

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa as Śruti

by

Robert A. Menzies

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religion
University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

The present study addresses the nature of Sruti within the Hindu tradition, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's attempt at inclusion within this category, and Rāmānuja's endorsement of this inclusion. As well, the demarcation between Sruti and Smṛti, and the beginnings of Vaiṣṇava sect are examined as is the general nature of Purāṇic literature.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa's self-description as Sruti is examined from the point of view of its maintaining orthodoxy regarding the Vedas and Vedic sacrifice, yet attempting inclusion as secondary Sruti through establishing a connection to the Vedas through common authors. The soteriological consequences of this inclusion are probed focussing on the concept of Phalaslokas. Particular attention is paid to the various types of contact, with the text narrating, remembering, hearing, which would result in the various terrestrial, post-mortem, or eternal benefits.

Rāmānuja's acceptance of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as Sruti and his use of it as a proof-text alongside other universally accepted Srutis is investigated primarily through his understanding of the philosophical definitions and physical descriptions of God, His qualities and the notion of His immanence and transcendence as presented Vedarthasamgraha and Sri Bhaṣya.

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I would like to thank Dr. K.K. Klostermaier for, not only aiding in the selection of a thesis topic which fired my imagination, but patiently guiding me back from the inevitable tangential research; Dr. T.P. Day for setting me on the path of Religious Studies; and Dr. R.E. Hueckstedt for introducing me to the perils and beauty of Sanskrit. Finally and always I would like to thank Petra for her support, and Alexandra and Tyler for their constant reminders of reality and priority.

ABBREVIATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCES

- SB Thibaut, George. The Vedānta-Sūtras With the Commentary by Rāmānuja.
- BG van Buitenen, J.A.B. Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā.
- V[^] Gupta, Munilala (ed.) Śrīśrīviṣṇupurāṇa.
- VP Wilson, H.H. The Vishṇu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition.
- VS van Buitenen, J.A.B. Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṁgraha.

SECONDARY SOURCES

GENERAL

- APTE Apte, V.S. The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary.
- CAI Renou, L. Civilization of Ancient India.
- CHI The Cultural Heritage of India.
- DFIT Sarkar, Anil Kumar. Dynamic Facets of Indian Thought: vol. 1. Vedas to the Auxiliary Scriptures.
- EH Sarma, D.S. Essence of Hinduism.
- EIP M. Hiriyanna, Essentials of Indian Philosophy.
- EIR Banerjee, P. Early Indian Religions.
- EIRT Vidyarthi, P.B. Early Indian Religious Thought.
- HASL Müller, F. Max. A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature.
- HCIP R.C. Majumdar gen.ed. The History and Culture of the Indian People.
- HH Seshadri, K. Heritage of Hinduism.
- HHD Organ, Troy Wilson. Hinduism: Its Historical Development.
- HIP Dasgupta, S.N. A History of Indian Philosophy.
- IH Dandekar, R.N. Insights into Hinduism.

IP	Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. <u>Indian Philosophy.</u>
ITI	Donald H. Bishop ed. <u>Indian Thought: An Introduction.</u>
MRLI	Jan Gonda. <u>Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit.</u>
NAT HIN	Renou, L. <u>The Nature of Hinduism.</u>
ORLI	Farquhar, J.N. <u>An Outline of the Religious Literature of India.</u>
PVL	Dandekar, R.N. <u>Post-Vedic Literature.</u>
RAI	Renou, L. <u>Religions of Ancient India.</u>
SAHH	Dandekar, R.N. <u>Some Aspects of the History of Hinduism.</u>
SH	Klostermaier, Klaus K. <u>A Survey of Hinduism.</u>
SILP	van Buitenen, J.A.B. <u>Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy.</u>
SRMI	Sircar, D.C. <u>Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India.</u>
VL	Gonda, Jan. <u>Vedic Literature.</u>
VSRs	Bhandarkar, Sir R.G. <u>Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems.</u>

PURANAS

AIHT	Pargiter, F.E. <u>Ancient Indian Historical Tradition.</u>
CHMP	S.G. Kantawala, <u>Cultural History From the Matsya Purāṇa.</u>
DM	T.B. Coburn, <u>Devī Mahātmya.</u>
HCSP	Roy, S.N. <u>Historical and Cultural Studies in the Purāṇas.</u>
HDBP	R.K. Arora, <u>Historical and Cultural Data From The BhaviṣyaPurāṇa.</u>
HIL	Winternitz, M. <u>A History of Indian Literature. vol. 1.</u>
INTRO	Hazra, R.C. "Introduction" to H.H. Wilson, <u>The Viṣṇu Purāṇa.</u>
PREF	Wilson, H.H, "Preface" to H.H. Wilson, <u>The Viṣṇu Purāṇa.</u>

PTDA	Pargiter, F.E. <u>The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age.</u>
PURA	Rocher, Ludo. <u>The Purāṇas.</u>
RSBP	S. Sheth, <u>Religion and Society in The Brahmā Purāṇa.</u>
SDB	Lalye, P.G. <u>Studies in the Devī Bhāgavata.</u>
SPRH	Hazra, R.C. <u>Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs.</u>
SPS	Sastri, Heramba N. Chatterjee. <u>Studies in the Purāṇas and Smṛtis.</u>
ViPur	Dayal, Thakur Harendra. <u>The Viṣṇu Purāṇa.</u>

VAIṢṆAVISM

AEV	Gonda, J. <u>Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism.</u>
CSPR	Gupta, Anima Sen. <u>A Critical Study of the Philosophy of Rāmānuja.</u>
EHVS	Raychaudhuri, H.C. <u>The Early History of Vaishnava Sects.</u>
ODV	Jaiswal, Suvira. <u>The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism.</u>
SRV	Bhatt, S.R. <u>Studies in Rāmānuja Vedānta.</u>
TPR	Sinha, Jadunath. <u>The Philosophy of Rāmānuja.</u>
TRA	Carman, John Braisted. <u>The Theology of Rāmānuja.</u>

INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps nothing more central to a religion than its scripture. Despite Western scholars having begun to analyze the Hindu scriptures, Hindus continue to regard them as having been given to their ancestors as a special privilege, and their having been faithfully transmitted orally for generations. The authentic Hindu tradition consists of that chain of authorities which dutifully maintained the oral nature of these scriptures.¹ Within that authentic tradition there is a distinction made between the various types of literature. The most important, and often most misunderstood, distinction is the fundamental delineation made between Śruti and Smṛti texts. Literally, "revelation" and "remembrance" Śruti and Smṛti are the two fundamental authorities in matters of secular and religious law. In order for a sect to be considered orthodox they must be āstika ("yes sayers") that is in agreement with the Śruti as ultimate religious authority. While Smṛti can be authoritative, it is the Śruti which is the final authority. So important are the Śrutis that even non-orthodox (nāstika, "no sayers") writers have used them in their arguments. In contemporary India the Śruti are recited daily by Hindus, and a theologian is appraised by his allegiance with them. In this modern India, worship is of a sectarian nature. Of the three primary major sects, Śaivism, Śaktism, and

¹ K.K. Klostermaier, SH,162.

Vaiṣṇavism, the last comprises the largest portion of Indians. Śruti recitations notwithstanding, the religion of these contemporary Hindu sects is primarily Purāṇic. While it is not entirely true to claim that Purāṇas are being ignored by scholars it is an unarguable fact that the fertile field of Purāṇic scholarship is relatively uncultivated. This despite the fact that Purāṇas are perhaps the most used form of literature in daily life. Originating in the ancient Indian oral tradition, Purāṇas transmit material of an encyclopedic diversity from mythology to penances to philosophy to temple construction. Of these Purāṇas eighteen are listed as "primary" while an almost limitless number, sometimes also classified into eighteen Upapurāṇas, of regional Purāṇas can be found. Probably the most important, and certainly the oldest, of the Vaiṣṇava Mahāpurāṇas is the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It was one of the first to be submitted to Western scholarly criticism following its translation into English. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa was so important to the Vaiṣṇava tradition that it moved from categorization as a Smṛti to Śruti in some Vaiṣṇava sects. The Purāṇa itself seems to endorse this use on several grounds. Within the large Śrivaṣṇava sect the Purāṇa is especially venerated and has been since the "founding" of the sect by Rāmānuja in the eleventhth century. His use of the Purāṇa as a proof in addition to the universally accepted Śruti has traditional precedents,

but only after Rāmānuja was it endorsed and expanded upon by later major theologians and philosophers.

In this paper we will begin with a brief introductory analysis of Hindu scripture which first examines the definition of Śruti, the several types of literature included in it, and their uses. A definition of Smṛti follows and the demarcation between the two types of literature is briefly explored. Since the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a Vaiṣṇava text this is succeeded by a short history of this movement including the Pāñcarātra, Bhāgavata and Kṛṣṇaite sects. Chapter ONE concludes with a preliminary look at Purāṇic literature from its origins as court stories and myths accompanying ritual, to their relationship to other forms of Indian literature. Included is a section on the traditional transmitters of Purāṇas and some proposals as to the uses of these texts by their editors.

Chapter TWO is an examination of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's attempt to assert its inclusion to the Śruti while maintaining its position as supportive of the Vedas and their sacrificial system. The consequences of this delineation as Śruti, whether terrestrial, post-mortem or eternal are then taken up. Chapter THREE is Rāmānuja's use of the work in his philosophical arguments, but primarily in his theological work, the Vedārthasaṃgraha. His position on the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is made most evident in his definition of God and His qualities.

In regard to Sanskrit terms, words or phrases integral to the development of the discussion are explained as a part of the text. Other terms which may be translated in a single word are placed initially beside the English and later appear alone.

Format and method of citation are based of Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. 5th edition. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

ŚRUTI IN THE HINDU TRADITION

A. Definition of Śruti

There are several types of literature in India. The most authoritative of the religious types is termed Śruti. The term Śruti comes from the verb śru, "to hear." S.N. Dasgupta cites Pāṇini as defining Śruti as "anything heard."¹ One modern scholar, D.S. Sarma, defines it as simply "what is heard."² Other modern scholars, including T.W. Organ,³ K.K. Klostermaier,⁴ and K. Seshadri⁵ give their definition nearly verbatim with D.S. Sarma's. The heard word was so important to the tradition that what we now call well-read was at one time (500 to 100 B.C.) called rich in hearing.⁶ This, then is the meaning of the Sanskrit word Śruti.

Almost by definition the literature listed in this category is taken as revealed. K.K. Klostermaier explains when he writes "as a technical term, it comprises the scriptures with the highest theological value, containing supreme and undebatable authority. Śruti may be commented upon, but can never be questioned."⁷ Śruti texts are taken

¹ S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.1, 12, citing Pāṇini III.iii.94.

² D.S. Sarma, EH, 11.

³ T.W. Organ, HHD, 57.

⁴ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 62.

⁵ K. Seshadri, HH, 8.

⁶ M. Winternitz, HIL, 33.

⁷ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 62. 5

as having "been in existence from time immemorial,"⁸ and the emphasis in Śruti is not on any particular individual who had spoken the word to be heard, but on the very manifestation of the word as something given directly to human understanding as such. The very impersonality of Śruti is an added guarantee of its universal authenticity in addition to its eternality. According to the Mīmāṃsakas the Veda is regarded as apauruṣeya (not of human origin). This is repeated by Hindu theologians and philosophers throughout the centuries.⁹ Thus we see that the literature taken by various ages of Hindus as Śruti is eternal and is "heard" by humans as revealed by the Supreme.

B. Types of Literature Delineated as Śruti.

It is important to determine which types of literature fall under this characterization. A.K. Sarkar gives four classifications of Hindu literature and in so doing mentions only one type of Śruti.¹⁰ Haritā, an author of an early Dharmaśāstra, on the other hand, delineates two types of Śruti, the Vedic, and the Tantric or Āgamic.¹¹ A contemporary scholar, K. Seshadri, mentions three types, according to their function.¹² For all practical purposes

⁸ R.N. Dandekar, SAHH, 30.

⁹ K. Seshadri, HH, 8; R.N. Dandekar, SAHH, 46; Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, An Introduction to the Commentary on the Vedas, 16.

¹⁰ A.K. Sarkar, DFIT, 15-16.

¹¹ See K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 62 n.6.

¹² K. Seshadri, HH, 101.

we must accept Haritā's two branches of Śruti, those taken by all to be acceptable as such, and those which are acceptable to some, but not to all. The oldest type of Āryan literature, the Vedas, would surely qualify in the first classification. In fact, "from the point of view of literary history, the word Śruti denotes the oral tradition through which the Veda has been transmitted from generation to generation."¹³ These eternal Vedas can be divided into several categories of literature, the Vedas themselves, and the associated literature as the Upaniṣads, Āraṇyakas and Brāhmaṇas. The "Vedas" proper are made up of four compilations called saṁhitās. They are the Rgveda Saṁhitā, the Sāmaveda Saṁhitā, the Yajurveda Saṁhitā, and the Atharvaveda Saṁhitā. The Rgveda Saṁhitā (the praise wisdom), the oldest, the largest, and the most important, is a collection of more than a thousand hymns to various gods, considered by many to be the work of the priests of the nomadic Āryans in the first period of their migration into India. It was considered the most important because of the inherent power of the spoken word. Much was done in the Hindu tradition to ensure that the intonations of the priests were carried out correctly. In fact a separate branch of literature, the Vedāṅgas, while not technically Śruti, developed as an important part of a Brahmin's training. In the Sāmaveda Saṁhitā (the chant wisdom), we find a collection of hymns, mostly extracted from the

¹³ R.N. Dandekar, SAHH, 31 n.1.

Rgveda Saṁhitā, with notations on correct recitation and musical accompaniment. These hymns are arranged according to their use in the sacrificial ceremonies. The Yajurveda Saṁhitā (the sacred formula wisdom), is the book of Vedic ceremonies containing directions for the correct performance of sacrifices. These three are commonly referred to as the Trayi Vidyā. The Atharvaveda Saṁhitā (the magical charm wisdom) is a collection of hymns and spells often associated with non-Brahmanical elements in Vedic society. It was probably a late addition into the Vedic canon.¹⁴

Included in the Śruti material, in addition to the four Vedic Saṁhitās, are various books dependant upon them. They are the Brāhmaṇas (books of the Brahmins), the Āraṇyakas (forest books), and the Upaniṣads ("near-sitting," so named because the pupils were taught by sitting near their teachers). The Brāhmaṇas are mainly textbooks of ritual and prayer for the priests, and "seem to codify the ritual of the aboriginal rather than the Āryan priesthood."¹⁵ The Āraṇyakas are primarily discourses on the mystical significance of humanity and their place within nature. They are primarily for the use of Saṁnyāsins, those who have retired from society to live in the forests to meditate on life's mysteries. Many of

¹⁴ T.W. Organ, HHD, 60; Benjamin Walker, The Hindu World, vol.1, 95.

¹⁵ B. Walker, The Hindu World, vol.1, 166.

the Āraṇyakas are linked with the Upaniṣads and their names are sometimes used interchangeably. While there are only four Āraṇyakas extant the Upaniṣads number in the hundreds, while only eighteen or so are commonly used.

Those texts which are traditionally included within these groups are all considered by Hindus to be Śruti. This may not have always been so, however. Just as the Atharvaveda Saṁhitā may have been a late addition into the canon some scholars claim the same for certain Upaniṣads, and some have even come to believe that they were Austric in origin.¹⁶ Regardless of their origin the Upaniṣads are taken to be "Vedānta," the end of the Vedas which "mark the summits of the Veda which is Śruti."¹⁷

While we noted above that there is another type of "revealed" literature, it is not universally taken as Śruti. The term āgama can be translated as "scripture,"¹⁸ and its etymology is similar to that of Śruti, according to T.W. Organ āgama is derived from a word meaning "come down." Āgamic scriptures are frequently as old as the Vedas themselves, but since they are non-Vedic, and not accepted by all groups within Hinduism, they do not universally receive the denomination Śruti. Therefore, non-Vedic scripture is taken as revealed and sacred, yet it

¹⁶ B. Walker, The Hindu World, vol.2, 531.

¹⁷ A.K. Sarkar, DFIT, 95 citing Mahadevan's Foreword to Swami Gambhirananda's Brāhma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya Of Śaṅkarācārya.

¹⁸ V.S. Apte, APTE, 76, col.1.

is taken as an addition to the Śruti, not a replacement,¹⁹ and is associated with the non-Vedic aspects of sectarian Hinduism.²⁰

C. Use of Śruti

The Śruti material, here meaning the Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads, were used by various philosophical systems as proof texts. We do not have space for an exhaustive examination here so a few brief points can be made.

The Mīmāṃsakas "held that the Vedas are eternal and therefore always valid in the life of man."²¹ However, they were transmitted by ṛṣis in the form of words, and humanly transmitted words, unlike Śruti, are fallible. The Mīmāṃsakas were orthodox reformers who sought to revive the Śruti ritual tradition by placing it on a different epistemological foundation. They attempted to support Śruti with rational enquiry. Since their purpose was the explication and justification of ceremonial activities, it is no wonder that they sought to support these texts. In the later Vedānta theology we also find Śruti honored.²² It was, however, supplemented and explicated by the later recorded experiences of sages and saints. Both Śāṅkara and

¹⁹ T.W. Organ, HHD, 124.

²⁰ B. Walker, The Hindu World, vol.1 10.

²¹ T.W. Organ, HHD, 213.

²² S.S. Raghavachar, "Śaiva-Siddhānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita," in ITI, 304.

Madhva revere Śruti as the highest scripture. For Śaṅkara Śruti "is not intended to replace perception and inference; it presents only that knowledge which cannot be attained in any other way."²³ Śruti is also the means by which the individual comes to realise the true nature of Ātman. Madhva, despite other theological differences, agrees. He is, however, more liberal in determining which scriptures are Śruti. He "declares that the Vedas, the Mahābhārata, the Pāñcarātras, the Ramāyāna, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and all other sacred literature that follows them are to be regarded as valid scriptures (sad-āgama). All other texts that run counter to them are to be counted as bad scriptures (dur-āgama), and by following them one cannot know the real nature of God."²⁴ Rāmānuja, the founder of the third major division of Vedānta philosophy, also supported a more liberal definition of Śruti.

Of the other major systems, the Sāṃkhya did not support Śruti as being higher than reason, and the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems were not directly concerned with Śruti as a group of texts, rather their focus was the power of words as regards logic and epistemology.

D. Conclusion

Śruti is "that which was heard," and in application to texts it refers to the word of the divine as revealed to sages. There are several main types of literature which

²³ T.W. Organ, HHD, 245.

²⁴ S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.4, 74-75.

fall into this category and they are taken as the ultimate authority, even over against our perception,²⁵ in most schools of Hindu thought. Even today scholars, theologians, and philosophers cite Śruti as the ultimate authority while the books composed by men have an indirect authority.²⁶

DEMARCATIION BETWEEN ŚRUTI AND SMṚTI

A. Introduction

A.K. Sarkar divides the elements of Indian literature which focus on the transcendent into four types, Śruti, Smṛti, Sūtra and Bhāṣya.²⁷ Of these only the first two are important for our purposes. T.W. Organ²⁸ and M. Banerjee²⁹ delineate two rather than four elements, Śruti and Smṛti. Where M. Banerjee gives us a psychological basis for this distinction, T.W. Organ expands the delineation to include the groups which take one or the other types of texts as normative. We will now look at Smṛti within the Hindu tradition by defining it, and showing the traditional demarcation between it and Śruti

²⁵ S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.3, 390.

²⁶ Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, An Introduction to the Commentary on the Vedas, 161-162.

²⁷ A.K. Sarkar, DFIT, 15-16.

²⁸ T.W. Organ, HHD, 164.

²⁹ M. Banerjee, Invitation to Hinduism, 20-21.

literature. We will follow that with sectarian uses of Smṛti.

B. Definition of Smṛti

The traditional etymology of Smṛti is to take it from the Sanskrit verb smar meaning "to remember."³⁰ In the tradition Smṛti literature is that which was written by the sages from their memory. That the Smṛti has no claim to an independent authority but derives its sanction from its intimate connection with Śruti, is implied by its very name. As a term for a group of texts "Smṛti seems to occur for the first time in the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, though it is said to be used there in the sense of Śruti. In the Sūtras, however, the distinction between Śruti and Smṛti is distinctly stated."³¹ As a classification of texts there are eight groups, Vedāṅgas, Darśanas, Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Upavedas, Tantras, Āgamas, Upāṅgas.³² It is interesting to note that T.W. Organ does not include the Sūtras in this classification.

Each of these eight types are taken to be of less authority than the Śruti material delineated above. Like the Śruti, Smṛti works "are holy and carry great authority with them. They are also divine. But whenever they appear

³⁰ V.S. Apte, APTE, 628 col.3.

³¹ F.M. Müller, HASL, 95-96; L. Renou, NAT HIN, and RAI; M. Banerjee, Invitation to Hinduism, 22.

³² T.W. Organ, HHD, 180.

to be inconsistent with the Śruti, their authority is at once overruled."³³ As Donald H. Bishop writes:

Śruti is the original, primary scripture and authority, whose truths were directly revealed to or intuited by the early seers or ṛsis. They are accepted as sacred, infallible and God-made. Smṛti literature is derivative or takes its authority from the first. They are of human, not divine origin, and were written to explain and elucidate the Śruti and make them understandable and meaningful to the masses.³⁴

C. Demarcation of Śruti and Smṛti Literature

The distinction between Śruti and Smṛti literature is of the most vital importance from the theological, historical and literary points of view. It governs everything else. But while this is so, it must not be forgotten that, Hinduism does not have a single ecclesiastical authority to control the theological uses of the texts. The distinction between Śruti and Smṛti may appear simple, if it is not a Samhitā, a Brāhmaṇa, an Āraṇyaka, or an Upaniṣad then it is Smṛti. However, not all groups adhered to this demarcation. Despite statements to the contrary,³⁵ it appears that there was a tradition of delineating between Śruti and Smṛti at least as far back as before the adoption of Sūtra style in Indian literature.³⁶ However by 300 C.E. there arose a tradition whose

³³ K.S. MacDonald, The Brāhmaṇas of the Vedas, 3.

³⁴ D.H. Bishop, "Prologue" in ITI, 13-14.

³⁵ For example see D.H. Bishop, "Prologue" in ITI, 15.

³⁶ F.M. Müller, HASL, 95; L. Renou, CAI, 102.

opposition was not rejection, as in the case of the Buddhists, Jains, and others. Rather it was an effort to expand the definition of Śruti to include other texts. It was propelled by the followers of Smṛti who did not reject the sacrality of Śruti, but "believed that these writings of original revelation required extension, augmentation, and application."³⁷ As well the social fabric of late Brahmanical era was under great strain. R.C. Hazra states that "the condition of Brahmanism became very unsure."³⁸ Consequently Smārta Brahmins felt it necessary to attempt the re-establishment of Varṇāśramadharma, the authority of the Vedas, and the moral rules among women, Śūdras, and those members of the upper three castes who, being influenced by the faiths other than Brahmanism, disregarded the Vedas and violated the rules of Varṇāśramadharma.³⁹ They frequently did so by incorporating new material into their definition of Śruti.

While the introduction of new material into the Śruti canon seems heterodox, it may have had a precedent in the slow inclusion of the Atharva Veda into the canon.⁴⁰

D. Sectarian Rejection of Vedic Definition

Once Brahmanism declined, the remnants of the pre-Āryan religions, in a changed form, became the prevalent

³⁷ T.W. Organ, HHD, 179-180.

³⁸ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 212.

³⁹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 213.

⁴⁰ T.W. Organ, HHD, 81.

mode of worship. With this eventuality the textual tradition underwent several changes, perhaps the most obvious of which is the insertion in the Śaivite and Śakta traditions of their own, non-Vedic texts as Śruti. In the Śaivite tradition the most used texts are the Āgamas. Within this tradition non-Vedic scripture is taken as revealed and sacred, yet it is taken as an addition to the Śruti, not a replacement. In the Śakta tradition the Tantras "are considered by the Śaktas as scriptures in addition to the universally accepted Śruti."⁴¹

More important for our study of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the fact that the Vaiṣṇavite sects reacted in the same manner. One of the sects of Vaiṣṇavism which was developing at the time was Bhāgavatism. The Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās "are regarded by the Bhāgavatas as superior to the Vedas. In fact they constitute the root while the latter were only the trunk and branches."⁴² P.B. Vidyarthi⁴³ and D.S. Sarma agree.⁴⁴ The purpose of these texts was "to gain knowledge of Vāsudeva, the 'final Truth'"⁴⁵ rather than to sacrifice to Him. For later Vaiṣṇava theologians this was the norm also. "Madhva urges that the ultimate

⁴¹ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 263.

⁴² M. Banerjee, Invitation to Hinduism, 100.

⁴³ P.B. Vidyarthi, EIRT, 164, citing Mahābhārata Śantiparva, 106-107.

⁴⁴ D.S. Sarma, EH, 106.

⁴⁵ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 222.

aim of all Śruti and Smṛti texts is to speak of the superexcellence of Viṣṇu, the supreme Lord."⁴⁶

While early Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were imbued with non-Brahmanical ideas and practices. There was among them, however a group for whom the Vedas were normative. It is undoubtedly to these Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite Smārta Brahmins that the composite character of Purāṇic Hinduism was originally due, and who were also the authors of the present Purāṇas, because these works exhibit, "the sectarian zeal in glorifying the respective deities, and, on the other, try to establish the Varṇāśramadharma and the authority of the Vedas."⁴⁷

E. Conclusion

For much of its history, the Hindu religion has been primarily sectarian. While not neglecting Śruti, it seeks to make other scriptures, frequently peculiar to the several sects, co-equal with the universally accepted Śruti literature. This is true of all sects, and the Bhāgavatas, the group most likely responsible for the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, are no exception. "Since Epic and Purāṇic literature may be of equal age, representing the more popular aspects of religion in ancient India, we have to consider it from the very beginning as complementary to the Vedas."⁴⁸ In the Purāṇas the Vedas are assigned a high position in a number

⁴⁶ S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.4, 78.

⁴⁷ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 203-204.

⁴⁸ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 38.

of ways, but this may be a reaction to the loss of power and status of Brahmins due to the Buddhist and Jain reformation.⁴⁹ The Purāṇas are also assigned a high position, in other literature, but this is not universal. H.N. Chatterjee Sastri cites works in which Purāṇas are listed as both inferior to Śruti, and superior to it.⁵⁰ They are not only supplements to the Vedas,⁵¹ but one of the component parts of the Atharva Veda as well.⁵² In the Purāṇic tradition they are given status as high as the Śruti, and sometimes higher. Hazra tells us of "an early Purāṇic tradition (in which) there was an original Purāṇa which came into existence earlier than even the Vedas."⁵³ Smṛti is thus universally stated to be of a less holy nature than Śruti, but in individual cases they may in fact be elevated higher.

