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HAYAGRĪVA: THE MANY "HISTORIES" OF AN INDIAN DEITY

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August 31, 1998**

**A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the degree of Ph.D.**

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0-612-70111-5

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Abstract

This study traces the complex development of a relatively “minor” pan-Indian deity—Hayagrīva—who, by the 14th century C.E., is revered as a full form of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition of South India. From the perspectives of mythology, iconography, and ritual, the analysis examines both the *diachronic* and *synchronic* dimensions of the images of the deity corresponding to the three-fold division of Hindu texts: (1) pan-Indian “mainstream” (Vedas, Epics, Purāṇas), (2) pan-Indian sectarian (Āgamas), and (3) regional sectarian (hymns of the Ālvārs and Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas).

Firstly, the study questions the structural interpretation of Hindu mythology by showing that there is no single unilinear history of the deity; rather, one can only speak of the various “histories” of Hayagrīva. Secondly, the study reconstructs the particular “religious history” of Hayagrīva as he appears in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, more specifically as the presiding deity in the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahindrapuram. The reconstruction reflects the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the five different forms the Supreme takes in five different locales (which I term as *topotheism*). In the process, the study demonstrates that (1) mythology is not simply an abstract historical process, but may be purposively adapted in the service of theology—as in the case of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, and (2) although the gods change according to sect, emblems and the function of the different images remain the same.

*for my grandmother Durga Devi,
and my mother and father*

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Résumé

Cette étude esquisse le développement complexe d'une divinité relativement mineure pan-indienne, Hayagrīva, qui, au quatorzième siècle, est vénérée comme une représentation à part entière du Dieu suprême Vishnou de la tradition vishnouiste du Sud de l'Inde. À partir des perspectives de la mythologie, de l'iconographie et du rituel, la présente analyse examine à la fois les dimensions diachroniques et synchroniques des images de cette divinité selon aux trois divisions de la littérature religieuse hindoue, à savoir, les textes acceptés par tous les Hindous (les Vedas, les récits épiques, les Purāṇas), les textes sectaires panindiens (les Āgamas) et ceux des sectes régionales (les hymnes des Ālvārs et des Ācāryas du Vishnouisme).

Premièrement, cette étude remet en question l'interprétation structurelle de la mythologie hindoue en montrant qu'il n'existe aucune histoire unilinéaire de cette divinité; il faut plutôt parler des divers "histoires" d'Hayagrīva. Deuxièmement, la présente étude reconstruit "l'histoire religieuse" spécifiques à Hayagrīva telles qu'elles apparaissent dans le Vishnouisme, plus particulièrement, celles de la divinité qui précède dans le temple Swāmi Hayagrīva à Tiruvahindrapuram. Cette reconstruction (que je nomme topothéisme) reflète la compréhension théologique du Vishnouisme relative aux cinq formes que cette divinité adopte selon cinq lieux différents. De cette façon, l'étude démontre que (1) la mythologie n'est pas simplement un procédé historique abstrait, mais qu'elle peut être adaptée intentionnellement au service de la théologie—comme c'est le cas dans le Vishnouisme—et (2) quoique les dieux changent selon les sectes, les symboles et la fonction de leurs différentes images restent les mêmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must express my gratitude to Dr. K.K.A. Venkatachari, founder and former Director of the Ananthacharya Indological Institute, Bombay for having recommended Hayagr̥ṣva as a research topic. He kindly gave me his own copy of Vedanta Desika's *Hayagr̥iva Stotra* in Sanskrit, which is otherwise difficult to obtain, and also accompanied me to Tiruvahindrapuram, Tamil Nadu for fieldwork in January 1997.

I am also thankful to all of Dr. Venkatachari's staff at the Ananthacharya Institute, who assisted in my research in one way or another, during my stay in Bombay in the Fall of 1992, Winter of both 1997 and 1998. I am particularly indebted to both Dr. Murlidharan and Dr. N. Patil, who helped me in my preparation of the initial draft of some of the Sanskrit works on Hayagr̥iva. I am also grateful to Dr. Pai who assisted me in getting sources at the Asiatic Society.

I am grateful to Prof. Katherine K. Young, my thesis supervisor who, after guided me in my work originally meant for a Master degree, saw potential in the topic for a Ph.D. dissertation. She provided academic support throughout the PhD program, and also gave careful and prompt attention to the drafts of the study.

I would like to acknowledge my debt to Prof. Richard Hayes who gave generously of his time to help me when I encountered difficulties with Sanskrit in the course of this study. Prof. Hori—Buddhism in Japan, Prof Wisse, Prof. Galli—feedback on theoretical

Ms. Samieun Khan, secretary at the Faculty of Religious Studies, was kind to teach me, on her own time, Wordperfect 6.0 and the program for diacritical marks. The Computer Lab of McGill University's Faculty of Arts Computing Centre, especially Jawad H. Qureshi, Christine Baker

Thanks are also due to Fonds which financed my doctoral studies.

I want to thank all family and friends in India, Canada and the U.S.A., particularly my sisters Sheila and Sunita, my brother-in-law Thom, Manjoo Singh, Sue Motyka, Tazim Mawji, Barbi Galli, Reynald Prévèreau, who all in their own way provided encouragement and support.

Thanks are due to my parents, who have not only been good role models as academics, but who taught my sisters and me not only to listen and learn, but also always to think for ourselves.

Finally, I am indebted to my grandmother in India who, ironically, can neither read nor write. With her wisdom and delight in the fact that her granddaughters, unlike herself, are educated, she has always been an inspiration to me. In her own way, she taught me how to appreciate both wisdom and knowledge and the difference between the two.

Although indebted to many, I alone bear full responsibility for the final analysis.

PART A
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

TRACING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PAN-INDIAN DEITY ESPECIALLY REVERED IN THE SOUTH¹

Tracing the development of an Indian deity is a challenge. To do some justice to the daunting task, it is necessary to analyse the deity from the perspectives of mythology, iconography, ritual, and theology, and all this both diachronically and synchronically. Treated thus, the analysis of any particular deity should shed light on its multi-faceted transformation as it occurred among the various Indian religious streams.

Studying the development of Hayagrīva, “one who has the neck of a horse” (*haya*=horse, *grīva*=neck), is an endeavour of enormous complexity. Firstly, it is difficult to trace the precise origins of this figure, who may have antecedents as far back as the Vedas. Secondly, the history of the deity spans at least two millenia, from the Hindu textual tradition (*Mahābhārata*) up to the present, during which time there appear many references and images of Hayagrīva in mythic, iconographical, and ritual texts. Moreover, although Hayagrīva is a relatively minor deity in the pan-Indian context, as an incarnation (*avatāra*) of Lord Viṣṇu he is revered in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition² of South India as one form of the Supreme God (*para*).

Although I use Hayagrīva (“one who has the neck of a horse”) as the proper name of the deity under consideration here, there are other Sanskrit names commonly used to identify this figure: “horse-faced one” as in *haya-vadana*, *haya-mukha*, *vāji-vaktra*, *vāji-vadana*, and “one who has the head of a horse” as in *haya-śiras* and *aśva-śiras*. There are

¹ For more information about the Hayagrīva temple in Tamil Nadu, see Chapter VII.

² See section “The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition” in Chapter V.

also two Tamil names used to denote the deity: *mā* "horse", and *pari-muka* "horse-faced one" (*pari*=horse, *muka*=face). In this study, I use the English "horse-headed" god and the proper name Hayagrīva as general terms. The former is more representative than the "the horse-necked one" and the latter is most commonly used in the texts themselves.

Hayagrīva in Hindu Literature

Major references to Hayagrīva are contained in the texts of Hindu religious literature, which can be divided into three broad categories: (1) pan-Indian "mainstream" texts,³ including the Vedas⁴ (*śruti*⁵) as well as the Epics and the Purāṇas (*smṛti*)⁶; (2) pan-Indian sectarian texts,⁷ including the Vaiṣṇava (Pāñcarātra), Śaiva, and Śākta Āgamas; and (3) regional sectarian texts, such as the Tamil poems of the Ālvārs and the varied compositions of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas.

The first category (pan-Indian "mainstream") in this three-fold division of Hindu texts (*śruti* and *smṛti*) is recognized as sacred scripture throughout the subcontinent by various Hindu groups and sects. There are no specific references to the horse-headed figure in the Vedic corpus; however, the later Vedic literature contain stories about the

³ I have grouped all the Purāṇas together in the category of pan-Indian "mainstream" texts (referring to the Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic corpus). Although many of the Purāṇas are sectarian, it would be misleading and simplistic to categorize all the Purāṇas as pan-Indian trans-sectarian texts. However, it is necessary to group the trans-sectarian and sectarian Purāṇas together here for the purpose of providing a broader overview. I will present a more differentiated analysis of the development of the myths about Hayagrīva on the basis of the Purāṇas in Chapter III.

⁴ There are no direct references to Hayagrīva in the Vedas; however, there may be Vedic antecedents to the deity. See Chapter II.

⁵ *Śruti* (that which is heard) refers to the Vedas, which are regarded as revelation.

⁶ *Smṛti* (that which is remembered) refers to religious texts that were written by the sages (ṛṣis), and include the Epics, the *Dharmaśāstras*, and Purāṇas.

⁷ Even though the Āgamas are mainly found in Kashmir and the South, the term pan-Indian here refers to those Āgamic texts that are not restricted to a single region.

beheading sacrifice of Yajña and Viṣṇu (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa*), which may be regarded as an antecedent to the later Purāṇic stories explaining the origins of a horse-headed being. In contrast, there are many references to, and several stories about, a horse-headed figure in the Epic and Purāṇic texts. However, there is a lack of consistency in the treatment of his nature and role: the horse-headed figure is portrayed both as Viṣṇu's incarnation and, by way of contrast, as a demon whom Viṣṇu kills. An examination of these various texts about the horse-headed figure should not only contribute to a more adequate understanding of his nature and role, but it should also shed light on the relation and interaction among different streams of Indian sects and on Hinduism at large (based on the pan-Indian "mainstream" texts). Furthermore, an analysis of the Hayagrīva myths should reveal the process of mythic transformation, in turn, reflecting the theological developments within Hinduism, especially in respect of Vaiṣṇavism.

References to Hayagrīva are also contained in the pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic texts included in the second category. The Āgamas are particularly crucial to this study of Hayagrīva, because not only are the Āgamic traditions foundational for Hindu temple ritual and practice in South India,⁸ but the Pāñcarātra Āgamic tradition has specifically been an important influence in the development of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (in which the major Hindu traditions of Hayagrīva are found today). Moreover, there are significant references to, and depictions of, the deity in Śaiva and Śākta Āgamic literature, which

⁸ Vedic *yajña* has the status of being the foundation of Hindu ritual and may be revered for purposes of legitimacy, but temple rituals are founded on Āgamas/Purāṇas. Although the Āgamas are foundational to Hindu temple ritual in the South, the Purāṇas are the basis of temple worship in the North. The temple iconographical and ritual portions pertaining to Hayagrīva in the Purāṇas will also be discussed in Chapter IV.

show that similar motifs and paraphernalia exist among the various sectarian traditions. Furthermore, there are references to Hayagrīva in the Buddhist tradition. However, a survey of the Buddhist references and an analysis of the relationship between the Buddhist and Hindu textual traditions would be a study in itself; accordingly, I limit myself to depictions of Hayagrīva existing in Hinduism.

In the last category of Hindu texts, that is, in the regional sectarian literature of Tamil Nadu, especially Śrī Vaiṣṇava, specific references to Hayagrīva are also to be found. The earliest of these references are contained in the hymns of two of the Tamil poets known as the Ālvārs (Nammālvār ca. 700 C.E. and Tirumaṅkai Ālvār ca. late 700 C.E.). Furthermore, there is a reference in the *stotra* of an early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya (Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, 12th century C.E.). More importantly, the most celebrated text on Hayagrīva in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism was composed by Vedānta Deśika (ca. 1268-1371 C.E.), the eminent theologian, philosopher, logician, and poet who resided in the town of Kāñcīpuram. Among his many compositions is the *Hayagrīva Stotra*,⁹ a thirty-two stanza Sanskrit praise-poem (*stotra*) to Hayagrīva, which has been pivotal in the development of the contemporary worship of the deity as the Supreme God in the South Arcot district. This devotional poem depicts Hayagrīva as the Possessor of wisdom, venerates Him for having recovered and restored the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaitabha and, most of all, designates Him as the Lord of light and learning.

Consequent to Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*, the later literature of Tamil

⁹ See: Vedānta Deśika, *Stotras of Vedānta Deśika* (3rd. ed; Bombay: Sri Vedanta Desika Sampradaya Sabha, 1973); Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi (Madras: Ubhaya Vedanta Granthamala, 1971), pp. 89-99; *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva-Pāṭalam*, compiled by G.D. Sonani (Bombay: n.p., n.d.), pp. 9-16.

Nadu includes references to Hayagrīva in the *sthala-purāṇa*¹⁰ of the Devanātha Temple of Tiruvahīndrapuram as well as in hymns praising the deity that follow Śrī Vaiṣṇava ritual: the *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā* (*The Worship of the One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva*), the *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* (*In Praise of the Śrī Hayagrīva Root Mantra*), the *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (*Self-Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī*), and the *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana* (*Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva*). These four devotional works are viewed as unauthored, implying that their source is divine. Although it is difficult to date the texts, they more than likely were composed no earlier than 13th century C.E. and perhaps not until the 17th-18th century C.E., an inference based in part on the fact that they celebrate the iconic form of Hayagrīva as the Supreme God—a later development in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava history of the deity.

There exist also other sectarian texts on Hayagrīva used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas which reflect the employment of pan-Indian religio-literary genres and the fluidity between pan-Indian and local traditions. There are four short ritual texts that are specifically concerned with this incarnation, which have their roots in Āgamic tradition: the *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*, the *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha* (*Beginning of Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Shield*), the *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* (*Another Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Shield*), and the *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* (*Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Cage*). As frequently found in the Hindu tradition, these works, too, are viewed as unauthored, implying that they are of divine origin. Although it is difficult to

¹⁰ *Sthala-purāṇas* “ancient story of a [sacred] place” (in Tamil known as *talapurāṇam*) contain the local myths and legends of specific pilgrimage places or temples, often connecting them with pan-Indian Purāṇic myths.

date the texts, they are certainly post-Epic. Most significantly, although these ritual hymns are in pan-Indian sectarian genres (such as the Upaniṣad), they were most likely composed after Vedānta Deśika and the establishment of Hayagrīva as the Supreme God; that is, these Āgamic compositions most likely are posterior to the regional establishment of the Swāmi Hayagrīva temple. There are two groups of practitioners involved with religious matters of a Tamilian Vaiṣṇava temple by the 12th century C.E.: (1) the *ācārya* (preceptor) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta), including Rāmānuja and Vedānta Deśika, and (2) the *arcaka* (temple priests) trained according to the Āgamic tradition. Although these two groups have different origins, their work is complementary; that is, the *ācārya* is responsible for the transmission of the tenets of the tradition, whereas the *arcaka* is responsible for the performance of temple rituals. The complementarity of the *ācārya* and *arcaka* is evident in the regional development of Hayagrīva worship in that there are late Āgamic hymns composed about Hayagrīva as Supreme, which are also used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas (even though the hymns are not specifically Śrī Vaiṣṇava).

OVERVIEW OF THE SECONDARY LITERATURE ON HAYAGRĪVA

There has been very little scholarly analysis of the Hayagrīva deity. For the most part, the scholarship that does exist is descriptive,¹¹ and is mostly limited to the Epic-Purāṇic myth of Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas or relates to his iconographical features as described in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. Sridhara Babu's study, *Hayagrīva, The*

¹¹ See: Kalpana Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu (In Northern India, upto the Medieval Period)* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1973), pp. 29, 46-47; Shakti M. Gupta, *Vishnu and His Incarnations* (Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1974), pp. 18, 58-59; Bhagwant Sahai, *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1975), pp. 241-242; Krishna Hosakote Sastri, *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses* (Delhi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1974), p. 55.

Horse-headed Deity in Indian Culture,¹² is a useful sourcebook of various references to Hayagrīva in Indian literature. However, the study is lacking in conceptualization and analysis of the material presented.

There are three analytical discussions available on Hayagrīva in the English language. The first of these is *Hayagrīva: The Mantrayānic Aspect of Horse Cult in China and Japan*,¹³ written by R.H. van Gulik. Apart from a very brief preliminary sketch of the Hayagrīva deity in India, van Gulik's study consists primarily of a textual survey of the Buddhist references to Hayagrīva in Tibet, China and Japan in the light of the status of horse-cults prior to the introduction of Buddhism in each of these countries. Van Gulik found that in the regions in which a dominant horse-cult existed before the introduction of Mantrayāna Buddhism¹⁴ (Tibet, Japan), the local traditions appropriated and syncretized Hayagrīva with local deities with the result that Hayagrīva became prominent. However, in China, where an indigenous horse-cult had receded in importance, Hayagrīva was a figure with very little status or place within the tradition.¹⁵

In the second work pertinent to my study, *Women Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*,¹⁶ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty¹⁷ looks at Hayagrīva in the larger context

¹² Sridhara Babu, *Hayagrīva, The Horse-headed Deity in Indian Culture* (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1990).

¹³ R.H. van Gulik, *Hayagrīva: The Mantrayānic Aspect of Horse Cult in China and Japan* (Leiden: 1935 *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* Bd 33 [Supplement]).

¹⁴ Mantrayāna Buddhism is Tantric Buddhism, also known as Vajrayāna Buddhism.

¹⁵ van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 95-95.

¹⁶ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Although the name Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty is the name which appears on many of her books, she is presently known as Wendy Doniger.

of the reversal of roles seen in some figures of Hindu mythology. She maintains that a common pattern in Hinduism is that a myth initially depicts a figure as benevolent, then as malevolent, and finally effects a "synthesis" of the two. According to O'Flaherty's interpretation, Hayagrīva exemplifies this pattern. One myth discussed by her describes Viṣṇu taking the form of a horse-headed man in order to save the Vedas, whereas in another myth a horse-headed man steals the Vedas. Finally, according to O'Flaherty, there is a "synthesis" of both benevolent and malevolent myths of Hayagrīva; that is, a horse-headed demon steals the Vedas, but then Viṣṇu becomes a horse-headed deity in order to kill the horse-headed demon.

The third analysis of Hayagrīva is contained in the article "The Demon and the Deity: Conflict Syndrome in the Hayagrīva Legend"¹⁸ by Suvira Jaiswal. She discusses the textual inconsistencies in the depictions of the Hayagrīva myth, and argues for the necessity of taking an anthropological and historical approach. Her general thesis is that one cannot simply assume direct textual links in the development of the Hayagrīva myth (such as associating Vedic antecedents of a horse-headed being with the later Purāṇic Hayagrīva myth), as some scholars have done (see O'Flaherty above).¹⁹ After observing the worship of Hayagrīva in the tribal hills of Assam, more specifically on Maṇikūṭa Hill, Jaiswal concludes that the figure found today in pan-Indian Hinduism originated in the beliefs and traditions of the indigenous tribes in Assam, and was then incorporated

¹⁸ Suvira Jaiswal, "The Demon And The Deity: Conflict Syndrome In The Hayagrīva Legend," in *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, ed. Ratan Parimoo (New Delhi: Books & Books Publishers, 1987), pp. 40-57.

¹⁹ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, pp. 218-219. Paul B. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 95-97.

into Mantrayāna Buddhism (Buddhist texts ca. 7th-8th century C.E. in which mantras, *mudrās* and maṇḍalas are central).

According to Jaiswal, Hayagrīva was worshipped on Maṇikūṭa Hill as the demonic figure of fever and was only gradually transformed and incorporated into the pan-Indian Hindu texts (as both demon and deity) as well as into the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Her historical reconstruction of Hayagrīva is questionable, however, as she bases her argument on late texts (there are ambivalent depictions of the deity in Hindu texts that are much earlier than the Buddhist evidence she cites).

Although my study builds on the contributions of these three analytical works in understanding the Hindu Hayagrīva deity, it goes well beyond them. Firstly, I survey and analyse the complex development of the deity from the perspectives of mythology, iconography, ritual and theology. The study includes also an examination of methodological problems in tracing the development of a deity among the various religious streams in Hinduism.

Secondly, I offer an understanding of the development of Hayagrīva at the regional level in Tamil Nadu, wherein the relatively minor pan-Indian god is identified as the Supreme God. In providing a perspective on the development of a local tradition's depiction and worship of Hayagrīva against the background of the larger pan-Indian history of the deity, I offer an extensive analysis of the references to Hayagrīva in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava sect, with specific attention to Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* in the light of several religious streams that contribute to its depiction of the god. No previous analysis exists of the understanding of Hayagrīva within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.

The limitations of the existing scholarship create the scope for an original

contribution to knowledge in the present study on the dynamic development of Hayagrīva. Because this study is concerned with the multi-faceted transformation and development of a Hindu deity, it is important to look first at the methodological issues that arise from a consideration of the work of previous scholars on the general topic of tracing historical developments in Indian religious texts.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL TRACING

There are two main reasons for the manifest complexity of, and thus the challenge in tracing, the historical development of an Indian deity: (1) India's long standing oral tradition, and (2) the various traditions in India which, however diverse, nonetheless selectively share similar beliefs, motifs and symbols.

General Problems with Indian Textual Studies

The influence of India's long standing oral tradition on written texts and on the reworking of written texts have made Indian textual research on the whole a formidable task. For the most part, the difficulty lies in identifying and grappling with the enormous corpus of extant literature that arises out of, and is based on, a predominantly oral tradition covering the great diversity of the subcontinent. The Vedas are fixed revelation transmitted orally; however, the Epics, Purāṇas and Āgamas are fluid texts, of which there are different recensions found throughout the Indian subcontinent. This aspect of the existence of different recensions, in effect, poses an enormous challenge in tracing the authenticity of, and in establishing an accurate date for, post-Vedic texts.

Although there is a variety of approaches to Hindu textual studies, the field is, in effect, dominated by the conflict between two opposing schools of thought—the textual-

critical and the structural. These two schools represent two radically different ways of dealing with a corpus of literature that contains many inconsistencies and contradictions. The textual-critical approach predominantly attempts to reconstruct the original version of a text (*Ur-text*) and then to discern its variants. This approach has been used in the study of the Epics and single Purāṇas in which “authentic” portions of the text are distinguished from later additions; as such, it is used as a means to determine the complex chronology of the various Purāṇas.²⁰

Whereas the textual-critical approach tries to discern “authentic” portions of individual texts and the relative chronology of the Epic and Purāṇic texts, the structural approach seeks to delineate the underlying structure of any given myth by a thorough study of its variants. By decoding mythemes—that is, breaking down the myths to their most basic units, and then indexing the basic units of the myth’s variants—scholars attempt to reconstruct the “basic mythic structure”. The underlying meaning of any given myth is often interpreted as an expression of the tension between oppositions in human existence (such as life and death), which then is resolved through a reconciliation.²¹

Given the enormity of the corpus of Hindu mythic literature, the different recensions of individual texts or myths, and the difficulty in dating the various texts, the structural approach attempts to delineate the basic myth, its variants and its underlying structure, which constitute the topic of the next section.

²⁰ The approach has been used primarily by European scholars, including Horace Wilson, Frederick Eden Pargiter, and Willibald Kirfel. See Ludu Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature, The Purāṇas*, Vol II, Fasc3 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), pp. 41-45.

²¹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning, Five Talks for Radio* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1978).

Oral Tradition and the Many Recensions

Early scholars, such as Horace Wilson, believed that there was an original “pure” Purāṇa. They subscribed to the “expansion” hypothesis, that is, from this original Purāṇic text a group of Purāṇas evolved. The evolved Purāṇas were viewed as late and “corrupt” versions of the “original” one (eventually lost), based on their strong sectarian biases.²² The extensive amount of sectarian material contained in the Purāṇas often led early modern Indian scholars (e.g., Ram Mohan Roy) and European scholars (e.g., Horace Wilson) to determine their “authenticity” in relation to an assumed original text before it was corrupted by later sectarian material.

By way of contrast, Ludo Rocher believes that there is no reason to presume that the sectarian portions of the Purāṇic texts are of late origin and, therefore, less authentic. According to him, the Purāṇas may well have been originally compiled as sectarian compositions.²³ And even if there were earlier “original” texts, there is no reason to suppose that they are any more authentic than the interpolated later ones. Though textual criticism as a means to reconstructing the “original” version of Purāṇic texts/myths has recently been under question, given the fluid nature of Hindu literature (from oral tradition to written texts, and then back to oral tradition), Western scholars often prefer the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*. However, textual criticism of the Epics is also under re-evaluation, for some scholars think that Epic and Purāṇic literatures are simply oral traditions written down.²⁴

²² Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 8-18.

²³ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 18-20.

²⁴ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 49-53.

The recent collection of nine articles in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*,²⁵ edited by Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty), is concerned with the problems of meaning and interpretation of the enormous corpus of Epic and Purāṇic literature. With their different orientations, the volume's authors attempt to discern various mythic and literary patterns among the Purāṇas by looking at the "intertextual" relations among their many layers—Purāṇas from the classical Sanskrit, regional, and sectarian traditions. Pertinent to the present study, the second section,²⁶ "From South to North and Back Again", contains essays²⁷ that shed light on the fluid relationship between the classical and regional Sanskrit Purāṇas. Because Epic and Purāṇic stories have been told and retold by different groups on the Indian sub-continent at different times, this has inevitably resulted in many different recensions.

In the case of the Āgamic texts, although they were originally transmitted orally, their inconsistencies lie in the fact that they were most likely detailed descriptions/prescriptions for specific temples, which then became written down in various texts, along with a sectarian theological worldview. Consequently, not only are

²⁵ Wendy Doniger (ed.), *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

²⁶ The first part, "From Vedic and Epic to Purāṇa and Upapurāṇa", illuminates the fluidity of the oral tradition and the relation among the Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic texts. The last part, "From Hindu to Jaina and Back Again", includes two articles that discuss the place of the Purāṇas in Jainism.

²⁷ Velcheru Narayana Rao's "Purāṇa as Brahminic Ideology" examines the *pañcalakṣaṇa* (the five distinguishing marks of the Purāṇas) as a brahminical ideological framework found in the Sanskrit Purāṇic tradition, by investigating the Purāṇizing of the Telugu folk tradition. In the article "On Folk Mythologies and Folk Purāṇas", A.K. Ramanujan compares folk myths from Karnataka and Sanskrit Purāṇic mythology. David Schulman's "Remaking a Purāṇa: The Rescue of Gajendra in Potana's Telugu *Mahābhāgavatamu*" deals with the similarities and differences in depictions of two variants of the same myth in the Sanskrit and Telugu traditions. Friedhelm Hardy's article "Information and Transformation—Two Faces of the Purāṇas" examines the interaction between the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions. His analysis is concerned with the interactions among, and the transformations of, pan-Indian Sanskrit and regional Tamil Purāṇas.

there different recensions, but inconsistencies are found even within a single text. The interpolations make it difficult to trace the origins of a specific text. Certain Pāñcarātra Āgamic texts that are important for Śrī Vaiṣṇavism appear to have been composed in the South (e.g., *Īśvara Saṃhitā*, according to Daniel Smith).²⁸ This complicates discernment of the origins of a text, for southern elements may be contained in one Āgamic text but, on the other hand, not in other recensions of it; that is, later versions of certain Āgamic texts may have southern material integrated in them. Because there are sometimes several recensions of a single text, their dating is difficult.

The Problem of Dating

As aforementioned, in the attempt to distinguish "authentic" portions from later editions, textual criticism has been the basic methodology used to date the Purāṇas. However, Rocher believes that textual criticism's goal of dating and tracing the original portions of the Purāṇas is simply futile. Furthermore, he rejects textual criticism as a viable means for the reconstruction of the complex chronology of the various Purāṇas. He questions the supposition that, by comparing the different versions of a text, one will be able to arrange them in a chronological order to establish mythological development.²⁹

The dating of the Epics, Purāṇas, and Āgamas has proven to be a very difficult challenge. Although I am in basic agreement with Rocher's criticism of the textual-critical method for the reconstruction of a precise chronology of the Purāṇas, I do think

²⁸ Daniel Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama, An Annotated Text to Selected Topics*, 2 Vols. (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. 168) (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1975, 1980), pp. 66-67.

²⁹ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 97-98.

that a general, if tentative, notion of the chronology of the Indian texts facilitates any inter-textual investigation, especially one that attempts a diachronic perspective. This does not mean that there must be a precise chronology of the Purāṇas and Āgamas. The development of a single line of history in Hinduism (India) can rarely be more than speculative. However, a general chronology for the Epics, Purāṇas and Āgamas allows one to better view each text within its own general, religio-historical context.

A General Chronology for the Hindu Texts

One can organize Hindu texts as belonging to several general historical periods:³⁰

I. Vedic period (1500-500 B.C.E.)³¹

- a. **early** (1500-900 B.C.E.): *R̥k Veda*
- b. **later** (900-500 B.C.E.): *Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads*

II. Classical period (500 B.C.E.-500 C.E.)

- a. **Epics:** *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṁśa*
- b. **Purāṇas:**³² *Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Brāhmaṇḍa Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, Brahma Purāṇa*
- c. **Āgamas:**³³ *Sārvata Saṁhitā, Śrīpaṇṣkara Saṁhitā*

³⁰ Even within the specific periods, I have placed the texts in successive chronological order.

³¹ Currently, there is a major debate regarding the dating of the Vedas and *Mahābhārata*, including the defence of the traditional belief that the texts were much earlier than some scholars now hold. See Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 37-38, 416.

If the dates for the Vedas and *Mahābhārata* are earlier than the accepted cited dates, the chronology would shift to earlier time periods.

³² The chronological periods for the Purāṇas are based on a synthesis of Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, pp. 418-421; Wendy O'Flaherty, *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 13-14; and especially Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 134-151, 154-160, 167-172, 175-183, 196-200, 202-203, 228-237, 245-252.

³³ The chronological periods for the Āgamas are based on Mitsunori Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology, with a Translation and Critical Notes from Chapters on Theology in the Ahirbudhnyā Saṁhitā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), pp. 34-35.

III. Early Medieval period (500-800 C.E.)

- b. **Purāṇas:** *Agni Purāṇa, Garuḍa Purāṇa*
- c. **Āgamas:** *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā, Viṣṇvakṣena Saṃhitā, Pādma Saṃhitā, Sanātkumāra Saṃhitā, Śeṣa Saṃhitā, Nārādīya Saṃhitā, Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā, Lakṣmī Tantra*
- d. **Ālvārs:**³⁴ Nammālvār (early 700 C.E.), Tirumaṅkai Ālvār (late 700 C.E.)

IV. Middle Medieval period (800-1000 C.E.)

- b. **Purāṇas:** *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,³⁵ *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa, Nārada Purāṇa*
- c. **Āgamas:** *Īśvara Saṃhitā, Parāśara Saṃhitā*

V. Late Medieval period (1000-1500 C.E.)

- b. **Purāṇas:** *Skanda Purāṇa, Kālikā Purāṇa*
- c. **Āgamas:** *Viśvāmitra Saṃhitā*
- e. **Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas:**³⁶ Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (1122-1174 C.E.), Vedānta Deśika (1269-1370 C.E.)

Specific Problems in the Historical Study of Indian Deities

Besides the general problems relating to Indian textual studies, such as the dating of texts, there are also specific methodological problems in tracing the historical development of an Indian deity. Some of these have been made evident in previous studies and are pertinent to the tracing of the development of Hayagrīva. Before proceeding to these specific problems, it is necessary to survey the important studies on

³⁴ The dating of the Ālvārs who mention Hayagrīva is based on Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 267-270.

³⁵ Wendy O'Flaherty, *Śiva*, p. 14.

Although O'Flaherty has placed the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the middle period, it either belongs to the "late" middle period or the "early" late period.

Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 488.

³⁶ The dating of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava ācāryas is based on Patricia Y. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute: Maṇavālamāmuṇi and Vedānta Deśika* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1988), p. 272.

several other deities.

Review of Previous Studies

In *The Many Faces of Murukan, The History and Meaning of a South Indian God*,³⁷ Fred Clothey surveys Sanskrit and Tamil literature in order to identify the interchange of religious elements between the two traditions and their effect on the development of the god Murukan. He uses an historical and phenomenological approach in the study of the symbols, images, motifs, and rituals connected with Murukan, and demonstrates how the different images of Murukan are influenced by the milieu in which they exist. Using broad historical periods in his analysis of the development of Murukan, Clothey shows that the deity does not reflect a single culture, but rather a variety of “ecological situations” and the changes and adaptations resulting from the decline of old elements and the rise of new ones.³⁸

Tracing the development of any Hindu deity is a complex process. However, when the god is a major one whose origins are agreed upon—as in the case of the Southern god Murukan—the process is somewhat simpler than when one is dealing with the history of a relatively minor pan-Indian god whose origins are unknown. Such is the case with Hayagrīva who, recognized as a relatively minor deity in the pan-Indian context, is simultaneously recognized as Supreme God in the South during the late medieval period (ca. 13th C.E. century onwards). Furthermore, although Clothey is concerned with the historical development of Murukan from the perspective of

³⁷ Fred W. Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan, The History and Meaning of a South Indian God* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978).

³⁸ Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, pp. 8-9.

mythology, iconography, ritual, and theology, he does not analyse the deity's depictions synchronically in relation to other streams, which is crucial in the tracing of the religious history of Hayagrīva.

Similar to Clothey's study is Alice Getty's *Gaṇeśa: A Monograph on the Elephant-Faced God*,³⁹ which is a foundational work on Gaṇeśa, one of the more frequently studied of the Hindu deities. In her analysis, Getty traces the change and transformation of Gaṇeśa in India and throughout East and Southeast Asia in the light of iconography (texts, icons, sculptures and paintings) and Tantrism (Brahminical⁴⁰ and Buddhist). Using an historical and phenomenological approach, she surveys Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Japanese literature in order to demonstrate the exchange of religious elements between the Hindu and Buddhist depictions of Gaṇeśa throughout Asia.

Although Clothey and Getty do not consider the variants of the Murugaṇ and Gaṇeśa myths in an analytical manner, Paul Courtright does so in respect of Gaṇeśa myths in *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*.⁴¹ Based on a combination of the structural approach and psychoanalytical interpretation, Courtright's study of the various mythic themes⁴² on Gaṇeśa is informative in that it provides an understanding of

³⁹ Alice Getty, *Gaṇeśa: A Monograph on the Elephant-Faced God* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971).

⁴⁰ Getty refers to "Brahminical" and "Buddhist Tantrism"; perhaps it would be clearer to call "Brahminical Tantrism" simply Hindu Tantrism. Although there are similarities between Vedic and Tantric beliefs and practices, Hindu Tantrism is a stream in its own right, although not necessarily Brahminical. See Chapter IV for a discussion on Tantrism.

⁴¹ Paul B. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴² Courtright outlines five levels of the Gaṇeśa myths (the first four are taken from O'Flaherty): (1) narrative—the various stories; (2) metaphorical—the meaning implied in the mythic events, i.e., the beheading of Gaṇeśa as initiation into Śiva's circle; (3) metaphysical—the goal of liberation from the cycle of rebirth; (4) socio-psychological—the various relations Gaṇeśa has with his family; and (5) etiological—explanation of how certain phenomena came into being, i.e., Gaṇeśa's elephant head. The last one is an addition by Courtright.

the many mythic variants and contradictions. It is limited, however, in that it views the myths in a vacuum. Courtright's objective in the use of the structural approach is not the tracing of the historical development of Gaṇeśa. Consequently, he is free to remove the variant Gaṇeśa myths from their texts and contexts, and thus he overlooks the historical and theological context of the myths. However, in tracing the development of Hayagrīva and its culmination in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *Hayagrīva Stotra*, it will become obvious that one cannot afford to ignore the historical and theological context of the Hayagrīva myths.

In *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*,⁴³ a compilation of articles about Gaṇeśa, Robert L. Brown demonstrates in his introduction (substantiated by the various articles) how Gaṇeśa has evolved and been transformed in East and Southeast Asia in the absence of the Gaṇeśa Purāṇic myths, including the most popular and recurrent one relating to the origins of Gaṇeśa's elephant head. Consequently, Brown asserts that there are, in fact, two distinct streams in the depiction of Gaṇeśa: (1) the Indian Purāṇic stream, which emphasizes the beheading of Gaṇeśa and restoration with an elephant's head, and (2) the iconographical association with Śiva, which interchanges with *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara (as in Tantra) in East and Southeast Asia. Brown's analysis reveals, moreover, how elements outside the mainstream Sanskrit tradition have had a prominent role in the development of Hindu/Buddhist belief and ritual, especially in other parts of Asia. This notion of the influential role of iconography is important in tracing the development of Hayagrīva. Here, one needs particularly to investigate the Āgamic tradition, because its depictions of Hayagrīva differ somewhat from those of the Epic and

⁴³ Robert L. Brown, *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Purāṇic streams, but also because Pāñcarātra has been influential in the development of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

Finally, Clifford Hospital in *The Righteous Demon: A Study of Bali*⁴⁴ traces the development of the demon Bali. In a textual survey based on his “modified” structural approach to the variant Bali myths, Hospital demonstrates how the myths about Bali as demon are transformed to the point where Bali becomes revered as the perfect devotee. He critiques O’Flaherty for speaking in vague terms, making grand generalizations concerning the “Hindu” tradition, and for ignoring contexts and time periods.⁴⁵

According to Hospital, it is important to view each myth in terms of its modifications, rather than be limited to a single interpretation based on all the variant myths. Consequently, his “modified structural approach” makes a distinction between phase (time) and milieu (place).⁴⁶ Regarding the myths about Bali, he detects five phases in the development of three different myths.

In what Hospital calls Myth-A (phase one)—the mythic strand contained in the Epics and early Purāṇas—Bali is portrayed as a demonic being who threatens *dharma* but is overcome by Viṣṇu’s *avatāra* Vāmana. In Myth-B (phase two) contained in the middle Purāṇic period, belonging to a new milieu, Bali is portrayed positively as prosperous, devotional, and *dharmic*. In the late Purāṇic period (phase three), Hospital discovers an important modification of Myth-B in which Bali is portrayed as Viṣṇu’s devotee

⁴⁴ Clifford Hospital, *The Righteous Demon: A Study of Bali* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, pp. 18-19.

(*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). Phase four, in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, contains five versions of the myth. Finally, Myth-C (phase five) is contained in the three versions of the Bali myth from modern Kerala, in which Bali is connected with Kerala's Onam festival, which is the development of the popular Malayalam myth. In this Malayalam *Mahābalicaritam*, we find a brief version of Myth-A set within a much longer story. Hospital's approach for studying the myths of a specific deity/demon is useful for the study of the Hayagrīva myth. However, I believe it is necessary to view the variant Hayagrīva myths in the context of the theological worldviews of their particular texts, which Hospital does not do.

In the light of these different studies, we can turn now to the problems pertaining to the tracing of the historical development of an Indian deity. Two specific problems relate to: (1) the tracing of the origins/antecedents of the deity, and (2) the complexity of the process of development resulting from interaction among a variety of traditions.

Origin of Deity/Antecedents to the Deity

Scholars have tended to trace the antecedents of pan-Indian deities to the Vedas. Some scholars of Hindu mythology (Biardeau, O'Flaherty) have limited their studies to the Vedic, Epic, Purāṇic literatures, disregarding the possibility that origins may be traced to non-Sanskritic traditions. Although Vedic antecedents may be discerned, one cannot assume that the Vedas are necessarily the sole or earliest antecedent to religious developments simply because they are the earliest religious texts in the pan-Indian "mainstream" Sanskrit literary tradition. It is plausible that many elements from outside the pan-Indian mainstream have been influential in the development of Hinduism, such as the religious practices and beliefs via the Āgamic stream, only later written down and

“Vedicized” in the form of the Āgamas (ca. 500 C.E.).⁴⁷ This sharply raises the issue of origins, especially in view of the complexity of India evident in the multiple racial/ethnic groups and in the several families of languages and their regional variations.

Many scholars who have studied Indian deities have limited themselves to a textual study of the pan-Indian “mainstream” literature; a few have gone outside the texts to make other claims as to the origin of, or contribution to, the development of deities. For example, regarding Gaṇeśa, Alice Getty argues that one cannot know whether Gaṇeśa is an original deity or a derivative.⁴⁸ Courtright notes that tracing the origin of Gaṇeśa can be nothing more than speculative, and offers his hypothesis that Gaṇeśa emerged during the textual transition from sacrificial ritual to temple worship.⁴⁹ Moreover, Jaiswal claims that Hayagrīva originated as a tribal deity in Assam.

In the case of Hayagrīva, even if possible antecedents can be theoretically traced back to Vedic literature, such as his association with the Vedic sacrifice and the beheading of Viṣṇu (see Chapter II), this may still have been simply a means of incorporating local deities into the mainstream tradition. The precise relationship between the pan-Indian Sanskrit and regional traditions is often difficult to discern, and it raises important questions for exploration regarding the Hindu tradition at large. For example, what is the influence of other religious streams on the development of beliefs

⁴⁷ According to Venkatachari, many Āgamic practices originated in the indigenous (Dravidian) tradition. See K.K.A. Venkatachari, “The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Āgamas”, in *National Seminar on the Contributions of the Tamils to Indian Culture* (forthcoming; Madras: International Institute of Tamil Studies). For an elaboration of his study, see “Hayagrīva’s Possible Non-Vedic Origin(s)” in Chapter II.

⁴⁸ Getty, *Gaṇeśa*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 11-12. I find the basis for this argument unconvincing. There are other factors also involved in the development of a myth. See the next two sections below.

and practices in the “mainstream” pan-Indian texts? What are the various elements from local traditions that have been incorporated into the “mainstream” pan-Indian literature?

These questions, and others that follow in this discussion on methodological problems, need to be prefaced by a warning. No single study, especially one that is focused on the development of a single deity, can aim to answer all of them or definitively any of them. But these are nonetheless important questions, and the hope would be that several studies in combination can move forward towards finding tentative answers.

Limitations of the Focus on Mainstream Sanskrit Tradition

Work on the historical development of deities for the most part has centred on the pan-Indian “mainstream” texts (Vedas, Epics, Purāṇas). However, it is quite conceivable that other influences have also played a role in the development of deities. It seems important in investigating the Hayagrīva figure to analytically examine religious streams in India other than the traditional Epic and Purāṇic texts. In the case of Hayagrīva, particularly important are the Āgamic texts which are prescriptive in respect of the practical and ritual aspects of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta traditions (esoteric and/or temple based). The Āgamic tradition—a part of the Sanskrit religious literary tradition—is a useful source in conjunction with the Purāṇic myths, as it can shed light on the dynamic relations between the mythic and ritual traditions.

No doubt, the three-fold division of texts proposed above, that is, (1) pan-Indian “mainstream”, (2) pan-Indian sectarian, and (3) regional sectarian, is a reasonably accurate conceptualization of the different streams of Hindu literature. However, the fluidity of the interaction and mutual influence among the various streams can make it

difficult to discern the precise relationship among the various Hindu traditions. Such interaction raises important questions regarding the Hindu tradition at large: What is the interaction between mainstream and pan-Indian sectarian traditions? More specifically, there are other important questions that I believe emerge in this complex study of the development of a deity in the light of mythology, iconography and ritual in which there is an overlap of similar material in the different genres of literature: What is the relation between the "encyclopedic" Purāṇas,⁵⁰ which contain portions of Āgamic material, and the Āgamic corpus itself? Does Hindu iconographical material originate from a common source?

Furthermore, a study of the various sectarian Tantric (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta⁵¹) traditions may also illuminate the overall development of deities. A consideration of the influence of inter-sectarian dynamics on the transformation of any given deity may shed light on the interrelations between, or the convergence among, the many traditions. Such a perspective may raise important questions for exploration regarding the Hindu tradition at large. For example: Is the diversity of traditions, yet sharing common religious beliefs, symbols and motifs, the result of mutual borrowing and/or the consequence of traditions having shared common origins, which then consequently became transformed?

⁵⁰ For information on "encyclopedic" Purāṇas, see "Purāṇic References" in Chapter III.

⁵¹ As aforementioned, there are also many references to Hayagrīva in the Buddhist tradition. A survey of the Buddhist references and an analysis of the relationship between the Buddhist and Hindu textual traditions would go beyond the scope of this study and, in fact, be a study in itself. Therefore, I do not incorporate the Buddhist tradition in my analysis. However, a further analysis on the relationship between the Hindu and Buddhist depictions of Hayagrīva would be very illuminating.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS: DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC APPROACHES

Given the shortcomings of the textual-critical and structural approaches in the light of the diversity of traditions in India and the complexity of the historical process pertaining to their development, it is evident that a multidimensional approach is required for a more adequate study of myth and, by extension, the development of a deity. Such an approach would involve an analysis along two key dimensions: (1) a *diachronic* dimension, where one examines the development and transformation of a myth or deity through the broadly defined religio-historical periods; and (2) a *synchronic* dimension, where at a given cross-section of time one analyses the relations among the various versions of a myth or deity existing among several religious sects (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta). These two dimensions would demand attention to the following aspects: (1) the mythology about the deity (Epics and Purāṇas), (2) the iconographical and mantraic references to the deity (Āgamas), and (3) the ritual and devotional hymns to the deity (pan-Indian sectarian and regional texts). In other words, the analysis of a myth and deity requires examining the historical development of theological shifts (*diachronic*) and of the relations among various religious sects within one or more of the time periods (*synchronic*) corresponding to the three-fold division of Indian texts: (1) pan-Indian “mainstream”, (2) pan-Indian sectarian, and (3) regional sectarian.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Although this study looks specifically at the changing role of the Hayagrīva deity, it aims at the same time to delineate the larger process of theological changes in Hindu

religion. Towards that end, I provide, firstly, an overview and analysis of the major references to, and texts about, Hayagrīva in pan-Indian Hindu literature. The analysis both of the antecedents to, and the development of, the Hayagrīva myth as well as of the iconography and ritual function of the horse-headed god should enlighten us on the multi-faceted transformation of the deity, especially as it occurs in Vaiṣṇavism. This analysis clearly demonstrates that one can only speak of the various “histories” of Hayagrīva. There is no single history of the god.

Secondly, I attempt to reconstruct the *religious history* of the deity Hayagrīva as he appears in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism itself draws from various streams (classical Epic and Purāṇic mythic tradition, Ālvārs, Pāñcarātra Āgamas). All are seen to have contributed to the regional evolution of Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotion to Hayagrīva. Here, it is necessary to emphasize that this part of the investigation is not merely an historical overview of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Rather, it is an analytical study of the various religious streams that have contributed to the important depiction of Hayagrīva in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* in a regional context.

Thus, the chief aims of this study are: (1) to offer an analysis of the various references to Hayagrīva in the *pan-Indian* “mainstream” texts and their implications for the study of Hindu myth, (2) to come to an understanding of the development of the deity in the *regional tradition of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism*, using Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* as a focal point and, importantly, (3) to provide an overall evaluation of the general place of Hayagrīva in the contemporary Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Note on Translation

Original translations of the primary compositions in praise of Hayagrīva used by

the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas have been provided by me. Included are: Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* (see Appendix I) and three Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional hymns that pertain to Śrī Vaiṣṇava initiation and daily rituals⁵² (see Appendix II). Beyond these texts, this study also includes my translations of the five short sectarian ritual compositions used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas which have their roots in the Āgamic tradition⁵³ (see Appendix III). I quote from these translations extensively in the analytical sections of this study.

I provide original translations of the nine primary compositions on Hayagrīva that have not so far been translated from Sanskrit to the English language. The non-technical language of the genre of *stotra* and other ritual/devotional hymns can be problematic. In order to avoid awkward constructions, in some places I have provided a loose translation, not always following the literal pattern of the Sanskrit grammar. I have been particularly concerned with capturing the meaning of the verses in English. Moreover, I have been attentive to the specific phraseology and imagery of the Āgamic and Śrī Vaiṣṇava traditions. I have broken up the verses into small units in order to facilitate readability.

In addition to the nine primary compositions, I have also translated the pan-Indian references to Hayagrīva or portions of passages on Hayagrīva in texts that either have not been translated or have been poorly translated from Sanskrit into English. These references are taken from: (1) Epics and Purāṇas: *Mahābhārata* (critical edition), *Harivaṃśa*, *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, *Kālikā*

⁵² Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā, *Attha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* (In Praise of the Sri Hayagrīva Root Mantra), *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (Self-Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī), and *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana* (Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva).

⁵³ Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad, *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha* (Beginning of Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Shield), *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* (Another Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Shield), and the *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* (Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Cage).

Purāṇa, and (2) Āgamas: *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā*, *Īśvara Saṁhitā*, *Pādma Saṁhitā*, *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā*, *Sātvata Saṁhitā*, *Śeṣa Saṁhitā*, *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*, *Śāradātilaka Tantra*, *Yoginī Tantra*, *Meru Tantra*. Likewise, I have provided original translations of the references to Hayagrīva in regional sectarian works, including the hymns of the Ālvārs (*Periya Tirumoli* and *Tiruvāymoḷi*), and Vedānta Deśika's philosophical treatise *Śata Dūṣaṇī*.

Summary of Chapters

The study consists of nine chapters, divided into four parts. Part A consists of the present chapter, Chapter I, in which I have reviewed the relevant scholarly literature and discussed the methodological issues in tracing the development of a deity, presented the broad approach necessary in the study of such development, set out the aims of the study, and listed the works for which I have provided original translations.

Part B (Chapters II, III and IV) is concerned with Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian tradition. In Chapter II, I look at the origins of Hayagrīva, including an examination of the Vedic (*śruti*) antecedents of the Hayagrīva figure in order to answer questions such as: What is the nature of development of the Hayagrīva figure with respect to the beheading motif? What is the argument put forth regarding the origin of Hayagrīva as non-Vedic? Chapter III summarizes the references to Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian Epic and Purāṇic (*smṛti*) texts in order to answer the following questions: What is the nature of the development of the Hayagrīva myth with respect to the god-demon conflict, and the loss and recovery of the Vedas? What might be the reason for the different portrayals of Hayagrīva in the various Purāṇas? Can Purāṇic myths be studied meaningfully without regard to text or context? Why or why not? Chapter IV is concerned with the Āgamic

references to Hayagrīva and includes an analysis of the importance and significance of the iconographical descriptions of Hayagrīva. I attempt to answer such questions as: From the viewpoint of theology and temple architecture, what is the status of Hayagrīva? Are the Āgamic depictions of the deity consistent? What important features and emblems form a part of the iconographical portrayals of Hayagrīva? How do the Āgamic and “classical” Purāṇic iconographical references compare? To what extent are they continuous with other iconographical prescriptions of Viṣṇu and other Indian deities or depictions of Hayagrīva in other sectarian traditions?

The focus of Part C of this study is on Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu. It derives its justification, firstly, from the fact that Hayagrīva, who is a minor deity at the pan-Indian level, is worshipped as the Supreme God in this region. Secondly, the worship of Hayagrīva is part of a lived tradition there even today. Part C is comprised of Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII. In Part C as a whole, I attempt to reconstruct the Śrī Vaiṣṇava history of this deity, using Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* (see Appendix I) as the focus (based on the fact that it has been pivotal in the development of the worship of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu). Chapter V provides an overview of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and an analysis of the references to Hayagrīva contained in the Tamil literature prior to Vedānta Deśika, and is concerned with the following questions: Was Hayagrīva a prominent figure in the Tamil land prior to Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*? How do the Ālvār depictions of Hayagrīva compare with the mainstream Epic/Purāṇic ones? What is the status of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu prior to Vedānta Deśika?

Chapter VI contains an overview of the life and religious thought of Vedānta Deśika, and a thorough analysis of Vedānta Deśika’s depiction of Hayagrīva in his *stotra*,

especially with regards to the theological status and role of the deity. This includes a discussion of the following: What is the theological status of the deity? Which form(s) of god is Vedānta Deśika addressing? Why was Vedānta Deśika attracted to this particular *avatāra*? What is the historical and theological significance of Vedānta Deśika's portrayal of Hayagrīva in his *stotra*? Furthermore, the chapter consists of an analysis of the development of Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning. The pan-Indian *śruti* and *smṛti* texts, the pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic texts, and the four short sectarian ritual texts which follow the Āgamic tradition are all related back to Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva. As a result of my analysis, I provide a salient perspective—the *reverse-prismatic perspective*—for the conceptualization of the contribution of the various religious streams to the development of Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva: the Epic and Purāṇic mythic tradition, Pāñcarātra theological tenets, iconographical depictions and ritual practice, as well as the emotionalism of the Ālvārs, all contributed to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. The chapter specifically attempts to answer the following questions: What are the continuities and discontinuities between the *Hayagrīva Stotra* and the Āgamic understanding of mantra? What does this *stotra* reveal concerning the various streams that are integrated in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view?

In Chapter VII, I examine the status and role of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu after Vedānta Deśika's time. This chapter includes an analysis of the references to Hayagrīva in sectarian Tamil literature and my own observations concerning the status of Hayagrīva at the famous Devanātha and Hayagrīva Temples at Tiruvahīndrapuram. Furthermore, I provide an overview of the religious practices at these temples, and include an analysis of

four devotional hymns on Hayagrīva used in Śrī Vaiṣṇava rituals. This discussion should increase our understanding of the presence of Hayagrīva in the Tamil milieu and answer the following questions: Did Deśika's *stotra* popularize Hayagrīva? What was the consequence of Deśika's devotion to Hayagrīva? How do the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns differ from Deśika's *stotra*? Why is Hayagrīva not a more prominent figure in more temples of Tamil Nadu?

Chapter VIII looks at the fluid relation between the local Śrī Vaiṣṇava and pan-Indian Āgamic traditions. Based on the relation between the *ācārya* and *arcaka* in the Tamil temple milieu, the chapter notes how the celebration of Hayagrīva as the Supreme God at the Śrī Vaiṣṇava regional level is, in turn, extended back to the pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic level. I survey the four short sectarian ritual texts used in praise of, or for meditation on, Hayagrīva in Āgamic tradition, and seek to answer such questions as: What is the relation between Āgamic, Tantra and mainstream Hinduism? What is the nature and role of Hayagrīva in these hymns? Does it differ from the portrayal of Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian mainstream and Śrī Vaiṣṇava sectarian texts? How is the *avatāra* presented as a focus of meditation? Is there a devotional element in the use of mantras with respect to Hayagrīva?

Following these substantive chapters, Part D consisting of Chapter IX provides a summary of the main conclusions of the study regarding the development of Hayagrīva. In effect, the analysis demonstrates two important features that occur in the development of the Hayagrīva deity in Hinduism: the connection between theology and mythology, and the relation between ritual function and iconographical images of deities.

In tracing the origins and antecedents of the Hayagrīva deity, the Vedic literature

is important as it demonstrates possible antecedents to the later Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva figure found in the pan-Indian textual tradition; accordingly, I examine these in the following chapter.

PART B

HAYAGRĪVA IN THE PAN-INDIAN TRADITION

CHAPTER II

ANTECEDENTS OF THE HORSE-HEADED FIGURE: THE *ŚRUTI* TEXTS OR THE TRIBES OF ASSAM?

Tracing the origin of any Hindu deity is a complex process. Particular problems arise in relation to Hayagrīva who, while recognized as a pan-Indian deity, is most visible in the South from the 14th-15th century onwards. In the secondary literature, the tracing of the origins of the Hayagrīva deity has been dominated by two perspectives, with one focussing on (1) Vedic antecedents, and the other on (2) non-Vedic traditions. Although the horse-headed figure known as Hayagrīva is absent from the Vedic corpus, according to some scholars (Rennow, O'Flaherty, Courtright) there are antecedents to the deity in the texts—the myth contained in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* about the beheading sacrifice of Viṣṇu and the placement of the horse's head on the Vedic sage Dadhyañic. By way of contrast, other scholars (Getty, Jaiswal) make the claim that Gaṇeśa and Hayagrīva have been integrated into the Hindu texts and pantheon from non-Vedic traditions. Jaiswal's specific study on the origins of Hayagrīva claims that he originated in the tribal hills of Assam. These two perspectives serve as the organizing framework for this chapter.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the various references in the pan-Indian *śruti* texts that some scholars have regarded as constituting the antecedents to the horse-headed figure, especially the myth of the beheading sacrifice contained in the *Brāhmaṇas*. The second part offers an analysis of these references. The third part looks at Jaiswal's alternative thesis regarding Hayagrīva's origin.

OVERVIEW OF THE REFERENCES TO HAYAGRĪVA IN THE ŚRUTI TEXTS

References in the *Ṛg Veda*

The religion of the Vedic period (1500-500 B.C.E.) on the Indian sub-continent has been termed Brāhmaṇism. The authoritative collection of the Vedic texts known as *śruti* (that which is heard)—and originally part of oral tradition—is regarded as crucial for the performance of sacrifice (*yajña*). The Vedas contain a variety of creation myths, including (1) *sat* arising out of *asat* (*Ṛg Veda* 10.72.3), (2) golden embryo (*hiranya-garbha*) set on the waters (*Ṛg Veda* 10.121; 10.82), (3) the creative power of *tapas* (*Ṛg Veda* 10.129; 10.190), (4) the cosmic pillar (*Atharva Veda* 10.7) and, most important for the study of the god-demon conflict in the late Vedic period, (5) the sacrifice of the primeval Man (*Puruṣa Sūkta*, *Ṛg Veda* 10.90).

In the pantheon of the *Ṛg Veda* (ca. 1500-500 B.C.E.), Viṣṇu is a deity of minor importance. There are various references to Viṣṇu in which he is said to represent the moon, the sun, and *soma*; he is the slayer of the demon Vṛta, the god who takes three strides to measure the universe. Although the Vedic depictions of Viṣṇu's role are ambiguous and vague, Deborah A. Soifer has effectively demonstrated a basic congruity in the nature of Viṣṇu: (1) benevolence towards humankind, (2) alliance with Indra,¹ (3) the deed of taking three strides, (4) pervasiveness, and (5) his ability to take on different forms.² The Vedas contain antecedents to the doctrine of *avatāra*—the animal or human

¹ The more important myths appear to be about the conflict between the god Indra and the demon Vṛta, a conflict in which Indra is victorious.

² Deborah A. Soifer, *The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana: Two Avatārs in Cosmological Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 15-17; Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism: A*

forms that the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu takes on earth in order to restore and/or maintain the cosmic order at specific times and places. Moreover, Soifer notes a continuity in characteristics between the Vedic Viṣṇu and the later *avatāric* forms of Viṣṇu found in Epic and Purāṇic literature. Most important is Viṣṇu's quality of benevolent action for the welfare of humanity and his connection with Indra in: (1) demon-slaying activity, (2) cosmogonic activity, and (3) ability to have more than one form.³

Concerning antecedents to the horse-headed figure (*haya-grīva*), it is an early Indian belief that the sun-god (Viṣṇu) both assumes the form of a horse⁴ and is associated with fecundity. For example, *R̥g Veda* 1.163 equates the horse with the sun. One possible antecedent to the horse-headed figure thus may be the Vedas themselves; that is, although Viṣṇu is not a major deity in the Vedic corpus, he is nonetheless associated with the sun and the horse.

References in the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Saṃhitās

By the later Vedic Period (900-500 B.C.E.), the Brāhmaṇical myths are predominantly about conflicts between gods (*devas*) and demons (*asuras*), even though they share the same ontological status because the gods and demons both arise out of Prajāpati—the primeval, cosmic *puruṣa* ("man").⁵ Coomaraswamy demonstrates the unpolarized nature of the relation between Vedic gods and demons; it is therefore

Comparison (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 3-4.

³ Soifer, *The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana*, p. 24.

⁴ Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism* (Utrecht: N.V.A. Oosthoek's Uitgevers Mij, 1954), pp. 147, 172.

⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.4.1.34; 1.5.3.2; 2.2.2.8 (Agni); 4.2.4.11. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa: According to the Text of the Mādhyandina School* (translation by Julius Eggeling), *The Sacred Books of the East*, vols. 12, 26, 41, 43, 44 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882).

necessary to distinguish *devas* from the Western sense of god because: (1) *devas* and *asuras* both arise from Prajāpati—giving them both the same ontological status; (2) both are blinded by their pride; (3) *asuras* were originally considered to be a class of gods which only later came to be depicted as negative beings. This close relationship between the two groups becomes clearer in the *bhakti* texts (wherein both gods and demons are secondary to the Supreme God).⁶

According to A.L. Basham, *asura* is a term used in the *R̥g Veda* for lesser gods, which only later became a name for a class of demons.⁷ By way of contrast, Wash Edward Hale argues that there is not enough evidence to claim that there is a specific group of gods called *asuras*.⁸ Rather, the term *asura* is used in the *R̥g Veda* for any god who functions as a leader (status attained by the support of his followers).⁹ Hale also demonstrates that there is no being called an *asura* who is depicted as god in the early *R̥g Veda* and then portrayed as demon in the later Vedic texts. He claims that the change that occurs in the Vedic literature is in the usage of the word *asura*, rather than in the nature of the beings to whom the term is applied.¹⁰

In his study of the demon Bali, Clifford Hospital discusses the relation between gods and demons. He states that even though the *R̥g Veda* describes the conflict between

⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Angels and Titans, an Essay on Vedic Ontology," *JAOS* 55, no. 5 (1935), pp. 373-419; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 59; Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, p. 2.

⁷ A.L. Basham, *That Wonder that was India* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954), p. 236.

⁸ Wash Edward Hale, *Asura - in Early Vedic Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), p. 37.

⁹ Hale, *Asura*, pp. 52-67.

¹⁰ Hale, *Asura*, p. 179.

Indra and the demon Vṛta, this conflict motif continues in the Brāhmaṇas in the context of the *deva-asura* conflict over sacrificial ritual.¹¹

Although the gods and demons share the same ontological status, there is conflict between the two in their quest for power, which is to be attained through the proper performance of sacrificial ritual. Through performing the rituals or chanting the mantras, the gods are able to ward off the demons. The gods win if they perform the rituals correctly. Consequently, Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*)—which is regarded as the universal principle of life—becomes established as the central ritual. Sacrifice is believed to have intrinsic power over the gods. Food offerings are made to the deities to please them and to receive some material reward in return. The sacrifice of animals, usually a goat (a horse for special occasions), is also made as an offering to the gods for the accumulation of merit in this world (*punya*), which leads to heaven (*svarga*). The intonation of the Vedic verses is considered as having the power to invoke the gods.

Gradually, the correct and perfect chanting of the Vedic verses came to be established as the most important aspect of the sacrifice. Consequently, the gods lost their major role in ritual. Because recitation is reflective of the re-creation of the world/cosmos, its sounds are thought to have cosmological significance. This is the foundation of the concept of mantra. By the time of the late Vedic period, with the increase in the importance of Vedic ritual in order to attain spiritual power, Brāhmaṇaism became fully developed. Vedic rituals, performed only by the priestly class (*brāhmaṇa varṇa*), resulted in a Brāhmaṇaical monopoly of Vedic education. The contents of the

¹¹ Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, pp. 29-32.

Brāhmaṇas show an increase in the importance of public ritual. One of the more important sacrifices (performed for kings) is the *aśva-yajña* (horse sacrifice).

Although Viṣṇu is only a minor deity in the early Vedic literature, in the *Brāhmaṇas* He is equated with Prajāpati—a “supreme” deity who is the god of creation—continuous with his early Vedic cosmogonic role of taking strides and pervading the three worlds. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*,¹² there are antecedents to the theriomorphous appearances of Viṣṇu. These are the fish (*matsya*),¹³ the boar (*varāha*),¹⁴ and the tortoise (*kūrma*).¹⁵ Interestingly, in the *Mahābhārata*, these animals become the “primary” *avatāric* forms of Viṣṇu.¹⁶

As in the *Rg Veda*, Viṣṇu is associated with both the sun and fecundity in the *Brāhmaṇas*.¹⁷ For instance, in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.3.1.29, Viṣṇu is equated with Dadhikrā (or Dadhikrāvan), a celestial horse described as a form of the sun.¹⁸ Viṣṇu is also linked with sacrifice, the central theme of the *Brāhmaṇa* literature. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.3.1, Viṣṇu is referred to as *Yajña* (a personification of “sacrifice”). Similarly, Viṣṇu is associated with sacrifice (*yajña*) in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.1.14; 5.2.3.6; 12.4.1.4.

¹² *Taittirīya Saṃhitā, with Commentary of Madhava* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1960).

¹³ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.8.1.1.

¹⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 5.4.3.19; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 7.1.5.

¹⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.1ff.

¹⁶ There are also antecedents to the myth about Vāmana (dwarf) in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2.1.3.

¹⁷ Gonda, *Aspects Of Early Viṣṇuism*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁸ Dadhikrā is the symbol of celestial light in *Rg Veda* 1.163.2 and 7.77.3. Dadhikrā is the most popular Vedic horse known for its strength, swiftness and triumphs.

Regarding antecedents to the horse-headed figure (*haya-grīva*), not only is Visnu linked with the celestial horse Dadhikrā, but the later figure of Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva (and the etiology of the horse's head) is linked, by some scholars (Ronnow, O'Flaherty, Courtright),¹⁹ to the *pravargya*²⁰ legend in the Brāhmaṇic literature. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*²¹ 14.1.1.1-17 contains a myth about Viṣṇu having his head cut off while he is performing ritual sacrifice with other deities (Agni, Indra, Soma, Makha and Viśvadeva). The myth tells of an occasion when termites gnawed at Viṣṇu's bowstring. When Viṣṇu's bow split, his head was also cut off. The gods, however, began worshipping the headless god during the ritual sacrifice. In the subsequent passage in the text, Indra warns Dadhyañc, a Vedic sage, that he will lose his head if he reveals the secret doctrine of the headless sacrifice (as Indra would be threatened by the recovery of Viṣṇu). The *aśvins*, however, convince Dadhyañc to reveal the secret (*madhu-vidyā*, literally "honey-wisdom"). Upon being told about Indra's threat, they remove Dadhyañc's head and hide it, while temporarily replacing it with the head of a horse. And, finally, when Indra, as he had threatened, cuts off Dadhyañc's head, the clever *aśvins* replace it with Dadhyañc's "real head".²²

¹⁹ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, pp. 218-219; Courtright, *Ganeśa*, pp. 95-97.

²⁰ *Pravargya*—"introductory ceremony to the Soma sacrifice at which fresh milk is poured into a heated vessel called *gharma* or into boiling purified butter"—is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *pra+vrj* "to place in or on fire/heat; to strew". Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Marwah Publishers, 1986), p. 693.

A man, while studying the special sections of ritual, offers the *pravargya* oblation when he is going to receive the *rahasyam* "secret doctrine" of Vedic ritual. Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual: The Non-Solemn Rites* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), p. 360.

²¹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (translation by Julius Eggeling), vol. 44, pp. 441-442.

²² This is continuous with the Vedic reference to the *aśvins*: "O *Aśvins*, your win is that Dadhyañc proclaimed to you the *madhu* with the horse's head" (*Rg Veda* 1.116.12).

Similar to the first portion of the *pravargya* story found in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.1.1.1-17), there are several other references in the Vedic *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and *Saṁhitās* to a personified Yajña (sacrifice) having had his head cut off during the performance of a sacrifice. However, these passages do not mention the headless Vedic sage Dadhyañc. In *Pañcaviṁśa Brāhmaṇa*²³ 7.5.6, the deity Makha's²⁴ head is cut off by his own bow which had been knawed apart by ants, and the head became the *pravargya*. Similar myths are also present in *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*²⁵ 5.1.1-5; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* 4-9.1. and 5.3.18; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*²⁶ 1.2-5.1.

Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads, which comprise the fourth and final body of Vedic literature, are speculative and philosophical in nature. According to Upaniṣadic belief, *yajña* and the earlier ritual-oriented Vedic texts are insufficient for gaining knowledge (*jñāna*) necessary for the attainment of *mokṣa* (liberation from the cycle of rebirths). The Upaniṣads reveal the essence of the cosmos, i.e., the underlying reality that is Brahman, and the individual self which is *ātman*. During this period, one finds the spiritualization of the concept of sacrifice; that is, one sacrifices desires and practices self-mortification for the accumulation of *tapas* (heat, spiritual power) as the means to the awareness of the true nature of reality and ultimately *mokṣa*.

²³ *Pañcaviṁśa-Brāhmaṇa* (translation by Dr. W. Caland) (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, Baptist Mission Press, 1931).

²⁴ Makha is another Vedic deity.

²⁵ *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, with Commentary of Sāyaṇa* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1872).

²⁶ *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, with Commentary of Sāyaṇa* (edited by Rajendralala Mitra) (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1859).

Consequent to the shift from the ritual to the metaphysical, the *asuras* (demons) are viewed negatively more explicitly as they are seen to be more of an explicit threat to the individual quest for knowledge and accumulation of *tapas*. This is evident in the description of *asuras* as arising from the “bad air” of the anus (as opposed to the *devas* arising from the breath).²⁷ Furthermore, the Upaniṣads²⁸ differentiate the *asura* Virocana, who is satisfied with a superficial answer to the true nature of Reality, from the *deva* Prajāpati, who is on the correct path in the quest for an understanding of the true nature of *ātman*.²⁹ Although there are no references to the horse-headed figure to be found in the Upaniṣadic texts surveyed, we do see a shift in the understanding of the god/demon relationship.

ANALYSIS OF ANTECEDENTS IN THE ŚRUTI TEXTS: PROBLEMS IN TRACING THE ORIGIN OF HAYAGRĪVA

That the tracing of the origin of any Hindu deity is a challenge is evident in the studies by Clothey, Getty, Courtright, Brown, and Hospital, which have been discussed in the previous chapter. Clothey traces a god who is known to be a Southern god (Murukaṇ),³⁰ and it would seem that understanding the evolution of this deity is a little simpler than when dealing with a pan-Indian god who may or may not have its origins in

²⁷ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3 and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.2. *Upaniṣad-Samgrahaḥ*, edited by J.L. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984); *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* (translation by Robert Ernest Hume) (2nd. ed., reprinted; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁸ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7ff.

²⁹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7-12. See also Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, pp. 37-40.

³⁰ Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukaṇ*.

the Dravidian milieu. When the god is a major one whose origins are known, the process is somewhat more straightforward than when one is dealing with the history of a deity like Hayagrīva who, although most popular in the South since the late medieval period (ca. 13th C.E. century onwards), is simultaneously recognized as a relatively minor pan-Indian deity.³¹

Some scholars of Hindu mythology (Biardeau, O'Flaherty) have limited their studies to the Vedic/Epic/Purāṇic literature. In the process of analyzing Hindu myths, they make various assumptions, a critical one being that which pertains to the Vedic antecedents of Purāṇic literature. However, disparate viewpoints exist regarding the precise relationship between the Purāṇas and the Vedas. Max Müller sees a link between the two. According to him, Vedic worship and Purāṇic worship are different; that is, "the outer form of worship is Vedic and exclusively so; but the eye of religious adoration is turned upon quite different regions".³² On the other hand, Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud find unity in the symbolic structure of the Epics and Purāṇas, and finds antecedents for this in the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Primarily, they conclude that the Vedic sacrifice and the Upaniṣadic concept of renunciation were incorporated, by *brāhmaṇa* authors, into the *smṛti* literature (Epics, Purāṇas and Āgamas) in the form of

³¹ Even in the case of a popular deity like Gaṇeśa, Courtright notes that tracing the origin of Gaṇeśa can be nothing more than speculative. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa, the Lord of Obstacles and the Lord of Beginnings*, pp. 11-12. However, he offers a hypothesis of his own: Gaṇeśa emerged during the textual transition from sacrificial ritual to temple worship. With the development of temple worship there grew a need for the maintenance of the purity of the sacred space of the temple—precisely the role attributed to the Gaṇeśa deity. However, this does not explain Gaṇeśa's elephant head. Further, I find the basis for this argument unconvincing. There are other factors involved in the development of a myth; see the next two sections of this chapter.

³² F.M. Müller, *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, So Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968 [1859]), pp. 54-55.

mythical stories.³³ By way of further contrast, Rocher holds that the linking of the Vedas with the Purāṇas leads to the assumptions that: (1) the Purāṇas developed as a reinforcement of Vedic teachings; (2) the Purāṇas are a necessary companion of the Vedas; and, lastly, (3) the Purāṇas rank as the “fifth Veda”.³⁴

In tracing the myth of a specific deity, scholars have tended to look for Vedic antecedents to pan-Indian deities. O’Flaherty takes the position that there is a link in the symbolic structure of the Vedas and the Purāṇas. In her analysis of the mythic transformation of Hayagrīva, in both *Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* and *Women Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, O’Flaherty claims Vedic antecedents to the Hayagrīva myth. Going further, she links—as does Courtright—the figure of Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva to the story of the sacrifice of Dadhyañc contained in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (as described in an earlier section “References in the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Samhitās”).³⁵ The myth of a deity having his head cut off can be traced as far back as the Brāhmaṇas, where Viṣṇu, an unimportant god in the Vedas, is associated with this beheading sacrifice. Although the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* myth describes the beheading of Viṣṇu, it does not directly link the horse-headed deity with Viṣṇu, the topic of the next section.

Hayagrīva and the Beheading Motif

As aforementioned, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Taittirīya Samhitā*, there are

³³ Madeleine Biardeau et Charles Malamoud, *Le Sacrifice dans L’Inde Ancienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 10-13.

³⁴ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 15-17.

³⁵ O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, pp. 218-219; Courtright, *Ganesa*, pp. 95-97.

antecedents to the theriomorphous appearances of Viṣṇu: the fish (*matsya*),³⁶ the boar (*varāha*),³⁷ and the tortoise (*kūrma*).³⁸ It has been suggested by Gonda that the early references to both *kūrma* and *varāha* may well reflect the process of incorporation of old tribal totems into the Sanskrit mythic tradition, with the totems evolving into gods and eventually becoming the incarnations of God Viṣṇu (*avatāra*).³⁹ There are also animal-headed human forms like *nṛ-simha* (Man-lion)⁴⁰ or *haya-grīva* (horse-headed Man) contained in the *Mahābhārata*. What is the significance or relevance of gods whose bodies are human whereas their heads are those of an animal?

An important aspect of Vedic ritual is animal sacrifice (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.2.1.1-2). *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.2.1.15-18 describes five “animals” that are sacrificed: horse, bull, ram, goat, and *puruṣa* or man. According to some scholars (see below), the mythic stories about the beheading of a human, as seen in the Dadhyañic myth of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.1.1.1-23), also belong to Vedic ritual. Although beheading occurs, the headless body is given another head, that of an animal. The new “real” head is considered to be the container of the secret teaching, the location of seed or *soma*, and the place of speech.⁴¹ The head as containing wisdom is continuous with the *Puruṣa*

³⁶ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.8.1.1.

³⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 5.4.3.19; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 7.1.5.

³⁸ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.1ff.

³⁹ Gonda, *Early Aspects of Viṣṇuism*, p. 124.

⁴⁰ *Nṛ-simha* is also written as *Narasimha*.

⁴¹ J.C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), pp. 71-75; Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 95-97; O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 219.

