





A World of Nourishment  
Reflections on Food in Indian Culture

*Edited by Cinzia Pieruccini and Paola M. Rossi*

**LEDIZIONI**

## CONSONANZE

Collana del  
Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Filologici e Linguistici  
dell'Università degli Studi di Milano

diretta da  
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3

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ISBN 978-88-6705-543-2

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Ledizioni – LEDIpublishing

Via Alamanni, 11

20141 Milano, Italia

[www.ledizioni.it](http://www.ledizioni.it)

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## *Preface, and a homage to Professor Giuliano Boccali*

Today as in the past, perhaps no other great culture of humankind is so markedly characterised by traditions in the field of nutrition as that of South Asia. These traditions see manifold forms of significance interweaving, according to broadly distinctive peculiarities. In India, in fact, food has served to express religious values, philosophical positions or material power, and between norms and narration Indian literature has dedicated ample space to the subject, presenting a broad range of diverse or variously aligned positions, and evidence of their evolution over time. This book provides a collection of essays on the subject, taking a broad and varied approach ranging chronologically from Vedic antiquity to the evidence of our own day.

The preliminary versions of the essays collected here were presented at an International Seminar held at the University of Milan in 2014 (*Food and Fasting. Nourishment in Indian Literature, Art and Thought*, 18-20 September 2014). The Seminar was organised in the framework of the solid tradition that has, since 1998, seen regular collaboration in rotating Seminars on various aspects of the literature and culture of India in the Indological Centres of a number of European universities. The group organising these rotating Seminars has grown over time and now includes, apart from the University of Milan, the Charles University in Prague, the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, the University of Warsaw, the University of Calicut (India), and the University of Cagliari. As also evidenced by this volume, the Seminars see the participation of scholars from numerous other Italian and international universities, and the fruit of this collaboration is to be seen in a great many publications.<sup>1</sup> One of the founders and promoters of this regular series of activities, and indeed the main organiser of the Seminar, the results of which are presented here, is Professor Giuliano Boccali. After his long experience of teaching Iranian Philology at the 'Ca' Foscari' University of Venice and the University of Milan, he served as full professor in Indological studies in Venice for 10 years, and subsequently, from 1997 to 2014, in Milan. In fact, Italian and international Indology are greatly indebted to his work as a scholar and as promoter of activities. We are indeed delighted to be able to dedicate this book

1. An updated list of the Seminars derived from this collaboration and the related publications can be consulted at the website of the Indological disciplines of the University of Milan (<http://users.unimi.it/india/>), at the English page 'Seminars and events' and the Italian page 'Convegni e seminari'.

to him, with gratitude and affection, as one of the tributes that his Milanese school and the community of scholars of Indological studies wish to pay him.

The approach adopted for this collection of essays, as previously mentioned, covers a very broad chronological span, in accordance with the fields explored in the various contributions. As far as possible, they have been arranged in chronological order in terms of sources and periods examined, and in part, generally without excessive temporal divergences, in conceptual clusters. The first essays look back to Vedic antiquity. A celebrated Ṛgvedic hymn dedicated to food (*Rgveda* 1.187) comes under the essentially linguistic analysis of Massimo Vai (University of Milan), while Joanna Jurewicz (University of Warsaw) concentrates her analysis on some passages of the cosmogonies of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*. Here she applies both philological and cognitive linguistics methodologies as tools to reconstruct what she considers an accomplished expression of fully coherent philosophical thought. With Edeltraud Harzer (University of Texas at Austin, USA) we move on to analysis of the ‘formative forces that largely contributed to an ambivalence towards eating meat’, approached in particular through study of Buddhist sources and passages of the *Mahābhārata*. Again, the *Mahābhārata* comes under the scrutiny of Danielle Feller (University of Lausanne), investigating the different pictures offered by different passages of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* of the Pāṇḍavas’ diet during their exile in the forest. Fabrizia Baldissera (University of Florence), on the other hand, looks into the significance of fasting on the basis of an ample range of ancient sources, analysing its various purposes, such as a means to achieve purity, obtain a boon, or make a voluntary pledge or expiation.

A group of papers then takes us in the direction of South India. Jaroslav Vacek (Charles University in Prague) presents a vast annotated repertoire of terms for different foods and beverages in Sangam literature, where the ample references to such topics ‘appear to be another aspect of the very realistic image of everyday life offered by the Sangam Anthologies’, and which, in the words of the author, would well deserve further systematic studies. Alexander Dubyanskiy (Moscow State University), by contrast, considers the significance attributed to food in ancient Tamil literature: ‘how food enters the sphere of Tamil culture and literature, what semantics it acquires, and how it is used with poetical purposes’, while in the paper by Chettiarthodi Rajendran (University of Calicut, India), we find a survey of the discourses on food by the Vidūṣaka, the comic character, in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Kerala’s traditional Sanskrit theatre. In the paper by Cinzia Pieruccini (University of Milan), a short story included in Daṇḍin’s *Daśakumāracarita* is analysed not only for the precious evidence on the food that was actually consumed in southern – Tamilian – India at the time, but also to highlight what appears to be the main purpose of the author, i.e. exaltation of the pure Brahmanical customs of that area of India to which he himself belongs.

After Sanskrit theatre and Daṇḍin, also the next two papers deal with *kāvya*, the classical courtly literature of India. Lidia Szczepanik (Jagiellonian University,



Cracow) discusses *dūtakāvya*, ‘messenger-poetry’, presenting poetical works in which the messenger is a bird, either a *haṃsa* or a *kokila*, focusing in particular on the birds’ sustenance during their journeys. Alessandro Battistini (Sapienza – University of Rome) offers ‘a complete review and translation of the passages dealing with *kāvyaṭpāka*, the “ripeness of poetry”, throughout the whole history of Sanskrit poetics’, a theory whose origins seem to lie in comparison ‘between poetry and fruit, the same idea that underlies the notion of the *rasa* “sap/aesthetic experience”’. Again, from *kāvya*, and indeed from other branches of literature and from visual arts, Hermina Cielas (Jagiellonian University, Cracow) draws her evidence, presenting a wide-ranging survey on the historical consumption of betel.

The focus is now on South Indian religious practices with the paper by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (Jagiellonian University, Cracow), who investigates the Pāñcarātrika texts on the subject of the food offered to the deity, and in particular on its treatment after the offering itself, when ‘it contains (...) [the deity’s] energies, which are potentially dangerous’. Then Lidia Sudyka (Jagiellonian University, Cracow) deals with some narrations – and in particular accounts drawn from adaptations of the *Bṛhatkathā* – as well as folk traditions concerning food endowed with the power to promote pregnancy.

With the paper by Danuta Stasik (University of Warsaw) we move on to a different literary and linguistic milieu. Through analysis of battle passages in Tulsīdās’s *Rāmcaritmānas* the author comes to her main conclusion, namely that in these passages ‘Tulsīdās repeatedly uses food and eating imagery (...) to expound the soteriological dimension of Rām Bhakti. (...) This imagery, first of all, refers to Rām’s image as the all-devouring Time/Death and to the *bhakta*’s longing to be united with his Lord’. In turn, Stefania Cavaliere (University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’) offers a detailed study of Keśavdās’s *Vijñānagītā* (1610), a philosophical work where the theme of food ‘is used as a metaphor for any worldly temptation binding the self to the *samsāra*, but also represents the means to restrain one’s own appetites and advance spiritually and ethically towards liberation’.

The paper by David Smith (Lancaster University) presents an extensive survey of Indian representations of aphrodisiacs, starting from modern examples and going back in time: from modern advertisements to illustrated manuscripts, and on to the temples of Khajuraho and elsewhere. It is followed by an analysis of Akbar’s – at least – semi-vegetarianism by Giorgio Milanetti (Sapienza – University of Rome), where contemporary sources are discussed to highlight this attitude of the great Mughal emperor in the framework of a very elaborate and peculiar concept of kingship.

More recent Hindi literature is taken into account in the following papers. Tatiana Dubyanskaya (Jagiellonian University, Cracow) offers a critical analysis of the lively passages dedicated to the food-bazaar by Bharatendu Harishchandra in his six-act farce *Andher Nagari Chaupaṭṭ Rājā* (lit. *The Blind/Anarchic City*

[with] *a Defunct King*, 1881). Donatella Dolcini (University of Milan) proposes a reading of *Kafan (Shroud)* by Prem Chand (1880–1936), singling out the revocation of twelve different aspects of hunger in this celebrated short story. The next three papers investigate the relationship between food and women in present-day India. Dagmar Marková (Prague), and Monika Browarczyk (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań) discuss the subject as treated in works by contemporary Hindi woman authors, while Sabrina Ciolfi (University of Milan) offers some examples of how Hindi cinema portrays the traditional women's fasts and their role as cooks and providers of food. In turn, Gautam Chakrabarti (Freie Universität Berlin) focuses on the multifaceted evolution of colonial Calcutta's cuisine in the framework of Bengali detective fiction, thus delineating 'a variegated portraiture of dietary habits and consumption-patterns of new, intercultural dishes that respond to (...) the changing demands of a rapidly-transforming society, which was still deeply tied to its civilisational ethos and cultural capital'.

The next two papers deal with recent works of Indian literature in English. Daniela Rossella (University of Potenza) analyses the different and highly metaphorical connotations of food and especially flesh, as food and as that of the human body, in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), a novel which moves between India and the USA. Alessandro Vescovi (University of Milan) proposes some reflections on this novel, too, and on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), pointing out how food appears to highlight the tensions between globalizing modernity and the continuance of India's age-old traditional dietary habits in these two works. Finally, the paper by Maria Angelillo (University of Milan) presents some results of extensive fieldwork among the Kalbeliya caste of Rajasthan, where peculiar funeral customs include, among other ritual acts, truly 'extravagant feasting and food distribution'.

While these essays as a whole reveal an exceptionally wide-ranging approach, we also wish to point out how useful and, indeed, in many respects indispensable such a broad view is when exploring an area so rich in implications and so crucial to Indian culture. Modern and contemporary attitudes to food in India can, in fact, only be understood in a diachronic perspective. On the other hand, to understand Indian antiquity it is essential to take into account that ultimately, as indeed is the case today in the sweeping changes entailed by globalisation, we are dealing with a culture that has always shown manifold tendencies, tensions and developments occurring within the framework of constant self-analysis and reflection.

In such a complex cultural blend, the wide-ranging approach has allowed a *fil rouge* to be outlined: the relationship between food and the feminine figure is transverse to manifold papers, confirming what was announced in 1995 by Patrick Olivelle, in his famous review essay *Food in India* («Journal of Indian Philosophy» 23, 367-380), about another fundamental work on this subject, *The Eternal Food*, by R. S. Khare (SUNY Press, Albany 1992). Both scholars highlighted the importance of the women-food connection in their studies, although

they recognized that such an issue had yet to be given proper attention. In this sense the essays collected here can be considered the founding point of more in-depth research. In particular, the relationship of food to women is traced out from three different aspects, which can be summarized in the archetypical figure of Annapūrṇā (M. Browarczyk's paper) or in the modern cinematographic feminine stereotype (S. Ciolfi's paper): food and eroticism; food and fecundity; food and feminine virtuous status.

The first of these three aspects of food is hinted at in A. Dubyanskiy's and J. Vacek's papers, related to the Tamil literature and culture, and, according to L. Szczepanik, is a main concern of *dūtakāvya* texts; aphrodisiac practices also relied on the magic 'sex-food' connection as focused on by D. Smith and H. Cielas; likewise, S. Cavaliere's paper underlines the relation between desire and food, since stomach and uterus are conceived of as 'sympathetically' corresponding. The theme of food and fecundity is the focus of both L. Sudyka's essay with its particular reference to mango fruits and also A. Dubyanskiy's paper; D. Dolcini connects it to the maternal role, in which the starving condition results from the death of the wife-mother.

However, these two aspects of the 'women-food' relationship are frequently interwoven with the third one, that is food and the feminine virtuous status: aphrodisiac substances can only be handled by 'good and auspicious' women (see D. Smith, H. Cielas and S. Cavaliere), and likewise, feminine fecundity is the most significant trait of the virtuous status of women. Thus, on the one hand, such a *subhaga* characteristic makes a woman 'the ideal one', worthy of being married and becoming a 'wife', as explained in C. Pieruccini's paper; on the other hand, the virtual good wife, endowed with 'auspicious signs', is depicted as equivalent to the devoted worshipper, in a Bhaktic religious perspective, as in M. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz's paper. In the light of this devotional tendency, some of D. Feller's and E. Harzer's observations could be even more interesting: the fact that it is especially women who practice vegetarianism, as opposed to meat-eating warrior customs.

Finally, the same 'women-food' relationship in its manifold aspects is dealt with in a modern critical key in the last papers, with particular reference to Anglo-Indian literature: here the representation of woman's condition assumes a more pregnant meaning, merely in consideration of the traditional feminine role in relation to food outlined above.

We hope that these partially sketched remarks will also be 'good' and 'auspicious' for any research yet to come.

Cinzia Pieruccini, Paola M. Rossi



# Some marginal linguistic notes about *R̥gveda* I.187 (*annastuti*)<sup>1</sup>

Massimo Vai  
Università degli Studi di Milano

## I. *Sāyaṇa* and the *R̥gvidhāna*

At the beginning of the commentary to *R̥gveda* (henceforth RV) I.187, which is dedicated to *pitú*, even though it is traditionally known as *annastuti*, *Sāyaṇa* explicitly introduces a passage from the *R̥gvidhāna*, whose reading is different in some points from that of Meyer's critical edition (Meyer 1877, 10: 'totum hunc locum citat Sāyaṇus ap. Müller [1903] non sine variis lectionibus'), although the general sense is the same.

Meyer's text is quoted below – in the transcription of his time – adjoining *Sāyaṇa*'s variant readings according to the current mode of transcription:

### *R̥gvidhāna* 26.6

pitum̐ nv ity upatishṭeta nityam annam upasthitam̐  
pitum̐ nu *ití* *upa*+√*sthā*-OP3SG always food-ACC *upa*+√*sthā*-PT-ACC  
[pūjayed açanam̐ nityam̐ bhuñjīyād avikutsayan /6/]  
√*pūj*-OP3SG food-ACC always √*bhuj*-OP3SG a-vi+√*kuts*-PRPT-NOM  
(*Sāyaṇa*: *bhum̐jīta hyavikutsayan*)

27

nāsyā syād annajo vyādhir;  
NEG\_of-him √*as*-OP3SG from-food-NOM disease-NOM  
visham̐ apy annatām iyāt.  
poison-NOM also √*ad*-PT-TĀ-ACC √*i*-OP3SG  
(*Sāyaṇa*: *viṣam̐ apyam̐ṛtam̐ bhavet*)

[visham̐ ca pītvaī\_tat sūktam̐ japeta  
poison-ACC and √*pā*-GER\_this hymn-ACC √*jap*-OP3SG  
vishanāçanam̐ /

1. Acknowledgment of help: it is my most pleasant duty to thank Maria Piera Candotti, Guido Borghi, Paola M. Rossi and Tiziana Pontillo for many valuable suggestions.

poison-destroying-ACC

(Sāyaṇa: *japed viṣavināśanam*)

nāvāgyatas tu bhuñjīta, nāçucir,  
na\_a-vāg-yata-NOM\_PTC √*bhuj*-OP3SG na\_a-çuci-NOM

na jugupsitaṃ.  
NEG disgusting-ACC

dadyâc ca pūjayec caiva juhuyâc ca çuciḥ sadâ /;  
√*dā*-OP3SG and √*pūj*-OP3SG and\_PTC √*hu*-OP3SG and pure-NOM always

(Sāyaṇa: *havis tadā*)

kshudbhayaṃ nāsyā kimcit syân; nānnajaṃ  
hunger-fear-NOM NEG\_of-him any √*as*-OP3SG NEG\_from-food-ACC

vyādhim āpnuyât.]  
disease-ACC √*āp*-OP3SG

And the following is Gonda's (1951, 32-33) translation:

(Whilst muttering the sūkta beginning with) 'the nourishment' one must regularly worship food that is at one's disposal: one shall regularly honour one's food and eat it without reviling. (Then) a disease caused by food will not (befall) him; even poison will become food. And when one has drunk poison one shall mutter this sūkta which is poison-destroying. But one must not eat without being reserved in speech, nor when one is not pure, nor (eat) disgusting food. And one shall always give and worship and offer (oblations in a) pure (state): (then) one will be entirely exempt from fear of hunger, (and) one will not catch a disease caused by food.

As Patton (2005) has abundantly illustrated, this passage allows us to understand, so to speak, the pragmatic value of RV 1.187: a prayer which concerns food, but not in the sense as it is normally understood. In other words, it is not a thanksgiving for received food, but a formula to be muttered in order to receive protection from eventual damage caused by food (or even by its lack).

Interestingly Sāyaṇa in his commentary always glosses *pítu-* with *pālakāna-*, so etymologically associating it to 'protect'. This etymology agrees with one of the alternatives occurring in Nirukta 9.24:<sup>2</sup>

*piturityannanāma / pātervā / pibatervā / pyāyatervā / tasyaiṣā bhavati*

The word *pitu* is a synonym of food. It is derived from [the root] *pā* [to protect], or from *pā* [to drink], or from *pyāy* [to swell].<sup>3</sup>

2. Quoted from Sarup (1967, 147).

3. María Piera Candotti points out to me that the name *pítu-* 'father' could be analysed as an agent noun by the Indian grammarians, and precisely as the agent noun of the root *pā-* with the meaning 'to protect'. So it seems to me that, in analysing *pítu-*, Sāyaṇa has combined that analysis of *pítu-* with Nirukta's analysis of *pítu-*, choosing the 'irregular' root form *pí-* with meaning 'to

Patton (2005) has devoted her entire monograph to the relationship between the *Rgvidhāna* and *Rgveda* and has already drawn some interesting conclusions on the practical and habitual use of the Vedic hymns. While many scholars see this as a magical use, Patton prefers to think of it in terms of the metonymic use of the hymns. In any case,

(...) the Vidhāna literature consists entirely of *viniyogas*, or applications of Vedic mantras, outside the sacrificial situation entirely. These texts imply that the brahmin himself, through the mere utterance of mantras, can change any situation in which he might find himself. These Vidhāna texts are, in a way, a natural extension of the Gṛhya Sūtras, although the domestic ritual itself is less present and the focus is on the use of the Vedic text alone as having magical powers.<sup>4</sup>

Besides this quoted passage from the *Rgvidhāna*, *pitú-* is also found elsewhere in the *Rgveda* as one of the main elements for which gods are asked for their protection and revenge is requested against those who try to steal it, e.g.:

RV 7.104.10

yó	no	rásam	dípsati	pitvó	agne
who-NOM	us	essence-ACC	√ <i>dabh</i> -DES.3SG	<i>pitú</i> -GEN	Agni-VOC
yó	áśvānām	yó	gávām	yás	tanūnām
who	horses-GEN	who-NOM	cows-GEN	who-NOM	bodies-GEN
ripúḥ	stenáh	steyakṛd		dabhrám	etu
deceitful-NOM	thief-NOM	committing-theft-NOM		distress-ACC	√ <i>i</i> -IMP3SG
ní	śá	hīyatām	tanvā	tánā	ca //
PREV	he	√ <i>hā</i> -IMP.PS3SG	self-INSTR	offspring-INSTR	and

Geldner (1951, II, 274) translates:

Wer uns den Saft der Speise verderben will, den unserer Rosse, Kühe oder unserer Leiber, o Agni, der Schelm, der Dieb, der Diebstahl begeht, soll dahin schwinden, er soll mit Leib und Kindern eingehen!

Jamison–Breterton (2014, II, 1016-17):

Whoever wishes to cheat us of the essence of the food, o Agni, or of our horses, of our cows, of our bodies, / let the swindling thief who does the theft go to insignificance. Let him be bent double, along with his life and lineage.

protect', possibly through the irregular affix (*tu*N. This analysis could explain his constant glossing *pitú-* as *pālakāna*.

4. Patton 2005, 27.

The previous observations have illustrated the pragmatics connected with RV 1.187. But what exactly is the meaning of *pítú-*?

## 2. Uses of the word *pítú-* in comparison with *ánna-*

RV 1.187 is traditionally known as *annastuti*. Graßmann (1996, 812) translates *pítú-* as ‘*Saft, Trank, Nahrung* [von pi]; in 187 als gottheit personificirt’: he therefore relates it etymologically to the verb  $\sqrt{pi-}/pī-$  ‘Schwellen, Strotzen; voll sein (von Gütern, Segen)’.

Mayrhofer in KEWA (II, 278) translates *pítú-* as ‘nourishment, food, esp. solid food’. However he thinks about i.e. *\*pítu-* in terms of ‘ein isoliertes idg. Nomen, von dem zwar denominative Verba ausgegangen sind, das aber auf keine Verbalwurzel sicher zurückgeführt werden kann’. The same scholar in EWAia (II, 130) accepts Kurylowicz’s explanation of the i.e. alternation *\*pítu-/\*pejtu-* as ‘Ergebnis verschiedener Fixierung eines ursprünglich beweglichen Paradigmas’.

In the Brāhmaṇic sources the *pítú-* = *ánna-* equivalence is clearly stated, e.g.:

### *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.13.13

pituṣaṇir		ity.	ánnam	vai	pitu-NOM,
bestowing-food-NOM		<i>iti</i>	food-NOM	PTC	nourishment
dakṣiṇā	vai		pítu		
fee-NOM	PTC		nourishment-NOM		

Keith (1920, 116) translates: ‘winner of nourishment (he says); nourishment (*pítú*) is food (*ánna*); nourishment is sacrificial fee’.

The same association of *pítú-* with a request for protection, as found in the *Ṛgvidhāna*, can also be observed elsewhere, in particular, as protection from food that can be a source of harm:

### *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.9.2.20

pāhí	mā	didyóḥ	pāhí	prásityai	pāhí
Protect me		thunderbolt-ABL	protect	fetter-DAT?	protect
dúriṣṭyai <sup>5</sup>		pāhí	duradmanyā	<i>iti</i>	sárvābhyo
badly-sacrificing-DAT?		protect	bad-food-ABL	all-ABL	me_pain-ABLPL
gopāyéty	evaitád	āh_āviṣam		naḥ	pítuṃ
protect_iti	<i>eva_etad</i>	$\sqrt{ah-}$ 3SG	non-poisonous-ACC	our	nourishment

5. With abl. case in T.S. 2.3.13.3: *dúriṣṭyā evánam pāti*, cf. Delbrück 1888, 110.



kṛṇv ity ánnaṃ vaí pitúr anamīváṃ na  
 √kṛ-IMP *iti* food-NOM PTC nourishment-NOM salubrious-ACC our  
 idám akilviṣam ánnaṃ kurv ít्य evai\_tád āha  
 this-ACC sinless-ACC food-ACC √kṛ-IMP *iti* *eva*\_this says

Eggeling (1882, 261) translates:

‘Guard me from the thunderbolt! guard me from bonds! guard me from defective sacrifice! guard me from noxious food!’ he thereby says, ‘Protect me from all kinds of injury!’ - ‘Make our nourishment free from poison!’ – nourishment means food: ‘make our food wholesome, faultless!’ this is what he thereby says.

The possibility of incurring the danger of food poisoning is not only a concern of the *Brāhmaṇas*, but also of some *R̥gvedic* hymns, e.g.:

*R̥V* 8.25.20

váco dīrgháprasadmani\_īśe vājasya gómataḥ /  
 speech-NOM having-extensive-seat-LOC\_√īś-ATM3SG prize-GEN cow-rich-GEN  
 īśe hí pitvò ’viśásya dāváne //  
 √īś-ATM3SG *hí* nourishment-GEN non-poisonous-GEN √*dā*-INF

Jamison–Brereton (2014, II, 1082):

The speech at (the plays) providing a long seat [= ritual ground] gains control (*īśe*) over a prize rich in cattle. It gains control (*īśe*) over non-poisonous food for giving.

Geldner (1951, II, 335):

Ein Wort bei Dirghaprasadman<sup>6</sup> vermag rinderreichen Lohn, es vermag ja giftlose Speise zu geben.

This also allows us to observe that non-poisonous food (*pitvò aviśásya*) is a matter of concern in *R̥V* too, just as in the *R̥gvidhāna* and in Sāyaṇa’s commentary.

6. Geldner (1951, III, 335, n. 20: ‘In diesem Zusammenhang wäre Beziehung auf Sūrya wohl denkbar’.

3. *Can ánna and pitú be synonymous?*

In some RV hymns *pitú-* and *ánna-* seem totally interchangeable, e.g.:

RV 10.117.2-4

2

yá	ādhṛāya	cakamānāya	pitvó	
who-NOM	poor-DAT	√kam-PPF.ATM-DAT	nourishment-GEN	
’nnavān	sán	raphitāy_opajagmūṣe /		
having-food-NOM	√as-PTPR-NOM	√raph-PPP-DAT_upa+	√gam-PPF-DAT	
sthírām	mánaḥ	kr̥ṇuté	sévate	puró
hard-ACC	mind-ACC	√kr̥-ATM3SG	√sev-ATM3SG	hitherto
_tó cit sá	mard̥itāraṃ	ná vindate //		
also PTC he	merciful-acc	NEG√vid-ATM3SG		

3

sá	íd	bhojó	yó	grháve	dádāty
he	PTC	charitable-NOM	who-NOM	beggar-DAT	√dā-PAR3SG
ánnakāmāya	cárate	kr̥śāya /			
food-desirous-DAT	√car-PRPT-DAT	emaciated-DAT			
áram	asmai	bhavati	yāmahūtā		
in-accordance	to-him	√bhū-3SG	invocation-LOC		
utā_pariṣu	kr̥ṇute	sákhāyam //			
and_future-LOC	√kr̥-3SG.ATM	friend-ACC			

4

ná	sá	sákhā	yó	ná	dádāti	sákhye
NEG	he	friend-NOM	who	NEG	√dā-3SG	friend-DAT
sacābhúve	sácamānāya	pitvāḥ /				
companion-DAT	√sac-PRPTATM-DAT	nourishment-GEN				
ápā_smāt	pré_yān	ná	tád	óko	asti	
ápā_from-him	prá+√i-OP3SG	NEG	this-NOM	home-NOM	√as-3SG	
pr̥ṇántam	anyám	áraṇaṃ	cid	ichet //		
√pr̥-PT-ACC	another-ACC	foreign-ACC	PTC	√is-OP-3SG		

Jamison–Brereton (2014, III, 1587):

2. Whoever – when a man, weak and broken, has approached desiring nourishment (*pitvó*) – though he has food (*annavān*), hardens his heart, though he always used to be his friend, he also finds no one to show mercy.
3. Just he is benefactor who gives to the beggar who, emaciated, goes roaming, desirous of food (*ánnakāmāya*). He becomes sufficient for him at his pleading entreaty, and he makes him his companion in the future.
4. He is no companion who does not give of his food (*pitvāḥ*) to a companion, who, being in his company, accompanies him. He should turn away from him; this is not a home. He should seek another who gives, even a stranger.

Geldner (1951, III, 342-343):

2. Wer selbst Speise hat, aber gegen den Armen, der Speise begehrend, klappernd kommt, sein Herz verhärtet und doch früher sein Freund war, auch der findet keinen, der sich seiner erbarmet.
3. Der ist ein Gastfreier, der dem Bettler gibt, welcher abgemagert, Speise wünschend kommt. Er steht ihm zu Diensten, wenn er ihn unterwegs anruft, und für die Zukunft erwirbt er sich einen Freund.
4. Der ist kein Freund, der dem Freunde von seiner Speise nichts gibt, dem treuen Kameraden. Er soll sich von ihm abwenden, hier ist seines Bleibens nicht; er suche einen anderen Geber, auch wenn der ein Fremder ist.

In actual fact, the beggar is described once in this passage *asādhṛāya cakamānāya pitvó*, and the second time, in the following verse, as *ánnakāmāya cārate kṛśāya*. Therefore in this case *pitú-* and *ánna-* seem to be coreferring words. Benveniste (1955, 32) thinks that this whole hymn highlights the *pitú-* = *ánna-* equivalence.<sup>7</sup> Other cases of similar co-occurrence can also be found elsewhere, e.g.:

ṚV 10.1.4

áta	u	tvā	pitubhṛto	jánitrīr	
then	PTC	thee	nourishment-bringing-NOMPL	parents-NOMPL	
annāvṛdham		práti	caranty	ánnaiḥ /	
by-food-growing-ACC		práti+√car-PR3PL	foods-INSTR		
tā	īm	práty	eṣi	púnar	anyárūpā
them	PTC	práti+√i-2sg	in-turn	having	another shape-ACCPL
ási	tvam	vikṣú	mānuṣīṣu	hótā //	
√as-2SG	thou	tribe-LOCPL	human-LOCPL	hótr-NOM	

Jamison–Brereton (2014, III, 1368):

And then your birth-givers [= ‘kindling wood’], bringing nurture (*pitubhṛto*), proceed toward you, who are strengthened by food (*annāvṛdham*), with food (*ánnaiḥ*); you go toward them in turn as they (acquire) other form [= ‘burn’]. You are the Hotar among the clans of Manu.

Geldner (1951, III, 122):

7. See Benveniste (1955, 32-33): ‘L’hymne X 117 porte sur le don de nourriture e met en évidence l’équivalence *pitú-* = *ánna-*. Le riche pourvu d’aliments (*ánnavān* str. 2) ne doit pas repousser le pauvre qui désire la nourriture (*cakamānāya pitvó*, cf. *ánnakāmāya* str. 3); on blâme celui qui ne donne à ses amis aucune part de sa nourriture (*pitvāh*)’.

Dann kommen dir, dem durch Speise Wachsenden, die Nahrung bringenden Erzeugerinnen mit Speisen entgegen. Zu ihnen kehrst du wieder zurück, wenn die andere Gestalt angenommen haben. Du bist der Opferpriester unter den menschlichen Stämmen.

In this case too, the *jánitr̥s* are *pitubhṛt-* and proceed bringing *ánna-*: therefore, *pitú-* and *ánna-* also seem to be synonymous words.

From the point of view of Indo-European comparative linguistics, we are in the presence of two distinct terms, whose analysis presents a quite different degree of difficulty: *ánna-*, as is known, is normally reduced to *\*adna-* (see EWAia I, 79) and this should be the past participle of  $\sqrt{h,ed-}$  ‘eat’ (see. LIV<sup>2</sup>, 230), a well spread root throughout the whole Indo-European family.

Instead, the etymological relationships of *pitú-* are much less perspicuous, and some occurrences in the R̥V seem to contradict the idea of ‘solid food’ (*feste Nahrung*), which is proposed in EWAia II, 130. In fact, Widmer (2004, 21-22) also identifies some instances where *pitú* can be ‘squeezed’ and ‘drunk’, e.g.:

#### R̥V 10.15.3

āhám	pitṛṇ	suvidátrām̐	avitsi
I	fathers-ACC	propitious-ACCPL	$\sqrt{vid}$ -AORISGATM
nápātam	ca	vikrámaṇam̐	ca viṣṇoḥ /
grandson-ACC	and	stride-ACC	and Viṣnu-GEN
barhiśádo	yé	svadháyā <sup>8</sup>	sutásya
on-barhis-sitting-NOMPL	who-NOMPL	<i>svadhā</i> -INSTR	<i>sutá</i> -GEN
bhájanta	pitvás	tá	ih_āgamiṣṭhāḥ //
$\sqrt{bhaj}$ -INJ3PL	pitú-GEN	they-NOM	here_most-willingly-coming-NOMPL

In this case, Geldner’s translation and Jamison–Brereton’s are very different: Geldner (1951, III, 145):

Die (Manen), die auf dem Barhis sitzend nach Herzenslust vom ausgepreßten Trank (*sutásya ... pitvás*) genießen, die kommen am liebsten hierher!

Jamison–Brereton (2014, III, 1393):

Those who, sitting on the ritual grass, share in the pressed soma (*sutásya*) and the food (*pitvás*) at (the cry of) ‘*svadhā*’, they are the most welcome arrivals here.

8. Here Jamison and Brereton think that *svadhā* should be understood as the moment of the invocation; Geldner, on the contrary, understands ‘to their (viz. ‘Manes’) heart’s content’.

In this context, Geldner considers *sutásya* [...] *pitvás* ‘ausgepreßten Trank’ as a single nominal constituent, whereas Jamison and Brereton translate it as two (asyndetically) coordinate constituents: *sutásya* ‘pressed soma’<sup>9</sup> and *pitvás* ‘food’. In the following case too, *pitúm* appears as ‘den Trank’ in Geldner’s translation, while it is translated as ‘the nourishment’ in Jamison–Brereton’s:

RV 1.61.7

asyéd	u	mātúḥ	sávaneṣu	sadyó
his_PTC	PTC	mother-GEN	sávana-LOCPL <sup>10</sup>	instantly
maháḥ	pitúm	papivāñ	cārv	ánnā /
great-GEN	pitú-ACC	√pā-PF.PT.NOM	pleasing-ACCPL	food-ACCPL

Geldner (1951, I, 78):

Bei seiner Mutter Somaspenden hat er so gleich den Trank (*pitúm*) seines großen Vaters getrunken, seine Lieblingsspeisen (*ánnā*). Vishnu, der Stärkere, stahl den gekochten Reisbrei; er traf den Eber durch den Fels hindurch schießend.

Jamison–Brereton (2014, I, 180):

Just this one – he, having already in an instant drunk the nourishment (*pitúm*) of his great (father), the pleasing food (*ánnā*) at his mother’s soma-pressings – while Viṣṇu the stronger stole the cooked (rice-porridge), he pierced the boar through the stone, (Indra) the archer.

#### 4. Etymological problems: *pitú-* in comparative Indo-European linguistics

Pokorny (1959, 793) attributes a large set of derivatives to the i.e. root *\*peǵ(ə)-*, *\*pǵ-* ‘fett sein, strotzen’, among which we find: *pǵ-tu-* ‘Fett, Saft, Trank’; *páyate* ‘schwillt, strotzt, macht schwellen, strotzen’ and *páyas* ‘Saft, Wasser, Milch’.

A totally different opinion is sustained by Benveniste (1955, 29-36) who deems it unlikely that a single lexical unit could contain such an extraordinary diversity of concepts: ‘moisture, milk, pitch, juice, grease, pine, grass, feed’. On the contrary, he suggests that it would be more reasonable to separate what he considers the result of confusion amongst different separate root units, so that:

9. Cf. Monier-Williams (1986, 1219 col. 2).

10. Graßmann 1996, 1492: ‘mit *mātúr* bildlich von der als Opfertrank gefassten Muttermilch, die Indra schlürft’.

1) some lexemes should not be introduced into this same lexical family, e.g.: the OCS verb *pitěti* ‘nourish’ should have nothing in common with the Gr. Boeotian verb *πιτεύω* ‘irrigate, water’: in fact *πιτεύω* is more likely to have been remade as a derivative of *\*πῖτός* = scr. *pītá-* ‘drunk’, therefore as a Greek dialectal innovation related to *πίομαι* ‘drink’.

2) *\*pitu-* ‘pine’ should be excluded too: it is only a nominal term with no verbal link: *πίτυς*, with short *i*, and should be not compared with *pītu-dāru-* which instead appears with a long *ī* and which moreover alternates with *pūtudāru-* and other forms as well. The lexeme for ‘resin, pitch’ must still be considered different: this should be from a stem *\*pik-*, see *πίσσα*, Lat. *pīx pīcis*.

3) moreover, the terms denoting ‘fat, fatty’ (‘graisse, gras’) Skt. *pīvar-*, Gr. *πῖ(ν)α* should be kept apart from the previously cited roots. On the contrary, gr. *πῖμελή* ‘fat’, OIr *íth*, *ítha* ‘fat’, Skt. *pīna-* ‘fat’ should belong to this same group.<sup>11</sup>

Benveniste is in total disagreement with Grassmann’s translation of *pítú-* as ‘Saft, Trank, Nahrung’ and also with Monier-Williams’ translation as ‘juice, drink, nourishment, food’. In his opinion, these translations were evoked by a comparison with *\*pī-*, *\*pay-* ‘swell’ to which *pītu-dāru-* ‘pine’ was also annexed because of its interpretation as ‘sap tree’, the notion of ‘juice’ being the link between the two. On the contrary, he considers *pítú-* as always and only meaning ‘nourishment’ and mostly ‘solid food’. This is evident by the already mentioned *pítú-* = *ánna-* equivalence of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* I.13.13. In the scholar’s opinion, this sense is confirmed by the phraseology of other hymns in which the term appears, and little does it matter that it sometimes appears as ‘squeezed juice’: the squeezed soma is indeed the food of the gods *par excellence*.

##### 5. OIr. *íth* < *\*pitu-*

As Pokorny and Benveniste had already noted, the outcome of *\*pitu-* with the meaning of ‘grain’ is present in Celtic. The OIr glosses allow us to obtain a good part of the paradigm, e.g., Stokes–Strachan (1903, II, 101): *lens.ti.lenticula* glossed with *cenele netha* ‘a kind of grain’ (OIG *cenéle n-hetha* ‘a kind of corn’ 51b6).<sup>12</sup>

Widmer (2004, 18) reconstructs the paradigm of *íth* in this way:

11. Benveniste also doubtfully introduces Lat. *opīmus* (<*\*opi-pīmus?*) into this group, while the latter derivation is excluded by de Vaan (2008), who considers more likely a derivation of the stem of Lat. *ops opis*.

12. The presence of nasalization is due to particular *sandhi* phenomena of OIr grammar, here in particular because of the neuter gender of *cenéle* ‘kind’.

Nom. Sg. *ith*  
 Gen. Sg. *etho/ etha/ atho*  
 Dat. Sg. *ith*  
 Gen. Pl. *ith / na neath*

Widmer (2004, 18-19), just like Pokorny, considers the possibility that this lexeme is etymologically connected with the verb (LIV<sup>2</sup>, 464) *\*pejH-* ‘strotzen, schwellen, fett, voll sein’. In OIr. we also find *íth* ‘Fett, Speck’ < *\*piHtu-* with no formal problems, because it shows the usual outcome of the long /i/ of i.e. *\*iH-*. However, this derivation becomes problematic if we also wish to include *ith* in the same lexical family, since it occurs with the short vowel /i/. However, it has been pointed out (see Widmer 2004, 19; Neri 2011, 270; Zair 2012, 139) that the allomorph *\*piHtu-* of the same root could have eliminated the laryngeal by the so-called *Wetter Regel*: VHTR/UV > VTR/UV,<sup>13</sup> that is, loss of laryngeal before stop plus resonant. The denomination ‘Wetter’ refers to the loss of the laryngeal in the derivation *\*h<sub>2</sub>ueh<sub>1</sub>-tro-* > *\*h<sub>2</sub>uetro-* to be assumed in order to explain the short vowel in protogerm. *\*weđra-* > germ. *Wetter* ‘weather’.

However, the allomorph before the vocalic /u/ *\*piHtu-* would not be eliminated, but a split in two different lexemes would be produced, corresponding to *ith* ‘corn, grain’ and *íth* ‘fat, lard, grease’ in OIr.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in OIr, according to McCone (1991, 3), another outcome of the same root *ithe* ‘eating’ < *\*ityā* < *\*pit-yā* penetrated into the paradigm of *ithid* ‘eat’, which presupposes an earlier *\*it-*, besides the subj. *es-*, fut. *ís-*, which both presuppose *\*h<sub>1</sub>ed-*.

In any case, the loss of the laryngeal would have already occurred in the protolanguage period, since the outcomes with a short vowel (or however without a laryngeal, as Lit. *piētū-*) are also present in Indo-Iranian. Therefore, in contrast with Benveniste, Widmer can also include *\*pej/iH-ur/n* ‘Fett’ *πῖ(ι)αϑ* and its derivative *\*piH-uon-* ‘fettig’ *pīvan*, *πίων* in the same lexical family.

## 6. Conclusions

1) *ánna-* could have existed longer than *pitú-* because the two terms could indeed be used interchangeably, but *ánna-* had the advantage of being transparent within the paradigm of the verb  $\sqrt{ad-}$ ;

13. Neri (2011, 295): ‘Schwund eines postvokalischen Laryngals vor Okklusiv + unsilbischer Resonant oder Halbvokal + Vokal’.

14. Other examples of the same rule in Neri (2011, 264 ssg.): he also considers that gr. μέτρον ‘measure’ vs. μέτρον ‘land measure’ could be explained by resorting to an analogous split from the same root *\*meH<sub>1</sub>*.

2) whatever the correct hypothesis for the origin of *pitú-* may be, it soon became a semantically opaque word, since it was no longer clear to which verb it could be reconnected: *pitúm papivân* of RV 1.61.7 seems to allude to an association with  $\sqrt{pā}$ - ‘drink’ and, moreover, some contexts may facilitate its interpretation as liquid nourishment.

3) Sāyaṇa in his commentary always glosses *pitú-* with *pālakāṇna-*, associating it etymologically to ‘protect’, as suggested also in *Nirukta* 9.24.



*RV 1.187: text and translation*

Text from TITUS	Geldner	Jamison–Brereton
<p>Verse: 1  पितुं नु स्तोषम्महो धर्माणं तविषीम् ।  pitúṃ nú stoṣam mahó dharmāṇam  táviṣim /  यस्य त्रितो व्योजसा वृत्रं विपर्वमुदयत् ॥  yásya tritó vy ójasā vṛtrāṃ víparvam  ardáyat //</p>	<p>Die Speise will ich jetzo preisen, die mächtige Erhalterin der Stärke, kraft deren Trita den Vritra gliedweise zerlegte.</p>	<p>Now I shall praise food, the support and the power of the great, by whose might Trita shook Vṛtra apart till his joints were parted.</p>
<p>Verse: 2  स्वादो पितो मधो पितो वयं त्वां ववृमहे ।  svádo pito mádho pito vayāṃ tvā  vavṛmahe /  अस्माकमविता भव ॥  asmākam avitā bhava //</p>	<p>Wohlschmeckende Speise, süße Speise, wir haben dich erwählt. Sei unser Helfer!</p>	<p>O sweet food, o honeyed food, we have chosen you: for us be a helper.</p>
<p>Verse: 3  उप नः पितुवा चर शिवः शिवाभिरूतिभिः ।  úpa naḥ pitava á cara śivāḥ śivābhir  ūtībhiḥ /  मयोभुरद्विषेण्यः सखा सुशेवो अद्रयाः ॥  mayobhúr adviṣeṇyāḥ sakhā suśévo  ádvayāḥ //</p>	<p>Komm zu uns, o Speise, freundlich mit deinen freundlichen Hilfen, als erfreulicher, nicht unverträglicher Freund, als liebevoller, unzweideutiger!</p>	<p>Draw near to us, food – kindly with your kindly help, joy itself, not to be despised, a very kind companion without duplicity.</p>
<p>Verse: 4  तव त्वे पितो रसा रजांस्यनु विष्टिताः ।  táva tyé pito rásā rājāṃsy ánu  viṣṭhitāḥ /  दिवि वाता इव श्रिताः ॥  diví vātā iva śritāḥ //</p>	<p>Deine Säfte, o Speise, sind durch die Räume verbreitet, bis zum Himmel reichen sie wie die Winde.</p>	<p>These juices of yours, food, are dispersed throughout the realms, adjoined to heaven like the winds.</p>

<p>Verse: 5  तव त्ये पितो ददतुस्तव स्वादिष्ट ते पितो ।  tāva tyé pito dádatas tāva svādiṣṭha té  pito /  प्र स्वाद्मानो रसानां तुविग्रीवा इवेरते ॥  prá svādmāno rāsānāṃ tuvigrīvā  iverate //</p>	<p>Diese deine  Verschenker, o  Speise, diese  deine  Genießer, o  süßeste Speise,  die Genießer  deiner Säfte  kommen  vorwärts wie  starknackige  Stiere.</p>	<p>These (juices) are  those that yield  you, o food, and  they also are part  of you, sweetest  food. Those who  receive the sweet-  ness of your juices  press forward like  strong-necked  (bulls).</p>
<p>Verse: 6  त्वे पितो महानां देवानाम्मनो हितम् ।  tvé pito mahānāṃ devānām mano  hitām /  अकारि चारुं केतुना तवाह्निमवसावधीत् ॥  ākāri cāru ketúnā tāvāhim  āvasāvadhīt //</p>	<p>Nach dir, o  Speise, steht  der Sinn der  großen Götter.  Schönes ist in  deinem  Zeichen getan  worden. Mit  deiner Hilfe hat  Indra den  Drachen  erschlagen</p>	<p>On you, food, is  the mind of the  great gods set. A  dear (deed) was  done at your sig-  nal: he smashed  the serpent with  your help.</p>
<p>Verse: 7  यद्दो पितो अजगन्विवस्व पर्वतानाम् ।  yád adó pito ajagan vivásva  párvatānām /  अत्रा चिन्नो मधो पितो ऽरम्भक्षाय गम्याः ॥  ātrā cin no madho pitó 'ram bhakṣāya  gamyāḥ //</p>	<p>Wenn jener  Morgenschim-  mer der Berge  gekommen ist,  o Speise, dann  sollst du uns  hier, du süße  Speise, zum  Genießen  geschickt  kommen.</p>	<p>When yonder  dawning light of  the mountains has  come, o food,  then you should  also come here to  us, honeyed food,  fit for our portion.</p>
<p>Verse: 8  यद्दुपामोषधीनाम्परिशमारिशामहे ।  yád apām ośadhīnām pariṃśām  āriśāmahe /  वातापे पीव इद्धव ॥  vātāpe pīva id bhava //</p>	<p>Wenn wir den  Rahm der  Wasser, der  Pflanzen  kosten, dann  werde uns, du  Freund des  Vata zu Speck.</p>	<p>When we bite off  a full share of the  waters and plants,  o you friend of  the wins – be-  come just the fat.</p>

<p>Verse: 9  यत्ते सोम गवाशिरो यवाशिरो भजामहे ।  yát te soma gávāśiro yāvāśiro  bhājāmahe /  वातापे पीव इद्भुव ॥  vātāpe pīva íd bhava //</p>	<p>Wenn wir, o  Soma, von dir,  dem  milchgemischten,  gerstegemischten,  genießen, so  werde uns, du  Freund des Vata,  zu Speck!</p>	<p>When we take  a share of you  when mixed  with milk or  mixed with  grain, o Soma,  o you friend of  the winds – be-  come just the  fat</p>
<p>Verse: 10  करम्भ ओषधे भव पीवो वृक्क उदारथिः ।  karambhā oṣadhe bhava pīvo vṛkkā  udārathīḥ /  वातापे पीव इद्भुव ॥  vātāpe pīva íd bhava //</p>	<p>Werde, du  Pflanze, zu  Grütze, Speck,  Nierenfett, .....,  werde uns, du  Freund des Vata,  zu Speck.</p>	<p>Become the  gruel, o plant,  the fat, the  steaming [?]  suet [?].</p>
<p>Verse: 11  तं त्वा वयम्पितो वचोभिर्गावो न द्रव्या  सुषूदिम ।  tām tvā vayám pito vácobhir gāvo ná  havyā suṣūdima /  देवेभ्यस्त्वा सध्मामदमुस्मभ्य त्वा  सध्मामदम् ॥  devébhyas tvā sadhamādam  asmábhyaṃ tvā sadhamādam //</p>	<p>Wir haben dich, o  Speise, mit Reden  schmackhaft  gemacht wie Kühe  die Opferspenden,  dich den Göttern  zum gemeinsamen  Mahle, dich für  uns zum  gemeinsamen  Mahle.</p>	<p>We have  sweetened you  with words, o  food, as cows  [= milk] do the  oblations – you  as feasting  companion for  the gods, you  as feasting  companion for  us.</p>

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Prajāpati is hungry.  
How can the concept of eating be used in philosophy?

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The aim of the present paper is to show that we can reconstruct abstract thinking in the Vedic texts even though they seem to be immersed in everyday experience. Moreover, I hope to show that the thought presented therein is so coherent and consistent that it can be called philosophical. Moreover, some concepts created by the Vedic philosophers are as sophisticated as philosophical concepts created in the Western tradition.

In order to reconstruct philosophical thought in the Vedic texts, along with philological methodology, I make use of the methodology of cognitive linguistics. This is a branch of linguistics which investigates the relationship between verbal and non-verbal signs, on the one hand, and thinking and experience on the other. The main question which cognitive linguists want to answer is how the world, as we perceive it, becomes meaningful.<sup>1</sup> They postulate that thinking is not independent from experience, but just the opposite, it is embodied, i.e. motivated by experience, in both universal and cultural dimensions.<sup>2</sup> The second main assumption of cognitive linguistics is that thinking reveals itself in verbal and non-verbal signs. This is the basis for the next assumption that it is possible to investigate thinking on the basis of the analysis of signs.

Cognitive linguistics investigates the mental operations through which we understand signs. It proposes three main models of these operations: conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor, and conceptual blending.<sup>3</sup>

Conceptual metonymy is a model of thinking which operates within one concept. It activates thinking about an aspect of a concept (or the whole concept) *via* its salient conceptual element. The concept which activates thinking is called the vehicle, the concept which is activated, the target domain. For

1. Johnson 1992.

2. Lakoff 1987.

3. For conceptual metonymy and metaphor cf. Lakoff 1987, Lakoff–Johnson 1980, Lakoff–Turner 1989. For conceptual blending cf. Fauconnier–Turner 2003.

example, the sign of the cross is a vehicle which activates the concept of Christ's death which, again metonymically, activates the concept of the Christian religion. In the Indian tradition, the sign OM can be seen as the metonymic vehicle which leads the recipient's thought towards the whole of reality, on the one hand, and towards the Hindu religion, on the other. Thus, metonymic thinking gives access to very complex concepts *via* simple signs.

Conceptual metaphor is a model of thinking which operates between two concepts. It enables thinking about one concept in terms of another. The concept which provides categories is called the source domain. The concept which is conceived in terms of these categories is called the target domain. For example, in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm in the *Old Testament*, God is presented as a good shepherd who allows the Psalm's composer to lie down on green pastures. The concept of a shepherd is also metonymically evoked by its salient conceptual elements which are the rod and the staff. Thus the composer of the Psalm elaborates the GOD IS A SHEPHERD metaphor in order to present the abstract concept of a God who takes care of human beings, conceived in terms of sheep.<sup>4</sup> In the *R̥gveda*, God is also conceived in terms of someone who takes care of cattle; in this case as a cowherd, *gopā*.

Conceptual blending is a model of a more complex conceptual operation. Its simplest form consists of four concepts which are called mental spaces. Two mental spaces, called input spaces, transfer part of their meaning to the third space called the blend. The meaning of the blend is new in comparison to the meaning of the input spaces. An example of a conceptual blend is the concept of an angel which consists of two input spaces: the concepts of a human being and of a bird. The input space of a human being transfers the concepts of the human body and human cognitive and emotional abilities to the blend. The input space of a bird transfers the concepts of wings and the ability to fly. The input spaces have something in common, usually on a very general level. These common features are called the generic space, which, in the case of the angel, is a living being. The same blend exists in the Indian tradition, namely, the fire altar built during the Agnicayana ritual which is both a bird and a human being.

I shall analyse some passages of the cosmogonies of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (ŚB) which explain why rituals should be performed.<sup>5</sup> The general reasons given by its composers is that man repeats the creative activity of reality during rituals. This is expressed with the help of various source domains, but the prevailing source domain draws from the experience connected with being hungry because of hard work, looking for food and its preparation, eating and digesting, and finally becoming reinvigorated. It is important to note that the ŚB composers metonymically evoke the holistic concept of eating and digesting

4. Sweetser–DesCamp 2005.

5. If not otherwise stated, all the quotations from the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* are from Titus Text Database.



via its first phase which is cooking.<sup>6</sup> The second important source domain is sexual activity, pregnancy, and birth-giving.

### *Cosmogony 1 (ŚB 2.2.4)*

The first cosmogony analysed here is the beginning of the main cosmogony explaining the Agnihotra ritual (ŚB 2.2.4.1):

*prajāpatiḥ ha vā idām āgra ēka evāsa / sā aikṣata kathāṃ nū prajāyeyēti sò 'śrāmyat  
sā tāpo 'tapyata sò 'gnīm eva mūkhāḥ janayāṃ cakre tād yād enām mūkhād  
ājanayata tasmād annādò 'gnīḥ /*

Prajāpati alone, indeed, existed here in the beginning. He considered, 'How may I be reproduced?'. He toiled and performed acts of penance. He generated Agni from his mouth; and because he generated him from his mouth, therefore Agni is a consumer of food.<sup>7</sup>

The composer of this cosmogony presents the Creator, called Prajāpati, as a man who releases fire from his mouth. In Vedic times, fire was created by means of a fire-drill and blowing was necessary to keep the fire going. The concept of blowing can be evoked thanks to metonymy and it is accessed via the concept of the mouth (LOCUS OF ACTIVITY FOR ACTIVITY metonymy). In this way the recipient can build the image of a man who kindles fire. This image is the source domain for the Creator. Such a conceptualization implies thinking of the cosmos in terms of fire.

The verbal form *janayāṃ cakre*, 'generated', evokes the second source domain for creation which is birth-giving. The ŚB conceives Prajāpati as an androgynous being: he is conceived in terms of a man and a father and of a woman and a mother.<sup>8</sup> The activation of this metaphor allows the composer to conceive creation in terms of birth. Within the frames of this conceptualization, the cosmos is conceived in terms of a new-born baby.

The composer explains the nature of fire by calling it the eater of food. This explanation is coherent thanks to the afore-mentioned LOCUS OF ACTIVITY FOR ACTIVITY metonymy: the concept of the mouth activates the concept of eating. In order to fully understand this explanation we also need to remember that, in the Veda, burning is conceived in terms of eating (BURNING IS EATING metaphor). Fire needs fuel to burn and it is in this function that it is conceived in terms of the eater of food.

6. THE FIRST PHASE FOR ACTION FOR THE WHOLE ACTION metonymy, see Radden-Kovecses 1999.

7. All the translation of the ŚB are Eggeling's translations (Eggeling 1994).

8. See ŚB 2.5.1.3 (analysed below).

We can see that several metaphors operate in this description: CREATION IS THE KINDLING OF FIRE, CREATION IS GIVING BIRTH, BURNING IS EATING. The recipient is expected to simultaneously evoke all of these. In other words, the recipient is expected to create a blend consisting of several input spaces. The first input space is the creation of the world. The second input space is the kindling of fire. The third is giving birth, and the fourth, eating. The generic space of this conceptual network is the concept of transformation. In the blend, Prajāpati is a man who kindles the fire which has to be kept alight with fuel, but he is also a woman who gives birth to a child which has to be fed, and the Creator of the world. The world is fire and a new-born baby.

Then Prajāpati thinks (ŚB 2.2.4.3-4):

*sá aikṣata prajāpatiḥ / annādān vā imām ātmāno jījane yād agniṃ ná vā ihā mād anyād ānnam asti yām vā ayaṃ nādyād íti kālvālikṛtā haivá tárhi pṛthivyāsa nauśadhaya āsur ná vānaspatayas (...) áthainam agnúr vyāttēnopaparyāvavarta /*

Prajāpati then considered, ‘In that Agni I have generated a food-eater for myself; but, indeed, there is no other food here but myself, whom, surely, he would not eat’. At that time this earth had, indeed, been rendered quite bald; there were neither plants nor trees. (...) Thereupon Agni turned towards him with open mouth; and he [Prajāpati] being terrified, his own greatness departed from him.

The composer elaborates the source domains activated in the previous sentences: fire needs fuel in order to burn, a new born child is hungry and needs food. In both cases, the agent of the activity is in danger. If fire cannot find any fuel, it will destroy the person who kindled it. If a child cannot be fed, its parent suffers mental distress. The composer highlights the first source domain: Prajāpati is in danger of being destroyed by his own creation which is conceived in terms of being eaten.

It is important to remember that the ŚB presents a monistic vision of reality which manifests its aspect during creation. The name *prajāpati* is the term given to the creative power within its manifest aspect which is identical with what it creates. Monism is expressed in the cosmogonies of the ŚB in the following ways: firstly, Prajāpati is also conceived in terms of fire: he toils and heats himself;<sup>9</sup> secondly, he is androgynous, so he is mother and father at the same time. As is well known, it was believed that a father is reborn in his son and, in many places in the ŚB, Prajāpati is simply called Agni. Thus, the recipient understands that in terms of Prajāpati who creates the fire that needs fuel, a reality is conceived which transforms itself into such a form that is dangerous for itself.

If the recipient elaborates the blend created in the previous part of the

9. The activity of fire is also conceived in terms of toiling, e.g. *Rgveda* 3.29.16.

cosmogony (ŚB 2.2.4.1), he will identify fire with a hungry child, more specifically, with its belly. In terms of this blended concept, the place for the future world is conceived.<sup>10</sup> And in the same way as the empty belly is filled with food and fire is filled with fuel, the emptiness created by reality will be filled with the world.

The conceptualization of the place for the future world in terms of a hungry belly which threatens the Creator with death opens the way to profound philosophical questions. Did reality in its manifestation as Prajāpati know what it was doing? Did it commit a mistake? Is it omniscient or not? Omnipotent or not? Or, maybe does reality manifest its freedom in this way? If reality is perfectly free, it is not limited by any attribute, even by the attribute of necessary existence. If this is the case, a great difference between Judeo-Christian and Vedic thought emerges. In the former, the attribute of God's existence has never been questioned. Yahweh's response to Moses, who questions him about his identity, is 'I am who I am'.<sup>11</sup> In Vedic thought, reality is so free that it can even commit suicide if it so wishes. And this very freedom of reality is manifested in Prajāpati's creative activity.

### *Cosmogony 2 (ŚB 2.5.1)*

The composer begins the cosmogony with the description of Prajāpati who creates the groups of beings: birds, snakes, and intermediate beings. All of them die. Since the father manifests in his son, the recipient can understand the concepts of the groups of beings as the source domains, in terms of which the manifestations of reality are conceived. The form in which reality manifests its ontic identity with its creation is conceived in terms of birds.<sup>12</sup> The form in which reality manifests as its own opposite is conceived in terms of snakes, which are the opposite form to birds. The form which allows reality to unite its opposing manifestations and to realize their ontic identity is conceived in terms of intermediate beings. In all these forms, reality dies within its creative manifest power called Prajāpati.

And then we read (ŚB 2.5.1.3):

*só 'rcañ chrāmyan prajāpatir ikṣāṃ cakre / kathāṃ nū me prajāḥ sṛṣṭāḥ  
pārābhavanṭī sā haitād evā dadarśānaśanātayā vai me prajāḥ pārābhavanṭī  
sā ātmāna evāgre stānayoḥ pāya āpyāyayāṃ cakre sā prajā asṛjata tā asya  
prajāḥ sṛṣṭāḥ stānāv evābhīpādya tās tātaḥ sāmabhūvus tā imā āparābhūtaḥ /*

10. The same idea of creation is expressed by the concept of *cimcum* by Isaac Luria (Scholem 1997, 321 ff.).

11. *Book of Exodus* 3.14. See Kolakowski 1988.

12. The composer of ŚB 2.1.1.1 explains the affinity of birds and Prajāpati in the following way: 'Now man is the nearest to Prajāpati; and man is two-footed: hence birds are two-footed'.

While praising and practising austerities, Prajāpati thought within himself, 'How comes it that the living beings created by me pass away?'. He then became aware that his creatures passed away from want of food. He made the breasts in the fore-part of [his] body teem with milk.<sup>13</sup> He then created living beings; and by resorting to the breasts, the beings created by him thenceforward continued to exist: they are these [creatures] which have not passed away.

The composer of this cosmogony activates the same source domain as the composer of the previous one (ŚB 2.2.4), i.e. the birth of a child who is hungry and needs food. Here it is not the parent who is in danger of death but the offspring. Such a conceptualization of this situation is closer to everyday life experience. The recipient understands therefore that in the frames of the target domain, reality is not threatened by its creation, but it somehow annihilates itself in its manifest part. Only the fourth manifestation is safe, and it is conceived in terms of feeding with milk.

Once again this brings us to ask fascinating philosophical questions. On the one hand, we are led to understand that reality fails in its creative activity, that it commits a mistake three times. Therefore is it omnipotent and omniscient or not? On the other hand, we can understand that reality is so free that it can commit mistakes whenever it wants and as much as it wants. Finally, we can understand that it is not a mistake, but that reality wants to create a place for the future world; this place is conceived in terms of hungry bellies and the emptiness which is left when the beings die.

Thus the concept of an empty belly and of a living being which dies of hunger is the source domain for a very subtle philosophical concept of the emptiness which is the place for the future world and, in fact, the first manifestation of reality. In this metaphysical system, death is given the highest possible rank because it is the form in which reality manifests itself. In other words, death is the first manifestation of reality. It is implied that if reality wishes to manifest itself, it has to die. Generally speaking, death is the only way through which the Absolute can express its total otherness from life which is the feature of its manifest aspect.

### *Cosmogony 3 (ŚB 7.1.2)*

The composer of this cosmogony explicitly describes the death of Prajāpati in his creative activity. At the same time, it presents the further phases of creation, conceived in terms of cooking, which allow reality to resurrect itself in its manifest aspect (ŚB 7.1.2.1):

13. Eggeling: 'He made the breasts in the fore-part of [their] body teem with milk'.

*prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata / sā prajāḥ sṛṣtvā sārvaṃ ājīm itvā vyāsraṃsata tasmād  
vīrastāt prāṇó madhyatā údakrāmad áthāsmād vīryám údakrāmat tasmínn  
útkrānte 'padyata tasmāt pannād ánnam asravat yac cākṣur adhyāseta tasmād  
asyānnam asravan no hehá tárhi kā caná pratiṣṭhāsa /*

Prajāpati produced creatures. Having produced creatures, and run the whole race, he became relaxed. From him, when relaxed, the vital air went out from within: then his vigour went out of him. That having gone out, he fell down. From him, thus fallen, food flowed forth: it was from that eye on which he lay that his food flowed. And, verily, there was then no firm foundation whatever here.

The source domain elaborated by the author of the cosmogony is the concept of a runner. The recipient understands that the runner dies because the middle breath goes out of him, and it is the middle breath that keeps life. The logic of the source domain allows the recipient to assume that the main reason for the runner's death is that he is exhausted. However, the concept of hunger is also evoked here because it is said that food flows from the runner. Thus, hunger is also the reason for his death. Therefore, in the target domain, reality dies in its manifest aspect. But in its unmanifest aspect, it is still alive and still omnipotent. This is implied by the concept of the gods, who are the manifestation of its subjective powers, which are able to continue creation after the death of the main power called Prajāpati (ŚB 7.1.2.6-7):

*tām devā agnāu právrñjan / tād yā enam právrktam agnír ārohad yā evāsmāt  
sā prāṇó madhyatā udákrāmat sā evainam sa āpadyata tām asmínn adadhur átha  
yád asmād vīryám udákrāmat tād asmínn adadhur átha yád asmād ánnam ásravat  
tād asmínn adadhur tām sárvaṃ kṛtsnām saṃskṛtyordhvam údaśrayaṃs tād yām  
tām udáśrayann imé sā lokāḥ / (6)*

*tásyāyám evá lokāḥ pratiṣṭhā átha yò 'smínn lokè 'gníḥ sò 'syāvān prāṇó  
'thāsyāntárikṣam ātmātha yò 'ntárikṣe vāyúr yā evāyám ātmán prāṇāḥ sò 'sya sā  
dyaúr evā'sya síraḥ sūryācandramāsau cākṣuṣī yac cākṣur adhyāseta sā candrámas  
tasmāt sā mīlātataró 'nnaṃ hí tasmād ásravat / (7)*

The gods heated him in the fire; and when the fire rose over him thus heated, that same vital air which had gone out from within him came back to him, and they put it into him; and the vigour which had gone out of him they put into him; and the food which had flowed from him they put into him. Having made him up entire and complete, they raised him [so as to stand] upright; and inasmuch as they thus raised him upright, he is these worlds. (6)

This [terrestrial] world truly is his foundation; and what fire there is in this world that is his [Prajāpati's] downward vital air. And the air is his body, and what wind there is in the air, that is that vital air of his in the body. And the

sky is his head; the sun and the moon are his eyes. The eye on which he lay is the moon: whence that one is much closed up, for the food flowed therefrom. (7)

Within the frames of the source domain, the composer builds the image of a dead body burnt in fire. This image evokes several concepts and thus the recipient is prompted to create a conceptual blend. In the context of Indian civilization, the image of a dead body burnt in fire metonymically evokes the concept of cremation (SALIENT ELEMENT OF AN ACTIVITY FOR THE WHOLE ACTIVITY metonymy). It was believed that the deceased is regenerated in a perfect form under the influence of cremation fire.<sup>14</sup> This belief is probably based on the everyday experience: when someone is cold, they should be warmed up and the deceased is especially cold, so he/she needs a special warming. This is the first input space of the blend built into this description.

The second input space is cooking which is also the heating of a dead body under the influence of fire. Cooking transforms the dead body in such a way that it can be eaten. It is worth noting that in the descriptions of cremation, the power of the cremation fire which transforms the dead person is also conceived in terms of cooking.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in the Veda, not only eating food but also its digesting are conceived in terms of its being put under the influence of fire. On the basis of this metaphor (EATING AND DIGESTING IS PUTTING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF FIRE), the recipient can create the third input space, namely, the eating and digesting of food. The next input space is the creation of the cosmos. The generic space is transformation. In the blend, Prajāpati cooks himself, eats and digests himself and thanks to this, he is resurrected and becomes the cosmos: Prajāpati's head becomes the sky, his feet become the earth, his belly the space between them. In this way, cooking becomes the source domain to conceive the spatial dimension of the manifest aspect of reality.

It is worth noting that cooking is also the source domain in terms of which the temporal dimension of the manifest aspect of reality is conceived. Let us consider the following short description of the sun's activity, whose movement is the visible sign of the temporal character of the cosmos (ŚB 10.4.2.19):

*eṣā vā idāṃ sārvaṃ pacati ahorātraīr ardhmāsair māsair ṛtūbhīḥ saṃvatsarēṇa*

That one [the sun] bakes everything here, by means of the days and nights, the half-moons, the months, the seasons, and the year.

The sun's activity is conceived in terms of cooking: the instruments of this activity are temporal divisions which are understood as fuel.<sup>16</sup> When the sun

14. Jurewicz 2010, Parry 1988.

15. *Rgveda* 10.16.1-2.

16. Divisions of time are conceived in the same way in *Rgveda* 10.90.6.

moves, it makes plants mature, and hence edible. At the same time, the sun's movement ages living beings, and this is the reason for their death. Both these processes are conceived in terms of cooking.<sup>17</sup>

From what has just been said, it follows that the concept of cooking, eating, and digesting is crucial for understanding creation within the manifest aspect of reality. Prajāpati's resurrection is conceived in terms of cooking, but also in those of eating and digesting, which are metonymically implied by the cooking scenario. Cooking is an intentional activity: one typically prepares food in order to eat it and not to throw it away without eating. The spatiotemporal functioning of the world is conceived in the same terms: it is an intentional activity on the part of reality which wants to manifest itself as the world.

In this way the composers of the ŚB create a model which allows them to express the functioning of the world motivated by the subsequent acts of Prajāpati's death and resurrection in a precise way. This model is a blend which consists of the following input spaces. The first input space is a human being who cooks, eats, and digests food. The second is the cosmos in its spatiotemporal dimensions. The third is the manifest aspect of reality. The generic space is transformation. In the blend, Prajāpati is both human being and cosmos, his head with his mouth is the sky; his feet are the earth with the mortal beings; his hungry belly is the space between the sky and the earth. Prajāpati kills himself, cooks, eats, and comes back to life.

The next input space is a philosophical assumption concerning reality and its creation. In this case, reality, when it creates the world, falls apart and annihilates itself in its manifest aspect. This is the stage when the creative movement is stopped. Then reality begins to act again and unites its dispersed elements. This act of unification is especially important because it allows reality to preserve its ontic identity within its manifest aspect. The blend expresses the monism of reality within its manifest aspect: the identity of the eater (the head) and the food (the earth) is realized when the food is put into his/her mouth. According to the composers of the ŚB, it seems that death and resurrection are the only way the immortality of reality can be manifested.

#### *Cosmogony 4 (ŚB 10.4.2)*

In this part I shall show how the composers of the ŚB conceived the role of human beings and other living beings (ŚB 10.4.2-3):

17. This way of thinking about the activity of time in terms of cooking is continued in later thought, e.g. *Mahābhārata* 12.217.39, 220.84, 231.25, 309.90. Cooking seems to be a suitable source domain for the conceptualization of maturing and growing old, because it takes time to cook meat properly in order to get tasty food, just as it takes time to become mature and old.

*sò 'yám saṃvatsaráḥ prajāpatiḥ sárvaṇi bhūtāni sasṛje yác ca prāṇi yác cāprāṇām ubháyān devamanuṣyānt sá sárvaṇi bhūtāni sṛṣṭivā riricāná 'va mene sá mṛtyór bibhayām cakāra / (2)*

*sá hekṣām cakre / katham nv hám imāni sárvaṇi bhūtāni púnar ātmānn āvapeya púnar ātmán dadhīya katham nv ahám evaiṣām sárveṣām bhūtānām púnar ātmā syām íti / (3)*

This Prajāpati, the year, has created all existing things, both what breathes and the breathless, both gods and men. Having created all existing things, he felt like one emptied out, and was afraid of death. (2)

He bethought himself, 'How can I get these beings back into my body? How can I put them back into my body? How can I be again the body of all these beings?'. (3)

In this description, the source domain is constituted by the process of excretion. If the recipient wants to elaborate the logic of this domain, he will think about excretion from the various openings of his/her body. As the result of this process, the agent feels hunger which is the cause of his fear of death and his desire to eat. This is how Prajāpati is conceived and such a conceptualization agrees with the conceptualizations analysed above. Within the frame of the monistic vision, food can only be constituted by what is excreted from reality, i.e. the creatures. When Prajāpati eats them, he will become their body, in the same way as a human being becomes the body of what he/she has eaten. Therefore, creatures are the part of the manifest aspect of reality which is conceived in terms of the food that builds the body of the agent who eats it. Thus their death is life-giving.

Moreover, the composers of the ŚB create the concept of death which is not real death. This is clearly explained in ŚB 6.2.1. Its composer presents the fire created by Prajāpati, which wants to hide itself because it is afraid that Prajāpati will kill and eat it.<sup>18</sup> It therefore assumes the forms of five living beings: a man, a horse, a bull, a ram, and a he-goat. But Prajāpati recognizes it in these forms. Then, the cosmogony in its source domain elaborates the scenario of preparing food, its cooking, eating, and digesting. Prajāpati kills the animals, cuts off their heads and eats them uncooked. He throws their torsos into water. Then he thinks (ŚB 6.2.1.9, quoted after Weber 1855):

*sá aikṣata / yádi vā idám ithám evá sádātmānam abhisamṣkarisyē mārtyaḥ kuṇapó 'napahatapāpmā bhaviṣyāmi hántaitád agnínā pácānti tád agnínāpacat tád enad amṛtam akarod etád vai havír amṛtam bhavati yád agnínā pácanti (...)*

18. This is expressed directly in *Tāṇḍyamahābrāhmaṇa* 21.1.2; see also Lévi 1898, 25.



He considered, 'Surely, if I fit this [matter] such as it is unto mine own self, I shall become a mortal carcase, not freed from evil: well then, I will bake it by means of the fire'. So saying, he baked it by means of the fire, and thereby made it immortal; for the sacrificial food which is baked by fire is indeed immortal [or, ambrosia].

Thus, the torsos are cooked and eaten. The act of eating is not explicitly expressed, but it is implied by the logic of the source domain. In this way, the sacrificial living beings, although they have been killed, become immortal, because they become the substance of the body of the reality which manifests itself in the cosmos. We could say that they are not killed but only transformed into a more perfect form.

In order to understand the role of human beings in the world thus conceived, it is important to evoke the ritual context of the above cosmogony. This explains the ritual of building the fire altar on which the fire was kindled and sacrifices were performed. This process can be seen as the ritualized process of the creation of a hearth, the preparation of food, and its eating. The fire altar is the ritual realization of the reality manifest in the cosmos: the heads of the animals are buried under the altar, their torsos are the layers of the altar. At the same time, the fire altar is the ritual representation of the human sacrificer. In the creative act, reality manifests itself as Prajāpati in the cosmos and in the fire altar built *in illo tempore*. A sacrificer, when he performs Agnicayana, re-enacts the creative process of reality and builds a sacrificial body for himself, identical with the cosmos and reality itself. In this way, he himself becomes reality which constantly dies and is resurrected in its manifestations.

It can thus be concluded that the composers of the ŚB knew how to use the concepts connected with everyday experience in order to express very subtle philosophical theories in these terms. They expressed monistic worldviews according to which reality manifests its aspect during creation. Death is the first manifestation of reality, while resurrection is the next stage. The living beings, who participate in these transformations thanks to rituals, become immortal in just the same way as reality is immortal within its manifestation: they constantly die and are resurrected. At the most general level, it could be said that the philosophers of the ŚB create a sophisticated model of the Absolute, whose most important attribute is not existence (as it is in its Western definitions) but freedom. In order to realize this attribute, the Absolute partly denies its existence in order to begin to exist in a different way. Human beings are the manifestation of the active powers of the Absolute which are able to kill, while other living beings are the manifestations of its passive powers which are able to be killed. Death is the transformation of the mode of existence within the manifest aspect. As the Absolute dies so that it can exist in another way, living beings also die in order to live in another way as the opposing aspects of the Absolute which manifests itself as killing and dying. Rituals are the only activity which renders this manifestation possible.

This philosophical theory is expressed in the scenario of being hungry, the preparation of food, eating and digesting. The first manifestation of reality which is the negation of the Absolute's attribute of existence is conceived in terms of a hungry belly. The constant manifestation of the Absolute in the world is conceived in terms of cooking, eating, and digesting. Within the ritual frames, human beings are those who eat, thereby achieving immortality, while the other beings are those who are eaten and become immortal, as parts of the immortal bodies of those who eat them.

It is worth adding that the source domain of the preparation and eating of food is not only conceptual but also experiential. The phase conceived in terms of hunger is realized during *dīkṣā*, when the sacrificer feels the same as Prajāpati *in illo tempore*. The phase conceived in terms of preparation and eating the food is realized during the ritual.<sup>19</sup> It therefore follows that, in their theories, the philosophers of the ŚB did not only use concepts close to experience in order to explain more complex concepts in terms of the simpler ones. They also wanted to ensure that the act of understanding philosophical issues completely overwhelmed the human being, in terms of his theoretical insight and practical activity. Philosophy was not only a matter of thought but also of living.

19. The ritual thus understood can be seen as the multimodal metaphor (Cienki–Müller 2008, Forceville–Urios-Aparisi 2009, Jurewicz 2014).

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# What the king ate? On the ambivalence towards eating meat during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE

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The middle of the last millennium BCE, overlapping the late post-Vedic and also the *śramaṇa*<sup>1</sup> period, was the most decisive phase for the development of the culture of the Indian subcontinent which, according to historians, signals the beginning of Indian history.<sup>2</sup> During this time (7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), tribal kingdoms (some call these political formations ‘republics’ and kingdoms, cf. Thapar 1969, 50 ff.) were the first political formations of a single nation/tribe or of several.

The aim of this study is to highlight the formative forces that largely contributed to an ambivalence towards eating meat, and yet the partaking of it. Extrapolating information on the topic from less-examined sources, I shall offer a variety of arguments,<sup>3</sup> including some concerning *karman*, which became a powerful catalyst, not only in other contexts and in different traditions, but also as regards the issue of eating meat. If we observe the term *karman* as used in the Veda *Samhitās*, there is an implied cause and effect relationship in the performance of ritual acts. The ritual is supposed to occasion some favourable resolution for the human condition, to sustain an order that supports everything, one could say. In the late Vedic period, concurrent with the *Brāhmaṇa* period, it becomes apparent that the term carries increasingly complex nuances that no longer pertain merely to actions, but also to intentions. Another carry-

1. Olivelle 1993, 11 ff. Regarding *śramaṇa*, ‘this term is used frequently in post-Vedic literature and in inscriptions with reference to various types of ascetics. Buddhist and Jain canonical texts use it frequently to designate Buddhist and Jain monks’.

2. Kulke–Rothermund 1998<sup>3</sup>, 49.

3. Some arguments will not be explored here in detail, but only mentioned summarily at the end, even though they are worthy of closer attention. For example, the idea that an increased prevalence of domesticated animals led to their becoming accountable property and hence necessarily subjected to more control regarding their use. Scarcity of food should not be overlooked since it definitely influenced some of the eating customs, such as women in households eating last. The influence of Jain animism deserves a separate study altogether.

over from the Vedic ritual is the so-called distribution of the sacrificed matter or, in a certain context, the oblations (i.e., 'leavings'). These can be considered the main contributing catalysts in the development of the food habits of South Asia. And yet, the *śramaṇa* influence cannot be neglected either.

Two kinds of sources will be utilized here for these purposes: Buddhist sources and Brahmanical Epics.<sup>4</sup>

The early Buddhist period gives evidence not only of the Buddhist heritage but also of the Brahmanical tradition, along with the co-existing practices of other religious developments, such as the Jain. None of these religious developments ever existed in isolation, although this is the manner in which they were, and still are, usually studied and examined; in fact, they bear heavily on each other's formation and development. As James Fitzgerald has shown in his incisive study of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>5</sup> we can find tangible evidence of the *Mahābhārata*'s trying to wrest the dominion of the Brahmanical culture from the impact/influence of the Buddhist and Aśokan ideologies, and also from their policies.

Aśokan inscriptions provide reliable testimony for some of Aśoka's policies effecting dietary restrictions, proclaiming that the royal kitchen will abstain from killing numerous animals daily, save for three, namely, two peacocks and an antelope, and the latter not consistently/regularly (Rock Edict #1 Girnar). Quoting from King Aśoka's first edict:

Formerly in the kitchen of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for the sake of curry.<sup>6</sup> But now, when this rescript on morality is written, only three animals are being killed [daily] for the sake of the curry, [viz.] two peacocks [and] one deer, but even this deer not regularly, even these three animals shall not be killed in future.<sup>7</sup>

In general, it is understood that this change of policy for the royal kitchen was

4. The term 'Brahmanical' does not only pertain to Brahmins but also to the identification of the culture and people later known as 'Hindu'.

5. Fitzgerald 2004, 53-54.

6. Hultzsch 1925, 2, translated *sūpa* as 'curry', others translate soups as cognate to *supa* in Prakrit as well as in Sanskrit (*sūpa*) meaning a complex dish with a legume liquid base containing a number of other food items.

7. *Ibid.* Hultzsch's translation of I. The Girnar Rock, Line 7 (F), p. 1 in Texts and Translations. The original reads as follows (transcribed from the *devanāgarī* text, without emendations suggested in the footnotes): (*F*) *purā mahānasamhi devānampriyasa priyadasino raño anudivasam bahūni prāṇasatasahasrāni ārabhisu sūpāthāya (G) se aja yadā ayam dhammalipi likhitā ti eva prāṇā ārabhare sūpāthāya dvo morā eko maḡo so pi maḡo na dhruvo (H) ete pi trī prāṇā pachā na ārabhisare*. A comprehensive reading of the edicts of Aśoka is presented in Bloch 1950, where he offered five versions of the edicts, as they were found in their respective locations. Since this study is not about Aśoka edicts, I have adopted Hultzsch's presentation based on the edict from Girnar.

instigated by Aśoka's particular version of Buddhism, which he assumed and propagated in his realm after he had almost completely overpowered the peninsula and, for the first time, solidified his power over a large area that eventually became India, i.e., Bharat. Such restrictions were followed by others that led to a minimization of the consumption of meat. Prolonged exposure and contact with communities and societies, such as the Jains, led to a possible assimilation of their ways of life. Furthermore, certain semi-restrictions, such as the Buddha's specific approach to eating meat, were adopted. Just as a monk begging for food does not make 'judgments', such as, I like this and I do not like that, begged food should not be favoured or disliked, but accepted, shared with one's community, and eaten without preference or dismissal. This was the general rule, with the only exception being when the animal was slaughtered for the sake of feeding the monk. In such a case, the monk was not permitted to eat the meat. The rule by which it is permissible to eat meat and fish is called *tikoṭiparisuddham*, which means blameless in all three ways, that is, not seen, not heard, and not suspected (*adiṭṭham*, *asutaṃ*, *aparisaṅkitaṃ*, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

There were also certain animals, such as elephants, horses, dogs, snakes, lions, tigers, leopards, bears, and hyenas that were not to be eaten. And as could be expected, the consumption of humans was not permitted either.<sup>9</sup> So when a monk received meat, he was obliged to examine it for its colour and form (*rūpa*) and determine whether or not it was one of the prohibited animals.

Given the title of the current paper, one might be prompted to imagine a lavish spread on which the king<sup>10</sup> and his court were feasting. But I should like to relate a different type of story of the king's diet. The Buddhist sources, as the *Suttanipāta*, allow us to glean information about a king's fare, depicted as both healing and invigorating. The description portrays two steps, first a vegetarian and then a meat diet, cleverly devised from the habits of scavenging animals whose source of meat is the leavings of wild animals.

The attitude towards animal fare does not seem to be univocal and what is documented in the texts of the various traditions, be they Brahmanical, Bud-

8. Alsdorf 1962, 563, n. 1. Prasad 1979, 290, where he shows how this rule of restriction (but not prohibition) came about, drawing on the Vinaya texts of the different schools in three languages, Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese. He employs the narrative of Sīha, who heard of the Buddha preaching on inaction. He became curious and went to listen to the Buddha and then invited the Buddha with his monks for a meal. The Buddha's adversaries spread the rumour that he and his monks had partaken of a non-vegetarian meal prepared solely for them, even though the meat came from a butcher's shop, 'meat procured from market, *pavattamaṃsa*' (literally, *pavattamaṃsa* means 'fresh meat'). Afterwards, the Buddha in his customary fashion, whenever there was a misconception, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation provided a rule to take care of the given controversy. Thus in this instance too: the rule of blamelessness in three ways that is discussed here. The reference to the three descriptives which Prasad gives here is *Vinaya Piṭaka* I, 233-38.

9. Cf. Prasad 1979, 295, n. 13, with reference to *Vinaya Piṭaka* I, 218-220.

10. 'King' in this paper refers to the *kṣatriya* class, aiming to separate their customs and experience from other social classes.

dhist, etc., does at times seem contradictory. But this has not always been so. Ascetics living in the wilderness certainly partook of the meat killed by predatory animals and birds. Scholars like Wezler,<sup>11</sup> Olivelle,<sup>12</sup> and others have inquired into these issues. An example from the commentary on the *Suttanipāta*, called *Paramatthajotikā* II (355.3-14),<sup>13</sup> gives the narrative of a certain King Rāma, who was ill with leprosy and hence gave up his harem and his kingship, entrusting them to his eldest son.

During his time in the wilderness, the king first lived on leaves, roots, and fruits, recovering from his illness and even developing a radiant complexion. Once, in the course of his wanderings, he came upon the hollow of a tree, and made this into his living quarters. He built a fire from twigs and wood and stayed up all night listening to the sounds of the forest. In one direction, he recognized the roar of a lion and, in the other, the cry of a tiger. At daybreak, he went to the two places in their opposite directions, towards the respective sounds of the wild beasts from the night before. Finding the remnants of the kill (meat-leavings, *vighāsamaṃsam*), he took the meat, cooked it, and ate it.