⁴⁹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 239.

⁵⁰ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS. Inferior: 64, Apārarka commentary of the Yajñavalkyasaṁhitā, (1.7); 65, Mitramiśra commentary on the Yajñavalkyasmṛti (II.21) Superior: 65, Vyavahāramukhya of Nīlakantha and the Nirnāyasindhu of Kamalakāra; 5, Chāndogya Upaniṣad VII.2 and 4; 8, Yajñavalkyasmṛti VI.1.83 and 72.

⁵¹ See M. Winternitz, HIL 527-528. Purāṇas were principally intended for the instruction of women and Sūdras, who are not entitled to the study of the Veda.

⁵² M. Winternitz, HIL, 208.

⁵³ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, a.

BEGINNINGS OF THE VAIṢṆAVA SAMPRĀDAYA

A. Introduction

There were two movements in Hinduism. As early as the Rg Veda we find that gods are petitioned with prayer on the one hand and impelled by sacrifice on the other. After the disintegration of Buddhism, Kumāṛila attempted to stabilize society reinforcing the prohibition against allowing Śūdras to sacrifice. They were left to their own devotional cults. Hence the reaction against the Mīmāṃsakas led to the "development of the theistic religions of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śaktism, which laid little stress on considerations of caste, race or social status."⁵⁴ Since the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a Vaiṣṇava document, we must now turn to a brief history of this sect. "The origin of Vaiṣṇavism as a theistic sect can by no means be traced back to the Ṛgvedic god Viṣṇu. In fact Vaiṣṇavism is in no sense Vedic in origin."⁵⁵ R.N. Dandekar states that there were two pre-Vedic non-Āryan cults in ancient India. One, the muni-yati cult with its notions of yoga, tapas and saṁnyāsa, developed into Śaivism, and later influenced Buddhism and Jainism, while the other cult of bhakti developed into religions of devotion to a personal divinity, of which Vaiṣṇavism is one. R.N. Dandekar is also of the opinion that while the Vedic religion

⁵⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 661.

⁵⁵ R.N. Dandekar, IH, 202.

selectively absorbed many elements of the indigenous religions, it did so in an effort to suppress these cults and Viṣṇu is only one example.⁵⁶ This is perhaps too severe a statement. It does seem that the Vedic religion selectively absorbed many "Dravidian" elements, however it also appears that the Āryans and indigenous peoples intermarried at an early date. These two facts lead us to believe that the selective absorption was due to a normal cross-generational theological vitality rather than a Vedic conspiracy. Given that the Vedic orientation was to the Āryan warrior class, and was existential in tenor it is hardly surprising that aboriginal notions, if adopted, would take on this flair. Thus we see a Vedic Viṣṇu who little resembles the sectarian deity due to his "original" Vedic role and his aboriginal role outside the textual tradition. Other scholars disagree with both suggestions. For example P. Bannerjee and H.C. Raychaudhuri suggest that while Viṣṇu itself is a Vedic deity, the cult-god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was originally the leader and hero of the Yādava tribe.⁵⁷ The success of the Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa cult is due to its identification as the "same Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa of the Brahmanic theology"⁵⁸. Most scholars agree, however, that when the authority of the Vedism began to decline, about the end of the period of the major Upaniṣads (eighth to

⁵⁶ R.N. Dandekar, IH, 205.

⁵⁷ See P. Bannerjee, EIR, 60; H.C. Raychaudhuri, EHVS.

⁵⁸ P. Bannerjee, EIR, 60.

sixth centuries B.C.E), the non-Vedic cults began to ascend. Some developed into the heterodox sects, some into facets of what we now call Hinduism.

There are several fairly clear elements into which we can divide the history of Vaiṣṇavism. First the Vedic nature, R.N. Dandekar's opposition notwithstanding, Vāsudevism, the Pāñcarātra cult and finally Kṛṣṇaism.

B. Vedism

Viṣṇu was a Vedic deity, yet we must not forget the sectarianism of the Āryan clans, and the cults of the pre-Āryans. R.C. Majumdar reminds us that the germ of Viṣṇu's later greatness is traceable even in the Rg Veda and in the later Vedic period he is regarded as the greatest god by at least one section of the people.⁵⁹ While to give Viṣṇu too great an influence in the Vedic period is to ignore that he is not the focus of many of the hymns, to deny him the position of a great god in all strata of Indian society would be to forget that the comparative prominence of the gods of all classes is not necessarily represented in the Samhitās given their Brahmanic Āryan sacrificial emphasis.⁶⁰

It appears, although the statement is disputed by some, that Viṣṇu was a solar deity in the Vedas. R.C.

⁵⁹ HCIP, vol. 2, 431; D.C. Sircar, SRMI, 7-9. Sircar cites Rgveda I.156.2-3, and VII.100.5.

⁶⁰ A.B. Keith, The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads, 109.

Majumdar⁶¹ and D.C. Sircar⁶² both assert that Viṣṇu was a sun god in earlier Vedic times and the greatest god in a later Vedic period. R.N. Dandekar calls Viṣṇu a fertility-god conceived in bird-form, who, in the process of his upgrading, was artificially associated with Indra and then came to be regarded as a solar divinity, his original bird-form having facilitated the transition from the fertility-bird to the sun-bird and then to the solar divinity.⁶³ J. Basu is even more specific when he explains that Viṣṇu was a manifestation of Sūrya, the sun. The sun at its zenith is called Viṣṇu in the Rg Veda. This natural phenomenon gave rise to the mythology of the Purāṇa which describes Vāmana, the dwarf as an incarnation of the Supreme god Viṣṇu. The rising, travel, and setting of the sun are interpreted to be the three steps of Viṣṇu as Vāmana.⁶⁴ This opinion is not unanimous, however. L. Renou states that the solar theme is unconvincing,⁶⁵ and P.B. Vidyarthi⁶⁶ agrees. It does appear that this may be an indigenous tradition "selectively absorbed" by the Āryans. As well, Viṣṇu appears as creator. The three steps of the Vāmana avatāra are a form of ordering chaos, and while the

⁶¹ HCIP, vol.2, 433.

⁶² D.C. Sircar, SRMI, 4-5

⁶³ R.N. Dandekar, SAHH, 96.

⁶⁴ J. Basu, India of the Age of the Brāhmaṇas, 191.

⁶⁵ L. Renou, RAI, 60.

⁶⁶ P.B. Vidyarthi, EIRT, 96.

Vedic Viṣṇu could not be taken as the Universal Creator, nevertheless he is a form of the Creator to whom the task of division of the universe has fallen.

In spite of his relatively subordinate position in the Samhitās, Viṣṇu began to rise in prominence in the time of the Brāhmaṇas while during the time of the Epics and Purāṇas he rose to the rank of the Supreme. He moves from a powerful yet not necessarily supreme deity (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.2.5), to that sustainer of the universe (Maitrī Upaniṣad VI.13), the highest of gods (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XIV.1.1; and Aitareya Brāhmaṇa I.1) and the goal of the journey of the human soul (Katha Upaniṣad VI.13).

At all events we see that Viṣṇu was present, yet of minor significance, in the Vedas. Probably he was a non-Vedic deity given improved stature, as T.J. Hopkins asserts.⁶⁷ Ultimately Viṣṇu's importance to the later tradition came with the conjunction of the popular god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and a second Brahmanical deity, Nārāyaṇa.

C. Vāsudevism

The origins of what we today call Vaiṣṇavism appears in the Vāsudeva cult. This cult seems to have been established in Pāṇini's time (sixth to fifth centuries B.C.E.) as he gives the etymology of vāsudevaka.⁶⁸ Most scholars tend to agree that Vāsudeva was a deified Vṛṣṇi

⁶⁷ T.J. Hopkins, The Religions of India, 89. See also HCIP, vol.2, 435.

⁶⁸ R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRs, 3; J. Gonda, AEV, 160.

hero.⁶⁹ Little is known of this religion, other than that Megasthenes is thought to be referring to this cult when he speaks of the people of Mathura as worshipping Herakles. In the Bhagavad Gītā it is stated that "Vāsudeva is all,"⁷⁰ although it is unclear whether this refers to Vāsudeva as a discrete entity, or as a synonym for Kṛṣṇa.⁷¹ It appears that Vāsudeva is the antecedent in that Kṛṣṇa declares himself to be Vāsudeva. It also appears that Balarāma and Arjuna were deities in their own right, but were later absorbed into Vāsudevism.

It is evident that Vāsudevism came to fulfill Vedic law, rather than to supercede it. It was due to its conservative nature, that it gradually made its way into Hindu society in general, though it did not succeed in uprooting the religion of sacrifices. The reforms which it proposed had no reference to specific historical personages and was promulgated by certain sages who were called Citrasikhandins and whose names had been handed down by tradition. A late account connects the reform with Vāsudeva and his brother, son and grandson, and the new religion is represented to have been identical with that taught in the Bhagavad Gītā. This reformed system is said

⁶⁹ See R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRS, 30; L. Renou, Hinduism, 48; J. Gonda, SAHH 33; P. Bannerjee, EIR 67.

⁷⁰ Bhagavadgītā, cited in S. Radhakrishnan and C.A. Moore, A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, 7.19.

⁷¹ See also Bhagavadgītā, 10.37 where Kṛṣṇa declares that he is Vāsudeva of the Vṛṣṇis.

to have been promulgated by Nārāyaṇa himself. Still it always retained its character as a religion for women and for all castes and in its later development it was associated with such Vedic rites as then remained when it was professed by the Brahmins, but not so associated when its followers were of lower castes, among whom it continued to exercise great influence. This association with both Brahmins, and Śūdras/women has ramifications for the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

D. Pāñcarātraism

This is arguably the most important sect of early Vaiṣṇavism. As L. Renou states, Pāñcarātrins "became at an early period the guardians of the real canon of Viṣṇuism."⁷² Even so, the etymology of the term is unclear. Literally pāñcarātra means "five nights," but whether this is to be used as an adjective referring to a deity, a noun, or in reference merely to five nights sacrifice at the initiation of devotees is unclear. It may be a corruption of pāñcaratha, five vehicles, and it may even refer to the tradition of mendicants spending five nights in the forest for every night spent in a town. S. Jaiswal goes so far as to propose that it involves human sacrifice at these initiations.⁷³ The later Pāñcarātra

⁷² L. Renou, NAT HIN, 116.

⁷³ S. Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism, 44.

texts offer no acceptable etymology.⁷⁴ It does appear, however, that it is possible to break this sect into five major influences which could indicate the syncretism of five monotheism traditions.

The first of these was the worship of an Indo-European deity, Bhaga. He is mentioned in the Rg Veda but his function is indistinct. Linguistically he is descended from the root bhaji "to apportion, distribute,"⁷⁵ and is therefore related to Bhāgavat, and bhakti. The term Bhāgavat came to mean one who graciously disposes of wealth, and Bhaga was fused with Viṣṇu.

The second of the five paths is the religion known as Ekantika. According to T.W. Organ, Ekantika was an ancient, anti-Vedic monotheism, whose deity was a god of youth. His worshippers were known as Kṛṣṇas (blacks) and they were religiously conservative. Therefore their absorption into Brahmanism presented no threat. The fact that the term for these practitioners is the same as a deity absorbed later is one we cannot help but notice.

A third group worshipped Viṣṇu through ascetic practices and renunciation of the world. This is the form of the muni-yati cult suggested by R.N. Dandekar, which became absorbed into Vaiṣṇavism, rather than Śaivism or Śaktism.

⁷⁴ For a good analysis of the term Pāñcarātra, see "The Name Pāñcarātra," in J.A.B. van Buitenen, SILP, 191-200.

⁷⁵ APTE, 398, col.3.

The fourth group appears to have been a non-Āryan people who specialized in sorcery and "Tantric" practices. It is interesting to note that one of their initiation rituals included the branding of an initiate, a practice continued in the later Pāñcarātra sect as one of the five initiatory rites.

The fifth monotheistic religion of the Pāñcarātra was known as Nārāyaniya. Not only was the ṛṣi associated with the Puruṣa sūkta named Nārāyana, but the duality of Nāra and Nārāyana, embodied as Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, is important to the tradition. The Nāra-Nārāyana cult seems to have originated in the Hindu Kush independently of Vedic tradition, which explains why it appears in so late a hymn as the Puruṣa sūkta.

The idea of Nārāyana as the resting place of the gods developed in the period of the later Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas.⁷⁶ Later he is associated with cosmic creation as the deity who lives on a serpent floating in a sea of milk, and in the Mahābhārata and Purāṇas he is conceived of as the Supreme, yet always with overtones of the creation. Nārāyana being thus evolved as the Supreme Being in the later Brahmanic period, was, of course, prior to Vāsudeva,⁷⁷ yet Nārāyana is taken to be an epithet of Viṣṇu/Vāsudeva. This is so simply because the human hero/

⁷⁶ R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRS, 31; J. Gonda, AEV, 15, 120, 171.

⁷⁷ R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRS, 32; J. Gonda, AEV, 161.

religious reformer Vāsudeva of the Vṛṣṇi tribe was later identified with the already supreme Nārāyaṇa.

These five religions have enough in common for them to have gradually merged. They appear to have been associated with sun worship, to be monotheistic worship of a benevolent deity, and to have condemned the Vedic sacrifices. While we can see glimpses of these traditions remaining within contemporary Vaiṣṇavism, it is evident that what was needed for a more complete merger was a common mythic thread. This was provided in the form of Kṛṣṇa.

E. Kṛṣṇaism

Kṛṣṇa was the, probably non-Āryan and certainly non-Vedic, deified tribal hero and religious leader of the Yādavas. It appears that there was a tradition about Kṛṣṇa as a sage from the time of the R̥gvedic hymns to the time of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. "This tradition gave rise to the identification of the sage Kṛṣṇa with Vāsudeva, when he was raised to the rank of the supreme deity."⁷⁸ At all events, Kṛṣṇa was the focus of the Yādava religion, and when the Vṛṣṇis and Yādavas came closer together, perhaps due to political pressure, they became fused into the composite Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, probably as early as the fourth century B.C.E. A third current was added in the following centuries when the nomadic Abhiras introduced the gopala

⁷⁸ R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRS, 9-10; J. Gonda, AEV, 154-164.

(cowherd) aspect to Kṛṣṇaism. The devotion of Gopala-Kṛṣṇa seems to have been a religious sublimation of sensuous love, as is evidenced by Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the gopis. It is the amalgamation of these three streams, Vāsudevaism, Kṛṣṇaism, and Gopalaism, which we can call composite Kṛṣṇaism. This is the final current in what we now call Vaiṣṇavism.

F. Synthesis

We see, then, that Vaiṣṇavism is a composite religion drawing from several disparate streams. It began as a non-Āryan religion and was absorbed into Vedism probably through intermarriage Āryans and Dravidians. As it developed we see that there are two main traceable influences, the Pāñcarātras, and the Bhāgavatas. They can be distinguished in that the former worshipped Viṣṇu/Nārāyana, and the latter Bhāgavan Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. The Pāñcarātrins were influenced more by Tantricism, while the Bhāgavatas were more Brahmanical in nature. Finally the Pāñcarātrins accepted the Vyūha doctrine, while Bhāgavatas accept the notion of avtāras. Both were monotheistic devotional (bhakti) religions.

There were differences, however. S. Jaiswal proposes, and argues somewhat convincingly, for the controversial notion that the original meaning for Pāñcarātra is based on the motif of human sacrifice used to worship Nārāyana and that the essential difference between Bhāgavatas and Pāñcarātrins seems to lie in the fact that

whereas the Bhāgavata devotees of Nārāyaṇa had accepted the Brahmanical social order, the Pāñcarātras were indifferent to and were perhaps against it. As was mentioned the Pāñcarātras had "prominent Tantric leanings and Tantricism, on the whole, was more popular with the lower classes. Bhāgavatism, on the other hand, gained support of the ruling classes and championed the varṇa system."⁷⁹ In fact the Pāñcarātras showed no respect to the varṇa rules, and their initiation was open to all with no distinctions of caste and sex. It is only gradually that varṇa distinctions "creep in into the Pāñcarātra rituals, more and more corresponding to the lateness of the texts in which they are described."⁸⁰ We see here the differences between the Āryan influenced Bhāgavata and the non-Āryan influenced Pāñcarātra cults.

Vaiṣṇavism continued theologically unchanged until the end of the first millennium of the Common Era. "From the fourth to the eleventh century Vaiṣṇavism is basically Bhāgavata faith with the inclusion of the notion of avatāras. Earlier Pāñcarātra doctrines had become so ingrained within the Bhāgavata faith that it is hard to separate them."⁸¹ The form of expression of these doctrines, however, underwent transformation from temple

⁷⁹ S. Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism, 44.

⁸⁰ S. Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism, 45.

⁸¹ R.G. Bhandarkar, VSRS, 43; J. Gonda, AEV, 174.

inscriptions, to Purāṇic material, to the hymns of the Tamil Ālvārs. The spread of Śāṅkarite monism in the eighth century C.E. was considered destructive to the bhakti which Vaiṣṇavism enjoined, and the feeling of hostility to spiritual monism gathered to a head in the eleventh century when Rāmānuja made strenuous endeavors to put it down and spread the religion of bhakti in a reinvigorated form. Thus we see a change in direction from the origins of the Vaiṣṇava deities in the north to this new form receiving its main impetus from South India in the form of Ālvārs and the Śrivaishṇava movement, a natural continuation of the Pāñcarātra.⁸²

HISTORY OF PURĀṆAS IN GENERAL

A. Introduction

It has been common practice when studying Purāṇas to state that they are an undervalued aspect of Indian literature. Today this is not entirely true. While, as L. Rocher⁸³ points out, Purāṇas have not been ignored by scholars of late, they are still studied less than other forms of Sanskrit literature despite the formation of a journal devoted to their study and the recent move toward the printing of critical editions and concordances. This despite the fact that the Purāṇas are the Bible of the

⁸² L. Renou, NAT HIN, 117.

⁸³ L. Rocher, PURA, 4-5.

common folk, both literate and illiterate.⁸⁴ Even more concisely S.K. Chatterji writes "the Vedas are studied by the antiquarian, the Upaniṣads by the philosopher; but every orthodox Hindu must have some knowledge of the Purāṇas."⁸⁵ Purāṇas, then, pervade every facet of Indian life. They are the heart of Hinduism.

B. Etymology

It appears that the term "Purāṇa" is related to the indeclinable pura, meaning "in former times."⁸⁶ It means "old narrative,"⁸⁷ and was used in connection with Itihāsa in the oldest texts.⁸⁸ It appears to be related to the terms ākhyāna, ghat, narasaṃsi, and others meaning old story. R.C. Hazra links the original Purāṇa material with the Purāṇas (as ancient stories, not the class of literature) ākhyanas, upākhyānas and gathas used in Vedic sacrifice. The material was used by Brahmin priests and was added to by them.⁸⁹ S.N. Roy suggests that before gaining in size and assuming the form of a distinct work the name Purāṇa was nothing more than a synonym for

⁸⁴ J.N. Farquhar, ORLI, 136.

⁸⁵ S.K. Chatterji, "The Purāṇas" in Purāṇa 1, 1959-60, 15, cited in L. Rocher, PURA, 13 n.25.

⁸⁶ V.S. Apte, APTE, 341, col.3.

⁸⁷ M. Winternitz, HIL, vol. 1, 518.

⁸⁸ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 1. Citing Vāyu Purāṇa 1.203, Matsya Purāṇa 53, 63 and Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1.22.

⁸⁹ R.C. Hazra, in CHI, vol.2, 242-243.

ākhyāna.⁹⁰ It is important to note here the overlap between these types of literature. T.B. Coburn, in citing P.V. Kane, suggests that this overlap was natural in the social group from which the Purāṇas came, and by definition Purāṇa was one of these types of literature which dealt with, among other things, the pañcalakṣaṇa.⁹¹ It was the association of "folktales" with Vedic philosophic notions which legitimated a form which may have been in existence anterior to the Vedas themselves.

C. Ur-Purāṇa

At some point in Western Purāṇic scholarship the existence of an original Purāṇa from which all others are derived was proposed. Perhaps H.H. Wilson was the first to notice the parallel passages in the Purāṇas and he suggested that there was an earlier class of Purāṇas from which our extant versions have descended.⁹² Other scholars such as A.A. MacDonell, A.B. Keith, and A.M.T. Jackson, continued this notion. As L. Rocher points out, it was F.E. Pargiter and W. Kirfel who solidified this notion within Purāṇic scholarship.

Not all scholars agreed with this position, however. M. Winternitz suggests that in the old texts the term Purāṇa never denotes one original text, rather a class of

⁹⁰ S.N. Roy, HCSP, 7.

⁹¹ T.B. Coburn, DM, 23 n.64.

⁹² H.H. Wilson, PREF, iv.

literature.⁹³ R.C. Hazra also doubts "whether there was really an original Purāṇa of such an early date from which the present ones were derived."⁹⁴ M.A. Mehendale takes a compromise position, which may prove to be the more correct. He states that it is more reasonable to surmise that "several Purāṇa texts existed before the Christian era which, revised and modified in later times, gave rise to the modern texts."⁹⁵

While the Western scholar's concept of an original Purāṇa is based on certain presuppositions of philology, in the Indian tradition itself there is a notion of an Ur-Purāṇa. In the most recent of the Vedas the term "Purāṇa" appears in the singular.⁹⁶ As T.H. Dayal points out, however, this may be a designation of Purāṇa Samhitā.⁹⁷ R.C. Hazra tells us that "according to an early Purāṇic tradition, there was an original Purāṇa which came into existence earlier than even the Vedas."⁹⁸ In various Purāṇas it is said to have sprung from one author, Romaharṣana, as one text.⁹⁹ Both the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and

⁹³ M. Winternitz, HIL, 522.

⁹⁴ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, a.

⁹⁵ M.A. Mehendale, in HCIP, vol.3, 297.

⁹⁶ Atharva Veda, 11.7.24, and 15.6.4.

⁹⁷ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 2.

⁹⁸ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, a.

⁹⁹ V[^], 3.16.15ff, Agni Purāṇa, 271.11ff, Vāyu Purāṇa, 61.55ff, and Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa, 2.35.63ff.

the Matsya Purāṇa have similar but differing accounts of this story. Despite the presence in the tradition as well as in the scholarship, the possibility of existence of a single original Purāṇa Saṁhitā is ruled out in the same way as the existence of a single Veda Saṁhitā or Brāhmaṇa Saṁhitā.¹⁰⁰

D. Contents

1. Pañcalakṣaṇa

While pañcalakṣaṇa is described in some Purāṇas the definition of Purāṇa ultimately returns to Amarakośa (Amara Simha, fourth century B.C.E.) who defined Purāṇas as having five characteristics. They are Universal creation; creation and renovation of worlds; genealogy of gods and heroes; chronology; and history of kings.¹⁰¹ Perhaps the definitive modern study on the subject is by W. Kirfel.¹⁰² While we have no manuscripts from the early periods and cannot verify how closely the ancient Purāṇas conformed to this definition, we see that today they do not. As T.H. Dayal states "none of the present Purāṇas is totally in agreement with this definition because some Purāṇas preserve much more than these while others passingly touch these and deal with other topics."¹⁰³ Certain Purāṇas rework the definition and assign pañcalakṣaṇa to the

¹⁰⁰ A.D. Pusalker, Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas, 30.

¹⁰¹ H.H. Wilson, PREF, iv-v, and v n.9.

¹⁰² W. Kirfel, Das Purāṇa-pañcalakṣaṇa.

¹⁰³ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 2-3.

"secondary" UpaPurāṇas while giving MahāPurāṇas a daśalakṣaṇa, ten characteristics. Both the pañca- and daśalakṣaṇa are debated by scholars. Some see in the latter a Pāñcarātra influence, while others attribute it to mere historical expansion. Relative dating based on conformity to the pañcalakṣaṇa categorization is also debated.

2. Number of Purāṇas

H.H. Wilson¹⁰⁴ and M. Winternitz¹⁰⁵ both state, that the list of eighteen Purāṇas in the eighteen MahāPurāṇas, containing as it does the names of all eighteen including the text being studied, means that none have come down to us in their original form. The existence of this list, despite the fact that H.H. Wilson's and M. Winternitz' are different, is important for Purāṇic scholarship. The earliest catalogue extant is from al-Beruni in the eleventh century C.E. It enumerates eighteen Purāṇas and is agreed with in most of the extant texts. This list is fluid to a certain extent in that placement within it, as well as the inclusion of several texts varies from manuscript to manuscript. However, even when the titles and their placement vary, the number eighteen is adhered to. As well as the eighteen MahāPurāṇas, there are also numerous other Purāṇas, called UpaPurāṇas (Secondary). L. Rocher states that R.C. Hazra had compiled thirty-three different lists

¹⁰⁴ H.H. Wilson, PREF, xiii-xvi.

¹⁰⁵ M. Winternitz, HIL, 466-467.

of these UpaPurāṇas, which demonstrates that their delineation is somewhat more fluid than the fairly standardized MahāPurāṇas.

3. Dating

Very nearly as soon as Western scholars began studying the Purāṇas the question of date arose. In reading lists of dates we see that there is little agreement. In fact the disagreements can range as much as 1000 years. Even so scholars continue to date whole texts while at the same time referring to their composite nature. In the case of the Purāṇas giving more than a general date is of little consequence since the various sections will be of different ages. T.H. Dayal declares "the problem of the fixing of the date of any Purāṇa (as a whole) is a very difficult task,"¹⁰⁶ and L. Rocher states that it is impossible.¹⁰⁷ Even so, the date, albeit an arguable one, places a text within a historical framework.

E. Purāṇas and Indian Literature

1. Vedas

A significant portion of Purāṇa scholarship is based on the relationship of the Purāṇas and the Vedas. Some scholars deny any connection between the two. Others see the Purāṇas as paying lip-service to the Vedas while proposing non-Vedic doctrines. Still others see Purāṇas as a continuation of the Vedic tradition in another form.

¹⁰⁶ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 20-21.

¹⁰⁷ L. Rocher, PURA, 103.

T.H. Dayal, for example states that the Purāṇas hold, and held, a significant position in the tradition being equal in sanctity to the Vedas.¹⁰⁸ M. Winternitz demonstrates that "in the later Vedic texts Itihāsa and Purāṇa are very frequently enumerated beside the Vedas and other branches of learning."¹⁰⁹ He and others mention that in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad¹¹⁰ ItihāsaPurāṇa is called the fifth Veda. It states that "the magic songs of the Atharva Veda stand in the same relationship to the ItihāsaPurāṇa as the hymns (ṛc) to the Rg Veda, the prayer formulae (yajus) to the Yajur Veda, and the melodies (sāman) to the Sāma Veda."¹¹¹ R.C. Hazra states that in other works such as Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and Saṅkhyāyana Śrautasūtra the Purāṇa is also called the fifth Veda,¹¹² while the Kautilya Ārthaśāstra states that the Atharva Veda, the Itihāsa, and the trayi form the Vedas.¹¹³ R.C. Hazra also finds evidence in the Brahmanical literature that the Purāṇa has an origin as sacred as the Vedas.¹¹⁴ According to the orthodox tradition recorded in the Atharva Veda and Bṛhadāraṇyaka

¹⁰⁸ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 1.

