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Studying Indian Religions – Concepts and Directions[1]

Abstract

The history of studying Indian religions is as old as the history of Indology. The interest in them, or even fascination, especially with Vedic religion and Buddhism, made the research into these two traditions one of the early and main domains of Indological research. Vedic studies have remained one of the most popular fields of Indology and for many centuries the Vedic religion used to be perceived as the main culture-shaping element of the Indian civilization. Modern Indology, and I mean here contemporary classical Indology as well, re-considers and re-evaluates this view. In my paper I would like to refer shortly to the issue of how this interest in Indian religions developed and describe some contemporary directions in the research on Hindu religious traditions as well as new concepts of approaching them and evaluating their role in the process of shaping the culture of the whole subcontinent.

Keywords: Religion, Hinduism, South India

From the very beginning the meeting of the Western world with India was biased by the dominating influence of the higher strata of Indian society. Kshatriyas and Brahmins were the first *varṇa*s[2] to interact with Europeans, thus the picture of India and its religion was shaped by these groups' perspective. As a result, it was the orthodox religion, especially dominated by Brahmins and referring to the Vedas, which was one of the first Indian cultural phenomena the Europeans encountered. This fact had a long-lasting, strong influence on perceiving India and its religions also by Western scholars. Among these

[1] The research on the South India was conducted within a research grant of the Polish National Science Centre, decision number UMO-2011/03/B/HS2/02267.

[2] Four principal classes/social groups of the society of India.

scholars were especially linguists and classical philologists fascinated by the similarities of Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages, and then Indologists inquiring into the complicated world of India from many different angles from the perspective of literature, philosophy, law, religion, art, etc.

Vedic studies and research on the Vedic religion have remained one of the main domains of Indology. Even in the 20th century they dominated the study on India, though, especially in the second half of the century, the contemporary, modified form of the Vedic religion attracted many scholars.[3] The shift of interest is connected with the rise of field research conducted among orthodox Brahmin communities (for example in Kerala), which enshrined the old, Vedic tradition, though, not infrequently in a modified way. Understandably, these modifications have been the result of the changing cultural, political and economic environment. Thus, the research into the orthodox, still existing Vedic tradition has been supplemented by the observation of the changes and modification it has been undergoing in the course of time.

Together with the study of the Vedas, the interest in Indian epics was growing. The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* were perceived not only as splendid literary works, but also as important religious sources. The career of the *Bhagavadgītā* is an example of the long-lasting fascination by this text not only of Hindus but also of Westerners. Being acknowledged as one of the most important and influential Hindu religious texts, it has been translated from Sanskrit not only into many Indian languages, but also into many European ones. Much less attention was given to the Purāṇas, which is meaningful. One of the reasons could be their accessibility to lower strata of the Hindu society, their frequent affiliation to the specific Hindu tradition and their application of the ideas coming from local cults. It made these texts less authoritative in comparison with the Vedic ones. Nowadays, however, especially the latter texts are perceived as very important sources for the research on the actual shape of the Indian religion, or better, Indian religions. The Purāṇas teach us about the manifoldness and diversity of Hindu religious traditions and touch on the practical aspects of the cult. For a long time perceived by Indologists as the sources of secondary value, presenting less refined and, in consequence, less valid streams of Indian religions, they are becoming a very important domain of research – thus the separate panel, abounding in many substantial papers was organized at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok (2015) as a result of the academic activity of such scholars as, for example, McComas Tylor, Greg Bailey, or the work of the group gathered in the *Skanda Purana Project* run by H. Bakker, and many others.

The second half of the 20th century brought an increasing interest in different religious streams and the re-evaluation of the notion of Hinduism – it was no longer viewed as a monolith with the decisive role of Brahmanical orthodoxy, but rather as a conglomeration of many local traditions. Yes, they were assimilated, and often domesticated by the Brahmanical community, but still it was them which often introduced new ideas and

[3] See for example Frits Staal, with C. V. Somayajipad and Itti Ravi Nambudiri, *Agni – The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, vols. I–II, Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley 1983.

shaped Hindu traditions. Thus, apart from the revival of the study of the Purāṇas, we witnessed the flourishing of the studies of the local as well as so-called Tantric traditions. The research on Tantra, initiated by Arthur Avalon (John Woodroffe), has been growing for the last decades of the 20th and first decades of the 21st centuries.

The Śaiva religion has become an especially rich and vital field of research, since it is understood as the source of Tantric ideas and elements (listed for example by Goudriaan as 18 in number).[4] Together with its Śakti component, it was a very influential stream of the Hindu religion. The research on its sources and history, main ideas and literature has attracted many scholars and become one of the most fruitful Indological fields.

The research regarding the Vaiṣṇava cult, especially its beginnings, seems to be less elaborated by the scholars. While the *Bhagavadgītā* and the epic-based Vaiṣṇava religion is still a popular domain, early Tantric Vaishnavism is not very well known. The situation of the research into the Hindu traditions, also in their local contexts connected with the literature in vernaculars, is changing with the development of the manuscript studies and the growth of the number of critical editions of newly discovered and newly published texts.

