

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Of Deities and Demons:

Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*

by

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Abstract

My thesis investigates the thirteenth century South Indian philosopher Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy through an analysis of sections from his *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy ranks all animate beings according to their innate capacity, placing the deity Viṣṇu as the highest God, and Vāyu, the Wind God as his highest devotee and agent.

Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy is one of the distinctive features of dualist (Dvaita) Vedānta, a theological system that argues for the fundamental disunity of the individual soul and God. I show in my thesis that Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy reaches its full expression in the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*, a narrative composition that re-interprets three epic texts: the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and portions of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. My thesis looks carefully at the three important functions that this doctrine plays within the *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. Firstly, the Doctrine of Hierarchy bridges the distinct genres of scripture (*śruti*) and epics and myth (*itihāsapurāṇa*). Secondly, it demonizes proponents of rival theologies. Thirdly, it resolves problematic episodes where moral norms are transgressed by female characters in the epics by deifying the characters in question.

My thesis contributes to growing scholarship on the intellectual history of Vedānta by explicating the relationship between literary texts and theology in medieval South India.

Keywords: Dvaita, hierarchy, Madhva, Mahābhārata, *tāratamya*

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Anusha Sudindra Rao.

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Dedication

eksamāyadvitīyāya maddvitīyāya eṣa me /
prabandho hṛdayasthāya dūrasthāyāpi dīyate //

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List of Abbreviations

BG Bhagavad Gītā

BS Brahmasūtra

BSB Brahmasūtrabhāṣya

BTN Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya

GB Gītābhāṣya

GTN Gītātātparyanirṇaya

MBh Mahābhārata

MBTN Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya

MV Madhvavijaya

RB Ṛgbhāṣya

VTN Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya

Introduction and Review of Literature

Vedānta is one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy. Through its commentarial traditions on the *Brahmasūtras* and other texts of the Vedic canon since the medieval period, it has wielded tremendous influence over perceptions of Hindu philosophy in scholarship and popular culture.

The three streams of Vedānta that emerged in South India are distinguished primarily by their answer to the question: What is the relationship between the soul and God? While all three systems claim to be the only one consistent with the Vedic texts, they provide different answers to this question. Advaita, a monist system, claims that the *ātman* or soul, and *brahman* or God, are, in the final instance, the same entity. Viśiṣṭādvaita claims that the relationship is one of qualified non-dualism, where the soul is a part of God. The last school to emerge, Dvaita, founded by Madhva in Karnataka in the thirteenth century, is vehemently pluralistic, arguing for a fundamental and inextinguishable difference between the *ātman* and *brahman*. It is noteworthy that the latter two schools are also associated with popular devotional traditions in regional languages and consider Viṣṇu the supreme God.

Until recently, however, both Western and Indian modern scholarship on Hindu philosophy dealt almost exclusively with Advaita Vedānta, ignoring the other two popular schools of Vedānta in South India, or regarding Dvaita Vedānta as a sect rather than a philosophy. The status of Dvaita as a school of Vedānta has been questioned at several points by various scholars. S. Radhakrishnan, for instance, presents Advaita Vedānta as paradigmatic of all Vedānta, with a little space devoted to Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, and chooses to present Dvaita

Vedānta with Śākta and Śaiva theistic schools rather than as a system of philosophical thought.¹ R.G. Bhandarkar too treats Dvaita Vedānta as a Vaiṣṇava theistic system, and Surendranath Dasgupta makes a careful distinction between the “life” of Madhva, where he refers to hagiographical material that regards Madhva as the incarnation of the Wind God Vāyu, with Vyāsa (an incarnation of Viṣṇu) as his *guru*, and Dvaita philosophy, where he explicates Dvaita ontology and epistemology, along with debates between the Advaita and Dvaita schools of philosophy.² Theos Bernard lists Madhva under the *darśanas*, or the traditional categories of philosophical schools, but in explaining Vedānta, he treats the doctrines of Advaita interchangeably with the doctrine of Vedānta itself.³

Andrew Nicholson offers a historical explanation for this treatment. One of the most widely used traditional compendia of the various schools of philosophy is the *Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha*, authored by the fourteenth century Advaita saint Mādhava (not to be mistaken for Madhva). Since Advaita and Dvaita scholars were theological rivals and competitors for royal patronage, and their exchanges were marked by polemical battles, the classification of philosophical systems in this text is far from neutral. This ideological bias explains why the other two schools of Vedānta, who would be Mādhava’s primary competitors, are classified as systems outside Vedānta, among the lowest systems in his hierarchy. This approach tends to be replicated by early Indologists such as Paul Duessen who accept Mādhava’s

¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd, The Macmillan Company, 1927), 737-51.

² Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and minor religious systems*, (Indological Book House, 1965), 57-.62; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Pluralism* Vol. 4, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961), 150-319.

³ Theos Bernard, *Hindu philosophy*. (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1999). See 11-12, 116-127.

framework as a given, resulting in a chain of scholarship that treats Advaita as the default school of Vedānta.⁴

Although Madhva and his disciples present a distinct philosophical system, it is indubitable that Dvaita is, to a large extent, theological. Robert Zydenbos argues that one of the key differences between Dvaita and the two Vedānta traditions that preceded it is that, while the earlier two can both be traced to older traditions to philosophy that were refined by gifted thinkers, Madhva was the first historical teacher of the Dvaita doctrine.⁵ This difficulty about the status of Dvaita as a sect or a school of philosophy has been a pervasive one. This problem is also in part due to Madhva's reliance on non-technical *itihāsapurāṇa* sources (sometimes untraceable ones) to make his theological claims, which he relates very closely to his philosophy. As a result, texts such as Madhva's *MBTN* have been greatly understudied.

This is only a part of the larger problem with early Indology's approach to philosophical texts of this tradition—the complete neglect of the more theological aspects of Vedānta. All elements of sectarian thinking, theistic belief, or hagiographical material are simply discarded in the treatment of philosophy. Recent scholarship on the intellectual history of Vedānta is questioning this approach to Vedānta as a static system concerned only with philosophical questions explored through textual commentary, and recognizing that religious formations cannot be fully understood without considering their broader relationships with knowledge production and social identities. While it is true that all Vedānta traditions claim to be the authentic inheritors of the Vedas, the Vedas can be regarded as the focal point of pre-modern

⁴ Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: philosophy and identity in Indian intellectual history*. (Columbia University Press, 2010), 158-63.

⁵ Robert J. Zydenbos, "On the Jaina Background of Dvaita Vedānta". *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 19, no. 3 (1991), 249-50.

Brahmanism only in a superficial sense, since these Brahminical traditions present very varied interpretations of the same texts. In order to make sense of the social and intellectual history of Vedānta, it is important to also consider other scriptural traditions and genres that are associated with several of these traditions to excavate their theological contexts and significance.

In the case of Madhva, Robert Zydenbos suggests that some theological doctrines were responding to the twelfth century devotional Vīraśaiva movement that brought in sweeping social reforms:

There can be little doubt that to some extent Madhva's Vaiṣṇavism is a politically reactionary phenomenon, aimed against the egalitarian sociopolitical reforms brought about in Karnataka by Vīraśaivism. Madhva's frequent emphasizing of hierarchies clearly serves the purpose of undoing the emancipatory effects of Vīraśaivism and strengthening the discriminatory brahminical social order.⁶

Valerie Stoker also argues that Madhva's work sought to “organize the various ‘Hinduisms’ of his milieu” during a period marked by the growing influences of Jainism and Islam.⁷

My thesis briefly interrogates Madhva's theological issues with Advaita in the second chapter, but does not delve into these social questions. Instead, I focus on Madhva's theological hermeneutics through a close study of Madhva's commentary on the epics, to contribute to scholarly understanding of the impact of Vedāntic thought on non-technical narrative genres. Dvaita Vedānta is an excellent field of study in order to understand the influence of Vedānta on other genres because of the high status given to the *Mahābhārata* in the school of thought, and because of the significance of narrative and hagiographical texts to the Mādhva community.

⁶ Zydenbos, "An Introduction to Mādhva Vedānta (review)," *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 4 (2006), 669.

⁷ Valerie Stoker, "Conceiving the Canon in Dvaita Vedanta: Madhva's Doctrine of “All Sacred Lore”," *Numen* 51, no. 1 (2004), 54.

Madhva's *MBTN*, which is the primary focus of my project, has remained unexplored in modern scholarship despite its importance to Dvaita Vedānta. As we will see in this thesis, Madhva regards the epic highly and often makes brief references to episodes from the epic in his technical works, and these episodes are narrated in some detail in the *MBTN*. The *MBTN* is also an ambitious undertaking in its own right; Madhva attempts to simultaneously narrate the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and reconcile the contradictions in the texts.

There are multiple editions of the *MBTN* in print in regional languages, which have some varying readings. For the purpose of this thesis, I have consulted the online version of the text based mainly on the Akhila Bharata Madhva Maha Mandala edition, critically edited by Bannanje Govindacharya (published in 1971). The online edition also incorporates alternate readings from other published sources where there are varying readings. I have also referred to other commentaries on the text at some points in the thesis, but none of the varying readings have been especially relevant to my arguments. The Vishwa Madhva Mahaparishat edition has so far published a part of the *MBTN* in three volumes, critically edited by Srinivasatirthacharya and Jayatirthacharya Puranik (published between 2005 and 2016), that contains ten commentaries on the *MBTN*, the earliest of which is likely to be from the 14 C. CE. This has been a very valuable resource, but since my thesis mainly focuses on Madhva's writings, I have used the edition critically edited by Govindacharya.

The focus of my study in the thesis is Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy, a distinctive theological feature of Dvaita Vedānta, and its hermeneutical functions within Madhva's commentary. I argue that the Doctrine of Hierarchy carries out several important functions in Madhva's reinterpretation of the epics. It helps Madhva establish the equal authority and consistency of the *śrutis* and *itihāsapurāṇas*. It also provides Madhva with a framework to use

epic characters to demonize his sectarian opponents, and to deify female characters from the epic by attributing moral ambiguities associated with them to their divine identities.

B. N. K. Sharma's scholarship on Madhva's philosophy has been an indispensable resource in working on this thesis.⁸ Despite his ideological biases towards Madhva's school, it is the only accurate work in English that gives a detailed introduction to Dvaita Vedānta.

I have drawn from scholarship relating to Vedānta as well as the *itihāsapurāṇas* in this thesis, and most secondary materials deal with either one or the other, since there is no scholarly work that convincingly brings together Madhva's writing in both genres. However, there is a wealth of scholarly material on the epics themselves, and where my thesis deals with female characters and their portrayal, I have had access to a large corpus of secondary sources. Arti Dhand, Alf Hiltebeitel, and Sally Sutherland, for instance, have worked extensively on the female characters in the two major epics, especially Sītā and Draupadī, and their readings of the characters have differed in distinctive ways.⁹ These readings help put Madhva's own reinterpretation into sharper focus by laying out the problems within the text that Madhva attempted to solve. Apart from a few such instances, my thesis deals mainly with the primary sources themselves. However, recent scholarship on other Vedānta traditions and their social contexts, as well as scholarship on later Dvaita writings have been very illuminating.

Valerie Stoker has highlighted this connection of theological doctrine with social realities in her work, especially by showing how Madhva's doctrines of the natural hierarchy of all beings

⁸ BN Krishnamurti Sharma, *Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya*, (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1986).

⁹ Arti Dhand, "Women in Hinduism: Ambiguities in the characterization of Sita in the Valmiki Ramayana," Master's thesis, (Calgary, 1992); Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Garments," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22.2 (1980): 97-112; Sally J. Sutherland, "Sītā and Draupadī: aggressive behavior and female role-models in the Sanskrit epics." *Journal of the American Oriental society* (1989): 63-79.

and his idea that the entire corpus of Vedic and Purāṇic texts are authoritative form a part of his project to pioneer a new Vedic tradition that redefines the canon to open it to local religious frameworks while retaining the significance of the Vedas.¹⁰ My thesis begins with Stoker's articulation of the Doctrine of All Sacred Lore, but I shift my focus to Madhva's presentation of this doctrine and the textual purposes that it serves within his commentary on the epics. Valerie Stoker's other work, along with Lawrence McCrea's writings, have focused largely on the sixteenth century Dvaita philosopher Vyāsatīrtha and his social and philosophical contexts.¹¹ Since the sixteenth century saw polemical writings by various Vedānta sects, motivated by contestations for royal patronage, this period has garnered the most attention from modern scholarship. But this leaves a large lacuna in the study of Dvaita Vedānta before the arrival of Vyāsatīrtha, and my work is a step towards understanding the origins of Dvaita Vedānta better.

Ajay Rao has performed a thorough study of the Śrīvaiṣṇava interpretations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the techniques used to inflect the epic with theological meanings.¹² My thesis is a step in a similar direction. Phyllis Granoff and Robert Zydenbos have both done valuable preliminary work on Vedānta hagiographical material, and I have drawn from their observations to make my arguments about the demonization of theological opponents in these genres.¹³

¹⁰ Valerie Stoker, "Conceiving the Canon in Dvaita Vedanta: Madhva's Doctrine of "All Sacred Lore"." *Numen* 51, no. 1 (2004): 47-77.

¹¹ Lawrence McCrea, "Freed by the weight of history: polemic and doxography in sixteenth century Vedānta." *South Asian History and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2015): 87-101; Valerie Stoker, *Polemics and Patronage in the City of Victory*, (University of California Press, 2016).

¹² Ajay K. Rao, *Re-figuring the Ramayana as Theology: A History of Reception in Premodern India*, (Routledge, 2014).

¹³ Phyllis Granoff, "Holy warriors: A preliminary study of some biographies of saints and kings in the classical Indian tradition." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (1984): 291-303; Robert Zydenbos, "Some Examples from Madhva Hagiography". In *According to tradition: hagiographical writing in India*, Vol. 5, eds. Callewaert, Winand M., and Rupert Snell, (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994).

Wendy Doniger has done extensive work on myths from a range of *itihāsapurāṇa* texts and their connections with Hindu theological beliefs.¹⁴ Doniger provides an excellent socio-cultural context to these myths, weaving together material from different historical periods and sects. While Doniger's focus lies on the narrative of the myths, I study Madhva's narratives as vehicles for his theological doctrines, providing a narrower, but detailed view of the articulation of Dvaita doctrines in the *MBTN*.

Chapters

My thesis argues that Madhva's concept of hierarchy is a crucial doctrine that carries out three functions, and accordingly, I use three chapters to explicate each of these.

The first chapter argues that the hierarchy is essential to Madhva's theological project of integrating the *śrutis* and *itihāsapurāṇas*. I show that Madhva puts forward the supremacy of Viṣṇu, and the extended hierarchy of gods, humans, and demons, as the main conclusion of both the scriptural canons, thereby attempting to demonstrate both the authority and lack of contradiction of the two canons. I look at how Madhva uses this idea to grant a high status to the epics, particularly the *Mahābhārata*. Finally, I examine Madhva's commentaries on technical and non-technical genres of scriptures to show that he brings up the hierarchy in most instances where he tries to connect the two scriptural canons.

The first chapter serves as a theoretical grounding to the importance of epic texts in Madhva's theology, and to the basics of the Doctrine of Hierarchy and its role in Dvaita

¹⁴ Wendy Doniger, *The origins of evil in Hindu mythology*. No. 6. (Univ of California Press, 1976); "Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A comparative study." *History of Religions* 37, no. 1 (1997): 21-49.

theology. In my next two chapters, I investigate how Madhva deploys his hierarchy within his interpretations of the epics.

The second chapter focuses on the bottom rungs of the hierarchy, i.e., the wicked demons that Madhva contends will reach eternal hell. I explicate how Madhva defines evil people and retells episodes from the *Mahābhārata* in a way that demonizes his principal opponents, the Advaita philosophers. I specifically look at Madhva's insertion of Śaṅkara, the eighth century monist philosopher, as a demon into the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. I also examine the various characters associated with this demon by both Madhva and his disciples. This chapter draws some interesting material from Madhva's immediate disciples, since they explain the connections that Madhva makes across various lengthy texts more clearly in their works.

In the third chapter, I shift my focus to the top rungs of hierarchy. I specifically take up Madhva's treatment of female characters from the epics in this chapter. Both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* present a variety of issues concerning the principal female characters. I show that Madhva deploys his hierarchy here to associate these characters with the exalted female deities in his hierarchy, sometimes using the traditional associations, and creating new narratives at others. All in all, Madhva's concern appears to be to defend the actions of the female protagonists of the epics while still protecting the moral or theological norms that they violate in the epic. Sītā's suffering and Draupadī's polyandry are two of the major issues the epics present, and I examine Madhva's resolution of these with reference to the position of the female deities in his hierarchy. I also argue that Madhva's technical commentaries use the same technique of deification in order to restrict women's qualification to study the Vedas.

I conclude with a brief look at the new kinds of questions that a study of Madhva's commentaries on the epics open up to scholarship, and indicate some avenues for future study.

Chapter 1: Bridging the Canons of *Śruti* and *Itihāsapurāṇas*

1.1 Introduction

The doctrine of All Sacred Lore refers to Madhva's claim that Vedic literature, generally conceived in terms of the *śruti* texts, and *itihāsapurāṇa* literature, which is heterogeneous and mainly contains myth, are equally authoritative and mutually uncontradictory. These claims of equal authority and consistency are separate claims, but are closely linked in Madhva's doctrines, and I deal with them together in this chapter. This doctrine of All Sacred Lore leaves Madhva with the task of reconciling the meanings of a bewilderingly vast corpus of texts composed over centuries. To Madhva, both these canons are sacred lore and authoritative sources of knowledge. While the idea that the *itihāsapurāṇas* supplement Vedic knowledge is found in the *Mahābhārata*,¹⁵ Madhva takes this seriously and uses the *itihāsapurāṇas* extensively in his interpretations of *śruti* texts. This complete inclusion of the epic tales and the *purāṇas* into the canon as authorities is unique to Madhva's dualist school of Vedānta.

Valerie Stoker has worked on the Doctrine of All Sacred Lore, focusing mainly on Madhva's *RB* to understand the purpose of this doctrine in terms of Madhva's social context. I, on the other hand, look at how Madhva formulates the doctrine of All Sacred Lore narratively in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata*.

In his works, Madhva creates an elaborate hierarchical system of all beings based on their intrinsic nature. Viṣṇu, whom Madhva regards as the Vedāntic *brahman* is placed at the very top, followed by Śrī, followed by Brahmā and Vāyu and so on, up to the last soul, Kali, who is

¹⁵ *itihāsapurāṇābhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabr̥ṃhayet*

MBh 01,001.204. The sentence translates to— “Fortify the Vedas with the *itihāsapurāṇas*”. All translations are my own, unless otherwise mentioned.

irredeemably evil.¹⁶ In this chapter, I argue that Madhva attempts to integrate the *itihāsapurāṇas* with *śruti* texts by using a variety of exegetical techniques that locate his Doctrine of Hierarchy within both sets of texts. Specifically, I argue that Madhva's conception of hierarchy inflects his interpretations of both technical scriptural texts (such as the *BSB*) and epic texts (such as the *MBTN*) to show a doctrinal equivalence between them.

First, I examine Madhva's tripartite classification of souls and the importance of his hierarchy in his theological system. Rather than summarizing Madhva's statements regarding the hierarchy, I choose to look separately at his statements on the structure of the hierarchy in his commentaries on the two genres. This allows me to examine the distinct hermeneutical techniques Madhva employs to arrive at his hierarchy in the *śruti* texts with the *itihāsapurāṇas*. To this end, I explicate how Madhva re-interprets key passages in *śruti* texts to lay out the structure of his hierarchy. I then move on to the *MBTN*, to examine the significance of the *itihāsapurāṇas* to his project, and briefly explore how Madhva's hierarchy is embedded into his interpretation of these texts. Finally, I look at several instances across Madhva's commentaries on technical, philosophical texts as well as epic texts to show that he consistently invokes his hierarchy in all his attempts to draw connections across the two canons.

1.2 Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy

The Doctrine of Hierarchy is a crucial feature of Dvaita theology. Madhva brings together the canons of *śruti* and the *itihāsapurāṇas* through his claim that the Doctrine of Hierarchy is the

¹⁶ *kramāl lakṣaṇahīnāṅś ca lakṣaṇālakṣaṇaiḥ samāḥ /*
mānuṣā madhyamāḥ samyag durlakṣaṇayutaḥ kaliḥ //
MBTN 1.123

ultimate message of both these sets of texts. Madhva specially emphasizes the status of Viṣṇu throughout his writings, insisting that all scripture ultimately praises Viṣṇu. According to Madhva, the main point of all scripture is to give knowledge of Viṣṇu—

Here, indeed, is the great purport: All the Vedas, *Itihāsapurāṇas*, and [valid] sources of knowledge give knowledge of Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu] who is omniscient, the creator of everything, free of all flaws, and the greatest of all. It is for the sake of this [giving the knowledge of Viṣṇu] that other things are told.¹⁷

However, the doctrine of hierarchy is not just about the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Madhva's ontological scheme admits of two categories of reality: the independent reality, which refers to the Vedic *brahman*, who is Viṣṇu in Madhva's doctrine, and the dependent realities, which include all sentient and non-sentient beings. In the latter category, Madhva ranks all beings into a hierarchy that he claims is innate, and associated with the unchanging nature of the various souls. Madhva makes a three-fold classification of individual souls: the superior ones, who will eventually be liberated, the middling ones, who remain in the bondage of the material world through infinite re-births, and the inferior kind who are destined for eternal hell.¹⁸ This too is a distinctive concept of dualist Vedānta. A higher ranking on this hierarchy corresponds to greater innate knowledge and devotion towards Viṣṇu (which will be realized as one progresses towards liberation, provided one is eligible for it), and greater strength, beauty, and bliss in liberation. While all these characteristics may be temporarily altered by boons, curses, or special powers gained temporarily, ultimately, the hierarchy is stable and unchanging. Madhva distinguishes between *svabhāva* or intrinsic nature, and all external influences. While external influences may

¹⁷ VTN p.15. This is an untraceable quote, purportedly from the *Nārādīyapurāṇa*.

¹⁸ Sharma, Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya, 78.

cause a superior person to sin or an inferior person to do good, these influences are counteracted by one's intrinsic nature over the course of infinite re-births, and this intrinsic nature, which results in a chain of good and evil actions (*karma*) determines one's final destination.¹⁹

B. N. K. Sharma points out, in a massive understatement— “The subdivisions of the *cetanavarga* [sentient beings] are, to some extent, theological in character.”²⁰ Madhva's classifications are clearly grounded in his theological beliefs. Madhva's consistent effort throughout his writings on the two canons of scripture is to establish this hierarchy as the main purport of all the sacred texts. Madhva uses different hermeneutical techniques to read a hierarchy into the two sets of texts, and we can now look at them separately to understand the structure of the hierarchy.