¹⁰⁹ M. Winternitz, HIL, 313.

¹¹⁰ M. Winternitz, HIL, 313, cites VII.1, and 7, while H.N. Chatterjee, Sastri, SPS, 5 cites VII.2, and 4.

¹¹¹ M. Winternitz, HIL, 313 n.2, citing Chāndogya Upaniṣad III.3, 4.

¹¹² R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 1.

¹¹³ M. Winternitz, HIL, 313, n.2.

¹¹⁴ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 1.

Upaniṣad the Purāṇas are of divine origin.¹¹⁵ Not all writings accepted this status, for H.N. Chatterjee Sastri cites the Apārarka commentary on the Yajñavalkya Saṁhitā (1.7) as specifically listing the Purāṇas as inferior to the Vedas.¹¹⁶

In the Itihāsa literature itself ItihāsaPurāṇa are declared to be supplements to the Vedas,¹¹⁷ and some Purāṇas even claim status of the Veda. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa (1.4.19-22) declares that Purāṇas are the fifth Veda and that it is superior to the other four since it alone emanated from the four mouths of Brahma combined. The Vāyu Purāṇa (1.18.a,b) and the Matsya Purāṇa (274-289) even use the term "Purāṇaveda." Thus we see that, despite a lack of unanimity, Purāṇas were given a high place in Sanskrit Literature, from both within the Purāṇic and from the Vedic traditions.

2. Epics and Smṛtis

In many ways the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata can be considered Purāṇas. They deal with much of the same material, they have been transmitted orally, and they have played the same role in the religious and moral education of Hindus. In particular the Harivaṁśa is both a supplement to the Mahābhārata and a Purāṇa in its own

¹¹⁵ M.A. Mehendale, in HCIP, vol.3, 296-297.

¹¹⁶ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 64.

¹¹⁷ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 1, citing Mahābhārata Adiparvan I.267-89.

right. There is also the term ItihāsaPurāṇa. Technically "itihāsa" means Epic story and is only applicable to the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana. H.N. Chatterjee Sastri notes that the Purāṇas and Itihāsa are closely related even in the Atharva Veda, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, and the Āpastambha Dharma-sūtra.¹¹⁸ In fact "it may well be that there was no essential difference at all"¹¹⁹ between Itihāsa and Purāṇa. However, a scholar as eminent as A.D. Pusalker proposes that they merely meant the same as atita, ākhyāna, kāṭha, narasaṃsi, and so on, "ancient tale, narrative," up until the time of the Atharva Veda.

As well as being related to the Epics, Purāṇas are related to the Dharmaśāstras. From the time of the early Dharmasūtras Purāṇas are referred to along with the Vedas, the Vedāṅgas, and the Upavedas as the sources of dharma.¹²⁰ Indeed there are long sections in some of the Purāṇas which correspond to sections in various Dharmaśāstras. They are also cited as proof texts not only in Smṛtis, but in commentaries and nibandhas as well. In the Gautama Dharmasūtra (XI, 19), which is regarded by some scholars as the oldest of the preserved law-books (and therefore it is also found in the law books of Bṛhaspati and Yajñavalkya), it is taught that the king is to take as his authorities on

¹¹⁸ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 5.

¹¹⁹ L. Rocher, PURA, 81.

¹²⁰ L. Rocher, PURA, 85.

the administration of justice, the Veda, the law-books, the Vedāṅgas, and the Purāṇa.¹²¹ They were not venerated in all the texts, however, as H.N. Chatterjee Sastri cites works in which the Purāṇas are listed as inferior to the Smṛtis.¹²² Many scholars argue that the Purāṇa sections on dharma are copied from Smṛti texts, but O. Prakash argues the opposite.¹²³ Cross-fertilization appears to be a more accurate description of this relationship. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa does deal with Dharmaśāstra material, but it modifies it to suit its needs. In V 3.8 it softens the proscriptions of Manu regarding sacrifice in X.109, 110, 111 to allow Śūdras to sacrifice through Brahmins. This could then influence later Dharmaśāstrikas. This is only one example of this interaction of the two literary forms.

F. Purāṇic Textual Tradition

1. Overview

While there is uncertainty as to the existence of an Ur-Purāṇa, few scholars believe that the Purāṇas have

¹²¹ M. Winternitz, HIL, 519, SPS, 64.

¹²² H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 64-5. Citing the Vyavahāramukhya (pp.97-98) of Nīlakaṇṭha and the Nirnāyasindhu of Kamalakāra. The Mitrāmīśra commentary on the Yajñavalkyasmṛti (II.21) argues for just the opposite.

¹²³ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 38 n.26. "This is also the opinion expressed by Om Prakash in Political Ideas in the Purāṇas (Allahabad: Panchanda Publications 1977), who furthermore maintains that it was not the Purāṇas who took over passages from the Smṛtis but that the Purāṇa sections dealing with dharma, representing the consensus of the people at large, were incorporated by the Śāstrakāras into their own codes."

remained unchanged throughout their history. As C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar states, Purāṇas are a combination of the very young and the very old.¹²⁴ T.H. Dayal¹²⁵ gives six stages in the development of the Purāṇas: 1) the pre-Atharva Veda period, where Purāṇas were allied with Itihāsa; 2) the post-Bharata war; 3) Upaniṣadic age, when the chapters on cosmogony, Saṃkhya and Upaniṣadic philosophy were incorporated; 4) the sūtra period, where the term "Purāṇa" came to mean a separate class of books; 5) the Smṛti period, where Smṛti and Dharmaśāstra material was added; 6) the encyclopedic period, where individual texts were elaborated upon in no certain manner by all and sundry.

It may be suggested that while the Vedas maintained their integrity despite their oral nature, Purāṇas have an encyclopedic nature of constant change and floatingness¹²⁶ due to that very oral nature. S.N. Roy states that the use of the word smāryante in Kumārila's Tantravārttika "indicates that the old tradition which had its emphasis on memorising the Purāṇas continued even in the age when these texts had already been committed to writing."¹²⁷ The difference between Śruti and Purāṇa literature is that Śruti was memorized carefully using such mnemonic devices

¹²⁴ C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Religion, Man and Society, 15.

¹²⁵ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 2.

¹²⁶ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 3.

¹²⁷ S.N. Roy, HCSP, 36-37.

as ghana and jata, whereas Purāṇa, and Itihāsa, material was not memorised with textual fidelity but poetic licence was allowed to its reciters.¹²⁸

Perhaps one of the reasons why the orally transmitted Purāṇas should have been given such freedom of transmission was that they may have been non-Āryan. R.C. Hazra suggests that they were pre-Vedic,¹²⁹ and M.A. Mehendale, in agreeing with F.E. Pargiter states that they probably first consisted of ancient court stories and ballads in Prakrit.¹³⁰ A. Danielou states that the Sanskrit Purāṇas are translations of the Dravidian folk originals.¹³¹ Given this origin, it is understandable that they would be sectarian in their later development.

As we have noted the pañcalakṣaṇa definition of Purāṇas occupies only an insignificant part of the extant Purāṇa. Thus T.H. Dayal writes "it is obvious that religious instruction was not one of their primary aims, nor were they originally written for the propagation of sectarian ideas."¹³² This is not the general opinion, however. L. Renou states that the Purāṇas are "specifically religious texts,"¹³³ and T.J. Hopkins argues

¹²⁸ C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Religion, Man and Society, 14-15.

¹²⁹ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, a.

¹³⁰ M.A. Mehendale, in HCIP, vol.3, 296 n.1.

¹³¹ A. Danielou, Hindu Polytheism, 189.

¹³² T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 1.

¹³³ L. Renou, RAI, 49.

that the Purāṇas "were taken over by theistic groups and were transformed even more than the epics by the addition of new material."¹³⁴ The sectarian treatments of various myths are probably more recent than non-sectarian treatments of the same myths, but this relative dating does not necessarily apply to the whole text, rather only the particular section in which the myth appears. H.H. Wilson notes in the text of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that one myth is a good example of a sectarian graft onto an older myth.¹³⁵ Sectarianism, however, does not mean exclusivism given the Hindu henotheistic context.

2. Traditional Origin of Purāṇas

The orthodox Hindu tradition ascribes both a divine and human origin to Purāṇas. In the R̥g Veda the word "Purāṇa" appears only as an adjective,¹³⁶ and it appears in the singular in a sacrificial context in the Atharva Veda (11.7.24), as well as in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (13.4.3.13), where it refers to the Purāṇa as equal to the Veda.¹³⁷ In the same context of maintaining parity with the Vedas it appears in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2.4.10), and Chāndogya Upaniṣad (7.1.2). According to the orthodox tradition recorded in the Atharva Veda and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad the Purāṇas are of divine origin. Even in the

¹³⁴ T.J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, 95.

¹³⁵ H.H. Wilson, VP, 208.

¹³⁶ T.B. Coburn, DM, 24.

¹³⁷ T.B. Coburn, DM, 24.

Purāṇa texts the chief speaker is represented to have gathered his information through Vyāsa from the Creator himself.¹³⁸ Early suggestions of the Purāṇa's divine origin is made more explicit in the texts themselves. With some variation in detail they claim that originally the Purāṇa was one and it emanated from the fifth mouth of Brahma.¹³⁹ The original divine Purāṇa still exists in the world of the gods, and is transmitted by Vyāsa to mortals according to their capabilities in the various ages. The Purāṇas are unanimous in declaring that neither Vyāsa nor the sūta Lomahaṛṣana were the author of the Purāṇas, rather mere compiler and transmitter respectively,¹⁴⁰ and according to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (1.5), Nārada, regarded by the Bhāgavatas as one of the great teachers of their religion,¹⁴¹ is given the original four stanzas of this Purāṇa from God. He then imparts them to Vyāsa.¹⁴² In this context we may also refer to Mahābhārata (I.1.105-106) which mentions a composition by Vyāsa of six million stanzas, portions of which are sung by gods, manes, gandharbas and humans.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ M.A. Mehendale, in HCIP, vol.3, 296-297.

¹³⁹ T.B. Coburn, DM, 25, cites 13 references in ten Puranas.

¹⁴⁰ R.C. Hazra, in CHI, vol.2, 242.

¹⁴¹ J. Gonda, MRLS, 13.

¹⁴² J. Gonda, MRLS, 14.

¹⁴³ P.L. Vaidya, in CHI, vol.2, 60.

Further, the divinity of the Purāṇas is enhanced by asserting the divinity of Vyāsa as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and also of Brahma and Śiva,¹⁴⁴ and this is carried out in many Purāṇas. P.L. Vaidya states that also within the Mahābhārata there is an acceptance of Vyāsa as Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, a secondary incarnation of Viṣṇu, who is the son of Parāśara.¹⁴⁵

The tradition of the human origin of the Purāṇas also draws on early material. Despite the appearance in the singular of the term "Purāṇa," it also appears in the plural indicating the existence of separate classes of works.¹⁴⁶ The usage of the singular may mean the same if a single divine work is not implicit. Vyāsa also appears in connection with this tradition. If he is not seen as an editor of a single divine Purāṇa, but, as his name implies, the "Arranger" of already existing material then we must see Purāṇas as having a human origin. In this context we can refer to the Vedas.

It is important to note here that while the two traditions are formally distinguishable and a case can be put for either side, in the Indian tradition "no effort is made in the texts themselves to establish one as logically

¹⁴⁴ T.B. Coburn, DM, 26.

¹⁴⁵ P.L. Vaidya, in CHI, vol.2, 59.

¹⁴⁶ T.B. Coburn, DM, 26, citing Yajñavalkya Smṛti (3.189), Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (2.9), Manu Smṛti (3.232).

superior."¹⁴⁷ In typical Indian fashion it is either depending upon which is important for your needs at the moment, while at all times remembering that it is both.

3. Traditional Author

a. Vyāsa

Vyāsa was also important to the whole Hindu tradition as well as the Purāṇic. For example there is an UpaPurāṇa identified with him.¹⁴⁸ In addition many works of the stotra type (hymns of praise) have been ascribed to Vyāsa among others, and the mythology of these stotras includes the figures Vyāsa, Parāśra. Sūta, and others.¹⁴⁹ As well there is even a philosophical work, probably written after 1400 C.E.,¹⁵⁰ attributed to him. What could be called secondary Gītā literature (half lyric-hymnic, half religious-didactic based on the Bhagavad Gītā itself) appears to have been written for the purpose of combatting the non-Vedic and anti-Vedic philosophical and religious movements of the time, while at the same time combatting the narrow ritualism of the Vedists.¹⁵¹ Thus we see a work, which concentrates on dharma, associated with

¹⁴⁷ T.B. Coburn, DM, 27.

¹⁴⁸ L. Rocher, PURA, 252-253.

¹⁴⁹ J. Gonda, MRLS, 240.

¹⁵⁰ M.L. Sandal, Siddhanta Darshanam of Vyasa, x.

¹⁵¹ P. Ayar, in CHI, vol.2, 204-206.

Vyāsa.¹⁵² This Vyāsa Gītā, as part of Kūrma Purāṇa (2.12-33), deals primarily with Dharmaśāstra topics.¹⁵³ Most of the other literature, however, appears to be Dharmaśāstra. This is understandable since in the Brahma Parvan of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa Vyāsa is taken to be an authority on Dharmaśāstra.¹⁵⁴ G.V. Devasthali states that there is a work ascribed to Vyāsa which may be dated about 200-500 C.E. The work comprises about 250 verses in four chapters and agrees mostly with Nārada, Katyāyana and Bṛhaspati.¹⁵⁵ Vyāsa is so important to the whole tradition as the transmitter of the Purāṇas, Mahābhārata and the Vedas, that he transcends sectarian divisions and is referred to in Purāṇas of all sects.¹⁵⁶

P.G. Lalye suggests that the character of Vyāsa is a composite used to metaphorically synthesize the Brahmanic and Popular cultures from the religious, and literary fields. Vyāsa is associated with both the Vedas and

¹⁵² J. Gonda, MRLS, 276, citing Vyāsa Gītā as part of the Kūrma Purāṇa (2.12-30). R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 64 n.132, and 72 states that the Vyāsa Gītā is the Usanas Samhita with a few additional chapters.

¹⁵³ L. Rocher, PURA, 186.

¹⁵⁴ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 170-171.

¹⁵⁵ G.V. Devasthali, in HCIP, vol.3, 299; U.N. Ghoshal, in HCIP, vol.3, 362.

¹⁵⁶ L. Rocher, PURA, 144-146 on Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 152 on Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 164-165 on Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa, 168-170 on Devībhāgavata Purāṇa, 189 on Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa, 192 on Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, 213 on Pādma Purāṇa, Śiva Purāṇa, and 247 on Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

Purāṇas, and thus we see in the Purāṇas references to sacrifice, albeit mostly "more or less routine worships"¹⁵⁷ and image worship. Though the heroes of the Purāṇas are mostly Kṣatriyas, the impelling force behind their actions were Brahmins, and this is represented in the fact that in a legend appearing in both Mahābhārata and Devībhāgavata Purāṇa,¹⁵⁸ Vyāsa's father is Parāśara, a Brahmin sage who is also important for the Purāṇic tradition, and his mother is Satyavatī, a Kṣatriya princess.¹⁵⁹

b. Parāśara

Unlike Vyāsa we do not find any stotra literature, nor any philosophy linked to Parāśara. We do note that he is a Vedic figure, appearing in Rg Veda (7.8.21),¹⁶⁰ and he appears to be associated with one of the nine families which composed Maṇḍala 1 of the this Veda.¹⁶¹ Parāśara had the Parāśara Saṁhitā (1100-1450 C.E.), a minor work devoted mainly to mantras, associated with him.¹⁶² As well we note that in addition to a Vyāsa Gītā there is one associated with Parāśara.¹⁶³ As to Smṛti literature, there is a Smṛti

¹⁵⁷ P.G. Lalye, SDB, 221.

¹⁵⁸ P.G. Lalye, SDB, 44.

¹⁵⁹ P.G. Lalye, SDB, 221-222.

¹⁶⁰ J. Gonda, MRLS, 105 n.145.

¹⁶¹ J. Gonda, Vedic Literature, 10-11.

¹⁶² J. Gonda, MRLS, 105.

¹⁶³ P. Ayar, in CHI, vol.2, 204, citing the Parāśara Gītā as a part of Mahābhārata 12.290-298.

of lesser rank dated at before 500 C.E. attributed to Parāśara.¹⁶⁴ This Parāśara Smṛti is a reworking of an older text, and attained considerable authority, so much so that the Br̥hatparāśara is a recast of it.¹⁶⁵ It was noted for its advanced view and is considered most suitable for the Kali age.¹⁶⁶ It is not as authoritative as the Manu Smṛti, nor the Yajñavalkya Smṛti, but very nearly so, and spawned a commentary, the Parāśara-Madhaviya, by Madhavācārya.¹⁶⁷ While Parāśara is not so obviously important to the Purāṇic tradition, he is decidedly important to the orthodox Hindu tradition as a whole.

c. Sūta¹⁶⁸

The terms Sūta and Māgadha appear to be two related types of Purāṇic transmitters, the former being the more common title.¹⁶⁹ As court official the Sūta occupied a conspicuous place yet their functions are imperfectly known. Some regard them as Brahmin sages, others take them to be the offspring of a pratiloma (Kṣatriya father and Brahmin mother) marriage, but most agree that they served

¹⁶⁴ U.N. Ghoshal, in CHI, vol.3, 362.

¹⁶⁵ G.V. Devasthali, in HCI, vol.3, 299.

¹⁶⁶ V.A. Ramaswami Sastri, in CHI, vol.2, 309.

¹⁶⁷ D.C. Bhattacharya, in CHI, vol.2, 377; R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 17.

¹⁶⁸ See L. Rocher, PURA, 53-59 for detailed discussion of the Suta.

¹⁶⁹ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, e.

as royal charioteers.¹⁷⁰ At the time of the Atharva Veda they were listed in the class of non-royal king-makers (rajahs were listed as royal king-makers). They were also listed as jewel-holders at the rajahsuya (ceremony of royal consecration), and their relatives were involved in the asvamedha rite (ceremony of Imperial consecration).¹⁷¹ They are next in position to the king's brother, and equal to the chief judge, and superior to the village head.¹⁷² As charioteer, court bard, and the other functions, and given that Purāṇic literature was associated with court stories told in Prakrit, the Sūta would have fulfilled a function in his critique of the monarch's administration.

Despite the later connection with Itihāsa and Purāṇa literature, R.C. Hazra contends that the Sūta was not involved with this material in the Vedic age, but was merely an officer of state. It is not possible to say how the Vedic Purāṇas passed from the Brahmin priests to the Sūta.¹⁷³ M.A. Mehendale and others disagree and consider them to have been the original authors of the Purāṇas and Epics.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ A.D. Pusalker, in CHI, vol.2, 15.

¹⁷¹ U.N. Ghoshal, in CHI, vol.2, 466.

¹⁷² R.C. Hazra, in CHI, vol.2, 243.

¹⁷³ R.C. Hazra, in CHI, vol.2, 243.

¹⁷⁴ M.A. Mehendale, in HCIP, vol.3, 296; P.L. Vaidya, in CHI, vol.2, 60; A.D. Pusalker, in CHI, vol.2, 21.

Regarding the literature associated with the Sūta, as the term for Purāṇic transmitters, the use of Sūta died out early and was replaced by bhatt.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps this, as well as the Kṣatriya origins, reveals why virtually no literature is associated to the Sūta. R.C. Hazra mentions a "Sūta Samhitā" of the Skanda Purāṇa,¹⁷⁶ which we are led to believe is different than the Suta Samhitā, a long treatise which deals primarily with Śaivite ritual and devotion.¹⁷⁷ As well there is a Gītā associated with Sūta,¹⁷⁸ and he is linked with Dharmaśāstra, although no Smṛti is attributed to him.¹⁷⁹

4. Mini-Purāṇas

Most scholars agree that the texts as we have them have been edited a great deal, some more than others. As a result there is some agreement that Purāṇas were gradually added to in small sections. It is also possible that the authors of both the Epics and Purāṇas had a technique for keeping the texts current. S.N. Roy calls this technique upabrimhana.¹⁸⁰ This resulted not only in the encyclopedic

¹⁷⁵ L. Rocher, PURA, 56-58.

¹⁷⁶ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 158-161.

¹⁷⁷ J. Gonda, MRLS, 163 n.3,

¹⁷⁸ J. Gonda, MRLS, 273, citing Sūta Gītā as a part of the Sūta Samhitā of the Skanda Purāṇa.

¹⁷⁹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 38, citing Matsya Purāṇa 53.1 where Sūta is asked to deal with the piety of making gifts.

¹⁸⁰ S.N. Roy, HCSP, 34.

nature of the texts, but the uneven nature of some of them, and the correspondences of some sections in different works. These correspondences have been a fertile field for scholars. L. Rocher, however, proposes a new direction.

I would like to submit that, rather than being a kernel, the pañcalakṣaṇa, like most other parts of the Purāṇas - as we understand them today - was a Purāṇa in its own right. In other words, I believe that the term Purāṇa originally applied not to groups of stories, legends, etc., but to each story, legend, etc., separately.¹⁸¹

These are what S.N. Roy defines as ākhyāna.¹⁸² This introduces a whole new dimension to Purāṇa studies. If this is the case, then it explains why there is such a discrepancy between the pañcalakṣaṇa definition and our extant texts. They are different levels of compilation. This being so, then our texts are a collection of mini-Purāṇas. They truly would be "Purāṇa Saṁhitās." This is perhaps the most important proposition of Purāṇic origins in recent scholarship. It renders the old perceptions of how to date Purāṇas somewhat obsolete in that each episode must be dated separately. It does, however, provide new dimensions for the study of these episodes in different traditions. Thus cross-traditional study of the material can be undertaken in more easily grasped sections.

¹⁸¹ L. Rocher, PURA, 96.

¹⁸² S.N. Roy, HCSP, 4-15.

G. Purpose

1. Authors

Brahmanism in the first centuries of the Common Era had become very insecure. At that time there arose various religious movements which R.C. Hazra¹⁸³ categorised according to their relation to the Vedas. They are anti-Vedic (Jainism, Ajīvakism, and Buddhism), semi-Vedic (Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Brahmanism), and non-Vedic (Śaktism). Besides the non-Brahmanical followers of these religions, there were Brahmins of two types. The one sought to reassert Brahmanical standards by the composition of, and adherence to, new Dharmaśāstras. The other group was "equally concerned to preserve the authority of the Vedas and the Varṇāśramadharmā system"¹⁸⁴ but were also the worshippers of one of the popular gods. It was these theistic Smārta Brahmins who were the first to use the Purāṇas, as well as the Epics, for their teachings. Their purpose was twofold. First "as worshippers of popular gods, they sought to give Brahmanical status to their theistic practices; and as Smārtas, they sought to regain support for Brahmanical authority by associating it with popular gods and the popular epics and Purāṇas."¹⁸⁵ R.C. Hazra is somewhat more cynical, but perhaps more accurate in mentioning the distinct personal interest

¹⁸³ See R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 193ff.

¹⁸⁴ T.J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, 96.

¹⁸⁵ T.J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, 96.

behind the attempt "appears to be due to a struggle of these Brahmins no less for their own economic and social recovery than for saving the Brahmanical culture in general."¹⁸⁶ The nature of the Purāṇas, then, is a result of the "reconciliation between the older Brahmanic and the popular cults"¹⁸⁷ for the purpose of undermining the heretical doctrines of the times.¹⁸⁸ While the is speculative, it is the most cogent hypothesis regarding intent of Purāṇic authors to date.

2. Women and Śūdras

These Brahmins were members of a new form of Hinduism, sectarian in nature which sought this reconciliation. "The elaborate and mechanical system of sacrifice offered to the gods by the Vedic Āryans did not satisfy the religious aspirations of all sections of the people, especially after they had intermarried with the pre-Āryan population and became familiar with the religious speculation and philosophical beliefs of the latter."¹⁸⁹ The Smārta Brahmins decided to expand the worship base and they used the Purāṇas to "universalise the knowledge of the Śrutis, which were not meant for all,"¹⁹⁰ in order to keep the legends of the Vedas before those who were excluded

¹⁸⁶ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 243.

¹⁸⁷ P. Bannerjee, EIR, 3.

¹⁸⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 663.

¹⁸⁹ D.C. Sircar, SRMI, 13.

¹⁹⁰ H.N. Chatterjee, SPS, 64.

from Vedic ritual.¹⁹¹ A critical study of individual Purāṇas leads us to believe that they were not written for any particular class but for people in general. They were created because, according to T.H. Dayal, it was honestly felt that it would take more than one's lifetime to study the sacred and complicated Vedic texts and actually they came to be the monopoly of a few only.

So masses must have hankered after some religious literature which would give them the old stories and legends for their delight and mental tranquility. The Itihāsa and Purāṇa literature served this purpose and thus this literature became popular among the general people.¹⁹²

As K.K. Klostermaier reminds us, the ItihāsaPurāṇa is the Bible of the mass of people not entitled to the Veda,¹⁹³ which would primarily mean Śūdras, and after c.300 B.C.E., women.¹⁹⁴ Up until that time women were given equal, if different, status regarding Vedic education, however the situation deteriorates until we see in the Purāṇas that "the birth of a daughter was unwelcome,"¹⁹⁵ and women have a position as extensions of their men.¹⁹⁶ Women and Śūdras

¹⁹¹ L. Rocher, PURA, 16.

¹⁹² T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 19.

¹⁹³ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 74.

¹⁹⁴ S. Sheth, RSBP, 106-107; S.G. Kantawala, CHMP, 95; R.K. Arora, HDBP, 115.

¹⁹⁵ S. Sheth, RSBP, 90-91; S. Kantawala, CHMP, 91; R.K. Arora, HDBP, 112.

