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Sanskrit and the *labour of gender* in early modern South India

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Abstract

In the early eighteenth century, a husband and co-wife trio undertook a household project in Maratha-ruled Tanjavur. These migrants from the Western Deccan jointly authored a set of Sanskrit commentaries invested in the idea of 'Maharashtrianness'. The unusual authoring of a Sanskrit commentary by these women alongside their husband exemplifies broader changes that were taking place in Sanskrit intellectual circles in early modern South India. Tracing new formulations of regional identity, changing ideologies of gender, and shifts in the very labour of Sanskrit intellectual production, I demonstrate how new avenues of access to Sanskrit emerged for women in early modern South India. These new avenues of access were facilitated by the growing importance of the household as a site of cultural production and the rise of new regional courts in the Karnatak and Coromandel Coast regions.

Introduction

In 1730, Tukkoji Bhonsle I ascended the throne of Maratha-ruled Tanjavur as its sole ruler.[1] Maratha-ruled Tanjavur was located on the opposite coast of the

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[1] For an analysis of Tukkoji's disputed date of accession, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The politics of fiscal decline: a reconsideration of Maratha Tanjavur, 1676–1799', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1995, pp. 185–86. For contrasting views, see C. K. Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic* (Annamalainagar: Annamalainagar University, 1944), pp. 236–42; K. R. Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1988), pp. 37–42. For the first names of Maratha rulers, I follow the spellings of my primary Sanskrit sources.

subcontinent from Śivāji Bhonsle's Maratha polity sprawling out from the Pune area.[2] Despite both states sharing in the Bhonsle family lineage, Maratha-ruled Tanjavur displayed a political ambivalence towards Śivāji's Maratha state in the Western Deccan for the first 36 years of its existence.[3] Looking to their Nayaka predecessors and the neighbouring courts of the Karnatak and Coromandel Coast regions, the Maratha-ruled court of Tanjavur fostered a highly multilingual cultural ecumene and offered a resurgence of centralized patronage for Sanskrit intellectuals.[4]

Although the multilingual Maratha-ruled court of Tanjavur remained politically independent, with the accession of Śarabhoji (r. 1712–1730), co-ruling with his brother Tukkoji (r. 1730–1735), Tanjavur started to memorialize and reaffirm its ties to the Maratha line of rulers in the Western Deccan.[5] Elite families migrated to Tanjavur, just as they had migrated from the sixteenth century onwards to other Deccani courts and intellectual hubs such as Banaras. At crucial junctures these migrants chose to memorialize their ties to various state entities.[6]

Writing from Tanjavur, in the midst of this significant shift was the prolific Sanskrit author and commentator, Ghanaśyāma.[7] A Brahman from Maharashtra and minister to Tukkoji, Ghanaśyāma called himself 'The diamond-in-the-crown among the fine company of Maharashtra Brahmans'.[8]

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[2] Though the Maratha capital regularly shifted, I reference Pune in relation to the original landholdings of Śivāji's father: Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Marathas, 1600–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 112.

[3] From the accession of Ekoji in 1676 until the accession of Śāhaji in 1712. See Subrahmanyam, 'The politics of fiscal decline', p. 184.

[4] On the multilingualism of Tanjavur, see Indira Viswanathan Peterson, 'Multilingual dramas at the Tanjavur Maratha Court and literary cultures in early modern South India', *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2011, pp. 285–321. On court-centred patronage of Sanskrit in the eighteenth century, see Sheldon Pollock, 'The death of Sanskrit', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2001, p. 413. Tukkoji's eldest brother Śāhaji (r. 1684–1712) was widely remembered for endowing an *agrahāra* (village) which supported 46 Brahmans. See V. Raghavan, *Śāhendra Vilāsa (A Poem on the Life of King Śāhaji of Tanjore 1684–1710) of Srīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa* (Tanjore: T.M.S.S.M. Library, 1952), pp. 37–38.

[5] Subrahmanyam, 'The politics of fiscal decline', p. 185. On the joint rule of Śarabhoji and Tukkoji, see Lennart Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara. Court Politics in Early Modern South India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022), pp. 148–49.

[6] On migration of Brahmans from Western Deccan to Banaras, see, for example, Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, 'What makes people who they are? Pandit networks and the problem of livelihoods in early modern Western India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2008, pp. 381–416; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Letters home: Banaras pandits and the Maratha regions in early modern India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2010, pp. 201–40; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple: Banaras scholar households and the Brahman "ecumene" of Mughal India', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp. 253–77.

