CHAPTER 5

Flowers of Language: Maheśvarānanda’s 
Mahārthamañjarī

The Dream

It would have been dark, perhaps after the moon had set, late at night in the temple. The adept would have been sitting, more in shadow than in the meager light the lamps afforded, surrounded by the accoutrements of his ritual discipline. Perhaps only the rustle of cloth nearby was there to remind him of the woman, who had joined him in his worship, as she sat nearby. Full of palm liquor, he had settled into a reverie: there in the deserted precincts of the temple, the adept surely was not anticipating any visitors. Such quiet stillness was exactly what his devotions called for, a moment outside of time. And so it was then that the goddess came.

She bore the marks of another member of his faith: the mendicant’s rags, the trident that set her out as a votary of Śiva, matted hair through which one could see the bright stroke of vermillion on her brow. More telling still was her beggar’s bowl: it was a human skull, inverted. He suspected that she was more than she appeared; fumbling, he paid her reverence, and ordered the woman there at his side to find some coins as a guest-gift. Perhaps he did this too hastily, for his visitor’s mood seemed suddenly to darken: she dismissed the offered gift, and flashed her hand before him—her thumb perhaps resting on the first joint of her middle finger. Then, with a smile, she spoke: not in the tongue of his country, nor in Sanskrit, but in the cooing tones of the language of Mahārāṣṭra. Perhaps the adept grew suspicious—who would speak in Māhārāṣṭrī, a language of the songs women sing in the theatre?—but he would have had little time to ponder this before the mysterious woman touched her skull-bowl to his forehead, and just as quickly vanished. Mind dimmed with toddy, late in the night, the man must have wondered: was it all a dream?

We know all of this because the adept, writing under the name Maheśvarānanda, composed an account of this momentous event. The midnight encounter occurs at the midpoint of the story Maheśvarānanda tells: the story begins in the indeterminate past, and in the presence of his deity Śiva, in his awesome form as Bhairava, the Terrifying. While residing in “the jewelled pavilion, the space of consciousness,” the god once obliged the entreaties of his
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consort to deliver a teaching of the secret nature of things. This teaching had subsequently been spread throughout the world of men by a series of masters as the Krama (‘Sequence’) or the Mahārtha (‘The Great Purpose’). Shifting to an account of himself, written in the third person, Maheśvarānanda related the events of his late-night meeting and its morning sequel:

So, while still thinking over that great marvel, the great-minded man had the remaining offerings done, and so passed the entire night. At daybreak, he went to his teacher's house, and once he had worshipped the teacher's feet with folded hands, he related the night’s events with courteous words. And so his teacher pondered the matter and resolved it right away, delighted (as this was a joyous occasion), the honorable man spoke to his pupil:

“No need to multiply meanings, the meaning, in its essence, is clear: both the fact that this siddhayoginī said, ‘Away with these things,’ and the fact that while she was making the number 'seven' on the blossom that is her hand, she said, ‘Let this be brought to fruition by one who understands the nature of things’: this means that she has gone beyond any material offering, and desires something in the form of language, whereby the Supreme Goddess can be worshipped by words that are as good as mantras. Surely the goddess Saptakoṭīśvarī is venerated by her, otherwise, she wouldn't have made such a gesture. Thus you, in your vast eloquence, must compile seventy sūtras, pregnant with mantras, into a tantra, containing the Great Purpose. From your own mouth, purified by In praise of the sandals, a great book must at once be published, one similar to the ancient scriptures. Furthermore, in this work, her language alone, an outpouring of sweet ambrosia, itself like to a powerful mantra, would add further still to its grandeur.”

Taking this order of his compassionate teacher to heart, with an independent mind, he did for some days compose this tantra, a mirror of consciousness called The Flower-Cluster of the Great Purpose: For the great, a task begun without hesitation is bound to be fruitful. And so he did relate this churning of the ocean that is the Great Purpose to his teacher, learned in all the Vedas, śāstras and arts in this world.
And that clear-sighted one did himself explain that wisdom, at the urging of his disciples, owing to their desire for self-reflection. For, just as there is a fragrance which is perceived in a flower's bloom, so too here, a commentary called The Fragrance should be there for the taking.\footnote{Mahārthaṅjarīparimala (hereafter Mañjari), 191: atha tan mahad āscaryam aśnuvāno maḥāmanāḥ | āracayyārcanāśeṣam aśeṣām anayan niśām || prātar gurukulaṃ gatvā prāṇamya caraṇau gurau | rātrīrvyāntam ācakhyau prāṇjalī praśītiḥ padaḥ || desīkendro ‘pi saṃcīn-tya nisītārtha ca tatksaṇam | punyotsava iti prītah śiṣyam śiṣmān abhāṣata || alam arthapra-paricena piṇḍito ‘rthah prakāṣyate || ālam arthaḥ iti prāha yad yam śiddhayogni || yac ca saptocītaṃ sankhyāṃ kurvānā karakudmale | saphalikriyātāṃ esā bhāvajñenety abhāṣata || tad ārthīṃ srṣṭiṁ uyllanghya śabdām sā kāścid icchat | yena mantrātmakaḥ śabdāḥ paramaśe- vary upāsyate || saptakotīśvarī devī tayā niṇām upāsyate || anyathā tādṛṣy eva mudrāṃ na pratipādayet | tat tvayātra vidhātāya sphītaśravasatārṣyā | sūtrānāṃ saptatītantra mahārthe mantragarbhī | sadyas tvadadanaį tasmāt pādukodayasodhiḥ || purātanāy- maprakhyo granthāh prakhyayātām mahān || kiṃ ca bhāṣa tādiyāva mādhuryamārttavarsīni || aucityāṃ poṣayate atra mahāmantrānsaraṇī || ity ājnāṃ desīkendrasya dayālāh mārdhni dharaṇay | mahārthesaṃ skandhānaṃ saṃviddaranmananaścālam || | tantrāṃ dīnaḥ katipayaḥ prabbandhāv santantrandhāh | kāryārāmbho hi mahatām avilambena sidhyati || tac ca tattvavi- daṃ loke vedasāstraṅkālo api mahārthasindhumānnaṃ śrāvayāmāsa desīkam || svayam eva ca tāṃ vidyāṃ svavimāraṅkutiḥalāt | śiṣyāṃ api nirbhandhād vyāccake śiṣyāṃ api || yathā ki puspamaṇjarīyā grāhyāḥ parimalo bhavet | tadvad asīmāpi grāhyāḥ vyākhā prā- malāhvayā ||}

This sketches in the basic details of the text at whose conclusion this passage is found: the Mahārthaṅjaṇī, The Flower-cluster of the Great Purpose properly speaking, is a set of seventy āryā verses (and a final verse in the art-meter śārdūlavikṛṣita), composed in Māhārāṣṭrī Prakrit: this is a language and a metrical form normally reserved for certain kinds of erotic poetry. These verses were accompanied by an auto commentary, the Mahārthaṅjarīparimala, or the “Fragrance” of the Flower-Cluster, which forms the major part of Maheśvarānanda’s complex text; it is here that we read of the conjoint text’s inception. Together, these teach the nature of the worship of a complex pantheon of the Śaiva goddesses of the Krama, along with the theological principles that follow from this worship and much else beside.

The extended Sanskrit narrative that closes the Parimala is transparently an adaptation of a typical feature of a Śaiva tantra, its āyātkrama or the mythic narrative of the text’s transmission from heaven to earth.\footnote{This is made self-consciously clear in Maheśvarānanda’s opening stanza (Mañjari, 188): āyātir atha tantrasya kathyate kaulikoditā || yām ākāryaṃ pumān atra vimarśaucityaṃ aśnute || “The
author's repeated declaration, throughout his text, that he wishes his work to be understood as a *tantra*, a work of revelation in its own right. But this is a work that is very different from the other Śaiva texts of that name, either those written long before Maheśvarānanda's lifetime or those new *tantras* produced closer to him in time and space. These works, as we have repeatedly seen, were written in simple meter and often in poor, even barbarous, Sanskrit; moreover, they were not the avowed creation of human authors, but the supposed products of conversations between different sages and members of the Śaiva pantheon. Maheśvarānanda's root-verses—his *tantra*, properly speaking—are written in a lyrical form and in a refined literary Prakrit, with no framing narration whatsoever. His Śanskrit autocommentary, which comprises the vast bulk of his conjoint text, is written in Śanskrit prose or sometimes, as in the āyātikrama, in an elegant register of verse filled with literary flourishes, generally adheres to the scholarly-forensic conventions of śāstra, and is explicitly the product of this particular human author. In its duplex, bilingual form, its eclectic erudition and, above all, in the emphatic declaration of its author's idiosyncratic voice, there was no precedent for a *tantra* like Maheśvarānanda's work.

It might be objected that in describing his work as a *tantra* (and himself as a *tantrakṛt*, ‘author of the *tantra*’), Maheśvarānanda was not necessarily claiming to be producing new revelation. For the word *tantra* is polysemic: most directly, it can refer to a loom or to its warp and so, by extension, can mean “composition” or “system” or indeed even just “text”. But Maheśvarānanda is completely explicit about the generic status of his work; as his closing revelation-narrative attests, as do other references scattered throughout, he means by this precisely that he was creating a work of revelation, the sort of text whose transformations we have been tracing. The contrast here with both Veṅkaṭanātha and Śāradātanaya is stark, and instructive. Veṅkaṭanātha borrowed from the methods of his anonymous Pāñcarātrika forebears, just as he appears to have borrowed from a tradition, now mostly lost, of Vaishṇava textual criticism. But he did so in order to buttress the claims to validity of a stable canon of scriptures; where a human hand could be detected in these, one needed to be careful. Maheśvarānanda, secure in his illuminationist access to reality, evidently saw no difficulty in asserting himself as a Tantric author: gate-crashing the canon instead of policing it. Maheśvarānanda's creation of new revelation might be understood to be similar to Śāradātanaya's penchant for literary invention and the con-
fection of missing sources. Though the two men shared an interest in poetic theory, the distance between them is considerable. Compared to the ingenuous way that Śāradātanaya went about remounting the pedestrian style and didactic longueurs of the tantra and purāṇa, Maheśvarānanda's work is a highly creative, virtuoso appropriation of their methods. In the Mahārthamañjarī, the reader encounters over and over recognizable variations on the tools of the anonymous philology, transformed in the hands of a singular literary intelligence. Ranging over grammar, belles-lettres and poetics, and grounded in his extensive learning in the most antinomian of the Tantric traditions of goddess-worship, the Mahārthamañjarī is like nothing else in the literature which survives from this period. It exists at the confluence of much of what this book has sought to reconstruct; in the effort to make a novel kind of tantra by this now little-known author we have a remarkable case of the self-conscious adaptation of the modes of philology of the medieval Tamil country.