¹⁹⁶ S. Sheth, RSBP, 92-99.

were not allowed to practice sacrifices,¹⁹⁷ although they were able to witness it, (this ban is later modified¹⁹⁸) nor are they allowed to have mantras recited when they perform snāna (ritual bathing).¹⁹⁹

Since they were excluded from the Vedic ritual they needed literature of their own. The Smārta Brahmins provided them with this in the form of the Purāṇas. The well-known social openness or inclusivism of the Epic due to its bhaktic nature, is carried on and intensified in the Purāṇas.²⁰⁰ From the position of women and Śūdras in the Vaiṣṇavism of the Epics and the Purāṇas it seems that in popular Vaiṣṇavism initiation was open to them, and they were allowed to worship Viṣṇu themselves.²⁰¹

Itihāsa and Purāṇa, then, are supplements to the Vedas for those not entitled to it and originating in the popular masses, it was used by the Smārtas to elaborate the dharma for those masses. Purāṇas, in general, have tried to raise the status of the Śūdras and women. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa has taken a sympathetic attitude towards these two sections of society. Other Purāṇas also hold the same

¹⁹⁷ S. Sheth, RSBP, 60, citing Brāhma Purāṇa 1.8-9; S. Kantawala, CHMP, 35.

¹⁹⁸ S. Sheth, RSBP, 60, citing Brāhma Purāṇa 20.30.

¹⁹⁹ S. Sheth, RSBP, 60-61, citing Brāhma Purāṇa 67.19; S. Kantawala, CHMP, 35, citing Matsya Purāṇa 102.

²⁰⁰ C.M. Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture" in History of Religions, vol.26 #1, 76.

²⁰¹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 199-200.

attitude to women and Śūdras. In the Devībhāgavata Purāṇa we read, "women, sūdras and the mean twice-born are not entitled to the Vedas; it is only for their good that the Purāṇas have been written."²⁰² The Purāṇas have given attention to Śūdras and women of Hindu society.

H. Conclusion

To conclude, we must remind the reader that "the Purāṇas have been regarded as the Veda of the common folk, since they present much traditional and orthodox religious doctrines through myth and legend, story and symbol"²⁰³ and their material is probably as old or older than the Vedas themselves. As a result "we have to consider it from the very beginning as complementary to the Vedas."²⁰⁴ They are old texts purporting to deal with old material. It is impossible to date them in their entirety, rather we can only date the sections within them relative to each other, and observe how they are used within a Purāṇa. The individual stories themselves are mini-Purāṇas, and they were each composed for various reasons ranging from explanations of natural phenomena to reworkings of Dharmaśāstra literature. They were used by a group of Brahmins to reinforce their own views on dharma and thus developed into texts containing both the speculative and

²⁰² Devībhāgavata Purāṇa I.3-21, cited in T.H. Dayal, VīPur, 20.

²⁰³ M. Banerjee, Invitation to Hinduism, 63.

²⁰⁴ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 38.

the concrete, the transcendental and the mundane, all being used by the members of popular sectarian Hinduism.

CHAPTER TWO
SELF-DESCRIPTION AS ŚRUTI
AND ITS SOTERIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

PART I. SELF-DESCRIPTION

A. Introduction - History of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

1. Date and Place of Compilation

As we noted above, it is difficult to date any given Purāṇa with any measure of certainty. Even so scholars hold different opinions regarding the date of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. H.H. Wilson, dates it quite late. His reasoning is that Purāṇic literature on the whole has "a comparatively modern date," explained in part by the inclusion of royal dynasties of the Kali Age in a prophetic format,¹ while the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and others have "as great antiquity as any works in their class."² He takes it to be of "a more authentic character than most of its fellows"³ since "it enjoins no sectarial or other acts of supererogation."⁴ Thus Wilson dates it at 1045 C.E. However since al-Beruni mentions a text we take to be the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, in his Purāṇic catalogue, which is dated at 1030 C.E.,⁵ it clearly cannot have been compiled so

¹ See H.H. Wilson, Analysis of the Purāṇas.

² H.H. Wilson, PREF, x.

³ H.H. Wilson, PREF, v.

⁴ H.H. Wilson, PREF, lxi.

⁵ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 21. 60

recently. R.C. Hazra, on the other hand, dates it at between the end of the first and the middle of the fourth century C.E.⁶ while emphasising the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth centuries. In another work, however, he dates it at "earlier than the beginning of the Christian era but later than the period of the first origin of the present Vāyu, Brahmaṇḍa, and Mārkaṇḍeya."⁷ M. Winternitz dates it at the fifth century C.E.,⁸ while J.N. Farquhar, dates it at not later than 400 C.E. due to its being equated with the Harivaṃśa.⁹ F.E. Pargiter states it is not earlier than fifth century C.E. while P.C. Bagchi in his presidential address at the Indian History Congress, states Viṣṇu Purāṇa cannot be later than the fifth century C.E. V.R.R. Dikshitar places it as early as the sixth or fifth century B.C.E.,¹⁰ and T.H. Dayal dates it between the first and early fourth centuries C.E.¹¹ L. Rocher provides us with a list of the various dates and their proponents. Some of those not mentioned above are: P.V. Kane, 300-500 C.E., C.V. Vaidya, and S.N. Roy, after 800-900 C.E.¹² All of these dates are only

⁶ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 24.

⁷ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, c.

⁸ M. Winternitz, HIL, 545 n.2.

⁹ J.N. Farquhar, ORLI, 143.

¹⁰ See T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 21-24 for a summary.

¹¹ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 32.

¹² L. Rocher, PURA, 249.

speculative, based as they are on the textual evidence of the Purāṇa. As such we are only able to date the compilation of the text, not the material itself.

Unlike most scholars, T.H. Dayal attempts to give a geographic area for the compilation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. His conclusion is based exclusively on the textual evidence as the compiler does not provide any additional information. The primary geographical features referred to with apparent familiarity are from the north of India, particularly rivers. The mountains of the south are rarely mentioned as are the southern tribes. In addition, many more of the stories told have been associated with the north than the south, and the genealogies of the future kings of India are almost exclusively of the north. Taking a closer look at the text T.H. Dayal determines that "we may tentatively assume that the place of the compilation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa might have been somewhere in the Gangā-Yamunā doab, not far away from Mathurā."¹³

2. Social and Religious Aspects

"The Viṣṇu Purāṇa has long been looked upon as a highly authoritative work from the points of view of both religion and society."¹⁴ In this context we may suggest that perhaps its most important social statement is its implicit granting of women and Śūdras access to theological material. We have seen above the determination of the

¹³ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 32-35.

¹⁴ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, k.

Smārta Brahmins to reform and revive Hinduism. In this context the Viṣṇu Purāṇa was used, however, it also supports the ancient order as well. The rigidity of the Varṇāśramadharmā was not there in the early Vedic period, and the four castes existed merely as class divisions. There was only a clear differentiation between the Āryans and the non-Āryans. Gradually the flexibility of social institutions decreased, and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa appears to fully support the domination by Brahmins of the other castes and the purity of lineage needed to enforce caste domination. However, change in caste status appears commonplace, as is mentioned in the text. (V[^] 4.1.17; 4.3.21-24; 4.19.21-25) Endogamy was therefore the predominant, but not exclusive form of marriage. While the upper three castes possessed the potential for financial independence through education, government, agriculture and trade, Śūdras were expected to serve the other castes. Although this was not a free service nor outright slavery, it might have been inadequate for their maintenance. For this reason many Śūdras sought to remove themselves from cast oriented Brahmanism in favour of non-caste religions such as Buddhism. In order to reverse this trend the Viṣṇu Purāṇa allows Śūdras recourse to trade, and mechanical labour, (V[^] 3.8.32) and provides a heaven to Śūdras who faithfully do their duties. (V[^] 1.6.35) We can see, then that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa attempted to preserve the

status quo by softening the rules of Varṇāśramadharmā to accommodate this important sector of society.

As well as using social and economic factors to retain Śūdras in the Brahmanical fold, religious duties were expanded. Śūdras are allowed to make gifts to Brahmins, which was formerly prohibited, to make sacrifices to ancestors, and perform any existing sacrifice without mantras, (V[^] 3.8.34; 4.2.23) and merely listening to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa becomes as efficacious as attendance at Vedic sacrifices,¹⁵ from which women and Śūdras were frequently prohibited.

It is also important to note that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a Pāñcarātra work.¹⁶ This is important for two reasons. First it influences the philosophical nature of the Purāṇa. It seems that the "original non-Vedic as well as anti-Vedic ideas of the Pāñcarātras"¹⁷ permeated the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. The text was also written "by a pro-Vedic Pāñcarātra scholar of a comparatively late age with the deliberate intention of writing a religious book for the propagation of his sectarian views under the garb of a Purāṇa."¹⁸ The influence accorded it therefore disseminated this "pro-Vedic sectarian" feeling faster than might otherwise have

¹⁵ J.N. Banerjea, Paurāṇic and Tantric Religions, 18, citing Mahābhārata XVIII. VI, 97.

¹⁶ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 17; R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 199, and INTRO, h; L. Rocher, PURA, 248; H.H. Wilson, PREF.

¹⁷ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 199.

¹⁸ R.C. Hazra, INTRO, h.

occurred. Second it influences the social in that it sets the precedent that, since the Pāṇcatrātrins attach more importance to their own sectarian scriptures than to the Vedas¹⁹, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa was elevated above the Vedas in the Pāṇcarātra circle. However, despite the historical opposition between Pāṇcarātrins and Vedists, this opposition is not found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. In fact the text "refers to the performance of several Vedic sacrifices"²⁰ in positive ways. These were accepted as earthly sacrifices in that they were performed for securing specific things on earth. (V[^] 2.14.21) As such it is important to look at the relationship of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa to the Vedas and sacrifice, as well as a brief mention of the epistemology of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

B. Relationship to Vedas

There is a relationship in Indian literature between Purāṇas and Epics, however there are few references to it in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It is more concerned with its relationship to the Vedas, to which, despite its Pāṇcārātra leanings, it essentially conforms. In fact in all the regulations in Book 3, it enjoins "no modes of worship other than those conformable to the ritual of the Vedas."²¹ The Viṣṇu Purāṇa adheres to the Vedas wherever possible in its myths and stories as well as in its theology and this

¹⁹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 222.

²⁰ T.H. Dayal, ViPur, 187.

²¹ H.H. Wilson, PREF, lxi

adherence takes the form of positive and negative support. On the positive side the Vedas are proposed as social and spiritual supports and the obligations to them and benefits of their proper use are expounded. On the negative side the turning away from or reviling the Vedas is equated with suffering.

On the positive side we may start with creation. In describing primary creation the Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that Brahma, by the authority of the Veda, determined "the names and forms and functions of all creatures, and of the gods." (V¹ 1.5.64) Here it is to the Vedas that the creator conforms when planning a creation. Also they are mentioned as a part of the creation itself. Brahma creates the several Vedas from various of his four mouths, as well as various metres, sacrifices, and other books which are part of the four primary Vedas. (V¹ 1.5.44-47) The passage is repeated in the Vāyu, Linga, Kūrma, Pādma, and Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas²² which demonstrates the mainline theology of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's author in that he incorporates wholesale an idea which is current in the tradition. In addition, in describing Viṣṇu the Viṣṇu Purāṇa paraphrases the Vedas²³.

The Vedas were important in the life of a Brahmin in many ways. In the story of King Bharata it is stated that after his second rebirth Bharata did not follow the

²² H.H. Wilson, VP, 37 n.21

²³ See also H.H. Wilson, VP, 397, n.13.

traditional pattern of Brahmins. He did not receive the Brahmanical thread, nor did he perform ceremonies, study scripture, nor read the Vedas with a spiritual preceptor. (V[^] II.12) Here the lack of study of scripture and Veda is unusual, therefore it is worthy of remark. In fact the Vedas were seen as so important to the support of the universe through propitiation of the ancestors that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa states flatly that one who does ancestral ceremonies should be one who has studied the Vedas and Vedāṅgas, and follows the duties they enjoin. (V[^] 3.15.1-2) While the members of all four castes have religious obligations, and the three upper castes have the study of scripture among their other duties, only for the Brahmins are the Vedas specifically mentioned. Both Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas are to give presents to Brahmins, perform various sacrifices, and study scripture, for Kṣatriyas it is the Śāstras, for Vaiśyas the Nitis. Śūdras, on the other hand are not told in this section that they should study any text at all, rather they are told only to make gifts, offer sacrifices in which food is presented and perform obsequial offerings. (V[^] 3.8.27, 31, 33-36) We see then, that the status of the Vedas in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is such that they are a part of the religious education of Brahmins and Brahmins alone.

While endorsing Vedic religious education (V[^] 3.9.1), the text does not make explicit to which caste this education applies, but we must assume that study of the

Vedas is applicable only to Brahmins. Religious education appears as well on the negative side of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's support for the Vedas. The text states that in the Kali age the Vedas will still be studied, but students will disregard the rules of studentship. (V[^] 6.1.32) In the same regard one who either teaches his servant the Vedas or is taught by him is unfit to attend the sacrifices to the ancestors. (V[^] 3.15.5) The veneration of the Vedas is such that the rules pertaining to their study and use are explicit and any transgression taints the offender in such a way as to make ineffective any offering performed, supervised, or even observed, by him. The Vedas were so important to the author of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that one of the signs of the deterioration of society into the Kali age was their improper study.

Another sign of the Kali age, according to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, (V[^] 6.1.10) is the general disuse of the Vedas and the laws enjoined therein. So important are the Vedas as a symbol of the following of divine law to Hindus that the farther removed one is from this law the less happy one is. (V[^] 6.1.39) Perhaps the most vivid example of a physical separation from the Vedas is the use of penances in the Kali age. When correctly carried out penances are believed to purify body and soul in ways that no other means could in order to properly expiate one's karma. (V[^] 2.6.36) In the Kali age, however, they will be horrible penances not enjoined by scripture (V[^] 6.1.40) which will cause undue

suffering. Also concerning the physical aspect is the story of Sagara, a descendant of Mandhātri. After defeating all of his opponents Sagara deprives them of the established oblations to fire and the study of the Vedas. Separated from religious rites, and abandoned by the Brahmins, these various tribes became Mlechchhas. (V[^] 4.3.48) That is to say that, once they were out of physical contact with the Vedas and the Brahmins who administered sacramental offerings, entire nations became degenerate.

Spiritually, contact with the Vedas provides the righteous their proper place in the cosmos. To cast them aside is to give up that place and reinforce the assertion that "as regard is acknowledged for the disseminators of heresy - so may the wise men note the augmented influence of the Kali age." (V[^] 6.1.47) The Viṣṇu Purāṇa (V[^] 4.20) tells the following story of Santanu and Devapī which reinforces that not only is the following of the Vedas desirable, but even an unconscious violation, no matter how small, leads to retribution and loss of place in the cosmic order. It was the marriage of a younger prince, Santanu, before his older brother which transgressed Vedic law and the resulting drought which was the punishment on the kingdom he ruled could only be ended with the marriage of the elder brother Devapī, or his abdication of Vedic authority. This was helped along by Santanu's minister, Asmarisārin, who sent a number of ascetics to Devapī to

teach him anti-Vedic doctrines. Once the abdication had taken place, in the form of Devapī's promoting doctrines "contrary to the Vedas" to Brahmins from Santanu's court it was as if he were never born. Santanu became the elder brother, according to Vedic law, and therefore his marriage and kingship were no longer contrary to divine law. The drought ended and the country prospered.

The above story illustrates the assertion that "the Rik, Yajur, and Sāma Vedas constitute the triple covering of the several castes, and the sinner who throws this off is said to be naked (or apostate)." (V[^] 3.17.5) The reference to heretical "Nagna" Buddhist sects can hardly be overlooked in this context.²⁴ We see that Devapī cast off the raiment of the Vedas and this apostasy removed him from the position he otherwise would have occupied under Vedic law.

Not only was the casting off of the Vedas a heinous sin, but so too was reviling them. In describing the hells and those who go there, the text states that he who reviles the Vedas will go to the salt hell. (V[^] 2.6.13) In fact these are not the only reasons for going to hell, nor are they the only hells. Rather, those who abuse the Vedas and their supporters are destined for hell. (V[^] 1.6.42) Thus we see many of the negative supports the Viṣṇu Purāṇa has for the Vedas.

²⁴ See H.H. Wilson, VP, 267, n.1.

It is interesting to note that in what may be a late interpolation two types of knowledge are mentioned: that which is derived from scripture, and that which is derived from reflection. (V[^] 5.1.34, 6.5.61) That is to say, as Wilson points out, that "Brahma is of two kinds; Śabda-Brahma, spirit of god to be attained through the word, that is the Vedas and the duties they prescribe; and Para-Brahma, spirit of god to be attained through reflection, by which the difference between soul and matter is ascertained."²⁵ The Supreme is present in both forms of knowledge, but the form which manifests itself as reflection is superior to the other. In Book 6 we see that the identification of Viṣṇu as the superior of the two types of knowledge is made and many of the attributes ascribed to the Supreme are given to the now distinctly sectarian god Viṣṇu. Not only that, but the veneration given to the Vedas and other scriptures are given a lesser place than we would expect. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa cites both the Atharva Veda (V[^] 6.5.65) and the Manu Smṛti (V[^] 6.5.63) as stating that by the one form of knowledge God is attained while the other consists of the Vedas. We see here a move beyond the notion of the Vedas as paramount sources for the attainment of "god-ness" and into a realm where they are superceded by supreme knowledge, "that which is derived from reflection." We also see in V[^] 6.5 that the Atharva Veda and the Manu Smṛti are taken as more

²⁵ H.H. Wilson, VP, 502, n.4.

authoritative than the Rg Veda. These must remind us of the composite nature of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. What is important for us is that we see that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is an āstika document, despite occasionally promoting something else above the Vedas.

C. Sacrifice

As H.H. Wilson writes "the Veda, it is said, was originally a ritual,"²⁶ so we must now mention the importance of sacrifice itself. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that humanity was created for the performance of sacrifices. By sacrifices the gods are nourished and the rain which they bestow supports humanity. (V[^] 1.6.6-7) In Book 2 a somewhat more sectarian meaning is attached in that Nārāyana/Viṣṇu is stated as the supporter of all, through the sun, which produces the rain which supports crops that are then sacrificed to nourish the gods. (V[^] 2.9.) We have noticed that the Vedas were so important to these rituals that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa requires a practitioner of ancestral ceremonies to be knowledgeable in the Vedas and Vedāṅgas and follow the caste and sacrificial obligations of a Brahmin. (V[^] 3.15.1-2)

As well as Brahmins carrying out sacrificial obligations in addition to those of their caste, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas were to do so also. (V[^] 3.8.27, 31) Sūdras, on the other hand do not have their sacrifice associated with any of the Vedas. They are only told to make gifts, offer

²⁶ H.H. Wilson, Analysis of the Purāṇas, 128.

sacrifices in which food is presented and perform obsequial offerings. (V^ 3.8.33-36) As H.H. Wilson notes their offerings would have to be made through Brahmins since Śūdras were not allowed to repeat the Mantras or prayers associated with sacrifice.²⁷ The Viṣṇu Purāṇa allows them to have oblations done for them so apparently the proscriptions of Manu have been relaxed to a certain extent. We see then that all four castes were obligated to perform or commission sacrifices, and in many cases these sacrifices were Vedic in nature, which would necessitate an intermediary for Śūdras.

Not only were there positive forces to make one sacrifice, but there were negative reinforcements as well, some of which we have already seen. The defeated tribes in the story of Sagara (V^4.3) became Mlechchhas because they were unable to properly carry out sacrifices, and those unwilling to sacrifice are destined for hell. (V^ 1.6.42) On the other hand the mention of King Bharata not performing sacrifices, as well as neglecting other caste duties, (V^ 2.13.38-39) is such that the omissions are remarkable. In a Brahmanical setting the omission of sacrifice would be inexcusable, but the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is not Brahmanical in the strictest sense. H.H. Wilson, in commenting on this story states that "this legend is a good

²⁷ H.H. Wilson, VP, 235-6, n.3 citing Manu Smṛti X.109, 110, 111

specimen of a sectarial graft upon a Paurāṇik stem"²⁸ which demonstrates the importance of sacrifice to all castes.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is undoubtedly an orthodox Brahmanical work, but it is also undoubtedly a sectarian text. Many deities appear, but it is to Viṣṇu that ultimacy is given. There is an element of this sectarianism in the support the Viṣṇu Purāṇa gives to the Vedas and sacrifice. In fact there is a passage, already cited above, in which Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa is stated to be the source of the universe yet it is sacrifice which nourishes the gods. (V².9) The endorsement of Vedic sacrifice continues, but with a sectarian twist. In this passage Viṣṇu is the support of the world, and the Vedas are mentioned as a part of him. This continues in other parts of the text. In eulogising Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa it is stated that Kṛṣṇa is the four Vedas, accentuation, ritual, signification, metre, and astronomy history, tradition, grammar, theology, logic, and law. (V⁵.1.36-37) In fact inexhaustible Viṣṇu is whatever thing that is designated by long, short, or prolated syllables, or that which is without a name. (V⁶.4.44) In one passage Viṣṇu is described as being identical with the R̥g, Yajur, and Sāma Vedas, (V⁴.1.5, 13) while in another the author calls him the parent of the Vedas. (V⁵.2.7) In relating the myth of the Varāha incarnation, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that Viṣṇu adopted a form composed of the sacrifices of the

²⁸ H.H. Wilson, VP, 208, n.1.

Vedas and thus he had a scriptural body (V[^] 1.4) and he is praised by stating that the Vedas are a part of him. In fact in this whole section Viṣṇu is repeatedly equated with the Vedas and their offshoots. Here we see that the Vedas are still given divine origin, as they were in the non-sectarian sections, but now it is done in a sectarian manner. The following passage brings the two notions together. The "Supreme spirit is the upholder of all things, and the ruler of all things, and is glorified in the Vedas and in the Vedānta by the name of Viṣṇu." (V[^] 6.4.40) In all these references to sectarianism within the Viṣṇu Purāṇa the Vedas still maintain their status as Śruti. In fact one could say that their position is enhanced by being equated with the cosmic principle.

We see then that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a fundamentally Vaiṣṇava document which adheres to the orthodox rules of the Vedas as far as it can while still maintaining the underlying supremacy of its primary deity, Viṣṇu. As such there is a tension between strict adherence to both the rituals of the Vedas and the universal monism of the Upaniṣads, and the sectarian assertions of the supremacy of Viṣṇu and the belief that bhakti is the only true path to ultimate salvation and all sacrifices are ultimately ineffective for that purpose. We can see that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa endorses sacrifice, and in so doing demonstrates its Brahmanical influence. Not only does it support sacrifice in itself as the support of the universe, but it also

supports the Vedas as fundamental tools of this sacrificial support.

D. Purāṇas as Śruti

In terms of the relationship with the Vedas there is little doubt that Purāṇas were considered valuable in the Vedic literature. H.N. Chatterjee Sastri notes that the Purāṇas and Itihāsa are closely related even in the Atharva Veda, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, and the Āpastambha Dharmasūtra.²⁹ In fact, he states that "the importance of the Itihāsa and the Purāṇas has been emphasised in the Mahābhārata when they have been declared to be supplements of the Vedas."³⁰ R.C. Hazra states that "in many of the works of the Vedic literature, the 'Purāṇa' is even called the fifth Veda,"³¹ and cites the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Sankhyāyana Śrautasūtra, and others. Finally L. Rocher mentions the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as a text which refers to itself as the fifth Veda.³² We refer to these sources again in order that we may be reminded that at one point the literature was called Puraṇetihāsa, and only later was it identified as two discrete types. We refer to them again to remind us that if the Purāṇa as a class of literature is thought of as the fifth Veda, then each

²⁹ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 5.

³⁰ H.N. Chatterjee Sastri, SPS, 1.

³¹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 1.

³² L. Rocher, PURA, 16-17.

individual text has a precedent in being equated with the Vedas, thus it would not be out of place for one Purāṇa to propose its equality to the Vedas and be taken as such.

In keeping with this thought we will now look at three passages which seem to consider Purāṇas as subsidiary texts evolved from the Vedas, co-equal. In the first passage which appears in the Varāha myth (V¹ 1.4), we see that the text repeatedly takes the Vedas as normative. While Prithivī praises Viṣṇu the text reads "thou art sacrifice; thou art the oblation; thou art the mystic Omkāra; thou art the sacrificial fires; thou art the Vedas, and their dependant works." (V¹ 1.4.22-23) The "dependant works" could specifically refer to the Vedāṅgas as supplementary to the Vedas. However, with the Vedas taken as normative and as the first writings, all other texts would be supplementary, therefore we could see not only Purāṇas, but all literature as being referred to here.

While this argument is tenuous, the second passage is much less so. At the end of the Book we see Parāśara praising Viṣṇu as being celebrated in the Vedānta as the four Vedas, Itihāsa, Purāṇa,³³ the Smṛtis, poems and all that is said or sung. (V¹ 1.22.83-85) We see here a passage which hymns the eternal Viṣṇu and again the Vedas are a fundamental part of god. Unlike the earlier passage where only one type of literature is mentioned, here many

³³ H.H. Wilson, VP, 130, n.10 states that ākhyānāni denotes Puranas in this passage.

of the extant literary forms are found and they are grouped into four classifications. The first reference is to three types of literature: the Vedas, inspired history, and sacred science. This list is then elaborated as the Vedas and their divisions, inspired history (the institutes of Manu and the other lawgivers), sacred science traditional scriptures, religious manuals (Purāṇas), the fourth grouping being other secular writings (poems, and all that is said or sung). The Vedas are mentioned individually by name, and all of the others, except the Manu Smṛti, are grouped in a classification rather than named. In both instances we see the Vedas as the preeminent textual authority, but the other literary forms, including the Purāṇa, are authorities in their own rite, they are not taken as ultimate, but it is now implied that they are on par with the Vedas as part of Viṣṇu.

In another passage where the almighty is praised, this time in the form of Kṛṣṇa, he is again stated to be all that there is in the form of literature. He is the four Vedas, Itihāsa, Purāṇa, grammar, theology, logic, and law. (V⁵.1.36-37) In this case Itihāsa and Purāṇa are referred to separately, and the term Purāṇa is used, rather than Ākhyāna, which was used in V¹.22.83-85. This passage appears to be more recent than the others because in the first passage (V¹ I.4) only Vedas and Vedāṅgas are mentioned, and in the second (V¹ I.22) there are four types, here there are many types. The Vedas are still

listed by name, but the other catagories are subdivided further. Ritual is still venerated as "accentuation, ritual and metre" (of ritual chants), however this passage is probably not directly associated with a ritual as the passage from V¹ 1.4 is. Given the fact that it is more specific in its reference to the various types of literature, and that specific schools are mentioned, this passage is easier to date than the other and it would appear that it comes from a later stratum of editing. In any event we must conclude that both passages see the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as being associated with the Vedas, but in a supplementary position.

