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# The Samkhya system of the Bhagavata Purana

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*University of Iowa*

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THE SĀṂKHYA SYSTEM OF THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

by

Peter Charles Basel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts degree in  
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in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

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Thesis Supervisor: Professor Frederick M. Smith

Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts  
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## INTRODUCTION

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one of the most popular and influential Sanskrit religious texts. Among the Purāṇic literature it occupies something of a unique and revered position as the primary religious document of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, or devotion; particularly devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Its popularity throughout South Asian history can be demonstrated from the overwhelmingly large number of manuscripts and commentaries as well as the number of translations into vernacular languages.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of the tenth book of the text which is primarily concerned with Kṛṣṇa's life. Though the text is commonly known today as one of the primary sources for the Kṛṣṇa stories, there is actually a great deal of speculative and theological material in the *Bhāgavata*, far more in fact than many of the other Purāṇas. A great deal of this material consists of some variation of the Sāṃkhya School of philosophy. Sāṃkhya is understood to be one of the six traditional *darśanas* of Hindu philosophy and though it has not always enjoyed as great of popularity as some of its rival schools, its influence can be seen in nearly every facet of Sanskrit literature. What is commonly referred to as the Classical Sāṃkhya philosophy is exemplified by the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cent. C.E.) attributed to Ívarakṛṣṇa, which present a dualistic and non-theistic system of philosophy. The version of Sāṃkhya that is found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* does not conform to the details of the classical system, although it does share many elements in common.

The Sāṃkhya of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be found in a number of places throughout the text, but its most systematic versions are found at 2.5, 3.5, 3.7, 3.26, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, vol. 2.3 of *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 149-150.

throughout the eleventh book.<sup>2</sup> The most prominent of these is probably 3.26, which is found within a larger section that is often referred to as the *Kapilagītā*, named after the traditional founder of the Sāṃkhya School. Though these are the principal places where the philosophy is given as a whole, this peculiar brand of Sāṃkhya is referenced throughout the text. When discussing the third book Dasgupta notes that “Kapila has been described as an incarnation of God, and the philosophy that is attributed to him in the *Bhāgavata* forms the dominant philosophy contained therein. All through the *Bhāgavata* the philosophy of theistic Sāṃkhya as described by Kapila is again and again repeated in different contents.”<sup>3</sup> While it is certainly arguable whether or not the *Bhāgavata*’s form of theistic Sāṃkhya is the “dominant philosophy” of the text, there is no denying its conspicuously prominent role. It could easily be argued that the central philosophy of the *Bhāgavata* is, in fact, devotion to God, specifically in the form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, but there is no denying that the Sāṃkhya philosophy as presented in these sections forms the basic cosmological, and in many ways even theological, underpinning of the entire text. What is most fascinating about the version of Sāṃkhya that is given in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the way in which it allows one to trace some of the influences that played major roles in the composition of the text. Although many of the Purāṇas contain Sāṃkhya material, in some cases quite a significant amount, the *Bhāgavata* presents a system that does not fully agree with any of them, but betrays a number of traces to quite a few other traditions. When these influences are traced a more complete understanding of the religious climate of the text’s composition may be reached.

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<sup>2</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *Indian Pluralism*, vol. 4 of *History of Indian Philosophy* (London: Cambridge University Press 1966), 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Date and Contents of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* is generally considered to be one of the more recent of the Mahāpurāṇas. Though the Purāṇic literature is vast and was composed over an extended period of time eighteen of the Purāṇas are generally understood by the tradition to be the most ancient and the most authoritative. The list of these eighteen is far from agreed upon by all commentators and thus there are more than eighteen texts that might be considered Mahāpurāṇas, but it is this class of scriptures which are of concern here. The two most common lists of these texts are those given in the *Viṣṇu* and *Matsya Purāṇas*. The *Viṣṇu Purāna* gives the list as; *Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Bhāgavata, Nārada, Mārkaṇḍeya, Agni, Bhaviṣya, Brahmavaivarta, Liṅga, Varāha, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa, and Brahmāṇḍa*. The list in the *Matsya Purāna* is nearly identical except that it replaces the *Śiva* with the *Vāyu Purāna*.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for placing the *Bhāgavata Purāna* among the most recent of these has to do with its character as a text as well as a number of anachronistic statements within the text that serve as clues to both its date and origin. The first clue to the probable later dating of the *Bhāgavata* is that it is not mentioned by or quoted in any text until the 10th century. The first possible reference is a quotation by Abhinavagupta 10th-11th century C.E. in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, although this has been disputed.<sup>5</sup> A text called the *Bhāgavata* is mentioned by Alberuni around 1030 C.E.<sup>6</sup> This may very well refer to the same text, but as no other information about it

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<sup>4</sup> Freda Matchett, "The Purāṇas," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 133.

<sup>5</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*," in *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, ed. Milton Singer (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin, F. Bryant, "The Date and Provenance of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 11:1 Fall (2002): 53.

is given it is difficult to know for sure. There are also a number of commentaries that are roughly dateable, the earliest of which is that of Śrīdhara in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> This means the latest possible date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is well into the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, a fairly late year for such a popular Purāṇa.

There is some good evidence that the *Bhāgavata* might have actually been written earlier than this and that there are simply no surviving records of its existence until much later. This is quite plausible as there are references in the remaining commentaries to an older commentarial tradition which is no longer available.<sup>8</sup> The date cannot be pushed back indefinitely though. The *Bhāgavata* appears to make reference to the Tamil Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs; “In the Kali Age there will be devotees of Nārāyaṇa, O King, in great numbers everywhere in Tamil country.”<sup>9</sup> Though the dates of the Āḷvārs are far from clear, there is good evidence that their work was completed by at least the eighth century and that most of them were not much earlier than this.<sup>10</sup> As this verse does not appear to be a conspicuously late addition to the text the current version of the *Bhāgavata* probably cannot be earlier than the eighth or ninth century. The *Bhāgavata* also has been shown to be based on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, a text was probably not written until somewhere in the range of 500-700 C.E.<sup>11</sup> Dennis Hudson has also shown a great deal of evidence that the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple in Kanchipuram shows clear evidence of the *Bhāgavata* and

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<sup>7</sup> Rocher, 149.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel P. Sheridan, “Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,” *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 2:3 (1994): 49.

<sup>9</sup> Van Buitenen, “On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,” 26.

<sup>10</sup> Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The early history of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 488.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.



since this temple was built around 770 C.E. the date of large parts of the text can be pushed back well into the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>12</sup>

The question then becomes one of authorship. Who wrote the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and why? One popular theory about the redactional history of the *Bhāgavata* is stated as follows, “The Śrīmad Bhāgavata has three phases of development. Its earliest form consisted of very old materials; it was given the shape of a Mahāpurāṇa, and this is the second phase in the early Christian era; and its last phase represents the contribution of the Tamil saints.”<sup>13</sup> Given the relative uniformity of the *Bhāgavata* as a whole it is difficult to trace such interpolations and it is thus likely that such additions would not have been merely additions of material, but major redactions of the entire text.<sup>14</sup> As compelling as this theory is, it is not necessarily well-reflected in the text itself. If the *Bhāgavata* is the product of a number of redactions, it certainly was a much more thorough job than much of the other Purāṇic material. In a number of the other Purāṇas clear distinction can be made between different source materials. A good example of this is the *Kūrma Purāṇa* which shows evidence that it was once a Pañcarātra text and then was completely re-edited by the Pāśupata School.<sup>15</sup> Though there are a few examples of such material in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, on the whole the text displays a remarkable unity which has led many scholars to conclude that it must have been the product of a single

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis Hudson, “Dating the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa,” in *Krishna’s Mandala: Bhagavata Religion and Beyond*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Ramnarayan Vyas, *The Bhāgavata Bhakti Cult and Three Advaita Ācāryas: Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Vallabha* (Jawaharnagar, Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1977), 197.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

<sup>15</sup> Rocher, 185.

author, or a small number of people working over a fairly limited time and geographical area; or at the very least that the final version of the text is the product of an extensive editing process.<sup>16</sup>

There is actually a tradition that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was the product of a single author, namely the thirteenth century grammarian Vopadeva. A number of early scholars accepted this authorship, but it is no longer taken very seriously. For one thing Vopadeva is most likely too late to have been the author of the *Bhāgavata*, even with its late date. It is likely that this is mere confusion resulting from certain manuscripts of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Vopadeva produced two texts related to the *Bhāgavata* which were often located in the margins of manuscript copies; the *Muktāphala* and the *Harilīla*. Due to this it is not unsurprising that some appear to have confused Vopadeva as the author of the text itself.<sup>17</sup> Even so, the version of the *Bhāgavata* that is extant today is very likely the product of a small number of people, probably working together, if not the product of a single author.

Due to the mention of the Ālvārs Southern India is a likely place of origin. Although the songs of the Ālvārs became quite significant in Southern, Tamil speaking India and eventually became identified as somehow equal to the Vedas in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, there is no evidence that these saints were considered significant in Northern India, particularly in the time period during which the *Bhāgavata* must have been written. This places the composition of the *Bhāgavata* at roughly the same time and place as one of two highly influential dynasties, the Pallavas and the Coḷas. It is probably not

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel P. Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of The Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 4-7.

<sup>17</sup> Rocher, 144 - 145.

insignificant that this is also a period in which there is an increased awareness of as well as production of Sanskrit literature. During both the later Pallava and Coḷa periods (roughly the same period and region in which the *Bhāgavata* must have been composed) there was a marked shift away from the use of Jain Prakrits to the use of Sanskrit and eventually Tamil in royal inscriptions.<sup>18</sup>

There is also some evidence that the composition of the *Bhāgavata* may have been driven by particular religious or political motivations, particularly motivation to prove the Vedic legitimacy of the authors. Even in the earliest mentions of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, there are serious questions about the nature of its language. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century William Ward actually reports that pundits in Bengal acknowledged the difficulty of its language and recognized that it was written in a different style than the other Purāṇas.<sup>19</sup> In many ways the language that is used in much of the text seems to be archaic. It uses Vedic expressions and grammar in ways that are uncommon of Classical Sanskrit texts, the majority of which follow the grammar of Pāṇini. More than this, it even seems to deviate stylistically from the other Purāṇas. While most Purāṇic literature is written in fairly standard (and often simple) meters, the *Bhāgavata* favors much more complex and poetic metrical forms; often seeming to self-consciously make use of Vedic meters.<sup>20</sup> The motivation behind this is not totally clear, but J.A.B van Buitenen has theorized that these eccentricities are evidence of Sanskritization. The placement of doctrines and practices

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<sup>18</sup> A.G. Menon, "The Use of Sanskrit in South Indian Bilingual Royal Inscriptions: Social, Political and Religious Implications," in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 251-252.

<sup>19</sup> Rocher, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Hardy, 491-492.

that might have been of questionable orthodoxy within a text with overtly Vedic language may have served to legitimate these practices and doctrines to the wider Vedic culture. There is quite a lot of evidence that the devotional traditions in South India from which the *Bhāgavata* seems to have sprung were considered to be of dubious orthodoxy by many within the Vedic tradition, particularly Vedāntins. Thus there may have been ample motivation to compose a text that sounded like the Vedas, but taught a doctrine which was often considered to be outside of the Vedic fold. Thus, the *Bhāgavata* may be the result of a process of Sanskritization undertaken in relation to the *Bhāgavata* tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Some have pointed out that this would be the only known example in all surviving Sanskrit literature in which such a thing was done. This calls into question how likely it would have been for someone to compose a text with artificial Vedic features; a fact that some have claimed proves it may include material of a significantly older date.<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted that as the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are not known, it is possible that the atypical language of the text may not necessarily imply a conscious effort to fabricate a Vedic pedigree for the text. It is not outside of the realm of possibility that the *Bhāgavata* was composed by a group of people, probably Brahmins, who simply did not follow the Pāṇinian grammatical tradition for whatever reason. A prime example of this can be seen with the case of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* of the *Atharvaveda*. This text, which was discovered only in the 20th century in Orissa, is of uncertain date, but at least portions of it appear to be quite old. This text includes quite a lot of material that is not generally considered to be Upaniṣadic such as temples and worship of images and is

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<sup>21</sup> van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Hudson, "The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Stone: The Text as an Eighth-Century Temple and its Implications," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 3:3 Summer (1995): 142-143.

written in an un-Pāṇinian form of Sanskrit. It also displays Sāṃkhya influence.<sup>23</sup> Though there is probably no relationship between this text and the *Bhāgavata*, it does show how the perception of Sanskrit literature is colored significantly by the texts that have survived. It is not completely outside the realm of possibility that many of the unique features of the *Bhāgavata* could simply be the result of relative isolation.

As a relatively late Purāṇa the influence of other Purāṇic and epic material on the composition of the *Bhāgavata* should not be disregarded. In fact, there is ample evidence that the *Bhāgavata* was composed by people who were well aware of the previous literature and were concerned with both referencing it and correcting what they perceived to be mistakes within or misinterpretations of these texts. Given the later date of the *Bhāgavata*, one of the most probable sources for much of the material found within it is the other Purāṇas themselves. There is a great deal of evidence that much of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is based on the model of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly true of the tenth book in which the version of the Kṛṣṇa story is kept relatively intact with additions made to the basic framework of the story presented in the *Viṣṇu*.<sup>25</sup> The influence of the *Mahābhārata*, as with all Purāṇas, cannot be discounted either. The *Mahābhārata* itself serves as something of a jumping-off point for most of the Purāṇas and in the case of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the influence of the *Mahābhārata* is more explicit.

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<sup>23</sup> Katherine Young, "Brāhmaṇas, Pāñcarātrins, and the Formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism," *Studies in Hinduism IV: On the Mutual Influences and Relationship of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Pāñcarātra* ed. Gerhard Oberhammer and Marion Rastelli (Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 210-211.

<sup>24</sup> R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Hardy, 497-499

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* consists of twelve books called *skandhas* and approximately 18,000 verses. The frame story of the text concerns Parīkṣit, a descendent of the Pāṇḍavas. After being cursed to die in seven days, he retires to the bank of the Ganges to fast until his death and while there engages in a dialogue with Śuka, the son of Vyāsa, who narrates the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to him. This is largely concerned with the proper method of worshipping the Bhagavān, Nārāyaṇa or Vāsudeva through *bhakti* (devotion). Over the course of the text the history of the world from its creation to eventual destruction is narrated with special emphasis placed on the *avatāras* of Bhagavān and his devotees. The tenth, and largest, book is generally considered the most important as it narrates the life of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva in detail. The importance of the tenth, and to lesser extent the eleventh, books of the *Bhāgavata* is amplified by the text's focus on *bhakti*, or devotion to Bhagavān, specifically in the form of Kṛṣṇa. Throughout, *bhakti* is presented as the most advisable form of religious practice and worship of Vaiṣṇava forms of divinity is praised over all others. The *Bhāgavata* also presents a curiously pro-renunciation view of religious practice. The Vedic sacrifices are almost unanimously denounced and abandoning the Vedic sacrifices, and in many cases the life of a householder in general, is deemed necessary for liberation.

### History of Sāṃkhya

Sāṃkhya appears to have arisen out of what might be loosely termed the renunciate traditions. There is ample evidence that this is the case in both the mentions of Sāṃkhya in other texts and the school's descriptions of itself and its own doctrines. The real question is not whether or not Sāṃkhya arose from within renunciate traditions, but what sort of traditions these were. In general were two broad traditions of renunciation in

early South Asia; Vedic or Brahmanical and what have been termed Śramaṇical traditions. While there are some scattered references in the Vedic corpus to ideas that may or may not be related to the Sāṃkhya, there is simply not enough clear evidence to know for sure whether what is being described is Sāṃkhya or something else entirely.<sup>26</sup> A few of the Upaniṣads contain material that looks to be related to Sāṃkhya, particularly the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, but it is not at all clear that these texts were composed without any influence from Śramaṇical culture, especially since the *Śvetāśvatara* is a relatively late Upaniṣad. It seems much more likely that Sāṃkhya emerged out of Śramaṇical movements. These traditions comprise a wide variety of later schools and religious traditions including Buddhism, Jainism, Ājīvikism, and a wide variety of renunciate orders. These Śramaṇical traditions probably sprang from a common religious and cultural milieu which existed apart from the religion of the Vedas.<sup>27</sup> In general Sāṃkhya shares a great many traits with the Śramaṇical systems; for instance, it denies the value of the Vedic sacrifices to bring about any ultimate goal, especially when these include killing, and it maintains that renunciation of the world is helpful, if not necessary, for liberation. Even though it is clear that Sāṃkhya shares many ideas with these Śramaṇical traditions, it is also the case that Sāṃkhya fared much better in terms of its acceptance within the Vedic fold. There is much about the early history of Sāṃkhya that is far from clear and it is quite likely that what became known as Classical Sāṃkhya represents

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<sup>26</sup> Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, *Sāṃkhya A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* Vol. 4 of *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), 3-5.

<sup>27</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2007), 72.

something of a fusion of various strains of thought from within both Brahmin and Śramaṇa thought.

The earliest clear references that can be unquestionably attributed to Sāṃkhya thought can be found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. This text is thought to represent an amalgamation of various strains of Upaniṣadic thought. Due to this it has often been charged with lacking a coherent doctrine. On the whole the *Śvetāśvatara* identifies the Brahman with the god Rudra, teaching that some sort of meditation on or devotion to Rudra will result in the liberation of the practitioner. The first most commonly cited to show the Sāṃkhya influence on the *Śvetāśvatara* is 4.5, “One unborn male [billy goat], burning with passion, covers one unborn female [nanny goat] colored red, white, and black, and giving birth to numerous offspring with the same colors as hers, while another unborn male leaves her as soon as she has finished enjoying her pleasures.”<sup>28</sup> Though this is obviously highly symbolic language, the commonality with Sāṃkhya ideas is obvious enough that it has been used throughout history by the Sāṃkhya School as evidence that their philosophy can, in fact, be found in the Vedas. Vācaspatimiśra (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century C.E.) even quotes from it in the introduction to his commentary on the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*, as if to show that this system is, contrary to what any might say, Vedic.<sup>29</sup>

The Dharma Sūtras do not contain much information that might be considered Sāṃkhya, though this is hardly surprising as no matter the authors’ opinions on the matter such questions largely do not fall within the purview of these texts. It might be

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<sup>28</sup> Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 425.

<sup>29</sup> Michel Hulin, *Sāṃkhya Literature*, A History of Indian Literature Vol. 4, Part 3, Fasc. 3 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), 131.



pointed out that on the whole the earliest of the Dharma Sūtras do seem to confirm the theories of Bronkhorst and others that there were two rather different types of renunciation; Vedic and non-Vedic. Interestingly, the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* contains a striking reference to Kapila. “There was once a demon named Kapila, the son of Prahlāda. It was he who created these divisions in his campaign against the gods. No wise man should pay any heed to them.”<sup>30</sup> While this would seem to confirm the idea that Sāṃkhya was initially a non-Vedic renunciate tradition, it is not at all clear that this is a definite reference to the same Kapila as he does not expound on any doctrine that is distinctly Sāṃkhya. It is a tantalizing hint at what very well could have been Brahmanical antagonism towards early Sāṃkhya teachers, but without further evidence it can prove little. Lengthy discussions of Sāṃkhya ideas can be found in a number of early works, notably the *Buddhacarita* of Āśhvaghōṣa and the *Carakasamhitā*.

