⁹ Certainly Raghavan knew of Shakespeare’s famous “all the world’s a stage” line from *As You Like It*, but here that notion operates as a full-blown theology.

In *Vimukti*, Raghavan has combined two *rasas*: *hāsya* for the lower level comedy and *śānta* (peacefulness) for the higher-level philosophical message. At the same time, *hāsya* itself becomes the symbol of this higher level of awareness. Comedy here is thus not a matter of secular pleasure but shifts up into the realm of the theological as a sign of liberation from the thirsts and wants of mundane material life. *Hāsya* becomes a sentiment not merely of derision but of pathos for the less spiritually advanced. However, the derisiveness of *hāsya* is not lost altogether, as the materiality from which liberation can be obtained is always painted as one of capitalist modernity and Western values. The opening verse and prologue’s complaints about the modern businessman and his ignorance and neglect of Indian culture imply the author’s rejection of Western culture and its capitalist mentality. Recalling that *Vimukti* was written in 1931 when young and idealistic Raghavan was associated closely with the Independence movement of the activist S. Satyamurthi, the play’s exhortation for liberation from materiality as defined by Western consumerism reads as a call for liberation that is not merely political. Also, considering that *Vimukti* was written a mere two years after the 1929 Wall Street stock market crash and ensuing global financial crisis, the play could be read, in a small way, as exhibiting anxiety about capitalism run amok. In place of capitalism and the materialist culture with which the colonists dominated the subcontinent, Raghavan’s play expresses a need to return to the spiritual, the supposed expertise of the Orient. He calls for an emancipation from nonreligion, an emancipation that leads to a comic vision shot through with Vedantic religious sentiment.

¹⁰⁹ Raghavan, *Vimukti tīkā*, xi.

*sūtradhāraśca sāksī ca yo jagannāṭyakautukī/
sa nāṭyayogairasmākaṃ prīyatām paramēśvaraḥ*

Despite this retreat into the spiritual, Raghavan’s comic vision does not involve a direct escape from life via renunciation or liberation from householder life or life itself (although those remain definite possibilities), but it does suggest an escape or liberation from the *delusion* that this life matters, from the interestedness of worldly action.¹¹⁰ Here Raghavan follows Vedanta ideas quite closely, seeing the physical world as a divine play of illusions, i.e. *māyā*. Raghavan’s comic vision is not only morally elitist but also philosophically elitist, for it is only the wise who have knowledge of this world’s illusoriness, who can see the divine comedy, and who can laugh at those who lack this higher perception. It is a religious sort of comedy, yes, but only for a specific group of adepts. The play’s final note suggests the possibility that the audience might also be able to understand this notion through viewing the play, but as usual perhaps Raghavan imagines a more advanced audience than it might be practical to expect.

Love in an Immortal Language

The philosophical turn that Raghavan gives to comedy parallels his reading of the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra*) as also having religious significance. In the classic texts of *śṛṅgāra*, love is utterly this-worldly. Its underlying stable emotion (*sthāyibhāva*) is *rati*, pleasure. In some instances there is love between divine beings (e.g. Kālidāsa’s poem *Kumārasambhava*) or divine beings and humans (as in Kālidāsa’s drama *Vikramorvaśīya*), but it is not the worshipful love that later becomes typical of *bhakti* poetry. Furthermore, love in Sanskrit literature has always

¹¹⁰ One might compare Raghavan’s comic vision to that which Bill Whedbee sees in the Bible. According to Whedbee, the Bible’s comic view is ultimately one that results in a celebration and affirmation of life despite setbacks, and has a tendency to “muddle through to a happier end.” Raghavan’s comic vision follows Vedanta and thus insists upon an escape or liberation from the *delusion* that this life matters, from the interestedness of worldly action. Further, Raghavan’s comedy is not only morally but also philosophically elitist, predicated on adepts who can see the comedy of the world, rather than a Biblical sense of the “comic” imparts a sense of celebrating the world. See J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

had a healthy element of the erotic, particularly in its illustrations of the beauty of women and descriptions of lovemaking. Most of this literature is court literature written for the enjoyment of the king and court, and thus fits squarely within the *laukika*, or secular realm of Sanskrit literature. This is to some extent the case in Kālidāsa's works, despite their undeniable religious dimensions, and later classical Sanskrit love-poetry often centered around the *nagāraka*, a man-about-town playboy of sorts.¹¹¹ Sushil Kumar De, a noted scholar of Sanskrit who was a contemporary of Raghavan's, notes that Sanskrit love poetry, while not "sicklied over with the subtleties of decadent psychologies or with the subjective malady of modern love-poets," nevertheless is not "troubled with a deep philosophy...or rising into mystic spirituality" nor does it "talk about ideals and gates of heaven but walks on the earth and speaks of the insatiable hunger of the body and the exquisite intoxication of the senses."¹¹² To an extent, De is arguing against the Orientalist supposition that South Asian thought is overly philosophical and mystical.

Raghavan's project of sanitizing Sanskrit for modern culture, however, requires borrowing that very notion, even if he would rail against the Orientalist perception that South Asian thought is other-worldly. Raghavan, as noted, regards literature as serving a higher purpose, and thus he reads a religious and moral dimension in this courtly literature of love, particularly in the works of Kālidāsa. To Raghavan's credit, Kālidāsa does describe the exploits of deities, and his *maṅgala* and *nāndī* verses do praise the deities. Furthermore, the classic *Abhijñāna-Śakuntalā* manages to skip over an all-important implied sex scene in the forest. But Raghavan is quite unique in interpreting the notions of "love" in Kālidāsa's literature as indicative of religious beliefs. The descriptions of love in Raghavan's plays themselves, I will

¹¹¹ See Sushil Kumar De, *Treatment of Love in Sanskrit Literature*, (New: Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 1983 [First ed. 1929]), 17.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

contend, follow quite closely his assessment of the spiritual dimension of love in Kālidāsa's plays. In general, Raghavan's redescription of romantic relations in his scholarship fall under two main categories: the first calls for a nonsexual form of love, while the second is concerned with the proper behavior of women.

Asexual Sanskrit

Raghavan's advocacy for avoiding sexuality is by no means novel. The dichotomy between the erotic life of the householder and the non-erotic life of the religious ascetic has a lengthy history in South Asian thought. In Tamil and Telugu Brahmin wedding ceremonies, a segment called Kāśi Yātrā enacts this anxious opposition: the groom dresses as a mendicant and threatens to pursue studies in Benares until the bride's family intercedes and offers him their daughter.¹¹³ In recent history, India has seen a considerable departure from the erotic in favor of, if not outright celibacy as in the case of Gandhi, at least a harnessing of sexuality. To some degree, Hindus during the nineteenth-century Hindu Renaissance (mostly in Bengal) responded to the prudish British colonial gaze with attempts at the reformation and spiritualization of the religion, and eroticism was swept under the rug. Another narrative suggests that Muslims killed off this erotic literature as well. Yet as Wendy Doniger notes, these narratives of British and Muslim anti-eroticism ignore a great deal of historical material, not least of which is Hinduism's own inbuilt traditions of prudery.¹¹⁴

In the early twentieth century in Tamil Nadu, the anti-sexual perspectives of the Victorian British colonizers, and Indian elites as well, maintained a divisive debate over sexuality in a protracted controversy over devādasīs, the temple prostitutes and dancers. British government

¹¹³ This practice nicely matches Arnold van Gennep's interpretation of rites of passage.

¹¹⁴ See Wendy Doniger, "From Kāma to Karma: The Resurgence of Puritanism in Contemporary India," in *On Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013), 405.

officials as well as many indigenous leaders sought to outlaw the devādasīs on account of their reputed sexual practices. They succeeded, officially, in 1947 with the Anti-Nautch Bill. Yet devādasīs were also the famed practitioners of Bharatanāṭyam, a dance form that Raghavan extensively and assiduously researched and promoted, and he weighed in on this controversy prior to the enactment of the law banning temple practices involving devādasīs and the practice of giving girls to the temple to become devādasīs. It is not surprising that Raghavan defended the devādasīs, considering his interest in Bharatanāṭyam, although it is also notable that he defended them without condoning prostitution. In a vehement article published under a pseudonym¹¹⁵ in the local film and arts magazine *Sound and Shadow* in 1933, he argues with regret that fifty years of anti-devādasī efforts have effectively killed the art of Bharatanāṭyam in many places. Further, he finds the accusations against them unfounded: “The charge of promiscuous sexual life itself is not proved by the actual facts obtaining in the community which is not lacking in examples of single-hearted devotion to single lovers, as can be seen by the evidence of life and literature.”¹¹⁶ In short, the evidence is insufficient to convict these women who practiced, according to him, an authentic art form. Rather just the opposite is the case, and even, somehow, their literature reveals monogamous behavior, though Raghavan does not cite evidence to that effect. Additionally, as he notes a month later in the same magazine, the dance is not limited to sexuality: “Some critics are so ignorant as to say Nayta means vulgar Sringara, or that the sentiment of sexual love alone can be portrayed by this art.” In contrast, he suggests that even patriotic notions can be rendered by the *abhinaya* (hand gestures that form the basis of

¹¹⁵ I have not ascertained why he wrote under a pseudonym. After a glance through a few old issues of this magazine, it appears that many of the authors wrote under pseudonyms. In later issues, they printed Raghavan’s pseudonyms followed by his actual name.

¹¹⁶ Bhava Raga Tala (pseudonym for V. Raghavan), “Bharata Natya-Classic Indian Dance, The South Indian Sadir-Nautch, The Recent Controversy over the Art,” in *Sound and Shadow* (June 1933): 56.

Bharatanāṭyam).¹¹⁷ But the notion that “vulgar sringara” might be a possible interpretation gives credence to the notion that Raghavan sought a nonvulgar *śṛṅgāra* in his works.

Raghavan’s main goal is to maintain and save this dance tradition from extinction. Thus he notes that those practicing prostitution represent a mere fraction of devādasīs, and that in general, it is a community in which women can “devote themselves wholesale to fine arts.” This is a rather rosy picture, and he seems to ignore the problem of who might patronize these arts. Money has to come from somewhere.¹¹⁸ Further, he finds no solution to the problem, but rather suggests that devādasīs be permitted to do as they please since they are the only hope of maintaining the Bharatanāṭyam tradition: “But the question fundamentally resolves itself into one of art versus morals, and twenty centuries of the Christian era and many more of this old world have not solved the problem. We must not demolish one community and in its place sow seeds for the gradual growth of a similar community of persons who, to adopt a Sanskrit saying, are lost both ways...for as is wellknown (*sic*), and human nature being what it is, it is impractical and extremely unreal to talk of family women developing into the future repositories of Bharata Natya.” Thus, the art of Bharatanāṭyam had to be the responsibility of married women who were not chained to the need for chastity and housework. Those married women, upholders of good Brahmin homes, he felt, could adopt and maintain some of the folk arts rather than Bharatanāṭyam *not* because of the issue of sensuality but merely because Bharatanāṭyam required more time for training.

As he goes on to note, the reformation that goes by the name of renaissance in this instance threatens to undermine an important art form, and as we have seen, Raghavan is always

¹¹⁷ Bhava Raga Tala, “Bharata Natya,” 61.

¹¹⁸ The reader might recall the discussion of Raghavan’s play *Punarunmeṣa* from chapter 2 in which Raghavan as a character in his own play offers to pay to found a school for teaching dance so as to prevent a young *devādasī* from being exploited by her mother.

ready to defend the arts in India, apparently even at the cost of allowing some sensuality. But this “live and let live” attitude of Raghavan’s appears to apply only to these female dancers. For family women, such extreme sensuality is forbidden, and anyway, family women, according to him, lack the time to master Bharatanāṭyam. He could take this stance precisely because the women in the home he imagined were Brahmins, and the devādasīs were a separate caste not beholden to those moral laws. It should be noted, however, that Raghavan seems to have had a change of heart about Brahmin girls studying Bharatanāṭyam in later years, since both of Raghavan’s daughters studied dance with the great devādasī artist T. Balasaraswati. But as his daughter, Nandini, said to me in an interview, they had to be married off somewhat quickly after college because there was some trepidation that their association with this devādasī might cause concern among potential suitors.

Instead of possible promiscuity among devādasīs, according to Raghavan there was a more serious threat to morality: Western movies. As he writes in the same article in response to accusations of the immorality of rich men organizing dance recitals with courtesans during marriage festivities: “But how is it better when a modernly married metropolitan couple repair to the cinema or talkie house and celebrate their marriage by seeing American nature-clad stars, in shows punctuated with osculations, acting scandalous stories.”¹¹⁹ Thus the real affront to moral decency is American movies, not Bharatanāṭyam practitioners. The West, for Raghavan, does not gaze upon India with a dismissive prudish gaze, but the reverse: he looks back to the West with an equal contempt for its sexuality. Sanskrit dramas, for him, provide a much more refined image of love, and it is this image that he attempts to resuscitate from the works of Kālidāsa and exhibit in his own dramas. Somehow, Raghavan wants to maintain the *devādasī* tradition, yet purge

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

them of all culpability for any eroticism to sanitize them for a modern public. Indeed, I argue that he wished to do the same in his interpretations of classical Sanskrit literature and in his depictions of love in his own plays.

We already saw a hint of Raghavan's distaste for free and open sexuality in *Vimukti*. The play's early wordplay about the son watching the bathing woman points to a deeper concern about open sexuality. It is the same son who later offers to help the family's financial situation by working as a curtain-puller in a movie theater, where Raghavan seems to have felt there to be a risk of unseemly leering. Further, when Daṃṣṭrī arrests Ātmanātha's sons, one transgression they are accused of is shamelessly hugging and kissing in the street. The eldest son/the mind replies that, "Among civilized people, kisses and such are merely a way of offering welcome, but you do not know this. And because you are very lustful, you see lust everywhere."¹²⁰ Implying, however, a need to keep up propriety, Daṃṣṭrī asks, "If you do this stuff in the street, what remains to be done inside?"¹²¹ The "civilized people" in the eldest son's defense refers to Europeans who kiss cheeks as a greeting. In the play, however, Raghavan seems to mock the idea that such behavior is "civilized," or at least that the Europeans have cornered the market of being "civilized." Instead, he stresses the necessity of keeping sexuality behind closed doors. This prudery is merely a subtle strain in the text, but it does resonate with Raghavan's concern about lustful materiality and Western customs.

This appeal for asexual *śṛṅgāra* appears prominently in Raghavan's reading of Kālidāsa, and there it symbolizes a purified or reformed version of love that is higher and more spiritual. For example, the famous *Meghadhūta* or *Meghasandeśa* (Cloud Messenger) poem, which most

¹²⁰ Raghavan, *Vimukti*, 153. "cumbanādi kevalasvāgatādisamudācāramātramiti nāgarikatām ajānatastavaiva sarvatra kāmameva utprekṣamāṇasya kāmukatā mahatī."

¹²¹ Ibid. "yadi raththāyāmeva etāvat, kimavaśiṣyate ābhyantarāya?"

scholars read as a portrayal of the theme of “love in separation,” (*viyoga* or *vipralambha*) Raghavan instead reads as a testament to a higher order of mutual love and in praise of suffering. Referring to the two lovers, he asserts: “Separation has made them more precious to each other and steadied and rendered firmer the foundations of their mutual attachment.”¹²² Such a reading owes more than just a little to the newfound importance of conjugality in twentieth-century moral thought regarding marriage in India. It also feels rather alien to the text wherein the main character’s pining for his lover leads him to the extremes of asking a cloud to send her a message. We feel pity (*karuṇā rasa*) for this separated lover, and not judgment for his insanity. Further, Raghavan declares the text to be particularly chaste and non-carnal due to the absence of descriptions of the woman’s beauty. Certainly the text does not say much about her appearance, but Kālidāsa clearly implies the lover’s desire to return to her bed, making Raghavan’s interpretation look very much like an attempt at whitewashing.

Judgment about the insanity of this lover in the *Meghadhūta* (an unnamed *yakṣa*, a semi-divine being associated with the god Kubera), is the main theme of a very short playlet of Raghavan’s entitled *Āṣāḍhasya Prathama Divase* (“On the First Day of [the month of] Āṣāḍha [June-July]”).¹²³ The play, which Raghavan wrote for performance on AIR, imaginatively portrays the meeting of the forlorn *yakṣa* with Kālidāsa himself. In Raghavan’s reading, the *yakṣa*’s judgment is shown to be impaired, and the character of Kālidāsa is quite condescending to and critical of this figure who is the narrator of Kālidāsa’s most famous poem. Raghavan reads Kālidāsa’s account of the pining of the *yakṣa* as a sarcastic critique of the madness of unevolved and materialistic love. The play thus gives this famous poem a back-story by working in some of the first lines of the poem in the dialogue, as if Raghavan tried to infer a plot from the first few

¹²² Raghavan, *Love*, 8.

¹²³ V. Raghavan, “*Āṣāḍhasya Prathama Divase*,” *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*, Vol. II (1961): 57-59.

verses of Kālidāsa's poem. It is humorous, too, as the poet finds everything aesthetically pleasing, such as the coming of the rains, while the *yakṣa* at first sees the cloud only as a sign of further suffering before suddenly thinking of it as granting him an opportunity to send a message to his beloved. In Raghavan's use of verse 5, on which the short play ends, the implication is that Kālidāsa is trenchantly criticizing the poor *yakṣa*'s belief that a cloud, made of mist and light, water and wind, can bear messages. Like Borges's Pierre Menard story, the same poem on love-in-separation, recycled in Raghavan's twentieth-century dramatic form, can be interpreted as a criticism of unchecked sensual love.

The Purification of Kāma

Raghavan's interpretation of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* is based on the notion that love ought to be asexual, and a footnote in the published version of his lectures on love in Kālidāsa's works specifically mentions his own play *Kāmaśuddhi* as expressing the "inner meaning of the *Kumārasambhava*."¹²⁴ I will turn to that play in a moment after noting that Raghavan's scholastic interpretation of the *Kumārasambhava* not only ignores the sexually explicit eighth canto, but focuses almost entirely on a small but famous scene: the burning of the god Kāma. At the end of the third canto of the *Kumārasambhava*, when Kāma hubristically attempts to shoot Śiva with one of his arrows, the meditating Śiva burns him to ashes. The widowed wife of Kāma, Rati, laments bitterly until a voice from the sky tells her that this is the result of a curse the god Brahmā uttered when Kāma made Brahmā lustful for his own daughter, Sarasvatī. Raghavan, however, interprets this small verse (*Kumārasambhava* 4.41) far beyond a mere curse. For Raghavan, Kāma's misdeed made him "the enemy of Dharma and Artha, and of

¹²⁴ Raghavan, *Love*, 34fn.

chastity,” and therefore, “Such a Kāma deserved to be burnt.”¹²⁵ The original merely states that Kāma was cursed by an angry Brahmā, and not that this curse was a moral assessment. Śiva eventually revives Kāma, but without a body (*anaṅga*). Raghavan reads this new Kāma as “non-physical, spiritual, sublime.”¹²⁶ It is this spiritual love that Raghavan extols. It is a far cry from the physical notions one might typically association with the *śṛṅgāra* rasa in Sanskrit poetry. This spiritual version of love is the theme of Raghavan’s own short drama based on this scene: *Kāmaśuddhi*, “The Purification of Kama.”¹²⁷

Raghavan’s retelling hinges upon one word in *Kumārasambhava*: apprehension (*sāśaṅkam*). In the original, Indra asks Kāma to shoot his arrow at Śiva to make him fall in love with Pārvatī, a task which he accepts. He proceeds to the Himālayas along with Madhu (spring) and Rati, who is described as following along with apprehension (*sāśaṅkam*). Raghavan extrapolates from this word the meaning that Rati disapproves of Kāma’s quest.¹²⁸ Given the frequency with which characters in Sanskrit texts manage to sense their impending peril, Rati’s apprehension could be her fear that her husband might face some difficulty in pursuing someone like Śiva. It is possible that she knew of Brahmā’s curse. Raghavan, however, spins this one word into a moral story in which Rati’s apprehension is the result of her concern for Kāma’s actions as being adharmic (not according to *dharma*). He makes pre-incineration Kāma out to be a miscreant in need of being taught a lesson and made asexual.

In Raghavan’s play, Rati does not think that Kāma should go through with this new quest, and tells him in no uncertain terms that he is misguided. As the action proceeds, Kāma goes on

¹²⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 34. The footnote referring to his own play, *Kāmaśuddhi*, comes after these words in the body of the text.

¹²⁷ V. Raghavan, *Kāmaśuddhi nāma ekāṅkarūpakam* (Bangalore: Amṛtavāṇyam, 1946). While many of the plays in this dissertation were written in 1931, they were not published until later. This is the earliest of Raghavan’s published plays.

¹²⁸ Raghavan, *Love*, 28-29.

alone, without Rati who stays behind and performs significant *tapas* (ascetic withdrawal), rather than follow along with apprehension. Her *tapas* is strong enough that it disturbs Śiva, who is in a deep ascetic state that prompts the gods to request Kāma's intercession in order for Śiva to wed Pārvatī (who is also in her own meditative state trying to win over Śiva). Śiva approaches Rati, learns of her situation, and grants her a boon that he will burn and thereby purify Kāma (hence the title of the play). Rati, rather than lamenting or being apprehensive about this possibility of her husband losing his body, is in fact joyful and relieved, since now she will be properly married to a dharmic husband.

An early exchange between Rati and Kāma nicely portrays what is at stake in the play.

Kāma has just found Rati in an angry state, yet happily announces his assignment:¹²⁹

Rati (covering her ears): Alas, alas! Enough with these famous deeds. They are not deeds, they are scandals.¹³⁰

Kāma: How is it that you, a lawful (dharmic) wife and a good woman (*satī*) revile me thus?¹³¹

Rati (in verse): If a husband does not know the difference between dharma and adharma and has taken the wrong road, his wife ought to instruct him.

Kāma: Ah, what?¹³²

Rati: (Flurried) Yes. Can someone do something more than this? Start whatever cruel sin now, because of whomever. You excited the senses and made Prajāpati covet his own daughter. You, arrogant person, incessantly afflict *artha* and *dharma* like the flow of a river on its banks. You turn faithful wives, in the habit of taking vows, into harlots.¹³³

There is some word play here in the first line that sets the scene: deeds are *apadāna*, and Rati contrasts them with scandals, *apavāda*, thus humorously heightening the sense of conflict and

¹²⁹ Raghavan, *Kāmaśuddhi*, 3. There is a slight oddity in the text here just before the exchange. Kāma says that he has promised Indra (Devendra) that he will make Viśvāmitra fall in love with Rambhā, which is a similar story of trying to get an ascetic to stop his asceticism and fall in love, but not the *same* story. Perhaps there is an implication in the text that Kāma will do something *like* what he did then, but the simile is not explicit.

¹³⁰ Ibid., "...avihā avihā. alamevairapadānakīrtanaiḥ. naitānyapadānāni, kintvapavādā eva. aho kiyatīm nāma lajjām nāvahantyetāni te manmathaḥ, darpakaḥ, madanaḥ iti duṣṭāni nāmāni."

¹³¹ Ibid. "kathaṃ mama dharmapatnī satyapī tvam māmevamavamanuṣe?"

¹³² Ibid. "āḥ kim?"

¹³³ Ibid. "ām. kimito 'pi dāruṇaṃ pāpam āramyatām kenāpi, yad bhavān udīritendriyaṃ prajāpatim svasutāyāmbhilāṣavantamakarot. aryadharmau ca sindhostaṣṭāvogha iva pravṛddhaḥ pīdayati anavaratam. ekapatnīvrataśīlāḥ puṃścalīkurute."

the characters' differing perceptions. Rati's verse is particularly telling, as a well-informed audience might recognize it as a rewriting of the famous verse-turned-proverb from the *Mahābhārata*: "If a guru does not know the difference between good and bad actions and takes the wrong road, he ought to be abandoned" (*Udyoga Parvan* 179.25).¹³⁴ Raghavan has changed the subject from a guru to a husband, and placed the good wife in the role of the teacher. He has also changed the second verb from "abandoned" to "instructed"; thus instead of "a guru should be abandoned," he suggests something more germane to mundane householder life: that the wife ought to instruct the husband. He also changes the focus from ritual action to lawful order, from *kārya* to *dharma*. Kāma's actions are betrayals not of ritual actions, or kingly actions, but of the proper order of things: men are not supposed to sleep with their daughters, sages are not supposed to be seduced by nymphs, and Śiva ought to be left alone to pursue his asceticism and not be disturbed by thoughts of love and sex. This change of focus from the original also shifts morality from the ritual sphere to the world of dharma and, by extension, a more modern inward moral universe that, while precedented in Sanskrit intellectual history, corresponds to the valorization of spirituality and the mystic soul in colonial and postcolonial Indian thought.¹³⁵

As the couple continues to bicker, Rati reminds Kāma that he cannot cause actual joy or pleasure without her, that he is just some "infatuation" or "sickness," and that not for nothing is he called "Death" (*mara*, a word for death, but also a synonym for Kāma).¹³⁶ She goes so far as to declare Kāma not a god but a demon (*rākṣas*): "I will be faithful to my husband when the demon becomes a god."¹³⁷ So saying, and dismissing Madhu's attempts to assuage her anger, she

¹³⁴ Altered words between this verse and the original in the *Mahābhārata* are underlined. In the original: *guroṛapyavalīptasya kāryākāryam ajānataḥ/utpathaṃ pratipannasya parityāgo vidhīyate*. Raghavan's version: *bharturapyavalīptasya dharmādharmaajānataḥ/utpathaṃ pratipannasya bhāryā bhavati śāsikā*.

¹³⁵ See Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*; and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (esp. Chap. 6).

¹³⁶ Ibid. "tvamadya ko 'pi unmādo vyādhirvā janānām...tata eve manye tvamapi māra iti prathase lokeṣu."

¹³⁷ Ibid., 4. "ahamanuvratā bhaviṣyāmi me bhartuḥ, yadā sa rakṣaḥ devo bhavitā."

insists on engaging in meditation so strong that it disturbs Śiva's own meditation. Rati, pleasure, thus becomes her opposite, asceticism, and contrasts with the immorality and sexual deviancy of her husband, Kāma, the god of love. In swinging Rati so far away from her usual role in the erotic, Raghavan essentially whitewashes her true nature so that nowhere in the play does she appear as what her name actually means.

In the play, Rati has two servants who are Raghavan's own invention: Arthasakhī and Dharmasaṃvardhanī, whose names mean, respectively, "friend of wealth," and "enhancer of duty." The servants on the one hand represent the importance of pleasure for fulfilling one's duty (namely women's duties to their husbands) and earning money, but they also represent the need for pleasure to be kept in check by the force of *dharma* and *artha*, as Raghavan discusses in various places. *Dharma* and *artha* are fully compatible with wealth and part of the householder system, but *mokṣa* (liberation), which is represented by Rati's unusual ascetic practice, is antithetical to such mundane endeavors. Thus the two maids announce that wives throughout the world have turned from their husbands and become interested in vows, and that even prostitutes have no interest in men and their money. With Rati in meditation, there is no more lovemaking but rather an interest in spiritual development. In defiance of her maids, and therefore in defiance of mundane necessities of life, Rati perseveres in her meditation.¹³⁸

Śiva, finally moved by this upstart challenger in austerities, arrives at Rati's place of meditation and observes that she is "doing atonement for the sins of her ill-mannered husband."¹³⁹ Rati expresses her predicament, which she describes as a "battle of dharma,"¹⁴⁰ in a *śloka* verse: "Should I seek to abandon my husband living in *adharma*, or fall into sin myself by

¹³⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 6, "*durlalitasya bhartuḥ pāpānāṃ svayameṣā bhāryā prāyaścittaṃ kurute.*"

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 7, "*dharmasaṃmoha.*"

assisting him?”¹⁴¹ In his reply, Śiva urges that, “A good wife should rein in a husband who is running unbridled by following him and offering conciliation and other remedies.” Rati feels that her husband is not just ignoble, but unbrahmanical, and describes him as an ingot but not real gold and in desperate need of polishing up. Śiva remarks that Kāma’s misdeeds are nothing yet, that a person’s sin is only destroyed once it hits rock bottom, and thus if Kāma attacks him, such a feat would surely spell the erotic god’s doom. By burning him, Śiva will purify him and turn him into a “worthy husband.”¹⁴² He declares that Kāma and Rati will then have children named Peace and Contentment (Śama and Tuṣṭi), who are also Raghavan’s inventions.¹⁴³ These characters do not seem like the children one would expect of the tutelary deities of erotic *śṛṅgāra* (except in a post-coital sense that I do not think Raghavan implies); they are much closer to what one might expect from lords of the quiescent *śānta-rasa*. In this play, then, Raghavan conveys the idea, in keeping with his discussions on love in Kālidāsa’s works, that the ideal result of *śṛṅgāra* should not only be union but also children, and it is through the child that the sublime and mystical state of love is best achieved. Śiva declares that, “Impure Kāma is one of the four aims of man. Pure Kāma who is bodiless, however, is itself alone the highest aim of man.”¹⁴⁴ In short, this Kāma proffers *mokṣa*, liberation. If there has been a shift from *kāma* to *karma* in Indian moral thought during the colonial period, as Doniger notes, Raghavan’s play requests an additional shift from *kāma* to *mokṣa*, from erotic love to nonphysical love that is outwardly dharmic and inwardly spiritual and liberatory.

A female deity is not always the one who takes the moral high ground in Raghavan’s plays. His short play entitled “*Lakṣmī Svayaṃvara*” is about the myth of the churning of the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., “*adharme vartamānasya bhartustyāgaḥ kimiṣyatām/ utaitatsāhacaryeṇa pāpa eva nipatyatām/!*”

¹⁴² Ibid., “*anurūpo bartā.*”

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 8, “*aśuddha eva kāmaḥ pumarthāntarāṅgamaṅgam. śuddhaḥ punaḥ anaṅga svayameva paramapuruṣārthaḥ.*”

ocean and Lakṣmī's marriage to Viṣṇu. After her marriage, Lakṣmī notices the Kaustubha gem on her husband's chest, a gem that was churned out of the ocean just as she was. She remarks as an aside that it is lucky he obtained it so that it could serve as a mirror for her to see her own beauty. She then observes, "I think there is no one more fortunate than me."¹⁴⁵ Having overheard that last remark, Viṣṇu comments, also as an aside, "The mind of the goddess has been touched slightly by pride,"¹⁴⁶ and thus resolves to teach her a lesson by turning himself into Mohinī, a female form as beautiful as Lakṣmī, by which disguise he deceives the demons and obtains the ambrosia from them. Thus Raghavan sneaks into this famous story a moral warning for women to be humble. There is also an implied philosophical dimension here: beauty is illusory if Viṣṇu can suddenly become as beautiful as Lakṣmī. Viṣṇu chides her that she ought not to be bashful, that he knows of her devotion to him, and that she is identical with him as light is with the sun. In this last part, we have again the image of a conjugal pair, although Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī here replace the more typical image of Śiva and Pārvatī. Further, it is devotion that matters most to Viṣṇu, and Lakṣmī's beauty is secondary since it is illusory. The play's message highlights the devotional aspect of a marriage as opposed to physical beauty, valorizing morality and a purified relationship modeled on the sacred image of the divine as opposed to mere material lustiness.

Another instance of a moral teachable moment occurs in Raghavan's short opera, *Rāsalīlā*.¹⁴⁷ In the last section I mentioned very briefly the humorous scene wherein Kṛṣṇa teaches an overly proud cowherdess (gopi) a lesson in humility by disappearing while she is in the midst of climbing on his shoulders. The play abounds in such instructive moments that show

¹⁴⁵ V. Raghavan, "Lakṣmī Svayaṃvara," *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*, Vol. 1 (1959): 9-16, 14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴⁷ V. Raghavan, "Rāsalīlā," *Sanskrita Ranga Annual* Vol. III (1963): 71-78. Published separately in book form. Citations are from the book version.

the gopis' lovelorn nature as ridiculous and less than sublime. For example, when the gopis express their pride at being the most fortunate on earth because of the attention they receive from Kṛṣṇa, the god suddenly disappears in order to quell their arrogance. The gopis become excessively distraught over his disappearance, and they start acting in ways that are less than sane (a love sickness similar to that of the *yakṣa* in the *Meghadūta*), such as speaking to trees, or mistaking the wind in bamboo for his flute. Noticing his footprints next to those of another gopi, the other jealous gopis follow the footprints only to find a gopi standing awkwardly on one foot. This image is actually Raghavan's invention and not found in the original *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* text, from which he reworks many verses verbatim, adding *rāgas* for musical performances of the drama. The gopi awkwardly standing on one foot had escaped with the god further into the forest, and feeling proud and entitled, she asked to be carried. Kṛṣṇa told her to climb on his shoulders, but he disappeared mid-mount.¹⁴⁸ Raghavan makes abundantly clear that the humorous image of the gopi is instructive both to the audience and to the other gopis. Kṛṣṇa reappears only after the narrator says: "Thus a fire of grief burned among those experiencing the pains of separation, their pride turned into ashes, and the mirror of their inner organ [mind] became spotless."¹⁴⁹ In short, they were cured of their evil ways, and this was a necessary condition of their reuniting in bhakti with their lord. Their love becomes something that is not jealous or self-centered. It becomes pure love, a form of devotion. The traditional Rasa Lila depicts the devotion of the gopis for the god Kṛṣṇa, and while it is an expression of *bhakti-rasa*, its *sthāyibhāva* (or stable underlying emotion) is Rati (pleasure), so that it does have an undertone of love. But Raghavan's portrayal amplifies these moments of instruction and humility so much that the ultimate lesson imparted in his version is that Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.

gopis is spiritual and not sexual. He converts their misguided *śṛṅgāra rasa* into *bhakti rasa* and adds to it a dimension of *dharma*.

In all three plays just mentioned, *Kāmaśuddhi*, *Lakṣmī Svayaṃvara*, and *Rāsalīlā*, love and the pride that can accompany it are purified through divine intervention. In each case, a deity (Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Kṛṣṇa, respectively) intercedes to rid the hapless lovers of their arrogance and sensuality and to convert love into a higher order of religiosity and moral discipline. Taken together with Raghavan's interpretation of Kālidāsa's metanarrative of love as the gradual ascent of love to a higher order, the continuity of interpretation should be quite apparent. Through increasing religiosity, morality, and culture one sheds any and all materialism in the nature of love and achieve the ultimate love. This idea of immaterial spiritual love further underlies Raghavan's criticism of Euro-American morality and modernity as antithetical to *dharma* and the goal of seeking liberation from *prakṛti*. In trying to escape modern mores, these plays express a desire to escape into a world of orthodox values, to be liberated from modernity in order to return to an imagined pre-colonial world of pure and spiritual goodness that never existed.

