THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

INTIMATELY COSMOPOLITAN:
GENEALOGICAL POETS AND ORCHESTRATED SELVES IN 17–18TH CENTURY SANSKRIT LITERATURE FROM SOUTH INDIA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY

TALIA ARIAV

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2022

Table of contents

Acknowledgments

This dissertation has much to do with the inseparable part played by teachers, friends, and family members in one's thinking and writing. While for the authors featured in this dissertation, no woman made it into either of these acknowledged circles, the idea of a singular or original work as a necessarily shared endeavor could not hold more accurately for this dissertation.

I am grateful to my dissertation committee. Whitney Cox has been a true adviser and an encouraging and supportive presence throughout. He steadily read various Sanskrit texts with me and offered directions of thought and interpretation that informed this dissertation from its start. This continued to be the case when he read (and reread) every word in this thesis with a critical and generous eye. Andrew Ollett's support and advice were invaluable. He has consistently responded with immediate and thoughtful reviews of each of the drafts, and the conversations with him were always eye-opening and fruitful. Yigal Bronner introduced me to the world of Nīlakaṇṭha and instructively read his work with me back at the Hebrew University. He generously agreed to serve on the committee of this dissertation, and his illuminating comments and questions on each chapter kept pushing me to refine and revisit my thinking. Gary Tubb's Sanskrit classes helped paved my path to the world of Sanskrit literature. He also graciously responded to the thesis with typical insight.

I deeply thank E. Annamalai, my Tamil professor at the University of Chicago, for his demanding and infinitely enriching reading sessions over the years. His erudition and openness are incomparable, and it is with his voice in mind that I approach the Tamil sphere and its multilingualisms. I also wish to thank Philip Engblom, with whom I was also lucky enough to study during his final years of Marathi teaching at U Chicago: his love for the language and its poetry was contagious. I thank Sascha Ebeling, Anna Seastrand, Thibaut D'Hubert, Rochona

Majumdar, Tyler Williams, and all the other faculty members at SALC from whom I have learned a great deal, in and outside the classroom. Laura Ring at the Regenstein library was an ever-helpful presence, especially in the wake of COVID-19. A special thanks to Tracy Davis, whose will to help, as a matter of course, made life easier while I was physically and virtually present. I also thank the Humanities Division, the Committee of Southern Asian Studies (COSAS), UChicagoGRAD, and David Shulman's ERC project (NEEM) for supporting my work over the past seven years.

David Shulman has initiated this journey in many ways and shaped this dissertation both directly and indirectly. He remains a constant source of advice, support, and insight. I feel fortunate to be walking in his footsteps in the field of early modern South India, which he has opened up for us all. Naresh Keerthi, whom I met in Jerusalem under David's auspicious wings, is a true mentor and friend. This thesis is indebted to his generosity and subtlety of thought. The one and only Rafi Peled, Daniel Raveh, Ronie Parciack, Ehud Halperin, and Roy Tzohar were my teachers and guides at Tel Aviv University. Yochanan Grinshpon was the reason I picked up Sanskrit, and I still cherish his unforgettable classes.

My friends and colleagues in Chicago also have their footprints all over this thesis as readers, editors, and supportive comrades. My love and deepest gratitude to Sanjukta Poddar, Akshara Ravishankar, Itamar Ramot, Eduardo Acosta, Mannat Johal, Thomas Newbold, Ayelet Kotler, Sharvari Sastry, Nell Hawley, Jo Brill, Supurna Dasgupta, and all my colleagues at SALC throughout the years. In Jerusalem, I feel lucky to have had the embracing solidarity of Sivan Goren Arzony, Danielle Chen Kleinman, Hemdat Salay, Odeya Ettun, Ofer Peres, Naomi Lossin, and Shani Goldfrad. Margherita Trento was and still is an infinite source of wisdom, sense of purpose, and friendship.

To my family, who like Nīlakaṇṭha for his brother, were present in the audience: my parents, Ayala and Yarom, whose love and support continue to show me the way. My incomparable siblings, Shanshi, Kiki, and Rot—my first and foremost shared self. Pino, who sat on my lap throughout most of it. To Yair and Shir, my rays of light.

Abstract

This dissertation is a literary study of the voices of some of the better-known, yet least studied, Sanskrit poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Tamil South. I argue that the circles of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and his student, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, are characterized by a unique and shared literary style that reflects intimate connections between poets and readers. I show that these authors wrote themselves into their works in marked yet deliberately oblique ways. Their voices allow the modern scholar of premodern India to glimpse what it means to be a person who sees himself as part of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, long after Sanskrit itself had ceased to be the exclusive idiom of political and cultural expression in the subcontinent, and centuries after thriving multilingual literary spheres came to be established in various parts of the subcontinent.

The weight of the authoritative Sanskrit tradition of writing is far from being a burden for these authors: they write as if Sanskrit poetry can only get better, and its canon of luminaries can continue to expand. I call these authors' mode of authorship "intimately cosmopolitan": they feel at home in the Sanskrit tradition, in turn experienced in their small Brahmin villages and transmitted through their beloved teachers, family members, and students. They seek to embody the entirety of a vast Sanskrit corpus in all disciplines and simultaneously present themselves through the gurus and immediate family members with whom they shared their lives. These clashing scales of centuries-old Sanskrit knowledge systems alongside their intimate worlds of the classroom or village home brought these authors to celebrate and experiment with the range at their disposal rather than lament their place and time. Much of their literary endeavors can be read against these contrastive scales.

This corpus of literature, rarely read in academic contexts for its literary value or content, is nevertheless unique. It conveys an attitude toward tradition that is neither traditionalist nor revolutionary: it is rather a consistent attempt to master the vast tradition of Sanskrit letters by playing with it, with deep respect yet with a notable lack of reverence, from within. It presents a densely intertextual and self-referential vision of poetry, accompanied by a double voice and hybridity of register. Writing within an intimately cosmopolitan milieu also entails that these authors' self-insertions are deeply collective: they are orchestrated through intricate intertexts from the Sanskrit tradition of knowledge and literature and further include their intimate genealogical ties with their teachers and kin (who were often the same), as well as their personal God or Goddess, whom they are often said to embody. Through these signature techniques, we can sense and analyze their senses of authorship and formations of self. These convey a heightened singularity, yet they are never in the singular: they are interwoven with the people, gods, and traditions that these authors took to be significant.

Their work was not designed to travel wide, but was premised on the sustainment of intimate genealogical networks. That these poets have a role in our received understandings of the history of Sanskrit poetry is primarily the result of this genealogical logic: the prominent modern scholars Kuppuswami Sastri and his student V. Raghavan were direct descendants of these poets' emphasized networks of students and kin. Throughout the dissertation, I pose and nuance questions regarding the broad epistemic, cultural, and economic models that inform this corpus of literature. These shed light on the role of hereditary capital in intellectual households in tax-exempt Brahmin villages in the Tamil heartland, on the particular relationship of Sanskrit literature with multilingual cultural production at the nearby court of Thanjavur and in the Tamil-speaking South, and on the role of Sanskrit knowledge, and particularly of Sanskrit poetry, in the

lives of these influential early modern Sanskrit poets. In the thesis, I attempt to do justice to these authors' largely forgotten yet remarkable literary programs and ambitions and to situate their work in the larger stories of Sanskrit literature and cultural production in the early modern period in South India.

Introduction

na kāla-bhedād rasa-varṇa-bhedo na jāmitā vā na ṛjīṣa-bhāvaḥ
sārasvataṃ nāma phalaṃ tad etat sadaika-rūpaṃ kṛtino labhante
(*Śivalīlārṇava*, hereon *Līlā*, v. 1.28)

Its tastes and sounds do not go bad due to changing times;
there is no mere repetition, no over-ripe residue.
The fruit of Sarasvati, Goddess of speech—
always in one and the same form—
is for good poets to enjoy.

This verse is one of many examples of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's reflections on poetic Sanskrit writing. The translation misses out on the pun in Sanskrit, contrasting the shelf-life of fruit—including its changing colors and residual juices—to those of the Sanskrit poetic tradition, which remains ever-relevant even in the wake of changing times (*kāla-bheda*). Nīlakaṇṭha's need to defend the timelessness of poetry is the point of this verse, a testament to his sensitivity to how times were, in fact, changing. His claim might be read against a presupposition that the perfected and divine state of the Sanskrit language and tradition can only deteriorate with time. Read in this light, Nīlakaṇṭha obliquely justifies his late intervention in a roughly fifteen-hundred-year-old literary corpus. Thus, thanks to its inherent (and long-argued for) stability[1], Sanskrit poetry can paradoxically survive—and elegantly so, with no residues or repetitions—any change in time. This point is performed in the verse by the use of rather exotic and pronouncedly Vedic

[1] Pollock writes on the argument for the stability of Sanskrit, inherent to the notion of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan tradition: "Even before his [Kumārila in the seventh century] time, the argument was standard in scholarly circles that *apabhraṣṭa* [non-Sanskrit] language communicates meaning only by reminding the listener of the original, predialectal word from which the *apabhraṣṭa* word was presumed to have been corrupted...As late as the seventeenth century, Sanskrit intellectuals were arguing that the capacity of vernacular literary texts (*bhāṣāprabandha*) to communicate meaning was due "only either to the illusion that they are expressive in themselves, or to the latent presence of the grammatically correct [Sanskrit] words that they suggest." Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (California: University of California Press, 2009), 309.

vocabulary (*jāmitā*, *ṛjīṣa*). We can already begin to sense the aesthetic of playful confidence and suggestive double-voice that govern this corpus.

This dissertation is a literary study of the voices of some of the better known, yet least studied, Sanskrit poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Tamil South. I argue that the circles of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and his student, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, are characterized by a unique literary style that reflects intimate connections between poets and readers. I show that these authors wrote themselves into their works in marked yet deliberately oblique ways. Through these signature techniques, we can sense and analyze their sense of self and authorship, which are deeply intertwined with their teachers and kin (who were often the same), their gods, and the tradition of Sanskrit letters. The ways in which these authors position themselves in their works allow the modern scholar of premodern India to glimpse what it means to be a person who sees himself as part of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, long after Sanskrit itself had ceased to be the exclusive idiom of political and cultural expression in the subcontinent, and centuries after thriving multilingual literary spheres came to be established in various parts of the subcontinent.

The weight of the authoritative Sanskrit tradition of writing is far from being a burden. These authors write as if Sanskrit poetry can only get better and its canon of luminaries can continue to expand. Thus, Rāmabhadra wrote a hymn addressed to his friend's hymn to their shared teacher, lauding the hymn's ability to outdo the major poets of the Sanskrit canon and to gladden the learned Brahmin men of his community, even more than the works of significant figures of the Sanskrit canon of śāstra.[2] While probably meant to be provocative, there is much to

[2] As expressed in the following two verses: *kṣiptvā bāṇam udāra-śabda-racanaṃ bhūyo-guṇākarṣaṇāt trāsaṃ bhāsa-mayūrayor janayatā dūre hariṃ dhūnvatā ācāryastavarāja tatrabhavatā harṣa-smaya-cchedinā coro 'jīyata cāṭu-kārakavane ced etad arhaṃ tava*. "You dismiss Bāṇa, who composes noble words; you frighten Bhāsa and Mayūra, with a strike of your bow's excellent sound; you blow Bhartṛhari far away. Ācāryastavarāja, you destroy Harṣa's smile, and defeat Cora (Bilhaṇa) in the woods of clever speech–given all this, you can do anything!" And: *na vyālendra-vacaḥ kramair na śabara-svāmi-prabandhoktibhir. nālāpair api pakṣilasya na girām apy aṅkuraiḥ*

take seriously in this comment. The scale of centuries-old Sanskrit knowledge systems stands alongside the intimate world of the classroom that Rāmabhadra shared with his fellow disciple. These clashing scales allow these authors to celebrate the range at their disposal, rather than lament their place and time.

I call these authors' mode of authorship *intimately cosmopolitan*: they feel at home in the Sanskrit tradition, which is in turn experienced in their small Brahmin villages and transmitted through their beloved teachers, family members, and students. They write as if they embody the entirety of a vast Sanskrit corpus in all disciplines and simultaneously present themselves through the gurus and immediate family members with whom they shared their lives. Much of their literary endeavors can be read against these contrastive scales: this is what I attempt to capture with the label "intimately cosmopolitan."

This corpus of literature, rarely read in academic contexts for its literary value or content, is nevertheless unique. It conveys an attitude toward tradition that is neither traditionalist nor revolutionary: it is instead a consistent attempt to master the vast tradition of Sanskrit letters by playing with it, with deep respect yet with a notable lack of reverence, from within. It presents a densely intertextual and self-referential vision of poetry, accompanied by a double voice and hybridity of register. Writing within an intimately cosmopolitan milieu also entails that these authors' self-insertions are deeply collective: they are orchestrated through intricate intertexts from the Sanskrit tradition of knowledge and literature, and further include their intimate

---

śāṅkaraiḥ. ullāso viduṣām udañcati tathā śālāntare yajvanām. ācāryastavarāja puṣpa-mṛdulaiḥ ślokair yathā tāvakaiḥ. "Ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇa [*Bhūṣaṇa*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), v. 11, 65.
"Not quite through the rules of *Patañjali,* king of snakes; not through the sayings of *Śabarasvāmi*, not with the teachings of *Pakṣila* of the Nyāya discipline, not even as much as with the budlike words of Śaṅkara; *ācāryastavarāja!* The absolute joy of the learned sacrificers of the *śālā* is brought about by your *ślokas*, gentle as flowers."

genealogical ties as well as their personal God or Goddess, whom they are often said to embody. This dissertation analyses how these authors constructed their authorial identities through their poetic work, and in doing so attempts to do justice to their largely forgotten, yet remarkable literary programs and ambitions, and to situate their work in the larger stories of Sanskrit literature and cultural production in the early modern period in South India.

In the discussion that follows, I introduce the key themes of the dissertation, organized by sections following its title: (1) Intimately Cosmopolitan (2) Genealogical Poets (and) (3) Orchestrated Selves (in) (4) 17-18th century Sanskrit Literature from South India. A chapter outline follows.

Intimately Cosmopolitan

The "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" was coined by Sheldon Pollock to theorize the role of the Sanskrit language as a semi-global, unified political and cultural idiom employed throughout South and Southeast Asia during the first millennium AD.[3] Pollock's theory of the "Sanskrit cosmopolis" giving way to the "vernacular millennium" has invigorated and reframed the discussion of premodern South Asia in several academic contexts.[4] One set of questions that this theory continues to invite is what happened to the cosmopolitan Sanskrit idiom in the

[3] Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*.

[4] Pollock's influential narrative informed and invited numerous works of scholarship that continue to affirm, nuance and/or challenge this narrative. See for instance Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea, eds., *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011); Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (California: University of California Press, 2017); Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2014); David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Elaine Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (California: University of California Press, 2017).

"vernacular millennium."[5] Writing in response to Pollock's thesis, Francesca Orsini has argued that the story of the vernacular millennium and the early modern period, in particular, can be also told as the story of the persistence of cosmopolitan idioms.[6] Yet another set of questions that Pollock's thesis elicits and which informs this dissertation regards the different *ways* of being and writing as a cosmopolitan person, and how these experiences and sensibilities may vary, in literature and in life. My project joins these two lines of inquiry to ask what may have been the imagination and experience of the Sanskrit cosmopolis in the minds of the many authors who continued to write Sanskrit well into the vernacular millennium. Specifically, how did the most notable authors of the early modern Tamil-speaking south write, indeed live, in Sanskrit, toward the end of the "vernacular millennium"?

These questions were addressed most incisively by Bronner and Shulman in "A Cloud Turned Goose," their study of the *Haṃsasandeśa* of the 14th-century poet Vedānta Deśika. There they identify Deśika and other Sanskrit poets of second-millennium South India, including the protagonists of this dissertation, as "local cosmopolitans." Bronner and Shulman postulate that the more locally grounded the work, the more depth and complexity it achieves. In their words:

> Sanskrit still allows a poet to transcend his or her parochial context and reach out to a space shaped by a wider, inherited discourse. At the same time, Sanskrit

[5] Pollock's theory was preceded by a strong hypothesis of the "death" of Sanskrit in the vernacular millennium, where he suggested that "Sanskrit writers had ceased to make literature that made history. In terms of both the subjects considered acceptable and the audience it was prepared to address, Sanskrit had chosen to make itself irrelevant to the new [early modern] world". Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (April 2001): 413–14. Pollock also identified Jagannātha of seventeenth-century Delhi as the last original Sanskrit poet (*Ibid,* 404–12). This thesis was contested and nuanced by several scholars (see for instance Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 1 (2006): 1–30). My thesis is a further contestation that brackets the idea of immediate political relevance, and demonstrates the originality of this corpus of poets, with its own ideas about originality and endurance.

[6] Francesca Orsini, "Whose Amnesia? Literary Modernity in Multilingual South Asia," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 7.

> enables a skilled poet to condense into the space of a single work—even a single verse—an entire world of specific associations, contents, and meaning.[7]

These reflections serve as one starting point for this thesis. Bronner and Shulman discuss a productive tension between the "local" and the "cosmopolitan", a density of intertext and its subversive effects, and the making of a "Tamil" religious-sectarian space in Sanskrit. They also postulate that these works mainly had local audiences: these are all features we will see governing this corpus.

Engseng Ho has used the identical label—"local cosmopolitans"—to describe the Hadrami Sayyids. This diasporic community originated from South Arabia and became prominent in the social landscape throughout the early modern Indian Ocean. He sees a special significance in their genealogies:

> Hadrami genealogies are not only linear instruments that point back to origins. They have evolved to become, in theory and in practice, complex languages of cosmopolitanism in which the foreign and the local negotiate coexistence in vital ways…the genealogies underwrite the existence of persons whom I call local cosmopolitans…[8]

Like some of the communities in Ho's account, the familial networks in this dissertation are well integrated into local elite circles, and they acquired additional identities such as sectarian commitments. They also retained their cosmopolitan identity through mediums such as genealogies and pilgrimage.[9] They are often said to be "well-known in the world," an idiom that

[7] Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 9.
[8] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (California: Univ of California Press, 2006), 188.
[9] Ho reflects on the affinity of genealogy and pilgrimage: "Like genealogy, pilgrimage is movement given moral meaning: the former gains meaning through time; the latter, across space…" Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, xxv. O'Hanlon exemplifies the extent of the subdivisions of identities among Maratha Brahmin familial networks, constantly debated and formed via genealogies and pilgrimage to Benares. Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Letters Home: Banaras Pandits and the Maratha Regions in Early Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 201–40.

might appear to be in tension with their otherwise local, community-bound, diasporic identity.[10] Bronner and Shulman, however, already connected this trope of worldwide fame precisely to the idea of local cosmopolitanism.[11] But unlike the vast genealogies that Ho describes, the genealogical frameworks of Nīlakaṇṭha's model are radically intimate.

Thus, as I show in chapters two and four, in his play, the *Nalacaritram* ("The Story of King Nala, henceforth *Nala*), Nīlakaṇṭha concludes his detailed survey of his illustrious family of writers with an additional mention of the fraternal love with which his brother has written a commentary to his play. In his *mahākāvya*, the *Gaṅgāvataraṇa* ("The Descent of the River Gaṅgā", henceforth *Gaṅgā*), he mentions the special bonds of brotherhood that he shares with his five brothers.[12] Moreover, Nīlakaṇṭha's students and brothers describe him in outstanding and loving passages, and cite him verbatim. The usual format of acknowledgment of teacher and lineage, often concerning three ascending patrilineal generations,[13] is consistently augmented with a sense of a historical singularity. The milieu in which these authors situate themselves is thus not just "local" in Bronner and Shulman's formulation, but "intimate," formed by close-knit family and educational ties. I will elaborate on the role and function of genealogical ties in these authors' writing below. These acknowledged literary bonds also allowed me to treat these

---

[10] For one example by Nīlakaṇṭha, see *kavir api tasya jagad-vidita eva;* "The poet of this work is very well known in the world" *Nalacaritram* [*Nala*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita* (Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrrita Samsthana, 1987), prose after v. 5.

[11] "In these verses, we find again and again words such as jagat, jaganti, bhuvana, viśva, all conveying a sense of a worldwide potential. Even a highly local milieu allows a skilled poet to dig deep, to tap into these underlying currents…". Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 5.

[12] *agrajanmā khalu tasya rasika-loka-mauli-maṇir āccādīkṣito vyākarod idaṃ rūpakaṃ* ***anuja-snehāt*** *Nalacaritram* [*Nala*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*., before v. 11; *jayanti tanayās tasya pañca* ***saubhrātra****-śālinaḥ garbha-dāsā maheśasya kavayaś ca vipaścitaḥ. Gaṅgāvataraṇam* [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Kedaranatha Sastri and Vasudeva Laxman Sastri Panasikar, (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1916), v. 1.49

[13] The *praśasti* format of three patrilineal generations is modelled on the Brahmanical *Śrāddha* ceremony, a Brahmanical worship of a deceased father, grandfather and great-grandfather. It is relevant for our context that the ceremony was appropriated to Śaiva contexts, whence the three generations are treated as manifestations of Śiva; Nina Mirnig, "Adapting Śaiva Tantric Initiation for Exoteric Circles: The Lokadharmiṇī Dīkṣā and Its History in Early Medieval Sources," in *Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions: Essays in Honour of Alexis G.J.S Sanderson*, ed. Dominic Goodall et al., Gonda Indological Studies 22, 2020, 285.

authors' works as a discrete literary corpus organized around the most influential figures of this milieu.

One good reason to work with the notion of cosmopolitanism in our authors' context is that it allows me to think of their privilege as Brahmin men of authorial pedigree in productive ways. Studies of cosmopolitanism have long flagged its built-in exclusions. Arjun Appadurai suggested an alternative cosmopolitanism "from below" in Mumbai slums in the twenty-first century that was, "driven by the exigencies of exclusion rather than by the privileges (and ennui) of inclusion."[14] The relationship between inclusion and cosmopolitanism is important, but Appadurai's binary between inclusion and exclusion effaces the many possible formations and factors at play in any given form of cosmopolitanism, especially in pre-modern, nonwestern contexts.[15] Probing and qualifying the specific cosmopolitanism of our authors provides me with a lens into the everyday realities of a specific and intimate dynamic of privilege and inclusion.

Elsewhere, Pollock defined cosmopolitanism as action: according to him, a narrow gap between action (in literature, the circulation of texts) and statement of circulatory space makes an author cosmopolitan, whereas vernacular texts, whether stating their world-wide relevance or not, remain local in action.[16] The intimate cosmopolitans at the heart of this dissertation are hardly cosmopolitans in practice. But they nevertheless imagined themselves to be

[14] Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (Verso Books, 2013), 198. The attempt to expose "cosmopolitanism from below" is well attested in recent scholarship on cosmopolitanism; see, for instance, several contributions to Paulo Lemos Horta, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitanisms* (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

[15] For the shift toward cosmopolitanisms, in the plural, see the introduction to Carol Appadurai Breckenridge et. al, eds., *Cosmopolitanism*, A Millenial Quartet Book (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[16] "My intention here is to think about cosmopolitanism and vernacularism as action rather than idea, as something people do rather than something they declare, as practice rather than proposition (least of all, philosophical proposition). This enables us to see that some people in the past have been able to be cosmopolitan or vernacular without directly professing either, perhaps even while finding it impossible rationally to justify either." Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 593.

cosmopolitans—participating in a timeless and placeless tradition of Sanskrit literature—and hence were cosmopolitans in outlook. This shift in emphasis can help capture the cosmopolitan *experience* of our authors, what Kate Franklin calls *everyday cosmopolitanisms*: "imagining the multiply scaled worlds within which one is situated and of dwelling (acting, dreaming, making) within those worlds." Franklin questioned the applicability of the "cosmopolitan" to a place like Armenia, whose inhabitants, from the medieval period to the twenty-first century, considered it to be the center of the universe, whereas nearly everyone else considers it to be "the edge of nowhere". Her application of the "cosmopolitan" is thus broadened such that "to be or to act cosmopolitan was to coexist with difference at multiple scales."[17]

This definition motivates me to probe the specific ways our authors coexisted at multiple scales: that of the Sanskrit cosmopolis of letters, with its inherited histories of impact and accumulated knowledge, and that of their radically local audience and bound everyday lives. The intimacies with which they speak the cosmopolitan idiom allow us to grasp what their sense of the cosmopolis—which we shall see was remarkably free of anxieties, at least in the hands of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra—felt like, how it was negotiated, and what literary effects it created.

Genealogical poets

My sister's desk drawers don't hold old poems,
and her handbag doesn't hold new ones.
When my sister asks me over for lunch,
I know she doesn't want to read me her poems.
Her soups are delicious without ulterior motives.
Her coffee doesn't spill on manuscripts.

There are many families in which nobody writes poems,

[17]Kate Franklin, *Everyday Cosmopolitanisms: Living the Silk Road in Medieval Armenia* (California: University of California Press, 2021)., 3,11,12.

but once it starts up it's hard to quarantine.
Sometimes poetry cascades down through the generations,
creating fatal whirlpools where family love may founder.

Excerpt from "In Praise of My Sister," Wisława Szymborska.[18]

Wislawa Szymborska's poem to her sister reflects a markedly modern notion of authorship as a profession of choice, independent from one's family relationships, even incompatible with them. Much unlike Szymborska's sister, whose love has nothing to do with her poetry, Nīlakaṇṭha's brother Atirātra proudly mentions that the former has lovingly read his draft. These men's presentation of themselves is inseparable from their teachers and kin, and this led me to posit the *genealogical* poet as a primary mode and model of authorship of these authors. Framing their writing as such allows me to begin to sketch both their socio-economical conditions of writing and some of their primary aesthetic concerns.[19]

Once noticed, the genealogical poet is everywhere in these authors' writing: the intimate paramparā relationships between these men are the most salient, nearly exclusive, indexes of their worlds. These references point to a community asking to be read as a group. What can we learn about the socio-historical and economic circumstances behind this model of writing? Rosalind O'Hanlon convincingly argued for the rise of the "scholar household" in the related context of Brahmin Maratha intellectuals of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Banaras, often patronized by Mughal kings. She concludes:

> The scholar household was thus a mainstay in the lives of Banaras's Maratha intellectuals. What made possible the brilliant achievements of so many of their members during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was precisely that corporate and familial dimension of their lives which we, perhaps, do not often

[18] Wisława Szymborska, *With a Grain Of Sand: Selected Poems,* 2001 (Transation: Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh).
[19] I expand on the notion of the "genealogical poet" in the context of what we know of Nīlakaṇṭha's life in Talia Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: An Independent Poet of the Kaveri Delta, or: The Forgotten Model of Genealogical Authorship," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 59, no. 3 (2022): 273–98.

> associate with individual intellectual distinction. The household provided an exceptionally high degree of specialized training and accumulation of expertise. . . . . In Mughal Banaras, there was a unique concentration of such households, linked by ties of family, migration, and pedagogy to Brahman communities elsewhere in India, creating a critical mass, which multiplied in its effects.[20]

Nīlakaṇṭha and his circles operated in roughly similar ways in Nāyaka and Maratha Thanjavur.[21] They were also directly related to these Banaras communities, as they held active intellectual exchanges with some of these contemporaneous Maharashtrian Brahmin men.[22] They lived, as I further describe below, in *brahmadeya* (alternatively, *agrahāra*) tax-exempt Brahmin villages around the Kaveri delta, such that they shared their professional and everyday lives with their teachers and colleagues. The household of their guru, often their father or close relative, is where they gained their proficiency in the Sanskrit tradition, and this is how many of them subsequently made a living as authors and teachers. Granted, variations on the genealogical model of writing existed in different formations throughout the history of Sanskrit writing. The genealogical model of writing in Sanskrit usually coexisted with other models of courtly and other institutional patronship, such that it has largely flown under the radar of scholarship to date.[23] But for this intimate community of poets, who—as we shall see—cite and reference each other in ways that make them recognizably filiated, genealogical identity was a primary form of

---

[20] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Speaking from Siva's Temple: Banaras Scholar Households and the Brahman 'Ecumene' of Mughal India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (March 23, 2011): 261.

[21] See Dominik Wujastyk, "Rāmasubrahmaṇya's Manuscripts: Intellectual Networks in the Kaveri Delta, 1693-1922," in *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South Asia*, ed. Saraju Rath (Brill, 2012), 235–52, for a documentation of another family of scholars situated in the "household" model, from the brahmadeya villages of the delta.

[22] For Nīlakaṇṭha's manuscript exchange with Dinakara Bhaṭṭa and Ananta Bhaṭṭa, both from well known families in Banaras, see Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 51–52.

[23] One example is Bāṇa, in his monumental seventh-century *Harṣacarita*, narrating King Harṣa's biography and genealogy, and yet, equally invested in the poet's own genealogy. Kumkum Roy's analysis of Bāṇa's self-positioning reveals a significant footprint of genealogical authorship within the locus classicus of the patron-centric poetry in the Sanskrit canon. Kumkum Roy, "Poetic Pasts: Patrons, Poets and Lesser Mortals in Bāṇa's Biography," *Religions of South Asia* 5, no. 1 (2012).

cultural and social capital. This capital transformed into various economic means, for poets working within a court or outside it.[24]

In other words, these authors' genealogical model of authorship was a product of the brahmadeya as a space of intellectual and artistic energies that allowed a certain poetic and economic independence. This independence is either complete, like in the case of Nīlakaṇṭha who mentions no patron at all, or partial, like in the case of Rāmabhadra, who referred to King Śāha in his scientific works but exclusively and emphatically mentioned his teachers in his literary works. The genealogical model is thus also a corrective to an unsatisfactory division between "court" and "temple" poets, usually assumed in South Asian, and especially South Indian, studies. That Nīlakaṇṭha was anachronistically "placed" in Tirumalai Nāyaka's court in Madurai in all accounts to date is partly because a poet like Nīlakaṇṭha simply does not fit this division.[25]

The genealogical model also contributed to the survival of poets and their works for future generations. The contemporaneous transmission of our authors' works was narrow, but it could stretch into the future via generations to come. This potential was actualized: Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra became prominent figures in the literary histories of Sanskrit writing primarily

[24] I draw here on Bourdieu's influential formulation of forms of capital, which stresses the hereditary element in cultural and social capital throughout: "the transmission of cultural capital [for instance, education] is no doubt the best-hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital..."Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, by John Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 19. I wish, however, to resist the complete instrumentality of human relations in Bordieu's framework, in which: "the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies… transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)." *Ibid,* p. 22.

[25] The distinction between court and temple poets (or their early modern overlap) drawn by Velcheru Narayana Rao in the Telugu context, for instance, does not apply to Nīlakaṇṭha, who does not fit the typology. Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Kings, Gods, and Poets: Ideologies of Patronage in Medieval Andhra.," in *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture, ed. B. Stoler Miller* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 142–59. See also Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 2–5.

thanks to the survival of their networks of students and kin.[26] Nīlakaṇṭha's comment about the love that he and his four brothers share is echoed, in the nineteenth century, in an elaborate family genealogy that posits the brothers as the five Pāṇḍava brothers of the Mahābhārata epic, and their generation marks the effective beginning of the lineage.[27] In the dissertation, I narrate the contours of a genealogical poetic network that collectively formed an enduring space and infrastructure for an early modern Sanskrit literary canon-in-the-making.

I also propose that these authors' mode of genealogical authorship, which developed in the institution of the Brahmin household in the brahmadeya, shaped the unique aesthetic of this corpus. It enabled their remarkable freedom of writing, which they have their own terms for (see below on *sarva-tantra-svatantra,* or *independent in all doctrines*). In the course of the dissertation, I demonstrate a dense and playful layering of voices and intertexts, a deliberately contrastive and hybrid poetry composed in a range of different registers, incorporating patent and hidden citations, and using a tone governed by double voices and knowing insincerity. I argue that such poetry can only be written when there is confidence in the audience's will and ability to read carefully and identify what is at stake. These, together with a marked lack of anxiety

[26] Kuppuswami Sastri and his student V Raghavan, two twentieth-century scholars most responsible for the publication and memory we have of these authors, are both Brahmins from brahmadeya villages in Thanjavur; Sastri was born and raised in Tiruvisanallur, the village in which Rāmabhadra and his colleagues received land grants from King Śāha, and his guru was a descendant of Nīlakaṇṭha's family. See ch. four, 219–20. Yigal Bronner has similarly traced the key role of descendants in the histories of transmission of the memory of Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle, Appayya Dīkṣita. Thus, a descendent writing in the second half of the eighteenth century links Appayya to the sun and his descendants to a row of mirrors that reflect his divine presence. Yigal Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory: Appayya Dīkṣita Through the Ages," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 20–21.

[27] The *Āccāndīkṣitavaṃśāvali* [hereon *Vaṃśāvali*] is a genealogy written in the second half of the nineteenth century by Vīrarāghavakavi, a descendant of the family. See *Āccāndīkṣitavaṃśāvali of Vīrarāghavakavi* [*Vaṃśāvali*], ed., P. P. Subrahmanya Sastri, (Udupi, 1923) v. 14, for the description of Nīlakaṇṭha and his brothers as the Pāṇḍava brothers. See Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," 8–10. for a discussion of what this genealogy reveals of the history of memory in the family.

regarding the breadth or ease of reception, suggest a notable reliance on the durability of protocols of reading and understanding through trusted genealogical networks.

Through their genealogical emphasis, the authors under discussion allow us to speak of a shared style of authorship. Kashi Gomez elaborated on O'Hanlon's observation about early modern intellectual households from Banaras in the context of mid-eighteenth century Thanjavur, a few decades after the active lifetime of Rāmabhadra and his circle. Describing the gendered dynamics in the intellectual household of Ghanaśyāma and his wives, Gomez ties the rise of the scholar household to a practice of a "family style." The idea of a family style was theorized in parallel contexts of early modern traditions of Indian painting.[28] This notion sits well with my own close reading of this corpus, which brought me to conceive of a collective, *paramparā*-based style of authorship.

Finally, the category of the genealogical poet is in part my response to a question that this dissertation inherited, regarding these authors' **choice** of Sanskrit, over the flourishing literatures of Tamil, Telugu, and likely other languages with which they were no doubt in everyday contact. This question began to trouble me in the course of writing: while there are no doubt numerous creative choices evident in these poetic works, these authors are very clear about the fact that they were literally born to write in Sanskrit. Nīlakaṇṭha's introduction to his *Gaṅgā* mentions the family's claimed ancestry from sage Bharadvāja and his sibling's collective devotion to Śiva,

[28] See Kashi Gomez, "Sanskrit and the Labour of Gender in Early Modern South India," *Modern Asian Studies*, 2022, 1–28. Rightly referenced in Gomez's discussion as a good theoretical account of the rise of the family style in painting is B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

inherited "ever since they were in their mother's womb."[29] Like the *kuladevatā* or the family god, the genealogical poet does not exactly choose his language; he carries it from the womb.

This is not to say that significant changes in language orders could or did not occur, and at will. Sheldon Pollock argues for the element of choice of language, specifically in the "vernacular millennium."[30] Elaine Fisher, whose work was crucial for this thesis, understands Nīlakaṇṭha's choice to write the *Śivālīlārṇava* ("The Ocean of Śiva's Games," henceforth *Līlā*), a Sanskrit version of Śiva's sixty-four games in Madurai, as an informed social and political choice. This analysis is on point, but its emphasis on the choice of language, rather than genre and medium, is misleading, and overstates the socio-political framework in Nīlakaṇṭha's work.[31] David Shulman, whose ongoing work on early modern literature and multilingual cultures of South India is formative for my thinking of this corpus, convincingly resists any analysis that treats languages as fixed entities tied with identities when he speaks, apropos of Nīlakaṇṭha's *Līlā,* of authors *choosing* to write in Sanskrit or the vernacular as a way of positing their agency.[32] Bronner and Shulman similarly write:

> In a polyglossic environment, in which Sanskrit is one more available option for literary production and in which the vernacular has internalized huge chunks of Sanskrit just as Sanskrit has absorbed significant patterns and modes of the vernacular, how are we to understand the dynamics of the linguistic spectrum underlying a poet's choice of language?[33]

---

[29] *jayanti tanayās tasya pañca saubhrātra-śālinaḥ garbha-dāsā maheśasya kavayaś ca vipaścitaḥ*, Kedaranatha Sastri and Panasikar, *Gaṅgāvataraṇam* [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*. v. 1.49.

[30] "…the vernacular literary languages we have studied here did not "emerge" like buds or butterflies at their fated biogenetic moment, whether through a natural process of linguistic evolution or a complementary process of linguistic decay on the part of cosmopolitan languages. They were made by acts of knowledgeable choice." Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 504.

[31] See Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 137–82. I further engage with Fisher's thesis in the concluding remarks of chapter one.

[32] See Shulman, *Tamil*, 281.

[33] Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 7.

Indeed, there are several important examples of authors who actively chose to write in a local language, or Sanskrit.[34] But the vast majority of Sanskrit authors in the second millennium were Brahmin men of intellectual pedigrees who overwhelmingly did not write in other languages.[35] The history of Sanskrit literature—including its aesthetics and conditions of possibility—cannot be told without accounting for the dominant filial channels in which Sanskrit writing continued to exist, up until the twentieth century.[36] In our case, it is essential to account for the fact that Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra believed that they were literally born to write in Sanskrit. They gained their expertise when they were small children and led their authorial lives accordingly.[37] The consistent self-identification through a hereditary, or filial microcosmos of authors, led me to rephrase the question of choice of writing in Sanskrit towards an emphasis on how they did so. Not *why* Sanskrit, but *how* Sanskrit: this question invites the modern reader to glimpse these authors' views of themselves and their worlds.

---

[34] For examples of Brahmins who actively chose to write in the vernacular, see Pollock's discussion of the case of Narasiṃha in Gujarat (Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 434–36) or of Keśavdās, who self consciously chose to write in the vernacular, unlike his father and brother (Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," 416).

[35] Vedānta Deśika is one exception that proves the rule. His multilingualism has to do with his Vaiṣṇava affiliation; See discussion on the Thanjavur court as the most relevant example of multilingualism below.

[36] I use the term "filial" in reference to this network of authors so as to mark the inherent connection of intimate family or guru ties with these authors' style and self-understandings. My use of the term "filiative" is broadly inspired—by way of its marked difference—by Edward Said's division of filiative and affiliative modes of textual critique. Said's division primarily calls into question any assumptions that are hereditary, or filial, within existing postmodern political and academic discourse. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983). Our authors, however, *value* the filiative mode and structure their identities and works around it. Far from a cautionary tale as in Said's division, in our late precolonial contexts, the filiative mode is a preferred way to exist as a poet and belong in a poetic tradition. The change in value of the filiative mode signals the different meaning of original authorship in these two vastly different contexts.

[37] Rāmabhadra describes his schooling in Sanskrit literature and grammar in his "Ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇa [*Bhūṣaṇa*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," v.3, which I analyze in chapter four, 216; see A. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study* (The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002), 137 fn 3. Relatedly, Milton Singer discussed a "choice crisis" in communities of Krishna worship in modern Madras, who traced themselves through networks of teachers to influential contemporaries of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita like Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa. Singer finds that, essentially, modern practitioners do not operate on the basis of choice but instead on the force of continuity of tradition. See Milton Singer, "The Radha-Krishna 'Bhajans' of Madras City," *History of Religions* 2, no. 2 (1963): 183–226.

Orchestrated selves

Without the other, there is no language for the self
A. K. Ramanujan.[38]

One methodological arc of this dissertation is a search for the ways in which these authors positioned themselves within their texts. This search was guided by my sense that they were invested in inserting themselves into their texts in complex and subtle ways, and that probing the ways they did so is key to their aesthetic as a whole. How may we characterize the particular technologies of the self that inform this milieu's self-writing? What can we make of the culture-specific constructions of self, interiority, and writing in our author's devotional texts and lives?[39]

I argue throughout the dissertation that these authors' authorial signatures are never in the singular: they are interwoven with the people, gods, and traditions that were significant to these authors. I speak of "orchestrated" selves to signify the constructed-ness of their voices, as well as their inherent plurality. They voice their authorial signatures through (a) their deep and intimate commitments to their gurus and influential family members, (b) their relationships with their personal gods, and (c) intricate conversations and affiliations with the vast Sanskrit tradition. The following is a concise theoretical discussion of each of these vehicles of orchestrated self-presentations, as well as an initial sketch of the principles that informed these authors' modes of self-writing.

---

[38] A. K. Ramanujan, "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections," *History of Religions* 28, no. 3 (1989): 26.

[39] Foucault's influential working assumption of self-writing as reflective of varying technologies of the self informs my analysis. Foucault posited that the paradigm of self-care which endured up to the Hellenistic age shifted to the imperative to "know thyself!" related to the arrival of the Christian framework of salvation, involving confession and self-examination. Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).This allows me to foreground practices of self-writing as culture-specific subjective frameworks, liable to negotiation and change. See David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, eds., *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), for a project with a similar goal with respect to several case studies of self-writing from modern and pre-modern India.

A. Selves defined through significant filiated men

I have already mentioned how Nīlakaṇṭha and his followers presented themselves through creative and elaborate presentations of members of their extended kinship networks, especially in their prologues. Nīlakaṇṭha does this with a characteristic wink: for instance, the assistant-director in the prologue to the *Nala* confuses him with his famous great uncle, Appayya Dīkṣita. Nīlakaṇṭha also cites other authors' verses in praise of his great uncle and his grandfather, before quoting two verses of his own, drawn from another work of his. Further, we have two prologues by Nīlakaṇṭha's students, each citing *verbatim* a verse from Nīlakaṇṭha's prologue. Such acts of citation are actions of self-building *through* authoritative others, which in turn allow for one's own voice to shine through. I propose that this reflects a fundamental truism about these authors' ideas of the writerly self, as indivisible in principle from other men who shaped their authorial and personal identities. This genealogical mode of self-portraiture through networks of filial ties neatly aligns with the neighboring idioms of royal sculpted portraits in temples, which began for the first time to include significant figures from past and recent royal genealogies together with the portrayed subject.[40] Similarly, David Shulman has analyzed the self-commisioned biography of Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai, writing a few centuries after Rāmabhadra in the nearby Pondicherry, and drew a connection between the necessary genealogical element and the biographical idiom.[41]

---

[40] Crispin Branfoot, "Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India," *Artibus Asiae* 72 (2012): 323–76. Branfoot identifies political reasons for this shift toward a genealogical portrayal, which have to do with these Nāyaka Kings' claims to authority in a time of political instability. However, as I propose here, these may be expanded with ideas of the self as a unique, principally non-isolated figure. See Trento, "Martyrdom, Witnessing, and Social Lineages in South India," for the making of meaningful genealogies, particularly the conditions for their beginning, as mechanisms of identity formation in parallel periods in South India among Tamil catechists.

[41] AutobiographyDavid Shulman, "Cowherd or King? The Sanskrit Biography of Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai.," in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autoiography and Life History*, ed. David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Delhi: Indiana University Press, 2004) 185 ,198: "Nearly half of this biography is, in fact, taken up with genealogical materials, as I have said; the biographer reaches far back into prehistory in an attempt to create a vital context out of which his hero

Prashant Keshavmurthi makes somewhat parallel observations about models of authorial selves from early eighteenth-century Delhi, revealing through the acts of repetition, homage and intertext a blurring of boundaries between the poet Kẖushgū's and his teachers: the fourteenth-century master Ḥāfiẓ, and his living teacher, Bīdil. Keshavmurthi writes, apropos of the poet's Sufi quatrain: "Repetition here evacuates the repeater of his ego to let him ventriloquize for a divine or human master, thus paradoxically inaugurating his creativity by negating it."[42] This pan-Indic, multilingual parallel is instructive: in our authors' hands, an orchestra of authorial voices from past and present contributes to, and pluralizes, such paradoxical creativity.

B. Iṣṭadevatā: Creating Selves through personal Gods

The poets at the heart of this dissertation were devoted to their chosen deities. For these authors, the long-standing devotional equation of god with the trans-subjective, all-encompassing Vedāntic Self, or *Ātman*, was personal.[43] They share their very names and hearts with their god or goddess. Quite like their self-staging through their teachers (whom they also identify as incarnations of god or goddess), their hymns constantly play with the possibility of constructing their autobiographies through their Gods' iconographies and epic stories. This impulse is not limited to these authors' hymns: Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya campū* is a long literary masterpiece dedicated to his personal god Śiva. It narrates Śiva's swallowing of poison during

---

can take shape..."and, "...The biographical subject emerges out of a strongly articulated genealogy; he lives out an ancestral logic.".

[42] Keshavmurthy, Prashant, "Khushgu's Dream: Building an Ark with Ārzu and Bīdil," 2015, 18.

[43] For the general process of the merging of the Bhakti movement and Vedānta thought, see Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement" (Columbia University, 2015). Fisher narrates the story of the reappropriation of Vedānta and Mīmāṃsa authorities by Śaiva theologians in the South beginning in the twelfth century onwards, such that "by the time of Appayya Dīkṣita in the sixteenth century, south Indian Śaivism had so thoroughly assimilated itself to the demands of a monistic Advaita Vedānta that Appayya himself, much like Kumārasvāmin, found it natural to equate knowledge of Śiva with the central mysteries of Advaita Vedānta." Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 44.

the churning of the ocean, which earned him the epithet *Nīlakaṇṭha,* or Darkneck. Elsewhere, Naresh Keerthi and I analyze this book in depth, and argue that it

> presents us with a striking model of doing biography—one that outlines individuals not by demarcating them from each other, but by situating them with the lens of sharedness.[44]

This sharedness is achieved through the careful construction of multiple perspectives in the story, met with explicit Advaitin references to an underlying shared Self. We suggest that through Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's own underlying identity with his god, apparent in the very title of the book as well as throughout the story, the poet presents a vision of a principally shared rather than unified subjectivity. The primary subject that emerges is the author who shares his name, and his *vijaya*—the victorious act of poetic and/or cosmic creation—with his god.

In the dissertation, I show how the creative and expansive conversations with the authors' personal Gods reflect a similar notion of shared subjectivity. On a related note, Anna Seastrand discusses how the appearance of the featured patron and devotee is doubled in the closely neighboring contexts of early modern Tamil temple portraits. The patron's features are strikingly unique when compared to earlier portraits as well as to portraits of divine beings in the same murals, thus conveying the subject's historical time. Simultaneously, he is also participating in a continuous ritual with the ever-present god in mythic scenes.[45] This governing notion, of individuated portraiture that participates in mythic time, takes on additional meanings in our authors' devotional literature, when the shared philosophical Self of god and the poet is constantly debated and personalized.

C. Selves through Tradition

[44]Talia Ariav and Naresh Keerthi, "Churning Selves: Intersecting Biographies in the Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 57–58.
[45]Anna Lise Seastrand, "History, Myth, and Maṭam in Southeast Indian Portraits," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 159–84.

The authors at hand invariably position themselves in their literature through different echoes of the entirety of the Sanskrit tradition, far and near: tropes, patterns, and implicit and explicit intertexts. This has to do with the aforementioned ideal of Sanskrit as Goddess Sarasvati's unchanging fruit, which dictates strongly formulaic and genre-bound literature, in which changes are deliberately subtle. But the reason for the exquisite intertextual resonances of this literature is more profound: it reflects the authors' unmediated relationship with the tradition of Sanskrit letters, which includes a vast timespan of all genres, scholastic, religious, and literary. They have internalized this tradition to the point of *speaking it*: it is who they are.

Two related terms that these authors use in relation to themselves and their works have helped me to conceptualize this idea. The first is *sarva-tantra-svatantra,* "independent in all Sanskrit disciplines," indicating absolute control over the entire body of Sanskrit knowledge, such that one can use it at will.[46] I show in the first chapter how Rāmabhadra applies the term to his teacher, Nīlakaṇṭha, with a renewed emphasis on poetry, which was entirely lacking in the latter's great uncle's exposition of the term. Nīlakaṇṭha and his followers are *sarvatantrasvatantra* poets rather than scholars. Much of their poetry is about incorporating the entirety of Sanskrit knowledge under poetry. Their poetic identities are crafted in light of such ideals of complete Sanskrit expertise.

The second related emic notion, found both in a programmatic verse of Nīlakaṇṭha's and in the way his students remember him, is the aesthetic principle of *uccāvaca:* "diverse, irregular,

[46] The term was coined by Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle, Appayya Dīkṣita. Yigal Bronner discusses Appayya's application of the term as "independent, all-around scholarship', translating Appaya's gloss of the term: 'A person who is a *sarvatantrasvatantra* is capable of picking any tenet from any of the disciplines—Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Early Mīmāṃsā, Late Mīmāṃsā [Vedānta], Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and so on—and either proving or disproving it at will." Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 6. Bronner and McCrea add that for Appayya, a *sarvatantrasvatantra* is "one who can write confidently and authoritatively in any field but who is the master of every tradition rather than its servant." Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea, *First Words, Last Words: New Theories for Reading Old Texts in Sixteenth-Century India*, Religion in Translation (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 84–85.

manifold, uneven", or literally, "both high and low."[47] This principle, discussed in chapter two, describes a literary Sanskrit that mixes within it different genres and registers, broadening the range of Sanskrit literature and aligning together high-and-low orders of knowledge, from a "classical" Sanskrit idiom to registers of *śāstra* to explicitly erotic language, to an imitation of everyday spoken Sanskrit. *Uccāvaca* poetry does not imply simplicity or accessibility; rather, it entails an aesthetic ideal of contrastive complexity, that necessitates informed readership. This aesthetic is one of Nīlakaṇṭha's primary legacies, through which he positions himself as a poet who has mastered the canon of Sanskrit poetry.[48]

We may think of this set of practices as "intimate intertextualities."[49] Adding the adjective "intimate" to the intertextual tool retrieves the intersubjectivity that theorists of intertextuality have tried to do away with.[50] For our authors especially, conversations with tradition were personal. They were the material with which they crafted their voice. The authorial voices orchestrated through these intricate conversations with tradition are, I further suggest and demonstrate, often double-voiced or ironic. As David Shulman writes in the broad

---

[47] To cite the dictionary meaning of *uccāvaca:* "*1. High and low, uneven, irregular, undulating; 2 Great and small, variegated, heterogeneous; 3 Various, multiform, of various kinds, diverse*." Vaman Shivaram Apte, "Uccāvaca," in *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1858–92.

[48]David Shulman writes in an essay on a family of literary compositions that he calls "prabandha" from across several languages (Telugu, Tamil, Kaṇṇaḍa, Maṇipravālam, and Sanskrit, including those of our authors) of early modern South India, that "mixed linguistic registers are a staple feature of these texts in all the languages." David Shulman, "Prabandha: Mode, Tone, Theme," 2019, 6. He goes on to demonstrate how these literary compositions feature a notable richness of horizontal references–with other genres and artistic mediums of their time–as well as vertical references–referencing a rich tradition of past Sanskrit and other texts. See also Sivan Goren-Arzony, "On Brewing Love Potions and Crafting Answers: Two Literary Techniques in an Early Modern Maṇipravāḷam Poem," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 85–109, for an equivalent praxis of *uccāvaca* in Maṇipravāḷam texts from neighboring Kerala.

[49] I borrow the term from A. S. Dasan's review of A. K. Ramanujan's philosophy of translation. Dasan refers to Ramanujan's ability to translate poetry from past and faraway cultures of the Indian subcontinent, very distant from modern English, and to communicate many of their layered meanings through his intimate familiarity with their contexts and through his practice and theory of translation and reflection. See A.S Dasan, "Discerning the Intimacies of Intertextuality: A.K Ramanujan's Hyphenated Cosmopolitan Approach to Translation Theory and Practice," *Translation Today Volume 8 Issue 02* 8, no. 2 (2014): 90–104.

[50] See my discussion of Kristeva's motivation to coin the "intertext" as a mechanical and impersonal description of tradition in ch. 4.

context of early modern literary texts from South India that he labels as *prabandhas*: "The mere act of quotation adds a tinge of reflexive distance, usually ironic or skeptical."[51]

Taken together, these three equivalent lines of self-orchestration point to a distinctive, shared vision of the self. Such readings undo a modern Eurocentric model in which selfhood is about distinction from others, and subjectivity involves a self-sufficient inwardness. In our authors' case, the metaphor of inwardness also exists (as in God, who resides in their heart), but the turn inward is about connectedness. Our authors' work provides a framework that naturally undoes an assumed modern ratio between self-sufficiency and agency, or freedom.[52] Persons find depth through infinite reverberations of significant others, who are inseparable from them. The notion of self-orchestration points toward larger ethical and philosophical dimensions of this corpus, which are rooted in non-dualist conceptions of the self as the one reality that inheres in all individuals.[53] This is similar to the notion of "family style" presented above, which locates the originality of style outside of a single individual.[54]

Arnold and Blackburn made similar formulations about premodern modes of life histories in South Asia, in which:

---

[51] Shulman, "Prabandha," 15.

[52] Charles Taylor's formulations of the major sources of the modern self, especially his reflections on "inwardness" in the second part of the book form a relevant comparison. In particular, Taylor writes of Descartes's "self-sufficient inwardness" as opposed to Augustinian patterns on which Descartes built:
"Following Augustine's path, the thinker comes to sense more and more his lack of self-sufficiency, comes to see more and more that God acts within him. In contrast, for Descartes the whole point of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty...The certainty of clear and distinct perception is unconditional and self-generated". Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 156–57.
Following from this, and also relevant for my comparison, is what Taylor terms a "disengaged subjectivity" of modernity, "...whereby we objectify facets of our own being, into the ontology of the subject, as though we were by nature an agency separable from everything merely given in us- a disembodied soul (Descartes) or a punctual power of self-remaking (Locke), or a pure rational being (Kant)... this is not just a wrong view of agency; it is not at all necessary as a support to self-responsible reason and freedom..." *Ibid,* 514.

[53] For further thoughts on Nīlakaṇṭha's formulation of the personal self in a non-dual world see Ariav and Keerthi, "Churning Selves."

[54] As also noted by Gomez, "Sanskrit and the Labour of Gender in Early Modern South India," 22.

> One author sets out to emulate, respond to, or complement the work of another. And so, as in a long hall of mirrors, one life history reflects and informs a multiplicity of others. . .
>
> . . .An individual (not necessarily at the center) [is] linked to many others, through alliances of varying intimacy and intensity.[55]

Our authors are not writing autobiographies or self–histories, and yet, these observations well describe their acts of self-positioning. In their texts, from Nīlakaṇṭha's *Vijaya* to Rāmabhadra's surge of hymns to Rāma, they present themselves through a dense, often fragmented, orchestration of their voice that includes the many voices that made up their worlds.

Sanskrit literature in 17th–18th century South India

I will now introduce the intimate cosmopolitans around whom this thesis is organized and briefly describe the social and literary worlds to which they belong. The dissertation is centered around two related figures. The first is Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, widely recognized—today as during his lifetime—as a remarkable and influential poet. He is remembered for his eloquent Sanskrit, his sense of humor, and his sectarian identity as a Śrīvidyā practitioner and devotee of Śiva and the Goddess. His oeuvre attests to the fact that he was primarily a poet: he wrote five major Sanskrit poems, several *subhāṣita* collections of aphorisms, and highly poetic stotras, or hymns. His nonliterary works include a treatise on the Śrīvidyā Tantric tradition, a work on grammar, and a short theological commentary.[56] Elsewhere, I show that he lived most (if not all) of his life

---

[55] Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*,14, 22.

[56] Nīlakaṇṭha's major poetic works include three *mahākāvyas*: the *Gaṅgāvataraṇa (Gaṅgā)*, *Śivalīlārṇava (Līlā)*, and *Mukundavilāsa*, the play *Nalacaritra (Nala)*, and a campū, the *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya (Vijaya)*. His laghukāvyas or Subhāṣita collections are the *Kalivaḍambana*, *Sabhārañjana*, *Anyāpadeśaśataka*, *Vairāgyaśataka*, and *Śāntivilāsa*. His hymns include the *Ānandasāgarastava* (*Ānanda*) to Goddess Mīnākṣī, the *Caṇḍīrahasya* to Goddess Durgā (following the Devīmāhātmya story), the *Śivotkarṣamañjarī* addressed to Śiva, the *Raghuvīrastava* addressed to Rāma, and the *Gurutattvamālikā* (*Gurutattva)* to his guru Gīrvāṇendra. I analyze the abbreviated works in the course of this dissertation. His scholastic works are the *Mahābhāṣyapradīpaprakāśa* sub-commentary on Kaiyaṭa's commentary on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, the theological commentary *Śivatattvarahasya*, and the *Saubhāgyacandrātapa*, a ritual manual of the Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantric tradition. See Elaine Fisher, "A Śākta in the

as a poet and influential teacher in the Kaveri delta during roughly the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century, and that the popular memory of his position as minister to King Tirumalai Nāyaka of Madurai is most probably groundless.[57] He was instead a "genealogical poet" par excellence. As far as we know, he was supported by his family's accumulated wealth (in land and cash) and by his role as an influential teacher, and he enjoyed remarkable independence in his writing. He was in personal contact with leading Brahmin scholars from distant Benares and very plausibly financially supported at least three of his students' works.[58]

Despite his independence from courtly patronship, Nīlakaṇṭha had direct contact with active figures at the nearby Thanjavur court. One of his teachers of Mīmāṃsa was Veṅkaṭeśvara Makhin, a famous musician from a family of courtly ministers who worked under the patronage of the Thanjavur kings.[59] Two of Nīlakaṇṭha's gurus—Veṅkaṭeśvara Makhin, and the ascetic

---

Heart: Śrīvidyā and Advaita Vedānta in the Theology of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 124–38, for the latter; see N. P. Unni, *Nilakantha Diksita* (Sahitya Akademi, 1995), for a brief survey of each composition, and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, trans., *Oeuvres Poétiques de Nilakantha Diksita* (Pondicherry: Institut Francais D'indologie, 1967), for an elaborate introduction and translated edition of Nīlakaṇṭha's short (*laghu*) works.

[57] These dates are a slight corrective to prevalent accounts: Unni, *Nilakantha Diksita*, 14–15 suggests that Nīlakaṇṭha lived between 1580–1644. Nīlakaṇṭha quite certainly never met his great uncle Appayya Dīṣita (Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 17–18) and was thus not yet born or a very young child when Appayya died in 1593. He was a mature author by the year of 1638 AD, whence he dates his *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya*: *aṣṭa-triṃśad-upaskṛta-saptaśatādhika-catus-sahasreṣu kali-varṣeśu gateṣu grathitaḥ kila nīlakaṇṭhavijayo 'yam*. *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya Campū* [*Vijaya*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., K. S. Sastri and N. Raghunathan (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1965) v. 10. "This Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya was composed following the kali year of four thousand, seven hundred and thirty-eight [converting to 1638 AD]." Nīlakaṇṭha's younger brothers, Atirātra and Appayya (Cinnāppayya), who cannot be too far from him in age (he is the second out of five children), were active in the second half of the seventeenth-century and their references to him suggest that he was too. The one exception to the modern scholarly and traditional identification of Nīlkaṇṭha with Madurai and Tirumalai Nāyaka comes from Raghavan, who noted in passing: "Though we have heard that Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita was a minister at the Nāyak Court at Madura, we have not yet come across mention of this fact in any historical record." V. Raghavan, "Some Appayya Dīkṣitas," *Annals of Oriental Research* 6, no. 14 (February 1941): 179. Descendants of Nīlakaṇṭha most probably shaped the Madurai-Tirumalai Nāyaka narratives in the nineteenth century. See Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita."

[58] The references to his own patronage regard works by Cokkanāthamakhin (who I refer to as 'the older Cokkanātha), Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, and Nīlakaṇṭha's brother Atirātra Yajvan. See *Ibid*, 5–6.

[59] Veṅkaṭeśvara worked for King Raghunātha (ruled 1600–34) and for at least some time under King Vīrarāghava, who ruled until the fall of the Nāyaka lineage in 1673. Veṅkaṭeśvara was the son of Govinda Dīkṣita (1588–1634), the most famous minister at the Nāyaka court, serving three successive kings. For his life and work in court, see Dominik Wujastyk, "La Bibliothèque de Thanjavur," in *Espaces et Communautés*, ed. Michel Albin, vol. 1 (Paris: Lieux De Savoir, 2007) and V. Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services,

Śrīvidyā guru Gīrvāṇendra, were also the teachers of Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita, a well-known poet and literary theorist who directly worked for the Thanjavur King Raghunātha.[60] Nīlakaṇṭha also taught students from surrounding brahmadeya villages, which the Thanjavur court patronized either directly or indirectly. These connections to figures around the court allow me to place Nīlakaṇṭha in the vibrant intellectual and artistic hub of the Kaveri Delta, which I describe below.

One of these students, emphatic about his debt to Nīlakaṇṭha, is Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, the most well-known and influential Sanskrit author from Śāhaji's newly established Maratha court at Thanjavur. Rāmabhadra, the second protagonist of this dissertation, comes from Kaṇḍaramāṇikyam, a small *brahmadeya* village in the vicinity of Thanjavur, and a micro-center of Sanskrit poets and scholars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[61] Nīlakaṇṭha's student and colleague Cokkanātha (whom I call the "older Cokkanātha") was Rāmabhadra's grammar teacher and father-in-law from the same village. As Rāmabhadra says, he gave him the two gifts in his life (in this order): his daughter in marriage, and the likewise flawless knowledge of grammar.[62] This endearing reference to his father-in-law is a rare instance in which we incidentally hear of the women in these authors' lives.[63]

1995), 118–21.

[60] Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita authored the *Rāghunāthavilāsa* in praise of his patron. See Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*, 66–69, 89–97.

[61] Kuppuswami Sastri, who grew up in this village himself, gives an immensely informative introduction to Rāmabhadra's contemporaries of this village in Kuppuswami Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time," *The Indian Anitquary*, 1904, 126–42, 176–96.

[62] *sa evāyaṃ yasmai kila nikhila-vidvaj-jana-ślāghanīya-vaiduṣya-śālino vadāvada-śiṣya-sahasra-vibhāvya-mānanija-vibavāḥ śrauta-dharmā iva mūrtim antas tatrabhavantaḥ cokkanāthamakhi-pravarā vitīrṇavanto 'pi prathamām ātma-kanyām anyām iva punar api snehena niravadyāṃ vitaranti sma pada-vidyām.* *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* [*Śṛṅgāra*] *of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, eds., Pandit Śivadatta and Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 44 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1894), prose after v. 6.
"Cokkanatha, whose erudition is praiseworthy by all knowledgeable men, has immanent power, recognized by a thousand well-spoken students; he is the ultimate form of śrauta and dharma texts. And this man gave to Rāmabhadra his own elder daughter in marriage, and–as if it were another flawless daughter– he also lovingly granted him with the knowledge of grammar."

[63] Thiruvengadathan mentions Rāmabhadra's daughter, Lakṣmī, and his unnamed sister. However, I surmise he

Rāmabhadra was one of the most awarded individuals among forty-five other Brahmin intellectuals and poets who received land in the village of Tiruviśanallūr (hereafter, Tiruvisanallur), renamed *Śāhajipuram* in a large donation project by King Śāhaji in 1693.[64] He praised the renunciant guru Kṛṣṇānandasarasvati as his teacher—along with many of his fellow colleagues at the newly inaugurated agrahāra—which points to his close affiliation with initiatory systems of Vedānta (see below). Rāmabhadra is remembered as a gifted grammarian, a devotee of Rāma, and a master poet. He composed three long poetic compositions (two plays and a Mahākāvya), four works of grammar or philosophy, and no less than fifteen elaborate hymns to Rāma, featuring great poetic experimentation.[65] His expertise in Sanskrit grammar traveled beyond the court: he was cited as a grammatical authority by Suppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar in the

gathers this information from the work of a descendant of these women's families, not from Rāmabhadra's own words. (Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 10). Some authors of this milieu, like Nīlakaṇṭha and the older Cokkanātha, mention their mothers (Bhūmīdevī and Gaṇapati, respectively), but that is about as much as we know. Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time," 129–30, for Cokkanātha, and Kedaranatha Sastri and Panasikar, *Gaṅgāvataraṇam* [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*, 1.50.

[64] See V. Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," in *Śahendravilāsaḥ of Śrīdharaveṅkaṭeśa (Ayyaval)*, second edition, vol. 54, Sarasvati Mahal Series (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2016), 25–28. The Marathi ministers Bhagavantarāya, Tryambakarāya, and Ānandarāya, mediated between the court and the neighboring worlds of the agrahāra villages; Rāmabhadra's name is associated with them. See also Keshavan Veluthat, "Introduction to Mahiṣaśatakam," in *The Buffalo Century: Vāñcheśvara Dīkṣita's Mahiṣaśatakam: A Political Satire for All Centuries*, 2011, 1–17, for a perspective narrating the decay of the "golden years" of these courtly mechanisms of support, by an eighteenth-century descendant of the family of Govinda Dīkṣita (whose son Veṅkaṭeśa was Nīlakaṇṭha's teacher).

[65] Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's longer poems include the *Patañjalicaritra,* narrating the story of the snake-grammarian Patañjali in the Cidambaram temple, and two plays: the *Śṛṅgāratilaka Bhāṇa* (*Śṛṅgāra)*, an erotic genre for a single actor that saw a great revival by Sanskrit authors in the early modern period and in Thanjavur specifically, and the *Jānakīpariṇaya Nāṭaka (Jānakī)*, which circulated widely in the nineteenth century as the first Sanskrit play read in Sanskrit colleges, and was translated into several languages. His hymns include the *Rāmacitrastava*, *Rāmacāpastava*, *Rāmabāṇastava* (*Bāṇa,* instigated or patronized by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita), the *Viśvagarbhastava* (*Viśva*) the three-part *Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana (Rasāyana)*, the *Rāmaprasādastava (Prasāda)* the *Varṇamālāstava*, the *Rāmāṣṭaprāsastava*, the *Rāmāyaṇasaṃgraha* stotra, and a few possible other hymns in collections surveyed by Thiruvengadathan, whose monograph on Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's corpus is highly informative. Rāmabhadra's scholastic works, all of which pay homage to King Śāhaji, include the *Paribhāṣāvṛttivyākhyāna*, a commentary on paribhāṣavṛtti by the twelfth century grammarian Sīradeva; the grammar section from the *Saḍdarśanīsiddhāntasaṃgraha,* a compendium initiated by King Śāhaji; the *Śabdabhedanirūpaṇa*, a brief work of the theory of meaning; and the *Unādimaṇi Dīpikā*, a grammatical treatise on the sub-genre of Unāḍi rules. For a detailed survey of these works and their persumed order see Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*.

latter's *Pirayoka Vivekam*. This Tamil treatise sought to rearrange Tamil grammar in light of Sanskrit metagrammatical rules.[66]

Rāmabhadra was an influential figure at Śāha's court: he was involved in several collective scholarly projects directly commissioned by the king, taking part in a multi-authored compendium of philosophical systems and composing one among three works of the same title (the *śabdabhedanirūpaṇam*, a concise theory of meaning based on examples from poetry) commissioned in parallel by the king.[67] He was mentioned as a literary authority by Bhagavantarāya, one of the key ministers at the court. His students include well-known figures such as Bhūmināṭha Kavi, who authored the *Dharmavijaya campū* dedicated to King Śāha, and numerous others.[68] Rāmabhadra reveals much about Śāhaji's patronage network and the possible relationships it engendered among the Brahmin scholars of the brahmadeya during his time: while he was deeply rooted in the courtly milieu, he lived throughout his life within the genealogical networks of the brahmadeyas of the delta, as a student and a teacher.

Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra were both luminaries of their generations, and together, alongside their preceptors, students, and family members, they paint a larger picture of early-

[66] Suppiramaṇiya states in the final verse that the editor labels as '*araṅkeṟṟam*', or public inauguration, that Rāmabhadra was his first choice to validate his treatise, with Patañjali himself being the runner-up if Rāmabhadra is not able to make it. He states in the commentary that Rāmabhadra praised his work. See *Pirayōka Vivēkam of Cuppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar*, ed., Ti Ve Kopalayyar, Tancai Caracuvati Makal 147 (Tañcāvūr: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1973), *kārikai* 51, 347–8. Suppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar was a Śaiva scholar of the late seventeenth century from southern Tamil Nadu, whose treatise initiated a close response in the form of another grammatical treatise at the Śaiva maṭam at Tiruvāvaṭuṭuṟai, as the author testifies in the *Ilakkaṇakkottu of Cuvāmināta Tēcikar*, eds., Arumuka Navalar and Vicuvanata Pillai, fourth (Cennapattanam: Vittiyanupalannayantiracalai, 1925) 105. This lauding reference to Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita thus point to a shared Brahmin community of grammarians who were aware of each other. Note, however, that we do not have evidence to the contrary: our Sanskrit authors left no reference to the world outside the domain of Sanskrit letters. I thank Professor E. Annamalai for this reference to Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, and for his reading of the *Ilakkaṇa kkŏttu* in the course of the year 2021–2, with a group funded by David Shulman's ERC project in Jerusalem.

[67] For information on the compendium *Saḍdarśanīsiddhāntasaṃgraha* and for the several *Śabdabhedanirūpaṇa* commissioned by Śāhaji simultaneously, see Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 140–1,144–4.