There are different modern approaches to the vast body of Indian religions, but one seems to be especially important – underlying the local aspect and the crucial role of researching into local traditions as constituting Hinduism. Such an assumption was an immediate stimulus to apply varied methods into the study of religions.

In the *Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies* (published in 2011) Jessica Frazer and Gavin Flood underline the rapid and multi-faceted development in the studies of the so-called Hinduism. They write:

> In a time in which scholarship in the study of religion is simultaneously facing serious challenges and promising advances, the field of Hindu Studies is emerging as an exemplary model for religious studies. The rich complexity of the Hindu tradition, or as we may now say in the plural, *traditions,* has inspired scholars in the field to develop sophisticated concepts and methods, and ever-more innovative skills in research.[5]

Indeed, the phenomenon of Hinduism as a coherent notion was contested, but there is also a new tendency to reclaim it. As Frazier and Flood say:

> Thus there has been a move to reclaim 'Hinduism' as a valid term of reference. It describes a family of religious cultures that is connected by shared concepts, ritual grammars, textual resources and forms of practice. While they do not constitute a single homogeneous tradition,

[4] Teun Goudriaan, in: Teun Goudriaan, Dirk Hoens, Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantrism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1979, pp. 7–9.

[5] Jessica Frazer and Gavin Flood (eds.), *Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, New York 2011, *Introduction*, p. 1.

> they are linked by common threads that bind them into a cultural entity of a different, more dynamic and diverse kind.[6]

Thus, the very concept of Hinduism is still a discussed notion. Similarly, the notion of Tantra, Tantrism or Tantric is yet another one which was re-defined at the end of the 20th century. One of the important projects undertaken to make the notion better-defined and based on more thorough research on the newly discovered sources is the *Tāntrikābhidhanakośa* [henceforth: TAK], the international project of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, in which I also have the pleasure to participate. Initiated in 1994 by eminent Indologists Gerhard Oberhammer, Hélène Brunner and André Padoux, it is the endeavour to prepare a dictionary which will cover a broad range of Tantric sources and define entries in accordance with them, often opening completely new scopes of meaning.[7] This project inscribes in the several crucial directions of the research on Indian religions. First of all, it refers to not only already known Indian sources, but especially to newly edited as well as newly discovered ones. This approach connects the project with the one of the main domains of not only Indology in general, but also of the studies of Indian religions, namely philological work on original and representative sources. The contested term Hinduism needs to be more reliably defined on the basis of the really representative literature, not only the sources which claim to be representative. The usage of local sources connected with local traditions has its important role in this process. This dimension of research immediately influences yet another important direction which is the re-evaluation of the hitherto acquired knowledge. This inscribes into the process of re-evaluation of the role of local cultures of India in shaping the culture of the whole subcontinent. These, and many other directions, such as for example the wider usage of the epigraphical, historical, and art historical sources are visible in the work of the international team of researchers working on the TAK.

One of the crucial domains in studying religions, which has already been mentioned, is the intense work on the new and unknown sources and this entails collecting, cataloguing and scrutinizing manuscripts. Several international joint projects, such as Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP; undertaken in 1970 and lasting till 2002) and its successor Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP; from 2015), undertaken in cooperation with the National Archives, Kathmandu (NAK), the Muktabodha Digital Library and many others, have been launched to bring these new original sources. Institute Français de Pondichéry possesses the largest collection of the manuscripts of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition in the world (8400 bundles, recently classified as "Memory of the World" by UNESCO), and the most important available collection of photographs (150,000) of the religious art and architecture of South India. These and many other endeavours, together with many Indian manuscript libraries in India, such as for example Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Adyar Library in Chennai and many others,

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6 Ibidem, p. 2.

7 Until now three volumes appeared in Vienna in 2000, 2004 and 2013, respectively.

make available to the scholars of Indian religions a vast collection of unknown texts. Also the above mentioned TAK project uses this stock of sources. Cataloguing these texts and then editing them critically is a very urgent but also very demanding, time-consuming and thus long-lasting task for Indologists.

From my own perspective, the possibility of using the newly discovered North Indian manuscript of one of the most important Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra text, the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā*, enabled me to prepare a critical edition of the chapter on *dīkṣā* (initiation), which was practically incomprehensible in the version of the published text, based on two South Indian manuscripts.[8]

Yet another dimension in the study of Indian religions is the much deeper interest and insight into archeological remnants and art objects connected with the temple cult. The shift from the Vedic religion to the theistic and *bhakti*-oriented Hindu religiosity had an impact on the rapid development of the temple cult and thus of the temple architecture and religious art. These issues were not just mere subjects left to artists' and craftsmen's imagination, but they were regulated by the prescripts of the religious literature. Thus it has become a topic of research into the particular religious traditions. One of the spectacular examples of this kind of research is the Archeology of Bhakti Project run in the École française d'Extrême Orient in Pondicherry. In the frame of this project an international group of scholars inquire into the mutual relations of the art and religion in Southern India.