*So 'asukasmiṃ padese sīho saddam akāsi, asukasmiṃ vyaggho 'ti sallakkhetvā pabhāte tattha gantvā vighāsamaṃsam ādāya pacitvā khādati.*<sup>14</sup>

This narrative provides us with anecdotal evidence for the consumption of meat when it became available without the person having had to engage in its killing. Certainly, during his life in the palace, this king would have gone hunting, and so a meat diet would not have been strange to him, but there is a major difference here. The king now dwells in the forest and is no longer a hunter and he is not in charge of the killing. Several texts, as Alsdorf observed,<sup>15</sup> consider meat ripped up by wild beasts suitable for consumption according to Brahmanical theory, for example, *Manu* 5.131, *Yājñavalkya* 1.192, and *Vasiṣṭha* 14.27.<sup>16</sup>

Evidence of a forest-dweller (*vanaprastha*)<sup>17</sup> surviving on meat leavings from wild animals is also found in the *Jātaka Gāthās* (6.81.14-15). Wezler,<sup>18</sup> in

11. Wezler 1978, 100 ff.

12. Olivelle 1991, 23 ff. Here we find a classification of ascetics according to the way they obtain food and the method of food intake, p. 24, preceded by an explanation of fear of food. On p. 25 there is an enumeration of five classes of hermits who cook. Among these, the first group eats anything they find in the forest; these are of two kinds: one eats only plant products, and the other eats the flesh of animals killed by carnivorous beasts.

13. Wezler 1978, 101.

14. *Suttanipāta*, lines 11-14. Cf. Wezler 1978, 101.

15. Alsdorf 1962, 568, n. 1. Also Wezler 1978, 99.

16. Alsdorf 1962, 577, n. 3, followed by Schmidt 1968, 638-39. Also Wezler 1978, 99.

17. Restrictions for this category of 'lifestyle' were formulated in various prescriptive texts; see for example, Schmidt 1968, 638-39, and in the texts of *Gautama* 3.31 and *Baudhāyana* 2.6.11.15; both texts refer to the meat of animals killed by beasts of prey, such as *baiṣka*.

18. Wezler 1978.



the footsteps of his teacher Alsdorf, surmises the probability that some forest-dwellers partook of meat daily and did so without engaging in any killing at all. Wezler corroborates this further with reference to MBh 12.236.7,<sup>19</sup> in which the forest-dweller, while performing his *pañcayajña* duties, should offer different ingredients to those of a householder (*gr̥hastha*). Therefore, he should not offer the cultivated variety of grains but, rather, wild rice (*nīvara*), as well as remnants of meat from wild animals, as a substitute for the flesh of domesticated animals. In fact, the praxis of the ascetic penance of fasting may correspond to intervals between the irregular discovery of animal carcasses or other food items. One could say that fasting is part of the lifestyle of ascetics by necessity, as food is not regularly available under conditions which dictate that any effort towards securing necessary items for one's livelihood, especially any effort involving killing, is undesirable.

There was possibly a tenuous influence from Vedic sacrifice, in which certain acts of sacrifice (*karman*)<sup>20</sup> were performed, and the 'leavings' were then distributed as food, later and till the present day known as *prasāda*. In the context of the certain Brahmanic groups who gave up the householder's effort at procuring a livelihood and hence did not engage in activities/actions for their subsistence, they either lived on what was available in the forest or by receiving alms or even 'donations' from local chieftains, etc. As such outside support may not always have been available, life in the wilderness had to be self-sustaining. But this is evidently so not only for ascetics but also for exiles, be they the protagonists of the Epics or even messengers and accompanying troops or other members of the retinue of whomsoever.

The dietary restrictions we can observe in the literature of ancient India and also directly in modern times are a very complex and unwieldy matter.<sup>21</sup> A straightforward answer cannot but elude us, but an attempt at bettering comprehension may help advance the discussion on the issue. The post-Vedic evidence available to us reveals the interchange and certain dependence of ideas on both the Vedic and the Brahmanic traditions. The sudden appearance of concepts such as *ahiṃsā* suggests that its influence might have been far less than often suggested. As Hanns-Peter Schmidt<sup>22</sup> observed, there is no tangible connection between *ahiṃsā* and abstaining from meat, since the mendicants who begged for their alms ate whatever was offered to them, meat included.

Continuing the inquiry into a diet obtained without any personal effort and without deliberate engagement in its procurement, Brahmanical records from

19. Reading as follows: *akṛṣṭaṃ vai vṛthiyavaṃ nīvaraṃ viḡhasāni ca / havīṃṣi samprayaccheta makheṣvatrāpi pañcasu //*

20. The work of the sacrificer had to be performed with the greatest precision so that no wrong outcome would ensue, be it drought or other grave misfortune.

21. Olivelle and others have done work in this area, drawing on *śāstra*, *sūtra*, and other texts.

22. Schmidt 1968, 626, claims that Alsdorf actually lost sight of the difference between *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism.

approximately the same time period as the previously mentioned sources can be used to somewhat round out our limited understanding of the early forces influencing dietary habits.

Beyond the *Dharmaśāstras* sources, texts on the topic of food are as diverse as Pāṇini's *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, Kātyāyana, the already-mentioned Buddhist *Jātakas* tales, with the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, and the medical sources *Caraka-* and *Suśruta-Saṃhitās*, to name but a few. Needless to say, both the Epics – the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* – include food narratives, which can elicit surprise and present controversy. The Epics portray a variety of foodstuffs and in some instances even provide something like recipes. In the *Mahābhārata*, we find *piṣṭaudana*, a dish consisting of rice and minced/ground meat and spices.<sup>23</sup> This is mentioned when Duryodhana is fussing and expressing his dissatisfaction over the Pāṇḍavas' well-being and affluence. To quell his jealousy, his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra gives a list of items that attest to Duryodhana's lavish lifestyle, and *piṣṭaudana* is one of these; it was apparently considered a delicacy or even a comfort food. Likewise, we find similar ingredients in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the recipe for *māṃsabhūtodana*, venison cooked with rice and vegetables and spices, supposedly a favorite of Sītā's.<sup>24</sup>

In both Epics, there are a number of particular books (*parvans* or *kāṇḍas*), which, more than any others, encourage us to look for dietary habits, adjustments, and adoptions. Such books include the *Vanaparvan* and *Virāṭaparvan* in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Āraṇyakāṇḍa*, etc., in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and depict the protagonists during their exile years, not only in the wilderness but also when they resided with their hosts, in short, away from their usual dwelling. But of course, even when they were residing at home, cf. *Bālakāṇḍa* and *Āyodhyākāṇḍa*, information regarding food is still to be found.

Yudhiṣṭhira's narratives in the *Mahābhārata* indicate the nature of his and his company's sustenance. *Vanaparvan* 3.2.7 portrays Yudhiṣṭhira sustaining himself and his immediate family on fruit, roots, and meat (*phalamūlamiśāhāra*, 3.2.2),<sup>25</sup> and also discusses the availability of these foods in the wilderness when they **ended up in exile** due to Yudhiṣṭhira's having gambled everything away. In this case his concern was that he would not be able to provide for the Brahmins who insisted on accompanying him, and he finds it unbearable to agree to their suggestion that they fend for themselves (3.2.13). Unlike the solitary king in the commentary on the *Suttanipāta*, Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers are the ones who are actively engaged in hunting antelope here, a circumstance that poses no problem for Yudhiṣṭhira. Then, one night he has a dream in which a small herd of antelopes/deer come to him and petition him to leave the particular forest,

23. Ghosh 1876, Vol. 2, 322; Achaya 1994, 54, follows Ghosh as does Om Prakash 1987.

24. Om Prakash 1987, 188.

25. Wezler 1978, 99. In *Mahābhārata* 3.2.8, a synonymous phrase, *phalamūlamṛga*, is used.

known as Dvaitavana.<sup>26</sup> The Pāṇḍavas and their adherents who dwelt in this forest had slaughtered all their kith and kin, and the animals wanted their kind to have a chance at survival. The next day, Yudhiṣṭhira discussed the issue with his brothers and they all set out to move to the Kāmyaka forest. On their way, they ate sweet corn and drank fresh water.

We find descriptions of food items, vessels for preparing food, and narratives of famous cooks, including the well-known King Nala<sup>27</sup> (*Mahābhārata* 3.73.20), who, despite his disguise, is recognized by his wife when she tastes the meat he had cooked and flavoured. King Nala must have cooked, or even just flavoured the meat on occasions, otherwise, at the end of her long search, his wife would never have been able to recognize him just by the flavours he had used in the meat dish. Furthermore Prince Bhīmasena (*Vīrāṭaparvan* 4.2.7 and 4.7.5), who identified himself as a cook of soups and sauces, operated as a butcher as well (*Mahābhārata* 4.2.7).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, we find many references to food in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and even to a royal cook for Rāma and Sītā. While they were in exile, Lakṣmaṇa, Rama's younger brother of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, cooked for all three of them for many years.

Om Prakash, in his *Economy and Food...* provides numerous examples of meat consumption in both the Epics<sup>29</sup> and also in many other sources. For example, Sītā's favourite was a dish of rice cooked with venison.<sup>30</sup>

From the literature dating to after the middle of the first millennium, there is plenty of evidence to show that dietary habits included eating meat and drinking wine, which was specifically a regular practice for royalty, be they male or female. The partaking of meat as part of the diet in and around the royal court is corroborated first of all by lifestyle. Lifestyle and custom included royal hunting expeditions, during periods of exile, as in both the Epics, and also during military or various other campaigns, as well as during expeditions accompanying the *aśvamedha* horse, or even intelligence-gathering expeditions.

By the way, in the above-mentioned exceedingly detailed work by Om Prakash, there is an instance in which he misconstrues the term *kīlāla*, rendering it only as *kīlāla*, and thus categorizing it as an intoxicating drink, somehow oblivious of the suffix *-ja*, which changes the meaning of the term from a drink

26. *Mahābhārata* 3.244.2 ff. A similar request to change the Pāṇḍavas' dwelling place appeared earlier, and on this occasion was requested by Vyāsa himself, 3.37.31.

27. There is a literature called '*Pāka*' this or that, for example *Pākadarpaṇa*. This *Pākadarpaṇa* is ascribed to a king in an *upākhyāna* (substory) in the *Mahābhārata*, known by the name of Nala. He is well-remembered as a skillful cook, especially of meat, and more specifically for its flavouring/dressing. The *Pākadarpaṇa* is of a late date (not established). See a recent study by the German scholar, Heike Gilbert (Gilbert 1997).

28. The term *ārālika* was understood by van Buitenen 1978, 28 and Olivelle 2014, 480, etc., as a meat cook or butcher.

29. Om Prakash 1987, 183-220.

30. *Ibid.*, 188.

to meat.<sup>31</sup> Two things have happened here; first, the suffix *-ja* has not been considered, and then the verb that follows the noun is from the root *khād/khādeyam* (potential/optative/*vidhi liṅ*) with a negative *na*. In other words, the item *kīlāla-ja* should not be eaten. If this were a beverage, why would it be prohibited from being eaten and not drunk?

The misread word occurs in the narrative about Karṇa, who is an important figure in the *Mahābhārata*, since it can be argued that he is the core protagonist of the Epic and according to some the initial panegyric of a fallen hero.<sup>32</sup> He is often called the only ‘tragic’ character in premodern Indian literature. The context of the discussed truncated term *kīlāla-ja* is of a promise and a vow made by Karṇa soon after he was knighted by Duryodhana, following a skirmish with Arjuna, and really with all the Pāṇḍavas. Karṇa swears to kill the Pāṇḍavas and takes a vow pledging to give up meat, after which he specifically promises to follow an *asura* (Titan?) vow.<sup>33</sup> This afore-mentioned pledge indicates some contradiction in his views. Karṇa takes a vow not to eat meat until he has killed the Pāṇḍavas, and Arjuna in particular.<sup>34</sup> In other words, he will abjure the eating of meat, as part of a penance, but also to motivate himself. He also takes the ‘*asura* vow’, even though it is not entirely clear what this vow entails. But at the very least, it is clear that his renouncement of meat eating thereby giving up his customary habit. By having been accepted by Duryodhana as kin, as mentioned above, Karṇa must also have shared in dining, etc., in addition to the fighting. He lived at the court of the Kauravas, who partook of both meat and liquor, as was customary for the warrior class.

Karṇa’s contradictory attitude towards meat eating can be observed in the *Karṇaparvan*. After a berating by his charioteer, Śalya,<sup>35</sup> he gives the latter a

31. *Ibid.*, 203. Cf. Monier-Williams 1982 (orig. 1899), giving ‘meat’ for *kīlāla-ja*.

32. Carroll Smith 1992, who argues that on the basis of her metrical analysis of the *Mahābhārata*, not only can we observe the *ksatriya* world but perhaps see the Epic in its pre-brahmanized form. She argues that parts of the *Karṇaparvan* form the kernel of the panegyric for a fallen warrior, whom we know as Karṇa. In modern times, Karṇa is definitely the darling of the nation, in the different strata of society.

33. *Mahābhārata* (Vulgate), *Vanaparvan*, 3.257.17. Although in Om Prakash’s bibliography the reference for section 5.2. is the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, the reference in the example is from the Vulgate edition of the *Mahābhārata*. This verse is not included in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, but does exist in the Vulgate. Om Prakash’s references are not easily traceable.

34. *Ibid.*, 3.257.17-18 (for *athotkuṣṭam*, I prefer to read *athotkṛṣṭa*, ‘to tear asunder’): *kīlāla-jaṃ na khādeyaṃ kariṣye cāsuravratam / nāstūti naiva vakṣyāmi yācito yena kenacit // athotkuṣṭam maheṣvāsair dhārtarāṣṭrair mahārathaiḥ / pratijñāte phālgunasya vadhe karṇena saṃyuge //*

35. Śalya unwittingly had fallen into the trap Duryodhana had set up for him, as he made his way to give support to the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana had deliberately set up rest-stops with refreshments, etc., along the route of Śalya’s journey. As a result of the mistaken source of hospitality, Śalya was obliged to serve on the Kaurava (Duryodhana’s) side. Yudhiṣṭhira exploited the confusing situation and instructed Śalya to work in a covert fashion for the Pāṇḍava side by demoralizing Karṇa, by driving Karṇa’s war wagon, and by ranting insults at Karṇa.

dose of his own medicine, scolding him in turn, and depicting the despicable behaviour of certain people. The target of Karṇa's malice/verbal vendetta is the Bāl̥hika people, and his aim is to belittle the inappropriate behaviour of women from the general area to which Śalya belongs, the Madra country. His deprecating speech includes blame for meat eating and liquor drinking. Was this really Karṇa's judgment of the women's behaviour, or was he making rhetorical use of a common custom? Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* i.e., in the *Virāṭaparvan*, Sudeśnā, Virāṭa's wife, sends Sairandhrī (the disguised Draupadī) to get wine, so that Sudeśnā, as she says: 'would not die of thirst'.<sup>36</sup>

The prohibition on eating animal flesh is strongly associated with South Asian (Indian) customs and beliefs, to such an extent that in the USA, most of the time, Indian cuisine and diet are equated with vegetarianism. What a misleading notion! It may be useful to examine some of the presuppositions. The frequent question concerning the origins of these prohibitions is mostly at the speculative stage. I am firmly convinced that there is no precise historical moment or event we could point to. Rather, a number of factors contributed to the spread of the idea and thenceforth the custom, as discussed in the translation of Ludwig Alsdorf's study *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*.<sup>37</sup> Magico-sacrificial fear and concern for purity versus pollution seem to be the early determining factors. Cows were not listed among the animals that could not be eaten. For the priests (Brahmans) partaking in the consumption of the sacrificial offerings, the distribution of the specific parts of the sacrificed animal was regulated, so that there was a certain order in the distribution of the meat. Importantly, the priest who appeased or 'quieted' the sacrificial animal ate last.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the changes can be phrased in this way: the disruption of the Vedic ritual that resulted in the abandonment of animal sacrifice consequently led to the substitution of surrogates, such as rice balls, for animals. Economic needs, such as avoiding using up one's capital, along with other factors, must have contributed considerably in this process.

An analysis of the development of food culture in the second half of the first millennium BCE, albeit in broad strokes, allows us to surmise that novel cultural influences arising from contact with settled populations were at work, which led to a varying amount of mutual assimilation. At the same time, it is also assumed that large swaths of population were unaffected by this cultural contact for an extremely long period. But if we consider where there was a custom of eating meat, the infiltrating changes, e.g., as manifested in the case of

36. *Mahābhārata* (Vulgate), 4.14.10: *sudeśnovāca, uttiṣṭha gaṅga sairandhrī kīcakasya niveśanam / pānam ānaya kalyāni pipāsā māṃ bādhyate //*.

37. See also Bollée's introductory matter to Alsdorf 2010 (orig. 1962) and Heesterman 1966, a review of Alsdorf 1962.

38. Heesterman 1966, Appendix I, 92 in Ludwig Alsdorf 2010.

Aśoka, made permanent inroads in affecting that custom. Furthermore the mendicants, ascetics, etc., of the *śramaṇa* culture, in short, those who gave up their station in society and family life were no longer involved in procuring food by growing, hunting, selling or buying it, etc., as people engaged in society normally were. As seen for example in the above mentioned offerings of wild grains and the remnants of wild kills, the sources of food stuff for these *śramaṇas* were neither cultivated nor domesticated. They themselves partook of the wild grain and at the same time opportunistically consumed meat when available. One could say they went about their sustenance in a passive way, making use of the leavings of animals of prey, avoiding any decisive actions that would make them accrue karmic traces.

The offering of sacrificial animals and the eating of meat, or the contrary, developed into a moral issue over time. The scholar R. Mitra was ostracized for writing an article called *Beef in Ancient India*,<sup>39</sup> which showed how much value was attached to the bovine species, and how integrated it was with the most important facets of society, particularly the Vedic sacrificial ritual, in which the priest not only officiated but also participated in consuming the sacrificed animal. As is generally known, cows were a substantial part of a community's capital, as they invariably provided sustenance and a currency. Hence, the use of bovines for sacrifice was truly a sacrifice, as it meant giving up a part of the community's livelihood, as well as a portion of its bartering or purchasing power. Related to this was the need to preserve the community's capital without large fluctuations, as there was an increased tendency to regard domesticated animals as accountable property and hence, necessarily subject to controlled use. This was important for stabilizing the society, as food scarcity was always a threat.

The *Mahābhārata*, one of our post-Vedic witnesses, documents some of the changes in the attitude toward the Vedic ritual, a change which actually took place on the ground under the influence of competing religious beliefs and sentiments, such as those of the Buddhists, the Jains, and the Abhirs.<sup>40</sup> In some groups, sacrificing an animal or eating meat became an insurmountable moral issue. A. Chakrabarti<sup>41</sup> discusses some of the problems, but sees no difference between killing for sacrifice or hunting which provides meat for consumption, on the one hand, and something like 'road kill', on the other, which is really what is left after the wild animals have had their fill or the meat freely given to mendicants on their begging rounds amongst the laity. In both of these latter instances, food is obtained and made available without any deliberate effort or act involving killing being performed, in other words, without the act = *karman*

39. Mitra 1881. Mitra's fairly short study is based on a careful textual analysis of the Vedic texts. This did not deter Gita Press's publication of *A Review of Beef in Ancient India* by an anonymous author (Anonymous 1971), denying any meat presence or availability in this 'Review', providing counter arguments to each piece of textual evidence Mitra had provided.

40. Bhattacharya 1896, Ch. II, 296 ff.

41. Chakrabarti 1996, 262 ff.

which would make an indelible mark in the karmic store. The crux of the matter here is in not being proactive – in not acting in the customary way which, with time indeed becomes the bottom line for the moral system advocated for religious goals and shared by the Brahmins, Buddhists, Jains, and others in South Asian society. It is not necessarily an expression of compassion or non-violence, but, rather, a concern with reincarnation.

Again, in contrast with popular opinion today, the radical adjustments made to the Vedic sacrifice were not necessarily caused by the abstention from meat on the part of the early Jains and the Buddhists. It is more likely that both these groups' opposition to the elitist and exclusionary practices of the Brahmanical ritualistic tradition may have led to the abandonment of that part of the ritual where the most precious possession was sacrificed. Vedic and post-Vedic literature and inscriptions allow us to extrapolate that restrictions on eating meat were not always a consistent process.

In retrospect, as we discuss customs and other issues, we can say that, although the term remains unchanged, action (*karman*) has undergone a radical shift as a concept, and also as a practice, closely reflecting changes in society and the value system. Most importantly, it became a term for expressing a relation of causality between cause and effect, which formed the cornerstone for a variety of developments in religious traditions.

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# Magical kitchens or hunting? How to survive in the epic jungle

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## *Introduction*

What can we gather from ancient literature as to the reality of the epoch to which it belongs? This question poses itself with acuity in the case of many ancient Indian texts – which often present the prescribed as factual – and even more so in the case of a composition like the *Mahābhārata* (MBh), where the supernatural and mythical freely mingle with the mundane. The Epics often give us an ideal picture of the ascetics who live in the hostile environment of the Indian jungle, subsisting on meagre forest fare. Is it actually possible to live on such a diet – provided one is bent on surviving and not on releasing one's body?

In this paper, I propose to examine what kind of food the Pāṇḍavas ate during their exile in the forest,<sup>1</sup> which is described in Book 3 of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Āraṇyakaparvan*. Those who are familiar with the literature of ancient India know to what extent all the aspects of food-intake are fraught with ideology, forming, for instance, one of the main topics of law-books. What to eat – or not to eat, when, with whom, offered by whom, was a topic of paramount importance for the Indian society. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that one of the first questions king Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana, when he questions him about the Pāṇḍavas' exile at the beginning of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, is 'What did they eat?': *kim āhārāḥ* (MBh 3.1.4c). As we shall presently see, the answer is not a simple one and different passages present a different picture of the Pāṇḍavas' diet.

1. During their exile, the Pāṇḍavas divide most of their time between two forests, the Dvaitavana and the Kāmyakavana.

*Sūrya's boon*

The problem of food is compounded by the fact that the Pāṇḍavas are not alone in the forest: they are accompanied by Brahmins who insist on following them – they are needed, they say, to perform rituals and to entertain the Pāṇḍavas with stories – even though Yudhiṣṭhira explains the dangers of the forest to them and mentions the problem of food. Yudhiṣṭhira points out that they will merely live on ‘fruit, roots, and meat’ (*phalamūlāmiṣāhārā*, 3.2.2) or ‘fruit, roots, and deer’ (*phalamūlamrgān*, 3.2.8). But the Brahmins are undaunted and reply that they will look after themselves and fetch their own forest food (*svayam āhrtya vanyāni*, 3.2.10). Yudhiṣṭhira finally allows them to come, but continues to worry about them. His chaplain (*purohita*) Dhaumya<sup>2</sup> comes to his rescue and provides a solution to his problems. The Sun, he says, is the foremost provider of food, thanks to him, plants grow. Let Yudhiṣṭhira pray to Sūrya and recite his 108 names.<sup>3</sup> The Sun-god is satisfied, appears before Yudhiṣṭhira and tells him the following:<sup>4</sup>

‘You shall attain to all that you aspire, king! I shall provide you with food for twelve years. The four kinds of food – fruit, roots, viands, and greens that are prepared in your kitchen – will be inexhaustible for you’. (...) He [Yudhiṣṭhira] joined Draupadī; and while she watched, the Lord Pāṇḍava went and prepared the food in the kitchen. The four kinds of forest fare, once cooked, multiplied: the food grew to be inexhaustible, and with it he fed the Brahmins. While the Brahmins were eating, Yudhiṣṭhira fed his younger brothers, too, and afterward ate the remains, which are known as the leftover. Pṛṣata’s granddaughter [Draupadī] then first fed Yudhiṣṭhira and ate the remnant herself.<sup>5</sup>

*yat te ’bhilaṣitaṃ rājan sarvam etad avāpsyasi /*  
*aham annaṃ pradāsyāmi sapta pañca ca te samāḥ //*  
*phalamūlāmiṣaṃ śākaṃ saṃskṛtaṃ yan mahānase /*  
*caturvidhaṃ tad annādyam akṣayaṃ te bhaviṣyati //* MBh 3.4.2-3 //  
 (...)

2. A certain Dhaumya (Āyoda Dhaumya) also figures in MBh 1.3.19-82, in stories which involve food. It is not clear whether he is the same Dhaumya as the Pāṇḍavas’ chaplain. (Cf. Feller 2004, 229, esp. n. 44).

3. Biardeau 2002, tome 1, 428-429 notes in her commentary to the MBh that this passage reveals the spread of the *bhakti* cult to other deities than Viṣṇu.

4. The text transmitted by the critical edition seems somewhat problematic: Dhaumya recites the Sun’s 108 names and explains the good that comes of it (end of 3.3). Yudhiṣṭhira himself is never said to recite the names. However the Sun-god is pleased with him and grants him a boon (3.4.1-3). Then Yudhiṣṭhira is said to rise out of the water (3.4.4), into which he is never said to have gone. After 3.3.14, some manuscripts insert Yudhiṣṭhira’s *stuti* to the Sun. (Cf. Appendix I of the crit. ed.).

5. Unless mentioned otherwise, all the translations are van Buitenen’s.

*draupadyā saha saṅgamyā paśyamāno 'bhyayāt prabhuh /  
mahānase tadānaṃ tu sādhayāmāsa pāṇḍavaḥ //  
saṃskṛtaṃ prasavaṃ yāti vanyam annaṃ caturvidham /  
akṣayyaṃ vardhate cānnaṃ tena bhojayate dvijān //  
bhuktavatsu ca vipreṣu bhojayitvānujān api /  
śeṣaṃ vighasasaṃjñāṃ tu paścād bhuñkte yudhiṣṭhiraḥ /  
yudhiṣṭhiraṃ bhojayitvā śeṣaṃ aśnāti pārṣatī // MBh 3.4.5-7 //*

This kitchen (*mahānasa*) is not further described, nor is its mode of functioning clearly explained. It is also not clear whether the kitchen was gifted by Sūrya or whether it was already in the Pāṇḍavas' possession. The text only specifies that Yudhiṣṭhira first prepares 'four types of forest food' (*vanyam annaṃ caturvidham*, MBh 3.4.6) which then multiply magically. But we do not know if the initial small amount of food is first gathered by the Pāṇḍavas or provided by the kitchen itself.

We can see that this passage reveals a certain number of differences as compared to the previous lists of food mentioned by Yudhiṣṭhira:

- The addition of a fourth category of food, namely greens or vegetables (*śāka*), which was lacking before. With these four types of food, the forest-residents are thus provided with something akin to a 'balanced diet'.
- This food here is properly prepared (*saṃskṛtaṃ, sādhayāmāsa*) in a kitchen by Yudhiṣṭhira himself. Yudhiṣṭhira first feeds the Brahmins and his brothers, then eats their left-overs, while his wife Draupadī eats his own left-overs. Thanks to the boon, he is now in the position of a house-holder (*gṛhastha*) – though one without a *gṛha* – while the Brahmins are his honoured guests whom he receives hospitably and feeds, instead of them all being on the same footing and having to forage in the forest to get their own food, as the Brahmins had previously suggested. Thus the king maintains his standing and is not dishonoured by his lack of hospitality.
- Perhaps most importantly, the boon solves the problem of the quantity of food, since a lot of food is necessary to feed the Pāṇḍavas' numerous entourage.

### *Hunting for food*

The question of food is subsequently taken up again in MBh 3.47.3-12. Once more, Janamejaya asks about his forefather's diet – evidently an object of sustained interest, not only on the part of the king, but also on the part of the redactors and the audience of the Epic. But this time, Vaiśampāyana provides quite a different answer:

Janamejaya said:

(...) Now tell me, what kind of food did the Pāṇḍavas eat in the forest? Was it forest fare or husbanded? Tell me that, sir.

Vaiśampāyana said:

It was forest fare and game killed with purified weapons that those bulls among men ate, after first providing the Brahmins. When those champions, mighty bowmen, dwelled in the forest, Brahmins with fire and without fire followed them there. There were another ten thousand *snātaka* Brahmins of great spirit and wise in the means of release whom Yudhiṣṭhira also supported. With his arrows he laid low *ruru* deer and black gazelles and other sacrificial forest game and provided for the Brahmins in ritual fashion. Among them not a man was found ill-colored or diseased, thin or weakened, unhappy or afraid. Like favorite sons or kinsmen or blood brothers he fed them, Yudhiṣṭhira the King Dharma, best of the Kauravas. And like a mother the glorious Draupadī served her husbands and all the twice-born first, before she herself ate what remained.

The King hunted the east, Bhīmasena the south,  
And the twins both hunted the west and the north  
For the meat of deer, all wielding their bows,  
And there they killed them, day after day.  
Thus they lived in the Kāmyaka Forest  
Without Arjuna, missing him sorely,<sup>6</sup>  
And all of five years did pass them by,  
As they studied and prayed and sacrificed.

*janamejaya uvāca /*

(...)

*kim āsit pāṇḍuputrāṇāṃ vane bhojanam ucyatām /  
vāneyam atha vā kṛṣṭam etad ākhyātu me bhavān //  
vaiśampāyana uvāca /  
vāneyaṃ ca mṛgāṃś caiva śuddhair bāṇair nipātītān /  
brāhmaṇānāṃ nivedyāgram abhuñjan puruṣarṣabhāḥ //  
tāṃś tu śūrān maheṣvāsāṃś tadā nivasato vane /  
anvayur brāhmaṇā rājan sāgnayo 'nagnayas tathā //  
brāhmaṇānāṃ sahasrāṇi snātakānāṃ mahātmanām /  
daśa mokṣavidāṃś tadvad yān bibharti yudhiṣṭhiraḥ //  
rurūn kṛṣṇamṛgāṃś caiva medhyāṃś cānyān vanecarān /  
bāṇair unmathya vidhivad brāhmaṇebhyo nyavedayat //  
na tatra kaścid durvarṇo vyādrito vāpy adṛśyata /  
kṛśo vā durbalo vāpi dīno bhīto 'pi vā naraḥ //  
putrān iva priyān jñātīn bhrātṛn iva sahodarān /  
pupoṣa kauravaśreṣṭho dharmarājo yudhiṣṭhiraḥ //  
patīṃś ca draupadī sarvān dvijāṃś caiva yaśasvinī /  
māteva bhojayitvāgre śiṣṭam āhārayat tadā //  
prācīm rājā dakṣiṇām bhīmaseno*

6. Arjuna is absent because he is sojourning in his father Indra's heaven.

*yamau pratīcīm atha vāpy udīcīm /  
 dhanurdharā māṃsahetor mṛgānām  
 kṣayam cakrur nityam evopagamyā //  
 tathā teṣām vasatām kāmyake vai  
 vihīnānām arjunenotsukānām /  
 pañcaiva varṣāṇi tadā vyatīyur  
 adhīyatām japatām juhvatām ca // MBh 3.47.3-12 //*

Janamejaya makes a distinction between forest food (*vāneyam*) and cultivated food (*kṛṣṭam*). The narrator immediately makes it clear that the Pāṇḍavas and the accompanying Brahmins only live on forest-food (as forest-ascetics are wont to do), but, it would seem that this is essentially meat.<sup>7</sup> Whereas this passage gives an elaborate description of their hunting, no roots, fruit, or vegetables are mentioned here and the Sun's boon seems entirely forgotten. From the above passage, it becomes clear that all manners of Brahmins follow our heroes:<sup>8</sup> 'Brahmins with fire and without fire'. Those 'with fire' are clearly Brahmins who follow the sacrificial life-style, and those 'without fire' are presumably bent on liberation. As we see, all of them without distinction eat the game provided by the Pāṇḍavas.

We cannot fail to notice this passage's insistence on the healthiness of all the Brahmins who eat meat: 'Among them not a man was found ill-colored or diseased, thin or weakened, unhappy or afraid'.<sup>9</sup> The advantages of a carnivorous diet are also expressed elsewhere in the great Epic, for instance in MBh 13.117.6-8,<sup>10</sup> where meat is specially recommended for the wounded or sick, and for those who undertake strenuous physical efforts:<sup>11</sup>

There is no other food here on earth superior to meat for its *rasa* [nourishing juice, sap]. For those who are tormented by wounds or weakness,<sup>12</sup> and those who delight in a villager's duty,<sup>13</sup> and for those who are emaciated by travelling, there is nothing better than meat. At once it increases the breaths [or

7. See Prakash 1961, 105-11 on meat-eating in the Epics and the *Manusmṛti*.

8. We also notice that from being previously 'a few' (*kecit*, 3.1.41), the Brahmins have now multiplied to tens of thousands (*sahasrāṇi (...)* *daśā*)!

9. Contrast this with MBh 3.245.11, where Vyāsa cannot restrain his tears, 'when he saw his grandsons so gaunt from living on forest fare.'

10. This passage is commented upon by Zimmermann 1982, 203.

11. We must however note that these verses are immediately followed by others which condemn meat-eating in no uncertain terms! This wavering between the pros and cons of meat-eating versus vegetarianism, and of sacrificing versus *ahimsā* is typical of the Epic. See also Prakash 1961, 109.

12. Zimmermann 1982, 203 translates: '(...) spécialement en case de cachexie ou de surmenage'.

13. *grāmyadharmā* (lit. a villager's duty) also means 'sexual intercourse'. This is most likely what is meant here.

life-span] and gives an excellent plumpness. There is no food superior to meat, tormenter of your foes. [Author's translation].

*na māmśāt param atrānyad rasato vidyate bhuvi //  
kṣataḥkṣīṇābhītapātānām grāmyadharmaratās ca ye //  
adhvanā karśītānām ca na māmśād vidyate param //  
sadyo vardhayati prāṇān puṣṭim agryām dadāti ca /  
na bhakṣo 'bhyadhikah kaścīn māmśād asti paramtapa // MBh 13.117.6c-8 //*

In his study entitled *La jungle et le fumet des viandes* (1982), Francis Zimmermann notes that the ancient Indian medical texts likewise insist on the healthiness of meat-eating and remarks that meat is systematically associated with strength and virility (1982, 204 ff.). Furthermore, meat (especially the rare rhinoceros!) is recommended for *śrāddha* ceremonies as the most nourishing and satisfying type of food for the ancestors (1982, 202).

The Pāṇḍavas' essentially carnivorous diet is subsequently corroborated in other passages of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*. Thus, in MBh 3.244.2-14, the deer of the Kāmyaka Forest visit Yudhiṣṭhira in a dream. They complain that their herds have practically been decimated, and beg Yudhiṣṭhira and his entourage to move on to another forest, so that their numbers can grow again.<sup>14</sup> In another passage at the end of the Forest-book (MBh 3.251), Draupadī is left alone in her hermitage in the Kāmyaka forest while her husbands are out hunting. King Jayadratha and his numerous entourage happen to travel that way. The king is smitten by her beauty. Unaware as yet of his evil intentions (he subsequently kidnaps her), Draupadī receives him hospitably and tells him:

Accept this water to wash your feet and this seat, son of a king. Let me give you a breakfast of fifty deer! Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira himself will give you black antelope, spotted antelope, venison, fawn, *śarabha*, rabbit, white footed antelope, *ruru*, *śambara*, gayal, many deer, boar, buffalo, and other kinds of game.

*pādyam pratigrhāṇedam āsanam ca nṛpātmaja /  
mṛgān pañcāśataṃ caiva prātarāśam dadāni te //  
aiṇeyān pṛṣatān nyanūkūn hariṇān śarabhān śāsān /  
rśyān rurūn śambarāṃś ca gavayāṃś ca mṛgān bahūn //  
varāhān mahiṣāṃś caiva yās cānyā mṛgajātayaḥ /  
pradāsyati svayam tubhyam kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ // MBh 3.251.11-13 //*

As we see, Draupadī enumerates an impressive number of animals killed by her husbands. One suspects that she is boasting to impress and intimidate Jaya-

14. For this passage, see Feller 2013.



dratha while hinting at her husbands' prowess. But what concerns us here is that she offers him only meat – no roots, fruit or vegetables!

### *Hunting as sacrifice*

To return to the above-quoted MBh 3.47.3-12: a close reading of this passage reveals that here the hunting is assimilated to a sacrifice. Note the expressions: 'sacrificial<sup>15</sup> forest game' (*medhyāṃś (...)* *vanecarān*), 'killed with purified weapons' (*śuddhair bāṇair nipātītān*), served to the Brahmins 'in ritual fashion' (*vidhivad*). As in a sacrifice, the aim of the hunt is primarily to feed the Brahmins: 'Those bulls among men ate, after first providing the Brahmins' (*brāhmaṇānām nivedyāgram abhuñjan puruṣarṣabhāḥ*). The summary of the heroes' activities in the last verse of the passage is: 'they studied, prayed and sacrificed' (*adhīyatām japatām juhvatām ca*). Since no 'ordinary' sacrifices are mentioned here, we have to assume that hunting is summed up as sacrificing.

Moreover, as the last two verses make clear, the Pāṇḍavas are said to hunt east, south, west and north, covering the four directions, which is also reminiscent of certain sacrificial rites. Thus, in the Sabhāparvan, before performing Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*, Arjuna conquers the north, Bhīma the east, Sahadeva the south and Nakula the west, while king Yudhiṣṭhira remains in the centre, in his capital (MBh 2.23-29). Similarly, before performing the horse-sacrifice in Book 14, Arjuna follows the sacrificial horse which tours India *pradakṣiṇa*-wise. Noteworthy in MBh 3.47.3-12 is the fact that the centre is left empty – but this is only seemingly so. For indeed, the Pāṇḍavas' thoughts are all centred around Arjuna, who occupies thus the central position as well as the zenith, since he is presently residing in heaven with his father Indra.

The motif of hunting in the four directions also appears quite prominently in the passage which describes Draupadī's meeting with Jayadratha. Verse 3.248.4 states that 'all the Pāṇḍavas went hunting in the four directions for the sake of the Brahmins' (*yayuh sarve caturdiśam / mṛgayāṃ (...)* *brāhmaṇārthe*). And in 3.250.6-7, Draupadī explains to Jayadratha where her husbands have gone:

The Pārthas have settled me here while they  
Spread out to the four directions to hunt.  
The king went east, Bhīmasena south,

15. 'Sacrificial' translates the Sanskrit *medhya*. According to the Monier-Williams dictionary, *medhya* means: 'full of sap, vigorous, fresh (AV); fit for a sacrifice or oblation, free from blemish (as a victim), clean, pure, not defiling (by contact or by being eaten)'. The first meaning would of course also be possible here, but the second seems more likely. The *medha* (sap, pith) is something like the 'sacrificial quality', that which makes an animal fit to be sacrificed. See Smith 1991, 536.

Westward went Jaya [=Arjuna], the twins to the north;<sup>16</sup>

*te mām niveśyeha diśāś catasro*  
*vibhajya pārthā mṛgayām prayātāḥ //*  
*prācīm rājā dakṣiṇām bhīmaseno*  
*jayaḥ pracīcīm yamaḥ udīcīm / MBh 3.250.6c-7b /*

Thus, through the vocabulary which is employed and through the motif of the hunt in the four directions, the Pāṇḍavas' hunting is made equivalent to a sacrificial performance. This 'sacrifice', it is true, is not described in detail anywhere. Does it merely consist in killing the animal, or are certain ceremonies performed? The text remains silent on this point.<sup>17</sup> Usually, only domestic animals were considered to be appropriate sacrificial victims in ancient India. The reason behind this is that the victim was thought to be a substitute for the sacrificer himself. Hence the sacrificer could only offer something that belonged to him, whereas something extraneous could not represent a valid substitute.<sup>18</sup> But as Zimmermann (1982, 203) remarks, hunting, like war, can be assimilated to a sacrifice wherein the hunter (or the warrior) would be simultaneously both the sacrificer (he is the one who kills) and the potential victim, if he gets killed by his intended prey. In the latter case, he would offer himself as a victim, instead of offering a substitute.

However that may be, in my opinion, the equivalence between hunting and sacrificing is mainly established here for the sake of an apology: an apology for hunting and an apology for meat-eating – especially in the case of the Brahmins. In short, thanks to the equivalence 'hunting = sacrificing' the Brahmins are allowed to eat meat. If we read the *Mānavadharmasāstra* (or *Manusmṛti*) for instance, a text which is roughly contemporary with the MBh, we see that the orthodox stance was that killing could be condoned only if it were carried out in a sacrificial context.<sup>19</sup> The same holds for meat-eating – Brahmins were only allowed to eat meat if the animal had been slaughtered in a sacrifice or in a

16. van Buitenen's translation, with modifications. In this passage, Draupadī is left alone to occupy the centre, which perhaps brings about a situation of weakness in which the Pāṇḍavas are exposed to attack.

17. This, by the way, is not unusual for the MBh. The Epic evokes many sacrifices, but the details of the performances are hardly ever dwelt on.

18. Bronkhorst forthcoming, while accepting the general validity of this argument, proposes the interesting counter-argument that 'In certain sacrifices the victim does not represent the sacrificer, but his enemy'. This seems however unlikely here.

19. See well-known quotes such as *Mānavadharmasāstra* 5.39: *yajñārthaṃ paśavaḥ sṛṣṭāḥ svayam eva svayambhuvā / yajño 'sya bhūtyai sarvasya tasmād yajñe vadho 'vadhah* : 'The Self-existent one himself created sacrificial animals for sacrifice; sacrifice is for the good of this whole (universe); and therefore killing in a sacrifice is not killing'. MDhŚ 5.44: *yā vedavihitā hiṃsā (...)* *ahiṃsām eva tāṃ vidyād*. 'The violence (...) which is sanctioned by the Veda (...) that is known as non-violence'.

situation of distress.<sup>20</sup> The latter was evidently increasingly found to be an insufficient excuse – even though surviving for over a decade in the wilderness should reasonably count as a situation of distress! Hence the necessity for ‘sacrificial hunts’.<sup>21</sup> From the point of view of their diet, there is thus no clear-cut difference between the *kṣatriyas* and the Brahmins in these passages. However, there is one between the Brahmins who accompany the Pāṇḍavas for a limited period of time and the permanently renunciant Brahmins who live in the wilderness as a way of life, and whose diet consists of the usual vegetarian fare gathered in the forest. The Pāṇḍavas similarly subsist on roots and fruit when they visit a holy forest hermitage.<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusions

Since killing animals and eating their meat was evidently becoming problematic, one may reasonably wonder why the Pāṇḍavas are not shown to adopt a wholly vegetarian diet, like the ascetics who permanently live in the wilderness. In truth, there seem to be two problems with a vegetarian diet: the first is that meat, as seen above, is considered to give strength, and obviously our heroes need to keep their stamina up, since a terrible war expects them at the end of their long exile. The other problem with this kind of diet is that in the great nutritional chain of beings, the rulers are traditionally the ‘top-dogs’, who feed on all the others. As Wendy Doniger puts it: ‘The rank order of eaters and food in the natural world is straightforward: the physically more powerful eat the physically less powerful. And the principle supposedly holds when it comes to the social world.’ (Doniger–Smith 1991, xxvii). Thus the *kṣatriyas*, and especial-

20. MDhŚ 5.27: *prokṣitam bhakṣayen māṃsam brāhmaṇānām ca kāmyayā / yathāvidhi niyuktas tu prāṇānām eva cātyaye*: ‘You may eat meat that has been consecrated by the sprinkling of water, or when priests want to have it, or when you are properly engaged in a ritual, or when your breath of life is in danger’; MDhŚ 5.36ab: *asaṃskṛtān paśūn mantrair nādyād viprah kathañcana / mantrais tu saṃskṛtān adyāc chāsvataṃ vidhim āsthītaḥ*: ‘A priest should never eat sacrificial animals that have not been transformed by Vedic verses; but with the support of the obligatory rule, he may eat them when they have been transformed by Vedic verses’ (transl. Doniger–Smith 1991).

21. We may contrast this situation with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā kill deer and eat their meat quite unabashedly, without any sacrificial apologetic stance. (See for instance R 3.6 and 3.12, which reveal that the sages consider the deer as an ornament to their hermitages, whereas for Rāma they are food!). They temporarily adopt a diet of roots, fruit, and bulbs only when they visit hermits in their *āśramas* (see e.g. R 3.10.68 & R 3.11.28). But of course, unlike the Pāṇḍavas, the heroes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* go to the forest alone, unaccompanied by Brahmins. This contrast is quite significant in itself. For the redactors of the MBh, it was apparently unthinkable that the king and his family could go to the forest alone, without brahmanical protection/supervision.

22. For instance, when they visit the sage Mārkaṇḍeya’s hermitage in the Kāmyakavana, they live on roots and fruit (MBh 3.295.4).

ly the kings, are super-predators who feed on the lower orders. Hence, becoming a vegetarian would amount to being the eaten, or the loser – a fate which the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* are not ready to embrace.

If depicting the hunt as a sacrifice is a first concession to the superiority of non-violence over killing (since killing is acceptable only in a sacrificial context), the episode of Sūrya's boon at the beginning of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* could be seen as a further step towards the ideal of non-violence and vegetarianism, where even the sacrificial context was no longer a sufficient excuse for killing other living beings and eating their flesh. The boon of the magically multiplying food provides the Pāṇḍavas with a neat means to feed themselves and their entourage in a healthy fashion, without them having to resort to violence at all, or only minimally so.<sup>23</sup> At the very least, this is nothing like exterminating whole populations of deer! Viewed from a diachronical perspective, the episode of Sūrya's boon certainly appears to be a later innovation in the text,<sup>24</sup> for the following reasons: as far as I know, it is never mentioned again in the whole of the MBh, but the subsequent passages concerning food systematically mention the heroes' hunts; in 3.47.3, Janamejaya asks about his ancestors' forest-diet again, almost as if he had never asked before: it may well be that at a certain stage of development of the text he was indeed asking this question for the first time; the text of the CE reveals obvious text-critical problems, as we noted above (note 4); the passage betrays *bhakti*, moreover *bhakti* for the Sun-god, which is probably later than *bhakti* for Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa.

However, viewed synchronically, these various episodes also unexpectedly provide us with a fragment of realistic information concerning the question we asked at the beginning of this paper, namely, whether one can really subsist only on the food found in the forest. The *Mahābhārata*, it seems, gives us the following answer: if you hunt and eat meat, you can easily survive in the forest. But if a group of people want to stay in good health and remain for a long period of time in the wilderness without killing animals, they had better arrange for supernatural help, such as a *deus ex machina* providing gifts of multiplying food – because no realistically valid solution could be proposed.<sup>25</sup>

23. We remember that the four types of food include meat as well, but that its provenance (from the heroes' hunting or magically provided by the Sun-god ?) is not made clear.

24. Though obviously one that found its way into a majority of manuscripts, since the CE contains this episode. This shows not only that it was found to be a good story, but also that it may have solved a moral dilemma – 'how could the heroes have slaughtered and eaten so many deer?' – that many scribes and redactors were increasingly finding problematic.

25. The same remark could be made about an episode found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In R 1.52.22-23, the forest-dwelling sage Vasiṣṭha admits that he entirely depends on his wish-fulfilling cow Śabalā to perform his sacrifices. Here too, a 'magical' solution is proposed for a concrete problem, namely, how could ascetics living in the forest follow the sacrificial life-style?

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# Notes on fast in India

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One of the contrasts apparent in Indian culture is the importance given on the one hand to nourishment – and to its dependence on water and on the human effort to obtain both – and on the other hand to its opposite, fasting.

Food is a cultural issue, and food transactions have shaped Indian society. Food's merit was extolled in ancient texts, from Vedic sacrifice onward; even today most ritual offerings consist of food, and by eating *prasāda*, the left-overs of food offered to the deity, devotees and sacrificers believe they come into contact with the divine.<sup>1</sup> In Olivelle's words, 'Food plays a central role in the socio-cultural construction of reality in India. Indian culture has formulated elaborate rules, prohibitions, and classifications in regard to food'.<sup>2</sup>

Fasting lies at the opposite end of the quest for food, but surprisingly enjoys equal prestige, depending of course on the community envisaged. This paper discusses mainly 'Hindu' communities. In the ascetic experience food is perceived as dangerous,<sup>3</sup> because it is seen as conducive to greed,<sup>4</sup> and Indian ascetics are well known for their long fasts. These traditions of fasting are quite ancient,<sup>5</sup> and persistent: people in India still fast, for quite different reasons. Interestingly, Indian fasts can be absolute or partial, but the act of voluntary fasting shows the faster in complete control of his body and senses, and the ability to restrain one's instincts was/is much appreciated.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, when people are constrained to fast by lack of resources, they do not enjoy any prestige.

In the literature there are several terms for fasting, as:

1. See Olivelle 1991, 22.

2. *Ibid.*

3. The Jains speak of 'fear of food', as in Jaini 2000, *passim*.

4. The first mention of this is in the *Agāṇṇasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*: greed, by a gradual process, is born of eating (see comments of Warder 1970, 155-64; Olivelle 1991, 29-32) and in turn produces the need for a ruler, to regulate transactions.

5. This practice is already found in the prescriptions for sacrificers and *brahmacārins* of *Atharvaveda* under the generic term *tapas*.

6. Whether real or pretended, as in stories found for instance in *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* and satire.

*anāśa, anāśaka, anāśana*: fasting

*anāśin*: the faster

*anāśakāyana*: a course of fasting

*upavāsatha*: attendance, from which Buddhist *uposatha* and Jain *poṣada*

*upasaḍ*: sitting in attendance

*pratiśi*: fasting

*prāya, prāyopaveśa*: fast to death

*niyama*: restraint; it includes fast, like fasting includes restraint from sex.

In mythological terms,<sup>7</sup> fasting deals a blow to the *asuras*, and particularly to Vṛtra, because ‘the belly is Vṛtra’, *udaram vai vṛtraḥ* (*Taittirīyasaṃhitā* [*Taitt.*] II.4.12.6, and similarly *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* [*Śat.*] I.6.3.17). Lévi<sup>8</sup> comments:

The notion of fasting thus becomes purified and moralized; at the end of *Śat.*, this development is accomplished: ‘in truth, abstention from food is complete asceticism; and this is why one must not eat while fasting’ (*Śat.* IX.5.1.7: *etad vai sarvaṃ tapo yad anāśakas tasmād upavasathe nāśnyāt*).

Lévi further observes that at the time of fasting the nourishment of the sacrificer is milk, and then, significantly, quotes *Śat.* X.6.5.1: ‘hunger is death’, *āsanāyā hi mrtyuḥ*.

#### *What is fasting supposed to achieve?*

In Hinduism fasting was resorted to A) in order to enhance one’s purity, in preparation for special rites, or for life; B) to ask for a boon; C) as a voluntary observance, *vrata*, to acquire religious merit, also on behalf of one’s family; D) as a technique of expiation/reintegration, *prāyaścitta*<sup>9</sup> – which accompanied by *prāṇāyāma* and Vedic recitation, or recitation of *mantras* and specific holy texts in the case of tantric devotees, would erase the fault of the offender; E) as the ultimate means to obtain redress when all other fail.

Fasting was not a standard medical procedure, except in the case of indigestion from overeating. Āyurvedic texts oppose a complete fast, seen as a health hazard, as their concern is with the well-being of the body: only keeping one’s body in healthy conditions could be conducive to a good spiritual life. A scientific observation of the effects of fasts is already in the *Chandogyopaniṣat*, with a good understanding of the relationship of food and fast with memory. A Brahmin, before listening to his son’s newly learned Vedic recitation, instructs him to take only water but no food for two weeks. The son obeys, but when he

7. Lévi 2009, 109, n. 31.

8. *Ibid.*

9. An apt definition is in Goodall–Sathyanarayanan 2015, 15: ‘The term *prāyaścitta* covers a number of rites and actions that are held to expiate or repair faults of omission and commission’.



comes back to show the father his learning, he cannot recall anything. His memory returns only after eating solid food.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledgement that certain beings, of different ages, have different food requirements occurs already in the *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* [*Baudh.*]:

Eight mouthfuls are the meal of an ascetic, sixteen that of a hermit in the woods, thirty-two that of a householder, and an unlimited [quantity] that of a student. A sacrificer, a draft ox, and a student, those three can do their work only if they eat; without eating they cannot do it.<sup>11</sup>

Fasting could be undertaken by men, women, ascetics, supernatural beings – including demons/titans – animals<sup>12</sup> and children.<sup>13</sup> All the above types of fast include, as part of the general restraint of the faster, abstention from sexual intercourse.<sup>14</sup>

#### A.1 *Fasting to become pure*

A fast for purity was of two types: ritual purity could be temporary, or be the final purity ascetics sought. To the former belong fasts prescribed for the actor and the participants of a rite. People fasted to be pure before a sacrifice, initiation,<sup>15</sup> or a deity's festival. In Vedic sacrifice the actor had to be 'fit to sacrifice, pure', *medhya*. The requirements were fasting and restraint, involving chastity. The initiands, be they Vedic sacrificers or young *brahmacārins*, were believed to become embryos, and embryos are not perceived to eat, but to fast until they are born. *Śat.* III.2.1.16 reads: *garbho vā eṣa yo dikṣate*, 'he who undergoes the *dikṣā* is an embryo'. The further conceptual step borders on self-sacrifice, as in *Śat.* III.3.4.21: 'he who undergoes the *dikṣā* becomes the food offering [to the gods]', *sa havir vā eṣa bhavati yo dikṣate*. The remarks of Lévi on this<sup>16</sup> are paralleled by those of Heesterman 2007, 265-67, who recalls *Śat.* I.6.3.17, where the victim is regularly equated with the sacrificer, as well as texts<sup>17</sup> stating that in a

10. *Chandogyopaniṣat* VI.8.1-6.

11. *Baudh.* II.7.13,7-8.; also *Āpastambadharmasūtra* II.4.9.13 and *Vāsiṣṭhadharmasāstra* VI.20-21, and see H. Scharfe 2002, 113-14.

12. The monkey-warrior Aṅgada and his retinue, for ex., fast to death in *Rāmāyaṇa* IV.55.15, Baldissera 2005a, 526-27. In *Skandapurāṇa* LV.1-8 a tiger fasts with Pārvatī for a thousand years (Yokochi 2004, 34, 48, 160-63).

13. Prescriptive texts have special provisions for the latter: see *Prāyaścittasamuccaya* XXVI.12.792c-793b on *śiśucandrāyaṇa* fast, which lasts only five days instead of twenty-eight (Goodall–Sathyanarayanan 2015, 331).

14. Āyurveda instead says that a correct sexual activity enhances health.

15. *Tantrāloka* XXII.14b-19 also prescribes a preliminary fast, similar to atonement, for a pupil whose former sectarian signs must be removed.

16. Lévi 2009, 90.

17. *Taitt.* VII.4.9, *Kauṣītaka Brāhmaṇa* XV.I, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 374.

*sattra* one's own self is the *dakṣiṇā*.<sup>18</sup> Fasting before a sacrifice is also a matter of etiquette: 'A man should not eat before his human guests have eaten, so how could he eat first, when the gods have not eaten?'.<sup>19</sup>

The *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* [*ĀpŚS*] reads:

When the consecrated sacrificer (*dīkṣita*) has become thin, he is pure (*medhya*) for the sacrifice. When nothing is left in him, he is pure for the sacrifice. When his skin and bones touch each other, he is pure for the sacrifice. When the black disappears from his eyes, he is pure for the sacrifice. He begins the *dīkṣā* being fat, he sacrifices being thin.<sup>20</sup>

Lubin recalls a special diet, *vrata*, in *Taitt.* II.8.9, for the *dīkṣā* preceding the Soma sacrifice, different for the different classes: hot milk for a *brāhmaṇa*, barley porridge for a *rājanya*, and a milk and grain mixture for a *vaiśya*.<sup>21</sup>

In Nepal, a self-declared Hindu nation, people fast before all festivals.<sup>22</sup> On particular occasions, as at Dasai/Navadurgā, they observe complete fasts on *aṣṭamī* or *navamī*.<sup>23</sup>

## A.2 The ascetic's fast to achieve a permanent state of purity

A man entering the ascetic path was dead to the world: as a 'dead' man, for whom the funeral rites had already been celebrated, he did not need any nourishment. The renouncer had no fire, and some did not even carry a begging bowl but ate with their hands or, like animals, ate with their mouths directly from the ground (which can be also a *vrata* and a *prāyaścitta* practice).

Olivelle 1991 focuses on the ascetic traditions, and shows different classifications of ascetic paths,<sup>24</sup> with their main division between wandering ascetics, and hermits who abide in one place. The latter differ according to their different ways of procuring food<sup>25</sup> and their diet. They avoid certain items, or follow

18. Also Filliozat 1967.

19. *Śat* II.1.4.1-2.

20. *ĀpŚS*. X.14.9-10 and Bronkhorst 1998, 39.

21. Lubin 2005, 90. The diet is for the *kuṣmāṇḍadīkṣā*, to expiate sexual faults, but it is the same used for the Soma sacrifice.

22. Anderson 1971, Levy 1979, Gutschow-Bāsukala 1987, 135-66.

23. For purāṇic fasts at Navarātrī see Einoo 1999.

24. See Olivelle 1991, 24-27, where he refers to several ancient *Dharmasūtras*, as well as to passages in the *Mahābhārata* (ex. XII.17.10; XII.236.8-12; XIII.129.35-55) and the *Vaikhānasa-dharmasūtra*.

25. They may cook their food or eat it raw, or eat things begged in different ways, or what people may give them without their begging for it (the pithon *vrata*), or live on a monodiet, or on what is gathered in a forest, or only on water, and finally only on air.

a monodiet, or accept what is given without begging. Some are supposed to subsist on air.

An early description of *tapas* with fasting is in *Śvetāśvataropaniṣat* II.8-13. The effect of *tapas* and yoga has the ascetic reduce his intake of food to such an extent that he has almost no excretions.<sup>26</sup>

The Jaina ascetics keep the longest fasts, that at the end of their lives can have them starve to death (*sallekhana* or *saṃthara*) in a controlled way. Up to recently, this was regarded with admiration, but a last consulted article shows that this death ritual 'raises constitutional conflict' and that it has actually been forbidden by a High Court judge in Rajasthan on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2015.<sup>27</sup>

### B. *Fasting for a boon*

In the Epics and the *Purāṇas*, and then in *kathā* and *kāvya*, many beings, as also king and queens, to obtain particular boons undertake voluntary fasts. A few of these are similar to the temporary fast for purity, as purity is required of the 'beggar'. The *kṣatriya* fasted to obtain victory in battle, or children, or special favours, like in the *Sāvitrīyupakhyāna* of *Mahābhārata* III.293-299. Here King Aśvapati observed a partial fast for eighteen years, before obtaining his daughter Sāvitrī. The wise princess chose a husband destined to die one year after his marriage, but then she fasted for three days before the date appointed for his death, III.296.3-17. The heightened state of consciousness born of her physical restraint was such that she won him back from Yama, becoming a paradigm of wifely devotion. Even today on *Jyāiṣṭhapūrṇimā* married women fast to preserve the life of their husbands in the name of Sāvitrī.<sup>28</sup>

Fasts were also undertaken by demons, who sought special powers, principally that of not being killed. A fit example is that of demon Hiraṇyakaṣipu, whose strict asceticism had obtained from Brahmā the boon of not being killed with a series of different requirements, though he was finally killed by Narasiṃha, who met them all.<sup>29</sup> A Kashmirian satire describes the fast-diet used by the *gehagaṇanāpati*, home accountant of the demons, for the sake of depriving the gods of their livelihood:<sup>30</sup> 'he went to the bank of the Vaitaraṇī,

26. *Śvetāśvataropaniṣat* II.13, translated in Hume 1921, 398:

Lightness, healthiness, steadiness,

Clearness of countenance and pleasantness of voice,

Sweetness of odour and scanty excretions.

These, they say, are the first stage in the progress of Yoga.

27. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/25/world/asia/sects-death-ritual-raises-constitutional-conflict-in-india.html>.

28. See Kane 1974, Vol. V, 1, 91.

29. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* VII.3.35-38.

30. Baldissera 2005b, at I.9-10, 15 and 43.

and practised ascetic exercises for a thousand years, for food eating only handfuls of his own urine', *svamūtraculakāhāra*.

### C. *Fasting as a voluntary pledge, vrata*

A voluntary fast performed by lay people, without a specific aim, entails a certain kind of prestige, similar to that of Brahmins, monks or ascetics.

Often the *grhapati* fasts on behalf of his entire family, for instance for the Śivarātrī festival. These celebratory fasts usually end with a large feast, *prāraṇā*, in which all members of one's family are invited. An example is also in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* II, prose after v. 16: a messenger comes to summon King Duṣyanta to the family feast that follows a *vrata* performed by the queen mother.

Some fasts in fact are specifically the province of women. Unmarried girls fast for getting a good husband, married women often fast in order to preserve his health. More recently, and notably among the Jains, voluntary fasting became a prerogative of married women, who fast on behalf of their whole family, often in a public display of piety, while male Jains<sup>31</sup> usually fast only on festive days.

### D.1 *Fasting as part of prāyaścitta, practices of reintegration/expiation*

Looking at the early sources of *prāyaścitta* prescriptions Lubin observes: 'Some of the practices that found a place in the *grhya*-codes were first introduced in *Taitt*. For example, the practice of private recitation (*svādhyāya*) as a form of expiation is taught in *Taitt*. II.16-18: Without eating, he should thrice perform *svādhyāya* of the entire Veda'. He then adds: 'In *Kāthakagrhyasūtra* 8.1-2.a the rules for a *kṛcchra* (arduous) penance include the avoidance of honey, meat, salt and *śrāddha*-food'.<sup>32</sup>

Many of these rules were then exposed methodically in the *Mānavadharmasāstra* [*Manu*]. Fasting could last from half a day to several consecutive days, a year, or several years. In later texts fasting is accompanied by the recitation of *mantras* of a specific deity: the most usual one for Śaivas, for instance, is the *Aghoramantra*.<sup>33</sup>

Rules for fast in *prāyaścitta* apply differently if the fault has been unintentional or intentional, as the former entails a lighter form of reparation. The prescriptions are quite inventive, both in terms of the fault envisaged, of the relative reintegration, and of the length of the fast. Some, like the *prājapātīya*,<sup>34</sup>

31. They rather give alms or do religious bidding for *pūjā* (see Dundas 1992, 171).

32. Lubin 2005, 89-90.

33. Somaśambhu 1968, Vol. II part III.

34. *Manu* XI.212, Olivelle 2005, 226.

prescribe partial fasts for nine days, and complete fast for the next three days. The *parāka* has a complete fast for twelve days, whereas the *candrāyaṇa* lasts for a whole lunar month: a man ‘should decrease his food by one rice-ball a day during the dark fortnight, and increase it likewise during the bright fortnight’.<sup>35</sup> Others are repeated in a prescribed pattern throughout a year or up to several years. A number of *prāyaścittas* have to do with food transgressions, like *Manu* IV.222: ‘If someone eats the food of any of them<sup>36</sup> unintentionally, he should fast (*kṣapaṇa*) for three days; if he eats intentionally, as also when he consumes semen, urine, or excrement, he should perform an arduous penance (*kṛcchrā*)’.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the fault, barring crimes considered unredeemable, the correct performance of *prāyaścitta* reintegrates the person in his social role.

## D.2 Partial fasts as *vrata* or *prāyaścitta*

Partial fasts are when people decide, as a *vrata*, or when a *prāyaścitta* prescribes, to fast only in the day, and eat at night, *nākta*, or the opposite, when they eat only in the day, like some types of Buddhist or Jain monks; or when they eat only once a day, *ekabhakta*; or when they avoid certain foods, or eat only some, like when they subsist only on water, or on milk or other substances.

*Manu*’s chapter XI is devoted to *prāyaścitta*, as are large sections of later tantric<sup>38</sup> and agamic manuals like the 11<sup>th</sup> century *Somaśambhupaddhat*<sup>39</sup> or parts of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Trilocanaśiva’s *Prāyaścittasamuccaya*.<sup>40</sup> The manuals use the same *prāyaścitta* terminology, but are more detailed.

## E. Solemn fast, or ‘fast unto death’, *prāyopaveśa*

In these solemn fasts the fasters, originally ascetics or brahmins, pledged themselves to fast unto death. This fast could be performed with several different aims in mind, usually to try and oblige people in power to redress a wrong done to the faster. In this case, the faster is angry and fasts as his only means to fight injustice,<sup>41</sup> usually against a more powerful opponent. On the other hand, in the case of a pious ascetic, usually a *brāhmaṇa* or a Jaina, it was a way to peacefully end his life in restraint.

35. *Manu* XI.217, Olivelle 2005, 226.

36. *parigrahaduṣṭa*, unfit individuals, or food unfit for other reasons.

37. See *Manu* XI.212, Olivelle 2005, 226. Brackets Baldissera.

38. *Tantrāloka* refers to *prāyaścitta* only in a general manner.

39. Somaśambhu 1968, 224-329.

40. See Goodall–Sathyaranayanan 2015, 329-32, where XXVI.1-14.777a-797b prescribe fasts.

41. See Baldissera 2005a, *passim*.

The oldest reference to a ‘protest fast’ seems to be an example given in an early *Upaniṣat*.<sup>42</sup> An ascetic performs it in anger, envisaging redress against the inhabitants of a village who did not feed him. This type of fast was used to plead with the ruler for economic redress against an opponent stronger than the claimant. Warriors, and women, used it to protect their honour. It entailed a preliminary *saṃkalpa*, a public, formal declaration of intents, then silence, and sitting in restraint on *darbha* grass after touching water. It had been employed by as diverse claimants as religious people, including an incarnation of the Buddha as a *mātariṅga*,<sup>43</sup> and even soldiers, as a powerful political means of blackmailing the government. It was a serious threat to royal authority.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes it was performed on false assumptions, or to force an issue, like when an old Brahmin suitor fasted in the house of a beautiful young girl he wished to marry.<sup>45</sup> As many instances of these false claims were clogging the government bureaucracy of Kashmir, a king instated the office of the *prāyopaveśādhikṛtas*, special investigators for *prāyopaveśa* cases. In *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* VI.14 these officers were already in place at the time of king Yaśaskara (939-948 CE). As a practice, *prāya* was officially abolished in 1870.<sup>46</sup> In times much nearer to ours Gandhi, as a freedom fighter against the British Empire, often exploited its political potential and the moral prestige it afforded. Even then this type of fast, prolonged up to the death if the faster did not obtain justice, was still interpreted as an ascetic stance.

From a pious act believed to bring the practitioner closer to the deity through altered states of mind, or to expiate some faults, Indian fasting later moved into the political arena. It was however not prescribed in Buddhism,<sup>47</sup> nor in Sikhism. As fasts take place in the religious practice of several foreign communities that took residence in India, such as those of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (though not in Zoroastrianism), it would be interesting, but exceeding the scope of this paper, to draw a comparison with these, especially when their aims are similar.

In contemporary western experience, however, voluntary fasting would probably be seen as an eating disorder.<sup>48</sup>

42. *Kauṣītakyopaniṣat*, 2.1, and see Baldissera 2005a, 515, 532-33.

43. *Papañcasūdanī*, commentary of the *Upālisuttam* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, and see Baldissera 2005a, 533-35.

44. This type of fast then became a politico-economical instrument of blackmail, as is quite obvious in many episodes recounted in the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* see Baldissera 2005a, 549-57.

45. *Kathāsaritsāgara* IX.2.30-91, and see Baldissera–Mazzarino–Vivanti 1993, 604-6, and Baldissera 2005a, 535. Fear of *brahmahatya* made the father give him the girl in marriage.

46. Renou 1943–1945, 117, n. 1.

47. Aśoka mentions fasting as a pious act in one edict, but edicts addressed all communities.

48. See for instance Desai 1999.

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Tasting, feasting and chasing the great enemy hunger  
– some attitudes and habits as reflected  
in Old Tamil Sangam works

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Sangam poetry reflects various aspects of everyday life **realistically**,<sup>1</sup> including the habits connected with food in general.

On the one hand, old Tamil society was obviously struggling with poverty and hunger. On the other, hunger, which is a frequent topic, is counterbalanced by hospitality (offered especially to bards). There were feasts and drinking occasions as a part of victory celebrations, and the hospitality offered to the hungry bards and their experience of feasting and forgetting about their difficulties is joyfully described and the liberal chieftains are praised. Hunger can afflict not only humans, but also animals, and this is also occasionally vividly portrayed.

We also learn about what was eaten and in which way. There are innumerable references to various types of food, including meat and killing animals for this purpose (also including cows, see the references to *maḷavar* in *Akanānūru*). And not only food, but also intoxicating drinks are mentioned, liquor (*kaḷ, naravu* etc.) was drunk with pleasure allowing people to relax.<sup>2</sup> The descriptions are very graphic and perfectly in agreement with Sangam realism (which has been underlined so many times).

1. Underlined repeatedly by M. Varadarajan (1969) and Thani Nayagam (1966). Further cf. Vacek (2007, 2014a) and the author's series of papers in the *Pandanus* Journal with further references to the translations and grammatical descriptions of the Sangam Anthologies.

2. Meat eating and drinking liquor in the Sangam period is briefly summed up by V. Balambal (1998, 4; 2010, 319). She also mentions the Brahmins eating meat (2010, 319): 'Though the Brahmins of Sangam age ate meat, they abstained from it due to Jain and Buddhist influence'. Concerning the Vedic tradition see Section 2.2. below. I should also like to thank Prof. Govindaswamy Rajagopal (University of Delhi) for inspiration concerning meat eating in *Akanānūru*.

1. *Enemy hunger*1.1. *Hungry people*

Hunger is repeated very often in the texts, not only as a noun (*paci*, Sangam total **78x**),<sup>3</sup> but also as a verb, e.g. in the *Puṛaṇāṅṅūru* (*pacitta* ‘which was hungry’, *pacittu* ‘having become hungry’, *pacittaṅṅu* ‘was hungry-it’), and derived nouns (*paciyar* ‘those who are hungry’, *paciyār* ‘those who are not hungry’).<sup>4</sup>

Hunger is unequivocally defined as an enemy causing fear,<sup>5</sup> but there are ways of relieving it, in other words, there are also ‘enemies of hunger’.

*paci alaikkum pakai onṅu eṅku o* (Puṛa. 136,9)

(Lit.): Shall I say that hunger is one **enemy causing suffering**?<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a *generous ruler* can be considered an *enemy of hunger*, as is said about Īrntūr Kilāṅ Tōyaṅ:

*īrntaiyōṅ ē pāṅ paci pakaiṅṅaṅ* (Puṛa. 180,7)

*iṅmai tira vēṅṅiṅ emmoṭu* (Puṛa. 180,8)

*nī um vammō mutu vāy iravala* (Puṛa. 180,9)

(Lit.): The one living in Īrntai is an **enemy of the hunger of bards** (7). If you want to remove [your] poverty, along with me (8) you also come, you eloquent begging [bard] (9).

3. Two texts have a greater number of occurrences, viz. *Puṛaṇāṅṅūru* (**25x**), *Akaṅṅūru* (**14x**). Two most typical phrases are: *paci kaḷai-* (**11x**) ‘to remove hunger’; *paci tīr-* (**9x**) ‘to finish hunger’; both in various grammatical forms. Other phrases: *paci kūr-* (**4x**) ‘hunger to become abundant’; *paci nīṅku-* (**2x**) ‘to get rid of hunger’. Hunger can also consume the individuals: *paci tīṅ-* (**5x**) ‘hunger eats’, ‘eaten by hunger’, as it is variously interpreted.

4. But *pañcam* ‘famine’ does not occur in the Sangam Anthologies, it appears in a later text (cf. PPTI s.v.).

5. Its ‘quality’ can also be specified by some repeated attributes: e.g. *kaṭu paci* (**5x**) ‘fierce hunger’; *uṅṅaku paci (kaḷaiyar)* (**4x**) ‘[to remove] the weakening hunger’; *uṅṅu paci* (**3x**) ‘excessive hunger’.

6. There are two more enemies and the author asks three similar questions – about the ‘lice’ (line 5), about ‘hunger’ (line 10), and about the ‘bandits’ (line 15). For lack of space we quote the literary translations only in some cases. The reader can find full literary translations of the poems in: Hart–Heifetz 1999 and Menon 2011 (for Puṛa.), or Vaidehi, web (for all texts). However, the literary translations (including those quoted below) are sometimes rather free. In fact, the translation into a European language of all the old Tamil poems (especially the longer ones) would be barely understandable, if it were to follow their complex syntactical constructions exactly. This is only possible for smaller sections of the poems.

Similarly, a *present* received from a chieftain (in this case Vallār Kiḷāṇ Paṇṇaṇ) can also be the *enemy of hunger*:

*uṇṇā varu kaṭumpu uytal vēṇṭiṇ* (Puṛa. 181,7)  
*iṇṇē ceṇṇmati nī ē ceūru avaṇ* (Puṛa. 181,8)  
*pakai pulam paṭarā aḷavai niṇ* (Puṛa. 181,9)  
***paci pakai paricil** kātṭiṇai koḷarḱu ē* (Puṛa. 181,10)

(Lit.): If you want to relieve [your] starving poor relatives [family] (7), immediately you go; having gone (8) at the time when (9) he (8) has not yet left for the enemy land (9), you will display [your poverty] in order to obtain a **gift** [that is] **the enemy of** (10) your (9) **hunger** (10).

Hunger (*paci*) is an enemy which must be overcome, and such occasions are sometimes very vividly described, for example, with reference to Cōḷaṇ Nalaṅkiḷi:

*nār ari naraviṇ nāl makil tūṅkuntu* (Puṛa. 400,14)  
*pōtu ariyēṇ pati paḷaka um* (Puṛa. 400,15)  
*taṇ pakai kaṭital aṇṇi um cērntōr* (Puṛa. 400,16)  
***paci pakai kaṭital** um vallaṇ māṭō* (Puṛa. 400,17)

(Literary translation:)

And I was filled with joy as I drank **liquor** that had been strained through fiber and I don't even know how much time I passed in that village! Not only can he drive away his enemies but **he can also drive away that enemy, hunger!** From those who come to him.

(Hart–Heifetz 1999, 240-1)

Hunger can cause great family suffering, as is described in the sickening family scene (Puṛa. 164), which forces the bard to go and ask for help from the victorious Kumaṇaṇ from the Kutirai Hills, a respected patron of bards. He describes the situation very emotionally – the stove is covered with mushrooms; his wife suffers from hunger; her breasts are dry with no milk and she cannot feed her child.

## 1.2. *Hungry animals and even hungry Death*

Can we say that hunger is a *universal* permeating the whole world? It is not only human beings, who are hungry, but also animals and (ironically or metaphorically?) even Death, which seeks satiation.

The pair of **elephants** suffers hunger patiently (Aka. 91). Not finding water in the spring, the male elephant eats moss (*pāci*) and lies down with the female

elephant suffering hunger (*paci*). Note the play of words: *paci* ‘hunger’ – *pāci* ‘moss’.

**Kites** or vultures (*paruntu*) are also hungry. A good warrior, in this case Nākaṅ, the lord of Nālai, whose ‘straight spear of fine battles feeds the vultures’ (Hart–Heifetz 1999, 116), lit. ‘removes the hunger of kites’ (*paruntu paci tīrkkuṁ*; Puṛa. 179,11), can also fill the poet’s begging bowl (Puṛa. 179,2).

The **bears** too have to look for something to eat. Since bears ‘hate the sweet fruits on the tall branches of *iruppai* trees’ (*ōṅku ciṅai iruppai tīm paḷam muṇaiyiṅ*; Aka. 81,2), they ‘look for prey’ (*irai tērum*; Aka. 81,5) in the ‘ant-hill with small holes’ (*pul aḷai purriṅ*; Aka. 81,3).

**Death** is also hungry and tries to relieve its hunger. One poem (Puṛa. 227) offers a symbolical and also ironical image. Hungry death took Vaḷavaṅ, a good warrior, who in fact had been feeding it regularly in battles. Thus death is called a ‘complete fool’ (*naṅi pētai*; Puṛa. 227,1).<sup>7</sup> And after describing Vaḷavaṅ’s qualities as warrior, Death is asked, ‘Who else will remove your hunger now?’ *iṅi yār marṛu niṅ paci tīrppōr ē*; Puṛa. 227,11).

## 2. Eating

### 2.1. Various occasions

Besides everyday eating, we hear much about hospitality, which was widely respected. Guests should not leave without at least tasting something. Hospitality is described very colourfully and repeatedly praised; a liberal chieftain removes not only the bard’s hunger, but also that of his family. And in their eulogies, bards ask that they may obtain gifts or food to satisfy themselves and their families as well.

E.g. this is how the bard Kallāṭaṅār was treated by Amparkilāṅ Aruvantai:

*nīl niṛam citāar kalaintu* (Puṛa. 385,6)  
*veliyatu uṭṭi eṅ paci kaḷaintōṅ ē* (Puṛa. 385,7)

(Lit.): He had my blue colour rags removed (6)  
Clad [me] in white and **removed my hunger** (7).

(Literary translation:)

He had my torn loin cloth removed, and clad me in white clothes. And

7. Possibly a play of etymologically related words? The word *pētu* ‘bewilderment, confusion, delirium, folly’, etc. (TL; DEDR 4437) can also designate death (e.g. Puṛa. 237,10; VIS s.v.). The word *pētai* ‘simpleton, ignorant person’ (TL; DEDR 4437) has some other semantic extensions (TL: 2. ‘woman as simple-minded’; 4. ‘girl between the ages five and seven’).

he **removed** the misery of **starvation** forever from me (...).  
(Menon 2011, 576)

Or the poet Kaḷḷil Āttiraiyaṅār asks Nallēr Mutiyaṅ to be open-handed like his ancestor:

*ātaṅuṅkaṅ pōla nī um* (Puṛa. 389,13)  
*pacitta okkal paḷaṅkaṅ vīṭa* (Puṛa. 389,14)  
*vīru cāl nal kalam nalkumatī peruma* (Puṛa. 389,15)

(Lit.:) Like Ātaṅuṅkaṅ, you too (13)  
in order to remove the distress of [my] **hungry relatives** (14)  
[kindly] give many nice ornaments, o chief! (15)

(Literary translation:)  
(..)You too, like Ātaṅuṅkaṅ,  
should give us the finest of jewels, to lift away the suffering  
of my **hungry family!** Greatness!  
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 229)

And bards would also praise dead chieftains. In a song for a dead warrior, his abilities are extolled, including also the feeding of hungry (and thirsty) bards. Pēreyil Muṛuvalār sings about Nampineṭuṅceliyaṅ, a vassal of the Pāṅṅiyas, who died of a disease and not in battle:

*ōṅku iyala kaḷīru ūrntaṅaṅ* (Puṛa. 239,15)  
*tīm ceṛi tacumpu tolaicciṅaṅ* (Puṛa. 239,16)  
*pāṅ uvappa paci tūrttaṅaṅ* (Puṛa. 239,17)  
*mayakku uṭaiya molī viṭutttaṅaṅ āṅku* (Puṛa. 239,18)

(Literary translation:)  
He rode out on noble elephants!  
He emptied jars of toddy, thick and sweet,  
and he made **bards** happy, **freeing them of hunger**,  
and he would never use bewildering words!  
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 149)

Similarly, there are also descriptions of **feasting** as part of celebrating victory by chieftains or also offering hospitality to hungry bards. This included various items of food and also drinks.<sup>8</sup>

8. However, it is also possible to avoid eating. One reason may be e.g. falling in love. This is called *paci aṅaṅṅal*, lit. ‘staying obstinately [in] hunger’, a term, which refers to ‘the situation in Aham of the lady love lacking all appetite for food as a result of her being love sick’ (PPTI s.v.).

## 2.2. *What was eaten and drunk*

Various types of food and drinks were consumed on various occasions, either as a part of hospitality or celebrations. Only a survey of selected items is discussed in the following; for a more extensive presentation cf. the paper by A. Dubianskiy in this same volume.

### 2.2.A.

**Meat** was eaten and various animals were killed, including cows, and often consumed together with various intoxicating drinks. In fact, it is well-known that meat was also eaten in the Vedic period. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar (2001, 120 ff.) enumerates the animals eaten according to textual references, including eating beef.<sup>9</sup> South Indian Brahmins also consumed the meat of various animals, a practice which was only given up after the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD.

There are a number of terms for meat or its preparation in the Sangam texts. It should also be noted that some of the lexemes have a number of meanings which become clear according to the contexts, and the meaning ‘meat’ may also be an ‘applied’ meaning. Occasional phonetic variants or the occurrence of a term in only one specific text may reflect the particular local dialects of the authors of the poems. The frequency and in some cases multiplicity of the terms in the texts also testifies to the importance of food in the description of everyday life:<sup>10</sup>

*ūṅ* (Sangam total **70x**): ‘flesh’ (Aka. 20x; Puṛa. 23x); cf. the following more frequent phrases (formulas); e.g.:

*viḷar ūṅ* ‘fat flesh’ (**4x**: Aka. 89,10; 265,15; Naṛ. 41,8; Puṛa. 359,5);

*mai ūṅ* ‘meat of (kind of) sheep’ (VIS), ‘goat flesh’ (Wilden 2008) (**4x**: Puṛa. 96,7; 261,8; Naṛ. 83,5; Pati. 12,17);

*viḷar ūṅ tiṅṛa* ‘who ate fat flesh’ (**3x**: Aka. 89,10; 265,15; Puṛa. 359,5).

*pulavu* (Sangam total **56x**): ‘flesh’ (Aka. 12x; Puṛa. 10x); ‘smell of flesh or fish’ (Aka. 4x); cf. the variants:

*pulā* (Sangam total **6x**): ‘flesh’ (e.g. Aka. 70,2; 89,14; Puṛa. 69,11; 181,5; 326,3);

*pulāl* (Sangam total **6x**): ‘flesh’ (e.g. Aka. 200,2; Puṛa. 99,6; 359,5);<sup>11</sup>

9. Cf. also D.N. Jha (2004) and the title of the first chapter – ‘Animals are verily food’ but Yājñavalkya Favours Beef (27 ff.).

10. For lack of space we will only give a few textual examples. The topic itself is too broad and deserves special attention in the future.

11. PPTI refers only to *pulāl maruttal* ‘refraining from meat eating’ (Kuraḷ, Chapter 26: 257,1; 260,1).



*pulāal* (Sangam total **2x**): ‘flesh’ (Aka. 265,18); ‘smell of flesh’ (Aka. 270,2).

*niṇam* (Sangam total **30x**): ‘flesh’ (e.g. Puṛa. 8x; Aka. 316,5); ‘fat’ (Puṛa. 8x; Aka. 8x); variants:

*niṇaṇ* (Sangam total **3x**): ‘fat’ (Aka. 375,6); ‘flesh’ (Puṛa. 373,37; Ciṛu. 198);  
*ñiṇam* ‘flesh’ (only Puṛa. 177,14; see *tacai* below).

*taṭi* (Sangam total **18x** + **5x** case form *taṭiyōṭu*): ‘piece of meat’ (Puṛa. 5x); ‘fish pieces’ (Vaidehi; SVS: ‘dried fish’; Aka. 60,6: *mīṇ taṭi*).<sup>12</sup>

*tīri* (Sangam total **5x**): e.g. ‘meat’ (Aka. 2x), ‘food’ (Aka. 1x).

*tacai* ‘flesh’ – (only Puṛa. **2x**); e.g.:

*māṇ tacai*, ‘deer meat’ (Puṛa. 33,2);

*eymmāṇ eṛi tacai* / *pai ṇiṇam perutta pacu veḷ amalai*, ‘porcupine cut meat / fresh meat, big fresh white rice ball[s]’ (Puṛa. 177,13-14).

*puḷukku* (Sangam total **8x** + **5x** case forms):<sup>13</sup> ‘cooked meat’ (Aka. 6x); *puḷukkal* (Sangam total **6x**): ‘cooked meat’ (e.g. Puṛa. 363,12); ‘cooked rice’ (e.g. Puṛa. 399,9).

*cūtu* ‘roasted meat’ (Puṛa. 7x), plus more meanings: ‘heaps of sheaves’ (Puṛa. 61,7; Aka. 84,12), ‘burning’ (Aka. 368,1) (Aka. 2x).<sup>14</sup>

There can be a rich meal containing several ingredients:

*puṛavu karu aṇṇa puṇpulam varakiṇ* (Puṛa. 34,9)  
*pāl pey puṇkam tēṇōṭu mayakki* (Puṛa. 34,10)  
*kuṛu muyal koḷum cūtu kiḷitta okkaloṭu* (Puṛa. 34,11)  
(...)