[68] See especially Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ."; Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 14–15; Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time."

modern Sanskrit literature of the Tamil South. This period is conventionally considered to be the "Nāyaka period", but also includes for our purposes the early days of the Maratha rule of Thanjavur, during King Śāha's reign (1684–12). The period derives its name from the Nāyaka successor states of the Vijayanagara empire based in Thanjavur, Senji, and Madurai. Each of these centers had multiple allied smaller courts ruled by local kings or *Pāḷaiyakkārars*. These political actors formed a dynamic distribution of local political power, in which poets and artists were patronized on different scales.[69] One prominent form of patronage was built on the medieval political infrastructure of tax-exempt brahmadeyas, gifted by kings to Brahmins throughout the Tamil peninsula. While there is no mention of this fact in their writings, the Brahmin authors living in these tax-exempt brahmadeyas were essentially agricultural landlords, served by the labor of servants and cultivators.[70] This structure survived into early modern times. It was especially important for the hub of Sanskrit writing in the Kaveri Delta, as the courts at Thanjavur largely preserved these donation models to Brahmin men of letters.[71]

---

[69] The formative historical and cultural analysis of the Nāyaka period is Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). For a recent detailed political study of each of these larger states from the perspective of Dutch documents, see Lennart Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early Modern South India* (Leiden University Press, 2022). See also Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore,* for a detailed survey of the Thanjavur kingdom and its actors. See Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Second (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993), for a complimentary view of the social and political world of the smaller dependent court of Pudukkottai; See Christopher John Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy 1880-1955 : The Tamilnad Countryside* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984) 39–56, for an economic history of the Tamil land through the alternative perspective of ongoing relations between the major river valleys (in which the large kingdoms were situated) and the rural plains, emphasizing the angle of local tribes and Telugu immigrants to the Tamil land.

[70] Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Oxford University Press, 1980) described the economic and political system in which tax-free brahmadeya villages were distributed to Brahmins through temples sustained by kings, beginning with the Pallava rulers and increasingly in the medieval Cola kingdom. Whitney Cox provides a summary of the debate around Southern politics of the Colas and an in-depth analysis of the dynamic roles played by agents of various brahmadeyas in different regions of the Cola kingdom: "[M]any of the central-place functions elsewhere associated with cities were scattered across the landscape in the brahmadeyas. Education, adjudication, and archival storage were all, if not monopolised in Brahman-dominated villages, strongly associated with them. And, of course, the brahmadeya villages housed temples, often as the geographical heart or 'nerve center' of the settlement.…The assemblies that governed individual brahmadeyas, noncultivating elites set throughout the rural landscape, served as principal loci of investment and capital accumulation." Whitney Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry in Medieval South India: Moonset on Sunrise Mountain* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46–47.

[71] The medieval model of land-gifting in return for symbolic power has been said to generally shift

This period saw the construction and renovation of temples, an emphasis on temple festivals with unprecedented traffic of pilgrims, and a boom of creativity in the arts of performance and literature, with new and influential genres in Tamil, Sanskrit, and Telugu.[72] David Shulman and others rightly speak of this cultural sphere as inherently multilingual. Any cultural, literary, or social processes in this period should be understood within the context of these multilingual spaces. More specifically, the Thanjavur court, especially with the Marathas' establishment of power under Śāhaji, famously boasted about its multilingualism.[73]

---

its emphasis from land to food donations in Nāyaka ideology, within its general emphasis on bhoga, or physical enjoyment (Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 67). However, land-gifting to Brahmins was picked up in numbers by the time of the Marathas, if not earlier. See Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 16–74, for several references to Brahmin village donations in the Kaveri delta, aside from the famous 1693 grant of Śāhajipuram. See Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, where the thesis regarding Nāyaka states' distancing from previous commitments and dependencies on Brahmin agents is nuanced in several respects.

[72] See Crispin Branfoot, *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple* (Society for South Asian Studies, British Academy, 2007) for early modern temple renovation and its link to the structure of temple festivals. Novel genres emerging in the Tamil land, written in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit include, for instance, the *talapurāṇa* or *sthālapurāṇa* genre of temple-origins in Tamil and Sanskrit (see David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1980), courtly genres such as 'a day in the life of a king' (Telugu; *abhyudayamu,* Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*) and multilingual performance genres such as the *kuṟavañji,* the *padam*, or the *yakṣagāna* (Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012)*;* Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Multilingual Dramas at the Tanjavur Maratha Court and Literary Cultures in Early Modern South India," *The Medieval History Journal* 14, no. 2 (2011): 285–321; Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "The Evolution of the Kuravañci Dance Drama in Tamil Nadu: Negotiating the 'Folk' and the 'Classical' in the Bhārata Nātyam Canon," *South Asia Research* 18, no. 1 (1998): 39–72. Novel Tamil genres theorized in newly emerging grammars as ninety-six 'Ciṟṟilakkiyam' (small compositions) were being composed on a large scale, such as the genres of *pillaitamil, noṇṭināṭakam,* or the *kuṟavañci*, (Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1974), 220–31; Jennifer Steele Clare, "Canons, Conventions and Creativity: Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India" (UC Berkeley, 2011), 59–83; David Dean Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 62–102). The poets at the center of this dissertation participate in augmenting or reviving genres in Sanskrit, notably the bhāṇa, which is a favorite of the agrahāra authors around our milieu (Talia Ariav and Whitney Cox, "On Unresolved Tensions in Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2022): 47–71).

[73] Śāhaji authored (or had ascribed to him) works that positioned different languages on par with each other, and sponsored works that experimented with different mixtures of languages, or with new languages in vernacular genres. For Śāhaji's self-ascribed titles as "Master of poetic composition in five languages", *Pañca-bhāṣā-kavana-nirvāhaka*, (in the colophon to the *Tyāgarājavilāsa*, p. 3) and "Master of poetry in all languages", *Sakala-bhāṣā-kavitā-nirvāhaka*, (in *Pañcabhāṣāvilāsa*, p. 22). See Peterson, "Multilingual Dramas", 293–4. For Śāhaji's ascribed works and patronship, see Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 22–60.

However, Śāhaji's multilingual rhetoric is likely not reflective of an on-ground equality among languages and their speakers.[74] Rather, it calls to inspect the specific ways in which the languages and people at court interacted.[75] This is one of the interventions that this dissertation makes: my framework of "intimate cosmopolitans" and the emphasis on the resolution of the household helps me to interrogate the limits of the interaction of these Sanskrit poets with the multilingual worlds around them. While it is important for them to incorporate the imagined and concrete space of the Tamil land into their literature, they actively maintain a parallel universe in which there is little to no indication of the other language-speakers around them, in their literature as well as in their lives.

Alongside Śāhaji's own flirtations with Sanskrit, Rāmabhadra's neighbors in the village are writing almost exclusively in Sanskrit, and predominantly in scholastic genres.[76] One wonders how often the residents of Śāhajipuram even visited the court, given its distance of around 70 km from the center at Thanjavur. The land grant that officiated this village apportions land according to the amount of Sanskrit disciplines (*śāstra*) that these authors mastered, indicating that these Sanskrit authors did not share the multilingual sphere in the same way as the

---

[74] Analysing the *Pañcabhāṣāvilāsa,* a play ascribed to King Śāhaji featuring five languages including Sanskrit on stage, Peterson concludes that Sanskrit's cosmopolitan status is "yielding to a dialogic cosmopolitanism of the vernaculars". Peterson, "Multilingual Dramas", 312. Shulman, citing this example and others, writes that "by now [i.e. the Nāyaka period and particularly Maratha Thanjavur] the very notion of a hegemonic Sanskrit, if it ever really existed, has given way to a democratic multilingualism…"Shulman, *Tamil*, 278. While these observations are undoubtedly true of the rhetoric of Śāhaji, I propose that the division of linguistic labor on the ground was more complex.

[75] See Francesca Orsini, "The Multilingual Local in World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015): 345, for an argument for multilingualism*s*. One example of research along these lines is Sumit Guha's analysis of the political idiom in the Maratha court of Śivaji, which shifted from Marathi to Sanskrit, and back into Marathi. In particular, the *Radhamadhavavilasacampu* is relevant for our discussion: it was written by Jayarama Pindye while serving a young King Śāhaji as the Adil Shahil general in Bijapur: the twelve languages in this work depict a complex and not precisely harmonious picture of the language hierarchy at court (Sumit Guha, "Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500-1800," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 27–29). See also Allison Busch, "The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi Rīti Tradition," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia* (Duke University Press, 2011), 47–48, for an instructive note on the "unequal division of linguistic labor" in this text.

[76] See Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 16–60.

other authors at court, who often counted languages rather than disciplines. As we will see, the cultural sphere of the Kaveri Brahmadeya institution in the seventeenth century reveals different aesthetic and intellectual sensibilities, and concomitantly, different views of self and society, than those prevalent at court.

An exception to this rough division of labor between court and agrahāra comes from Cokkanātha Makhin, whom I call "the younger Cokkanātha," a resident of Śāhajipuram active roughly two decades after the inauguration of the village, whom we will encounter in the dissertation for his citation of Nīlakaṇṭha's verse. He not only authored a Sanskrit play that features the king as the protagonist—the *Kāntimatīpariṇaya*—but he also authored the *Candrakalāśāhajīyam*, which has embedded Telugu and Sanskrit songs, designed to fit the prevalent performance genres at court.[77] This choice of courtly themes and genres signals that, for some reason, toward the end of Śāhaji's rule authors from the brahmadeya villages moved toward a more direct model of literary patronage from the court.[78] Our authors are situated before this shift, or in parallel to it.

Another way to characterize this period, pertinent to our authors' lives and practices, is through the social and religious landscape and its notable consolidation of sectarian practices and institutions. Elaine Fisher labeled the early modern period as the "sectarian age" (pp. 48), whence:

---

[77] *Candrakalaśāhajīyam of Cokkanātha,* ed., N. Srinivasa (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1991). The younger Cokkanātha's father, Tippādhvarin, was one of the donees of Śāhajipuram. Cokkanātha also resided there before traveling westward to Karṇāṭaka (see ch five).

[78] There are other reasons to assume this generational shift: Rāmabhadra's student Bhūmināṭha kavi (*Dharmavijaya campū)* and Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa (*Sāhendra Vilāsa)*, both residents of the agrahāra, composed poems about Śāhaji. In the next generation, the example of poet Raghunātha is striking: his Sanskrit expertise from his learned Brahminical household was converted to compositions on worldly and courtly topics in Marathi, in accordance with the shifting tastes of women patrons at courts. See Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Leaving Kashi: Sanskrit Knowledge and Cultures of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century South India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 57 (2020).

> By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Hindu sectarianism had become not only a doctrinal but also an institutional cornerstone of the south Indian religious landscape. Monasteries and megatemples emerged as regional power centers in their own right, their pontiffs negotiating alliances with kings and emperors and disseminating the values of their community through transregional monastic networks.[79]

Nīlakaṇṭha, Rāmabhadra, and their milieu were active participants in the literary-sectarian landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Kaveri delta, home to a number of key figures in the history of the formation of religious identities and practices in South India as we know them today.[80] Elaine Fisher has mapped Nīlakaṇṭha's contribution to the making of the sectarian affiliation of smārta Brahmins like himself, heirs to the merge of Śaiva traditions

---

[79] Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 45. For further information the institutionalization of sects in the early modern South see Arjun Appadurai, *Worship And Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). For the story of the Appayya Dīkṣita's contribution to the formation of Śaiva Advaita, see Lawrence McCrea, "Appayyadīkṣita's Invention of Śrikaṇṭha's Vedānta," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 81–94 and Jonathan Duquette, *Defending God in Sixteenth-Century India: The Śaiva Oeuvre of Appaya Dīkṣita*, Oxford Oriental Monographs (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). For the story of the foundational relationship between gurus of monastic institutions and the Vijayanagara kings, see Valerie Stoker, *Polemics and Patronage in the City of Victory: Vyasatirtha, Hindu Sectarianism, and the Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara Court* (University of California Press, 2016), and Nabanjan Maitra, "The Rebirth of Homo Vedicus: Monastic Governmentality in Medieval India" (The University of Chicago, 2021). For perspectives from Śaiva monestaries of the south, See Kathleen Iva Koppedrayer, "The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Vellala Lineages of Tiruvavaturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal" (McmMaster, 1990); and Elaine M. Fisher, "A Microhistory of a South Indian Monastery: The Hooli Bṛhanmaṭha and the History of Sanskritic Vīraśaivism," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2019): 13–47.

[80] While we do not know much about Gīrvāṇendra's life in the delta, the ascetic teacher of Rāmabhadra is a good example of a "household institution," in direct affiliation with the court (and with no known affiliation to proliferating maṭam institutions): Rāmabhadra's guru Kṛṣnānandasarasvati (also called Bālakṛṣṇa guru or Bhagavatpāda) had numerous disciples from the agrahāra (Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 30–34). Bhāskararāya of the eighteenth century, widely acknowledged today as the reformer of the southern Śrīvidyā who was probably influenced by Nīlakaṇṭha and his milieu (Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 70–7*)*, received an entire village from Śāhaji, renamed Bhāskararāyapuram (Raghavan, *Ibid,* 36–7). I should also note the flourishing of the *nāmasiddhānta* or 'doctrine of the name', promoted by the contemporary figures Sadāśiva Brahmendra and his guru Paramaśivendra Sarasvati, Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa (Āyyāvāl) and Bodhendra, whose ideas find direct echoes in the work of Rāmabhadra, and fed into modern formations of Hinduism. See V. Raghavan, *The Power of the Sacred Name: Indian Spirituality Inspired by Mantras*, ed. William J. Jackson and M. Narasimhachary (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2011) 49–67; Davesh Soneji, "The Powers of Polyglossia: Marathi Kīrtan, Multilingualism, and the Making of a South Indian Devotional Tradition," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 339–69, for a critique of what Raghavan saw as an all-Hindu phenomena, and its contextualisation within caste- and class-bound formations in the polyglot context of Maratha Thanjavur; Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement," 118–26, for further social contextualization of Raghavan's thesis and a discussion of Bodhendra's writing as an example of a Thanjavur-centered interpretation of the thesis of redemption through god's name, and Singer, "The Radha-Krishna 'Bhajans' of Madras City," for an anthropological survey of the afterlife of the *nāmasiddhānta* thesis in twenty-first century Madras.

with authoritative Vedic traditions, with the Śrīvidyā cult of the goddess.[81] Relatedly, David Shulman has described the novel forms of Advaita in influential literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Kaveri delta. He finds in this body of literature tantric influences such as an interest in singularity, which I find especially useful for this corpus.[82]

Finally, this particular milieu of authors was invested in both their Sanskrit and Brahmin identities, and they are part of the story of second millennium Sanskrit literature at large. Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski's work on the internal debates among Brahmin communities of Maharashtra reveals the diversity—and its making and contestation—of communities of Brahmins in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century across the subcontinent. Their work focuses on processes of formations of these communities, suggesting the beginning of a consolidation of authoritative Brahmin*ism*, debated by influential Brahmin scholars and administrators based in Benares.[83] To this one may add active networks of Brahmin scholars from across the subcontinent, as can be gleaned for instance from the 1650 commemoration volume of Kavīndrācarya.[84] Our authors' emerging identity as intimate cosmopolitans is both fueled by these processes, and alternative to them. Their genealogical-based household institutions are anchored in the old, yet newly revived model of the brahmadeya, and they do not pursue the legal-oriented debates that their Maharashtrian counterparts from Benares do.[85]

---

[81] Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*.
[82] Shulman, "Prabandha", 11.
[83] Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, "What Makes People Who They Are? Pandit Networks and the Problem of Livelihoods in Early Modern Western India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 381–416. See also contributions to Rosalind O'Hanlon, Christopher Minkowski, and Anand Venkatkrishnan, eds., *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India: Discipline, Sect, Lineage and Community* (Routledge, 2017).
[84] Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," 417.
[85] Somewhat relatedly, David Washbrook has argued that Maratha Brahmins who immigrated to South India in the early modern period set a precedent for the prevalent modern model of a 'secular Brahmin' (mostly due to their

As for relevant processes in Sanskrit scholasticism, Sheldon Pollock has identified a consistent shift from the attitude of older Sanskrit authors who saw themselves as inferior to the glorious past to an attitude of superiority over the past.[86] More recently, Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea presented a novel interpretation of the nature of early modern innovation in Sanskrit scholastics, emphasizing the *rhetoric* of conservatism of this tradition. They suggest that early modern scholars such as Appayya Dīkṣita—Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle and avowed inspiration—were often insincere in their adherence to scholastic or philosophical tradition, while in practice (and in a way that was transparent to their contemporaries) they posed innovative claims and radical or contrastive arguments.[87] Our authors' corpus can be seen as a poetic response to these trends, by which they are directly influenced.

Throughout the dissertation, I argue that these authors fashioned a remarkable poetic voice. In a paraphrase of their influential predecessors in scientific discourse, they pose a *poetic* insincerity. I characterize this tone as a dense double voice. This double-voicedness or ironic tone also has to do with a constant endeavor to recast the entire Sanskrit tradition in their own poetic voices, primarily aimed at their intimate friends in the audience. David Shulman in particular has identified shared historical, cultural, and linguistic themes and features across

---

scribal skills and dharmaśāstra proficiency), much in contrast to existing economical models of Tamil Brahmins from the river valleys, who did not face the need to adapt to new skills in response to a decline of courtly support. David Washbrook, "The Maratha Brahmin Model in South India: An Afterword," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 597–615. Our authors' community's afterlife as the influential community of smārta Brahmins who migrated to Madras in the colonial period is narrated by C. J. Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmans: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[86] "Beginning in the fourteenth century but gaining far greater currency by the seventeenth...the very history of the development of thought-systems itself, the periodization of viewpoints,… seems to constitute its very purpose. Concomitantly, 'new' has ceased to connote 'worse', and instead effectively serves to signify the furthest point of advancement in a discourse...". Sheldon Pollock, "New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 7. There is a very real line of communication connecting Nīlakaṇṭha with some of the scholars that Pollock is surveying: thus, Ananta Bhaṭṭa, who sent Nīlakaṇṭha manuscripts from Varanasi (Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 50–1), is the son of the polymath Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, one of the leading scholars surveyed by Pollock.

[87] Bronner and McCrea, *First Words, Last Words*, 1–11.

these literary spheres, such as the reframing of past traditions, a fashioned authorial singularity, dense intertextuality, and an ironic distance.[88] These features, often difficult to pin down, emerge in my discussion as pertinent to our corpus, and I will be invoking and conversing with them throughout.

Chapter outline

The chapters of the dissertation are organized along the lines of these authors' reflections on, and self-insertions into, their poetic works. Nīlakaṇṭha was one of the more influential Sanskrit poets of this time, and he wrote like one. In the first chapter, "Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic manifesto of poetics," I trace his views on poetry in the opening chapters of two of his major works, the *Śivalilārṇava* (*Līlā*) and the *Gaṅgāvataraṇa* (*Gaṅgā*). I argue that these introductions should be read like manifestos: they include sustained reflections on the reasons to write poetry, and formulate key aesthetic principles that were pertinent to Nīlakaṇṭha's work as a whole. The chapter elaborates on Nīlakaṇṭha's dramatic poetization of the title of the *sarvatantrasvatantra,* the renaissance-man ideal of a master of all Sanskrit disciplines: poetry is superior because it can negotiate an endless tradition of knowledge, with added beauty, self-awareness, and play.

The chapter unpacks three key themes in these manifestos. The first is the ability of poetry to do the work of poetics. Through various intertexts with central voices and notions from the tradition of poetics, or *alaṅkāraśāstra*, Nīlakaṇṭha adds an amused irony to the discourse of poetics, which serves to both affirm it, and playfully decontextualize it, making it citable and

[88] David Shulman's ongoing work on the multilingual early modern South is one of the narrative arcs of his career and one that has deeply influenced the state of the field. It has been most recently articulated in publications from an ongoing research project (in which I am a participant) titled NEEM, short for New Ecologies of Early Modern South India, such as *Shulman,* "The Early Modern Southern Prabandha," "Seeing into the Mind in Early Modern South India," and the forthcoming *Introspection and Insight: South Indian Minds, 1500 to 1835*.

generalizable. The second theme is the argument *for* Sanskrit poetry against other genres and mediums, which is strikingly *non*-defensive; it allows me to reflect on Nīlakaṇṭha's confident, half-sincere voice. The third theme is the trope of bad poets and critics, which Nīlakaṇṭha returns to time and again in these manifestos and elsewhere. I connect his attraction to this convention with his motivation to delimit the field of poetry and thus inscribe his authorial voice into the canon of Sanskrit luminaries. Nīlakaṇṭha's desire and tendency to define his craft and position himself within it reflect a consistent concern with the role of his time and place in the sphere of Sanskrit poetics. His subtle, double-voiced signature speaks to the confident and playful mode in which he does so.

The second and third chapters are dedicated to two main generic stages on which our authors formulate their poetic voices: the prologues to their plays, and their hymns to their gods. The second chapter, "The autobiographical games of the prologue: multivocal stagings of the self," traces our authors' subtle variations on the inherited formulas of the Sanskrit prologues. In these formulas, the playwright introduces himself through a staged dialogue between the director, his actress or assistant, and the audience. I show that the inherent paradoxes of the prologue, as a liminal paratext that entextualises its performance and its author, allow Nīlakaṇṭha and his related milieu of students to craft deliberately ambiguous autobiographical statements through a collage of conventional patterns and recognizable citations. Most notably, their voice is inextricably and creatively tied to their influential predecessors and teachers. Here, I present the principle of *uccāvaca,* a multitextured or high-and-low aesthetic, which supports the authorial multivocality that these prologues achieve and is emblematic of this corpus as a whole.

I also indicate a notable shift in prologues by early modern Southern authors, who markedly elaborate on an inherited trope of the prologue, naming Southern towns and temple festivals as

venues of performances that are easily identifiable. For some of the authors who follow Rāmabhadra's generation at court, the scale of these performances became increasingly local. I argue that these references are pertinent to the intimate cosmopolitanisms that our authors negotiate. I conclude with a reflection on the kinds of selves our authors fashion in their prologues: a multi-vocal self that is made of creative constructions of citations, sedimented tropes, and influential teachers.

In the third chapter, "Shared, fragmented, poetic subjectivities: *stotra*s of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra," I demonstrate how both these authors explore the experiential dimensions of the inherited theological triangular equation between the impersonal Self (*ātman*), the God or the Goddess, and their own selves. They pose ever-evolving formulations of this trio that allow them, in part based on the identity of their names with their personal gods, to fashion their subjectivities as shared with their gods. I also demonstrate how they construct their first-person speaking subjects through variations on various conventions, tropes, and extremely learned, at times esoteric, intertexts. Each hymn features an uneven texture and tempo that adds up to a sense of a singular, yet fragmented subjectivity. These crafted fragmentations of the identifiable author who is speaking present a fundamentally multivocal and elusive authorial self. And yet, I demonstrate that the voices that emerge, especially from within familiar tropes or generic instances, are strikingly personal. They produce notably long and tireless explorations of devotional subjectivity: this is especially true of Rāmabhadra. I suggest that these authors' praxis of poetry is tied to their expressions of devotion, making both their devotion and their poetry into mutually-constitutive playgrounds in which they can make and unmake their authorial selves.

In the fourth chapter, "Familiar faces in the audience: genealogical writing in the *śālā*," I examine the intended audience of the texts analyzed thus far. I return to the prologues' shifting

representations of the plays' audience, conventionally made up of learned pilgrims who become increasingly recognizable in our authors' hands: their intended audience members may well identify themselves in it. I then turn to another set of hymns by our authors—this time addressed to their renunciant guru (or, in the case of Rāmabhadra, to *another hymn* to their renunciant guru), to envision the small and intimate communities within which our authors worked. I juxtapose these cues from the texts with the intricate intertexts that any reader of these texts is expected to know, with the history of the circulation of these texts, which was narrow yet carefully sustained, and with what we know of these authors' living realities on the ground.

In this context, I propose and explore the twin notions of the genealogical author and the modality of intimate cosmopolitanism. I argue that our authors are primarily writing for their immediate circles with whom they shared their worlds and interests. The partly isolated microcosm of their villages informs and qualifies their adherence to a classical or cosmopolitan Sanskrit framework. Their poetic signatures, featuring a learned yet lighthearted, double-voiced style, are better understood through the literal common grounds they share with their audience, who are constitutive of their very sense of themselves.

I conclude the dissertation with questions regarding these authors' proto-modernity. I acknowledge some lines of comparison with the somewhat contested view of the modern, or early modern features in both global and South Asian contexts, such as fragmented yet integrative self-fashioning, or self-reflexive parody. To contribute to the debate, I interrogate our authors' sense of their "modern world": their ideas of their place in history, and the relationship between past, present, and future. I do so through a brief account of Nīlakaṇṭha's fascination with the trope of the Kali age, which reveals an inclination to position his times as differentiated from, even better from, the past. And yet, his formulations of the Kali metaphor emphasize

clashing temporal and notional scales of the Kali age, as both a linear dating system and a morally charged idea of a degraded, extended present. These are characteristically contradictory and confident, and they highlight the role of corrective human agency, and poetry, in dealing with what Nīlakaṇṭha experienced as his time and place.

This thesis describes the aesthetic, broadly defined, of a particularly influential early-modern community of Brahmin scholars and poets. It provides a window into a vast literary world that, despite its notable neglect in contemporary scholarship, played a formative role in the story of Sanskrit literature. Through the discussion, I pose and nuance questions regarding the broad epistemic, cultural, and economic models that inform this corpus of literature. These shed light on the role of hereditary capital in intellectual households in tax-exempt Brahmin villages in the Tamil heartland, on the particular relationship of Sanskrit literature with multilingual cultural production at the nearby court of Thanjavur and in the Tamil-speaking South, and on the role of Sanskrit knowledge, and particularly of Sanskrit poetry, in the lives of these influential early modern Sanskrit poets.

1. Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic manifestos of poetics

yān eva śabdān vayam ālapāmo yān eva cārthān vayam ullikhāmaḥ
tair eva vinyāsa-viśeṣa-bhavyaiḥ saṃmohayante kavayo jaganti (*Līlā,* v. 1.13)

They use the same words that we do,
and in the same senses that we do,
yet, reconfiguring them in clever patterns,
Poets mesmerize all the world.[1]

Nīlakaṇṭha's introduction to the *Līlā* is comprised of eighty-one verses that read like an amused, extended poetic manifesto. Paired with a similar and part-autobiographical introduction to his *Gaṅgāvataraṇa (Gaṅgā)*, the two introductions make for insightful metaliterary moments contemplating the importance of and defining Sanskrit poetry.[2] Nīlakaṇṭha is one of the defining authors of this time, and he inaugurates his aesthetic views in his manifestos. His style and aesthetic were formative of the writings of subsequent authors in this *paramparā* of students and teachers, and fed into the poetic ideals of later descendants of the lineage like the famous twentieth-century scholars Kuppuswami Sastri and V. Raghavan, who contributed to the shaping of the Sanskrit canon as we know it. The verse cited above, noting the special role of poets to potentially mesmerize the world by patterning the conventional linguistic toolkit, was cited by the latter as formative of Sanskrit literature on the whole, in his introduction to Sanskrit poetics.[3]

---

[1] This translation by Naresh Keerthi appears in Talia Ariav and Naresh Keerthi, "Churning Selves: Intersecting Biographies in the Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 49.
[2] *Gaṅgāvataraṇam* [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Kedaranatha Sastri and Vasudeva Laxman Sastri Panasikar, (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1916); *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* ed., J. K. Balasubrahmanyam (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911).
[3] V. Raghavan, "Use and Abuse of Alaṅkāra in Sanskrit Literature," in *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṅkāra Śāstra* (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1942), 50. Raghavan cites two verses of Nīlakaṇṭha's before delving into an introduction to poetics that cites mostly from poetic works. As is often the case in these manifestos as we shall see, Nīlakaṇṭha's verse echoes a well known theme of poetry's contribution as a clever rearrangement of existing knowledge. Here is one version of it from the *Nyāyamañjarī: kuto vā nūtanaṃ vastu vayam utprekṣituṃ kṣamāḥ vacovinyāsavaicitryamātram atra vicāryatām. Nyāyamañjarī of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa,* ed., Pandit Śrī Sūrya Nārāyaṇa Śukla (Benares: Vidya Vilas Press, 1936),1.8. "For that matter, how could I possibly be able to imagine something

My reading of these introductions as poetic manifestos requires explanation, as Nīlakaṇṭha's statements echo well-known notions, tropes, and conventions from the history of Sanskrit reflections on poetry, and there are other literary texts who begin with similar introductions.[4] Moreover, his "manifestos" read very much like a *subhāṣita* collection, or single-verse poems of proverbs and aphorisms, and are reminiscent of Nīlakaṇṭha's own collections of *subhāṣita*s. As such, the statements present a loose logical sequence and are occasionally even contradictory; they are often ironic or witty, and may easily be extracted and cited in different contexts.[5] And yet, Nīlakaṇṭha's introductions are remarkably long, and when read as wholes and understood as framing chapters of poetic compositions, they behave like manifestos–they feature Nīlakaṇṭha's sustained reflections on his craft.

This chapter is governed by Nīlakaṇṭha's implicit argument regarding the ability of poetry to do the work of the śāstric discipline of poetics, or *alaṃkāraśāstra,* albeit with an added

---

new to say? Please just attend to the clever way the words have been arrangement herein." I thank Whitney Cox for this reference and translation. Nīlakaṇṭha's version stands out from this statement, as it makes poetry's "mere" rearrangement into world-mesmerizing material.

[4] The sub-genre of metapoetic introductions to long poems seems to be related to patron-centric works, such as Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* and Bilhaṇa's *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*. The latter similarly deals with disdain toward bad critics and poets, and reflects a concern with a poetic "touchstone" that can appreciate good poetry. Other examples are Padmagupta's *Navasāhasaṅka Carita,* which consists of a few verses dealing with praise of past poets and the apology of the author following the initial *maṅgala*, Someśvara's *Kīrtikaumudi* in which he praises and names past poets and laments the existence of bad poets, and the *Vasantavilāsa* of Bālacandra Sūri, which consists of a rather elaborate introduction on good and bad poets, and the nature of poetry. Many works in Prakrit literature open with similar metapoetic reflections; one famous example is Vākpatirāja's *Gauḍavaho*. I thank Whitney Cox and Andrew Ollett for pointing me to relevant examples. *Harṣacarita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa*, ed., Pandurang Vaman Kane, 1st ed. (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1917); *The Vikramāṅkadevacarita of Bilhaṇa*, ed., Murari Lal Nagar, (Governamnet Sanskrit College, 1945); *Navasāhasaṅka Carita Of Padmagupta*, ed., Pandit Vamana Shastri Islampurkar, (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010); *Kîrtikaumudî of Someśvaradeva*, ed. Ābājī Vishṇu Kāthavaṭe, Bombay Sanskrit series (Bombay: Government central Book depot, 1883); *Vasantavilāsa of Bālacandrasūri*, ed., C. D. Dalal and Candanabālāśrī, (Ahmedabad: Bhadraṅkara Prakāśana, 2010); *Gauḍavaho of Vākpatirāja,* ed., N. G. Suru, (Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1975).

[5] See Ludwik Sternbach, *Subhasita, Gnomic and Didactic Literature* (Wiesbaden : O. Harrassowitz, 1974), for a survey of the Subhāṣita genre which normally includes sections on poetry, poets, and bad poets; Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Dean Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (University of California Press, 1998), for a discussion of circulating *cāṭu* or subhāṣita verses and their major cultural role; Daud Ali, "The Subhasita as an Artifact of Ethical Life in Medieval India," in *Ethical Life in South Asia*, ed. Pandian Anand and Daud Ali (Indiana University Press, 2010), for an analysis of the dialogic contexts in which subhāṣitas were cited in India in the second millennium, and their role in shaping ethical sensibilities.

wink, or ironic distance. This wink, characteristic of Nīlakaṇṭha's aesthetic on the whole, is often subtly subversive, and it is effectively tied to the superiority of poetry over other Sanskrit mediums, which he argues for in his manifestos. In the first section, I show how Nīlakaṇṭha constructs amused presentations of the śāstric medium, and crafts poetic intertexts with canonical voices from the tradition of poetics, thus raising the question of the role of poetry in relation to the śāstric idiom. In the second chapter, I discuss a related ideal that ran in Nīlakaṇṭha's family: the author who is a "*sarvatantrasvatantra*," or *independent in all Sanskrit doctrines*. Nīlakaṇṭha crucially added the governing lens of poetry to this ideal, as I discuss in section two. He is a *poet* independent in all doctrines, and this attribution is key to this dissertation as a whole.

In the third section, I look at Nīlakaṇṭha's arguments *for* Sanskrit poetry against other genres and mediums. Throughout these verses, Nīlakaṇṭha borrows key scholastic terms from the world of poetics in a lighthearted, decontextualizing way, emblematic of his aesthetic. I argue that through these arguments for poetry in general, he posits his authorial signature and subtly inserts his time and place into his otherwise seemingly timeless compositions. In section four, I reflect on Nīlakaṇṭha's lighthearted, half-sincere double voice, which can be seen as a sign of his time. This style is strongly related to the need of authors who subscribed to the long and convoluted tradition of Sanskrit knowledge to creatively negotiate this knowledge and contribute to it. The tension between the programmatically new and the conventionally old is key to Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic signature.

In the fifth section, I pay attention to Nīlakaṇṭha's liking for the trope of bad poets and poor critics. I suggest that these malpractitioners of poetry serve to delimit Nīlakaṇṭha's contemporaneous poetic sphere and its prinicple independence from the constraints of poetics, and showcase both his śāstric skills and his ironic poetic style. The prevalence of this theme also

partially explains Nīlakaṇṭha's choice to write his *Līlā,* a version of the story of Śiva's games, based in Madurai: the latter includes a famous episode about the magical *sangham* plate that differentiated real Tamil poets from the false poets and mean critics. Broadening the question of his choice to write the *Līlā*, I conclude the chapter with a short reflection on Nīlakaṇṭha's aesthetic choices and concerns while discussing Elaine Fisher's recent work on the subject. I suggest that his work consistently and subtly inserts his poetic voice into the conventional world of Sanskrit poetry, broadening its scope from within to attend to his regional, contemporaneous socio-religious concerns, yet catering primarily to insiders of the tradition.

These introductions make for playful and poetic manifestos of (Nīlakaṇṭha's) poetry. His desire and tendency to define his craft and position himself within it reflect a consistent concern with the role of his time and place in the sphere of Sanskrit poetics. His subtle, double-voiced signature speaks to the non-anxious and playful mode in which he does so. These manifestos ask both *why* poetry, and *how* poetry: the answers to these questions are somewhat related, as Nīlakaṇṭha's ongoing conversations with the tradition of Sanskrit knowledge and playful, confident double voice are his clear poetic signature, and they are exclusive to the domain of poetry, making it superior.

Poetry as poetics

For the learned Sanskrit authors of the mid-seventeenth century, reflections on poetry would have been naturally composed in the prestigious and well-established field of poetics, perhaps by writing a new treatise, a commentary on an old treatise of poetics, or a commentary on literary texts. But Nīlakaṇṭha did not do this, in contrast to his great uncle Appayya and other

learned Brahmin poets who were also poeticians and/or commentators.[6] He rather enjoys staging the technical and burdensome character of poetics:

> *kvārthāḥ kva śabdāḥ kva rasāḥ kva bhāvāḥ kva vyaṅgya-bhedāḥ kva ca vākyarītiḥ*
> *kiyatsu dṛṣṭiḥ kavinā na deyā kim asti rājñām iyatīha cintā* (*Līlā,* v. 1.30)
>
> The words, the meanings, the poetic effects, their corresponding feelings,
> the varieties of implicit meaning and the style of speech—
> how many of these can a poet afford to ignore?
> Do kings have as many things to worry about?

Or similarly, from the introduction to the *Gaṅgā*:

> *śīlite kavi-lokena siddhe brahmaṇi vāṅmaye*
> *pāmarāḥ kalahāyante paśyāsminn anyathānyathā* (*Gaṅgā*, v. 1.8)
>
> Poets inhabit the perfected world of Brahman, made of words
> and idiots fight over it: look at this! It should be completely different!

Or:

> *bhāratīṣu kavīndrāṇāṃ yāvatī sukumāratā*
> *tāvatī kāvya-marma-jña-saṃmardaika-sahiṣṇutā* (*Gaṅgā,* v. 1.13)
>
> However much tenderness there is in the words of the best of poets,
> is proportionate to the forbearance required
> in putting up with assaults by those who know the vulnerable spots of a poem.

Such repeated statements about the gap between poetics and the poetic craft, or between petty poeticians and creative poets, raise a constant question about the ratio of poetry and poetics, especially when stated through poetry. The question becomes, then, what can poetry do to, contribute to, or undo in, the discipline of poetics? How subversive are his comments about poetics?

---

[6] One famous example is Nīlakaṇṭha's contemporary Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja, who critically engaged with the poetics of Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle Appayya. Another example from Nīlakaṇṭha's nearby time and place is Gaṅgādhara Vājapeyin's *Rasikarañjani*, a commentary on Appayya's *Kuvalayānanda* requested by King Śāhaji through the minister Tryambakarāya. This author, who received a separate village of his own from king Śāhaji, mentions that his grandfather's brother was Appayya's student. See V. Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ" in *Śahendravilāsaḥ of Śrīdharaveṅkaṭeśa (Ayyaval),* second edition, vol. 54, Sarasvati Mahal Series (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2016), 36.

To begin to answer this question, let us linger on Nīlakaṇṭha's echoes of the opening reflections of canonical treatises on poetics, especially Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa*:

> *bālyaṃ viduḥ prākṛta-bhāṣitāni śruti-smṛtīr vṛddha-daśāṃ vadanti*
> *sāhityam ekaṃ tu girāṃ savitryāḥ tāruṇyam udgāḍham uśanty abhijñāḥ* (*Līlā* v. 1.29).
>
> Wise men know the everyday speech of Prākṛt to be her childish version,
> and cite the scriptures as her older self.
> But it is literature alone, being Sarasvatī's overflowing youth,
> that they desire.

The verse, being part of the serial arguments for poetry that I survey below, brings to mind a well-known formula, perhaps coined in Bhaṭṭanāyaka's now lost *Hṛdayadarpaṇa* and elaborated on by others, where literature is compared to a seductive lover, whereas the scriptures are compared to a master who commands, and historical discourse to a friend who advises.[7] This formula was rephrased to different ends by several poeticians, most famously in the opening lines of Maṃmaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa*. In the latter, poetry is compared to a seductive woman lover, the Vedas are compared to the command of a teacher, and the Purāṇas (what Nīlakaṇṭha calls *smṛti* in the above verse) to the advice of a friend.[8]

Nīlakaṇṭha uses an equivalent template to praise poetry through an analogous comparison with other genres. The paraphrase results in a certain happy irreverence toward everything authoritative, beginning with the Vedic scriptures and evident in the sexualization of Goddess Sarasvatī and her belittling as a child or as an old woman. This irreverent attitude, by no means a dismissive gesture toward the tradition or the goddess, is a signature of Nīlakaṇṭha's, expressed

[7] The extract from Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka states that a reader of literature desires *rasa* rather than advice or knowledge; the analogy to a lover, friend, and master was given in later commentaries such as the *Dhvānyālokalocana*. See Sheldon Pollock, "What Was Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka Saying?," in *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History : Essays in Honor of Robert P. Goldman* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010), 152, 163, fn 31, 80.
[8] *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa*, ed., Ganganatha Jha, (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1967), commentary to 1.2.

time and again in his works.[9] We can already see that the intertext with poetic treatises serves to contribute to the explicit content of the superiority of the poetic medium. Poetry is capable of encompassing poetic discourse and playing with it, by posing an ironic distance from the paraphrased medium.

Moreover, if in this verse the allusion to treatises of poetics is not immediately evident, the intertext with Mammaṭa's opening statements becomes clearer still two verses later:

> *āvarṇa-śakti-graham āpavargaṃ duḥkhaikarūpā viracayya vidyāḥ*
> *viśrānti-hetoḥ kavitāṃ janānāṃ vedhāḥ sad-ānandamayīṃ kim ādhāt* (*Līlā*, v. 1.31).
>
> From grasping the force of letters all the way to final liberation:
> The creator made every single form of knowledge, and they are all
> full of misery. It is most probably for some relief
> that he gave people poetry, made of true bliss.

Nīlakaṇṭha is not inventing these notions: the idea of the affinity of the poet's creation with the creator god is, by his time, a poetic cliché.[10] More specifically, this verse is likely in conscious dialogue with Mammaṭa's opening lines of the *Kāvyaprakāśa*, in which the poetician states that God Brahma's worldly creation is comprised of the entirety of the world, including both pleasant and unpleasant things such as pain (*duḥkha*), whereas poetry is superior since it is not restricted to Nature's laws, is self-dependent, and contains only pleasure (*hlādaikamayīm*).[11]

---

[9] I wish to thank Naresh Keerthi for formative discussions on this feature of Nīlakaṇṭha's writing, as well as for many direct and indirect contributions to this thesis. I discuss Nīlakaṇṭha's mode of irreverent devotion in chapter three.

[10] As noted by Phyllis Granoff, "Putting the Polish on the Poet's Efforts: Reading the Karṇasundarī as a Reflection on Poetic Creativity," in *Innovations and Turning Points : Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 529–31. Ali notes apropos of the apparent recycling of topics in *subhāṣita* verses, that 'the existence of large numbers of similar verses in the anthologies is not evidence of a "corrupt" system of textual preservation but rather a continued modulation, remembrance and, improvisation. Ali, "The Subhasita as an Artifact of Ethical Life in Medieval India," 35; Nīlakaṇṭha clearly uses the *subhāṣita* in ways that maximize variation and modulation.

[11] "The poet's speech prevails: it lacks the restraints of nature's law; it is a pure pleasure, it stands on its own and has nine splendid *rasas*." Autocommentary: "Brahmā's creation is subject to the laws of nature; it is made of pleasure, pain, and delusion, and is dependent upon co-dependent causes such as atoms and actions respectively, and it has

Nīlakaṇṭha paraphrases this idea with typical underdetermined irony. In his version, poetry is reminiscently made of true bliss (*sad-ānandamayīm),* and it contrasts with the uniformly painful world. The opening lines *āvarṇa-śakti-graham āpavargaṃ* present a range between the cosmic power of letters (ā-*varṇa-śakti-graham*) and liberation *(ā-apavargaṃ*): two basic philosophical notions of the Śaiva-Vedānta thought world.[12] This makes the following statement, due to which it is all *duḥkha,* highly provocative, as liberation is the widely accepted means to escape suffering. The provocation runs deeper: this range of misery is the entire corpus of "knowledge" (*vidyā*), from which poetry is singled out. Another likely intended possible parsing of the phrase *āvarṇa-śakti-graham āpavargaṃ* would read *ā-a-varṇa*, "beginning with the vowel 'a'" and *ā-pa-vargam*, "ending with the labial set of consonants 'pa'": this range strengthens the totality of the knowledge, from a to z, as it were, that poetry is singled out from. The available double-meaning of the phrase contributes to another meta-level argument for poetry, as a medium that can achieve a dense and ambiguous statement even when dealing with śāstric and theological notions. As in the previous verse, this is a subversive statement about the force of poetry concerning all other forms of authoritative and scholastic knowledge. That the verse paraphrases, in playful and complex poetry, a statement from a well-known poetic treatise, directs the force of the statement toward the science of poetics in particular.

The distinction between the "world" as composed of a range of charged phonemes and the bliss of poetry is not the stark difference we see in Mammaṭa, where poetry is separate from

---

only six tastes, and these, too, not always of an agreeable nature. The creation of the poet's speech, on the contrary, is different. It is, therefore, said to prevail...."
Verse: *niyati-kṛta-niyama-rahitāṃ hlādaikamayīm ananya-paratantrām nava-rasa-rucirāṃ nirmitim ādadhatī bhāratī kaver jayati*. Auto commentary*: Niyati-śaktyā niyata-rūpā sukha-duḥkha-moha-svabhāvā paramāṇv-ādyapādāna-karmādi-sahakārikāraṇa-paratantrā ṣaḍrasā na ca hṛdyaiva taitādṛśī brahmaṇo nirmitir nirmāṇam. etat vilakṣaṇā tu kavi-vāda-nirmitiḥ. Ata eva jayati*. Ganganatha Jha, *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa*. 1.1. English translation is roughly based on Jha's translation in this edition.
[12] The term "varṇaśakti" occurs throughout the Śaiva canon, referencing the divine power of the letters.

Brahma's realm as the human poet's creation. Instead, Nīlakaṇṭha ascribes both creations to Brahma, marking the difference in terms of motivation. This is related to the notion with which I began the chapter, due to which literature is made of the same material of the world—just carefully rearranged. This issue of how literature belongs in the world and acts upon it is a major driving force in Nīlakaṇṭha's aesthetic.

What do these intertexts with Mammaṭa's canonical treatise achieve? Other than showcasing his and his audiences' knowledge as Sanskrit-educated persons, I think they also form a subtle yet quite radical statement about what literature can do. Poetry, for Nīlakaṇṭha, can do everything, including theorize itself.[13] This idea seems to govern Nīlakaṇṭha's manifestos, and it is especially evident through numerous lighthearted references to the most well-known notions of Sanskrit poetics. For example:

> *doṣaḥ kvacit kaścid iti pratītaḥ prācām alaṅkāravidāṃ pravādaḥ*
> *sarva-prabandhānugatas tu manye kartuḥ kaveḥ jīvanam eva doṣaḥ* (*Līlā*, v. 1.65).
>
> Some fault, somewhere, will be there:
> We all know that is what the old poeticians declared.
> Come to think of it, since it inheres in all compositions,
> might we say that the fault is the very life of the creative poet?

In the first half of this verse, Nīlakaṇṭha is alluding to the common habit of poeticians of typifying and demonstrating poetic faults, or *doṣa*s, a subject of poetic treatises since their very inception. Perhaps, he is once again responding with a wink to Mammaṭa's qualification of good poetry as faultless, "*nirdoṣatva*".[14] In the second half of the verse, however, he turns the fault

[13] See Granoff, "Putting the Polish on the Poet's Efforts," 547, for an equivalent suggestion to read the sub-genre of a play-within-a-play as a "unique genre of works on literary theory". She goes on to observe, "...Rājaśekhara, and his followers, Bilhaṇa and Rāmacandra and no doubt others, represent a new self-consciousness about their craft and are willing to explore its mysteries through various media: texts on theory, poems, and drama. They clearly built on the works of their predecessors, ...but their reflections on poetry and their use of their art to theorize about itself in a sustained manner seem somehow new". Nīlakaṇṭha inherits these reflexive and cross-genre inclinations from these poets from the beginning of the second millennium, either directly or indirectly.

[14] *tad-adoṣau śabdārthau saguṇāvan alaṃkṛtī punaḥ kvāpi,* Ganganatha Jha, *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa*.1.4.

into the very "life force" of poetry: with this joke, designed like a logical conclusion, Nīlakaṇṭha is replying to another ancient debate among poeticians. Many Sanskrit ālaṃkārikas have tried to locate the "life force" or the essential identity of poetry.[15] Nīlakaṇṭha's poetry is designed to take part in the debate on Sanskrit poetics, but also to decontextualize them to the point of making them arguably redundant, as in the verse above, and charge them with humor and play. A learned poet like him can outdo a poetician in thinking of poetry, because poetry—to follow the implicit argument—can outdo scholastic language in its principally open, infinite scope of meaning and tone.

Like his references to the life force of poetry or the poetic fault, we will encounter throughout the rest of this chapter numerous references to key terms and ideas from the field of poetics, such as *rasa*, *dhvani, vyaṅgya, rīti,* and more. Nīlakaṇṭha's modes of application of these terms are key to his poetic signature of learned poetry, aimed at learned men. The effect is a half-serious provocation toward the very need to engage in hard-core poetics when one can simply read Nīlakaṇṭha's poetry. As he concludes the composition, in the penultimate verse of the *Līlā:*

> *hālasyeśitur īśitur yadi sakhe līlāsu śuśrūṣase*
> *tat-sarvāgama-guptam asya yadi vā tattvaṃ vijijñāsase*
> *pāraṃ vātha didṛkṣase yadi paraṃ kāvyāgama-srotasāṃ*
> *tat karṇe kuru nīlakaṇṭhamakhino vācaṃ śivaikāśrayām* (*Līlā,* v. 22.99)
>
> My friend, if you wish to hear about the games of Śiva, the Lord of Madurai
> or if you want to know his true essence, concealed in all of his scriptures,
> or if you want to see **the other shore of the streams of works of poetics**
> lend your ears to Nīlakaṇṭha's words, which take shelter in Śiva alone.

[15] Thus, Vāmana for *rīti* as the *ātma*, or identity, of poetry (*Kāvyālaṅkāraḥ of Bhāmaha*, eds., Batuknath Sharma and Baladeva Upādhyāya, 2nd ed., Kasi Samskrita granthamala (Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrita Samsthana, 1981), 1.2.6); Ānandavardhana's influential thesis crowns *artha* as the "soul of poetry" (*kāvyātman*) (*Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana*, ed., Bishnupada Bhattacharya, (Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1956); Kuntaka's notion of *vakrokti* (*Vakroktijivita of Kuntaka*, ed., Śaṅkha Ghosha, Kashi Sanskrit series 180 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1967)), whose title gives away his thesis; or Kṣemendra, an interesting author to think of alongside Nīlakaṇṭha because of his well-known tendency to satire and subhāṣita-like texts, who identifies *aucitya* as the "life-force" (*jīvitam*) of poetry (*Aucityavicāracarcā of Kṣemendra*, ed., Samir Kumar Datta, (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 2002),19). See Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1971).

Nīlakaṇṭha addresses his reader as a "friend", indicating the intimacy with which he envisions his audience. He tells him that he might appreciate his composition of Śiva's games for one or more of the following reasons: hearing a good story, grasping the ultimate truth of god Śiva, or reaching the 'other shore', namely, the ultimate truth, of poetic knowledge.[16] This is a provocative statement on poetry's ability to restate, in effect outdo, past authoritative doctrines of Śaiva thought, as well as previous piles of treatises of poetics. Nīlakaṇṭha himself had read these treatises, as his learned references reveal, and he expects his audience to have read them, a necessary condition to fully grasp his poetry. But they allow one to reach the 'other shore' only when they are made into the material of poetry. His poetry rises above all sciences, even obviates the need for them. These statements, I think, are meant to be taken as half-jokes with much intent.

A *sarvatantrasvatantra* poet: science for poetry's sake

Before I continue to demonstrate Nīlakaṇṭha's application of scholastic poetic notions through the governing themes of his manifesto, I want to relatedly suggest that Nīlakaṇṭha makes a unique contribution to the existing ideal of *sarvatantrasvatantra,* the renaissance man who masters all sciences. A *sarva-tantra-svatantra* is an honorific title given to a Sanskrit scholar who has mastered all the śāstric disciplines. The epithet is associated with Nīlakaṇṭha's family: Bronner discusses Appayya's application of the term as 'independent, all-around scholarship', translating Appaya's gloss of the term: 'A person who is a *sarvatantrasvatantra* is capable of picking any tenet from any of the disciplines—Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Early Mīmāṃsā, Late

[16] I take *kāvyāgama* as a *tatpuruṣa* compound meaning the science of poetry, rather than as a dvandva compound meaning "both poetry and scripture", because of the appearance of the word *āgama* in the sense of "scripture" in the preceding pada.

Mīmāṃsā [Vedānta], Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and so on—and either proving or disproving it at will'. Bronner and McCrea add that for Appayya, a *sarvatantrasvatantra* is "one who can write confidently and authoritatively in any field but who is the master of every tradition rather than its servant".[17] In Nīlakaṇṭha's hands, this ideal takes a poetic turn, becoming the *poet* who masters all sciences. This shift is evident both in his predominantly literary projects and in his poetic style, which—as we began to see—involves constant incorporation and negotiation of scientific language within the poetic medium. Note that this ideal sits well with the poet who can weave all doctrines into his poetry, with no need for commentaries (I use the masculine pronoun as I am not aware of *sarvatantrasvatantra* poetesses).

The shift toward the *sarvatantrasvatantra* poet is not only evident in Nīlakaṇṭha's praxis: it was also explicitly acknowledged in the application of the epithet to Nīlakaṇṭha by his student, Rāmabhadra, who wrote:

> The ability to string together rasa-full words appears even for someone who visited, just once, the classroom of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣiṭa, who through his uncommon independence (*asādhāraṇena svātantryeṇa*) explained that all the different Sanskrit disciplines (*sarva-tantrāṇi*) are nothing but Brahma's wife Sarasvatī; taking his form, she descended secretly to earth to vivify the thin shoot of true poetry, which bad poets have entirely destroyed. How much more, then, should this be said of poet Rāmabhadra, who is his own student, and who is especially intent on revering him?[18]

---

[17] Yigal Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory: Appayya Dīkṣita Through the Ages," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 6; Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea, *First Words, Last Words: New Theories for Reading Old Texts in Sixteenth-Century India*, Religion in Translation (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 84–85.

[18] *tasya paricita-bhūyiṣṭha-niṣṭhura-kaiyyaṭa-vacana-saṃparka-karkaśa-vākya-kramasya kathaṃ sarasa-pada-saṃdarbhe'pi prāgalbhyam iti. Sūtradhāra - yat kiṃcit etat kiṃ na paśyasi? samantanto'pi duṣkavibhir upahatasya sarasa-kavitā-kandalasya punar ujjīvanāya dharaṇyāṃ gūḍham avatīrṇāṃ caturmukha-vara-varṇinīm ātmarūpety asādhāraṇena sarva-tantrāṇi svātantryeṇa vivṛṇvatāṃ nīlakaṇṭha-makhināṃ sadasi sakṛt praviṣṭasyāpi samullasati sarasa-pada-saṃdarbhavaidagdhī. asya punaḥ kaves tadīya-śiṣyasya viśiṣiya tad-bhajanānuraktasya kimu vaktavyam. Śṛngāratilakabhāṇa* [*Śṛngāra*] *of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita,* Kāvyamāla 44 (Bombay: Nirnayasagara Press, 1894), introduction. See related discussion of this representation of Nīlakaṇṭha's in ch. two. My translation takes some liberty in posing that the goddess took Nīlakaṇṭha's form, as the prose is slightly ambigous here: Nīlakaṇṭha is said to interpret all doctrines *as* the goddess in the accusative (*caturmukha-vara-varṇinīm... sarva-tantrāṇi svātantryeṇa vivṛṇvatāṃ*) but the intervening adjective *ātmarūpety* describing the goddess strongly implies that it is Nīlakaṇṭha's form that she takes. There is a

Rāmabhadra ascribes the well-known epithet to Nīlakaṇṭha in a slightly different formulation (*sarva-tantrāṇi svātantryeṇa*), marking the innovative take on the term that he ascribes to Nīlakaṇṭha. The latter's independence is also performed 'uncommonly': here is a statement about the bold and innovative voice of Nīlakaṇṭha, staged through his adherence to authoritative tradition. Nīlakaṇṭha is further said to have regarded *poetry* as the mother of all disciplines, as well as taking her form. If Appayya's gloss of the term had nothing to do with poetry, Rāmabhadra's description of his teacher clearly links the two. He is identified as the Goddess of Speech whose sole mission is to rectify Sanskrit poetry. We will have the chance to reflect on the role of the theme of bad poets for Nīlakaṇṭha: Rāmabhadra too recognizes its centrality when describing him. Nīlakaṇṭha's son Gīrvāṇendra presents his father in very similar terms in the prologue to his own *bhāṇa*: Nīlakaṇṭha is the renowned Goddess incarnate, and he has explained, on his own, all systems of knowledge in a manifold and independent manner.[19]

The entirety of the Sanskrit disciplines can be embodied by the sort of poetry that Nīlakaṇṭha is promoting. Nīlakaṇṭha does not ascribe the title to himself: that is not an available cultural possibility. Appayya too applied it only to Vedānta Deśika, while perhaps thinking of himself, as Bronner suggests. But Nīlakṇṭha does mention the term in a way that is relevant to this discussion in his *Sabhārañjana*[20], one of his *subhāṣita* collections, which shares many topical similarities with his manifestos:

---

trope of poets as incarnations of the Goddess Sarasvatī, for instance in Telugu poetry. See Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry* (University of California Press, 2002),1–2.

[19] *...svātantryaṃ vividhaṃ vivṛṇvati nijaṃ sarvāsu vidyāsv api.....bhagavatyāḥ paradevatāyā eva puruṣāvatārasya pavitrakīrter nīlakaṇṭhamakhinas*. P. P. Subrahmanya Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahāl Library, Tanjore*, vol. IIX (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1928), 3598.

[20] "Sabhārañjana Śatakam of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,"ed., Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Nilakantha Diksita* (Pondicherry: Institut Francais D'indologie, 1967), 27–45.

āñjasyaṃ vyavahārāṇām ārjavaṃ paramaṃ dhiyām
svātantryam api tantreṣu sūte kāvya-pariśramaḥ (*Sabhārañjana,* v. 15)

The effort of writing poetry makes you honest in action,
sincere in thought, even
independent in all doctrines.

This is a rare attestation of Nīlakaṇṭha's own usage of the term. This verse states openly that writing poetry makes you a scholar who is "independent in all doctrines." This is not a statement that scholars of the tradition such as his great uncle would have readily approved of. But for Nīlakaṇṭha, poetry induces independent scholarship. It makes one into a better scholar and a better person. And it involves independence of voice that has to do with the poetic license to play with a long-lasting authoritative tradition. A poet, Nīlakaṇṭha says quite clearly, can express himself freely. As we shall see, this is a major part of what makes poetry superior, a recurring discussion of the manifestos that I will now survey.

Why poetry? On catchy scholasticisms that enter the heart

Nīlakaṇṭha's reflections on the superiority of Sanskrit poetry spelled out against other genres, mediums, and languages, govern about one-third of the *Līlā*'s introduction. These verses' topics and tone throw light on Nīlakaṇṭha's views on poetry. These include an emphasis on what we have seen thus far: what poetry can do to the scholastic idiom of poetics by using key terms from the tradition of poetics. The following verse opens the theme of the argument *for* poetry in the *Līlā*'s introduction:

asmin mahaty astamitānya-vedye visṛtvare vīci-taraṅga-rītyā
kāvya-dhvanau jāgrati deha-bhājāṃ karṇaṃ viśeyuḥ katham anya-śabdāḥ (*Līlā*, v. 1.10)

It spreads like a sequence of waves and silences anything else we might know.
As the great ring of literature reverberates,

how can any other sound possibly find its way
to the ears of sentient beings?

Nīlakaṇṭha's manifesto effectively opens with the notion of *dhvani,* influentially understood as the essence of poetry in canonical definitions of poetics.[21] Moreover, the phrase *astamitānya-vedye,* "silencing everything else we might know," paraphrases a well-known formulation of Mammaṭa's.[22] But despite this learned reference, this verse is far from a scholarly intervention: instead of defining or discussing *dhvani,* Nīlakaṇṭha takes its centrality for granted and pairs it, while drawing on its literal meaning, with other charged notions such as *rīti* (here, "sequence," but also the different possible styles of poetry). The verse seems to be stripping these loaded terms of their inherited, contested, and convoluted meanings, using their literal meaning (which in the advanced discourse of poetics are often ignored) to form the image of reverberating waves. Just enough of their conventional meanings from the tradition is left to suggest the superiority of literature over all other pieces of knowledge. This technique of stripping notions of their convoluted histories of thought and rethinking them is an important feature of Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic signature.[23] Through Nīlakaṇṭha's defense of the genre, we are introduced to his preferred tone of literature: it is highly informed, lighthearted, and provocative. To cite another argument for poetry:

karṇaṃ gataṃ śuṣyati karṇa eva saṃgītakaṃ saikata-vāri-rītyā
ānandayaty antar anupraviśya sūktiḥ kaver eva sudhā-sagandhā (*Līlā* v. 1.17)

It reaches the ear, and dries on its surface;
A musical performance is a wave, crashing onto shore.

[21] The notion of *dhvani* opens the chapter following the introductory verses, in *Līlā* 1.8–9. For an introduction to the concept and history of *dhvani* and what was termed the "*dhvani* turn" in Indian poetics with Ānandavardhana's, which Nīlakaṇṭha undoubtedly has in mind when giving his own takes on the term, see Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics* and Lawrence McCrea, "One 'Resonance' and Its Reverberations: Two Cultures in Indian Epistemology of Aesthetic Meaning," in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Arindam Chakrabarti (England: Bloomsbury, 2016), 25–40.
[22] Mammaṭa's formulation (borrowing from Abhinavagupta) is *vigalitavedyāntara*, Ganganatha Jha, *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa,* commentary on 1.2. I thank Andrew Ollett for this reference.
[23] See my discussion of his similar employment of *prapatti* in chapter three, "On the self in self-surrender".

The beautiful word of a true poet alone makes its way into the heart
and gladdens it. It smells like nectar.

Unlike a musical concert, poetry lingers. It can enter the heart with its synaesthetic smell of immortality. This verse too features a possible reference to an old debate in Sanskrit poetics, revolving around the ability of wordless musical performances to convey aesthetic emotion.[24] This verse is part of a sequential thread within the manifesto, as the description of *dhvani* from v. 10 cited above, which 'spreads like a sequence of waves' (*vīci-taraṅga-rītyā),* is still present enough in the audience's mind to be contrasted with the shore-crashing waves of music. This serves to deepen the image of the different wave-lengths, so to speak, of music and literature. It is another good example of Nīlakaṇṭha's recasting of śāstric terms within the generally episodic nature of the introduction. Here is yet another one:

tantrāntareṣu pratipādyamānāḥ te te padārthāḥ nanu te ta eva
nirveda-bhī-śoka-jugupsitāny apy āyānti sāhitya-pade rasatvam (*Līlā* v. 1.22)

In other disciplines, every meaning of a word is investigated,
and simply remains as it was.
But with poetry, even indifference, fear, sorrow, and disgust
can transform into *rasa*.

This is a basic caricature of the *rasa* theory, due to which literature can transform raw emotions into the refined sensation of rasa. By contrast, a well-intended sound effect accompanies the tedious śāstric inquiries into every word, or topic (*nanu te ta eva*). This rough statement of the rasa theory, in line with the project's tendency to produce simple one-liner references to the theory of poetics, is designed to communicate the ability of poetry to influence the everyday world and dramatically transform it at will.

[24] Ānandavardhana admits that wordless musical performance can possess the power of suggestion (*vyañjakatva)* and convey rasa, though he wishes to reserve a special power for semanticized language. See the related debate in Bhattacharya, *Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana*, 3.33; I thank Whitney Cox for this reference.

While this theme of poetry's ability to theorize itself takes up much of Nīlakaṇṭha's arguments for poetry, he does not limit poetry's sphere of intervention to poetics:

> *stotuṃ pravṛttā śrutir īśvaraṃ hi na śābdikaṃ prāha na tārkikaṃ vā*
> *brute tu tāvat kavir ity abhīkṣṇām kāṣṭhā parā sā kavitā tato naḥ* (*Līlā,* v. 1.16)
>
> When the Veda seeks to praise God, it is not as a grammarian, nor as a logician.
> Rather, it constantly calls Him "poet":
> the ultimate goal of our existence
> is clearly poetry!

This verse alludes to a famous statement from the Vedic textual corpus to declare that the author's ultimate goal in life is poetry: *kāṣṭhā parā sā kavitā tato naḥ*.[25] The line of provocation continues: the authoritative scriptures are merely an auxiliary of poetry, which is an aim in itself, and the worthiest one at that. This notion governs this corpus of poetry, to the point that Rāmabhadra's elaborate corpus of hymns to his personal God Rāma repeatedly states that poetry itself is the object, rather than the means, of devotion. Poetry is also the best genre because it is not trivial:

> *gāyanti vīṇā api veṇavo 'pi jānanti bālāḥ paśavo 'pi cedam*
> *kāvyāni kartum ca parīkṣituṃ ca dvitrāḥ bhaveyur na tu vā bhaveyuḥ* (*Līlā*, v. 1.14)
>
> Vinas sing, flutes do too; Children, even beasts, know as much.
> But to compose, and to understand poetry
> is reserved for two or three people, or rather
> for no one at all.

Even though our authors rarely spoke to this fact, writing in the kind of 'cosmopolitan' idioms they inherited and reproduced anew actively demarcated their audience. Nīlakaṇṭha was confident enough to raise it as an existing tension, or joke. It is plausible that Nīlakaṇṭha is in

[25] God as *kaviṃ kavīnāṃ,* poet of poets, is found in several stotras, such as *Ṛgveda* 2.23.1 beginning with *gaṇānāṃ tvā gaṇapatiṃ havāmahe kaviṃ kaviṇām*. Already in *Ṛgveda* 1.1.5, Agni is called *kavikratuḥ, having a poet's insight*. *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, ed., F. Max Muller, 1st Indian edition (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1965).

fact complimenting his audience for being able to understand his learned poetry, while simultaneously commenting on the narrow circulation and elitism of his literature. Note in this regard that writing and reading are closely related actions: the intended audience members are poets themselves, or at least part of the filiative milieu that has the intellectual and social *adhikāra,* or capital, to be included. This statement reinforces Nīlakaṇṭha's statements of independent authorship seen thus far, painting an ethos of an author who needs no outside authority other than himself and the bound tradition from which he writes.

Yet, like other statements in this manifesto, the exclusivity in this statement should not be taken at face value. The inaccessibility of poetry is a well-used trope,[26] and the *Līlā* in general, and all the more its introduction, seem to aim instead at clarity and accessibility.[27] Nīlakaṇṭha makes a point about the accessibility inherent to Śiva of Madurai and the 64 games in the very last chapter of this work, as stated by the gods praising Śiva.[28] The same goes for the implied

[26] One influential instance from the neighboring world of Kaṇṇaḍa literature is from the *Kavirājamārgam*, 1.15–17: "The person who can disclose the ideas of one person, in the way they intend, and communicate them to others, is a competent speaker. The person who is capable of communicating a vast meaning in brief is even more clever than them. The person who knows how to arrange their speech in a fitting meter is more skillful than them. The person who knows how to produce works of the Great Path without hesitation is the most learned of all. Among the people spread over the surface of the earth, there are few who are competent speakers. Among them, those who know the rules, that is to say, the principles of faultless poetry, are fewer still—the best of the best poets." Translation by Sarah Pierce Taylor and Andrew Ollett; I thank the latter for suggesting and sharing this reference with me. A similar anonymous *subhāṣita* verse refers to the savoring of poetry that requires thought versus the immediate joy of music: "The Goddess of Arts has two breasts. One is delicious at first tasting. The other becomes so when you chew on it. *saṅgītaṃ sāhityaṃ ca sarasvatyāḥ stana-dvayam. ekam āpāta-madhuram anyad ālocanāmṛtam.*Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (University of California Press, 1998), 61. Unlike Nīlakaṇṭha's formulation, there is no apparent bias toward literature here.

[27] I base this assesement on my own reading of the *Līlā,* which often reads like a classical poem in terms of depictions of subject matter and sophistication of verse, but it is generally more straightforward and has a lighter pace in comparison with his other longer poems. Another indication for the relative accessibility of this text is that it lacks a premodern commentary, unlike the *Vijaya* for instance; See Tubb, 'Something New in the Air', p. 559–560 for a discussion of the modern paradox of meanings lost on us precisely due to their premodern accessibility, which obviated the need for a commentary, in the context of Abhinanda's Ramacaritam.

[28] *kaivalya-dānāya kṛta-pratijñau kāśīpatiḥ pāṇḍyapatir yuvāṃ dvau. śiṣyaikaviśrāntam amuṣya dānaṃ sārvatrikaṃ tāvakam eva śambho.* (*Līlā*, v. 22.56) "The two of you, lord of Kāśī and lord of Pāṇḍyas, have promised to grant liberation. However—as far as he is concerned, this ultimate freedom is reserved for students, while yours, Śambhu, is generally applicable to everybody!"

critique of music: we can only assume that the rise of Carnatic music in the nearby Thanjavur court was part of his and his audiences' intellectual and experiential world, especially given that the great theorist of music, Veṅkaṭamakhin, was his admired teacher. I will soon reflect on Nīlakaṇṭha's possible degrees of sincerity in his statements, and this is an important quality of his authorial voice. Here is one final argument:

> *vyāmohayantī vividhair vacobhiḥ vyāvartayanty anya-kalāsu dṛṣṭim*
> *kālaṃ mahāntaṃ kṣaṇavan nayantī kanteva dakṣā kavitā dhinoti* (*Līlā,* v. 1.24)
>
> She mesmerizes the eye with her various words,
> averts it from all other arts.
> She makes a long time seem as
> a moment.
> Like an experienced lover,
> poetry is delightful.

Poetry enters the heart and averts the gaze from all other arts. It does this through its unique variance of words (*vividhair vacobhiḥ)*; this is a hint at Nīlakaṇṭha's fondness of variegation of register, an aesthetic I elaborate on in the next chapter, which he obliquely terms 'high-and-low' (*uccāvaca*).

We have seen in this selection of verses how Nīlakaṇṭha often uses the pattern of speaking for poetry against other mediums and genres to produce catchy scholastic references: his own simplified, hyper-learned yet almost de-contextualized versions of key poetic notions. We have also seen him pose his own version of well-known tropes and ideas about poetry, such as its power to operate on the world (and by extension, the poet's analogy with the creator), the wink at the exclusivity of his sophisticated poetry, and the sheer delight that poetry offers to its connoisseurs. The mere accumulation of these verses—we have sampled just a few of them—grants that Nīlakaṇṭha is sketching an argument for poetry, albeit in a sporadic manner that is markedly different in style from a śāstric argument.

Nīlakaṇṭha's answers to the question "why poetry?" stand out from previous answers that the tradition of poetics has given, which tended to point to the ethical or normative dimensions of the poetic craft.[29] We heard echoes of these answers above, but for Nīlakaṇṭha, it is mostly about the special joy of writing and reading or hearing poetry. As the epitome of all other arts and disciplines, it is most aesthetically and intellectually gratifying, because it involves experiencing a depth of knowledge like no other discipline. It thus lingers for a long time, and it allows the poet and his audience unprecedented freedom to remake and unmake rigid inherited truths and to challenge the tradition with original streaks from within, on ambiguous and playful grounds.