The Conjugation of the Feminine

Raghavan's reworking of the *Mahābhārata* verse in *Kāmaśuddhi* raises another issue about romantic love that informs his plays' moral ideology: the proper relationship between husband and wife. Raghavan's version of the verse suggests that Rati must serve as the teacher to her unruly husband. In *Lakṣmī Svayaṃvara* we saw that Viṣṇu had to keep *Lakṣmī*'s pride in check. Certainly Sanskrit sources have long discussed the ideal relationship between husband and wife, and Hindu culture has been predominantly patriarchal. Yet in Raghavan's work there is an emphasis on the ideal of the conjugal pair that is somewhat novel in the tradition reflecting

changing values in the society. This focus on the married pair resonates with social changes in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu that emphasized the importance of the conjugal marriage ideal in contrast to the joint family ideal that had previously prevailed in Tamil society. Instead of a wife coming into the husband's family and serving as a member of that larger household, the husband-wife pair was becoming the central object of importance in Tamil society.¹⁵⁰ Marriage itself was a subject of much controversy among Brahmins at this time, too, as attempts were made to outlaw child marriage, which had previously been widespread.¹⁵¹ Additionally, there was much anxiety throughout twentieth-century India about the role that women might have in modern society. Dubbed "the woman question," the concern was over the place of women in public life when they had previously been confined to the private sphere of the home. Raghavan's response, at least in his scholarship and plays, appears to be mixed. He advocated the ideal of the conjugal pair, and at times seemed to maintain the ideal of the private woman in the home. We saw in the previous chapter's discussion of heroines that he did support female scholars and even staged an all-female production of a Sanskrit play. But his plays and scholarship express a certain ambivalence.

As for the ideal of the conjugal pair, it comes out most plainly in his reading of love in the plays of Kālidāsa. In the courtly world of the Gupta era in which Kālidāsa wrote (and in later courts as well), a king was expected to have many wives, and while there would be conflict between the wives and the king, the plays make sure it all works out in the end. After all, they were written for the enjoyment of the king who was the patron of the playwright. But Raghavan sees in the plays a celebration of the vicissitudes of love in addition to a moral message about the

¹⁵⁰ For an in depth study on this matter, see Mytehli Sreenivas, *Wives, Widows, and Concubines: The Conjugal Family Ideal in Colonial India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, I have no data on Raghavan's opinion of this legislation.

importance of achieving the highest love with a single woman, even if she must supplant earlier queens. He writes that “polygamy was the prevailing custom, though the high ideal of devotion to a single wife, *Ekapatnī-vrata*, as in the case of Rāma, was held in high esteem.”¹⁵² No further evidence is provided for this notion. Raghavan continues to claim that this highest ideal of the two-person conjugal relationship needs to pass through the difficulties of past wives for the king to obtain his highest potential match. Polygamy becomes a matter of personal growth for the king: “It is through this multiplicity of women that the impediments to the course of love, which are necessary not only to develop the plot, but to refine and stabilize love itself, are worked out by the poet (Kālidāsa) in his plays.”¹⁵³ Thus Raghavan rationalizes polygamy as a matter not of kingly prerogative and sexuality, but of a king’s spiritual development.

The epitome of love according to Raghavan is *Abhijñānaśākuntala*. In his exegesis, the key philosophical moment is in the denouement of the play when King Duṣyanta finally reunites with Śakuntalā through the mediation of their son.¹⁵⁴ It is this final union through the son that Raghavan calls a “spiritual welding”¹⁵⁵ with love ultimately symbolized in the image of the child. This tripartite unity of lovers and child is what Raghavan deems the true essence of love. In his essay, Raghavan finds this notion to be the primary message of Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava*, and he also notes it in various other Sanskrit works, in Schopenhauer’s theory of the will, and even in Shakespeare’s sonnets.¹⁵⁶ He summarizes his theory of love thus: “It is this advaita, the two becoming one that is symbolized on the one hand by the idea of the child and on the other by

¹⁵² Raghavan, *Love*, 35.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ To recount the plot in brief, Duṣyanta gives Śakuntalā a ring by which she might be recognized when she comes back to meet him in the capital after their forest tryst. Śakuntalā is cursed to not be recognized by her lover and loses the ring, and is then rebuffed by Duṣyanta. However, after Duṣyanta regains his memory (the ring is found in a fish), and comes to the heavenly hermitage where Śakuntalā and his son, Bharata, are staying, the king is recognized as the boy’s father since he is able to pick up the talisman bracelet that the boy dropped.

¹⁵⁵ Raghavan, *Love*, 62.

¹⁵⁶ Raghavan quotes the Shakespearean sonnet: “From fairest creatures we desire increase/ That thereby beauty’s rose might never die, /But as the riper should by time decrease/ His tender heir might bear his memory.”

that of Śiva and Pārvatī...becoming the one united image of Ardhanārīśvara.”¹⁵⁷ This last bit is odd, since he would be on firmer ground if he referred to the Somaskanda image of Śiva, Pārvatī, and Kumāra (alias, Skanda, their son), but perhaps he is more taken by the idea of Śiva and Pārvatī’s physical union in the Ardhanārīśvara image which more closely represents a “spiritual welding,” albeit minus the child. He makes this image out to be the model for conjugal marriage in society and the world, writing of the union of Śiva and Pārvatī in Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava*, “in the image of whose love should all love on earth be modelled (*sic*).”¹⁵⁸ The most intriguing aspect of Raghavan’s philosophy of love is the emphasis on nonduality, advaita. He makes Kālidāsa out to be an Advaita Vedanta philosopher of love, converting love from the erotic into an emotional representation of the fundamental idea of the unity of self and universe, *ātman* and *brahman*. He further extends this philosophy of love into an ethics, as if basing dharma on Advaita.

Raghavan’s discussions of morality in Kālidāsa’s works give prominence to women’s morality, and he praises the tendency for chief queens (Dhārinī in *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Auśinārī in *Vikramorvaśīya*) to grant permission to their husbands to marry their true loves. If we extend the implications of Raghavan’s interpretation of love, women who permit this process become the handmaidens of increased spiritual unity. In the previous chapter, I discussed how intellectuals in twentieth-century India regarded women as upholders and symbols of morality, culture, and tradition.¹⁵⁹ Here I want to suggest that this recasting of the image of the feminine was also part and parcel of the expansion of secularist ideas from Europe. Women in India were already confined to the house, or even the most private quarters within the house (this depended on the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26. Again, he does not mention their overt sexuality, focusing on the transcendent fact of their union rather than the immanent and active practice of their copulation.

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 116-134.

region in India, as well as the caste). Meanwhile the discourse of secularism demanded that religion and morality devolve upon the realm of the private. Since women were already identified with the private realm, it is not surprising that they would come to represent religiosity and morality.

Raghavan's *Vimukti* insists that women cannot uphold religion and morality if they are strident and independent – in other words, if they are too active in public. Trivarṇinī not only represents materiality in the play, she also functions in the public world. She frequently sidelines her husband in public discussions, claims to take charge of supporting the family, and interacts with random citizens and government operatives. When Damṣṭrī comes looking for Ātmanātha, Trivarṇinī intercedes, tells her husband to shut up, and informs Damṣṭrī that her husband is an ascetic incapable of dealing with business matters.¹⁶⁰ We are, I think, meant to laugh at this strident woman's chutzpah, and to judge it as a breach of women's morals, as an instance of women acting outside the realm of the private sphere. When Trivarṇinī suggests the option of divorce "as in the West,"¹⁶¹ Ātmanātha declines. For the philosophical allegory, this moment points to the importance of a "this-worldly" liberation that maintains the marriage bond. In terms of the ethical matters at stake, particularly within twentieth-century India, the incident signifies a rejection and mockery of "Western values," the idea of independent women, and the completely unacceptable notion of divorce in Orthodox Brahmin society.

Earlier in the play, while discussing the sorry state of their house, Ātmanātha remarks to his eldest son that it is because husbands do not listen to their wives that they experience

¹⁶⁰ Raghavan, *Vimukti*, 150.

¹⁶¹ Divorce is rendered as *vivāhatantvicchedaḥ*. The commentary (p. iii) glosses it with a direct transliteration of "divorce" into *devanāgarī* script: डिवोर्स, or "divorsa."

misfortune. The son concurs that there can be no mistake if one follows a clever wife, and it is the very nature of women to be more intelligent.¹⁶² Later in the conversation, the son mentions women's independence in praising tones,¹⁶³ to which Trivarṇinī adds that creation is dependent on us (women) alone,¹⁶⁴ and goes on to quote directly the first verse of Śaṅkara's *Saundaryalaharī*, which says that if Śiva is joined with Śakti (Śakti is the generalized female force), he can do anything, but he is powerless without her.¹⁶⁵ Certainly this line suggests that Raghavan had some respect for women's importance, and it is sure that he did, but the narrative arch of the play, the sidelining of Trivarṇinī in favor of Candrikā (who speaks just one word in the entire play), suggests a tension between women's independence and women's subservient roles in the home.

The notion of the supportive wife who allows her husband to take a second wife is certainly quite common in the history of Sanskrit drama. But given the context of twentieth-century India's increasing emphasis on the conjugal pair, these plays pose a problem. It is a problem that Raghavan solves by suggesting that each wife is somehow an improvement, part of a path towards a more perfect union. We will also see something of this notion exemplified in *Anārkalī* in the next chapter, and we have already seen Raghavan express this notion in *Vimukti*. But by frequently casting the wife in a supportive and passive role, Raghavan's plays also suggest a critique not just of Euro-American sexual freedoms but also of the Euro-American image of strong and public women.

When Trivarṇinī's overbearing nature ends due to Ātmanātha's curse, she declares that,

¹⁶² Raghavan, *Vimukti*, 144.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Raghavan renders women's independence in Sanskrit as “*strīsvārājya*.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., “*asmāsu adhīneyaṃ sṛṣṭireva*.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 145. *Saundaryalaharī* 1.1 “*śivaḥ śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum/ na cedevaṃ devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi/*”

“Only she who is noble and of pure habit is worthy to be the wife of my preeminent husband,”¹⁶⁶ and then she gives her consent for Ātmanātha to marry Candrikā. This demurring act leads the old man/god to declare that she has finally become gracious (*prasāda*), a good woman (*satī*), and chaste (*pātivratya*). The supreme lord declares that, “Even if adverse, virtuous women who are fond of their husbands serve them.”¹⁶⁷ Raghavan does not cite the verse, but it is rather appropriately the first line of the penultimate verse of *Mālavikāgnimitra* when the chief queen gives her consent to the king’s marriage to the danseuse and incognito princess Mālavikā.¹⁶⁸ In that play, it is a female ascetic who declares this moral lesson; in *Vimukti* it is god himself. Raghavan has thus turned a comment from a classical play into a lesson in morality and placed it in the mouth of the deity, reinforcing female subservience by turning a line of *kāvya* into a line of *dharmaśāstra*, thus echoing his call to unite those two types of Sanskrit texts. Liberation on this account is not merely from materiality to spirituality, but from bad wives to better wives, from wives whose dominance Raghavan intends as a humorous depiction of how wives ought *not* act, to wives who serve their husbands. The final realization in *Vimukti* is both a liberation from the material world of secular capitalism and a liberation from women who behave in ways that Indian women ought not to. It is a liberation to a profoundly “Indian” and “philosophical” way of regarding the world comically that also involves, on the plane of this world, a liberation to a better kind of love with good and true women.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 158, “*bharturme guṇātīśayasya saiva mahāsattvā svacchaśīlā bhāryā bhavitumarhati.*”

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 159, ““*pratikūlenāpi patiṃ sevante bhartṛvatsalāḥ sādvyah.*”

¹⁶⁸ Raghavan changes the first word: the original verse uses *pratipakṣa* as the first word, whereas Raghavan has *pratikūla*. The original word merely implies an opposition or rivalry, appropriate to the context of the play. Raghavan’s *pratikūla* means essentially the same, but has an added connotation of impropriety. While it could merely be Raghavan’s misremembering of the verse (unlikely) or a different reading of the original of Kālidāsa (completely possible), there is also the possibility that Raghavan’s choice of words amplifies the moral dimension of the scene. But for whom? The “impropriety” could apply to the wife, but it could also, grammatically, apply to the husband! In *Vimukti*, obviously since the second marriage has god’s sanction, and philosophically amounts to a liberation, it is not the husband who is at fault here. But this stands in tension with the message we get in *Kāmasūddhi*, where it is the husband who is improper, and the good wife whose opposition to him proves superior.

Religious Aesthetics as a Response to European Secularism

Raghavan's use of the comic and erotic as matters of religion functions within his larger discourse of uniting aesthetics with religion, and this rhetoric corresponds to the trope that India's culture is spiritual. Meanwhile, his overemphasis on literature as a means of inculcating morality echoes the notion presented in the last chapter that literature can be a primary source for imparting culture and forming a nation. In these remaining pages, I will argue that Raghavan's rhetoric should be understood as an Indian nationalist and Romanticist response to European secularism that nevertheless manages to mimic, albeit in new forms, various aspects of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British ideas about literature and culture filling in the vacuum abandoned by religion in an era of secularization.

We might begin by returning to Raghavan's explanation of the spiritual nature of Sanskrit literature and arts, which appears in his lectures on the theme of "love" in the plays of Kālidāsa:

The aim of art and poetry in India is to reinforce spiritual truth and to help to its realization; and the purely artistic end of aesthetic bliss was one of two ends, the other being the cultural refinement of man. Thus to adopt Indian scholastic terminology, there is to be 'eka-vākyatā' between Śāstra and Kāvya, i.e., the ultimate suggestions of poetry and drama should be in harmony with the findings of philosophy.

In terms of our own categories, Raghavan is rather all over the map here. The idea of the arts as a separate category is fairly consistent, but on the religious side of the equation, there is a slippage from "spiritual truth" to *śāstra* (ethical and scientific treatises) to "philosophy." His use of the word "philosophy" is somewhat awkward as it does not gloss the sense of *śāstra* very well (at least not as well as *darśana* typically might), but again this illustrates his tendency to collapse categories. While he does not use the word "religion" explicitly, the ensuing discussion in his essay frequently mentions "Hinduism" and the idea of dharma, and it is apparent that Raghavan believes in the unification of secular aesthetics and secular law with philosophy and religion.

Corroborating the impression that he was conscious of the religious/secular binary, just moments before the quote above, he cites Kālidāsa's "erudition in the sacred and secular lores."¹⁶⁹ We might say that he has fully absorbed this categorical divide. Yet the quote suggests that he is discontent with it, arguing that *kāvya* (poetry) and *śāstra* (texts usually dealing with ethics but also ritual procedures and even erotic practices) should be conjoined. Traditionally speaking, these two branches of thought in South Asian intellectual history have been as far removed as science and the humanities often are in our modern academic circles today. Why then is he so insistent on combining them?

Reading deeper into the quote reveals some intriguing switches in verb tense: from the present identification ("...is to reinforce..."), to past identification ("...was one of two ends..."), to the future ("...there is to be..."), and lastly the optative ("...should be in harmony..."). Since the gist of his identifications remains the same between aesthetics and religion, extracting just the verbal variations is suggestive of Raghavan's insistence upon a transhistorical essence which contrasts with his fevered exhortations for maintaining and reviving Sanskrit culture. This tension between continuous cultural essence situated in nationalist thought and the perceived threat of loss due to colonialism and modernity, I want to argue, lies at the heart of postcolonial nationalist thinking. I also propose that this tension lies at the heart of anti-secular rhetoric.¹⁷⁰

The example above is not unique, and such instances of religious and aesthetic union are to be found scattered throughout Raghavan's scholastic oeuvre. In his lectures entitled *The Concept of the Beautiful in Sanskrit Literature*, Raghavan concludes with a discussion of, on the one hand, the idea of art for art's sake and the educative purposes to which art can be put, and on

¹⁶⁹ Raghavan, *Love*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ And this tension applies not just to Raghavan, but could equally apply to, for example Christian conservatives or Muslim fundamentalists.

the other hand the religious side of art. In conclusion, he states that, “When we realise that the *Rasa* or bliss that Beauty engenders is a non-worldly detached condition, a repose of the heart, an intimation of the ineffable supreme bliss of the Self, we can harmonise the two ends of art.”¹⁷¹

Raghavan’s aesthetic theory rested on a desire not only to unify concepts, and to unify Eastern and Western categories and thought (as implied in his almost incessant quotations of Euro-American scholars of aesthetics), but more plainly to unify all aesthetic philosophy under the banner of the religious, and to remove it from its mundane and non-spiritual realm.

Yet there is always a divide of sorts presumed in such discussions. In his preface to his work on Tyāgarāja, the great eighteenth to nineteenth-century Carnatic musician and famous religious devotee, he even uses the word “religio-aesthetic.”¹⁷² The hyphen speaks volumes. Furthermore, it is not just a conceptual matter but a national one that he naturalizes within the Indian nation. His statement that: “The conception of all art in our country has been spiritual,”¹⁷³ makes this equation of art and religion into a perennial philosophy firmly planted in native Indian soil. Following the argument of the previous chapter and the discussion based on *Punarunmeṣa*, this perennial philosophy only needs the tender care of an elite Brahmin like Raghavan to make that perennial philosophical culture bloom again in a Sanskrit medium.¹⁷⁴

The references to nationalism are symptomatic of another important about religion and *rasa*: Raghavan’s vocabulary regarding religion, culture, and nationalism is almost entirely borrowed from English. A voracious reader of English language materials, Raghavan was heavily influenced by Hindu reformers such as Vivekananda and Aurobindo who themselves

¹⁷¹ Raghavan, *Concept of the Beautiful*, 118.

¹⁷² V. Raghavan, “Preface” in C. Rāmānujāchāri and Dr. V. Raghavan, *The Spiritual Heritage of Tyāgarāja*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1966). xi.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷⁴ Raghavan was familiar with Aldous Huxley’s famous book *The Perennial Philosophy*, the ideas of which somewhat echo his own, and my purple prose here is riffing on the pun that title makes possible.

wrote in English in conversation with colonialists. Their works were what Srinivas Aravamudan calls “Guru English,” a specific form of English that mimics European categories such as “religion” and the “secular,” and responds to the colonial gaze with reforms to the Hindu “religion.” These thinkers not only began using these loan words and thinking in English terms about South Asia and religion, but also borrowed ideas about themselves and their culture. German romanticism was particularly influential, as was English romanticism.¹⁷⁵ Raghavan was very familiar with various Romantic poets including Gray and Keats (he translated some of their poems into Sanskrit) along with T.S. Eliot. He quotes Oliver Goldsmith very frequently both in English and in Sanskrit. Thus, even if Raghavan was aware of the long historical debates about *rasa* in the Sanskrit tradition, he is writing about it in English and as something of a descendant of these nationalist and Romanticist movements within South Asian and British thought.

If Raghavan borrowed freely from European categories, it should therefore be of little wonder that the idea of “secularism,” which itself implies a disjunction between the religious and the material, became influential for his thought. It is almost as if Raghavan fuses the Sāṅkhya idea (subsumed within Vedānta) of *prakṛti* vs. *puruṣa* with the European dichotomy of religion/secular. Raghavan’s project is not merely an extension of the Sāṅkhya idea into the realm of aesthetics. More significantly, the plays inveigh against secular disenchanting capitalism and secular aesthetic categories in a manner that mirrors the European dichotomy. Further, Raghavan’s lectures on love and the comic, given in the England and the United States, make a point of correcting Euro-American perspectives on the absence of comedy or the absence of philosophy of love in Sanskrit sources. He is speaking there directly to this presupposition and arguing against it. *Vimukti* especially has as its opposite Euro-American notions of capitalist

¹⁷⁵ Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

materialism, sexual freedoms, and gender equality. While the play attempts to turn comedy into philosophy, it does so by insisting on the baseness of the disenchanted secular “West” and the superiority of philosophical and culturally advanced Indian adepts in the “East.”

To reach a better understanding of Raghavan, then, we might first plumb our own perspectives, since in our own academic milieu we often associate literature with the realm of secular experience, for example by reading the Bible as literature. This tendency has a lengthy history. A publishing house in London in the early twentieth century printed a Bible to be read as literature, which Talal Asad considers to have been an act of publishing that relied on a distinctly secular outlook that might attempt to desacralize the text. Yet Asad argues also that “it has become possible to bring a newly emerging concept of *literature* to the aid of religious sensibilities.”¹⁷⁶ The separation of literature and religion is the condition that makes possible attempts at their unification, which is precisely Raghavan’s project, and he is not alone. The notion that religion has scriptures while literature is secular remains a fundamental divide in Euro-American thinking, despite crossovers that merely seem to prove the rule. Numerous scholars over the past decades have attempted to resist the tendency to disaggregate religion and aesthetics, particularly literature. One can point to the field of theological aesthetics or our own department of “religion and literature.” Again, the fact that so much work is being done to bring together religion and literature or theology and aesthetics presupposes a fundamental fault line, no matter how narrow the gap or the extent of blurred lines, and the quakes that try to push them together have their historical epicenter in European ideas of secularism.

While many of the debates in the field of Religious Studies and in India regarding the issue of secularism have largely centered on questions of policy, asking whether or not a

¹⁷⁶ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 9 (italics in original).

government could be wholly separate from religion, Raghavan takes a different approach by contesting the secular/religious divide not in terms of policy and legislation but in terms of the need for aesthetics and emotive unity in the new nation. He is less concerned about the nitty-gritty of government than he is about national identity construction and cultural awakening: his nationalism is a cultural and religious elitism combined with a rejection of the particularism and materialism of Dravidian and European political movements. His Sanskrit works respond to Euro-American material superiority by highlighting Indian cultural and philosophical superiority.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, they also respond to communism and the ravages of atheist fascism in Europe, and they also seem to critique, at least implicitly, the Tamil Dravidian movements, particularly the atheism of Periyar's Self-Respect movement.

Raghavan's response to the secular shadow was not merely to convert Sanskrit back into the language of the gods and of the state, to reverse Pollock's account of the Sanskrit cosmopolis and subsequent vernacularization. Instead, Raghavan's tactic was to suggest that Sanskrit religious material and Sanskrit aesthetics had always been and always would be coextensive. He is resolving the supposedly secular realm of the arts into its religious basis, and locating it as a timeless aspect of the newly minted Indian nation.

While Raghavan's imagined audience was all of India, to a significant extent his original works in Sanskrit were speaking to a specific Tamil Brahmin audience about their own betterment and philosophical advancement. He spoke to them in order to impart morality and religious teachings, with the expectation that they would either understand the Sanskrit or be bettered merely by hearing it, not to mention being exposed to the culture. The revival of

¹⁷⁷ See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 136-142. And here I use the term "Indian" advisedly, since that is his perception of these works as "Indian," even if the referent "South Asian" for these philosophies would be more accurate.

Sanskrit was supposed to be a means of restoring the language and culture, but it is apparent that for him it was also a means of restoring to popular awareness the philosophy and morality drawn from these sources. Yet the morality has been shifted into the realm of the individual; no longer part of the courtly realm of literature, or the strict rules of ritual *karma* or divine *dharma*, morality becomes a matter of individual spiritual development that, as in the British model, can be coaxed along through literature. And here Raghavan follows the idea of working on the “self” in South Asian ascetic traditions along with European intellectual shifts on the topic of morality and literature under the influence of secularization.

An important aspect of Europe’s exported secular/religious binary was a move toward privatization. The religious was shunted into the private sphere, insisting upon the public as secular. Much ink has been spilled over how this formula failed in India where religion continues to have a strong public existence, and secularism becomes a matter of the state’s protective tolerance of different religious groups. I leave these matters of tolerance pluralism for the next chapter. But it is important to note that Raghavan’s rethinking of morality depends upon this privatization. In the previous chapter, I discussed Raghavan’s attempts to “civilize” India with Sanskrit literature as a reflection of similar endeavors in Victorian England. But his project was also dependent upon the privatization of religion, in which capacity literature, and the act of reading individually along with the benefit of mass printing, could emerge as a means of inculcating morality and imparting “truth” since ideological and organized religion was no longer felt to be capable of such a mission. Raghavan’s literary works seem to be driven by a similar concept of literature as a conduit for culture. Although there is a precedent for Sanskrit literature to be considered as conveying some form of morality (the idea of *vyutpatti*), Raghavan’s works do so in a far more didactic and blatant manner than classical Sanskrit

literature. Furthermore, Raghavan does not think literature replaces religion: for him literature leads to elevated religious knowledge. He champions the spirituality of India, agreeing with the Orientalists that Indian religion and philosophy are the nation's defining features, and posits that spirituality in stark contrast to Euro-American secularism.

In my perusal of Raghavan's English works, I have noted that he uses the term "spirituality" more often than "religion," which further echoes an erosion of political ideologies in favor of an ideology of privatization. Indeed the messages Raghavan's plays impart link internal morality to spirituality far more than to structured dharmic rules and orthodox codes. The exception to this, however, is in terms of the roles of women, on which Raghavan is more traditional. Just as women became the upholders of tradition as argued in the previous chapter, women become the central concern of discourses about proper moral behavior as situated within the private/religious space of the home and conjugal marriage. Love thus becomes internal and spiritualized, devoid of public display, and this spiritual/moral love then becomes a premise for critiquing and mocking Euro-American materialism, including the public nature of sexuality outside of India. Raghavan's argument about love then reads as one of "more Victorian than thou," and India, he seems to say, can rise to a superior level of Victorian sexual and religious morals in large part because of its inherent patriarchal order and its spiritual prowess.

In direct contrast to this account of the spiritualization of love as a matter of privatization centered on the image of women, Raghavan takes the opposite tack in his longest play, *Anārkalī*. In that play, as I will argue, he makes love a matter of national integration, championing love as an important dimension of a civic emotion for Indian and even universal unity. His message in *Anārkalī* deals with religion on a more public scale, specifically the issue of Indian "secularism" which maintains that the government ought to treat all religions equally, without the strict wall of

separation. Yet, despite the message of tolerance in Raghavan's *Anārkalī*, and specifically in its staging of Akbar's Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference of religions, the play subtly highlights the superiority of Hinduism as the handmaiden of Indian unity. Just as he opposed the desacralization that European secularism creates, Raghavan was profoundly against Indian secularism at the national level. So, having ventured from the national level of "culture" to a narrower view of colonial and postcolonial religion and aesthetics and their significance for discussions of private morality, we will next return to aesthetics at the national level and its relation to the problems of Indian pluralism as detailed in *Anārkalī*.

CHAPTER 4

ACTS OF INTEGRATION: ROMANTIC NATIONALISM AND VEDANTIC TOLERANCE IN *ANĀRKALĪ*

In the previous chapter, I contended that love as a theme in Raghavan's plays takes on new meanings within the context of his deployment of that sentiment in a spiritual sense in opposition to the religious/secular binary and in opposition to a perceived sense of Euro-American materiality and immorality. In this chapter, I will show that Raghavan's modern recasting of the aesthetic sentiment of love is not only moral and religious, but profoundly political, and that this political extension of the concept of love is exemplified most plainly in his longest drama, *Anārkalī*, which converts the classic tragic story of Anārkalī into a classical Sanskrit romance that serves as an allegory for the union of the postcolonial nation.

The political dimension of love in this play coordinates with a larger discussion of religious harmony that was of particular importance to Raghavan in the latter part of his academic and creative writing career. Raghavan prefaces the story of Anārkalī with a lengthy depiction, in Sanskrit, of Akbar's Dīn-i-Ilāhī (or Tauhid-i-Ilāhī),¹ a conference of religions held in Akbar's court during which scholars discussed theology in search of an ultimate unified truth. The play thus addresses the problem of religious harmony and national integration in independent India through an idealized depiction of tolerant governance under the unifying rule of Akbar. Yet Raghavan's portrayal of tolerance in this play subtly suggests the superiority of Hinduism, particularly Vedanta, as well as Sanskrit as the most expedient means of national cohesion, to the exclusion of other possible paths. While this tension between tolerance and the best means of promoting it leaves Raghavan open to critique, some final observations will attempt to complicate a wholly cynical reading.

¹ "Dīn-i-Ilāhī" is Persian phrase meaning "divine faith" (*dīn*: "faith"; *ilāhī*: "divine"; the interconnecting "i" is an enclitic.)

In the previous chapters, I have been alluding to *Anārkalī* as a significant play, but reserving further exploration until this chapter. It is Raghavan’s longest play by at least threefold, in the published form if not in performance time. But length is no basis for significance, rather it is the sheer number of subjects touched upon and their novelty within the Sanskrit dramatic tradition that make this play worthy of a lengthy study. Digging into the details of *Anārkalī* will unearth quite clearly some significant implications of Raghavan’s engagement with new themes in an ancient language during the postcolonial period. Furthermore, it is a play that will draw upon and together a number of threads touched upon earlier in this dissertation, and will segue to the concluding chapter’s discussion of Raghavan’s modern Sanskrit cosmopolitanism.

An Overview of Raghavan’s *Anārkalī*

The printed edition of *Anārkalī* was published in 1972, and although Raghavan wrote the play in 1931, it then languished for many years in his house (“like a young, innocent girl,” as he writes in the *prastāvanā*²) until it was taken up for presentation, rewritten, and first performed by the Samskrita Ranga on September 1, 1968 in Madras as part of a celebration for the author’s sixtieth birthday.³ It was also performed in 1972 at the first World Sanskrit Conference in Delhi, for which occasion Raghavan wrote an alternate *prastāvanā* included in the printed edition.

Anārkalī has been performed by the Samskrita Ranga on various occasions since its author’s death, including a shortened version directed by Raghavan’s student, S.S. Janaki, performed in several venues such as the World Sanskrit Conference in Bangalore in 1997, and another shortened

² V. Raghavan, *Anārkalī: A New Sanskrit Play in Ten Acts* (Madras: The Samskrita Ranga, 1972), 2.

“*grhāntarmughdeva pustakāntarnilīnā...*”

³ Ibid., ix. The completion of the sixtieth year, *ṣaṣṭyabdapūrṭi*, is a special occasion for Hindus. In the English preface, Raghavan refers to it as his “sixty-first birthday,” translating it to the English calendar. Something is awkward with the math here, however, as 1968 was the year Raghavan’s sixtieth, not sixty-first, birthday.

version directed by Nandini Ramani for the Ranga's Golden Jubilee celebration in 2008.⁴ While a study of the performance history of the play might be interesting, my analysis here sticks exclusively to the published version. Since *Anārkali* is lengthier than some of the other plays discussed thus far, it will behoove us to have at the outset a fairly detailed summary as a springboard into the deeper waters of the text and the issues swimming therein.

Raghavan's *Anārkali* begins, as is traditional, with a *nāndī* verse. In this case, the *nāndī* verse praises Pārvatī as one-half of Śiva. The play continues with a *prastāvanā* (prologue) starring the *sūtradhāra* (producer) and the secretary of the Samskrita Ranga. The prologue starts with a list of past performances put on by the Samskrita Ranga, a sort of curriculum vita not just of the author but also of the troupe. Then the secretary asks the producer (Raghavan) if he might have some other longer play to stage. He admits that he does, and after he provides some vague details hinting at it, the secretary guesses that it must be the story of *Anārkali*. They have a short discussion on how the original is a tragedy and that the director has changed it to fit the tradition. At the end of the prologue, they discuss the necessity of religious harmony in India after independence and the problems of communalism. Suddenly they hear behind the stage two Muslims, a Sunni and a Shiite, cursing each other. This device of having the first action of the play's plot begin off stage at the end of the prologue is typical in Sanskrit dramas. Two Muslims arguing at the beginning of a Sanskrit drama, however, is far from typical. The director and secretary depart, and the play commences.

At the play's performance in 1972 at the International Sanskrit Conference in Delhi, Raghavan wrote an alternate *prastāvana* wherein the producer, after introducing himself, inquires if there might be a student (*śiṣya*) in the audience, and whether anyone there even knows what the

⁴ I have a recording of this last performance in 2008, and it includes an altered prologue discussing Raghavan as the creator and the father of the current director (Nandini Ramani). This performance featured Raghavan's granddaughter, Sushma, in the title role, and a number of other actors still with the Samskrita Ranga today.

word *śiṣya* means (a not-so-subtle poke at the problem of few people understanding Sanskrit). He spots a man in white robes, but he does not know whether the potential student is a Muslim or some sort of “hippy.” They discuss the play briefly, with far more brevity than the earlier *prastāvana*, but with more emphasis on Sanskrit’s revival. At the end, a Sunni is heard off stage cursing Shiites, at which point the volunteer student reveals himself to be a Shiite and he takes leave to debate the Sunni.



Image 3: Raghavan and “Student/Shiite” in the *prastāvana* of the 1972 World Sanskrit Conference performance of *Anārkalī*. Photo courtesy of the Samskrita Ranga and the Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts.

The first act of *Anārkalī* after the prologue begins with the Sunni and a Shiite, now on stage, arguing and casting aspersions at each other. They also each claim to be the true Muslims. Then two figures approach and break up the fight: a Hindu sannyāsī (renouncer), who we later

learn is Akbar in disguise,⁵ and a Hindu householder who is actually Akbar's minister, Birbal.⁶ The Muslims try first to kill the renouncer/Akbar and then to convert him. Failing that (he is physically stronger than they are, and insists he has gone beyond the divisions of religions), they turn their attention to the householder who reveals himself openly to be Akbar's minister, Birbal (although in a riddle that they do not understand), in a verse introducing himself that includes a line mentioning that god plays with him like a ball (pointing to the theme of *līlā* I have previously indicated as prevalent in Raghavan's works). The Muslims ask Birbal for directions to Akbar's court because they wish to bring their debate between Sunni and Shi'a Islam to Akbar for the emperor to judge. The renouncer/Akbar and Birbal continue on after giving directions to the Muslims, and the Muslims remain to lament Akbar's alleged favoritism toward Hindus. In the end of the scene, they have an inkling that it was Akbar and Birbal that they just happened to see on the road to Fatehpur Sikri.

After that opening scene, the play continues in Akbar's palace, Fatehpur Sikri, in the hall, Ibadat Khana, which he had had constructed for spiritual discussion. Akbar then discourses, in conversation with some of his ministers, about the various religions in India, the importance of being inclusive of peoples and religious views in governing the empire, and the dangers of being insensitive or punishing Hindus. In particular, Akbar mentions the activities of Qazis and Mullahs who were trying to incite rebellion against Akbar's inclusivist stance. A renouncer, whose name is Saccidānandāśrama, arrives at the palace, and Birbal places on Akbar's forehead the *prasād* of ashes and saffron that the renouncer brought. The renouncer, this time a real one, implores Akbar to end the *jizya*⁷ tax and to forbid the killing of cows. Next, Viṭalanāthaguruswāmi, a student of the Puṣṭimarg, arrives and Akbar converses with him at some length about the possibility of seeing

⁵ The Sanskrit for this character is "*sannyāsiveṣadhārī*," literally "someone wearing the clothing of a *sannyāsī*," thus he is not necessarily an actual *sannyāsī*. Ibid., 8.

⁶ Raghavan re-Sanskritizes his name as "Vīravara." I will maintain the more familiar "Birbal" here.

⁷ Raghavan uses a Sanskritized spelling: "*jessiya*."

god in a physical form. Then a Śvetāmbara Jain enters and requests the repeal of the jizya tax as well as the prohibition of killing cows and all animals. Akbar assents and further decrees that all those who have been converted to Islam should be allowed to return to their religion. He also decrees that temples should not be destroyed. The two Muslims from the opening scene are present in the court, and they express their displeasure for these decrees with contorted faces.