12. The basic meaning of *taṭi* is ‘piece’ (derived from the verb *taṭi-* 1. ‘to hew down, cut down, cut off’; TL *s.v.*; it occurs frequently in various forms in the texts). Cf. also the specific meaning of *taṭi* ‘plot of a field’ (Naṅ. 254,10); or *taṭivu* ‘piece’ (e.g. Puṛa. 320,13). This is the sense that should be given to the word in the combination with a specific term for meat: e.g. *ūṇ taṭi* (Aka. 193,9; Puṛa. 74,1); *koḷu niṇam taṭiyōṭu* ‘with pieces of fat meat’ (Peru. 345); *pai niṇam taṭiyōṭu* ‘with pieces of fresh meat’ (Malai. 563).

13. N. Subrahmanian (PPTI *s.v.*) gives the meaning ‘boiled dhal mixed with rice and sugar; also called Kummāyam’ (Peru. 165). *puḷukku* can also mean ‘sultriness’ (in: *puḷukkuṛra*, Aka. 136,21). There is a verbal form *puḷukkiya* ‘which was boiled’ (**2x**) < *puḷukku-* ‘to boil before husking, as paddy’ (TL *s.v.*). Obviously the general meaning is ‘something boiled’, which, according to the situation, can apply to various foods (possibly a special jargon), both in the form *puḷukku* and *puḷukkal*.

14. Similarly the basic meaning is ‘to burn, be hot’ (< *cuṭu-* ‘to be hot, burn’; TL, DEDR 2654) and it can be applied contextually or as jargon for ‘something burnt’.

*em kōṇ vaḷavaṇ vālka* (...) (Puṛa. 34,16)

(Lit.:) [bards] (...) with relatives tearing [=eating] **roasted fatty meat** of small rabbits (11)

[and] mixing [balls of] rice cooked in milk with honey (10)

With grains of millet from poor land [but as big] as pigeons' eggs (9)

(...)

Long live our king Vaḷavaṇ (...) (16).

Even the poet Kapilar consumed meat, as he says in Puṛa. 14, where he explains to Cēramāṇ Celvak Kaṭuṅkō Vāḷiyātaṇ why his hands are soft (cf. Iyengar 2001, 120-21):

*pulavu nārṛatta pai taṭi* (Puṛa. 14,12)

*pū nārṛatta pukai koḷi ūṇ tuvai* (Puṛa. 14,13)

*kaṭi cōṛu uṇṭu varuntu toḷil allatu* (Puṛa. 14,14)

*pīṛitu toḷil aṛiyā ākaḷiṅ naṅṛu um* (Puṛa. 14,15)

*melliya peruma* (...) (Puṛa. 14,16)

(...)

(...) *niṅ pāṭunar kai ē* (Puṛa. 14,19)

(Literary translation:)

Soft are the hands of those who know no work  
more difficult than eating **rice and curry** and **chunks of meat**  
from new-killed **flesh** with its aroma of **meat** cooked  
in the smoke of fire burning with the aroma  
of **flowers** – the **hands of those who celebrate you in song!**  
(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 12)

## 2.2.B.

The meat of animals that was eaten includes e.g. the meat of pigs, cows (!), goats and others.

*naṅavu um toṭumiṅ viṭai um vīḷmiṅ* (Puṛa. 262,1)

(Lit.:) Strain the **toddy!** Slaughter a **male goat!**

Pork was prepared in ghee, as we learn from the poet Puṛattiṇai Naṅṅākaṅār in his praise of Ōymāṇ Villiyātaṇ, a chief of Ilaṅkai:

*yāṅ ē peruka avaṅ tāḷ niḷal vāḷkkai* (Puṛa. 379,1)

*avaṅ ē peruka eṅ nā icai nuvaṅal* (Puṛa. 379,2)

(...)

*villiyātaṅ kiṅaiyēm peruma* (Puṛa. 379,7)

*kuṛu tāḷ ēṛai kolūm kaṅ a vīḷar* (Puṛa. 379,8)

*naṛu ney urukki nāl cōṛu īyā* (Pura. 379,9)  
*vallaṅ entai paci tūrttal eṇa* (Pura. 379,10)

(Literary translation:)

May I gain a life shaded by his feet! May he receive, from my tongue,  
 the accounting of his glory! (...)

My lord, O greatness! is well able to **relieve our hunger**, for in the morn-  
 ing he passes out **rice** and the fine **white meat** running with juice of a  
**short-legged pig**, all of it with **fragrant melted ghee**!

(cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 220)

The eating of cows' meat is mentioned, e.g. in the *Akanāṅṅūru*, as it is consumed  
 by the *maḷavar*s:

*koḷuppu ā tiṅṛa kūr paṭai maḷavar* (Aka. 129,12)

(Lit.:) robbers with sharp weapons who ate **fatty cows**

or

*tōkai tūvi toṭai tār maḷavar* (Aka. 249,12)

*nāku ā vīttu tūṛi tiṅṛa* (Aka. 249,13)

*pulavu kaḷam* (...) (Aka. 249,14)

(Lit.:) (...) flesh-smelling place (14)

[where] robbers with peacock feather garlands (12)

are eating flesh having slain **young cows** (13)

or

(...) *kaṭuṅkaṅ maḷavar* (Aka. 309,2)

(...)

*teyvam cērnta parārai vēmpil* (Aka. 309,4)

*koḷuppu ā eṛintu kuruti tūuy* (Aka. 309,5)

*pulavu puḷukku uṅṭa vāṅ kaṅ akal arai* (Aka. 309,6)

(Lit.:) broad rock in a high place, where (6) cruel-eyed robbers (2)

were eating [smelling] cooked meat (6)

having killed a **fat cow** and spilled blood (5)

at the large-trunk neem [tree], where god[s] stayed (4).

## 2.2.C.

Other important component parts of food:<sup>15</sup>

*cōru* (Sangam total **48x**): ‘cooked rice’ (e.g. Puṛa. 18x; Aka. 8x); var. *cōrru* (Sangam total **48x** + **3x** case forms): id. (e.g. Puṛa. 9x; Aka. 5x).

*pun̄kam* (Sangam total **4x**): ‘cooked rice’ (Puṛa. 2x; Aka. 2x).

Isolated usage of a polysemous word: *maṭai*<sup>16</sup> ‘cooked rice’ (Puṛa. 366,17); ‘oblation of food to a deity’ (Kuṛu. 362,3; Kali. 109,19).

*tiṇai* (Sangam total **94x**): ‘millet’ (Puṛa. 12x; Aka. 19x); frequent attributive phrases: *ciṛu tiṇai* (31x) ‘small millet’; *ce tiṇai* (12x) ‘red millet’.

*varaku* (Sangam total **11x** + **20x** case forms): ‘millet’ (Puṛa. 13x; Aka. 7x).

*erutu kāl urāatu ilaiṇar koṇra* (Puṛa. 327,1)  
*cil viḷai varakiṅ pulleṅ kuppai* (Puṛa. 327,2)  
*toṭutta kaṭavarkku koṭutta miccil* (Puṛa. 327,3)  
*pacitta pāṇar unṭu* (...) (Puṛa. 327,4)

(Literary translation):  
 whatever was left to him of his small low-yielding harvest  
 of **millet** that required only the stamping feet of boys  
 rather than buffaloes for its threshing was eaten up  
 by **hungry bards**.  
 (cf. Hart–Heifetz 1999, 187)

*ēṇal* (Sangam total **42x**): ‘millet’ (e.g. Aka. 5x; Puṛa. 0x); ‘millet field’ (e.g. Aka. 6x; Puṛa. 1x: 28,9); cf.:

*ēṇal am ciṛu tiṇai* – ‘tiny millet in the millet field’ (2x: Aka. 73,14; Kuṛu. 357,5);  
*pular kural ēṇal* – (Lit.:) ‘mature cluster millet field’ (Aka. 118,12).

15. To say nothing of spices and various types of fruits, also including the general terms *paḷam* ‘ripe fruit’ and *kāy* ‘unripe fruit’), which can also relieve hunger and which could be mentioned only in passing.

16. Cf. DEDR 4657: *maṭu* to take food or drink, devour; cause to eat or drink, feed; *maṭai* boiled rice, offering of food to a god, cooking etc. (Kota, Toda, Telugu); cf. 4678: Konḍa *maṇḍi* earthen pot, a covering dish (etc. Pengo, Kui, Kuwi, + cf. 4682: Tamil *maṇṭai* mendicant’s begging bowl, earthen vessel, head, etc.). But the lexeme is a homophone (Sangam total **19x**) which also appears to have more meanings in Sangam: hooking, sluice, division (Puṛa., VIS); joint, the act of chasing (Aka., SVS) etc. The Puṛa. occurrence of the meaning ‘cooked rice’ may be unique, since the other available indexes do not provide it (Aiṅk., Kuṛu., Naṛ.).

### 2.2.D. *Drinking*

Drinking fermented liquors was quite common. A number of terms are used, although some may vary semantically, or the meaning ‘liquor’ may be a contextual (jargonistic) meaning of lexemes with different basic meanings.

*kaḷ* (Sangam total **69x** + **36x** case forms): ‘fermented liquor’, ‘toddy’ (Pura. 34x; Aka. 17x), ‘honey’ (Pura. 48,4; Aka. 400,22); cf.:

*kaḷ tēral* ‘clear essence of toddy’ (PPTI *s.v.*; Sangam total **9x**);  
*iṅ kaṭu kaḷḷiṅ* ‘of sweet strong toddy’ (Sangam total **6x**).

*naṟavu* (Sangam total **30x** + **29x** case forms): ‘fermented liquor’, ‘toddy’ (Pura. 12x; Aka. 16x); also ‘honey’, ‘odour, fragrance’, or ‘Arnotto’ (a special bush; e.g. Aka. 19,9); variant: *naṟavam* (Sangam total **5x**) id. Cf.:

*nal amiḷtu āka nī nayantu uṇṇum naṟavu ē* (Pura. 125,8)

(Lit.:) may that toddy you drink with pleasure be the finest *amṛta*

*maṭṭu* (Sangam total **10x** + **1x** case form *-iṅ*, Pura. 120,12): ‘fermented liquor’ (Pura. 5x; Aka. 346,15), ‘liquor jar’ (Pura. 120,12), ‘honey’ (Pura. 188,10; Aka. 212,16).<sup>17</sup>

Two marginal terms – polysemous words where the meaning ‘toddy’ is an occasional ‘metaphorical’ usage, possibly jargon:

*tēral* (Sangam total **37x** + **2x** case form + **3x** pronominalized forms): ‘clarified juice’ (e.g. Pura. 6x), ‘toddy’ (e.g. Pura. 9x, Naṟ. 1x), ‘honey’ (e.g. Aka. 1x); often combined with the specific terms for ‘toddy’: e.g.:

*kaḷ tēral* (see *kaḷ* above); *tēm kaḷ tēral* ‘clear essence of sweet toddy’ (Sangam total **4x**).

*naṇai* (Sangam total **51x** + **13x** verbal forms): ‘honey’, ‘toddy’ (e.g. Aka. 4x; Pura. 1x), ‘must of an elephant’, ‘flower-bud’; ‘to become wet, moistened’; cf. e.g.:

*naṇai kaḷ* ‘flower honey’ (Pura. 396,7); *naṇai naṟavu* ‘limpid liquor’ (Pati. 40,19).

17. Cf. DEDR 4662: Tamil *maṭṭu* honey, toddy, fermented liquor, sweet juice, drink taken at the time of sexual union, liquor jar, fragrant smell etc. Malayalam *maṭṭu* sweetness, honey; *maṭṭu* nectar. Tulu *miṭṭi* sweetness. The lexeme is not easy to interpret etymologically. The DEDR offers the possibility that the lexeme is derived from IA when adding: or < IA; cf. Turner, CDIAL, no. 20299. This would be Skt. *mṛṣṭa*-I rubbed, washed etc.; sweet, pleasant (*Mahābhārata*) etc. with a number of Pkt. and NIA variants.

*nīr* ‘water’ (occasionally mentioned as a drink):<sup>18</sup>

*puṇ kāl nelli pai kāy tīṇṇavar* (Aka. 54,15)  
*nīr kuṭi cuvaiyīṇ tīviya mīlarri* (Aka. 54,16)  
 (...)  
 (...) *eṇ makaṇ* (...) (Aka. 54,18)

(Lit.): my son (18) (...) spoke sweetly like the taste of **drinking water** (16) after eating **fresh nelli fruit** with small seeds (15).

We have briefly surveyed some of the component parts of food with the main textual references and a few examples of selected poems. It is obvious that the picture of everyday life was referred to in detail, even though this was not the main purpose of Sangam poetry. Food was one of the items in what is called the *karu poru!* (natural subject matter or ‘native things’; Zvelebil 1973, 69; plus Table 10, *ibid.* p. 100). It represented the general context or framework of the *uri poru!* (the ‘proper, specific’ subject matter; Zvelebil 1973, 95). The general principles of Sangam poetry have been repeatedly described in detail e.g. by Thani Nayagam (1966), Mu. Varadarajan (1969), K. V. Zvelebil (1973, 1986), E. Wilden (2006) and others (for references cf. Vacek 2014b). The above description should be understood in this context.

### 3. Conclusion

The references to food and eating (and drinking) appear to be another aspect of the very **realistic** image of everyday life offered by the Sangam Anthologies. We have only been able to touch upon a few interesting examples, which we have tried to present in a logically arranged manner. However, the topic is very broad and would in fact supply material for a whole book. Apart from the often colourful descriptions of the scenes of eating, drinking and tasting, it would be especially interesting to carry out a systematic survey of what was eaten and drunk, which could also be mentioned only selectively. This would be a topic for a special study.

18. This is a highly frequent lexeme (over five hundred), but it can also mean ‘you’ (plural), and therefore exact mechanical counts would be misleading.

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### Abbreviations

- Aiñk. = *Aiñkurunūru*  
 Aka. = *Akanāñūru*  
 Ciṛu. = *Ciṛuppāñāṛruppaṭai*  
 Kali. = *Kalittokai*  
 Kuṛu. = *Kuṛuntokai*  
 Malai. = *Malaiṭaṭukaṭām*  
 Naṛ. = *Naṛriṇai*  
 Pati. = *Paṭiṛrupattu*  
 Peru. = *Perumpāñāṛruppaṭai*  
 Puṛa. = *Puṛanāñūru*

- CDIAL = see Turner 1966.  
 DEDR = see Burrow–Emeneau 1984.<sup>2</sup>  
 PPTI = see Subrahmanian 1966.  
 SVS = see Subrahmanian 1972.  
 TL = *Tamil Lexicon*  
 VIS = see Subramoniam 1962.

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## The semantics of food in old Tamil poetry

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It seems appropriate to begin a study on food with a definition coined by Olga Freidenberg, a Russian scholar, who was a specialist in ancient literature and culture: 'Food is a metaphor of life and resurrection'.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, this is a universal truth well understood all over the world, and it is no wonder that we meet a somewhat similar expression in old Tamil poetry, namely in the anthology called *Puṛaṇāṇūru*.

*uṇṭi koṭuttōr uyir koṭuttārē*  
*uṇṭi mutarṛē uṇavin piṇṭam*  
*uṇavu eṇappaṭuvatu nilattoṭu nīrē* (Puṛa. 18, 19-21)

Those who give feeding give life.  
The first in feeding is a lump of food.  
What is called food is water together with the earth  
[or, produced by water with the earth].

Food is an important component of the contents of old Tamil poetry and is quite often mentioned in the so-called *caṅkam* poems. In fact, they present a vast nomenclature of food products and dishes consumed by Tamils, along with verbal pictures of cooking and eating which are often given in some detail. For example, Puṛa. 168, 8-13 describes a feast undertaken by mountain hunters (*kuṛavar*) to celebrate the new harvest of millet:

*maraiyān kaṛanta nuraiko ṭimpāl*  
*māṇṇṛati puḷukkiya pulavunāṅgu kuḷici*  
*vāṅkēḷ irumputtai kalāa terri*  
*cānta viṛaki ṇuvitta puṅkam*  
*kūtaḷam kaviṇiya kuḷavi muṇṇiṛ*  
*ceḷuṅkōḷ vāḷai yakalilaip pakukkum* (...) (Puṛa. 168, 8-13)

1. Freidenberg 1997, 67.

The hunters pour the sweet foaming milk of the she-elk  
 Into the unwashed pot with white paunchy side,  
 Smelling of meat, for pieces of deer were boiled in it;  
 In the yard with jasmine decorated with ipomoea  
 [They] divide on wide leaves of the plantain abundant with fruit  
 [Their] rice boiled on fire made of sandalwood.

To compose a list of food and dishes known to Tamil people of ancient times is outside the limits of the present article. I shall try to discover how food enters the sphere of Tamil culture and literature, what semantics it acquires, and how it is used with poetical purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, Tamil people's rations as seen through the old poetry, included rice, millet, different vegetables, fruits and roots, milk, and milk products. They were not vegetarians and ate fish and meat lavishly (the meat of ram, deer, hare, boar, porcupine, iguana, tortoise, fowl) using salt, ghee, and spices.<sup>3</sup> It is natural to suggest that all these items were common to all parts of Tamilakam (or to the whole India for that matter). At the same time, there is also quite a natural and traceable tendency in the texts to connect certain food-products with certain regions and their dwellers. Thus, the main food for hunters was meat, millet, and honey; for agriculturalists – rice; for fishermen – food brought by the sea; for shepherds – milk and milk-products, and for the tribes of hunters and robbers from the desert areas (*pālai*) – meat once again. We can even speak of the ethnic characteristics of food-products and kitchens, but for our purpose it is more important that food became a part of the old Tamil poetic system of five canonical themes, called *tiṇai*. Each theme consists of a certain love-situation correlated with a particular landscape which is represented by a set of specific canonical features (called *karu*, literally 'embryo'). Food is considered one of these and recognized by the poetic tradition in a *sūtra* of the old Tamil grammatical and poetical treatise *Tolkāppiyam* (*Poruḷatikāram*, 20) which presents the *karu*-elements of the themes. Food occupies the second place after local gods in this work.

The *caṅkam* poets when speaking of food usually adhered to this regional principle. Moreover, they often try to use it for solving purely poetic tasks. For instance, the poet Uruttiraṅ Kaṇṇaṅār in his poem *Perumpāṇāṅṅruppaṭai* (Peru.) from the *Pattuppāṭṭu* collection not only mentions some food items as attributes of certain regions, but also introduces them as points along the path a poet should follow (in the situation known as *āṅruppaṭai* when one poet explains to a fellow-poet the route to a generous patron): *ūṅ puḷukkaḷ* (100) (...) *tēkkilaiḱ kuvaiinum paṭṭir kaṭumpoṭu patamikaḱ perukuvir* 'you and your companions

2. One of the early works in which food and eating were treated in a cultural perspective was the article by Brenda Beck (Beck 1969).

3. The flesh of the domestic cow is not mentioned in the texts, but wild-cow meat (*āmāṇ*) was consumed (*Cirupāṇāṅruppaṭai*, Ciru. 177).

who end [people's] distress, will get pieces of meat served on teak leaves' (100, 104-105); *cuvavilāi nellin (...)* *uṭumpiṇ vaṛaikāl yāttatu (...)* *perukuvir* 'you will get rice grown on hillocks and a bunch of fried legs of iguana' (131-133); *pacuntinai mūral pāloṭum perukuvir* 'you will get boiled millet with milk' (168); *iṅcuvai mūrar perukuvir* 'you will get sweet boiled rice' (194-195); *vennir ariyal viralalai narumpili taṇmīṇ cūṭṭoṭu taḷartalum perukuvir* 'you will quench your hunger receiving fresh fried fish and fragrant juice [made] from rice-paste stirred by fingers' (281-282). Thus, the poet on his way to the king should encounter different people: mountain hunters (*kuṛavar*), hunters from the wild plains (*eyiṇar*), shepherds (*iṭaiyar*), peasants (*uḷavar*), and fishermen (*paratar*), and he should pass through the geographical zones they occupy (in terms of *tiṇai*-landscapes: *kuṛiṇci*, *pālai*, *mullai*, *marutam*, *neytal*).

This poetic device (repeated in *Ciru.*, another poem from *Pattuppāṭṭu*) not only demonstrates the regional features of the country and the characteristic points of the route, but also appears to be saturated with a clear panegyric meaning. Indeed, the abundance of food enjoyed by the people of the kingdom signifies their happy life under the sceptre of the ruler and, in a disguised fashion, expresses the idea that the king provides food for his subjects. That is why food-products, scenes of eating and drinking, festivals and feasts, fertile fields of rice, unfailing crops, etc. constitute a regular feature of praise-poems. In *Pura.* 236 the poet *Kapilar* thus addresses his patron *Pāri*: *kalaiyuṇa kiḷinta muḷavumarul perumpalam cilaikeḷu kuṛavaraku alkumicaivākum malaikēḷu nāṭa* 'O, the owner of the mountain country where big jack-fruits, resembling *mulavu*-drums, are torn [from the trees] and eaten by monkeys, and what is left is a food for the hunters-*kuṛavar* with bows' (1-3). The idea of these lines is not only to show the land rich in food for both beast and man, but also to stress that the food is ready and easy to obtain.

Another example gives a picture of food brought together from different parts of the Chola kingdom, thereby producing the impression of a happy plentiful life:

*kāṇurai vāḷkkaik katanāy vēṭṭuvan*  
*māṇracai corinta vaṭṭiyu māymakaḷ*  
*tayirkoṭu vanta tacumpu niraia*  
*ēriṇ vāḷnar pēri larivaiyar*  
*kuḷakkūḷ viḷanta kaḷakkoḷ veṇṇel*  
*mukantaṇar koṭuppa* (*Pura.* 33, 1-6)

The hunter with fierce dogs who leads his life in the forest  
 Gives a basket full of the deer's meat,  
 The cow-girl – a pot full with *tayir*;<sup>4</sup>

4. A kind of home-made yogurt.

The women from the big houses of those who live by the plough  
Scoop the white rice which has grown in the field beneath ponds.

However, the more or less abstract idea of a king feeding his subjects takes a very concrete and meaningful form in Tamil poetry in connection with a specific relationship between kings and the poet-performers, whose work was to compose and sing praise-songs. Since I have dealt with this subject in detail previously,<sup>5</sup> I shall only stress two points here: firstly, the relationship in question was part of a much broader system of ties between supplicants and patrons (*iravalar-puravalar*); in fact it symbolized the interrelation between a ruler and his land and people; secondly, considerable stress was laid upon the act of feeding poets and performers in this relationship, and this appeared to be one of the main obligations of a king or a chieftain towards these figures.

The importance of the motive can be illustrated by numerous instances from anthologies, especially from *Puṛa*: *neruppuṣ ciṇan taṇinta niṇantaiyaṅku koḷuṅkukuraḷai parūukkaṅ maṇṭaiyo tūḷmāru peyara uṅku mentainir kāṅkuvantiṇeṇ* ‘I have come, o father, to see you and [thinking] that we shall eat fat pieces of meat fried on fire which ceased its anger, and drink *kaḷ*<sup>6</sup> incessantly in big vessels (...)’ (*Puṛa*. 125, 2-4); *vēṭṭattir rāṇuyir cekutta māṇiṇap puḷukko ṭāṇuruk kaṇṇa vēriyai nalki* ‘he gave us fat pieces of deer which he killed in the hunt, and toddy which was like ghee made of cow’s [milk]’ (*Puṛa*. 152, 25-26); *pāṇar paitar curratup pacippakai yāki* ‘he became the enemy of the hunger of bards (*pāṇar*) and their weak relatives’ (*Puṛa*. 212, 11-12); in *Puṛa*. 14, 13-15 the poet states that the bards at the king’s court ‘do not know other troublesome work apart from eating meat, rice, and curry’ (*ūṇruvai kaṇicōṛuntu varuntutoli lallatu piṇitutoli laṇiyāvākaḷ*); in his praise-song for the chieftain Ōri, the poet Vanparaṇar as the leader of a group of bards says, in a somewhat grotesque way, that after much eating and drinking at Ōri’s court they ‘could not dance and forgot their songs’ (*āṭalu mollārtam pāṭalum maṇantē*, *Puṛa*. 153, 12).

The number of examples from poems showing eating and drinking at kings’ courts can be easily multiplied, which only stresses the important place of this motive in Tamil poetry. Its inner significance lies in the fact that the relationship of bards and patrons can be viewed from the angle of a certain ritual, structurally similar to rites of passage. In this case the motive of food and eating fully corresponds to the third stage of such rituals connected with the ideas of renovation, life, and energy.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the previous stage which may be called transitional signifies sufferings, danger, and death. It finds its poetic ex-

5. Dubianski 2000, 62-72.

6. An alcoholic drink made from palm-juice.

7. Dubianski 2000, 64-65. These stages, as B. Beck demonstrated (Beck 1969), are understood in terms of heating and cooling and it is no wonder that hunger is looked upon as hot (*kāypaci* ‘hot hunger’ *Puṛa*. 150, 14; *vayiruttī* ‘the fire of guts’ *Puṛa*. 74, 5).

pression in descriptions of the deplorable physical state of bards and their family, the state of utmost poverty, hunger and thirst. In the fragment from *Pura*. 159, 6-14 the poet describes his wife's sufferings:

*pacanta mēṇiyoṭu paṭaraṭa varunti*  
*maruṅkiṭ koṇṭa palkuru mākkal*  
*picantutiṇa vāṭiya mulaiyaḷ peritalintu*  
*kuppaik kīrai koykaṇ ṅakaiṭta*  
*muṛṛā viḷantalir koytukon ṭuppiṇru*  
*nīrulai yāka vēṛri mōriṇ*  
*ṛaviḷppata maṛantu pācaṭaku micaiṇtu*  
*mācoṭu kuṛainta vuṭukkaiya ḷaṅampaliyāt*  
*tuvvā ḷākiya veṇvey yōlum* (*Pura*. 159, 6-14)

With pale body, thinking [of us] in despair,  
 She, with breasts dried out and bruised by many children at her  
 side, suffering much,  
 Plucks young unripe sprouts [grown] on a heap of rotten vegeta-  
 bles,  
 Puts them into a pot with water without salt.  
 She who forgot [even what is] poor rice without *mōr*<sup>8</sup> pounds  
 them;  
 Clad in dirty rags, cursing *dharma*, she cannot eat it, but does not  
 get angry with me.

In this and similar cases, the state of hunger can be considered circumstantial, so to say, but there are situations when starvation is brought on voluntarily. First of all, a feminine ritual of the type known as *noṇṇu* in Tamil culture should be mentioned. This also has the structure of a rite of passage and is connected with the idea of fertility, often constituting a religious service as shown in the poem *Tiruppāvai* by Āṇṭāl (9c). In verse 2, the girls who are performing the rite in the name of Krishna describe their departure from a normal state and a kind of ascetic behaviour with the rejection of food, among other things:

*vaiyattu vālvīrkāḷ nāmumnam pāvaikkuc*  
*ceyyuṅ kiricaikaḷ kēḷirō pāṛkaṭaluḷ*  
*paiyat tuyiṇṇa parama ṇaṭipāṭi*  
*neyyūṇṇōm pāluṇṇōm nāṭkālē nīrāṭi*  
*maiṇṇiṭ ṭeḷutōm malaritṭu nāmmuṭiyōm*  
*ceyyā taṇaceyōm tikkuṛalai ceṇṛōtōm*  
*(Tiruppāvai 2, 1-6 = TPA. 475)*

8. A kind of butter-milk.

O you, who live in this spacious world! We also  
 Undertake actions corresponding to the rite – won't you listen  
 about them?  
 Having sung the Transcendental one, who sleeps on the hood [of  
 the snake]  
 Amidst the milk-ocean,  
**We do not eat ghee, do not drink milk.** At the beginning of the day  
 After bathing we do not decorate our hair with flowers, do not  
 blacken our eyes,  
 We do not do improper things, do not utter, even by chance, evil  
 words (...).

The third and final stage of the rite signifies the end of fasting and is accompa-  
 nied by a feast:

*kūṭārai vellumcīrk kōvintā uṇṇaṇṇaiṇ  
 pāṭip paraikoṇṭu yāmpērum cammāṇam  
 nāṭu pukaḷum pariciṇāl ṇaṇṇākac  
 cūṭakamē tōḷvalaiyē tōṭē cevippūvē  
 paṭakamē yeṇṇaṇṇaiya palkalaṇṇum yāmaṇivōm  
 āṭai yuṭupṇō matanṇiṇṇē pārcōru  
 mūṭaney peytu muḷaṅkai vaḷivārak  
 kūṭi yiruntu kuḷirntēḷō rempāvāy (Tiruppāvai 27 = TPA. 500)*

O, Govinda who has the habit of conquering those who do not  
 join you!  
 On having sung you and completed the rite, we will get your re-  
 sponse,  
 Let it be so good that the whole country will praise it!  
 And we, putting arm-bracelets, earrings, feet-bangles  
 And other decorations on, clad in new clothes,  
**Shall pour lavishly – up to our elbows – butter**  
**Into the vessels full of rice and milk,**  
 And together shall be cooled off. Accept [our rite], o, our *pāval*

No doubt, cooling off here means eating. It crowns the rite of passage and dis-  
 closes the semantics of food as a source of life and renovation.

Religious fasting is not the only case of self-starvation which has a special  
 aim and meaning. Ancient Tamil kings were known to resort to this when they  
 suffered defeat in battle or lost their dignity in some other way. They used to go  
 to a solitary place and sit there facing the Northern part of the horizon. They  
 would reject eating and drinking until they died. The custom, or, rather, vow,  
 was, presumably, borrowed from the ascetic practice of Jainas, *sallekhana*. It  
 was called *vaṭakkiruttal* ('staying [facing] North') and mentioned in Puga. 65, 66  
 and Aka. 55 referring to kings wounded in the back during battle, which was  
 considered shameful.



There is one more interesting example of a similar vow in the military sphere given by Pati. 58, 6-7: in the words of the warriors ‘we will not eat until we overcome the walls of the enemy’s fortress’ (*matil kaṭantallatu uṅkuva mallēm*). Another case of rejecting food is represented by a notion (influenced, perhaps, by Buddhist thought) expressed in Puṛa. 182: the world exists because of the existence of people who, among the other things they do for the sake of others, ‘do not eat and enjoy [food] alone, even if they get the *amṛta* of gods’ (*intirar amiḷtam iyaiva tāyīṇum iṇiteṇa tamiyar uṅṭalum ilarē*, Puṛa. 182, 1-3).

Rejection of food is also met with in Tamil love-poetry (*akam*). It is always connected with the heroine’s emotions. In the poems on *kuriñci-tiṇai* there is a situation when she cannot meet her beloved, because she is being guarded and kept at home. She is grief-stricken and does not take food, even milk: *pālum uṇṇāl* (Aka. 48, 2); *tēṇoṭu tīmpāl uṇṇāl* ‘she does not drink sweet milk with honey’ (Naṟ. 179, 5-6). The same occurs in the situation when she runs away with the young boy and her behaviour at home on the eve of her flight is called to mind: *manicey maṅṭait tīmpāl ēnti iṅāttāyār maṭuppavum uṇṇāl* ‘she does not drink sweet milk given to her by her foster-mother in a cup made of sapphire’ (Aka. 105, 5-6); *cempor puṅaikalat tamporik kalanta pālum palaveṇa vuṇṇāl* ‘she does not eat, saying “much”, even milk mixed with good rice in a vessel decorated with gold’ (Kuṛu. 356, 6-7).

In the situation of separation when the heroine is waiting for her husband to return from his journey (usually a military expedition) she takes up a mode of behaviour which can be defined as a ritual of separation, another variety of rites of passage.<sup>9</sup> Its description can be reconstructed from Tamil poetry in many details. Among other things her physical state at this period is expressively described: her body is virtually withering, its beauty (*nalam*) perishing. Fasting is without doubt one of the conditions of the rite, but not much is actually said about it in poems. However, a number of general typological considerations and also several features of the heroine’s appearance allow it to be presumed: the brown-blue colour of her skin dims and is replaced by a specific pale, yellowish tinge which is called *pacalai* or *pacappu* (the verb *pacattal*).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in this context the heroine herself is understood as the food for this paleness: *pacalai yuṇṇiyar vēṇṭum titalai yalkuleṇ māmaik kavīṇē* ‘the mango beauty of my loins covered with small spots would be eaten by *pacalai*’ (Kuṛu. 27, 4-5). This motive brings us further to the image of a woman eaten by her sufferings in the love-affair. A short poem from the Kuṛu. anthology serves as a good example:

9. Dubianski 2000, 127-30.

10. It is not a mere coincidence that in the poem Puṛa. 159 cited above, the poet uses exactly the same verb: *pacanta mēṇṇiyōṭu*, that is, ‘with pale body’ to describe a hungry woman (Puṛa. 159, 6).

*puṇavaṇ ruṭavaip poṇṇōr cīruṭṭinai*  
*kīlikuṛait tuṇṭa kūlai yīruvi*  
*perumpeya luṇmaiṇi ṇilaiyolit tānken*  
*urañcettu muḷeṇē tōḷiyēṇ*  
*nalam puti tuṇṭa pulampigāṇē* (Kuru. 133)

Like stubbles of small millet, resembling gold,  
 Which was eaten and smashed by parrots on the field of a high-  
 lander  
 Leaves sprout [again] because of heavy rain,  
 Though my strength has died, I still exist, my friend,  
 By my affliction which has eaten recently [or, for the first time]  
 The wealth of my beauty.

The poetical structure of the poem points to the fact that the heroine's beauty has actually been eaten by her lover (a notion which has obvious sexual connotations). In some other instances it is stated explicitly: *avar uṇṭa eṇ nalaṇē* 'my beauty which was eaten by him' (Kuru. 112, 5).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the heroine of Tamil *kuṇṇi-tiṇai* love-poetry (describing premarital meetings) is in some subtle way associated with food. It is remarkable that when she reaches puberty, a girl is defined in Tamil with the verb *camaital*, whose transitive form *camaittal* means 'to cook'. B. Beck explains this fact in terms of the main theme of her article (cooling-heating processes): coming of age means that a girl is in a heated condition.<sup>12</sup> But it also means that she is ripe for sexual relations and marriage, or, in terms of the present article, for 'being eaten'.

There are certain indications in *kuṇṇi* poems that the heroine is associated with *tiṇai*, a mountain millet, one of the main food-products of the tribe of mountain-hunters (*kuṇṇavar*). This association is worked out first of all on a vegetative level: girls who have just reached puberty are sent to guard the field of ripening millet (the situation that should stimulate fertility energy on both sides). At the same time, food overtones in the association were obvious for poets, and they used them to construct poetical images with an inner meaning (or 'inner comparison'), as in Naṅ. 98, which contains a verbal picture of a boar trying to enter the millet-field to feast itself on the fresh ears. In the poetic system of *akam* poetry the boar is a symbol of the hero who wants to enjoy the girl's virgin beauty.<sup>13</sup>

A further important semantic property of food should be named: in some poetic contexts food symbolizes the unity of lovers in a family way, their happiness, and how they care for each other. It is true, however, that poets usually

11. See also: Kuru. 236, 6; 384, 3; Naṅ. 15, 4; Aka. 320, 13.

12. Beck 1969, 562.

13. This poem was translated and analysed in Dubyanskiy 2013, 68.

present idyllic scenes drawing pictures of animals and birds, but, again, these pictures always symbolize human relations: *aṇṇal iralai ceṇṇiyalaip pataviṇ ceṇkol meṅkural maṇṇiyāṭu maruṇkiṇ maṭappiṇai yarutti* ‘a handsome stag is feeding its simpleton pair with a lamb at its side, with bunches of soft [millet] with red stalks’ (Aka. 34, 4-7); *piṭṭipaci kaḷaiya peruṇkai vēlam meṇṇiṇai yāam poḷikkum* ‘the elephant with a big trunk splits soft branches of the yam-tree to quench the hunger of its mate’ (Kuru. 37, 2-3).

The descriptions and examples given herewith do not exhaust all the possible semantics of food and images connected with food that are found in Tamil poetry. But they do give us a clear-cut notion of its importance and of the many ways of its poetical usage.

## References

### Abbreviations

- Aka. = *Akanāṇṇuru*  
 Cīru. = *Cīrupāṇāṇṇruppaṭai*  
 Kuṟu. = *Kuṟuntokai*  
 Naṟ. = *Narriṇai nāṇṇūru*  
 Pati. = *Patirruppattu*  
 Peru. = *Perumpāṇāṇṇruppaṭai*  
 Puṟa. = *Puṟanāṇṇūru*  
 TPA. = *Tiruppāvai – Āṇṭāl = Tiruppāvai*

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*Puraṇāṇūru*, mūlamum paḷaiya uraiyum, makāmakōpāttiyāya tākṣiṇātyakalāniti  
 ṭāktar u vē cāminātaiyaravarkaḷ (patippācīriyar), ṭāktar u ve cāminātaiyar  
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From fast to feast:  
The *aśana* discourse of the Vidūṣaka  
in Kerala's traditional Sanskrit theatre

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The Vidūṣaka, who appears as the court jester and companion of kings in Sanskrit drama, is always portrayed as fun loving and fond of food. The origin of the character is shrouded in mystery, and even the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the seminal text of dramaturgy, which assumes him to be a necessary character in drama, is silent about the problem. Dramaturgical texts like the *Daśarūpaka* cursorily discuss his nature with the terse statement that the Vidūṣaka is a 'fun maker' (*hāsyakṛt*),<sup>1</sup> and even Dhanika, in his gloss, does not say much, except that the deformed nature, dress, and the like of the Vidūṣaka are assumed on the basis of the fact that he causes fun. However, Śāradātanaya's *Bhāvaprakāśana* mentions, among the Vidūṣaka's qualities of easy going hero (*dhūralalita*) represented by ministers and others, a fondness for food, both prescribed and prohibited.<sup>2</sup> In fact, there is no Vidūṣaka portrayed in Sanskrit drama as wanting in the passion for food. Even though there is no prescription available regarding his food and drinks in dramaturgical texts, almost all the playwrights have portrayed him as a glutton, who revels in all savoury dishes and, more importantly, dwells upon items of food whenever possible in his discourse.<sup>3</sup> Examples are galore; they include Vasantaka in Udayana plays such as Bhāsa's *Pratijñāyau-gandharāyaṇa*, as well as *Svapnavāsavadatta*, Harṣavardhana's *Ratnāvalī* and *Priyadarśikā*, Santuṣṭa in *Avimārika*, Maitreya in *Mṛcchakatikā*, Mādhavya in *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, Gautama in *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Mānavaka in *Vikramorvaśīya*, as well as Ātreya in *Nāgānanda*. Apart from the fact that the Vidūṣaka is a food loving glutton and that his obsession with food is always a point of humour in classical Sanskrit drama, it can be seen that further elaborate references to food are meager therein. At the best, his cursory references to

1. *Daśarūpaka* II.7, see Malaviya 1979.

2. *Bhāvaprakāśana*, see Swami-Sastri 1968, 282.

3. Bhat 1959, 67.

kitchen matters provide some comic relief to the play, especially in his conversations with the love-obsessed heroes.

The Vidūṣaka has always been a prominent character in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Kerala's traditional Sanskrit theatre, which is the only surviving traditional performance of ancient Sanskrit drama anywhere in the world. Of course, some of the plays traditionally staged in Kerala, such as Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* and Bhāsa's *Abhiṣeka*, do not have the Vidūṣaka in their dramatic persona. The main Vidūṣaka characters seen in Kūṭiyāṭṭam presentations are Vasantaka in *Pratijñāyugaṅdharāyaṇa* ascribed to Bhāsa, Śaṅḍilya in Bodhāyana's *Bhagavadajjuka*, Kauṇḍinya in *Subhadrādhanañjaya* and Pārāśarya in *Tapatisamvaraṇa*, both by Kulaśekhara, and Ātreya in Harṣavardhana's *Nāgānanda*. One of the causes of his prominence is his freedom in using Malayalam, Kerala's regional language, in his discourse, in addition to Sanskrit and Prakrit, allowing him to establish an intimate rapport with the audience, which includes people who may not be scholars in Sanskrit and Prakrit. The Vidūṣaka actually bridges the gap between the play and the audience, by interpreting and elaborating the textual passages in the regional language and also by pretending that the audience actually belongs to the time/space framework of the play presented, often cracking jokes at their expense. As pointed out by Kunjuni Raja, he is a 'chartered libertine' as he has unlimited freedom to make fun of anybody present in the audience, irrespective of their rank and class. His torrential discourse lasts for hours and whenever he is present on the stage, even the hero and the other characters pale into insignificance. True to his role as a jester, he often sends the audience into peals of laughter with timely jokes, often at the expense of the hapless audience itself, which is supposed to have a grin and bear it attitude to his vagaries. In short, it can be stated that in his new avatar, the Vidūṣaka has become an institution by himself. Due to the inevitable structuring the character has undergone on the Kerala stage, his individuality often gets blurred, to such an extent that apart from the personal name the Vidūṣaka possesses in different dramas, there are not very many distinguishing features between one Vidūṣaka and another in the many extant presentations, and food discourse is one of the interesting features which stand out in his function.

It seems that the food discourse of the Vidūṣaka in the Malayalam language in its present form is a result of a long process of evolution, since many plays belonging to earlier times do not possess this feature. Two such instances are the *Bhagavadajjuka* and *Pratijñāyugaṅdharāyaṇa*. In Bodhāyana's *Bhagavadajjuka*, ascribed to the third century AD<sup>4</sup>, featuring the exchange of the souls of a hermit and harlot and the ensuing comedy, the student Śaṅḍilya, who attends the hermit, describes himself as born in a clan of the twice born. However, he decides to convert to the Buddhist fold, on account of the utter lack of food in his abode and in the hope of getting a decent breakfast. But he soon

4. Warder 1974, 335.



becomes disillusioned as he realizes that the Buddhists take no food except for breakfast. In his Malayalam discourse elaborated as a part of his script, the Vidūṣaka uses the expletive ‘sons of the slaves’ (*cerumimakka*) to describe them<sup>5</sup> and states that he had also hoped to have a solid supper, but that his hope had been belied. He exclaims:

Due to the grace of the supper  
Strength accrues the next day  
Hence supper should be eaten  
More diligently than breakfast.<sup>6</sup>

Hence he felt that they did not eat any food at all and he relinquishes his connection with the fold.

In the *Mantrāṅka of Pratijñāyauḡandharāyaṇa*, Vasantaka is disguised as a wandering Brahmin with a lock of hair, who holds a curved stick, wears a loin cloth, is smeared with holy ashes, bears a rag bag, and puts a garland made of conches around his neck. In his present form, he is engaged in the serious business of securing the freedom of his Lord, King Udayana, who has been imprisoned in Ujjain by Mahāsenā. Though he has no opportunity to revel in gastronomic pleasures in his present state, he uses a code language featuring food to attract the attention of Rumaṇvān and Yauḡandharāyaṇa, his fellow ministers. He uses the word *modaka* (sweetmeat) to indicate his master, Udayana, the King of the Vatsas. Interestingly, the term *vatsa* is used even nowadays in Kerala to denote *modaka*, the sweetmeat made of rice, and there can be no other explanation for this, save the influence of the Vidūṣaka’s discourse.

These cursory references to food in the earlier plays are a far cry from the elaborate food discourse which we find in plays belonging to the later phase, such as the *Nāḡānanda*, *Subhadrādhanarājaya*, and *Tapatīsamvarāṇa*, which feature the three Vidūṣakas named Ātreya, Kauṇḡinya and Pārāśarya respectively. In all these plays, there are no food discourses as such to be found in the texts themselves, but when they are staged, the Vidūṣaka makes the elaborate discourse called *Puruṣārthakkūtu* as part of the auto-narration of the character’s previous history, technically known as *Nīrvahaṇa*. In fact, although the plays, the characters, and their nature are all different, their improvised and out-of-text oral discourse is more or less the same in this auto-narration, and their identities are blurred. All the characters begin their narration at the outset with an opening passage in the text and, after the preliminary rituals, start with an account of the inevitability of past deeds (*karman*).

5. Pisharoti 2001, 105.

6. Krishnachandran 1994, 22.

The Vidūṣaka narrates how the villagers unanimously select him to be the person to serve the King and how he approaches the King. Asked as to why he has come, he says:

The leaves of the drumstick plant,  
Which were confined to the side dish  
Now wish to replace  
Even the main course of rice.<sup>7</sup>

The king really enjoys the Vidūṣaka's wit, through which he conveys the idea that he had no rice to eat in his house, and all that was available were some leaves of the drumstick plant. The king accepts him into his fold as the court jester.

In his succeeding narrative, the Vidūṣaka describes how he settles an imaginary dispute between two aristocratic Brahmins in what is technically called the 'Settling of Dispute' (*Vātu tīrkkal*), where he pleads with them to forget their silly differences and to work for the welfare of the village. He further remarks rather satirically that the four aims of life (*puruṣārthas*), consisting of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*, are difficult to realize in the modern age and, in their place, the Brahmins should regard eating, serving a king, the enjoyment of a courtesan, and cheating on her, as the four respective *puruṣārthas*.<sup>8</sup> The Vidūṣaka's ensuing discourse is known as *Puruṣārthakkūttu* and it is here that feasting becomes a prominent item. In presentation, one night is devoted by the Vidūṣaka to dilate on the nature of the typical feast. At the outset of the discourse, he invites all his friends and acquaintances for the event. The occasion is the first annual ceremony commemorating the demise of a prominent Brahmin.

As a prologue to his discourse, the Vidūṣaka narrates the story of Vaiśravaṇa, the god of wealth, who once audaciously invited Gaṇapati, Lord Śiva's son, to a feast at his home, since he found him ill fed by his parents and wanted to show off his wealth. Śiva decides to teach him a lesson and taps on his son's stomach, with the result that the already gluttonous Gaṇapati becomes mad with hunger and finishes off everything which is offered to him, including even pots and plates, and then, with his hunger unsatiated, turns his wrath on the hapless host. To cut a long story short, Śiva had to feed his son some holy ash to remove his insatiable hunger and to save a thoroughly chastened Vaiśravaṇa from him.

In his discourse, the Vidūṣaka compares rice, Kerala's staple diet, to a king: the king is always alert to the welfare of his subjects. He is loved by all and in-

7. Krishnachandran 1994, 51: *upadaṁśapade tiṣṭhan purā yaḥ śigrupallavaḥ / idānīm odanasyāpi dhuram udvoḍhum ihate //*.

8. *Ibid.*, 123: *āmantraṇaṁ brāhmaṇānāṁ hi dharmāḥ sevā rājñām arthamūlaṁ narāṇām / veśyāstrīṣu prāptir evātra kāmo bhuyas tāsāṁ vañcanaṁ mokṣahetuḥ //*.

visible to the wicked. He is agreeable to the feelings of the fourfold ministers. The rice is also indispensable for people's welfare. It is unavailable to the petty minded; it is suitable for the taste of fourfold accompaniments consisting of *erissēri*, *pulissēri*, *madhurakkari*, and *upperi*. He further compares rice to a damsel. The melting butter added to the hot rice is her smile; the cooked aubergines are her lips, the sweet pudding her breasts; the curd made from buffalo milk is her hips and the plantain fruit her thighs.<sup>9</sup>

The Vidūṣaka refers to four hosts, viz. those who are first hospitable and subsequently hostile; hostile first and then hospitable; hostile throughout, and, finally, hospitable throughout, and he advises people to only visit the last type; the second type can be approached only in an emergency. The other two types are best avoided.<sup>10</sup>

The feast goers are described as marching to the house of the prospective host after a lot of misadventures, and the Vidūṣaka points out that ten *yojanas* (about a hundred miles) is no distance for a Brahmin who is eager to attend a feast, just as a hundred *yojanas* are no distance for a *sūdra* fleeing from a battlefield.<sup>11</sup> What follows is a description of a huge feast with all its details, which is more or less the description of an ideal, something like the fulfilment of a fantasy, with undertones satirizing the gluttonous habits of contemporary society. At times, the description is decidedly exaggerated. In this elaborate narration, erotic undertones are conspicuous in many places, when food items and even vegetables are compared to women. Generally, the tone and tenor are witty and gently sarcastic, especially when describing how the food lover behaves towards the food served at the feast, but there is also a sense of earnestness and enthusiasm in the description of food. On the whole, the discourse gives a vivid picture of an upper-caste, traditional vegetarian feast in the Kerala of pre-modern times, whose general structure survives to date.

As he describes the huge assemblage of people for the feast, the Vidūṣaka points out that crows, on hearing that food will be served to the twice born, also flock to the place, since they too are 'twice born'.<sup>12</sup> The first place the group visits is the huge kitchen, which consists of sheds filled with people carrying bunches of banana fruits on rods placed on their shoulders and baskets full of coconuts. There are also huge porcelain containers full of jaggery and oil, heaps of old rice, ash gourds, heaps of green gram, looking like the mountains of emerald struck unconscious by Indra,<sup>13</sup> plantains, pitchers of curd and buttermilk,

9. *Ibid.*, 51.

10. *Ibid.*, 193: *sarasavirasagehaṃ bhoktukāmo na gacched virasasarasagehaṃ kaṣṭapakṣe prayātu / virasavirasagehaṃ mā kṣudhartho 'pi gacchet sarasasarasagehaṃ yātu tāpopaśāntyai //*

11. *Ibid.*, 225: *bhoktukāmasya viprasya na dūraṃ daśayojanam / raṇabhītasya sūdrasya na dūraṃ śatayojanam //*

12. *Ibid.*, 226: *samāgatānām akhiladvijānām mṛṣṭāśanam syād iti kiṇṇvadantīm / ākarnya kākā dvijānāmāyogān māse prayāntīva mahājanena //*

13. *Ibid.*, 230.

pots, utensils, and the like. The rice heap, surrounded by ash gourds, is fancied as looking like the white coloured Mount Kailāsa surrounded by its 'children' (a possible allusion to small hillocks surrounding it), which has fled to the storehouse of the feast to escape the wrath of Indra, who in mythology appears as having cut down the wings of all mountains.<sup>14</sup> Heaps of cooked rice are piled up, along with heaps of coconut scrapings. People have already reserved their places for the feast, squatting on the ground in the hall. But, first of all, the visitors take a comfortable bath to be ready for the oncoming feast.

There are some norms to be followed if one is to enjoy a feast without disturbance, and the Vidūṣaka is happy to share his expertise. According to him, one should not sit near aristocratic Brahmins at the feast, since they drop items, wasting everything, and they tend to lean on their neighbour to rest. One should also avoid scholars who will engage in deep distracting discussions. One should not sit at the end of the row, as there is the chance that the items of food could be finished by the time the server reaches that place; nor should one sit at the corner, as there is every possibility that the server may miss him. And again, one should not sit in a dark room, in a place which is concealed and which is low deep.<sup>15</sup> According to the Vidūṣaka, to really enjoy a feast, one should sit in a comfortable place, on a smooth wooden plank with men of taste on either side.

The food is ideally served on a neat plantain leaf which has not been dirtied by crows. In the subsequent narration, the Vidūṣaka describes the turmoil of the feast from the point of view of a Brahmin guest called Mūssad. In his eagerness, Mūssad is described as demanding that leaves should be placed on all sides around him. The leaf is to be sprinkled with water and washed. Thereupon, clarified butter is to be served, followed by plantain fruits and jaggery. The Vidūṣaka portrays the nearly delirious ecstasy of the Brahmin guest when the rice is being served. He almost passes out from excitement, much to the amusement of the onlookers. The warm rice served is white like the flower of the medicinal plant called *tumba* (*Leuca indica*.) The gentleman demands clarified butter to be poured like a female elephant urinating (*hastinīmūtrapāta*),<sup>16</sup> followed by a handsome serving of lentils. Next arrive all kinds of chips roasted in ghee, made of banana, jackfruit, elephant yam, tuber, and catmint. The next items are sautéed vegetables consisting of bitter gourd drumstick leaves, *Cassia tora*, aubergines, bitter aubergines, plantain, and tender jackfruit. Typically, Kerala's ethnic curries, such as *olan*, *erīśseri*, and *paccaṭi*, made of ingredients such as curd, tamarind, and various vegetables are described with mouth watering details and also with reference to the method of their preparation very

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 237: *yatrāḍhyāḥ yatra vidvāṃso yatra bhāṇḍāḥ pratiṣṭhitāḥ / tatra tatra tu na stheyam antaṃ koṇaṃ ca varjayet //*

16. *Ibid.*, 243.

much as if in a cookbook. Then comes the turn of pickles, made of lemon, gooseberry, tender mango, and big mangoes. Also mentioned are items like sour curry (*puliśśer*), ginger-curd mixture (*iñcittair*), the last item being extolled as hot enough to chastise one's tongue in preparation for the sweet puddings which are to finish off the feast. Roasted plantain soaked in jaggery, plain sugar, and steamed banana fruits are the other items served afterwards, as a precursor to the grand finale consisting of various puddings, followed by roasted wafers called *papaḍs* (*pappaṭam*), big plantains, and *rasam*, the concoction made of pepper.

In Vidūṣaka's discourse, the puddings, called *pāyasam* and *prathamam* in contemporary Malayalam, are designated 'sweet curries' (*madhurakkari*) in accordance with the upper class dialect. Pride of place goes to the *aṭaprathamam* made of steamed rice cake to which coconut milk, milk, jaggery, dry ginger, and cumin seed powder is added. The Vidūṣaka recounts that Brahmā, the creator god had created this delicacy for human beings, and when the gods became upset over this, he had to create nectar to please them. He points out that since even the gods yearn to become human beings just to taste this nectar, it is futile for human beings to desire godhead.<sup>17</sup> The other puddings to follow are made of ripe bananas, roasted green gram, jackfruit, and a variety of plantain called *poovan*. All this sweet fest is to be signed off with a huge dose of sour curry, which in its turn should be mellowed with the curry called *olan*, which consists of vegetables boiled in water. Then arrives the final crescendo for the whole feast with a pudding (*pāyasam*) made of rice, sugar, and milk. The Mūssad commissions the server not to be deterred by the signs he gives, which are not to be taken literally. The server should continue to serve pudding even if the eater makes a preventive sound or a preventive gesticulation with his hand, and even when he pretends that he is going to fold up the leaf. He should only stop when he roars like a lion.<sup>18</sup> The Mūssad then consumes a handful of rice with curd and water boiled with dried ginger which has several confectioneries added to it. He finds it difficult to stand up to wash his hands after this heavy feast. The tailpiece of the whole episode is that the pleased Mūssad pronounces his blessing for another feast to be held in this selfsame thatched shed constructed for the feast now. This new feast should solemnize another anniversary of a death, although, in his ecstasy, little does he realize that his poor host will be the casualty if this wish were to be fulfilled.

The elaborate discourse of feast is also seen with variations in many medieval treatises such as the *Campū* works and *Tuḷḷal* works in Malayalam. When we compare the representation of the Vidūṣaka from earlier Sanskrit plays with that of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the local colour is very clear, since all the items men-

17. *Ibid.*, 256.

18. *Ibid.*, 259: *he he śabde pradātavyaṃ dātavyaṃ hastavāraṇe / patrapravāraṇe deyaṃ na deyaṃ śiṃhagarjane //*.

tioned in his narrative are typical Kerala dishes. It is also interesting to note that there is no reference whatsoever to non-vegetarian dishes in the discourse, although, as pointed out by Bhat, early Sanskrit drama suggests that meat-eating was not a taboo for the Vidūṣaka.<sup>19</sup>

19. Bhat 1959, 71-72.

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A suitable girl.  
Daṇḍin and a meal on the banks of the Kāverī

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In the sixth *ucchvāsa* of Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita* the hero-narrator of the chapter, Mitragupta, eventually happens to land on an island; here he climbs a fine mount and delights in the waters of a little lake. Thus refreshed, however, he is faced with a fearsome *rākṣasa* that dwells on the shores of the lake and that challenges him with four questions, threatening to devour him if he does not give the right answers. Of course, Mitragupta comes up with the answers, adding that, as examples of his statements, the stories of four women could be cited, and mentioning their names. The *rākṣasa* then asks him to tell their stories, and so Mitragupta's narration begins. Naturally, this is a way to bring four additional tales into the text; each is set in a different place in India and presents characters whose moral standards are not of the highest, except for the second story. The point of this tale, which is set in present-day Tamil Nadu, is to illustrate the *rākṣasa*'s question 'What makes a householder's happiness and well-being?' (*kiṃ gṛhīṇaḥ priyahitāya*), and Mitragupta's reply, 'The wife's qualities' (*dāraguṇāḥ*), the protagonist being a girl who is a paragon of virtue, named Gominī.<sup>1</sup> The tale dwells in particular on a description of the girl's beauty and how she prepares a meal in accordance with the solid principles of domestic economy, which qualifies her as an ideal bride. The tale probably originated from some traditional source, for a similar story is narrated in the *Mahāummagga Jātaka* (Cowell 1907, 156-246), where the *bodhisattva* puts a young woman to a similar test with the prospect of becoming his bride. However, apart from certain undeniable affinities between the two narratives,<sup>2</sup> as a whole and in the details the tale of

1. The *Daśakumāracarita* is quoted according to the edition of M. R. Kale (Kale 1966<sup>4</sup>). The *rākṣasa*'s questions are on page 156 of Kale's text, and the story of Gominī (*gominīvṛttānta*-) on pages 159-63; all the quotations without further indication are from this passage. All the translations from Sanskrit are mine. For the *Daśakumāracarita* I use for reference Kale's translation and commentary in the same volume, my own translation into Italian (Pieruccini 1986), and Isabelle Onians' translation for the Clay Sanskrit Library (Onians 2005).

2. Also in the *Mahāummagga Jātaka* the girl, there called Amarā, is said in passing to show lucky marks, but the main similarity lies in the fact that for the test she is asked to prepare some

Gominī reveals profoundly original qualities. In fact, one cannot help feeling that Daṇḍin was aiming at more than simply constructing a pleasant interlude. Here, together with close examination of the text and, above all, of the meal prepared by Gominī, its detailed description being of exceptional documentary value, we will try to see what his probable aim was.

To begin with, a few remarks are indispensable concerning certain significant features of the work, and the personality of Daṇḍin.<sup>3</sup> Above all, we must remember that the *Daśakumāracarita* is a work that has come down to us in the conditions of a fragment, completed in different and much more recent periods with the addition of opening and concluding parts (*pūrvapīṭhikā*, *uttarapīṭhikā*). The ‘original’ fragment of the *Daśakumāracarita* is generally held to be part of a more extensive work entitled *Avantisundarīkathā*, of which, in turn, a substantial opening fragment has come down to us, while there are epitomes that connect the plots of both works. Due to the complex textual circumstances, albeit to some extent investigated, it is somewhat problematic to draw exhaustive conclusions on many aspects of the narrative work of Daṇḍin. Nevertheless certain aspects emerge perfectly clearly, including the orthodox Brahmanic faith of the author and, at the same time, his tendency to create characters and stories in generally ‘amoral’ terms, setting the scene for breezy intrigues or blatant misdemeanours. Moreover, Daṇḍin always seems to take great care over the precise geographical location of his characters’ roaming adventures. As for Daṇḍin himself, he wrote around the year 700 and was a *brāhmaṇa* of the Kauśika *gotra* who came from the Pallava Kingdom. Thus Daṇḍin was from present-day Tamil Nadu, the same region of India in which the tale of Gominī is set. The first, obvious, conclusion to draw is that he was well acquainted with the household chores and the recipes upon which he dwells in such detail. But let us now go on to outline the text.

Śaktikumāra is the very wealthy son of a businessman (*śreṣṭhiputraḥ*) living in Kāñcī, in Draviḍa country (*draviḍeṣu*), i.e. in the present-day city of Kanchipuram, which in the times of Daṇḍin was the capital of the Pallavas. Approaching his eighteenth birthday, and distrustful of the intermediation of others, he sets off from his hometown to find for himself a suitable wife. To accomplish this mission he disguises himself as an astrologer (*kārtāntika-*), and binds to his clothing a *prastha* of rice (*śālīprastha-*); it is hard to define the *prastha* as an exact measure, but such a quantity of raw rice can be considered a good daily

rice recipes with the very limited quantity of rice she is given (see below); as a whole, however, the tale differs greatly from that of Daṇḍin. On the similarities with other texts of the stories told by Mitragupta, cf. Singh 1979, 101-2.

3. On Daṇḍin and the issues discussed from here on, i.e. the *Daśakumāracarita* as a fragment of the *Avantisundarīkathā*, the general spirit of the characters’ adventures, the geographical references contained in the work and the biographical details of Daṇḍin himself, see Gupta 1970, 1972; Singh 1979; Warder 1972, § 490; Warder 1983, § 1961-2062.

ration.<sup>4</sup> Taking him for an astrologer, the people believe that he can interpret birthmarks (*lakṣaṇa-*), and so parents show him their daughters. Whenever he meets a young girl endowed with lucky marks, and of his own social class (*lakṣaṇavatīm savarṇām*), he asks her if she would be able to prepare a tasty meal (*guṇavad annam*) with his *prastha* of rice, but he is always made fun of and rejected – until he comes across a *suitable girl*, as Vikram Seth would put it.

This comes about, Mitragupta goes on, when Śaktikumāra arrives ‘in the region of the Śibis, in a town on the banks of the Kāverī’, the great river of the South (*śibiṣu kāverītīrapattane*). It seems fairly certain that Śibis was another name for the Coḷas,<sup>5</sup> the heart of whose territory was the Kāverī delta, and who were at the time still very far from enjoying the power they were later to acquire. We may even conjecture that the town which Daṇḍin refers to was the celebrated ancient port at the mouth of this river, variously known as Kāverīpaṭṭinam, Kāverīpūmpaṭṭinam, Pūmpuhār, etc.<sup>6</sup> In one of his detailed studies on Daṇḍin, D. K. Gupta takes these identifications for granted, attributing the territory in question to the domain of the Pallavas at the time (Gupta 1972, 101, 103). Pallava control of the Kāverī delta dates back to the reign of King Siṃhaviṣṇu, i.e. the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but it is hard to determine how things stood in this area in the times of Daṇḍin (cf. Gopalan 1928, 84-85, 104-5). However, apart from the contingent vicissitudes, I think that we may fairly safely consider this to be a region that Daṇḍin felt as his own; in fact I believe, as we shall see, that one of Daṇḍin’s aims was to celebrate the customs of his ‘country’.<sup>7</sup>

The girl in question is shown to Śaktikumāra by her nurse – she is an orphan who, together with her parents, has lost the considerable wealth once enjoyed, to be left with only a tumbledown dwelling. Here, through the thoughts

4. For this measurement of weight Monier-Williams (*s.v.*) proposes various equivalents, including 32, 16 or 6 *palas*. It is a unit of measure that has evidently undergone variations in the course of time, and it is hard to define it here with any precision; for the complexity of the problems regarding measurements in mediaeval India, see e.g. Paramhans 1984. The significant fact remains, however, that according to the *Arthaśāstra*, precisely a *prastha* constitutes the daily supply of uncooked rice reserved for high-ranking male members of the royal household, to whom, on account of their status and indeed of their physical needs as compared with women’s and children’s, went the most abundant ration of food (Trautmann 2012, 57-58); thus, we might imagine something like half a kilo.

5. It is worth noting that the Tamil form of the name Śibi, i.e. Cempiyan, was to find frequent use among the Coḷas; thus would be named, among others, a celebrated queen of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Cempiyan Mahādevī, whose idealized portrait is probably to be seen in a bronze statue now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. On this statue, and on the Coḷa art of the period of this queen, see in particular Dehejia 1990, 1-47.

6. For essential details about this site, cf. for example Ghosh 1989, 216.

7. On the other hand, we may perhaps consider a place further north along the course of the Kāverī, i.e. closer to Kanchipuram; the extremely generic toponym recurs in present-day Kaveripattinam, in the district of Krishnagiri, a place that owes its fame to the wars between the British and Hyder Ali, and his son Tipu Sultan.

of the young man as he beholds her, Daṇḍin provides a long description of the girl: this, together with the description of the meal she subsequently prepares, constitutes a major feature of this short story. Basically, it proceeds upwards, from the girl's feet to her hair, and obviously the general picture is of a comely, buxom woman with ample breasts, bewitching eyes and long black locks – the image of female beauty common to all classical Indian culture. Of course, the very epitome of this kind of description of the female body, starting 'from below', is to be seen in the portrayal of Umā in Canto I of the *Kumārasambhava*. The truly striking feature of this passage by Daṇḍin, however, lies in the fact that it aims to show this beauty coinciding, in every detail, with auspiciousness. It is indeed fitting, and obviously was meant to be, that Daṇḍin gives this interior monologue through the voice of a character representing – albeit feigned – an astrologer, since the most accurate interpretation of the passage is to be made when comparing it with the chapter dedicated to the young maiden's signs of good and bad omen by Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, the famous text on astrology attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup> century (BS Chapt. LXX, *Kanyālakṣaṇam*).<sup>8</sup> In fact, the comparison shows clearly that when we read the passage by Daṇḍin we are to take as integral parts of a picture evoking and promising good fortune not only the details most evidently associated with the idea of *lakṣaṇas*, 'signs', such as the lines on the hands presaging 'abundance of money, grain and children' (*dhanadhānyaputrabhūyastva*-), but also what we might call the more aesthetic observations, dedicated to the shape, harmony and hues of the various parts of the body.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the actual 'signs', the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* dwells at length on precisely these aspects, pointing out the forms of good or bad omen of each part of the female body, and of course the ideal is precisely the same. For example, Daṇḍin writes:

Her feet have even ankles, and they are fleshy and without veins; her shanks are well rounded, and hers knees are difficult to see, as if swallowed by her plump thighs.<sup>10</sup>

While Varāhamihira notes that:

8. The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* is quoted according to the edition by M. Ramakrishna Bhat (Bhat 1986–7). The affinity between the two passages, by Daṇḍin and in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, is also briefly noted by Singh (1979, 456–57); cf. also Gupta (1972, 212–13).

9. As Bhat had already pointed out (Bhat 1986–7, Vol. 2, 674–75), fairly close comparison can also be made with the words of Sītā in *Rāmāyaṇa* VI.38.2–14. Here Sītā speaks of the predictions – erroneous, she complains, thinking that Rāma is dead – regarding her future made by the astrologers (*kārtāntikāḥ*, v. 5, etc.) on the basis of her physical appearance, and describes her own beauty as closely bound up with auspiciousness.

10. Kale 1966<sup>4</sup>, Text 159: *samaḡulphasandhī māṃsalāv asīrālau cāṅghrī jaṅghe cānupūrvavṛtte pīvarorugaste iva durupalakṣye jānūnī*.

If a man wishes to be a lord of the earth, he should marry a girl who has (...) even, fleshy, lovely and well-hidden ankles. Auspicious (...) are shanks without hair, without veins and well rounded, knees which are even and without prominent joints. Plump thighs, similar to the trunk of elephants, and without hair (...) confer great wealth.<sup>11</sup>

Highly significant is one of the concluding phrases in Śaktikumāra's monologue: 'Surely such an aspect is not in contradiction with her character' (*seyam ākṛtīr na vyabhicarati śīlam*), which seems to echo the observation in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* at the end of the chapter cited: 'In general, in ugly women there are faults, and where is [a beautiful] aspect there are virtues' (*prāyo virūpāsu bhavanti doṣā yatrākṛtis tatra guṇā vasanti*, BS LXX.23cd).<sup>12</sup> It goes without saying that implicit in this conception is the role of *karman*, which determines 'fortune' in every respect, while the concurrence of auspiciousness and beauty is fundamental in the representation of the female figure in classical Indian sculpture and its interpretation.

In any case, having observed these features, the young Śaktikumāra decides to put the girl to the test, asking her too to prepare a complete meal using only his *prastha* of rice. The girl succeeds triumphantly and eventually, we learn, there is even some food left over. In fact, she shows herself to be not only an excellent cook, but also skilled in domestic economy, for the tale describes a series of shrewd deals she is able to pull off, though they are rather unlikely given the meagre value of the exchanged objects. She sends her nurse to sell the rice husk to goldsmiths, for it is said to be useful to polish jewels, and with the small coins (*kākinī-*) thus obtained she sends her to buy some good quality wood for the fire to cook on and some dishes – a small cooking pot and a couple of bowls (*mitaṃpacāṃ sthālīm ubhe śarāve ca*). From the wood used to cook the rice she then obtains charcoal, which she similarly sends her nurse to sell to buy the ingredients to prepare the meal and a refreshing bath for the guest, i.e. vegetables, clarified butter, curd, sesamum oil, myrobalan and tamarind (*śākaṃ ghrtaṃ dadhi tailam āmalakaṃ cīncāphalaṃ ca*). Not only do these deals seem somewhat improbable, but the tale is hardly very consistent in its description of the dishes and raw materials; in fact, to give the guest a fitting reception Daṇḍin has the girl using various other implements and ingredients which she had not purchased with her deals. At the same time, it is precisely thanks to this easy-going approach that the author is able to give us such a live-

11. BS LXX.1-3: (...) *kumāryāḥ* (...) *samopacitacārunigūḍhagulphau* / (...) *yasyās tām udvahed yadi bhuvō 'dhipatitvam icchet* // 1 // (...) *praśastau* / *jaṅghe ca romarahite viśire suvṛtte jānudvayaṃ samam anulbaṇasandhidesam* // 2 // *ūrū ghanau karikarapratimāv aromāv* (...) / (...) *vipulāṃ śrīyam ādadhāti* // 3 //

12. For various other literary passages (of the *Mṛcchakaṭikā*, *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, etc.) reflecting the same idea, cf. Kale 19664, Notes 103; Gupta 1972, 213, n. 1.

ly account. Here we will look more closely into some of the salient features, with inevitably some repetition.<sup>13</sup>

*Equipment, dishes, places and furnishings*

The list of dishes and equipment includes, in particular, the above mentioned cooking pot (*sthālī-*), which also has a lid (*pidhāna-*), and the two bowls (*ubhe śarāve*). The latter appear suitable to contain liquids, which justifies the translation of this term, very generic in Monier-Williams' dictionary (cf. *s.v.*), with bowl or suchlike rather than 'platter' (e.g. Gupta 1970, 396). Then we have: a mortar (*ulūkhala-*) of *kakubha* wood (*kakubholūkhala-*), with a long pestle of *khādīra* wood (*vyāyatena [...] khādīreṇa musalena*)<sup>14</sup> the end of which is iron-plated (*lohapatra-*), used, as we shall see, to make the rice good for consumption; a winnowing basket (*śūrpa-*), again for the rice;<sup>15</sup> a ladle (*darvī-*), to stir and serve; a water pitcher (*bhṛṅgāra-*), to pour out the water to drink; another water vessel (*karaka-*), to pour out the water to rinse the mouth at the end of the meal;<sup>16</sup> a fan of palm-leaves (*tālavṛnta-*), and, obviously, the fireplace itself (*cullī-*), which the young woman worships throwing in a few grains of rice before starting on the work of cooking (*dattacullīpūjā*, cf. Kale 1966<sup>4</sup>, Notes 103). The young man is immediately invited to take his place on the terrace before the house-door (*alinda-*), which has been sprinkled with water and then swept. When the time to eat comes he is invited to sit on a bench (*phalaka-*) placed on the floor (*kuṭṭime*), which has been wetted and swept too. The meal is served placing the two bowls, moistened (*ārdra-*), on a *kadalī* leaf from the garden (*aṅgaṇakadalī-*) cut to a third of its size. As is well-known, the use of banana leaves was universal in Tamil Nadu at least until very recent times as a plate or tray to serve the traditional complete vegetarian meals, consisting of rice and other preparations, which are commonly called, indeed, *meals*, and which the food cooked by the girl here resembles fairly closely. At the end of the guest's meal the nurse clears away the leftovers and spreads the floor with fresh green

13. Brief analyses of the 'culinary' vocabulary in this passage are proposed in Gupta 1970, 396; 1972, 243-46; Singh 1979, 333 (which appears entirely copied from Gupta 1970, 396). In some cases, my interpretation of the terms differs slightly from that of these authors.

14. Onians (2005, 607) notes: '*Khādīra* wood, used for the pestle, is cashew, the wood recommended for a Vedic sacrificial stake. *Kākubha* wood, used for the mortar, is from *ārjuna* tree, and is still used today to make the mast from which devotees suspend themselves for mortification at festivals. These woods bear witness that even for vegetarian preparations an evocation of the violence of sacrificial killing is required'.

15. As a description of this object, the definition by Monier-Williams (*s.v.*) may be useful: 'a winnowing basket or fan (i.e. a kind of wicker receptacle which, when shaken about, serves as a fan for winnowing corn [...])'.

16. Monier-Williams (*s.v.*): 'water-vessel (esp. one used by students or ascetics)'.

cowdung (*haritagomayopalipte kuṭṭime*). Here the young man spreads out his cloak and lies down to sleep it off.

*Preparing and cooking the rice, and other cooking preparations*

These are the preliminary operations performed by the girl, constituting one of the most interesting parts of the short story, especially with regard to the preliminary treatment of rice, which has much in common with the post-harvest methods used in India to this very day; when performed manually, this is a typically female task.<sup>17</sup> The rice brought by the young man is evidently still in the form of ears; in fact, the girl completes the threshing, firstly by ‘pounding (shelling?) this perfumed rice a little’ (*tān gandhasālīn saṃkṣudya mātrayā*),<sup>18</sup> after which she leaves it to dry – an indispensable part of the process – turning it over in the sun, which is obviously the most traditional method. Then, ‘on a firm and flat ground, beating delicately with the back of a cane, she separated the rice from the husk, without breaking this’, because in fact she meant to sell it (*sthirasamāyām bhūmau nālīpṛsthena mṛdumṛdu ghaṭṭayantī tuṣair akhaṇḍais taṇḍulān pṛthak cakāra*). The rice is then placed in the long-handled mortar – a common article in the villages of India up to this day – which basically serves to separate the grain from the bran; here the girl beats the rice vigorously, stirring it with her fingers as she proceeds, and then ‘the rice is cleaned from particles and awns through the winnowing basket’ (*śūrpaśodhitakaṇakimśārukāṃs taṇḍulān*), after which it is rinsed thoroughly. On cooking the rice must absorb all the water. In fact, the girl boils five times as much water as there is rice (*kvathitapañcagūṇe jāle*); she pours it in, and when it floats up she skims off the ‘rice scum’ (*annamaṇḍa-*) placing the lid at the opening of the pot. Cooking is completed on a lower fire, stirring, and finally the rice is poured out tipping the pot upside down.

Apart from the rice, Daṇḍin tells us that the girl cooks ‘two or three [vegetable] relishes’ (*dvitrān upadaṃśān*).<sup>19</sup> She has gathered the rice-scum in one of the new bowls which she cools, placing the bowl in the wet sand and fanning it. To this rice-scum she adds some salt (*lavaṇa-*) and scents it with incense (*dhūpa-*) which she has evaporated over the embers.

17. For the entire process of rice cultivation in India useful information can be found at [http://www.agritech.tnau.ac.in/expert\\_system/paddy/phtc.html](http://www.agritech.tnau.ac.in/expert_system/paddy/phtc.html) (last access on January 2016). For the work of women in rice cultivation, cf. for example *Women in Rice Farming* 1985 and Saradmoni 1991.

18. Throughout the passage uncooked rice is called *dhānya*, *śālī* or *taṇḍula*, and the two terms are always used in the plural when declined, while cooked rice is called *anna*, *sikṭha* (pl.) or *śālyodana*.

19. That these relishes are made of vegetables is said, quite convincingly, in the commentary by Kale (*upadaṃśān śākādīn*, Kale 19664, Text 162).

### *Ablutions, and lunch is served*

On receiving the young man the girl offers him water for his feet. The text points out that she has already bathed (*snāna-*); now, before serving the food, she crumbles the myrobalan, and has the nurse invite him to wash in his turn, handing him the myrobalan and sesame oil for the purpose (*dattatailāmalkaḥ*). At the end of the meal she offers the young man water to rinse his mouth (*ācamana-*) – this being a codified rule (cf. *Mānavadharmasāstra* V.145).

And now we come to the meal itself. To begin with, the girl serves the young man with a rice-gruel (*peyā-*), probably prepared with the rice-scum mentioned above.<sup>20</sup> She then brings, in order: to ladlefuls of cooked rice (*tasya śālyodanasya darvīdvayaṃ*), a little clarified butter (*sarpis-*), a soup (*sūpa-*) and the vegetable relish (*upadaṃśā-*, here sg.). After this comes the remaining rice (*śeṣam annam*) together with curd (*dadhi-*) sprinkled with (*avacūrṇita-*) ‘the three spices’ (*trijātaka-*),<sup>21</sup> as well as some buttermilk (*kālaśeya-*) and sour gruel (*kāñjika-*),<sup>22</sup> the latter two being served cold (*sītala-*). The water which she then gives him to drink from a new pitcher (*navabhṛṅgāra-*) is flavoured: the text describes it as treated with aloe incense, scented with fresh *pāṭalī* flowers and infused with the fragrance of full-blown *uṭpala* flowers (*agurudhūpadhūpitam abhinavapāṭalikusumavāsitam utphulloṭpalagrathitasaurabham*). Daṇḍin gives a detailed description of the delight experienced by the young man as he drinks it. Finally, the girl gives him water to rinse his mouth from another vessel (*aparakaraka-*).

### *Conclusions*

Thus not only is Gominī in appearance a sort of perfect embodiment of good omens, but her behaviour has proved impeccable in every respect: indeed, she has shown herself to be shrewd in her management of the domestic resources, but also careful about cleanliness or, in more Indian terms, purity. Moreover, the fact that she never strays from the home is clearly to be seen as a sign of

20. Monier-Williams (*s.v.*) defines *peyā* ‘rice gruel or any drink mixed with a small quantity of boiled rice’. In his commentary Kale, quoting Vāgbhaṭa, points out that *peyā* contains cooked rice, while *maṇḍa*, i.e. the rice-scum mentioned above, does not contain rice (*peyā sasikthā / ’maṇḍo ’sikhthā, sasikthā peyā (...)*’ *iti vāgbhaṭokteḥ* /, Kale 19664, Text 162). Gupta (1970, 396) says: ‘water-gruel mixed with some boiled rice’; cf. also Gupta 1972, 245-46.

21. Monier-Williams (*s.v.*): ‘mace, cardamoms, and cinnamon’; Kale’s commentary says instead *tvak tailaṃ trikaṭuṃ vā*, i.e. ‘cinnamon, sesamum oil or *trikaṭu*’ (Kale 19664, Text 163); for this last word, Monier-Williams (*s.v.*) has ‘the 3 spices (black and long pepper and dry ginger)’. Gupta (1970, 396), translates *trijātaka* with ‘cinnamon oil’.

22. Monier-Williams (*s.v.*): ‘sour gruel, water of boiled rice in a state of spontaneous fermentation’.



virtue – in fact it is the nurse we see engaged in transactions away from home. The tale draws to a close explaining that Śaktikumāra marries the girl; later on, however, he neglects her and takes a courtesan (*gaṇikā*) as a mistress. Yet, she continues to honour her husband like a god, the classical role of womankind (*Mānavadharmasāstra* V.154, *Kāmasūtra* IV.1). In virtue of her qualities she is entrusted with running the whole household – and so Śaktikumāra can enjoy the fruits of the *trivarga* in peace: that is why, Mitragupta concludes, it is the virtues of the wife that make a man happy.

Apart from its considerable inventive and stylistic literary qualities, characteristic of the author Daṇḍin in general, the tale is, as we have seen, interesting above all on account of its documentary value; here, clearly, we have concrete evidence of the recipes of Pallava India, and a series of utensils and practices then associated with the consumption of food. In keeping with the preamble to the account, Daṇḍin places the emphasis on rice and what can be derived from it, while the context is simple and rural. Hence we cannot assume that what has been described adds up to a standard meal of the time, nor indeed can we arrive at too many conclusions *ex silentio*.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the fact remains that to this very day rice is the staple food of Tamil Nadu, and basically we could still today easily identify the descendants, as it were, of all the dishes mentioned in this tale.

However, as hinted above, it is perfectly possible that Daṇḍin wants to tell us something more between the lines. Among the crafty, or at least morally unconstrained, characters that throng the adventures he recounts, the figure of Gominī is outstanding on account of her virtues, and all the more so coming after the previous tale told by Mitragupta, depicting a particularly loose and indeed wicked woman, Dhūminī (who is said to come from Trigarta, a country in the North). Is it simply a matter of chance that the story of Gominī is set in the region that Daṇḍin came from? Actually, the whole account can be read as praise of the nature, manners and – why not? – beauty of the Tamil women.

Secondly, while bearing in mind the basic conditions – rice as essential ingredient, the rural context – it seems clear that the vegetarian meal prepared by Gominī, and indeed the care she takes over purity (considering, also, the various utensils described as ‘new’), have profound Brahmanic connotations. It has to be added that this is not the only case in which Daṇḍin extols the ‘orthodox’ practices of the Tamil region; a passage in the *Avantisundarīkathā* appears to describe the exquisitely pure conduct of the Brahmans who dwell, in fact, on the banks of the Kāverī.<sup>24</sup>

23. On the subject of preparing rice, a passage in the *Avantisundarīkathā* contains some particularly interesting material, listing a series of operations ranging from husking to the final seasoning (*Avantisundarīkathā*, ed. Śāstrī 1954, 28-29; cf. Gupta 1972, 244). At first sight, however, the vocabulary and recipes appear to be rather different.

24. *Avantisundarīkathā*, ed. Śāstrī 1954, 195 ff.; cf. Gupta 1972, 202-3. The term ‘Brahmanic’ is to be understood here in terms of religious orthodoxy and not, obviously, with reference to the *varṇa* of the protagonists of the story: Śaktikumāra, as a *śreṣṭhiputraḥ*, is probably to be con-

Thus both the behaviour of Gominī, recalling in every respect the well-known Brahmanic standards for the good wife, and the meal she prepares can be interpreted as a little part of, as it were, the ‘conquest’ of the South by Brahmanic values or, perhaps better, of their promotion as favoured both by the Pallava dynasty with its magnificent monuments, and by a literary figure of their world as Daṇḍin eminently was.

sidered a *vaiśya*, and so too the girl, given that the young man seeks someone of his own social class (*savarṇāṃ*).

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What to take on a wild goose chase.  
The journeys of two feathered messengers  
in Sanskrit *dūtakāvya*

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*Dūtakāvya* or *sandేశakāvya*, messenger-poetry, arguably constitutes one of the most widespread literary phenomena in the history of South Asia. Patterned in most part after Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*, the *Cloud-Messenger*, these poems usually posit a pair of separated lovers, one of whom sends an unlikely envoy – for example a cloud, the wind, a language – with a message to the faraway beloved. Most often, the route the messenger is to take is described in the first half of the poem, while the second imagines it reaching its destination and delivering the missive. Whether the *Meghadūta* was the first *dūtakāvya* poem ever composed in Sanskrit remains unknown, but it is unquestionably the earliest poem of the type to survive to our times. It is clearly the seminal text in the development of Sanskrit messenger-poetry, as all later *dūtakāvya* poets seem to have referred to the *Cloud-Messenger* in some way, whether directly quoting it in their own messenger poems or less directly, by taking inspiration from Kālidāsa's ground-breaking style. Sanskrit messenger poems are usually composed in *mandākrāntā* metre and tend to be no longer than 200 stanzas. The poems are mostly about *viraha*, that is, separation or abandonment and the prevailing aesthetic sentiment is understandably *vipralambha-śṛṅgāra rasa*, love-in-separation. Hundreds of *dūtakāvya* poems have been composed over the centuries in Sanskrit and in the vernacular languages of South Asia.<sup>2</sup>

1. This paper is based on research the author carried out while preparing her PhD dissertation. The author received funding for the preparation of her doctoral thesis from the National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) as approved by decision: DEC-2013/08/T/HS2/00140.