The Pleasures of the Text

Maheśvarānanda flourished around the turn of the fourteenth century. He was active in Cidambaram, in the same environs which had earlier seen the promulgation of the Sūtasaṃhitā and the Pĕriyapurāṇam. By Maheśvarānanda's time, Cidambaram was a thriving autonomous temple-city, a parallel Śaiva universe to Veṅkaṭanātha's Śrīraṅgam. Śastric authors had long had the habit of producing a running commentary on their own versified root-text. This was especially the case in alaṃkāraśāstra, as it had been revolutionized in Kashmir from the middle of the ninth century, and Maheśvarānanda certainly had this model in mind. Yet there is something more at work in the duplex root text-and-commentary format of the Mahārthamañjarī, which sets it out from the available models of philosophical or doctrinal writing. This difference is referenced in the opening verses to the Parimala; already there, the reader can detect something of the philological impulse that is at work in the text. The commentary begins with a customary invocation to Gaṇeśa, the lord of obstacles (in a cryptic verse that is likely an interpolation), and proceeds to pay homage over a number of verses to the philosophical principles of Maheśvarānanda's system, Maheśvarānanda certainly had this model in mind. Yet there is something more at work in the duplex root text-and-commentary format of the Mahārthamañjarī, which sets it out from the available models of philosophical or doctrinal writing. This difference is referenced in the opening verses to the Parimala; already there, the reader can detect something of the philological impulse that is at work in the text. The commentary begins with a customary invocation to Gaṇeśa, the lord of obstacles (in a cryptic verse that is likely an interpolation), and proceeds to pay homage over a number of verses to the philosophical principles of Maheśvarānanda's system,
to its mythic founders, and to his tradition and immediate teachers. After announcing his own civil name—Gorakṣa, son of Mādhava—and his initiate's title, he writes: 4

Though it be my own work, I myself now undertake the commentary upon it, eager to repeat yet again the consummation of my own undertaking.

It is true that this effort is taken up here for the sake of the delight that it will bring to the minds of those in need of instruction—but let this be put aside. May this work, which has a particular brilliance through its brief and lengthy expositions, be a flower-offering, made of language, to Śiva.

Compared to the literary fireworks that began Veṅkaṭanātha's Pāñcarātrarakṣā, these two verses are much more modest. The passing note of apologia that begins the first of these—when self-commentary was a widely accepted intellectual habit—signals at the outset the self-consciousness that is Maheśvarānanda's most distinctive feature as a thinker and writer. Also characteristic is the image of the scholarly author as a hedonist of language: when he speaks of himself as 'eager to repeat the consummation' of his own text, he is drawing quite knowingly on the vocabulary of erotic poetry: Sanskrit sambhoga possesses exactly the nuances of English's 'consummation'. The loving attention to language—philology—is shown here to be a form of satisfaction even, or perhaps especially so, when the language is one's own.

The intertwining of pleasure and scholarship carries through into the next verse, which figures the work as a handful of flowers scattered before the feet of an honored guest, in this case Śiva. Again, there is the pleasurable, even sensual quality attributed to a work of Sanskrit theology. This metaphor tells us something significant about both the means and ends of Maheśvarānanda's work: this is something that is more than the sum of its parts, just as a cluster of flowers has a beauty above and beyond its constituents. Further, this is a work that is vineyajanacamatkriyārtham, intended to evoke a sense of delighted wonder in the minds of its audience, those in need of its salvific knowledge. The Mañjarī is thus dedicated to instruction through a certain sort of pleasure, a pleasure above all of language itself. The sort of language matters, too: in referring...
to *samkṣepavistaravibhāga*, “brief and lengthy expositions”, Maheśvarānanda directly refers to a scholarly convention, the ability of a master of a given śāstra to teach it pithily or dilate on its intricacies.

As we have seen, Maheśvarānanda attributes the decision to compose the root-text of the *Mañjarī* in Māhārāṣṭrī Prākrit, which is not usually a medium of scholarship, to a dream encounter with a *siddhayoginī*, a Śaiva demi-goddess who addressed him in that language as he was in the midst of a midnight ritual. Interpretative charity insists that we take this claim seriously, but dreams are after all built up and interpreted out of ready-to-hand cultural materials, and this dream in particular situates its dreamer within multiple intersecting contexts of intelligibility. These contexts in turn can help us to understand Maheśvarānda’s waking life as an author and scholar. Most immediately, the *dream-yoginī’s* language choice places the work within the longer history of his Krama-Mahārtha tradition of Śaiva goddess-worshippers, and the several surviving works of this system composed in languages other than Sanskrit. But it is unclear whether Maheśvarānanda had direct access to any of these: the extant works were composed in Old Kashmiri—most of the Krama literature was a product of the far Northwest—and do not appear to have had a wide dissemination. These vernacular compositions, with their artfully artless language, were appropriate to the subitist soteriology embodied in one tendency of the Krama’s doctrine, suggesting a sudden, unbidden eruption of enlightened consciousness unmediated by the linguistic disciplines of Sanskrit. But while he invokes this rhetoric at various points in his presentation, Maheśvarānda’s theological aesthetics in the *Mahārthamañjarī* differ markedly, as we shall see.

For all that Maheśvarānanda’s visionary encounter possessed earlier models within his own lineage tradition, it was also a part of a much wider network of narratives from across southern Asia, in which a feminine figure arrives in

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5 Besides the closing passage in verse with which the chapter began, this demi-goddess appears in the *Parimala*’s twelfth introductory verse (*Mañjarī*, 2, but reading *svocita*- for the edition’s *svāpita*- [see Cox, “Making a tantra,” 269]), and in the *Mañjarī*’s seventy-first and final Prakrit verses (184, see fn. 36 below).

6 On the surviving texts, the *Mahānayaprakāśa* attributed to Śitikanṭha, the *Chommāsaṃketa-prakāśa* of Niṣkriyānandanaṇa and the anonymous *Triṃśaccarcārahasya* (transmitted within the latter) see Sanderson, “Śaiva Exegesis,” 299–307 and 333–344. A similar habit of the Śaiva use of Middle Indic can be seen in Apabhraṃśa verses included in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrasāra*: these are corrupt in the text’s edition; see H.C. Bhayani, “The Apabhraṃśa passages in Abhinavagupta’s Tantrasāra and Parātrimśikāvṛtti,” Vidyā 14, no. 2 (1971) for a convincing reconstruction.
a dream to endow or to incite the creation of a new text. Just such a dream inspired the ninth century Kashmirian poet and critic Ānandavardhana to compose his Devīśataka, and these visionary meetings became the core narrative element in the massive corpus of Tibetan revelations called *gter ma* or ‘treasures,’ offering a series of striking parallels to Maheśvarānanda’s story, in which goddess figures—there called ḍākinīs as opposed to Maheśvara’s yoginī—transmit scriptural texts through both mysterious language and significant gestures.  

Maheśvarānanda was certainly a voracious and self-conscious consumer of Kashmirian Sanskrit, and his work provides one of the strongest attestations of the southern domestication of the Valley’s textual exports in this period, and this domestication involved a great deal of demanding philological labor. Alongside the Tantric corpora that were most evidently influential upon the *Mahārthamañjarī*, the signature Kashmirian discipline of *alaṃkāraśāstra* or poetics was a formative influence upon Maheśvarānanda. Significantly, works in this discipline frequently had recourse to proof-texts drawn from Māhārāṣṭrī erotic lyrics. Thus one way to approach the unusual form of the work is to see it as a creative fusion of two different textual precursors, both emanating from Kashmir: on the one hand, there is the visionary tradition of transformative encounters with a radically unpredictable feminized divine; on the other the long habit of adventurous literary interpretation based on Prakrit’s built-in semantic ambiguities.

This juxtaposition—in which sources with the most reputable high śāstric pedigree and the influence of the esoteric visionary Tantric subculture are mixed together—suggests the wider tenor of Maheśvarānanda’s writing and thinking. When he wished to do so, Maheśvarānanda was perfectly capable of producing normative scholarship, often at a very high level. Every page of the *Parimala* is a tribute to his extensive reading in the Śaiva literature of Kashmir. Maheśvarānanda could be a meticulous critic and textual historian, as when, in his central presentation of the meditation-liturgy on the cycles of the Krama goddesses, he unobtrusively but definitively draws attention to the relationship

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7 On the *Deviśataka*, see Ingalls, “Ānandavardhana’s Devīśataka,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 565–575; on the Tibetan treasure tradition, see Janet Gyatso, “Signs, Memory, and History: A Tantric Buddhist theory of scriptural transmission,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 7–35; and eadem, “Genre, Authorship and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism: The Literary Traditions of Thang-stong rGyal-po,” in *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, ed. Ronald M. Davidson and Steven D. Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

8 See Cox, “Saffron in the *rasam*,” especially 188–193.
of textual dependence between the Mahānayaprapāśa of Arṇasimha and the Cidgagacandrikā of Śrīvatasa, establishing a filiation that modern scholarship has gone on to verify.9

But Maheśvarānanda’s intentions in the Mahārthamañjarī lie in a great many ways outside the ambit of conventional textual scholarship. The contrast with Veṅkaṭanātha is instructive. In his Pāñcarātrarākṣa, the Vaiṣṇava sought to craft a rational presentation of his religion’s revealed texts; the Śākta Śaiva Maheśvarānanda crafted his sole surviving work as a participant in his own religion’s scriptural canon. Veṅkaṭanātha proved ultimately willing to acknowledge the human authorship of certain parts of his canon, and to disparage the authority of the scriptures of his doctrinal opponents on the same grounds; Maheśvarānanda embraced the textual proliferation that had transformed the worlds of the Southern theists for at least the preceding two centuries by the creation and circulation of his own tantra. In presenting the Mahārthamañjarī as a piece of revelation, on a par with the many anonymous works that were confected in the South up to and including his own time, he explicitly declared his intention to create a novel textual object. Although a great deal was made to pass for scripture within Maheśvara’s world of tantric Śaivism, to claim this status for a text crafted on the model of a Prakrit literary anthology and glossed at length in recondite Sanskrit prose—in which Maheśvara’s voice of the text’s human author is constantly asserting itself—is unusual enough to seem to constitute a category error.