[7] Ghanaśyāma states that he wrote 64 works in Sanskrit, 20 in Prakrit, and 25 in vernaculars. See J. B. Chaudhuri, 'Sanskrit poet Ghanaśyāma', p. 240.

[8] *Mahārāṣṭramahattarapaṭalakoṭirahīreṇa…ghanaśyāmapaṇḍitena* (colophon to *Prabodhacandrodaya-saṃjīvana*) as printed in E. Hultzsch, *Reports on Sanskrit Manuscripts in Southern India* (Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1905), Vol. 3, p. 42, no. 1583. Although Ghanaśyāma identifies himself as a Maharashtra Brahman, he does not indicate whether he himself, or an ancestor, migrated from the Western Deccan to Tanjavur. His brother established roots in the neighbouring

As a scholar, his unique Sanskrit commentarial style mobilized vernacular language, particularly Marathi, as a critical philological tool for either establishing or undermining an intellectual position. This style epitomized both the multilingual vigour of the Tanjavur intellectual world and a growing orientation towards the Maratha-state in the distant Western Deccan.

More anomalous, however, is this: Ghanaśyāma, who regularly paid tribute to his two wives Sundarī and Kamalā in his writings, also undertook a joint commentarial project with them on the play, the *Viddhaśālabhañjikā*, written by the eminent author Rājaśekhara (active *circa* 885–950 CE).[9] Their commentaries, which make the case for recovering evidence of the author's 'Maharashtrianness', also subtly subvert the social and aesthetic gender norms of Sanskrit intellectual production to which women rarely had access.

The commentaries of Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā offer a unique opportunity to examine early modern trends in cultural production and social relations among migrant Maharashtrian Brahman circles and at the royal courts of the Karnatak and Coromandel Coast. The commentaries present a rich archival record of Brahman migration out of the Western Deccan, new eighteenth-century considerations around regional identity, the centrality of familial relations in Sanskrit intellectual production, and the abstraction and representation of these changes in processes of gendering alongside new avenues of access to Sanskrit for women. Buried in the intricacies of philological conventions, this comes to light most effectively through attending to what I term *the labour of gender* in the household project of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives.

The problem of gender in Sanskrit

Despite the almost universal dictate that Sanskrit was the language of men, a certain subset of women could, and did, have access to Sanskrit learning.[10] The

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state of Ramnad in the city of Devipattana. See *Prabodhacandrodayasaṃjīvana* v. 6 as printed in ibid., p. 41.

[9] For Rājaśekhara's dates, see A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature: The Bold Style (Śaktibhadra to Dhanapāla)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), Vol. 5, p. 413.

[10] References to Sanskrit as the language of men are too numerous to cite in full. That Sanskrit is restricted to representing the male voice is evident from grammatical treatises, literary theory, and literary texts. The grammarian Patañjali (second century BCE) remarks that women lack the capacity to speak Sanskrit properly: Madhav M. Deshpande, *Sociolinguistic Attitudes in India: An Historical Reconstruction* (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1979), p. 26. According to Sanskrit dramaturgy, women should only be portrayed as speaking Sanskrit under very limited circumstances: *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya* (Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 1992), Vol. 2, vv. 17.36–43. The consequences of ignoring this wisdom can be dire, resulting in the aesthetic failure of a text. One theorist, in fact, suggests that the genre of *kāvya* is inferior to plays, since in plays multiple linguistic registers can be expressed so as to avoid the illusion of female characters speaking Sanskrit: Sheldon Pollock, 'From rasa seen to rasa heard', in *Aux abords de la clairière*, (eds) C. Guenzi and S. d'Intino (Paris: Brepols, 2012), pp. 190–91. In a fifth-century Sanskrit play, the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, the Brahman character named Maitreya, who has a rigid sense of social order, laments: 'Really only two things prompt me to laugh: A woman reciting Sanskrit and a man singing a lulling melody (*mama tāvad dvābhyām eva hāsyaṃ jāyate/ striyā saṃskṛtaṃ paṭhantyā, manuṣyeṇa ca kākalīṃ gāyatā/*).' See Kāśīnātha

authorial voices of women have been recorded as far back as the Vedic corpus, and can be found scattered across inscriptional records and anthologized verses in premodernity.[11] Nevertheless, this was uncommon. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, an unprecedented cluster of women authoring full-length Sanskrit texts emerged in the self-consciously multilingual and newly established Vijayanagara successor-states of the South.[12] Still, even against this backdrop, the project of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives Sundarī and Kamalā was unorthodox.