2. See Bronner 2013, Bronner–Shulman 2006, Hopkins 2004, 2009, Pieris 2010, Radhakrishnan 1936, Rossella 2008. For instance, the authors of Sinhala messenger poems have been composing *dūtakāvya*s since around the 14<sup>th</sup> CE and seem to have predominantly employed bird messengers in their poems. Anoma Pieris writes that over 115 *dūtakāvya* poems in Sinhala have been identified, each over one hundred verses long (Pieris 2010), while Charles Hallisey gives the number of *dūtakāvya* poems composed in Sinhala as 126. He also notes that 'the South Indian

The aim of this paper will be to present the journeys of two very different avian messengers found regularly in *dūtakāvya*s heralding from all over India – the *haṃsa* (bar-headed goose, *Anser indicus*) and the *kokila* (Asian koel, *Eudynamys scolopaceus*). I will concentrate on the way these messengers were approached and coaxed into undertaking their mission as well as on the steps the dispatchers took to ensure that the messenger’s journey was as pleasant as possible, keeping my focus mainly on the birds’ sustenance. Yet this sketch of feathered messengers must be preceded by a brief outline of how these topics were developed in the greatest of all *dūtakāvya*s, the *Meghadūta*, as it is this fundamental work that seems to have set the standard for poets composing *dūtakāvya*s in the subsequent centuries.

One might say that the indelible bond that forms between the hero, the cursed Yakṣa and the messenger cloud from the instant they start to interact is an important building block of the entire poem. It seems that the audience, ready to immerse itself in the fantastical world in which a cloud can act as a messenger for a celestial being, was just as easily expected to accept the instant camaraderie between the two. The Yakṣa asks a significant favour of the cloud and tries to make as enjoyable as possible its tedious journey across the Indian peninsula from Rāmagiri, where he is waiting out his curse, to Alakā, Kubera’s capital where the poor Yakṣiṇī is pining away.

The Yakṣa does not objectify the cloud or treat it as a run-of-the-mill emissary; instead, he befriends it and strives to rouse genuine empathy for his condition. He makes sure that his ally is well looked after and since he realises that the cloud will probably get tired and hungry as it soars, maps out enjoyable pit-stops along the way. This is expressed in the second half of stanza 1.13 of the *Meghadūta*:

First hear from me the path suited to your journey as I describe it to you, and then, O cloud, you will hear my message, agreeable to the ear: – the path which you are to pursue after setting foot [resting] on mountains, whenever fatigued, and also after drinking the wholesome water of streams, whenever you find yourself exhausted.<sup>3</sup>

and Sri Lankan *sandēśa* poems portrayed the messenger’s journey more realistically than did the *Meghadūta*’ (Hallisey 2003, 699).

3. Kale 2011, 28 (all the translations and the Sanskrit text of the *Meghadūta* in this paper come from this edition): *mārgaṃ tāvac chṛṇu kathayatas tvatprayānānurūpaṃ sandēśaṃ me tadanu jalada śroṣyasi śrotapeyam / khinnaḥ khinnaḥ śikhariṣu padaṃ nyasya gantāsi yatra kṣiṇaḥ kṣiṇaḥ parilaghu payah srotasāṃ copabhujya // MD 1.13*. The mountain peaks on which the cloud rests along the way are only three – Āmrakūṭa in stanza 1.17, Nica in 1.26 and the Himālaya, at the source of the Gaṅgā in verse 1.55. Kālidāsa does not religiously keep to this rule as the cloud also spends one night in the roosting with the pigeons in Ujjain.

As the monsoon cloud travels north, it is expected to constantly purge itself of water and will need a means to replenish its exhausted substance. Apart from one instance (in verse 1.35 when it is told to inhale the incense drifting from the windows in Ujjain), this is only accomplished by stopping at the bodies of water, predominantly rivers, which appear along the way.<sup>4</sup>

These rivers, which as we would expect in Sanskrit, are all of feminine gender, feed the (masculine) cloud with their waters as it passes above them or, in some cases, lowers itself to ground level. As women, the waterways are presented as exhibiting their feminine beauty to the passing cloud, and the most erotic description is surely that of the river Gambhīra in verse 1.44:

After you will have removed her blue garment in the shape of the water, slipped down from her hips in the form of the bank and appearing to be clutched up by the hand on account of the branches of the canes touching it [the garment in the form of water], it will be with considerable difficulty that the departure of you hanging obliquely, will take place: who that has experienced the pleasure is able to leave a woman with loins uncovered [*lit*, exposed to view]?<sup>5</sup>

Kale's quite literal and technical translation perhaps takes away from the suggestive nature of the stanza, but the image is clear; the cloud is to undress the river and then make love to her before it leaves her side with great difficulty as it continues on its mission.

Kālidāsa takes care to strongly underline the natural, mutual relationship that exists between the masculine cloud and the feminine rivers. The exchange was not only of the life-giving substance of water (the cloud fed the river as it rained and the river, in turn, fed the cloud as it evaporated) but also a sexual exchange.

### *Kokila*

Uddaṇḍa Śāstrī (15<sup>th</sup> century CE), author of the *Kokilasandēśa*,<sup>6</sup> the *Koel-Messenger*, seems to have been inspired by this dual nature of consumption

4. There are in total seven of these places of consumption along the cloud's path. They are: the Revā – v. 1.20, Vetravatī – v. 1.25 *pāsyasi svādu* (...) *payo vetravatyaś*, Gambhīrā – v. 1.43, 44, Carmanvatī – v. 1.49 *tvayyādātuṃ jalam*, Sārasvatī – v. 1.52 *kṛtvā tāsām abhigaman āpaṃ sārasvatīnām*, Gaṅgā – v. 1.54 *tasyāḥ pātuṃ* (...) *acchasphaṭikaviśada ambhaḥ*, and finally there is lake Mānasa itself, from which the cloud is to drink on arrival at its destination (v. 1.65), *mānasasyādadānaḥ salilam*.

5. Kale 2011, 76: *tasyāḥ kiṅcit karadhṛtam iva prāptavānīrasākhyaṃ hṛtvā nīlaṃ salilavasanaṃ muktarodhonitambam / prasthānaṃ te katham api sakhe lambamānasya bhāvi jñātāsvādo vivṛtajāghanaṃ ko vihātuṃ samarthaḥ //MD 1.44.*

6. Srinivasachariar gives a list of 5 *Kokilasandēśas*, the most famous being Uddaṇḍa Śāstrī's. The others are by Varadācārya (son of Vedāntadeśika), Veṅkaṭācārya, Guṇavardhana and Nara-

envisaged by Kālidāsa in the *Meghadūta*. The protagonist of his poem is a man who has been teleported from his home town in Kerala to Kanchipuram in his sleep. After he has spent some time in exile, spring comes and he cannot bear the contrast between his glum disposition and the exuberantly amorous mood of the advancing season.<sup>7</sup> He sees a *kokila* and decides to send a message to his wife through the bird. *Kokila* birds are the harbingers of spring (*vasanta*) and often portrayed in poetry as accompanying Kāma. In his significant book *Birds in Sanskrit Literature*, Dave remarks that ‘Cuckoos do not pair for the breeding season like other birds and promiscuity is very common with them’.<sup>8</sup>

Particularly interesting is the relationship that the protagonist establishes with the bird and how he ensures its well-being. On seeing the koel feasting on new mango blossoms,<sup>9</sup> the protagonist says:

Come here, dear friend! You are indeed welcome!  
Look over at that mango-bough, sweating fresh drops of sweet nectar.  
Friend! Surely she desires your caress.  
That bee-eyed one is trembling,  
and calls you with her swaying leaves.  
She is flushed with passion.<sup>10</sup> (KS I.6)  
Oh! You cause such great joy to unfold in my heart!  
I know you are the commander in chief  
of the Five-arrowed King’s forces.  
O *kokila*, trustworthy companion,  
you preach with your honest song,

simha (Srinivasachariar 1974, 367). The *Kokilasandeśa* of Uddaṇḍa has been expertly translated into English by Shankar Rajaraman and Venetia Kotamraju. They describe the poem thus: ‘The *Kokila Sandeśa* is particularly rich in historical, sociological and topographical detail, but it is also a lyrical paean to the lush, temple-studded land of Kerala by one of her most talented adopted sons’ (Rajaraman–Kotamraju 2012, iii).

7. It is worth underlining that spring is a time of unrestrained lust and rendezvous between lovers and the whole of nature seems to be working to intensify the desire felt by humans. In the words of Daniel Ingalls: ‘Spring was beautiful not for the beauty of its birds and flowers so much as for the harmony with which human nature accompanied physical nature’s change’ (Ingalls 1965, 112).

8. Dave 2005, 129.

9. It will be remembered that besides the *kokila*, another very prominent symbol of spring is the mango tree (*āmra*, *Mangifera indica*), as it blooms with the advent of the season. The two are connected in *kāvya* poetic convention – the *kokila* is said to feast on the mango buds and flowers. Therefore, Uddaṇḍa Śāstri’s hero makes sure to invite the *kokila* to stop as it flies over South India and dine on the mango buds, sprigs and blossoms. See, for instance, *Subhāsi-taratnakośa* 171.

10. All translations of the *Kokilasandeśa* are mine. The Sanskrit text comes from Unni 1972: *atrāyāhi priyasakha nanu svāgataṃ paśya pārśve pratyagrodyanmadhurasakaṇasvediniṃ cūtavallim / tvatsamparkaṃ subhaga nīyataṃ kāñkṣate ’sau vilolā lolambākṣī calakisalayaīr āhvayanti sarāgā //* KS I.6.



and occupy yourself with uniting suitors  
and their proud beloveds.<sup>11</sup> (KS 1.7)

The very first words the protagonist utters to his future messenger evoke the lascivious nature of the bird. He first tries to kindle lust in the *kokila* by describing the suggestive figure of the mango-bough damsel.<sup>12</sup> Thus the koel itself now feels a burning, unfulfilled lust and can sympathise with the poor hero. However, the protagonist is infinitely more miserable because, in his case, separation from his wife means that his yearning cannot be sated, while the koel can indulge in his desire with the mango-bough. The hero then strokes the bird's ego by referring to its prominent role in Kāma's army. In a later verse he entertains the koel:

Take my missive, O lord of birds,  
perform this brotherly act.  
O articulate one! Console my darling,  
wrought with sorrow.  
For what are the words of her husband  
relayed by a dear friend  
but sustenance?<sup>13</sup> (KS 1.10)

The protagonist speaks of an abandoned woman who is not only morose but 'scorched' (*tāpārtām*), literally burning up. The promiscuous *kokila* should be able to relate to this problem and in the end, of course, it does take the message to the young woman. The man and bird instantly become brothers in arms, who have to face the same dire straits. The entire poem, whether the descriptions are of nature, temples or of passers-by, is tinted with a distinctly sensual tone.

11. *antastoṣaṃ mama vitanuṣe hanta jāne bhavantāṃ skandhāvāraprathamāsubhaṭaṃ pañcabāṇasya rājīnaḥ /kūjāvyaṅād dhītam upadiśan kokilāvyaṅjabandho kāntaiḥ sākaṃ nanu ghaṭayase kāmīnīr mānabhājah //* KS 1.7. This may be a reference to Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* 4.16, where Ratī laments the death of Kāma and directs her message to a koel:

Taking on you charming body  
and rising up,  
appoint once again the kokil's mate  
as messenger for the pleasures of love  
she so naturally clever in sweet talk. (Smith 2005, 136)

12. Mango trees bloom with small, pale cream coloured flowers; yet the little shoots from which they bloom are a dark pink, hence the blush in the description. The mango is therefore not only intended to be a source of nourishment, but the mango-bough damsel is also an irresistible temptress.

13. *sandēṣaṃ me naya khagapate sādhyā bhrātṛkrtyaṃ santāpārtāṃ suvacana samāśvāsaya preyasīm me / kāntodantaḥ suhrdupanato viprayogārditānāṃ prāyaḥ strīnāṃ bhavati kimāpi prāṇasandhāraṇāya //* KS 1.10.

The hero takes care to plot out a journey for the koel that will not only take it from place A to B, but will also be a feast for the senses (this is for the benefit of the audience or readers of the poem). He also makes sure that his messenger has the opportunity to satisfy its every culinary need as it traverses the lush Indian South.

The poem's protagonist first sees the *kokila* 'indulging in mango blossoms' (*cūtānkūrāsvadanarasikaṃ kokilaṃ sandadarśa* 1.4d) and tells it that the ladies in the garden will delight when they spot it 'going from mango bud to mango bud' (*cūte cūte kusumakalikāṃ tvāṃ ca dṛṣtvā* 1.23a). When the hero imagines the koel reaching his house, he envisages the scene: 'Koel! [you will see] a young mango tree teeming with your kin, greedy to taste its blossom' (*cūto 'stī potas tvajjātīyaiḥ pika parivṛtaḥ pallavāsvādalubdhaiḥ* 2.14ab). The *kokila* is also told to 'drink the floral wine of the trees along the way' (*viṭapinā puṣapmādhvīm lihānaḥ* 1.69b).

Apart from these descriptions which focus strictly on the nourishment the koel will receive from the mango tree, Uddaṇḍa Śāstrī plays with the image of the mango as the bird's lover. The first such verse where this idea appears outright is the already quoted stanza 1.6 and another similar description of this kind may be found in verse 1.33:

Take the time to help yourself to the mango boughs there.  
As you kiss the fresh, liquor-filled bloom which is like the *bimba* of the  
lower lip,  
as you cradle the fresh buds like breasts, do what you want!  
What man could possibly want to leave,  
when his lover's passion blossoms?<sup>14</sup>

There is another such allusion in verse 2.35, in which the *kokila* is addressed: 'perch upon that mango tree and help yourself to its buds red like a beautiful girl's lips' (*sthītvā cūte prathamakathite mugdhakāntādhārābhaṃ / daṣtvā svairam kisalayam athā*). Thus, the mango trees in *Kokilasandesa*, like the rivers in the *Meghadūta*, are sources of not only gourmet pleasure but also sexual enjoyment for the messenger which is sent to carry out a difficult task.

### *Haṃsa*

The second messenger of interest for this paper is the *haṃsa*. Like most Indian birds, the bar-headed goose functions as an important constituent of *kāvya*

14. *cumban bimbādharam iva navaṃ pallavaṃ śīthugarbhaṃ prāptāśleṣaḥ stana iva nave korake kāmācārī / bhoktāsi tvam kamapi samayaṃ tatra mākandavallīḥ kāntārāge sati vikasite kaḥ pumāṃs tyakyum iṣṭe* // KS 1.33.

imagery, evoking a set of standardised themes. It is closely connected with the coming and going of the monsoon rains and is traditionally thought to be able to separate milk from water with its beak. *Haṃsa*'s voices are compared to the 'tinkle' of bracelets and anklets and a perfect woman was either to have the gait of an elephant or a goose. Vogel writes that: 'In addition to swiftness of wing and other visible qualities, Indian imagination endows the *haṃsa* with moral virtues of the highest order. He is the noble bird par excellence, and worth of being elected king of the feathered tribe'.<sup>15</sup> Its pure white colour symbolised its physical and spiritual purity and fortified its position as the ruler of all birds (white being the colour associated with kingly fame).

The reasons *haṃsas* were chosen as messengers in *dūtakāvya* are manifold. Firstly, they were strongly connected with the season of *śarat*, autumn; when the monsoon had finally died down, the majestic geese were thought to leave their lofty resting grounds by Lake Mānasa in Tibet and fly south. As Lienhard notes, autumn is a time when 'love takes its rightful place again'<sup>16</sup> and *haṃsas*, which are said to have one mate for life, symbolise that enduring emotion. Significantly, the end of the monsoon also heralds a reunion between two lovers separated by the torrential rains, so the bird that is innately connected with autumn and the end of the rainy season, came to naturally be a symbol of that reunion. It is worth mentioning that *haṃsas* are said to have fed on lotuses and lotus fibres or stalks and the lotus-flower was also one of the conventional symbols of autumn.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, as previously mentioned, the *haṃsa* is the most noble of birds and could be counted on not only to understand the difficult situation of the protagonist of a *dūtakāvya* but also to help, on account of its natural predisposition for compassion and higher virtues. The third, and most practical, reason the bar-headed goose was so popular in *dūtakāvya* was because it is said to fly the highest of all the birds<sup>18</sup> which made it an ideal choice of messenger because it was sure to reach any destination with no trouble at all. This also bene-

15. Vogel 1962, 12.

16. Lienhard 1984, 33.

17. This is even mentioned by Kālidāsa in the *Meghadūta*, verse 1.11: *kartuṃ yac ca prabhavati mahīm ucchilīndhrām avandhyāṃ tac chrutvā te śravaṇasubhagaṃ garjitaṃ mānasotkāḥ / ā kailāsād bisakīsalayacchedapātheyavantaḥ sampatsyante nabhasi bhavato rājahaṃsāḥ sahāyāḥ //* 'And on hearing that thunder of yours which is grateful to the ear and which has the power to make the earth covered with mushrooms and fertile, the royal swans, eager to go to lake Mānasa, and having a stock of bits of shoots of lotus-stalks to serve them as provisions on their journey will become your companions in the sky as far as the mountain Kailāsa' (Kale 2011, 25).

18. *Anser indicus* can fly up to 27,000 feet, that is, 8,200 metres, allowing it to cross the Himalayas.

fitted the poem itself because it allowed for an admirable bird's-eye-view description of the lands the *haṃsa* was soaring over.<sup>19</sup>

In the corpus of *dūtakāvya*s currently known to us, the *haṃsa* appears to have been the most common avian messenger<sup>20</sup> and my preliminary studies have shown that these poems seem to have a tendency to contain religious or mystic strains. This is definitely true of the *Goose-Messenger* examined below – the little-known *Haṃsasandeśa* of Pūrṇasarasvatī<sup>21</sup> (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century CE, Kerala). The protagonist of this poem is a woman from the South, a devotee of Kṛṣṇa who sends a gander, first on a tour of her homeland and then to Vṛṇḍāvana in search of her lord.

The heroine first notices the gander as it sits with its wife in a pond nearby. She says:

Tell me brother, did you land on earth well?  
Your goose, your lawful wife, is delighted.  
Though she was suffering from thirst [/desire] while you were away,  
she still holds the sweet lotus-shoot silently  
in her *bimba*-red mouth.<sup>22</sup>

The goose is shown to be waiting for her husband to return home, with dinner ready, as it were. Apart from the observation that geese tend to eat lotus stalks, the wording of this verse is particularly noteworthy. The phrase *bisakisalaya* was first used by Kālidāsa in the *Meghadūta* and a search of the various text repositories has thus far shown that it appears nowhere else.<sup>23</sup>

However, let us return to the question of nourishing the messenger; the *haṃsa* in Pūrṇasarasvatī's poem is also told in further verses to rehydrate itself in the Kaverī river as if it were enjoying a lotus-faced, desired lover (*kāverīṃ*

19. It is worth noting that in the *Kokilasandeśa* the koel never flies higher than the leafy canopy of the forests.

20. There are 11 *Haṃsadūtas* or *Haṃsasandeśas* known to us in Sanskrit (there are many more in the vernacular languages of southern India): *Haṃsadūta*, Raghunāthadāsa; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Vedāntadeśika; *Haṃsadūta*, Rūpagosvāmin; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Vāmana Bhaṭṭa Bāṇa; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Vidyāvidhāna Kavīndrācāryasarasvatī; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Venkaṭeśa; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Pūrṇasarasvatī; *Haṃsasandeśa*, Haṃsayogin; *Haṃsasandeśa*, anonymous (x2).

21. This poem was one of the areas of interest during the Sanskrit Summer Academy in Jerusalem, 2013. I would like to thank the organisers and participants of the seminar for the inspiring work-sessions and thought-provoking discussions on the topic of this *Haṃsasandeśa* specifically as well as *dūtakāvya* in general.

22. All translations of Pūrṇasarasvatī's *Haṃsasandeśa* are mine. The Sanskrit text comes from the 1937 edition: *kaccid bhrātaḥ kathaya kuśalair āgamas tvam dharitrīm dhanyā kaccij jayati varatā dharmadārāḥ priyā te / dūram yāte tvayī sumadhuram yā tṣārttāpi vaktre bimbātātre bisakisalayaṃ bibhrati jośamās te // HS 1.4.*

23. It should be remembered that Pūrṇasarasvatī is actually best known for his commentary of Kālidāsa's *Cloud-Messenger* entitled *Vidyullatā*.

*tām kamalavadanām bhuñkṣva kāntām iveṣṭām* HS 1.13c) and to drink the lotus nectar, famous for its perfume, which is being offered by its beloved *pādmīnī* women (*pāyaṃ pāyaṃ pathi parimalaślāghinīm padmamādhvīm / modaṃ modaṃ muhur upahr̥tām padminībhiḥ priyābhiḥ* HS 1.31cd).

Finally, there is verse 1.38 in which the idea of the *haṃsa* eating lotuses in order to regain its strength before a long journey dominates:

You will desire to eat the slippery and tender lotus fibres  
which wipe away fatigue,  
like the *cakora* strongly thirsting for the thick rays of the moon.  
And gathering the juice from every lotus on its [the Yamunā's] banks  
Go to Vṛndāvana, accompanied by flocks of your brethren.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, we may observe that the choice of messenger (in this case, an avian messenger) was not an arbitrary one. It was definitely a selection that set the mood of the poem. Choosing the right courier was essential for the *dūtakāvya* to be cohesive and allowed the poet to establish his messenger poem within a larger context of the genre. Moreover, the correct selection could enrich the poem with further layers of subtle meanings and undertones. We may presume that *haṃsas* could have seemed appropriate for carrying messages in poems that had a devotional slant, while *kokilas* would have been an ideal choice of courier if a poet wanted to emphasise the erotic longing felt by the separated young lovers. One may also get the impression that the opposite would not have met the approval of critics and connoisseurs.

The protagonists of the presented *dūtakāvya*s took considerable care to ensure that the messengers' journeys were as delightful as possible and supplied them with the necessary nourishment of body and soul. The heroes established strong relationships with their messengers in their imagination and, as friends, knew how to map their passage so as to please them. This included providing the food they expected the messenger to consume along the way, hence, the cloud received sweet water, the *kokila* – mango blossoms and the *haṃsa*, lotus shoots and nectar.

It must be noted that the theme of the protagonist 'feeding' the messenger does not appear in all *dūtakāvya* poems, for example, it is not found in the *Kāmasaṃdeśa* of Māṛḍatta, Dhoyī's *Pavanadūta* or in the *Uddhavasandeśa* by Rūpagosvāmin, to name a few that I have studied with the topic of this paper in mind. Therefore, this motif should perhaps not be seen as a staple feature of *dūtakāvya* as a genre but rather as a consequence of the strong relationship that grows between messenger and protagonist in some poems. In *dūtakāvya*s

24. *jaḡdhvā ḡrdhnuḥ śramaparimṛjaḥ snigdhamugdhā mṛṇālīḥ sāndrās cāndrīr iva karalatāḥ sphāratarṣas cakoraḥ / padme padme paricitarasas tīrabhāgena tasyā vṛndaiḥ svānām samupacarito yāhi vṛndāvanān tam //* HS 1.38.

where the bond is strong and the two are best friends, especially as in the *Meghadūta* and the *Kokilasandēśā*, the protagonist is more likely to concern him or herself with the messenger's welfare.

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# When poetry is ripe: An overview of the theory of *kāvya**pāka*

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This paper will offer a complete review and translation of the passages dealing with *kāvya**pāka*, the ‘ripeness of poetry’, throughout the whole history of Sanskrit poetics. The origin of the idea most probably lies in an impressionistic comparison between poetry and fruit, the same idea that underlies the notion of the *rasa* ‘sap/aesthetic experience’. Indeed, the vividness of the image is even more striking than for *rasa*, and the juxtaposition of *kāvya* and juicy items has aroused the theoretic fancy of many *ālaṃkārikas*.

In fact, although it does not enjoy a prominent position amongst critical devices, *pāka* and its varieties are mentioned and discussed in all major works on poetics.<sup>1</sup> Using a chronological viewpoint to follow the development of the concept, we start from some episodic remarks to arrive at the more complex classifications offered by Puranic systematists, only to end again with a simplified categorization. This theoretic insight is followed by a brief review of the practical application of the theory of *kāvya**pāka*, presenting excerpts from classical literature in which well-known works and authors are compared to fruits.

The Sanskrit texts of the translated passages are given in the Appendix at the end of the paper, in the order they appear.

## 1. *Pāka in theory*

### 1.1 *Bhāmaha, Kāvyaālaṃkāra 5.62*

Bhāmaha is the first author to compare poetry to fruit, although he does not explicitly mention *pāka*. The rationale of the simile is evident: pedantic poetry is like a disgusting fruit. His judgment points to the realm of *artha*: indeed the passage comes from the chapter devoted to poetic defects springing from logi-

1. So far, the only contribution explicitly devoted to the topic of *kāvya**pāka* is Dwivedi 1974.

cal fallacies. There is no trace of a developed set of maturations as in later writers, only an isolated image. *Rasa(vat)* is still an *alamkāra*, and the sour *kapittha*, ‘wood apple’,<sup>2</sup> will remain as the symbol of bad poetry up to Bhoja and Rājaśekhara.

Poetry which even in the presence of *rasa* is unpleasant (*ahr̥dyam*), unclever (*apesālam*) and not easily analysable (*asunirbhedam*) according to some is like an unripe wood apple (*kapittham āmam*) (...).

## 1.2 *Vāmana*, *Kāvyaalamkārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15; 3.2.15

*Vāmana* refers to *pāka* twice, with different implications. When he deals with deliberation (*avekṣaṇā*), one of the aids for poetry (*kāvyaṅga*), he quotes two *śloka*s centred on ripeness: the focus is on sound (*śabda*). This formulation will be the basis for all subsequent speculations, not only on *pāka*, but also on the cognate idea of *śayyā*, ‘repose’. Ripe poetry is the one in which words have found their definitive arrangement and cannot stand synonyms:

As long as the mind hesitates there is insertion and deletion (*ādhanoddharaṇe*).  
When the stability of a word is fixed, alas! Eloquence is accomplished.  
When words abandon the capacity of being substituted (*parivṛttisahīṣṇutām*),  
experts in the disposition of words call it ripeness of words (*śabdapākam*).  
(*Kāvyaalamkārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15)

The second occurrence comes from the section on qualities of meaning (*arthaguṇa*), under the heading *kānti*, ‘brilliance’. The three stanzas provide a first, neat subdivision of *pākas*. Here, *pāka* is the overall taste bestowed on a composition by *guṇas* or by their absence:

The complete blooming of qualities (*guṇasphuṭatvasākalyam*) is called ripeness of poetry (*kāvya-pāka*),  
and it is compared to the full maturation (*pariṇāmena*) of Mango (*cūṭasyā*);  
having the quality of difficult matter (*kliṣṭavastuguṇam*), and being based on  
the refinement of nouns and verbs (*suptūnsamskārasāram*),  
poetry has the ripeness of Eggplant (*vṛntākapākam*) and therefore people  
dislike it.  
Something whose meaning is devoid of the ten *guṇas* is useless:  
the sentence ‘ten pomegranates, etc.’ is not fit for using.  
(*Kāvyaalamkārasūtravṛtti* 3.2.15)

2. *Feronia limonia*. Botanical identifications follow Khare 2007. I have personally tasted all the fruits mentioned in this paper during a pleasant tour of Pondicherry’s bazaars with Miss Iona MacGregor.

The allusion to the proverbial nonsense ‘ten pomegranates, six cakes, basin, goat-skin, lump of flesh, a petticoat, this of a maiden, of a swordsmith’s son, father, dropping’ (*daśa dāḍimāni ṣaḍ apūpāḥ kuṇḍam ajājinam palalapiṇḍaḥ adharorukam etat kumāryāḥ sphaiyaktasya pitā pratiśinaḥ*) discloses a game of cross references between early *ālaṃkārikas* and grammatical literature.<sup>3</sup> The same nonsense is employed by Patañjali in *Mahābhāṣya* 1.2.2 when he discusses *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.2.45, a *sūtra* dealing precisely with the ‘meaning’ of words. The authors of *Kāśikāvṛtti*, commenting on this *sūtra*, give the word *kapittha* as an example of *prātipadika*. Without jumping to any conclusions, the recurrence of names of fruits (pomegranates, wood apple) within the same passage certainly deserves mention.

### 1.3 *Rājaśekhara*, *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* 5

Rājaśekhara devotes the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his work to the investigation of *kāvyapāka*. His main contributions are the lucid discussion of previous positions and the abundant enumeration of fruits with their maturities. He rejects *pāka* as the definitive stability of words and follows his wife Avantisundarī in seeing ripeness as something very similar to poetic propriety (*aucitya*). A quotation from Vāmana on *vaidarbhī rīti* somehow links *pāka* to this poetic style. Unfortunately, examples for each *pāka* are not given, nor are we offered any hint as to how they can effectively be distinguished. Were it not for the existing internal hierarchy, we would be inclined to read the passage simply as a lush *enumeratio chaotica*.

Thanks to continuous exercise (*abhyāśavaśataḥ*), the expression (*vākyam*) of a good poet reaches ripeness (*pākam*). The Ācāryas ask: ‘What then is this ripeness?’. Maṅgala<sup>4</sup> answers: ‘It is the maturation (*pariṇāmah*)’. The Ācāryas ask ‘Again, what is this maturation?’. Maṅgala: ‘It is the proficiency which consists in the intimacy with verbs and nouns (*supāṇ tinnāṇ ca śravaḥ*)’.<sup>5</sup> The Ācāryas say: ‘That is the felicity of expression (*sauśabdyaṃ*). Ripeness is the stability in the disposition of words (*padaniveśaniṣkampatā*)’.

It is said: ‘As long as the mind hesitates (...)’. [Vāmana, *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15].

The Vāmanīyas say: ‘The conclusion of the stability of words comes also from the inserting and inserting again. Therefore ripeness is the aversion of words for substitution (*parivṛttivaimukhyam*)’. They say: ‘When words abandon (...)’. [Vāmana, *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15].

3. For the influence of grammatical thought on Bhāmaha and Vāmana see Chakravarty 1984 and 1993.

4. On the figure of Maṅgala see Krishnamoorthy 1971.

5. Cf. *supra* Vāmana, *Kāvyālaṃkārasūtravṛtti* 3.2.15.

Avantisundarī remarks: ‘Again this lack of creativity (*aśakti*) is not *pāka*’. Because for one and a single matter, there is more than one reading which is ripe for great poets. Therefore, ripeness is the composition in which expressions (*sūkti*), meaning (*artha*), and sound (*śabda*) are appropriate for *rasa*.<sup>6</sup> It is said:

According to me the ripeness of expression  
is the right fastening of sound and meaning  
suffused with qualities, ornaments, styles, expressions,  
by which the connoisseurs attain pleasure.

This is said:

Being the speaker, being the meaning, being the sound, being the *rasa*  
there is still not that by which the nectar of poetry flows.

[Vāmana, *Kāvyaśaṅkārāsūtravṛtti* 1.2.11]

The Yāyavariya says: ‘Thanks to its being inferred through the result, *pāka* is in the dominion of denotation (*abhidhāviśayaḥ*) and can also be expressed through different words. And now it is subject to usage if the agreement of the connoisseurs is sanctioned there’.

And this is ninefold for the community of poets who exercise themselves in poetry.

Among these, not sweet at the beginning and at the end is Neem (*picumanda*); not sweet at the beginning but middling in the ripening is Jujube (*badara*); not sweet in the beginning but sweet in the ripening is Grape (*mṛdvikā*); middling at the beginning but not sweet at the end is Eggplant (*vārtāka*); middle at the beginning and at the end is Tamarind (*tintīdīkā*); middling at the beginning and sweet at the end is Mango (*sahakāra*); delicious at the beginning and not sweet at the end is the Betel nut (*kramukā*); delicious at the beginning and middle at the end is Cucumber (*trapusā*); sweet at the beginning and at the end is Coconut (*nālikera*). Among these the first *pākas* in the three triads must be rejected. It is better not to be a poet than to be a bad poet. Bad poetry is indeed death with breath. The middle ones [in the triads] must be refined. Indeed, refinement enhances the quality of everything. Even impure gold becomes pure gold when heated in fire. The others are acceptable. What is naturally pure needs no refinement. A touchstone has no power compared to the brilliance of a pearl. Again a work of unstable ripeness is traditionally considered the ripeness of the wood apple (*kapitthā*). Good speech is obtained just as edible grain is obtained through threshing straw.

At the same time poetry ripens in nine different ways for one who exerts himself,

The clever should divide it according to the rule of insertion and rejection.

This threefold classification has been shown for the students’ sake,  
nevertheless in the three worlds there are many more varieties.

6. This brings *pāka* very close to the more developed concept of propriety (*aucityā*), for which see *Dhvanyāloka* 3.10-14 *vṛtti* and *Aucityavicāracarā*.

1.4 *Bhoja, Sarasvatikaṅṭhābharaṇa with Ratneśvara's comm. 1.77*

Bhoja and the commentator Ratneśvara cast a new light on *pāka*. They treat the topic under the heading *prauḍhi* 'maturation', belonging to the category of *vākyaguṇas*. Together with the usual recollection of previous argumentations, their main contribution is the illustration of a practical criterion to distinguish different *pākas*, based on the phonetic texture of single stanzas. The *Sarasvatikaṅṭhābharaṇa* agrees with Vāmana on seeing *pāka* as (a consequence of) *avekṣaṇa*: results (and *pākas*) vary according to the nature of the words immutably chosen by the poet. A point of disagreement is the *vārtākāpāka*'s place: for Vāmana, it characterizes 'bookish' poetry, while for Bhoja, the very same expertise in lexical subtleties constitutes the *guṇa* of felicity of expression (*suśabdātā*). The existence of *arthapākas* as opposed to these *śabdapākas* is stated at the end of the passage, but the topic is not fully developed. Indeed, it will be more adequately discussed by Vidyādhara and Vidyānātha.

Now the author defines the quality of the expression characterized by a supreme pitch:

[Bhoja:] A mature ripeness (*prauḍhaḥ parīpākaḥ*) of poetic diction goes by the name maturity (*prauḍhiḥ*).

As:

He uprooted the earth; he crushed the enemy's chest; he ate the fortune of king Balin all at the same time.

What has been done by this young hero in the span of one life time, could not have been accomplished by the Ancient Man in three lives.<sup>7</sup>

Here the ripeness of expression is called maturity: this maturation of Coconut, of Grapes, and so on which is obtained by practice through a pleasant composition, adding or removing words like the *grāmya*, etc. [as '*abhyuddhṛta*'] or also from the words *prakṛtistha*, *komala* and *kathora*<sup>8</sup> or *nāgara*, *upanāgara* and *grāmya*. And so, this sentence is called the ripeness of Coconut. In the same way the ripening of Mango and Grape also remain to be explained.

[Ratneśvara:] This ripeness of poetic diction is called maturity. Ripeness is the impossibility to substitute words with synonyms (*pariyāyaparivartāsahatvam*). As he said: 'When words abandon (...) [Vāmana, *Kāvyaśāstrakārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15]. 'Mature': accomplished at the beginning and at the conclusion. And this can be of three types: Coconut, Mango, and Grapes. That is to say: the ripe coconut is hard in its skin, it has its soft core hidden in the coir and is much harder in the shell. In the same way, a composition can be hard in one's mouth, but immediately after, it is full of sweetness, and then harder; therefore the *nālikerapāka* is said to be quite hard. That is to say, in the first *pāda* of the mentioned example, the four syl-

7. Attributed by Jalhaṇa's *Sūktimuktāvalī* to Cittapa.

8. The terms refer to the classification of words according to their phonic texture (normal, sweet, harsh) or to their social context of use (urban, common, and vulgar).

lables ‘*abhyuddhṛta*’ are hard at the beginning, the six syllables ‘*vasumatī dalī*’ are soft, the four letters ‘*taṃ rīpūraḥ*’ are harder because of *anusvāra*, *repha*, and the long vowel. Also here ‘*taṃ*’ through a sweet disposition strengthens the similarity with that part of the shell which is tender: this according to our elders. Thus in the three *pādas* starting with the second, the similarity with the coconut fruit must be inferred, because of the four, six and four syllables.

He [i.e. Bhoja] said how this ripeness then arises: ‘here’, ‘by practice’, that is, it is obtained through exercise. ‘Exercise is the frequentation under the guidance of those who know how to make and compose poetry’ [Mammaṭa, *Kāvya prakāśa* 1.3 *vṛttā*]. He said how that particular *pāka* arises: ‘through a pleasant composition’, through the sweetness in the combination. And also how that happens: ‘adding or removing’. Adding is inserting in the composition and removing is deleting. Then it is said, adding or removing what: ‘words’ like *abhyuddhṛta*, etc. intentionally taken one by one. And then it is said from what: ‘*prakṛtistha*, etc.’. Therefore this is the meaning: this really must be chosen among *prakṛtistha* words and so on, which on account of the charm of the composition does not allow the substitution with synonyms.

This is the convention: another word may exist, but for the connoisseurs it does not. This is the kind of an accomplished composition, how could it be otherwise? A word synonym inserted somewhere else in the composition is not pleasant in the same way.

And therefore this is a quality of expression (*vākyaguṇa*). And the harshness arises from conjunct consonants or long vowels. As in the present example ‘*rīpūra*’, etc., someone [i.e. Vāmana] has said that *vārtākāpāka* is characterized by the proficiency in using nouns and verbs. But this is really the *guṇa* defined as felicity of expression. ‘In the same way’. As the Grape has a soft skin at the beginning, and inside contains some hardness on account of its two, three, four kernels, in this way some compositions are indeed soft at the beginning and at the end and hard in the middle. ‘Ripeness of grapes’ is the name given to what has a slightly hard nature made up only of conjuncts and long vowels. Such as:

Are the young leaves of these creepers, cared for by the water you sprinkle, continuous?

The leaves are similar to your lips, red though long bereft of red lac.  
[*Kumārasambhava* 5.34]

And also as:

The trembling eyes bear the face whose musk *tilaka* was washed off by the teardrops of the fickle eyes,

as if the *mṛga* mark of the moon had gone away.<sup>9</sup>

For this very reason it has been said by the author of the *Kavikalpatā*<sup>10</sup> and by others that there is no fourth *nīlakapīthapāka*, ‘blue wood apple’s ripeness’. And as the mature mango fruit is sweet at the beginning, but in the kernel it is hard, so another composition starting from the beginning is soft and in the middle it is harder: this is called *sahakārapāka*. And again as:

9. Anonymous. I read *vahati*, which gives a better sense.

10. An unidentified work not to be confounded with the *Kavikalpatā* by Deveśvara.

O *kamalinī*, morning is your friend! *Kumudinī*, you will rejoice the next moonrise!

Blessed night, you are gone, darkness is dispelled! – *rathāṅga* birds say aloud shaking their wings.<sup>11</sup>

And also here in this example the hardness must be recognized as double. These here are the only three pure *pākas*. But there are many more born from contamination. Those are indeed *arthapākas* and will be analysed differently in the fifth chapter.

The 5<sup>th</sup> *pariccheda*, which has come to us with no commentary, places *pākas* amongst the features of *rasa*: they are laconically defined as varieties of love (*premabhaktayah*) and divided into ripeness of grapes, coconuts and mangoes (*Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharaṇa* 5.125). The passages in *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* dealing with *pāka* (mainly in chapter 36, the last one in the work) are too fragmentary to be taken into account here.

#### I.5 Agni Purāṇa 345.22cd-23

The *Agni Purāṇa* places *pākas* among *ubhayaguṇa*, that is, amongst qualities of both sound and meaning. The passage adds nothing to our understanding of *pākas*, and is, moreover, invalidated by the typical Puranic carelessness. The question of the dependence of the *Purāṇa* on Bhoja or vice versa is of no interest here: whether Bhoja has expanded the clumsy Puranic views, or the *Agni Purāṇa* has imperfectly summarized the learned king makes no difference whatsoever.<sup>12</sup>

A certain high maturity (*uccaiḥ pariṇatīḥ*) goes by the name ripeness.

It is fourfold [!], according to the distinction between grape (*mṛdvikā*), coconut (*nārikelā*) and mango (*ambū*). The ripeness of grapes is sweetness in at the beginning and in at the end.

#### I.6. Vidyādhara, Ekāvalī with Mallinātha's comm. I.12

Vidyādhara treats *pāka* in the first section of his work, while discussing the causes of poetry, namely *abhyāsa*. His contribution is nothing else more than an almost literal reprise of previous literature. As often happens, the most interesting insights come from the commentator, Mallinātha, who conciliates *pāka* with *śayyā* and provides an example of his own to illustrate the theory. The whole passage is much indebted to Rājaśekhara.

11. Anonymous.

12. For a discussion in merit, see the *Introduction to Agni Purāṇa*, 120-28.

[Vidyādhara:] The expression of poets who exercise incessantly (*anavaratam abhyasyatām*) reaches ripeness (*pākam*). And *pāka* is the conjunction of sound and sense appropriate for *rasa* (*rasocitasābdārthanibandhanam*) [cf. supra Avantisundarī quoted by Rājaśekhara]. Others say: ‘*pāka* is the proficiency in words (*padavyutpattih*) flowing from the ambrosia of what has been heard (*śravaṇasudhā*)’ [cf. Maṅgala quoted by Rājaśekhara]. And others again say: ‘*pāka* is the aversion of words for substitution’ [cf. the Vāmanīyas quoted by Rājaśekhara].

[Mallinātha:] *Rasas* are *śṛṅgāra*, etc. That use of words capable to express them, given their distinction between soft and haughty etc., through the appropriate stitching of sound and meaning (*ucitasābdārthagumphanāḥ*) becomes a shower of ambrosia for the ears. Therefore *pāka* is the blossoming of words appropriate for the savouring of *rasas* (*rasāsvādocitasābdanispattih*) and can be obtained through practice. The meaning is that exercise is fruitful. And this *pāka* is famous in the compositions of Kālidāsa and others. Another opinion is: ‘The aversion of words for substitution’, it which is the impossibility of being exchanged. And that is also called also mutual repose (*maitrīśāyā*). As in my *śloka* describing the moonrise:

Because of the touch of the rays of the moon,  
all the beings, from the lump of grass, are portrayed by the shiny night as  
having a peaceful soul.

If we insert other words here, such as *kṣapā* instead of the words *nisā*, etc., reciprocal mutuality would be broken (*parasparamaitrībhaṅgaḥ*).

### 1.7 Vidyānātha, Pratāparudrīya with Kumārasvāmin’s comm 2.35-36

After the Puranic exploit, the situation returns to simplicity with Vidyānātha. He reserves a prominent place for *pāka* among the main constituents of *kāvya*, along with *śabda*, *artha*, *guṇas*, *rītis*, etc. For this rhetorician, *pāka* is concerned with *artha*, and is defined as the basically twofold savouring of *rasa* (*rasāsvādaprabhedāḥ*) (*Pratāparudrīya* 2.5ab). The emphasis is on the simplicity of the meaning, and both the *pākas* are illustrated with examples marked respectively by clarity or obscurity. The ambiguity between *rasa* as juice / as an aesthetic experience reaches here its apex here.

Ripeness is the depth of meaning (*arthagambhīrīmā*), pleasant in two different ways: grape and coconut, with clear differences.

Grape has the *rasa*/juice bursting inside and outside.

(*Pratāparudrīya* 2.35-36ab)

And this is glossed by the commentator Kumārasvāmin as: ‘It bursts inside and outside because is savoured at the very moment of reading (*pāṭhasamayē*)’.

On the other hand, the ripeness of coconut ‘has the rising of the juice hidden inside (*antargūḍharasodayaḥ*, 2.36cd)’. The commentator explains: ‘The meaning is not grasped quickly because it relies on a detailed explanation (*vyākhyānasāpekṣatvāt*)’.



The *asunirbhedam* of Bhāmaha resounds here (see *supra*). The difference lies in the fact that Vidyānātha admits ‘difficult’ poetry as well.

Kumārasvāmin sums up and admits the possibility of additional *pākas*:<sup>13</sup>

*drākṣāpāka* and *nārikelapāka* fall in into one or the other category according to the slow or quick grasping of the meaning (*arthasya drutavilambitapratītyohi*). Because there is another variety of understanding, a middle one, consequentially other *pākas*, such as banana and mango, etc. (*kadalīrasālādī*) can consequentially be imagined.

## 2. Pāka in practice

In the following passages, taken from *maṅgalācaraṇas* and *praśastis* of *kāvya*s, single pieces of poetic art are judged (sometimes in a biased way) under in the light of *kāvya*pāka.<sup>14</sup> Given the ingenuity of the comparison between poetry and fruit, a theoretic background may not be necessarily be implied.

### 2.1 Mallinātha, Ghaṇṭāpatha commentary on Bhāravi’s Kirātārjunīya, maṅgalācaraṇa 6

The voice of Bhāravi is similar to a coconut (*nārikelaphalasaṃmitam*): it can be cracked open with a single stroke, and the connoisseurs may agreeably savour agreeably its pulp (*sāram*) rich in sources of juice/aesthetic sentiment (*rasagarbhanirbharam*).

Mallinātha’s pointed opinion has a counterpart in the popular *subhāṣita*:

The simile is proper to Kālidāsa,  
and pregnancy of sense (*arthagauravam*) to Bhāravi,  
to Daṇḍin is grace in wording,  
and in Māgha all the three qualities are present.  
(*Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra* 37.63)

### 2.2 Sūryapaṇḍita, Rāmakṛṣṇavilomakāvya, maṅgalācaraṇa 7

A less apt statement is made by Sūrya, premising a boasting remark to his *Rāmakṛṣṇavilomakāvya* palindrome. Indeed, the judgment is hardly fitting for a composition belonging to the *citrakāvya* genre, which by definition is abstruse and difficult (cf. also the synonym *duṣkara*).

13. Vidyānātha admits the ripeness of dates (*madhukṣīra*) as well.

14. *Pāka* as a hermeneutic tool has crossed the border of Sanskrit literature: Rao 1995, 38 discusses the parodistic attack on a contemporary Telugu poet as being ‘as ripe as a stone’.

The versification (*chandoktī*) does not contain monosyllabic words (*ekākṣarāṇī*),  
 nor unusual words (*aprasiddhābhidhānakam*);  
 grammatical solecisms (*vyākaraṇakliṣṭam*) are absent:  
 here there is only the ripeness of Grapes (*drākṣāpāko*).

### 2.3 *Jayadeva*, *Gītagovinda* 12.31

The last stanza comes from the closing part of Jayadeva's poem. In this bold *praśamsā*, *Gītagovinda* is said to encompass all possible delicacies. Although the verse is positively a late interpolation it still deserves mention, because almost all the sweet items of in the stanza have already been mentioned by previous theorists. So, even if the author did not have in mind a precise reference to the theory of *kāvya-pāka* (which is very likely, given the conventional character of the *praśasti*), the learned reader would have certainly recalled for sure some passages in *alaṅkāra* literature.

O sweet wine (*sādhvī mādhvīka*), no one cares of for you! Sugar (*śarkare*), you are bitter! Who will look at you, grape (*drākṣe*)? Ambrosia (*amṛta*), you are mortal! Milk (*kṣīra*), you taste like water! O mango (*mākaṇḍā*), weep! And you, lover's lips, do not try to compare, therefore go! As for the essence of love, the clever words of Jayadeva arouse the sentiment just too well.

## Appendix Sanskrit texts

### 1. Pāka in theory

#### 1.1 *Bhāmaha*, *Kāvyaḷamkāra* 5.62

*ahṛdyam asunirbhedaṃ rasavattve 'py apeśalam /  
kāvyam kapittham āmaṃ yat keśāṃcit tādṛśam yathā //*

#### 1.2 *Vāmana*, *Kāvyaḷamkārasūtravṛtti* 1.3.15; 3.2.15

*ādhānoddharaṇe tāvad yāvad dolāyate maṇaḥ /  
padasya sthāpīte sthairyē hanta siddhā sarasvatī //  
yatpadāni tyajanty eva parivṛttisahiṣṇutām /  
taṃ śabdanyāsaniṣṇātāḥ śabdapākaṃ pracakṣate // 1.3.15 vṛtti //  
guṇasphuṭatvasākalyaṃ kāvyapākaṃ pracakṣate /  
cūtasya pariṇāmena sa cāyam upamīyate //  
suptiṃsamskārasāraṃ yat kliṣṭavastuguṇaṃ bhavet /  
kāvyam vṛntākapākaṃ syāj jugupsante janās tataḥ //  
guṇānām daśatāmukto yasyārthas tad apārthakam /  
dāḍimāni daśetyādi na vicāraḥsamam vacaḥ // 3.2.15 vṛtti //*

#### 1.3 *Rājaśekhara*, *Kāvyaṃimāmsā* 5

*abhyāsavaśataḥ sukaveḥ vākyam pākam āyāti / 'kaḥ punar ayam pākaḥ?' ity  
ācāryāḥ / 'pariṇāmaḥ' iti maṅgalaḥ / 'kaḥ punar ayam pariṇāmaḥ' ity ācāryāḥ /  
'supāṃ tūnām ca śravaḥ saiśā vyutpattiḥ' iti maṅgalaḥ / 'sauśabdyam etat /  
padanivesāniṣkampatā pākaḥ' ity ācāryāḥ / tad āhuḥ – 'āvāpoddharaṇe tāvad  
yāvad dolāyate maṇaḥ / padānām sthāpīte sthairyē hanta siddhā sarasvatī //  
'āgrahaparigrahād api padasthairyaparyavasāyas tasmāt padānām  
parivṛttivaimukhyaṃ pākaḥ' iti vāmanīyāḥ / tad āhuḥ – 'yatpadāni tyajanty eva  
parivṛttisahiṣṇutām / taṃ śabdanyāsaniṣṇātāḥ śabdapākaṃ pracakṣate // 'yam  
aśaktir na punaḥ pākaḥ' ity avantisundarī / yad ekasmin vastuni mahākavīnām  
aneko 'pi pāṭhaḥ paripākavān bhavati / tasmād*

rasocitaśabdārthasūktinibandhanah pākah / yad āha –  
 ‘guṇālaṅkārarītyuktiśabdārthagathanakramah / svadate sudhiyām yena  
 vākyapākah sa mām prati //’ tad uktam – ‘satī vaktari saty arthe śabde satī rase  
 satī / astī tan na vinā yena parisravati vānmadhu //’ ‘kāryānumeyatayā  
 yattacchabdanivedyaḥ paraṃ pāko ’bhīdhāviśayaḥ / tatsahṛdayaprasiddhisiddha  
 eva vyavahārāṅgam asau’ itī yāyāvariyaḥ / sa ca kavīgrāmasya kāvyam  
 abhyasyato navadhā bhavati / tatrādyantayor asvādu picumandapākam, ādāv  
 asvādu pariṇāme madhyamaṃ badarapākam, ādāv asvādu pariṇāme svādu  
 mṛdvīkāpākam, ādau madhyamam ante cāsvādu vārttākapākam, ādyantayor  
 madhyamaṃ tintīdikapākam, ādau madhyamam ante svādu sahakārapākam,  
 ādāv uttamam ante cāsvādu kramukapākam, ādāv uttamam ante madhyamaṃ  
 trapusapākam, ādyantayoḥ svādu nālikerapākam itī / teṣāṃ triṣv api trikeṣu  
 pākāḥ prathame tyājyāḥ / varamakavir na punaḥ kukaviḥ syāt / kukavitā hi  
 socchvāsaṃ maraṇam / madhyamāḥ saṃskāryāḥ / saṃskāro hi sarvasya guṇam  
 utkarṣayati / dvādaśavarṇam api suvarṇam pāvakaḥ pākena hemībhavati / śeṣā  
 grāhyāḥ / svabhāvasuddham hi na saṃskāram apekṣate / na muktāmaṇeḥ  
 śānastārātayai prabhavati / anavasthitapākam punaḥ kapitthapākam āmananti /  
 tatra palāladhūnanena annakaṇalābhavat subhāṣitalābhah /  
 samyag abhyasyataḥ kāvyam navadhā paripacyate /  
 hānopādānasūtreṇa vibhajeṭ tad dhi buddhimān //  
 ayam atraiva śiṣyāṇāṃ darśitas trividho vidhiḥ /  
 kintu vivīdham apy etat trijagaty asya varttate //

#### 1.4 Bhoja, Sarasvatīkaṅthābharaṇa with Ratneśvara’s comm. I.77

samprati prakarṣakāṣṭhālakṣaṇam vākyasya guṇam lakṣayati –  
 [Bhoja:] ukteḥ prauḍhaḥ paripākah procyate prauḍhisamjñayā / yathā –  
 ‘abhyuddhṛtā vasumatī dalītam ripūrah kṣiptakramam kavalitā balirājalakṣmīḥ /  
 atraikajanmani kṛtam yad anena yūnā janmatraye tad akarot puruṣaḥ purāṇah //’  
 atra prakṛtishakomalakāṭhorebhyo nāgaropanāgaragrāmyebhyo vā  
 padebhyo ’bhyuddhṛtādīnām grāmyādīnām ubhayeṣāṃ vā padānām  
 āvāpodvāpābhyāṃ sanniveśacārutvena yo ’yam ābhyāsiko nālikerapāko  
 mṛdvīkāpāka ityādīr vākyaparipākah sā prauḍhir ity ucyate / tathā caitad vākyam  
 nālikerapāka ity ucyate / evaṃ sahakāramṛdvīkāpāke apy udāharaṇīye itī //  
 [Ratneśvara:] ukter itī / ukter vākyasyāyām pākah sā prauḍhiḥ / śabdānām  
 paryāyaparivārtasahatvam pākah / yad āha – ‘yatpadāni tyajyanty eva  
 parivṛtisaḥiṣṇutām / tam śabdanyāyaṣṇātāḥ śabdapākam pracakṣate //’ itī /  
 prauḍha itī / upakramopasaṃhārayor nirvyūḍhaḥ sa cāyam  
 nālikerasahakāramṛdvīkopalakṣaṇais trividho gīyate / tad yathā –  
 nālikeraphalam pakvam tvaci kaṭhinaṃ śīrāv avivṛtakomalaprāyam  
 kapālikāyām kaṭhinataram tathā kaścit samdarbho mukhe kaṭhinas  
 tadanantaram mṛduprāyas tataḥ kaṭhinataro nālikerapāka ity ucyate / tathā hi –  
 prakṛtodāharaṇe prathamapāde ’bhyuddhṛteti varṇacatuṣṭayam ārambhe

*kāthinam 'vasumatī dali' iti varṇaṣaṭkaṃ komalam 'tam ripūraḥ' ity  
 anusvārephadīrghair akṣaracatuṣṭayam kāthinataram / atrāpi tam iti  
 mṛduprāyaniveśena komalakapālikāmukhabhāgasārūpyam draḍhayatīty  
 asmadārādhyāḥ / evaṃ dvitīyādīpādatraye catuṣkaṣaṭkacatuṣkair  
 nālikeraphalasāmyam unneyam / katham punar evaṃvidhaḥ pākāḥ  
 saṃbhavatīty ata āha – atreti / abhyāseṇa nīrvṛtta ābhyāsikāḥ / kāvyam kartum  
 vicārayitum ca ye jānanti tadupadeśeṇa karaṇe yojane ca paunaḥpunyena  
 pravṛttir abhyāsaḥ / [Mammaṭa, Kāvyaṇprakāśa 1.3 vṛtti] asāv api katham  
 pākaviśeṣo bhavatīty ata āha – sanniveśacārutveneti / sanniveśo racanā tasyām  
 cārutvam / tad api katham ity ata āha – āvāpodvāpābhyām iti /  
 saṃdarbhānupraveśanam āvāpaḥ / tataḥ samuddharaṇam udvāpaḥ / keśām ity  
 ata uktam – padānām iti / uddhṛtānām iti buddhyā pṛthak kṛtānām / kebhya ity  
 ata uktam – prakṛtiśhādītyādi / tenāyam arthaḥ / prakṛtiśhādīpadato 'py etad  
 evoddhartavyam yad ghatanāsausthavana paryāyaparivartanam na saḥate /  
 bhavati hi saḥṛdayānām evam anyat padaṃ nāstīti vyavahāraḥ / so 'yam  
 racanāśiddhivīśeṣaḥ katham anyathā tajjātīyam eva padaṃ anyatra saṃdarbhe  
 niveśitam na tathā svadate / ata evāsau vākyaguṇaḥ / kāthinīyam ca saṃyogair  
 dīrghair vā svarair bhavati / yathātraivodāharaṇe ripūra ityādau /  
 sūptīnvyutpattīlakṣaṇas tu vārtākāpākāḥ kaiścid uktaḥ, sa tu  
 suśabdatālakṣaṇaguṇa eva / evam iti / yathā drākṣāphalam tvaca ārabhya  
 komalam antarā dvitricaturāsthīsāmpādītam kiṃcīt kāthinīyam evam kaścīt  
 saṃdarbham upakramopasāmhārayoḥ komala eva madhye kāthina eva /  
 saṃyogaḍīrghasvaramātrakṛtamanākkāthorabhāvo mṛdvīkāpāka ity ucyate /  
 yathā – 'ayi tvadāvarjītavārisāmbhṛtaṃ pravālam āsām anubandhi vīrudhām /  
 cirojjhitālaktakapāṭalena te tulām yad ārohati dantavāsasā //'  
 [Kumārasambhava 5.34] yathā ca –  
 'anavaratanayanajalavanīpatanaparīpītaharīnamadatīlakam / vadanam  
 apayātāmrāgamaḍaśāsīkīraṇam vahanti loladṛśaḥ //'  
 ata eva kavīkalpalatākārādībhīr ukto nīlakapīthapākāścaturtho nāstī /  
 yadvac ca parīṇatam saḥakārāphalam ārambhād eva komalam asthani tu  
 kāthoraprāyam evam aparāḥ saṃdarbho mukhād ārabhya mṛdur antare  
 kāthinataraḥ saḥakārāpāka ity ucyate / yathā / – 'kamalīni kuśalam te  
 suprabhātam rathāṅgāḥ kumudīni punar indāv udgate tvam ramethāḥ / sakhi  
 rajani gatāsi tvam tamo jīrṇam uccair itī taralītapakṣāḥ pakṣīṇo vyāharanti //'  
 atraivodāharaṇe 'pi dīdhā kāthoratvam avaseyam / te 'mī traya eva  
 śuddhapākāḥ / vyatīkaraṇmānas tu bhūyāmsaḥ / eta evārthapākāḥ pañcame  
 prakārāntareṇa pratīpādayīsyante //*

#### 1.5 Agni Purāṇa 345.22cd-23

*uccaiḥ parīṇatīḥ kāpi pāka ity abhidhīyate // 22cd //  
 mṛdvīkānārikelāmrāpākābhedaś caturvīdhaḥ /  
 ādāv ante ca saurasyam mṛdvīkāpāka eva saḥ // 23 //*

1.6 *Vidyādhara, Ekāvalī with Mallinātha's comm. 1.12*

[Vidyādhara:] *anavaratam abhyasyatām eva kavīnām vākyaṇi pākam āsādayanti / pākas tu rasocitaśabdārthanibandhanam / śravaṇasudhāsyandinī padavyutpatih pāka ity anye /*

[Mallinātha:] *rasāḥ śṛṅgārādayaḥ / teṣāṃ mṛdūddhatādibhedabhinnatvād ucitaśabdārthagumphanāt tadvyāñjanasamarthā satī sā padavṛttiḥ karṇāmṛtavārṣiṇī bhavati / ato rasāsvādocitaśabdanīṣpatih pākāḥ sa cābhyāśasādhyā iti saphalo 'bhyāsa ityārthaḥ / ayaṃ ca pākāḥ kālidāsādīprabandheṣu prasiddha eva / matāntaram āha / padānām iti / parivṛttivaimukhyaṃ vinimayāsahiṣṇutvam / etad eva maitrīśayeti cākhyāyate / yathāsmadīyaśloke candrodāyavarṇane – 'nīśākarakarasparśān nīśayā nirvṛtātmana / amī stambhādayo bhāvā vyajyante rajyamānayā // ' atra nīśādīpadasthāne kṣapādīpadāntaraprakṣepe padānām parasparamaitrībhaṅgaḥ /*

1.7 *Vidyānātha, Pratāparudrīya with Kumārasvāmin's comm. 2.35-36*

[Vidyānātha:]

*arthagambhīrīmā pākāḥ sa dvidhā hṛdayaṅgamaḥ / drākṣāpāko nārikelapākaś ca prasphuṭāntarau // 2.35 // drākṣāpākāḥ sa kathito bahir antaḥ sphuradrasaḥ / 2.36ab /*

[Kumārasvāmin:] *pāthasamaye 'py āsvādyamānatvād antar bahiś ca sphuraṇaṃ draṣṭavyam (...) evaṃ vyākhyānasāpekṣatvān na drutam arthapratītir ity arthaḥ / drākṣāpākanārikelapākāv arthasya drutavilambitapratītyoḥ parām koṭim ārūḍhau / atas tadantarālavartinyā madhyapratīter anekavidhatvāt tadanusāreṇa kadalīrasālādīpākāḥ svayam ūhyā ity āha /*

2. *Pāka in practice*2.1 *Mallinātha, Ghaṇṭāpatha commentary on Bhāravi's Kirātārjunīya, maṅgalācaraṇa 6*

*nārikelaphalasammitaṃ vaco bhāraveḥ sapadi tad vibhajyate / svādayantu rasagarbhanirbharaṃ sāram asya rasikā yathēpsitam //*

[*Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra 37.63*]

*upamā kālidāsasya bhāraver arthagauravam / daṇḍīnaḥ padalālityaṃ māghe santi trayo guṇāḥ //*

2.2 *Sūryapaṇḍita, Rāmakṛṣṇavilomakāvya, maṅgalācaraṇa 7*

*naikākṣarāṇi chandoktir nāprasiddhābhīdhānakam / naiva vyākaraṇakliṣṭaṃ drākṣāpāko 'tra kevalam //*

2.3 Jayadeva, Gītagovinda 12.31

*sādhvī mādhvīka cintā na bhavati bhavataḥ śarkare karkaśāsi drākṣe drakṣyanti  
ke tvām amṛta mṛtam asi kṣīra nīraṃ rasas te /  
mākanda kranda kāntādhara dhara na tulāṃ gaccha yacchanti bhāvaṃ yāvac  
chṛṅgārasāraṃ śubham iva jayadevasya vaidagdhyaṅgavācaḥ //*

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# Betel chewing in *kāvya* literature and Indian art

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Betel chewing is one of the best-known and widespread customs in South-East Asia. Its popularity and sustainability resulted in the creation of the entire tradition of betel consumption, which includes not only all the rites where it plays an important role, but also the artistic genre which consists of implements and items for storing, preparing, and serving betel ingredients, as well as numerous references in literature. This means that the act of betel chewing can be considered from many different points of view. Most of the publications concerning this custom deal with the medical and health aspects of the consumption of betel. The main goal of the present article is to show the tradition through the analysis of provided examples of stanzas taken from the works of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature and through the way in which the betel motif occurs in Indian art. The article will therefore be divided into three main parts. The first concerns the plant, the main stimulating ingredient, and will offer a brief summarization of the historical aspects of betel chewing. The second part will focus on the occurrence of the betel motif in *kāvya* literature, in order to show in what context it is present in texts and its role therein. Finally, the tradition will be presented from the artistic point of view with special reference to the Applied Arts. Examples of the implements required to prepare a betel quid and used in a chewing session will show the artistic dimension of the phenomenon and pay attention to details in the process of consuming betel.

## *A brief history of betel chewing*

Components of the betel quid differ across Asia. In the most popular, widely prescribed form it consists of the fruit of the *Areca catechu*,<sup>1</sup> the leaf of the *Piper betle* and a small portion of lime. The first ingredient which is the fruit (small, ca. five centimeters long, usually round or oval) is commonly, yet incorrectly called

1. *Areca catechu* is commonly called betel palm, however, the term is incorrect since this name is reserved for *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* (Zumbroich 2008, 91).

a nut, probably due to its thick fibrous pericarp (the so-called husk) which encloses the seed.<sup>2</sup> The ripeness of the fruit at the moment of harvesting and the way in which it is added to the quid depends on local preferences. It can be dried, boiled to fermentation or simply used raw. In the areas where the areca palm is not cultivated it can be replaced by other wild growing palm species such as *Pinanga dicsonii*, *Areca triandra* or *Areca macrocalyx*.<sup>3</sup> The second and very important component of the quid is the heart-shaped leaf of the *Piper betle* (sometimes substituted by leaves from other *Piper* species). Lime, the third ingredient of the quid, is ground to a powder and with the addition of water (to create a paste-like consistency) smeared onto a leaf. Quicklime is usually obtained by heating the shells of mollusks or coral to a high temperature. Such a combination of components creates a basic quid to which further ingredients can be added.

The properties of plants constituting a quid are precisely described in the works concerning the *āyurveda* medical system. The *Carakasamhitā* (ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE)<sup>4</sup> in the part concerning *mātrāsītīya* (the recommended daily regimens for well-being and hygiene) enumerates fragrant refreshing substances to keep in one's mouth:

One desiring clarity, taste and good smell should keep in his mouth the fruit of nutmeg, musk seed, areca nut,<sup>5</sup> cubeb, small-cardamom and clove, fresh betel leaf<sup>6</sup> and exudate of camphor.<sup>7</sup>

Betel chewing was considered to be not only refreshing, but was also used to treat afflictions of the oral cavity, thereby playing an important role in oral hygiene. This property has also been later underlined by the *Suśrutasamhitā*:

Chewing betel leaves with powder of camphor, nutmeg, cubebs, clove, musk seed, lime and areca nut (...) mitigates excess salivation, is good for the heart, and cures diseases of the throat; it is beneficial soon after getting up from sleep, partaking meals, bathing and vomiting.<sup>8</sup>

Betel has been described in Indian medical literature as a therapeutic agent having de-worming properties, recommended for such diseases as leprosy, anemia or obesity.<sup>9</sup> Among its other medicinal values, betel is listed as being useful for constipation,

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, 118.

5. Skt. *pūga*.

6. Skt. *tāmbūla*.

7. *Carakasamhitā*, *Sūtrasthāna* 5.76cd-77, transl. P.V. Sharma (Zumbroich 2008, 118).

8. *Suśrutasamhitā*, *Cikitsāsthāna* 24.21-23, transl. K.R.S. Murthy (Zumbroich 2008, 119).

9. Velayudhan *et alii* no year, 2.

headaches or for treating hysteria.<sup>10</sup> The plant is also believed to have antibacterial and antifungal properties.

Although the earliest European reference to betel was made by Marco Polo<sup>11</sup> in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup> the custom is much older. The habit of chewing betel is spread throughout South-East Asia; from the whole Indian subcontinent and the southern part of China in the North to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea in the South; from Madagascar in the West to Micronesia and Melanesia in the East.<sup>13</sup> In these areas all the components necessary to prepare a quid are easily obtainable. But the custom also reached the other territories to which betel-chew ingredients were exported, namely the Arabian Peninsula, Mecca and the Hejaz, Tibet and even Southern Europe – Portugal, Italy, etc.<sup>14</sup> The sources of information concerning the beginnings of betel chewing are archaeological, archaeobotanical, and linguistic data. From the archaeological point of view, a very important role is played by dental remains, which are indicators of human diet and lifestyle. However, the so-called ‘betel stains’ can be confused with ‘teeth blackening’, the deliberate practice of colouring teeth for aesthetic reasons or ritual purposes.<sup>15</sup> Archaeobotanical data indicate that the areca palm and betel vine were relocated by humans to South India from the islands of South-East Asia to which they natively belong. According to Thomas Zumbroich, this could have happened ‘as early as the middle of the second millennium BCE’.<sup>16</sup> The third and very important source of knowledge concerning the beginning of the betel chewing custom is linguistic data, especially in the case of the Indian subcontinent, where no archaeological evidence has been found. In summary, this kind of analysis confirms the data obtained from archaeological and archaeobotanical sources claiming that neither the areca palm, nor the betel vine were native to southern India.<sup>17</sup>

Since betel chewing was a widely spread custom, it was also commonly mentioned in literature which is the reflection of human lifestyle, habits, and views. By tracing references to betel in Indian literature, many aspects of the tradition of its consumption can be reconstructed. In fact, it is not just the common occurrence of the betel motif that provides evidence of how important this element was in social life. A similar role is played by the frequent mention in

10. Guha 2006, 90.

11. In a later period European travellers such as *inter alia* Ludovico di Varthema, Duarte Barbosa or Niccolao Manucci paid attention to the custom of betel chewing. Penzer (1927, 255-70) gives a useful overview of their travel reports.

12. Rooney 1994, 6.

13. *Ibid.*, 2.

14. Stanyukovich 2014, 4.

15. Zumbroich 2008, 98-99.

16. Zumbroich 2012, 84.

17. For more information on the linguistic analysis of words related to betel chewing see Penzer 1927, 238-39 and Zumbroich 2008, 114-15.

the literature of the existence of castes connected with betel – *barai* (*baraiyā*, *bāru*), namely, the plant growers, and the *tamboli* (*tamoli*, *tamdī*), the leaf sellers. Equally important is the fact that betel gardens were ‘of great cultural significance, treated almost like a sacred spot’.<sup>18</sup> The availability of ingredients and the simple preparation of the quid makes the custom popular amongst all the social strata, including the lowest ones. Nevertheless, betel chewing in ancient India was part of an urban culture formed in the 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in Indian literature it is often related to court life, such as in one of the *jātaka* tales which mentions it as part of a king’s post-prandial toilet or in *Cilappatikāram*, the Tamil Epic, where a king gave a present of a golden betel case to his favourite courtesan. This kind of gift was a token of acceptance. Although betel chewing was popular not only amongst the nobles, it was also a sign of social status, for example, as shown by the existence of the role of betel set valet or the value of items used in the preparation for the chew.

The great source of knowledge of customs connected with betel chewing is also Vātsyāyana’s *Kāmasūtra*. It is introduced in the treatise not only as an important element of daily regimens for hygiene (KS 1.4.5), as an essential part of hospitality for a householder’s friends offered by his wife (KS 4.1.36) or as a gift or tip for servants (KS 2.10.5), but it was also a significant component of the art of love. It was recommended that betel should be kept next to one’s bed along with other aromatics (KS 1.4.4) and used to gain a girl’s trust, building her confidence by transferring it directly to her mouth (KS 3.2.11–12). The *Kāmasūtra* also suggests chewing betel together with a partner after intercourse (KS 2.10.6). It was believed to stimulate pleasure, love, and passion and through the usage of particular additions, it was also considered to be an aphrodisiac. Optional substances added to a chew are commonly known as *pañcasugandhaka*. Monier-Williams’ dictionary suggests translating the term as ‘a collection of 5 kinds of aromatic vegetable substances (viz. cloves, nutmeg, camphor, aloe wood, and *kakkola*)’,<sup>20</sup> but the number and names of substances (including spices and aromatics) differ in various texts. Norman M. Penzer recalls the medical dictionary titled *Vaidyakaśabdāsindhu* according to which these are *karpūra* (camphor), *kañkāla* (probably *Piper chaba*), *lavaṅga* (cloves), *jātiphala* (nutmeg) and *pūga* (areca fruit).<sup>21</sup> Some of these substances were also mentioned in one of *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*’s (6<sup>th</sup> century CE) *adhyāyas*. In the chapter concerning the preparation of perfumes we read that:

At night it is beneficial to have an overdose of betel-leaf, while by day of areca-nut. To change this order is a mere farce of betel-chewing. When betel-leaf is

18. Penzer 1927, 270–71.

19. Stanyukovich 2014, 4.

20. Monier-Williams 2005, 577.

21. Penzer 1927, 246.

made fragrant by Kakkola, areca-nut, clove and Jatee it makes one happy with the joy of amorous intoxication.<sup>22</sup>

In Varāhamihira's work, betel chewing was placed in the wider framework of the art of love – the author suggests that consumption of betel with the addition of particular substances incites amorous ardour. The inclusion of betel in the art of love was not accidental. As Thomas Zumbroich suggests:

Besides the sexual overtones of orality during consumption of betel, its visual symbolism was coded in shape (betel leaf as yoni, areca nut as liṅgam), spatial arrangement (areca nut [seed/fruit] resting in the leaf [vulva, placental]) and colour (lime as semen, red saliva as female sexual discharge/menstrual blood) and growth habits of the source plants (betel pepper vine entwining/embracing the palm trunk [...])<sup>23</sup>

Betel chewing was therefore an important aspect in fostering social and sexual relationships. Its symbolism was probably the source of its incorporation in rites concerning puberty or pregnancy.<sup>24</sup> Since the two halves of the betel seed are a perfect match, symbolizing a couple and a lovers' go-between, it is also an important part of wedding ceremonies in many communities.<sup>25</sup>

### *Images of betel in kāvya literature*

In light of the fact that the betel chewing custom was so popular across India and played an important role in many ceremonies and rites, it is not surprising that it also became a popular motif in literature, commonly occurring especially in love poems. On account of its rich symbolism, it is a significant tool, desirable in the poetical creation of a *śṛṅgārarasa* – pervading atmosphere, a mood of love and passion. Additionally, the function of images of tastes and odours was to affect the senses and supplement the poetry's appeal, such as in the example taken from the *Rtusamhāra* attributed to Kālidāsa:<sup>26</sup>

*grhītātāmbūlavilepanasrajaḥ puṣpāsavāmoditavaktrapañkajāḥ |*  
*prakāmakālāgurudhūpavāsitaṃ viśanti śayyāgr̥ham utsukāḥ striyaḥ ||*  
(RS 5.5)

22. *Bṛhatsamhitā* 77.37, transl. Sastri-Bhat 1947, 613.

23. Zumbroich 2012, 74.

24. Penzer 1927, 42-44.

25. Interesting references to the betel chewing custom can be found in the seven volumes of Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. For a detailed overview see Penzer 1927, 275-83.

26. The six cantos poem describing the changing seasons (six seasons – one per each canto) in relation to lovers' feelings.

Taking (with them) betel-rolls, cosmetics and garlands, their lotus-like faces redolent of floral liquor, women full of longing enter the bed-chamber (which is) thoroughly perfumed with the incense of *kālāguru*.<sup>27</sup>

The quoted passage is taken from the fifth canto describing *śísira*, the winter season, when it is cold outside and warm bedrooms beckon people to make love. In this fragment, all the fragrances and tastes underline women's efforts to create perfect surroundings for an amorous meeting. The substances they brought to the chamber resemble those recommended in the *Kāmasūtra* to be kept next to the bed.

But betel does not only occur in the descriptions of love play. It may also emphasize an unfulfilled feeling, being rejected, just as in Bhaṭṭi's *Rāvaṇavadha* (7<sup>th</sup> century CE):<sup>28</sup>

*ābadhanetrāñjanapañkaleśas tāmbūlarāgaṃ bahulaṃ dadhānaḥ |*  
*cakāra kānto 'py adharo 'ṅganānāṃ sahoṣitānāṃ patibhir laghutvam ||*  
(BhK 11.23)

Bearing the ample redness of the betel roll, the attractive lower lip to which a bit of wet collyrium from the eyes had got stuck brought lowliness to the ladies who had stayed in the company of their husbands.<sup>29</sup>

The woman's lips smeared with reddish betel symbolize rejection because it means that she has not been kissed. Otherwise, the dye would have been removed by passionate kisses. The girl's misery is also emphasized through the mention of eye-pigment on her lip – a sign that she has been crying. All these factors create an image of a weeping, disillusioned, and insulted woman whose careful preparations for the amorous meeting had been ignored. They also underline her misery at the moment of being rejected. Nevertheless, as in the previous example, she used betel during her preparation for the night.

*Tāmbūlarāga*, the betel redness mentioned in the above stanza, similarly to the *bimba* or *bandhūka* flower, often occurs in the poetical descriptions of faces, where it refers to the colour of women's lips. This relation was emphasized by the author of *Bhaṭṭikāvya* in one more passage:

*dantacchede prajvalitāgnikalpe tāmbūlarāgas tṛṇabhāratulyaḥ |*  
*nyastah kim ity ūcur upetabhāvā goṣṭhīṣu naris taruṇīr yuvānaḥ ||*  
(BhK 11.33)

27. Transl. Kale 1967, 50.

28. *Rāvaṇavadha* is also known as *Bhaṭṭikāvya*. It is one of the *mahākāvyas*. *Mahākāvya* (lit. great poem) is a genre in classical Sanskrit literature characterised *inter alia* by ornate and elaborate descriptions of scenery, love and battles.

29. Transl. M. A. Karandikar and S. Karandikar (Sudyka 2004, 155).



‘Why put the redness of betel on the lips like a load of grass into a blazing fire?’.

The young men roused to passion asked the slender girls in conversations.

Colouring lips with betel juice is described here as an useless action which is merely used to sustain an already existing feature. It is the emphasis on the redness of a woman’s lips which is an extremely important element in the poetical convention concerning the depiction of female beauty.

Betel has already been mentioned as the meaningful factor that plays a significant role in the preparation for the amorous interaction, but it also occurs in the descriptions of the venue which has already been witness to love play, as in one of the stanzas in the *Amaruśataka*:<sup>30</sup>

*aṅgaṃ candanapāṇḍupallavamṛdustāmbūlatāmrādharo dhārāyantrajalābhi-  
śekakaluṣe dhautāñjane locane /  
antaḥpuṣpasugandhirādrakavarī sarvāṅgalagnāmbaram romāṇām ramaṇī-  
yatām vidadhati grīṣmāparāhvāgame //*  
(AŚ 65)

Scarlet betel-nut juice splattered around, black streaks of sandalwood oil, smears of camphor, and imprints from the henna designs on her feet. In scattered folds petals lost from her hair. Every position a woman took pleasure from is told on these bed sheets.<sup>31</sup>

Once again, betel juice stains indicate that it had been used by a woman before intercourse, along with other fragrant substances designed to prepare her body for the meeting. All of these elements, including the marks left by the lovers on the sheets become a mute testimony to past events. Such a description is a tool to underline the sensual nature of the scene, filling it with a passionate mood.

As in the above examples, betel is often mentioned in poetry together with other aromatics in the descriptions of *sambhoga-śṛṅgāra* – love-in-enjoyment. However, the memories of the moments spent together are also recalled by poets while depicting *vīpralambha-śṛṅgāra* – love-in-separation. All the substances become a medium that brings the image of a lover to mind, inciting a poetical vision, as in one of the stanzas of the *Caurapañcāsikā*:<sup>32</sup>

*adyāpi tāṃ nidhuvane madhudigdhamugdhalidhādharām kṛṣatanuṃ ca-  
palāyatākṣim /*

30. As is well-known, the *Amaruśataka* is a collection of love stanzas ascribed to Amaru or Amaruka, probably compiled ca. 8<sup>th</sup> century CE (Schelling 2004, ix).

31. AŚ 65, transl. Schelling 2004, 65.

32. The *Caurapañcāsikā*, also known as *Caurasuratapañcāsikā*, *Cauraśataka* or *Bilhaṇaśataka* is attributed to Bilhaṇa (ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century CE). The above stanza occurs in the northern recension of the text, while it is not present in the western-southern one.

*kāśmīrapaṅkamṛganābhikṛtāṅgarāgāṃ karpūrapūgaparipūrṇamukhīm smārāmi //*  
(CP 9)

Even now, I remember the wine-smearing lips she innocently licked in love, her weak form, her wanton long eyes, her body rubbed golden with saffron paste and musk, her mouth savourous with camphor and betel nut.<sup>33</sup>

In this ‘elegant catalog of remembered moments of love’, as Barbara Stoler Miller calls the *Caurapañcāsikā*,<sup>34</sup> the poet creates a vision filled with fragrances and tastes. The substances recalled bring to mind the recommendations in *kāmaśāstric* literature which help to create the *śṛṅgāra* mood of the poem and the memory of the moments of intensified emotions.

### *Betel art*

The betel chewing custom was also reflected in visual art. The commonly occurring motif in painting is the *tāmbūla sevā* – offering betel, as in the case of the anonymous work depicting Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in which Kṛṣṇa offers betel to his beloved and envelops her in a gentle embrace.<sup>35</sup> A simple leaf emphasizes the *śṛṅgāra* mood of the composition. It plays the same role in a painting of ca. 1890 portraying the scandalous Tarakeswar Affair (also known as the Mahant-Elokeshi affair) of 1873, which concerned the forbidden relationship between a brahmin head priest and Elokeshi, the young wife of the Bengali government employee Nobin Chandra Banerjee.<sup>36</sup> The work is an example of a Kalighat painting<sup>37</sup> where such images were created by painters who began to migrate to Calcutta from rural Bengal in around 1830.

Moreover, the popularity of the custom amongst nobles has also been portrayed in painting. Many works present kings and princes chewing betel. A *Vibhāsa Rāga* painting (late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rajasthan) in the collection of the London’s Victoria and Albert Museum<sup>38</sup> depicts a prince and lady with an at-

33. Text and transl. Stoler Miller 1971, 18-19.

34. *Ibid.*, 8.

35. This painting is from Kishangarh, Rajasthan, and probably belongs to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is currently found in the South Asian Art Department of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (Accession Number 1984-72-1).

36. This work, by an unknown artist from Calcutta, is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Museum Number IM. 137-1914).

37. A type that derives its name from the Kalighat Temple in Calcutta. The Kalighat paintings developed from the depiction of Hindu gods, goddesses, and other mythological characters, to reflect a variety of themes, sometimes of a political nature, as for example the above mentioned Tarakeswar Affair.

38. Museum Number IS.44-953.

tendant. The woman is offering him a betel leaf. As the title suggests it is an illustration of the musical mode of a very diverse *rāga* heard in the early morning hours. Since chewing betel was an element of one's daily toilet, it may also refer to the previously mentioned morning regimens for hygiene described in the *Kāmasūtra*.

Another work, *A Prince of Jaipur Playing Chess* (ca. 1780–1800, Jaipur, Rajasthan)<sup>39</sup> by an anonymous artist shows the man smoking a huqqa as he reclines on a low couch. One of the servants portrayed in the drawing is holding a piece of betel.

However, the betel does not only occur in art in the form of a painting theme. It is also used as a pigment. Betel fruit juice gives a red colour not only to lips but also to the paint used in the creative process. In the *Lakshmi and Saraswati* (1995–1998, Naya, West Bengal) painting by the contemporary artist Ranjit Chitrakar,<sup>40</sup> it gives a beautiful scarlet colour to the goddess's dress.

Another dimension of betel occurrence in art is the artistic nature of the implements required to prepare a betel quid and used in a chewing session. The basic items are the areca fruit cutter and the pestle and mortar to grind it for the toothless. Then there is the lime container with a spatula or small spoon for its application, the box for storing the areca fruits, the betel bag, and the spitting bowls and various trays for storing the leaves and serving the chew. Since betel chewing was enjoyed by the royals, richly ornamented implements became indicators of social status. Everyone could chew betel but not everyone could afford to use special tools made of certain materials. In rich households, betel sets were not only everyday objects but also home decorations. Embroidered bags for carrying the leaves were usually oval or square with a central design. Servants who were assigned to the job attached the bag to their waist-belt or carried it over their shoulder. Bags vary in size from large to small, just as betel boxes come in many shapes and sizes. These boxes were designed for holding areca fruits and additional substances and were usually made of brass or copper (Fig. 1) even though silver or wooden items can also be found. Animal shaped betel boxes were very popular (Fig. 2) and animals were also one of the favourite motifs for areca fruit cutters. The latter were often carved in the shape of birds or erotic figures (Fig. 3), which could be helpful in creating an amorous mood during the preparations for spending the night together with a partner and decorating the venue – the lovers' chamber. Sometimes they were inlaid with coloured glass or precious stones, with ornate handles made of ivory, bone or pearl. Another extremely important element needed to prepare a quid is the

39. This work is in the collection of the South Asian Art Department, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (Accession Number 2006-53-113).