1.3 The Hierarchy in Madhva's Technical Works

Since it is difficult to find explicit mention of any clear hierarchy in technical texts, Madhva ingeniously uses a passage from the *BS* to justify the existence of a hierarchy in *śruti* texts. Madhva explains that when *śruti* texts refer to inanimate objects or mental functions, they are actually speaking of the deities that control these functions—

From texts such as, “The Earth spoke, Waters spoke”, scriptural texts appear contrary to logic. [Madhva continues] Then, the author of the aphorisms explains: *Only the deities that control these objects/functions are designated [here], since they have great powers and are omnipresent*. In texts such as the above, the deities that govern the earth, etc. are denoted by the words [such as earth], since, unlike other beings, they have superior

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 322-24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

powers and are present everywhere. Therefore, the statements made about them are true and do not contradict reasoning.²¹

In this way, where the scriptural texts mention any inanimate objects, such as fire, water, or mountains, cognitive processes or functions such as speech, discernment, or thinking, or even sense organs, such as the eyes, ears, or the mind, Madhva glosses these words as the governing deity of that specific object, sense organ, or function. In this manner, a mention of fire speaking would refer to the God of Fire, Agni speaking, and the mind being absorbed into the intellect would indicate the dissolution of the governing deity of the mind, Śiva, into Sarasvatī, the governing deity of the intellect. This connection is established by regarding deities as synonymous with the material objects or bodies that they preside over and control.

For instance, in the *BSB*, Madhva comments on *BS* 4.2.1, which states—

Speech [is withdrawn] into the mind, on account of observation and scripture.²²

According to Madhva, this passage explains the manner of death and liberation of the gods.²³

Madhva goes on to explain this passage as follows:

The presiding deity of speech, Umā, is withdrawn into the presiding deity of mind, Rudra [Śiva]. [This is] on account of the observation that speech is under the control of the

²¹ *BSB* 2.1.6

²² *BSB* 4.2.1

²³ *devānāṃ mokṣa utkrāntiś cāsmiṃ pāda ucyate*
BSB 4.2.1

mind, and on account of the scriptural statement, “As long as his speech has not been withdrawn into his mind”.²⁴

Madhva then cites from the *Skandapurāṇa* to justify his gloss of the words ‘speech’ and ‘mind’ as the respective deities—

Umā indeed is termed speech, and Rudra is termed the mind. Having understood these two, one’s matrimonial relationship will never be lost.²⁵

Madhva uses this analysis to present his theological convictions regarding the hierarchy of gods, with each deity being inferior to the deity they are withdrawn into.

Madhva proceeds to use other quotations²⁶ to explain that all the inferior gods are withdrawn into the presiding deity of fire, Agni, who is withdrawn into Indra, the ruler of all gods, who is in the seventh position in Madhva’s hierarchy. Indra is further withdrawn into Umā, who is withdrawn into Rudra. The presiding deity of the mind, Rudra, is withdrawn into the presiding deity of the vital airs (*prāṇas*), Vāyu. Finally, Vāyu is withdrawn into Viṣṇu. The presiding deity of material nature (*prakṛti*) is Lakṣmī, and she is not withdrawn into Viṣṇu since she is in a state of eternal liberation and is never bound in the material world.²⁷ This explanation

²⁴ *vāgabhimāniny umā mano 'bhimānini rudre vilīyate | vāco manovaśatvadarśanāt | tasya yāvan vāñ manasi sampadyate iti śabdāc ca |*
BSB 4.2.1

²⁵ However, as with Madhva’s other quotations, this is untraceable in any extant recensions of the *Skandapurāṇa*. See Roque Mesquita, *Madhva's quotes from the Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata: An analytical compilation of untraceable source-quotations in Madhva's works along with footnotes*, (Aditya Prakashan, 2008), 292.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Roque Mesquita has drawn up a comprehensive list of all these citations, and finds most of them to be untraceable to any extant recensions of the texts in question. He concludes that Madhva composed these verses himself.

²⁷ BSB, Madhva’s commentary on 4.2.1-4.2.3

leaves us with a sketch of the top positions of the hierarchy, with a few omissions, such as the consort of Vāyu, and some other deities such as Garuḍa, the bird-vehicle of Viṣṇu.

This concept is clarified in Madhva's *GTN*. Madhva quotes from an anonymous source and presents his views on hierarchy among the gods:

The gods headed by Indra, who are of the nature of the sense organs, are superior to all. The presiding deity of the mind, Rudra, is superior to them [these gods], and Sarasvatī, the presiding deity of intellect, to him. Brahmā, who is of the nature of the *mahat*, is regarded as superior thence. Lakṣmī, who is of the form of the unmanifest principle (*avyakta*) is superior, and even higher is Hari himself. There is no one equal to or superior to Hari—thus the precedence has been declared.²⁸

In the above citation, Madhva is forced to quote from an untraceable text to equate personal deities with cosmic principles and sensory functions. By doing so, Madhva seeks to locate the hierarchy within the sacred *śruti* texts that are firmly established as sources of valid knowledge. This allows Madhva to support his reading of a similar hierarchy into the *itihāsapurāṇas* and validate their authority as scripture.

1.4 The Status of *Itihāsapurāṇas* as Scripture: Problem and Resolutions

In his *BSB*, Madhva carves out a space for the epic texts, particularly the *Mahābhārata*, as an authoritative source of knowledge. In other words, the doctrine of All Sacred Lore not only implies the validity of Hindu mythical literature, but it gives this literature the status of *śruti* or

²⁸ *sarvebhyah pravara deva indradya indriyatmakah /
tebhyo mano 'bhimani tu rudras tasmāt sarasvatī ||
buddhyātmikā tato brahmā mahān ātmā varaḥ smṛtaḥ /
avyaktarūpā lakṣmīśca varāto' to hariḥ svayam ||
na tatsamo 'dhiko veti hy ānupūrvī prakīrtitā /
GTN, commentary on 3.42-43*

scripture. Madhva quotes from the *Bhaviṣyatpurāṇa* to make his point that these epic and mythical texts are valid sources of knowledge, going as far as to state that if one perceives an error in them, it is a result of one's own past sins rather than a contradiction in the text. This implies that the authentic meaning of sacred texts is inaccessible to those who are not qualified to study it—

The *Ṛk*, *Yajus*, *Sāma*, *Atharva*, and the *Mūlarāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Pañcarātras* are termed as the Vedas, along with the *purāṇas* that the wise know to be devoted to Viṣṇu. It is not to be doubted that the authority of these as sources of knowledge is derived in and of themselves. If what is said in these is not observed, then [one's sinful] earlier actions are the reason. It is not possible for these to lose their authority; [rather,] one can observe [their results] according to one's own qualification.²⁹

While Madhva uses an array of etymological techniques in his technical commentaries to affirm that the Vedic *brahman* is Viṣṇu, he meets with a challenge when he claims that the *purāṇas* are authoritative sources of knowledge, since the sectarian character of the *purāṇas* is next to impossible to reconcile with the supremacy of a single deity. These texts present innumerable contradictions since, even within the same text, different gods are sometimes eulogized as being the superior deity. This leaves Madhva with the challenge of explaining why the same author, Vyāsa, whom Madhva regards as Viṣṇu incarnate, would compose *purāṇas* that regard other deities as superior to Viṣṇu. This becomes the fundamental question that Madhva poses to himself and attempts to answer in his commentaries on these texts.

Madhva answers these possible objections in several ways, some of which are drawn from traditions that precede him. One such instance is Madhva's claim that the *purāṇic* literature is written in three different kinds of language: *samādhi*, *darśana*, and *guhya*. According to

²⁹ *BSB*, commentary on 2.1.5.

Madhva, the *samādhī* language is used where Viṣṇu is directly praised as the supreme deity and is to be understood literally. This allows Madhva to accept passages that eulogise Viṣṇu and sectarian Vaiṣṇava texts as straightforward truth. The *darśana* language is used to simply represent or paraphrase the theological beliefs of another group. It may be discerned that the *darśana* language is being used when what is said in the middle of a text contradicts what is expressed in the beginning and end. This implies that the text is to be understood through its self-proclaimed subject and goals, and the contradiction within it is to be understood as merely representing the viewpoint of another faith. This allows Madhva to classify passages that eulogize Śiva or other gods as Vyāsa's statement on the beliefs of Śaiva sects instead of viewing them as sacred truth. The third kind is the *guhya* language which expresses something completely irreconcilable with Viṣṇu's supremacy.³⁰ When the entire text expresses ideas that are against Viṣṇu's supremacy, the text is generally to be discarded (with the exception of very highly qualified persons) since humans are not qualified to understand its true meaning. Even in these cases, however, the authentic meaning of the text is hidden (*guhya*), and if one has the qualifications to decipher the concealed meaning, they are still authoritative sources of knowledge. As we can see, the main criterion that gives a text its status as scripture is its acceptance of Madhva's hierarchy, especially the supremacy of Viṣṇu.

³⁰ *bhāṣās tu trividhās tatra mayā vai sampradarśitāḥ /
ukto yo mahimā viṣṇoḥ sa tūkto hi samādhinā ||
śaivadarśanam ālambya kvacic chaivī kathoditā |
samādhībhāṣayoktaṃ yat tat sarvaṃ grāhyam eva hi ||
aviruddhaṃ samādhes tu darśanoktaṃ ca grhyate |
ādyantayor viruddhaṃ yad darśanaṃ tad udāhṛtaṃ ||
darśanāntarasiddhaṃ ca guhyabhāṣānyathā bhavet |
tasmād viṣṇor hi mahimā bhāratokto yathārthataḥ ||
MBTN 2.114-17*

In several mythical and epic texts, Viṣṇu's incarnations are shown to worship or offer prayers to other gods. This would be problematic since Viṣṇu, as the highest God, should be self-fulfilled and have no desires at all, let alone worship other gods to acquire the objects of his desire. Madhva clarifies such episodes elaborately at the beginning of the *MBTN*.

Sometimes, Viṣṇu worships, bows to, and praises Śiva, the sages, the gods, and even humans at other times, and requests them for boons and benedictions. In spite of these actions, Viṣṇu's supremacy, omniscience, etc. are uncontested. These episodes are for the purpose of deluding the wicked.³¹

In Madhva's theology, deluding the wicked is an important concern, since he admits of individual souls that are evil by nature and destined to reach eternal hell. If these individuals were to gain knowledge and act in righteous ways, with devotion towards God, then they would be acting against their true natures, and there would be the risk of their reaching liberation. Hence, several episodes across narrative texts are explained as an elaborate cosmic ploy to avert wicked individuals from the path to liberation. For instance, when two incarnations of Viṣṇu or Vāyu have altercations with each other in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, this is explained as being divine play (*līlā*) that deludes the wicked into thinking of the two incarnations as different entities, leading the wicked directly to eternal hell.³² This exegetical strategy results in a reading

³¹ *kvacīc chīvaṃ kvacīd ṛṣīn kvacīd devān kvacīn narān |*
namaty arcayati stauti varān arthayate 'pi ca ||
liṅgaṃ pratiṣṭhāpayati vṛṇoty asurato varān |
sarveśvaraḥ svatantra 'pi sarvaśaktiś ca sarvadā |
sarvajña 'pi vimohāya janānāṃ puruṣottamaḥ ||
tasmād yo mahimā viṣṇoḥ sarvaśāstroditāḥ sa hi |
nānyad ity eṣa sāstrāṇāṃ nirṇayaḥ samudāhṛtaḥ ||
MBTN 2.127-29

³² *MBTN 1.34-55*

of the vast body of the *itihāsapurāṇas* in a manner that is both internally consistent, and consistent with the hierarchy that Madhva reads into *śruti* texts.

Madhva repeats his claim of All Sacred Lore with added emphasis in the *MBTN*. He quotes from the *Purāṇas* to assert that the *Mahābhārata*, along with the *Vedas*, is an authority in and of itself; one that needs no support from other scripture to be a valid means of knowledge (*svataḥ pramāṇa*). He then claims that other scriptures, including the *dharmaśāstras*, can only be considered authoritative in so far as they do not contradict the *Mahābhārata* (and the *Vedas*). Additionally, the *Mahābhārata* is considered the decisive authority on the correct meaning of all other scriptures. This is established by narrating an episode from the *Mahābhārata*.

The gods headed by Brahmā, along with the sages, under the instructions of Vyāsa himself, weighed the *Vedas* and all other scriptures against the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Mahābhārata* was proven to be heavier because it illustrates the directives of the *Vedas* through narrative. [The text] is known as the *Mahābhārata* on account of its weight and importance. He who knows this etymology will be freed of all sin. The conclusive meaning of all scripture is given along with illustrations in the *Mahābhārata*. [For instance,] the subordination of all the gods, headed by Brahmā, to Viṣṇu is expressed here.³³

Specifically, Madhva claims that the epic illustrates the greatness of Kṛṣṇa, who is the incarnation of Viṣṇu, the hierarchy of the gods, and the great deeds of Bhīma, who is the second

³³ *bhāratam sarvavedāś ca tulām āropitāḥ purā ||
devair brahmādibhiḥ sarvair ṛṣibhiś ca samanvitaiḥ |
vyāsasyaivāñjayā tatra tv atyaricyata bhāratam ||
mahatvād bhāravatvāc ca mahābhāratam ucyate |
niruktam asya yo veda sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate ||
niṛṇayaḥ sarvaśāstrāṇāṃ sadṛśtānto hi bhārate |
kṛto viṣṇuvaśatvaṃ hi brahmādīnāṃ prakāśitam ||*

MBTN 2.9-12. The first of these verses is also found in the *Mahābhārata* 01,001.209.

incarnation of Vāyu, thereby establishing his superiority to other beings, and his closeness to Viṣṇu.

The idea that the *Mahābhārata* and other Purāṇic literature are morally instructive in a way that is different from Vedic injunctions can already be observed in the eleventh century aesthetician Mammaṭa's work *Kāvyaprakāśa*, which makes the distinction among the modes of instruction in the Vedas, Purāṇas, and *kāvya*, as being the modes of instruction of a master, a friend, and a lover. The *Mahābhārata*, as an *itihāsa*, would be closest to the mode of instruction of a friend, who counsels rather than commands.³⁴ However, to Madhva, the distinction between the two genres is not that of a master's instructions and a friend's counsel, but that of an abstract principle and a story that illustrates it. The high status that Madhva gives to the *Mahābhārata* shows an awareness of the power of narrative as codifying principles that cannot be conveyed as powerfully merely by philosophical argumentation.

1.5 The Hierarchy in Epic Texts

In his commentaries on *śruti* texts, Madhva is constrained by the genre of the text, and can only explain his doctrine of hierarchy through his gloss of the sense organs or sensory functions to mean the presiding deity. The *MBTN* gives him greater scope to lay out his own framework of the hierarchy, which he does succinctly at the very beginning of the first chapter—

Vāyu is his [Viṣṇu's] reflection. Rudra is the reflection of Vāyu, along with Garuḍa, who is also of the nature of Śeṣa [the serpent-bed of Viṣṇu]. Indra and Kāma are reflections of Garuḍa and Rudra, the sages are reflections of them, and so on. The attributes reduce to a fraction of the previous one at each step in the progression. Lakṣmī is his [Viṣṇu's]

³⁴ Mammaṭa, *Kāvyaprakāśa*, I.2 (prose passage), 55, explains the mode of instruction in *kāvya* as different from the other two.

reflection, superior to Vāyu as well as Brahmā. Accordingly, the presiding deity of speech [Sarasvatī] is greater than Rudra. Umā and the wife of Garuḍa are the reflections of the presiding deity of speech, and the others headed by Śacī are reflections of them both, in a progression, as with the males.³⁵

These statements create a hierarchical chain with Viṣṇu at the top, followed by Lakṣmī, followed by Brahmā and Vāyu who are of equal rank, followed by their consorts Sarasvatī and Bhāratī. These deities are then followed by Śiva, Garuḍa, and Śeṣa, who in turn are followed by their consorts Umā, Suparṇī and Vāruṇī, followed by Indra and Kāma, followed by their consorts Śacī and Ratī, and so on, up to the sages and then the humans. The notable addition to this hierarchy is the Vedic God Vāyu, identified as the Wind God. In an unprecedented move, Madhva, within most of his compositions, claims to be the third incarnation of Vāyu, imbuing himself with religious authority.³⁶ Within this hierarchy, the females occupy a position inferior to their husbands, but superior to the next male deity in the hierarchy. I will discuss the question of the female deities and women in Madhva's doctrines in a separate chapter. For now, it is important to note that this functions as a narrative tool because all these deities preside over certain senses and functions within the microcosm, and Madhva regards these as "governing principles"³⁷ of the abstract functions delineated in scripture. Within the epic, however, these principles are not a

³⁵ *ābhāsako 'sya pavanaḥ pavanasya rudraḥ /
śeṣātmako garuḍa eva ca śakrakāmau ||
vīndreśayos tadapare tv anayoś ca teṣāṃ /
ṛṣyādayaḥ kramaśa ūnaguṇāḥ śatāmśāḥ ||
ābhāsakā tv atha ramāsyā marutsvarūpāc |
chreṣṭhāpy ajāt tadanu gīḥ śivato variṣṭhā ||
tasyā umā vipatīnī ca giras tayo 'stu |
śacyādikāḥ kramaśa eva yathā pumaṃsaḥ /
MBTN 1.14-15*

³⁶ See Roque Mesquita, "The rank and function of God Vāyu in the philosophy of Madhva", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 46, no. 2 (2003), 97-117.

³⁷ Sharma's term in the Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya.

mere allegory, but represent a literal manifestation of the governing deities, who are in conflict or union at several points in the narrative. Thus, the narrative allows for an illustration and understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of all these deities. This understanding is indispensable in order to achieve liberation. Madhva comments—

In this way, the hierarchy must be known, along with the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Without knowing this, no one can ever achieve liberation.³⁸

Throughout the *MBTN*, Madhva attempts to maintain this hierarchy of power in the complex narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. The most crucial transformations effected in Madhva's reinterpretation of the epic are certainly to be found in the character of Bhīma. The most obvious explanation for this lies in Madhva's own identification as the third incarnation of Vāyu, whose previous two incarnations are the famed figures of Hanumat, the monkey God from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Bhīma, the second of the Pāṇḍava brothers from the *Mahābhārata*. Madhva's self-identification as Vāyu frames his entire narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. Madhva makes the claim that he is Vāyu incarnate in several different works, the clearest reference being at the conclusion of his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*—

Of Vāyu whose three divine forms are spoken of in the words of the Vedas, whose is the great splendor of a God, bestowed and thus visible—this Vāyu, whose first appearance is as the bearer of the word to Rāma [Hanumat]; the second, the “destroyer” [Bhīma]; the third Madhva by whom indeed this commentary is composed, showing the supremacy of Hari.³⁹

³⁸ *tāratamyam tato jñeyam sarvocatvam hares tathā |*
etad vinā na kasyāpi vimuktiḥ syāt kathaṅcana ||
MBTN 1.80

³⁹ *BSB* 1.229. Translation by S. Subha Rau, *The Vedānta Sūtras with the Commentary by Śrī Madhwācārya*, (Madras: Thompson and Co., 1904), 294.

This assertion is unique to Madhva, since other religious thinkers of Vedānta traditions did not identify themselves as divine, although some were later deified by their followers. Madhva, on the other hand, repeatedly claims to be a divine incarnation, in both his technical and non-technical works. He quotes a verse that he claims is from the Purāṇas at the very beginning of the *MBTN*—

His [Viṣṇu's] first agent is Vāyu, with three manifestations. The first named Hanumat, and the second, indeed being Bhīma, and Pūrṇaprajña [Madhva's name] being the third, [he is] the accomplisher of God's work.⁴⁰

It is no coincidence that both these characters are sons of Vāyu in the epics, or that their roles are of the greatest significance in Madhva's retelling. Madhva uses his claim of being the third incarnation of Vāyu to assert his own position in the hierarchy, and to give authority to his re-interpretation of the epic. Madhva completely erases the distinction between the author and character. He gains his religious authority, characterized by a claim to omniscience, not only by claiming to possess divine charisma, but by asserting he can access the subjectivity of the character he is writing on. Madhva then proceeds to explain controversial passages about Bhīma by associating him with Vāyu, an essentially Vedic deity, in order to prove his doctrine of All Sacred Lore.

The connection between the morally ambiguous warring of the other protagonists and antagonists of the epic and their ranking is made explicit in another section of verses from the *MBTN*. To Madhva, the *Mahābhārata* establishes that Brahmā is superior to Rudra and other

⁴⁰ *MBTN* 2.127

gods through the example of Bhīma. It is also established that Vāyu is the most significant aide to Viṣṇu in his task of reducing the burden of the earth, through the episodes of Bhīma's slaying of Jarāsandha and Duryodhana, who are some of the prominent antagonists in the epic.

In Madhva's introduction to the epic, where he formulates his interpretive framework, he states that, in the warrior caste (*kṣatriya*), the highest one in the hierarchy corresponds to the mightiest warrior. However, he adds some conditionals to this principle—the first being that the warrior must play a role in supporting Viṣṇu's task during his incarnation, out of devotion to Viṣṇu, and secondly, that the warrior's strength must be a reflection of his natural capabilities, and not the result of boons, curses, special weapons, or of being possessed by a superior power. Among the gods, the one with the greatest strength is also the one with superior devotion and knowledge, and the dearest to Viṣṇu.

According to Madhva, since the innate nature of the gods generally manifests clearly in their actions, and they are less prone to external influences, a higher ranking indicates both a superior intellect and superior strength. However, the reader, who is presumably a human being of deficient intellect, cannot recognize superior intellect. For this reason, strength is an accurate measure of the warrior's ranking in the hierarchy. In cases where Viṣṇu is engaged in the destruction of evil, the ranking of others may be gauged by the same criterion as the warrior. The ranking of the *brāhmaṇas*, in contrast, is based on their knowledge, as is the ranking of others (Madhva does not specify who) when Viṣṇu incarnates for the purpose of disseminating knowledge.

To sum up, the ranking of the warrior caste is based on strength, and the ranking of *brāhmaṇas* on knowledge, taking into account whether these are used in service of Viṣṇu's specific task in his incarnation. The important caveat here is that these criteria, particularly the

concomitance between strength, knowledge, and devotion are only applicable in the case of the pantheon of gods and not in the case of humans.⁴¹ This is especially significant since Madhva regards most of the characters from the *Mahābhārata* not only as the sons of specific deities but as the incarnations of their fathers.