The self-styled tantrakṛt sets up the expectation of his text’s novelty in its very first words. In the opening prose of the Parimala, the paired techniques of textual incorporation and bibliographic articulation—what we have seen were the principal tools of the anonymous philology—are clearly at work:

Here begins this great scripture entitled The Flower-Cluster of the Great Purpose, which has been undertaken in order to explain the method whereby one may reflect on God as nondifferent from the real nature of individual identity; in terms of its content, in line with the conclusion by tentative admission, it contains the five parts of a syllogism, beginning with the major proposition; in it, there are seventy lyric verses serving as sūtras.10

9 Mañjarī, 98, citing Mahānayaprapāśa 46cd–47ab and Cidgagacandrikā 108; the wider evidence for the relationship between the two texts is set out in Sanderson, “Śaiva Exegesis,” 297, esp. n. 205.

10 Mañjarī, 2: atha yad etad ātmavarāpāvibhinnaparameśvaraparāmarśopāyapratipādani-
First of all, in speaking here of “the conclusion by tentative admission” (abhyupagamasiddhānta), Maheśvarānanda gestures towards the canonical authority of the Nyāyasūtra (1.1.31) and its commentaries.\textsuperscript{11} What is tentatively admitted here is not directly stated, though it is likely to be the pretheorized sense of the world in its seeming duality, that which Maheśvarānanda means to overcome in the course of his work.\textsuperscript{12} But this appeal to the orthodox system of logic as a shared repository of philosophical common sense, which is analogous to the opening of the Pāñcarātratrānakṣa, is tangential to Maheśvarānanda’s central claim here. He declares that the Mañjarī—a text, as he here obliquely admits, that formally is akin to a short anthology of erotic verse—should be understood at once as a major work of scripture (mahat tantram) and as possessing a syllogistic structure. This latter claim derives from an unacknowledged borrowing from the Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśini, Abhinavagupta’s learned and influential commentary on the work of Utpaladeva, where its root-text is characterized identically as containing the five parts of a classical syllogism.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} aparīkṣitābhuyapagamā tadviśeṣaparīkṣaṇam abhyupagamasiddhāntaḥ, “The conclusion by tentative admission is the examination, based on the tentative admission of something that is not itself examined, of the particular features of that thing.” In the Nyāyabhāṣya ad loc, Vātsyāyana explains that this term labels those axioms implicitly accepted within a śāstra, which go without saying in its fundamental text, for example the acceptance of the internal organ of attention (manas) by the Naiyāyikas.

\textsuperscript{12} Maheśvarānanda returns to this theme in one of the Parimala’s finer passages (45–47) where, adopting the dialectical style of opponent and siddhāntin, he stages a debate on just this topic, the apparent teeming dualisms of everyday experience, while splitting the argumentative voice of his own text. This is discussed in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 141–144 (the passage is reedited ibid., 313–315 and translated, 361–365).

\textsuperscript{13} The fact that the text contains seventy āryā verses itself suggests the model of the foundational work of Māhārāṣṭrī courtly poetry, the Gāhāsattasaś (Seven Hundred Lyrics) attributed to the Sātavāhana king Hāla: see now Andrew Ollett, “Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit and the Language Order of Premodern India” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2015), 75–100.

\textsuperscript{14} Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśini, 24 ff.: evaṃ pratijñātavyasamastavastusamgranhanena idam vākyam uddeśarūpaṃ pratijñāpiṇḍātmakaṃ ca, madhyagranthas tu hetvādinirūpakaḥ iti prakaṭito mayā (= 4.3.16) iti cāntyaśloko niṣgaṃanagraṇthā iti evaṃ pañcāvayavātmakaṃ idam śāstraṃ paravyutpattiphalam, ‘So, through the inclusion of all of the elements that are to be maintained [in the course of the work], this utterance serves both as an indicatory statement [of the contents of the work] as well as a major proposition. Further, the central
But Abhinava’s commentary pointedly pertains to the domain of a śāstra, and not a scriptural work, and Maheśvara’s repurposing of his language here in the service of describing his own text relies on a studied homage to the scriptures’ own self-characterization. In two widely cited examples of what exactly makes up a mahātantra, earlier tantric authors had recourse to numerical sets, in a way which parallels Maheśvarānanda’s claim that his work instantiated the five parts of logician’s proof. The Mṛgendra, for instance, declares ‘a great scripture contains the three fundamental categories and is divided into four topics,’ while the opening of the Svacchandatantra declares ‘a great scripture [contains] the four thrones.’ These enumerative definitions seem to have provided the ground for Maheśvarānanda to effect his mélange of the genre of scripture with the philosophical-dialectical contents of his complex text.

### Ambiguity and Auto-Philology

The explicit decision to frame the Mahārthamañjarī as a part of the library of Śaiva tantras is only the first of Maheśvarānanda’s philological gambits. The text’s bilingual form—Prakrit root verses and extensive Sanskrit gloss—is perhaps his most thoroughgoing. As we have seen, strong precedents existed within his Śaiva tantric milieu for the use of speech-forms other than classical Sanskrit, above all a connection between the supposedly simpler, more direct idioms and the sudden irruption of liberated consciousness that is a hallmark of its nondualist currents. But in adopting Māhārāṣṭrī, the preeminent language

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portions of the text include the adduced reason [as well as the other two middle terms, the example (udāharaṇa) and its application (upanayana)], while the final verse, in declaring ‘thus I have revealed it’ supplies the concluding term. Thus this work consists of a five membered syllogism, one that is directed towards the instruction of others.’ On the importance of this passage to the epistemological and argumentative presuppositions of Abhinava’s interpretation of the Pratyabhijñā, see Isabelle Ratié, Le Soi et l’Autre. Identité, différence et altérité dans la philosophie de la Pratyabhijñā (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 20–23, and especially the further parallels cited in nn. 39 and 40 there.

Mṛgendratantra, vidyāpāda, 2.2ab tripadārtham catuspādaṃ mahātantram; Svacchandatantra 1.5c catuspīṭhas mahātantram; according to Kṣemarāja (ad loc.), these pīthas are those of mantra, vidyā, maṇḍala, and mudrā. The latter is a work which was well-known to Maheśvarānanda: he gives labelled quotations of the text six times in the Parimala, while evincing familiarity with it elsewhere (see Whitney Cox, “A South Indian Śākta Anthropogony: An Annotated Translation of Selections from Maheśvarānanda’s Mahārthamañjariparimala, gāthās 19 and 20,” Journal of Indian Philosophy 40, no. (2012b): esp. nn. 29 and 42).
of ambiguously erotic verse beloved of the literary-critical avant garde, Maheś-
varānanda was not choosing a language with a claim to being ready-to-hand. In
taking this particular literary language as his medium, the Śaiva tāntrika links
himself with a wider philological turn towards the antiquarian study of Prakrit
that had been on the rise in the far South from the early thirteenth century. The
outstanding figure here is the grammarian Trivikrama, who likely composed
his comprehensive Prakrit grammar, complete with lexicographic appendix
and extensive literary citations, in the southern Kannada country sometime in
the early decades of that century. Trivikrama’s work, in contrast to his major
source, the grammar of the twelfth century polymath Hemacandra, achieved a
wide circulation beyond Jaina circles. This can be seen by its use as the main re-
ference text in the Bhāvadīpikā, the commentary on a selection of verses drawn
from Sattasaī attributed to the Andhra king Vemabhūpāla (r. ca. 1403–1420).
Veṅkaṭanātha also participated in this minority philological trend, composing
a devotional sequence, the Acyutaśataka, in Māhārāṣṭri.

Maheśvarānanda’s work contains no direct references to any grammatical
authority, so it is not clear if he himself drew upon Trivikrama or some other
work. Judging from the gāthās’ lexis and their relatively simple style, Maheś-
varānanda did not possess the suppleness with Prakrit that he did with San-
skrit: he presumably crafted his root-verses through the mediation of one of
these texts, which were mainly bodies of rules, themselves composed in San-
skrit, for transforming Sanskrit into Prakrit (and vice versa). Even though the
root-text of the Mahārthamañjarī has no claim to real literary merit, it is worth
lingering over the details of how Maheśvarānanda made use of his Prakrit
medium. The relationship between the root-text and the auto-commentary
opens up a space where the distinctive feature of Maheśvarānanda’s writing
and thought can be seen at work. This feature might best be described as a
sort of auto-philology, where the inspiration and the methods of the anony-
mous tantric authors were joined to the tools of literary criticism, discourse
analysis, and the methods of Prakrit grammar. This auto-philology is staged in
the service of a productive contradiction at the heart of the work: Maheśvara
affirms the immediacy of the understanding his work offers, while he himself

16 On this date and location, see A.N. Upadhye, “A Note on Trivikrama’s Date,” Annals of the
Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 13, part 2 (1932): 171–172, who identified a funerary
inscription of a co-pupil of Trivikrama found at Halebid dated to 1236 C.E.

17 This is discussed in Steven Hopkins, Singing the body of God: the hymns of Vedāntadeśika
in their South Indian tradition (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 215–231 and translated in full
(with useful annotation) in idem, An Ornament for Jewels: Love poems for the Lord of Gods
by Vedāntadeśika (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73–103.
persistence seeks to interrupt the very process of understanding through interpretative puzzles and idiosyncratic modes of interpretation.

Throughout the Parimala, these interruptions depend on the Prakrit medium itself, on its pliant capacity to allow multiple simultaneous meanings. An example of this linguistically-grounded exegetical misdirection can be seen early in the commentary, in the remarks on the Mañjarī’s fourth gāthā. Taking up the paradoxical theme of the radical availability of the text’s esoteric teaching, Maheśvara presents his audience with a verse that supports more than one interpretation, the plurality of whose meaning depends on the Prakrit medium. The Māhārāṣṭrī base-text reads:

\[
\text{jaṃ jāṇamti jaḷ ā pi jaḷahārīo pi jaṃ vijāṇamti |} \\
\text{jassa ccia jokkāro so kassa phudo na hoi kuḷānāho ||}
\]

This appears at first to yield the following translation:

Even the slow-witted know him, and even water-bearers understand him;
reverence is to whom is the lord of the kula not manifest?