40. Ranjit Chitrakar is one of the Naya artists. This West Bengal village, often called the 'village of painters', is home to over three hundred working artists' families. The painting is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Museum Number IS.42-2011).

lime container whose shape resembles a watch-case (Fig. 4). It was usually made of brass or copper and has a chain to which a spatula or a small spoon was attached. It served for the application of lime to a leaf. Craftsmen often created whole betel sets in which the adornment of each individual element was thematically consistent.

If one considers all the presented examples, it is fair to say that the *tāmbūla* motif commonly occurred in Indian art and literature. Betel chewing was a link between almost every kind of relationship: between a host and a guest, a king and his subjects, a man and a woman. It was not only an element of sexual etiquette or popular enjoyment but also an item used in the worship of gods. *Tāmbūla* leaves and areca fruits were offered to a deity while chanting a *mantra*. Nowadays, betel chewing evokes those particularly nauseating red stains that cover walls and streets. It is no longer associated with kings and nobles but with the lowest strata of society. Beauty ideals are changing and young people educated in the West no longer maintain the custom (or at least they do not follow it to such a degree as before). The occurrence of betel during rites and ceremonies still plays an important role, but the custom itself is no longer so popular. One of the reasons is also due to the increasing awareness of the influence it has on health. Despite the many positive sides of betel chewing mentioned *inter alia* in Indian medical literature, it is also often reported as causing mouth cancer. All of the associations with royal life, high status, and the art of love have been replaced by images of dirt and disease. Luckily, the bright side of the custom is still alive through the numerous references in art and literature which remind us of its glorious aroma-filled past.

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Fig. 1. Betel box, copper and brass, 18<sup>th</sup> century, from Gujarat, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, India (photo T. Szurlej).



Fig. 2. Betel box, brass, 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century, from Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, India (photo T. Szurlej).



Fig. 3. Areca fruit cutters, brass, 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century, from Gujarat and Maharashtra, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, India (photo T. Szurlej).



Fig. 4. Lime boxes, brass and copper, 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century, from Maharashtra, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, India (photo T. Szurlej).



## The food of gods – *naivedya/nirmālya* in the Pāñcarātrika sources

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The issue of feeding gods is one of the important topics treated in religious texts, for example in those connected with the Tantric traditions of India, such as the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra. The strong belief articulated by these traditions that the god is really present in his earthly representations is the reason for treating him as a real person with natural needs for food, drink, adornments, pleasures, etc.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the offering of food – especially in India, which frequently faces the danger of famine and where food is a vital issue, becomes a very important subject.

A god needs food, but the food offered to him is not the usual trivial food – it has to be chosen, collected, prepared, and offered to him in a proper way. Then, when it is consumed by the god (which means, when it is touched by him), it contains his energies, which are potentially dangerous. The practice of dealing with sacrificial food is therefore an important and also interesting subject commented upon in the religious literature of the Tantric traditions.

The title I have proposed<sup>2</sup> suggests that the issue is not only about the food offered to gods, but also about the way this food should be treated if it has already been consumed by them. In fact, just as important is what happens to the food after it has been used in the ritual. The way it is treated is even one of the features which, as we will see, distinguish different religious traditions.

Some research has already been done on the role of food in the context of the mutual relation between god and man, and the role of offerings, including food, as an element of this mutual relation and exchange. Some of the results of such research have been presented for example in the volume edited by Khare.<sup>3</sup> Important contributions were made by Brunner and Edholm.<sup>4</sup> In these works

1. We do not intend to speak here about the dietary habits of the Vaiṣṇavas, which are treated, for example, in Stinivasan 2000, but about the special kind of food which is meant for gods.

2. 'Food of gods', and not for example 'Food for gods'.

3. Khare 1992.

4. Brunner 1969, Edholm 1984.

some consideration was also given to the social and caste aspect – normally, the food, on account of the rules concerning its potential pollution, is accepted from a member of the same or higher social position. However, when it is offered to a god, the situation should instead be compared to the relation between a husband and a wife. In this case, because she is his inferior, the wife cooks for and feeds her husband who is her superior and this seems to be the situation with the food offered to gods.<sup>5</sup> What is more, the act of offering food also refers to one of its particular features, that is, that the giver ranks higher than the receiver. Therefore, the only way that the god does not place the devotee in a position superior to his own is by reciprocation of the gift of food (*naivedya*) in the form of consecrated food (*prasāda*).<sup>6</sup> Food distribution was also connected with other social, economical, and even political issues, also discussed by some of the authors mentioned in this article, namely, the matter of the establishment of the links and relations not only between a god and his devotees but also between different groups of devotees and between large temples and the community, as well as the relation between power (kings, landlords, food suppliers) and the community and temple.

The pollution of food concerns cooked food, and such food forms the most part of the offerings to gods, even though high position devotees usually bring raw food (fruit, vegetables), which is not subject to pollution, to the temples. The cooked food for the god is to be prepared by Brahmin priests in the temple kitchen. Although Brahmins do not accept cooked food from strangers, they do accept food that is cooked in the temple and which remains from the offerings.<sup>7</sup>

As pointed out, for example, by Fuller, who conducted his research in the South of India, the principal substances received by devotees in the temples as *prasāda* are sacred ash (*vibhūti*) from Śiva, holy water (*tīrtha*) from Viṣṇu, and red powder (*kuṅkuma*) from the goddess.<sup>8</sup> However, in some cases food is also distributed and there exists a long theological discussion about who may, or may not, eat Śiva's left-over food (*nirmālya*).<sup>9</sup> Moreno writes that while Kṛṣṇa's devotees give him food offerings (*naivedya*), whose leftovers are taken as *prasāda*, Śiva's leftovers (*bhojana*) are only eaten by priests. Śiva's other devotees receive the god's washings (*abhiṣeka*) to be consumed. The washings are also known as *pañcāmṛta* (five ambrosial substances), which are milk, curds, clarified butter, honey, and sugar. These substances are used to bathe the god's image in a particular order, namely sugar comes last and removes all effects of oiliness. Only then is the image bathed with pure water.<sup>10</sup> There are also specific

5. See also Moreno 1992, 152.

6. See also Ferro-Luzzi 1978, 86.

7. As regards the dispute concerning this issue see for example Fuller 1979.

8. He also mentions that in some Śaiva temples, particularly in Gujarat, no food offered to Śiva can ever be eaten by ordinary people.

9. See for example Brunner 1969.

10. Kane 1941, 731.

substances, for example, bathing the god in a kind of jelly-like mixture called *pañcāmirtam*, which is offered to the Murugan's devotees belonging to a group of the Tamil Cettiyars.<sup>11</sup>

The differences between the fierce and peaceful natures of Śiva and Viṣṇu are also visible in the choice of food for them. As Ferro-Luzzi writes, Śiva receives spices and sometimes even green chillies, while Viṣṇu does not receive hot food and never green or red chillies. Pure gods eat vegetarian food, while local, impure village deities may eat meat, which is not offered to them by Brahmins but by other devotees.<sup>12</sup>

Goodall in his article dedicated to Caṇḍeśa,<sup>13</sup> when referring to several secondary works and especially to Edholm's article,<sup>14</sup> explains *nirmālya* as 'food and garlands that have been offered to Śiva and thereby been imbued with a dangerous power'. As he says, in order to neutralize what has been tasted and abandoned (*ucchiṣṭa*) by Śiva, a fierce and powerful deity is required. In the case of Śaiva tradition this is Caṇḍeśa – Śiva's commander-in-chief, the punisher of transgressions and on whose head Śiva placed his used garland (*nirmālya*) – the remnant from the offering. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition the function of consumer of the remnants goes to one of Viṣṇu's attendants, Viṣvakṣeṇa – the chief of Viṣṇu's army.<sup>15</sup>

I have already briefly referred to the issue of the role of food in the Pāñcarātra ritual,<sup>16</sup> and mentioned that although not all Pāñcarātrika texts treat this issue, the manner of disposing of the sacrificial substances is indeed very important for this tradition. As for the Śaiva context, I have already said that Brunner explains that *nirmālya* (remains) are mainly the garlands (*mālya*), which should be thrown away after *pūjā*, but the term also describes the unguents, betel, and food offered to the god. These leavings which are to be used by the devotees are also called *ucchiṣṭa*. In general, sacrificial substances are pure because of their contact with the deity, but they are also dangerous, because the god's power is still present in them after they have been offered.<sup>17</sup> The *Jayākhyasamhitā*, one of the main Pāñcarātrika texts (15.258-259), requires that

11. Moreno 1992. He gives (165) a list of these substances (sometimes more than 5): *viruppacci* plantains, unrefined sugar (*carṅkarai*), seedless dates (*periccam palam*), raisins (*kismis*), sugarcandy (*kalkantu*), clarified butter (*ney*), and cardamom (*ellakkai*).

12. See Ferro-Luzzi 1977a, and also Ferro-Luzzi 1977b and Ferro-Luzzi 1978.

13. Goodall 2009, 357.

14. Edholm 1984.

15. Goodall 2009, 358; Edholm 1984, 89.

16. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003, 195-96.

17. See Brunner-Lachaux 1968, 272-78. Also G. Bühnemann (Bühnemann 1988, 84-85), on the evidence of the current tradition from Maharashtra, writes that the food offered to the god (*naivedya*) is usually given as *prasāda* to worshippers, the water used for bathing idols (*tīrthā*) is drunk, and flowers (*nirmālya*) are placed on their heads. The leftovers from the offering called *ucchiṣṭa* are used by devotees and by doing this, the devotee participates in and obtains the god's power.

the remnants of the food-offerings should be cast into deep flowing water,<sup>18</sup> and in the chapter on funerary rites (24.54), one can read that all the offerings (*pūjādravya*) up to and including the food-offering (*naivedya*) should be offered up in the fire of the sacrificial fire-pit (*agnau kuṇḍagate*).<sup>19</sup> In another Pāñcarātriḱa text, the *Paramasaṃhitā*, information concerning the remnants can be found in the chapter on initiation (*dikṣā*). In this case, the worshipper is required to throw remnants away into deep water or to bury them in pure soil far from the road.<sup>20</sup> The issue of substances remaining from the offering is also treated in the chapter concerning *dharma* (Chapter 12), as a part of the rules concerning the third part of *dharma*, which is *karma* (deeds, work). *Nirmālya* is defined here as whatever has been employed by worshippers as an offering, and which is therefore unfit for use for any further purpose.<sup>21</sup>

Pāñcarātriḱa literature offers many more passages from several texts in which references to *naivedya/nirmālya*<sup>22</sup> and the various ways of treating them appear.

In the *Viṣvaksenasamhitā* the *nirmālya* is defined as follows:

The food, water, sour milk, milk, clarified butter, honey and molasses,  
a mixture of honey and milk, as well as flowers and the mouth-perfumes and  
offerings [offerings of mouth-perfumes],  
this is known as *nirmālya* which gives me pleasure and which is pure.<sup>23</sup>

The texts, however, often warn followers about the dangerous nature of the remnants and inform them what should be avoided. The *Paramasaṃhitā* reads:

One should never step over the remnants from the offering, nor eat [them]  
nor touch [them],  
one should not give, should not smell but should protect [them].<sup>24</sup>

18. JS 15.258c-259b: *naivedyam upasaṃhṛtya vastrālaṅkāraṅvarjitaṃ // agādhodakamadhye tu vahaty adhiviniḱṣipet /*.

19. JS 24.54: *pūjādravyaṃ samastaṃ ca naivedyāntaṃ hi nārada / upasaṃhṛtya juhuyād agnau kuṇḍagate tataḥ //*.

20. ParS 8.77: *dikṣāvasāne tat \*sarvaṃ agādhe [em. Sanderson; sarvaṃ samṛddhe GOS] 'mbhasi niḱṣipet / anyatra vā śucau deśe nikhanet pathi dūrataḥ //*.

21. ParS 12.36c-37b: *pūjāyāṃ viniyuktaṃ tu yad dravyaṃ iha pūjakaiḥ // nirmālyam iti vijñeyaṃ sarvakāryeṣu varjitaṃ /*.

22. Edholm (Edholm 1984, 81) writes that the moment which changes *naivedya* into *nirmālya* (or *prasāda*) is *visarjana*, the god's dismissal after the offering. He quotes from the *Agnipūraṇa* 196.14: *arvāgvisarjanād dravyaṃ naivedyaṃ sarvamucyate / visarjite jagannāthe nirmālyanbhavati kṣaṇāt //*: 'Before the dismissal (*visarjana*) the sacrificial substance (*dravya*) is called *naivedya*. When Jagannātha is dismissed it becomes *nirmālya* instantaneously'.

23. ViṣS 33.7c-8: *annaṃ toyāṃ dadhikṣīraṃ ghrtaṃ madhu gulaṃ tathā // madhuparko 'tha puṣpaṃ ca mukhavāśopahāraḱam / nirmālyam iti vijñeyaṃ mama pritikaraṃ śubham //*.

24. ParS 3.44: *nirmālyāṃ laṅghayennaiva na bhūñjīta na saṃsprṣet / na dadyāc ca na jighrec ca rakṣet (...) ca //*.

The consummation/usage by people of the objects [belonging to] the god and [the usage] of the place etc., O Great Father, is the cause of sin – this is the rule.

The substance which was used here during the offerings by the officiants, this is known as *nirmālya*, which is to be avoided in all acts [rituals].<sup>25</sup>

These dangerous substances, however, have to be disposed of in some way and, as we have already mentioned, there is a particular means of doing this, namely, they should be offered to Viṣvaksena.<sup>26</sup> The *Paramasamhitā* mentions this god, one of Viṣṇu's attendants, who is responsible for remnants and to whom they should be given:

In the direction of Someśa (north-east) one should prepare the abode of Viṣvaksena.

Not very far from the enclosure [one should install] the one who keeps the remnants from the offerings to the God.<sup>27</sup>

A bit further on the *Paramasamhitā* adds:

having determined the place for *nirmālya* beyond the outside enclosure<sup>28</sup>

(...)

having purified the place, having given the vessels and *bali* outside,

having offered to Viṣvaksena the remnants *nirmālya* [garland] and *naivedya* [food],

having sipped [water], together with Vaiṣṇavas and the others, one should eat [the remnants] to the best of one's ability.<sup>29</sup>

The *Sātvatasamhitā*<sup>30</sup> reads that *nirmālya* should, or can, be eaten by the one whose form/body is composed of *mantras*, namely the one who has performed the imposition of *mantras* on his body, which is equal to the creation of the new pure body of *mantras*.

25. ParS 12.35c-37b: *devopakaraṇānāṃ ca sthānādīnāṃ pitāmaha // doṣahetur manuṣyānām upabhoga iti sthūtiḥ / pūjāvāṃ viniyuktaṃ tu yad dravyam iha pūjakaiḥ // nirmālyam iti vijñeyam sarvakāryeṣu varjitaṃ /*

26. In the Śaiva tradition the one to whom the remnants are offered is Caṇḍeśa. An elaborate study about the role of this god can be found in the article by D. Goodall (Goodall 2009); as regards *nirmālya* see especially 356-58. See also Edholm 1984.

27. ParS 19.56c-57b: *somesānāntare kuryād viṣvaksenasya cāspadam // prakārasyāvidūreṇa devanirmālyadhāriṇam /*

28. ParS 27.17cd: *nirmālyasthānam uddiśya bahirāvareṇād bahiḥ //*

29. ParS 27.24-25b: *sthānaṃ viśodhya pātrāṇi baliṃ datvā bahis tathā / viṣvaksenāya nirmālyā pūjayitvā nivedya ca // ācāmya vaiṣṇavaiḥ sārddham bhujñitānyaiś ca śaktitaiḥ /*

30. In the chapter entitled *pratimāpīṭhaprāsādalakṣaṇam* ('characteristic of the idol, the altar, and the temple'), in the passage dedicated to the description of the acts undertaken by the one who would like to execute the daily ritual.

Having given the full offering (*pūrṇāhuti*), the one devoted to meditation and recitation [of the *mantras*] should conclude the day.

When the night comes, he, through the *bali* [offerings], should perform the offering satisfying the *bhūtas*.

He, having the body composed of *mantras*, should eat the rest of *naivedya* [food offering].<sup>31</sup>

This would suggest an initiated devotee and the Śaiva tradition takes a similar position.<sup>32</sup>

The *Viṣvaksenasamhitā* reads that the remnants of the food offering can also be given to the teacher:

Sesame seeds, a mixture of honey and milk and the food for offerings, without what has been consumed, one should give to the teacher, O Brahman. Having collected one fourth [of it] first, he should place [it] in due order. One should worship me by offering perfumes, flowers, etc. And these remnants which are consumed by him, one should give to the Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>33</sup>

The *Pārameśvarasamhitā* reads that the sacrificial food should be duly prepared by the entitled person and then distributed to the devotees:

Even *naivedya* for the [god] present on the [painted] cloth, having taken some from the vessel, the teacher himself should take and [he] should even give [it] to the *guru* and others .

One should give to the teacher and others, together with *madhuparka* and other [substances], the food offering prescribed for the one [the god] present in the main image and the one present in the processional image.

Then he should undertake the *homa* offering.<sup>34</sup>

31. SātS 24.67-68b: *datvā pūrṇāhutim dhyānaḥapayuktaḥ kṣapedahaḥ / niśāgame ṛcanaṃ kuryād balibhir bhūtatarpaṇam // naivedyaśeṣam aśnīyān mantravinyastavigrahaḥ /*. A similar passage appears in the *Īśvarasamhitā*, 17.64c-66b: *uktadigdvitayasyaikadeśe kuṇḍe 'thavā [corr.; kuṇḍetha vā ed.] sthale // datvā pūrṇāhutim dhyānaḥapayuktaḥ kṣiped ahaḥ / niśāgame ṛcanaṃ [em.; niśāgamercanaṃ ed.; see the Sātvatasamhitā above] kuryād balibhir [corr.; bhalibhir ed. see the Sātvatasamhitā above] bhūtatarpaṇam // naivedyaśeṣam aśnīyān mantravinyastavigrahaḥ /*.

32. See for example Edholm 1984, 84 ; Brunner 1969, 248.

33. ViṣS 33.9-11b: *tāmbulaṃ madhuparkaṃ ca naivedyānaṃ tathaiva ca / yad bhuktaṃ tad vinā brahman ācāryāya pradāpayet // turyabhāgaṃ hi saṃgr̥hya samāgre sthāpayet kramāt / gandhapuṣpādīnābhyarcya mām uddiśya nivedayet // tannirmālyaṃ ca tadbhuktaṃ vaiṣṇavānāṃ tu dāpayet /*

34. PāramS 369-371b: *paṭasthasyāpi naivedyaṃ kiṃcid ādāya pātraḡam / deśikaḥ svayam ādadyād gurvādibhyo pi vai dadet // mūlabīm̐basthitasyāpi yātrābīm̐basthitasya ca / devasya madhuparkādyaḥ naivedyaṃ viniveditam // dāpayed deśikādībhyas tato homaṃ samācāret /*

The texts belonging to the canon of Pāñcarātra literature are therefore clear about the importance of food in the ritual and also about the possibility or even the need to consume it after the offering. Moreover, sacrificial food also plays an important role in contemporary temple practice. During my field research in South India, one of my informants<sup>35</sup> told me that the attitude towards *nirmālya* and *naivedya* is one of the important features which differentiate orthodox Smārta Brahmins from Pāñcarātrikas. The Smārtas dispose of the remnants from the offering by throwing them into deep water, while Pāñcarātrikas distribute them among the devotees.<sup>36</sup> In this context Sampatkumāra Bhaṭṭar also mentioned *aṣṭāṅgayāga*, the term which is used in the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* to describe the eight levels or elements of the offering, among them *anuyāga*, namely ‘secondary offering’, offered in the fire of vital breaths (*prāṇāgnihavana*). This is executed by the consummation of the food remaining from the offering to the god.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in this tradition, the consummation of the remnants from the offering becomes an element of the established set of ritualistic acts, typical of the Pāñcarātra.

Breckenridge also commented on the special role of food in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, stating that the offerings of food and water are especially significant for Śrīvaiṣṇava worship.<sup>38</sup> Ferro-Luzzi presents the whole list of food offerings and ingredients, including the particular sweets and savouries, one comes across in the Vaiṣṇava temples of South India.<sup>39</sup> As she writes, it is only in the large temples in Tamilnadu, and mostly Vaiṣṇava ones, that the food offering consists of the regular South Indian meal, which is rice, *dhal* (spiced pulses), *sambar*

35. Mr. Sampatkumāra Bhaṭṭar, the eminent Pāñcarātrika priest from Melkoṭe (see Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2008, 62-68).

36. The written sources give a slightly different version of procedures (see for example Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003, 195-96) and only some offering substances are given to the devotees, for example, flowers or the water with which the image was bathed, while the others should also be thrown into deep flowing water or buried in a clean place, far from the road. Such is the prescript of many Pāñcarātrika texts, for example JS 15.258c-259b: *naivedyam upasaṃhṛtya vastrālaṅkāravajitam // agādhodakamadhye tu vahaty adhiviniḥṣipet /*; ParS 8.77: *dikṣāvasāne tat \*sarvam agādhe* [em. Sanderson; *sarvam saṃṛddhe* GOS] *'mbhasi niḥṣipet / anyatra vā śucau deśe nikhānet pathi dūrataḥ //*.

37. The classification of the *aṣṭāṅgayāga* appears in the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* 22.74-80ab, and its elements are: 1) *abhiḡamana*, ‘approaching’, namely the acts which begin with the offering in mind (mental offering – *antaḥkaraṇayāga*), and end with the self-offering (*ātmanivedanam*); 2) *bhoga* namely ‘enjoying/using’, which is the offering of water *arghya*, flowers, etc. according to the rules; 3) *pūjā*, ‘offering’ of honey, butter, fat, sour milk or an animal offering (*paśu*); 4) *annena pūjanam* namely ‘offering with food’; 5) *saṃpradāna*, ‘giving’, the offering of cooked food (*niveditasya yad dānam*); 6) *vahnīsantarpaṇa*, ‘satisfying in the fire’ (worshipping deities of the *mantras* with an offering in the fire); 7) *pitṛyāga*, ‘offering for ancestors’; 8) *anuyāga*, ‘secondary offering’, namely offering in the fire of vital breaths (*prāṇāgnihavana*) executed through the consummation of the remnants of the food offered to the gods. See also Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2003, 186.

38. Breckenridge 1986, 30.

39. Ferro-Luzzi 1978, 103-8.

(spiced pulses and vegetables), *rasam* (liquid *dhal*), and curries (spiced vegetables), etc. Furthermore, Viṣṇu in the Keralan Padmanābhaswāmi temple in Trivandrum also receives a full meal. Another similar example is found in the case of the Murukan temples in Palni and Tiruchendur. In the Hanuman temple in Mylapore in Chennai the food is simplified to only rice and *dhal*, while, for example, only rice and *sambar* are offered in the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram.<sup>40</sup> Ferro-Luzzi mentions that the maximum number of meals per day in large temples seems to be seven, but sometimes it is six plus a ‘bed-tea’.<sup>41</sup>

The issue of food remnants was also treated in the literature of the broader Vaiṣṇava milieu, for example in the work of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya*, Yāmunamuni (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century AD) entitled the *Āgamaprāmānya*. The text reads that the offerings to Viṣṇu are pure and can be consumed by the *munis*, but if one eats the offerings for other gods, one should purify oneself by undertaking the Cāndrāyaṇa vow:

Viṣṇu’s *naivedya* is declared by the wise men as pure and fit for consumption, [but] having eaten *naivedya* or *nirmālya* of other [gods, e.g. Śiva, etc.] one should perform *cāndrāyaṇa*.<sup>42</sup>

The [*nī*]mālya touched/purified by the body of Viṣṇu removes sin and is pure. The man who takes it on his head goes to the highest abode.<sup>43</sup>

In the later Vaiṣṇava tradition (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century AD), for example the *Haribhaktivilāsa* of Sanātana Gosvāmī dedicates some parts to the topic of remnants

40. Ferro-Luzzi 1978, 90.

41. Ferro-Luzzi 1978, 91–92 writes: ‘In big temples the maximum number of meals per day seems to be seven, as in the Vaishnava temples of Srirangam and Alakarkoil, in the Siva temples of Chidambaram and Madurai as well as in the Murukan temples of Swamimalai and Tirupparankundram, all in Tamilnad. In these cases, however, the temple usually indicates six *pujas* and the equivalent of ‘bed tea’ in the morning or at night often is not counted as *pūja*. A great number of *pujas* with *naivedya* is not limited to Tamilnad but seems to occur in fewer temples in the rest of South India. *Naivedya* is offered six times in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh; five times in Padmanabhaswami temple of Trivandrum, in the Krishna temple of Guruvayur and in the Siva temple of Ernakulam, Kerala; four times in the Krishna Mutt of Udipi, South Canara and in Varahanarasimhaswami temple of Simhachala, Andhra Pradesh. In the temples providing several meals a day, there is a tendency to offer a light refreshment early in the morning as well as late at night and to serve the rice and curry meal towards noon, before the temple doors close for the afternoon nap of gods and priests. Where an early morning refreshment is given in Tamil temples it usually consists of cold sweet milk, sometimes accompanied by puffed rice with sugar. At night, when god and goddess retire to their bedroom, they may again receive sweet milk but this time hot’.

42. *cāndrāyaṇa* is a fast regulated by the moon where the amount of food is diminished by one mouthful for the dark fortnight and then increased in the light fortnight.

43. ĀgP, p.166 Gaekwad edition (e-text thanks to Prof. A. Sanderson): *viṣṇos naivedyakam śuddham munibhis bhojyam ucyate / anyat nivedyam nirmālyam bhuktvā cāndrāyaṇam caret // viṣṇudechaparāmṛṣṭam mālyam pāpaharam śubham / yas naras śirasā dhatte sa yāti paramām gatim //*



from the offerings to Viṣṇu, among which are the flowers, which should be placed on one's head.

As for accepting the remnants:

One considering it and saying: 'This is the great favour of the merciful God', should place the remnants [of the offering to the God] on one's head.<sup>44</sup>

The text also refers to the *Pādmapūraṇa* and reads:

There is a necessity to accept the remnants [of the offerings to the God]. In the *Pādma [pūraṇa]*, in Gautama's discussion with the king Ambarīṣa [he says]: 'O King Ambarīṣa, the one who does not place the remnants of flowers, water or the sandal paste offered to Lord Hari on his head is worse than the one who eats dogs'.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, in the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, there is a portion which is entitled *Śrībhagavannirmālyamāhātmya* praising the glory of the remnants from the offering to Viṣṇu, in which the possibility and even the need to use and consume these remnants is clearly stated. The text of the *māhātmya* begins with the following verses:

This is the glory of the remnants [of flowers] offered to the God. In the *Skānda [pūraṇa]*, in Brahma's discussion with Nārada [he said]: 'O Nārada, the one whose body touches the remnants [of flowers] offered to Kṛṣṇa is free from all diseases and sins. Who purifies his body with the remnants from the offerings to Viṣṇu, [his] sins disappear and diseases gradually go away'.<sup>46</sup>

In other Tantric traditions, for example, in the Śaivasiddhānta, the texts not only speak about *nirmālya* as consisting of flowers and food, but actually differentiate six types, for example, the *Pratiṣṭhāpārameśvara (Prāyaścittasamuccaya* of Trilocanaśivācārya, 12<sup>th</sup> century AD) enumerates: 1) *devasvam* (divine property); 2) *devatādravyam* (divine materials); 3) *naivedyam* (what has been prepared to be offered to the deity); 4) *niveditam* (edibles offered to the deity); 5)

44. HBh 8.482: *atha śeṣagrahaṇam – tato bhagavatā dattaṃ manyamāno dayālunā / mahāprasāda ity uktvā śeṣam śirasī dhārayet //*.

45. HBh 8.483: *atha nirmālyadhāraṇanīyatā – pādme śrīgautamambarīṣasaṃvāde ambarīṣa harer lagnaṃ niraṃ puṣpaṃ vilepanaṃ / bhaktyā na dhatte sirasā svapacād adhiko hi saḥ //*.

46. HBh 8.484-485: *atha śrībhagavannirmālyamāhātmyam – skānde brahmanāradasaṃvāde kṛṣṇottīrṇaṃ tu nirmālyam yasyāṅgaṃ spṛśate mune / sarvarogair tathā pāpāir mukto bhavati nārada // viṣṇor nirmālyaseṣena yo gātraṃ parimārjayet / duriṭāni vinasīyanti vyādhayo yanti khaṇḍaśaḥ //*. See also Sathyanarayanan 2012.

*caṅḍadravyam* (what has been offered to Caṅḍeśa) and 6) *nirmālyam* (what has been thrown away [after having been offered to the deity]).<sup>47</sup>

The *Pratiṣṭhāpārameśvara* speaks about the results of using and consuming forbidden *nirmālya*: by eating it one can become a low-born *mātaṅga*; one who steps over it loses prosperity (*siddhi-hāni*); if one smells it – one becomes a wolf; if one touches it – one becomes a woman, and so on. Some texts say that only repeated initiation can purify one from the sin of conscious eating of the *nirmālya*. Nevertheless, some other texts (Sathyanarayanan mentions the *Vidyēśvarasamhitā* in the *Śivapurāṇa*) recommend the eating of the *nirmālya*, since by doing this one acquires identity with Śiva (*śivasāyujya*). Usually, what has come into contact with *liṅga* should be given to Caṅḍeśa and should not be taken by the devotees, but some Śaiva texts state that in the case of natural *liṅgās*, *bāṇa liṅgās*, and the idols made of gems and installed by *siddhas*, Caṅḍeśa does not have the *adhikāra* (authority/right) to receive *nirmālya*. But whenever it is Caṅḍeśa who holds the *adhikāra*, then the consummation of such *nirmālya* is forbidden to the devotees.<sup>48</sup>

From the material presented above, it can be seen that the role of food offerings is extremely important, since, on the one hand, these offerings enable a very special and intimate relation to be established between the devotees and the god. On the other hand, the attitude towards the leftovers from the offerings to gods differs not only in various traditions but also in different texts of the same tradition. Sometimes the scriptures allow their restricted usage and consummation, but the general tendency is to get rid of them in a safe manner, preferably by offering them to a deity specializing in neutralizing their power or by throwing them into deep water.<sup>49</sup>

In general, the remnants from the offerings to Śiva should especially be avoided, while Viṣṇu's *naivedya* is often perceived as pure and even purifying, and, for example, their purifying power is discussed in the *Āgamaprāmāṇya*. Religious texts usually dedicate several passages to the subject, and it seems very important to

47. See Sathyanarayanan 2012 and Sathyanarayanan 2015.

48. Edholm 1984, 83-85 refers for example to the *Śivapurāṇa*, and also mentions (*ibid.*, 87-88) the similarities of Rudra's role as a consumer of the remnants from the offering in the Vedic ritual and Śiva as the consumer, and thus neutralizer, of the by-product of the churning of the milk ocean. As regards the treatment of the remnants of the offerings to gods in the later Vaiṣṇava traditions, for example, the Caitanya movement, one can consult the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, *vilāsa* 8.

49. As Sathyanarayanan mentions (Sathyanarayanan 2012), in the case of the Śaiva tradition, while some texts, for example, the *Merutantra*, prescribe the consummation of the *nirmālya*, others, such as the *Pūrvakāmika*, advise getting rid of *nirmālya* by throwing it into deep water or by giving it to cows. This special faculty of cows, namely the ability to neutralize or take the dangerous effects or powers of the gods upon themselves, can also be observed in Vaiṣṇava temples, where a cow is taken to the temple in the morning to get the first sight/look of the awakened god.

know what could or should be offered, what is counted as *nirmālyā*<sup>50</sup> and what is not, and then, how these different substances should be dealt with after they have been consumed by gods.

50. For example, as mentioned by Sathyanarayanan (Sathyanarayanan 2012), a lotus that has been used once in the offering can be re-used for 5 days, *bilva* for 10 days and *tulsi* leaves for 11 days, provided that they are cleaned/washed.

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# Impregnating food. The miraculous conception motif in Indian narratives

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It is a well-known fact that, for many reasons, producing a son has always been of utmost importance for an Indian couple. For the husband, a male child meant not only the possibility to ensure the continuation of his patrilineage, but also the fulfilment of obligations to the ancestors. A woman truly entered her affinal home only with the birth of a child, and giving birth to a son made her incorporation into the husband's family worthy of celebration.

Everyday life in its all manifestations, along with all its sorrows and joys, is reflected in human literary creativity. No wonder, therefore, that the question of how to get a son has become the nucleus of many Sanskrit narratives as well as of folk tales in different vernaculars. Longing for a child stimulated their heroes to undertake different actions. All the methods used could be divided into three groups:

- I. ritualistic means (sacrifices, special rituals engendering a male issue),
- II. psycho-physical means (ascetic practices, fasts and other mortifications),
- III. animal and vegetal remedies (special food and concoctions).

It sometimes happens that the means belonging to two or all three groups are combined, whereas, at other times, another and immediate solution is undertaken, namely the adoption of a son. In any case, we shall focus on the motif of impregnating food, which occurs frequently in Indian narrative literature and poses interesting questions. Let us quote a handful of examples first.<sup>1</sup>

As collections of different stories, it seems that the adaptations of the *Bṛhatkathā* cycle are a good source of material. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva (11<sup>th</sup> century CE), as well as in the *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī*<sup>2</sup> of Kṣemendra (c. 990–1070

1. Some of these examples were discussed in my article (Sudyka 1992) devoted to the miraculous conception motif in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, published in the brochure *Seminarium Sanskrytu. Miscelanea* edited by Sławomir Cieślowski, Hubert Hladij and Lucyna Sawicka.

2. Both the *Kathāsaritsāgara* ('Ocean whose Rivers are Stories') and the *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* ('Cluster of Blossoms of the Great Story') belong to Sanskrit paraphrases of the now lost *Bṛhatkathā* ('Great Story'), written in 11<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir. The earliest Sanskrit version of the

CE), there is a story of a childless king,<sup>3</sup> Parityagasena (*Kathāsaritsāgara* VII.8). Together with his two wives he prayed to the Goddess Durgā and begged for a son. He fasted and slept on *darbha* grass for a long time and, finally, he saw the Goddess, who gave him two fruits for his wives to eat in order to obtain sons. One of the queens deceitfully ate both fruits and gave birth to twins. The name of the fruit is not specified, it is just given as *phaladvayam*, i.e. ‘a pair of fruits’. The story of King Vīrabhuja (*Kathāsaritsāgara* VII.5) shows a more ‘scientific’ treatment of childlessness. Although Vīrabhuja had a hundred wives, not one of them had borne him a son. He asked a physician (the text uses two terms: *vaīdya* and *bhīṣa*) for advice, and the latter then prepared a special soup (*rasaka*) from the flesh of a wild goat and gave it to ninety-nine of the queens along with some medicine. Alas, the doctor did not perceive the absence of the king’s beloved wife Guṇavarā. The physician found a solution for the problem by preparing a very special elixir made from goat’s horn for her. All the queens brought forth sons, but only Guṇavarā’s son had very auspicious marks on him and, as the rest of the story shows, he was the only son who deserved to be an heir to the throne. In the *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṃgraha*, a very ugly woman named Piṅgalikā was reminded by Viṣṇu about her good deed in a former birth which could provide her with a husband and many children. This consisted in a gift of a bushel of barley to a *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>4</sup> In this case, a mother-to-be was not a recipient of food but she herself donated it.

In the folktales of Bengal recorded by Lal Behari Day, one can find a story about a king who had seven wives and not a single offspring. One day a *sādhu* told him to pick seven mango fruits from a tree growing outside his capital city. After consuming the mangoes, all the queens gave birth to their children.<sup>5</sup> Yet another story from the same collection tells about a barren queen who was given a medicine by a certain holy man, who recommended her to drink it with pomegranate juice.<sup>6</sup> Then in due time she gave birth to a son as beautiful as a pomegranate flower, which is why he was called Dalim (Pomegranate). A folk tale from the Maharashtra region describes a king who, after ascetic practises and prayers to Śiva, was given two mango fruits for each of his two wives.<sup>7</sup> His

‘Great Story’ is the *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṃgraha* (‘Selection from the Great Story’) of Budhasvāmin (c. 8–9<sup>th</sup> century CE). More about these works in Warder 1990 and Warder 1992.

3. The problem of childlessness is particularly painful for kings and dangerous for their kingdoms. As noticed by King Udayana, one of the main heroes of the *Bṛhatkathā* adaptations, if he dies without a son, there will be no one to guard his fortune (*Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṃgraha* of Budhasvāmin, IV.43) and since, in such a case, his merits are few, his going to hell is a certainty (IV.53).

4. Maten 1973, 13–14.

5. Day 1912, 113.

6. *Ibid.*, 1.

7. Dikshit 1980, 33.



favourite wife did not believe in the miraculous properties of a common fruit, but the second one ate both of them and gave birth to twin boys.

What can be noticed while analysing these stories? The motif of miraculous conception after eating a certain fruit is very popular in folk tales all over the world.<sup>8</sup> However, is there any viable explanation as to why the mango fruit appears so frequently in such stories? Mary Brockington, in her article *Jarāsaṃdha and the Magic Mango: Causes and Consequences in Epic and Oral Tales*, states that the mango fruit offered by the sage Caṇḍakaśika to the barren King Bṛhadratha may be the earliest recorded instance of its use as part of a fertility-charm. She also points to the fact that it was not only the mango fruit, but also other parts of the tree that 'have had erotic associations in Indian literature since at least the time of Kālidāsa (...)'.<sup>9</sup> Mango leaves are considered auspicious in marriage rituals as they are believed to assure the birth of sons. It is said that whenever there is a birth of a son, a mango tree bears new leaves. Oral tales abound in mango-motifs.<sup>10</sup> Mary Brockington mentions 'the association with the fertility of the mango stone, seen among the Gadaba and Kond tribes as resembling human testicles (...)'.<sup>11</sup> It is worth indicating that mangoes very often grow in pairs: one fruit is bigger, the other smaller (Fig. 1). And this is perhaps the hint which unravels the mystery of involving mangoes in fertility-charms: the equivalence between macro- and microcosm, exactly as explained by Paracelsus, who believed that all earthly objects are impressed with divine powers (macrocosm), and in this way we have 'signatures', i.e. the indications as to which parts of the body (microcosm) they could serve as the best remedies and medications; in other words: to understand the world of the human body, knowledge of the functioning of the universe is needed. This way of reasoning is in fact very close to the Indian way of thinking, where attempts were made to correlate different macrocosmic principles with corresponding microcosmic ones.

Conception after drinking pomegranate juice can also be explained in a similar manner: the fruit consists of so many seeds. The potential to give birth to hundreds of new plants is hidden inside this quite small 'seeded apple'. The same concerns the gift of the bushel of barley – each barley ear has many seeds. Piṅgalikā had given a bushel of barley to a *brāhmaṇa* which was, indeed, a very pious act, but the fact that her gift consists of grain seeds is of greater importance. In return, the ugly woman was blessed with a husband and many children.

8. See the chapter 'Conception and Birth' in the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Thompson 1957, 302-5.

9. Brockington 2000, 86.

10. Perhaps the legend about finding the famous courtesan Ambapāli/Amrapāli in the mango grove, hence her name, is also associated with this motif.

11. Brockington 2000, 87.

The story concerning King Vīrabhuja and his wives seems to address the problem of childlessness from a more rational standpoint. The physician is asked for advice and he prepares an extract from wild goat's meat. According to ancient medical treatises, what did physicians recommend for childless couples? Of course, first of all aphrodisiacs. The libidinal effects of eating special food, spices, herbs, and minerals were important but also some remedies to cure this particular inability were recommended. In the ninth *adhya*ya of *Cikitsāsthāna* of the *Carakasamhitā*, for instance, 'auspicious clarified butter' (Skt. *kalyāṇakam ghṛtam*) is recommended for barren women (*strīṇām ca vandhyānām*). It must have been a time-consuming endeavour to prepare this substance because the recipe names as many as 28 different ingredients, which should be ground together and added to the clarified butter together with *akṣa*,<sup>12</sup> and then boiled together with water until  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the liquid remains. But it was worth putting effort into preparing it, since, among other beneficial properties, it was the best remedy for obtaining a male child as Caraka indicates: 'This auspicious clarified butter is the best in respect of bringing forth male progeny' (*kalyāṇakam idaṃ sarpiḥ śreṣṭhaṃ puṃsavaneṣu ca, Carakasamhitā IX.23a*).

Among all these ingredients, pomegranate – *dāḍīma* – is mentioned. This time, however, its role is not decisive; it is just one of many substances, but the belief in its beneficial influence on generative organs and fertility possibly comes from folk tradition. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the nutritious values of certain remedies are also taken into consideration by the authors of medical treatises. To function properly, the human body and mind should be in good condition and for this purpose proper food is needed. This mixture known as *kalyāṇakam ghṛtam* is also described as effecting long life and vigour (*āyur-bala-pradam*).

To get back to the Vīrabhuja story, the queens received special treatment here, namely a dish made from wild goat meat. Eating big game as a good diet to maintain sexual activity is shown as one of the benefits of hunting, which is otherwise considered as one of the addictions or vices (Skt. *vyasana*) of the human race.<sup>13</sup> According to the *Śyainikaśāstra* ('A Treatise on Hunting with a Hawk') ascribed to Rājā Rudradeva of Kumaon:

By the eating of the wholesome meat of the wild boar and buffaloes bagged

12. *akṣa* – most probably *Terminalia bellerica* (see Meulenbeld 1974, 521, 601).

13. E.g. in Kauṭīliya's *Arthaśāstra*, hunting is mentioned as the last among eighteen addictions discussed in the *Puruṣavyasanasarga*. It is stated that between hunting and gambling, hunting is the worse vice, seeing that falling into the hands of robbers, enemies, and elephants, getting into wild fire, fear, the inability to distinguish between the cardinal points, hunger, thirst and loss of life are evils consequent upon hunting. But, Kauṭīliya remarks, there are also positive things which should be said about hunting: exercise, the disappearance of phlegm, bile, fat, and sweat, the acquisition of the skill of aiming at stationary and moving bodies, the ascertainment of the appearance of beasts when provoked and occasional marching (AŚ VIII.3).

in hunting, sexual desire and capacity are increased, which leads to the enjoyment of women by the increase of strength. (III.25)<sup>14</sup>

Such a diet could help men to have progeny. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, women were served game only once, just as medicine. And the most important of these women received a *rasaka* made from goat's horn, which according to the physician was the best remedy, and, indeed, this decoction produced the best results. The boy who was born, after the queen had eaten the cooked meat extracted from the horns (*śṛṅgamamṣa*), and hence called Śṛṅgabhuja, was a paragon of handsomeness and possessed all the possible and necessary qualities of an heir to the throne. The sexual connotations of the wild goat and its horns are obvious and this must be the reason for introducing it into a fertility-charm.

One could also take into consideration the fact that all these tales about impregnating food, so popular among tribal people in different parts of the world, are based on a close observation of nature, and certain substances introduced into the diet can really stimulate procreativity and even help in programming the sex of the progeny. As confirmed by modern pharmacology, certain parts of animal organisms provide precious substances and drugs. Horns and hooves provide amino acids, the urine of pregnant cows or mares contains folliculin, and so on. Perhaps interesting hints for medical doctors are still hidden in folk tales, and according to Paracelsus's statement:

Not all things the physician must know are taught in the academies. Now and then, he must turn to old women, to Tartars who are called gypsies, to itinerant musicians, to elderly country folk and many others who are frequently held in contempt.<sup>15</sup>

And it must be said that nowadays there is an increasing awareness about the medicinal properties of plants and other ingredients known and applied by traditional medicine. Modern medicine can profit from the knowledge developed over generations within different communities. Scientists are testing various plants used by indigenous medicine centuries ago. Quite recently, researchers have tested the reproductive impact of aqueous mango leaf extract on rats. In conclusion they write:

Estradiol level was also significantly increased compared to control while other hormones such as progesterone and LH were not affected. FSH is responsible for stimulating the growth of the graffian follicles indicating that the MILE [i.e. aqueous leaf extract of *Mangifera indica* – LS] influenced the cycle via the pituitary ovarian axis hormones, as a reduction in the FSH level will also potentate a decrease in growth of the follicles which are ultimately

14. *Śyainikaśāstra*, Shāstri 1910, 10.

15. Debus 1978, 10.

released during ovulation. However, no significant alteration was recorded in the number of implants or viable fetus at day 19 of pregnancy in extract treated rats compared to control. Further work will be required to investigate the effect of the extract on ovulation and fertilization of the oocyte.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, in the future and following further research, it could turn out that *Mangifera indica* leaves or other parts of this plant could actually have an impact on human fertility, and that it was not only magical thinking which associated it with procreativity.

16. Awobajo–Olatunji–Bello–Ogbewey 2013, 62. I should like to thank Dr. Thomas Kintaert who brought this article to my attention.

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Fig. 1. Branches of mango tree with fruits (photo L. Sudyka).





# Let the feast go on: Food and eating on the battlefield of Lankā

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The cultural landscape of India, from the earliest Vedic period to contemporary times, is littered with food.  
Patrick Olivelle<sup>1</sup>

The eater of food and food indeed are everything here.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. *Introductory remarks*

In the opening lines of the battle passages in Book 6 (*Lankā*) of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, where the climax of the war between Rām and Rāvaṇ (6.39-103) is described,<sup>3</sup> Rāvaṇ, reacting to the war cries of his adversary's troops, utters some very significant words:

'Monkeys have come encouraged by Death,  
[While] all my demons are hungry',  
Said that ignorant villain, bursting out with a loud laughter.  
'Vidhi<sup>4</sup> has sent [us] food just straight home'.<sup>5</sup>  
(6.40.2)

These lines introduce Tulsīdās's audiences to the battle of Lankā, considered by Rāvaṇ, one of its chief actors, as an occasion for a meal to appease the demons'

1. Olivelle 1995, 367.

2. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.1.6.19; see Smith 1990, 177.

3. All references to Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas* are to the text as constituted in the Gītā Press edition.

4. 'Vidhi/Bidhi' – a title of Brahmā as Creator. However, since in the *Rāmcaritmānas* it may also refer to Rām in his unqualified (*nirguṇ*) aspect of the Supreme Being, I have decided to leave this epithet in its original form in order not to narrow its multilayered meaning.

5. *āe kīsa kāla ke prete / chudhāvanta saba nisicara mere // asa kahī aṭṭahāsa satha kīnhā / gṛha baiṭhe ahāra bidhi dīnhā.*

hunger. They also bring to mind an inspiring article by Vidyut Aklujkar in which she discusses a banquet metaphor employed in the early manuscripts of Sūrdās's poems describing the battle between Rām and Rāvaṇ.<sup>6</sup> Underlining the novelty of the metaphor in this context, Aklujkar notes that while uncommon, it is not unprecedented,<sup>7</sup> and her main argument allows her to reveal new sources for Sūrdās's Rām poems – the *Ānandarāmāyaṇa* and the *Hanumannāṭaka*. Observing the unusual choice of imagery in this context,<sup>8</sup> she also very rightly notes that while the figure of speech used by Sūrdās in his poem is a '*sāṅga rūpaka*, or extended metaphor, where a situation is paralleled with another in a number of details', which is common in Sanskrit as well as in vernacular poetry, '[t]he imagery used in numerous Rāma-kathā texts almost always is from the realm of nature'.<sup>9</sup> Aklujkar refers for example to the *Vālmiki-Rāmayāṇa* where we read of Rāma's and Rāvaṇa's '*showers of arrows*' or that 'Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa being shot by Indrajit's arrows appear *like two mountains being drenched by torrential rain*', 'Rāma covered with blood resembles a *kiṁśuka tree in blossom*' or that '[t]he brilliance of warrior Rāma is *like the blinding brilliance of the Sun at the end of an eon*'. She also notes that the same applies to Tulsīdās, the key author of this paper, who 'confines himself to the traditional choice of nature imagery and uses the metaphor of torrential rains at the time of the deluge in describing the shower of arrows in this battle'.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Tulsīdās goes far beyond this in his use of nature imagery. And we can best illustrate this point by quoting a few examples from his work, some of which very interestingly refer to phenomena that can, even if only by the power of convention, be observed in the animal realm:

[Rāvaṇ said:] 'All champions, set forth in four directions,  
Seize bears and monkeys and eat them all!  
'O, Umā', said Śiv, 'Rāvaṇ is so self-conceited  
As a *tittibha* bird<sup>11</sup> that sleeps with its feet up!<sup>12</sup>  
(6.40.3)

6. Aklujkar 1991. The poem in question, which does not appear in the *Sūrsāgar*'s edition published by the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā (esp. 191-254), is number 373 in Bryant–Hawley 2015, 633-39.

7. For more details see Aklujkar 1991.

8. *Ibid.*, 353.

9. *Ibid.*, 354.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Identified as the red-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*; see e.g. <http://aranyaparva.wordpress.com/tag/tittibha/>; access on 10 August 2014), believed to sleep in such a manner in order to prevent an unexpected falling of the sky. Its way of sleeping is also said to indicate how self-conceited it is. In the quoted lines, Rāvaṇ is said to be a *tittibha* bird and Rām is the sky that may fall; Añjanānandaśaraṇ 1998, 229-30.

12. *subhaṭa sakala cārihū disi jāhū / dhari dhari bhālu kisa saba khāhū // umā rāvanahi asa abhimānā / jimi tittibha khaga sūta utānā*.

They [demons] rush forth  
*As if a flock of meat-eating foolish birds who,  
 Having seen piles of bloodred stones,  
 Do not even think that their beak may break on them.*<sup>13</sup>  
 (6.40.5)

Kumbhakarna, having seized myriads of monkeys, was devouring them,  
 [And it looked] *like a swarm of locusts filling a mountain cave.*<sup>14</sup>  
 (6.67.1)

Those hit with [Rām's] arrows *thunder as rain clouds.*<sup>15</sup>  
 (6.68.4)

Bear and monkey troops fled,  
*Like a flock of sheep at the sight of wolves.*<sup>16</sup>  
 (6.70.1)

Each of his ten heads was hit with a hundred of [Lakṣmaṇ's] arrows,  
 And they looked *like serpents entering the top of the mountain.*<sup>17</sup>  
 (6.83.3)

Who will count elephants, footmen, horses, donkeys  
 And various vehicles that are like *aquatic animals [living in that river of  
 blood],*  
 Arrows, spears and lances that *are like serpents, bows – its waves,  
 And shields – a mass of turtles?*<sup>18</sup>  
 (6.87 *chand*)

Although nature imagery prevails in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the battlefield descriptions in the poem also use imagery founded on food on more than one occasion. One such example comes from the scene in which Aṅgad and Hanumān enter the fort of Laṅkā and fight with demons – the poet uses a simile that likens the demons' heads to vessels with yogurt:

They crush one [demon] against another  
 And [then] tear off their heads

13. *jimi arunopala nikara nihārī / dhāvahī saṭha khaga māsa ahārī // cōca bhaṅga dukha tinhaḥi na sūjhā / timi dhāe manujāda abūjhā.* This image is based on equating meat and rubies with monkeys and bears, all of which are of a red or russet-red colour.

14. *koṭī koṭī kapi dhari dhari khārī / janu tīṭī giri guhā samā.*

15. *lāgata bāna jalada jimi gājahī .*

16. *bhāge bhālu balimukha jūtha / bṛku biloki jimi meṣa barūthā .*

17. *sata sata sara māre dasa bhālā / giri sṛṅganha janu prabisahī byālā.*

18. *jalajantu gaja padacara turaga khara bibidha bāhana ko gane / sara sakti tomara sarpa cāpa tarānga carma kamaṭha ghane.*

That fall under Rāvaṇ's feet  
 And burst open like vessels with yogurt.<sup>19</sup>  
 (6.44)

Returning to Sūrdās and Aklujkar's article, we may conclude that she demonstrates how the use of a metaphor, which in her opinion is not well suited to describing a well-known topic, allows the poet to display 'his originality and to use the metaphor in an off-beat situation quite successfully'.<sup>20</sup>

This lengthy reference to Aklujkar's article is an indispensable introduction here, since it was actually her work that started me thinking about Tulsīdās's choice of imagery in his treatment of the battle between Rām and Rāvaṇ, which outwardly, especially after reading Aklujkar, may seem so traditional and usual. However, is this really so? My paper offers an investigation into the battle imagery used by Tulsīdās. Focusing on the relevant portions of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, it seeks to analyse the importance of food and eating in Tulsīdās's treatment of the battle and their role in creating the poem's symbolic and metaphorical imagery. It also forms an attempt at a discussion of the role of references to food and eating in the construction of the narrative of the battle portion of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and of its message.

## 2. The battlefield of Laṅkā

Let us first recapitulate the situation on the battlefield of Laṅkā, where the fight between the two contending armies of the two opponents, Rām and Rāvaṇ, takes place during the daytime, i.e. from sunrise to sunset.<sup>21</sup> As is well known from tradition, the first army is formed of bears and monkeys, the other one from the host of demons, usually referred to in the poem as *nisācara*,<sup>22</sup> lit. 'walking by night'.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the battle, Lakṣmaṇ fights by Rām's side, while Rāvaṇ is at times supported by his kinsmen, in particular by his son Meghnād and his brother Kumbhakarna.

The above-mentioned words uttered by Rāvaṇ before the beginning of the battle (6.40.2), as well as a number of other passages from the poem (6.40.3, 6.40.5, 6.67.1, 6.70.1) and the words of one of his ministers (6.8.5),<sup>24</sup> visualize

19. *eka eka sō mardahī tori calāvahī muṇḍa / rāvana āgē parahī te janu phūṭahī dadhi kuṇḍa*.

20. Aklujkar 1991, 355.

21. E.g. *sandhyā bhāi phirī dvau bāhanī* (6.55.2); *dīna kē anta phirī dvau anī* (6.72.1); *nisā sirāni bhayau bhīnusārā* (6.78.2).

22. Please note that all words cited from the *Rāmcaritmānas* are given in their Avadhī forms used in the poem.

23. Referred to twice as *pisāca/pisācā* (6.68.2 and 68).

24. This line features not only bears and monkeys but also men, who occupy the prominent first place here: 'men, monkeys and bears are our food' (*nara kapi bhālu ahāra hamārā*).

bears and monkeys as the natural food of demons, so it is logical that during the battle they become their easy prey. However, sometimes bears and monkeys are lucky enough to escape with their lives, and one of the most spectacular examples is lines 6.67.1-4,<sup>25</sup> featuring Kumbhakarna in a martial mood:

He caught myriads of them and crushed them against [his] body,  
Myriads of them he rubbed into the dust,  
While crowds of bears and monkeys  
Escaped through his mouth, nose and ears.<sup>26</sup>  
(6.67.2)

This tragicomic image is followed by a very significant line, worth quoting here, especially in view of the discussion that will follow in the subsequent part of the paper:

The demon [Kumbhakarna], overcome with a warlike mood, was so self-conceited  
As if Vidhi had sacrificed to him the universe which he was about to swallow.<sup>27</sup>  
(6.67.3)

In this context, we may add that Kumbhakarna enters the battle after a long sleep, having eaten myriads of buffaloes and having drunk alcohol.<sup>28</sup>

In another place, frightened monkeys are depicted as turning to Rām for his help, when Rāvaṇ is devouring them like Time/Death (*kāla*):

O, Raghubīr! O, Lord, save us, save us!  
This villain is eating us like Time!<sup>29</sup>  
(6.82.4)

However, throughout the battle and on more than one occasion, bears and monkeys empowered with Rām's energy and glory (*rāmapratāpa prabala*; 6.42.1) prove their might.<sup>30</sup> Not only do they not fall prey to the demons but, changing the normal course of things, they also make the demons their own prey:

25. For line 6.67.1 see above.

26. The two last lines mean that he was gobbling them up! *koṭinḥa gahi sarīra sana mardā / koṭinḥa mīji milava mahi gardā // mukha nāsā śravananhi kī bāṭā / nisari parāhi bhālu kapi ṭhātā.*

27. *rana mada matta nisācara darpā / bisva grasīhi janu chi bidhi arpā.*

28. *koṭi ghaṭa mada aru mahiṣa aneka* (6.63) and *mahiṣa khāi kari madirā pānā* (6.64.1).

29. *pāhi pāhi raghubīra gosāi / yaha khala khāi kāla kī nāi.*

30. Cf. e.g. 6.81.2: 'monkeys [are] victorious thanks to the power of Rām' (*kapi jayasīla rāmbala tāte*).

Bears and monkeys perform the unusual –  
 They seize fleeing warriors and dash them down to the ground.  
 They grab [demons by] their feet and throw them to the ocean.  
 Crocodiles, serpents and fish seize hold of [demons] and eat [them].<sup>31</sup>  
 (6.47.4)

These lines address a crucial problem: those who are initially considered to be eaters of food are actually eaten here – they become food,<sup>32</sup> and the poet stresses that the unusual happens, making use of the phrase *adbhuta karanī* for this purpose. It is also worth noting here that monkeys and bears do not eat their prey themselves, but feed them to aquatic animals. The commentators on the *Rāmcaritmānas* see this as repaying the debt of gratitude for the help these animals had given to Rām’s army during the ocean crossing.<sup>33</sup>

There is also another, quite similar, situation at a later stage of the battle (6.81.2-4), when the monkeys and bears, caught up in this martial mood, launch a frenzied attack on the demons. They not only crush their foe but, what is more, they tear their faces apart, pull out their entrails and hang them around their own necks (6.81 *chand* 1-2), as if they were victory garlands (*jayamālā*). According to the commentators, this happens in retaliation for all the cows and Brahmins who had ever been eaten by the mouths of demons and filled their bellies.<sup>34</sup>

Not only warriors are present on the battlefield. With the advancement of military activities and as the number of victims increases, the battlefield becomes flooded with those who feed on the fallen in the battle. There are flocks of carnivorous creatures – birds such as crows (*kāka*), white kites (*kaṅka*) and vultures (*gīdha*) and packs of jackals (*jambukā*), but the most prominent among these are *bhūtas*, *pisācas*, *betālas* as well as *joginīs*<sup>35</sup> and *cāmuṅḍas*. They really feast on the battlefield and/or rejoice in being there:

*Bhūtas, pisācas, betālas* and terrifying Śiv’s attendants  
 With matted hair bathe [in this river of blood].  
 Crows and kites grab [cut-off] arms and fly with them,

31. *bhāgata bhaṭa paṭakahī dhari dharanī / karahī bhālu kapi adbhuta karanī // gahi pada dārahī sāgara māhī / makara uraḡa jhaṣa dhari dhari khāhī*.

32. Cf. Añjanīnandanśaraṇ 1998, 255. Brian K. Smith’s extremely apt observation also catches our attention in this context: ‘Eating is, then, both the destruction of food and the continual reappropriation of it as it ever regenerates itself. Eating and killing were two sides of the same coin. But eating was also frankly regarded as the perpetual reenactment of the defeat and subjugation of one’s rival’; Smith 1990, 185; cf. Smith’s part of *Introduction* to Manu, xxv.

33. Añjanīnandanśaraṇ 1998, 255. See also Smith 1990, esp. 177-79.

34. Añjanīnandanśaraṇ 1998, 433. Cf. also 6.45.2 where *nisācaras* are referred to as man-eaters (*manujāda*) and Brahmin-eaters (*dvijāmiṣa*).

35. Explained by *Mānas-pīyūṣ* (Añjanīnandanśaraṇ 1998, 465) as ‘companions of Kālī’ (*Kālī devikī sahcariyā*). In modern Hindi dictionaries, the noun *joginī* is glossed as ‘war-goddess’ (*ek prakār kī raṇ devī*) or ‘demonness’ (*pisācinī*); Varmā 1992<sup>2</sup>, 386.

Having snatched them from one another, they devour them.

Some of them say: 'Hey, you fools! Even in such an abundance  
Cannot you forego this your [mentality of] paupers?'  
(...)

Vultures pull out entrails in such a way as if  
Giving themselves over to fishing on the river bank.  
Many warriors are carried away by the river  
And birds go on top of them as if playing boat-games on the river.

*Joginīs* collect skulls, filling them [with blood].<sup>36</sup>  
Wives of *bhūtas* and *pisācas* dance in the sky.  
*Cāmuṇḍās* beat time by sounding cymbals of warriors' skulls  
And sing in various ways.

Packs of jackals, gnashing their teeth, tear [corpses] apart  
And eat them. They growl at one another, eat their fill and bark at one  
another.<sup>37</sup>  
(6.88.1-5)

*Betālas*, *bhūtas*, *pisācas* and *joginīs* also appear when demons resort to their power of illusion (*māyā*), as in the case of Meghnād (6.52.1) or Rāvaṇ, who used this ability just before his culminating duel with Rām (6.101.1-2).

It is worth noting here that during the night-time suspension of military activities, two sacrifices are performed outside the battlefield: one by Meghnād (6.75.1-76.1) and the other by Rāvaṇ himself (6.84-85), both of which are disrupted by monkeys. Meghnād's sacrifice, meant to make him invincible (*ajaya makha*), is a fire offering of blood and buffaloes (*āhuti deta rudhira aru bhaīsā / kīnha kapinha saba jagya bidhāsā*; 6.76.1). The text, however, remains silent as to who the beneficiary or beneficiaries were of both sacrifices, nor do we know what was offered in the sacrifice performed by Rāvaṇ. I mention these here not only because they are in the form of food offerings, but also with regard to the centuries-old Indian tradition – noted by many scholars<sup>38</sup> – of identifying feed-

36. Cf. 6.101.2 where *joginīs* drink fresh blood from human skulls (*kari sadya sonita pāna*).

37. *majjhī bhūta pisāca betālā / pramatha mahā jhoṭiṅga karālā // kāka kaṅka lai bhujā uṛāhī / eka te chīni lai khāhī // eka kahāhī aisiu saūghāi / saṭhahu tumhāra daridra na jāi // (...)*  
*khaīcahī gīdha āta taṭa bhae / janu baṁsī khelata cita dae // bahu bhaṭa bahāhī caṭhe khaga jāhī*  
*/ janu nāvāri khelahī sari māhī // joginī bhari bhari khappara saīcahī / bhūta pisāca badhū*  
*nabha naīcahī // bhaṭa kapāla karatāla bajāvahī / cāmuṇḍā nānā bidhi gāvahī // jambuka nikara*  
*kaṭkkata kaṭṭahī / khāhī huāhī aghāhī dapaṭṭahī.*

38. See e.g. the article of Brian K. Smith where he observes that '[s]acrifice, cooking, feeding, and eating were close kin in Vedism' and points to the fact that '[t]he identification of ordinary eating and drinking with the sacrifice (the stomach envisioned as an internal sacrificial fire) is already found at ŚB 10.5.4.12 where what man drinks is equated with sacrificial oblations and

ing and eating with sacrifice; these offerings are also food for supernatural beings, who should at least be mentioned in the discussion of the diners at Lañkā.

3. *Who actually eats what in Lañkā? The symbolism of food and eating in the Rāmcaritmānas*<sup>39</sup>

While the above-described feast takes place on the battlefield and in its vicinity, the protagonist and the antagonist of the story, Rām and Rāvaṇ, are almost absent from the picture. In fact, contrary to what might be expected, they do not figure prominently on the scene almost until the climax of the battle. Of course, this may simply be explained by their roles as commanders in chief, who – as a rule – were not overexposed in the front line. A more critical explanation relates this to strategies employed by Tulsīdās in the composition of his poem with the aim of clearly defining its leading characters (to a great extent shaped by tradition) and of putting forward his work’s ideological message that translates into the use of figurative language. Thus, before we focus on Rām and Rāvaṇ, who – notwithstanding – are the key actors in the battle, and examine three crucial situations that directly and indirectly relate to them, let us briefly recount the main characteristics of the poem’s protagonist.

In my earlier research devoted to the *Rāmcaritmānas* as one of the best, most accomplished and most interesting expressions of north Indian Bhakti,<sup>40</sup> I paid special attention to its protagonist, the God Rām. In his complete, i.e. an earthly – or more precisely, kingly – manifestation of the Ultimate Being, he epitomizes the most characteristic features of north Indian Bhakti and has also become an important cultural figure. He is God of composite nature, infinite in his mercy. In his non-manifested form, he is a *nirguṇ Brahman* – the unknowable, unqualified Ultimate Being, and in his manifested form, he is a *saguṇ Brahman* – the qualified, personal Supreme Being. He is seen as the foundation and soul of the world (*ṣaḍādhārā*; 6.77.2; *ṣaḍātmā*; 6.35.3) which he pervades, dwelling in ‘the city of the hearts of all’ (*śaba ura pura*; 1.120.3). As the Supreme Being, who has become incarnate as a human, he has to overcome numerous adversities. The intertwining elements of Rām’s nature are often impossible to separate, but Tulsīdās’s poem leaves no doubt – whatever Rām does in this world, having appeared in the form of Daśarath’s son, it is a divine drama or *līlā*. In the context of our discussion, it is also important to note that Tulsīdās pictures Rām as a God who is ready to protect anyone, irrespective of

what he eats is identified with the fuel for the sacrificial fire. Cf. ŚB 11.1.7.2. This theme recurs frequently in later texts; Smith 1990, 181 together with note 11 and *Introduction* to Manu, xxii-xxx.

39. I draw here on the subtitle of Jonathan Parry’s inspiring article: Parry 1985.

40. See e.g. Stasik 2009 and Stasik 2013.



their status or morals, and it is not difficult to secure his compassion. He is compassionate not only towards the *bhaktas* who are sincerely devoted to him, but even to those who (albeit demons) incidentally, or even in hatred, utter his name: having done so, they become released from the wheel of birth (6.45.1-3). Time/Death, deeds and lives are in Rām's hands (*kāla karama jīva jākē hāthā*, 6.6.5). Last but not least, he is the Devourer of the Serpent of Time (*kāla byāla kara bhacchaka*; 6.54.4), the one at whose will Death dies (*kāla mara jākī icchā*; 6.102.2), he is – the Death of Death (*kālahu kara kālā*, 5.39.1).<sup>41</sup>

One of the most important questions for Tulsīdās is *dharma* and following its path, which seems to be a natural consequence of the reasons for Rām's *avatāra* who 'descends to earth for the sake of *dharma*' (*dharama hetu avatarehu*, 4.9.3). There are many passages in the *Rāmcaritmānas* that refer to *dharma* directly.<sup>42</sup> In the culminating stage of the war, before his decisive encounter with Rāvaṇ, Rām sets off for the battle on foot, with *dharma* as his chariot (*dharmamaya ratha*); thanks to this, he is able to defeat not only Rāvaṇ but also life and death, the most potent of foes from the human perspective – the cycle of rebirths (6.80.2-80).

Let us now proceed to examine the aforementioned situations that directly or indirectly relate to Rām and Rāvaṇ, i.e., firstly, Hanumān and Aṅgad's treatment of the demons when they both attack the fort of Laṅkā; secondly, the death of Kumbhakarṇa, and thirdly – Rāvaṇ's death.<sup>43</sup>

Especially when discussing the first of these situations, one should remember that the monkeys fight empowered with Rām's might and glory (*pratāpa*), and whatever they do, such as killing demons, they do it in the name of this God or even on his behalf. They kill demons with Rām's name on their lips, yelling to their enemy that this is the result of their not worshipping him (6.44.1-4). Their war cry: 'Reap the fruit of not worshipping Rām!' (6.44.4),<sup>44</sup> is

41. For more on Rām's nature see Stasik 2009, esp. 227-47. It is worth noting here that when Lakṣmaṇ falls on the battlefield struck by Rāvaṇ with a terrible Brahmā spear (n.b. he is referred to here as 'Master of Three Worlds', *Tribhuvanadhani*, not recognised by Rāvaṇ!), Rām tells him: 'Consider this in your heart: you are the devourer of death and the saviour of gods' (*samujhu jīva bhrātā / tumha kṛtāntabhakṣaka suratrātā*; 6.84.3).

42. Their exact number is 172; Callewaert-Lutgendorf 1997, 147-49; cf. Sūryakānt 1973, 265-56 and 268.

43. An analysis of these situations, in which special attention would be paid to verbs and direct object arguments, although beyond the scope of the present study, seems interesting and only natural, especially in view of the fact that certain Hindi verbs, among them *khānā* 'to eat', do not allow for the omission of their direct object. Cf. a Polish sentence '*Jan je*', an English sentence '*John is eating*' or a Hindi sentence '*Mohan khānā khā rahā hai*' in which, as observed by S. Löbner, even if the direct object is omitted, it is understood that 'the concept "eat" necessarily involves a second argument. Eating cannot be defined without relating to something that is eaten. Therefore that argument is understood to be involved in the situation described, even if it is not specified'; Löbner 2013<sup>2</sup>, 114.

44. *bhājahu na rāmaḥi so phala lehu*.

expressive of the Bhakti dimension of the poem, elaborated in the following lines:

The greatest of the greatest chiefs caught by them [Hanumān and  
 Aṅgad],  
 Are dragged by [their] feet and taken to [the] Lord.  
 Vibhīṣaṇ tells Rām their names  
 And even to them he bestows [a place] in his own abode.<sup>45</sup>  
 (6.45.1)

The last line of this passage expresses the actual meaning of the war in Laṅkā and, in fact, of all the encounters of this kind with Rām, i.e. when he sets out to eliminate unrighteousness, the symptom of chaos in any sphere. The sense of such an encounter for a wrong-doer is to die at the hands of Rām and go straight to his abode. The paradox is that thanks to Rām's compassion and mercy, refuge – liberation – is so easily attained by wicked men- and Brahmin-eating demons, while accomplished ascetics have to humbly ask for it (*khala manujāda dvijāmiṣa bhogī / pāvahī gati jo jācata jogī* 6.45.2).

Let us now recount the second of these situations, i.e. the episode ending with Kumbhakarṇa's death, in which the poet continues the same train of thought but, in the most crucial moments, uses imagery based on food and eating. Kumbhakarṇa, before he enters the battle to relieve Rāvaṇ and his army, virtually scolds his brother for leading Laṅkā into war with Rām who has gods (e.g. Śiv, Brahmā) as his servants (6.63.3).<sup>46</sup> This episode reveals its Bhakti dimension especially in the lines that depict Kumbhakarṇa looking forward to feasting his eyes on the beauty of the dark body and lotus eyes of Rām who relieves all from the three sufferings<sup>47</sup> (*locana suphala karaū māi jāi / syāma gāta sarasīruha locana / dekhaū jāi tāpa traya mocana*; 6.63.4). He is also depicted as being lost for a moment in contemplation of Rām's nature and his qualities (*rāma rūpa guna sumirata magana bhayau chana eka*; 6.63) – conduct which is typical of a *Rām-bhakta* but rather unexpected on the part of Kumbhakarṇa. This mood continues in Kumbhakarṇa's meeting with Vibhīṣaṇ in whom Kumbhakarṇa is happy to recognize a *Rām-bhakta* (*raghupati bhakta jāni mana bhāyo*; 6.64.2). He even calls Vibhīṣaṇ 'the ornament of the family of demons' (*nisicara kula bhūṣana*; 6.64.4) and says that he has made their family illustrious by worshipping Rām, the ocean of splendour and happiness (*bandhu baṁsa tāi kīnha ujāgara / bhajehu rāma sobhā sukha sāgara*; 6.64.5).

However, as is well known from tradition, Kumbhakarṇa entered the battlefield to fight against Rām's troops. He succeeds in breaking the morale of the

45. *mahā mahā mukhiā je pāvahī / te pada gahi prabhu pāsa calāvahī // kahai bibhīṣaṇu tinha ke nāmā / dehī rāma tinhaū nija dhāmā.*

46. *sīva birañci sura jāke sevaka.*

47. Namely, material, supernatural and spiritual; cf. Prasād 2005<sup>7</sup>, 475.

monkey troops and in subduing Hanumān and Sugrīva, their commanders. The poet comments on this through the words of Śiva, one of the chief narrators of the story in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, who says that Rām, without batting an eye, devours Time/Death. Allowing for such a state of affairs, he is simply playing his role as a man (*naralīlā*).<sup>48</sup> Tulsīdās draws his audience's attention here to Rām as the Ultimate Being – the Devourer of Time, Death. When the situation so requires, he enters the battlefield in this form and everything is then conclusive, brought back to normal and to harmony.

At the final stage of his duel with Rām, it seems as if Kumbhakarṇa wants to devour the three worlds (*grasana cahata mānahū trailokā*, 6.70.6). However, not long after, he is the one to be 'devoured' by Rām:

He [Kumbhakarṇa] fell to the ground like [two] mountains from the sky,  
Crushing monkeys, bears and demons that were below him.  
His [life] energy filled the mouth of Lord (...).<sup>49</sup>  
(6.71.4)

In this multi-layered image, Rām figures as the all-devouring Time/Death, the Death of Death that stops the cycle of rebirths, bringing about liberation and allowing one to commune with the Lord in his abode. Such an understanding is further corroborated by Śiva's words in the closing couplet of the whole stanza: '[O, Girijā! Rām] gave [a place in] his own abode to that vile demon, a mire of sin' (*nisicara adhamā malākara tāhi dīnha nija dhāma*, 6.71).

Finally, we come to the third situation, Rāvaṇ's death, which is one of the culminating moments in the poem's narrative. It ensues after a long duel with Rām, who had learnt the secret of Rāvaṇ's immortality from Vibhīṣaṇ. He shoots thirty-one arrows – one at Rāvaṇ's navel, in which *pīyūṣ*, the food of gods, had been hidden, and the rest at his ten heads and twenty arms (6.102-103.1). This results in a horrifying scene, in which Rāvaṇ's head- and handless trunk dances on the earth which begins to sink, causing Rām to shoot again and divide the trunk into two parts (6.103.1-2). The earth quakes, seas and rivers seethe, and the elephants of the quarters (*diggaṇā*) and mountains are restless. When Rāvaṇ finally collapses, Rām's arrows lay Rāvaṇ's heads and hands in front of Mandodarī<sup>50</sup> and obediently return to Rām's quiver (6.103.4). Rāvaṇ meets the very same end as Kumbhakarṇa – he is 'devoured' by Rām: 'His [life] energy filled the mouth of Lord' (*tāsu teja samāna prabhu ānana*, 6.103.5). All

48. (...) *karata raghupati naralīlā / (...) bhṛkuṭi bhaṅga jo kālahi khāi / tāhi ki sohai aisi larāi* (6.66.1).

49. *pare bhūmi jimi nabha tē bhūdhara / heṭha dābi kapi bhālu nisācara // tāsu teja prabhu badana samānā*.

50. According to the commentators on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, this happens out of a special kind of respect paid to Rāvaṇ, a measure that is meant to protect his corpse against being eaten by dogs and other carnivorous animals. Añjanānandaśaraṇ 1998, 529.

gods and the entire universe rejoice over Rām's victory and he is addressed here three times as Mukunda/Mukundā, i.e. as the one who, in the common Vaishnava understanding of this epithet, is believed to bestow liberation (*mukṭi*)<sup>51</sup> (6.103.6, 6.103 *chānd* 1, 6.103).

Tulsīdās's account of these events, known from the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, with the use of his particular figurative language, brings about a novel result – a passage with a soteriological load in which death, eating, and liberation are interconnected: in the battle of Laṅkā, to be eaten is to be liberated.<sup>52</sup> Of course, this imagery is not all new and original, and although it may be novel in this context, it is well-rooted in Indian thought, validating the enduring cultural potential of its oldest layers.<sup>53</sup> In Vedic literature, as Brian K. Smith notes: 'An "eater of food" is a ruler and conqueror, and possessing food is often depicted as "defeating" and "gaining supremacy over" it', where 'Consumption was (...) the ultimate victory of the consumer over the consumed, of the victor over the vanquished, and of the self over the rival. Eating and winning were fully equatable, as were being eaten and losing'.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, on the basis of the textual evidence analysed here, my central conclusion is that Tulsīdās repeatedly uses food and eating imagery in the battle passages of the *Rāmcaritmānas* to expound the soteriological dimension of Rām Bhakti.<sup>55</sup> Despite Rāvaṇ's words, in which he rejoices at the news of war, commenting that Vidhi has sent food straight home to demons, the real sense of the battle is not to eat one's fill, but to appease one's hunger for being liberated by being 'eaten' by Rām. This imagery, first of all, refers to Rām's image as the all-devouring Time/Death and to the *bhakta's* longing to be united with his Lord. Dying at his hands, or in his presence, means to be liberated and, paradoxically, this understanding is heralded in Rāvaṇ's words which allude to *mukṭi* that just comes to one by itself. However, it seems that Rāvaṇ's self-conceit and ignorance do not allow him to grasp the real meaning of his own words.<sup>56</sup>

51. Cf. 'mukṭi (= *mukṭi*) – a word formed to explain *mukun-da* as "giver of liberation"; Monier-Williams.

52. Cf. Francis Zimmerman's very apt observation: 'Food, sacrifice, and the cycle of rebirths: all belong to the same constellation of ideas'; Zimmermann 1987, 206, quoted after Smith 1990, 183.

53. Visible also in later key cultural texts of Hinduism, see e.g. Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

54. Smith 1990, 186.

55. Cf. Parry 1985, 612.

56. Añjanānandaśaraṇ 1998, 229.

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Eating and fasting to liberate the Mind.  
Some remarks on the theme of food in Keśavdās's *Vijñānagītā*

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Many remarkable studies in the past decades have investigated the crucial role of food in Indian culture in its wide-ranging cultural meanings and uses (see, for example, Khare 1992; Olivelle 1992, 2011, Sen 2015). 'Food in India is never merely a material substance of ingestion, nor only a transactional commodity. It is synonymous with life and all its goals, including the subtlest and the highest' (Khare 1992, 1). According to Khare (1992, 8) three food discourses overlap within a Hindu's life – one ontological and experiential concerned with the cultural sphere and worldly life, one therapeutic connected with the sphere of healing and happiness and one transcending the first two aiming to self-control and salvation. Several theoretical dogmas are formulated around the issue of food and a number of socio-cultural institutions develop, since 'the cultural construction of food is part of the broader social construction of reality' and the 'rules regarding food transactions constitute a social code that strengthens the hierarchical organization of society and demarcates the boundaries of purity' (Olivelle 2011, 71; 77). In cosmological speculations, food is the source of life, playing a central role in several creation myths of ancient India (Olivelle 2011, 73). But it can also be a cause of attachment, fostering greed and vices. Especially in the ascetic ideology and practice, the fear of food becomes a crucial path towards detachment from the world and salvation (Olivelle 1992, 105). In the medieval period, after the organization of monastic orders ascribed to the Advaita School, many theoretical texts based on ascetic ideologies were composed, and it is precisely in this philosophical context that we can insert the observations proposed in this paper.

The theme of food offers an interesting key to the interpretation of a philosophical text such as the *Vijñānagītā* by Keśavdās (1610), since it is used as a metaphor for any worldly temptation binding the self to the *samsāra*, but also represents the means to restrain one's own appetites and advance spiritually and ethically towards liberation.

The *Vijñānagītā* (VG) is a Braj Bhāṣā adaptation of the Sanskrit drama *Prabodhacandrodaya* (PC), composed by the poet Kṛṣṇamiśra at the court of

King Kīrtivarman Candela during the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The drama describes the process of the gradual awakening of the transmigrating self, which is progressively released from the mirages of the illusory world and the trap of *samsāra*, and the ascent towards the monistic experience, passing through a symbolic interior war.<sup>2</sup> The tale is narrated in the form of an allegory describing the battle between the two armies of King Discrimination (Viveka) and King Delusion (Mahāmoha). Both Kings are the sons of Mind (Manas), who was, in turn, generated by Self (called Puruṣa in PC, Jīva in VG) and his consort, Illusion (Māyā). Mind (Manas), accompanied by Egoism (Ahaṃkāra), has usurped the throne of his father and bound Self, while Delusion (Mahāmoha) with his armed forces<sup>3</sup> has conquered the entire world. In order to liberate Self, the troops of Discrimination (Viveka)<sup>4</sup> have to defeat all the followers of Delusion (Mahāmoha) and dispel the heretical schools of the *nāstikas*. After a terrible war, Delusion's (Mahāmoha) militia is destroyed and Mind (Manas), overwhelmed with grief over the loss of his relatives, resigns himself to putting an end to his life. However, Sarasvatī helps him to find solace and yield to Dispassion (Vairāgya). In the end, Discrimination (Viveka) agrees to join his wife Sacred Lore (called Upaniṣad in PC, Vedasiddhi in VG) in order to give rise to Knowledge (Vidyā) and Spiritual Awakening (Prabodha), which will liberate Self.

This popular story had a long tradition of translations and adaptations in many different languages. At least 25 versions are known in Hindi,<sup>5</sup> but many others are found in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Persian. As Keśavdās states at the very beginning of his work, he decided to tell this story in Bhāṣā, since the mythological war between Discrimination (Viveka) and Delusion (Mahāmoha) is the greatest tale (*uttama gāthā*), offering release to whomsoever listens to it. Therefore, inspired by the redemptive power of this parable, he composed VG for his patron, Vīr Siṃh of Orcha (r. 1605–1627) and recommends that he follow the same path of moral progress, for the sake of his own spiritual elevation.

Compared to the Sanskrit PC, the VG introduces several innovations in the narrative, opening the discussion to many other theoretical issues: it is a kind

1. We know from the prologue (Lad 2-9) that the play was written to celebrate Kīrtivarman's victory over the Cedi King Kārṇa of Tripuri, and the reappropriation of some of the territories lost by his predecessors that re-established Candela suzerainty (see Pédraglio 1974, 3 ff.; Dikshit 1976, 106; Nambiar 1998, 1). The rivalry between the Candela and Cedi dynasties is reflected in the symbolic war narrated in the drama.

2. Nambiar 1998, 18; Pédraglio 1974, 22.

3. Led by the generals Egoism (Ahaṃkāra), Lust (Kāma), Cupidity (Lobha) and Anger (Krodha).

4. Conducted by Investigation-into-Reality (Vastuvicāra), Patience (Kṣamā) and Contentment (Santoṣa).

5. Agravāl (1962, 202 ff.) classifies them into four typologies: translations (*anuvād*), adaptations (*rūpāntar*), autonomous allegorical dramas (*svatantr rūpak nāṭak*) and dramas which are in part inspired by the PC (*aṃśataḥ prabhāvit nāṭak*).



of philosophical compendium reflecting the historical and cultural panorama of 17<sup>th</sup> century North India. In this text every character has an allegorical meaning and, therefore, the mentions of food also assume a symbolic value. In an Advaita Vedānta perspective, which is the philosophical framework of the work, food is considered primary as the breeding-ground for the appetites binding to the world, and as a means to reinforce the illusion that the objects of senses are real. However, if converted into a means to restrain one's own impulses, it becomes an instrument to strengthen self-discipline and emancipate the Mind from the cravings of the senses.

### 1. *Food as the basis of rebirth*

The first hint at food is found in the third chapter, when Deceit (Dambha), one of the combatants in the army of Delusion (Mahāmoha), on his way from Delhi to Vārāṇasī, meets Egoism (Ahaṃkāra) in Mathurā. He explains the story of the imminent war between the two kings Discrimination (Viveka) and Delusion (Mahāmoha) to conquer Vārāṇasī, which is the last stronghold of morality where Enlightenment (Prabodha) can be generated. They discuss a method to convince the people to surrender to Delusion (Mahāmoha) and they come to the conclusion that the only way to persuade them is to rely on the temptations of their stomach.

दंभ

बोध उदै के लोप कों एकै पेट समर्थ ॥ २७ ॥

केसव क्योंहुँ भयों न परै अरु जौ रे भरै भय की अधिकाई ।

रीतत तौ रितयौ न घरी कहुँ रीति गएँ अति आरतताई ।

रीतो भलो न भरो भलो कैसेहुँ रीते भरे बिनु कैसे रहाई ।

जानि परै परमेसुर की गति पेटन की गति जानि न जाई ॥ २८ ॥

Deceit (Dambha)

27b. To prevent the rise of Enlightenment (Prabodha), only the stomach (*pet*) will be successful.