These rankings feature heavily in Madhva's retelling of the epic, and are used to answer questions regarding the relative strength and power of two warriors in battle, as well the ranking of the specific warrior in the hierarchy. For instance, since Arjuna derives his strength from divine missiles and benedictions, his strength is considered inferior to Bhīma's brute strength, which is innate, and consequently, Arjuna is placed lower on the hierarchy. In this way, by using the actions of the warriors in the epic, Madhva attempts a ranking of the gods identified with the warriors' fathers, arriving at the same hierarchy that he established in the *śruti* texts. The point of this exegetical exercise is to lay the groundwork for interpreting episodes throughout the epic in

⁴¹ *jñānadaś ca śukādīnām brahmarudrādirūpiṇām ||
brahmādhikaś ca devebhyaḥ śeṣādrudrād apīritaḥ /
priyaś ca viṣṇoḥ sarvebhya iti bhīmanidarśanāt ||
bhūbhārahāriṇo viṣṇoḥ pradhānāṅgaḥ hi mārutiḥ /
māgadadhādivadhād eva duryodhanavadhād api ||
yo ya eva balajyeṣṭhaḥ kṣatriyeṣu sa uttamaḥ /
aṅgaḥ ced viṣṇukāryeṣu tadbhaktyaiva na cānyathā ||
balaḥ naisargikaḥ tac ced varāstrādes tad anyathā |
anyāveśanimittaḥ ced balamanyātmakaḥ hi tat ||
deveṣu balinām eva bhaktijñāne na cānyathā |
sa eva ca priyo viṣṇor nānyathā tu kathaṅcana ||
tasmād yo yo balajyeṣṭhaḥ sa guṇajyeṣṭha eva ca /
balaḥ hi kṣatriye vyaktaḥ jñāyate sthūladṛṣṭibhiḥ ||
jñānādayo guṇā yasmāj jñāyante sūkṣmadṛṣṭibhiḥ /
tasmād yatra balaḥ tatra vijñātavyā guṇāḥ pare ||
deveṣv eva na cānyeṣu vāsudevapratīpataḥ |
kṣatrād anyeṣv api balaḥ pramāṇaḥ yatra keśavaḥ /
pravṛtto duṣṭānidhane jñānakārye tathaiva ca ||
anyatra brāhmaṇānām tu pramāṇaḥ jñānameva hi |
kṣatriyāṇām balaḥ caiva sarveṣāṃ viṣṇukāryatā ||*
MBTN 2.13-22

ways that elevate Bhīma's, and consequently Vāyu's greatness. But the exercise also extends to all the major characters of the epic, who are identified with their deity-fathers. Madhva is deeply invested in proving the conformity of all the epic characters to the hierarchy he locates in the *śruti* texts, and to his interpretive framework for the epic, consisting primarily of the strategies of the three languages, and the association between the strength and moral merit of epic characters enables Madhva to carry out his project.

1.6 Using the Hierarchy to Integrate the Two Canons

In Madhva's own corpus of work, he attempts to establish a conclusive link between the *itihāsapurāṇas* and the Vedas, often using Sanskrit etymology and creative parsing to arrive at radically new interpretations of contentious passages in Vedic texts. In most of these passages, Madhva's hierarchy plays a prominent role in elevating epic narratives to the status of scripture. Madhva quotes extensively from *purāṇic* texts to justify his readings of technical material, such as in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. Most of his citations appear to be in favor of his unique doctrines, and have not been located in extant recensions of the texts he cites. Often, the texts and sources that Madhva cites were unknown even to his disciplines and his opponents, thereby eliciting the allegation even early on that Madhva composed them himself. Appayya Dīkṣita and Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita, for instance, accuse Madhva of bad grammar, and of quoting from unknown sources, thereby flouting the hermeneutical limits imposed by tradition on the interpretations of sacred texts.⁴²

⁴² See Christopher Minkowski, "Maryādām Ullāṅghya", In *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices: A Global Comparative Approach*, Anthony Grafton and Glenn W. Most eds., (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 90–109.

Roque Mesquita's exhaustive compilations of Madhva's untraceable quotations and his arguments with regard to these quotations suggest that Madhva authored these quotations himself. However, the social history of these citations provides insight into norms of intellectual inquiry in various Indian disciplines in medieval and early modern South India. While the rival Advaita tradition wrote polemical texts condemning Madhva's untraceable quotations and his loose style of interpretation, other traditions seem to be more ambivalent about Madhva's usage. The Bengali Gauḍīya tradition, for instance, seems to side with the Dvaita tradition, and accepts Madhva's quotations on the basis of his religious authority as the incarnation of Vāyu.⁴³

Even within Madhva's own work, these citations are illuminating in that they clearly show us the unique doctrines that Madhva attempts to locate within scripture. The foremost of these is the conception of hierarchy. Even in passages that require grammatical or semantic analysis, Madhva uses statements from the epics that emphasise the greatness of Viṣṇu and Vāyu to make his point. Again, in interpreting episodes from the epics, specifically the episodes focused on the incarnations of Viṣṇu and Vāyu, Madhva tries to draw connections to *śruti* texts to establish that there is no contradiction between the two genres.

I will quote specific instances to examine Madhva's effort in these directions. First, I turn to Madhva's *GTN*, one of his two commentaries on the *BG*. It is noteworthy that both of Madhva's South Indian predecessors, Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, composed commentaries on the *BG*, but not on the *Mahābhārata* itself. Śaṅkara's, Rāmānuja's and Madhva's commentaries on the *BG* are all technical, and attempt to present the author's own doctrines as the philosophy of the text. However, Madhva diverges from the convention in using the larger frame of the *BG*, the

⁴³ See Kiyokazu Okita, "Quotation, Quarrel and Controversy in Early Modern South Asia: Appayya Dīkṣita and Jīva Gosvāmī on Madhva's Untraceable Citations", *Abhandlungen Fur Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* (2017), 255-279.

Mahābhārata epic, as the evidence for his readings, focusing especially on passages about Bhīma’s might and greatness. This is best seen in Madhva’s commentary on Kṛṣṇa’s words to Arjuna in the final chapter of the *BG*. The verse from the *BG* reads—

The lord stands in the heart of all beings, causing them to move, mounted as they are on the motor of Māyā. Descendant of the Bharatas! Take refuge in him with your all. By his grace, you will obtain the permanent state of the highest peace.⁴⁴

The issue here is that Kṛṣṇa refers to “the lord” in the third person, despite declaring himself to be God in other passages, giving rise to the doubt that Kṛṣṇa may be different from the entity he refers to as God. The problem to be resolved is a grammatical one. Can one refer to oneself in the third person? If not, then Kṛṣṇa cannot be God, since he speaks of himself in the third person. Madhva comments, in his usual terse style—

“The indirect reference is akin to Bhīma’s words to Droṇa.”⁴⁵

The episode that Madhva refers to here is clear from multiple commentaries, as well as from Madhva’s own narration of the episode in the *MBTN*. During the Kurukṣetra war, Droṇa, the teacher of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, attempts to impede Bhīma who is on his way to find Arjuna on the battlefield to reassure Yudhiṣṭhira of Arjuna’s safety. Bhīma responds to Droṇa in a powerful passage—

⁴⁴ *BG* 18.61 and 62

⁴⁵ *parokṣavacanam tu droṇam prati bhīmavacanavat GB*, commentary on 18.61-62.

[Bhīma said—] “Droṇa! I am not that tender-hearted Arjuna who worships you and holds you in high regard. I am Bhīmasena, your foe. We all have always held that you are our father, our teacher and relative, and likewise, that we are your children. And so we have bowed before you. And today, you appear to be saying the contrary to us. If you consider me your foe, so be it. Here! Bhīma will do to you as he would to a foe.” Then, having spun his mace like the God of Death spins the staff of time, he flung it on Droṇa, who leaped off his chariot. Then, Droṇa’s chariot, with the horses, charioteer, and flag was crushed to smithereens.⁴⁶

Madhva mentions this episode in more detail in his commentary.⁴⁷ His main point in referencing this episode is Bhīma’s statement— “Here! Bhīma will do to you as he would to a foe.”

Although Bhīma is speaking about himself, he refers to himself indirectly, in the third person.⁴⁸

Therefore, it is perfectly grammatical to speak of oneself in the third person, and when Kṛṣṇa speaks of God in the third person, he is really speaking of himself. But this explanation still leaves one question to be answered. It could be grammatical to refer to oneself, but is such usage

⁴⁶ *yena vai paramāṇ pūjāṁ kurvatā mānito hy asi |
nārjuno 'haṁ ghrṇī droṇa bhīmaseno 'smi te ripuḥ ||
pitā nas tvam gurur bandhus tathā putrā hi te vāyam |
iti manyāmahe sarve bhavantaṁ prañatāḥ sthitāḥ ||
adya tad viparītaṁ te vadato 'smāsu dṛśyate |
yadi śatruṁ tvam ātmānaṁ manyase tat tathāstv iha ||
eṣa te sadṛśaṁ śatroḥ karma bhīmaḥ karomy aham |
athodbhṛāmya gadāṁ bhīmaḥ kāladaṇḍam ivāntakaḥ ||
droṇāyāvasṛjad rājan sa rathād avapupluve |
sāśvasūtadhvajam yānam droṇasyāpothayat tadā ||
MBh 07,102.084-088*

⁴⁷ *dāsyē na te mārgam ahaṁ kathañcit paśyāstravīryaṁ mama divyam adbhutam ||
ity uktavākyāḥ sa gadāṁ samādade cikṣepa tāṁ droṇarathāya bhīmaḥ |
uvāca cāhaṁ pitṛvaṁ mānaye tvāṁ sadā mṛdus tvāṁ prati nānyathā kvacit ||
amārdave paśya ca yādṛśaṁ balaṁ mameti tasyāśu vicūrṇito rathaḥ |
gadābhipātena vṛkodarasya sasūtavājīdhvajayantrakūbaraḥ ||
MBTN 26.119-21*

⁴⁸ Although the critical edition reads ‘*eṣa te sadṛśaṁ śatroḥ karma bhīmaḥ karomy aham*’ both Śrīnivāsaśrīrtha’s commentary on the *GB* and Bannanje Govindācārya’s commentary on the *MBTN* record the alternate reading ‘*eṣa te sadṛśaṁ śatroḥ karma bhīmaḥ kariṣyati*’ which makes the point better. See *GB* 501, *MBTN*, vol. 2, 421.

not misleading? Why would Kṛṣṇa speak of himself in the third person with words such as “him” and “God” instead of just saying “I” and “me”?

In Madhva’s second commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, he quotes from an unknown source to answer this question—

It is to be understood as [an expression of] certainty when Viṣṇu speaks of himself as *brahman* and so on.⁴⁹

Madhva’s interpretation appears to be as follows: Just as Bhīma says menacingly to Droṇa—“Here! Bhīma will do to you as he would to a foe” in order to emphasise his strength and his ability to destroy enemies, when Viṣṇu speaks of God in the third person, he is simply emphasizing his own status as God and his omnipotence and greatness.

Madhva’s point is that speaking of oneself in the third person lends a sense of certainty and emphasis, and so the purport of Kṛṣṇa’s usage of the third person is an emphasis on Kṛṣṇa’s status as God. Instead of quoting from a scholarly work on grammar or pointing out such usages in scriptural texts, however, Madhva uses a short episode from the *Mahābhārata* to make his point. In doing so, he elevates the status of the *Mahābhārata* to that of scripture, not only in its message but also as a reliable standard for grammatical and semantic use. The authority of the *BG* as scripture is not in question in any of the Vedānta traditions, but Madhva treats the rest of the *Mahābhārata* epic as equally authoritative, thereby elevating the status of the entire text to scripture. By using the epic to interpret a technical text on philosophy and theology, Madhva puts into practice his Doctrine of All Sacred Lore and is attempting to demonstrate that the distinction among the scriptural canon and the mythical one is only one of genre. Merging the

⁴⁹ GTN, commentary on 18.61

two canons opens up the possibility of knowledge and as a consequence, liberation to all readers, irrespective of caste and gender. The idea that the *Mahābhārata*, which is not bound by restrictions of exclusivity, is used to arrive at the correct interpretation of technical works of scripture that are only accessible to upper-caste men places the epic on a higher pedestal than the *smṛti* literature, and in terms of inclusivity, higher than the Vedas too.

It is not a coincidence that the passage Madhva uses to achieve this is one where Bhīma's might is expressed most powerfully. Madhva's commentary lends credence to the validity of the *Mahābhārata* as scripture, and does so by drawing on an episode that emphasises Bhīma's valour and superiority over his enemies. This way, even where the text calls for a philosophical or grammatical discussion (such as about the propriety of using the third person to refer to oneself), Madhva uses the text as an opportunity to emphasize the authority of *itihāsapurāṇas*. The choice of passage from the *Mahābhārata* demonstrates the importance of the Doctrine of Hierarchy to Madhva's exegetical project. Madhva finds in the epic an excellent opportunity to underscore the supremacy of Viṣṇu and the greatness of Vāyu—the two primary principles of his hierarchy. The above instance from the *BG* appears to be a continuation of the same strategy of invoking the *Mahābhārata* as authority, and inserting Bhīma's greatness firmly into a philosophical text that seemingly has nothing to do with him.

It is well known that Madhva uses several episodes from the *Mahābhārata* to justify Bhīma's greatness. However, the same episodes also correspond to the high rank of Vāyu in the hierarchy, emphasising the claim of All Sacred Lore, and insisting on the validity of scripture and myth as sources of knowledge. This is most obvious in Madhva's narration of Bhīma's gory killing of Duṣśāsana, and his drinking Duṣśāsana's blood. Duṣśāsana is Duryodhana's younger brother, and also the one who attempts to disrobe Draupadī in the assembly. Duṣśāsana forcibly

drags Draupadī to the assembly, disregarding her pleas, and tries to disrobe her. Additionally, he mimics Bhīma as Bhīma walks away from the palace when exiled. Bhīma takes a vow that he will break Duḥśāsana's chest in battle and drink his blood.⁵⁰ In the epic, Bhīma remembers on the battlefield all of Duḥśāsana's slights and summons up all his anger towards him. After killing him, he savors Duḥśāsana's blood, jubilantly declaring that his blood is sweeter than nectar.⁵¹ The warriors, terrified of Bhīma, run helter-skelter, screaming that he is not human.⁵²

Madhva explains this episode very differently. Madhva states that although Bhīma appeared to drink the blood, he did not allow the blood to pass his teeth, thereby remaining technically free from the sin that would be incurred by drinking human blood.⁵³ In addition, Bhīma declares that the blood tastes sweeter than nectar merely in order to intimidate his opponents in war. Most importantly, Madhva maintains, Bhīma was reflecting on the famous Manyusūkta, a hymn in the *Ṛgveda* to *manyu* (anger), which, according to Madhva, is in praise of Narasiṃha, the fearsome half-human, half-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. Madhva equates Bhīma's worship and offering of blood to the offering of the *soma* that customarily accompanies Vedic rituals. Bhīma is, therefore, the first seer of the Manyusūkta according to Madhva.

⁵⁰ *mā ha sma sukr̥tā lokān gacchet pārtho vṛkodarah |*
yadī vakṣasi bhittvā te na pibec choṇitam raṇe ||
 MBh 02,068.021

⁵¹ MBh 08,061.936.006-09

⁵² *sarve palāyanta bhayābhipannā*
nāyaṃ manuṣya iti bhāṣamāṇāḥ ...|
 MBh 08,061.010

⁵³ *dantāntaram na praviveśa tasya raktaṃ hy apeyaṃ puruṣasya jānataḥ ||*
tathāpi śatrupratibhīṣaṇāya papāv ivāsvādya punaḥ punar bhṛśam |
smaran nṛsiṃhaṃ bhagavantam īśvaram sa manyusūktaṃ ca dadarśa bhaktyā ||
"yaste manyo" ityato nārasimhaṃ somaṃ tasmai cārpayac choṇitākhyam |
yuddhākhyayajñe somabuddhyārivakṣa iheti sāmṇā gadayā vibhindaṇ ||
 MBTN 27.139-41

We can now see the connections Madhva makes between the scriptures that he insists are uncontradictory. Since Viṣṇu is the primary referent of all scripture, the hymn to anger becomes a hymn to Narasiṃha, and Bhīma, even in the most violent moment on the battlefield, becomes a devotee who is offering sacrifice to his God, rather than a bloodthirsty warrior fighting for vengeance. Here, Madhva blurs all distinctions between the import of various scriptures, as well as the distinction between the Wind God in the Vedic hymns, and the epic character of Bhīma, identifying them with the same deity. Bhīma becomes a great seer of the Vedas, and through him, the *Mahābhārata* becomes both source and illustration of Vedic knowledge, equalling or even excelling the authority of the *śrutis*.

Madhva also draws connections across varying narratives from epics and myths in different texts. The most voluminous instance of this is the *MBTN*, which is a simultaneous narration of the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and portions of the Kṛṣṇa story from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, brought together into a single timeline as Madhva sees it. But Madhva also makes thematic connections between these texts, especially to highlight his Doctrine of Hierarchy, using the dual figures of Hanumat and Bhīma to anchor his tale. For instance, one of the most important episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* deals with Rāma killing the monkey Vālin, the son of Indra, the king of the gods. This episode continues to be debated in modern scholarship, since it raises larger questions about just war, fratricide, and violence, and complicates the portrayal of Rāma as God.⁵⁴ In the epic, Rāma makes a pact of friendship with Vālin's estranged brother, Sugrīva, the son of the Sun God. Rāma promises to kill Vālin, in return for Sugrīva's promise

⁵⁴ See Raj Balkaran and A. Walter Dorn, "Violence in the 'Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa': Just War Criteria in an Ancient Indian Epic", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 3 (2012), 659-90, and J. Moussaieff Masson, "Fratricide among the Monkeys: Psychoanalytic Observations on an Episode in the Vālmīkirāmāyaṇam", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no. 4 (1975), 672-78 for discussions of this episode from the perspectives of just war and psychoanalysis respectively.

that upon ascending the throne after his brother's death, he would enlist the monkey army to aid in Rāma's search for his wife Sītā. Accordingly, Rāma, concealing himself in a thicket, kills Vālin, who is battling with Sugrīva. This is a problematic episode because it seems to violate an important norm of battle to engage in direct combat instead of attacking an enemy who is busy fending off another opponent. Instead of facing Vālin head on, Rāma conceals himself and insinuates himself into a battle between brothers, giving one the edge over the other, and ultimately killing Vālin unjustly. This is a problem even within the text, with Vālin pointing out that Rāma's actions did not befit a righteous man. The episode only grows more problematic, given Rāma's status as a morally perfect being and his identification as the incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Madhva resolves this issue by side-stepping the problem and focusing on Viṣṇu's compassion for his devotees on the one hand, and the justice of cosmic law on the other. He remarks—

Even with regard to the body, where Vāyu is, there Viṣṇu resides, and where Viṣṇu is, there Vāyu resides. The statement from the Vedas in this regard, '*kasmin nvaham tu*' is well-known. Thus, even in the incarnation, for this reason, he [Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Rāma] protected the son of the Sun God for the sake of Hanumat. Likewise, during his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, by having the son of the Sun God killed, he protected Arjuna for the sake of Bhīma. Earlier, because the son of the Sun God took refuge in Vāyu, Rāma killed Vālin. Thus, he even protects the gods who are under Vāyu's refuge; and so he protected Sugrīva here and the son of Indra in the other instance.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *dehe 'pi yatra pavano 'tra harir yato 'sau tatraiva vāyur iti vedavacaḥ prasiddham / kasmin nvaham tv iti tathaiva hi so 'vatāre tasmāt sa mārutikṛte raviḥ rarakṣa || evaṃ sa kṛṣṇatanur arjunam apy arakṣad bhīmārtham eva tadarim raviḥ niḥatya / pūrvam hi mārutim avāpa raveḥ suto 'yaṃ tenāsya vālinam ahan raghupah pratīpam || evaṃ surāṇs ca pavanasya vaśe yato 'taḥ sugrīvam atra tu paratra ca śakrasūnum / sarve śrītā hanumatāś tadanugrahāya tatrāgamad raghupatiḥ saha lakṣmaṇena ||*
MBTN 5.46-48

Madhva is drawing a parallel between the two stories from the narratives of the two epics and linking them across two different timelines to illustrate the circle of *karma* and Viṣṇu's impartiality in the larger cosmic scheme. Since Viṣṇu has the greatest regard for his devotees, his affection for Vāyu, who in Madhva's hierarchy is ranked at the top of all the gods, and who consequently is the most devoted to him, knows no bounds. The common rule among the two epics is, to Madhva, that Viṣṇu will side with Vāyu and those who surrender to him. The son of the Sun God in the *Mahābhārata* is Karṇa, whom Arjuna kills in the war. Madhva neatly ties up the loose ends of both stories in this passage, highlighting the seeming injustice to Vālin, the son of Indra in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and to Karṇa, the son of the Sun God in the *Mahābhārata*, and the justice to both in Viṣṇu's cosmic scheme. Each brother kills the other once, and their actions neutralize one another's, with Viṣṇu and Vāyu acting as impartial warriors who protect those who surrender to them.

The significant aspect of this story is also the mention of the Vedic passage to link Madhva's own doctrine with the scriptural canon of Vedānta. The sentence beginning with 'kasmin nvaham tu' that Madhva cites is in the extant recensions of the *Praśnopaniṣad*. The sentence translates loosely to— "He saw: 'Upon whose going out will I go out, and upon whose standing will I stand?' He created the life-breath [*prāṇa*; Vāyu, being the Wind God, is also said to regulate breathing, and is, therefore, the presiding deity of breathing]."⁵⁶ Madhva argues that this passage refers to Vāyu, and establishes the inseparability of God and his greatest devotee. Here, Madhva is using a *śruti* text to clarify the meaning of an episode of the epic. And yet again, he equates breath to the governing deity of breath, Vāyu, and uses Vāyu's status in the

⁵⁶ *sa īkṣācakre | kasminn aham utkrānta utkrānto bhaviṣyāmi kasmin vā pratiṣṭite pratiṣṭasyāmīti | sa prāṇam asrjata | Praśnopaniṣad 6.3-4*

hierarchy (relative to those of the Sun God and Indra) to explain the cosmic plan behind the events of the epic, equating the characters in the epic to the governing deities of the sun, breath, and so on. Madhva is claiming to derive from the epic an illustration of the Vedic principle that Vāyu is the greatest devotee of Viṣṇu and inseparable from him.