Lastly, his arguments for poetry are markedly free of angst. Mentioning 'competing' mediums and genres such as other art forms and scholastic writing which were flourishing around him in the Thanjavur court, he is far from defensive, but rather confident, and witty. I propose that these defenses are a way for him to discursively craft his signature wink and poetic philosophy while retaining a conventionally impersonal voice.[30] This may explain at least part of his motivation for a sustained argument for poetry: he does not have available models with

---

[29] See Sheldon Pollock, "The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, no. 1/2 (2001): 197–229,
wherein it is argued that Bhoja's formulations, which highlighted the moral and social basis of literary theory, are eminent to the tradition of poetics, even when largely denied by the theoriests of the "dhvani turn". I thank Andrew Ollett for guidance in this comparison. Compare also with Jagganātha Pāṇḍitarāja's reasons for engaging with poetry, identified by Pollock in this article as a later voice that continues the normative views emblematic of Bhoja's work, in *Rasagaṅgādhara* 1.9 (which in turn converse with the opening of Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa*): *kīrti-paramahlāda-guru-rāja-devatā-prasādāt ādy aneka-prayojanakasya jānakasya kāvyasaya;* "Knowledge of poetry results in many things such as fame, extreme bliss, and appreciation by teachers, kings and gods..." Cited in Norman Sjoman, "Jagannātha's Definition of Poetry: An Analysis of the Introductory Verses of Rasagangādhara and the Definition of Poetry," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1981): 371.

[30] As a comparison in point, Jeanine Johnson argues for the rise of poetic defenses in verse by modern American poets, asking *why poetry*. Johnson's overall argument can be divided into two parts: the first, largely synchronic, is that "apology in poetry is, at base, a function of lyric introspection". This, I think, is what Nīlakaṇṭha is doing in his "defenses". Her second argument concerns the "modern problem of poetry's cultural obsolescence", as the primary generator of a boom of poetic defenses in American poems of the twentieth century. Jeannine Johnson, *Why Write Poetry?: Modern Poets Defending Their Art* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 18, 32. Nīlakaṇṭha is a far cry from the socio-political anxiety that governs the poetic apologies Johnson surveys: by contrast, he uses these stages for a confident display of his style.

which to insert himself directly. Nor would he be interested in such explicit insertions, which are far from the collective and subtle style with which individual authorship is possible or valuable in Nīlakaṇṭha's inherited notions of Sanskrit poetry. Nīlakaṇṭha's arguments for poetry are for (his) poetry. It is a poetry that values the bracketed, encoded presence of the author's pen.

Insincerity, double-voice, and *vyaṅgya*

Following what we have seen thus far, I will now try to qualify Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic voice. How may we characterize the freedom with which he treats the entirety of the Sanskrit tradition? The following verse will aid us in reflecting on his signature wink.

> *vidvat-priyaṃ vyaṅgya-pathaṃ vyatītya śabdārtha-citreṣu kaler vilāsāt*
> *prāpto 'nurāgo nigamān upekṣya bhāṣā-prabandheṣv iva pāmarāṇām* (*Līlā*, v. 1.37)
>
> Seduced by the kali age, people turn away from the path of suggestion,
> cherished by the wise, and develop a passion for flashy words and meanings,
> just like those idiots who desert the Veda
> in favor of poetic compositions in vernacular languages.

This verse presents an oblique and rare acknowledgment of Nīlakaṇṭha's life during the 'vernacular millennium': an era that saw the rise of literary forms of local languages throughout the Indian subcontinent, accompanied by the decline of Sanskrit as a cosmopolitan language. Nīlakaṇṭha at the very least spoke, if not read, languages other than Sanskrit and Prakrit, primarily Tamil, plausibly also Telugu, Kannada or Malayalam, but his literature seldom betrays this fact. This is a feature of the cosmopolitan ethos that our authors subscribe to, which involves a loud silence regarding much of the cultural and social developments around them. But in this rare instance, we again hear not anxiety but a happy reflection on the role of (Nīlakaṇṭha's) poetry in the world around him.

And the self-irony is hard to miss: this unfavorable mention of the vernaculars appears in Nīlakaṇṭha's version of the foundational myth of Tamil poetry, which circulated primarily in Tamil.[31] This was not a trivial choice for Nīlakaṇṭha, whose other long poems are based on classical Puranic narratives. It follows that he himself can be reasonably identified as one of those idiots who engage with vernacular compositions. The statement is subtle and ambiguous enough to maintain a double voice, an open-ended interpretation: how serious is this statement? How blunt is the self-irony? This subversive tone can be applied further: we have seen that within this very introduction Nīlakaṇṭha provocatively 'abandons' the Veda time and again.[32] That this verse is governed by a subversive tone, easily lost over time, is strengthened through a juxtaposition with a similar and less ambiguous wink composed by Rāmabhadra, his close student, who echoes the traditional aversion to *yamaka* techniques of alliteration while employing them.[33]

And again, the manifesto restates truisms from the field of poetics in free and rather unpredictable ways: the verse builds on a well-known normative gradation from within Sanskrit poetics, due to which *vyaṅgya* or suggestion is a higher-level feat, versus the degradation of "flashy" poetry that deals with effects of sound and form.[34] But in the context of the ironic

---

[31] As noted in Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 166. I discuss the role of the kaliyuga in this verse in the conclusion.
[32] See the relevant discussion of *Līlā* 1.3 whence the Vedas' inferiority to the eyes of the Goddess is discussed as a theme in Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 8.
[33] *yamaka-hatābhā grāvā-svādā jagad-īśa ghoratā-bhāg-rāvāḥ śrīrāma kṣantuṃ gās tavocitaṃ māmikāḥ samakṣaṃ tuṅgāḥ.* "Rāmacitrastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6, 1932, 122–35, v. 57. "Their brilliance is slain by *yamakas*, they taste like stones, and their sounds are full of horror. Śrīrāma, Lord of the World—please bear, as you usually do, with my obviously "lofty" words." The apology for using yamakas throughout the hymn is noted with a yamaka (underlined in the verse), as noted in A. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study* (The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002),157, fn 8. Compare also Nīlakaṇṭha's own statement regarding the proposterous amount of Krishna-themed poetry, given that he himself has a poem about Krishna (the *Mukunda Vilāsa*), as I discuss in the introduction.
[34] This well received gradation was perhaps coined by Ānandavardhana and often recycled in modern Sanskrit evaluations. It is worth noting, however, that Ānandavardhana composed a text based on *citra* techniques in his *Devīśataka* hymn to the goddess; See Daniel H. H. Ingalls, "Ānandavardhana's Devīśataka," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 565–75, who explains this poet's deviation from his own theory with

analogy between *citra* or flashy literature and vernacular compositions, the statement seems to be more about playing with, and questioning inherited patterns from the history of Sanskrit poetics, rather than a restatement of these evaluations, which everyone in his audience knows. Despite the rough adherence to canonical definitions of vyaṅgya, Nīlakaṇṭha's own poetry exemplifies a new meaning of *vyaṅgyapatha*: or "path of suggestion", which he performs in this verse and throughout these manifestos. It is about a playful, ironic double voice, that his poetry constantly seeks.

The term *vyaṅgya* has come to mean "irony" or "sarcasm" in several modern Indian languages.[35] The genealogy of these modern terms is most plausibly the result of translation processes influenced by the colonial encounter, in which western terms such as irony and sarcasm were approximated with existing vocabulary. And yet, I wonder if Nīlakaṇṭha is something of a forerunner to the transition of these terms from their learned poetic origins into their modern dictionary meanings. His verses nod at the audience member who can grasp the subtle intertexts, and building on this familiarity, they recontextualize these terms in ways that invite a catchy, every-day use. They seem to offer these scholastic terms as ready-to-hand, de-scholarized notions. My thoughts about this are inspired by the evolution of the word *viḍambaṇa*, featured in the title of Nīlakaṇṭha's *Kaliviḍambaṇa,* Or "Mockery of the Kali Yuga"; *viḍambaṇa*

---

the special "license" that the goddess gave him to execute his special talent for these feats. It anyways seems to me that the rigid interpertations of Ānandavardhana's theory seem to have stiffened in time, and that Nīlakaṇṭha calls out this rigidness as part of his wink toward poetic theory. The above verse is part of a mini-sequence in praise of *vyaṅgya,* or suggestion within the manifesto.

[35] Tamil: "Viyaṅkiyam," in *The Tamil Lexicon* (University of Madras, 36 1924): "2. Wit, irony, sarcasm, *kuttalāṉa vārttai*," Hindi: Mahendra Caturvedi, "Vyaṅgya," in *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1970): "suggestion; irony, sarcasm, innuendo; caricature", Kannada: Ferdinand Kittel, "Vyaṅgya," in *Kannada-English Dictionary* (Madras: University of Madras, 1968-71): "allusive language or insinuation, sarcasm, covert expression of suspicion or contempt, etc.", or Telugu: Charles Philip Brown, "Vyaṅgyamu," in *Telugu English Dictionary* (Madras, 1798): "Sarcasm, irony, covert expression of contempt".

is the modern Hindi and Marathi for *parody* or *irony*.[36] This is Nīlakaṇṭha's best-known work, which circulated extensively in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. Could it have played a role in the cultural-linguistic evolution of this modern meaning?[37]

I am not suggesting here a comparative analysis with the history of scholarly interpretation of the western terms "irony" or "parody". I use these categories as heuristics for lack of equivalent theoretical terms that our authors actually used, and for their available meanings for the modern English speaker.[38] It is crucial to qualify Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic framework of aesthetics with the underdetermined, double-voiced forces inherent in his manifestos, which reflect his poetic voice at large. These more relevantly display some affinities with strong parodical elements in Telugu works from the neighboring Nāyaka courts.[39] But they

---

[36] Hindi: Hardev Bahri, "Viḍambaṇā," in *Learner's Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Rajapala, 1989): "Irony, mockery", or Mahendra Caturvedi, "Viḍambaṇākāvya," in *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979): "parody", Marathi: T.S Molesworth, "Viḍamban," in *A Dictionary, Marathi and English* (Bombay: Education Society Press, 1857): "1 Mocking, ridiculing, deriding. 2 Imitating; assuming the appearance, form, or character of."

[37] The Kaliviḍambaṇa was printed ten times and translated into Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and Hindi in the short time-span between 1859 and 1911; it has over 30 documented manuscripts in the Catalogus Catalogorum alone, spread throughout the subcontinent (including a copy of the famous library of Kavīndrācarya of Benares); V. Raghavan, ed., *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, vol. 3 (University of Madras, 1967), 230. It was also translated by V. Raghavan into English under the name "A Satire on the Present Age" in 1970. V. Raghavan, trans., "Kalividambana of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: A Satire on the Present Age," *Indian Literature* 13, no. 2 (1970): 76–86. Raghavan prefaced the translation with a short note, characterizing Nīlakaṇṭha as "perhaps the most gifted of the South Indian poets...wit and satire are his forte".

[38] There are various points that may be offered in comparison in the western history of the understandings of parody. Bakhtin's formulations of the double-voice are closely linked with his notion of dialogism and parody: "Someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume anew (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them; that is, they become double-voiced". Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Heteroglot Novel," in *The Bakhtin Reader*, ed. Pam Morris (Britain: Arnold Publishers, 1994), 106. For a summary of Bakhtin's evolving thought on parody, see Lars Kleberg, "Parody and Double-Voiced Discourse: On the Language Philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin," in *Dialogue and Technology: Art and Knowledge*, ed. Bo Göranzon and Magnus Florin (London: Springer, 1991), 95–102. We can also easily find general relevant theoretical definitions in formalist definitions of Irony, for instance Wilson and Sperber's definition of "a case of echoic mention" which relies on the analytical distinction of use (the intended reference of a word) and mention (the reference of the word itself). Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," in *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 295–318. However, the convoluted histories of these terms, and their focus on modern and western genres and discourses, ultimately do little to nuance the understanding of Nīlakaṇṭha's voice.

[39] Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*. While Nīlakaṇṭha's voice in these introductions and his poetry is quite distinct from the explicitly subversive and sexual contents in Telugu compositions such as the *Tārāśaśāṅkavijayamu* and the *Annadānamahānāṭakamu*, the authors of *Symbols of Substance* identify about the former a tendency of parody of different scholastic and devotional registers (161) and about the latter, which they

are also qualitatively unique, as they have to do with the depth of Sanskrit knowledge that poetry can cover.

Another closely relevant notion comes from Yigal Bronner and Larry McCrea recent proposistion that influential scholastic debates in early modern Sanskrit hermeneutics stand out for a novel tendency of scholars to be deliberately insincere. This has to do with sectarian and philosophical allies and enemies with whom each thinker either agrees or contends institutionally, while in effect agreeing with a fierce opponent, or diverging from a valued predecessor. Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle and avowed inspiration, is a lead figure in Bronner and McCrea's thesis.[40] We have seen several examples of playful insincerity in Nīlakaṇṭha's manifestos, from irreverent claims toward the Veda, the Goddess, or the topic of his own poem. In general, when writing manifestos that playfully decontextualize the vocabulary of Sanskrit poetics, Nīlakaṇṭha seems to align with those early modern pandits who see the complex historical baggage as an opportunity, and a poetic one at that. He suggests that poetics can be done through the suggestive, insincere, ironic gist of poetry.

By way of a final demonstration of this poetic feature, which allows me to gesture toward the application of Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic program in his students' work as well, here is one straightforward example of double-voiced insincerity from Rāmabhadra's *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* (hereafter, *Śṛṅgāra)*. It is a clear presentation of human trafficking, highly problematic for any reader who vaguely shares feminist and humanist sensibilities. At the very least, these presentations form a part of the literary imagination of these authors, who wrote from within a homogenous and exclusive male, nominally heterosexual world. The genre of *bhāṇa,* an erotic

define as an "echo-text," deep parodical conversations with other genres at court, as well as its inherent ambiguity and self-irony (214–16) all roughly relevant to Nīlakaṇṭha's thought-world.

[40] Bronner and McCrea, *First Words, Last Words*.

stage-play in which a single actor narrates his adventures of the day, became extremely popular in the time and place that this dissertation is set.[41] One of the things that may have been appealing to authors and audiences is the built-in double-voiced potential of the genre, as the actor enacts all the characters he meets, including his friends, lovers and rivals.[42]

The situation is as follows: The *bhāṇa*'s protagonist, Bhujaṅgaśekhara (let's call him Bhujaṅga) meets his friend, who is training and selling dancing courtesans to make a living. He presents the protagonist with two sisters: the first, Candralekhā, is the younger, inexperienced one, and the second, Citralekhā, is the older sister who embodies the prototype of the *prauḍhā,* the woman experienced in matters of love. At this point of the narrative, the protagonist had just gotten himself out of a legal entanglement over such a contract with the madam of his ex-courtesan-wife through the help of his friend, a biased judge who is also present in this scene and whom he addresses as *ārya* ("noble sir"). Following a description of the "advantages" of each of them as a chosen wife-by-contract,[43] their teacher cum seller recommends that the protagonist choose Citralekhā, the more experienced sister, who can provide immediate sexual pleasure (she is *sadyo-bhoga-kṣamā*). The protagonist replies:

> *maivam vādīḥ:*
> *rata-kṣamāyāḥ prauḍhāyā varaṃ mugdhā ratākṣamā*
> *yato bhogaḥ kramāl labhyaḥ prauḍhā-madhyamayor api* (*Śṛṅgāra,* v. 125)
>
> *tac candralekhaiva kalatrī kariṣyate*

---

[41] There are numerous authors who are affiliated with Nīlakaṇṭha who compose *bhāṇa*s, beginning with his son Gīrvāṇendra, his student Rāmabhadra, and numerous other writers in their intellectual surroundings at the court agrahara. See Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, 3565–3616.

[42] *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* [*Śṛṅgāra*] of *Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, eds., Pandit Śivadatta and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 44 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1894). Whitney Cox and I discuss this piece and what we take as its subtle ironic or self-conscious gaps between the narrator's view of the world and the author's. Talia Ariav and Whitney Cox, "On Unresolved Tensions in Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2022): 47–71.

[43] These *bhāṇa*s often mention the marriage agreement with courtesans through the *kalapatra* contract; this may be related to a practice on ground called *katti kalyāṇam* or "sword marriage" between courtesans and kings in Maratha Thanjavur; see Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*, 34–36. The relationship between the two merits further research.

Don't say this—

The innocent woman, still unskilled in love,
tops the experienced woman who is skilled in love,
since sexual pleasure should be obtained gradually
both with a mature woman, or a teenage girl.

So, I choose Candralekhā for my wife!

The protagonist gives a proverbial-sounding verse about the superiority of the inexperienced woman, which reads like either a citation or a parody of a would-be citation from the notional world of *Kāmaśāstra*. The proverbial idiom of the *subhāṣita* genre usually involves incorporating a certain value judgment to suit a situation within the world.[44] But how sincere is the protagonist's citation here? Take a look at the ensuing dialogue (in the *bhāṇa*, each time the protagonist speaks as someone else he employs the formula *kim bravīṣi*, or "what are you saying?" before voicing the character).

Mitravinda, kiṃ bravīṣi--
"adya saphalam asyā janma mad-avalambanam ca" iti
ārya, kiṃ bravīṣi—"prayaccha kalatra-patram avilambam asyai" iti
Citralekhām ānīya śvaḥ prabhāte tathā kartāsmi

Mitravinda, what are you saying?
"Her birth and all my supporting her just became worth it!"

And what are you saying, noble *Ārya*?
"present her a contract without delay!"

Bhujaṅgaśekhara: I will take **Citralekhā** tomorrow morning, and do just that!

[44] Daud Ali discusses the function of *subhāṣitas* as citable vignettes in relevant dialogic situations. He thus cites a situation from the *Pañcatantra*, where a jackal is warned against serving kings with a subhāṣita verse and replies with a counter-verse that supports his decision to help a king. In general, Ali concludes, "one important aspect of ethical sophistication was not simply knowing subhāṣitas, but knowing how to use them in everyday conversation, whether in advising friends or explaining one's own ethical views". Ali, "The Subhasita as an Artifact of Ethical Life in Medieval India," 34, 36.

The protagonist enjoys reversing his decision through an orchestrated slip-of-the-tongue. After setting the stage for the "right" choice, framed by the legal and economical stakes that his friends bring to the table, he does "just that": namely, the exact opposite of what he stated is right to do. This is one small example of the freedom that these authors find in poetry. It allows them to contextualize and play with the allegedly generic and ahistorical values of judgment, a tension that we have seen Nīlakaṇṭha pose throughout his proverb-like manifestos. People do not exactly act "just as" they speak, and for Nīlakaṇṭha and his poetic milieu this makes poetry superior.

This writing, I should add, invests a great deal of trust in its audience. It is an aesthetic principle that can only exist with a well-versed crowd. As I will argue in the rest of this thesis, Nīlakaṇṭha's filiative audience is integral to his aesthetic program. Those of us who are not immediate candidates to be included in the 3–4 people who can read this literature (to cite Nīlakaṇṭha's miserly estimation), removed from them in time, place, language, and gender, can make an effort (in my case, this often necessitated the help of the informed readers on my committee) to sense at least a part of his subtle winks.

We will encounter more examples of insincere, *vyaṅgya* poetry below, on inspecting Nīlakaṇṭha's sensitivity to the topic of bad poets and especially bad critics, who miss out on all the double-voiced subtleties that poetry is meant to perform.

The *sangha* plank of Sanskrit poetry: On mean critics and bad poets

More than a quarter of the introduction to the *Līlā* is devoted to bad poets and bad critics, and in that of the *Gaṅgā*, roughly three quarters are devoted to this theme.[45] Nīlakaṇṭha raises

[45] In the *Līlā,* these are verses 1.15, 35, 40–68, 73, 75–6 out of 80, not counting the *maṅgala* verses. In the *Gaṅgā,* the count is up to the verses beginning the bio-genealogical information (1.38), which I survey in the next chapter,

this theme in many of his texts. His name has even become identified with the theme of bad poets and critics, as is evident in the way his students remember and cite him.[46] What is the role of this theme in his program of poetry, and where does this constant preoccupation with the subject come from? Let us first read a selection of such verses:

> *ullaṅghya tantrāntara-saṃpradāyān utprekṣamāṇā jagad anyad anyat*
> *kasmāt bibhītmaḥ kavayo bhavāmaḥ kāvya-jña-daṇḍāt bibhimas tu kāmam* (*Līlā,* v. 1.21)
>
> We transgress the traditions of other disciplines,
> envisioning the world in ever new ways—
> What do we possibly have to fear? We are poets. Then again—
> the pens of critics, we truly are afraid of.

This verse again captures the great power that Nīlakaṇṭha ascribes to poetry and poets, himself emphatically included. It also continues its lighthearted conversation with the tradition of poetics, through the verb *utprekṣ,* "envision", which in scholastic contexts has a well-defined and specific meaning. Here I am concerned with the humorous remark on the frightening effect of "poetry-knowers"—critics and poeticians, on poets like himself. Nīlakaṇṭha casually displays his mastery of Sanskrit grammar, as he presents the two different, but equally valid, forms of the first person plural root *bhī*, "to fear", as taught in Pāṇini's grammar.[47] This grammatical "easter-

---

minus the *maṅgala* verses. The relevant verses are 1.8, 11, 13–28, 30–34, 36–7. The final verse of the *Gaṅgā* (8.94) is also a treatment of duḥkavis and ignorant men.

[46] Two of Nīlakaṇṭha's students, the so-called "younger Cokkanātha" and his brother Atirātra, cite in their prologues v. four from Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nalacaritam* regarding the unjustified critique of modern poets who burn the audiences' ears, as I discuss in chapter four. This image seems to have survived into modern times: a modern Tamil commentary to the *Līlā* explains Nīlakaṇṭha's grudge in the verse about vernacular prabandhas cited above (*Līlā* 1.37) with a story in which Nīlakaṇṭha, as the chair of Tirumalaināyaka's sabhā, was impressed with Parañcoṭi's composition performed in court. He accordingly opened positions equal to his status for Tamil pandits at court, but to his disappointment, he could not find good Tamil poets. They were, so he says to his student Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, interested in obscene kuravanjis and impressed with *etukai* and *monai* (echoing his verse's criticism of *śabdārthacitra*). See appended commentary to S. Jagadisan, trans., *Śiva Līlārṇavam of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (with Tamil Commentary and Translation)* (Bangalore: Sri Mahaperival trust, 2013), 18–19. This image of Nīlakaṇṭha has survived into modern scholarship as well; see, for instance, Phyllis Granoff, "Sarasvati's Sons: Biographies of Poets in Medieval India," *Asiatische Studien* XLIX, no. 2 (1995), 371 fn 31.

[47] *Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*, 1987, ed., S. M. Katre, 6.4.115, 831-2 gives the short substitute phoneme iT as optional for the root bhī.

egg", or encoded references to learned traditions that learned men can take pleasure in, subserves the humorous and double-voiced tone of this verse. His mastery of grammar goes to show that he still clearly subscribes to the grammatical tradition that he "transgressed" as a poet, also that the "expert" poetry-knowers are no more expert than he is. Mostly, it suggests that his fear is insincere. It is a clear signature of the *sarvatantrasvatantra poet*, for whom scientific knowledge is useful mostly as it allows one to compose good poetry. And, one may add, to battle critics:

> *kva nu nāma sabhā rājñāṃ durākṣepaika-śikṣitā*
> *kva nu vācaḥ sudhī-loka-lālanaika-rasāḥ kaveḥ (Gaṅgā,* v. 1.23)
>
> A courtly poetic assembly trained solely in harsh critique,
> are worlds apart from the words of a poet,
> who produces poetic emotion just for the delight
> of learned men.

Here, the parallel use of the word *eka,* "only", serves to stress the difference between critics who are obsessed with finding faults and a poet like himself, who is *just* about producing the kind of sophisticated delight that his poetry is about. It is quite tempting to read this verse as a remark on Nīlakaṇṭha's own life as an independent scholar who acknowledged no patron or courtly context. Or:

> *prācetasa-vyāsa-mukhāḥ kavīndrāḥ prāñco'pi kiṃ duṣkavibhir viraktāḥ*
> *kāvyāni kartuṃ śataśaḥ kṣamās te kathaṃ na ced āsata kāka-vandhyāḥ* (*Līlā*, v. 1.54)
>
> Even the great Vālmīki, Vyāsa, and other great poets who followed,
> Were dismissed by bad poets.
> If this were not the case, how is it that these masters
> who could compose poems by the hundreds
> ended up being mothers
> of a single offspring?

A woman "barren-like-a-crow" (*kākavandhyā*) is a woman who could give birth to a single child only.[48] Here again we are presented with Nīlakaṇṭha's signature doubled speech: on the one hand, it is quite outrageous to state that the mythical authors of the epics composed "only" a single piece: the sheer length of each of these epics is enough for an author's (or a few authors') lifetimes. And in any case, it is not very common to encounter such a teasing comment toward the great master poets of the past and compare them to part-barren women, not to mention the comparison to a crow, known for his poor musical ear. In fact, this might be a reverse compliment that Nīlakaṇṭha's shades of *vyaṅgya* speech enables: good poetry is is not about quantity, but about quality, and about singularity. Further, the historical imagination at play, envisioning these legendary poets' canonization processes, builds another layer to the joke, reflecting on the political conditions that make a poetic canon. Here, it is not poets who produce fame, as the trope has it, but rather bad poets and critics (in Nīlakaṇṭha's treatment, these categories seem to overlap) who shape the tradition of Sanskrit poetry, ever since it was created. Here is a hint I will soon return to—the very tradition of poetry can only survive, however partially, against the backdrop of bad poets and critics. Frustratingly, The latter enjoy themselves immensely:

> *ānandathur brahmavidāṃ yad ekas te vyaṅgya-lābheṣu śataṃ kavīnām*
> *ete sahasraṃ punar arbudaṃ vā parokti-doṣa-sphuraṇe khalānām* (*Līlā*, v. 1.63)
>
> Multiply the single bliss of Vedānta philosophers by a hundred, and that equals
> the superb thrill of understanding a poet's implicit meaning.
> Multiply that feeling by a thousand, or by ten million, and that is what petty men
> feel when spotting a fault in someone else's poem.

[48] As defined in Monier Williams, "Kākavandhyā," in *Monier Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899).

This verse begins with the provocation that we have become used to by now, due to which the joy in grasping a poem's suggestion (*vyaṅgya*) is a hundred times greater than the joy of knowing Brahman—the cultural designation of paradigmatic joy, also meant to cancel out all joys that concern life. But it then fashions another surprise: the joy of reading poetry is again outdone by far by the malicious joy of critics who find a fault in the poem.[49]

These critics pose yet another opportunity for us to ask how is Nīlakaṇṭha's poetry conversing with and outdoing the śāstric discussion. In this instance, it is significant that the story of Śiva's sixty-four games that Nīlakaṇṭha retells in his *Līlā* includes a famous episode in which Sarasvatī is cursed by Brahmā to reincarnate as the forty-eight phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet, embodied as the forty-eight Tamil *Sangham* (Ta. *caṅkam*) poets. These poets end up asking Śiva to provide them with a criterion of good poetry, a request that yields the tiny *saṅghaphalaka* plate that can tell true poets from imposters by miraculously expanding for true poets only to stand on.[50] Nīlakaṇṭha's condensed version of the story in chapter twenty of the *Līlā* stands out—as we may expect—for the vivid argumentation that he puts in the mouths of the jealous poet-critics who debate with the phonemes-cum-poets who just settled in Madurai.[51] Here is a snippet of the ill-critics' abusive remarks directed at the great poets:

> *śabdārthau doṣa-nirmuktau sālaṃkārau guṇottarau*
> *kāvyam ātiṣṭhamānebhyaḥ kavibhyo 'yaṃ kṛto 'ñjaliḥ* (*Līlā*, v. 20.6).
>
> The critique that followed was a death-offering
> to those excellent poets who thought of Kāvya as words and meaning
> that are free of fault, have ornaments, and are superior with virtues.

[49] This verse is part of a thematic sequence of verses (61-5) on mean critics and their search of faults, which results in the conclusion (cited above) that a fault is "the very life of the creative poet" (1.65). Verse 1.64 suggests that there is after all punishment for these joyful critics, in the form of their anger after wrongly identifying a verse as old.

[50] See David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 32–38, for a summary and analysis of this narrative and its role in the Tamil context.

[51] Elaine Fisher points out that this is Nīlakaṇṭha's original contribution to the narrative on comparing Nīlakaṇṭha's version of the story with the canonical Tamil account of Parañcoti and provides some select translations from this dialogue. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 167-70. The entire passage is *Līlā* 20.7–19.

dhūmena dhvanyatāṃ vahniś cakṣuṣā dhvanyatāṃ ghaṭaḥ
arthaś ced dhvanayed arthaṃ kā pramāṇa-vyavasthitiḥ (*Līlā*, v. 20.16).

"...Fire can be suggested by smoke—a pot suggested by the eye;
But if any meaning can be implied by any meaning
How could we keep the different means of knowledge straight?

duḥkhado 'pi tu kāvyoktaḥ sukhāyārtho bhaved iti
sukhaṃ bhavantaḥ śṛṇvantu svanindāṃ kavibhiḥ kṛtām (*Līlā*, v. 20.17)

As you would have it, something said in a poem, even if painful, is there for pleasure.
In that case, sit back and listen to the personal insults that poets direct at you!

aho bhāva-vyakteḥ pariṇatir aho gūḍha-rasa ity
alīka-vyāmīlan-nayana-vigalad-bāṣpa-salilaiḥ
udañjad-romāñcair udara-lulitāmair iva muhuḥ
kathaṃ vyāptā bhūmiḥ kavibhir apaṭujñāna-paśubhiḥ (*Līlā*, v. 20.18)

Oh, what a transformation of the emotion (or medical symptoms)!
Oh, the hidden rasa (digestive juices)!
As tears pour out from their falsely shut eyes, and their thrilling hairs standing on end
it seems that their bowels are churning in their bellies—
how is the earth so full of these slow-witted beasts, the poets?"

These verses, part of a long attack of ill-intentioned poet-critics, reference well-known discussions of poetics, showcasing Nīlakaṇṭha's especially resonant intertextual depth.[52]

[52] Verse 20.6 features a condensed caricature version of famous definitions of poetry by Bhāmaha (*śabdārthau sahitaū kāvyam*, Sharma and Upādhyāya, *Kāvyālaṅkāraḥ of Bhāmaha*, 1.16) and Mammaṭa (*tad-adoṣau śabdārthau saguṇāvan alaṃkṛtī punaḥ kvāpi,* Ganganatha Jha, *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa,*1.4*)*. The reference in v. 20.16 regarding the stability of the basic means of knowledge converses with philosophical discussions regarding *pramāṇavyavasthā*, and it could also specifically reference a well-known objection to Ānandavardhana's influential theory of *dhvani* by Mahimabhaṭṭa, who argues that what Ānandavardhana terms as "suggestion" in his Dhvanyāloka can be understood in terms of the already existing category of "inference", or *anumāna*. See Lawrence McCrea, "Mahimabhaṭṭa's Analysis of Poetic Flaws," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 1 (2004): 77–94. Finally, verse 20.18 echoes the famous objection to the *dhvani* theory given by Ānandavardhana himself in *Dhvanyāloka* 25:*...prakāraleśe dhvanir dhvanir iti yad etad* ***alīka-sahṛdayatva-bhāvanā-mukulitalocanair*** *nṛtyate tatra hetuṃ na vidmaḥ*. "we see no reason for people to dance about, saying 'dhvani, dhvani,' closing their eyes in the false belief that they are connoisseurs." Text and translation is from McCrea, Lawrence, "Standards and Practices: Following, Making, and Breaking the Rules of Śāstra", in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011), 233. I thank Whitney Cox for his guidance in tracing these intertexts.

Moreover, they demonstrate Nīlakaṇṭha's skill to bring the story to life. He voices these critics like a good Sanskrit philosopher voices his *pūrvapākṣin* opponent, and portrays the frustration that the true poets must be feeling through the reverse accusation that the Sangham poets themselves are fake. This is consistent with Nīlakaṇṭha's wider aesthetic, and his fondness for bringing situations and emotions to life through multiple perspectives.[53] Here, we can see that the extensive treatment of the topic of bad critics and poets in the manifesto infiltrates the narrative as well, and grants a subversive context to it, for it is the cruel critics themselves who fashion these critiques. Within the narrative, the double-voice can be achieved with increased complexity. In fact, this narrative may have served as one of Nīlakaṇṭha's reasons for composing a Sanskrit poem based on the textual tradition of Śiva's games.[54] The true Tamil Sangham poets maliciously attacked by critics finally reply, addressing Śiva:

> *kāvyāgamajñāḥ sukham ākṣipantu kā tatra cintā bhavataḥ prasādāt*
> *aho vayaṃ pravyathitā amībhiḥ kāvyādhva-duṣṭa-śvabhir eḍa-mūkaiḥ* (*Līlā*, v. 20.21)
>
> Let those proficient critics deny us as they please.
> Why should we worry about this? You, God, are on our side.
> Damn, we got so anxious by those men;
> they are filthy dogs on the road that is kāvya,
> deaf and dumb.

[53] Nīlakaṇṭha's *Vijaya* masterfully displays this aesthetic feature of multiperspectivalism that enlivens the situation, as discussed in Ariav and Keerthi, "Churning Selves." In the *Līlā,* I find that the stories are often told in a very condensed manner, but almost in each episode, there is an occasion for the story to "come to life", whence the composition thickens the familiar story. For instance, see how rural women address the young Queen Goddess Mīnākṣī in her digvijaya (*Līlā,* v. 8.42-49), or the thoughtful description of the sex scene of King Vaṃśacuḍāmaṇi and his queen (*Līlā,* v. 20.29-40), which leads to the famous poetic competition regarding the scent of the hair.

[54] Nīlakaṇṭha's choice of narrative as motivated by this particular episode is strengthened with the opening lines of false modesty (*avaiyaṭakkam*) by Parañcoṭi Munivar, the author of the popular Tamil version, the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal*, in which he links his own attempt as a poet with this episode, marking its centrality in the popular imagination of the sixty-four games. In Sascha Ebeling's translation: "Even though it would not be difficult for the people of that place, where the scholars of the Sangam dwelled, who established a mistake even in the poem of the Lord, to find a mistake in my ignorant speech, may they accept the story of the Beautiful One (Śiva) like the pure, sweet milk that the goose drank, separating it from the water. Sascha Ebeling, "Appeasing the Assembly: Competition among Poets and the History, Poetics and Social Logic of the Avaiyaṭakkam Convention in Tamil Literature," in *Colophons, Prefaces, Satellite Stanzas. Paratextual Elements and Their Role in the Transmission of Indian Texts*., ed. Eva Wilden and Suganya Anandakichenin (Hamburg University Press, 2020), 160.

Why, indeed, worry about this? To return to the question I began with, why the preoccupation with bad poets and ill-meaning critics? Do these horrible men even exist? What is their role in his poetry?

To answer these questions, I should first place this trope in generic and historical terms. Though the topic is an old one, it became more prominent in the second millennium CE, being grouped in anthologies under categories such as *kukavinindā*, almost always included in *subhāṣita* anthologies.[55] They also became prominent in neighboring vernacular works of literature such as Telugu and Tamil.[56] Nīlakaṇṭha's fondness of the topic thus makes him a man of his tradition and his cultural context. His take on the matter, however, is emphatic, and we can try to understand why.

Daud Ali recently postulated a connection between the significant rise of the genre of *subhāṣita-saṅgrahas,* or anthology collections, and a newfound interest in the biographies and anecdotes about the lives of individual poets, often in an imagined courtly setting, in the second millennium AD. Ali argues that the juxtaposition of the two genres points to "a re-orientation of the tradition in which the poetic virtuosity of the tradition's poets could be continually re-enacted and constituted into something like a canon."[57] Ali partly builds on the work of Phyllis Granoff, who connected medieval biographies of poets with discourses on poetics, arguing that "at least

---

[55] See Daud Ali, "Verses at the Court of the King: Shifts in the Historical Imagination of the Sanskrit Literary Tradition during the Second Millennium," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 1 (2021): 21. For early prototypes of the "apology" in the beginning of the prose *kāvya*s *Vāsavadattā* and the *Kādambarī*, see Herman Tieken, "On Beginnings: Introductions and Prefaces in Kāvya," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, South Asia Research (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89–90. It is also a prevalent topic in introductions to poetic treatises; see for instance *Kāvyālaṅkāraḥ of Bhāmaha* 1.12: *nākavitvam adharmāya vyādhaye daṇḍanāya vā kukavitvam punaḥ sāksān mṛtiṃ āhur manīsinaḥ "*There's nothing wrong about not being a poet. There are no health-hazards. No risks of incarceration. Being a poetaster, however, is death then and there, so say the wise." Translation is from Yigal Bronner, "Change in Disguise: The Early Discourse on Vyājastuti," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 2 (2009): 189.

[56] See Rao and Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 25–26, for examples in Telugu. They translate from Nannecoda: "Small minds cannot enjoy a good poem, full of flavor. They run to cheap poetry, like flies that pass by whole sugarcane and swarm around the chewed-up pulp".

[57] Ali, "Verses at the Court of the King", 30.

one of the central themes of the biographies is a treatment of the wider issue, what is good poetry and what kind of person could write it."[58]

These analyses may help begin to explain Nīlakaṇṭha's particular interest in the issue of bad poets and critics. There is a connection between the tradition's ways of delineating a canon as Nīlakaṇṭha inherited it, removed from political and historical time, and the preoccupation with self-definitions of the poetic sphere and its codes constituted through the *subhāṣita* themes of the bad poet and critic. It seems plausible that Nīlakaṇṭha was interested in invoking these debates because they help him to claim *his* place in the poetic sphere. The implication is that there is still a canon of luminaries in the making, one that he has a place in. It seems logical that these critics had to be invented if they did not exist, for the very act of carving out space for oneself in the *sangham* plate, so to speak, of the vast Sanskrit canon of luminaries. Nīlakaṇṭha makes this clear enough when he writes:

> *prācetasena yānītā pālitā bhavabhūtinā*
> *sarvataś carvyate vāṇī saivādya kavi-mānibhiḥ* (*Gaṅgā*, v. 1.36)
>
> Sarasvatī, Goddess Language herself, first brought out by Vālmīki
> and protected by Bhavabhūti,
> is just chewed everywhere nowadays
> by those who think themselves poets.

Nīlakaṇṭha rarely mentions a poet like Bhavabhūti, who is neither of his immediate ancestry nor of the classical triad of Vyāsa, Vālmīki, and Kālidāsa. Here, he draws a clear line between the trope of describing bad poets and the formation of the classical Sanskrit canon.[59]

---

[58] Granoff, "Sarasvati's Sons," 354.

[59] Another verse along these lines, in which Nīlakaṇṭha asserts his superiority to both Kālidāsa and the Tamil poet Ñānacampantar through allusions to well-known legends or "authorial scenes" about them, is *Līlā* 1.4: *stanyena kaścit kavayāṃ babhūva tāmbūla-sāreṇa paro jananyāḥ/ ahaṃ tato 'py unnatim āptukāmaḥ seve tato 'py unnatam akṣikoṇam*. In Elaine Fisher's translation: "One became a poet through the breast milk of the Mother, another through her tāmbūla spittle. Desiring to achieve even greater elevation [*unnati*], I served the more elevated [*unnata*] corner of Her eyes." Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 87.

Within the introduction to the *Gaṅgā*, this verse is staged as a transition between the "manifesto" and Nīlakaṇṭha's lauding introduction of himself and his family, which I introduce in the next chapter. The conclusion of the section governed by bad critics and poets, then, naturally leads to his self-insertion into the canon.[60]

As a second persumed reason for Nīlakaṇṭha's draw to the topic, it seems to me that it served as fertile ground for him to portray his personal voice, albeit in impersonal generic idioms of Sanskrit literature. According to Ali's argument, the internal Sanskrit debate about the poetic canon and its luminaries was formed through "scenes of authorship": anecdotes and stories about particular authors, which joined the ascription of verses to canonical authors in anthologies. Together, these formed vignettes which speak to these authors' particular styles or poetic choices. Nīlakaṇṭha's anthologies and anthology-like sections are single-authored, unlike the anthologies that Ali surveys.[61] However, these verses are vibrantly designed to capture his poetic double-voice. His own—often subversive—voice, it seems, shines through a gradual, blurry photographic negative of bad poets and unfavorable critiques.

While delineating the space for (his) poetry, Nīlakaṇṭha constantly draws on the tension between undercurrents of conventional knowledge and unexpected new formulations. He argues for and demonstrates the great poetic freedom to converse with the tradition with a wink. Throughout this chapter, we have seen that Nīlakaṇṭha argues *for* the medium of poetry through

[60] We can see a trace of the claims to the classical poetic canon in Rāmabhadra's *Śabdabhedanirūpaṇam,* a short digest on the denotative and suggestive powers of language. Rāmabhadra surveys the well-known division of powers of *śaktā* (equivalent to *abhidhā*), *lakṣaṇā,* and *vyañjana*: in it, he cites examples from Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*, Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*, Mūrāri's *Anargharāghava*, the *Amaruśataka* collection, and Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa*, alongside more recent poetic treatises of Appayya's *Kuvalayānanda* and Jagannātha's *Rasagaṅgādhara*. To these, he adds verses from Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nalacaritam* (demonstrating *atiśayayukte lakṣaṇā*) and a verse from his own *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* (demonstrating *apahartari lakṣaṇā*). See *Śabdabhedanirūpaṇam* in Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works,* 225–231 (appendix B).

[61] In this, they are akin to classical, single-authored collections. Two famous precedents of single-authored *subhāṣita* verses are Bhartṛhari and Kṣemendra. These comparisons are worth pursuing separately, but his endeavor seems to stands out for the specific emphasis on the delineation of the normative poetic world.

its ability to add layers of play, ambiguouity, and pleasure to scientific discourse on poetics. We have seen him directly paraphrase famous poetic moments from Mammaṭa to these ends; we have seen him play on major notions from the poetic tradition in a manner that decontextualizes them from hard-core theory and literalizes them; and we have seen his persistent liking for the topic of the bad poets and critics, which allowed him to delineate a place for good poetry while continuing to paraphrase, with notable subversion and ambiguouity, learned instances from the poetic tradition.

What does the sarvatantrasvatantra poet *do* to the scientific discourse, then? I think it allows him to showcase his expertise while posing a principle distance between his formulations and the śāstric contexts from which they are borrowed. This distance provides the conditions of possibility for his almost ever-present ironic tone. It poses the freedom of poetic subversion, gained in the mastery of all disciplines: this is a major part of Nīlakaṇṭha's vision of good poetry, and a good reason to write poetry, to begin with.

Concluding remarks: situating the manifestos in Nīlakaṇṭha's world

The argument offered here about the manifesto-like nature of Nīlakaṇṭha's major poems and what they seek to do can be brought into higher relief by a comparison with another recent interpretation of the *Līlā* by Elaine Fisher. Discussing Nīlakaṇṭha's motivation to compose a Sanskrit poem dealing with Śiva's 64 games, Elaine Fisher remarks: "[first,] Nīlakaṇṭha defiantly inserts the distinctive idiom of Sanskrit intellectual discourse into explicitly non-Sanskrit contexts; and second, he intentionally reads the canonical repertoire of Tamil Śaivism through the lens of the Sanskrit Śaiva tradition."[62] Both parts of Fisher's argument, namely the insertion

[62] Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 166.

of the Sanskrit scholastic idiom and that of the Sanskrit Śaiva tradition, touch on issues that are pertinent to our discussion and can be further nuanced and contextualized.

One, Fisher is right in pointing out the socio-political element in introducing learned śāstric allusions into the foundational myth of the formation of the canon of Tamil poetry in Madurai. As we have seen, there are numerous such references, often deliberately parodic and double-voiced. Together with other authors of his milieu, Nīlakaṇṭha is interested in entextualizing the presence of learned Sanskrit and its cosmopolitan imaginaries in Tamil space, as I discuss at length in the next chapter concerning prologues. One missing link from Fisher's observation is Nīlakaṇṭha's general practice of inserting learned Sanskrit registers into all of his poetic works. This is part of his ideal of *sarvatantrasvatantra* poetry. It also involves an aesthetic that I discuss in the next chapter, which he implicitly calls *uccāvaca*—aligning different and contrasting registers, scholastic, poetic, and speechlike. We have seen a slight demonstration of this above: highly learned references are made through toxic insults, all within a well-known local Tamil myth. This practice grants a depth of reverberation to this literature as multi-intertextual at its core, playfully conversing with multiple authoritative traditions.[63]

After all, Nīlakaṇṭha is not the first to have produced a Sanskrit version of Śiva's games. Nor was he the first to compose the narrative of Śiva's games in a poetic language other than Tamil.[64] This language choice of the *Līlā* in itself is therefore not particularly outstanding: we know that Nīlakaṇṭha was aware of the Sanskrit *Halāsyamahātmya* Purāṇa on which his composition is based, whereas we cannot know for sure if he even read Parañcoti's influential

[63] See Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," for a discussion of this feature in the Śivalīlārṇava among other texts of the early modern south.
[64] The *Cokkanātha Caritramu* (The story of Cokkanātha) of Tiruveṅgaḷakavi, dated to the mid sixteenth century, is a Telugu poem narrating Śiva's games that predated Parañcoṭi's influential version. See Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 148.

Tamil version.[65] The ambigous defense of Sanskrit against vernacular compositions cited above (*Līlā* 1.63) appears once within the eighty verses of the introduction to the *Līlā*, and alongside other competing genres and mediums that we have seen compete with Sanskrit literature.[66] It is rather the choice of composing a long Sanskrit poem out of the popular local myth, that is notable about this project. The *Līlā* forms an ideal ground to perform Nīlakaṇṭha's version of good Sanskrit literature, in the prestigious genre of the mahākāvya, with its unique figurative and descriptive range. The socio-political element does not seem to motivate his writing: it rather silently informs his ironic undertones, and can be recovered through his gestures of delineation of his home audience. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, Nīlakaṇṭha's primary interest is not intervening in non-Sanskrit contexts, but rather, intervening in the realm of Sanskrit poetry, allowing it to play and alter registers of *śāstra*, and exploring the creative possibilities that it affords the poet.[67] As we will see throughout this thesis and in chapter four in particular, Nīlakaṇṭha—and his milieu of followers—primarily write to familiar faces in the audience.

Second, regarding Fisher's argument about the insertion of a Brahmin-affiliated Śaiva Siddhānta Sanskrit tradition into Tamil Śaiva space: Fisher is right to point out Nīlakaṇṭha's omission of the Tamil devotional idiom from the *Līlā*, for instance in Ñānacampantar's debate with the Jains, whence he omits a citation from the Tevaram in favor of an appeal to Sanskrit authoritative texts. This is once again indicative of his learned Sanskrit poetry, especially

[65] Fisher demonstrated Nīlakaṇṭha's recycled verse from the *Halāsya Mahātmya* (*Ibid,* 164). However, Fisher occasionally compares Nīlakaṇṭha's *Līlā* with Parañcoṭi's version and not with the *Halāsya Mahātmya* (*Ibid*, 169-170), posing the latter as the source text of his work.
[66] One other reference in *Līlā* 1.29 employs "bhāṣā" to mean exclusively "Prakrit".
[67] David Shulman asks in response to Fisher's reading: "is this necessarily a passionate contest between cosmopolitan and vernacular ways of thinking and feeling? A Sanskrit-speaking Sangam has its own surprising charm, not devoid of a certain teasing irony, not to mention the powerful intertextual resonances that Sanskrit can offer both poet and reader…" Shulman, *Tamil*, pp. 281. Shulman is responding to Fisher's doctoral dissertation; Fisher seems to have responded to Shulman's critique with a greater emphasis on the multilingual nature of this cultural world, and a stronger emphasis on Nīlakaṇṭha's irony in "Hindu Pluralism."

heightened within a version of the foundational story of Tamil poetry. But Fisher further reads such instances in the *Līlā* as active competition with neighboring Śaiva maṭams such as Tarumapuram and Tiruvāvaṭuturai, whose authors primarily wrote in Tamil and self-identified as Vēḷāḷa.[68] This is unlikely: I suggest that Nīlakaṇṭha is rather primarily holding an intimate conversation with his home audience of Sanskrit-knowing and -speaking Brahmins, rather than with other communities in his larger cultural sphere. Fisher's analysis of the doctrinal terms that Nīlakaṇṭha uses does not suggest a "rivalry" with Tamil Śaiva doctrines, which allegedly existed in these neighboring Śaiva maṭams. Rather, Nīlakaṇṭha is aligning the authoritative Siddhānta āgamas with local Śaiva stories and idioms, a practice that Fisher herself shows to have existed in these maṭams at least as early as the late seventeenth century.[69] Moreover, the distinctive Tamil and Vēḷāḷa identities of maṭam institutions, which became very pronounced in modern narratives of these institutions, consolidated at a far later point in time: Koppedrayer's informative contribution on the matter shows how these maṭams' caste-based objections to

[68] Fisher's survey is an essential step toward understanding the tensions and coexistence of literary and religious production in the pre-eighteenth-century space of Śaiva thought and devotion in the Tamil land. Recent contributions to the question of the differences between what has been termed the Tamil *Caiva Cittāntam*– the consolidation of Tamil Śaiva practices and doctrines centered around maṭams, beginning in Cidambaram and spreading to other influential matams, and the pan-Indian Sanskritic school of Śaivasiddhānta, include Margherita Trento, "Translating the Dharma of Shiva in Sixteenth-Century Chidambaram: Maṟaiñāṉa Campantar's Civatarumōttaram, with a Preliminary List of the Surviving Manuscripts," in *Essays on the Śivadharma and Its Network*, ed. Florinda De Simini (Napoli: Unior Press, 2021). Focusing on Maṟaiñāṉa Campantar's sixteenth-century translation of the *Śivadharmottara*, the *Civatarumōttaram*, Trento demonstrates that the process of synthesis, as well as the tensions, with the pan-Indian Sanskritic traditions, were well underway by Nīlakaṇṭha's time, and that the maṭam spaces of *Caiva Cittāntam* were invested in a cross-linguistic negotiation of the Śaiva doctrine and practices.

[69] Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 149–175. For instance, Fisher demonstrates how Nīlakaṇṭha inserts the authoritative Kāmika Āgama into the story of Ñānacampantar's debate with the Jains, as well as his ideas about Śaiva initiation and the removal of caste, on which she writes: "Given that the Sanskrit and Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta lineages had maintained institutionally and doctrinally distinct profiles for centuries before Nīlakaṇṭha's own floruit, conflating the scriptural corpus of the two is no mere oversight" (173). But Fisher's own analysis continues to cite Koppedrayer's work on the eighteenth-century *Varṇāśramacandrikā,* a Sanskrit text from a neighboring maṭam, which conveys very similar ideas about the removal of caste while also citing Āgamic traditional sources. Fisher seems to be suggesting that this was a *later* development of an ongoing conversation between the Tamil and Sanskrit Śaiva tradition, but it seems more likely that this conversation and mutual infiltration was a result of a centuries-long process, and it is difficult to assess just how divergent these traditions were in the Tamil land when Nīlakaṇṭha is writing, in the early to the mid-seventeenth century.

Brahminism, as well as their emphasis on the Tamil language, is most probably a product of modern anachronisms.[70] Finally and crucially, is Nīlakaṇṭha's writerly independence: he is not competing for patronage with these institutions, as Fisher suggests. He was rather rooted in his scholar-household in the Kaveri delta, and his genealogical commitments to his family and students provide us with clues about both his income as a teacher and his relative freedom as a patronless author.[71]

How, then, are we to understand Nīlakaṇṭha's participation in the socio-religious spheres around him, evident in his very choice to compose his poetic version of Śiva's games? Fisher's point encourages us to consider his choice to compose the *Līlā,* as well as his hymn to the goddess of Madurai, the *Ānandasāgarastava*, as gestures of belonging to the Tamil Śaiva spheres that were not as transparently his hereditary property. These choices hint at an acknowledgment of the relative space that Brahmin-oriented intellectual and literary work took up in the world of Tamil devotion. Writing as a devotee situated at a distance from the physical space of Madurai, his Madurai-based works are a way of participating, in his own poetic style and with his intimate audience of connoisseurs, in the religious space that Madurai was increasingly becoming for Śaiva devotees, particularly for Śrīvidyā practitioners like himself.[72] His playful and confident

---

[70] Koppedrayer writes: "In its present publications, it [the Dharmapuram maṭam] repeatedly draws attention to its Tamil character. Whether it was so dogmatic about being a Tamil institution in the late seventeenth century is another somewhat difficult question, given our records from that period. We know that the works from Dharmapuram from its very beginning have been Tamil works, with a few exceptions..."Kathleen Iva Koppedrayer, "The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Vellala Lineages of Tiruvavaturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal" (McMaster, 1990), 304. As a relevant case in point, the *Ilakkaṇakkŏttu* written by Cvāmināta Tecikar of eighteenth-century Tiruvavatuturai matam is one of three Tamil grammatical treatises from the area which attempts to reconcile the Tamil grammar with the Sanskrit system, featuring very little anxiety about Sanskrit influence. I thank Professor E. Annamalai for his instructive readings of this text under the NEEM project throughout the year 2021-2. Fisher's evidence of Vēḷāḷa authors who made a point of their caste identity begins only with eighteenth-century authors such as Tirumalainātar, author of the Cokkanātar Ulā, Vīmanāta Paṇṭitar, author of the *Katampavaṉapurāṇam,* and Tiruvampaḷatēcikar, author of the *Varṇāśramacandrikā*.

[71] See further discussion in ch. 4 and in the introduction.

[72] As a Śrīvidyā practitioner, Nīlakaṇṭha may have been participating in a certain colonization of Mīnākṣī's worship by the Śrīvidyā sect, as an ectype of Kāmākṣī in Kanchi, explicitly understood to be the tradition's central goddess Tripurasundarī. (I thank Whitney Cox for this suggestion). See my discussion in chapter three for the *Ānandasāgara*

signature can be better understood against the privileged, independent, and somewhat isolated conditions of his world of letters.

In this chapter, I argued that Nīlakaṇṭha's manifestos hold a dense, yet playful and decontextualizing conversation with the tradition of Sanskrit poetics. Through it, he stages his own vision of poetry, which can encompass all Sanskrit disciplines and add flexibility and beauty to them. With his happy arguments for poetry against other artistic and intellectual genres, and through his delineation of the mal-practitioners of poetry, Nīlakaṇṭha inscribes his authorial voice into the realm of Sanskrit poetry. His voice, we have seen, often shines through double-voiced, half-sincere statements, and comes with a happy and irreverent wink. The oblique ways in which Nīlakaṇṭha and the other poets of his milieu insert themselves into their works, and into the tradition of Sanskrit poetry, govern the discussion in the next two chapters.

hymn. Mīnākṣī is treated as a pan-local goddess, identified with local goddesses of the Kaveri, for figures from eighteenth-century Thanjavur such as Śyāma Śāstri and Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar. See David Shulman, *Introspection and Insight: South Indian Minds in the Early Modern Era* (Delhi: Primus, 2022), ch. 6.

2. The Autobiographical Games of the Prologue: Multivocal Stagings of the Self

and yet I feel quite confident[1]

This chapter is dedicated to the self-positioning of the author-protagonists of this dissertation within the tradition of Sanskrit poetry and within their social worlds. I introduce these authors' ways of speaking of themselves in their prologues, and interrogate what we can learn from these instances in terms of their historical circumstances and in terms of the key aesthetic principles that guide their writing, both collectively and individually. Within the longstanding conventions of Sanskrit literature, the prologue (*prarocanā, prastāvanā*) of the stage play is one of the few places where the authors explicitly introduce themselves to the audience. These self-introductions, however, are loaded with conventional patterns and familiar tropes. The autobiographical is heavily coded, in what may be a cultural praxis of the "language of the gods" to safeguard, at least rhetorically, against personal whims and idiosyncrasies that belong in time.

Where, then, can one search for an individual voice in a corpus permeated by inherited patterns and subtle intertexts?[2] When the formulaic instances of self-reference, as well as

---

[1] *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* ed., J. K. Balasubrahmanyam, (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911), 1.79. the full verse reads: *kvāhaṃ kva kāvyaṃ kavirājasādhyaṃ kvāhaṃ kva śambhur nigamair agamyaḥ niḥśaṅkam evaṃvid api pravarte nirlajjate devi tava prasādāt*. "Where am I, and where is the kāvya perfected by the kings of poets? Where am I, and where is Śiva, who even the Vedas cannot reach? Hey, goddess *Shamelessness*! Even though I know this, I feel quite confident to begin, thanks to you!"

[2] The authors of *Innovations and Turning Points* suggest, in this regard, that "the creative ways in which poets consciously engaged with the ever-increasing richness of the received kāvya tradition…(created a) lively sense of irony and a sophisticated awareness of the expressive possibilities which their intertextual space afforded them." Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 609–10.

referential terms such as times, people, and places of these prologues, are read alongside the network of intertexts that these authors are invoking, these prologues reveal subtle self-insertions of these authors. This will allow us to illuminate patterns and shifts in the self-presentations of the textual corpus that Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra belong to, and actively shape. It will also shed light on the very notions of self and authorship that inform these poetic works.

Modern research has, since its very inception, turned to the Sanskrit prologue for its historical and biographical value.[3] The scholarship to date has privileged these documentary aspects and almost completely ignored the poetic context of the information at hand.[4] The prologue, as it has developed in the hands of our authors, is set somewhere between the paratextual and the textual, and the implications of this have rarely been discussed to date. What I suggest is a reading that contextualizes the information given intertextually (vis-à-vis the inherited tropes of the prologue) as well as intra-textually (vis-à-vis each prologue and play).[5]

Instead of asking the naïve question "is it real?",[6] the questions leading this quest are: Why did these authors choose to present themselves in the ways they did? What kind of

[3] The search for the hard fact is driven by the recurring underlying complaint of the lack of it in South Asian premodern literature. H Wilson's, in his 1835 introduction to the *Mālātīmādhava:* "The history of the drama, however, or more correctly of its author, is attended with more certainty than most of the topics of the literary history of the Hindus…" H Horace Wilson, "Introduction to Malati and Madhava," in *Malati and Madhava (Translation of Bhavabhūti's Mālatīmādhava)* (Calcutta: Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1835), 3. Most modern accounts concerned with Sanskrit literature in a social or historical context note the prologue for its historical and biographical value in one way or another.

[4] Dominick LaCapra offers the distinction of the *documentary* and the *worklike* as a tool to uncover how basic working assumptions of scholarship privilege the "factual" and treat works as objects, rather than as actors in the world. See Dominick Lacapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980): 30–31.

[5] See Jonardon Ganeri, "Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5/6 (2008): 551–62. Ganeri tackles the problem of the lack of social or historical context for scholastic writing in premodern India with a methodological suggestion to replace Quentin Skinner's influential imperative to reveal the "illocutionary force" of texts by their historical and social context with an understanding of the premodern Sanskrit context *as intertext:* the texts' illocutionary forces are set by the authors' intervention within their vast diachronic textual traditions, rather than with their worlds.

[6] David Shulman shows how a series of Sanskrit poeticians ruled this type of question out when dealing with the poetic experience of the spectator who watches a play. "According to Ruyyaka, Abhinavagupta, and Jagannātha,

information did they include, what did they choose to remain silent about, and what do these choices tell us about their notions of authorship and textuality? How do the poetics of these self-presentations fit in with their aesthetic as a whole, and what happens to the biographical "fact" when read in its poetic context? I will be suggesting that these plays are inviting just such questions. The framing of the information is meant to enmesh the "real" and the "unreal" to create a playful and deliberately ambiguous presentation of the authors.

The first section of the chapter presents a short history of the Sanskrit prologue and its evolution as a liminal, crucially reflexive, and—despite its theme of staging—*textual* paratext. In the second section, I shortly analyze an important precedent from the eighth century: Bhavabhūti's fractured and playful self-insertions in his famous prologue to the *Mālatīmādhava*. In the third section, I discuss the principle of *uccāvaca,* a multitextured or high-and-low aesthetic, drawing on different registers and references. This principle, together with the aesthetic ideal of the *sarvatantrasvatantra* scholar-poet, examined in the previous chapter, is necessary for the discussion that follows, as it conveys these authors' mindful attention to the art of self-positioning among preceding Sanskrit writings.

The fourth section is the heart of the chapter, where I demonstrate how for Sanskrit poets such as Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra, the prologue is especially productive in forming an autobiographic voice that both masters and alters the inherited tropes of self-presentation. Their aesthetic is governed by a deliberately contrastive endeavor in which the author problematizes, and yet affirms, the very notion of a singular voice within the tradition. This voice ranges from the author's own "direct speech" cited by the stage director, the inherited formulas of the

---

each in his own way, the cognitive aspect of poetic experience requires an intermediate kind of knowing, not reducible to a question such as "is what I am seeing or hearing real?" David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 78.

prologue, and a lauding description of the author's influential gurus or predecessers. It involves a collage of citations from tradition, far and near, such that the very idea of a singular poetic voice becomes deeply embraided within voices from the authoritative tradition of Sanskrit letters and those who taught it.

In the fifth section, I consider the historical realities behind the formulas of the performative setting of the prologue and tie this question with the author's biographical self-presentation, and with the boom of performance culture at the Thanjavur court, which some of our authors are working for. I argue that these should not be necessarily read as historical occurrences, or at least not exclusively so, but rather as participation in a very timely investment of Tamil space with cultural and religious centers through literature and pilgrimage. In conclusion, I reflect on the kind of selves that our authors fashioned in their prologues. This self is defined and celebrated in a multi-vocal, refracted way, and, necessarily, through a reservoir of other voices from the tradition, including specific precedents and sedimented tropes. This tradition is further embodied by the authors' teachers and genealogical lineages. The author is inseparable from it: he internalizes it, speaks through it, and plays with it in creative ways.

The prologue as a liminal paratext; a short introduction

In poetry as in life, nothing is more deceptive than the norm.[7]

[7] David Dean Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

The prologue to the Sanskrit play makes its first appearance in Kālidāsa's plays, if not earlier.[8] It includes, as discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the oldest and most definitive authority on dramaturgy and aesthetics, at least one or more benedictive verse (conventionally said to encapsulate something of the work on the whole) and a mention of the playwright's name in a scripted dialogue between the director (*sūtradhāra)* and his assistant or actress wife, who become dramatic personas.[9] In his survey of beginnings of Sanskrit literature, Herman Tieken observes that the prologues of a play are "not detachable from the text of the play proper."[10] Bracketing Tieken's larger argument, this points to a general, inherent tension of the prologue. Although it presents itself as the stuff of behind-the-scenes *realia,* made of spontaneous conversation and pointing to the world "outside" the play, the prologue is an integral part of the scripted play. The breaking of the fourth wall is scripted into the text. In fact, the poet typically thematically links the prologue with the play itself, so as to blur boundaries between world and stage.[11] In short, the typical biographical information of the prologue regarding the author, the audience and the place of performance is part of an orchestrated story, not designed to be understood at face value.

---

[8] Tieken, "On Beginnings: Introductions and Prefaces in Kāvya," 90. Tieken suggests this is the case since what survives of Aśvaghoṣa's play is missing its beginning, and Bhāsa's two plays consist of prologues but these are probably a product of the later Southern adaptations in which they are found (and if these are Bhāsa's plays at all).
[9] See *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni,* ed., R. Nagar, (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1983), 20.29.
[10] Tieken, "On Beginnings," 90.
[11] *Ratnāvalī* of Harṣa, *The Lady of the Jewel Necklace & The Lady Who Shows Her Love,* trans., Wendy Doniger, Clay Sanskrit Library 17 (New York: NYU Press),2006: 77, is one paradigmatic example, in which the actress anticipates the situation of the heroine of the play; another notable example is the *Āgamaḍambara of Bhaṭṭa Jayanta*, *Much Ado about Religion : A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation,* trans., Casba Dezso, Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: NYU Press, 2005), in which the director echoes the play's theme of renunciation by paradoxically withdrawing from the play in its prologue. For an example from our corpus, *Janakipariṇaya Nāṭaka of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, ed., Svetaranya Narayana Sarma, trans. L.V Ramachandra Iyer (Madras, 1906) presents its own version of this trope, in which the actress' worry about her daughter's wedding being broken forms a direct analogy to that of Sītā in the play. See also Michael Lockwood and Vishnu A. Bhat, *Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama: Part I*, Second, Revised and Enlarged (Madras: Tambaran Research Associates, 2005), introduction, for their analysis of the play-proper as a metatext of the prologue. Their analysis stresses elements of continuity of the prologue with the play itself, including the suggestive *maṅgala* verse and the transition of the director (*sūtradhāra*) to a character in the play itself, while never fully letting go of his identity as the director.

In other words, the Sanskrit prologue traditionally speaks to and of the gap between the text and the world outside it. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* provides a roughly relevant distinction between nāṭyadharmī, or *stagely-mode* and lokadharmī, or *worldly-mode*. These two types grant scholastic vocabulary to discuss the simultaneous presence and tension of various conventional elements such as poetic language, music, and scenery, along with material from everyday life such as colloquial speech, real-life props, realistic gestures and the like.[12] I propose that the ways in which these two basic components of the drama can be made to interact have been thoroughly explored within the evolution of the Sanskrit prologue, albeit not explicitly theorized.[13] In fact, this binary distinction falls short of accounting for the complexities that the prologue presents. The world "behind" the play includes biographical references and proceeds via seemingly prosaic conversation, and is yet highly aware of its being on stage; it seems to be both extremely *loka* and *nāṭya-* oriented. The two profoundly supplement each other when it comes to a hall of mirrors such as that of the prologue.

These two terms may be added to an additional inherent tension of the prologue, namely *play-as-performance* and *play-as-literature*.[14] Since its very beginning, the Sanskrit prologue has been a locus for experimentation with the tension between the play as a textual artifact and its

[12] I draw on Raghavan's synthesis of the subject, where he draws primarily on Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra and on Abhinavagupta's commentary on it, alongside treatises such as the Daśarūpaka and (notably) the Naṭāṅkuśa, probably of the fifteenth century. He translates the two as *world-way* and *stage-way,* and links them to the notions of realism and idealism. Nāṭyadharmī, writes Raghavan, is "anything peculiar to drama and not found in exactly the same manner in the world…"so that though based upon nature, the very idea of drama as such is nāṭyadharmī". Raghavan, V., *Sanskrit Drama Its Aesthetics and Production,* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1993), 374.

[13] Abhinavagupta's *nāṭyāyita* dicussed in Lockwood and Bhat, *Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama*, 41–5, is one attempt of a scholastic engagement with the topic.

[14] I draw on the discussion in Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (California: University of California Press, 2017), 101–2, who borrows these categories from the case of the choral odes in ancient Greece. Ollett analyzes the case of Harṣa's embedded Prakrit song, pointing toward a tradition of making the *play-as-performance* into a *play-as-literature*. The persistence of the prologue from the very beginning of documented Sanskrit plays might very well be an early and influential movement in the same direction.

staged performance.[15] Bracketing the question of the actual performance culture of Sanskrit plays (more on this below), Sanskrit plays have—like all plays—always also circulated in their textual form. In the language of the prologues themselves, every author imagines the play's recurring circulation (on stage or palm-leaf) after a first (*apūrva)* staging of the "new play" that is presented in the prologue.[16] Consider the end of the prologue to Bhavabhūti's *Mālātīmādhava* (*Mālatī)* where the actor learns (together with the audience) that they are to perform this play:

> Assistant: So that is why you have been rehearsing us in that very work! But sir, you were reading the first scene as the old Buddhist nun Kamandaki, and I read the part of her disciple Avalokita.
> Director: What of it?
> Assistant: Well, how are you going to get into the costume of the hero of this play, Malati's sweetheart Madhava?
> Director: It will be easy enough while Kalahamsaka and Makaranda are making their entrances…[17]

During the conversation preceding this moment, the director comes up with the idea to stage this play, which suits the audience's demands. However, the actor then reveals the allegedly spontaneous statement of the director as staged: *So that is why you have been rehearsing us all in that same work!* This is a rather convoluted comment, as a scripted dialogue that poses as an impromptu conversation has within it an actor who raises the possibility of the director's earlier improvisation being staged. Moreover, at the end of the prologue, the technical issue of the change of dress is raised. Why, one might ask, did Bhavabhūti include this detail? I

---

[15] In general, this tension is emblematic of literary traditions in Sanskrit: I am thinking for instance of the Mahābharata frame story, in which a wandering sage narrates the epic to an audience in a sacrifice, or of the Rāmāyaṇa, in which Rāma's sons hear their own story in an embedded performance: the embedded framing device can be safely said to be one of the core features of storytelling in the Indian subcontinent.

[16] The trope of the "new play" that is about to be performed is a constant recurring feature at least since Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitram*.