Quite a few references to Sāṃkhya and Sāṃkhya-like ideas can be found in the *Mahābhārata* as well. Discussions of Sāṃkhya in the *Mahābhārata* can primarily be found in three places: the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Anugītā* of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, and the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Śāntiparvan*. Though the textual history of large portions of the *Mahābhārata* is still not entirely clear, the *Bhagavadgītā* is most likely the earliest of all of these. One of the primary difficulties involved with the *Bhagavadgītā* is knowing how the text should even be interpreted in the first place. The text claims that it is teaching Sāṃkhya, but it is not entirely clear how this should be understood. These references are probably best explained as implying not a systematic explanation of the philosophy of the Sāṃkhya School itself, but this certainly does not discount the very

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 98-99.

probable influence of Sāṃkhya ideas during the course of its composition. The *Mokṣadharmā* is a much larger and much more heterogeneous text than the other two. It is comprised almost entirely of a series of shorter dialogues concerning a wide variety of methods of attaining *mokṣa*, or liberation. There is a great deal of material that might be considered Sāṃkhya or proto-Sāṃkhya in the *Mokṣadharmā* and it seems to preserve a wide variety of differing opinions on every aspect of philosophical thought, thus making it an invaluable source for the history of ideas in ancient India.<sup>31</sup>

The first surviving text that might be termed a Sāṃkhya text proper is the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*. There is actually quite a lot of evidence that this is by no means the first Sāṃkhya text that was actually written. The text itself maintains that it is nothing more than a summary of a much more extensive system that can be found in a text called the *Ṣaṣṭitantra*.<sup>32</sup> Īśvarakṛṣṇa also maintains that the philosophy of his text has been passed down through a long line of teachers beginning with a sage, who is identified as Kapila by the tradition. As this is the earliest surviving Sāṃkhya text its philosophy is generally given as the basic system of the Classical Sāṃkhya School. However, the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*' identity as a mere summary of what was most probably a much more complex system presents something of a problem as there are many questions about how its concise and poetic formulation of Sāṃkhya philosophy should be understood. A number of commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* were produced between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it is within these that the system is more fully fleshed out. Eight commentaries on the *Kārikas* survive, though five of them appear to be based on a

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<sup>31</sup> John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 303-309.

<sup>32</sup> Larson, *Sāṃkhya*, 125-127.

common commentarial tradition. These include the *Sāṃkhyavṛtti*, *Sāṃkhyasaptativṛtti*, Gauḍapāda's *Bhāṣya*, and the *Māṭharavṛtti*, as well as the *Suvarṇasaptati* which survives only in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Chinese translation of Paramārtha. The three remaining commentaries are all slightly later. The *Yuktidipikā* contains perhaps the most complete example of the argumentation of the early Sāṃkhya School and is probably slightly older than the other two commentaries, the *Jayamaṅgalā* and the *Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī* of Vācaspatimiśra.<sup>33</sup> Besides the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* and their commentaries the most complete version of the Classical system is to be found in the *Sāṃkhya Sūtras*, which cannot possibly be older than the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century C.E..<sup>34</sup> Due to their age this text cannot be of very much use for an understanding of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

#### Summary of the Classical Sāṃkhya System

Although there is much about Sāṃkhya that does not find its way into the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a short summary of some of the relevant aspects of the classical system will highlight some of the basic differences and similarities between the two versions. The Sāṃkhya philosophy as described in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikas* is fundamentally dualistic. There are two eternally existing and fundamentally different principles, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. While there is a multitude of *puruṣas* there is only one *prakṛti*. This *prakṛti* is comprised of three qualities, or *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*; or, brightness, activity, and darkness. Ordinarily the three *guṇas* exist in a state of equilibrium within *prakṛti*. When this is the case *prakṛti* is referred to as either *pradhāna*

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

or *mūlaprakṛtī*. In this state *prakṛti* is entirely inactive and lies dormant; alone it is incapable of action. It is only through the association with *puruṣa* that *prakṛti* begins the production of the twenty-three *tattvas* (elements or principles), which comprise the material universe. When *puruṣa* becomes associated with *prakṛti* the three *guṇas* are agitated and the process of evolution begins. At this point *mahat*, the great one, is produced; in the Classical system *mahat* is equated with *buddhi* (the intellect). From *buddhi* the *ahaṃkāra* is produced. *Ahaṃkāra* is often translated as Ego, and literally means “I-maker”; this *tattva* creates the impression of individuality and egoicity. The *ahaṃkāra* is understood to be threefold. In each of these three *ahaṃkāras* a separate *guṇa* predominates; in *vaikṛta-ahaṃkāra* *sattva* predominates, in *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* *rajas*, and in *bhūtādi-ahaṃkāra* *tamas*. The *ahaṃkāra* produces two different groups of *tattvas*. The first group is produced from the *vaikṛta-ahaṃkāra* and includes the five *buddhi-indriyas* (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin), the five *karma-indriyas* (speech, hands, feet, organ of excretion, and organ of generation), and *manas* (the mind in its capacity as mental sense organ). The five *tanmātras* (sound, touch, form, taste, and smell) are produced by the *bhūtādi-ahaṃkāra*. Both of these groups are produced with the aid of the *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* since *sattva* and *tamas* both are inactive in their natural state and incapable of producing anything unaided. From the five *tanmātras* the five *mahābhūtas* or gross elements (earth, water, air, fire, and space) are produced. The *antaḥkaraṇa*, or internal organ, is comprised of the first three *tattvas*; *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*. In addition to this all of the *tattvas* except the five gross elements comprise what is called the *liṅga-śarīra*, or subtle body. It is this concept which is used to explain reincarnation. Following

the death of the physical body the *liṅga-śarīra* continues to exist and transmigrates from body to body.

It should be noted that the dualism of Classical Sāṃkhya is not a strict mind-body dualism. A great deal of mental activity, including the individual personality, is understood to be comprised of *prakṛti* and it is in fact only the *puruṣa*, something like undifferentiated consciousness, which is really separate from *prakṛti*. Somewhat confusingly, the *puruṣa* is understood to actually be incapable of activity or causal interaction with *prakṛti*. It is said to be the enjoyer of *prakṛti*, but it is not actually touched by the karmic activity of the *prakṛti*. However, the *prakṛti*, being devoid of any intelligence, acts solely for the benefit of the *puruṣa*. This doctrine actually creates an interesting problem for Sāṃkhya though. If the *puruṣa* is incapable of action, how is it able to become liberated at all and how did it even become bound in the first place? It cannot actually *do* anything to change its situation since it does not act and is not affected by any action of *prakṛti*. The solution is that it actually doesn't have to do anything. The false impression that the *puruṣa* was bound in the first place existed wholly as a function of *prakṛti* and once the knowledge of the *puruṣa*'s true nature is achieved the *prakṛti* ceases to be associated with it. As the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* put it, "As a dancer, having exhibited herself to the spectators desists from the dance, so does Prakṛti, the Primal Nature, desist, having exhibited herself to the Spirit."<sup>35</sup> Thus liberation in the Sāṃkhya philosophy is the result of salvific knowledge. Though knowledge seems to be the primary means for attaining liberation, the Sāṃkhya School appears to have held that a number of activities were at the very least conducive to attaining this knowledge, if not

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<sup>35</sup> T.G. Mainkar, trans., *The Sāṃkhyakārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa with the commentary of Gauḍapāda* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1964), 150.

absolutely necessary for it. These tended to include renunciation and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), which the Sāṃkhya seem to have been famous for. Even so, these methods are not specifically mentioned in the *Kārikas* and it is possible that some Sāṃkhya did not understand these things to be essential for liberation.

As might be expected from this sketch of the system, the position of Sāṃkhya within the wider Vedic culture is actually somewhat tenuous. At various points throughout history opinions toward Sāṃkhya have often been outwardly hostile. Sāṃkhya has often been attacked for being un-Vedic. This is a slightly strange phenomenon as in the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* the Vedas seem to be listed as one of the valid sources of knowledge. The *Kārikas* list three sources of knowledge; sense experiences, inference, and reliable testimony. This is then interpreted by most commentators as meaning the testimony of both reliable people and the Vedas. Despite this Sāṃkhya is often accused of being non-Vedic or even anti-Vedic. This may have something to do with its probable roots in Śramaṇical culture. Even so Sāṃkhya, or at least a great number of its theories, found a place in a wide variety of texts which gave rise to the somewhat confusing situation of the Sāṃkhya cosmology being something of a default position for nearly everyone while at the same time the school itself was attacked as heretical. This was particularly the case with Vedānta, but criticisms of Sāṃkhya can be found in a wide variety of texts and it is usually listed along with Yoga, Pāśupata, and often Pañcarātra as being uniquely non-Vedic. This has led to the perplexing situation where a number of texts, particularly some of the Purāṇas, seem to simultaneously condemn Sāṃkhya and use it as the basis for their cosmology. This animosity that some

held towards Sāṃkhya and related systems may, very well have influenced some aspects of the way in which the Sāṃkhya in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was eventually formulated.

#### Other Influences

Apart from the obvious influence of Sāṃkhya itself, there are a number of other schools of thought and religious and philosophical traditions that appear to be related in some way to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The background of the *Bhāgavata*'s ideology is not entirely clear, but it is very unlikely that it simply appeared as a unique formulation of Sāṃkhya ideas without influence of anything else. What is most probable is that the people responsible for the composition of the *Bhāgavata* were influenced by a wide range of traditions, many of which were probably in direct competition with one another. This cultural context would have provided a large number of vocabularies to the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and would have allowed for a unique synthesis of religious and philosophical ideas. This is, of course, not an isolated event in the history of Indian literature, but the *Bhāgavata* presents an interesting case study of the mechanisms behind this process as it is an extremely interesting text, both stylistically and ideologically. Besides the Sāṃkhya School proper there are a number of other traditions that make use of related Sāṃkhya concepts and arguments that in many ways resemble those of the *Bhāgavata*; principally the Classical Yoga School and the Pañcarātra tradition. The influence of the wider first millennium Vaiṣṇava tradition, especially that of the Tamil Ālvārs, must not be discounted either, nor should the possible influence of Vedānta.

In general the Yoga School is considered to be closely related to the Sāṃkhya School. The principle texts of this school are the *Yoga Sūtras* attributed to Patañjali and its principle commentaries and subcommentaries. The *Yoga Sūtras* are usually dated to

somewhere around the 4<sup>th</sup> century, just slightly after the appearance of the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*.<sup>36</sup> The *Yoga Sūtras* actually refer to themselves as a *sāṃkhyapravacana*, or explanation of Sāṃkhya<sup>37</sup>, and it is not an accident that the two schools have often been associated with one another. Apart from the doctrinal differences between the two texts, the *Yoga Sūtras* and their associated literature is far more concerned with the practical methods of attaining liberation than the literature of the Sāṃkhya School is, which has led many to theorize that originally the two traditions were part of the same system and the literature of each represented a different function; Yoga being the practical method by which liberation could be reached and Sāṃkhya forming the theoretical foundation.<sup>38</sup> Apart from the *Yoga Sūtras* themselves the two most important Yoga texts for the study of Sāṃkhya are the *Yogabhāṣya* attributed to Vyāsa, which is usually thought to be roughly contemporaneous with the *Yoga Sūtras*, and the *Tattvavaiśārādī* of the Advaita Vedāntin Vācaspati Miśra.

The Pañcarātra is generally understood to be a form of sectarian Vaiṣṇava tantra. In a sense this is true as it contains much ritual material that could easily fit under most definitions of tantra, although in general its surviving works do not contain very much that would be considered radical or antinomian. Generally speaking Pañcarātra is a ritual system; primarily of temple ritual and initiation, but also of individual Yogic practice. However, besides this extremely detailed system of rituals the Pañcarātra scriptures also

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<sup>36</sup> Larson, *Sāṃkhya*, 166.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation* vol. 12 of *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), 23.

<sup>38</sup> Yaroslav Vassilkov, "The Gītā versus the Anugītā: Were Yoga and Sāṃkhya Ever Really 'One'?" *Epics, Khilas, and Puranas: Continuities and ruptures : proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Puranas, September 2002* (Zagreb: Croatia Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 225.



contain a theological system that forms the core of their understanding of the world and actually shares quite a bit in common with the theology of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

There are indications that the Pañcarātra may have existed at an early date. For instance there is iconographic evidence of the Pañcarātra theological system in southern temples, associating this evidence too strongly with later ritual systems is probably a mistake. Within the *Mokṣadharmā* is a text which is of central importance for the history of ideas that shaped the *Bhāgavata* and other texts like it, this is the *Nārāyaṇīya*.<sup>39</sup> The *Nārāyaṇīya* is generally considered to be among the most recent additions to the *Mahābhārata*, as with many such texts there is a great deal of disagreement over when it was actually written and whether or not it was originally an autonomous text that was added into the *Mahābhārata*, and if so, when? The general consensus is that the *Nārāyaṇīya* is dependent on the *Bhagavadgītā* and thus must be more recent; probably not earlier than 300 CE.<sup>40</sup> However, Hildebeitel rejects this dating based on his interpretation of the textual evidence and maintains that there is no evidence that the *Nārāyaṇīya*, at least in its basic form, is any older than 150 BCE – 0.<sup>41</sup> The text as a whole was almost certainly not composed as a single unit, and most textual studies have confirmed that it is composed of a number of smaller passages that have been linked together in a way that strongly implies oral improvisation.<sup>42</sup> Doctrinally the *Nārāyaṇīya*

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<sup>39</sup> Located at 12.321-339 in the Critical Edition.

<sup>40</sup> Brockington, 293.

<sup>41</sup> Alf Hildebeitel, “The *Nārāyaṇīya* and Early Reading Communities of the *Mahābhārata*,” in *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 187.

<sup>42</sup> Brockington, 294.

is remarkably cohesive for a text composed of a number of smaller portions. It is concerned almost entirely with the *ekānta*, or singular worship of the Supreme Being Nārāyaṇa, to the exclusion of all other deities.

Even the name Pañcarātra itself poses something of a mystery. There are a wide variety of interpretations of what the word means, but most of these appear to be late and are not of much use in deciphering where the name actually comes from. Some have connected the Pañcarātra to a brief reference in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in which Nārāyaṇa conducts a sacrifice that lasts for five days in order to become the entire universe.<sup>43</sup> The performance of this ritual also includes the recitation of *R̥gveda* 10.90<sup>44</sup>, a text that has long been assumed to be a formative influence on Vaiṣṇava theology.<sup>45</sup> This suggestion is not taken very seriously. Walter Neeval has made an interesting observation about the first known usage of the word Pañcarātra in relation to a Vaiṣṇava system that provides a very plausible explanation for the original meaning of the word. This occurs in the *Nārāyaṇīya* where the word *pañcarātra* is used to describe the *upaniṣad* (or secret teaching) which is given to Nārada by Nārāyaṇa. Neeval maintains that the word *pañcarātra* must then be understood as the night, or annihilation of the only group of five that is given any special attention in the preceding section; the five *mahābhūtas*. Thus the word *pañcarātra* would refer to the practices which bring about the separation of the self from physical reality. Since this is the earliest reference to Pañcarātra in a Vaiṣṇava ritual

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<sup>43</sup> Julius Eggeling, trans., *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa according to the text of the Mādhyandina School*, Sacred Books of the East Vol. 64 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 13.6.1.1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.6.2.12.

<sup>45</sup> Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 213.

context this is a very possible explanation for the meaning of the term.<sup>46</sup> It is, of course, impossible to know whether or not this represents the original usage of this term, but it is interesting that it seems to be so closely related to the Sāṃkhya cosmology that is so prevalent in the later Pañcarātra material.

The Pañcarātra literature itself is quite voluminous and has not been much studied by modern scholars. The vast majority of this literature is concerned primarily with ritual and thus is not of very much interest for any comparison with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. For the tradition itself the three most important texts are the *Sāttvata*, *Paṇṣkara*, and *Jayākhya Saṃhitās*. Collectively these are known as the three gems (*ratnatraya*). These three are generally considered to be the oldest of the Pañcarātra saṃhitās.<sup>47</sup> Pañcarātra texts that contain enough speculative philosophical and theological material to be of interest for this paper include the *Paramasaṃhitā*, *Ahīrbudhnyasaṃhitā*, and the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, none of which appear to be particularly early.<sup>48</sup> It should also be pointed out that what remains of the Pañcarātra literature is fairly late and may not accurately represent the earliest stages of Pañcarātra thought. Alexis Sanderson has demonstrated that all Pañcarātra texts appear to be based on Śaiva models and thus cannot possibly be older than the ninth century C.E. in their present form.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Walter G. Neeval, Jr., *Yāmuna's Vedānta and Pāñcarātra: Integrating the Classical and the Popular* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 8-10.

<sup>47</sup> Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit* vol. 2.1 of *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 52.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-98.

<sup>49</sup> Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism* ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 2009), 62.

It is also important to note the differences between the terms Bhāgavata and Pañcarātra. In a general sense Bhāgavata can refer to any worshiper of the Bhagavān, or Lord, and is a typical designation for any Vaiṣṇava. It seems that in earlier times it sometimes had a much more exact usage. One such usage was for the priests who were in charge of the ritual worship of Viṣṇu. These priests, though Brahmins were often accused of having lost their ritual purity and brahmanical status, a fact that has much bearing on the possible origins of the Purāṇa which bears their name. Thus, Bhāgavata appears to be a much broader category than Pañcarātra. Bhāgavata would seem to have been appropriate to describe a wide range of groups who engaged in the worship of some form of Vaiṣṇava deity, while Pañcarātra appears to have denoted a specific ritual system that may or may not have had its own peculiar theology. For the purposes of this paper it will be assumed that during the period in question all Pañcarātrins were Bhāgavatas, but not all Bhāgavatas were necessarily Pañcarātrins.