Yet another technique that Madhva uses to underscore the connections between technical and epic texts is to insert moral teachings about the hierarchy into his commentaries on technical works by references to characters from the epics. This is apparent in the *BTN*, his commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Madhva remarks on the phrase ‘*nirmatsarāṇām satām*’ (translates to: of the good who are without envy) in the second verse of the text—

Even good people may sometimes be seen to harbor envy, such as Arjuna’s of Ekalavya. That [Envy] should be abandoned by one who desires knowledge with regard to those who are superior to him. It is said in the *Mahāsaṃhitā*— “One must give up envy with respect to one who is superior to oneself. Indeed, the envious one loses every object whose desire causes him envy.”⁵⁷

In this case, the point that Madhva makes appears at first glance to be that Arjuna was jealous of Ekalavya, who was a superior archer.⁵⁸ In the *Mahābhārata*, Ekalavya is the son of a hunter who approaches Droṇa for education and is refused, since he does not belong to the warrior caste. Undeterred, Ekalavya makes an image of Droṇa, worships him as his teacher, and practices archery by himself, superseding even Arjuna, Droṇa’s favorite disciple, and most gifted archer.

⁵⁷ *satām ca mātsaryam arjunasyaikalavya iva kutracid dṛśyate | tad varjanīyaṃ uttameṣu jñānārthinā | mahāsaṃhitāyāṃ ca—
uttame svātmano nityaṃ mātsaryam parivarjayet /
kurute yatra mātsaryam tat tat tasya vihīyate || iti*
BTN, commentary on 1.1.2

⁵⁸ Simon Brodbeck discusses the implications of this episode in "Ekalavya and ‘*Mahābhārata*’ 1.121-28", *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 1 (2006), 1-34.

When Arjuna encounters Ekalavya, he is envious and greatly disturbed, and reminds Droṇa of Droṇa's promise to make Arjuna the singularly greatest archer in the world. Droṇa, in order to maintain his promise, demands Ekalavya's right thumb as teacher's fee, which Ekalavya gladly cuts off, thereby rendering his skill ineffectual, since the right thumb is indispensable for archery.⁵⁹

Reading the *MBTN* shows that Madhva's views on Ekalavya are widely divergent from this literal reading. I will deal with the issue of Ekalavya in more detail in the next chapter, but it is significant that, to Madhva, Arjuna was superior to Ekalavya in archery by all means, and yet experienced envy. This is in keeping with Arjuna's portrayal as Indra, who occupies a high rank in Madhva's hierarchy. Rather, Madhva opines that envy towards one's inferiors, such as Arjuna's, is a lower offense than envy towards one's superiors, which results in the complete loss of what is desired. Although envy is a generally undesirable trait, Madhva is making a distinction between envy towards one's superiors and inferiors, and judging that envy towards one's inferiors is a lesser offence.

Madhva uses this episode to convey the unconventional idea that, while envy is a negative trait, it is a forgivable one. The greater offence, to Madhva, is a lack of discernment regarding one's superiors and inferiors in the hierarchy. For this reason, Arjuna's envy towards Ekalavya is a pardonable offence, and he does not face severe rebuke. In this case, as in many others, Madhva chooses instances liberally from the epics to illustrate his points in his commentaries on other *purāṇas* and *śrutis*, mentioning the instance very briefly in a single phrase, necessitating a close reading of his interpretation of the epic to understand his commentaries on other texts, and demonstrating that the two canons are closely connected and

⁵⁹ *MBh* 01,123.006-039

cannot be understood without each other. The lesson to be learned from the episode of the epic is the importance of the hierarchy, and of knowing one's own and others' positions in it. Madhva's brief commentary on this episode illustrates both the importance of the epics to his theological project, and the hierarchy, to Madhva, is the predominant moral teaching of the epics.

1.7 Conclusion

Madhva's writing draws a variety of material from both the Vedic traditions and the different sectarian traditions and attempts to integrate them into a single comprehensive philosophical, theological, and sectarian framework with distinctive beliefs and rituals. To legitimize his doctrines, Madhva must incorporate them into his commentaries on *śruti* texts, but he deliberately chooses to cite from purāṇic sources and the *Mahābhārata*, giving us a vast array of untraceable citations, in order to reaffirm the purāṇic genre as an authoritative source of knowledge and underscore his point that these texts are as valid as the Vedas. He uses these sources as authorities on grammar, semantics, and as important sources to determine the meanings of ambiguous passages in technical texts, indicating the importance of narrative genres and epic tales to his larger project. In most of these cases where Madhva attempts to merge the two canons, he uses the Doctrine of Hierarchy to do so. Since the authority of a text is determined by its acceptance of Viṣṇu as God, and Vāyu as his greatest devotee, references to the wind, breath, and so on in scriptural texts are equated with Vāyu, and references to God are equated with Viṣṇu. By presenting the epics as illustrations of hierarchy, Madhva then reinterprets key episodes to conform to his own interpretations of scripture, thereby contending that the two genres are equally valid. This way, the Doctrine of Hierarchy is indispensable for Madhva to demonstrate his claim of All Sacred Lore.

Chapter 2: Vilifying key figures from the epic

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at the lowest rung of Madhva's hierarchy to examine the rationale for the demonization of characters from the epics. Madhva uses his hierarchy to create a playing field for cosmic conflicts in the epic, where the characters are not human, but complex combinations of divine and demonic forces that are locked in eternal battle.

While the previous chapter looked at the theoretical connections between Madhva's hierarchy and his commentaries on the epics, this one closely studies the portrayal of the demonic, and the actions and characteristics that give them the positions of demons on the hierarchy.

I show that Madhva deploys his hierarchy to delegitimize rival schools of theology, particularly Advaita Vedānta. The complex scheme of the demonization—in a very literal sense— of the eighth century monist philosopher, Śaṅkara, in Dvaita writings is crucial to emphasize the authority of the Vedānta tradition and acknowledge Advaita Vedānta as a part of the tradition by assigning it a teleological function. At the same time, however, the narrative demonization of Śaṅkara allows the Dvaita tradition to reject Advaita doctrines in a way that underscores Madhva's own religious authority.

Since the distinctive feature of Dvaita Vedānta is its doctrine of a fundamental and irrevocable distinction between the identities of *jīva* and *brahman*, Madhva's efforts often focus on disproving tenets of Advaita, which equates the two entities. This zeal to refute Advaita doctrines has been noted by scholars within the tradition and has led to the

treatment of Dvaita as a mere counter-point to Advaita rather than as a distinct school of theology and philosophy in modern scholarship. In his large corpus of writings, Madhva vehemently critiques the Advaita doctrine of the illusory nature of the world (*mithyātvā*), and the unity of the *jīva* and *brahman*. These tropes are carried over into Dvaita writings after Madhva, and they continue to be embellished and deployed against rival sectarian opponents at different points in time. For this reason, and also for more clarity regarding the characters being demonized in Madhva's commentary, I also look at how Madhva's disciples of the Dvaita tradition continue to deploy the hierarchy to demonize their theological opponents. This is particularly useful because Madhva's comments on the characters here are scattered across various portions of his work, and his disciples draw on all these references to present a coherent narrative regarding Advaita.

In this chapter, I try to answer both how and why Madhva demonizes rival theologies. I first look at Madhva's characterization of the demons at the bottom of his hierarchy and explain what it means to be evil in Madhva's theology. I then sketch out representations of Advaita and Śaṅkara in the narrative and hagiographical works of Madhva and his direct disciples, by tracing the identification of Śaṅkara as the demon Maṇimat. I explain Śaṅkara's somewhat ambiguous connection to Śiva. The other character who is associated with Śaṅkara in the *MBTN* is Ekalavya, and I look at the implications of this for the demonization of Śaṅkara. I also examine Advaita's connections to Buddhism. I look at a relatively minor character, Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, and his depictions with respect to Advaita. Finally, I answer the question of why Madhva undertakes this project of demonization and show how Madhva uses the hierarchy to assume greater religious authority for himself through the demonization of his opponents.

2.2 Haters of Viṣṇu

The identification of rivals with demon incarnations is not a novel technique created by Madhva. Phyllis Granoff traces the (possibly) first such representation to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, where the outsider (*mleccha*) is regarded as a demon.⁶⁰ The Mādhvas have also been tainted by the same brush, with the *Saurapurāṇa* alleging that they are *mlecchas*.⁶¹ The point of such a characterization is fairly obvious. As Granoff points out, “The conclusion to be derived from these myths [myths that use the argument of divine delusion] is that practitioners of the heretical religions are in fact demons to whom the gods and their representatives taught wrong views.”⁶² These practices of demonization, as Granoff shows, are deployed in the hagiographies of kings and of saints, both of whom must fight wars and win conquests over rival kings or rival theologies. The prevalent sects of the time generally identify the king with the incarnation of their God, and regard the rival as the incarnation of a demon, while adherents of various theologies do the same with their teachers.⁶³

Madhva’s depictions, however, are more complicated, and involve an identification of rival theologians with multiple characters and concepts from the epic. The basis for these identifications can be found in Madhva’s theology. As we have seen

⁶⁰ Phyllis Granoff, "Holy warriors: A preliminary study of some biographies of saints and kings in the classical Indian tradition", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (1984), 292.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 291-303.

in the previous chapter, Madhva, in an unprecedented break from previous commentators on the Vedas, posits the existence of an eternal hell from which there is no return. His philosophy also makes a tripartite classification of souls that are as yet not liberated, into the categories of *muktiyogya*, *nityasamsārin*, and *tamoyogya*. B. N. K. Sharma translates these terms as salvable, ever-transmigrating, and damnable, respectively.⁶⁴ While the first category of these is characterized by devotion to Viṣṇu, the third category of souls harbor an eternal hatred of Viṣṇu, which leads them to an eternal hell (*andhantamas*).⁶⁵ To Madhva, the distinguishing characteristic of evil beings, who are placed in the third and lowest category of Madhva's hierarchy, is their hatred towards Viṣṇu. Thus, Madhva's conception of hatred towards Viṣṇu is an important part of his hierarchy; it determines whether a character is good or evil, and consequently, whether the character is destined to reach liberation or spend eternity in hell.

Madhva mentions the Doctrine of Hierarchy in his commentaries on both the technical and non-technical genres of scripture. But it is only in the *MBTN* that we find clear portrayals of characters that Madhva regards as evil and destined for eternal hell. As Madhva states, these evil beings hate Viṣṇu. But what does it mean to hate Viṣṇu? The question is not as straightforward as it seems. Madhva defines his idea of the hatred of Viṣṇu as being of nine kinds, analogous to the nine kinds of devotion in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*:

Understanding Viṣṇu to be non-different from the soul, to be without attributes, to have incomplete attributes, understanding others to be equal or superior to him,

⁶⁴ Sharma, *Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya*, 70.

⁶⁵ *MBTN* 1.18 for instance.

believing that there are differences within him [such as his different forms or even body parts], understanding him as subject to birth or change, hatred of his devotees, and abuse or condemnation of scriptural proofs [that establish his supremacy]—all these are regarded as hatred [of Viṣṇu]. Only devotion that is devoid of the above is called devotion.⁶⁶

The interesting feature of this characterization of hatred is that various forms of inaccurate understanding of Viṣṇu qualify as hatred towards him. Not surprisingly, almost all of these nine kinds of hatred are linked either to Advaita doctrines, or to the very unflattering biography of Śaṅkara that Madhva and Dvaita scholars present. We will return to the nine kinds of hatred after investigating how Dvaita writings portray Śaṅkara and Advaita, to understand how these classifications demonize Advaita.

The use of the *Mahābhārata* for this project of demonization is at least partly motivated by the high status of the text in Madhva's doctrine. But the epic is especially suited for this task due to its enormous collection of narratives and its strong links with tradition. The reason for this can be found in an observation made by McComas Taylor with regard to lineages in Purāṇa literature. While Taylor is talking about lineages of narrators that can be traced back to divine revelations, the argument is equally valid for Madhva's own project of re-interpretation:

the function of such a lineage [of narrators] is to “prove” publicly a direct link between the divine origins of the text and the text as it exists today. In effect, the lineage is also evidence of the text's divinity and its status as divine revelation. . . . The process of ascribing a discourse to a lineage of mythical narrators also has the

⁶⁶ *jīvābhedo nirguṇatvam apūrṇaguṇatā tathā |*
sāmyādhikye tadanyeṣāṃ bhedās tadgata eva ca ||
prādurbhāviviparyāsaś tadbhaktadveṣa eva ca |
tatpramāṇasya nindā ca dveṣaite 'khilā matāḥ ||
etair vihinā yā bhaktiḥ sā bhaktir iti niścītā |
MBTN 1.113-15.

effect of imbedding the discourse in an ancient past. The creator of the narrative may thereby present his contemporary concerns as being of primordial or timeless origin.⁶⁷

Since the *Mahābhārata* already has a large collection of myths, and since it is regarded popularly as the fifth Veda, drawing characters and narratives from the epic enables Madhva to use a legitimate tradition and alter it to conform to his theology, while claiming to give the authentic and original meaning of the text as Vyāsa intended.

2.3 Maṇimat

The first and most important of characters from the *MBTN* who is associated with Śaṅkara is the seemingly insignificant demon Maṇimat, who is only briefly mentioned in the epic but is integral to Madhva's understanding of it. The doctrines of Advaita, especially the illusory nature of the world and the unity of *jīva* and *brahman*, and tropes of purposeful delusion feature heavily in Madhva's narration of the story of the demon Maṇimat.

Śaṅkara is not explicitly described as Maṇimat in Madhva's works, but the implication is available for all readers with a background in Vedānta. In his *MBTN*, Madhva explains that sacred texts that advocate the superiority of other gods over Viṣṇu have been composed by Viṣṇu's command in order to delude the demons (and those of demonic nature). In Madhva's cosmic scheme, these demons hate Viṣṇu and are destined

⁶⁷ McComas Taylor, "What Enables Canonical Literature to Function as 'True'? The Case of the Hindu Purāṇas", *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 12: 3, 313.

to attain eternal hell through their evil actions.⁶⁸ The mention of eternal hell makes it plain to the reader that Maṇimat is in the lowest category of the hierarchy. Madhva narrates the story of the demon Maṇimat as a part of the *Saugandhikā* flower episode from the *Mahābhārata*: Draupadī, the wife of the five Pāṇḍavas, finds a golden flower, and enchanted by its fragrance, asks Bhīma to get more flowers for her. Bhīma sets out to do so but is obstructed by the *Krodhavaśa* demons and their chief, Maṇimat, who are guarding the lake where the flowers grow. Maṇimat is supposedly invincible due to a benediction from Śiva, but Bhīma, who is higher than Śiva in Madhva's hierarchy, kills all the demons and takes the flowers for Draupadī.⁶⁹ Madhva, during his narration, also refers to an episode in the *Mahābhārata* where Maṇimat is cursed by the sage Agastya that he would be killed by a human—as result of which he was killed by Vāyu who was in human form as Bhīma.⁷⁰

Further, he states that these demons and Maṇimat were reborn in the age of Kali, and reached hell after propagating illusory knowledge (*mithyāmati*):

Maṇimat, who was killed in the Saugandhika forest, took birth again in the age of Kali, and having caused the spread of illusory knowledge (*mithyāmati*), reached the great darkness [hell].⁷¹

⁶⁸ *mohārthāny anyasāstrāṇi kṛtāny evājñayā hareḥ /
atas teṣūktam agrāhyam asurāṇāṃ tamogateḥ ||*
MBTN 1.34.

⁶⁹ *agre nidhāya maṇimantam ajeyam ugram śambhor varād vividhaśastramahābhivṛṣṭyā /
tān sarvarākṣasagaṇān maṇimatsametān bhīmo jaghāna sapadi pravaraiḥ śaroghaiḥ ||*
MBTN 22.295

⁷⁰ See MBTN 22.320

⁷¹ *te hatā bhīmasenena prāpur andhantamo 'khilāḥ /
hatāḥ saugandhikavane maṇimāṃś ca punaḥ kalau /
jāto mithyāmatim samyag āstīryāpus tamo 'dhikam ||*

Here, the term *mithyāmati* is forcefully reminiscent of the repeated condemnation of the Advaita school for their doctrine that the world is illusory (*mithyā*), and hence a particular reference to Śaṅkara. Also, Madhva's phrasing appears to indicate a causative link between the spreading of illusory knowledge and reaching the great darkness, implying that Maṇimat reached eternal hell because he propagated illusory knowledge. This ties Śaṅkara in with the category of *tamo-yogya* (damnable) individuals. In fact, the past perfect tense Madhva uses (*āpuḥ*) indicates that Śaṅkara and his disciples completed their fair share of sin and had already been damned.

This idea that Śaṅkara was Maṇimat is reiterated in Trivikrama Paṇḍitācārya's *Vāyustuti*, a devotional hymn to the three incarnations of Vāyu. From Madhva's hagiography, authored by Trivikrama's son, Nārāyaṇa, Trivikrama is known to have been a scholar of Advaita, who became Madhva's disciple after losing an extensive debate to him.⁷² In eulogizing Madhva, Trivikrama writes:

The crooked, worm-like Maṇimat, the chief of the evil ones who were killed [by Bhīma], a *Krodhavaśa*, having taken birth on the earth for revenge, composed an evil treatise that was hurtful as a saw to the minds of good people, arguing wrongly that Viṣṇu is devoid of all attributes/virtues [*guṇas*]. Evil ones followed this heretical doctrine of "I am *brahman*; I am devoid of all attributes; this [the world] is unreal," while others abandoned it. While this poisonous tree [of false doctrine] grew, may Vāyu, the fire who burnt down this tree, who descended in his third incarnation, be victorious. As the lion's roar of your [Madhva's] commentary sounded, they, [like] jackals, their arrogance destroyed, angry,

MBTN 22.297

⁷² MV 13.43-69, 15.1-70

fearful, leaving the country with curses and promises to fight back, scattered in all directions.⁷³

As we can see, Trivikrama Paṇḍitācārya's work uses strong imagery to eulogize Madhva and demonize Śaṅkara explicitly as Maṇimat, invoking tenets of Śaṅkara's system, such as the illusory nature of the world (*mithyātvā*), and the idea that *brahman*, here equated with Viṣṇu, is devoid of all attributes (*nirguṇa*). It is interesting to note that scholars of the Dvaita tradition regard Madhva himself as the author of the two prefatory verses to the *Vāyustuti*, which contain a prayer to the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu, Narasiṃha, indicating his approval of the contents of the hymn and imbuing it with greater religious significance.⁷⁴

The term '*Krodhavaśa*', which is used as the name of the group of demons, is also mentioned in the epic, but is noteworthy here. It is a compound word comprising the words '*krodha*', meaning 'anger', and '*vaśa*', meaning 'under the control of'. The compound can be parsed in two ways to mean either that it refers to those who are under the control of anger, or to those who control anger. It is not clear in which sense Madhva uses the term, but the group of demons is strongly associated with anger.

Trivikrama Paṇḍitācārya's tone is carried over into Madhva's religious biography, the *Madhvavijaya*. Here, Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya specifies both the name and the place of Śaṅkara's birth:

⁷³ Trivikrama Paṇḍitācārya, *Vāyu-Stuti*, ed. Bannanje Govindacharya, (Tatva-Saṁsodhana-Samsat, 2011), 29-31.

⁷⁴ GV Kulkarni, *Trivikrama Panditacharya's Sri Vayu Stuti* (Anandatirtha Pratishtana, 1996), 27, for instance, mentions Srimadānandatīrtha (a name of Madhva) as having composed the first two verses.

Maṇimat, earlier killed [by Bhīma], filled with enmity, [out of a sense of] competition, acquired oratory skills as a result of pleasing Śiva. By the name of Śaṅkara, he was born in Bottom of the Feet [*Aṅghritala*—a literal Sanskrit translation of Kalady, the birthplace of Śaṅkara], along with demons born for the same purpose. As a cat takes away the sacrificial offering of milk and curd, as the dog that subsists on waste takes away sacred offerings, as a fickle monkey grabs a precious necklace, even so, the sinful Śaṅkara took the Vedas and other sacred literature. Realizing that people would not trust him, the evil one took up the guise of an ascetic, and like a wild elephant, he muddied the clear waters [of the Vedas] by stirring up slush. Seeing Buddhism rejected since it did not accept the validity of the Vedas, and being partial to Buddhism himself, he began to propagate the same by different means.⁷⁵

Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya then goes on to expound the various tenets of Advaita, equating each with the corresponding principle in Buddhism, and calling Śaṅkara a thief. He also narrates that, over time, even the good people began to believe Śaṅkara's doctrine.

In the next chapter, he describes Viṣṇu's command to Vāyu to go to the earth and lead the good in the right direction.⁷⁶ The *Madhvavijaya* mentions that a demon, in the form of a snake, attempted to bite young Madhva, and he crushed it with ease.⁷⁷ This snake is identified as Maṇimat. However, the most virulent and lengthy personal attacks on Śaṅkara are certainly made in Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya's *Maṇimañjarī*, which reads like a prologue to the *Madhvavijaya*.

In this work, Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya charts an elaborate history of Advaita, and makes several allegations about the “true” nature and personal history of Śaṅkara, claiming that he was born of an adulterous widow and altering his name from Śaṅkara

⁷⁵ MV 1.47-54

⁷⁶ MV 2.1-2.5

⁷⁷ MV 3.38-40

(with a palatal sibilant), meaning ‘the giver of joy’, to Saṅkara (with a dental sibilant), meaning ‘a sinful mingling [of castes]’:

As he was born from an illicit relationship (*saṅkara*) and was [thus] prohibited from all Vedic ritual, his mother called him Saṅkara.⁷⁸

Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya repeatedly emphasizes the name of Śaṅkara’s birthplace, Kalady, which he translates as the bottom of the feet (*aṅghritala*), in a mark of derision. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya also gives a detailed account of the conversations among a set of demons, headed by Kali, who is regarded as the vilest and most sinful being in Dvaita doctrine. Kali is said to be the embodiment of ignorance (*ajñāna*) who incarnates as Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata*. The other characters from the epic who are demonized by Madhva include Duḥśāsana, who is the embodiment of mistaken knowledge (*viparītajñāna*), and Śakuni, who is the embodiment of a lack of faith in the Vedas.⁷⁹ These identifications of the characters from the epic with specific demons is already made in Madhva’s *MBTN*, and Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya is only drawing on established convention here. But, by relating a conversation between these characters and Maṇimat, a minor demon from the epic, Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya relegates Maṇimat and his future incarnation as Śaṅkara to the lowest rung of Madhva’s hierarchy.