The commentary here merits quoting at length:\(^{18}\)

Even ‘the slow-witted,’ such as the Ābhīras, in whom the light of consciousness is barely evident, know him to be universally present. [They know this] as if they were Heroic Masters, who are nothing but the Light. And even such people as pot-carrying serving-women, who possess only a

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\(^{18}\) Text as constituted in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 213–214, with departures from the printed edition as indicated in the apparatus there: yam vaiśvātmyena prasiddhimantam prakāśāt-māno vireṣvāravāvānudriktaparakāsā jaḍā abhirādayo ‘pi jānanti, yam ca vimarsamayayo vireṣvārya iva vaidagdhyāhhasasālanyo ghataḍāsāprabhṛtyo ‘py avabadhyante. sarveṣām api sthūlo ‘haṃ sampanno ‘ham ityādek svātmasphuraṇasya sphiṣṭam evopalahamā-natvāt. yac chṛuṭiḥ: ‘utainam gopā adṛṣān adṛṣān udahārya’ [= Śatarudriya, 1.8] iti. vimar-saprādhānyāj jalajāryātīyā prati vaivistyaṃ uktam. jñānasaktyeva pramātṛṇāṃ kriyā-saktāpy ayam kroḍikriyāta ity āha ‘yasyaiva namaskāra iti. jaḍajalajāhyādir hi sarvo ‘pi jīvavargas tattatpalakāṅkṣayā tatra tatra namaskarvāṇo lakṣyate. sa sarvo ‘pi namaskāro yatsambandhenaiva bhavati. yathā śrutīḥ: ‘yasmai namas taccīra’ iti. […] atha ca jaḍāḥ stambhakumbhādayo bhāvā jaḍahāryayā śabdasparsādyādīnākṣanā indriyāsaktayus te ‘pi yam jānanti pariṣmēsvarasya prāktyoktarṣa upapādayate. yataḥ stambhakumbhādayo ‘pi tattatpramātṛvyāyikārādvarā jñānakriyāsrayatāyā niścīyante.
semblance of sophistication, comprehend him as if they were the Heroic Ladies, consisting of self-reflection. This is because the awareness of one’s own self—for instance, thinking “I am fat”, or “I am fortunate”—is perceived directly by all people. It is as it says in the Veda: “The cowherds saw him, the water-girls saw him.” An exceptional quality was attributed to the awareness of the water carrying women because of their especially prominent power of self-reflection.

Percipients can take him in through their faculty of action as well as through their faculty of awareness and for this reason he says, “Reverence is to him alone.” In fact, any living creature, be they slow-witted man, water-girl or what have you, can be seen to do reverence to someone or other, with the anticipation of garnering some reward. But every act of reverence relates to him alone, as in the Vedic text: “[He is] the head of that one to whom reverence is done.” […]

And further, the ‘insensate’ are objects, such as pillars and pots, and the ‘bearers of the insensate’ are the powers of the senses, adept at taking up sounds, tactile sensations, and so forth. These also ‘know him’: thus the Lord’s absolute self-evidence is propounded, since even such things as pillars and pots can act as the support for activity and awareness, by virtue of their objectification by various percepts.

There is a lot going on in what seems at first glance to be a wildly discordant piece of text, in which people, things, and abstractions appear to be juxtaposed in a chaos of confused reference. To begin at the simplest level: Maheśvara asserts that all people have potential access to the reality of Śiva (called kulanātha, “lord of the clan” in the verse). The examples he picks—proverbially simple-minded figures like the Ābhīra-cowherds and serving girls—seem drawn from the repertoire of the Māhārāṣṭrī literature, set in an imagined world of rural idyll. But this gesture towards the world of the Sattasaī is doubled by the quotation of the ancient Vedic hymn to Śiva, the Śatarudrīya, which speaks of exactly these same figures, cowherds and girls bearing water. Here for the first time (but not for the last) Maheśvara’s auto-commentary expressly cites the source from which his verse draws its inspiration, pulling back a bit of the curtain on his own composition.

But the most extraordinary part of this important passage comes in the sudden metamorphosis of cowherd and servant-girl into object and faculty of sense. It is a hallmark of Maheśvara’s Krama system that the ongoing process of sensory cognition can be understood according to the phenomenological analysis embedded within its contemplative liturgy: for the Krama adept, every act of perceptual cognition enacts the structure of his ritual mediation.
Here, early in the Parimala, before the Krama liturgy has been disclosed in any detail, Maheśvara stages a version of that ontological intuition through a specific, linguistically-mediated means. Jala in the Prakrit root-verse can refer to either persons (‘the dull-witted’) or things (‘the insensate;’ this equivocation is also present in the Sanskrit jaḍāḥ), while Prakrit jaḷahārio can at once mean (feminine) ‘bearer of water’ or (feminine) ‘bearer of the insensate,’ the (grammatically feminine) indriyaśaktis, the powers or capacities of the sense organs. Thus the simple phonetic collapse of the two Sanskrit phonemes ḍa and la into Prakrit ja internalizes the meaning of the Mahārthamañjarī and its Vedic precursor.

This is a slight example. For one thing, the phonetic phenomenon seen here is not exclusive to Prakrit, as Sanskrit poets and commentators both invoke the pragmatic identity of ḍa and la in speech as a basis for adventitious puns. But the location of this auto-interpretation at the outset of the Mahārthamañjarī is telling: it follows close upon what look to be eulogies to Maheśvarānanda’s guru Mahāprakāśa contained in the Mañjarī’s two opening verses, but which the Parimala explains as a series of complex ontological and phenomenological arguments, through a series of vertiginous commentarial operations, pointedly ignoring the verses’ patent meanings. This turn to polysemy mediated through the verse’s Prakrit medium, then, is meant to serve as a final section to the work’s overture, an advertisement of the linguistic ingenuity which the reader can expect from the Parimala’s unpacking of its root-text’s meaning. As the text progresses, this grows more and more complex, culminating in a remarkable set-piece reading of the Mañjarī’s fifty-sixth verse, whose second half, Maheśvarānanda tells his readers, can simultaneously yield three different transpositions into Sanskrit, describing three hierarchically ranked intentional states leading ultimately to liberation. These interpretative operations work to establish hidden connections, identifications, and metamorphoses both as sort of entertaining linguistic play and as an enactment of what for Maheśvarānanda is the protean and pliant nature of the world of our experience. And throughout, these depend on his invocation of the battery of techniques—

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19 These are described in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 205–213.
20 This set-piece is explained in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 218 ff.: Maheśvarānanda’s explanation for its underlying mechanism is prākṛtabhāṣāprābalyāt tantreṇoktam, “this is taught through a construal of the meaning [tantreṇa], owing to the capacity of the Prakrit language.” Here, his methods are evidently assimilable to the wider literary phenomenon of śleṣa or multiple-meaning poetry: refer to Bronner’s exemplary study (Yigal Bronner, Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)).
grammatical derivation, etymological analysis, the citation of parallels and proof-texts—that form the methods of the conventional commentary, redeployed to Maheśvarānanda's own purposes.

But the most significant detail of Maheśvarānanda's auto-philology is the self-reflection that it provokes. This can be seen in the unique apologia that he appends to the Mañjarī's conclusion. The seventy-first and final verse of the root-text stands apart from the rest of the work: written in a much longer meter, it is encomiastic and descriptive, instead of doctrinal, returning the reader to the dream-encounter that was the work's inception:

\[
\text{itthām pāḍasuttasaattaśamullās'ēkkasamdhāinim}
\]
\[
\text{jaggattakkhanānivisesasavin'oīṛṇam paśottaram |}
\]
\[
\text{lo'ullaṅghanajōggasiddhipaavipatthānabaddh'ujjamam}
\]
\[
\text{kanthāsūlakapālamĕttavihavaṃ vandāmi taṃ joiṇim ||}
\]

Thus I do honor to that yoginī who, entirely focused upon the creation of this work in seventy Prakrit sūtras, appeared as dream and waking became one; who, with total devotion to her vows, set her efforts upon the laying-out of the path that leads to the perfection suited to world-transcendence, whose only possessions are her ascetic's cloak, trident, and skull-bowl.

It is as he proceeds through this verse word by word that Maheśvarānanda gives his most sustained and surprising description of what the now-completed text has been about:

**prākṛta:** Sanskrit is in fact the basis of any other speech-form. That which has arisen from the basis of that [other speech-form], that is from Sanskrit, is [called] Prakrit. In this way one may acknowledge the ingenuity that goes into the construction of the derivative (that is, the other language), while at the same time retaining familiarity with the excellence of its basis. Thus, in both ways it is evident that [Prakrit] is suitable for evoking a sense of delighted wonder. One might object 'Now, in both the revealed texts (e.g. “one ought not speak barbarously, one ought not speak incorrectly”) and the traditional texts (e.g. “in such arenas as the sacrifice, one should never speak barbarously”) the use of a speech-form other than Sanskrit is forbidden, as it consists of *apabhramśa*, corrupt language. After all, any other speech-form by virtue of its difference from Sanskrit is *apabhramśa*, degenerate speech. It is for this reason that it is said that, “In learned writing, anything other than Sanskrit is said to be *apabhramśa*”'
Such an objection is incorrect. Leaving aside the reflection upon God and one’s true self, a word is *apabhramśa* when, like a tender flower-bud that has fallen into the mud, it is debased in the reflection on, for instance, the *camasa*-dish or the *caṣāla*-ring. But the other kind of word, even though it be stained by some language or another, is as much a source of excellence as the syllables of a *mantra*.21

Maheśvarānanda begins conventionally enough, with a typical and widely-cited interpretation of the name ‘Prakrit.’ The language used in the *gāthās* does not represent some radically different means of verbal communication; rather, it is a code that is fundamentally based on Sanskrit.22 Maheśvarānanda adds to this the idea of a specific aesthetic or textural effect peculiar to Prakrit, an effect that is only apparent through the lens of the properly cultivated knowledge of the prototype language. We may recognize in this a certain realism, as Maheśvarānanda or any of his potential readers’ understanding of Māhārāṣṭrī would necessarily have been mediated through grammatical literature written in Sanskrit.23