In another passage, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa goes step further since it is explicitly stated in V¹ 1.1 that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is equal to the Vedas. Having venerated all literature as being a part of Viṣṇu, glorifying the Vedas in particular, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa proposes explicitly that it is equal in sanctity to the Vedas. (V¹ 1.1.) For a text to state this and survive as an orthodox document two things must be present. First, there must be general support for the Vedas in the text as a whole. This is amply demonstrated in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Secondly, there must have been present in the thought of the Hindus of the time that the Purāṇas, and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in particular, were special books. That is to say that they must have been taken as authoritative for some time in order for the insertion of so obviously late an addition to have been

accepted. We see in the last book another similar late insertion. Here the text states explicitly in terms no one could misconstrue that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa was taken to be equal to the Vedas. (V[^] 6.8.12)

One cannot mistake the intention of the author in any of these passages. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is to be seen as being as holy as the Vedas. In another passage we see Kṛṣṇa being praised. Given all the references to the Vedas in the text, and seeing how the Viṣṇu Purāṇa took them as normative, it seems unlikely to find Kṛṣṇa being praised as he who "is skilled in the sense of the Purāṇa." (V[^] 5.20.49) We would expect the Vedas to be mentioned in this context since they are taken as the primary literary constituents of Viṣṇu.

As well as being mentioned in association with the Vedas as supplementary or equal, there are instances where the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is given priority over the Vedas. Two instances we will look at appear in the first and last chapters of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. In the first instance, it is explicitly stated in V[^] 6.8 that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the most excellent of holy writings. (V[^] 6.8.3) It is unusual to find the Viṣṇu Purāṇa now classed as the best of all religious writings since to do this is to elevate it above the Vedas. Certainly it would be the best of all non-Vedic writings and it appears that, given the otherwise unfailing devotion to the Vedas in the text, we see a new concept. While we can take this phrase to mean that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

is to be included in the category of the most excellent, in which the Vedas are also included, that seems to be a rather strained interpretation. Rather it is fairly obvious that the author is stating that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is by itself beyond compare as the most efficacious text for expiating sin and providing the ultimate end of man. Given that the notion of reunification is a later development and that there was developing a Viṣṇu-oriented bhakti movement which was not oriented towards Brahmanical/Vedic sacrifice, we can see that the chapter may be a later accretion. That would explain why devotion, rather than sacrifice, would be the preeminent form of worship. We must also remember that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa was an important document to the Pāñcarātra sect.

In the second, instance it is interesting to note that the text is referred to in the singular in V¹ 1.1. The author narrates one Purāṇa but it can also be translated as "I will narrate THE Purāṇa." Based on this alternate reading we can see several things. First we notice that the author proposes that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the only Purāṇa. In that case, given the high cultural esteem in which Purāṇas were put by the masses, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa would be seen as the ORIGINAL Purāṇa. If the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the original Purāṇa then it must have been delivered from the mouth of god to a specially chosen individual and transmitted to the rest of the world. H.H. Wilson notes the ancients to whom oblations are given are

the "teachers through whom this Purāṇa was transmitted from its first reputed author Brahma, to its actual narrator, the sage Parāśara."³⁴ Given the consensus that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is one of the oldest Purāṇas extant it is possible that it could have been taken in the Hindu tradition as "the original" Purāṇa simply because it was cited by so many other works, Purāṇa included, and the genealogy of ṛṣis given as transmitters would only enhance that perception.

While it is never stated in the text that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is inferior to the Vedas, that must be taken as a given. If, however, we assume that it is taken as inferior to the Vedas, yet a second level of Śruti, then we have a compromise. The first way to accommodate this situation is to provide for a new status as the preeminent Purāṇa. We have already established that it may be attempting to do so in the previous passage. In addition the passage at the end of the text states that it is imperishable, as well as the means of attaining the great end of man. (V[^] 6.8.3) There is very little doubt here as to the proposed status of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. More important is the adjective "imperishable." In Hindu notions there is only one "imperishable" and that is god itself. To call a thing such is to equate it with god. Here the author intends us to equate the Viṣṇu Purāṇa on the deepest level with Viṣṇu. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is equal to Viṣṇu as an entity the same

³⁴ H.H. Wilson, VP, 2, n.8.

way all literature are the body of the mighty Viṣṇu, assuming the form of sound (V[^] 1.22.83-85) but the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is Viṣṇu in his eternal uncreated form and it is this which the author suggests. As such it was transmitted from a higher sphere to humans and from there handed down from generation to generation. As a result we must look at the tradition of transmission of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

We see that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, both implicitly and explicitly, seeks to establish a link between itself and the Vedas. It attempts to show how it is of the same level of Śruti as the Vedas are. It also attempts to demonstrate that it is, in fact, more efficacious for removing sin than the Vedas are. We can now see that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa takes sacrifice as important, and the Vedas are crucial for the support of sacrifice, but there is now a more important long-term goal of humanity. That is not the support of the universe, rather it is the reunification of individual ātman with Supreme Brahman. In this matter the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is more efficacious than the Vedas.

E. Authors/Transmitters

1. Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapter the place of Vyāsa, Parāśara, and Sūta in the Hindu tradition. We may now continue this discussion from the perspective of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

2. Parāśara

At first glance there is little doubt as to who the author of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa would be. The text begins "Śrī Sūta said," (V^ 1.1) however he does not appear as narrator again. That function falls to Parāśara. Parāśara is addressed as being versed in traditional history and the Purāṇas, the Vedas, and skilled in law and philosophy.³⁵ Maitreya's opening line states that Parāśara taught him the Vedas. (V^ 1.1.9) Exactly how Parāśara was given the responsibility and honour of distributing the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is told shortly thereafter. Parāśara narrates the story of his sacrifice and in it Pulastya praises him on his ability to control his anger and provides him with two boons, becoming learned in every science, and becoming the author of a Purāṇa Saṁhitā. (V^ 1.1.26)³⁶ Interestingly enough these are two distinct boons, and it appears that the compilership of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the superior of the two. Given that Parāśara is stated as being conversant with the Vedas in V^ 1.1.9, we can see this elevation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa above the other sciences as setting it near to the Vedas.

There is a problem with Parāśara as compiler, however. On the authorship of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa M. Winternitz states that contrary to the tradition and in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, which ascribes all the Purāṇas to Vyāsa,

³⁵ H.H. Wilson, VP, 3.

³⁶ See also H.H. Wilson, VP, p.5 n.14.

Parāśara is here directly called the author of the work.³⁷ H.H. Wilson also notes that it "is incompatible with the general attribution of all the Purāṇa to Vyāsa"³⁸ to have Parāśara compose a Purāṇic Saṁhitā. Despite the affirmation that Vyāsa is the traditional author of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and Sūta is the nominal author, Parāśara is also stated to be the author.

3. Vyāsa

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes the division of the Vedas into their separate Samhitās and the person responsible for this division is Veda-Vyāsa. He is not a mere mortal, but a portion of Viṣṇu. (V[^] 3.2.57, 3.3.2) Later we read that for each of the twenty-eight arrangements of the Vedas there has been a Veda-Vyāsa. (V[^] 3.3.9) These Vyāsas are accordingly twenty-eight minor incarnations of Viṣṇu, without the significance of the ten major avatāras. In fact not only were they incarnations, but "in the first Dvāpara age the distribution was made by Svayambhu (Brahma) himself." (V[^] 3.3.10) The passage which follows lists all twenty-eight compiler/distributors of the Vedas. In all cases the distributor is Veda-Vyāsa incarnated as another individual Vyāsa. Furthermore in enumerating the twenty-eight Vyāsas the text lists Rikṣa who is known also by the name Vālmīki. (V[^] 3.3.18) If we take this Vālmīki to be the author of the Rāmāyana then we have a connection to the

³⁷ M. Winternitz, HIL, 546.

³⁸ H.H. Wilson, VP, 5 n.14.

Itihāsa literature. This connection gets somewhat stronger, however, when we add the name of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana. In the following chapter Parāśara states that the Vyāsa of the present Manvantāra, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, is the deity Nārāyaṇa, "for who else on this earth could have composed the Mahābhārata?" (V^ 3.4.5) Here again we see Itihāsa linked to the transmitter of the Vedas and therefore also to the transmitter of the Purāṇa. Given the connection of Purāṇetiḥāsa this is enough to tentatively link Vyāsa to the Purāṇas. In addition, not only are the Epics linked to the compiler of the Vedas, but Parāśara, the stated author of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, calls himself the Vyāsa of the twenty-sixth Dvāpara. (V^ 3.3.18) In this case we see a connection of Vyāsa and Parāśara. We see, then, a Purāṇic account of the literary history of the Vedas in which the compilers of the Purāṇas and the Vedas are associated.

After giving this history of the Vedas the Viṣṇu Purāṇa abruptly changes gears to provide us with a history of the compilation of the Purāṇas, the story of Sūta Romaharṣana. (V^ 3.6.15-19) Here we see the Viṣṇu Purāṇa giving us the connection we look for. Vyāsa is associated with the Vedas, and now is teaching the archetypal transmitter of the Purāṇas, Sūta. We must take this to mean that Vyāsa knew the Purāṇas as well as the Vedas. This is stated in the first line of the above passage. (V^ 3.6.15) As well, the context of the whole Purāṇa is one of

Parāśara, the Vyāsa of the twenty-sixth Dvāpara, having taught all other important works to him, now teaching Maitreya the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. That being the case, then Purāṇas as a class of literature are derived from Viṣṇu, as are the Vedas. The transmitters of both classes of literature are the same. Vyāsa, in this context, is an archetype since Vyāsa is probably not a name but a title. Despite one of the meanings of vyāsa being "compiler,"³⁹ within the tradition Vyāsa has become the archetypal wise man. For example, to resolve a dispute as to when the least action would produce the most merit, it is to Vyāsa that a group of sages go, (V[^] 6.2) and it is he who lectures Arjuna on the true meaning of life. (V[^] 5.38.50.ff) Like the title Sūta, Vyāsa refers to one who does something; it is a category of individuals who fulfill certain functions. He has various functions as generic wise man, and as literary precursor. In this case, the function is to compile and distribute the Vedas.

We see a parallel between these two archetypes. Vyāsa is called the "arranger" of the Vedas. We are told that Viṣṇu divides the Vedas to adapt it to the limited capacity of mortals, and assumes the form of Veda Vyāsa in order to carry out their transmission. (V[^] 3.2) We are told that Sūta, also called Romaharṣana, does the same thing. As H.H. Wilson states, "the mode in which Vyāsa is described as arranging the Veda implies its prior existence

³⁹ V.S. Apte, APTE, 541 col.1.

in separate portions, as he called to his assistance four persons severally acquainted with them."⁴⁰ Vyāsa divides and distributes four Vedic Samhitās and Romaharṣana compiles four Purāṇic Samhitās. We see, then, that the disciple of the compiler of the Vedas compiles the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. As well, however, Sūta has disciples, as does Vyāsa, and there appears to be some prior knowledge of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa on the part of these disciples. The resultant work is in four Samhitās. We cannot identify the four Purāṇic Samhitās with the four Vedic Samhitās, since we know of a time when only three Vedic Samhitās were accepted.⁴¹ The purpose of the author, however, appears to be establishing just such a link. He appears to be attempting an equation of the four Vedas with the four Samhitās of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, otherwise he would surely refer to the six books of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Romaharṣana has enough disciples to compose six books with himself as the overall editor, yet it is not presented that way. On the other hand, if we take parts of the first four books as original, with all of Books 5 and 6 as later insertions, then we have a much greater parallel. Unfortunately, that is impossible since the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is stated almost universally in the tradition as being in six Books and containing a specified number of ślokas. These facts serve

⁴⁰ H.H. Wilson, Analysis of the Purāṇas. 128.

⁴¹ See H.H. Wilson, VP, 68, 79, 166, and 418 for references to four Vedas and 36, 219 for references to three.

to aggrandize Purāṇas in general, but two further statements exalt the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in particular. The first comes in the story of Romaharṣana. The substance of the four Saṁhitās compiled by him and his disciples is "collected into this Purāṇa." (V[^] 3.6.19) The second follows shortly thereafter. We read that the text is listed third of the eighteen Mahā-Purāṇas and in every part of it Viṣṇu is declared. (V[^] 3.6.27) Despite the fact that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is placed third in the traditional list of Purāṇas we see an attempt to make it stand out as the preeminent Purāṇa. The Saṁhitās of Romaharṣana are collected into it, and it is thus the original Purāṇa. The literature stemming from this divinely sponsored text is the Purāṇic tradition. As well Viṣṇu is in ALL of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, therefore it is elevated above more mundane literature to the level of the divine, eternal Vedas.

There is little more one could do to give it more authority, one would think, except claim that the work is a result of divine command stemming from a divine author. In fact these suppositions also appear. We read that when Vyāsa was enjoined by Brahma to arrange the Vedas in different books, he took four disciples. He also took Romaharṣana as his pupil in Itihāsa and Purāṇa. (V[^] 3.4.10) We are not told that Brahma demanded Vyāsa to take Romaharṣana with him, but he took him as his fifth pupil and the result was "the fifth Veda," the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. We

will mention more about divine sponsorship when we look at Sūta.

Another of the ways that the Purāṇa is linked to the Vedas is through line of transmission. The Vedas are said to have been created by Brahma/Viṣṇu and transmitted directly to Vyāsa. In Purāṇas the "immediate narrator is commonly, though not constantly, Lomahaṛṣana or Romahaṛṣana, the disciple of Vyāsa, who is supposed to communicate what was imparted to him by his preceptor."⁴² This is the case in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, as the text begins with "Śrī Sūta said". (V¹ 1.1) We have seen how Sūta is equated with Romahaṛṣana as the disciple of Veda-Vyāsa. By linking the methods of transmission of the two groups of texts the author of the Purāṇa links the texts.

4. Sūta

The term Sūta is here used for one particular individual as a generic term for one who deals with the Purāṇas.⁴³ In Book 1 in the episode on the birth and reign of Prithu, Sūta and Māgadha appear. We have already seen L. Rocher's analysis of the role of the Sūta as transmitter of the Purāṇas in Indian culture. They are royal bards assigned the task of transmitting all non-Vedic literature. It is interesting to note that they appear as products of the sacrifice performed by Brahma to consecrate Prithu. They are told to praise the new king and that unlike other

⁴² H.H. Wilson, PREF, x.

⁴³ See L. Rocher, PURA, 53-59.

panegyrics, which glorify the past accomplishments of the monarch, these praises are to be the agenda by which Prithu reigns. (V[^] 1.13.64) Here we see that Sūta and Māgadha operate as a foil to the king. Usually bards were merely reciters of royal glories, but here they actually influence policy. In fact according to M. Winternitz, in the Gautama-Dharmasūtra (XI, 19), which is regarded as the oldest of the preserved law-books (and therefore it is also found in the law books of Brhaspati and Yajñavalkya), it is taught that the king is to take as his authorities on the administration of justice, the Veda, the law-books, the Vedāngas, and the Purāṇa.⁴⁴ Here we can take Purāṇa not only to mean the texts themselves, but their composers, the Sūtas, also. That all kings followed their criticism and took it to heart as positive praise and constructive criticism would be too much for our understanding of human nature to believe. We have here, however, not real monarchs and subjects, but idealized archetypal representations of the bard and the king. Instead of giving them names they could almost be given titles as in the plays of August Strindberg, or Luigi Pirandello,⁴⁵ and the morality plays of Medieval Europe. They may have been as real as the chieftain Kṛṣṇa appears to have been, but their significance is in that they are used as transmitters

⁴⁴ M. Winternitz, HIL, 519.

⁴⁵ See Luigi Pirandello, "Six Characters in Search of an Author," and August Strindberg, "The Ghost Sonata."

of Purāṇic lore. As was mentioned they were archetypes in the same manner as Vyāsa. In this case the archetypal monarch is given advice by two archetypal advisors. Prithu for his part vows to take the advice of the bards to heart. (V[^] 1.13.66) The point of this discussion in relation to Śruti lies in the function of the Sūta. Above we have seen that Rocher proposes that Sūta and Māgadha are generic terms for court-bard and chronicler whose functions were royal charioteer, the king's confidant and messenger.⁴⁶ Rocher cites the Vayu Purāṇa and the Pādma Purāṇa and we see that, in the Purāṇic tradition at least, the Sūta was to protect (or compose) the genealogies of gods, ṛṣis and most glorious kings, and the traditions of great men.⁴⁷ Here we see that the Sūta, is given an exalted place in the royal court, perhaps higher than the sacrificial priest.⁴⁸ Where the propounders of Vedic lore would be expected to have some influence on the monarch, and may in fact have had some, there can be no doubt that the Sūta associated with Purāṇas is given a high place. This is not to say that the Purāṇas are the only texts dealt with in the court. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa refers to Prahlāda's being taught "the science

46 L. Rocher, PURA, 53-59.

47 L. Rocher, PURA, 54.

48 See L. Rocher, PURA, 55 esp. notes. Here Rocher states that sūtas were given a special seat at an assembly, even of ṛṣis, and were duly honored by sages. They were not, however, allowed to know the Vedas, therefore they may have a special place in the court, but were excluded from brahmanical functions.

of polity, as essential to the administration of government" (V¹ 1.19.27) which probably refers to the Artha Śāstra literature. Here the literature is used to educate an individual, but it is not on the same level as the type which is used as a foil for the king's actions.

The link between Parāśara and Vyāsa has been explored, but in their case we have no indication of their birth. In the case of Sūta, and Māgadha, we know how they were produced. They were produced by Brahma at the sacrifice for the birth of Prithu. (V¹ 1.13.51-64) We have, then, a pair of divinely produced bards, coming as they did from a sacrifice performed by Brahma. We must see them, therefore, as divinely authorized bards who transmit the Purāṇas. Parāśara and Vyāsa are divinely authorized to transmit sacred scripture, but these two are produced for that purpose.

5. Brahma/Viṣṇu

There is one other possibility for the authorship of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. That is the Divine itself. Not only does Brahma compose the Viṣṇu Purāṇa indirectly through Parāśara and through Sūta as product of his sacrifice, as well as through Vyāsa and his disciple Romaharṣana, but He does so directly. In fact we know that Brahma is the actual author since it is to Him that a sacrifice is given as it would be to any spiritual preceptor. In fact in referring to an oblation made to "Brahma and the rest"⁴⁹

⁴⁹ H.H. Wilson, VP, 2-3.

H.H. Wilson notes that "Brahma and the rest is said to apply to the series of teachers through whom this Purāṇa was transmitted from its first reputed author Brahma, to its actual narrator, the sage Parāśara."⁵⁰ Not only was the compiler of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa connected to the divine but the Viṣṇu Purāṇa itself is given divine origin in the text. The Vedas are the word of god transmitted to humans. Here the same is applied to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, it was composed by Brahma and transmitted through humans, until Parāśara narrated it to Maitreya. At the beginning of Parāśara's narration, he states that the text that follows was originally imparted by Brahma, to Dakṣa and other sages (V¹ 1.2.7-8) and ultimately transmitted to him. Not only was the Viṣṇu Purāṇa created by the father of all, but the metre in which most of it is composed also. We read that the Anuṣṭubh metre was created from Brahma's northern mouth, (V¹ 1.5.57) and it is in this metre that much, although not all, of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is composed. While other types of literature are written in Anuṣṭubh, and other metres, and prose, appear in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the text is related to Brahma, through being linked to a metre created by him.

We see here a potential for having four authors for the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Of course these are not the human composers and editors of the Hindu world, rather they are mythico-religious figures who may or may not have some

⁵⁰ H.H. Wilson, VP, 3 n.8.

historical reality. We see a link to the divine in that Brahma is said to have been the author of the text. Not only this, but there is a connection to the Vedas set up through the introduction of Vyāsa as the preceptor of a figure traditionally associated with the Purāṇas, Sūta. As well there is another issue which appears to have been unresolved for over a century, that of how Parāśara can be taken as the author of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, when the tradition usually ascribes this function to Vyāsa.

F. Conclusion

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa considers itself to be a text of great value for the ultimate end of humanity, the attainment of release. It also supports the older Vedic notions of earthly sacrifice. The tension between these concepts is a balance between casting aside the old moribund tradition, which clearly the Smārta Brahmins responsible for the Viṣṇu Purāṇa did not want to do, and being too radical in its incorporation of non-Brahmanical elements into the tradition. This balance is achieved through endorsement of the sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas, while also supporting the philosophy of mokṣa. It is achieved through seeing Viṣṇu present within the text while establishing a relationship to the non-sectarian Vedas. It is also done by ascribing its authorship to several different individuals, from the divine to the court bard.

PART II. SOTERIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Introduction

In order to look at the soteriological consequences of taking the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as Śruti, we must first take a brief look at the notion of salvation in this text. Salvation, in the general terms of the country of India, was release oriented. While there were materialist and existential schools the emphasis was on reunification of the individual with the divine. This took many forms, including the notion of "emptiness" in the Buddhist schools. Whereas in the West there is a belief in one body, one soul and only one chance to gain heaven, many Indians saw the soul as a part of the ultimate constituent of the universe, and the goal of our recurrent lives was to become reunited with this Ultimate. The geographical unit of India itself was special in this regard in that from other regions people are reborn into another form according to their actions, and they all must eventually be reborn into the land of Bharata for it is only from this region that heaven and liberation are obtained, as well as the fall into hell. (V[^] 2.3.2, 4) These three options, hell, heaven, and release form the parameters with which we will examine the notion of soteriology in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

B. Soteriology of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

1. Hell

In sharp contrast to the promise of unification with the World-Soul is the notion of Hell. It is necessary to

examine this briefly in order to fully understand the systematization of post-mortem rewards and punishments in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. While many religious systems have a notion of a place of punishment in the afterlife, and some have a notion of multiple hells, probably none has as elaborate a systematization of the netherworlds as did the ancient Hindus. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa gives a brief inventory of the hells and the various actions responsible for sending one there, as well as the punishments inflicted.⁵¹ The most important reason for going to Nāraka is the lack of expiation of guilt, (V[^] 2.6.35) however this is not always to be seen as the sinner's fault directly since ignorance can be a factor. (V[^] 6.5.)

2. Heaven

In India both Paradise and Hell exist, but neither are eternal. In describing the creations the text gives a brief reference to the various heavens. Brahmins go the heaven of the Pitṛs, unless they lead religious lives, in which case they go to the world of the eighty-eight thousand saints, Kṣatriyas go to that of Indra, Vaiśyas to that of the Wind, Śūdras to that of the Gandharbas, and ascetics go to the world of the seven Rṣis. (V[^]1.6.33-35) In another section the text describes the various worlds beyond the material and lists the Mahārloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka, and Satyaloka, (V[^] 2.7.12-15) all of which are

⁵¹ See V[^] 2.6, H.H. Wilson, VP, 170-174 notes, and Manu Smṛti IV.88-90.

the various divisions of the highest heaven, Brahmaloka.⁵² The various heavens are used as places of reward for those who please the gods. For example Muchukunda, (V^ 5.24) Trisanku, (V^ 4.3) Raji, (V^ 4.9) Satadhanu and Saivya, (V^ 3.18) all attain heaven while Dhruva is lifted into the heavens as a constellation. (V^ 1.12.)

Not only does heaven come as a boon from a deity one has pleased, but apparently it can be reached automatically. For example, we are told that the Ganges, which flows from Viṣṇu's toe, (V^ 2.9.111) confers heaven upon all who bathe in it by design or accident. (V^ 4.4.30-31) We are also told that the pious man who, among other things, worships the gods, and sacrifices to the manes, who suppresses anger and envy, who is benevolent to all, and allays the fears of others, secures, as the least of his rewards, enjoyment in Svarga. (V^ 3.12.35) We see in both cases that one does not need to receive a boon from a deity to ascend to heaven. It is worth mentioning that here Svarga must be taken to be synonymous with the heaven of Indra,⁵³ and it is to Svarga that most of the "automatic" attainments of heaven go. For example Trisanku pleased Viṣṇu with his performance of caste duties and was lifted to heaven. (V^ 4.3) Fulfilling caste obligations appears to be a major factor in determining one's post-mortem state. As we have seen neglect leads to Hell and proper

⁵² B. Walker, Hindu World, vol.2, 183-186.

⁵³ See B. Walker, Hindu World, vol. 2, 183-186.

performance leads to reward. Some of the various merits accrued by the proper carrying out of caste and aśrama duties are: a monarch who maintains the discipline of the different castes secures whatever region he desires; (V^ 3.8.29) the householder who fully performs his chief duty of hospitality is released from every kind of bondage, and obtains the highest of stations after death; (V^ 3.8.10, 18) the sage who diligently leads the life of the hermit conquers for himself the mansions of eternity; (V^ 3.9.23) the brahmin, who seeks for liberation and meditates upon it, secures the sphere of Brahma. (V^ 3.9.33)

3. Physical Benefits

There are existential benefits mentioned in the text also. For example the flower seller in the story of Kṛṣṇa's youth receives a blessing which is primarily earthly in nature. (V^ 5.19.25-28) As well the narration of the story of Dhruva causes the narrator to receive a similar benefit, (V^ 1.12.102-103) and the narration of the myth of the daughters of Dakṣa is stated to cause great fertility. (V^ 1.10.20) Here we must refer to the myths of the Syamantaka jewel, (V^ 4.13) Saubhari, (V^ 4.3) Prahlāda, (V^ 1.20) and the Churning of the Ocean. (V^ 1.9) These earthly benefits support the individual's need to see tangible benefits, but do not appear to be the ultimate purpose of the text, promoting liberation.

4. Summary of Soteriology in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

As we have seen Hindus have a fairly complex systematization of Paradises and Hells and their acquisition is both dependant on the gods and automatic. Living a virtuous life and fulfilling one's caste obligations will, whether as a boon from a deity or spontaneously by itself, send one to Heaven. Lack of virtuous living as well as the active commission of sin, sends one to Hell. In neither case is the result permanent, rather they all result in rebirth. The ultimate goal is reunification with Viṣṇu, and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa does tell us what is efficacious in this regard.

C. Consequences of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa Being Śruti

1. Release

While Hell is a place of punishment and heaven a place of reward, they are not the ultimate end, whether positive or negative, of humanity. Both Heaven and Hell are temporary. (V[^] 6.5.49) The goal of humanity is release from the physical and reunification into the Supreme. (V[^] 6.7.94) We see several references to this notion in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, for example, the stories of Khatwanga, (V[^] 4.4) Śalagrama, (V[^] 2.13) and Dhruva (V[^] 1.12) where Viṣṇu states "the man who worships me obtains speedy liberation from life. What is heaven to one whose mind is fixed on me?" (V[^] 1.12.89) As well, in describing one of the conflicts between the gods and the Daityas, the text tells us that Viṣṇu goes to delude the Daityas. He does so by

enticing them with secret knowledge about the true path to liberation. (V^ 3.18) Thirdly, when Vyāsa is instructing Arjuna on the meaning of life at the end of Book 5 he states that death is the doom of all who are born and the wise look beyond the material. (V^ 5.38.79-89) Finally, perhaps the best example of this notion is proposed at the end of Book 4, when Earth (Dharanī) tells us that monarchs are foolish in that they desire dominion over the world, yet cannot attain it. Human possession of property is impossible since this implies a sense of permanence altogether lacking in the mortal world, and the wise, being aware of this truth do not regard all material things, including children, fame, lands and property to be their own. (V^ 4.24.143) These examples demonstrate how pervasive the notion of emancipation was within the tradition and text.