⁷⁸ *utpannaḥ saṅkarātmāyaṃ sarvakarmabahiṣkṛtaḥ /
ity uktaḥ svajanair mātā saṅkarety ājuhāva tam ||
Maṇimañjarī, 6.7.*

⁷⁹ *ajñānādisvarūpas tu kalir duryodhanaḥ smṛtaḥ /
viparītaṃ tu yaj jñānaṃ duḥśāsana itīritaḥ ||
nāstikyam śakunir nāma sarvadoṣātmakāḥ pare /
dhārtarāṣṭrās tv ahaṅkāro drauṇī rudrātmako yataḥ ||
MBTN 2.136-37*

In Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya's account, the demons congregate after the departure of Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma from the earth, to decide how they could destroy Vedic knowledge.⁸⁰ They choose Maṇimat for their task, since he has previous rivalry with Bhīma, and urge him to enter the minds of scholars who write commentaries on the Vedas in order to distort real knowledge in a way that Bhīma cannot rectify since he has left the earth. They also exhort him to propound the doctrine of the identity of the *jīva* and *brahman* and the illusory nature of the world, which in turn, would waylay virtuous people seeking to understand Vedic principles. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya narrates a brief history of Buddhism, explaining that Śaṅkara was secretly an atheist who agreed with the *Śūnyavāda* of the Buddhists, and propounded Buddhism in a disguised form, by substituting their technical terms such as *śūnya* and *saṃvṛtti* with *brahman* and *avidyā*.

Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya narrates incidents of Śaṅkara engaging in sexual relationships despite being an ascetic, giving up his sacred thread and stick, lying, and deliberately spreading false doctrines, despite being rejected by the good, and ultimately, of Śaṅkara as dying an undignified death, decrepit with disease. Such depictions are found across Dvaita writings.

One of the few exceptions to such vilifications of Advaita philosophy and philosophers appears to be Madhva's *guru*, Acyuta Prekṣa, who is known to have been an adherent of Advaita Vedānta. While Madhva never acknowledges Acyuta Prekṣa as his *guru* in his works, preferring to acknowledge Vyāsa, Viṣṇu's incarnation, as his worthy *guru*, he does not vilify him in any way. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya claims that the ascetic

⁸⁰ The *Maṇimañjarī* describes this scene in detail. The fifth and sixth chapters are a detailed account of these discussions, and the subsequent story of Śaṅkara's life.

order of Acyuta Prekṣa had a strange relationship with Advaita philosophy. While monks of his monastic order were threatened by violence and had to pretend to convert to Advaita philosophy, they continued to distance themselves from monist doctrines within their minds. This narrative lends Acyuta Prekṣa some relief from the vilification accorded to all the other followers of Advaita.

The transmutation of Advaita philosophy into a purposefully evil and demonic system, formulated for the express purpose of misdirecting good people away from the path of the Vedas reaches its apex in *Maṇimañjarī*. It carries all the more force since Trivikrama is known to have been an Advaita scholar who converted after losing the debate with Madhva, making his and his son's revulsion to Advaita a powerful cautionary tale to adherents of Madhva. Daniel Sheridan points out the exclusion of elements such as these accounts of demons conversing, and the vicious hagiography of Śaṅkara in scholarship on Dvaita:

... the distinct insights “of the fire of religious zeal” that he [Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya] brings to that life tend to be screened out as hagiographical and mythological embellishments. This is an unfortunate instance of the tendency of contemporary historians to “teach” the past according to what is evidentially allowable or not allowable rather than to learn from the past. That neither Madhva nor Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya shares the contemporary restrictions on what is permissible in religious and historical experience is apparent. Profound religious experiences that lie within the historical realm are narrated in this biography. These experiences assume a “mythic” and historical importance for the biographer since they are the reason why Madhva is religiously and theologically significant.⁸¹

⁸¹ Daniel P. Sheridan, “Vyāsa as Madhva's Guru”, *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm, (State University of New York Press, 1992), 111.

Madhva's authority as an interpreter of Vedic texts, as Sheridan explains, lies precisely in this demonization of Śaṅkara and Madhva's own identification as Vāyu. Madhva quotes extensively from texts that others have not even heard of, and uses his charisma to justify his knowledge of those sources, and even of verses that he claims have been deliberately erased.⁸² The untraceable quotations from works that Madhva quotes frequently, and his refiguration of Vedānta to reconcile contradictions through etymology and other techniques can only be accepted with the prerequisite assumption that he has an omniscient perspective and unlimited access to an undisclosed realm of textuality.

To sum up, Madhva's own characterizations of Advaita and Śaṅkara provide a framework for later religious thinkers of the Dvaita tradition to treat an essentially philosophical position as intrinsically evil. Within the Dvaita religious tradition, Advaita becomes invariably associated with a kind of egoistic arrogance that stems from identifying oneself as God, for the devotee would find the idea of being the same as the object of his adoration abhorrent. New links that have been forged in the Sanskrit texts between Advaita and the egoism of being the supreme stand in the way of the possibility of considering Advaita a tenable position for a disciple of the Dvaita tradition. Maṇimat is equated with Śaṅkara to delegitimize Advaita and present it as a demonic and dangerous philosophy that ultimately leads its proponents and adherents to hell.

⁸² Valerie Stoker, "Conceiving the Canon in Dvaita Vedānta: Madhva's Doctrine of "All Sacred Lore"." *Numen* 51, no. 1 (2004): 47-77 discusses this at length.

2.4 Śaṅkara as Śiva

Since we know that Śaṅkara is demonized in Dvaita writings, it seems counterintuitive that Śaṅkara would be associated with the deity Śiva by other traditions. Madhva mentions, as we saw, that Maṇimat had a benediction from Śiva. But some other traditions take this a step further, claiming that Śaṅkara was an incarnation of Śiva. A certain verse quoted in commentaries on the *Mahābhārata-tātparyanirṇaya* (attributed to the *Padmapurāṇa*) claims that Śaṅkara was Śiva himself. The verse seems to be addressed to Pārvatī by Śiva, and asserts that Śiva would incarnate as a *brāhmaṇa* in the age of Kali, spread the illusory philosophy of *Māyāvāda*, and assert the identity of the *jīva* and *brahman*.⁸³ The verse is convenient to Madhva's own ideas and also accommodates Madhva's statement that Śaṅkara possessed a boon from Śiva, which would allow him a certain amount of divine power, and could be used to explain away Śaṅkara's eloquence or knowledge as a result of divine charisma.

This narrative also resolves other issues that Dvaita scholars would surely encounter; that of Śaṅkara's knowledge of the Vedas and other scripture and Śaṅkara's devotional compositions to Viṣṇu. The historical figure of Śaṅkara would not quite fit in with ideas of hatred towards Viṣṇu due to his various hymns to Viṣṇu, such as his *Acyutāṣṭakam*, *Rāmabhujāṅgaprayāstotra* and so on, since within the Dvaita narrative, his status as a demon is based on the criterion of his hatred for Viṣṇu. This adjusted narrative, on the other hand, whether Śaṅkara obtains a benediction from Śiva or is himself an incarnation of Śiva, accounts for both Śaṅkara's devotion, since in Madhva's

⁸³ Madhva, *Mahābhārata-tātparyanirṇaya*, vol. 1, ed. Bannanje Govindacharya (Tattva-samsodhana-samśat, 2009), see Govindacharya's commentary to 1.113 on p. 45.

hierarchy of gods, Śiva occupies a high position owing to his devotion to Viṣṇu, and also for Śaṅkara's perceived ills, such as his doctrine of non-difference, which can then be explained as Maṇimat acting within him. We see this argument of two souls with different tendencies in a single body used several times in *Mahābhārata*tātāparyanirṇaya, often to explain the moral actions of an evil character and vice versa.⁸⁴ In summation, there is a certain ambivalence about the demonization of Śaṅkara in Dvaita writing, which we will explore further over the course of the chapter.

2.5 Ekalavya and Śaṅkara

Madhva often gives multiple explanations and background stories about all the major characters in the *Mahābhārata*. This is true of Maṇimat too, since Madhva makes an interesting association between Ekalavya and Maṇimat. We have already seen the story of Ekalavya briefly in the previous chapter. In the *MBTN*, Madhva narrates the story of Ekalavya and Karṇa consecutively, explaining that Droṇa, the teacher of the Kaurava princes, refuses to teach the two of them because of their castes, since Ekalavya is a *niṣāda* and Karṇa is the son of a charioteer.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *sā tāṭakā corvaśisampraviṣṭā kṛṣṇāvadhyānān nirayaṃ jagāma |*
sā tūrvaśī kṛṣṇabhuktastanena pūtā svargaṃ prayayau tatksaṇena ||
MBTN 12.87

Here, Madhva says that Pūtana, the demoness killed by Kṛṣṇa as she attempted to feed him poison, actually had two souls within her—one of Ūrvaśī, the celestial *apsaras*, who experienced the desire to feed Kṛṣṇa, and Tāṭaka, a demoness killed by Rāma, who wanted to kill Kṛṣṇa.

⁸⁵ *tadā karṇo 'thaikalavyaś ca divyāny astrāṇy āptuṃ droṇasamīpam īyatuh |*
sūto niṣāda iti naitayor adād astrāṇi viprah sa tu rāmaśiṣyaḥ ||
MBTN 15.46

However, Madhva does not appear to concern himself deeply with the issue of caste or any perceived injustice to the two warriors by the *guru*'s refusal to teach them. Rather, Madhva's attempt is to prove Bhīma's superiority over Arjuna. Therefore, in the background to Droṇa's promise to Arjuna that he would make him the best charioteer, Madhva justifies why Bhīma did not demonstrate his natural strength and prowess during the lessons, stating that Bhīma's sense of morality did not permit him to kill Bhīṣma, Droṇa, etc during the impending war that Bhīma knew of due to his omniscience. Due to this and his affection for his brother, along with his conviction that his natural strength was sufficient to destroy enemies and that he did not require any divine weapons for the purpose, Bhīma remained silent when Droṇa asked his students about which of them would promise to carry out his word, promising, in turn, to make that student the greatest warrior. Thus, Arjuna promises his teacher to carry out his word and is taught the secrets of divine missiles.⁸⁶ Thus, Madhva's emphasis in this passage is on Bhīma's heroics rather than the problem of caste.

However, Madhva expresses no qualms in categorizing Ekalavya repeatedly with the demons and the "evil" side in the epic. The very first mention of Ekalavya in Madhva's narrative occurs before his introduction as Droṇa's disciple, during a battle. Madhva clearly states that Ekalavya was the partial incarnation (*amśa*) of the demon Maṇimat, who was the chief of the group of *Krodhavaśa* demons, implying that Ekalavya and Śaṅkara are two incarnations of the same demon.⁸⁷ A closer look at the epic reveals the connections that Madhva makes. The *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* lists the births

⁸⁶ MBTN 15.35-45

⁸⁷ MBTN 14.40. The verse is noted later in the chapter.

of several demons, and among the names of the *Krodhavaśa* demons who took birth on the earth, one Ekalavya is mentioned, although he is not associated with the archer.⁸⁸ In the same list of demons, Maṇimat is mentioned as a royal sage on earth, who was an incarnation of the demon Vṛtra.⁸⁹

Several characters in the epics, especially minor characters who are cursorily mentioned, occur with the same or similar names, and they are said to belong to several different classes of demons or evil powers. This appears to be such an instance of two minor characters with the same name, and does not equate the archer Ekalavya with Maṇimat. As Edward W. Hopkins opines,

The close connection between the various classes of demons and spiritual powers not exactly evil yet not divine enough to be regarded as gods will often be the subject of a special remark [in the epics]. This is sufficiently illustrated by the interchange of the same name among various groups.⁹⁰

Madhva, however, uses this similarity of name to draw connections between the two characters, equating Ekalavya with a demon, and seemingly justifying the treatment meted out to him. Again, the epic gives varied accounts of Ekalavya's death. It is implied in the epic that Ekalavya was associated with Rukmi, Jarāsandha, and several other

⁸⁸ *ekalavyaḥ sumitraś ca vāṭadhāno 'tha gomukhaḥ* /
MBh 01,061.058

⁸⁹ *vṛtra ity abhivikhyāto yas tu rājan mahāsuraḥ* /
maṇimān nāma rājarṣiḥ sa babhūva narādhipaḥ //
MBh 01,061.042

⁹⁰ Edward Washburn Hopkins, *Epic mythology*, (Biblo & Tannen Publishers, 1968), 38.

antagonists in the epic, and that he was killed by Kṛṣṇa at some point, but there is no clear narrative establishing his timeline in the epic.

Madhva mentions that Ekalavya was present in the war between Kṛṣṇa and the king Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, and Kṛṣṇa, through his divine power, summoned forth Kṛṣṇa's unborn son, Pradyumna to subjugate him in the battle.⁹¹ Madhva also mentions that Bhīma defeated Ekalavya during the conquest before the *Rājasūya* sacrifice, an incident that is briefly mentioned in the epic as well.⁹² Thus, in the case of Ekalavya too, as with Maṇimat, Madhva is drawing on minor narratives from the epic and bringing them together within his framework of hierarchy. While Madhva does not make an explicit connection between Ekalavya and Śaṅkara, his statements that Maṇimat later incarnated as Śaṅkara, and that Ekalavya was a partial incarnation of Maṇimat might be taken together to constitute a further attack on Śaṅkara. On the other hand, the identification of Ekalavya as a partial incarnation of the same demon could explain other, non-demonic aspects of Śaṅkara's character.

Unlike Maṇimat, who is just a minor demon in the epic, Ekalavya is not generally perceived as a negative character. In fact, Ekalavya is held up as an illustration of devotion to his *guru*, leaving us with the question of why Madhva would choose to equate this character with Śaṅkara when he clearly wishes to vilify Śaṅkara. A plausible answer to this question too would be that Dvaita doctrines must explain Śaṅkara's

⁹¹ *yuddhvā ciraṃ raṇamukhe bhagavatsuto 'sau cakre nirāyudham amuṃ sthiram ekalavyam / aṃśena yo bhuvam agāt maṇimān iti sma sa krodhatantrakagaṇeṣv adhipo niṣādaḥ ||*
MBTN 14.40

⁹² *bhīmo jigāya yudhi vīram athaikalavyam /*
MBTN 14.92

scholarship even if they question his interpretations and doctrines. Since knowledge can only be gained by service and devotion towards the teacher, this could be a way of reconciling Śaṅkara's scholastic prowess with what is perceived as his intrinsically evil nature. Thus, even though Maṇimat will reach eternal hell according to Madhva, we see some ambivalence in the choice to portray him as Ekalavya. This indicates that Madhva envisioned Maṇimat as an irredeemably evil character, but with some merits nevertheless, unlike Madhva's idea of Kali. Madhva does not appear to equate Maṇimat directly with the demons who are the last in the hierarchy. In Madhva's disciples' retellings, however, the association of Maṇimat with epic characters that Madhva already demonized is fully established, and Maṇimat's hierarchical position is shifted further down through the narrative.

2.6 Advaita and Buddhism

The characterization of Buddhism within Dvaita writings, and indeed, more broadly within Hindu writings is of significance in discussing Advaita, since the common accusation against Śaṅkara is his crypto-Buddhism, as we saw in Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya's works. Wendy Doniger has traced two parallel lines of development of myth regarding the Buddha in purāṇic literature, both of which involve Viṣṇu incarnating as the Buddha in order to delude unworthy demons from their practice of Vedic rituals and Vedic belief, which would give them victory or prosperity.⁹³ Doniger argues that the identification of Buddha as Viṣṇu's incarnation makes a detailed appearance first in the

⁹³ Wendy Doniger, *The origins of evil in Hindu mythology*. No. 6, (Univ of California Press, 1976), 187-88.

Viṣṇupurāṇa (400-500 CE). While Doniger's citations from various purāṇic prayers to the Buddha demonstrate an envisioning of the Buddha (as Viṣṇu's incarnation) as a deity who can protect one from heretics and heresy, Doniger argues that in myth, the Buddha's function is precisely to produce such corruption through heresy. She appears to see these two functions as contradictory.⁹⁴ However, in my view, these functions of the Buddha are not mutually contradictory, but complementary. It is because Viṣṇu as the Buddha causes delusion in the demons or morally ambiguous human characters that devotees are to pray to him to be freed of such heretical influences. As Doniger goes on to point out, the Advaita tradition recognizes Śaṅkara as the incarnation of Śiva who descended on the earth to counter Buddhism and eradicate its heretical influences. As she also notes, and as we have seen already, some later schools (the Vallabha sect)⁹⁵ turn this trope on its head by agreeing that Śaṅkara was Śiva's incarnation but maintaining that he himself was the heretical influence.⁹⁶ This turning of the tables is managed by claiming that some people were incorruptible by the Buddhists because of their steadfast faith in the Vedic *dharma*s. But the evil Śaṅkara, in this reading, manages to delude even this set of people by assuming the garb of a Vedic *sannyāsin* and corrupting the Vedic tradition from within by subsuming Buddhist doctrines within it.

Madhva uses this argument of divine delusion to explain parts of the scriptural canon that would belie his argument that all the Vedas, Purāṇas, and even the Itihāsas are authoritative sources of knowledge and serve to glorify Viṣṇu. These events and

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 200-202.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209-10.

passages, he claims often in his *MBTN*, are present to confuse the demons and delude them into believing a false philosophy, so that they would reach hell. For instance, in speaking of Viṣṇu's incarnation as Buddha, Madhva argues that he propagated philosophy that was true, but in a way that would confuse or bewilder demons, and that he later explained the "true" meaning of his statements to the gods, who understood him correctly.⁹⁷ Madhva has to insert this additional episode of Viṣṇu narrating the true meaning of his statements to the gods because, in his doctrine, Viṣṇu is a perfect being and would not lie. Therefore, Advaita becomes a greater evil than Buddhism within Madhva's reading, since it is a deception from within, and has no secret truth inaccessible to humans, unlike Madhva's conception of the Buddha. While Buddha is a negative figure through his purposeful attempt to delude the demonic people, his position as Viṣṇu is justified through the idea that his teachings have a secret meaning inaccessible to humans. Maṇimat, on the other hand, reaches hell himself after leading others to it through his teachings.

Madhva repeatedly uses this argument of divine delusion in his writings. The encounters between two incarnations of Viṣṇu, Rāma and Paraśurāma, and between the two incarnations of Vāyu, Bhīma, and Hanumat, are explained as a part of their divine *līla* for devotees, and to confuse the evil and delude them. As we can see, this includes an implicit warning to the followers of other traditions that their beliefs are demonic and will lead to hell. This technique simultaneously legitimises their own tradition of reception of philosophy by including the parts of the tradition that Madhva would disagree with, which cannot be discarded from the tradition, since they are already embedded in it, and

⁹⁷ *MBTN* 32.128-47

negates the tradition of the other by supposing a superior understanding of their own position in the tradition, and offering adherents of opposing traditions only two subjective positions within their discourse—either that of the honest, but intellectually deceived, or that of the evil and willfully deluded. This complex combination of explanations, involving both the demon Maṇimat and Ekalavya, and Advaita's connections to Buddhism, are used to present the picture of Advaita as a heretical doctrine, while also accounting for Śaṅkara's scholastic ability. The clear Buddhist influence on Śaṅkara could also have played a role in the accusation that Śaṅkara was a crypto-Buddhist. This also explains the frequent occurrences of Advaita and Buddhism side by side within Dvaita writings, including, as we have seen, in *Maṇimañjarī* and the *MBTN*.

2.7 Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, Jarāsandha and Advaita

Madhva uses all his opportunities to condemn Advaita through the characters in the epic, even in the instances where Śaṅkara is not mentioned. One of the myths most suited to this purpose is the one of Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, whose story is very briefly mentioned in the epic.⁹⁸ The deluded Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, regards himself as Viṣṇu and dresses up with Kṛṣṇa's insignia. He attacks Kṛṣṇa along with the king of Kāśī and is defeated in battle, but his life is spared. Madhva narrates this episode tersely, but with emphasis on

⁹⁸ *jarāsandham gatas tv evaṃ purā yo na mayā hataḥ /*
puruṣottamavijñāto yo 'sau cediṣu durmatih //
ātmānaṃ pratijānāti loke 'smin puruṣottamam /
ādatte satataṃ mohād yaḥ sa cihnaṃ ca māmakaṃ //
vaṅgapuṇḍrakirāteṣu rājā balasamanvitaḥ /
pauṇḍrako vāsudevati yo 'sau lokeṣu viśrutaḥ //
Mbh 02,013.017-19

the nature of Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva's sin. In Madhva's view, Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva is the demon Vena and is also born to Vasudeva, making him Kṛṣṇa's brother. His sin is that of considering himself identical to Viṣṇu.⁹⁹ Madhva adds to his list of sins by mentioning that Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva was also Jarasandha's disciple in the subject of Śaiva scriptures, thereby conflating all philosophical and theological sects that Madhva himself was competing with and opposed to; including the Śaivas and Advaitins.¹⁰⁰

These ideas become poetic tropes in sixteenth-century Dvaita saint Vādirāja's *Rukmiṇīśavijaya*, an epic poem based on the story of Kṛṣṇa. The thirteenth and fourteenth cantos of the work, dealing with the battle between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha use puns to equate Jarāsandha with Advaita philosophers, and the battle ends with Jarāsandha's destruction.¹⁰¹ The choice of demon is not a coincidence here. B. N. K. Sharma writes that Vādirāja encountered opposition to his religious project from three main quarters, the Smārtas, who were Advaitins, the Śaivas and the Jains. By juxtaposing Jarasandha, a demon known to be a staunch devotee of Śiva,¹⁰² with the Advaita doctrine, Vādirāja

⁹⁹ *yo manyate viṣṇur evāham ity asau pāpo venah pauṇḍrako vāsudevah / jātaḥ punaḥ śūrajāt kāmśijāyāṃ nānyo matto viṣṇur astīti vādī ||*
MBTN 12.8

¹⁰⁰ *śivāgameṣu siṣyakāḥ sarugmisālvapaṇḍrakāḥ / mamākhilā nṛpās tataḥ kurudhvam etad eva me ||*
MBTN 17.71

¹⁰¹ See Vādirāja, *Rukmiṇīśavijaya*, ed. Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya, (Vyasa Madhwa Pratishthana, 2014). Canto 14 is filled with such puns.

¹⁰² *mahātmānam umāpatim arindama || abhiṣikṭaiś ca rājanyaiḥ sahasrair uta cāṣṭabhiḥ / ārādhya hi mahādevaṃ nirjitās tena pārthivāḥ || pratijñāyāś ca pāraṃ sa gataḥ kṣatriyapuṅgavaḥ / sa hi nirjitya nirjitya pārthivān pṛtanāgatān ||*
MBh, 2,013.063-064

conflates his contemporary opponents with the evil and wicked demons of the epic tales, and presents them uniformly as haters of Viṣṇu. This idea of Advaita as a depraved philosophy finds its way into the devotional *dāśasāhitya* tradition in Kannada, which has been heavily influenced by Dvaita philosophical ideas.