Sūkta of *R̥g Veda* 10.90, in which *brāhmaṇas* are said to have emerged from the mouth of the Primordial Man (*puruṣa*). The mouth is the place of speech and represents the wisdom of the Vedas and the knowledge of the rituals. According to J.C. Heesterman, in the *R̥g Veda* the head represents the head of the universe and the head of the cow/bull represents the invisible place that is the locus of the secret treasure.⁴² Although the severing of the head is an important part of the ritual, it is by no means the final step. The restoration of the head is necessary in order to complete the sacrifice.⁴³

As is evident, the beheading motif is manifest in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1-17. One possible antecedent to the origin of Hayagrīva may be that text, as it associates Viṣṇu with the beheading sacrifice. Wendy O'Flaherty identifies the sacrifice of Viṣṇu and the placement of the horse's head on the sage Dadhyañc as the Vedic antecedent to the Hayagrīva myth, based on the fact that the horse head contains the "secret"/wisdom.⁴⁴ She maintains that Hayagrīva is a suitable *avatāric* form for the role of rescuing the Vedas, as his image is similar to the stallion Dadhyañc and Vedic sacrifice. In the Vedas, the horse-headed figure Dadhyañc is associated with the recovery of the lost sacrifice. Assuming this link in her analysis of Hindu myths, O'Flaherty exaggerates the continuity between Vedic myths and the Epics and Purāṇas, and neglects other possible religious streams as a source. The head as the container of wisdom and the "place of speech" is, of course, continuous with the later roles attributed to Hayagrīva. However, it is important to note that the Vedic references to the beheading sacrifice,

⁴² Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice*, p. 72.

⁴³ Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice*, p. 72.

⁴⁴ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, pp. 218-219.

other than that contained in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, do not mention Dadhyañc. In fact, J.A.B. van Buitenen refutes the thesis that there is a connection between the sacrifice of Viṣṇu's head, the horse's head placed on Dadhyañc, and Hayagrīva.

Based on the fact that the *madhu* (honey/secret) of the horse-head is different from the *soma* of the *pravargya*, van Buitenen concludes that the Dadhyañc myth is not related to the *pravargya* ceremony,⁴⁵ and that it is mere speculation to associate the Dadhyañc myth with Hayagrīva. He writes: "It is hard to accept that the intermittently visible complex of a horse-headed hero or demon is completely accounted for by a person who promulgates the 'honey' to the *āsvins*."⁴⁶ van Buitenen claims that there is no trace of human sacrifice in the Dadhyañc story. Further, he finds that the horse-headed figure (Dadhyañc), who reveals the *madhu* to the *āsvins*, is instead "connected with the *gharma* (heated vessel) of the *Rg Veda* in which Atri, who introduced the elaborate *pravargya* ritual into the *agniṣṭoma* (sacrificial fire) as a new 'head', is lost among the secrets of the forest from which it emerged."⁴⁷ van Buitenen refutes Kenneth Ronnow's interpretation of *makhasya śiraḥ* (head of *makha*)⁴⁸ in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* as human sacrifice, because van Buitenen regards it as misleading to associate human sacrifice as part of the *pravargya* ceremony.⁴⁹ For the *pravargya* ceremony, the

⁴⁵ J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Pravargya: An Ancient Indian Iconic Ritual, Described and Annotated* (Poona: Deccan College, 1968), pp. 16-18.

⁴⁶ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ *Makhasya śiraḥ* can also be translated as "head of festivals" and "beginning of the rite".

⁴⁹ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, pp. 16-18.

head of *makha* is the pot/vessel (*iṣṭilukhā*), the container used in the sacrifice (but not a human head). He states that *makha* is also a Vedic term for “ritual celebration” (as opposed to sacrifice). Because *agniṣṭoma* consists of only three parts (whereas Vedic religious sacrifice consists of four parts), the sacrifice is incomplete. Consequently, the *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice of the three parts is completed by the restoration of the head of the Primordial Man (*puruṣa*). As the *agniṣṭoma*, the incomplete or “headless sacrifice” of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is completed by the essential fourth part.⁵⁰ For van Buitenen, there is no evidence that the *madhu* (honey) of the horse-head in the *Śatapatha* myth is related to the *pravargya* ceremony—the “introductory ritual to the Soma sacrifice at which fresh milk is poured into a heated vessel called *gharma* or into boiling purified butter”.⁵¹

In contrast to van Buitenen, Courtright’s analysis of Gaṇeśa relates the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇic* myth of the beheading sacrifice with the most common and recurrent motif in the myths of Gaṇeśa, the origin of his elephant head. According to Courtright, the birth of the deity includes both the beheading and restoration of the original effigy head with the “real” elephant head. Although Gaṇeśa’s first head is cut off by Śiva, it has to be replaced so that he may possess his “real” head. Dismemberment is the violent and necessary act for the creation of the Gaṇeśa form; that is, the sacrifice of Gaṇeśa’s initial head is the means to initiate a demon into the divine realm.⁵² Although this interpretation is applied to Gaṇeśa, it could conceivably be applied to Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva, that is, Gaṇeśa and Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva are both beheaded and restored with a different or

⁵⁰ van Buitenen, *The Pravargya*, pp. 19-20.

⁵¹ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 693.

⁵² Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 62-74.

“real” head.

Gaṇeśa’s ambivalent character and his initiation into the Sanskrit pantheon suggest a demonic past. Getty argues that the beheading of Gaṇeśa reflects an historical process in which he was, although originally regarded as an outsider (i.e., indigenous) and hence a threatening figure, later rehabilitated by his beheading and adoption into Śiva’s inner circle.⁵³ As in the case of Gaṇeśa, several important Purāṇic texts contain ambivalent depictions of Hayagrīva.⁵⁴ Hayagrīva’s malevolence may be an expression of his demonic past, and thus his need to be “rehabilitated” so that he may be included in the Hindu pantheon. However, unlike the many variants of the Gaṇeśa myths in which the beheading and restoration motif of Gaṇeśa’s head is prominent and significant, the beheading motif is not central in the later Epic and Purāṇic myths about Hayagrīva.⁵⁵ In fact, there are only two minor references to the beheading motif in the Purāṇic literature surveyed—both of which are in very late Purāṇic texts and neither of which are regarded as Vaiṣṇava.

The story of the beheading sacrifice found in Vedic literature reappears only in the mythic variants of the later sectarian Purāṇas, *Skanda Purāṇa* (Śaiva) and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (Śākta), as an explanation for the origin of Hayagrīva: the beheading of Viṣṇu and the replacement with the sacrificial horse-head. I believe that it is significant that the mythic strand of the beheading sacrifice found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is maintained only in non-Vaiṣṇava texts. This may reflect the position that

⁵³ Getty, *Gaṇeśa*, p. 1.

⁵⁴ See Chapter III.

⁵⁵ See “Epic References” and “Purāṇic References” in Chapter III.

Hayagrīva was originally not Vaiṣṇava, or that there are different strands of the horse-headed figure (evident in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaiśa* passages in the next chapter). Furthermore, the two myths that contain the explanation of the origins of the horse's head *make no mention* of the important Vaiṣṇava *avatāric* myth of Hayagrīva recovering the Vedas from the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha!

It must be emphasized that none of the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas surveyed incorporate any stories regarding the origins of the horse's head for Hayagrīva. Why would Vaiṣṇavas not include this strand of the explanation of the origin of Hayagrīva, especially given the fact that they so regularly attempt to legitimize their sectarian tradition by linking it with the Vedas? One could, I suppose, argue that Hayagrīva's origin is simply taken for granted. But I find it significant that not even a single Vaiṣṇava text (Purāṇic or Āgamic) that I surveyed includes the myth of the beheading sacrifice; that is, there are no birth stories for Hayagrīva. Furthermore, for Vaiṣṇavas (unlike for Śaivas), Hayagrīva is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who came to earth to restore the *dharma* at a certain time and place, and thus by nature is "wholly" benevolent.⁵⁶ Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, wholly benevolent, require no explanation as to how they obtained their animal heads. In this, the Vaiṣṇava myths on Hayagrīva and Nṛsiṃha are consistent. The Western (O'Flaherty, Courtright) notion of sacrifice as a means to initiate a once "demon" into the Vaiṣṇava pantheon as an *avatāra* is not present. It is precisely for that reason that one needs to speak of the "*histories*" of the deity rather than a single history. Although the various forms of Viṣṇu are by their very nature benevolent without a demonic past, the many forms of Śiva are

⁵⁶ For an explanation as to why the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, although a Vaiṣṇava text, contains two different myths about a malevolent and benevolent horse-headed figure, see section "Overview of the Synchronic Development of the Myths about Hayagrīva" in Chapter III.

commonly depicted as ambivalent, and even gruesome in imagery. Thus, the motif of the beheading sacrifice may be acceptable in the Śaiva "histories" of the ambivalent gods. Because Hayagrīva is connected with Viṣṇu, Śaivas do not mind that he was beheaded and reconstituted, given the competitive nature of relations between the two gods. However, it is not acceptable in the Vaiṣṇava stories of the various incarnations of Viṣṇu. Furthermore, because Gaṇeśa is only the son of Śiva, the issue of supremacy does not arise.

One case of a Vaiṣṇava "history" of a deity in which a demon is incorporated into Vaiṣṇava circles is that of Bali. It is crucial to note, however, that Bali does not appear as a full form incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. Although Bali exists as a demon in the Epic and early Purāṇic literature, he is depicted as benevolent in the later Purāṇic texts (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). Here, the important concepts of sacrifice and initiation are reflected in Bali's self-sacrifice and single-minded devotion to Viṣṇu. In the case of Bali, the motif of beheading of the demon Bali is unnecessary (and not present!) as he is transformed by his single-minded devotion to the Supreme God Viṣṇu in the later Purāṇic literature. Bali attains his divine stature only in the later Vaiṣṇava Bhakti texts like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where he serves as the model of a perfect devotee who sacrifices his desires to the will of Viṣṇu.⁵⁷

HAYAGRĪVA'S POSSIBLE NON-VEDIC ORIGIN(S)

Although many scholars who have studied Indian deities have limited themselves

⁵⁷ Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, pp. 20-24, 154ff.

to a textual study of the pan-Indian “mainstream” literature, others have gone outside the religious texts to make other claims on the origin of deities or on the contribution to the development of deities. For example, in *Gaṇeśa: A Monograph on the Elephant-Faced God*, Alice Getty argues that one cannot know whether Gaṇeśa is an original deity or a derivative. However, she does posit that Gaṇeśa was possibly a totem in Dravidian culture, because primitive effigies have often been animal-headed.⁵⁸ She suggests that the beheading and restoration motif of Gaṇeśa may be understood as the initiation of Gaṇeśa into Śiva’s circle, with the motif possibly reflecting the historical process by which local/regional elements were incorporated into the Sanskrit tradition. Likewise, in her article “The Demon and the Deity: Conflict Syndrome in the Hayagrīva Legend”, Suvira Jaiswal attempts to reconstruct the history of Hayagrīva on the basis of mythology in combination with her observations of a shrine of the deity in Assam, and claims that Hayagrīva was originally a tribal god.

The complexity of the development of the Hayagrīva myth, overlooked by O’Flaherty, is hinted at by Jaiswal,⁵⁹ who explains the textual inconsistencies in the various depictions of Hayagrīva in the following manner. Observing that Hayagrīva is worshipped by tribals in the hills of Assam, especially on Maṇikūṭa Hill (near the village of Hajo), Jaiswal holds that this deity is the direct antecedent of the Epic and Purāṇic gods. She argues that the figure is based on an original demonic god of fever, and must have originated in an interaction of beliefs and traditions among the indigenous tribes in

⁵⁸ Getty, *Gaṇeśa*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Jaiswal, “The Demon and the Deity”, pp. 40-57.

Assam.⁶⁰ According to her, the figure of Hayagrīva must have been incorporated into Mantrayāna Buddhism (ca. 7th-8th century C.E.). She suggests that after the appropriation of the Hayagrīva deity by the Brāhmaṇaical tradition, involving its subsequent brāhmaṇaization, Hayagrīva was incorporated into the pan-Indian texts as well as into the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Rather than limit the transformative process of the Hayagrīva myth solely to the Brāhmaṇaical textual tradition, Jaiswal explores other variables within her textual and anthropological study. She bases her argument on textual (*Kālikā Purāṇa*⁶¹) and anthropological evidence. In doing so, she theorizes how, after the golden years of Buddhism in India, Hayagrīva was integrated into the Brāhmaṇaical tradition by adopting him as an *avatāra*, a process by which tribal elements in Assam were incorporated into Purāṇic texts.

In *Kālikā Purāṇa*,⁶² Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva is described as having killed the demon of fever (*jvarāsura*) and taken his abode in the Maṇikūṭa hills, where His temple still exists. Jaiswal believes that Hayagrīva is an import from an animalistic cult in interaction with Mantrayāna Buddhism, which was then absorbed by “Greater” Hinduism (via Buddhism). Her argument that Hayagrīva was a phenomenon appropriated by Mantrayāna Buddhism from the tribes in Assam is speculative, however, and she

⁶⁰ Interestingly, there are several references to Hayagrīva’s head as being placed in the northeastern part of the ocean (*Mahābhārata* 12.335.1-64; *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.13.1-10). Assam is in the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Likewise, the Āgamas contain many iconographical references prescribing that the Hayagrīva image be placed in the northeastern side of the temple’s main shrine (see Chapter IV).

⁶¹ *Kālikā Purāṇa* 81.74-77. See also R.H. van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, p. 22.

⁶² Chapter 83 in *Kālikā Purāṇa* describes Viṣṇu killing the demonic form of Hayagrīva.

provides little empirical evidence for her theory. For instance, much of her argument concerning Hayagrīva in the Assam Hills is based on the references to Hayagrīva in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. She does not take into consideration the fact that the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is a Śākta Purāṇa believed to have been compiled as late as ca. 900-1100 C.E.,⁶³ and this seriously weakens her argument, for it is considerably later than the references to Hayagrīva in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇic literature. She further establishes her argument on the basis of a reference to Hayagrīva in the *Yoginī Tantra* (ca. 16th century C.E.), an even later text!⁶⁴ Although her citation of *Yoginī Tantra* is meant to bolster her argument, in truth the late date of the text undermines her view. I do not, therefore, find Jaiswal's interpretation to be a convincing one. Even though Jaiswal has not established a case, the possibility of non-Vedic origins or contributions cannot be ruled out.

One cannot simply assume that the Vedas are necessarily the only or earliest antecedent to religious developments solely because they are the earliest religious texts in the pan-Indian "mainstream" Sanskrit literary tradition. The birth of a deity may be the result of an exchange of elements between Vedic and other religious traditions. And later in Indian history, the mainstream Sanskrit tradition, which has been called the "Great Tradition" by scholars,⁶⁵ must necessarily be viewed in relation to regional traditions. However, I do not believe that the two are completely distinguishable; indeed, there has

⁶³ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 179-182.

⁶⁴ For details regarding the reference to Hayagrīva in the *Yoginī Tantra*, see Chapter IV.

⁶⁵ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 70-71. Although Redfield defines the terms "Greater" and "Little" traditions as interdependent, the precise interrelation between the two traditions is at times difficult to discern.

been a long-standing interaction between the pan-Indian Sanskrit and regional traditions. It is plausible that many elements from outside the pan-Indian mainstream have been influential in the development of Hinduism; specifically, religious practices and beliefs of people outside the Vedic tradition were perhaps integrated into the evolving Sanskritic tradition via the Āgamic stream,⁶⁶ and only later written down in the form of the Āgamas (ca. 500 C.E.).⁶⁷ This also sharply raises the issue of origins, in view of the complexity of India evident in the multiple racial-ethnic groups and in the several families of languages and their regional variations. For, it is also plausible that there has been more than a single origin of the horse-headed figure.

CONCLUSION

The tracing of the origins of the Hayagrīva deity is, as is obvious, a formidable challenge. There are two dominant scholarly perspectives on the origins of the Hayagrīva figure which focus, respectively, on: (1) Vedic antecedents and (2) the indigenous tribes of Assam. The Vedas contain stories about the beheading sacrifice of Viṣṇu and Yajña (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1-17; *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* 7.5.6), which some regard as an antecedent to the later Purāṇic stories explaining the origins of a horse-headed being. Even if antecedents to the Hayagrīva figure can be theoretically traced back to the Vedic literature, such as the references to the Vedic horse sacrifice (*aśva-yajña*) and the

⁶⁶ The infiltration of Āgamic material is evident in the "encyclopedic Purāṇas. For further details, see "Depictions of Hayagrīva in the Āgamas and Purāṇas" in Chapter IV.

⁶⁷ Based on his study of Sri Vaisnava Āgamic ritual, Venkatachari demonstrates that many Āgamic practices have originated in the indigenous (Dravidian) tradition. His argument is based on linguistics; that is, Venkatachari traces the etymology of several Āgamic terms and shows how they are in fact derived from the Tamil (Dravidian) language. See K.K.A. Venkatachari, "The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Āgamas".

beheading of Viṣṇu, they can be interpreted as (1) a means of incorporating local deities into the mainstream tradition, or (2) only one origin of the horse-headed figure. Similar to Courtright's view regarding the origins of Gaṇeśa, I, too, think that any attempt to make a definitive discernment on Hayagrīva's origins (given the complexity of India's geographical and racial-ethnic make-up) can be no more than speculative. There may have been one or several origins of the horse-headed figure. Regardless of his origins, however, later developments show that one can only speak of the various "histories" of Hayagrīva (whether it be several trajectories from a single origin or several independent origins). In order to see clearly the development of Hayagrīva figures, myths, and rituals, including his various "histories", especially his evolution as an *avatāra* in Vaiṣṇavism, it is necessary to analyze the depictions of Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian "mainstream" *smṛti* texts (Epics and Purāṇas), which form the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

MYTHIC TRANSFORMATION, DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC: HAYAGRĪVA IN THE PAN-INDIAN *SMṚTI* TEXTS

It would appear that the conceptions of, and stories about, deities have evolved in a wide variety of different contexts, which have influenced their various characterizations. Such is the case with Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian “mainstream” *smṛti* texts (Epics and Purāṇas) in which the references to, and myths about, him are varied and disparate. The horse-headed figure is described in some texts as benevolent, in others as malevolent, in some as benevolent and malevolent (in separate references), and in others as both benevolent and malevolent (in a single reference). The changes and contradictions in the myths about Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian Epic and Purāṇic texts clearly demonstrate that a deity does not exist in a single milieu. Because the versions of myths reflect major changes the deity has undergone in several religious contexts, one has necessarily to speak in the plural regarding the “*histories*” of *Hayagrīva*.¹

The mythic account of the deity’s benevolent act of recovering the Vedas from the demons (*Mahābhārata* and certain Purāṇas) is the beginning of Hayagrīva’s Vaiṣṇava history as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Meanwhile, the Epic and Purāṇic myths of Hayagrīva also provide the scope for the development of the god as rescuer and protector. That is, the myths associate him, firstly, with the Vedas which he rescues, and, secondly, with the role of a protector because he kills the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.

The first part of this chapter provides a survey of the various references to, and myths

¹ The “*histories*” of *Hayagrīva* may or may not be a result of radically different origins of the deity. It is plausible that “*histories*” may be trajectories from a single origin.

about, Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian *smṛti* texts. The second part offers an analysis of them, which includes an examination of the *diachronic* and *synchronic* dimensions of the images of the horse-headed figure. In doing so, the chapter sheds light on Hayagrīva's place in the development of the Vaiṣṇava tradition of *avatāras* — as the benevolent deity who recovers the Vedas.

OVERVIEW OF THE REFERENCES TO HAYAGRĪVA IN THE PAN-INDIAN TEXTS

Epic References

In Classical Hinduism (ca. 200 B.C.E.-500 C.E.) one sees a unique attempt to reconcile the ritual-based Vedic religion with Upaniṣadic² beliefs. The result is a pluralistic tradition, in which there are three different paths leading to salvation (*jñāna* [knowledge], *karma* [action], and *bhakti* [devotion]) as promulgated in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, contained in one of the two great Epics — the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 200 C.E.-400 C.E.). By the time of the Epics, as reflected in the *Mahābhārata*, Viṣṇu had evolved into a deity of greater importance; he is revered as Supreme. Much *smṛti* literature describes Lord Viṣṇu not only as Supreme, but as appearing on earth in animal and human *avatāric* forms. An important concept in theistic Hinduism is that of *avatāra*. The term *avatāra* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *ava + ṭ* “to descend, enter into, to get over”. The term *avatāra* means “descent, manifestation, or incarnation” and refers to the animal or human forms that the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu takes on earth. The belief is that Viṣṇu appears on earth as an *avatāra* in order to restore and/or maintain the cosmic order at specific times and places. One of the earliest references to the

² For a description of Upaniṣadic beliefs, see “Upaniṣads” in Chapter II.

concept of *avatāra* is in *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.6, in which the charioteer reveals himself as Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu who has come to earth to save *dharma* and to teach it to the warrior Arjuna. The human *avatāric* forms may reflect the deification of historical heroes. Although the concept of *avatāra* is not of great significance within the Śaiva tradition, it has remained an important concept within the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

During the Epic period, the concept of *avatāra* was still fluid; that is, there was an attempt to systematize the various incarnations of Viṣṇu in the *Mahābhārata* with lists. The *Mahābhārata* contains what are probably the two earliest lists of Viṣṇu's various *avatāras*. The first list (*Mahābhārata* 12.337.36³) consists of only four *avatāras*: (1) boar (*varāha*), (2) man-lion (*nṛsimha*), (3) dwarf (*vāmana*), and (4) human (*manuṣa*). The second list (*Mahābhārata* 12.326.77-78) contains three different *avatāras*, which may be a further development of a human (*manuṣa*) *avatāra*: (5) Rāma of Bhārgava, and (6) Rāma, son of Daśaratha, and (7) Kṛṣṇa. Other independent references to the various incarnations are found throughout the *Mahābhārata*.⁴

Kalpana Desai notes that *avatāras* became popular beginning with the *Mahābhārata*. She also observes that the twenty-four standing forms of Viṣṇu that are acknowledged in the Āgamic texts are mentioned in the list of *The Thousand Names of Viṣṇu* in the *Mahābhārata* (*Anuśāsanika Parvan* 149).⁵ Although Hayagrīva is not mentioned in this list of twenty-four forms, Viṣṇu is described, in the *Mahābhārata*, as having the form of a horse's head.

³ *Mahābhārata* (edited by V.S. Sukthankar et al.) (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-1960).

⁴ For example, (1) fish (*matsya*) 3.185; (2) tortoise (*kūrma*) 1.16.10-11; (3) boar (*varāha*) 12.202; (4) man-lion (*nṛsimha*) 3.270; (5) dwarf (*vāmana*) 3.; (6) Paraśurāma 3.115; (7) Rāma 12.326.77 (more developed in the other Epic—*Rāmāyaṇa*); (8) Kṛṣṇa 2.188.270; (10) Kalkin 3.139, and so forth.

⁵ Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, pp. 3-10.

Epithets for the Horse-headed Figure

There are epithets and stories in the *Mahābhārata* that refer to Viṣṇu's association with a horse's head. Furthermore, similar to the earlier Vedic references, the *Mahābhārata* describes the sun assuming the form of a horse (12.262.41).⁶ Oddly enough, in *Mahābhārata* 1.23.16, Garuḍa⁷ (King of the birds), is referred to as *haya-mukha* (one who has the face of a horse). Like the god Hayagrīva, Garuḍa is also depicted as a symbol of the Vedas.⁸ However, unlike Hayagrīva who is revered as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, Garuḍa is later recognized as Viṣṇu's vehicle.⁹

Furthermore, there are several names/epithets of the horse-headed being in the *Mahābhārata*, including: *haya-śiras* (one with a horse's head) (*Mahābhārata* 5.94.7; 1.59.23; 1.61.10; 12.326.56; 12.327.79-87), *aśva-śiras* (one with a horse's head) (*Mahābhārata* 3.315.14; 12.126.3; 12.335), *haya-grīva* (one with the neck of a horse) (*Mahābhārata* 5.128.50), and, finally, *vāji-grīva* (one with a horse's neck) (*Mahābhārata* 12.25.31). These various epithets describing a horse-headed being may possibly refer to different figures. There are ambivalent depictions in the *Mahābhārata* of the role and nature of a horse-headed figure as will be discussed in the next three sections. Hayagrīva is depicted in a couple of passages as a king (*Mahābhārata* 5.72.15; 12.25.22-31) and in several passages as a horse-headed demon

⁶ Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, p. 148.

⁷ Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, p. 148.

Garuḍa is the son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā. According to Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty), the Garuḍa bird is an ancient symbolic form of Agni who carries the seed like the Indo-European fire-bird carries the ambrosia. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 105.

⁸ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III.21.34 depicts Garuḍa's wings as singing the Vedic hymns.

⁹ *Agni Purāṇa* 12.32-33; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.59 and 8.3.32.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.59.23; 1.61.10; 5.128.50), and in other passages he is described as a form of Viṣṇu (*Mahābhārata* 3.315.14; 3.193.16; 12.126.3; 12.326.56; 12.335.1-64). Interestingly, the etiology of the horse's head is not important in early texts such as the *Mahābhārata*.

Horse-headed King

Firstly, and least importantly, there is a horse-headed figure called *haya-grīva* depicted in the *Mahābhārata* as a king. *Mahābhārata* 12.25.22-31 refers to *haya-grīva* as a good king who performs many sacrifices and fights heroically in many battles (even after he loses his followers). By way of contrast, *Mahābhārata* 5.72.15 describes a horse-faced figure called *haya-grīva* as the evil king of Videha,¹⁰ who is killed by his subjects. These depictions of the horse-headed king are relevant in so far as they reflect a split between good and evil, which parallels the conflict between the Supreme God and the demons.

Horse-headed Demon

In *Mahābhārata* 1.59.23 and 1.61.10, there is mention of a horse-headed demon (*haya-sīras*) in the lists of demons (*asuras*) including Ayośīras and Ayosaṅku. According to *Mahābhārata* 1.65.24, the horse-headed demon was born to the sage Kaśyapa and Danu. In *Mahābhārata* 5.128.49-50, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is described as having killed the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. This passage is continuous with the myth about Viṣṇu's *avatāra* slaying the demons in order to recover the Vedas (see below). Furthermore, the passage states that Śrī Kṛṣṇa during another lifetime also killed the horse-headed demon:

When sleeping on the vast ocean,¹¹ he slew Madhu and Kaiṭabha, and in another birth he also killed a horse-headed [demon named *haya-grīva*].

¹⁰ Videha is the country where Janaka—Sītā's father—is said to have been king. The capital of Videha is Mithilā.

¹¹ The motif of reclining on the Milk Ocean is associated with Nārāyaṇa.

Although this is a very simple passage, lacking in explicit details, it is very significant for at least two reasons: firstly, the horse-headed demon is called *haya-grīva*, which is the “official” name identifying Viṣṇu’s horse-headed *avatāric* form in the later Purāṇic literature. Secondly, although there are several passages which refer to a horse-headed demon as *haya-śiras*, an enemy to the gods, this depiction in the *Mahābhārata* of a horse-headed figure as an explicit enemy of Kṛṣṇa is unique.

Hayagrīva as Supreme God: Myth of Recovering the Vedas

More importantly for the purposes of this study, the *Mahābhārata* contains references to the horse-headed god (*haya-śiras* or *aśva-śiras*)—Viṣṇu proper. Several short passages identify Hayagrīva as a form of Viṣṇu. Firstly, *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79ff describes the four *vyūhas* (cosmic emanations of Viṣṇu): from Vasūdeva emanates Saṁkarṣaṇa, from Saṁkarṣaṇa emanates Pradyumna, from Pradyumna emanates Aniruddha. *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79-87 describes the horse-headed figure (*haya-śiras*) as having sprung from Aniruddha. Later on, the Pāñcarātra Āgamas provide complex categorizations of the various forms of Viṣṇu, including this *Mahābhārata* notion that Hayagrīva emanates from Aniruddha (*Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*).¹² This is an important *Mahābhārata* reference because it reflects the belief that Hayagrīva is an emanation from a *vyūha*, an idea found also in Epic and Āgamic literature.

Meanwhile, *Mahābhārata* 12.326.56 identifies the horse-headed figure as one of

¹² F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ājīrbudhīya Saṁhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1916), pp. 47-48; S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Āgama-kosha Vol. IV Pāñcarātrāgama* (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1991), pp. 123-125.

By way of contrast, there are also references in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas that describe Hayagrīva as an emanation of Saṁkarṣaṇa. For the Pāñcarātra Āgamic descriptions of the various forms of Viṣṇu and depictions of Hayagrīva, see Chapter IV.

Viṣṇu's forms. Viṣṇu reveals himself as *haya-sīras* to Nārada (a sage) and states that he is, in fact, the one with a horse's head:

I am the horse-headed (*haya-sīras*) One, who in the northwestern ocean, receives good oblations to the gods (*havya*) and offerings to the manes (*kavya*) with faith/devotion.

This passage reflects Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva's association with sacrifice (*yajña*).

Furthermore, *Mahābhārata* 12.126.3 describes the "horse-headed one" (*aśva-sīras*) as pertaining to the region called Badari—the abode of Nara and Nārāyaṇa—wherein "*aśva-sīras* reads the eternal Vedas". This passage associates Hayagrīva with the Vedas by depicting him simply reading the Vedas.

In *Mahābhārata* 3.315.14 (not the critical edition),¹³ Viṣṇu himself is referred to as *aśva-sīras* (the horse-headed one), a form he takes for destroying the *dāityas* (demons); however, the reference does not specifically identify the demons as Madhu or Kaiṭabha. By way of contrast, in *Mahābhārata* 3.193.16-194.30, Viṣṇu is referred to as one who with his discus (*cakra*) slays the demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who had stolen the Vedas from Brahmā while they were being created.

Mahābhārata 5.97.4 mentions a horse-headed One (*haya-sīras*) who brings the Vedas:

On every auspicious occasion *haya-sīras* rises from the nether regions and fills the world with Vedic hymns.

This passage associates "one who has the head of a horse" with the Vedas; that is, it links Hayagrīva with the Vedic texts, which he recovered from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha—the central myth of the benevolent Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva.

¹³ Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, p. 148.

Finally, *Mahābhārata* 12.335.1-64 is a detailed account of Viṣṇu who, as the horse-headed One, recovered the Vedas, which the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha had stolen from Brahmā and taken to a hell beneath the ocean. Two drops of water were cast by Nārāyaṇa into the lotus arising from his navel. One of the drops looked like honey and from it sprang the demon Madhu, who is composed of *tamas*.¹⁴ The other drop was hard, and from it sprang Kaiṭabha, who is composed of *rajas*. The two demons, one of *tamas* and the other of *rajas*, seized the Vedas from Brahmā and took them to the bottom of the ocean. When Brahmā informed Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) as to what had occurred, he woke up from his sleep and took the form of Hayagrīva (*haya-sīras*) and recovered the Vedas from the nether regions. Viṣṇu returned the Vedas to Brahmā and established the horse-headed form in the northeastern region of the great ocean. After returning the Vedas to Brahmā, Viṣṇu put the horse's head into the ocean and resumed his original form. Madhu and Kaiṭabha (*tamas* and *rajas*) had been confronted by Hayagrīva (*satva*), wherein *satvic* qualities triumphed.

The *Harivaṁśa*: Horse-headed Enemy of Viṣṇu

Although it is believed to have been composed as early as ca. 200-400 C.E.,¹⁵ the *Harivaṁśa* was later appended to the *Mahābhārata*, and is often called the "Appendix" to that epic. The *Harivaṁśa* — a text in which Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme God — describes the various episodes in the life of Kṛṣṇa (including the great deeds he performed as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu), an aspect of Kṛṣṇa that is only alluded to in the *Bhagavad Gītā* of the *Mahābhārata*. Although the *Harivaṁśa* is an appendix to the epic *Mahābhārata*, it is, at the same time, quite

¹⁴ The technical term *guṇa* (quality) means the constituent of the material world and is three-fold: (1) *satva* (purity, white, true); (2) *rajas* (passion, activity, agitation); and (3) *tamas* (darkness, lethargy).

¹⁵ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 420.

similar in genre to the Purāṇas. Much has been written regarding the close relationship between the *Harivaiṣṇa* and the Purāṇas. Stories from the *Harivaiṣṇa* are retold in Purāṇas such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹⁶ The *Harivaiṣṇa* passages about Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* (cowherdresses) are believed to be some of the earliest depictions of that motif. The critical edition (containing around 6,000 *ślokas*) allows for the identification of later interpolations, including the increase in erotic elements which, according to Friedhelm Hardy, belong to a southern recension of the *Harivaiṣṇa*.¹⁷

The *Harivaiṣṇa* describes the various episodes in the life of Kṛṣṇa, including his triumphant battles against the demons. There are a few references to *haya-grīva* as a horse-headed demon, which are similar to several passages in the *Mahābhārata*. However, in the *Harivaiṣṇa* the horse-headed demon is directly in conflict with Kṛṣṇa (unlike in the Epic).

Horse-headed Demon

In *Harivaiṣṇa* 31.70,¹⁸ the horse-headed demon (*haya-grīva*) is listed with the demons who accompany Bali to fight Viṣṇu in his incarnate form as Vāmana (31.68). This passage is interesting as *haya-grīva* is listed as one among many *asuras* like Vipracitti, Śibi, Ayośaṅku, Ayośiras as well as what appears to be another horse-headed demon, Aśvaśiras! This may well reflect the fact that the *haya-grīva* demon is altogether different from the Aśvaśiras demon.

Harivaiṣṇa 33.15 mentions a horse-headed demon (*haya-grīva*) who is in conflict with the gods: "Then the demon *haya-grīva* had a war chariot drawn by a thousand horses,

¹⁶ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 83.

¹⁷ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 65-78.

¹⁸ *Harivaiṣṇa* (edited by V.S. Sukthankar et al.) (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-1960).

crushing the enemies in combat". Following *Harivamśa* 37.6, the horse-headed figure is listed among other demons: "The night of Hayagrīva, along with Maya, Tāra, Varāha, Śveta and Svaralamba also appear (to help the demon Kālanemi)." Interestingly, there is simultaneously a boar demon and a boar *avatāra* in the *Mahābhārata*.

Harivamśa 44.67 depicts two horse-headed demons; one called *haya-grīva* and the other an incarnation of him called Keśi (one with a mane) who are at different times sent by Kāṁsa to kill Kṛṣṇa: "*haya-grīva*, remembered as having the might of a horse, appeared in this life as the vile [demon] Keśi (the younger brother of Kāṁsa)."¹⁹ However, the horse-headed demon (*haya-grīva*) is eventually killed by Kṛṣṇa. In *Harivamśa* 67.47-56 Keśi in the form of a horse (*haya-asyāśya*) was also killed by Kṛṣṇa.

In *Harivamśa* 91.19, a mighty demon Bhaumāsura was accompanied by Hayagrīva, Nisunda, Pañcājana, and Varadatta, with his 1000 sons. Kṛṣṇa destroyed this group of demons (*asuras*) (91.27). A horse-necked demon (*haya-grīva*) is then described, in *Harivamśa* 91.50, as a great and ferocious demon who was killed by Kṛṣṇa — the unconquerable one adored by the Yādavas (tribe of Kṛṣṇa). In *Harivamśa* 92.8, the horse-headed demon called *Hayagrīva* was killed along with Nisunda and Narakāsura by Kṛṣṇa. Other demons who survived bestowed all the riches of Narakāsura to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. After Hayagrīva, Naraka and Mura were killed, the wives of the demons who were killed approached Kṛṣṇa and bowed before him in surrender (*Harivamśa* 92.28).

Harivamśa 105.14 contains a list of the valourous deeds of Kṛṣṇa, including the killing of King Jarāsaṁdha and the granting of freedom to the kings he imprisoned. It

¹⁹ Kāṁsa, the King of Mathurā, is the maternal uncle of Kṛṣṇa. Kāṁsa was an enemy of Kṛṣṇa and attempted to kill him.

mentions that Kṛṣṇa also “disturbed the ocean and killed a horse-necked demon (*haya-grīva*)”. Finally, *Harivamśa* 109.40 provides a list of demons killed by Kṛṣṇa for the benefit of the gods, which includes a horse-headed figure called *haya-grīva*.

The strand of the demonic horse-headed form is predominantly found in the *Harivamśa* — a Kṛṣṇaite text in which Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme God. Significantly, according to the early references (*Mahābhārata* and *Harivamśa*), the horse-headed demon is always killed by Kṛṣṇa (never Viṣṇu!). Furthermore, the horse-headed demon killed by Kṛṣṇa is consistently referred to as *haya-grīva* (*Mahābhārata*, *Harivamśa*). By way of contrast, in the *Mahābhārata*, the horse-headed god — a form of Viṣṇu — is most frequently called *aśva-sīras* or *haya-sīras* (although the *Harivamśa* does not refer to a horse-headed god at all). It appears that there were at least two different strands of a horse-headed figure during the Epic period — the formative years of “textual” Vaiṣṇavism. This further enhances the notion that there may have been, in fact, several religious cults (Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Vasūdeva-Kṛṣṇa) that fused together to form the Vaiṣṇava pantheon (including *vyūha* and *vibhava-avatāric* forms of Viṣṇu).²⁰ This would serve to explain why a mythic strand of the horse-headed demon is contained in a Kṛṣṇaite text; although the *Mahābhārata* takes for granted the link between Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, its identification of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu with Vasūdeva-Kṛṣṇa was only a later development/strand.²¹ The *Harivamśa* also contains references to other demons whom Kṛṣṇa kills who have a form similar/identical to *avatāric* forms of Viṣṇu, such as Varāha. Furthermore, the mythic references in the early Purāṇas (*Bṛahma*, *Agni*) reinforce the thesis

²⁰ See Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism (Vaiṣṇavism from 200 B.C to A.D. 500)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981), pp. 60-63.

²¹ Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 73.

that the horse-headed demon comes from a stream of Kṛṣṇaite literature, for these early Purāṇas describe the horse-headed demon as having been killed by Kṛṣṇa. It is possible that the *Mahābhārata* borrows from both Vedic and regional traditions, resulting in several different horse-headed figures.

Purāṇic References

By the time of medieval Hinduism (ca. 500-1600 C.E.), two major religious streams emerged: (1) Bhakti, a devotional theistic tradition, and (2) Tantra, an esoteric tradition that emphasizes specific meditative practices, using mantras (meditative syllables) and maṇḍalas (circular meditative diagrams). During this period, an extensive amount of Purāṇic literature was composed (ca. 500-1300 C.E.), in which Viṣṇu is recognized as one of the three main gods, the preserver and sustainer of the universe (the other two gods are Brahmā, the creator, and Śiva, the destroyer). Furthermore, there are elaborations of the myths of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*. In the later Vaiṣṇava Purāṇic literature, many myths were further expanded upon to demonstrate the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu (over the gods Brahmā and Śiva), who makes occasional appearances on earth in order to help and protect his devotees.

In the general Purāṇic mythology the similar ontological status of the *devas* and *asuras* is even more evident than in the Vedas. The Purāṇic corpus demonstrates the notion that demons are not always considered evil; a significant example is that of the demon Bali who sacrifices himself as a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, and thereby obtains divine status.²² The more ancient concept of Vedic sacrifice is transformed to mean the giving up of one's desires ultimately to the Supreme God's will.

²² See Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*.

In the Purāṇic texts that focus on Viṣṇu, there is a lack of consistency in the number, order, and types or forms of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*. According to Purāṇic cosmology,²³ the Supreme Lord is believed to have appeared four times during the "golden age", during which all is pure (*kṛta-yuga*); three times during the second age, when the *dharma* (moral and ethical law) begins to deteriorate so that only three-fourths of the state of the world is pure (*treta-yuga*); twice during the third age, during which only half of the state of the world is pure (*dvāpara-yuga*); and will appear only once during the "dark age", during which three-fourths of the state of the world is impure, sinful and degenerate (*kali-yuga*).

Generally speaking, Viṣṇu is a wholly benevolent deity of preservation, endowed with the quality of mercy. This is demonstrated by his performance of restoring and maintaining the cosmic balance between good and evil. Although the *avatāras* vary greatly in form and appear on earth in their own specific circumstances, each, whatever the form, demonstrates Viṣṇu's benevolent nature by performing acts of preservation. Only two of the ten *avatāras* are not in conflict with demons: Parāśurāma appeared in order to protect the *dharma* from the threat of *kṣatriyas* (warriors), and Kalkin, the *avatāra* to come, will save the *dharma* from the *mleccas* (barbaric foreigners).

Both Indian and Western scholars²⁴ often speak of Viṣṇu as having ten major *avatāras* (*dasāvatāra*, ten embodiments of Viṣṇu). This view refers to what is categorized as the "traditional" list of *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, drawn from the variant lists from the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas: (1) fish (*matsya*), (2) tortoise (*kūrma*), (3) boar (*varāha*), (4) man-lion

²³ There are four ages (*yugas*) in each era (*kalpa*).

²⁴ Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in the Tamil Country*, pp. 80-161; Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, pp. 124-146; O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, p. 175.

(*nṛsiṃha*), (5) dwarf (*vāmana*), (6) Paraśurāma (Rāma with the axe), (7) Rāma, (8) Kṛṣṇa, (9) Buddha,²⁵ and (10) Kalkin.

In addition to these ten "major" or traditional incarnations in "mainstream" Hinduism, there are numerous other *avatāric* forms within the sectarian Vaiṣṇava traditions. Some post-Epic texts mention a larger number, including historical figures such as Kapila. During the period of post-Epic Vaiṣṇava literature, texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra Āgamas give a more extensive listing of the number of *avatāras*.²⁶ As will be noted in the body of this chapter (and the next one), Hayagrīva, the horse-headed god, is found in the various Purāṇic and Āgamic lists of Viṣṇu's incarnations.

Indian and Western scholars²⁷ also distinguish between "major" and "minor" categories for the various *avatāras*. The distinction reflects the fact that many *avatāras* are not mentioned in the traditional listing of the ten more widely-known *avatāras*. Although the "traditional" list of ten *avatāras*, used by scholars, have become a common category, there are many other lists of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* in the Purāṇic and Āgamic literature. Consequently, Hayagrīva is included in some of the various *avatāric* listings found in the Purāṇas, including *Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Along with his inclusion in these, there are a variety of myths about the horse-headed figure. At times, Hayagrīva is depicted as benevolent; at other times, he is described as malevolent.

²⁵ While the swan (*hamsa*) is referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, the Buddha replaced the swan-incarnation in the later Purāṇic *avatāric* lists, like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.17-18) and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.3.24; 2.7.37). Even though the Buddha is not mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, he has been incorporated as the ninth *avatāra* in the "traditional" list.

²⁶ See the subsequent section on "Purāṇic References" for the listings of *avatāras* found in the *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*, and Chapter IV for the incarnation listings in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

²⁷ Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in the Tamil Country*, pp. 162.; Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, p. 147.

In the attempt to organize the enormous amount of Purāṇic literature, Western scholars have placed importance upon the classification of the texts into two subcategories: (1) *mahā* (great, high, important) -*purāṇas*, consisting of the "more" original and authentic texts,²⁸ and (2) *upa* (together with, under or nearby) -*purāṇas*, consisting of the later and more sectarian texts. The list of the *upa-purāṇas* is inconsistent and often contains more than eighteen (including texts such as the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, and the *Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambha*). Following the notion that *mahā-purāṇas* are more original and authentic, most Western scholars consider them as superior.²⁹

Rocher, however, rejects the *mahā*- and *upa-purāṇa* classification because of its ambiguity and historical insignificance. Firstly, the term *mahā-purāṇa* rarely appears in the Purāṇic texts themselves and, in fact, many of the *upa-purāṇas* are as well-known and as much respected as the so-called *mahā-purāṇas*. Secondly, the listings found in Purāṇic texts are not uniform and, at times, certain texts have appeared in both categories, for example, *Kūrma* and *Skanda Purāṇa*.³⁰

Other scholars have established different classifications of the Purāṇic literature.³¹ For instance, P.V. Kane categorizes the Purāṇas thematically into four groups: (1) encyclopedic (*Agni*, *Garuda*, *Nārada*); (2) those concerned with *tīrtha* (*Pādma*, *Skanda*, *Bhaviṣya*); (3) sectarian (*Linga*, *Vāmana*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*); and, lastly, (4) historical (*Vāyu*,

²⁸ The most common list of the eighteen *Mahāpurāṇas* is: (1) *Bṛahma*, (2) *Bhaviṣya*, (3) *Bṛahmāṇḍa*, (4) *Brahmavaivarta*, (5) *Bhāgavata*, (6) *Kūrma*, (7) *Mārkaṇḍeya*, (8) *Agni*, (10) *Vāmana*, (11) *Mutsya*, (12) *Varāha*, (13) *Skanda*, (14) *Śiva*, (15) *Viṣṇu*, (16) *Nārada*, (17) *Garuda*, and (18) *Pādma*.

²⁹ Rocher, *History of Indian Literature*, p. 37.

³⁰ Rocher, *History of Indian Literature*, p. 69.

³¹ Rocher, *History of Indian Literature*, pp. 78-79.

Bṛalunāṇḍa). Rocher also refers to encyclopedic Purāṇas in his thorough study on Purāṇic literature and claims that *Agni Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, and *Matsya Purāṇa* especially belong to the category of encyclopedic. According to him, “encyclopedic” Purāṇas — unlike the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which is considered the most unified text and is believed to have been written by a single author³² — are those texts that contain a variety of unrelated subjects.³³ Although the texts have been viewed as unreliable (based on the fact that they do not follow the *pañcalakṣaṇa*³⁴ framework), the encyclopedic Purāṇas are valuable in that they contain fragments of ancient material, some of which appear to have otherwise been lost.³⁵

The various sects also have their own classification of Purāṇas, based often on their own sectarian beliefs. For example, the Vaiṣṇava tradition divides the Purāṇic corpus according to the three *guṇas* (attributes): (1) *satva* (white, pure) texts, including *Viṣṇu*, *Bhāgavata*, *Nārādīya*, *Garuḍa*, *Pādma*, and *Varāha*; (2) *rajas* (excitement, heat) texts, including *Bṛaluna*, *Bṛalunāṇḍa*, *Bṛalunavaivarta*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Bhaviṣya* and *Vāmana*; and finally (3) *tamas* (dark, black) texts, including *Śiva*, *Līṅga*, *Skanda*, *Agni*, *Matsya*, and *Kūrma*.³⁶

For purposes of analysis of the variant myths of Hayagrīva, I have divided the Purāṇic texts into (1) “encyclopedic” texts and (2) sectarian texts, further classified as Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva

³² Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 486-488.

³³ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 78-80.

³⁴ *Pañcalakṣaṇa* (the five distinguishing marks of the Purāṇas) includes: (1) *sarga*, creation and cosmogony; (2) *pratisarga*, secondary creation, that is, re-creation or destruction; (3) *vaṁśa*, genealogy of gods and patriarchs; (4) *manvantarāṇi*, reigns of *manu*; and, (5) *vaṁśānucarita*, history preserved by princes, solar and lunar races and descendants up to modern time.

³⁵ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 80.

³⁶ Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 92.

or Śākta. Because it is difficult to provide precise dates for most of the Purāṇas, I have given approximate (and tentative) dates for each one that is important for the analysis of the development of the Hayagrīva myth and figure. Within each category, I have placed the various texts in chronological order (according to these approximate dates).

Pan-Indian “Encyclopedic” Purāṇas

“Encyclopedic” Purāṇas is a term first used by Kane in his four-fold classification of the Purāṇic texts. He regards *Agni Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, *Nārada Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa* as encyclopedic Purāṇas.³⁷ There are several references to Hayagrīva in these; some references relate to his mythic role and others are iconographical. Because the focus of this chapter is mythology, I will only review the mythic references here, and look at the iconographical Purāṇic passages in Chapter IV.

Matsya Purāṇa 170.1-30 (ca. 400 C.E.) contains a story similar to the Hayagrīva myth of the recovery of the Vedas from the demons (contained also in the *Mahābhārata*, *Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). However, in this Purāṇa, there is no explicit description as to the form of Viṣṇu; that is, Hayagrīva is absent. Furthermore, there is, similar to the *Harivaṃśa*, an account of several demons, including *haya-grīva*, preparing to fight Viṣṇu with their armies (173).

Agni Purāṇa (ca. 700-800 C.E.) contains what is probably the earliest list of the twenty-four *avatāras*.³⁸ Hayagrīva is mentioned in various lists of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras* contained in the *Agni Purāṇa* with respect to ritual. Some of the traditional *avatāras* and

³⁷ Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 5, Part 2 (2nd ed; Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1977), p. 842.

³⁸ Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, pp. 3-10.

Hayagrīva are mentioned together in *Agni Purāṇa* 31.6 (“Mode of Cleansing Oneself and Others”),³⁹ in which the god Agni describes the ritual of cleansing prescribed in order to free oneself from suffering and to attain joy. He states:

Salutations...O Boar (*varāha*), Lord as Man-Lion (*nṛsiṃha*), Lord as dwarf (*vāmana*), Trivikrama, Lord as *Horse-necked One* (*Hayagrīva-īśa*), Lord of all beings, the Lord of all senses (*hr̥ṣīkeśa*), destroy my impurity.

An account of a malevolent Hayagrīva is likewise found in *Agni Purāṇa* 2.1-17 (“Manifestation of Viṣṇu as Fish”). Here, Agni describes Viṣṇu’s manifestation as a fish growing in a vessel. Agni describes the growing fish as saying:

Keśava (Kṛṣṇa) killed the horse-necked demon (*haya-grīva*), the destroyer of the Vedas of Brahmā, and thus protected the Vedic mantra.

Interestingly, similar to the *Harivamśa* references of the demonic horse-headed form, here the horse-necked figure (*haya-grīva*) is killed by Kṛṣṇa (Keśava, “the One with the beautiful locks of hair”).

Like *Agni Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (ca. 800 C.E.) is also an “encyclopedia” text. Chapter 202 provides a list of many different forms (*mūrtis*) of Viṣṇu; the “traditional ten” are, of course, present, but there are several other ones, including Hayagrīva: Matsya, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Nṛsiṃha, Rāma, Varāha, Nārāyaṇa, Kapila, Datta, Hayagrīva, Makaradhvaja, Nārada, Kūrma, Dhanvantari, Śeṣa, Yajña, Vyāsa, Buddha, and Kalkin.

There is also a complete chapter of fifty-seven verses on “The Worship of Hayagrīva” (*Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.34) in which Hara describes the deity’s worship. Hayagrīva is depicted as

³⁹ All quotations from the *Agni Purāṇa* are taken from: *Agni Purāṇa* Parts 1 & 2 (translation and annotation by N. Gangadharan) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).

a benevolent form of Viṣṇu and in v. 50 the horse-headed figure (*haya-sīras*) is described as the presiding deity of learning.

Pan-Indian Sectarian Purāṇas

The *Brahma Purāṇa* (ca. 500 C.E.), which does not belong to the three medieval sectarian groups (i.e., Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta), contains a reference to Hayagrīva. The *Brahma Purāṇa* is best known for its reiteration of stories from the *Harivamśa* and other Purāṇas.⁴⁰ In *Brahma Purāṇa* 93.19 ("Naraka is Killed"), Kṛṣṇa slays the *asura* Naraka. Vyāsa describes how Kṛṣṇa has slain many demons. In his account of Kṛṣṇa's victory in killing Mura, Vyāsa lists several *asuras* that Kṛṣṇa has killed, including Hayagrīva:

Lord Kṛṣṇa hurled his discus Sudarśana and cut off those nooses. Then the *asura* Mura got up. Keśava killed him. By the fire from the sharp edges of his discus Hari burned the seven thousand sons of Mura as though they were mere moths. O brahmins, after killing Mura, *horse-necked [demon] (haya-grīva)* and Pañcājana the intelligent lord hastened to Prāgjyotiṣa.⁴¹

This story is similar to the several malevolent depictions of a horse-necked figure found in the *Harivamśa*, in which a horse-necked demon (*haya-grīva*) is killed by Kṛṣṇa.

Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas

In the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, there is a variety of references to, and depictions of, Hayagrīva. As in *Agni Purāṇa*, Hayagrīva is listed as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in both the *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (ca. 300 C.E.) 5.17.11⁴² contains a list of the various forms Viṣṇu has taken in order to preserve the world:

⁴⁰ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 155.

⁴¹ *Brahma Purāṇa*, ed. by J.L. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), p. 483.

⁴² *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. (Sanskrit and English, Translated by H.H. Wilson; New Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1980). I have provided my own translation.

He, the unborn, who has preserved the world in the various forms of a fish (*matsya*), a tortoise (*kūrma*), a boar (*varāha*), a horse (*aśva*), and a lion (*siṃha*), will this day speak to me!

Also, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 2.2.49-50 describes certain *avatāras* as residing in certain regions:

Viṣṇu resides, in the region of Bhadrāśva,⁴³ as the *horse-headed One* (*haya-sīras*); in Ketumāla, as the boar (*varāha*); in Bhārata, as the tortoise (*kūrma*); in Kuru, as the fish (*matsya*); in His all-pervasive form, the omnipresent Hari is everywhere.

It is important to note that there are only positive depictions of Viṣṇu in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

Hayagrīva is only depicted as an *avatāra* of the "wholly" benevolent Viṣṇu.

Moreover, the *Aṭha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ*⁴⁴ contains an important prescriptive description of Hayagrīva. This text is one of the many *upa-purāṇas* that are traditionally considered to be summaries of the eighteen principal *Purāṇas* (*mahā-purāṇas*). According to Kane, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* is the earliest *upa-purāṇa* (ca. 600-650 C.E.), whereas the others were written ca. 8th-9th century C.E. up to 1170 C.E.⁴⁵ In *Aṭha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* 3.80.1-6,⁴⁶ the sage Mārkaṇḍeya tells Vajra about the horse-necked form of Viṣṇu (*haya-grīva*). Regarding the theological status of the deity (as opposed to *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79-87, which describes Hayagrīva as emanating from Aniruddha), the text claims that Hayagrīva is an emanation of the *vyūha* Saṅkaraṣaṇa (3.80.3b). The passage also refers to His *avatāric* activity of recovering the Vedas from the

⁴³ There are four principal regions in relation to Mt. Meru which is at the centre: (1) Bhadrāśva, which is east of Mt. Meru, (2) Ketumāla, which is west of Mt. Meru, (3) Bhārata, which is south of Mt. Meru, and (4) Kuru, which is north of Mt. Meru. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 294, 309, 746, 753.

⁴⁴ The contents of the text can be divided into three sections: (1) geography, astronomy and astrology, (2) *Rājā dharmā*, and (3) dancing, music, songs, construction of images, building of temples and the law. Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras*, pp. 834-38, 874-76.

⁴⁵ Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras*, pp. 834-38.

⁴⁶ *Aṭha Viṣṇudharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* (Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1912).

two demons in ancient times (3.80.6).

Finally, Hayagrīva appears in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Tamil Nadu, ca. 10th century).

Even though the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is believed to have been composed by a single author,⁴⁷

it contains three different *avatāra* lists:

I. **ten *avatāras*** (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.40.17-22):

(1) Matsya, (2) *Hayagrīva*, (3) Kūrma, (4) Varāha, (5) Nṛsiṃha, (6) Vāmana, (7) Parāśurāma, (8) Rāma, (9) Buddha, and (10) Kalkin.

II. **twenty-two *avatāras*** (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.1-25):

(1) four sages (Sanatkumāra, Sanaka, Sanandana, and Sanātana), (2) Varāha, (3) Nārada, (4) Nara and Nārāyaṇa, (5) Kapila, (6) Datta, (7) Yajña, (8) Rṣabha, (9) Pṛthu,⁴⁸ (10) Matsya, (11) Kūrma, (12) Dhanvantari, (13) Mohinī, (14) Nṛsiṃha, (15) Vāmana, (16) Parāśurāma, (17) son of Parāśara, (18) Rāma, (19) Kṛṣṇa, (20) Balarāma, (21) Buddha, and (22) Kalkin.

III. **twenty-three *avatāras*** (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.7.1-38):

(1) Varāha, (2) Suyajña, (3) Kapila, (4) Datta, (5) four sages: Sanatkumāra, Sanaka, Sanandana, and Sanātana, (6) Nārāyaṇa and Nara, (7) name not known,⁴⁹ (8) Dhruva,⁵⁰ (9) Pṛthu, (10) Rṣabha, (11) *Hayagrīva*, (12) Matsya, (13) Kūrma, (14) Nṛsiṃha, (15) Gajendra, (16) Vāmana, (17) Dhanvantari, (18) Parāśurāma, (19) Rāma, (20) Balarāma, (21) Kṛṣṇa, (22) Buddha, (23) Kalkin.

It is important to note that two out of the three lists found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* include Hayagrīva. In the first list, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.40.17 praises the One who assumed the form of the horse-necked god (*haya-grīva*) for the purpose of killing the demons Madhu and

⁴⁷ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 486-488.

⁴⁸ According to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4.15.3, Pṛthu is an *aiśa-avatāra*; that is, a partial incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.

⁴⁹ Portions of the chapter are quite obscure and the list of names is inconclusive, i.e., explicit names are not provided for numbers 7, 8, and 9 (only descriptions of figures). The elaborate description of number 7 is: "The great gods verily burn down Kāma, the god of Love, by their angry looks. But they cannot burn down the unbearable anger which consumes them. Such anger is afraid of even entering his pure heart. How can Kāma dare to enter his mind again?" (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.7.7).

⁵⁰ I have determined number 8 and 9 incarnations on the basis of other portions of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: (8) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4.8-9; and (9) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4.15-23.

Kaiṭabha. In the third list, Brahmā relates the various forms of Viṣṇu with their specific activities; concerning Hayagrīva (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.7.11), Brahmā states:

Then the lord incarnated in my sacrifice as *Hayagrīva*...He is the Yajña Puruṣa (presiding deity of all sacrifices). He is the main object of worship in the Vedas (or Veda incarnate), the sacrifice incarnate (or for whose grace sacrifices are performed) and the soul of all the deities. From the breath of his nostrils beautiful words (i.e. Vedic hymns) came forth.

This reference to Hayagrīva, in which he is associated with Yajña Puruṣa, "the sacrifice incarnate," may be considered to be an allusion to the late Vedic myths (such as *Śatapatha Brahmanā* 14.1.1-17 and *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 5.1 mentioned above) of Yajña's head being cut off and replaced with a horse's head. However, the whole passage describes Hayagrīva as the incarnate form of, or as the source of, sacrifice, the Vedas, and speech (similar to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva in the South⁵¹), thus establishing the horse-headed god as the primordial being, an image contained in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*.

In contrast to *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, however, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*⁵² combines both the malevolent and benevolent myths of Hayagrīva from the *Mahābhārata* tradition, revealing a lack of consistency even within the same text.

***Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: Horse-headed demon**

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 6.10.19 ("With Vajra Forged, Indra Fights"), sage Śrī Suka describes the fighting between Indra and the *asuras*. Hayagrīva is depicted as a horse-headed demon led by Vṛtra against Indra:

Namuci, Śambara, Anarvā, Dvimūrdha (a two-headed demon),

⁵¹ See Chapters V, VI, and VII.

⁵² All quotations from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are taken from: *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Part 1-3 (Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, Vols. 7-9), trans. and annotated G.V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978).

R̥ṣabha, Ambara *Hayagrīva* (a demon with horse's head), Śaṅkuśiras, Vipracitti, Ayomukha, Puloman, Vṛṣparvan, Praheti, Heti, Utkala, the sons of Diti and Danu and Yakṣas, ogres in the thousands, of whom Sumāli and Māli were prominent — all armoured and decorated with gold ornaments — resisted the vanguard of Indra's army, which was unapproachable even to the god of death.

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.10.21 ("A Battle between Gods and *Asuras*"), Śrī Śuka elaborates on the battles between Nārāyaṇa and the *dānavas*⁵³ (demons) and *daiṇyas* (demons). *Hayagrīva* is described as a demon or *asura*:

On all sides around him, in their respective aerial cars, attended various squadron-leaders of demons (*asuras*) such as Namuci, Śambara, Bāṇa, Vipracitti, Ayomukha, Dvimūrdha, Kālauābha, Praheti, Heti, Ilvala, Śakuni, Bhūtasantāpa, Vajradanīṣṭra, Virocana, *Hayagrīva*, Śaṅkuśiras, Kapila...and others.

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.2.4-5 ("Hiraṇyakaśipu Consoles his Mother and Kinsmen"), Nārada narrates how Hiraṇyakaśipu was agitated because his brother Hiraṇyākṣa was killed by Hari (Viṣṇu). Wanting to take revenge on Hari, Hiraṇyakaśipu rounded up the demons in order to attack the beings who killed his brother on Hari's behalf:

O Dānavas and Daityas, Oh Dvimūrdhan (two-headed demon), Oh three-eyed one, Śambara, hundred-armed one, horse-headed one, Namuci, Pāka, Ilvala, Vipracitti, Puloman, Śakuni and others! Listen to my words and then immediately execute them. Do not delay.

There is no description of the actual attack of the demons. The subsequent section relates Hiraṇyakaśipu's performance of the appropriate oblations for his deceased brother, and his comforting of his mother by speaking of the true nature of Reality (*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*).

Bhāgavata Purāṇa also contains a myth of a horse-headed, malevolent demon who is specifically in conflict with Viṣṇu. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.24.7-57 ("The Fish incarnation of

⁵³ *Dānavas* are a class of demons identified with *daiṇyas* and *asuras*.

Lord Hari”) describes the Lord as having assumed the form of a fish in order to save the Vedas from the Hayagrīva demon (similar to the myth discussed in *Matsya Purāṇa*). At the end of the *Brahmā kalpa* (era):

Brahmā caused a flood and a mighty demon called *Hayagrīva*, who was in the vicinity of Brahmā, carried away the Vedas from the mouth of Brahmā.... Noticing that act of *Hayagrīva*, the king of *Dānavas*, the glorious Supreme Lord Hari, assumed the form of a small glittering fish.

This passage depicts Hayagrīva as the one who steals the Vedas. The role of Hayagrīva in this passage is the reverse of his role as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

***Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: Hayagrīva as God**

By way of contrast to the above-mentioned passages, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11.4.17 (“Description of the Lord’s Incarnation by Drumila”) depicts Hayagrīva as one of the various incarnations that Viṣṇu has taken, such as Nārāyaṇa, Rāma, Vāmana, and Paraśurāma :

Taking the form of *Hayagrīva*, he killed the demon Madhu and recovered the Vedas from him.

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.18.1-6 (“Descriptions of various continents”), Śrī Śuka explains how Bhadrāśravas of the Bhadrāśva continent established the horse-headed lord (*hayaśirsa*), “who is righteousness incarnate in their minds”, by praying:

Salutations to the glorious Dharma, the embodiment of righteousness, represented by the sacred syllable *Oṃ*, the purifier of the mind! Praise the Lord for his strange and mysterious acts.... The Vedas attribute to you the authorship of the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe, even though you are not the doer conditioned [by *māyā*]... You are essentially different from all things.... He assumed the form of Man-horse (*haya-grīva*), and recovered from nether worlds the Vedas which were concealed there by the demon [Madhu], at the end of the *yuga* and returned them to the suppliant sage Brahmā.

In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.9.37 (“Prahāda eulogizes Nṛsiṃha Incarnation”), Prahāda

describes Hayagrīva's act of recovering the Vedas thus:

Assuming the form of a horse-necked god, Your worshipful self killed the extremely powerful enemies of the Vedas, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, by name, who were the very embodiments of *rajas* and *taṃas*. You thus restored the Vedas to him (Brahmā). The Vedas declare that You, most beloved person, consists of pure *sattva*.

This passage is similar to *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79-87 in that the *guṇa* theory is linked with the myth of Hayagrīva (who is *sattvic*) recovering the Vedas from the demons Madhu (who is *rajasic*) and Kaiṭabha (who is *taṃasic*).

Śaiva Purāṇas

The Śaiva Purāṇa called *Skanda Purāṇa*⁵⁴ (ca. 1100 C.E.) contains a passage that characterizes Hayagrīva as benevolent. Furthermore, unlike the passages in other Purāṇas (except for *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*), this passage explains the origins of the horse-head based on the Vedic myth of the beheading sacrifice (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1.1-17; *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.6). Here is a summary of the passage about Hayagrīva in the *Skanda Purāṇa* passage (*Brāhmā Kaṇḍa* 3-2.14-15):

Skanda asks Īśvara [Śiva] how Hari [Viṣṇu] became one with a horse's head, caused the death of the vile demon, and endeavoured to elucidate the meaning of the Vedas. Vyāsa explained that the gods commenced a sacrifice while chanting the Vedic mantras. All went to the Milk Ocean. They asked Bṛhaspati to tell them where Mahāviṣṇu was. Bṛhaspati, after meditating, pointed out where Hari was. They saw Mahāviṣṇu, the killer of the demon (*dairya*), sitting in a meditative posture with a bow. They attempted to wake him up and pulled the bow of Hari. As the ants ate the cord of the bow, his head was cut off and went to heaven. Brahṃā and the learned gods then asked Viśvakarma what they could do now. Brahṃā asked the carpenters to make a head for Viṣṇu. They brought the horse from the chariot and fixed it to the headless body of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu then said he was pleased and would give the book to all the residents of heaven. Pleased to have *Hayagrīva*, the *brāhmaṇas* performed the sacrifice.

⁵⁴ *Skandamahāpurāṇa* Vol. I (arranged by Nag Sharan Singh) (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1982).

Interestingly, although this myth told in *Skanda Purāṇa* depicts Hayagrīva as benevolent and explains the origin of his horse-head, there is no mention of Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. However, there is reference to his elucidation of the meaning of the Veda and destruction of a vile demon.

By way of contrast, in Chapter 9, which explains the procedure for constructing a mandala for worship, Hayagrīva is described as the horse-headed human (2.9.29) among many other forms of Viṣṇu (the chapter also describes different forms of Śakti and Śiva). Lastly, in a list of demons Viṣṇu has killed, there is a reference to the horse-necked demon (*aśva-grīva*) among others like Vipracitti, Virocana, Madhu and Kaiṭabha.

Śākta Purāṇas

Lalitā Māhātmya (ca. 600 C.E.), an addendum to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (ca. 300 C.E.),⁵⁵ appears in the form of a dialogue between Agastya and a horse-necked sage (*Hayagrīva*). They describe the origins of the goddess Lalitā, that is, her emergence out of a sacrifice offered to the goddess by Indra, and her triumph in destroying the *asura* Bhandā. Hayagrīva is referred to as the benevolent incarnation of Viṣṇu in both Chapter 5 ("Agastya's Pilgrimage to Sacred Places: Manifestation of Viṣṇu") and Chapter 6 ("A Dialogue Between Agastya and Hayagrīva: The Nature of Violence etc."). However, although Chapter 5 of the *Lalitā Māhātmya* describes the horse-headed deity (*Hayagrīva*) as being one among several other forms of Viṣṇu, both Chapters 5 and 6 also refer to Hayagrīva as a great sage who teaches Agastya the true nature of Reality. Although Hayagrīva is said to possess knowledge,

⁵⁵ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, Vol. 25, (translation and annotation by Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), pp. 1031-1042.

he is not depicted as the Supreme God, because the purpose of this text is the establishment of the supremacy of the goddess.

The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (ca. 900 C.E.), another Śākta text, contains a story about Hayagrīva that, like *Skanda Purāṇa*, includes the explanation of how Viṣṇu obtained a horse-head based on the later Vedic myths (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1.1-17; *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.6). Curiously, the passage in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* also combines the stories about the benevolent and malevolent horse-headed figures. *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.5.1-112⁵⁶ ("On the Narrative of Hayagrīva") tells the story of Hayagrīva thus (paraphrased):

The ṛṣis ask Śrī Sūta to describe the details of the *horse-necked Lord* (*haya-grīva*). Śrī Sūta said that after a battle for ten thousand years, Lord Nārāyaṇa seated himself on the throne in some lovely place. Placing his head on the front of his bow with the bow strung erect on the ground, Nārāyaṇa fell fast asleep. Seeing the Lord of the universe asleep, Brahmā, Rudra and the other gods (*devas*) became anxious. Brahmā created white ants (*vamrī*) so that they might eat up the forepart of the bow that was lying on the ground, causing the other endpart to rise up and thus break his sleep. The head of the God of gods (*devadeva*) Viṣṇu vanished; nobody knew where it fell.

When the darkness disappeared, Brahmā and Śiva (*mahādeva*) saw the disfigured body of Viṣṇu with its head cut off. They could not understand why there was a delay in fixing again the head on Viṣṇu's body. Brahmā suggested that they ask the Goddess (*devī*) to help them, so they propitiated her. The Goddess explained why Viṣṇu had been beheaded. Lakṣmī, out of anger because of Viṣṇu's laughing at her face, and fear that He might take another woman, cursed: "May your head fall off". As a result, His head fell into the ocean of salt. The head was put back on because, in ancient days, a famous demon (*daiṛya*) named *Hayagrīva* practiced severe penance (*tapasyā*) on the bank of the Sarasvatī river. Hearing the words of the Goddess, the demon instantly got up, circumambulated her, and fell down with devotion at her feet. *Demon Hayagrīva* said: "If it be thou art not

⁵⁶ *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* in *The Sacred Books of the Hindus*, Vol. 26, (edited by B.D. Basu and translation by Vijnanananda) (New York: AMS Press, 1974).

willing to grant me immortality, then grant me this boon that my death may not occur from any other being than from one who has a horse-face. Let Viśvakarma take a horse-head and fix it on the headless body of Viṣṇu. Then *Lord Hayagrīva* will slay the vicious wicked *asura* (*Hayagrīva*) for the good of the *devas*.

Clearly, this passage from the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* combines the malevolent and benevolent depictions of the horse-headed figure; that is, the malevolent demon-Hayagrīva is killed by the benevolent Lord Hayagrīva. However, like the passage in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, even though there is a reference to the “beheading” sacrifice of Viṣṇu, there is no reference to Hayagrīva recovering the Vedas.

As in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, a passage about Hayagrīva in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (ca. 900-1100 C.E.)⁵⁷ narrates a story in which Hayagrīva is portrayed as both demonic and benevolent. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* consists of a narrative framework in which Kamaṭha and other *munis* address a number of questions to Mārkaṇḍeya, who has taken up residence near the Himālayas. *Kālikā Purāṇa* 81.74-77 tells the story of how Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva, for the welfare of men, gods, and demons, killed *jvara-asura* (demon of fever) who stayed at Maṇikūṭa hill. Curiously, there is another reference in the text (*Kālikā Purāṇa* 83.24) that describes how, after Viṣṇu killed demon-Hayagrīva, the Lord settled at Maṇikūṭa hill. Not only is Hayagrīva depicted as a benevolent god, but He is described as having killed the demon-Hayagrīva. Similar to the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the stories in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* reflect the combination in Hayagrīva of both demon and god.

⁵⁷ The *Kālikā Purāṇa* (ca. 900-1100 C.E.) is very much a Śākta text, and often goes under the title of *Kālikā Tantra*. The text is believed to have originated in Kāmarūpa, a part of Bengal. The extant *Purāṇa* is different from an earlier one, that is believed to have contained fewer Tantric elements. Nevertheless, the *Purāṇa* continues to have an important role in Durgā *pūjā* — central in the region of Bengal. Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 179-182.

There is an account of Hayagrīva in the eightieth chapter of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*⁵⁸ :

A river known as Sarasvatī is where the other fish flag is hoisted. On the Eastern side of the Sarasvatī river is a river by the name of Dīpvatī. This river originates from the Himālayas. It is called Dīpvatī because it removes the darkness from the *devas* and *manuṣas*. On the eastern side of this river is a mountain called Śrīgata where a *līṅga* for Bhṛgu has been established. Lord Viśvanātha accompanied by Śiva *līṅgam*, Viśvadevī, Mahādevī who is in the form of the *yonī*, fought with [the demon] Hayagrīva where Viśvanātha dwells. The place where Hayagrīva was killed is called Maṇikūṭa. A person known as Śārada performs *pūjā* for Durgā along with [reciting] the Hayagrīva mantra in worship of the deity whose flag is Garuḍa. One who worships Śaṅkara by Kanesura *tantra* and mantra and who performs *pūjā* with great devotion on the twelfth day (*dvādaśī*), or on the eighth day or the fourteenth day will stay in the place of Viṣṇu for one crore years (*kalpa*) and the place of Śiva. After living so many years in Viṣṇu's and Śiva's abode, he will come to the earth and take the form of Brahmā.

Here, Hayagrīva is portrayed as *both* a demonic figure who was killed by Śārada and a *mantraic*-deity in the form of Hayagrīva. Through meditation on the Hayagrīva-mantra, along with performance of Durga *pūjā*, one attains a lengthy stay in the abodes of Viṣṇu and Śiva, as well as eventual rebirth as Brahmā. Interestingly, the Hayagrīva-mantra is associated with the Garuḍa flag; an association of Hayagrīva with Garuḍa appears in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition (See Chapter VI).

ANALYSIS OF HAYAGRĪVA IN THE PAN-INDIAN TEXTS

The Epic and Purāṇic figure of Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva is linked, by some scholars,⁵⁹ to the story of the sacrifice of Dadhyañc contained in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (as discussed in the

⁵⁸ *Kālikāpurāṇam* (edited by Śrī Viśvanārāyaṇa Śāstrī) (Vārāṇasī: Caukhambā Sanskrit Series Office, 1972).

⁵⁹ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, pp. 218-219.; Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 95-97.

previous chapter). Although the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* myth describes the beheading of Viṣṇu, it does not directly link the horse-headed deity with Viṣṇu. The horse-headed deity first appears in the Epic *Mahābhārata*.

Hayagrīva: Benevolent and Malevolent Deity

Although the horse-headed figure is not included in the lists of *avatāras* in the *Mahābhārata*,⁶⁰ there are several epithets and stories in the text that refer to Viṣṇu as having a horse's head. The *Mahābhārata* contains the imagery of a horse-headed figure as (1) a demon, and (2) a god. Furthermore, the text contains the foundational and familiar Vaiṣṇava myth about Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. By way of contrast, the *Harivamśa* depicts Hayagrīva solely as a mighty demon in conflict with Kṛṣṇa, whom Kṛṣṇa eventually kills.

In the Purāṇas (such as *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), Hayagrīva is included in the lists of *avatāras*. He is described both as a demon whom Lord Viṣṇu kills (*Agni Purāṇa* 2.1-17; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.24.7-57) as well as an incarnation of Viṣṇu who saves the Vedas for the welfare of the cosmos (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.17.11; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.9.37). Two Purāṇas contain a further development of the Hayagrīva myth — the combination of both benevolent and malevolent stories of Hayagrīva (*Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.5.1-112; *Kālikā Purāṇa* 80).

One basic characteristic of the Hindu tradition is its tendency to assimilate — rather than to reject — ideas, images, rituals and the like. This inevitably results in the incorporation of contradictory viewpoints and beliefs within a single religious system. Nevertheless, all the

⁶⁰ See previous section "Epic References".

contradictions that occur are accepted, because they are considered to be part of the whole. This characteristic of Hinduism is evident in many Purāṇas. Authors often make the attempt to incorporate earlier schools of thought into their own system. As van Buitenen has written:

The blending together of different creation myths (in Purāṇic texts) has been ingeniously and creatively, if not always consistently, accomplished. And the attempt to reconcile apparently different views of the creative process reveals a distinguishing feature of Purāṇic style as a whole, perhaps of Hindu thought as a whole: a preference for the synthesis of disparate views into a larger whole rather than the rejection of apparently dissident elements in favour of a single view considered to be exclusively true.⁶¹

Because the descriptions of the Hayagrīva myth in the Epics and Purāṇas are inconsistent, I would argue, going beyond van Buitenen, that there is nonetheless a selective process in some of the Purāṇas in regard to synthesizing and rejecting certain elements; one can observe this more clearly in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. The primary contradiction contained in these texts is that Hayagrīva is depicted not only as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, but also as a demon whom Viṣṇu kills. There are two main versions of the story of Hayagrīva proper: (1) a benevolent Hayagrīva, who recovers the Vedas, and (2) a malevolent figure who is killed by Viṣṇu. Although some texts (such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) contain the two versions separately, other texts (such as the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Kālikā Purāṇa*) offer a combination of the two figures.