In my own work, I am inquiring into the process of the development of the temple cult in close connection with the research into iconography which enables to create efficient receptacles to invoke god, and into the rules concerning religious architecture enabling to build a place which is a proper residence and abode of God.

South Indian religion and art are also strongly connected with the development of particular royal dynasties strengthening their power by using religious traditions through funding temples and gods' images. Such was the case of the Tamil dynasties of the Pallavas, mostly worshipping Viṣṇu, and then the Cōḻas, mostly worshipping Śiva. Thus yet another important dimension, namely the insight into political, social and also economical context of the religions under research appears to be very fruitful and in fact indispensable. The manifold spectrum of issues connected with particular regions of Indian subcontinent leads us to the fruition of field research, enabling not only more effective gathering of textual sources, but also allowing confrontation with the contemporary forms of old artefacts and traditions through contact with material remnants and contemporary communities of devotees, priests, traditional scholars (pundits).

To study Indian religions means to collect, edit, translate and interpret the texts in the context of the history of not only religions, but the whole culture of India in its manifold and divers manifestations. All these dimensions form the net of mutual relations and

[8] The copy of the manuscript was available to me through the courtesy of Prof. Alexis Sanderson (All Souls College, Oxford) with whom I had the pleasure to work on the edition. See Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, *Studia nad pańćaratrą. Tradycja i współczesność*, WUJ, Kraków 2008.

interdependencies. The interdisciplinary approach, a deeper insight into the cultural and political history of the region and research on religious art are present also in my own study on the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra tradition. Beginning with the interest in Vedic ritual and ancient Indian society, through researching into domestic *gṛhya* rites, I have finally started my research on the early Vaiṣṇava Tantra. This particular tradition, represented by the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa cults, which flourished in the first century A.D. especially in the South of India,[9] remains relatively little known, though since the end of the 20th century it has been drawing attention of some scholars who undertook research on its canonical literature. My own research began with textual sources in a hermeneutical effort to understand and explain them from the point of view of a Western scholar who mostly has to rely on this kind of sources since they are often the only available ones. However, later on it turned out that the Pāñcarātra tradition can also be studied *in situ* and not only because there are material remnants of it such as manuscripts, art objects, temple architecture, but also because there are still communities of the followers of Pāñcarātra, mostly in the South of India.

Rapid changes in Indian culture, including religions, demand on the one hand preservation and protection of the old materials and description of the remnants of the old forms of tradition, but on the other hand field research enables observation of the changes and modifications in the still existing groups of the followers of these old traditions. Such research gives not only insight into their present-day situation, but also gives us knowledge about the possible reasons for modifications of the traditions throughout the history of their existence.

Religious centers were often established alongside with political developments in a given region. In the South of India one of the first temples were those built by the Pallava rulers (3rd–8th century A.D.). The Pallavas established their capital in Kāñcīpuram and the main harbour in Mahābalipuram and in these places important religious centers were founded. Famous cave temples were probably introduced by Pallava king Mahendravarman I (circa 571–630 A.D.) in Mahābalipuram and two excellent examples of the stone temples, namely Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ, dedicated to Viṣṇu, and Kailasanātha, dedicated to Śiva (600–800 A.D.) in Kāñcīpuram belong to the period of the flourishing Pallavas' reign.[10]

Yet another powerful dynasty of South India, the Cōḻas (850–1279 A.D.) dedicated many religious centers to god Śiva. As we have already mentioned, their predilection towards Śiva was meaningful and it was an useful tool of the acculturation of the *liṅga* cult (important in the Sangam time), which was significant and typical of this dynasty.[11]

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[9] They flourished and they are still very important in the South, though their roots should be searched in the North of India. See for example Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, *Pāñcarātra Scripture in the Process of Change. A Study on Paramasaṃhitā*, De Nobili Research Library, Vienna 2003, and Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, *Studia nad pańćaratrą*.

[10] It was built by Rājasiṃha Narasimhavarman II (690/91–728/29 A.D.).

[11] Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, Anna Ślączka, "Cōḻa Bronzes in the context of the history and culture of Tamil Nadu", *Art of the Orient*, vol. 5, Toruń 2016, pp. 109–146.

They also adopted and adapted local cults such as the Korravai=Durgā, Mother goddess cult, Murukaṉ cult etc., and finally the dancing god of the cremation ground – Naṭarāja.