Instead, Maheśvara’s choice of medium rests on its potential to express something that is beyond the connotative powers of Sanskrit acting by itself, while necessarily bound up in that timeless, placeless standard of learned cul-

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21 Text as constituted in Cox, “Making a Tantra,” 187, with the exception of accepting the earlier edition’s *apabhramśātmakatvāc ca: prākṛteti. saṃskṛtam hi prākṛtir aśeṣasya bhāṣāntarasya. tatprakṛteḥ saṃskṛtya utpannaḥ prākṛtam ity anena bhāṣāntarātmakavikṛty-śil-pavайдagdhavasvākāraḥ prakṛtisauṣṭhavaparicayaparītyāgasya cety ubhayathā camakāraucityaḥ āsūcyate. nanu ‘na melcchitavai nāpabhāṣitavai’ ‘na melcchitavyaṃ yajñādāv’ (= Mahābhāṣya, Paspaśāhnikā, p. 2) iti śrutisṛṣṭityām saṃskṛtyayātiktabhāṣā pravyojyatatāyam pratiśidhyate. apabhramśātmakatvāt tasyāḥ saṃskṛtyayarekenānyā sarvāpi bhāṣā ity apabhramśa iti. ‘sāstresu saṃskṛtyāt anyad apabhramśatayocyate’ (= Kāvyādarśa 1.36cd) ity ucyata iti cen na. svātmaparamesvaraparārāmśam apahāyanyatra camasacāsa-lādiparyālocone bhrāṣyān pankilasthalakhalitakusumakilsalayasthānyāh sabdo ‘pabhrama-saḥ. anyādyās tu yatā÷ciddhāsoparūṣito ‘pi mantrikāravād atyantasaúṣṭhavāspa-dam.

22 Compare here the opinions gathered together in Kahrs’ carefully argued essay (Eivind Kahrs, “What is a *tadbhava* word?” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992): 225–249). Much of our understanding of the literary-historical hermeneutics of Prakrit literature is to be reconsidered in light of Ollett’s brilliant dissertation (“Language of the Snakes”).

23 See here David Seyfort Ruegg, “Allusiveness and Obliqueness in Buddhist Texts: *samdhā, samdhī, samdhya*, and *abhisaṃdhi*,” in *Dialectes dans les Littératures Indo-Aryennes*, ed. Collette Caillat (Paris: Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1989), 320 ff. discussing this passage.
ture as a presumed substratum of his audience’s understanding. Maheśvarānanda then turns to the dialectic method of śāstra, putting the objection to the medium of his work in the mouth of an imagined opponent. The objection depends on whether Prakrit must be considered apabhraṃśa, corrupt or degenerate language. This is a notion, as Maheśvara reminds his readers, that is supported by two impeccable authorities: the testimony of authoritative brahmanical scriptures that were mediated through their citation by the arch-grammarian Patañjali, and the great literary critic Daṇḍin’s injunction in his Kāvyādarśa that systematic thought is exclusively the preserve of Sanskrit. Rather than seeking to impugn the testimony of these loci classici, Maheśvarānanda flips their value judgment on its head: a word may certainly be said to be corrupt if it is abused through use in adjudicating such trivia as the details of the orthodox sacrificial cult (the camasa-cup and caṣaka-ring are a part of the equipment of Vedic ritual).

This defense of the form of the Mahārthamañjarī thus rests on two distinct points. Prakrit possesses a glamour that derives from being different from but subsumable to Sanskrit. This aesthetic argument is somewhat at odds with the second point about the significance of the subject matter of the work. The text is supposed to communicate the understanding of the real nature of things and the means to attain and render certain this understanding. All question of the particular fitness of Prakrit is left aside; it is simply important that we speak of it at all, especially when compared to the degrading, trivializing misuse of language that we see elsewhere in the world. Philology, even something as abstruse as Prakrit philology, must be directed towards some final end.

For Maheśvara the autocommentator, what is really useful about the Prakrit medium is its indeterminacy. When seen with an eye or heard by an ear attuned to Sanskrit, it does not so much obscure its final meaning as leave its interpretation open, at least initially. The Parimala, he goes on to assert, is thus an indispensable supplement to the verses, as it unpacks and regiments the proliferation of meaning that Prakrit allows. This is not, as we have already seen, simply because the Sanskrit autocommentary provides a single authoritative interpretation: indeed, Maheśvara implies by his practice as an auto-commentator that his gāthās admit of multiple interpretations because he would have his readers know the world itself to be equally indeterminate, to be subject to perspective. It is only through the gradual refinement of our vision that we may arrive at a final understanding, an understanding that allows for the world’s many partial meanings within itself.

But to put things so directly overshoots the present context and sells short Maheśvara’s subtlety. It also draws us away from what is perhaps the most important and certainly the most jarring moment in the entire passage, when
Maheśvarānanda characteristically recurs to the same point with markedly different effect. Atypically, Maheśvarānanda gives the lemma pāaḍa, the verse’s Prakrit rendering of the name ‘Prakrit’: this is one of the handful of such cases in the Parimala where he gives the word in its original form, and not in its Sanskrit transformation:\textsuperscript{24}

The use of the form pāaḍa [*‘Prakrit’], which due to its phonetic resonance can also yield [the Sanskrit word] ‘manifest’ [prakaṭa], implies that the sūtras do not contain a very great degree of non-apparent meaning, even though—being sūtras, after all—they are mainly meant only to hint at things.

We are told that, because of its phonetic alternation with prakaṭa, the Sanskrit word for ‘manifest,’ pāaḍa subtly communicates a limitation of the text’s potential for polysemy. The word itself points the text’s audience to a limit, a governing mechanism internal to the language. Here, at the very end of the text, we readers are assured that the text has operated all along within the scope of this inherent limit; Maheśvarānanda would have his readers believe that the ambiguity and polysemy of his Prakrit medium is governed by an underlying tendency to clarity. There’s only one problem: in Prakrit, ‘Prakrit’ is not pāaḍa, or at least it is not supposed to be. In lexica, in grammars, and in classical literary sources, the word ‘Prakrit’ in Prakrit is pāia or pāua; pāaḍa certainly can be the equivalent to Sanskrit prakaṭa, for so it was already taught by in early grammatical literature and so it had been attested in classical literary sources.\textsuperscript{25} The place of this anomaly as Maheśvarānanda’s final flourish here seems especially egregious: he would have his readers believe the ambiguity of Prakrit to be governed by an underlying tendency to clarity, yet he would have us believe this through an appeal to a fact about the language which appears to be patently false.

\textsuperscript{24} Cox, “Making a tantra,” 190 and Mañjarī, 186: pāaḍety anenānuraṇanaśaktyā prakaṭasab-daparyāṇe sūtrāṇāṃ sūcanapraṇāhye ‘pi nātyantam avyaktārthatety abhyayaśe.

\textsuperscript{25} Bhāmaha cites and discusses the form ad Vararuci’s Prākṛtaprakāśa, 1.2. The form is of sparing occurrence in the Sattasaśa: pāaḍa itself I find only once in Hāla’s anthology (vs. 473); similar forms occur as participles (vv. 199 and 460, pāadia-; 687 pāadijamte) and as a finite verb (vs. 869, pāadijamti); cf. the synonymous paaḍei (vs. 553), paadamta (vs. 406) and paaḍa (vs. 721); in the later and more learned Setubandha of Pravarasena, pāaḍa or pāadia occur some twenty-eight times (!). Ollett’s dissertation (“Language of the Snakes,” 125–126) includes a further attestation of the word in Jagadvallabha’s Vajjālagga, and a brief discussion of the form.
But Maheśvarānanda’s spurious Prakrit philology did not occur in a vacuum: pāaḍa as “Prakrit” is not unique to him, but rather is a regional shibboleth, a form found in the far southern transmission of Māhārāṣṭrī texts. This same regional reading is defended in the commentary on a selection of Sat-taśai verses attributed to the Reddi king Vemabhūpāla, which was composed in coastal Andhra perhaps two generations later. Vema explicitly discusses the reading pāaḍa in his comments on the anthology’s second and programmatic verse, going so far as to provide for the form’s legitimacy, based on the authority of Trivikrama’s grammar.26 Much later, pāaḍa would be the form adopted for the name of the language by the Keralan revivialists Rudradāsa and Rāmapāṇivāda. Evidently, it exerted a tenacious appeal on Southern authors and readers.27

It is completely possible that Maheśvarānanda was simply being credulous in his adoption of this local malapropism, and that he simply went one step beyond his fellow southern Prakrit readers in offering a blundering explanation of it. Yet I suspect that Maheśvarānanda almost certainly knew of the form to be anomalous, and it was this that motivated his use of it in the first place. Aware of both the local shibboleth and the form established in classical literature, he seems to have used this errant form as a learned conundrum, a recondite ‘easter egg.’ This might seem trivial—a great deal of effort expended on the sort of word only a philologist could love. Yet Maheśvarānanda goes out of his way to draw attention to it, and to equate it with the ‘correct’ Prakrit-to-Sanskrit equivalence. This impulse appears of a piece with what was earlier described as Maheśvarānanda’s linguistic hedonism, his desire above all else to take pleasure in the act of reading and composition. In fact, this whole gambit forms a kind of straight-faced philological joke made with completely

26 Cited ad Saptasatāśāra vs. 2 [= Sattasaśi 1.2], pāaḍakavvaṃ ity atra ‘pratige ‘pratīpage’ iti datvam, citing Trivikrama 1.3.33. This rule is not a sure foundation on which to defend the form, as its governing conditions are highly variable: providing the necessary elements from earlier sūtras, it declares “ta becomes da when the set of elements beginning with prati precedes it, excluding the set of words beginning with pratīpa.” The grammar’s auto-commentary proceeds to give a list of cases meeting that condition, as well as counterinstances, without ever specifying the two sets in question.