[17] Naṭaḥ: (*smṛtvā*) *tataḥ khalu bhāvena tadaiva sarve vargyāḥ pāṭhiṭāḥ. saugata-jarat-pravrājikāyās tu kāmandakayāḥ prathama-bhūmikāyāṃ bhāva ekodhītī tad-antevāsinyās tv aham āvalokitāyāḥ. Sūtradhāraḥ: tataḥ kim? Naṭaḥ: prakaraṇa-nāyakasya mālatī-vallabhasya mādhavasya varṇikā-parigrahaḥ katham. Sūtradhāraḥ: kalahaṃsa-makaranda-praveśāvasare tat-suvihitam. Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti,* trans., Michael Coulson, (Oxford University Press, 1989), 6. My translation in text closely follows Coulson's.

suggest that among other things,[18] the dress change strengthens the paradoxical tension of a prologue's "scripted improvisation", mentioned explicitly in the actor's comment. Bhavabhūti carefully layered his prologue to create a baffling effect, in which he both stages a play in a *lokadharmī* or performance-oriented manner, and comments on its very textuality, or *nāṭyadharmī* quality.[19]

I want to argue that in the world of Sanskrit drama after Bhavabhūti, such embedded reflections on this tension within the prologue became readily available, and increasingly complex in the aesthetic of our poets.[20] Thus, Vedānta Deśika's (hereon, Deśika) *Saṃkalpasūryodaya,* no doubt a major poetic influence on them, features a stage director who names his teacher, and his teacher's teacher:

> *pratigṛhītā ca mayā bharatamatopādhyāyasya sanmārgavardhanasyāntevāsinaḥ saṃtoṣa-pālaka-nāmadheyasya śailūṣa-cakravartinaḥ putreṇa pratibhaṭa-kuśīlava-kuñjara-kaṇṭhīraveṇa vaikuṇṭhavinodinā sapratijñaṃ viduṣām ājñā.*
>
> I, Vaikuṇṭhavinodin (Viṣṇu's Devotee), a lion when facing elephant rival actors—
> the son of Saṃtoṣapālaka (The Guard of Satisfaction) the great ruler of actors,
> himself the disciple of Sanmārgavardhana (Spreader of the Good Path) a
> professor of the theatre discipline of Bharata—
> received a command from the learned audience, and promised to deliver
> (*Saṃkalpasūryodaya,* prose after v. 3).[21]

---

[18] Herman Tieken, "The Pūrvaraṅga, the Prastāvanā, and the Sthāpaka," *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Südasiens* 45 (2001), 118, references this moment as one which corresponds to a passage of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. If this is correct, this could be added as further evidence to Tubb's insights on Bhavabhūti's usage of technical terms to blend the world and the stage, which would complement my sense of this moment (see the following fn).

[19] Gary Tubb traces Bhavabhūti's innovation precisely in his blending of "world" and "stage": "...this sort of reference to things outside the play–sometimes referred to nowadays as "breaking the fourth wall"–occurs also in Bhavabhūti's frequent and deliberate blurring of the boundaries between dramatic presentation and real life." Gary Tubb, "The Plays of Bhavabhūti," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 409. Tubb suggests this specifically considering Bhavabhūti's apparent references to the audience's memory of recurrent verses amongst his plays, and again as an analysis of the former's tendency to use the language of dramatical theory (*Ibid,* 411-12).

[20] Hopkins, writing on Deśika's Saṃkalpasuryodaya, notes: "third-person self-references in such classical playwrights as Kalidāsa and Bhavabhūti are far from elaborate and are downright laconic compared to Deśika's self-description." Steven Paul Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52.

[21] *Saṃkalpasūryodaya of Veṅkaṭanātha* [*Vedāntadeśika*], ed., V. Krishnamacharya, Adyar Library Seriesno. 65 (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library, 1948), 18.

This "historical" lineage of a fictional character is nevertheless couched in marked artificial names (the Sanskrit is not as artificial as the English, but it still stands out as such) in line with the analogy-driven play. Deśika is crafting a language that makes a point of mixing worldly and stagéd idioms, especially relevant to the genealogical concerns that I will raise in this dissertation. Deśika takes Bhavabhūti's playful legacy to the point of abandoning the elusive effect of realism altogether in favor of a humorous and direct problematization of the reality markers of the prologue. His is a unique example of an almost straightforward acknowledgment of the fictionality of the prologue.

Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's *Nalacaritram* (hereafter *Nala*), which stands at the core of this chapter, presents a characteristically playful and oblique version of the legacy of embedded reflections on the ontologies of world and stage. Here, for instance, is an extract in which the director explains his own understanding of the play by crediting a (now lost, if it ever existed) commentary to the play by the author's brother:

> *Pāripārśvakaḥ*: *katham idam ati-gambhīra-hṛdayaṃ rūpakam āryeṇa tattvataḥ parijñātam*
> *Sūtradhāra: (vihasya) asty upāyaḥ*
> *Pāripārśvakaḥ: ka iva*
> *Sūtradhāra: agrajanmā khalu tasya rasika-loka-mauli-maṇir āccādīkṣito vyākarod idaṃ rūpakaṃ anuja-snehāt.*
>
> Assistant: how did you truly understand this play, with its profound depths?
> Director: (chuckles) there is a way.
> Assistant: what is it?
> Director: Āccādīkṣita, the author's older brother and the very head-jewel of all connoisseurs, commented on this play with brotherly love.[22]

[22] *Nalacaritram* [*Nala*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita* (Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrrita Samsthana, 1987), end of prologue.

It takes a moment to unearth the layers of intertwined *loka* and *nāṭya* in this instance: a fictional and scripted director speaks of his own understanding of the play he is himself a character in, and thanks the author's flesh-and-blood brother for unpacking its depths with his commentary. If the previous example by Deśika is at one end of the post-Bhavabhūtian spectrum in acknowledging the actors' role as fabricated, Nīlakaṇṭha stands at the other end, where the prologue constantly performs the built-in tension of the textual stage. Bear in mind, too, the familial bonds of love that sustain the innermost circle of this body of literature, which I will unpack throughout this dissertation: did his brother receive a draft?

In his *Kuśakumudvatīyam*, Nīlakaṇṭha's younger brother Atirātra Yājvan crafted a crescendo of the prologue's awareness of its own textuality. He had his director present the manuscript of the play to his actress-wife. She flips through the pages, and as she reads, she comments in Prakrit verse, using dramaturgical language:

> …this drama has the five elements and the five actions… it is very suitable for assemblies of learned men…it is called *Kuśakumudvatīyam*... its protagonist is of the heroic typecast.[23]

The director agrees and adds some information about the play, describing its rasa and author. The textual life of the text is inserted into the "improvised" prologue, pointing to the concealed textuality of the prologue itself. The survival—and radical development—of the

[23] Naṭī*: kutta tannāḍaam (kutra tannāṭakam)* Sūtradhāra*: pustakam arpayati Naṭī: (gṛhitvā) tat tatra vācayantī — paṃca-viha-vatthu-mariaṃ kajjā-vatthāṇaṃ paṃcaa-samedam. rūvaam idam aṇurūvaṃ uvaṭhṭhidāe viaṭhṭha-goṭhṭhīe (pañca-vidha-vastu-bharitaṃ kārya-vasthānāṃ pañcaka-sametam. rūpakam idam anurūpam upasthitāyā vidadha-goṣṭhyāḥ). assa a ṇāma kusakumujjaīaṃ ti (asya ca nāma kuśakumudvatīyamiti). teṇa dhīrodatto assa ṇāaotti dasidam (tena dhīrodātto 'sya nāyaka iti darśitam*). "Kuśakumudvatīya Nāṭaka [Kuśa] of Atirātra Yajvan (Appendix)," ed., S Jayasree, in "Contribution of Atirātrayajvan" (University of Madras, 1983), 91 (prose after v. 10).

prologue format allowed for an increasingly playful insertion of the authors' imagined or actual stages into their texts.

To paraphrase Gerard Genette's oft-cited definition, the prologue is a paratext: a threshold between social realities and the imaginary world of the text. Genette's typology of paratexts, and more specifically of prefaces, is admittedly limited to the western canon, but it can serve as a useful vantage point for this discussion. To begin with, one of Genette's key intuitions is that despite its references to the world, "the preface is perhaps, of all literary practices, the one that is most typically literary"[24]. This can be rephrased as saying, in the language introduced above, that the preface or the prologue has a strong *nāṭyadharmī* element, despite, or rather because of, its referential *lokadharmī* content. This is because this content is necessarily bound up with (and here is the second of Genette's key intuitions) the author's reflection on the very act of writing. Genette's typology of "fictional prefaces" is especially relevant:

> … the fictional preface - a fiction of a preface - does nothing but aggravate, by exploiting, the **preface's underlying bent toward a self-consciousness both uncomfortable and playful**: playing on its discomfort. I am writing a preface - I see myself writing a preface - I describe myself seeing myself writing a preface - I see myself describing myself ... This endless reflecting, this self-describing in a mirror, this staging, this playacting of the prefatorial activity, which is one of the truths of the preface - all these the fictional preface brings to their ultimate fulfillment by passing, in its own way, over to the other side of the mirror. But this self-depiction is also, and to a very high degree, that of the activity of literature in general.[25]

The third key intuition that Genette's study offers is the above quoted "playful" nature of the fictional preface. Elsewhere, Genette demonstrates a typical "extravagant humor" of the

---

[24] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, reprint (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 293.
[25] *Ibid,* 292, emphasis mine. In Genette's typology, the "fictive authorial preface" comes closest to the prologues in my discussion. He cites as an example for this otherwise rare fictional preface novels by Walter Scott, in which "the paratextual game of imagining the author gets complicated in a way that makes them, for us, the most novelistic and fascinating part (about them)…" *Ibid*, 284.

fictional preface,[26] that he interprets as a "light touch that is often used as a warning that means, watch out for the paratext!"[27]. The Sanskrit prologue is perhaps more complex in terms of its games between the *nāṭya* and the *loka*, because of its performative aspect and because of the rich history of this convention that each prologue converses with. However, these three intuitions taken together form an apt set of analytic tools for the examples to come. The paradoxical *literariness* of the prologue, its inherent self-reflection, and its "light touch" which Genette reads as a warning of overly serious or biographical readings, all play a major role in my analysis to follow.

Bhavabhūti and the Paradigm of the Author's Voice(s)

Long before the intervention of the authors of this corpus, the Sanskrit prologue has been a stage for playful authorial presence.[28] Perhaps for the first time, and in any case clearly influencing the entire tradition of prologue writing since, Bhavabhūti introduces a minimum of four speakers- the director, his assistant or an actor or actress (usually his wife), the audience members who are "cited" by the director and, significantly, a citation by the author of the play himself. Additionally, a meta-reflexive authorial presence is silently apparent throughout the prologue, one that we may call the historical author, since the different characters serve as a constant reminder of their own fictionality, speaking on behalf of the author or of him from the

[26] "This intoxication with incognito, this proof of otherness by identity ("It cannot be I, for it is I"), is a form of extravagant humor that prefigures the most unsettling masquerades of a Pessoa, a Nabokov, a Borges, a Camus (Renaud, of course)". *Ibid,* 288.
[27] *Ibid,* 410.
[28] See *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni* 5.155: *...vidhivat kaver nāma ca kīrtayet*. "The name of the poet should be properly anounced". Viśvanātha's fourteenth-century *Sāhityadarpaṇa* adds that things like the *gotra* of the poet should also be mentioned: *...kaver ākhyāṃ gotrādyapi sa kīrtayet*. *Sāhityadarpaṇa of Viśvanātha Kavirāja,* ed., Javaji Pandurang, (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1936), 6.28; Cited in Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God*, 258, fn 5.

"outside".[29] I thus begin by introducing a chunk of Bhavabhūti's famous prologue to the *Mālatīmādhava*, demonstrating all four (or rather five) "voices", which will serve as a point of reference to later versions of the prologues.

> Director: (Looking back-stage) My assistant, we completed the preparations, and men from various places have gathered on their pilgrimage to the festival of God Kalapriyanatha. What are the actors waiting for, then?
>
> Assistant (entering): Sir, this audience of wise and learned men have asked that we entertain them with some new drama. I don't know of a composition that would suit their desires!
>
> Director: What are the features that the noble and learned Brahmins want?
>
> Assistant (citing audience):
> "works diving deep into emotions (rasas), actions driven by deep commitments, boldness governed by the laws of love, amazing stories, and skill of expression." (*Mālatīmādhava,* v. 4)
>
> Director: (enacting recollection) I have it!...
>
> [here I skip a long introduction of Bhavabhūti's hometown—southern Padmapura—and familial lineage of Taittiriya Brahmins, concluding with these words]:
>
> …Bhavabhūti, being a poet with a natural affection for actors, has handed us one of his own compositions, one full of the qualities you listed. In fact, he said the following about it:[30]
>
> "Those who scorn me now know what they know.
> My work is not for them. But someday someone will be born

[29] Relatedly, Gary Tubb writes that it was Bhavabhūti "...who established this reflexive attention to language, long present in the works of the great Sanskrit poets but never before so powerfully and engagingly examined in poetry, as an abiding topic that would be taken up with increasing levels of complexity in the *Naiṣadhīya* of Śrīharṣa and in other important works of Sanskrit poetry in the centuries to follow…" Tubb, "The Plays of Bhavabhūti," 413.

[30] Sūtradhāraḥ: *(nepathyābhimukham avalokya) māriṣa suvihutāni raṅga-maṅgalāni saṃnipatitaś ca bhagavataḥ Kālapriyanāthasya yātrā-prasangena nānādiganta-vāstavyo janaḥ. tat kim ity udāsate bharatāḥ/(praviśya)* Pāripārśvikaḥ: *bhāva, ādiṣṭo 'smi vidvad-vidagdha-jana-pariṣadā yatha kenacid apūrva-prakaraṇena vayaṃ vinodayitavyā iti. tat-pariṣan-nirdiṣṭa-guṇaṃ prabandhaṃ nādhigacchāma iti.* Sūtradhāraḥ*: mārīṣa katame guṇās tatra yān udāharanty āryā vidagdha-miśrās ca bhagavanto bhūmidevās ca?* Nataḥ*: Bhūmnā rasānāṃ gahanāḥ prayogāḥ sauhārda-hṛdyāni viceṣṭitāni. auddhatyam āyojita-kāmasūtraṃ citrā kathā vāci vidagdhatā ca (4)* Sūtradhāra: *(smṛtiṃ abhinīya) smṛtaṃ tarhi… Bhavabhūtir nama…kavir nisarga-sauhṛdena bharateṣu vartamānaḥ svakṛtim evaṃ prāyaḥ guṇa-bhūyasīm asmākam arpitavān. yatra khalv iyaṃ vācoyuktiḥ. Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti, prologue (*prose before v. 4). My translation is based on *Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti,* trans., Michael Coulson, 307–8.

who shares my nature, for time
is boundless and the world is wide."(*Mālatīmādhava,* v. 5)[31]

Again –

As for the study of the Vedas, and knowledge of the Upaniṣads, of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, why proclaim them?
It produces nothing good in a play.
It is only boldness, nobility of language, and depth of meaning,
that lead to erudition and perceptiveness." (*Mālatīmādhava,* v. 6)[32]

This short prologue by "arguably the most 'meta' of premodern Indian authors"[33] introduces many of the formal features that I discuss in this chapter. The author presents himself through several different characters, including the embedded audience and his own voice, cited *verbatim*. To begin with this latter allegedly direct self-insertion, the author's direct speech involves two remarkable verses. Bhavabhūti's words first reject the spiteful critique he might receive (or already has received) and goes on to direct his efforts to his future ideal reader, who shares the author's sensibilities (his *dharma*). This famous verse demonstrates the paratextual qualities of the prologue discussed thus far, of a heightened meta-poesis, and an awareness of its very textuality as an artifact that can travel and survive in time. It also presents a lighthearted reflection on the multiple temporalities of the prologue, in which an eternal present ("it is performed now") references a future that can never, within the logic of the prologue, occur.

---

[31] *ye nāma kecid iha naḥ prathayanty avajñāṃ jānanti te kimapi tān prati naiṣa yatnaḥ utpatsyate tu mama ko'pi samānadharmā kālo hy ayam niravadhir vipulā ca pṛthvī*. *Ibid,* v.5. The translation is by Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb, *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, 4.

[32] *api ca yad vedādhyāyanaṃ tathopaniṣadāṃ sāṃkhyasya yogasya ca jñānaṃ tatkathanena kiṃ na hi tataḥ kaścid guṇo nāṭake. yat prauḍhatvam udāratā ca vacasāṃ yaccārthato gauravaṃ tac ced asti tatas tadeva gamakaṃ pāṇḍityavaidagdhyayoḥ. Ibid,* v. 6. The translation is by Tubb, "The Plays of Bhavabhūti," 406.

[33] The quote is from Sheldon Pollock, discussing the ways in which Bhavabhūti constantly flags representation itself, as well as its effect (namely, rasa) in his plays. Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *Rama's Last Act (Uttararāmacaritam) By Bhavabhūti*, Clay Sanskrit Library (NYU Press, 2007), 38–44. Coulson also notes "(Bhavabhuti's) readiness to play upon his audience's awareness that they are participating in a work of fiction" in *Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti*, ed., Coulson, 299.

The second verse that Bhavabhūti ascribes to himself contrasts the scholastic genres of Sanskrit with that of the play, laying the ground for a trope that will become important for my discussion. Gary Tubb reads these verses with a biographic framework of interpretation, hypothesizing that they are a response to the ill reception of the *Mahāvīracarita*, which Tubb suggests to have been Bhavabhūti's first play.[34] Given Bhavabhūti's innovation in this tradition, this reading is plausible. My concern, though, lies elsewhere: these self-embedded quotes have a rich afterlife in Sanskrit plays henceforth, and pronouncedly in the corpus at hand. As a trope, such biographical readings of the meta-poetic instance are no longer possible: their reading requires careful comparison with the history of the trope, and their understanding lies in their role in the prologue, as a chamber of fractured authorial voices.

Where the Gaṅgā River roams the earth: the aesthetic principle of *uccāvaca*

The influence of these conventions on Sanskrit playwriting, and specifically on the corpus at hand, has been profound. Deśika's fourteenth-century version of this trope appears in the trendsetting prologue of his *Saṅkalpasuryodaya,* cited above. The actress asks the director:

> *Naṭī- ayya, kahaṃ ṇāma edasya eataṇiamaṃta-viāṇa-saṃdia-maṇasassa kakkasaara-takkakulisa-ṇissuṭhia-pāsaṃḍa-ddumasaṃḍā-bhāraī ahmārisa-keli-joggaṃ rūvaaṃ kuṇajja?* [*Sanskrit chāyā: ārya katham nāma etasya ekānta-nigamānta-vitāna-saṃdita-mānasasya karkaśa-tara-tarka-kuliśa-nistruṭita-pāṣaṇḍa-druma-ṣaṇḍā-bhāratī asmādṛśa-keli-yogam rūpakam kuryāt*]. (*Saṅkalpasuryodaya,* prose after v. 1.15).[35]
>
> Actress: Tell me, why would he, whose mind is exclusively captured by various Vedāntic doctrines, use his speech, which has blown asunder the thickets of

[34] The *Mahāvīracarita* includes, in reference to the first verse, oddities that Tubb sees as likely to receive harsh critique, and in reference to the second, ample intertextual scholastic references. Tubb, "The Plays of Bhavabhūti", 403-407.

[35] *Saṃkalpasūryodaya of Veṅkaṭanātha* [*Vedāntadeśika*]*, 43-45*. See Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God,* 51–55, for a translation of the prologue and a discussion of the reliance of later hagiographies and biographies of Deśika on the details of this prologue, without taking their meta-fictional artifice into account.

> heretical doctrines with the thunderbolt of his exceedingly harsh reasoning, to compose a play that is just for the amusement of people like us?

Deśika's statement is different from Bhavabhūti's: if the latter proposed parameters for a good play, Deśika makes the discussion about himself, and asks why would a serious scholar like him write in an inferior genre like a play. This difference signals a turn toward a marked authorial presence that this dissertation seeks to analyze. But there is also a clear continuum at play: we can see that the oppositions between scholastic works and drama that Bhavabhūti has introduced by citing himself are refashioned by Deśika, and stated in an even stronger manner. Here, the actress (another fractured voice of the author, despite her distance from him in gender and language) is echoing the well-remembered embedded citation of Bhavabhūti the author. What was stated by the latter (perhaps already ironically) as the preferability of the learnedness of a play to that of the Sanskrit sciences, is here raised as a teasing question, assuming the incongruity, and the cultural hierarchical preference, of serious scholasticism over a popular genre of amusement meant for "people like us".

The director answers the question regarding the tension of devotion and stagecraft with a question:

> …k*im enam aprasakta-nikhila-karaṇa-vyāpāram anubhavaikatāna-mānasam atyanta-nibhṛtâvasthaṃ nibandhāram avadhārayasi*?
>
> Do you really think the author is in a constant state of fixation, having only one thing in mind as he meditates, while completely ignoring all other matters of the world?.

He then continues to recite two verses in which the heavenly Gaṅgā, whose natural habitat is Śiva's hair, might also touch a lame man and flow through the earth, worth citing in full:

> *manu-vyāsa-prācetasa-pariṣad-arhā kvacid iyaṃ*
> *sudhā-siktā sūktiḥ svayam udayam anvicchati jane*
> *nirundhyuḥ ke vindhyācala-vikaṭa-saṃdhyā-naṭa-jaṭā-*

paribhrāntā paṅgor upari yadi gaṅgā nipatati (*Saṃkalpasūryodaya,* v. 1.16)

Poetic phrases, dripping with nectar, worthy of an assembly of
Manu, Vyāsa, and Vālmīki together,
have a life of their own: they seek to speak through anyone, whoever that may be.
Could anyone stop the Ganges River that gushes
from the matted locks of Śiva—the dancer of twilight,
broad like the Vindhyā Mountains—
from falling on a crippled man?

anyad api nidhyāyatu bhavatī:

gambhīra-bhīṣaṇa-gatir giri-khaṇḍanādau
cūḍāpadaṃ paśupater api ghūrṇayantī
svādu-prasanna-subhagāni vasuṃdharāyāṃ
srotāṃsi darśayati kiṃ na sura-sravantī (*Saṃkalpasūryodaya,* v. 1.16)

And you should also know:

Her course is deep and terrible,
And when she breaks through mountains
she messes even Śiva's top bun.
Doesn't the Ganges, River of Gods,
reveal her stream as sweet, clear, and delightful
right here on earth?

This answer, I believe, is something of a forerunner to a key aesthetic principle that Nīlakaṇṭha will come to develop. I am referring to the ideal of *uccāvaca*: diverse, irregular, manifold, uneven, or literally, high-and-low.[36] By this, I refer to an intended fusion of contrastive registers and themes, which I will now take the opportunity to introduce at length. Bhavabhūti raised within the author's voice the play's ability to outdo scholastic speech. But his own cited voice concluded with the need for "nobility of language", literally "loftiness" of speech (*udāratā ca vacasāṃ*), alongside "boldness" and "depth of meaning". Deśika, in turn, is preparing the stage for a ranged principle of high-and-low, which spans various genres and styles (earlier in

[36] See Vaman Shivaram Apte, "Uccāvaca," in *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1858–92*: 1 High and low, uneven, irregular, undulating; 2 Great and small, variegated, heterogeneous; 3 Various, multiform, of various kinds, diverse.*

this self-introduction, he is said to master the three poetic styles: the *gauḍa*, *vaidarbha*, and *pañcāla*)[37]. Here is an author who was interested precisely in those "matters of the world" (*vyāpāra*), and in the paradoxical clarity of the gushing *Gaṅgā* in the world of humans. Nīlakaṇṭha was fond of this image: he wrote a whole composition devoted to the story of the Gaṅgā's descent to earth.

This image, comparing the Sanskrit language to a heavenly river flowing on earth, nicely captures these authors' answer to a framing question that this dissertation inherited: why, or rather how, write in Sanskrit in the "vernacular millennium"?[38] A similar image comparing the heavenly Gaṅgā and the Sanskrit language reappears within a debate staged by Nīlakaṇṭha's rough contemporary, Veṅkaṭādhvarin, in the *Viśvaguṇādarśa*.[39] Here, the more skeptical of the two narrating *Gandharva* creatures compares the misuse of Goddess Sarasvatī, identified with Sanskrit speech (*vāṇī*), to the water of the Ganges utilized to water vegetables.[40]

---

[37] *Saṃkalpasūryodaya of Veṅkaṭanātha* [*Vedāntadeśika*], v.12.

[38] See introduction.

[39] Veṅkaṭhādhvarin is often said to be a classmate of Nīlakaṇṭha's and this is based on the mention of a "Nīlakaṇṭhakavi" in the latter's *Śrīnivāsavilāsacampū*. There is, however, no way of knowing if this Nīlakaṇṭha is indeed the poet in question, and moreover, this composition is in fact most probably not by the same Veṅkaṭadhvarin who authored the well known *Viśvaguṇādarśacampū*, as the colophons of these works are entirely different. See D.G. Vedia, "Agunadarsacampu: A Critical Study" (Baroda, 1972), who hesitates to state this conclusion but presents the evidence for it. I should add, however, that this reference to poet Nīlakaṇṭha fits Nīlakaṇṭha's authorial persona, as the poet in this text is commenting on modern times being like bad poetry: *deva sāyaṃtanaḥ kālo bhāti duṣkavikāvyavat*. *Śrīnivāsavilāsacampū of Veṅkaṭhādhvarin*, eds. Mahamahopadhyaya Durgaprasada and Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 33 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1886) second ullāsa, v. 9, 145. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is in line with the "authorial scene" that Nīlakaṇṭha has come to be known for.

[40] *śrī-nātha-stavanānurūpa-kavanāṃ vāṇīm mano-hāriṇīm kaṣṭaṃ hā kavayaḥ kadarya-kuṭila-kṣmā-pāla-sātkurvate/ dūropāhṛta-saura-saindhava-payo devābhiṣekocitam saṃseke viniyuñjate sumatayaḥ śākalāval(ṇ?)āsya kim*. *Viśvaguṇādarśa Campū of Veṅkaṭādhvarin,* ed., Mahadev Gangadhar Shastri Bakre, (Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1906), 542. Translated as follows in Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 1 (2006): 1–30, 2: "There are lovely words fit to be turned into poetry that praises God. Poets, alas, enslave them to petty, crooked kings. Would anyone in his right mind go to the end of the world to fetch a libation for the god from the heavenly Ganges and then use it to water his vegetables"?

Bronner and Shulman show how the answer to this statement presents a broadening of the scope of themes, particularly worldly ones, that Sanskrit is fit to deal with. They use this examples and others to coin what they call a "regional Sanskrit" of early modern South India. In their words,

> Composing poetry in Sanskrit in seventeenth-century Tamil Nadu means, among other things, positioning oneself in relation to these wider literary universes: pan-Indian epics, cosmopolitan and local Sanskrit kāvya, scientific Sanskrit discourse, and vernacular poetry…Sanskrit enables a unique connectedness of the various domains. It opens up a certain space and offers the poet a kind of freedom.[41]

This analysis describes an essential feature of the corpus of Sanskrit poetry at hand. I wish to relate Nīlakaṇṭha's principle of *uccāvaca* to this "connectedness" of domains and to further qualify it. Here is Nīlakaṇṭha's near-explicit introduction of the *uccāvaca* principle:

> *nantavyāḥ kavayaḥ katīha bahumantavyā rasajñāḥ katī–*
> *–ty etāvat tv alasaḥ karomi kavayo hṛṣyantu ruṣyantu vā*
> *ā-vātsyāyana-tantram ā-śruti-śiras-siddhāntam uccāvacā*
> *vidyā yat-prabhavā jayanti bhuvi tāṃ vande girāṃ devatām* (*Vijaya,* v. 1.8)[42]
>
> There are so many poets to be honored here, so many critics to be considered…
> I am tired of all that. Whatever I do, let poets commend or condemn it!
> I bow to the Goddess of language,
> the origin of all variegated knowledge that thrives on earth
> all the way from the Kāmasūtra, to the Upaniṣads.

This verse, taken from Nīlakaṇṭha's introduction to the *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya* (hereon *Vijaya),* is manifestly programmatic, not unlike the introductory verses surveyed in the previous chapter. We have here again a demarcation of the poetic sphere through the theme of bad critics, which entails an active self-insertion. To my point here, the verse openly states—and performs—a key feature of Nīlakaṇṭha's writing. The verse promotes a vision of *uccāvaca*: a literary Sanskrit that

[41] Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 5.
[42] *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya Campū* [*Vijaya*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., K. S. Sastri and N. Raghunathan (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1965).

encompasses, in effect mixes, different genres and registers to create an uneven texture. Deśika's image of the Ganges flowing on earth anticipated something of this idea: language is divine, and this divinity thrives precisely in its ability to touch the impurities of earth.

The verse deliberately flips the hierarchy of materials, as all Sanskrit knowledge markedly begins with the *Kāmasūtra*, known for its erotic subject matter, and ends with the authoritative *Upaniṣad* scriptures. Additionally, the textual range between the Kāmasūtra and the Upaṇiṣads is enhanced and somewhat enlarged through the slight shift in register between the first half of the verse, composed to imitate a bitter impromptu reflection, built of quick, short phrases, and the second half of the verse, with its well-crafted crescendo that serves both the humorous punch and the devotional statement of the verse. The variegated, uneven *uccāvaca* aesthetic is about broadening the range of Sanskrit literature, aligning together high-and-low orders of knowledge as well as high-and-low registers.

The confident and ironic tone of this verse is also achieved through Nīlakaṇṭha's inversive use of the common trope of poets who rhetorically state their humble position at the beginning of compositions, marked with the word *alasa,* "tired" or "inactive". Nīlakaṇṭha flips this trope to state his dismissal of critics.[43] Unlike the Bhavabhūtian confidence that builds on future appreciation, Nīlakaṇṭha derives his confidence from the goddess alone; this is also evident in the citation I began this chapter with. Nīlakaṇṭha is consistently posing a strong notion of independent authorship. His confidence stems from his intimate relationship with the

[43] In this, Nīlakaṇṭha seems to be in line with the trends of his time. Pollock remarks in passing that "the trope of intellectual self-depreciation (recall Eknāth's confession of being "without knowledge, unstudied in the *śāstra*s") had become so trite by the seventeenth century that Akho, a celebrated Gujarati poet of the period, ridiculed it as completely disingenuous…"Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, 320.

Goddess, strongly identified with the Sanskrit language and corpus, which he sees himself as an indivisible part of, as we shall see in the course of this thesis.

What does *uccāvaca* poetry look like? The following is a representative of Nīlakaṇṭha's treatment of the Gaṅgā's encounter with the earth, briefly cited within the story of King Nahuṣa in the *Līlā*. King Nahuṣa was appointed to serve as the king of the gods following a political vacuum that followed Indra's escape from heaven; like many of Nīlakaṇṭha's themes, the story features a confluence of earthly and divine players.[44] This earthly king creates chaos before being finally dethroned with a famous curse. Here is a snippet of this man-made chaos in Nīlakaṇṭha's version of the story:

> *udadheḥ sura-sindhu-toya-pūrṇāt*
> *udapadyanta yad adbhutāḥ padārthāḥ*
> *tad iyaṃ nipuṇaṃ viśodhanīyety*
> *akhilaṃ gāṅgam avākirat sa toyam* (*Līlā*, v. 3.20)
>
> "Since such astonishing things were born from the ocean
> while it was filled with water from the divine river,
> the earth too could use a full cleansing treatment!"
> With this thought, he poured Ganges water everywhere.

If I am correct, this joke relies on an Ayurvedic treatment that prescribes cleansing with enemas to both man and woman in the context of fertility treatments. Thus, what was done to the ocean (male) should be also applied to earth (female), in hope of more successful products/progeny. While the procedure is traceable in canonical Āyurvedic texts[45], the joke most

[44] Many of Nīlakaṇṭha's compositions principally deal with this topic: besides his *Gaṅgā* as the story of the divine river's descent to earth, his *Vijaya* features the gods' exile to earth, and deals extensively with the tensions of the earthly and the divine, for instance through descriptions of deceased Brahmins who cannot adjust well to heaven, and of gods whose exile on earth is unbearable. The *Līlā* too is premised on the productive encounter of God with the impurities of the earth, and the good poetry that can stem from it.

[45] Cāraka refers to various cleansing procedures, including different kinds of enemas that both man and woman should perform as part of a fertility treatment: *athāpy etau strīpuṃsau sneha-svedābhyām upapādya... saṃśuddhau cāsthāpanām uvāsanābhyām upācaret*. "First of all, both man and woman should undergo unction and fomentation.... then, they should apply non unctuous and unctous enema". *Cārakasamhita,* trans., Priyavrat Sharma (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia), *Śārīrasthānam* 8.4, 462. Translation by Prabhu Ganesh.

probably relies on common idiomatic knowledge that Sanskrit-filiated communities shared in their everyday lives. The joke is quite graphic and its implications of disaster quite extreme, while the Sanskrit itself is rather encoded, and requires interpretative skills of its readers or listeners.[46] To add to this, King Nahuṣa is a human being, not a very accomplished one, who is ruling the gods. He is an epitome of the upside-down mix of heaven and earth, reminiscent of the image of the Gaṅgā on earth, inviting thematic and stylistic hybridity of registers that Nīlakaṇṭha constantly tries to achieve. In the following verse from a different episode of the *Līlā,* Nīlakaṇṭha relatedly invokes the *uccāvaca* principle while describing the poetry of great poets:

> *uccāvacābhir api bhaṅgibhir ullikhanto*
> *nādrākṣur asya hṛdayaṃ kavayo mahāntaḥ*
> *āsādya kaścana vaṭuḥ punar ādiśaivaḥ*
> *padyaṃ prabhor adhisabhaṃ paṭhati sma hṛdyam* (*Līlā,* v. 20.44)
>
> Great poets, composing tongue-twisters, high-and-low
> did not capture his heart's intent.
> Then some Ādiśaiva boy sat down
> and recited a lovely verse in the king's assembly of poets.

With typical self-irony, Nīlakaṇṭha is contrasting the kind of aesthetic that he coined and practiced (here, describing the great Tamil poets of the legend) with a simple, spontaneous verse that ends up winning the king's contest. *Uccāvaca* poetry does not imply simplicity or accessibility; rather, it entails an ideal of hybridity that necessitates informed readership.

If Nīlakaṇṭha was not explicit about *uccāvaca* as a marker of his aesthetic, the principle of *uccāvaca* has come to be identified with his authorial persona. The following lines were written by Rāmabhadra's teacher and father-in-law Cokkanāthakavi, probably the person who

[46] The "earth" is not specified in the verse, but rather identified with a female pronoun, which makes the process of unearthing the image somewhat challenging; I thank Whitney Cox for guidance with this verse.

sent Rāmabhadra to study with Nīlakaṇṭha in the first place (to whom I refer hereon as the 'older Cokkanātha'):

> *śrīmad-vākya-pada-pramāṇa-gahana-pracchāditoccāvaca-*
> *-sphītārtha-pratipādanātinipuṇaḥ śrīnīlakaṇṭhādhvarī*
> *yaṃ bhāṣya-prakaṭīkṛtau paṭayate dvedhārtha-dānātkṛtī*
> *tasyānye sudhiyaḥ kathaṃ na vimalāḥ puṣṇīyur arthapradāḥ.*[47]
>
> The respected Brahmin Nīlakaṇṭha—
> a man exceptionally skilled in expounding rich and diverse (*uccāvaca*)
> meanings and goods (arthas),
> hidden in the depths of the honorable disciplines of Hermeneutics, Grammar, and Logic—
> It is for him that I, Cokkanātha, have composed this work which clarifies language,
> thanks to his double gift (artha) of both intellectual and material support.
> Would other wise teachers, however faultless,
> be able to foster anyone with such gifts (artha)?

This verse is a testament to the fact that the older Cokkanātha was also a student of Nīlakaṇṭha, and that the latter possibly helped the author with funding in some capacity. As I mention in the introduction, Nīlakaṇṭha's role as a possible patron is stated by three different students of his, including this statement by the older Cokkanātha. More to my point here, this verse captures the very core of Nīlakaṇṭha's concerns as a writer. By drawing on the "depths" of authoritative Sanskrit traditions, he is crafting his meanings that are rich (*sphīta*) and diverse, and, literally, high-and-low (*uccāvacā*). When juxtaposed with Nīlakaṇṭha's own use of this word, this statement captures the theoretical force with which he positioned himself within the long and established tradition of Sanskrit knowledge. Literature, as we saw in the previous

[47] Taken from Cokkanātha's *Bhāṣyaratnāvali*, cited in Kuppuswami Sastri, "Introduction to Śivalilārṇava," in *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita* (Srirangam: Vani Vilas Press, 1911), 33.

chapter, is made of all materials of the world, beginning with the Sanskrit canon and including anything that the River Goddess may have encountered on earth.

This principle of composite textualities can be generally said to be a feature of early modern literary cultures in South India. David Shulman identifies mixed linguistic registers as a feature of early modern texts throughout different literary languages of South India. Shulman demonstrates how these literary compositions feature a notable richness of horizontal references with other genres and artistic mediums of their time—as well as vertical references, referencing a rich tradition of past Sanskrit and other texts.[48] This ecosystem of embraided citations results from traditions that celebrate their notable continuity, and deal in creative ways with the awesome burden of these continuities, which are especially pertinent in Sanskrit. The *uccāvaca* principle of variegation, which stems from influential precedents such as Deśika's notes in his prologue, is a signature of Nīlakaṇṭha's poetry and his poetic milieu.

By way of comparison, we can draw a parallel with the turn to poetic range in poetry in western contexts from the mid-twentieth century onward, which

> saw a considerable rise in the poetic use of a range of language varieties not traditionally associated with poetry, including colloquial, conversational language. This tendency often goes hand in hand with the adoption of imaginary poetic voices, clearly separate from that of the author...[49]

[48] "Reading prabandhas (i.e, compositions that Shulman defines in this essay, which function as compositional wholes) from this period, I am sometimes reminded of Walter Benjamin's dream of composing a book entirely from quotations. Benjamin was thinking in terms of depth, resonance, and, one supposes, the continuous weaving together of chunks of past language to produce novel singularities—through juxtaposition, raucous disharmonies and irregular harmonies, decontextualization and recontextualization, abstraction, discontinuous segmenting, separating, making strange, shifting perspectives, sudden illuminations, and so on..." David Shulman, "Prabandha: Mode, Tone, Theme," 2019, 14.

[49] Elena Semino, "Stylistics and Linguistic Variation in Poetry," *Journal of English Linguistics* 30, no. 1 (2022): 28.

The range of language varieties not associated with poetry, and the element of other imaginary poetic voices, are emblematic to our authors' use of the master trope of the prologue. To clarify, Nīlakaṇṭha differs in numerous respects from late twentieth-century poets. The comparison is fruitful mainly because the aesthetic value of a broad range of registers in a verbal art form, especially in poetry, is recognizable to any modern reader.[50] One clear difference from the democratic sensibilities that guide the alignment of registers in modern theory and praxis is just how broad the range of language is. There is a clear limit to Nīlakaṇṭha's *uccāvaca*: when compared to other Sanskrit works from the nearby Thanjavur court, Nīlakaṇṭha's range seems rather narrow when it comes to the "lower" or colloquial end of the spectrum.[51]

However, the very ideal of heterogeneity is important to him, and it is one of his primary techniques of positioning himself as a learned poet in the canon of Sanskrit poetry. Concomitantly, the *uccāvaca* principle does not mean that these texts were meant for variegated audiences, with different levels of Sanskrit expertise. I'm inclined to say the opposite: the principle of variegation actively delineates communities of readers who can enjoy both ends of the spectrum. The contrastive effect doesn't work otherwise. Moreover, Nīlakaṇṭha's principle of variegation applies exclusively to Sanskrit. Veṅkaṭadhvārin whom I cited above explicitly mentions Tamil predecessors alongside the more expected Sanskrit luminaries in the introduction to his piece, as does Deśika, whom Veṅkaṭadhvārin mentioned as a poetic influence.[52]

---

[50] Semino (*Ibid)* surveys the formalist evolution in theorizing this wide-spread phenomena through the idea of "deviation" of register and style.

[51] I intend to pursue the Sanskrit that lies outside of Nīlakaṇṭha's range at the neighboring court in future work. I am thinking of works like the anonymous *Gajakaliviḍambaṇa,* a parody about the maltreatment of elephants in the Thanjavur court, written in extremely straightforward verse, or of works meant for the stage, such as Vāsudevakavi's padams, or Cokkanāthakavi's *Candrakalāśāhajīyam*, a work about King Śāhaji which incorporates Telugu padams alongside Sanskrit verse, or the *Mohinīvilāsa Kuravañci* of Saptaṛṣi, again featuring the character of King Śāhaji as the lover protagonist, and written in a mixture of Tamil, markedly non literary Sanskrit, and Telugu.

[52] Deśika, whom Bronner and Shulman introduce as "a foundational figure in the world of south Indian 'regional' Sanskrit" (Bronner and Shulman, "Cloud Turned Goose", 5), is an exceptional figure who composed in Sanskrit,

Nīlakaṇṭha's writing is expressively unilingual, as we have seen in the previous chapter, and this seems to be the prevailing model for most Sanskrit poets of the 'vernacular millennium'. It is plausible that the programmatic call for, and performance of, the enlargement of the Sanskrit range of registers and genres is a certain reaction—conscious or not—to the vernacular literary culture flourishing around these men.

Self-orchestrations in early modern prologues from South India

Having introduced the *uccāvaca* principle, we are better equipped to turn to Nīlakaṇṭha's variegated voices in the prologue to the *Nala*.

> *Sūtradhāra: kasya vā punar anyasyânugraheṇa bhaviṣyati. tatra-bhavatyāḥ paradevatāyās tad-avatārasya ca bhagavato nārāyaṇādhvariṇaḥ prasādena*
>
> *uktaṃ ca tenaiva kavinā:*
>
> *candraśekhara-savyāṅga-caraṇonmārjanāmbhasām*
> *vivartā jagad-utsaṅge viharanti mad-uktayaḥ (Nala,* v. 1.9).
>
> *nārāyaṇādhvarīndrāya namo 'stu jñāna-sindhave*
> *śāradā yat-kaṭākṣāṇāṃ sāpy avetana-kiṃkarā* (*Nala,* v. 1.10).
>
> Who *else* could foster Nīlakaṇṭha's special talent? It is his father, Nārāyaṇādhvarin, an incarnation of the ultimate divine Goddess, who granted him with this gift. (Nīlakaṇṭha) the poet *said so himself*—
>
> "My words are whirlpools running deep into the world,
> transformed out of the waters with which
> I clean the feet of the Goddess,
> known as Śiva's–better–half;
>
> I bow to the master Nārāyaṇādhvarin, an ocean of knowledge.
> Goddess Śāradā herself is an unpaid servant
> of his sidelong glances."

Tamil and Maṇipravalam, and explicitly drew on the canons of both Sanskrit and Tamil literatures; his mulitlinguilism has much to do with his Vaiṣṇava identity. See Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God*. Veṅkaṭadhvārin cited Deśika as his major source of inspiration; see Vedia, "Agunadarsacampu: A Critical Study," 14.

These embedded citations by the "author himself", following the trope we are already familiar with, are actual citations by the author: they appear in Nīlakaṇṭha's introduction to the *Gaṅgā*. Here, their order of appearance is reshuffled; in the *Gaṅgā*, the verse about Nīlakaṇṭha's father appears within the opening sequence introducing great poets beginning with Vālmīki and Kālidāsa (v. 1.5), and the verse about Nīlakaṇṭha's words flowing out of the water with which he cleans the goddess' feet appears later (v. 1.58), in a sequence describing his choice to compose the story of the Gaṅgā. The twinning of these disparate verses in the prologue grants new meaning to the poet's creative devotion to the goddess, as is made clear in the prose introduction to these verses. If Nīlakaṇṭha cleans the goddess' feet with water (which then transform into his poetic flow), the goddess herself cleans his father's feet as an unpaid servant. The water metaphors also somehow add up: Nīlakaṇṭha's words impressively flow (*vivartāḥ*) from the little water one needs to wash the goddess' feet in a puja ceremony, but his father is an entire ocean of knowledge.

Before I go on to reflect on the genealogical commitment in Nīlakaṇṭha's self-presentation, let us closely inspect the effect of the trope of the direct speech of the poet. These citations grant a marker of authenticity by making the author into a flesh-and-blood person who "speaks," all the more by citing his own words from a different composition of his. And yet, the illusion of the stage and its complex relationship with the world is still somehow present. The author's own words, perhaps identifiable to his audience, are presented through the textual convention of the author's direct speech and are deliberately reshuffled. It is as if the author can take bits of himself apart and put them back together again, crafting a textual presentation of himself that is staged as a spontaneous debut play. The direct speech of the author then continues:

> *Pāripārśvakaḥ: ayam kavir antarmukhas trayyanta-vicāra-pravṛtto'pi karoti sma nāṭake'py abhirucim.*

Sūtradhāraḥ: yato 'yam īdṛśas tad evoktam atrāpi viṣaye tenaiva:

kālaṃ jetum upāyau dvau kali-kalmaṣa-saṃplutam
kathā vā niṣadheśasya kāśī vā viśvapāvanī (*Nala,* v.1. 11).

Assistant: why is this poet, an active introspective scholar of Vedānta, now interested in composing a mere play?

Director: Since this is the way he is, he said on this very subject:

"There are two means to overcome these times,
overwhelmed by the filth of the Kali era:
either the story of Nala, King of Niṣadha,
or Kāśī, the city that purifies worlds".

Bhavabhūti's "direct" citation about the superiority of a play's "learning and craftsmanship," alongside Deśika's reversal of the affirmation into the actress' playful doubt regarding the reasons to produce a play, create for Nīlakaṇṭha precisely the density of the material that allows for his biographic game of shadows. Here, I doubt if the citation is taken from one of Nīlakaṇṭha's prior compositions. However, the history of intertexts makes this scripted citation of the author's own voice into another gesture of familiarity. Through the implicit comparison with these intertexts, the difference in style and content of Nīlakaṇṭha's answer is heightened.

There are two things worth stressing about this last embedded citation. The first is the reference to Kāśī. The implication is that for a Southerner like Nīlakaṇṭha, there are creative alternatives to traveling all the way to Benares (where one famously overcomes death and achieves liberation).[53] This is also Nīlakaṇṭha's way to link the topic of his composition with his motivation to write it, apropos of the metapoetic conventions of the prologue: even though the

[53] This might also be Nīlakaṇṭha's whimsical response to contemporary controversies around the "death-in-Benares" doctrine. Christopher Minkowski demonstrates how the old doctrine of seeking death in the city gained prominence in the early modern period, and was discussed by major Sanskrit philosophers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the Mahābhārata commentator Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara, Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita and Nagoji Dīkṣita. Christopher Minkowski, "Nilakantha Caturdhara's Mantrakasikhanda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 2 (2002), 336-338.

plot of the Nala and Damayantī story is incomplete in the play, in the epic the story ends with a boon that Nala receives from the demon Kali, the personification of the devastating throw of the dice, due to which whoever reads his story will not be affected by the Kali age.[54] It is thus a statement on the power of literature and its making in the phenomenal world of the Kali yuga.

The second thing to note is the marked simplicity of the author's cited speech. We have seen Bhavabhūti's quotations of himself pronounce the idea of an alternative learnedness that comes through in plays rather than in scholastic works, and we have seen Deśika's director evoke the idea of the heavenly Gaṅgā roaming the earth in this context, but Nīlakaṇṭha's contribution is also one of register. In all three embedded citations, he quotes himself in the simple and speech-like *anuṣṭubh* meter, as well as in a straightforward syntax and register of Sanskrit.[55] The result, I think, especially in this last citation about Kāśī, is a certain imitation of spoken Sanskrit, with a proverbial or subhāṣita-like style, that the author might have regularly conversed in with his colleagues. The convoluted and poetic *maṅgala* verse that precedes the author's "direct" words demonstrates the range of poetic and proverbial Sanskrit, including the

[54] This appears in the Mahābharata version of the story, 3.70.33, where Kali promises to Nala: *ye ca tvāṃ manujā loke kīrtayiṣyanty atandritāḥ matprasūtaṃ bhayaṃ teṣāṃ na kadācid bhaviṣyati*. "The men who will attentively glorify you will never fear me" "Mahābhārata Electronic Text, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute," 1999, http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/mbh/sas/mahabharata.htm.

[55] Māyurāja is a notable example of an early author (cited by Kashmiri poeticians already in the tenth century) who cites "himself" in the prologue, and he too employs the anuṣṭubh meter. His introduction, however, does not involve the trope of defending the genre of the play as inferior, and hence is less evident as an interetext in Nīlakaṇṭha's version. It reads: *sa kila kavir evam uktavān mayā hi- na kavitvābhimānena na ca vyāmūḍha-cetasā racitaṃ nāṭakam idaṃ sugoṣṭhī bhāvitātmanā* (Udātta Rāghava, 1.6). "The poet himself said, and I (the director) repeat: "I wrote this play not because I consider myself as a poet, nor because of a hallucenary state of mind- but because the assembly of good men encouraged me to do so". Māyurāja goes on to describe the assembly as scholars who excel in linguistics, hermenuitics, epistemology (nyāya) and many languages, as well as all Vedic branches of learning. (7). *Udātta Rāghavam of Māyurāja*, ed., V. Raghavan, trans. M. Jayaraman (Chennai: Centre for Performing Arts), 2016. Another notable precedent (not in the anuṣṭubh meter) is Rājaśekhara, who "cites" himself in the prologue in five straight verses, but he too does not deal directly with the trope of genre inferiority. *Balarāmāyaṇa of Rājaśekhara*, ed., Andit Govinda Deva Sastri (Benares: Medical Hall Press), 1869. v. 1.8–12.

intense conversation with authoritative precedents. This is a performance of the *uccāvaca* principle, a signature of Nīlakaṇṭha's voice and of his time more generally.

The familiarity of the audience with the trope of the author's embedded speech makes this statement into 'direct speech', quotation marks intended. It is not the most authentic or unmediated authorial voices of the prologue; rather, it is meant to complement the inheritance of the fragmented voice of the author, who masters a range of registers, from the speechlike to the poetic and learned. If Bhavabhūti's self quotations are especially meta-poetic and arguably true-to-life, Nīlakaṇṭha's "direct speech" is designed to make the audience contemplate the fragmentary and multi-voiced game of the author in his prologue, recognizable as a distinct author and yet dismantled and recycled anew on stage through multiple voices. The question I posed, *how* to write Sanskrit (in the "vernacular millennium"), begins to find an answer in this pronounced aesthetic, which values expertise in articulating—indeed, self-referencing—one's distinct voice from within the canonical tradition. It is not that individuality is not valued, quite on the contrary: but rather, blending in and standing out are, in this model of individuality, complimentary.

As a comparison in point, Nīlakaṇṭha's appropriation of the inherited chamber of voices in the prologue brings to mind Bakhtin's analysis of heteroglossia in the novel:

> All forms involving a narrator or a posited author signify to one degree or another by their presence the author's freedom from a unitary and singular language, a freedom connected with the relativity of literary and language systems; such forms open up the possibility of never having to define oneself in language, the possibility of translating one's own intentions from one linguistic system to another, of fusing "the language of truth" with "the language of the everyday", of saying "I am me" in someone else's language, and in my own language, "I am other". Such a refracting of authorial intentions takes place in all these forms [the tale of a narrator, of a posited author, or of one of the characters].[56]

[56] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson, Revised ed. edition (Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1982), 315.

Nīlakaṇṭha is not writing novels, but this description of the authorial freedom entailed in the refraction of his authorial signature seems especially apt. In the case of the prologue, this refraction takes on personal dimensions as the characters literally include the author himself, and include biographical references to him.

To return to the format of the prologue, Rāmabhadra also enjoys the freedom of refracted authorial voices in his *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* (hereafter *Śṛṅgāra*).[57] He too uses the mold of the "direct speech" while invoking (and elaborating on) the inherited contrasts of a play, especially of the erotic *bhāṇa* genre, with other, more serious genres of Sanskrit production:[58]

> *Pāripārśvikaḥ- katham asya raghu-vīra-caraṇāravinda-smaraṇa-nirantara-pravaṇa-cetaso bhāṇa-nirmāṇe 'pi pravṛttaṃ hṛdayam*
>
> *Sūtradhāra: uktam atra tenaiva:*
>
> *"prārthito nija-śiṣyeṇa raghunāthena dhīmatā*
> *śṛṅgāratilakaṃ nāma bhāṇam viracayāmy aham"*
>
> Assistant: How is this possible? His mind is full of ongoing meditations on the lotus feet of Rāma, the Raghu hero, yet his heart is fixed on composing a bhāṇa!
>
> Director: The author himself said about this:
>
> "since my own student, the clever Raghunātha, had asked me to,
> I am composing a bhāṇa, called the Śṛṅgāratilakam" (*Śṛṅgāra,* v. 7 and prose leading to it) [59]

Once more we see the inherited trope of the clash of genres serve as a stage for biographical details, here clearly meant to refer to the author who (as we will see in the next

---

[57] *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* [*Śṛṅgāra*] *of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, eds., Pandit Śivadatta and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 44 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1894).

[58] There is an especially developed history of this trope in prologues to *bhāṇa* plays: for instance, in the *Rasaratnākarabhāṇa* of eighteenth-century Kerala, the director convinces the actress to perform the bhāṇa; she would have rather performed one of Kalidāsa's plays. See K.K Raji, "Rasaratnākara Bhāṇa: Critical Study and Translation." (Tripunithura, Government Sanskrit College, 1999). appendix, 121.

[59] I wasn't able to trace the identity of his student Raghunātha, and neither has Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time."

chapter) devoted much of his poetic energy to his hymns to Rāma. The formula is a direct inheritance from the self-citation of Nīlakaṇtha's (*uktam atra tenaiva* "the author himself said about this") and the answer is again in marked spoken Sanskrit, and in the straightforward *anuṣṭubh* meter. Here, the statement does not even sound like a citable proverb, but rather like an idiosyncratic, direct reply. It is as if Rāmabhadra naturally speaks in *anuṣṭubh*. The contrast of this straightforward spoken Sanskrit with Rāmabhadra's learned poetic style, as well as the intertext with Nīlakaṇṭha, becomes especially evident in the discussion that follows, cited in the previous chapter in the context of my discussion of the *sarva-tantra-svatantra* poet, and worth repeating in full for our purposes here:

> Assistant: but again, here my heart is somewhat in doubt.
>
> Director—how is that?
>
> Assistant: how does someone like him, whose compositions are mostly known for their rough touch of coarse grammatical style, have the confidence to compose words filled with rasa?
>
> Director: Don't you know? The ability to string together rasa-full words appears even for someone who visited, just once, the classroom of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣiṭa, who independently and quite uncommonly explained that all the different disciplines are Brahma's wife Sarasvatī, in her very embodiment; taking his form, she descended secretly on earth in order to vivify the thin shoot of rasa-full poetry, which bad poets have entirely destroyed. How much more, then, should this be said on the part of this poet, who is his own student, and who is especially intent on revering him?[60]

Rāmabhadra continues to employ the inherited theme of generic contrast of scholastic Sanskrit and plays to insert a laudatory introduction of his authorial persona, as his other well-

[60] *Pāripārśvikaḥ - punar api tatra kiṃcid āśaṅkate me hṛdayam. Sūtradhāra - kiṃ tat Pāripārśvikaḥ - tasya paricita-bhūyiṣṭha-niṣṭhura-kaiyyaṭa-vacana-saṃparka-karkaśa-vākya-kramasya kathaṃ sarasa-pada-saṃdarbhe 'pi prāgalbhyam iti. Sūtradhāra - yat kiṃcit etat. kiṃ na paśyasi? samantanto 'pi duṣkavibhir upahatasya sarasa-kavitā-kandalasya punar ujjīvanāya dharaṇyāṃ gūḍham avatīrṇāṃ caturmukha-vara-varṇinīm ātmarūpety asādhāraṇena sarva-tantrāṇi svātantryeṇa vivṛṇvatāṃ nīlakaṇṭhamakhināṃ sadasi sakṛt praviṣṭasyâpi samullasati sarasa-pada-saṃdarbha-vaidagdhī. asya punaḥ kaves tadīya-śiṣyasya viśiṣiya tad-bhajanânuraktasya kimu vaktavyam* (*Śṛṇgāra,* prose after v. 7).

known hat (other than being a most creative devotee) is that of the grammarian.[61] This answer stands in stark contrast of register to the earlier "direct" quote, presenting an entangled and crafted Sanskrit. It performs the *uccāvaca* effect of range, and also *speaks* it: this answer is something of a restatement of Nīlakaṇṭha's *uccāvaca* principle. Nīlakaṇṭha, writes Rāmabhadra, innovatively subsumed *all* Sanskrit disciplines under the umbrella of poetry, as an incarnation of the goddess herself, whose mission is to save poetry.

For our purposes here, note that Rāmabhadra's elaborate introduction of his teacher is his way of introducing himself. On the face of it, there is nothing new in a laudatory introduction of the author and his lineage at the beginning of a work.[62] What is noticeable is the extent to which, and the creativity with which, Nīlakaṇṭha, Rāmabhadra and their circles present their role models and teachers. In the prologues of the corpus at hand, there is no self-promotion without a laudatory, often playful, and sometimes very detailed presentation of the author's ancestry. As a rule, and in a manner emphasized in comparison to former formulas of the prologue, our poets' self-introduction is tied in with their families, teachers, and students.

To demonstrate this further, let us return once more to Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nala*. The introduction of the author begins after the director mentions a glorious new play that suits the audience's demands, written by Nīlakaṇṭha. The discussion follows:

Pāripārśvika: āh, sa (sa hi) rukmiṇīpariṇayasyāpi praṇetā.

---

[61] See for instance the prologue to Bhagavanta's *Rāghavābhyudaya*, cited in P. P. Subrahmanya Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahāl Library, Tanjore*, vol. IIX (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1928), 3501.

[62] The reference to the author's teachers in literary works probably began around the 9th century, and became established practice by the 14th c., with a figure like Pūrṇasarasvatī. I thank Andrew Ollett for this observation (personal communication).

Sūtradhāra: (vihasya) nahi nahi, asmai khalu pitṛvyo 'yam appayyadīkṣito nāma sarasa-kavitā-sāmrājya-sārva-bhaumas tat-praṇetā. ayaṃ tu mukundavilāsasya kāvyasya nibanddhā. (*Nala,* prose after v. 1.5).

Assistant: Yes, he is the author of the Rukmiṇīpariṇaya as well.

Director: (Laughing)—No, no—the composer of the Rukmiṇīpariṇaya is his paternal uncle, Appayyadīkṣita, the universal ruler of the empire of poetry, full of rasa. He (Nīlakaṇṭha) is rather the composer of the Mukundavilāsa.

Nīlakaṇṭha repeatedly situates Appayya as his most significant figure of inspiration, a god incarnate. Read as an absurd mistake, and/or as a parody of common mistaken attributions,[63] this is in any case a bold and witty self-presentation on Nīlakaṇṭha's part. An author's individuality and prestige are intrinsically bound with his *paramparā* or lineage—to the degree that his identity becomes fused with that of the famous ancestor of his lineage. The lauding presentation of Appayya continues on unprecedented terms: Nīlakaṇṭha includes *verbatim* citations about Appayya by the contemporary authors Bālakavi and Samarapuṅgayajvan, and another citation about his father, Accā Dīkṣita (Appaya's brother) is ascribed to Gururāmakavi.[64] Nīlakaṇṭha seems to assume that these texts or verses are at least vaguely familiar to the audience through their filial circles. And as if to add volume to the inherently multivoiced prologue, he

[63] This mistake is historically interesting since it somewhat anticipates the wrong dates that the scholarship has reproduced with regards to Nīlakaṇṭha, precisely by mistakenly assuming that Appayya was his living teacher. For this mistaken attribution see Yigal Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory: Appayya Dīkṣita Through the Ages," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016), 20–1.

[64] *Nala*, v. 6–8. Bronner traced the quote by Samarapuṅgayajvan, which references the shower of gold that Appayya received by his patron Cinnabomma, to the *Yātrāprabandha* (2.95). Bālakavi may be identical to the author of the *Ratnaketūdayam* (see Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue* , 3492-4); the verse by him reads: *appadīkṣita kimity atistutiṃ varṇayāmi bhavato vadānyatām so 'pi kalpatarur arthasiddhaye tvadgirām avasaraṃ pratīkṣate* "Oh Appadiksita, how can I sing a praise for you, the very principle of generosity? Even a wishing tree awaits the opportunity of your words, for the flourish of goods/meanings (*artha*)." Sastri tells a background story that circulated about this verse, due to which Govinda Dīkṣita, the famous minister of King Rāghunātha of Thanjavur and the father of Nīlakaṇṭha's teacher Veṅkaṭanātha, taught his students the concept of the wishing tree and asked them to compose a verse to show their understanding of it; Appayya Dīkṣita happened to come by, and the students composed a verse that implies that he is even more generous than the wishing tree. Sastri goes on to show that the *Harivaṃśasāracaritam,* on which Appayya wrote a commentary, was written by a different Govinda Dīkṣita, such that this story probably circulated in light of a misidentification of this texts' author. Kuppuswami Sastri, "Introduction to Śivalilārṇava," 30. Gururāmakavi's citation was not traced to date.

inserts the novel feature of voices of *other* authoritative men into the conventional self-praise of the author and his ancestry in the prologue.[65] Surveying the praxis of praise of poets in the introductions to Sanskrit works of literature, Sheldon Pollock suggests that:

> The kaviprasaṃsā is one form that literary history has taken in early South Asia; it is one of the key mechanisms of canon-creation and classic-creation; and it is part of a strategy of the self-canonization of the work that the kaviprasaṃsā introduces.[66]

Here, however, there is a notable difference in scale from conventional canon-building through praise: Nīlakaṇṭha focuses on a closed circle of family and teachers, and avoids the mention of the better-known poets of the past. Everybody knows *them*.[67] As I discuss further in chapter five, this introduction reveals a certain taken-for-granted familiarity of the readers with the author's lineage (perhaps similar to the kind that a dissertation like this assumes on the part of its most immediate readership). It is *also* meant, I suggest, for a more distant circle of readers of his time or for future readers, for whom this intimacy would become a signature trace of this network of poets. After all, the temporal modality of the prologue, as framed by Bhavabhūti and his imagined soulmate of the future, assumes the circulation of texts beyond the playwright's own lifetime and milieu. This self-presentation wears its intimacy on its sleeve.

---

[65] This finds resonance in equivalent practices of Tamil literary circles of pulavars (learned poets) in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which Sascha Ebeling has termed "the pulavars' economy of praise", such as the practice of the *cīṭṭukkavi* ("letter verse") where poets composed verses in prefaces of works of their peers in various occasions, or the practice of the *araṅkēṟṟam,* a public book launch which usually included the live commentary and praise by disciples and fellow poets. See Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words,* pp. 62–86. There are also rough parallels from early modern North India, such as the famous *Kavīndracandrodaya*, a colleciton of verses from various Sanskrit poets in honor of a Banaras Pandit who managed to convince the emperor Shah Jehan to abolish tax pilgrimage to Banaras, and another such collection from the time of Akbar in honor of Narasṃhāśrama. See Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Letters Home: Banaras Pandits and the Maratha Regions in Early Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 201–40, 205, fn 18.

[66] Sheldon Pollock, "In Praise of Poets: On the History and Function of the Kavirpraśaṃsā," in *Ānanda Bhāratī: Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy Felicitation Volume*, ed. B Channakeshava and H.V Nagaraja Rao (Mysore: D. V. K. Murthy, 1995), 452.

[67] As noted in the above cited prologue of the *Rāghavābhyudayam*: *vidyāmāneṣu prācām api rūpakeṣu*. (Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 3501).

Much like his poetic fingerprint in general, Nīlakaṇṭha's self-insertion is unique, yet it is subtly woven into the familiar tropes of the prologue. The "direct speech" in Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's cases is not meant to present the author as an unmediated, biographical presence, at least not unproblematically so. Rather, it contributes to the authorial range of registers and rearranged citations, which are a marked innovation of Nīlakaṇṭha's as far as I can tell. The complementary voices of the director and audience reveal more of the author's identity so that it becomes clear that within this game of mirrors, a direct or explicit authorial autograph is not an option. It is rather inseparable from the intimate student-teacher relationship with which each author deeply identified and communicated through the long-inherited tropes and conventions of the Sanskrit tradition. The two are deeply related: the author is part of a cosmopolitan or classical tradition precisely because he was trained by a teacher who intimately embodies this tradition.

Textualized performances and the authors' making of space

Given the discussion thus far, here is a rule of thumb that this chapter will continue to test and demonstrate: wherever the Sanskrit author comes closest to speaking in the first person, a well-known textual trope is probably present. We have already seen that bits and pieces of the social realities of these writers are inserted through inherited formulas of the prologue. Notable among these are the insertions of specific locations of the stages in well-known Southern temples, which were actual, or at least imagined homes to these authors.

It might not come as a surprise that Bhavabhūti was probably the first Sanskrit poet to name a specific temple stage in his prologues.[68] This convention was taken up by the authors of

[68] All three of Bhavabhūti's plays mention in their prologue the Kālapriyanātha temple, probably identifiable to readers of his time, and plausibly located through intricate guesswork in V. V. Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti* (Delhi: Motilal

the corpus at hand, who began to reference temples in well-known Southern towns and temples. Thus, Deśika places his audience in Srirangam, having come from a tour of Vaiṣṇava temples;[69] the famous Vijayanagara king and poet Kṛṣṇadevarāya of the early sixteenth century echoes a similar pattern to describe an audience who came to see the festival of Virūpākṣadeva;[70] Nīlakaṇṭha mentions the audience arriving at the Kāmākṣī festival for the God of Kancipuram,[71] his brother Atirātra mentions an audience of pilgrims to the *Caitrotsava* festival in the Mīnākṣī temple in Madurai;[72] Nīlakaṇṭha's son Gīrvāṇendra places the audience to his *bhāṇa* in the festival of Vāradārāja, again in Kancipuram;[73] Rāmabhadra mentions the temple of Mīnākṣī in Madurai;[74] Ghyanaśyāma, a prolific eighteenth century author and minister to the Maratha kings following Śāha, who wrote a commentary to Nīlakaṇṭha's *Vijaya,* mentions the famous Ārdrādarśana (Thiruvadirai) temple of Naṭarāja at Cidambaram.[75] And the list goes on: as far as I can tell, the vast majority of Sanskrit plays from the vicinity of the corpus at hand stages their audience, and venues, in such a way.

Were these plays actually performed in these major temple festivals, given what we know of the games of realia in the prologues? Or do the authors imagine them to have been, using old templates to insert their socio-religious sites of identification? The relevant scholarship is silently conflicted on this question. Some scholars present an assumption that Sanskrit plays stopped, at some point in time, being written for an actual stage. This assumption has been silently accepted by many, and yet the accounts that directly promote it seem to be overdetermined, if not

---

Banarsidass, 1996), 80–86.
[69] *Saṃkalpasūryodaya of Veṅkaṭanātha* [*Vedāntadeśika*], prose after v.2.
[70] *Jāmbavatīpariṇayam*, extract cited in Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 3402–3.
[71] *Nala,* prose after v.3.
[72] Jayasree, "Kuśakumudvatīya Nāṭaka [Kuśa] of Atirātra Yajvan (Appendix)," prose after verse 5.
[73] *Śṛṅgārakośaḥ* of Gīrvāṇendra, extract cited in Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 3597 prose before v. 4.
[74] *Śṛṅgāra,* prose after v.3.
[75] *Madanasaṃjīvanabhāṇa* of Ghyanaśyāma, extract cited in Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 3586.

problematic.[76] The situation may certainly vary from play to play: the most convincing voices arguing for non-staged plays point to specific specimens that seem too long or complex for a full performance.[77] The surviving *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* tradition of Kerala is one indication that a performance of classical Sanskrit plays would have required a radical revision for the stage.[78] There are recent voices to the contrary, too. Timothy Bellefleur develops a compelling argument for the required stage interpretation embedded in Rājaśekhara's *Viddhaśālabhañjikā*.[79]

We have seen that these plays were at least *also* texts, circulated and enjoyed as such. Granoff suggests that by Bilhaṇa and Rāmacandra's influential playwrighting in the eleventh century, "plays were as much meant to be read as poetry as they were meant to be performed...", and cites the independent circulation of verses from plays without their surrounding prose as evidence for their reception as textual artifacts.[80] By the time of our authors, the prologue was a traditional arena to contemplate the very textuality of performative aspects of the play. Our

---

[76] Herman Tieken presents a strong version of this argument, arguing for a very early rift between the stage and the text. He argues that *all* known dramatical scripts functioned as literary texts (perhaps later staged by way of revival), drawing on a compelling, yet over-determined, analysis of patterns of prologues in some plays alongside intertexts from the Nāṭyaśāstra. Tieken, "The Pūrvaraṅga, the Prastāvanā, and the Sthāpaka,"117–121. The introduction to Rachel Van M. Baumer and James R. Brandon, eds., *Sanskrit Drama in Performance* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1993), xvii-xix, places the rift much later and is not nearly as grounded: its editors state that the earlier playwrights, from Kalidāsa to Bhavabhūti, meant for their plays to be performed, whereas around the twelfth century there occurred a "death" of Sanskrit theatre. Raghavan's paper in this volume states that "the further specimens of Sanskrit drama [were] becoming more and more exhibitions of the poetic or literary gifts of a writer". V. Raghavan, "Sanskrit Drama in Performance," in *Ibid*, 9–44.

[77] David Shulman suggests that Murāri's Anargharāghava was meant for recitation, rather than for enactment on stage, due to the play's complexity, and the repeated reading or listening that it requires. David Shulman, "Murāri's Depths," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 459.