### The Cosmology of the *Kapilagītā*

The Sāṃkhya teaching given in the third book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is presented as the teaching of the sage Kapila as it was given to his mother Devahūti. Like all Sāṃkhya systems the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* posits a fundamental dichotomy between two basic principles, *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. The *Puruṣa* is beginningless and attributeless, “distinct from and superior to *Prakṛti*.”<sup>50</sup> The *Puruṣa* seems to be identified with Bhagavān who associates himself with *prakṛti* as part of his *līlā*, or play.<sup>51</sup> *Prakṛti* is also

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<sup>50</sup> Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, trans., *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* vol.1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 3.26.3.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bhāgavata [Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahapurāṇa]. Critical Edition. Vol. 1 [Skandhas I to III]*. Critically edited by H.G. Shastri. (Ahmedabad: BJ Institute of Learning and Research, 1996), 3.26.4.

eternal and initially exists with its three *guṇas*; *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in a state of equilibrium. *Prakṛti* is incapable of acting alone and only begins to evolve its twenty-four *tattvas*, or principles, when it comes into contact with *Puruṣa*. Interestingly, the *Bhāgavata* refers to Brahman not as the supreme principle as in Vedānta, but instead as the sum total of the evolutionary process of *prakṛti*. “The learned know Brahman as comprising of the effects of Pradhāna – a collection of 24 principles 5 *tanmātrās*, 5 *mahābhūtas*, 4 internal organs, 10 sense organs (5 cognitive and 5 conative organs). There are only five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*)”.<sup>52</sup> The precise order in which these twenty-four *tattvas* is as follows; *mahat* (also referred to as *citta*) is produced from the unmanifest (*avyakta*) *prakṛti* and then gives rise to the threefold *ahaṃkāra*.<sup>53</sup> In each one of these *ahaṃkāras* one of the three *guṇas* is dominant; in *vaikārika-ahaṃkāra sattva*, in *taijasa-ahaṃkāra rajas*, and in *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra tamas*, from these the remaining *tattvas* are produced.<sup>54</sup> The *vaikārika-ahaṃkāra* produces *manas*<sup>55</sup> The *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* produces *buddhi*, the ten *indriyas* (cognitive and conative sense organs), as well as *prāṇa* (which is properly speaking not one of the *tattvas*).<sup>56</sup> The *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra* produces the five *tanmātras*, which produce their corresponding five *mahābhūtas* (gross elements) in pairs. While this cosmological scheme might appear simple enough, there is much about

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<sup>52</sup> Tagare, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.26.11-12.

<sup>53</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*., 3.26.23.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.27.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.29-31.

its details, particularly as they appear throughout the *Kapilagītā* which deserves a closer examination.

CHAPTER 1  
MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS

The Place of God

One element of the Sāṃkhya system in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which is immediately evident is how overtly theistic it is. The Classical Sāṃkhya School itself is somewhat famous for being atheistic, and even though this is an oversimplification, the degree to which a more or less monotheistic deity figures into the system presented in the third book of the *Bhāgavata* is striking. While in what became the normative Sāṃkhya account of creation the world is the byproduct of the intermingling of two eternal substances, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, and thus has little need to posit a theistic cause, the *Bhāgavata* presents this entire process as the direct result of God (Nārāyaṇa). Again and again God is described in terms that place him in a role superior to and necessary to the Sāṃkhya cosmology which comprises the created universe. He is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe and thus he both creates the universe and *is* the universe. In addition to this he is actually both constituent parts of the Sāṃkhya cosmology since he is both the *puruṣa* and the *prakṛti*. This is all, of course, highly reminiscent of Vaiṣṇava theology in general, particularly that of the other Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. On the surface all of this would seem to directly contradict the Sāṃkhya philosophy, of which Kapila is ostensibly the founder, but when the evidence is examined more closely it becomes clear that the situation is significantly more complicated. In addition to this, the concepts of God, or lack thereof, in some of the related systems reveal much about the religious and philosophical climate in which the doctrines of the *Bhāgavata* were formulated.

It is often stated with little explanation that Sāṃkhya is an atheistic system of philosophy. While this is true in a sense, it is only true for one particular brand of Sāṃkhya which existed in a particular time, for all other formulations of Sāṃkhya the reality is far more complex and often ambiguous. The *Sāṃkhya Sūtras* do contain explicit refutations of the concept of a creator deity and all the texts which follow this that belong to the Sāṃkhya School proper maintain its position on the matter. However, the problem with using this text to interpret the view of Sāṃkhya as a whole is twofold. Firstly, despite the fact that it is commonly attributed to Kapila himself, the text appears to be quite late. Not only is this later than the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is significantly later than much of the other important early literature of the Sāṃkhya School, particularly the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* and the “proto-Sāṃkhya” portions of the *Mahābhārata*. The second problem is that the *Sāṃkhya Sūtras* seem to be attempting to refute a particular sort of deity, not the notion of deities itself. What the *Sāṃkhya Sūtras* object to is that there is a creator god who supersedes the two principles which it considers to be eternally existing, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. It has theorized that such arguments reflect a worldview that is actually thoroughly polytheistic in outlook not atheistic. While the gods and other heavenly entities are assumed to exist they, like humans, are understood to be finite and, though long-lived, subject to periodic death and rebirth. The world itself does not, and cannot have a creator as it has always existed and presumably always will. The gods are, therefore, part of the system and do not exist outside of it as the creator god of the monotheistic systems does.<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, quite at odds with the system that is presented in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in which the universe is cyclically created and

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<sup>57</sup> Knut A. Jacobsen, *Kapila: Founder of Sāṃkhya and Avatāra of Viṣṇu* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008), 52-53.



destroyed and created again by a single eternally existing deity who is not subject to any of the transformations of the physical world. If the philosophy of this text did represent the definitive Sāṃkhya system it would be quite a simple case of the two versions of Sāṃkhya (that of the *Sūtras* and that of the *Bhāgavata*) obviously disagreeing with one another. However, a closer analysis of some of the earlier Sāṃkhya literature shows that the situation is not nearly this clear.

The *Sāṃkhyakārikas* do not actually have anything to say about God. They are conspicuously silent on the issue and contain no arguments against God's existence. As tempting as it may be to simply assume the author of the *Kārikas* agreed with the author of the *Sūtras* but did not feel the need to argue about it, the absence of any definitive statement on the problem cannot be counted as evidence for either position. Īśvarakṛṣṇa might have denied the existence of a creator, but it is simply not possible to know one way or another.

A more interesting picture emerges when one looks at the commentarial tradition for the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*. The *Sāṃkhyakārikabhāṣya* of Gauḍapāda rarely brings up Īśvara (or any other name that might be construed as a creator deity), but potential arguments are countered on two occasions. The first is on *kārika 27* where it is argued that Īśvara is not the cause of diversity as some have apparently theorized.<sup>58</sup> The second is the commentary on *kārika 61* where a more explicit argument about creation is given; “How can beings with qualities proceed from Īśvara who is devoid of qualities?” And again “Īśvara is without qualities: therefore the production of the worlds endowed with qualities

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<sup>58</sup> Mainkar, 81.

from Him is not logical.”<sup>59</sup> As is clear from these examples Gauḍapāda does not actually argue against the *existence* of Īśvara, only whether or not Īśvara created the world. In fact, from the second example it seems clear that Gauḍapāda actually accepts the existence of Īśvara as he seems to have some definite ideas about what the nature of Īśvara is. The Chinese translation of the *Suvarṇasptati* mostly follows that of Gauḍapāda; though it also maintains in its commentary on *kārika* 31 that in addition to *puruṣa*’s status as a non-agent, Īśvara is also a non-agent. It does not argue that Īśvara does not exist though.<sup>60</sup> In much the same way, Vācaspatimiśra argues against the belief that Īśvara is the cause of the universe in the *Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī*. In his commentary on *kārikas* 56 and 57 he states that the Sāṃkhyas deny that Īśvara could possibly be the cause of the universe, but he never actually presents an argument against the existence of such a being. In fact, it would almost seem that he assumes Īśvara’s existence as his argument is concerned primarily with how the nature of Īśvara is incompatible with his having created the world. He maintains that such arguments also necessarily ascribe emotions such as self-interest or compassion to Īśvara; things that he could not possibly have.<sup>61</sup> The *Yuktdīpikā* largely agrees with the other commentaries, though it is quite a bit more systematic in its

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>60</sup> M. Takakusu, *The Samkhya Karika Studied in Light of Its Chinese Version*, trans. SS Suryanarayana Sastri (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1933), 40-41.

<sup>61</sup> Larson, *Sāṃkhya*, 311.

Vācaspatimiśra, *Sāṃkhyatattva-Kaumudī (Sanskrit Text with English Translation)*, ed. Gangānāth Jhā (Delhi: Bhārtīya Buk Kārporeshan), 100-103.

refutation of the notion that Īśvara created the world. He also elaborates on this and maintains that Īśvara actually takes on a body in order to teach Sāṃkhya to the world.<sup>62</sup>

The general opinion about the relationship between the schools of Sāṃkhya and Pātañjala Yoga is that they are basically related and only contain some minor doctrinal differences. In later works, particularly the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, the primary difference between Sāṃkhya and Yoga is said to be that Yoga is *seśvara* (with God) and Sāṃkhya is *nirīśvara* (without God). In a general way this is true, particularly in the post-11<sup>th</sup> century articulations of these philosophies. The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali certainly include Īśvara in their system and even recommend a form of devotion to or meditation on Īśvara as a means of liberation. They state that “[concentration] is attained by devotion to the Īśvara. Untouched by hindrances or karmas or fruition or by latent-deposits the Īśvara is a special kind of self.”<sup>63</sup> This means that Īśvara is not fundamentally different from individual selves (*puruṣas*), but is simply a special sort of *puruṣa*. Vyāsa comments that what makes Īśvara special from other *puruṣas* is that he has the distinction of never having been in bondage to *prakṛti*; thus, he is eternally liberated. This is very different from what most mean when they use the word “God”. Īśvara is not the creator of the world and seems to have very little to do with it, though it is stated in the commentaries that, much like in the *Yuktidīpikā*, Īśvara takes a body in order to teach the knowledge that can bring about liberation.<sup>64</sup> Īśvara’s primary purpose seems to be as an object of devotion for the practitioner; an example to meditate on that will facilitate liberation.

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<sup>62</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst, “God in Sāṃkhya,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasians* 27 (1983), 151-154.

<sup>63</sup> Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtras*, trans. James Haughton Woods (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 1.23-24.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

What is particularly interesting about these arguments concerning a God, or Īśvara as he is identified in the Sāṃkhya texts is that, as noted, they do not argue that Īśvara does not exist, they merely argue that he is not the cause of creation. This is striking because this is precisely the view of Īśvara that nearly everyone agrees is presented in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. This is even more significant when one takes into account the fact that all of these commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* mention the *yamas* and *niyamas*, which are a fundamental doctrine of the system taught in the *Yoga Sūtras*. This is also precisely the point at which the Pātañjala System's belief in Īśvara becomes important as devotion to Īśvara is listed as one of the *yamas*. In actuality, this appears to be his primary function within this system, which makes the designation of Sāṃkhya as the *nirīśvara* system and Yoga as *seśvara* version of Sāṃkhya that is favored by later systematizers extremely problematic as there does not appear to be that great of a difference between the two. In their earliest forms, both schools were actually theistic, though neither accepted the existence of a creator God.

In his *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* the 8th century Jain writer Haribhadra makes reference to two different sorts of Sāṃkhya, “Some Sāṃkhyas are without God, some have God as their deity.”<sup>65</sup> While it might be assumed that this verse is simply explaining the difference between the Yoga School and the Sāṃkhya School there is reason to believe it is not nearly as simple as this. From the above it should be clear that though the Sāṃkhya School denied the existence of a creator god, it did not deny the existence of God or gods in general. In fact, it seems more likely that the existence of God was assumed by most Sāṃkhyas and it was only the belief that God was the cause of the world which was denied. This would mean that Haribhadra was probably simply

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<sup>65</sup> Bronkhorst, “God in Sāṃkhya,” 157.

explaining that there were some Sāṃkhya followers who held the notion of a creator and some who did not. Though this is probably what Haribhadra has in mind, the principle commentary on the *Śaḍdarśanasamuccaya* by Guṇaratna further complicates the matter. Guṇaratna plausibly interprets the verse as meaning that some Sāṃkhyas have Īśvara as their object of worship (*devatā*) and some others do not, which would imply that these other Sāṃkhyas have someone else as their principle deity. He glosses the verse with “And there are those who are without God, their deity (*deva*) is Nārāyaṇa.”<sup>66</sup> In this context the implication would seem to be that for Guṇaratna, Īśvara does not refer to “The Lord” in general, but instead to Śiva and that some Sāṃkhyas are worshippers of him while others worship Nārāyaṇa. This is not implausible as a number of the Sāṃkhya texts would seem to be referring to Īśvara in more or less Śaiva iconographic terms while a number of texts, the *Bhagavadgītā* and much of the *Mokṣadharmā* for instance, seem to posit Nārāyaṇa or some other Vaiṣṇava deity as the supreme principle.

It should be obvious by now that what one means when using the word “God” is not always entirely clear. This is especially true in the case of Sāṃkhya where systematic explanations of what exactly is meant by terms such as Īśvara are rarely given. In general there can be said to be two sorts of God in these Sāṃkhya and Sāṃkhya-like systems. There is a God who creates and a God who does not create; a God who is different from both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* and a God who is not. The Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems denied the God who creates the world and denied that there was anything that might be considered different from or above *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. For the most part the *Purāṇas*, tantric texts, and most of the Sāṃkhya portions of the *Mokṣadharmā* took the opposite view. God is fundamentally different from all other *tattvas* and he is the creator of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

world. He is the controller of both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. This is the position that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes.

Some have argued that Sāṃkhya is actually incomprehensible as a system without something above *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* that can account for their association in the first place.<sup>67</sup> However, it is unclear that this is necessarily true. The Classical system appears to be coherent, though probably not very appealing to modern ears. What is true is that some of the earliest texts that discuss Sāṃkhya philosophy at all appear to be quite theistic, and in a way that the Sāṃkhya of the *Kārikas* simply is not.

The number of texts that utilize a Sāṃkhya cosmology and envision a personal God who is the creator of the system and is intimately involved with its preservation is simply too large to discuss. Obviously the *Bhagavadgītā* is an exemplary specimen, but there are a huge number of such texts, particularly from the Vaiṣṇava tradition which is of prime importance for a discussion of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. A good example of this sort of text can be found in the *Mokṣadharmā*, which is certainly older than the *Bhāgavata*. Following a lengthy discussion of Sāṃkhya and Yoga this dialogue includes the following; “The exalted Nārāyaṇa supports the whole, immeasurable Body of Total Knowledge, king. I have declared to you, O God among men, this fundamental reality. Nārāyaṇa issues this entire primordial knowledge at the time of creation and he swallows it again at the time he draws the world back in.”<sup>68</sup>

The *Bhāgavata*'s theism may not exactly preserve an original theistic Sāṃkhya, but it certainly preserves elements of it. Likely sources include texts like the

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<sup>67</sup> K.B. Ramakrishna Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṃkhya* (Mysore: Prasaraṅga, 1966), 90-91.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in, James Fitzgerald, “The Sāṃkhya-Yoga “Manifesto” at MBh 12.289-290,” *Proceedings from the Thirteenth World Sanskrit Conference*, 28.

*Bhagavadgītā* and proto-Sāṃkhya ideas that are not as well preserved. The literature that hints at these ideas is extensive, so there was most likely quite popular. In general, this form of theistic Sāṃkhya that is found in the *Bhāgavata* is not all that extraordinary as the transcendent monotheistic deity is a central component to the well-known Purāṇic cosmology.<sup>69</sup> Obviously the Pañcarātra texts present a theistic, Vaiṣṇava version of Sāṃkhya as well. The *Bhāgavata*'s conception of God is extremely similar to Pañcarātra, but since the history of Pañcarātra is obscure it is unclear whether Pañcarātra as we have it now is the source of the *Bhāgavata*'s doctrine, or whether they represent two similar attempts at a synthesis of Sāṃkhya philosophy with an earlier, non-Sāṃkhya, form of the Bhāgavata religion. Though the presence of a Sāṃkhya system that is so overwhelmingly theistic may seem strange, particularly in the middle of a text that is well-known for its devotional character, it should not. It is not at all strange that a Vaiṣṇava text includes a version of theistic Sāṃkhya as this is precisely what the cosmologies of most Vaiṣṇava texts consist of. The thing that is strange is that this system is placed in the mouth of Kapila, the purported founder of the *nirīśvara* Sāṃkhya School who one would think would have been placed in a position of dubious orthodoxy by most Vaiṣṇavas.

### Kapila

The fact that the Sāṃkhya system of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is delivered by Kapila is quite a striking departure from the other Purāṇas. While it is true that nearly all of the Mahāpurāṇas include Sāṃkhya teachings, the *Bhāgavata* is the only one which provides a lengthy account of a philosophy called Sāṃkhya and places it in the mouth of Kapila. For instance, the *Brahmā Purāṇa* contains a teaching that is explicitly identified as

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<sup>69</sup> Madeleine Biarreau, "Some Remarks on the Links Between The Epics, the Purāṇas and Their Vedic Sources," in *Studies in Hinduism: Vedism and Hinduism*, ed. Gerhard Oberhammer (Wien: Verlag, 1997), 120-121.

Sāṃkhya, but it is delivered by Vyāsa, not Kapila.<sup>70</sup> Kapila is the sage who was traditionally thought to have originated the Sāṃkhya School, by both those within the school and those who were not. The use of Kapila in this account serves to immediately link the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to the Sāṃkhya School in a rather unique way, as well as to the distinctively Vaiṣṇava uses of the character of Kapila in the centuries preceding its composition. In many ways however, the version of Kapila that appears in the *Bhāgavata* is at odds with the picture of Kapila that one finds when examining the texts of the Sāṃkhya School.

Although in later literature Kapila is thought of as an ancient sage who apparently actually lived at some point in the historical past, the earliest references to him are much more ambiguous. The earliest surviving references to Kapila appear to be the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*. The word Kapila literally means reddish brown in color, and it is often suggested that it is in this sense, not in reference to a personage, that the early instances of the word were intended. The verse appears in a description of “the one who rules over both knowledge and ignorance.”<sup>71</sup> It is said this one “alone presides over womb after womb, and thus over all visible forms and all the sources of birth; who in the beginning carried this Kapila born of the seer together with his body of knowledge and would look on him as he was being born.”<sup>72</sup> What this actually means is anyone’s guess, but it is hardly a solid foundation for an historical Kapila. Bronkhorst suggests that much of the confusion about this reference is

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<sup>70</sup> *Brahmā Purāṇa* Vol.1, trans. A Board of Scholars, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series 33 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 1.127-137.

<sup>71</sup> Olivelle, *Early Upaniṣads*, 5.1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.2.



related to the reluctance to identify Kapila with Hiraṇyagarbha as this makes little sense if Kapila is supposed to be a human sage. He argues that when all of the early evidence is examined, it is actually more natural to understand Kapila as a divine or semi-divine figure, rather than a liberated human.<sup>73</sup>

In the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* it is at least clear that a personage of some sort is being described. It describes the origins of the some sort of renunciate tradition as deriving from the teachings of someone named Kapila, the son of Prahlāda.<sup>74</sup> This brief mention is important for a number of reasons; first of all it links Kapila with renunciation. It would also seem that this renunciation is not considered to be part of the Vedic way of life by the Brahmin authors of the text. In this instance, Kapila seems to be, at the very least, completely uninvolved with the Vedic rituals, if not openly hostile to them. This Kapila is also said to be an Asura; not a god or even a sage, but a demonic being. In general Kapila is a figure who represents the religion of renunciation and this would not have been considered an agreeable belief system by followers of the Vedic ritual. Kapila is definitely identified with this view even in the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>75</sup> It should also probably be pointed out that not all Asuras were necessarily considered to be evil per se; they were just the faction of divine beings who routinely lost to the Devas. Even in the Upaniṣads there are figures who are understood to be Asuras who are portrayed as being the source of quite advanced mystical teachings.