The combination of the benevolent and malevolent myths is significantly observed only in non-Vaiṣṇava texts, such as the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.5.1-112) and the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Chapter 80). Although one Vaiṣṇava text (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) refers to both

⁶¹ C. Dimmitt and J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 16.

portrayals of Hayagrīva, no synthesis of the malevolent and benevolent depictions of Hayagrīva is provided: the text presents the two depictions as two different figures. The ambivalent nature of gods, whereby they are depicted as both malevolent and benevolent, may also reflect religio-historical and theological change and transformation.

It is to be expected, particularly in an oral tradition, that myths undergo change and transformation. They are influenced by the milieu in which they are being told, and then once again as they begin to be compiled into texts. Scholars need to deal with the question of additions and substitutions by asking why a storyteller or an editor would choose certain motifs and details and leave out others? It is important to reflect on what is the purpose of combination, omission or synthesis of the various and disparate elements of a myth.

Because it is likely that compilers have not blindly omitted and incorporated myths into their texts, it is misleading to remove the myths from their context (as is done by scholars employing the structural approach to understanding myth). Myths do not exist in a vacuum, but reflect the specific religious world-view and theological leaning of any given text. Texts are thus not fixed entities; rather, they have undergone transformation related to particular contexts: (1) through time (diachronic) and (2) as a sectarian viewpoint in relation to other sectarian viewpoints at any one time (synchronic).

Myth and the “Histories” of Myth: Transformation Through Time

Myths that are transformed through time never exist in a vacuum. Rather, they change as religious sects adapt Epic and Purāṇic myths to their own theological/religious agendas. Thus, it is important to view the myths in their textual and religio-historical context, because the variations of a single Hindu myth in many cases reflect the development and evolution of the many religious sects. Myths, in the diverse context of India, have a variety of “histories”.

Conversely, new myths also develop out of many histories. A general chronology of the Epics and Purāṇas allows one to view better each text within its own general religio-historical and specific theological context. Although it is difficult to date precisely the Epic and Purāṇic texts, it does an injustice to the Purāṇas to remove them completely from their most probable chronological (and religio-historical) contexts.

Overview of the Diachronic Dimension of the Myths about Hayagrīva

I. Vedic Period (1500-500 B.C.E.)

1. Early period (1500-900 B.C.E.) Viṣṇu's association with demon-slaying activity, and his image as a sun-horse: *R̥k Veda*
2. Late period (900-500 B.C.E.) Viṣṇu's/Yajña's beheading sacrifice: *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*

II. Classical period (200 B.C.E.-500 C.E.)

- A. Hayagrīva god: *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*
- B. horse-headed demon: *Harivaṃśa*
- C. benevolent and malevolent figures (not combined): *Mahābhārata*, *Matsya Purāṇa*
- D. benevolent and malevolent figures (combined): none in texts surveyed

III. Early Medieval period (500-800 C.E.)

- A. Hayagrīva god: *Garuḍa Purāṇa*
- B. horse-headed demon: none in texts surveyed
- C. benevolent and malevolent figures (not combined): *Agni Purāṇa*
- D. benevolent and malevolent figures (combined): none in texts surveyed

IV. Middle Medieval period (800-1000 C.E.)

- A. Hayagrīva god: *Nārada Purāṇa*
- B. horse-headed demon: *Brāhma Purāṇa*
- C. benevolent and malevolent figures (not combined): *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; *Skanda Purāṇa*
- D. benevolent and malevolent figures (combined): none in texts surveyed
- E. continuities with I, containing an explanation for the origins of the horse's head (beheading sacrifice): *Skanda Purāṇa*

V. Late Medieval period (1000-1500 C.E.)

- D. benevolent and malevolent figures (combined): *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*
- E. continuities with I, containing an explanation for the origins of the horse's head (beheading sacrifice): *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*

Hayagrīva and the God-Demon Conflict

One of the important themes on evil that Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty) traces in *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* is the god-demon conflict.⁶² She casts light on the cycle of the god-demon conflict and distinguishes three historical phases of it in Hindu mythology: (1) the Vedic phase, (2) the post-Vedic phase, and (3) the *Bhakti* phase.⁶³ She relates each of these phases to the mythic pattern of the recovery of the Vedas:⁶⁴ (1) Viṣṇu takes form as

⁶² In *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, O'Flaherty traces the theme of evil and the various Indian concepts of evil in Hindu mythology, and in doing so demonstrates several mythic patterns. She does not look at evil as described in chronological periods from the Vedas to the present day, because "Indian religious texts are difficult to date, it is more interesting to trace the different concepts of evil, finally also because there is no clear cut development of Hindu mythology". She does not make generalizations on the basis of a single Indian concept of evil because there are many contradictions and variations in Hindu myths. Rather, she pursues several themes related to the Indian concepts of evil, and attempts to trace the themes back to their earliest source or sources. In effect, she finds that archaic concepts from the *Vedas* re-emerge in later texts, along with later dissident themes. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), pp. 11-13.

⁶³ In the Vedic phase, *yajña* (sacrifice) is central. Humans must perform sacrifice in order to please the gods and to gain boons in heaven (*svarga*). Humans are dependent on the gods for prosperity and happiness. Here, the gods are in harmony with humans, but in conflict with the demons. The gods inflict evil upon the demons in order to maintain their own power and status.

The post-Vedic phase, on the other hand, emphasizes ascetic and meditative practices for attaining spiritual power. Here, for the attainment of salvation, humans are independent of the gods. Indeed, *brāhmaṇas* consider themselves more important to the cosmic order than the gods. Thus, humans are in competition with the gods. Evil in humans, which is the consequence of being in alignment with the demons, causes the omniscient and omnipotent gods to inflict delusion and pain upon their human enemies. Priests, then, take on the role of mediator between humans and the gods.

Finally, in the *bhakti* phase, the path of "selfless" devotion to God is regarded as superior. Humans and "good demons" are no longer in conflict with the gods. The myths return to the Vedic concept of good humans as dependent on God for their well being. God is benevolent and, out of compassion, wishes humans to attain salvation by His divine grace. During the *bhakti* stage, God is reconciled with humans. O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, pp. 79-93.

⁶⁴ See O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, pp. 100-101.

Hayagrīva in order to recover the stolen Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha;⁶⁵ (2) Viṣṇu assumes the form of Mahāmāyā (Great Illusion) in order to corrupt the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha and converts them to Buddhism (neither the horse-headed deity nor the motif of recovering the Vedas is part of this version),⁶⁶ and (3) Viṣṇu takes the form of a fish (*matsya*) to recover the Vedas stolen from the horse-headed demon.⁶⁷

Even though O'Flaherty's delineation of the three phases of the god-demon cycle is original, her claim about the correspondence between this cycle and the myth of the recovery of the Vedas is unconvincing.⁶⁸ It seems that O'Flaherty is highly selective in her choice of passages from the various texts in attempting to demonstrate the thematic cycles of the recovery of the Vedas. For instance, she cites the mythic version from *Mahābhārata* 12.335.21-65, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.17.11, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.18.1-6 for the first "Vedic phase", and from *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 81.49-77 for the version of the second "post-Vedic phase". However, the versions of the myth for both phases are taken from post-Vedic texts. Despite the fact that the variants may be regarded as belonging to different mythic strands, it is misleading to categorize them in terms of Vedic and post-Vedic "phases", which are differentiated according to textual-historical periods.

Or, take again the third "*Bhakti* phase". The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a *Bhakti* text, and thus can be considered appropriate for the third "*Bhakti* phase" about the demon form of Hayagrīva who steals the Vedas, which are recovered by Matsya. However, this variant of the

⁶⁵ *Mahābhārata* 12.335.21-65; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.17.11; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.18.1-6

⁶⁶ *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 81.49-77.

⁶⁷ *Agni Purāṇa* 2.1-17; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.24.7-57

⁶⁸ O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, pp. 100-101.

myth is also present in *Agni Purāṇa* 2.1-17 — an “encyclopedic” Purāṇa which pre-dates the *Bhakti* phase. Further, it is not clear how this particular myth from the *Agni* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* can be regarded as reflecting the “*Bhakti* phase”, since the mythic motif of the stolen Vedas being rescued by god has been categorized as belonging to the “Vedic phase”; the difference between the two is chiefly in respect of the specific *avatāra* of Viṣṇu rescuing the Vedas.

In *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, O’Flaherty distinguishes the three phases of the mythic transformation of Hayagrīva: (1) a benevolent deity, (2) a malevolent deity, and (3) a synthesis of the two. She regards the third phase as being composed of a synthesis of the two previous myths. Interestingly, she altogether ignores (1) the texts that contain both myths of the benevolent Hayagrīva and those of the malevolent Hayagrīva, but in which there is no synthesis of the two stories (*Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), and (2) those that omit references to the demonic Hayagrīva altogether (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*). The texts that agglomerate the benevolent and malevolent aspects of the Hayagrīva deity/demon actually omit the myth of the benevolent Hayagrīva who recovered the Vedas from the demons (the central Vaiṣṇava myth of the benevolent Hayagrīva). Furthermore, the stories that combine the benevolent and malevolent aspects of the deity are not found in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇic texts surveyed, the sect in which Hayagrīva has come to have the greatest significance.

Although the synthesis of the god-demon myth is contained in some of the later Purāṇic texts (*Devibhāgavata* and *Kālikā*), O’Flaherty completely displaces the variants from their contexts, and as a result overlooks any possible religio-historical significance that the “synthesis” of the benevolent and malevolent Hayagrīva may reflect.

The "Histories" of Hayagrīva: Transformation Among Sects

The Purāṇic texts must be viewed not only in terms of their overall content, but in what they add or omit from any particular set of myths. In the transmission of the prominent symbolic structure of any given myth, that myth is likely to be transformed as it is written or adapted to a specific pre-determined sectarian or theological framework. The specific features of each myth, incorporated into any given Purāṇa, reflect the point of view (whether philosophical or devotional) of the Purāṇic compiler(s) and his/their tradition. Myths or certain of their elements/motifs may, therefore, be included, excluded, or transformed for reasons that go far beyond the myth itself.

Some scholars have had the tendency, after arranging Sanskrit texts chronologically, to gear their studies solely to historical development, thus neglecting various other factors and influences on any given myth. In his analysis of the development of emotionalism in South India, Friedhelm Hardy has shed light on the dynamic relationship between the pan-Indian Sanskrit tradition and other more local ones. He describes the relationship and interaction between the classical Purāṇas and the regional ones (*sthāla-purāṇas*):

This whole process of transformation, controlled by the need to provide specific information, has revealed itself as possessing two dynamic directions. We may choose as our starting point classical standards, which means assuming that there are objective, fixed archetypes (like "the" story of Rāma).... On the other hand, we may choose as our starting point the most restricted, localized milieu available. Now we find the Purāṇic process is busy transforming this by providing much wider confines and by creating far larger contexts. This may be described as "integration," but could also be called "distortion" depending on what ideological yardstick one uses.⁶⁹

This dilemma of recensions (pan-Indian and local) not only exists in respect of the regional

⁶⁹ Hardy, "Information and Transformation", p. 175.

Purāṇas, but also extends to the “classical” Purāṇas (or for that matter the Epics and Āgamas). For, the so-called “classical” Purāṇas may also have a variety of different theological or metaphysical orientations. As I have demonstrated with reference to the Hayagrīva myth, different theological reference points play a crucial role in the various versions of the Hayagrīva myth in the Purāṇas.

In her analysis of the Hayagrīva myth in *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, O’Flaherty claims that the inconsistent depiction of Hayagrīva in the Purāṇic literature is commonly found in myths, as is the combination of both the benevolent and malevolent depictions of this figure. Although it is true that this feature may be observed in the Hayagrīva myth, is it a general development of the myth or is it the result of particular sectarian readings of the myth or both? Myth may be adapted to serve the theological purposes of the different religious sects rather than simply evolve through a single abstract historical process.

It is important to note that the Purāṇas contain different theological and philosophical world-views and the Hayagrīva myth or myths that are contained in, or absent from, specific Purāṇas may be more reflective of the world-view of a particular sect than of any linear or cyclical development of the myth. For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a Vaiṣṇava sectarian text heavily influenced by the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is a Vaiṣṇava text that contains certain consistent elements which later came to be associated as Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, whereas *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* is a Śākta sectarian text, and *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa* are encyclopedic ones (with Āgamic influences). The sectarian theological context of the text is significant as demonstrated in the table below.

Overview of the Synchronic Dimension of the Myths about Hayagrīva

- I. **Vedic antecedents** to the horse-headed deity in the *Brāhmaṇas*
- II. *Mahābhārata*: Hayagrīva god and horse-headed demon (not combined)
Harivaṁśa (Kṛṣṇaite):⁷⁰ horse-headed demon only
- III. **“encyclopedic” Purāṇas**: Hayagrīva god and horse-headed demon (not combined)
- IV. **sectarian Purāṇas**:
 - a. Vaiṣṇavism: Hayagrīva god only
 - b. Advaita Vedānta (Kṛṣṇaite/Vaiṣṇava): Hayagrīva god and horse-headed demon (not combined)
 - c. Śaivism: Hayagrīva god and horse-headed demon (not combined)
 - d. Śāktism: Hayagrīva god and horse-headed demon (combined)

The variants of any given myth, by the time of the Epics and Purāṇas, may then be dependent upon the particular theological context in which they appear. For instance, why is the combination of the benevolent and malevolent horse-headed deity found in the *Devibhāgavata Purāṇa* — a Śākta sectarian text — but not in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, a Vaiṣṇava sectarian text? And, why does the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* — a Vaiṣṇava sectarian and heavily Advaita Vedāntic text — contain both benevolent and malevolent depictions of Hayagrīva, yet not a combination of the two? The Hayagrīva Purāṇic myths are thus not fixed entities nor can one discern a linear development in the myth over time; rather, the myths most often have undergone transformation related to particular contexts, according to the agendas of the Purāṇic compiler(s).

The character of the sectarian Purāṇas reflects the relationship between the different religious streams in India. As demonstrated, the particular usage of the Hayagrīva myth can

⁷⁰ See section “The *Harivaṁśa*: Horse-headed Enemy of Viṣṇu” above for explanation as to why a Kṛṣṇaite text depicts Hayagrīva as a demon.

have disparate theological implications and significance. Although there may be continuity of certain themes and motifs that are contained in the myths, the discontinuities often reflect a different theological or philosophical matrix. There is a solely benevolent depiction of Hayagrīva in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, a Vaiṣṇava text, because for Vaiṣṇavas an incarnation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu can, by definition, possess no trace of evil. For Vaiṣṇavas, Viṣṇu is wholly taintless.⁷¹

It would have been philosophically and theologically impossible for the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the Alvar hymns to contain depictions of an *avatāra* of the wholly benevolent Viṣṇu as having a demonic past, or even to acknowledge another horse-headed figure who is demonic. According to the theology of God established by the most eminent Śrī Vaiṣṇava teacher (Rāmānuja), Viṣṇu is consistently portrayed as wholly benevolent and wholly taintless (*amalarva*).⁷² This only further reinforces the idea that one can only speak of the “histories” of Hayagrīva.

It is important to note that although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a Kṛṣṇaite text, composed in the same milieu as Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, it includes myths both of the benevolent and malevolent Hayagrīva. Although the text provides both myths, it does not agglomerate the disparate myths of the horse-headed figure; rather, its author simply relates the two different stories, with no attempt at integration. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, although it is centred around

⁷¹ Śrī Bhāṣya 3.2.5.20. Rāmānuja, *The Vedānta Sūtras with the Śrī Bhāṣya of Rāmānujāchārya* 3 vols. (translation by M. Rangacharya and M.V. Varadaraja Aiyangar) (Nungambakkam, Madras: The Educational Publishing Co., 1961, 1964, 1965).

⁷² See Nancy Ann Nayar, “The Tamilizing of a Sacred Sanskrit Text: The Devotional Mood of Rāmānuja’s *Bhagavadgītā-Bhāṣya* and Ālvār Spirituality”, in *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India*, Ed. by Katherine K. Young (McGill Studies in Religion Series Vol I; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 193-198.

Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*, is Advaitic in orientation. This orientation means that all manifestations of Viṣṇu are in the realm of *māyā*, and the author is therefore less anxious to establish the wholly taintless nature of any particular form of Viṣṇu. The text can then contain both a benevolent and a malevolent depiction of Hayagrīva. Indeed, there may well be two different horse-headed figures included in the same text.

By way of contrast, non-Vaiṣṇava s (such as Śaivas and Śāktas) view Viṣṇu and his *avatāras* as having only minor importance in their understanding of the Supreme. Moreover, the ambivalent depictions of Hayagrīva are continuous with the ambivalent nature of Śiva and the Goddess. The combination of benevolence and malevolence with regards to Hayagrīva that is found in *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Kālikā Purāṇa* would not be problematic for Śaivas or Śāktas, who respectively revere Śiva or Śakti, not Viṣṇu, as the Supreme Deity. The ambivalent nature of both their deities (Śiva and Śakti) has demonic features incorporated into the very nature of the Supreme. Furthermore, the combination of the malevolent and benevolent aspects of Hayagrīva found in *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (a late Purāṇic text compiled ca. 11th century C.E.) can be justifiably interpreted as the later variant of a myth used in order to demonstrate sectarian superiority: the Hindu depiction of the Hindu Hayagrīva god who kills the Buddhist Hayagrīva figure depicted as a demonic form of Hayagrīva because it is from (at least, represents) the Mahāyāna/Mantrayāna Buddhist pantheon.

On the other hand, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes a middle stand by relating, but not integrating, the two stories.⁷³ Because of its Advaitic viewpoint on *māyā*, it is perhaps less

⁷³ Similarly, the “encyclopedic” Purāṇas like *Agni Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa* depict Hayagrīva both as benevolent and malevolent. Although these texts are concerned with Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*, their contexts differ based on the fact that “encyclopedic” Purāṇas contain a variety of subjects without connection.

important for the deity to be portrayed as wholly benevolent. But for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, *māyā* is Viṣṇu's wonderful and mysterious "creation", a thing to be enjoyed. The affirmation of God's creation means that the forms which Viṣṇu takes are real, not illusory. In the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas (such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) or in the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava texts (such as *Hayagrīva Stotra* discussed in Chapter VI and the devotional hymns in Chapter VII), the malevolent aspect of Hayagrīva is not even so much as mentioned! This only further reinforces the idea that one can only speak of the "*histories*" of Hayagrīva.

Furthermore, the story of the beheading sacrifice found in Vedic literature reappears only in two very late Purāṇas (*Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*), which use the story in order to explain how Viṣṇu came to be one with a horse's head. Although the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* story of Dadhyañc may provide a paradigm for the origins of Hayagrīva, it is not a salient feature of the Hayagrīva myth in generally, and, in fact, only reappears in the mythic variants of these two Purāṇas as an explanation for the origin of Hayagrīva: the beheading of Viṣṇu and the replacement with the sacrificial horse-head. I believe it is significant that the mythic strand of the beheading sacrifice found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is maintained only in non-Vaiṣṇava texts. Furthermore, the two myths that contain the explanation of the origins of the horse's head make no mention of the important Vaiṣṇava myth of Hayagrīva, as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, recovering the Vedas from the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha!

It must be emphasized that none of the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas I have surveyed incorporate any stories regarding the origins of Hayagrīva; such explanations are only found in a Śaiva and a Śākta Purāṇa. Why would Vaiṣṇavas not include this strand of the explanation of the origin of Hayagrīva, especially given the fact that they so often attempt to legitimize their

sectarian tradition by linking it with the Vedas? One could, I suppose, argue that Hayagrīva's origin is simply taken for granted. But I find it significant that not even a single Vaiṣṇava text (Purāṇic and Āgamic) that I surveyed repeats the myth of the beheading sacrifice; that is, there are no birth stories for Hayagrīva. For Vaiṣṇavas (unlike for Śaivas), Hayagrīva is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who came to earth to restore the *dharma* at a certain time and place, and thus by nature is "wholly" benevolent, and because he is an incarnation he cannot be created in another way. Viṣṇu's benevolent *avatāric* forms require no explanation as to how they obtained their animal heads. In this, the Vaiṣṇava myths on Hayagrīva and Nṛsiṃha are consistent. This would necessarily exclude the Western interpretation of sacrifice as a means to initiate a once "demon" into the Vaiṣṇava pantheon as an *avatāra*.⁷⁴ Although the various forms of Viṣṇu are by their very nature benevolent without a demonic past, the many forms of Śiva are commonly depicted as ambivalent, even gruesome in imagery. Thus, the motif of the beheading sacrifice may be acceptable in the Śaiva "histories" of the ambivalent gods; it is, however, not so in the Vaiṣṇava stories of the various incarnations of Viṣṇu.

One case of a Vaiṣṇava "history" of a deity in which a demon is incorporated into Vaiṣṇava circles is that of Bali. It is crucial to note, however, that he is not regarded as a full form incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. Although Bali appears as a demon in the Epic and early Purāṇic literature, he is depicted as benevolent in the later Purāṇic texts (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). Here, the important concepts of sacrifice and initiation are reflected in Bali's self-sacrifice and single-minded devotion to Viṣṇu. In the case of Bali, the beheading motif is unnecessary because the demon Bali is transformed by his single-minded devotion to the Supreme God

⁷⁴ The origins of Nṛsiṃha, the man-lion *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, are also not a feature in the Vaiṣṇava stories of Nṛsiṃha.

Viṣṇu. Bali attains his divine status only in the later Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* texts like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in which he serves as the model of a perfect devotee who sacrifices his desires to the will of Viṣṇu.⁷⁵ The structural approach, which sheds light on the underlying structure of a myth, fails to consider the context, and thus relevance, of certain changes in a myth. It should now be evident that O'Flaherty's structural approach, by ignoring the context of the various myths, exaggerates their continuity and neglects the implications of their discontinuities. The removal of myths from their textual context, as is done by the structuralists, causes them to miss the complexity of the many "histories" of a mythical figure(s) such as Hayagrīva.

The compilers-editors of the Purāṇas often make an attempt to incorporate deities, religious beliefs, and motifs into their own system. For contemporary scholars to remove a myth from its carefully constructed context is to imply that the compilers have blindly incorporated and agglomerated myths and/or elements of myths into their texts. This study of Hayagrīva would appear to support the position that this is not the case.

CONCLUSION

Because the references to, and myths about, Hayagrīva in the Epic and Purāṇic texts are disparate, one can only speak, in the plural, of the "histories" of Hayagrīva. The Vedas contain stories about the beheading sacrifice of Yajña and Viṣṇu (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1-17; *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.6), which may be regarded as an antecedent to the later Purāṇic stories explaining the origins of a horse-headed being. There are passages from one Śaiva and one Śākta Purāṇa that include the mythic strand of the beheading sacrifice as an

⁷⁵ Hospital, *The Righteous Demon*, pp. 20-24; 154ff.

explanation of the origin of Hayagrīva — *Skanda Purāṇa* 3-2.14-15 and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.5.1-112. However, neither of these passages includes the central Vaiṣṇava myth of Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas from the demons; that is, the horse-headed figures share the same lower ontological status as god (*deva*) and demon (*asura*), and should not be confused with the "history" of the horse-headed God of gods (*devadeva*).

Important motifs and structural patterns are found in an Epic or Purāṇic myth. However, to the extent that it is feasible, myths must be read and studied in their *religio-historical*, *sectarian* and *theological* contexts. The structural approach to Hindu mythology, although useful in discerning certain mythic patterns and cycles, (1) removes myths from their context, ignoring their possible multi-faceted development, (2) assumes antecedents back to the *Vedas*, which implies a purely linear understanding of mythic transformation, and neglects other variables, such as Āgamic influence on the development of a deity (which will be discussed in the following chapter) and, finally, (3) overlooks the text's context, which reflects its theological or philosophical orientation and the editor's agenda.

Most importantly, serious questions can be raised about the application of a research tool developed for the study of pre-literate societies (as in Lévi-Strauss) to highly developed literate societies and civilizations, such as we find in the case of India. Accordingly, it suffers from inherent limitations when applied to literate self-conscious civilizations with highly developed philosophical and theological systems. In the latter, myth may be purposively adapted to serve the particular theological world-views of the different religious streams rather than simply evolve through some single, abstract historical process.

In Epic literature (*Mahābhārata*), there are references to Hayagrīva that depict him as a horse-headed demon, a horse-headed god, as well as saviour of the Vedas. Meanwhile, the

Harivaṁśa contains only depictions of Hayagrīva as a demon killed by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, in the *Purāṇas* there are inconsistent depictions of Hayagrīva: as a benevolent deity who recovers the Vedas from the demons (such as *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.9.37); and as a malevolent demon who is killed by Viṣṇu (such as *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.24.7-57, *Agni Purāṇa* 2.1-17).

The mythic account of Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha is the beginning of Hayagrīva's Vaiṣṇava history as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* only relates the two versions separately, the Śākta *Purāṇas* (*Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.5.1-112 and *Kālikā Purāṇa* 80) give a combination of the two versions, whereby Hayagrīva is depicted both as benevolent and malevolent in a single story. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, because it has an *advaitic* orientation, is able to relate both the benevolent and malevolent (not combined) stories of Hayagrīva separately. It is important to note, however, that although the Śākta texts combine the benevolent and malevolent horse-headed figures, they do not include the central Vaiṣṇava myth describing Hayagrīva's role and act as *avatāra*.

For Vaiṣṇavas (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*), Hayagrīva is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and thus can only be benevolent in nature. Here we encounter a text that is primarily theological, wherein myth is adapted to a larger theological world-view! Not unexpectedly, with its Vaiṣṇava theological orientation, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* contains only the benevolent depiction of Hayagrīva, without mention of Viṣṇu's beheading sacrifice. The wholly benevolent nature of Viṣṇu's *avatāra* must be presented without a trace of impurity!

Although the *avatāric* listings and myth of Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas in the Epic and Purāṇic literature shed some light on the "histories" of Hayagrīva, there are other features of Hayagrīva that are not as important in the predominantly mythic genre of

literature. These are the various explicit descriptions of Hayagrīva in the Āgamic corpus, which form the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN INDIAN SECTARIAN TRADITIONS: RELIGIOUS PRACTICE CONCERNING HAYAGRĪVA IN THE ĀGAMAS

In tracing the development of a deity, an analysis of the Āgamic stream, a part of the pan-Indian Sanskrit tradition, is not only useful, but essential. Although Vedic *yajña* is considered the origin of Hindu ritual and has been used to legitimize later ritual developments, temple rituals are actually based on the Āgamas/Purāṇas. The Āgamas are foundational to Hindu temple ritual in the South, whereas the Purāṇas are the basis of temple worship in the North. The Āgamas provide prescriptive information regarding Hindu religious practice, including the worship of particular deities. These texts, which prescribe the iconography of deities as well as the specifics of many temple rituals such as image worship, are central to Hinduism and thus a necessary source in tracing the histories of Hayagrīva.

Although some of the information that the Āgamas contain is included in the “encyclopedia” Purāṇas (see below), the Āgamas provide descriptions of deities not included in the ordinary Purāṇas. Both the Āgamas and the “encyclopedia” Purāṇas shed light on the dynamic relations between mythology and iconography as well as the interaction between pan-Indian “mainstream” Hinduism and pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic traditions.

The three divisions of the Āgamic traditions correspond to the three major Hindu sects: (1) the Śaiva (Kapāla, Kālamukha, Pāśupata, Kashmir-Śaiva, and Siddhānta-Śaiva); (2) the Vaiṣṇava (Pāñcarātra and Vaikhāṇasa); and (3) the Śākta (Dakṣiṇa and Vāma). These three sects acknowledge the supremacy of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti, respectively. Because the Āgamas are clearly sectarian, an analysis of the various texts may well demonstrate the interrelation and possible convergence of the sectarian traditions.

This chapter begins with an overview and analysis of the many Pāñcarātra Āgamic

references to Hayagrīva, including a look at the theological and temple ritual status of the deity, and his *devatā*, *mantraic* and *yantraic* forms. This is followed by a comparative study of these Pāñcarātra Āgamic depictions of Hayagrīva with those contained in the “encyclopedic” Purāṇas. Lastly, the chapter considers the references to, and depictions of, Hayagrīva (or lack of them) in the Śaiva and Śākta Āgamic (Tantric) traditions. An analysis of the various references to Hayagrīva contained in the sectarian Āgamas reflect the complexity in the development of the notion of a deity, and the interchange of, or common source of, many of the motifs and emblems in the various Indian sectarian traditions. The similarities raise the important issue of the role and influence that indigenous beliefs and practices might have had both on the Āgamas and larger Hinduism.

Before proceeding to an overview and analysis of the depictions of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamic corpus, it is necessary to provide some background on Vaiṣṇava iconography.

Vaiṣṇava Iconography

In the Epic and Purāṇic literature, Viṣṇu is represented anthropomorphically, along with what have become conventional iconographical features and emblems. Viṣṇu may appear in one of three positions: (1) in the reclining position, where he rests on the coils of the serpent Ādiśeṣa, (2) in the sitting position, and (3) in the standing position.

When Viṣṇu is depicted in the sitting or standing position, each of his four arms bears a particular emblem. The four distinct emblems carried in Viṣṇu’s hands are: the discus (*cakra*), which symbolizes the sun and is often associated with the thunderbolt of Indra; the conch (*śaṅkha*), which is a symbol of the origin of existence; the mace (*gada*), which is a symbol of the power of knowledge; and, finally, the lotus (*padma*), which is a symbol of

purity, eternity, and good fortune.¹

OVERVIEW OF THE REFERENCES TO HAYAGRĪVA IN THE ĀGAMAS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PĀÑCARĀTRA

Pāñcarātra Āgamas and the References to Hayagrīva

Even though the Āgamas are mainly found in Kashmir and the South, the employment of the term pan-Indian here qualifies the Āgamic texts as not being restricted to a single region. I regard the Āgamic traditions to be relatively old. Scholars have dated the earliest Pāñcarātra Āgamic texts ca. 500 C.E., but the texts (or at least portions or elements of the texts) were likely part of a more ancient oral tradition that only later came to be written down in the form of *samhitās*. For dating the Āgamas that I have cited, I have relied on the work of Mitsunori Matsubara,² which is the most recent and thorough study of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas available.

According to Jan Gonda, although the “Āgamas”³ tend to have a ritualistic outlook— involving a preoccupation with the Lord’s ornaments, construction of temples, installation of images, temple worship, ceremonial bathing, and public festivals—they are also concerned with cosmogonic and salvific matters, such as creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe, speculations on the nature of the Absolute, the creative nature of sound, and the use

¹ Gupta, *Vishnu and His Incarnations*, pp. 3-5.

² Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Samhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 34-35.

³ Here, Gonda refers to the Āgamas as Tantras. Although presently Pāñcarātrins do not consider Pāñcarātra as Tantric, most likely due to the generally negative attitude to, and disrespect for, some of the Tantric practices, the word Tantra is sometimes used interchangeably with Āgama. Pandit M. Durniswamy Aiyangar and Pandit T. Venugopalacharya (eds.), *Śrī Pāñcarātrarākṣa of Vedānta Deśika* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967), pp. vii-xii.

of mantras.⁴

The Pāñcarātra Āgamas are believed to have been revealed by Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) Himself.⁵ The most ancient and therefore authoritative of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas are the *Jayākhyā Saṁhitā*, the *Sārvata Saṁhitā* and the *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*, referred to collectively as the *ratna-traya* (three gems). As might be expected, the Vaiṣṇava Āgamic corpus contains continuities and discontinuities with the conventional depictions of Viṣṇu. Because the Pāñcarātra Āgamas describe three forms of a deity—*devatā* (personifying), *yantra* (symbolic) and *mantra* (sonic)—their references to Hayagrīva can be analysed from the viewpoint of theology, ritual, and iconography. They contain some interesting adaptations and variations as to Hayagrīva's role and nature.

Theological Status

The post-Epic Vaiṣṇava texts (such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Pāñcarātra Āgamas) give a more extensive listing of the number of *avatāras* than the "traditional ten" referred to by both Indian and Western scholars. On the basis of the *avatāric* listing found in *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṁhitā* (see below), Gonda claims that there are four *vyūhas*, "cosmic emanations of Viṣṇu" (Vāsudeva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha), and thirty-nine *vibhava-avatāras* (incarnations of Viṣṇu on earth at particular places and times) according to Pāñcarātra.⁶

In a more comprehensive study, Desai finds that the Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās are

⁴ Jan Gonda (ed.), *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature, A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. III, Fasc. I (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), p. 8.

⁵ See "Hayagrīva's Possible Non-Vedic Origin(s)" in Chapter II.

⁶ Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivism: A Comparison* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 54-56.

inconsistent in their various lists because they attribute three or four emanations to each of the principal *vyūhas*.⁷ Moreover, the Āgamic texts acknowledge twenty-four standing forms of Viṣṇu, which are said to have been taken from the *Mahābhārata*, symbolizing Viṣṇu's different visible forms. The twenty-four forms are mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*'s list of *The Thousand Names of Viṣṇu*.⁸

Just as there are variant listings of *avatāras*, so also there is ambiguity as to the status of Hayagrīva in the Āgamic lists of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. According to the Āgamic corpus, the major (*mukhya*) and minor (*gauṇa*) *avatāric* forms have different theological statuses based on the fact that the *mukhya* forms are closer derivatives from the four-fold aggregate of cosmic emanations (*vyūha-avatāra*). The Pāñcarātra Āgamas contain inconsistencies as to Hayagrīva's status as a *mukhya* (major) or *gauṇa* (minor) form of Viṣṇu.

The *Sārvata Saṁhitā* (ca. 500 C.E.),⁹ one of the three most ancient and authoritative of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, provides a list of the *vibhava-avatāric* forms of the Supreme God—human, animal or combined incarnations on earth at specific times and places. *Sārvata Saṁhitā* 9.77-84¹⁰ (*Vibhavadevatāntartanagavidhi*, “Rules for the silent worship of *vibhava-devatā* forms”) lists thirty-eight *avatāras*. The list includes the popular ten emanations (Matsya, Varāha, Kūrma, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Kalkin) along with lesser known incarnations (such as Hayagrīva) and secondary incarnations who are

⁷ Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, pp. 3-10.

⁸ *Anuśāsanika Parvan* 149.

⁹ The *Sārvata Saṁhitā* (3500 *ślokas*) is considered to be one of the oldest Pāñcarātra texts. Seventy-five percent of the text pertains to *mantra*. In the framework narrative, wherein Nārada tells some sages what Bhagavan told Saṁkarṣaṇa, the text is concerned with the various *vyūhas*, *vibhava* and *avatāric* forms of the one God. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 514-536.

¹⁰ *Sārvata-saṁhitā* (edited by Vrajavallabhadvivedah) (Vārāṇasī: Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa Trivari, 1982).

sages that have come to be considered parital incarnations (such as Kapila, Vyāsa):

1. Padma-nābha (lotus-navelled one)
2. Dhruva (illuminous one)
3. Ananta (form of the Śeṣa-serpent)
4. Śaktyātmā (soul with *śakti* power)¹¹
5. Madhusūdana (slayer of *Madhu*)¹²
6. Vidyādhīdeva (god of Vedic learning)
7. Kapila (teacher of Sāṃkhya philosophy)
8. Viśvarūpa (all-pervasive form)
9. Vihaṅgama (swan)
10. Krodātmā (soul of the [inner] cavity)
11. *Badabāvaktra* (horse-headed one)
12. Dharma (personification of conduct)
13. *Vāgīśvara* (lord of speech)
14. Ekaṇavaśāyī (one who reclines on the [Milk] Ocean)
15. Kamaṭheśvara (tortoise)
16. Varāha (boar)
17. Nṛsimha (man-lion)
18. Amṛtahaṛaṇa (bestower of nectar)
19. Śrīpati (consort of Lakṣmī)
20. Kāntātmā (one of bliss)
21. Rāhujit (conqueror of [demon] Rāhu)
22. Kālanemigha (destroyer of ignorance)
23. Pārijātaḥara (bearer of the *pārijāta* flower)
24. Lokanātha (Buddha)
25. Dattātreya (form of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva)
26. Nyagrodhaśāyī (one who reclines on the banyan leaf)
27. Matsya (fish)
28. Vāmanadeha (dwarf)
29. Trivikrama (form pervading the three worlds)
30. Nara (Arjuna)
31. Nārāyaṇa
32. Hari
33. Kṛṣṇa
34. Paraśurāma
35. Śrī Rāma
36. Vedavid (knower of the Vedas)
37. Kalkin

¹¹ According to S. K. Ramachandra Rao, Śaktyātmā has four faces—Hayagrīva, Nṛsimha, Varāha, and Kapila. Rao, *Āgama-kosha Vol. IV Pāñcarātrāgama*, p. 114.

¹² Madhusūdana is the form which killed the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Thus, this form is related to the Hayagrīva myth.

38. Pātālaśayana (one who reclines in the nether world)

It is noteworthy that the list includes *baḍabā-vaktra*, that is, *baḍabā* (or *vaḍabā*) which means “female horse, mare”, compounded with “face” (*vaktra*); in other words, “the one with a mare’s face”. Although this form appears to refer to Hayagrīva, according to secondary sources (Schrader, Matsubara, and Rao),¹³ *baḍabā-vaktra* does not refer to Hayagrīva. For some scholars, the thirteenth *avatāra* listed above, *vāg-īśvara*, refers to Hayagrīva.¹⁴ *Sārvata Saṁhitā* 12.59 explicitly connects *vāg-īśvara* with Hayagrīva (*vāji-vaktra*), which is also the role attributed to him in the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition as the Lord of Speech (see Chapter VI). Meanwhile, *baḍabā-vaktra* is referred to in *Mahābhārata* 12.329.48 but not in connection with the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. Although according to the secondary sources the name *vāg-īśvara* refers to Hayagrīva, the name does not describe Hayagrīva’s main physical feature, that of having a horse’s head. This may reflect the fact that in the Āgamic texts there are two separate images that eventually fused (that is, Hayagrīva in the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition came to be associated with speech), or that there occurs a split in which one figure takes on the status of the icon and the other takes on the mantraic form of Hayagrīva.

Similarly, both *baḍabā-vaktra* and *vāg-īśvara* are found in chapter five of the *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* (ca. 600 C.E.)¹⁵—*Suddhasṛṣṭivarmāna* (“Description of Pure

¹³ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā*, p. 46; Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, p. 208; Rao, *Āgama-kosha Vol. IV Pāñcarātrāgama*, p. 116.

Although Srinivasa Chari reviews the list and discusses Hayagrīva, he does not specify as to whether or not Hayagrīva is *baḍabā-vaktra* or *vāg-īśvara*. Srinivasa S.M. Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism: Its Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Discipline* (1st ed; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), p. 219.

¹⁴ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā*, p. 46; Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, p. 208; Rao, *Āgama-kosha Vol. IV Pāñcarātrāgama*, p. 117.

¹⁵ The *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* (3750 śloka) is the best known Pāñcarātra Āgama, due to Schrader’s study. The *saṁhitā* consists of 66 chapters and is primarily concerned with the theoretical part of the Pāñcarātra system.

Creation")—which describes the *vyūha* doctrine¹⁶ and lists thirty-nine *vibhavic* forms of Viṣṇu (*Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* 5.50-56¹⁷). The only difference between the list of *Sātvata Saṁhitā* and *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* is that the latter has the additional form of Śāntātmā (Tranquil Soul).

The thirteenth chapter of *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*¹⁸ (ca. 800 C.E.) also discusses the *vyūha* doctrine, followed by a list of only thirty-six *avatāras*. The list excludes Kapila, Dattātreyā and Paraśurāma, but includes both *baḍabā-vaktra* and *vāg-īśvara*. *Lakṣmī Tantra* (ca. 800 C.E.)¹⁹ chapter ten—*Paravyūhaprakāśa* ["Manifestation of the Supreme (*para*) and cosmic emanations (*vyūha*)"]²⁰—explains the *vyūha* doctrine,²¹ and then chapter eleven—

The text is in the narrative framework of a conversation between Durvāsas and Bhṛadvāja. The latter part is concerned with the questions Nārada asks of Ahīrbudhnya (Śiva). Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 43-65.

¹⁶ The *vyūha* theory posits that the six qualities of Vāsudeva form the three *vyūhas* (Saṁkarsana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha), and out of the three *vyūhas* emanate twelve *vyūhanūtas*. This theory is a characteristic of Pāñcarātra doctrine.

¹⁷ *Ahīrbudhnya-saṁhitā of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, Vols I-II, (edited by Pandit M.D. Rāmānujāchārya and Revised by Pandit V. Krishnamāchārya) (Madras: Adyar Library & Research Centre, 1966).

¹⁸ *Viṣvaksena-saṁhitā* (critically edited by Lakṣmī Narasimha Bharta) (Tirupati: Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1972).

The *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* (around 3250 ślokas) consists of 39 chapters. It has been suggested that the text may have originally been two texts; the first part is a dialogue between Viṣvaksena and Śacipati, and the second part a dialogue between Viṣvaksena and Nārada. The central focus of the text is temple rituals (like icon worship) and festivals. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 395-416.

¹⁹ The *Lakṣmī Tantra* (3600 ślokas) consists of 50 chapters. It is a unique *saṁhitā* in that it is the only text that is exclusively devoted to Lakṣmī. Furthermore, the *saṁhitā* is concerned with *jñāna*, while it only provides a scant treatment of *kriyā*—the practical concerns of the Āgamas—like icon building and so forth. It deals with esoteric matters like mantras. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 345-364.

²⁰ *Lakṣmī-tantra: A Pāñcarātra Āgama* (edited with Sanskrit gloss and introduction by Pandit V. Krishnamāchārya) (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1959).

²¹ From *para-vyūha* emanates Saṁkarsaṇa, from Saṁkarsaṇa emanates Pradyumna, and from Pradyumna emanates Aniruddha.

Vibhavaprakāśa ("Manifestation of *Vibhava* Forms")—provides an extensive list of thirty-nine *avatāric* forms.²² This list is identical to the list found in *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṁhitā*.

It is important to note that, although the Āgamas (such as *Sārvata Saṁhitā* and *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṁhitā*) provide lists of *vibhava-avatāras*, the forms are not all necessarily primary *avatāric* forms; that is, the lists include figures like Kapila and Vyāsa who clearly are secondary incarnations. This makes the status of Hayagrīva somewhat ambiguous.

Unlike the other *avatāric* lists (found in *Sārvata*, *Ahīrbudhnyā* and *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitās* and *Lakṣmī Tantra*), there is no similar list found in the *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā*. Even though the *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā* begins with the explanation of the great deeds done by Hayagrīva as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, the text also depicts him as a minor one. Chapter twenty-three of the *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā*²³ describes the iconic forms for the ten *avatāra* incarnations²⁴ and chapter twenty-four describes the nine *vyūhas*, but with no mention of Hayagrīva.²⁵ It is only in the following chapter (25.16-25) that Hayagrīva (called *haya-śīrṣa*) appears in an iconic list of other miscellaneous forms of the Lord, including Viśvarūpa, Hariśaṅkara and Jalaśāyi. The forms *baḍabā-vaktra* and *vāg-īśvara* are not included in these lists.

The ambiguity of Hayagrīva's status in the *avatāric* listings of Viṣṇu found in the Āgamas is increased by the inconsistency in the depiction of him both as a *mukhya* (a primary

²² *Lakṣmī-tantra* 11.19-25.

²³ The *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā* (6500 ślokas) is concerned with the building of temples, the construction of icons and their sanctification. It is in the form of a dialogue between Bhṛgu and Mārkaṇḍeya, based on a conversation between Brahmā, Śiva and Gaurī. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāncarātrāgama*, pp. 537-550.

²⁴ The ten *avatāras* are: Matsya, Kūrma, two types of Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Vāmana, Janadagnya, Rāma, Balarāma, Buddha, Kalkin.

²⁵ The nine *vyūhas* listed are: Ādimūrti Vāsudeva, Vāsudeva, Baladeva (Saṁkarṣaṇa), Pradyumna accompanied by His wife, Aniruddha, Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Nṛsiṁha, Varāha.

form that is a direct emanation from Viṣṇu himself) and as a *gauṇa* (a secondary form, i.e., a soul in bondage which is pervaded by the power of Viṣṇu for a particular function). According to *Aṭirbudhūya Saṁhitā* 8.51 and *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*,²⁶ the *mukhya avatāras* should be approached when seeking *mokṣa*, whereas the *gauṇa avatāras* should be worshipped only for mundane fruits. In *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* and *Pādma Saṁhitā*, Hayagrīva is not a direct emanation of Aniruddha and thus is considered as a *gauṇa avatāra*. According to the *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*, all *avatāras* are said to spring out from the *vyūha* Aniruddha. *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* describes Hayagrīva as springing out from Aniruddha through the fish (*matsya*) who directly comes from Kṛṣṇa.²⁷ Therefore, according to *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*, Hayagrīva is an indirect emanation of a *vyūha*. This is an important reference because the *Mahābhārata* also refers to Hayagrīva as being an emanation of Aniruddha, which shows that ancient beliefs and practices have been prescribed in both the predominantly mythological texts (Epics and Purāṇas) and the sectarian ritual ones (Āgamas). Indeed, an ancient belief regarding Hayagrīva has been incorporated in both the Epics and the Āgamas. Likewise, *Pādma Saṁhitā*²⁸ (ca. 800 C.E.) claims that the ten *vibhava-avatāras* are derived from one of the four *vyūhas* (1.2.31-36),²⁹ and the remaining *vibhava-avatāras* are emanations from those

²⁶ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Aṭirbudhūya Saṁhitā*, pp. 47-48; Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 218.

²⁷ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Aṭirbudhūya Saṁhitā*, pp. 47-48; Rao, *Āgama-kosha Vol IV, Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 123-125.

²⁸ The *Pādma Saṁhitā* is the primary text used in Śrī Raṅgam and Mysore for the formal training of the Pāñcarātra *arcakas*. It provides guidelines for worship. According to the *saṁhitā*, the grace of God is granted only to those who observe their appropriate *jāti* and *āśrama*. The narrative framework is a conversation between the Lord and Brahmā, with Saṁvārta a narrator. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 197-242.

²⁹ *Pādma Saṁhitā* (Part I) (Madras: Pāñcarātra Parisodhana Paṇṇad, 1974).

ten.³⁰ This makes Hayagrīva an emanation from a primary *vibhava*, and thus indirectly an emanation of Aniruddha. By way of contrast, *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā*³¹ (ca. 1300 C.E.) and *Pādma Saṁhitā* 2.35a (ca. 800 C.E.) describe Hayagrīva as an emanation of Saṁkarṣaṇa (4.26).³²

Thus, we see the radical inconsistencies found in the depictions of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas: texts describe Hayagrīva as either an emanation of Saṁkarṣaṇa, whose qualities are knowledge (*jñāna*) and strength (*bala*) (*Viśvāmitra*, *Pādma*), or of Aniruddha whose qualities are creative energy (*śakti*) and splendour (*tejas*) (*Viśvaksena*, *Pādma*). Furthermore, one text depicts Hayagrīva as primary, a major (*mukhya*) form of Viṣṇu and includes a detailed story of his activities as *vibhava-avatāra* (*Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā*), whereas other texts show him as a *vibhava-avatāra* of secondary status (*Ahīrbudhīya Saṁhitā*, *Viśvaksena Saṁhitā*).

Several descriptions of Hayagrīva contained in the Āgamas are concerned with the practice of meditation and the use of the maṇḍala,³³ yantra,³⁴ and/or the *bija-mantra*³⁵.

³⁰ Matsya, Kūrma and Varāha are emanations of Vāsudeva. Nṛsiṁha, Vāmana, Śrī Rāma, and Paraśurāma are emanations of Saṁkarṣaṇa. Balarāma is an emanation from Pradyumna. Kṛṣṇa and Kalki are emanations of Aniruddha.

³¹ The *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* (2600 śloka) contains 27 chapters—a condensed version of the wisdom Nārāyaṇa taught Brahmā. The topics are varied, and include discussions on Wisdom, and prescriptions for the initiation ritual, mantra-lore, construction/consecration of temples/icons, as well as temple ritual and festivals. The text is not known to have been used as a guide for temple construction and liturgy by any Śrī Vaiṣṇava temple. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 365-382.

³² *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* (critically edited by Uadmane Shankara Bhatta) (Tirupati: Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1970).

³³ Maṇḍala (circle, disc, or wheel) refers to the circular diagrams used in complex meditative practices popular in the Tantra tradition (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 775).

³⁴ Yantras are symbolic diagrams used for meditation.

³⁵ *Bija-mantra* (seed-mantra) refers to the key mantra of a deity.

*Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*³⁶ 24.35b (ca. 500 C.E.) describes Hayagrīva as being “one who has the quality of pervading the universe completely” (*saṁpūrṇa-nara-lakṣaṇa*) for the attainment of an awareness of Reality. This is significant as it alludes to Hayagrīva’s association with the Supreme. Furthermore, the sections on mantra and *yantra* are believed to be the oldest of the Āgamic literature, and are thought to be the preservation of a very ancient tradition.³⁷ *Śeṣa Saṁhitā*³⁸ 40.17 (ca. 800 C.E.), too, is concerned with the description of the Hayagrīva mantra and *yantra* design. The text reads: “O Highest Being, the god who has the neck of a horse [and is] in the form of consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*), [and] has a body decorated by all splendour/light”. In *Īśvara Saṁhitā*³⁹ 24.244-256 (ca. 1300 C.E.), Nārada teaches the sages that wisdom (*dhyāna*) is the goal of uttering mantras to various images (*mūrtis*) of god, including *vāji-vaktra* (the horse-headed one). Finally, in *Parāśara Saṁhitā*⁴⁰

³⁶ *Śrīpauṣkarasaṁhitā: One of Three Gems in Pāñcarātra* (edited by Sree Yathiraya Saṁpathkumara Ramanuja of Melkote) (Bangalore: A Srinivasa Aiyanger and M.C. Thirumalachariar, 1934).

The *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā* (5900 *ślokas*) is the most famous and ancient Pāñcarātra text. The narrative framework is a dialogue between Pauṣkara with Bhagavān. It is primarily concerned with the esoteric meanings of maṇḍalas as well as the consecration of the icons. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 277-284.

³⁷ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhnyā Saṁhitā*, pp. 16-19.

³⁸ The *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* (2800 *ślokas*) is most likely a later Pāñcarātra text. The text is solely concerned with mantra. All the mantras are considered to be Vedic and the text refers to itself in chapter 2 as the “fifth Veda”. According to Smith, it lacks the typical scope of a Saṁhitā text. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, p. 435-447.

See *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* 22.22-23 on the *bīja-mantra* of Viṣṇu’s various forms.

³⁹ *Īśvarasaṁhitā-Śrīpāñcarātra* (Conjeevaram: Sudarśana Press, 1923).

Īśvara Saṁhitā (8200 *ślokas*) is a popular reference manual. Its origin is believed to have been in South India, for it contains descriptions of local temple rituals. It is divided into three parts: (1) *nitya*, concerned with daily rituals of worship, (2) *naimitika*, concerned with the special festivals throughout the liturgical calendar, and (3) *kāmya*, concerned with the ritual pertaining to the icon. It is popularly considered to be the derivative of the *Sātvata Saṁhitā*. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 66-92.

⁴⁰ *Parāśara Saṁhitā* (2000 *ślokas*) belongs to the late period of Saṁhitā literature. The text is primarily concerned with mantras (composition and application), as well as the installation of icons. It is in the framework of a dialogue in which Parāśara repeats Brahmā’s exposition to a sage. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 188-196.

28.6-23 (ca. 1000 C.E.), there are discussions of the Hayagrīva mantras, wherein Hayagrīva is described as the supreme horse-headed one, situated in the middle of the full moon, bearing the *cakra*, *śaṅkha*, and the book of wisdom (*jñāna-pustaka*).

Lastly, there are several descriptions of the icon of Hayagrīva found within the context of other minor and auxillary deities, which further indicate the ambiguity in his theological status.

Temple Ritual Status of Hayagrīva

On the basis of temple architecture, Krishna H. Shastri recognizes ten popular forms of Viṣṇu—five of primary importance, commonly represented for worship in the Inner Sanctum, with the remaining five being representations found on walls and pillars. Still other forms of Viṣṇu include the reclining Viṣṇu (Anantaśāyin), Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇu, and the twenty-four names that are recited and represented as Viṣṇu in standing form.⁴¹

Similar to the ambiguity of Hayagrīva's theological status in the *avatāric* listings, the *Saṁhitās* are also divided on his temple *ritual status* based on the fact that some texts describe the horse-headed god as an auxillary deity. *Pādma Saṁhitā* 22 consists of rules for the attendant deities (*parivāra-devatā*) and includes Hayagrīva (v.2b-8a) in the list of minor gods, several of whom belong to the Śaiva complex: Soma, Gaṇānana, Śaṁmukha, Kāma, Dhanada, Rudra, Brahmā, Vināyaka and so forth. *Pādma Saṁhitā* X.100-104 also includes Hayagrīva in a list of auxillary deities such as Sūrya and Candra. *Nārādīya Saṁhitā* 14.106⁴² (ca. 800

⁴¹ Shastri, *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*, pp. 22-55.

⁴² *Nārādīya Saṁhitā* (edited by Rāghava Prasāda Chaudhary (Tirupati: Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1971).

The *Nārādīya Saṁhitā* (2800 *ślokas*) contains 30 chapters. This *Saṁhitā* is typical in that its primary concern is worship, including the different modes of worship, festivals, locus of worship and the necessary

C.E.) depicts Hayagrīva as a *vimāna-devatā* (a deity placed on temple tower [*gopuram*]) along with deities such as Śrīdhara, Viśeṣa, Śrī Hari, and Varāha. Likewise, *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* 21.68-69 describes Hayagrīva as a *vimāna-devatā* in a list which includes both primary *vibhava-avatāras* (Varāha, Nṛsiṁha) and secondary forms (Śrīdhara). Finally, Hayagrīva (*haya-vaktra*), along with Śrīdhara, is described as a doorkeeper (*dvāra-pālaka*) in *Nārādīya Saṁhitā* 15.226.

Interestingly, although the Āgamas are divided on Hayagrīva's temple ritual status, the texts are in general agreement concerning the placement of Hayagrīva shrines in the temple; that is, they are in general agreement regarding his *ritual function*. For instance, *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* 17.37 prescribes that the seat for Hayagrīva be in the north for the purpose of *pūjā*. Similarly, in *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* 21, the prescription for the location of the presiding deities in the temple, wherein Nārāyaṇa is the main icon, includes Hayagrīva (*haya-vaktra*) who should be placed in the northern direction (21.68-69); *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā* 4.24⁴³ (ca. 800 C.E.) also refers to Hayagrīva as an attendant deity which should only be placed in the northern side of the temple. Likewise, *Nārādīya Saṁhitā* 14.106 prescribes the north as the seat for Hayagrīva, as one of the *vimāna-devatās*.⁴⁴ *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā* 13

paraphernalia. Uniquely, the text contains several chapters on the *phala* (fruit/boons) received and used in worship. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 147-165.

⁴³ *Sanatkumāra-Saṁhitā of the Pāñcarātrāgama* Vol. 95, (edited by Paudit V. Krishnamāchārya) (Madras: Adyar Library & Research Center, 1969).

The *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā* (3500 ślokas) is one of the older Pāñcarātra texts. It is quoted in Yāmunā's *Āgama Prāmānya* (c. 10th century C.E.). It is in the form of a monologue narrated by Sanatkumāra, who tells of the knowledge he has learnt from Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and some ancient sages. The text covers a variety of unconnected topics, including mantra, *mudrās*, *maṇḍalas*, *prasāda*, *dīkṣā-yoga* and so forth. Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama*, pp. 494-513.

⁴⁴ *Vimāna* means "measuring out, traversing, or extension" and is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *vi+ma* "to measure, meter out, or pass over". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 980.

In the context of shrines in a temple, the term *vimāna-devatā* refers to images which are extensions or vehicles of the presiding deity; that is, they are not central, but are attendant deities of the main temple icon.

prescribes the correct location of the various deities on the *vimāna*, including Hayagrīva in the north. Finally, *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā* 14 prescribes the placement of Hayagrīva in the northeast as a sub-shrine of the main shrine housing Vāsudeva (the other sub-shrines contain Vāmana in the southeast, Nṛsiṁha in the southwest, and Varāha in the northeast). The Āgamas are significantly more consistent in the proper placement of Hayagrīva's icon in the northern direction of the temple than they are on the theological question as to his particular status as a form of Viṣṇu.

Iconographical Depictions

There are many iconographical prescriptions concerning Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. The general listings of the different icons of Viṣṇu or his attendants contain detailed descriptions of Hayagrīva. Once again, these specific references to Hayagrīva are inconsistent regarding such things as the number of his arms (four or eight), and the emblems that he carries in his hands. Although in every text consulted Hayagrīva is depicted as bearing the conch shell (*śaṅkha*) and the discus (*cakra*), there are several other emblems that he may or may not carry in his other hands, depending on the text. They are: the mace (*gaḍa*), the lotus (*padma*), the book (*pustaka*), and the rosary beads (*akṣa-sūtra*). Some texts also describe him as having one hand in the specific position (*mudrā*) representing wisdom. Although the carrying of the book (sometimes specified as book of wisdom) is a common Āgamic depiction of Hayagrīva, the references to Hayagrīva bearing a book of wisdom do not explicitly say whether the book represents the Vedas, Āgamas, or simply a symbol for wisdom.

According to *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā* 24.356, Hayagrīva should be depicted as having a horse's face and a human body. He may have two or four arms, or at times may be depicted

even with eight or twelve arms. He bears the same emblems as Viṣṇu; additionally, however, he is often depicted as bearing the rosary (*akṣa-mālā*) and the book (*pustaka*). These two emblems appear to reflect his *vibhava-avatāric* act of recovering the Vedas and as bestower of wisdom.

In its discussion of the various incarnations of Viṣṇu, *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā* 3.58-62a describes Hayagrīva as bearing several of the items associated with Viṣṇu: “The horse-headed one has four arms [bearing] the conch shell (*śaṅkha*), the discus (*cakra*), the mace (*gada*) and the lotus (*padma*)”. By way of contrast, in *Pādma Saṁhitā* 22.2-7, which is concerned with the rules regarding the forms of the attendant deities, Hayagrīva (*aśva-vaktra*) is described as having four arms. The lower hands, close to his hip, bear the *śaṅkha* and the *varada-mudrā* (hand position of bestowal), whereas his two upper hands carry the book of wisdom (*vijñāna-pustaka*) and the string of rosary beads (*akṣa-sūtra*). A mace (*gada*) is said to rest on his thigh. Hayagrīva is also described as being composed of crystal-like nectar. In *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* 40.7, Hayagrīva—as a *bija-mantra*—is described as “the Supreme (*vibhu*) and the Bestower of wisdom (*vidyā-pradāyaka*) who bears in his hands the conch shell (*śaṅkha*), and a discus (*cakra*)”.

Parāśara Saṁhitā 27.6-23, too, contains various depictions of Hayagrīva in the context of prescriptive salutations to the deity: Hayagrīva is depicted as holding a discus (*cakra*) and lotus (*padma*); here, he is accompanied by both Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī (v. 6). Verse 10 is a salutation to the (Hayagrīva) deity who wears a crown, holds the conch shell (*śaṅkha*), discus (*cakra*), mace (*gada*), lotus (*padma*), and book of wisdom (*jñāna-pustaka*). Then, in verse 14, Hayagrīva is praised as one who bears the *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gada*, *padma*, *jñāna-pustaka*, *pāśa* (noose, rope) and *aṅkuśa* (staff). Lastly, in verses 22-23, Hayagrīva is

worshipped as one who carries a *cakra*, *śaṅkha*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *jñāna-pustaka*, *pāśa*, *aṅkuśa*, and a bow (*agni-vajra*).

Although the *baḍabā-vaktra* form (see section “Theological Status” above) appears to refer to Hayagrīva, according to secondary sources (Rao), *baḍabā-vaktra* refers to a human body with a horse’s head that wears a crown—but is said not to be Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva.⁴⁵ The description of the deity with a horse’s head (*baḍabā-vaktra*) is identical to the description of Hayagrīva in *Parāśara Saṁhitā*, wherein Hayagrīva is praised as one who bears the *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *pustaka*, *pāśa* and *aṅkuśa* (27.18), and is worshipped as one who carries a *cakra*, *śaṅkha*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *pāśa*, *agni-vajra*, *aṅkuśa*, and *pustaka* (27.22-23).⁴⁶

Lastly, in *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā* Adi 20.2.24-26, the horse-faced one (*vāji-vaktra*) is one among the various descriptions of the icons of the Lord. According to this Āgama, Hayagrīva should have four arms that bear the *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa* and *pustaka*. Furthermore, the deity should be seated on a blue lotus and accompanied by his consort Lakṣmī. His left foot rests on the serpent Śeṣa (*śeṣa-nāga*) and his right foot on a tortoise. This unusual depiction is similar to the passage in the *Agni Purāṇa* 49.26 (see “Overview of the Iconographical References of Hayagrīva in the Purāṇas” below).

Myth and Hayagrīva’s Recovery of the Vedas

Regarding the mythic dimension of the Āgamas, the *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā* (ca. 800

⁴⁵ Schrader, *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Āṅgīrṣa Saṁhitā*, p. 46; Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, p. 208; Rao, *Āgama-kosha* Vol. IV *Pāñcarātrāgama*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ The latter two descriptions of the horse-headed deity, in the *Parāśara Saṁhitā*, include the staff, arrow and bow and have Him wearing a crown, which are features—although not commonly contained in the depictions of Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva—that are found in some of the various Buddhist depictions of the horse-headed deity associated with Avalokiteśvara. van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 29-38. See Appendix IV on “Hayagrīva in the Buddhist Tradition”.

C.E.), the *Saṁhitā* that bears the name of the horse-headed god, begins with the story about Hayagrīva and his glorious act of saving the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.⁴⁷ (This story is similar to the one told in *Mahābhārata* 12.335.1-64). In the first chapter of *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā*, Mārkaṇḍeya asks Bhṛgu as to why Viṣṇu took on a horse's head (1.1). Bhṛgu relates how Śiva and Gaurī asked Brahmā to tell them about the teachings revealed to Brahmā by Hayagrīva. Then Brahmā tells them how, when the Lord was in his *yoganidrā* (yogic-sleep), a beam of light emitted from his navel and became a lotus of a thousand petals. Brahmā, himself, appeared from this lotus and, when he was chanting the Vedas, he shed two drops of sweat that dropped on the Lord. These two drops became the two *asuras*—Madhu and Kaiṭabha—who then stole the Vedas from Brahmā. Upon learning of this, the Lord awoke from his sleep and took the form of the horse-headed god (*haya-sīrṣa*). He went to the nether world, recovered the Vedas and returned them to Brahmā and other *ṛṣis* (1.5-23). Although this is a very detailed account of Hayagrīva's mythic act of recovering the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, there is, significantly, no mention of precisely how or why Viṣṇu took on a horse's head.

Several other Āgamic passages associate Hayagrīva with the Vedas. According to *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā* 3.58-62a, Hayagrīva both recovered the Vedas from the demons and is the possessor of the knowledge of the Vedas. *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā* 24.35b describes Hayagrīva as being in the form of the Vedas: "The horse-faced one who is the Vedas, *smṛti*, [and] has the quality of pervading the universe completely". Although the *Lakṣmī Tantra* has the goddess Lakṣmī as its primary focus, it too describes Hayagrīva as the representation of

⁴⁷ The *Saṁhitās* often begin with a description of the lineage of transmission, connecting the Āgama with gods, and ultimately with the Supreme.

the four Vedas (*Lakṣmī Tantra* 36.16-18). Finally, there are also references in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas depicting Hayagrīva as carrying the book of wisdom (*vijñāna-pustaka*) (see “Iconographical Depictions” below), which may also reasonably be interpreted as the Vedas (*Pādma Saṁhitā* 22.2-7; *Parāśara Saṁhitā* 27.6-23; *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā* 24.356).

Overview of the Diachronic Dimension of Hayagrīva’s Theological and Temple Ritual Status in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas⁴⁸

I. Classical period (200 B.C.-500 C.E.)

- A. *Sātvata Saṁhitā*: *gaṇa* (minor) status (ambiguous)
- B. *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*: *mukhya* (major) status

II. Early Medieval period (500-800 C.E.)

- A. *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā*: *gaṇa* (minor) status
- B. *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*: emanation of *vyūha* Aniruddha; *gaṇa* (minor) status
- C. *Pādma Saṁhitā*: emanation of *vyūha* Aniruddha/Saṁkarṣaṇa; *gaṇa* (minor) status; *parivāra-devatā* (attendant deity)
- D. *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā*: *parivāra-devatā* (attendant deity)
- E. *Śeṣa Saṁhitā*: *mukhya* (major) status
- F. *Nārādīya Saṁhitā*: *vimāna-devatā* (deity on temple tower); *dvāra-pālaka* (doorkeeper)
- G. *Lakṣmī Tantra*: *gaṇa* (minor) status (ambiguous)
- H. *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā*: *mukhya* (major) status; *gaṇa* (minor) status

III. Middle Medieval period (800-1000 C.E.)

- A. *Īśvara Saṁhitā*: ambiguous
- B. *Parāśara Saṁhitā*: *mukhya* (major) status

IV. Late Medieval period (1000-1500 C.E.)

- A. *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā*: emanation of the *vyūha* Saṁkarṣaṇa; *mukhya* (major)

⁴⁸ The chronological periods for Āgamas is based on Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 34-35.

status; *vimāna-devatā* (deity on temple tower)

The *Mahābhārata* provides the earliest reference about Hayagrīva's origins: according to the Epic, he is an emanation of the *vyūha* Aniruddha. This notion was also included in the early Medieval Āgamas (*Viṣvaksena* , *Pādma*). By way of contrast, an early Medieval Purāṇa—*Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa*—describes Hayagrīva as an emanation of the *vyūha* Saṁkarṣaṇa. Similar to the Purāṇa, *Pādma* and *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitās*, which were written in the early and late Medieval period, respectively, describe Hayagrīva as an emanation of Saṁkarṣaṇa.

Hayagrīva's theological status based on the *vibhava-avatāra* listings and placement of his icon in the temple prescribed in the Pāñcarātra corpus is not only inconsistent according to different texts, but important discrepancies are found even within a single text. Furthermore, there is inconsistency regarding Hayagrīva's status as a major *avatāra* in the texts belonging to any one specific period; that is, there is no evidence of the rise or decline over time in his status or importance.

The *Devatā*, Mantra, and Yantra Forms of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas

Although the Āgamas provide an extensive and systematic theological explanation of the evolution of the various forms of Viṣṇu (especially *vyūha* and *vibhava-avatāra*), the texts also depict other categories involving the three forms of a deity: *devatā* (personifying), mantra (sonic), and *yantra* (symbolic).⁴⁹ The three forms are found specifically with reference to Hayagrīva, and the linkage among the three is said to be for purposes of ritual practice. These

⁴⁹ See Sanjukta Gupta, "The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra", in *Mantra*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 224-48.

three forms are the means of linking the devotee with God. Mantras recited while performing the worship (*pūjā*) rituals are said to bring single-minded concentration on the divine, of which they are the primary form. Similarly, the visual meditation involving a *yantra* and the worship of the *devatā* form of a god also function as links between the devotee and the divine.

According to Sanjukta Gupta, in Pāñcarātra, unlike in the other Tantric sects, the power derived from mantra is solely the fruit of God's grace; this position based on its (i.e., Vaiṣṇava Tantric) concept of the forms of God (such as *vyūha* and *vibhava-avatāra*).⁵⁰ In viewing the ambiguity and inconsistency in the theological and temple ritual status of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra corpus, it is important to note that, though many of the *devatā* prescriptions of Hayagrīva seem to qualify him as a minor god, the descriptions of his mantra and *yantra* frequently endow him with qualities belonging only to the Supreme God Viṣṇu. For example, *Pādma Saṁhitā* 22.2-7 (ca. 800 C.E.), which is concerned with the rules regarding the forms of the attendant deities (*parivāra-devatā*), prescribes the iconic form of Hayagrīva (*aśva-vaktra*) as having four arms: the lower hands, close to his hip, bear the *śaṅkha* and the *cakra* (or *varada-mudrā*, hand position of bestowal) and his two upper hands carry the book of wisdom (*viññāna-pustaka*) and the string of rosary beads (*akṣa-sūtra*). *Śrīpaṇṣkara Saṁhitā* 24.35b (ca. 500 C.E.) describes Hayagrīva's mantraic form as having: "the quality of pervading the universe completely" for the attainment of an awareness of Reality. Similarly, *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* 29.18-19 (ca. 800 C.E.) provides prescriptions for Hayagrīva's mantraic and *yantraic* forms: "The Highest Being, God who has the neck of a horse [and is] in the form of consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*), whose entire body is decorated by splendour".

⁵⁰ Gupta, "The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra", p. 224.

As mentioned before, although the Āgamas are the foundational texts of Hindu temple ritual in the South, the Purāṇas are the basis of temple practice in the North. Because there are Purāṇic references concerned with temple practice regarding Hayagrīva in the encyclopedic Purāṇas, which are the basis of north Indian temple ritual, I think it is crucial to compare the Āgamic references with them in order to shed light on the relation between the Purāṇas and the Āgamas.

DEPICTIONS OF HAYAGRĪVA IN THE ĀGAMAS AND PURĀṆAS

Encyclopedic Purāṇas

As seen in Chapter II, the Purāṇic corpus not only contains several myths about Hayagrīva, but certain of the texts also provide iconographical descriptions of the deity. The “encyclopedic” Purāṇas, as mentioned previously, were first termed so by Pandurang Vaman Kane in his four-fold classification of the Purāṇic texts,⁵¹ based on the fact that they contain a variety of subjects without connection.⁵² Included in the category are *Agni Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, and *Nārada Purāṇa*. Although the texts have been viewed as unreliable (because they do not follow the *pañcalakṣaṇa*⁵³ framework), the encyclopedic Purāṇas are valuable in that they contain fragments of ancient material, some of which has been lost.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Kane categorizes the Purāṇas thematically into four groups: (1) encyclopedic (*Agni, Garuḍa, Nārada*); (2) concerned with *nīrtha* (*Pādma, Skanda, Bhaviṣya*); (3) sectarian (*Līṅga, Vāmana, Mārkaṇḍeya*); and, lastly, (4) historical (*Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa*). Kane, *History of the Dharmasāstras*, p. 842.

⁵² Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 78-80.

⁵³ *Pañcalakṣaṇa* refers to the five distinguishing marks of the Purāṇas: (1) *sarga*, creation and cosmogony; (2) *pratisarga*, secondary creation, that is, re-creation or destruction; (3) *vanśa*, genealogy of gods and patriarchs; (4) *manvantara*, reigns of *Manu*; and, (5) *vanśānucarita*, history preserved by princes, solar and lunar races and descendants upto modern time.

⁵⁴ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, p. 80.

All three of the most important encyclopedic Purāṇas contain elaborate iconographical depictions of Hayagrīva. In fact, there is a striking continuity between the Pāñcarātra Āgamic and "encyclopedic" Purāṇic depictions of Hayagrīva. This raises the question as to the relation between the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and the "encyclopedic" Purāṇas.

It is interesting to note that the passages which refer to Hayagrīva in the *Agni Purāṇa* are similar in orientation to the Pāñcarātra texts (such as the *Pādma Saṁhitā*), in which the central focus is the construction of temples, temple rituals and the like. *Agni Purāṇa*, surprisingly, contains fifty chapters on iconography (Chapters 21-70), which have been described by Rocher as "a summary of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas".⁵⁵

Firstly, *Agni Purāṇa* (ca. 700-800 C.E.) contains what is probably the earliest list of twenty-four *avatāras*.⁵⁶ Hayagrīva is mentioned in various lists of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* contained in the passages of the *Agni Purāṇa* concerned with ritual practice. Some of the traditional *avatāras* and Hayagrīva are mentioned together in *Agni Purāṇa* 31.6 ("Mode of Cleansing Oneself and Others")⁵⁷ in which the god Agni describes the ritual of cleansing prescribed in order to free oneself from suffering and to attain joy. He states:

Salutations...O Boar, Lord as man-lion, Lord as dwarf, Trivikrama,
Hayagrīveśa (Lord as horse-necked one), Lord of all beings, Hṛṣīkeśa
(Viṣṇu) (the Lord of all senses), destroy my impurity.

Similar to *Parāśara Saṁhitā* 27.10, *Agni Purāṇa* 49.26 describes the Hayagrīva (*haya-śiras*) form as one which should be represented as bearing the conch shell (*śaṅkha*),

⁵⁵ Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁶ Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, pp. 3-10.

⁵⁷ All quotations from the *Agni Purāṇa* are taken from: *Agni Purāṇa*, Parts 1 & 2, (translation and annotated by N. Gangadharan) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).

discus (*cakra*), mace (*gada*), and a book (*pustaka*). Here the emblems prescribed are the conventional emblems that Viṣṇu bears, except for Hayagrīva's holding the book (normally Viṣṇu carries a lotus instead). Although the book is not part of Viṣṇu's usual paraphernalia, it highlights Hayagrīva's role as an *avatāra* who came to earth to rescue the Vedas. Furthermore, like *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā* 25.16-25,⁵⁸ *Agni Purāṇa* 49.26 states that Hayagrīva's left foot should be represented as resting on the serpent Śeṣa (*śeṣa-nāga*), and his right foot should rest on a tortoise. This is significant because, among all the Āgamas and Purāṇas surveyed, it appears only in these two texts.

Following the more consistent depictions of Hayagrīva's association with the northern or northeastern regions, *Agni Purāṇa* 108.15.29-30 describes Hayagrīva as a form of Viṣṇu who resides in Bhadrāśva.⁵⁹ Similarly *Agni Purāṇa* 42.24-25 prescribes that the Hayagrīva icon face north, as do many of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (*Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* 17.37, *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* 21.68-69, *Sanaikumāra Saṁhitā* 4.24, *Nāradya Saṁhitā* 14.106, *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā* 13 and 14).

The *Agni Purāṇa* also contains several rather obscure references to Hayagrīva, linking him to *śālagrāma* stones⁶⁰ and cosmology. *Śālagrāma* stones are regarded as inherently full-

⁵⁸ *Hayaśīrṣa Pāñcarātram*, Vol. II Adikanda, (edited by Bhuban Mohan Sankhyatīrtha) (Rajshahi [East Pakistan]: Varendra Research Society, 1956).

⁵⁹ Bhadrāśva is north of the country lying east of Ilāvṛta, one of the divisions of the known world (comprehending the highest and most central part of the old country). Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 168, 746.

⁶⁰ *Śālagrāma* stones are sanctified petrified fossils found in river-beds of the Himālayas and are used for worship. *Śālagrāma* stones are worshipped in even numbered groups (such as four, six, eight). Purāṇic stories are narrated in the worship of the *śālagrāma* stones.