[78] As already signaled in *Ibid*. for the best account of the surviving Kudiyattam theatre, see Heike Oberlin and David Shulman, eds., *Two Masterpieces of Kūṭiyāṭṭam: Mantrāṅkam and Aṅgulīyāṅkam* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[79] The convincing parts of Bellefleur's argument involve stage directions, especially those that he calls "affective", which require some interpretation on the part of the actor or director, as well as what he reads as spatial considerations of the stage embedded in the plot. This argument is far from decisive: it is not impossible to assume that these stage directions, as do all the "performative" elements that Bellefleur is pointing to, were meant to be read by a learned audience that had the necessary theoretical toolkit to envision the text on reading it. Timothy Earl Bellefleur, "Reconsidering Rājaśekhara : Performance and Courtly Context in Viddhaśālabhañjikā" (University of British Columbia, 2012).

[80] Granoff, "Putting the Polish on the Poet's Efforts," 547.

authors' prologues became increasingly complex and playful in this regard, and this strengthens the plausibility that the Sanskrit drama was, for the authors of this dissertation, primarily a textual tradition.

We are also far closer in time to the modern absence of Sanskrit stages than in the case of, say, Rājaśekhara or Bhavabhūti. We know, for instance, that Rāmabhadra's *Jānakīpariṇaya* was regularly read in Sanskrit colleges in the early nineteenth century, around a hundred years or less after it was composed, and its many translations and editions point to its textual reception.[81] Other Sanskrit compositions for the stage from Thanjavur are generically designed for music and dance, and are centered around the king. Like other stage-genres at court in Telugu, Tamil, and Kannada, their language is markedly simple, and they are short in text and highly erotic in nature.[82] This generic difference makes the performative career of the long and erudite plays of Nīlakaṇṭha's circle less likely, at the very least radically different in its performative mode and audience from the booming performance culture in courts and temples surrounding them.

To complicate the picture further, we have roughly conventional Sanskrit plays written by learned Brahmin authors who were Rāmabhadra's neighbors at the same *brahmadeya* village, whose prologues feature information that very likely points to a historical debut performance. Thus, the *Rāghavābhyudaya* of Bhagavantarāya, which mentions Rāmabhadra as a literary

[81] It was "...the first drama read by the majority of students in the indigenous Sanskrit schools of Southern India. This drama has repeatedly been printed in Telugu, and in Grantha charracters at Madras and in Devanagari at Bombay. It is known also among those who do not read Sanskrit through its translations into Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi and other vernacular languages. Even its translations in some of the South-Indian vernaculars have been more than once prescribed as textbooks for University examinations in the Madras Presidency..." Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time," 126. Sastri seems to be describing a pedagogical situation that is already prevalent for a few years, if not more.

[82] An example in point is Vasudeva's Sanskrit padams. See Talia Ariav and Margherita Trento, "A History of Sandeśa on Stage (and Its Aftermath): Sanskrit Padams from Eighteenth-Century Thanjavur," in *Mapping the World through Courier Poetry*, ed. Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, Forthcoming. Cokkanātha's *Candrakalaśāhajīyam* was undoubtedly meant to be performed as its short length and embedded padam songs (some in Telugu) reveal.

authority, describes the audience of the play attending a sacrifice held by the author's cousin, the minister Tryambakamākhin. We know that such a sacrifice indeed took place in 1696.[83] Elsewhere we have a clue regarding the kinds of interactions that stemmed from cultural events held in such a sacrifice at court: we learn how King Śāhaji had asked Appādhvarin of the adjacent village of Mayavaram, who visited the sacrifice and impressed the king, to narrate the Mahābharata at court for three straight months following the sacrifice.[84]

There are other examples: the *Kāntimatīpariṇayam* is another play by young Cokkanātha, narrating King Śāha's marriage to Kāntimatī, which mentions the *Caitrotsavam* festival in the Vaiṣṇava temple of God Madhyārjuna in the village of Tiruvitaimarutur in the Kaveri Delta. In response to the assistant's question about hiring actors, the director describes how he sent a letter to his friend in the neighboring village of Kumbakonam, in which he asks him to gather his troupe.[85] It would be quite counterintuitive to postulate that this playwright did not have in mind a specific neighboring troupe of actors.[86] Likewise, the prologue to the *Adbhutapañjara,* a play

---

[83] *Sūtradhāraḥ: adya khalu bhāradvāja-kula-jaladhi-kaustubhena tryambakarāyamakhinā samārabdhasya krator didṛkṣayā āgatena nānādi-ganta-vāsinā vidvaj-jana-samājena sabahumānam āhūya samādiṣṭo 'smi*. Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, 3499. The story of a sacrifice held by Tryambakamakhin in 1693 is given in Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time," 192–3. I assume this is the same sacrifice or one like it.

[84] After the recitation ended, the king asked Appādhvarin to compose a treatise on Dharmaśāstra, and the result–the Ācārasāranavanīta, in which this story appears–was completed together with his son eight years later. The relevant text is: (suggestions of emendations in brackets are mine): *dhātur varṣe yadā yajñasevārtham aham āgataḥ śrīmahārāja-rājasya mantriṇa(ḥ) tryambaka-prabhoḥ. mahārājas tu māṃ prītyā sva-sabhāyām avāsayat. Bhārata-śravaṇārthāya rātriṃ divam udāradhīḥ. yadā māsa-trayād ūrdhvaṃ prāpyānujñāṃ mahīpateḥ gantum (kartuṃ?) icchāmi ca tadā dharma-śāstra-nibandhane (nibandhanam?). mahārājena cājñāto gaurī-māyūram āgataḥ. tasmin varṣe vṛścikārke dharmaśāstra-sudhā-nidheḥ ekenaiva mayā putra-yuktena śanakaiḥ kṛt./ buddhi-daṇḍena mathane rātriṃ divam anekadhā aṣṭabhir labdhavān asmi vatsarais tat-phalaṃ mahat ācārānavanītaṃ tan mṛdu sarva-manoharam… Ācārasāranavanīta,* afterward. Cited in *Ibid*.

[85] *bṛhatkucanāyikāvallabhasya bhagavato madhyārjunasya caitrotsavaṃ draṣṭum ihopayātair vaideśikair asmi samīrito 'ham….pātrakḷṛptiṃ kathaṃ manyate bhāvaḥ? Sūtradhāraḥ: sakhe kāntimatīśāharājīyaṃ nāma nāṭakam. abhinetuṃ āyāhi śīghraṃ parijanaiḥ saha… Kāntimatīpariṇayam* of Cokkanātha, extract given in Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 3369–70. Raghavan identifies the village as Madhyārjuna Kṣetra, namely Tiruvitaimarutur, in V. Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," in *Śahendravilāsaḥ of Śrīdharaveṅkaṭeśa (Ayyaval)* (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2016), 56. The *Sevāntikāpariṇaya* of the same author is set in Subrahmaṇya Kṣetra near Keladi in West Karnataka, whence his patron, the Keladi King Basava (1697–1714), is also the protagonist: the younger Cokkanātha seems to have specialized in writing dramas that feature his patron-king.

[86] This might also be true of Bhavabhūti, who famously said of himself that he is a "friend of actors." However, the

dedicated to the love story of King Sāhaji and Līlāvatī, composed by Nārāyaṇa, another student of Rāmabhadra's, is said to be staged at the *Mahāmakham* festival of God Kumbhīśvara at Kumbhakonam.[87] These specific references stand out, making their small-scale performance likely, and the games of realia we have seen thus far less pronounced. While the settings of the great temples at Chidambaram, Kanchipuram, and Madurai could have reflected an actual and central debut performance, they seem more likely to have been imaginatively staged than these small-scale settings in the delta.

To conclude this discussion, it seems plausible that the performance-oriented court of Śāhaji created a unique environment, in which some Sanskrit plays, especially those directly affiliated with the court, were performed in small-scale, intimate settings. This would mean that the trope of the "textual performance" was reused, concretized, and somewhat lost in translation in their hands, and this awaits more elaborate study. If this is true, this would make Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra into authors who preceded a dramatic local re-staging of the textual tradition of the Sanskrit play.[88] Textual stagings at the bigger temple stages by Nīlakaṇṭha, his brother Atirātra, his son Gīrvāṇendra, Rāmabhadra, and Ghyanaśyāma, could be a marker of independent authorship of Nīlakaṇṭha and his followers. The lack of (or partial) commitment to a patron would have been economically enabled by performances in one of the major temples, or

---

detail in the *Kāntimatīpariṇayam* stands out in its specificity of location and means of communication. Note, apropos of Bhavabhūti's comment, that Nīlakaṇṭha's brother Atirātra, whose play we will have the occasion to encounter below, refers to himself as "friend of poets" (*kavilokamitram*) in his prologue (Jayasree, *Kuśakumudvatīyam* [*Kuśa*] of Atirātra, 93). Given that he is probably responding to Bhavabhūti's famous statement, this might attest to his purely textual, rather than performative, intentions for circulation.

[87] See Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 52, where he dates this festival to 1693, being one of two such festivals (in 1693 and 1705) during Śāhaji's rein. See Ambika, C. P., "Adbhutapanjaram of Narayana Diksita: A critical study" (Mahatma Gandhi University, 1998).

[88] For a parallel example from roughly contemporary North India, the prologue to Śeṣakṛṣṇa's *Kamsavadha* mentions Giridhārī, a minister of Akbar's, as an audience member (seating at the learned assembly *vidagdha-goṣṭhī*); *Kamsavadha of Śrīkṛṣṇa*, eds., Mahamahopadhyaya Durgaprasada and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 6 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1935), v. 13.

alternatively, it might have led the authors to posit a *textualized* setting on a bigger Southern scale.

Whether performed or not, these pan-local temple stages play a role within the prologue's convoluted thresholds, as parts of the scripted play. Thus, Deśika's *Saṅkalpa* is set in Śrīraṅgam, and mentions other sites of Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centers such as Tirupati, Kancipuram, and Tirunarayanapuram (Melkote): this is directly linked with Deśika's sectarian affiliation to which the entire play is devoted. Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nala* is staged in Kancipuram, the hometown of Appayya and his family at large, whose central role in his self-positioning we have seen above. Finally, Rāmabhadra's *Śṛṅgāra* is in line with the tradition of *bhāṇa* plays, which tend to disturb the realia-effect of the prologue by setting the performance and the play's plot in the same town.[89]

In Rāmabhadra's case, the stage in Madurai is plausibly a participation in the literary imaginations of Madurai. In his words:

> *Sūtradhāra: atra kila vṛtrārisamārādhita-caraṇāravindasya vicitrīkṛta-catuḥ-ṣaṣṭi-vidha-vihāra-dhaureyasya sundareśa-nāmno bhagavatas candra-kalāvataṃsasya nitya-nivāsena nikhila-nagarātiśāyi-saubhāgya-dhuraṃdhare madhurāpure mīnākṣī-pariṇaya-mahotsava-didṛkṣayā samāgatair vaideśikair ādiṣṭo 'smi sāmājikaiḥ* (*Śṛṅgāra,* prose after v. 3).
>
> Director- I was instructed by this crowd of foreigners, who gathered with the desire to see the marriage festival of Mīnākṣī in Madurai; It is a town of uttermost fortune, excelling all other towns because of the permanent dwelling of lord Sundareśa, whose crest is a crescent moon—the protagonist of the wondrous 64 games, whose lotus feet are worshiped even by Indra, as everyone in here knows...

[89] See for instance the *Śāradātilakabhāṇa*, which probably preceded the notable resurgence of the bhāṇas of the South that concerns us in several centuries, and places both its audience and the plot itself in the imaginative *Kolāhalapura*. see *The Śāradātilaka Bhāṇa of Śaṅkara: Spring Pastimes of an Indian Gallant,* F. Baldissera, trans., (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Inst, 1980).

If it were not for the discussion up to this point, Madurai's presence in the prologue as well as in the play itself would seem rather straightforward, and the possibility that the play was staged or read out in the Madurai festival remains. However, the direct mention of Madurai's literary and cultural baggage of the sixty-four games, which "everyone in here knows" (*atra kila*) seems key. As we know, these are being retold in various languages, including paintings and sculptures, throughout the Tamil land and beyond it during the seventeenth century, most notably, as we know, by Rāmabhadra's teacher, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita.[90] Madurai of the *Śṛṅgāra* is a city of erotic pleasures in the spirit of the genre, created, I think, in deliberate ironic conversation with the idea of Madurai as a major temple city, as well as perhaps with the physical city of Madurai. One need not live in Madurai to participate in this cultural boom, just as one does not need to set foot in Kāśī to appeal to its iconic position.

As I described in the introduction, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the renovation of existing temples and the building of new ones in great measures, the genre of temple origin-stories (Sanskrit, *Sthalapurāṇa*, Tamil, *Talapurāṇa*) was at its height of production, and networks of pilgrimage to temples, gradually established since the twelfth century, become increasingly popular and dominant, especially around calendrical festivals.[91] This set of practices can justifiably be said to link the everyday lives of many with literary and

[90] Note also that Nīlakaṇṭha is somehow present in the passage because of the 64 games, as well as perhaps by the occurrence of the word *saubhāgya,* which appears in the title of his tantric work. I thank Whitney Cox for this observation.

[91] The basic model in which the South Indian town is built around the temple so that it is suited to festival processions, so recognizable in modern Tamil towns, was introduced and elaborated in the seventeenth century, notably under the Nayaka kings. See Leslie C. Orr, "Processions in the Medieval South Indian Temple: Sociology, Sovereignty and Soteriology," in *South-Indian Horizons : Felicitation Volume for François Gros on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Jean-Luc Chevillard and Eva Wilden, Collection Indologie (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2004), 437–70, and Branfoot, *Gods on the Move*. See also Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "The Evolution of the Kuravañci Dance Drama in Tamil Nadu: Negotiating the 'Folk' and the 'Classical' in the Bhārata Nātyam Canon," *South Asia Research* 18, no. 1 (1998): 39–72, for a compelling reading of an eighteenth-century Tamil genre that finds echoes of social realities of migration and intensifying processes of identity formation.

cultural productions. It stands to reason that the prologues at hand, in which major sites of the Tamil cultural and religious sphere are inserted on the basis of a previous convention, are participating in the making of the notion of the *Tamilakam* space.

In support of this suggestion, many other works of the authors under discussion directly contribute to this *making* of Tamil space. I mentioned in the previous chapter Nīlakaṇṭha's *Līlā* and his hymn to the Goddess, linking the deities of Madurai with his personal religious affiliation as well as with the idea of a Tamil cultural and religious sphere. Rāmabhadra's *Patañjalicaritram* promotes macro-local traditions in his poetic descriptions of the mythological luminaries Patañjali and Śaṅkarācarya in Cidambaram and Kancipuram, respectively.[92] Śaṅkarācarya's link to Kanchipuram was also notably poetically crafted by Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita, a famous writer and a co-student of Nīlakaṇṭha's, in his *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*.[93]

Arguably beginning with Deśika, whose sectarian motivation and affiliation are very pronounced, this broadly-defined milieu is using the old Bhavabhūtian trope of mentioning a temple to invest their writings with the Southern centers of their cultural, sectarian, and religious identities. The temple as a textual entity signifies a very real sphere to which one belongs through writing, auditing, or watching. This makes plays that are allegedly mythic and space-less, such as Nīlakaṇṭha's *Nala,* into active participants in the network of the Tamil literary-geographical sphere. When viewing these prologues in tandem, it becomes clear that the insertion of temple-networks serves as a framing, or prefixing, of these authors' authorial

[92] *Patañjalicaritam of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, eds., Pandit Sivadatta and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 51 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1895).
[93] Elaine Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (California: University of California Press, 2017), 69–70.

identities. This is one aspect of the negotiation of cosmopolitan themes and idioms with local frameworks of identity, which runs as a thread through this dissertation.

Note also that the performances lack dates. Doreen Massey's definition of space as the plurality-of-stories-so-far is especially apt here, as these spatial indexes contribute to a principal radical simultaneity, devoid of temporal "layering" of events.[94] Through their ambiguous ever-present temporalities, these prologues bridge mythic pasts and pronouncedly modern (*nava)* texts. In this act of self-insertion, these authors are carving a place for themselves within classical Sanskrit literature, which (as every prologue reminds us) is still being written. Simultaneously, in indexing the major temples of the Tamil land alongside their intimate filiated self-presentations, our authors are geographically demarcating a community of Brahmin poets of Tamil Nadu.

Finally, it is perhaps not by chance that the audience of pilgrims is another fractured voice of the author in the prologue (more on this in chapter four). The old textual trope of the pilgrim audience feeds into, and is sustained by, real-world practices: these authors are witnesses to, and active participants in, the dramatically expanding pilgrimage networks of Tamil Nadu. Burton Stein suggests thinking of space, and particularly of the Tamil space, in terms of different measures of overlap between conceptual categories and de-facto circulation. Stein's analysis shows how the modern boundaries of Tamil Nadu have developed from ancient concepts of the *Tamilakam* that gradually came to overlap with the concrete circulation of people and texts. The

[94] Doreen B. Massey, *For Space*, 1st edition (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005).

authors we are concerned with were living at the crux of what Stein identifies as a near overlap of the conceptual and material demarcation of the Tamil land.[95]

These insights are instructive in thinking of parallel textual tropes that involve space and circulation, such as that of the foreign pilgrim audience. For the authors at hand, an audience of pilgrims is both a classical, conceptual trope and a feature of everyday life. The overlap of trope and world is not coincidental: we have seen how this trope became a salient feature of Southern plays, which began to incorporate large and unmistakably identifiable temples. Tropes have the dormant potential to touch the ground, especially when in the hands of authors who are living in the world of the trope as much as they are living their worldly realities.

Orchestrated self-insertions: concluding remarks

In this chapter, I listened to the self-presentations of our authors via the molds of paratextual autobiographies that the Sanskrit prologue offered them. My analysis showed that the inherent tension of the prologue as a textual performance, or as scripted *realia*, was being creatively taken up by our authors. Within it, Nīlakaṇṭha and his poetic milieu had the freedom to craft their authorial voices through inherited formulas and various discordant registers and to index their worlds in deliberately indirect ways. It seems to me that the prologue's inherent play of world and text is one factor that played a role in their fondness for the genre of the Sanskrit play. Within it, they can gesture toward their writing and toward their identities as authors and students, while remaining traditionally cryptic and paradoxical.

[95] Burton Stein, "Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (1977): 7–26.

Describing the feature of self-reflexivity in early modern works from South India that David Shulman refers to as '*prabandhas*', in which he includes the Sanskrit narrative poems and plays of our authors, he writes:

> ...that the kind of self-referential and reflective moments we are discussing are radically different from the mirror effects that are everywhere in classical kāvya...The prabandha modes and means of self-reference are more akin to multi-voicing, a ventriloquism that entails innovation through actualizing a second or third, or fourth vocal tone, overlapping and often at odds with the first (surface) voice and its semantic contents. Prabandha tonality thus tends to the symphonic, the contrapuntal, and the creative (dissonant) echo.[96]

Our authors' self-presentations in their prologues well resonate with these formulations of self-reflection *as* multi-voicing and echoing. Our authors happily present themselves through the liminal reality of the prologue, in which the scripted textual archive ever-clashes with the radical presentism of the act of staging. Their authorial figure arises out of a multiplicity of actors, in a playful and multiregistered orchestration of voices. Moreover, the author carefully presents himself through his intimate ties with his teacher or authoritative family members: his signature can never be isolated from his immediate intimate lineage, or from the cosmopolitan tradition that this lineage embodies. I will return to define the role of this intimacy in chapter five.

The renowned location of the stage is another play on the question of the "real" author who lives through his text: if true-to-life or not, the ever-debuting "new" play makes the temple stage doubled. It is on the one hand a way for our authors to link themselves and their filiated audience with key temples in the Tamil land. Like in the case of Nīlakaṇṭha's investment in Madurai discussed in chapter one, my impression is that this investment is aimed inward, toward

[96] Shulman, "Prabandha," 10.

their community's sense of identity, rather than to other cultural milieus in the Tamil sphere. Simultaneously, staging the play through intertextual formulas and within the liminal paratext of the prologue is a way for our authors to entextualize these spaces. We have seen that unlike some colleagues following Rāmabhadra's generation at court, who seem to have taken the formula for granted and unambiguously staged their plays in true-to-life identifiable occasions, Nīlakaṇṭha and his close students do not, signaling, if not their larger-scale stages, their accentuated interest in the ambiguity of the pan-local textualized identity. If their plays didn't come to the temple, the temple, at the very least, came to their play.

These poetics of self-reference shed light on the very notion of original or individual authorship within the Sanskrit tradition, scarcely directly expressed by Sanskrit authors and often rhetorically denied. Such individuality does not preclude the self-reflective sensitivities and layered personas that we usually associate with the modern individual; in fact, we have seen that it is quite the opposite.[97] This self is defined and celebrated in a multi-vocal, refracted way, and, necessarily, through a reservoir of other voices from the tradition, including specific precedents and sedimented tropes. The author is at home in this tradition, to the extent of internalizing it, speaking through it, and playing with it in creative ways.

This idea, of self-reflection *as* intertext or dialogue, will be further substantiated in the next two chapters of this dissertation. Chapter three shows how our authors' dialogues with their gods allowed them to speak of and to themselves, and provides an ontological framework in which self-reflection as dialogue is possible, indeed warranted; chapter four develops the claim

[97] Here I disagree with Sheldon Pollock's judgment on Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja as the first and last moment of a "personal" voice in Sanskrit, based on his analysis of his self-authored examples in the *Rasagaṅgādhara*. Even if one agrees with Pollock's reading of these verses as personal, the suspicion of any innovation that is not posited as counter-traditional is worth correcting. Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (April 2001): 392–426.

(in part through looking at other parts of the prologues surveyed above, involving the role of the audience members) that our authors speak of themselves and think of themselves as inherently bound to their intimate communities of families and teachers in their small villages. Our authors' individual signatures are posited, and celebrated, through the defining binds with the tradition in which they were taught, their relationships with their gods, and their relationships with their most intimate others.

3. Shared and fragmented subjectivities: Stotras of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra

In the previous chapters, we explored how the authors of this corpus articulate their authorial signature through intense participation in the Sanskrit tradition of tropes and precedents, and through their intimate relationships with their teachers and influential family members. This chapter is dedicated to a different and central angle of the self-positioning of these authors: the devotional lives of these authors, who have a special, defining relationship with their personal gods. This relationship comes through most pointedly in their hymns, or *stotra* compositions. As a genre, the stotra is uniquely structured as a first-person address to God or Goddess, in which the speaker is traditionally identified with the poet.[1] Not unlike the prologue, then, the stotra is a space or a literary idiom that encodes the "personal." This chapter takes the genre as its framework and tries to listen for the ways in which the authors position themselves vis-à-vis their gods.

Stotras to personal gods have been a popular genre throughout the history of devotion in the subcontinent, and they become increasingly popular in the period in which this dissertation is

[1] Norman Cutler argued that in the formative Tamil context of early bhakti, there emerged an autobiographical framework in which the narrator of the song was for the first time identified with its historical author, who in turn became an individualized persona. This framework overrided earlier *akam* conventions of impersonal characters narrated by an uninvolved narrator. "...the tendency to categorically identify the narrator with the author in the sacred poems is so strong, [that] even dramatized narrators are interpreted as aspects of the saint-author's persona. This is plainly demonstrated in Srivaisnava interpretations of the akapporul portions of Tiruvaymoli, where the frame narrative of akam poetry is subordinated to the autobiographical framework that these commentators bring to bear on the text as a whole..."Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 103–4.

set.[2] Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita alone composed around fifteen hymns of roughly 1700 verses in total.[3] The sheer amount and length of Rāmabhadra's stotras, which make for about two thirds of the overall number of works in his *Curriculum Vitae*, merits investigation. To rephrase Rāmabhadra's own question, raised by the assistant director in the prologue to the *Śṛṅgāra* discussed in the previous chapter: why would Rāmabhadra write *stotra*s so prolifically? Why did his teacher Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, a devout Śaiva and an active proponent of the Śrīvidyā sect of the goddess, encourage, and likely even fund, one of Rāmabhadra's stotras to Rāma?[4] This chapter is an attempt to answer these questions. In this, I join voices from recent scholarship, who began to ask why is it that stotras were important, and what is it that they *do*.[5]

The following verse from the *Ānandasāgarastava* (hereafter *Ānanda*)[6], Nīlakaṇṭha's hymn to goddess Mīnākṣī, will allow me to present the sections that frame this chapter.

> *bhaktis tu kā yadi bhaved ratibhāvabhedas*
> *tatkevalānvayitayā viphalaiva bhaktiḥ*
> *prītis tv ayi trijagadātmani kasya nāsti*
> *svātmadruho na khalu santi janās trilokyām* (*Ānanda,* v. 22)
>
> But what is bhakti? If we take it to be
> a specific feeling of love,
> that would be logically superflous, and lead absolutely nowhere.
> Since you are the very Self of everything,

---

[2] For a survey of the history of the stotra genre in Sanskrit and a detailed analysis focused on stotras from Kashmir, see Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, AAR Religion in Translation (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[3] My estimation is based on the thorough presentation of Rāmabhadra's stotras in A. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study* (The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002),124–184.

[4] Veṅkatakṛṣṇa kavi, Rāmabhadra's student who composed a commentary to his *Patañjalicaritam*, states that Rāmabhadra composed the *Rāmabāṇastava* (hereon, *Bāṇa*) the hymn to the arrow, with the encouragement, perhaps the active funding, of Nīlakaṇṭha; *yo rāmasya ca nīlakaṇṭhamakhinā bāṇastavaṃ kāritaḥ*. See Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works,* 159–60.

[5] In recent years, we see a corrective to a prevalent tendency of dismissing the genre of the *stotra* as lesser in terms of literariness or in terms of importance. Edelmann cites several voices that mildly echo this bias from the tradition itself, as well as more pronounced 20th century versions of it in Jonathan B. Edelmann, "Introduction to Special Issue: Stotra, Hymns of Praise in Indian Literature," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 3 (December 1, 2016): 303–7.

[6] "Ānandasāgarastava [*Ānanda*] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," ed., Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Nilakantha Diksita* (Pondicherry: Institut Francais D'indologie, 1967), 256–99.

who in their right mind does *not* love you, Goddess?
It makes no sense for anyone to hate themselves!

For an English speaker in the twentyfirst century, self-hate is an available social-emotional category.[7] For Nīlakaṇṭha, however, it is most likely not: the punchline of this verse operates on the boldness of raising self hate (*svātmadruh*) as a possible emotional category. For Nīlakaṇṭha, speaking of and to the Goddess—a manifestation of the very *ātman,* the principle Self at the core of the non-dual universe—is speaking of oneself. And speaking *to* the Goddess is speaking to himself. This equation of selves is repeated in playful variations such as this throughout this hymn. It is not surprising: this theme is a truism in Nīlakaṇṭha's intellectual and religious world, rooted in the Southern Śrīvidyā tradition, which came to be aligned with Śaiva *advaita* and smārta Brahminism. In the first two sections of this chapter, I demonstrate that Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra creatively and consistently explored the experiential tensions in the theological and philosophical triangular equation of god or goddess, the impersonal *ātman,* and their own selves. In doing so, I attempt to describe the particular technologies of the self that inform their devotional writing.[8]

In sections three through five I continue to probe their self-writing through the ways in which they converse with Sanskrit tradition and generic convention. To return to the verse above, the *śāstric* setting of an argument, posing the Nyāya principle of *kevalānvaya,* or 'categorical

[7] Google n-gram shows a consistent rise in the terms self-hate and self-hatred from 1920s onwards, peaking in the last decade of the twentieth century. "(Self-Hate), in Google Ngram Viewer," accessed September 29, 2022, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%28Self-hate%29&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3.

[8] I generally draw on Foucault's influential working assumption of Self-writing as reflective of varying technologies of the self. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*. This allows me to foreground practices of self-writing as culture-specific subjective frameworks liable to negotiation and change. See David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, eds., *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), for a project with a similiar goal with respect to several case studies of self-writing from modern and pre-modern India.

identity', reads like a parody of a philosophical investigation.[9] More specifically, the objection raised in the verse is a neat and deliberately crude articulation of an old debate asking whether devotion can be defined through prisms of aesthetic theory which focus on emotions such as love.[10] It stages with characteristic humor a familiar problem of theistic advaita, particularly pertinent to Śaiva thought, according to which everyone *must* love the goddess since everyone *are* the goddess.[11] Thus, the influential statement of the Kashmiri Śaiva nondualist Utpaladeva: *tvam evātmeśa sarvasya sarvaś cātmani rāgavān; "*You alone are the Self of all, and everyone loves themselves…".[12] This verse is therefore a good example of what I term an "intimate intertextuality" governing the poetics of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra: an extensive and layered

[9] The whole verse reads like a parody of a śāstric argument: this verse is the first in a series of three verses interrogating the concept of devotion, or bhakti (v. 22-25), and none of them reach a definitive answer. Moreover, the structure in which an objection is phrased with the conditional "if x is y, that is pointless—" and then goes on to refute this statement, is a śāstric convention. See for instance *Sāṅkhya-kārika of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa,* ed., Dr Har Dutt Sharma, (Poona: The Oriental Book Agency, 1933). The term "*kēvalānvayānumāna*," is a technical *Nyāya* term, which occurs where there is no discrepancy (*vyatirēka*) between two terms (Here, the idea is that there is no case of *ratibhāva* that is not also a case of *bhakti*). I thank Whitney Cox and Andrew Ollett for their helpful remarks on this term.

[10] For the history of the attempts to align or contain religious sentiments within the theory of rasa, especially the discussion on early modern developments that focused on equating or subsuming rasa with devotion, see Sheldon Pollock, *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 276–309. For related theoretical alignment of rasa with Vedāntic thought, see *Ibid,* 310-326.

[11] Compare a similar argument made by Nīlakaṇṭha's rough contemporary, Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha: "In the course of his commentary on SBS [*Śāṇḍilyabhaktisūtra*] 1.1.2, "[Bhakti] is supreme love for the Lord" (*sā parānuraktir īśvare*) NT [Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha] raises a direct objection to the whole idea that bhakti is possible for Advaitins at all: If God is no different from the individual, it makes no sense for him to have bhakti towards himself…". "…This is a common enough problem…" Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement" (Columbia University, 2015), 143. A stotra verse from Kashmir at the turn of the first millennium speaks to this Advaita paradox: "You alone, who have the nature of the agent, the object of action, and the action itself, play as the one who praises, the one to be praised, and the praise itself. Therefore I have no independence in the act of praising you. On the other hand, whatever pleasing prayers I offer, O lord of the rays, are real, for anything in the universe that seems different from you would be meaningless…" Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, 102, translation of *Sāmbapañcāśikā,* 15.

[12] The full verse (*Śivastotravalī* 1.7) reads: *tvam evātmeśa sarvasya sarvaś cātmani rāgavān, iti svabhāva-siddhāṃ tvad-bhaktiṃ jāna jayej janaḥ. bhakti-lakṣmī-samṛddhānāṃ kim anyad upayācitam, enayā vā daridrāṇāṃ kim anyad upayācitam*. In Venkatkrishnan's translation: "Lord! You alone are the Self of all, and everyone loves themselves, so people will really flourish if they realize that bhakti for you is spontaneous—within their own nature. Those who prosper with the wealth of bhakti, what else can they pray for? Those who are impoverished without it, what else can they pray for?". We know that Utpala's verse was famous in the early modern south: Rāghavānanda of fourteenth-century Kerala cites this verse in his commentary on the *Mukundamālā*, one of the most influential stotras to have circulated at the time. See Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement," 60-61.

conversation with various Sanskrit disciplines and conventions. As we saw in the first chapter, these intertexts achieve an ironic, or subversive distance: Utpaladeva's phrase is brought, both in its original context and in a commentarial text that cites it, as an argument *for* bhakti as a valid path to liberation. But for Nīlakaṇṭha, there is no need to justify his devotional act. Rather, the intertext is an opportunity for a striking, thus personal, statement of love for his goddess. I suggest that their intense, often subersive use of intertexts contribute to a deliberate and playful fragmentation of the authorial voice that our authors achieve.

In Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's hands, the *stotra* provides room for a playful, often anti-didactic, literary creativity. It is the perfect stage, for these *sarvatantrasvatantra* poets we defined in the previous chapters, to bridge their command of Sanskrit disciplines with the Sanskrit in which they think and converse with each other, enjoying the aesthetic effect of conflating registers. I conclude the chapter with Rāmabhadra's formulations, from within his hymns, of the aim of writing so many poems to his god. For him, poetry is the perfect devotional act, and devotion is the perfect stage for poetry. Speaking to his God, and by extension to himself, allows him to pose and explore his fragmented yet personal authorial signature, ontologically anchored in his identity with his god and fashioned out of the depth of the Sanskrit world of letters.

Articulating selves through devotion

The language of *bhakti* is governed by a language of interiority, and for Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra, this involves an inner seeing, a guided meditation that makes the god or goddess

come alive.[13] The language of interiority is so inherent to the genre of stotras that it seems almost too obvious or conventional to pursue as a theme. But these authors, and primarily Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, composed in this genre so prolifically, that the interiority that the stotra offered must have been productive and meaningful to them, to their audiences, and to their patrons. Moreover, their hymns constantly re-explore and thematize this innerness.

Where, to begin with, does the god or goddess come alive? One basic *bhakti* truism primarily positions one's personal divinity in the devotee's heart or mind. God being present in the heart is a central and well-spread concept, and it has multiple precedents in the *bhakti* tradition.[14] Here is one formulation from Vedāntadeśika, a major influence on these authors, as we will see below:

> *…He is here, asleep on the coiled serpent, where, just in front of himself, his very own self, his image, shines. Here, in the middle of Srirangam town, a king with his three queens—here, in the middle of my heart!*[15]

Deśika's verse follows a sequence describing, head-to-toe, the *mūla* image of Viṣṇu in the temple. This verse shifts to describe the *utsavamūrti,* the moving image of God in procession. The devotional experience in the temple thus already assumes a god who can embody two spaces at once, as Viṣṇu mirrors himself (*agre svātmanā eva ātmanaḥ*). The doubled use of *ātman* is

---

[13] For the precedents of these techniques in Kashmiri traditions, see Alexis Sanderson, "The Visualization of the Deities of the Trika.," in *Image Divine: Culte et Méditation Dans Hindouisme*, ed. A. Padoux (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (1990), 31–88. For one canonical example from similar tantric formations of devotion from a few decades after Rāmabhadra's life in the Kaveri Delta, see David Shulman, *Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar and the Invention of Modern Carnatic Music: The Abhayāmbā Vibhakti-Kṛtis*, Gonda Lecture 21 (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2014).

[14] Steven Hopkins presents some traces of this idea in the Śrīvaiṣṇava context: here a snippet from his translation of Tiruppāṉāḻvar's *Amalaṉātipiraṉ* ("Pure Primordial Lord"), v.5: "*Cutting me loose from my burden of old sin, he made me his own. It was after that he entered me*". Steven Paul Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 141. For other examples of this theme from the Āḻvar corpus, see numerous translated examples from the *Tiruvaymoli of Nammalvar,* trans., Archana Venkatesan, *Endless Song* (Gurugram, Haryana, India: India Penguin, 2020).

[15] Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God*, 161. *agre kiñcid bhujaga-śayanaḥ svātmanaivātmanaḥ san madhye raṅgam mama ca hṛdaye vartate sāvarodhaḥ* (*Bhagavaddhyānasopanam,* v. 11, Sanskrit text from "Bhagavaddhyāna Sopanam of Vedānta Deśika," https://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/vdesikan/bhagavad_dhyana_sopanam/index.html.

marked, and it nicely expresses the well received notion of the embodied god as the Upaniṣadic ātman.[16] By the fourth quarter of the verse, God's ability to take on several bodies expands and creates the spatial possibility for him to reside in the speaker's heart (*mama hṛdaye vartate*). Deśika's meditative ladder begins from God's crest, to his feet, and inward, to the devotee's heart.

Let us now listen to Nīlakaṇṭha's opening of his *Ānanda*:

vijñāpanārha-viralāvasarānavāptyā
mandodyame mayi davīyasi viśvamātuḥ
avyājabhūta-karuṇā-pavanāpaviddhā-
-ny antaḥ smarāmy aham apāṅga-taraṅgitāni (*Ānanda,* v. 1)

Being faraway as I am from the mother goddess of the universe,
I could not obtain, in my pathetic efforts, the rare opportunity of seeing her in person.
So I envision in my heart the waves emanating from the corner of her eye, created in the wind of her un-swaying compassion.

If Vedānta Deśika's ladder begins with God's temple image to arrive at his own heart, Nīlakaṇṭha begins with his heart. His inner vision in turn generates the description of the Goddess's icon (*Ānanda*, v. 53–96). An actual meeting with the goddess, a *vijñāpana*—is no longer necessary to trigger the author's imagination, who is distant (*davīyas*) from the goddess. It is tempting to read Nīlakaṇṭha's distance not only as the existential distance of the devotee, but also as a physical distance from the icon of the goddess in the temple, and by extension as a statement of dis-affiliation with institutional worship, which reflects on his independent model of writing. But more to my point here, since the goddess is inside the author from the start, speaking to the goddess means turning inwards.

[16] For a formulation especially relevant to Nīlakaṇṭha, see Duquette's discussion of Appayya Dīkṣita's project of equating the *Brahman/ Ātman* with Śiva. Duquette, *Defending God in Sixteenth-Century India*, 34.

Nīlakaṇṭha begins his hymn by invoking the familiar apology-cum-boast of incompetency with his "pathetic efforts" (*manda-udyama*). This apology is then turned on its head. It becomes the reason for the speaker's very endeavor of speaking to the goddess, which, we are led to conclude, end up being as close as possible to the Goddess. This trope of the poet as slow or incompetent (*alasa*, *manda*) has a long and prevalent history in South Asian literature and in stotras more specifically.[17] In the corpus of hymns in question, the authors keep returning to it and exploring the possibilities of its reversal, not unlike the reversal of far and near we saw in this verse.[18] These reversals are a good gateway to the type of confidence in writing, and self-positioning within the classical tradition that I map in this dissertation.

More specifically, in the context of their hymns to gods, these poetic manipulations of humbleness are tied in with the question of agency that the bhakti tradition ascribes to the devotee. The goddess' side-glances are often experienced as waves in devotional poetry—but the wind of compassion that created these waves stands out as the poet's creative take on this image. The goddess' compassion blew the wind that allowed for the poet's active imagining of her into

[17] Beginning perhaps with Kālidāsa (*Raghuvaṃśa* 1.3), becoming one of the standard features opening literary works. In Tamil, this self-deprecation-cum-boast is called *avaiyaṭakkam* and almost no premodern text begins without it. More specifically, Nancy Ann Nayar identifies passages of self-deprecation as one of the six markers of Vaiṣṇava stotras, almost all of which are central to the stotras at hand. Nancy A. Nayar, *Poetry As Theology: The Srivaisnava Stotra in the Age of Ramanuja* (Wiesbaden, 1992), 9. This was common practice also in Sanskrit stotras as our authors inherited it: Yigal Bronner notes, apropos of a similar statement of humility in Appayya Dīkṣita's *Ātmārpaṇastuti*: "when Appayya, whom king Cinnaboma bathed in gold in recognition of his fortification of the Śaiva school, publicly calls himself a worm, his humility takes on special, exemplary proportions." Yigal Bronner, "Singing to God, Educating the People: Appayya Dīkṣita and the Function of Stotras," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, no. 2 (2007): 14. See also Allison Busch, "The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/Riti Tradition," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 49, for a rejection of a literal reading of equivalent tropes of incompetence or slow-wittedness of early modern Braj poets such as Kesavdas.

[18] Within this hymn (*Ānanda*) Nīlakaṇṭha continues to use the word *alasa* to refer to poets who do not worship the goddess as he does, thus again very literally reversing this trope (v. 16, 37). See also examples from Rāmabhadra's hymns: "Rāmaprasādastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," in Subrahmanya Sastri, ed., *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 63–80, v. 5 and in "Viśvagarbhastava [Viśva] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," in Subrahmanya Sastri, ed., *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 101–21, v.13.

being. Nīlakaṇṭha creates a duo of agencies that create each other, and depend on each other. The author's very subjectivity is performed through a mutual dependence with the goddess and involves the reflective articulation of this shared subjectivity.

Rāmabhadra spent much of his career articulating his devotion to Rāma in different and ever evolving formulations. Here is one example from *Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana* ("A hymn to Rāma: an elixir to the ear", hereafter *Rasāyana*),[19], which too makes the trope of god-in-heart into the nontrivial poetic matter:

> *vedāntavibhramavane vihitapracāraḥ kākutsthavaṃśam avatīrya kadāpi khelan*
> *vālmīki-vāṅ-nikura-vāgurayā gṛhīto hṛtpañjaraṃ vrajati kaścid ayaṃ śuko me*
> (*Rasāyana* v. *II.74*)
>
> His old habitat is the beautiful forest that is Vedānta;
> he once played a game of descending to the Kākutstha family as Rāma, and
> was captured by the net of Vālmīki's many words;
> he is now a marvellous parrot, roaming the cage that is my heart.

This verse is located in the midst of Rāmabhadra's longest stotra (consisting 383 verses of various meters, in three parts), which we know to have been cited by an influential teacher of the early twentieth century.[20] It presents one (out of numerous) creative depiction of Rāma's presence in Rāma(bhadra)'s heart. Somewhat like Deśika's ladder, the movement is from the ancient and abstract to the intimate, concrete, and notably poetic presence of God in the heart. Rāma's "old habitat" is the Upaniṣad corpus; in Rāmabhadra's Southern early modern world, the marriage of devotion and advaita are a significant aspect of sectarian life.[21] Once, God playfully

---

[19] "Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana [Rasāyana] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," in Subrahmanya Sastri, ed,. *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 1–54.
[20] As testified by Thiruvengadathan: "The late Srirangam Satakopachariar used to quote many verses from the *RSK* [*Rasāyana*] in his discourses [of the popular *Kathākālakṣepa* vareity]. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 163, fn 15.
[21] Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement." See also Ajay K. Rao, *Re-Figuring the Ramayana as Theology: A History of Reception in Premodern India*, 1st edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014), for the process of theologizing the Rāmāyaṇa and transference of its status from poetry to authoritative *smṛti*, which he shows to have been substantial in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries of Vijayanagara through influential figures like Vedānta Deśika and Govindarāja.

took on Rāma's form—but this form was captured and forever caught in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa. The first Sanskrit poet, whose opposition to bird-hunting is famously the emotional trigger to compose his poetry, is featured as a professional bird trapper who has the competence to capture God's flirtation into eternal words. We have here a set of mild, implicit inversions, opening an imaginative realm of possibilities and producing a light ironic touch.

The final quarter of the verse is where things get personal: Rāmabhadra's heart *is* a cage—and God Rāma is a parrot that roams it. Rāmabhadra is so well versed in the Rāmāyaṇa, or in the net that is Vālmīki's words, that he holds the Rāmāyaṇa, and Rāma who is held in the Rāmāyaṇa, inside him. His command of the epic is indeed exemplified throughout this long hymn, and in at least a dozen other hymns of Rāmabhadra's. This poet has a special taste for combining obscure episodes of the epic in his hymns, and these are often inserted in a roundabout manner that expects equal mastery from his readers or listeners. God Rāma, we might add, is a parrot—a bird usually compared to a poet. It is as if God himself, locked in the poet's heart, sings this stotra to himself. The reflexive content in this verse is extremely pronounced. In a world governed by the nondualist recognition of one-ness and the bhakti mediation thereof, almost every poetic statement about God is also a reflexive statement about the author's writing, in different degrees of explicitness.

Many of the individual verses in the *Rasāyana* and in other hymns of Rāmabhadra's are built out of a similar internal gradation, leading to Rāma's presence in the author's mind. The repetition of this notion is key: it is not so trivial to keep God in one's heart, and it requires work and meditative maintenance. The many variations on this idea, especially if sung and heard, emphasize the process of internalizing god. Here, Rāmabhadra is a keeper of his caged pet bird, but numerous images in other verses cast this relationship as dynamic in principle. In a

neighboring verse, for instance, Rāma, who lives in mythical places like the sun, the ocean of milk, and Viṣṇu's heaven (Vaikuṇṭha), *chooses* to make the author's heart into a room of his own.[22] The author's very subjectivity, similarly to his teacher Nīlakaṇṭha's, is framed through the constant and dynamic technologies of internalizing god. Subjectivity is inherently reflexive, but it is never solipsistic, and never autarkic. This is primarily because the poet shares his heart, his very self, with someone else.

The poet *as* God

We have seen that for Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra God and Goddess emphatically reside *in* the devotee's heart. Does the poet aim at becoming god? Is he already god? In what ways is he distinct from him or her? Nīlakaṇṭha's renowned great uncle Appayya Dīkṣita's *Ātmārpaṇastuti* is one relevant articulation of the foundational tension in the movement toward identification with god. As Yigal Bronner writes,

> 'Appayya surrenders his self (ātma) to the Self (ātma) that is Śiva's ultimate form. Hence, the title "Ātmārpaṇastuti" is intentionally ambiguous, and the work consists of an intimate conversation between god and devotee as well as between different aspects of the same identity'.[23]

This intimate conversation between different aspects of the self is built on the tension between *bhakti* as means to liberation, and *bhakti* as an end in itself. This is an old *bhakti* tension:

---

[22] *śāla-grāma ivārkamaṇḍala iva kṣīrāmbu-rāśāv iva śrīvaikuṇṭha ivāgamāñcala iva prācetasoktāv iva. nirvyājena kṛpābhareṇa nitarāṃ nidhūya mohāṃhasī kāṅkṣaty eṣa kakutstha-vaṃśa-tilakaḥ kartuṃ padaṃ me hṛdi. Rasāyana, 2.95* "Just like he did in the *śālagrāma* stone, in the orb of the sun, in the ocean of milk, in the divine city of Vaikuṇṭha, in the Upaṇiṣads, and in Vālmīki's words—Rāma, the *tilaka* mark of the Kākustha family, now that he destroyed my delusion and anxiety with his unfailing, never-ending compassion, wishes to make a home in my heart."

[23] Bronner, "Singing to God, Educating the People.,"12. Or, as Bronner and Shulman note: "the main paradox at work is the surrender of one thing to itself so that the giving of the self is, inevitably, the full coming into self." Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, "Introduction to Poems and Prayers From South India," in "*Self Surrender*", "*Peace*", "*Compassion*", & "*Mission of the Goose*", Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: NYC Press, 2009), liii.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism, for instance, famously opted for bhakti as an end.[24] But Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra see only potential in such tensions. Thus, in another verse Nīlakaṇṭha wishes to become one with the goddess so that he can know her better, since only *she* can know her divine form.[25] Nīlakaṇṭha's bhakti economy is a both/and economy: it is about having the cake and eating it, too (while offering some to his goddess). For him, the soteriological and the experiential do not rule each other out.[26] We will see that Rāmabhadra inherits this economy, and seeks to merge the experiential soteriological language of bhakti with the equally divine goal—not means—of writing poetry.

Much of the force of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's hymns to their gods lies in the paradoxical formula in which becoming god is simultaneously a way, perhaps *the* way, of articulating the individual, personal self. This might be their indirect answer to contemporaneous sectarian polemics: a subjective stance that allows them to freely draw on the various traditions they are situated in, and also enables cross-fertilization across sectarian affiliations. It begins, most significantly, at the level of their name. Both Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra share their names with their personal gods (their *iṣṭadevatā),* and this fact is ever-present in their writing.

Nīlakaṇṭha dedicates a long and masterful *campū* titled the *Nīlakaṇṭha Vijaya,* or Nīlakaṇṭha's victory, to his god, Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva. This text, as its name indicates, features a near-autobiographic signature of the author of the same name. It is a poetic construction of Nīlakaṇṭha's vision of nondualism, which is expressively subjective. This vision is enabled

---

[24] Lance Nelson, "The Ontology of Bhakti: Devotion as Paramapurusartha in Gaudiya Vaisnavism and Madhusudana Sarasvati," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (August 1, 2004): 345–92.

[25] *divyā dṛśo 'pi diviṣad-grahaṇocitāni vastūni kāmam avadhārayituṃ kṣamante. tvan-mātra-vedya-vibhave tava rūpadheye tvad-bhāva eva śaraṇaṃ pariśeṣito naḥ. Ānanda,* v. 62. "Only divine eyes can truly perceive things that are for gods to grasp. So we are left to take refuge in your very body, whose given form only you fully know."

[26] See Whitney Cox, "A South Indian Śākta Anthropogony: An Annotated Translation of Selections from Maheśvarānanda's *Mahārthamañjarīparimala*, Gāthās' 19 and 20," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2012): 202, for the theory of the tattvas, forming different reality planes of existence and soteriology, as "doctrinal common sense" for all Śaivas.

through the ability to *share* one's identity with their god; sharedness, a notion suggested by Naresh Keerthi, is a way to think of theistic nondualism not only philosophically, but also existentially.[27] In the *Vijaya,* the author's story is his god's story, and the craft of writing it is an action of self-writing.[28] This requires a different model of autobiography, and of self, which this chapter seeks to spell out.

This logic is everpresent in Rāmabhadra's verses to Rāma. His hymns oscillate between an inherent identity with God and the experience of being other from him, evident in the basic vector of striving toward surrender to God. I now offer a few examples for Rāmabhadra's formulations from his *Rāmabāṇastava* (*Bāṇa*)[29]. This is a hymn dedicated in its entirety to Rāma's arrow, a work encouraged, probably sponsored, by Nīlakaṇṭha himself. Note, initially, the overall structure in which Rāmabhadra writes an entire hymn to his god's arrow and another one to his bow. This can be seen as a certain inheritance from Vedāntadeśika's *Pādukāsahasram*, a hymn of 1008 verses to Raṅganātha's sandals. Rāmabhadra chooses what are perhaps less obvious candidates for exclusive ritual contemplation. This logic is somehow enabled and reinforced through the overarching *advaita* mechanism of selves: if Rāma is the true essence of the entire phenomenological world, his bow and arrow are heightened, metonymic instances of this unitary yet essentially plural self.

---

[27] For a detailed account of this interpertation of the *Vijaya,* see Talia Ariav and Naresh Keerthi, "Churning Selves: Intersecting Biographies in the Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 29–60.
[28] This is broadly in line with notions from the Śaiva thought world that Nīlakaṇṭha was certainly educated in. Thus, Maheśvarānanda of fourteenth century Cidambaram, who may have been known to Appayya Dīkṣita and was influential in Śaiva doctrinal debates following Appayya (Duquette, *Defending God in Sixteenth-Century India*, 208, fn 71) equates his own authorial endeavor with the divine manifestations of god. In Whitney Cox's translation: "While elaborating (/explaining at length) the hidden miracle in which the Five Purposes arise, the ground of the diverstiy of the entire world, Maheśvara (/Maheśvarānanda) himself completely transformed into Illumination (/revealed) his self-awareness, which consists of Representation (cognition)". Cox notes apropos of this verse that it "... contains a ślesa that depends on the equivalence of Siva's creation of the world with the author's acts of composition and interpretation". Cox, "A South Indian Śākta Anthropogony," 216.
[29] Subrahmanya Sastri, ed., "Rāmabāṇastava [Bāṇa] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 147–61.

saṃkruddhyat-tāṭakābhyutpatana-java-samudbhūta-pītkāraghora-
vyāttāsyodvānta-vakṣaḥ-sravad-asṛg abhita[*s*][30] *svapraveśa-pradeśaḥ*
līlā-vidhvasta-mūlāvaniruha-nivahānudruto raudra-vego
harṣād dyām āvṛṇod yo haratu sa duritaṃ rāmabhadrasya bāṇaḥ (*Bāṇa,* v. 8).

The spot where it went in
sprayed blood in all directions, gushing from the chest of maddened Tāṭakā joined
with vomit from her mouth that was anyways wide open as it was making rapid,
awful sounds of attack;
it was terribly fast,
followed by clusters of trees that it playfully uprooted, as if standing on end,
and joyfully surrounded the sky—
Let Rāmabhadra's arrow snatch away all faults.

The graphic display of violence, here in the slaying of the demoness Tāṭakā, is central to the experience of this hymn and of others of Rāmabhadra's. It is made to make us halt in wonder.[31] Rāmabhadra's notion of play, literally commented on with *līlā* (playfully) and the ambiguous *harṣāt* (either describing the arrow's joy or the bristling effect of the trees), serves to soothe the violent element. This play is carefully constructed: following the microscopic details from Tāṭaka's wound and mix of fluids, the description zooms out to describe the arrow's speed-of-light movement around the sky. The human eye can't quite catch it, but a domino effect of uprooted trees tells of the arrow's route when it is already far in the sky. You can almost hear the

[30] I emended to "*abhitas*" in place of "*abhita"* given in *Ibid* and in "Rāmacāpastava and Rāmabāṇastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," in Mahamahopadhyaha Sivadatta and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, eds., *A Collection of Old and Rare Sanskrit Kāvyas*, Kāvyamāla 12 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1897), 1–37. The *Rāmabhadrasāhasramañjarī; (A Collection of Rāmabhadra's Stotras)* ed., V. Swaminatha Atreya, 2 vols. (Bangalore: Sri Mahaperival trust, 2009), has, alternatively, "*ubhita*", which makes little sense to me.

[31] See Hamsa Stainton's related discussion on the awesome nature of the stotra, tied with the awesome nature of Śiva, in Jagaddhāra's hymn. Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir,* 145–6. On the historical role of violence in South Indian devotion as found in the Periyappūrāṇam, and a roughly relevant argument for specifically southern Śaiva aesthetic experience of violence as an ethical device, see Anne E. Monius, "Love, Violence, and The Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 2/3 (2004): 113–72. That this spectacular violence is enacted on a woman was heeded a matter in need of clarification in the Rāmāyaṇa itself and its exegesis, and Rāmabhadra was well aware of these discussions: see next fn. These concerns, however, did not lead Rāmabhadra to tone down his descriptions of spectacular violence on the female body; the dharmic problematics of killing a woman do not quite overlap with contemporary concerns regarding the fetishization of violence on the female body.

speed: the demoness's battle shrieks, which temporally preceded her slaying, still reverberate while the arrow slices through the earth and shoots into the sky.

This clever description of speed is joined with the heightened pace of the large and alliterative compound that occupies the first half of the verse. The compound drives the reader or performer to hasten to the end, to get hold of its meaning. There is nowhere to stop within it, as the meter breaks the words in the middle with a rhyming alliteration (*saṃkr**ud**dhyat-tāṭakābhy**ut**patana-java-sam**ud**bhūta-pītkāraghora*), drawing the attention to the violent music of the words and to the upper movement of the arrow (*"ut"*). But simultaneously, because of the intricate details involved and the interpretative work required by such a compound, the description of the arrow's action is also slowed down. The verse reads like a slow-motion zoom-in that instantly becomes a fast forward in the second half of the verse. This entire hymn, in my estimation, is a masterful visualization of time and of movement, created through the governing theme of the arrow's speed.

More to my point here is the chain of identities between poet and God, captured in the arrow's movement. In this verse in particular—since the poet uses the name "Rāmabhadra" to refer to his God (whereas numerous other epithets are used throughout the hymn)—the author's presence is heightened, as is the game of subjectivities between God, arrow, and poet who speaks. The arrow serves both as a synecdoche to God Rāmabhadra, in that it can function as god himself and remove difficulties, and also as the literary arrow, the pen of Rāmabhadra the poet, which can be made to swiftly shift between the resolution of the bloody wound and that of the satellite eye. The poem builds an analogy between arrow and composition throughout. The identical name of the two Rāmabhadra-s who grant life to the arrow reinforces this analogy, as

does the fact that like the redeeming role of the arrow explicated in every verse, the composition itself is supposed to grant relief when sung, as the hymn states in verse 105, discussed below.

The analogy between arrow and hymn should not be overstated: it is part of Rāmabhadra's overlapping orchestration of subjectivities. Thus, the arrow, pointing simultaneously to god and to poet, has its own agency: in this verse it is happy, and its piercing of Tāṭakā is described as "its own entrance" (*svapraveśa*), as if he were entering the stage. In the following verse, this is even more pronounced:

> *prāpyānujñām abhijñāt kuśikakulabhuvas tāpasāt kopasāndre*
> *svāminy unmoktukāme 'py anucitam idam ity antar udbhinnacintaḥ*
> *kaṃcit kālaṃ vilambya smṛta-nikhila-jagad-rakṣaṇas tatkṣaṇaṃ yaḥ*
> *saṃtāpaṃ tāṭakāyā vyadhita yudhi tam evāśraye rāmabāṇam* (*Bāṇa,* v. *5*)
>
> God Rāma was furious: he took permission from his wise powerful guru
> Viśvāmitra,
> he was just about to shoot,
> when the arrow made up his own mind: "this is wrong..."
> It held back for some time.
> Then, thinking of the protection of the entire world, it instantly
> enflamed Tāṭakā in battle. In it alone I take refuge: Rāma's arrow.

The surprising thought process of Rāma's arrow stands at the center of this verse, and is also found elsewhere in Rāmabhadra's corpus.[32] The Sanskrit poetic system has a vast archive and metalanguage for granting human qualities to nonliving beings, first and foremost through the poetic figure of the *utprekṣā,* "envisioning", or "seeing-as".[33] The arrow conducts its own

[32] Compare Rāmabhadra's mirror image of this idea of the arrow's agency in his *Jānakīpariṇayam* where the arrow releases itself and overcomes Rāma's hesitation in shooting Tāṭakā. *yāvad bāṇa-samīra-vārita-mahāmāyā-rajo-durdināṃ tena kṣatriya-bālakena balinā dṛṣṭvā purastāṭakām. hanta strītijugupsayā śithilito maurvī-vikarṣī karo vegād utpatitena tāvad iṣuṇā sā ca svayaṃ cichide. Jānakīpariṇaya Nāṭaka of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, ed., L. V. Ramachandra Iyer, (Madras: Oriental Press, 1906), v. 3.3. "Just as the young Kshatriya warrior saw Tāṭakā, emerging from the dust in the great confusion caused by the wind of his arrows in battle, he saw with disgust that she is a woman. His hand loosened its grip on the bow. Just then, the arrow quickly released itself and pierced the demoness to death".

[33] This is arguably a strong case of this poetic figure, even though strictly speaking, here the agency ascribed to the arrow is not marked by an "as-if" particle. The canonical definitions of the figure of *utprekṣā* include the particle "iva", or as-if. See Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, "Introduction to Mapping the World through Courier Poetry," in *Mapping the World through Courier Poetry*, forthcoming, for a discussion of the boundaries and

moral calculation regarding the killing of the demoness, who is protected by the laws of dharma against killing women. Rāmabhadra is adding a significant split second to the well known story: the arrow questions its guru's authority, and its guru's guru's authority, and decides in his heart—*antas*—to pause and question the command. It is a split second necessary for reflection, or doubt: the necessary lingering (*kaṃcit kālam vilambya*, 'he held back for some time') in which the arrow's subjectivity emerges, another actor in the multisubjective universe that Rāmabhadra's vision of devotion and *advaita* invites.[34]

To further complicate the discussion, let us return to Nīlakaṇṭha's hymn to the goddess. On the one hand, following the logic due to which the goddess is everyone on earth, Nīlakaṇṭha relies on the identity of the speaker and the goddess, such as in *Ānanda,* v. 22 discussed above ('… dearest goddess, you are the entire universe embodied. Who doesn't care for you? Nobody on earth can possibly hate themselves!'). But unlike his affinity of name and gender with Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva, the goddess is *not him* in more immediate ways. She is more immediately—as the goddess is for all devotees, and for the entire universe—his mother:

> *na jñāyate mama hitaṃ nitarām upāyo*
> *dīno 'smi devi samayācaraṇākṣamo 'smi.*
> *tat tvām ananyaśaraṇaḥ śaraṇaṃ prapadye*
> *mīnākṣi viśvajananī jananīṃ mamaiva* (*Ānanda,* v. 32)
>
> I do not know what is good for me, let alone how to get there.
> I am poor, Devi, and I cannot perform the prescribed rituals;
> I have no other refuge. I take refuge in You,
> Mīnākṣī, the mother of the universe,
> My own mother.

This verse is the culmination of a sequence (28–32) of verses that invoke the rhetoric of the helpless devotee, who finally surrenders (*prapadye*) out of his incapacity for more expensive

---

mechanisms of the narratological utprekṣā at play in Kālidāsa's Meghadūta, in which a cloud is assigned the role of a messanger.

[34] I thank David Shulman for his insightful observations apropos of this verse.

and exclusive forms of the knowledge of God. In the context of Nīlakaṇṭha's hymn, the speaker reads as distant from the historical author, as we (and his circle of immediate readers) know him to be the educated poet of cultural means that he was. Indeed, a few verses below he states that it is not economic means that stand in his way to performing his obligations, and that the problem is more mental.[35] He therefore purposely contradicts his own invocation of poverty. How may we understand the possible distance between speaker and author?

On the one hand, this rhetoric alienates the speaker from the author of the stotra. At the same time, there is a conflicting sense of demanding authorial presence in this verse, as it is designed as an active speech-act of surrender, which will not recur in this hymn.[36] There thus emerges a speaker who exists on the thin line of the generic and the personal, the ironic and the authentic (more on this below). The verse very pointedly articulates this tension: the Goddess is "the mother of the universe", and "my own mother", too. The repetition (*viśvajananī : jananīṃ mamaiva*) fashions the contrast, and the syntax of the verse supports it—in the vocative, she is the mother of the universe, but as the object of his personal surrender, she is his very own mother, with the exclamation mark in the form of the *eva* particle that closes the verse. With this emphatic personal demand for his very own mother, the author suddenly becomes a speaking subject.

---

[35] *tyājyaṃ tyajāni vihitaṃ ca samācarāṇi nityeṣu śaktim anurudhya hi vartitavyam, tad-buddhi-śaktim anurudhya na kārya-śaktim ity etad eva tu śive vinivedayāmi*. *Ānanda* 36. "I'll avoid prohibited actions and perform only what is prescribed in the scriptures; "the obligatory duties should be performed **according to one's capacity**". But, Dear Goddess, I should clarify: it is my capacity to understand them, not my financial capacity to perform them, that I draw on!". A modern translator notes: "The poet cannot plead financial incapacity to perform the rituals, worship, etc., which are enjoined, because he is very well off. So he explains his inability to perform these in full measure as being due to his limited understanding...". (P.S. Krishnan, *Ānandasāgarastava of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (with English Translation and Commentary)* (Chennai: Mahakavi Sri Nilakantha Foundation, 2000), commentary to v. 36).

[36] Much like Appayya Dīkṣita's surrender to God in "Self Surrender (Ātmārpaṇastuti) of Appayya Dīkṣita," Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, trans., in "*Self Surrender*", "*Peace"*, "*Compassion*", & "*Mission of the Goose*" *of Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika*, Clay Sanskrit Library (NYC Press, 2009), v. 15-17.

Moreover, and similarly to the ever-shifting grids of identification that we have seen between poet and God in Rāmabhadra's hymn to the arrow, the relationship of the subject and the Goddess is dynamic: it shifts between the horizon of a complete identification of her with all selves, to her presence at heart, to the relationship of mother and son. And it can get quite entangled:

> *āśaiśavān mamatayā kalitas tvayāsāv*
> *ānṛṇyam amba tava labdhum anā mṛgāṅkaḥ*
> *svātmānam eva niyataṃ bahudhā vibhajya*
> *tvat-pādayor vinidadhe nakharāpadeśāt* (*Ānanda*, v. 64)
>
> Ever since he was little, the moon considered you his very own.
> To clear his debt to you, mother,
> he regularly divides himself into many parts,
> and places them on your feet;
> they merely look as if they are your toenails.

This verse, part of the head-to-toe description of the goddess, brings the game of dynamic relationships with the goddess to the extreme through a complex figuration of "envisioning for a reason" (*hetūtprekṣā*). Because the crescent moon (the "child" moon) occupies the left side of Śiva's head, the goddess—who occupies Śiva's left half—treats the moon as her child. The verse then invokes the vedic notion of the three debts all humans are born with (ṛṇatraya): being the parents, the ṛṣis, and the gods.[37] The moon cycle is therefore envisioned as a monthly payment of debt to the moon's mother goddess, in which he places parts of himself on her feet, thus explaining the luster of her shiny toenails.[38]

The particle *eva* is again far from trivial: the moon regularly divides *his very self* into many parts, *svātmānam eva niyataṃ bahudhā vibhajya*. This verse presents a subtle and complex

[37] For the history of the *ṛṇatraya* debts system, see Charles Malamoud, "The Theology of Debt in Brahmanism," in *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, ed. David White (Delhi: OUP, 1996).
[38] The modern commentator to the verse spells this out; *Ānandasāgarastava of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (with English Translation and Commentary),* trans. Krishnan. com to v. 64.

demonstration of a self that can, in principle, be divided in many parts, and shine as he does so. Note, too, how the speaker of the stotra and the moon momentarily converge as the speaker addresses the goddess as his mother (*amba*) in the second pada. The author inserts himself into the equation, as he identifies with the moon's position as a son and a devotee. I propose that this is part of the hymn's larger effort of constructing a contradictory, pluralized speaking subject, who keeps building himself vis-à-vis his Goddess. This is quite the opposite to the influential Christian model articulated for instance by Augustine, who addresses god saying: "you gathered me together from the state of disintegration in which I had been fruitlessly divided."[39]

Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's hymns feature a sustained and creative reflection on their own subjectivity, situated within the worlds of Sanskrit intellectual and theological traditions. We are getting closer to grasping the governing sense of self that Rāmabhadra and Nīlakaṇṭha are positing in their stotras: the recurring interior spaces that the devotional genre speaks are phrased such that the notion of a plural, shared, principally dynamic subjectivity is postulated and celebrated.

"Intimate intertextuality", and the personalized convention

Scholarship about the stotra has long noted the triple marriage of devotion, scholasticism, and poetry. Srilata Raman writes of the Tamil stotras of Rāmānuja's disciples as a dense mixture of poetical verses and theological sections.[40] Steven Hopkins discusses how in Vedānta Deśika's

[39] Augustine, Confessions, 2.1.1. Translation in Zac, Modes of Self-writing from Antiquity to the Later Middle Ages, pp 288. Zac further clarifies that "Augustine's self-cultivation is paradoxically based on the progressive denial of his attachment to his earthly self" (p 299). His act of writing is an act of integration and redemption: I think it is safe to say that for Nīlakaṇṭha, the act of writing, while it certainly involves an ideal akin to redemption, it is far from integrative.

[40] Srilata Raman, *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Shrivaishnavism: Tamil Cats Or Sanskrit Monkeys?* (Routledge, 2007), 53–54.

Tamil, Sanskrit and Manipravalam hymns, there is a conscious blend of the doctrinal and the emotional.[41] Edelmann similarly labels Sanskrit stotras as 'an artful theology'[42]. Hamsa Stainton's comprehensive work shows how nearly every Sanskrit stotra features a varying balance between scholasticism, emotive devotion, and poetic craft, and further, how stotras developed a self-conscious ideal of poetry that amplifies and serves devotion.[43]

Quite unlike Appayya Dīkṣita's governing didactic motivations in his stotras,[44] I suggest that this blend of registers in the stotra is one of the reasons that our authors are so drawn to it, as the *sarvatantrasvatantra* poets we know them to be. I will now sample some verses that exemplify how our authors treat scholastic and devotional idioms within their poetry.

kāle mahaty anavadhāv apatan kadāpi
kvāpy antime januṣi ko 'pi gatiṃ labheta
itthaṃ samarthanavidhiḥ paramāgamānāṃ
paryāyasūktividhayā nayanaṃ nañarthe (*Ānanda,* v. 14)

Sometime, somewhere, someone
who has lived a long, infinite time,
might get there, at the very end of their life.
This is the law of probability given in the scriptures.
It's a roundabout, polite manner
of saying 'no.'

puṃsaḥ kṣaṇārdham api saṃsaraṇākṣamasya
sāṃkhyādayaḥ saraṇayo na viśanti karṇam
saṃkhyāya gāṅga-sikatāḥ sakalāś ca sūkṣmā
bhuṅkṣveti vāgiva mahākṣudhayārditasya (*Ānanda*, v. 21)

For a man who cannot bear
even for half a moment,
his endless worldly existence

[41] "Deśika is a poet who sings—to quote a verse from his *Kāñcītamil Māhātmyam*—with "love" (aṉpu) and a "sharp, subtle intellect" (cūr mati)." Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God*, 236.
[42] Edelmann, Jonathan B., "Introduction to Special Issue: Stotra, Hymns of Praise in Indian Literature." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 3 (2016), 4.
[43] See in particular the discussion of Jagaddhara's massive *Stutikusumāñjali*, a large hymn from the fourteenth century, brings Sanskrit scholastic discourse of poetics into the language of religious sentiment. Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, ch. 4-5.
[44] Bronner, "Singing to God, Educating the People."

paths like the Sāṃkhya doctrine are completely irrelevant.
It is like telling a man dying of thirst:
'count (samkhyāya) the entirety of fine grains of sand on the shore of the Ganges,
then, you may drink…'

Verse fourteen is an amused take on the concept of the "path of knowledge" versus the immediacy of bhakti, and the commentarial language thereupon. One is led in a "roundabout, polite manner" (*paryāyasūktividhayā*) to the technical term *nañartha,* "negation". When wearing the hat of the bhakti poet, Nīlakaṇṭha has no problem with openly dismissing the traditions that were a very central part of his life; we have already seen this with his statements about the Vedas and the śāstras in his manifestos. The verse also brings to mind Bhavabhūti's famous statement in the *Mālatīmādhava*.[45] While Bhavabhūti imagines a soulmate from the future who may understand his work, Nīlakaṇṭha portrays another someone from the future, for whom an infinity of time (*kāle mahati anavadhau*, echoing Bhavabhūti's *kālo hy ayam niravadhir*) rather points to his unlikely chances of existence. The echo is underdetermined, but it serves as an undercurrent in the lighthearted reiteration of the old bhakti trope. Nīlakaṇṭha's devotion drew freely on śāstra and kāvya idioms, inserting his intimate command of the language and its history into a devotional context and register.