Akbar's son Salīm next comes on stage and discusses his childhood and interaction with Hindu practices. Shortly thereafter Akbar discusses his reasons for calling the Dīn-i-Ilāhī. Continuing the interreligious dialogue, a Zoroastrian arrives, and Akbar notes the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, specifically the fire services. A Jesuit priest is the next entrant into the conversation, and he thinks Akbar is ready to convert, as a prerequisite of which he requests that Akbar give up his polygamous harem and take only one new wife. As this conversation occurs, a Jewish Rabbi bursts in past the doorman and says that his religion is older and better than Christianity, and he points out Judaism's disavowal of Jesus as the messiah. Meanwhile the Catholic priest gives Akbar a Bible and picture of Christ. Akbar requests that Abul Faisal translate the Bible into Persian. After all these representatives of the various faiths have arrived, Abul Faisal suggests that the time has come to start the conference and Akbar discusses the preparations and the order of things. He also provides a "ten commandments"⁸ for the meeting and thus the conference begins. We do not see any more of the Dīn-i-Ilāhī.

After this harmonious end to Act I, Act II commences with a discussion among a number of Muslims expressing their distaste for Akbar's inclusivist policy towards Hindus in his administration. Badauni, who had been relieved of his official position by Akbar, is particularly

⁸ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 27-28. The ten commandments (*daśa śāsanāni*) seem to be historically accurate. See Makhan Lal Roy Choudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi, or Religion of Akbar*, Third Edition (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1985 [1952]), 178-179. This text was one of Raghavan's sources mentioned in the bibliography.

angry, and continuously mutters: “Two donkeys, one dog.”⁹ These four words are, in fact, the first words of Act II. Upon the inquiry of the others, he explains that the dog is Birbal and the brothers, Faisal and Faisi, are the donkeys. The Muslims hatch a plan to turn the king against Birbal. After that introductory interlude, we return to the assembly hall where we see Akbar lamenting the absence of Birbal (the actual ousting of Birbal from the court is not portrayed). Birbal arrives as a sage in disguise, and after successfully answering Akbar’s questions and earning himself a place in the court, he reveals himself to be Birbal after all. There then begins a conversation about various texts that have been translated from Sanskrit into Persian and vice versa. When they arrive on the subject of a musical text, the *Samgītakalāya Śāstra*, Akbar is reminded to ask where Tānsena, his court musician, has gone. After Tānsena has arrived and discussed at some length a means of tricking a certain great singer into singing for Akbar, General Man Singh arrives accompanied by Puṇḍarika Viṭala, who is a Carnatic singer. A discussion ensues over the differences and similarities between music and dance in the north and the south of India. Akbar mentions Nādirā (the given name of Anārkalī), and suggests to Tānsena and Puṇḍarika Viṭala that they train her to put on a Carnatic-Hindustani “fusion”¹⁰ performance.

Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* extends to 87 pages in the printed edition (not including the second *prastāvana*), but it is only in Act III, beginning about halfway through the text at page 44, that we actually meet our play’s eponymous heroine. We are introduced to her as she is being teased by her friends (fellow servants in Salīm’s wife’s retinue) for her beauty. Her nickname, Anārkalī (pomegranate blossom) comes from the fact that she is, at the time we meet her, holding such a blossom in her hand. While reading her fortune from the lines of her palm, her friends notice a

⁹ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 30. “*dvau garbhau! ekaḥ śvā!*” Exclamation points are in the original Sanskrit text. That Badauni thought of Birbal as a dog seems to be historically accurate. See Makhan Lal Roy Choudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi, or Religion of Akbar*, xv.

¹⁰ The Sanskrit word is *āyोजना*, “combination,” which I translate somewhat anachronistically as “fusion” to fit the artistic context.

ring on her finger and ask her about it. She explains that it is a *rakṣa* given her by her mother at the suggestion of a Hindu Sādhu who predicted that Anārkalī would obtain great fortune but face an unfortunate fate. A king's page arrives to discuss the future concert with her. When he leaves, Anārkalī, thinking in trepidation about her pending public performance debut, is told by her friends that she is trembling like a deer. The mention of that animal reminds her of her pet deer, named Priyaka, and Anārkalī runs off looking for it.

In Act IV, we first see the Prince Salīm wandering in his garden and reciting poetry, and then we hear Anārkalī calling out for her pet deer. Salīm hears Anārkalī and remarks on her beautiful voice. He hides himself in a thicket that Anārkalī then sits beside, and as she reaches out to pick some flowers, he remains hidden and hands her a bouquet of flowers he has gathered. When Anārkalī again laments aloud her lost pet Priyaka (dear one or darling, but also a particular type of deer), Salīm emerges from the thicket and declares himself to be her Priyaka (dear one). Salīm then attempts to woo Anārkalī and expresses his enchantment with her. Anārkalī introduces herself as a mere helper in Salīm's Hindu wife's harem, and, citing her lowly status, she remains bashful in the face of Salīm's advances.

In Act V, we meet Salīm's good friend, Rahim,¹¹ who expresses his distaste for Akbar's concern for dharma (here meant primarily in the sense of law, but not without the possibility of considering it as religion). Rahim would rather go out and plunder. Ismat Begum, a master of scents and the mother of Mihirunnisā, a servant of Salīm's Hindu wife, overhears Rahim and offers to help him. Ismat Begum wishes to marry her daughter, Mihirunnisā, to Salīm and thus turn him towards Islam and away from the Hindu-favoring ways of his father. After they had conspired thus in the interlude, we then see Ismat Begum bemoaning the fact that Anārkalī has

¹¹ On a side note, in some performances of the 1980's this role was taken by the professor who helped me read this text, T.V. Vasudeva.

been given the job of bringing water and milk to Salīm, a job that usually belongs to her daughter. She hides herself near Salīm’s apartment when she hears Anārkalī approach. Anārkalī reveals in a monologue that she is indeed in love with Salīm, but she feels unsure and guilty since his wife has taken good care of her. She laments aloud that her fortune is to be forced to see her beloved again. At the word “again,” Ismat Begum, still in hiding, becomes apoplectic and conspires to stop Anārkalī’s impending dance performance.

Act VI begins with a long monologue by Salīm expressing his love for Anārkalī. He laments his fate, specifically the fact that he is in love with Anārkalī but must keep this secret from his wife. Anārkalī sneaks up on him accidentally, and as he turns around, he accidentally upsets the drinks she was carrying, and thus her as well. Salīm tells her not to cry over spilled milk. Anārkalī is timid, but Salīm tries to make her feel comfortable during their brief second meeting. Act VII further builds up the emotional aesthetic of love between Salīm and Anārkalī by showing their mutual pining for one another while not in each other’s company. These scenes add to the aesthetic, common in Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetics, of love-in-separation (*vipralambha*, *viraha*, or *viyoga*). In a palace scene, Rahim tells of his desire to see Salīm marry Mihirunnisā, and he also asks for money to put down a rebellion in the army. In the face of these political machinations, Salīm is completely absorbed and distracted by Anārkalī. This short scene over, the action cuts to Anārkalī training with Puṇḍarika Viṭala for the concert, followed by the arrival of a friend who comes to help Anārkalī with her costume. Anārkalī expresses to her friend her despair about the impossibility of marrying Salīm. The friend tries to console her, but Anārkalī persists in grumbling about her awful fate, and even suggests that death would be better than to be without her love.¹²

Act VIII begins with Anārkalī’s dance performance. When Akbar and others close their eyes in enjoyment of *rasa*, Anārkalī and Salīm’s eyes meet. When Akbar suddenly notices their

¹² This is a very common trope in Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetry.

ocular flirtations, he stops the performance abruptly and sentences our heroine to death by burial inside a wall. Akbar paces censuring the wanton ways of youth. Ismat Begum, waiting on the sidelines to cause trouble, reveals to Akbar that the relationship between Salīm and Anārkalī is not new but rather well established. Akbar then turns on Ismat Begum and accuses her of trying to foist her daughter on Salīm (it is not clear in the play how Akbar knows this, but he must surmise by her eagerness to be on the king's good side), and the king exiles her and her daughter to Bengal. Akbar laments how little Anārkalī had once been youthful and innocent and has now grown up to become a fickle woman. He also claims that Salīm has ruined the Dīn-i-Ilāhī, and condemns his son's impulsiveness. At the end of the scene, however, Akbar regrets being cruel to Anārkalī.

In Act IX's introductory interlude, Rahim is disappointed about the failure of his scheme to marry Ismat Begum's daughter to Salīm, but he is happy at least that Anārkalī will be killed and the prince can focus on important matters of state again. After that interlude, we see Anārkalī incarcerated and lamenting her fate. Salīm comes to her and tries to reassure her. He offers to break her out of jail and depose Akbar. Anārkalī requests that he not give up his whole future for her. She says they could be together in another birth. Salīm offers to die with her to be with her. As this sorrowful scene continues, Rahim runs into the prison to announce that the king is approaching the jail, and so he and Salīm depart quickly, leaving Anārkalī alone. Anārkalī, further lamenting her fate, then starts to open the ring from her mother that hides a poison powder. At that very moment, Akbar comes into the prison, and, seeing our heroine about to take her own life, nudges the ring away with his sword thus preventing her attempted suicide.

In Act X, Rahim drugs Salīm so that he might sleep and not torment himself all night thinking about Anārkalī. Salīm then awakens to Puṇḍarika Viṭāla's lute-playing. Puṇḍarika Viṭāla announces that Anārkalī is alive and that the king has revoked the death sentence. Salīm suspects the musician is behind this development in saving the life of his student, but Puṇḍarika Viṭāla

reveals that in fact it was Salīm's Hindu wife who requested that Akbar spare Anārkalī. A friend of Anārkalī's then enters and announces that Salīm's wife has given him Anārkalī in marriage as a birthday gift, and Anārkalī comes on stage dressed for a wedding. Akbar asks, as is traditional at the conclusion of a Sanskrit play, if he could do anything else for Salīm, the hero. Salīm expresses his appreciation and declares that all has ended well. The play then ends, as is traditional, with a *bharatavākya* that sums up the play's themes: the meeting of lovers and governing India without religious distinctions.

The basic original legend of Anārkalī is not a very detailed account, and there are various versions. There is a tomb in Lahore said to be the sepulcher of Anārkalī, but there is little consensus and sparse documentation about who is actually buried there. Simply put, the legend is that Anārkalī was a girl in the harem of Akbar or his son; she and Prince Salīm fell in love; Akbar discovered the relationship and sentenced the girl to death by burial in a walled tomb. In some accounts, Anārkalī was a mere slave girl and thus the relationship was inappropriate. In others, Anārkalī was a favorite in Akbar's harem and forbidden to young Salīm. According to some sources, the story grew out of a misunderstanding by British travelers, while others aver that the tomb in Lahore is for one of Salīm's wives.¹³ Whatever the reality, the scanty core of the story allows authors to embellish the details as they see fit.

The general story of Anārkalī is well known in South Asia and has been the subject of numerous short stories, plays, and movies. The prologue briefly mentions that the story is familiar from cinema.¹⁴ The audience at the time of the play's initial performances would have been familiar with the film *Mughal-e-Azam* of 1960, starring Dilip Kumar as Salīm and Madhubala as Anārkalī. Apparently, Prithviraj Kapur, who played Akbar in that film, requested that Raghavan

¹³ This information on the "actual" story of Anārkalī and her tomb drawn from Nazir Ahmad Chaudhry, *Anarkali, Archives and Tomb of Sahib Jamal*, (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 2002), 47-65; and Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Studies in Islamic Archaeology of Pakistan*, (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1997), 93-99.

¹⁴ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 4. "chāyācitrādiṣu suviditā kathā."

recite the benedictory verses for it.¹⁵ There was an earlier film from 1953 entitled *Anārkalī* that is classic Bollywood, playing aggressively on the heartstrings and presenting little more than a fraught romance. In that version, Anārkalī is a favorite in Akbar’s harem. It also includes Anārkalī’s pet deer. It is unclear if Raghavan knew this version as well. The Urdu dramatist Sayyid Imtiaz Ali Taj wrote an Urdu drama about Anārkalī in 1922 that he rewrote in 1931, the very same time that Raghavan was first writing his version on the other side of the subcontinent.¹⁶ There is also a Telugu rendition by the great author of Telugu and modern Sanskrit Vishwanatha Satyanarayana.¹⁷

Despite the lengthy bibliography of books on Mughal times that Raghavan provides in the printed edition, which he claims to have consulted in preparing the play, it remains unclear from what particular source he drew the story of Anārkalī. In none of the books listed in the bibliography was I able to find the story of Anārkalī related.¹⁸ It may be that he drew the basic story not from any written text but rather from common knowledge of the legend as depicted on the screen or in other dramas, and gave it his own treatment. It is, as he says in the prologue, a story that has come down “by the succession of ears.”¹⁹

Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* stands as a rare example in the history of Sanskrit literature in part because it draws on this Muslim story, rather than on a story in the Purāṇas, Epics, or scenes from Hindu or Buddhist life. The prologue claims the play to be the first of its kind by virtue of being

¹⁵ R. Kalidas, “Father – An Embodiment of Duty and Devotion,” in *Stuti Kusumāñjali: Garland of Tributes*, ed. Nandini Ramini (Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2008), 61. It would be nice to have more information about this instance. The opening of the film is itself an interesting instance of nationalism in film as it features an anthropomorphic “India” addressing the audience.

¹⁶ See Alain Désoulières, “Historical Fiction and Style: The Case of *Anarkali*,” *The Annual of Urdu Studies* Vol. 22 (2007): 67-98.

¹⁷ Vishwanatha Satyanarayana, *Anārkalī* (Vijayawada: Andhragranthalaya Mudralayamu, 1933). My thanks to Rajagopal Vakulabharanam for going over this text with me. This is a play that deserves further study. A comparative study of twentieth-century versions of the Anārkalī story would be interesting, but is outside the scope of this present dissertation.

¹⁸ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, xiv-xvi.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. “*anārkalī karnāparamparayā āgatā kathā.*”

based on a Muslim topic.²⁰ Similarly the alternate prologue says that this diverse topic has not been dealt with previously in Sanskrit.²¹ Indeed, such novelty is difficult to deny, although it is more the specific focus of the story than its incorporation of Muslim ideas. Still, it is a unique play within the tradition, although it certainly has its precedents, including the author's own earlier version. Unfortunately, the original manuscript from 1931 is no longer available, but in the English preface, Raghavan gives us a sense of what he changed. He mentions that it was originally a tragedy but when revising for production, he changed its *denouement*: "I took my own line, giving a new turn to the story, quite in keeping with the cultural atmosphere of the times and the court and the chief character."²² He seems to be insisting that his non-tragic version is more accurate to the cultural milieu of Akbar's court than the usual tragic version. As a character in the prologue mentions, the great Akbar could not have been so cruel as to order the death of this young girl. Raghavan adds that this revised version added the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī* and discussions of Akbar's patronage of the arts and Sanskrit. As Raghavan writes in the preface:

I had become interested in the fascinating course of the cultural and emotional integration that India had witnessed from the beginning and more especially during the Moghal times and the momentum and direction that it gained during the reigns and times of Akbar, Jehangir, Shahjehan, and Dara Shikuh...I wanted to harness all this material not only to present an authentic and significant picture of the times but also to reinforce and support the orientation that I was giving to the end of the story.²³

In short, Raghavan is ever the historian here, and insists that his play is an accurate depiction of the Mughal times, precluding any tension between fiction and history. As he goes on to say, regarding the speeches and depictions: "*na amūlam likhitam kiñcit* (nothing I have written is

²⁰ Ibid., 3. "*kathaiva saṃskṛtarūpakaprapaṅca idaṃprathamatayā upāttā muhammadīyaviṣayā.*" Although I have no exact counterexamples, I would wager that there are plays within Sanskrit literary tradition, prior to Raghavan's work, that include Muslims in some way shape or form. This is a subject for future research. There was certainly a good deal of Sanskrit being written in the Mughal court and about the Mughals. There are numerous other Sanskrit dramas on Muslim themes that I have seen mentioned in bibliographies. On Sanskrit during the Mughal period, see Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), esp. 166-202. For twentieth-century Sanskrit literature dealing with Muslims, there is no good research yet.

²¹ Ibid., 89: "*vastu ca vicitramitaḥ pūrvaṃ saṃskṛtabhāṣayā na vyavahṛtam.*"

²² Ibid., x.

²³ Ibid.

unfounded),”²⁴ and his depiction of Mughal religious acceptance is reasonably accurate. He even includes in the printed edition an image of a painting in Abul Faisal’s Persian *Mahābhārata* depicting “followers of various faiths.”²⁵ Despite this claim that the play is historically based and more accurate than the tragic legend, it is impossible to ignore the fact that these notes of cultural and emotional integration are also what Raghavan speaks of as needed in modern India, and the play at times reads rather more like a utopian allegory, a model for newly independent India’s government based on Akbar’s pluralistic court. As for assessing the accuracy of his rereading of the tragedy of Anārkālī, that is another matter, but the play itself is so strongly redolent of the style and idiom of Kālidāsa, Harṣa, and other classical Sanskrit dramatists, that it seems rather more like a Sanskrit romance than a Muslim historical narrative, and that, I want to argue, is part of the play’s charm and its message.

All You Need is Love: Romantic Nationalism

Raghavan’s rewriting, or really translating, of the story of Anārkālī into the language and style of classical Sanskrit drama is quite apparent in the overall alteration of the story of Anārkālī from a tragedy to a romance, an alteration that is Raghavan’s innovation entirely and, he says, in keeping with the absence of tragedy in Sanskrit aesthetics. In *Mughal-e-Azam*, there is a slight change to the traditional story in that Anārkālī avoids death in the walled tomb – due to the fact that Akbar owed a favor to her mother – only to be banished with her mother and forever separated from her lover, Salīm.²⁶ Raghavan, however, mentions no such favor owed to Anārkālī’s mother, and rather considers the heroine to have been an orphan Akbar rescues, and,

²⁴ Ibid. He gives the transliterated form here.

²⁵ Ibid., x-xi. He obtained the image from this text from the Rare Books section of the University of Chicago Library Special collections after seeing it during a visit to the library in 1964. Milton Singer helped him obtain the image for printing. If I am not mistaken, that particular book is on display in a special exhibit as I write a draft of this chapter.

²⁶ The banishment of Ismat Begum and her daughter seems to mirror in reverse, whether intentionally or not, this plot device from the movie. The ring motif, too, echoes *Mughal-e-Azam*’s storyline of a ring that Akbar gives Anārkālī’s mother and that earns her a boon.

most importantly, he has the lovers ultimately unite in marriage. As we saw in the last chapter, this ideal of unity through marriage was not only a matter of romantic feeling for Raghavan, but also part of a rhetoric of twentieth-century conjugality overwritten with a sense of spiritual union. In *Anārkalī*, too, this sense is present, but expressed in Sufi language, as Salīm declares that it is only around Anārkalī that he has the feeling of *tauhid* (oneness).²⁷ I presume if I asked him, Raghavan would have said that this ideal of lover’s spiritual unity is present in the works of Kālidāsa, as discussed in the previous chapter, and his *Anārkalī* merely follows suit. But even if it follows suit, its ultimate meaning is trumped by the context and language of its utterance. As I want to argue, Raghavan’s rewriting of a Muslim story as a classical Sanskrit romance in effect overwrites a perception of Muslim aggression with a supposedly more spiritual and cultured version of Sanskritic Hindu love.

There is also a way in which this rewriting imagines a perfect world without violence, both aesthetically in terms of the Sanskrit tradition and emotionally in terms of what a play provides for an audience. In the prologue, the producer (Raghavan) and the secretary of the Samskrita Ranga discuss the fact that tragedy is alien to the Sanskritic dramatic tradition. The producer pontificates:

For us, an appreciable quality of a performance is very clearly that which tastes like *Kādambarī* and sticks closely to clever Kālidāsa. Calamity exists in our rhetoric only as a passing reference. Moreover, the truth is that pain happens in the world, but it is not the highest truth proper for us to honor. This, our art of poetry, is different from creation; it is possessed of only joy, appearing to have surpassed the ordered creation of Prajāpati that is incomplete and unhappy. Poets protect us from the mere appearance of poorly arranged creation.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 85. “*anārkalyāḥ sānnidhye ’pi etādrśyeva tauhīd-saṃvittih sampadyate.*”

²⁸ Ibid., 4-5. This emphasis on joy seems in agreement with Abhinavagupta’s aesthetics: “*asmākaṃ yah svarasaḥ prekṣāguṇaḥ sa suspaṣṭa eva kādambarīgandhavatām, nipuṇaṃ kālidāsamanuśīlitavatām ca. yadyasmatsāhitye ’pi vipānmayam vastu antarbhāvyaṭe, tadaṅgatayā bhavati. kiñca, satyam asti loke dāruṇā vipat; na tāvatā saiva paramam tattvamiti asmābhirupāsītumapi योग्याṃ bhavati. kavikalā nāmeyam duḥstha-asamagra-prajāpatisṛṣṭivyaavasthitimatikramya vilasanti sukhaikamayī svatantrā uparaiva kācit sṛṣṭih. rakṣantvasmān kavayaḥ durvyavasthaprapaṇca-yāthātathya-pratibimbamātra-pradarṣanebhyah.*” The hyphenated compounds are in the original Sanskrit text.

Despite the fact that *ślokas* were supposedly first invented out of Vālmīki's *śoka* (sorrow), Raghavan here insists that poetry should provide a joyful outlook, not one of sorrow via *karuṇa rasa*. He further asserts that “there is a quality called genius, that is the art of the life of poetry, in whose fire something somehow completely different is baked.”²⁹ We have here again an admission of doing something innovative, retelling the story in such a way as to purify it of its less desirable parts. Raghavan would never admit that this is mere creativity, and grounds his change in both historical and aesthetic precedent. He quotes Ānandavardhana's insistence that when a story's ending is not suitable to the *rasa*, the story can be changed.³⁰ He also suggests that the cruel Akbar depicted in the original is not in keeping with the noble nature of the Mughal Emperor, although he comes close to being cruel.³¹ In this prologue, Raghavan seems to be suggesting that he is doing something new while simultaneously denying that his creation is in any way unfounded or unorthodox. It is also difficult to miss the sense that he views his rendition as a perfection of the legend through Sanskrit, clearing up its blemishes and rooting out what is distasteful in order to present the image of a perfect world in the perfect language.

While the prologue insists that Sanskrit aesthetics prefers something that adheres to Kālidāsa in spirit, it is also the case that *Anārkalī* hews closely to Kālidāsa in style and plot. On a structural level, the play is traditional in having a *prastāvanā* and ten acts with *viṣkambhakas* (interludes) at the start of some of the acts. It has an opening *nāndī* verse and a *bharatavākya*. In the first line after the *nāndī* verse, Raghavan describes the play as a “*nāṭaka*” and indeed it is a heroic drama based on a historical source, and like a *nāṭaka*, it cannot include the death of the hero

²⁹ Ibid. “*asti hi tādrśo guṇaḥ pratibhā-pariṣkāro nāma, yaḥ kāvyasya jīvakalā bhavati, yadyāgnau paripākam prāptim vastu anyadeva kimapi bhavati.*”

³⁰ Ibid., 5. This is the idea of *aucitya*, “fitness.” Raghavan quotes verbatim *Dhvanyāloka* 3.11: “*itivṛttavaśāyātāṃ tyaktvānanuḡuṇāṃ sthitim/ utprekṣyo 'pyantarābhīṣṭa-rasocīta-kathonnayaḥ.*”

³¹ Ibid. “*kiñca tādrśo suvidīta-gambhīrodāttasvabhāve akabara-cakravartini ca tathāvidhaṃ krauryaṃ na ghaṭate.*”

according to Bharata's rules in *Nāṭyaśāstra*.³² Further, the characters, especially the romantic hero (Salīm), frequently break out in verse, as one would find in classical Sanskrit dramas. The opening section of the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, however, is far less poetic than the romantic latter half of the play, has far fewer poetic verses interlaced with dialogue, and reads much more as a social play than a romance. It seems to mimic Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's *Āgamaḍambara* and the debates about religion therein far more than it does anything by Kālidāsa and company.

The opening scenes of the main story in Act III betray a distinct Kālidāsan influence. For example, when Anārkalī's friends tease her for her blossoming maturity, the scene echoes the first description of Śakuntalā with her poorly fitting bark garments. Meanwhile, after she races off to seek her pet deer, Act IV opens with Salīm enjoying the beauty of the garden, not unlike Duṣyanta alone on stage in the opening of *Abhijñāna-Śakuntalam*, while also echoing the sense of loneliness of the *yakṣa* in the *Meghadūta* at the onset of the monsoon. Here are Salīm's first two verses:

The earth smells good; the wind swells thick with fragrance; a small bejeweled drop of
Dripping water places a *tilak* on the forehead of a nearby sprout.

Having incensed the mind with smoky sighs, this cloud becomes purified,
It seems to cast off moonbeams as a guide for my unbearable yearning.³³

And then, after a few other words in the same vein, he continues to wax poetic:

My heart wiped clean and polished like a moonstone that wanders;
My whole body bristling like a tree, my mind wide open like a flower.
I tremble a little weary like this scented wind does because it is bodiless.
Some fortunate longing falls on my mind like the moonlight.³⁴

³² For a good discussion of this topic of death in Sanskrit drama, see Bruce Sullivan, "Dying on Stage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*: Perspectives from the Sanskrit Theater Tradition," *Asian Theater Journal* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 422-39.

³³ Ibid., 48: *udgandhā pṛthivī valatyabhi marut tatsaurabhāmedurah
lambāmbhahkaṇikāmaṇiḥ tilakayatyagram dalasyābhitah/
niḥśvāsairabhidhūpya mānasamasau meghe gato dhautatām
unmuktendukaraissudussahadaśām netum madīyotkatām//*

The doubled "ss" sounds in the end of this verse seem to use a touch of onomatopoeia to indicate sighs.

³⁴ Ibid. *dhautamṛṣṭamidaṃ madīyahṛdayaṃ sañcāracandrāśmavāt
hṛṣṭam vṛkṣavadetaṅgamakhilam, phullam manah puṣpavat/*

This sense of longing brought on by observing the natural world seems to echo the opening moods of both *Śakuntalā* and *Meghadūta*. It is also a sort of prescient *vipralambha*: he is separated from his lover but only because he has not yet met her, but somehow he knows she is near. When Salīm hears Anārkālī seeking her lost pet, he hides in a thicket, like Duṣyanta, but instead of jumping out to protect her from a bee, Salīm hands her a flower while he still hides. And when she calls out for her deer named “dear” (Priyaka), he jumps out declaring himself to be her “priyaka” (beloved).³⁵

The subsequent courtship scene certainly reminds a reader of classical Sanskrit romantic dramas. It drips with *śṛṅgāra rasa* as Salīm expresses his love for Anārkālī, while Anārkālī remains timid but potentially amorous. One of Salīm’s verses upon meeting Anārkālī nicely illustrates *śṛṅgāra rasa* and also shows off Raghavan’s poetic skill in Sanskrit using alliteration and rhyming, at least in the first line: “*nādirā madirā nūnaṃ mādinī mama/ satyam etāvad aprāptapākaṃ tvam puṇyameva me*” (“Nādirā, certainly you are a liquor that intoxicates my mind/ Truly you are my merit that had not yet matured until now”).³⁶ Later, in Act VI, he reflects on his condition, in love with Anārkālī and yet hesitant to disrespect his wife. He further muses that the mind is fickle:

When she is elsewhere for an instant, my mind moves persistently to that place.
Human desires are like bees, springing up when they see something totally new.³⁷

Further expressing his sense of separation while looking out at the garden where they met:

My heart is struck for just a quick moment, as if by lightning, but only a moment,
A beauty that has departed, never to come back again. That is my Nādirā.³⁸

*spande laghvalasam vimuktavapuṣā gandhānilo ’yam yathā
maccitopari kaumudīva subhagā kāpyutkatā lambate//*

³⁵ It is unclear whether Raghavan intended the pun to work in English translation as well, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility.

³⁶ Ibid., 50.

³⁷ Ibid., 61: *mūhūrtamasyāmaparatra kaṃcit kālāṃ khalaṃ khelati mānasam naḥ/
navaṃ navaṃ vīkṣya samunmiṣanto manuṣyakāmā madhupopamā hi//*

There is some nice alliteration in the first line that I cannot quite recapture in translation.

³⁸ Ibid., 62: *taḍḍidiva hr̥dayaṃ vegāt kṣaṇamabhītāḍya kṣaṇādeva/
apunaḥprāptyai yātā bhāgyaśrīrme ca nādirā sā ca//*

Soon thereafter, they collide as Salīm, distracted by day-dreaming, bumps into Anārkalī and knocks over the pitchers she was carrying. As she complains, he tells her, in a possible instance of English semi-translated into Sanskrit, not to worry about spilled milk.³⁹ Riffing on that, he declares in verse that when he has obtained the juice of her lower lip, what is the point of this pretense of milk?⁴⁰ In a way, some of Salīm’s lines are unnecessarily sappy, but they do give this tale of the Muslim royal court a distinct taste of classical Sanskrit court intrigue and romance.



Image 4: Salīm and Anārkalī conversing in a garden. Photo courtesy of the Samskrita Ranga and the Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts.

Of all of Kālidāsa’s works, *Anārkalī* is in many ways closest to *Mālavikāgnimitra*. First and foremost, both plays include the heroine performing a dance and music scene. Additionally, Salīm, like king Agnimitra, has to keep his garden romance from his wife (the eventually relenting Dhāriṇī), although prince Salīm also has to keep the affair from his father, the king. Even more reminiscent of Kālidāsa’s play, prior to her death sentence, Anārkalī is imprisoned, just as Mālavikā was. There are many other Sanskrit plays with similar themes, plotlines, so Raghavan is not necessarily playing off of *Mālavikāgnimitra* alone here.⁴¹ Whatever the exact model

³⁹ Ibid., 63: “*alaṃ naṣṭakṣīracintayā.*”

⁴⁰ Ibid., “*Anārkalī! tava prāpte phullānārkalikādhare/ auṣṭhāmṛtarase, keyaṃ kṣīrāsavavidāmbanā/!*”

⁴¹ One might be reminded here, for example, of Harṣa’s *Ratnāvalī* and its plot components of court intrigue between a king and a new love interest, and his wife’s imprisonment of the soon-to-be new co-wife. Garden or bower scenes where lovers meet are also quite common in Sanskrit literature.

Raghavan might have had in mind, it is clear that while the story is a Muslim one, and its characters are predominantly Muslim, the plot intrigues that the author employs give this Muslim legend a classical Sanskrit makeover. As much as Raghavan might have insisted he was presenting a more accurate version of the legend of Anārkālī that ends without the heroine’s death, and despite the fact that Akbar’s court did promote the study of Sanskrit, it is nevertheless evident in Rāghavan’s *Anārkālī* that the author supplemented the events in Fatehpur Sikri with a strong Sanskritic romantic sentiment and classical Sanskrit plot devices. In a fashion, Raghavan translates the Mughals into Sanskrit culture not just through the subject matter of the play but also through the romantic plotlines.

But there is more to this story than mere romance: the play also suggests an unorthodox and very modern tale about the possibility of union and marriage of lovers from different classes. Unlike Mālavikā in Kālidāsa’s play, Anārkālī is no princess in disguise but rather a mere slave girl in Salīm’s wife’s retinue, thus his marriage to her would seem inappropriate, just as the marriage of Mālavikā and Agnimitra is deemed inappropriate until Mālavikā’s true identity as a princess is revealed. Anārkālī, however, is never revealed as being of a like class to Salīm; rather, she is throughout characterized as a servant. The opposition in status of the two is apparent when first they meet and Anārkālī does not know how to address the prince properly.⁴² While there is some mysteriousness about her birth in the play, Anārkālī is still considered a mere servant when Akbar, who claims to have rescued her in her youth according to this telling, sentences his beloved orphan to death. When he interrupts the dance performance after seeing the two lovers’ eyes meet, he calls the heroine an unchaste woman and harlot,⁴³ and decries women’s fickle nature. Before proceeding to inveigh against his own son’s fickle youth, he throws in a dig at her caste: “Alas,

⁴² Ibid., 50: “*bhavantam jānantī na vedmi sambodhanasamudācāram.*”

⁴³ Ibid., 74: “*kulaṭā...puṃścalī.*”

how insignificant is this (willfulness) of the dust that is servant folk!”⁴⁴ When chastising Salīm, he worries that his son might ascend to his throne while chasing after unchaste servant girls.⁴⁵ There is thus little doubt that this class difference is a primary reason for Akbar’s opposition to the pair.

Yet the very fact that the two eventually unite in marriage signals a post-Independence insistence on an ideal classless society in India. In *Anārkalī*, I want to suggest, Raghavan presents exogamous love as a potential glue that might hold together a postcolonial India and erase internal divisions by class. We even see a hint of this sort of interpretation in the pair’s first scene together when Salīm, madly in love, says that even though he is the prince, he is her servant, thus reversing the actual class difference.⁴⁶ Salīm and Anārkalī, on this reading, serve not each other but as Raghavan’s synecdochic representation of an ideal union of classes in India. Certainly such an anti-caste reading is subtle, somewhat hidden by the theme of the union of religions, but there is a undeniably a sense at the end of the play that true love must triumph over caste, as well as religious difference.

Religious Fluidity and the Turbulence of Unity

This message of national fusion surfaces also in the fact that although Salīm and Nādirā/Anārkalī are nominally Muslim, there is throughout the course of the play a fluidity in their religious identities and a penchant toward Hindu ideas. In the introductory portion about religion in the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, there is some discussion of Salīm’s interest in Hinduism. Salīm was himself half-Hindu, since Akbar’s wife/Salīm’s mother was Hindu, and Salīm was married to the Hindu woman, and it is she who calls for Anārkalī’s rescue in the end of the play. As the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī* is about to start, he tells his father of his conversations with sannyāsīs, observation of sādhus during Śiva Rātri, and having a *rakṣābandhu* tied on his wrist. He ends his short speech with a direct

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75: “*aho kiyadetat paricārikājanaparāgasya!*”

⁴⁵ Ibid.: “*yad etad madīyaṃ siṃhāsanam kulaṭāḥ paricārikās ca anudhāvan eṣa putra āsyāsyati.*”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 51: “*yuvarājo’smi, tvadīyo dāsaḥ.*” It seems reasonable to read in an implicit “*api*” prior to the comma.

quote from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, telling his father: “I am your student. Instruct me who has taken refuge in you.”⁴⁷ When we first meet Anārkalī as she chats with her girlfriends, they ask her about a ring on her finger, which she explains was given to her by a Hindu Sādhu who told her fortune: “I will obtain great fortune, yet I will not endure a difficult fate.”⁴⁸ Her late mother favored that Hindu Sādhu and thus she wears the ring for protection. It is the same ring that we later learn contains a poison to avoid that aforementioned difficult fate. Thus even if she has a Muslim name, at least her mother was given to frequenting Hindus sages.