2.8 Demonization and Madhva's Claim of Divine Charisma

With these depictions in mind, we can go back to the kinds of hatred that Madhva lists as the causes for eternal hell. These categories act as an extension of the Doctrine of Hierarchy by explaining the nature and offences of the individuals on the lowest rung of the hierarchy. We saw that Madhva mentions nine kinds of hatred:

Understanding Viṣṇu to be non-different from the soul, to be without attributes, to have incomplete attributes, understanding others to be equal or superior to him, believing that there are differences within him [such as his different forms or even body parts], understanding him as subject to birth or change, hatred of his devotees, and abuse or condemnation of scriptural proofs [that establish his supremacy]—all these are regarded as hatred [of Viṣṇu]. Only devotion that is devoid of the above is called devotion.¹⁰³

The first kind of hatred, i.e., identifying *brahman* (Viṣṇu in Madhva's understanding) as the *jīva* clearly refers to Śaṅkara's concept of the identity of the *jīva* and *brahman* (*jīvabrahmaikya*).

¹⁰³ *jīvābhedo nirguṇatvam apūrṇaguṇatā tathā |*
sāmyādhikye tadanyeṣāṃ bhedās tadgata eva ca ||
prādurbhāviviparyāśas tadbhaktadveṣa eva ca |
tatpramāṇasya nindā ca dveṣaite 'khilā matāḥ ||
etair vihinā yā bhaktiḥ sā bhaktir iti niścītā |
MBTN 1.113-15

The second type of hatred that Madhva defines is the understanding that *brahman* does not possess any attributes. This is a direct attack on Advaita as well, since *brahman* possessing no attributes (*nirguṇatva*) is also a key Advaita doctrine.

Again, Madhva repeatedly refers to Śaṅkara (in his characterization, Maṇimat)—experiencing deep hatred towards Bhīma, whom he considers the greatest devotee of Viṣṇu, implying that Śaṅkara was antagonistic to devotees of Viṣṇu. Hatred towards devotees of Viṣṇu is one of the nine categories of hatred towards Viṣṇu.

Another form of hatred that Madhva defined was the condemnation of scriptures that proclaim Viṣṇu's supremacy. This category of hatred finds its way into Dvaita portrayals of Śaṅkara. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya, in his *Maṇimañjarī*, while narrating the discussion between various demons and their request to Maṇimat, specifically states that the demons advised Maṇimat to propagate a false philosophy, and render the Vedas futile by terming parts of them *atattvāvedaka* (not authoritative sources of knowledge),¹⁰⁴ thus contending that the term *atattvāvedaka* is a mere technicality used by Advaitins to dismiss parts of the Vedas as not authoritative. This would render Advaita philosophy, yet again, a form of hatred of Viṣṇu, since it would amount to a condemnation of scriptures that, according to Madhva, assert Viṣṇu's supremacy. In this way, we can see with just a cursory glance that at least four out of the nine kinds of hatred defined by Madhva are concomitant with some tenet of Advaita philosophy.

¹⁰⁴ *vedāntasūtrair asmākaṃ matam ekātmyagocaram |
vitatya sakalān vedān atatvāvedakān vada ||
Maṇimañjarī, 5.23*

The point of Madhva's classifications of hatred as forms of incorrect knowledge about Viṣṇu is to embed rival theologies into the categories of demonic within his hierarchy, and to indicate that these kinds of incorrect knowledge are dangerous.

We have now seen how Madhva and his followers demonize Advaita by interweaving narratives of deities and demons and bringing in other characters from the epics. Madhva also creates a narrative that sets up a role for his own incarnation as Vāyu, explaining that he took birth to save the good people misled by Advaita in the age of Kali. These depictions are meant to delegitimize the philosophy of Advaita by rendering it evil, and by implicitly claiming eternal hell as the consequence of the philosophy. They blur distinctions between philosophy and theology by asserting that certain thoughts and beliefs about the nature of the world are inherently evil, and will lead to divine punishment. This becomes a narrative means of enhancing the power and authority of one's own philosophical tradition by giving an explanation that delegitimizes another tradition, possibly to discourage adherents from considering it as a tenable alternative.

However, if Advaita were to be completely delegitimized of all its authority and value, it would create a problem in Madhva's doctrine, since his doctrine would be unable to assign any function to Advaita, or a teleological cause for the existence of Advaita in the divine framework within which the world operates, given that Viṣṇu is supreme, and also benevolent. What Madhva and his successors do in this case is to assign Advaita and Śaṅkara specific narrative roles. The philosophy and the philosopher do hold a place in the divine scheme for the age of Kali; they become the means devised for evil people to reach eternal hell; and so, they act as instruments to emphasize Madhva's own authority as a religious figure. Without the demonization of Śaṅkara,

Madhva, even with the claim of being Vāyu, could not build the grand narrative of saving the good in the evil age of Kali. This way, the narrative of Śaṅkara as a demon allows Advaita philosophy to be condemned as evil, but it also allows Dvaita a superior position in presenting a worldview that has already foreseen the rise of Advaita and is adequate to counter it.

The demonization of Śaṅkara obviously places an emphasis on Madhva's religious authority as the *avatāra* of Vāyu, since the purpose of this characterization is to demonstrate the greatness of Madhva in vanquishing Maṇimat for the benefit of the good, who seek release in the age of Kali. Demons such as Kali frequently overpower the good during the narrative of the epic. But Madhva's power of goodness, directly associated with Vāyu's rank in the hierarchy, allows him to challenge and defeat these demons. The claim that Śaṅkara is Maṇimat therefore, allows Madhva to establish his authority as a divine incarnation, and as an authentic interpreter of the *Mahābhārata* and other religious texts that he admits into the canon. It also allows him to adopt an omniscient perspective on all scripture.¹⁰⁵

2.9 Conclusion

Madhva crafts his Doctrine of Hierarchy carefully to create a new interpretation of the epic as a complex field of divine and demonic interactions that are a part of the cosmic plan. In this process, Madhva demonizes a specific set of characters from the epic to lend credence to his theological ideas, which gain traction among his disciples, leading to a

¹⁰⁵ Roque Mesquita, *Madhva's unknown literary sources some observations*. (Aditya Prakashan, 2000). See especially the Introduction.

unique tradition of identification of epic characters with demonic forces who can then take a chain of re-births as members of contemporary heretical sects. This allows for the narration of a mythical history that is refined over time to represent Advaita as an immoral doctrine.

The narrative of Śaṅkara carries out several functions within Dvaita theology, with important ramifications for Dvaita hermeneutics. It creates a world where Madhva's radical readings of Vedic texts can be supported and affirmed by the adherents of Dvaita through narrative knowledge.

Chapter 3: Madhva's Hierarchy and the Deification of Women

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at Madhva's characterization of the prominent female characters of both the epics. I argue that Madhva falls back on the Doctrine of Hierarchy to explain the events of the epic, especially while dealing with problematic transgressions of moral norms. We will see that Madhva uses his hierarchy in these cases, not to demonize the characters in question, but to deify them and ascribe divine motivations to their behaviour, thereby insulating them from criticism for their morally ambiguous actions.

I begin by studying Madhva's justifications of Sītā's trials and suffering in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and then move on to Madhva's remarks on the significant controversies around Draupadī. I explain Madhva's contextualization of Draupadī's polyandry and its connections to the hierarchy. Finally, I examine Madhva's statement on the qualification of women to study the Vedas, and show that deification is similarly applied there to retain the authority of scriptural texts while also maintaining the restriction on women's study of the Vedas.

As we saw briefly in the first chapter, women have a well-defined place in Madhva's hierarchy. This is clearer in the case of female deities, who can be identified and ranked accordingly as such. Women are always ranked right below their husbands, and are generally superior to the next male deity in the hierarchy. In keeping with this general rule, Lakṣmī is inferior to Viṣṇu, but is ranked superior to Brahmā and Vāyu, the next male deities in the pantheon. Similarly, Sarasvatī and Bhārati, their respective wives,

are ranked right below them and above Śiva and the others. This pattern is consistently maintained in Madhva's narration of the epics as well. Where the epics mention characters who are the children of some deities, Madhva regards the characters as incarnations of their fathers. The most obvious instance, of course, is that of Bhīma, who in the epic is regarded as the son of Vāyu, and who is regarded as the incarnation of Vāyu by Madhva. The ranking of these characters from the epics vary, depending on the curses or benedictions they are under, the different beings who reside in the same body, and so on. Again, any inconsistency with regard to their behaviour, especially when it deviates from Madhva's ranking for them, is explained using curses, benedictions, and divine *līlā* for the purpose of deluding the demonic *asuras* or those unworthy of liberation.

We will first see how these factors play out in the characterization of Sītā.

3.2 The Real and Illusory Sītās

The Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* presents Sītā as the daughter of the earth, found in a furrow in the Videha king's sacrificial grounds. Brought up as the king's daughter, she is wedded to Rāma when he wins the archery contest set up as a part of her *svayamvara*. After living with Rāma in Ayodhyā for some years, she insists on going to the forest with her husband when he is exiled. In the final part of the exile, she sends Rāma to bring her a golden deer, which happens to be a demon who in disguise to lure Rāma away. Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma's brother, who also accompanied him on the exile, is left behind for Sītā's protection. However, when she suspects that Rāma is in danger, she urges Lakṣmaṇa to go to his help, accusing Lakṣmaṇa of desiring her for himself when he refuses. Once abducted by Rāvaṇa, she refuses to give in to advances and remains steadfast in her love

for her husband. After Hanumat locates her and passes on Rāma's message, he relays her whereabouts to Rāma. After a lengthy war, Rāvaṇa is killed, and Rāma, instead of expressing his joy at seeing Sītā, claims that he cannot accept her after she has lived in another man's house, and tells her that she is free to go where she chooses. Unable to tolerate these words from her husband, Sītā undertakes a trial by fire, the renowned *agniparīkṣā*, and the Fire God declares her to be chaste and pure, at which time Rāma declares that he knew Sītā's purity, but wished to demonstrate it to the world.

The next part of the story is found in the final canto of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is also the latest part of the text. Upon returning to Ayodhyā, Sītā is pregnant, but is abandoned by Rāma in the forest because of the widespread doubt in the kingdom regarding her chastity. She is sheltered by the sage Vālmīki, and she gives birth to twins in his hermitage. Rāma later wishes to reinstate Sītā, but wants her to declare her innocence yet again before the assembly. Sītā requests her mother, the earth, to take Sītā into her lap, and the earth opens up and Sītā disappears forever.

Sītā's suffering has been perceived as deeply problematic even within the tradition, which has attempted to come up with multiple, over-determining solutions to the issue. The *Rāmāyaṇa* explains that Rāvaṇa could not rape Sītā because of a previous curse he had received from the celestial nymph Rambhā that he would die if he attempted to force himself upon any other woman.¹⁰⁶ The *Rāmāyaṇa* also narrates the story of a similar curse from the woman Vedavatī, who is said to be reborn as Sītā.¹⁰⁷ While these

¹⁰⁶ Wendy Doniger, "Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A comparative study." *History of Religions* 37, no. 1 (1997), 21-28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

justify Sītā's purity, various stories of the real Sītā being replaced by fake Sītās are found in the *purāṇas*, some of which also attempt to justify Rāma's harsh treatment of her. The emotional value of these narratives which exculpate Rāma and negate Sītā's suffering are clear in an episode from the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, a sixteenth century hagiography of Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sect in Bengal. When Caitanya arrives at Kāmaakoṣṭhī in the course of his travel to various pilgrimage centres, he meets a man who is greatly pained by the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. The text goes as follows:

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took His lunch at about three o'clock, but the *brāhmaṇa*, being very sorrowful, fasted. While the *brāhmaṇa* was fasting, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu asked him, "Why are you fasting? Why are you so unhappy? Why are you so worried?" The *brāhmaṇa* replied, "I have no reason to live. I shall give up my life by entering either fire or water. My dear Sir, mother Sītā is the mother of the universe and the supreme goddess of fortune. She has been touched by the demon Rāvaṇa, and I am troubled upon hearing this news. Sir, due to my unhappiness I cannot continue living. Although my body is burning, my life is not leaving." Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu replied, "Please do not think this way any longer. You are a learned paṇḍita. Why don't you consider the [this] case?" Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu continued, "Sītādevī, the dearest wife of the Supreme Lord Rāmacandra, certainly has a spiritual form full of bliss. No one can see her with material eyes, for no materialist has such power. To say nothing of touching mother Sītā, a person with material senses cannot even see her. When Rāvaṇa kidnapped her, he kidnapped only her material, illusory form. As soon as Rāvaṇa arrived before Sītā, she disappeared. Then just to cheat Rāvaṇa she sent an illusory, material form. Spiritual substance is never within the jurisdiction of the material conception. This is always the verdict of the Vedas and Purāṇas." Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu then assured the *brāhmaṇa*, "Have faith in My words and do not burden your mind any longer with this misconception." Although the *brāhmaṇa* was fasting, he had faith in the words of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and accepted food. In this way his life was saved.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *Sri Caitanya-Caritamṛta: Madhya-Lila*. 2,9.185-196. Italics and diacritics have been added.

While this story is meant to be hyperbolic, it demonstrates the power of the narrative of Sītā on the Indian traditions, and also of the magnitude of the problem the narrative created.

Madhva, who accepts Rāma as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, naturally portrays Sītā as the incarnation of Lakṣmī:

The incomparable Ramā [Lakṣmī] herself was born, indeed, from the plough in the Videha king's sacrificial land for the purpose of [joining] Rāma. From then, she became [known as] his [the Videha king's] daughter.¹⁰⁹

However, the assertion of Sītā's identity with Lakṣmī poses two kinds of problems: first, the general problem that all *Rāmāyaṇa* traditions have grappled with— that of the virtuous and godly Rāma's actions towards Sītā, and second, the more unique problem of reconciling Sītā's obvious suffering with her identity as Lakṣmī, who, in Madhva's doctrine, is eternally blissful and never separated from Viṣṇu. Madhva solves both these issues by drawing from the existent purāṇic traditions, which present the narrative of the shadow Sītā or the illusory Sītā, and making substantial changes to the story of the epic as we shall now see.

When Sītā sees the fake deer, and insists that Rāma bring it to her, Madhva justifies her behaviour by noting:

¹⁰⁹ *svayaṃ ramā sīrata eva jātā sīteti rāmārtham anūpamā yā |
videharājasya hi yajñabhūmau suteti tasyaiva tatas tu sābhūt ||*
MBTN 3.80

He [the demon] took on the form of a golden deer, remarkable with many gems, and quickly wandered in Sītā's proximity. Even though the goddess [Sītā] eternally possesses great knowledge untainted by error, she spoke thus [to Rāma] for the purpose of the destruction of the demons and for deluding [wicked] people.¹¹⁰

Again, presumably for the same purpose of causing the destruction of the demons, when the dying demon disguises his voice and calls out to Lakṣmaṇa for help, Madhva narrates that Sītā “incited him with harsh words”, causing him to follow his brother's path, armed with bow and arrows.¹¹¹ Madhva then gives us the theological underpinnings of the episode:

Every *līlā* that the highest lord performs, even the goddess Lakṣmī performs in his stead in the same way. By [events like] this, one must never presume even the minutest flaw in the lord or Lakṣmī. Indeed, whence [would arise] ignorance or danger for the goddess, whose side-glance is the cause for creation, maintenance, destruction, and re-birth? This is merely the enactment of the two, who play-act as demigods, humans, etc. Then, afterwards, Rāvaṇa approached the goddess, and she, despite possessing indomitable power, became invisible. After creating a likeness of herself, she immediately went to the Kailāsa mountain, where she resided, her feet worshipped by Śiva and Pārvatī. Then, Indra entered her likeness, which also had a special presence of the goddess for the fruitfulness of the task [at hand]. Then, the king of the demons took her and left...¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *sa prāpya haimamrgatām bahuratnacitraḥ sītāsamīpa urudhā vicacāra śīghram |
nirdoṣanītyavarasaṃvid apī sma devī rakṣovadhāya janamohakṛte tathāha ||*
MBTN 5.32

¹¹¹ *śrutvaiva lakṣmaṇam acūcudad ugravākyaiḥ so 'pyāpa rāmapatham eva sacāpabāṇaḥ ||*
MBTN 5.34

¹¹² *yām yām pareśa urudhaiva karoti līlām tām tām karoty anu tathaiva ramāpi devī |
naitāvatāsyā paramasya tathā ramāyā doṣo 'nūr apy anuvicintya uruprabhū yat ||
kvājñānam āpad apī mandakaṭākṣamātrasargasthitipralayasamsṛtimokṣaheṭoḥ |
devyā hareḥ kimu viḍambanamātram etad vikṛḍatoḥ suranarādivad eva tasmāt ||
devyāḥ samīpam atha rāvaṇa āsasāda sādṛśyatām agamad apy aviśahyaśaktiḥ |
sṛṣṭvātmanaḥ pratikṛtiṃ prayayau ca śīghram kailāsam arcitapadā nyavasac chivābhyām ||
tasyās tu tām pratikṛtiṃ praviveśa śakro devyāṅ ca sannidhiyutām vyavahārasiddhyai |
ādāya tām atha yayau rajanīcarendro hatvā jaṭāyuṣam uruśramato niruddhaḥ ||*

Madhva deliberately emphasizes Sītā's equivalence with Lakṣmī. Also notable is the reference to Lakṣmī's "indomitable power", implying that female deities possess physical strength in keeping with their rank in the hierarchy.

The consequences of not taking Madhva's theory regarding the omniscience and omnipotence of Lakṣmī seriously have already been noted in the previous chapter; these would constitute a form of hatred towards Viṣṇu and lead to eternal hell. Other theories have been advanced in the *purāṇas*, including other women taking up residence in Sītā's likeness,¹¹³ but Madhva does not seem to support any of those theories, perhaps because chaste women would not, according to his doctrine, undergo the kind of trials that Sītā did. It is notable that Madhva places not just a man, but the king of the gods, Indra, in Sītā's body as a form of devotional service to the goddess, perhaps negating the suffering that a woman would face under a threat of the nature posed by Rāvaṇa.

Madhva uses the same sleight of hand as in the *purāṇas* to explain Sītā's trial by fire, marking it as an elaborate orchestration by the gods, with the likeness of Sītā vanishing into the fire, and the fire God delivering the original Sītā back to Rāma, stating again that Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī are never parted from each other, and never experience sorrow.¹¹⁴

MBTN 5.35-38

¹¹³ For details, see Doniger, "Sita and Helen", 21-28.

¹¹⁴ *sītākṛtiṃ tām atha tatra cāgatām divyacchalena praṇidhāya pāvake |
kailāsatas tām punar eva cāgatām sītām agrhṇādd hutabhuksamarpitām ||*
MBTN 8.222

3.3 Sītā's Abandonment

The final problem of Sītā, and perhaps the one without a plausible solution within the purāṇas, is the question of Sītā's abandonment due to criticism in the kingdom regarding her chastity, and her final choice to enter the earth. While Sītā is traditionally regarded as the ideal, submissive, and self-effacing wife, this picture has been complicated through close readings of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sally Sutherland sees Sītā as embodying a model of femininity associated with inward aggression and masochistic actions, since Sītā's "faithfulness and devotion never fluctuate", despite the many ordeals that she is forced to undergo by the man she loves.¹¹⁵ Sutherland goes so far as to describe Sītā's response as follows:

After suffering countless insults and rejections, Sītā finally takes revenge on Rāma in the most aggressive manner she knows. In carrying out her characteristic and oft repeated threat of self-immolation, she brings to a culmination her passive-aggressive response to Rāma.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, Arti Dhand reads the same passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa* very differently, presenting Sītā as an assertive and articulate woman who dearly loved her husband, stating unequivocally:

tasyākhileśitur anādy anugaiva lakṣmīḥ sītābhidhā tv aramayāt svarataṁ sureśam |
nityāviyogiparamoccanijasabhāvā saundaryavibhramasulakṣaṇapūrvabhāvā ||
 MBTN 9.13

¹¹⁵ Sally Sutherland, "Sītā and Draupadī: aggressive behavior and female role-models in the Sanskrit epics." *Journal of the American Oriental society* (1989), 77.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

As I see it, this is a very powerful victory for the feminine symbol. Sītā loves and honours her husband with faith and devotion; when she discovers that this love is not adequately valued, she withdraws, exercising a free and strong will. The solidarity of mother and daughter is moving to watch, and it is powerful and effective. Rāma suffers, as Sītā suffered; in truth, it is his life that is rendered meaningless, without even any hope of reprieve.¹¹⁷

While the epic is ambiguous about Sītā's state of mind and emotions, it is clear that Sītā suffers greatly through her abandonment and the pain of rejection. The tradition has struggled with the question of why Sītā undergoes such suffering. The *Padmapurāṇa* does offer an explanation in terms of Sītā's cruelty to a pair of birds in her childhood, which leads to a curse that she would be separated from her husband in the same manner that she separated the birds.¹¹⁸ Obviously, this explanation would not suit Madhva's doctrines, and would cast aspersions on Sītā's own actions. It would also reduce her status to that of an ordinary human being. Instead, Madhva narrates an alternate story to explain the abandonment of Sītā, using yet again the ingenious argument of divine delusion.

There once lived some demons by the name 'Surāṇaka' whose might was well known. They performed severe penances to appease Brahmā, and once they saw him, said, "Oh one of generous virtue! We will [wish to] perform great sins but certainly reach liberation." Then the God heard them and spoke with a smile, "Until you cause Lakṣmī to part from Viṣṇu, who is the ocean of virtues, even the greatest sins will not cause an obstruction to your liberation." Having understood what was said to them, the demons, who were desirous of achieving liberation quickly, went to the earth and lived in large numbers where Viṣṇu was ruling, in

¹¹⁷ Dhand, "Women in Hinduism", 43.

¹¹⁸ *Padmapurāṇa* V.57.1-67, 1879-83.

order to obtain the necessary elements of spiritual attainment. The daughter of the king of Mithilā, with her illusory body, diverted them, who were bereft of the qualifications for liberation because of the sins they had committed since beginningless time, from their path. The demons, who were deluded through illusion by the command of Viṣṇu, condemned Rāma repeatedly for taking Sītā back after she was abducted by the demon. And he [Rāma], caused Brahmā's word to stay true, and the demons to fall into eternal hell. Although he is eternally accompanied by Sītā, he became as one separated from her before the eyes of the ignorant. By this, the demons went to eternal hell...¹¹⁹

This clever narrative creates a *purāṇa*-like story to explain the abandonment of Sītā that completely alters the focus of the story away from Sītā's human nature. As with

Madhva's other narratives, this one shows a glimpse into his Doctrine of Hierarchy.