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<sup>73</sup> Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 63.

<sup>74</sup> Olivelle, *Āśrama System*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 72.

A great number of the earliest references to Kapila, contrary to him being a demonic figure, present him as being a divine, or at least semi-divine, entity. The *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa, which lays out a form of theistic Sāṃkhya (or at the very least a form of Sāṃkhya in which there is only a single *Puruṣa*) actually identifies Kapila with the *kṣetrajñā*, the *Puruṣa* itself, “Kapila with his pupils, tradition says, is the Conscious in this system; Prajapati with his sons is said to be the Unconscious in this system.”<sup>76</sup> It also gives him a position that seems to be higher even than that of Prajāpati.<sup>77</sup>

There are numerous references to Kapila in the *Mahābhārata*, most of them in the *Śāntiparvan*. It is very clear throughout that Kapila is not simply a man who has worked out a particularly brilliant philosophy. He is a divine figure and he is identified with a variety of different gods. For instance, at one point Kapila is described in terms that seem to be quite human, but then is identified as Prajāpati; “There was one individual among the seers who, they say, avoided the sensual pleasures of men while searching for that final, eternal bliss so hard to attain: the Sāṃkhya followers call him Kapila, as well as Prajapati, the supreme seer.”<sup>78</sup> Kapila is also identified with Kṛṣṇa<sup>79</sup> and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>80</sup>

Two of the more notable examples of Kapila in the *Mokṣadharmā* illustrate just how odd this character really is. The first of these does not even really concern Kapila

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<sup>76</sup> Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghōṣa*, Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2008), 335.

<sup>77</sup> Bronkhorst, *Two sources of Indian Asceticism*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Alexander Wynne, trans., *Mahābhārata Book 12, Vol.3* Clay Sanskrit Library (New York University Press, 2009), 385. 218.8-9.

<sup>79</sup> MBh 12.43.12. Jacobsen, 18.

<sup>80</sup> MBh 12.326.64. Jacobsen, 19.

himself, but his students. It is said that Āsuri, an ascetic, sat in the “great brotherhood of Kapila” and that by so doing achieved the supreme goal.<sup>81</sup> Notice that it is not at all clear that Kapila himself had anything to do with this, only his “great brotherhood”. The case of Āsuri’s student Pañcaśikha, which follows immediately after this, is even more perplexing. The text recounts how “His disciple Panchashikha was raised on the milk of a certain Brahmin woman called Kapila. Panchashikha became her son, and used to drink from her breast. Hence he became a son of Kapilā and eventually attained the highest understanding.”<sup>82</sup> This is obviously an extremely perplexing image and it is not at all certain what this means. Some have theorized that it may actually be an attempt to explain symbolically the incorporation of the rival Pañcaśikha School into the lineage of Kapila Sāṃkhya.<sup>83</sup> An even stranger example can be found at 12.260-262 in which the sage Kapila has a conversation with a cow that is on its way to be slaughtered. The content of the discussion is concerned with renunciation and the uselessness of Vedic ritual, particularly ritual which takes the life of other creatures.<sup>84</sup> What is noteworthy in these examples is what Kapila does not seem to do, and that is explain Sāṃkhya philosophy to anyone. In fact, the only person this Kapila even talks to in the whole of the *Mahābhārata* is not a person at all; it is a cow.

In terms of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga School itself, the character Kapila is quite a complex figure. The *Sāṃkhyakārikas* do not mention Kapila by name. They refer to him

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<sup>81</sup> Wynne, 387.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.15.

<sup>83</sup> Jacobsen 20.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

only as *paramarṣi* (great seer)<sup>85</sup> and as the *muni* (sage) who imparts this knowledge out of compassion.<sup>86</sup> Generally the commentaries on the *Kārikas* agree with one another that Kapila is much more than just a simple human teacher. They also tend to connect Kapila with their notions of God, which have already been discussed. The Chinese translation of Paramārtha's commentary on the first *kārika* states that "There was formerly a wise ascetic called Kapila, born of heaven"<sup>87</sup> The *Sāṃkhyakārikabhāṣya* of Gauḍapāda adds that Kapila is a son of Brahmā (one of seven)<sup>88</sup> and adds that Kapila came into being at the same time as the creation of the world. A fact that makes little sense if he is supposed to be a normal human.<sup>89</sup> The *Yuktidīpikā* is clear that although Īśvara is not the creator of the world and has the distinction of never having been in bondage to *prakṛti* he still is able to take on various kinds of material bodies. One of these is that of the *īśvaramarṣi*, the great seer who is Īśvara. It is pretty clear that what is meant here is Kapila.<sup>90</sup>

The commentarial tradition on the *Yoga Sūtras* is virtually identical to that of Sāṃkhya. If anything it is even more inclined to associate Kapila with a deity. The primary place where this is discussed is on 1.25, one of the places where Īśvara is explicitly discussed. The *Yogabhāṣya* states that Īśvara takes a form in order to teach and that his student was Āsuri. Given the fact that Āsuri is unanimously said to be Kapila's

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<sup>85</sup> Mainkar, *kār.*, 69.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>87</sup> Takakusu, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Mainkar, 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>90</sup> Bronkhorst, "God in Sāṃkhya," 152-153.

student, there can be little doubt that his presence is implied here.<sup>91</sup> Vācaspati confirms this and elaborates on it a bit, claiming that Kapila is actually an incarnation of Viṣṇu.<sup>92</sup> It is worth noting that traditionally the Yoga system is said to have originated with Hiranyagarbha (i.e. Brahmā) while Sāṃkhya is said to have been taught by Kapila. Given the close connection between these two Schools these two figures are often grouped together and mentioned in a way that implies they are equals.<sup>93</sup> This makes little sense if Kapila is assumed to have been a man, but if he is a manifestation of Īśvara, it suddenly becomes much more clear. From all of this it would seem that the Sāṃkhya and Yoga traditions maintained a set of systematic beliefs about Kapila's nature. Kapila was the incorporation of Īśvara, and Īśvara was understood to be the Self of Kapila.<sup>94</sup>

However, by far the most numerous references to Kapila, particularly in the literature that does not belong to the Sāṃkhya or Yoga Schools, are to Kapila the sage. These tend to present something of a problem though as there is a great deal of contradictory information regarding this figure. By far the most common story associated with this Kapila is that of the burning of the sons of Sagara. This story can be found in multiple sources; the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.37-41), *Mahābhārata* (3.104-220), and in a number of Purāṇas. Though there is a great deal of variation between versions of this story, the basic elements are as follows. Sagara does penance and receives sixty thousand sons. After some time Sagara is performing the horse sacrifice and the sacrificial animal goes

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<sup>91</sup> Patañjali, 56.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Jacobsen, 20.

<sup>94</sup> Bronkhorst, "God in Sāṃkhya," 159.

missing. Sagara's sons go looking for the horse and eventually find it with the sage Kapila whose penance they disturb at which point he uses his yogic powers to burn them all alive.<sup>95</sup> This Kapila seems to be far removed from the Kapila of the Sāṃkhya tradition. He is a violent figure in opposition to the *ahimsa* of the Sāṃkhya School, and he appears to at the very least tolerate the Vedic sacrifice as he eventually gives up the animal so that the ritual can be completed.

Whether or not this was originally intended to refer to the same person is difficult to know. Obviously the name Kapila could be referring to a number of different people who just happen to share the same name. Śaṅkara actually recognizes the apparent contradiction between the two Kapilas and in his *Brahmāsūtrabhāṣya* on 2.1.1 and attempts to split Kapila into two distinct people; Kapila who is the founder of Sāṃkhya, and a Kapila who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. He identifies the *avatāra* as the same figure who burned the sons of Sagara.<sup>96</sup> Despite this, the fact remains that a number of people disagreed with Śaṅkara on this point and all of the Kapilas were often thought of as the same person. Though this may not have been the original intent, all of the different Kapilas must be considered in relation to one another to arrive at a complete picture of later interpretations of the figure.

Of course the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also presents Kapila as an *avatāra*, but this is within a purely Vaiṣṇava context. However, this association of Kapila with Viṣṇu did not begin with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and can be found in a number of other sources. A few Purāṇas identify Kapila as an *avatāra*, most notably the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which, as has

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<sup>95</sup> Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 64.

<sup>96</sup> V. M. Apte, trans., *Brahma-Sūtra Shāṅkara-Bhāṣya: Bādarāyaṇā's Brahma-Sūtrās with Shankarāchārya's Commentary* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1960), 278.

been noted, was a major source for the *Bhāgavata*. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* states that "The Ṛṣi Kapila is a portion of the mighty and universal Viṣṇu, who has come down upon the earth to dissipate delusion".<sup>97</sup> Despite the fact that in Sāṃkhya sources Kapila appears to have been born at the same time the world was created, the *Bhāgavata* claims that Kapila is the son of Kardama and Devahūti, the *aṃśa* (portion) of the Lord. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* confirms this; "by Maharṣi Kardama, in the womb of Devahūti was born the Bhagavān Kapila Deva, the famous author of the Sāṃkhya Śāstra."<sup>98</sup> The *Mātharavṛtti* commentary on the *Sāṃkhya Kārikas* also seems to be aware of this tradition.<sup>99</sup> However, in the form in which this text currently exists it does appear to be dependent on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as it quotes from it, thus making it unlikely that it is the source of this tradition.

The real question becomes one of which Kapila the authors of the *Bhāgavata* are intending to portray. Is this meant to be the Kapila who taught Sāṃkhya to Āsuri or the Kapila who burned the sons of Sagara, or a different Kapila altogether, or perhaps all of these? Apart from the Purāṇic sources there are a number of references to Kapila in literature that are closely related to the *Bhāgavata* that may actually help to clarify the situation. Kapila is mentioned in the *Bhagavadgītā* where Kṛṣṇa states that he is Kapila.<sup>100</sup> This reference is, of course, not entirely helpful. It occurs in a lengthy passage in which Kṛṣṇa appears to be equating himself as the superlative member of a number of

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<sup>97</sup> H.H., Wilson, trans., *The Viṣṇu Purāṇam* (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2002), 215.

<sup>98</sup> Swami Vijayanand, trans., *Devībhāgavata* (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishtan, 2008), 8.3.13-14.

<sup>99</sup> Larson, *Sāṃkhya*, 292.

<sup>100</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 10.26.

different groups such as the lion among wild animals or the Gāyatrī meter among poetic meters. Kapila then may not have any special relationship to Kṛṣṇa in this verse other than the fact that he is the most prominent representative of the category of *siddhas*. Knut Jacobsen has argued that this reference is actually not to the Kapila who is associated with Sāṃkhya in the later books of the *Mahābhārata*, but refers instead to the violent sage Kapila who appears only in the earlier books. He bases this theory on the fact that the two Kapila figures appear exclusively in two places. The violent sage Kapila who burns the sons of Sagara appears only before the battle, while Kapila the teacher of Sāṃkhya appears only after the battle. He argues that since the *Bhagavadgītā* also appears before the battle and ideologically does not accept the *ahimsā* of the Kapila who teaches Sāṃkhya, that it is the other Kapila who is meant.<sup>101</sup> Whether this is true or just some fascinating speculation is hard to know, but it remains an interesting theory.

In addition to this there are quite a few places in sectarian Vaiṣṇava literature where Kapila is given a prominent place. Interestingly, in most of these places Kapila does not seem to be associated with Sāṃkhya or any other teaching, but instead appears to be revered as a prominent divine or semi-divine sage. This Kapila seems more like an example to which ascetics might aspire. If the *Bhagavadgītā* is the basis for these ideas (which seems like a likely possibility) it is quite possible that it is, in fact, the violent sage which was meant by the *Bhagavadgītā*. The *Mahābhārata* also makes it clear that when Viṣṇu appears on the earth he appears as Kapila. This is explicitly in reference to the violent sage Kapila as it is explained in the context of the story of the burning of Sagara's sons.<sup>102</sup> In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kapila the sage is actually called Vāsudeva,<sup>103</sup> and the in

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<sup>101</sup> Jacobsen, 22-24.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.



*Brahmā Purāṇa* it is stated that Viṣṇu (here the supreme deity) was sleeping in the guise of Kapila.<sup>104</sup>

Given all of these references it might be expected that Kapila would form an essential part of the Pañcarātra scriptures, but this is not really the case. He is occasionally mentioned as a *siddha*, but in general is not given a prominent position. These references are most likely to the sage who burned the sons of Sagara as well. The Pañcarātras do not generally reference Sāṃkhya as a separate system, but when they do they are generally opposed to it. The story related above about Pañcaśikha provides a tantalizing possibility about the original links between the two systems however. Pañcaśikha, who is also called Kāpileya, is said to have been skilled in the practice of “five nights” (*pañcarātra*).<sup>105</sup> This may be a clue to the origin of Pañcarātra as a form of theistic Vaiṣṇava Sāṃkhya, but there is simply not enough evidence to confirm or deny this.

The situation is further complicated by the name of one of the poets associated with the Tamil Caṅkam literature, Kapilar. There has long been a tradition that Kapila actually came from the Tamil-speaking regions, though only by those who live in the South. There seem to be a number of poets who were known by the name Kapilar and there is actually a work which appears to teach Sāṃkhya-like ideas, the *Kapilar Akaval*. Most scholars consider this to be a late work, but it does show that there were at least traditions about Kapilar in the South of India and these may very well have played some

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<sup>103</sup> Brockington, 461.

<sup>104</sup> *Brahmā Purāṇa*, 6.55.

<sup>105</sup> Wynne, 387.

role in the composition of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* given its probable Southern authorship.<sup>106</sup>

What, then, can be concluded about this about all of this? Which Kapila is it that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is speaking of? On the one hand it is clear that the text means to link its Kapila with the Sāṃkhya philosophy as his primary purpose in the text is to expound the *Bhāgavata*'s own peculiar brand of Sāṃkhya. Even so, the *Bhāgavata* retains a number of elements of this character that are incongruous with such an understanding. The *Bhāgavata* actually *does* contain the story of the burning of Sagara's sons, complete with Kapila.<sup>107</sup> This Kapila appears to be identical with the Kapila of the third book. In general Kapila also seems to be immortal (at least until the dissolution of the universe at the end of the present world-cycle). It seems then that the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* do not make a distinction between these different Kapilas. Whether or not they were originally the same character is, of course, mere speculation, but in the case of the *Bhāgavata* itself these seemingly contradictory figures are harmonized to create a single sage who is the teacher of Sāṃkhya as well as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The Kapila of the *Bhāgavata* does not, however, represent a unique creation, but is instead the result of a long process of the evolution of the character, likely coming from a wide variety of sources; Sāṃkhya-Yoga, sectarian Vaiṣṇava literature, Purāṇic and epic accounts, and possibly even a separate Tamil tradition.

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<sup>106</sup> S.N. Kandaswamy, "The Philosophical Aspects of Paripāṭal," in *Philosophical Heritage of the Tamils*, ed. S.V. Subramanian and R. Vijayalakshmy (Madras: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1983), 120.

<sup>107</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 9.8

## Puruṣa

The most fundamental difference between the Sāṃkhya of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Classical Sāṃkhya is to be found in their formulation of the *Puruṣa*.<sup>108</sup> In general, Classical Sāṃkhya taught that there is a multitude of *puruṣas*, something that is explicitly stated in the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* “The souls are many since birth, death and the instruments of cognition and action allotted severally, since occupations are not simultaneous and at once universe; since the three Attributes affect severally.”<sup>109</sup> Obviously this is not an entirely convincing argument, but it is clear that what is meant here is that there are as many *puruṣas* as there are individual selves. The commentarial tradition on the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* agrees with this, but adds little of substance besides directing the same argument towards other theoretical schools. The Pātañjala Yoga School seems to assume the same.<sup>110</sup>

It is worth pointing out that despite this homogeneity there are indications that in the period preceding the composition of the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* there was not nearly so much agreement and that a number of different proto-Sāṃkhya teachers and schools (or sub-schools) had a number of opinions on the matter before the time in which many *puruṣas* and a single *prakṛti* was agreed upon.<sup>111</sup>

In contrast to this the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* teaches that ultimately there is only one *Puruṣa*, though on a phenomenal level it is perceived as a multitude. This *Puruṣa* is

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<sup>108</sup> Dasgupta, 32.

<sup>109</sup> Mainkar, kār., 18.

<sup>110</sup> Larson, *Yoga*, 89.

<sup>111</sup> Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 133.

understood to be either a manifestation of Bhagavān or the Bhagavān himself. According to the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of the third book there is only a single *Puruṣa*, transcendent to *prakṛti* which “shines forth” as all the individual souls.<sup>112</sup> Though it is discussed in a rather confusing way, there are a number of places where poetic allusions are used in order to convey the truth that although there might appear to be numerous *puruṣas*, there is really only one, revealing itself as the individual *jīvas*. “Just as the one fire manifests as many according to the difference of the fuel in which it manifests, so also the one Supreme Spirit abiding in Prakṛti manifests differently as innumerable centres of consciousness (Jīvas).”<sup>113</sup> The *Puruṣa* cannot act, but mistakes itself for the agent and thus becomes bound by karma; blinded by the power of ignorance of the *prakṛti* it acts as the individual *jīvas*.<sup>114</sup>

It could be argued that this difference between the two notions of *puruṣa* is due to the fact that the Sāṃkhya of the *Bhāgavata* is largely a cosmological system (just as it is in most of the other Purāṇic accounts). While this is true up to a point, it fails to recognize that the function of Sāṃkhya itself as a philosophy was largely cosmological as well as the somewhat unique and nuanced position of the Sāṃkhya of the *Bhāgavata* when compared to that of the other Purāṇas. The various Purāṇas place different emphasis on the Sāṃkhya cosmology, often changing its doctrine slightly or using it to present vastly different theologies. For the most part the other Purāṇas are far more likely to agree with the *Bhāgavata* than the Classical Sāṃkhya system is. This is particularly

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<sup>112</sup> Dasgupta, 24.

<sup>113</sup> Tapasyananda, Swami, trans, *Srimad Bhagavata: The Holy Book of God*, Vol. 1 (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980), 3.28.43.