Anārkalī also alludes to the concept of rebirth on occasion, and Salīm is familiar with it as well. Just before her dance performance in court, Anārkalī pours out her sorrows to her friend, lamenting the impossibility of her love for Salīm and burning with the fire of separation, indicating the aesthetic of *vīyoga* by in fact using that term frequently in her monologue. Considering her desires to be bound to fail, she says in verse:

When obtaining each other is hopeless, death offers solace for the suffering.
Let my death be quick so in another birth I obtain my love and never part.⁴⁹

Later, while the lovers speak in prison for what could be their last conversation together, Anārkalī says, “Certainly, if my love for you in my heart is no delusion, how would even death separate me from you? I will surely possess you in my next birth.”⁵⁰ While these words express a sense of potential love in separation, and cut against the tragedy of the original, they also foreground reincarnation, a Hindu idea, as salvific for those in distress. Salīm ponders to himself, “The next birth! Yes, this is reincarnation such as Hindus believe. Certainly even you have this belief!”⁵¹ It is unclear if the “you” here is the prince himself, but he then offers to die with her so that the two

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20, and *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.7, pāda 4: “śiṣyaste ’haṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 46: “ahaṃ mahatīm lakṣmīm lapsye, tathāpi dāruṇaṃ daivaṃ na sahiṣyate.”

⁴⁹ Ibid., 70: *parasparaprāptinirāśamṛtyurapyamuṣya śokasya śamāya kalpate/
druṭaṃ mṛtirme ’stu yathānyajanmani dhruvaṃ tamevāviraḥaṃ priyaṃ labhe//*

⁵⁰ Ibid., 81: “satyaṃ yadi acchalametanme tvayi hṛdayaprema, kiṃ nāma maraṇamapi tvatto māṃ viśleṣayitum? sarvathā tvāmeva bhajāmi punarjanāvapi.”

⁵¹ Ibid., 81. The word for “believe” here is *śraddadhati*. It would be intriguing to find other uses of this term in Sanskrit literature, and whether or not it is an indigenous concept or borrowed from Europe.

can be reborn together. This marks, in a sense, the triumph of Hindu ideas of reincarnation over tragedy. As the producer remarks in the prologue while insisting on turning a tragedy into a romance, “he who thinks all ends in death has a useless vision.”⁵² Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* imagines an ideal world where cruelty and capital punishment can be avoided, and the only people who are antithetical to national cohesion are those still devoted to scheming, aim at division, and believe that death is final.

Since both of the two lovers are ambiguously Hindu and Muslim, acknowledging the differences yet fluid in their beliefs, there seems to be a suggestion in the text that religious harmony is also possible through love. And indeed, there is a further sense that love itself is a matter of unity. After Salīm awakens from his drugged state, he hears the sound of music and muses in a few verses about the power of song and literature to ease the mind; he then thinks of *Anārkalī* and declares that it was around her that he felt a similar sense of *tauḥīd*.⁵³ Earlier in the play, there is a conversation about the similarity between *tauḥīd* as an idea within Sufism and the Vedantic idea of *tat tvam asi*. Salīm himself suggests that there is no difference between Sufism and Advaita Vedanta.⁵⁴ Indeed, the feeling of love is both a religious feeling and a feeling of unity that binds people together. We saw this notion of love as a matter of “*advaita*” in the previous chapter in Raghavan’s interpretation of Kālidāsa’s philosophy of love as an *advaita* union symbolized best in the image of the *Ardhanārīśvara* image and represented best in his *Kumārasaṃbhava*. In Raghavan’s *Anārkalī*, the author seems to advocate an “*advaita*” union of lovers that is not only a romantic fusion, nor merely a socio-political union, but also, in keeping with the theme of the earlier part of the play, a union of religious ideas.

Corroborating this reading of the two lovers’ union as calling for an end to caste division and to communalism, allegorically suggesting that such reforms would be for the sake of national

⁵² Ibid., 4. “*yo manyate ‘maraṇāntaṃ sarvaṃ’ iti sa phulgudrṣṭiḥ.*”

⁵³ Ibid., 85. “*anārkalīyāḥ sānnidhye ’pi etādr̥syeva tauḥīd saṃvittiḥ saṃpadyate.*”

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21. “*...sūphīyānasya advaitavedāntasya ca nāsti bheda iti.*”

unity, Raghavan provides an indication of *Anārkalī*'s main themes in the introductory *nāndī* verses that pay homage to Pārvatī as one-half of Śiva, building from Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*:

The non-external,⁵⁵ inferior aspect (the left side) whose goal is Śiva's love,
She who is sunk willfully into the unfortunate activity of obtaining a lover,
Homage to that Satī, who has abandoned her body and done intense penance,
Who in her next birth obtained sovereignty over half the body of the Lord.⁵⁶

Here, Raghavan praises Pārvatī as the reincarnation of Śiva's first wife, Satī, who endures much hardship to reunite with Śiva. The story of Pārvatī's attempt to obtain the supreme god Śiva as her husband (detailed in the *Kumārasambhava*) resonates with the servant maid Anārkalī's own attempt to obtain prince Salīm as her lover, the misfortune of their separation, and the pain she must endure, almost to the point of death. Anārkalī is the "inferior aspect" in her union with Salīm in terms of both gender and class, yet they are ultimately united. Since this play is, on my allegorical reading, primarily about national integration, we might further suggest that the image of Pārvatī united with Śiva implies the unity of the Indian nation's high and low castes: it calls for a union that supersedes division. On an additional allegorical level, Pārvatī here seems to represent Bhārata Mātā, Mother India, who wishes to have sovereignty (*sāmrājya*, a word also used for "empire") over half of the body of the conqueror, *vijejit*. "Vijejit," however, is a rather unusual epithet for Śiva. If Pārvatī is Anārkalī, then Śiva in this analogy must be Salīm. In that case, the verse makes sense because Anārkalī is a member of the inferior class compared to Salīm who is royalty. Then this rare epithet for Śiva could make further sense if Salīm as "vijejit" indicates the Mughal conquerors of South Asia, while Anārkalī represents Pārvatī/Bhārata Mātā. The analogy is a little forced, and perhaps the opening verse merely points to the possibility of love conquering

⁵⁵ The first word of the verse is *a-bāhya* (printed with the alien hyphen), internal or *ātman*, and this points to both a Vedantic interpretation and to the concept that the first word or letter of the verse ought to be auspicious.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1. The two *nāndī* verses are:

*a-bāhya-tucchavārtā sā premakāṣṭhā vijejite
priyalābhasamūdyoga-vipatsvaira-nimajjinī /
svayaṃ svadehamujjhitvā taptvā tīvram punarjanau
patyurardhāngasāmrājyaṃharantīm tāṃ satīm numah//*

even death through the possibility of rebirth. But there does appear to be something in this opening verse that points to the notion of unity of classes and people of multiple religious groups (Hindus and Muslims) through the image of a pair of lovers as a united entity. Further, if we pair the opening verse with the play's *bharatavākya*, the final verse that Tānsena sings, the interpretation of this play as an allegory about nationalist communal and caste political matters becomes readily apparent:

May lovers have an auspicious union like that of speech and emotion in virtuosos.
Without good joint government, the distinctions of religions would conquer India.
May we who are batted about like a ball between life and death,
Be released by Śiva, lord of Ramāpura, famous for his renunciation.⁵⁷

The point of the play, as I read it, is that mutual love between those who are inferior and those who are superior, or, at another level, between Muslims and Hindus, might heal the rifts between the various communities in India. The play's *nāndī* verse contains *in nuce* the main point of the play, albeit in poetic language rooted in mythology and romantic aesthetics, while the *bharatāvākya* works as a bookend to clarify the underlying political dimension of the play. Like the final verse of *Vimukti*, here again Raghavan makes the allegory clear. And echoing *Vimukti*'s philosophy as well, the whole world is an illusory game for Śiva, and Raghavan requests liberation.

Raghavan's imagined postcolonial India is in a state not just of internal fragmentation but of social *viyoga*, and he suggests that the way to resolve this conflict is through love. He seems to propose a kind of romantic nationalism. As Raghavan suggested in his Patel Lectures, freedom and political integration are insufficient and what is required in postcolonial India is "emotional

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87. The form of Śiva honored here is Tyageśa, the presiding deity of Raghavan's hometown, Tiruvārūr.

*vāṇībhāvukayorivāstu sahr̥doryogaḥ śubhaḥ preyasoh
saurājyena mitho vinā matabhidā jyādidaṃ bhāratam/
madhyejanmamṛtiha kandukasamam vyāhanyamānānimān
asmān mocayatād ramāpurapatiḥ tyāgapraṭiṣṭhaḥ śivaḥ//*

integration,”⁵⁸ which, he believed, can help the Indian people *feel* as if they are part of one country. This idea strikes me as a useful extension of Benedict Anderson’s theory of imagined communities: it is not enough to *know* one is part of a community, one has to *feel* a connection, to experience nationalism as an emotion.⁵⁹ In Tagore’s *Gora*, for example, the eponymous character goes from being extremely orthodox to not only dropping his caste boundaries, but also, upon realizing he is himself actually a white European, agreeing to follow through with marrying the Hindu girl he loves. Thus *Gora* reads as Tagore’s call for joining caste, cultures, races, and religions together in marriage, and there seems to be a similar message in the marriage of Salīm and Anārkalī and in their fluid religious identities. Should it be any surprise then that, according to his autobiography, Raghavan won a copy of Tagore’s *Gora* as a young student and cherished it greatly?⁶⁰ It is difficult to deny echoes of *Gora* in the overall theme of *Anārkalī*. Further, Raghavan had read the works of Vivekananda, another key figure in the Bengali renaissance, and his notion of love as a means to political unity echoes Vivekananda’s words: “This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality.”⁶¹ The sentiment of love, according to Raghavan and classical Sanskrit aesthetics, is not only the best emotion, but also the most cohesive. It appears that his tacit intent in staging that emotion in a nationalistic drama was to provide the possibility that an audience might partake of that emotion while cognizing its political significance. Thus *Anārkalī* could have, or so Raghavan seems to have intended, the potential of “dramatically” *rasa*-fying the nation together.

⁵⁸ V. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators: The Saint-Singers of India*, Patel Memorial Lectures (Delhi: India Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Publications Division, 1996), 15.

⁵⁹ This is an idea becoming quite popular in recent political theory. The importance of emotion in politics, particularly for bringing people together, surfaces, for example, in Martha Nussbaum’s recent work on political emotions where indeed love is shown to be central to the possibility of sympathy and unity required for successful nationalism of nations with multiple ethnicities or religions. See Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶⁰ Raghavan, “Autobiographical Reflections,” 325.

⁶¹ It is not clear to me if Raghavan read and knew these *exact* words, but I am merely pointing out a similarity in the perspectives of the two men. Quoted in Wilhelm Halbfass, “Practical Vedānta,” in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Steitencron (New Delhi: Sage 1995), 212.

Devatā ex Machina: Vedantic Tolerance and the Education of Akbar

In Raghavan's *Anārkalī*, this Sanskrit romance follows not only the usual prologue but also a two-act dramatic representation of Akbar's Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference that consumes almost half the printed edition. In one of the only reviews of this work that says anything negative, Dr. R. Krishnamoorthy, writing in *Deccan Herald*, remarks after commenting positively on the work's attempt at something new, that in *Anārkalī*: "There is no sustained rasa from the beginning to the end; the first act...is packed with Akbar's ideas about religious integration, a subject more suited to the pulpit than to a drama. It does not link up naturally with the drama of court love and intrigue in the harem which is the subject of the rest of the play and characters here hardly reach the height of the classical plays."⁶² Indeed, the reviewer may be picking up on the fact that the work was revised at a later date and was subsumed to Raghavan's increased interest in religious harmony in his later years. Whether the characters do not measure up to the classical works is not a judgment I will endeavor to contradict, nor do I disagree with the notion that the work's introduction is far more preachy than poetic. But I do want to argue that despite the lack of a sustained rasa, particularly a rasa of courtly love, there is a sustained rasa of patriotic love, not to mention an undercurrent of love for Sanskrit. Further, I contend that the play's concern for religious harmony continues through the denouement, when Salīm's Hindu wife insists on saving the heroine. The courtly rasa of love, I will argue, is subsumed to a larger pluralistic rasa that borders on the rasa of peace, albeit framed within distinctly Hindu terms.

Akbar assembled the Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference of religions beginning in 1572. He is known to have been keen to formulate a unified religion, and, in contrast to some of his successors, he treated native Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and others in a relatively fair manner. Whether or

⁶² Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy, "Modern Sanskrit Play," in *The Deccan Herald*, Sept. 9th (no year). This clipping was found in Raghavan's daughter's collection.

not Akbar's accommodating attitude toward Hindus was genuine, or a matter of political expedience to consolidate his power over India, or a means of gradually converting Hindus to Islam through his magnanimous treatment of them, are historical questions outside the scope of this analysis of *Anārkalī*. I am more interested here in what Raghavan's discussion of the Dīn-i-Ilāhī illuminates about his thoughts on the problems of religious plurality in postcolonial India.

On my reading, three major themes animate the discussion of religion in Raghavan's portrayal of the Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference. First, the discussion is not without criticism of religions, particularly internal factionalism and the intolerance that some religions hold for the views of others. Second, Akbar paves the way for a unification of religions and tolerance of multiplicities of religions by creating a unified culture founded primarily on Sanskrit thought and literature. Third, notions of unification and tolerance of multiplicity are actually in tension with one another here as Raghavan appears to insist that religious conflict might be alleviated by taking the best from each religion and "unifying" the religions under the royal umbrella of Advaita Vedanta. While I argued earlier in Chapter 1 that Raghavan appears to have held a fairly ecumenical perspective on pluralism, in discussing *Anārkalī* I will complicate this assessment by showing how his thoughts on religion are somewhat biased toward Vedanta. Further, I will point out how his views might be read as a response to Euro-American discourse about religion and as an attempt to speak back against Euro-American epistemic hegemony. His discussion of religion is also a critique of sectarianism, particularly of Muslims, but also of the notion of religious division in general. Yet he expresses these notions within the context of Sanskrit and modern Vedanta, which he regards as essential for Indian nationalism, thus making his views on religious pluralism somewhat one-sided.

Angling for an Advaita India

The Sanskrit prologue of Anārkalī presents quite clearly the need for unity in the face of religious discord in modern India, priming us just as much as the English preface, if not more so, for this dimension of the work. Toward the end of the prologue, the secretary requests that the producer indicate the beginning of the play, but rather than point to action, the producer responds that the beginning of the play is about “that which is wished for by all of India: the great and auspicious sound of harmony (*sāmarasya*).”⁶³ The producer/Raghavan expresses his disdain for “all those quarreling because of adherence to various religions, especially the fragmentation of unified India after the conflagration of partition. Because of the fire of duality there is no peace today, and people who are thoughtless and careless cause breezes that here and there fan and increase duality’s flames.”⁶⁴ On the one hand, the idea of unified India, “*akhaṇḍam bhārataṃ*,” is perhaps the only place I have seen Raghavan use a patently Hindutva phrase. On the other hand, the poetic description in this quote suggests not inaccurately that the communal problem in India is a matter of strict adherence to religion and heartless people who fan the flames for their own ends. Raghavan places blame on the separation, through partition, between Hindu and Muslim nations, and he considers this rhetoric of religious duality as a matter of, literally, “*dvaita*” thought, as opposed to the *advaita* thought that to which Raghavan subscribes both philosophically and politically. In short, Raghavan’s claim about the necessity of non-difference between religions has the scent of an Advaita Vedanta argument about the unity of *ātman* and *brahman* but applied to religious plurality and national polity.

The blame for this fissiparous state of “India” (geographically speaking, South Asia) rests not necessarily with the internal divisions established by Muslim rule, as indeed he shows Akbar

⁶³ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 6. “*yo’ dhūnā bhārata sutarāṃ sarvairiṣyate, tena udātena sāmarasyamaṅgalatūlyghoṣeṇa upakramah.*”

⁶⁴ Ibid. “*nanu vividhamatāvalambena kalahāyamānānām sarveṣāmeva, viśiṣya yayorbhedamuddīpya akhaṇḍam bhārataṃ khaṇḍitam, yena dvaitavādakṣṇavartmanā nādyāpi śāntam, yasya kāpi śikhā tatra tatra vījamānena aviveka-pramādasamīraṇena utthāpyate.*”

to be uniting the country, but rather with the British: “The foreign rulers who had become uncaring and left, having renounced the empire of India, suddenly released on the country this Brahma Weapon which was in the quiver of independence...and as a result lakhs of people on both sides died.”⁶⁵ This line’s reference to the “Brahma Weapon” poetically provides the possibility of perceiving Partition in mythological terms, thus blending mythic past and political present, translating Euro-American historicism into a non-historicist mythic time. This description further indicates that the divisions in South Asia are externally imposed, and that, therefore, unification remains possible from within. Indeed, the producer proceeds to promote the idea that integration of different groups has been the tendency in South Asia for millennia. Colonialism, as well as intolerant Muslim rule, presented a rupture in the usual course of history in India. The producer observes that in ancient times, India absorbed Śakas, Huns, and Greeks, and they all became “part of one stream,”⁶⁶ but the Muslims and Christians, in contrast to Indians, “protected and increased their individuality.”⁶⁷ In other words, they did not blend in with the tolerant ways of Indian thought, unlike Akbar as described in this play.

To be truly Indian in demeanor, Raghavan suggests in this play, is to be accepting and tolerant of difference. India, he writes in the prologue, received all of these foreign guests into her heart and lap with motherly love.⁶⁸ He quotes various sources from Hindu texts to this effect: “The wise speak of what is one in many ways,”⁶⁹ “Among men, you are the one reached, like the ocean

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6. “*bhāratasāmrājyaṃ sannyasya gacchadbhiḥ virasīmbhūtaiḥ videśīyaśāsakaiḥ svarājyatantratūñīre brahmāstrībhūtametam muhuḥ parīkṣitasiddhiṃ deśasyopari muktvā khalu gataṃ, yena lakṣaśaḥ prajā ubhayapakṣīyā nidhanaṃ gatāḥ.*”

⁶⁶ Ibid. “...*pravāhā āpatya advaitaṃ prāpitāḥ.*”

⁶⁷ Ibid. “...*pārthakyameva paripālayanto vardhayantaśca sthitāḥ.*”

⁶⁸ Ibid. “...*sarvātītiḥ bhārata-pṛthivīyaṃ viśāle naije hṛdaye utsaṅge ca sarvameva janam matam ca lālitavatī.*”

⁶⁹ Rig Veda 1.164.46, *ekaṃ sadviprā bahudhā vadanti*. I am following Wendy Doniger’s translation (Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, [NY: Penguin, 1981], 80.) Vivekānanda, however, translated “*sad*” as “truth” (i.e. “truth is one, the sages speak of it variously”), thus giving the Vedic line a distinctly Vedantic flair, as Doniger notes (Doniger, “The Uses and Misuses of Polytheism and Monotheism in Hinduism,” *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, The University of Chicago Divinity School, [January 2010], 10).

for all waters,”⁷⁰ “The other theories are contradictory, but this is not contradicted by them.”⁷¹

These sayings suggest that South Asia has long had a tradition of inclusivity, and that the divisiveness of Partition is alien to that sentiment. They appear to naturalize tolerance within South Asian culture. Yet all of these quotes are taken from Hindu religious sources. The first quote is from the R̥g Veda, the second from the *Śiva Mahima Stotra*, and the last is from the *Gauḍapāda-kārika*, or Gauḍapāda’s Advaita commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. The fact that they are all Hindu in origin seems to corroborate Sumathi Ramaswamy’s claim that Hinduism is often disguised behind the mask of “culture,” especially by the nationalist scholars on the Sanskrit Commission like Raghavan. The text speaks of a national demeanor, but corroborates it with religion. Further, the last quote skips over the previous verse in the original: an attack on dualists that insists on Advaita as the only philosophy that lacks the possibility of disagreement.⁷² This verse, and indeed the general thrust of the play, indicates a strong preference for Advaita philosophy as superior to other religious thoughts, and a sense that Advaita philosophy might lead to an Advaita India.

Even Akbar, the producer remarks, followed suit with this natural “advaita” way of viewing the world in South Asia by “sprinkling that Upaniṣadic creeper of coordination (*samanvaya*).” Raghavan describes Akbar as a royal and saint (*rājarṣi*),⁷³ thus locating him not only among other great culture-promoting kings in Indian history,⁷⁴ but also among the tradition of unifying poetic figures such as Kabir, whom Raghavan elsewhere recruits for the Advaita camp.⁷⁵ The secretary echoes the producer’s sentiments: “Difference, that is what derangement of the mind

⁷⁰ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 6. This quote is from the *Śiva Mahima Stotra*: “*nṛṇāmeko gamyastvamasi payasāmarṇava iva.*”

⁷¹ Ibid., 6. “*parasparaṃ viruddhyante tairayaṃ na viruddhyate.*” See Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya, ed. and trans., *The Āgamaśāstra of Gauḍapāda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 59.

⁷² Ibid.: “*svasiddhāntavyavasthāsu dvaitino niścita dṛḍham.*”

⁷³ Ibid., 6-7: “*asya samanvyayopaniṣadvallyā arvācīne kāle ye bījāvāpa-jalaseka-varadhanādi cakruḥ teṣu prathamah akabar-sārvabhaumah, yamabhinavaṃ rājarṣi rūpakametad viṣayīkaroti.*”

⁷⁴ And thus in opposition to the idea of the cruel “oriental despot.”

⁷⁵ In a discussion of Tulasi and Kabīr, Rāghavan writes, “Both of them were *Vedāntins* and adored Rāma, but Kabīr was more strictly *advaitic*.” (Italics in the original.) I cannot imagine any scholars of either poet agreeing with that assessment. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators*, 28.

makes...and that mistake effects not only the opposite religion, but even one's own religion where there are different sects that are part of the whole nation."⁷⁶ And indeed, in accord with the dictum that "meaning chasing after speech,"⁷⁷ shortly after the secretary condemns religious intolerance, a Shiite and a Sunni are heard backstage cursing each other, and thus the play begins. The contrast of the secretary's words and the bickering Muslims sets the stage for the play's message about religious harmony, but also for its unequivocal attack on Muslim divisiveness.

Interreligious Dialogue in Sanskrit

Raghavan's ultimate depiction of Hindu inclusivity appears in heightened relief when compared with his depiction of Islam. Beginning the play with two Muslims from different sects "pulling the beard"⁷⁸ – which phrase Raghavan uses in humorous contrast to Hindu philosophical debates described as "pulling on the top-knot"⁷⁹ – presents the discord that Raghavan implies is antithetical to the ideal unity of religions, but it is notable that it is Muslim infighting, not Hindu, with which Raghavan prefaces the play. Throughout *Anārkalī*, Raghavan depicts Muslims as angry (the two in the beginning, as well as Badauni who curses the "one dog and two donkeys" in Akbar's court), scheming (Ismat Begum and Rahim as well as Badauni and his accomplices in the scheme to oust Birbal), and belligerent (Rahim claims to be sick of talk of dharma and wishes to plunder). The first words of Rahim Khan, Salim's supposed friend, are quite humorous: "Damn dharma!" Given the context of a Sanskrit drama wherein the intimate connection between Sanskrit and Hinduism would be taken for granted, having a Muslim say those words would immediately depict him to a mostly Hindu audience as being on the opposing team. The rest of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7. "bhedaḥ, tatkr̥taścittabhramaḥ....sa ca doṣo na kevalaṃ paraprasthānamātraṃ spr̥śati, kintu svaprasthānābhyantara eva ye bhinnasākhina ekadeśinaḥ."

⁷⁷ Ibid. "vācamartha'nudhāvati," qtd. from Bhavabhūti's *Uttarāmacarita*, Act I, verse 10. Raghavan includes quotation marks, but leaves out the source as with almost all of his quotes in this play.

⁷⁸ Ibid. "śmaśrugrahayuddham."

⁷⁹ I have not found this exact expression. T.V. Vasudeva pointed out to me this small joke.

Rahim's ensuing speech reveals a disdain for religious matters and a desire to be the rapacious conqueror that the Mughals are often depicted as (and some were): "Damn this timid Emperor! Why have we left our home to come to this land of India only for the sake of following dharma and for the sake of *mokṣa*? My soul is afflicted from lack of enjoyment. My hand grows tired itching to plunder."⁸⁰ Aside from Akbar, Salīm, Anārkalī, Abu Faisal and Faisi, and Mihirunnisā (who has no spoken lines and is just a pawn in her mother's scheme), the Muslims in *Anārkalī* come out as rather antagonistic and intransigent characters who are the primary impediments to any sort of religious tolerance. In Akbar's court, the two Muslims from the end of the prologue and beginning of the first act repeatedly contort their faces in response to Akbar's inclusivist comments. Ironically, they are united only by their distaste for uniting India under a religiously tolerant rule.

The message Raghavan wants to convey is one of provincializing provincialism: putting aside differences in the name of unity and tolerance. Indeed, Birbal says that Akbar is "not favorable to those having provincial views because of an obsession with unreasonable and vile intentions,"⁸¹ and Raghavan would concur. Yet Raghavan notably does not accuse any Hindus of being intolerant, but rather implies that they are naturally tolerant. The only Muslims who receive some praise are, unsurprisingly, Sufis. Akbar, when declaring the assembly for the discussion of spirituality, calls it "Dīn-i-Ilāhī or also Tauhīd-Ilāhī," and Faisal specifies that *tauhīd* is considered the highest spiritual truth among the Sufis and means the singularity of self and the highest self, "Anal Hak," or "Aham sa" ("I am it"). Saccidānandāśrama, a Hindu renouncer present for the conference, remarks that the doctrine of the Sufis is not very far from the doctrine in the Upaniṣads, and Sufis only mistake the truth of "*aham sa*" for such sayings as "*tat tvam asi*" and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 54. "*dhik dharmam! dhig enam bhūrukaṃ mahārājaṃ! kimatra svadeśamujjhivā dharmānusaraṇārtham mokṣārtham ca bhāratabhūmimimāṃ vayamāgatāḥ? bhogāridryeṇa śuśyati me svāntam. luṅṭhanakaḍūrme hasta eva sādāmāyāti.*"

⁸¹ Ibid., 11. "*pratikūlaśca saṅkucitaduṣṭīnāṃ yuktihīnahīnāśayadurāgrahēṇa.*"

“*aham brahmāsmi.*”⁸² In short, the only Muslims to avoid considerable censure are those Sufis who get it mostly right – “right” being Vedantic truth.

By comparison, the Hindus in *Anārkalī*, particularly in the Dīn-i-Ilāhī scenes, come out as particularly friendly, and in fact their main concerns are to prevent Muslims from wiping them out. The play begins with Akbar and Birbal in Hindu garb playing the role of peacemakers, and that alone signals the binary between Hindu-Muslim mapped on to a binary of peaceful and divisive. In the initial court scene at Fatehpur Sikri, after some discussion among Akbar and his ministers regarding of translations of various texts from Sanskrit (including Kālidāsa and other classics), the first Hindu visitor for the Dīn-i-Ilāhī is Saccidānandāśrama. He enters with the king’s page and then has Birbal offer *prasād* of ashes and turmeric powder which Birbal applies as a *tilak* on the king’s forehead. Meanwhile, some Muslims in attendance look at each other with contorted faces. Saccidānandāśrama asks for the repeal of the jeziya tax and for cow-killing to be forbidden. Soon thereafter, a sage from the Puṣṭimārg sect (a Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition), named Viṭṭalanātha Gosvāmī. He and Akbar engage in a conversation about visualizing god. While it is not entirely clear what sect Saccidānandāśrama belongs to, he corroborates Viṭṭalanātha’s comments by saying that the same notion the Puṣṭimārg sage mentions is also supported in Vedanta, and provides a quote from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (KU 2.23): “Only the man he chooses can grasp him, whose body this self chooses as his own.”⁸³ Thus the Bhakti and the Vedanta folks agree.

Later in the scene, a Zoroastrian discusses fire worship to Mitra and there ensues an exercise in comparative religion as the assembled hold a discussion about fire worship in multiple religions. Actually, Dastūr Mahayarji Rāṇā has few words, merely tying an *avyanga* (a ritual girdle) around the emperor. It is Akbar who then discusses fire rituals and compares it to Vedic rituals. Saccidānandāśrama corroborates this idea and adds that sun worship, too, is important.

⁸² Ibid., 20-21.

⁸³ Ibid., 17. “*yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṃ svām.*” The translation in the text is from Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 238.

Abkar comments that Birbal asks him why he prays to the west (implying he prays toward Mecca) when the sun has risen, and how this makes no sense. At which point one of the two Jains in attendance begins discussing sun worship as well. These scenes with the Jains, Hindus, Zoroastrian representative, and Akbar seem to model an ideal comparative religions discussion. Everyone agrees with each other despite their differences and they note the vast similarities in terms of practices, objects of worship, and general beliefs among their religions. This portrayal of harmoniousness among Hindu/Jain/Zoroastrian (all native religions of South Asia) is in direct contrast to the depictions of the representatives of the Muslim groups within the play. Only Muslims such as Akbar, Salīm, and some scholars in Akbar’s court appear to escape this critique, and they do so not only because they study South Asian religions, but also because they appear in the play to have imbibed some of the wisdom South Asian thought has to offer.

While Muslims bear the brunt of Raghavan’s critique, the other Abrahamic faiths are not above censure as well. The Catholic priest is eager to convert Akbar, who only wants to have theological discussions, and Raghavan’s portrayal of the priest’s eagerness to convert the emperor reads simultaneously as a diatribe against Christian proselytization in modern India. Raghavan’s criticism of Christianity extends to Western morality when the priest gives Akbar the one stipulation for conversion: he must abandon his wives and take just one wife, because, as the priest says, “Polygamy is forbidden in Christianity, although marrying multiple wives at different times is not.”⁸⁴ Raghavan, through Akbar, mocks the priest’s concern for ethics over spirituality in protesting with impatience, “This is the essence of Christianity?! And the most important thing to be explained is conversion?! Fine, fine. I have no interest in such things.”⁸⁵ Instead, Akbar says he would like to get further clarity about the idea of the Trinity. In contrasting this moment with

⁸⁴ Ibid., 24: “*ekaikaśo bahupat(n)nikatvamasmākaṃ na anabhimataṃ, kiṃ tu samakārameva saṃbhūya bahvyaḥ patnyo noḍhavyāḥ.*”

⁸⁵ Ibid., 24: “*kraistavamatasya ayameva sāraḥ! mukhyoddeśyaṃ ca kraistaviḥkaraṇamanyeṣām. sādhu, sādhu. nāsmākamasti etādṛśamautsukyaṃ kimapi.*”

the discussion between Akbar and the South Asian religious groups in the play, it appears that Raghavan wants to depict interreligious dialogue as a discussion of ideas rather than an attempt to convert others. While in keeping with Akbar's actual conference of religions, this image of peaceful conversation resonates with modern communal concerns as well.

Raghavan's *Anārkalī* also includes a rabbi, who bursts into the hall without permission from the king, displaying an utter lack of decorum, although Akbar has no qualms about it. The rabbi says little, however, other than to point out that Judaism does not think that Jesus was the messenger of god born to a virgin, and that Judaism is older and better than Christianity. The picture given of the rabbi is one of arrogance and little theology. Akbar is rather more interested in talking with the Catholic priest about the forms of the Christian deity, a conversation of theology rather than mere negativity. In pointing out the antagonism between the Western religions, Raghavan again provincializes provincialism and tacitly praises Hindu tolerance. Having depicted the Shia-Sunni divide, and then the Christian-Jewish divide, and agreement only within Hinduism, Raghavan sets the stage for Vedanta to emerge as the religious "grand unified theory." Indeed, throughout the play no two Hindus are ever depicted in disagreement, unlike members of the other religions that, as he said in the prologue, defend their particularity and tend toward divisions.

Raghavan presents Hinduism early in the play as a potential peacemaker. As the Shia and Sunni Muslims quarrel at the very beginning of the first act, Akbar and Birbal (in disguise as a Sannyasi and a householder) arrive on stage and Akbar physically interrupts the Muslims' brawl. Thinking he is a Brahmin, the Sunni suggests they kill him, further stereotyping Muslims as angry and belligerent. As they raise their hands to strike him, the Sannyasi/Akbar grabs their hands and

overpowers them. They then insist that the Brahmin sannyasi convert, each to his own sect. The renouncer laughs, and inquires why they assume he is *not* a Muslim.⁸⁶ He goes on to say in verse:

I am neither Shi'a nor Sunni, Hindu nor Jain,
I am neither Zoroastrian, nor Christian.
I have gone completely beyond all of these.
I worship the one who is unnamed.”⁸⁷

This verse echoes the sentiments of Kabir and the Sikh Gurus who followed him, as well as various figures of the “Saint-Singer” tradition that Raghavan wrote about in his Patel Lectures. I have not found an exact match for the verse. The denial of belonging to any of various traditions has a precedent in a verse by Rumi.⁸⁸ Further, the verse is in the same meter as the *Nirvāṇaśatakam* attributed to Śaṅkarācārya, *bhujāṅgaprayāta*,⁸⁹ and echoes that poem’s serial denial of various things god is not as well as echoing the self-identification (*aham*) at the end of the fourth verse.⁹⁰ In building from Muslim, Sikh, and Advaita sources, Raghavan’s verse, in the mouth of Akbar and uttered in Sanskrit, appears on the surface to exemplify its own message.

The two Muslims, unable to fathom such a concept as Akbar describes, start conversing with Birbal, and ask him for directions to Akbar’s Dīn-i-Ilāhī conference, where they intend to have the king settle the debate between Shiites and Sunnis. Yet Raghavan does not merely have them ask for directions in Sanskrit. Their query emulates the first *sūtra* in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*:

⁸⁶ This motif of sartorial obfuscation of religious identity to signify the necessity of religious pluralism is common in Bollywood films dealing with that subject, such as *Amar*, *Akbar*, *Anthony* (1977) and the recently released *P.K.* (2014).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 9: *na śīyā na sunnī na hindurna jaino*
na vā zāratuṣṭro na ca kraistavo 'ham.
idaṃ sarvamevāhamebhyaḥ parastāt
nirākhyam yadekaṃ tadārādhako 'ham.

⁸⁸ Rumi 116: “I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu/I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew.” Accessed at:

<http://www.rumionfire.com/shams/rumi116.htm>. My thanks to Zayn Kassam for pointing out this similarity to me.

⁸⁹ I find this meter interesting for its four successive “*ya*” segments (short, long, long) that make it feel like a reverse of a waltz or blues shuffle. It also seems to be an onomatopoeic representation of its name’s meaning: snake’s gait.

⁹⁰ The *Nirvāṇaśatakam* (or *Ātmaśatakam*) of Śaṅkarācārya, e.g. 1.3-1.4: “*na ca vyoma bhūmirna tejo na vāyuh/ cidānandarūpaḥ śivo 'ham śivo 'ham.*” My thanks to Travis Smith who informed me of this similarity in response to my RISA-L attempt at crowd-sourcing this verse’s source.

“*athāto mārgajijñāsā*,”⁹¹ by merely replacing *dharma* with *mārga*. A well-educated crowd in India would certainly get the reference. Thus Raghavan slyly makes the Muslims into students of Vedanta. Furthermore, they are asking a Hindu for directions, putting Birbal in the position of being more knowledgeable about how to get around the Hindus’ native country, but also how to reach religious truth. There is a pun on the word *mārga* here as both the best way to get to the conference, and also the best religious path: Raghavan makes the two fighting Muslims ask quite literally, in a Sanskrit twist on a foundational Vedanta text, which religion is the best religion.