For one thing, the project entailed the entry of these two women into an even more rarefied segment of the Sanskrit world—commentarial production.[13] This marks a departure from other premodern and early modern women writing in Sanskrit. Secondly, the project entailed a division of labour between husband and co-wives, with Sundarī and Kamalā co-authoring their portion of the project together.[14] Ghanaśyāma authored one commentary entitled the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, and the co-wives authored a second accompanying commentary entitled the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*.[15]

Although joint authorship was common among early modern Sanskrit intellectuals, the way in which the trio divided their labour was unusual. The

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Pāṇḍuraṅga Paraba and Vāsudeva Lakṣmaṇa Śarmā Paṇaśīkara (eds), *Mṛcchakaṭikam of Śūdraka with the Commentary of Prithvīdhara* (Bombay: Tukaram Javaji, 1916), p. 69.

[11] Michael Witzel, 'Female rishis and philosophers in the Veda?', *Journal of South Asia Women Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009; J. B. Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature: Sanskrit Poetesses* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2001), Vol. 1; Cynthia Talbot, 'Rudrama-Devi, the female king: gender and political authority in medieval India', in *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization*, (eds) Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 391–430.

[12] See George Meredith Gibbons, 'An Edition of the *Abhinavarāmābhyudaya* of Abhirāmakāmākṣī', PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1978. See J. B. Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature: Sanskrit Poetesses* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2001), Vol. 2, pp. 55–63, 41–55, 37–41.

[13] Lakṣmīdevī Pāyaguṇḍa composed a commentary on Mādhava Ācārya's *Kālamādhava*. In it, she refers to an event in 1792/1793. She was the wife of the commentator Vaidyanātha Pāyaguṇḍa and the mother of Bālasarman (Bālambhaṭṭa) Pāyaguṇḍa who composed the *Dharmaśāstrasaṃgraha*. See J. B. Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature: Kālamādhavalakṣmī by Lakṣmīdevī Pāyaguṇḍa* (Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press, 1941), Vol. 7, pp. xxxiv; xxviii. Another woman Hatī Vidyālaṅkāra was active in the mid-eighteenth century in Banaras. She taught Nyāya philosophy and was active in debates. See Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 55 and fn 29.

[14] Though vastly understudied, shared authorship between family members appears to have been quite common. The only other possible example of joint-authorship involving women authors that I know of is the *Ānandalatikā*. Some editors have attributed this work to the husband-wife pair, Kṛṣṇanātha and Jayantī (1652–1653). This assertion is based on the prologue of the play, in which a character states: 'I have read this text, the *Ānandalatikā*, which was composed by Kṛṣṇanātha with the assistance of his wife (*patnīsahāyena śrīkṛṣṇanāthakavinā viracitam ānandalatikāgrantham adhītavān asmi*).' J. B. Chaudhuri, however, argues that this cannot be verified by the colophons in the extant manuscripts. See Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 35–37.

[15] The *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* with the commentaries, the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, and the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā* have been edited in a printed edition. See J. B. Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature: Drama* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2001), Vol. 3.

husband attended primarily to the Prakrit portions of the text (associated with the female voice) and the wives attended primarily to the Sanskrit portions of the text (associated with the male voice). This move emphatically breaks with the conventional gendering of the languages with which their project engaged. Through their commentaries, the trio set out to demonstrate the Maharashtrian identity of the author Rājaśekhara, in the process chipping away at the highly regulated cosmopolitan and gendered boundaries of Sanskrit linguistic usage.

To write in Sanskrit, whether as a woman or a man, was to write in a uniform, transportable, male, high-caste, and upper-class cosmopolitan language devoid of regional linguistic markers.[16] This cosmopolitanism, identified by Sheldon Pollock, is what enabled Sanskrit to become a language of power for an 'aesthetic state'.[17] Pollock explains:

> Constituted by no imperial state or church and consisting to a large degree in the communicative system itself and its political aesthetic, this order was characterized by a transregional consensus about the presuppositions, nature, and practices of a common culture, as well as a shared set of assumptions about the elements of power—or at least about the ways in which power is reproduced at the level of representation in language.[18]

Underlying this cosmopolitan order, however, is an absolute gendering of the Sanskrit voice as male—an issue that that generally falls outside the scope of Pollock's discussion of Sanskrit cosmopolitanism.[19]

Sundarī and Kamalā, and the labour of gender

Scholars, confronted with Sundarī and Kamalā's authorial production, have expressed remarkable anxiety over its attribution. Did they or did they not write it? Does it express a female voice or is it an artificial female voice?[20] In line with the cosmopolitan expectations of the language, women writing in Sanskrit did not always choose to represent themselves according to their

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[16] For a brief overview of cosmopolitan Sanskrit as a 'largely homogeneous language', see Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 10–19.