We also get a sense of this at the end of a passage which gives the setting of a story about Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. We read that the small fish in a pond were oppressed by heat, the lakes were dried up, just as those who do not worship Viṣṇu are, but in Viṣṇu the waters were as clear and pure as the minds of the wise, who behold Viṣṇu in all things. (V^ 5.10.1-16) Also, in the story of Keśidvāja and Khaṇḍikya, Keśidvāja states that the consequence of physical acts is another body "so that their result is nothing but confinement to bodily existence." (V^ 6.7.16) Nor is the family taken to be the primary goal of

life. Saubhari (V^ 4.2) is a mendicant who becomes sidetracked and takes up the life of a householder. Eventually, he gives up all desires for his family as being exclusive of those who desire final liberation. In the end, he obtained the condition of Acyuta. (V^ 4.2.131) Yayatī, who exchanged his old age for his youngest son's youth, eventually determines that material desire cannot be appeased by gratification. Yayatī then took back his old age and retired to the forest to meditate. (V^ 4.10) We learn that this should be the process of those who wish to attain liberation, and reunification with the Ultimate. (V^ 2.14)

The question remains, how do we learn to be like the perfect sage, the one who never returns from the supreme sphere? Mere memory is an incomplete answer, as we see at the end of the story of the Syamantaka jewel. (V^ 4.13.162) The complete answer is meditation. While there is some ambiguity about what exactly is being discussed in the conversation between Dhruva and the ascetics, (V^ 1.11.41-56) it is clear that the path to the rewards being discussed is Yoga.⁵⁴ Meditation on Viṣṇu is so powerful that the heavenly sphere of the Yogis is the highest seat of Viṣṇu. (V^ 1.6.38-39) Meditation is the seed of eternal freedom. Therefore, the man who meditates on Viṣṇu, day and night, escapes Nāraka after death, all his sins are atoned for, (V^ 2.6.43) and the wise man, having detached

⁵⁴ See also H.H. Wilson, VP, 75 n.2.

himself from human objects through meditation, obtains final dissolution. (V[^] 6.5.59-60) Yoga is so powerful that the gods asked Viṣṇu to make Dhruva stop, since through meditation his power was becoming a danger to the cosmos. (V[^] 1.12.33-37)

While meditation is the best method of attaining union with the Ultimate, works are efficacious as well. Works such as sacrifice are qualified as being necessary for the continued existence of the material world, but they must be accomplished only as a method of worshipping Viṣṇu. Śalagrama lists the best things in life and states that the ultimate end in life is eternal, but it would be transient, if it were accomplished through transitory things. (V[^] 2.14.24) In fact the Viṣṇu Purāṇa states he who is subject to the influence of works is repeatedly reborn, but he who knows Vāsudeva to be the universal form, may continue to perform actions, and thereby enters into the deity. (V[^] 2.12.36-37) H.H. Wilson notes that these action may be committed only as far as they are intended to propitiate Viṣṇu, and not for any other purpose.⁵⁵ Works are beneficial, but in a lesser way, since they lead to better births, not liberation. The householder, for example, who expels imperfections and fulfills all caste obligations merely has final felicity in his grasp, (V[^] 3.12.40) while the sage who expels imperfections, and thereby takes no action in the world, is ready for emancipation. While not

⁵⁵ H.H. Wilson, VP, 197 n.8.

technically accepted in the path of works since they are a form of bhakti, performing religious acts does have positive ramifications. The visiting of a holy shrine, Kṛṣṇa's temple at Dvāraka, liberates one from sin, (V^ 5.38.11) and saints who bathe in the Ganges acquire final liberation. (V^ 2.9.121) This last must be qualified, since this action causes liberation for saints alone, for others the expiation of offenses and engendering of virtue appears to be purely this-worldly (V^ 2.9.118). These saints must be intent on Keśava, therefore meditating, while they perform their ablutions. Thus it is really a combination of bhakti meditation and works.

The performance of caste obligations could be construed as being a form of devotion to Viṣṇu also. In the Prahlāda myth Viṣṇu, through his blessing, grants his devotee liberation (V^ 1.20.28), and in the Dhruva myth Viṣṇu gives him a place in the heavens as a constellation. (V^ 1.12.90) It is not only devotees who attain liberation as a result of Viṣṇu. In his hatred Hiraṇyakaśipu thought constantly of Viṣṇu. This is enough to ensure even an enemy of Viṣṇu a place in heaven. (V^ 4.15) Not only can hatred of Viṣṇu expiate sin, so too can not seeing him be as effective as seeing him. In the story of Kṛṣṇa among the Gopis, we read that one damsel dared not enter the clearing where Kṛṣṇa and the Gopis were dancing. She had to content herself with meditating on Kṛṣṇa with closed eyes, and entire devotion, by which immediately all karma

was effaced by rapture. (V^ 5.13.20-21) Here we see that meditating on Kṛṣṇa expiates negative as well as positive karma. This enables the individual to be united with Viṣṇu directly without spending time in heaven first.

Demons, (V^ 1.19) gods, (V^ 5.33) and special humans are all capable of apprehending the truth that all is Viṣṇu. Hiranyaśipu and the gopi, as well as individuals such as Śalagrama (V^ 2.13-16) know this. This is what yogis as a class seek to intuit. In describing these yogis, the text states that those who annihilate ignorance attain the supreme spirit and are not reborn, nor can they generate progeny. (V^ 1.22.54, 55)

Two of the tales mentioned have deeper ramifications. At the end of the Dhruva myth the text states that whoever worthily describes the ascent of Dhruva into the heavens as a constellation forever shall be freed from all sin, and enjoy the heaven of Indra. (V^ 1.12.102) There are several ramifications this statement leaves for us. First is the notion of being freed from sin. This is not merely a temporary amnesty from past sins which allows the karma from future sins to begin to accrue. Rather this is a permanent freedom from all sin, past, present, and future. Given the context of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in which freedom from sin leads to final emancipation, then the highest goal of man is to be gained from a careful and devout retelling of the story. Secondly is conception of the heaven of Indra. It is the third highest heaven in

paradise, it is not, however, the ultimate emancipation which is the goal of much of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. This seems to be the gist of the blessing Kṛṣṇa bestows upon Muchukunḍa. Here he is told to go to whatever celestial regions he desires, and when he has enjoyed all heavenly pleasures he is to be born in a distinguished family, and ultimately obtain emancipation. (V[^] 5.24.2-3) There is also a benefit to accrue from the narration or listening to the story of Śalagrama. It is the enlightenment of the individual's mind to understand that there is no individuality, and to fit him for ultimate emancipation. (V[^] 2.16.)

As well, we see an equation of the lessening of one's sin and final emancipation. This occurs in Book 4. The text states whoever listens frequently to the account of the origin of the race of Vṛṣṇi, shall be purified from all sins and obtain the sphere of Viṣṇu. (V[^] 4.15.50) They are not to be taken as two discrete things, rather they are two steps in the chain of circumstance which leads to final emancipation. In another passage we see the efficacy of the spoken word. The text states that Kaṇḍu recited a particular mantra propitiating Viṣṇu and from this "essence of divine truth" attained final emancipation. (V[^] 1.15.59) Therefore it is possible to recite a text and attain liberation. Narrating certain parts of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa which appear to be taken as particularly sacred can be as effective in leading one to emancipation as certain

generally accepted mantras. For example listening to the history of the house of Yadu, (V^ 4.11.4) whether in its entirety or certain of its parts, (V^ 4.12.45) is said to efface sin. As we are told, this particular history is more effective than any other since it was into the Yādava tribe that Viṣṇu descended as Kṛṣṇa.

Not all of the literature presented as parts of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa can be used for mantras, however. We see that in the myth of Prahlāda (V^ 1.19) he answers Hiranyakaśipu's request to summarize the rules of polity which he has learned, presumably from the Artha Śāstra literature. Prahlāda answers from the perspective of a devotee of Viṣṇu. The question of subduing one's enemies and rewarding one's friends is moot to a true Vaiṣṇavite bhakta, we are told, as he knows neither friends nor foes since all is Viṣṇu. Thus the study of polity is the study of ignorance, and it is a waste of time to study such false knowledge, when all our energies should be dedicated to the acquirement of true wisdom. (V^ 1.19.39) Such true wisdom leads to correct and dutiful actions and the knowledge that all the existing world, proceeds from and is identical with Viṣṇu. (V^ 1.19.38, 48) Literature is like any other physical entity in that it is only important if it leads one to final liberation.

2. Physical Benefits: Phalaśloka

a. Introduction

Perhaps the most revealing methods of continuing our examination is to look at the notion of Phalaśloka in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

The term phalaśloka is a compound of phala; "fruit, result of an action,"⁵⁶ and śloka; "a stanza or verse in general, and one in the Anuśtubh in particular".⁵⁷ Phalaśloka means the benefits resulting from contact with a verse or collection of verses. While perhaps the most obvious description is "the promise of a reward for reading (the text)"⁵⁸ Phalaślokas are by no means limited to the reading of a text. Among the various Phalaślokas, as they are used in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, several of these types appear. First we see that certain benefits accrue from remembering the text, narrating it, as well as reading it, but the vast majority of the references to these benefits refer to hearing the text. There are also three types of benefits an individual can receive from devout contact with the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. They are the expiation of sin, benefits in heaven and benefits on earth.

b. Narrating

The first type of Phalaśloka we shall examine is that of narrating the Viṣṇu Purāṇa or stories from it. The

⁵⁶ V.S. Apte, APTE, 383 cols. 1-2.

⁵⁷ V.S. Apte, APTE, 567 col.3.

⁵⁸ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 92.

first example is alone in providing an existential benefit for correct narration. The text states that he who faithfully recapitulates the account of the daughters of Daksa shall never want offspring. (V^ 1.10.20) This appears fairly self explanatory in that both the act of faith and the existential outcome are delineated. For more eternal benefits we must return to the Dhruva story. Here the benefit is eternal as well as existential. One who worthily narrates the story is to be freed from all sin forever and to dwell in Indra's heaven where post-mortem bliss may be enjoyed forever. (V^ 1.12.102-103) This, in effect, guarantees that the recipient will never suffer in any of the hells for any perceived sin. Nor will he/she have to expiate sin in any way, all of which guarantees union with the Supreme. In the material world, the recipient will live long and enjoy all blessings. As well, Book 1 reiterates the expiatory benefits of the text, this time referring to the tale of Prithu. (V^ 1.13.94-95) In doing so it not only removes all sin, but relieves afflictions also. Finally Book 2 recounts the story of Bharata, the narration of which enlightens the narrator's mind and makes him fit for ultimate emancipation. (V^ 2.16.25) It is interesting to note that the first two instances demand virtuous recitation where the last two do not.

c. Remembering

While not as commonly mentioned as narrating is, remembering the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a vital function and is given certain benefits. For example, after telling the story of the Syamantaka jewel, Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that he who calls to mind the vindication of the character of Kṛṣṇa from false aspersions, shall never become the subject of unfounded accusation and shall be cleansed from every sin. (V[^] 4.13.162) The this-worldly aspect appears here in that those dutiful ones will never be falsely accused. As well as the existential there is the transcendental. The person who remembers will have his/her sin expiated and attain mokṣa. Another reference gives a time limit to the benefits one can accrue. The text states that one who remembers the legend of Saubhari will for eight successive births, be free from evil thoughts and selfish attachments. (V[^] 4.2.132-133) Here the benefits are existential, but carry over into other realms. Insofar as there is no direct mention of post-mortem benefits, one can assume that the lack of addiction to evil thoughts and improper objects is strictly secular, but carrying out these virtues will increase one's positive karma and thus benefit the individual soul in the long run. There are other instances of the benefits of remembering the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, for example "the lineage of him shall never be extinct" who remembers the race of Manu, originating with Brahma, (V[^] 4.1.4) and the same is promised to one who remembers the

Daksa myth. (V^ 1.10.103) In both cases, the prospective recipient must narrate the story with faith. The latter quote is, according to H.H. Wilson, a part of a more ancient narration.⁵⁹

d. Reading

In addition to the narration and remembering of tales being of benefit, there is the reading of them. As we have seen above the tale of Saubhari was of benefit to those who remember it, but it was also beneficial to those who read it. In fact the text allows reading, hearing, remembering and understanding to be efficacious in sparing one from addiction to evil thoughts and improper attachments. (V^ 4.2.132-133) Despite the obvious importance of oral transmission of texts we see clear reference not only to the composition, in writing, of religious documents, but the blessing given to one who uses such writings.⁶⁰ Again we read that he who reads and retains with faith this Purāṇa, acquires the eternal state of perfection, which is Hari. (V^ 6.8.52) This echoes the end of the Prahlāda myth. (V^ 1.20.36) The "Churning of the Ocean" provides benefits, but those are not the eternal expiation of sin, but the existence in one's house of the goddess Lakṣmī for three generations. (V^ 1.9.146) All of

⁵⁹ H.H. Wilson, VP, 277 n.2.

⁶⁰ See also V^ 6.8.3 where the V^ is called "the most excellent of holy writings."

the other references give eternal benefits, but this one gives an existential one.

e. Hearing

In all the above examples of its benefiting the reciter, reciting is seen as being identical to, and almost an extension of, hearing. For example, at the end of the Churning of the Ocean myth the listener and the reciter are equally blessed for three generations, and at the end of the story of Saubhari both reciter and listener, as well as one who remembers and one who understands, are to be purified from evil thoughts and selfish attachments for eight successive births. (V⁴.2.133) In the same vein we read that whoever hears the story of how Rāji defended the gods from the Daityas shall retain for ever his proper place, and never be guilty of wicked acts. (V⁴.9.23) Virtually anyone, then, who is of pious heart who comes into contact with this story receives some merit. We see not only in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa are hearing and reading of equal merit, but J.N. Banerjea cites the Mahābhārata as proposing a similar theme.⁶¹ It is possible to group the Phalaślokas into three groups, similar to those delineated above with respect to types of benefits. First are those which provide eternal benefit, secondly are those which provide worldly benefit, and finally those which have conditions attached. Of the first, there are also two subgroups of explicit and implicit.

⁶¹ J.N. Banerjea, Paurāṇic and Tantric Religions, 18.

We may first refer back to the Book 4 to the genealogy of Manu, by listening to which all sin shall be effaced (V^ 4.1.4) to see an element of the first group. Here we see that there is no temporal limitation, seven generations, for example, nor is there mention of eternal existence in heaven or reunion with Hari. All that is stated is that all sin will be effaced, but, again we are unsure if it is all previous sin, or all sin past, present and future. There is another passage at the end of the same Book which states that whoever listens reverently and with faith to the story of the genealogy of Manu, shall be purified entirely from all his sins. (V^ 4.24.139) Here the purification is somewhat more clear. The reverent listener will be cleansed entirely from all his sins. We are also given a reason for the special nature of the family of Manu. We are told that in this line there have flourished kings endowed with a portion of Viṣṇu. (V^ 4.24.138) We see here that this family is particularly blessed. Not only do the accounts of the family of Manu provide effacement of all sin, but the family of Yadu does also. Here we are given a reason, because Viṣṇu, the supreme spirit that is without form, was manifested in this family (V^ 4.11.4) the same reason the Mānavas were efficacious. Later the text states that listening to the account of the progeny of Jyamagha, a descendant of Yadu, purifies one from sin, (V^ 4.12.45) as does the lineage of Ikṣvāku. (V^ 4.4.113) The lines of Vṛṣṇi, (V^ 4.15.50)

Prithu, (V^ 1.13.94-95) Dhruva, (V^ 1.12.102-103) Prahlāda, (V^ 1.20.36) and Raji (V^ 4.9.23) are also beneficial. The lines of Ikṣvāku, Vṛṣṇi, Prithu, Dhruva, Prahlāda, and Raji are mentioned once in this context, while that of Yadu and Manu are mentioned twice. The lineages of Prithu, Dhruva, and Prahlāda appear almost to give continuity to the text while it inserts these important myths. In these cases there is more going on than the relation of historical and semi-historical figures to each other. This is borne out by the fact that they are distinguished from the other stories by being able to expiate sin for the listener.

As we see, Book 4 is not the only place in which hearing portions of the text is cited as beneficial. In Book 6 we are told in a long passage that listening to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa obliterates all sins, gives one the positive karma equal to the performance of an Aṣvamedha sacrifice, and so on. What is important for our purposes is that it is stated quite clearly and repeatedly in what is fairly obviously a later addition that hearing is of great benefit in expiating one's karma and in aiding in the reunion of individual soul and that of the Supreme. (V^ 6.8) As well the Prahlāda myth is cited as purifying one of all one's sins, whether committed by day or night. (V^ 1.20.37) It is interesting to note that there are three types we can see in these passages. Book 4 gives the benefit of listening to a genealogy, Book 1 gives the benefits of

listening to a myth, and Book 6 states that listening to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, in whole or in part, will clear away one's sins and enable one to attain emancipation from existence which is the fruit of self-control, (V[^] 4.24.131) and the great end of man. (V[^] 6.8.3)

In addition to the ability to expiate sin and enable one to transcend the afflictions of worldly existence permanently, there are existential benefits to be gleaned from listening to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. These vary from the guarantee of an eternal lineage, (V[^] 1.10.103, 4.1.4,) to the removal of the contamination of the Kali age. (V[^] 1.13.94, 6.8.52) The benefits range from relief from affliction (V[^] 1.13.94) to the bestowal of the dignity of a divine sage upon the listener. (V[^] 1.22.90) A combination of two of the above types of benefits, that of removal of afflictions and eternal progeny, comes at the end of the Churning of the Ocean myth. We read that whoever hears or reads the account of the birth of Lakṣmī will have her protection in his house for three generations. (V[^] 1.9.146) Lakṣmī, as benefactress of the world, provides good fortune, which can be taken as the opposite of affliction. This fortune will be received by the recipient's family for a specified period of time. This myth also provides an example of the combination of positive and negative blessings. In addition to increasing one's heir's fortunes Lakṣmī would not allow misfortune to enter into their house. In this way she provides a positive blessing in

that she will increase the fortunes of those she protects, and she wards off misfortune and other afflictions as well. We also read at the end of Book 4 that by listening to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa ambition fades away. Whoever shall listen reverently and with faith to this narrative, shall be purified entirely from all his sins, and, with the perfect possession of his faculties, shall live in unequalled affluence, plenty, and prosperity. (V⁴ 4.24.138-143) Ambition, a negative notion in this context, will be removed and physical prosperity will begin. More specifically listening to ten chapters of the text every day is stated as being able to give one the rarely attainable merit equal to the giving of a brown cow, and hearing the whole text while meditating on Viṣṇu obtains the reward of a properly conducted Aṣvamedha rite. (V⁶ 6.8.54) Interestingly enough in a time when the Brahmanical preoccupation with Vedic sacrifices was becoming more and more removed from the masses and tension between practitioners of these sacrifices and those members of the bhakti movement may have been high, we see an effort to remove the obligation to sacrifice from the strata of society where it was least likely to be practiced. We see again the fine line the redactors of our text are treading in attempting to keep the Viṣṇu Purāṇa orthodox while expanding into the non-Brahmin castes. Brahmins can sacrifice, and those who can either not afford sacrifice, or are not inclined to do so, perhaps due to the influence

of ahiṃsa and like concepts, need not. Both however are seen to gain the merit of these sacrifices, one through sacrifice itself, one through other means.

There are certain qualifications involved with the hearing of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It would not be true that one who was wealthy and did not wish to spend the money associated with a sacrifice would gain the merit of an Aṣvamedha. Nor would one who, though capable, refused to do a pilgrimage to a tīrtha at which to bathe or fast, gain the merit associated with these actions merely by listening to a recitation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.⁶² Rather in order to benefit, one must listen frequently, (V[^] 4.15.50) reverently and with faith (V[^] 4.24.139) to these accounts in order to receive the profits associated with them whether existential or transcendental. They are not to be seen as easy replacements of strict rules, rather they are strict in and of themselves, but in a different sense.

f. Summary of Phalaślokas

The fruits of contact with the text are certain benefits. First we see that certain benefits accrue from remembering the text, narrating it, as well as reading and perhaps writing it, but the vast majority of the references to these benefits refer to hearing the text. Among the benefits which accrue from contact with the text, are the temporary physical and heavenly, however expiation of past,

⁶² See V[^] 1.22.89, 2.8.118 for examples of bathing as equal to recitations of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

present and future sins predominate. Ultimately the one thread that ties all of the benefits together, is the notion of reverence. If one reads, recites or remembers as an act of devotion, then the benefits are guaranteed.

D. Conclusion

There appears to be certain stratifications we can see in the passages on soteriology and the after-life in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. First we can see the existential benefits. Secondly are the post-mortem rewards and punishments of heaven or hell. Thirdly is the expiation of sin and the accompanying notion of emancipation and release from rebirth. While it is impossible to say categorically that one level comes before another, it appears that one may be nomadic-pastoral, another sedentary-agricultural, and the last post-Upaniṣadic. In order to better qualify these distinctions, more research, particularly a multi-textual one is necessary.

CHAPTER THREE

RĀMANUJA ON THE VIṢṆU PURĀṆA AS ŚRUTI

A. Introduction

The Śrīvaiṣṇava movement is especially established in the Tamil speaking regions, but has spread to all parts of India and in doing so has, to a certain extent, reinvigorated Hinduism in those areas. It has been called the natural continuation of Pāñcarātrism,¹ and also its antithesis.² In either case it was, and is, a major force in India's religious history. The original leaders of the movement are the Ālvārs, but it "does not attain its full individuality until the appearance of Rāmānuja."³ The age of the Ālvārs was succeeded by the age of the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas - Nāthamuni, Yamunācārya and Rāmānujācārya - who, being great scholars, were able to combine the traditions of the Sanskrit Veda and the hymns of the Ālvārs and give a philosophical basis for their theistic beliefs and practices. They combined bhakti with jñāna and karma, and reconciled the Vedas and the Upaniṣads with the Tamil Prabandham and were thus given the title of Ubhāya Vedāntins. The first of the Ācāryas is Nāthamuni (dated at the end of the tenth, or beginning of the eleventh centuries C.E.), who raised the Prabandham to the status of a Veda in public as well as private worship. He did so by

¹ L. Renou, NAT HIN, 117

² S. Jaiswal, ODV, 47.

³ L. Renou, NAT HIN, 117. 119

collecting the hymns, setting them to music, and having them regularly sung in temples. The second great Ācārya, Yamuna, established the orthodoxy of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and put the religion on a firm philosophical footing which laid the foundations on which Rāmānuja built his Viśiṣṭādvaita system. This Viśiṣṭādvaita is "Advaita" or non-dualism with "Viśiṣṭa" or special qualifications.

Rāmānuja tried to meet the doctrine of Ādvaita or monism which posed a direct challenge to the cult of bhakti. Bhakti was not so much an unbounded love as a continuous upasāna (meditation) prescribed in the Upaniṣads. Both in his philosophy and general practices he appeared to be a champion of orthodox Brahmanism. He followed more or less the Vāsudevism of the old Pāñcarātra system, recognising Vāsudeva with his four vyūhas and his identity with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa."⁴ As one writer puts it, "the philosophy of Rāmānuja is a philosophy of realistic theism assigning the highest place to a suprapersonal God."⁵

A.A. MacDonell states that the chief aim of Rāmānuja was the reconciliation of the doctrines of the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas with his own religion and philosophy.⁶ In doing so, Rāmānuja draws frequently from the Upaniṣads. In cases where the "primarily monistic" Upaniṣads are in conflict with his

⁴ P. Banerjee, EIR, 103-104.

⁵ A.S. Gupta, CSPR, 155.

⁶ A.A. Macdonell, India's Past, 149.

view, Rāmānuja supports his doctrines by quoting profusely from the Purāṇas, especially the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.⁷ V.K.S.N. Raghavan states that Rāmānuja cited many sources⁸ and S.N. Dasgupta points out this has traditional precedents.⁹

1. Life of Rāmānuja

Rāmānuja was born in Śrīperumbudur probably in the first half of the eleventh century,¹⁰ and is reputed to have lived 120 years. At an early age, he was placed under the tuition of Yādavaprakāsa, who belonged to the Advaitic school of Śaṅkara. His characteristic independence of judgement soon brought him into conflict with his teacher, with whom he could not agree in the interpretation of sacred texts. He thereupon placed himself under the influence of certain Vaiṣṇava teachers who were the pupils of Yamuna, then head of the Śrīrangam temple. His attitude towards caste was so broad that it could not be tolerated by his orthodox wife, from whom he later separated. On the

⁷ Sarasvati Chennakesavan, A Critical Study of Hinduism, 64-65.

⁸ V.K.S.N. Raghavan, History of Viśiṣṭādvaita Literature, 10. Raghavan states that Rāmānuja quotes Bodhāyana's Vṛitti, Tanka's Vākya, Dramida's Bhāṣya. Also "passages from the Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Pāñcarātra Samhitās are also extensively quoted by Rāmānuja in support of his interpretation of the Sūtras."

⁹ S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.3. See pages 16, 260, and 496 in citing Yamuna, Madhva, Vallābha, Jiva Goswāmi, Bāladeva, and Venkatanātha as using Purāṇas and especially the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as a proof text.

¹⁰ S. Rādhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, dates his birth at 1027, while M. Banerjee, Invitation to Hinduism, dates it at 1017. For a detailed biography of Rāmānuja, see J.B. Carman, TRA, 24-48.

death of Yamuna, Rāmānuja was offered the position of his successor as religious and intellectual leader of Śrīrangam. It is reputed that upon seeing the corpse of Yamuna Rāmānuja noticed that three of his fingers were twisted. He took this to mean that he was to fulfill three wishes for Yamuna, convert the people to Śrīvaisnavism, write a commentary on the Brahmasūtras, and write many works on Śrīvaisnavism. These he undertook. While at Śrīrangam he learned all that was possible of the doctrines of his predecessor. He took up pilgrimages which took him as far as Kaśmir, but most of his life was spent in Śrīrangam until, late in life, he was forced to flee the persecutions of the Cola King Kulottunga, a staunch Śaivite. After Kulottunga's death he returned to Śrīrangam and remained as leader until his death, reputed to be in 1137 CE. Rāmānuja's most important works are the Srī Bhāṣya, the Vedāntadīpa, Vedāntasāra, the Gītā Bhāṣya, and the Vedārthasaṃgraha.