When the Muslims complain that the route Birbal indicates is difficult, and they ask if there is an easier way, his response further suggests a religious message: “There are many paths but the place to be gone to is only singular,”⁹² and he follows this with a section of a verse: “Easy or hard, short or long, straight or crooked, all paths go to that place.”⁹³ This idea of all paths leading to one place is a reference to *Raghuvamśa* 10.26 (among other Sanskrit texts), which Raghavan explicitly quotes in his Patel Lectures on the Saint-Singer tradition: “All paths of realization, though manifold and different according to different traditions, flow to You only, even as all streams of the Ganga flow into the ocean.”⁹⁴ While the ostensible meaning is about how to get to Akbar’s castle, the hidden allegorical meaning here is that there is one god, albeit many paths/religions that might reach it; yet Hindus, not Muslims, show the way.

Yet in opposition to this message of multiple paths, there is also a hint of hierarchy in the text. In response to accusations that Akbar favors giving ministerships to Hindus,⁹⁵ Birbal responds that Akbar is rather “like a bee, a collector of the essence of various wise moral

⁹¹ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 10. I am indebted to T.V. Vasudeva for pointing out this reference to me. It is also an echo of the first line of the *Vedāntasūtra*, which begins *athāto brahmajijñāsā*.

⁹² Ibid., 10. “*santi anekā vartanyaḥ, kintu gantavyaṃ sthānamekameva*.”

⁹³ Ibid. *laghurvā kathino vāpi hrasvo dīrgho ’thavā punaḥ/
rjurvakro ’thavā panthāḥ sarvo gacchati tatpadam//*

⁹⁴ Raghavan, *The Great Integrators*, 76. The translation is Raghavan’s, and he attributes the verse to Kālidāsa.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 11-12. This mention of the allotment of government jobs according to religion echoes debates over allotments for government seats in India’s colonial and postcolonial administration.

sayings.”⁹⁶ While they are talking about economics, he is talking about religion. This apian imagery, which appears elsewhere in the play, presents an alternative metaphor for the unification of religious paths: instead of seeing them as leading to one goal, there is a need for picking the best ideas from the various religious flowers and compiling the ideal bouquet, and that would be the ultimate unified religion. Further, it is implied in Birbal’s comment that this method is useful with respect to religions as well as government management, which is echoed again in *Anārkalī*’s final verse’s mention of “good joint government.” While Akbar tolerates multiple religious paths, as long as they are peaceful, he also wants to suggest a hierarchy, in which one religion supersedes the others, and that ultimate religion can be revealed and created by compiling the best of all the other religions. What constitutes the touchstone for “the best” remains unspecified, yet as the play progresses, it is clear that just as the proper *rasa* is that which “tastes” like *Kādambarī*, “the best” religious thought is that which “tastes” like Vedanta.

There is an intriguing prescient echo in Raghavan’s play about the differentiation between the “good” Muslims and “bad” Muslims, prominent in modern American discourse about the Middle East, as described most notably by Mahmoud Mamdani.⁹⁷ A number of Muslims are portrayed negatively as overly sectarian and belligerent. The aforementioned Sunni and Shiite contort their faces during Akbar’s discussions leading up to the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, and Rahim and Ismat Begum’s scheming is at odds with the romantic progression of the play. Further, in the interlude that prefaces Act II, we see a group of four Muslims, primarily comprised of Mullahs and Qazis, united only in their hatred of Akbar. In a fairly funny moment, worth mentioning, Abdul Qadir

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11. “*sa madhukara iva vividhasūktisumanasmāragrāhī*.”

⁹⁷ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books: 2004), 17-27. Mamdani’s discussion roots this binary in what he calls “Culture Talk,” a way of talking about others in terms of cultures as determinative, and imagining a clash of civilizations. However, instead of opposing “good” modern American Liberal culture to “bad” nondemocratic terrorist Muslims, as the media often do, Raghavan’s binary posits an opposition between those who exhibit divisiveness (Muslims and other religious groups from the West) and the “good” Indian culture, which for him is naturally harmonious, and which good Muslims such as Akbar have adopted. Raghavan’s depiction of Akbar and his court is thus rather similar to the U.S. media’s valorization of “Westernized” Muslims, except with Advaita taking the place of Euro-American liberal democracy.

Badauni, who did indeed begrudgingly translate the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Persian, mentions the text in a mocking fashion, telling with disdain of a god that could be a servant, wander in the forest, have his wife abducted, lament his situation, and seek assistance from monkeys.⁹⁸ As they hatch a plan to oust the “dog” Birbal from the assembly, the audience sees these Muslims (they were dressed in Muslim garb as I have seen from a few pictures of the original performances) as nothing but angry obstacles in the path of harmony.

Akbar, on the other hand, is the “good” Muslim in *Anārkalī*, ruling India in a manner that favors Hindus, and uniting it as well under good leadership and cultural patronage. In the prologue, Raghavan says that the story’s ending must be changed not only to fit the *rasa* but also because Akbar would not have been so cruel as to convict a young girl to death. Akbar is thus a repository of kindness and compassion, not to mention tolerance, and he is undoubtedly the hero of the first half of *Anārkalī*. He is depicted in opposition to the other Muslims in the story who are quick to anger. Indeed, Akbar’s first words as Akbar (rather than in disguise) in Fatehpur Sikri suggest a long lineage of rulers possessing such equal temperament, as he quotes his grandfather Babur’s words to his father Humayun:

The people of India follow many paths. By sticking to your own religion, do not permit the perturbation of opinions. Having considered all the sects of the people and their respective religions, decide what is proper without taking a side. Especially, refrain from killing cows. Let a person follow the religion of his choice, whatever it is. Do not destroy his places of worship and *pūjas* or temples, etc. If you want to spread Islam, it can be done with love, faith, and favor, and not with a sword.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 32. “*tatra devāvatāraḥ īśvara ityupāśyamānaḥ kathānāyakaḥ paricārikayā rājyānnirvāsyate, araṇye bhramati, tatpatnīm rākṣasaḥ apaharati, rodīti, kapīnām sāhyaṃ yācate.*” Mullah Mohammad Yazdi continues to lament the fact that on account of this story, the king has made monkeys a protected species.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 12-13. “*vividhamārgānusāriṇo janā bhārate vasanti. tatsvamatāgraheṇa te mativikārasya padaṃ na dehi. sarvathānānāmapi janānām tattanmatācārādi gaṇayitvā niṣpakṣapātaṃ nyāyāṃ vyavahara. viśiṣya govadhādvirama; yadvā tadvā matamanusaratu kaścit, tatpūjārādhanaśthānamālayādi mā nāśaya. islāmataṣya pracāraṃ yadi vāñchasi, sa pracāraḥ premṇā śraddhyā upakāreṇa ca tathā kartuṃ śakyate, yathā na śakyate pralayakāriṇā khadgena.*”

Abdul Faisal suggests that Akbar follows in this tradition of dharmic kings, and Akbar agrees saying, “I am the king of India, therefore it is proper that I should be Indian.”¹⁰⁰ That “India” (referred to as “Bharata”) might have existed as a political unit prior to 1947, and included the lands now belonging to Pakistan and Bangladesh, is a typical Hindutva claim that Raghavan has Akbar espouse here, and having Akbar admit that to be the case further cements the notion and pushes it back in history prior to even the British Raj. The Mughal emperor continues to tell the tale of how his father was forced out of the kingdom and took refuge in a Hindu house, where Akbar was born, and Faisal adds that Akbar’s wife is a Hindu woman, Yodhabhai. Although himself a Muslim, Akbar appears to be critical of how Muslims in his kingdom treat the native population and he insists that rules be created to protect Hindus from Muslim anger and insensitivity in order to create peace. The conversation ensues as the emperor and his minister discuss means of forging religious harmony through reform and softening of Muslim divisiveness.

Akbar: Emperor, Patron of Culture, Student of India

Raghavan further styles Akbar as a major spokesman and patron for Sanskrit literature. In Act II, there is lengthy discussion of Akbar’s requests for translations of certain texts from Persian into Sanskrit and vice versa. In what I take to be a subtly humorous bit, Akbar sees the *Yogavasiṣṭha* in a dream. He then requests a translation into Persian of this “Advaita Vedāntic text.”¹⁰¹ Despite the mention of a few texts from Persian that Akbar wants translated into Sanskrit, the emphasis in the play is on translating Sanskrit texts into Persian precisely for the purpose of culling the spiritual elements from them. Raghavan’s implication is that Akbar will be a better integrative king if he is familiar with Sanskrit materials and Vedantic ideas.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. “*ahaṃ bhāratīyo rājā, bhāratīyenaiva mayā bhāvyamiti nyāyyamevaitat.*”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 37.

In terms of the arts, too, Raghavan's Akbar is practically an avatar of the author himself, keenly interested in music and dance, and eager to support it. In a way, he is the ideal government patron of the arts imagined in Raghavan's *Punaranmeṣa*. There are lengthy discussions in the text of music, including far too much time spent by Akbar and Birbal trying to figure out how to get a certain singer to perform for the king. When the Carnatic singer, Puṇḍarika Viṭala, arrives in Akbar's court, a discussion over the differences between northern and southern varieties of music arises. Akbar asks if anyone knows the difference in styles of singing between the two regions, and Birbal responds that just as the languages of the north are various but all descended from Sanskrit, so the styles of music are all rooted in the same source, namely Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. As for the difference, Tānsena suggests that it is a fallacy, but Puṇḍarika Viṭala details some of the specific differences while agreeing with Birbal that the *śāstric* root is the same.¹⁰² This insistence on a singular Sanskritic root for culture is vastly inaccurate, but it is intended to serve a nationalist idea of a unified, pan-Indian culture beneath the appearance of cultural variegation. Later, when Puṇḍarika Viṭala announces the *tāla* and *rāga* of Anārkalī's performance, Akbar asks Tānsena to translate the terms into Hindustani.¹⁰³ That such a translation would be possible serves in the play to point out the common source despite the terminological differences. That a Sanskrit text lurks in the historical background behind both northern and southern traditions makes Sanskrit the apical ancestor of all Indian culture, and coincides with Raghavan's account of Sanskrit's integrative history. As this claim erases the boundaries between north and south on a cultural level, the message Raghavan insists upon is again national integration, with Sanskrit and culture as the glue. This erasure of north and south as culturally divided also suggests a none-too-subtle pushback against the Dravidian movements, a pushback that coincides with the religious and class unification themes in the play, not to mention the idea of promoting Sanskrit as the great unifier.

¹⁰² The word for the "styles" of the North and the South is "*mārga*," the same word used to indicate religious paths.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 73.

Raghavan further demonstrates Sanskrit’s supposed integrative capacity within the realm of dance and music in Anārkalī’s performance that (re)unifies Hindustani and Carnatic musical and dance traditions. The idea behind such a fusion performance seems to be that Raghavan could, through that very performance, not merely speak *about* unification but actually *unify* the two cultural traditions by demonstrating their merger. The performance’s song itself, sung by Puṇḍarika Viṭala, contains a message that resonates with the play’s integrative theme:

1. O bee, this flower bud grows tired in the bewilderment of longing for you.
Her charming color, smell, and fruit-bearing maturity are not able to attract you.
2. Clinging here, concealed in leaves, afflicted by thorns and insects,
Losing the beauty of her bloom, she sits depressed without her own bee.
3. Buzz, buzz, buzz, the sweet buzzing bee says “Where are you?”
But you, bee, are nowhere to be seen. Cruelly, you play at torturing her.¹⁰⁴

Raghavan’s song is a poetic representation of *vipralambha*, separation of lovers. While the bee as lover was likely drawn from Kālidāsa’s *Śākuntala* 1.20, there also seems to be a conscious reference to *Kumārasaṃbhava*. One difference would be that the bud/Pārvatī here does have leaves, as opposed to Pārvatī who is famously “*aparṇa*,” without leaves. Also, the idea that the bee plays a cruel game appears here, and this echoes both one of Birbal’s early lines in the first act and the *bharatvākya* at the end, in which cases it is god or Śiva who plays a cruel game.¹⁰⁵ The theme of the separation of lovers in the song relates to the larger plot of Anārkalī and Salīm’s fraught love, but allegorically the poem refers to the separation of North and South India, given the context of the performance as a fusion of both styles.

But who is really the cruel bee in this scenario? Salīm has fully admitted his love for Anārkalī. Rather it is Akbar who presents an obstacle to the lovers immediately following

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 73-74. Here are the three verses from the performance:

1. *kalikā madhukara! kiyadutkalikākuliteha tām̐yati tavārthe/
lalito varṇo gandraḥ phalito ’syā vaśayituṃ na tvām//*
2. *līnā ’tra patraḡahane dūnā ’sau kaṇṭakaiḥ kṛmibhīḥ/
hīnā vikāsalakṣmyā kīnā sīdati nijaṃ vinā madupam//*
3. *rīn̐ rīn̐ rīn̐ – iti madhuro rīnkāraste kuto ’pi tām̐eti/
tvam̐ tu kvāpi na dr̐śyah hantuṃ tām̐ kṛḍasi krūra//*

¹⁰⁵ Birbal’s first lines of poetry: “God plays with me like a ball.” Ibid., 9. Although the concept of *līlā* is suggested here, Raghavan consistently uses the verb root “*krīḍ*.”

Anārkālī's dance to this song. In the latter half of the play, Akbar is not entirely the compassionate monarch depicted in the first half. During the initial flirtation scene between Anārkālī and Salīm, after he tries to lift her face with a finger, Anārkālī protests that Salīm is deluded, that the mistress (Ismat Begum) is cruel, and the king Akbar is strict about rules.¹⁰⁶ Later, as she approaches Salīm's place with drinks, she expresses her fears while pointing to Akbar's duality: "If the virtuous cruel king catches a scent of this news, what will become of my afflicted life?"¹⁰⁷ She refers to the king again as cruel in the seventh act just before going on stage.¹⁰⁸ This is the Akbar who has always loved and taken care of her, according to Raghavan's rendition, and yet he is still an imperfect being, still given to anger. It is not the Akbar of the first part of the story, but it is far closer to the depiction of the Muslims in the story, including Ismat Begum, who are frequently referred to as cruel using the same Sanskrit.

It is difficult to adjudicate whether these two Akbar's – the Akbar who supports religious harmony and Sanskrit learning and the Akbar who sentences Anārkālī to death – are really two Akbars conjoined imperfectly through the historically divergent times of the play's composition. Yet there are clues in the second part that suggest it is the same Akbar but he is gradually being taught and perfected through the course of the play. In the beginning, while he does have considerable knowledge of South Asia, Hinduism, and South Asian literature, he is still in the process of learning. After Akbar sentences Anārkālī to death, he soon regrets it. Having just exiled Ismat Begum and her daughter, Akbar describes the heroine, in absentia, as being like a deer playing in the harem,¹⁰⁹ but whose audacity led her to this youthful sin. But even as he curses this youthful transgression,¹¹⁰ he also curses himself: "Oh, damn me, too, since I treated you cruelly

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 51. "...grhāśca ugradharmaṇaḥ akabaramahīpateḥ."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 58. "sadācārakrūrasyāsya mahārājasya, asyā vārtāyā gandhasyapyupalambhe, kiṃ syānme tapasvijīvitasya?"

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 66. "hanta, apakāriṣu krūraḥ khalu maharajaḥ śrūyate."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 76. "mugdha hariṇīva antahpure vihantiyāsīḥ!"

¹¹⁰ Ibid. "dhi getatte pāpaṃ tāruṇyam!"

out of adherence to dharma.”¹¹¹ Here we see a king beginning to regret his words, but also to regret that he has crushed the life of a young girl under the ironclad rule of law. Further, the rules of dharma that he implies, without saying so explicitly, are rules about caste purity and intermarriage. He follows these musings with a short verse: “This wretched mind of mine is certainly made of iron if it has resolved to kill such an innocent form.”¹¹² Akbar appears to see now the conflict between the rule of law and the vulnerability of humans. The play here appears to be a moment in Sanskrit literature, like so many in the *Mahābhārata* among other texts, where the subtleties of dharma are under interrogation.¹¹³

But Akbar does not yet see the importance of love as a means for unity, nor does he fully understand the possibilities of their marriage as part and parcel of his larger spiritual and political goals. As Akbar turns to berate Salīm, he declares that his son has utterly destroyed the opening ceremony of the Dīn-i-Ilāhī (which he describes here as a commingling of Hindu and Sufi sādhus).¹¹⁴ But is it really ruined? It appears that the true conference of faiths, the real coming together of the religions, that the narrative arch of Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* aims at is precisely this the outcome of the marriage of the lovers rather than their death. It mirrors a call for interreligious harmony founded on mutual love rather than mutual fighting. The message of unity sought in the beginning is, in fact, love. Akbar learns to respect and foster love as a pathway toward unity. What Akbar learns is similar to what Gora learns in Tagore’s novel, and is eloquently spoken by the elderly Brahmo Samaj character, Poreshbabu:

It can never be true that it is the human being who must always submit to social considerations. It is society that must constantly grow and extend itself for the sake of human beings.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid. “*aho dhiṅ māmapī dharmāgrahaṇa tvayyapī krūrābhīniveśam.*”

¹¹² Ibid. “*aśmasāramidaṃ nūnaṃ madīyaṃ hatamānasam/ yadīḍṛśakalārūpaghātāya kṛtaniścayam!*”

¹¹³ My thanks to Justin Henry for this observation about the play.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. “*hindu-sūphī-sādhūnāṃ saṃparkaṃ dīn-ilāhi-dīkṣāṃ anyatsarvam ekapada eva vināśitavānasi!*”

¹¹⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*, trans. Radha Chakravarty (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), 403.

Anārkalī's Other Heroine

While a repentant Akbar interrupts the suspenseful moment of Anārkalī's attempted suicide, it is not he who is the real savior in the story. Rather, it is Salīm's Hindu wife, who, although she is never on stage, plays the heroic role in this tale of the triumph of love and national integration. This is the crucial moment of *Anārkalī* on my interpretation: it is both the denouement and the point when Raghavan lays his cards on the table to reveal his belief in the superiority of Hindu tolerance. When read in the text along with Akbar's earlier comments about being a naturally tolerant Hindu king, at this moment following the long interlude of love, the play's clarion call for tolerance begins to sound self-contradictory, crumbling under the weight of its own implicit sectarianism and self-righteousness. When Puṇḍarika Viṭala tells him that Anārkalī is alive and well, the singer explicitly says that the responsible party is "the emperor's Hindu daughter-in-law, who is like a goddess."¹¹⁶ It is then that Anārkalī's friend presents her in matrimonial garb to Salīm as a birthday present from his wife. Salīm then remarks that his wife "shines as a goddess in the harem."¹¹⁷ In this way, the semi-divine Hindu wife emerges as the play's *deus ex machina*, or "*devatā ex machine*," if you will. It is she who resolves the conflicts of the play. The Hindu wife of Salīm appears as the most tolerant and accepting figure in the play, not only in so far as wives in Sanskrit dramatic literature always are, but in approving this mixed-caste match in opposition to Akbar's initial prohibition. Further, by dint of her being Hindu, the scene metonymically gives the fillip to Raghavan's contention that Hinduism is, and Hindus are, the most tolerant religion/people in India both toward other religions and toward other marriage rules.¹¹⁸ The scene implies that Hindus are predisposed to foster true love, wherever it may be found.

¹¹⁶ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 86. "*mahārājasya hindusnuṣā devateva...*"

¹¹⁷ Ibid. "*sā antaḥpurālaye prakāśamānā devatā.*"

¹¹⁸ There is also, possibly, an implicit critique of Christianity here in so far as the Catholic priest in the Dīn-i-Ilāhī scene was so adamant about Akbar giving up polygamy.

Certainly it is an extremely common, if not almost ubiquitous, trope in Sanskrit romantic dramas for the first queen to eventually relent and allow her husband to marry a new wife, often right before the king's new love interest is in danger of dying. However, the focus in the play's text on the fact that Salīm's first wife is Hindu suggests this broader conclusion. Further, there are moments prior to this final scene wherein the text idolizes the image of the tolerant Hindu woman. In the prologue, Raghavan describes Mother India as accepting into her heart and warm embrace all those various religions and groups that had come into her lap. Raghavan portrays the tolerant Hindu wife as a representation of Bhārata Mātā, and therefore gives the "tolerant Hindu woman" the air of being autochthonous, thus further suggesting that this sort of tolerance is in the Hindu DNA, as it were.¹¹⁹ There are other moments prior to the final scene when the text praises Hindu wives. It is Rahim who comments on this first, while plotting with Ismat Begum to marry her daughter to Salīm. He remarks that the feat will be difficult because the prince's Hindu wife is so beautiful, and, "She has the quality of kindness suitable to Indian women that is not found elsewhere."¹²⁰ In a subsequent monologue after first meeting Anārkalī, Salīm frets that his new love interest could lead him to disrespect his Hindu wife, which he is unwilling to do since: "These women of India are rightly praised as goddesses of dharma."¹²¹ This image of the upstanding Indian woman, repository of all that is good and cultured yet subservient to the patriarchy, carries over from earlier discussions in earlier chapters about the image of the woman in postcolonial India. Yet it takes this notion further in specifying that it is a Hindu woman who has the capacity for granting integration through love. Akbar, the heroic king who promotes religious tolerance and supports the arts, nevertheless fails in being a true unifier. That role is usurped by a Hindu woman offstage. Indeed, it is she who teaches Akbar how to nourish harmony

¹¹⁹ That tolerance is in the Hindu DNA is a claim that right-wing Hindutva types tend to make. Such rhetoric is an interesting example of fusing scientific terminology with an Orientalist naturalization of supposed cultural traits.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 56. "...*asyām bhāratastrījanānurūpaḥ anyatra adṛśyo guṇaḥ saujanyaṃ nāma.*"

¹²¹ Ibid., 60. "*yuktaṃ praśasyante dharmadevatāḥ amūrbhāratavadhvaḥ.*"

in his kingdom through allowing love to blossom. She is the truly tolerant one, and thus, by extension, Hindus appear as more tolerant than Muslims and in a position to teach proper tolerance and harmonious governance to those of other religions. This small plot twist at the end is subtle, but it speaks volumes about Raghavan's opinion of Hindu superiority when it comes to fostering *advaita* in human relations.

Tolerance and Perspective, *Anārkalī* and Archimedes

Having explored *Anārkalī* in depth over the course of this chapter, I want to draw back to think in more general terms about what it might mean to write and perform a Sanskrit play on the topic of Akbar's Court and the Dīn-i-Ilāhī within the context of twentieth-century India. I specifically want to contemplate this text as intended for dramatic performance but also as being the product of a performance – Raghavan's act of writing Sanskrit. This section will also consider Raghavan's account of *Anārkalī* and the Dīn-i-Ilāhī in terms of metanarratives of South Asian history that influenced twentieth-century Indian thought. Finally, in the last few pages of this chapter, having earlier criticized in a somewhat cynical vein Raghavan's depiction of Hindu religious tolerance as superior to Muslim divisiveness, we will briefly struggle with the intractable problem of religious tolerance and how, as scholars, to address claims to be tolerant.

That a twentieth-century Sanskrit drama might present a unified Indian nation to itself, i.e. an Indian audience, as a future utopia appears to echo Jonathan Z. Smith's definition of ritual as “a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are.”¹²²

South Asia in the postcolonial situation was fragmented both physically and figuratively, particularly in terms of religion, but Raghavan's *Anārkalī* presents India as potentially unified under the flags of Sanskrit and Akbar's integrative religious policies. Yet there is an important

¹²² Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63 (original quote in italics). The overlap between theater and ritual has been a subject of a great deal of research over the past few decades, but I will abstain from going down that rabbit hole here.

adjustment that we would have to make to Smith's definition to make it fit *Anārkalī* fully: the drama not only performs the way things *ought* to be, in an imaginary future or an alternative present, but the way they *were* or *could have been*, albeit in an equally imaginary past.¹²³ The play acknowledges the tension between a politically fissiparous present and a past perceived as peaceful and cohesive. While Raghavan insists that his depiction of Mughal rule is accurate, and that his account of Anārkalī is a correction of other accounts, it is still a fictional representation that shows a far clearer map of good tolerance and bad divisiveness than could have been the case. *Anārkalī* performs the way Raghavan imagines things *were* and *might be again* in conscious tension to the way they *are* today in a *dvaita* India.

Indeed, the very idea of performing a Sanskrit play on a Muslim topic is founded on the premise that one can provide an emulsifier for the fissiparous oil and water of religions, cultures, and languages by presenting to an audience not mere talk *about* unification but an actual *enactment* of nondifference. But this is merely a pretense, and it is unclear whether much that is Muslim remains in the text. Persian is completely sidelined, and it is Sanskrit that emerges as the language of unity. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, Raghavan held that "Sanskrit went about its consolidating activity by a wise policy of give and take," mimicking colonialism and Akbar's integrative philosophy. Yet in calling Sanskrit the "supreme integrator,"¹²⁴ as he calls it in the preface to *Anārkalī*, he seems to insist on the superiority of the language itself as a means of creating unity, dismissing not only Persian and other Islamic-associated languages but also the Dravidian languages.

The play utilizes the free creative space that the literary imagination affords to craft a narrative that encompasses part of the Muslim period of Indian history within a larger narrative of the historical continuity of Sanskrit and a naturalized sense of Hindu inclusivity. In his analysis of

¹²³ If this alteration were made in the original, I think it would add to Smith's definition the important issue of the heterogeneous timeframes, or historicities, in and by which people live.

¹²⁴ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, xi.

Krishnamachari's colonial era translation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* into Sanskrit, David Mason notes that the resulting translation completely refashions Shakespeare's play into the style of Kālidāsa, subsuming the bard, and by extension Englishness, to Sanskrit cultural superiority. As Mason argues convincingly, the translation is "less concerned with writing back to the empire than with exploiting imperial culture in order to aggrandize the tradition of Kalidasa."¹²⁵ Raghavan's *Anārkalī*, I want to argue, makes a similar move but with regard to Muslims. The play uses the example of Akbar's inclusivity and promotion of Sanskrit to suggest that this is what is needed in modern India, yet with Hindus at the helm. Further, by translating Salīm and Anārkalī into the idiom and style of Kālidāsa (among other Sanskrit dramatists), the play overwrites Muslim aggression and political intrigue with a court romance, and subtly insists on the superiority of India's cultural tradition for achieving "emotional integration." Raghavan's project is not to write back to the Muslim or British empires, but to aggrandize and supplement the Sanskrit tradition by smuggling the Muslim empire into the Sanskrit literary tradition under the Advaita Vedanta umbrella, integrating the nation's religions and its history in an imagined continuity of Sanskrit hegemony.

By translating Akbar and his court into Kālidāsa's Gupta period, Raghavan not only imagines that Akbar partakes of the eras before him, imagined eras of perfect rule under dharmic Hindu kings, but he also erases nearly every vestige of Mughalness in the story. Akbar appears as far more a Hindu king than otherwise. The result is an imagined continuity back to a pre-Muslim era of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, in which Akbar appears to partake, that functions as an ideal for elites such as Raghavan who might be at home in such a world, even if it is far from ideal according to modern postcolonial discourses of progress. There is in this play, and Raghavan's work as a whole, a nostalgic desire to return to an era in which the government supported Sanskrit,

¹²⁵ David V. Mason, "Who Is the Indian Shakespeare? Appropriations of Authority in a Sanskrit "Midsummer Night's Dream," *New Literary History* 33:4 (Autumn, 2003): 639-658, 640.

to recycle an ancient past of imperial formations authorized through Sanskrit as a forerunner to contemporary sovereignty and as a possible model for resolving through language the remaining fault lines in the modern nation.

This narrative of ancient Sanskrit glory in comparison with current Sanskrit desuetude matches another narrative of Indian history that occurs frequently in both European and Indian nationalist historiography: that of “classic glory, medieval decline, and modern renaissance.”¹²⁶ As Partha Chatterjee notes, the era of decline in this formulation is that of Muslim rule in India, and in Indian nationalist accounts of the period, Muslims are described as “fanatical, bigoted, warlike, dissolute, and cruel,” precisely the way that Raghavan characterizes many Muslims in *Anārkalī*. But there is no contradiction in *Anārkalī*’s claim of Akbar for Sanskrit history. Bengali nationalist historians, at least, have quite a bit of praise for Akbar as a sort of exception to the metanarrative – a momentary peak in the midst of the presumed descent of Sanskrit and South Asian culture.¹²⁷ Certainly praise for Akbar is not unfounded, but Raghavan’s play appears to be an attempt at recapturing that supposed golden era and redeploying it for nationalist means. In the process, Raghavan not only appropriates Akbar into a depiction of Sanskrit’s continuity but imagines Akbar as a window to this prior perfect world of Sanskrit, religious harmony, and servant women marrying princes. It is a world that looks far less like the Mughal era than it does a mixture of an idealized classical first-millennium Sanskrit cosmopolis combined, awkwardly, with the anti-caste and communal politics of postcolonial India. Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* thus includes Muslim history only to subsume it under the juggernaut that is Sanskrit history and forces it to speak to modernity.

Just as the text seems to aggrandize Sanskrit language and literature, it also suggests the superiority of Hinduism as the most tolerant religion. In my remaining few pages, I want to talk more about this matter, and to complicate the more cynical direction this chapter has taken. In his

¹²⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993), 102.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 83 and 105.

Patel Memorial Lectures, Raghavan avers that true religious experience can be found among India's many "saint-singers," among whom he includes various Tamil saints (*nāyanārs* and *ālvārs*), Kabir, Guru Nanak, Tyāgarāja, and many others.¹²⁸ According to Raghavan, the songs of these saints, and their tireless pilgrimages, worked to foster the integration of India. He calls them "pioneers of what is called today Comparative Religion," who helped to rein in the extremes of Hindu polytheism and ritualism as well as "softening the severity of sectarian and communal fanaticism," especially of Muslims.¹²⁹ According to Raghavan, these saint-singers spread these ideas of unity throughout South Asia over the centuries such that "tolerance became a national trait."¹³⁰ Again, we see the idea that tolerance in India is deeply ingrained in the Hindu populace.

Yet this tolerance, as described by Raghavan, is blatantly Vedantic in character. He even calls Kabir "advaitic," although the fifteenth-century North Indian poet is more closely associated with the *nirguṇa bhakti* tradition. In his discussion of these supposedly integrating figures, Raghavan emphasizes throughout the saint-singers' monistic mystical vision, and corroborates this as the essential religious experience by reference to William James's description of mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹³¹ He also avers that all of the saint-singers had knowledge of Sanskrit religious texts, and presumes that it is from this well of knowledge that they drew their unifying/Vedantic perspective.¹³² Such a conclusion of a Sanskrit base for all wisdom in India is not merely nationalistic rhetoric: it is also derogatory and dismissive of those early poets and thinkers based in other languages, particularly Tamil, the language revered by the anti-Brahmin Dravidian movement in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu. In his work on these saint-singers,

¹²⁸ The presumption that these singers can be categorized together is itself a problem, but not one worth exploring on this occasion.

¹²⁹ Raghavan, *The Great Integrators*, 81.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28, 32. Raghavan seems to be picking up on the tendency in the field of comparative religion to reduce religion to essentials, and he is using this as a warrant to suggest that Vedanta is "religion" at its most essential, the holy grail, as it were, of comparative religion.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 45-46.

Raghavan points out quite plainly that the search for the proper religion is a matter of finding the essence of truth, essentializing the bevy of different views and religious thoughts, and refining it into a unity. While Akbar, like a bee, selects what is best from the various religions, Raghavan seems to be saying that it is in modern Advaita Vedanta that it becomes honey. He thus marginalizes not only the other languages, but the various other philosophical schools in South Asia. The Dīn-i-Ilāhī appears less like the discipleship for the study of religion that it was, and rather more like a class in Vedanta at a Ramakrishna Mission.

Raghavan’s portrayal of a conference of religions in a Sanskrit play does have a precedent in the Sanskrit literary tradition of which Raghavan was well aware, namely Jayanta Bhaṭṭa’s *Āgamaḍambara* (circa ninth century C.E.), and there are some similarities between that play and the Dīn-i-Ilāhī scene in *Anārkalī*. Yet Raghavan’s reading of that play, too, implicitly favors Advaitic unity as the answer for the country’s present religious tensions. Raghavan concludes his introduction to his edition of *Āgamaḍambara* by making a case for the applicability of the text’s message of supposed inclusivity for modern India and the world¹³³ writing that the play “breathes a remarkable spirit of catholicity.”¹³⁴ While indeed the final act of Jayanta’s play does portray a some degree of tolerance, it is also the case that *Āgamaḍambara* utterly discards and denigrates Buddhism and Jainism as well as the Cārvākas, and emphasizes that the Veda alone is the primary authority; thus Raghavan’s emphasis on religious unity in diversity (all *āgamas* lead toward salvation, he says¹³⁵) in Jayanta Bhatta’s text is perhaps misplaced and he is blind to the outright Vedantic leaning of the text, as well as its blatant satire on all other religions. He does not see his own bias in his interpretation of the play.

¹³³ Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Āgamaḍambara*, or *Ṣaṅmatanāṭaka*, ed. V. Raghavan and Anantalal Thakur (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1964), xxix. Apparently, it was Raghavan himself who discovered this play, or, as he says in *Anārkalī*’s *prastāvanā*, “brought it out from the mine of previously unheard of Sanskrit jewels,” (Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 2).

¹³⁴ Raghavan, Introduction to *Āgamaḍambara*, xxviii.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

There is a tension, it seems, in Raghavan's discussion of religious pluralism between tolerance on the one hand and unity on the other; between a kind of universal relativism and a particularistic Advaita Vedanta perspective. Raghavan is not unique in this respect. The same tension can be seen in the work of the noted Vedāntin philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who quite explicitly argues that Vedanta is the essence of all religions: "The Vedānta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance."¹³⁶ Raghavan, I take it, would agree with this sentiment. As Robert Minor notes, there is a tension between Radhakrishnan's calls for secularism and tolerance and the overwhelming evidence in his work that he views Vedanta as the superior path.¹³⁷ One interpretation of this tension in Raghavan and Radhakrishnan alike is to propose that they exhibit what Paul Hacker called "hierarchical relativism,"¹³⁸ in which all religions are equally valid, but there is one higher truth that encapsulates all of them. Indeed, to borrow a phrasing from George Orwell, the idea here would be that all religions are equal but some are more equal than others.

I mentioned this notion of hierarchical relativism briefly in chapter 1 using Reid Locklin's phrase "conversion up" as a means of understanding Raghavan's advocacy for Sanskrit. Indeed, at this point it is worth pointing out that Raghavan's promotion of Sanskrit as the national language partakes of a rhetorical strategy that is very similar to his religious discussions. This tendency within Hinduism to be inclusively tolerant, yet to categorize other philosophies as inferior, has a long history among Vedantins as Andrew Nicholson has pointed out recently. For these thinkers

¹³⁶ Quoted in Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 68.

¹³⁷ See Robert N. Minor, "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on the Nature of 'Hindu' Tolerance," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 50, no. 2 (June 1982): 275-290.

¹³⁸ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 403-18, 411. Halbfass argues that this "not a contradiction in terms," but it is not therefore without tension. Despite the seemingly intractable irony of the institutionalization of irenic ideologies, I would insist that one has to investigate rather than inveigh against inconsistencies that arise as part of the process of contextualized strategic imagination.