[17] On 'aesthetic power' and 'aesthetic state', see ibid., p. 14.

[18] Ibid., p. 19.

[19] Pollock does, however, offer an interesting discussion on how women were imagined in space-contingent sexual taxonomies: ibid., pp. 197–99.

[20] Andrew Ollett, for example, argues that it was really Ghanaśyāma who wrote the commentary: 'The commentary is ascribed to Ghanaśyāma's wives Sundarī and Kamalā, but I believe that Ghanaśyāma ghost-wrote it, or that his wives somehow learned how to uncannily replicate their husband's pretentious style': Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), p. 217, n. 65. Anecdotally, this is the most widely held view and the first question scholars ask upon hearing about the commentaries of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives Sundarī and Kamalā.

ascribed gender, and even when they did this, they did not necessarily present a discernible female subjectivity.[21] A gendered subjectivity was often determined by choice of language, not the other way around.

Anxiety over authorial attribution is not unique to Sundarī and Kamalā but routinely crops up in scholarship on other women who wrote in Sanskrit.[22] We also see related discussions about women *bhakti* poets and female voiced-*rekhti* poetry.[23] Sanskrit scholarship, however, stands out for its overall resistance to gender studies.[24] This is further compounded by a lack of historical scholarship that can locate the labour of women authoring Sanskrit texts in relevant social institutions and contexts.

In what follows, I often refer to Sundarī and Kamalā collectively as 'the co-wives'. Sundarī and Kamalā always refer to themselves in the dual and use the designations 'co-wives (*sapatnī*)' and 'daughters-in-law (*snuṣā*)' in their prefatorial remarks. The commentary is seamlessly co-authored with no distinctions in who wrote what. In line with their own self-designation, I use the term 'the co-wives' to signal their collective labour.

At times I also refer to Sundarī and Kamalā as 'the co-wives' in order to distance the question of authorial identity, as well as to highlight the significance of their familial relationships as a point of access to Sanskrit learning. Although there are good historical grounds for thinking that Sundarī and Kamalā did, in fact, author their commentary, I reject the drive to make a positivist determination as this closes off more productive avenues of enquiry. Instead, I focus on the labour of gender. There are two kinds of labour: 1) the labour of Sanskrit intellectuals, that is, who produces it, who has access

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[21] Cynthia Talbot notes that Queen Rudramadevī from the South Indian Kakatiya kingdom ruling in the thirteenth century referred to herself in both the masculine and feminine gender in her inscriptions: Talbot, 'Rudrama-Devi the female king', pp. 391–430. The manuscripts of a fifteenth-century woman, Abhirāmakāmākṣī, writing in Vijayanagara, presents a similar situation. The author describes herself with the adjective 'not bold' (v. 1.33) and all four manuscripts record this adjective in the masculine gender: Gibbons, 'An Edition of the *Abhinavarāmābhyudaya*', pp. xiv, 403–04, v. 1.33. Parallels can be seen in vernacular literary traditions as well. Harshita Mruthinti Kamath has examined this phenomenon in the context of seventeenth-century Telugu literature emerging out of Tanjavur. See Harshita Mruthinti Kamath, 'Kṣētrayya: The making of a Telugu poet', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2019, pp. 253–82.

[22] See Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 12–14, 35–37; Gibbons, 'An Edition of the *Abhinavarāmābhyudaya*', p. xiv; Potukucci Subrahmanya Sastri (ed.), *Madhurāvijayam: Vīrakamparāyacaritam with the Bhāvaprakāśikākhyavyākhyā* (Kollūru: Śrī Ajantā Ārṭu Prinṭarsu, 1969), pp. 42–45. For a critical discussion of women poets writing in Sanskrit, see Kathryn Marie Sloane Geddes, 'Voices from the Margins: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Classical Sanskrit Women Poets', MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2018.