2. Introduction to Rāmānuja's Philosophy

While it is true that there are three emphases to Rāmānuja's thought, God, Nature and the Individual Soul,¹¹ we will only be focussing on one, his conception of God. Accordingly it is necessary to briefly summarize his positions on three other concepts.

¹¹ M. Yamunacharya, Rāmānuja's Teachings in His Own Words, 40.

In approaching Rāmānuja's notion of the Self, we immediately notice how intensely related it is with God. The notion of individual is inextricably linked with that of over-soul. V.R. Srisaila Chakravarti gives eleven characteristics of the individual soul as being: [1] distinct from the body, sense-organs, the mind, breaths and the intellect; [2] self-luminous; [3] blissful; [4] eternal; [5] atomic in size; [6] imperceptible; [7] inconceivable; [8] without parts; [9] changeless; [10] the abode of consciousness; [11] controlled, sustained and supported by God and subservient to Him.¹² We see that the Self has many characteristics, but it is controlled, sustained and supported by God, without whom its existence is impossible. Since the infinite dwells in all, He may be said to dwell in any individual, and so one can say with Prahlāda, that as Brahman "constitutes my 'I' also, all is from me I am all, within me is all."¹³ The proper form of the soul is free from all various differentiations, which are brought about by the natural action of prakṛti. In essence the soul is knowledge and beatitude. "The soul can only be defined as essentially knowledge: and this essential nature is common to all souls."¹⁴

¹² V.R. Srisaila Chakravarti, The Philosophy of Śrī Rāmānuja, 10.

¹³ SB 1.1.31, quoting V[^] I.19.85. See S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 688.

¹⁴ VS 5 quoting V[^] 1.4.40.

While the individual soul is related to God, yet not identical with it, it is also the agent of action and the enjoyer of retribution of this action.¹⁵ It is this connection with matter that gives uniqueness to the soul of which the soul can be rid as it is not a natural connection. It follows that "the individuality determined by bodily connections is not eternal. When it is shattered the soul is said to attain the nature of Brahman and manifest its own true nature."¹⁶ In fact birth and death are the soul's association with or dissociation from bodies. This results in expansion and contraction of intelligence in each different lifetime. In terms of the Self, Rāmānuja states that the person arisen from deep sleep never represents himself as "pure consciousness, devoid of all egoity", rather he says "I slept well." Even in sleep the Self is always an ego, and cannot become pure knowledge. "It is egoity that is opposed to salvation, and not individuality."¹⁷

Some proclaim that it is the bondage to the body which obstructs the individual soul's vision of the eternal and prevents it from recognising its kinship with God. Perhaps J. Sinha proposes this best.

A soul is essentially of the nature of unlimited knowledge and bliss. But in the state of bondage its essential knowledge and

¹⁵ See S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 692.

¹⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 710.

¹⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 710.

bliss are veiled by nescience and potencies of actions- merits and demerits, and it appears to be of the nature of limited knowledge and bliss. In the state of release its veil of nescience and karma is destroyed, and it realizes its essential community of nature with God.¹⁸

Release, then is the realization of unity without identification of one's individual soul with that of God. This release is attained through knowledge.

In VS 5 Rāmānuja states that the soul is pure knowledge. He does admit, however that mundane knowledge is of several different types. Unlike many other schools of Indian philosophy, Vedāntins recognise three branches of knowledge; perception, inference, and scripture. Of these, perception is authoritative only regarding things knowable by the senses; inference is authoritative regarding unseen objects as extensions of the known; and "in the case of things beyond the reach of the senses, āgama or śāstras are the only authority."¹⁹ Rāmānuja accepts perception, inference and scripture as valid sources of knowledge, and is indifferent about the rest. Perception has for its object what is distinguished by difference, possessing a general character which constitutes its form. Rāmānuja admits the distinction between determinate and indeterminate perception. Indeterminate perception is neither pure being nor the apprehension of a qualified

¹⁸ J. Sinha, TPR, 149.

¹⁹ V.R. Srisaila Chakravarti, The Philosophy of Śrī Rāmānuja, 6-7.

object and its qualifications unrelated to one another. The essential feature of consciousness is discrimination, and we cannot apprehend an object without apprehending some special features of it. All knowledge consists in the apprehension of an object qualified by some specific quality. However unlike others in the Hindu tradition, for Rāmānuja yogic perception is not admitted as an independent source of knowledge. Each sense operates through its discrete sense organ. "If yogic perception operates through the senses, then it is not different from the sense perception; if it is independent of all experience, then it is invalid."²⁰ That is to say that since yogic perception is a distinct knowledge of an object perceived in the past and remembered in the present, it is not valid, since it is but a recollection, although a vivid one, brought on by the intensity of meditation. For Rāmānuja, knowledge was a substance because it is different from a quality in nature. Touch and other qualities produce their effects being in contact with their substance. "Knowledge manifests an object which does not come into contact with the Self in which knowledge subsists. So it differs from other qualities."²¹ Even so, all knowledge is of the real, and representative of some aspects of reality, but not of the whole of it. While this is so, it is not complete and perfect until it takes in the whole of reality and the

²⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 672.

²¹ J. Sinha, TPR, 172.

knower becomes free from all defects. This cannot happen to individuals as mortals. If all knowledge is real, how does it happen that sometimes our knowledge does not correspond to things? This is through errors of perception, or confused conclusions about unclear perceptions of the elemental constituents of things.²² This is in contrast to Brahma's knowledge which is immediate and is not dependant on the organs of sense. He is all-knowing and has direct intuition of all, and is beyond perception and inference.²³

Thought itself, however, cannot bring us face to face with reality without meditation. Through meditation the individual comes to true realizations of the nature of God, and the relationship of the soul to him, whereupon emancipation is possible through the performance of correct actions.²⁴ The essential nature of the soul, while in the state of samsāra, is obscured by avidyā and karma. "The state of release means the unimpeded manifestation of the natural qualities of intelligence and bliss."²⁵ In order to achieve this emancipation, prohibited actions should not be committed, the prescribed duties should be performed. These duties should be performed with detachment so as not to accrue merit, thus leaving one able to know God and

²² S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 675.

²³ J. Sinha, TPR, 46.

²⁴ VS 91 citing V[^] 6.6.12.

²⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 710.

thereby attain emancipation.²⁶ Salvation, according to Rāmānuja, is not the disappearance of the Self, but its release from the limiting barriers especially those of physicality. For the disappearance of the Self will be the destruction of the real Self. The released soul attains the nature of God, though not identity with him. It becomes omniscient and is ever having the intuition of God. In this state there are no distinctions of gods, men, animals or plants.²⁷ This state of non-distinction should not be confused with the identification of the Śāṅkarite school, not the Buddhist's "absorption" in that Rāmānuja insists that the soul attains the nature of God, but not identity with Him. The individual soul still maintains its individuality, but is now in harmony with divinity. In this position it could theoretically choose to act against the will of God, but since it is now enlightened it would not do so. This distinction between attaining the nature of God and attaining identity with God could be viewed as the most fundamental presupposition on which most of Rāmānuja's theology is based.

Release is the ultimate goal of the individual soul, which is essentially pure knowledge, and the means to attain this is to correctly use mundane knowledge to know God which will cause one to commit proper actions, which in turn eliminates karma. These actions, if done as a form of

²⁶ J. Sinha, TPR, 34.

²⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 709.

selfless devotion, will produce no positive karma. Release is then possible.

B. Sources of Rāmānuja's Philosophy

For Rāmānuja scripture consists of Śrutis, Smṛtis, Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Brahmasūtras, Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās, and the sayings of the Tamil Ālvārs. Of these types of literature, Śruti is always to be taken as superior. (SB 2.1) Of these, "all texts are equally important and they should be interpreted in a synthetic manner."²⁸ The Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta of Rāmānuja is thus based upon the Svetaśvatāra Upaniṣad and other theistic Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and the Pāñcarātra scriptures.²⁹

As defined in CHAPTER ONE Śruti would include the Veda Saṁhitās, the Āraṇyakas, Brāhmaṇas, and the Upaniṣads. As was mentioned, for Rāmānuja all Śruti is of an equal stature. As a class of literature, since it is of divine origin, "the scriptural testimony is the only infallible proof with regard to the nature of ultimate Reality. The scriptures tell us the truth."³⁰ This is so because "scripture is our only source regarding supersensuous matters, though reason may be employed in support of

²⁸ S.R. Bhatt, SRV, 35. See also S. Sampath Kumar, "Bhagavad Rāmānuja and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta" in Viśiṣṭādvaita: Philosophy and Religion, 44.

²⁹ J. Sinha, TPR, 3.

³⁰ K.D. Bharadwaj, The Philosophy of Rāmānuja, 35.

scripture."³¹ Human arguments can be refuted by other arguments, and for this reason Rāmānuja "adheres to the scriptural testimony in matters of a transcendental nature."³² He argues that "scripture which rests on endless unbroken tradition, cannot therefore be suspected of any, even the least, imperfection, and hence cannot be non-authoritative; the state of bondage, on the other hand, with its manifold distinctions is proved by Perception, Inference, and so on, which are capable of imperfections and therefore may be non-authoritative." (SB 1.1.1, see also VS 52)

While all Śruti is of equal stature, Rāmānuja appeals to Vedic authority as the original source of authority. "Brahman is not perceived. He cannot be proved or disproved by reason. He is proved by the Vedas alone."³³ However, the recital of the Veda as an aggregate of syllables is "in this way analogous to the recital of mantras." (SB 1.1.1) Mantras in and of themselves are not an effective means to know God. Through their study the student ascertains that the fruit of mere works, as typified in the Vedas, is transitory, while the result of the knowledge of Brahman, as typified in the Upaniṣads, is something permanent. (SB 1.1.1) Here Rāmānuja venerates the Vedas, but ascribes to the Upaniṣads a higher value since

³¹ S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 674.

³² K.D. Bhāradwaj, The Philosophy of Rāmānuja, 34.

³³ J. Sinha, TPR, 45.

the Vedas enjoin committing actions which lead to temporary benefits, while the Upaniṣads enjoin true knowledge of Brahman which leads to emancipation of the soul from the body.

Accordingly Rāmānuja declares his affirmation to Vedic lore, he has based much of his philosophy on the teachings of the Upaniṣads. He has given ample justification for his particular interpretation of these texts. The fundamental conception of Rāmānuja's philosophy is the conception of the Absolute as a Triune Unity and this he has formed in accordance with the Upaniṣadic teachings,³⁴ especially as found in the theistic Upaniṣads. J. Sinha even goes so far as to say that the Svetaśvatāra Upaniṣad is the primary Upaniṣad for Rāmānuja.³⁵ While this is almost unanimously declared in the literature, there is a dissenting view. B. Kumarappa states that while Rāmānuja claimed Śruti, in this case the Upaniṣads, as the source of his knowledge of Brahma, "no such clearly formulated doctrine is to be found in them."³⁶ Moreover, Rāmānuja is aware of this as is clear from the great pains he takes to explain the Upaniṣadic texts which disagree with him. His very eagerness to claim support for his view from Śruti reveals that he obtained his view elsewhere. Many scholars would contend that these come

³⁴ A.S. Gupta, CSPR, 9.

³⁵ J. Sinha, TPR, 1.

³⁶ B. Kumarappa, Realism and Illusionism in Hinduism, 185.

from Purāṇas. S.R. Bhatt states that "there can be no doubt" that Rāmānuja drew his conception of the six qualities of God from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa,³⁷ and we see that his explication of kṣetrajñas in the Gītā Bhāṣya comes from V[^] 1.4.51-52. As well the notion of the physical properties of Brahman stem from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa,³⁸ and some "characteristic doctrines and technical terms" used by Rāmānuja are also drawn from there.³⁹ While B. Kumarappa's opinion is in the minority, it has certain merits. For example in the Vedārthasaṃgraha Rāmānuja uses the Vedas as the first text in his proof, and works his way "down the ladder of authority" to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.⁴⁰ He does the same in the Śrī Bhāṣya, only this time the only other Śrutis mentioned are Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā.⁴¹ "Rāmānuja profusely quotes"⁴² the Svetaśvatāra Upaniṣad, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, as well as the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. As justification for not basing a theology solely on the Vedas, Rāmānuja's reasoning is as

37 S.R. Bhatt, SRV, 64, referring to Rāmānuja's citation of V[^] 1.2.10-14; 1.22.53; 6.5.72, 82-87.

38 S.S. Raghavachar, Viśiṣṭādvaita, 36, probably referring to VS 134 which cites V[^] 6.7.80ff, and 1.22.

39 S.S. Raghavachar, Viśiṣṭādvaita, 8.

40 VS 133 citing V[^] 1.9.145, 1.22.63, 4.1.84, 6.7.70. Also VS 110 stating that the V[^] agrees with Śruti.

41 SB 1.1.1 citing V[^] 2.12.39-45. Also SB 1.1.31 citing V[^] 1.19.85 to support only Upaniṣadic texts.

42 Jadunath Sinha, TPR, 1.

follows: "The Smṛtis and the Purāṇas, which are in accord with the Vedas, are sources of valid knowledge. The Pāñcarātra Āgama uttered by Vāsudeva is in complete harmony with the Vedas, and therefore authoritative."⁴³ S. Radhakrishnan agrees,⁴⁴ as does Swami Adidevananda who states that "whatever might be the origin and position of the Pāñcarātra according to its critics, it was always regarded by the Viśiṣṭādvaitin as not only of Vedic origin, but as no less authoritative than the Vedas."⁴⁵

If, as Swami Adidevananda states "Viśiṣṭādvaita accepts the Pāñcarātra as a supreme authority,"⁴⁶ then there is little wonder that Rāmānuja would take a Pāñcarātra influenced text, as the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is, as authoritative to some degree. Yet this is not the only reason. In fact he reminds us that the purpose of Purāṇas is to reinforce the Vedas. They are to make the Veda grow, and the Veda fears that an unlearned man may harm it. (SB 1.1.1) Not only are they to make the Veda grow, but in answer to the question "How can a person meditate upon Brahma without knowing the Veda?" Rāmānuja answers "Those ... who do not study Veda and Vedānta may acquire the

43 Jadunath Sinha, TPR, 45.

44 S. Radhakrishnan, IP, vol.2, 674.

45 Swami Adidevananda, "Pancharatra and Visishtadvaita" in Viśiṣṭādvaita: Philosophy and Religion, 225.

46 Swami Adidevananda, "Pancharatra and Visishtadvaita" in Viśiṣṭādvaita: Philosophy and Religion, 223.

requisite knowledge by hearing Itihāsas and Purāṇas." Thus Rāmānuja endorses the Purāṇas as efficacious for those not entitled to hear or read the Vedas, but only "in so far as they confirm or support the Veda, not independently of the Veda." (SB 1.3.32) Purāṇas thus are to support the Veda, and also to provide theological benefits to those not entitled to hear the Vedas. According to some scholars, Rāmānuja considered the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as Smṛti on the same level as the Bhagavad Gītā, and certain portions of the Mahābhārata.⁴⁷ In fact in the Śrī Bhāṣya, in demonstrating that neither Śruti, Smṛti nor Purāṇa teach that Brahma is "intelligence, free from all difference" (SB 1.1.1) he used both the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhagavad Gītā as source texts, and "in the Vedārthasaṃgraha the quotations from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa outnumber those from the Bhagavad Gītā while in the Śrībhāṣya the latter appears to play a far more important role."⁴⁸ It appears then, that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the most important of the Purāṇas for Rāmānuja, while the Bhagavad Gītā is the most important of the non-Purāṇic Smṛtis. While the Bhagavad Gītā was, and is, used in much of Hinduism as an authoritative text, for Rāmānuja to take the Viṣṇu Purāṇa on similar terms would be acceptable if, as he states in the Śrī Bhāṣya the Viṣṇu Purāṇa had been accepted as a religious and edifying book without

⁴⁷ See S.R. Bhatt, SRV, 17 n.10.

⁴⁸ J.A.B. van Buitenen "Introduction" to VS, 33.

dissension by all scholars in all directions.⁴⁹ For Rāmānuja the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhagavad Gītā are therefore different but equal texts.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa stands alone, however, in the field of Purāṇas. Except for a handful of references to the Matsya Purāṇa in the Vedārthasaṃgraha and the Harivaṃśa Purāṇa, and Mahābhārata in the Gītā Bhaṣya, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is the sole representative of Purāṇa literature cited by Rāmānuja. For a theological basis to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa being taken this way we have only to turn to the Vedārthasaṃgraha. We read that "all the compilers of purāṇas have compiled their purāṇas after Brahma himself had told them all the contents." (VS 94) It must be admitted that here Rāmānuja is using the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as proof of its own supremacy for he is citing V¹ 1.2.8, but it is for this reason that he states "when there is contradiction between Purāṇas which Brahma has revealed on days when sattva prevailed, and Purāṇas revealed on other days when other guṇas prevailed, then the Purāṇa that was revealed on a sattvika day contains the truth and another that contradicts the former contains no truth." (VS 94) Given the typical Purāṇic classification; the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is sattva, therefore it is always correct in any

⁴⁹ J.A.B. van Buitenen "Introduction" to VS, 35, also VS 110.

disagreement of this kind.⁵⁰ Again Rāmānuja states that when any other Purāṇa disagrees with the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, "all other purāṇas which give a diverging version should be so interpreted that they are not in conflict with the above one" or else abandoned. (VS 111) The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is important enough to Rāmānuja that he spends considerable time explaining that it does not teach that Brahma is free from all difference, contains Nescience, and the world is wrongly imagined due to Nescience. (SB 1.1.1 citing V^ 2.12.37-45) This exegesis would not be done if the text was not of some theological value and taken as a proof text. Nor would the exegesis of V^ 6.7.53. To emphasize his argument and lend more orthodoxy to it Rāmānuja cites the Svetaśvatāra Upaniṣad (3.8) and Taittirīya Upaniṣad (3.1). Here these Śruti texts are used as reinforcements for the basic argument formulated from a Viṣṇu Purāṇa quotation. This is unusual in that it is usually the Viṣṇu Purāṇa which is a support text for other Śrutis. For example Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.2.50-52 is used to argue that all cognition has the Real for its object, since the Real is Cognition. This is in addition to the Vedānta Sūtras 3.1.3; and Purva Mīmāṃsa Sūtras and various Upaniṣads. (SB 1.1.1) The same case occurs elsewhere in Rāmānuja's

⁵⁰ See H.H. Wilson, PREF, xii, for a delineation of which Purāṇas are sattvika, which are tamasa, and which are rājasa.

work.⁵¹ Rāmānuja does use the Epics and Purāṇas as primary texts as well. In discussing the creation and destruction of the world, Rāmānuja states that Nārāyaṇa is the body of the world,⁵² and in examining the notion that knowledge is a path to liberation he again relies on the Viṣṇu Purāṇa first.⁵³ As J.A.B. van Buitenen writes it is to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa "that Rāmānuja turns to enlarge upon topics most dear to his heart."⁵⁴ These are but a few examples.

It is important to mention a few observations about Rāmānuja's writings. As J.B. Carman notes "most of Rāmānuja's writings begin with an invocation of dedicatory verse called a maṅgalaśloka."⁵⁵ It is here that Rāmānuja's description of deity can be found in its most compact form. We will have occasion to look at a maṅgalaśloka below. Regarding the more important works, we see that Rāmānuja cites the Viṣṇu Purāṇa frequently, but in the Śrī Bhāṣya the vast majority of these citations appear in SB 1.1.1 (pp. 78-102) in refuting the principle of a Brahman devoid of all difference.⁵⁶ There are almost no citations of the

⁵¹ For example in SB 1.1.32. Rāmānuja uses V[^] 1.19.85 to support quotations from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad on Brahman as the soul of all.

⁵² VS 110 citing V[^] 1.1.31; 1.1.4-5; 6.4.39-40; 6.5.83-87.

⁵³ VS 91 citing V[^] VI.6.12.

⁵⁴ J.A.B. van Buitenen "Introduction" to VS, 34.

⁵⁵ J.B. Carman, TRA, 65.

⁵⁶ Here we notice that pp. 78-86 are devoted to analysis of the Śrutis, and pp. 86-102 to the Smṛtis.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa in the Gītā Bhāṣya while it may be the most often cited source in the Vedārthasaṁgraha. All this is to show that Rāmānuja's use of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa can be found to a greater or lesser degree in most of his writings, but primarily in the Vedārthasaṁgraha.

C. Rāmānuja's use of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

1. Definitions and Descriptions of the Divine

A.S. Gupta gives us a concise description of Rāmānuja's notion of God. She states that for Rāmānuja God is infinite, eternal and the indwelling principle and is beyond all sorts of impurities of the world. Infinity of God means that He is not limited by space, time or any other object of the same status. As He is the indwelling principle of all beings, He is not limited by space; as He is eternal, He is above all temporal changes. As He is the inner principle of all, all become meaningful only through Him.⁵⁷ In the Vedārthasaṁgraha we see several examples of this definition. Perhaps the best appears in VS 127, where Rāmānuja summarizes the various descriptions of God. Brahma Nārāyaṇa has a proper form of "undefinable knowledge and beatitude in the purest form; He has immeasurable, innumerable, all-surpassing beautiful qualities, such as knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, fortitude, glory etc.; the sum-total of spiritual and non-spiritual entities different from Himself are actuated by an act of His will; He possesses one invariable divine form that is in

⁵⁷ A.S. Gupta, CSPR, 155-156.

accordance with His pleasure and in harmony with Himself." (VS 127) Similarly, we read that the Divine is categorically different from everything else, and possesses innumerable perfect qualities since He is in opposition to imperfection, (VS 10, 78) and transformation. (VS 14)

Rāmānuja repeats these statements in both simple hymns of praise,⁵⁸ and in complex philosophical arguments. (SB 1.4.27)

Rāmānuja derives his definition from the Śrutis. Not all Śrutis are in agreement, however, and Rāmānuja must reconcile the apparent contradictions. In doing so, he reiterates his definition. (VS 84) Rāmānuja also states that the Vedas and their subsidiaries are corroborated by Epics, Purāṇas and Dharmaśāstras. Again, the primary definition is repeated. It is interesting to note that Rāmānuja cites the Śruti sources, then other Smṛtis, and corroborates them all by citing V[^] 1.19.85, (VS 108) and V[^] 2.12.38. (VS 140) Rāmānuja also uses the same method in the Śrī Bhāṣya which also uses the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as the last cited text. (SB 1.1.1 citing V[^] 1.2.10-14) Perhaps the most detailed description of the nature of Brahman useful for our purposes appears in VS 42.

"The Supreme Brahman is by nature such that his proper form is absolutely opposed to imperfection and is solely constituted by infinite knowledge and bliss." So

⁵⁸ Sri S.V. Srinivasan, Rāmānuja's Śaraṇāgatī Gadya, 65, 66.

far nothing new. Nor is the statement that he is an ocean of noble qualities which are proper to his nature. What is new is that he is "modified by all creatures, for his body is constituted by all entities because he is the inner Ruler of all entities." We have seen before that he is their ruler, but not that his mode of being is modified by them. Both the spiritual and non-spiritual entities constitute only a particle of Brahman and form the material for his sport, but nevertheless they modify him; He who is unaffected by Time, either in its smallest or largest divisions, and who in fact is the operative cause of these units of time. Rāmānuja concludes this paragraph by stating that this person is the one spoken of in the Śruti, and he then cites several texts to demonstrate this fact. In this passage the text most quoted is the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. He cites V¹ 1.2.18, 1.22.53, 1.4.84, 6.5.72-79 as proof-texts for his statement on the nature of Brahman. Again we notice that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is used as the last in a series of texts used. While, in the Indian context, the most powerful argument or text is cited first, here we see the Viṣṇu Purāṇa cited last, but more than the other texts.

Despite seeing Brahman as one infinite unity, Rāmānuja provides Him with certain aspects. Brahman is not devoid of all difference. The refutation of the arguments to the contrary are refuted by Rāmānuja. In doing so, Rāmānuja cites the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and states that Brahman is free from imperfection and yet contains difference. (SB

1.1.1) In directly discussing the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Rāmānuja gives a slightly different interpretation than one expects of the beginning of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Maitreya's first question to Pāraśara in Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.1 is taken by Rāmānuja to "refer to the essential nature of Brahman, the different modes of the manifestation of its power, and the different results of propitiating it," and what is the material cause of the world, and its Self. The different, theistic, interpretation of Rāmānuja is an interesting use of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and one we are not expecting, namely, that of refuting a Brahman devoid of all difference and supporting the teaching that the relation of Brahman to the world is that of the Self and its body. (SB 1.1.1) Both of these passages appear in the SB and refute other systems. In the VS, however, Rāmānuja does exegesis on the use of the word Bhagavat. It connotes the infinite manifestation of the Supreme as Ultimate Cause, and connotes all his perfections, knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, fortitude, and glory, without any imperfect quality. It is immaculate, real, pervasive, perennial and free from all imperfections of which time is a part but upon which time has no effect.⁵⁹.

As well as those aspects, Brahman is said to be "essentially of the nature of intelligence, the form of

⁵⁹ VS 42 citing V^ 1.2.18; 1.22.53; 4.1.84; 6.5.72; 6.6.76; 6.6.77; 6.6.79.

all, but not material."⁶⁰ Despite the assertion that Brahman has no material form, Rāmānuja states in the maṅgalaśloka of the Gītā Bhāṣya the form of God is adorned with manifold and wonderful weapons which are of inconceivable power. As well, there is other evidence that Brahman was given material form. He is the entity modified by all others and is the body of the Universe, He is also all effects. There is no physical act which does not involve Him. As a result He is both cause and effect. (VS 69) In reconciling the physical and anti-physical nature of Brahman, Rāmānuja states that an omniscient Brahman is the material cause of the phenomenal world without this causality compromising His omnipotence, for He remains essentially different from everything else and this negates the existence of a separate operator of this creation. (VS 33) Brahman is physical and not physical. The non-physical notions may stem from the Upaniṣads, but the description of the body of God comes from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.⁶¹

Perhaps there is no better way to understand Rāmānuja's definition of God other than that of knowledge. There are three primary aspects to God as knowledge, cit, acit, and antaryamin. Cit is from the verb "to think" therefore God is thinker, not-thinker (matter) and inner controller of both thinker and not-thinker. It is

⁶⁰ SB 1.1.1 citing V^ 2.12.39-45.

⁶¹ VS 134 citing V^ 6.7.80ff, and 1.22.

understandable, that for one to whom epistemology is so important, two of the three primary aspects of the divine should be thinker and non-thinker; that spirit and matter should be differentiated in these terms.⁶² A good example of this is taken from the Śrī Bhāṣya. Brahman's nature is established by his own consciousness, and it is contradictorily opposed to non-knowledge. (SB 1.1.1) The form of God comprises all that is good and is antagonistic to all that is evil, and "is nothing but knowledge and bliss."⁶³ This appears more fully in the VS. "The Supreme Brahman is by nature such that his proper form is ... constituted by infinite knowledge and bliss." (VS 42) Rāmānuja continues this argument and cites the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (V[^] 1.3.8-9; 1.3.26-28; 4.1.8) as an authority.