Madhva sees this hierarchy at the base of both the epics, which, to him, depict an ongoing cosmic opposition between the forces of *dharma* and *adharma*. While *dharma* and *adharma* as defined in the epics themselves are far more complex, Madhva's system is clear and based on the theological grounds of Viṣṇu as the ultimate God. Madhva takes

¹¹⁹ *atha kecid āsurasurāḥ surāṇakā ity uruprathitapauruṣāḥ purā |*
te tapaḥ sumahad āsthitā vibhuṃ padmasambhavam avekṣya cocire ||
bhūripāpakṛtino 'pi niścayān muktim āpnuma udārasadguṇa |
ity udīritam ajo 'vadhārya tat prāha ca prahasitānanaḥ prabhuh ||
yāvad eva ramayā rameśvaraṃ no viyojayatha sadguṇārṇavam |
tāvad uccam api duṣkṛtaṃ bhavanmokṣamārgaparipanthi no bhavet ||
ity udīritam avetya te 'surāḥ kṣipramokṣagamanotsukāḥ kṣitau |
sāadhanopacayakāṅkṣiṇo harau śāsati kṣitim aśeṣato 'bhavan ||
tān anādikṛtadoṣasañcayair mokṣamārgagatiyogyatojjhitān |
maithilasya tanayā vyacālayan māyayā svatanuvā svamārgataḥ ||
ājñayaiva hi hares tu māyayā mohitās tu ditijā vyanindayan |
rāghavaṃ niścārāhṛtāṃ punar jānakīm jagṛha ity anekāśaḥ ||
brahmavākyam ṛtam eva kārayan pātayaṃ tamasi cāndha āsurān |
nityam eva sahito 'pi sītayā so 'jñāsākṣikam abhūd viyuktavat ||
tena cāndhatama īyur āsurā yajñam āhvayad asau ca maithilīm |
MBTN 9.26-33.

the norms laid down for women, including chastity, very seriously, but these rules are subservient to the larger function of the goddess in question. Lakṣmī's actions in her incarnations are to be understood in alignment with Viṣṇu's, and they cause the wicked to reach hell, and shower blessings upon the faithful. In other words, the epics are not a tale of what happened, but a tale of what humans were meant to see, and Madhva envisions himself as the divine narrator who enters the narrative to show readers what actually took place. Sītā's trials and suffering, to Madhva, must be understood within the context of the hierarchy. She is divine and cannot suffer; therefore, her pretence of suffering is a divine act intended to establish and maintain cosmic order.

While there is much debate that this final section was a later addition to the epic,¹²⁰ it is obvious that it was already well-known and problematic by Madhva's time, and that several theories had already been advanced in purāṇic literature. Madhva's own reading completely dispenses with any human element to Rāma's and Sītā's behaviour, creating omniscient characters whose actions can only be discerned within his own theological framework. By doing this, Madhva resolves the problems of Sītā's suffering as well as her morally questionable behaviour, such as in the case of her words to Lakṣmaṇa.

We can now see the same pattern in Madhva's narrative of Draupadī, which takes up far more space in his work, and which Madhva explains in some detail.

¹²⁰ For discussion, see John Brockington, *Righteous Rāma: the evolution of an epic*, (Oxford University Press, 1985), 8-15.

3.4 Draupadī's Rank and Importance in the Hierarchy

At the very outset, Madhva declares Draupadī to be equivalent to Sarasvatī, the deity of learning, on account of their equal rank.¹²¹ Madhva considers Draupadī the incarnation of the deity Bhāratī, the wife of Vāyu, and she is the personification of the Vedas themselves.¹²² Draupadī's rank, and consequently, her importance to the theological project that Madhva lays out, is stated clearly at the beginning of the *MBTN*.

After them [the various forms of Lakṣmī], Draupadī is superior to everyone in terms of beauty. She herself plays a part like Bhīma does, in God's actions to reduce the burden of the earth [by killing the wicked]. While Bhīma is the destroyer of the sinners and the cause for [their] enmity, Draupadī is the cause for [their] enmity, and therefore comes after him [in the hierarchy].¹²³

Thus, Madhva sees Draupadī's beauty, and her narrative in the text as an important part of the divine project to ensure that the wicked people reach eternal hell. Madhva also pauses his narrative to impart moral lessons that Draupadī's behaviour demonstrates. For instance, when the Pāṇḍavas are to go incognito for a year, it is well known that Bhīma assumes the role of the cook, and Draupadī works as the maid to the queen of the Virāṭa

¹²¹ *sarvavidyā draupadī tu yasmāt saiva sarasvatī ||*
MBTN 2.135

¹²² *prāṇo hi bharato nāma sarvasya bharaṇāc chrutaḥ ||*
tadbhāryā bhāratī nāma vedarūpā sarasvatī |
MBTN 18.93-94

¹²³ *tataḥ paścād draupadī ca sarvābhyo rūpato varā |*
bhūbhārakṣapaṇe sākṣād aṅgaṃ bhīmavad īśituḥ ||
hantā ca vairahetuś ca bhīmaḥ pāpajanasya tu |
draupadī vairahetuḥ sā tasmād bhīmād anantarā ||
MBTN 2.40-41

king. Madhva explains Draupadī's choice of profession as being motivated by devotion towards Bhīma.

In order to perform her duty along with Bhīma, Draupadī became a *śūdra* maid, since accompanying the husband in his duty is always the duty of women.¹²⁴

Here, even the caste that Draupadī assumes during the period when the Pāṇḍavas are in hiding is explained as being in accordance with Bhīma's caste during the period. In this and other instances throughout Madhva's narration of the epic, it is clear that he wishes to assert Draupadī's greater affection for Bhīma as compared with the other Pāṇḍava brothers, in accordance with his hierarchy, where Bhīma takes precedence over the other brothers. Madhva is quite vehement about this, as becomes evident in several episodes. The foremost of these is during the narration of the death of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. In the epic, as in Madhva's narration, Draupadī falls first as the Pāṇḍavas attempt to climb the mountain to heaven. As each character falls, the eldest brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, explains the character's fatal flaw that led them to fall. In Draupadī's case, Yudhiṣṭhira states that her excessive affection for the third brother, Arjuna, caused her fall.¹²⁵ Madhva, on the other hand, easily glosses Yudhiṣṭhira's statement to mean that Draupadī was partial to Arjuna among the four brothers, with the exception of Bhīma. He also adds

¹²⁴ *bhīmasenasadharmārthaṃ śūdrā sairandhrikābhavat |
draupadī bhartṛsādharmyaṃ strīṇāṃ dharmo yataḥ sadā ||*
MBTN 23.10

¹²⁵ *pakṣapāto mahān asyā viśeṣeṇa dhanañjaye |
tasyaitat phalam adyaiṣā bhuñkte puruṣasattama ||*
MBh 17,002.006

that this perceived partiality was just, since it was in accordance with the virtues of each brother, and maintains Draupadī's perfection and flawlessness in his reading.¹²⁶

Madhva also briefly mentions the conversation of the duties of women between Kṛṣṇa's wife Satyabhāmā, an incarnation of Lakṣmī, and Draupadī that the epic gives us in great detail. Draupadī, jokingly asked about how she manages to control all her husbands, responds to Satyabhāmā with a sermon on the duties of married women towards their husbands, including treating the husband with respect, keeping the house and kitchen clean, and acting in accordance with the husband's likes and dislikes.

Madhva is at pains to point out that both Satyabhāmā and Draupadī are perfectly aware of these duties and abide by them. Moreover, Satyabhāmā does not question Draupadī in order to obtain an answer for herself, which would make her inferior to Draupadī.

Madhva asserts that Satyabhāmā was merely testing Draupadī, and that Satyabhāmā herself was omniscient and without flaws, and mentions again that Draupadī was well aware that Satyabhāmā's understanding was not tainted by the smallest flaw. However, Draupadī proceeds to give elaborate instruction to teach the people of the world their duties. Knowing Satyabhāmā's words to be playful, Madhva maintains, Draupadī answered in the same vein out of affection for Satyabhāmā.¹²⁷ In doing so, Madhva does

¹²⁶ *bhīmād ṛte hi caturṣu pakṣapātas tu vāsavau |
yogya eveti kṛṣṇāyā na doṣaḥ syāt kathañcana ||*
MBTN 32.67

¹²⁷ *kṛṣṇā ca satyā ca parasparam mudā sambhāṣaṇam cakratur yoṣidagrye |
parīkṣantyā satyayā sarvavettryā nirdoṣayā coditā prāha kṛṣṇā ||
strīdharmān akhilāṃs tatra satyāṃ nirdoṣasaṃvidam |
jñātvāpi kṛṣṇā provāca lokaśikṣārtham eva tu ||
krīḍārtham eva vacanam jñātvā satyāsamīritam |
tasyānusāravākyaṇi tatprītyā eva sābravīt ||*
MBTN 22.358-60

away with the apparently humorous nature of Satyabhāmā's question, finding in the conversation an opportunity for a lesson on the duties of women. However, he does not elaborate on the content of Draupadī's instruction, which could indicate that he finds it perfectly acceptable without having to re-narrate it, or that it did not assume as much significance for him as establishing the omniscience of both the characters involved. Even in this episode, we can see that Madhva is at pains to reassure the reader that the characters are actually deities and that their thoughts and actions are free of all errors. This depiction of Draupadī also perhaps sets the stage for explaining Draupadī's polyandry as morally permissible and even laudable by giving a background of her devotion towards her husbands.

3.5 Draupadī and the Marital Bond in the Hierarchy

The most horrific and most frequently invoked event involving Draupadī in the epic is the attempt of the Kauravas to disrobe her in open court. The most contentious and perhaps still unresolved question regarding the episode is the one that Draupadī poses when she is informed that she has been lost in the dice game and is now a servant of the Kauravas. Madhva uses this to highlight the importance of the marital bond in his hierarchy. Draupadī asks whether her husband wagered himself first or her, and appears to believe that the answer to this question is crucial in determining her present status. However, the other characters in the epic refrain from answering her question, and her husbands remain silent. The significance of the question has troubled contemporary scholarship to no little extent. In Irawati Karve's sociological analysis, Draupadī's question is nothing short of a blunder:

The question Draupadī asked rested on a difficult and complicated legal point. Even Bhīṣma, who had often taken the part of the Pāṇḍavas in quarrels with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana, was unable to give an answer, perhaps for fear of compromising Draupadī. What Draupadī was contending was that once Dharma had become a slave he had lost his freedom and had no right to claim anything as his own; a slave has nothing he can stake. Then how could Dharma stake her freedom? Although her argument seems plausible from one point of view, even a slave has a wife, and the fact of his slavery does not destroy his authority over her. Moreover, from the most ancient times a slave had the right to accumulate certain property that was entirely his own. The question was thus a tangled one, involving the rights of a master over a slave and a slave over his wife. Draupadī's question was not only foolish; it was terrible. No matter what answer was given her position was desperate. If Bhīṣma told her that her husband's rights over her did not cease, that even though he became a slave, she was in his power and he had the right to stake her, her slavery would have been confirmed. If Bhīṣma had argued that because of his slavery her husband had no more rights over her, then her plight would have been truly pitiable. Draupadī was described as *nāthavatī anāthavat* — “with husbands, but like a widow”, and if her relation with her husband was destroyed she would have been truly widowed.¹²⁸

Alf Hiltebeitel finds the question problematic as well, albeit in a markedly different way:

The question remains moot through the entire episode. To the wisest counsellors it is irresolvable, and it drives Yudhiṣṭhira to silence. For, as J. A. B. van Buitenen says: “Yudhiṣṭhira cannot very well confirm that she was either won or not, for in either case he would have to confirm a lie: if she was won, he lied about his own stake, for he would still have been free to stake her; if she was not won, because he was no longer free, his staking her was a lie.”¹²⁹

Both these interpretations of the question grant that the husband has complete ownership and authority over the wife, and that he would be legally permitted to stake his wife, granted that he is free himself.

¹²⁸ Iravati Karve, *Yuganta, The End of an Epoch*, 125. The passage has been edited to add diacritics.

¹²⁹ Alf Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's Garments", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22.2 (1980), 99.

Madhva, on the other hand, has a completely different view on whether the stake is valid, and places more value on the marital bond than the transaction involved in gambling. In Madhva's reading of the episode, Draupadī's question is a just and legitimate one, since it proves that in either case, it is against *dharma* to subject her to humiliation in open court. Madhva's unique solution to this problem answers possible questions regarding his hierarchy and the roles of women in it. In Madhva's narrative, Draupadī poses the question in this manner—

How have I been won in the dice-game when my husband has not lost [himself], since the wise say that the wife has the same *dharma* as the husband? In the event of the husband being a servant, the wife must work alongside him. The state of being a servant cannot be separately foisted upon me if my husband has been won as well.¹³⁰

Madhva's argument is that the husband and wife share the same status and duties, and that the marital bond cannot be dissolved through an act of gambling. Since the wife shares the husband's *dharma*, there is no question of separately staking her. Staking the wife would be automatically invalid since she becomes a servant by default if her husband loses himself and becomes a servant. When Draupadī asks whether Yudhiṣṭhira staked himself first or her first, she is pointing out that, in either case, she cannot be regarded as a slave of Duryodhana. If Yudhiṣṭhira staked himself first, then, by the mere fact of his servanthood, Draupadī would become a servant as well; making his second act

¹³⁰ *katham dyūte jitā cāham ajite svapatau sthite |
samānadharmiṇīm āhur bhāryāṃ yasmād vipaścitaḥ ||
sahaiva karma kartavyaṃ patau dāse hi bhāryayā |
dāsītvaṃ na prthaṇ mesyājite' pi hi patau tataḥ ||
MBTN 21.318-19*

of staking her invalid. Alternately, if Yudhiṣṭhira staked her first, then it would be impossible for her, as a wife, to take on the *dharma* of a servant that her husband does not share in, making the act of staking her invalid anyway.

While it is impossible to guess at Draupadī's reasons for asking the question in the epic, it is clear that Madhva believes that the marital bond cannot be dissolved in these cases, and more importantly, that the husband and wife share all their rights and responsibilities, and that the husband cannot stake the wife on a gamble, since the wife's *dharma* is not transferable to that of someone who wins her in a gamble. This sheds some light on Madhva's beliefs regarding the relationships between spouses in the hierarchy, and he appears to unambiguously state that the marital relationship is not subject to dissolution. This also explains why female deities are placed below their husbands, but above other deities. This is because, in Madhva's conception, the husband and wife must function as a single unit in relation to those above and below them in the hierarchy. Just as the wife takes on the caste of her husband, and takes on the status of a servant automatically when her husband does, the female deity in the hierarchy remains worthy of worship along with her husband by all those below, and participates in the service of superior deities. By interpreting Draupadī's question in this manner, Madhva asserts that Draupadī's knowledge is flawless gives credence of her status as the deity of knowledge in his hierarchy.

3.6 Draupadī's Infinite Garments

The other interesting aspect of this episode in the epic is the magical appearance of infinite garments to save Draupadī's modesty and honour. While most purāṇic retellings

of the episode imply or explicitly mention Kṛṣṇa rescuing Draupadī by providing an infinite number of garments that appear as Duḥśāsana attempts to disrobe her, the epic itself merely states that Draupadī prayed to Kṛṣṇa, and that an infinite number of garments appeared, without mentioning a causal link between the two statements. The critical edition of the epic and several scholarly works treat the elaborate prayer to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's personal presence in the court to rescue Draupadī as later interpolations to promote devotional movements. According to Alf Hiltebeitel, the passage in the epic reads as though cosmic justice saved Draupadī from humiliation, as opposed to the presence of a personal God. Both Franklin Edgerton and Alf Hiltebeitel provide compelling reasons to accept the kind of textual reconstruction presented in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*.¹³¹ What is interesting for our purposes is that Madhva too appears to agree with these scholars. He mentions that Draupadī prayed to Kṛṣṇa as everyone should in times of trouble, but the manifestation of infinite garments is not presented as a consequence of this prayer.¹³² In this case too, Madhva appears to defer to Draupadī's rank as an elevated deity, which gives her the power to defend herself against such violence.

All these episodes reveal a great deal about Madhva's portrayals of Draupadī. He presents her as the incarnation of the deity of learning, who is unparalleled in her scholarship, and who can save herself from affronts by the power of her own virtue. This

¹³¹ Hiltebeitel, "Draupadī's garments", 98-112.

¹³² *vikṛṣyamāṇe vasane tu kṛṣṇā sasmāra kṛṣṇaṃ suviśeṣato' pi /
tadā' nyad āsīd vasaṇaṃ ca tasyā divyaṃ susūkṣmaṃ kanakāvadātāṃ ||
punaḥ punaś caiva vikarṣamāṇe duḥśāsane' nyāni ca tādrśāni |
babhūvur antaṃ na jagāma pāpaḥ śrānto nyaśīdat svinnagātraḥ sabhāyām ||*
MBTN 21.347-48

picture of the fiery Draupadī, who walks defiantly to the forest with her hair unbound, signalling to the Kauravas that their wives will weep over their bodies similarly, with hair unbound, is a very powerful one.¹³³ While Madhva presents a sanitised and sanctified image of Draupadī preaching the codes of conduct to be followed by married women, he also envisions Draupadī as a scholar in her own right, and views her insights into *dharma* as far superior to those of Yudhiṣṭhira. For instance, he relates Draupadī’s arguments against Yudhiṣṭhira’s penchant to always forgive his enemies with respect. Draupadī argues that forgiveness is not always the appropriate response for a king, and that one cannot abandon one’s effort (to acquire a kingdom that is rightfully one’s own) and simply leave it all up to fate. She champions the value of effort in achieving one’s ends, rebuking Yudhiṣṭhira’s passive attitude towards life. Madhva carefully qualifies Draupadī’s statement by asserting that she spoke with Bhīma’s permission. While, in the epic, Yudhiṣṭhira appears to win the argument with his sermon on the greatness of the virtue of forgiveness, in Madhva’s narrative, Yudhiṣṭhira is brought to silence by his wife and retorts angrily, at which point she keeps silent, not because she lost the argument, but because she knows that “garrulousness is inappropriate in women”.¹³⁴ In Madhva’s work, Yudhiṣṭhira is struck by self-loathing for having gambled Draupadī away and regards her

¹³³ *abaddhakeśā prayayau draupadī sā sabhātalāt |*
muktakeśā bhaviṣyanti dhārtarāṣṭrastrīyas tv iti ||
MBTN 21.393

¹³⁴ The entire episode is narrated in the *MBTN* from 22.60-73. The final quote reads as follows:
itīrito dharmajāḥ kṛṣṇayaiva nīruttaratvaṃ gamitas tv abhartsayat |
kutarkam āsṛitya harer api tvam asvātantryaṃ sādhasyaṣīti cōktvā ||
chalena tena pratibhartsitā sā kṣamāpayāmāsa nṛpaṃ yataḥ strī |
vācālatā nātitarāṃ hi śobhate strīṇāṃ tataḥ prāha vṛkodaras tam ||
MBTN 22.72-73

as his brother's wife, seemingly renouncing his claim as husband to her.¹³⁵ While all these passages are at least in part motivated by demonstrating the superiority of Bhīma, they also indicate Madhva's views about Draupadī's stature and Yudhiṣṭhira's inability to live up to her. This takes the reader back yet again to Madhva's hierarchy, where Yama, who has incarnated as Yudhiṣṭhira, is placed quite low, while Draupadī occupies a much higher rank. Thus, Madhva seems to be implying that Draupadī is worthy only of Bhīma, since she is the incarnation of five deities, the prominent among whom is Bhārati.

In all these instances, Madhva overcomes the problems in the text by elevating the status of these women to that of deities, and by attributing hidden schemes to characters that are intrinsically linked with their divine status. This is perhaps most obvious in Madhva's resolution of the massive problem that Draupadī's polyandry presents.

3.7 Five Goddesses and Draupadī's Polyandry

Draupadī's polyandry, i.e., her act of marrying the five Pāṇḍavas, posed a major problem in the epic, and so we find multiple explanations for why polyandry was justified in this case. In the epic, the Pāṇḍavas are in disguise after Duryodhana attempts to have them killed in the lacquer palace. They attend the *svayamvara* ceremony of Draupadī, and Arjuna, who is in disguise, wins the archery contest organised by Drupada, Draupadī's father. They bring Draupadī home, and Arjuna victoriously announces to Kuntī, his mother, that they have brought alms. The unknowing Kuntī asks them to share the alms

¹³⁵ *tataḥ paraṃ dharmarājo nirviṇṇaḥ svakṛtena ha /
bhrātṛbhāryāpade kṛṣṇāṃ sthāpayāmāsa sarvadā ||*
MBTN 22.57

among themselves, leading to a discussion on how they can possibly obey their mother's word without committing *adharma*. Finally, all the five Pāṇḍavas assent to marrying Draupadī, but Drupada is understandably reluctant, since he is unsure of the propriety of polyandry, even though polygamy was widely prevalent. At this point, Vyāsa, the author and character in the epic, tells Drupada two divine secrets behind Draupadī's birth, one of which justifies the marriage by explaining that five female deities are present in Draupadī, and the other which explains Draupadī's past life and a boon she was given by Śiva, necessitating five husbands in the next birth.

The first of these stories, which Jonathan Geen titles "Śiva's boon", is narrated by Vyāsa to the Pāṇḍavas and Drupada on two different occasions, and goes as follows.¹³⁶ There was once the daughter of a seer who, though beautiful and virtuous, could not obtain a husband (one of the versions mentions that the cause for this was the woman's previous actions, without specifying what they were). She engaged in austerities to appease Śiva, and when he appeared to grant her a boon, she enthusiastically asked for a husband multiple times, at which time the pleased Śiva told her that she would get five husbands. The horrified woman asks for just one husband in lieu of the five, but Śiva merely transfers the boon to the woman's next birth, telling her that she would marry five men. Predictably, this woman is born as Draupadī in her next birth, and is destined to marry five men.