An interesting social and political phenomenon connected with the religious cults is the role of the queens belonging to these powerful dynasties. The role of the Cōḻas' queens is more thoroughly presented for example in the works of Venkataraman, Kaimal and Schmid.[12] Women of the Cōḻa dynasty had a relatively important role in the development of the temple cult due to their sponsoring many temples and many sculptures installed inside them. Among these queens were Sembiyan Mahādevī, the wife of Gandarāditya and mother of Uttama Cōḻa and grand-mother of famous Rājarāja I; Kundavai who was the eldest sister of Rājarāja Cōḻa, the builder of the Great Temple of Thanjavur, and Lokamahādevī who was the wife of Rājarāja.[13]

A spectacular example can be observed in the case of the queen Sembiyan Mahādevī who lived in the 10th c. A.D. The queen was a devotee of Śiva and she supported the establishment of Śaiva temples and the creation of Śiva's images, thus the flourishing temple architecture and stone and then bronze images of the time. The devotion of the queen influenced the whole Cōḻa dynasty. The Śaiva cult was promoted by Cōḻa kings who constructed Śaiva temples as their royal temples. This was the case of the four famous South Indian temples: Rājarājeśvara in Tanjavur (1010 A.D.), Rājarājeśvara in Gangaikondacolapuram (1035 A.D.), Airavateśvara in Darasuram (1166 A.D.), and Kampeśvara in Thirubhuvanam (circa 1176 A.D.) built, respectively, by Rājarāja I, Rājendra I, Rājarāja II, and Kulottunga Cōḻa III. The dynasty rulers established the non-anthropomorphic form of Śiva – *liṇga*s and then the anthropomorphic Śiva Naṭarāja form as their imperial emblem. The political need for strengthening the position of the dynasty influenced the development of the particular religious tradition as well as the specific architectural style and specific iconography of Śiva.

In the case of queen Sembiyan yet another dimension of the research on Indian religions can be seen, namely the need for studying the history of minor local rulers vis à vis the big, powerful dynasties. Though less powerful, these minor rulers often had a big impact on the stronger ones. Very often the queens belonged to these local rulers' families and they influenced the culture of their mighty husbands.[14] It refers not only to famous Sembiyan, but also to other queens, for example the splendid temple in Tiruccennampūṇṭi was built by the queen belonging probably to the one of the local Paḻuvēṭṭaraiyar, Irrukuvēl, Muttaraiyar or Pāṇṭiya dynasty.[15] Queen Sembiyan

[12] B. Venkataraman, *Temple Art under the Chola Queens*. Thomason Press (India) Ltd. Faridabad, Haryana, 1976; Charlotte Schmid, *Le Bhakti d'une reine, Śiva à Tiruccennampūṇṭi*, Institute français de Pondichéry, École française d'Extrême Orient, Pondichéry 2014; Padma Kaimal, "Early Cola Kings and 'Early Cola Temples': Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 56, No. 1/2 (1996), pp. 33–66; Padma Kaimal, "Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meanings of an Icon", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 81, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), pp. 390–419; Padma Kaimal, "The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970–1000 A.D.", *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 60, No. 1 (2000), pp. 139–179.

[13] See also Czerniak-Drożdżowicz and Ślączka, "Cōḻa Bronzes", 2016.

[14] Irrukuvēl, etc., the queen building Tiruccennampūṇṭi, which was then taken up by Sembiyan.

[15] More about the role of the queens in founding Cōḻa temples one can find in Schmid, *Le Bhakti*, chapter: "La *bhakti* de la Princesse Māṟaṉ". See also for example articles by Padma Kaimal, "Early Cola Kings and 'Early

sponsored such temples as for example Umāmaheśvara in Konerirajapuram [photo 1] or Tirukkotiśvara in Tirukkodikkaval [photo 2 and 3] and it was her who influenced establishing of a particular iconographical programme in Śaiva temples in the South of India and she was responsible for introducing the images of the Naṭarāja as one of the most characteristic forms of Śiva.[16]

As Charlotte Schmid supposes,[17] the early form of Śiva Naṭarāja can be found in the temple established in-between the Kāverī and Kollidam rivers. In the above mentioned Caṭaiyar temple in Tirucceṉṉampūṇṭi, having traces of both dynasties, the Pallava and the Cōḻa, the relief representing Naṭarāja appears above the *devakoṣṭha* with the Śiva Vinadhāra's sculpture. [photo 4].

Of the two other queens which we have already mentioned, Kundavai[18] founded four bronze sculptures in the Tanjavur temple, among them two which represented her parents. Lokamahādevī,[19] apart from founding Śaiva temples, sponsored also Vaiṣṇava and Jaina temples.

Religion and art are therefore the domains which are inseparable, and what more they were influenced and, as I have mentioned in the case of the Cōḻa dynasty, biased by the political issues. These mutual relations of art and religion can be seen while studying particular religious ceremonies, for example construction and consecration of a temple, creation, installation and consecration of the temple idols. The rituals such as installing the deposit in the foundation of the temple (*garbhanyāsa*) or installation of the idol (*pratiṣṭhā*) make the whole artistic process of creation an element of the complicated net of interdependencies which has the aim in ensuring the real presence of the God in his palace-temple.[20] The role of the royal sponsor and founder of the temple makes these religious ceremonies into elements of the process of establishing and strengthening the position of the ruler.