27 See Herman Tieken, “Hāla’s Sattasaśi: Stemma and Edition (Gāthās 1–50) with translation and notes” (PhD Dissertation, Leiden, 1983), 185–186 and the references cited there; I do not have an opinion as to Tieken’s conjecture that the vector for the introduction of this shibboleth depends on the southern texts’ ultimate dependence on a Jaina Nāgarī exemplar written by a scribe familiar with the Jain scriptural Prakrit Ardhamāgadhī and Jaina Māhārāṣṭrī: though the necessary sound change is present there, neither language shows a lexical equivalent.
serious intent. He was, I propose, completely sincere in his belief that his chosen medium allowed him to as it were directly manipulate the subjectivity of his reader: it is right there, integral to Prakrit itself. But in setting out this article of linguistic-ontological faith, he chose to create this verbal puzzle for his readers, as an argument through demonstration. In this tiny detail, he betrays just how great were the depths of his interpretative reflexivity, and his willingness to stage it for his readers for what he genuinely thought were salvific ends.

Writing, Reading, and the Hermeneutical yogin

There is much more to be said about this work, the abundance of whose intellectual energy and ambition is in inverse proportion to the attention it has received in modern scholarship. It would be possible to devote many pages to describing Maheśvarānanda’s efforts to synthesize the difficult and dispersed scriptural corpus of the Krama and its cognate Tantric traditions, to detail his habits of citation or to describe his playful, learned style of Sanskrit prose. Instead, I will just focus on a single theme, which directly addresses the nature of Maheśvarānanda’s philology. This is the explicit and remarkable linkage that he makes between textual study and his theory of liberation. Throughout the Parimala, we can see the impress of the literary theory of his time, particularly the theory of implicit meaning first described in Ānandavardhana’s Dhvanyāloka and Abhinavagupta’s Locana commentary. While other restatements or expansions of this theory had been promulgated before Maheśvarānanda’s time, he is explicit that it is this early formulation that is especially influential upon him: “I was a navigator on the sea that is Literature,” he writes, “once I has studied the Kāvyāloka and the Locana”. Abhinavagupta’s works of tantric exegesis and non-dualist theology were models for Maheśvarānanda—and there is hardly a page of the Parimala that does not directly reflect the Kashmirian’s profound influence—but the adaptation of his literary-theoretical thinking to the task of scriptural composition is evidence of his greatest debt to the Kashmirian master. This is part of the basic armature of the text: the Kashmirian poeticians had been drawn to the Māhārāṣṭrī gāthā literature as source material for their own exercises in virtuoso interpretation, and so Maheśvarānanda drew on the linguistic resources of the same language in his Prākrit root-

28 Mañjarī 195, Kāvyāloka and Sahṛdayāloka are both alternate titles of Ānandavardhana’s text.
verses, only to systematically walk his readers through an elaborate demonstration of this in his own Sanskrit gloss.

But for all that Maheśvara derives his explicit theoretical justification from the dhvani poetics, which was the dominant intellectual position in the interpretation of the elite literary culture of his day, his work cannot simply be derived from an account of its influence on him. Instead, the self-awareness that informs his whole project appears to be an extension of the interpretive and compositional practice of the tantra authors in whose wake he wrote. The point can be further extended: the textual proliferation which surrounded Maheśvarānanda prompted not only a new way to think about the making of texts, but their consumption as well. For Maheśvarānanda, reading possessed a transformative, even liberating power. To read the text right is to have one’s consciousness fundamentally transformed. Reading right is, in fact, identical with liberation in life.

Over a set of six verses late in the text (vv. 60–65), Maheśvarānanda describes the hidden protagonist of his work, what the Māhārāṣṭrī text calls the joī (= Skt. yogin). Within the root-verses, the joī is a solitary figure, characterized through a series of oblique metaphors as the sole actor in the drama of his own enlightenment, as when we read that “The yogin bears the array of the the states of waking, dream, deep sleep, and the fourth state, as if it were a wonderful jewelled necklace, strung on the single thread of self-awareness.”²⁹ In the prose introductions to each of these, however, Maheśvarānanda repeatedly emphasizes that it is a group of such yogins he is describing. This can be seen from the first such avataraṇikā, to the sixthtieth verse:³⁰

He now prepares to teach the incredible nature of those yogins whose energies are grown great through that reflection on the real nature of the self, which they have acquired through the spectrum of Methods that have just been taught [in vv. 57–59]. At the outset, in order to characterize their fearless calm (naścintyam), which is without restriction in its rejection of the limitations that is the distinction between inner and outer, he says ...

²⁹ vs. 61 (Mañjarī, 155): jojāarasivīṇaasasuttatūrīapavaparipāhiṃ | cittaṃ vi maṇimālaṃ vimarisasuttekkagubbhabhuvvahaï ||. The ‘fourth state’ is that of pure, contentless consciousness, a notion whose pedigree extends back to the upaniṣads.

³⁰ Mañjarī, 154: athetham upadiśtopaṇapranaṇacapratilabhātmavaparāmarṣaṃsaṃ-salollāsaṃ yoginām atiśayam ākhyāsyann ādāv eṣām antarbhāhivabhāvadāvāvete-vicche-vicche-davyudāsanirantraṇaṃ naścintyam niścetum āha.

³¹ These are discussed in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 216–227.
Maheśvarānanda introduces the main rubric by which he characterizes liberation in the Parimala, naiścintyam, the absence of fear or concern. This appears to be the only major innovation Maheśvara makes to his tradition’s doctrine of enlightenment: naiścintyam is a term of art to which he returns repeatedly in his presentation, and it is one that none of his predecessors ever use.\footnote{32} Given Maheśvarānanda’s familiarity with poetic theory and the evident pride with which he refers to his own literary works,\footnote{33} it is significant that the one potential source for this usage (quite possibly the word’s only prior attestation) is a verse found among the epigrams ascribed to Bhartṛhari in his Vairāgyaśataka:\footnote{34}

A threadbare loincloth, falling into a hundred pieces, an ascetic’s cloak that’s equally tattered, fearless calm, eating without a care as to the food, and a night’s sleep in a burning ground, wandering at will, without anything to driving you along, your heart ever at peace, abiding in the celebration of yoga—if you have this, what good is ruling all of creation?

\footnote{32}{Including references in the opening and closing anukramaṇikās, naiścintyam- occurs ten times in the Parimala (3, 128, 154, 161 [three times], 163 [twice], 173, 194) Dwivedi unaccountably does not include it in his index of viśiṣṭāḥ śabdāḥ (135–149).

\footnote{33}{Cf. Mañjarī 70: ataś ca śabdārthasāmarasyātmani sāhitye'py asmadāgrahaḥ pārameśvaro 'nugraha eva, yadanuprāṇānaḥ kundalābharaṇamukundakeliparimalaguhākomalavallīs- tavanakhapralāpādayaḥ prabandhāḥ prakhyāyante. “As a result, even my obsession with literary writing—where we find the complete fusion of word and meaning—is nothing other than divine favor; the compositions of mine that have found fame, including The Earring, The Cave of Pleasure, the Hymn to Komalavallī and the Tell-tale Fingernail, all take their inspiration from this.” None of these works survive, except for some quotations from the hymn in the Parimala; the odd name parimalaguhā is queried in the mmp’s edition, but is confirmed as the reading of Adyar Library ms. 72866 [A₁ in Cox, “Making a tantra”], f. 30r, ll. 8–9 and ori Mysore ms. e.40300887 [M, ibid.], p. 196, ll. 2–4; these two mss. also share the reading kundalāraṃbhaṇa for ed.’s -ābharaṇa. With the exception of the stava, all of the titles suggest works of erotic poetry; this has influenced my translation of nakhapralāpa (in a more pious context it could, for example, also mean A Discourse on the Claws [of Narasimha?]).

\footnote{34}{Vs. 91 in Rāmacandrābjudhendra’s recension: kaupīnaṃ satakhaṇḍajarjarataraṃ kanthā punas tādṛśi naiścintyam nirapekṣabhaikṣam aśañām nidrā śmaśāne vane | svātantryena nirantkuśaṃ viharānāṃ svāntaṃ prasāntaṃ sadā sthairyam yogamahotsave ‘pi ca yadi trailokyārājyaṃ kim ||}
Naiścintyam here may be a coinage of the verse’s author, who was almost certainly not the historical Bhartṛhari. Beyond the generically Śaiva character of this verse, it notably contains the keyword svātantryam (‘autonomy’), a term used everywhere throughout Maheśvarānanda’s Kashmirian sources to characterize liberation-in-life. Speculatively, it may have been his memory of this term of art in the Bhartṛharian verse that connected the two notions of autonomy and fearlessness in Maheśvarānanda’s mind, and might have led him to adopt the latter as the watchword for his understanding of his system’s ultimate goal.

In yet another unacknowledged borrowing from Abhinavagupta, Maheśvarānanda goes on to frame his yogins in terms taken over verbatim from the Kashmirian’s description of the sahrdaya, the connoisseur and ideal reader whose competence to understand implicit meaning is one of the foundational presumptions in Abhinava’s immensely influential recasting of literary the-
The joī is thus a reader first and foremost, whose sensitivity to textual nuance is what sets him on the road to liberation.

In his concluding verse on the community of yogins united through his text, Maheśvarānanda is clear that he is to be numbered among them:

The author of the tantra, reflecting on the miraculous nature of those yogins who revel in this sort of fearless calm—inasmuch as he himself is no different from them, he possesses the even greater delight of the abundant self-aware knowledge as to this nature of theirs—with his mind reeling at the magnificence of the sudden expansion of his own awareness, augmented by the all-consuming inrush of that [fearless calm], he speaks of the greatest wonder of all.

The ‘greatest wonder’ in question is the final loss of inhibition—doing what comes tantrically—that is characteristic of Maheśvarānanda’s refined Śākta style of Śaiva religiosity. The yogin then is not just an ideality of the text, but is an actually inhabitable social role that results from an encounter with the Mahārthamañjarī, whether as author or as reader. One becomes such a yogin through the act of writing and reading; the two textual acts of composition and consumption are in a significant way fused, as the reader comes to share in the liberating insight that the tantrakṛt experiences in the course of making this particular text.

Maheśvarānanda’s Gītā

In the final bravura movement of the Mahārthamañjarī, Maheśvarānanda expands this unique theory of his text’s ontology outward into the world of other, prior texts. The last limiting inhibition to fall away is a hermeneutical one: once one's vision has been set right by the liberating knowledge the text offers, the interpretation of all other texts—the ‘outer knowledge’ such as the śruti and smṛti—is revealed to be identical with the Krama’s own teaching, which lies hidden, like the nectar of immortality in the ocean, waiting to be disclosed.