<sup>114</sup> Dasgupta, 24.

true in the case of the *Puruṣa*. The singular *Puruṣa* who enters the formless *prakṛti* is a fundamental component of the Purāṇic cosmology. The *Puruṣa* is the Supreme God (whoever that may be according to the particular Purāṇa) who is totally inactive and removed from the world, but somehow present in everything, down to the grossest *tattvas*.<sup>115</sup>

Despite this general usages of the *Puruṣa* concept in the Purāṇas in general, there is an incredibly close connection between the Vaiṣṇava traditions and the *Puruṣa*. This connection appears to stretch all the way back to Vedic literature, particularly *Ṛgveda* 10.90, the *Puruṣa-sūkta*. In this hymn the whole of the universe is described as the body of a cosmic man. This text has been called “the major source of cosmogonic thought in ancient India” as well as “the foundation stone of Viṣṇuite philosophy”.<sup>116</sup> These descriptions ring true as the imagery used in this hymn gets repeated over and over again throughout Indian literature and in Vaiṣṇava devotional literature in particular. Very quickly this figure of the cosmic man appears to have become identified with Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, or the other names which came to denote the Vaiṣṇava supreme deity. For instance, the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* identifies the transcendent *Puruṣa* of its system with Viṣṇu.<sup>117</sup>

The tension that seems to exist between the traditional Sāṃkhya-Yoga understanding of the *Puruṣa* and the *Puruṣa* that is found in more devotional texts (particularly Vaiṣṇava devotional texts) is highlighted in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Following a

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<sup>115</sup> Biardeau, 127-128.

<sup>116</sup> Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 212-213.

<sup>117</sup> David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 95.

lengthy discussion of the worship of Nārāyaṇa, Janamejaya asks “are there many Purushas or is there only one? Who, in the universe, is the foremost of Purushas? What, again, is said to be the source of all things?”<sup>118</sup> This would seem to be a natural question to ask as it gets to the heart of much of what is confusing about Vaiṣṇava theology. Terminology, and often whole portions of Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophy are used extensively, but the traditional understandings of this often seem to clash quite visibly with what the Vaiṣṇava systems wish to argue for. Vaisampayana’s response to this question is even more interesting,

In the speculations of the Sankhya and the Yoga systems many Purushas have been spoken of, O jewel of Kuru’s race. Those that follow these systems do not accept that there is but one Purusha in the universe. In the same manner in which the many Purushas are said to have one origin in the Supreme Purusha, it may be said that this entire universe is identical with that one Purusha of superior attributes.<sup>119</sup>

Vaisampayana acknowledges that the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems teach the multiplicity of *Puruṣas*, but he seems to be saying here that they are actually mistaken, and that there is, in reality, only one *Puruṣa*. Vaisampayana explains this concept further by relating a conversation that took place between Brahmā and Rudra over Rudra’s confusion about the very same problem. Brahmā informs Rudra that

[M]any are those Purushas of whom thou speakest. The one Purusha, however, of whom I am thinking, transcends all Purushas and is invisible. The many Purushas that exist in the universe have that one Purusha as their basis; and since that one Purusha is said to be the source whence all the innumerable Purushas have sprung, hence all the latter, if they succeed in divesting themselves of attributes, become competent to enter into that one Purusha who is identified with the universe, who

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<sup>118</sup> Kisari Mohan Ganguli, trans., *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* vol. 4 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2000), 198.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

is supreme, who is the foremost of the foremost, who is eternal, and who is himself divested of and is above all attributes.<sup>120</sup>

There is so much overlap between the description of the *Puruṣa* found here in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and that of later *Vaiṣṇava* texts, particularly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that it is extremely unlikely that the understanding of the *Puruṣa* that is given in the *Bhāgavata* represents some form of innovation. Obviously the *Nārāyaṇīya* is probably not a direct source for the theology of the *Bhāgavata*, for one thing it is much more focused on the ritual worship of *Nārāyaṇa* than the *Bhāgavata* is and is hardly concerned with *bhakti* at all. However, it does seem likely that the *Nārāyaṇīya* represents one of the earliest surviving records of a particular sort of *Vaiṣṇava* theology which was expanded over time by a number of different groups and found a place in both Purāṇic Vaiṣṇavism and the scriptures of the Pañcarātra.

The *Bhagavadgītā* would represent another such source. While the *Gītā* presents some sort of fundamental distinction between the *Puruṣa* of Kṛṣṇa and the *puruṣas* of individuals, this other trend, exemplified by this portion of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, stresses unity. There is, in reality only a single *Puruṣa*. There appear to be numerous *puruṣas* from the standpoint of everyday reality, but all of these singular *puruṣas* are in some way the same as the single *Puruṣa* which takes on the appearance of being many.

In the *Bhagavadgītā* Kṛṣṇa proposes the perplexing idea that there are three different *puruṣas*. To make matters worse he does not make this explicit, but merely makes reference to all three of them with no real explanation.

In this world there are two Persons, the transient and the intransient. The transient comprises all creatures, the intransient is called the One-on-the-Peak. There is yet a third Person, whom they call the Supreme Soul, the everlasting lord who

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

permeates and sustains the three worlds. Inasmuch as I have passed beyond the transient and transcend the intransient, therefore I am, in world and in Veda, renowned as the Supreme Person.<sup>121</sup>

This would seem to imply that the first *puruṣa* is the souls of those who are in bondage, the second *puruṣa* is the super-soul into which the individual souls return, and the third *puruṣa* is Kṛṣṇa himself, transcending both of them. This has been broken down by those who have studied the text extensively as; the *kṣara* (perishable) *puruṣa* which is all beings, the *akṣara* (imperishable) *puruṣa* which is the *kūṭastha*, and *uttama* (highest) *puruṣa* which is the *paramātmān* or *īśvara*.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also seems to acknowledge three different *puruṣas*, the primordial *Puruṣa* who is identical with God, the *puruṣa* who is said to be the cosmic *ahaṁkāra*,<sup>123</sup> and the individual *puruṣas*, the bound *jīvas*. There is significant overlap between these and the theology of the Pañcarātra.

The comparisons between what is said about the *Puruṣa* in the *Kapilagītā* and what is said in the Pañcarātra texts are quite striking. The Pañcarātra texts are very clear that though there might appear to be many individuals, in reality there is only one *Puruṣa*. The Pañcarātra School built up an elaborate system around this concept which provides a great deal of detail that may help one to better understand the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s somewhat cryptic statements on this subject. Overall the Pañcarātra scriptures are united in their opinion that there is, in reality only one *Puruṣa*. This is closely related to the Pañcarātra belief that there is actually only one thing, as much of Pañcarātra's

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<sup>121</sup> van Buitenen, *Bhagavadgīta*, 15.17-18.

<sup>122</sup> Vassilkov, 234-235.

<sup>123</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.26.25.



complicated theology and cosmology is concerned with reconciling the apparent contradiction between the unity of everything and the reality of the phenomenal world.

The central fact of Pañcarātra theology is that Nārāyaṇa does not act. If this is accepted though, there is a problem, because if Nārāyaṇa does not act, why does anything happen at all? The answer to this problem is that it is Nārāyaṇa's *Śakti* that acts for him, carrying out his will. *Śakti* is at the same time different from Nārāyaṇa and identical to him. This is a paradoxical relationship that allows everything that happens to be at the same time different from the highest God and identical to him. *Śakti* divides herself into a number of different combinations which then interact with one another to create the universe. The details of this are usually quite complicated, but the general facts of this are as follows. After a series of emanations from the pure *Śakti* a number of other *śaktis* are produced. One of these *śaktis* (in the *Ahirbudhnya Sāṃhitā* it is the *bhūtiśakti*) then divides into two, a conscious principle and an unconscious principle. The conscious principle becomes the *kūṭastha puruṣa* and the unconscious principle becomes *māyā*, which is the stuff from which the material world is made.<sup>124</sup> The *Lakṣmī Tantra* explains this as follows; "I voluntarily divide myself into these two *śaktis*, i.e. conscious and non-conscious, to represent my two everlasting aspects. The conscious *śakti* is flawless and pure, consisting of consciousness and bliss. Influenced by beginningless nescience it travels unendingly (through the bondage of many lives and deaths)."<sup>125</sup>

This *kūṭastha puruṣa* is a strange concept, but it is the central element in the Pañcarātra understanding of the unity of the *puruṣas*. The *kūṭastha* is thought to be

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<sup>124</sup> Pratap Kumar, *The Goddess Lakṣmī: The Divine Consort in South Indian Vaiṣṇava Tradition*. (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 24.

<sup>125</sup> Sanjukta Gupta, trans., *Lakṣmī Tantra: A Pañcarātra Text* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 3.25-26.

something like the aggregate of all individual souls (generally called *jīvas* in this system). It is said to be like a beehive from which the *jīvas* come forth and act as individuals only to return again. It is the totality of all individual selves. Often the *kūṭastha* is described in terms that are extremely reminiscent of the Puruṣa Śukta of the *Ṛgveda*, the Manus coming forth from it to bring about the creation of the human race.<sup>126</sup> This theory offers a possible explanation for one of the most perplexing aspects of the *Kapilagītā*, the description of the *ahaṃkāra* in the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter. It includes the statement that *ahaṃkāra* is “the Puruṣa called Saṅkarṣana. He has actually a thousand heads and is designated as Ananta (endless). He is the form of aggregate of *bhūtas*”.<sup>127</sup> If this is intended to refer to the *kūṭastha* it makes a great deal of sense. The cosmic *ahaṃkāra*, the point of individuation, is identified with the aggregate of all individual souls, a concept that is quite fitting, though this identification is only conjecture.

What becomes clear from an examination of the third book of the *Bhāgavata*’s conception of the *Puruṣa* is that it is not at all similar to that of Classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga. If there can be said to be two sides to the debate about how many *puruṣas* there are it is obvious that the *Bhāgavata* has chosen the opposing viewpoint. This is not surprising though. Though the *Kapilagītā* has the superficial signs of being a Sāṃkhya text, it has much more in common with ideas that are traditionally associated with Vaiṣṇavism and in this case it is no different.

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<sup>126</sup> F. Otto Schraeder, *Introduction to the Pañcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1916), 60-61.

<sup>127</sup> Tagare, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.26.25.

### Kāla

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is its theory of Time (*kāla*), particularly the way in which it relates to the underlying Sāṃkhya cosmology of the text. This is laid out most explicitly in the *Kapilagītā* of the third book where it is of central importance in the creation of the universe. In verse 26 Kapila explains that, “What is called ‘Time’ (*Kāla*) is the twenty-fifth principle.”<sup>128</sup> He explains further in verse 29;

This is the form of the glorious Lord, the Supreme Soul, the Brahman. It is both Prakṛti and Puruṣa (and still) is also beyond them. It is the unseen destiny (*daiva*) which is the cause of all *karmas* (in the form of *saṃsāra*). The divine form (of the Lord) which is the cause of the differences in the appearances of things, is called Time. From it, fear is caused to beings, which entertain the notion of difference and which preside over the *Mahat* and others. He enters into all beings (*bhūtas*) and supports them all. He eats them up (annihilates them) by their means. He is called Viṣṇu, presiding deity of sacrifices who confers the fruit of the sacrifice (on the performer). He is the Time, the ruler of rulers.<sup>129</sup>

From this it would appear that *Kāla* is identical with Īśvara, or at the very least *Kāla* is one of his powers. It is obvious from this that *Kāla* does not exist as one of the formations of *prakṛti*, but that it is different from both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* and is, in effect its own distinct *tattva*. Kapila is adamant that there are only 25 *tattvas* and that *Kāla* is the 25<sup>th</sup>,<sup>130</sup> but this does not fully account for all of the elements of this cosmology that described; specifically *puruṣa* and individual souls. Depending on whether or not these are counted, or how these are counted, the *Kapilagītā* lists 25, 26, or 27 *tattvas*.<sup>131</sup>

*Kāla* is also an important component of the philosophy of the remainder of the

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.15-16

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.30.36-38.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.15.

<sup>131</sup> Dasgupta, 25.

*Bhāgavata* and actually forms one of the central ideas that tie the speculations of the text into something approaching a coherent philosophy. The majority of these instances take the form of praise to Bhagavān or one of his manifestations. “You alone are the unwinking Time. You reduce the duration of the life of men by units of time called lava, nimeṣa and others. You are the immutable Soul, the occupant of the most exalted position, the birthless, all-pervading principle, the supporter and controller of all living beings.”<sup>132</sup> Just as important are the numerous places in which Time is described as some sort of transcendental divine power which is involved in the creation of the world.<sup>133</sup> Another particularly noteworthy example is the following; “Time is that which has for its form the modification of *gunas* (like *sattva* etc.). Of itself, it has no special property, but is beginningless and endless. Purusa (God) sportively procreated himself in the form of the universe by using Time, as the instrumental cause.”<sup>134</sup> What is interesting about such passages is that they show how exactly the authors of the *Bhāgavata* actually understood *Kāla*'s function in the creation of the world. It actually serves as a solution to a significant problem in Sāṃkhya philosophy. If creation only takes place when the equilibrium of the three *gunas* is upset, what causes this equilibrium to be disturbed in the first place? The answer to this is not always entirely clear in Sāṃkhya thought, but the *Bhāgavata* concludes that it is actually Time which is responsible for upsetting this balance and setting in motion the process of creation and that Time is the force which ultimately brings about its dissolution into the primordial equilibrium once again.

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<sup>132</sup> Tagare, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 7.3.31

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.5.22.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.10.11.

This is all, of course, contradictory to the Classical Sāṃkhya system as it is described in the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*, which state that "The external organ functions in the present; an internal organ functions in respect of all three times."<sup>135</sup> For Sāṃkhya, time is only another modification of *prakṛti*. It has no reality outside of the material world system as the Sāṃkhyas hold that there are only really three things, *puruṣas*, *pradhāna*, and *prakṛti* or modifications of *pradhāna*. *Kāla* is added to this list by the system found in the *Bhāgavata*, but in the Classical system it is considered to be only one of the creations of the third category, *prakṛti*. *Puruṣas*, in their liberated state, have nothing to do with time and there can be no temporal substrate which is responsible for the entire process as this would admit an additional principle which Sāṃkhya is not prepared to do.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s doctrine of *kāla* being somehow the cause of the world is not unknown to the Sāṃkhya School. In fact, they appear to be quite familiar with this view as they spend a great deal of time arguing against it. Gauḍapāda states that,

According to some Time is the cause: it is said, 'Time rears the beings, Time withdraws the world; Time watches when all sleep, Time is not to be surpassed.' To this the Sāṃkhyas would say: There are only three categories: the Manifest, the Unmanifest and the Knower. Time also is included under one of these. Time is manifest. Since the Nature is the cause of everything, producer, maker of everything, it must be the cause of Time also.<sup>136</sup>

The Chinese commentary on *kārika* 61 echoes this, claiming that *kāla*, along with God and *svabhāva*, cannot be the cause of the world since "Time does not exist; it is only a modality of the manifest world."<sup>137</sup> Vācaspatimiśra explains the belief that *kāla* is a principle that exists apart from the phenomenal experience of temporality before arguing

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<sup>135</sup> Mainkar, *kār.*, 33.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 154.

<sup>137</sup> Larson, *Sāṃkhya*, 177.

against such a thing, “Time, according to the Vaisesikas, being one, cannot allow such divisions as past, present, and future. Hence we must have for the various units, the various conditions or specifications to which we give the names, past, present and future. So the Sāṅkhyas do not admit of a distinct principle in the shape of Time.”<sup>138</sup> The *Yuktidīpikā* explains that “There is nothing called Time in our theory. On the contrary, it is the cause of the knowledge of the identity of a particular duration in the acts in the form of the thundering of the cloud”<sup>139</sup> and explains that “The notion of earlier and later, etc., is observed in the case of the created objects only. If that would have been caused by something else than activity, it would be found commonly in both – the eternal and the non-eternal objects.”<sup>140</sup> Clearly such views are not simply the individual interpretations of one or two particular writers, but represent the conventional view of the Classical Sāṅkhya School. This means that despite the *Bhāgavata*’s claims that it is explaining the Sāṅkhya system, it is actually teaching a view that is explicitly rejected by what might be termed conventional Sāṅkhya, the view that Time is a principle and that it is somehow responsible for creating the world.

The *Yoga Sūtras* and their commentaries present a view of Time that is quite similar to that of Sāṅkhya. This is to be expected as the two systems are related, but the concept of Time is quite a bit more developed than in Sāṅkhya. Like the Sāṅkhya School, Yoga holds that Time is part of the reality of change (*pariṇāma*).<sup>141</sup> However the

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<sup>138</sup> Mainkar, kār., 33. Vācaspatiśra, 75.

<sup>139</sup> Shiv Kumar and D. N. Bhargava, trans., *Yuktidīpikā*, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1992), 105.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>141</sup> Randy Kloetzli and Alf Hildebeitel, “Kāla,” in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 554.

Yoga theory of time is significantly more developed than that of the Sāṃkhya commentaries, being based on the theory of *kṣaṇa* (momentariness).<sup>142</sup> Since it is quite clear that the ideas about *Kāla* which are found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* cannot have come from anything resembling Classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga, it is necessary to examine competing temporal theories in order to ascertain what the *Bhāgavata*'s sources might have been.

In general there are two competing theories about the nature of Time. The first is exemplified by classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga and holds that Time is a product of the modifications of *prakṛti* and nothing more than a part of the phenomenal world. The opposing theory is holds that Time is a force or entity that transcends the world system and guides it; that Time is not a part of Nature, but is outside of Nature and acts on Nature in order to bring about creation, maintenance, and destruction. These two views would appear to be mutually exclusive. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Kapila does not side with Sāṃkhya-Yoga and gives a view of Time that is nearly identical to that of the Bhāgavata literature.

The earliest references to a transcendent or deified *Kāla* can be found in *Atharva Veda* 19.53 and 19.54 where time is said to be the highest deity and the creator of all worlds.<sup>143</sup> These kinds of speculation are found throughout the Upaniṣads, notably in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* where *Kāla* is rejected as the source of the totality of the world, but still occupies a significant role in the text. *Kāla* is not identical with Īśvara, but does seem to be a principle that is controlled by Īśvara and through which he creates and

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<sup>142</sup> Larson, *Yoga*, 48.

<sup>143</sup> Kloetzli, 555.

destroys.<sup>144</sup> Another notable example can be found in the *Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad*, “Time ripens all beings in the great self. But the one who knows in what Time is ripened knows the Veda.”<sup>145</sup> Bhartṛhari famously made reference to these speculations on time in his *Vākyapadīya*, where he states that “Some consider time to be one single, eternal, all-pervading substance, apart from activities and processes, the measure of entities involved in action” and that it is the cause of the “origin, duration and destruction” of temporal beings and that it is the “wire-puller of this world machine.”<sup>146</sup>

Descriptions of *Kāla* that seem similar in spirit (if not in details) to those in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* appear throughout the Epic and Purāṇic literature, particularly in texts that are now considered foundational to the Vaiṣṇava traditions. The most famous of these references to *Kāla* in its relationship to the supreme divinity is the *Bhagavadgītā*. In one of its most famous verses Kṛṣṇa proclaims that “I am Time grown old to destroy the world, embarked on the course of world annihilation.”<sup>147</sup> Though this is a single verse, it is a very clear identification between Kṛṣṇa, here at the very least a manifestation of the supreme deity, and *Kāla*, particularly its destructive capacity. It is extremely likely that the *Bhagavadgītā* actually served as a major source of inspiration for the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* so the similarities between the two texts are to be expected. Despite the similarities in some regards between the two, there are significant differences in terms of doctrine. Though the *Gītā* does not directly contradict the *Bhāgavata* on these points, it

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Valerie Roebuck, trans., *The Upaniṣads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 370.