The issue of the religion versus society and politics is connected, as I have already mentioned, with the new approaches to the Purāṇa studies and growing research on Tantric texts. The Purāṇas, being very popular texts, accessible also to the lower strata of the Indian society, are receiving growing attention of scholars. It is both the result of a better access to the texts and unpublished manuscripts as well as the growing interest in the processes of acculturation, Sanskritization and Brahmanization. These important terms refer to the specific features of the mutual relations between the Brahmanical culture and local cultures.

Cola Temples': Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 56, No. 1/2 (1996), pp. 33–66; "Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meanings of an Icon", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 81, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), pp. 390–419; "The Problem of Portraiture in South India, Circa 970–1000 A.D.", *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2000), pp. 139–179.

16 For more details concerning the temples patronized by Sembiyan Mahādevī see for example Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, "Cōḻa Bronzes".

17 Schmid, *Le Bhakti*, pp. 168–171.

18 Venkataraman, "Temple Art", pp. 65–84.

19 Ibidem, pp. 85–103.

20 See for example Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, "At the Crossroads of Art and Religion – Image Consecration in the Pāñcarātrika Sources", in: *Consecration Rituals in South Asia*, Istvan Keul (ed.), Brill, Leiden/Boston 2017, pp. 171–197.

The researchers of the Purāṇas underline the role of these texts, on the one hand, in introducing pan-Indian notions and ideas into the local cultures and, on the other hand, in assimilating local elements into the pan-Indian, Brahmanical culture. Some interesting data concerning particular examples of the strategies employed to introduce into the Purāṇic corpus the local and sectarian elements, also the local divinities, who become identified with particular Hindu gods, one can find for example in the volume edited by one of the distinguished scholars of the Purāṇas, Hans T. Bakker.[21] In the volume, for example Phyllis Granoff[22] presents examples of the mutual relations of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava elements while she describes the Śarabha form of Śiva, being connected with the Narasiṃha *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. These are the Purāṇic texts which give us the possibility to follow the development of Indian religious traditions and their mythology.

One of the elements which are common to Purāṇic texts as well as to religious scriptures of the *āgama*s are the *māhātmya*s, known also as *sthalapurāṇa*s. They are very valuable sources of the knowledge about the history of religious cults and their holy places, among them temples. *Māhātmya*s – the eulogies – are the stories comprising mythological history of the place, but sometimes also some elements of the real history of the site. They are important sources of our knowledge about the place and the tradition itself, especially with respect to particular reasons for which these places were established and then acquired their high position.[23] In the Pāñcarātrika sources I am working on, there are several examples of such passages. One is the case of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*. Though the *Pauṣkarasaṃhitā*, a Pāñcarātrika text associated with Śrīraṅgam, does not contain a *māhātmya*, its *vyākhyā*, the *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā*, has it in its chapter 10 (10.108ff.; entitled *svayaṃvyaktādiprāsāda-devatā-nirṇaya*).[24] This source can be confronted for example with the history of Śrīraṅgam presented in the temple chronicle *Kōil Oḻugu*.[25] There exist, however, other examples of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* which do not belong to the *saṃhitā*s and some preliminary notes on this independent *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* I am aware of and I have been working on recently, were presented in my paper at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok (2015).

Within the Pāñcarātrika *saṃhitā*s themeselves one can find portions which refer to particular places of worship. Considering that these texts were mostly dedicated to

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[21] Hans. T. Bakker (ed.), *Origin and Growth of the Purāṇic Text Corpus. With Special Reference to the Skandapurāṇa*, Motilalal Banarsidass, Delhi 2004.

[22] Phyllis Granoff, "Saving the Saviour: Śiva and Vaiṣṇava Avatāras in the Early Skandapurāṇa", in: Hans T. Bakker (ed.), *Origin and Growth of the Purāṇic Text Corpus. With Special Reference to the Skandapurāṇa*, Motilalal Banarsidass, Delhi 2004, pp. 111–138.

[23] Among the reasons could be, for example, the need to strengthen a particular tradition and connect it, together with the community of the followers, with a particular place and particular mythological events.

[24] See Marion Rastelli, "Der Tempel als Mythisierung der Transzendenz", in: Gerhard Oberhammer; Marcus Schmücker (eds.), *Mythisierung der Transzendenz als Entwurf ihrer Erfahrung. Arbeitsdokumentation eines Symposiums*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2003, pp. 313–348, especially about the portions of the PārS concerning the story of the appearance of the temple, its structure and being the body of god.

[25] V.N. Hari Rao, *Koil Olugu. The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes*, Rochouse & Sons, Madras 1961.

ritualistic issues and were addressed to the developed and initiated devotees, the passages concerning holy places could have played an important role in popularizing the tradition among less religiously advances followers. We can think here about conscious introducing of more "popular" elements, addressed to the broader Vaiṣṇava public. The mythological context serves to make the worship of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa more accessible and stimulates devotees' imagination, referring to the stories present in the common consciousness of the Vaiṣṇava community. It also serves to glorify individual shrines, through citing "localized myths" as observes Shulman,[26] who uses the example of particular south Indian temples to speak about the phenomenon of localization.[27]

The role of the temple cult was growing with the passage of time[28] and in the Pāñcarātrika sources we can find also theoretical remarks referring to the understanding of the role of the temple and image of the god. The temple is an embodiment of the universe but also of the god himself, especially given the fact that the whole world is god's manifestation.[29] Thus, in the *māhātmya*s praising particular temples we find many details concerning the theological and philosophical understanding of these crucial religious issues.