In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava sect of South India, the daily worship of *śālagrāma* stones parallels that of the icon (*arcā*); that is, the stone is greeted with the chanting of the Ālvār hymns in the morning, bathed and adorned with sandalpaste and flowers. Furthermore, the water from the bathing of the *śālagrāma* stone is used as *śrīpadatīrtam*, and the food cooked in the household is always offered to the stone before being eaten by the people of the household as *prasāda*. Consequently, households that have *śālagrāma* stones have to maintain

forms of the Supreme God, and therefore do not need to be consecrated for worship. In *Agni Purāṇa* 46.7 ("Characteristics of Different *Śālagrāma* Stones"), the Lord describes the different gods represented by different kinds of *śālagrāma* stones, which are said to yield enjoyment and emancipation:

Hayagrīva [stone] has a line in the shape of god. It is blue [coloured] and is dotted. The *Vaikuṇṭha* [stone] has [the mark of] a disc and lotus. It has the radiance of a gem. It has tail-shaded lines.

In *Agni Purāṇa* 108.15.22-30 ("Cosmographical Account"), the fire-god describes the seven continents and oceans, mountains, and rivers:

The Meru [mountain]⁶¹ lies between them in the shape of a lotus. [The countries] Bhārata, Ketumālā, Bhadrāśva, and Kurus situated outside these boundary mountains are the petals of this lotus of the world.... O Excellent sage! Abodes of [goddess] Lakṣmī, [lords] Viṣṇu, Agni, and Sūrya and other gods are situated in the caves in the mountains of Keśara and others. They are the abodes of gods on the earth. Sinners do not go there. Lord Viṣṇu resides in Bhadrāśva as *Hayagrīva*, in Ketumālā as *Varāha*.

The passage describes *Hayagrīva* as dwelling in Bhadrāśva, a mythological region in the North.

Furthermore, *Agni Purāṇa* 42.24-25 ("Construction of a Temple") describes the building of a temple, the walls, pathways, arches, the position of the icons, and the direction the temple should face. It prescribes the placing of a *Hayagrīva* icon facing north.

Similar to the *Agni Purāṇa*, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (ca. 800 C.E.) is also an

ritual purity. See Vasudha Narayanan, "Arcāvatāra: On Earth as He is in Heaven", in *God of Flesh/God of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, ed. by Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutler (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1985), pp. 53-66.

⁶¹ There are four principal regions in relation to Mt. Meru which is at the centre: (1) Bhadrāśva, which is east of Mt. Meru, (2) Ketumālā, which is west of Mt. Meru, (3) Bhārata, which is south of Mt. Meru, and (4) Kuru, which is north of Mt. Meru. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 294, 309, 746, 753.

“encyclopedic” text. Chapter 202 provides a list of many different forms (*mūrtis*) of Viṣṇu; the “traditional ten” are, of course, present but several others are included: Hayagrīva Matsya, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Nṛsiṃha, Rāma, Varāha, Nārāyaṇa, Kapila, Datta, Hayagrīva, Makaradhvaja, Nārada, Kūrma, Dhanvantari, Śeṣa, Yajña, Vyāsa, Buddha, Kalkin. Similarly, in *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.13.1-10 (“Viṣṇu *pañjarastotra*”), where Hara requests the protection of Viṣṇu, Hayagrīva is mentioned among the many epithets and *avatāras* of Viṣṇu.

Taking up Viṣṇu’s garland (*vaijayantī*)⁶² and mole (*śrīvatsa*)⁶³
protect me in the northeast. O Hayagrīva, obeisance to Thee.⁶⁴

There is also a complete chapter of fifty-seven verses on “The Worship of Hayagrīva” (*Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.34) in which Hari describes the deity’s worship. Hayagrīva is depicted as a benevolent form of Viṣṇu and in v. 50 (wherein he is called *hayaśiras*) is described as the presiding deity of learning. The chapter discusses the recitation of the Hayagrīva *mūla-mantra*⁶⁵ and contains descriptions of Hayagrīva as having cheeks crimson in colour and a complexion as white as a conch shell, the moon, and the *kuṇḍa* flower. His sheen is compared to that of a lotus stalk or silver. The description of Hayagrīva’s white complexion appears in the later Śākta references as well as the ritual hymns that follow the Vedic and Āgamic traditions (see Chapter VIII). As in *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā* 3.58-62a, he is described as bearing in his hands the *śankha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa* and *padma*, all conventional emblems of Viṣṇu.

⁶² *Vaijayantī* (Viṣṇu’s necklace) is a garland that indicates victory. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1021.

⁶³ *Śrīvatsa* (mole/curl) is a feature on Viṣṇu’s chest marking his supremacy.

⁶⁴ *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (edited by J. L. Shastri) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), p. 42.

⁶⁵ *Mūla-mantra* is “principal, primary, or fundamental *mantra*.” Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 826.

The reception of the *mūla-mantra* is the fourth rite in *pañca-saṁskāra*—the five rites to be performed as initiation into Pāñcarātra practice (also used in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism).

Hayagrīva is further described as wearing a crown, earrings, wild flowers, and a yellow garment, as in conventional depictions of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa. Verse 26 states that the seat of the deity shall be made auspicious with the daily worship offerings (*pūjā*) of fragrant pastes, flowers, incense, light, and food.

Nārada Purāṇa (ca. 900 C.E.), the other remaining "encyclopedic" Purāṇa, likewise contains a chapter on the worship of Hayagrīva. In 3.72 ("The Worship of Hayagrīva"), Sanatkumāra, a great sage, describes the proper worship to be performed. Hayagrīva is described as white like a pearl and as stationed in the moon with a lustre similar to the snow-capped mountains. Again, the description of Hayagrīva's white complexion appears in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, in the later Śākta references as well as in the ritual hymns that follow the Vedic and Āgamic traditions (see Chapter VIII). The performance of the *homa* sacrifice is recommended along with the recitation of the *mūla-mantra*. Furthermore, v. 34 describes Hayagrīva as the bestower of speech and prosperity:

We shall then meditate on the deity—"I salute *Hayagrīva* whose lustre is equal to that of the snow-capped mountain, who is bedecked in garlands and *tulasī* leaves and whose high region is that of speech...(Nārada Purāṇa 3.72.32-36).⁶⁶

Pan-Indian Sectarian Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas

The *Aṭha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ*⁶⁷ contains an important prescriptive description of Hayagrīva. As mentioned in Chapter II, *Aṭha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* is one of the many *upa-purāṇas* that are considered to be

⁶⁶ *Nārada Purāṇa*, Vol. 17, (translation and annotation by Hemendra Nath Chakravorty) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), p. 1033.

⁶⁷ The contents of the text can be divided into three sections: (1) geography, astronomy and astrology, (2) *rāja dharma*, and (3) dancing, music, songs, construction of images, building of temples and the law. Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras*, pp. 834-38, 874-76.

summaries of the eighteen principal Purāṇas (*mahā-purāṇas*). According to Kane, the *Viṣṇu Dharmottara Purāṇa* is the earliest *upa-purāṇa* (ca. 600-650 C.E.), whereas the others were written ca. 8th-9th century C.E. up to 1170 C.E.⁶⁸

In *Atha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* 3.80.1-6⁶⁹, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya tells Vajra about the horse-headed form of Viṣṇu. In contrast to *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79-87 which describes Hayagrīva as emanating from Aniruddha, this Purāṇa claims (as does *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā* 4.26) that Hayagrīva is an emanation of the *vyūha* Saṁkarṣaṇa (3.80.3b). Although the reference in the *Mahābhārata* differs in that it describes Hayagrīva as emanating from Aniruddha, it is significant that there is an ancient association of the Hayagrīva deity with the *vyūhas*, which is continued in the *Atha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* and in the Āgamas (see section on Āgamic references in which Hayagrīva is described as emanating from Saṁkarṣaṇa and Aniruddha).

Furthermore, according to this text, the prescriptions for the icon of Hayagrīva are that the image should have the head of a horse, wear blue garments, and bear in his four hands the several iconographical emblems commonly associated with Viṣṇu—the *śaṅkha*, the *cakra*, the *gada*, and the *padma* (3.80.3b-4a). Here, Hayagrīva bears the same emblems that are listed in *Parāśara Saṁhitā* 27.10. More significantly, Hayagrīva's remaining four arms should be placed upon the four personified forms of the Vedas (3.80.4b-5a). Although carrying the book (sometimes specified as that of wisdom) is continuous with several common Āgamic depictions of Hayagrīva, there are no other references in the texts surveyed

⁶⁸ Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras*, pp. 834-38.

⁶⁹ *Atha Viṣṇudharmottara Mahāpurāṇa Prārambhaḥ* (Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1912).

that refer to Hayagrīva as having his hands placed on the personified forms of the Vedas. The passage also refers to his *avatāric* activity of recovering the Vedas from the two demons in ancient times (3.80.6).

Comparative and Diachronic Dimensions of the Depictions of Hayagrīva's Iconographical Paraphernalia in the Āgamas and the Purāṇas:

II. Classical period (200 B.C.-500 C.E.)

A. Purāṇas:⁷⁰

- a. *Matsya Purāṇa*: *śaṅkha* (conch shell), *cakra* (discus), *gaḍa* (mace), *pustaka* (book)

B. Āgamas:⁷¹

- a. *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *akṣa-mālā* (rosary of beads), *pustaka*

III. Early Medieval period (500-800 C.E.)

A. Purāṇas:

- a. *Agni Purāṇa*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *pustaka*
- b. *Lalitā Māhātmya* (*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*): *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *akṣa-mālā*, *pustaka*
- c. *Garuḍa Purāṇa*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma* (lotus)
- d. *Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahapurāṇa*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, four personified forms of the Vedas

B. Āgamas:

- a. *Pādma Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *varada-mudrā* (hand position of bestowal), *vijñāna-pustaka* (book of wisdom), *akṣa-sūtra*, *gaḍa*
- b. *Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*
- c. *Śeṣa Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *mudrā* (hand position), *pustaka*
- d. *Hayaśīrṣa Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *pustaka*

⁷⁰ The chronological periods for the Purāṇas are based on a synthesis of Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, pp. 418-421; O'Flaherty, *Śiva*, pp. 13-14; and, especially, Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature*, pp. 134-151, 154-160, 167-172, 175-183, 196-200, 202-203, 228-237, 245-252.

⁷¹ The chronological periods for the Āgamas is based on Matsubara, *Pāñcanītra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 34-35.

IV. Middle Medieval period (800-1000 C.E.)

B. Āgamas:

- a. *Īśvara Saṁhitā*: *śaṅkha*, *padma*, *mālā* (rosary), *pustaka*
- b. *Parāśara Saṁhitā*: *cakra*, *padma*, Śrīdevī and Bhudevī, *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *jñāna-pustaka* (book of knowledge); *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *jñāna-pustaka*, *pāśa* (rope), *aṅkuśa* (staff); *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*, *jñāna-pustaka*, *pāśa*, *aṅkuśa*, *agni-vajra* (bow)

The iconographical paraphernalia that Hayagrīva bears in his hands parallels the emblems carried by Viṣṇu: *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gaḍa*, *padma*. However, the *pustaka*, appropriate for Hayagrīva (but which is not an emblem that Viṣṇu ordinarily bears), appears in the earliest iconographical depictions of him in both the Purāṇas and Āgamas. By way of contrast, the *akṣa-mālā* is only carried by Hayagrīva in the Āgamic texts. Interestingly, it is a symbol for mantra recitation—a common Tantric practice.

Similarly, the later iconographical depictions (later Medieval period) of Hayagrīva in which he bears the *pāśa*, *aṅkuśa*, and *agni-vajra* are also limited to the Āgamic texts. These later iconographical paraphernalia are similar to the emblems carried by Hayagrīva in the Buddhist pantheon. The similarities between Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism are either a result of (1) a common source, or (2) the fact that Buddhists have borrowed from Hindus or that Hindus have borrowed from Buddhists. In the case of common origins, the presence of *so many similarities* make it likely that many concepts, symbols, and rituals in the Āgamas are derived from non-Vedic indigenous traditions that have been transformed according to the specific requirements of the sectarian traditions.

HAYAGRĪVA IN THE SECTARIAN ĀGAMIC -TANTRIC TRADITIONS: ŚAIVA AND ŚĀKTA

Hayagrīva and the Śaiva Āgamic Tradition

Unlike Vaiṣṇavism, the notion of *avatāra* is not a feature of Śaivism. Śaivism does, however, have a concept of the *mūrti* (embodiment) of Śiva. The concept of *mūrti* exists in Śaivism, in particular the Śaiva Āgamas and the later Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. Unlike the later Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta tradition, *mūrti* is secondary to the experience of knowledge in Śaiva Siddhānta. Although Śiva's embodiments do not have the same philosophical or theological status, the worship of them however is a very salient feature of South Indian Śaivism.

The Śaiva Āgamas list up to twenty-five different *mūrtis* of Śiva. The manuals describe in detail the attire, postures, weapons, and ornaments of Śiva appropriate to each *mūrti*. According to *Kāraṇa Āgama*,⁷² there are twenty-five *mūrtis* of Śiva, most of which are present in South Indian temples. The *mūrtis* may be classified under two broad headings: (1) *ugra* (*ghora*), the "terrific" aspect of Śiva, which is either (i) present in myths commonly associated with the God or (ii) not present in myths of the God; and (2) *saumya* (*śānta*), the "peaceful" aspect of Śiva, which either is (i) associated with a particular Śaivite story or (ii) not primarily associated with a Śaivite story. The latter *saumya* type of *mūrti* is believed by Jitendra Nath Banerjea to be continuous with the earliest known form of Śiva, that is, the representations of Śiva on ancient coins and seals from the Indus Valley Civilization.⁷³

⁷² The *Kāraṇa Āgama* is one of the ten Āgamas regarded as authoritative by all Śaiva Āgamic traditions, including Śaiva Siddhānta. The text is dualistic in philosophical perspective; as a primary/higher text, it is believed to have been received by Kāraṇa, Sarva, and Prājapati.

⁷³ Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), pp. 464-5.

According to the Śaiva Āgamas, Śiva may appear as standing (either alone or with one of his consorts, such as Umā), or as seated (either alone or accompanied by a consort and/or his son Skanda). The graceful and peaceful forms of Śiva include Dakṣiṇāmūrti—the expounder of the treatises (*śāstras*) or practicing yoga—and Nṛtyamūrti, the master of the various arts of dancing/music.⁷⁴

Out of the twenty-five forms of Śiva (*mūrti*) that are predominantly found in South Indian temples, Banerjea claims that the most important Śaiva image is that of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.⁷⁵ According to T.A. Gopinatha Rao, the etymology of *Dakṣiṇā-mūrti* (image facing south) reflects the belief that “Śiva was seated facing south when he taught the sages yoga and *jñāna*”.⁷⁶ Generally, Dakṣiṇāmūrti’s complexion is white and is compared to the appearance of crystal (*sphaṭika*), just as is Hayagrīva’s in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. Unlike Hayagrīva, however, Śiva’s body is smeared with ashes, and he has matted locks, three eyes, four arms, and his left leg rests on his right thigh.

Even though no references to Hayagrīva have been located in the Śaiva Āgamas, the iconographical depictions of Hayagrīva and one of the forms of Dakṣiṇāmūrti are similar. Dakṣiṇāmūrti has four different forms: (1) *yoga-mūrti* (teacher of *yoga*), (2) *vīṇādliara-mūrti* (bearer of the *vīṇā* instrument), (3) *jñāna-mūrti* (expounder of wisdom/knowledge), and (4) *vyākhyāna-mūrti* (expounder of the *śāstras*).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 464-5.

⁷⁵ Although Dakṣiṇāmūrti may be one of the more important *mūrtis* of Śiva in the South, there are very few references to him in the “mainstream” pan-Indian texts. In *Śiva Purāṇa* 33.16-17, there is a reference to the worship of Dakṣiṇāmūrti without any details as to His form or role. In *Nārada Purāṇa* 3.91.127, there is a reference to the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-mantra*.

⁷⁶ T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol II Part I, (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971), pp. 273-274.

⁷⁷ Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 273-292; Sastri, *South-Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*,

The form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti most frequently found in temples is the *vyākhyāna-mūrti*, with Śiva seated either on a tiger skin or a white lotus under a banyan tree. His right forearm is in the hand position of knowledge (*jñāna-mudrā*) or the pose of exposition (*saṁdarśana*), his left forearm is either in the boon-bestowing (*varada*) position or holds a book (*pustaka*), the right upper arm holds the rosary (*akṣa-mālā*), and the left upper arm holds either a snake (*sarpa*) or a lotus (*padma*). There are some differences amongst the four different forms of Dakṣiṇāmūrti mentioned above: (1) *yoga-mūrti* has the *yoga-mudrā* rather than the *jñāna-mudrā*; (2) *vīṇādhara-mūrti* holds the *vīṇā* instrument in both forehands rather than the *jñāna-mudrā*, and *varada* (giver of boons); (3) *jñāna-mūrti* has a hand in either the hand position of *abhaya* (fearlessness which inspires confidence) or *dāna* (charity). The *vyākhyāna-mūrti* is not only the most popular form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, but it is also the form that is most continuous with the Pāñcarātric depictions of Hayagrīva (both iconographically and in terms of their similar roles as the Expounder of wisdom and the Śāstras).

The iconographical descriptions of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātri Āgamas are parallel to the iconographical features of the *vyākhyāna* form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, which came to represent the ascetic tradition in Śaiva Siddhānta, a school of Śaivism located in Tamil Nadu. The iconographical similarities in the Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva and the Śaiva descriptions of the *vyākhyāna* form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti reflect continuities that, in the Āgamas, transcend sectarianism. The role of Dakṣiṇāmūrti (and Hayagrīva) is consistent with the philosophy of the Śaiva Āgamas:

Their philosophy mainly concentrates upon the power of Speech, i.e. upon the power of the energy concealed in the Divine Word, an

insight which is the basis of their theory of mantras.⁷⁸

As aforementioned, it is likely that many concepts, symbols, and rituals in the Āgamas (especially ones not commonly found in the Purāṇas) are derived from non-Vedic indigenous traditions that later have been transformed according to the specific requirements of the sectarian traditions and only later written down in the Āgamic texts.

Hayagrīva and the Śākta Āgamic -Tantric Tradition

Although no references to Hayagrīva were located in the Śaiva Āgamas surveyed for this study, there are passages about the deity in three of the late Śākta Tantric texts.⁷⁹ According to *Meru Tantra* Chapter 28⁸⁰ vs. 10-52, Hayagrīva is described as having a white complexion, and is decorated with ornaments held in his hand, including the rosary (*mālā*), book (*pustaka*), and lotus (*paṅkaja*) (28.51). The iconographical descriptions are similar to the iconographical passages in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (see, for example, *Pādma Saṁhitā*).

Besides the description of an image of Hayagrīva in the *Meru Tantra*, the text provides esoteric information regarding the mantra, *yantra* and *japa*⁸¹ of Hayagrīva. The description of the mantra is similar to that described in the *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* (see Chapter VIII).

⁷⁸ Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, p. 167.

⁷⁹ The *Meru Tantra*, *Śāradātilaka Tantra*, and *Yoginī Tantra* are late minor Śākta texts. It is believed that the Śākta Tantra has been heavily influenced by the Śaiva Āgamic tradition, and that these late Śākta texts have drawn from many other sources, including the Purāṇas (*Devibhāgavata*, *Kālikā*, *Skanda*, *Brāhmanāṇḍa*) and Pāñcarātra Āgamas (*Hayagrīva Saṁhitā*, *Viṣṇvakṣena Saṁhitā*). For Śāktas, the divine energy is approached in three different ways: (1) mantra, (2) *kuṇḍalinī* (life-force), and (3) icon and *maṇḍala* forms of the Goddess. The *Meru Tantra*, according to tradition, is the earliest of the three. The *Śāradātilaka Tantra* is believed to have been written by Viṣṇudharma and Lakṣmaṇa-dīkṣā. See S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Āgama Koṣha Vol. II, Śaiva and Śākta Āgamas* (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1990), pp. 171-173.

⁸⁰ *Merutantram* (Mumbai: Mudrayitvā Prakāśitam, [first edition 1830], 1965).

⁸¹ *Japa* means "muttered prayers" and refers to a mode of worship whereby devotees silently recite prayers and/or mantras in praise of God.

In *Śāradānilaka Tantra* Chapter 15 vs. 73-74,⁸² the horse-headed god is described as having a pure white complexion similar to a conch shell decorated with pearls. According to this text, the horse-headed image should have four arms; the two upper hands should carry the disc (*rathāṅga*) and conch shell (*śaṅkha*), whereas the lower two hands should be placed on the knees in the a meditative pose, *yogāsana* (15.75). This description of Hayagrīva in a meditative pose is appropriate to the context, as its description is followed by esoteric descriptions of mantra, *mudrā*, *japa* and so forth of the horse-headed deity.

Chapter 9 of the *Yoginī Tantra*⁸³ (ca. 16th century C.E.) refers to the worship of Hayagrīva at Maṇikūṭa hill, near the village Hajo in Assam (Kāmarūpa). This Tantric text belongs to the Vāma-Śākta Āgamic tradition, and its narrative framework is that of a dialogue between Pārvatī and Śiva.⁸⁴ It describes the worship of Hayagrīva-Madhava. The worship of Hayagrīva at Maṇikūṭa hill appears to be of the Left-handed Tantric sect, based on the fact that there are no restrictions about meat eating and that sex is said to be natural.

Hayagrīva in the Light of Sectarian Iconographical Texts

It is important to move beyond the traditional Epic and Purāṇic texts and to examine analytically the various other Hindu religious streams. These other streams have played a significant role in the development of Indian deities. In the case of Hayagrīva, it is crucial to study the Āgamic texts as they provide “prescriptive descriptions” for the practical and ritual aspects of the worship of Hayagrīva among the three sectarian Āgamic esoteric and temple-

⁸² *Śāradānilakatantra*, by Lakṣmaṇa Deśikendra with commentary by Raghāvaḥṭṭa (Benares City: Jai Krishnadās Haridās Gupta, 1934).

⁸³ *Yoginī Tantra* (edited by Gaṅgāviṣṇu Śrī Kṛṣṇadās (Kalyāṇa, Mumbai: Lakṣmī Veṅkateśvara Press, 1983).

⁸⁴ For a similar narrative framework see the *Hayagrīva Kavaca Anṣat* in Chapter VIII.

based traditions. Significantly, the Hayagrīva myth does not appear to be primary in the Āgamas, which rather emphasize the iconography and worship of Hayagrīva.

Because India has such a diversity of peoples and cultures, it is difficult to say anything regarding the development of a deity without it being tentative.⁸⁵ By studying the Hayagrīva deity as depicted in the Āgamic literature synchronically, the continuities and discontinuities among various sectarian traditions (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta) are made evident. In the case of Hayagrīva, it appears that the deity has varied according to sect and text. Certainly, both convergence and interchange between pan-Indian and local indigenous traditions must be one factor in the development. Is the continuity in similar religious beliefs, symbols, and motifs the consequence of mutual borrowing and/or the consequence of traditions having shared common origins that subsequently became transformed? The similarities between Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism and Śāktism are either a result of (1) a common source, or (2) the fact that Śaivas/Śāktas have borrowed from Vaiṣṇavas or that Vaiṣṇavas have borrowed from Śaivas/Śāktas. But how can one possibly establish who borrowed from whom when it is not possible to date texts precisely (even more as oral traditions)? The presence of so many similarities make it likely that many concepts and symbols and rituals in the Āgamas are derived from non-Vedic indigenous traditions that have been transformed according to the specific requirements of the sectarian traditions.⁸⁶ Although there is the possibility of a common shared source in specific regions (like Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Āgamic

⁸⁵ Certain divine figures may have a relatively more simple history. For example, the main deity of the Simhācalam Temple clearly represents the incorporation of the indigenous figure occurring only at the local level, adapted to the development of the Vaiṣṇava tradition in the South India milieu; that is, the local indigenous figure is transformed into Nṛsiṃha. See, Dr. K. Sundaram, *The Simhachalam Temple* (Waltair: Andhra University Press, 1969).

⁸⁶ See Chapter II.

depictions of the expounder of the *śāstras* as in Hayagrīva and Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the South Indian milieu), the religious motifs, beliefs, and rituals appear to have been reworked over time in each tradition. The “histories” of a god, as evident in the case of the Hayagrīva deity, are based on a multifaceted process wherein there is the reworking of myth, iconography, ritual, at many levels, including the pan-Indian “mainstream” Purāṇas, sectarian Āgamas, and regional beliefs and practices.

CONCLUSION

The Pāñcarātric references to Hayagrīva can be analyzed from the viewpoint of theology, ritual and iconography, and contain some interesting adaptations and variations as to his role and nature. Firstly, there is discrepancy as to the source of Hayagrīva; that is, the deity is described in some texts as an emanation of Saṅkarṣaṇa (*Viśvāmitra*), and in other texts as an emanation of Anuruddha (*Viṣvaksena*, *Pādma*). Secondly, there is ambiguity in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas regarding the theological status of Hayagrīva: though in some texts the deity is depicted as a primary (*mukhya*) form of Viṣṇu, other Āgamas describe him as a secondary (*gaṇa*) *avatāra*. Furthermore, in some texts, he is described as an auxiliary deity: that is, Hayagrīva is either depicted as a *dvāra-pālaka* (doorkeeper) in *Nāradya Saṃhitā* 15.226, a *vimāna-devatā* (deity placed on a temple tower) in *Nāradya Saṃhitā* 14.106 and *Viśvāmitra Saṃhitā* 21.68-69, or a *parivāra-devatā* (attendant deity) in *Pādma Saṃhitā* 22.2b-8a.

The iconographical features described in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas differ regarding the number of arms Hayagrīva possesses or the emblems he bears in his hands. Although Hayagrīva is always depicted as bearing the couch shell (*śaṅkha*) and the discus (*cakra*), he

may or may not carry in his other hands the mace (*gaḍa*), the lotus (*padma*), the book (*pustaka*), and the rosary beads (*akṣa-sūtra*). Some texts also describe him as having one hand in the specific position (*mudrā*) representing wisdom.

Although there are striking inconsistencies as to the theological status of Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, the texts are more consistent in their depictions of Hayagrīva as an icon placed in the north or northeast direction of the temple. Perhaps temple design and ritual practice are more important in the Āgamas than theological viewpoint.

Interestingly, the form of Śiva that is revered by Śaivas as the expounder of the *śāstras*—Dakṣiṇāmūrti—is continuous with Hayagrīva in both its theological and ritual functions. Although Dakṣiṇāmūrti's image is different from Hayagrīva's, they are both Lords of learning and wisdom, and they share several unusual and specific emblems. It is striking that both the theological and ritual functions in respect of the two deities remain the same, even though they are associated with different sects.

For a further development in the understanding of Hayagrīva, we now turn to the worship of the god in the region of Tamil Nadu. Moving beyond the ritual texts based on the Āgamas, here we encounter a confluence of Āgamic ritual understanding of deity (*devatā*, *mantra*, and *yantra*) and *bhakti* that involves the emotional worship of a personalized God. We now move from the pan-Indian depictions of the Hayagrīva figure (Part B) to the local depictions of the Hayagrīva God in Tamil Nadu (Part C), the region in which Hayagrīva is presently worshipped as Supreme—the subject of the next four chapters.

PART C
HAYAGRĪVA IN TAMIL NADU

CHAPTER V

HAYAGRĪVA IN TAMIL NADU: THE HYMNS OF THE ĀLVĀRS AND AN EARLY ŚRĪ VAIṢṆAVA ĀCĀRYA

Although a “relatively” minor pan-Indian deity, Hayagrīva is revered as a full form of the Supreme God¹ in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition of South India. Consequently, it is necessary to provide a thorough analysis of the depictions of Hayagrīva in the South, with a particular focus on Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.² Hayagrīva was known to the Ālvārs, for several of their poetic stanzas in the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*³—which is regarded by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as the “Tamil Veda” with a status equal to that of the Sanskrit Veda—refer to Him. Hayagrīva is also mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which—although it is now a pan-Indian text—has its origins in the Tamil-speaking region of South India.⁴ And, finally, the *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava* composed by Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, a Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya during the formative years of the tradition, contains a stanza in praise of Hayagrīva. The full development of Hayagrīva’s status and role in the Tamil milieu reflects the particular Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding that the Supreme God Viṣṇu appears at different places, in His full form, as a temple icon.

This chapter provides an overview and an analysis of the several references to Hayagrīva found in the texts composed in the South Indian milieu prior to Vedānta

¹ All epithets for the deity will be capitalized to bring out the fact that Hayagrīva is revered as the full form of the Supreme God Lord Viṣṇu.

² Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* was pivotal in popularizing the horse-faced deity in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, where He is worshipped as the Supreme God. This will be discussed in Chapters VI and VII.

³ *Nālāyira Tivviyap Pirapantam* (edited by K. Veṅkatacāmi Rettīyar) (Ceṇṇai [Madras]: Tiruveṅkaṭattāṅ Tirumaṅṅam, 1987). Although the Tamil form is *Nālāyira Tivviyap Pirapantam*, I use the more familiar form to Sanskrit scholars—*Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*.

⁴ Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 486-488.

Deśika; that is, a survey of the references to Hayagrīva contained in the *Divya Prabandham*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava*. Furthermore, as a prerequisite to my analysis of Bhaṭṭar's reference to Hayagrīva, I discuss the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the five different forms God takes in five different locales, which I have termed *topotheism*.

Because this chapter has as its major concern Hayagrīva as an *avatāra* within the context of Tamil Nadu and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, it is necessary to give an overview of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition before proceeding to the analysis.

THE ŚRĪ VAIṢṆAVA TRADITION

The Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*⁵ is centred in the area of South India now known as Tamil Nadu. Its theological tenets and devotional spirituality are based on three main scriptural sources: (1) the pan-Indian texts, including *śruti* (Vedas and Vedānta Sūtras) and *smṛti* (Epics, Purāṇas, and *sāstras* including *Manusmṛti*); (2) the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (ca. 500-1500 C.E.⁶), Sanskrit texts which incorporate the Tantric usage of *bīja-mantras*,⁷ *yantras*⁸ and *maṇḍalas*,⁹ and include prescriptions for temple construction, the

⁵ *Sampradāya* means "bestower, presenter, established doctrine transmitted from one teacher to another, or any sectarian system of religious teaching". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1175.

⁶ Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 34-35.

⁷ *Bīja-mantra* (seed-mantra) refers to the key *mantra* of a deity used for worship.

⁸ *Yantras* are symbolic diagrams used for meditation.

⁹ *Maṇḍala* (literally means "circle, disc, or wheel") refers to the circular diagrams used in complex meditative practices popular in the Tantra tradition. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 775.

making of images and ritual performances; and, lastly, (3) the Tamil hymns of the Āḷvārs (ca. 600-900 C.E.¹⁰), collectively referred to as the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, devotional poems that draw on both South Indian Tamil *caṅkam* poetry and pan-Indian motifs. *Caṅkam* poetry, from Tamil Nadu, is traced back to ca. 200 B.C.E. and was collected ca. 700-800 C.E. The *caṅkam* poems are of two basic types: the heroic theme of war is treated in the *puṇam* (exterior) collection, and the emotional love poems are the subject of the *akam* (interior) poems. These *akam* poems are based on depictions of five external landscapes used in connection with highly stylized descriptions of internal-emotional states. This literary genre had a critical impact on the development of the later emotional Tamil Āḷvār *bhakti* poetry.¹¹

Devotional *bhakti* became popular during the period of Medieval Hinduism (starting ca. 600 C.E. in South India and ca. 900-1000 C.E. in North India). In *bhakti*, the devotee totally surrenders to God and lives a life of devotion to, and the service of, Him. Surrender (*prapatti*¹²) is the preferred religious act, which takes place by the divine grace of God. *Prapatti* is one of the central features that distinguishes the emotional devotion (*bhakti*) found in the Āḷvār hymns and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism from the *bhakti-yoga* promulgated in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.¹³ The Āḷvārs implicitly describe *prapatti* in their

¹⁰ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 261-265.

¹¹ See Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India*, pp. 120-237.

¹² *Prapatti* (surrender) is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *pra + pad* "to throw oneself down, to surrender". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 682.

¹³ The classical Hindu text, the *Bhagavad Gītā* (written ca. 200 B.C.E.- 200 C.E.), describes three possible paths for salvation: (1) *jñāna-yoga* (the path of knowledge), in which one renounces "this-worldly" life; (2) *karma-yoga* (the path of action), in which one renounces the fruits of one's actions; and, lastly, (3) *bhakti-yoga* (the path of devotion), in which the devotee renounces the 'Self' in the service of the Lord.

hymns as the ultimate religious act. The act of self-surrender is regarded as the preferred and easiest means of liberation, because this salvation is open to all irrespective of gender, caste or education, and is solely dependent on the grace of God.

It is unlikely that the religious beliefs of the Ālvārs were based on a well-established, highly centralized tradition. The formal institutionalization of South Indian Vaiṣṇava devotionism occurred with the emergence of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava lineage of *ācāryas*. In the earliest period of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (ca. 10th century C.E.), the Tamil Ālvār *bhakti* poems began to be recognized as a full-fledged religious scripture with a status and importance equivalent to the Sanskrit Vedas. As such, the Ālvār poems are called the “Tamil Veda”. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism’s recognition of this two-fold heritage is captured in the term “dual Vedānta” (*ubhaya-vedānta*). Nāthamuni (ca. 10th century C.E.), the lineage’s first historical *ācārya*, is acknowledged for having established this *ubhaya-vedānta*. He is credited both with having recovered the “lost” hymns of the Ālvārs and with having instituted their chanting in ritual performances in the main Śrī Vaiṣṇava temple at Śrī Raṅgam.¹⁴

Nāthamuni’s grandson Yāmuna (ca. first half of the 11th century) is the first *ācārya* to have composed extant philosophical works. He established the foundation of what later came to be called Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy—the philosophical-theological school of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Although Yāmuna accepted his orthodox *brāhmaṇical* heritage, he was sympathetic to the religious changes of his time (*bhakti* and Tantra

¹⁴ Vasudha Narayanan, *The Way and the Goal: Expressions of Devotion in the Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Institute For Vaiṣṇava Studies, 1987), pp. 55-57; John Braisted Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷān’s Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḷi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 3-12, 180-190; Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 7-13.

movements), which were considered heretical in orthodox circles. One of Yāmuna's greatest contributions to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition was his integration of popular temple-oriented *bhakti* with the orthodox Vedic tradition, demonstrated both in his praise-poem *Stotra Ratna* and in his defence of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

Yāmuna wrote two major philosophical works: (1) *Siddhi Traya*, The [Establishment of the] Three *Siddhis*¹⁵ (Truths), and (2) *Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, The Authoritativeness of the [Pāñcarātra] Āgamas.¹⁶ *Siddhi Traya* is an orthodox, philosophical text based on Vedānta philosophy, whereas *Āgama Prāmāṇyam* establishes the Pāñcarātra Āgamas as authoritative scripture. The central argument in the *Āgama Prāmāṇyam* is two-fold: (1) on theological grounds, the Pāñcarātra Āgamas are said to have equal status with the Vedas, for both set of texts are revealed by the Supreme One (*puruṣottama*),¹⁷ and (2) on sociological grounds, the "authentic" Pāñcarātrins are considered to be orthodox *brāhmaṇas* (Bhāgavatas Class IV),¹⁸ because they perform rituals prescribed by both the Vedas and the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

The main theological problem that the Vedāntins have had with the Pāñcarātra

¹⁵ According to Yāmuna, the three *siddhis* are *atman* (soul), *saṁvit* (matter), and *Īśvara* (Lord). In the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, they came to be called *cit* (soul or consciousness), *acit* (matter), and *Īśvara*.

¹⁶ Yāmuna's *Āgama Prāmāṇyam* (translation by J.A.B. van Buitenen) (Madras: Rāmānuja Research Society, 1971), pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ Yāmuna's *Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁸ According to Neevel's analysis of Yāmuna's *Āgama-Prāmāṇyam*, there are four classes of *brāhmaṇas*: Bhāgavata Class I: Traditionally called *vaiśya-vratya* (of the *vaiśya varṇa*), who lost their Vedic status because of their worship of Viṣṇu instead of following Vedic *karma*. Bhāgavata Class II: Temple priests who perform *pūjā* for devotees for their livelihood. Bhāgavata Class III: Bhāgavata *brāhmaṇas* who perform worship and rituals according to *Ekāyana Śākha*. Bhāgavata Class IV: *Śiṣṭa brāhmaṇas* who perform both orthodox Vedic rituals and rituals prescribed in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. Walter G. Neevel, Jr., *Yāmuna's Vedānta and Pāñcarātra: Integrating the Classical and the Popular* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 29-37.

Āgamas is their unique doctrine of the four *vyūhas* or the four-fold aggregate of cosmic emanations of the Supreme. Yāmuna, however, interpreted the four Vedānta Sūtras (II.2.42-45)¹⁹ so as to provide a defence of the legitimacy of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. He claims that the *vyūhas* are not different gods, nor are they four different parts of the Supreme; rather, the *vyūhas* are four different forms that the Supreme takes in order to make Himself increasingly accessible (as He does in a more radical way by taking the *vibhava* and *arcā-avatāric* forms). Yāmuna further noted that Vedānta and the Āgamas are agreed on the notion of Viṣṇu as the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*).²⁰

Although Yāmuna is revered as the initiator of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school, Rāmānuja (ca. 1077-1157 C.E.)²¹ is regarded by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as their greatest teacher and most eminent theologian. Building on the thought of Yāmuna, Rāmānuja established a respectable and full-fledged Vedāntic philosophical foundation for devotional religion. Rāmānuja formulated a system of Vedānta compatible with the theistic devotion and temple ritual of Pāñcarātra. Even so, Rāmānuja quoted Pāñcarātra only in sections of his *Śrī Bhāṣya* where he was directly defending the authority of Pāñcarātra literature.²²

Rāmānuja did not employ Pāñcarātric doctrines—such as the *vyūha* theory of

¹⁹ In Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedānta Sūtra* II.ii.42-45 *utpattayasambhavāt-adhikāraṇa*, the "Section on the Impossibility of Origination" has been, according to van Buitenen, the *prima facie* argument against heterodoxy. It is only in the later commentaries on the *Vedānta Sūtras* (i.e., Śaṅkara) that the contents are actually linked to the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. van Buitenen, *Yāmuna's Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, pp. 16-19.

²⁰ *Yāmuna's Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, pp. 16-19.

²¹ Carman, *Theology of Rāmānuja*, pp. 44-47.

²² *Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.2.42-43 acknowledges and defends Nārāyaṇa as the composer of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. In this section, Rāmānuja primarily uses *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.1.5-6) as a proof text. Rāmānuja, *The Vedānta Sūtras with the Śrī Bhāṣya of Rāmānujāchārya* 3 vols, translated into English by M. Rangacharya and M.V. Varadaraja Aiyanger (Nungambakkam, Madras: The Educational Publishing Co., 1961, 1964, 1965).

cosmic emanations and the six qualities (*ṣaḍguṇas*)²³ of Brahman—functionally within his Vedāntic system as Yāmuna had done.²⁴ Rāmānuja, thus, removed the *vyūha* theory from its original doctrinal and cosmological context in the *Śrī Bhāṣya* as a theory of the manifestation of the universe, and appears to treat it solely in a devotional context as providing the sacred names of the Godhead to be used in meditation (*upāsana*).²⁵ Likewise, Rāmānuja cited the six qualities of Brahman primarily in a devotional context and carefully distinguished them from the five qualities that define Brahman's essential nature (*svarūpa*)²⁶, which he derived from the Upaniṣads.²⁷ For Rāmānuja, the *ṣaḍguṇas* are secondary to the nature of Brahman than the five defining attributes.²⁸

According to Rāmānuja, the key relationship between the devotee and Viṣṇu is the relationship of servant (*śeṣa*) and Master (*śeṣi*). The Supreme Being is the Inner Controller (*antaryāmin*) of that which is both sentient (*cit*) and non-sentient (*acit*). Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme God, is eternally accompanied by His consort Śrī (Lakṣmī). The importance of *avatāras* is their identity with the Supreme Form of Viṣṇu: "Even with

²³ The six qualities (*ṣaḍguṇas*), according to Pāñcarātra, are: *vīrya* (valor), *jñāna* (knowledge), *bala* (strength), *tejas* (splendour), *śakti* (power), and *aiśvarya* (sovereignty).

²⁴ Neevel, Jr., *Yāmuna's Vedānta and Pāñcarātra: Integrating the Classical and the Popular*, pp. 17-28.

²⁵ Although Rāmānuja mentions the four *vyūhas* and identifies them with the Supreme, he does not elaborate on the particular Pāñcarātric function or role of the emanations. See *Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.2.41ff. For further information on the role of Pāñcarātra in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, see Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ According to Rāmānuja, the *svarūpa* (essential nature) of Brahman includes *jñāna* (knowledge), *ānanda* (bliss), *ananta* (infiniteness), *satya* (truth), and *amalarva* (purity).

²⁷ *Śrī Bhāṣya* 3.3.11-13. Rāmānuja uses *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.1; 2.5; 3.1; 3.6) and *Katha Upaniṣad* (3.3) as proof texts.

²⁸ Carman, *Theology of Rāmānuja*, p. 92.

respect to incarnation, his emphasis is not on the particular characteristics of Rāma/Kṛṣṇa but on their identity with God in His essential nature and supreme form".²⁹ In the section of Rāmānuja's *Śrī Bhāṣya* wherein he defends the Pāñcarātra tradition, he specifically discusses only three of the five forms (*para*, *vyūha-avatāra*, *vibhava-avatāra*).³⁰

As Katherine K. Young has clearly demonstrated, although Rāmānuja did not mention the Śrī Vaiṣṇava technical term for the worshipping iconic form of Viṣṇu (*arcā-avatāra*)—the most beloved form of Viṣṇu in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism—he did provide the scope for the concept in his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.11. Therein, Rāmānuja created the theoretical framework for the concept of *arcā-avatāra*, holding that one of the purposes of God's incarnation is to enable devotees to directly perceive God.³¹ In his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.7-9, he referred to *vibhava-avatāra* (although he did not use the term): God as One who comes at a time of need in order to re-establish the worldly-state of *dharma*. He described God's births as unique and non-material.

Rāmānuja provided the scope for the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of *arcā-avatāra* in several ways through his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.11.³² Firstly, Rāmānuja

²⁹ Carman, *Theology of Rāmānuja*, p. 181.

³⁰ Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja*, pp. 179-180. The *Nitya Grantha* manual of home worship includes the five forms but there is dispute over the authorship of the text.

³¹ Katherine K. Young, "*Beloved Places (ukantūḷinanilāṅkaḥ): The Correlation of Topography and Theology in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition of South India*" (Ph.D. Dissertation; Montreal: McGill University, 1978), pp. 150-155.

³² Young, "*Beloved Places (ukantūḷinanilāṅkaḥ)*", pp. 150-155; Katherine K. Young, "Rāmānuja on *Bhagavadgītā* 4.11: The Issue of *Arcāvatāra*" in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23 (Summer, Fall 1988), pp. 92-95.

depicted God as One who shows Himself to His devotees who “keep on experiencing [Him], with their own eyes”.³³ Secondly, he also described God’s incarnational appearance as being the full presence of God with His essential nature (*svarūpa*), a crucial aspect of Śrī Vaiṣṇava spirituality. This act of God revealing Himself to His devotees is understood as an expression of His love—His gracious condescension (*saūṣīlya*)—wherein He makes Himself accessible to His devotees for their welfare. Finally, such appearance of God, which does not occur at a specific time, implicitly differentiates *arcā-avatāra* from *vibhava-avatāra*.³⁴

Sectarian theological tenets became more prominent in the writings of the *ācāryas* after Rāmānuja, such as his immediate disciples Kūreśa and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. Following Rāmānuja’s “blueprint” for the iconic form of God, the concept of *arcā-avatāra* was explicitly developed and elaborated by these later Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas. According to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava and late Pāñcarātra texts, there are five forms of God: (1) *para*—Viṣṇu, the transcendent God who dwells in the Supreme heaven of Vaikuṇṭha; (2) *vyūha-avatāra*—Viṣṇu, the four-fold aggregate of cosmic emanations (Vāsudeva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha); (3) *antaryāmin*—Viṣṇu, the Inner Controller or Indweller of the human heart; (4) *vibhava-avatāra*—Viṣṇu, the human, animal, or animal-headed incarnation on earth at specific times and places (i.e., Rāma, Kṛṣṇa); and, lastly, (5) *arcā-avatāra*—Viṣṇu, fully present in properly consecrated icons in temples

³³ *Gītā Bhāṣya* 4.11. Rāmānuja, *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja* (translation by M.R. Sampatkumaran) (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1985).

³⁴ Young, “Rāmānuja on *Bhagavadgītā* 4.11”, pp. 95-104.

and homes.³⁵

Although Rāmānuja's immediate disciples employed their *ācārya*'s philosophical theology, they synthesized its tenets with the Tamil Veda.³⁶ Following Periyavāccāṇ Piḷḷai's interpretation of *prapatti* as described in Yāmuna's *Stotra Ratna* (v. 22), the understanding among the early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas was that *prapatti* is the simple surrender to God who, out of His grace, saves His devotee. The concept of *prapatti* became a key Śrī Vaiṣṇava doctrine and is regarded as the preferred and easiest means to *mokṣa*. For Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, after the performance of *prapatti*, the devotee's actions are all to be performed in the total service of God and, ideally at least, the devotee—God's servant—experiences the continual enjoyment of His presence. Salvation granted by divine grace alone is open to all, regardless of caste and gender.³⁷ Vedic education, open only to males of the twice-born *dvija*³⁸ classes, is no longer a requisite for salvation, as it is amongst the orthodox Hindu schools of thought.

Two centuries after Rāmānuja, Vedānta Deśika attempted to reconcile the more radical notions of Viśiṣṭādvaita doctrine with a more orthodox Hinduism, by reinterpreting the relationship between God and devotee. Even though devotion and

³⁵ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, p. 103.

³⁶ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 78-92.

³⁷ According to the classical salvific scheme, women and *śūdras*, those without Vedic study, do not attain *mokṣa* in 'this life'.

³⁸ The classical Hindu *varṇa* (colour) system contains four classes: (1) the *brāhmaṇa* (priestly) class, (2) the *kṣatriya* (warrior) class, (3) the *vaiśya* (agricultural) class, and lastly (4) the *śūdra* (serving) class. The first three are categorized as *dvija* (twice-born), to whom the Vedas and Vedic education is accessible. The *śūdra* class, on the other hand, is required to serve all those belonging to the *dvija* classes, and is forbidden to have any Vedic education. Furthermore, women, no matter which class they are born into, have the status of *śūdra* males; that is, women are denied Vedic education and, thus, salvation in their present birth.

salvation are open to all, Deśika postulated that salvation is not entirely effortless. He maintained that Vedic education should be mandatory for *dvija* males, particularly *brāhmaṇas*. Although Deśika appears to have had no intention to create a sub-sect, nor to cause a division within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, he has come to be revered as an *ācārya* of the Vaṭakalai sect (Northern school) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Similarly, Maṇavālamūni has come to be recognized as belonging to the lineage of the Teṅkalai sect (Southern school) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism even though he, too, had not intended to cause the split, which is believed to have occurred ca. 17th-18th century.³⁹

The common analogies used to compare the Vaṭakalai sect's concept of *prapatti* with the Teṅkalai school's view on salvation are the monkey and the cat, respectively. The relationship that the baby animal has with its mother parallels the relationship a devotee has with God. For the Vaṭakalai school, the baby "monkey" must grip the mother's fur as it is carried, just as some effort must be made by the devotee to obtain God's grace. In contrast, the Teṅkalai "kitten" is carried by the mother's mouth by the gripping of its neck, implying that absolutely no effort other than self-surrender upon the part of the devotee is required for salvation.

Because the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* is centred in South India and it regards the Tamil hymns of the Ālvārs (ca. 600-900 C.E.⁴⁰) as scripture, it is to the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, which contains several references to Hayagrīva, that we now turn.

³⁹ K.K.A. Venkatachari, *The Manipravāla Literature Of The Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas* (Bombay: Ananthacharya Research Institute, 1978), pp. 164-166.

According to tradition, the Vaṭakalai and Teṅkalai sects differ on eighteen issues (doctrinal and ritual). For further elaboration, see "The Religious Thought of Vedānta Deśika" in Chapter VI. For a full discussion of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava split into the two sects, see Mumme, *The ŚrīVaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*.

⁴⁰ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 261-265.

Early Depictions of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu

Hayagrīva in the Hymns of the Ālvārs

Continuous with several passages in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, all references to Hayagrīva in the Ālvār hymns depict Him as a benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, without any mention of how Viṣṇu happened to gain a horse's head (as in *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). Two of the Ālvārs, Nammālvār (ca. 700 C.E.)⁴¹ and Tirumaṅkai Ālvār (ca. late 700 C.E.),⁴² mention Hayagrīva in their *Tiruvāymoḷi* and *Periya Tirumoḷi*, respectively. Hayagrīva is recognized as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in listings composed by these two Ālvārs as *mā* (horse) and *parimuka*⁴³ (horse-faced one).⁴⁴

In *Tiruvāymoḷi* II.8.5, Nammālvār includes the horse (*mā*) in a list of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*:

The Supreme Lord,
the Causeless Cause of the flowing universe,
its Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer,
Chief of the Celestials,
My Tirttan came down as
a horse (*mā*), a tortoise (*āmai*), a fish (*keṇṭai*), and a man (*perumāṇ*), and
protected all the worlds.

Nammālvār depicts Hayagrīva as the full form of God and as Protector of the world.

In *Periya Tirumoḷi*, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār also refers to Viṣṇu's horse-headed

⁴¹ Nammālvār (ca. 700 C.E.) is from the Pāṇḍya region of South India. He is the author of *Tiruvāymoḷi*—the most important work contained in the *Divya Prabandham*. Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 267-269.

⁴² Tirumaṅkai Ālvār (ca. late 700 C.E.) is from the Nāṅkūr district of South India. Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 267.

⁴³ *Pari* in Tamil means "horse". *Muka* (Sanskrit *mukha*) means face. *Madras Tamil Lexicon*, Vol. IV, p. 2561.

⁴⁴ *Periya Tirumoḷi* 5.3.2; *Periya Tirumoḷi* 7.8.2.

incarnation in his listing of the Supreme's various incarnations. In *Periya Tirumoli* 4.5.6, Hayagrīva appears in a stanza which contains a list of Viṣṇu's incarnations:

The One who becomes
the fish (*keṇṭai*), dwarf (*kural*),
swan (*puḷ*), pig (*keḷal*),
lion (*ari*) and horse (*mā*),
who is also the cosmic egg, sun and moon,
who is all other things, and my God,
stays in Nāṅkūr where the powerful people
are able to defeat the Pāṇḍya and Cōḷa kings. (*Periya Tirumoli* 4.5.6)

The Āḷvār's list is almost identical to that of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.17.11, which contains a list of *avatāras* beginning with the various earlier animal forms Viṣṇu has taken in order to preserve the world, including the fish, the tortoise, the boar, the horse, and the lion. The only difference between the Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār's list and that of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s is that in the Āḷvār's swan (*puḷ*) replaces Vāmana.

Although the *puḷ* (swan) form of Viṣṇu is found in the *Mahābhārata*, the swan is not included in many Puranic *avatāric* listings surveyed in this study (e.g., *Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). In fact, the swan incarnation is more commonly found in the Āgamic listings. Several of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas list the swan (*vihaṅgama*) as one of the forms of Viṣṇu (*Sātvata Saṁhitā* 9.78; *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* 5.50; *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* 13; *Lakṣmī Tantra* 11.19-20). Interestingly, Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār appears here to have been directly influenced by the Āgamic tradition.

The following two stanzas on Hayagrīva by Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār are the only references in the *Divya Prabandham* which mention the mythic act of Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaṭaibha. In *Periya Tirumoli* 5.3.2, Hayagrīva is described as having the form of the Vedas; in the same stanza a reference is

made to Brahmā, who is said to have lost the Vedas:

Once upon a time,
the One who,
taking the form of the horse-faced one (*parimuka*)
gave the attractive sounding Vedas
to Brahmā (Ayaṇ),
who appears at the navel of the Lord with compassion,
and who lost the Vedas.

In *Periya Tirumoli* 7.8.2, Tirumaṅkai explicitly praises Hayagrīva for his glorious act of saving the universe by recovering the Vedas:

Please look at the Supreme, our Lord,
who once upon a time took the form of a horse-faced being (*parimuka*)
and restored the four Vedas
[from the demons who]
brought darkness to the universe.

When the sages or the demons
were unable to do anything
because of the darkness,
the Horse-faced One (*parimuka*) restored the Vedas.

The one who dwells in this place
known as Taṇiyaḷūntūr (Tiruvaḷūntūr),
surrounded by [the fields of] superior quality paddy
which is blowing like whisks [in the wind],⁴⁵
has a swan as his feminine part
who enjoys the flowers of the fields.

Hayagrīva's act is here connected with a bountiful rice crop. This comparison is expressive of Hayagrīva's greatness, because rice is the most important staple crop in the Tamil lands. Most importantly, this passage brings out an implicit connection of Hayagrīva with an *arcā-avatāric* form of God (The one who dwells in this place known as Tiruvaḷūntūr).

⁴⁵ The whisk is one of the symbols of a king.

Hayagrīva in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

As aforementioned in Chapter III, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is an important *bhakti* devotional text in Sanskrit, best known for its stories about the life of Kṛṣṇa, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. According to recent scholarship, although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has been at least since the 16th century a pan-Indian Purāṇa, it is believed to have been composed in South India by a single author during the formative years of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (ca. 9th-10th century C.E.).⁴⁶

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* provides three different lists of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*. Two of these lists that include Hayagrīva are: a list of twenty-two (1.3.1-25) and a list of twenty-three *avatāras* (2.1-38). The third list of ten (10.40.17-22) does not include Hayagrīva. Neither of the lists which mention Hayagrīva in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* conform to the listings of *avatāras* given in the Ālvār hymns. Again, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's list includes *pul*, whereas the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* includes *vāmana* (dwarf) (as does the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*).

Hayagrīva appears as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu not only in the Tamil hymns of the Ālvārs, but also in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This clearly demonstrates that Hayagrīva's presence in the South is not limited to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition (although he is most popular therein). However, by way of contrast to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the Ālvārs, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* contains both the malevolent and benevolent myths about Hayagrīva from the Purāṇic tradition. In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.18.1-6; 7.9.37 and 11.4.17, Hayagrīva is depicted as a god and is praised for His act of recovering the Vedas from the demons

⁴⁶ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 486-488.

Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Yet, a horse-headed being is at the same time portrayed in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.24.7-57 as a malevolent demon; Viṣṇu assumed the form of a fish in order to save the Vedas from the horse-headed demon. This confirms the widely held notion that the Pāñcarātra Āgamas have not been a significant influence on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Even though the mythic stories in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are primarily Vaiṣṇava, the text is heavily influenced by an *advaitic* world-view⁴⁷ which, as argued previously, allows for the ambivalent depictions of Hayagrīva. From a philosophical viewpoint, therefore, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can comfortably contain the two horse-headed figures—the benevolent and malevolent ones. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* provides two separate stories of a benevolent and a malevolent Hayagrīva, but the text does not contain a story that combines the two horse-headed figures (as do the Śākta Purāṇas, *Devībhāgavata* and *Kālikā*). Although the association of a demonic character with a form similar to the benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu would be highly problematic for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas who hold that Viṣṇu is wholly taintless,⁴⁸ it is philosophically less important for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* because of its *advaitic* viewpoint in which all forms are considered to belong to the realm of *māyā*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, therefore, can easily contain two different strands of the horse-headed figure. In other non-*advaitic* Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas (such as *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) and in the Ālvār hymns, however, the malevolent horse-headed demon is not even so much as mentioned! It would have been philosophically

⁴⁷ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 497.

⁴⁸ *Śrī Bhāṣya* 3.2.5.20.

and theologically impossible for the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the Ālṅvār hymns to depict an *avatāra* of the wholly benevolent Viṣṇu as having a demonic past, or even to acknowledge another horse-headed figure, a form similar to the Supreme God, as demonic.

Hayagrīva was definitely known in Tamil Nadu before the theological development of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition (based on the references in the Ālṅvār hymns and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). However, it is in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism that we see the full development of the worship of Hayagrīva. The development of Hayagrīva's status and role in the Tamil milieu is based on the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding that the Supreme God Viṣṇu appears not only at different times (*vibhava-avatāra*), but also at five different locales—which I have termed *topotheism*. Before proceeding to the references to Hayagrīva in Śrī Vaiṣṇava literature, it is therefore important that I discuss *topotheism* in more detail.

TOPOTHEISM: THE ŚRĪ VAIṢṆAVA WORSHIP OF THE VARIOUS FORMS OF VIṢṆU AT SPECIFIC PLACES

Max Müller developed the concept of *henotheism* (Greek: *heis* “one” and *theos* “god”) with regards to Vedic mythology; that is, each individual god is worshipped as Supreme, even though there is no defined relationship among the gods as superior or inferior.⁴⁹ The concept of *henotheism* differs from *polytheism* (Greek: *polus* “many”,

⁴⁹ Müller uses *henotheism* interchangeably with *kathenotheism* (*kat-hena* “one by one”)—which expresses more precisely the Rk Vedic practice of the worship of one god at a time as Supreme. Friedrich Max Muller, *The Vedas* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969), p. 85.

theos “god”), which is the worship of many gods at the same time, and *monotheism* (Greek: *mono* “one”, *theos* “god”) which is the worship of the one single God as Supreme.⁵⁰ Muller believed that *henotheism* represented an unsystematic stage in the development of mythology/religion, arising along with *polytheism*, yet before the “more sophisticated” phase of *monotheism*.⁵¹

According to R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, *henotheism* “to a lesser degree is evident in *bhakti*”.⁵² The concept of *henotheism* may also be applied to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in one sense, based on the fact that there are various forms worshipped as Supreme. However, there is a basic discontinuity between *henotheism* and Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology. *Henotheism* refers to the worship of each individual god as Supreme. On the contrary, in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the Supreme all-pervasive (*vibhu*) Lord Viṣṇu assumes at different places a wide variety of forms—each with the same theological status of the Supreme. All of these different forms are but the different forms that Viṣṇu takes at particular places. I call this phenomenon *topotheism* (Greek: *topos* “locus”, *theos* “god”).

The previously discussed five forms of God described in Śrī Vaiṣṇava texts⁵³ and based on the three forms in the Pāñcarātra texts (*para*, *vyūha-avatāra*, *avatāra* with a subcategory of *arcā-avatāra*)⁵⁴ are, interestingly, all related to specific regions or places:

⁵⁰ *Henotheism* also pertains to the worship of one deity among several as the special god of one's family, clan, or tribe. Müller, *The Vedas*, p. 85.

⁵¹ Friedrich Max Müller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Indian Religion* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 276.

⁵² R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, “Polytheism”, in the *Encyclopedia of Religions* Vol 11, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 439.

⁵³ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, p. 103.

⁵⁴ *Sārvata Saṁhitā* 9; *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* 5; *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* 13; *Lakṣmī Tantra* 10 and 11.

(1) *para*—Viṣṇu, the transcendent God, who resides in the Supreme Heaven of Vaikuṇṭha; (2) *vyūha-avatāra*—Viṣṇu's four-fold aggregate of cosmic emanations (Vāsudeva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha), associated with the Milk Ocean;⁵⁵ (3) *antaryāmin*—Viṣṇu, the Inner Controller, who dwells within the human heart; (4) *vibhava-avatāra*—Viṣṇu, a human, animal, or animal-headed incarnation, who dwells on earth in specific times and at specific places (i.e., Rāma at Ayodhyā, Kṛṣṇa at Vṛndāvana); and, lastly, (5) *arcā-avatāra*—Viṣṇu, as the fully-incarnate God, present in a properly consecrated icon in temples and home shrines.⁵⁶ For Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, these five forms (*para*, *vyūha*, *antaryāmin*, *vibhava-avatāra*, and *arcā-avatāra*) reflect the increasing accessibility of Lord Viṣṇu. The most popular, worshippingable, and preferred form of Viṣṇu among Śrī Vaiṣṇavas is the *arcā-avatāra*—Viṣṇu as a local icon—because it is accessible to all, unlimited by specific times or places.⁵⁷

The relation between Viṣṇu and His iconic manifestations (*arcā-avatāra*) has been discussed by various scholars of South Indian religion, drawing on the poems of the Ālvārs and the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava literature. Firstly, Katherine K. Young, in tracing the conception of the divine in the *caṅkam*, Ālvār, and Śrī Vaiṣṇava literatures, refers to the development of “terrestrial beloved places”, which are the special places within *samsāra*

⁵⁵ The *vyūha-avatāras* are associated with the Milk Ocean—the cosmic boundary of *samsāra* (the transitory world of birth, death, and rebirth).

⁵⁶ “What is called *arcā-avatāra* is that special form which, without remoteness of space and time, accepts for its body substance chosen by the devotees, and descends into it with a non-material body.”

Śrīnivādāsa, *Yatīndramatadīpikā*, translated and with notes by Swami Adidevananda (Mylapore, Madras: Śrī Rāmakrishna Math, n.d.), 9.27.

⁵⁷ *Tattvatraya* 97. *The Tattvatraya of Lokācārya: A Treatise on Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* (translation by B.M. Awasthi and C.K. Datta (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973).

where God takes a special iconic form so that He may be seen by His devotees.⁵⁸ That this form of Viṣṇu (His incarnation in an icon) is a “full form” of Viṣṇu, implied in the Ālvār poems, is well established in Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology. And, indeed, even the *various places Viṣṇu has appeared in His arcā form are of equal status*. As Young has written:

At the outset let us state that we are speaking about popularity, not about any qualitative difference that assigns a hierarchy to the terrestrial Beloved Places. It is a case of favouritism. Though the Śrī Vaiṣṇava acknowledges that those places where God, in His *arcā* form and the devotees meet have equal theological status, they are partial to those places about which the Ālvārs sang and especially Śrī Raṅkam, Venkaṭam, Kāñcī, and Tirunārāyaṇapuram.⁵⁹

Friedhelm Hardy also discusses the worship of Māyoṇ (Kṛṣṇa) by the Ālvārs, and demonstrates the ways in which the landscape motif of *caṅkam* love poems influenced the Ālvārs.⁶⁰ Although icon worship was not yet developed into a full-blown theological system by the Ālvārs, it becomes so with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas—conceptualized by them in the theological term *arcā-avatāra*. Vasudha NarAyaṇan refers to the Ālvārs’ and Śrī Vaiṣṇavas’ devotion to God at specific sites as a “territorial theology”.⁶¹ Finally, Nancy Nayar sheds further light on the relationship between the Supreme and the *arcā-avatāra* evident in the praise-poems written by Rāmānuja’s immediate disciples Kūreśa and Bhaṭṭar. In her analysis of the praise-poems of Kūreśa, Nayar demonstrates how Kūreśa, in his synthesis of the two Vedas (Sanskrit Veda and *Divya Prabandham*),

⁵⁸ Young, “Beloved Places (*ukantūḷinanilaṅkaḷ*)”, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Young, “Beloved Places (*ukantūḷinanilaṅkaḷ*)”, p. 107.

⁶⁰ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, pp. 468-469.

⁶¹ Narayanan, *The Way and the Goal*, pp. 33-39.

establishes the equality of the *para*, *antaryāmin*, and *arcā-avatāra* forms of Viṣṇu. Kūreśa does so by combining, in Sanskrit, Rāmānuja's phraseology describing the essential nature of the Supreme with a variety of epithets for local deities praised by the Ālvārs (including Nammālvār, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār, and Āṇṭāl).⁶² Nayar explains this development of the *equality of the forms of Viṣṇu* thus:

Kūreśa develops the linkage between the fullness of the Supreme Brahman as transcendent God and His incarnation in the temple icon by establishing the parity or equality of these two locales of Viṣṇu: Vaikuṇṭha and the terrestrial sacred place called Vanagiri.⁶³

Topotheism conceptualizes the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of God in terms of all the five forms that God takes at specific locales as well as the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the equality these many forms. Although *topotheism* is central to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava conception of God generally, it is particularly evident in the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva.

Hayagrīva in the *Stotra* of an Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya

Among the early Ācāryas who were the immediate companions of Rāmānuja, at least one, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (ca. 12th century C.E.),⁶⁴ dedicates a stanza to the horse-headed God. In his *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava: the Latter Hundred Stanzas*, in praise of the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam, Bhaṭṭar describes the various forms of Viṣṇu, including *para*, the four *vyūhas* (Vāsudeva, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha), and many of Viṣṇu's *vibhava-*

⁶² Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 123-131; see the entire chapter "Parity with *Para*", pp. 105-138.

⁶³ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 123-124.

⁶⁴ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 25-30.

avatāras. Stanza by stanza, Bhaṭṭar praises the *vibhava-avatāric* forms of Viṣṇu: swan⁶⁵ (v. 53), child on a banyan leaf (v. 54), fish (vs. 60-62), tortoise (v. 62), boar (v. 63), man-lion (vs. 65-66), dwarf (v. 67), Rāma with an axe (v. 68), Balarāma (v. 70), Kṛṣṇa (v. 72), and Kalkin (v. 73). Significantly, among the stanzas in praise of Viṣṇu's *avatāric* forms is one in praise of Hayagrīva:

O Possessor of [Śrī]Raṅgam!
Incarnated as a horse,
You destroyed the obstacles Madhu and Kaiṭabha,
bestowed upon Brahmā divine vision
in the form of the Three [Vedas]
and gave life to the whole world
freely and spontaneously! (v. 52)⁶⁶

This stanza follows the Hayagrīva myth in that it is a portrayal of Hayagrīva as the horse-headed God who recovered the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha and bequeathed them to Brahmā. Not only does Bhaṭṭar describe Hayagrīva as the One who recovers the Vedas by killing the demons, but also praises Him for giving "life". Bhaṭṭar recognizes Hayagrīva as a full form of Lord Viṣṇu, and therefore wholly benevolent and pure in nature.

Even though Hayagrīva appears both as a demon and *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, neither the Tamil Ālvārs nor Parāśara Bhaṭṭar mention the Epic and Puranic stories of a demonic Hayagrīva who is killed by Viṣṇu. The Ālvārs and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya are careful to establish the horse-headed figure as wholly benevolent.

⁶⁵ As aforementioned, the swan (*haṁsa*) appears to be more popular in the regional literature of South India, including Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's hymns. The swan is also mentioned in the Āgamas: *Sārvaṭa Saṁhitā* 9.78, *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā* 5.50, *Viṣṇaksena Saṁhitā* 13, *Lakṣmī Tantra* 11.19-20.

⁶⁶ Nancy Ann Nayar, *Praise-Poems to Viṣṇu and Śrī: The Stotras of Rāmānuja's Immediate Disciples* (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1994), pp. 247-248.

Interestingly, neither the Ālvār hymns, nor the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, nor Bhaṭṭar's *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava* mention or concern as to how Hayagrīva became one with a horse's head (as in the Hayagrīva passages in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*) in . Nowhere is Hayagrīva linked to the Vedic myth of Dadhyañc. Since the effort to establish Vedic legitimacy in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is otherwise so strong,⁶⁷ one would think that the myth would have been mentioned if it were at all credible to Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.

Although Bhaṭṭar makes reference to the myth about Hayagrīva, along the lines of the story related in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā*, there is also an implicit depiction of him as the full form of Viṣṇu in that He is identified with the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam—an *arcā-avatāra* of Viṣṇu in his image of the *para* form sleeping on the serpent couch in the temple at Śrī Raṅgam. At the same time, the *ācārya*'s poem evidences the phenomenon of *topotheism* in that, relating the many forms of Viṣṇu to the icon at Śrī Raṅgam that he praises, Bhaṭṭar demonstrates how the various forms of Viṣṇu are understood as equal in theological status.

The early depictions of Hayagrīva in the Ālvār poems and in the work of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya Bhaṭṭar composed during the formative period of the tradition are consistent in their reverence for, and gratitude to, the wholly benevolent Hayagrīva. Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's and Bhaṭṭar's stanzas reflect *topotheism* in that the iconic incarnation present right before them (whether the Lord of Tiruvalūntūr or the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam) can be identified with, and praised as, Hayagrīva. *Topotheism* is evident in the stanzas by Tirumaṅkai Ālvār and Bhaṭṭar in their identification of the Lords of

⁶⁷ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 16-18.

Nāṅkūr and Tiruvalūntūr and the Lord at Śrī Rangam, with Hayagrīva. The following two chapters will demonstrate how Śrī Vaiṣṇava *topotheism* is the basis of the development of the understanding and worship of Hayagrīva in South India. Indeed, in the short Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional hymns discussed in Chapter VII, we will see the reverse; there, the iconic incarnation in the form of Hayagrīva at Tiruvahīndrapuram is praised by reference to the various forms of Viṣṇu.

CONCLUSION

There are references to Hayagrīva in the literature of South India prior to Vedānta Deśika in the Ālvār hymns, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and Bhaṭṭar's *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava*. All of these references depict Him as a benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who recovered the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Although Hayagrīva appears as both a demon and as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, neither the Ālvārs nor Parāśara Bhaṭṭar mention the Epic and Purāṇic stories of a demonic horse-headed figure who is killed by Viṣṇu. The latter feature is due to the fact that the Ālvārs and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya are careful to establish the horse-headed figure Hayagrīva as wholly benevolent. Likewise, there is no mention or concern in any of the texts as to how Hayagrīva became one with a horse's head (as in the Hayagrīva passages in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). The absence of any interest in the etiology of His horse-head further reinforces the wholly pure nature of Hayagrīva; that is, Hayagrīva is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, without the need for any explanation of His form.

Furthermore, *topotheism*, which conceptualizes the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of

the five forms that God takes at five different locales, as well as the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the equality of these many forms—evident in nascent form in *Periya Tirumoli*—was a well-established doctrine by the time of Bhaṭṭar's stanza in *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava*. Just as Tirumaṅkai Ālvār equates the Lords of Nānkūr and Tiruvalūntūr with Hayagrīva, Bhaṭṭar, too, identifies the many forms of Viṣṇu, including Hayagrīva, with the icon at Śrī Raṅgam. As we will see, Vedānta Deśika and the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns explicitly describe Hayagrīva as a form with the same ontological status as Viṣṇu, whether in the heart or in the temple.

In this chapter, I have analysed the several references to Hayagrīva in the South Indian literature prior to Vedānta Deśika. However, Hayagrīva became more popular in Tamil Nadu only after Vedānta Deśika's experience of the grace of Hayagrīva and his composing the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. The next two chapters reflect the Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional preference for the Supreme Viṣṇu's iconic-incarnations in specific places in the Tamil lands. It is in Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* that we see Hayagrīva explicitly worshipped as the Supreme Lord whether as a *vibhava*, *anātryāmin*, or *arcā-avatāra* (Chapter VI), and the later worship of Hayagrīva as *arca-avatara* at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram (Chapter VII).

CHAPTER VI

VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S DEPICTION OF HAYAGRĪVA: TOPOTHEISM AND THE LORD OF LIGHT AND LEARNING

The most celebrated text on Hayagrīva in the region of Tamil Nadu is the composition by the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya Vedānta Deśika¹ (ca. 1268-1371 C.E.), the eminent theologian, philosopher, logician, and poet who resided in the town of Kāñcīpuram. The *Hayagrīva Stotra*—a thirty-two stanza Sanskrit poem in praise of Hayagrīva (for a complete translation, see Appendix I)—reflects the religiosity of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition.² Vedānta Deśika writes in an emotional-devotional mood, typical of Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetry, even as he incorporates into the poem crucial theological tenets of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part of the chapter provides background material on Vedānta Deśika. The second part of the chapter consists of an analysis of Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. This analytical section provides an overview of crucial theological themes of the poem, as well as demonstrates that Vedānta Deśika's depictions of Hayagrīva reflects *topotheism*—the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of God in terms of the many full forms that He takes in five specific places or regions. The analytical discussion also looks at the historical and theological significance of the horse-headed *avatāra* in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

¹ Vedānta Deśika is also known by the names of Vedāntācārya "Preceptor of Vedānta" and Venkṭaṇātha "Lord of the Bell".

² In addition, Vedānta Deśika also wrote fifteen stanzas on Hayagrīva that are included in his larger philosophical treatise *Śata Dūṣarī*. One of the fifteen stanzas is a reproduction of the third verse from the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. The stanzas reflect the philosophical and theological tenets of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, encompassing important Śrī Vaiṣṇava concepts such as: universal grace, *prapatti*, the five forms of God, including the iconic-incarnation (the form that God takes in order to become accessible to all), and His essential form as Inner Controller of *cit* and *acit*. The stanzas that are important for the present study will be cited within the analytical portion of the chapter.

The third part of the chapter discusses the relationship of Vedānta Deśika's poem to the various religious streams discussed earlier in Part B (Epic, Purāṇic, Āgamic). These religious streams are, of course, reflected in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* depiction of Hayagrīva, but which elements Vedānta Deśika selects from the various streams and how he adapts and organizes them still remains to be understood. For that, we turn to the "reverse-prismatic" perspective, which is useful in comprehending Vedānta Deśika's particular depiction of Hayagrīva within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. Using the *reverse-prismatic* perspective, the analysis in the third part of the chapter demonstrates how the elements from the various streams are fused together and filtered through the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view of Vedānta Deśika's *stotra*: Vedānta Deśika incorporates and properly arranges elements from both the pan-Indian Sanskrit stream of religious literature and the Āḷvār religion of grace, even as he unites them with features from the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

Before preceding to the overview and analysis of the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, I provide below essential background material on the poet Vedānta Deśika himself.

VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S LIFE AND WORKS

Life of Vedānta Deśika

Vedānta Deśika was a philosopher-theologian in the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophical school of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. The Vaṭakalai *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam*³ records that he was born in 1268 C.E., into the Viśvāmitra *gotra*, in the Tuppil

³ The *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam* (6000) (The Splendor of the Lineage of Spiritual Preceptors) is the earliest and the most popular collection of hagiographies among Teṅkalais. Following the pan-Indian genre of hagiography, the text is a mixture of fact and legend about the historical Ācāryas; that is, the descriptions of the Āḷvārs and Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas include supernatural births, miracles and so forth. It is written in Maṇipravāḷa ca. 12th to 13th century C.E. Piṅgaḷakiya Perumāḷ Jiyar, *Āṇḍīrapaṭi Kuruparamparāprapāvam* (Tirucci:

suburb of the important intellectual centre of Kāñcīpuram.⁴ Vāṭakalai Śrī Vaiṣṇava hagiography describes Vedānta Deśika as having had a sacred birth: Vedānta Deśika's father dreamt that he should take a pilgrimage trip to Tirupati,⁵ while his mother dreamt that the goddess Padmavatī told her to visit her shrine—both in order to have a son. At Tirupati, Vedānta Deśika's mother saw Lord Venkateśvara stand before her in the guise of a child and presented her with a bell. Because of the vision, she named her son Venkaṭanātha ("Lord of the Bell"), after the main deity of the Tirupati Temple.