The other story is narrated by Vyāsa in private to Drupada, and Geen titles this the story of "The Five Indras". Indra chances across a woman who is weeping, and asks her the reason for her tears. She then guides him to the mountains, where he sees a young

¹³⁶ Geen, "The Marriage of Draupadī", 174-76.

man, who is Śiva, surrounded by women and playing a game of dice. Angered by the youth's lack of respect for himself, Indra boasts about his prowess, only to find himself unable to move, and all his powers gone. Śiva then asks Indra to roll away the peak of the mountain that they are on, and to enter the centre, where he would find other Indras. Indra finds this to be true, and sees four others like himself. He requests to be released, but Śiva refuses and tells them that they would be born on the earth, and accedes to their request that they be begotten by gods. He also tells them that they will marry Śrī (Lakṣmī). The gods request Viṣṇu to assent, and thereafter, Viṣṇu incarnates as Kṛṣṇa, and Lakṣmī as Draupadī, and the Pāṇḍavas are destined to marry her.

Jonathan Geen argues that the first of these stories, “Śiva's boon” was appropriated from an earlier story from the Jain *Mahābhārata*, which raises very interesting questions about the re-appropriation of these myths into the Hindu *Mahābhārata*.¹³⁷ Moriz Winternitz naturally thinks of this story as a rather weak plot device to explain away the conundrum that polyandry posed, but Geen points out that the power of the *mantra* or efficacious speech has been emphasised time and time again in the epic, making it perfectly plausible that the woman's repetition of the prayer for a husband five times left Śiva no choice but to grant her five husbands.¹³⁸ Again, it is very certain that both these stories were a part of the *Mahābhārata* when Madhva wrote the *MBTN*, since he draws from both of them to construct a longer and more complex story that again establishes the superiority of Vāyu and of Viṣṇu.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁸ Geen, “The Marriage of Draupadī”, 233-34, Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 1, 3.17n.

Both these stories have wide currency in Madhva's time, and several portions are problematic for his theology. If Draupadī is Bhārati, then she is superior to Śiva in the hierarchy and has no necessity to pray to him. Again, the very character of Draupadī appears to be at odds with Bhārati, who is said to never suffer the touch of a man other than her husband, and whose nature is blissful and without sorrow.¹³⁹ The most contentious aspect of this story, however, is the idea that Draupadī is an incarnation of Lakṣmī, which would completely topple Madhva's hierarchy. In Madhva's hierarchy, each of the deities has a specific rank in relation to their spouse. The idea of Lakṣmī marrying inferior gods would be completely untenable for Madhva, since she is only Viṣṇu's consort, and is regarded as the mother of other gods.¹⁴⁰ In a characteristic move, Madhva does not explicitly mention this problem, but chooses to re-etymologise the word used in the *Mahābhārata* text to refer to Lakṣmī: 'Śrī'. While this is well known to be Lakṣmī's name, Madhva uses etymological roots to gloss 'Śrī', such that it refers to the other female deities, who are the spouses of the gods who incarnate as the Pāṇḍavas. In order to maintain his Doctrine of Hierarchy, Madhva must establish that Draupadī is a manifestation of the spouses of each of the gods that the Pāṇḍavas are identified with. According to Madhva, Draupadī is the incarnation of five female deities, Pārvatī (who does not obtain her husband due to a curse), Śacī, Śyāmalā, and Uṣas (whose husbands are Indra, Yama, and the Aśvini gods, who have incarnated as Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, and

¹³⁹ *caturjanma bhaved bhūmau tvāṃ nānyo mārutād vrajet ||
niyamo' yaṃ harer yasmād anādir nitya eva ca |*
MBTN 18.104-05

¹⁴⁰ See Deepak Sarma, "Hanuman qua Madhvācārya and Sītā qua Lakṣmī: Traces of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Mādhva Doctrine", *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies*, 2, no. 2 (2004), 121-23, for a brief discussion on the role of Lakṣmī in Madhva's ontology.

Nakula and Sahadeva). He tries to prove this by enmeshing narratives from different parts of the epic, countering the mention of Draupadī as Lakṣmī's incarnation by observing:

Since she takes refuge (*āśritā*) in Vāyu, who is of the nature of bliss (*śam*), Bhāratī is praised as Śrī. The other goddesses, Śacī, Śyāmalā, and Uṣas, who are present as *āveśas* are known as Śrī because of their taking refuge in Indra, Dharma [Yama], and the Aśvinī gods [who are their respective husbands].¹⁴¹

In this way, Madhva maintains his hierarchy by explaining away Śrī as the name of Bhāratī and the other goddesses.

Then, Madhva proceeds to narrate an elaborate tale of several curses and benedictions to reconcile the multiple stories from the epic with his own hierarchy, to avoid the charge of Draupadī's sin of polyandry or any other immorality. Madhva instead places the blame on the deities other than Bhāratī who are present in Draupadī. He brings together both the narratives of "Śiva's boon" and "The Five Indras" along with other benedictions and curses that are found only in the *MBTN*. I have translated Madhva's hitherto untranslated narrative in the appendix, since it plays a very important role in Madhva's solution to Draupadī's five husbands. I will summarize the story here and show the different points at which Madhva inserts his own theology into the tales.¹⁴²

Madhva begins with the deities Pārvatī, Śacī, Śyāmalā, and Uṣas, who were once being coquettish with their husbands in Brahmā's presence. Brahmā curses them to be

¹⁴¹ *śaṃrūpam āśritā vāyum śrī ity eva ca kīrtitā ||
āveśayuktāṇ sacyāṇs ca śyāmalāyās tathoṣasaḥ |
tāṇs cendradharmanāsatyasaṃśrayāc chriya īritāḥ ||*
MBTN 18.84-95

¹⁴² *MBTN* 18.98-138

born as humans and commit adultery during their human birth. These deities are also subject to another curse by Brahmā—when they try to fool him by assuming a single body and walking past him thrice, he curses them to be born as humans thrice, in a single body, just as they did when they attempted to fool him. The goddesses realize that the curses are inescapable, but are worried about the moral implications of committing adultery as humans, and so approach the sinless Bhāratī to help them by incarnating in the same body with them four times. This helps to ward off any sin, because Bhāratī, by the rules of the hierarchy, is never approached by any male except Vāyu. This implies that the goddesses can be present in the same body when Bhāratī enjoys a sexual relationship with her husband, and commit adultery in order to fulfil Brahmā's curse, without facing the moral consequences of sin.

This part of the narrative is Madhva's own contribution, and is not found in any other scriptural text. This works as a clear insertion of Madhva's hierarchy into the text as a backdrop to the narrative of Draupadī's polyandry. Madhva then proceeds to connect his own narrative to that of the two explanations offered in the epic.

First, he mentions all these deities taking birth as the daughter of the unnamed *brāhmaṇa*, and performing penance to Śiva. Bhāratī performs penance to appease Viṣṇu who is present in Śiva, since she ranks higher than Śiva. Śiva blesses the other four goddesses that they will unite with their husbands in their human births. Madhva then narrates the story of Indrasenā, the daughter of the king Nala, who was the next incarnation of the five goddesses. Mudgala once mocks Brahmā for desiring his daughter, and is cursed to approach the five goddesses, which would be a matter of great sin. Upon his begging for a reprieve, Brahmā tells that he will remain unconscious, while Vāyu

enters his body and has a sexual relationship with Indrasenā. After a long while, Vāyu awakens Mudgala who goes away to do penance, while Vāyu returns to his abode.

While the Mudgala-Indrasenā narrative is already present in the epic, the Vāyu narrative is Madhva's addition. This part of the story allows Madhva to connect the narratives already in the epic. The distraught Indrasenā performs penance to regain her husband. Again, Bhāratī prays to Viṣṇu who is within Śiva, and the other goddesses to Śiva. Each goddess requests for her husband, and the request is heard five times. As a result, the benediction of five husbands is granted. At this point, the goddesses are unaware that they are five entities in a single body, and cry at having been granted five husbands. So far, Madhva has narrated his own version of the the story of "Śiva's boon". Now he integrates it with the "Five Indras" story, using the crying of the woman as a starting point.

Indra finds Indrasenā weeping and asks for the reason, and she points to Śiva, complaining that when she asked for a benediction, he granted her five husbands. Indra then rebukes Śiva, who asks him to move the top of the mountain to see the other gods who have fallen by insulting him. Indra does so, and sees Vāyu, Indra, Yama, and the Aśvini gods. These gods are the five Indras because they have all occupied the post of Indra at one time. Śiva also curses Indra to be born on the earth and marry the woman. However, in Madhva's reading, this is not the end of the story, since we know that Śiva was telling an untruth. Vāyu is greater than Śiva, and none of the other gods fell by insulting Śiva. Instead, the gods were in the mountain to secretly plan their incarnations on the earth. Thus, Brahmā appears again and curses Śiva for lying, and for granting the woman union with their husbands without consulting with Brahmā. The curse is that,

although Śiva's spouse, Pārvatī, is present among the deities in Indrasenā, Śiva will not unite with her during his incarnation as Aśvatthāman.

The purpose of this long story is to integrate the narratives of Draupadī's polyandry from the purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata* with Madhva's own Doctrine of Hierarchy. Madhva's emphasis on the superiority of Bhāratī to the other deities is obvious. But Madhva is also providing a connection between the story of "Śiva's boon" and "The Five Indras" through his remarks that Indra challenged Śiva regarding the benediction given to the woman. However, Madhva, who regards himself as a divine narrator, is not content with merely joining the two tales; he brings in the story of Nala's daughter that is already present in the epic, and adds an afterword to the already known stories with the narrative about Śiva's pride which led to his curse.

This allows Madhva to elevate Draupadī to the status of not just any deity, but Bhāratī. Having set the stage to Draupadī's polyandry with this tale, Madhva has already attempted to free Draupadī of any sin. The simultaneous manifestation of several goddesses within Draupadī is a scheme by the four goddesses to avoid the sin of adultery, by ensuring that Bhāratī is present in the same body, since she is ranked so highly that it is impossible that she commits the sin of adultery. Being present in the same body as Bhāratī ensures that the goddesses do not face further sins, because only Vāyu can approach her. Due to this, Draupadī's polyandry is an act of merit, and through it, the goddesses are avoiding sin. As with the other tales of women, Draupadī is deified here, such that her actions are unfathomable to humans, since they are governed by a confusing array of divine benedictions and curses. In this way, Draupadī is certainly exempt from the sins that would accrue if any other person were to act as she does. Madhva achieves

two goals through his narrative—firstly, he establishes that Draupadī is divine and her actions are not comprehensible to humans, and secondly, he argues that Draupadī's polyandry or other transgressive actions are not to emulated by ordinary women, since these actions are divine.

While Draupadī's character in the epic is generally accepted as transgressing ideal notions of femininity and submissive wives, Madhva is doing the same with Draupadī's narrative that he did with Sītā. The trope of divinity and incomprehensible reasons are present in all of Madhva's tales of women, showing a kind of ambivalence about moral norms surrounding women. In both these cases, Madhva wants to maintain the divine and perfect nature of these epic characters while restricting others from following their patterns of behaviour.

This is abundantly clear when he describes Draupadī's sexual relationships with her husbands more explicitly:

Draupadī, who was of the nature of four different goddesses, enjoyed with them [the four husbands excluding Bhīma] separately, on account of the difference in the presiding deity, even though she had a single body. She became a virgin every day, and the presiding deity was born anew... Bhārati was always present, and so was Vāyu in all her husbands.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ *kṛṣṇā ca teṣu pṛthag eva catuḥ svarūpā reme tathaikatanurapy abhimānibhedāt ||
kanyaiva sābhavad ataḥ prativāsaram ca janmābhavadd hy abhimateḥ pṛthag eva nāṃsāt |
prāyo hi nābhimatinām samavāpa vānī tasmān maruc ca sakaleṣv abhiviṣṭa āsīt ||
dharmātmajādiṣu marut prativiṣṭa eṣām buddhiṃ vimohya ramate satataṃ tayā yat |
śuddhaiva sā hi tata eva dine dine ca sammohato maraṇavad bhavatīha kanyā ||
MBTN, 19.183-85*

*no suptivat tv idamato 'nyavaśatvato hi dehasya saṃsmṛtita eva harer na mohaḥ |
nā 'veśavac ca tata eva mṛteḥ svarūpam etat tv ataḥ pratidinam jananāddhi kanyā ||
MBTN 19.186*

Madhva's "solution" to Draupadī's polyandry is to maintain that she is not polyamorous at all, since only a part of her (involving one deity) has a sexual relationship with each husband, while the other parts temporarily give up their identification with her body. The distinctness of each deity from the other is repeated in Madhva's narrative, and he goes even further to claim that Draupadī dies and is born again every single day in order to maintain the separation between the deities who constitute Draupadī. Also, Draupadī regaining her virginity every day is clearly a reiteration of the theme of the divine action that humans cannot emulate. Madhva even goes on to maintain that Draupadī died every day, rather than merely being unconscious or falling asleep. Madhva answers the charge that this would be physically impossible by stating that the narrative is not to be doubted, since divine sexual enjoyment is markedly different from sexual enjoyment among humans, underscoring the notion that Draupadī's actions cannot be judged by human standards.¹⁴⁴

3.8 Conclusion

Madhva uses the same techniques in his technical discussions about women. The implications of the deification of female characters in the epics become apparent in Madhva's statements about the qualification of women for the Vedas. In the *BSB*, Madhva states that superior (*uttama*) women, unlike *śūdras*, have the qualification to

¹⁴⁴ *anyādrśā hi surabhuktir ato' nyarūpā mānuṣyabhuktir iti nātra vicāryam asti / MBTN 19.187*

study the Vedas.¹⁴⁵ The reason for this accommodation is clearly because the seers of some *śruti* passages are female deities.¹⁴⁶ However, it remains unclear from this text whom Madhva refers to as superior women, since *uttama* could be a technical term or could be used in a general sense to refer to women of superior ability. But Madhva states the meaning of *uttama* in the context of qualification in his *GT*—

[Of those qualified for liberation], humans are the inferior ones, sages are the middling ones, and gods are the superior ones. Vāyu is the most superior among the superior ones.¹⁴⁷

This makes it patently clear that Madhva refers to the gods as superior in terms of their qualification. Therefore, the mention of superior women designates the female deities, who are the seers of the Vedic hymns, and who possess the qualification to study the Vedas.¹⁴⁸ We see the same technique used in Madhva's technical work as he discusses the qualification of women, and his portrayal of women in the epics. In both cases, Madhva creates an exception in his theological system to account for the female character, since he is determined to establish the authority of the texts in which these women carry out their roles (i.e., the epics where the female characters flout moral norms, or the Vedic hymns that have women as the seers). In an effort to maintain the

¹⁴⁵ *uttamānām tu strīṇām na śūdravat*
BSB 1.3.36, commentary on p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ Madhva quotes one of these; see 1.3.36 comm. p.43.

¹⁴⁷ *GTN*, prose passage on p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ The *GTN* is speaking of qualifications with regard to liberation, while the statement from *BSB* is speaking of qualification with respect to the Vedas. But the term *uttama* in both places suggest that Madhva intends to designate female deities in the *BSB*.

authority of these texts, Madhva creates an exception for female deities, and stresses on the special, divine nature of these deities, coming up with a new category for them and accommodating them on high positions in his hierarchy. For this reason, female deities have the qualification to study the Vedas, and Sītā and Draupadī are presented as divine incarnations whose actions are beyond human understanding.

Conclusion

My thesis attempted a tentative outline of Madhva's Doctrine of Hierarchy and its implications on Dvaita commentaries on epic texts. A close study of the *MBTN* shows conclusively that the Doctrine of Hierarchy plays a predominant role in Madhva's project to reinterpret the epic texts. It allows Madhva to bring together the scriptural canons of *śruti* and *itihāsapurāṇas*. Within the epics, it provides Madhva with a framework to present his demonization of theological rivals as a part of the epic tradition. It also enables Madhva to deify the female protagonists of both epics by creating divine cosmic schemes to explain their suffering or transgressions.

It is not within the scope of this work to consider the canon of Dvaita Vedānta in its entirety, or to look at the historical progression of the representation of epic characters within Vedānta and other religious traditions. However, this thesis makes a substantial contribution to the study of Hinduism in its mythical, theological, and philosophical contexts by demonstrating links between epic literature and Vedānta theologies.

While recent scholarship has begun to pay attention to the Vijayanagara period and Vyāsatīrtha's intellectual contributions, there is a huge lacuna in the study of Dvaita Vedānta before Vyāsatīrtha. Again, contemporary scholarship tends to focus on Vyāsatīrtha's technical texts, leaving out the broader context and implications of these philosophical ideas on other genres of literature and regional languages like Kannada. While I have not been able to incorporate Kannada material into this thesis, I look at the origin of Dvaita doctrines in Madhva's works, and trace these partly to the *itihāsapurāṇa* literature.

This study is particularly useful in the case of Madhva's writings for another reason. Madhva's commentaries are very terse and usually need sub-commentaries to be comprehensible. B. N. K. Sharma, Kiyokazu Okita, and several other scholars note the difficulty that Madhva's terse commentaries pose.¹⁴⁹ Madhva's commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, is lengthy and fairly unambiguous with regard to his philosophical doctrines. Reading technical works alongside such commentaries (as I have done while studying Madhva's depiction of female characters and their connection to the hierarchy) would enable a more conclusive view of scriptural doctrines in their theological contexts. It would also allow us to distinguish Madhva's views from those of his later commentators in mapping out the intellectual history of scholastic disciplines like Vedānta.

Finally, such a study refrains from insulating parts of Vedānta doctrines that are generally dismissed as *ad-hominem* attacks or hagiographical embellishments, instead treating the different genres of religious writing as a part of the same intellectual tradition, and using these materials to excavate stronger conclusions about the history of scholastic disciplines in India.

¹⁴⁹ See the footnote in David Buchta, "Dependent Agency and Hierarchical Determinism in the Theology of Madhva". In *Free will, agency, and selfhood in Indian philosophy*. eds. Matthew R Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 261.

Also see Okita, "Quotation, Quarrel and Controversy in Early Modern South Asia: Appayya Dīkṣita and Jīva Gosvāmī on Madhva's Untraceable Citations", 65.

Appendix: Madhva's Narrative of Draupadī's Five Husbands

This is a translation of the passage from Madhva's *MBTN* where he narrates the story of Draupadī's previous incarnations. As we have seen, it is a very significant portion of Madhva's justification of Draupadī's polyandry, and an ingenious instance of the insertion of hierarchy into existent epic tales. The story is as follows:

Once, Pārvatī and the other deities [Śacī, Śyāmalā, and Uṣas], were being excessively coquettish with their husbands in the presence of Brahmā. Brahmā then cursed them to take birth in a human body. Additionally, he cursed them to be adulterous in their birth as humans.

Having considered the curse, they approached Bhāratī and told her the whole story, and served her for a thousand years. Then they said, "Goddess! We do not want to take birth as humans, and we certainly do not want to be adulterous. Even so, [since it is unavoidable], we will not be in contact with anyone but Vāyu. We have also been cursed previously by Brahmā, when we all tried to fool him by going before him in a single body. He cursed us saying, "Arrogant ones! Take birth thrice as humans in a single body, since you [tried to] fool me thrice". Therefore, Goddess! We wish to obtain a single body [with you] in all four births, on account of the two curses. Hence, there will be four human births, and no one but Vāyu will approach you, since that is Viṣṇu's beginningless and eternal rule. Because of that, [if we are in a single body], no one will approach us except Vāyu."

Being requested in this way, Bhāratī assented, and along with Pārvatī etc., became the daughter of a *brāhmaṇa*. Situated in a single body, the four performed great penance to appease Śiva, while Bhāratī, from the same body, appeased Viṣṇu, who is present

within Śiva, in order to achieve oneness of action [in the body]. From within the body of Śiva, Viṣṇu bestowed on Bhārātī the benediction of appeasing Viṣṇu along with her husband in every birth. Meanwhile, Śiva bestowed upon the others the benediction of union with their husbands even in their human births.

Then, all the five deities gave up that body and together became Indrasenā, the daughter of the king Nala. At that time, there was a sage Mudgala, who was deep in penance. He once laughed at Brahmā for desiring his own daughter, and Brahmā cursed him, “Fool! Go [as husband] to the five goddesses headed by Bhārātī and meet your doom”. Spoken to thus, Mudgala performed penance to pacify Brahmā. Then Brahmā altered the curse, stating, “You will not approach the goddesses. Vāyu will go to them in your body, while you remain unconscious and unknowing. You will not acquire any sin on account of this”.

This being said, Vāyu entered Mudgala’s body, married Indrasenā, and became a householder. The lord of the worlds, Vāyu, sported with her for a long time. Then he awoke Mudgala and returned to his abode. Mudgala, now awoken, went away to perform penance.

Indrasenā, thus bereft of husband, performed great penance. As before, Bhārātī appeased Viṣṇu, who is present within Śiva, in order to achieve oneness of action [in the body], while the others did penance to Śiva. When Śiva and Viṣṇu within him manifested themselves, each of the goddesses asked separately to obtain her own husband, leading to a repetition of the words five times. Viṣṇu granted Bhārātī the benediction, and Śiva granted the others the same. When the benediction was granted, necessitating the incarnations of the gods, their respective husbands, the five goddesses did not know that

they were five, due to a mingled consciousness like the mixture of water and milk. They thought that as a single woman, they would have five husbands, and cried aloud that they were only one.

At this point, Indra came there in form of a *brāhmaṇa* youth, and asked the beautiful woman why she was crying. She then pointed at Śiva, saying that she asked him for a benediction, but he granted her five husbands. Unknowing, Indra rebuked Śiva loudly, “You of perverse mind! Why do you curse a woman for no fault in this world of which I am overlord?” Then Śiva cursed him, “Fall into a human body. You will be among this woman’s husbands; she will marry you. Look here at the bottom of this mountain to see the other gods who have fallen due to their indifference to me.” Then Indra moved the top of the hill and saw Vāyu, Indra, Yama, and the Aśvini gods, all of whom had previously been Indras, who were secretly planning their incarnations on the earth. Then Indra prayed to Viṣṇu, and by his grace, took birth on the earth as a partial incarnation of Nara.

Then Brahmā cursed Śiva, “Since you lied that Vāyu and the others had fallen because of indifference to you, you will soon be born on the earth and experience defeat at the hands of Indra who will also be in human form. And because you granted the benediction of union to the goddesses whom I had cursed, without consulting me, you will not obtain your wife in the world of men, but only in your own abode. Vāyu and the rest, whom you lied about, will become their husbands. Pārvatī and the others will only act in accompaniment with Bhāratī and not independently. Vāyu and the rest are to be born to accomplish great divine tasks, not out of indifference to you. Therefore, you will be among men for a very long time.” Having said this, Brahmā left. Śiva became

Aśvatthāman. And the one with five goddesses in her body became Draupadī, as we hear in the Vedas, purāṇas, and the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰*MBTN* 18.98-138

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