[23] See Carla Petievich, 'Rekhti: impersonating the feminine in Urdu poetry', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 24, 2001, pp. 75–90; C. M. Naim, 'Transvestic words? The rekhti in Urdu', *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2001, pp. 3–26; Dean Accardi, 'Orientalism and the invention of Kashmiri religion(s)', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 22, 2018, pp. 411–30.

[24] While numerous scholars have written about gender and Sanskrit, overall this remains a siloed area of scholarship in part due to a wider anti-theoretical conservatism in the historically male-dominated fields of philology and Indology. See the work of Robert Goldman, Sally Sutherland Goldman, Stephanie Jamison, Kumkum Roy, and Audrey Truschke for illuminating counterexamples.

to it, and what institutional structures support this; and 2) the labour that the act of gendering performs in the construction of new regional identities within the Sanskrit sphere; this entails thinking about processes of gendering and how ideas of gender are deployed. That some early modern women had access to Sanskrit or were associated with Sanskrit production does not necessarily indicate that this was a historical trajectory specifically propelled by women, for women. This article also examines the value attributed to gender and how it was leveraged in varying political, social, and cultural arenas.

Redefining regional identity

Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā were part of a broader trend of early modern Brahmans who had migrated out of the Western Deccan to other Sanskrit intellectual centres. Negotiating their regional identity from the multilingual Maratha-ruled court of Tanjavur, the commentarial trio makes the case that Rājaśekhara, the author of their source text, was Maharashtrian and wrote in a Maharashtrian-inflected Sanskrit and Prakrit. They drew Marathi vocabulary into their Sanskrit commentary and urged flexibility in Sanskrit conventions in order to accommodate expressions of regional identity. In the way they divide their labour—whether real or imagined—the husband and co-wife trio reposition and re-gender these languages.

The tenth-century poet Rājaśekhara wrote from Kannauj under the patronage of Mahendrapāla (*circa* 885–910) and Mahīpāla (*circa* 912–940) of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, and then later under Yuvarājadeva I of the Kalachuris of Tripuri/Cedi (*circa* 910–950).[25] Although these regions were all decidedly beyond the pale of what we might call Maharashtra, Rājaśekhara referred to his great-grandfather as 'the crown jewel of Maharashtra'.[26] Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives, living in an eighteenth-century world where regional identity had taken on new connotations, made this a defining element of their commentary.

Expanding on this family-identifier, the trio repeatedly asserted Rājaśekhara's 'Maharashtrianness', producing an intra-textual Marathi glossary along the way.[27] Sundarī and Kamalā, for example, say, 'By the phrase "*mahaty eva prabhāte* (in the early dawn)," the poet indicates his own Maharashtrianness. The reason being, Maharashtrians say, "*moṭhyāca pahāṭe* (in the early morning)."'[28] They also flag Maharashtrian sayings and idioms

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[25] V. V. Mirashi suggests that the *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* was produced under the patronage of Yūvarājadeva of the Kalachuris of Tripuri/Cedi (910–950). See V. V. Mirashi, 'Yuvarāja I of Tripurī', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1930, p. 364.

[26] In the *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, Rājaśekhara calls his great-grandfather the '*mahārāṣṭracūḍāmaṇi*'. In the Benaras edition of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, however, Rājaśekhara refers to himself with this title: see Manjula Mitra, *Studies on the Dramas of Rājaśekhara* (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1983), p. 11. For an extended discussion about scholarly opinions on Rājaśekhara's origins, see ibid., pp. 8–15.

[27] For some select examples, see *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, pp. 24, 35, 39, 60, 71, 99, 123, 156, 175, 185, 190, 203.

[28] *mahaty eva prabhāta ity anena nijamahārāṣtratvaṃ kavinā sūcitam| ata eva mo[ṭh]yāca pah[āṭ]e iti mahārāṣṭrā vadanti| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, p. 24 | The printed edition reads *moḍyāca pahāṭe*. Ms. no.

in the text, attending to references that might not register for readers outside the Marathi socio-linguistic sphere.[29] Quoting a line from Rājaśekhara's play—"'What will I do, friend?" This *durdolī* of love is difficult break!'[30] — Ghanaśyāma explains that the word *durdolī* does not really mean 'a tightly tied knot'. Instead, he asserts that it has a specialized meaning among certain caste groups in the Western Deccan. He explains 'Koṅkaṇa and Deśastha Brahmans use the word "*durdolī*" to mean "abundance."'[31]