During Vedānta Deśika's studentship, when he was known as Venkaṭanātha, he attained mastery of the various Indian schools of philosophy and logic. His maternal uncle, Atreya Rāmānuja—who is considered to be an incarnation of Garuḍa⁶—was his teacher. (In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, the Ācāryas are regarded as partial *avatāras* of Viṣṇu because their work is the establishment of *dharma* on earth.)

Soon after Vedānta Deśika finished his studies and began his career as a poet-logician, his teacher died, leaving him in the position of Ācārya in Kāñcīpuram. During Vedānta

Kirūṣṇasvāmi Ayyaṅkar, 1975). It is believed that, because of the later Teṅkalai-Vāṭakalai split within Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the Vāṭakalai sect started a new version referred to as the Vāṭakalai *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam* (3000), which includes an account of Vedānta Deśika's life.

⁴ *Kuruparamparā Prapāvam of Brahmatantra Svatantra Jīyar* (edited by V.V. Kīṭambi Raṅkāchārya Svāmi (Ceṇṇapattanam: K. Ānantāchārya, n.d), pp. 94-95.

Kāñcīpuram is a city in present-day Tamil Nadu. During Deśika's time, it was an important centre for philosophical discourse amongst the educated elite. After the emergence of the sects within Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, Kāñcīpuram became associated with the Vāṭakalai school (Northern school). Śrī Raṅgam is associated with the Teṅkalai school (Southern school). Kāñcīpuram remains an important Śrī Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage place even today. See Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, pp. 6-9.

⁵ Tirupati is a town in present-day Andhra Pradesh that has a temple popular for Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage. The icon in the main shrine is of Venkateśvara, who is worshipped primarily for worldly boons, such as prosperity.

⁶ Garuḍa, an eagle-headed man, is an attendant deity of Viṣṇu. Garuḍa is revered for his strength, and is said to be composed of the Vedas.

Deśika's career as Ācārya, he became known as Vedāntācārya. Learned in both streams of *ubhaya-vedānta*—Tamil Veda and Sanskrit Veda—and the philosophic and poetic compositions of previous Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas, Vedānta Deśika wrote prolifically. During the middle period of his life (ca. 1325-1336 C.E.), Vedānta Deśika visited North India, including Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage places such as Dvāraka⁷ and Mathurā.⁸ Disillusioned by the presence of Islamic power, the weakness of Hinduism, and the hypocrisy found amongst the *brāhmaṇa* priests, he returned to Kāñcīpuram in Tamil Nadu and then toured South India. Vatakalai hagiography which, in legendary rather than historical fashion, establishes the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *guruparamparā* through Vedānta Deśika,⁹ claims that it is during the time he spent in Śrī Raṅgam that he engaged in a theological dispute with the Ācāryas of that temple. After a life of teaching, preaching and writing, Vedānta Deśika died, according to tradition, on November 14, 1369 C.E.¹⁰

According to legend (and perhaps based on historical events), Vedānta Deśika had a close association with Tiruvahīndrapuram, where he went to pursue his career.¹¹ It is during

⁷ Dvāraka is a Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage place in present-day Gujarat. It is built near an ancient city associated with Kṛṣṇa which, according to the Purāṇas, was submerged in the sea. See L.V. Gopalan, *Sri Vaisnava Divya Desams (108 Tiruppatis)* (Madras: Visishtadvaita Pracharini Sabha, 1972), p. 89.

⁸ Mathurā is an important pilgrimage place for the devotees of Kṛṣṇa in present-day Uttar Pradesh. The activities of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* (cowherdresses) took place in Mathurā and the surrounding areas, such as Vṛndāvana.

⁹ In the 18th century, during the time of tension over the control of temple administration, the differences between the two *guruparamparās* became sharper. Venkatachari, *The Manipravāla Literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, pp. 164-166.

¹⁰ Dr. Satyavrata Singh, *Vedānta Deśika: His Life, Works and Philosophy* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1958), p. 29.

¹¹ *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam of Brahmātantra Svatantra Jīyar*, pp. 94-103; Singh, *Vedānta Deśika*, p. 98.

his sojourn there that he wrote the *Hayagrīva Stotra*.¹² Even today, anyone who visits Tiruvahīndrapuram is shown the seat where Vedānta Deśika is said to have composed, and then recited, the *stotra* before an icon of Hayagrīva. During the annual *Brahmā-utsava* (annual Hindu temple festival) in Tiruvahīndrapuram,¹³ Śrī Vaiṣṇavas today recite the poem as part of the temple ritual.¹⁴ Vedānta Deśika's favorite place is said to have been Auśadhagiri,¹⁵ where he meditated upon the Garuḍa mantra (as mentioned earlier, his teacher was regarded as the incarnation of Garuḍa) and received the grace of Hayagrīva. Around 1667 C.E., a Hayagrīva temple was built at Auśadhagiri in memory of Vedānta Deśika and his experience of Hayagrīva's grace.¹⁶ Whether based on historical fact or not, this association of Vedānta Deśika with Tiruvahīndrapuram is central to the worship of Hayagrīva there and in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community generally.

Vedānta Deśika's Religious Thought and Works

Vedānta Deśika lived two and a half centuries after Yāmuna (11th century C.E.) and two centuries after Rāmānuja (11th-12th century C.E.)—the two Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas who are revered as the founders of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy. Vedānta Deśika himself professed the philosophical and theological tenets of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school.

¹² Information given by T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar in an interview on January 24, 1997 at the home of T.K. Piran at Tiruvahīndrapuram, Tamil Nadu. See Chapter VII for autobiographical information about the informants.

¹³ For information about the Brahmotsavam festival, see "Rituals at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple, Tiruvahīndrapuram" in Chapter VII.

¹⁴ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

¹⁵ The hill is also called Mount Cappar.

¹⁶ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar. For more information about the Hayagrīva temple, see "Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram" in Chapter VII.

Although he followed the Śrī Vaiṣṇava sectarian tenet of *prapatti*—the simple surrender to God who, out of His grace, saves His devotee—as the superior path to *mokṣa*, Vedānta Deśika offered a new understanding of *prapatti* that became very important in the subsequent development of the Vāṭakalai sect of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. He argued that salvation is not completely effortless; rather, one must perform prescribed religious acts to attain it. Thus, Vedānta Deśika's concept of *prapatti* differed from the more “radical” understanding of surrender that was formulated by Maṇavālamāmuni¹⁷ who, following the approach contained in Yāmuna's *Stotra Ratna*, established the view of *prapatti* accepted by Teṅkalais.¹⁸ Vedānta Deśika, and the Ācāryas of the later Vāṭakalai sect, promulgated the view that salvation is dependent upon *prapatti*, but that it necessarily includes the performance of rituals of *prapatti*, as prescribed by the Supreme Lord in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

In general, Vedānta Deśika views *prapatti* as the preferred path to salvation and knowledge of God; however, he creatively integrates elements from the Vedas and Āgamas, making *prapatti* into a more complex and ritualized act. Continuous with the thought of Rāmānuja, Vedānta Deśika preserved the Vedāntic conception of the soul's nature; that is,

¹⁷ Maṇavālamāmuni (b.1370) is the revered Ācārya of the later Teṅkalai (Southern) School of Śrī Raṅgam which placed importance upon analogies and popular legends in order to capture the attention of the common people. A gap thus developed between the thought of Maṇavālamāmuni and that of Deśika; however, neither saw himself as belonging to a different sect within Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. The Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition divided into two distinct sects only in the 17th-18th century. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸ According to tradition, the Vāṭakalai and Teṅkalai sects differ on eighteen issues (doctrinal and ritual): (1) the Lord's grace (*kṛpā*), (2) fruits (*phala*) of *prapatti*, (3) the paths other than *prapatti*, (4) the omnipresence of Śrī Lakṣmī (*śrīvyaṭṭi*), (5) Śrī Lakṣmī's instrumentality (*upāya*) in salvation, (6) the Lord's affection (*vātsalya*), (7) the Lord's mercy (*dayā*), (8) the recitation of the *dvaya-mantra*, (9) surrender, (10) the *prapanna*, (11) the abandonment of *dharma*, (12) opposition to expiation of sins, (13) the essence of *prapatti*, (14) the cause (*hetu*) of *prapatti*, (15) the expiation of sins, (16) serving Lord's devotees, (17) Lord's pervasion of atomic souls (*anuvyaṭṭi*), and (18) the abode of heaven (*kaivalya*). Dr. V. Varadachari, *Two Great Acharyas: Vedānta Deśika and Maṇavāla Māmuni* (Madras: Prof. M. Rangacharya Memorial Trust, 1983), pp. vii-xxxv (Appendix II).

the soul's inherent nature is governed by *karṣṭva* and *bhokṣṭva*—*jīva*'s (soul) capacities as agent and enjoyer, respectively. Vedānta Deśika refuted the teaching that *śeṣatva* (subsistence) is the soul's essential nature (*svarūpa*); according to him, *śeṣatva* refers only to the relationship between the soul and the Lord and is not a description of the soul's essential nature (*svarūpa*).¹⁹

Although Vedānta Deśika gives Vedic legitimacy to *prapatti*, in the process of doing so he gives importance to action (*karma*) and effort, for he suggests that the relationship between God and the devotee requires effort upon the part of the devotee. This concept of ritual action (*karma*) by Vedic injunction is central to the Mīmāṃsāka school and orthodox *bhakti-yoga*. Of course, whether Vedānta Deśika intended it or not, this particular interpretation served to reinforce the important theological, ritual, and social role of the *brahmanas*.

Regarding the nature of the Divine, Vedānta Deśika demonstrates how the two aspects of divine nature—mercy and autonomy—operate together harmoniously. Because he realized the potential for contradiction, Vedānta Deśika asserted that the Lord expresses both His mercy and supreme autonomy in creating and maintaining the *karmic* order and the limited autonomy of individual souls.²⁰ This stance on the interrelation and harmony between mercy and autonomy, according to Patricia Mumme, (1) protects the Vedāntic conceptions of God and soul, (2) preserves the value of *śāstras*, and (3) supports the Lord's supremacy, the egalitarian mercy that He has chosen to manifest in His role as the judge of

¹⁹ Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, pp. 60-68.

²⁰ Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, pp. 211-221.

karma.²¹

During Vedānta Deśika's long career as a theologian-logician, he wrote in three languages: Sanskrit, Tamil and Maṇipravāḷa.²² His Maṇipravāḷa works are often written in combination with other languages; along with Maṇipravāḷa, he writes in "pure" Tamil and Sanskrit within a single text, such as *Rahasya Traya Sāra*²³ (*The Essence of the Three Secrets*). This work—his *magnum opus*—is a detailed summary of Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology. The three Śrī Vaiṣṇava *rahasyas* (secrets, mantras) discussed are: (1) *tiru-mantra*;²⁴ (2) *dvaya-mantra*;²⁵ and (3) *carama-śloka*.²⁶ Although, as the title suggests, the text concerns the three Śrī Vaiṣṇava mantras, the treatise covers all the major tenets of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, including Śrī's role as intercessor and so forth.

Besides his *Rahasya Traya Sāra*, Vedānta Deśika wrote extensively in various literary genres: *stotras*, such as *Varadarāja Pañcāśat* (*Fifty [stanzas] [in Praise of] Varadarāja*),²⁷

²¹ Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, pp. 215-221.

²² Maṇipravāḷa is a literary language that emerged ca. 12th-15th century C.E. It consists of "Tamil words interspersed with Sanskrit words even as ruby and coral are strung together alternately in a necklace." There is an intermixture of Sanskrit stems and roots (there are no Sanskrit noun or verb endings) and Tamil grammar. In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, Maṇipravāḷa is always used for prose literature. See Venkatachārī, *The Maṇipravāḷa Literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, pp. 4-5.

²³ Vedānta Deśika, *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra* (translation by M.R. Rajagopala Ayyangar) (Kumbakonam: Agnihotram Ramanuja Thatachariar, 1956).

²⁴ "Om, Salutations to Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu]" (*Om namo nārāyaṇāya*).

²⁵ "I take refuge with the feet of Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu], who possesses Śrī, Salutations to Śrī and Nārāyaṇa" (*Śrīmān Nārāyaṇa caraṇau, śaraṇam prapadye, śrimate nārāyaṇāya namaḥ*).

²⁶ *Bhagavad Gītā* 18.66: Having relinquished all *dharma*s (duties/rites), take refuge with me only. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve. (*sarva dharmān parityajya, mām ekaṁ śaraṇam vraja. ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi, mā śucaḥ*)

²⁷ The *Varadarāja Pañcāśat* is a fifty *śloka* praise-poem written in Sanskrit in praise of Lord Varada at Kāñcīpuram. *Varadarāja Panchasat of Vedānta Deśika*, with Meaning and Commentary in English by D. Ramaswamy Ayyangar (Madras: Visishtadwaita Pracharini Sabha, 1972).

and *Devanāyaka Pañcāśat* (Fifty [stanzas] [in Praise of] *Devanātha*);²⁸ epics, such as *Śaṅkalpa Sūryodaya* ([God's] Will for Salvation)²⁹ and *Hansa Sandeśa* (The Messenger Swan);³⁰ religious manuals, such as *Nikṣepa Rakṣā* (Defence of Self-Surrender)³¹ and *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā* (The Defence of Pāñcarātra);³² philosophical treatises, such as *Tattva Mukta Kalapa* (The Necklace of Truths)³³ and *Śata Dūṣaṇī* (One Hundred Refutations);³⁴ and commentaries, such as *Tattva Ṭikā* (Challenge of Truth)³⁵ and *Stotra Ratna Bhāṣya*

²⁸ The *Devanāyaka Pañcāśat* is a fifty-three stanza *stotra* in praise of the main deity at the Devanātha temple at Tiruvahindrapuram—Devanāyaka. The poem demonstrates the central role of the *arcā* in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism; that is, it contains a detailed depiction of the beautiful image of Devanāyaka. *Devanāyaka pañcāśat of Vedānta Deśika*, with Meaning and Commentary in English by Ramaswamy Ayyangar (Madras: Ayyangar, 1978).

²⁹ *Sūryodaya* literally means "mountain behind which the sun rises", which I translate as a metaphor for salvation. The *Śaṅkalpa Sūryodaya* is a ten act allegorical drama outlining the basic tenets of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, including God's will as an essential requisite for salvation. *Śaṅkalpa Sūryodaya, a Sanskrit Allegorical Drama in Ten Acts by Vedānta Deśika* (translation by M.R. Rajagopala Iyengar) (Madras: Vedānta Deśika Research Society, 1977).

³⁰ The *Hansa Sandeśa* is a story about a swan (a symbol of a sacred teacher) which flies over important pilgrimage places (Tirupati, Kāñcīpuram, Śrī Raṅgam) on its way to Śrī Laṅk. Through its account of Rāma, Sītā, and Rāvaṇa, the story reflects the love a devotee has for God. *Hansa Sandeśaḥ* (1st ed; Maisuru: Sudharma, 1972).

³¹ The *Nikṣepa Rakṣā* is a work that describes the act of self-surrender (*prapatti*; *niksepa*) as a means to God. This work emphasizes the importance of one's love for God. *Śrīmad Vedānta Deśika Granthamālā*, 8 vols., (edited by P.B. Anantāchārya) (Kāñcī: A. Sampatkuṇārāchārya, 1940-41).

³² The *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā* is Deśika's defence of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. It is written in Sanskrit and is obviously intended for scholars outside the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya*. *Śrī Pāñcarātrarakṣā of Vedānta Deśika* (edited by Pandit M. Duraiswamy Aiyangar and Pandit T. Venugopalacharya) (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967).

³³ The *Tattva Mukta Kalapa* is one of the most authoritative works by Vedānta Deśika, outlining the philosophical tenets of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy. It is similar in style to Yāmuna's *Siddhi Traya*. *Tattvamuktakalapah and Sarvārtha Siddhi with Commentaries of Ānandadevīni and Bhuvaprakāśa* (Mysore: Government Branch Press, 1940).

³⁴ The *Śata Dūṣaṇī* is a philosophical treatise in refutation of the philosophy of Śaṅkara, Bhāskara and Yādava. Although according to its title there should be one hundred and one refutations, there are only sixty-six in extant. *Adhikaraṇaśarāvalī Śatadūṣaṇī* (Madras: Liberty Mudranālaye Sapramudyat, 1940).

³⁵ The *Tattva Ṭikā* is a Sanskrit exposition of Rāmānuja's *Śrī Bhāṣya*, a commentary on Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedānta Sūtras*, which provides the metaphysical foundation of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school. *Śrīmad Vedānta Deśika Granthamālā*.

(*Commentary on the Jewel of Praise-poems*).³⁶

Vedānta Deśika was a great Sanskrit philosopher-poet and, indeed, he seems to have favoured poetry for the expression of his personal devotion to God. He composed *Hayagrīva Stotra* soon after he completed his studies, and it is regarded as one of his earlier poetical works. As we can see in *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Vedānta Deśika's poetic works are expressions of deep religious emotion combined with the theological tenets of Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotionism.

As Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat has stated concerning the poetry of Vedānta Deśika:

In fact doctrine and poetry are not here distinguishable, are not in relation of a body of philosophical thoughts and [sic, to] its literary ornamentation. They are blended together. The doctrine is a conception of the world rooted in a feeling of man's submissiveness and love towards God, which feeling has a natural emotive appeal, and the expression of which is spontaneously literary expression being dependent only on the authenticity of the description.³⁷

ANALYSIS OF VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S *HAYAGRĪVA STOTRA*

Theological Themes in *Hayagrīva Stotra*

The *Hayagrīva Stotra* consists of thirty-two stanzas, written in Sanskrit, in the *upajāti* metre.³⁸ The names of Hayagrīva found in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* are: Haya-grīva "One who has the neck of a horse" (vs. 1, 5); Haya-vadana "One who has the face of a horse" (vs. 2, 3);

³⁶ The *Stotra Ratna Bhāṣya* is a commentary on Yāmuna's *Stotra Ratna*, a sixty-five stanza poem in praise of Viṣṇu, reflecting the basic tenets of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy. *Stotraratnabhāṣyam* (edited by Chettaloor V. Śrīvatsaṅkāchāryar) (Madras: Śrī Vedānta Deśika Seventh Century Trust, n.d.).

³⁷ Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, *Vedānta Deśika Varadarājapañcāśat* (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1990), p. ix.

³⁸ *Upajāti* is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *upa + jan* "to be added or put to". *Upajāti* refers to a mixed metre—a combination of various metres. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 198; and Singh, *Vedānta Deśika*, p. 52.

and Vāji-vaktra “One who has the face of a horse” (v. 4). Epithets of Hayagrīva contained in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* are: Lord, God, Incarnation of Vāsudeva (v. 4); Expounder of the Veda (v. 4); Lord of speech (vs. 4, 12, 32); Treasury of speech (v. 8); King Swan (v. 14); all-pervading God (v. 25); and the glorious and sinless One (v. 32). The poem especially praises and depicts Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning. Hayagrīva is described as the divine light that is both the goal of, and the means to, the knowledge of God.

The important theological themes contained in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* are: (1) the essential nature of God (*svarūpa*); (2) the nuances of Hayagrīva as *avatāra*; and (3) the nature of devotion (*bhakti*).

The *Svarūpa* of Hayagrīva

For Vedānta Deśika, as for Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in general, Hayagrīva is a full *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, there exists the category of *aṁśa-avatāra* (*aṁśa* “small or minute portion”). *Aṁśa-avatāra* specifically refers to the incarnations of a portion or attribute of Viṣṇu’s form, or an emblem associated with Him. Examples of some *aṁśa-avatāras* are Sudarśana (the incarnation of Viṣṇu’s discus), Viṣṇu’s vehicle (the bird Garuḍa), and Kapila. However, in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Vedānta Deśika describes Hayagrīva as “having the Form of knowledge and bliss” (v. 1)—the fundamental attributes of Viṣṇu’s essential nature (*svarūpa*),³⁹ and this clearly establishes Hayagrīva as a full incarnation of God. *Jñāna* and *ānanda* are not only two of the five defining attributes of God (the other three being *satya* “true being”, *ananta* “infiniteness”, and *amala* “taintlessness”), but are also regarded as

³⁹ Carman, *Theology Of Rāmānuja*, pp. 88-97; Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, pp. 80-81.

the fundamental attributes identifying the “whatness” of Brahman.⁴⁰ Furthermore, *jñāna* and *ānanda* are often used as a shorthand list implicitly referring to all five qualities, i.e., Brahman’s *svarūpa*. Because the Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva recognize Him as having the full form of Viṣṇu, Hayagrīva cannot be viewed as an *aṁśa-avatāra* (partial incarnation); rather, for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas He is a “full” incarnation of the Lord.

Hayagrīva is not only described as having the form of *jñāna* and *ānanda*, but also as granting these auspicious qualities to His devotees (vs. 5, 6, 7). Because of Hayagrīva’s grace, devotees attain wisdom and experience bliss. Throughout the praise-poem, Hayagrīva is associated with knowledge and learning. He is described, for example, as the “Foundation of all learning” (v. 1), “an Ocean of knowledge” (vs. 3, 25), and the “Treasure of pure knowledge” (v. 5). Hayagrīva is said to be one “who has vowed to grant wisdom” (v. 5) and His light is “for the lotus of knowledge” (v. 21). It is by His grace that one is able to know and speak the truth:

On account of Your grace,
may [You] decorate my heart
with the truths,
which are luminous
which completely remove impurity and doubt
[and] are undisturbed by fallacious reasonings. (v. 31)

Besides the description of Hayagrīva as having the *svarūpa* of Brahman and granting *jñāna* and *ānanda* to His devotees, He is described as the creator (vs. 2, 3, 11, 12), protector (v. 22) and sustainer (vs. 3, 8, 9) of the worlds—key functions belonging only to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. Moreover, Hayagrīva is characterized as “the First Cause—before names and forms”

⁴⁰ Carman, *Theology of Rāmānuja*, pp. 88-90, 111-112; Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, pp. 80-81.

(v. 12). This is continuous with Viṣṇu's Supreme Lordship as creator, protector and sustainer of the universe. Hayagrīva is also frequently described as creator, preserver and protector of the Vedas—that is, of divine revelation (vs. 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 22, 23).

Furthermore, Hayagrīva is acknowledged as the origin of the power of other gods:

Even the speech of the renowned ones
beginning with,
the image of lord Śiva facing south,
the goddess (Sarasvatī),
the dutiful wife (of Brahmā) seated on a lotus
and Vyāsa,
is brilliant
with the [mere] traces
of Your [extensive] power. (v. 7)

Again:

O God [Hayagrīva]!
Having removed
the swing of doubt,
You establish Br̥haspati
in truth/wisdom.

Now, because of that,
the empire of thirty gods
is untouched by vacillation. (v. 9)

Such passages establish Hayagrīva as none other than the Supreme God who has power over all other gods, including Brahmā and Śiva.

It is interesting to note that, although Hayagrīva is depicted in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism as a “full” incarnation of the Lord, Vedānta Deśika never describes Hayagrīva as accompanied by His consort Śrī (Lakṣmī).⁴¹ The inseparability of Viṣṇu and Śrī—maintained even during

⁴¹ There is a picture of Hayagrīva accompanied by Śrī Lakṣmī on the cover of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava booklet *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, which contains Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*. The booklet incorporates Śrī in its title and mentions her in the *kavaca*; however, Śrī is absent from Deśika's *stotra*.

His incarnations on earth (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 9.1.42)—has been developed into a central and extremely important doctrine in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.⁴² It is expressed in the poetry of Rāmānuja's immediate disciple Parāśara Bhaṭṭar thus:

O Goddess!
If you had not descended
in a suitable form
alongside the Lord
Who engages in sportive activities
similar to animals and men
in every one of His incarnations
then His play [here on earth]
would have been tasteless and uninteresting.
(*Śrī Guṇa Ratnakoṣa* v. 48)⁴³

Although there are no explicit descriptions of Śrī in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra*, his philosophical treatise *Śata Dūṣaṇī* does refer to Hayagrīva as accompanied by Śrī-Lakṣmī:

The [Supreme] God
who has the face of a horse⁴⁴
is [full of] compassion.
Accompanied by Lakṣmī,
He removes the three innate *guṇas*⁴⁵
difficult to overcome
by spreading the beautiful field wisdom.

May that Glorious One make us,
who are impure/diminishing servants,
cross over [His] creation of the world
for [our] happiness. (*sūtra* 42)

⁴² See Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 225-227.

⁴³ Nayar, *Praise-Poems to Viṣṇu and Śrī*, p. 296.

⁴⁴ "Who has a face of a horse" (*turagavadana*).

⁴⁵ *Guṇa* "attribute, quality". Consciousness is composed of three strands of substantive qualities: (1) *sattva* "pure, white, brightness, illumination, intelligence"; (2) *rajas* "passion, emotion, activity"; and (3) *tamas* "dark, dullness, inertia". Although each of the three *guṇas* have their own separate identity, none of the three exist independently. The combination of the three *guṇas* in different proportions is responsible for different kinds of people. There is a predominant *guṇa* which is easily recognizable in a particular thought, perception, material structure, although the other two *guṇas* are present but subordinate and less present or determinable.

Although from a text written later in his career, this verse depicts Hayagrīva as accompanied by Śrī and is thus further proof of the fullness of His incarnation.⁴⁶ The Śrī Vaiṣṇava depiction of Hayagrīva accompanied by Lakṣmī commonly appears during the phase when Hayagrīva comes to be worshipped explicitly as the presiding deity at the Tiruvahīndrapuram Temple (see Chapter VII).

The mysterious absence of any reference to Śrī in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* substantiates the possibility that Vedānta Deśika is writing the *stotra* to a specific Yoga-Hayagrīva iconic image, based on the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.⁴⁷ Indeed, the Āgamas do not commonly depict Hayagrīva as accompanied by Śrī-Lakṣmī.⁴⁸ According to the oral tradition at the Tiruvahīndrapuram Temple, there were two images that were worshipped by Vedānta Deśika. Interestingly, temple officials claim that one of these was the Yoga-Hayagrīva form. However, it is important to note that the Yoga-Hayagrīva image in that temple does not exactly parallel Vedānta Deśika's iconographical descriptions of Hayagrīva in his poem.⁴⁹

Although there are no clear and definitive references either to a particular icon of Hayagrīva or to a specific sacred place in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Vedānta Deśika does implicitly mention the worship of iconic forms (*arcāvatāra*) at pilgrimage places in his

⁴⁶ For further elaboration on the later depictions of Hayagrīva as accompanied by Śrī in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, see Chapter VII.

⁴⁷ See Chapter IV.

⁴⁸ See Chapter IV.

⁴⁹ See Chapter VII for an elaboration on the two images of Hayagrīva at the Devanātha Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram during the time of Vedānta Deśika.

praise-poem to Hayagrīva:

Helpless
in the various kinds of learning and arts,
I, who have not even [prostrated]
to [Your] incarnation
in the sacred places,⁵⁰
am a new and worthy vessel
for Your compassion
that eternally embraces the helpless. (v. 30)

Nuances of Hayagrīva as *Avatāra*

Viṣṇu's *vibhavic*⁵¹ incarnation as Hayagrīva has as its purpose the welfare of humanity through the rescuing of the Vedas from the demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha (v. 8). Although Hayagrīva is recognized as a *vibhava-avatāra* who descended to earth to accomplish certain deeds, the poem emphasizes an interplay of the concept of the Vedas with the concept of *jñāna*.

The purpose of the Hayagrīva incarnation is described most frequently as the bestowal of knowledge, speech and bliss on His devotees. However, there are two references that describe Him as the Granter of *mokṣa* (liberation). The first is described in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*:

[May my salutations]
be with Your lotus-like feet
and increase to their full strength!

Those salutations which
are the fruits of penances
measured out from previous [births]
bring me liberation,

⁵⁰ "[Your] incarnation (*avatāra*) in the sacred places" refers to the iconic form of Hayagrīva (*arcāvatāra*). *Tīrtha* derived from the verb root *ṛ* "to cross over" means the place of crossing over, which refers to a pilgrimage place where God descends as an incarnation. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 449.

⁵¹ For *vibhava-avatāra*, see the section on "Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tradition" in Chapter V.

and are the thought-gem
of [my] desires. (v. 19)⁵²

Likewise, a *sūtra* from Vedānta Deśika's *Śata Dūṣaṇī* expresses Hayagrīva's role in granting liberation to His devotees:

Salutation to the horse-headed One,
Brahman,
the Soul of the three categories⁵³ of souls
[and devotees' single-] goal for *mokṣa*
because [He delivers those]
bound [by existence].⁵⁴ (*sūtra* 36)

Not only does Vedānta Deśika describe Hayagrīva as the Bestower of the Vedas and *jñāna*, but he also emphasizes meditation on Hayagrīva for the purpose of conjuring up the image of God (vs. 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 29).

Although one of Vedānta Deśika's emphases is the *antaryāmin* form of Hayagrīva (He dwells in the mind and heart as divine light, leading one to the experience of knowledge and bliss), there are four verses (vs. 23-25, 32) that are iconographical and may therefore be interpreted as referring to one or another of Hayagrīva's iconic-incarnations. Hayagrīva is described as being seated on a white lotus and bearing four emblems: "a conch, disc, book, [and] with [Your] lotus-like hand in the position of exposition" (v. 32). In another verse, Hayagrīva's right hand is described as bearing radiant rosary beads (v. 24), while in still another His left hand "[shining] with red lustre [as if] bearing a cluster of corals, [holds] a

⁵² "Thought gem" (*cintāmaṇi*) is a fabled gem supposed to yield its possessor all desires.

⁵³ The "three categories" (*tredha*) of souls (*cit*) are: (1) those bound by *karma* (*baddha*); (2) those liberated from *karma*, and having attained the highest abode of the Lord (*mukta*); and (3) those eternally free, i.e., never bound to *saṁsāra* (*nitya-sūri*).

⁵⁴ "Bound [by existence]" (*bandha*) refers to *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

book" (v. 25). According to the oral tradition at Tiruvahīndrapuram, as mentioned earlier, there were two images (Yoga-Hayagrīva and Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva) that were worshipped by Vedānta Deśika. Although Vedānta Deśika's descriptions correspond to the Pāñcarātric depictions of God, neither of the images corresponds exactly to Vedānta Deśika's (Pāñcarātric) iconographical descriptions of the deity in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*.⁵⁵ In fact, Vedānta Deśika's depictions of Hayagrīva based on the Āgamas may be descriptions of actual icons, or more likely mental images of the God conjured up in meditation.

Hayagrīva Stotra and the Bhakti Tradition

Several verses of the poem contain a mood typical of Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetry, both Tamil and Sanskrit. The theology of *prapatti* (liberation by surrender) and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of the devotee's reliance upon the grace of God are present in the poem. Although there are several references to the Vedas in the poem, not surprisingly given Hayagrīva's rescue of the Vedas in His *vibhava-avatāra*, there are also descriptions of Hayagrīva as God appearing in image form so that all His devotees (including ordinary people) can directly perceive Him and be perceived by Him in the *darśana*⁵⁶ experience:

Out of Your very compassion,
You must grant me Your side-long glance
because even though ignorant,
I am praising [You]! (v. 6)

and

⁵⁵ See Chapter VII for a comparison of Deśika's description of Hayagrīva with the two images of Hayagrīva at Tiruvahīndrapuram.

⁵⁶ *Darśana* (sight) is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *drś* "to see". In Hindu temple religion, the "sight" of the divine is the auspicious experience of the icon involving the meeting of the eyes of God and devotee whereby the devotee directly perceives God and is also perceived by Him. See Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1981).

O God!
 May Your side-long glances
 which are the companions
 of Your waves of compassion,
 bestow upon me continuously
 the sacred speech (v. 27)

The side-long glance is associated in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism with the Lord's presence. The calling on God for the bestowal of His "side-long glance" is an expression—in the imagery of romance—of the devotee's desire to experience the delight of God's presence and His grace. Out of His compassion, God condescends to grant devotees the blissful experience of His presence. One of the goals of Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotion is the blissful visual experience of the Lord.

Likewise, even though the *stotra* emphasizes meditation upon the Lord, it is principally for an ecstatic experience of Hayagrīva, continuous with Ālvār emotionalism, that its author longs for:

O Master!
 the fortunate ones seek You
 with their minds;
 [their] meditating upon You
 is like the waxing moon;
 in [their] heart
 an ocean of boundless bliss
 that overflows with tears [of joy]. (v. 17)

Earlier, the poet describes in one verse the ecstatic experience of bliss brought about by meditation on Hayagrīva:

O Master!
 While meditating on Your Lordship,
 the fortunate ones continuously experience
 their body hair standing on end in delight,
 from bathing in [Your] nectar,
 which consists of bliss
 that takes firm root

in some imperceptible place,
and [causes] sprouts [to stand upright]
on limbs [of the body]. (v. 16)

Hayagrīva is depicted as One who possesses light-like nectar, an image expressive of His grace for all devotees. He is the “Abode of compassion” (v. 5) and “produces the nectar of bliss like a high tide rising up from the Milk Ocean”⁵⁷ (v. 13).

Interestingly, one reference includes the peacock motif used in the stories of Kṛṣṇa’s sport (*līlā*), as described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁵⁸ Vedānta Deśika, employing the pan-Indian peacock motif, writes:

O Lord!
The learned ones,
who experience [You] of [Your] own accord,
who are subject to You,
[and] whose [inner] strength flourishes
with [Your] grace,
cross over *māyā*,
the enticing peacock feather
used in Your sport (*līlā*). (v. 18)

Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.21.3-5⁵⁹ describes Kṛṣṇa as enticing the *gopīs* with his peacock feather in order to teach them about the path of devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) and Truth; here, Vedānta Deśika, borrowing the peacock feather image from the God Kṛṣṇa, has it represent Hayagrīva’s *līlā*.

Although the *Hayagrīva Stotra* does contain several stanzas (already described) reflective of the emotional-devotional mood contained in the Ālvār hymns, and its author

⁵⁷ Viṣṇu reclines on the Milk Ocean.

⁵⁸ The important role of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in South Indian religion as well as in the development of the *bhakti* movement is discussed in Chapters III and V.

⁵⁹ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 1389.

expresses the delight experienced by the devotee of His presence, it contains no descriptions of the agonizing experiences of God's absence such as we find in *Nammālvār* and *Āṇṭāl*. The focus of the *Hayagrīva Stotra* is the praising of Hayagrīva's untainted essential nature; that is, the verses laud the glorious nature of Hayagrīva and His saving and purifying activities. An example of the desire to attain Hayagrīva's pure state is expressed thus: "raising [myself] up to You with the splendorous form of *śabda*"⁶⁰ (v. 29). In advocating meditation upon God in order for the devotee to become like Him, Vedānta Deśika surely meant it to be within the context of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy; that is, although there is an eternal distinction between *cit* (*ātman*) and *Īśvara*, *cit* in liberation expands to become the equal of *Īśvara* in knowledge and bliss (creatorship is the one quality that belongs to *Īśvara* alone.) The poem combines the sectarian notion of *prapatti* and the universality of God's grace, even as it contains frequent references to the Vedas and knowledge.

Finally, the poem contains the important Śrī Vaiṣṇava doctrine of salvation based on grace alone:

Helpless
in the various kinds of learning and arts
I, who have not even [prostrated]
to [Your iconic incarnation
in the sacred places,
am a new and worthy vessel
for Your compassion
that eternally embraces the helpless. (v. 30)

The major theological themes contained in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* (the *svarūpa* of God, the understanding of *avatāra*, and the nature of *bhakti*) demonstrate that Hayagrīva, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, is praised as Supreme. Vedānta Deśika, unlike the Purāṇas and Āgamas,

⁶⁰ *Śabda* literally means "word", but may refer to *mantra* or *śruti*.

consistently depicts Hayagrīva as a full form of Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. Not only does Vedānta Deśika's depictions of Hayagrīva reflect His supremacy, but also conceptualize the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of God in terms of all the five forms God takes at different regions/places as well as the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the equality of the many forms that Viṣṇu takes at specific places and sites, which is the topic of the following section.

Topotheism: Vedānta Deśika's Depiction of Hayagrīva

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* manifests the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding that I have termed *topotheism*—that the five forms of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu (*para*) are all connected with specific locales and share an equality of status in being full forms of God. Hayagrīva is depicted as a form with the same ontological status as Viṣṇu, whether as a horse-headed being on earth at a specific time and place (*vibhava-avatāra*), as the indweller in the heart/mind (*antaryāmin*) perceived by a yogi in meditation, or as an iconic-incarnation (*arcā-avatāra*) in the temple.

True, the *stotra* recognizes that the Hayagrīva incarnation has as His purpose the welfare of humanity through the saving of the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha (v. 8). But the *stotra* contains many more references to Hayagrīva as the Indweller of the soul/mind (*antaryāmin*). For example, “The wise ones in [their] hearts, contemplate your image” (v. 13); “The King Swan [dwells] in the minds of the knowledgeable ones...[For] the ones who behold You, existing in [their] minds,” (v. 14); “O Master! While meditating on your Lordship, the fortunate ones continuously experience their body hair standing on end in delight” (v. 16); “the fortunate ones seek [You], with their minds; [their] meditating upon

You" (v. 17).

Similarly, there are many references to the meditation and contemplation of Hayagrīva for the experience of His presence in the heart/mind: "The wise ones in [their] hearts, contemplate your image that is attractive like [rays] flowing out from the new moon" (v. 13); "the fortunate ones seek [You] with their minds, [their] meditating upon You is like the waxing moon" (v. 17); "We meditate on Your two [lotus-like] feet" (v. 21); "I reflect on Your sweet hand in the beautiful position of exposition" (v. 23); "O Lord! I contemplate [Your] right hand which [holds] the radiant string of rosary beads" (v. 24).

Because the mental image resembles in detail the iconography prescribed for a temple image, it is often difficult to discern whether or not some of Vedānta Deśika's stanzas are directed to an icon (see vs. 6, 19, 20, 27, 32). However, in stanza 30, Vedānta Deśika does implicitly mention the worship of iconic forms.

Most importantly, all these references to Hayagrīva (*vibhava-avatāra*, *antaryāmin*, and *arcā-avatāra*) are to forms of equal status, and most importantly they are all equal in status to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu: "the Cause [of the universe]" (v. 11), "Even before [there were] names and forms, You, revealer of the Vedas, are the [first] cause from which all things were created" (v. 12), and the epithet of Hayagrīva as the "All-pervading God" (v. 25).

In the *stotra*, Vedānta Deśika integrates and unites highly selective elements from several religious streams: the pan-Indian mythic stream of the Epic and Purāṇic literature, the sectarian texts (the Pāñcarātra Āgamas) of iconography and ritual practice, and the devotionalism of the Ālvārs of the Tamil lands.

The various religious streams discussed in Part B (Epic, Purāṇic, Āgamic) are

manifest in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning. However, what Vedānta Deśika selects from the various religious streams and how he adapts and organizes elements still remains to be understood. For that, we need to turn to the "reverse-prismatic" perspective, which is a useful tool to comprehend Vedānta Deśika's particular depiction of Hayagrīva within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, the subject of the following section.

THE REVERSE-PRISMATIC PERSPECTIVE: LOOKING BACK IN TIME

The attempt to more fully comprehend the development specifically of Vedānta Deśika's particular depiction of Hayagrīva in his *stotra*—and thus comprehend the developments in the regional "Śrī Vaiṣṇava" history of the deity in Tamil Nadu—one needs to look backwards in time to see the influence on the *stotra* of the various religious streams (Epic, Purāṇic, Āgamic). For, whereas the understanding of the Hayagrīva figure in the pan-Indian context involves an understanding of a multiplicity of myths and images, in the regional Śrī Vaiṣṇava context the comprehension of the Hayagrīva figure involves the study of Vedānta Deśika's synthesis of several variants.

In tracing the development of the images and worship of the pan-Indian deity Hayagrīva in the region of Tamil Nadu, I believe that the most suitable analogy for the purpose to be that of a prism—"a transparent polygonal solid, often having triangular ends and rectangular sides, for dispersing light into a spectrum or for reflecting and deviating light".⁶¹ In physics, the prism is a mechanism used in the understanding of light. The prism

⁶¹ *Collins English Dictionary* (2nd ed; London: William Collins Sons, 1986), p. 1217.

diffracts light, breaking it into a spectrum of the rainbow colours. Similarly, in reverse fashion, white light can be understood to be fused together out of the spectrum of colours. It is in this latter sense of developing one out of the many that I employ the term *reverse-prismatic perspective*, a spectrum of rainbow colours fused into white light.

Although the prism belongs to the field of physics, it is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the development of an Indian deity, especially a pan-Indian god who is particularly revered and worshipped in the South. One may view Vedānta Deśika's praise-poem as the light and, *looking back in time*, see how through a Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view (prism) there has occurred in Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva a fusion of the various streams concerning the god. It should be noted that the use of the conceptual tool of the reverse-prismatic perspective emerged, not as a result of imposing a rigid preconceived methodology on the research materials (which can often limit understanding), but as a consequence of an intensive study employing diachronic and synchronic analysis.

By employing the reverse-prismatic perspective in the analysis of Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*, I mean to suggest that the poem can most profitably be viewed as a purposive and selective fusion of the varied spectrum of religious streams that have influenced the poet's consistent and unique depiction of Hayagrīva in the context of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view. This depiction further bolsters the notion that one can only speak of the "histories" of the notion of the deity, and that there is a special Śrī Vaiṣṇava local "history" of Hayagrīva. The *Hayagrīva Stotra* integrates and unites elements from several religious streams: the pan-Indian mythic stream of the Epic and Purāṇic literature, the sectarian Pāñcarātra Āgamas that deal with iconography and ritual practice, and the devotionism of

the Ālvār poets. Significantly, these religious streams are manifest in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning. However, what Vedānta Deśika selects from the various religious streams and how he adapts and organizes selective elements from them still remains to be understood. Importantly, one can discern in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* the influence of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and their understanding of mantra, which sensitizes the reader to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava "personalization" of that tradition's more abstract understanding of mantra.

Hayagrīva Stotra:

Continuities and Discontinuities with *Śruti* and *Smṛti* Texts

In order to understand clearly the influences of the various Hindu streams upon Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and to gain an understanding of Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning, one needs to look at the pan-Indian references and depictions of Hayagrīva in the Epic and Purāṇic texts. A comparative analysis of the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, in the light of the Epic and Purāṇic *avatāric* listings and myths, demonstrates how the myth about Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas in the pan-Indian mainstream texts (which make Him the saviour and protector of the Vedas) provides the scope for Vedānta Deśika's portrayal of the deity as the Savior and Protector of His devotees.

Hayagrīva and the Vedas

The great importance that Vedānta Deśika places upon *śruti* (that which is heard, the Vedas) is amply reflected in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Although the poet evinces no concern at all for the origins of the horse-headed figure, nor refers to the possible Vedic antecedents of the later *avatāra* (as in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*), he does make an explicit association between Hayagrīva and the Vedas. Firstly, Vedānta Deśika describes Hayagrīva's rescue of the Vedas

as the reason for Brahmā's good fortune, as it was Brahmā from whom the Vedas had been stolen:

O treasury of speech!
 Brahmā would definitely become dull-headed
 and lose his good fortune [as a god],
 if, You who alone are compassionate,
 did not teach him the Vedas
 which were recovered from the demons. (v. 8)

This verse makes reference to Viṣṇu's particular descent to earth in the form of *vibhava-avatāra*. Hayagrīva is praised for His act of recovering the Vedas from the demons (Madhu and Kaiṭabha) and preserving it, a theme traced back to the *Mahābhārata* and various Purāṇas (see Chapter III).

More significantly, however, Hayagrīva as a full form of Viṣṇu is also associated in the *stotra* with the Vedas in a variety of ways. Vedānta Deśika refers to Hayagrīva as the "Expounder of the Vedas" (v. 4), as well as praises Him for "sending forth the eternal Vedas" (v. 2) and "sending forth the collection of the Ṛg, Yajur and Sāma" with His neighing sound (v. 3). All of these references describe Hayagrīva as not only the rescuer of the Vedas, but as their very source.

The *stotra* also describes Hayagrīva as having the "Form of the Vedas" and being the "Manifestation of the Vedas" (v. 6). He is described as the "Root of the great tree of the Vedas" (v. 11). Hayagrīva is further characterized as being the Protector of the Vedas:

...The safe-keepers
 by which You alone,
 protected the Vedic verses
 down through the ages ... (v. 22)

Lastly, Hayagrīva's grace itself is referred to as being in the form of the Vedas (vs. 2, 3, 11).

Through His association with the Vedas, Hayagrīva also becomes associated with speech. He is regarded as the “Lord of speech” (vs. 4, 12) and as the “Treasury of speech” (v. 8). His grace of “true” speech “removes the ignorance causing the loud and confused noise of speakers” (v. 3). Vedānta Deśika prays to be blessed with sacred speech by His grace, communicated through His side-long glances:

O God!
 May Your side-long glances
 which are the companions
 of Your waves of compassion,
 bestow upon me continuously
 the sacred speech that flows like nectar
 into people’s ears [who hear me]
 [and are like] the cow of plenty,
 for devotees seeking refuge [with You]. (v. 27)

This stanza, directed to Lord Hayagrīva, contains Vedānta Deśika’s personal request to be made the recipient of His side-long glances so that he may attain sacred speech as a poet-logician.

Vedānta Deśika accords great potency to Hayagrīva’s grace of “true” speech:

Those
 who even for half a moment
 betake themselves to You,
 who bathe [them] with [Your] rays
 of pure/white light,
 can slow the heavenly Ganges
 flowing down from the Himālayas,
 with [their] unimpeded rush of words. (v. 15)

and

... [For] the ones who behold You
 existing in [their] minds
 ... Their words compete
 in excelling [each other]
 of their own accord,

with appropriate dignity. (v. 14)

The philosopher Vedānta Deśika further requests Hayagrīva to grant him the grace of success in debate: “may the tip of my tongue obtain [its place] on Your throne”(v. 28).... “strengthen me as champion at producing words” (v. 29). It is only by God’s grace that one may be a vehicle of sacred speech. Śrī Vaiṣṇavas regard Vedānta Deśika’s own expertise in poetics and philosophical-theological debate as the fruit of his requests for the grace of “true” speech in this *stotra*.

Hayagrīva in the Epics and Purāṇas

Vedānta Deśika’s Hayagrīva is both continuous and discontinuous with the pan-Indian “mainstream” *avatāric* listings and myths. Hayagrīva appears in several lists contained in the Purāṇas as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, yet he is most often considered therein as a subsidiary deity of minor importance. Although used in “mainstream” Hinduism and Pāñcarātra, the categories of “major” and “minor” are, however, inadequate when viewed within the context of Vaiṣṇavism. As noted previously, Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology contains the category of *aṁśa-avatāra* (*aṁśa* “small or minute portion”), but this specifically refers to the incarnations of a portion or attribute of Viṣṇu’s form, or of an emblem associated with Him.⁶² There is an atypical description of Hayagrīva as a partial incarnation in *Bṛahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* 5.37 (ca. 400 C.E.). However, in the context of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, to categorize Hayagrīva as a “minor” *avatāra* (or an *aṁśa-avatāra*) would definitely be theologically misleading.

We have noted the ways in which Vedānta Deśika establishes the supremacy of

⁶² Some examples of *aṁśa-avatāras* are Sudarśana (the incarnation of Viṣṇu’s *cakra*), Garuḍa, Kapila, and several of the Ālvārs and Ācāryas.

Hayagrīva: He is described as “having the form of knowledge (*jñāna*) and bliss (*ānanda*)” (v. 2). Furthermore, Vedānta Deśika depicts Hayagrīva as Creator of the worlds (vs. 11, 12). Because the Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva recognize Him as a full form of Viṣṇu, Hayagrīva cannot be viewed as a “minor” incarnation. Rather, for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, He is a “full” incarnation of the Lord.

Although there are disparate depictions of Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian “mainstream” texts, Vedānta Deśika in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* makes reference to only one among several of the Hayagrīva myths surveyed therein. *Hayagrīva Stotra* describes Hayagrīva as One who possesses a wholly benevolent nature; it contains no references to, or depictions of, Hayagrīva as ambivalent or demonic. Hayagrīva recovered the Vedas from the demons for the welfare of humankind. The central and crucial aspect emphasized by Vedānta Deśika from the pan-Indian texts (such as *Mahābhārata* 12.335.1-64) is Hayagrīva’s benevolent act of preserving and restoring the cosmic order by killing the demons. Each *avatāra* descends to earth in very specific circumstances. In the case of Hayagrīva, the purpose of Viṣṇu’s *avatāric* appearance was to save the Vedas, an act to which Vedānta Deśika explicitly refers in his poem only once (v. 8). The wholly benevolent nature of Hayagrīva, continuous with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava and larger Vaiṣṇava understanding of Viṣṇu, is what makes Hayagrīva recognizable as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

As in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, there is no mention in Vedānta Deśika’s *stotra* as to how Hayagrīva became one with a horse’s head (as in the Hayagrīva passages in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). The lack of reference to, and interest in, the etiology of Hayagrīva’s horse-head is continuous with the stories about Hayagrīva in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*

(one basis of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta philosophy according to Śrī Vaiṣṇavas)⁶³ and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The fact that Hayagrīva appears as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which is a South Indian text, clearly demonstrates that Hayagrīva's presence in the South was not limited to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. But Vedānta Deśika, following the Ālvārs and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (see Chapter V), is careful to establish Hayagrīva as a wholly benevolent "full" form of God. Not unexpectedly, with his Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological orientation, Vedānta Deśika (like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) only incorporates the Purāṇic myth of the benevolent Hayagrīva who recovers the Vedas in order to maintain the cosmic order. Vedānta Deśika may have had a dual agenda: the desire to give Vedic legitimacy to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and to maintain the wholly benevolent nature of Viṣṇu's *avatāra*, without a trace of impurity!

For Vedānta Deśika, the Epic and Purāṇic myth of Hayagrīva's benevolent act of restoring the Vedas is important, because it (1) establishes the deity as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, (2) associates Him with the Vedas, and (3) depicts Him as a protector of the devotees on the basis of having killed the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. But, in fact, Vedānta Deśika does not place as much importance upon the Hayagrīva myth as he does upon Hayagrīva's qualities and power. All of these three aspects provide the scope for Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning.

As we have seen, although the myth of Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas is mentioned only once, the *stotra* does contain several references associating Hayagrīva with the Vedas. In fact, Vedānta Deśika appears less interested in the Hayagrīva myth and not at all

⁶³ See *Stotra Ratna*, v. 4. *Stotraratna, or The Hymn-Jewel, of Śrī Yāmunācārya* (translation by Swami Adidevanda) (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1950), p. 7.

concerned with how Viṣṇu obtained the head of a horse; rather, he is more focused on Hayagrīva's connection with the Vedas, speech and mantras. This latter aspect reflects Āgamic influence on Vedānta Deśika, and on Śrī Vaiṣṇavism as a whole.

Hayagrīva Stotra in the Light of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas

Śrī Vaiṣṇavism—a temple-centred tradition with a strong orientation towards icon worship—has been influenced a considerable degree by the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. Many of the beliefs, concepts, and rituals contained in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas have been incorporated into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. Given the influence of the Āgamas on the development of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, an analysis of the Āgamic references to Hayagrīva—from the viewpoints of theology, devotion, and iconography—is crucial to a better understanding of Vedānta Deśika's portrayal of Hayagrīva in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

The Āgamas' primary concern is with temple building, image making, and rituals. Although claiming to be Vedic, they seek to give legitimacy and recognition to what are really extra-Vedic traditions. To be accepted by the orthodox, the Āgamas had to be legitimated as Vedic. Following Yāmuna (11th century C.E.), Vedānta Deśika regards Pāñcarātra as "Vedic". Yāmuna defended the Pāñcarātra Āgamas in his *Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, and Vedānta Deśika wrote a whole text in "defence"⁶⁴ of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas entitled *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā*.

The continuities and discontinuities of the Pāñcarātra Āgamic depictions of Hayagrīva with the *Hayagrīva Stotra* sheds light on how the portrayal of Hayagrīva is, in fact, a

⁶⁴ Although Deśika's *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā* is often referred to as a defence of Pāñcarātra, the text, in fact, seems to be more of an exposition of Pāñcarātra theology.

synthesis of elements from both the mainstream pan-Indian (*Mahābhārata*, Vaiṣṇava and “encyclopedic” Purāṇas) and the pan-Indian sectarian texts (Pāñcarātra Āgamas). Furthermore, the *stotra* provokes a pertinent question about the relation between the Purāṇic and Āgamic texts with regards to the source of, the mythology about, and iconographical references to, Hayagrīva. The references to Hayagrīva in the Āgamas illuminate one aspect of the development of this *avatāra* as the Lord of light and learning within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, but also the ways in which Śrī Vaiṣṇavism has exploited, expanded and, in some cases, ignored the Pāñcarātra theological tenets.

Theological Status

A comparative study of the Āgamic descriptions of Hayagrīva as an emanation of a *vyūha* reveals the Āgamic influence on Vedānta Deśika’s depiction of Hayagrīva. Inconsistencies are found in various Āgamic depictions of Hayagrīva. *Viśvāmitra Saṁhitā*⁶⁵ describes Hayagrīva as an emanation of the *vyūha* Saṁkarṣaṇa; *Viśvakṣena Saṁhitā*, following *Mahābhārata* 12.327.79-87, depicts Him as an emanation of the *vyūha* Aniruddha. Vedānta Deśika does not portray Hayagrīva as a *vyūha* emanation. Significantly, however, he does link the qualities associated with *both* Aniruddha and Saṁkarṣaṇa to Hayagrīva. According to Pāñcarātra and Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology, Aniruddha’s special qualities are creative energy (*śakti*) and splendour (*tejas*); the Saṁkarṣaṇa *vyūha* is endowed with the qualities of knowledge (*jñāna*) and strength (*bala*) and it is Saṁkarṣaṇa who provides the *śāstras*. Vedānta Deśika’s portrayal of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning must certainly have its origins in the qualities of these two *vyūhas*. Although Vedānta Deśika ignores the Āgamic

⁶⁵ Also contained in *Atha Viṣṇu Dharmottara Mahāpurāṇa* 3.80.3b.

vyūha-vibhava systematic theology, the *tejas* of Aniruddha has become the light of Hayagrīva and the *jñāna* of Saṁkarṣaṇa (and his role as the provider of the *śāstras*) has become Hayagrīva's learning in the *stotra*.

Vedānta Deśika refers to *Sārvata Saṁhitā* and *Ahīrbudhīya Saṁhitā* in His defence of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (*Pāñcarātra Rakṣā*).⁶⁶ Matsubara regards Vedānta Deśika as the first Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya to recognize the *Ahīrbudhīya Saṁhitā* as authoritative. Thus, we can be certain that Vedānta Deśika was familiar with the two *Saṁhitās* that contain extensive lists of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* (including Hayagrīva). These texts portray Hayagrīva's status with ambiguity. In one text, Hayagrīva is regarded as a "major" (*mukhya*) *avatāra*; in another He appears as a "minor" (*gaṇa*) form of Viṣṇu. With regards to these Āgamic categories, Vedānta Deśika carefully distinguishes himself from Pāñcarātra theology. Vedānta Deśika writes that the *mukhya* and *gaṇa* categories of the *vibhava-avatāras* are simply for the purpose of "organization", and instead uses only the terms *vyūha* and *vibhava-avatāras* as technical terms for the many forms found in the Āgamic listings.⁶⁷

Vedānta Deśika explicitly states that there are thirty to forty *vibhava* incarnations of Viṣṇu, but he does not provide an extensive and systematic theological description of the evolution of the forms emanating from the Supreme God (as do certain Pāñcarātra Āgamas),

⁶⁶ *Śrī Pāñcarātrarakṣā of Vedānta Deśika*, pp. 186-189 (Index).

The other Pāñcarātra Āgamas that Vedānta Deśika cites which contain references to Hayagrīva are: the *Nārādīya Saṁhitā*, the *Śrīpauṣkara Saṁhitā*, the *Hayagrīva Saṁhitā*, the *Īśvara Saṁhitā*, and the *Pādma Saṁhitā*.

⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya Pillai Lokācārya in his treatise *Tattvatraya* distinguishes the major (*mukhya*) form from the subsidiary (*gaṇa*) form of the Lord; while the former type possesses God's essential nature, the latter *avatāric* form exists as a result of God's will (*sūtra* 104). According to Lokācārya, one should worship the *mukhya* form if desirous for *mokṣa* (*sūtra* 105), as the *gaṇa* form is only able to bestow worldly boons (*sūtra* 106). Pillai Lokācārya, *The Tattvatraya of Lokācārya: A Treatise on Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* (translation by B.M. Awasthi and C.K. Datta) (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973).

nor does he list the incarnations (as do the various Pāñcarātra Āgamas).⁶⁸ Like Rāmānuja, Vedānta Deśika removes *avatāras* from their Āgamic doctrinal context (*vyūha* and *vibhava-avatāra* theory and listings) and uses them primarily in a devotional context.⁶⁹ Unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, even as he incorporates *vyūha* imagery (light and learning), Vedānta Deśika is consistent in his portrayal of Hayagrīva, that is, Hayagrīva is a full form *avatāra* of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu.

According to the Āgamas (such as *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā*), whereas the primary (*mukhya*) *vibhava-avatāras* are worthy of worship for liberation (*mokṣa*), the secondary (*gauna*) *avatāras* should be worshipped only for mundane fruits. By way of contrast, Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* describes Hayagrīva as bestowing both mundane fruits, such as the mastery of speech in his theological debate (v. 28), and liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (v. 19). The fact that Vedānta Deśika looks to Hayagrīva not only for material fruits, but for *mokṣa* itself, is further proof of the poet's understanding of Hayagrīva's status as the full form of Viṣṇu.

The only reference to Hayagrīva with the epithets of knowledge (*jñāna*) and bliss (*ānanda*) located in a Pāñcarātra text is in the mid-to-late *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* 40.17 (ca. 800 C.E.), which describes Hayagrīva as follows: "God who has the neck of a horse [and is] in the form of consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*), and has a body completely decorated by

⁶⁸ Vedānta Deśika, *Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra*, Chapter V, section "Īśvara".

⁶⁹ As discussed in Chapter V under "Śrī Vaiṣṇavism", Rāmānuja removed the *vyūha* theory and the *śat-guṇas* of God from their original doctrinal and cosmological contexts and used them in the *Śrī Bhāṣya* in a devotional context; that is, he treated the *vyūha* theory solely as providing the sacred names of the Godhead to be used in meditation, and carefully described the *śat-guṇas* as less essential to the nature of Brahman than the five defining qualities of Brahman's *svarūpa* (essential nature), which he derived from the *Upaniṣads* (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 3.3.11-13) (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1; 2.5; 3.1; 3.6 and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3). See Canman, *Theology of Rāmānuja*, p. 92.

splendour/light”.

Although there is a great deal of ambiguity regarding Hayagrīva’s theological status in the Āgamas, His mantraic form is associated with the Eternal Spirit and the Vedas in *Śrīpaṇṣkara Saṁhitā* 24.35b (ca. 500 C.E.). This aspect can be understood as perhaps the earliest Āgamic attempt to establish Hayagrīva’s supremacy. This strand of Āgamic theology is reflected in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

Hayagrīva Stotra refers to Hayagrīva as having the form of *mantras*: “You, whose body consists of mantras” (v.10). This specific theological description of Hayagrīva as having mantraic form is directly based on the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (for example, *Śeṣa Saṁhitā* 40.17). Among the pan-Indian “mainstream” texts, a similar depiction of Hayagrīva is found only in the “encyclopedic” Purāṇas (see, for example, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.13.1-10; 1.34 which is believed to contain summaries of Āgamic literature). The similarities between the Āgamas and encyclopedic Purāṇas reflect the relation between the two genres of Hindu literature.

Hayagrīva’s association with the Vedas is central in both Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* and the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā* (ca. 800 C.E.) begins with the story about Hayagrīva and His glorious act of saving the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha—the central benevolent myth about Hayagrīva referred to in the *Mahābhārata*, *Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*. It appears that the earliest detailed benevolent myth of Hayagrīva’s recovery of the Vedas is found in the *Mahābhārata*, and then later referred to in several Purāṇas (*Agni*, *Bhāgavata*), but similarly retold in the *Hayasīrṣa Saṁhitā*. Likewise, Hayagrīva is also described in the Āgamic corpus as “having knowledge of the Vedas” and as the “Bestower of knowledge” (*Sanatkumāra*

Samhitā), as well as the “Horse-faced One who is [in the form] of the Vedas, and *smṛti*...” (*Śrīpauṣkara Samhitā* 24.35b).

An important doctrine of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is that of the eternal inseparability of Lord Viṣṇu and His consort Śrī. As seen in Chapter V, Śrī, taking an appropriate form, is said to accompany Viṣṇu in each and every one of His incarnations.⁷⁰ It is therefore surprising that the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, although presenting Hayagrīva as a “full” form of Viṣṇu, never depicts Him as being accompanied by Lakṣmī. This is, however, continuous with the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, in which Hayagrīva is usually not depicted as being accompanied by His consort.⁷¹ In the vast majority of Āgamic depictions, Hayagrīva is either standing or sitting alone. Furthermore, although the concept of the inseparability of Śrī and Viṣṇu is present in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and several late Āgamas, Hayagrīva is not usually depicted with Lakṣmī. Although Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* does not depict Hayagrīva accompanied by Lakṣmī, his philosophical treatise *Śata Dūṣaṇī* does. Furthermore, we find that at Tiruvahindrapuram, where Hayagrīva is explicitly worshipped as an iconic incarnation of the Supreme (see Chapter VII), there are images of Him accompanied by Lakṣmī. This reflects the gradual change in depictions of Hayagrīva according to Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology. Indeed, Hayagrīva’s association with Lakṣmī is a late development.

Devotional-Poetic Descriptions

A few of the poetic descriptions of Hayagrīva in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* are continuous

⁷⁰ See Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 225-227.

⁷¹ There are two exceptions to this depiction in the Āgamas surveyed. Hayagrīva is portrayed as being accompanied by Lakṣmī in *Hayagrīva Samhitā* 20.2.24-26 as well as accompanied by Śrīdevī and Bhūmidevī in *Parāśara Samhitā* 28.6.

with mainstream Vaiṣṇavism. The conventional devotional-poetic depictions of Hayagrīva include the common lotus (*padma*) motif, reflecting Viṣṇu's purity, tenderness, and beauty. Hayagrīva is described as having "lotus-like feet" (v. 19), "lotus-like hands" (v. 32), and as "seated on a white lotus" (v. 32). There are also references to Hayagrīva's "side-long glances" (v. 27), a common motif reflective of the Lord's compassion and grace. These motifs, often contained in Hindu devotional poetry, are commonly used in classical Sanskrit love poetry.

Certain of the poetic descriptions of Hayagrīva in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* are continuous with the *stotra* genre generally. The gods are frequently described in the *stotras* as "shining" (*devas* "shining ones"), an epithet more ancient than the Āgamas. In the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Hayagrīva is depicted as having "the body [made of] pure crystal" (v. 1) and is frequently referred to as "Splendour". Both of these depictions reflect Hayagrīva's luminosity—which is both a name of Viṣṇu "He Who shines" (*bhānuḥ*),⁷² and one of His six qualities (*ṣaḍguṇas*), *tejas* (splendour), a quality associated with *vyūha* Aniruddha (see "Theological Status" above). Throughout the poem, Hayagrīva is described as possessing white or bright light. Although "Splendour" is one of the names of Viṣṇu, white light is not a feature usually associated with Him generally.⁷³ In the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, however, Hayagrīva's radiance is said to be "more lustrous than a mountain of pure crystal gems" (v. 2), and He is compared to

⁷² *Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma with the Bhashya of Sri Parasara Bhuttar*, translation by Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan (Madras: Sri Visishtadvaita Prachari Sabha, 1983), n. 126. There are other names reflecting Viṣṇu's splendour: *candra-amṣuḥ* "He who is possessed of effulgent rays like those of the moon" (n. 282); *bhāskara-dyauḥ* "He Who has the refulgence of the sun" (n. 283); *amṛta-amṣu-udbhavuh* "the Source of the nectar-rayed moon" (n. 284); and *bhānuḥ* "Lustrous Sun" (n. 285).

⁷³ There is a reference to the quality of crystal-like radiance in the awakened ones in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.24.25-29). The *Purāṇa* states the following concerning those who will be saved by Viṣṇu's *avatāra* (Kalkin) during the Kali age, when the practices taught by the Vedas and the institutions of law shall nearly have ceased: "He [that is, Kalkin] will then re-establish righteousness upon earth; and the minds of those who will live at the end of the Kali age shall be awakened, and shall be as pellucid as crystal."

a “cut crystal” (v. 32). There are other descriptions based on the imagery of light, such as “Whose body is [made of] pure crystal” (v. 1), and the One who has “rays shining from [His] anklets” (v. 21).

This *stotra* imagery, although ancient, may be Āgamic in origin. The references to Hayagrīva in the Āgamas also depict Hayagrīva as radiant. *Pādma Saṃhitā* 22.2b-8a describes Hayagrīva as being composed of “crystal-like nectar”, continuous with the frequent descriptions of His luminosity. This description is a prominent theme in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, too. Not only is there a luminous quality to Vedānta Deśika’s Hayagrīva, but light is also said to radiate from the objects He bears. Hayagrīva’s left hand holds a book which “[shines] with red lustre [as if] bearing a cluster of corals” (v. 25), while His right hand holds “the radiant rosary beads” (v. 24).

Iconography

Four stanzas in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* (vs. 23-25, 32) are especially significant in that they appear to be iconographical in content. Because, according to Āgamic practice, iconography is employed both in terms of an appropriate mental image and temple icon, the referent of these stanzas is ambiguous. As in the Āgamas, the iconographical emblems and features connected with Hayagrīva in Vedānta Deśika’s *stotra* can be divided into two categories: those that are associated with Viṣṇu generally—the conch (*śaṅkha*) and the discus (*cakra*)—and those that are specific to the Hayagrīva incarnation. Specific to Hayagrīva are the book (*pustaka* in v. 25), the rosary beads (*mālā* in v. 24), and the hand position of knowledge/exposition (*jñāna-mudrā* in v. 32). These emblems that are specifically attributed to Hayagrīva are, interestingly, continuous with the Tantric tradition and are found in several

Pāñcarātra passages (for example, *Pādma Saṁhitā* 22.2b-8a),⁷⁴ thus reflecting the influence of the Āgamic tradition upon Vedānta Deśika. The book can be interpreted as the Vedas, or simply the manifestation of His Divine Wisdom. The rosary beads most likely have their origin in the tradition of mantra—the rosary being a device for counting the number of mantra repetitions. Finally, Hayagrīva's hand position of knowledge (*jñāna-mudrā*) symbolizes His role as Expounder of the Vedas and True Wisdom. It is significant that the two emblems (the rosary and the *jñāna-mudrā*) that are attributed specifically to Hayagrīva, although not described in the “mainstream” Epic and Purāṇic texts, appear in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas; their appearance reflects the role of Hayagrīva as the bestower of bliss and knowledge through meditation.

Hayagrīva and Mantra

An important element in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* is mantra. Hayagrīva is described as one “whose body consists of mantras” (v. 10). Furthermore, the poem claims that the devotee raises himself up to God “with the splendorous form of *śabda* (mantra or *śruti*)” (v. 29). Key syllables (*bīja-akṣara*) are representative of particular deities. Hayagrīva is also referred to as the “imperishable Divine Source of the sacred syllable (*akṣara*)” (v. 11), that is, *Om*—the eternal syllable and the ultimate source of sound and creation (as in the Vedas).

Furthermore, several verses in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* emphasize contemplation on Hayagrīva's form in one's mind through images conjured up by the repetition of mantras. The contemplation of Hayagrīva's form is believed to be the means by which one attains

⁷⁴ And, indeed, Vedānta Deśika makes reference to the *Pādma Saṁhitā* in his defence of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (*Pāñcarātra Rakṣā*), which is evidence that he was familiar with the text. *Śrī Pāñcarātrarakṣā* of Vedānta Deśika, pp. 186-189 (Index).

knowledge and bliss. Quite different from the ecstasy expressed in other stanzas, the following one emphasizes that contemplating Hayagrīva's form and viewing Him as the eternal syllable is one of the means to experiencing these two qualities of His:

Reflecting upon You,
taking refuge with Your form,
raising myself up to You,
with the splendid form of *śabda* (*mantra*, *śruti*) (v. 29)

Interestingly, the theological, poetic and iconographical descriptions of Hayagrīva in the *stotra* bring together the *devatā*, *mantra*, and *yantra* forms of a deity (especially *devatā* and *mantra*) as described in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

Hayagrīva Stotra and the Personalization of Mantra

The Pāñcarātra Āgamas and the *Hayagrīva Stotra* contain depictions of Viṣṇu common to "mainstream Hinduism", as well as elements that follow the specific Āgamic prescriptions concerning the deity. Although the Āgamas provide an extensive and systematic theological explanation of the evolution of the various forms of Viṣṇu, the texts also depict three forms of a deity: *devatā* (personifying), *mantra* (sonic), and *yantra* (symbolic).⁷⁵ These three forms of a deity, important for the purpose of ritual practice, are evident in the specific references to Hayagrīva. The more abstract ritual usage of *mantra*, *yantra* and *devatā*, already found in the Pāñcarātra tradition, is taken up and expanded upon by Vedānta Deśika in his devotional poem *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

Vedānta Deśika extends the Āgamic abstract linkage of *mantra* and *yantra* with *devatā*, as he incorporates into his poem typical devotional-poetic motifs and Ālvār

⁷⁵ See Gupta, "The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra", pp. 224-48.

emotionalism. This, in effect, creates a highly “personalized” understanding of God, more appropriate for Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in which a unique spirituality, founded on the devotees’ intimate and emotional relationship with Deity (as *antaryāmin*, or more commonly, *arcā-avatāra*), is central.

Hayagrīva Stotra reflects the process of the removal of Āgamic images and ideas from their Pāñcarātric milieu, and of their recontextualization according to the unique Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view. With regards to Hayagrīva, Śrī Vaiṣṇavism appears to have not only appropriated, but expanded and personalized the rather abstract Pāñcarātric linkage of mantra and *devatā*, thus creating an understanding of Hayagrīva, that is suitable and attractive to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava emotional-devotional experience of a personalized God. For example, Vedānta Deśika prays to be bathed in the shining rays of Hayagrīva (v. 32). Vedānta Deśika’s Hayagrīva is a more personal deity, wherein we can see the appropriation and of these various forms as the *antaryāmin* and, possibly, *arcā-avatāra* forms of God.

Along with its poetic elements of devotion, one of the *Hayagrīva Stotra*’s most significant features is the way in which it incorporates mantra into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view. Mantra and deity are linked generally in Tantric traditions, and specifically in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, where the conception of deity in those traditions remains relatively abstract, a figure to be visualized in highly formalized systems of meditation. Following the Ālvārs, however, Śrī Vaiṣṇavas have developed a passionately emotional and intimate relationship with God, especially in His incarnation in temple icons.⁷⁶ Although there is no direct and explicit reference in Vedānta Deśika’s *stotra* to its having been written in praise of

⁷⁶ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 165-169.

a *particular icon*, the poem contains stanzas that reflect Tamil Ālvār emotionalism along with iconographical descriptions that are continuous with the Āgamic Saṁhitā literature.⁷⁷

In his poem, Vedānta Deśika emphasizes meditation on Hayagrīva based on the mental image: “The wise ones in their [hearts] contemplate Your image” (v. 13); and “[For] the one who beholds You, existing in [his] mind/heart, the King Swan, [dwelling] in the minds of the knowledgeable ones...” (v. 14). These stanzas reflect the importance given by Vedānta Deśika to the practice of conjuring up a mental image of God, a practice intimately connected with mantra, which is an abstract sound-expression used for the purpose of conjuring up the image of God⁷⁸ through its repetition. The image of God is connected to the understanding of mantra. According to Vedānta Deśika, Hayagrīva not only has the form of knowledge and bliss (v. 1), but He is the means for his devotees to attain knowledge and bliss (v. 13), and is Himself the bestower of knowledge and bliss (v. 5). Similarly, this pattern directly corresponds to the role of mantra in the Āgamic tradition: mantra is the syllabic form of Truth, the means of attaining Truth, and the giver of Truth.⁷⁹ Unlike the ritual texts based on the Āgamas, however, the *stotra* represents a confluence of Tantric ritual understanding of deity (*devatā*, mantra and *yantra*) and ecstatic *bhakti* (emotional worship of a personalized God). The *Hayagrīva Stotra* demonstrates the process of the “personalization” of the Āgamic understanding of mantra. For Pancarātrins mantra is both the goal and the means, and Śrī Vaiṣṇavas extend it to a more personal God.

⁷⁷ See Chapter IV.

⁷⁸ V.K. Subramanian, *Saudaryalahari* (Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p. 55.

⁷⁹ Hayagrīva is also described as having the form of the Vedas (vs. 3, 4), as being the means for his devotees to attain the Vedas (vs. 3, 4), and also as One who grants the wisdom of the Vedas to his devotees (vs. 3, 4, 6, 10).

The Confluence of Mantra and Iconography

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the confluence of the understanding of mantra and iconography. As we have seen in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Hayagrīva is, on the one hand, depicted in image form with specific iconographical features and emblems (*devatā-mūrti*) (v. 32). On the other hand, He is also described in mantraic fashion, as "You, whose body consists of mantras" (v. 10), and as "the imperishable Divine Source of the syllable" (v. 11). The verses do not only parallel the mantraic and *yantraic* practice of the Āgamic tradition, but also show that the author of *Hayagrīva Stotra* has employed and expanded these concepts by personalizing the Āgamic approach to both mantra and deity.

Śrī Vaiṣṇavas regard the *Hayagrīva Stotra* as a poetical hymn created from the mantra of Hayagrīva. The recitative purpose of the *Hayagrīva Stotra* is the obtaining of the boons of powerful speech and knowledge. According to Staal, although the mantras that are prescribed in the Purāṇas are literally meaningful (unlike the Tantric *bīja-mantras*), they are treated as if they are, in fact, devoid of meaning.⁸⁰ By way of contrast, in *Hayagrīva Stotra* the mantra is personalized and given not only meaning but explicit visual content. There is an emphasis on the personal and, as in the Ālṡvārs, on the ecstatic experience of God through meditation and contemplation on the deity's form as described in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (v. 32). Ālṡvār emotionalism is incorporated into the poem through the ecstatic experience elicited by meditation upon the image of the horse-headed deity (v. 16).

The poem, for the most part, advocates meditation resulting in a mental image of

⁸⁰ Kane's rationale is that they are not distinguished from each other by the different deities to which they refer or by their "translatory meanings", but by the fact that these mantras are, respectively, five-syllabic (*pañcaksara*), six-syllable (*ṣaḍaksara*), eight-syllabic, etc. Kane 1930, cited in Staal's "Vedic Mantra", in *Mantra*, p. 63.

Hayagrīva (vs. 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 29). Because, according to Pāñcarātrins, the mental image resembles in detail the iconography prescribed for a temple image, it is often difficult to discern whether or not some of Vedānta Deśika's stanzas are directed to an icon (see vs. 6, 19, 20, 27, 32).

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the process of the "personalization of mantra". Just as the interplay between the function of mantra and the *stotra* can be observed in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, whereby more devotional and emotional praise-poems become increasingly more salient features of temple liturgical performances,⁸¹ there is a somewhat similar process evident in respect of the mantra-deity. The mantra-deity in Vedānta Deśika's poem is considerably more personalized than in the Āgamas.