The force of the statement regarding the thirsty man is doubled: the sisyphean labor of counting sand is equated with studying the authoritative philosophical doctrines both explicitly and literally, through a verbal game with the prefix and root *saṃ+ √khyā*. It is as if the author did not spend his life studying traditional Vedic and philosophical knowledge, or as if this hymn

[45] *ye nāma kecid iha naḥ prathayanty avajñāṃ jānanti te kimapi tān prati naiṣa yatnaḥ. utpatsyate tu mama ko'pi samāna-dharmā kālo hy ayam niravadhir vipulā ca pṛthvī* (*Mālatīmādhava,* 5). "Those who scorn me now know what they know. My work is not for them. But someday someone will be born who shares my nature, for time is boundless and the world is wide." Translation is by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4. This verse was discussed in the previous chapter as an intertext in Nīlakaṇṭha's opening to his prologue.

is not full of nods and references to these very traditions. This is really the point: Nīlakaṇṭha trusts his readers to realize this. The distance of Nīlakaṇṭha's personal biography from the rhetoric of disdain toward authoritative vedic and śāstric knowledge creates a subtle irony which is part of the elusive presence of the authorial voice. The poetics of devotion are hardly restrictive or conservative in approach: rather, they pose a learned but lighthearted flexibility, oscillating between largely accessible verses and more demanding ones, a composite *uccāvaca* texture discussed in the previous chapter, that makes for Nīlakaṇṭha's signature throughout his hymns.

The occasional accessibility of Nīlakaṇṭha's writing is often complemented by a more demanding one in Rāmabhadra's hymns. Many of his hymns feature oblique references to esoteric stories of the epic, and numerous allusions to authoritative scripture, requiring certain detective work even from its informed readers.[46] Yet, he certainly inherits from his teacher the happy performance of range that the stotra enables. The next verse raises an objection to the happy marriage of poetry and devotion and answers with a humorous and definitive reply:

> *padārthān asmṛtvā na khalu ghaṭate śabdaracanā*
> *tad icchadbhiḥ stotuṃ prathamam asi cintyo raghupate*
> *smṛtis te sarvārthān ghaṭayati nṛṇām ity api punaḥ*
> *vimarśe kiṃ stutyā tadapi kimapi staumi capalaḥ* (*Prasāda,* v. 2)
>
> Without first thinking of the meaning of words, they cannot be brought together.
> So those who wish to praise you, must first think of you, Raghupati.
> And on thinking of you, men fulfill all their wishes.
> Come to think of this—what's the point of praise?
> Still, somehow, I praise you; I don't easily follow the argument.

[46] Thiruvengadathan remarks on his readerly experience of the second part of his *Rasāyana*, a section of 111 verses called the *paryāyokti niṣyanda*, which references various episodes of Rāma's life through the figure of speech *paryāyokti*, or indirect statement: "Though Paryāyokti gives a lot of exercise to one's brain, a whole section full of Paryāyokti and nothing but that, makes the reader weary." Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 169. See also *Ibid*, appendix D (234-242), which lists a select survey of sources found in his stotras, including (not limited to) the *Praśnopaṇiṣad*, the *Kathopaṇiṣad*, the *Chāndogyopaṇiṣad*, the *Muṇḍakopaṇiṣad*, the *Ṛgveda*, the *Śvetāśvataropaṇiṣad*, the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, the *Brahmasūtra*, and the *Bhagavad Gīta*.

The objection involves an epistemic argument regarding the primacy of the meaning of words in the process of constructing sentences. This is followed by a devotional principle due to which anyone who wishes to praise Rāma can do so by simply remembering him. The combination of these arguments makes articulated praise such as a stotra redundant. This elegant objection is answered with four words concluding this verse—*tadapi kimapi staumi capalaḥ*—*yet,* somehow, I praise: I am a *capala,* literally, fickle-minded. The author clearly knows how to craft elegant arguments—the verse's force lies in this sudden shift, which points to the presence of a double-voiced historical author. The final few words introduce an entirely different tone to the scholastic objection: they have a colloquial, almost anti-syntactical ring to them: the verb "I praise" has no object, and the adjective *capala* is given without cause. The stotra is an ideal stage for aligning the philosophical-theological argument condensed into the verse with the speechlike finale of the verse. And again, there is no room for an apology: the fickle-mindedness usually staged as a devotee's weakness is here used as the very reason—even if disingenuous—for his sincere act of poetic praise. Here again, is a clear personalization of the devotional idiom, constructed through the *uccāvaca* aesthetic.

These self-positionings can be understood as acts of 'intimate intertextuality'.[47] On the one hand, post-structuralist formulations of intertextuality offer a useful vocabulary with which to think of creative, layered, and intricate citations at play in a single textual moment, which were helpful for my own reading of this literature, especially as an outsider to the tradition.[48] On

[47] I borrow the term from Dasan, "Discerning the Intimacies of Intertextuality: A.K Ramanujan's Hyphenated Cosmopolitan Approach to Translation Theory and Practice." See my discussion in the introduction.
[48] Another theoretical candidate was "reuse", originally an architectural term, especially as argued for in Elisa Freschi and Philipp A. Maas, eds., *Adaptive Reuse: Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Cultural History* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016), which offers a catalogue of different kinds of reuse in Sanskrit philosophy and literature, and in Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on*

the other hand, the post-structuralist assumption of an open-ended, principally idiosyncratic intertextuality that emphasizes the reader's act of producing meaning does not capture the vast yet at-hand reservoir of references that our authors shared. Relatedly, the notion of intertextuality was suggested, in Kristeva's formulations especially, in order to replace the notion of "intersubjectivity" (as argued for by T. S. Eliot, for instance), aiming toward the description of an impersonal mechanism of literature.[49] I thus add the adjective "intimate" to the intertextual tool so as to retrieve the "intersubjectiveness" involved in the intertextuality we are dealing with. For our authors especially, conversations with tradition were personal and intricate. It allowed them to construct their own voice with the expectation that their audience will grasp just what exactly they do with this familiar material, and to what effect.[50]

On the "self" in "self-surrender"

The following case study centers around *prapatti,* or self-surrender, in Nīlakaṇṭha's *Ānanda*, which allows me to flesh out the "intimate intertextuality" that Nīlakaṇṭha employed, and ask what it allowed him to do in the context of the stotra. The influential debate around *prapatti,* or "self surrender", a central theological concern in the Śrīvaiṣnava tradition, became a

India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600 (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. chapter three, for the application of reuse in its original architectural context in the early modern Deccan, which reveals dramatic claims and revisions to the memory of the past. As an analyitical category, "reuse" stands at the other end of the spectrum from intertextuality in terms of the strong intentional agenda behind the recontextualisation implied in it, and this seemed less adequate for the kind of prolific, playful and lighthanded way in which our authors cite their traditions.

[49] For an analysis of the intellectual history of intertextuality as a strong explanatory device for poetic creativity, including an emphasis on Kristeva's assumptions of the universal and impersonal nature of intertextuality, see Scarlett Baron, *The Birth of Intertextuality: The Riddle of Creativity* (Routledge, 2020), esp. 332-340.

[50] Yigal Bronner's work on *śleṣa,* or "Simultaneous Narration", provides numerous examples for the immense yet shared intertextual references at the disposal of classical Sanskrit poets. He offers helpful suggestions from the case-study of intertextuality in classical Sanskrit poetry, for instance that: "intertextual analysis must be open to nuances such as the degree of reflexivity with which acts of connecting one's text to an intertext (or to what [Jonathan] Culler calls the discursive space) are invested..." Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 262.

focal characteristic of bhakti in South India by the early modern period. Doctrinally, it is a term most associated with Vaiṣṇava theologians and poets, and it is often presented as an option for devotees who cannot perform the more demanding paths to liberation through knowledge (*jñāna*) or ritualistic devotion (*bhakti*); alternatively, it is presented as the sole and superior path to god.[51] For our purposes here, note that the *prapatti* debate hinges on the degree of effort and agency of the devotee.[52] This debate was widely adopted much due to the influential followers of Rāmānuja in the eleventh century, and of Vedānta Deśika in the fourteenth century.[53] Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha's most acknowledged influence, employed the notion of *prapatti* for his own sectarian needs, with intentional reappropriation across the sectarian divide.[54]

I suggest that the language of *prapatti* served to perform our authors' subjectivity not only as devotees, but also as authors. Its echoes are everywhere in these hymns, mostly in the first person *prapadye*—"I surrender"—which we have already encountered in Nīlakaṇṭha's

---

[51] In intra-Vaiṣṇava disputes, the *Vaṭakalai* doctrine saw *prapatti* as suitable for devotees of lower castes, whereas the Southern doctrine of *Teṅkalai* interpreted *prapatti* as the only means to liberation, accessible to everyone. Raman suggests that it was Rāmanuja's heterogenous notion of *prapatti* that led to the future contestations around the term (Raman, *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Shrivaishnavism*, 23. For a study of the history of the debate since its inception by Rāmanuja to modern times, see *Ibid*. See also Rao, *Re-Figuring the Ramayana as Theology*, for the Rāmāyaṇa's central place in future debates of *prapatti* (such that scholars of the sixteenth century came to call it "*prapatti–śāstra*"; *Ibid*, 46).

[52] The debate was was often theorized through the maxim of the cat and the monkey (*markaṭa-mārjāra-kiśora-nyāya):* the Southern *Teṅkalai* devotee is viewed as a kitten, whose mother carries in her teeth, while the Northern *Vaṭakalai* devotee is a baby monkey, who actively clings onto its mother. The divide became a motif and a debate in devotional stotras and their commentaries from their very beginning, but crystallized as a sectarian divide between the *Teṅkalai* and *Vaṭakalai* sects only in the nineteenth century, as shown in detail in Raman, *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Shrivaishnavism*.

[53] The circulation of the influential Viṣṇu-themed *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in Śaiva circles is one possible reason for the notional world of bhakti as a Vaiṣṇava contribution across-sects, as suggested in Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement," 3. Vedānta Deśika's work was very probably well known to Nīlakaṇṭha, given Appayya's high regard to him, evident in his commentary on Deśika's *Yādavābhyudaya*. For a discussion of influence see Yigal Bronner, "A Text with a Thesis: The Rāmāyaṇa from Appayya Dīkṣita's Receptive End," in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011), fn 18.

[54] Bronner and Shulman state: "as an abstract noun this verb [*prapadye*] gives us the form *prapatti* or *prapadana,* which evoke the Shri Vaishnava ideal… indeed, Appayya has effectively appropriated this terminology and the devotional practice it signifies for a Shaiva context…" Bronner and Shulman, "Introduction to Poems and Prayers From South India," l-li.

paradoxically distant, yet personal statement cited above. In the following verse, Nīlakaṇṭha engages with—and subverts—the doctrinal definition of *prapatti*.

> *ātmaiva bhāra iti taṃ tvayi yo nidhatte*
> *so 'ṅgāni kāni kalayatv alasaḥ prapatteḥ*
> *viśvasya*[55] *sākṣiṇi vilakṣaṇa-lakṣaṇā yā*
> *visrambha-sampad iyam eva samastam aṅgam*. (*Ānanda,* v. 37)
>
> Thinking "my very Self is a burden," some lazy person like myself
> might surrender himself to you.
> But what auxiliaries (*aṅga*) of *prapatti* would such a person perform*?*
> Goddess, the witness of the entire universe,
> just the gift of having confidence in you,
> non-definable by definition,
> is the entirety of *prapatti* elements taken together.

This verse holds a convoluted conversation with the Śrīvaiṣṇava systematization of the *prapatti* system, in particular at the theological concept of the auxiliaries (*aṅgāni*) of *prapatti*.[56] Let me try to unpack it: in his *Nyāsa Daśakam*, Deśika gives one of his several influential definitions of *prapatti*. The first two verses are worth translating in full:

> *aham mad-rakṣaṇa-bhāro*[57] *mad-rakṣaṇa-phalam tathā*
> *na mama śrīpater evety ātmānam nikṣipet budhaḥ* (*Nyāsa Daśakam,* v. 1)
> *nyasyāmy akiñcanaḥ śrīman anukūlo 'nya-varjitaḥ*
> *viśvāsa-prārthanāpūrvam ātmarakṣābharaṃ tvayi* (*Nyāsa Daśakam,* v. 2)
>
> "Myself, the burden of protecting myself, and the fruit of my protection,
> are not mine, but Vishnu's", wise men let go of their Selves in this way.
> God—by being a nobody, following the rules, avoiding the unruly,
> Having full confidence in you, and constantly begging you—

[55] The *Ānandasāgarastava of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (with English Translation and Commentary),* trans. Krishnan, suggests *viśvatra* in place of *viśvasya*.

[56] According to Ajay Rao, the notion of the five/six *aṅgas* comes from the *Pañcarātra* sources. Rao shows how the notion serves as a rather flexible stage for a lively debate between different Vaiṣṇava views (see Rao, *Re-Figuring the Ramayana as Theology*, 49–58). Rao's translation of *aṅga* is "components": I borrow the term "auxiliaries", which accounts for the Mīmāṃsa terminology it was borrowed from, from Manasicha Akepiyapornchai, "Pre-Vedāntadeśika Application of Mīmāṃsā Hermeneutics in the Validation of the Doctrine of Self-Surrender to Personal God (Prapatti)" (World Sanskrit Conference, Vancouver, 2018), https://www.academia.edu/40831318/Pre_Veda_ntades_ika_Application_of_Mi_ma_m_sa_Hermeneutics_in_the_Validation_of_the_Doctrine_of_Self_surrender_to_Personal_God_Prapatti.

[57] I emend here from "bharo" given in the edition I consulted, based on the requirement of the seventh long syllable of the first half of the anuṣṭubh meter, which the rest of the couplet follows.

I surrender the weight of protecting myself to you.[58]

Deśika's outline of *prapatti* in this hymn begins with breaking it down into three elements: surrendering oneself (*ātman*), the burden of protecting that self, and the fruit of this protection. His second verse enumerates five auxiliaries (*aṅga*) of *prapatti* that self-surrender requires of the devotee; full confidence, or trust (*viśvāsa*) is one of them. Nīlakaṇṭha's verse completely reshuffles this definition. In his version, Nīlakaṇṭha begins with his by-now familiar false self-deprecation as '*alasa'*, or lazy, by identifying with the need to relinquish the burden of one's self—the very gist of *prapatti* for Deśika's 'wise men'. However, such a lazy person is not capable of fulfilling all the auxiliaries that Deśika defined.[59] But the Goddess comes to the rescue: confiding in her, which in Deśika's formulation was only one of the auxiliaries, comes naturally to our lazy speaker, and it outdoes all the meticulously defined auxiliaries.

Further, on comparing these two verses, Nīlakaṇṭha seems to be manipulating the use of *bhāra*/*bhara* (weight), which occurs twice in Deśika's short definition of self surrender (*madrakṣaṇabhāro, ātmarakṣābharaṃ*) and paraphrases it as follows: "thinking his very self to be a burden" *(ātmaiva bhāra iti)*'. The burden of protecting one's self, connotatively present from Deśika's formulation, becomes the burden that *is* the self. This plausibly parodies the language of *prapatti,* pointing to Nīlakaṇṭha's vision of subjectivity: he happily rejects the idea

[58] My translation relies on the commentarial tradition, which aligns the five elements in the second verse with the five *aṅga* components: 1. *anukūlya saṃkalpaṃ* (in the verse; *anukūla*) relating to conduct according to rules; 2. *pratikūlya varjanam* (in the verse, *anyavarjitaḥ)*, relating to avoidance of unruly conduct 3. *karpaṇyam* (in the verse, *akiṃcanaḥ),* relating to the inability of the devotee to follow other paths of devotion; 4. *viśvāsam* (as in the verse), literally confidence, trust ; and 5. *goptṛtva varaṇam* (in the verse, *prārthanā),* relating to the need of subsequent requests for protection from god. The tenth verse of this hymn makes clear that Deśika aimed to define the five *aṅgas: śrīmān niyata-pañcāngam madrakṣaṇa-bharārpaṇam, acīkarat svayaṁ svasmin atoham iha nirbharaḥ*. V.10. "Nyāsa Daśakam of Vedānta Deśika," accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/vdesikan/nyasa_dasakam/index.html.

[59] Andrew Ollett suggested a different reading, in which Nīlakaṇṭha is stating that one who surrenders himself because he is too lazy (*alasa*) is not really surrendering himself—he has to be motivated by confidence (*viśvāsaḥ*/*visrambhaḥ*), thus arguing for a disposition toward the deity, rather than a disposition toward himself.

of the self as a burden to get rid of. Rather, for him, confidence or trust in the goddess redefines the premise of *prapatti*.[60] This reversal is all the more potent if we consider that in an alternative Vaiṣṇava formulation that lists six rather than five auxiliaries, the extra and principal auxiliary (aṅgin) is 'entrusting one's self'.[61] If Nīlakaṇṭha is directly responding to this influential formulation, his verse replaces "self-surrender" with "confidence" as a principal auxiliary: *visrambha-sampad iyam eva samastam aṅgam*. And in any case, in Nīlakaṇṭha's formulation *prapatti* is all about the intimate action of confiding in someone else, and the devotee does not let go of her subjectivity or individuality in the process. Nīlakaṇṭha paraphrases Deśika's *viśvāsa*, which etymologically comes from the action of releasing one's breath, with a close synonym: *visrambha,* also related to the action of a relaxation of one's muscles. It might not be coincidental that in the context of the *prapatti* paraphrase, Nīlakaṇṭha's address to the goddess as *viśvasya sākṣiṇi* sonically suggests Deśika's *viśvāsa*.

Finally, it is striking that Nīlakaṇṭha's verse literally poses a *uniqueness* of the speaker's confidence in the goddess. His own confidence—not the goddess—is *vilakṣaṇa-lakṣaṇā*, non-definable by definition. Nīlakaṇṭha shifts the emphasis of surrender to a singular gift that devotee and goddess share. One may object to such a strong reading of this verse by saying that an attribute like *vilakṣaṇa-lakṣaṇā* simply invokes the old tension between bhakti and logical definitions: devotion is beyond reason. It is true that this verse—and many verses of the stotras at hand—reiterate this tension. But I maintain that this verse uses this tropic tension to argue for a

[60] There is a possible yamaka, or intended polysemy in Nīlakaṇṭha's verse: if we take the second *aṅga* in the verse in a more general sense of "limb", or "part", rather than in the technical theological sense of the first appearance of the word, this would make Nīlakaṇṭha's rejection of the action of surrender more explicit, and translate as something like: ...The gift of having confidence in you is by definition non-definable, the entirety of *everything* taken together.
[61] This version is given by Govindarāja of the sixteenth century, in his *Bhūṣaṇa* commentary on the Rāmāyaṇa. It is plausible that Nīlakaṇṭha was aware of Govindarāja's formulation: the latter was an influential early modern Vaiṣṇava theologian, and he directly refutes Appayya Dīkṣita's reading of the Rāmāyaṇa as a Śaiva text, a fact which may have captured Nīlakaṇṭha's attention. See Rao, *Re-Figuring the Ramayana as Theology*, 49.

distinct, personal relationship. He clearly enjoys crafting the conditions of his unique subjectivity while rejecting the notion of the Self as a burden.

Why, we might ask, is Nīlakaṇṭha engaging with the *prapatti* paradigm of self-surrender with such intricate detail? To begin with, Nīlakaṇṭha is a practicing devotee. As such, he is naturally grappling with prevalent notions of South Indian devotion that he was educated in, and that he was emotionally invested in, such as *prapatti* or self-surrender. Additionally, he is subverting well-used notions and ideas associated with the Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition, and this cross-sectarian wink may well play a part in his motives. Finally and crucially, we may note the way in which he reshuffles the theological debates: he playfully converses with them, but simultaneously takes them literally, disembedding them of previous meanings, not unlike what we saw with his treatment of terms like *vyaṅgya* from the tradition of poetics in chapter one. Nīlakaṇṭha's praxis of intimate intertextuality allows him the freedom to readily zoom out of the intricacies of a notion such as the elements of *prapatti*, so that it seems manageable and easy to carry. This lightheartedness within hard-core philosophical matter stands at the heart of his aesthetic. It also fits in with roughly contemporary trends around Thanjavur, which Anand Venkatkrishnan has called an aesthetic of 'levity', in contrast with scholasticism at Benares that took itself more seriously.[62] And it allows him to craft the conditions of his unique subjectivity from deep within the tradition, while blatantly rejecting the notion of the Self as a burden. As is often the case with Nīlakaṇṭha and other authors of his circle, individuality is hardly performed against tradition. It is rather stated through the subtle remaking of one.

[62] Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Leaving Kashi: Sanskrit Knowledge and Cultures of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century South India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 57 (2020).

Individuals composed of convention

Such a treatment of *prapatti* is one example of Nīlakaṇṭha's signature, which invariably involves a nuanced personalization of tradition. The genre of the stotra suits this program well: it provides numerous templates for the person who speaks to God, readily conflating the personal and the formulaic. The stotra allows the historical author to play with a different and shifting distance to the speaking subject, often varying within each hymn. We already began to see above how the poet-protagonists of this dissertation make full use of this range between the poles of the autobiographic and the anonymous.

Nīlakaṇṭha's *Śāntivilāsa* ("Peace", hereon *Śānti*)[63] is another important text to consider in this regard. In terms of genre, the *stotra* and the *laghukāvya* or *subhāṣita* collection are closely affiliated.[64] This affinity holds especially true in the case of Nīlakaṇṭha's *Śānti*, which features a small but significant role for God. The *Śānti* treats themes that often appear in stotras such as the fear of death, the struggle with one's own reckless mind, the race after means, and the meaning of duty. And like in many of these stotras, the linear accumulation of statements, coupled with occasional distinct remarks, give a sense of a singular human experience. Consider the following verse:

nirmaryādaḥ parama-capalo niḥsamājñāna-rāśir

---

[63] *Śāntivilāsa* ["Peace"] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: trans., Bronner, Yigal and Shulman, David. In "Self Surrender," "Peace," "Compassion," &"Mission of the Goose" of Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika, 187–226. Clay Sanskrit Library. NYC Press, 2009. The translations from this composition are taken from this translation by Bronner and Shulman.

[64] Hamsa Stainton summarizes the generally openended theoretical engagements of Sanskrit scholars with the genres of *laghukāvya, khaṇḍakāvya,* or *muktaka,* under which both the stotra and the subhāṣita are categorized; See Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, 199–201. Steven Vose notes in the context of multilingual *citrakāvya* stotras of Jain monks, that: "...[the forms of hymns discussed] must also be seen as *laghukāvya*, short, erudite poems meant for performance in the intellectual setting of the goṣṭi…" Steven M. Vose, "Jain Uses of Citrakāvya and Multiple-Language Hymns in Late Medieval India: Situating the Laghukāvya Hymns of Jinaprabhasūri in the 'Assembly of Poets,'" *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 3 (2016): 334. Vose takes the *sabhā* or *goṣṭī* setting of the assembly seriously, and there is a comparison to be drawn between his case studies and those I analyze here in terms of the complexity of many of the hymns I discuss here. We will arrive at the question of the audience in the next chapter.

mādṛkṣo 'nyaḥ ka iti bhuvane mārganīyaṃ tvayaiva
īdṛkṣe'pi kvacid iha dayeyeti kautūhalaṃ cet
svāmin viśveśvara tava bhavam nistareyaṃ tadāham (Śānti, v. 44*).*

Unruly, utterly reckless, an ocean of mindlessness—
just see if you can find, anywhere in this world, someone
like me. And if, God of Everything,
you happen to wonder
if you're capable of feeling for some such creature,
then even I, Lord, stand a chance
of reaching the shore.

The phrase *mādṛkṣo 'nyaḥ* or "someone else like me", calls for attention, and it appears in different versions throughout this text (notably in Śānti, 41: …*bhraṣṭe mādṛśy api sa dayate cet kṣato dharma-setuḥ*, "the dam of dharma will break if Śiva pardons a swindler like me"). Such instances speak to Nīlakaṇṭha's uniqueness of voice within the familiar, genre-bound language of self deprecation and authentic devotion. As Bronner and Shulman observe,

> …the poet's voice is entirely distinctive, indeed unmistakable once you have read a few verses… at first glance, these highly personal and rather sober verses call to mind the whole genre of poems preaching dispassion (vairāgya), beginning perhaps with the fifth-century poet Bhartṛhari…but Nīlakaṇṭha, by contrast, is in no way committed to rejecting the world or to a simple notion of release. He is as skeptical about this idea as about everything else. His tone is confessional, intimate, self-ironic and reflective…[65]

The authors conclude their discussion by reflecting on Nīlakaṇṭha's remarkable final request to Śiva for "a gentle feeling that is mine" (*masṛṇitaṃ māmakānandam*). Literally, Nīlakaṇṭha concludes with a wish for his very own—and gentle—*ānanda*, or trans-subjective happiness.

Nīlakaṇṭha is offering a way for the Sanskrit poet to speak about himself, enjoying the paradoxical quality of a custom-made *ānanda*, or of a *prapatti* that produces a non-reducible subject. Such marked gestures of individuation are joined in this piece with what we know to be

[65] Bronner and Shulman, "Introduction to Poems and Prayers From South India," lix-lxi.

true-to-life autobiographic snippets of Nīlakaṇṭha's familial background: "what a family to be born into! Can you believe who turned out to be my parents?" (*vaṃśe kasminn ajaniṣi kayoḥ putratām agrahīṣam, Śānti*, 1), or: "I was born into the best Brahmin family…" (*dvija-vara-kule janma, Śānti*, 47). These embedded remarks must have been immediately recognizable as true-to-life to his readers, as they still are to modern readers across the globe. They also closely echo similar declarations by Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle Appayya, such that those who follow the "intimate intertext" also know exactly what family he is from.[66] Joined with his personalized take on well-trodden tropes, the very option of a historical authorial signature opens up. Note, again, that this signature is intrinsically tied to the author's indebtedness to his family.

This subjectivity, moreover, is never direct: it is made of tropes and extractable generic statements. These games of the personal are almost as close as we get to Nīlakaṇṭha's biographical information in his writings.[67] The subtle line between biography and trope was lost over time, such that the unlikely stories that emerged about him as a minister at the Madurai court and his subsequent retirement to the village of Palamadai are at least partly a product of his treatment of generic themes of renunciation of worldly life in the *Śānti*.[68] Biographical data aside, I propose that such cryptic manipulation of his authorial persona, alongside flashes of his individual style, are key to Nīlakaṇṭha's voice as an author.

Rāmabhadra inherits the formula of subtle individuation within tropic language from his teacher. And he has his own manner of doing it, which is even more subtle than Nīlakaṇṭha's.

---

[66] "I was born in the very best of families", *utpadyāpi...mahaty uttamānāṃ kule 'smin*. "Self Surrender (Ātmārpaṇastuti) of Appayya Dīkṣita," trans., Bronner and Shulman, v.7.
[67] Excluding the rare insertion of date of writing that he inserts into the beginning of the *Vijaya* (see conclusion) his comment about his being at the Kaveri River in the first chapter of his Gaṅgāvataraṇa, and the information he gives in the both the latter and in the *Nalacaritam* about his family and teachers. See introduction.
[68] See Talia Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: An Independent Poet of the Kaveri Delta, or: The Forgotten Model of Genealogical Authorship," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 59, no. 3 (2022): 273–98.

One stotra in which this effect is very apparent is the *Viśvagarbhastava* ("The God Who Holds the Universe in Him", hereon, *Viśva*)[69]. This hymn of 125 verses features common themes and tropes from the bhakti vocabulary, very reminiscent of Nīlakaṇṭha's *Śānti*, such as the fickleness of mind, the absurdity of life in the face of a certain death, and the conclusion to surrender to God while still living.

The language in this hymn tends to be highly theological and, for the seeker of the author's voice, frustratingly generic. It invokes multiple intertextual references, ranging between specialized language such as a specific *dharmaśāstra* injunction for ritual purification of both parents after giving birth (*Viśva,* v. 71), to more general stock-phrases, such as taming the six senses (*Viśva,* v. 47-8), or treatment of the "six enemies of the mind" (*Viśva,* v. 40–49), which are well-known theological notions. For a taste of such a generic verse, here is one instance from this latter mini sequence, in the verse devoted to Kāma:

> *dhammillaḥ śikhi-barha-bhāra-ruciraḥ pūrṇendukāntaṃ mukhaṃ*
> *vṛttottuṅga-ghanau stanau kṛśataro madhyo nitambaḥ pṛthuḥ*
> *ity āsaktam idaṃ vadhūṣu hṛdayaṃ mā bhūd iti prārthayaṃs*
> *tasmai prāñjalir asmi dāśarathaye śrījānakījānaye* (*Viśva,* v. 41)
>
> The braided hair shining like a load of peacock feathers,
> the face shining like a full moon, the breasts round, high and large,
> the waist incredibly thin, the hips wide—
> I pray that my heart does not get stuck on women like that!
> And so, I bow to Rāma, who married Jānakī.

Such a hyperconventional description of women, especially within the hymn's sequence of the stock-taxonomy of all-too-human tendencies, makes the first-person voice of the stotra appear like a generic formula, hardly personal. But the third quarter of the verse, fashioned as a

[69] Sastri, "Viśvagarbhastava [*Viśva*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita."

surprise, transforms the conventional description of the woman, making it into a normative self-reflection. This surprise comes with a wink, since the gaze received ample space to describe its object up until the final prayer that seeks to undo it. This ironic element weakens the normative tone, as well as the reflective orientation of the verse. To add to that, the description of the woman's beauty is so heavy with tropes that one wonders if the speaker is really concerned for his own mind's wanderings; he seems to be meta-describing, rather than experiencing, the prototypical male gaze. This verse thus plays, again, on the question of distance of poet and speaker.

But then, not unlike what we have seen with Nīlakaṇṭha, there are also moments of a seeming stray personal comment. For instance:

> *saptāṣṭaiḥ kavalaiḥ supūram udaraṃ prādeśamātraṃ vahan*
> *viṣvag bhrāmyati viśvagarbha iva yo vittārjanākāṅkṣayā*
> *so 'haṃ saṃprati deśikasya kṛpayā mohaṃ tyajan muktaye*
> *tasmai prāñjalir asmi dāśarathaye śrījānakījānaye* (*Viśva,* v. 58)
>
> My belly is a mere handspan wide, easily filled with 7-8 bites at most,
> but I traveled the earth, greedy for money, as if I had the world for a stomach.
> Now, by the compassion of my teacher, I gave up this illusion. To be free,
> I bow to you—Rāma, Daśaratha's son, Śrījānakī's lover.

A slight metapoetic tone governs this verse, located in the middle of this hymn, as the title of the hymn, *Viśvagarbha*, is embedded in its second line. The title of the hymn is explicated in a more straightforward manner toward the end of the hymn (*Viśva,* v. 122), where one would expect it to appear, and where the speaker spells out the talismanic effects of the stotra and asks God Rāma to grant the wishes of all men who recite it. Here, however, it appears in a different meaning and from the back door: rather than a name of god, "who holds the universe inside him" it describes the literal food capacity of the greedy poet. This doubled meaning is heightened

through the title of the composition, and it spells out the ever-present identity of god and poet in a lighthearted, creative manner.

A poet compromising his work and travelling just to fill his belly or pocket is a familiar theme from the history of stotra literature, as is the general tension between the worldly poet and the poet who resigns the world.[70] With the additional force of the encoded title, however, it is tempting to read the verse as a self-reflection on Rāmabhadra's days as a visiting scholar of sorts, followed by a meeting with his teacher who pushed him to more devotional or sectarian directions, and suggested he composed this hymn.[71] Here is Rāmabhadra's take on the Nīlakaṇṭhean mode of fashioning the poet's voice through blurring the lines of trope and life.

More generally, I want to suggest that something happens to the generic effect of this hymn when all verses are repeatedly being led to the speaking subject in the refrain of the fourth line, addressing God in the first person. The concluding line of each verse is identical: *tasmai prāñjalir asmi dāśarathaye śrījānakījānaye;* I fold my hands in prayer to Rāma—son of Dāśaratha, husband of Goddess Jānakī. The focus of the listener shifts to the creative, ever-evolving ways in which the poet's voice stages itself within the expected trope. The options seem endless: the verses shift from a relative-correlative construction with the pronoun *tasmai*, to

---

[70] See, for instance, Jagaddhara's extensive treatment of this trope in his *Stutikusumāñjali,* surveyed by Hamsa Stainton. In Stainton's translation: "I have revered wicked lords (duṣṭeśvarāḥ) who are fickle like lighting, instead of gurus whose weight comes from the abundance of their virtues. I have wasted my days in vain, alas! Struck down by the blindness of great ignorance, I am exhausted." *Stutikusumāñjali*, 11.74. And elsewhere: "We praise, we debate various things, we are ashamed, we partake of impure things, we desire, we endure slanderous words, we are consumed by sins—all to fill our stomachs." *Stutikusumāñjali* 9.51
ārādhitāḥ pracapalāś capalāvad eva duṣṭeśvarā na guravo guravo guṇaughaiḥ. yātāni tāni mama hānim ahāni mithyā śrānto 'smi hā vitatamohatamohato 'ham. Stutikusumāñjali, 11.74;
647 vandāmahe ca vividhaṃ vivadāmahe ca lajjāmahe ca kaluṣāṇi bhajāmahe ca. īhāmahe ca kuvacāṃsi sahāmahe ca dahyāmahe ca duratair jaṭharasya hetoḥ. Stutikusumāñjali 9.51. In: Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, 248.

[71] The modern Tamil commentary on this verse shares this feeling, and identifies the teacher as his guru, whom he calls Bodhendra (perhaps he means Kṛṣnānanda Sarasvati?) Atreya, *Rāmabhadrasāhasramañjarī; (A Collection of Rāmabhadra's Stotras)*. See also verses 11, and 92 of the *Viśva*, in which the speaker salutes his teacher without naming him.

simply addressing god in the dative, adding up to this pronoun, and/or to using the refrain to formulate the speaker's motivation for his final address to god, as in the example we just saw. While this is common enough stotra-practice, Rāmabhadra's use of this technique allows him to repeatedly mark the poet's voice.[72] Let us look at another example:

> *rāmety uccaritavyam akṣara-yugaṃ tac cāpi bhaktyā sakṛt*
> *prāpyā tena vimuktir eva yadi taj jānaty api glāyasi*
> *kiṃ vakṣye sukham āsva devi rasane snigdhau mama staḥ karau*
> *tasmai prāñjalir asmi dāśarathaye śrījānakījānaye* (*Viśva,* v. 106)

> If you only knew that uttering the two syllables "rā-ma" with devotion
> is an immediate path to liberation, no less, you would hold back.
> What can I say? Relax yourself, divine tongue of mine. My hands now step in—
> I fold them in prayer to the son of Dāśaratha, lover of Goddess Jānakī.[73]

Here, the final refrain receives a semantic preparation in the third line, so that the action entailed in it is de-automatized: the speaker is made to stop speaking, and fold hands. On addressing his own tongue as a goddess in the vocative (*devi*), the speaker is addressing himself, or part of himself, asking it (rather, her, or himself) to stop speaking, since it already spoke the two syllables that encapsulate everything with the very beginning of the verse. He paradoxically begs his tongue to hold itself back, while using it to speak. We will soon see that Rāmabhadra often rejects the notion implied here, namely that poetry is an obstacle to liberation, in favor of a philosophy that sees no contradiction between the two. The contradiction here should therefore not be taken too seriously; it mostly allows the poet to perform the movement of splitting into different subjective, divine constituents.

---

[72] There are precedents for this format of a refrain in the fourth pada, the immediate one being Nīlakaṇṭha's *Śivotkarṣamañjarī*.

[73] *Snigdhau* reads *vaśyau* in one of the manuscripts consulted in the kāvyamāla edition ("Viśvagarbhastava [*Viśva*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita,", eds., Mahamahopadhyaya Durgaprasada and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, in *Kāvyamāla Anthology*, Kāvyamāla 14 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1938), 22–44.

This verse, I should add, speaks of a prevalent notion, later called *nāmasiddhānta* or *bhajanasampradāya*—"the doctrine of the name"—promoting the idea of infinite condensed power held in the name of god itself, and accessible to all. This doctrine gained popularity through contemporary colleagues of Rāmabhadra's around Thanjavur, primarily Sadāśiva Brahmendra, Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa (Ayyavāl), and Bodhendra Sarasvatī.[74] To this day, Rāmabhadra is linked with this tradition and his memory lives through it: a publication house based in Chennai that seeks to promote *nāmasiddhānta* practice has published a renewed two-volume edition of several of Rāmabhadra's stotras, with an appended Tamil commentary.[75]

More generally, I am interested in the accumulating effect of the refrain of the *Viśva,* one of the author's more theological, philosophical, and impersonal hymns. In my assessment, the structure poses a living person, repeatedly attempting to position himself—syntactically and existentially—in his text and in his world. Our authors' stotras tread the thin line between the cohesive and the fragmentary: unity, cohesion, or faithful representation are not a concern when it comes to our authors' self-writing. They present an ideal of self-writing which has to do with the approximation of an experiential self, built out of the fragments of the tradition in which it lives, and the gods and people in whom they confide.

---

[74] For the history of the *nāmasiddhānta* doctrine and its efflorescence in eighteenth-century Thanjavur, see V. Raghavan, *The Power of the Sacred Name: Indian Spirituality Inspired by Mantras*, ed. William J. Jackson and M. Narasimhachary (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2011), 49–67. See Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement,"118–126, for a discussion of Bodhendra's writing as an example of a Thanjavur-centered interpretation of the thesis of redemption through god's name. See Davesh Soneji, "The Powers of Polyglossia: Marathi Kīrtan, Multilingualism, and the Making of a South Indian Devotional Tradition," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 339–69, for a critique of what Raghavan saw as an all-Hindu phenomenon and its contextualization within caste and class-bound formations in Polyglot Maratha Thanjavur.

[75] A devotee involved in the management of the site of the Ayyāval maṭam that celebrates Ayyaval (Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa) in Thiruvisanallur introduced me to this publication house. We know that Rāmabhadra was a contributor to this doctrine from other evidence throughout his hymns: in his *Varṇamālāstava* and *Rāmaprasādastava* hymns he often quotes authoritative sources that were used as the basis of this thesis, e.g. the *Rāmapūrvatāpinī*, the *Rāmottaratāpinī* and the *Rāmarahasya*; see Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 206, esp. appendix D, which traces relevant scriptural citations in Rāmabhadra's hymns.

To conclude this discussion, here is one final taste from Rāmabhadra's overlapping generic and authentic self within the *Viśva*:

> *dauṣṭyaṃ sādhuṣu sādhutām api tathā duṣṭeṣu mūḍheṣv api*
> *prājñatvaṃ bata mūḍhatām api punaḥ prājñeṣu yaḥ śaṃsati*
> *rājño 'gre piśunaḥ kalau sa narakī mā bhūvam ity utsukas*
> *tasmai prāñjalir asmi dāśarathaye śrījānakījānaye (*Viśva, v. 104*).*
>
> Declaring good men to be wicked, and wicked men to be good,
> ascribing knowledge to the stupid, and stupidity to the knowledgeable:
> a despicable scholar from hell stands in front of his king in the Kali age.
> Damn, I fear to become this person. I eagerly
> fold my hands in prayer to Rāma, son of Dāśaratha, lover of Goddess Jānakī.

This verse begins like a highly extractable and memorable verse, verbally exemplifying the upside-down ethical world of the Kali era. It is part of a sequence of Kali-themed verses within the hymn, bringing to mind Nīlakaṇṭha's *Games of the Kali Era (Kaliviḍambaṇam)*, which I touch on in the conclusion. We are also familiar, by now with the trope of the scholar who cut a deal with the devil to make a living out of selling lies at court. But in the third *pāda,* there is a twist: the trope is personalized, as the speaker himself is at risk of becoming this scholar. This twist, which repeats itself in Rāmabhadra's hymns in many variations, reads as a sudden flash of personhood within an ultra-generic framework. Indeed, the ultra-generic is where we would expect the personal voice to occur. Or rather, the generic *is* personal: persons, and especially authors, fashion themselves out of authoritative tradition, far and near.

The conventional identification of the speaker with the historical author allowed our authors to consciously experiment with the fragmentation and orchestration of their own voices. There was, at the time, no other available genre in which Sanskrit authors could have devoted so much creative energy to self-writing in the first person.[76] It testifies to a technology of self-

[76] See David Shulman, "Cowherd or King? The Sanskrit Biography of Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai.," in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autoiography and Life History*, ed. David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Delhi: Indiana University Press, 2004), 175–202, on Pillai's experimental eighteenth-century autobiography. In their introduction to this

writing that builds on a shifting distance between the personal and the conventional, and the historical author and an elusive speaker.[77] The incoherencies and tensions presented by our authors is, in my assessment, a unique and radical approach to the possibilities of self-orchestration.

Writing as devotion: Rāmabhadra's philosophy of writing

Rāmabhadra's hymns to Rāma feature numerous techniques, meters, and structures. These range from a hymn following the alphabet (*Varṇamālāstava*) to a hymn telling Rāma's story through the syllables of the *Gāyatrīmantra* (*Gāyatrīrāmāyaṇa*), hymns that address Rāma's bow and arrow (*Rāmacāpastava*, *Rāmabāṇastava*), to several hymns orchestrating alliterative techniques and visual poetry, retelling major and esoteric incidents of Rāma's life in suggestive ways and featuring intricate intertexts with scripture. The versatility of the programs and themes of Rāmabhadra's stotras reveal great poetic experimentation. On the whole, they speak his commitment to an ever-evolving exploration of his relationship with God and with himself. Being a significant part of his corpus of creative work, they also display his vision of poetry.

---

volume, Stuart and Arnold note that "autobiographical writings began to appear in Indian languages only in the second half of the nineteenth century" Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*, 9.

[77] By way of a distant comparison, Petrarch's self-writing, characterized as fragmentary in comparison with someone like Augustine and the coherent self posed in his Confessions, seems far less fragmentary than the personal voices that Rāmabhadra and Nīlakaṇṭha's stotras sketch for us. Gur Zak classifies Petrarch's self-writing as one that thus produces a fragmentary model of the self: "This sense of circularity and repetition militates against the very linearity the collection attempts to convey, and thus depicts more realistically, according to Petrarch, the indeterminate, contradictory, and shifting nature of the development of the self than the Augustian confessional narrative. it is this type of fragmentary self-representation that will continue to evolve in the early modern period in the letters of Angelo Poliziano, the Essays of Montaigne, and countless other letter collections and sonnet sequences. The modern secular autobiography, in which the author "securely" recounts his or her past life from the vantage point of the present, thus emerged in spite of-- rather than, as is generally assumed, because of-- Petrarch's obsessive experiments with the variety of ancient and medieval modes of self-writing at his disposal."Gur Zak, "Modes of Self-Writing from Antiquity to the Later Middle Ages," in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, ed. Ralph. J. Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford University Press, 2012), 501.

To return to my guiding question regarding Rāmabhadra's impulse to write so many stotras: I suggested that the answer partially lies in the fact that the genre of the stotra offered these authors a language to explore their autobiographical impulses, and that it is an ideal space to form variegated *uccāvaca* textures, as well as cross disciplinary formulations of the type they were fond of. Rāmabhadra has another, explicit answer, which can be said to encompass all these reasons: writing poetry to God, and as much as possible of it, is an aim in itself. It allows one to be a devotee, to be a poet, and, moreover, to simply be oneself. Here, for instance, is the opening verse to Rāmabhadra's *Prasāda*:

> *prasādo yasyeha dviṣad-avarajenāpi sulabhaḥ*
> *prasannaś ced rājya-śriyam api tiraśce diśati yaḥ*
> *udeti prābalyaṃ kaviṣu grṇato yasya ca guṇāṃs*
> *tam īḍe d*[*t*]*roḍhāraṃ taruṇa-śaśi-cūḍāla-dhanuṣaḥ* (*Prasāda*, v. 1*)*
>
> His divine favor, even to his enemy's brother,
> his will, if so inclined, to give a whole kingdom to an animal.
> Any person who sings of his virtues will shine as the foremost of poets—
> I praise the smasher of the bow
> of the god who has a young moon on his forehead.

This verse—and this entire hymn of 107 verses—opens with the keyword from the title of the hymn: *prasāda,* or divine favor. It is an auspicious beginning for a poem: the title "*prasāda*" signals both Rāma's saving grace, and a poetic quality of clarity, or clearness of style. The verse marks the reason for anyone to compose a hymn that describes Rāma's virtues (*guṇas*): he or she will instantly become remarkable poets. Concomitantly, Rāmabhadra encodes the major episodes of Rāma's life, which reflect his virtues: he references Rāma's generous acceptance of Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa's brother (pada a); his impartiality in giving a kingdom to the monkey Sugrīva (pada b) and his heroic strength shown in the breaking of Śiva's bow at Sītā's *svayaṃvara* (pada d). Singing of his God's virtues, he *ipso facto* proves the superiority of his poetry. This is an unapologetic programmatic statement of a poet for whom performing devotion

is the perfect stage for excelling in the poetic craft. In Rāmabhadra's formula, devotion *is* poetry: the two can only enhance each other.

Here are a few more formulations of this aesthetic principle from the *Bāṇa,* the hymn to Rāma's arrow briefly sampled above.

> *ekas tūṇīra-garbhe daśa dharaṇi-sutā-nātha-hastābhimarśe*
> *cāpārope sahasraṃ prayutam uḍupathe nyarbudaṃ karbureṣu*
> *dṛṣṭo yo vega-kṛṣṭo 'pahata-khara-rathaḥ siddhagandharvayakṣair*
> *akṣīṇaṃ dīnarakṣī diśatu sa kavitādākṣyam aikṣvāka-bāṇaḥ* (*Bāṇa,* v. 46)
>
> In the quiver, it was one;
> in the hands of Rāma, husband of the earth's daughter, it was ten;
> affixed on the bow, it was a thousand; in the skies, a million; in the face of demons, it was tens of millions—
> Siddha, gandharva, and yakṣa beings of the sky saw it from above,
> swiftly drawn back, then crushing Khara's chariot—
> may this arrow of Rāma's, Protector of the poor
> Grant me an inexhaustible talent for poetry.

This verse is a paraphrase of the description of Rāma's battle with Khara in the epic, in which Rāma shoots back the millions of arrows shot by the demons while the heavenly beings follow from above.[78] The verse traces the arrow's ability to multiply itself exponentially, which is precisely what Rāmabhadra seeks for his writing to be: *akṣīṇam*, inexhaustible, a word readily associated with Rāma's mythological quiver that never becomes empty.[79] The poet needs the arrow, or his God, to continue re-fueling his writing with the same intimately familiar material of the epic. Composing tens of millions of arrows is the poet's purpose. The multiplicity that can arise from the very same arrow is the great potential of Rāmabhadra's non-dual universe, in

[78] For instance in the following verse from Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa: *tato rāmaḥ tu susaṃkruddho maṇḍalī-kṛta-kārmukaḥ sasarja niśitān bāṇān śataśaḥ atha sahasraśaḥ* (3.24.15) "Rāma was infuriated: he stretched his bow into a circle, and shot sharpened arrows in the hundreds—no, in the thousands…". Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: Valmiki: Ramayana, Kandas 1-7," accessed September 30, 2022, http://gretil.sub.unigoettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/ramayana/ram_1-7u.htm.

[79] See *Ibid*, 3.11.30, where Agastya gifts two inexhaustable quivers: *tūṇī ca akṣaya-sāyakau* to Rāma.

which it is up to the poet to create and sustain the phenomenal world made of selves, himself included.

Consider another example from this hymn, which hinges on a *śleṣa* or bitextual pun:

yena prauḍhena madhye mahi-tarasa-bharālaṃ-kriyā-kalpakena
[mahita-rasa-bhara-alamkriyā-kalpakena]
ślokān utpādayitrā rajanicara-kulotpāṭanā-nāṭakasya
nyastaṃ prastāvanāyāḥ sapadi kila pade tāḍanaṃ tāṭakāyāḥ
so 'smākaṃ rāmabāṇaḥ sulalita-racanāṃ sūktim āviṣkarotu (*Bāṇa*, v. 10)

The mighty arrow put a stop to mounds of flesh,
thrown in the middle of the sacrifice
[it was a standard for ornamentation of great poetic flavor,
in the heart of the composition],
It instigated the famous drama [the theatre songs] of the destruction of hordes of demons;
It instantly struck down Tāṭakā at the very beginning
[in the poetic introduction]—
May Rāma's arrow inspire in me beautiful words
for a charming composition.

This verse could not be more explicit about what Rāma's arrow is doing for Rāmabhadra. It narrates well-known stories of the epic, from chasing away Tāṭakā and her son, who sabotaged the Brahminical sacrifices in the forest with meat, to destroying the demons and Tāṭakā herself. Simultaneously, the pun spells out the poetic role of the arrow's stories: it invites numerous other poetic compositions and produces aesthetic relish. While we do not know if Rāmabhadra physically wrote his compositions on palm leaf, the arrow comes across as his pen, an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Finally:

bhāsvad-bhānu-prabhāvābhibhava-paṭur uru-svaprabhābhir vidhūnvan
sauvargopaplavaughodbhavam ṛju sumano-bhāva-suprāpa-rūpaḥ
pāpavyālopam āyurvibhavam api madhu-svādu-vāg-gumpham āvi-
ṣkurvan prahveṣu bāṇo bhavatu śubhavaho 'sau subāhu-dviṣo vaḥ (*Bāṇa*,105)

It overpowers the brilliance of the burning sun with its own radiating lights, as it destroys
the very source of the gods' flood of disasters,
in one go.

Its form is easily given for those of clear mind,
and it reveals, for whoever praises it,
a garland of sweet-tasting words that removes faults and enriches life.
The arrow of Rāma's—Subāhu's enemy—will bring good for you all.

This verse spells out the talismanic results for whoever sings this stotra, and this includes, primarily, our author. It is an oblique and unusual *phalaśruti*: the good results promised for the reciters that stotras often state at their conclusion. Here, Rāmabhadra states the *phala,* the fruit, of singing to the arrow while describing his process of writing it. Despite its blinding inner light, the arrow gives itself easily for people of clear mind like the poet (*sumanobhāva*), or—one can also read—for people of divine nature, like our poet Rāma, who keeps God Rāma in his heart. The arrow revealed to him the garland of sweet words that are this very hymn, which can destroy faults and enrich one's life (*āyurvibhavam*). For Rāmabhadra, writing—especially the writing of one's God and one's self—is about leading a richer life.

In this chapter, I suggested that Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's hymns are invested in debating and crafting their voices as devotees, persons, and poets. Their stotras point to a principally shared subjectivity with their gods, parallel to how they posit a shared genealogical subjectivity that we saw in the previous chapter. Their stotras also present, through their intense and variegated "intimate intertextual" praxis, as well as through the verse-by-verse format of the author-speaker of the stotra, a fragmented yet personal sense of authorship. This staging of voice, as we saw in the previous chapters as well, is often subtly ironic and subversive, and it is both extremely learned and lighthearted. I finally proposed, primarily through Rāmabhadra's case study, that their extensive and ad-infinitum explorations of devotional subjectivity are tied to their ideals of themselves as primarily creative, ever-evolving poets.

In the next chapter, I explore the question of the texts' audience, both in the context of the prologues discussed in chapter two and the context of the stotras discussed here. The underlying ontology of shared selves will become more apparent on the ground of the small communities of Brahmin men in which our authors lived and wrote.

4. Familiar faces in the audience: genealogical writing in the śālā

> They say it is honored by the best of wise scholars, who can crack the fine points of the difficult great books, admired with nodding heads by visiting professors who have come from the corners of the earth;
> Its side streets glisten with the amassed radiance of lovely moon faces of young women, turned with astonishment and admiration at the sight of furrowed, raised brows of students, totally engrossed in debates over contested topics;
> Adorned with young poets holding books under their arms, still trembling from the heated arguments they had with people from the countryside who came in search of breaking their routine;
> Teeming with learned authors from afar (vaideśikas), who arrived for the hard work of writing out their lectures[1], which young students greatly appreciate and comment upon;
> Abound with learned teachers who come close to profound bliss on observing the concentrated faces of their pupils, intensely focused on composing different sorts of depictions, eager to go first in arranged competitions of filling in half-verses from eulogies composed by great poets, glorifying the Bhosle family;
> Where, on the corners of verandas outside the houses of the Brahmin men, endearing, not yet initiated, clever children are playing, pretending to make philosophical comments with their gestures, surrounded by other children of their age who pretend to be their students, banana leaf make-believe books in their hands—
> It is a treasury of all sons of Goddess Saravatī, the birthplace of the practice of śrauta and smārta rituals, a mantra to expel the possessing spirit of the wicked Kali age, the victory-banner of king Śāha, endowed with all good virtues, a village of truly learned men. I am so lucky to have gotten to see it![2]

This is a day in the life in the village that Rāmabhadra lived in, together with his guru and many of his friends, colleagues, and students. This extract from the *Dharmavijaya Campū*

---

[1] This is the modern Brahman Tamil meaning of upanyāsam (i.e. upaniyācam); it might be the earliest attestation of the work in this very specific sense. I thank Whitney Cox for this observation.

[2] *adhunā kila nānādiganta-vāstavyāgantuka-paṇḍita-jana-śiraḥ-kampābhinandyamāna-karkaśa-mahāgrantha-marma-bhedanālaṃkarmīṇa-vibudha-kuñjara-samañcitaḥ; śiṣya-jana-pratijñā-prakrānta-vakretara-vādāṭopa-vikaṭa-bhrukuṭī-vilokana-vismerodāra-taruṇī-vivalita-mukha-candra-mañjula-ruci-puñja-rañjita-vīthyantaro; vyavahāra-paricchedanecchāsamāgata-jānapada-jana-vivādānuyoga-caṭula-kakṣapuṭa-nyasta-pustaka-māṇava-kavi-rājitac;chātra-jana-vijṛmbhita-mānyataropanyāsa-vilekhana-kṛtodyoga-samāgata-vaideśika-granthakṛt-sūri-nibirīso; mahākavi-vitīrṇa-bhosala-vaṃśāvataṃsa-yaśaḥ-praśasti-samasyā-pūraṇāhamahamikā-pravṛtty-āsakta-nānāvidhollekha-samāhita-cchātrajana-paristimita-mukhāvalokanānanda-mantharāntara-vidvad-bṛndaḥ; kadalī-paṭṭa-mithyā-pustaka-hasta-nāṭita-śiṣya-bhāva-savayaḥ-parivṛta-vyākhyātṛtābhinaya-kamanīyānupanīta-catura-bālaka-vilasita-vidvad-gṛhabahir-vedikākoṇaḥ; kośagṛhaṃ sārasvata-sarvasvasya janmabhūmiḥ śrauta-smārta-karmācaraṇasya samuccāṭana-mantraḥ kalimahāgrahasya kīrtipatākā śāhasārvabhaumasya sakala-sadguṇa-samagro 'yaṃ vidvadgrāmaḥ prāpto mama diṣṭyā dṛṣṭi-gocaratām. Dharmavijaya campūḥ of Bhūmināṭha Kavi*, ed., Ke, I. Govinda, (Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library), 1980, 14.

(*Dharmavijaya*) was written by one of them: Bhūmināṭha Kavi, a close student of Rāmabhadra's.[3] The village of Tiruvisanallur was renamed as Śāhajipuram when gifted to fourty-five different scholars and poets in 1693; It was a major and well known project of King Śāhaji as a patron of Sanskrit. While Nīlakaṇṭha was not affiliated with the court in the way Rāmabhadra and the other agrahāra residents were, he was part of the Brahmin world of agrahāra villages that thrived around the Nāyaka Thanjavur court during the seventeenth century.[4]

Idyllic and exaggerated to be sure, this excerpt depicts a place in which everyone participates in poetry and scholarship: from the local scholars, to the visiting professors (or *vaideśikas*, a term we will encounter below), to younger poets debating with some unaffiliated bored visitors, to students who compete in completing their teacher's verses describing the king (the technique mentioned, *samasyā-pūraṇa* or *samasyāpūrti*, is a well-known sport of courtly settings), to the children who mimic the classroom situation outside.

This vision allows glimpsing the kind of primary readership that the poets at the center of this dissertation envisioned. Within this ideal description of a vibrant community of Sanskrit scholarship and poetry, the women who indirectly participate in the scholarly and artistic atmosphere mark its bounds: they serve to delimit this Brahminical world of cultural and religious connoisseurship. In its rhetoric of cosmopolitan inclusion (scholars from everywhere arrive here, and both śrauta and smārta practitioners are welcome), it actively marks an intimately familiar, exclusive cosmopolis. It is a project that speaks to the king's vision and

[3] Bhūmināṭha states several times his debt to Rāmabhadra, for instance in the third verse of this work: *rāmabhadra-caraṇāravindayor āśrayaprabalitaś cikīrṣati bhūmināṭhakavi-cakravarty asau śāha-dharma-vijayokti-sāhasam* (*Dharmavijaya Campū* of Bhūmināṭha, v. 3). "Strengthened by the protection of the two lotus feet of Rāmabhadra, I, the great poet Bhūmināṭha, make bold to utter the story of king Śāha's victory of dharma".
[4] See Talia Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: An Independent Poet of the Kaveri Delta, or: The Forgotten Model of Genealogical Authorship," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 59, no. 3 (2022): 273–98, for an argument for Nīlakaṇṭha as part of this world of agrahāras in the delta.

power but also operates on the literal margins of the city. The structure of the *Dharmavijaya* reinforces this spatial logic: this description is the peak of the first chapter, in which the poet introduces himself, and the rest of this text is mostly a formulaic yet rich description of the city, with King Śāha at its center.[5]

The previous chapters of this thesis drew a picture of poets who speak of themselves through a refracted plurality of voices and identities: voices from the tradition of Sanskrit poetry and poetics, including its tropes and conventions, these authors' primary figures of influence, teachers and family members, and the authors' personal gods, who were part of their core identity, philosophically and experientially. I now turn to examine the intended audience of these texts as they are reflected in our authors' prologues (sections one through three) and hymns (sections five through six), juxtaposed with what we know of the history of circulation of these texts, and of these authors' living realities on ground. In section four, I explore the twin notions of the genealogical author, and the modality of intimate cosmopolitanism, through the lens of these authors' intended audience, who reflect themselves in more ways than one. I argue that our authors are primarily writing for their immediate circles with whom they shared their worlds and interests, and that their part-isolated microcosmos in these villages informs their adherence to a classical or cosmopolitan Sanskrit framework. Their poetic signatures, carrying their learned and lighthearted style, are better understood through the literal common grounds they share with their filiated audience.

[5]This excerpt is part of a longer description of this village, itself the epitome of a longer description of a "chain of agraharas" (*agrahāraparamparā*, *Dharmavijaya* pp. 12), described through the eyes of a certain Dharmapuruṣa, a Thanjavur-based pilgrim, on his way home from Varanasi.

Vaideśika Deśikas: Communities of writers and readers

The authors' imagination of the ideal audience member in their prologues, which we have glimpsed in the second chapter, can serve as an invitation for the modern scholar to envision the communities of writers and readers of this corpus. Here is Nīlakaṇṭha's description of his audience in the *Nala*[6]:

> *Sūtradhāra: (vihasya) api nāśruyanta bhagavataḥ kāñcīpuranāthasya kāmākṣīpariṇayotsavayātrāgatānām ājñākṣarāṇi sāmājikānām*
>
> *Pāripārśvika: kathamiva*
>
> *Sūtradhāra:*
>
> *svādūn eva rasān kaṭūn vidadhatāṃ karṣantu mā meti ca*
>
> *krandanty eva padāni vā kavayatāṃ kurvantu lajjāṃ ca vā*
>
> *kutraiko madhuro rasaḥ kva madhurā vāṇīti no jīvatāṃ*
>
> *karṇau niṣkaruṇaṃ dahanti kavayaḥ kasmād idānīntanāḥ (Nala,* v. 1.4)
>
> *tad arhati bhavān abhinava-rūpaka-darśana-vyāpannānām āyuṣyam āpādayitum. tathā ca—*
>
> *yatra citrāḥ kathodghātā yatra ca syandate rasaḥ*
>
> *vyutpannasya kaveḥ karma tat kiñcid abhinīyatām (Nala,* v. 1.5*)*
>
> *Pāripārśvika: (vihasya) sadhu sāmājikāḥ, sadhu, idaṃ khalu lavaṇodadhīkṣu-rasānayanādeśanam. kaḥ punar asmin kāle tādṛśaḥ prabandhaḥ*
>
> *Sūtradhāra: satyam, tathāpi khalv asti tādṛśam eva nava-nirvartitaṃ nalacaritraṃ nāma nāṭakam. kavir api tasya jagad-vidita eva.*
>
> Director: (laughing): Didn't you hear the explicit orders of the audience of pilgrims who came to the festival of Kāmākṣī's wedding to the God of Kanchipuram?
>
> Assistant: What were they?
>
> Director: (pointing to the audience)
>
> Writers who turn purely sweet rasas into bitter ones—
> ignore them.
> As for those who only cry out, "don't do this, don't do that"—

[6] *Nalacaritram* [*Nala*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Shyamdas Sastri and Ramapati Mishra, (Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrrita Samsthana, 1987).

better put them to shame.
What ever happened to a single sweet sentiment, a sweet word?
Why do poets of this age mercilessly burn our ears?

[in prose] So, Sir, since we have been badly injured by watching new dramas—you can now save our life!

That is to say,

Please enact any work of an accomplished poet where the story unfolds in a spectacular way and rasa pours forth!

Assistant: (laughing) well said, spectators! Well, this really is alchemy that you are requesting, getting sugarcane juice (rasa) from the salty ocean.
Could there be such a composition at a time like ours?

Director: True, and yet—there is in fact such a play! It was just completed. It is called Nala's Life (*Nalacaritram*). And its poet is well known in the world.

We have seen Nīlakaṇṭha's fondness of the theme of bad poets and critics, which I suggested had to do with his delineation of and intervention in the Sanskrit poetic sphere. Here, the words that Nīlakaṇṭha puts in the mouths of his audience draw a tension that is inherent to Nīlakaṇṭha's work. Verse four is syntactically convoluted, as if somehow echoing those bad poets who produce non-intuitive poetry.[7] This is accentuated by a sharp contrast with the audience's next comment in prose and in verse five, couched in the straightforward *anuṣṭubh* meter. The audience members ask for a good and juicy story, and the contrastive simplicity of their request is amplified by the assistant's ironic comparison of their standard request to an esoteric and difficult alchemical process of turning salt into sugar. Nīlakaṇṭha shifts between two extremities of the accessible and the difficult, or learned aesthetics, both in form and in content: his self presentation is tied in with the aesthetic of hybridity, or *uccāvaca,* that we have come to

[7] This is primarily due to the two imperatives (*karṣantu*, *kurvantu lajjām*) whose objects are in the form of genitive participles (*vidadhatām*, *kavayatām*) of the first half of the verse, as represented by the hyphens in my translation (this reading is supported by the Hindi commentator in the cited edition). The second half of the verse is also somewhat ambiguous, as the audience shifts to speaking of themselves using another genitive plural (*naḥ jīvatām*) and use, I propose, a syntactical structure that is usually used to indicate a rhetorical diminutive comparison (where is X, when compared to Y?) in a different and more straightforward manner.

identify. The subtle dissonance betwen the audience's words and Nīlakaṇṭha's aesthetic is brought to light when compared to the close-by preceding *maṅgala* verse, commonly understood as a condensed preview of the entire play:[8]

> Her two hands covered the two eyes of her husband, but the eye on his forehead could see her.
> So she hid herself, but he quickly kissed her lips with his rear-facing mouth.
> Although the lights were out, the rays of the moon on his hair made her moves clearly visible;
> may Gaurī, bashful, and utterly thrilled in that first moment of intimacy always protect you.[9]

The emotional mixture that the Goddess is experiencing, accentuated by the games of light and shadow in foreplay, is the crux of this verse, very marked by its location at the beginning of the last *pada* and by its alliterative scheme (*hrīṇā hṛṣṭā ca bhūyaḥ*). Although not surprising to Sanskrit readers acquainted with the literary type of the "inexperienced woman", it is a nontrivial combination, particularly when applied to the goddess, and it achieves much more than a "single sweet sentiment" that the audience asked for.[10] The audience's demands for simple and happy poetry can be read either as opposed to this dynamic emotional flavor, in that more than one sentiment (rasa) is too challenging a composition for them, or as a sort of minimum criteria for poetry in which there is *at least* a single sentiment, such that Nīlakaṇṭha is

---

[8] As noted, for instance, by the commentator Śvetāraṇya Nārāyaṇa Śarma in *Jānakīpariṇaya Nāṭaka of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita,* ed., L.V. Ramachandra Iyer, (Madras: Oriental Press, 1906), 7.

[9] *patyur netre karābhyām api ca pidadhatī lakṣitā phāladṛṣṭyā. paścāl līnāpi pītā sarabhasam adhare paścimenānanena. dīpe nirvāpite 'pi prakaṭa-viharaṇā candrikābhir jaṭendoḥ. hrīṇā hṛṣṭā ca bhūyaḥ prathama-paricaye pātu gaurī ciraṃ vaḥ.* (*Nala,* 2).

[10] The following verse (*Nala, 3*) involves a similar paradoxical mix of emotions. It describes the mixture of joy and spite (*harṣa-īrṣya-śabalāḥ*) as aesthetic responses, as Rāma's two sons recite the Rāmāyaṇa story. Note that the word for "mixture" here, *śabala*, is something of a parallel to *uccāvaca*. Borrowed from the semantic world of colors, it is used in poetics as a term referencing the mixture of emotions (*bhāvaśabalā*); Monier Williams, "Śabala," in *Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1899) references as sources the *Kuvalayānanda* and the *Pratāparudrīya*. Elsewhere, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita echoes this poetic use of the scholastic term: he describes yogis whose hearts are mixed (*śabala*) with joy, wonder and fear (*harṣādbhuta-bhaya-śabala*), in "Rāmabāṇastava [Bāṇa] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 14.

overwhelmingly fulfilling their demands. In any case, Nīlakaṇṭha is constructing a certain gap between the author's praxis and the imagined popular demand of the audience.

Nīlakaṇṭha's staging of his audience is not one of ideal readership, but rather more playfully, of a readership that has little patience for his own aesthetic, or that captures only parts of it. Nīlakaṇṭha's audience is constructed as another fractured voice of his, especially in echoing the grudge with bad poets and critics, but it is simultaneously caricatured as impatient with complexities, much unlike the sophistication required of Nīlakaṇṭha's audience. Just as we have established the author's embedded "direct speech" as one that raises the very question of the author's voice within the maze of mirrors that is the prologue in chapter two, an informed reader can differentiate herself from the average audience member who "speaks".

As another interesting example along these lines, let us look at the prologue to the younger Cokkanātha's *Sevāntikāpariṇaya*, written for the Keladi king Basava, most probably after this author's Thanjavur days.[11] Here, the author first describes men and women (not a trivial presence in a description of an audience) arriving to the festival stage from across different places in the subcontinent, including among others Nepal, Kashmir, Karṇāṭaka, Kerala, Aṅga, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga.[12] The author then describes snippets from the festival, such as children

[11] I have labeled this author the "young Cokkanātha" to differentiate him from the older Cokkanātha, teacher and father in law of Rāmabhadra's (see introduction). The reason for the later date of this play is detailed in the introduction to *Sevāntikāpariṇaya Nāṭakam of Śrī Cokkanātha*, ed., S. Narayanaswamy Sastry (Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, 1959), building on the way the author introduces himself in the prologues to his three known plays. Cokkanātha's father, Tippādhvarin, was one of the donees of the famous 1693 land-grant of Śāhajipuram, and Cokkanātha himself wrote two plays dedicated to king Śāhaji, the *Kāntimatīpariṇayam* and the different, Thanjavur-styled *Candrakalāśāhajīyam*. See my discussion in ch. 2.

[12] *..mahotsavadarśanārthaṃ aṅga-vaṅga-kaliṅga-baṅgāla-nepāla-gaula-cola-dramiḍa-kerala-kuru-kukuru-sindhu-gāndhāra-karnāṭa-lāṭa-karahāṭa-pāṇḍya-pāñcāla-magadha-niṣadha-karūśa-kāśmīrādi-nānādeśa-samāgata-nara-narī-jana-nivaha-nibiḍita-rathyaṃ pṛthvītalanepathyaṃ subrahmaṇyaṃ nāma nagaram* (*Sevāntikāpariṇaya* 2, prose before v. 3).

fearlessly playing with snakes, anthill dust removing leprosy, and barren women's fasting leading to instant impregnation. This builds the atmosphere toward the next remarkable verse:

> *Foreigner (vaideśika) Deśikas are strolling the streets in large numbers, white robes hanging down to their ankles, earrings shining on cheeks; brilliant with their entourages of two generations of students (śiṣya-praśiṣyojjvalāḥ), whose own notable achievements shine through by the mass of lights coming off their jewelled necklaces, which numerous kings have awarded them with. (4) And these men commanded me with the following:…*[13]

Let us follow the evolution of Cokkanātha's treatment of the trope of the foreigner (*vaideśika*) audience. The initial description of the pilgrims' places of origin seems to be deliberately overstated and yet detailed enough so as to raise the question of the extent to which it is real, or conventional. What follows enlivens the expected festival stage with a few vivid festival scenes, and then brings the audience closer to home: here, in verse four, are the learned men that we are used to seeing in the prologue. They are *vaideśikāḥ deśikās*—this intended alliterative punchline captures, in a nutshell, the productive tension of global and intimate readership, and of the classical trope and the realities that continue to shape it.