28. It cannot be filled by any means and when filled, fear increases – Keśav says.

If it is empty, not even a second is spent unfilled, but if the way [to fill it] has already been achieved, more pain arises.

Neither it is fine to have it empty, nor it is fine to have it filled. But if it is empty, without having it filled, how can one survive?

The plays of the Lord can be comprehended, but the plays of the stomach cannot be comprehended.<sup>6</sup>

Food and eater are strictly interrelated, since '[c]onceptually, one cannot exist without the other [and p]hysically, one becomes transformed into the other' (Olivelle 2011, 75). Therefore one's approach to food is a key to understand his approach to the cosmos and the entire creation can be seen as a food chain.

पेटनि पेटनि हीं भटक्यौ बहु पेटनि की पदवी न नक्यौ जू ।  
पेट तें पेट लयौ निकस्यौ फिरिकै पुनि पेटहि सों अटक्यौ जू ।  
पेट को चरो सबै जग काहु के पेट न पेट समात तक्यौ जू ।  
पेट के पंथ न पावहु केसव पेटहि पोषत पेट पक्यौ जू ॥ २९ ॥

29. [People] roam from stomach to stomach, still they do not find a way to ride out the path of the stomach.

After a [previous] stomach, they obtained a stomach again; still they stick only to their stomach.

The entire world is a slave of the stomach, I would just say, I [never] saw anyone able to restrain his own hunger.<sup>7</sup>

The path of the stomach is never accomplished – Keśav says – and [trying to] satisfy one's own stomach, one eats away his stomach [with concerns].

तृष्णा बड़ी बड़वानली क्षुधा तिमिगिल क्षुद्र ।  
ऐसो को निकसै जु परि उत्तर उदर समुद्र ॥ ३० ॥

30. Thirst (*tṛṣṇā*) is a great lake of flames, hunger is like a leviathan.

Who would be able to come up again, once fallen into that sea that is the belly (*udar*)?

This figurative image of a huge stomach destined to devour the entire world with its unappeasable cravings is very significant in this context. In the Sanskrit text (PC II.ad 33) this mission is carried out by Avidity (*Tṛṣṇā*), asked by her husband Cupidity (*Lobha*) to condemn the people to insatiable desires depriving them of their tranquility. She replies that she has always been devoted to that purpose, but now thousands of worlds will not fill her belly (*udar*). Therefore, in the VG, the original image of the insatiable belly of *Tṛṣṇā* is transposed into a giant stomach devouring everything and binding the self to transmigrate from one birth to another.<sup>8</sup>

6. Unless indicated differently, all translations are mine. For the Hindi text, cf. Mīśra 1959, to which some minor corrections have been applied in accordance with the metres (*dohā* in 27cd and 30, *indav savaiyā* in stanzas 28-29).

7. Explained by Lāl (1993, 51) as an idiom meaning *peṭ meṃ peṭ kī bhūkha ko samā nahīm pānā* 'not to be able to contain the stomach's hunger in the stomach'.

8. Cf. Nambiar 1998, 53.

The importation of *tr̥ṣṇā* is a point of interest for our discussion, since it seems to be diachronically adjusted to different theoretical frameworks. The term occurs several times in the *R̥gveda* in its literal meaning and without any metaphorical implication.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the concept becomes crucial in the Buddhist etiology of pain (*duḥkhasamudaya*) and the binding to the conditioned reality which brings to rebirth.<sup>10</sup> As regards Vedānta texts, it is interesting to highlight that few occurrences of the term appear in Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* to gloss some other words for 'craving' or 'thirst' occurring in the *mūla* text, such as *kāma*,<sup>11</sup> *pipāsā*<sup>12</sup> or *jighatsā*.<sup>13</sup> On tracing some connections in the imagery connected with *Tr̥ṣṇā*, we can say that if the concept seems to assume a crucial symbolic value quite late in Indian philosophical speculation, maybe due to Buddhist influence, its figurative representation in these *Advaita* texts was possibly inspired by the allegorical characters that first occurred in some Buddhist dramas.<sup>14</sup>

9. Cf., for example, *R̥gveda* 1.38.6c, 1.85.11a, 1.105.7c, 5.57.1c, 7.33.5a, 7.89.4a, 9.79.3c, 10.94.11c.

10. Concerning the central role of *tr̥ṣṇā* in the exposition of the four noble truths as the cause of the arising of pain and its varieties, as described in the *Theravāda* Buddhist canon, see, for example, Anderson 2013, 68, 82-83. Buddhist texts speculate further on this theme, identifying *tr̥ṣṇā* as the eight *nidāna* of the *pratītyasamutpāda*. Moreover, in the Mahāyāna tradition, it is associated with the topic of the realms of existence represented in the *bhāvavaktra*, especially with the *pretas*, namely the 'hungry ghosts' afflicted with an insatiable hunger, who are represented with huge bellies but long, thin necks and tiny mouths through which they cannot swallow enough food to placate their cravings.

11. See, for example, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.7: *yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye 'sya hr̥di śritāḥ* commented as *yadā yasminkāle sarve samastāḥ kāmāstr̥ṣṇāprabhedāḥ pramucyante*. Or else, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.33: *yaś ca śrotṛiyo 'vr̥jino 'kāmahataḥ* commented as *sa eṣa parama ānando vit̥ṣṇāśrotṛiyapratyakṣo 'dhigataḥ*, followed by a quotation from *Mahābhārata* 12.168.36: *tathā ca vedavyāsaḥ – 'yacca kāmasukhaṃ loke yacca divyaṃ mahatsukhaṃ / tr̥ṣṇākṣaya sukhasyaite nār̥hataḥ ṣoḍaśiṃ kalām' // iti* in which it is said that no worldly pleasure is comparable to the supreme bliss which is experienced when the self has destructed all desires. Incidentally, this quotation occurs also in several later texts on aesthetics, to explain the *śānta rasa*. See, for example, *Dhvanyāloka* 3.ad 26 and *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 3.ad 250.

12. Cf. for example, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1: *āsanāyāpipāse* 'He is the one who is beyond hunger and thirst' (Olivelle 1998, 83).

13. Cf. for example, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.5: *vijighatso 'pipāsaḥ satyakāmaḥ satyasaṅkalpaḥ* 'That is the self free from evils – free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions become real' (Olivelle 1998, 275).

14. The origin of the allegorical drama in Sanskrit literature is quite obscure. However, it seems that some forerunners of this genre, which was to become more popular after the PC in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, can be found in some fragments attributed to Aśvaghōṣa (reported in Lüders 1911, 66 ff.), in which we witness a dialogue between the allegorical figures of Wisdom (Buddhi), Fame (Kīrti) and Firmness (Dhṛti). Cf. Keith 1924, 83-84; Johnston 1936, xx-xxi. This seems to be connected with Olivelle's attempt to trace the development of the theology of renunciation in the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads. Even arising in a broad 'literary tradition concerning renunciation and related topics both within the Brahmanical mainstream and in non-Brahmanical traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism', it is unclear whether it was produced within 'ascetic institutions and later

This association between the stomach and thirst/hunger has an immediate philosophical implication. *Peṭ* is represented in this stanza as the cause of rebirth, intersecting the concept of *udar*, as the cavity in which the fetus is conceived; it is close to the womb and the matrix of birth. Therefore the circle of rebirths from womb to womb (or from matrix to matrix) is transformed into the cycle from stomach to stomach. Coming from the original idea of the bag-shaped inner cavity that is involved, *peṭ* is, on the one hand, the belly, the womb, while, on the other, it is the stomach as the breeding-ground for hunger, thirst, and desire. This polysemy of the word is also perceivable in its modern usage, since it is idiomatically employed both to express the meaning linked to appetite (e.g. *peṭbhar khānā* to eat one's fill, *peṭ kāṭnā* to eat frugally, *peṭ kī āg* the pangs of hunger) and pregnancy (e.g. *peṭ ānā* to become pregnant, *peṭ girnā* to miscarry).<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, a similar image is also used by Brahmā Kavi (1528–1586), the *nom de plume* of Maheś Dās Bhaṭṭ, advisor at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, best known as Rāja Bīrbal. In one of his Hindi compositions, he writes:

पेट ते आयो तु पेट को धावत हायों न हेरत घामरु छाही ।  
पेट दियो जिहि पेट भरे सोई ब्रह्म भनै तिहिं ओरु न जाहीं ।  
पेट पर्यो सिख देतहि देत रे पापिउ पेटही पेट समाहीं ।  
पेट के काज फिरै दिन राति सु पेटहु से परमेसुर नाही ॥<sup>16</sup>

Coming from one stomach and running into a[nother] stomach, you have been overcome and cannot see any sunshine or shadow [anymore].

If he to whom a stomach was given just fills his stomach, he cannot progress in the direction of the Brahman.

Until the stomach goes on, it keeps giving this exhortation: 'O sinner, nothing is like the stomach!'

If such activity of the stomach works day and night, through the stomach the supreme Lord cannot be achieved.

This idea of the entire existence being drenched with delusion due to the pines of desires had already been proposed by the *sant* poet Kabīr (1440–1518), who asserts that all the forms of existence are enmeshed in Māyā, even the gods, the *ṛṣis*, and the *siddhas*, just because they have been endowed with a stomach.

कहि कबीर जिसय उदर तिसु माया । तब छूटै जब साधु पाया ॥

incorporated into the Upanisads or merely reflect the influence of ascetic ideologies on some segments of the ancient Vedic schools' (Olivelle 1992, 11–13).

15. Cf. Dāsa 1965–1975.

16. Cf. Agravāl 1950, 353. Interestingly, this stanza is in *indav savaiyā* metre, just like the one composed by Keśavdās on the topic of the stomach.

Says Kabīr, whoever has a belly to fill, is under the spell of Māyā.  
He is emancipated only when he meets a saint.<sup>17</sup>

It is also said in VG that the only way to placate the craving of desire is to dwell on holy places and enjoy the company of saints which will help the mind to liberate itself from its lowest impulses.

In this regard, the third chapter of VG closes with a quotation from *Mahābhārata* 3.80.30 concerning the meritorious effects of *tīrthas* for salvation, while at the end of the story, having overwhelmed Tṛṣṇā and the craving of its stomach, the Self prepares to give rise to Prabodha and interrupt the cycle of rebirths. In fact, in PC 6.8, Puruṣa claims to have ‘torn asunder the spreading creepers of desire’ (*vighaṭitās tṛṣṇālatāvistarāḥ*),<sup>18</sup> while in VG 16.104 Tṛṣṇā is compared to a large black bee shadowing the intellect until it rises up abandoning the lotus of the heart.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Food in a materialistic perspective

A different interpretation of food is given in the seventh chapter of the VG, in the description of the heresies that spread everywhere during Delusion’s (Mahāmoha) rule. In the narrative, Faith (Śraddhā) has been kidnapped by Delusion (Mahāmoha), and now her daughter, Peace (Śānti), sets out to look for her with her friend Compassion (Karuṇā). While searching for her mother, she finds some heretics who try to cheat her. Here we find the Materialists (Cārvāka), who, as suggested by the very etymology of their name,<sup>20</sup> chew on the enjoyment of worldly pleasures coming from food, etc. as the ultimate purpose of human life. They do not accept any other religious or moral responsibility and savour food as the only reality in the world, since it enters the sphere of the object of knowledge, directly perceived through the organs of sense (*pratyakṣa*), which, in their opinion, is the only reliable means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*).

The context is a dialogue between a teacher and his pupil who discuss the inutility of abstaining from mundane pleasures like food and drinking to obtain

17. Dās 1970, 219. Curiously enough, the idea of being subject to one’s stomach is also present in another line from *padā* 156.1 by Kabīr (cf. Dās 1970, 240) where it is said *bhūkhe bhagatī na kījai*, ‘I am so hungry, I cannot perform devotional worship’. This is probably also the source of a popular proverb sometimes attributed to some saint poet, *bhūkhe bhajan na hohi Gopālā*, ‘O lord! I can’t sing your praise on an empty stomach’ (Tivārī 1960, 879).

18. Cf. Nambiar 1998, 150-51.

19. *tṛṣṇā kṛṣṇā śaṭpadī bhaya bhramarāni mati maṇḍi. ko jāne kit uḍi gāi hṛday kamal ko choḍi*. Cf. Lāl 1993, 234.

20. In some etymological reconstructions the term is connected with the verb *carv*, which means ‘to chew, to grind with the teeth, to taste’. Cf. Chattopadhyaya 1992, 51-52; Dasgupta 1922, 79 and *Id.*, 1940, 512-50; Chattopadhyaya–Gangopadhyaya 1990.

an imaginary reward beyond this world, since what is not perceivable does not exist.

सिष्य

साँचो जो है जग खैबो रु पीबो । तौ यह झूठ तपोबल पैबो ।

चार्वाक

मूढ दुरास के मोदक खाहीं । सा<sup>21</sup> मिस देखत नर्कहि जाहीं ॥ ६ ॥

6. Pupil (Śiṣya)

If only eating and drinking are real in the world, obtaining any strength by virtue of asceticism is nothing but a lie.

Materialist (Cārvāka)

These stupid men enjoy [literally: eat] the delicacies of vain hopes, but by such reason they will go [straight] to hell.

Instead of enjoying the pleasure of real food, the ascetics eat their vain hopes of liberation, which are ironically described as immaterial delicacies, and in so doing they act irresponsibly, wasting the most exquisite things in the world.<sup>22</sup>

वै सिगरे मतिमूढ हैं अमल जलज मनि डारि ।

सीपिन के संग्रह करत केसवराय निहारी ॥ ९ ॥

9. They are completely foul since they throw away the most precious pearls, And they try – says Keśav – to gather shells.

### 3. *Food and immorality*

Among the innovations of the VG, we find a strange couple of heretics formed by a Śūdra and a Ṛṣi Nārīveṣa (dressed in the guise of a woman), who are missing in the Sanskrit PC. In his explanation of why the Ṛṣi is dressed like a woman, Keśavdās hints at his own cultural and historical period, and especially at the Rādhāvallabha *sampradāya* founded by Hita Harivaṃśa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which came to expand the group of unorthodox doctrines described in the text.<sup>23</sup> Under the pretext of taking part in the divine *līlā*, these heretics indulge in all kinds of mundane pleasures and consume even impure or prohibited

21. In accordance with the *dodhaka* metre (भ भ भ ग ग), I have emended the word *tapasā* occurring in Miśra's edition, which would be translated instead as 'by reason of asceticism'.

22. PC 2.23cd keeps a more appropriate alimentary metaphor: 'What man seeking his true interest would fling away the berries of paddy, rich with finest white grains, because they are covered with husks and dust?' (Nambiar 1998, 43).

23. The devotees of the *Rādhāvallabha sampradāya* were supposed to dress as women to imitate the devotional approach (*mādhurya bhāva*) of the *gopīs* toward Kṛṣṇa. Cf. Snell 1991, 3.

food. These ingenuous and submissive devotees assume that any substance belonging to their pretended gurus will wash their sins away.

In VG chapter eight, the two friends Karuṇā and Śānti describe a fake preacher among his eager devotees as a *cakor* among the moons. These women are completely dedicated to him and are disposed to do anything to go to his dwelling and enjoy the pleasures of his *lilā*, as though they were his *gopīs*. They would even drink the water of his feet and eat his spit, and in the end, as a fee for his teachings, they would offer him a sip of the nectar of flowers from their lips.<sup>24</sup>

करुणा

चंद्रमुखीन में चारु चकोर कि चंद्र चकोरन में रुचि रोहै ।  
लोचन लोल कपोलनि मध्य बिलोकत यौं उपमा कहँ टोहै ।  
सुंदरता सरसीन में मानहु मीन मनोजन के मन मोहै ।  
मानिक सों मनमंडल में कहि को यह बालबधून में सोहै ॥ ४२ ॥

Compassion (Karuṇā)

42. Is this a charming *cakor* bird among these moonfaced women or a moon shining among the *cakor* birds?

Looking at their trembling eyes and cheeks what similes could be found?

It is as though in the pond of beauty, the fishes of love obfuscate the mind.

Tell me who is he who shines among his friends as a ruby in a heap of jewels?

शांति

नित्यबिहारनि की मढी, त्रियगन देखि सिहाति ।  
एक पियति चरनोदकनि, एक उगारनि खाति ॥ ४३ ॥  
पुत्री दक्षिनराज की, आई तजि कुलतंत्र ।  
देउ कृपा करि याहि प्रभु, नित्य बिहारी मंत्र ॥ ४४ ॥  
सेवैगी तुमकों सदन, छोडि जु सबै बिकल्प ।  
तन धन मन को प्रथम ही, करवाए संकल्प ॥ ४५ ॥  
सिखए मंदिर माँझ लै, मोहन मंत्रविधान ।  
उन दीनी गुरुदक्षिना, सधर अधर मधुपान ॥ ४६ ॥

Peace (Śānti)

43. Looking at that cell of [this false preacher fond of] perpetual recreation these women are happy.

One drinks the water of [his] feet, one eats [his] vomit.

24. This passage echoes a similar description occurring in PC II.1, where Deceit (Dambha) proudly describes the swindlers of Vārāṇasī who, under his command, corrupt the other people: '[They] spend the moonlit nights in the house of courtesans and rejoice with intoxication the mouths of women which smell of liquor and delight in the sexual pleasures and in the day times pose that they know everything as performers of sacrifice, as those who perform Agnihotra Sacrifice for a long time, as knowers of Brahman, as austere people' (Nambiar 1998, 27).

44. [Even] the daughter of a [reputable] crafty king came to him, spoiling the decorum of her family.

'Be graceful, o Lord, advise her to live in perpetual recreation.

45. This slave will serve you, abandoning any restraint,  
Having committed previously her body, wealth and soul [to you]'.  
46. Having taught the prayers for Mohan and taken them to his dwelling,

They gave him as a reward to their guru a sip of the nectar of flowers with their lips.

These passages can be analysed in the light of the new emphases for food produced by the Bhakti movement locating 'the otherworldly (the divine) within this world' (Khare 1992, 210). In such a situation, food assumes new sensual, aesthetic, and culinary implications, since its salvific powers are bestowed as the blessings of a guru upon his disciples.

#### 4. *Food as a way to asceticism*

Finally, in chapter nine of VG, after the fratricidal war, during which King Mind (Manas) has lost his son Delusion (Mahāmoha) and all his allies, he resolves to put an end to his life. Still, he is prevented from committing suicide, since he must accomplish his kingly duties and restore morality to his reign. It is recommended that he live with Contentment (Santoṣa) and be satisfied with simple and little food to purify himself.

In this case, eating with moderation – or even starving – is the way to enjoy the supreme bliss. The following statement is a piece of advice offered to King Mind (Manas) in order to attain liberation on a psychological and metaphysical plane. But it is also a practical recommendation for the king to enjoy his kingship and pursue a *dharmik rājya*. As Olivelle (1992, 37-38) has observed, the theology of renunciation arose from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC as a radical challenge to the Vedic world and aligned to a new social system associated with the nobility and the kings. 'In every case the value system of the Vedic world is inverted: wilderness over village, celibacy over marriage, economic inactivity over economic productivity, ritual inactivity over ritual performance, instability over stable residence' (Olivelle 1992, 46). The Vedic ritual is internalized and sublimated in the renouncer's body and 'his eating becomes a sacrificial offering' (Olivelle 1992, 68), because only through renunciation he can focus all his energies on achieving his supreme goals. The following stanzas are constructed with words from the semantic field of tasting and drinking, associated with self-restraint. This is an essential standard for the king in order to achieve spiritual



elevation and come to epitomize high moral principles with his own body and his conduct.<sup>25</sup>

राजधर्म

भूलत जीव चिदानंद ब्रह्म समुद्र के स्वादहि सूंघत नाही ।  
पीवै न बेद पुरान पुकारि पुकारि पिवावत है बहुधाहीं ।  
झूठे बिषै बिषसागर तुंग तरंगनि पीवतहीं न अघाहीं ।  
मज्जत है उनमज्जत केसवदास बिलास बिनोद वृथाहीं ॥ ४६ ॥

King's duty (Rājadharmā)

46. Once the Self (Jīva) forgets the *brahman* made of consciousness and joy, he cannot perceive the flavour of that sea [of bliss],  
He does not drink the water of *Vedas* and *Purāṇas*, even though they made him satiate by chanting and praying.  
He can even drink the highest waves of the sea of venom made of the deceitful object of senses, but his thirst is not [placated],  
He sinks in this vain pastime of pleasure – Keśav says – and never comes out.

राजा

को करिहै संग्राम में, लोभ मोह सारोष ।  
उद्यम  
ताकों राज प्रयोगियै, अब एकै संतोष ॥ ५६ ॥

King (Rājā)

56a. Who could engage in battle with Cupidity (Lobha), who has the fierceness to bewilder [his enemies]?

Udyama

56b. O king, only Contentment (Santoṣa) can be appointed.

संतोष

निर्मल नीर नदीन के पानि बनी फल मूल भखे तन पोख्यौ ।  
सेज सिलान पलास के डासन डासि कै केसव काज संतोष्यौ ।  
यौं मिलि बुद्धि बिलासन सौं निसिबासर राम के नाम निघोख्यौ ।  
राज तुम्हारे प्रताप कृसानु दहूँ दिसि लोभ समुद्रनि सोख्यौ ॥ ५७ ॥

25. In the original Sanskrit text (PC IV 19-23), Contentment (Santoṣa) comes to the royal court to describe to the king how he destroyed Cupidity (Lobha). He declares that since in the forest every fruit is available to one's own desire, 'only people who are void of judgment suffer distress at the door of rich people' (Nambiar 1998, 109). He then proclaims the futility of greed for wealth which quickly disappears, stressing on the need for people to be content with or maybe resign themselves to the meagre resources they have, not seeking something they cannot afford. In a radically different perspective, probably influenced by the ideal of the ascetic sovereign which became so popular in medieval *sūfī* literature, Keśavdās transforms this passage into a kind of moral and political advice for the king.

Contentment (Santoṣa)

57. Drinking the pure water of the rivers and eating the fruits of creepers and some roots, I nourished my body,  
Laying a sheet of *palāśā* leaves on a bed of stones, I fulfilled my duty.  
Joining people satisfied in their mind, I remembered the name of Rāma in night and morning prayers.  
O King, with the flame of your vigour, I soaked up everywhere the sea of Cupidity (Lobha).

उद्यम

अपने दल बल समुच्चियै, रे भट आलस छोडि ।  
प्रभु की तुम पाषंड पुर, फेरौ प्रतिदिन डोंडि ॥ ५९ ॥

Effort (Udyama)

59. Oh soldiers, abandon any indolence in fighting and demonstrate your own strength!  
Conquer the city of the heretics and make the fanfare of your lord resound every day.

### Conclusion

As we have tried to highlight in this paper, the themes of eating and fasting assume an emblematic function in Keśavdās's VG, since food, which is symbolically considered as the cause of binding to the *samsāra*, becomes the instrument to train one's own moral strength. If the appeasement of one's own appetites, and metaphorically the fulfillment of one's own desires, is ruled only through the stomach it becomes deleterious. On the contrary, if it is filtered through judgment, it is sublimated into a practice (*sādhana*) that releases the self from its own desires and achieves the highest bliss.

As already observed by Olivelle (2011, 89), this ambivalence towards food is a hallmark of Hindu ascetic attitude, since '[i]t values and devalues food. Food is life and death, happiness and suffering. Food is to be worshipped as a god and to be shunned like a demon. It nourishes and it entraps'. Incidentally, the association between the supreme joy belonging to the *brahman* and some terms pertaining to the ambit of eating is well-established in Indian philosophical speculation. In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, for example, the *brahman* is described as *rasa* (*raso vai saḥ*, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7, p. 82). Later on, in the aesthetic speculation of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta,<sup>26</sup> the realization of the

26. As universally agreed upon from Bharata onwards, the aesthetic experience is based on the enjoyment of the *rasa*, which is a kind of emotional flavour. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (935–985) introduces a dimension of universality theorizing a process of idealization or generalization (*bhāvakatva*), which dispels the delusion of the spectator's mind. This allows him to relish the

*brahman* is described as *brahmāsvāda*, and compared to the aesthetic experience (*rasāsvāda*), since it is a particular form of tasting of mental order. The difference with the material act of eating resides in the fact that, while in eating, he who eats may be *anyacitta* and think of other things – especially other desires to satisfy –, in this spiritual tasting, the mind of he who tastes is *ekāgra*, i.e. absorbed in the object of tasting without any other sensory perception, and in this condition, the subject is immersed in a supreme bliss (*camatkāra*), apart from any distinction of ‘self’ and ‘others’.<sup>27</sup>

*rasa* through a process of delectation (*bhogatva*), which is characterized by a state of mental peacefulness having the same nature of the joy of illumination (Walimbe 1980, 38-40). This opens the way to Abhinavagupta’s (975–1025) concept of *camatkāra*, comparing the enjoyment of the *rasa* to the bliss of the highest spiritual experience (Gnoli 1985<sup>2</sup>).

27. Gnoli 1985<sup>2</sup>, 54-55.

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# Visual representations of aphrodisiacs in India from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE

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Kenneth Zysk has examined in detail what the Sanskrit medical treatises of Caraka and Suśruta, and the commentaries thereon, have to say about aphrodisiacs that promote male sexual potency.<sup>1</sup> He begins by pointing out that virility and potency are of universal concern, since ‘they lie at the very basis of the survival of the species’, and he also provides modern context for his historical investigations by mentioning that ‘the promotion and sale of aphrodisiacs are highly visible in India’: ‘Nearly every Indian newspaper routinely carries advertisements about wonder drugs that promise male potency and assure male offspring’. Apropos of the universality of aphrodisiacs, Zysk recalls the 1959 hit song of The Coasters, ‘Love Potion No. 9’: (‘smelled like turpentine and looked like Indian ink’) that made the man who took it kiss ‘everything in sight’, even ‘a cop down on Thirty-Fourth and Vine’, who then broke the ‘little bottle of Love Potion No.9’ and stopped the rot.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I restrict the large field of aphrodisiacs to a very small area, namely the visual representation of aphrodisiacs, where in fact there is only one well-known candidate for discussion. I refer to the Khajuraho orgy scene on the plinth of the Lakshmana temple with at its centre the cooking of an aphrodisiac substance. Apropos the broken bottle of Love potion No. 9, I shall consider the possibility that the Lakshmana orgy substance was a liquid that was put in water bottles. To be more fully understood it is desirable that the Khajuraho sculpture be presented in a wider context, and to that end, I preface its discussion by working back in time from the 1950s, when photographs of that

1. Zysk 2005. I follow Zysk in restricting aphrodisiacs almost entirely to products that increase male potency (*vājīkaraṇa*). My first example, which parallels his playful instance of Love Potion No. 9, is an instance of an aphrodisiac that works on men and women equally by removing inhibitions. We may note in passing that *kāmasāstra*, in contradistinction to medical texts, has little to say about *vājīkaraṇa*; for details from main texts, see Schmidt 1922<sup>3</sup>, 603-16.

2. Zysk 2005, 101.

sculpture were first published, working back to the tenth century through other visual representations of aphrodisiacs, whether real or implicit.

My material, though limited, is diverse, reflecting the diversity of its subject. Of the seven images discussed, two do not directly represent aphrodisiacs (fn. 9 and Fig. 5b), but are clearly intended to have an aphrodisiac effect, and perhaps imply that the participants have taken aphrodisiacs. Fig. 2 alone shows the condition of someone in need of an aphrodisiac. Figs. 4 and 8 show the actual cooking process. Figs. 2 and 5 show a producer-salesman in action; Fig. 9 conceivably so, but unproven.

Zysk's reference to Love Potion No. 9 points to the special significance of the late 1950s in this area. At that time the sexual revolution of the west took special interest in the *Kāmasūtra* (first mass-market publication of English translation 1961), and the sculpture of Khajuraho (1950s and -60s); ancient and medieval India was admired for a decade or so as a shining example of sexuality as it should be.

The cover of Alex Comfort's 1961 novel *Come Out to Play* (Fig. 1) whereon two South Indian style statues cavort, the man wearing a bowler hat, and the woman a stylish contemporary hat, refers to the imagined action in England of a fictional aphrodisiac – though a fragrant perfume, rather than a drink smelling of turpentine like No. 9 – that removed all inhibitions (in a context of *kāmasāstra* terminology given in untranslated Sanskrit). The male figure has four arms, and holds a neatly furled umbrella to his lips as Kṛṣṇa would his flute.

It was in this period, that the Khajuraho frieze (see below, Fig 8) was first published. I believe that the very first publication was in Mulk Raj Anand's *Kāma Kalā*, in 1958, pl. XXXI,<sup>3</sup> though the frieze is not shown completely, and the cooks are denied their centrality by being cut off to the right; little of the third cook can be seen. Although this frieze soon found a place in almost every illustrated book on Khajuraho, it has received almost no detailed discussion, though the same year, 1958, Herman Goetz referred to it in vague terms:

the Indian Sakta-Tantric adepts had, like their Taoist colleagues in China, certain rather unsavoury practices which came down to a sort of primitive hormone treatment and which, as far as informations are available, seem to have been quite effective. If I rightly interpret certain subsidiary scenes to the minor erotic friezes at Khajuraho, they describe also the preparation of that hormone elixir.<sup>4</sup>

Goetz belonged to an earlier generation, subject to some extent to the sexual anxiety that Comfort and Mulkh Raj Anand claimed could be removed. To that

3. It is not among the photographs in the 1957 issue of *Marg*, *Homage to Khajuraho*.

4. Goetz 1974 (1958), 118.



earlier period my next two examples, newspaper advertisements, belong. In India, in the early decades of the last century, both the colonial power and growing nationalism opposed advertisements for aphrodisiacs, the revenue from which was, however, vital for the newspapers' financial health. Douglas Haynes in discussing the prominence of aphrodisiacs in Indian newspaper advertising notes that 'until the 1930s, many papers had considerable difficulty in attracting businesses to run other kinds of ads and had to rely on sellers of medicines, especially tonics, for a significant portion of their revenues'.<sup>5</sup> He claims that in the 1940s such advertisements came to stress the critical importance of a husband's ability to provide his wife with sexual pleasure; and show the unhappiness of both partners when the man fails to perform, and their joint happiness when he does succeed. Earlier advertisements are more male-centred.

A feeble young man features in the most interesting and complex advertisement that Haynes discusses (Fig. 2). This advertisement for a multiple product called *Jadibuti Manliness Set* appeared in *Mumbai Samachar*, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1928. It shows a sage seated on a mountain peak, a sacrificial fire beside him. Before him stands a knock-kneed young man in suppliant posture, around whom is wrapped a cobra. The cobra's coils are labelled in English, 'masterbation (*sic*), spermatorrhea, premature ejaculation and nocturnal emission'. Coming out as five tongues from the snake's mouth are the phrases 'no health, no happiness', 'shyful disgrace', 'anxiety', 'no enjoyment', 'dead life', and 'dishonour of family'. Poking into the middle of all these labelled tongues, the sage holds up in his left hand a massive syringe, its cylinder bearing the name Jaribooti Mardai Set. The arm that holds the syringe is labelled 'sharp spear', but the object is clearly a syringe. In my view this raised object signifies the erect penis of the man who takes this aphrodisiac package, and in addition the powerful force with which the reinvigorated semen will shoot forth in large quantity. The sage's right hand points downwards to the labelled box in which the product – a powder, an oil, and a pill – will arrive; the accompanying text of the advertisement assures the buyer that the postal package will contain no indication of the contents. One of three angels carries at the top of the picture the guarantee: 'Guaranteed extirpation of impotence'; the angels have moustaches, demonstrating their own special virility.

In the body of the advertisement, written in Gujarati, S. H. Hussain, the producer of the aphrodisiac tells how, being unfit for marriage, he travelled to Kashmir and found the *mahātma* who gave him the herbs to treat his problem. Haynes notes that the advertisement, which claims to be a 'service for the motherland', was drawing upon 'a longstanding logic deployed through much of the nineteenth century that linked physical capacities diminished through masturbation to weakness of the nation'.<sup>6</sup>

5. Haynes 2012, 790.

6. Haynes 2012, 800-2.

Charu Gupta shows how nationalist *brahmacārya* – male sexual restraint to strengthen the nation – coincided with the widespread appearance of advertisements for aphrodisiacs in Indian newspapers. She includes in her discussion an advertisement from the Allahabad *Leader* in 1911 (Fig. 3): a powerful Hindu young man, bare-chested, clad only in a dhoti, walking over a passive lion and carrying on his broad shoulders an elephant; his right hand grasps its trunk, his left its rear-quarters. Gupta notes that ‘the lion, widely recognised as a symbol of British masculinity, was an icon frequently used in aphrodisiac advertisements at this time, showing the animal’s subjugation by the virile Indian male’.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Zysk shows, the elephant was renowned for his abundant semen.<sup>8</sup>

My next image concerns not the man in the street, but a king, and although only a few decades earlier than the two advertisements considered above, it belongs to a very different world. A court painting from Kotah, in Rajasthan, it was almost certainly not meant to be seen outside the private quarters of the Maharaja. It is known as *The Great Orgy of Maharao Shatru Sal II*. This raja ruled in Kotah from 1866 to 1889. The painting is now in the Sackler Museum at Harvard; I am not able to reproduce it here.<sup>9</sup> There is no direct representation of aphrodisiacs, although it is well known that kings even in their physical prime often used aphrodisiacs to enable them to service their harems. Another solution to the problem of numerous wives was to pleasure several wives at the same time with hands and even feet, as can be seen in some court paintings as well as, most notably, in the most publicised erotic sculpture at Khajuraho.<sup>10</sup> Such manipulation features in the image, but that is not an aspect of the painting that makes it relevant here. The royal intercourse is set, even lost, amid a whole panorama of sexual copulation. No aphrodisiac usage is shown, but there can be no doubt that the painting was intended to have an aphrodisiac effect. Extravagant, even overwhelming, in design and intention, it is a rare extant example of what quite probably was a favourite *topos* in court circles, namely universal copulation seen as centred in the monarch with his women.

In the top half, on a green plain rising to a mountain, a variety of animals copulate in pairs. Below on a white flat level is an even greater variety of sexual coupling and sexual contact. Slightly to left of centre, the great king lies, satisfying no less than five women at once, four of them with his hands and feet. Around them, male animals, a bull, a horse, a ram, a monkey, copulate with

7. Gupta 2002, 79.

8. See Zysk 2005 and 2009, with references to *Caraka Samhitā*.

9. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century water colour painting, *The Great Orgy of Maharao Shatru Sal II* (c. 1866–1889 in Kotah, Rajasthan), Sackler Museum, Harvard University (formerly in S. C. Welsh collection). Published Finch 1997, 3.

10. The bottom erotic panel on the south *antarāla* wall of the Kandariya temple, where a rather majestic male stands on his head while copulating with a woman seated above him and pleasuring with his hands the two women who keep the pair upright.

other women. Lastly, at the lower left and right edges of the foreground, three large ascetics, grey white in colour no doubt because of the excessive semen that have stored within themselves, and with gigantic erections, are fondled by women. There can surely be no doubt that the painting was intended to have an aphrodisiac effect on its royal owner, to spur him on. The painting is certainly a representation of the universality of sexual love, where even asceticism denotes sexual power in a universe that is overwhelmingly sexual.

I turn now to explicit recipes for aphrodisiac foods, and a representation of the cooking of such food (Fig. 4).

The *Nīmatnāma*, *The Book of Delights*, is a beautiful illustrated manuscript cookery book attributed to the 15<sup>th</sup> century Sultan of Mandu, Ghiyath Shahi, and which subsequently belonged to Akbar and then Tipu Sultan. The world of common man is again far behind us here. The many illustrations show the sultan out of doors supervising his numerous female cooks, and the page shown here (folio 133b, Fig. 4) is formally like all the other pages of the book. Only from the text on the page do we know that there is an aphrodisiac in the cooking pots. The accompanying recipe, which begins on the preceding folio, is as follows:

Cook meat of every kind and hens' eggs and pigeons and birds of every kind and onions and fat young pigeons. Cut them into tiny pieces and fry them in duck fat, add salt and roughly minced white chickpeas. Make it produce enough liquid to cook it thoroughly, then seal the lid of the cooking pot and cook for long enough to cook the pigeon and chickpeas. Then add one *diram* [approximately 3 grams] [folio 133b now starts] of cassia and half a *diram* of galingale (*khūlanjān*) and add the acid juice of citron (*karna*). Eating this food makes the semen flow, increases strength and increases sexual desire making it much stronger.<sup>11</sup>

There are many other recipes in the book for which similar results are claimed. Such recipes are frequent in many texts; it is the combination of text and picture that make this page worthy of note.

I turn now to temple sculpture, and firstly to a remarkable representation of the velocity of ejaculation of semen. There is no direct reference to aphrodisiac, but the exaggerated power that is portrayed is suggestive of aphrodisiacs. The complex imagery is best introduced by referring first to an image in Anand Patwardhan's 1995 documentary film, *Father, Son and Holy War*, a film which, as Charu Gupta says, connects 'male sexuality, patriarchy, and the militant politics of Hindutva' (Fig. 5). Gupta singles out the point in the film when 'an aph-

11. Titley 2005, 55.

rodisiac seller's sales pitch rhapsodising semen "shooting like an arrow from a bow" is juxtaposed with an iconic arrow glistening in the night sky at a Shiv Sena rally'.<sup>12</sup> From here I jump to the twelfth century, to the Kalleshvara temple at Bagali in Karnataka. On this Chalukya temple are instances of erotic sculpture in a style that Desai characterises as 'nearer folk than classical'; and which she sums up as 'crude and gross'.<sup>13</sup> Desai's plate 104, labelled 'Sexual scenes on the wall below the *sikhara*, Bagali', includes several groups of figures, one of which is the most remarkable of any in her book, or of any that I have seen, for its originality, complexity, and humour.

The scene in question has two main elements, a man with a very long horizontal penis directed towards a seated woman who exposes herself (Fig. 6). The man faces the woman; she faces outwards, her body and exposed vulva directed at right angles to the man, but her face is turned towards the man, and there is no doubt that it is at her *yoni* that he is aiming. In erotic temple sculpture, it is not at all unusual for a man to direct his erect penis towards a woman, nor for a woman to sit exposing herself. Two features make it altogether remarkable. One is the extreme distance between the two principals; the other is the other people involved in this event. There is indeed what can only be a band of enthusiasts to celebrate the extreme projection of the seed, and a naked woman dancing beside the target woman holds a kind of flag, reminiscent of a caddy holding up the flag above the hole for a distant golfer making a long shot. The pole she holds, however, has at its top what seems to be a set of strings and two egg-shaped balls, possibly representing testicles. Beneath the man's penis are four small men, diminishing in size so as not to interrupt his organ's field of fire. The largest holds a drum, the middle two hold cymbals, and the smallest a trumpet. All of them are bent at the knees, perhaps again simply to lower them and keep them from getting the way. But the principal man's knees are also bent. Does the sexual effort require this pose, or are they all symbolically marching forward? However, anticlimactically, the seed emitted immediately curves downward over the second largest small figure. Is there then a planned contradiction between intention and result?

At all events, we may finally note that the principal man seems to hold up or restrain his erect penis with an elephant goad, the curved spike of which reaches down to the glans. As distinct from the convolutions of the phallic monstrosities that are to be found elsewhere on the same temple, this sculpture seems to make a direct statement parallel with the arrow-like semen claim of the aphrodisiac seller in Patwardhan's film, and with the large syringe held by the sage in Hussain's Jaribhooti advertisement discussed above. The elephant goad relates to the elephant as pre-eminent source of semen, as noted above; and also as controlling and directing the elephantine power of the penis. As

12. Gupta 2002, 82.

13. Desai 1985, 68.

with the painting from Kota, there is no reference to aphrodisiacs here, but in the case of the temple a triumphant and grinning resolution of male fears, with the implication that worship at this temple solves your problems.

My final example brings us to Khajuraho, to well known sculpture, and also to cooking; to the clearest representation possible of the preparation of an aphrodisiac, since the production team are surrounded by the effects of their labours, in the frieze at the eastern corner of the south side of the plinth of the Lakshmana temple (Fig. 7 for overview; Fig. 8 for the cooks). Goetz, cited above, refers to ‘certain subsidiary scenes to the minor erotic friezes at Khajuraho’, but I have been unable to find any other scenes than this at Khajuraho or elsewhere – this, and this alone, is the scene Goetz is referring to. Desai quotes Goetz, but adds nothing herself in the discussion of this frieze. Indeed she refers to ‘three persons pounding something in a special type of vessel’,<sup>14</sup> when in fact two are naked men pounding in a large pestle, or churning in a churn, and a third man is stirring a pot that might be cooking on a fire. All three are men. The two standing pounding have had their heads broken off, but are men, for their penises are prominent above the bowl of the pestle/churn.

Tripathi in 1960 pointed out the remarkable fact that the naked men in erotic and other poses on the Lakshmana and other Hindu temples are Digambara ascetics, *kṣapaṇakas*, since they carry peacock feather brooms (*picchikās*), just as they do on the Jain Parshvanatha temple.<sup>15</sup> The man sitting stirring the pot or cauldron is clearly a naked Jain monk, like the older figure on the bed to his left who seems to be in charge of the whole orgy, without ornaments, and shaven head with slight growth of hair. The prominence of the penises of the two men pounding is not surprising given that they are in the very heart of the orgy, which Desai calls ‘One of the most frantic orgiastic scenes in Indian art’,<sup>16</sup> but the penises are in some danger from the action of the pestles. Could it be that the penises are an essential part of the process, providing semen as part of the ingredients? As is well known, consumption of mixed male and female sexual fluids is a part of Kaula ritual. Indeed, there is, Tucci suggested, a specific vessel associated with this ritual, namely ‘a kind of three-faced stand with a rectangular empty cavity on top, each face of the stand a sitting male personage, one of whom is masturbating’.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that animal semen does feature in some Indian aphrodisiac preparations.<sup>18</sup> However, there is nothing on

14. Desai 1985, 49.

15. It should be noted that Hegewald 2006 has shown that the Parshvanatha temple was originally a Hindu temple, later converted to Jainism, and the *kṣapaṇakas* Tripathi refers to are part of the reversion. However this does not affect his argument. Desai almost entirely neglects to follow up Tripathi’s discovery; Rabe 1996 does briefly mention it.

16. Desai 1985, 49.

17. Tucci 1968, 289.

18. E.g. the semen of buffaloes, bulls, and rams (*Suśruta Saṃhitā*, *Cikitsāsthāna* 27ab); and see Zysk 2005, 12 and fn. for other animals.

this frieze to directly indicate that masturbation is involved in the preparation of the substance in the pot and pestle/churn (though masturbation features on the Lakshmana temple in other scenes as part of the erotic activity). And we have to do with ostensibly Jain monks, not Kaulas.

It is certainly more likely that an aphrodisiac is being prepared by the cooks than that the scene pertains to a Kaula-type of ritual substance. What the ingredients are, I cannot say. There is one mention of a churning stick in the *Nīmatnāma*, though no illustration of its use. ‘Cooked rice gives strength and makes semen flow. Boil bananas or jackfruit (...) or honey (...) as well as saffron, camphor and musk, in water and beat it with a churning stick (...) and cook (...) [rice] in the liquid’.<sup>19</sup> But the possibilities for the vessels and processes shown in Fig. 7 are unlimited.

Apropos Love Potion No. 9, we might note that in the case of *kṣapaṇakas* engaging in sex acts on the Lakshmana and the Vishvanatha temples, a water-vessel hanging in a net from their shoulder is emphatically present – well sculpted and close to their genitals. On the orgy frieze, there is only one instance among the several monks, but a particularly significant one. With his *picchikā* broom in his left hand held over his head, with his right hand he lifts up dramatically, triumphantly even, a particularly large flask (Fig. 9). I have not been able to find instances anywhere else of such hanging flasks. Could it be that these containers hold an aphrodisiac liquid? In the absence of any other evidence, the answer must be that this is unlikely. At all events, a complete account of the representation of *kṣapaṇakas* at Khajuraho is much to be desired.

The material discussed in this paper is diverse, but at the same time closely interconnected. At Khajuraho the cooks are a familiar certainty amid the wild tumult of the orgy, except that the cooks are monks not women, and their food or drink not ordinary. The uplifted flask almost suggests an advertisement. Tripathi would see the *kṣapaṇaka* scenes as ‘stone posters’ to arouse hatred of ‘morbid behaviour’, but an alternative view would take them as just a variation of the pervasive eroticism of Khajuraho, transgressive but complementary. At Bagali and Kota, reality is altogether transcended; the quality of imagination in the artwork is of a higher order, but the aphrodisiac element is imaginary or symbolic. The miserable young man in Hussain’s advertisement is the one example of a person shown needing an aphrodisiac, and he is promised that the aphrodisiac will be sent in concealing packaging. This is the closest we come to the everyday world. In sum, each of the examples throws light on all the others, and enhances our understanding of the place of aphrodisiacs in a wide range of Indian culture.

19. Titley 2005, 70.

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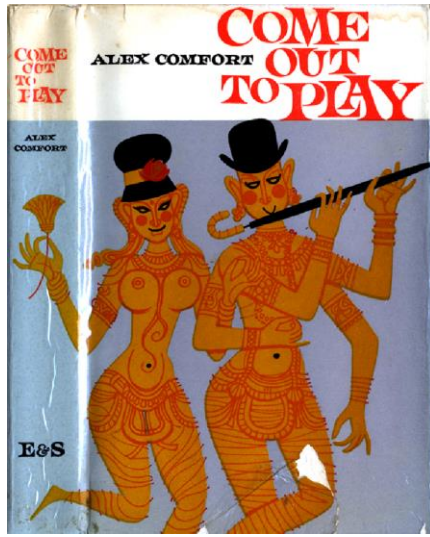


Fig. 1. Cover of Alex Comfort's 1961 novel, *Come Out to Play*, referring to orgiastic results of an aphrodisiac perfume.

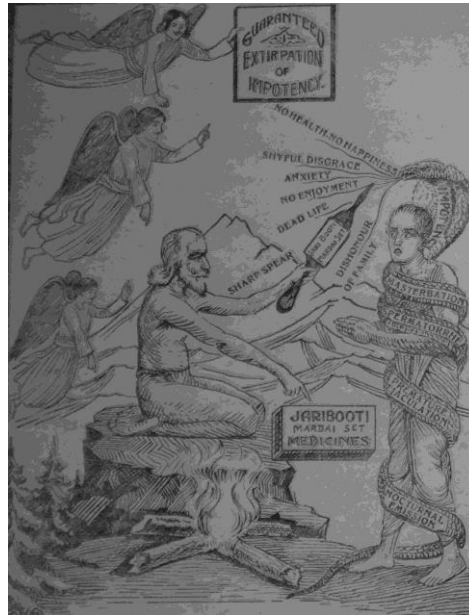


Fig. 2. Aphrodisiac advertisement in *Mumbai Samachar*, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1928, showing an ascetic providing cure for a sexually weak youth.

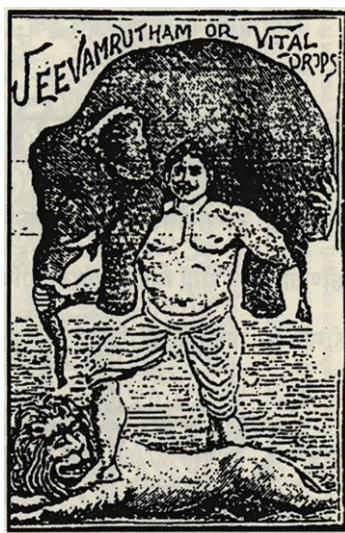


Fig. 3. Aphrodisiac advertisement in Allahabad *Leader*, 8<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1911, showing sexually strong man (from Gupta 2002, 76).



Fig. 4. Illustration from *Nīmatnāma*, 15th century Cookery Book. Sultan of Mandu watches preparation of aphrodisiac food (British Library IO Isl 149, f. 133b).



Fig. 5. Stills from *Father, Son and Holy War*, dir. Anand Patwardhan 1995; Part 2: Hero Pharmacy; from above, a, b, c (courtesy Anand Patwardhan).



Fig. 6. Relief sculpture from south wall of *śikhara*, Kalleshvara temple (12<sup>th</sup> century), Bagali, Davangere District, Karnataka (photo D. Smith).



Fig. 7. Overview of orgy frieze on southeast end of south side of plinth of Lakshmana temple, Khajuraho (10<sup>th</sup> century) (photo D. Smith).



Fig. 8. Detail of Fig. 7: three naked Jain monks cooking in the centre of the orgy frieze (photo D. Smith).

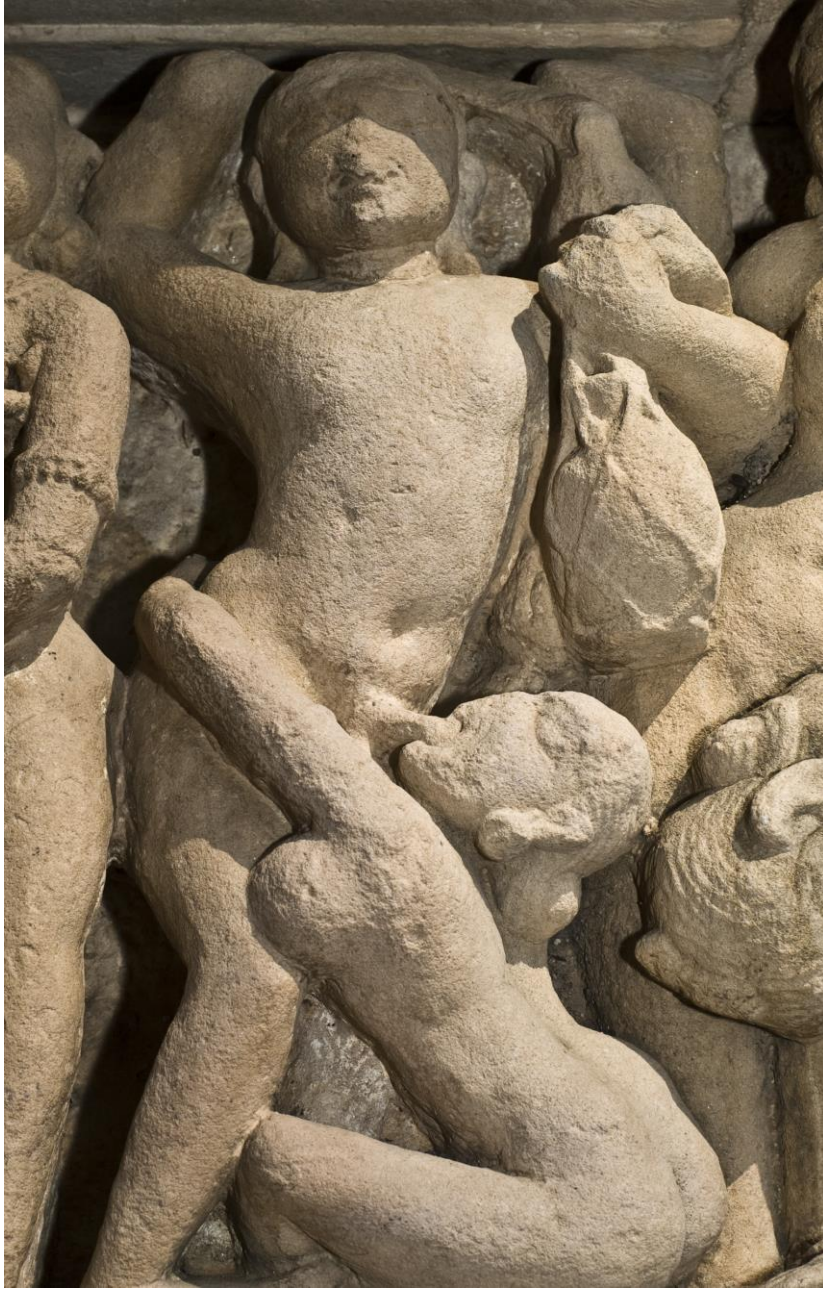


Fig. 9. Detail of Fig. 7: naked Jain monk lifting up an oversized water-vessel in a containing net (photo D. Smith).



Governing the body and the state:  
Akbar's vegetarianism  
through the lenses of coeval literary sources

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Studies on Akbar's religious outlook are often interspersed with shades of bias. A large number of analyses focus, for instance, on the emperor's private spiritual attitudes, which brings the authors either to emphasize their bizarre or even freakish aspects;<sup>1</sup> or, on the contrary, to highlight Akbar's tolerance as both a token of his innate open-mindedness and a primary source of inspiration for administrative activities.<sup>2</sup> Scholars' cultural background may also be a source of prejudice: Muslim communalist historians tend to accuse Akbar of apostasy,<sup>3</sup> while Indian scholars often perceive in his measures elements of proto-secularism<sup>4</sup> and even national identity – to the point that, as it has been observed, 'Akbar was reassessed in ways as diverse as the historians who reassessed him'.<sup>5</sup>

Problems in interpretation are also linked to the fact that Akbar's religious politics has generated sharply conflicting viewpoints since his very times, as it is demonstrated by the dramatic conceptual distance between the works of two of his most illustrious courtiers: in fact, while Abū al-Faẓl's panegyric narrative<sup>6</sup>

1. See e.g. V. A. Smith: 'The whole scheme was the outcome of a ridiculous vanity, a monstrous growth of unrestrained autocracy. (...) The Divine Faith was a monument of Akbar's folly' (Smith 1919<sup>2</sup>, 222).

2. See e.g. M. Roychoudhury: 'Toleration was the basis of the whole system' (Roychoudhury 1941, 305). Victorian intellectuals were instrumental in popularising the notion of Akbar's tolerance. See e.g. Tennyson's poem *Akbar's Dream*, that 'grants the authority of toleration's origin to India not Europe – Akbar's "tolerance of religions and abhorrence of religious persecution", says Tennyson, "put our Tudors to shame"' (Stevens–Sapra 2007, 392).

3. Hodgson 1974, 61.

4. See e.g. Sen 2005, 18-19, 273-74, 287-88.

5. Hodgson 1974, 61.

6. Abū al-Faẓl was the author of the monumental *Akbar-nāma* (*The Book of Akbar*), a work on the history of Akbar's reign in three volumes (see Beveridge 1897–1939); and of the

celebrates the emperor's enlightened rule, Al-Badāoni harshly criticizes Akbar's 'heretical attacks on orthodoxy'.<sup>7</sup> Another intrinsic contradiction lies in the fact that, although it is difficult to find in the history of the whole Indian subcontinent a monarch so interested in religious knowledge and personally involved in spiritual enquiries, these elements do not implicitly authorize interpretations that attribute to Akbar's religious sensibility any choice where religious issues were at stake.

Many instances occurred throughout his reign: from his famed marriage in 1562 to the daughter of the Hindu Rājā Bihār (or Bihārī) Mal of Amber, to the measures by which Akbar lifted the fiscal imposition on Hindu pilgrimages (1563) and immediately later (1564) abolished the *jiziyā* – the tax imposed on non Muslim people. Although many scholars have attributed these choices to the emperor's resolution to be 'a father to all his people', Hindu and Muslim alike, and to follow the path of religious tolerance,<sup>8</sup> other historians have rather interpreted them as moves of political and administrative nature<sup>9</sup> connected to the widely established custom of marriage alliances or to the large set of reforms progressively implemented from the 1560s, that eventually brought about, in 1583, a complete reorganization of the state<sup>10</sup> – a process that is often forgotten or underestimated by historians.

Yet the most interesting example of a governmental measure that is usually given an almost exclusively religious interpretation is perhaps the enactment of the *mahzar* ('petition' or 'declaration') in 1579, which gave the emperor the right to choose among conflicting opinions in religious matters and authorized him to formulate new ordinances according not only to Qu'rān, but also to 'universal goodness'.<sup>11</sup> This act placed him, *de facto* and *de iure*, above any religious authority – which has led some scholars to affirm that Akbar intended to assert himself as 'both pope and emperor'.<sup>12</sup> It should be observed however, that the purport and the potential consequences of this initiative were far more significant in relation to the international context, than within the internal political-religious arena. At the time, in fact, Akbar already possessed an almost total influence over the court's religious authorities, as it is demonstrated by the simple

*Ā'in-i Akbarī* (*Akbar's Regulations*), a detailed account of Akbar's institutions (see Blochmann–Jarrett 1873–1907).

7. Ranking–Haig–Lowe 1884–1925, Vol. II, 338 (year 992).

8. Cf. Burn 1957, 81–82.

9. It has been aptly observed that pre-Mughal Sultans already recurred to implicit tolerance towards the non-Muslim population as a 'political expediency' (G. T. Kulkarni 2000, 158). On *jiziyā* see for instance A. R. Kulkarni 1996, particularly 156–57. The author sees the reintroduction of the *jiziyā* enacted by Aurangzeb more as a fiscal than as a religious measure.

10. Cf. Roychoudhuri 1941, 220–24.

11. For the whole text of the document see Ranking–Haig–Lowe 1884–1925, Vol. II, 270–72.

12. Smith 1919<sup>2</sup>, 178. See also Burn 1957, 123.



fact that they all – albeit not always gladly, as Al-Badāoni remarks<sup>13</sup> – agreed to sign the ‘declaration’. Akbar’s attention was rather drawn towards the external boundaries of his empire. Since the *mahzar* stated that the emperor, in his capacity as *Imām-i ‘ādil* (‘Just governor’) is superior to the *Mujtahid* – the Shiite religious authority who interprets canonical law – and, at the same time, attributed to him the caliphal title of *Amīr al-Muminīn* (‘Guide of the faithful’), it implicitly placed him above any *external* religious power and – what counted most – outside the sphere of influence both of the Shiite Safavid monarchy in Persia and of the Sunnite Ottoman Caliphate.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to it – as it has been rightly observed<sup>15</sup> – this initiative should be seen within the frame of the complex relationship between Akbar and his stepbrother Mirzā Hakīm, sovereign of the Timurid state of Kabul. This is another issue that is often forgotten or downsized by colonial and contemporary historians, who usually dismiss Hakīm as a weak-willed ruler<sup>16</sup> or a narrow-minded Muslim fanatic – at least partially drawing from the coeval accounts produced at Akbar’s court. Yet, for almost two decades, Mirzā was perhaps the most resolute antagonist of Akbar’s rule, representing not only a competitor for dynastic succession, but also the centripetal force that attracted Islamic orthodox authorities discontented with, or marginalized by Akbar’s positions on religious issues. The *mahzar* was thus enacted against him as well as against the Islamic opposition that continued to coalesce in some centres, with the aim of publicly sanctioning the emperor’s primacy in the domain of Islamic doctrine. Evidence for this interpretation may be considered here, since a few years later Akbar ‘threw all caution to the wind, abandoning even the slightest pretence of being an orthodox-minded Sunni-Muslim ruler or even someone who was mindful of Islamic religious opinion. Thus, starting in 1582, Akbar began initiating disciples into a religiously eclectic imperial cult – the *silsilah-i muridan* (circle of disciples), commonly referred to as the *Din-i Ilahi* (Divine Faith)’.<sup>17</sup> All this happened only three years after the declaration of his doctrinal infallibility, and immediately after he had conclusively defeated Mirzā Hakīm.

Apart from the Sunni representatives, whose role at court both coeval sources and contemporary scholarly works tend perhaps to overemphasize, other actors were present on the religious scene. The dynamics developed by these other figures, were decisive in carving Akbar’s religious policy, as it is shown by various sources (including some outstanding pictures and miniatures) which describe the regular presence at court of religious dignitaries belonging

13. Ranking–Haig–Lowe 1884–1925, Vol. II, 270.

14. International circumstances were favourable to Akbar’s move. On the subject, see also Buckler 1924, 602–4.

15. See Faruqui 2005.

16. Cf. Smith 1919<sup>2</sup>, 190–91.

17. Faruqui 2005, 518.

to different faiths and diverse cultural areas, as well as the long debates the emperor had with them<sup>18</sup> – a process in which we could even detect elements of what has post-modernly been termed as ‘reverse transculturation’.<sup>19</sup>

Within this scenery of religious interplay a place apart must be reserved for the representatives of Sufism. Indian Sufis have traditionally played a prominent role in Indian Muslim courts, almost constantly opposing the orthodox personnel charged with religious-administrative responsibilities. A vast literature has amply dealt with this topic,<sup>20</sup> to which I would add the data that may be gathered from coeval Sufi literary sources, and particularly from Sufi Avadhi poems – basically love stories (*premākhyān*) that elaborate on local narrative themes. Through a political decryption of Malik Muhammad Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat* (1520–1540)<sup>21</sup> – one of the greatest achievements in world literature – we can detect for instance a condition of trilateral confrontation involving (1) the sovereign, (2) the orthodox personnel at court, and (3) the ascetics.<sup>22</sup> Through these dynamics a concept of kingship is outlined that is conspicuously different from, and in some passages radically antithetical to, that expressed by the Islamic orthodoxy.

This concept of kingship would have greatly appealed to the great Mughal emperor. We do not go as far as to image a direct influence of Avadhi Sufism on the evolution of Akbar’s political strategy. Yet there is evidence<sup>23</sup> of the strict correspondence between the values expressed by Sufi Avadhi poems and those upon which local or specific forms of coeval Islamic government were based. Among the latter we might quote the extraordinarily innovative experiences represented by the Sharqī (the ‘Easterner’) Sultanate of Jaunpur<sup>24</sup> (1394–1483) and by the rule of the Afghan sovereign Śer Śāh Sūrī, who had won the Delhi kingdom from Akbar’s father Humāyūn, giving his state an administrative structure and a political consistency which were to prominently inform Akbar’s model of governance.

Indeed, various other elements allow us to hypothesize an ideological ‘consonance’ between the Sufis of Avadh and the Mughal emperor, one of which is surely represented by the strong links that Akbar established with the Chistiya order. As it is well known, for many years Akbar showed warm devotion to Sufi saints and ascetics, in particular to Śaikh Salim Chisti of Sikri: he named his first son after him, then he chose to build the new capital Fatehpur close to Sikri. Less debated are perhaps the reasons that moved the emperor to establish a

18. See Roychoudhuri 1941, Chapt. V, 121–213.

19. Cf. Stevens–Sapra 2007, 379–411.

20. One of the latest publications on this subject is Aquil 2012.

21. Ed. Agravāl 19803; Italian translation and Introduction, Milanetti 1995.

22. See Milanetti 2008 (2012).

23. See Milanetti 2006.

24. See Saeed 1972.

strategic alliance with the Chistiya order – some of which can be put in relation, once again, with the threat represented by his half-brother Mirzā Hakīm: ‘(...) in their eclectic and accommodating religious and spiritual practices, the Chishtis were the perfect bridge between the Indic and Islamic elements within Akbar’s realm. The last was an especially crucial point because an important source of Akbar’s political legitimacy – vis-à-vis the Mirza – was his willingness to embrace the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of his empire’.<sup>25</sup>

Correspondingly, from its very outset the Sufi poetical tradition of Avadh was associated with the Chistiya *silsilā*. Maulānā Dāūd, the author of *Candāyan* (1379), and the first known representative of this school, was the disciple of Śaikh Janaidī (Zainu’d-Din),<sup>26</sup> a disciple of the great Chisti saint Nasiru’d-Din ‘Cīrāgh-i Dihlī’. Śaikh Qutban, the author of *Mīrgāvatī* (1503), was associated with another famous Chisti saint, Śaikh Muhammad ‘Isa Tāj of Jaunpur. Malik Muhammad ‘Jāyasī’, the author of *Padmāvat*, was deeply inspired by the millenarist currents of Islam, which were particularly widespread in Avadh and had an enormous influence on the religious debate at Akbar’s court. Yet among his many spiritual preceptors, the first and foremost name he mentions in the poem is that of Saiyad Aśraf, ‘my beloved teacher, (...) a Sovereign in this world (*jahāngīr*), as pure as the moonlight’, who ‘belongs to Cīstī’s lineage’.<sup>27</sup>

In Jāyasī’s poem, kingship takes on a peculiar form, since it is presented neither as something given once and for all, nor as a function to be negotiated between different actors. The poem in fact expresses strong disapproval of the alliance between the monarch and the representatives of the ‘official’ religion that in the text is covertly described in reference to Gandharvasen’s Hindu court.<sup>28</sup> Rather, kingship is conceived as a dimension to be reached through an itinerary where royal splendour and asceticism, *yog* and *bhog*, self-sacrifice and enjoyment, could be reciprocally modulated and elaborated, until the very ‘substance’ (*sār*) of kingship ‘emanates’ – one might say – from the whole monarch’s being.<sup>29</sup> *This* concept of kingship is exactly what the visual, ritual or literary narratives produced at Akbar’s court were meant to portray and circulate. We argue that without taking into account *this* concept of kingship, any analysis of Akbar’s vegetarianism (or other forms of asceticism, physical challenges, interior prowess, he carried out) is bound to fall short.

Akbar was truly a half-vegetarian, at least from a certain period onward. Abū al-Faḥl quotes several of his sayings on this subject: ‘Were it not for the thought of the difficulty of sustenance, I would prohibit men from eating meat.

25. Faruqui 2005, 514.

26. *Candāyan* stanza 9 (see Gupta 1967).

27. *Padmāvat* I.18.

28. See Milanetti 2008 (2012), 232.

29. See *Padmāvat* XXV.14-15; XXVI.2; XXVII.15-26, etc.

The reason why I do not altogether abandon it myself is, that many others might willingly forego it likewise and be thus cast into despondency'. And further on: 'From my earliest years, whenever I ordered animal food to be cooked for me, I found it rather tasteless and cared little for it. I took this feeling to indicate a necessity for protecting animals, and I refrained from animal food'.<sup>30</sup> Other sections of the first book of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* – which interestingly enough are grouped under the heading *Šúfiyānah* ('Living according to the manner of the Sufis') – contain a list of the days when the emperor used to abstain from meat consumption, together with clarifying statements such as the following one: 'If his Majesty had not the burden of the world on his shoulders, he would at once totally abstain from meat; and now, it is his intention to quit it by degrees, conforming, however, *a little to the spirit of the age*'.<sup>31</sup> These words, we argue, provide clear evidence for both the emperor's strong commitment to vegetarianism and his awareness of the complex dynamics brought about by it.

We have also passages from Al-Badāoni – albeit in a critical perspective – confirming the extent of these practices and calculating the global period of abstention from meat:

The killing of animals on the first day of the week was strictly prohibited, because this day is sacred to the Sun, also during the first eighteen days of the month of *Farwardīn*; the whole of the month of *Ābān* (the month in which His Majesty was born); and on several other days, to please the Hindús. (...) During the time of these fasts the Emperor abstained altogether from meat, as a religious penance, gradually extending the several fasts during a year over six months and even more, with a view to eventually discontinuing the use of meat altogether.<sup>32</sup>

We cannot fully agree with Al-Badāoni where he describes meat abstention as a religious penance. It is true that we have indications showing that preparations without meat 'probably entered the Islamic medico-culinary tradition from indigenous Christian communities (possibly Nestorian) where they were prepared for days or periods of fasting'.<sup>33</sup> Yet these dishes later underwent a marked transformation regarding their content and purpose, since they were basically adopted for medical use. Al-Warraq's *Kitab al-Tabikh* – the earliest culinary manual in Arabic language, dating from the late tenth century<sup>34</sup> – 'presents two

30. Blochmann–Jarrett 1873–1907, Vol. III, Book V, 241.

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Book I, 26, 'The Days of Abstinence' (*Šúfiyānah*), italics added.

32. Ranking–Haig–Lowe 1884–1925, Vol. II, 321–22. *Farwardīn* is the first month of the Persian calendar, starting from March; *Ābān*, or the 'water' month, is the eighth month.

33. Waines 2003, 578.

34. *Ibid.*, 574.

*muzawwar* [lit. ‘counterfeit’] recipes attributed to the Christian physician Ibn Masawayh (d. AD 857), who is possibly the one responsible for introducing the notion of a medicinal use of these vegetarian dishes into the Islamic dietetic tradition’.<sup>35</sup>

Different reasons for abstention from meat were in any case known to the Indian Islamic tradition. Al-Badāoni himself recounts how the famous Sufi saint Śaikh Burhan (d. AD 1562–3) ‘for nearly fifty years [before his death] (...) had abstained from flesh-meat and from most other articles of food and drink’<sup>36</sup> – thus implicitly presenting this habit more as an existential choice than an occasional form of self-mortification. To this we can add the case of another Mughal emperor, Akbar’s son Jahāngīr, who recounts in his memoirs how, on certain days, he abstained from meat and prohibited the killing of animals in order both to honour his father – who ‘used to say it was better on that day that all animals should be free from the calamity of those of a butcherly disposition’ – and to celebrate the day of his own accession.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously, local influences accounting for the abstention from meat eating in the Indian subcontinent are many and of diverse cultural origins. In particular, court literary and pictorial sources are full of descriptions of the emperor’s meetings with the representatives of Hindu and Jaina religions. Especially noteworthy was his relation with the Jaina saint Hiravijaya, who reached the imperial court in 1582 and left behind an enduring imprint of spiritual dignity and asceticism.<sup>38</sup> In parallel with Persian court literature, Gujarati literary sources tend to emphasize the role of Jaina saints in shaping Akbar’s religious policy and ethical choices, while simultaneously honouring him as the ‘omniscient, all pervading, all powerful monarch or as Chakravarty Raja-paramount power’.<sup>39</sup> However, it could be observed that Akbar’s attention towards Jainism was due not only to his attention for spiritual values, but also – once again – to his political strategy: he was in fact ‘the first ruler to comprehend the regional roots of the plural societies of India which contain sub-systems that were distinct from each other. He undertook componential approach, respected regional collective identities, encouraged the development of different traditions, culture, religion’.<sup>40</sup>

Avadhi Sufi poetry offers other interesting clues in order to better frame the values and feelings on which Akbar’s vegetarianism could have been based. Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat* – which also contains one of the brightest descriptions of a

35. *Ibid.*, 578.

36. Ranking–Haig–Lowe 1884–1925, Vol. II, I.4.

37. Rogers–Beveridge 1909–1914, Vol. I, 43.

38. Smith contends that ‘Akbar’s action in abstaining almost wholly from eating meat (...) certainly was taken in obedience to the doctrine of his Jain teachers’ (Smith 1919<sup>2</sup>, 168).

39. Mehta 1992, 58.

40. *Ibid.*

king turned ascetic, then turned king again – offers a breathtaking account of the seizing and the slaughtering of animals for the royal banquet:

Muttons and fat goats of any size were taken and brought there, and also deer, antelopes, gazelles, blackbucks, and hares. (...) Neither birds such as partridges, quails, herons and cranes, nor peacocks which are so fond of dancing could escape. (...) Instantly the knife fell on their throat, and they began pouring bloody tears, since that very body they had nourished and viewed as their own, turned now to be meat for someone else.<sup>41</sup>

This passage, and the moral teaching it conveys, reminds us of the famous episode that took place in May 1578, when ‘Akbar was hunting along the banks of the Jhelum River in Punjab. As the circle of beaters [was] closing around the game, Akbar was suddenly filled with a sublime joy and drawn by a sense of spiritual communion with God. In gratitude for his spiritual illumination, he ordered that the hunt be stopped and the thousands of animals caught up by the beaters be allowed to go free’.<sup>42</sup> This experience, as Abū al-Faḥl documents, ‘drew him even more strongly to a life of ascetic withdrawal from the world’.<sup>43</sup>

This and other similar episodes, the ascetic habits that the emperor progressively assumed, and – as mentioned before – the same, controversial creation of the so-called imperial cult, or *tauhid-i ilāhī*, were in fact conveniently elaborated and emphasized by a court narrative that, at least from the 1580s onwards, aimed at presenting Akbar as a ruler endowed with divine light (*farr-i izidī*), or ‘a ray from the sun’. This gave the sovereign – as Abū al-Faḥl puts it – an almost perfect blend of saintly attitudes: ‘a paternal love towards the subjects; a large heart which implied a sense of discrimination, courage and firmness and [*sīc*] attending to the wishes of great and small; and a daily increasing trust in God, and prayer and devotion so that he is not upset by adversity, punishes the tyrant and behaves with moderation and with reason’.<sup>44</sup> Yet – as I argue – this celebration of the virtues of the ‘perfect man’ (*insān-i kamīl*) should not merely be seen as part of the process of elaborating Akbar’s imperial authority, but also, and perhaps mainly, as a function of the project of circulating and propagating instruments for self-elevation dedicated *primarily to the high ranking officials of the state*. Indeed, Abū al-Faḥl’s two works, ‘the *Akbar-Nāma* and the *Ā’in-i Akbarī* together formed one of the most important means of conveying to a wider court the nature of Akbar’s authority and its meaning for his imperial servants. Abu’l Faḥl made it clear that not only the detailed imperial regulations of the *Ā’in*, but the history set out in the *Akbar-Nāma* was

41. *Padmāvat* XLV.1.

42. O’Hanlon 2007, 902.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Chandra 2005, 132.

philosophy teaching by example. It was intended “as a lesson book for the instruction of mankind and as a moral treatise for the practical teaching of subjects in the right conduct of life”.<sup>45</sup> In fact, ‘the code for imperial service was not simply one of loyalty to the emperor, but of constant striving for the qualities that both developed a man’s highest nature as a man, and made him fit for the ultimate form of worship: *imperial service*’.<sup>46</sup>

Once again, these statements call forth an analogy between Akbar’s political vision and the teachings of Avadhi Sufis, since a direct antecedent of the integration of personal edification and public service implemented at the emperor’s court, may be found in the dimension of ‘world orientation’ in which all their poems are set. In a sense, the commitment to worldly duty represents exactly the place where Akbar’s political itinerary and the Sufi spiritual path do meet each other – and where the asceticism that characterizes both the emperor’s attitudes and Avadhi Sufism at large reveals its inner meaning. Several stanzas in *Padmāvat* openly censure asceticism if it is limited to renouncement and self-mortification; on the contrary, ‘world abandonment must be practised at home’.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned before, Jāyāsī’s teachings seem in fact to focus on the necessary integration of inner refinement and world experience, asceticism (*jog/yog*) and enjoyment (*bhog*), as it is shown throughout the whole plot of the poem – from the moment when the hero Ratan’sen, taking the garb of an ascetic, leaves his royal mansion in search of the beautiful Padmāvati, symbol of spiritual perfection, until his return to his kingdom and his death on the battlefield, which brings his *kṣātra dharma* to culmination.

Mañjhan’s *Madhumālatī*<sup>48</sup> shows similar dynamics. When the two lovers, prince Manohar and Madhumālatī, are finally reunited after a long separation and severe penances, they set forth to come back to Manohar’s kingdom, where he will be reinstated as a ruler. At the same time, Manohar’s return is the necessary condition for his kingdom to recover its harmony and prosperity. On hearing the news, the previously dull and gloomy city of Kanaigiri suddenly regains colour; the members of local society recover their function and activity: ‘All was decorated by the town’s people, each according to his own responsibility. All the palaces were freshly whitewashed. Sandalwood incense was burned in each one. Inside and outside, on gates and ramparts, silken hangings made everything colourful’.<sup>49</sup> Spiritual experiences – we might comment – are nil if divested of involvement in world activities. The asceticism of Avadhi Sufi poets does not

45. O’Hanlon 2007, 897. See *Ā’in-i Akbarī* III, 251.

46. O’Hanlon 2007, 905. Italics added.

47. *Padmāvat*, L.7.

48. See Behl–Weightman 2000.

49. *Ibid.*, 227, stanza 536.

separate human beings from their daily life; rather, it empowers them to fully live their worldly life.

The ‘philosophy teaching by example’ carried out by Akbar both through his personal behaviour, and the narrative produced at court, pointed in the same direction. Vegetarianism, within the limits we have tried to describe, was part of *this* project. Akbar’s disciples were mainly state officials who ‘agreed to observe particular regulations: a special mode of greeting, alms-giving, periodic abstention from meat and avoidance of those involved in its slaughter’.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that, through the promulgation of the *tauhid-i ilāhī* – specifically based on ‘a combination of [Akbar’s] divine illumination and inner attributes’<sup>51</sup> – the whole Mughal dynasty not only strengthened its imperial authority but also gained a halo of sacredness that endured for centuries, giving depth to its political power even during the periods of its decline, until the tragic deposition of its last representative, Bahadur Shah, by the British invaders.

50. O’Hanlon 2007, 906. See *Ā’in-i Akbarī*I, 161.

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With Bharatendu Harishchandra  
through the food-bazaar of *Andher Nagari*

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*Andher Nagari Chaupaṭṭ Rājā*<sup>1</sup> or *The Blind/Anarchic City [with] a Defunct King* (1881), also popularly known as *The City of Darkness*<sup>2</sup> or *The Lawless State* (Dimitrova 2004, 18), is one of the famous pieces by Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850–1885). It is loved for its evergreen satirical message and a number of vivid scenes displaying the life of an Indian city. A short play of ‘folk-tale like character’ (Dalmia 1997, 313), it was created spontaneously by the author and staged by the ‘Hindu National Theatre (Natak Samaj) of Banaras, which consisted of a group of Bengali and Hindi speakers’ who regularly performed at Dashashvamedh Ghat (Hansen 1989, 83). *Andher Nagari* is neither a purely allegorical piece with straightforward political contents – like *Bhārat Durdaṣā* (*The Misfortune of India*, 1876), – nor is it a bizarre portrait of a contemporary city – like *Prem-joginī* (*The Yogini of Love*, 1874–5). Rather, in a concise form, it combines the features of both: set in an imagined Dark/Lawless City, the play, through a chain of fast-spinning events of a picaresque nature, makes fun of an ignorant raja, thus providing a ‘transparent satire’ of a state with authoritarian rule (Dimitrova 2004, 14). The plot is loosely based on a series of anecdotes about the legendary Raja Harbong, known for his ‘dim-witted, whimsical and often cruelly unjust treatment of his people’. Popular oral tales, among other episodes, narrate the sad conclusion of this reign: the

1. I dedicate this paper to Dr. Yulia M. Alikhanova, my mentor and supervisor during the years I spent studying and working at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, as a token of my deepest appreciation of her knowledge and expertise, and heartfelt gratitude for her insightful guidance. The idea for this article was largely inspired by her fascinating lectures on India’s literary history.

2. This translation was popularized by the Amar Chitra Katha comic book *Andher Nagari*, *The City of Darkness* first published in 1974 (see, for example, *Andher Nagari* 2011; the same translation is used by Annie Montaut, see Montaut 2011). It may be an apt English title for this play, as it indicates the connection between the ancient Kāśī, the pure ‘city of light’, and its modern *avatār*, parodied by Harishchandra (Schilder–Callewaert 2000, 72).

famous yogi Gorakhnath tricked the ‘defunct raja’ into taking his own life (Dalmia 2006, 60).

According to Dalmia, the real popularity of *Andher Nagarī* in the theatre only started in the 1970s (Dalmia 1997, 314, n. 92); this short play (or, rather, farce), thanks to its funny and uncomplicated language and the light nature of the story, became an obvious choice for both amateur and professional theatre-groups in India, especially for school and children’s theatres. Thus, it is no surprise that of all the texts by Harishchandra, *Andher Nagarī* is the one that is easily-available on the somewhat unpredictable Hindi book market; its editions are often particularly targeted at younger generations – typically published as thin booklets, printed in a clear large font with amusing illustrations (see, for example, Hariścandra 2003).

The action in this six-act farce takes place in two areas: in the so-called *bāhya prānt*, or ‘premises outside [the city]’ together with *jarigal/aranya* – the forest (Acts 1, 3 and 5), and inside the city – namely, at the bazaar (Act 2), at the king’s court (Act 4) and, finally, at the cremation-cum-execution grounds (Act 6). Similarly, the story revolves around two initially unconnected groups of characters – one from the ‘outside’ world, represented by three religious figures – a *vaiṣṇava mahānt* (chief priest) and his two disciples, and the other – the dwellers of the Dark City, their raja, and his retinue. The outsiders visit the city in hope to collect alms and get some food appropriate for the *mahābhog* (food offering) ceremony for their idol, Śrī Śālagrām Jī (the black stone image of Kṛṣṇa). At first, this simple task looks very promising: not only is the food in the city cheap and of excellent quality, but also the prices for all the items are very attractive – everything from vegetables to meat and fish costs one *ṭākā* (coin) for a *ser* (at present, the equivalent of ca. 0.93 kg). Soon enough, however, the prospect of having a great feast becomes bleak, as one of the young disciples called Gobardhandas, having decided to remain behind in this food-paradise, gets arrested and is sent directly to the gallows. The local police choose him as this city’s scapegoat for a minor crime, merely because he has a fat neck that could fit the noose, since all the citizens of *Andher Nagarī* are terribly underweight as they live in constant fear of their raja’s ill-temper. Gobardhandas’ life can only be saved by his clever guru, who lures the raja to the gallows, thus sparing his disciple and the whole city from the brainless authoritarian ruler.

One of the most memorable parts of this play is its second Act, which takes place at the city’s food-bazaar. Here, the author invites us to a literary feast, where captivating images of food-items are served, generously seasoned with humour and satire. The play as a whole, and this act in particular, can be called a brilliant example of Harishchandra’s art of ‘literary photography’: his

snap-shots, or, as he put it elsewhere, *chhāyāchitras* made with words,<sup>3</sup> allow us to discover the vibrant life of this city-center, its air filled with the voices of vendors and smells of spices, kebabs, and sweetmeats. Together with Go-bardhandas as he inspects the food-stalls, the reader/spectator also becomes a *flâneur*, who observes and collects impressions of a happening urban space. As this paper will argue, even though the first impression may suggest that the events take place in an imaginary country ‘once upon a time’, there are enough details to betray the fact that Harishchandra used his own city of Banaras as the prototype for the City of Darkness. Hence, this paper suggests considering the second Act of *Andher Nagarī* as a valuable textual source that showcases the author’s keen interest in contemporary city-life and his intentions to create a satirical reflection of a larger society through the captivating imaginary of a food-bazaar. Analysing the pictures of the food-stalls and the sounds of the crowd and of the individual voices ‘recorded’ for us by Harishchandra – the utterances of the merchants, who are praising their goods, the exchanges between the vendors and the client, – this paper calls for the exploration of the fundamentally interactive nature of a traditional bazaar and its functions as an information hub and a community centre, as well as its ability to present the face of a city/country, since it displays the essence of an ‘area’s economy, technology, and society – in brief, of the local way of life’.<sup>4</sup>

In colonial times, European travellers often expressed their awe at ‘the bustle and colour of the oriental bazaar’ (Bayly 1983, vii); in the occidental imagination, the traditional bazaar provides a picaresque display of goods – things may be arranged inside the ground-floor shops, on tables, carts, or simply on some rags on the ground; customers/visitor typically move along the lanes of the bazaar, making their way through the cacophony of voices, enjoying the different smells, and resisting or succumbing to culinary temptations. Numerous travelogues and reports from the Orient spurred the imagination of writers and painters, who, in their turn, created inviting images of markets, where fruits and spices, luxurious carpets, heavy brocaded cloths, shining brass jars and ornate pottery were on display. The bazaar gradually evolved as a powerful cultural trope, serving as the ‘exoticized Other place of Western imagination’ (Yang 1998, 2):<sup>5</sup> there, a visitor walks ‘peacefully and dreamily (...) inhaling the odour

3. Harishchandra’s fascination with his city and attempts to record the life therein are evident from *Prem-joginī*, a.k.a. *Kāsī ke cchāyācitra arthāt Kāsī ke do bhale bure fotogrāf*– ‘Reflections of Kāsī or a Couple of Good and Bad Photographs’ (Dalmia 1997, 303).