This personalization does not just reflect the interplay between the concept of the mantra as a manifestation of God and the link between the worshipper and the worshipped, as in Tantra. Rather, it reflects the on-going transformation of the relatively more abstract notions of the manifestation of God in the mantra, in Pāñcarātra, into a more personalized notion of God who evokes for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas an emotional and relational experience (whether it be the *antaryāmin* or *arcā* form of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu).

Significantly, unlike the references to Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, the Ālvārs or the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* explicitly describes Hayagrīva as granting liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*) (v. 19). Verse 19 is a key verse, reflecting the transformation from the inconsistent Purāṇic depictions of Hayagrīva and the ambiguous theological status of Hayagrīva as *avatāra* in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, into a

⁸¹ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 22-24.

conception of the deity Hayagrīva as having the same theological status as that of Lord Viṣṇu. This is made evident in the description of His role as bestower of *mokṣa*, with whom a devotee may take refuge (seen most explicitly in the later text *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti*).

Hayagrīva in the Regional Hymns of the Tamil Ālvārs and An Early Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya

Following the Ālvārs and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, Vedānta Deśika is careful to establish Hayagrīva as a wholly benevolent *avatāra* of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. Firstly, on the basis of Nammālvār's and Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's stanzas listing Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, we can be confident that these two Ālvārs regarded Him as the full form of God and as Protector of the world. Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's *Periya Tirumoli* contains the only Ālvār references to the mythic act of Hayagrīva's recovery of the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha as *avatāra* (*Periya Tirumoli* 5.3.2 and 7.8.2). Tirumaṅkai explicitly praises Hayagrīva for His glorious act of saving the universe by recovering the Vedas.

The portrayal of Hayagrīva in Bhaṭṭar's stanza describes the horse-headed God as having recovered the Vedas from the demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, and as having bequeathed the Vedas to Brahmā, bringing life to all. *Hayagrīva Stotra*'s depiction of Hayagrīva as the recoverer of the Vedas and as a benevolent protector is continuous with both the Ālvārs and Bhaṭṭar.

Secondly, similar to both the Ālvārs and Bhaṭṭar, Vedānta Deśika does not refer to, nor show any concern about, the etiology of Viṣṇu's horse-head (as is done in the Hayagrīva passages in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). Any reference to etiology would have undermined the wholly benevolent nature of Viṣṇu's *avatāra*. Although Vedānta Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva is continuous with those of the Ālvārs and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar,

there are some new features in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Vedānta Deśika does not only write about Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas at a certain time and place (as a *vibhava-avatāra*), but also explicitly as the Supreme who grants both boons and *mokṣa*. For Vedānta Deśika, Hayagrīva, the protector of the Vedas, has become the protector of His devotees.

Though Vedānta Deśika's poem is continuous with the early Tamil references, there are some differences. Although the early depictions of Hayagrīva are simply with regards to Him as a *vibhava-avatāra* who recovered the Vedas, Vedānta Deśika moves beyond the Ālvārs and Vaiṣṇava Purāṇic descriptions of the deity. He depicts Hayagrīva as not only the saviour of the Vedas, but the very source of the Vedas. There is in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* a confluence of the Āgamic mantraic and iconic descriptions of Hayagrīva. And, the mere meditation on Him for the conjuring up of His image is for the experience of the *antaryāmin* form of Hayagrīva—a "full" form of Lord Viṣṇu.

The various religious streams, including the pan-Indian mainstream texts, are well manifest in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* depiction of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning. Vedānta Deśika selects from the various religious streams, and organizes and adapts selective elements within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological world-view. Because he unites the pan-Indian Sanskrit stream of religious literature and the regional Tamil Ālvār religion of grace, Vedānta Deśika's portrayal of Hayagrīva in this *stotra* has both historical and theological significance.

THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HAYAGRĪVA STOTRA

Vedānta Deśika placed importance upon the Vedic tradition within Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotionalism. Consequently, his writings are geared towards two different audiences: (1) the pan-Indian scholars and Brāhmaṇa priests, for whom he writes in Sanskrit, with proof texts from the Vedas [for example, *Īśopaniṣad Bhāṣya*⁸² (Commentary on the Īśa-Upaniṣad), *Tatva Tīkā* (Challenge of the Truth), *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā* (Defence of Pāñcarātra)]; and (2) the larger Śrī Vaiṣṇava community of ordinary Tamil-speaking people, for whom he writes both in Sanskrit and in the South Indian vernacular languages (Tamil and Maṇipravāḷa). Some of his compositions have a strong Ālvār devotional-emotional tone [for example, *Varadarāja Pañcāṣat* (Fifty [stanzas] [in Praise of] Varadarāja) and *Dehaḷīśa Stuti*⁸³ (Praise Poem to the Lord of the Porch)]. Other compositions have a strong Pāñcarātric esoteric-ritual bent, such as *Rahasya Traya Sāra* (The Essence of the Three Rahasyas) and *Carama Śloka Curukku*⁸⁴ (Commentary on the Carama Śloka).

The *Hayagrīva Stotra* emphasizes both the Vedic tradition—restricted to twice-born males or, more often, only to *brāhmaṇa* males—and the universal religion of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, in which salvation, open to all, is dependent on the grace of God. It would seem that this dual emphasis in Vedānta Deśika preserves the pre-eminent position of the priestly class, even when articulated within the context of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava notion of grace.

⁸² The *Īśopaniṣad Bhāṣya* is a Sanskrit commentary on the *Īśa-Upaniṣad*. *Īśvāsyopaniṣadbhāṣya* (Madras: Vedānta Deśika Research Society, 1975).

⁸³ The *Dehaleesa Stuti* is a Sanskrit praise-poem which contains twenty-eight stanzas, and is in praise of the Lord of the Porch at Tirukkoilūr.

⁸⁴ The *Caramaśloka Curukku* is a Tamil commentary on the *carama śloka*, which is *Bhagavad Gītā* 18.66.

Hayagrīva Stotra is significant in that its imagery (an incarnation of Viṣṇu who recovers the Vedas) mirrors the importance Vedānta Deśika himself gives to Vedic education and Vedic tradition. Although Vedānta Deśika's disillusionment with the disintegration of Hinduism, particularly the hypocrisy of the *brāhmaṇa* priests and the downplaying of traditional Sanskrit education, probably occurred after Vedānta Deśika composed the *stotra*, it was apparently reinforced by an already present appreciation of the Vedas and high regard for the Sanskritic tradition. Furthermore, the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, because it is in Sanskrit, can be seen as pan-Indian in terms of its language, even as the regional use of the pan-Indian language lifts a deity popular in a local region to the pan-Indian level. This phenomenon will be further highlighted in Chapter VIII.

This poem is thought to have been written early in Vedānta Deśika's life. It seems that he had apparently already determined that Śrī Vaiṣṇavas were marginalizing the Vedic tradition with their radical interpretation of doctrines like *prapatti*. He therefore believed in the need for a corrective by way of a renewed appreciation for the Sanskritic Vedic side of the tradition. Consequently, Vedānta Deśika's original purpose would seem to have been to restore the balance between the Tamil and Sanskrit Vedas within *ubhaya-vedānta* by re-emphasizing the Sanskrit side so as also to restore the balance between grace and action. This view must certainly have been reinforced after his trip to the North. Lastly, Vedānta Deśika's attraction to the Hayagrīva God can be interpreted in the light of the religio-political climate of India at the time (Islamic rule). Indeed, the deity who saved the Vedas from the demons can be understood as a metaphor for the political situation, wherein the Vedas needed to be rescued from the "demons"—the Muslims.

CONCLUSIONS

The important theological themes contained in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* are: (1) Hayagrīva's essential nature (*svarūpa*) as *jñāna* and *ānanda*, and as thus identical with Lord Viṣṇu, (2) emotional devotion (*bhakti*) towards the deity, (3) the Supreme's association with the Vedas, expressed not only as His having recovered and protected the Vedas, but predominantly as protector of His devotees, and (4) the Supreme as the source of the syllable *Om̐*.

Not only did Vedānta Deśika popularize the horse-headed deity among Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, but he depicted Him as a "full-form" of God who can be approached for both mundane fruits and for *mokṣa*. Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the influence of Śrī Vaiṣṇava *topotheism*; that is, the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding that the five forms which the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu takes at specific places all share a theological status that is equal to the *para* form in Vaikuṇṭha. Vedānta Deśika explicitly describes Hayagrīva as a form with the same ontological status as Viṣṇu, whether in the heart or as an icon.

As one analyzes the mythological (benevolent, malevolent, ambivalent) depictions and stories of Hayagrīva in the Epics and Purāṇas, as one surveys the variant theological and ritual references to Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic texts, and as one considers further the developments in the regional Śrī Vaiṣṇava literature, it becomes obvious that the material on Hayagrīva defies any simple interpretation that suggests a unilinear development of the deity.

The tracing of the development of the images and worship of this pan-Indian deity,

who is at the same time especially revered in the South, is a matter of some complexity. The pan-Indian texts reveal a profound and abundant diversity in the depictions of the horse-headed figure. On the basis of the wide variety of texts surveyed for the present study, it appears that one can only speak in the plural of the “*histories*”, rather than a single history, of the horse-headed figure Hayagrīva. In order to assist comprehension of the development of Hayagrīva worship in Tamil Nadu, the analogy of the prism proves to be eminently useful.

In line with the “*reverse-prismatic*” perspective, *Hayagrīva Stotra* can most profitably be viewed as a fusion of a spectrum of selected elements from a variety of religious streams (Epic, Purāṇic, Āgamic, local Tamilian). That perspective further enhances the notion that one can only speak of the “histories” of the deity and that the Śrī Vaiṣṇava “history” of the understanding of Hayagrīva is, among those histories, unique. This aspect aids our understanding of the interrelation among the various religious streams within Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Vedānta Deśika selects elements from the various religious streams, and then adapts and organizes them according to his Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view.

Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* is a poem that reflects Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology as a confluence of the classical myths contained in the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas, the esoteric (*devatā*, *yantra* and *mantra*) and iconographical elements of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, and Āḷvār devotionism. Śrī Vaiṣṇava concepts of *prapatti* and forms of god, based on the Āgamas, can be clearly discerned in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*, as well as the Āḷvār emotional-devotional mood, which includes references to ecstatic religious experience.

Even though Hayagrīva appears as both a demon and an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in some of the Purāṇas (*Agni*, *Bhāgavata*), following *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as well as the Āḷvārs and Parāśara

Bhaṭṭar, Vedānta Deśika is careful to establish Hayagrīva as a wholly benevolent incarnation of Viṣṇu. Furthermore, none of the Ālvār or Śrī Vaiṣṇava authors refer to, or show any concern about, the etiology of Viṣṇu's horse-head (unlike the Hayagrīva passages in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). However, unlike the Nammālvār, Tirumāṅkai Ālvār, and Bhaṭṭar who refer to Hayagrīva only as a *vibhava-avatāra* who recovered the Vedas, Vedānta Deśika chooses to emphasize the identification between *para*, *vibhava*, *antaryāmin*, and possibly *arcā* forms of Lord Hayagrīva.

At the same time, great importance is placed in the *stotra* upon Hayagrīva's association with the Vedas, sacred speech, and meditation/contemplation in one's mind of His form (*antaryāmin*). The emphasis on the mental image, which is described in one stanza as the *mantraic* form of Hayagrīva (v. 11), although founded on the Pāñcarātric understanding of mantra, moves significantly beyond it toward a distinct "personalization" of the mantra concept of deity. The Pāñcarātric understanding of mantra as the essence of, the means to, and the giver of Truth parallels Vedānta Deśika's understanding of Hayagrīva as the essence of, the means to, and the bestower of *jñāna* and *ānanda*.

The confluence of Āgama and *bhakti* in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* will be further highlighted in Chapter VII, which provides an analysis of post-Vedānta Deśika worship of Hayagrīva at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahindrapuram, Tamil Nadu. Moreover, that chapter includes a discussion of the description of Hayagrīva in three Śrī Vaiṣṇava texts—literary genres which demonstrate the merging of Ālvār emotionalism and Āgamic ritual according to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view.

Specifically, the *Hayagrīva Stotra* contains one reference to the Epic and Purāṇic

myths of the benevolent Hayagrīva who recovered the Vedas from the demons (see Chapter III), and several iconographical descriptions continuous with the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (see Chapter IV). The later Śrī Vaiṣṇava worship of Hayagrīva founded on the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, evident in the construction of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple and in the composition of devotional hymns, more explicitly demonstrates that the history of Hayagrīva in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism has been deeply influenced by *topotheism*. In his depictions of the iconography of Hayagrīva, Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* may be interpreted as advocating the worship of Hayagrīva in iconic form. Although Vedānta Deśika's description of Hayagrīva cannot be tied to any particular extant icon, its final outgrowth is the specific iconic-incarnation of Hayagrīva present at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple (Tiruvahindrapuram) and in three late Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns, which form the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII

TOPOTHEISM AND THE LIVING TRADITION OF HAYAGRĪVA WORSHIP AT TIRUVAHĪNDRAPURAM

Vedānta Deśika's experience of the grace of Hayagrīva, and the *stotra* he consequently wrote in His praise, led to the popularization of the worship of the horse-headed deity in Tamil Nadu. Most importantly, a Hayagrīva temple was built at Tiruvahīndrapuram where, according to legend, Vedānta Deśika had first received Hayagrīva's grace. Furthermore, four Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns have additionally been composed in devotion to Hayagrīva: *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā* (*The Worship of the Hundred Names of Śrī Hayagrīva*), *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* (*The Praise of the Root Mantra of Śrī Hayagrīva*), *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana* (*Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva*), and *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (*Surrender to Hayagrīva Accompanied by Lakṣmī*). As frequently found in the Hindu tradition, these works are unauthored, implying that their source is divine. It is difficult to date the hymns, but they are certainly from the post-Vedānta Deśika era.¹ Although they follow Āgamic ritual practice and are meant to be used in temple or home rituals, they also explicitly depict Hayagrīva's status as the "full form" of Viṣṇu, incarnate in iconic form (*arcā-avatāra*). [All quotations are based on my own original translations, which form Appendix II.]

This chapter deals with Hayagrīva after Vedānta Deśika. Apart from discussing the local story about Vedānta Deśika and his worship of Hayagrīva, it provides an

¹ One reason for this conclusion is that *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* contains a complete verse from Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*. See section below on "Śrī Vaiṣṇava Hymns in Praise of Hayagrīva".

account of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple and its rituals, as well as a commentary on the significance of the four Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns in praise of this deity. In addition, this chapter includes an analysis of the role and status of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu. The development of Hayagrīva's status and role in the Tamil milieu reveals the Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding that the five forms of God appear at specific places as Supreme Viṣṇu—*topotheism*. Though Hayagrīva's status in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* corresponds to the various forms of Viṣṇu (*para*, *vibhava*, *antaryāmin*), Hayagrīva worship in contemporary Tamil Nadu reflects the Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional preference for the Supreme Viṣṇu's iconic-incarnations (*arcā-avatāra*) in specific places in the Tamil lands.² The regional evolution of the horse-headed deity illuminates the change in the status and role of Hayagrīva in the light of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava concept of the *arcā-avatāric* form of God.

Tiruvahīndrapuram: The Divine Region of Hayagrīva

According to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, there are one-hundred and eight *divya-deśas* (divine regions or sacred places). The pilgrimage places located in present day Tamil Nadu are categorized according to five different regions: Cōḷa Nāṭu, Pāṇḍya Nāṭu, Malai Nāṭu, Nāṭu Nāṭu, Toṇḍai Nāṭu.³ Two *divya-deśas* are located in Nāṭu Nāṭu (South Arcot District), one being Tiruvahīndrapuram.⁴ The god at Tiruvahīndrapuram is Devanātha (Tamil, Devanāyaka Perumāl) and the goddess is Hemāmbuja Nāyaki (or

² Śrīnivadāsa, *Yatīndramatadīpika*, 9.27.

³ The two remaining *divya-deśas* are: Vada Nāṭu (border of *saṁsāra*) and Tiru Nāṭu (heaven).

⁴ According to Gopalan, other names for Tiruvahīndrapuram are: "Ayindai, Phanipathipuram, Ponn Ayindai, Tenneyindai, and Ayindainagar". *Śrī Vaiṣṇava Divya Deśams (108 Tiruppatis)* (compiled by L.V. Gopalan) (Madras: Visishtadvaita Pracharini Sabha, 1972), p. 55.

Vaikuṇṭhavallī). As we will see, Vedānta Deśika is very closely associated with the Devanātha Temple, having written a complete poem in praise of its presiding deity called *Devanāyaka Pañcāśat*. The river that runs close to the temple is called the River Garuḍa (*garuḍa-nadī*). On the basis of information from two modern-day devotees of Hayagrīva, Neelameha Bhattachariar and T.K. Piran (whom I interviewed),⁵ the Devanātha Temple was built some 550 years before Vedānta Deśika's time (ca. 8th or 9th century C.E.).⁶ According to Neelameha Bhattachariar, there is a unique feature in the iconography of the *mūla-bera* (fixed or immovable image)⁷ of Lord Devanātha at Tiruvahindrapuram: a lotus in the middle of Devanātha's hand represents Brahmā, an eye in the forehead represents Śiva, and His forelocks of hair also represent Śiva. The temple priest maintains that all the three deities—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva—are represented here.⁸ Devanātha's *utsava-bera* (*utsava*, the movable festival image) carries the *śaṅkha*, *cakra*

⁵ An interview with T.K. Piran, Neelameha Bhattachariar, D. Rajagopalan, and Thiruvaezi Gopalachariar, was held on January 24, 1997 at the home of T.K. Piran at Tiruvahindrapuram. As the discussion and conversation was in Tamil, Dr. K.K.A. Venkatachari asked the questions I had prepared and translated their answers into English. I have reworked the contents of the conversation so that it is organized according to the outline of my study. However, I have remained true to the ideas and comments of the various people present during the interview. All four men spoke of Hayagrīva, Vedānta Deśika, and the Devanātha and Hayagrīva temples.

a. Neelameha Bhattachariar (b. 1930) is a priest of the Devanātha temple at Tiruvahindrapuram. He received the initiation *mantra* from Krishnamurthi Bhattachariar, his adopted father. Since attaining the *mantra*, Neelameha Bhattachariar has been giving the *mantra* to others so that they may receive the benefits of its recitation. A number of people approach him to co-meditate on the particular *mantra*, with the expectation of gaining worldly benefit from meditation/recitation.

b. T.K. Piran (b. 1913) is the grandson of Pandita Bhushana, Bhagavata Vishyam. He is a retired Sugarcane Inspector for Parry & Co factory.

c. D. Rajagopalan (b. 1916) is a practitioner of *siddhi* medicine; the main aim of those who practice *siddhi* medicine is alchemy. He is a RMP (registered medical practitioner).

d. Thiruvaizi Gopalachariar (b. 1917).

⁶ See below for evidence regarding the date of the Devanātha temple.

⁷ Every South Indian temple contains a *mūla-bera*, the main deity which is immovable and usually of granite. A smaller movable icon is called the *utsava-bera* (*utsava*, festival), because it is taken out in procession during special festival days.

⁸ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

and *gaḍa* in three hands, whereas the fourth hand holds the lotus. The temple today is under Vaikhānasa Āgamic ritual (not Pāñcarātra).⁹

Bhattachariar claims that, according to local tradition, during Vedānta Deśika's time the Devanātha Temple had two images of Hayagrīva for worship: (1) the Yoga-Hayagrīva which gives the power to speak even to a dumb person; and (2) Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva, which is Hayagrīva accompanied by Viṣṇu's inseparable consort Śrī Lakṣmī. The Yoga-Hayagrīva remains till today in the Devanātha Temple, though the Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva is presently the presiding deity at the Vaṭakalai Parakāla Maṭha¹⁰ in Mysore, where Hayagrīva, along with His consort, is worshipped with great devotion. Both of the images are of bronze and are movable.

⁹ Tradition has it that the Vaikhānasa Āgamas were written by Vikhāsa (a Vedic sage) under the guidance of Viṣṇu, whereas the Pāñcarātra Āgamas are believed to have been revealed by Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) Himself. The name Vaikhānasa means "ritual fire", and these Āgamas possibly take their name from the forest hermits who performed fire rituals. Although the Vaikhānasa texts appear only in post-Vedic and post-Epic times, they are believed to be the oldest Vaiṣṇava literature. The Vaikhānasa tradition is mainly found in the Tamil and Telugu regions, and presently several important temples such as Tirupati, Kāñcīpuram and the Vaiṣṇava temple at Mathurā continue to be run according to Vaikhānasa practices. Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit, A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, Fasc. I (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), pp. 140-141.

According to some circles, Vaikhānasa is "more" legitimate and orthodox, based on the fact that the Vaikhānasa tradition follows many Vedic principles and rituals represented in the *Taittirīya* branch of the *Black Yajur Veda*. The followers of Vaikhānasa considered Pāñcarātra unorthodox. Consequently, animosity developed between the two sects of the Vaiṣṇava Āgamic tradition. Smith, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography: According to Pāñcarātrāgama Texts*, p. XXV. Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, p. 141. Although there has been tension between the two Āgamic traditions, the only real difference between the Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra is their ritual practice. Smith, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography*, pp. XXV-XXVI.

According to Gonda, the main differences between the two Vaiṣṇava Āgamic groups are: (1) the Pāñcarātrins recite the Tamil Ālvār hymns during worship, whereas Vaikhānasins do not; (2) unlike the Pāñcarātrins, Vaikhānasins do not have icons/images of the Ālvārs or the *ācāryas*; (3) although the Pāñcarātrins recognize Āṇṭāl as a consort of Viṣṇu, Vaikhānasins do not consider the possibility of an ordinary woman attaining such status; (4) although both Pāñcarātrins and Śrī Vaiṣṇavas brand their bodies as part of their initiation ritual (*pañca-samskāra*), Vaikhānasins do not; (5) differences in the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa descriptions of Viṣṇu's attendant deities; and (6) Vaikhānasins give special prominence to Śrī as Viṣṇu's *śakti* "creative power". Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, pp. 142-143.

¹⁰ According to tradition, the founder of the Parakāla Maṭha (Vaṭakalai) knew Vedānta Deśika in Kāñcīpuram. The Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva image was given as a donation to the Mysore royal family of Vodayars in return for having received temple offerings. See *Śrī Vaiṣṇava Divya Deśams*, pp. 55-56.

Significantly, the Ālvār poet who specifically sang in praise of the Devanātha Temple is Tirumaṅkai Ālvār. As we have seen, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār explicitly mentions Hayagrīva several times in his *Periya Tirumoli*. The temple area is likewise connected with Vedānta Deśika, for it is here that he is said to have performed penance and received the grace of Garuḍa and Hayagrīva on the hill called Auṣadhagiri, right next to the Devanātha Temple.¹¹ There is an annual festival during September-October celebrating Vedānta Deśika's association with the Devanātha Temple.¹²

The story of Vedānta Deśika's experience of Hayagrīva's grace on the Auṣadhagiri hill and his subsequent composition of the *Hayagrīva Stotra* served to popularize devotion to Lord Hayagrīva in the area. Consequently, around 1667 C.E., the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple was built on Auṣadhagiri. Before describing the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple, I will first provide an overview of the *sthala-purāṇa*¹³ of the Devanātha Temple and the local story about Vedānta Deśika.

The *Sthala-purāṇa* of the Devanātha Temple, Tiruvahīndrapuram

The *sthala-purāṇa* of the Devanātha Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram claims that it is based on the story from the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.¹⁴ Typically, there is an attempt in the

¹¹ *Śrī Vaishnava Divya Deśams*, pp. 55-56.

¹² *Śrī Vaishnava Divya Deśams*, pp. 55-56. For information about the rituals and festivals at the Swāmi Hayagrīva temple, see the section below on "Rituals at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple, Tiruvahīndrapuram".

¹³ *Sthala-purāṇa* (ancient story of a [sacred] place) (Tamil, *talapurāṇam*) is a collection of the local myths and legends of a specific pilgrimage place or temple. The religious stories reflect the particular traditions that have evolved around a shrine and its locale and, more importantly, account for its sanctity. The deity of each South Indian shrine has both a Tamil and a Sanskrit name. In the *sthala-purāṇa*, local myths are frequently connected with pan-Indian mythological history. See David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Āṣṭa Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 4-9.

¹⁴ "Tiruvahīntirapura Stalapurāṇam", in *Tiruvayintirapurattu Tirukkōyil* (Tiruvahēndirapuram: Sri

sthala-purāṇa genre to connect local myth and legends with the classical Sanskrit Purāṇas, adapting certain of their stories to the particular town, temple, and icon.

In the first chapter of the *sthala-purāṇa*, Nārada asks his father Brahmā to teach him about the glory of Viṣṇu (Hari). Brahmā responds by narrating the story of the *arcā-avatāra* of Hari (Viṣṇu). Brahmā explains how Viṣṇu was not found until the *ṛṣis* (such as Sanaka) went to Tiruvahīndrapuram. The *sthala-purāṇa* then gives precise directions as to the location of the temple:

Tiruvahīndrapuram is situated at six *yojanas*¹⁵ north of Kumbakonam, in a direction due southeast of Tirupati, due south of Kāñcīpuram and at a distance of half a *yojana* west of the sea.¹⁶

This is a typical *sthala-purāṇa* motif; the sages or gods are unable to find the Deity until they arrive at the specific place that is the subject of the *sthala-purāṇa*. This motif demonstrates the sanctity and importance of the particular temple or shrine.

Upon arriving at Tiruvahīndrapuram, the *ṛṣis* saw their Splendorous Viṣṇu holding the conch and discus, accompanied by His consort Śrī Devī. Meanwhile, as the *ṛṣis* were praising the Lord, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya asked the Lord to incarnate Himself in the form of an icon at Tiruvahīndrapuram. In chapter three of the *sthala-purāṇa*, the sage Narada continues to ask his father Brahmā to explain the glory of Śrī Devanātha and the River Garuḍa. Brahmā then informs Nārada about a certain sage who will receive the grace of Hayagrīva at this spot. One passage in the *sthala-purāṇa* associates Vedānta

Devanatha Kaikarya Sabha, 1982), pp. 7-39.

¹⁵ One *yojana* is equivalent to four *krośas* or approximately nine miles. Monier-William, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 858.

¹⁶ The sea refers to the Bay of Bengal.

Deśika both with the Devanātha Temple and with Hayagrīva:

In Kali *yuga*, a great sage, who would be an *avatāra* of Hari's bell,¹⁷ shall be doing penance under a *peepul* tree. He shall obtain the Grace of Hayagrīva. The sage shall reside long here and shall make a residence here. Even a bath in or sip of the water of the well, shall beget all auspiciousness and *mokṣa*.¹⁸

Vedānta Deśika's attainment of the grace of Hayagrīva through penance is presented as the central basis of the importance and sanctity of the temple. This *sthala-purāṇa* clearly appears to have been written after the time of Vedānta Deśika. Worshippers of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu today believe that it is through Hayagrīva's grace that Vedānta Deśika attained *mokṣa*.¹⁹

The Local Story of Vedānta Deśika at Tiruvahīndrapuram

The temple's *sthala-purāṇa* is supplemented by a number of local stories based on oral tradition of Vedānta Deśika's sojourn at Tiruvahindrapuram. According to T.K. Piran and Bhattachariar, Vedānta Deśika, having received the special *garuḍa-mantra* from his uncle, Atreya Rāmānuja, then performed penance by reciting the mantra in Tiruvahīndrapuram. Finding the nearby river congenial for his *tapas* (austerities), Vedānta Deśika chose the area of the Devanātha Temple to meditate upon Hayagrīva. The Supreme is said to have appeared before Vedānta Deśika in the form of Hayagrīva, and blessed him with wisdom. Because of Vedānta Deśika's penance, Hayagrīva granted him knowledge and facility in the composition of hymns. Hayagrīva's grace is believed

¹⁷ Vedānta Deśika was named Veṅkaṭanātha (Lord of the Bell) by his parents, after the main deity of the Tirupati Temple.

¹⁸ "Tiruvahintirapura Stalapurāṇam", p. 36.

¹⁹ Information given by T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

to have enabled Vedānta Deśika to write many scholarly books.²⁰ Interestingly, Vedānta Deśika is said to have meditated on the *garuḍa-mantra* (given by Atreya Rāmānuja, who is considered to be an incarnation of Garuḍa) and received the grace of Hayagrīva. Here, we see the importance of the Vedas in Vedānta Deśika's spirituality: Garuḍa²¹ is regarded as the representation of the Vedas, and Hayagrīva is praised for having recovered the Vedas from the demons as well as being the source of the Vedas.

Vedānta Deśika was bestowed with a special title, *sarva-tantra-svatantra* (independent master of all the arts), by the community. The local oral tradition today has many legends about Vedānta Deśika as the independent master of all arts. Today an image of Vedānta Deśika is found in the Devanātha Temple, in a separate shrine on the left side of the inner sanctum; according to tradition, this image was made by Vedānta Deśika himself. The traditional account has it that Vedānta Deśika as a master of the arts was challenged by a sculptor to make an image of himself. Vedānta Deśika fulfilled this demand in order to prove his status as the master of the arts.²²

Another fascinating legend tells us how Vedānta Deśika was tested for his cobbler skills, and surprisingly he made a fine pair of leather *chappals* (sandals). Vedānta Deśika's association with the making of leather sandals is now used to legitimize Vaṭakalais' wearing of leather chappals (whereas previously they only wore wooden shoes because leather was a taboo). As one of the temple priests put it: "Anything

²⁰ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

²¹ Garuḍa, an eagle-headed man, is the vehicle of Viṣṇu.

²² Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

connected with Vedānta Deśika has become sacred in Tiruvahīndrapuram.”²³ It is important to note that Hayagrīva in Vedānta Deśika’s *stotra* is praised as the Lord of learning, and these local stories about Vedānta Deśika as the master of the arts are undoubtedly derived from these depictions of Hayagrīva.

The two local stories about Vedānta Deśika cited above, not only depict him as skilled in philosophy and the arts, but also reflect the deification process of a great Ācārya, whereby he attains the status of an *anu-praveśa-avatāra* (divine element of the Supreme). According to Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, the divine entered into Vedānta Deśika and made him an incarnate form of God Himself. An *anu-pravesa-avatāra* can be worshipped either as the possessor of divine qualities or as God Himself.²⁴ In the case of Vedānta Deśika, his image is worshipped now at the Devanātha Temple as both Ācārya and God.²⁵

It is highly significant that, when I tried to raise the issue about the ambivalent nature of Hayagrīva (including the horse-headed demon killed by Viṣṇu, or Hayagrīva as found in the *Mahābhārata*, *Devībhāgavata* and *Kālikā Purāṇas*), there was great reluctance to even mention the subject. It was clear that to broach such a subject—the possibility that a horse-headed figure might have had malevolent qualities—was inappropriate. Such an image of Hayagrīva is completely foreign to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view and theology, for God in His many forms is wholly benevolent.

²³ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

²⁴ Srinivasa S.M. Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism: Its Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Discipline* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), p. 218.

²⁵ *Śrī Vaishnava Divya Deśams*, pp. 55-56.

The Local and Living Tradition of Hayagrīva Worship

Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram

The hill that rises next to the Devanātha Temple is known as the mountain of herbs (*oushada-giri*). There are now seventy-four steps up the hill that lead to the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple (previously, and in Vedānta Deśika's time, there was only a path up to the top of the hill). When the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple was constructed so were the seventy-four steps, representing the number of propagators-teachers Rāmānuja had himself appointed.²⁶

The Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple was built around 1667 C.E., thus it is only 330 years old and relatively new for a temple in the Tamil lands. Auśadhagiri is an ideal place for a temple; the Āgamas advocate the construction of temples near a river, or on top of a hill, and it meets both of these recommendations. Nevertheless, Auśadhagiri's greatest claim to fame is as the place where Vedānta Deśika received the grace of Hayagrīva. There are four *mūla-beras* (immoveable fixed images) at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple. The central image is of Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva. On His right side stands Venugopāla (Kṛṣṇa with a flute), and on His left is Garuḍa. The image of Garuḍa has a unique feature among Garuḍa icons: one hand is in the *upadeśa-mudrā*, because it was Garuḍa (Atreya Rāmānuja) who gave the mantra to Vedānta Deśika.²⁷

According to Neelameha Bhattachariar, the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple was reconstructed in 1881 C.E. by P.L. Punnarangan. More recently (1892 C.E.), on top of

²⁶ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

²⁷ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

the hill, there was constructed a Hayagrīva *maṇḍapa* (a covered shrine that is part of the temple) at the place where Vedānta Deśika is believed to have performed his *tapas*.

There are relatively recent inscriptions at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple relating to the construction of the *maṇḍapa* as well as the later renovation of the temple.²⁸ The inscriptions demonstrate how the worship of Hayagrīva is, indeed, local; that is, seven of the eight donors are from the South Arcot District (five of the six are living in Putuvai [Pondicherry]). Although there is one donor from Rajasthan, he is a Vaṭakalai “who has settled in the north”. The latter fact demonstrates how important Hayagrīva is to devotees of the Vaṭakalai sect and the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition of devotees’ identifying themselves with the *divya-deśa* in, or closest to, their natal place. Even when Vaṭakalais leave the Tamil lands, they continue to associate with, and be devoted to, Hayagrīva and Vedānta Deśika.

²⁸ There are seven temple inscriptions dating from 1873 to 1961 C.E.:

- 1873 The bed chamber was constructed by Raṅkammāl, wife of Cuppurāya Ceṭṭiyār, belonging to Putuvai (the old name of Pondicherry).
- 1875 The well on the hill is the *tarma* (Sanskrit, *dharma*) [religious duty, thus donation] of Cuppurāya Ceṭṭiyār, belonging to Putuvai.
- 1879 On the hill belonging to Putuvai the five sons of Mugicāmi Ceṭṭiyār (1) Kōpāl Ceṭṭiyār, (2) Irākava Ceṭṭiyār, (3) Kiṣanappa Ceṭṭiyār, (4) Cāmi Ceṭṭiyār and (5) Kurunāta Ceṭṭiyār.
- 1881 Central *maṇḍapa* (Sanskrit, *maṇḍapa*) at Hayagrīva temple. It is the *tarma* of Ku. Nārāyaṇa Cāmi Tāsaṅ, belonging to Putuvai.
- 1885 The planting of different kinds of trees is the *tarma* of Apirāmi Ammā belonging to Vaḷavanūr Kumāra Kuppam, wife of Appāvu Uṭaiyār and mother of Varatarāja Uṭaiyār.
- 1892 On the southern side of the Hayagrīva temple is a four pillared *maṇḍapa*. It is the *tarma* of Mācilā Maṇipillai, belonging to Putuvai, Kārāmaṇik Kuppam.
- 1961 The southern direction of the Śrī Hayagrīva svāmi saṅgaṭi (Sanskrit, *samadhī*) and the eastern side of the *maṇḍapa* is renovated, [also] a front *maṇḍapa* of four pillars is added. All of these services are offered by Paṅkūr, Śrī Māṇakaḷ Maṅkaṇirām [an industrialist belonging to Diddvana (Rajasthan)]. Ācārya of the latter is chief of Uttara Ahobila Māṭha (those settled in the North) Ācārya Vīṇā Rakavan. The trustee of the temple is Śrī Kō. Tanakōṭi Paṭaiyākṣiyar, with great devotion.

Tiruvayintirapurattu Tirukkōyil, pp. 65-67. I am indebted to K.K.A. Venkatachari for the translation.

Rituals at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple, Tiruvahindrapuram

Utsava (remover of obstacles or misery) means festival. The proper performance of a festival or festive religious observances is believed to generate power that affects the cosmic and psychic forces. In effect, it reaps fruits for the sponsor and/or for the community as a whole. There are three general categories of temple rituals/festivals: (1) *nitya-utsava* (also referred to as *pūjā* or *arcanā-karma*) are the daily, weekly, and/or monthly rituals to be performed in a temple; (2) *naimittika-utsava* are the annual observances for special occasions like harvest, marriage and birthdates of the deity or patron of the temple; and (3) *kāmya-utsavas* are rites observed for special reasons, i.e., boons, thanksgiving, atonement and the like.²⁹

The *nitya-utsava* at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple is performed twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. People in Tiruvahindrapuram and its surrounding region also worship Hayagrīva in a special way every Thursday. In pan-Indian Hinduism, Thursday is the day of Bṛhaspati (the god of learning). Śrī Vaiṣṇavas in the Tiruvahindrapuram area especially meditate on Hayagrīva, who is also revered as the god of learning, on that day. Functionally, for Vāṭakalais, Hayagrīva also takes the place of the non-sectarian goddess Sarasvatī in the worship that is performed at the beginning of *pūjā*. Vaiṣṇavas pray only to Vaiṣṇava deities, and Hayagrīva has come to acquire the function earlier ascribed to Sarasvatī as the bestower of knowledge.

Once again, we see that for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas Hayagrīva is functionally aligned with

²⁹ H. Daniel Smith, "Festivals in Pāñcarātra Literature", in *Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Lankā*, ed. by Guy R. Welborn and Glenn E. Yocum (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982), pp. 27-49.

the worship of Sarasvatī in another way: On the eve of Vijyadaśmi, which takes place at the end of the Navarātri celebrations—the traditional autumnal equinox (*kanyā samkrānti*)³⁰—people come and worship Hayagrīva as the God of learning. Generally, in other regions of Tamil Nadu, the day is celebrated among non-Vaiṣṇavas with the *pūjā* of Sarasvatī. However, even though the day is also known as Sarasvatī *pūjā*, Vaiṣṇavas come to Tiruvahīndrapuram to worship Hayagrīva in her place. Many students start school from that day onwards, since the worship of Hayagrīva, the Lord of learning, is considered as the most auspicious time to commence study. There is also a monthly worship of Hayagrīva at the temple during the time of the *śrāvaṇa* star (night of the full moon in the month of July-August). During the time of the *śrāvaṇa* star, the bronze *utsava-bera* of Hayagrīva is taken from the Devanātha Temple along with the image of Vedānta Deśika to the top of the hill. This ceremony is known *maṅgala-śaṅsana* (“the act of wishing for joy”).

The *Brahmā-utsava* (also called *mahā-utsava*) is the annual Hindu temple festival which may last from one up to thirty days. The celebration occurs in order to mark the day of the consecration of the temple or of the icon. Annually, during the *Brahmā-utsava* festival in Tiruvahīndrapuram, Śrī Vaiṣṇavas recite Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* as part of the temple ritual.³¹ According to the priests in Tiruvahīndrapuram, the local

³⁰ The traditional autumnal equinox (*kanyā samkrānti*) is in the tenth lunar phase (*tithi* “lunar phase” which refers to the moon travelling twelve degrees; the moon cycle of fifteen phases is equivalent to a fortnight) during the month of *āśvina* (third week of October to second week of November). Karen L. Merrey, “The Hindu Festival Calendar”, in *Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Lankā*, ed. by Guy R. Welborn and Glenn E. Yocum (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982), p. 2.

³¹ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar. See also Singh, *Vedānta Deśika*, pp. 13-20, 50-54.

people celebrate Hayagrīva for ten days in the month of Āvaṇi (Tamil month of mid-August to mid-September).³² During this festival, the image of Hayagrīva is not taken out in procession, but worshipped only in the sanctum itself.

Generally, people go to the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple with requests for healing from diseases, especially eye diseases. People who want to get cured from their illnesses, or seek good education, or desire success in business endeavours, are frequent visitors to the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple. Because Hayagrīva is the Lord of learning and is believed to be powerful in the fulfillment of all worldly desires, He is a popular form of God to pray to for boons, especially those regarding education and business.³³ According to Bhattachariar, even Muslims are frequent visitors to the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple on the hill, seeking boons, though they are not allowed in the Inner Sanctum of the Hayagrīva Temple.³⁴

Śrī Vaiṣṇava Devotional Hymns in Praise of Hayagrīva

There are four Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional hymns (in Sanskrit) specifically directed to Hayagrīva: *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā* (*The Worship of the Hundred Names of Śrī Hayagrīva*), *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* (*The Praise of the Root Mantra of Śrī Hayagrīva*), *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (*Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī*), and the *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana* (*Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva*). All four of the hymns refer to the mythic history of Hayagrīva as *avatāra*;

³² Merrey, "The Hindu Festival Calender", p. 2.

³³ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

³⁴ Information from T.K. Piran and Neelameha Bhattachariar.

however, they appear to have been written only after Hayagrīva was established as Supreme and installed as icon (*arcā-avatāra*) in Tiruvahīndrapuram. The hymns reflect the importance of the recitation of mantra/*stotra* in Śrī Vaiṣṇava ritual and theology. The Śrī Vaiṣṇava ritual practices delineated below are the foundation of the popular devotional texts to Hayagrīva under discussion here. Hymns such as these are often ignored in scholarship because they are not written in a highly stylised form of Sanskrit, nor do they convey the intellectual dimension of Hinduism (like the philosophical texts). However, they constitute the very heart of Hindu religion, and thus reflect popular belief and worship. These devotional poems are found in pamphlets, obtainable cheaply at the entrance to every South Indian temple.³⁵ These types of hymns are one of the most common mediums through which ordinary people gain religious knowledge and derive their world-view.

Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā (The Worship of the One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva)³⁶

The Worship of the One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva is a good example of a literary genre (*nāmāvali* or *nāmastotra*) employed, in part, for the purposes of Vedicization and celebration of the Supremacy of Hayagrīva. It is imitative of the *Thousand Names of Viṣṇu*, which is contained in one of the two great Hindu Epics, the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 200 B.C.E.-200 C.E.), and to this date continues to be chanted as part of Vaiṣṇava ritual and Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotion. Although the *Mahābhārata* is classified as

³⁵ Music is also a medium of popular religious devotion. The Bombay Sisters, who are famous Tamilian singers of religious music in Mumbai, have recorded an audio-cassette entitled *Lakshmi Hayagreeva Stotramaala*.

³⁶ *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi* (Madras: Ubhaya Vedānta Granthamala, 1971), pp. 86-88.

smṛti (that which is remembered), it is frequently referred to as the “fifth Veda”, a concept promulgated by the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācārya Rāmānuja and his disciple Parāśara Bhaṭṭar.³⁷ Like the chanting of mantras, the recitation of *nāmastotra* (praise-poem of names) is found in both mainstream Hindu and Tantric traditions. The *Thousand Names of Viṣṇu* is contained in the *Mahābhārata* (Anuśāsanika Parvan 149), and the recitation of *nāmāvali* was incorporated into the Āgamas as an important and simple mode of devotion. The titles are often of “one hundred names” or “one thousand names”, but it is common for the lists to actually contain one hundred and eight and one thousand and eight names, respectively. Variant lists of the names of gods/goddesses were developed in the Purāṇic and Āgamic literature (such as the *Lalitā-sahasra-nāma* of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*). The devotee chants the names of the deity for his/her protection; the devotee is also protected by the visualization of the various attributes of the deity,³⁸ heightened in particular names.

Out of the one hundred and eight names contained in *The Worship of the One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva*, thirty-four are taken from the older and highly revered *Thousand Names of Viṣṇu*, and they predominantly reflect the nature of Hayagrīva as Supreme, establishing Him as a “full” incarnation of Viṣṇu: for example, *Parameśvara*, “Supreme Ruler” (n. 54); *Pūrṇa*, “He who is full” (n. 34); and, *Paramātmā*, the “Supreme Soul” (n. 39). Various commonly used epithets of Viṣṇu are also included in the *Hayagrīva Nāma-Stotra* like *Hari* (n. 9), *Madhusūdana* (n. 4) and

³⁷ See Nayar, *Poetry As Theology*, p. 114.

³⁸ Elizabeth Anne Benard, *Chinnamastā: The Aweful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess* (Delhi: Motilal Banarāsidass, 1994), pp. 51-61.

Govinda (n. 5).

The remaining seventy-four names not found in the *Thousand Names of Viṣṇu* are epithets that depict Hayagrīva in a variety of ways. Some names describe him as Supreme reflecting His status as the full form of Viṣṇu, such as *Nirīśa*, “One who has no lord over Him” (n. 16); *Pāraga*, “Master” (n. 42); *Mahāviṣṇu*, “Great Viṣṇu” (n. 2); *Cidānandamaya*, the “One who consists of consciousness and bliss” (n. 22); and *Niṣkaḷaṅka*, the wholly “Taintless One” (n. 19). One name recalls Hayagrīva’s act as a benevolent *avatāra* by describing Him as *Vidhistuta*, the “One who is praised for the act [of recovering the Vedas]” (n. 71). Hayagrīva is also called *Tamohara*, the “Remover of darkness” (n. 86), and *Ajñānanāśaka*, the “Destroyer of ignorance” (n. 87), both names reflecting His role as Supreme.

Furthermore, many names specifically reflect Hayagrīva’s unique association with (1) wisdom/Vedas, and (2) speech/mantra. In the case of wisdom/Vedas, Hayagrīva is named as *Jñānada*, the “Bestower of wisdom” (n. 90); *Jñāni*, the “Wise One” (n. 88); *Vedavedya*, the “One who is celebrated for [recovering] the Vedas/Knower of the Vedas” (n. 32); and, *Śrutimaya*, the “One who consists of *śruti* (Vedas)” (n. 76). Likewise, there are names which reflect Hayagrīva’s association with speech/mantra, such as *Vākpati*, the “Lord of speech” (n. 91); *Jāpakapryakṛta*, the “Benefactor of those who recite *japa*³⁹” (n. 66); *Japapriya*, the “One who is fond of *japa*” (n. 64); and, *Japastuti*, the “One who is praised by *japa*” (n. 65).

Interestingly, there is also an interplay of Hayagrīva with the swan, a pan-Indian

³⁹ *Japa* means muttered prayer.

symbol of wisdom and learning. In order to emphasize the greatness of Hayagrīva as the Lord of learning, Hayagrīva is called *Hamsa*, “Swan” (n. 99) and *Paramahamsa*, the “Supreme Swan” (n. 100). As seen in the previous chapter, the rituals for Hayagrīva at the temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram replaced the rituals for Sarasvatī the pan-Indian goddess of learning who is symbolized by the swan.

Finally, there are names which are iconographical in content. For instance, Hayagrīva’s name *Suddhasphaṭikasamkāśa*, “One whose [lustre] is similar to pure crystal” (n. 104), an image found in several Āgamic texts. Hayagrīva is, likewise, called *Akṣamālājñānamudrāyuktahasta*, the “One who has a hand in the position of wisdom and a hand holding the rosary” (n. 49). Once again, this description of the icon of Hayagrīva is contained in several of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas.

Although *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcānā* contains names for Hayagrīva which are included in the *Mahābhārata’s Thousand Names of Viṣṇu*, other names not contained in that listing reflect the specific nature and role of Hayagrīva in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. And, even though many names are “new/different” epithets, the names contained in this text establish Hayagrīva as Supreme. Hayagrīva is clearly regarded as a “full” incarnation of Viṣṇu, a status made evident by a variety of epithets such as *Mahāviṣṇu* “Great/Supreme Viṣṇu” (n. 2) and *Viṣvambhara* “all-Supporting” (n. 8), *Nirīśa* “One who has no lord over Him” (n. 16), *Para* “Highest One” (n. 43), and *Cidānandamaya* “One who is made of *cit*⁴⁰ and *ānanda*” (n. 22).

⁴⁰ *Cit* according to Upaniṣadic and Advaitic understanding is “consciousness”. *Cit* according to Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta refers to “sentient beings”, which is one of the three eternal realities (Īśvara and *acit* are the other two). Īśvara is the Inner Controller of *cit*.

Several of the one-hundred and eight names of Hayagrīva also reflect the positive description of the Supreme as possessing infinite auspicious qualities. He is referred to as *Nirañjana* “eternally Taintless” (n. 18), *Niṣkaṣaṇka* “Taintless One” (n. 19), and *Vimala* “Pure One” (n. 68), reflecting His wholly pure nature. The theological grounds for this text to be regarded as a Śrī Vaiṣṇava one celebrating the status of the deity is that it is based on two attributes of Hayagrīva: (1) supremacy and (2) purity. According to the theology of God established by the most eminent Śrī Vaiṣṇava teacher (Rāmānuja), Viṣṇu is consistently portrayed as *wholly benevolent* and *wholly taintless (amalarva)*.⁴¹

One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva is written in an authoritative literary genres (*nāmāvali*) that derives its legitimacy from its supposed origin in the Vedic tradition, which it imitates. The hymn is based on the *nāmāvali* or *nāmastotra* from the “Fifth Veda” (*Mahābhārata*). By way of content and genre, it appears to be employed for the purpose of the celebration of Hayagrīva’s status as Supreme God who is wholly taintless (*amalarva*). It is important to note, however, that the *Mahābhārata’s Thousand Names of Viṣṇu* does not contain any names reflecting the taintless nature of Viṣṇu.⁴² By way of contrast, the *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā* contains such names. Even though this hymn demonstrates the employment of a pan-Indian literary genre, it does so explicitly within the context of Rāmānuja’s, and in general the Śrī Vaiṣṇava, theology of God.

Unlike *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā* which reflects the employment

⁴¹ *Śrī Bhāṣya* 3.2.5.20. See Nayar, “The Tamilizing of a Sacred Sanskrit Text”, pp. 193-198.

⁴² Nayar, *Poetry As Theology*, p. 83.

of an authoritative “mainstream” literary genre, the next three Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns are based directly on Āgamic ritual: the giving of the mantra (the fourth rite in *pañca-saṁskāra*),⁴³ of *prapatti* “self-surrender” (fifth rite of *pañca-saṁskāra*), and the daily ritual of *abhigamana* (approaching the deity).

***Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*⁴⁴ (In Praise of the Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra)**

Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti reflects the influence of Pāñcarātra ritual on Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. The receiving of the *mūla-mantra* (principal, primary, or fundamental mantra),⁴⁵ which contains the name Nārāyaṇa and is known as the *tiru-mantra*,⁴⁶ is the fourth rite in *pañca-saṁskāra*.⁴⁷ Although in Śrī Vaiṣṇava initiation rites, the *mūla-*

⁴³ *Pañca-saṁskāra* is comprised of five simple rites of initiation into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition (also known as the Śrī Vaiṣṇava sacraments): (1) *tāpa*, the application by branding the *cakra* and *śaṅkha* emblems on the shoulders; (2) *pundra*, the application of the forehead marks with white clay on the initiate; (3) *nāma*, naming the initiate as *Viṣṇu-dāsa* (“servant of Viṣṇu”); (4) *mantra*, the preceptor gives the esoteric Vaiṣṇava *mantras* to the initiate; and, finally, (5) *ijyā*, the initiate receives instruction in the formal worship of God (icon or *śālagrama* stones). Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, pp. 307-311.

The Vaikhāṇasa Āgamic tradition does not formally practice the *pañca-saṁskāra* because it is not prescribed in their treatises. However, the Vaikhāṇasa belief is that the child of a woman who is eight months pregnant receives the marks directly from Nārāyaṇa. Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 308.

⁴⁴ *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva-Paṣalam* (compiled by G.D. Somani) (Bombay: n.p., n.d.), pp. 31-34.

⁴⁵ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 826.

⁴⁶ “Om̐, Salutations to Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu)” (*Om̐ namo nārāyaṇāya*).

⁴⁷ *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (1.34) and *Nārada Purāṇa* (3.72) mention the worship of Hayagrīva with the *mūla-mantra*:

He shall repeat the following mystic words, “*udgīrat Om̐ udgītha sarvavāgīśvara*”, then he shall repeat *sarvavedamaya* (O deity identical with all the Vedas) *acintya* (the inconceivable) *sarvam bodhayam bodhaya* (enlighten, enlighten everything). The *mantra* begins with *tāra* (*Om̐*). Its sage is Brahmā, the metre is *anustup* and the deity is Hayagrīva, the lord who bestows speech and prosperity.

He shall conceive the five *aṅgas* by uttering *Om̐* and the (four) quarters of the *mantra*. He shall then meditate on the deity--“I salute the *Horse-faced lord* whose lustre is equal to that of the snow-capped mountain, who is bedecked in garlands and *tulasī* leaves and whose high region is that of speech...(Nārada Purāṇa 3.72.32-36).

After worshipping the *Horse-faced deity* thus for fifteen times he shall become equal to the lord of speech in fluency of speech and the lord of wealth by means of his riches.

When the *mantra* has been achieved thus the repeater of the *mantra* can apply it to

mantra is concerned with Nārāyaṇa, *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*, imitative of that mantra, is concerned with Hayagrīva. This hymn has as its subject the praise of the Hayagrīva *mūla-mantra* and asserts His supremacy.

Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti is similar to *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara*,⁴⁸ in that the hymn consists of both salutations and requests for the attainment of worldly fruits, rather than for protection (as in the *kavacas*).⁴⁹ According to *Yatīndramatadīpika*, there are two types of *prapannas* (devotees who have performed *prapatti* “surrender”): (1) *ekāntin*, one who seeks refuge (*śaraṇam*) with Viṣṇu for both liberation and worldly fruits, and (2) *parama-ekāntin*, one who desires only knowledge of, and devotion to, God.⁵⁰ *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* is continuous with the notion of the first type (even though for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas the *parama-ekāntin* is the preferred type of devotee). This hymn, then, reflects the popular element in its emphasis on worldly fruits. It asks both for the removal of evil, such as demons, and for the provision of good health and fortune (v. 4). Some stanzas describe Hayagrīva in words that would appear to be imitative of Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*: “Salutations, to the Great Horse-headed One whose radiance shines like a crystal bulb of red coral” (v. 13). Most significantly, there is a stanza in the hymn that is taken directly from a stanza in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* (v. 4):

practical purpose. He shall charge pure water with the *mantra* one thousand and eight times and for a month with the *mūla-mantra* (*Nārada Purāṇa* 3.72.46-48).

⁴⁸ *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* is discussed in Chapter VIII. For a translation this religious text, see Appendix III.

⁴⁹ *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha* and *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* are discussed in Chapter VIII. For a translation of these two religious texts, see Appendix III.

⁵⁰ *Yatīndramatadīpika* 8.22.

[As] the dawn [arises]
 [in] the east
 after any night,
 [so] the new light [shines out]
 from the black collyrium [-lined] eye of wisdom.

May the incarnation of Vāsudeva,
 the Expounder of the Vedas,
 who is called the Lord of Speech,
 and has the face of a horse
 appear before me! (v. 15)

The insertion of Vedānta Deśika's stanza in this popular hymn attests to the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas' great esteem for Vedānta Deśika and his *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Although this would be considered as plagiarism in the West, according to traditional Indian thought it honors the one from whom the words have been lifted.

The last stanza of *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*, although not following the classical form of a *phala-śruti* (fruits of reciting the text) does, however, make the claim that Hayagrīva destroys inner darkness and provides everything to His devotees. This can be interpreted to mean that Hayagrīva grants both the material and the spiritual desires of a devotee. Similar to Vedānta Deśika's poem, Hayagrīva here has a dual role as the giver of boons and *mokṣa*, and thus He has the status of Supreme.

***Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti*⁵¹ (Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī)**

The devotee in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is obligated to perform a series of rituals daily after *prapatti* and in complete service to Viṣṇu. The concept of *prapatti* (self-surrender) comes from the Sanskrit verb root *pra+pad* "to throw oneself down, to surrender".⁵²

⁵¹ *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, p. 110.

⁵² Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 682.

Based on the Āgamas, Vedānta Deśika advocates the six-fold discipline of surrender to God, the final step being *ātma-nikṣepa*, the act of total surrender to the care of God.⁵³

Vedānta Deśika refers to *Jayākhya Samhitā* 22.68, which divides the day into five parts, with the daily religious routine outlined accordingly. This routine to be performed daily is called the *pañcakāla-prakriyā* (five daily religious duties): (1) *abhigamana* (morning prayer), (2) *upadāna* (collection of materials for worship), (3) *ijyā* (worship of God), (4) *svādhyāya* (recitation/study of sacred lore), and (5) *yoga* (contemplation of God).

Prapatti and *kainkarya*, the state of total service to God which follows it, are central to Śrī Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*; that is, they constitute the salvific act of devotion to God. *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (*Surrender to Hayagrīva Accompanied by Lakṣmī*), a hymn of twelve stanzas, is an expression of the devotee's surrender to Hayagrīva. Each stanza begins with the verse "I bow down to the God Hayagrīva who is my refuge" (*śaranyam devam hayagrīvamahaṃ prapadye*). According to Śrī Vaiṣṇava thought, the devotee can take refuge only with the Supreme and full form of God, and thus here the "fullness" of Viṣṇu's form as Hayagrīva is once again affirmed.⁵⁴ The act of *prapatti* is performed before an icon and, accordingly, this type of hymn is specifically meant to be recited in the presence of an icon. In fact, just as the *Hayagrīva Stotra* explicitly affirmed the *antaryāmin*, so this hymn takes for granted the iconic form of Hayagrīva as Supreme. Both of these are examples of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu as He appears in various forms at specific places, all of which are of equal status

⁵³ *Rahasya Traya Sāra* XI.

⁵⁴ Pillai Lokācārya, *Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇa of Pillai Lokācārya* (translation by Robert C. Lester) (Madras: The Kuppaswamy Shastri Research Institute, 1979).

(*topotheism*).

The hymn also refers to the myth of the malevolent act of the stealing of the Vedas by the demons Madhu and Kaitābha, who sprung from two drops from the lotus that arose out of Viṣṇu's navel.

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

the forms Madhu and Kaitābha
both arose out of the two drops of nectar
[arising out of the Lord's navel]
which fell out of the stem of the lotus
[giving them] the qualities of *rajas* and *tamas*,
which caused them to steal the Vedas.(v.5)

This reference parallels the story found in both the *Mahābhārata* (12.335.1-64) and the *Hayagrīva Samhitā* (chapter 1), which relate this particular detailed story of Hayagrīva's *avatāric* form. It shows that, while the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition regards *Hayagrīva Stotra* as the basic text, it does move beyond it to original sources. The hymn also praises Hayagrīva as the full form of God who bestows knowledge and guides devotees towards *mokṣa*, à la Vedānta Deśika:

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who is the Lord of Learning
Madhusūdana (Slayer of Madhu)
the One who provides the interest
in the highest goal of *mokṣa*
to those who are born in this world. (v.7)

Similar to the *Hayagrīva Stotra* and *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*, Hayagrīva is described in this hymn as having the dual role of Granter of boons and *mokṣa*.

Whereas in the *Hayagrīva Stotra* there was only an implicit understanding of

Hayagrīva's iconic form, with the greater emphasis on mental concentration, the final stanza (*dhyāna-śloka*) of this hymn clearly describes Hayagrīva as *arcā-avatāra* accompanied by Śrī Lakṣmī:

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who, seated on the white lotus,
bears in His hands the conch (*dara*), wheel (*cakra*), book (*kośa*)
and has the hand position of exposition (*vyākhyāna-mudrā*)
[and] who has Lakṣmī, the form of knowledge (*vidyās*),
on His left side. (v. 12)

Following Vedānta Deśika's *Śata Dūṣaṇī* (*sūtra* 42), the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva are more commonly of the deity accompanied by Lakṣmī. This is also evident at the Swāmi Hayagrīva temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram, wherein Hayagrīva-Lakṣmī is the presiding deity (*arcā-avatāra*).

Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana⁵⁵ (Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva)

The term for the ritual act of *abhigamana* comes from the Sankrit verbal root *abhi+gam* which means "to go near, to approach".⁵⁶ The literal meaning of *abhigamana* is "approaching", and the *abhigamana* ritual refers to the act of approaching God with devotion each morning. It is the first of the five obligatory daily rituals that a Śrī Vaiṣṇava must perform. After bathing and drawing the Śrī Vaiṣṇava mark representing the feet of Viṣṇu on his/her forehead, the devotee starts the day by "approaching" God (either in a temple or at the home shrine) in order to seek His grace and in order to be able to fulfil his/her daily religious duties properly. This discipline is the devotee's

⁵⁵ *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, pp. 107-109.

⁵⁶ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 61.

demonstration of complete subservience and reliance upon the Supreme. For the devotee, it is the daily re-enactment of the salvific surrender (*prapatti*) of the ego to Viṣṇu.

Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana is a thirteen-stanza hymn that describes Hayagrīva as an *avatāra* whom one is to approach with great devotion. As with the aforementioned *Śrī Hayavadana Prapatti*, the hymn is meant to be recited in front of an icon. The first stanza describes the approaching of Hayagrīva thus:

I approach with devotion (*abhigamana*) the One
who is [born] from the body of Aniruddha,
has the nature of strength,
is the destroyer of the difficulties of Brahmā,
is the Lord of Lakṣmī
and has the form of the neck of a horse (Hayagrīva). (v. 1)

This stanza not only refers to Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas (that is, as the destroyer of Brahmā's difficulties), but it further depicts Hayagrīva as accompanied by Lakṣmī. This text is continuous with *Viṣvaksena Saṁhitā* (chapter 13), as the hymn also describes Him as having sprung out from Viṣṇu's *vyūha* Aniruddha. Yet, Hayagrīva's theological status herein is devoid of the ambiguities contained in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. Rather, this hymn is consistent with Vedānta Deśika's depictions of Hayagrīva as the full form of Lord Viṣṇu.

The stanza that follows is in the form of a *suprabhāta* (an auspicious good morning),⁵⁷ which is recited at the time of the awakening of the Lord as if the icon is a living being. This stanza is based on Tiruppalliyēlucchi by Periyālvār.

At this time,
destroying the darkness,
the sun causes the blooming of all lotuses

⁵⁷ *Śrī Venkaṭeśvara Suprabhātam* is perhaps the most famous Hindu temple hymn. It is recited to awaken Lord Venkaṭeśvara at the Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh.

and awakens everyone
with His own [rays],
[we] set out for the One,
seated on the white lotus,
to praise and fix [our hearts] upon Him.

O, auspicious morning (*suprabhāta*) to You
Lord with the face of a horse. (v. 2)

Two stanzas of *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana* make explicit reference to the Epic and Purāṇic myth of the benevolent *avatāra* who recovers the Vedas from Madhu and Kaiṭabha: “the feet of the glorious Horse-faced One which carefully wandered about searching for Madhu and Kaiṭabha in the ocean, recovered the Vedas, and with reverence disseminated them” (v. 4), and “having killed the thieves Madhu and Kaiṭabha, and having restored the Vedas quickly [to Brahmā], You were able to protect the entire world” (v. 6).

As in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*, this text, although containing a couple of references to the benevolent Hayagrīva myth, has many more depictions of His association with wisdom and speech.

The mind races like a monkey
overpowered by external senses.
How can I meditate upon You, lustrous Horse-faced One?

Hayagrīva’s word (holy verse) is
sweet, excellent and auspicious,
superior to the abounding and continuous flow
of the heavenly Ganges
in the most splendid pilgrimage place. (v. 8)

Although He is praised for bestowing the power of speech, Hayagrīva is also described as removing the difficulties of His devotees and the other “lower” gods. The final stanza (*phala-śruti*) states that those who concentrate on the deity by reciting this hymn will

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UMI

Tiruvahīndrapuram, the more recent construction of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple on Auṣadhagiri, and the spread elsewhere of devotion to Vedānta Deśika (among Vāṭakalais)—all these have made for a strong local tradition of devotion to Hayagrīva. That this local tradition spread to other localities and regions is evidenced by the Hayagrīva image at the Vedānta Deśika temple at Madurai and the temple inscription at the Swāmi Hayagrīva temple concerning a donor from Rajasthan.

According to T.K. Piran, Hayagrīva became popular among the Vāṭakalais because of Vedānta Deśika and his *Hayagrīva Stotra*, and this study reveals no evidence to the contrary.⁵⁹ Though the people of Tiruvahīndrapuram and the greater South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu have a deep devotion to Hayagrīva and believe Him to be a powerful god who fulfils all worldly desires and even gives *mokṣa*, the popularity of Hayagrīva has for the most part remained local.

In Tamil Nadu, Hayagrīva was seldom represented in stone or metal before the 12th or 13th century. According to Champalaksmi, one of the panels on the northern wall of the central shrine of Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl Temple (ca. 8th century C.E.) in Kāñcīpuram contains a representation of Hayagrīva in the standing position with His upper left and right hands carrying the *śaṅkha* and the *cakra*; His lower left hand is in the *kātyāvalambita* position (the lower right hand is damaged). Above the horse-headed figures are four other figures that are believed to be the representations of the four Vedas. And, there is in front of Hayagrīva an image who some have identified as the sage Agastya (before whom Hayagrīva appears to teach, according to chapter 5 in the *Lalitā*

⁵⁹ Information from T.K. Piran.

Māhātmya, and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*).⁶⁰ Likewise, there is an image of Hayagrīva at the Varadarāja Perumāḷ Temple at Kāñcīpuram wherein he has two arms in the position of *nāmaskāra* (greeting or reverence). Again, there is facing Hayagrīva a figure who has been identified as Sage Agastya. There is a small shrine in a maṇḍapa in the Raṅganātha Perumāḷ Temple at Śrī Raṅgam. Here, Hayagrīva has four arms: two bearing the *śaṅkha* (conch shell) and *cakra* (discus), and the other two in the hand position (*mudrā*) of *abhaya* (fearlessness) and *varada* (boon-bestowing).

Later representations (after 13th century C.E.) of Hayagrīva in stone or metal show him with four arms (1) in the *yogāsana* position, carrying the *śaṅkha* and *cakra* in the upper hands, with the lower hands reposed on his knees bound by a *yogapāṭṭa*, or (2) the *lalitesana* position, with Lakṣmī on His left, carrying the *cakra* and *śaṅkha* in His upper hands with His right lower hand in the *vyākhyāna-mudrā* (hand position of exposition).⁶¹

Although there are several early images of Hayagrīva during the time of the Āḷvārs in Tamil Nadu, they were never central. The lack of images of Hayagrīva is to be expected, based on the fact that many of the Purāṇas and Āgamas do not present the horse-headed figure as a presiding deity in any of the temples and classify Him as a minor or secondary form. However, one may ask: if Hayagrīva was so central to Vedānta Deśika—who was subsequently viewed as the most important Ācārya of the Vāṭakalai sect of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism—and to the people of the region in and around

⁶⁰ Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in the Tamil Country*, pp. 164-165.

⁶¹ Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in the Tamil Country*, pp. 164-165.

Tiruvahīndrapuram, why is there relatively little visibility of Hayagrīva in temples in other areas of Tamil Nadu? One important reason may be that many temples are actually under the control of Tenkalais, who not only do not follow the tradition of Vedānta Deśika, but actually look down upon it. It is also important to note that, according to the *Vaṭakalai Guruparamparā Prabhāvam* (3000), Vedānta Deśika himself does not appear to have been much involved with temple activities in any of the places he lived, nor did he attract a large audience with his public religious discourses.⁶²

Hayagrīva shrines are not commonly found in South Indian Vaiṣṇava temples *per se* because of the tension between the Vaṭakalai and Tenkalai sects of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Although the Tenkalai Ācāryas dominate the temple scene, the Ācāryas of the Vaṭakalai sect emphasize the intellectual aspect of the tradition, as did Vedānta Deśika himself. Hayagrīva was popularized through the recitation of Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* and especially by his association with Tiruvahīndrapuram. This led to the building of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple in that *divya-deśa*. Furthermore, unlike the Tenkalais, the Vaṭakalais' involvement in temple building and administration is a relatively recent phenomenon.⁶³ The Śrī Raṅgam Temple, the heart of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, is the main temple for the Tenkalai sect. By way of contrast, the Vaṭakalai sect has only in the last one to two hundred years (18th century, around the time of the actual split in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism) been in control of several temples, such as the Varadarāja Temple at Kāñcīpuram (the birth place of Vedānta Deśika) and the Devanātha and Hayagrīva

⁶² *Guruparamparā Prabhāvam of Brahmatantra Svatantra Jīyar*, pp. 145-151.; Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute*, p. 13.

⁶³ Venkatachari, *The Manipravāḷa Literature Of The Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, pp. 165-166.

Temples at Tiruvahindrapuram, where Vedānta Deśika performed penance, attained wisdom, and experienced the grace of Hayagrīva.

There is a relatively recent Vedānta Deśika Temple in Madurai which has Hayagrīva-Lakṣmī as the main icon at the entrance tower gate. Similarly, R.S. Chari, IAS, a retired chief secretary of Pondicherry state, and devotee of Hayagrīva “because He is the God of Vedānta Deśika”, has recently (1980s) built a Hayagrīva Temple in Pondicherry. According to his wife, Mrs. Chari, “the *Hayagrīva Stotra* is fundamental to the worship of Hayagrīva and Hayagrīva is an important God because of Vedānta Deśika”.⁶⁴ Chari built the modern temple in Rāmakṛṣṇapuram, Pondicherry (Muthiyalpettai—old name of the greater area of Rāmakṛṣṇapuram). The main icon is the Yoga-Hayagrīva, but the temple is filled with many different icons and pictures of Hayagrīva.

CONCLUSION

Although there are several references to Hayagrīva in South Indian literature prior to Vedānta Deśika and His image is found in several temples, Hayagrīva became more popular in Tamil Nadu only after Vedānta Deśika’s experience of the grace of Hayagrīva and his composition of the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Vedānta Deśika not only popularized the horse-headed deity among Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, but he also depicted Him as a “full form” of God who can be approached for both mundane fruits and for *mokṣa*. Post-Vedānta Deśika Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotion to Hayagrīva is even more explicit and continues the Śrī

⁶⁴ Interview with Mrs. R.S. Chari at Pondicherry, January 24, 1997, who kindly showed me the Hayagrīva temple at Ramakṛṣṇapuram.

Vaiṣṇava *topotheistic* conceptualization of Hayagrīva. Hayagrīva is revered as the “full form” of Viṣṇu, with Whom one may even take refuge in His form as *arcā-avatāra*.

Once only an auxiliary icon present in Tiruvahīndrapuram’s Devanātha Temple, Hayagrīva was subsequently honoured by a separate temple (built ca. 1667 C.E.) in which He, accompanied by His consort Śrī Lakṣmī, is the presiding deity. The shorter Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns analyzed in this chapter, appropriate as they are for iconic worship, take for granted Hayagrīva’s status as a full form of Viṣṇu incarnated in an icon. The hymns explicitly describe Hayagrīva as a form with the same ontological status as Viṣṇu, whether in the heart/mind or as icon.

This last point will be further highlighted in Chapter VIII, which provides an analysis of the short hymns that follow the Āgamic tradition but are used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. I demonstrate there how there is fluidity between the local Śrī Vaiṣṇava development of the worship of Hayagrīva as Supreme and the pan-Indian (sectarian) Āgamic genres.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLUIDITY BETWEEN TANTRIC AND NON-TANTRIC HINDU BELIEF AND PRACTICE: HAYAGRĪVA IN FOUR SHORT ĀGAMIC RITUAL TEXTS

There are four short pan-Indian ritual texts concerned with Hayagrīva that have been heavily influenced by Vedic and Tantric literary genres, filtered through the Āgamic tradition.¹ These four Āgamic ritual texts used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are: (1) *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*, (2) *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha* (*Beginning of Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective] Shield*), (3) *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* (*Another Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective] Shield*), and (4) *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* (*Śrī Hayagrīva Cage*). [All quotations are based on my own original translations, which form Appendix III]. These ritual texts on Hayagrīva are imitative of literary genres well known to mainstream Hinduism (such as the Upaniṣads), and of those typical of the Āgamic tradition (such as the *kavaca* and *Pañjara*).

As frequently found in the Hindu tradition, these works, too, are viewed as unauthored, implying that they are of divine origin. Although it is difficult to date the texts, they are certainly post-Epic.² Most significantly, although the ritual hymns are in Āgamic (pan-Indian sectarian) genres, they are used and published by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. Even though speculative, they are likely to have been composed in Tamil Nadu after Vedānta Deśika and the establishment of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple; that is, the Āgamic compositions most likely are posterior to the regional establishment of the worship of Hayagrīva as the presiding deity at the temple.

¹ See “Indian Tantra” below for the differentiation of the Tantric and Āgamic traditions.

² There are references to figures in these devotional texts that have originally come from the Epic literature. For example, in *Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* there is a reference to Hanumān “[May] the One who is served by the powerful monkey chief, Hanumān [protect my] throat” (v.10).

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of the ritual texts on Hayagrīva that follow the Āgamic tradition. The second part consists of an analysis of Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* in the light of these ritual texts. This treatment as a whole, in the first instance, demonstrates how generic literary genres are used to celebrate late sectarian themes (such as the development of Hayagrīva as the "full" incarnation of Viṣṇu) in order to present them as well established within mainstream Hinduism. Secondly, the analysis of these compositions sheds light on a two-fold process that one can observe within the Tamil religious milieu: (1) the dual lineage and relation between the Ācārya and *arcaka* in the Tamil temple scene; and, more importantly, (2) the process, in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, that I call the "personalization" of the Āgamic tradition of mantra. Certainly, unlike these ritual hymns, Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional attitude towards *mantra*. These texts reflect an Āgamic form of devotion. But, unlike the references to Hayagrīva in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (as seen in Chapter IV), these compositions depict Hayagrīva as *Protector of His devotees* and, more significantly, consistently *establish Him as Supreme* (in line with Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology). However, these Āgamic texts differ from the *Hayagrīva Stotra* in that they do not contain the distinctive Āḷvār/Śrī Vaiṣṇava emotionalism.

OVERVIEW OF THE SHORT TEXTS ON HAYAGRĪVA FOLLOWING THE ĀGAMIC TRADITION

Indian Tantra

The word *tantra* literally means "essential part, thread or loom".³ It refers to a

³The word *tantra* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *tan* "to shine, extend, spread, spin out,

lineage of gurus through whom the disciple is given the secret teachings of a particular sect. Tantric literature is comprised of a huge number of texts. According to Andre Padoux, there are four general statements about the historical development of Tantrism that can be made with some certainty: (1) although there are Tantric elements in Vedic and Brāhmāṇic literature, the Tantric tradition is a later development, (2) Tantra took shape around the 1st century C.E., (3) Hindu Tantra preceded Buddhist Tantra, and lastly (4) Tantra was well established by the 6th-7th century and flourished during the 8th century to 14th century.⁴

The Tantric religious path is a practical one that entails specific rituals and meditative techniques in order to attain spiritual realization. There are various modes of worship in Tantra, including: (1) chanting the mantra (meditative syllable), (2) meditation using the *yantra* (meditative diagram), (3) *pūjā* (worship offering), (4) *homa* (sacrificial offering), (5) recitation of the *kavaca* ([protective] shield), (6) chanting of the *hrdya* (essence [hymn]), (7) recitation of *nāmastotra* (praise-poem of names), and (8) chanting of the *pañjara* ([protective]-cage).⁵ The Tantric practice of recitation of sacred syllables and texts is central to the religious path for the purpose of (1) self-purification, (2) self-consecration, and, finally, (3) visualization of the deity.⁶

manifest". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 435-436.

⁴ Andre Padoux, "Tantrism", in *Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol. 14, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987), p. 275.

⁵ Benard, *Chinnamastā*, pp. 23-46.

⁶ Although the Hindu and Buddhist Tantric practices are quite similar, their goals differ. In Hindu Tantra, the goal is the merging of one's *ātman* with *brahman* (or the attainment of union with one's particular deity), while in Buddhist Tantra the goal is to quickly achieve buddhahood. Benard, *Chinnamastā*, pp. 77-78.