2. Qualities

Rāmānuja attributes qualities to God, and spends time in refuting the notion that God is without qualities. In order to understand more fully the place of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in Rāmānuja's thought, we must review his notion of the Six qualities of God by starting with his use of the definitions of the names of God. However, we must first briefly summarize the place of guṇa (quality) in the Hindu intellectual tradition.

In the earliest Vaiśeṣika text, which may be the

⁶² See A.S Gupta, CSPR, 150ff.

⁶³ GB, maṅgalaśloka.

oldest philosophical text we have,⁶⁴ Kaṇāḍa delimits six categories of reality, three of which, substance, quality and action, are extensions of existential being.⁶⁵ Guṇas, numbered at twenty-four, are integral parts of substance and there are two types; viśeṣa-guṇa (specific quality) and sāmānya-guṇa (general quality).⁶⁶ Qualities, as well as actions, universals and particularities, are distinct realities in themselves, but they have their locus in the substances in which they subsist through the relation of inherence,⁶⁷ and cannot be found outside of substance, while substances can do without qualities for a particular period of time.⁶⁸ They are so important to the notion of substance that Kaṇāḍa uses guṇa and karma (quality and action) as part of his definition of substance.⁶⁹ In the Mīmāṃsa, like the Vaiśeṣika, twenty-four guṇas are enumerated, but with a few modifications, so sound is replaced by śakti (power).⁷⁰ Little more can be said

⁶⁴ K.K. Klostermaier, SH, 349.

⁶⁵ S. Bhaduri, Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics, 3, 21.

⁶⁶ M. Hiriyanna, EIP, 92-93.

⁶⁷ S. Bhaduri, Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics, 22.

⁶⁸ M. Hiriyanna, EIP, 93.

⁶⁹ S. Bhaduri, Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics, 22, citing Kaṇāḍa's Vaiśeṣika Sūtras, 1.1.15.

⁷⁰ M. Hiriyanna, EIP, 135.

since, due to their orientation toward sacrifice, Mīmāṃsakas did not examine guṇas in depth.

While the notion of guṇas exists in both the Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsa traditions, its primary exposition is in the Sāṃkhya. In fact S.N. Dasgupta goes so far as to say that the guṇa theory is the "characteristic mark of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga schools of philosophy."⁷¹ J.A.B. van Buitenen states that the notion of three guṇas, as typified by Sāṃkhyan philosophy, is traceable to the Atharva Veda.⁷² Like the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsa systems twenty-four elements are enumerated. Unlike them Sāṃkhya presupposes an evolutionary dualistic realism composed of the eternal Puruṣa, in himself pure consciousness, and Prakṛti, pure matter. Prakṛti is composed of the three guṇas, sattva, rājas, and tamas in equilibrium. They are not parts of Prakṛti, but are its operational modes.⁷³ Under the influence of Puruṣa, the equilibrium is disturbed and universal evolution begins, according to a fixed pattern, and the resultant material world, including both things and ideas, is composed of the three guṇas in various combinations. While the three guṇas are frequently defined as sattva (lightness), rājas (passion), and tamas

⁷¹ S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga Philosophy, 70.

⁷² J.A.B. van Buitenen, SILP, 26.

⁷³ K.B.R. Rao, Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṃkhya, 49.

(darkness),⁷⁴ S.N. Dasgupta uses the creative terms intelligence-stuff, energy and mass.⁷⁵ It is by the functioning of these three gunas that the phenomenon of consciousness is produced. E.H. Johnston attaches great importance to the term bhāva and suggests that it is the oldest name for the three gunas, and their function of psychical moral qualities is their original function.⁷⁶ J.A.B. van Buitenen agrees with the former but disagrees with the latter statement and considers the original meaning to have been cosmological.⁷⁷ G.J. Larson proposes both.⁷⁸ While the Samkhya admits to the existence only of the three gunas as components of Prakṛti, Puruṣa, and does not recognise a conscious Absolute or Creator God,⁷⁹ Yoga does allow the introduction of God.⁸⁰ As such, all movement and transformation, diversity and change, belong to the world of matter and are alien to the Puruṣa and Īśvara⁸¹ who are thought as pure illumination.

⁷⁴ For example see G.J. Larson, Classical Saṃkhya, 11, and J.A.B. van Buitenen, SILP, 75-110.

⁷⁵ S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga Philosophy, 77.

⁷⁶ E.H. Johnston, Early Saṃkhya, 31-36.

⁷⁷ J.A.B. van Buitenen, SILP, 43-51, and 77-78.

⁷⁸ G.J. Larson, Classical Saṃkhya, 64, 119-120.

⁷⁹ G.J. Larson, Classical Saṃkhya, 216, although K.B.R. Rao (Theism of Pre-Classical Saṃkhya) argues that Pre-Classical Saṃkhya is in fact theistic.

⁸⁰ S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga Philosophy, 98-99.

⁸¹ S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga Philosophy, 104.

How does this cursory examination impact upon our study of Rāmānuja? Rāmānuja and Saṃkhya differ on one fundamental point regarding guṇas, that of causality. The Saṃkhya affirmed no sentient Absolute, where for Rāmānuja that is the whole purpose of theology. To return to Rāmānuja, we must first state that the Vaiṣṇava tradition has attached great importance to the names of the Divine, and there are many which are hallowed in Śruti, only one of which will be particularly holy for each sect of Vaiṣṇavas. For Vaiṣṇavas name and form are inextricably linked and for this reason they are so important to Rāmānuja. The general term for "Lord" in Rāmānuja's writings is Īśvara, but Bhagavān, which approaches the personal name of Viṣṇu, is the preferred term, even though it is synonymous with Īśvara. Rāmānuja does not define the root form of Bhagavān, bhagavat, but twice quotes the definitions given in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, (V[^] 6.5.72-75, 76-77, 79) once in the VS and once in the SB. (SB 1.1.1) It is interesting to note that both citations appear in a long list of quotations from Smṛti that are meant to refute decisively the Advaitic notion of an undifferentiated Brahman. There are two types of definitions of Brahman in this passage. The first is a metaphysical definition of the Lord's qualities, the other is based on the common usage of the term and defines the Lord as the supreme.

The second definition, which follows the metaphysical one, states that "thus this great word

Bhagavān is the name of Vāsudeva, who is one with the supreme Brahma, and of no one else. This word, therefore, which is the general denomination of an adorable object, is not used in reference to the supreme in a general, but a special way." (V[^] 6.5.76) It is on this that Rāmānuja focusses, noting that Bhagavān and Brahman can be used as general names, but the "greatness" and "lordship" meant by these terms is of a secondary nature, while the specific use referring to the Supreme is of primary nature. The metaphysical definition breaks down bhagavat into its component letters and assigns a metaphysical meaning to each, while the dissyllable Bhaga indicates the six properties of Pāñcarātra origin.

It appears that Rāmānuja accepted as well known the idea that the five qualities of Brahman mentioned in the defining Upaniṣadic texts are defining attributes distinguished from other less essential qualities in the Divine nature. "Yet this well-known distinction does not seem to affect the description or the ranking of the Divine attributes," except that essential nature is mentioned more often than auspicious qualities.⁸² That is to say that the five-fold form of God is known to Rāmānuja, but this Upaniṣadic notion is not his preferred one. Rather, he proposes that "the Lord has the six qualities of infinite knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, virility, and

⁸² J.B. Carman, TRA, 89.

splendour."⁸³ It appears that Rāmānuja's conception of these kalyāṇaguṇas, auspicious qualities which exist in God in addition to the essential defining attributes, stems from both the Viṣṇu Purāṇa⁸⁴ and the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. These six qualities are jñāna, bāla, aiśvārya, śakti, virya, and tejas. These also appear in the Gītā Bhāṣya. (GB 12.42, 18.73) They also appear in a maṅgalaśloka to the Gītā Bhāṣya.⁸⁵ J.B. Carman also notes that Rāmānuja distinguishes two types of qualities of Brahman. The first group is the śadguṇas, the second group consists of compassion or mercy (karuṇya), gracious condescension (sauśilya), forgiving and protecting love (vatsālyā), and generosity (audārya).⁸⁶ J.B. Carman gives a good analysis of why Rāmānuja would have two groups of qualities which are not part of the essential nature of Brahman.⁸⁷ This list of six qualities is referred to often by Rāmānuja, but he never defines them. We must turn to Varāvara who tells us that God's "(1) knowledge is eternal and conscious, and manifests His self and all objects and beings. (2) His power is the material cause of the world, and can do what is impossible. (3) His strength is the power of creating the world without the least fatigue and power of supporting

⁸³ J. Sinha, TPR, 49.

⁸⁴ V[^] 6.5.79, cited in SB 1.1.1.

⁸⁵ J.B. Carman, TRA, 77.

⁸⁶ J.B. Carman, TRA, 79.

⁸⁷ J.B. Carman, TRA, 88-97.

all objects. (4) His sovereignty is the free power of controlling all beings and objects. (5) His virility consists in being the material cause of the world without undergoing any modification, in remaining immutable and yet being the stuff of modifications of the world. (6) His splendour consists in producing the world without auxiliary causes."⁸⁸ However, the individual esoteric meanings assigned them in the tradition are less important than "their collective testimony to the lordship and supremacy of the Lord."⁸⁹ B. Kumarappa finds in Rāmānuja's use of this Puranic-Pāñcarātric notion evidence of Rāmānuja's introduction of sectarian concepts into Hindu philosophy.⁹⁰ In fact, in citing B. Kumarappa⁹¹ S.R. Bhatt states that "Kumarappa smells sectarianism in Rāmānuja's reference to the six qualities of God, which are characteristic in the Pāñcarātra school. He writes, "He (Rāmānuja) at any rate found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa a description of the blessed qualities of the Deity, which description he failed to find except in a very meager form in the Upaniṣads."⁹² J.B. Carman notes that B. Kumarappa finds Rāmānuja to use two ideas found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa not found in the Upaniṣads,

⁸⁸ J. Sinha, TPR, 49.

⁸⁹ J.B. Carman, TRA, 163.

⁹⁰ B. Kumarappa, Realism and Illusionism in Hinduism, 187.

⁹¹ B. Kumarappa, The Hindu Conception of the Deity, as Culminating in Rāmānuja. London, Luzac, 1934.

⁹² S.R. Bhatt, SRV, 63.

that of the śadguṇas, and of avatāras. He refutes B. Kumarappa, however, and states if Rāmānuja were introducing his own sectarian view it is hard to understand why he would often take the narrower Upaniṣadic definition of Brahman.⁹³ "Kumarappa overlooks that for Rāmānuja the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is an authority and that it has not been regarded as a sectarian work. These six qualities, it is true play an important part in the Pāñcarātra philosophy but they form no less important part of the nature of the Deity in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa."⁹⁴

It is important to note here that for Rāmānuja the Viṣṇu Purāṇa would not have been considered sectarian in that this is a designation which can only be assigned from the outside. To those within a tradition sectarianism of their own religion is inconsequential. In addition we may also state that Rāmānuja uses Smṛti as authority much less than Śruti, in contrast to others such as Madhva. It must be mentioned that Rāmānuja uses an Upaniṣadic notion of qualities of God, but not to the same extent. For example Rāmānuja is following the Upaniṣadic interpretation of the qualities of God when he combines various texts to define God as truth (satya), knowledge (jñāna), bliss (ānanda) and purity (amalatva)⁹⁵ which are different from the qualities as expressed in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It is

⁹³ J.B. Carman, TRA, 204-5.

⁹⁴ S.R. Bhatt, SRV, 63-64.

⁹⁵ J.B. Carman, TRA, 93.

interesting to note that this composite Upaniṣadic notion is a construct of several texts while the qualities are drawn from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa only. What Rāmānuja appears to be doing is providing an essential nature of deity based on the Upaniṣads upon which he can then superimpose the qualities of God as proposed in the Purāṇa. There is nothing inherently contradictory in the two definitions. Truth, (eternal supersensory) knowledge, bliss, and purity are the more intangible aspects of God's essential nature and provide the foundation upon which the more concrete, definable, yet non-physical qualities of knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, virility and splendour are set.

Rāmānuja also uses both natures in SB 1.1.21 when he cites Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.1.5 in discussing the creational aspect of God as being beyond karma.⁹⁶ It must be pointed out that, while it is convenient to delineate the one notion as being Upaniṣadic and the other as Purāṇic, in fact the Upaniṣadic notion also appears in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Rāmānuja proposes that Brahman is essentially bliss itself. This is not a temporary state of enjoyment which for any entity other than deity is due to karma and therefore impermanent. Rather, it is the fundamental nature of Bliss itself, which is an aspect of the essential nature of Brahman. As proof Rāmānuja cites the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. (VS 143, citing V[^] 4.6.44-47)

⁹⁶ J. Lipner, The Face of Truth, 90.

Rāmānuja uses the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as a proof text frequently to reinforce Śrutis. In one notable instance, however, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is used by itself. In VS 110, Rāmānuja summarizes several passages of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa concerning the qualities of God. The world has originated from him and subsists in Him, it is sustained by him and will be destroyed by him, He is the world. (V[^] 1.1.31) He is the sovereign, Supreme, without any particularizing attributes, free from decay and destruction, evolution, birth and growth, He always is, He is in everything and everything dwells in Him, He is supreme, eternal, unborn, undying, imperishable, essential, always perfect, and takes on the form of Puruṣa and Time as the proper form of the evolved and the unevolved. (V[^] 1.2.10-14) He transcends matter and its imperfections, all beautiful qualities are inherent in his nature and He supports Creation. The Universe is in harmony with his pleasure, and in the body that is the universe He works the fulfillment of what is salutary to the entire Universe. His qualities include, glory, force, sovereignty, transcendent knowledge, fortitude, might, and he has no afflictions. His form encompasses all beings individually and as a whole, and he is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. (V[^] 6.5.83-87) In the last citation we see that Rāmānuja uses the Puranic-Pāñcarātric notion. These passages are to "teach that the Highest Brahman is essentially free from all imperfection whatsoever, comprises within itself all auspicious

qualities, and finds its pastime in originating, preserving, reabsorbing, pervading, and ruling the universe,"(SB 1.1.1) and that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is consistent with the other texts which teach this tenet. In VS 129 Rāmānuja seeks to prove that the paramam padam (Supreme place) is the proper form of Viṣṇu Himself. As his final proof for his argument, Rāmānuja cites V^ 1.22.41, 53. Regarding the soul, Rāmānuja uses the Viṣṇu Purāṇa to demonstrate that only auspicious qualities are inherent to it while inauspicious qualities resulting from karma are not. These qualities result from the natural conjunction of soul with matter, and do not belong to the eternal soul per se. When separated from karma and its effects, all souls are identical and are ensouled by Brahman.(VS 79 citing V^ 6.7.22)

Being a "sectarian" theologian, we would expect Rāmānuja to promote his particular deity. While he does so only rarely it is well within the constraints of Vaiṣṇavite orthodoxy without resorting to vicious polemics. In so doing he uses all evidence available to him including the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. For example Rāmānuja identifies Brahman with Nārāyaṇa and states that "it is declared that Brahma and Śiva are likewise manifestations of Him, because they are of the same order as Indra and the like."(VS 97) In explaining why some writings do not use either the name Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa, Rāmānuja states that the mere fact that some texts use the names of the deities Brahma and Śiva as

names of Brahman does not mean that they are identical to Him. Rather they form manifestations of Him. (VS 104)

3. Immanence vs. Transcendence

One of the distinctions Rāmānuja seeks to make between himself and the Advaitins concerns the ability of God to be immanent as well as transcendent. Advaitins argue that the true God is ineffable and therefore in essence cannot be immanent; rather only manifestations, which are not truly real, can be immanent. Rāmānuja disagrees. He has no trouble with a deity who is both. At one point Rāmānuja summarizes the various descriptions of God and states that in addition to having innumerable, all-surpassing beautiful qualities, such as knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, fortitude, glory, and so on, He possesses one invariable divine form that is in accordance with His pleasure and in harmony with Himself, yet He has innumerable beautiful ornaments and invincible weapons, a Consort, an entourage, an infinite glorious manifestation, and a divine residence. (VS 127) We see that God is transcendent according to Rāmānuja. This is apparent in his description of the Creator. Rāmānuja cites V¹ 1.5.64 in stating that in the beginning God made the name and form of beings. (VS 16, 21) In another instance, Brahman is described as pure knowledge, and knowledge is its only form. (VS 143 citing V¹ 6.7.22) While Brahman is given form this transcends the physical. There is another indirect reference to Brahman's transcendence drawn from the Viṣṇu

Purāṇa. In discussing the qualities of the soul as part of Brahman, Rāmānuja states that qualities which affect the physical manifestation of Brahman are the results of interaction between the spiritual soul and physical matter. (VS 79 citing V[^] 6.7.22) This last mentioned shows how for Rāmānuja God is both immanent and transcendent. In fact, He is both cause of the Universe and the effect of this cause. In addition to Śruti texts used to prove this point, Rāmānuja again uses the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. (VS 74 citing V[^] 1.9.37) In addition the maṅgalaśoka of the Gītā Bhāṣya is made up of two parts.⁹⁷ The first ends with a statement of God's inaccessibility to men or even to gods. The second begins with the declaration that this Supreme Person has made himself accessible to his worshippers by descending into the phenomenal realm in a form similar to theirs.

More important for Rāmānuja's theology than a purely transcendent God was one concerned with the world. Ultimately, the goal of the individual mortal is to transcend the world, and Rāmānuja's God is concerned with helping him do just that. When the individual has propitiated Brahman by virtuous lives he can then, with the assistance of God, attain release. The basis of this is knowledge of Brahman (brahmavidyā) which is equal to many sacrifices. (VS 91 citing V[^] 6.6.12) As well as being concerned with the individuals in the world, God is the

⁹⁷ J.B. Carman, TRA, 77-79.

world itself. Rāmānuja states that Viṣṇu is the woods, luminaries, lands, and so on. He is all that is and that is not. (VS 140 citing V^ 2.12.38) The multiplicity of forms comprising the world is another vast form of Hari.⁹⁸ In addition there is a physical form of Viṣṇu complete with Consort, weapons, and celestial sphere. These physical descriptions found in VS 134 stem from V^ 1.22, and V^ 6.7.80. Not only is the whole physical world made of Brahman, but one of the constituents of all matter, Prakṛti, does also. (VS 73 citing V^ 1.2.18)

Perhaps the most important use of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in the immanence-transcendence debate stems from its very nature. It is concerned with theology and transcendental things to be sure, but its primary focus is with the world, and it devotes all of Book 5 to the Kṛṣṇa avatāra of Viṣṇu, avatāra by definition being the immanent form of God. Śrutis deal with God in his transcendental nature so it is to them that Rāmānuja turns for primary support. For immanence he cites the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as well.

D. Conclusion

Vaiṣṇavism, as a religion, owes much to Rāmānuja, for it is he who made it popular amongst the masses. His sole purpose was to "justify a theistic religious view as against the monistic view of Advaita of Śaṅkara according

⁹⁸ VS 133 citing V^ 1.8.39; 1.9.145; 1.22.63; 4.1.84; and 6.7.70: and VS 65 citing V^ 1.22.38.

to which theism is only contingently useful."⁹⁹ Rāmānuja avowed obeisance to the Vedas without using them as fully as other philosophers did, while the Svetaśvatāra Upaniṣad is the primary Upaniṣad for him.¹⁰⁰ Rāmānuja also used the Mahābhārata, and from the Bhagavad Gītā he adopted a pantheistic notion that the Highest Reality is a Personal God endowed with innumerable auspicious qualities. From the Pāñcarātra literature he adopted the sectarian notion that Viṣṇu is to be identified with the Supreme of the Upaniṣads. From the Ālvārs and the Bhagavad Gītā he took the intense personal commitment to God, bhakti. He uses the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as a proof-text more than some philosophers, and less than others.¹⁰¹ From here he adopted more proof that the Upaniṣads were correct in their assessment of God, yet did not make it plain to all.

Rāmānuja's theology therefore consists of reinterpreting the Upaniṣads. He did this by submitting to Upaniṣadic authority in some instances, and by submitting to Purāṇic authority, particularly the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, in others.

Rāmānuja's citations of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa are primarily illustrative and corroborative, however. His justification of these citations shows clearly that he was anxious not to introduce any evidence that would be unacceptable to his

⁹⁹ S. Chennakesavan, A Critical Study of Hinduism, 63.

¹⁰⁰ J. Sinha, TPR, 1.

¹⁰¹ See S.N. Dasgupta, HIP, vol.4, 74-75.

fellow Vedantins,¹⁰² that is while Rāmānuja had his own way of interpreting the texts of the scriptures, he based it on the ancient tradition.¹⁰³

¹⁰² J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Introduction" to VS, 35-36.

¹⁰³ K.D. Bharadwaj, The Philosophy of Rāmānuja, 10.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the research above, we see that in the Hindu tradition the notion of Śruti and Smṛti as "Revelation" and "Tradition" is orthodox. The former comprises scripture of the highest theological value, coming as it does from the mouth of Brahma, and may be commented upon but never questioned. Śruti includes such unanimously accepted works as the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads. Smṛti is comprised of virtually any efficacious book that is not Śruti. The differentiation between the two is often somewhat fuzzy, for in addition there are certain texts taken as included within the demarcation of Śruti by various groups, and often used more than the Śrutis, but not unanimously agreed upon. One type of literature that is particularly important in this context is the Purāṇic literature. While as a class of literature, Purāṇas appear to have links to both the Vedic Brahmanist ritual and Kṣatriya court, as a distinct literary form they do not appear until late in Indian literary history. They appear to have gained popularity and power as the Brahmanical religion waned and the masses of women and Śūdras were enticed back to the Varṇāśramadharma by the Smārta Brahmin redactors of the various Purāṇas. The precise period of development is still very much uncertain, but we can say that while it is impossible to date individual Purāṇas, and much of the Purāṇic material, there is no doubt that they have been one

of the greatest influences on popular Hinduism in the last two millennia. It is worthwhile to note that despite the attempt by the Smārta Brahmin sectaries to repopularise the Varṇāśramadharma, this composite faith has never been allowed by the orthodox Brahmanists to be identified with their own, but it is regarded by them as only inferior to the Vedic.¹ Even in the modern era we see evidence of this in that members of the Ārya Samāj have repeatedly disclaimed the Purāṇas as authoritative texts and denied the traditional authorship of Vyāsa.² Even so, modern popular Hinduism is primarily Purāṇic.³

Perhaps the most complete of these texts is the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. In its current form it appears to be one of the oldest Purāṇas, and there is no doubt that it is one of the most important texts to Vaiṣṇavas of all sectarian affiliations, Śrīvaiṣṇavas in particular. Its material appears to have originated in the north of India, yet its influence spreads throughout the whole sub-continent. It was edited by Smārta Brahmins yet it is heavily influenced by the Pāñcarātra sect, who were less devoted to the Vedas than were the Brahmins. As such it retains the flavour of both and is avowedly orthodox in its acceptance of the Vedas and all the sacrificial acts they enjoin, however it tempers much of the earlier material by providing women and

¹ R.C. Hazra, SPRH, 226-227.

² L. Rocher, PURA, 10.

³ K. Klostermaier, SH, 75; J.N. Farquhar, ORLI, 136.

Śūdras with spiritually edifying tasks that, while they do not run counter to Vedic teachings, demonstrate the changing nature of sectarian Hinduism. The text itself is linked with the Vedas through its conformity to them, as well as through its transmitters. It does, however, support the non-Vedic notion of mokṣa. As a piece of literature, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa endorses its traditional use by Vaiṣṇavas as Śruti both through its adherence to Vedic proscriptions and its valuation of those not entitled to Śruti. The ability to attain release, as well as receive physical and post-mortem benefits, is associated with contact with the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Such contact comes in the form of reading, narrating, remembering, and above all hearing this Purāṇa. While we have made an analysis of the Visnu Purāṇa as a complete document, we must remember that it is made up of what were at one time discrete stories, what L. Rocher calls "Mini-Purāṇas." Much work is left to be done on the relative dating of stories in this work, both in relation to their presentation in other Purāṇas and with respect to other parts of the Visnu Purāṇa itself. For purpose of this study, however, we must take the text as one complete entity, since that is how it is perceived within the tradition.

One of the most influential Hindu theologians was greatly influenced by the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Rāmānuja, despite being a Śrīvaiṣṇava, a predominantly Southern sect, took the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as a proof-text on nearly the same level

as Srutī. It is used as a proof text cited in many of Rāmānuja's arguments, and it may be the most frequently cited work in his theological, rather than philosophical, Vedārthasaṁgraha.

Much work remains to be done in the field of Purāṇic Studies. Certain of the topics briefly touched upon in this study merit closer scrutiny. For example there is the perception of the Vedas in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa both from a textual and sacrificial orientation. Also worthy of study is the depth of Pāñcarātra influence in the text and its subsequent influence on Rāmānuja, as are the notion of religious education, mokṣa and the general soteriology of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. It is also of interest for future research to explore the issue of authorship by examining the characters of Parāśara, Sūta, Vyāsa, and Brahma. Perhaps the most timely work would be that on Phalaślokas as they appear in all Purāṇas, and in many other writings as well, and they express their author's conviction in the efficacy of his work. They frequently equate certain actions regarding the written word with other ritual actions, some of which would be accessible only to certain strata of society. The equation between bathing and hearing the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is only one example. One can speculate as to how an entire text becomes venerated. A preliminary theory may be: 1) prayer/myth/mini-Purāṇa is venerated 2) the recitation of this kernel within another text is venerated 3) the text as a whole is venerated.

That is to say the story of or prayer to a deity is beneficial by itself and it retains its powers within another text. Therefore by extension the rest of the text becomes beneficial. This is only speculation and requires more research. Much more scholarship is needed to provide a clearer picture of the evolution of the Purāṇas from being tangential works of court stories and narratives explaining Vedic rites, to the mainstream of the sectarian Hindu religion as we know it in the twentieth century.

APPENDIX

CITATIONS OF VIṢṆU PURĀṆA IN RĀMĀNUJA

Drawn from appendices SB, BG, and VS. Page numbers are given in brackets.

ŚRĪ BHĀṢYA

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1.2.50-52	[119]
1.3.1-2	[94]
1.4.38ff	[21-94]
1.19.85	[253]
1.22.53	[87]
1.22.55	[88]
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2.12.44	[129]
2.12.45	[129]
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2.14.31	[21]
2.14.31ff	[96]
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1.22.38;	65,112
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1.22.63;	133
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4.6.45;	144
4.6.46-7;	144
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