“inclusivistic strategies...were used as a tool for assimilation from a position of strength.”¹³⁹ It is also a matter of cataloguing, for by cataloguing a variety one thereby achieves mastery over that variety yet condenses it all in one rubric, book, or encyclopedia. Likewise for the Hindu reformers in the twentieth century this process of unifying Hinduism takes on the additional task of unifying the Hindu-*deśa* as one entity. By writing and performing a play that illustrates this unification, Raghavan in *Anārkalī* seems to be engaging in just this sort of inclusivist strategy.

This ecumenical approach toward religions that Raghavan favors is further complicated by a question of the idea of “religion” that animates it. Through its critique of Islamic discord contrasted with Hindu concord, Raghavan’s *Anārkalī* employs a rhetoric of religious difference to instill a notion of religious harmony following a Vedantic model of hierarchical inclusivism. Such rhetoric depends on the notion that religions are bounded, natural entities, an idea that has its origin in Euro-American history and thought. Raghavan appears to be aware of this in his comments on how the Abrahamic religions “maintain their individuality” as opposed to Hindu traditions. To an extent, it might be argued that there was more fluidity among Indian religious practices prior to the colonial era, allowing for the possibility of following multiple paths as we saw Birbal advocating or going beyond identity as Akbar’s verse suggested. While surely there are rumblings of identity discourse in earlier religious writings in South Asia, the transformation of Hinduism into a reified “world religion” of the Euro-American variety that occurs under colonialism goes hand-in-hand with new notions of national identity. It is at the point of creating naturalized national identities, proposing that Indians are naturally more tolerant, that Raghavan’s rhetoric begins to partake of the very rhetoric of individuality and exceptionalism of religions that he otherwise might denounce. Further, he starkly compares Hinduism and Hindus to Islam and Muslims, not only praising Hindu ways but showing them through the play’s plot to be superior to

¹³⁹ Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism, Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 187.

Muslim sectarian conflict and legalism. To the extent that Raghavan implies that such a Vedantic approach is ideal as a model of contemporary national governance, the notion that what Raghavan really wants is “joint” governance (as the last verse suggests) becomes questionable.

Much of this rhetoric of Hindu and Sanskrit pre-eminence is taking place off stage, behind the curtain and under the cover of tolerance. Indeed, it seems to substantiate Sumathi Ramaswamy’s suggestion that the members of the 1956 Sanskrit Commission (including Raghavan) passed off religion under the guise of culture (see the introduction). In *Anārkalī*, I suggest that we can see this resignification and sublimation of Hinduism to Sanskrit illustrated dramatically in the fact that Salīm’s Hindu wife recedes into the background of the play and yet is instrumental in bringing about its denouement. Hinduism works offstage while Sanskrit “culture” and “morality” (the issue of dharma and intercaste marriage) take the limelight. As Raghavan portrays it, her impact is not because she is “Hindu” so much as that she is a moral and upstanding person, and one who very much loves and cares for her husband, as a “good” wife should. But her marking as “Hindu” is unmistakable, and the allegorical message is there to be found, and thus uncovered, subject to critical questioning.

Yet, having launched this critique of Raghavan’s model of tolerance, I find its presupposition troublesome, and perhaps the tension in Raghavan’s discussion of tolerance is in the observer rather than the observed. The foregoing analysis presumes that tolerance based on the model of Advaita Vedanta is not possible because Advaita Vedanta is a religious belief system that is not necessarily held universally. Further, such an analysis establishes a hierarchy based on a projected ideal of complete equality, presuming that some even playing field without bias exists, and from which vantage any opinion that suggests a topography (a hierarchy) is immediately subjugated as inferior. This ideal bias-free view immediately appears not only impossible but self-contradictory. In contrast, we might grant that Raghavan’s pitch is from his own perspective, not ours, and the expectation otherwise seems to be itself a matter of subjecting his thought to,

perhaps, a latent colonialism. We might further question whether tolerance is always circumscribed, and if rhetorical devices of religious distinction are unavoidable in an era of identity politics.

My critical analysis also suggested that Raghavan's ideal world is so entrenched in Sanskrit that it cannot be truly universal and egalitarian. Yet is there much difference between advocating tolerance in English, the language of colonial England and Liberal Protestantism, and portraying and promoting religious harmony in the elite Hindu register of Sanskrit? While I cannot ignore that the two languages carry different baggage historically and socially, in terms of the circumscribed nature of language as a means of communication of ideals, the answer to that question is assuredly negative. Those who might fault Raghavan for writing in the elite language of Sanskrit yet launch such a critique in English, from the metropole, or even in the jargon-laden language of postcolonial studies, are perhaps ultimately hoist by their own petards.

I wanted to lay bare some of these concerns at the close of this chapter as I transition to considering Raghavan's work in a more cosmopolitan key, particularly his advocacy of Sanskrit (and Hinduism) as ideal unifiers of global fractiousness, and thinking about his work more in terms of its historical context of cosmopolitan India. The next chapter will also attempt to treat Raghavan's advocacy of Sanskrit in a more theoretical light that provides him with agency and does not condemn him to being a function of mere caste politics and nationalism. It is here that the critical Euro-American reader, especially an advocate of the subaltern, might begin to resist his claims more stridently. Admittedly, in my thinking of *Anārkalī* as a text of tolerance, this has been a matter over which I have struggled: trying to reconcile my respect for the text with my concern for its provincialism.

Yet I have found in an unlikely source a possible solution of some sort for this struggle: the wise words of the thinker with which this conclusion section began. J.Z. Smith argues that the historian of religions has no place on which to stand, no Archimedean point from which to move

the world: “The historian’s task is to complicate, not to clarify.”¹⁴⁰ While I fear that in places my critique above might have clarified by complicating Raghavan’s narrative, it did not attempt to adjudicate matters fully, and it did not offer solutions. Smith presents this vision of the historian’s craft in opposition to the philosopher, or, as he adds in another version of the same idea, the theologian,¹⁴¹ who does have an Archimedean point, a place from which to push for an idea, an ideal, a religion, or even a language. If Raghavan is a theologian, we must engage him as such, not as a fellow historian, even if he was a fine historian and scholar in his many academic works. As much as a critic might be weary of Raghavan’s strident and sanguine support of Sanskrit linguistic nationalism, and his visions of Advaita Vedantic ascendancy, particularly when observing the current chauvinism of some elements of the Hindu right-wing, it is itself an act of tolerance to render onto Raghavan the right to speak to the world from his perspective, and for us to study his writings as those of a philosopher or theologian with whom we might respectfully disagree while being ultimately concerned to historicize.

¹⁴⁰ J.Z. Smith, “The Influence of Symbols upon Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand” in *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 129.

¹⁴¹ J.Z. Smith, “Map is not Territory,” in *ibid.*, 289.

CONCLUSION

A HOME IN THE WORLD: SANSKRIT COSMOPOLIS, MODERN COSMOPOLITANISM

My husband was very eager to take me out of *purdah*.
One day I said to him: “What do I want with the
outside world?”
“The outside world may want you,” he replied.
“If the outside world has got on for so long without
me, it may go on for some time longer. It need not
pine to death for want of me.”
“Let it perish, for all I care! That is not troubling me.
I am thinking about myself.”
— Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*¹

As the previous chapter drew to a close, I began a discussion between two perspectives on Raghavan’s religious pluralism. One voice was critical of the fact that his pluralism was not fully equally divided but rather privileged Advaita Vedanta. The other voice countered that what might appear as the creation of a hierarchy is the inevitable result of the situatedness of the speaker, and thus the outside observer ought to await judgment and give Raghavan the leeway to create the image of the world he desires. Like the Sunni and the Shiite arguing at the end of *Anārkalī*’s prologue, these two voices were just off-stage, heard but not fully identified. In this chapter, I want to begin by introducing those two voices more clearly. The first voice is constantly critical and obsessed with regarding Raghavan’s work entirely in political terms. This voice often read Raghavan’s work following Frederic Jameson’s assertion that all third-world literature is allegorical and refers to political matters.² It spoke of Raghavan through a filter of suspicion of ulterior motives and proselytic propaganda. The second voice wants to save Raghavan from such a reductive view and to recover something of his perspective as a situated

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, trans. Surendranath Tagore (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 23.

² Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88. I find this to be a sweeping overgeneralization and regret the use of the term “third-world,” but, nevertheless, his argument has some usefulness here.

and interested human being. This second voice wishes to maintain his works and *his* voice as expressive of his emotions, to read his works as having meaning for him and a small circle of like-minded individuals who share his opinions. In short, these two voices are the hermeneutic of suspicion and hermeneutic of recovery as proposed by Paul Ricoeur.³ These two voices will form the backbone of this chapter's oscillation.

Those voices presume another conversation partner, a voice that has remained quite silent through these pages: the supposed audience. The critical perspective assumes that we, the Euro-American scholars, are the audience. In other moments, it also assumes some amorphous and imagined totality of Indian society as an audience interpolated by messages and propaganda but, as with Homi Bhabha's thoughts on "writing the nation,"⁴ is not the actual audience addressed but rather far from being receptive to such cultural imperialism. The second voice, the emotional voice, allows for the possibility that these works make available a sense of emotion, perhaps for an audience, but also for the author himself. This hermeneutics of recovery has been quieter throughout these pages, and adopting it allows for the possibility that the audience and the author might be one in the same. In short, it is to take a very different approach to our initial question of what it meant for Raghavan to write in Sanskrit in the twentieth-century, focusing on the writer as much as the social historical context, and attempting not to reduce the writer to a mere function of the times but rather taking seriously his literary agency as an affective, rather than solely (in)effective, creative response to his environment.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 20-36.

⁴ See above, chapter 2.

Towards an Advaita World: Sanskrit for the Globe

The question of the audience surely haunted the end of the last chapter. If Raghavan wrote his Advaita-favoring *Anārkalī* for a Hindu audience, what harm is there? Surely it might serve to bolster a sense of superiority in the minds of a Hindu Brahmin audience, to reify some sense of greater catholicity. On the other hand, it might have been meant to remind that audience of their pluralistic character, and to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims, even while encoding a message of hierarchy. It might create imperfect peaceful relations, but peaceful nonetheless. If the intended audience is the Other, the Muslims or even Euro-Americans, a message that Advaita is superior begins to grate. Thus how we might read Raghavan's pluralistic message depends to some degree not only on how the play's logic holds together within the play, but on how it imagines its audience. Indeed, we might take a cue from Althusser's notion of interpolation, and ask how the play interpolates its audience: as Hindus in need of identity reification, as Hindus-in-training, or as Others who need leadership and teaching.

Raghavan's *Anārkalī* was never performed outside of India, and it has mainly been staged in Chennai. Thus the actual audience was primarily Hindus, and Tamil Brahmins more specifically, within Raghavan's social sphere of the arts and culture world. In that case, the play addressed its audience in a manner that primarily sediments identity. Viewing *Anārkalī* would, in this understanding, ultimately shore up a sense of Hindu tolerance in opposition to the divisive Muslim other. It might serve to remind its audience of this feature of Hindu tolerance, and the play's Sanskrit medium and classical romance reaffirm Sanskrit not just as the language of the arts but also as the language of religious harmony. *Anārkalī* conveys its message of integration through romance, but also subtly suggests that patriotism is itself a manner of romance, love for the nation. The play thereby attempts to serve the objective Raghavan has in mind for reviving

Sanskrit in modern India: making Indians feel as if they are part of one country. In that sense, *Anārkalī* provides the occasion for that aesthetic experience of nationalism not only through Sanskrit but through its integrative message as well, even though the play subtly excludes the others who are rendered foreign to what is deemed Indian and Hindu.

In addition to its stagings in Chennai, *Anārkalī* was twice performed for international audiences in India at meetings of the World Sanskrit Conference, including the first such conference in 1972 in Delhi (called at that time the International Sanskrit Conference) and then for the Tenth World Sanskrit Conference in Bangalore in 1997. In his preface to *Anārkalī*, Raghavan makes clear that he is confident about the possibility of his message reaching an international audience through the performance in Delhi: “A contemporary Sanskrit play which showed the living character of the language as a medium of creative expression today, the presentation of a Muhammedan story in Sanskrit and the over-all ideology of integration and harmony, all these made the production of *Anārkalī* most appropriate at a gathering at which scholars from every part of the world had assembled to place flowers at the altar of the supreme integrator, Sanskrit.”⁵ A number of threads from this dissertation converge here. We see again the notion of Sanskrit as a supreme integrator, mentioned above in Chapter 1. There is also a reappearance of Sanskrit conceived of as an object of worship, not unlike many languages in twentieth-century India. The quote also suggests that Sanskrit has the ability to unite the world. Indeed Raghavan wrote a number of publications on the status of Sanskrit studies throughout the world, and even in his early writings he noted that the discovery of the Indo-European language family was a means of drawing the world closer together. In *Anārkalī*, then, it is not just language but also religion that Raghavan forwards as the joint unifiers of the world – the heavenly parents, as it were.

⁵ V. Raghavan, “Preface,” in *Anārkalī* (Madras: The Samskrita Ranga, 1972), xi.

It is unclear what messages, if any, the audiences of *Anārkalī* actually received, and whether it varied for each person, and they might have only seen the surface level. Of those international scholars in attendance at the 1972 performance, only Jean Filliozat’s response has been published, and he mentions how “the conference of religions under Akbar gave the opportunity to express through Sanskrit ideas coming from various horizons.”⁶ Other reviewers, all Indian Hindus and many in government, noted the religious message. Minister of Education Sher Singh echoes Raghavan’s concern for “emotional integration” and the “synthesis of all the faiths of this country.”⁷ Other Hindu reviewers also lauded Raghavan’s inclusion of Muslims and his message of religious harmony.⁸ Whether others outside of the government received this message is unclear. The playbill that was distributed at performances included an English synopsis and discussion. It is rather likely that audiences directed toward the issue of “harmony” would utterly miss the issue of alterity and sectarianism pointed out in the previous chapter.

In Sanskrit, Raghavan is quite clear about his intent, but he adjusts it slightly for the international audience. If in the original prologue he focuses on the need for religious harmony in India, in the alternate prologue for the World Sanskrit Conference he adds that “what today is greatly required in India and in other countries is coordinated union, and the appearance of harmony among various religious and all variety of people, that is addressed through this play.”⁹ He continues to note how the theme of harmony is woven throughout the play.¹⁰ Thus while his emphasis in the English preface is on promoting Sanskrit, in the Sanskrit text he emphasizes harmony as a message for an international audience. Perhaps he presumed that the mere

⁶ Ibid., vii.

⁷ Ibid., v-vi.

⁸ There were a number of such positive reviews in English journals of Indology based in India, and many were reprinted in the *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*. See *Sanskrita Ranga Annual*, Vol. 7, (1979): 164-76. There was one review in the popular Tamil magazine *Dinamani* that was also laudatory: Tiruvenkaṭattan, “Anārkalī” *Dinamani*, (August 18, 1974).

⁹ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 89. “yo ’dya bhārate ’nyatra loke ca atīva apekṣitaḥ samanvaya-yogaḥ, nānāmatānām nānājanasamudāyānām ca mithāḥ sāmarasyarūpaḥ, sa eva etadrūpakadvārā āghoṣyate.”

¹⁰ Ibid.: “...sarvatomukhaṃ kimapi rūpake ’asmin sāmarasyamāsūtritam.”

appearance of Muslims in a Sanskrit play would symbolize harmonious relations, and the subtler messages would be elided by Sanskrit's supposed naturally integrative character.

In contrast to this international perspective, *Anārkalī*'s original prologue suggests that the play might foster not world harmony, but harmony on a more regional, albeit still international, scale: he urges that the play be performed in Pakistan. In the course of discussion in the prologue, after briefly mentioning Partition, the secretary says that *Anārkalī* might be performed beneficially not only in India but also in Pakistan, here referred to as "the brother country."¹¹ Raghavan recognizes here the divisiveness that precipitated Partition, and the tension between the two young co-uterine twin nations in various wars (the 1965 conflict being most recent prior to the play's revisions, although the 1971 Indo-Pak War did take place between the first performances in Chennai and the World Sanskrit Conference performance). More significantly, given the scolding tone the play takes towards Muslim sectarian conflict, the play as proposed for a Pakistani audience indicates not only a role for India and Hinduism as the bringers of peace to Muslim lands, and not only the supposedly superior peacefulness of Hindus, but it further suggests that Sanskrit and Hinduism need to be exported in order to foster peace and harmony among those who are perceived of as lacking those traits, e.g. to Pakistan and the Muslim world.

Peace, Love, and (an Academic) Understanding

The notion of Hinduism as a peacemaking export surfaces occasionally in some of Raghavan's writings contemporaneous with *Anārkalī*'s publication, and would thus corroborate the sense that Raghavan thinks of Hinduism as a potential leader of peace. Certainly this perspective is not entirely new, and numerous religious leaders, from Vivekananda to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to the Beatles (as middlemen in such an endeavor) have sent out spiritual rhizomes

¹¹ Ibid., 7. "evam ca na kevalam bhārata, kintu samanantaravartini bhrātrbhūte deśe ca prakṛtaparisthitidṛṣṭyā mahad aucityam bibharti rūpakamidam."

around the globe. Raghavan himself was active in the Ramakrishna Mission and reported that he visited missions around the globe during his travels.¹² In contrast to those figures, Raghavan's efforts toward international harmony through Hinduism are almost entirely within the framework of academia: in keeping with his views of culture, and his high estimation of education, he speaks within a scholarly register and in scholarly fora. He almost always seems to presume and target a very well educated English-speaking audience, particularly among the Indian elites. It is to them that he is conveying these ideas about tolerance and religious pluralism, though certainly many of them were saying the same. For example, his Patel Lectures in 1964 were entirely on the subject of religious integration as evidenced in what he called the "Saint-Singers," poets and saints of the second millennium, mostly in North India though he also includes many Tamil figures, who, according to Raghavan, sang on religious themes in the spirit of interfaith harmony. Again, these pieces appear to shore up an identity of the tolerant Hindu adept in spiritual matters, but they are couched to a large degree in the language of academia.

Two English-language pieces, containing roughly the same argument, reveal Raghavan's insistence that Hinduism is not only useful for modernity but also a potential leader of religious harmony. The first, presented at the First Spiritual Summit Conference in Calcutta, is on the relevance for Hinduism for the modern world. The conference was held under the auspices of the Temple of Understanding,¹³ and the summit in which Raghavan spoke included speakers from various religions, from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism. Raghavan was not the only representative

¹² V. Raghavan, "V. Raghavan's Autobiographical Reflections," in *The Power of the Sacred Name*, ed. William J. Jackson, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994), 325.

¹³ The Temple of Understanding is an interfaith organization and NGO associated with the United Nations, founded in 1960 in New York by Juliet Hollister with the assistance of Eleanor Roosevelt. The group runs a number of interfaith meetings and colloquia among religious leaders and heads of state worldwide. I could not find a decent study of them, although a scholarly history considering the organization in its mid-twentieth-century, post-World-War II context, would be a desideratum. Information provided here is from their website: <http://templeofunderstanding.org/>.

of Hinduism (Swami Chinmayananda, among other lesser known names, also spoke and gave speeches) yet it was Raghavan who gave an invocation prayer for the meeting:

He who is Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, and the Sun to the followers of the Veda; the impersonal absolute, Brahman, to those who follow the path of knowledge. He who is Buddha, Anri and Ahura Mazda to the followers of the traditions of Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. And for those who are the followers of the Jews, of Christ, and Mohammed, He who is Yahweh, God and Allah. The same one which is in diverse forms, that one truth we adore.¹⁴

It is a short invocation verse, and the grammar issues and odd punctuation lead me to believe that it might have been offered in verse in Sanskrit and then translated into English. It seems likely the translation was done by someone else, since Raghavan's English translations of his own Sanskrit verses are normally more idiomatic. The idea of "followers of the Jews" is itself awkward, but again this sounds like a translation problem, or perhaps a misunderstanding of Judaism as a founded religion.¹⁵ If there was a translation issue, the "path of knowledge" must have be *jñāna* originally, although it is hard to ignore that this line, when paired with the last concerning "the one truth," suggests some superiority of the *jñāna* intellectual path. The arrangement of religions is also instructive: the first segment includes the classical Hindu *bhakti-yoga* and *karma-yoga* and adds *jñāna-yoga* in a way that seems to valorize it. The second group consists of religions that are closer to Hinduism geographically, and Raghavan would argue they are conceptually closer as well since both Buddhism and Jainism branch from Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism, as Akbar notes in *Anārkalī*, has a similar fire ritual. The last grouping appears to follow a chronological order, but is nevertheless separate. Still, even if the final group is something of an awkward sustained chord, expressing tension through difference, it resolves in the last sentence into a major chord of harmony.

¹⁴ V. Raghavan, "An Invocation" in *The World Religions Speak on "The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World,"* World Academy of Art and Science 6, Ed. Finley P. Dunne Jr., (The Hague: Dr. W. Junk N.V. Publishers, 1970) xvii.

¹⁵ Given Raghavan's wide-ranging reading, he would certainly have known enough about Judaism not to make this mistake, hence my suggestion that some translator must have erred resulting in these infelicities.

It is illuminating, by way of a side note, to read Raghavan's invocation verse in relation to the opening and closing prayers with which it is printed on the same page. The opening prayer was given by Juliet Hollister, founder of the Temple of Understanding, and includes the sentence: "We ask only that Thou continue to guide and protect us in this holy endeavor to create a Temple of Understanding." Since that is exactly the name of her group, we might lodge the critique that her prayer is even more sectarian than Raghavan's. At least he mentions other religious groups by name and says they lead to the same place, which remains unnamed. Hollister's speech insists on unity under the name of her organization. Further, Hollister's prayer refers to God as the "Father" and is thus undeniably Christian while Raghavan's is merely androcentric. The closing prayer was offered by the American Catholic monk Father Thomas Merton, and unlike Raghavan's it includes no mention of other religious groups or concepts of god. While his prayer does suggest creating a "new language of prayer" that "has to come out of something which transcends all our traditions," his answer is still in a recognizably Christian language and style, emphasizing God's love, love for God, the filling of being with Spirit, and ending on the word "Amen." This perusal again reaffirms the claim made at the end of the previous chapter that calls for equality among religions are inherently biased toward the perspective of the speaker and uttered in the discourse of his or her tradition. In short, calls for universality are always uttered from the point of view of a particularity.

Raghavan recognizes this intractable problem at the opening of his essay, claiming that he will "place before you my ideas from a special as well as a general point of view" but that in the end he cannot keep the two separate since he speaks "on behalf of Hinduism" as a universal: "For it is on the general, the fundamental and universal aspects of Hinduism that I propose to

concentrate.”¹⁶ His essay goes on to refute claims that Hinduism and modernity, particularly modern economics, are at cross-purposes. He especially attempts to refute the charges of Max Weber and R.C. Zaehner against the Hindu capacity for development. In the main, his argument suggests that Hinduism offers various useful perspectives for the modern world. For example, he suggests that the *puruṣārtha*-s include economics and spirituality, and are thus an improvement on the contemporary Euro-American worldview that emphasizes only economic development as the aim of life. Further, he finds a number of examples of how Hinduism thinks about religious diversity in useful ways.

Perhaps most interesting to a scholar of religion is Raghavan’s suggestion that Hinduism provides a typology of religions:

In its laboratory, Hinduism has given us a threefold scientific analysis of all religions. No religion can escape these three characteristics. Just as all food, from whatever area and whatever substance, color, taste, form of consuming, etc. has to be assimilated as carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, so also have all religions to be analysed into three approaches or *margas*: *karma*, *bhakti*, and *jnana*.¹⁷

Aside from the delightful thought of studying the world’s religions as one would cuisines, Raghavan’s approach here imitates a *Religionwissenschaft* project of typologizing religions in a scientific laboratorial manner, yet utilizes indigenous categories.¹⁸ Thus religions might be thought of as focused either on ritual and activity, or on worship and devotion, or on knowledge and philosophizing. Admittedly, translating those terms into English does some violence to Raghavan’s system. To an extent, such a typology is worth some consideration for it at least topples Euro-American tendencies to group religions according to whether they are, for example,

¹⁶ Raghavan, “The Relevance of Hinduism” in *The World Religions Speak on “The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World,”* World Academy of Art and Science 6, Ed. Finley P. Dunne Jr. (The Hague: Dr. W. Junk N.V. Publishers, 1970) 12-23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ Cf. Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, Ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1988); or, further back, Friedrich Max Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1882).

founded or ethnic-based, ritualistic or philosophical, or primitive versus modern. Still, an academic approach that attempts to index religions is not entirely foreign to South Asian thought, as there is a tradition of doxographical approaches within South Asian philosophy.¹⁹ What is novel here, however, is Raghavan's use of overarching categories into which can be sorted the archive of the world's religions. Thus rather than constructing a hierarchy of existing traditions (as the doxographers did), Raghavan's model appears to be a very Euro-American model of sorting species of religions under certain types, and it includes religions beyond the strictly South Asian fold. Further, his model borrows the Euro-American notion that religions are separate, bounded entities that are a natural, worldwide phenomenon of human experience. In a sense, Raghavan's system localizes a larger Euro-American project of categorization but then offers it as a solution for what he views as a decidedly Euro-American (and Muslim, although he does not indicate that here) problem of religious disharmony. In this document, the model appears intended primarily for a Euro-American audience.

Raghavan further elaborates this theory in a short piece published in the journal *Swarajya* (a journal of the center-right Swatantra Party) at around the same time, and based on a speech he gave in Madras in 1969. In that piece, entitled "Religious Harmony," there is a continuation of Raghavan's tendency to combine South Asian and European sources in such a way as to make them appear mutually supportive of the same general notions. Still, there are signs of Hindu superiority when he claims that the problem of interreligious understanding "had been tackled in India four or five thousand years ago by the Rishis, which by itself shows how Hinduism has an uncanny genius to understand religious and philosophical problems and how on the present

¹⁹ On this, see Andrew Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

question Hinduism has held the golden key from its very beginning.”²⁰ Aside from the issue of the genetic fallacy in this reasoning, which itself betrays a Romantic Euro-American antiquarianism, and a concomitant ahistorical essentialization of “Hinduism,” the comment stands in some tension with the rest of the article’s insistence on unity and its eclectic use of quotes. In fact, Raghavan opens with two epigrams: a quote from the Bhīṣma’s speech to Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Mahābhārata* (on the subject of followers of multiple gods and *dharmas*) and a quote from Alfred North Whitehead on the necessity of tolerance. The body of the text is bookended by a quote from W.E. Hocking that “the State alone cannot civilize,” and a quote from T.S. Eliot expressing how the “spiritual unity that we have been speaking about ‘does not require us all to have only one loyalty.’” In between, there are quotes from Aldous Huxley, Lord Northbourne (Raghavan appears to have rather liked his work on religion), Joseph Gorres’ *Chrisliche Mystick*, Gandhi, Jayanta Bhatta, and a variety of other Sanskrit writers. In form, at least, Raghavan suggests not necessarily a solely Hindu outlook but rather a commonality among various speakers who favor unity.

Yet there is a deeper message in the text, to be found in the Hocking and Eliot quotes and the idea of Hindu religion as a solution: for Raghavan at this later stage in his career, the impediment to religious unity is actually nationalism. If tolerance is a mark of civility, and if the state cannot do the job but rather encourages factionalism, or loyalty to a political state entity or cultural identity, then the way out of religious strife is not through political provincialism, or even cultural provincialism, but through religion and the thoughts of the best philosophers who seek unity at more abstract and non-particular levels. It is an intriguing idea, and it perceptively suggests that the ideals of neo-liberalism are in fact subverted by the structures of the same neo-liberal state system. Yet if the political system is the problem, and that political system is

²⁰ Raghavan, “Religious Harmony” in *The Swarajya Annual Number* (1970): 221-224.

primarily European in origin, the implication of Raghavan's argument is that the state structure impedes Hinduism's potential to unify, and that this political impediment of religious potential is a hindrance not merely in India but worldwide.

This critique of the political is especially intriguing considering that the speech was given at the Shankara-Shanmata Conference in Madras, an undeniably religious affair. Yet it was reprinted in the *Swarajya* journal of the Swatantra Party. The essay itself only suggests the aptness of Hinduism for world religions, and critiques Indian secularism, which is itself in keeping with the Swatantra movement, though its objective is far more global. What seems to be happening here is a growing tension in Raghavan's later works between a sense of Hindu superiority and a growing dissatisfaction with the political system. There appears to be an erosion of the emphasis on Indian nationalism that was so evident in his earlier works on the tri-color flag or Vivekananda or Gandhi. Instead, we see more attention to the global situation in Raghavan's works at the end of the 1960's and early 1970's. While he advocates for unity and religious harmony, it is evident in numerous instances (some of which appear later in this chapter), that his solution to political difference was religious harmony rather than secularism.

In the beginning of the last chapter, I advanced the argument that Raghavan's notion of nationalism was founded on love as a means for creating national unity in postcolonial, religiously and socio-economically diverse India. However, Raghavan's literary recruitment of the romantic sentiment for the project of political unification extended beyond the national stage. In a book entitled *Universal Love and World Unity*, written in English and published a few years after *Anārkalī* and the other essays just mentioned – it is actually one of the last book-length works he published during his lifetime – Raghavan draws upon an international cadre of philosophers, literary greats, and religious leaders to promulgate the idea that love is essential for

world unity, and not just national unity. Since, as he says poetically, “The honey or fruit of civilization has never been, since dawn of time, free from its wasps of discords and thorns of war,” he wishes to “draw your attention to the Scriptures of world religions and what their teachers have taught on this subject in their writings and then discuss the problems involved in the concepts of love and unity and their relevance to the conditions in the world today.”²¹ The number of sources he draws upon in this book is dizzying and impressive, yet the message is simple: we need universal love and world unity, and the former can lead to the latter. That he would write such a book is itself a testament to his more global focus at this stage, and to his underlying concerns. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that the book’s publisher was Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, a conservative press founded by K.M. Munshi, suggesting that his audience for the publication was predominantly Indian. Even if the publisher was conservative and nationalistic, however, Raghavan’s sources are by no means limited to India and the text is once again a conglomeration of thoughts drawn from Sanskrit as well as international thinkers and writers. The text appears directed at an elite, English-speaking audience knowledgeable in various trends in Euro-American thought, and the message Raghavan conveys is not the partisan chauvinism one might normally associate with the publisher. Indeed, Raghavan’s role in the text is rather like that of his Akbar in *Anārkalī* who is described as a bee collecting the best honey from various sources.

To reach a unified world through universal love, as Raghavan argues, what is at stake is not mere reconciliation but better moral standards. In the book, he suggests that what is required is not love in an emotional sense but rather love in the sense of proper interpersonal action. Raghavan takes from Arnold Toynbee the idea that civilizations fall when they lose their

²¹ V. Raghavan, *Universal Love and World Unity* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978), 1-2.

morality.²² This notion that the world needs more moral fiber in its diet also echoes much of Vivekananda's rhetoric about Indians during the colonial era.²³ Also evident in the book is a continuation of Raghavan's concerns to maintain better ethics, particularly as concerns sexuality and overt capitalism. Many of his literary works, as discussed in earlier chapters, served as vehicles for ethical teachings and cultural development primarily for a Hindu and Brahmin audience, the audience of his Sanskrit works in particular. In these later years, Raghavan appears concerned about the cultural and spiritual development not just of the nation but also of the world, and his writings reflect national but also global concerns.

Indeed, he seems at this later point in his career to be moving away from nationalism altogether. In *Universal Love and World Unity*, Raghavan explicitly decries the provincialism of nationalism when it becomes a matter not of peaceful unification but of nationalistic *ahamahamikā*.²⁴ He cites Einstein's famous quote about nationalism as an "infantile disease" and Goethe's description of it as "the lowest stages of culture." He has little faith in the United Nations and their bureaucracy, and seems to sense that despite the end of colonialism, the U.N. is but another reiteration of empire. He also notes that, "Nationalism or patriotism in a narrow sense figures but rarely in Sanskrit literature, on the other hand universalism (*sarve janāḥ and lokāḥ samastāḥ*) figures prominently."²⁵ While I have heretofore been suggesting that Raghavan was trying to recreate the Sanskrit cosmopolis in the modern world, in this text we are somewhat

²² Raghavan, *Universal Love*, 86.

²³ The extension of love and Vedāntic thought into the realm of ethics is perfectly in line with the ideas of "practical Vedānta" that Vivekananda forwarded. For Vivekananda, practical Vedānta meant the application of Vedāntic ideas to the realms of the political, social, and ethical, the credo of such applied philosophy being "*tat tvam asi*" interpreted as a bond between fellow humans founded upon love. As Vivekānanda wrote: "this expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality." See Wilhelm Halbfass, "Practical Vedānta," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Steitencron (New Delhi: Sage 1995), 212.

²⁴ This word "*ahamahamikā*" means in Sanskrit a fight for superiority. It cannot be translated directly, but is based on the repetition of the first person pronoun "I." So it literally means something like, "that which is full of 'I' 'I,'" and it brings up the image of a verbal fight where egotistical parties continuously express their prowess.

²⁵ Raghavan, *Universal Love*, 85-86.

removed from the author of poems on the flag or the fiery oratory of Sanskrit as the national language to be seen in Raghavan's earlier writings in English. Indeed, what we see is a concern less for recreating a modern Sanskrit cosmopolis than for living in a modern cosmopolitan world.

This worldly perspective is a not entirely unsurprising development given that Raghavan was much more of a world-traveler by this point, having been to Europe, Russia, the U.S., and various other parts of the globe. He now had significantly more connections to scholars in the Euro-American world. Cliché as it might seem, such exposure would indubitably give a perceptive thinker like Raghavan a more global outlook. It also seems that he was beginning to become disillusioned with politics as a means of fulfilling his ends. On a global level, the United Nations certainly had not proven to be the promised panacea post World War II. Political secularism had not fully succeeded at stopping religious tensions in India. The carnage of the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1969 in Gujarat took place after most of these works were written, although there must certainly have been palpable tensions leading up to that outbreak. A greater possible impact on Raghavan's writing of this period might have been the precipitous rise of the anti-Brahmin anti-Sanskrit movement in the 1960's. The anti-Hindi agitations in 1965 shook the Tamil region and precipitated the rise to power in 1967 of the DMK political party that supported a pro-Tamil anti-Sanskrit platform. Meanwhile, the era of the original freedom fighters was drawing to a close, and even Raghavan's friend Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan left the presidency in 1967. Thus Raghavan's shift to a more worldly outlook coincides with a shift in Indian politics that saw more factionalism and less of the idealistic centralized spirit that had been so prominent at the nation's founding. If Sanskrit was to stay alive, and Hinduism was to have an impact, the international academic community was certainly more welcoming, the world more in need of a Raghavan, than his own homeland in Tamil Nadu and secularizing nation of India.