Traditionally, only a few individuals were formally initiated into a particular Tantric sect in order to receive the secret teachings. Nevertheless, Tantra is central to the study of the development of Indian traditions because it has had a major influence on non-Tantric traditions within Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. There are many Tantric elements to be found in traditions that regard themselves as Vedic. This mutual borrowing makes it difficult at times to clearly distinguish what has its origins in Tantra and what does not.

Similarities exist between Vedic and Tantric meditative and ritual practices; the most important of these is the equation of *śabda* (speech/word/sound) with divine cosmic energy. The concept of *śabda* is both the means to, and the goal of, spiritual attainment. Mantra means “instrument of speech, sacred sound, sacrificial formula, prayer”,⁷ derived from the Sanskrit verb root *man* “to think, believe, imagine, conjecture”.⁸ The most popular and least complex form of worship—the chanting of mantras—is related to this notion of speech. Although both the Vedic and Tantric traditions use mantras, there is some divergence in their respective understanding of them. The various conceptions of mantra have been studied by scholars, and these form the subject of the next section.

The Hindu Understanding of Mantra

Several articles have been published comparing the understanding of mantra in the various streams of Hindu thought. However, scholars disagree radically among themselves as to the nature and function of mantra in the various traditions. In his article

⁷ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 785-786.

⁸ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 783.

“Vedic Mantras”,⁹ Fritz Staal concludes that the “alleged differences” between the Vedic and the Tantric mantras do not exist. According to his theory of mantra, “it is not possible to make a systematic distinction between Vedic, Tantric, and other Hindu mantras.”¹⁰ Although some mantras are closer to ordinary language and others are devoid of translatory meaning, functionally they are identical. Staal claims that even though Puranic mantras can be understood literally (unlike the Tantric *bīja-mantras*), they are actually named according to their number of syllables; that is, both Vedic *stobhas*¹¹ and Tantric *bīja-mantras* are constructed in accordance with the phonological rules of Sanskrit.¹²

Contrary to Staal’s claim, in his article “The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual”¹³ Wade Wheelock recognizes both similarities and differences between Vedic and Tantric conceptions of mantra. However, he concludes that there is a basic underlying difference between the Vedic and Tantric understanding of mantra. Whereas the Vedic mantras are regarded as eternal, the Tantric mantras are regarded as having been created within time.

In her article “The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra”,¹⁴ Sanjukta Gupta

⁹ Fritz Staal, “Vedic Mantras”, in *Mantra*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 48-95.

¹⁰ Staal, “Vedic Mantras”, p. 63.

¹¹ *Stobha* is a chanted interjection, contained particularly in the *Sāma Veda*.

¹² Staal, “Vedic Mantras”, p. 63.

¹³ Wade T. Wheelock, “The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual”, in *Mantra*, pp. 98-122.

¹⁴ Gupta, “The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra”, pp. 224-48.

distinguishes the nature and functions of the mantra in the Vedic, Tantric and Pāñcarātric traditions. The purpose of the utterance of mantras is single-minded concentration, while performing the worship (*pūjā*) rituals, on the mantras and the divinities of which they are the primary form. For Pāñcarātrins, mantra—the sonic manifestation of God—is the link between the devotee and his or her God. The power a Pāñcarātrin derives from his or her mantra is understood to be solely the fruit of God's grace. According to Pāñcarātra Āgamic thought, mantras, God's forms assumed out of grace, are the very embodiments of that grace.¹⁵

In her study of Rāmānuja's two immediate disciples Kūreśa and Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, Nancy Ann Nayar looks at the relation between mantra and *stotra* (praise-poem) within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. She demonstrates how the three streams of the tradition (the Sanskrit Vedas, the Tamil Vedas, and the Pāñcarātra Āgamas) were synthesized by developing a multidimensional view of mantra, linking mantra closely with *stotra*. Although the Pāñcarātra Āgamic texts tend to be very ritualistic in outlook (emphasizing subjects such as the construction of temples, installation of icons, temple worship and the like), they are also concerned with esoteric matters, such as the nature of the Absolute, cosmogony, and the creative nature of sound, word, and mantra. According to Nayar, the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas appear to have expanded the Pāñcarātric practice of regarding *stotras* as mantras in order to endow the poems with prestige and potency. The significance given to the liturgical recitation of *stotras* within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *pūjā* (worship) ceremony is directly linked to the community's devotional orientation. The use

¹⁵ Gupta, "The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra", p. 224.

of mantra is central to ritual described in the early “classical” Pāñcarātra Āgamas, whereas the later texts place an increasing emphasis on the recitation of *stotras*. Indeed, Bhaṭṭar distinguishes mantra from *stotra* solely on the basis of the reciter’s intentions: it is called a mantra if it is recited for the attainment of specific fruits, whereas it is called a *stotra* if it is recited for pure delight.¹⁶

Even as there are differences in the Vedic and Tantric concept and usage of mantras, there is also ambiguity about the relation between mainstream Hindu traditions and Tantric traditions. Due to the negative attitude and disrespect attached to some of the Tantric practices (such as eating meat and religio-sexual practices), Pāñcarātrins have tended to disassociate Pāñcarātra from Tantra. On the other hand, the word Tantra is sometimes used interchangeably with Āgama,¹⁷ and the Pāñcarātra Āgamic tradition definitely contains ritual practices influenced by Tantra. According to Gonda, the medieval ritual manuals of both the Vaikhānasa and the Pāñcarātra Āgamic traditions contain popular Tantric elements, for instance, the use of *yantras* and *bija-mantras*.¹⁸ After the medieval period, even more Tantric elements were incorporated into their ritual manuals,¹⁹ including the practice of *nyāsa*.²⁰

¹⁶ Nayar, *Poetry as Theology*, pp. 22-24.

¹⁷ Pandit M. Duraiswamy Aiyangar and Pandit T. Venugopalacharya, *Śrī Pāñcarātrarakṣā of Vedānta Deśika* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967), pp. vii-xii.

¹⁸ *Bija-mantras* (seed mantra) is the *mantra* used in the worship of a particular deity, and is regarded as a component part of the *yantraic* form of the deity.

¹⁹ Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, p. 143.

²⁰ See “*Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*” and “*Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha*” for the description and incorporation of the practice of *nyāsa*.

The four ritual texts about Hayagrīva used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are Āgamic in content. The texts allow for the worship of Hayagrīva as the Supreme in the temple milieu. Apart from Elizabeth Anne Benard's study on the goddess *Chinnamastā*,²¹ little has been done by way of scholarly studies on the subject of these genres (Tantric Upaniṣads, *kavacas* and *pañjaras*). Therefore, it is important to open up the study of the Āgamic ritual texts. Because little has been written, this chapter is more descriptive than analytical (as compared to the other chapters).

Literary Genres Imitative of Authoritative Texts: The Motives for Vedicization and Celebration

A common occurrence observed in sectarian Hindu traditions is the imitative employment of traditional authoritative literary genres to "Vedicize" new religious developments. This appears to have happened with the literary genre of the Upaniṣad. And, indeed, one has been composed about Hayagrīva as an important *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. An attempt was evidently made to relate the deity back to the Vedas.

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad²²

The ten²³ or thirteen²⁴ principal "classical" Upaniṣads form the last portion of the

²¹ Benard, *Chinnamastā: The Aweful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess*.

²² *Upaniṣat-saṃgrahah* (edited by J.L. Shastri) (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), pp. 619-621; *Śrī Śrilakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, pp. 12-14; *Aṣṭa Śrī Hayagrīva-Pañjalam*, pp. 23-30.

²³ The ten classical Upaniṣads are: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, *Kena Upaniṣad*, *Kātha Upaniṣad*, *Īśa Upaniṣad*, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, *Praśna Upaniṣad*, *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*. See *Upaniṣat-Saṃgrahah*; N.S. Subramanian, *Encyclopedia of the Upaniṣads* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985), pp. vii.

²⁴ The additional three of the "thirteen" classical principal Upaniṣads are: *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*. *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* (translation by Robert Ernest Hume) (2nd. ed., reprinted; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Veda (Veda+*anta* = Vedānta) belonging to the late Vedic period (ca. 900-500 B.C.E.), and are regarded as divine revelation (*śruti*, that which is heard). Among the most important and authoritative of the “classical” texts are *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Later on, many smaller “Tantric” and sectarian Upaniṣads, imitative of these mainstream Upaniṣads, were composed, and their subjects include a wide variety of deities. They became popular for the worship of, and meditation upon, the Supreme through the use of key syllables (*bīja-akṣara*) representative of a particular deity.

In the list of 108 Upaniṣads, *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* is the 100th.²⁵ According to N.S. Subramanian, there are 10 major and 25 *sāmānya* classical Upaniṣads, as well as other Upaniṣads that he classifies as Śaiva (14), Śākta (8), Vaiṣṇava (14), Yoga (20) and *samnyāsa* (17).²⁶ *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* is included as one of the fourteen in the Vaiṣṇava category. Interestingly, there are Upaniṣads written about various forms of Viṣṇu, including the Āgamic doctrine of the four *vyūhas* (see *Kṛṣṇa Upaniṣad*).²⁷ Unlike the classical Upaniṣads, these Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads are esoteric, with their hymns completely focused on the mantra of the deity, and they describe the fruits derived by acquiring the knowledge of the mantra.

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad is an example of a brief Tantric Upaniṣad. It is difficult

²⁵ *Upaniṣat-saṃgrahaḥ*, pp. 619

²⁶ Subramanian, *Encyclopedia of the Upaniṣads*, pp. vii-xi.

²⁷ Tāra-sāra; Avyakta; Nārāyaṇa; Kṛṣṇa; Kali-saṅtaraṇa; Vāsudeva; Dattātreya; Hayagrīva; Garuda; Gopāla-tāpini; Tripād-vibhūti; Rāma-rahasya; Rāma-tāpini; and Nṛsiṃha-tāpini. See Subramanian, *Encyclopedia of the Upaniṣads*, p. ix.

to determine the precise dates of the numerous later Tantric Upaniṣads; however, one can be sure that the short Tantric Upaniṣads are post-Epic (after 200 C.E.) and probably much later still. In fact, the Tantric Upaniṣads were most likely written around the 8th century to 14th century (and later), during which period Hindu Tantrism flourished.²⁸ It would be speculative to determine a precise date for *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*. However, its contents reflect the *mantraic* form of deity which is Āgamic in nature. Vedānta Deśika cites several classical²⁹ and *sāmānya*³⁰ Upaniṣads as proof texts in *Rahasya Traya Sāra*, *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā*, and *Śata Dūṣaṇī*, but he does not cite *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*.

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad is an example of the process of Vedicization, especially with regards to establishing the horse-headed deity as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and connecting him back to the Vedas. It is not only written in an authoritative literary genre, but it also includes key *mahā-vākyas* (great statements) to be used as mantras, such as *tvam asi* (Thou art that) taken directly from one of the most authoritative of the classical Upaniṣads, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7). This imitation of genre and the inclusion of *mahā-vākyas* from the classical Upaniṣads, in effect, connect Hayagrīva with the Vedānta, and thus directly associates Him with *śruti*.

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad, addressed to Hayagrīva, is a text to be recited. It is about the Hayagrīva mantra, which is considered to provide knowledge that should eventually lead to liberation. It is regarded as containing the wisdom necessary for

²⁸ Padoux, "Tantrism", p. 275.

²⁹ Such as the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*.

³⁰ Such as the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*.

mokṣa. Hayagrīva is described as:

... Salutations to You,
whose form is consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*)
whose essential nature is beyond the Universe. (1.1)

Hayagrīva is clearly regarded as Supreme God in the text. Furthermore, He is praised both for His great wisdom and for His action of recovering the Vedas, a myth featured in the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas*. Continuous with His association with the Vedas and speech, He is also depicted as having the form of the Vedas. Hayagrīva is finally depicted as having the form of certain mantras:

Hail!Hail! Salutations to the King of wisdom,
the form of the *Rg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma*,
who [performed] the act of rescoring the Vedas. (1.1)

Salutations to the great One,
who has the head of a horse
whose body is the *Udgītha*³¹ and *Pranava*³². (1.2)

The recitation of the *Upaniṣad*, and meditation upon the mantras provided in the text, are stated to have the potency of purifying even those who are adulterous.³³

Furthermore, *nyāsa*, the Tantric practice of placing a spiritual letter on each body part, is prescribed in *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*. Practiced in order to spiritually transform each part of the body, *nyāsa* purifies the body to make it a suitable receptacle for God. The *Upaniṣad* reads thus:³⁴

Aṅga-nyāsa [placement on the limbs of the body] is to be
done with the syllables *a*, *u*, and *m*. (1.4)

³¹ *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma* Veda.

³² *Pranava* is the sacred syllable *Om*.

³³ *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* II.3.

³⁴ Kane, *History of the Dharmaśāstras*, Vol. 5, Part 2, pp. 1120-1123.

The various mantras are distinguished according to the number of seed syllables (*bija-akṣara*) in each. For example:

The seven syllable [mantra] is *Oṃ namaḥ bhagavat*.

The five syllable [mantra] is Hayagrīva.

The six syllable [mantra] is *mahyam medhām prajñām*. (1.5)

According to the Upaniṣad, the Hayagrīva mantra is *hasum*, and consists of five syllables. The mantras are claimed to have the same meanings as the four popular Upaniṣadic passages on Brahman, the underlying nature of Reality. These four *mahāvākyas* are actually listed in *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*:³⁵ (1) *prajñānam ānandam brahman* (Brahman is consciousness and bliss);³⁶ (2) *tat tvam asi* (Thou art that);³⁷ (3) *ayam ātma brahman* (the soul is Brahman);³⁸ and, lastly, (4) *aham brahmāsmi* (I am Brahman)³⁹.⁴⁰ The understanding of mantra is further established in the Upaniṣad by the inclusion of four Vedic verses.⁴¹ Three of the four verses are taken directly from the *Ṛg Veda* and are concerned with the power of speech. These verses are: (1) *Ṛg Veda Samhitā* 8.100.10; (2) *Ṛg Veda Samhitā* 1.164.41; and (4) *Ṛg Veda Samhitā* 3.53.15. *Ṛg Veda Samhitā* 1.64.41 significantly describes the infallibility of sacred syllables filled with deep meaning.

³⁵ *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* II.4.

³⁶ See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3. 9.28 and *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.3.

³⁷ See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

³⁸ See *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* 2 and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.9.

³⁹ See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10.

⁴⁰ Gajanana Sadhele, *Upaniṣad-vākya-mahā-kośa* (Delhi: Śrī Satguru Publications, 1987).

⁴¹ *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* II.5.

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad has a strong orientation towards syllables and is predominately constituted of a variety of Vedic and Tantric mantras. It is devoid of devotional expressions. It does clearly state, however, that the recitation of the Hayagrīva mantra is “for the purpose of liberation (*mokṣa*)”.

Literary Genres Typical of the Āgamic Tradition: Ritual Texts and their Tantric Element

As aforementioned, the agglomeration of Vedic and Tantric elements make it difficult at times to clearly discern what is Tantric and what is not. The Pāñcarātra Āgamas nonetheless grew out of Tantric antecedents as did several other sectarian traditions and have incorporated into their medieval ritual manuals Tantric elements, including *bīja-mantras*, *yantras*, the practice of *nyāsa*).⁴² The three remaining ritual texts concerned with Hayagrīva, to be discussed in this section, are written in literary genres that are common to the Tantric and Āgamic traditions: *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha* (*Beginning of the Śrī Hayagrīva-Protective Shield*), *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* (*Another Śrī Hayagrīva-Protective Shield*), *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* (*Śrī Hayagrīva-Cage*). *Kavaca* and *pañjara* are two literary genres common to the Āgamic tradition, based on the understanding that spiritual power (*śakti*) is associated with words (*śabda*). These compositions are meant to be recited. The power generated by the recitation is believed to neutralize evil power and influences, and *kavacas* and *pañjaras* are specifically recited both for protection and the attainment of boons.

The three ritual texts about Hayagrīva are generic in nature; that is, the name of

⁴² Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, p. 143.

any god could conceivably be inserted with a *stotra* stanza on the specific deity. Thus, although the generic compositions (may be early), they include a more recent beginning and ending specific to Hayagrīva. The generic nature of these Āgamic compositions make them difficult to date. However, unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, these compositions are consistent in their portrayal of Hayagrīva as the full form of Viṣṇu; this is evident in the interplay of epithets of Hayagrīva and other forms of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. The fact that these ritual texts are connected with temple worship (and the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple built in 1667 C.E. is the only temple to my knowledge wherein Hayagrīva is the presiding deity) would explain the inconsistency between the Āgamas and these Āgamic compositions; that is, even though the Āgamas are ambiguous about the status of Hayagrīva, these compositions are consistent in depicting Him as Supreme. Although it may seem speculative, I am inclined to believe that these texts are posterior to Vedānta Deśika and the establishment of the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple and were developed in the Vaṭakalai temple milieu.

***Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha*⁴³ (Beginning of Śrī Hayagrīva-[Protective] Shield)**

The *kavaca* reflects the Āgamic tradition of the recitation of mantras. The word *kavaca*—meaning “armour, jacket, amulet, charm, mystical syllable forming part of a mantra used as an amulet”⁴⁴—is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *ku* “to cry out, moan, make a sound or any noise”.⁴⁵ *Kavacas* are chants recited for the purpose of

⁴³ *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, pp. 103-104; *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva-Paṭalam*, pp. 17-22.

⁴⁴ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 264.

⁴⁵ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 299.

protection. The very words of the *kavaca* are themselves regarded as having a protective function similar to that of a shield.

Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha begins by describing Hayagrīva as the Seer and Supreme Soul: "The *ṛṣi* of this great mantra, the *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca*—is Hayagrīva. It is [composed in] the eight syllabled metre. Śrī Hayagrīva, the Supreme Soul, is its deity (*devatā*).” This introduction is followed by three mantras along with salutations directed to Hayagrīva: the *bīja-mantra*, the *śakti-mantra*, and the *kīlaka-mantra* are connected with salutations to the Lord of Speech, the Foundation of Learning, and the Ocean of Vedas, respectively.

The stanzas describing the three mantras are followed by three stanzas that consist of both devotional-poetical and iconographical descriptions of Hayagrīva, continuous with passages in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas:

[I meditate on Hayagrīva]
whose hands are glittering
with the discus (*cakra*), conch shell (*śaṅkha*), rosary (*akṣa-valaya*)
and the hand position of knowledge (*jñāna-mudrā*)
whose multitude of splendid lightbeams
decorates the sky ... (v. 2)

The fifteen stanzas that follow are descriptions of God along with requests for protection. Several verbal imperatives are employed, e.g., *pātu*⁴⁶ (protect me) or *rakṣatu*⁴⁷ (save me). The *kavaca* includes stanzas on each part of the body, with a separate stanza requesting the protection of each part. The stanzas commence with a request for the

⁴⁶ *Pātu* is the second person singular imperative form of the Sanskrit verbal root *pā* "to protect from, defend against, watch, or preserve". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 613.

⁴⁷ *Rakṣatu* is the second person singular imperative form of the Sanskrit verbal root *raks* "to save, protect, take care, preserve, guard". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 859.

protection of the head and facial features, thus:

Om̐, may Hayagrīva protect my head.
 [May] the One who abides in the moon,
 protect my forehead.
 May the One who is the wisdom of the *sāstras*
 protect my two eyes.
 [May] Brahman's nature,
 which is the Word (*śabda*),
 [protect my] two ears. (v. 4)

Following the request for the protection of the head and facial features, the text proceeds through the other parts of the body down to the feet and toes. Although the recitation of the *kavaca* and practice of *nyāsa* (the practice of placing a spiritual letter on each body part in order to purify the body to make it a suitable receptacle for God) are both part of Āgamic rituals concentrated on specific parts of the body, they differ in their aims. The recitation of the *kavaca* is for the neutralization of evil whereas the purpose of *nyāsa* is the spiritual transformation of each body part so that the body may become pure and suitable for the reception of boons.

After going through the various parts of the body, the *kavaca* requests the protection of mental facilities like the senses and the heart:

May the Soul of the all-enveloping sky
 protect my essence.
 [May] the Soul that is [vast as] heaven
 [protect] the interior cavity of my heart. (v. 14)

The *kavaca* then requests protection for the regions of the world. Several stanzas contain depictions of the nature of Hayagrīva (see v. 4 above), whereas others make reference to other forms of Viṣṇu:

May the omnipresent One
 who resides in the cavity (*kukṣi*) [of the heart]
 [protect my] belly (*kukṣi*).

[May] the Destroyer of Bali
 [who took three strides to measure the earth]
 [protect] the three folds of skin [on my belly]...⁴⁸ (v. 6)

Finally, the *kavaca* ends with a *phala-śruti* explaining the benefits obtained by its recitation of the Hayagrīva *kavaca* and the surrender of one's body: the *phala-śruti* promises knowledge, wealth and a good life as a result of the recitation of the *kavaca*.

Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat⁴⁹ (Another Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective]-Shield)

As its name suggests, the *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat* is also a text meant to be recited for protection. It begins in a narrative form, in which Pārvatī asks Śiva to tell her the story of Hayagrīva. This narrative framework is similar to that found in the Purāṇas and the introductory portions of the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra Āgamas.⁵⁰

Siva explains that Viṣṇu takes a form on earth as his play (*līlā*) at the end of the *kali* age. The narrative passage is followed by two mantras—*hnaum bījam* and *Om̐ kilakam* (v. 6)—along with an opening stanza resembling that of a *stotra* stanza. Hayagrīva is described thus:

I praise the One with a horse's mouth,
 who bears in His hands a book (*pustaka*), a lotus (*ambuja*), rosary
 beads (*akṣa-mālā*),
 and the hand position (*mudrā*) of exposition (*vyākhyā*),
 whose head is anointed
 by the nectar overflowing
 from the golden jar

⁴⁸ Vāmana (the dwarf *avatāra* of Viṣṇu) recovers the three worlds (heaven, sky and earth) from the demon Bali, by taking three strides. Vāmana is often referred to in the hymns of the Ālvārs. See, e.g., *Tiruvāymoḻi* 2.4.11, 2.7.7-8; *Nacciyaṛ Tirumoḻi* 4.2, 11.4, and *Periya Tirumoḻi* 6.1.10, 8.3.10. See also *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (III.1.42-43) and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (VIII.18).

⁴⁹ *Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi*, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁰ It seems unnecessary to bring Siva and Parvati in the *kavaca*. However, it may be a form of establishing Hayagrīva's supremacy since the narrative frameworks are often of "lesser" gods telling the story of the Supreme.

[held] in the lotus-like hands of Lakṣmī. (v. 7)

The stanzas that follow then describe the nature or attributes of God, each followed with a specific petition for protection: *pātu* (protect me) or *rakṣatu* (protect/save me). As in *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha*, the text goes through all the parts of the body with a stanza requesting the protection of each part, beginning with the head and moving down through all the body parts to the feet.

Several stanzas requesting protection refer to Viṣṇu and his *avatāric* forms. Interestingly, there is a frequent play on words in the *kavacas*, for the epithets of Viṣṇu used often contain the name of the part of the body. There is a reference to Viṣṇu as the incarnation of Rāma who is served by Hanumān (as described in the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*):

[May] the One who is served by Hanumān
(the powerful-jawed one)
[protect my] jaw (*hanu*). (v. 10)

There are also stanzas that refer to attributes specifically associated with Hayagrīva:

May the Lord of Speech,
protect my face.
May the slayer of the enemy of gods
protect my tongue. (v. 9)

May the Horse-necked One (*haya-grīva*)
protect my neck (*grīva*). (v. 10)

After going through each part of the body, the *kavaca* makes requests for the protection of the regions of the world:

May the Lord of speech
protect the eastern quarter.
[May] the unconquerable One
[protect] the southern quarter.
May the Supporter of the universe

protect the western quarter.
 [May] the One who is celebrated by Śiva,
 [protect] the northern quarter. (v. 13)

The *kavaca*'s final two stanzas (vs. 15-16) prescribe the appropriate times for the recitation of the *kavaca* and the fruits to be obtained. Most significantly, v. 16 states that one is purified by this devotional practice and attains *mokṣa*:

A learned one,
 even though doubting, rivalling, and perplexed,
 should recite this *kavaca*
 during the three divisions of the day
 [dawn, noon, sunset].

[That one] purified
 by [the practice of] devotion (*bhakti*),
 is not born again. (v. 16)

Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha and *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavacam Anyat* are midway between mantra and *stotra* (praise-poem). The stanzas of both *kavacas* describe the icon and qualities of Hayagrīva, with requests in stanza form addressed directly to God, as in the *stotra*. The significant difference between these *kavacas* and Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional poetry (such as the *Hayagrīva Stotra*) is that the requests in the former are directed to God for protection (with the understanding that by the recitation of the *kavaca* one may attain *mokṣa*); on the other hand, *stotras* are recited as aids to attaining the blissful enjoyment of God's presence, the simple reception of His grace, or his visual appearance (*darśana*) to the devotee.

*Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara*⁵¹ (*Śrī Hayagrīva-Cage*)

Typical of the Āgamic tradition, the *pañjara* is recited in order to gain the power

⁵¹ Śrīh Śrīlakṣmī Hayagrīva Sahasranāmastotrādi, p. 16.

of a particular deity. The word *pañjara*, meaning “cage, body, particular prayers and formularies”, is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *paj* (to become stiff or rigid).⁵² According to Vedic and Āgamic belief, one attains spiritual power upon the performance of religious recitations (especially mantras).⁵³

*Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara*⁵⁴ is a short ritual text of salutations and requests made to God. It begins with an affirmation statement that one becomes powerful through the recitation of the hymn:

Now, I become more powerful
[with] the proper *pañjara* of Hayagrīva,
wherein the words
containing the totality of wisdom
is like the flowing Ganges river. (v. 1)

God is described iconographically: for example, He “who has long lotus-like eyes and who has noble limbs and four arms” (v. 3). This is a common description of Viṣṇu/Hayagrīva. Other descriptions reflect the splendid quality of Viṣṇu/Hayagrīva: “who shines with a diadem and crest, who is illuminated with the *vanamālā* (garland)” (v. 3,4). There are also salutations made to Hayagrīva similar to those found in *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*:

Obeisance to the God of gods,

⁵² Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 575.

⁵³ There is a reference to Hayagrīva in the context of the recitation of a *pañjara* in the Purāṇic corpus. In *Garuda Purāṇa* 1.13.1-10 (“Viṣṇupañjarastotra”), an “encyclopedic” Purāṇa, Hari requests Viṣṇu for protection. Hayagrīva is mentioned among the many epithets and *avatāras* of Viṣṇu: “taking up Vaijayantī and the necklace (*śrīvatsā*) protect me in the northeast. O Lord *Hayagrīva*, obeisance to Thee”. However, although the passage in the *Garuda Purāṇa* is solely a request for protection, *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* is a petition for the removal of evil and attainment of fruits.

⁵⁴ This ritual hymn is in fact quite similar to *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* contained in Appendix I, and discussed in the section “Śrī Vaiṣṇava Devotional Hymns in Praise of Hayagrīva” of Chapter VII.

whose body is the sacred syllable *Om̐* and *Udgītha*,⁵⁵
 who is the image of the *R̥g*, *Yajur*, and *Sāma* [Vedas],
 and who is the Granter of the desired goal (*artha*). (v. 6)

Each stanza has at least one vocative, and makes heavy use of the second singular imperative verbal form; thus the stanzas are directed to God. The requests, made in the imperative, are for God to destroy evil. For example:

Obeisance to God,
 who has the head of a horse (*haya-śīrṣa*)
 and is the Destroyer of enemies.

Destroy all poverty
 [and] bring about good fortune. (v. 9)

There are petitions for good fortune, knowledge, and protection:

Obeisance to the One
 who has the head of a horse (*haya-śīrṣa*),
 the Lord who is God of gods.

May [He] grant me intelligence, wisdom
 strength, knowledge
 wealth, sons and grandsons. (v. 10)

The final portion of the *pañjara* consists of stanzas praising Hayagrīva for His qualities and acts, in particular, the removal of ignorance and the bestowal of wisdom. Furthermore, stanza 18 refers to the "One who is to be worshipped with these twelve mantras" (here the term mantras refers to the stanzas of the *pañjara*). Although the stanza refers to the chanting of twelve mantras (stanzas), there are actually 18 stanzas in the hymn. Thus, it is possible that stanzas were later added to the hymn. The final stanza claims that the Lord is the Remover of all the difficulties of the world, which may be a reference to Hayagrīva as the granter of *mokṣa*, the release from *saṃsāra*.

⁵⁵ *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma* Veda.

The *pañjara* (unlike the *kavaca*) does not make requests for the protection of each part of the body. However, similar to the two *kavacas*, *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara* appears to fulfill a function somewhat between the Tantric Upaniṣads and *bhakti stotras*. The *pañjara* parallels the *Hayagrīva Stotra* in several ways: it contains vivid visual depictions of Hayagrīva like those of the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, and its intended audience is God Himself. Furthermore, it includes requests for God's boons and protection. However, the *pañjara* differs from the *Śrī Vaiṣṇava stotra* in that many of its requests are not for the enjoyment of the visual experience (*darśana*) of God (as in the *stotra*); rather, they are for the attainment of boons and spiritual power.

ANALYSIS OF HAYAGRĪVA IN THE SHORT ĀGAMIC RITUAL TEXTS

Hayagrīva as Supreme

Unlike in the Āgamas, the short ritual texts that follow that tradition are in agreement with each other in their depiction of Hayagrīva as the Supreme. *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* describes Hayagrīva as Supreme in its portrayal of Him as having the form of consciousness and bliss. This is continuous with the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman in the stanza quoted in *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* itself— *prajñānam ānandam brahman* (Brahman is consciousness and bliss) (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3. 9.28; *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.3).

Unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, which contain highly contradictory references to Hayagrīva's status, these brief texts, literary genres typical of the late Āgamic tradition, consistently acknowledge Hayagrīva as Supreme, establishing Him as a "full form" of

Viṣṇu. Not only are there references to Hayagrīva as the Supreme God, Supreme Soul, Ruler of the three worlds, Supreme Ruler and the like, the short texts also include the many epithets (such as Madhusūdana and Keśava) and *avatāras* (Vāmana, Rāma, and Hari) of Viṣṇu, reflecting the understanding that Hayagrīva and Viṣṇu are one and the same. In praising One He becomes all the others. This equation of Hayagrīva with Viṣṇu and the various forms of Viṣṇu further establishes Hayagrīva as a “full-form” of Lord Viṣṇu. Even though the actual Pāñcarātra Āgamas are ambiguous about Hayagrīva’s theological status, these Āgamic ritual hymns are consistent in depicting Him as Supreme.

Hayagrīva as Avatāra

Although the ritual texts that follow the Āgamic tradition depict Hayagrīva as full *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, there is no mention nor concern expressed as to why or how this particular incarnation of Viṣṇu has a horse’s head (an issue important in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Skanda Purāṇa*). Neither do the texts dwell on Hayagrīva’s mythic *avatāric* act of recovering the Vedas from the demons, although that act may be implicit in the great importance placed upon His association with wisdom and the Vedas. Although there are a few references to the Epic and Puranic myth of Hayagrīva’s *avatāric* act of recovering the Vedas and killing the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, the myth provides the scope for Hayagrīva’s description as the Source of the Vedas and as Protector of His devotees.

Hayagrīva and the Vedas

Both an implicit and an explicit connection between Hayagrīva and the Vedas is

expressed in these ritual texts. Firstly, *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* directly connects Him with the Vedas merely by the literary genre of the text. Secondly, although there are only a few references to the myth of Hayagrīva's benevolent act of recovering the Vedas, He is otherwise connected to the Vedas by being described as in "the form of the *R̥k*, *Yajur* and *Sāma* [Vedas]" or "the form of the Vedas". Hayagrīva is not just the recoverer of the Vedas but their very source! References to the horse-headed deity as being the source or form of the Vedas, which are present in all of these ritual texts, also implicitly establish Him as Supreme.

Hayagrīva as Protector

Interestingly, both *kavacas* refer to Hayagrīva's destruction of the demons, but neither mentions His mythic act of saving the Vedas. Yet, His destruction of evil forces is paramount in both texts, and this must surely be an extension of His mythic *avatāric* role as destroyer of the demons. The ancient myth has become the revelation of God's qualities, and, in fact, Hayagrīva's protective role towards His devotees now has superceded His rescue of the Vedas in olden times. Hayagrīva is also praised for His own wisdom and His gift of ignorance-destroying wisdom to His devotees. In the *kavacas*, through an extension of His benevolent act of killing the demons, Hayagrīva is established not only as the Protector of the Vedas, but also as the Protector of His devotees (as does Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*).

Hayagrīva and Speech/Mantra

Although in *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* Hayagrīva is described as being in the form of *praṇava* (sacred syllable *Om̐*) and as a *bija-mantra* with a number of syllables, the

other short ritual texts describe Hayagrīva in a slightly more personalized fashion. Because the *kavacas* are spoken directly to God, they encourage a more personal relationship between Hayagrīva and the devotee.

The efficacy of the Pāñcarātric mantra is dependent on God's grace;⁵⁶ that is, mantra is the link between the devotee and his or her God. These texts, following the Āgamic tradition, refer to Hayagrīva both as a mantra (with various numbers of syllables) and as an image with specific iconographical features. The mantras contained in the texts are continuous with the Āgamic usage of mantra within a devotional temple context. Here, mantra and iconography blend in a style typical of the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātric tradition.

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* in the Light of the Ritual Texts that Follow the Āgamic Tradition

Śrī Vaiṣṇavism has been influenced by Tantra filtered through the Pāñcarātra Āgamic tradition, which prescribes some Tantric ritual practices.⁵⁷ These four short ritual texts concerned with Hayagrīva (medieval or, more likely, post-medieval) are used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. It would be speculative to precisely date the texts. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, although the ritual hymns are in pan-Indian Tantric genres, they were most likely composed after Vedānta Deśika and the establishment of Hayagrīva as the Supreme God; that is, these Āgamic compositions most likely are posterior to the regional establishment of the Swāmi Hayagrīva temple because Hayagrīva is consistently portrayed as Supreme.

⁵⁶ Gupta, "The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantra", p. 224.

⁵⁷ Aiyangar and Venugopalacharya, *Śrī Pāñcarātrarākṣa of Vedānta Deśika*, pp. vii-xii.

The Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple is the only temple in the South wherein He is the presiding deity. The ritual Āgamic hymns are often connected with a particular temple. There are two groups of practitioners involved with religious matters of a Tamilian Vaiṣṇava temple: (1) the *ācārya* (preceptor) of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta), including Rāmānuja and Vedānta Deśika, and (2) *arcaka* (temple priests) trained according to the Āgamic tradition. Although these two groups probably once belonged to different Vaiṣṇava groups, their work is complementary; that is, the *ācārya* is responsible for the transmission of the tenets of the tradition, whereas the *arcaka* is responsible for the performance of temple rituals. The complementarity of the *ācārya* and *arcaka* is evident in the regional development of Hayagrīva worship in that there are late Āgamic hymns composed about Hayagrīva as Supreme which are used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas (even though the hymns are not specifically Śrī Vaiṣṇava).

These hymns shed light not only on the relation between *ācārya* and *arcaka*, but they also demonstrate the confluence of Vedic and non-Vedic ritual practices. For instance, the great emphasis placed on the concept of mantra and on the power one attains through the recitation of various texts (*kavaca* and *pañjara*) is found in many Indian religious streams.

As do the ritual texts concerned with Hayagrīva that follow the Āgamic tradition, Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the confluence of the traditions of mantra and iconography, typical of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. In the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, Hayagrīva is, on the one hand, depicted in image form with specific iconographical features (*devatā-mūrti*), on the other hand, He is also described in mantraic fashion. The pertinent stanzas

not only parallel the mantraic and *yantraic* practice of the Āgamic tradition, but also show that the author of *Hayagrīva Stotra* has employed and expanded these concepts by personalizing the Āgamic approach to both mantra and deity.

There are differences between the ritual texts that follow the Āgamic tradition and the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, however. Firstly, Vedānta Deśika follows strictly the Śrī Vaiṣṇava world-view, while these short ritual texts are more Pāñcarātric in orientation. Though both the *stotra* and the Āgamic compositions are consistent in their portrayal of Hayagrīva as Supreme, the relation and experience the devotee has with God differs; that is, the intimate relation a devotee has with God is absent in these compositions. The *stotra*, like the ritual texts, contains several stanzas requesting an increase in strength, yet the *stotra* incorporates Ālvār emotionalism in a way that the shorter ritual texts based on the Āgamas do not.

The *stotra* also differs from these shorter ritual Āgamic texts in the kinds of requests it makes to God. Deśika, for example, seeks the blissful enjoyment of Hayagrīva's presence in his mind or heart (*antaryāmin*), rather than His protection.

Although the reciter of these short ritual texts seeks power and protection (according to their literary genre), the *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the more personal and emotional relationship that devotees have with God in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

Unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, which are inconsistent in their depictions of Hayagrīva's theological status, these late Āgamic texts clearly depict Hayagrīva as Supreme or the "full" form of Viṣṇu in stanzas descriptive of His iconic form (*arcā-avatāra*). According to Pāñcarātra, mantra is both the means and goal; Śrī Vaiṣṇavas

extend this to God. Indeed, through His connection with *jñāna* and speech, Hayagrīva is both the means (*upya*) and the goal (*upeya*). According to Vedānta Deśika (and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in general), God is both *upāya* and *upeya*.⁵⁸ This stance reflects the process I call the “personalization of mantra”, which is contained in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of *arcā-avatāra* and *stotra*. Unlike these four Āgamic ritual compositions, the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition appropriates the Āgamic rituals within a consistent theological context.

The Personalization of Mantra in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* reflects the aforementioned process which I term the “personalization of mantra”. The interplay between the function of mantra and *stotra* can be observed in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, wherein more devotional and emotional praise-poems become increasingly more salient features of temple liturgical performances. The way in which the deity is depicted depends also on the genre imitated; that is, Hayagrīva is depicted in a very abstract manner in the syllable-oriented Śrī *Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*, whereas He becomes slightly more personalized in the two *kavacas* and *pañjara*, and even more so in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

This personalization is reflected not just in the concept of the mantra as a manifestation of God as in Tantric literary genres. Rather, it is reflected in the on-going transformation of the relatively more abstract notions of the manifestation of God in the mantra in Pāñcarātra into a more personalized notion of God who evokes for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas an emotional and relational experience (whether it be the *antaryāmin* or *arcā*

⁵⁸ *Rahasya Traya Sāra* 9.

form of Supreme Lord Viṣṇu).

The transformation of mantra in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism—a tradition with a strong emotional-devotional attachment to Viṣṇu’s iconic manifestations—is a process whereby the esoteric mantraic deity is personalized. Although Pāñcarātra is a temple tradition with emphasis on icons, often worshipped with mantra recitations, for Śrī Vaiṣṇavas Hayagrīva has evolved, on the basis of Vedānta Deśika’s *stotra*, into a highly personalized form of God, wherein the devotee has an emotional and personal relationship with Him. Indeed, Hayagrīva became personalized and popular. Although Śrī Vaiṣṇavas worship the personalized Hayagrīva deity, they use Pāñcarātra ritual texts that emerge from the Āgamic temple milieu. (The personalization of Hayagrīva is even further evident in the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns to Hayagrīva described in Chapter VII.)

CONCLUSION

The four short ritual texts that follow the Āgamic tradition reflect the movement between the regional and pan-Indian traditions. Although these short religious texts follow early literary genres, they appear to have been composed in Tamil Nadu after Vedānta Deśika. As a development from His *avatāric* act of recovering the Vedas, Hayagrīva is referred to in the ritual texts as having the form of the Vedas and the sacred syllable *Om̐*. He is likewise related back to the Vedas by the employment of well-established literary genres such as the Upaniṣads, both in general and by citation from the classical and authoritative *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.28 and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

Even though the actual Pāñcarātra Āgamas are ambiguous about Hayagrīva's theological status, these ritual texts based on the Āgamic tradition and likely post-Vedānta Deśika, are continuous with the understanding of Hayagrīva in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, as a “full” incarnation of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. And, like Vedānta Deśika, the short Āgamic ritual texts clearly and definitely establish *Hayagrīva as the Protector*, not only of the Vedas, but also of His devotees. However, unlike these four short ritual texts based on the Āgamas, the *Hayagrīva Stotra* consists of a confluence of Tantric ritual understanding of deity (*devatā*, mantra and *yantra*) and *bhakti* (emotional worship of a personalized God).

PART D
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER IX

THE ŚRĪ VAIṢṆAVA IMAGE AND WORSHIP OF HAYAGRĪVA: MYTH IN THE SERVICE OF THEOLOGY AND THE CONTINUITY OF THEOLOGICAL AND RITUAL FUNCTIONS

There are two main reasons for the manifest complexity and challenge in tracing the development of the images and worship of an Indian deity: (1) India's long-standing oral tradition wherein many variants of myths and the like have emerged, and (2) the diversity of traditions in India that nevertheless do share some common beliefs, motifs and symbols.

The religious history of Hayagrīva—a pan-Indian deity who is especially revered in Tamil Nadu—illuminates the multi-faceted development of a deity as it occurs among the plurality of India's religious streams. The diversity and complexity of the historical process that traditions in India have undergone necessarily requires a multidimensional approach in the tracing of the development of the depictions of Hayagrīva. Such an approach consists of, in the first instance, an analysis that is both *diachronic*—examining the religious development and transformation of the deity through time (historically)—and *synchronic*, that is, viewing the depictions of the deity in one religious stream in relation to other versions in other streams in a certain period of time. Furthermore, when tracing the development of an Indian deity, it is necessary to examine: (1) the mythology about the deity (Epic and Purāṇas), (2) the iconographical and mantraic references to the deity (Āgamas), (3) the ritual and devotional hymns to the deity, and (4) the local sectarian texts, including, in the present case, the regional ones of Tamil Nadu.

This study has looked at the various depictions of Hayagrīva in terms of mythic, iconographical, and ritual transformation of the deity during the course of the development of the various religious traditions at the pan-Indian level. Because the living

tradition of Hayagrīva worship is located in Tamil Nadu, the study has necessarily included an analysis of His status and role at the regional level. In examining, both *diachronically* and *synchronically*, the various religious streams that contributed to the regional development of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning in Tamil Nadu, two salient ways have emerged as highly useful in understanding the development of the god. Firstly, viewing the development of the Indian god at the pan-Indian level through the *kaleidoscopic perspective* helps us more fully understand the many variant depictions of the horse-headed figure, and prevents us from thinking too unilinearly in terms of the development of the deity. This perspective clearly shows that the development of Hayagrīva does not have a single history, but many “histories”. Secondly, looking back in time through the *reverse-prismatic perspective* at the development of the deity at the regional level enables us to comprehend better the particular regional understanding of the changing nature and role of a pan-Indian deity who is especially revered within the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition of Tamil Nadu (since the 14th century C.E.). These two perspectives on the development of the horse-headed deity Hayagrīva shed considerable new light on the relation and interaction between Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and pan-Indian Hinduism.

THE KALEIDESCOPIC PERSPECTIVE: MOTIFS AND PATTERNS OF HAYAGRĪVA AS A PAN-INDIAN DEITY

The kaleidoscope is “an optical toy for producing multiple symmetrical patterns by multiple reflections in inclined mirrors enclosed in a tube. Loose pieces of coloured glass, paper, etc., are placed in the tube between the mirrors and as this is turned,

changing patterns are formed.”¹ In a kaleidoscope, the constituent elements remain the same, but every time the kaleidoscope is turned, it provides a different pattern, highlighting some elements more than others (some pieces actually fall to the bottom and are hidden). The analogy of the kaleidoscope has been usefully employed by Diana Eck to advance our understanding of Hinduism, given the variety and complexity of beliefs, images, and rituals within it.² The same analogy has been creatively used by K.K.A. Venkatachari in his study of the development of the worship of Sudarśana (the personification of Viṣṇu’s *cakra* (discus)).³

My study extends the application of the kaleidoscopic analogy to the development of the images of a specific deity on the understanding that, although many of their constituent elements remain the same, they appear in different patterns. My intensive investigation of the development of Hayagrīva demonstrates the usefulness of the *kaleidoscopic perspective* as well in the case of the various depictions of Hayagrīva in the multitude of Hindu texts. Indeed, sometimes the horse-headed figure is an incarnation of God who kills the demons Madhu and Kaitābha, and at other times it is a demon who is killed by Viṣṇu. The kaleidoscopic perspective helps us understand the many variant

¹ Collins English Dictionary, p. 832.

² Diana Eck uses the analogy of the kaleidoscope in passing in her discussion on the variety and complexity of the Hindu pantheon. See Eck, *Darśan*, p. 26. The analogy can also be made use of in comprehending the emergence of the six Hindu orthodox philosophical schools; that is, the analogy makes vivid how the same essential elements in Hinduism (such as *samsāra* [cycle of rebirth], *mokṣa* [liberation], *brahman* [Ultimate Reality], and *ātman* [soul]) are employed, but give rise to different patterns.

³ K.K.A. Venkatachari, “Personification at the Intersection of Religion and Art: A Case Study of Sudarśana Cakra”, in *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, edited by Ratan Parimoo (New Delhi: Books & Books Publishers, 1987), p. 271.

depictions of the horse-headed figure appearing in the profusion of Hindu texts, at times even within a single text. These texts have been earlier differentiated as: (1) pan-Indian “mainstream”; (2) pan-Indian sectarian; and (3) regional sectarian.

Vedic Antecedents

The Vedas contain stories about the beheading sacrifice of Yajña and Viṣṇu (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1-17; *Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa* 7.5.6), which some regard as an antecedent to the later Purāṇic stories explaining the origins of a horse-headed being. Even if antecedents to the Hayagrīva figure can be theoretically traced back to the Vedic literature, such as the references to the Vedic horse sacrifice (*aśva-yajña*) and the beheading of Viṣṇu, there are no explicit references to the horse-headed figure Hayagrīva in that literature.

Interestingly, of all the literature surveyed for the present study, only the very late Śaiva and Śākta texts connect Hayagrīva with Dadhyañc and the head sacrifice. For example, *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* incorporate the story from the Vedic literature about the beheading sacrifice (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*) as an explanation as to how Viṣṇu obtained a horse’s head. This limited reference suggests that one cannot simply assume, as O’Flaherty does, that the Vedas contain the antecedent to the particular Hindu deity of Hayagrīva. That the antecedent may lie in the Vedas may well be correct. However, because the desire for Vedic legitimacy is very strong in such texts as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, one would have expected these Purāṇas to mention this Vedic connection if it were believable to Vaiṣṇavas as an explanation.

It seems also speculative to assume, as Jaiswal does, that because one finds the worship of a horse-headed deity in a particular region such as at Maṇikūṭa Hill, Assam—even if substantiated by the late texts like the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and *Yoginī Tantra*—one can conclude that Hayagrīva originated in the tribal region of Assam. It is possible that there has been considerable interaction between the pan-Indian tradition and other religious streams (beliefs and practices); however, it is speculative to indicate a precise and singular origin for the horse-headed god. In fact, it seems quite reasonable to assume that there may have been several independent origins. Furthermore, if the myth of the horse-headed figure was widespread among the non-Vedic traditions, myths regarding the deity/demon could have also differed; that is to say, one cannot necessarily assume unified beliefs and motifs among the non-Vedic groups, though there may have been at the same time some interaction among them.

Myth in the Epics and Puranas

The analogy of the kaleidoscope is useful in understanding the myth of Hayagrīva, that is, the myth of the horse-headed figure in the context of a god slaying a demon for stealing the Vedas. Sometimes Hayagrīva is a god and at other times he is a demon. The depictions of Hayagrīva in the pan-Indian “mainstream” epic *Mahābhārata* are both of the benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu as well as of a horse-headed demon. However, the *Harivaṃśa* provides only malevolent depictions of a horse-headed figure as demon, who is specifically an enemy of Viṣṇu. In the pan-Indian “mainstream” Purāṇas also, there are variant depictions of Hayagrīva—a benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*), a malevolent depiction of a horse-headed being (*Brahma Purāṇa*, *Skanda*

Purāṇa), an unsynthesized depiction of the horse-headed figure as both benevolent and malevolent (*Agni Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), and, finally, a synthesis of both the malevolent and benevolent forms of Hayagrīva (*Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*).

Issuing out of certain common constituent elements, different depictions of Hayagrīva became the basis of separate “*histories*” of the deity. One can distinguish between (1) the same set of constituent elements, and (2) the different depictions formed out of variant combinations of the same elements. This is what the kaleidoscope does, and this is what the kaleidoscope analogy enables us to understand about Hinduism. At the same time, different depictions can serve as the foundation for separate “*histories*” or “*trajectories*”. Using the kaleidoscope analogy, it appears that, on the basis of a wide variety of texts surveyed for the present study, one can only speak in the plural of the “*histories*”, rather than a single unilinear history, of the horse-headed figure known as Hayagrīva.

The analysis of the passages on Hayagrīva in the Epic and Purāṇic literature sheds light on the relation of mythic transformation to the development of religious traditions. In terms of the development of the “Vaiṣṇava history” of Hayagrīva, the most important feature contained in the Epic and Purāṇic corpus is that Hayagrīva is both included in several of the Purāṇic lists of *avatāras* as well as specifically mentioned as the benevolent horse-headed form that Viṣṇu takes in order to recover the Vedas from the demons Madhu and Kaitābha. There are no attempts in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas to combine the benevolent and malevolent forms of Hayagrīva (as there is in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Kālikā Purāṇa*). Nor do the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas even mention the origins of

Hayagrīva's horse-head (as do *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*)! On the other hand, in the case of the Vaiṣṇava *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, one finds that its Advaitic perspective allows it to contain both myths about the benevolent and malevolent forms of the horse-headed figure. For, in the Advaitic worldview all forms are part of the realm of *māyā*. Here, however, the malevolent form is not connected to the benevolent form.

Iconography in the Āgamas and Purāṇas

Texts belonging to the Vaiṣṇava Āgamic tradition provide pertinent information about deities, especially about their mantraic and iconographical features and their locus in the temples. Although there is ambiguity as to Hayagrīva's theological status in relation to Viṣṇu in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas (i.e., whether He is a primary [*mukhya*] or a secondary [*gauna*] form), He is nonetheless consistently depicted as a benevolent form of Viṣṇu (never as a demon!). Importantly, He is also depicted not only as the One who recovered the Vedas, but as the very form of the Vedas.

Interestingly, notwithstanding the ambiguity regarding Hayagrīva's theological status, there appears to be more consistency in respect of the ritual practice surrounding Him, particularly His locus in the temple (north or northeastern direction). Various forms are permissible according to the iconographical prescriptions for Him (whether He should be depicted with four or eight arms bearing different elements, and so forth): some of Hayagrīva's iconographical features are continuous with the features of Viṣṇu (i.e., bearing the *cakra* and *śankha*), whereas others are associated with His unique role as the One who recovers the Vedas (i.e., bearing the *pustaka* and having one hand in the position of wisdom [*jñāna-mudrā*]).

Although no depictions of Hayagrīva could be located in the Śaiva texts surveyed, there are nonetheless similarities in the way Dakṣiṇāmūrti is functionally and iconographically depicted; in other words, the theological and ritual function of both Hayagrīva and Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the same even though the gods differ. Furthermore, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, like Hayagrīva, is described as bearing the *padma*, *akṣa-mālā*, *pustaka* and *jñāna-mudrā*, and is also revered as the Expounder of wisdom and the *sāstras*.

By way of contrast, there are several references to Hayagrīva in the later Śākta (Āgamic) texts. Although he is described therein as a benevolent deity with iconographical features similar to those found in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, Hayagrīva is depicted as an auxillary deity in the Śākta texts, wherein the goddess is Supreme.

Regional Temple in Tamil Nadu

Included among the various depictions of Hayagrīva are those from the local worship of Hayagrīva at Tiruvahīndrapuram in the region of Tamil Nadu. There are references to Hayagrīva in South India prior to Vedānta Deśika (the Āḷvār hymns, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Bhaṭṭar's *Śrīraṅgarāja Stava*), which depict Him as a benevolent *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who recovered the Vedas from Madhu and Kaiṭabha. Significantly, there are two images of Hayagrīva present at the Devanātha Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram—a temple associated with Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, who explicitly refers to the god—where Deśika is said to have performed his religious and meditative practices. Although there are several references to the deity prior to the life of Deśika (Nammāḷvār, Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar), Hayagrīva became more popular in Tamil Nadu principally because of the influence of Vedānta Deśika and his *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

Consequent to Deśika's *stotra* and the growing popularity of Hayagrīva worship, the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple was built at Tiruvahīndrapuram, wherein Hayagrīva, accompanied by His inseparable consort Śrī Lakṣmī, is the presiding deity. The four Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns (*Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā*, *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*, *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti*, and *Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana*)—all of which are recited in front of an icon—not only provide explicit depictions of Hayagrīva's iconic incarnation as the full form of God, but also request that He bestow mundane fruits (like the power of speech) as well as *mokṣa*. Importantly, Śrī Vaiṣṇavas take refuge only with the full form of God. That Śrī Vaiṣṇavas take refuge with Hayagrīva is explicitly evident in the *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti*, in which each refrain mentions taking refuge with Hayagrīva.

These later regional hymns in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition in Tamil Nadu do not emphasize the myth of Hayagrīva's *vibhava-avatāra* per se, a form that appears only at a specific place and time. Rather, the pan-Indian Epic and Purāṇic myths about Hayagrīva, as the One who recovers the Vedas, simply provide the scope for the depictions of His iconic form (carrying the Vedas) or His image in ritual hymns as Protector. Thus, myth as such is not the central element in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

Short Texts Appropriating Vedic and Āgamic Ritual

We have noted that no Vaiṣṇava text relates Hayagrīva to the Vedas through the myth of Dadhyañc. However, the short ritual texts in praise of Hayagrīva that follow the Āgamic tradition attempt to link Him to the Vedas by the imitative employment of traditional Vedic authoritative literary genres. This is a common practice found in

sectarian literature to legitimize (or celebrate) new religious developments. There is evidence of an attempt to relate newer beliefs concerning the deity Hayagrīva's supremacy back to the Vedas. *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad* is an example of this quest for legitimation. It clearly establishes Hayagrīva as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, as well as explicitly links Him with the Vedas.

There is also evidence of fluidity between the pan-Indian Āgamic tradition and regional traditions like Śrī Vaiṣṇava. Indeed, these short ritual texts (*Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat*, and *Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara*) based on Pāñcarātra Āgamic ritual and theology are used by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas in the worship of, and devotion to, Hayagrīva. *Kavaca* and *pañjara* are two literary genres typical of the Āgamic tradition, whereby spiritual power (*śakti*) is associated with words (*śabda*). The power generated through the recitation of the *kavacas* and *pañjaras* is believed to neutralize evil power or influences. Even though the texts are specifically recited for protection and the attainment of power, they celebrate Hayagrīva as Supreme. They depict Hayagrīva not only as the protector of the world against the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, but also as the protector of His devotees.

In summary, the *kaleidoscopic perspective* at the pan-Indian level reveals the profound and abundant variety and diversity in the depictions of the horse-headed Hayagrīva figure. A survey of the mythological stories from the Epics and Purāṇas and the iconographical references from the pan-Indian sectarian Āgamic texts—and as well the examination of developments in the understanding of Hayagrīva in the regional Śrī Vaiṣṇava literature and temple milieu—demonstrate that it would be misleading to

attempt to understand the development of a deity in a simple unilinear manner. Significantly, several of the pan-Indian religious streams discussed are manifest in the regional depictions of Hayagrīva as the Lord of light and learning in Tamil Nadu, but the understanding of this regional aspect requires a different approach.

THE REVERSE-PRISMATIC PERSPECTIVE: REGIONAL AND SECTARIAN HISTORY OF A PAN-INDIAN DEITY

Because of the variety and complexity of developments in Hindu mythology, iconography and ritual, one needs a different conceptual tool to adequately understand the evolution of the regional Śrī Vaiṣṇava “history” of Hayagrīva. As seen in Chapter VI, I believe that the most suitable conceptual tool is the *reverse-prismatic perspective*, which is particularly useful in comprehending Vedānta Deśika’s specific depiction of Hayagrīva in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Interestingly, the employment of the reverse-prismatic perspective in respect of the development of the horse-headed deity Hayagrīva sheds considerable new light on the relation and interaction between pan-Indian Hinduism and local Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in Tamil Nadu. This conceptual tool further reinforces the notion that, just as there are many “histories” of the deity, so too there is a distinctive Śrī Vaiṣṇava “history” of Hayagrīva.

Among the several disparate myths present within the pan-Indian texts, Śrī Vaiṣṇavas make reference *only* to the myth that describes Hayagrīva’s benevolent act of recovering the Vedas from the demons for the welfare of his devotees (*Mahābhārata*, *Agni Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). Hence, Śrī Vaiṣṇavas depict Hayagrīva as a wholly benevolent *avatāra*, in conformity with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition’s understanding of the wholly benevolent nature of Viṣṇu.

Śrī Vaiṣṇavas show no concern at all for the other aspects of the Hayagrīva myth, such as, for example, the etiology of Hayagrīva’s horse-head. It is only the later Śaiva and Śākta texts that incorporate the paradigm of the beheading sacrifice (as described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*) into their history of Hayagrīva. There are a few references to

the myth of the recovery of the Vedas in Vedānta Deśika's *stotra*, but the myth about Hayagrīva's *avatāric* act is not the central focus. Although references to the Epic and Purāṇic myth of the benevolent god are few, the myth of Hayagrīva as recovering the Vedas and killing the demons provides the scope, however, for the Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Hayagrīva as the form of the Vedas, the Lord of learning, the Protector of all (including devotees from *saṁsāra*, cycle of rebirth), and the Bestower of *mokṣa*.

Myth in the Service of Theology

There are two approaches to the study of myth in Hinduism. One, the critical-textual approach, attempts to reconstruct the history of an "authentic" myth in the Epic and Purāṇic texts. However, this approach encounters serious problems in view of the complexity of Indian religions, their diversity, and the presence of an oral tradition. Particularly daunting for this approach are the difficulties in respect of the many interpolations, additions and substitutions in the religious texts over time. Moreover, one cannot assume that there is one correct and fixed version of a myth; rather, there are many versions of the horse-headed figure.

By way of contrast, the structural approach seeks to delineate the underlying structure of all the variants of a particular myth in the literature. This approach was developed by Lévi-Strauss and has been employed most effectively in the study of myth in Hinduism by Biardeau and O'Flaherty. It involves the determination of continuity in thematic patterns and motifs through indexing parts of the story. In regard to Hayagrīva, O'Flaherty sees three phases in the development of the myth in which the story of a benevolent figure and that of a malevolent figure are finally synthesized into a single

figure. The structural approach, reductive and acontextual, assumes that everything fits into a pattern. In tracing the Epic and Purāṇic myths in the present study for a better understanding of the development of the deity Hayagrīva, it emerges that neither approach provides an adequate understanding either of Hinduism or of myth, given the complex nature of the development of the two.

The structural approach was originally developed for the study of myth in pre-literate folk societies. Accordingly, it suffers from inherent limitations when applied to literate, self-conscious civilizations with highly developed philosophical and theological systems. In the latter, myth is frequently purposively adapted to serve the particular theological agendas of different religious streams rather than as simply evolving through a single historical process. Vaiṣṇavas (as evident in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*), and even more so Śrī Vaiṣṇavas (including Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva), have a primarily theological world-view, wherein myth is subservient to their larger theological understanding!

For Vaiṣṇavas (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*), Hayagrīva is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and thus can only be benevolent in nature. Furthermore, as *avatāra*, Hayagrīva is in no need of an explanation of his horse-head, for Viṣṇu has taken a wide variety of animal, animal-human, and human forms at different times and places to restore the *dharma*. Based on the fact that Śrī Vaiṣṇavism makes a serious attempt to gain Vedic legitimacy, it is significant that Śrī Vaiṣṇavas do not explain the etiology of Hayagrīva's horse-head with the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mythic strand of the beheading of Dadhyañc (as has been done in *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*). The Western interpretation of the paradigm of beheading (as by Courtright in the case of Gaṇeśa) as a means of

incorporating a demon into the pantheon of Hindu gods has little meaning in the Vaiṣṇava history of the deity. In fact, Vaiṣṇavas ignore it altogether as it undermines the wholly benevolent nature of Viṣṇu; that is, Viṣṇu as having a demonic past, wherein he has to be sacrificed for the placement of the “real” head, is completely outside their world-view.

Topotheism: The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Understanding of Viṣṇu’s Forms

The iconographical depictions of Hayagrīva in Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra* and the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns are continuous with the Pāñcarātra Āgamas. The Pāñcarātra Āgamas depict Hayagrīva as having elements based on both general Viṣṇu iconography as well as specific features attributed to the horse-headed incarnation by those that follow the Pāñcarātric tradition. The elements that are important and found in the Pāñcarātric tradition—the bearing of the book of knowledge/wisdom (*viññāna-pustaka*), hands in the position of the *jñāna-mudrā*, and holding the rosary beads (*akṣa-mālā*)—all interplay with Hayagrīva’s association with the Vedas and speech. Vedānta Deśika, and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism as a whole, have followed the Āgamas in their depictions of Hayagrīva’s iconic form. On the other hand, by way of contrast, the ambiguity with regards to Hayagrīva’s theological status that is contained in the Āgamas is emphatically replaced by a consistent portrayal of Him as a full form of Viṣṇu in the hymns of two Āḷvārs (Nammāḷvār and Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār) and the Ācāryas Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and Vedānta Deśika (as it is in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in general).

The various Śrī Vaiṣṇava devotional compositions (*Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śar Nāma Arcanā*, *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti*, *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti*, and

Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana) that have appropriated Āgamic ritual are, by placing it in a Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological context, continuous with the *Hayagrīva Stotra* in that they both bring out Hayagrīva's association with the Vedas and sacred speech and, more importantly, establish Him as a full form of the Supreme. Hayagrīva is associated with the Vedas by the references made to Him as the source of the Supreme Syllable (*Om̐*) and the Vedas, as well as to His benevolent act of recovering the Vedas.

Although Hayagrīva's association with the Vedas and sacred speech in the devotional hymns is similar to that contained in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*, the latter differs from the former in that the *stotra* also incorporates Ālvār emotionalism and requests for the delight of God's presence, rather than for protection alone. Nonetheless, both the hymns and the *Hayagrīva Stotra* depict Him as the Supreme who bestows wisdom on His devotees, and protects them from *saṁsāra*. Deśika depicts and reveres Hayagrīva as having the form of knowledge (*jñāna*) and bliss (*ānanda*). According to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, this form is the essential nature (*svarūpa*) of Viṣṇu and thus establishes Hayagrīva as a "full" *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, Deśika and later Śrī Vaiṣṇavas explicitly depict Hayagrīva as granting devotees both mundane fruits and *mokṣa* (liberation)—indicative of His status as Supreme.

In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu appears in a variety of forms at specific regions/places, with each form having the same theological status as the others, a phenomenon I have termed *topotheism*. *Topotheism* is evident in the development of Hayagrīva's status and role in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. In fact, although the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas (including Kūreśa, Bhaṭṭar, and Vedānta Deśika) praise each of the five forms of God

(i.e., *para*, *vyūha*, *antaryāmin*, *vibhava* and *arcā*), their praise is most often directed to the *icon*. Thus, the mainstream Epic and Purāṇic tradition of myth is not of primary concern for them (though it may be alluded to because the *arcā*, being the full form of the Supreme, may be connected to all of Viṣṇu's *vibhava-avatāras*). Though the reference to Hayagrīva as a *vibhava-avatāra* is often made, the horse-headed deity is mainly depicted by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as *arcā-avatāra* in the later devotion to Hayagrīva at Tiruvahīndrapuram.

As an outgrowth of Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* and his association (whether historical or partially legendary) with Tiruvahīndrapuram, Hayagrīva appears at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple, accompanied by His consort Śrī Lakṣmī, as the presiding deity. The later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns celebrate Hayagrīva's incarnation in an icon as the full form of Viṣṇu, a God before whom one may perform the ultimate and salvific act of *prapatti* as well as the daily morning ritual called *abhigamana*. Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* and these later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns are meant to be chanted in front of the icon, and explicitly refer to Hayagrīva as the Supreme Lord who grants both mundane fruits as well as *mokṣa*.

Continuity in Theological and Ritual Functions

The important and distinctive elements of Hayagrīva iconography that are found in the Pāñcarātra tradition—the bearing of the book of knowledge/wisdom (*viññāna-pustaka*), hands in the position of wisdom (*jñāna-mudrā*), and holding the rosary beads (*akṣa-mālā*)—all interplay with Hayagrīva's association with the Vedas and sacred speech, and are present in Deśika's and the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava depictions of Him.

However, the depictions of Hayagrīva (both iconographically and functionally) are in a manner similar to those of other gods. Although I encountered no references to Hayagrīva in the Śaiva Āgamic texts, the images of Dakṣiṇāmūrti—who is described, as already noted, as bearing the *padma*, *akṣa-mālā*, *pustaka* and *jñāna-mudrā* and is also revered as the Expounder of wisdom and the *sāstras*—are remarkably similar to the Pāñcarātric depictions of Hayagrīva. Functionally, one could call Dakṣiṇāmūrti, like Hayagrīva, the Lord of learning. His role as Expounder of the *sāstras* is expressed through the same iconographical emblems as Hayagrīva's.

Similarly, it is noteworthy that the worship of Hayagrīva at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple at Tiruvahīndrapuram appears to be functionally equivalent to that of the pan-Indian goddess Sarasvatī. Instead of the devotees worshipping the non-Vaiṣṇava Sarasvatī for the grace of learning, they turn to Hayagrīva. This change is reinforced by the interplay of Hayagrīva with the swan in the *One Hundred and Eight Names of Hayagrīva*. Both Hayagrīva and Sarasvatī are connected with the swan, which is a pan-Indian symbol of wisdom and learning. In order to emphasize the greatness of Hayagrīva as the Lord of learning, Hayagrīva takes on the attributes of wisdom/discernment by being referred to as *hamsa*, “Swan” (n. 99), and *paramahamsa*, the “Supreme Swan” (n. 100).

**Pāñcarātra and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism:
The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Personalization of Mantra and the Selective Transformation of
Pāñcarātric Theology**

Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* appears to selectively transform and expand several elements from the Pāñcarātric tradition. The Vedic and esoteric elements of

Hayagrīva, as drawn from the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and clearly observed in the *Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*, are considerably more personalized in the *Hayagrīva Stotra*. We see in the *stotra* the Śrī Vaiṣṇava expansion of Pāñcarātra's abstract linkage of mantra and deity, along with the incorporation of Tamil emotional devotionism. The result is a more emotional tradition that directs itself towards a more personalized icon/God with whom the devotee cultivates an intimate relationship.

Mantra is an abstract concept which, in the context of Pāñcarātric meditation, is both the means to, and the goal of, salvation. Likewise, God's incarnation in an icon, in the context of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, is the same means and goal of every devotee. Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*, as well as the four later Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns, personalize the deity Hayagrīva, enabling the devotee to have an emotional and personal relationship with Him.

Furthermore, the process by which the deity Hayagrīva evolved into the "Lord of light and learning" amply illustrates the Śrī Vaiṣṇava usage of Pāñcarātric theology, even as it transforms it. Although Vedānta Deśika's *stotra* does not appear to recognize Hayagrīva as an emanation from an *vyūha*, in his poem He is especially endowed with certain qualities of the *vyūha* Aniruddha (splendour) and *vyūha* Saṁkarṣaṇa (knowledge and teacher of the *sāstras*), the two emanations from which He is claimed to have originated in various Pāñcarātra Āgamas

Vedānta Deśika's poem vividly demonstrates the highly selective blending of images and ideas from the pan-Indian myths of the Epics and Purāṇas with the more sectarian works based on the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and the Ālvārs. It is this synthesis that

provided the scope for Hayagrīva's position as presiding deity, worshiped in the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple in Tiruvahuindrapuram, Tamil Nadu.

Thus, the *reverse-prismatic perspective* sheds light not only on the manner in which Hayagrīva's status as the full form of God took place through the confluence of several religious streams (Epic and Purāṇic myth, Pāñcarātra Āgamic iconography and ritual practice, and Ālvār *bhakti* and iconic presence in the temple), but also on the high degree of selectivity in the process of popularizing an ambiguous and relatively minor deity to full status as the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. Although the deity Hayagrīva has many “*histories*”, as Supreme Lord (even though primarily of local interest) His Śrī Vaiṣṇava history is founded on Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra* and association with Tiruvahindrapuram. In truth, it could be said that here we see a God who gets His popularity because of the great reverence in which His devotee—Vedānta Deśika—is held.

EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The present study makes an original contribution both in the empirical and theoretical realms. In analyzing the references to, and depictions of, the deity in the three-fold corpus of Hindu texts and in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*, I demonstrate, first of all, the process by which a relatively minor deity at the pan-Indian level has been elevated and popularized to that of Supreme Lord in the South (Tamil Nadu). Further, by viewing the *Hayagrīva Stotra* and also the regional development of a relatively “minor” pan-Indian deity into Supreme Lord in the South from the *reverse-*

prismatic perspective, I illuminate a way to analyse the regional and sectarian development of a pan-Indian deity.

By surveying the various Epic and Purāṇic descriptions of Hayagrīva, I show that one cannot speak of a unilinear history of this deity, but rather His “*histories*”. Though the etiology of Gaṇeśa’s elephant head is central to the Gaṇeśa birth myths (as Courtright demonstrates), the etiology of Hayagrīva is not important for the Vaiṣṇavas. It is only in two very late Purāṇic texts (one Śākta and one Śaiva) that the link is made between the origins of the horse-headed god with the Dadhyañic sacrifice described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Interestingly, although mentioned once, the central myth of Hayagrīva’s rescue of the Vedas contained in the Epic and Purāṇic texts is not a dominant feature of Vedānta Deśika’s *Hayagrīva Stotra*. Rather, Vedānta Deśika extends the image of protector/rescuer of the Vedas, emphasizing instead Hayagrīva’s protection of His devotees.

Some elements (e.g., mantraic and iconic) have contributed to the development of the Hayagrīva deity in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism as significantly as myth. I advance the concept of “the personalization of mantra” (Pāñcarātra) to more adequately understand the profound contribution that Deśika made in depicting Hayagrīva as a more personal form of God in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava context.

Some scholars (like Matsubara)⁴ have alluded to the notion that Śrī Vaiṣṇavism draws upon the ritual aspects of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas but ignores the Āgamic theological-philosophical system as such. My study confirms this position. I demonstrate

⁴ Matsubara, *Pāñcarātra Saṁhitās and Early Vaiṣṇava Theology*, pp. 9, 38–41.

that, although Deśika's depiction of Hayagrīva and the later Śrī Vaiṣṇava Hayagrīva cult are in fact continuous with the iconic descriptions and temple rituals described in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, they are not continuous with the Āgamic ambiguity in respect of Hayagrīva's theological status. I show convincingly that Deśika's understanding of Hayagrīva is adapted to the particular Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu. In Vedānta Deśika's *stotra*, Hayagrīva is praised as *antaryāmin*, *vibhava-avatāra* and possibly *arcā-avatāra*. In the, probably, later Śrī Vaiṣṇava short devotional hymns and at the Tiruvahīndrapuram temple where Hayagrīva is the presiding deity, Hayagrīva's place in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism has basically become one of an iconic presence. Here, I advance the concept of *topotheism* to underline the distinctive Śrī Vaiṣṇava theological understanding of Viṣṇu—that all His various forms are appearances at specific places and that all of them share equal theological status.

Through my study I also demonstrate how a revered Ācārya, through his devotion to a particular deity, may in fact popularize the worship of that deity. It is only after Vedānta Deśika that Hayagrīva became popular in South Indian Vaiṣṇavism. I further show that the later depictions of Hayagrīva in Tamil Nadu not only reflect the Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu (*topotheism*), but also that the process of elevation of Hayagrīva by Śrī Vaiṣṇavas has been accompanied by the acquisition of a function earlier ascribed to another deity (Sarasvatī). It is striking that the emblems remain the same, but the images have changed. The rituals at the Swāmi Hayagrīva Temple in the worship of Hayagrīva are similar to those of the pan-Indian non-sectarian Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning. However, undoubtedly, Vaiṣṇavas

cannot worship Sarasvatī because she is a non-Vaiṣṇava deity. Similarly, for Śaivas, the form of Śiva who is revered as expounder of the *sāstras*—Dakṣiṇāmūrti—is continuous in its function with Hayagrīva; although Dakṣiṇāmūrti's image is different from Hayagrīva's, several of His specific emblems are the same.

One of the significant theoretical contributions that my study makes is to underline the inherent limitations of the structural approach in understanding mythology when that approach is applied to literate self-conscious civilizations with highly developed philosophical and theological systems. Because the structural approach removes myths from their theological context, it misses the significant implications of the myths. For self-conscious civilizations, myth is purposively written or adapted to serve the particular theological agendas of the different religious streams, rather than simply evolving through some single abstract historical process. In viewing the Vaiṣṇava and Śrī Vaiṣṇava understanding of Hayagrīva, I demonstrate an important aspect in the interrelation between mythology and religion in sectarian Hinduism—myth is often, in fact, in the service of, and subservient to, theology.

Finally, in view of the immensely complex nature of Hinduism, I also offer a new conceptual tool—the *reverse-prismatic perspective*—for analyzing and understanding the development of a pan-Indian deity. The *reverse-prismatic perspective*, as interpreted here, calls for looking back at the various religious streams in order to see how they have been fused and integrated, no doubt with a great deal of selectivity, into a particular tradition's world-view.

APPENDIX I

VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA STOTRA
(Original Translation from Sanskrit)

APPENDIX 1

VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA'S ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA STOTRA (An Original Translation from the Sanskrit)

Salutations to the great spiritual teacher (*deśikāya*).
the Honourable Veṅkaṭanātha,
lion among the poets and logicians,
[and] for me, the chosen teacher of Vedānta
who dwells always in [my] heart.¹

1

We worship God²
whose body is [made of] pure crystal,
who is full of knowledge and bliss,³
who is the foundation of all learning,
and who has the neck of a horse (*haya-grīva*).⁴

¹ This introductory *śloka* is most likely not part of the original *Hayagrīva Stotra*, but a later addition to the text. Although the name of the author is unknown, it was most probably written by one of Vedānta Deśika's disciples.

² God (*deva*) refers here to the Supreme God Viṣṇu. Based on the fact that Hayagrīva is described as being one who has the essential nature of knowledge and bliss, identifies him as Supreme God. Because Viṣṇu's "full-form" *avatāras* are all praised as the Supreme, Hayagrīva is a "full-form" *avatāra*. In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, *deva* can refer to any of the five forms of Viṣṇu, including the worshipable temple icon (*arcā-avatāra*) or to lesser gods. Although technically, according to the pan-Indian "mainstream" texts, Hayagrīva is regarded as a *vibhava-avatāra*, Deśika depicts Him in the *stotra* primarily as *antarayāmin*—the Indweller in all creation, and particularly in the human heart and mind. There are also several references in the poem to an iconic form of Hayagrīva.