The occurrence of such an element as *māhātmya*, apart from the fact that it situates the worship of god in a broader mythological context known by and closer to the average devotee, can be also connected with the fact of the growing role of temples as pilgrimage sites.[30] The officiating priests as well as the inhabitants living near such places would have been very much interested in creating and spreading such stories, strenghtening the

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[26] David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths. Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1980, p. 17.

[27] Ibidem, pp. 40–89, chapter II "The Phenomen of Localization". The author speaks for example about *sthalapurāṇa*s of Cidambaram, Kanchi, places along the Kāverī river, flood myths of Madurai. He says (p. 352, *Conclusion*): „God is present in men's life: he is rooted forever in the very soil of the Tamil land. The localization of the divine presence in the Tamil shrine guarantees the rewards open to the pilgrim in this life."

[28] For some information about the beginning of the temple cult as well as its development in the South of India see for example Hélène Brunner, "L'image divine dans le culte agamique de Śiva: Rapport entre l'image mentale et le support concret du culte", in: A. Padoux (ed.), *L'Image Divine: Culte et médiation dans l'hindouisme*, Paris, CNRS 1990; Burton Stein, "The Economic Function of a Medieval South Indian Temple", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 19, Association for Asian Studies 1960; Burton Stein (ed.), *South Indian Temples. An Analytical Reconsideration,* Vikas Publishing House, Delhi 1978; Arjun Appadurai, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350–1700 A.D.", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XIV, 1997, No 1, pp. 47–73; Arjun Appadurai, "The Past as a Sacred Resource", in: *Temples, Kings and Peasants: Perceptions of South India's Past*. George W. Spencer (ed.), Madras 1987; Arjun Appadurai/Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "The South Indian Temple: authority, honour and redistribution", in: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 187–211; Anthony Good, "Law, Legitimacy, and Hereditary Rights of Tamil Temple Priests", *Modern Asian Studies* 23.2, Cambridge 1989, pp. 233–257; George W. Spencer, "Crisis of Authority in a Hindu Temple under the Impact of Islam. Śrīraṅgam in the Fourteenth Century", in: Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and the legitimation of Power in South Asia*, Brill, Leiden 1978, pp. 14–27.

[29] This was observed also by my colleague M. Rastelli in her article Rastelli 2003.

[30] One can consult for example Phyllis Granoff, "Defining Sacred Place: contest, compromise, and priestly control in some *māhātmya* texts", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 29, 1998, where one could find some more bibliography concerning the study of *māhātmya*s.

role of particular places. Thus, the development of the genre of *sthalapurāṇa* (known also as *māhātmya*, *vaibhava*, or in Tamil *talavaralāru* or *talapurāṇa*) is connected with the temple cult. *Sthalapurāṇa*s consist usually of several structural elements. They refer to the name of the temple, its holy tank and main shrine (*vimāna*), the iconography of the particular form of god worshipped there, for example explaining a particular position of the image towards cardinal points. Some parts refer to the specific features of the cult, some to the administration of the temple; they explain the presence of several shrines in one place, refer to the public festivals, and, finally, describe the fruits of worshipping god in this place.[31]

It is hard to overvalue the role of the Purāṇic literature, comprising often *sthalapurāṇa*s or *māhātmya*s, in the above mentioned processes of Sanskritization/Brahmanization and acculturation which are discussed (e.g. by Staal, Coburn, Shulman) in the context of mutual relations of the pan-Indian tradition with the local ones.[32] *Sthalapurāṇas* (Tamil *talapurāṇa, talavaralāru*), however, were probably mostly created by Brahmins and the local elements were mingling in them with the Brahmanical ones. One of the first examples of such literature glorifying holy places is the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* in the *Mahābhārata* (MhBh 3.80–153). Shulman mentions an even earlier, short passage of this kind belonging to the *Bṛhaddevatā* (6.20–24).[33]

The *māhātmya*s texts are frequently, or rather claim to be, integral parts of a Purāṇic text, but many of them belong to the Āgamas or they exist independently as, for example, in the Pāñcarātrika context, the *māhātmya* of Kāñcīpuram[34] or Śrīraṅgam.[35] Sometimes these texts were created by distinguished religious teachers and philosophers and such is the case of one of the *māhātmya*s concerning Kāñcīpuram. Its author is Veṅkaṭanātha (Vedānta Deśika) himself (and it is classified as one of his so-called *rahasyagrantha*s, i.e. works

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[31] See for example Friedhelm Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Temple", in: Stein 1978, pp. 119–151. On p. 149 Hardy writes: "The *sthalapurāṇa*, by utilizing the genre of the pan-Indian *purāṇa*, integrates all these disconnected elements into a coherent and therefore meaningful structure of a narrative about past events. Thus it "answers" all the questions which the observant pilgrim might ask, and establishes also for the resident devotees a definite frame of reference which they can resort to in cases of dispute over ritual, social, administrative, legal, or political matters connected with their temple." He writes further: "Altogether we can say that these *sthalapurāṇa*s are very complex edifices (though usually not in terms of purely literary merit), structures of meaning and of values, which turn the village or town with its temple into a miniature cosmos."