<sup>146</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 205.

<sup>147</sup> van Buitenen, *Bhagavadgītā*, 117.



does fail to mention much that seems to be central to the *Bhāgavata*'s understanding of *Kāla*. For instance, it is not clear how *Kāla* actually fits into the already murky Sāṃkhya system that is given in the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* does not refer to *Kāla* as a *tattva* and it does not appear to serve any particular purpose in its Sāṃkhya system. It also is identified exclusively with Kṛṣṇa's destructive capacity with no mention being made of *Kāla*'s role in creative activity, something which is central to the *Bhāgavata*'s teachings on Time.

The references to *Kāla* in the *Mokṣadharmā* are too numerous to discuss in full, but a number of them are quite striking. The function of *Kāla* as the force which sets into motion the creation of the world is found in a number of places such as the following; "Just as the various characteristics of the seasons appear in a regular order in the course of time, so too do living beings appear whenever a world age begins. At the beginning of a world age Time impels consciousness to appear; it becomes manifests in order to regulate worldly existence."<sup>148</sup> The notion that *Kāla* is the thing within which all of creation happens is also to be found in the *Mokṣadharmā*, complete with the image of *Kāla* as the thing which cooks all of creation, "Time matures all beings by itself in itself. But no one here on earth knows him in which Time is matured."<sup>149</sup> Just as fascinating, and probably most noteworthy in terms of the *Mahābhārata*'s relationship to the *Bhāgavata*, is the fact that there are a number of places in which *Kāla* is explicitly related to Vaiṣṇava deities. Perhaps the most significant of these references is found at 12.335 in which *Kāla* is understood to be the same as the Supreme God, Nārāyaṇa, "And time

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<sup>148</sup> Wynne, 12.210.17.

<sup>149</sup> Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 268.

(kāla), which [is computed by] the course of the stars, is the supreme Nārāyaṇa.”<sup>150</sup> This is, of course, nearly identical with the idea that is expressed in the *Bhāgavata*, that Nārāyaṇa is the same as Time.

The Purāṇas, as a group, are in no way united on the subject of Time. Some do not discuss the issue and some explain time in terms that are not at all compatible with an understanding of Time as a transcendent force, relegating it to a place as part of the ultimately unreal phenomenal world. While most of the Purāṇas contain some discussion of the nature of what might be termed gross time (as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* does<sup>151</sup>), a number of the Purāṇas contain references to *Kāla* as a power that is either identical with God or which is wielded by God in order to enact the creation or destruction of the world. By far the most common examples of *Kāla* as some sort of divine force in the Purāṇas are related to *Kāla*'s destructive nature, particularly its function in the annihilation at the end of the world cycle; something which is reminiscent to the reference to *Kāla* in the *Bhagavadgītā*. There are numerous examples of this, for example *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*<sup>152</sup>, and the *Liṅga Purāṇa* where *Kāla* is simply the form that God takes in his *tamas* aspect.<sup>153</sup> Examples of *Kāla* as both a creative and destructive force, superintendent to the entire universe, can be found throughout the *Kūrma Purāṇa*. For example, “the elements (or all living beings) and even Vāsudeva and Śaṅkara are created by Kala (time). He

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<sup>150</sup> 12.335.80, quoted in Kloetzli, 556.

<sup>151</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.11.

<sup>152</sup> Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, trans., *The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna. Motilal Banarsidass 1983), 1.1.4.

<sup>153</sup> *Liṅga Purāṇa* Vol. 1, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, trans. A Board of Scholars (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 1.37.

alone devours them again. This Lord Kala is beginningless, endless, free from old age or decay and immortal. He is the Supreme Ruler because of his omnipresence, independence and his state of being the soul of all.”<sup>154</sup> In the ninth chapter it is explained that Śiva becomes Time in order to create, maintain and destroy the universe.<sup>155</sup> Significantly, the *Kūrma* also identifies *Kāla* as the force which is the controller of *māyā*.<sup>156</sup>

The most significant example of Purāṇic notions of time for any discussion of the *Bhāgavata* is found in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. This is important for a number of reasons, but principally because of the highly probably connection between the two texts. Much of what can be found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be explained as an elaboration of things that are found in a much more cursory form in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and the concept of *Kāla* is no exception to this. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* states that “These four – Pradhāna (primary or crude matter), Puruṣa (spirit), Vyakta (visible substance), and Kāla (time) – the wise consider to be the pure and supreme condition of Viṣṇu.”<sup>157</sup> Two things are clear from this; the first is that *Kāla* is evidently understood to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu by the author and the second is that it is not simply part of the *vyakta*, or manifest world, but is one of the primary components of creation along with *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The same discussion also includes one of the clearest illustrations of Vaiṣṇava speculations on *Kāla* and its place in the theistic cosmology.

The two forms which are other than the essence of unmodified Viṣṇu, are

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<sup>154</sup> Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, trans., *Kūrma Purāṇa* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banarsidass 1981), 1.5.22-23.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.9.60-61.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.12-23-24

<sup>157</sup> Wilson, 7.

Pradhāna (matter) and Puruṣa (spirit); and his other form, by which those two are connected or separated, is called Kāla (time). When discrete substance is aggregated in crude nature, as in a foregone dissolution, that dissolution is termed elemental (Prakṛta). The deity as Time is without beginning, and his end is not known; and from him the revolutions of creation, continuance, and dissolution unintermittingly succeeds: (or when, in the latter season, the equilibrium of the qualities (Pradhāna) exists, and spirit (Pumān) is detached from matter, then the form of Viṣṇu which is Time abide? Then the supreme Brahmā, the supreme soul, the substance of the world, the lord of all creatures, the universal soul, the supreme ruler, Hari, of his own will having entered into matter and spirit, agitated the mutable and immutable principles, the season of creation being arrived, in the same manner as fragrance affects the mind from its proximity merely, and not from any immediate operation upon mind itself: so the Supreme influenced the elements of creation. Puruṣottama is both the agitator and the thing to be agitated; being present in the essence of matter, both when it is contracted and expanded. Viṣṇu, supreme over the supreme, is the nature of discrete forms in the atomic productions, Brahmā and the rest (gods, men. etc.).<sup>158</sup>

What is important about this passage is how completely this notion of time is integrated into the Sāṃkhya cosmology of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. While some of the earlier systems of theistic Sāṃkhya posited a deity, Īśvara, who was the superintendent of both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, the *Viṣṇu* identifies all three of these manifestations of the highest God Viṣṇu. It also classifies the superintendent of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* not as Īśvara, but as *Kāla*, the power of Viṣṇu which allows *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* to periodically come together, exist, and then be separated again.

The concept of *Kāla* also plays a significant role in the Pañcarātra cosmology, one that far exceeds what one would expect from a tradition that seems to have so much Sāṃkhya influence. For the most part the Pañcarātras agree with the doctrine of Time found in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*; Time is, along with *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, the third fundamental element in the creation of the universe. Since the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is certainly older than any of the surviving Pañcarātra Saṃhitās it is impossible to know if the *Viṣṇu* is borrowing from some earlier Bhāgavata tradition about *Kāla* or if the Pañcarātra scriptures are

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

actually using the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as a source. What is clear is that there is a long tradition of speculation about Time and its relationship to divinity in Bhāgavata circles going back at least to the *Bhagavadgītā*. However, the scriptures of the Pañcarātra provide a much more detailed and systematic description of these speculations that can help to provide perspective on what the meaning of the *Bhāgavata*'s doctrine of time might be.

Although the most authoritative Pañcarātra texts, the “three gems”, are mostly concerned with ritual and do not contain much in the way of philosophical speculation, there are indications that even these texts presuppose an understanding of *Kāla* that is significantly different from Classical Sāṃkhya. For instance, the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*'s description of visualization techniques includes a procedure in which the *tattvas* of the traditional Sāṃkhya system are visualized on the body of the practitioner. Interestingly, the *Jayākhya* adds two *tattvas* to the pattern of 25, Īśvara and *Kāla*.<sup>159</sup>

The *Ahirbudhnya Samira* gives quite a lot of information about the relationship of *Kāla* to the overall Pañcarātra philosophy. In general the *Ahirbudhnya* associates *Kāla* with God only through an intermediary; his *śakti*. *Śakti* separates herself into two forms, *kriyāśakti* and *bhūtiśakti*. *Kriyāśakti* is transcendent and responsible for pure creation, while the *bhūtiśakti* manifests herself as three constituent parts of the impure creation, *avyakta*, *kāla*, and *puruṣa*. These are activated at the beginning of creation by the *kriyāśakti*.<sup>160</sup> Before the impure creation begins the *bhūtiśakti*'s three forms exist as a potentiality in the *vyūha* Pradyumna. When Aniruddha emanates from Pradyumna, *Kāla*

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<sup>159</sup> Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 117.

<sup>160</sup> Mitsunori Matsubara, *Pañcarātra Saṃhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 186.

splits into *niyati* and *kāla*, eternal and gross time. This is known as *kālaśakti*.<sup>161</sup> These are the three components of the Sāṃkhya creation that are manifested from the potential in Pradyumna to manifest in Aniruddha and then create the world. *Niyati* is the regulating power<sup>162</sup> while

[The second aspect] of Kāla, its ripening form, is what drives [everything on] (*kalanātmaka*). This Driver or Time (*kāla*) then arises from Niyati, urged on by the will. The *manus* also descend from Niyati into Time. Time is the one force that drives [everything] on (*kalayati*), being impelled by Viṣṇu's will. It drives on everything [making it] subject to time, just as a stream does the bank of a river.<sup>163</sup>

It has been demonstrated that the *Parama Saṃhitā* has a complex textual history and that it has undergone significant editing, particularly in its sections concerning creation.<sup>164</sup> However, it does contain some interesting speculation regarding *Kāla* that seems to have much in common with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Oddly, *Kāla* is introduced not as a transcendent aspect of God, but as a *tattva* produced from *taijasa-ahamkāra*.<sup>165</sup> It is stated that “Time creates the elements (bhūtani); Time destroys things born. Time is ever wakeful. Time cannot be transgressed. Time distinguishes all human ends, worldly as well as other worldly. The Past, the Present and the Future, all these take their course in Time.”<sup>166</sup> What is interesting is that although *Kāla* appears here to be simply another

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>164</sup> Marzenna Czerniak-Drozdowicz, “Sṛṣṭikrama – Order of Creation in the Paramasaṃhitā,” *Studies in Hinduism II: Miscellanea to the Phenomenon of Tantras* ed. Gerhard Oberhammer (Wien: Verlag Der Osterreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1998).

<sup>165</sup> S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, ed. and trans., *Paramasaṃhitā [of the Pāñcharātra]* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1940), 2.41.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.67-68.

modification of *prakṛti*, it is also somehow also God manifesting himself in the phenomenal world. As in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* God exists in the world as Time.<sup>167</sup>

“The Supreme Being (*Puruṣa*), O, Brahman! Having become *Kāla*, sits and turns the wheel of time perpetually. In this manner keeping the universe going round through the illusion of his *Guṇas*, the eternal God remains busily doing, as if in play.”<sup>168</sup>

Clearly the history of speculations about the nature of Time is quite complex. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, though it presents a system that is all its own, does not appear to be ignorant of these theories. Roughly speaking, the *Bhāgavata* has rejected the doctrine of Time which was taught by Classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga in favor of the alternative theory that there is an eternal temporal substratum that gives rise to the phenomenal experience of time as well as the creation and destruction of the world. It also identifies this force (*Kāla*) with its highest god, Nārāyaṇa. Though the *Bhāgavata* has much in common with all the systems which accept this general notion, it is clear that whoever composed the text was greatly influenced by the *Bhāgavata* tradition as a whole, and the Vaiṣṇava *Purāṇas* in particular. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, for instance, appears to have been very much a source of inspiration for the *Bhāgavata*'s authors. However, the relationship between the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the surviving scriptures of the Pañcarātra School should not be discounted as there is considerable overlap between the two. The two most significant points in common between the *Bhāgavata* and the Pañcarātra scriptures are the place of *Kāla* within the Sāṃkhya system, and the relationship between *Kāla* and the individual *jīvas*. The *Bhāgavata*, along with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, holds that there are three

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<sup>167</sup> Marzenna Czerniak-Drozdowicz, *Pāñcarātra Scripture in the Process of Change: A Study of the Paramasamhitā* (Vienna: De Nobili Research Library, 2003), 105.

<sup>168</sup> Aiyangar, 2.77-78.

fundamental *tattvas* which are involved in the creation of the world; *puruṣa*, *avyakta* (the unmanifest *prakṛti*), and *kāla*. These are all understood to be both controlled by God and in some way the same as God, a somewhat confusing doctrine that is resolved with the addition of *śakti* into the scheme by the Pañcarātra scriptures. This idea is echoed in the Pañcarātra texts, particularly the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, where the *bhūtīśakti* is said to have three manifestations, *avyakta*, *puruṣa*, and *kāla*. The *puruṣa* that is meant here is the *kūṭastha puruṣa*, which is none other than the aggregate of all the individual souls, thus, for the *Ahirbudhnya* it is quite explicit that *Kāla* and the *jīva* are the external and internal manifestations of exactly the same *śakti*.<sup>169</sup> In addition to this, the Pañcarātra scriptures maintain, and expand upon the distinction that seems to be implied in the *Bhāgavata* between gross and subtle Time.<sup>170</sup>

### The Vyūhas

A clue to one of the major sources of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s doctrines can be found in its scattered references to the four *vyūhas*. This doctrine is specifically associated with the various Bhāgavata movements which gave rise to the more systematic Pañcarātra teachings found in the Saṃhitās and other Pañcarātra scriptures. This word is usually translated as emanation, but can also be translated as something like “formation”, as in the formation that an army takes during battle, which is probably closer to the sense that is intended.<sup>171</sup> In general this system is concerned with the four-fold manifestation

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<sup>169</sup> Kumar, 24-25.

<sup>170</sup> Schrader, 65.

<sup>171</sup> D. Dennis Hudson, “The Vyūhas in Stone,” *Studies in Hinduism IV: On the Mutual Influences and Relationship of Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta and Pāñcarātra* ed. Gerhard Oberhammer and Marion Rastelli (Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 130.



of the personal absolute, usually identified as Nārāyaṇa, Bhagavān, or Vāsudeva. This ultimate reality is understood to have six qualities; *jñāna* (knowledge), *aśvarya* (lordship), *śakti* (potency), *vīrya* (virility), and *tejas* (splendor); and the *vyūhas* represent the different configurations these powers take. They are the different formations of the six *guṇas*. The first *vyūha*, Vāsudeva encompasses all six of these qualities and the remaining three; Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha have two each (these two are the dominant powers, the remaining four are understood to be present but dormant).

The exact origins of this belief are not entirely clear, especially since all surviving Pañcarātra literature is from much later than the period in which this idea seems to have arisen. The earliest evidence for the worship of the *vyūhas* appears to be sculptural with cultic images that appear to show the four *vyūhas* dating back to as far as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>172</sup> Early written evidence of the worship of the four *vyūhas* is mostly tenuous. The earliest written sources that explicitly mention a four-fold manifestation of the supreme god are also in disagreement about the nature of these manifestations. The *Nārāyaṇīya* refers to these manifestations not as *vyūhas*, but as *mūrtis*, and mentions two completely different lists of names for these four entities; the more common version of Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, as well as a unique version in which Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, and Kṛṣṇa are all manifestations of Nārāyaṇa, the supreme god.<sup>173</sup> The *Jayakhyā Saṃhitā*, perhaps the earliest surviving Pañcarātra scripture, provides an

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<sup>172</sup> Dennis Hudson, “Early Evidence of the *Pañcarātra Āgama*,” in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 142-144.

<sup>173</sup> Brockington, 291-292.

alternative list of *vyūhas*; Vāsudeva, Acutya, Satya, and Puruṣa.<sup>174</sup> It is clear then that this doctrine underwent quite a long development with a number of different versions before its eventual crystallization into the more common theory that is found in all other Pañcarātra scriptures. As even the most conservative dates for the final redaction of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are well before most of these texts it would not be surprising if it preserved some vestigial elements of the *vyūha* doctrine.

There are a number of references to the *vyūhas* in the *Bhāgavata*.<sup>175</sup> It should also be noted that the entirety of the tenth book, the central book of the entire text, is concerned not only with the exploits of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, but also with his family members who are identified with the other three *vyūhas*. It is possible that this entire book could, in fact, be read symbolically with the stories of Kṛṣṇa and his family members representing the esoteric functions of the *vyūhas* and their interactions with one another, but this is perhaps too big of a stretch, and without a systematic analysis of this it is impossible to say for sure. As noted above, the *vyūha* theory of the Pañcarātra School, or at the very least the skeleton of it, is given a prominent place in the third book's description of the evolution of the *tattvas*. Despite the very clear links with this theological system, there are a number of ways in which the *Bhāgavata*'s account appears to be in conflict with the more fully developed examples of the Pañcarātra Saṃhitās themselves. If at all possible these incongruities need to be explained if a fuller understanding of the theology behind the *Bhāgavata* is to be discovered.

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<sup>174</sup> Klaus K. Klostermaier, *Mythologies and Philosophies of Salvation in the Theistic Traditions of India* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 98.

<sup>175</sup> 4.24, 11.4.29, 10.40.21.

The fully developed system of even the earliest Pañcarātra texts distinguishes between two separate creations. The impure creation in which the mundane world and the gross elements are created in a manner that is roughly equivalent to the Purāṇic version of Sāṃkhya, and the earlier, pure creation which involves the emergence of the four *vyūhas* and the activities of the *śaktis* of Vāsudeva. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, despite its use of the *vyūha* terminology, seems to completely do away with this distinction. The *vyūhas* are not produced separately from the phenomenal world, but at the same time as it. In fact, they are even equated with three of the first four *tattvas* that are produced; Vāsudeva being *mahat*, Saṃkarṣaṇa as *ahaṃkāra*, and Aniruddha as *manas*. This could, rather plausibly, be written off as a simple misunderstanding of Pañcarātra theology by someone who was only vaguely familiar with its details and probably was not actually initiated into the ritual system, but there are a few hints that the rather strange outline given in the *Bhāgavata* reflects something that a number of people actually believed.