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37 See Cox, “Saffron in the rasam,” 189–191.
38 Mañjarī, 163: ittham atyaścaryam naiścintyaśālināṃ yogināṃ svabhāvam anusandadhānas tantrakṛt svātmano ‘pi tebhya vaiśeṣānāṃbhāvāt tattādṛksvabhāvatāparāmarśamāṃsalam āhlādātiśayam anubhavann etadāveśavaivaśyodriktasvasaṃvidātopagauravocaelaccittavṛtiś camatkārottaram āha.
39 Mañjarī, 171: alam atra śrutimāṣāntānāṃ bāhyavidyānāṃ mahārthopāyatā prātyāyana-
This forms a radicalized reinvention of the tantric and purāṇic philologists’ incorporative style of composition: all reading is assimilated to the creative appropriation of a prior textual authority.

The Mahārthamañjarī’s seventieth and penultimate verse presents a demonstration of what this theory of philology looks like in practice. As a hermeneutic coda to the whole text, and as an enactment of the theory of reading suggested by his soteriology, Maheśvarānanda turns to that founding civilizational document of the Sanskritic order, the Bhagavadgītā, claiming that its core teaching is nothing but that of the Mahārthamañjarī itself:

It is this same Great Purpose that the god Mādhava, possessing sixteen thousand powers, teaches to Pāṇḍu’s son at the outset of the war. Thus may there be peace.

In the Parimala on this verse, Maheśvarānanda begins in mode similar to his other expansive interpretations of his own Prakrit text:

That which is [called the] ‘Great’ […] ‘Purpose’ is the reality that is to be sought after […] It is precisely this that the blessed ‘Mādhava’, the beloved of the goddess of fortune and the greatest of the descendants of Madhu, who as one ‘possessing sixteen thousand powers,’ experiences the real nature of the goddess Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī, uninfected by time and consisting of the manifestation of the [mantra called] the More-Than-Sixteen, [and] so thereby is referred to as ‘the god’—as one capable of any of the number of actions beginning with play—‘teaches’ (which is to say, ‘taught’) to

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40 gāthā 70 (Mañjarī, 177): eṇaṃ cea mahatthaṃ jutthārambhhammi paṇḍuuttassa | chola-hasahassasattī devo uvadisaī mādhavo tti sivam ||

41 Mañjarī, 177–178 yo’yaṃ […] mahān […] arthaḥ prāpyam tattvam […] tam enam eva śoḍaśasahasraśaktiḥ śoḍaśādhiśkarṣaṇaśaṃkaraṃ akālaśaṃkaraṃ bhāvam anubhavann ata eva devah kriṣṭadānyekeprapārṣidapragalbha mādhavo mahālakṣmivai labho madhukloottamās ca bhagavān yuddhārambhe kauravapāṇḍavasenāsamghalgoṣaṃ kramāvasthāyāṃ pāṇḍuputrustavyaṃ jyotisyaṃ kramāvasthāyāṃ ādikṣad iti yāvat. prākṛtabhāṣayāṃ bhūtavartamānādilakāraṇāyātābhāvāt. yad vā bhagavatā pratīyugam evam asya bhāra-tādiśiyaparāṣa pravāhanatvāṃ prāhārāvahānātavāṃ pravāhanatvāṃ iti latpravagāḥ.

42 As the noun devah is derived from the verbal root ṛdv, see Dhātupāṭha 4:1: dīvu kriṣṭādi-jigisāryavyahāradyutistutimamadadasvapnakāntigatiṣu (“ṛdv occurs in the sense of ‘play,’ ‘the desire for victory,’ ‘interaction,’ ‘shining,’ ‘praising,’ ‘perfuming,’ ‘intoxicating,’ ‘dreaming,’ ‘shining,’ and ‘motion’”).
Arjuna, the ‘son of Pāṇḍu,’ ‘at the outset of the war’; [that is] at the onset of the violence between the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava armies. [As for the use of the present ‘teaches’ for ‘taught’], this is owing to the absence of any restriction of the verbal forms in Prakrit according to the tenses like past and present. Or, better still, since these events of the Bhārata war—just like everything else—are set in motion in this exact same way by God in each cosmic age, the use of the present tense here is meant as a continuous present, as an ongoing, eternal process.

I have truncated this quotation, leaving out several of Maheśvara's grandiloquent asides and quotations. This nevertheless gives something of the Pari-mala's flavor: it is couched in the trappings of a conventional expository commentary, moving through the passage to be explained word by word, and offering interpretative and etymological details of each, in a style familiar to readers throughout the Sanskrit cosmopolis (indeed, throughout much of premodern Eurasia). But the interpretative game here is in important ways a rigged one: in his interpretation of the gāthā's main verb uvadisaï, for instance, where Maheśvarānanda takes characteristically strategic advantage of Prakrit's lack of finite past tenses to make a leading interpretation of his own verse. More to the point, however, is his gloss of the verse's cholahasahassasattī, rendered in Sanskrit as śoḍaśasahasraśaktiḥ, ‘having sixteen thousand powers’. This is grounded in the narrative fact of Kṛṣṇa's sixteen thousand wives in the Mahābhārata, though Maheśvarānanda does not mention this here. Instead, he plays on the acoustic and (he would have us understand) conceptual rhyme with the śoḍaśādhikā, a mantra associated with the central Krama goddess Kālasamkarṣiṇī. With this identification, the central purport of the verse is made clear: Maheśvarānanda would have his readers understand the Bhagavadgītā to be communicating the essentials of his own Tantric goddess cult. This is an interpretation of the text which would surprise a great many of the Gītā's readers, then and now. Maheśvarānanda is not alone in so arguing—he associates his interpretation with a similar one made by Abhinavagupta in a now-lost work—but the way he goes

43 Both of the occurrences of this mantra-name are questioned in Dwivedi's edition (Mañ-jarī, 177 and 178; in both cases it should be read in compound). On this mantra, see Sanderson “The Visualisation of the Deities of the Trika,” in L’Image Divine: Cult et Medita-tion dans l’Hindouisme, ed. by A. Padoux (Paris: Éditions de CNRS, 1990), 591–520 and—touching on the passage under discussion here—Sanderson, “Śaiva Exegesis,” 358–359.

44 Sanderson (“Śaiva Exegesis,” 358–359) notes that Maheśvarānanda links this claim with Abhinavagupta's lost Kramakeli, a commentary on Eraka's Kramastotra. As he notes, Abhinava also authored the Gitārthasaṁgraha, a minor work broadly arguing the same
about substantiating this claim seems to be unique. After this initial gloss of the global meaning of the whole verse, Maheśvarānanda again goes through its text word by word, this time adducing and interpreting verses from the Gītā itself. To give only a brief extract, of his second gloss on the name Mādhava (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) in the gāthā:45

By revealing the marital connection between himself and Arjuna through the use of the name ‘Mādhava,’ the Blessed One’s eagerness to reveal the secret truth to him [is suggested] ([cf.] ‘How can this stupor have come upon you at such a bad time? Arjuna, this is unacceptable to noble people, unworthy of heaven, and giving rise to ill-fame. Kaunteya, do not give yourself over to effeminate weakness! It does not suit you: give up this ignoble weakness of heart and stand up, enemy-burner!’ [= BhG 2.2–3]). Immediately after this, because of Arjuna’s role as a pupil, adopted as a result of the forlorn state that is his wretched pity ([cf.] ‘My natural demeanor has been assaulted by the flaw of wretched pity, my mind is baffled as to dharma, and so I ask you: Tell me what would certainly be the better course. I am your pupil; instruct me, who has submitted himself to you.’ [= BhG 2.7]), it is revealed that the ‘god’s’ heart is overcome by compassion and that, through such verses as ‘Neither he who thinks it to be a killer, nor he who thinks it killed truly understand: it [the Self] neither kills nor is killed’ [= BhG 2.19], by revealing the impossibility of killing another person, since the Self—embedded though it be in the body of any number of people, for instance Bhīṣma or Droṇa—possesses such qualities as being eternal and all-pervasive, [the god] has a surfeit of grace

point; Maheśvarānanda does not invoke the authority of this work, which he probably did not know.

Mañjarī, 177–178: mādhava ity anenārjunena sahāsyā kiñcid yaunam sambandham unmīlayītvā—kutas tvā kaśimalam idaṃ viśame samupasthitam | anāryajusťam asvargyam akir-tikaram arjuna || mā klaibhyam gaccha kaunteya naitat tvayy upapadyate | kṣudram hydaya-duarbalyam tyaktvottīṭha paraṁtapa || iti tam prati bhagavato rahasyārthatatvatvapratyab-hijñāpanaunmukhyam. anantarām asyaiva—kārmaṇyoṣopahatvabāvah prucchāmi tvāṃ dharmasamāśadhetāḥ | yac chreyah syān niscitām brūhi tan me śīyas te’haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam || iti kārpaṇyalakṣānaṁārthaḥsyaḥpavṛttāc chisayabhāvid devasya kārpan-yākṛntahadyatā—ya enam vetti hantāraṃ yaś caśān caśānmanyate hatam | ubhau tau na viśāno nāyam hanti na hanyate || ityādinā bhīṣmadronādīdāśṣaśarīrarāntarbhūtasyātmano nityatvavrāpakatvādiyośgād anyajanahanyamānatvādyasaṃbhavodbhavadvārā laukikavat kim bāhyāsāstrabhiṣakāya kātaryam anubhavasītī tasyopary anugrahodrekaś con-mudrate.
for him, [as it might be expressed:] ‘Why is it that you are acting like such a coward, like some ordinary man, out of a terror of the orthodox teachings?’