 By the eighteenth century, it seems that Rājaśekhara's *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* had been abandoned to dusty shelves and practically forgotten.[32] Sundarī and Kamalā lament:

> Some collected it, others copied it, some never touched it, and others hadn't even heard of it. Teachers are equal to students when it comes to its meaning. Ghanaśyāma, our husband, the one to revive this composition, the *Viddhaśāla*, descended to the earth in the land of Jambudvīpa (India) at the wish of sincere readers.[33]

The text, they argue, had been spurned due to a propensity for local usage in both the Sanskrit and Prakrit portions of the play:

> In Maharashtra, because of this commentary, this play of Maharashtrian origin which is but an agitation to people of other origins, will become fun.

> Because of the following and more:

> 1) the beauty but also the trickiness in the arrangement of *deśī* (non-Sanskrit-derived) Prakrit words
> 2) the use of sounds that seem like those in a manuscript with scribal mistakes but are enjoyable for learned people from Mahārāṣṭra, our

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671/JL 672 in the Tanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library reads *moḍyāca pahaṭṭe*. I thank Madhav Deshpande for the suggested emendation of *moṭhyā* for *moḍyā*. It seems the commentators are drawing a parallel between the adjectives *mahat* (great/large) and *moṭha* (great/large) used idiomatically with *prabhātam* and *pahāṭa*, respectively, in the sense of 'early'. Alternatively, the commentators may be emphasizing the use of the intensifying particles *eva* and *ca*. For further examples, see also *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, p. 139.

[29] See also *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, p. 87.

[30] *kiṃ karomi sakhi, durbhedyā premadurdolī| Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, p. 158 ||

[31] *koṅkaṇadeśastha atiśayārthe durdolīśabdaṃ vyavaharanti| Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, pp. 158–59 |

[32] In contrast to the sentiment expressed by Sundarī and Kamalā, Rājaśekhara was quite widely quoted by anthologists and *ālaṅkārikas* at least in earlier periods: Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 5, p. 413–532. My fieldwork indicates that in some contemporary Sanskrit circles within India, Rājaśekhara's works are not included in syllabuses because they are considered 'strange'. For a history of Rājaśekhara's unfavourable reception in the Western academy, see Timothy Earl Bellefleur, 'Reconsidering Rājaśekhara: Performance and Courtly Context in Viddhaśālabhañjikā', MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2012, pp. 4–13.

[33] *eke saṃjagṛhuḥ pare samalikhan yām aspṛśan netare kecin nāma na śuśruvuś ca guravaḥ śiṣyā yadarthe samāḥ| tām ekaḥ kila viddhaśālakṛtim uddhartuṃ satām āśiṣā jambudvīpataleṣu nau patighanaśyāmo 'vatīrṇo bhuvam|| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 19 ||

husband,   Ghanaśyāma,   rescued   the   poet   Rājaśekhara's
if-not-already-elevated play just as the best of boars raised up the sunken
earth.[34]

The question of Maharashtrianness in eighteenth-century Tanjavur was condi-
tioned by the unique position of Tanjavur in a broader history of Brahman
migration out of the Western Deccan.

Marathi, Maharashtrianness, and Deccan Brahmans on the move

Brahman intellectuals on the move (1500–1650)

Like Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā, many early modern Sanskrit intellec-
tual households were on the move. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth
centuries, a steady trickle of Brahmans migrated out of the Konkan and
the Western Deccan, often cycling through various Deccani sultanate courts
en route to Banaras.[35] By the early sixteenth century it is clear that familial
connections between the Western Deccan and Banaras had thickened.
Scholars have suggested that these Brahman intellectual households were
increasingly attracted to Banaras in part because of new economic opportun-
ities, extended circles of elite patrons, and an expansion in the pilgrimage
infrastructure facilitated by the Mughal empire.[36] As Rosalind O'Hanlon has
suggested, the cultural policies of Akbar promoting regional and religious
exchange in the 1570s added further momentum to the intellectual milieu
of Banaras.[37] By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Banaras had
become firmly established as a flourishing centre of 'new' Sanskrit intellec-
tual thought.[38]

These intellectuals in Banaras operated not through a courtly patronage
system but via diversified sources of economic subsistence.[39] Once in
Banaras, many of the Brahmans who had migrated from the Western Deccan
distinguished themselves as experts in legal matters, alongside their