One major problem with this portion of the text is that even though this seems to be a clear reference to the *vyūhas*, one of the four *vyūhas* appears to be missing, Pradyumna. Pradyumna usually appears between Saṃkarṣaṇa and Aniruddha and his absence in this system is conspicuous. However, one clue to this is that though he is not explicitly named, there is an addition to the Sāṃkhya system here that implies that the author must have meant to imply his presence. Contrary to other enumerations of the Sāṃkhya system, even versions that appear in the *Bhāgavata* itself, the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of the third *skanda* adds a *tattva* to the *antaḥkaraṇa* (internal organ). Usually the *antaḥkaraṇa* is comprised of three parts, *mahat* (usually identified with *buddhi*), *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*. In this enumeration there are *four tattvas*; *mahat*, which is here identified as *citta*,

*ahaṃkāra*, *manas*, and *buddhi*. Vāsudeva is *mahat/citta*, Saṃkarṣaṇa is *ahaṃkāra*, and Aniruddha is *manas*. This leaves *buddhi* without any corresponding deity, a fact that strongly implies Pradyumna is meant to be applied to *buddhi*. This appears to be confirmed by the earliest available commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Bhāvārthabodhinī* of Śrīdhara Svāmin which also records this opinion in its commentary on 10.21 in which all four of the *vyūhas* are associated with one of the *tattvas*, Vāsudeva with *citta*, Saṃkarṣaṇa with *ahaṃkāra*, Aniruddha with *manas*, and Pradyumna with *buddhi*.<sup>176</sup>

Interestingly, a few verses later, Śrīdhara, apparently reports an entirely different theory about the presence of Pradyumna in this system. He explains that the Pradyumna *vyūha* is desire, which is nothing more than a function of *manas*.<sup>177</sup> While this reading may seem totally nonsensical, there is a basis for it in Bhāgavata literature, quite a significant one in fact. It would seem that Pradyumna has long been associated with desire, and even with Kāmadeva himself, the personification of desire. The *Bhāgavata* itself makes the connection in the tenth book stating that Pradyumna is an incarnation of Kāmadeva.<sup>178</sup> This is, of course, in reference to Pradyumna the son of Kṛṣṇa and not necessarily to the *vyūha* Pradyumna, but it should be noted that the association between the earthly Kṛṣṇa and his relatives and the *vyūhas* of Pañcarātra theology is not entirely clear. This connection between Pradyumna and Kāmadeva seems to go back quite far.

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<sup>176</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa With Sanskrit Commentary Bhāvārthabodhinī of Śrīdharasvāmin*, ed. J.L. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 143.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>178</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10.55.1-3.

For example, Dennis Hudson has documented it in south Indian Vaiṣṇava temples.<sup>179</sup> In addition to this, the ninth century Tamil poet Aṅṅāl, one of the Āḷvārs, devotes a great deal of her *Nacciyaṅ Tirumoli* to calling upon Kāmādeva. What is remarkable about this is that Aṅṅāl, and all of the Āḷvārs in general, are usually very strictly sectarian and rarely invoke any deity besides Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa, or one of their numerous manifestations. This may imply that Aṅṅāl understood Kāmādeva to be a Vaiṣṇava deity, perhaps even Pradyumna himself, a fact that has been noted by scholars.<sup>180</sup> Interestingly, this quite possibly places the association in the south, the exact geographical area where the *Bhāgavata* is thought to have been completed. This fact certainly does not disprove the notion that this may very well be a reference to Pradyumna, and in a way that is explicitly related to Pañcarātra. Of course, all of this is speculation. While it is clear that Pradyumna was identified with Kāmādeva and it is clear the third book refers to the other three *vyūhas*, it does not explicitly mention Pradyumna. It is significant that there appears to be so much other evidence that would point to such a notion though; particularly in terms of the commentarial tradition. While the authors of the *Bhāgavata* may not themselves had this in mind (though it is quite likely that they did) the text they produced was certainly interpreted this way not long after its appearance.

Although this specific doctrine of the *vyūhas* does not appear in any of the surviving Pañcarātra Saṁhitās, this does not necessarily mean that it was not more prevalent at some point in the past, perhaps even a primary component of Bhāgavata cosmological thought. As has already been pointed out, all surviving Pañcarātra

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<sup>179</sup> Hudson, “The Vyūhas in Stone,” 156-157.

<sup>180</sup> D. Dennis Hudson, *The Body of God: An Emperor’s Palace for Krishna in Eighth-Century Kanchipuram* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 436-437.

scriptures are relatively late and because of this it is difficult to know how representative even the earliest of these texts is of the formative period. In this case there are a number of hints that this doctrine may have been much more popular at one point as well as a number of significant factors that would have contributed to its falling out of favor in more recent times. The *Nārāyaṇīya* is probably the earliest surviving document from the Bhāgavata tradition and it refers to its teachings as Pañcarātra (though how closely it relates to Pañcarātra's ritual system, even in its own time is certainly debatable).

Interestingly, it seems to mention a teaching that is very similar to the association of the four *vyūhas* with the *antaḥkaraṇa* in the *Bhāgavata*. It lists Vāsudeva as the *puruṣa*, Saṃkarṣaṇa as the *jīva*, Pradyumna as *manas*, and Aniruddha as *ahaṃkāra*.<sup>181</sup> However, this doctrine is not presented as a central teaching of the Bhāgavatas in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and is mentioned almost in passing; thus it is difficult to know how it should be interpreted. The *Nārāyaṇīya* as it exists today is far from a monolithic text. It seems to have accumulated material over a long period of time and likely incorporated material from a variety of sources even in its earliest versions.

Śaṅkara assigns a very similar opinion to the Bhāgavatas (who he also identifies with Pañcarātrins) in his *Brahmāsūtrabhāṣya* when trying to refute them. He claims that the Bhāgavatas think that Vāsudeva “has divided himself in four ways, and has set himself up in four forms (*vyūhas*) of Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. ‘Vāsudeva, verily, is said to be the Highest Self, ‘Samkarshana’, the Jīva-Self,

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<sup>181</sup> Gerard Colas, “History of Vaiṣṇava Traditions: An Esquisse,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 235.

‘Pradyumna’, the mind and ‘Aniruddha’ the ego (*ahaṃkāra*).”<sup>182</sup> Śaṅkara clearly disapproves of this opinion and uses it as the basis for his entire attack on the Bhāgavatas.

Most of the other early commentators follow Śaṅkara in his use of this particular doctrine to explain sūtras 2.2.42-45, most notably Bhāskara. Bhāskara, a Vedāntin of the Bhedhābheda School, was slightly later than Śaṅkara and seems to have had at least some knowledge of either Śaṅkara’s writings or the school from which he came. Bhāskara follows Śaṅkara very closely, a fact that is somewhat surprising.<sup>183</sup> In general Bhāskara is quite critical of Śaṅkara so the fact that he is very much in agreement with Śaṅkara in terms of his argumentation is striking. Rāmānuja also comments on the same verses and understands them to be an argument against a particular form of Pañcarātra. This is even more surprising as Rāmānuja is generally considered to have been a proponent of the Pañcarātra. He does, however, interpret the final sūtra of the section to be an explanation that not *all* Pañcarātra is denied, only that which is contrary to the Veda.<sup>184</sup> What this all implies is that this was a traditional argument that was used against the Pañcarātrins by followers of Vedānta, probably going back to a very early date, and thus it may preserve a tradition of Bhāgavata cosmology that has not survived intact.<sup>185</sup>

As was noted above, this understanding of the *vyūhas* is quite different from that of the surviving Pañcarātra Saṃhitās. The *tattvas* of the Sāṃkhya cosmology, even the higher ones such as *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra* are understood to be part of the world-system

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<sup>182</sup> Apte, 418.

<sup>183</sup> Neeval, 18.

<sup>184</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, ed. and trans., *Yāmuna’s Āgama Prāmāṇyam or Treatise on the Validity of Pañcarātra* (Madras: Ramanuja Research Society, 1971), 28-38.

<sup>185</sup> Neeval, 18.

that consists of modifications of *prakṛti*. The Pañcarātra scriptures place emanation of the *vyūhas* in the pure creation, before the creation of the phenomenal world and, thus, any attempt to identify even the lower three *vyūhas* with any of the *tattvas* would be nearly as problematic for Pañcarātra as it was for Vedānta. With this in mind it is hardly surprising that this doctrine is almost entirely absent from entirety of the surviving Pañcarātra corpus, with one notable exception.

Although it is a fairly late text that generally agrees with the creation accounts of the other Saṃhitās, the *Lakṣmī Tantra* does identify three of the *vyūhas* with *tattvas* that correspond to the system referenced in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtras*. In the sixth book, Aniruddha states that he exists “as the egohood of Saṃkarṣaṇa,” and that “These three ancient divinities headed by Saṃkarṣaṇa are known as *jīva*, *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra* (egohood).”<sup>186</sup> It is important to note that the context in which this statement appears is not so much a description of the nature of the universe as it is a description of the nature of individual souls, or *jīvas*. The *Lakṣmī Tantra*, like most Pañcarātra texts, understands the individual selves to be manifestations of Nārāyaṇa who are, at the same time, somehow different from him. How there can appear to be a multitude of individual selves that are all somehow real then poses a problem for most Pañcarātrins as God is understood to be unchanging. The *Lakṣmī Tantra* solves this problem by identifying the individual selves as modifications of Śakti. It would seem then that this does not serve a cosmological function so much as it does a microcosmic function as the emanation of the constituent parts of the individual selves.

Interestingly this is actually closer to the position Śaṅkara and the other Vedāntins seem to be arguing against since their objection seems to be related to the production of

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<sup>186</sup> Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra*, 6.12-13.



the individual *jīvas*. If the selves are produced as emanations from the Supreme Self (Vāsudeva) then they cannot be co-eternal with Brahman as the *Brahma Sūtras* maintain. Of course, the *Lakṣmī Tantra* gets around this by placing this entire process in the pure creation. As if to counter the potential arguments of the Vedāntins (whose arguments would have been widely known by the time the final version of *Lakṣmī Tantra* was produced) the text actually qualifies its discussion of all of this with the following; “These are indeed not phenomenal (*aprākṛta*, i.e. do not consist of the three *guṇas*), but consist of pure consciousness.”<sup>187</sup> Thus, even though the *Lakṣmī Tantra* assigns two of the *tattvas* to corresponding *vyūhas*, it does not seem to have the *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra* of the gross creation in mind. Schrader maintains that the idea expressed in this verse is that Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha are “*as it were*” the *jīva*, *buddhi*, and *manas*.<sup>188</sup> He also theorizes that the original meaning of this doctrine must have been that the *vyūhas* were the tutelary deities of these particular *tattvas*, a doctrine that seems to be partially preserved in the *Viṣvaksena Saṃhitā* where Saṃkarṣaṇa is the “superintendent of all the souls” and Pradyumna is the “superintendent of the mind (*manas*).”<sup>189</sup> In general this interpretation seems to conform to what is being said in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* where these *tattvas do* serve a cosmological function in addition to their function as the *antaḥkāraṇa* of the individual. Throughout the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter the *tattvas* are associated with a variety of different deities and in general this addition to the Sāṃkhya cosmology is quite common throughout the Purāṇic literature and, thus, it is not

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.12-13.

<sup>188</sup> Schrader, 39.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

unreasonable to assume that this doctrine was once far more widespread than the surviving literature would imply. Thus, it would appear that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one of the few texts to preserve a trace of this earlier Pañcarātra doctrine of the *vyūhas*. Although it does not fully agree with that of the *Nārāyaṇīya* or the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, the systems are fundamentally similar in their disagreement with the more commonly found understanding of the *vyūhas*. In fact, the major difference between the two systems appears to be not so much in their understanding of the *vyūhas*, but in their enumeration of the *tattvas* which are to be associated with the *vyūhas*.

#### The Antahkarāṇa

In terms of the psychological makeup of the individual, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents a somewhat unique theory. In general, all those systems which follow the enumeration of reality as given by the Sāṃkhya School agree on the basic points, particularly in terms of the number of *tattvas* and the basic list. The earlier the text is the less likely it is to agree with this formulation though, and a great deal of diversity can be seen when Classical Sāṃkhya is compared with that of some parts of the *Mahābhārata* and other texts such as the *Buddhacarita*. However, even though there are some minor points of disagreement, for the most part the general sketch of the system is followed in texts that post-date the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*. This is true even in texts that are not generally considered to belong to the Sāṃkhya School proper, but which borrow its general cosmological enumeration such as the Purāṇas or Pañcarātra Saṃhitās. Obviously these texts do not agree with Classical Sāṃkhya on many fundamental issues, including those which have already been discussed, but in terms of the understanding of *prakṛti*, what the number of *tattvas* is, and how they function together, there is very little in the way of

deviation from the basic Sāṃkhya pattern. There are 24, and the *antaḥkaraṇa* consisting of three *tattvas*, *manas*, *aḥṃkāra*, and *mahat (buddhi)*.

The presentation of the *tattvas* in the Kapila portion of the *Bhāgavata* poses something of a problem then as it lays out a system that appears to be unique. This is true not only in the case of any transcendent reality, but in terms of the *tattvas* that constitute the material world, particularly those which are said to comprise the *antaḥkaraṇa*. Instead of the normative threefold *antaḥkaraṇa*, the *Bhāgavata* explicitly defines the *antaḥkaraṇa* as fourfold.<sup>190</sup> This formulation is continued throughout the *Kapilagītā* and, as discussed above, is explicitly identified with the *vyūhas* of Pañcarātra theology as part of its cosmological function.

Somewhat strangely, this disagrees not only with other Sāṃkhya, Bhāgavata, and Purāṇic texts, but with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself. Nowhere else in the *Bhāgavata* is this description of a fourfold *antaḥkaraṇa* given. The other places in the *Bhāgavata* where systematic explanations of Sāṃkhya are given maintain a more traditional *antaḥkaraṇa* of three *tattvas*, and it is not even mentioned as a possibility in the eleventh book's discussion of the numerous alternative versions of the Sāṃkhya philosophy. This obviously creates a significant problem as it is not immediately clear where this is actually coming from; is it original to the *Bhāgavata* or is it derived from somewhere else?

A very probable source for this seeming anomaly is actually the Yoga system of Patañjali. Although this system agrees with Classical Sāṃkhya on nearly every point in terms of basic cosmology, this is one of the few places where it the two diverge. Coincidentally the *Yoga Sūtras* offer a description of something that is similar to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The *Yoga Sūtras* add a significant element to the Sāṃkhya schema,

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<sup>190</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.26.11.

*citta*. *Citta* appears nowhere in the Sāṃkhya of the *Kārikas*, but is a central component of the Pātañjala system. What the *Yoga Sūtras* themselves mean is not always entirely clear. Concepts are often mentioned without providing clear definitions so modern interpreters must rely on the aid of the commentarial tradition to get at least some idea, flawed though it may be, of what the *Sūtras* are attempting to convey. In the case of *citta* the general consensus is that it is not exactly a *tattva*, but is comprised of the three *tattvas* that usually make up the *antaḥkaraṇa* in Sāṃkhya; *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*. In effect it replaces the *antaḥkaraṇa* and subsumes these three mental processes within itself, acting somewhat like a container for *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*. It is the most fundamental component of *prakṛti* as well, the “mind-stuff” out of which everything else proceeds; often it is spoken of in a way that would seem to imply it is the same thing as *prakṛti* or *puruṣa*.

Clearly this is not identical with the doctrine found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; in which the addition of *citta* does not replace the *antaḥkaraṇa*, instead it is explicitly added to it. It is possible that this may refer to the same general idea, but in an ambiguous way. As discussed, these four *tattvas* appear to be related to the *vyūhas* in the *Bhāgavata*, this may be a clue to interpreting their relationship to one another. In terms of the *vyūha* theory, the lower three *vyūhas*, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha are understood to come forth from and also exist within the first *vyūha*, Vāsudeva. It is probably not too great of a leap to imagine that the author of this section of the *Bhāgavata* understood this relationship between the *vyūhas* to mirror that of these four *tattvas*; as Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha exist within Vāsudeva, so do *ahaṃkāra*, *manas*, and *buddhi* exist within *citta*. This is, of course only speculation though as there are enough

differences between these two systems to lead one to doubt they have anything to do with each other.

Oddly enough, one of the few places in which this anomalous version of the *antaḥkaraṇa* appears is actually in the writings of Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara does not present a unified theory of the *antaḥkaraṇa* over all of his writings, a situation that is complicated by the attribution of many works to Śaṅkara of many works that he likely did not write and the impossibility of coming to a definitive authorship in many cases. Generally Śaṅkara holds that the *antaḥkaraṇa* is fourfold. There is not always uniformity in his descriptions of what four things comprise the *antaḥkaraṇa*, but it appears that he does occasionally give a list that is identical with the *Kapilagītā*.<sup>191</sup> Just as often he modifies this in some way however, such as in his *Brahmāsūtrabhāṣya* on 2.3.32 where *ahaṃkāra* is replaced by *viññāna*.<sup>192</sup>

Another unexpected place where this fourfold *antaḥkaraṇa* can be found is in some of the later, so called Saṃnyāsa or Yoga Upaniṣads. These texts often present these four; *citta*, *buddhi*, *manas*, and *ahaṃkāra* as a unit, but give little context for what they are. Examples of this include the *Adhyātma Upaniṣad*,<sup>193</sup> *Subāla Upaniṣad*,<sup>194</sup> *Garbha Upaniṣad*,<sup>195</sup> *Tejobindu Upaniṣad*,<sup>196</sup> and *Varāha Upaniṣad*.<sup>197</sup> Other Upaniṣads

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<sup>191</sup> Śaṅkara, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, vol. 2: *Introduction and English translation*, ed. Sengaku Mayeda (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2006) 30-31.

Richa Pauranik Clements, “Being a Witness,” in *Theory and Practice of Yoga* ed. Knut A Jacobsen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 82.

<sup>192</sup> Śaṅkara, *Brahmāsūtrabhāṣya* (Dilli: Prakashaka, 2001), 164.

<sup>193</sup> K. Narayanasvami Aiyar, trans., *Thirty Minor Upaniṣads* (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1997), 43.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 52, 54.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

explicitly mention these four within the context of the Sāṃkhya cosmology such as the *Nāradaḥparivrājaka Upaniṣad*,<sup>198</sup> while others such as the *Śārīraka Upaniṣad* specifically name these four as the *antaḥkaraṇa*; “*Antaḥkaraṇa* (or the internal organ) is of four kinds – *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *citta*.”<sup>199</sup> Somewhat strangely the *Paiṅgala Upaniṣad* actually provides five, not four elements; *antaḥkaraṇa*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta*, and *ahaṃkāra*.<sup>200</sup> It is extremely difficult to know how to relate these texts to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* though. The later Upaniṣads have undergone a lengthy period of redaction and rewriting and thus cannot be reliably dated at all. Some probably date back as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century while others are clearly much later; as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century. One of these that has actually been given a provisional date, the *Nāradaḥparivrājaka*, is not thought to be older than the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>201</sup> Given the date of these texts there may even be influence from the Śaṅkara School of Vedānta. Due to this it seems unlikely that these Upaniṣads were somehow a direct influence on the third book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the same is probably true for Śaṅkara. However, what these examples do show is that despite what is seen in the textual record of Classical Sāṃkhya, speculation about the nature of the Sāṃkhya cosmology was very much in a state of flux, particularly at this late date. The *Sāṃkhyakārikas* represent just one version of this cosmology and a number of other groups saw no problem with modifying the system, especially those groups that

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* 86.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>201</sup> Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), 8-11.

had no affiliation with Sāṃkhya philosophy proper, such as Vedānta or the Bhāgavatas. There is also a very real possibility that all of these texts may be influenced by some earlier tradition, possibly a rival to the school which gave rise to the *Kārikas*, but given the lack evidence it is simply impossible to know whether this was the case.