³ Who is full of knowledge and bliss (*jñāna-ānanda-mayaṁ*). These are the two qualities in the list of the five which Rāmānuja calls the essential nature (*svarūpa*) of God (the remaining three are *ananta*, *satya*, and *amalatva*). See John Carman, *Theology of Rāmānuja* (reprint; Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1981), pp. 88-96.

⁴ In my translations hereafter, I consider Hayagrīva as the personal name of the god "who has the neck of a horse". However, when other names are used to identify Hayagrīva, I provide a literal translation.

2

We praise the splendid One,
 the self-existent One,
 more lustrous than
 a mountain of pure crystal gems,⁵
 who brightens the three worlds
 with his light-like nectar,
 destroys all the imperfections
 [of his devotees],
 who has the face of a horse,⁶
 and whose neighing⁷
 sends forth the eternal Vedas.⁸

3

The neighing of the horse-faced One⁹
 that spreads in a large wave
 from the ocean of knowledge,
 destroying the obstacles [of his devotees]
 and removing the ignorance
 caused by the loud and confused noise
 of the assembly of speakers
 in [their] pride-disturbed conversation
 is the entrance to the *Rg Veda*,
 the collection of the *Sāma Veda*,
 and the dwelling place of the *Yajur Veda*.

⁵ More lustrous than (*pratibhaṭam*) literally means an enemy. However, in this verse it refers to Hayagriva as an enemy to the lustre of a mountain of pure crystal gems, that is, one in competition with and superior to "a mountain of pure crystal gems".

⁶ Has the face of a horse (*haya-vadana*).

⁷ Neighing (*heṣā-hala-hala*) is literally "hala sound from neighing". *Hala* is onomatopoeic of the sound a horse makes.

⁸ Vedas (*trai-anta*), which literally means "the three-fold [Vedas] and last portion", refers to the *Rg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, and the *Upaniṣads*.

⁹ The horse-faced One (*haya-vadana*).

4

[As] the dawn [arises]
 [in] the east
 after any night,
 [so shines out] the new light
 from the black collyrium [-lined] eye of wisdom.¹⁰

May the incarnation of Vāsudeva,¹¹
 the expounder of the Vedas,
 who is called the Lord of speech,
 and has the face of a horse¹²
 appear before me!

5

I take shelter with God Hayagrīva;
 the refuge of all sentient beings,
 [and] the abode of compassion,
 whose essential nature is
 a treasure of pure knowledge,
 [and] who has vowed to grant wisdom
 [to his devotees].

¹⁰ Collyrium is a black cosmetic ointment used under the eyes to bring out hidden beauty and to protect clarity of sight. The imagery of collyrium on the eye of wisdom reflects the bringing out of hidden light.

¹¹ The name Vāsudeva is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *vas* "to reside" with the suffix *deva* which describes God's all-pervasive nature. In the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, Vāsudeva is classified as the first of the four *vyūha-avatāras* "Viṣṇu's four-fold creative cosmic emanation".

¹² Who has the face of a horse (*vāji-vaktri*).

6

O Lord!
 Even now
 with the manifestation of the uncreated Vedas,¹³
 the full extent of Your wealth
 [of knowledge and bliss]
 is still unknown.

Out of Your very compassion,
 You must grant me Your side-long glance
 because even though ignorant,
 I am praising [You]!¹⁴

7

Even the speech of the renowned ones
 beginning with,
 the image of lord Śiva facing south,¹⁵
 the goddess [Sarasvatī],¹⁶
 the dutiful wife [of Brahmā]¹⁷ seated on a lotus
 and Vyāsa,¹⁸
 is brilliant
 with the [mere] traces
 of Your [extensive] creative power.

¹³ *Vāk* (Vedas) literally means “word/speech”, but can also refer to the Vedas, which are considered as the uncreated and eternal Word.

¹⁴ The request for God’s “side-long glance”, calling Him into relationship, is a romantic expression used to demonstrate the devotee’s desire to experience the delight of God’s presence—His grace.

¹⁵ Lord Śiva (*giriśa*), literally “lord of the hill”, is an epithet for Śiva, the god who dwells on Mt. Kailāsa.

The form of Siva facing south, refers to Dakṣiṇāmūrti who is particularly popular in South India. Śaṅkara composed a *stotra*, *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*, in praise of him.

¹⁶ Sarasvatī is the goddess of learning and speech.

¹⁷ Brahmā, according to mythology, arises from the lotus in Viṣṇu’s navel.

¹⁸ Vyāsa is the mythical sage and celebrated author of important religious texts, such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

8

O treasury of speech!
 Brahmā¹⁹ would definitely become dull-headed
 and lose his good fortune [as a god],²⁰
 if You, who are alone compassionate,
 did not teach him the Vedas²¹
 which were recovered from the demons.²²

9

O God [Hayagrīva]!
 Having removed
 the swing of doubt,
 You establish Brhaspati²³
 in truth/wisdom.

Now, because of that,
 the empire of thirty gods²⁴
 is untouched by vacillation.

¹⁹ Brahmā (*virīṇca*). Virīṇca is an epithet of lord Brahmā derived from the Sanskrit verb root *vi+ric* "to reach/extend beyond". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English*, p. 983.

²⁰ This line reflects the competitive nature of the gods, used here to establish the supremacy of Viṣṇu. This is a common theme in Hindu mythology.

²¹ Vedas (*nigamana*). *Nigamana* is derived from the verb root *ni+gam* "to settle down or near", and *nigama* means "insertion, place or passage where a word occurs, such as Vedic passages". The word *nigamana* refers to "that which possesses the words/quotes of the Vedas" or to the Vedas themselves. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 545.

²² Although he does not name them, "the demons" refer to Madhu and Kāṭaibha who stole the Vedas from Brahmā, which Hayagrīva then recovered. The myth is found in *Mahābhārata* 3.193, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.18.1-6; 7.9.37.

²³ Brhaspati is the lord of knowledge and sacred speech. The name was originally an epithet for Indra but Brhaspati then evolved into an independent god. Again, this line reflects the competitive nature of the gods.

²⁴ Thirty gods (*tridaśeśvarāṇām*) are under Brhaspati. Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 458.

10

Having [received] the entire essence
 of the gifts of oblation
 [offered] into the blazing fire
 of the seven-fold sacrifice,²⁵
 You, whose body consists of mantras,
 grant satisfaction
 to the gods dwelling in the sky.

11

The pure *sattvic* ones²⁶
 [possessed] of the truth
 know You as
 the imperishable divine source
 of the syllable [*Om̐*],
 the cause [of the universe]
 the root of the great tree of the Vedas
 which shines forth [as the] truth.

12

O Lord of speech!
 Even before [there were] names and forms,
 You, revealer of the Vedas,
 are the [first] cause
 from which all things were created.

Among these [forms],
 the practicing and seeking ones
 acknowledge—You.²⁷

²⁵ The seven-fold sacrifice (*saptatantoḥ*) literally means “consisting of seven parts” as in a sacrifice. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1149.

²⁶ Pure *sattvic* ones (*viśuddhasattvāḥ*) literally means ones who are completely *sattvic* (pure) in nature.

²⁷ Revealer of the Vedas (*upajñāvācaḥ*).

13

The wise ones in [their] hearts
 contemplate Your image
 that is attractive like [rays]
 flowing out from the new moon,
 and produces the nectar of bliss
 like a hightide [rising up]
 from the Milk Ocean.²⁸

14

The King Swan²⁹
 [dwells] in the minds
 of the knowledgeable ones.
 [For] the ones who behold You
 existing in [their] minds,
 what is there for them to do?

Their words compete
 in excelling [each other]
 on their own accord
 with appropriate dignity.

²⁸ Milk Ocean is the ocean on which Lord Viṣṇu reclines. According to Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology, it is associated with the *vyūha-avatāras* (Viṣṇu's four-fold creative cosmic emanation).

²⁹ The swan is a symbol of knowledge and is also associated with Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and speech in pan-Indian non-sectarian Hinduism.

15

Those who
 even for half a moment
 betake themselves to You,
 who bathe them with Your rays
 of pure/white light,
 can slow the Heavenly Ganges³⁰
 flowing down from the Himālayas
 with [their] unimpeded rush of words.

16

O Master!
 While meditating on Your Lordship,
 the fortunate ones continuously experience
 their body hair standing on end in delight,³¹
 from bathing in [Your] nectar
 which consists of bliss
 that takes firm root
 in some imperceptible place,³²
 and [causes] sprouts [to stand upright]
 on the limbs [of the body].

³⁰ "Heavenly Ganges flowing down from the Himālayas" (*mandākinī*). Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 788.

³¹ Their body hair standing on end in delight (*pulaka-anubandham*) refers to horripilation, which is a common motif used in *bhakti* poetry to express the ecstatic experience of God's presence.

³² In some imperceptible place (*alaksite kvapi*) literally means "unperceived anywhere/somewhere", which refers to the unperceived place of one's heart or mind.

17

O Master!
 the fortunate ones seek [You]
 with their minds;
 [their] meditating upon You
 is like the waxing moon,
 [which they experience] in [their] heart
 and an ocean of boundless bliss
 that overflows with tears [of joy].

18

O Lord!
 The learned ones,
 who experience [You] of [Your] own accord,
 who are subject to You,
 and whose [inner] strength flourishes
 with Your grace
 cross over *māyā*³³
 the enticing peacock feather
 used in Your sport.³⁴

19

[May my salutations]
 be with Your lotus-like feet
 and increase to their full strength!

³³ In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, *māyā* is understood more positively than in Śaṅkara's *advaita-vedānta* philosophy, where it means "illusion". For Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, *māyā* refers to the wonderful actions and creations of Lord Viṣṇu.

³⁴ In the story of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa uses His peacock feather, a symbol of His beauty, in order to entice the *gopīs* onto the path of devotion (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.21.3-5).

Those salutations that
 are the fruits of penances
 measured out from previous [births],
 bring me liberation,
 and are the thought-gem (*cintāmaṇi*)
 of [my] desires.³⁵

20

The grace of the dust particles
 from Your blue-lotus feet
 destroyed the rows of [unfortunate] letters
 which are the sportive footsteps
 of the lord of gods (Brahmā)
 on the heads [of the devotees].³⁶

O Lord!
 Let more [dust particles
 from Your lotus-feet]
 come to me!

21

We meditate on
 Your two [lotus-like] feet,
 that are associated with the light
 shining from Your brilliant darkness-removing anklets
 [and] are connected with the dawn light
 of the lotus of inner knowledge.

³⁵ *Cintāmaṇi* is a fabled gem supposed to yield its possessor all desires.

³⁶ According to Hindu mythology, on the sixth day after birth, Brahmā inscribes every individual's destiny by imprinting his footsteps on their forehead.

22

We believe Your sweet-sounding gem anklets
 [to be] delightful decorations
 for Your servants
 [and] the safekeepers
 by which You alone
 protected the Vedic verses
 down through the ages.

23

I reflect on Your sweet hand
 in the beautiful position of exposition³⁷
 that is [like] a sprout
 on the *kalpaka* tree³⁸ of wisdom
 [and] that enkindles the wick of intelligence,
 with the light of [Vedic] doctrine.

24

O Lord!
 I contemplate [Your] right hand
 which [holds] the string of radiant rosary beads,³⁹
 [and] which is like a well-bucket
 used in [Your] sport (*līlā*),
 for Your devotees,
 desirous [of obtaining] the rising
 of [Your] nectar of knowledge.

³⁷ Hand position of exposition (*vyākhyāna-mudrā*).

³⁸ *Kalpaka* tree is one of the trees of *svarga* (heaven) fabled to fulfill all of its possessor's desires.

³⁹ String of rosary beads (*akṣa-mālā*).

25

O all-pervading God!
 Your left hand [shines] with red lustre
 [as if] bearing a cluster of corals
 [taken] from the ocean of knowledge
 and [holds] a book (*pustaka*)
 which is capable of [bestowing boons
 upon] Your devotees.

26

I see You [seated]
 on a freshly [blossomed] white lotus,
 shining like the autumn moon.

Having destroyed the darkness [of ignorance]
 with [Your] pure white light,
 [You] delight the impure *cakora*.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Partridge (*cakora*) is fabled to subsist on moonbeams. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 380. *Cakora* partridges, which are believed to exist on drinking moonlight, become happy because they drink the light of the moon (used figuratively for Hayagriva's grace). In this stanza the *cakora* is used figuratively for devotees; that is, one with impure eyes.

27

O God!
 May Your side-long glances
 which are the companions
 of Your waves of compassion
 bestow upon me continuously
 the sacred speech that flows like nectar
 into people's ears [who hear me]
 [and are like] the cow of plenty,⁴¹
 for devotees seeking refuge [with You].

28

O Lord!
 I am desirous of victory
 over the chief poets and logicians,
 who are amongst the learned members
 during the debate in the assembly
 of the knowledgeable and specialized ones.

[In order to attain victory]
 may the tip of my tongue
 obtain [its place] on Your throne.

⁴¹ The cow of plenty (*kāmadhenu*), the mythical cow that provides its possessor all its desires.

29

O Lord!
 Reflecting upon You,
 taking refuge⁴² with Your form,
 [and] raising myself up to You
 with the splendorous form of *śabda* (*śruti*),⁴³
 [I request You to]
 strengthen me as champion
 at producing words,
 over the assembly members,
 as I so desire!

30

Helpless
 in the various kinds of learning and arts,
 I, who have not even [prostrated]
 to [Your iconic]⁴⁴ incarnation
 in the sacred places,⁴⁵
 am a new and worthy vessel
 for Your compassion
 that eternally embraces the helpless.

⁴² Who have surrendered to You (*prapanna*). In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, *prapatti* “self-surrender” is a central concept. Vedānta Deśika taught that *prapatti* is superior to the paths of *jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*.

⁴³ With the splendorous form of *śabda* (word) (*śabda-mayena dhamna*). Although *śabda* literally means “word”, it may also refer to *mantra* or *śruti*.

⁴⁴ The word “iconic” is inserted based on the fact that the stanza is about taking refuge at a pilgrimage place.

⁴⁵ [Your] incarnation (*avatāra*) in the sacred place (*tīrtha*) refers to the iconic form of Hayagrīva (*arcāvatāra*). *Tīrtha* derived from the verb root *tr* “to cross over” means the place of crossing over, which refers to a pilgrimage place where God descends as an incarnation. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 449.

31

On account of Your grace,
 may [You] decorate my heart
 with the truths
 which are luminous
 which completely remove impurity and doubt
 [and] are undisturbed by fallacious reasonings.

32

O Lord of speech
 who is seated on a white lotus
 that has the brilliance of a cut crystal!

Bearing a conch, disc, book,
 [and] with [Your] lotus-like hand
 in the position of exposition,⁴⁶
 may You, the glorious and sinless One
 appear in [my] mind
 and bathe me in [Your] shining rays
 of bright lustrous nectar.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Vyākhyāna-mudrā* hand position of exposition.

⁴⁷ This *śloka* is a description of an image (*mūrti*) of Hayagrīva. It may be a *dhyāna śloka* which is used by devotees to visualize the deity during meditation or is memorized by artisans (*śilpīns*) to follow while making the icon of the deity, as it describes the form and qualities required in an icon of Hayagrīva. It resembles prescriptive descriptions contained in the Āgamas. See Chapter IV.

One must recite with devotion
 this *Hayagrīva Stotra*
 composed by Venkṭaṇātha⁴⁸
 the lion-like poet-logician
 for the goal of success
 in the meaning of speech.

Salutations to the Honourable Venkaṭeśa,
 the guru of Vedānta,
 the lion among poets and logicians,
 who is endowed with auspicious qualities.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ During the early period of his writing career, Vedānta Deśika was known by the name of Venkṭaṇātha and/or Vedāntācārya.

⁴⁹ This is the *phala-śruti* (verse of reward/fruit), a verse that describes the benefit to be gained from the recitation of the *stotra*. This last *śloka* is more than likely not part of the original *Hayagrīva Stotra*, but a later addition to the poem. Although the author is unknown, this stanza, like the introductory stanza, was most probably written by a disciple of Vedānta Deśika.

APPENDIX II

ŚRĪ VAIṢṆAVA DEVOTIONAL TEXTS (Original Translations from Sanskrit)

Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā
Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti
Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti
Śrī Hayagrīva Abhigamana

ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA AṢṬOTTARA ŚAT NĀMA ARCANĀ
(Worship of the One Hundred and Eight Names of Śrī Hayagrīva)

Om Salutations to ...

1. *Hayagrīva*: Horse-necked One.
2. *Mahāviṣṇu*: Great/Supreme Viṣṇu.
3. *Keśava*: One who has lovely locks of hair [* (n. 23)].¹
4. *Madhusūdana*: Slayer of Madhu [* (n. 74)].
5. *Govinda*: Chief Cowherder (Kṛṣṇa) [* Recipient of words (of praise) and He who rescued the earth (ns. 189, 543)].
6. *Puṇḍarikākṣa*: Lotus-eyed One [* Eye of Puṇḍarīka (i.e., the Transcendental world) (n. 112)].
7. *Viṣṇu*: One who pervades [* Pervader (ns. 2, 259, 663)].
8. *Viṣvambhara*: all-supporting One.
9. *Hari*: the Green-coloured One [* the Green-hued (n. 656)].
10. *Ādiṭya*: Son of the mother of gods [* the Person on the Sun and the Son of Ādiṭi (Devaki) (ns. 39, 568)].
11. *Sarvavāgīśa*: Lord of all speech.
12. *Sarvādhāra*: Bearer/Sustainer of all [the universe].
13. *Sanātana*: Eternal One [* Ancient One (n. 897)].
14. *Nirādhāra*: Remover of ignorance.
15. *Nirākāra*: Formless One.
16. *Nirīśa*: One who has no lord over Him.

¹ * indicates that the identical name is found in the *Thousand Names of Viṣṇu, Mahābhārata*. I have also included in brackets the number(s) of each name, as well as any definitions (variant from my own translations), that appear in the *Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma with the Bhasya of Śrī Parasara Bhaṭṭar*.

Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma with the Bhasya of Śrī Parasara Bhaṭṭar, translation by Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan (Madras: Sri Visishtadvaita Prachari Sabha, 1983).

17. *Nirūpadrava*: Essence without form.
18. *Nirañjana*: eternally Taintless.
19. *Niṣkalaṅka*: Taintless One.
20. *Nityatṛpta*: One who is eternally satisfied.
21. *Nirāmaya*: Pure One/Infallible One.
22. *Cidānandamaya*: One who is made of *cit*² and *ānanda*.
23. *Sākṣi*: Observer [* He who sees them all directly (ns. 15, 157)].
24. *Śaraṇya*: One who is refuge.
25. *Sarvadāyaka*: Bestower of all.
26. *Śrīman*: Possessor of wealth [of knowledge (*jñāna*) and bliss (*ānanda*)] [* He of a lovely form, Possessed of beauty and He who is endowed with wealth (ns. 22, 180, 222)].
27. *Lokatrayādhiśa*: Supreme Lord of the three worlds.
28. *Śiva*: Auspicious One [* He who confers auspiciousness (ns. 27, 607)].
29. *Sārasvataprada*: Bestower of [the wisdom] of Sarasvatī.
30. *Vedoddharṭṛ*: Recoverer of the Vedas.
31. *Vedanidhi*: Ocean or Receptacle of the Veda.
32. *Vedavedya*: Knower of the Vedas or One who is celebrated for [recovering] the Vedas.
33. *Prabhūttama*: Supreme One among the lords.
34. *Pūrṇa*: One who is full [of knowledge and bliss] [* (n. 690)].
35. *Pūrayita*: [* Fulfiller (of the desires of others) (n. 691)].

² *Cit* according to Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta refers to “sentient beings” which is one of the three eternal realities (*Īśvara* and *acit* are the other two). The difference between *Īśvara* and *cit* is that *Īśvara* is the Inner Controller of *cit* as well as that *Īśvara* creates.

36. *Punya*: Purifier' [* (ns. 692, 925)].
37. *Puṇyakīrti*: Famous or celebrated One [* He, the singing of Whose glory also is purifying (n. 693)].
38. *Parāt para*: Superior to the best.
39. *Paramātmā*: Supreme Soul [* (n. 11)].
40. *Parajyotiḥ*: Supreme light or the Supreme radiant One.
41. *Pareśa*: Highest Lord.
42. *Pāraga*: Master.
43. *Para*: Highest One.
44. *Sarvavedātmaka*: One whose nature is the entire Veda.
45. *Vidvāṁs vedavedāntapāraga*: Learned One, who has mastered the Vedas and Vedānta.
46. *Sakalopaniṣadvedya*: One who knows the entire Veda and Upaniṣad.
47. *Niṣkala*: One who drives out [ignorance, impurity] or One who drives away [demons].
48. *Sarvaśāstrakṛta*: Maker of all the *śāstras*.
49. *Akṣamālājñānamudrāyuktahasta*: One who has hands that are in the position of wisdom and a hand holding the rosary.
50. *Varaprada*: One who grants boons.
51. *Purāṇa*: Ancient One.
52. *Puruṣaśreṣṭha*: Best amongst the *puruṣas*.
53. *Śarāṇya*: Protector.
54. *Parameśvara*: Supreme Ruler [* (n. 379)].
55. *Śānta*: Tranquil One [* He who is always tranquil (n. 589)].
56. *Dānta*: One whose [complexion] is [white] like ivory.

57. *Jitakrodha*: One who has conquered anger [* He who conquered the anger" (n. 463)].
58. *Jitāmitra*: Conqueror of enemies [* (n. 527)].
59. *Jaganmaya*: One whose [body] is the earth.
60. *Janmamṛtyuhara*: Destroyer of birth and death [* (n. 966)].
61. *Jīva*: One who brings or gives life [* He who makes (them) live (n. 515)].
62. *Jayada*: Bestower of victory.
63. *Jāḍyanāśana*: Destroyer of ignorance.
64. *Japapriya*: One who is fond of *japa*.³
65. *Japastutya*: One who is praised by *japa*.
66. *Jāpakapriyakṛta*: Benefactor of those who recite *japa*.
67. *Prabhu*: Almighty Lord [* He who is all powerful, and He who is powerful (ns. 35, 300)].
68. *Vimala*: Pure One.
69. *Viśvarūpa*: One [who takes] various forms.
70. *Viśvagoptṛ*: Preserver of the universe.
71. *Vidhistuta*: One who is praised for act [of recovering the Vedas].
72. *Vidhīndraśivasamstutya*: One who is praised by Brahmā, Indra and Śiva.
73. *Śāntida*: Bestower of (eternal) peace [* (n. 594)].
74. *Kṣantipāraga*: Master of patience.
75. *Śreyahprada*: Bestower of welfare or bliss.
76. *Śrutimaya*: One who consists of *śruti*.⁴

³ *Japa* (muttered prayers) refers to a mode of worship whereby devotees silently recite prayers and/or mantras in praise of God.

⁴ *Śruti* (that which is heard) refers to revelation; that is, the Vedas and Vedānta.

77. *Śresāmpati*: Lord of the Highest.
78. *Īśvara*: Lord [* Supreme Ruler (ns. 36, 75)].
79. *Acyuta*: Imperisheable One [* He who is never separated (n. 101)].
80. *Anantarūpa*: One who has innumerable forms [* He of infinite forms (n. 932)].
81. *Prāṇada*: Giver of life [* Giver of breath (ns. 66,323,409)].
82. *Pr̥thivīpati*: Sovereign of the earth.
83. *Avyakta*: Unmanifested One [* He who is not manifest (n. 727)].
84. *Vyaktarūpa*: One who has a form perceptible by the senses [* (n. 306)].
85. *Sarvasākṣin*: Witness of everything.
86. *Tamohara*: Dispeller of darkness.
87. *Ajñānanāśaka*: Destroyer of ignorance.
88. *Jñānin*: Wise One.
89. *Pūrṇacandrasamaprama*: One whose light is like the full moon.
90. *Jñānada*: Bestower of wisdom.
91. *Vākpati*: Lord of speech.
92. *Yogin*: One who is endowed with super-human powers [* (n. 853)].
93. *Yogīśa*: Lord of *yogins* [* (n. 854)].
94. *Sarvakāmada*: [* “Bestower of all desires” (n. 855)].
95. *Mahāyogin*: great Sage.
96. *Mahāmauni*: great silent One.
97. *Maunīśa*: Lord of silence.
98. *Śreyasāṁgati*: One who is in the Highest state.

99. *Haṁsa*: One who is [pure and white like] a swan [* Swan (n. 193)].
100. *Paramahaṁsa*: Supreme Swan.
101. *Viśvagopṭṛ*: Protector of the words.
102. *Virāj*: Sovereign King.
103. *Svarāj*: Self-ruler.
104. *Suddhasphaṭikasamkāśa*: One whose [lustre] is similar to pure crystal.
105. *Jaṭāmaṇḍalasaṁyuta*: One who has a bundle of twisted hair locks.
106. *Ādimadhyāntarahita*: One who is free from ignorance.
107. *Sarvavāgīśvareśvara*: Lord over all the gods of speech [* Lord of all who have a master over all words (n. 808)].

Salutations to ...

108. *Śrimate lakṣmīhayavadanaparabrahman*: Śrī Hayavadana (Horse-faced One), accompanied by Lakṣmī, is Supreme Brahman.

ATHA ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA MŪLA MANTRA¹ STUTI
(In Praise of the Śrī Hayagrīva Root Mantra)

1

Om [my] obeisance to You,
Lord of the worlds (Jagānātha),
the primordial One,
the Supreme of the best,
whose consort is Lakṣmī.

[We] utter the word *namah* (obeisance)
to Viṣṇu,
the King of learning (and the arts).

2

Obeisance to the God of gods,
whose body is the sacred syllable *Om* and *Udgītha*²
who is the image of the *Rg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma* (Vedas),
and who is the giver of the desired goal/object!

3

Obeisance to You,
Lord Hayagrīva.

Destroy the darkness of ignorance,
provide me wealth,
[and] quickly grant me knowledge!

¹ *Atha Śrī Hayagrīva Mūla Mantra Stuti* reflects the influence of Pāñcarātra ritual on Śrī Vaiṣṇavism.

² *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*.

4

O God Janārdana³ !
 Destroy the ghosts, evil spirits, and demons,
 abolish all diseases
 begining with fever,
 [and] bring prosperity (to me).

5

Obeisance to You,
 Lord Hayagrīva.

Destroy all poverty,
 destroy my enemies
 [and] make [me] a vessel
 for all auspicious and good fortune.

6

Obeisance to You,
 [Lord] Hayagrīva,
 the Lord of lords.

May He grant me wisdom (*medhā*), knowledge (*vidyā*),
 valor (*bala*), wealth (*saṃpad*), sons and grandsons.

7

Obeisance to You,
 God Hayagrīva!
 Destroy poisonous snakes
 like *kārkoṭaka*,⁴
 and make me immortal.

³ Janārdana is the Destroyer of demons and the Protector of people. See *Śrī Vishnu Sahasranāma with the Bhasya of Sri Parasara Bhanur* (translation by Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan) (Madras: Sri Visishtadvaita Prachari Sabha, 1983), p. 257.

⁴ *Kārkoṭaka* is one of the principal snakes of the hell called *Pātāla*. See *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* XXI.21.

8

[O] Supreme over all,
whose lotus-like feet are worshipped by women
belonging to heaven.⁵

Provide me power
over women, public citizens, and the king.

9

Obeisance to the horse-headed One⁶ (Hayagrīva),
the One who possesses [light]
like the halo of the moon,
the Giver of desired goal,
who is [in the form of] a swan
[and] is the Highest Lord.

10

Obeisance to the splendid One,
in the Form of the *R̥g*, *Yajur*, and *Sāma* (Vedas),
whose [body] is *ṛta*,
who [dwells] at the centre of the moon,
and who is seated on the blue-lotus.

⁵ Divine females (*devāṅganā*), see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 495.

⁶ Whose head is a horse (*haya-utama-aṅga*) literally means whose highest body part is a horse.

⁷ The central concept in the *R̥g Veda* is *ṛta*. *Ṛta*, difficult to translate, means "Law" or "Order". Originally *ṛta* was a concept that pertained to the physical world denoting the Natural Law operative in the movement of the planets, the cycle of night and day, the season cycles and so forth. However, the cosmic understanding of *ṛta* gradually developed into a social concept denoting Moral Law. The world takes its regular course because of *ṛta*; therefore, humans must live according to *ṛta*. *Ṛta* is the ethical order for humans and is the physical order for the universe.

11

Obeisance to *Brahman*,
 who is known by the Vedas and Vedānta,
 who recovered the Vedas [from the demons],
 and destroyed the great confusion
 by rescuing the Vedas.

12

[Obeisance] to the eternal One,
 whose words are *Pranava*⁸ and *Udgītha*,
 and who bestows wisdom
 on those who worship whole-heartedly.

May my prostration be conveyed to Him!

13

Obeisance to the great horse-headed One,⁹
 whose beautiful radiance surpasses
 the great [lustre] of a crystal bulb of red coral,
 and to the God,
 [and] who fulfills everyone's [desires].

⁸ *Pranava* is another word for the sacred syllable *Om*.

⁹ Great horse-headed One (*mahā-asva-sīras*).

14

Nārada,¹⁰
 who is an ocean of *tapas*,¹¹
 who has a face [full of] happiness,
 after bowing to Janārdana,
 recited the twelve *mantras*
 to Parāśara.

15

[As] the dawn [rises]
 [in] the east
 after any night,
 [so] the new light [shines out]
 from the black collyrium [-lined] eye of wisdom.¹²

May the incarnation of Vāsudeva,
 the Expounder of the Vedas,
 Who is called the Lord of Speech,
 and has the face of a horse¹³
 appear before me!¹⁴

16

I prostrate to the horse-headed One,¹⁵
 Hari,
 who destroys the darkness of ignorance,
 who gives everything,
 and is a flood of pure knowledge.

¹⁰ A sage who is the son of Parāśara.

¹¹ *Tapas* (heat) accumulated with meditation or practices of austerity.

¹² Collyrium is a black cosmetic ointment used under the eyes to bring out hidden beauty and to protect clarity of sight. The imagery of collyrium on the eye of wisdom reflects the bringing out of hidden light.

¹³ Who has the Face of a horse (*vāji-vaktri*).

¹⁴ This stanza is identical to the fourth stanza in Vedānta Deśika's *Hayagrīva Stotra*.

¹⁵ Horse-headed One (*turaga-grīva*).

LAKṢMĪ HAYAVADANA PRAPATTI¹
(Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī)

1

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings²
whose essential nature is pure wisdom
who vowed to give wisdom [to His devotees]
and is an abode of compassion.

2

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who created Brahmā
who always provides the eternal Vedas to him
and bestows self-knowledge on all.

3

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who taking the [form of] the neck of a horse,³
[and] uttering the *Udgītha*⁴ in high pitch
entered the nether world
and brought the Vedas from there.

¹ The word *prapatti* (surrender) comes from the Sanskrit verb root *pra+pad* "to throw oneself down, to surrender". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 682.

For Vatakalais, there is a six-fold discipline of surrender to God, the final step being *ātma-nikṣepa*, the act of total surrender to the care of God. *Rahasya Traya Sāra* XI. The *Lakṣmī Hayavadana Prapatti* (Surrender to Hayavadana Accompanied by Lakṣmī) is a hymn that expresses surrender specifically to Hayagrīva.

² I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva who is a refuge for all beings (*dehabhīnām śaraṇyaṁ devaṁ hayagrīvaṁ ahaṁ prapadye*).

³ Neck of a horse (*kaṇṭha-haya*).

⁴ *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*.

4

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

After worshipping with oblations [of cooked food and fruits]
and after giving again the Vedas
to [His] son (Brahmā),
He killed the two demons (Madhu and Kaitābha)
who reside in the ocean.

5

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

the forms Madhu and Kaitābha
both arose out of the two drops of nectar
[arising out of the Lord's navel]
which fell on the stem of the lotus
[giving them] the qualities of *rajas* and *tamas*⁵
which caused them to steal the Vedas.

6

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who became adorable
to the gods
who was supplicated as carrier of oblations
in the sacrifices
and who showed His body in the beautiful form of a horse.⁶

⁵ The technical term *guṇa* (quality) means the constituent of the material world and is three-fold: (1) *satva* (purity, white, true); (2) *rajas* (passion, activity, agitation); and (3) *tamas* (darkness, lethargy).

⁶ Body in the beautiful form of a horse (*kāya-hayam vapus*).

7

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who is the Lord of learning
Madhusūdana (Slayer of Madhu)
the One who provides the interest
in the highest goal of *mokṣa*
to those who are born into this world.

8

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who is an abode of compassion
who has taken the form of a horse⁷
in the disc of the sun
and provides the eternal Vedas
for Yajñavalkya.⁸

9

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

even the clever speech that spreads
the sound of wisdom
of people beginning with Vyāsa
originates from the glance [of Lord Hayagrīva].

⁷ The form of a horse (*aśva-vapus*).

⁸ Yajñavalkya is an ancient sage who is frequently cited as an authority in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* as the first teacher of the White Yajur Veda. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 850.

10

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who has taken the form of [incarnations] beginning with Matsya
who has taken the forms of different *ācāryas*
and who gives the knowledge of Vedānta.

11

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who a refuge for all beings;

who is most splendid, gracious, and auspicious
with pure wisdom
and is the well-known horse
who expressed all the true qualities
by taking the shape of a horse's mouth.

12

I bow down to Lord Hayagrīva
who is a refuge for all beings;

who, seated on the white lotus,
bears in His hands the conch (*dara*), wheel (*cakra*), book (*kośa*)
and has the hand position of exposition (*vyākhyāna-mudrā*)
[and] who has Lakṣmī, the form of knowledge (*vidyā*),
on His left side.

ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA ABHIGAMANA¹
(Morning Prayer to Śrī Hayagrīva)

Salutations to the glorious Hayagrīva—

1

I approach with devotion (*abhigamana*) the One
who is [born] from the body of Aniruddha,
has the nature of strength,
is the destroyer of the difficulties of Brahmā,
is the Lord of Lakṣmī,
and has the form of the neck of a horse (Hayagrīva).

2

At this time,
destroying the darkness,
the sun causes the blooming of all lotuses
and awakens everyone
with His own [rays],
[we] set out for the One
seated on the white lotus
to praise and fix [our hearts] upon Him.

“O, auspicious morning (*suprabhāta*) to You
Lord with the face of a horse.”²

¹ The term for the ritual act of *abhigamana* (approaching) comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *abhi+gam* which means “to go near, to approach” (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 61).

The literal meaning of *abhigamana* is “approaching”; however, the *abhigamana* ritual refers specifically to the act of approaching God with devotion in the morning. It is the first of the five obligatory daily rituals that a Śrī Vaiṣṇava must perform. After bathing and drawing the Śrī Vaiṣṇava mark representative of the feet of Viṣṇu on his/her forehead, the devotee starts the day by “approaching” God (either in a temple or home shrine), in order to seek God’s grace and in order to be able to fulfill his/her daily religious duties properly.

² The face of a horse (*vāji-vaktra*).

3

Headed by Brahmā, the creator of the Vedas,
 [and] followed by his consort (Sarasvati),
 then Śiva, Bṛhaspati, his sons Kavi and Buddha,
 the moon, the gods, and then the preceptors
 gather [in front of Hayagrīva and say—]

“O, auspicious morning (*suprabhāta*) to You
 Lord with the face of a horse.”³

4

I take refuge at the feet of the glorious Horse-faced One⁴
 who carefully wandered about
 searching for Madhu and Kaiṭabha in the ocean,
 recovered the Vedas, and with reverence disseminate them,
 [and] which are worthy of being washed
 by the devotees headed by Brahmā.

5

O glorious and splendid Horse-faced One
 [accompanied by] Lakṣmī⁵
 accept my worship.

While taking refuge with Your lotus-like feet
 I ask You
 to let Your beautiful and glorious form
 which is the essence of auspicious nectar
 flowing from the moon
 shine in my innermost heart/mind.

³ The face of a horse (*vāji-vaktra*).

⁴ Horse-faced One (*vāji-vaktra*).

⁵ Horse-faced One accompanied by Lakṣmī (*lakṣmīhayamukha*).

6

O glorious Horse-faced One [accompanied by] Lakṣmī,⁶
 having killed the thieves Madhu and Kaiṭabha,
 and having restored the Vedas quickly [to Brahmā],
 You were able to protect the entire world.

Establish me in wisdom,
 even if [I am] disturbed by various thoughts,
 let that knowledge never leave me.

7

O You Hayagrīva [accompanied by] Lakṣmī⁷
 You narrated the true essence of the Vedas
 to those who desired heaven,
 narrated the fruits of worship
 and told the preferred meanings of all words.

So [according] to the human goals,
 You are residing in the heart/mind of all.
 Let my supreme devotion rest in You.

8

The mind races like a monkey
 overpowered by external senses.
 How can I meditate upon You, lustrous Horse-faced One?⁸

Hayagrīva's⁹ word (holy verse) which is
 sweet, excellent and auspicious,
 superior to the abounding and continuous flow
 of the heavenly Ganges
 in the most splendid pilgrimage place.

⁶ Horse-faced One accompanied by Lakṣmī (*lakṣmīhayamukha*).

⁷ Horse-faced One accompanied by Lakṣmī (*lakṣmīhayamukha*).

⁸ Horse-faced One (*vāji-vaktra*).

⁹ Hayagrīva is literally *hayamukha* (horse-faced One).

9

O Śrī Hayagrīva!

Those who have set their minds on renunciation
never think of worshipping other gods,
and do not [worship] [boons] beginning with prosperity
Their [devotion] is all towards You.
You are skilled in protecting [one] from the rupturing of devotion.
Please bring upon me that which is good for me.

10

The flowering (*puṣpa*)¹⁰ of spiritual attainment
begins with truth.

O Horse-faced One, the consort of Lakṣmī,
I worship You for total satisfaction.
Householders protect their wives and children and so forth
thinking that their abandonment is a sin.
Make me do acts that are proper
[so that I may live as a householder in the right way].

11

O Horse-faced One,¹¹
Provide me the wisdom of service (*kaiṅkaryā*),
which is pleasing to You.
and the overflow of devotion and knowledge
fixed between heaven and earth.

Bestow the knowledge that will remove all bad deeds
and the roots that tie us to this world.

¹⁰ The composition is very late based on the fact that the *puṣpa* flower is not common in the South, but is referred to in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

¹¹ Horse-faced One (*turaga-vadana*).

12

Your form is related [to the other gods]
 in that Your daughter-in-law (Sarasvatī)
 dwells on the tongue of Brahmā.
 Even Brahmā has four faces by Your grace
 and Śiva [who has the form of] Dakṣiṇāmūrti,
 is Your grandson.

Lustrous Hayagrīva,
 immortal and omniscient,
 is thus connected with all the gods.
 Please dwell in my [heart]
 and shower Your blessing [upon me].

13

Those people who gaze at the Slayer of Madhu (*Madhusūdana*)
 and supplicate Him with this glorious hymn
 will become happy with auspicious intelligence, qualities, and character.
 The goals for humans are fixed in their own hands.

APPENDIX III

SHORT RITUAL TEXTS FOLLOWING THE ĀGAMIC TRADITION (Original Translations from Sanskrit):

Śrī Hayagrīva Upaniṣad
Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Prārambha
Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca Anyat
Śrī Hayagrīva Pañjara

ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA UPANIṢAD¹

May that Lord
who has the neck of a horse
always shine in my heart.

He is all-knowing,
and with His grace,
one can obtain its result,
[His] wisdom.

Śānti mantra is *Oṃ bhadraṃ karnebhiḥ*
(*Oṃ*, hearing auspicious [things]).

Hari Oṃ.

Nārada,² approaching Brahmā, said, “Oh Lord learn the highest sacred knowledge (*brahma-vidyā*), by which one quickly gets rid of all obstacles [arising from] evil, and gains glory.”

Brahmā said, “The knower of the mantra pertaining to Hayagrīva, knows the *śrutis*,³ *smṛtis*,⁴ *itihāsas*,⁵ and *purāṇas*.⁶ He becomes glorious.”

These mantras are:

O Hayagrīva!
Salutations to You,
whose form is consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*),
whose essential nature is beyond the Universe.

¹ *Upaniṣad*, comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *upa+ni+ṣad* “to go near or to go to the side” and, refers to the sitting down at the feet of another to listen to his words, or setting at rest ignorance by revealing the knowledge of the Supreme spirit. Sir Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Marwah Publisher, 1986), p. 201.

² Nārada is the son of Brahmā who acts as a messenger between the gods and people. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 537.

³ *Śruti* (that which is heard) refers to the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads, revered as divine revelation.

⁴ *Smṛti* (that which is remembered) refers to sacred literature (other than the Vedas), including the texts of the subcategories *itihāsa* and *purāṇa*.

⁵ *Itihāsa* (history) refers to the two great Hindu Epics—the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

⁶ *Purāṇa* (ancient) refers to the vast collection of tales that are historical, legendary and mythological.

Hail! Hail! Salutations to the King of wisdom, [1]
the form of the *Rg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma*,
who [performed] the act of recovering the Vedas.

Salutations to the great One,
who has the head of a horse,
whose body is the *Udgītha*⁷ and *Pranava*. [2]

Salutations to the Lord
the Master of all speech.

May You make us all wise,
having contemplated on [Your] form
that is comprised of all the Vedas. [3]

The *ṛsis* [for the mantras] are Brahmā, Atri, Ravi, Savitr and Bhārgava. The metre [for the mantras] is *gāyatrī*⁸, *triṣṭhub*⁹, and *anuṣṭubh*¹⁰.

That auspicious divinity, who has the head of a horse, is the Supreme Soul/Godhead. *Lhaum* (*hasaum*) is the seed. I am that which is the power. *Lhūm* (*hasaum*) is the inner syllable of the mantra (*kīlaka*). This mantra is for enjoyment and *mokṣa*. *Āṅganyāsa*¹¹ (placement on the body) is to be done with the syllables *a*, *u*, and *m*.

[We] meditate upon [the verses] —

I worship Hayagrīva
who shines like a full moon
[and] who has four arms [bearing]
the conch shell, disc, great *mudrā* and book.

The two syllable [mantra] is *Om śrīm*.
The one syllable [mantra] is *lhaum* (*hasaum*).

⁷ *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*.

⁸ *Gāyatrī* (song) is a Vedic metre that consists of three lines and eight syllables.

⁹ *Triṣṭub* is a Vedic metre that consists of four lines of eleven syllables.

¹⁰ *Anuṣṭubh* is a Vedic metre that consists of four *padas* that are eight syllables each (one stanza contains thirty-two syllables).

¹¹ *Āṅga-nyāsa* is *nyāsa* of the limbs/body. *Nyāsa* is Vedic and Tantric practice of placing a spiritual letter on each body part, resulting in the spiritual transformation of each body part and making the body a pure and suitable receptacle for worship.

The seven syllable [mantra] is *Om̐ namo bhagavate*¹².
 The five syllable [mantra] is Hayagrīva.
 The three syllable [mantra] is Viṣṇu.
 The six syllable [mantra] is *mahyam medhām prajñām*.
 The five syllable [mantra] is *prayaccha svāha*.
 The four syllable [mantra] is Hayagrīva. [4]

The two syllable [mantra] is *Om̐ śrīm*.
 The two syllable [mantra] is *lhaum (hasaum)*.
 The three syllable [mantra] is *emaimaim*.
 The two syllable [mantra] is *klīm*.
 The two syllable [mantra] is *sauh*.
 The one syllable [mantra] is *hrīm*.
 The seven syllable [mantra] is *Om̐ namo bhagavate*.
 The five syllable [mantra] is Hayagrīva.
 The six syllable [mantra] is *mahyam medhām prajñām*.
 The five syllables [mantra] is *prayaccha svāha*.
 The fifth is Manu. [5]

[End of the first section of the *Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*]

I shall now tell the wisdom pertaining to Brahman (*brahma-vidyā*) by the syllables of Hayagrīva. Brahman [gave it] to Maheśvara¹³. Maheśvara [gave it] to Saṁkarṣaṇa¹⁴. Saṁkarṣaṇa [gave it] to Nārada. Nārada [gave it] to Vyāsa¹⁵. Vyāsa [gave it] to the world. [1]

All the three syllables *h*, *s* and *m* are one reality.
Lhaum (hasaum) is the *bīja-akṣara* (seed syllable). The one who meditates upon the *bīja-akṣara*, the form of *lhaum (hsaum)*, becomes the essence of prosperity. One who knows the wisdom of the essential nature of these [mantras] is released from the body. One becomes masters of the guards of directions, kings, elephants, and *kinnaras*.¹⁶ The sun and others are doing their own duties, by [possessing] the knowledge and discipline to repeat the one syllable [mantras] of Hayagrīva. The seed syllable (*bīja-akṣara*) is best of all seed syllables. It is [really] the king of the mantras. *Lhaum (hsaum)* is the essential nature of Hayagrīva. [2]

¹² *Om̐ namo bhagavate* is "Om̐ Salutations to the Lord".

¹³ Maheśvara (Great Lord) refers to Lord Śiva.

¹⁴ Saṁkarṣaṇa one of the *vyūhas* (four-fold cosmic emanations of Viṣṇu).

¹⁵ Vyāsa is the mythical sage and celebrated author of important texts including the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

¹⁶ *Kinnaras* are mythical figures with human bodies and horses' heads.

Hail! Make me, make me immortal. One who recites [the mantra] becomes successful in speech (*vāk-siddha*), established in prosperity (*śrī-siddha*), and accomplished in eight-limbed yoga (*aṣṭaṅga-yoga-siddha*).

Lhaum (hasaum) make me, make me one who has the attainment of dominion over all.

Hail! One who knows these mantras, even if impure, becomes pure. One who is incontinent becomes continent. One is purified even if adulterous. One is purified [even] after talking with fallen ones. One is free from sins, such as killing a *brāhmaṇa*. Just as the master of the house enters the house, the person at the end of his life enters into the Supreme Soul (*parama-ātma*). [3]

These mantras explicate the same meaning explicated by the four Upaniṣadic great statements (*mahāvākya*):

Brahman is wisdom and bliss (*prajñānam ānadam brahman*).¹⁷
 Thou are that (*tat tvam asi*).¹⁸
 That soul is Brahman (*ayam ātma brahman*).¹⁹
 I am Brahman (*aham brahmāsmi*).²⁰ [4]

These mantras have two parts—vowels and consonants.

The mantras are recited as follows:

- (1) *yadvāgvadanīyavicetanāni rāṣṭi devānām niṣasāda mandrā. catasra ūrjam duduhe payāṁsi kva svidasyāḥ paramaṁ jagām*.²¹
- (2) *gaurīrmimāya salilāni takṣatyekapadi dvipadi sā catuspadi. aṣṭāpadi navapadi babhūvuṣi sahasrākṣarā parama vyoman*.²²
- (3) *oṣṭāpidhānā nakulī dantaiḥ parivṛtā pavih. sarvasyai vaca īśānā cāru māmiha vādayediti ca vāgrasaḥ*.
- (4) *sasarparīramatiṁ bādhamānā brhanmimāya jamadagnidantā. āsūryasyaduritā tatātān sravo deveṣvamṛtamajuryam*.²³ [5]

¹⁷ *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.28 and *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.3.

¹⁸ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

¹⁹ *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2 and *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 2.9.

²⁰ *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10.

²¹ *R̥g Veda Saṁhitā* 8.100.10.

²² *R̥g Veda Saṁhitā* 1.164.41.

²³ *R̥g Veda Saṁhitā* 3.53.15.

One who recites the knowledge of Brahman
on the *ekādaśī*²⁴ day
becomes a great person
with the grace of Hayagrīva.

One [will be] liberated
from one's mortal body/life.
Oṃ Salutations to Brahman.
Let this [Upaniṣad] be held by me.
Let the holder stand steady.
Let me hear great things for years to come.

Oṃ [to this] *Upaniṣad*.
Hari Oṃ tat sat (to this Truth).
Śānti [mantra] is *Oṃ bhadraṃ karṇebhiḥ* (*Oṃ*, hearing auspicious [things]). [6]

[So ends the *Sri Hayagrīva Upaniṣad*.]

²⁴ *Ekādaśī* day is the 11th day of a fortnight. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 230.

ATHA ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA KAVACA¹ PRĀRAMBHA
(Beginning of the Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective]-Shield)

Now the Commencement of the Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca...

The *ṛṣi* of this great mantra, the Śrī Hayagrīva kavaca, is Hayagrīva. It is [composed in] the eight syllabled metre. Śrī Hayagrīva, the Supreme Soul, is its deity (*devatā*).²

The *bīja*³ [mantra] is

“Om śrīm, salutations to the Lord of Speech.”

The *śakti*⁴ [mantra] is

“Om klīm, salutations to the Foundation of Learning.”

The *kīlaka*⁵ [mantra] is

“Om saum, salutations to the Ocean of the Vedas.

Om, salutations to Hayagrīva,
the white-lustred One,
who is in the form of wisdom.

Om, hail to the Creator [of the universe]
the Imperishable One,
the Bestower of the knowledge of Brahman.

My task in repeated recitation (*japa*) has as its purpose the attainment of the grace of Hayagrīva.

The meditation:

¹ The word *kavaca*—meaning “armour, jacket, amulet, charm, mystical syllable forming part of a mantra used as an amulet”—is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *ku* “to cry out, moan, make a sound or any noise”. *Kavacas* are chants recited for the purpose of protection. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, pp. 264, 299.

² This introduction of the *kavaca* is continuous with the Pāñcarātra Āgamic and Śrī Vaiṣṇava style. See introductory passages of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, and *Śrī Vishnu Sahasranāma with the Bhasya of Parasara Bhaṭṭar* (translation by Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan) (Madras: Sri Visishtadvaita Prachari Sabha, 1983), p. 49.

³ *Bīja* is the mystical letter forming the essential part of the mantra of a deity.

⁴ *Śakti* is the power or energy of a composition, a deity or spiritual being.

⁵ *Kīlaka* is the name of the inner syllable of a mantra.

1

In the fulfillment of [my] established goal,
 I meditate on [Hayagrīva]
 who resembles an ocean [contained] in a water pot,
 who possesses long lotus-like eyes,
 whose dwelling place is the moon,
 and who stays on the pericarp of the lotus.

2

[I meditate on Hayagrīva]
 whose hands are glittering
 with the discus (*cakra*), conch shell (*śaṅkha*), rosary (*akṣa-valaya*)
 and the hand position of knowledge (*jñāna-mudrā*),
 whose multitude of splendid lightbeams
 decorates the sky.

3

[I meditate on Hayagrīva]
 who has a splendid continuous flow of eloquent speech
 from [His] beautiful lotus-like face,
 and who is the divinity that rules
 over the whole world.

4

Om may Hayagrīva protect my head.
 [May] the One who abides in the moon
 [protect my] forehead.⁶
 May the One who is the wisdom of the *śāstras*
 protect my two eyes.
 [May] Brahman's nature, which is the Word (*śabda*),
 [protect my] two ears.

⁶ According to Hindu mythology, Brahmā inscribes everyone's destiny on their forehead, on the sixth day after birth.

5

May the One whose nature consists of a [lovely] fragrance
protect my nose.

[May] the One who is the origin of the sacrifice (*yajña*)
[protect my] mouth.

May the Lord of speech
protect my tongue.

[May] the Giver of liberation (*mukunda*)
[protect my] two rows of teeth.

6

May the One whose nature is Brahman
protect my upper lip.

May Nārāyaṇa
protect my lower lip.

May the auspicious Soul
protect my chin.

May Kamalā's Lord
protect my two cheeks.

7

May the Soul of wisdom
protect my base (back).

[May] the One whose nature is sound (*nāda*)
[protect] my throat.

May the four-armed One
protect my two arms.

[May] the Destroyer of the chief of the demons
[protect my] two hands.

8

May the Soul of knowledge
 protect my heart.
 [May] the all-pervading Soul
 [protect my] two breasts.
 May the Soul of all
 protect my waist.
 May the One who wears the yellow garment⁷ [on his hips]
 protect my hip.

9

[May] the omnipresent One
 who resides in the cavity (*kukṣi*) [of the heart]
 [protect my] belly (*kukṣi*).
 [May] the Destroyer of Bali⁸
 [who took three strides to measure the earth]
 [protect] the three-folds of skin [on my belly].
 [May] the lotus-naved One
 [protect my] navel.
 [May] the Producer of wisdom,
 that is the meaning of the mysterious secret (*guhya*)
 [protect] my anus (*guhya*).

⁷ One who wears the yellow garment (*Ṣṭāmbara*) is a name for Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu in the Pāñcarātra tradition. See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 630.

⁸ Vāmana (dwarf *avatāra* of Viṣṇu) tricked Bali by taking three strides covering the earth, sky and heaven, in order to recover the entire world from the demon.

10

May the One who has rope around His waist⁹
 protect my thighs.
 May the Destroyer of the demon Madhu (*madhusūdana*)
 protect my two knees.
 May the Great Viṣṇu
 protect the calf [of my leg].
 May Janārdana¹⁰
 protect my two ankles.

11

May the One who [took] three strides [Trivikrama]¹¹
 protect my two feet.
 May Hari
 protect my toes.
 May the all-pervasive One (*sarvaga*)
 protect my entire body (*sarvāṅga*).
 May the One who has lovely locks of hair (*keśava*)
 protect the hairs of my body.

12

May the One who comes forth with a flute
 protect the humours¹² of my body.
 [May] Lakṣmī's Husband (*lakṣmīpātri*)
 [protect] my wife.
 May the Caretaker of the universe
 protect my sons.
 [May] the Lord of gods
 [protect my] relatives.

⁹ "Rope around His waist" (*Dāmodara*) is an epithet for Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu.

¹⁰ Janārdana. See *Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*, p. 25.

¹¹ Trivikrama is the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who is said to have strode over the world in three steps. See v. 9.

¹² The humours are phlegm, wind and bile. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 513.

13

May the One whose nature is that of a friend (*mitrātmaka*)
 protect my friends (*mitra*).
 [May] the One whose nature [burns] like fire¹³
 [protect me] from the multitudes of enemies.
 May the One whose nature is [like] air
 protect my life-breath (*prāṇa*).
 [May] the One whose nature is Sustainer of the universe
 [protect my] body.

14

May the Soul of the All-enveloping sky
 protect my essence.
 [May] the Soul that is [vast as] heaven
 [protect] the interior cavity of my heart.
 May the Lord of the senses¹⁴
 protect the day and night.
 [May] the Guru of the worlds
 [protect] everything.

15

May Hari,
 the Promoter of security
 protect me even in [times of] danger and confusion.
 May the One whose Form
 is truth, consciousness, and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*)
 protect my knowledge at all times.

¹³ From *Pāñcarātra*. See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 954.

¹⁴ Lord of the senses (*vittada*) is a name of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu used in the *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*. See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1303.

16

May the Soul of all,
 who is a lamp of knowledge,
 protect the eastern quarter.
 May the Bestower of knowledge
 protect the southern quarter.
 [May] the One who gives light to sentient beings
 [protect] the southwestern quarter.

17

O Delighter in sentient beings!
 May the One who is an ocean of knowledge
 defend the north-western quarter belonging to Varuṇa.
 May the famous Bestower [of liberation]
 protect the northern quarter.
 [May] the Guru of the world
 [protect] the northeastern quarter.

18

May the Master of the worlds
 protect the higher region.
 May the One who superior to the best (*parāt para*)¹⁵
 protect the lower region.
 May the Guide of the entire [world]
 protect those who remain in a state of perfect tranquility,
 and who do not withdraw from protection.

19

May that Lord of Speech
 give the power of health, long life,
 and mastery of all the *śāstras*
 to those who surrender their body [to Him].

¹⁵ *Parāt para* is an epithet for Hayagrīva and is included in *Śrī Hayagrīva Aṣṭottara Śat Nāma Arcanā*

There is no doubt that here one obtains
the grace of Hayagrīva.
This renowned divine *kavaca*
is honoured by the gods.

I conquer by means of the Hayagrīva mantra
The *Śrī Hayagrīva Kavaca* is completed.

ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA KAVACA ANYAT
(Another Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective]-Shield)

Pārvatī said —

O God of gods!
O Supreme God!
O Treasure-House of compassion!
O Śaṅkara!
The many *kavacas* concerning the numerous incarnations of the husband of
Lakṣmī (*ramā-patī*)¹ are stories [told] by virtue of Your grace.

I now want to hear the *kavaca* of the all-pervading Horse-faced [Lord]. [1-2]

Śiva said —

O my beloved Goddess!

The dear secret I tell is for you. Reciting the *kavaca* of the Horse-faced [Lord]
is [like] the nectar of an ocean [contained] in a [small] pot.

During the night at the end of the great age,² by His sport (*līlā*), Viṣṇu,
himself having taken the form named Hayavaktra ("the Horse-faced One"),
roamed around.

Brahmā (*virīṇca*), who has motherly affection for his sons, instructed me
(Śiva) in this *Hayagrīva Kavaca*.

The sage Brahmā revealed [it] and declared thus [that the mantra] has eight
syllables and its god is Hayagrīva. [3-5]

Śakti (creative power) is pronounced
[by the] *hnawm bīja*³ mantra
which is similar in appearance
to the *hnim* [mantra].

In the same way,

¹ *Ramā-patī* (Husband of Lakṣmī). Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 868.

² The end of the great age (*mahā-kalpa-anta*) refers to *pralaya* or the dissolution of the worlds. Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 262.

³ *Bīja* is the mystical letter forming the essential part of the mantra of a deity.

*Oṃ kīlaka*⁴ [mantra] is similar in appearance to the intense *kīlaka* [mantra]. [6]

7

I praise the One with a horse's mouth,⁵
 who bears in His hands a book (*pustaka*), a lotus (*ambuja*),
 a string of rosary beads (*akṣa-mālā*),
 and the [*mudrā*⁶] of exposition (*vyākhyā*),
 whose head is annointed
 by the nectar overflowing
 from the golden jar
 [held] in the lotus-like hands of Lakṣmī.

8

May the One who pours forth nectar
 protect my head.
 May the One who shines like the moon
 protect my forehead.
 May the Enemy of the [two] demons [Madhu and Kaiṭabha]
 protect my two eyes.
 May the One who is an expanding ocean of speech
 protect my nose.

⁴ *Kīlaka* is the inner syllable of a mantra.

⁵ One with a horse's mouth (*haya-mūḍa*).

⁶ *Mudrā* is a symbolic hand position.

9

May the One who is firm in hearing
 protect my ear.
 [May] the Treasury of compassion
 [protect my] two cheeks.
 May the Lord of speech
 protect my face.
 May the Slayer of the enemy of gods
 protect my tongue.

10

[May] the One who is served by Hanumān⁷
 (the powerful-jawed one)
 [protect my] jaw (*hanū*).
 May the Chief of Vaikuṇṭha
 protect my throat/neck (*kanṭha*).
 [May] the Horse-necked One (*haya-grīva*)
 [protect my] neck (*grīva*).
 May the One who is a pool of lotuses
 protect [the lotus of] my heart.

11

May the Supporter of the universe
 protect my belly.
 [May] the One who has lotus-like eyes
 [protect my lotus-like] navel.
 May the Lord of creatures
 protect my penis.
 May the Bearer of the club
 protect my two thighs.

⁷ The One who is served by Hanumān refers to Lord Rāma, whose story is told in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (one of the two great Epics). Hanumān, the monkey-headed god was Rāma's loyal servant during Rāma's exile from Ayodhyā. Rāma, like Kṛṣṇa, is a popular incarnation of Viṣṇu.

12

May the Supporter of the universe
 protect my knees.
 and may the Lord of the worlds
 protect the two calves [of my legs].
 May the Horse who destroys [the two demons]
 protect my two ankles.
 [May] the Ocean of wisdom
 [protect my] two feet.

13

May the Lord of speech
 protect the eastern quarter.
 [May] the unconquerable One
 [protect] the southern quarter.
 May the Supporter of the universe
 protect the western quarter.
 [May] the One who is celebrated by Śiva,
 [protect] the northern quarter.

14

May Hari
 protect the upper region.
 May the Treasury of auspicious qualities
 clearly protect the lower region.
 May Hari
 protect [those] in between heaven and the earth.
 May the Creator of the universe
 protect [the universe] all around.

15

An intelligent person should tie this *kavaca*
 to his body
 so [then] he will never be affected
 by Durva and other demons.

16

A learned one,
even though doubting, rivalling, and perplexed,
should recite this *kavaca*
during the three divisions of the day
[dawn, noon, sunset].

[That one] purified
by [the practice of] devotion,
is not born here again.

ŚRĪ HAYAGRĪVA PAÑJARA¹
(Śrī Hayagrīva [Protective]-Cage)

1

Now, I become more powerful
[with] the proper *pañjara* of Hayagrīva,
wherein the words
containing the totality of wisdom
is like the flowing Ganges river.

2

The [Śrī Hayagrīva *Pañjara*] is like
the [lustre] of pure crystal
and the white peaks
of the Himālaya mountains²
in the middle of the moon's halo.

3

In the attainment of the chosen goal
one should meditate on the God
who has long lotus-like eyes, noble limbs, and four arms,
who bears the conch (*śankha*) and the discus (*cakra*),
and who shines with a diadem (*kirīṭa*) and crest (*makuta*).

¹ The *pañjara* is a hymn recited in order to gain the power of a particular deity. The word *pañjara* meaning "cage, body, particular prayers and formularies" is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *paj* "to become stiff or rigid". Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 575.

² Himālaya literally means the mountain covered by snow and refers to the Himālaya mountains.

4

[One should meditate on] the God
 who is illuminated with the garland of forest flowers,³
 whose chest is branded with the mole,⁴
 and who wears a yellow garment.

5

[One should meditate on] the God
 who has the neck of a horse,
 who is holding in [His] two principal hands
 the rosary⁵ and book (*pustaka*)
 and has [another] hand in the position of knowledge.⁶

6

Obeisance to the God of gods,
 whose body is the sacred syllable *Om̐* and *Udgītha*,⁷
 who is the image of the *R̥g*, *Yajur* and *Sāma* [Vedas],
 and who is the Granter of the desired goal.

7

Obeisance to the Horse-faced One,
 the Lord who is God of gods.

Destroy the darkness of ignorance
 [and] quickly grant me knowledge.

³ Garland of forest flowers (*vanamālā*)

⁴ Mole/curl (*śrīvatsā*) is a feature on Viṣṇu's chest marking His supremacy.

⁵ *Akṣa* (beads) refers to a rosary; that is, a string of beads.

⁶ Hand-position of knowledge (*jñāna-mudrā*).

⁷ *Udgītha* is the chanting of the *Sāma Veda*.

8

O God Janārdana!
 Destroy these
 evil spirits, ghosts, and devils.⁸

O Husband of Lakṣmī,
 quickly abolish all
 fever and disease completely.

9

Obeisance be with God,
 who has the head of a horse (*haya-śīrṣa*),
 and is the Destroyer of enemies.

Destroy all poverty
 [and] bring about good fortune.

10

Obeisance to the One
 who has the head of a horse (*haya-śīrṣa*)
 the Lord who is God of gods.

May [He] grant me intelligence, wisdom
 strength, knowledge
 wealth, sons and grandsons.

⁸ Ghosts, evil spirits, and devils are *bhūtas*, *pretas*, and *piśācas*, respectively.

11

Obeisance to the One
who has a horse's head (*haya-sīrṣa*).

May [He] subdue all poisonous snakes
like the *kārkoṭaka*,⁹ and death
[and] make me immortal.

12

O Supreme over all,
whose lotus-like feet are worshipped
by women belonging to heaven.

Provide me power
over women, public citizens, and the king.

13

Obeissance to the horse-headed One,¹⁰
the One who possesses [light]
like the discus of moon-light,
the Granter of the desired goal
who is in the [form of] a Swan,
[and] the Highest Lord.

14

Obeissance to the Splendorous One
in the Form of the *Rg*, *Yajur*, and *Sāma* (Vedas),
whose [body] is the universal order (*ṛta*),¹¹
who [dwells] at the centre of the moon,
[and] who is seated on the blue-lotus.

⁹ *Kārkoṭaka* is one of the principal snakes of a lower region called *Pātāla*. See *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* XXI.21.

¹⁰ Literally, "the one who has a horse for an upper limb" (*haya-utama-aṅga*).

¹¹ The central concept in the *Rg Veda* is *ṛta*. *Ṛta* is the ethical order for human nature and is the physical order for the universe.

15

Obeissance to Brahman
 who is known by the Vedas and Vedānta,
 who [performed] the act of recovering the Vedas
 [from the demons]
 [and] who breaks the confusion
 between truth and untruth.

16

I bow down to the eternal One
 who has the form of *Pranava*¹² and *Udgītha*,
 [and] who bestows wisdom
 on those who worship Him whole-heartedly.

17

Obeissance to God
 who has a great horse-head
 whose beautiful radiance surpasses
 the great [lustre] of a crystal bulb
 of red coral
 [and] who fulfills everyone's [desires].

18

Salutations to Janārdana,
 the One who is to be worshipped
 with these twelve mantras.

In the morning [we worship],
 the Lord, who is the remover of the difficulty of the world,
 whose face is bright,
 [and] who is also worshipped by our ancient *ācāryas*.

¹² *Pranava* denotes the sacred syllable *Om*.

APPENDIX IV

HAYAGRĪVA IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

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Although a survey of the Buddhist depictions of Hayagrīva is beyond the scope of this study, a follow-up study on the various Buddhist depictions of Hayagrīva, including those in Southeast and East Asia, could shed further light on the general development of the horse-headed deity, as well as on the specific relation between the Hindu and Buddhist depictions of Hayagrīva. A preliminary discussion of the secondary literature on Hayagrīva in Buddhism may, however, be useful and interesting here.

Mahāyāna Buddhism

There appear to be at least two different strands in the development of the horse-headed figure in Buddhism. According to Alice Getty, the most probable and ancient form of Hayagrīva in Buddhism is associated with Avalokiteśvara in his non-Tantric form as Padmapani (lotus-bearer).¹ Padmapani may be accompanied by four assistants, one of them being Hayagrīva. Interestingly, the other three are female: (1) Green Tārā, (2) Prajñāpāramitā (or Mārīcī), and (3) Yellow Tārā.² Significantly, in the Āgamic listing the etymology of the reference to the horse-headed form of Viṣṇu (*baḍabā-vaktra*) is given as "one whose face is a female mare". Moreover, Avalokiteśvara in his Tantric form, who is believed to have first appeared in mid-6th century C.E., may also be accompanied by Hayagrīva.³

¹ Padmapani is believed to create all animate things by the command of his Dhyani-Buddha—Amitābha.

² Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (2nd edition; Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), p. 62.

³ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, p. 63.

By way of contrast, van Gulik states that Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva was incorporated in the Mahāyānic pantheon as a Vidyārāja (the expounder of knowledge), based on the reference to a horse-headed deity in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. The role of Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva parallels that of Vidyārāja—the Expounder of Word/Knowledge.⁴ Indeed, Hayagrīva the Lord of learning (Viṣṇu-Hayagrīva) appears to have been transformed into a fierce god with terrifying features (Vidyārāja Hayagrīva) as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara in Mahāyāna Buddhism ca. 500 C.E. On the other hand, Hayagrīva-Avalokiteśvara is a benevolent deity possessing one head and four hands; two of his hands bear the rosary and a lotus flower, whereas the other two arms are bent before the breast in the *dharmacakra-mudrā* (hand position of *dharma*). Hayagrīva-Avalokiteśvara sits cross-legged on a lotus seat in the meditative pose. Again, similar to what I have noted about Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Chapter IV) and Sarasvatī (Chapter VII) in respect of their role as the deities of knowledge, the ritual function here persists even though the image changes among sectarian traditions! This may reflect borrowing and competition among the sectarian traditions.

Furthermore, the Paramāśva (Highest Lord-) Hayagrīva is a malevolent deity depicted as trampling on Hindu gods—demonstrating sectarian superiority. To the right of Paramāśva-Hayagrīva's face is the four-fold head of Brahmā, on whose head is a large horse-head in greenish colour. This form of Hayagrīva has eight arms: in his right hands he carries a quadruple *vajra* (thunderbolt), *tripaṭaka-mudrā* (hand position of the knife), sword, arrow, whereas in his left hands bear a lotus, three peacock feathers, a staff, and bell. He has a tiger-

⁴ R. H. van Gulik, *Hayagrīva: The Mantrayanic Aspect of Horse Cult in China and Japan* (*Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* Bd 33 [Supplement] Leiden: 1935), p. 28.

skin draped around his waist.⁵

Indonesia

Although Hayagrīva does not have much of a presence in Indonesia, F.D.K. Bosch has noted three different images of Hayagrīva, which appear similar to the Mahāyāna Buddhist depictions of the figure. Candi (temple) Jago in east Java has a horse-headed figure in stone with two arms, wherein the left hand rests on a club. The figure has a headdress of snakes and a tiger skin wrapped around its waist. There also exists a Javanese bronze statue of Hayagrīva (precise place of origin is unknown), which consists of eight arms, four legs and three faces. The horse-head is evident on the crown of the figure. Lastly, in Padang Candi (temple) in Central Sumatra, there is an image of Hayagrīva, in which he is accompanied by Bhṛkūti and Green Tārā.⁶

Tibet

Although it was by means of Avalokiteśvara that local deities were introduced into the Buddhist pantheon—including the horse-headed deity—Hayagrīva assimilated well, according to van Gulik, into the Mahāyāna pantheon, especially in Tibet and Mongolia, because of the presence of local horse-headed gods.⁷ There are several different forms of Hayagrīva which van Gulik identifies in Tibetan Buddhism, these include Hayagrīva as an

⁵ van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 34-35.

⁶ F.D.K. Bosch, "The God with the Horse's Head", in *Selected Studies in Indonesian Archaeology* (the Hague: 1961), p. 147.

⁷ van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 28-29.

emanation of Amitābha and Akṣobhya, which are also connected with Hinduism. van Gulik describes a Rāga-Hayagrīva; he bears on his crown the image of Amitābha—he progenitor of the Rāga-kūla. This form of Hayagrīva has a red complexion, two faces, three eyes, reddish brown hair, and a protruding abdomen. One face has fangs and is adorned with a garland of skulls; the second face is a blue horse's head, neighing. One foot of the deity tramples upon the Hindu deity Brahmā, whereas the other foot brings about the end of the world. Adorned with eight serpents, the Rāga-Hayagrīva has the stature of a dwarf, who wears a tiger-skin for a garment and carries the *vajra* and staff in his hands.⁸

Dveśa-Hayagrīva, on the other hand, bears on his chest the image of Akṣobhya—the progenitor of the Dveśa-kula. The prescriptions for Dveśa-Hayagrīva are that He should be imagined with a red complexion with three faces (the right head is blue with a rolling tongue, the left head is white with fangs). The right and left faces have angry-looking eyes, whereas the middle face is smiling. He is required to be adorned with a crown on His middle head, which has an image of Akṣobhya. He is to be adorned by serpents and wear a tiger-skin garment. He is to have eight arms: the four right hands carry the *vajra*, staff, *karana-mudrā*, and arrow, whereas the four left hands bear the threatening forefinger, touching His own breast, a lotus and a bow. For meditation, the *Parama-aśva-vajra* (the thunderbolt of the Supreme horse) mantra to chant is: *Om̐ ham Hayagrīva svaha* (*Om̐*, Salutations to Hayagrīva).⁹

Hayagrīva is also included as one of the eight deities in the *dharmapāla* (Defenders of

⁸ van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 29-33.

⁹ van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 33-34.

the Law): Lha-mo (goddess), Ts'angs-pa (white Brahmā), Beg-ts'e (god of war), Yāma (god of death), Kuvera (god of wealth), Hayagrīva (horse-headed god), and Mahākala (black one), Yamantaka (conqueror of death). The eight terrible defenders of northern Buddhism are Tantric divinities with the rank of *bodhisattva* and are considered to wage war without mercy against the demons and all enemies of Buddhism. Hayagrīva has the rank of *bodhisattva*.¹⁰ Generally, the horse-headed deity wears a crown of skulls and tiger-skin around his waist, and steps to the right on a lotus. The horse-headed deity has one head and four arms: the upper left hand holds a mace and a flower; the lower left has a wheel against the breast; the upper right hand swings a sword and the lower right holds a lasso. The lower right hand is in the position of the mystic *mudrā*.¹¹

Japan

Although Hayagrīva has some presence in Tibet, van Gulik points out that he has none in China due to the absence of any previous horse cult. However, Hayagrīva appears in Japan as *batō-kannon*—*batō* (horse-headed) and *kannon* (god of mercy). Though the Tibetan understanding of Hayagrīva is as the protector of horses, who is supposed to frighten away the demons with his neighing sounds, the horse-headed deity in Japan is revered as the patron of horse dealers.¹² It is interesting to note that Vedānta Deśika depicts Hayagrīva as one who brings forth the Vedas with His neighing sound!

¹⁰ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, p. 148

¹¹ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, pp. 162-163

¹² van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, pp. 79-80.

Getty states that, after founding the Shingon sect, Sin-ren popularized divinities like Avalokiteśvara in Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan. There are seven forms of *kannon* Avalokiteśvara that show the influence of the Tibetan Mahāyāna school; they include Shō (Ārya Avalokiteśvara), Jūichimen (Ekadeśa-mukha), Sen-ju (Sahasra-bhuja-sahasra-netra), Juntei (Cundi), Fukūkenjaku (Amoghapāśa), Batō (Hayagrīva), and Nyoirin (Cintamāṇi-cakra). Hayagrīva, referred to as *batō-kannon*, takes the form of the Tibetan masculine divinity Hayagrīva.¹³

The *rokkanon* group of gods refer to the six *kannon* who save living beings in the Buddhist realms of transmigration (rokudō). The lesser known of the two traditions of *rokkanon* includes Hayagrīva: (1) Shō (Ārya Avalokiteśvara), (2) Sen-ju (Sahasra-bhuja-sahasra-netra), (3) Batō (Hayagrīva), (4) Jūichimen (Ekadeśa-mukha), (5) Fukukensaku (Amoghapasa) or Jundei (Cundi), and (6) Nyoirin (Cintamāṇi-cakra).¹⁴ Batō Kannon (horse-crowned *kannon*) is regarded as the lord of the realm of animals and is a fierce form of Amida Buddha.¹⁵

Batō kannon is not himself a horse-headed deity; rather, it carries an image of a horse head in his hair, which is what makes him the horse god. *Batō* is also a northern Buddhist symbol, which must be white in colour for it to be efficacious. The god's facial expression is often angry. Above the central head is a smaller horse's head. *Batō*, generally, has eight

¹³ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, p. 94.

¹⁴ The more popular *rokkanon* tradition includes: (1) Daihi, (2) Daiji, (3) Shishimui, (4), Daikō-fushō, (5) Tennin-jōbu, and (6) Daibon-jinnon. Hsiao Inagaki, *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms Based on References of Japanese Literature* (Union City, California: Heian International, 1989), p. 247.

¹⁵ Inagaki, *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms*, p. 11.

arms: whereas five hands carry his symbols (such as the wheel, sword, and lasso), the sixth is in the position of the *vara-mudrā* (or holding a symbol), and the seventh and eighth are against the breast in the position of the *renge-no-in mudrā*—emblematic of the lotus.¹⁶

¹⁶ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, pp. 90-95.

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