This is a difficult passage to translate, due to Maheśvarānanda’s deliberately odd way of structuring it. Throughout the *Parimala*, he gives massive amounts of quotations, drawing on scriptural texts, the works of earlier authorities, and his own writings. And throughout—like any good Sanskrit scholiast—he prefaces or follows this quotation with a tag, sometimes giving the title or the author of the work, sometimes simply generically introducing or concluding it. Not so here: with the exception of third citation, the direct quotations from the *Gītā* are dropped directly into the running text of the *Parimala*, with no explanatory introduction and only the indeclinable particle *iti*, a metapragmatic ‘close-quote’, at the end (I have tried to reproduce this here through the use of brackets). Over the following two and a half pages of the printed text of the *Parimala*, Maheśvarānanda continues in this vertiginous way, invoking a battery of quotations—of what was after all a text which most of his readers would have had by heart—to serve as a textual apparatus to his account of his own Prakrit *gāthā*’s radical reinterpretation of the *Gītā*. This builds to the crescendo of his gloss of the word *mahattha/mahārtha* itself, where all semblance of the cohesion of his source gives way to a kaleidoscopic set of verses drawn from disconnected parts of the *Gītā*.46

In effect, Maheśvarānanda composed two commentaries simultaneously in the *Parimala*—one on his own words in the Prakrit root-verse, and another on his apparatus of citations from the *Gītā*. The result is a duplexed experience of reading that oscillates between the author’s own words and that of his source, without any intervening transition. This is an unusual way to write Sanskrit commentary, and the idiosyncrasy would have been apparent to any of the *Parimala*’s initial readers. Though he does not articulate them expressly here, Maheśvarānanda had soteriologically sound reasons for doing so. This induced philological double-vision served as another means by which to catch up his *yogin*-readers, and to shock them out of the dualist habits of thought that led them to think of themselves, Maheśvarānanda, Kṛṣṇa, Kāli, text and counter-text as ontologically separate. Indeed, the passage’s location at the end of the *Mañjarī* suggests just this: that it is meant as a final demonstration of all that has proceeded, grounding esoteric doctrine in the

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46 *Bhagavadgītā* 4.36, 18.66, 2.40, 18.63, and 4.1–3 are given in rapid succession (*Mañjarī*, 180).
most publically available textual source imaginable in Sanskrit, a secret hidden in plain sight.

The particular form which this final demonstration took, however, is not exhausted by this theological rationale. Maheśvarānanda’s unorthodox composition here needs to be situated within the material and practical constraints in which he wrote. A palm-leaf manuscript written in the Grantha script would have to be composed in a running text, scratched into the surface of its physical matrix by an iron stylus, generally in a miniscule hand, covering as much of each side of the leaf as possible, and ‘inked’ through rubbing lampblack along the incised surface (see Figure 1). These physical conditions for the production of text-objects were imbricated in local practices of reading and writing: a south Indian palm-leaf manuscript did not lend itself to annotation, rubrication, or illumination, and commentarial works generally circulated independently of their root-texts, as separate codices. Marginal notations like folio numbers are found, but not extensive marginalia or interlinear annotation. In seeking to relate his own words and the received text of the Gītā, this jarring style of juxtaposition may have been the only way practically possible for Maheśvarānanda: these practical constraints did not allow for the sort of paratextual displacement that commentarial and exegetical writing depended upon elsewhere in the pre-print world.

Maheśvarānanda’s local textual culture thus may plausibly have constrained his own compositional habits, leading him to produce a single, running text, tacking back and forth between his own words and that of his source. By contrast, in the other textual-cultural environment in which the Mahārthamañjarī was transmitted—above all, in the Kashmirian world of birch-bark codices and ink-pens—the material and practical conditions differed greatly (see Figure 2). Striking evidence of the truncated, inferior version of the Mahārthamañjarī that circulated in Kashmir can be seen here: the seventieth gāthā (itself an alternate version of that found in the south) is given without any comment in the Parimala. And though this folio, the manuscript’s final, just gives its version of Maheśvarānanda’s text, its format easily allows for marginalia and other forms of paratextual comment, as indeed are found in other

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47 On these material-cultural constraints, see Jeremiah Losty, The Art of the Book in India (London: The British Library, 1982), 5–8; and Dominik Wujastyk, “Indian Manuscripts.”
48 See Losty, The Art of the Book and Bühler, Detailed report, 29–34.
49 The basis for this judgment can be found in Cox, “Making a tantra,” 276–283 and (more briefly) idem, “Saffron in the rasam,” 191–193 and “A South Indian Śākta Anthropogony,” 205–206.
Kashmirian Mahārthamañjarī manuscripts, and as anyone familiar with Śāradā manuscripts can attest to be common practice.

These limits imposed by local textual habit, however, opened up rather than foreclosed new possibilities of writing for Maheśvarānanda. These two texts running together in turns prompt what McGann once termed a sort of ‘radial reading’ that pushed at the limits of the text-artifact of his time and place, while subserving the author’s therapeutic, salvific purpose.⁵⁰ This mode of reading was embedded within material and practical circumstances that greatly differed from those of its creator’s northern sources. Kashmirians who were possessed of the same theological priorities as Maheśvarānanda never produced anything like the readerly-writerly fusion that concludes the Mahārthamañjarī. Indeed, this may account for the Mahārthamañjarī’s radical condensation at the hands of later Kashmirian readers.⁵¹

The doubled philological gesture embodied in the seventieth gāthā is more than just evidence of the South Indian non-invention of the footnote. It points to a transformed philological consciousness at work in the Mahārthamañjarī: as with Vedāntadeśika’s habits of scrupulous citation and his attention to the nature of textual transmission, this marks another area of real innovation, a point where we can perceive the junction of the material-practical and the conceptual-ideational in the work of these two philologists. Maheśvarānanda’s embrace of the Gītā does not end with this act of duplexed commentary. Instead, after his exhaustively cross-referenced second pass through his Prakrit root-verse, he turns to his own elevated register of Sanskrit verse, writing in

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⁵⁰ On ‘radial reading’ (“in which the activity of reading regularly transcends its own ocular physical bases”) see Jerome McGann, The Textual Condition (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991), 116 ff.; McGann argues that “[w]hat is called ‘scholarship’ is one territory … where radial types of reading are continually being put into practice” (119). The critical edition is an especially suggestive concretization of such a mode of reading:

One does not simply move through works like these in a linear way … [rather,] one moves around the edition, jumping from the reading text to the apparatus, perhaps from one of these to the notes or to an appendix, perhaps then back to some part of the front matter which may be relevant, and so forth. The edition also typically drives one to other books and acts of reading, ancillary or related materials which have to be drawn into the reading process in order to expand and enrich the textual and the reading field.

From this perspective, Maheśvarānanda’s embedded style of composition served as a form of constraint or resistance, canalizing the perceptual and cognitive acts of simultaneously processing multiple texts within a single extended chirographic string.

⁵¹ On this point, cf. Cox, “Saffron in the rasam,” 191–193.
an epic style, but in a way that could not be confused with the work of the Mahābhārata poets:52

The great yogin Vyāsa, Parāśara's son, that ocean of strength and calm, set about composing the *Song of the Blessed One* within the *Bhārata* and spoke the following: Bibhatsu, Arjuna the terrible, came to the field of the Kurus and, in the midst of the armed sons of the Dhrṛtarāṣṭra and his own battle-ready Pāṇḍavas, gathered together his army in the blink of an eye. Looking out upon the fathers, grandfathers, brothers, sons, grandsons and even the teachers there, that he would have to kill with his own hand, he weakened and he wavered. Fearful of that horrid task, he gave up his preparations for battle. Arjuna was disgusted, and no longer cared for the wealth of kingship—realizing all of this, the blessed Mukunda, Rukmiṇī's lord, his mind overcome with compassion, spoke to him as he stood in his chariot. "How can it be that this great despair overtakes you now, at the worst possible moment? Give up this weakmindedness, condemned in this world and the next! Who is your father and who your brother, who is your guru and who are your relations? Indeed, who are you, and what is this compassion of yours? Who is there who might serve as its object? Or who is killed and by whom? The many forms of expression that we find in the world and in texts are fashioned from generalities: do not feel terror at these, ignoring the particulars!"

This begins a third retelling of the *Gītā*-as-Krama-teaching: here Vyāsa, the omniscient author of (and character in) the *Mahābhārata*, is significantly described as a *mahāyogī*, and is thus obliquely linked with Maheśvarānanda's culminating description of himself and his imagined readers as liberated hermeneuts. More than half of the passage's thirty-eight ślokas are linked together,
as here, in extended verse clusters or kulakas, long sentences that spill over from one verse to the next, in an effort perhaps meant to mimic enthusiastic ex tempore composition. In this final move, Maheśvarānanda fuses the acts of reading, writing, and interpretation into a single novel mode, overwriting or (perhaps better) writing through the Gītā to his own ends. As he produces line after line of his own carefully crafted, artfully ecstatic verse, we leave off from the conventional mode of exegetical philology from which he had taken his earlier marks, and enters into something quite different. There is an implicit argument here, one in line with the wider project of the Mahārthamaṇjarī: Maheśvarānanda would have his readers know that once one's vision has been set aright, constituting one's own values and even rewriting one's textual precursor becomes something natural, as simple and as self-evident as grasping the implied sense of a line of verse.

Maheśvarānanda ends the Parimala’s lengthy comments on this last gāthā on an unexpected, even bizarre note, suggesting once more his idiosyncratic sense of the interrelationship of reading, interpretative freedom, and the dauntless absence of inhibition of naiścintyam. Invoking the Pāṇinian habit of inclusive abbreviation (pratyāhāra), Maheśvarānanda informs his readers—there is no other way they could have happened upon this themselves—to connect the final word of the seventieth gāthā (sivam [= śivam]) with the first word of the entire Prakrit text (ṇamiūṇā [= Skt. natvā]). The Mahārthamaṇjarī is thus shown to embed within itself not one but two acrostics: the first, “having bowed to Śiva,” he tells us, can be further reduced to the text’s first and last syllables, ṇavam, “new.” Maheśvarānanda would have his readers understand that it is this novelty, the will to transform the world and oneself, that is embedded in this way within the verbal fabric of his work. His willingness to manipulate the language of his textual object, and to reinscribe its meaning within his own interpretative program thus extended to his own work, in ways that exceeded anything his anonymous tantric predecessors had themselves ever set out to do.
Figure 1  Mahārthamañjariparimala, Adyar library ms. no. 72866 (Descriptive Catalogue no. 966), folio 95v (image courtesy of Hugo David)

Figure 2  Mahārthamañjariparimala, Benares Hindu University manuscript no. 14/7770, final folio (image courtesy of Andrew Nicholson)