The *deśika* broadly signifies a religious teacher, but in our context it clearly refers to Brahmin men of the lineages that this dissertation traces.[14] These men walk around with their teachers and teacher's teachers; they are wearing clothes that point to their Brahmin identity.[15] As they travel from king to king (which is autobiographically true of the young Cokkanātha

---

[13] *tat-tat-pārthiva-datta-ratna-rucira-graiveya-hāra-dyuti-prāgbhāra-prakaṭīkṛtātma-vibhavāḥ śiṣya-praśiṣyojjvalāḥ. gulpha-prāntas-vilambi-dhauta-vasanā gaṇḍa-sphurat-kuṇḍalāḥ rathyāsīmani sañcaranti bahavo vaideśikā deśikāḥ* (4) *etair aham āhūya samādiṣṭo 'smi… Ibid,* v.4 and prose after.

[14] Already in the Mahābharata,(13.147.42) as noted in Vaman Shivaram Apte, "Deśika," in *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1858–92. The word probably derives from the verb *diś,* to teach, or to show, but deśika can also mean "of one's place" (deśa), and when paired with *vaideśika* or foreigners the oxymoronic effect is clear.

[15] The white garment is likely the clothes of learned Brahmins. See Elaine Fisher's discussion of an excerpt from Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa,* in which Śaṅkara rebukes Brahmins who changed their orthodox white apparel for the red clothing marking the goddess as part of their affiliation with the tantric Srīvidyā sect. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 92.

himself), they are simultaneously well known by the broad, yet inner circle of *deśika*s. What we see in the prologue to the *Sevāntikāpariṇaya* is an example of a unique rearrangement of the sedimented "foreigner" audience trope, in which general and trans-local features of a pilgrim audience are mixed in with the intimately identifiable, almost autobiographical, features of this audience. It is not by chance that, as we shall see below, the passage that follows this extract cites Nīlakaṇṭha's above cited verse *verbatim*: the readership or audience of this prologue are expected to know Nīlakaṇṭha as a canonical, recent figure of authority in their milieu.

What can we glimpse of Nīlakaṇṭha's sensitive readers, who are asked to differentiate themselves from the formulaic descriptions of his audience? What can we learn of the audience that lies beneath the trope, which mirrors—with different levels of distortion—the lauding formulaic descriptions of the author himself? Rāmabhadra's *Śṛṅgāratilaka Bhāṇa* (hereafter Śṛṅgāra) offers some further clues. In the latter, the director's concluding versified words describe the *vaideśika* or foreigner audience as *rasajña-paṇḍita-kavi-prāyāś ca sāmājikāḥ*, "an audience full of connoisseurs, pandits and poets."[16] On its own, this seems like a standard description that forms an alliance between authors and audiences.[17] I would like to argue, however, that this alliance exceeds the trope, and is of close and intimate nature, as is revealed later in the play.

[16] The full verse reads: *unmīlan-nava-mallikā-parimalodagrāḥ kaver uktayo bhānty ete 'pi rasajña-paṇḍita-kavi-prāyāś ca sāmājikāḥ khyāto nṛtta-kalāsu naḥ paricayaḥ kiṃcāyam ālakṣyate kālaḥ kokila-kāhalī-kalakalārambha-priyaṃbhāvukaḥ*. "The sayings of the poet are intense with the perfume of blooming jasmine as it opens; the members of the audience seem to be mostly connoisseurs, pandits and poets; our practice in the arts and dance is well known; and what's more, the time appears to be propitious for beginning, considering the cries of the coocoos". *Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa* [*Śṛṅgāra*] *of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, eds., Pandit Śivadatta and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, Kāvyamāla 44 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1894), v. 8.

[17] Compare with the formulaic description in *Nāṭyaśāstram Of Bharatamuni*, vol. 1–4, ed., R. S. Nagar, (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1983), ch. 27, v. 50–4, in which the ideal audience member's broad Sanskrit and theatre education and general sensitivity are described.

Well into the plot of the *Śṛṅgāra*, the protagonist arrives at a magic show. This show readily suggests a strong metapoetic reading, since the magician creates images in thin air in a manner that clearly echoes the solo performance of the actor of the *bhāṇa*.[18] Before the show begins, the protagonist observes: *pīṭhamardaka-viṭa-vidūṣaka-prayāḥ sarve 'pi sāmājikāḥ*; "the entire crowd are mostly idlers, playboys and buffoons". An attentive reader or audience member will notice that this statement is echoing in almost identical terms the statement from the prologue, describing the audience as *mostly rasa experts, pandits, and poets*.[19] The genre of the *bhāṇa* is the immediate context for the protagonist's comment at the show: the entire *Śṛṅgāratilaka* describes Madurai as a city generally comprised of courtesans and bored Brahmin playboys. But this intra-text also humorously juxtaposes the embedded audience with its readers or audience members.

This instance reveals something about the attentive observation that the audience/readers of this play are meant to perform, and about the levels of familiarity that such an ironic reference to the audience reflects. In a sense, Rāmabhadra is inserting the members of the external audience into the play itself. This case reveals how the heavily formulaic prologue is not a barrier to intimacy, but rather, it is an opportunity to unmake and remake the formulas, capitalizing on the tension we have seen governing this corpus in the previous chapters, between the singular and the formulaic, or the intimate and the cosmopolitan. The trope of the foreign spectators collides with the realities of intimate and informed audience members, and is hence a

[18] The magic show is a convention of *bhāṇa*s in general, which is somewhat similar in its metapoetic overtones to the convention of a play-within-a-play. See David Shulman, "Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, by Paula Richman (University of California Press, 2001), 49–69.
[19] See the discussion in Talia Ariav and Whitney Cox, "On Unresolved Tensions in Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2022): 61, where this verse is contextualised in greater measure.

productive playground for our authors. Below we will encounter further instances in which the title of the foreigner is completely reversed.

Networks of citation and the household style

One striking evidence of the intimate intertextualities in our authors' writings come from two of Nīlakaṇṭha's direct successors—his youngest brother Atirātrayajvan, and the aforementioned "younger" Cokkanāthamakhin. Both these authors quote in their own prologues Nīlakaṇṭha's verse, cited above (in full in one case, and as an extract in another) that communicated his audience's requests in the *Nala*. To reiterate:

> Writers who turn purely sweet rasas into bitter ones—
> ignore them.
> As for those who only cry out, "don't do this, don't do that"—
> better put them to shame.
> What ever happened to a single sweet sentiment, a sweet word?
> Why do poets of this age mercilessly burn our ears?

Both Atirātra and Cokkanātha cite this verse in the context of a familiar trope of suspicion toward new plays. In both cases, this verse is part of a buildup toward the author's introduction of himself through the dialogue, as a person fitting enough to fill in the shoes of the classical authors. In younger Cokkanāthamakhin's *Sevāntikāpariṇaya Nāṭaka*, the assistant first recites a verse about how new poets pale in comparison with the classical poets like Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti, and then goes on to cite the last line of Nīlakaṇṭha's verse: "Why do poets of this age mercilessly burn our ears?" In response, the director introduces Cokkanātha, the playwright, and adds the king's request to watch his very play.[20] Nīlakaṇṭha's own recent words are inserted

[20] *Pāripārśvakaḥ: nava-rūpakeṇeti vismāpayeti ca vyāhatam eva vyāhṛtaṃ vaideśikaiḥ, yataḥ- pañcaṣāṇi viracayya padāni kvāham eṣa bhavabhūti-kaviḥ kava kālidāsakavirītir abhavyety āmananti kavayo hi navīnāḥ (6) ata eva kaṇṭharaveṇābhihitaṃ nīlakaṇṭha-makhināpi—*"*karṇau niṣkaruṇaṃ dahanti kavayo kasmād idānīṃtanāḥ*" *iti*

verbatim, a technique that Nīlakaṇṭha himself was perhaps identified with, as we saw in chapter two. If this is true, it makes his presence doubled, both in form and in content. And the irony is deliberate: the very warning about new poets comes from a fellow and authoritative new poet, the exact opposite of devaluing anything "new." It is a joke catering to insiders, which establishes Nīlakaṇṭha's voice as canonical among his immediate followers, and performs the insincere double voice that we have seen as characteristic to this textual corpus.

Similarly and even more strikingly is Atirātra's *Kuśakumudvatīyam Nāṭakam* [*Kuśa*][21]. Atirātra devotes most of his prologue to praising his older brother, Nīlakaṇṭha, and here I will give samples of it. Following the description of the learned audience, the director states: "I managed to have a special poet in the assembly, thanks to infinite luck!" (*labdheyaṃ pariṣad mayā kavayitur nissīma-bhāgyodayāt, Kuśa*, part of v.6). The director goes on to declare:

> *uktaṃ hi mayi svakṛtim arpayatā paṇḍitam-manya-durjana-saṃvāda-nirviṇṇena kavikulāgra-gaṇyena:*
> *vibhāvādi-svādūkṛta-nava-rasāsvāda-caturā*
> *yadi syuḥ śrotāraḥ sukṛtaparipākena militāḥ tadā*
> *teṣām eva prakaṭaya purastān mama kṛtiṃ*
> *na ced āstāṃ gūḍhā ciram iyam aniṣpanna-sadṛśī* (*Kuśa*, v. 7).
>
> This distinguished poet of a respected family [who is sitting in the audience], who loathes unworthy people who think they are pandits, had told me the following verse of his:
> If there are people in the audience,
> Who have the talent for appreciating new *rasa,* sweetened with the other aesthetic elements,
> And who possess the ripe fruit of good deeds—
> they can listen to my work.
> If not, then let it remain hidden, for as long as it takes,
> Like a fruit that has yet to ripe.

Sūtradhāraḥ: māriṣa! mā maivam, acirānubhūtam api vṛttāntaṃ kathaṃ vismṛtavān asi tippādhvarīndratanayo nanu cokkanāthanāmā…. (*Sevāntikāpariṇaya*, 3).

[21] "Kuśakumudvatīya Nāṭaka [Kuśa] of Atirātra Yajvan (Appendix)," ed., S. Jayasree, in "Contribution of Atirātrayajvan" (University of Madras, 1983).

This statement, which is again said to be a direct citation by Nīlakaṇṭha, even though seemingly communicated in private, explicitly states the hypothesis of this chapter: this text is meant for an informed audience that can be trusted to perform subtle readings. The buildup toward Nīlakaṇṭha's presence, which has not yet been explicitly stated, is already hinted at by the wording *svādūkṛta* (lit., "sweetened"), which opens the verse by Nīlakaṇṭha that will soon be cited *verbatim*; the audience can also guess that it is Nīlakaṇṭha through his description as dismissive of mean critics, which we know to be a theme identified with his authorial persona. He goes on to name Nīlakaṇṭha in the prose and verse:

> *tad eṣā pariṣad abhimatā tasya kaveḥ* (*punaḥ pariṣadaṃ nirvarṇya sānandam*)
> *athavā kim abhimateti? sarvasyāpi prārthita-durlabhaivaiṣā yataḥ:*
> *vidvad-vāda-vivāda-kāla-yugapad-viṣphūrty-ahaṃpūrvikā-*
> *niryad-yukti-sahasra-darśita-nijāhīndrāvatārākṛtiḥ*
> *kartuṃ kārayituṃ tathārasayituṃ kāvyāni navyānyalaṃ-*
> *bhūṣṇur bhāti sabhā-sabhājitamatiḥ śrīnīlakaṇṭhādhvarī* (*Kuśa*, v. 8)

> This is just the sort of audience that this poet [Atirātra] desires.
> (looking over the audience once more, with delight): But, why say "desires"?
> This audience is in more than one could ever wish for:
> Sitting in it is the human form of the great grammarian Snake Patañjali,
> as is evident from the thousands of arguments that compete to issue forth from
> him, all appearing at the same time whenever he debates with learned men;
> he is a man who is himself capable of composing, sponsoring, and savoring new
> works of literature;
> His opinion is held at utmost esteem in the assembly;
> The esteemed Brahmin Nīlakaṇṭha (adhvarin) is sitting right there!

This description of Nīlakaṇṭha in one of the testaments we have to his possible role as a patron, as a person who also has others issue works, *kārayitum* (see introduction). To our point, we have here a vivid description of Nīlakaṇṭha's presence in a context of a learned assembly, comparing him to Patanjali—who has a thousand heads that can speak simultaneously—presumably for the outstanding speed in which he simultaneously fashions all his reasonings or arguments (*yukti*) in a debate. It might even be an insiders' wink to Nīlakaṇṭha's style of debate,

as a fast, sharp, and especially enthusiastic debater. The tribute to Nīlakaṇṭha does not stop here: the director calls the actress to tell her that a well-respected man is sitting in the audience, and when she inquires about his identity, he lauds Nīlakaṇṭha and his ancestry in a long prose section.[22] The actress replies by pressing her hand to her chest in a gesture of fear: she remembers that Nīlakaṇṭha has authored the *Nalacaritram*! The director knows just what she is thinking (*jñātas tavābhiprāyaḥ*): he cites in full the above-mentioned verse from the *Nala* (*svādūn eva rasān...*), describing how modern poets are burning the audience's ear.

The irony is double: like in Cokkanātha's case above, this warning about new poets serves to justify giving a chance to new poetry; but more than this, the fear of the actress comes from her identification of Nīlakaṇṭha the person who wrote this verse. His judgmental stance toward what he considers to be bad poetry, which we considered in the first chapter, must have become material for jokes between the brothers, and among their milieu. But this joking comment also allows Atirātra to tie himself to Nīlakaṇṭha, and in the most intimate terms: he responds to this comment by telling the actress that she should not be afraid—the author of this play is a student of Nīlakaṇṭha, and the latter is very fond of him. More than that—Nīlakaṇṭha has even heard the play already, and said that it was superbly full of *rasa*.[23]

Atirātra's prologue is an extreme demonstration of the forms of self-insertion and canon-building through familial ties that this corpus of plays and authors display. The actress' fear is

---

[22] *Naṭī: bhāva ṇamo de! kiṇṇu khu eṇhaṃ tumhāṇa eārisa-koahalakāraṇaṃ? Sūtradhāra: abhimata-sabhā-nāyaka-lābhaḥ. naṭī: ko ṇu khu eso īdiso? Sūtradhāra: ayaṃ kila bharadvāja-kula-pārijātaḥ sakala-kalā-sāmrājya-siṃhāsanādhipatis tatrabhavataḥ śrīmato nārāyaṇādhvariṇaḥ tapaḥ-paripākakartā kāvyānāṃ vyākartā tan-trāṇām āhartā kratūnāṃ vyāhartā nṛpasabheṣu dig-antara-viśrānta-kīrtir apāramahimā mānavākṛtis sākṣād eva dākṣāyaṇī-vallabhāḥ śrīnīlakaṇṭhādhvarī. Kuśa*, prose before v. 9.

[23] *naṭī*: (*urasi hastaṃ nidhāya*) *ṇaṃ eṇaṃ ṇa āṇāmi. eso khu vīa saṃkara-rūvāṇaṃ appaadīkkhiaṇaṃ ṇattaro ṇalacariaṇāḍaa-pavaddhā . Sūtradhāra: atha kim. naṭī: keṇa kavikammeṇa eso avaṭṭheo? Sūtradhāra: jñātas tavābhiprāyaḥ — svādūneva rasān....kasmād idānīntanāḥ. ity ato nalacarita-ślokād bhītāsi. mā maivam. — tac-chikṣayā pariṇataṃ tad atipriyaṃ ca tat-karṇa-dhāritam abhūd api yasya kāvyam tenedam adya niravadya-rasānusāri tene navaṃ prakaraṇaṃ tad iha prayojyam. Kuśa,* v. 9–10

the witty culmination of elaborate praise of the author's brother, said to be sitting in the internal audience, and to have *heard* (did Atirātra read it out to Nīlakaṇṭha?) the play prior. Whether this should be read as a representation of an actual planned *araṅkerṟam* or as a fabricated one is a question that I leave open.[24] Whatever the case, the layers of potential realia are deliberate. It is worth noting that Atirātra provides both a citation of, and a direct quote of, his brother's words to him. The pattern analyzed in chapter two, in which the author both directly cites himself and speaks via his director, is here used for strengthening the genealogical ties that lie at the base of an author's identity. The inherited game of the prologue, centered around the author's subtle self-presentation, was broadened in the hands of Nīlakaṇṭha and his followers to refer to their immediate figures of inspiration, whose voices simply cannot be separated from their own.

The socio-historical realities of these authors, living in their largely homogeneous villages of Brahmin men of letters, support this hypothesis of intimacy. Rosalind O'Hanlon convincingly argued for the rise of the "scholar household" in the related context of Brahmin Maratha intellectuals of sixteenth and seventeenth century Banaras, who were often patronised by the kings of the city. She concludes:

> The scholar household was thus a mainstay in the lives of Banaras's Maratha intellectuals. What made possible the brilliant achievements of so many of their members during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was precisely that corporate and familial dimension of their lives which we, perhaps, do not often associate with individual intellectual distinction. The household provided an exceptionally high degree of specialized training and accumulation of expertise... In Mughal Banaras, there was a unique concentration of such households, linked by ties of family, migration and pedagogy to Brahman communities elsewhere in India, creating a critical mass, which multiplied in its effects.[25]

---

[24] The *araṅkerṟam* is the Tamil word for a debut of a text or play, an event which became an elaborate festive occasion in circles of Tamil pulavars or pandits in this period. See Sascha Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words* (New York: SUNY, 2010), 76–79.

[25] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Speaking from Siva's Temple: Banaras Scholar Households and the Brahman 'Ecumene' of Mughal India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (March 23, 2011): 261.

I suggest that Nīlakaṇṭha and his circles operated in roughly similar ways in Nāyaka and Maratha Thanjavur.[26] Their context in the Kaveri *brahmadeya* villages made them less dependent on courts, and, I presume, more independent in their choice of theme and in their overall poetic concerns. Kashi Gomez recently contextualized O'Hanlon's observation of early modern Banaras intellectual households in the context of eighteenth-century Thanjavur. Gomez ties the rise of the scholar household to the notion of a "family style," as theorized in the case of early modern traditions of Indian painting.[27] The *verbatim* citations of Nīlakaṇṭha's, beyond referencing him directly, echo his own style, and speak for a shared style of poetry that these intimate circles promote.

No longer foreigners: On being intimately cosmopolitan

The trope of the "foreigner" (*vaideśika*) audience which we encountered above was, in particular cases adjacent to our corpus, reused and inverted. The crowd of foreign pilgrims became, in the prologues surveyed in this chapter, intimately familiar, to the extent of Rāmabhadra's embedded joke about the audience of buffoons cited above, or of younger Cokkanātha's seemingly contradictory *Vaideśika Deśikas,* or of Atirātra's placement of his own brother and teacher in the audience. A full manifestation of this inversion is found in the prologue to the *Rāghavābhyudaya*, written by Bhāgavanta, a key figure from a famous family of Maratha ministers of the Bhonsle Maratha kings.

[26] As I discuss in the introduction, they even held active intellectual exchanges with some of these contemporaneous Maharashthrian Brahmin men as Fisher gathers from manuscripts of Nīlakaṇṭha's library. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 51–52.

[27] See Kashi Gomez, "Sanskrit and the Labour of Gender in Early Modern South India," *Modern Asian Studies*, 2022, 1–28. Rightly referenced in Gomez's discussion as a good theoretical account of the rise of the family style in painting is B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

Here, the assistant says: "since I am not from here (*vaideśiko 'smi*), I ask: who is Tryambakarāyamakhī?", to which the director replies with the formulaic, yet potent gesture of expected familiarity, "don't you know?" In this play, the *vaideśika* assistant replaces the audience, who are no longer referred to as foreigners but rather as visitors to the royal sacrifice held by the author's cousin. Rather, they are extremely informed. They know exactly what play they want to see, and when asked why they want this play instead of the old and famous ones, they reply that Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, a modern Patañjali and a second Vālmīiki, has wholeheartedly recommended it to them.[28]

Through the trope of the "novel" play, the audience is contrasting knowledge of the old canon with a preferred kind of intimate knowledge—the trusted recommendation of a local and contemporary authority. Rāmabhadra is the very embodiment of Patañjali, the arch-traditional authority of Sanskrit grammar. It became customary in this milieu to refer to authors as incarnations of the most canonical figures of the tradition. Nārāyaṇa, a pupil of Rāmabhadra's, echoes Tryambaka as he refers to the latter as both *pratyagrapatañjali* and *dvitīyavālmīki* ("a new Patañjali", "a second Vālmīki").[29] As we saw above, Atirātra's *Kuśa* also refers to Nīlakaṇṭha as an incarnation of Patañjali; he also has his actress refer to Appayya as a second Śaṅkara (*vīa-saṃkararūvāṇaṃ,* "second Śaṅkara embodied"); and to himself as

[28] *Pāripārśvika: vaideśiko 'smīti pṛcchāmi kaḥ punar ayaṃ tryambakarāyamakhī nāma? Sūtradhāraḥ: kiṃ na jānāsi…*(skipping a discussion about other members of this family of priests, following their request of this specific play) *Pāripārśvika: vidyamāneṣu prācām api rūpakeṣu kathaṃ nūtanapraṇīte tasminn evaṃ pariṣado bahumānaḥ Sūtradhāraḥ: tad etat pratyagrapatañjalinā dvitīyaprācetasena kuṇḍinakulamaṇḍanena rāmabhadrādhvarīndreṇa vimṛśya saśiraḥślāgham anumoditam iti*. Excerpt from *Rāghavābhyudaya* of Bhāgavanta, in P. P. Subrahmanya Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahāl Library, Tanjore*, vol. IIX (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1928), 3498-3501. See also Kuppuswami Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time," *The Indian Anitquary*, 1904, 127-8, for Sastri's exposition of Rāmabhadra through this verse. See discussion in ch. 2 for the question of staging of this play in this sacrifice.
[29] see Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 52.

pairahuvaṃsādikattāro, "countering the author of the Raghuvaṃśa".[30] We also have a striking identification of Rāmabhadra with Patañjali outside of the Sanskrit circle, coming from Suppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar in the latter's *Pirayoka Vivekam*.[31]And the list goes on.[32]

Elaine Fisher already noted Nīlakaṇṭha's identification as a 'new Kālidāsa', and convincingly suggested it is not only about bold self promotion, but also a conscious intervention in the making of a new sectarian community of Śrīvidyā, which links the goddess, linked with Kālidāsa's very name, with this community of writers.[33] Given my overall argument about the primacy of poetry for Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra, I wish to reflect on the more general literary and cultural meaning of these assertions. These poets are incarnations, not only of Kālidāsa, but of other definitive figures of tradition, such as Patañjali. This tendency, juxtaposed with the persistent emphasis on intimate relations with recent and contemporary family and teachers, points to a collective and sustained project of literary space-making on these men's part. Their vision of authorship and of Sanskrit literature lies in this deliberate aligning of contrasting resolutions, shifting between the macro and the micro.

As I described in the introduction, Bronner and Shulman think of the Sanskrit writers of early modern South India, beginning with Deśika and including Nīlakaṇṭha and others, as 'local cosmopolitans'. Bronner and Shulman postulate that the more locally grounded the work, the more depth and complexity it achieves. In their words:

> Sanskrit still allows a poet to transcend his or her parochial context and reach out to a space shaped by a wider, inherited discourse. At the same time, Sanskrit

[30] *Kuśa*, v. 9, prose after v. 13.
[31] *Pirayōka Vivēkam of Cuppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar*, ed., Ti Ve Kopalayyar, Tancai Caracuvati Makal 147 (Tañcāvūr: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1973), *kārikai* 51, 347–8. See Introduction, fn 66; I thank Professor E. Annamalai for this reference.
[32] There are precedents for this: see Murāri as a *Bāla-Vālmīki* in David Shulman, "Murāri's Depths," in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 486. But in this period, it has become entirely normal to refer to poets with such epithets.
[33] See Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* esp. 57–98.

> enables a skilled poet to condense into the space of a single work—even a single verse—an entire world of specific associations, contents, and meaning.[34]

One other important intuition from Bronner and Shulman's thesis regards a local audience of connoisseurs that they postulate from the nature of the works they read: this feature of this literature is especially accentuated in the case of the poetic archive examined here, as we will continue to see.

However, our authors' evident investment in their close filial networks merits further qualification, which I dub "intimate cosmopolitanism". We have seen the astoundingly intimate references from Nīlakaṇṭha's brother and student, together with the increasing familiarity of the trope of the pilgrim audience. Nīlakaṇṭha ends his elaborate survey of his family of writers in the *Nala* with an additional mention of the fraternal love with which his brother has written his commentary, and in his *Gaṅgā* he mentions the special bonds of brotherhood that he shares with his five brothers.[35] They belong to a group of authors who are writing about universally applicable themes, formulating general audience demands, identifying their teachers as the god or goddess themselves, and identifying themselves as luminaries of the canon; and yet they are unapologetically flagging the local and hereditary nature of their communities of writers and connoisseurs. As we have seen in the thesis thus far, the intimate and the cosmopolitan do not rule each other out, but rather, they are mutually reinforcing, and create the conditions that sustained the intertextual density and thematic boldness that are something of a signature of Nīlakaṇṭha's and of this community more generally.

---

[34] Bronner and Shulman, "A Cloud Turned Goose," 9.

[35] *agrajanmā khalu tasya rasika-loka-mauli-maṇir āccādīkṣito vyākarod idaṃ rūpakaṃ anuja-snehāt Nala*, prose before v. 11; *jayanti tanayās tasya pañca saubhrātra-śālinaḥ garbha-dāsā maheśasya kavayaś ca vipaścitaḥ*, *Gaṅgāvataraṇam* [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*, eds., Kedaranatha Sastri and Vasudeva Laxman Sastri Panasikar, (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1916), v.1.49

These men's exceptional self-presentation through their teachers and kin lead me to further suggest the genealogical poet as a primary model of authorship of these authors. The prism of genealogical filiation will allow me to account for both the social and aesthetic concerns of our authors' "intimate cosmopolitanism": a world in which nameless foreigners have to be invented, and the family or the *paramparā* of the guru is the focal center of one's very identity.

The genealogical poet

Providing some guidelines of comparison to our case, Engseng Ho argues that the basic theme and logic of the Hadrami Sayyids' diasporic literature is that of genealogy. Ho describes a hybrid world of the early modern Indian ocean in which a diasporic community preserved and carried its identity through the medium and language of genealogy. These formed, in his analysis, communities of "local cosmopolitans."[36] The comparison with the identical tag that Bronner and Shulman gave early modern Sanskrit authors from the South is fruitful: Nīlakaṇṭha, Rāmabhadra and their families maintain their identities primarily through *paramparā* lineages of teaching or familial genealogies, which often include their *gotra* lineages (exogamous subgroups of Brahmins) and religious or sectarian affiliations.[37] Like some of the communities in Ho's account, the familial networks in question are well integrated in local elite circles, and they acquire additional identities, such as their pronounced sectarian commitments. They too retain

[36] "Hadrami genealogies are...complex languages of cosmopolitanism in which the foreign and the local negotiate coexistence in vital ways…the genealogies underwrite the existence of persons whom I call local cosmopolitans…"Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 188.

[37] In Nīlakaṇṭha's case, the filial references are exclusively genetic; this is not always the case with his followers. In his survey of Advaita Vedānta in early modern India, Christopher Minkowski maps and lists three types of lineages; "that between teacher and pupil, often as part of a longer chain of pedagogy; that of members of the same family, usually by descent through the male relatives; and that of guru and disciple. The three affiliations can overlap…" Christopher Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (March 23, 2011): 213.

their cosmopolitan identity through vehicles such as genealogies and pilgrimage. The emphasis on genealogy allows me to account for our author's primary markers of hereditary Brahmin identity. Yet quite unlike vast, encyclopedic forms of genealogy that Ho describes, we have seen a radical intimacy in Nīlakaṇṭha's genealogical commitments.

I propose the "genealogical model" of poetry writing as a methodological tool that allows us to raise socio-historical questions that are rarely posed in the context of patronless poets. Did Nīlakaṇṭha make his living primarily as a teacher? Did the extended family sustain itself collectively? Was he writing from his home, surrounded by his brothers, sons, and male students? What exactly was his role in assemblies of Sanskrit experts that his brothers and students mention, presumably located in Brahmin villages in the Kaveri Delta, in which he was clearly a dominant figure?[38]

This model also contributed to the survival of these poets and their works into future generations. It is in fact designed to survive: in terms of contemporary circulation, their textual production might be relatively narrow.[39] However, it has the theoretical potential to stretch into the future, via generations to come. This echoes the logic of Vedic recitation, through which the Vedas were orally recorded for generations, pertinent to the original idea of the brahmadeya as an institution. However, these smārta Brahmins clearly shift the focus from the Vedas to their literature.

[38] The assembly, or *sabhā,* readily suggests a temple context, but in our case it likely refers to the core institution of the Brahmin village at least since the Cola period. See Whitney Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry in Medieval South India: Moonset on Sunrise Mountain* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), for instance 221 fn 32, citing an inscriptional record from the Bṛhadīśvara temple in which King Rājarāja's sister, Kuntavai, deposits a large sum to the *sabhās* of ten different *brahmadeyas*.

[39] See fn 50 in this chapter for a survey of available manuscripts.

This potential proved actual, as I will show below: Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra became identifiable figures in the intellectual histories of Sanskrit writing thanks to the survival of their *śiṣyapraśiṣyādi* ('along with students, and students of students', to cite the younger Cokkanāthamakhin) networks. Yigal Bronner has traced the history of the transmission of the memory of Nīlakaṇṭha's great uncle, Appayya Dīkṣita, in which his descendants played a key role. Thus, a descendent of the family, writing in the second half of the eighteenth century, links Appayya to the sun, and his descendants to a row of mirrors that reflect his divine presence.[40]

This image clearly articulates the sustained role of genealogies of students and family members in this literary corpus of authors—arguably beginning with Appayya—and of other related milieus. It poses a logic of continuity, in which a network collectively forms an enduring space and infrastructure for a literary canon-in-the-making.[41] It also captures these authors' conceptions of themselves as inherently bound with their recent *paramparā* lineages, which we have seen thus far. Genealogical self-writing is both a socially relevant way to exist as a local, or intimate cosmopolitan, and a performance of the principle that we have seen in the previous two chapters, of individuality as an embedded condition, orchestrated through innumerable citations and meaningful identifications with god or with a guru.

[40]Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 20–21. The exchange (in response to the assistant's question, regarding the seemingly large four-generation gap between him and Appayya) contains a series of rhetorical questions that stress that Appayya's radiance lives on, and that his own words still please wise men with his stringing of garlands (of words), just like the sun's splendour through successive mirrors, his glory travels (saṃkrāntaṃ mahas) via the logic of adjacency (savidha-ga). *Vasulakṣmīkalyāṇam of Veṅkaṭasubrahmaṇya*, ed., K. Rāghavan Piḷḷai, Trivandrum Sanskrit series (Anantaśayana: Keralaviśvavidyālaya, 1969), 6.

[41] As Bronner writes: "It is no coincidence that all the commemorative sources available to us up to the very end of the nineteenth century are by Appayya's descendants, and that generations of family members have studied his work, have written secondary scholarship on it, and have been the dominant force in his commemoration. If Appayya was a card-carrying member of his family, its members, in turn, proudly and continuously displayed his badge…". Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 35.

These modes of self-presentation is very much in line with the common grounds of premodern self-presentations from South Asia as summarized by Stuart and Arnold, where "an individual (not necessarily at the center) [is] linked to many others, through alliances of varying intimacy and intensity-[which] enables us to visualize the predicament presented in these life histories".[42] It also neatly aligns with neighboring idioms of royal sculpted portraits in Nāyaka temples, which began for the first time to include figures from past and recent significant genealogies around the portrayed subject.[43]

The genealogical model may also shed light on these authors' economic conditions, particularly in the case of Nīlakaṇṭha, or his brother Atirātra, who have sustained their writing without any mention of a patron. I discussed in the first chapter the prominence of the *sarvatantrasvatantra* ideal of mastery of disciplines or independent scholarship that Nīlakaṇṭha inherited from Appayya and subsumed under the hat of the poet, and its related independence of patronage.[44] Nīlakaṇṭha's teaching career, and the references we have to his activities as a patron, suggest a form of livelihood that is at least partly based on the expressed genealogical affiliations we have seen thus far.

In other cases, such as Rāmabhadra's, genealogical poetry and courtly support worked in tandem: while his poetic works echo Nīlakaṇṭha's exclusive reference to teachers and family members, his scholastic works acknowledge King Śāha as a patron. Like forty-five other scholars and poets, he received land on the basis of his mastery of four Sanskrit disciplines: the

[42]Arnold and Blackburn, *Telling Lives in India*, 22.
[43] See Branfoot, "Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India."
[44] To cite from Bronner's conclusions about Appayya: "His lack of extra-familial institutional affiliations goes hand in hand with his scholarly independence and his resistance to being confined in his Śaiva role." Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 36. To rephrase this formulation, it is the development of a familial logic of readership and transmission that goes hand in hand with independence of thought (*sarvatantrasvatantra*).

system of courtly patronage roughly echoes the respectful title of *sarvatantrasvatantra*, revealing something of the influence of the logic of the scholar household on courtly mechanisms of support, probably through the mediation of Brahmin ministers who orchestrated it.[45]

Variations on the genealogical model of writing existed in different formations throughout the history of Sanskrit writing, but in the context of the early modern rise of the scholar household and of the prevalent ideal of *sarvatantrasvatantra,* it became a prominent and explicit way of being an author, either working in a court or outside it. The Brahmin brahmadeya village, an infrastructure that had the continuing support of courts since the beginning of the second millenium at least, and had been newly augmented by Śāha's grants, is the setting of many of these writers, even when they were not working for a patron. I suggest that their "genealogical model" of writing accounts for much of the ethics and aesthetics that govern their work.

Poets as readers, and readers as poets: Writing stotras in the *śālā*

With these categories in mind, let us return to the question of the audience in the genre of the stotra, pursued in chapter three. Norman Cutler's work on early Tamil devotional hymns stressed that the formal dialogical framework of the stotra (a devotee speaking to his or her god) always-already includes a third party of listeners or reciters.[46] We know that Sanskrit stotras from

[45] See Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 25–28 on the figures of Bhagavantarāya, Tryambakarāya and Ānandarāya, Brahmin ministers at Śāha's court, who mediated Śāha's requests of scholars and, seemingly, the neighboring worlds of the agrahara of the court; Rāmabhadra's name is associated with them in particular.

[46] "Ultimately, through the reciter, the devotee identifies with the poet, and, in this way, the devotee becomes an immediate participant in the poetic reenactment. It is as if a whole historical context is reincarnated in the performance of a bhakti poem, just as the god, who is the object of the saint's devotion, enters history time and time again", Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, 70. See also Jonathan Culler's similar observations of the lyric form, whence, for instance, "To invoke or address something that is not the true audience, whether a muse, an urn, Duty, or a

different periods were regularly sung in homes and temples; this is a practice that remains well attested to this day. Sanskrit stotras are sometimes transmitted orally, in individual verses, and they have the proven potential to circulate among lay audiences of devotees, who are not necessarily trained in Sanskrit.[47] Pūrṇasarasvatī, a famous writer and commentator of fourteenth-century Southwest India, defended the genre of Sanskrit stotras based on its ability to appeal to a diverse audience.[48]

Who, then, were the invisible third parties of our authors? Did any of their stotras breach the immediate circle of intimate and informed *deśikas* described above? We have seen that the tension between the ideal accessibility of bhakti, and esoteric and technical registers or complex ideas is very marked, and often thematized in these hymns. To what extent, if at all, is Pūrṇasarasvatī's claim regarding the stotras that I sampled in the previous chapter valid? In the following verse from Rāmabhadra's *Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana* ("A hymn to Rāma: an elixir to the ear", hereafter *Rasāyana*)[49], the author states that he writes primarily for poets:

> *raghuvara-caraṇāravinda-bhakti-cchala-makaranda-nirantarābhiṣiktāḥ*
> *vakula-parimalā giro madīyāḥ kavi-kula-karṇarasāyanāni santu* (*Rasāyana,* v. I.7)
>
> My words are fragrant *Bakula* trees—
> Completely bathed in the inexhaustible nectar that is my
> devotion to Rāma's lotus feet, they blossom.
> May they become elixir to the ears of lineages of poets.

---

beloved, highlights the event of address itself as an act, whose purpose and effects demand critical attention." Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 187.

[47] See Gudrun Bühnemann, "Some Remarks on the Structure and Application of Hindu Sanskrit Stotras," *WZKS* XXVII (1984): esp. 81–87, for a survey of textual evidence for the use of stotras in pūjās in dharmaśāstra texts, tantric instructions, and instructions embedded in the stotras themselves, paired with anthropological observations in modern contexts. See also Hamsa Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, AAR Religion in Translation (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), introduction, for a survey of different usages of stotras in temples in the known literature to date.

[48] In Pūrṇasarasvatī's *Bhaktimandākinī,* a commentary to the *Viṣṇupādādikeśa*, a hymn descibing Viṣṇu from head to foot that he ascribes to Śaṅkara. Cited in Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement" (Columbia University, 2015), 56–8.

[49] Sastri, "Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana [Rasāyana] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita."

According to poetic convention, Bakula trees blossom when women sprinkle them with liquor from their mouths. Rāmabhadra compares his own words to such trees, which benefit from the constant nectar of flowers that are given in devotion to Rāma's feet, and then bloom. It is quite outstanding that devotion—*bhakti*—grants the opportunity (*chala,* a word usually translated as "pretext" marking the poetic ornament of *utprekṣā*) for his poetry to blossom, rather than the other way around. It is not entirely clear, moreover, who are the agents, equivalent to the women of the convention, who sprinkle the nectar. The verse seems to imply a happy, rather than vicious circularity, in which Rāmabhadra's poetry itself produces the nectar with the pretext of devotion, that ever-feeds the trees that produce the poetry. The goal, in any case, is explicit: it is for poets to enjoy. It is difficult to understate this statement, which also gives this long hymn its name. This poetry is meant for poets.

In terms of circulation, none of these hymns have a substantial number of surviving manuscripts, and their modern circulation can be largely traced to publications by descendants of the family.[50] These hymns, moreover, are not short and accessible like other stotras whose

[50] Nīlakaṇṭha's *Ānandasāgarastava* has five manuscripts in the Saraswati Mahal library and one other in a private collection (Oppert II 6570). A descendent of the family, Brahmasri Mahalinga Sastrigal, translated the hymn to Tamil in 1944, translated shortly after into English (*Ananda Sagara Stavam of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (with English Translation),* Mahalinka Sastirikal, trans., (Cennai: Sri Kamakoti kocastanam, 1954): note about his Tamil translation is given in *Ibid, xx*. Today, it is relatively well known among Sanskrit readers (including online translations of the hymn into several Indian languages, such as here: "Ananda Sagara Stavam | Stotram.Co.In," accessed October 1, 2022, https://stotram.co.in/ananda-sagara-stavam/). The commentator on the *Śivotkarṣamañjarī* is Sivananda Yogindra, another descendant of the family who also wrote Appaya's hagiography, the *Srimadappayyadiksitendravijaya* in 1880; see Filliozat, *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 7). The *Gurutattvamālikā* has only two surviving manuscripts, edited by Filliozat. (*Ibid*, 25). As for Rāmabhadra: a few verses from the *Rāmāṣṭaprāsastava*, the *Rasāyana,* and the *Bāṇa*, were included in an anthology from late eighteenth-century Travancore, written by a descendant of Appayya Dīkṣita called Nīlakaṇṭha. (See A. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study* (The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002), 13; The collection is called the *Varṇanāsārasaṃgraha*). Kuppuswami Sastri, born and raised in the same agrahāra of Tiruvisanallur towards the end of the 19th century, notes in his edition of the *Viśva* that it was based on four palm leaf manuscripts in Grantha letters: three of them belonged to "my honorable maternal uncle Nagaswami, who is a resident of the agrahāra Mahārājapura. The third one was sent and arranged by my honorable Tāta from the sthala of Arūya of Tiruvashanalur [Tiruvisanalur], of the poet Vāsabhūmi." See "Viśvagarbhastava [*Viśva*] of Rāmabhadra

performative, instrumental or pedagogical aspect is clearer.[51] Additionally, the praxis of incorporating intricate intertext of philosophical and theological material surveyed in the previous chapter is a strong indication of the access and competence that these texts require, especially in performed contexts such as the stotra.[52] We have seen in chapter three, Nīlakaṇṭha invoke the detailed theory of *prapatti* to effectively and playfully reverse it, or Rāmabhadra encode the "doctrine of the name" in his ironic address to his own tongue. The expectations of the writers regarding the level of proficiency in śāstric and literary references are evident. I am therefore inclined to think that our authors's primary stotra audience is the learned men from their intimate familiar circles.[53]

The possibility remains that some of these hymns or extracts from them had unrecorded oral circulation in other devotional contexts. This was a world of increasing movement, of evolving public devotional contexts such as pilgrimage routes and festivals, and of a nearby court that encouraged and enabled potential mixtures of languages, registers, and communities.

Dīkṣita," eds., Mahamahopadhyaya Durgaprasada and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, in *Kāvyamāla Anthology*, Kāvyamāla 14 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1938), introduction, xx.

[51]Bühnemann, "Some Remarks on the Structure and Application of Hindu Sanskrit Stotras," 74–77, provides some examples of stotras whose *phalaśruti* verses contain instructions for the amount of daily recitations, or stotras that contain a prescribed time of day, or a more immediate reason for their application. For a comparison in point, Rāmabhadra's contemporary Āyyāval writes what strikes me as highly accessible, simple Sanskrit stotras, some of which are between eight and 12 verses long. For all of Āyyaval's known stotras, see: Sridhara Ayyaval Mutt, Tiruvisaloor, "Sri Sridhara Ayyaval," accessed October 1, 2022, https://www.sriayyaval.org/history/ayyval_works/Index_works.htm.

[52] This is in line with Bauman and Briggs' general claim of performance, according to which "…to decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control, and in regard to the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises. More specifically, we may recognize differential access to texts, differential legitimacy in claims to and use of texts, differential competence in the use of texts, and differential values attaching to various types of texts…"Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 76.

[53] See Tyler Williams, "Notes of Exchange: Scribal Practices and Vernacular Religious Scholarship in Early Modern North India," *Manuscript Studies* 3, no. 2 (October, 2019), for an interesting comparison by contrast, dicussing the intellectual networks of sectarian communities from Rajasthan through practices of material circulation of vernacular texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In these comunites, both the material evidence and the textual archive points to a variegated audience of lay merchants and monks at maṭha or other home-based institutions, whose practices of performance and pedagogy vary according to genre and sect.

These hymns may have been written with this potential in mind, and they may have also had unexpected and unrecorded lives and afterlives. We also saw some differences among the surveyed hymns, whose audiences do not necessarily tightly overlap. Thus, Rāmabhadra's *Bāṇa* or hymn to the arrow, perhaps sponsored by Nīlakaṇṭha, is a sophisticated work of kāvya written in the complex *sragdhara* meter, which requires minute knowledge of the epic. His *Varṇamālā* is a work that an audience untrained in the Vedic corpus would find difficult to enjoy. But his *Viśvagarbha* may have been able to cater to a wider range of audiences, since despite its various intertexts and display of poetic skill, it reads as a relatively accessible and memorizable composition. Nīlakaṇṭha's *Ānanda*, my central example from his corpus of hymns, pronouncedly plays the double role of accessible Sanskrit with rich intertextual resonance from Sanskrit theological and philosophical debate.[54] Yigal Bronner speaks of different circles of possible readership in the context of the pedagogy implied in Appayya Dīkṣita's stotras.[55] We know of at least two of the hymns under our discussion served pedagogical purposes well into the twentieth century.[56] But Appayya's pedagogical motivation is starkly different from the governing tone of most of the surveyed hymns. We have seen, rather, reflexive poetic compositions, often playful and anti-didactic, which lack auto-commentaries.

---

[54] In my assessment, the *Ānanda* is the most accessible among Nīlakaṇṭha's hymns. His *Śivatattvarāhasya* comes close to being a śāstric commentary: see Filliozat's survey of the arguments featured in the hymn in Filliozat, *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 30–39. Nīlakaṇṭha's *Śivotkarṣamañjarī* is packed with allusions, and it hinges on indirect allusions to Śiva, somewhat similarly to many of Rāmabhadra's hymns surveyed above. Filliozat too notes the difficulty of this hymn, and notes the value of its commentary—perhaps the first commentary of this corpus of hymns from before the twentieth century—by Nīlakaṇṭha's relative, relative Sivananda Yogindra. (*Ibid,* 7*)*. Nīlakaṇṭha's *Caṇḍītrahasya* and *Rāghuvirastava* are also closer to the śāstric side of the devotion-poetry-śāstra triangle. My assessment does not include Nīlakaṇṭha's *Subhāṣita* works, which share some features with the stotra, but are clearly meant to be more accessible and perhaps to circulate more widely, as I discuss in the second chapter.

[55] Bronner, "Singing to God, Educating the People."

[56] Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*, 163, fn. 15, testifies that the late Srirangam Satakopachariar used to cite many verses from the *Rasāyana* in his *kathākālakṣepa* discourses. Nīlakaṇṭha's *Ānanda* appears in modern teachings, such as the following from the Kamakoti mutt in Kanchipuram: *Maha Periyava " Divine Expositions" Ananda Sagara Stava Audio with English Translation*, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9uIQpxvGLI.

Guided by Rāmabhadra's statement in his *Rasāyana* about his audience of poets, I suggest narrowing the question of the audience down to the potential devotees who may have understood these stotras.[57] We might add that the kind of devotion that these hymns reflect entails an active engagement with the material, in line with the influence of tantric modes of devotion such as that of the *Śrīvidyā* sect that Nīlakaṇṭha was an active member and propagator of.[58]

Hymns for the (hymn for the) teacher: *Feeling* cosmopolitan at home

We have seen in the previous chapter how, within the generic setting of these stotras, there are occasional references to foundational figures of influence for our authors. Such was Rāmabhadra's probable reference to his teacher in *Viśva* 58 ("…I traveled the earth, greedy for money, as if I had the world for a stomach. Now, by the compassion of my teacher, I gave up this illusion…"). More pointed is Nīlakaṇṭha's reference to Appayya's surrender to the goddess:

> *tvayy arpitaṃ prathamam appayayajvanaiva*
> *svātmārpaṇaṃ vidadhatā svakulaṃ samastam*
> *kā tvaṃ maheśi kuladāsam upekṣituṃ māṃ*
> *ko vānupāsitum ahaṃ kuladevatāṃ tvām* (*Ānanda,* v. 43)
>
> The first to grant himself to you was Appayya Yajvan
> in his "*Ātmārpaṇa*" hymn. With this, he gave his entire family to you.
> Godess Maheśi: can you give up on me, a servant by blood?
> Can I give up on you, my inherited goddess?

An intertextual reference to his great uncle's famous textualized surrender serves, here, as a binding document in this staged conversation with his goddess.[59] It is mutual: they are both

---

[57] Bühnemann, "Some Remarks on the Structure and Application of Hindu Sanskrit Stotras," 73, mentions an emphasis on the requirement of understanding, not merely reciting, of hymns that she characterizes as "Vedāntastotras", such as many hymns ascribed to Śaṅkara.
[58] Rāmabhadra's sectarian identity as a devout Rāma bhakta who is also affiliated with Śākta circles remains to be investigated, along with the story of the significant presence of devotion to Rāma in the early modern delta.
[59] Appayya's statement is from "Self Surrender (Ātmārpaṇastuti) of Appayya Dīkṣita," trans., Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, in *"Self Surrender", "Peace", "Compassion", &"Mission of the Goose" of Appayya Dīkṣita,*

legally bound to each other.[60] This verse is meant to make his audience smile: this is an audience who knows Appayya's *Ātmārpaṇastuti*. It is an audience who is expected to know what family Nīlakaṇṭha comes from, and that Appayya is his great figure of inspiration. The self he shares with his goddess, explored in the previous chapter, is in fact a trio at the very least. This verse happily reflects on the meaning of the well-established notion of *kuladevatā*, a divinity who runs in the family. It expresses the inherent connection between an imbricated genealogical self and a selfhood tied to the goddess. It seems to me that on the whole, these stotras should be read against the intimate, genealogical communities of readers and writers that were the primary audience of these authors.

The two most striking stotras in this regard, perhaps also the most limited in their circulation, are two hymns to the two respective renunciant gurus of these authors—the *Gurutattvamālikā (*"Garland for the true essence of the teacher" hereon *Gurutattva),* Nīlakaṇṭha's hymn to Gīrvāṇendra Sarasvatī, and the *Ācāryabhūṣaṇa Stava (*"Ornament for the King of Hymns to the Teacher", hereon *Bhūṣaṇa)*, Rāmabhadra's hymn to the hymn to Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī, a fellow inhabitant of Tiruvisanallur.[61] The choice to write a stotra (let alone, to a

---

Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika, Clay Sanskrit Library (NYC Press, 2009), v.15. It reads: *adyaiva tvat-pada-nalinayor arpayāmy antar-ātmann ātmānaṃ me saha parikarair adri-kanyādhinātha. nāhaṃ boddhum śiva tava padaṃ na kriyā-yoga-caryāḥ*
kartum śaknomy anitara-gatiḥ kevalaṃ tvāṃ prapadye. In their translation: "Now is the time. I'm at your feet. I take my self and offer it, together with everyone around me, to Myself, that is, to You, Lord, Lover of the Mountain's Daughter. I'll never understand you, Śiva, and I'm far from being good at yoga, rites, and prayers. There is no other way. I give myself to you." See Bronner, "Singing to God, Educating the People," 14, for the intertextual connection with Nīlakaṇṭha's hymn.

[60] The metaphor of a legal contract with god is an old trope in Tamil bhakti traditions; see for instance Whitney Cox, *Modes of Philology in Medieval South India* (Brill, 2016), 49–52, for a discussion of the this feature in the story of Cuntarar as told in the *Periyapurāṇam*.

[61] "Gurutattvamālikā [Gurutattva] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," in *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, (Institut Francais de Pondichery, 1967), 219–29; "Ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇa [*Bhūṣaṇa*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita,", ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6 (Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932), 162–80. There are only two surviving manuscripts of the *Gurutattva*, and only one for the *Bhūṣaṇa*. Gīrvāṇendra is Nīlakaṇṭha's guru, as well as Rājacūḍāmaṇi's guru. He is not the same person as Nṛsimhāśramin's guru Gīrvāṇendra (as obliquely noted in Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 63–7 and in Filliozat, *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 26). Rāmabhadra's guru Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī, also called

stotra) to one's guru is not trivial.[62] Elaine Fisher cites these hymns as examples for what she describes as a new phenomenon of Southern smārta Brahmins subscribing to renunciant gurus, affiliated with tantric śaivism and the Śaṅkarācarya order, that the title "Sarasvatī" indicates.[63] This is an important observation: the sort of intimacy that these pair of hymns attests to is rarely found in other Sanskrit stotras of the period. Similar sentiments can be found in smaller dosages in the commentaries to these guru's works, and/or in the introductions to scholastic works that other students of these gurus wrote.[64]

Some of the philosophical and historical roots of these emerging social realities lie in the redeeming devotional bond with a guru that many schools of Śaiva thought promoted.[65] The guru's substitution of god is repeatedly stated in Nīlakaṇṭha's *Gurutattva*. For instance:

> *nīlagrīvam umāsakhaṃ triṇ*[*sic*]*ayanaṃ rūpaṃ yad ādyaṃ vibhor*
> *duḥsaṃrodha-bhava-pravāha-laharī-kandena kiṃ tena naḥ*
> *kāruṇyā-kaṭākṣa-vīkṣaṇa-kalā-nidhūta-māyā-malāṃ*
> *gīrvāṇendraguroḥ prasanna-lalitāṃ mūrtiṃ smarāmaḥ parām* (*Gurutattva*, v. 2)
>
> That dark-necked, paired with Umā, three-eyed form of the foremost god—
> What does it have to do with us?
> It is the root of the waves of our insufferable existence.
> We turn to the ultimate form, soothing and lovely
> of the guru Gīrvāṇendra.
> Just a fraction of his kind and compassionate glance
> removes the stains of illusionary existence.

Bālakṛṣṇa Guru or Bhagavatpāda, is a better-documented figure: he was an active teacher in the region since at least 1670 when a copy of his work was made.

[62] Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, 44, remarks that writing stotras to gurus may have been an influence from Jain and Buddhist stotra traditions. The first stotras written to identified gurus in Sanskrit in the South may have been a pair of Vaiṣṇava stotras to Rāmānuja, which are the *Yatirājasaptati* by Deśika, whose influence on our authors I have been tracing throughout the dissertation, and the *Yatirājavimśati* of the influential Varavaramuni, being the only composition that he wrote in Sanskrit. What seems unique to our case is the intimate and embodied relationship with the guru to whom one sings.

[63] See Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 68.

[64] For a description of the tribute of Rājacuḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita to Gīrvāṇendra, see *Ibid*. For a survey of Kṛṣṇānanda's students and their recognition of him, see Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 30–34.

[65] This was directly influenced by śaiva tantric practices, not exclusively but potently in krama traditions from 10-11th century Kashmir, in whose writings (which include stotras) the role of the guru is emphasized, and gurus are often revered by name. See Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir," in *In Mélanges Tantriques à La Mémoire d'Hélène Brunner / Tantric Studies in Memory of Hélène Brunner*, ed. Dominic Goodall and Padoux, André (Pondichéry: IFI / EFEO, 2007), 231–442.

As Filliozat noted in the introduction to his edition and translation of this hymn, this notion stands at the heart of the *Gurutattva*, which stresses the kind of accessibility and intimacy that gurus can offer their devotees, culminating with a compassionate glance.[66] The verse can read as a principal statement about the guru's role for any devotee, and there is a whole genre of stotras to gurus in this mode, which became prevalent in several modern religious formations in India.[67] Nīlakaṇṭha states on different occasions that Gīrvāṇendra, as well as Appayya, exceed even his god Śiva.[68] Simultaneously, and in the context of my discussion, Nīlakaṇṭha presents the aesthetic possibility of speaking of his historical self through his genealogical ties with his guru. The fact that Gīrvāṇendra is identifiable (primarily through the mention of his composition, the *Sārasaṅgraha*, for instance in *Gurutattva,* 5), signals a very real 'us', a community of fellow students and authors who would have read or heard this hymn. The personal aspect of the relationship between guru and student—Nīlakaṇṭha named his third son after his guru, Gīrvāṇendra—has a collective and intimate dimension.

To further examine the communities behind such gestures, I now turn to Rāmabhadra's *Bhūṣaṇa:* his hymn dedicated to another hymn that Brahmānanda, a fellow student, wrote to their

---

[66] See Filliozat, *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 50–51. Fisher plausibly reads Nīlakaṇṭha's mention of "śaktipāta" in v. 20 of the *Gurutattva* as an implicit declaration that he received initiation from his guru. In her translation: "If the descent of power [*śaktipāta*] is certainly the fruit of fortune from an array of meritorious action conditioning this lifetime, amassed through the bondage of endless mortal bodies, it is still conveyed through contact with the compassionate glance of the preceptor. Thus, proclaim, you who are freed from error, that there is no reality [*tattva*] higher than the Guru". *antānanta-śarīra-bandha-parivāhopātta-tat-tacchubha*[sic?]*-prārabdhārtha-samāja-bhāgya-phalito yaḥ śakti-pātas taraḥ. nirṇīto yadi so 'pi deśika-dayāpāṅga-prasaṅgāvahas tattvaṃ tarhi guroḥ paraṃ kim api nety ākhyāta vīta-bhramāḥ* (Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 65). For a history of the range of meanings of *śaktipāta* throughout tantric traditions (with a focus on Abhinavagupta), see Christopher Wallis, "The Descent of Power: Possession, Mysticism, and Initiation in the Śaiva Theology of Abhinavagupta," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 247–95.

[67] Stainton reflects on Lakshman Joo's legacy: "reciting stotras that are seen as embodying this complex theology in a simpler form allows them to engage with these traditions at multiple levels. At the end of the day, it is devotion to the guru, and the identity between the guru and Śiva, that is stressed in much modern practice within this community." Stainton, *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*, 279.

[68] See *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* ed., J. K. Balasubrahmanyam, (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911), 1.5, 1.6.

shared tantric guru. The very project is highly unusual, and I am aware of nothing like it.[69] As Rāmabhadra writes, addressing the hymn: *kas tava kaviḥ stotuṃ pragalbho guṇān*—"who is this poet, bold enough to praise your virtues"? (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 7). This following verse announces the hymn's title and effectively opens it, following an initial praise to the guru, Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvati, (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 1), and to the author of the hymn to whom this hymn is addressed, his fellow student Brahmānanda (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 2):

> *labdhaiḥ sadhu-kavi-prabandha-jaladhiṣv antaś ciraṃ majjatā*
> *śabdākhyair maṇibhiḥ patañjali-vacaḥ-śāṇopalottejitaḥ*
> *yatnena grathitaṃ mayā sumatayaḥ sarve 'pi kautūhalād*
> *ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇam idaṃ paśyantu hṛṣyantu ca* (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 3)
>
> For a very long time, I dove in the ocean of works of worthy poets,
> and with great effort I composed, with the gems that I brought forth and polished
> with the touchstone of Patañjali's words,
> my Ornament for the King of Hymns to the Teacher (*ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇam*).
> Let all good men read it, and enjoy themselves.

In line with these authors' tendency to echo Nīlakaṇṭha's words, the verse probably converses with a similar verse from Nīlakaṇṭha's *Vijaya,* which I have mentioned in chapter 2 ("let poets commend or condemn it!" *kavayo hṛṣyantu ruṣyantu vā*). Rāmabhadra's clearly alludes to it—*paśyantu hṛṣyantu ca*. In place of Nīlakaṇṭha's playful disclaimer, Rāmabhadra's statement shows sheer confidence in his skill. The defensive rhetoric aimed at critics, a trope we now know to be Nīlakaṇṭha's trademark, is replaced with an explicit aim toward intelligent, or well-disposed men (*sumati)*.

Rāmabhadra begins by diving in an ocean of compositions of worthy poets—the image is that of a pearl diver—for a long time. This poetic vocabulary, namely the gems he dug out of the ocean, he then refines with his grammatical toolbox. At the heart of Rāmabhadra's process of

[69] There are precedents of stotras to texts: for instance, the *Śivapañcākṣara Stotra* that praises the mantra *oṃ namaḥ śivāya*. But I know of no stotras to stotras to gurus, and I would be surprised to find another one like it.

writing is therefore his extensive reading of previous great poets and grammarians. These include both the unnamed masters of the past, and his living teachers: his guru to whom this hymn is indirectly written, his teacher Nīlakaṇṭha who is present between the lines, and perhaps also his other guru and father in law the older Cokkanāthamakhin, whom Rāmabhadra credits with his learning of grammar (see introduction).

Following the introductory verse above, all verses of the *Bhūṣaṇa* address the now-lost *Ācāryastavarāja* hymn itself, in the vocative. The meter was probably chosen to fit the name of the addressee, *Ācāryastavarāja,* which consistently opens one of the four padas in all remaining verses. Here are a few verses that delineate the intimate audience that Rāmabhadra is writing for, which further reveals his related theory of writing-through-reading.

> *na vyālendra-vacaḥ-kramair na śabarasvāmi-prabandhoktibhir*
> *nālāpair api pakṣilasya na girām apy aṅkuraiḥ śāṅkaraiḥ*
> *ullāso viduṣām udañcati tathā śālāntare yajvanām*
> *ācāryastavarāja puṣpamṛdulaiḥ ślokair yathā tāvakaiḥ* (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 65)
>
> Not the many grammatical rules of Patañjali, king of snakes, neither all of
> Śabara's words, one after the next,
> nor in Pakṣila's sayings, not even the budding words of Śaṅkara.
> Your verses, *Ācāryastavarāja*, delicate as flowers,
> gladden the hearts of the wise Brahmins at the village assembly.

The *śālā* mentioned in this verse clearly refers to Rāmabhadra's community in the institution, and/or in the village that we know he shared with his teacher, Kṛṣṇānanda Sarasvatī, and with Brahmānanda, who wrote the hymn. The verse also features a pun meant for connoisseurs of poetic theory: *ullāsa* primarily signals happiness, but it is also, untranslatably, a name of an *alaṅkāra*—a poetic ornament—in which a reference to one object's virtues or faults proliferates or extends the virtue or fault of another object. This is exactly what this verse is doing while comparing the great Sanskrit philosophers of the past with the hymn in question. In fact, it can be seen as a master trope of this hymn, designed to extend the virtues of the hymn it is

responding to, which in turn is designed to capture and hence proliferate the virtue of their joint guru.[70] Rāmabhadra praises the ability of his friend's hymn to gladden the Brahmins of his close community (literally, *yajvans*, sacrificers), which outdoes their joy of reading their most authoritative texts. He simultaneously gladdens them by mentioning the poetic device he is using by name. Rāmabhadra assumes that his listeners not only share the broad Sanskritic knowledge of all the disciplines mentioned in the verse but also they would enjoy the *hutzpa*—the *prāgalbhyam*—of stating that this intimate hymn is superior to all Sanskrit disciplines.

The contrast between the intimate *śālā* setting and the universal one is apparent throughout the hymn. For instance,

> *antarveśmasu catvareṣu valabhī-mūleṣu rathyāsu ca*
> *krīḍā-kānana-maṇḍapeṣu ca nadī-rodheṣu kuñjeṣu ca*
> *grāme vā nagare 'pi vā kim aparaṃ sarvatra dṛṣṭo bhavān*
> *ācāryastavarāja darśayasi kiṃ tad vaibhavaṃ yad guroḥ (Bhūṣaṇa,* 61)
>
> In houses, in courtyards, from rooftops to doorsteps, along roads,
> in gardens of pleasure and in temples, on riverbanks, in shady groves,
> in the village, even in the city, and elsewhere—
> you are everywhere to be seen, hymn, sir.
> *Ācāryastavarāja*—what is it that you reveal?
> Your magnificence
> is the guru's magnificence.

This statement stands in stark contrast with the fact that Brahmānanda's *Ācāryastavarāja* did not survive. While we know that this is a world of active pilgrimage and of relatively quick

[70] Appayya Dīkṣita's definition of *ullāsa* in the *Kuvalayānanda* is: *ekasya guṇadoṣābhyām ullāso 'nyasya tau yadi,* "If through virtues and faults of one thing, the virtues and/or faults of another thing become visible (*ullāsa*)." The examples reference four cases: virtue of one thing reflecting on the virtue of another (as in the case in Rāmabhadra's verse), the fault of one thing reflecting on the fault of another, the virtue of one thing emphasizing the fault of another, and the fault of one thing emphasizing the virtue of another. See *Kuvalayānanda Kārikās of Appayya Dīkṣita*, ed., P. R. Subrahmanya Sarma, (Calcutta: Banerjee and Son, 1903), 110–12. Appayya expanded and retheorized this ornament, which appeared previously in the *Candrāloka*, making this into a recent, close-to-home reference by Rāmabhadra. I thank Yigal Bronner for his thoughts on this point (among numerous others in this dissertation).

exchanges of manuscripts between Nīlakaṇṭha and Banaras intellectuals, we also know that Sanskrit literature no longer played the same cosmopolitan roles that it used to. And Rāmabhadra knows this as well, especially in the context of his hymn to his guru's hymn: not exactly the material that travels far and wide.

This verse seems to notionally echo Bilhaṇa's famous statement about the wide circulation, from villages to regions, from cities to forests, of his own *Vikramadevacarita*.[71] This is, in fact, a fruitful comparison to reflect on. Sheldon Pollock cites Bilhaṇa's statement about his poetry reaching far and wide in his analysis of the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Pollock proposes that while Bilhaṇa's description is exaggerated, it attests to the literary cosmopolitan imagination that Bilhaṇa took an active part in.[72] In Bilhaṇa's case, the exaggeration is not farfetched: it reflects something of the situation on the ground, and is thus a good example of cosmopolitanism. In Rāmabhadra's case, it does something quite different: rather than hyperbole, it is closer to irony.

The intimate cosmopolitans at the heart of this dissertation are hardly cosmopolitans according to Pollock's definition, which stresses cosmopolitanism as action. However, they are, as I suggested above, cosmopolitans in their education and language, in their self insertions into the bottomless world of Sanskrit literature. This distinction can help assess the cosmopolitan *experience* of our authors, what Kate Franklin calls "everyday Cosmopolitanisms": "imagining

[71] *grāmo nāsau na sa janapadaḥ sāsti no rājadhānī tan nāraṇyaṃ na tad upavanaṃ sā na sārasvatī bhūḥ vidvān mūrkhaḥ pariṇatavayā bālakaḥ strī pumān vā yatronmīlat-pulakam akhilā nāsya kāvyaṃ paṭhanti The Vikramāṅkadevacarita of Bilhaṇa*, ed., Murari Lal Nagar,(Governamnet Sanskrit College, 1945),18.89). In Whitney Cox's translation (personal communication): There is no village, no country, no royal city, no forest, no garden, no place of learning, where every last person–wise man, fool, old fellow, young boy, woman, or man–does not recite his poems with a thrill.

[72]Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," 559.

the multiply scaled worlds within which one is situated, and of dwelling (acting, dreaming, making) within those worlds".[73]

Does Rāmabhadra hope this hymn will circulate as Bilhaṇa's did? I am certain he does not; in fact, a close reading of the circulation described in his verse shows that while he rhetorically stresses its width (*sarvatra dṛṣṭo,* "you are everywhere to be seen") he effectively draws relatively modest and rural trajectories, especially when compared to Bilhaṇa's. The latter's capital cities, regions, and schools are replaced with villages, river banks, and "even" (*api*) the city. This ambiguity, or puncturing of the cosmopolitan idiom, is clearly intended. Rāmabhadra is enjoying the differences of scale in his experienced world, where a vast tradition is practiced vigorously and confidently on an admittedly small scale.[74] Another verse in this hymn ironically states that the Ācāryastava outdoes all the great poets of the past, including Bilhaṇa, for that matter.[75]

To be sure, an author like Bilhaṇa also had local contexts that informed his writing. The difference lies in the different psychological and emotional ways of being cosmopolitan. Rāmabhadra knows that his friend's hymn is not likely to travel the imagined cosmopolis, but he praises it with the horizon of possibilities that his intense participation in this literary cosmopolis, rigorously practiced in his small village, enables him. Such self-aware clashes are, as we have

---

[73] Franklin's formulation, which builds on Pollock's emphasis on action, is helpful in that it allows us to foreground the different experiences of cosmopolitanism, in Franklin's case as they were experienced by people living and traveling around the Silk Road in medieval Armenia. Franklin, *Everyday Cosmopolitanisms*, 3.

[74] Here, I disagree with Fisher's analysis of a few of the verses from the *Bhūṣaṇa*, who writes: "…(Rāmabhadra's) mode of address, compelling all learned scholars to take delight in his composition, makes it unambiguously clear that Rāmabhadra intended his hymn not for the confines of a monastery but for a more public consumption among connoisseurs of sophisticated Sanskrit verse…"Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism,* 67–8.

[75] *kṣiptvā bāṇam udāraśabdaracanaṃ bhūyo guṇākarṣaṇāt trāsaṃ bhāsamayūrayor janayatā dūre hariṃ dhūnvatā ācāryastavarāja tatrabhavatā harṣasmayacchedinā coro 'jīyata cāṭukārakavane ced etad arhaṃ tava*, *Bhūṣaṇa,* 11. "You dismiss Bāṇa, who composes noble words; you frighten Bhāsa and Mayūra, with a strike of your bow's excellent sound; you blow Bhartṛhari far away. Ācāryastavarāja, you destroy Harṣa's smile, and defeat Cora (Bilhaṇa) in the woods of clever speech—given all this, you can do anything!"

seen, typical of both Rāmabhadra's and Nīlakaṇṭha's poetry. The major chord of the cosmopolis is happily struck in the intimate setting of the śāla. As a grandson of Vāñcheśvara, one of the eighteenth-century residents of the agrahāra, put it in retrospect:

Śrīśaha-rājendrapure, Śrīśa-harājendra-viṣṭapaiḥ sadṛśe

In the village of the great King Śaha, which is like the worlds
Of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahmā and Indra together.[76]

It is against this background that I want to reflect on the implicit notion of writing that this hymn presents us with. There are several descriptions of the experience of listening to the hymn. For instance:

nodbhūte maṇi-cāmare na ca dhṛtaṃ chattraṃ śaśāṅka-prabhaṃ
na dhmātā jaya-kāhalī na ca punaḥ saṃtāḍito dundubhiḥ
ācāryastavarāja cetasi parāmṛṣṭo 'yam utkaṇṭhayā
saṃdhībhūya punas tathāpi bhavataḥ panthānam ālokate (*Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 9)

Lacking a pair of gemmed chowries,
As well as a high parasol that shines like the moon.
No victory flute is sounded, nor is there the beating of drums.
Ācāryastavarāja, you are rather
grasped in the mind. One first joins you out of curiosity,
and only then perceives your path.