4. Eder 1976, 76, quoted in Yang 1998, 1.

5. Also, as Pratt suggests, bazaars prove to be crucial ‘contact zones’ between civilizations, ‘the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’ (Pratt 1992, 6).

of sandalwood',<sup>6</sup> and at times is disturbed by a merchant praising their 'citrons from the South, sweet to tongue and sound to eye' and shouting 'come buy, come buy'.<sup>7</sup> It is not rare to detect a mixture of fascination and embarrassment or even dread before the concentrated 'foreignness' of exotic markets: Victorian travel writers typically reported their shopping experience in Egypt as being a hard, if not hopeless exercise, primarily due to their inability to communicate with the locals. Travellers were in no hurry to become proper customers and to actually start buying things they fancied, or even to strike a simple deal, such as finding a guide or fixing a boat. Many reportedly preferred to abstain from any acts of interaction and 'derive full benefit from a bazaar simply by observing and documenting it' (Haddad 2006, 82). This happened not only because of the obvious language-barrier; the acceptable behaviour of a client presupposed the knowledge of general etiquette and specific gestures, but, most importantly, a readiness to actively engage in negotiations. For many, bargaining was specifically challenging as, according to Haddad, it meant ceding 'the inherently superior position of observers for that of participants'.<sup>8</sup>

The contacts between foreigners and oriental merchants described in 19<sup>th</sup> century travelogues demonstrate, in a very lucid way, at least two general features of an average non-Western market. Firstly, they highlight the market as 'a place of exchange' (*ibid.*), emphasizing its interactive nature, when both customers and vendors are involved in verbal and non-verbal interchanges; the accounts highlight two modes of behaviour – active participation in the act of buying, and choosing a passive role as an observer who admires the goods but does not shop. Secondly, such interactive situations are instrumental in distinguishing between insiders and outsiders: withdrawal from interaction is likely to be regarded as unnatural and foreign, whereas asking the price, discussing goods, and bargaining characterize a skillful, locally-rooted customer. Although Harishchandra's play showcases a person who is only an outsider, but not a foreigner (Gobardhandas does not know the local rules, but he is as 'Indian' as the majority of the vendors he meets), it does reveal the author's intuitive awareness of both these traits.

It is difficult to imagine that the environment of the local markets, famously spread along all the narrow lanes of the 'old city' of Banaras, felt exotic to

6. From Gustave Flaubert's *Voyage en oriente* (Flaubert 1980, 115).

7. From Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (written in 1859), a poem of a clearly Orientalist origin, betraying, among other emotions, a deeply rooted fear of all things that are foreign yet irresistibly-tempting (Rossetti 1993, 72).

8. '(→) it is principally the necessity of bargaining that sets the market apart from the master-tropes of theater and exhibition. While shopping, travelers can no longer remain confidently detached from what they observe, as they might in the theater of exhibit hall. If only temporarily, they occupy a subject position constrained by, rather than empowered by, the Egyptian setting' (Haddad 2006, 82).

Harishchandra, who, as Bayly put it, ‘came from the background of bazaar and temple’ (Bayly 1983, 453), but he was certainly strongly attracted to it. One feels that he was aware of the bazaars’ representative role, especially to the outsiders, who had to be impressed by the display of goods and the local manners in a different way to the city-dwellers themselves. The author’s keen interest in ‘recording’ street- and bazaar-scenes, in both *Andher Nagarī* and *Prem-joginī*, comes from his firm belief – at his time not yet shared by many – that there is value in contemporary events and common things surrounding us, which makes them worth being described and preserved, by means of literature, fine art or photography.<sup>9</sup> Act 2 of the play in focus takes us through a happening urban space and supplies priceless hints about the behaviour or, rather, speech habits and mindsets of people at a typical North-Indian bazaar; thus, it appears to be a valuable source for investigating the role of a traditional market-place in the changing socio-cultural conditions of India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, it needs to be underlined that Act 2 is the only part of the play which, in a concentrated way, establishes clear connections with the actualities of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Indian life.

Harishchandra’s methods of depicting the city in a drama were somewhat limited – verbal portrayal was naturally chosen as the main tool of characterization; as Dalmia notices, he preserved the typical language of Banaras in *Prem-joginī* (‘on the borderline between Avadhī and Bhojpurī’), and used ‘many colourful idioms of the crooks, of the temple servants, of the Agarvāls, as they spoke it at home’ (Dalmia 1997, 304). Similarly, in *Andher Nagarī* the bazaar-scenes are constructed almost entirely with the help of speech characteristics. One may get an impression of a polyphony of voices; however, the vendors speak in turns, as if we follow a visitor moving along the rows of stalls. This illusion of progress is created by placing ten differently-arranged, richly-modulated monologues one after another. Actors could develop each vendor’s speech into an impressive one-man show: unlike the central character of the play – the raja, whose identity is hypothetical and whose portrait is purely comic,<sup>10</sup> – the ten bazaar-types from Act 2 appear real, if not realistic, as they – one wants to believe – come directly from the streets of Harishchandra’s Banaras.

1. The *kabābvālā*, whom we hear first, briskly praises his mouth-watering meat preparations, seasoned with ‘with eighty-four spices, [roasted] on thirty-two kinds of fire – kebabs hot and spicy! Who tried, licked their lips, who did not, bit their tongue [in regret]’ (Harishchandra 1953, 969).

2. The next to appear is Ghasiram (this seems to be a clichéd name for a

9. As regards Harishchandra’s innovative approach to literature as a tool to ‘photograph’ the city, and photography as his hobby, see Dalmia 1997, 302-3.

10. For more detailed observations on how authorities and the ruler are ridiculed in *Andher Nagarī*, see Montaut 2011, 22-23.

man selling *canā*, parched chickpeas), who cooks his spicy sizzling snacks in a wok over charcoals. Not only are his couplets lengthier, but, in a sense, they are also more informative – this is the first time that the unnamed city acquires the features of contemporary Banaras. His *canā* is so popular among the citizens, that even Tauki and Maina, as well as Gafuran and Munni – famous courtesans from Harishchandra’s time – ‘don’t want to hear about anything else’. Furthermore, satirical observations about the city’s notable communities are craftily woven into the advertisements of his famous snacks. All happily indulge in eating the chickpeas – ‘Bengalis in their loose dhotis’ (*jin kī dhotī dhālī-dhālī*, read: ‘Bengalis not known for their bravery’), and the weavers-*miyāns*,<sup>11</sup> whose ‘pointed beards shake as they chew’. Above all, the men of power (*hākims*), once they try his *canā*, start ‘double-taxing everyone’ in excitement (*ibid.*). This is, indeed, the moment when the vendors, as Montaut puts it, ‘insidiously start subverting the genre of the street sellers’ shouting’ (Montaut 2011, 22) turning it into socio-political satire.

3. The performance of a citrus-vendor, *nāraṅgīvālī*, has a few humorous catchphrases,<sup>12</sup> but is also remarkable because it pins Andher Nagarī to the map of Colonial India: the oranges, tangerines, grapefruits, lemons, as she announces, come from Butwal in Nepal, Sylhet in Bengal (presently in Bangladesh), from Rambagh – the gardens inside the Ramnagar Fort of the raja of Banaras, and from Anandbagh, one of the central districts in the same city (Hariścandra 1953, 969).

4. The fourth seller, whose voice we hear, is a sweetmeat-maker, or *halvā*. At first, nothing seems to challenge the blissful atmosphere of his shop. His voice lulls the customer: ‘Soft and delicate pies! Soft and juicy halwa! [All] dripping with ghee, soaked in syrup, dressed in souses! Who ate – regretted, but who abstained – repented! Rewari, crunchy rewari! Papad, crisp papad!’. He claims that he lives in harmony with ‘thirty-six nations’, that everyone is keen to call him ‘brother’. But then, he cracks a joke, that throws us back into the context of the British Raj: ‘Me in Andher Nagarī – as good as Calcutta’s Wilson in a *mandir*? (*ibid.*), says the *halvā*. Hinting that his shop is quite out of place in this messy city, he ironically connects himself to David Wilson, a Calcutta-based businessman, who started a confectionery/bakery in Calcutta and set up a famous Auckland hotel, in 1841, popularly known as Wilson’s Hotel (today, the Great Eastern Hotel). This place and especially its restaurant had a questionable reputation in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it served alcohol and beef to both Europeans and Indians (Roy 1999, 58). The parallel between Wilson and the traditional sweetmeat-maker, possibly, suggests their negative

11. *Miyām* is a respectful way to address a Muslim.

12. She plays with the word *nāraṅgī* – ‘orange’, and the expression *raṅg na raṅgnā* – ‘fail to fall in love’, complaining about the lack of romance between her beau (*priya*) and herself.



role in society – the temptations they offer destroy morale from the inside.<sup>13</sup> It is not a coincidence, then, that Govardhandas decides only to shop at the *halvāī*, which ultimately would lead him into trouble.

5. The green-grocer, *kuñjārīn*, who sells various vegetables, herbs, and fruits, impresses with a long list of her goods – ‘falsa-berries, khirnis, mangos, guavas, limes, green peas, young chickpeas!’. And then: ‘Both working people and worthless folks, all citizens are consent [that] the veggies [cost] one-coin-ser! Buy the fruits of Hindustan – phut and bair!’ (Hariścandra 1953, 970). Here, Harishchandra plays with the double meanings of *phut* and *bair*, which, respectively, signify phuts – ‘exploding’ cucumbers resembling musk-melon, but also ‘split’/‘discord’ and the fruit of the ber-tree (jujube, or *Ziziphus mauritiana*), as well as ‘enmity’. This intended pun makes it quite obvious that Andher Nagarī is a part of a much more complex metaphor: the satirical arrows are now undoubtedly pointed at present-day India herself.

6. Next comes the turn of fruits from abroad: before us appears the Afghan merchant, popularly called the Mughal. He names his delightful goods – ‘almonds, pistachios, walnuts, pomegranates, quince-seeds, raisins, figs, king almonds, plums, pine-seeds, apples, pears, quince, melons, grapes’ – but this is not all he has to say. The subjects discussed at this bazaar are now presented at an entirely new level, for the Mughal introduces current geopolitical affairs. ‘Hour kantree iz such, dat English broke hiz tooth. He only lost money and became like a fool’ – he informs us in his broken Hindi. ‘Hindustani people – weak-weak! Afghani people – brave-brave!’ (*ibid.*).

7. One of the most important numbers in the current sequence are the couplets performed by the so-called *pācakvālī* – she sells a well-known medicinal powder – *pācak cūrṇa* (here *cūran*) that helps digestion. It is only natural that in a city, where all goods, be they *khājā* (a kind of sweets) or *bhājā* (vegetables), cost the same one coin per *ser*, the citizens should be concerned about their digestive health. The vendor, in the typical manner, first praises the potency of her powdered sour medicines made with amla (myrobalan); very soon, however, what starts as an amusing advertisement with creative bywords and puns, grows into a rather gloomy picture of current socio-political life. The satirical message gets stronger with every line, as digestion-themed metaphors describe the confused state of India:

It is called the Hindu *cūran*,  
but the effect of it is foreign.

13. According to a popular Bengali rhyme, Hindu *dharma* received fatal blows from the ‘three Sens’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Keshob Sen (religious reformer), ‘Wil-sen’ (Wilson’s restaurant), and ‘iste-sen’ (railway-stations, where no caste/religion segregation was possible, especially when one visited the eateries) – see, for example, Chaudhuri 1990, 73.

When this powder came to India,  
 it made minds weaker and purses thinner.  
 The powder is so thick,  
 it put everyone's teeth on the edge.  
*Cūran* arrived at Dāl-maṇḍī,<sup>14</sup>  
 now all the whores will eat it.  
 The clerks in the court, once they consume the *cūran*,  
 digest double [portion] of bribes;  
 Having eaten the mixture, the actors  
 start mimicking the clerks.  
*Cūran* is eaten by the merchants,  
 who then stomach the cash pretty well.  
 The money-lenders eat this *cūran* –  
 they suffer from mental maldigestion.  
 Let the editors [too] eat *cūran*,  
 since their stomachs can't process any words!  
 Sahibs partake this powder  
 and ingest the whole of Hindustan.  
 Policemen who take it  
 manage to process the laws in their bellies.  
 Take a portion of *cūran* – pay a coin per *ser!* (*ibid.*)

8. The verse of the fishmonger provides temporary relief from the rather surrealistic modality of the previous vendor, yet it fails to bring any cheerful mood. Her sad couplet warns against the tenets of love: 'Eyes like fishes in the nets of beauty – are trapped the moment they glance. Fish without water, like a love-sick person, suffocates' (Hariścandra 1953, 971).

9. The next person we find is the *jātvālā*, literally, the seller of castes. This invented figure ridicules Brahmans, who offer *dharma*-related counsellings and provide centuries-old hereditary knowledge about people's family-trees and caste background. In these corrupt times, however, the *jātvālā* offers to exchange any given caste and religion for a 'better' one: to quote Vasudha Dalmia, this is Bharatendu's 'sweep at the upward mobilization, made possible by British insistence of classification of the varna status of caste' (Dalmia 2006, 61). The *jātvālā* says: 'For a coin, lies will be made into the truth. For a coin, a Brahman into a Muslim, for a coin, a Hindu into a Christian. For a coin, I shall sell *dharma* and reputation, for a coin, I shall give false evidence (...). The Vedas, *dharma*, pedigree, honour, truth, greatness – all for a coin. I have looted precious goods – buy [paying] coin-per-*ser!*' (Hariścandra 1953, 971). This grotesque episode seals the impression about this 'Dark' place – it is evident that not only does it expose the colonial authorities, the weakness of the Hindustani people,

14. Lit., the lentil-market, a well-known wholesale market in Banaras, situated next to the brothel area.

the bribery of the bureaucrats, the stupidity of the ruling classes, and the laughable state of the country's affairs as a whole, but, most importantly, it speaks about the moral decline. Later on, when the action moves to the raja's court, the sad consequences of this degradation will become even more obvious.

10. Eventually, the *baniyā*, the shopkeeper in a grocery-store, puts an end to this surrealistic frenzy. The final voice in this sequence has a matter-of-fact quality, the vendor confirms the general idea of this market – since everything costs the same, there is no place left for normal seller-buyer rituals, no bargaining is possible, hence, the fundamental interactive nature of such a public place is compromised.

Therefore, the bazaar has served Harishchandra perfectly in his design to gradually unravel the subversive picture of Hindustan. He skillfully constructed the sequence of ten expressive voices, each adding a new perspective and a new depth to the case. Both the first and the final speakers sound completely plausible for a North-Indian market; the contents inside this frame, however, seem to be the result of a creative marriage of reality with the author's satirical fantasy. As has been demonstrated, the degree of parody and satire increases steadily, until the culminating point is reached in the speeches of the *pācakvālī* and the *jātvālā*.

At the same time, Harishchandra's mode of depicting the market-place allows us to investigate the relationship between an alienated visitor, who is moving along its lanes and stalls, and the object of his interest – the stationary, albeit buzzing, world of the bazaar. In fact, it is possible to differentiate between the two kinds of visitors here: one is a hypothetical spectator/reader, an imaginary guest, a detached observer, who is following the author in this excursion, another is Gobardhandas himself, whose journey starts at the very moment the grocery merchant finishes his speech: 'Enters Baba's disciple Gobardhandas; he listens to the voices of all the sellers; delighted with the food, he rejoices' (*ibid*). The colourful speeches of the ten vendors will not be repeated for a second time, Govardhandas' progress along the rows of shops will have to be imagined. As we already know, at the end, he spends all the alms he had received on sweets and leaves the bazaar, having failed to interpret the crucial piece of information revealed to him by the *halvā*: that the place is called 'The City of Darkness', ruled by the 'Defunct raja' (or, using Montaut's translation, 'the King of Mess' – see Montaut 2011, 23).

It is tempting to recognize Gobardhandas as one of the first *flâneur*-like figures reflected in modern Indian literature and interpret his discovery of the bazaar in terms of a modern cultural appropriation of an urban space; at the same time, it might be too far-fetched an idea to look for many similarities between this Indian figure and Benjamin's 'heroic pedestrian', given all the complexity of the latter's character and the nature of his relationship with the city and the crowd (Gilloch 1996, 241). Still, specific urban situations depicted both in this play and in *Prem-joginī* may point at Harishchandra's search for a mod-

ern hero, a city type well fit to represent the environment, and also a keen and engaged observer of street life.

Thus, Gobardhandas' journey through this City of Darkness seems to bear a greater cultural significance than the story itself might suggest. It may not be surprising that, being a traveller and a somewhat aloof observer, this character managed to step out from the frames of *Andher Nagari* and start an independent literary life. His second birth happened in 1995, when a Malayali writer Anand (P. Sachidanandan, born in 1936) chose Harishchandra's Gobardhandas as the protagonist of his own socio-critical novel *Govardhan* (Anand 2006). Disturbed by the fact that in the Hindi farce the young disciple's fate was decided through a faulty legal procedure,<sup>15</sup> the writer transferred the 'character from fiction into the historical world', to a different temporal and spatial context. His novel starts almost at the same point where Harishchandra's play ends and 'tells the story of Govardhan's journey through centuries of India's history' (Kumar 2008, 193), thus exemplifying this character's potential of collecting impressions *en route* and his inquisitive nature.

15. 'Walking this path, I do not remember exactly when I arrived at Bharatendu's Andher Nagari. This work, described as a light farce, moved me deeply (...) Govardhan, a passer-by, was finally led to the gallows because his neck happened to fit the noose!' (Anand 2006, 5-6).

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## The theme of hunger in *Kafan*, a short story by Prem Chand

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*Kafan* (*Shroud*) is the most famous of the about three hundred short stories written by the great Hindi author Prem Chand (1880–1936).<sup>1</sup> Wherever in the world Hindi language is studied and wherever modern Indian literary works are spoken of, it has been translated and appreciated for the sake of its narrative structure, the vividness of its images, the suffused irony, and its absolutely masterful psychological introspection.

The plot is fairly straightforward: an idle father and his idle son are cooking their meagre meal by the door of the hut, where the young man's wife is in labour. The woman dies and the two have to seek a loan to buy a shroud for her burial. While they are out looking for one in the bazaar, they let themselves be tempted by the food in a tavern<sup>2</sup> and spend their whole store of rupees there, ending up drunk.

The characters in the story are few: father and son (Ghīsū, the shoemaker, and young Mādhav), the *zamīndār*,<sup>3</sup> who reluctantly lends them some money, a small crowd of villagers, an equally small crowd of patrons of the tavern, and a beggar. The whole story actually unfolds under the influence of the wife, who, both when alive and dead, casts her beneficent shadow over her father-in-law and husband.

The different phases of the story are however linked together by hunger, explored and represented in a variety of nuances, that is indeed remarkable in the space of such a short exposition (eight pages). In fact hunger is absent from only two of the about twelve scenes<sup>4</sup> into which the story is divided, while in the other occupies at times a leading role, at others a supporting one, or else it

1. On Prem Chand see among others Pisani–Mishra 1970, 353–55, etc., Sarma 1989, Sarma 1992, Dolcini 1997.

2. *madhuśālā*.

3. The official in charge of collecting the land taxes under the Mughals, who then becomes the land owner under the British.

4. Actually Prem Chand organized his story in only three sections, based on the location of the characters: namely, the cooking and eating of the potatoes outside the hut, the meeting with the *zamīndār* and the getting the village's solidarity, and the foolish behaving in the bazaar.

appears as a background presence. It should also be noted that the intensity with which hunger is described in detail or simply suggested is not expounded in a logical crescendo or decrescendo, but varies from one passage to another, underscoring the actions of the characters or serving as a veiled counterpoint to them. Therefore, in relation to hunger, the story can be divided into a dozen sub-scenes, each of which expresses, as it were, a different type of hunger.

### *Twelve types of hunger*

The story begins with a description of a father and son who are so indolent that, if they have nothing to fill their stomachs with, they generally do not trouble themselves greatly, provided that they can avoid having to work:

After going hungry for three or four days, Ghīsū would go out to collect firewood and Mādhav would sell it at the market. As long as the money earned lasted, they would never do a hand's turn. If there was some wheat in the house neither of them would lift a finger, as if they had sworn off working. (Prem Chand 2002, 214)<sup>5</sup>

So this is **hunger** described as more or less **routine**, and accepted passively, as happens in relation to a situation that one might think was decreed by fate (*karma*): 'They lived with the aid of heaven' (215), observes the author ironically.

On this particular evening, however, they have scraped together a few potatoes, which they are roasting in the embers outside the hut. This is another aspect of the **same routine**: on certain days they go hungry, on others they manage to pick up something to eat.

Sometimes they would steal potatoes and peas from the fields and cook them to eat or steal a half dozen stalks of sugar cane and suck them at night. (215)

On the contrary, at this moment they are so famished that they devour the potatoes while they are still burning hot. Here, **hunger** is **impatient**:

They had gone hungry since the day before, they could not wait for them to cool, so they both gulped them down, even though their eyes watered at the effort. (215)

5. The text of the story is taken from a collection of Prem Chand's most important works. Since it is the source of nearly all the quotations in the text, only the page number is given hereafter. The translation from Hindi is by D. Dolcini.



Their meagre meal revives the father's distant memories of a wedding banquet, where the courses that followed each other were so numerous and abundant that even voracious diners like himself were unable to eat them all. 'We were stuffed so full that we could not even take a sip of water' (216). To his son, however, the nostalgic story evokes images of a chimeric gorgeous satiety which is never attained and quite unattainable:

With his mouth watering, Mādhav said: 'Now there is nobody to invite us. How many *pūz̄s*<sup>6</sup> did you eat? About a score? I could swallow fifty'. (216-17)

This is **hunger** satisfied only with words, in the total lack of the concreteness which is characteristic of **memory** or **illusion**.

Distressed by the screaming of his daughter-in-law, Ghīsū seeks to persuade his son to stay with his wife:

Ghīsū took out a potato and peeling it said: 'Go inside and see how she is!'. Mādhav replied: 'I'm afraid to go there'. (215)

Neither of them really wants to move away from the stove, out of fear that the other will eat all the potatoes once he is left alone. And this is **hunger as a necessity**, that which allows for no delays or reductions in its fulfilment.

The following morning the woman is found dead with her baby. It is what father and son were expecting and what in their cynicism they perhaps wished to happen, so that they would no longer have to submit to the rules that the poor woman had laid down at home. A little later, after getting help and comfort from their fellow villagers and the *zamīndār*,<sup>7</sup> the two go to the market. In their wanderings they are irresistibly attracted to a tavern, 'as if a quasi-religious inspiration were guiding them' (218). **Hunger** here turns into **gluttony**.

The temptation is too strong, but before yielding to it the pair has to come up with an excuse that will appease their guilt. And what better excuse than to see the poor dead woman as a kind of tutelary deity,<sup>8</sup> who, having been lavish in procuring them food in her lifetime, even now from heaven, certainly looks down with joy on the pair of them enjoying a good meal, as it is still (indirectly) procured by her? The father-in-law is moved at the thought of what she had always done for the men of the house and pronounces a kind of funeral oration in her honour, acknowledging her merit in having devoted herself to feeding her family day by day, earning a little money by her work as a cleaning woman, and using it to procure food and prepare meals. Through the woman, **hunger**

6. Unleavened bread fried in butter.

7. The *zamīndār* feels only scorn and resentment for them, but he 'was pitiful, [although] he had to make an effort to feel pity for Ghīsū' (217).

8. We infer that this deity is Annapūrṇā, the 'Full with food', the goddess responsible for feeding the living.

appears as a **hunger to be satisfied for others**: ‘She was very good, poor woman, and even in death she has given us something to eat and drink’ (220).

Nor could a touch of spirituality be omitted here, imbued with that sense of religiosity inseparable from every manifestation of the soul of India, even where it is entrenched behind a proclaimed atheism:<sup>9</sup>

God, you are omniscient! Take her with you into paradise, we all bless her in our hearts. We have never seen a meal like this in all our lives. (220)

In the tavern, the father and son eat greedily with abundant libations – a whole bottle – amidst the envy of the other patrons, who are less flush with money, and the imploring glances of a beggar. And this is **hunger** that comes to be **greed** in the case of the two main characters, whereas, when Mādhav is so full that he cannot eat any more, it is regarded by the onlookers as their own form of **defeat**: ‘All of them gazed with envy: “Oh, how lucky they are!”’ (219).

Then the pair experiences the unusual satisfaction of giving their leftovers to the beggar, who is gazing longingly at them: the **hunger of others** interpreted as an impulse to exercise an unprecedented **generosity**:

He gave the leftovers on his dish to the beggar and for the first time in his life he had the satisfaction of experiencing the pride of those who give. (220)

They are therefore moved to bless the dead woman who constantly watches over them:

‘Eat and bless, the one who has given us this food is dead but will go to heaven. By her death she has fulfilled the strongest desire of our lives’. (220)

They exalt the significance of the gift she has bestowed upon them, reinforcing the image of the deity that provides for all without distinction by bestowing that same gift of food.

Finally, father and son, now sated and completely drunk, dance like dervishes, spinning around and eventually collapsing on the floor, beside themselves. This is **hunger** seen as the peak of **gluttony**, uncontrolled **guzzling**, in a perfectly inverted companion piece to the **miserably satisfied hunger** in the first scene of the story:

Completely inebriated they began to dance, jumping and wriggling, stumbling and getting up again, until both collapsed. (221)

9. As was the case with Prem Chand himself.

*The lack of starvation to death*

One should note, however, that, even amidst the variety of all the different kinds of hunger described, we fail to find the tragic aspect of that lack of food which inevitably and painfully leads to death; that hunger, for instance, which has been imputed to India as an endemic and irremediable plague, until it has become a true, unjustified commonplace.<sup>10</sup>

Now, in the first half of the twentieth century, when Prem Chand wrote his works, a large proportion of the Indian population<sup>11</sup> were suffering from this lack of food, a suffering which was to continue for decades<sup>12</sup> and even after the obtaining of independence (1947). Therefore it is hard to imagine that an author like this, such a keen observer of the reality around him, was unaware of this situation, and all the more so, since his own family, although not starving, was however in difficult straits.<sup>13</sup> It is surprising that in this story, which is built to such a large extent on hunger in its most disparate forms, there is either no mention of the hunger that rages in famine or that which leads to the deaths of poor malnourished human beings, or that which is suffered in conditions of absolute poverty. Yet around Prem Chand – who lived in Benares (Varanasi), a city visited by large numbers of pilgrims, many of whom are very poor<sup>14</sup> and who arrive in that sacred place with the desire to die there<sup>15</sup> – there must certainly have been scenes of the lack of food, some of them very acute. Nevertheless, in *Kafan* there are no characters starving to the ultimate extent and the only death happens because of childbirth.

And so, in this story, considered his masterpiece, hence in a certain sense the culmination of his principles in terms of literature, this aspect of hunger unexpectedly does not appear. And this is for a good reason, we think. In fact, the realism (*yathārthavād*) which constitutes the framework of his poetic, in the version that the writer adopted, envisages an attenuation produced by idealism (*adarsāvād*).

This is because, according to the author, whenever a note of optimism is lacking, literature no longer fulfils its fundamental mission of making readers

10. Today the Indian Union exports cereals to countries in Central Asia.

11. According to reports of the time, the total Indian population amounted to less than three hundred million people

12. Up until the 1990s.

13. His father was a postman and from his first boyhood, Dhanpat Rai (that is the writer's real name, whereas Prem Chand – Moon of Love – is his pen name) had to earn his salary to allow him to study and, later, to support his family.

14. Many of these pilgrim-mendicants are actually people who have voluntarily renounced all the privileges of their former lives and have reduced themselves to living on alms outside the temples, in accordance with the principle of the four ages of man – *varṇāśramadharmā* – which prescribe the duty of detachment from all worldly things to old age.

15. Dying in Varanasi ensures immediate release from the cycle of reincarnation (*samsāra*).

aware of the problems of everyday reality, but without depriving them of hope in a possible future improvement of the various situations:

No doubt realism is extremely useful in directing [the reader's] attention to the evil customs of society. (...) But he wonders what sense it can have for him to read a book of stories and tales centred on the very people with whom he necessarily has to deal every hour of the day. (...) While, on the one hand, realism makes us open our eyes, on the other idealism raises us higher to a more pleasant place.<sup>16</sup> (Prem Chand 1965a, 49-50)

16. Moreover, Indian literatures always avoid providing a narrative – be it epic, theatrical or fictional – with a tragic ending, given the certainty of a possible better rebirth after death.

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# The food motif in the writings of Hindi women writers

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A serious attitude towards food has always been reflected in Indian literature. In recent decades a number of women have entered onto the Hindi literary scene. The motif of food appears very frequently in their writings too, but from a specific point of view. As women they have down-to-earth experience in the preparation of food and with its role as a means of even very intimate communication. We can often feel a tinge of irony in the female way of dealing with the subject.

The preoccupation with food and with the rules of eating has always been part and parcel of the Hindu tradition. Much space is given to food and eating in the *Manusmṛti* – the Laws of Manu; in Kṛṣṇa poetry, food comes to the fore as a means of communication with their gods, while in the *Bhagavadgītā*, wise Kṛṣṇa, the adviser, also focuses on food. The threads of Manu's and Kṛṣṇa's principles can be followed through the ages to contemporary everyday life. This long tradition of preoccupation with food in Indian culture in the widest sense of the word means that, although it may seem odd to a foreign reader, there is in fact nothing strange about the high frequency of the motif in modern literature.

The motif of food, as it appears in the writings of diverse authors from different trends and groupings, signifies something more than mere food. In particular, many short stories describe family situations through scenes of serving and consuming a meal. People communicate (or refuse to communicate) through the means of food. The women serve the meals, the men consume them and express their satisfaction or, rather, their dissatisfaction. A male writer depicting a family situation describes everything very truthfully and usually in dead earnest; for example, let us consider **Amarkant**'s short story *The Dinner* (Amarkant 1966).<sup>1</sup> A family is having dinner. There is great disharmony within the family and this is rendered by the lengthy silent scenes of serving and consuming the meal, which indeed nobody enjoys.

1. The names of Hindi authors are given in their most common anglicised spellings. Diacritics will be used only in the titles of works.

To quote another example: *The Voice of the Soul* by Kamleshwar (Kamleshwar 1966) depicts two wives in different places who are not able to prepare *capātīs*, Indian pancakes, properly. One wife is humiliated by her husband, while the other is treated condescendingly, but, whatever the case, both of them are unhappy. And the motif of preparing, serving, and consuming food has been chosen to present all this to the reader. Many such examples could be given. Indeed, a sensitive reader might even start feeling depressed on reading these short stories.

Of course, the same can happen when we read some of the short stories by women writers, but in this case, on the contrary, one might even smile – or grin a little.

For example, let us consider the short story *Repulsion* by Mridula Garg (Garg 1986). Throughout their married life, a husband had never found time for his wife, who was a perfect housewife. Now when he is retired and they are both getting old, he is the one who longs for a few warm intimate words, but all she does is run the house perfectly and cook. She does not need him any more. The ‘well-balanced, tasty and nutritious’ dinner (Garg 1986, 24) is always perfectly served on the table, but the wife never shows the minimum interest in her husband. Even when he deliberately ‘finds’ a small stone in the lentils (an imaginary one), she simply throws the prepared dish away and does not feel hurt in any way.

A husband’s criticism or praise of food is an important element in Indian married lives and the kitchen symbolism applied by Hindi writers is clearly seen in India, although not always in the West. Mild criticism of the wife’s cooking is part and parcel of togetherness. As Pushpa Saxena puts it, in two short sentences in the short story *A relation of distances*. ‘Did he never complain of your burnt food? Your brother-in-law seeks out faults in my cooking all the time’ (Saxena 2010, 58). These lines are taken from a conversation between two sisters. The older one is happy with her husband who criticizes her cooking, while the younger one is divorced – her husband turned out to be a liar and an unreliable man. But – he never complained about her cuisine. On the contrary, she recognizes different values. In the background, there are more important things than small talk about food and cooking!

Mamta Kaliya often injects irony and scepticism into many of her short stories and poems. Such is the case in her longish poem *A girl from a small town* (Kaliya 2009): ‘The lord of the house ate his fill, belched, stroked his tummy and said / the world has changed / but you are the same / a girl from a small town’ (Kaliya 2009).

His wife felt hurt and started looking for a job, which she found and coped well with, but

at home – the same role  
for centuries the same  
she understood



that her victory should have been at home  
 the rest of the world has no significance  
 (...)
   
 She put all her talents  
 in potatoes with vegetables  
 mixed all her creativity into curd with vegetables  
 created a whole era  
 from tastes and smells  
 but her husband never said thank you. (Kaliya 2009)

Mamta Kaliya herself did not 'put all her talents' in the kitchen; however, perhaps it is only a woman who can present cooking and serving scenes in so few words and in such a way that they come to life in the reader's mind's eye. This is perhaps because every Indian woman has had to confront this role at some time in her life.

The motif of food is frequent in the short stories dealing with Indians living abroad. Vegetarianism is naturally a frequent stumbling block in their lives and relations.

In the short (possibly autobiographical) story *Five days* by **Sunita Jain** (Jain 2007), the first person narrator visits her son who is living in the United States, married to a fully Americanized Indian girl. The daughter-in-law insists on eating meat daily and is not ready to give it up even for a few days. The mother-in-law feels sick when she sees and smells raw meat. Just three pages later, a whole paragraph follows which depicts the mother-in-law preparing Indian pancakes for the family. All the ingredients are mentioned. The paragraph can whet the reader's appetite for these pancakes, but he might lose his appetite after the mentions of red meat. The two women have a number of other problems, but the writer chooses food for the most detailed discussion.

In the literature written by women we can find really vivid pictures of preparing, serving, and consuming meals. After all, cooking and serving food rests on their shoulders for some time at least, and, indeed, one's own experience is the best inspiration. Women writers are not so deadly serious about cooking and serving; instead of layering gloom upon gloom because of their husbands' or anybody else's disgruntled taste buds, they find it better to make use of a touch of teasing, taunting, irony. They do not treat the gloomy atmosphere that is somehow connected with food as a tragedy. Life is just like that and one cannot expect any thanks. It is far better to refuse the role of an obedient unpaid servant.

How marvellous it would be if more non-writing Indian women followed their examples!

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# Present-day Annapurnas. Food in Hindi life writings by women

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## *Reading Annapurna – introduction*

Annapurna (Annapūrṇā)<sup>1</sup> presents us with a Hindu mythological *topos* of a Goddess who provides nutrition and sustenance in the form of food (*anna*),<sup>2</sup> thereby reflecting the combined archetype of a mother and an earth or nature goddess. Since Annapurna is a form of Shakti (Śakti) or female divine power, an important aspect of her mythical persona is that she creates and supplies food independently, without the need for any support from the male divine principle or Shiva (Śiva). This proves her capacity for self-sustenance and her further generosity in nourishing all living beings. Annapurna embodies the interrelation of the so-called domesticated and fiercely independent aspects of the female divinity in Hinduism, transmuted into the convoluted and all-encompassing nature of Devi (Devī).

It seems that some popular adaptations, inspired by this aspect of the Annapurna myth, translate her supremacy into a sort of counter-narrative to a vision of subservient domesticated womanhood. What is noticeable in several North Indian folk versions, for example, is an element of sarcastic commentary on man-woman relationships and the division of household responsibilities. In one of the popular retellings, Annapurna feeds her sons and her husband, while the latter – either intoxicated or immersed in meditation, or indeed both – neglects his duty

1. In this text Sanskrit and Hindi words (common nouns, titles of literary works, etc.) are transliterated with diacritics. For the names of popular Hindu gods and goddesses transliteration is provided only once, when they appear for the first time. In case of contemporary authors I do not provide the transliterated version of their names, but the Romanized form that is used by authors themselves.

2. In Indian food taxonomy *anna* denotes a specific kind of food, or cultivated grains, e.g. rice, wheat, lentils. Compare Achaya 2014, 61-62: 'Food materials that grew without cultivation (...) like wild grains, vegetable and fruit, were broadly termed phala'. However in the Goddess's name, *anna* does not merely denote nourishment, but 'the essence of life, the support of life' (Eck 1992, 161).

to care for his family. In another retelling, popular in the Varanasi area where the Goddess is considered the reigning queen of the city, Shiva diminishes the importance of food as a form of *māyā* or material illusion, which prompts the Goddess to disappear from the world, nearly bringing it to destruction through the starvation of all living beings. Annapurna rescues the universe by offering food, only after Shiva pleads with her to do so, thereby acknowledging the need for equilibrium: the goddess supplies food in its material form and he provides the spiritual essence that leads to liberation.<sup>3</sup>

In these popular versions of Annapurna's story, the goddess's capacity to feed and nourish becomes a subversive statement; it is the act of empowerment that she appropriates for herself. However, Annapurna, as a domesticated form of a female deity, willingly channels her supremacy of self-sustainment into the energy of nourishing others.<sup>4</sup> The common belief in the domesticated form of the female divinity is expressed by Devdutt Patnaik in his introduction to his book on the images of Hindu gods in Indian calendar art; the author defines the goddess as 'the universal and timeless kitchen-goddess, Annapurna, the mother who feeds. Without her, there is starvation, a universal fear: this makes Annapurna a universal goddess'.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing its inspiration from different popular North Indian interpretations of Annapurna's archetype, this article analyses how contemporary women authors of autobiographies in Hindi re-examine a culturally specific discourse on food. In their narratives, food is contextualised within their life stories and, simultaneously, within the various constructs of Indian society, gender, caste, and individual identity.

The authors whose autobiographies I shall refer to belong to different castes, classes, and regions of India, and their family status and age vary too. Kausalya Baisantri (1926–2009) was a Dalit (Mahār) from Maharashtra and a divorcee at the time of writing her life story. Chandrakiran Sonrexa (1924–2010) and Maitreyi Pushpa (b. 1944) are both Brahmins from different Hindi speaking areas of Uttar Pradesh and were both married, whereas Prabha Khaitan (1942–2008) was a Marwari Baniya settled in Calcutta who had a lifelong relationship with a married man. The different social, caste, cultural, and regional backgrounds of the authors provide diverse perspectives that often result in somehow contradictory observations on food related topics. Therefore an analysis of these themes in autobiographies by women presents us with the complex view of some aspects of Indian society as narrated by women.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Compare Thieme–Raje 2007, xxxix: 'food is first and foremost a material object and the power it brings to those who consume, control and distribute it is never merely symbolic'.

5. Patnaik 2009, 25.

*Rereading Annapurna – food in Hindi autobiographies by women*

Seeing that women in India are generally responsible for cooking and many other homemaking activities, it is presumed that the topic of food is markedly visible in women's writings. Screening the autobiographies of the women authors, one becomes aware that the extent of their writing related to food is significantly individual. For example, different nourishment-related topics – cooking utensils, food spaces, acquiring and processing food, feeding or refusing to eat, etc. – constantly appear and reappear in Sonrexa's autobiography. Baisantri too often mentions these subjects, but more within a social context of efficiency in obtaining food and of eating practices as elements of social inclusion or exclusion through the ill-practice of untouchability. Instead, Pushpa and Khaitan occasionally write on food in their life narratives.

Food and related activities in India are a clear marker of communal identity pertaining to religion, geographical location, social status, and caste, all of which construct their own sets of rules of various dietary customs. Khaitan, for instance, employs the description of her eating habits as a measure of her Indianness, as she becomes sensitive to dietary distinctions during her stay in the USA. The author migrates for a short period to the USA, where she faces severe problems because of her American roommate's dietary habits. The American woman cooks and serves non-vegetarian food or vegetarian dishes which Khaitan deems inedible since she finds them tasteless i.e. devoid of any spices. Khaitan misses both her family and her partner and the continuing lack of Indian food generates even more homesickness. Her roommate feeding her dogs seated at the dining table appals her even more than the meat being served. These experiences prompt her to express the view that food is what makes her Indian: 'I will always remain an Indian who prefers to eat rotis instead of hamburgers and if rotis are not available, I'll have bread and boiled potatoes instead. But I will always remain proudly and unchangingly Indian, no matter what' (Khaitan 2013, transl. by Pande, 116). The author defines her identity as *desī* (local/indigenous) *pahcān* (distinction) (Khaitan 2007, 123), i.e. a quality, which distinguishes her from others, but she equates her identity with her upper caste's (Brahmin) regional (Marwari) eating habits, which exclude beef from her diet.

However, for a large part of the Indian population, made up of other castes or belonging to other regions, avoiding beef does not constitute a dietary requirement. In Baisantri's depiction of her Dalit community of Nagpur (Maharashtra), eating beef is described as a common practice, not only in her community but also in some other ethnical, caste, and religious groups:

Mostly, we ate beef. People from the basti ate beef most of the time. It was cheaper. The abattoir was only a short distance from our basti (...). Muslim butchers used to sell this meat. (...) A veterinary doctor used to come and inspect cows before giving the permission to slaughter them. The servants of

the English, Anglo-Indians and Christians used to come here to buy meat.  
(Baisantri 1999, 13; transl. by Raje in Thieme–Raje 2007, 357)

In Dalit writings, food narratives strongly highlight the exclusionist angle of eating practices in India, revealing the oppression and humiliation experienced by Dalits. Baisantri writes about the shame she constantly experienced at school because of her poor food (coarse *rotī* with some molasses) carried in a modest aluminium lunchbox, compared to her Brahmin school colleagues who brought more sophisticated dishes (*rotīs* with ghee, *parāṭhās*, vegetables, pickles, and sweets) in solid brass containers. Humiliated, not merely by the content, but even by the meagre appearance of her lunchbox which clearly revealed her poor background, Baisantri always ate alone, facing the wall, so as not to be mocked or laughed at by others (Baisantri 1999, 41). The Dalit girl was constantly on her guard fearing that the inferior food would proclaim her lower caste identity, which she did not wish to disclose and parade around.

Another childhood incident described by Baisantri happened at a picnic when her teacher put aside the bottle of linseed oil, she, like all the other pupils, who carried different types of oil, had brought along for frying *pūrīs*. This gesture of rejection made her realise that her oil was of a lesser quality, not used by Brahmins and rich people, and it also taught her something new, as she had been unaware of the fact that there were also other types of cooking mediums. Her lack of expertise in oil products accentuates her social inexperience and juvenile innocence; she is unacquainted with the common truth of the world of grown-ups where even oils have their communal and class designation. Following this incident, she was also taunted by one of the schoolgirls, who called her by the nickname of 'linseed oil' whenever she spotted her at school (Baisantri 1999, 46). Albeit an innocent mockery, a child's prank poses a hideous threat of possible exclusion to one who is socially inferior, as in the case of Baisantri. She is the only Dalit girl in her school and therefore lives in constant fear that her caste identity might be revealed.

The oppressive character of this marginalization is clearly visible in another reminiscence of Baisantri's childhood. As a seven-year-old child she was severely scolded and shouted at by a tribal friend of her elder sister, when she took some water from the pitcher in the courtyard of this girl's house. She was told that now the container would have to be replaced as it had been marred by her touch. Neither as a child, nor as a seventy-year old woman who pens her life story, is she capable, or rather, willing to understand so much fuss about the supposedly polluting touch of a child or, for that matter, of anybody else (Baisantri 1999, 88).<sup>6</sup>

6. The story of Baisantri's childhood trauma related to the incident of polluting a water pitcher is in stark contrast with Sonrexa's reminiscences of her grandfather, who as a teenager – when orphaned by his father and forced to support his mother and siblings – came up with the

On the other hand, Baisantri gratefully remembers her only upper caste school friend who shared food with her, knowing she was a Mahār. She ate at Baisantri's house, shared the simple meals she brought to school and invited her to dine at her home, where for the first time in her life, Baisantri tasted food superior to that made at her own home. The memory is so vivid that even after half a century, she still remembers what dishes her friend's mother cooked for her and names them all: lentils, rice, *rotīs*, *pohā*, all served with rich ghee (*ibid.*, 86).

The enumeration of all of a woman's day-to-day household responsibilities at the different stages of her life provides a framework that structures Sonrexa's self-narrative. The author includes detailed descriptions of the activities throughout her life's linear progression: shifting from house to house, furnishing the new one, setting up kitchens, purchasing and preparing food, childbirth, etc. Sonrexa lists her daily routine of cooking, serving food, feeding children and guests, working at school and on the radio, coming back home to cook and feed everyone again (Sonrexa 2010, 212-13). It appears that a continuing avalanche of duties carried out by a single woman engulfs every day of her life. She not only repeatedly mentions the food that she prepares at home each day or for special occasions, but also provides readers with lists of the food items she shopped for every day, as well as their prices.

When the author recalls the first home she ever settled in after her marriage, which had the limited space of a rented room, she considers it a home only after she had acquired and equipped it with a basic set of kitchen utensils (*tavā* or flat pan; *karhāī* or a cooking pot, *cimṭā* or tongs and *angīthī* or brazier, *ibid.*, 170). The number of plates, cups, *thālīs*, and glasses listed by Sonrexa – both purchased and received from her father's house – translates into home-making and speaks volumes about her capacity to domesticate any new living space she moves into (*ibid.*, 178).

Sonrexa supplies her reader with step-by-step recipes of how to make a sweet dish or *malpuā* (*ibid.*, 67) or different sweets and snacks for Divali (*ibid.*, 184). She gives practical advice on what sort of food should be given to someone with a fever (*ibid.*, 66) or to a child learning to eat on his own (*ibid.*, 229). As she furnishes her readers with repeated, detailed descriptions of all those necessary actions associated with acquiring and preparing food, she proves that the logistics of feeding multiple members of a joint family requires a constant effort and the hard labour of a dedicated homemaker. Her narrative accentuates 'the insistence on the conscious labour involved in the reproduction of cultural

idea of selling water in the streets, which his granddaughter considered an act of *punya* or religious merit (Sonrexa 2010, 17) and proof of his genuine resourcefulness. Harsh rules of strict caste hierarchy obviously offer different sets of rules for a Brahmin and a Dalit.

practices' – to quote Ann Goldman's words<sup>7</sup> – and the fact that in Indian households this laborious, time-consuming task is often understood as women's sole responsibility.

Efficiency in cooking becomes a requirement for the upbringing of girls, as it is understood that they will be expected to prepare food for their future families. This fact is repeatedly emphasised by Sonrexa's mother, who understands that upper-caste middle class parents are obliged to equip their daughter with the only pre-requisite skills worth investing in i.e. cooking and housekeeping. Her mother is determined to take Sonrexa out of school against her father's wishes and teach her the basics of how to fit into the ideal woman's role. This is how she persuades Sonrexa's father to follow her advice: 'What is the need to teach her any further! She will not work! She can read *Rāmāyaṇ*, that's enough. (...) She can keep the record of washer man and shopkeeper! And now it is time for her to learn homework – to learn how to grind spices and make daily food' (*ibid.*, 75).<sup>8</sup>

The importance of cooking efficiency in establishing the power structure in a family is also a focal point of some advice that an elderly family servant gives to Pushpa before her marriage: 'When you know the way to man's stomach, you enter his heart' (Pushpa 2002, 161), the statement has equivalents in proverbs in many other languages, including English (The way to a man's heart is through his stomach). By inference, the observation of an older woman, verbalized in a proverb, attempts to present a certain female perspective on the dominant position in the household. The advice is to operate within the established system, where a man is the head of the family, but with a subversive intention and mode, i.e. the ability to nourish can be used to influence people, especially men, in order to establish a more convoluted and less obvious substructure of power within the family.

Group efforts, often required because of the prolonged processes of food making or the need to prepare it in bulk, create occasions for women from the family, community or even colony to connect and bond. Baisantri, who composes a somehow idealised image of her childhood and youth in her autobiography, dwells on the equal share of kitchen responsibilities in her family, a harmonious routine of everyday cooking that involved all its members and from which a special connection between her mother, sisters and her ensued. The

7. Goldman 1992, 172.

8. Interestingly, the father – to counter his wife's reservations and to let Sonrexa attend her classes – made an effort to teach his daughter cooking. During one of his lessons, Sonrexa burnt the vegetables, since she was completely immersed in reading a short story by Premchand in a magazine (*ibid.*, 95-96). The account of the childhood incident is in contrast with the other passages in the narrative, where the author describes her competence in cooking even large quantities of food. She was forced to acquire this competence when, in her early teens, after the death of her mother, she prematurely had to take her share of household duties. If not otherwise stated, the translations from Hindi are made by the author.



junctures for larger gatherings of women, such as making pickles, *pāpaṛs*, *beriyās*, food for festivals etc., create space for orally transmitted cultural practices. Baisantri, for example, writes about Dalit women singing songs in praise of Ambedkar while grinding flour (Baisantri 1999, 82).

Limbale in his *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Writings*<sup>9</sup> underlines the fact that the continuing scarcity of food in Dalit communities results in Dalit writers focusing on subjects related to securing access to food. Efficient provision, procurement, preservation or complete ‘recycling’ of cooked food dominate, whereas the aspect of sensual enjoyment and pleasure of eating is missing. Baisantri derives pride from detailed descriptions of how effective and resourceful Dalits are in acquiring food from wild growing plants and trees. Moreover, she describes how her family reuses stale food, which for some caste groups is a strict food taboo, since stale food is considered ritually polluted and thus harmful:

If there was food left over from the night before the younger siblings would eat it. During summers if there was stale food left over, we would add water to it and keep, and the next morning cook it in tamarind water like khitchri. (...) We never threw any food away. If there was wedding in the neighbourhood and there was any food leftover we prepared this kind of *ghata* and distributed it among neighbours. If there was a lot of rice left over we’d put it out in the sun to dry and when it was really dry we ground it into a powder and made rotis. That is to say instead of throwing away the grain we used it. (Baisantri 1999, 50; transl. by Raje 2007, 361)

Baisantri experienced food shortages during her lifetime and is acutely aware of the social and moral responsibility that is attached to food and, even more significantly, to excessive eating and feasting in the Indian social context. On the one hand, large communities are excluded from the bare necessities of daily sustenance, while, on the other, the serving of great quantities of food to guests is a much-required part of social gatherings, religious ceremonies, festivals, etc. She mentions a visit to a donning of a *janeū* or the sacred thread ceremony of an acquaintance, where guests were served plenty of various snacks and a rich dinner, which made her depressed, because she continuously thought about the food wastage:

Plenty of different dishes were made. Sweet *laḍḍūs*, rich *pulāo*, fried *pūrīs* and *pakoṛās*, sugary *śrikhānd* and many more. When I was eating I suddenly remembered that at home my little brothers and sisters, my parents, they were probably having the everyday potatoes and aubergine in gravy with coarse rice. I was saddened. I was eating but I grieved over the wastage of all

9. Limbale 2004, 115.

that food here and those children of beggars, who outside were falling on leftover food<sup>10</sup> plates.  
(Baisantri 1999, 87)

Feeding constitutes an important component of the concept of *mamtā* or motherly affection and love as it is conceptualised in the modern Hindi language. *Mamtā* is also perceived by some as a virtue that is unique to, or specifically abundant in Indian women.<sup>11</sup> The act of nourishing itself is inscribed in the concept of women's self-sacrifice. Sonrexa mentions how her mother gave away her own portions of milk, ghee, and food to her stepchildren, in turn, eating their leftovers: an act, which the author equates with her motherly devotion (Sonrexa 2010, 43). The author describes how she herself cooked for her husband and her brother-in-law, even when she was going through the first pangs of childbirth, because she knew there was no other woman at home to feed them. Her narrative of the event does not produce an air of HEROISM; she simply states the facts, legitimising her actions by her understanding of the practicalities of her family life.

On the other hand, Baisantri's narrative, through its observation of the harsh realities of the life of those struggling to survive, gives an account of her father being repeatedly undernourished by his stepmother. She would feed her own children first, which, in a home where food was lacking, meant that there was nothing left over for her stepson. Baisantri does not condemn this conduct, she merely explains the circumstances and plainly states facts that pain and disturb her. Another practice that she finds unsettling is giving opium to those babies, whose mothers have to earn a living outside their homes and who cannot feed them on time (Baisantri 1999, 33). Working women constitute the majority in Baisantri's colony, which is mostly occupied by Dalits, low castes, and Adivasis. Many of these female workers have no one to care for their children when they are at work, because most people capable of doing any kind of job – be they young or old – are busy. Baisantri explains that in these circumstances, mothers, including her own mother – a fact she admits later on in her narrative (Baisantri 1999, 56) – are compelled to give opium to their children to make them sleep while they are away. She is reluctant to admit this fact, because feeding opium to her sister might actually have been the cause of the child's death.

In the autobiographies under scrutiny, food and the act of nourishing become the stage for contestation through women's self-imposed restrictions or

10. The concept of *jūṭhā* food (defiled by touch) has strong symbolic connotations in Dalit writings, since leftovers were traditionally given to Dalits after religious ceremonies or even in the homes of the people they worked for. The symbolic usage of the term is reflected, for instance, in Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography, which is simply titled *Jūṭhan* (2007, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1997).

11. At a conference in India on women's writings, a female participant asked me why Western women were devoid of *mamtā*.

actions of rebellion. To illustrate this, Sonrexa mentions how her mother refused to cook and went on strike after her husband had accused her of unnecessary and excessive cooking to celebrate Divali festivities (Sonrexa 2010, 71). Like Shiva in the popular tale mentioned at the start of this paper, the father soon learnt his lesson. He realised that he could not buy ready-made food in the bazaar each time the children were hungry and finally had to ask his wife to take up cooking again, promising, at the same time, never to interfere with her domain again. Sonrexa also describes an incident from her fasting on the occasion of the *karvā cauth* festival (dedicated to marital harmony), when she rejected her dinner, the first and only food she was supposed to have that day, because her husband and brother-in-law had had a quarrel and had refused to eat (Sonrexa 2010, 200).

### *Present-day Annapurnas – closing remarks*

Food is inscribed in the Indian concept of a woman and she herself is equated with the archetype of Annapurna, the one who is filled with food, the 'kitchen-goddess'. However, the occurrence and distribution of food-related subjects vary in the autobiographies examined here. They are distinctly visible in Sonrexa's and Baisantri's narratives, while Khaitan and Pushpa neither give it much importance, nor do they devote it much space.

The narratives of present-day Annapurnas, in particular Baisantri and Sonrexa and to a lesser degree Khaitan and Pushpa, portray the heterogeneity of women's life experiences and present us with their individual understanding of the links between food and the cultural Indian constructs of womanhood and motherhood in relation to caste, religion, and class. These narratives draw a complex and diverse picture of food and eating practices in India. The observations of the authors are often bitter, critical, and sometimes in contradiction with each other, but they are close to the realities of their individual lives.

It seems that, just as in the story of goddess Annapurna, men are largely missing from the picture as far as the laborious process of food preparation and often even its procurement are concerned. The women of these narratives are regularly the sole providers of not only food but also the emotional support, which accompanies nourishing. They are successful and efficient caretakers devoted to their children and feeding numerous relatives and guests. These life writings make their readers mindful of the fact that in India, just as anywhere else in the world, the woman occupies a far more liminal space than the two extremes of complete submission and total subversion.

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# Food and fasting: Representing the traditional role of women in Hindi cinema

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## *Food and Hindi cinema*

Food and movies have always been closely related from the very beginnings of cinema. This decidedly happy ‘marriage’ has seen the birth of some authentic masterpieces to which various studies have been dedicated, mainly in relation to western cinema,<sup>1</sup> while hardly any studies have dealt with the relationship between food and Indian cinema.

Actually food has rarely been used as a central theme in Hindi cinema;<sup>2</sup> it often appears in bizarre movie titles and song lyrics, as well as in odd item numbers, but without playing a prominent role in the film.

Generally speaking, the scenes showing preparation of food tend to represent the woman busy in the kitchen as an obedient and loving wife. But in the commercial production of the last few years, by contrast, scenes are not infrequent, and not without a touch of exaggeration, of an elite of young, urban, upper-class and extremely cosmopolitan men and women showing off their modern attitudes as they breezily potter about in their highly technological, fully equipped kitchens. Indeed, in a number of popular and very successful Hindi films of the last few years the male protagonist plays the role of the chef. Of these, the most famous are Saif Ali Khan in *Salaam Namaste*<sup>3</sup> (2005) and Amitabh Bachchan in *Cheeni Kum* (2007). The choice of the profession is

1. See in particular Bower 2004, Keller 2006, Zimmerman 2009, Hertweck 2014.

2. An important point to make here is that for the purpose of analysis in this paper we will not be referring to Indian cinema in general, rather to Hindi cinema, both mainstream and independent films. The whole Indian film industry includes other production centres which make films in more than twenty Indian languages. However, Hindi cinema is the largest and most popular sector of Indian cinema, having the biggest budgets and stars and worldwide circulation.

3. Names and titles are spelt as in the credits and advertisements for the films. For the benefit of the readers, dialogue quoted from the films is translated from Hindi to English. All the translations are ours. A number of relatively common words in Indian languages are written here in their familiar forms and without diacritical marks.

clearly due to the fact that it has recently become very glamorous and, moreover, serves a purpose in the plot, but in reality, despite long sequences taking place in the kitchen or restaurant, food never becomes the true protagonist of the film.

Scenes of food being consumed, too, generally serve to celebrate the values of tradition or, in other cases, of modernity. Family unity is celebrated, above all in the commercial films, on the occasions of the great Hindu festivals, when all the components of the joint family gather; it is a moment of great joy and serenity, usually underlined with a tracking shot over the best dishes of Indian cuisine, rigorously vegetarian. At the same time, and often in the same film, once the young heroes of Indian cinema have shed the traditional costumes worn for festivals and abandoned the formal air they assume to bow low and touch the feet of the elders as a sign of respect, they become the very embodiment of modernity. Always well-off and westernised, they are great connoisseurs of the most refined delicacies of international cuisine and go to the most fashionable restaurants.

In the 'art', more realist cinema, generally recognised as more committed, often exposing social ills, representation of abundance or want of food usually serves to evoke the extreme inequalities characterising Indian society, above all when it comes to caste.

In this paper, however, we will be focusing on the way food is represented in relation to Hindu women's feelings and duties in certain films of Hindi cinema.<sup>4</sup> The analysis will take into account some particular situations in different stages of women's life course, in relation to love and marriage.

### *Karva Chauth: fasting for the desired husband*

The plots of the most successful and representative popular films released between the 1990s and the 2000s always revolve around romantic stories developing between teenagers. Here we are referring to Bollywood films and, following the practice of Rajadhyaksha,<sup>5</sup> we use the term Bollywood to define a reasonably specific narrative and mode of presentation that emerged in the early 1990s: a particular genre of glossy 'feelgood-happy-ending' romance, family-centred, packed with songs and dances.

Although the film that pioneered this genre is *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995, also known as *DDLJ*) is often considered the film most representative of Bollywood. It was the first of a long series of films representing the Indian diaspora. Written and directed by Aditya Chopra, making his debut in direction at the tender age of twenty-three, and

4. For the purpose of analysis, I will consider some of the most successful films belonging to both mainstream and independent cinema released in the last two decades.

5. Rajadhyaksha 2003, 28.

produced by his father Yash Chopra, the film is one of the most successful films of all time in India.

It tells the story of two young British Asian people, the wealthy spoilt Raj (Shah Rukh Khan) and tender, romantic Simran (Kajol), who meet and fall in love during an inter-rail trek across Europe. The girl's father, having emigrated from Punjab twenty-two years before, dreams of a future for his daughter and marriage far from the corrupt West – in his native land, in fact, where, he is convinced, the old moral values still hold. So it is that he arranges her marriage with the son of a childhood friend of his in Punjab, Kuljeet. Born and bred in London, and now in love with Raj, the girl tries to resist and wants to run away with the boy she loves. But he surprisingly shows far more virtue and respect for the traditional Indian values than even his Indian rival, and agrees to marry Simran only on obtaining her father's consent. In full respect of the happy ending that characterises this genre of film, at the end the young couple will win the family over.

As the story implies, a characteristic ingredient of Bollywood films is continual celebration of Hindu family values. As Dwyer puts it,<sup>6</sup> these values include great respect for religion and the family, evoking domesticity and morality in new perspectives. Religion and traditions remain a part of everyday life, but with a new consumerist turn, appealing to India's new middle classes. Religiosity is highlighted with elaborate celebration of festivals, with the virtual invention of a new tradition.

Of particular relevance to our analysis is the portrayal of Karva Chauth in the films. This is an important Hindu festival, in which married women fast from sunrise to moonrise, praying for the welfare, prosperity and longevity of their husbands. After a day's fast the woman views first the rising moon through a sieve, and then her husband's face. He then gives her the first sip of water and morsel of food.

Originally the festival was practised by married Hindu women in North India, in particular in Punjab and parts of Uttar Pradesh. It is now gaining tremendous popularity among women of all classes and regional communities across the country.<sup>7</sup>

Karva Chauth owes its recent popularity to the cinema of Bollywood,<sup>8</sup> and in particular to the film *DDLJ*, which marked a real turning point in Karva Chauth celebrations, prompting increasing participation all over India. As in the film, unmarried women have increasingly taken to fasting and praying for their boyfriends or desired husbands. By now it has become an extremely popular

6. Dwyer 2006, 155-56.

7. Karva Chauth also features widely in advertising campaigns in India. For example, a TV commercial shows a husband buying his wife a Chevrolet with a sunroof, perfect to go for a drive on the night of Karva Chauth until she glimpses the moon rising above.

8. We have seen Karva Chauth scenes in many Bollywood movies, although it appeared even before, in the 1980s.

romantic festival, rather like Valentine's Day, with couples dining together and exchanging presents. Media publicity becomes all pervasive as the festival approaches, attention also turning to the latest fashions and *mehndi* patterns. Austerity gives way to the pleasures of dressing up, shopping and having a good time.

In *DDLJ*, at the end of the beautiful Karva Chauth sequence, the married women are given water by their husbands to break the fast, and Simran decides to play out a scene. She pretends to faint in order to avoid drinking the water offered to her by Kuljeet, the groom chosen for her by her father. Raj promptly intervenes reviving her with a sip of water, and so she breaks the fast, with a significant wink for him. Simran and Raj later complete their bonding rite in the moonlight, exchanging food with each other, and Simran learns that Raj has reciprocated with a day's secret fast, demonstrating just how much he feels for her.

A decidedly odd feature of this movie is the fact that a ritual symbol of patriarchal society is used here by two young lovers to declare to each other their eternal love and, exceptionally, I would say, with Raj's fast, promoting a sort of gender equality.

### *The duties of the ideal Hindu wife*

To describe the typical situation in Indian cinema where preparation of a meal is represented as one of the first duties of the ideal Hindu wife we have chosen a very particular film, namely *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008). This is an extraordinary epic historical drama played out in Bollywood style: a box-office hit in India, it has turned out to be an award-winner at many of the most important Indian and international film festivals.

*Jodhaa Akbar* recreates the ascent to the throne of the young Akbar (Hrithik Roshan), the first Mughal emperor born on Indian soil, as the film's hero proudly declares in the movie. The plot centres on the romantic love story that blossoms between Akbar and the Hindu Rajput princess Jodhaa (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan), who becomes his wife following a marriage of alliance. According to tradition the princess is a historical character. The daughter of the Maharaja of Amber, the emperor Akbar married her to extend his empire in Rajasthan,<sup>9</sup> a fate which befell many Rajput princesses.

9. She was the mother of Salim, Akbar's first-born son and successor to the throne. In actual fact, the princess is known to scholars by the name, or rather the title, of Maryam-Uz-Zaman, that is 'Mary of the Age' while the name 'Jodhaa' only appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jodhaa, however, remains the name with which the legend of the princess has been handed down to the present day, reinforced by the enormous popularity of the film *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960).



To begin with, the princess refuses to enter into the marriage which her father has arranged for her, and above all she is not prepared to have a Muslim as husband. She sets two conditions for her marriage: that she is not forced to convert to Islam and that she is allowed to continue to practise her faith.

Various episodes combine to touch the princess's heart, and gradually the two young people get to know each other and fall in love, despite intrigues and plots designed to lead Akbar to suspect that his wife is betraying him. The turning point in their relationship comes when Jodhaa is at last able to perform the duties of a true Hindu wife, cooking for her husband. Akbar orders that a great Rajput feast be held in the palace in honour of the princess, and sends her a precious necklace as a gift. To show him her profound appreciation, Jodhaa decides to attend to the cooking herself. When a maid in her service objects, peremptorily reminding her: 'You are the Empress of Hindustan!', Jodhaa answers: 'Then I shall cook as a wife, not an Empress!'

The cook and his assistants are astonished to see a princess in the royal kitchen, but at the same time honoured by the presence, they collaborate with Jodhaa in the preparation of a marvellous lunch consisting of various traditional dishes of Hindu cuisine, served to the guests in the traditional *thali*. Akbar is delighted with the surprise that Jodhaa has prepared for him and, even more, with the food – a veritable declaration of love.

As the food is being prepared, and even while the emperor is consuming it, an extremely tense confrontation is played out before us between Akbar's wet-nurse, Maham Anga who, claiming to be like a mother to him, exercises considerable influence over him, and the young bride, each intent on winning the Emperor's absolute love and so controlling him.<sup>10</sup>

The battle, or at least the skirmish as lunch is being consumed, sees Jodhaa triumphing. The old lady tries to ruin the feast, insisting that, according to the law, food served to the Emperor must first be tasted by the cook, thus spoiling the splendid presentation of the dishes. Lovingly, however, Akbar demonstrates his devotion to his bride by asking to eat from the same plates that Jodhaa had tasted from. In Indian tradition this is a gesture indicating intimacy and bonding, and in general a prerogative of married couples, as evidenced by the practice of sharing food from each other's plates in the first lunch by newly-weds. And indeed at the end of the splendid, fantastically colourful lunch sequence, romance starts to blossom with a beautiful love song sequence, showing touching moments of tenderness between the young couple.

Actually, as Dwyer points out,<sup>11</sup> in the film vegetarianism is clearly equated with Hinduism, while in reality it is just a practice of some high castes

10. As Dwyer (2014, 46-47) points out, here the evil wet-nurse plays the wicked mother-in-law in a manner familiar from the popular *saas-bahu* (mother/daughter-in-law) genre of Indian television.

11. *Ibid.*, 246-47.

(Brahmins and merchants in particular); nevertheless, it is certainly no secret that Rajputs are non-vegetarian. The ‘vegetarian Rajput meal’ that Jodhaa prepares for her husband should in reality be called a Marwari (merchant) feast and not a Rajput one. It is clearly fictional, a choice made by the director for obvious narrative purposes.

Another element clearly serving the purposes of the plot but hardly reflecting historical reality is the representation of the marriage between Akbar and Jodhaa as monogamous. Although the film covers a very brief period in the couple’s life, the plot leaves us in no doubt that there will never be room for another woman in the heart or the bed of the emperor. Their relationship is strong, unbreakable and exclusive because it has overcome severe trials that have changed them both profoundly. In the cinematic fiction the princess contributes to the development of the enlightened vision that will make Jalaluddin Muhammad ‘Akbar’, that is ‘the Great,’ respectful of all religions, and above all of the Hindu religion.

#### *From housewife to entrepreneur*

*English Vinglish* (2012) is a comedy-drama film, written and directed by Gauri Shinde, who began her career as an ad-film director, this being her feature film debut. It was premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and earned global acclaim there and at several other international festivals across the world. In India, too, it was enthusiastically acclaimed by the critics, and had enormous success with audiences.

It is a crossover film: we might define it as socially progressive, but at the same time it is very entertaining and has continued to enjoy commercial success worldwide. Very distant from the traditional romantic plots of Bollywood, it is one of the most female-centric films to come out of Hindi cinema in decades. Not only does *English Vinglish* have a female lead, but the protagonist is actually in her late forties. Starring Sridevi, the film marks the return of this Indian superstar to the screen after fourteen years. She got a standing ovation in Toronto, where she was hailed as India’s Meryl Streep by the local media.

The film revolves around Shashi (Sridevi), a middle-class Maharashtrian housewife. She is a caring mother, a devoted wife and a dedicated homemaker, yet she is taken for granted by her family. Her poor English exposes her to the derision of her husband Satish (Adil Hussain), a busy executive, who has little respect for her, and her teenage daughter, who is ashamed even to introduce her mother to her school friends and teachers. She is a great cook and she runs a small home-based business making *laddoos* and delivering them in the neighbourhood, which gives her great satisfaction. However, her husband

doesn't understand how important it is for her; he belittles her work, deeming it a frivolous waste of time, and discourages her from going on with it.

When her sister, who lives in the USA, tells her about the upcoming wedding of her daughter, Shashi, at first she is reluctant, but eventually agrees to go and help out with the preparations. Far from her family and trying to overcome her insecurities, Shashi secretly enrolls in an English class. She is now set on a path that will lead her, step by step, to become a new woman, self-confident and trusting in her skills. Thanks to her small *laddoo* business her teacher describes her as an 'entrepreneur'. Suddenly, this English word gives new, higher significance and value to her work, making her feel important. The scene where we see the new Shashi walking proudly, head held high, along the streets of Manhattan in her marvellous *sari* repeating this word constitutes the emblematic image at the heart of the film. The film ends with Shashi giving a lesson in humility to all, surprising her family with the progress she has made in speaking English; a little step forward on the way to self-determination and emancipation.

The extraordinary figure of Shashi, as created by the director taking inspiration from her mother, is played with authentic feeling by Sridevi, at the same time humble and full of dignity, fragile and determined, very feminine and uniquely Indian. In New York Shashi never abandons her *sari* and *mangalsutra*. She does not destroy her marriage yielding to the advances of Laurent, a sensitive French fellow student on the course who has much in common with her; indeed, she has no hesitation in rejecting his advances. She has become a new woman, but without foregoing her traditional role as wife and mother.

The film exposes the real conditions of women in the domestic and social spheres in India. In the film Shashi's frustration is all too evident. When Laurent, also a cook, tasting her *laddoos* says 'You are an artist', Shashi brusquely replies: 'when a man cooks, it is art; when a woman cooks, it is her duty'. And it is precisely this element that makes the film so interesting: Shashi finds her path towards emancipation through the very duties her role forces on her – in cooking. She plumbs the depths of humiliation when her husband sneers: 'My wife was born to make *laddoos*'. And yet, paradoxically, Shashi is able to transform what sounds like condemnation into a great opportunity.

We see that, if her progress with the English language was the main element leading Shashi to become more self-confident and win the respect of her family, her realisation of her great potential as cook and entrepreneur was ultimately no less important. A number of articles in the press describe how the huge success of this film has prompted many women in India to enrol in English courses, but one cannot help wondering how many of them have found the right motivation to assert themselves at the personal level, transforming their pursuits into small or big businesses.

*The way to a man's heart is through his stomach*

Food is a central theme in *The Lunchbox* (2013), an innovative independent Hindi film, written and directed by Ritesh Batra and jointly produced by various studios. This talented Indian filmmaker's feature debut has been successfully presented in many international film festivals and has been released in India and in many other countries in Europe and North America, enjoying great success with critics and public alike.

In present-day middle-class Mumbai live Ila (Nimrat Kaur), a neglected young housewife, and Saajan Fenandes (Irrfan Khan), a widowed clerk approaching retirement. The two seem to have nothing in common apart from the utter solitude to which both appear to be condemned until, by a twist of fate, their lives meet.

With the precious advice of 'Auntie', the neighbour living in the apartment above hers, with whom she converses shouting from the kitchen window, Ila decides to rekindle attention and interest in her husband, ever more distant and cold with her, cooking special new and increasingly tasty dishes for him. 'One bite of that, and he'll build you a Taj Mahal', 'Auntie' tells her, lowering a basket full of spices down to her through the window on a rope. Ila laughs and reminds her that the Taj Mahal is a tomb. This gets her nowhere; her husband remains totally indifferent to her attentions and, as she is about to learn, is having an affair with another woman.

Ila lovingly prepares the lunch and entrusts it, as she does every day, to the *dabbawalla*, one of the famously efficient men who deliver hot meals in Mumbai. However, due to an unaccountable and, as the old man proudly points out, statistically impossible error, from that day on he delivers Ila's lunchbox to someone else, Saajan. The latter realises he is eating another man's lunch, and so slips a note into the tin when it goes back, complimenting the cook. This is the beginning of a long and often confidential exchange of messages hidden in the lunchbox, destined to change both their lives forever. At first Ila's curiosity is aroused; then, gradually, she becomes increasingly involved and gratified by the attention the stranger shows in her, putting ever more passion into the daily preparation of the lunch.

For Ila it is no longer a matter of normal routine among her duties as a housewife, but a veritable act of love, initially aimed at her husband, to rekindle his deadened feelings, then at Saajan, who is attentive and urges her to react against her unhappy condition and, ultimately, at herself, in a rediscovered vitality.

The list of the protagonists of this film is rather longer than the credits would suggest. The cooking and the eating, the foods themselves, become the main characters in the movie. The film also pays tribute to the *dabbawalla*, an army of two hundred thousand men who collect hot homemade lunches from kitchens all over the city every day and, transporting them by bike, train, and

handcart, deliver them to the workplaces in time for lunch. Indeed, Batra's original idea had been to make a documentary on them, and the inspiration then came to make this feature film. 'They are very accurate and take a lot of pride in their job', the director says, 'the statistic is that one in six million lunchboxes goes to the wrong address. If something is happening one in six million times, it's a miracle, not a mistake, so the story to me is about the miracle of the big city that connects these lonely souls'.<sup>12</sup>

Particularly interesting is the special relationship – a sort of complicity – that develops between Ila and 'Auntie', the elderly neighbour who remains for us only a voice coming in through the window, dispensing wise, and not only culinary, advice. The two women hit it off and communicate through aromas – they both understand the power of food.

Worth noting, finally, are the extremely limited proportions of Ila's kitchen, which the director insisted upon, practically constituting a metaphor for her life and marriage. The point was made very eloquently by the actress herself, Nimraut Kaur, in an interview: 'The kitchen where I was shooting in the film was so cramped up that I would find it difficult to move (...) despite the suffocation I had to face, it actually translated beautifully onscreen, and displayed Ila's claustrophobia in her marriage'.<sup>13</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In this paper we have taken four recent Hindi films of different genres but all enjoying popularity and success with audiences and critics alike, to see how food is used in the narrative of films to represent Hindu women's feelings and duties.

We must, however, point out that the films analysed here are not representative of the Hindi film scene – apart from *DDJJ*, which in many respects we may define as emblematic of the most widespread genre, characterised as Bollywood – and are therefore not taken as models. Nevertheless, they depict particular situations which Hindi cinema evidently felt the need to evoke and which, in any case, have had considerable impact on popular imaginings. Thus they constitute for us a particularly apt starting point for a series of reflections on the condition of women in India in relation to love and marriage.

It is worth noting, in the first place, that in none of the films taken into consideration is the preparation of food experienced by women as an unwelcome obligation, but rather as a right, in *Jodhaa Akbar*, if not actually a pleasure and form of expression of personal qualities, as in *English Vinglish* and *The Lunchbox*. And in all the cases, albeit in different ways, food is used as

12. *Chicago Tribune*, May 15, 2014 (see Sitography).

13. *The Times of India*, February 13, 2015 (see Sitography).

a means for women to assert their will. In *DDLJ* a young woman, while respecting the rules laid down by a patriarchal society, hits on a ploy to exploit a traditional custom to declare her love to the man she adores and wishes to marry, and is then surprised and delighted when he reciprocates with the same means. In *Jodhaa Akbar* the Hindu woman asserts her role as wife through food, once and for all winning the love of her husband, and from then on actually achieving a certain degree of control over him and his empire. In *English Vinglish* Shashi's food becomes a means of emancipation and, finally, in *The Lunchbox* Ila, who knows the power of food, uses it in an attempt to win back her husband, only, to her great surprise, to encounter the man who will encourage her to change her life for good.

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# Fowl-cutlets and mutton *singāḍās*: Intercultural food and cuisine/s in Bengali detective fiction

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One of the less emphasised aspects of a relatively widely-studied phenomenon like the so-called – for right and wrong reasons – ‘Bengal Renaissance’ is that of the intercultural gastronomic spectrum it opened up. Bengali cuisine, though lacking the global commercial and marketing success of its ‘Punjabi’ and ‘South Indian’ counterparts – to isolate the two best-known portmanteau culinary brands of provincial Indian food – has enjoyed a steady, even zealous, appreciation and espousal within Bengali-speaking communities, both on the Indian Subcontinent and abroad. One need only visit one of the annual cultural jamborees or, as Bengalis like to call them, ‘get-togethers’ – such as the North American Bengali Conference<sup>1</sup> – to get a sense of the average diasporic Bengali-speaking expatriate’s attachment to and longing for ‘*āmāder khābār*’<sup>2</sup> (‘our food’). This attachment to a specific ‘traditional’ or home/ly cuisine is, of course, not something unique to Bengalis, as diasporic situations tend to fuse professional and personal needs and contingencies with a dietary and culinary irredentism, which is not unknown to those who seek to read or project their nostalgia for a lost or forsaken homeland into or onto the template of food and

1. It is quite indicative of the Bengali passion for food that the website of the 35<sup>th</sup> North American Bengali Conference (<http://www.nabc2015.org>), organised by the Tagore Society of Houston, Texas, has a link for ‘FOOD COUPONS’, as one of the two most prominent clickable links on the home-page. In fact, the NABC dinners have become the stuff of legends, with the organisers assuring that ‘[s]umptuous Bengali menu will be served. Both veg and non veg will be available’. Cf. <http://www.registration.nabc2015.org/foodcoupon/foodcouponregistration.html>, retrieved on 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. It is interesting that the Bengali character of the menu is emphasised as one of its essential recommendations.

2. This notion of ‘our (home/ly) food’, which is based on but not limited to the trope of domesticity that much of Bengali cuisine seems to revolve around, was cherished by none less than Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), India’s first globally-renowned and ‘modern’ cosmopolitan exponent of spiritual wisdom and Indic socio-religious practices. He is, once, reported to have quipped: ‘*Āmrā oder khābār khābo, āmāder moton kore!*’ (‘We will eat their food, in our own way!’). The present author came to know of this during a conversation with Swāmi Suparṇānanda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.

cuisine. One needs only to browse through the lists of ‘ethnic’ and/or ‘alternative’ restaurants in the major cities of the world – including even those in the so-called global ‘South’ – and wonder at the availability of cuisines as varied as Armenian and Tibetan, Norwegian and Tamil, to appreciate the extent of diasporic patronage of the cuisine/s of the homelands involved, given that most of these niche-eateries were, at least initially, started by expatriates from the places concerned. However, with Bengali-speakers, it acquires an entirely new dimension – one even bordering on the paradigmatic – of privileging food that reminds one of or *is*, in certain cases, *from* home – that is to say from the State of West Bengal in India, or its next-door neighbour Bangladesh. This can assume various forms of social and cultural normativity and layered expressions of exclusivist commission and omission, which give one a sense of the negotiated and nuanced compromise that characterises homes that are away from Home. As a number of Euro-American writers of Bengali origin have shown in their novels and short stories, inter-continental migrations, which trigger and even necessitate intercultural encounters and adjustments, are not bereft of a lingering nostalgia for the smells and tastes of an often-fictive – at least, in part – socio-religious and cultural *Urheimat*.<sup>3</sup> This leaves certain residual traces in the phenotypical constitution of hybrid spatio-temporal interstices that come together to form the polymorphic reality/ies of expatriate sensibilities. As Jhumpa Lahiri points out, in her short story ‘The Third and Final Continent’, this interstitial *mélange* can be, and more often than not *is*, simply a matter of random quotidian choices and juxtapositions and may involve ‘ma[king] yet more egg curry, and play[ing] Mukesh on a Grundig reel-to-reel, and soak[ing] (...) dirty dishes in the bathtub’ (Lahiri 1999, 174).

This may give one the impression that the by-products of trans-spatial dislocation, that is to say, intercultural ‘lifestyle choices’ – to use the phrase rather differently from the controversial manner in which the former Australian Prime Minister did<sup>4</sup> – are solely, and even necessarily, a matter of contingency and unavoidability. Likewise, the limited availability of certain foods and other goods, substances, products, and raw materials – although ever lessening, due to the development of international trade and the ease with which culture-specific, even esoteric food and provisions are crossing borders – seems another societal-cultural constant. In reality, however, this need not be the case, as culinary and dietary border-crossing does often happen at the level of personal and idiosyncratic choice and predilection, which may or may not be conditioned

3. The linguistic term *Urheimat* refers to the theoretical existence of an originary homeland of a reconstructed proto-language.

4. Mr Tony Abbott, the former Australian Prime Minister, seems to believe – going by his public utterances on the matter – that Aboriginal communities and their ‘alternative’ ‘lifestyle choices’ are wasteful and a hindrance to the realisation of societal unity and harmony in his country. Cf. <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/10/remote-communities-are-lifestyle-choices-says-tony-abbott>, retrieved on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.

by either spatial removal from one's homeland or spatio-temporal location and/or situation during one's formative years. Furthermore, such individual cosmopolitanism of dietary-culinary taste may also be a result of deeply ingrained and schooled appropriations of ideational and aspirational norms in terms of lifestyle and food-habits. In the case of the diasporic Bengali, such cultivation of eating-habits and culinary practices, which were Anglo-European in origin and had come to the Bengali-speaking world through colonial agency, was, in more ways than one, a part of the symbolic capital of Bengal's entry into colonial modernity. This could be seen in the light of what Samuel Moyn, in his insightful essay 'On the Nonglobalization of Ideas', calls 'the model of truncated universals and subaltern fulfilment' (Moyn 2013, 192), while discussing '[t]he history of human rights as a galvanizing idea [that] was, in the beginning and for a very long time, a history of *nonglobalization*, especially compared with their circulation and resonance now' (*ibid.*). Thus, one could argue that Anglo-European culinary universals, packaged in the allure of modernising Otherness and loaded with the promise of what Moyn calls the 'prior invocation [of 'rights in imperial spaces'] as a gift of civilization' (*ibid.*, 195) had reached colonial Bengal through divergent modes of access and dissemination and were truncated and modified by local actors in the quest for a kaleidoscopic intercultural cuisine that could address the tectonic paradigm shifts of the time.

In the early-colonial years, Calcutta was both a site of intercultural dynamism occasioned by the sudden juxtaposition of different cultural-ideological communities and also a geopolitical entity called into being by transcultural capital and enterprise – as represented by the world's first truly-global corporate behemoth, the British East India Company. This meant that in a period when the British administration was still seen as a necessary concomitant to modernity and the modernising process, Calcutta provided ample opportunity for its inhabitants to mediate their transition from a somewhat-liminal existence on the fringes of Hindustan to a suddenly-empowering situation as residents of a new transnational imperial capital, as it was destined to become by the end of the nineteenth century. As befitting their new-found status as residents of a global city that was roughly in the middle of East-West trade for a considerable amount of time and which traded with cities old and new, Calcuttans sought to broaden their culinary horizons. In this context, it is worth noting that, at the time, not everyone had such a positive opinion of what was occasionally considered a transgressive movement towards culinary experimentation and the consequent interstitial hybridity. Some critics of this culinary fraternisation with the British and other Europeans saw it as an ingratiating and debasing pattern of subservience and even surrender to the colonial masters. As Kaliprasanna Singha, in his uninhibited *Designs of the Barn-Owl*, writes, while discussing the

commotion and confusion in Calcutta during the Sepoy Mutiny,<sup>5</sup> a number of Calcuttans ‘volunteered, due to the temptation of foreign dishes’ (Singha 2012 [1862], 96), in certain areas of Calcutta that were almost exclusively British-inhabited. Thus, there does seem to have been a section of public opinion that connected the support of or, at least, collaboration with the British, more to a fascination with foreign food than to any modernising imperative. This perception, ironically, even sarcastically exaggerated as it might have been, could, however, in an implicit manner, lead one to the assumption that the enthusiasm for intercultural cuisine might have had more to do with mere curiosity for the exotic than the spatio-temporal dynamism of early-colonial Calcutta’s societal contexts.