“*Bho Lokāḥ*” (*Hey, People*): *Hailing the Globe in Sanskrit*

Yet it would not be right to say that Raghavan’s worldly focus began at this point, and in fact we might extend his cosmopolitan tone back to his very first poem, uttered when he was a mere child of nine years. It is a verse honoring Śiva at the Tyāgeśa temple in his native Tiravārūr. The moment is a touching one in Raghavan’s sister recollection of it to her niece (Raghavan’s daughter, Nandini Ramani): the two recently orphaned children stood in the temple praying to the universal parents, and Raghavan directed his sister to recite this piece. He later told his sister that he considered it his first composition.²⁶ The verse is a fairly stock *stotra* to Śiva describing him as a naked mendicant covered in ashes, with the crescent moon in his topknot and the Ganga in his matted hair. But the vocative addressed in the poem is not Śiva but rather “O people, worship the lord.”²⁷ We have here an early glimpse of Raghavan advocating religious worship and addressing the world, interpolating a collectivity as potential worshippers, without regard to specificity of background. Additionally, to take a small step back from that analysis, we also see him addressing an amorphous collective of “people” while simultaneously addressing his fellow orphan sister, and one might suggest that on a personal level, the verse is a call for a sense of belonging within a cruel world.

To take an example of this universal perspective from his middle years, while he was writing more nationalist material, he makes of Gandhi not merely a nationalist but also a world leader. I mentioned briefly in Chapter 2 his poem praising the Mahātmā, a full translation of which appears below in Appendix A, which he wrote after the leader’s assassination (although published much later). This poem is not merely nationalist in upholding Gandhi as a hero, as

²⁶ Nandini Ramani, *V. Raghavan*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2014), 53.

²⁷ Raghavan, “Invocatory Verse on Lord Siva” in *Kavikokila Mañjari*, Vol. 3, compiled by Nandini Ramani (audio Cd) 2014, booklet, p. 3. “*bho lokāḥ bhajata iṣam...*”

discussed earlier, since beneath that *vīra rasa* is a sense of the need for peace and a veneration bordering on the religious. Even here at this earlier date, we can see Raghavan's insistence on Hindu-Muslim harmony, as he highlights Gandhi's visit to Naukhali after the communal riots there in 1946, and mentions his chanting of "Rām Rahīm."²⁸ The theme picks up later in the poem turning Gandhi into a global religious leader in a long line of such leaders:

There was Buddha and there was Jesus Christ.
Gandhi, too, advocated peace and was killed.
Alas when will there be peace that conquers this animalism?
Alas when will our greatness be fulfilled?²⁹

The poem expresses a deep sense of loss about Gandhi's death but also resonates with the uneasiness felt after World War II. In its later publication in 1970, the sense of religious disharmony would have been equally resonant. The next verse continues this praise of Gandhi as a world leader and a model for dealing with the horrors of modernity:

At night they make atoms burst. By day they are the Assembly of Nations.
Hey World, if you are sincere, listen to the philosophy of Gandhi.³⁰

Again we see Raghavan addressing the world in Sanskrit, yet here not Śiva but Gandhi is posited as a divine figure worthy of admiration. Further, the poem expresses some doubt about the ability of political solutions, even international political bodies, to prevent destruction. Instead, the poem insists that religion is required to stem nuclear proliferation and conflict in general. Since the addressee is the world at large, but the language is Sanskrit, there is something of a conflict. The addressee is not going to receive this message. It does project an image of Gandhi, the native son, as a potential leader of the world, but because that the message is conveyed in Sanskrit, it remains localized. Even if Raghavan felt that Sanskrit was gaining a worldwide

²⁸ V. Raghavan, "Mahātmā," *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā*, 8.2 (1970): 5-6, verse 8.

²⁹ Ibid., verse 16. *buddho babhūva sa babhūva ca jesukṛstuh gāndhyapyabhūtsa śamameva vadan hataśca/ śāntiḥ kadā bata mṛgatvavijitvarā syāt aho bhavema ca kadā nu mahātmanām naḥ//.*

³⁰ Ibid., verse 17. *rātrau kurvannaṅusphoṭaṃ sarvadeśasabhā divā/ he loka yadyārjvaṃ te gāndhino darśanaṃ śṛṇu//*

vogue and scholars around the world were studying it, any perception on his part that such interest was massively widespread speaks of a sense of idealism and elitism on his part. Instead, the poem serves to valorize the Hindu voice for twentieth-century concerns for world peace.

Yet there were moments when Raghavan’s Sanskrit writings did reach a global audience. There is another instance of Raghavan addressing the world and advocating peace in a Sanskrit verse written for and sung by the great Carnatic singer M.S. Subbulakshmi for the United Nations at Carnegie Hall in October 1966. There is much controversy over the actual identity of the author of this piece, as some claim that Raghavan wrote it at the request of Chandraśekarendra Sarasvatī, the Śāṅkarāchārya of the Kanchipuram Math, while others attribute it to the Śāṅkarāchārya himself. Certainly the Raghavan clan claims the former, and without further evidence I cannot adjudicate the controversy. The verse in fact has its own Wikipedia page, which attributes it to the Śāṅkarāchārya.³¹ The famous verse, in my translation, is as follows:

Worship friendship, which conquers the hearts of everyone.
See others as your own self.
Abandon war, abandon envy, abandon attacking each other.
Mother earth fulfills wishes and God the father is compassionate.
Humanity, be restrained, be generous, be compassionate.
May there be prosperity for all.³²

The last line (the penultimate in my translation), “be restrained, be generous, be compassionate,” (or “*dāmyata datta dayadhvam*”), is from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.2, in which it is the words of the Thunder. It can also be found, in the original Sanskrit, as the penultimate line of T.S.

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maithreem_Bhajata.

³² The verse is reprinted in *Kavikokila Mañjari*, ed. Nandini Ramini, Vol. 1, CD and booklet, (Madras: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts), 35:

*mairīm bhajatākhillahṛjjetrīm ātmavadeva parānapi paśyata/
yuddham tyajata spardhām tyajata tyajata pareṣvakramamākramaṇam//
jananī pṛthivī kāmādughāste janako devaḥ sakaladayāluḥ/
dāmyata datta dayadhvam janatāḥ śreyo bhūyāt sakalajanānām//*

Eliot's 1922 poem "The Wasteland." The audience addressed here in the vocative is "humanity," and the object of worship is "friendship." The theology mentioned is almost entirely of an interfaith variety, designed for a diverse audience. The emphasis is on unity first and foremost and ethics as a means to that end. Whether or not these lines were actually written by Raghavan, the poem at least seems of a piece with his efforts towards unity and peacefulness, as well as his view of the arts as a means toward a more elevated culture, and it is a further example of the attempt to ensure Sanskrit's place on a global stage.

These notions of unity and harmony that spread throughout some of Raghavan's works require some contextualization. To those of us thinking about such matters in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century, after the post-structural turn in social theory and almost three decades of what Cornel West has famously called "the cultural politics of difference,"³³ this bourgeois utopianism and universalism seems like a quaint relic of the early twentieth century and the metanarrative of Liberal Protestantism. It appears, in fact, to be an instantiation of "empire" that conflicts with a current intellectual mode of accentuating difference as much as possible and deconstructing metanarratives. Certainly there are still remnants of this discourse of unification; after all, the UN still exists, as does global capitalism. But in the wake of post-structural studies and the rise of identity politics, it is apparent that these universalist utopianisms excessively elide difference, and they do so through the clever trick of hiding the fact that their models and rhetoric are inevitably founded upon particularities, not to mention the superpower governments and financial structures that back them. It is instructive, in this vein, to compare Raghavan's rhetoric with those of the modern Hindu right. While Raghavan would surely favor a sense of Hindu exceptionalism, he does so without completely denying the worth and value of others, and his ideal is in fact a hierarchy rather than a rejection.

³³ Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," *October* 53 (1990): 93-109.

The Hindu Right today engages in a different discourse of exceptionalism that derides all things Euro-American as either derivative of original Hindu achievements (particularly in the sciences), and presumes Hindu thought and culture to be entirely epistemologically different. Thus it is important to note that as conservative as Raghavan might seem in a number of instants, and though his Sanskrit advocacy and pro-Hindu approach was in strong contrast to the identity politics of the Tamil Dravidian movement and the more atheistic Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu, he positioned himself as primarily opposed to opposition and factionalism and wanted to exclude the excluders not just in India but around the world. It is a difficult position to uphold, but at least his thoughts on a global level seem far less driven by binaries and identity politics than are those of modern advocates of Sanskrit and conservative Hindu politics.

Twentieth-Century Sanskrit and Self-Preservation

In the waning moments of this dissertation, I want to pull away from an overriding tendency thus far to take a critical stance toward Raghavan. This late resistance is not because there is nothing to criticize, nor due to an over familiarity with the man whom I wish to protect, but rather because the tendency to critique overly emphasizes the hermeneutic of suspicion to the detriment of recovering Raghavan's perspective: it so thoroughly enmeshes the subject in webs of context and power that he becomes nothing but an object of our discourse. Instead, I want to take a cue from Leela Gandhi's insistence that:

Perhaps it is time for postcolonial thought to offer...acknowledgment to a poetic view of the world, conceding its claim to the hitherto singular space of the political. To refuse this gesture...is to surrender the political to the joylessness of a utilitarian dispensation,

condemned eternally to counter the prose of imperialism in the derivative prose of anti-aestheticist anti-colonialism.³⁴

I take this to be salutary advice: there is a way in which the hermeneutics of suspicion undergirding the postcolonial and subaltern studies tends to disregard twentieth-century Sanskrit as merely nostalgic nonsense or an attempt at shoring up Brahmin hegemony. That suspicion exerts a different kind of hegemony upon authors of modern Sanskrit, condemning their literary works as weapons in a war of words. There is little room in such an approach to twentieth-century Sanskrit literature for the notion of literature as expressive of an author's interiority, for his or her subjectivity to be taken into account. Lost in such discourse analysis is the way in which an author sets out to recover something felt to be lacking, or, instead of being paranoid about alterity, to face the world in a reparative stance that might allow the author both expression and a means of creating a safe place in the world.³⁵

A similar argument has been made in the field of religious studies, following the so-called affective turn. Donovan Schaeffer usefully argues that the field has been overly dominated by scholars, many of them associated with History of Religions here at University of Chicago, who regard religion in terms of social discourse and power struggles, thus leaving little space for emotion.³⁶ Particularly germane for this present analysis, he suggests that affect theory's emphasis on emotion can "question the extremely tight fit between language and power – the flawless symmetry without remainder – that has become the orthodoxy of some offshoots of the

³⁴ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 176.

³⁵ I take the word "reparative" from Eve Sedgwick's model, itself based on Riceour's model, which contrasts a paranoid view with a reparative one. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You" in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁶ See Donovan O. Schaeffer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). The introduction and first chapter are particularly informative. I owe a debt of thanks to my colleague Adam Miller for informing me about this helpful and interesting book.

linguistic turn.”³⁷ Perhaps, then, the presumption that Raghavan’s Sanskrit is at all times an exercise in nationalism and power struggles within India and the postcolonial experience elides something about Raghavan’s writing. Instead, affect theory provides “a picture in which bodies move in a variety of directions at a variety of odd angles that cannot always be cashed out in terms of ‘social benefits’ like financial or political gain.”³⁸ In short, religious experience and activity are far messier and less predictable than economic, political, and linguistic-based theories of religion would have us believe. This line of argument does not insist upon a nostalgic turn back to the phenomenological view of *sui generis* religion or a sense of “the sacred,” nor does it insist on bracketing socio-historical context, discursive structures, or Marxist political analysis. Rather, this affective turn insists that there is a phenomenological perspective of religious actors, and that consideration of experience might allow researchers to recover something of how emotions, and the emotions of individual writers, also play important roles in religious activities, in the writing of texts, in constructing ideal worlds, and in engaging with the political. As this dissertation draws to a close, I would like not just to draw attention to Raghavan’s work to promote Sanskrit and impart messages within his texts, but to turn my critical eye into a sympathetic one and address how Raghavan’s Sanskrit works might be expressive of his own emotions as he tries to find a place in the modern world.

Poetic Museums and Historical Anxiety: The Cosmopolitan Sanskrit Writer

In a poem written after travelling in communist Eastern Europe in 1971, Raghavan appears to be attempting to reconcile his regard for European achievement with his sadness about Europeans’ criticism of India and the continent’s fall into despair after World War II. He opens by mentioning that Sanskrit is studied in Europe, but he quickly shifts to considering the rise and

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

fall of civilizations, their preservation in museums, and the critical and atheistic tones of communist Europe. The poem's title is “*Abhramamabhramāya*,” which means something like “for accurate and clear knowledge,” as he notes in a footnote;³⁹ although the title might also be translated as “Composure for Composure.”⁴⁰ The opening two verses introduce an image of the fundamental unity of Europeans who study Sanskrit with Indians by virtue of their ancient connection through the Indo-European language family. The second set of verses contrasts scholastic achievement and the unity of peoples with the destruction of the past and the dissolution of bonds.

All around Europe, there is composure for composure.
I saw people knowledgeable about the revered Language of the Gods (Sanskrit)
And that language is related to the speech of the people of that land.
The earth was previously inhabited by ancient people.⁴¹

From the land of the Celtic realm to our Arya land
Having spread in many directions, they are one great family.⁴²
I saw internally a picture of the past history
That was of an unclear and unsteady form on the surface of a black screen.⁴³

The fractured stories of cities of Egypt, Babylon, Sumer, to the Greeks and the Romans.⁴⁴
Their ruins of extensive buildings are evident. In museums they awaken my mind.⁴⁵

The rising success and failures of various peoples,
the enactment of religious wars over Mithra, Jehovah, Christ, and Mohammed.
Joy and wonder lead to pain in the end.
It nourishes in the mind a Vedantic tranquility.⁴⁶

³⁹ V. Raghavan, “*Abhramamabhramāya*,” *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol., IX, No. 2 (1972): 107-109. This is another one of Raghavan's Sanskrit writings with copious footnotes. Footnote on 107: “*samyak-sākṣādñānāya*.”

⁴⁰ This is T.V. Vasudeva's suggested rendering.

⁴¹ Ibid., verse 1: *airopadeśamabhito'abhramamabhramāya vijñān vyalokayamupāsītadevavācaḥ/
tadvāksahodaragirāmavanīrjanāṃśca tatpūrvapūruṣapurāṇanivāsabhūmīḥ//*

⁴² The footnote mentions that he means the Indo-European language family.

⁴³ Ibid., verse 2: *ākelṭigāryabhuvamā ca madāryabhūmim viṣvagiṣṭvāvara-mahājana-vaṃśaśākhā/
adrākṣamātmani purāṇa-caritracitraṃ kālāpaṭī-tala-calāviśadasvarūpam//*

⁴⁴ Some of the names here are a little hard to decipher. “yona” is probably Greece, but that is not the usual term for Greeks used in Sanskrit texts.

⁴⁵ Ibid., verse 3: *aigipt-bābila-sumervabhisīri-yona-romādināgarikatā itihāsa-bhagnāḥ/
unmīlayan vipulaśilpacayastadīyaḥ prāgvastudhāmasu mano'pyudamīlayanme//*

⁴⁶ Ibid., Verse 4: *nānājanodayasamṛddhinipāta-maitra-jaihova-kṛstu-muhamad-mata-yuddhanātyam/
harṣādbhutāvatha śucaṃ samudīrya cānte vaidāntikaṃ praśamameva manasyapuṣṇāt//*

It is as if Raghavan sees a PBS special on the history of the world, first viewing it as an interconnected language family with great accomplishments, and then the next image, seemingly accompanied by a soundtrack switch to a minor key, depicts how these civilizations fall into ruins as people are rent by divisiveness and religious wars despite the underlying linguistic unity. He witnesses a history filled with destruction, its only remnants to be found in museums – Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history” refashioned as a tourist. Yet there is still a drive for knowledge, as he begins the piece, and the subtle implication here is that study of Sanskrit might lend itself to more unity, that seeing the commonality among peoples through linguistic familiar relations might stave off discord and revive the past’s great civilizations. Further, he finds solace in a “Vedantic tranquility,” a sense of acceptance of the impermanence of the world. Raghavan here resorts to Vedanta as a solution not necessarily to the world’s problem but to his own interior sense of rootlessness and nostalgia for the past.

The poem continues to discuss what he sees in museums and even Christian churches, including a verse about beautifully illustrated versions of the Bible. He is awestruck in general, but the notion of decline looms overhead. He sees all these items in museums as vestiges of former greatness, of the world’s accomplishments before religious wars and Marxist atheism destroyed them. The poem surges with a sense of Romantic nostalgia for past glories and disdain for modernity and its ravages. Yet instead of a positing a Christian postlapsarianism or the idea that the present era is the Hindu *kaliyuga*,⁴⁷ the poem expresses hope for the future that puts its faith not just in the prospects of Vedantic thought as a potential salve but also in museums that serve to preserve these ancient materials as relics and memories of past glories.

Providing the reader with an even stronger sense of the poet’s subjectivity, at verse 7 Raghavan begins asking himself a question (he notes that he means “*antarātmānam*,” or

⁴⁷ The fourth of four *yuga*-s, or eras, of decreasing dharma.

“internally” in a footnote), and then appears to be speaking to himself as he reports his own thoughts on viewing relics in the museum. Then in verses 11 and 12, there is a change in tone from this voice mulling over the past to concerns about the present:⁴⁸

It is right here where the blows were endured
Of the sharp words of the hurricane of atheism.
Everything is uprooted. What is to be done here?!
O mother, you are diminished, you are changing.⁴⁹

Don't faint from fear of this poisonous speech⁵⁰
That is against the East, specifically against our ancient land (India).
Our ancient dharma, in the past present and future, remains like a mountain
And is favorable to those foreign here and those foreign to oneself.⁵¹

The penultimate verse highlights the rapid changes endured in Europe during the beginning of the twentieth century and the wars fueled by atheist fascism and communism. It is addressed to a world, mother earth, viewed here as under threat from the march of history. Yet the last verse appears directed not at Europe but rather at his Sanskrit-reading audience. Raghavan insists that his readers should not be fearful, nor should they feel wounded by criticism of religion or criticism of India. Instead, he suggests that since people in these countries still learn Sanskrit, and Hinduism is eternal and beneficial, India's ancient teachings will not only survive the changes but might aid these European nations through their difficulties. The words of atheism and Marxism, he indicates, pose no threat to India; rather, Indian culture ought to be friendly towards these nations despite their antipathy.

⁴⁸ Verse 11 begins with another open quote, but the printing does not include a close quote, so it is not clear if the inner voice continues for the rest of the poem.

⁴⁹ Ibid., verse 11: *saiveyameva dharaṇīrnu vivāti yatra jhañjhānilapratima-nāstika tīvravādaḥ/
unmūlya sarvam; iha kim bavitavyate! te nyūtatvamamba, parivartayase yadevam//*
(The original has a small typo: “nyūtatbamamba.”)

⁵⁰ The footnote specifies that he means atheism here.

⁵¹ Ibid., verse 12 : *mā mūrccchatu pratibhayo viṣavāta eṣa prācīṃ prati, prati viśiṣya na ārṣabhūmim/
kālatrayehapara-naijaparānukūlo dharmo na ārṣa iha tiṣṭhatu parvatābhaḥ//*

Despite the Hindu-centric theme at the conclusion, and the politics involved therein, we might ask whether these verses express something of Raghavan's attempt to maintain a sense of identity while travelling abroad. He sees the world changing rapidly, a world foreign to himself, and the whirlwind is disorienting. He views the world much as many prominent thinkers and writers within twentieth-century modernity did. I noted earlier that the verse he purportedly wrote for M.S. Subbalakshmi's UN performance includes the words "*dāmyata datta dayadhvam*" are also in T.S. Eliot's 1922 poem "The Wasteland," but there is a far more striking similarity between the two thinkers. Eliot's famous poem elicits a Romantic nostalgia for lost cultures and glorifies the attempt to recover them. The poem is something of a *mélange* of bits and pieces from classical civilizations of the Mediterranean as well as South Asia and Sanskrit. In the last line before he switches to Sanskrit, Eliot writes: "These fragments I have shored against my ruin." In short, he has cobbled together pieces of culture to maintain an image of continuity, a sense of belonging and identity, a need for preservation in light of rapid change. It is as if Raghavan's "*Abhramamabhramāya*" poem serves as a response to Eliot, looking at the fragments in museums, and having the same sense of loss, yet resorting (as does Eliot) to Sanskrit and Hinduism as a means of shoring himself up against the ruin of his civilization.

Expanding upon this line of Eliot's, we might read Raghavan's entire project to revive Sanskrit as a means of shoring up fragments from Sanskrit literary history against his own ruin. Yes, from a political standpoint, there is an anticolonial dimension to his work, operating against the decay of Sanskrit and the challenge to Brahmin identity in a globalizing world and especially in mid-twentieth-century Tamil Nadu. Within Tamil Nadu, especially after 1967, his defense of Sanskrit is an extremely marginal position limited to a small society of Brahmins and artistic associations. Within India, Sanskrit is read by but a few people, even if he thinks its revival is

essential to instilling nationalism, not to mention possible. And within the world, he can find some solace only among other scholars of Sanskrit, whom he champions, but must know is a small number. Nevertheless, the flipside of the political is his own attempt to revive Sanskrit such that his own knowledge of it and experience of it evokes a feeling of being not marginal but rather part of a community, country, and world. Raghavan shores up the ruins of Sanskrit civilization in fragments of poems and dramas not only for political gain but also for a sense of not being obsolete or trivial, for a *feeling* of being integral to national and global efforts.

This notion of collecting fragments, this process of preservation, regards Raghavan as somewhat like museum, and indeed while Raghavan described himself to Singer by saying “I am a museum”⁵² as a way of thinking about his various religious affiliations, the self-description might be interpreted more broadly. He was a museum not just of religions, but also of Sanskrit knowledge, and his academic efforts were to a great extent a matter of encyclopedic preservation. There is a political dimension to this exercise of museumification: as Benedict Anderson has noted, the colonial museum is a matter of “political inheriting,” a process of digging up ancient treasures and then presenting them as representative in a manner that often pitted the colonists as the curators of the long-buried achievements the natives had once been capable of but were no longer.⁵³ The Euro-American Orientalist study of Sanskrit is an example of this process in India. In the postcolonial setting, Raghavan was continuing this process with a twist for the purpose of representing Sanskrit’s breadth and inclusivity as a national museum, as it were. Raghavan’s compilation of the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, while in one sense an archive, is in another sense a museum. The same could be said of his Tamil and Sanskrit literary works that re-present

⁵² Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972) 138.

⁵³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, (London: Verso, 2006), 178-184.

the “classics” of South Asian literature: they become exhibits in the national museum of culture. Raghavan functions as the museum’s curator. This project is not entirely novel since cataloging and classifying – in other words, museumifying – has a long history in South Asian writing, for example *Āgamaḍambara*’s museum/debate of religions, the doxographical projects and the model of Vedantic inclusivity described by Nicholson, and even Bhoja’s aesthetic work – which Pollock describes as eminently encyclopedic.⁵⁴ That being said, the museum is recreated for different audiences at different times. Its organization of species, especially of religions, is unique to Raghavan’s intellectual inheritance from Europe. Just as the curator of a museum has to cull various examples and present them as representative of a certain idea, Raghavan presents the museum of Indian history in such a way that Sanskrit emerges as the prime integrator for the newly independent nation.

Yet in the preceding paragraph, we have strayed from the original quote: from Raghavan’s “I am a museum” we quickly fell into the territory of the political, viewing Raghavan as crafting a museum rather than being one. What this illustrates for me is a tension between two different ways, again, of viewing the colonial. On the one hand, we have Frederic Jameson’s notion that all third-world literature is allegorical. But what if we read Raghavan’s Sanskrit writings differently, as not entirely nationalistic? What if Raghavan’s literary works in Sanskrit are a means of expressing the need to be a museum to maintain an identity and a sense of self within the rapidly changing world? Thus Raghavan’s tireless efforts to preserve Sanskrit appear not necessarily as a mere fantasy of recovering some lost imaginary Sanskrit cosmopolis, nor of an attempt to create a Hindu nation that excludes others and maintains Brahmin hegemony, but rather as a hope (the Sanskrit word “*manoratha*” would work best to convey the sense of

⁵⁴ Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 105-106. Raghavan, meanwhile, thinks of Bhoja’s aesthetic theory as a matter of “compromise” (Raghavan, Bhoja’s *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, 152).

both desire and illusion) of fostering a Sanskrit public sphere in which he might feel less marginal, as if he belonged in the newly formed nation and not in South Asia's hoary past.

Milton Singer, who knew Raghavan personally and was a good friend of his, observed that, "From my association with him, I believe that what really mattered to him as a creative participant in a great living Sanskritic tradition was to keep that tradition alive in the face of hostile movements to suppress or obliterate it."⁵⁵ One might thus read much of this dissertation as a means of giving flesh to that observation, showing how Raghavan attempted to be a creative participant, adapting Sanskrit for a modern world and in response to challenges to Sanskrit's continuity and vivacity. Singer's description suggests that Raghavan's agenda was animated by a desire not only to keep Sanskrit alive and to write original creative literature in the language, but that ultimately it was something that *mattered* to him as a means of identifying himself *as* a participant in this tradition. His literary works must therefore be considered as building blocks, or better, literary practices, for the *creation of a self as part of a community*. One might even suggest, to expand on theoretical notions of embodied selves, that through his literary activities Raghavan created the image of an encultured self. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes: "The desire of the reparative impulse...is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will have resources to offer to an inchoate self."⁵⁶ For Raghavan, a Brahmin Sanskritist in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu, who surely felt that his surrounding culture was unsuited to him, that object of his reparative, and revivalist, impulse was Sanskrit, and writing in Sanskrit was a means for him to write a self into existence.

⁵⁵ Milton Singer, "Dr. V. Raghavan, A Personal Reminiscence," in Jackson, *The Power of the Sacred Name*, 340.

⁵⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 149.

Cheating Death in Modern Sanskrit

If Raghavan aimed to preserve Sanskrit through his writing and maintain it as a living tradition, not just to speak about Sanskrit but to speak Sanskrit (and, to extend that quote, not just to write about Sanskrit but to write and perform Sanskrit), he was working not only against the Dravidian movements and modernity but also against an ingrained sense that Sanskrit is somehow dead. To return to an allegorical mode of analysis, a cross section of Raghavan's works focusing on the theme of death makes visible an uneasiness and avoidance of the death and decay of culture as well of certain main characters that both seem to coincide with a concern for the decay of Sanskrit. There are moments when the reader or playgoer might be held in suspense, thinking that death might reach out its fangs, but of course it does not, and characters (and Sanskrit culture itself) are saved and revived. His works exude a vociferous denial of Sanskrit's death, evident through the writings themselves, and, simultaneously, the author's efforts to revive Sanskrit. There appears to be a reluctant acknowledgment of a language in limbo; there is also a subtle optimism that revival is possible, that death can be cheated, and not just the death of the characters, but also of Sanskrit itself.

This theme of escaping death is evident in a number of the plays and a few poems. Raghavan's *Punarunmeṣa* explicitly acknowledges Sanskrit's precarious state by juxtaposing talk of decay with talk of nourishment and revival. As Āgantuka/Raghavan converses with the Brahmin, the musician, the thief, the dancing girl, and her mother, he meets with resistance and the characters' presumption of cultural decay. But each time he manages to convince them to foster culture's revival, and his efforts are shown to be fruitful in the final scene with the poem to Mother India accompanied by song and dance. Here, death is avoided through government intervention as well as by the elite and academic involvement of people like Raghavan who

travel the country cataloguing and preserving heritage, bringing the museum of Indian culture to life once again. In *Vimukti*, Ātmanātha's triumph over death is both spiritual and political as he achieves liberation in a philosophical sense but also liberation from Euro-American atheistic materialism. Ātmanātha's liberation is the triumph of Vedanta philosophy and the escape of religion from the deadly snares of atheism.

In *Anārkalī*'s prologue, the director suggests that “whoever thinks all ends in death has a useless vision” and chides “modern cārvākas” (atheists) for not believing in reincarnation. In an allegorical fashion, this insistence on a religious belief in reincarnation is fundamental to the project of reviving Sanskrit, even as, a more historicist perspective, the language appears to have been lost. Here, Raghavan subtly needles the doubting Thomases who view matters as objective historians, thinking Sanskrit dead and unable to be revived, and he thinks he proves them wrong through the play itself. Towards the end of the play, the eponymous heroine threatens suicide, and while the audience expects that death will not be depicted on stage as per the norms of Sanskrit drama, they also know that the original story is a tragedy. In the end, just as Anārkalī is about to commit suicide, Akbar saves her at the request of Salīm's wife. The play thus resonates with *Punarunmeṣa* in depicting a government official stepping in at the last moment to save from destruction the dancing girl who metonymically represents culture. The play can also be read as an attempt to rescue Hinduism and its ideals of universal peace from the imagined deadly hands of sectarian Muslims and Christians. Additionally, the play as a Sanskrit drama appears to encourage Hindus themselves to work to prevent cultural death, while the Sanskrit medium represents an active attempt to keep the language from committing suicide through neglect or being killed with the weapons of disparagement and neglect by political leaders of vernacular identity movements who seem to sentence Sanskrit to the walled tomb of libraries.

In one of Raghavan's poems, the threat of the death of Sanskrit and literature is particularly evident. Entitled "*Kavikokila Nirveda*" ("Disregard of the Cuckoo"), this allegorical poem features a cuckoo speaking with a friend. There is some ambiguity of identity as the cuckoo could be Raghavan himself, the *Kavi-kokila*, and the poem thus an instance of him speaking to himself; but the cuckoo could also be any number of other contemporary poets and writers, too, and Raghavan merely the friend. In the poem, the friend encourages the cuckoo to sing, but the cuckoo resists, saying: "Tender-hearted friend, I am destroyed and a bit deserted by the rapid-fire shouting of the envious crows."⁵⁷ He complains that the coarse crows of uncouth culture condemn him to silence with their cacophony. The friend is more hopeful, encouraging the cuckoo: "Cuckoo, wait some time, have patience, your wings sprout forth, you will go where you wish."⁵⁸ Cuckoo, digging in his talons, says: "This is not spring, nor is there any blossom sprouting for me in a mango tree. Where should I go?"⁵⁹ The friend thinks there is indeed a revival coming, a springtime not just for the bird but, by implication, for Sanskrit and the arts as well: "Kokila, certainly your job – which is the spring revival – is coming soon."⁶⁰ This optimism appears to reflect Raghavan's own optimism about the prospects for a nationalist culture achieved through a vernal renewal of Sanskrit in independent India. The cuckoo will have none of this pep talk, however:

Surely the likes of you are rare in this world.
 I'll just be right here in some corner of the wilderness.
 Who here wants to hear and is disposed toward aesthetic expression?
 Who knows the *rasa*? For whom will I sing?⁶¹

⁵⁷ V. Raghavan, "*Kokila Nirvedaḥ*," *Samskṛta-Bhavitavyam*, August 22, 1970, 3. The verses are unnumbered. These are the first words of the cuckoo: "*hrdayālusanmitra mātrā viyuktaḥ īrṣyālukarāṭaugharaṭanairmriye'tra//*"

⁵⁸ Ibid. "*kokila, dhārāya samayaḥ kṣamayā rohati patraṃ svairam yāsyasi//*"

⁵⁹ Ibid. "*nāyaṃ vasanto na ca vā resale ankūritaṃ me kisalam kva yāni//*"

⁶⁰ Ibid. "*kokila, nūnaṃ cakragatiṃ tvam mādhavabhāgyaṃ nacirātprāpsyasi//*" ...

⁶¹ Ibid.: *aṅga tvadābhāḥ viralāḥ prapañce satsyāmi cātraiva kāntāraṅge/
 ko vā'tra śuśrūṣuranubhāvaśīlaḥ ko vā rasaṃ vetti gāsyāmi kasmai//*

Here the cuckoo insists that his friend is a rarity and no one else cares for his voice or even knows how to listen to him properly. Thus Raghavan acknowledges the desuetude of knowledge about traditional arts and literature and declares that such talents are unappreciated and that the best home for the poor bird is some unreachable spot hidden away in the forest. The verse echoes the naysayers in *Punarusmeṣa*, and the poem resonates with Raghavan's intercession in their abandonment of the arts. After a few more lines, and a pointed critique of the "stupid" crows squawking in modern literature, the cuckoo ends on a dour and defeatist note:

Hey, good sir! This birth is not considered easy.
Even compared to great Śiva, the world is stronger.
If one's path is not ideal, then it would be better to die young.⁶²

In the end, death becomes a viable option for the unappreciated maestro of literature. Nothing is easy in this life, and if one is thus born to a life that is unsuitable or unsustainable, then it would be better to die young than to proceed in vain. In other words, if one is a literary genius in a world where no one cares for the arts, or if one is a trying to revive Sanskrit in Tamil Nadu, perhaps one's project is distinctly Sisyphean. The poem ends on a note of *karuṇā rasa* as we feel pity for this poor bird, and by extension for the author writing it. Yet beneath this dirge for culture, there is also a hidden optimism, a sense that someone is listening and there is an audience receptive to his message. Why else would Raghavan be writing these lines? For whom does *he* sing? He sings for an audience, however small, of a particular weekly Sanskrit journal. He sings for those who might be presumed to be sympathetic with his despair about the degradation of his ideal of an elitist culture. Yet we cannot read this poem as a resignation or a declaration of literary suicide. Like the suicides in Sanskrit dramas, it is meant to be averted at the last moment. Instead, the poem conveys implicitly the opposite of what the last line states

⁶² Ibid.: *ayi samya! na hi janma guṇyaṃ sukhāya balavān maheśo 'pi loko balīyān//
ajanirvariṣṭhā yadi sā na, jantoh śiśubhāva eveha maraṇaṃ varīyaḥ.*

explicitly: it insists that the current situation is wrong, and it ought to be corrected. Further, there is a subtle implication that the very act of the poem's composition and publication in Sanskrit supports the maintenance of the language's apparent liveliness.

There is a tension in Raghavan's writings between, on the one hand, sanguine celebration of Sanskrit and culture conveyed through language of revival and survival, and, on the other hand, anxious advocacy that acknowledges adversity. The very act of writing Sanskrit during the twentieth century appears to be an exercise in evading the death of one's language and ideal of culture. But while outsiders might only see the marginality of Sanskrit among Tamil Brahmins and tides of materialism and modernity threatening orthodoxy (and here is where I am trying to suggest a switch in perspective), there is a palpable desperateness that is worth acknowledging, and it stems from a feeling of exclusion. For those who witnessed these plays, for that set of elites within the community and for the author himself, the very act of writing these plays and performing them, or seeing them performed, would, if not give a glimpse of Sanskrit as fully alive and well, at least allow a momentary view of Sanskrit's past. They provide a walk through a museum of relics that benevolently haunt a present frightening for these elites who feel marginalized in a changing world.

To Live in Literature

In the prologue to *Anārkali*'s, the director offers various rationales for departing from the story's original tragic ending, but one quote in particular resonates with the author's larger project of maintaining Sanskrit despite opposition. I cited it in the previous chapter, but will provide it again:

The truth is that pain happens in the world, but it is not the highest truth proper for us to honor. This, our art of poetry, is different from creation; it is possessed of only joy, appearing to have surpassed the ordered creation of Prajāpati that is incomplete and unhappy. Poets protect us from the mere appearance of poorly arranged creation.⁶³

Here Raghavan suggests another possible meta-interpretation for his works in Sanskrit: that as a poet he provides an image of Sanskrit's liveliness in contrast to its diminishment in the world. His creation supersedes the failed creation of a world in which Sanskrit has declined, and offers that creation to others to provide pleasure. In performing a Sanskrit play, and in the performance of merely writing Sanskrit, an alternate world is created that brackets off the political and the problematic. Literature itself becomes a refuge.