[32] Frits Staal, "Sanskrit and Sanskritization", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 22, No. 3 (May, 1963), pp. 261–275; Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya*: *The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1988; Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, pointing out the role of Agastya in the South-Indian literature, mentions that his importance comes from his knowledge of the Sanskrit as well as Tamil texts, and the fact that he was taught Tamil by Murugan himself, so by the one of the main gods of the South identified with Śiva's son Skanda.

[33] Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, p. 17.

[34] See for example Marie-Claude Porcher, "La representation de l'espace sacré dans le Kāñcīmāhātmya", in: Jean-Claude Galey (ed.), *L'espace du Temple I. Espace, itineraries, meditations*. EEHESS, Paris 1985, pp. 23–51, and English Summary.

[35] See e.g. G.R. Srinivasan, *The Hastigiri Māhātmyam of Vedāntadesika*. Śri Vedānta Deśika Vidhya Trust, Chennai 2004; V.N. Hari Rao, *The Śrīrangam Temple. Art and Architecture*, The Sri Venkateswara University Tirupati 1967.

concerning esoteric themes). While writing about the Varadarāja temple, Veṅkaṭanātha equates it with the heaven on earth, *bhūlokavaikuṇṭha*.[36]

The *māhātmya* which I have just started to work on together with my colleague Dr. R. Sathyanarayanan from the EFEO in Pondichéry,[37] can possibly be identified with the one particular version called *Daśādhyāyī* and mentioned by Hari Rao.[38] It is a text in Sanskrit written in the Telugu script, published in Chennai in 1875.[39] The preliminary research on this version shows, first of all, that we cannot identify this text with any portion of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, which it claims to be a part of (*iti śrīmadbrahmāṇḍapurāṇe*…). It shows conformity with the general plot known from other sources, but there are also some portions typical of this version of the *māhātmya*. As for the structure, it consists of 11 chapters (580 ślokas + colophon) which contain a dialogue of Nārada and Maheśvara.[40] From the table of content one can see that this text concentrates on the core story about establishing of the holy site and the description of the main shrine – *vimāna* and the idol – *arcā*, and supplements it with a short exposition of the order of creation of the world – *sṛṣṭikrama* in its part known as *brahmāsṛṣṭi*, presentation of the twelve-syllable *dvādaśākṣaramantra*, and passages praising the glory of the place.

During further research on this text we hope to acquire more information about the history of the Pāñcarātra tradition in the South of India. *Sthalapurāṇa*s and *māhātmya*s often bring data about changes, modifications and adaptations to which the texts, and what is more important – the traditions to which they belong, were subjected. E. Wilden,

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[36] This text, apart from describing the holy place, refers also in its 19 parts to the Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya* (in part 4), presents Śrīvaiṣṇava philosophy (part 5), and includes fragments concerning art, especially theatre and dance in the religious context.

Srinivasan 2004, p. 115.

bhūlokavaikuṇṭha:
vaikuṇṭhe tu yathā loke yathaiva kṣirasāgare /
tathā satyavratakṣetre nivāsaste bhaved iha /
hastiśailasya sikhare sarvalokanamaskṛte /
puṇyakoṭivimāne 'smin paśyantu tvaṃ narās sadā /

[37] I have to mention here Dr. R. Sathyanarayanan from EFEO, Pondicherry who kindly agreed to prepare a transcript for me as well as offered his help and expertise in further work on this text.

[38] Hari Rao, *The Śrīrangam Temple*.

[39] Edited by Narayanaswaminayaka, revised by Ramacandra Sastri of Mūñjūrpaṭṭu, in the press Vivekakalānidhi and owned by Veṅkaṭācāri, Chennai, August 1875.