Despite the presence of critical and sceptical voices in their midst, it may definitely be said that the Bengali-speaking elites and subalterns, in their own ways, delighted in being considered ‘*khādyā-rasiks*’ (gourmets, connoisseurs of the *rasas* implicit in food, bordering on gluttony). They were capable of hybridising ‘*biletī*’ (<*vilāyati* = foreign, European) dishes to suit their epicurean – indeed even sybaritic – and/or eclectic tastes. This meant, to cite just one instance, that the mid-nineteenth-century English workers’ staple ‘fish and chips’ – itself a hybrid, dating back to the sixteenth century, fashioned from the original Iberian *pescados fritos* by the Marranos and first made into a commercial success, in 1860, by a certain ‘Joseph Malin, a Jewish immigrant newly arrived from Eastern Europe’ (Roden 1996, 113) – became the ‘fish-fry’, which is one of Bengal’s favourite heavy snacks. It was as true then as it is now that the Bengali passion for or, rather, obsession with food and the average expenditure on and consumption of different kinds of food-products, be they regular and easily available or exotic and rare, are unsurpassable in South Asia. Perhaps it was due to this Bengali propensity to dietary and culinary enthusiasm, even excess, that Calcutta, Bengal and, indeed, the entire Subcontinent were exposed to a number of the latest products and services in the food and beverages industry at the *same* time as they were being introduced to Anglo-European markets.

From the end of the eighteenth century to that of the nineteenth and onwards, ‘some of the best-selling new products of the period – Mellin’s and Lactogen’s baby foods, Keventer’s butter, Firpo’s bread, Nestle’s condensed

5. The so-called Sepoy Mutiny of 1857–8, which started off as a rebellion by various disgruntled Indian individuals and groups within the 19<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry (BNI) of the armies of the English East India Company, soon spread – aided, with considerable evidence of prior planning on their part, by networks of other British-Indian soldiers, dispossessed sub-/caste-groups, religious orders, and elites, landlords, and princes – mainly through British-held North India. It resulted in the temporary restitution of the Mughal Emperor as a largely-symbolic figurehead under whom various groups and individuals coalesced against British ascendancy. Numerous professional and amateur Indian historians, beginning with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his book *The History of the War of Indian Independence* (1909), have called this India’s ‘First War of Independence’.

milk, the all-time health drink, Horlicks [as well-received now as it was then], Coca Cola and Morton Sweets' (Guha-Thakurta 2011, 33) were made available in Calcutta. Thereafter, they spread to the rest of India, in what can only have been recognition of a large demand for such 'global' food-products. Often, this demand was created by the deployment of modern mechanisms of advertising and even 'product placement',<sup>6</sup> with some of the first and most well-known transnational advertising firms, such as D. J. Keymer, J. Walter Thomson (also known as JWT, the first really multinational agency) *et alii*, opening and maintaining their offices in Calcutta and Bombay in the first half of the twentieth century. As Gautam Bhadra shows, in his exhaustive and definitive archival research on the introduction and development of tea-consumption in South Asia, accessible in *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, 'the promotion of this new "national drink"' invited some of the best graphic designs and advertising ideas of the time' (*ibid.*, 34). In fact, the manner in which tea, 'a lucrative item of the Euro-Asian trade of the British Agency houses from the 1840s' (*ibid.*, 33), journeyed from the quintessentially-colonial plantations of Eastern and North-Eastern India, to the drawing-rooms of 'a small circle of the British and anglicized elite' (*ibid.*) is a fascinating lesson in the power of product-placement and manipulation of public desires and demands. 'It took the concerted marketing campaigns of various Indian tea associations and committees to popularize tea drinking among a home public over the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (*ibid.*). Thus, it may be safe to opine that, in both early- and late-colonial Bengal, dietary-culinary tastes were not simply a matter of personal predilection on the part of the average consumer but also the outcomes of the operation of both concerted campaigns for creating specific demands and subconscious aspirational drives in certain sections of society. This set the stage for a rather wide-ranging culinary hybridisation, which was celebrated by the figure of the fictional Bengali detective, her/himself a product of competing and coalescing hybridising agencies, and configured the composite nature of the modern Bengali palate.

It is instructive to recollect the names and descriptions of the various dishes, and especially but not only the snacks consumed by various fictional Bengali detectives, from the unassuming *telebhājā* (deep-fried flour-coated savouries, usually made from/with different vegetables, like aubergines, onions, potatoes, banana-flowers, *et cetera*) and *cānācur* (spicy combinations of different roasted/parched/fried chickpeas, pulses, lentils, nuts, puffed rice, *et cetera*) to the more upper-end *dimer devil cap* (egg devil) and fish-fry. It is apparently clear

6. The term 'product placement' has been institutionally defined by the European Commission as 'any form of audiovisual commercial communication consisting of the inclusion of or reference to a product, a service or the trade mark thereof so that it is featured within a programme, in return for payment or for similar consideration'; cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/information\\_society/avpolicy/reg/tvwf/advertising/product/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/information_society/avpolicy/reg/tvwf/advertising/product/index_en.htm), retrieved on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2015.

that these are, almost self-evidently, rather mixed-up concoctions that could only be the products of an intra- and international ‘[f]ood globalization [that] draws our attention to diasporic identities, authenticity, food nostalgia, and power’ (Counihan–Van Esterik 2013, 7). The above-mentioned snacks are an example of how the globalisation of food can also take the form of a dietisation – if one may be allowed a neologism – in one part of the world, of substances and ingredients, which had previously – at least, in a particular manner – never been used or even heard of in another. Thus, the basic ‘cooked [= boiled] egg’ of Londonian provenance became the *devil cap* in Anglo-Indian cuisine – through, apparently, the diasporic food nostalgia mentioned above – from which it entered the domain of Bengal’s anglicised elites. It percolated, thence, to that of the upper-/middle-classes who saw a potential evening-snack in what had originally been intended as something more substantial. It is worth noting here that the Bengali fascination with snacking, both as a nutritive and social act, is quite well-represented in various Bengali detective-stories. In fact, serving Anglo-Indian snacks – the various ‘chops’ and ‘fries’ – to clients seems, more often than not, a way of prefiguring the ‘progressive’ template of the detective’s *modus operandi*. So much so that ‘the people of Calcutta turned their snacking into a fine art’ (Guha-Thakurta 2011, 34).

The glaring absence of ‘a distinctive restaurant cuisine of its own’ (*ibid.*) in Calcutta is, as Tapati Guha-Thakurta sees it, definitely a function of the proliferation of neighbourhood-based and ‘peer-reviewed’ snack-shops and confectioners’ establishments selling take-away products: in the land of the *telebhājā*, word-of-mouth is king! However, the diversified but focused and cost-effective manner in and virtuosity with which these ‘food adventurers [who, perhaps, even deserve to be seen as a dietary-culinary precariat] at home reproduce “cultural food colonialism” by seeking and cooking ethnic foods to satisfy their taste for the exotic other without actually encountering “real” others on their own terms’ (Counihan–Van Esterik 2013, 7) is a testament to the intercultural culinary enthusiasm of Calcutta’s food-culture. As Guha-Thakurta writes, while detailing the various *tapas*-like/quick-food options in Calcutta:

[f]ried food ranged from *telebhaja*, to *luchi*<sup>7</sup> and *kachuri*,<sup>8</sup> to the uniquely Calcutta versions of the chop and the cutlet. Allen’s on Grey Street, renowned for its prawn cutlet, Chacha’s on Cornwallis Street [renovated recently, after decades of dilapidation, as seen by the present author] whose invention was the ‘fowl cutlet’, Golbari at Shyambazar for its *kosha*

7. A deep-fried circular *pita*-like bread, which is made from wheat-flour and, usually, soft; its crunchier version is called *puri*. In one of the stories with Byomkesh Bakshi as the detective or, as he liked to be called, ‘truth-seeker’, one of the main characters, Debashish, is described as eating ‘puris [similar to *lucis*], potato curry and home-made sweets’ (Bandopadhyay 2006, 206).

8. A smaller and very crunchy variant of the *luci*, with a stuffing of gram/green-pea-paste or some other filling, as per taste.

*mangsho*,<sup>9</sup> Basanta Cabin on College Street and Dilkhusa Cabin on Harrison Road became famous eating houses and an integral part of the ambience of these *paras* [neighbourhoods]. Calcutta also has its own tradition of Mughlai [Indo-Turko-Afghan hybrid] food, often traced to the chefs from Lucknow who accompanied the exiled Nawab Wajid Ali<sup>10</sup> to Matia Burj. While Royal on Chitpur Road and Sabir in Chandni Chowk developed special recipes for their *biryani*<sup>11</sup> and *kababs*,<sup>12</sup> a Calcutta invention was *kabab* rolled in a *paratha*,<sup>13</sup> first introduced by Nizam's behind New Market, that has now become a ubiquitous fast food in the city. (Guha-Thakurta 2011, 35)

One of the most significant culinary spheres in which this 'cultural food colonialism' was almost seamlessly introduced to the Bengali palate, especially in Calcutta, involved what Guha-Thakurta, echoing a widely-nurtured perception about Bengalis as a cultural community, calls '[t]he Bengali [s]weet [t]ooth' (*ibid.*, 32). The Bengali predilection for indulging, actually overly so, in various desserts and other sweet dishes is, according to the available evidence, no modern or even early-modern phenomenon. A number of medieval texts, such as the sixteenth-century *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, an almost-hagiographical compendium on the life of the famous Bengali Sanskrit scholar, logician, and societal-religious reformer Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu<sup>14</sup> (1486–1534), testify to the existence of a rich and diversified array of sweet dishes and desserts in the food-culture of Bengal. However, there seems to be at least one crucial and a few other characteristic differences between sweet dishes and confectionaries in pre-colonial and British-era Bengal. 'The extensive descriptions of Bengali sweets found in the [*Caritāmṛta*] mention mainly milk and *kho[ā]* (thickened milk) as the ingredients in use, and it seems the extensive use of [*chānā*], like the city itself, was occasioned by colonial occupation' (*ibid.*). In fact, the extensive use of sweetened cottage cheese, which is what *chānā* actually corresponds

9. A thick, spicy and, actually, quite hot mutton curry, which has almost become *the* representative of Bengali meat-cooking.

10. Wajid Ali Shah was the last *Nawāb* (Imperial Governor) of the princely state of Oudh, who reigned from 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1847 to 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1856, before being forced by the British to abdicate in what was a bloodless campaign of intimidation.

11. A Mughlai dish of steamed and/or fried rice and meat, flavoured with an assortment of spices, nuts, raisins, and dried fruits.

12. Various kinds of roasted or grilled meat-dishes, Central Asian in origin, made from minced or skewered pieces of meat.

13. A variant of the *roṭī* (flatbread made out of wheat-flour and baked in/on a clay-oven), which is lightly fried with clarified butter.

14. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's understanding of *bhakti* (= religious devotion, as a yogic principle) and its capacity to lead a practitioner towards personal salvation and release from the cycle of birth and death was, and remains – even more so through its twentieth-century appropriation and espousal by the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) movement – one of the most evocative and popular ritual- and faith-oriented platforms of Bengali Hindu, especially Vaiṣṇava religiosity.

to, is a culinary trope that exemplifies and reifies colonial intercultural hybridity. This is so, at least, in the case of the colonial renewal, even re-configuration, in contemporaneous Calcutta, of the Bengali fascination with sweet dishes.

This led to the invention of two iconic – in the contemporary understanding of Bengali cuisine – desserts, the *sandesh* (sweetened soft cottage cheese pressed and rolled into various shapes, with, optionally, various fillings, colours, and/or nuts, raisins, pistachios, and other add-ons) and the *rasagollā* (spongy cottage cheese always shaped into balls, dipped in sugar-syrup, with a hollow or stuffed centre). Other staples of the Bengali sweet smorgasbord are the even more hybrid *ledikeni*, a variant of the North Indian *gulāb jāmun* (a ball of intensely deep-fried – to achieve its red ochre colour – cottage cheese boiled in sugar syrup). It is supposed to have been a hasty invention of the *mairās* (confectioners) of Calcutta to appeal to the taste-buds of Lady Canning – hence the rather strange name that seemingly has no Bengali or Indian roots – the wife of the post-1857 Viceroy and Governor-General of India. Here, it is worth remembering that the latter was derided by many British administrators and military officers of the time as ‘Clemency Canning’ because of his pardoning of a number of the rebel soldiers in what was, arguably, India’s first war of independence. Yet other famous specific ‘sweet items’ are the *nalēn guḍer sandesh* (with date molasses being the extra ingredient here) and the internationally-renowned *miṣṭi ‘doi* (sweetened yoghurt) – that ethereal silken-tasting substance in a clay jar found in every confectionary in the city’ (*ibid.*, 33). In fact, the term ‘sweet item’ is essential to the trade-jargon of the catering companies, one mainstay of the Bengali food-industry that caters to marriages and other socio-religious ceremonies, which revolve around a lot of almost compulsory and staggered feasting.

All this, one feels, may be sufficient to delineate a variegated portraiture of dietary habits and consumption-patterns of new, intercultural dishes that respond to both the changing demands of a rapidly-transforming society, which was still deeply tied to its civilisational ethos and cultural capital. In fact, this colonial palimpsest of varying degrees of transactional correspondence of Eurasian culinary tropes may even be prefigurative of the decidedly intercultural cuisine that is a staple of the Bengali-speaking intelligentsia, a class to which the Bengali detective manifestly belongs.

The fictional life-worlds of this rather transcultural and interstitial figure, especially as seen through those of his – all the leading protagonists being male – clients, were full of various kinds of Anglo-Indian and other intercultural dishes. This is true of almost all clients, ranging from those belonging to the Anglophone upper-middle-classes and elite – both Feluda’s<sup>15</sup> and Jayanta-

15. Feluda, arguably the most loved fictional detective in South Asia, certainly in its Bengali-speaking areas, was created by Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), one of India’s best-known film-directors



Manik's<sup>16</sup> clients included a number of *zamindārs* (holders of large tracts of agricultural land) and even *mahārājās* (rulers of the princely states), not to mention rich businesspeople and stiff-upper-lip administrators and judges – to office-clerks and wage-earners with no access to culturally-diversified products and services. ‘Thus, the (...) “chicken pies” (Roy 1953, 205) (...) of the *Sāhib-s* have their keen interest for many colonial-era Bengali sleuths, who seem to be, at the very least, deferential to their envisioning of the distant Occident in terms of what constituted modern civility’ (Chakrabarti 2012, 267).

Thus, by extension, one may also safely assume that Anglo-European cuisine had a privileged, if not even valorised, position in the pecking order of societal-cultural taste and the consumption of intercultural food that spanned the Eurasian spectrum, and became a marker of progressive and intellectual sociality. As Dipesh Chakrabarty astutely points out in his essay ‘Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?’, while discussing a paragraph from the autobiography of Nirad C. Chaudhuri, ‘the desire to be “modern” screams out of every sentence’ (Chakrabarty 1992, 10) – in this context, every intercultural recipe – in almost every ‘bourgeois private’ (*ibid.*, 9) narrative of self-ascription. From this perspective, it is quite evident, [a]s Meredith Borthwick, Ghulam Murshid, and other scholars have shown, [that] the eighteenth-century European idea of “civilization” culminated, in early nineteenth-century India, in a full-blown imperialist critique of Indian/Hindu domestic life, which was now held to be inferior to what became mid-Victorian ideals of bourgeois democracy’.

Thus, when Kaliprasanna Singha dwells on the various *śakhs* (= fancies, whims based on prevalent fashions) that seem to have been current amongst the English-educated, moneyed, enthusiastic and, yet, leisure-obsessed ‘gentlemen’ of his time – the mid-nineteenth century – one gets a tentative sense of the tenuous coalescing of, in the words of Hélène Cixous, ‘the other side of the self’ (Cixous 1979, 408). These were the in/famous *bābus*, leisured aristocrats who seem to have led a deeply and radically split existence between the demands of conforming to the self-critical – at best – and self-flagellating – certainly not at worst – criteria of Europhile and Europhone ‘modernity’ in public life and the maintenance of an interiorised traditionalist private sphere. It does appear that the occasional wild interculturality of Anglo-Indian cuisine and, even more so, the pathways through which it enters the Bengali-speaking household – even if not its most interiorised spaces – belie the very premises of the argument for the configuration of a new, hybrid taste in culinary matters.

and the recipient of an Honorary Oscar for Lifetime Achievement (1992) from Audrey Hepburn, one of his favourite Hollywood-actresses.

16. Jayanta and Manik are a detective-duo, in the manner of Holmes and Watson, who solve a number of mysteries using, in a Poirot-esque manner, “the little grey cells”; some of their best-known narratives are *Cābi ēbarā Khil* (‘Key and Bolt’) and *Ēkrati Māṭi* (‘A Speck of Dirt’) (Roy 1953, 203-22) (Chakrabarti 2012, 266, n. 14).

There seems to be transgenic multivalence in this composite cuisine, but there is always the looming suggestion of an overarching imbalance of power in the terms of the exchange, occasioning what Homi Bhabha calls ‘that occult instability which presages powerful cultural changes’ (Bhabha 2006, 157). This instability, in the case of Bengali cuisine, seems to have had a second coming.

It should be noted that the ‘fowl-cutlet’, a typically-Calcuttan innovation consisting of a breaded or batter-fried chicken cutlet, without any strong spices, such as ginger, onion and garlic, is a dish that functions with such occult instability. It acts as an intercultural bridge between two separate concepts, that of roasted wildfowl – as coming from England – and the batter-coating that is so distinctly an Anglo-Indian colonial invention, straight from the *burra khana*s (lavish dinners on festive occasions, usually Christmas, that were common in colonial officialdom and other sections of Anglo-Indian ‘high society’) of the pages of William Makepeace Thackeray’s (1811–1863) novels. The mutton *singāḍā* is a representative example of what one may term twice-born interculturality. Originally, a non-vegetarian Central Asian dish, it has come to be a largely vegetarian one at least in West Bengal, if not in Bangladesh, although the mutton-filled variant seems to be preferred by many Bengali detectives and other fictional characters. It needs to be noted that this is not just an issue of personal taste and preference but also symptomatic of a broader pattern of the privileging of meat-eating amongst Bengali-speaking elites. Of course, this ought to be done in the *pucca sāhebi* (perfect western) style, with cutlets, chops, mutton, and not the lowly home-grown *pānthā* (Indian goat), and, of course, knives and forks.

As Utsa Ray has shown, while discussing the short story *Rātārāti* (‘Over the Night’, 1929–30) by Paraśurām, the Bengali writer of primarily social satire, colonial modernity and, especially, the transgenic intercultural grafts it had brought to Bengal had conjured into existence a ‘hybridity of taste [that] tells us the story of the construction of the colonial middle-class’ (Ray 2015, 1). Simultaneously, while underscoring the alienation-effect of this modernity and the deeply-subversive role it played with regard to the self-critique of early-colonial Bengali society, it should be useful to keep in mind the aspirational hierarchies occasioned by the operation of the colonial power-gradient. The latter triggered an occasionally-notional and, hence, almost comic predilection for crossover cuisine and dishes, like the *murgir French mālpoā* (an originally-sweet Bengali pancake stuffed with chicken, *à la française*) in Paraśurām’s story. Thus, it is quite self-evident that ‘the early-twentieth-century Indian, especially Bengali, intelligentsia – of which the figure of the detective is a part – remained an avid consumer of socio-cultural Anglophilia (...) [that] extended to the domains of popular culture [and] cuisine’ (Chakrabarti 2012, 256). The resultant openness to border-crossing and interstitial food and dietary-culinary practices was a subset of the broader scheme of cultivating oneself in the practice of Anglo-European societal-cultural choices and preferences. In the process, a culinary

hybrid that has managed to survive the rollback of Empire through continuous evolution and self-reconfiguration came into being.

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Meat & flesh:  
A reading of Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*

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As is known, the novel by Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, is divided into two parts.<sup>1</sup> The main male character of the story is Arun, who represents a temporary link between two worlds, namely, his Indian family and the Pattons from America. Food is the key-theme, although it has no nutritive functions. On the Indian side, it is used to make small transgressions, to reach marriage agreements and celebrate weddings; it also helps as a demonstration of being part of an unbreakable couple where the male is the absolute sovereign: he, in fact, exercises power over the family and also shows off modernity. Food serves as a useless means of finding a husband, and as a short and disastrous test of marital life and of being trapped at home; it is used to celebrate extraordinarily chic and untraditional weddings and, through vegetarianism and dietary sobriety, to firmly underline a personal freedom of thoughts and movements. Furthermore, as we shall see later, food is also an instrument of death.

If we take a look at the American side, we find food as an instrument of affirmation of Western masculinity (Mr. Patton's barbecues). By contrast, Mrs. Patton views food as a way of filling her life or as an attempt to reinvent it in a style that she believes exotic (vegetarianism). Ron, the Pattons' son, continuously 'feeds' his muscles, while his sister Melanie literally vomits everything and everyone. I should like to point out that food in this novel does not only replace sexuality, but also the family and maternal roles, whether they are authentic or 'vicarious'; indeed, there are other key topics, such as the persistent heat pervading the story and the inexorable ritual and ritualistic value of what we eat (or we do not eat) common to all cultures.

I feel that Desai is suggesting that none of the characters is really happy, and, even if they do eat, they live an existence of emotional and spiritual fasting.

1. Desai 1999; throughout the article, the numbers of pages refer to this edition. See the *References* for a list of critical works on this novel.

The main character in the first part is Uma, an Indian and Hindū spinster, who waits on her parents as if she were a servant, but only receives anger and spite in return. The second part is focused on the bloodless Arun, Uma's younger brother, who has gone to study in America. In a continuous succession of flashbacks, the first part of the novel covers thirty years, whereas the second part only deals with a single summer. In some way, we are put in touch with the Hindū roots of the family and the lives of the characters until Uma reaches the ripe 'old age' of just forty three. On the other hand, the Pattons are 'timeless': we know nothing about them. Desai's vitriolic irony seems to highlight the emptiness of the modernity of a rootless America. Notwithstanding, she criticizes the Indian *modus vivendi*, pointing her finger at its hypocritical traditionalism.

The novel begins with the image of Uma preparing a parcel, as her parents have ordered, to send to Arun in Massachusetts. *Fasting, Feasting* ends with the arrival of the parcel which seems to represent a double estrangement. In fact, Arun presents Mrs. Patton with the tea and the shawl sent by his family, that is to say, something to taste and something to warm oneself up with.

Arun's family's gifts reveal their complete lack of touch with reality, since a man wearing a shawl in America would cast doubts on his manhood. Arun, however, rids himself of the gift and apparently breaks off all connections with his Indian family. This last attempt seems fruitless: the reader has the impression that Arun has never really left home. Indeed, ever since he was a child, his family had fed him, most of the time forcedly, on account of his lack of appetite; they had also given him an education and forced him to move to America. On the other hand, Uma had prepared the parcel out of a mere sense of duty, knitting a sweater for her brother 'more practical (...) than the shawl (...)' (p. 66). However, she does not send it to him: all of Uma's initiatives are destined to be set aside.

The end of the first part is characterized by heat, death, and food, once more by means of a ritual: we take part in the scattering of the 'perfect' cousin Anamika's ashes. This woman had 'spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for his family (...) – first the men, then the children, finally the women' (p. 70). For 25 years, Anamika had literally been swallowed up by her family-in-law, in such a way that Uma wonders: 'had marriage devoured her?' (p. 134); she eventually died burned alive: is it suicide or murder? [Some of the neighbours said:] 'she herself [i.e. Anamika's mother-in-law] (...) poured the kerosene over her and set her on fire' (p. 151). She was useless: after an abortion caused by her mother-in-law's beatings, she became sterile. During Anamika's funeral, as her ashes disappear into the water, a sort of connection emerges for the first time between Uma and her mother, which, interestingly, is not the usual servant-mistress one. In Anamika's case, food is a cause of death.

The second part, starting with 'It is summer', shows Arun absorbed in watching Mrs. Patton pleasurably emptying enormous grocery bags. She acts with the same religious attention as those who place precious objects in a shrine.



Soon after, we perceive the stink of the first in a long series of Mr. Patton's pyre-like barbecues, whose disgusting smell poisons the air (we often 'smell' in this part of the novel, 'the odour of raw meat being charred over the fire', p. 162). I believe that there is a clear reference to Anamika's body sizzling in the kerosene flames. Once again: heat, food, death... and blasphemy: Mr. Patton is uselessly keen on his 'summer night's sacrament'.

At first, Mrs. Patton is charmed by the young Arun. To conquer her guest, she (trapped at home like Uma, deprived of the freedom that Mira-masi enjoys, incapable, like Mama, of being a good mother) initially identifies herself with a vicarious mother, playing the game of food. She enthusiastically becomes vegetarian ("I've always wanted to be one myself (...) Look, Ahroon, you and I – we'll be vegetarians together!"', p. 179).

However, Mrs. Patton is only capable of proposing a misrepresentation of the vegetarian diet to Arun. After this, Arun 'developed a hearty abhorrence for the raw foods everyone here thinks the natural diet of a vegetarian' (p. 167). Even more disappointing and pathetic is her attempt at preparing 'Indian dishes': Mrs. Patton buys what she *believes* to be exotic, forcing the young man to cook these ingredients. Arun, who cannot cook, can only put a miserable imitation of *dhal* on the table and is forced to eat it under the delighted gaze of Mrs. Patton. In this episode, food bears witness to a misunderstanding or an erroneous communication between worlds, since everything is wrong: first of all, the choice of ingredients, and then the expectation that a man, Arun, could ever take a place in the kitchen. As he swallows this sludge, he feels just as revolted as Melanie Patton was on viewing the horrible dish. So, 'For the first time in his existence, he found he craved what he had taken for granted before and even at times thought an unbearable nuisance' (p. 185). Here, and once again, there is a fasting of the senses; of course, food and Eros are both present, but both are 'untasted'.

Paradoxically, as a child, Arun had been obliged to follow a meat-eating diet, because of Papa's Western tastes; by contrast, Arun had turned vegetarian of his own free will. After this, he arrives in Massachusetts, hungry for freedom and anonymity: '(...) he had at last experienced (...) the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties, responsibilities (...) ' (p. 172). Nonetheless, he is trapped 'in the sugar-sticky web of family conflict' (p. 195). Since he is persistently the victim of an obstinate sense of nausea, Arun discovers the countless forms of the American food ritual.

Every boiling evening, he takes part in Mr. Patton's barbecues (Arun finds vegetarianism 'not natural', p. 166, and states that 'A cow is a cow', *ibid.*), and also reluctantly participates in the compulsive spending sprees at the supermarket. He is witness to the Pattons' daughter's bulimia; Melanie immediately vomits whatever she eats.

Mrs. Patton's vegetarian turning point is soon followed by an apparent change of feelings towards Arun. After an offering of food as an action of

'vicarious motherhood' and complicity, I see open seduction, although I have not found evidence of this aspect in the numerous essays on *Fasting, Feasting*. Mrs. Patton's love (her 'appetite') is so evident that a cashier even asks her if she is pregnant ("“You pregnant?”", p. 209). While 'Summer is beating at them' (p. 212), Mrs. Patton starts excessively seducing Arun: she nastily exhibits 'lipstick (...), very pink' (p. 218) and scanty clothes.

Definitely, Arun is also obsessed by the flesh of his hosts, which is as disgusting as the packages 'damp from the seeping blood of (...) carcass' (p. 202) from the supermarket. The woman shows her shapeless flesh, which is doubly repugnant to Arun. On the one hand, the spectre of incest is recognisable ('It is like confronting his mother naked', p. 213). On the other, Mrs. Patton's semi-nudity is pathetic and revolting: '(...) her limp breasts that fall into pockets of mauve plaid cotton, freckled and mottled like old leather' (p. 213). Thus, Mrs. Patton arrives at a new turning point: she 'no longer cooks dinner for Arun' (p. 215). The lady, '[s]unstruck, bedazzled', lets the sun cook her, after anointing her body with oil, just like a red steak. Therefore, Mrs. Patton resembles the meat sold at the supermarket ('[that] meat [which] lay steaming in pink packages of rawness', p. 183). From a sexual point of view, she is not at all attractive, since she is 'a scrap'. As a result, Arun 'finds he has lost his appetite' (p. 216). Once again, Desai does not express moral or moralistic judgments, but a harsh and merciless realism. Melanie is obviously bony, her face disfigured by acne, always dirty with vomit. She suffers from a chronic, not spiritual, repudiation of food: it is a blasphemous eating-vomiting in view of her painful and real hunger, and also of the useless abundance that surrounds her.

Finally, there is Ron Patton, who belongs to the 'gladiatorial species' (p. 191). He is exclusively devoted to the care of his body, he is brainless. In spite of his obsession with physical vigour, he has no interest in girls. Ron openly dislikes the 'slim chicks' (*ibid.*) like his sister and the other girls who lack male muscular virility. Not surprisingly, Ron is a hearty eater and, indeed, the scene at night where he devours the barbecue leftovers is memorable.

Hence, this is the picture: Ron is devouring, Melanie is vomiting, Ron is stuffing himself, Melanie is distraught. There is a very thin boundary between rubbish and food, as Arun eventually declares. He also highlights the similarity between Melanie and Uma, although their 'hungers' are as different as equally unfulfilled ('Then Arun does see [...] a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister', *ibid.*).

Desai never shows Arun in the act of appreciating a woman of any age. Although he lives in a country with total female freedom ('He has never seen so much female flesh before', p. 215), he only observes their too revealing or sloppy clothes, etc. Indeed, Arun does not manifest any homosexual tendencies, whatever Mr. Patton may insinuate.

Therefore, America eats greedily. Food is nothing but stuff to accumulate and swallow, a ritual, openly compared to the Eucharistic celebration, when Arun

feels himself 'unfit to take the wafer upon his tongue, the wine into his throat' (p. 165). Its consumption is mandatory, the ways of getting it are homologated, but the act of eating has lost every inclusive or exclusive meaning. Everyone can eat everything with everyone, unlike in India. There is no communion. In America, the act of cooking recalls neither warmth nor any sense of protection; food and its waste offer proof of prosperity, of social success. Mrs. Patton usually buys more than they need, their bins are always full and Melanie resents her mother for considering the family as 'garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing' (p. 207). Mrs. Patton literally gets pleasure from stuffing the pantry, which is as fresh and comforting as the air conditioning in the supermarkets, but then she loses interest in the following step, i.e. cooking.

In the Indian part, the food is constantly under control and is absolutely women's business, even if Mama is never described preparing food herself. As Arun recalls in America, 'he has never seen his mother cook' (p. 193). Mama is incessantly giving orders about what and how to cook; food is the only cause of arguments between the Mama-Papa couple.

On the other hand, Mama's small transgressions are related to food and play. It is only in these rare moments that she seems a silly girl. Arun's birth coincides with the end of these playful and gastronomic eccentricities. As the mother of a son, she cannot behave like a 'little girl' as she used to do with her daughters: a son deserves total attention.

Uma never cooks but only serves others and, first of all, men. For this reason, Mama recalls, 'In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat (...) it was given to the boys in the family' (p. 6). In this part, food is a mark of the hierarchy between the two sexes.

As if in a mirror, cooking food (i.e. meat) in America is paradoxically in the hands of Mr. Patton. In this presentation of meat-food, Desai seems to evoke the archaic test of virility, violence, blood, and power, up to foreshadowing the spectre of cannibalism.

The farewell to Mrs. Patton corresponds with the end of the novel. Arun gives the woman the shawl and the strong Indian tea, passing them off as gifts from his parents. Is he really lying when he says, "'Please take these things – my parents sent them for you,'" he lies' (p. 228)? After the failure of her seduction-vegetarianism and the exposition of her flesh, she starts dressing like a sober nun. Basically, Arun has changed continent just to find 'a plastic representation of what he had known at home' (*ibid.*), often being forced to carry out unintentional fasting in the country of plenty. Overall, as regards the *feasting* part of the novel, the reader experiences a deep and permanent sense of nausea, the same feeling that Arun has towards food.

By contrast, the *fasting* part of the novel is a triumphal celebration of smells and tastes, of (food) 'needs'. Suddenly, Uma's, Aruna's (Aruna is the older sister of Uma and Arun) and Arun's parents, PapaMama or MamaPapa, appear on the scene: within the novel, they only have this double name, a *dvandva*

(‘MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever had separate existences’, p. 5). In particular, Papa is an arrogant despot: he needs to be ‘stuffed’ by his wife and his daughter Uma. Here, food is an order and a service; as she does not have a husband, she must serve her father.

Mama is now responsible for an unexpected happening: she suddenly discovers that she is ‘full’ (i.e. pregnant): ‘it was a late pregnancy’ (p. 16), which is rather annoying to her. Her ‘enlarged’ family sees this as a catastrophe and the result of an abhorrent act which brings revolting images to Uma’s mind. In Papa’s opinion, however, it represents his last chance to have a son.

This embarrassment soon turns into excitement when the son arrives, although his birth does not break the MamaPapa twin-set. On the other hand, Mama’s self-confidence is boosted, since she is now the mother of a son.

At this point, Uma achieves a new *status*, as from maidservant she now becomes babysitter. More precisely, her responsibilities are such that the young girl does not have any time to dedicate to her education. As Mama imperatively proclaims: ‘We are not sending you back to school, Uma’ (p. 18). In addition: ‘You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons’ (p. 22).

Soon after, Mama ‘developed a nervous fear on the subject of Arun’s feeding’ (p. 32), but often Uma gives proof of being an inadequate nanny when trying to wean her little brother. In fact, unlike Papa, Arun has no interest in food and taste. The boy is often forced to take food; there would be trouble if Papa were to find out that his only son was not getting enough food.

As a young man, Arun is under double pressure: on the one hand, his father compels him to study, on the other, he is obliged to overfeed himself. Instead of making him stronger, this compulsive diet leaves the boy weak and bespectacled. Therefore, in this Indian home they do not fast at all; in actual fact, they eat too much, to such a point that Arun thinks it is a ‘grim duty’ (p. 197). Uma does not even allow herself to indulge in innocent gluttony, frustrating her desires. She has also been forced to leave school in order to ‘feed’ others. This means that even though she is a very bad student, Uma has had to forget her hunger for studying: school represents her only chance to escape the domestic sphere.

The only ‘satisfied’ character is Arun’s and Uma’s maternal aunt, Mira. With her name connected to Mirabai, she lives ‘safe in her widow’s white garments’ (p. 38), strolling around as an ascetic. Her vegetarian diet is a banner of abiding faith: she believes in the religious meaning of food and has religious values. If we consider the Pattons, they never allude to anything concerning religion or religiosity in a proper sense: Mr. Patton does not like Arun because he is a vegetarian, not because of his Hindū background. Melanie despises him because of the food he eats, not for religious reasons. Uma welcomes her aunt, foretasting the delicacies that she will cook; in fact, Uma says ‘(...) I love Miramasi – she makes the very best ladoos!’ (p. 38). From Arun’s point of view, what Aunt Mira makes for herself – what insipid food! – is so appetising! Food

is given a paradoxical meaning here: a true woman and true mother, Mama, is incapable of fulfilling her children's needs, which are strangely gratified by the exact opposite of an 'authentic woman' – a widow. Now we experience food, surrogate maternity, and jealousy.

Soon after Arun's birth, Uma decides to follow Mira on a pilgrimage: on this occasion, the girl suffers a convulsion fit, perhaps due to the fasting and heat. Even in this case, Uma is manifestly a disaster, echoing her mother's words: 'You, you disgrace to the family (...)' (p. 53). While watching the 'fits', Mira-masi diagnoses that 'She is possessed. The Lord has taken possession of her' (p. 60). Like Mirabai and Mira, Uma has also become a spouse of God. But a gynaecologist rushes over and takes steps to revive her. Once again, Desai seizes her chance to underline Uma's endless childhood, from which there is no way out: 'Seeing Uma blue and purple on the floor and fighting for breath, he [the gynecologist] bent and lifted her up as if she were an infant newly born' (p. 60). Thereby, Uma's supposed possession pathetically glides into the wail of a baby. After the pilgrimage experience and the embarrassing problem of her convulsions, the family devotes itself to the cause of getting Uma married. To do so, the main concern is Uma's skills in the kitchen. Mama succeeds in obtaining a good match and the marriage is celebrated but not consumed. What the virgin-spouse learns during her pseudo-conjugal short experience is only 'how to cut vegetables in pieces of exactly the same size, how to grind spices into a wet paste (...)' (p. 93): in this case, food is a substitute for eroticism.

Years go by, but Papa's needs do not change. Arun has the chance to move to America: Uma can only commit a few transgressions, merely in the field of food. Chronically afflicted by the heat and others' needs, she starts her journey to her unsolved spinsterhood, the true 'emptiness' and the supreme 'fast'.

The correspondences between the first and the second part of the novel are clearly recalled. The pretentious Papa is mirrored in Mr. Patton's arrogance. The former is trying to westernise, the latter to affirm his superiority with respect to the vegetarian Indians. Neither Mama nor Mrs. Patton cook: the first one has servants, the second one confines her role as a housewife to raids at the supermarket. PapaMama are only one, but at last, the Pattons also form a unit, with no trace of sex. Mama calls her husband Papa, more often father; Mrs. Patton calls her husband dad or daddy. The late pregnancy of Mama is brightly reflected when Mrs. Patton is suspected of being pregnant. But, Mama bears fruit, while in contrast Mrs. Patton exhibits the sterility of fat. Furthermore, both women do not 'nourish'; Mama never cooks and is practically unable to give love; Mrs. Patton only stuffs her pantry and is always reproached for trying to 'poison' relatives.

The (apparently happy) Aruna finds her parallel in Ron. We do not know how satisfied they are from their lives; ironically, we can read about the boy that 'Fortunately, (...) has won a football scholarship' (p. 227). As for Aruna, Uma

perceives her sister's unhappiness as soon as her perfect world steams up. Nor does Aruna seem to find particular satisfaction in motherhood.

She only appears to have fun with her daughter Aisha, but the little girl seems to be more like a toy.

Although Uma shares several characteristics with Melanie (both are unsatisfied, ugly, pimply and just as prone to eccentric or pathological behaviours), the American girl also represents the tragic counterpart of Mira-masi: Mira escapes her sad and traditionally unhappy condition to enjoy hectic religious activities and the so-called 'food oddities'. Melanie is searching for the attention of her nuclear family.

The result of the two stories is also interesting: the Western girl is hospitalised in a specialised clinic. By contrast, Mira-masi is tolerated in India.

There is also an indubitable link between Uma and Arun. On the one hand, Uma is firstly useless as a woman, abhorred because she is incapable of meeting the standards of womanhood (beauty and culinary skills); she eventually becomes the victim of a condition of semi-slavery at home. On the other hand, we have Arun: he is the favourite, the one who must receive Uma's service. Arun is given every opportunity: he can go abroad, but this is to no avail.

Uma and Arun seem to be two sides of the same coin; when we stop listening to Uma's voice, we immediately meet Arun, who observes food. Both are unattractive, bespectacled and forced into a programmed life; neither of them seems interested in sexuality. Both disappoint their parents. Uma feeds the others and Arun struggles to eat as he likes, that is to say, their hunger for life remain unsatisfied. This point is even apparent in his sad letters from America, where food as a subject clearly finds its manifesto: "The most personal note he struck was a poignant, frequently repeated complaint: "The food is not very good"' (p. 123).

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A man is what he eats (and what he doesn't).  
On the use of traditional food culture in Anita Desai's  
*Fasting, Feasting* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

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Among the problems left open by two centuries of British colonialism, that of Indian modernity has yet to find a satisfactory solution. How can India become a modern democratic nation without mimicking the west on the one hand and without shedding her millennial culture on the other? Contemporary novelists, especially NRIs, have often addressed the issue both from a sociological and from a cultural viewpoint. Since food is a universal experience for human beings, which traverses political, gender, and castes boundaries, for a writer it may become a vantage point from which society can be observed, as well as an objective correlative of the characters' plight, or even a clue to the author's viewpoint. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out as early as in the Sixties, food is an important token of identity in every society; still, besides rooting identity, food in India plays a major important role also in ethics and cosmology. According to Olivelle (2011) food is a means to connect humans with the gods, while on a social level, sharing food is a must of Indian culture, since greed is the root of all evils.

The fracture that one perceives between Varanasi and Bangalore, or between the Chola sculptures and Anish Kapoor, between *kāvya* and contemporary novelists like Kiran Desai and Amitav Ghosh, can be viewed as a fracture between classical India and what some call modernity. If one considers typically modern issues such as economic development, internal product, awareness of caste inequality, women's rights, environment and, to a certain extent, the subject matter of literary artifacts such as sci-fi, one can hardly refrain from admitting to such a fracture. And yet there are other ideologies and there are some undercurrents, thoughts and practices that modernity has not quite obliterated; if you look at issues that are not typically modern, you can still perceive a continuity, where contemporary India resists globalizing modernity. The relationship with food is, I will argue, one instance of this continuity, and I shall endeavour to trace it in two contemporary novels by Indian authors who seem to attribute

the same ethical qualities to food as the *sūtras* did. I shall refer to *The Glass Palace* (2000) by Amitav Ghosh, and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) by Anita Desai.

According to Dipesh Chakrabarti (2000), this dichotomy between modernity and tradition developed in the early phases of the *swaraj*. Before Indian intellectuals ever dreamed of getting rid of the British, they went through a period when they reacted to the cultural denigration of which they had been victims by imitating their masters. The rising Indian Anglophone middle class welcomed such novelties as cricket, novels, tea parties and the possibility to equal the English in military or administrative positions. This proximity with the Europeans and involvement in administrative – if not political – life is the first germ of *swaraj*. However, in order to create the secular notion of fatherland, early freedom fighters had to dismiss *varṇas*, and in order to foster social mobility they had to dismiss *jātis*. In the public sphere, they had to adopt the English ways. This compromise with the aliens had to be counterbalanced somehow, so it fell to the women to become the custodians of tradition (Narayan 1997). If men could be polluted in the public arena during the day, they needed a domestic shrine to come back to in the evening. This attitude, maintains Uma Narayan, is certainly visible in the treatment of food, so that men who have to leave the house to attend to business are allowed to forego daily rituals and to eat forbidden food, if necessary, while it fell to the lot of women to remain at home and preserve *gṛhalakṣmī* – traditional domestic harmony.

Predictably, this division of roles and attitudes to food did not cease with Independence; the new Indian middle class has actually consolidated these customs despite the obvious contradictions that emerged in the new contexts of modern India. This is exactly what Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* is about; here food is both a motive and a theme which develops throughout the story pointing to the difficult relationship between tradition and modernity. The novel is sharply divided into two parts set in India and in the USA respectively. Both parts depict dysfunctional families whose difficulties are represented through food. The family described in the first part is the epitome of the crisis of the Indian middle class, while the overfed American family is just as unbalanced and ultimately unhappy. Their unhappiness and dysfunctions however do not depend on food, but are realistically revealed and poetically symbolized by it.

The Indian middle class appears poised between tradition, decorum and *kismet* on the one hand, and modernity, progress and welfare on the other. Contradictions appear particularly hard when it comes to children, especially daughters, who must be educated as if they were to go into the world, but who are actually never let free to decide for themselves (Oliver 2000). The case of Uma's cousin Anamika is emblematic. She is a clever young woman, so much so that she wins a scholarship to Oxford, but eventually that 'award' is only used to build her curriculum as a bride-to-be. Later, when her husband and her mother-in-law kill her by setting fire to her, her own family can only accept the result of the enquiry. The mingling of tradition and modernity has patently

failed; had Anamika's family been an older clan, they would have been able to protect her even within another household, but a modern nuclear family proves powerless in the face of old discriminations. As is customary in India, food rituals are used to enforce the power relations within the family (Appadurai 1981, Khare–Rao 1986), and also as a battlefield on which tensions are brought to the fore. Uma's uneasiness is first hinted at during a family outing, when the girl craved some sweets, but could not bring herself to say anything because she knew that she could not have them – as a girl she was supposed to eat very little and never show any greed for food (Khare 1986). Later, Uma gives vent to her discontent and tries to defy her parents during a meal, but is discomfited (Ravichandran 2004, 2005).

'UMA, pass your father the fruit'.

Uma picks up the fruit bowl with both hands and puts it down with a thump before her father. Bananas, oranges, apples – there they are, for him.

Blinking, he ignores them. Folding his hands on the table, he gazes over them with the sphinx-like expression of the blind. Mama knows what is wrong. She taps Uma on the elbow.

'Orange,' she instructs her. Uma can no longer pretend to be ignorant of Papa's needs, Papa's ways. After all, she has been serving them for some twenty years. She picks out the largest orange in the bowl and hands it to Mama who peels it in strips, then divides it into separate segments. (...) One by one, he lifts them with the tips of his fingers and places them in his mouth. Everyone waits while he repeats the gesture, over and over. Mama's lips are pursed with the care she gives her actions, and their importance.

(...)

'Where is Papa's finger bowl?' she asks loudly.

The finger bowl is placed before Papa. He dips his fingertips in and wipes them on the napkin. He is the only one in the family who is given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status.

Mama sits back. The ceremony is over. She has performed it. Everyone is satisfied. (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, 23-24)

The contradictory position of Uma's family surfaces when the newborn son, Arun, refuses to eat any meat. In a modern secular society this should be interpreted as a natural dietary preference – indeed, he is not vegetarian by choice, he naturally dislikes meat – but vegetarianism in his family is not simply a matter of taste, it is interpreted as a defiance of the family status and identity:

Papa was confounded. A meat diet had been one of the revolutionary changes brought about in his life, and his brother's, by their education. Raised amongst traditional vegetarians, their eyes had been opened to the benefits of meat along with that of cricket and the English language: the three were linked inextricably in their minds. They had even succeeded in convincing the wives they married of this novel concept of progress, and passed it on to their children. Papa was always scornful of those of their relatives who came

to visit and insisted on clinging to their cereal and vegetable eating ways, shying away from the meat dishes Papa insisted on having cooked for dinner.

Now his own son, his one son, displayed this completely baffling desire to return to the ways of his forefathers, meek and puny men who had got nowhere in life. Papa was deeply vexed. He prescribed cod liver oil. (Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, 32)

Predictably enough the task of administering cod liver oil to the child will fall to Uma, the unmarried sister. Apparently, Mamapapa's generation has been able to modernize only by mimicking the west, and even so only in some aspects of their lives, which makes things all the more complicated for those who have to bear the brunt of keeping up the tradition. The situation is paradoxical; young papa had to assert himself by changing his diet in order to become modern, his son has to assert his vegetarianism. Uma never actually asserts herself, but the only time when she appears happy is when she follows her aunt Mira-masi to an Ashram, where she lives on very little food and green berries.

Uma and her brother Arun grow up within these contradictions symbolized by food. Eventually Arun is sent off to America to complete his education, and he hopes that he will be able to get rid of the constrictions that he had endured at home. He is wrong. His contradictory identity follows him, and once again his plight is described and highlighted through his impossibility to comply with food codes in the new land. In fact, he is not peculiar in any way, but he falls victim to the unbalanced attitudes of other people, be they Indians or Americans. The whole novel can be described as a criticism of the international middle class, whose attitude to food mirrors its unbalanced attitude to life in general.

*The Glass Palace* is a historical novel that spans three different countries, India, Burma and Malay, and describes a family saga, which develops internationally within a rising secular Indian middle class. The contradictions of modern India and of food consumption are described here, as it were, in their making. Moreover, as in the case of *Fasting, Feasting*, the ethical relationship with food points to other ethical values of the Indian tradition. At the beginning of the novel the protagonist, Rajkumar, is a teenaged Bengali orphan stranded in Mandalay. Even though he is still a boy, the narrative suggests that he has the stamina and the self-discipline to become a great man. As he gets into the city of Mandalay, he looks for a job at a food stall run by a woman who is said to be half-Indian. When he arrives, she is busy chopping vegetables and berates him for begging her for a job. Rajkumar does not waver, and remains impassible.

She glared at Rajkumar suspiciously. 'What do you want?'

He had just begun to explain about the boat and the repairs and wanting a job for a few weeks when she interrupted him. She began to shout at the top of her voice, with her eyes closed: 'What do you think – I have jobs under

my armpits, to pluck out and hand to you? Last week a boy ran away with two of my pots. Who's to tell me you won't do the same?' And so on.

Rajkumar understood that this outburst was not aimed directly at him: that it had more to do with the dust, the splattering oil, and the price of vegetables than with his own presence or with anything he had said. He lowered his eyes and stood there stoically, kicking the dust until she was done. (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 5)

Eventually the boy's impassive behaviour wins her over and she hires him; soon the discourse turns to food:

'All right. Get to work, but remember, you're not going to get much more than three meals and a place to sleep'.

He grinned. 'That's all I need'. (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 6)

The woman is afraid lest Rajkumar be a thief or not a good worker, but his being content with little food, and his lack of greed, like an ascetic, convince her. I do not mean that Rajkumar reveals ascetic qualities, only that his discipline is of the same kind as that required of Hindu asceticism. As Patrick Olivelle (2011) puts it: one's relation with food mirrors one's behaviour with life. Rajkumar appears trustworthy because his relation to food appears balanced.

Later in the novel, we find two characters whose relation with food appears problematic, and indeed, both will eventually die because of their failure to establish a good relationship with life. In both cases, they compromise with the colonial administration and cuisine, failing to overcome the contradictions that it implies for them as Indians. I am talking about Collector Dey, in Ratnagiri, and of Arjun, one generation younger. Both are basically good men, who have only one fault: they unwittingly believe the English propaganda about the civilizing mission of colonizers. Dey is District collector in Ratnagiri. Educated in England, he marries Uma, a Bengali woman some 15 years younger, hoping to develop a romantic and equal relationship with her, for which she was not prepared. Besides, his anxiety towards his precarious position within the British administration poses major problems even for his domestic felicity. This is epitomised by a dinner party. Rajkumar, the orphan we met in Mandalay, is by now a successful Indian businessman based in Burma, who comes to the Collector's house as a guest. In the letter that recommends him to Uma, the collector's wife, he is introduced as a self-made man, only 'slightly uncouth'. When he disembarks from the ferry, Uma receives a report of 'the dishevelled untidiness of his attire, his crumpled longyi, his greasy vest and his uncombed hair'. So that 'Uma was left with a sense of lingering unease. Was it prudent to invite someone like this to dinner? What exactly did he eat?' (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 139). Unable to figure out what kind of man he is, Uma is unable to imagine what his dietary habit could be. She is doubly worried because in a kind of didactic attitude, her husband insists that she takes the responsibility for the

dinner; so she decides to ask the cook to do exactly what he had prepared two weeks before, according to the Sahib's instructions: 'shepherd's pie, fried fish and blancmange' (*ibid*). The Collector cannot bear the fact that his wife cannot cope with English food codes; before the beginning of the dinner, he scolds her because the fish knives were not in the right position and, during dinner, he makes light of her, much to her exasperation, because she drops a fork. Again, during this selfsame dinner, the ever successful and self-assured Rajkumar, irritated by the profusion of cutlery, is at a loss how to cut the fish, so he does something that leaves everyone astonished: he snaps his fingers nonchalantly in the middle of sentence and his attendant hurries to show him the right knife to be used.

This clumsiness with food mirrors a real life difficulty. It comes as little surprise that Uma wants to divorce Collector Dey and that he is dismissed when the British administration needs a scapegoat to blame for a supposed scandal in the Burmese Royal Family exiled in Ratnagiri. Needless to say, defiant Rajkumar will not fall victim to the colonizers' contradictions, even though he too will be crushed by the war.

The other character in *The Glass Palace* who is caught in a cultural contradiction is Arjun (Sonia 2013). He is Uma's nephew, and one of the first Indian cadet officers in the British army. He and his companions are proud of their position, which they see as an important achievement for themselves and for all Indians that they feel they represent. In fact, their position is far more awkward than they care to admit, as we shall see. Eventually he will face the difficult dilemma as to whether to join the INA (Indian National Army) led by Subhash Chandra Bose and take up arms against the English or remain loyal to them. He decides for the former, but the inner conflict far more than the actual war will consume and kill him. As it happened in the case of Collector Dey, with Arjun too, the first warning signs that something is not quite as it should be are connected with food codes.

In his letters home, cadet Arjun goes to great lengths to explain how lucky he and his friends have been to be chosen for that position. He also explains that they feel as if they were the first true Indians, because they live together regardless of religions and castes. They can 'eat beef and pork and think nothing of it'; 'Every meal at an officers' mess, Arjun said, was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos' (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 278). However, he explains, it is difficult for many of them to get used to consuming this revolting food. All of them have tasted for the first time food that they would never have had at home. But this is a sort of test to prove that they are worthy of their new rank, that they have left behind all their ancestral divisions. In the army, the only way to be accepted by the English as equals is to eat like the English. On the contrary, the lower ranks of soldiers in their mess are fed according to the dietary prescriptions of their own communities.

Arjun's best friend, a Sikh called Hardidayal, and duly dubbed Hardy, is incapable of going without his daily *daal* and *chapatis*. So he surreptitiously goes to the troop's mess in order to have some of this forbidden food. When he is eventually appointed company commander, Indian soldiers refuse to serve under a younger man, who comes from their own village. When the Commanding Officer rebukes them for this, they complain with these words: 'How can we respect this boy as an officer? He cannot even stomach the food that officers eat. He steals secretly into our messes to eat chapati' (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 282). Hardy's appointment is suspended on account of this.

Later in the novel, the sad reality of World War Two brings all these contradictions to a point of no return. When the Japanese conquer Singapore, Subhash Chandra Bose exhorts the Indian soldiers to desert the English and join the Japanese as Asian friends against the English masters. Hardy and Arjun will gradually come to their senses and realize that their allegiance to the English had been a mistake all along. Whatever they did, they could never be equal to the English as long as the latter were the masters in India. This realization comes to them slowly during the campaign in Malay, where they experience trench warfare for the first time, and where most importantly they endure racial discrimination. Even this transition phase is marked by a shift in the food code. Hardy and Arjun, along with other officers find shelter in an abandoned house in the forest, where, after a long time, they can cook some food and have a proper meal: ham and herring to begin with. After a while, Hardy excuses himself from the table and goes to the kitchen, where the subordinates were cooking, and emerges after a while with a tray of *chapatis* and '*ande-ka-bhujia*' – scrambled eggs. On seeing the steaming dishes, Arjun becomes hungry all over again and asks for some, to which Hardy replies 'It's all right, yaar'. (...) 'You can have some too. A chapati won't turn you into a savage, you know' (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 415).

Just as had happened with Rajkumar and the District collector from Ratnagiri, personal changes are anticipated by a certain attitude towards food. Hardy asserts himself primarily through food, by overtly eating 'forbidden' *chapati* in front of his Commanding Officer. Unsurprisingly it is Hardy, who first deserts the British army for the INA. A few hours later, he entertains Arjun to do the same in a dramatic dialogue. Like his epic namesake, Arjun is puzzled and cannot see where his duty lies. He agrees that Indians should fight to get their freedom, but he is not sure whether it is right for him to leave the British army at that particular moment. He argues against this because what they believed to be their modernity has in fact estranged them from the country. It is as if eating English food has turned them into Englishmen as well.

Just look at us, Hardy – just look at us. What are we? We've learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth

is that except for the colour of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognize us as Indians'. (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 439)

Later, Arjun also makes up his mind and passes over to the Indian National Army. Eventually he dies under English fire, refusing to surrender; but just before the epilogue, it is again his attitude towards food that signals his attitude to life. Dinu, a distant relation, meets him in the jungle. Arjun is gaunt and emaciated, on the brink of starvation, but when Dinu gives him some food he declines to eat any, and distributes it among his soldiers instead. The war is over, the Japs have lost and long forsaken them, but they are still fighting, without any hope, he admits. He is fighting because he feels that this is the only right thing that is left for him to do. For the first time Arjun has reached a higher moral standard than his interlocutor, he has renounced his glamorous post as an English officer; he has renounced going back to normalcy after the end of the war, and he has renounced food. After this only death can follow.

In conclusion, both Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh resort to food to point to some kind of disorder or contradiction in the lives of their middle class characters. Furthermore, Ghosh utilizes two concepts from the classical Hindu relationship with food, which run throughout the over 500 pages of the novel: the first is the idea that discipline and self-control applied to food are proof of a high moral standard; the second is the idea that compromising on the purity of food and food-related practices eventually leads to some kind of unbalance, as we have seen in the case of the District Collector and of Arjun. The former dies, the second will face a major crisis whereby he first gives up foreign food in a highly symbolical moment in order to follow his karma, and then renounces food altogether. In the end, he attains the status of a renouncer, who even refuses to beg for his own living, and commits a kind of ritual suicide.



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# Mourning for the dead, feeding the living: *mausar khānā*

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The present paper is meant to introduce a particular Hindū funeral feast, the so-called *mausar*, paying particular attention to the way it is celebrated by the members of the Kalbeliya caste.

The following analysis is based on extensive fieldwork amongst the members of the Kalbeliya caste who live in a camp on the outskirts of the holy town of Pushkar<sup>1</sup> and, in particular, on the participation in a joint funeral feast held in April 2011 in a temporary camp set up in the Pali district.

A detailed introduction to the cultural and social features of the Kalbeliyas goes far beyond the purposes of the present argumentation, whence, it will suffice to briefly dwell on two elements of their identity.

The first of these is their belonging to a caste of householder *Nāths*: Kalbeliyas, in fact, consider themselves to be descendants of Kanipāv, one of the nine *Nāths*, the semi-divine masters of the practice of *haṭha-yoga* which inspired the *nātha-yogin* movement and, as such, they are considered to be a caste of householder *Nāths*. The art of snake charming<sup>2</sup> is connected to descent from Kanipāv, and this activity with its host of spiritual and devotional meanings constitutes the caste's traditional money-earning occupation and its main social and cultural characteristic. Since the snake is regarded by many communities, especially in rural areas, as the embodiment of God, Kalbeliyas 'are regarded as the priest of snake'.<sup>3</sup> Up till now Kalbeliyas have always been able to attract donations with a creature which is full of religious symbolism for Hindū people. Snake charming is basically related to religious begging, but, if at one level its nature is highly ritualistic and devotional, it also has a significant, practical

1. The small town of Pushkar is a famous place of pilgrimage, *tīrtha*, for Hindūs, and a popular tourist destination, especially for foreign backpackers. It is situated at the edge of the Thar Desert and at the foot of the outer fringes of the Aravalli mountain chain, at the centre of the western state of Rajasthan.

2. Robertson 2002, 281-88.

3. Bharucha 2003, 53.

side. The Kalbeliyas' ability in catching the poisonous serpents and also their knowledge and expertise in medicines against snake bites are very useful and even today often preferred over hospital treatment. Until not so long ago, in order to perform both their ritualistic services and their snake related knowledge and expertise, Kalbeliyas had to be constantly on the move: a single village, in fact, would not have been able to provide them with adequate work, while others might not have needed their services, meaning that nomadism was, and partly still is,<sup>4</sup> an economic strategy caused by the limited demand for their services in any one location.<sup>5</sup>

The Kalbeliyas' traditional nomadic way of life and their past means of living describe a form of economic, social, and cultural adaptation common to groups defined both as service nomads and as peripatetic peoples.

In India, service nomads<sup>6</sup> are endogamous groups offering highly specialized services, such as entertainment, ritual religious specialties, folk medicines, and repairs of specific types of implements, to settled populations, from whom they derive most of their subsistence.

Nowadays, Kalbeliyas have been shifting from one set of adaptive strategies to others, and the adoption of a new means of surviving has partially modified the structure of their nomadic way of life. We may say that the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar settlement are experiencing a change into a kind of sedentarization. Nevertheless, the members of the Kalbeliya community who have been living on the outskirts of Pushkar for approximately 20 years still consider themselves to be members of a *ghumakkaṛ jāti*, a wandering caste, even if the definition does not exactly mirror their actual life style.

Keeping in mind these two elements of Kalbeliya social and cultural identity, namely, that they are both a caste of householder *Nāths* and a community of service nomads, let turn to the main topic of the present paper: the *mausar*.

The *mausar* is a ritualized funeral feast widely celebrated in Rajasthan by all the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. The members of the *jātis* coupled with the first three *varṇas* do not perform this peculiar funeral rite, which must not be confused with the *mṛtyubhojan*, the Hindū funeral feast which concludes the twelve day set of funeral rituals following death. As far as I know, there is no written record of the *mausar*, both in ancient and in contemporary literature, and it seems that the only two authors who have dealt with it are Jeffrey G. Snodgrass and Shalini Randeria. While Snodgrass described the way the members of another Rājasthānī caste, the Bhats, perform and conceive the *mausar*,<sup>7</sup> Shalini Randeria studied the Dalit mortuary rituals in Gujarat<sup>8</sup>

4. Angelillo 2013, 79-95.

5. Hayden 1983, 292.

6. Hayden 1979, 295-309.

7. Snodgrass 2007, 107-22.

8. Randeria 2010, 177-96.

which, in structure and meaning, partly recall the Rājasthānī *mausar*. The lack of studies on this subject is quite surprising seeing that the *mausar* is the central rite and the central activity for most Hindū Rājasthānīs. Since the *mausar* is definitely the most important ceremony in the whole social and personal life of the members of the Kalbeliya caste, the present paper means to identify the reasons behind this importance. When a member of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar dies, his or her corpse is transported to an area, a few kilometres away from the camp (*dērā*) where the whole group lives. The area in which the dead body is buried fits the local definition of *jaṅgal*, that is to say, an area not included in fixed and permanent settlements of villages or towns.<sup>9</sup>

As householder *Nāths*, it is not surprising that the Kalbeliyas bury their dead: in fact, householder *Nāths* typically bury their dead together in a separate gravesite, which generally lies just outside the village, neighbouring on the area where they live. The gravesite is usually small, and the dead are always buried without a coffin, generally sitting up in a lotus position like yogis. As D. Gold and A. Grodzins Gold state, the common gravesite of the householder *Nāths* usually constitutes a concrete reminder of their awesome strangeness as a community.<sup>10</sup>

Nowadays, the members of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar tend to bury all their dead in the same area, which they call *qabristān*, literally 'burial-ground'. The first burial, which occurs immediately after the person's death, is made up of a grave covered by a series of stones as long as the length of an average-sized body lying down. In the past, when Kalbeliyas used to lead an entirely nomadic way of life, their burial places were scattered all over the Rājasthānī landscape. The burial is followed by a series of funerary rites that last for twelve days, the so-called *barah dīn*. The '*barah dīn*' formula consists of a broad and complicated range of rituals, which, as far as the Kalbeliyas are concerned, also includes the interpretation or, better, the divination of the next rebirth of the deceased. The *mausar* can be considered as being the last and final funeral ritual performed by Kalbeliyas. The *mausar* can be held in honour of the recent dead, the many years dead, and even before death happens, but it is not held for all the dead members of the caste. The *mausar* is only celebrated for all the married members of the caste and can be celebrated even when they are still alive. For example, if the husband dies, his wife's *jīvat mausar* will also be celebrated along with his *mausar*, but if the wife should die first, her *mausar* will only be celebrated when her husband also dies or when her husband decides to celebrate his own *mausar* (which could in fact be a *jīvat mausar*). The sons can also celebrate their *jīvat mausar* together with the *mausar* of their dead

9. An interesting analysis of the word *jaṅgal* and of its evolution in the frame of Indian culture is provided by Zimmerman 1999.

10. Gold–Grodzins Gold 1984, 119.

father. In addition, a single *mausar* can commemorate more than one dead man, but the men must be brothers (with their living or dead wives). *Mausars*, as well as the *barah din*, are never celebrated for people who are not yet married, who have not yet chosen their own *guru*, for children, and for anyone who dies before reaching adolescence.

The Kalbeliya *mausar* is rarely celebrated immediately after the person's death: several years usually pass before a *mausar* is held and the main reason for this delay is that sponsoring a *mausar* is economically very demanding. Indeed, it takes a certain amount of time for the Kalbeliyas to collect enough money to celebrate it properly. However, the *mausar* is considered to be such a central, essential, and necessary ritual, that some Kalbeliyas, in fear of the fact that their children and relatives may not hold one or sponsor a minimally acceptable, even perfunctory one after their death, choose to celebrate their own *mausar* while they are still alive (*jīvat mausar*).

The close family of the deceased, basically his or her sons and unmarried daughters, is responsible for organizing the *mausar* after consulting both kinsmen and affines. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of the community's elders (*pañc*) to give permission to host the feast and to supervise its entire organization. When, for example, I asked Rakhi, my *dharm bahin* and my first and foremost collaborator in the field, if I could take part in her father Galla Nath's *mausar*, she had to ask the *pañcāyat* for permission, which I was eventually granted. Even the date of Rakhi's father's *mausar*, celebrated more than ten years after his death, was fixed a year before (May 2010) its actual happening (April 2011) by the members of the *pañcāyat* together with Rakhi's family.

In every Kalbeliya *mausar*, all the Kalbeliya communities of a *parganā* must be invited by the family sponsoring the ceremony: for the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar this rule implies that at least all the Kalbeliya communities who live in the four districts of Ajmer, Mewar, Pali and Nagaur must be invited to the funeral feast. The *mausar* is more than a simple funeral feast, since it is a rather complex performance, lasting three days, with some six to seven hundred participants: it includes extravagant feasting and food distribution, dancing and singing by men and women, the ostentatious exchange of money and gifts, and the building of a funeral monument. The elaborate ceremony is held on unowned land, generally near the place where the dead person was born or where he or she died, and all the facilities (the big tent-pavilion, *maṇḍapa*, where people can gather during the day and where all the rituals, meetings, and public speeches are held; blankets; mattresses; drinking water tanks; food; alcohol; matting; chairs; the sound system; microphone, etc.) must be provided by the sons and eventually the daughters of the dead person. Basically, Kalbeliyas pour most, if not all of their earnings, into a single mortuary feast.

It is difficult to give an exhaustive summary of the *mausar*, but at least two of its rituals are worth describing. The first one is held on the third and last day of the *mausar* and is called *māyṛā*: during the *māyṛā* the natal kin of each of the

married women in the deceased's household must make a gift of dresses and jewellery to their married daughters. Shalini Randeria<sup>11</sup> describes a similar transaction, called *maraṇ māmerū*, which is part of life-course ritual celebrations among the Dalits in Gujarat. Randeria states that women's status in their conjugal families depends in no small measure on the value of the gifts they receive from their natal families at mortuary feasts. It must be remembered that even though Kalbeliya women become part of their husband's household with marriage, thereby acquiring a new family, their ties with their natal families are not broken. Indeed, the relationship between married women and their natal kin proves to be much stronger and effective than it usually is in Hindū society.

A second noteworthy ritual consists of the placing of a stone slab (*mūrti*) portraying the dead person in a highly conventional way, on the funeral monument which is built, days before the *mausar* celebration, on the first burial. Kalbeliyas call this funeral monument *samādhi* and it must be noted that each *samādhi* corresponds to a *mausar* and not to a person. Since one *mausar* can commemorate more than one person, one *samādhi* can be dedicated to more than one individual. The *samādhi* is basically a sign that a *mausar* has been held. As far as a *jīvat mausar* is concerned, stone portraits are not placed on the *samādhi* until the person dies. As a rule, stone portraits are not provided for women: in some unusual cases a slab will be placed with just a name engraved on it. The highly conventional portrait of the dead person is placed on his *samādhi* during the morning of the second of the three days of the ceremony: the sponsors of the *mausar* and their families move from the camp where the *mausar* is held to the burial place, where a funeral monument, the *samādhi*, has been built on the previous heap of stones which indicates the actual burial ground. The only people to attend and take part in the installing of the portrait on the *samādhi* are the dead man's widow, any existing sons with their own wives and children, his unmarried daughters, his brothers, and, if they are still alive, his parents. The stone slab portrays a sort of paradigmatic or ideal image of a Kalbeliya man, visually stressing his belonging to the *Nāth sampradāya*. In fact, the depicted male figure bears a striking resemblance to Kanipāv as he is represented in the *mūrti* of the temple on the outskirts of Pushkar, which the Kalbeliyas dedicated to him around fifteen years ago. In both cases, the male figure represented is a young adult male, with a fair complexion, a long, black beard and black moustache, sitting down in *padma āsana*, with a couple of *mālā* beads around his neck and his body completely covered by a pink or orange garment, except for his feet and hands. There are a few differences between Kanipāv's *mūrti* and the ones placed on the Kalbeliya *samādhis*: while Kanipāv is depicted with long black hair and holding a small plate in one hand and a snake in the other, the *samādhis*' stone slabs portray men wearing turbans of

11. Randeria 2010, 177-96.

the same colour as their pink or orange garment, holding *mālā* beads in one hand while their other hand with its open palm facing forward is raised to chest level. This hand reproduces the form of the *abhaya mudrā*, a ritual hand pose, common to both Buddhist and Hindū iconography, which denotes the granting of the condition of being without fear, the imparting of calm or reassurance to the soul, and the transmission of protection against harm, generally of a spiritual nature: *abhaya mudrā* is commonly held by Hindū deities and is directed at the devotee who falls under the deity's protection. Along with this highly conventional representation of the dead person, the stone slab also reproduces his name and the date, not of his death, but of the first of the three days of his *mausar*.

The extravagant feast usually sends Kalbeliya families into debt, but even so, each Kalbeliya family must spend on the *mausar*, before other essentials like food, clothing, and shelter. When Kalbeliyas are asked about the reason behind such impressive but necessary destruction of wealth, they say that they celebrate *mausar* '*nāk ke liye*', which basically means 'in order to save face', and they explain that it is a matter of *izzat*,<sup>12</sup> reputation, honour. However, their answer still does not really explain how and why their reputation depends so strictly on the *mausar*.

According to Snodgrass, an extreme form of competition lies at the heart of the *mausar*, together with an attempt to distinguish oneself hierarchically from the other caste members: the *mausar* would basically represent a display of status.<sup>13</sup> Snodgrass's statement, applied to the Kalbeliya experience, can only partly be held true: the *mausar* for the Kalbeliyas is certainly a matter of reputation, but I do not think that it is a way to display their social and material status. First of all, it should be noticed that displaying social and material wellness is not part of the Kalbeliya's attitude. In general, the members of the Kalbeliya community living in the Pushkar settlement think that through the displaying of their poverty they can obtain several material advantages: not only in their relationship with the foreign tourists who come to Pushkar, but even with Indian people and with the members of their own caste and their own family, they always admirably fill the role of poor people. They are, in fact, convinced that people, whoever they may be, will comply with their requests only out of sympathy for their poverty. I would therefore not go so far as to state that the *mausar* is about showing a wellbeing and wealth that they are constantly trying to hide. On the contrary, I think that the sponsoring of the *mausar* is strictly related to what may be called the moral economy and the 'highly personal

12. An interesting analysis of the concept of *izzat*, applied to the Baluchi society, can be found in Fabietti 2004, 139-43. It must also be noticed that the Hindī word *nāk* that literally means 'nose' also translates the word 'honour', 'prestige' in a figurative sense.

13. Snodgrass 2007, 107-22.



mechanism of mutual support<sup>14</sup> subscribed to by the Kalbeliya community. Kalbeliyas are morally obliged, if asked, to help out and share their wealth with needy members of their family and their caste. What Randeria writes about Dalit castes in Gujarat proves to be very true with regard to the Kalbeliyas:

To insult a man who refuses to host a mortuary feast for his father or mother by saying that he eats [his wealth], but does not feed [it to others] (...) is to accuse him not only of stinginess but of sheer immorality. The purpose of acquiring wealth is not individual private consumption but public redistribution.<sup>15</sup>

Kalbeliyas are morally obliged to share every kind of goods, from food to money. According to my experience, Kalbeliyas never refuse to lend money to a member of their own caste, and since denying a loan is shameful for the person who does not fulfil the request for money, Kalbeliyas will never try to borrow money from a member of their caste if they are not sure whether he or she has some money. On many occasions, I have bought special food, the kind of food they never buy, such as fruits, almonds, pistachios, honey, rice, etc. for the Kalbeliyas I am close to, and they have always, even if sick or seriously in trouble, shared my gifts with the members of their joint families. Very rarely have I ever seen anyone hiding my gifts to avoid having to share them. Therefore, once again in Randeria's words, for Kalbeliyas 'the mere hosting of a mortuary feast to honour one's deceased parent is no virtue, but a *sine qua non* of belonging to the community'.<sup>16</sup> The *mausar* is based on a moral economy, whereby lavish spending on a socially valued event in which the entire caste participates is considered productive and moral, while individual personal consumption is barren. Between the end of *barah din* and the celebration of *mausar*, the sons of the dead person are subjected to lots of restrictions: they cannot spend money on anything before they sponsor their father's *mausar*, and until they are able to sponsor it, they will constantly be blamed by the whole Kalbeliya society.

Not only do Kalbeliyas generally consider themselves first and foremost as part of a social body more than independent individuals, but they basically level their individual self-identity to that of their caste. Quite interestingly, it has been stressed that this mechanism of quasi-fusion between individual and collective identities intensifies when there is a marked difference between the group the individual belongs to and the outside,<sup>17</sup> and also when identity salience comes through defining the group's identity against other groups.<sup>18</sup> Both these conditions apply to the experience of the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar's settlement. Based on my familiarity with these Kalbeliyas, I would state that it is difficult

14. Snodgrass 2002, 613.

15. Randeria 2010, 192.

16. *Ibid.*, 193.

17. Terry-Hogg 1996, 776-93.

18. Oakes 1987, 117-41.

for them to perceive themselves as different from their social group and, although they yearn for the social approval of the members of their own caste, they accord no importance to the judgement of third parties who do not belong to it. Pushkar, the most important and famous Rājasthānī *tīrtha*, is socially and culturally pervaded and even ruled by Brahmanical values and morals to such an extent that socially sanctioned behaviour is the one inspired by Brahmanical orthodoxy. Not only do the members of the Kalbeliya community make almost no attempt to conform to the Brahmanical behaviour patterns, but they actually openly challenge and defy them. Their explicit autonomy from brahmanical policy in Pushkar draws wide criticism, disapproval, and reproach, which however does not seem to bother the members of the caste at all. On the contrary, the Kalbeliyas, prompted by brahmanical social and cultural hegemony, proudly highlight their singularity and peculiarity, reiterating and reaffirming their unique social and cultural identity. If conformity of behaviour with regard to the body of social conventions does indeed constitute a strong marker of identity, then it follows that opposition to these conventions is also a solid identity statement. It is now clear that belonging to the Kalbeliya caste is not a mere matter of birth and blood: Kalbeliya caste identity depends on involvement in a social network of relationships and on agreement with a moral and ethical system of values. This agreement is testified by the actual behaviour of the members of the caste: individual identity is defined by the individual's membership within a community and for a given caste, and hence it results in conformity in terms of behaviour within each community.<sup>19</sup>

Communitarian cohesion and the socially imposed and prescribed solidarity are the driving forces behind most of the behaviours of the members of the community: for example, if a group of Kalbeliya women go together to Pushkar from the camp (*derā*) where they live, and when they are at the town's market, one of them manages to earn some money from a tourist, perhaps by drawing a henna tattoo for example, she has to share her earnings with all the women who went with her to Pushkar before they return home. Or, if a Kalbeliya living in the Pushkar settlement is admitted to hospital, the members of his/her joint family and a good share of the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar camp will bed down outside the hospital until the Kalbeliya patient is discharged. The patient's family has to pay for the daily food and tea of all the members of the caste camping outside the hospital. The reader may now appreciate how Kalbeliya cohesion can be both a relief and at the same time a huge burden for the members of the caste. Throughout their lives, Kalbeliyas are used to behaving and thinking first as members of a community rather than as an individual with his/her own needs and ambitions. The *mausar* can ideally be considered the final step of an education through which people are taught to subordinate their own needs to the promotion of the social wholeness of their community.

19. Ballet–Radja 2006, 7.

Moreover, the behaviour of the caste members is supervised and continuously questioned by the community they belong to: all the aspects of their life, be it their attire or their means of living, are implicitly or openly judged, and whenever their conduct is considered to be inappropriate and not in compliance with the caste's moral and ethical code, the *pañcāyat* intervenes, fining or expelling the transgressor from the caste. It must be noticed that Kalbeliyas allow members of other endogamous groups to join their caste and to become Kalbeliyas: of course, due to the low status of the caste, this does not happen very often, but it is however possible. In fact, during my fieldwork period in Rajasthan I met two men, an Indian and an Australian, who had succeeded in becoming Kalbeliyas. The main reason and perhaps the only one that can push people to acquire Kalbeliya caste identity is marriage. Even today, Kalbeliyas do not allow marriages outside the caste, and if a Kalbeliya marries someone belonging to another caste, whatever this caste may be, he or she is cast out by the *pañcāyat*. Nevertheless, inter-caste marriages are gladly accepted when the non-Kalbeliyian half of the couple agrees to give up his or her original social belonging and to become a Kalbeliya.<sup>20</sup> Kalbeliya identity is constructed by social agents, according to an interactionist rationale that is based on the expectations that group members have about their roles. As Claude Dubar suggests, 'identity is nothing else but a result (...) of diverse processes of socialization which at the same time construct the individuals and define the institutions'.<sup>21</sup> And the *mausar* is precisely an example of such a process of socialization: by sponsoring a *mausar*, Kalbeliyas prove their compliance with the caste's moral code, its values, its beliefs, and its ethical thinking and show that they behave accordingly. The *mausar* is based on feelings of social belonging which sustain the group's existence: in other words, the *mausar* feeds those feelings of social belonging which reiterate caste identity. Besides being, as Snodgrass states, a memory machine which constructs images that freeze the dead into a perfect and durable form,<sup>22</sup> the *mausar* can also be considered an identity building machine, inasmuch as identity is understood, in accordance with the most recent research in sociolinguistics, social psychology, and cultural studies, as a performative act, realized when people expose who they are in specific social interactions.<sup>23</sup> Identity is a negotiated process of exposure and interpretation of social positions, affiliations, roles, and status.<sup>24</sup> During the celebration of the *mausar*, the main features of Kalbeliya identity are explicitly and consciously displayed. On this occasion, the Kalbeliyas act as paradigmatic householder *Nāths*: their attire, the

20. Adoption of Kalbeliya caste identity first of all entails changing one's name and paying a sum of money to the *pañcāyat*. The amount is fixed by the *pañcāyat* itself and is supposed to be redistributed among the members of the Kalbeliya community the person will join.

21. Bauman 2008, 18-19.

22. Snodgrass 2007, 117.

23. De Fina-Schiffrin-Bamberg 2006, 189.

24. Ochs 1992, 335-58; Ochs 1993, 297-306.

food, the very place where the *mausar* is held, the linguistic strategies adopted, the dancing, and the music are all aspects that convey the ideal image of the caste as it is perceived by its members. The *mausar* represents Kalbeliyas as they are supposed to be according to their own inner representation of themselves. One example of this paradigmatic performance of Kalbeliya identity is offered by the way the Kalbeliyas greeted each other during the *mausar* I attended. The usual Kalbeliya greeting, at least for those living in the Pushkar settlement, is ‘Rām Rām’ or more rarely *namaste*. Nevertheless, during the three days of celebration of the *mausar*, the Kalbeliyas addressed each other saying *ādes̄*, the common greeting formula used by members of the *Nāth sampradāya*. In the period between 2005 and 2011, this was the first time I had ever heard Kalbeliyas uttering this word, which in fact I expected them to use being distinctive to the *Nāths*, be they ascetics or householders. It goes without saying that after this *mausar* experience I never heard it again.

As Bloch states, the *mausar* therefore proves that ‘death as disruption, rather than being a problem for the social order, (...) is in fact an opportunity for dramatically creating it’.<sup>25</sup> The *mausar* presents the social fabric, which has been torn apart by the death of a member, as a coherent whole, ruled by moral and ethic feelings. The funeral feast is the occasion for the reproduction, rebuilding, and reiterating of the caste as a meaningful, ordered group fed by its members’ sense of belonging.

The idea that the *mausar* confirms and restores the structure of the Kalbeliya caste and the roles of its members is further suggested by the custom of celebrating *sagāñs̄*, betrothal and formalizing marriages during this funeral feast. There are two main reasons that generally underlie the connection between the two rituals: an economic one and a social one. Economically speaking, the co-celebration eliminates the cost of re-inviting and entertaining the same guests, and thereby reduces expenses for the family hosting the *mausar*. In turn, the social motivation concerns both the status of the deceased person’s family within the caste and the enhancement of the caste bond. Marriage is, in fact, an opportunity for families to maintain their social rank, to distinct socially and to receive social approbation from the other members of the community. As briefly explained above, families must respect caste rules and norms regarding weddings under constraints of dishonour and non-social esteem. Marriages, which promote and finalize new alliances within the caste, enlarge the social network on which the caste is based and sustained. Moreover, a third evocative explanation has been suggested by some Pushkar inhabitants who, when questioned about this low caste tradition, explained that marriages are formalized during the *mausar* in order to balance the inauspicious (*asūbh*) character of the mortuary feast through a highly auspicious celebration (*sūbh*), such as a wedding.

25. Bloch–Parry 1982, 218–19.

Considering death an unavoidable rite of passage, consisting of the classic tripartite sequence outlined by Van Gennep<sup>26</sup> and made up of the three phases of separation, transition, and incorporation, the Kalbeliya *mausar* undoubtedly acts as the last of the three ritual phases. The *mausar* is a rite of incorporation, where the purpose of the shared meal is to reunite, in a meaningful framework and structure, all the surviving members of the group. In fact, the main action connected to the *mausar* is eating, as is testified by the expression *mausar khānā*, which is used to describe the act of taking part in the celebration. As Parry,<sup>27</sup> Inden and Nicholas<sup>28</sup> have underlined, food is a key symbol of nurture and kinship, and the refusal to eat is a repudiation of kinship, where outcasting is expressed above all in a withdrawal from commensality. According to both Van Gennep's well-known model and to Inden's and Nicholas's interpretation of the Hindū *samskāra* function,<sup>29</sup> the main aim of Kalbeliya funeral rituals, in common with all rites of passage, is to provide the subject of the rite with a new identity.<sup>30</sup> In fact, apart from its socially unifying function, the Kalbeliya *mausar*, as the very last funeral ritual, provides a new identity to all the ritual actors involved therein: the deceased, the sponsors, and the caste. The dead person is, in fact, transformed into a perfect and paradigmatic householder *Nāth*, a model and epitome of caste membership; his sons are identified and legitimated as Kalbeliyas not through a mere blood-birth tie, but through the moral and social acknowledgement bestowed on them by their community, and, finally, the caste is renewed, rebuilt, and restated by the sense of belonging of its members and through the maintained prominence of its moral code on individual needs, desires, and aspirations. It is worth remembering that until a very recent past, the *samādhīs* were the only fixed, stable structures built by Kalbeliyas, and the only fixed signs of their presence on the Rājasthānī landscape. *Samādhīs* outline and sketch out the history of the caste in the region: they are documents that produce the caste as a local community and testify to its ongoing biography. It can be noticed that the present shifting of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar to a kind of sedentarization is mirrored by the confluence of all the *samādhīs* in a single area. *Samādhīs* are the signs which prove that the society of the living regularly recreates itself, and that the individual's ability to influence and interact with the world does not end with biological death.

In conclusion, by sponsoring the *mausar*, the Kalbeliyas subscribe to a moral community, that is to say, a community of people who share the same values and the same behaviours: by sponsoring this celebration, they prove that

26. Van Gennep 1909.

27. Parry 1985, 614.

28. Inden–Nicholas 1977.

29. 'every *samskāra* is regarded as a transformative action that "refines" and "purifies" the living body, initiating it into new statuses and relationships by giving it a new birth', *ibid.*, 37.

30. Boivin 2000, 374.

they endorse and are part of a cultural and social framework of values. This fact of being established within the same moral norm shapes their concept of *izzat*: the same values and the same behaviours that outline the group as a moral community define their idea of *izzat*, honour. The reproduction of these values, as proved by the *mausar*, is highly pragmatic, since it occurs through appropriate and morally fitting behaviours handed down to caste members of the same and of different generations. The *mausar* is therefore a matter of *izzat*, inasmuch as it is a matter of endorsing the values and the behaviours on which the moral community of equals is based.

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