In addition to thinking about Raghavan's resemblance to Eliot, shoring up fragments against his ruin, we might also think of his resemblance to the writer in exile as described by Theodor Adorno: "Authors settle into their texts like home-dwellers.... To those who no longer have a homeland, writing becomes home."⁶⁴ While one would be hard-pressed to consider Raghavan in exile, if exile is considered as a matter of being marginal and distanced from a sense of one's original nature, then the modern world that is neglectful of Sanskrit is precisely where Raghavan found himself. We might thus take into account Raghavan's short autobiographical note that begins with a detailed description of his childhood home, which he fills with various aunts, uncles, and grandparents who either knew and wrote Sanskrit or patronized it (as well as the arts). One might float an argument that Raghavan's Sanskrit recreates a lost childhood, or that his poetry recreates a golden era of Sanskrit that would feel like home to him. Such an interpretation, founded on the hermeneutics of recovery, counterbalances a more cynical political

⁶³ Raghavan, *Anārkalī*, 4-5. "kiñca, satyam asti loke dāruṇā vipat; na tāvatā saiva paramaṃ tattvamiti asmābhirupāsītumapi योग्या भवति. kavikalā nāmeyam duḥstha-asamagra-prajāpatīsrṣṭīvyavasthīmatikramya vilasantī sukhaikamayī svatantrā uparaiva kācit sṛṣṭiḥ. rakṣantvasmān kavayaḥ durvyavasthaprapañca-yāthātathya-pratibimbamātra-pradarṣanebhyah." The hyphenated compounds are in the original Sanskrit text.

⁶⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 87.

reading by thinking of Raghavan’s writing in Sanskrit as an emotional endeavor to feel as if the world in which he wished to belong actually existed, and finding that place in the peaceful world created by literature.

Some of his poems clearly bear out such an interpretation of his literary creations as attempts at finding a safe space in literature. In a poem published in the first issue of the Sanskrit periodical *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, of which he was the editor, and which began a year after he founded the Samskrita Ranga, Raghavan crafted a few verses based on Tolstoy’s story of the green stick. This fanciful tale that his brother told to young Tolstoy about a green stick buried on their property that was inscribed with a message that would grant worldwide prosperity. The last verse of Raghavan’s poem shows him rejecting such a story yet still insisting on the possibility of peace through literature:

Your older brother told you this story in your childhood.
Let there not be such a green stick.
I think that you alone are of such a sort
Who produced literature for people’s quietude.⁶⁵

This belief in literature’s ameliorative properties, that literature can heal the world in place of some fanciful green stick, appears to be in line with Raghavan’s general thinking about culture and world peace. It shows a retreat from the political in favor of the literary, and it echoes Raghavan’s concerns for an “emotional integration” through Sanskrit literature. He suggests here that Tolstoy shared his ideal of culture and peace founded through the literary medium.

In another poem published in 1970, during a subtle retreat in his political engagement, Raghavan muses about wanting very little in life. In “*Yadi Syād Alam*” (“It will be enough if...”),

⁶⁵ V. Raghavan, “*Tolstoy Harillaguḍaśca*” (“Tolstoy and the Green Stick”), *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1959): 35. Raghavan provides a footnote in English explaining the original story.

*itthaṃ kathāmakathayattava śaiśave te jyeṣṭhaḥ, sa tādrśaharillaguḍo ’stu mā vā/
manye tathāvidhaguṇaṃ tu bhavantameva yadvānmayam pravahati sma janasya śāntyai!*

he begins by disavowing the pursuit of Kubera's land or celestial damsels, the things of wealth and the senses. In the third verse, he speaks of worshipping the lord, growing intellectually from the words of the wise, and enjoying the sound of sweet music. But before he asks for all these pleasures of religion, knowledge, and the arts, in the second verse he requests a simple home life:

Prosperity that is certain even if meager for offering to the fire of the belly,
 A small house nestled in the lap of a flower-strewn garden.
 A family that is without fear, where labor is shared with a beloved wife
 Whose happy heart blossoms at the innocent smiles of good children.⁶⁶

Raghavan disavowed the pleasures of wealth, he rented his house in Royapettah and never owned the property, and, I have been told, his house was filled with thousands of books – fragments shoring up his academic career and literary retreat. In the last verse, he turns again to the literary as refuge:

When the daylight fades to red at the start of night, my body,
 Completely weary, is spread on the soft sands by the ocean.
 The sound of the tumultuous waves, the throbbing of the stiff winds–
 Alas I will be granted repose in the cool mist of literature.⁶⁷

He thus imagines himself relaxing on the shore (likely Marina Beach near his home, where he used to stroll frequently), surrounded by nature and its chaos but in a state of repose bathed by the literature that sprays him with a calming mist. There is still a tension in that poem, however, between the hope of obtaining that repose and the actual attainment, a gap between the real world and its discontents and the literary home's peacefulness.

⁶⁶ V. Raghavan, "Yadi Syād Alam," *Samskṛta-Bhavitavyam*, September 5, 1970, p. 4. My translation is partially my own, and partially that of Usha Satyavrat, "Raghavan the Poet: His Other Poems" in *Dr. V. Raghavan Shashyabdapurti Felicitation Volume* (Madras: Kuppaswami Shastri Research Institute, 1971), 335.

Verse 2: *mitastadapi niṣṭhito vibhava audarāgnyāhuteḥ grhaṃ tanusuvāṭikāsumacitāṅkasāmlālitam/
 kuṭumbakamabhīṣaṇaṃ subhgaḍimhamugdhasmita-
 prajrmbhiḥṛdayollasatpriyatamāvibhaktasramam//*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, verse 4. I read *sāhitī* as *sāhitya*, altered for meter.

*praśāmyadaruṇe jvaladdivi niśā mukhe vāridheḥ pratāntamakhilam vapurmasṛnavālūkāsu kṣīpan/
 taraṅgatumuladhvaniṃ saralamārutaspandanam tuṣārajaḍasāhitīlayamavāpayan syāmaho//*

Another poem of Raghavan's, "Bhoḥ Kave" ("O Poet"), greatly captures this tension between a *mokṣa*-like liberation of literature and suffering in an ever-changing, *samsāra*-like world. The last two verses are particularly poignant:

By your illusion, flowers appear as friendly faces
And you bestow skill upon the cuckoo.
As seen by you, the autumnal river on gravelly beds,
Through the twists of literature, becomes a secret assembly.
O when might I obtain your dominion here?
Will I always rest in your scented winds?
In your lotus ponds, in your disks of the moon
Will my delighted mind wander day and night?⁶⁸

The penultimate verse shows how the funhouse mirror of literature changes perception, creating a world through imagination that transforms nature and its roughness, even anthropomorphizing it. The last verse, however, highlights an odd tension. On the one hand, the poet enjoys delights of the mind that is lost, as it were, in a good book, or rather swimming in the poetic depictions of the natural world. On the other hand, the poet feels uneasy here, as if the world of poetry too is in flux and out of reach, and the poet wishes for some form of dominion over poetry in order to achieve stasis or mastery over its vicissitudes. Thus even poetry's world appears elusive, as if it functions as a world of escape for a time yet is never permanent and never approximates the real world. Still, it offers rest for the weary soul, particularly in the comforting thoughts of poetic tropes built up over centuries of Sanskrit literary production.

This notion of finding security and repose in poetic tropes, in the midst of literary figures, brings us back to the notion of preserving fragments against one's ruin. The literary itself becomes like a museum filled with the comforts of a makeshift home in exile. Raghavan's

⁶⁸ Raghavan, "Bhoḥ Kave," *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1965): 127.

Verse 5: *ivanmāyayā surabhilāni mukhāni puṣpānyunmīlya sandadhāti kākalivaiduṣīm ca/
tvām vīkṣya śarkarilabhūsu śaratsaritsā sāhityabhaṅgibhirupāṃśu karoti goṣṭhīm//*

Verse 6: *sāmrājyametadayi te'tra kadā labeya tvayyeva gandhapavane śayitassadā syām/
padmāṭavīṣu tava, te śaśimaṅdaleṣu mādyanmanāḥ bata cariṣṇuraharniśam syām?//*

modern Sanskrit writings thus appear as a collection of bits and pieces of the past, a pastiche of tropes and words in a language resonant with historicity. At the same time as it picks up this debris from past literary works, and combines it into new forms, it serves as place of refuge against the dust thrown up by the march of globalization. Though some elements from outside Sanskrit infuse his work and structure his project, the materials are primarily from the museum built as a bulwark against the death of Sanskrit.

Raghavan uses these bits and pieces of past Sanskrit literature in a manner that is redolent of Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, who builds myths from the "remains and debris of events...fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society."⁶⁹ Yet Raghavan does not entirely match Lévi-Strauss's very specific definition. But in a more modern gloss on the concept, Wendy Doniger refers to the bricoleur as a "recycler."⁷⁰ This notion of "recycling" is particularly apt for Raghavan, and it points to a possible expansion of Doniger's word as a means of thinking about the construction of texts. First, if we extend the image, the act of recycling does not merely repurpose but recontextualize, so that Sanskrit takes on new meanings in its new uses. If we extend the metaphor even further, we might ask what world this sort of recycling is trying to save. In the case of Raghavan's twentieth-century Sanskrit literary works, it seems clear that world he is trying to save is one in which Sanskrit remains alive and flourishing. Yet in so far as these iterations of bricolage are posited strictly within the realm of language games and politics, they utterly miss what might be the most important aspect of the process. Bricoleurs or recyclers do not work with the materials at hand merely because they have a limited grab bag from which to work. The items in their sack are not mere trinkets, all of equal value and potential, and merely stored away until the need arises for their employment, as if the objects and ideas were

⁶⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, translated from French (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 22.

⁷⁰ Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 145.

workers for hire. Instead, the items and ideas with which recyclers work are inflected by meaning. In particular, recyclers use materials that are infused with a sense of the past; they are ideas and words that possess emotional or nostalgic weight. It is not mere recycling or museumification, but also memorializing and reviving, and that need to remember and renew speaks to a felt tension between problematic present and idealized past.

There is also a tension between the political and the emotional here. On the one hand, Raghavan's view of Sanskrit is not unlike Benjamin's characterization of Robespierre's outlook on ancient Rome as "a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history."⁷¹ That seems an accurate description of Raghavan's overall project to revive Sanskrit for independent India. On the other hand, if we consider the affective dimension of his works, the matter is rather reversed: Sanskrit is a now, charged with the time of the past, in which the author might feel part of the continuum of history, and indeed a religious idea of history as well. It is as if history's march, and the onslaught of Euro-American globalization, was not passing him by leaving him coated in dust, rather he retreats to the eternity of Sanskrit. Further, Sanskrit literature has personal and familial meaning for Raghavan, as do the religious materials and literary bits and pieces that he compiles in his works, which might provide him a sense of affinity and belonging. To recycle is thus to save a world that one wants to inhabit, to construct that world in the imagination, and to offer it in opposition to the reality of an imperfect world. The emotional is always in conversation with the political in an uneasy relation, a conflict between the home and the world in which the self wants to obtain both political strength and personal safety.

⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses of History" (Thesis XIV), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (NY: Schocken Books: 1968), 261.

Indeed, much of Raghavan's struggle is an attempt to find a home in the world, and Tagore's words at the beginning of this chapter suggest this tension between the literary home and the political world, the realm of safety and the realm of the public. Perhaps the world got along just fine without Raghavan's Sanskrit in the public sphere. Perhaps, like that book's hero Nikhil, he only published these Sanskrit writings for the world while thinking of himself. Thinking of himself could be interpreted as a political elitist move, writing Sanskrit to exclude others and to drown out the "crows" of low culture. Yet it could also be read simultaneously as an attempt to express his emotions in a language that reminded him of home, that shored up fragments around him to create the image of Sanskrit's liveliness, that recycled materials and presented them as a exemplifying Sanskrit's continuity for his own benefit. It could be said that it was through his act of writing Sanskrit, and not *about* Sanskrit, that he achieved the image of a *punarunmeṣa* in his own eyes.

And yet this desire of his could never be a pure escape, for the world always intercedes into the home and threatens to destroy it. This tension underlies the entire recycling process. There is a precariousness of the past recycled into the present as impermanence looms. This tension underlies the entire recycling process. In fact, the recycling process itself might be said to be animated by the same binary of hermeneutics mentioned earlier: a concern for recovery but a suspicion of deleterious outside forces. There is a precariousness of the past recycled into the present as impermanence looms. There is also a limit to the literary or academic mind engaging in the world since it can be ignored; there is a similar limit to the ability of Sanskrit to reach a large audience. This limitation of Raghavan's Sanskrit is not unlike the fate of much academic writing, which might appear to many as unintelligible "Sanskrit" and be left on a shelf to collect dust. For whom does the academic sing? But even when literary works address impermanence and unfulfilled wishes, the sense of pity, of *karuṇā rasa*, is itself conducive to enjoyment, and

the poem itself has a permanence that conveys its message. In that vein, I conclude with one of Raghavan's poems, entitled "*Manoratha*" ("Wish"), that strikes me as symbolic of his Sanskrit revival's simultaneous successes and failures, encapsulating to some degree what it must have meant for Raghavan to write and promote Sanskrit in the twentieth century:

The captivating wish rises higher and higher,
In a blink, it vanishes as if it were a bubble.
Glimmering on the edge of the forest that is my mind,
My hope gallivants like a handsome young antelope.
Like jasmine at day's end, my thought blooms for an instant,
Glow beautiful and fragrant, and falls away in a flash. Alas!⁷²

⁷² V. Raghavan, "*Manorathah*," *Saṃskṛta Pratibhā*, Vol., IX, No. 1 (1971): 14.

*uparyuparyudañcate manoratho manoharah/
kṣaṇena budbudaprabhaṃ tathā tathā vilīyate//
sa sa sphurannitastato manovanāntasīmasu/
kuraṅgapotasundaram bhramatyaho mamāśayaḥ//
dināntamallikeva me matirvikasvarā kṣaṇam/
sagandhalakṣmi rājate viśīryate kṣaṇādaho//*

APPENDIX A: SELECT TRANSLATIONS

In the following pages, I offer full translations of three of Raghavan's longer poems. As with any translation, it cannot be exactly precise. I have done what I could to stay as close to the original as possible but also to convey as much of the meaning as possible. I have also tried, in a few places, to make the poems at least *look* like poems despite having no meter or rhyme scheme. I have provided citations for the original published poems (I have abstained here from typing pages upon pages of transliterated versions), and the reader is welcome to consult them for meter, nuance, and far more "poetic-ness" than I have offered here.

"*Brahmapatravaivartapurānam*" ("Purāna of Rolling the Tobacco Leaf")¹

1. That which is sung by all the lofty Upanishads and which is praised
As matchless nectar of superior joy and has transcended the ultimate,
2. Is the tobacco leaf (Brahmapatra) called Brahmapatra, which is heard of on the earth.
Know that alone to be Brahma. There is no doubt.
3. And because of its being the extreme limit of joy due to its association with the word
"Brahma," and because it forms the tail of Brahma, and it is called the fourth part.

Thus the first teaching is the mutual connection.

¹ V. Raghavan, "*Brahmapatravaivartapurānam*," *Saṃskṛta-Bhavitavyam*, Vol. 19 (April 12, 1969): 3.

4. That Brahma which is whole and singular assumes a form triply,
Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, as a favor to the world.
5. Likewise, this Brahmapatra has three forms:
Snuff, cigarettes, betel nut, and the fourth part (conventional tobacco).

Thus the second teaching is the power.

6. Because of the absence of the destruction of form when it is being consumed,
The fourth is superior to the other three.
7. Indeed so highly is the greatness of that Brahmapatra regarded,
That the man who has placed some of it in his cheek after betel nut,
8. Having successfully achieved inactivity, there is neglect of bathing and eating,
And in this manner one sits motionless as if in simple Parabrahma.

Thus the third teaching is the greatness of the Brahmapatra leaf.

9. Having taken a pinch (of snuff), breathing is restricted.
Of those chanters devoted to the sound of Brahmapatra, it is their most precious.
10. That food is Brahma is said in our *śāstra*-s; for cooks, too, snuff is the most eminent.
11. Just as worship can be with or without recitation,
Snuff's course is twofold, with or without sound.
12. Then when it touches the top of the head,² a leakage occurs.³

Certainly those who use powder are yogis, what doubt could there be?

Thus the fourth teaching is the greatness of snuff.

² This is the *Brahmarandhra cakra*, the hole in the top of the head.

³ They get a runny nose.

13. Vedic practitioners and believers constantly honor snuff and tobacco,
And having become proud they revile the cigarette.
14. “Nonbelievers, because their Brahmanical hair is cut and their Brahminhood fallen,
They are of low castes, and damn you whom they worship.
15. Your devotees, fire-breathing ghosts, make smoke rings with their mouths and noses.
You are a rolled thing burning the belief in God.”
16. Thus having been reviled in the villages, and beaten with clay and wood
Those ascetic (*tapasvini*) cigarettes go to the city for refuge.
17. There, the foremost who are very civilized and have social graces
Smoke cigarettes and pass them around.
18. Here, those who use cigarettes ridicule as uncivilized and rural
The use of nose powder or even the love of Brahmapatra.
19. How is it impure, this activity of burning with fire?
May this latter-day-*agnihoma*, the cigarette, flourish!
20. Some who are continually smoking⁴ are skilled in speech while smoking.
Some chain smoke until they are completely pure in appearance.

Thus the fifth teaching is the greatness of cigarettes.

⁴ Always endowed with fire, e.g. have a continually burning sacrificial fire.

“Gopa Hampanna”⁵

Part 1

1. The English soldiers travelling by foot were tired from walking since morning.
They were like angry monkeys, having red faces like the sun towards evening.
2. The cloudless day was a bit hot, and the heat was greatly oppressive.
But the moon returned at the end of the old day and protected that rapidly heating world.
3. A division of the English army scheduled to go to Secunderabad found,
A place to camp and take some rest in the area near Guntakal.
4. Because of liquor, the soldier’s spirits were raising and bodily consciousness falling.
The area was drowning in the undulating clamor arising from the army camp.
5. Having sold *channapakka*⁶ in the heat of the day and earned some livelihood, an old
woman slowly went home by a path on the side of a field.
6. Having spent many afternoons protecting her grain fields, a young girl,⁷
Who wanted to go home, was accompanying the woman.
7. Their path was bordered by trees whose gold crowns shone in the low, long sunlight.
There arose the sound of wild laughter and chatter from drinking.
8. The travelling old woman and young girl heard that and craned their necks to see.
At that moment the white soldiers, deluded by lust, crept up swiftly on the girl.

⁵ V. Raghavan, “Gopa Hampannaḥ,” (Bangalore: *Āmṛtavānyām*, 1947). The organization of lines does not match exactly the original metrical verses. I have endeavored to make this poem look like poetry in some form, but do not have the poetic chops to render it in a truly metrical poetic form in English. There are four segments in the poem. They are separated somewhat in terms of focus and theme. Each segment is in a different Sanskrit meter.

⁶ This is a boiled gram dish as Raghavan tells us in a footnote. An English-speaking audience might better understand it as a simple fried chickpea dish. He also mentions it is called “sundal” in Tamil, indicating that he imagines his audience to be at least partially comprised of Tamilians.

⁷ Raghavan tells us in his brief preface that she was a Lingayat caste girl.

9. The pair of women looked at each other expressionlessly and trembling,
They examined the situation of six people chasing after them. They also ran.
10. Nearby there, at the level crossing of the railway and the road,
There dwelled a herdsman named Hampaṇṇa who guarded the gate.
11. He saw that pair of agitated running women, and he saw the white soldiers,
Rushing forward. At that moment the wise Gopa understood the situation.
12. He hid those two women inside of his hut and concealed them completely
By closing the door. Then he stood there holding his position firmly.
13. Those white wolves rushed forth with great speed but did not see the beautiful woman,
but they did see that lionhearted Gopa positioned in front of the cottage door.
14. Even though a flaming tongue was bursting inside of him, he observed a steady silence.
They looked at him angrily and struck the door with their feet.
15. Hampaṇṇa tried to restrain with his hand those wretched dogs of white soldiers. He
motioned as if to restrain them. But then they began to peel open the door.
16. When even after a while those blind from liquor could not be dissuaded from depravity,
That cattle herder grabbed a bamboo pole that was nearby on the ground.
17. Seeing Hampaṇṇa whirling around a mighty bamboo stick their faces went pale.
Alas, those white soldiers fought each other to take refuge under a tree.
18. Among those soldiers on the run, someone took a revolver into his hand.
Then there was the sound of one blast. And Hampaṇṇa's body fell to the ground.

Part 2

19. Like sorrow, the people gathered in the surrounding quickening darkness.
Hampaṇṇa lay there fondled in the lap of Vīralakṣmī.

20. Like dogs, those soldiers fled in an instant. They went away to their camp
Confidently, as if having done nothing wrong.
21. But during the identification parade, Hampaṇṇa was dying
And could not indicate his murderer.
22. Then the people performed the funereal ablutions full of tears.⁸
They made preparations for a funeral fire for Hampaṇṇa .

Part 3

23. As time passed, everyone acknowledged that his death marked Hampaṇṇa as a hero.
The people were furious with the white murderers and took them to the Court of Justice.
24. They extracted the bullet from Hampaṇṇa’s wound in order to find the murderer.
Due to the Madras populace’s anger, they were brought before the police to be punished.
25. The crowned white rulers gathered there looked at the natives with disgust .
There came together a stream of people, mouths hissing, like a snake crushed under foot.
26. “She is a harlot, Gopa is her pimp. He was haggling about her fees.
He rushed at us to beat us with a bamboo stick. I killed him in self defense.”
27. Thus the white soldier explained his rationale for committing murder.
The arrests were thus unsubstantiated.
All the people were stunned with wonder and anger.
Other white people quickly backed the soldier’s words.
28. But that surprise, which was like pouring acid in a wound, was not enough.
Alas the judge, as if writing with a needle, summoned that woman,
And struck at her vitals by asking “are you a prostitute?”⁹

⁸ This is *udaka*, the ceremony of offering water ablutions to the deceased. There appears to be a poetic sense in which the tears serve as the *udaka*.

29. “She is a prostitute, and the murder was in self-defense,” The judge clearly stated.

“This is not the last instance of disdain for subject people.

The Lord will certainly punish him,” the people said and went away.

Part 4

30. Hey Good People, along the Kurnool-Bangalore road,

You really ought to take a pilgrimage to the fields near Gooty.

A glorious monument shines there,

And you ought to offer considerable homage to it.

31. Many among the English rulers have violently

Mocked it or prevented its construction.

It was established as an eternal symbol for us,

Unable to bear being objects of humiliation and sunk in sorrow.

32. Hey hey, happy traveler! In front of that statue,

Make your tears an offering to its base.

Recite the *śloka* written on its stone face.¹⁰

“Here Hampañña was attacked by a white soldiers

While protecting a Hindu lady, and he was killed by them.

The great one’s ashes rest here.”

⁹ Rāghavan notes that the judge was one Mr. Collins.

¹⁰ These verses on the monument are in English, according to Raghavan’s preface.

“Mahātmā”¹¹

1. The Mahātmā, most excellent among Mahātmās, who has passed away,
What he has not achieved while living, let that be accomplished in death.
2. He overcame the distaste for cleaning feces and for leprosy,
He did not show hatred even to those who harmed him.
3. Even though he was supplied with security, he never had any fear,
Forgiving even to murderers, he was full of compassion.
4. He was a friend to others who endured hardships, that was his mark of Vishnu;
He was even-tempered and selfless, and endowed with wisdom.
5. Someone like Gandhi, even in this noble sacred land of Bharata,
Who sees God in all things, such a Mahātmā is hard to come by.¹²
6. Where there is the Gītā, Gaṅga, and also the Himālayas,
Gandhi is not the last of those reasons for the excellence of India.
7. He desired to wash away the tears that fell from every eye,
He could not wait patiently to release the pain of the earth.
To uplift the pitiable masses, the poor people,¹³
He exerted himself by his character and action.
8. After setting aside the joy of India’s Independence
At midnight in Delhi, which was acquired through his own efforts,
Chanting “Rām Rahīm,” he maintained peace,
Proceeding barefoot in the thick darkness of Naukhali.

¹¹ V. Raghavan, “Mahātmā,” *Samskṛta Pratibhā*, 8.2 (1970): 5-6. The author notes in a footnote that these verses were expressed at the time of Mahātmā Gandhi’s death.

¹² This line is verbatim from *Bhagavad Gītā* 7.19: “vāsudevassarvamiti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ.”

¹³ Literally, “daridranārāyaṇa-s” a term used by both Vivekananda and Gandhi.

9. Only one person shot the final murderous bullet into his heart,
But by our wrongdoing his heart had already been pierced.
10. Spinning wheel, uplift of the villages, abstaining from alcohol, the welfare of harijans,
Ending the quarrels over caste, nonviolence (*ahimsā*) as the undifferentiated truth,
11. Indeed this Lord Gandhi is endowed with six qualities. His soul is eternal.
Because of him who offered worship, he and this country are certainly worshipped.
12. A building to memorialize him, even if large, even if lovely, even if there are many.
Its value is very little. What could surpass following his words?
13. By friendship, by truth, by asceticism, through treating others as equal,
O People of India, make the land of India a great memorial.
14. Do not shed many tears, do not let yourselves become weak,
Do not, with praises, depart from his teaching of words and deeds.
15. Let no liar, hater, or harmful person touch his bones or his ashes.
Let those who criticized him not praise him now mockingly.
16. There was Buddha and there was Jesus Christ.
Gandhi, too, advocated peace and was killed.
Alas, when will there be peace that conquers this animalism?
Alas, when will our greatness be fulfilled?
17. At night they make atoms burst. By day they are the Assembly of Nations.
Hey World, if you are sincere, listen to the philosophy of Gandhi.
18. He transformed into something spiritual cruel and deceitful politics.
And he even moved the earth with *satyāgrahas* and asceticism,

19. “There is no truth but God, there is no worship but *ahimsā*.
Equality is the best activity that unifies the earth like a family.”¹⁴
20. This is the instruction, this is the teaching of the Mahātmā,
This alone is the Veda and Upaniṣad: “*Ahimsā* is the only salvation.”
21. Not harming each other, that is what Gandhi wished for.
Let there be Rāmraj on earth by the grace of Gandhi who is Rām.

¹⁴ Raghavan places this verse in quotation marks, and it does seem to reflect things Gandhi said, but he does not cite the source, and I have not been able to track it down. The same applies to the short quoted portion in the next verse.

APPENDIX B: THE WRITER AND HIS TIMES

Biographical Sketch

An entire book could be written on the life and work of Dr. V. Raghavan, and indeed his daughter, Nandini Ramani, just published a short biography of him in 2014 through Sahitya Akademi.¹ Throughout the text of this dissertation, I have given bits and pieces of information about his life, work, and thought as pertained to this writing in Sanskrit and his advocacy. In this space, I want to provide a brief biographical sketch of the man – a mere few words, although he is deserving of far more – for the reader to get a general overview of the basic facts of his life. Following this piece, I have provided a brief chronology that attempts to map Raghavan’s life onto a timeline of events taking place in India, and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the world. It is hoped that it might show some correlation between man and history and suggest how the times might have informed his thoughts. (Raghavan was a devoted reader of the news. Apparently, just before he himself passed away, he was very upset about the execution of former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979.) This basic summary should give the reader a very general overview of who Raghavan was, although the dissertation, and particularly chapter 1, does this to a much greater and more in depth degree.

Venkatarama Raghavan was born on August 22, 1908 in the town of Tiruvārūr, in what is now east central Tamil Nadu in the Kaveri River delta region. He was born in a family of Sāmavedin Smārta Brahmins. He was the third of three brothers, and had two other younger sisters. His parents, S. Venkatarama Iyer and Minakshi, both died when he was only seven, and he was then raised by aunts and uncles. It appears that his family valued education very highly

¹ Nandini Ramani, *V. Raghavan*, Makers of Indian Literature Series (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2014). Information for this sketch has been culled from that source, his autobiographical reflections, as well as a short CV of his found in the Milton Singer Papers at the University of Chicago Library Special Collections.

and they were also very involved in the music and arts scene, having various performers stay in their house at various times. His family also ensured that he had a thorough training in Sanskrit.

In 1925, he came to Madras to study at Madras Presidency College, going on then to earn his M.A. (Honors) in Sanskrit in 1930. He then spent a brief stint in 1931 Thanjavur at the Saraswati Mahal library working with manuscripts there. From 1931-1934, he did his Ph.D. under Kuppaswami Shastri at University of Madras. His dissertation, published first in 1963, was on Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, and it is a monumental work for which he is often best known in academic Sanskrit circles. He would go on to spend his entire professional career at Madras University. From 1935-1938, he worked as a researcher for the *Catalogus Catalogorum* at Madras University, before becoming a Lecturer at the University in 1939, Senior Lecturer in 1948, Reader in Sanskrit and Head of Department in 1950, Professor and Head in 1954. He retired from the department in 1968, and then from 1969-1972 he was a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow working on a critical edition of Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* (that has not yet been published).

Alongside his official academic roles, he had a plethora of other appointments, and was active in many other fields. He was Secretary of the Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Secretary and Editor of the Madras Music Academy and its Journal, Vice President of the Madras Sanskrit Academy, and a member of numerous boards of Indological research groups. As for government involvement, he was on the advisory boards for AIR and Sahitya Akademi, and an active member of a variety of committees and associations including the Sanskrit Commission, the Sangita Nataka Akademi, the Madras Natya Sangh, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Central Sanskrit Board and Indology Committee, Bharatiya Natya Sangh, All India Kalidasa Festival Committee, Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee, and the list goes on and on. One should also mention his awards, including the Padma Bhushan, title of Kavi-Kokila, P.V. Kane Gold Medal, Best Book Prize from Sahitya Akademi, etc.

During his long career, he wrote prolifically on a variety of academic subjects, writing books numbering over a hundred and articles (some academic, some less so) over a thousand. An intellectual biography of the man would be a dissertation in itself, and his knowledge of Sanskrit literature and philosophy, particularly aesthetics, as well as any number of other Indological subjects, was encyclopedic. Beyond that, he was also very learned in Euro-American scholarship on India, as well as general theory, literature, and other subjects. During the course of his career, he was in close association with a number of foreign scholars who sought his advice and knowledge, and he trained many scholars in India as well.

In addition to scholarship, he wrote numerous creative works (the subject of this dissertation) and was actively involved in the Madras arts scene. He pursued dramatic activities through the Madras Natya Sangh and then his own Samskrita Ranga, founded in 1958. He was involved with the famous Madras Music Academy, and he also studied and promoted Bharatanāṭyam performances, especially those of the great T. Balasaraswati.

When Dr. V. Raghavan died of a heart attack on April 5, 1979, he left behind his wife, Sarada, and four children: R. Kalidas, R. Charudattan, Priyamvada Sankar, and Nandini Ramini, along with a number of grandchildren. He also left behind a giant library of books, and boxes of reams of unpublished materials. Many of those unpublished works have now been published thanks to the activities of Nandini Ramini. The Samskrita Ranga survived under the leadership of his student, S.S. Janaki, until her passing, and it now continues under the direction of his daughter, Nandini Ramani. In fact, I have just recently been informed that the Samskrita Ranga is currently in the process of preparing for a performance of Bodhayana's farcical play, *Bhagavadajjukīyam*.

Chronology

1908 (August 22)	Venkatarama Raghavan born in Tiruvārūr
1921	Justice Party comes to power in Madras Presidency
1920-22	Gandhi's non-cooperation campaign
1925	Periyar starts the Self-Respect Movement
1929	Wall Street stock market crash
1929	Raghavan writes his "Essay on the Uses of Adversity" in Sanskrit
1930's	Raghavan writes for local talkies and film and theater journals
1930	Raghavan Completes M.A. in Sanskrit Language and Literature
1930	Gandhi leads Salt <i>satyagraha</i>
1931	Raghavan works as superintendent of the Saraswati Mahal Library
1931	Raghavan writes drafts of <i>Vimukti</i> , <i>Anārkalī</i> , and <i>Pratāparudra-Vijaya</i>
1931-34	Raghavan does Ph.D. under Mm. Prof. Kuppuswami Sastri
1935-38	Raghavan works on the <i>Catalogus Catalogorum</i> (a post-doc, of sorts)
1937	First Anti-Hindi agitations in Madras
1939	Raghavan joins the Sanskrit Department at Madras University
1940	Jinnah proposes "Two Nations"
1941-45	World War II (some sporadic fighting occurs in Madras)
1944	Start of the DMK
1946	<i>Kāmaśuddhi</i> published
1947 (August 15)	India officially gains independence from England; Partition
1947	Anti-Nautch Bill
1947	<i>Svarājya-Ketu</i> published
1948 (January 30)	Gandhi assassinated
1948	<i>Gopa Hampañña</i> published
1950 (January 26)	Republic Day (establishment of Indian Constitution)
1953	First linguistic states, Madras and Andhra Pradesh, established
1953-54	Raghavan travels in Europe
1954	Raghavan becomes head of the Sanskrit Department at Madras University
1954	First meeting between Raghavan and Milton Singer
1956	Sanskrit Commission established in New Delhi
1956	India reorganized along linguistic lines
1956	<i>Prekṣaṇakatrayī</i> published
1958	Raghavan founds the Samskrita Ranga
1959	Raghavan starts the journal <i>Samskṛta Pratibhā</i>
1959	Raghavan starts the Samskrita Ranga Annual
1960	<i>Punarunmeṣa</i> staged in New Delhi
1961	<i>Punarunmeṣa</i> published
1962	Indo-China War
1962	Raghavan receives Padma Bhushan Republic Day Award
1962	Raghavan conferred the title of <i>Kavi-kokila</i>
1963	Official Languages Act
1964	Raghavan travels in the United States
1964	Raghavan receives the Sahitya Akademi Prize for his work on Bhoja
1964	Raghavan gives the Patel Memorial Lectures (<i>The Great Integrators</i>)
1965	More Anti-Hindi riots in Tamil Nadu

1967	DMK comes to power in Tamil Nadu
1968	<i>Vimukti</i> published
1968	Raghavan retires from Madras University
1968	Raghavan's <i>Ṣaṣṭyabdapūrti</i>
1968	First staging of <i>Anārkalī</i> in Madras
1968	Raghavan writes his short "Autobiographical Reflection"
1969	<i>Brahmapatravaivartapurāṇam</i> published
1969	<i>Pratāparudra-Vijaya</i> published
1969	Communal riots in Gujarat
1971	Tamil Nadu government decrees Sanskrit not the sole language of liturgy
1971	AIDMK splinters from DMK
1971	Raghavan travels in Eastern Europe
1971	Indo-Pakistan War
1972	<i>Anārkalī</i> published
1972	<i>Anārkalī</i> performed at the World Sanskrit Conference
1975-1977	Indira Gandhi initiates Emergency Rule
1978	<i>Universal Love and World Unity</i> published
1979 (April 5)	V. Raghavan dies of a heart attack at home in Madras

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