In other verses in the hymn, the addressee sounds more like a living guru than a hymn to a guru ("the whole universe is subdued by you, you are well versed in all the śāstras..." Bhūṣaṇa, v. 7). This has to do with Rāmabhadra's vision of a world infused with unexpected subjectivities through which the poet finds his own voice, like we saw most pointedly in his *Bāṇa* hymn to the arrow. But here and in other occasions, the framework of the diverted address to the hymn is not taken as an enhancing metonym for the guru, or not only as that. It is also, simply, a poem. We

[76] Taken from the commentary of Śleṣacakravartin on the *Mahiṣaśatakam*, written by his great-grandfather in eighteenth century Thanjavur. Cited in Veluthat, "Introduction to Mahiṣaśatakam." The spelling of king Śāhaji as "Śahaji" seems to have been formed to fit the pun.

get a glimpse of a description of Rāmabhadra's experience of listening to a Sanskrit hymn that moved him. Unlike an actual king, its grandeur is first vaguely felt (*parāmṛṣṭa*) in the mind. The result of the process of hearing this hymn and perceiving it (in somewhat odd Sanskrit terms) is composing in response to it: the very framework of the *Bhūṣaṇa* points in this direction. Rāmabhadra explicitly formulates this connection toward the end of the hymn:

> *prītaḥ syād iyato bhavān iti phalet kāmo mamety antataḥ*
> *sandarbhād uparamyate na tu punaḥ śakter abhāvān mayā*
> *ślokānāṃ yad ahaṃ sahasram ayutaṃ kartuṃ punaḥ śaknuyām*
> *ācāryastavarāja tāvakaguṇagrāmaikadeśe sthitaḥ (Bhūṣaṇa,* v. 122)
>
> "Sir, may you be satisfied!", or, "May my desire come to fruition!"—
> finishing my composition like that is really not an option for me.
> I could compose thousands and tens of thousands more verses,
> Just by being near a fraction of your numerous virtues, *Ācāryastavarāja*!

A hymn composed by Rāmabhadra's friend or colleague to their shared guru is an ever-productive muse for the poet. Writing, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is an aim in itself. And here, it is first and foremost the result of reading. This process is strongly tied to what I have analyzed as poetry of filiation. We already saw Rāmabhadra's acknowledged debt to his teachers, those of old and those of late, or living, in his opening of the verse. One can even imagine this hymn to his friend's hymn be a result of some poetic challenge or a product for some event for his teacher, similiar to what we have seen in the description of this village that I opened the chapter with. Here we have a description of the fruition of the generative capacity of being a student, being a co-student, and—to return to the question of the audience—being a reader or an audience member.

What we might, at our historical distance, perceive as a vanishing irrelevant world of Sanskrit writing in the era of the vernacular, probably felt like a vibrant and thriving world to its inhabitants. Rāmabhadra's thriving śālā granted the conditions to write for living ideal readers.

These men's cosmopolitanism thrives within their bound social contexts: they felt at home in their micro-cosmopolis. Their genuine devotion to their gods and teachers allowed their creative explorations of their poetic signature in a world of shared subjectivities.

It is not for nothing, I think, that the intimate cosmopolitanisms that we are encountering trust their audience to read like poets, while offering no auto-commentaries. Their literature betrays no trace of anxiety: the level of playful layering of voices through subtly woven intertexts that we have seen throughout this dissertation could have only be written, I think, with a confidence in one's audience, and in one's collective identity and potential durability fostered through their genealogical networks. That Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra achieved a relative canonical status in the modern story told about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sanskrit poetry is not coincidental. It is because the descendants of their students and family and/or *paramparā*s played a vital role in the making of the Southern Sanskrit canon in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Thus, Kuppuswami Sastri, whose influence on Sanskrit education and publication at the turn of the twentieth century was immense, was raised and educated in the same small brahmadeya of Tiruvisanallur.[77] He made the first pioneering contributions to modern scholarship about Nīlakaṇṭha and his milieu.[78] Sastri's primary guru was another famous scholar known as Tyāgarāja or Rāju Śāstrigal of Mannārguḍi, a proud descendent of Nīlakaṇṭha's family.[79] Kuppuswami's primary student was V. Raghavan, one of the most renowned Sanskrit

[77] Raghavan mentions that Kuppuswami Sastri was from the Tiruvisanallur agrahāra in "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 1. For Kuppuswami's immense contribution to shaping the Sanskrit curriculum and published canon, including for instance his curation of over 60 volumes of the Descriptive Catalogue of th Madras Government Manuscript Oriental Library which resulted in the pioneering publication of numerous Sanskrit works, and and schooled a generation of south Indian research; see Raghavan's introduction to Dr. V. Kameswari et al., eds., *The Kuppuswami Sastri Memorial Volume*, Revised enlarged, 2015.
[78] Notably, Sastri, "Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time"; Sastri, "Introduction to Śivalilārṇava."
[79] For Kuppuswami's relation to his guru Rāju Śāstrigal, See Raghavan's introduction to Kameswari et al., *The Kuppuswami Sastri Memorial Volume*, xviii. Śāstrigal modeled his scholastic life on Appayya Dīkṣita's life, and

scholars of the early 20th century. Raghavan too played a key role in publishing works of and about this milieu of authors, thus securing these authors' place in the Sanskrit hall of luminaries.[80] One of Raghavan's doctoral students is Thiruvengadathan, whose monograph on Rāmabhadra I often cited in this dissertation.[81]

These leading scholars, whose work informed this dissertaion on many levels, were therefore genealogically connected with our authors' world of Sanskrit writing, sustained through the generations in little *agrahāra* villages around Thanjavur. Sastri and Raghavan inherited the image of Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra as ideal poets. Their active canonization of these authors' work—the result of which is Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's modern memory as major Sanskrit poets of early modern South India—is in large part the result of these men's preconceived notions of the Sanskrit canon of luminaries.[82] Situating our authors' genealogical writing in their Brahmin villages thus also points to significant factors in the making of the second-millenium Sanskrit canon of literature as it is being circulated today, in India and beyond.

---

wrote a hagiography on Appayya's life, the *Appayyadīkṣitendravaṃśābhāraṇa*, analyzed in Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory," 23–27.

[80] Several of Raghavan's related contributions include Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," and the edition of the Śāhendravilāsa itself; V. Raghavan, "Some Appayya Dīkṣitas," *Annals of Oriental Research* 6, no. 14 (February 1941); "Kalividambana of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: A Satire on the Present Age," trans., V. Raghavan, *Indian Literature* 13, no. 2 (1970): 76–86. In his well-circulated V. Raghavan, "Use and Abuse of Alaṅkāra in Sanskrit Literature," in *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṅkāra Śāstra* (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1942), 48–91, he opens by citing a few of Nīlakaṇṭha's "manifesto" verses. Raghavan's ambitious vision of Sanskrit in modern India, in which he "...presents the museum of Indian history in such a way that Sanskrit emerges as the prime integrator for the newly independent nation" was recently narrated at length by Charles Scott Preston, "Writing a More 'Saṃskṛta' India: Religion, Culture, and Politics in V. Raghavan's Twentieth-Century Sanskrit Literature" (The University of Chicago, 2016), 328.

[81] Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works*.

[82] Raghavan writes: "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita who walked in his footsteps, set the ideal in the field of poetry". Raghavan, "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ," 18.

Concluding remarks: On Defeating the Kali Yuga with Poetry

In this dissertation, I attempted to describe the aesthetic program and style of a prominent poetic milieu, centered around the influential figures of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita who flourished in early modern South India. One question that hovered over the discussion throughout is, in what sense are these authors early-modern?[1] To put it crudely: are these authors, writing in the final decades of pre-colonial South India, subjects of a premodern, precapitalist era, which would come to be violently replaced with what is generally understood as western notions of time, individuality, and the like? Alternatively, does this corpus reflect an indigenous, alternative transition toward discourses we today conceptualize as modern? By way of conclusion, I restate some of the major findings of this thesis through a discussion that tackles this question by narrowing it down, and ultimately rephrasing it, through a sketch of Nīlakaṇṭha's views on his times.

David Shulman, whose work has been formative of this thesis, has consistently argued for the latter option, of modern sensibilities that are evident within early modern literature of South India. Shulman describes the rise of a "Tamil Modernity" from fifteenth-century South India, which includes:

> Notions of the self and the integrity, also the dis-integration, of self; of dissonant and overlapping temporalities; of irony, broadly defined, and self-parody, or a reflexive reframing of experience that foregrounds cognitive disharmonies and

[1] Sanjay Subrahmanyam is one notable advocate for the "early modern" global, non-eurocentric context, centered on the exceeded connectedness of people and processes world-wide, for instance in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997). Some critiques of this term have centered around the pitfalls of a predetermined search of a single 'modernity' that this term sends the twenty-first century reader to look for. See for instance Chakraborty, "The Muddle of Modernity". I primarily use the term as a historical signifier, "articulating India into a world historical synchrony, not into a world conceptual symmetry" (Sheldon Pollock, "Is There an Indian Intellectual History?" Introduction to "Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5–6 (2008): 536). However, the associations of modernity (or, for that matter, of modernism) as a qualifier are an inevitable and productive part of my discussion, as I discuss below.

> dissent; of shifting models of the mind and of the person; of redefinitions or differential, nuanced theories of what is real; of the relation of human and cultural worlds to the rule-bound natural domain that envelops them and of which they are part; of a reconceived politics and innovative, restructured polities; of cash-based economics and the reconfigured social order; of radical experiments in the erudite sciences, including mathematics, physics, logic, poetics, and linguistics—and so on. It is, of course, often the case that major shifts in all the above areas and topics mask themselves in highly traditional modes of speaking and writing...[2]

In the course of my analysis of this corpus, we have seen several aesthetic features that are in direct conversation with the themes Shulman is describing. For example, I have highlighted the emphasis on irony and self-reflexive parody in this corpus, which I have occasionally termed double voice, irreverence, insincerity; experimentation in the erudite sciences, here through the medium of poetry; and the representation of a fragmented yet personal sense of self. To these, we can add the ideal of an orchestrated range of linguistic registers and an uneven texture within the same work (what I have referred to as *uccāvaca*); a remarkable intertextual depth; and through these, a governing notion of a past tradition that these authors can fit in and outdo, in a way that is similar to contemporaneous trends in the neighboring domain of scholastic Sanskrit.[3]

The ways in which the concerns of our authors are linked to what we have come to understand as "modernity" is, I think, a useful and bold comparative query, worth keeping open

---

[2] Shulman, *Tamil*, 250. This direction of thought was further developed most recently in Shulman's work stemming from his Jerusalem-led ERC project "NEEM" in which I am also taking part. He writes: "in all the major languages of southern India—Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Sanskrit, Persian, and to some extent also Marathi and Oriya—a rich literature of personal introspection, of a new kind, emerged, beginning in the late 15th century and accelerating in intensity through the 16th to 18th centuries." David Shulman, "Seeing into the Mind in Early Modern South India," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 1–2. Also relevant is Shulman's identification of a proto-modern sense of individuality in Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai's self-commissioned biography, cited throughout this thesis, in which there arises: "A consciousness playing at new forms, composing in innovative prose style (mixed with poetry in the lyrical meters) an image of an individual of many parts and aspects, who is nonetheless whole and singular, strikingly separate from other individuals..." Shulman, "Cowherd or King? The Sanskrit Biography of Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai.," 198.

[3] As suggested in Sheldon Pollock, "New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 3–31, and more recently in Yigal Bronner and Lawrence McCrea, *First Words, Last Words: New Theories for Reading Old Texts in Sixteenth-Century India*, Religion in Translation (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

for the sake of the sort of questions it permits us to raise. However, "identifying" modern instances in these texts makes it theoretically difficult to account for the different trajectories of modernity in the world.[4] Even if we pursue the question, with its pitfalls and potentials, the depth of the ocean (to invoke Rāmabhadra's image) of past and contemporaneous literature required for this type of inquiry lies beyond the scope of my ability. To narrow the question down in a way that is relevant to our authors, it might be useful, by way of conclusion, to pursue their understanding of the "modern" as an epistemic condition, rather than a qualifier. That is, how did our authors speak of their own day and age, in relation to the past, and in view of the future?

Throughout this dissertation, I have questioned the nature of these authors' conscious conversation with the Sanskrit tradition: their intimate genealogical self-insertions into the Sanskrit canon suggest that they wished to be read as a time-bound group. The rhetoric of Sarasvatī's ever-fresh fruit, with which I began the dissertation, embedded within itself notions of a collective and timely literary style. We have seen how they mastered the tradition to the point of being free to navigate it, as *sarva-tantra-svatantra* poets, and we saw them use this freedom to subscribe to the authoritative tradition with different degrees of sincerity and self-irony. We saw Nīlakaṇṭha and Rāmabhadra's subtle yet marked personalization of literary as well as devotional and scholastic tropes and idioms. Nīlakaṇṭha's very drive to present a manifesto of Sanskrit literature, his frequent recourse to the old trope of bad poets and critics, and the spatial anchoring of many of these authors' plays into their local religious and communal identities, equally point to these authors' interest in their role as poets living in their time and place. It also became clear, however, that the adherence to traditional genres, conventions, and

[4] The term is Sudipta Kaviraj's, who notes, "if the history of the West itself shows a tendency for forms of modernity to diffract, how can we reasonably expect them to be homogeneous when modernity goes out of the frame of European history into other continents and cultures?" Sudipta Kaviraj, "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity," *European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 3 (2005): 506.

idioms is not mere masking or rhetoric for our authors. It is connected with these authors' intimate identification with their tradition. They did not tend to ask themselves, as far as I can tell, how are they different from their predecessors; their subtlety of conversation with past traditions is one of their core aesthetic programs, and it does not sit very comfortably with modern paradigms of innovation as intervention, however nuanced. How can we describe their understanding of their role in history, then?

Insofar as Nīlakaṇṭha can speak for this milieu of poets, I will offer preliminary thoughts in response to this question by briefly observing his fascination with the idea of the *kaliyuga*, the worst of four ages of the world, in which the current human civilization as we know it exists. Traditionally, the kaliyuga is reckoned to have begun roughly 5,000 years ago, and it is expected to last for another 350,000.[5] The notion of the kaliyuga was a favorite of Nīlakaṇṭha's: he invoked it in different ways throughout his work, often in his programmatic metapoetic verses. Nīlakaṇṭha's poetic appeals to the kaliyuga are typically ambiguous: they reveal hints toward an understanding of his present as different from the past, but they are simultaneously also a way for him to pose a shared, extended present with the past tradition and near future. His multiple takes on the current cosmic age reveal a playful, conflicting, and somewhat optimistic attitude toward his own era, in the form of the corrective human agency foregrounded in the making of (Sanskrit) poetry.

---

[5] Wendy Doniger and Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, 1999, p. 445). Understandings of the kaliyuga as the present became prevalent "during, and especially after, the Gupta period (i.e 320-550 CE)", according to Luis González Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India's Great Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages*, Asian Thought and Culture, vol. 51 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 160. Scholars have probed appropriations of the term to posit questions regarding transitions to an Indian modernity: Sarkar demonstrated a plurality of appropriations of the kaliyuga in late colonial Bengal in Sumit Sarkar, "Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal," in *Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal* (University of Toronto Press, 2016), 98–126. Elsewhere, Sarkar suggests to replace the problematic ways in which naratives of modernity assume a static premodern kaliyuga with a multiplicity of pre-capitalist notions of time Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2002).

The following is one out of numerous verses that Nīlakaṇṭha devotes to his influential great uncle, Appayya Dīkṣita:

> *līḍhālīḍha-purāṇa-sūkti-śakalāvaṣṭambha-sambhāvanā-*
> *paryasta-śruti-setubhiḥ katipayair nīte kalau sāndratām*
> *śrīkaṇṭho 'vatatāra yasya vapuṣā kalkyātmanevācyutaḥ*
> *śrīmān appayadīkṣitas sa jayati śrīkaṇṭha-vidyāguruḥ* (*Vijaya*, v. 1.3)[6].
>
> While the *kaliyuga* had unbearably thickened
> because of the many men who collapsed the dams that are the Vedas,
> imagining them to be grounded on bits and pieces of poetry and purāṇas that they superficially sampled, if at all,
> Appayya Dīkṣiṭa, a follower of the guru Śrīkaṇṭha, the very embodiment of God Śiva- just like Viṣṇu in the form of Kalki-
> prevails!

Kalki is Viṣṇu's tenth messiah-like incarnation, meant to appear with a sudden surge of violence and bring the current kali age to a close.[7] Nīlakaṇṭha fuses the worlds of divine figures with men of the recent past, like the figure of Śrīkaṇṭha (circa 12th century) ,[8] his great uncle Appayya, and his rivals, who misuse the authoritative texts (literally, they chew on them *līḍha,* or do not even do that, alīḍha).[9] In other words, recent events and purāṇic stories are placed on the same axis of history. Moreover, on equating Appayya with Kalki, of all possible incarnations of Viṣṇu, Nīlakaṇṭha is strongly suggesting that the kali era is over! As his contemporary and modern

---

[6] *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya Campū* [*Vijaya*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., K. S. Sastri and N. Raghunathan, (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1965).

[7] As described for instance in *Gītagovinda* 1.14: *mleccha-nivaha-nidhane kalayasi karavālaṃ dhūmaketum iva kimapi karālam, keśava dhṛtakalkiśarīra jaya jagadīśa hare*. "In Kalki's body, you are a sword to eliminate *mleccha* foreigners, like some dreadful comet: Keśava, Hari, King of the world!". "Gītagovinda of Jayadeva (GRETIL)," Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), accessed October 2, 2022, http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_jayadeva-gItagovinda-alt.htm.

[8] Śrīkaṇṭha mentioned in the verse was a 12th-century anonymous scholar, whom Appayya revived in order to found a new philosophical doctrine, the *Śivādvaita*. See McCrea, "Appayyadīkṣita's Invention of Śrikaṇṭha's Vedānta."

[9] Yigal Bronner has shown that Nīlakaṇṭha didn't meet Appayya in person, and was the first to identify Appayya with Śiva himself, which becomes a prevalent trope in later hagiographies of his life by members of the family. Bronner further suggested that the accusation of "imagining" doctrines on the basis of "inexplicit" fragments might be referring to a famous accusation regarding Madhva of the 14th century, said to have invented authoritative scriptures. Yigal Bronner, "A Renaissance Man in Memory: Appayya Dīkṣita Through the Ages," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 19. But this accusation might be less specific, corresponding to a prevalent trope of forgery, as noted in Whitney Cox, *Modes of Philology in Medieval South India* (Brill, 2016), 92.

readers all know, Appaya had lived and died in the recent past. If Appayya redeemed the world of the kaliyuga with his scholarship, Nīlakaṇṭha himself lives in the revived golden age of the Sanskrit world of letters. This implication of the metaphor is made to be amusing and provocative.[10] Still, it markedly differentiates Nīlakaṇṭha's own present from the near past. With this in mind, Nīlakaṇṭha's formations regarding the formative, world-redeeming role of (his) poetry in his manifestos, receive additional force.

Just a few verses after the above-cited verse, Nīlakaṇṭha inscribes the date of his composition, which is the single such reference we have by him:

> *aṣṭa-triṃśad-upaskṛta-saptaśatādhika-catus-sahasreṣu*
> *kali-varṣeṣu gateṣu grathitaḥ kila nīlakaṇṭhavijayo 'yam*. (*Vijaya,* v. 1.10)
>
> When the Kali year four thousand, seven hundred
> and thirty eight (=1638 CE) was complete, this text, the *Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya*, was composed.

This colophon-like verse inserts, in the Kali-year dating system—not a popular system in other poetic works from the early modern south, as far as I can tell—a historical time that Nīlakaṇṭha shares with the past figures he mentioned in the verse above. This historical anchor, which somewhat playfully undoes the previous statement about Appayya's intervention in the kali age, stands in temporal contrast to what immediately follows: the opening of the mythic story of Indra's fatal deportation from heaven, describing the city of gods in the sky. The

[10] When invoking this Vaiṣṇava image to describe both Śiva and Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha is deliberately conflating sectarian notions, which adds to the verse's provocation. There are clues regrading a principally non-defensive religious and sectarian identity in our authors' writings: Nīlakaṇṭha authored a long poem about Kṛṣṇa's life (*Mukundavilāsa*) and even plausibly joked about it in his *Vijaya,* noting a disproportionate poetic treatment of Kṛṣṇa's story when compared to Śiva (Noted in Talia Ariav and Naresh Keerthi, "Churning Selves: Intersecting Biographies in the Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 29–60, p. 32). Nīlakaṇṭha also commissioned the *Bāṇa,* Rāmabhadra's hymn to Rāma; we also have plausible evidence that Nīlakaṇṭha praised the scholastic work of Rāghavendra Tīrtha, the head of a Mādhava maṭham in Kumbhakonam; see Talia Ariav, "Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: An Independent Poet of the Kaveri Delta, or: The Forgotten Model of Genealogical Authorship," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 59, no. 3 (July 1, 2022): 12–13. On Appayya Dīkṣita's negotiation of his Śaiva identity while writing Vaiṣṇava-afiliated works, see Ajay Rao, "The Vaisnava Writings of a Saiva Intellectual," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 5 (2014).

"historical" and "mythic" temporalities are set in deliberate tension within this corpus of works, as we have seen throughout this dissertation.[11] The kali-age is thus a productive way to pose a conflicting and evasive past and present, in both ethical and temporal terms. Consider the following two verses from Nīlakaṇṭha's "manifesto" to his *Līlā*[12]:

> *vidvat-priyaṃ vyaṅgya-pathaṃ vyatītya śabdārtha-citreṣu kaler vilāsāt*
> *prāpto 'nurāgo nigamān upekṣya bhāṣā-prabandheṣv iva pāmarāṇām* (*Līlā,* v. 1.37)
>
> *kṛte yuge vyañjanayāvatīrṇaṃ tretāyuge saiva guṇībabhūva*
> *āsīt tṛtīye tu yuge 'rtha-citram yuge turīye yamaka-prapañcaḥ* (*Līlā,* v. 1.38)
>
> Seduced by the kali age, people turn away from the path of suggestion,
> cherished by the wise, and develop a passion for flashy words and meanings,
> just like those idiots who desert the Veda
> in favor of poetic compositions in vernacular languages.
>
> In the age of perfection, subtle implication descended to earth
> In the treta yuga, it became merely secondary,
> But in the third yuga, poetry became just flashy meaning;
> In the fourth yuga, the world is full of rhymes.

Here, the yugas are an available metaphor for a decline in value. However, they are not completely de-temporalized. In verse 1.37, (discussed in chapter one in the context of the reference to vernacular literature) the kaliyuga marks the present via a self-ironic wink at the contemporary vernacular literary alternatives, while tying the golden past to Vedic scholarship and suggestive poetry. Verse 1.38 creates a vague sense of relatively recent temporality: it is as if the vast time span of the yugas has shrunk to denote a much smaller passage of time. This "history" does not strive for accuracy, nor does it refer to a clear demarcated past. However, it

[11] We have seen the tension of the historic and the mythic in many of these authors' prologues that "place" their otherwise puranic-themed plays in their visions of the socio-religious scape of the Tamil land. See Anna Lise Seastrand, "History, Myth, and Maṭam in Southeast Indian Portraits," *Cracow Indological Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 159–84, for a discussion of portraitures of this period that function in both mythic and historical time.
[12] *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* ed., J. K. Balasubrahmanyam, (Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911).

introduces the idea of historical evolution into Mammaṭa's static typology.[13] Like in the example featuring Appayya above, the kaliyuga allows Nīlakaṇṭha to introduce a recent change in what we might call a historical, rather than mythical, resolution. The scale of the yugas can shrink, in Nīlakaṇṭha's hands, into measurable history. This allows Appaya, like the poet who can choose to write on the "path of suggestion", to reconstitute the golden era.

Most significantly, Nīlakaṇṭha composed a collection of *subhāṣita* verses devoted to the theme, the *Kaliviḍambaṇam*, or "mockery of Kali",[14] certainly his most widely read work. Its popularity was such that it possibly inspired the use of the term "*viḍambaṇa*" as the modern meaning calque of "parody" or "irony" in several Indian languages.[15] While the topic of a degraded society in the kaliyuga is well attested in Sanskrit literature, the format of a systematic *śataka* collection around it seems to be Nīlakaṇṭha's innovation. The text is divided into categories of professions or types, including scholars, spiritual advisers, astrologers, doctors, poets, relatives, moneylenders, poor people, rich people, informers, greedy people, righteous people, and malicious people. Nīlakaṇṭha describes all of these (with the exception of the poor) as hypocrites, whose main motive is money or recognition. Here is how he ends the collection:

> *yatra bhāryā-giro vedā yatra dharmo 'rtha-sādhanam*
> *yatra svapratibhā mānaṃ tasmai śrīkalaye namas* (*Kali,* v. 100)
> *kāmam astu jagat sarvaṃ kālasyāsya vaśaṃvadam*
> *kālakālaṃ prapannānāṃ kālaḥ kiṃ naḥ kariṣyati* (*Kali,* v. 101)
> *kavinā nīlakaṇṭhena kaler etad viḍambanam*
> *racitaṃ viduṣāṃ prītyai rājāsthānānumodanam* (*Kali,* v. 102)

---

[13] Nīlakaṇṭha probably has in mind Mammaṭa's opening of the *Kāvyaprakāśa*. *Kāvyaprakāśa Of Mammaṭa,* ed., Ganganatha Jha, (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1967) v. 1.4–5. See my discussion of Nīlakaṇṭha's close conversation—and ironic distancing—of the discipline of poetics, most notably with Mammaṭa, in ch. 1.

[14] "Kaliviḍambaṇam," in *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, (Institut Francais de Pondichery, 1967), 3–23.

[15] Hindi ("viḍambaṇā"; "Irony, mockery", in Barhi, Learners Hindi-English Dictionary or "viḍambaṇākāvya"; "parody", in Caturvedi, , a practical Hindi-English Dictionary), Marathi ("viḍambaṇa"; "parody, travesty", in Shabdkosh, English Marathi Dictionary). The Kaliviḍambaṇa was printed ten times and translated into Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and Hindi in the short time-span between 1859 and 1911; it has over 30 documented manuscripts in the Catalogus Catalogorum alone, spread throughout the subcontinent (including a copy in the famous library of Kavīndrācarya of Benares).V. Raghavan, *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, 3:230. See my discussion in ch. 1.

> Where the words of one's wife are the Veda, where *dharma* is means of making money,
> where one's own imagination is proof; hail to the glorious Kali yuga!
> Let the whole world be under the sway of time.
> We surrender to Śiva, Slayer of Time; what can time do to us?
> Poet Nīlakaṇṭha composed this *Mockery of Kali*,
> an "applaud" of men of the court,
> for the delight of the learned.

This amused crescendo demonstrates something of the conflicting games of temporality and aesthetics that the kaliyuga offered to Nīlakaṇṭha. His description subscribes to a vision of a degraded extended present that includes the past and the future: his poets, doctors, and astrologers are general enough to be recognizable in future contexts as well.[16] However, through invoking Śiva's epithet as the killer of time/death (*kāla*) based on a famous purāṇic episode, Nīlakaṇṭha is also asking what this framework means, and how can one escape its predetermined outlines. The happy tongue-in-cheek irony with which he praises the kaliyuga in the courtly scene—a rare reference to a courtly surrounding, and I imagine he has Thanjavur in mind—serves to mark his concrete present, and personality, from within the generic framework.[17] His vision of the kaliyuga is far from catastrophic: rather, it serves as material for poetic creativity, and it can be subdued at will.

---

[16] The generic nature of his descriptions make it quite far from a "social critique", as it is sometimes dubbed in scholarship. By contrast, a text from King Śāhaji's reign (1684–1712) called the *Gajaśālākaliviḍambaṇa*, whose name plausibly suggests a reference to Nīlakaṇṭha's text, is written as a petition to the king by the royal elephant's doctor, and includes very specific details regarding the corruption of the caretakers in the elephant stables in Thiruvarūr. "Kaliviḍambanam [Gajaśālākaliviḍambanam]," *The Sarasvati Mahal Library Society*, 1988, 11–29. I thank Eric Gurevich for tracing the published edition of this text in the Sarasvati Mahal Library.

[17] There are roughly equivalent praises of the kaliyuga in well-known sixteenth century Vaiṣṇava poems from Kerala—the *Nārāyaṇīyam,* and the Malayalam *Jñānappāna*, which rely on the older idea that devotion to god in the Kali age is easiest and most accessible. Nīlakaṇṭha might have this idea in mind, but these references do not appear to be ironic as in his poem. For citations of these instances, and their interpertation as a mere guise of accessibility offered by the Bhakti language, See Kesavan Veluthat, "Making the Best of a Bad Bargain: The Brighter Side of Kaliyuga," *Indian Historical Review* 41, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 173–84.

In comparative terms, Nīlakaṇṭha's flexible, somewhat optimistic treatment of the kaliyuga is opposite to a surge of kaliyuga references in epic and puranic literature and inscriptions in the third and fourth centuries AD. Ram Sharan Sharma famously proposed that this recorded fascination was indicative of a crisis in Brahmanical consciousness due to social disorders, such as the mixture of caste (*varṇa*).[18] Nīlakaṇṭha, in contrast, presents a characteristically lighthearted and ironic take on this trope, which highlights the role of human agency in fighting the threats of the age: kali can be overcome through Appayya's scholarship, through composing the subtle poetry of suggestion, or quite simply in devotion to Śiva, slayer of time (the latter two Nīlakaṇṭha does himself). This is also apparent in Nīlakaṇṭha's statement about his reason to compose his *Nala* play: "There are two means to overcome these times, overwhelmed by the filth of the Kali era: either the story of Nala, King of Niṣadha, or Kāśī, the city that purifies worlds." [See discussion of this verse in ch. 2, p. 111].

The playfulness with which Nīlakaṇṭha approaches the trope of the kaliyuga points to his confidence in the conditions of possibility of his poetry, and to his interest in subtly positioning his own times within past and future poetic tradition. These constructions of the kaliyuga support what we gleaned from these authors' sense of their role in history: they do not see themselves as breaking off from a past, or as different from it; but they write as if they can creatively reshuffle it, through internal collisions and orchestrations, so as to remake it from within. As the non-defensive definitions of poetry we have seen in the first chapter, Nīlakaṇṭha's kaliyuga is devoid

[18] Ram Sharan Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society* (Orient Blackswan, 2003), 50. Giovanni Verardi builds on Sharma's proposal to tie the Kali-anxiety of Brahmins to the rise of Buddhist hegemony, which he gathers from archeological evidence.Verardi Giovanni, "Issues in the History of Indian Buddhism," *Research Center For Buddhist Studies in Asia*, 2013, 3. For a survey of uncritical adaptations and critical responses that Sharma's thesis engendered, see Veluthat, "Making the Best of a Bad Bargain," 176–78.

of angst; it is rather a productive way for him to reflect on his time and its ratio to the Sanskrit tradition and on the possibilities of man-made shifts from within.

A. Thiruvengadathan, whose work on Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita has been priceless in shaping this project, thinks of Rāmabhadra's milieu as part of "a golden era, as far as Sanskrit and Hindu art and culture are concerned".[19] With this assessment, Thiruvengadathan is referring to the relatively large scale of patronship of Sanskrit at the Tanjavur court under the Nāyakas and the Marathas between the 16th and the 18th centuries, and to the high quality of their work—posing an argument against inherited suppositions about a decline in the poetic value of medieval and early modern Sanskrit. Mid-eighteenth-century texts from Thanjavur seem to mourn this lost paradise: Kesavan Veluthat has read the *Mahiṣaśatakam*, a political satire written by Rāmabhadra's near contemporary in the Tiruvisanallur village, against the background of the distress caused by famine and shrinking patronage in the years that followed Śāhaji's rule.[20] Veluthat even suggests reading the songs of the celebrated composer Tyāgarāja of the late eighteenth century, who occasionally refers to the kaliyuga, as a "reaction to the political and social decadence as well as economic misery of his times"[21].

Thiruvengadathan is very much an insider of the tradition, an audience member from the future, not unlike his doctoral supervisor Raghavan: both men continued, with the modifications of shifting structures of scholarship in the twentieth century, the genealogical logic of this corpus, as I discuss in chapter four. Thiruvengadathan's label of the golden age captures a

---

[19] A. Thiruvengadathan, *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study* (The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002), 1.

[20] The *Mahiṣaśatakam* was written by Vāñcheśvara Dīkṣita, a resident of the Śāhajipuram village and a descendent of the family of Govinda Dīkṣita (whose son Veṅkaṭeśvara was Nīlakaṇṭha's teacher at court). Veluthat reads a "negative attitude of the times towards scholarship: [whence] the renowned Kuṭṭikavi [the author's nickname] is sleeping at the doorstps of evil lords". Veluthat, "Introduction to Mahiṣaśatakam," 9.Veluthat surmises that the commentator to this text, a great-great grandson of this author, attempted to soften the impression of the critique in a retrospect attempt to preserve the image of the golden age of Thanjavur. *Ibid,* 2–3.

[21] *Ibid*, 8. Veluthat builds on the work of William Jackson for Thyagarāja.

tension that deeply informs this corpus: it is a golden age celebrated on a local scale, by an intimate community of connoisseurs. I began the dissertation with a quest for the experiential and epistemic dimensions of the intimate cosmopolitan authors of this corpus. We have seen that, if directly affiliated with a court or not, these authors write with remarkable confidence in their filial readership and in their place in the world, which governs their tone and aesthetic. The role of good poetry as a possible corrective intervention in the Kali-world of phenomena makes sense when the most immediate dangers of the world seem to be its bad poets, and where literature is not measured by its width of circulation, but rather by the depth of its orchestration.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, ed., Katre, S. M. 1987.

Āccāndīkṣitavaṃśāvali of Vīrarāghavakavi [*Vaṃśāvali*], ed., Sastri, P. P. Subrahmanya. Udupi, 1923.

Ātmārpaṇastuti ["Self Surrender"] of Appayya Dīkṣita, trans., Bronner, Yigal, and Shulman, David. In *"Self Surrender", "Peace", "Compassion", &"Mission of the Goose" of Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika*, 151–86. Clay Sanskrit Library. NYC Press, 2009.

Nalacaritram [*Nala*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Sastri, Shyamdas, and Ramapati Mishra. Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrrita Samsthana, 1987.

"Ācāryastavarājabhūṣaṇa [*Bhūṣaṇa*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Sastri, Subrahmanya, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 162–80. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

Āgamaḍambara of Bhaṭṭa Jayanta, Much Ado about Religion : A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation, trans., Dezso, Casba. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

"Ānandasāgarastava [*Ānanda*] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," ed., Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. In *Oeuvres Poétiques de Nilakantha Diksita*, 256–99. Pondicherry: Institut Francais D'indologie, 1967.

———. *(with English Translation),* trans., Sastirikal, Mahalinka. Cennai: Sri Kamakoti kocastanam, 1954.

———. *(with English Translation and Commentary)*, ed., Krishnan, P.S. Chennai: Mahakavi Sri Nilakantha Foundation, 2000.

Aucityavicāracarcā of Kṣemendra, ed., Datta, Samir Kumar. Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 2002.

Balarāmāyaṇa of Rājaśekhara, ed., Andit Govinda Deva Sastri. Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1869.

Candrakalaśāhajīyam of Cokkanātha, ed., Srinivasa, N. Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1991.

Cārakasamhita, trans., Sharma, Priyavrat. Vol. 1. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1981.

Dharmavijaya campūḥ of Bhūmināṭha Kavi, ed., Govinda, Ke. I. 172. Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1980.

Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana, ed., Bhattacharya, Bishnupada. Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1956.

Gaṅgāvataraṇam [*Gaṅgā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Kedaranatha Sastri, and Vasudeva Laxman Sastri Panasikar. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1916.

Gauḍavaho of Vākpatirāja, ed., Suru, N. G. Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1975.

"Gītagovinda of Jayadeva (GRETIL)." Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL). Accessed October 2, 2022. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_jayadeva-gItagovinda-alt.htm.

"Gurutattvamālikā [*Gurutattva*] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," ed., Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. In *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 219–29. Institut Francais de Pondichery, 1967.

Harṣacarita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa, ed., Kane, Pandurang Vaman. 1st ed. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1917.

Ilakkaṇakkottu of Cuvāmināta Tēcikar, eds., Arumuka Navalar, and Vicuvanata Pillai. Fourth. Cennapattanam: Vittiyanupalannayantiracalai, 1925.

Janakipariṇaya Nāṭaka of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, ed., Sarma, Svetaranya Narayana, trans., Iyer, L.V Ramachandra. Madras, 1906.

"Kaliviḍambanam [Gajaśālākaliviḍambanam]." *The Sarasvati Mahal Library Society*, 1988, 11–29.

"Kaliviḍambaṇam of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," ed., Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. In *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*, 3–23. Institut Francais de Pondichery, 1967.

———. "A Satire on the Present Age," trans., Raghavan, V. *Indian Literature* 13, no. 2 (1970): 76–86.

Kamsavadha of Śrīkṛṣṇa, eds., Durgaprasada, Mahamahopadhyaya, and Kasinath Pandurang Parab. Kāvyamāla 6. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1935.

Kāvyālaṅkāraḥ of Bhāmaha, eds., Sharma, Batuknath, and Baladeva Upādhyāya. 2nd ed. Kasi Samskrita Granthamala. Varanasi: Caukhambha Samskrrita Samsthana, 1981.

Kāvyaprakāśa of Mammaṭa, ed., Ganganatha Jha. Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1967.

Kīrtikaumudī of Someśvaradeva, ed., Abaji Vishnu Kathavate. Bombay Sanskrit series. Bombay: Government central Book depot, 1883.

"Kuśakumudvatīya Nāṭaka [Kuśa] of Atirātra Yajvan (Appendix)," ed., Jayasree, S. In Jayasree, S., "Contribution of Atirātrayajvan." University of Madras, 1983.

Kuvalayānanda Kārikās of Appayya Dīkṣita, ed., Subrahmanya Sarma, P R. Calcutta: Banerjee and Son, 1903.

"Mahābhārata Electronic Text, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute," 1999. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/mbh/sas/mahabharata.htm.

Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti, trans,. Coulson, Michael. Oxford University Press, 1989.

Mohinīvilāsa Kuravañji Nātyanāṭakam of Saptaṛṣi, ed., N. Srinivasan. 2nd edition. Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2016.

Navasāhasaṅka Carita of Padmagupta, ed., Islampurkar, Pandit Vamana Shastri Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010.

Nāṭyaśāstram Of Bharatamuni, ed., Nagar, R. S. Vol. 1–4. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1983.

Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya Campū [*Vijaya*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita,* eds., Sastri, K. S., and N. Raghunathan. Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1965.

Nyāyamañjarī of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, ed., Pandit Śrī Sūrya Nārāyaṇa Śukla. Benares: Vidya Vilas Press, 1936.

Patañjalicaritam of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, eds., Pandit Sivadatta, and Kasinath Pandurang Parab. Kāvyamāla 51. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1895.

Pirayōka Vivēkam of Cuppiramaṇiya Tīkkitar, ed., Kopalayyar, Ti Ve. Tancai Caracuvati Makal 147. Tañcāvūr: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1973.

Ratnāvali of Harṣa, The Lady of the Jewel Necklace & The Lady Who Shows Her Love, trans., Doniger, Wendy. Clay Sanskrit Library 17. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

"Rāmabāṇastava [*Bāṇa*] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Sastri, Subrahmanya, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 147–61. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

"Rāmacāpastava and Rāmabāṇastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," eds., Sivadatta, Mahamahopadhyaha, and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, in *A Collection of Old and Rare Sanskrit Kāvyas*, 1–37. Kāvyamāla 12. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1897.

"Rāmacitrastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 122–35. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

"Rāmaprasādastava of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Subrahmanya Sastri, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 63–80. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

Rāmabhadrasāhasramañjarī; (A Collection of Rāmabhadra's Stotras), ed., Atreya, V. Swaminatha. 2 vols. Bangalore: Sri Mahaperival trust, 2009.

"Rāmastavakarṇarasāyana [Rasāyana] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita," ed., Sastri, Subrahmanya, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 1–54. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, "Valmiki: Ramayana, Kandas 1-7." Accessed September 30, 2022. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/ramayana/ram_1-7u.htm.

Ṛgveda Saṃhitā, ed., Muller, F. Max. 1st Indian edition. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1965.

"Sabhārañjana Śatakam of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita," ed., Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. In *Oeuvres Poétiques de Nilakantha Diksita*, 27–45. Pondicherry: Institut Francais D'indologie, 1967.

Saṃkalpasūryodaya of Veṅkaṭanātha [Vedāntadeśika], ed., Krishnamacharya, V. Adyar Library Seriesno. 65. Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library, 1948.

Sevāntikāpariṇaya Nāṭakam of Śrī Cokkanātha, ed., Narayanaswamy Sastry, S. Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, 1959.

Sāhityadarpaṇa of Viśvanātha Kavirāja, ed., Pandurang, Javaji. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1936.

Sāṅkhya-kārika of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa, ed., Sharma, Dr Har Dutt. Poona: The Oriental Book Agency, 1933.

Śāntivilāsa [*Śānti*, "*Peace*"] of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: trans., Bronner, Yigal and Shulman, David. In *"Self Surrender", "Peace", "Compassion", &"Mission of the Goose" of Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika*, 187–226. Clay Sanskrit Library. NYC Press, 2009.

Śāradātilaka Bhāṇa of Śaṅkara*: Spring Pastimes of an Indian Gallant,* trans., Baldissera, Fabrizia. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Inst, 1980.

Śivalilārṇava [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*, ed., Balasubrahmanyam, J. K. Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911.

———. *(with Tamil Commentary and Translation),* trans., Jagadisan, S. 2 vols. Bangalore: Sri Mahaperival trust, 2013.

Śrīnivāsavilāsacampū of Veṅkaṭhādhvarin, eds., Durgaprasada, Mahamahopadhyaya, and Pandurang Parab. Kāvyamāla 33. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1886.

Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa [*Śṛṅgāra*] *of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita,* eds., Pandit Śivadatta, and Kasinath Pandurang Parab. Kāvyamāla 44. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1894.

Tiruvaymoli of Nammalvar, trans., Venkatesan, Archana, *Endless Song;* Gurugram, Haryana, India: India Penguin, 2020.

Udātta Rāghavam of Māyurāja, ed., V. Raghavan, trans., M. Jayaraman. Chennai: Centre for Performing Arts, 2016.

Vakroktijivita of Kuntaka, ed. Kashi Sanskrit series 180. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1967.

Vasantavilāsa of Bālacandrasūri, eds., Dalal, C.D, and Candanabālāśrī. Ahmedabad: Bhadraṅkara Prakāśana, 2010.

Vasulakṣmīkalyāṇam of Veṅkaṭasubrahmaṇya, ed., Rāghavan Piḷḷai, K. Trivandrum Sanskrit series. Anantaśayana: Keralaviśvavidyālaya, 1969.

Vikramāṅkadevacarita of Bilhaṇa, ed., Nagar, Murari Lal. Governamnet Sanskrit College, 1945.

"Viśvagarbhastava [Viśva] of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita." In *Kāvyamāla Anthology*, eds., Durgaprasada, Mahamahopadhyaya, and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, 22–44. Kāvyamāla 14. Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1938.

———. ed., Sastri, Subrahmanya, in *Stavamaṇimālā, Stotras of Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita*, 101–21. Sarasvati Vilasa Series 6. Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1932.

Viśvaguṇādarśa Campū of Veṅkaṭādhvarin, ed., Mahadev Gangadhar Shastri Bakre. Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1906.

With a Grain Of Sand: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska, trans., Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak. 1st edition. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001.

Secondary Sources

Ali, Daud. "The Subhasita as an Artifact of Ethical Life in Medieval India." In *Ethical Life in South Asia*, edited by Pandian Anand and Daud Ali. Indiana University Press, 2010.

———. “Verses at the Court of the King: Shifts in the Historical Imagination of the Sanskrit Literary Tradition during the Second Millennium.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 1 (2021): 1.

Appadurai, Arjun. *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. Verso Books, 2013.

———. *Worship And Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Apte, Vaman Shivaram. “Deśika.” In *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1858–92.

———. “Uccāvaca.” In *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1858–92.

Ariav, Talia. “Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita: An Independent Poet of the Kaveri Delta, or: The Forgotten Model of Genealogical Authorship.” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 59, no. 3 (2022): 273–98.

Ariav, Talia, and Whitney Cox. “On Unresolved Tensions in Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita’s Śṛṅgāratilakabhāṇa.” *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2022): 47–71.

Ariav, Talia, and Naresh Keerthi. “Churning Selves: Intersecting Biographies in the Nīlakaṇṭhavijaya.” *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (2022): 29–60.

Ariav, Talia, and Margherita Trento. “A History of Sandeśa on Stage (and Its Aftermath): Sanskrit Padams from Eighteenth-Century Thanjavur.” In *Mapping the World through Courier Poetry*, edited by Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, Forthcoming.

Arnold, David, and Stuart Blackburn, eds. *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Bahri, Hardev. “Viḍambaṇā.” In *Learner’s Hindi-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Rajapala, 1989.

Baker, Christopher John. *An Indian Rural Economy 1880-1955 : The Tamilnad Countryside*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1984.

Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Revised ed. edition. Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1982.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. “The Heteroglot Novel.” In *The Bakhtin Reader*, edited by Pam Morris, 88–122. Britain: Arnold Publishers, 1994.

Baron, Scarlett. *The Birth of Intertextuality: The Riddle of Creativity*. Routledge, 2020.

Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88.

Baumer, Rachel Van M., and James R. Brandon, eds. *Sanskrit Drama in Performance*. Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1993.

Bes, Lennart. *The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early Modern South India*. Leiden University Press, 2022.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, by John Richardson, 241–58. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986.

Branfoot, Crispin. "Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India." *Artibus Asiae* 72 (2012): 323–76.

———. *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple*. Society for South Asian Studies, British Academy, 2007.

Breckenridge, Carol Appadurai, Pollock, Sheldon, K. Bhabha, Homi, and Chakrabarty, Dipesh, eds. *Cosmopolitanism*. A Millenial Quartet Book. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Bronner, Yigal. "A Renaissance Man in Memory: Appayya Dīkṣita Through the Ages." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016).

———. "A Text with a Thesis: The Rāmāyaṇa from Appayya Dīkṣita's Receptive End." In *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, edited by Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea. Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011.

———. "Change in Disguise: The Early Discourse on Vyājastuti." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 2 (2009): 179–98.

———. *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

———. "Singing to God, Educating the People: Appayya Dīkṣita and the Function of Stotras." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, no. 2 (2007): 113–30.

Bronner, Yigal, Cox, Whitney, and McCrea, Lawrence, eds. *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011.

Bronner, Yigal, and McCrea, Lawrence. *First Words, Last Words: New Theories for Reading Old Texts in Sixteenth-Century India*. Religion in Translation. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Bronner, Yigal, and Shulman, David. "A Cloud Turned Goose: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millennium." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 1 (2006): 1–30.

———. "Introduction to Poems and Prayers From South India." In *"Self Surrender", "Peace", "Compassion", &"Mission of the Goose" of Appayya Dīkṣita, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, and Vedānta Deśika*, xix–lxx. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: NYC Press, 2009.

Bronner, Yigal, Shulman, David and Tubb, Gary. *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Introduction to Mapping the World through Courier Poetry." In *Mapping the World through Courier Poetry*, Forthcoming.

Bühnemann, Gudrun. "Some Remarks on the Structure and Application of Hindu Sanskrit Stotras." *WZKS* XXVII (1984): 73-104.

Busch, Allison. *Poetry in Motion: Literary Circulation in Mughal India*. Brill, 2014.

———. "The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/Riti Tradition." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 45.

Caturvedi, Mahendra. "Viḍambaṇākāvya." In *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary*. Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979.

———. "Vyaṅgya." In *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary*. Delhi: National Publishing House, 1970.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Muddle of Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 663–75.

Cox, Whitney. "A South Indian Śākta Anthropogony: An Annotated Translation of Selections from Maheśvarānanda's *Mahārthamañjarīparimala*, Gāthās' 19 and 20." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2012): 199–218.

———. *Modes of Philology in Medieval South India*. Brill, 2016.

———. *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry in Medieval South India: Moonset on Sunrise Mountain*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Culler, Jonathan. *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

Cutler, Norman. *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion*. Indiana University Press, 1987.

Dasan, A.S. “Discerning the Intimacies of Intertextuality: A.K Ramanujan’s Hyphenated Cosmopolitan Approach to Translation Theory and Practice.” *Translation Today Volume 8 Issue 02* 8, no. 2 (2014): 90–104.

Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Second. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Doniger, Wendy, and Inc Merriam-Webster. *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions ; Wendy Doniger, Consulting Editor*. Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, 1999.

Duquette, Jonathan. *Defending God in Sixteenth-Century India: The Śaiva Oeuvre of Appaya Dīkṣita*. Oxford Oriental Monographs. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Eaton, Richard M., and Wagoner, Phillip B. *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India’s Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Ebeling, Sascha. “Appeasing the Assembly: Competition among Poets and the History, Poetics and Social Logic of the Avaiyaṭakkam Convention in Tamil Literature.” In *Colophons, Prefaces, Satellite Stanzas. Paratextual Elements and Their Role in the Transmission of Indian Texts*., edited by Eva Wilden and Suganya Anandakichenin, 139–80. Hamburg University Press, 2020.

———. *Colonizing the Realm of Words*. New York: SUNY, 2010.

Edelmann, Jonathan B. “Introduction to Special Issue: Stotra, Hymns of Praise in Indian Literature.” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 3 (December, 2016): 303–7.

Filliozat, Pierre-Sylvain. *Oeuvres Poetiques De Nilakantha Diksita*. Institut Francais de Pondichery, 1967.

Fisher, Elaine. “A Śākta in the Heart: Śrīvidyā and Advaita Vedānta in the Theology of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita.” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 124–38.

———. *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*. South Asia Across the Disciplines. California: University of California Press, 2017.

———. “A Microhistory of a South Indian Monastery: The Hooli Bṛhanmaṭha and the History of Sanskritic Vīraśaivism.” *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2019): 13–47.

———. “Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and the Saubhāgyacandrātapa: A Study of the Role of Śrīvidyā among Prominent Intellectual Families in Early-Modern South India.” Accessed September 4, 2022.

Foucault, Michel. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Franklin, Kate. *Everyday Cosmopolitanisms: Living the Silk Road in Medieval Armenia*. California: University of California Press, 2021.

Freschi, Elisa, and Maas, Philipp A. eds. *Adaptive Reuse: Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Cultural History*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016.

Fuller, C. J., and Narasimhan, Haripriya. *Tamil Brahmans: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Ganeri, Jonardon. "Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5/6 (2008): 551–62.

Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Reprint. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Giovanni, Verardi. "Issues in the History of Indian Buddhism." *Research Center For Buddhist Studies in Asia*, 2013.

Gomez, Kashi. "Sanskrit and the Labour of Gender in Early Modern South India." *Modern Asian Studies*, 2022, 1–28.

González Reimann, Luis. *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India's Great Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages*. Asian Thought and Culture, vol. 51. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Goren-Arzony, Sivan. "On Brewing Love Potions and Crafting Answers: Two Literary Techniques in an Early Modern Maṇipravāḷam Poem." *Cracow Indological Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 85–109.

Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Granoff, Phyllis. "Putting the Polish on the Poet's Efforts: Reading the Karṇasundarī as a Reflection on Poetic Creativity." In *Innovations and Turning Points : Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, 525–49. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Sarasvati's Sons: Biographies of Poets in Medieval India." *Asiatische Studien* XLIX, no. 2 (1995).

Guha, Sumit. "Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500-1800." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 23–31.

Ho, Engseng. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*. California: Univ of California Press, 2006.

Hopkins, Steven Paul. *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Horta, Paulo Lemos, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Bruce Robbins, eds. *Cosmopolitanisms*. New York: NYU Press, 2017.

Ingalls, Daniel H. H. "Ānandavardhana's Devīśataka." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 565–75.

Johnson, Jeannine. *Why Write Poetry?: Modern Poets Defending Their Art*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007.

Kameswari, Dr. V., Dr. K. S. Balasubramanian, Vasudeva, Dr. T.V, Yamuna, Dr. V. Devi, and Krishna, Sri. S. N., eds. *The Kuppuswami Sastri Memorial Volume*. Revised enlarged., 2015.

Kane, Pandurang Vaman. *History of Sanskrit Poetics*. Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1971.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity." *European Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 3 (2005): 497–526.

Keshavmurthy, Prashant. "Khushgu's Dream: Building an Ark with Ārzu and Bīdil'." In *Sabk: Essays on Form, Manner and the Stylistics of Metaphor in Persian and Indo- Persian Literatures*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Kittel, Ferdinand. "Vyaṅgya." In *Kannada-English Dictionary*. Madras: University of Madras, 71 1968.

Kleberg, Lars. "Parody and Double-Voiced Discourse: On the Language Philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin." In *Dialogue and Technology: Art and Knowledge*, edited by Bo Göranzon and Magnus Florin, 95–102. London: Springer, 1991.

Lacapra, Dominick. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts." *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980): 245–76.

Lockwood, Michael, and Bhat, Vishnu A. *Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama: Part I*. Second, Revised and Enlarged. Madras: Tambaran Research Associates, 2005.

Malamoud, Charles. "The Theology of Debt in Brahmanism." In *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, edited by David White. Delhi: OUP, 1996.

Massey, Doreen B. *For Space*. 1st edition. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005.

McCrea, Lawrence. "Appayyadīkṣita's Invention of Śrikaṇṭha's Vedānta." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 81–94.

———. "Mahimabhaṭṭa's Analysis of Poetic Flaws." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 1 (2004): 77–94.

———. "One 'Resonance' and Its Reverberations: Two Cultures in Indian Epistemology of Aesthetic Meaning." In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, edited by Arindam Chakrabarti, 25–40. England: Bloomsbury, 2016.

———. "Standards and Practices: Following, Making, and Breaking the Rules of Śāstra," in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2011).

Meyler, Bernadette. "Bakhtin's Irony." *Pacific Coast Philology* 32, no. 1 (1997): 105–20.

Minkowski, Christopher. "Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History." *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (March 23, 2011): 205–31.

———. "Nilakantha Caturdhara's Mantrakasikhanda." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 2 (2002).

Mirashi, V. V. *Bhavabhūti*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996.

Mirnig, Nina. "Adapting Śaiva Tantric Initiation for Exoteric Circles: The Lokadharmiṇī Dīkṣā and Its History in Early Medieval Sources." In *Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions: Essays in Honour of Alexis G.J.S Sanderson*, edited by Dominic Goodall, Shaman Hatley, Harunaga Isaacson, and Srilata Raman, 249–82. Gonda Indological Studies 22, 2020.

Molesworth, T.S. "Viḍamban." In *A Dictionary, Marathi and English*. Bombay: Education Society Press, 1857.

Monius, Anne E. "Love, Violence, and The Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 2/3 (2004): 113–72.

Morris, Pam, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. London ; New York, 1995.

Narayana Rao, Velcheru. "Kings, Gods, and Poets: Ideologies of Patronage in Medieval Andhra." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture, ed. B. Stoler Miller*, 142–59. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Nayar, Nancy A. *Poetry As Theology: The Srivaisnava Stotra in the Age of Ramanuja*. Wiesbaden, 1992.

Nelson, Lance. "The Ontology of Bhakti: Devotion as Paramapurusartha in Gaudiya Vaisnavism and Madhusudana Sarasvati." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (August 1, 2004): 345–92.

Oberlin, Heike, and Shulman, David, eds. *Two Masterpieces of Kūṭiyāṭṭam: Mantrāṅkam and Aṅgulīyāṅkam*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Letters Home: Banaras Pandits and the Maratha Regions in Early Modern India." *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 201–40.

———. "Speaking from Siva's Temple: Banaras Scholar Households and the Brahman 'Ecumene' of Mughal India." *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (March 23, 2011): 253–77.

O'Hanlon, Rosalind, and Minkowski, Christopher. "What Makes People Who They Are? Pandit Networks and the Problem of Livelihoods in Early Modern Western India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, no. 3 (2008): 381–416.

O'Hanlon, Rosalind, Minkowski, Christopher, and Venkatkrishnan, Anand, eds., *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India: Discipline, Sect, Lineage and Community*. Routledge, 2017.

Ollett, Andrew. *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India*. South Asia Across the Disciplines. California: University of California Press, 2017.

Orr, Leslie C. "Processions in the Medieval South Indian Temple: Sociology, Sovereignty and Soteriology." In *South-Indian Horizons: Felicitation Volume for François Gros on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, edited by Jean-Luc Chevillard and Eva Wilden, 437–70. Collection Indologie. Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2004.

Orsini, Francesca. "The Multilingual Local in World Literature." *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015): 345.

———. "Whose Amnesia? Literary Modernity in Multilingual South Asia." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 266–72.

Peterson, Indira Viswanathan. "Multilingual Dramas at the Tanjavur Maratha Court and Literary Cultures in Early Modern South India." *The Medieval History Journal* 14, no. 2 (2011): 285–321.

———. "The Evolution of the Kuravañci Dance Drama in Tamil Nadu: Negotiating the 'Folk' and the 'Classical' in the Bhārata Nātyam Canon." *South Asia Research* 18, no. 1 (1998): 39–72.

Philip Brown, Charles. "Vyaṅgyamu." In *Telugu English Dictionary*. Madras, 1798.

Pollock, Sheldon. *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

———. "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History." *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 591–625.

———. "In Praise of Poets: On the History and Function of the Kavirpraśaṃsā." In *Ānanda Bhāratī: Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy Felicitation Volume*, edited by B Channakeshava and H.V Nagaraja Rao, 443–57. Mysore: D. V. K. Murthy., 1995.

———. "Introduction." In *Rama's Last Act (Uttararāmacaritam) By Bhavabhūti*, 27–62. Clay Sanskrit Library. NYU Press, 2007.

———. "Is There an Indian Intellectual History?" Introduction to "Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5–6 (2008): 533–42.

———. "New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 3–31.

———. "The Death of Sanskrit." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (April 2001): 392–426.

———. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. California: University of California Press, 2009.

———. "The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, no. 1/2 (2001): 197–229.

———. "What Was Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka Saying?" In *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History : Essays in Honor of Robert P. Goldman*, 143–84. New Delhi: Manohar, 2010.

Raghavan, V. "Introduction to Śahendravilāsaḥ." In *Śahendravilāsaḥ of Śrīdharaveṅkaṭeśa (Ayyaval)*, Second edition. Vol. 54. Sarasvati Mahal Series. Thanjavur: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2016.

———. "Sanskrit Drama in Performance." In *Sanskrit Drama in Performance*, First Indian Edition., 9–44. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993.

———. *Sanskrit Drama: Its Aesthetics and Production*, Madras: Punarvasu, 1993.

———. "Some Appayya Dīkṣitas." *Annals of Oriental Research* 6, no. 14 (February 1941).

———. "Use and Abuse of Alaṅkāra in Sanskrit Literature." In *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṅkāra Śāstra*, 48–91. Madras: The Adyar Library, 1942.

———. ed., *New Catalogus Catalogorum*. Vol. 3. University of Madras, 1967.

———. *The Power of the Sacred Name: Indian Spirituality Inspired by Mantras*. Edited by William J. Jackson and M. Narasimhachary. Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2011.

Raman, Srilata. *Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Shrivaishnavism: Tamil Cats Or Sanskrit Monkeys?* Routledge, 2007.

Ramanujan, A. K. "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections." *History of Religions* 28, no. 3 (1989): 187–216.

Rao, Ajay. "The Vaisnava Writings of a Saiva Intellectual," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 5 (2014).

———. *Re-Figuring the Ramayana as Theology: A History of Reception in Premodern India*. 1st edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2014.

Rao, Velcheru Narayana, and Shulman, David. *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India*. University of California Press, 1998.

———. *Classical Telugu Poetry*. University of California Press, 2002.

Rao, Velcheru Narayana, Shulman, David, and Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Roy, Kumkum. "Poetic Pasts: Patrons, Poets and Lesser Mortals in Bāṇa's Biography." *Religions of South Asia* 5, no. 1 (2012).

Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press, 1983.

Sanderson, Alexis. "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir." In *In Mélanges Tantriques à La Mémoire d'Hélène Brunner / Tantric Studies in Memory of Hélène Brunner*, edited by Dominic Goodall and Padoux, André, 231–442. Pondichéry: IFI / EFEO, 2007.

———. "The Visualization of the Deities of the Trika." In *Image Divine: Culte et Méditation Dans Hindouisme*, edited by A. Padoux, 31–88. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (1990), 31-88.

Sarkar, Sumit. *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2002.

———. "Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal." In *Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal*, 98–126. University of Toronto Press, 2016.

Sastri, Kuppuswami. “Introduction to Śivalilārṇava.” In *Śivalilārṇava* [*Līlā*] *of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita*, 1–38. Srirangam: Vani Vilas Press, 1911.

———. “Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and the Poets of His Time.” *The Indian Antiquary*, 1904, 126–42, 176–96.

Seastrand, Anna Lise. “History, Myth, and Maṭam in Southeast Indian Portraits.” *Cracow Indological Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 159–84.

Semino, Elena. “Stylistics and Linguistic Variation in Poetry.” *Journal of English Linguistics* 30, no. 1 (2022).

Sharma, R. S., and Sharma, Ram Sharan. *Early Medieval Indian Society (Pb)*. Orient Blackswan, 2003.

Shulman, David. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1980.

———. “Bhavabhūti on Cruelty and Compassion.” In *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, by Paula Richman, 49–69. University of California Press, 2001.

———. “Cowherd or King? The Sanskrit Biography of Ānanda Raṅga Piḷḷai.” In *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, edited by David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, 175–202. Delhi: Indiana University Press, 2004.

———. *Introspection and Insight: South Indian Minds in the Early Modern Era*. Delhi: Primus, 2022.

———. *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012.

———. “Murāri’s Depths.” In *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, 443–90. Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. *Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar and the Invention of Modern Carnatic Music: The Abhayâmbā Vibhakti-Kṛtis*. Gonda Lecture 21. Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2014.

———. “Prabandha: Mode, Tone, Theme,” 2019. https://neemerc.huji.ac.il/publications/prabandha-mode-tone-theme

———. “Seeing into the Mind in Early Modern South India.” *Cracow Indological Studies* 24 (August 18, 2022): 1–21.

———. *Tamil: A Biography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

———. “The Early-Modern South Indian Prabandha.” *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (May 4, 2022): 1–21.

———. *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Singer, Milton. “The Radha-Krishna ‘Bhajans’ of Madras City.” *History of Religions* 2, no. 2 (1963): 183–226.

Sjoman, Norman. “Jagannātha’s Definition of Poetry: An Analysis of the Introductory Verses of Rasagangādhara and the Definition of Poetry.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1981): 359–402.

Soneji, Davesh. “The Powers of Polyglossia: Marathi Kīrtan, Multilingualism, and the Making of a South Indian Devotional Tradition.” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 339–69.

———. *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India*. South Asia Across the Disciplines. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Sperber, Dan, and Wilson, Deirdre. “Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction.” In *Radical Pragmatics*, edited by Peter Cole, 295–318. New York: Academic Press, 1981.

Stainton, Hamsa. *Poetry as Prayer in the Sanskrit Hymns of Kashmir*. AAR Religion in Translation. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Stein, Burton. “Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (1977): 7–26.

———. *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*. Oxford University Press, 1980.

Sternbach, Ludwik. *Subhasita, Gnomic and Didactic Literature*. Wiesbaden : O. Harrassowitz, 1974.

Stoker, Valerie. *Polemics and Patronage in the City of Victory: Vyasatirtha, Hindu Sectarianism, and the Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara Court*. University of California Press, 2016.

Subrahmanya Sastri, P. P. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji’s Sarasvatī Mahāl Library, Tanjore*. Vol. IIX. Srirangam: Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1928.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia.” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997).

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Thiruvengadathan, A. *Ramabhadra Diksita and His Works: A Study*. The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 2002.

Tieken, Herman. "On Beginnings: Introductions and Prefaces in Kāvya." In *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, 86–108. South Asia Research. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "The Pūrvaraṅga, the Prastāvanā, and the Sthāpaka." *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Südasiens* 45 (2001).

Trento, Margherita. "Translating the Dharma of Shiva in Sixteenth-Century Chidambaram: Maṟaiñāṉa Campantar's Civatarumōttaram, with a Preliminary List of the Surviving Manuscripts." In *Essays on the Śivadharma and Its Network*, edited by Florinda De Simini. Napoli: Unior Press, 2021.

Tubb, Gary. "The Plays of Bhavabhūti." In *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavya Literature*, edited by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, 395–414. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Unni, N. P. *Nilakantha Diksita*. Sahitya Akademi, 1995.

Veluthat, Kesavan. "Making the Best of a Bad Bargain: The Brighter Side of Kaliyuga." *Indian Historical Review* 41, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 173–84.

———. "Introduction to Mahiṣaśatakam." In *The Buffalo Century: Vāñcheśvara Dīkṣita's Mahiṣaśatakam: A Political Satire for All Centuries*, 1–17, 2011.

Venkatkrishnan, Anand. "Leaving Kashi: Sanskrit Knowledge and Cultures of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century South India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 57 (2020).

"Viyaṅkiyam." In *The Tamil Lexicon*. University of Madras, 36 1924.

Vose, Steven M. "Jain Uses of Citrakāvya and Multiple-Language Hymns in Late Medieval India: Situating the Laghukāvya Hymns of Jinaprabhasūri in the 'Assembly of Poets.'" *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20, no. 3 (2016).

Vriddhagirisan, V. *The Nayaks of Tanjore*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995.

Wallis, Christopher. "The Descent of Power: Possession, Mysticism, and Initiation in the Śaiva Theology of Abhinavagupta." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 247–95.

Washbrook, David. “The Maratha Brahmin Model in South India: An Afterword.” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 597–615.

Williams, Monier. “Kākavandhyā.” In *Sanskrit–English Dictionary*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1899.

———. “Śabala.” In *Sanskrit–English Dictionary*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1899.

Williams, Tyler. “Notes of Exchange: Scribal Practices and Vernacular Religious Scholarship in Early Modern North India.” *Manuscript Studies* 3, no. 2 (October 2019).

Wilson, H Horace. “Introduction to Malati and Madhava.” In *Malati and Madhava (Translation of Bhavabhūti’s Mālatīmādhava)*. Calcutta: Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1835.

Wujastyk, Dominik. “La Bibliothèque de Thanjavur.” In *Espaces et Communautés*, edited by Michel Albin, Vol. 1. Paris: Lieux De Savoir, 2007.

———. “Rāmasubrahmaṇya’s Manuscripts: Intellectual Networks in the Kaveri Delta, 1693-1922.” In *Aspects of Manuscript Culture in South Asia*, edited by Saraju Rath, 235–52. Brill, 2012.

Zak, Gur. “Modes of Self-Writing from Antiquity to the Later Middle Ages.” In *Oxford Handbooks Online*, edited by Ralph. J. Hexter and David Townsend, 486–505. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Zvelebil, Kamil. *Tamil Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1974.

Unpublished Dissertations

Ambika, C. P. “Adbhutapanjaram of Narayana Diksita: A critical study.” Mahatma Gandhi University, 1998.

Bellefleur, Timothy Earl. “Reconsidering Rājaśekhara : Performance and Courtly Context in Viddhaśālabhañjikā.” University of British Columbia, 2012.

Clare, Jennifer Steele. “Canons, Conventions and Creativity: Defining Literary Tradition in Premodern Tamil South India.” UC Berkeley, 2011.

Jayasree, S. “Contribution of Atirātrayajvan.” University of Madras, 1983.

Koppedrayer, Kathleen Iva. “The Sacred Presence of the Guru: The Vellala Lineages of Tiruvavaturai, Dharmapuram, and Tiruppanantal.” McMaster, 1990.

Maitra, Nabanjan. “The Rebirth of Homo Vedicus: Monastic Governmentality in Medieval India.” The University of Chicago, 2021.

Preston, Charles Scott. “Writing a More ‘Saṃskṛta’ India: Religion, Culture, and Politics in V. Raghavan’s Twentieth-Century Sanskrit Literature.” The University of Chicago, 2016.

Raji, K.K. “Rasaratnākara Bhāṇa: Critical Study and Translation.” Government Sanskrit College, 1999.

Venkatkrishnan, Anand. “Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and the Bhakti Movement.” Columbia University, 2015.

Vedia, D.G. “Agunadarsacampu: A Critical Study.” Baroda, 1972.

Web Sources

Akepiyapornchai, Manasicha. “Pre-Vedāntadeśika Application of Mīmāṃsā Hermeneutics in the Validation of the Doctrine of Self-Surrender to Personal God (Prapatti).” Vancouver, 2018. https://www.academia.edu/40831318/Pre_Veda_ntades_ika_Application_of_Mi_ma_m_sa_Hermeneutics_in_the_Validation_of_the_Doctrine_of_Self_surrender_to_Personal_God_Prapatti.

“Ananda Sagara Stavam | Stotram.Co.In.” Accessed October 1, 2022. https://stotram.co.in/ananda-sagara-stavam/.

“Bhagavaddhyāna Sopanam of Vedānta Deśika,” https://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/vdesikan/bhagavad_dhyana_sopanam/index.html.

Maha Periyava “ Divine Expositions” Ananda Sagara Stava Audio with English Translation, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9uIQpxvGLI.

“Nyāsa Daśakam of Vedānta Deśika.” Accessed September 29, 2022. https://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/vdesikan/nyasa_dasakam/index.html.

“(Self-Hate), in Google Ngram Viewer.” Accessed September 29, 2022. https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%28Self-hate%29&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3.

Sridhara Ayyaval Mutt, Tiruvisaloor. “Sri Sridhara Ayyaval.” Accessed October 1, 2022. https://www.sriayyaval.org/history/ayyval_works/Index_works.htm.