[40] Chapter I: *śrīraṃgakṣetravaibhavaṃ* [the glory of the Śrīraṅgakṣetra] – 46 *ślokas*; II: *brahmāsṛṣṭyādikathanaṃ* [presentation of the *brahmāsṛṣṭi*] – 57 *ślokas*; III: *śrīraṃgavimānāvirbhāvaḥ* [the glory of the Śrīraṅga temple (*vimāna*)] – 42 *ślokas*; IV: *vidhikṛtaviṣṇustotrakathanaṃ* [presentation of the duly prepared *stotra* of Viṣnu] – 39 *ślokas*; V: *arcāvatāravigrahasvarūpavarṇanaṃ* [the description of the nature/peculiarity of the *arcāvatāra* form] – 52 *ślokas*; VI: *dvādaśākṣaravarṇanaṃ* [the description of the 12-syllable [mantra]] – 50 *ślokas*; VII: *ikṣvākurājño raṃgavimānaprāptiḥ* – [receiving/obtaining of the Raṅgavimāna by the king of Ikṣvakus (Rāmā)] – 72 *ślokas*; VIII: *śrīraṃgavimānasya kāverītīraprāptiḥ* [approaching/arrival at the Kāverī bank by the Śrīraṅgavimāna] – 59 *ślokas*; IX: *vibhīṣaṇānugrahaḥ* [kindness/favour of [to] Vibhiṣaṇa] – 55 *ślokas*; X: *navatīrthaprabhāvavarṇanaṃ* [the description of the glory of the new pilgrimage place] – 69 *ślokas*; XI: *śrīdivyavimānapradakṣiṇavaibhavaṃ* [the glory of the circumambulating of the divine *vimāna* (?) or glory of the *vimāna* directed towards south?] – 39 *ślokas* + colophon: *śrīmadbhrahmāṃḍapurāṇe brahmasanatkumārasaṃvāde śrīraṃgamāhātmye*…].

while writing about *Hālāsya Mahātmya* (concerning Madhurā), supposes that the reason of sometimes complicated mythological insertions in the *māhātmya*s was the need for cultural adaptations.[41] Thus, we hope to acquire some knowledge about such processes as well as more details about the situation of the Pāñcarātra tradition within a religious and cultural context of South India.

Reconsideration of the role of the local traditions and their texts, among them Purāṇas, as well as better access to the sources, make scholars more aware of the fact that the already known sources are just the tip of the iceberg which is the vast, unstudied material that should be taken into consideration to get a broader and more reliable view of the actual situation. It refers not only to the literature in vernaculars. Research on later Sanskrit sources, among them religious texts, is very much neglected by Western scholars, and as Hanneder points out in his criticism of Pollock, this was probably the basis of the idea of "death of Sanskrit" formulated by Pollock in 2001.[42] Here I would like to mention my own study on the Sanskrit work of Uttamur Viraraghavacarya, a contemporary Śrīvaiṣṇava Pandit (died in 1997), who discussed, among others, the issue of the Ekāyanaveda concept[43] in the Pāñcarātra tradition. Some of my colleagues in Cracow are also working on the contemporary literary tradition in Sanskrit, thus our studies inscribe in the important, contemporary streams of Indological research.

Among new directions of the research on Indian religions are those connected with the insight into the local, Tantric and caste dimensions of the religious traditions, but also those connected with women and gender studies. This implies research on the role of women in the cultural history of India, and the role of female cults of goddesses as well as the changing paradigm of the role of women as active participants in the ritual and taking up priests' duties. Promising directions are also the research on village worship and folk deities, temple cult, Hindu diaspora and the issue of "Tradition and Authority".[44]

Thus, Indology, including the study of religion, facing many new challenges, remains a modern discipline. What makes it modern, very deeply immersed in the present-day life of India is not only the application of modern methodologies into philological studies, but also the interdisciplinary approach and the deep and growing interest of scholars in

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[41] Eva Maria Wilden, *Manuscript, Print and Memory. Relics of the Caṅkam in Tamilnadu. Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, Michael Friedrich, Harunaga Isaacson, Jeorg B. Quenzer (eds.), vol. 3. De Gruyter Berlin/München/Boston 2014, pp. 263–268 (*Hālāsya Mahātmya*).

[42] J. Hanneder and Pollock, see Jürgen Hanneder, "Textual Studies versus Field Studies; Classical Indology as a Modern Research, New Approaches like Cyber Humanistics", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, Bd. LII–LIII, 2009–2010, *Text Genealogy, Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique*, Jürgen Hanneder and Philipp A. Mass (eds.); Jürgen Hanneder, "On 'The Death of Sanskrit'", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 45(4), pp. 293–310. December 2002; Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit", *Comparative Studies in Society and History.* Cambridge University Press. 43 (2) April 2001, pp. 392–426.

[43] This is an idea of the lost Veda being the source of the Pāñcarātra doctrine. See for example Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, *Studia*, and Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, *Ekāyanaveda – in search of the roots* (forthcoming).

[44] These directions, as well as information concerning the state of knowledge on Hindu religious traditions are presented for example in Frazier and Flood, *Continuum Companion.*

field research, which demands confrontation with the real, present-day religious life of the communities and traditions under research. Thus knowledge and awareness of important problems of contemporary India is often not less spectacular among the so-called "Classical Indologists" than among the representatives of the Modern South Asian Studies.

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1. Śiva Naṭarāja, Umāmaheśvara temple in Konerirajapuram
[photo Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (2013)]

2. Tirukkotīśvara temple in Tirukkodikkaval
[photo Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (2017)]

3. Śiva Naṭarāja, Tirukkotīśvara temple in Tirukkodikkaval
[photo Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (2017)]

4. Śiva Naṭarāja, Caṭaiyar temple in Tiruccen̲n̲ampūṇṭi
[photo Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (2013)]