## CONCLUSION

In addition to the major doctrinal deviations from the formula of Classical Sāṃkhya, the *Kapilagītā* features a great deal of smaller differences with the more well-known versions of Sāṃkhya that betray its Purāṇic origins. The most obvious of these is the role of the *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* in the evolution of the other *tattvas*. In the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* does not itself emanate any further *tattvas*; instead its role seems to be related more to its role as *rajas* in that it activates the *sāttvika* and *tāmasa ahaṃkāras*. These are understood to be static in their unmixed form, just as the *sattva* and *tamas guṇas* are; it is only the addition of the active *guṇa, rajas*, that allows for anything to take place.

The *Bhāgavata* greatly increases the role of *taijasa-ahaṃkāra*. Most importantly, *buddhi*, the additional *tattva* that is added to the system is understood to emanate from *taijasa*. In addition to this the ten *indriyas* are said to emanate from the *taijasa* as well, and not from the *sāttvikāhaṃkāra*. The *buddhi* also appears to take on the role that *manas* plays in the Classical system as the controller of these *indriyas* in which they are all processed. The exact relationship between the two remains slightly unclear as it is not completely apparent whether the *indriyas* emanate directly from the *taijasa-ahaṃkāra*, or from *buddhi*. Whichever of these the author originally intended, what is obvious is that this is a significant departure from the way in which *taijasa-ahaṃkāra* is understood in the Classical system.

The situation is similar for the *tanmātras* and the *mahābhūtas*. The *Sāṃkhyakārikas* maintain that the *tanmātras* are derived from the *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra* and that the *mahābhūtas* are derived from their corresponding *tanmātras*; space from sound-



*tanmātra*, wind from touch-*tanmātra* etc. The *Bhāgavata* provides quite a different system. The first of the *tanmātras*, sound, is derived directly from the *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra* and space is derived from sound-*tanmātra*, but after this the next *tanmātra*, touch, seems to be derived from space, sound, or the combination of the two, not from the *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra*. This continues for all of the remaining *tattvas*; touch produces wind which leads to sight, sight produces fire which leads to taste, taste produces water which leads to smell, and smell produces earth.

What is striking is how closely this compares with a creation account that was studied quite extensively by Paul Hacker. Hacker notes that the creation accounts of a great number of the Purāṇas are based on the same the same textual source. His hypothesis is that there was, at some point, a short cosmological tract that all of these Purāṇas used as a source. He dates this hypothetical text to no later than 300 C.E., but notes that it could very well be much older, possibly even into the first century B.C.E. He also notes that this hypothetical source is almost certainly based in *Mahābhārata* 12.224. The cosmology which is described in this portion of the *Mahābhārata*, as well as all of the texts that are based on it, is a form of Sāṃkhya, but it is a Sāṃkhya that has significant differences with the Classical Sāṃkhya of the *Sāṃkhyakārikas*.<sup>202</sup> One way in which this cosmology differs from that of Classical Sāṃkhya is in the evolution of the *mahābhūtas* and the *tanmātras*. Interestingly, it is precisely the same as that of the *Kapilagītā*; the sound-*tanmātra* evolves from the *tāmasa-ahaṃkāra*, and space evolves from the sound-*tanmātra*, each *tanmātra-mahābhūta* pair being evolved from the one

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<sup>202</sup> Paul Hacker, "The Sāṃkhyization of the Emanation Doctrine Shown in a Critical Analysis of Texts," *Archiv Fur Indische Philosophie*, 110-111.

before it.<sup>203</sup> While the *Bhāgavata*'s account of this is textually quite different from Hacker's proposed cosmological tract, and thus cannot be shown to have directly borrowed from it, it is clear that the *Bhāgavata* preserves, at the very least, portions of a cosmological account that is associated with a Purāṇic tradition that can be shown to connect back with the Sāṃkhya of the epic. This version of Sāṃkhya, perhaps a rival to the Sāṃkhya of the *Kārikas*, is then placed into the mouth of Kapila, the founder of the Sāṃkhya School himself, by the authors of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, thereby claiming the original Sāṃkhya teaching for its own tradition.

The cosmological content of the *Kapilagītā* is obviously quite a significant part of what it is attempting to convey, but apart from the relationship to Purāṇic cosmologies in general it is not totally clear what its purpose is in this particular exchange. In most Purāṇas such speculation occurs exclusively in the portions of the text in which creation or destruction are discussed. This, however, is not the stated goal of the teaching which Kapila is attempting to convey, liberation is. How such teachings might relate to a system that's goal is liberation is quite a complicated issue, but may very well reveal what the purpose of this text was in the first place.

While it is well known that the Purāṇas are quite interested in explaining the cosmology of the universe in the most minute detail, the writings of Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga are also quite concerned to provide an accurate description of the universe. This can mostly be found in the commentaries to the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* and the *Yoga Sūtras* where descriptions of the various *lokas* and their inhabitants are presented as an important element of the teaching of the school. These descriptions are also remarkably similar to what might be called the typical Purāṇic cosmology. The commentaries on the

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

*Yoga Sūtras* in particular seem to be extremely interested in correctly explaining the cosmology of the universe, though it is never entirely clear why this might be the case. It is possible that it is only the scholastic desire to be thorough, but there may also be more playing into this.

One should always keep in mind that any description of the universe is, to a certain extent, also a description of the human body, and the body of the practitioner in particular. The picture of the universe is always understood to be exactly replicated in miniature in the human body and the universe is generally thought to have the shape of the body of a human male. The macrocosm is the microcosm and vice versa. When this is kept in mind the preoccupation with describing the various components of the universe and their inner-workings in detail begins to make sense.

It is generally thought that in the Classical Sāṃkhya system that liberation was brought about simply by an intuitive understanding of the structure of the universe, but the question of whether or not some sort of practice, perhaps some sort of ritual contemplation of the *tattvas*, might have been necessary to arrive at this knowledge. It should also be remembered that even in Sāṃkhya, where the focus appears to be overwhelmingly on the *prakṛti* that binds the individual *puruṣa* there was an idea that the *prakṛti* which all share in common actually constituted the body of Brahmā.

It is relatively easy to see why Sāṃkhya might have been interested in such things, but Yoga would appear to be a different matter as Yoga provides a system of practice that is intended to bring about liberation, the eight *āṅgas* (limbs) of the Yoga system. This includes a series of five *yamas* (abstentions) and five *niyamas* (observances) that are understood to be a necessary preliminary of all practice. Significantly, the *Kapilagītā* also

presents a system of practice that includes a version of the eight limbs of Yogic practice, complete with the same list of *yamas* and *niyamas*.<sup>204</sup>

What is clear is that as a whole the *Kapilagītā* is attempting to provide some sort of systematic teaching that will allow the practitioner to attain liberation. It does not, however, simply stop with the eight limbs and assume that these will, on their own, allow one to reach the goal. After this system of Yogic practices is explained, a series of devotional practices are recommended. These include traditional forms of devotional practice.<sup>205</sup> It is clear that these have very much in common with practices that are central to the practices of a number of devotional traditions, particularly Vaiṣṇava traditions. It would seem then that these yogic practices are not intended to bring about liberation themselves, but are purifying practices which prepare the practitioner for devotion, which is the only path to liberation the *Bhāgavata* recognizes.

Immediately following the explanation of the eight *āṅgas* there is a practice recommended that includes a detailed visualization of and meditation on the body of God. It is important to remember that such practices are of the greatest importance to a number of Vaiṣṇava devotional schools, but are given particular importance in the Pañcarātra where they form some of the central practices.

Visualization practices in general also have a function in the Pañcarātra tradition that relates back to the Sāṃkhya cosmology. If the *tattvas* of the Sāṃkhya system are understood to be only of the false material nature that is responsible for the bondage of the practitioner (and in the Pañcarātra system they are), and the body is understood to

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<sup>204</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.28.1-12.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.29.

replicate the universe as a body, then all of the deities and mantras associated with all of the *tattvas* can be understood to reside in the body as well. These can then be visualized within the body. To meditate on one is to mediate on the other. The process of creation and destruction of the universe has important an important ritual function in the Pañcarātra system in which, through visualization, the process is recreated by the practitioner. The practitioner visualizes the body as the microcosm and then proceeds to visualize the destruction of the world at the end of the world-cycle starting with the *mahābhūtas* all the way up through the Sāṃkhya cosmology. When this is finished the microcosm is recreated through the reverse of this, which is identical to the process of evolution in the Sāṃkhya system of Pañcarātra.<sup>206</sup> Generally this ritual is undertaken as purification before direct worship of the deity.

With this in mind, might it be possible that the cosmological portions of the third book of the *Bhāgavata* might have been included for some practical application? The description of the evolution of the *tattvas* followed by a detailed description of the universe as the body of *Virat Puruṣa* may be intended as meditative guides for the practitioner. Though this might seem like it is reading far too much into the text than is there, it seems to be a possibility that is worth of consideration. For one thing, this would help to explain the confusion regarding the *vyūhas* in chapter 26. In the Pañcarātra cosmology it does not make any sense to associate the *vyūhas* with the *antaḥkaraṇa*, but if the goal is not so much to inform the reader of facts so much as it is to provide a meditative guide it begins to look much more plausible. Even if the author would have acknowledged that the *vyūhas* are a part of the pure creation, and thus are not located

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<sup>206</sup> Sanjukta Gupta, “Yoga and *Antaryāga* in Pañcarātra,” in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 192.

anywhere within the world-system, it is hardly possible to visualize them on the body if they are not allowed to be placed anywhere within the body. As the *vyūhas* are an important part of the system, it makes sense that the author would want to include them in the description if he was trying to be systematic, particularly if this was intended to be used as some sort of ritual guide. It may also be worth noting that the cosmological description appears first, followed by the eight-limbed Yogic practices, visualization of the deity, and then devotional practices culminating in liberation. This would mean that if a progression is intended here, the proposed visualization of the Sāṃkhya cosmology takes place first, before the other practices. This fits quite nicely with the status of such practices as purification. This would make the entirety of the *Kapilagītā* something like a self-contained handbook for the practice of a particular system of Vaiṣṇava yoga. This is speculative of course, but it does provide another possible avenue for further research into such texts.

One of the most perplexing aspects of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the degree to which it appears to have been influenced by, or at the very least is responding to, the Vedānta school. It should in no way be thought of as a Vedāntic text (at least in terms of the Vedānta that would seem to have existed in the time before its composition) as there is far too much material that would seem to disagree with this position. For one thing the influence of Bhāgavata traditions is too considerable in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to ignore, and although there very well might have been some early school of Vedānta that was focused primarily on devotion to some Vaiṣṇava deity, there is not a sufficient amount of data to confirm this. Even so, the text makes considerable references to ideas that are generally associated with Vedānta. While at times these are inserted into the text in a very

casual way, at other points the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* almost seems to be responding to some of the criticisms of the Bhāgavata religion that appear to have been common at the time of its composition.

The entire text of the *Bhāgavata* actually seems to be trying to associate itself with the central text of Vedānta, the *Brahmā Sūtras*. The first part of the first verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is identical to the second sutra of the *Brahmā Sūtras*; “*janmādyasya yataḥ*.”<sup>207</sup> This can hardly be a coincidence as this is not a formulaic beginning to texts, so it is almost certainly a direct quotation meant to associate the subject matter of the *Brahmā Sūtras* with that of the *Bhāgavata* itself. This would seem to indicate that whoever has done this wanted to show that the object of inquiry of the *Brahmā Sūtras*, Brahman, was identical to the object of devotion in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Bhagavān. These verses are complex and have been the subject of a great deal of commentary and diverse interpretations. What is striking about this is that the vague Brahman of the *Brahmā Sūtras*, a concept that was generally interpreted in an abstract or impersonal way, is identified as the same thing as the object of worship in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the Bhagavān. In effect this creates the impression that the contents of the *Bhāgavata* reveal the same knowledge as the Vedānta School itself, and perhaps even a more complete knowledge. Though this might seem a stretch given the vast difference of content between the two texts, it has often been interpreted this way; even to the point that the *Bhāgavata* is itself regarded as a commentary on the *Brahmā Sūtras*. Not only

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<sup>207</sup> Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10. BS 1.1.2, BhP 1.1.1.

that, theoretically it would be the *best* commentary as the two texts are understood to have the same author.<sup>208</sup>

A complete analysis of the influence of Vedāntic philosophy and terminology on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is far outside the scope of this paper, but most likely would reveal quite a lot of interesting information. However, the third book of the *Bhāgavata*, which this paper has mostly been concerned with, provides a great deal of material that appears to show the influence of at least some form of Vedānta, if not Śaṅkara himself. Much of this was covered above.

Despite all of this it does not seem likely that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was written by followers of Śaṅkara, or any known school of Vedānta for that matter. As has been discussed, Vedānta itself appears to have been quite hostile towards Bhāgavatism, the tradition that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* champions. That being said, it seems clear that the authors of the *Bhāgavata* were very much aware of the Vedānta tradition, though maybe not of Śaṅkara as the date is still very much up in the air. The similarities the *Bhāgavata* has with Vedānta seem to be the results of the influence of Vedānta, but perhaps not so much a positive influence as a negative one. If the Bhāgavata tradition was under attack from Vedānta, and the commentaries on the *Brahmā Sūtras* certainly imply that it was, it is quite possible that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was written specifically to counter these attacks. Thus, the close connection between the *Bhāgavata* and Vedānta may be an attempt to accommodate the criticisms of Vedānta while maintaining as much of the tradition as possible.

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<sup>208</sup>Traditionally Vyāsa is the author of both the *Brahmā Sūtras* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.



The only Vedāntic tradition with which the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can claim any strong ideological connection is the Śrīvaiṣṇava School. However, referring to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas as a major influence is problematic for many of the same reasons as assuming an Advaitin authorship of the *Bhāgavata* is problematic. Given that the *Bhāgavata* was almost certainly known by his time, it seems odd that Rāmānuja never quotes from it and never mentions it. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case. It is possible that the *Bhāgavata*'s overwhelming emphasis on the worship of Kṛṣṇa may have rendered it un-interesting to a Śrīvaiṣṇava audience, or it might be the case that Rāmānuja had simply never heard of it. Both of these are possibilities, but there are very likely ideological reasons for this. Van Buitenen has noted that Rāmānuja is extremely careful in what texts he makes use of. He does not quote from a number of things that one might have expected a member of a devotional Vaiṣṇava sect to quote from.<sup>209</sup> When the polemical character of Rāmānuja's writings is taken into consideration along with what seems to have been an attack on the Bhāgavata tradition in general by Vedāntins, it is not surprising that he would only have made use of texts of impeccable orthodoxy. The entire philosophical project of all early Śrīvaiṣṇava writings that survive is one of defending their own devotional tradition from attacks, seemingly of other Vedāntins. The response appears to have been one of accommodation to Vedānta. By assimilating the language and artifice of Vedānta the Śrīvaiṣṇavas were able to counter the claims that they were un-Vedic and incorporate themselves into the orthodox fold. There is good evidence that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* represents another such attempt by South Indian Bhāgavatas to integrate themselves into the Vedic tradition.

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<sup>209</sup> van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," 26.

It is obvious that the status of the Bhāgavata Brahmins in South India was highly questionable during this period. As has been seen they were under attack from a number of different forms of Vedānta as well as from the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā School.<sup>210</sup> This situation would have provided a rationale for efforts to prove the legitimacy of the Bhāgavata traditions as these Brahmins would have understood themselves to be just as brahmanical as anyone else, and in many cases more so. It is very likely that whoever wrote the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* subscribed to such views. This can be seen from the name of the text itself; the Purāṇa of the Bhāgavatas.

The early history of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas provides an illustrative example as the earliest known writings of this sect are heavily concerned with proving a Vedic pedigree for their own Bhāgavata traditions. This is particularly true of Yāmuna whose *Āgamaprāmāṇya* provides a lengthy argument that tries to prove that Bhāgavata practices and Pañcarātra scriptures are not only not contradictory with the Vedas, but are actually *more* Vedic than the Vedas themselves. It is not difficult to see these same sorts of motivations at play in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Obviously the *Bhāgavata* is not a Śrīvaiṣṇava text, but it certainly arose from roughly the same geographic location and time period. Due to this it should not be surprising to see similar motivations at work behind the composition of the *Bhāgavata* and the systemization of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

Despite the fact that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is clearly not a Pañcarātra text, it displays many signs that it had considerable influence from Bhāgavata, and probably even Pañcarātra ideas. It is very likely that whoever wrote the text also subscribed to such views. A significant difference between the creation accounts of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and those of the Pañcarātra scriptures is the *Bhāgavata's* lack of *śaktis* in the process.

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<sup>210</sup> Neeval, 18.

Both the Purāṇic and Pañcarātra adaptations of the Sāṃkhya cosmology have the tendency to personify the processes as deities and the *Bhāgavata* is no exception to this. However, the Pañcarātra texts generally personify all activities as the interactions of the *śaktis* of God in order to maintain both a separation and identity with the Supreme God. While such ideas could easily be read into the material in the *Kapilagītā*, the fact that it is never specifically mentioned may be significant. It is quite possible that the *Bhāgavata* came from a tradition in which these ideas were undeveloped, but they may also have been left out on purpose, in order to present a Pañcarātra cosmology (which it certainly is in many ways) in a more acceptable Purāṇic context.

As has been seen throughout this paper, in almost every instance the portion of the *Bhāgavata* which is being discussed agrees not with Classical Sāṃkhya, but with the Bhāgavata or Vedānta tradition. The question then becomes, why is Sāṃkhya even used in the first place? It is not so much that the text calls the teachings it is passing on Sāṃkhya, there is nothing strange about that in and of itself. What is strange is that it incorporates Kapila into this. A figure that is, in almost all instances, identified with a particular brand of philosophy, is placed into the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and made to say things that blatantly disagree with the School he is supposed to have founded.

As with all things in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the answer is probably *bhakti*. One thing which the *Bhāgavata* is extremely good at is being inclusive. Not in the sense that it welcomes other ideas, but in the sense that it attempts to incorporate every possible tradition into its own devotional system. There is quite a lot of evidence that Sāṃkhya was well known in South India. Tamil literature appears to have knowledge of its basic

tenants, for instance it makes a notable appearance in the *Maṇimekhalai*.<sup>211</sup> The Sāṃkhya School is not refuted by the *Bhāgavata* though. Instead it is transformed into *bhakti*. The true meaning of the teaching of Kapila becomes not liberation through knowledge of the *tattvas*, but devotion to God in the form of Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* attempts to do this with all opposing views. It is not that they are wrong, it is that people have misunderstood them; in reality they all lead to devotion to God. Kapila provides a particularly good example of this as the system he is made to teach is so radically different from the Classical system he is known for.

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<sup>211</sup> Alain Danielou, trans., *Manimekhalai (The Dancer with the Magic Bowl)* (New York: New Directions, 1989), 137-139.

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