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[34] *vyākhyayaiṣā mahārāṣṭre nāṭikā mahārāṣṭrajā| cāpalaṃ tv anyajātīnāṃ hāsāyaiva bhaviṣyati|| Camat-
kārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 30 *|| deśyaprākṛtasaṃvidhānakuhanābhikhyāmahārāṣṭrasa[ccamyā]lekhakadoṣapustaka-
sadṛgvarṇ[a]pracārādibhiḥ| magnā kolavareṇa bhūr iva ghanaśyāmena nāthena nau na tv āryā yadi
rājaśekharakaver uddhāritā nāṭikā|| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 31 || emended on the basis of Ms. no.
671/JL 672 in the Tanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library.

[35] The Jaḍe and Ārḍe families, for example, had origins in the southern Konkan region. Some
other regions of origin in the Western Deccan include Nanded (the Śeṣas), Pandharpur
(the Padhyes), Nasik, and Paithan (the Śeṣas, the Bhaṭṭas, the Devas). See O'Hanlon, 'Speaking
from Siva's temple', pp. 257, 256–58, 260. Regarding affiliations with Deccani sultanate courts,
see ibid., pp. 256–57.

[36] Sheldon Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India', *The Indian Economic and
Social History Review*, vo. 38, no. 1, 2001, pp. 21–22; O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', p. 254.

[37] O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', p. 202.

[38] For a discussion of how these intellectuals conceptualized their contributions as new (*navya*),
see Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India'.

[39] Ibid., p. 21; Ananya Vajpeyi, 'Śūdradharma and legal treatments of caste', in *Hinduism and Law:
An Introduction*, (eds) Timothy Lubin, Donald R. Davis and Jayanth Krishnan (Cambridge and
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 163.

Sanskrit intellectual and literary activities. At various junctures, over the course of a century—in 1583, 1630/31, 1657, 1664, and 1683—these Brahmans in Banaras brought a translocal clout as they weighed in on disputes about the caste standing of communities in the Western Deccan and the Konkan.[40] Although these rulings were made through Pandit assemblies that included a good number Brahmans from these regions, overall, the assemblies were composed of regionally diverse assembly members.[41]

Among these migrants from the Western Deccan and Konkan, some Brahmans marked themselves as belonging to a community of 'Maharashtra' Brahmans, while in the same documents, other members identified themselves as belonging to specific Brahman subcastes of the Western Deccan, while Brahmans from the Konkan often identified themselves separately and as members of a distinct Konkan region.[42] Certainly, these Brahman families from the Western Deccan and Konkan accumulated material resources along regionally defined caste lines, through marriages, and through active participation in the affairs of relatives and land disputes tied to their family networks there.[43] These Sanskrit intellectuals, however, still placed a premium on the translocal power of Sanskrit intellectual lineages.[44] One of the primary identifiers they used was the broader regional category of 'Southern' pandits.[45]

Although a collective identity defined by the Marathi language had long been variously promulgated by the Vārkarī saints as early as the late thirteenth century, and since the sixteenth century among Maratha troops and service elites, Sanskrit intellectuals had not sought to define themselves in such terms until the close of the seventeenth century.[46] Instead, Sanskrit intellectuals saw themselves as part of a transregional Sanskrit intellectual

[40] O'Hanlon and Minkowski, 'What makes people who they are', pp. 403, 392–98, 382–83; O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', pp. 220–24, 224–28, 229–34.

[41] See O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', p. 231. On occasion, these assemblies were also headed by Brahmans from the Western Deccan. For example, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa (fl. 1570s), the great-grandfather of Gāgā Bhaṭṭa, held a prominent leadership role in an assembly of southern Brahmans: ibid., pp. 217–20. The diversity of the assemblies, however, was crucial to their transregional authority. As O'Hanlon indicates, 'judgements given in other assemblies also emphasized that Brahmans of every region were present, in a way that seems designed to enhance their authority' (ibid., p. 223).

[42] Theodore Benke, 'The Śudrācāraśiromaṇi of Kṛṣṇa Śeṣa: A 16th Century Manual of Dharma for Śūdras', PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, p. 46; O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', pp. 221–23, 226, 229–30.

[43] O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple'.

[44] See, for example, the list of students of Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa, patriarch of the prominent Bhaṭṭa family in Banaras in Haraprasad Shastri, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benares', *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 41, 1912, p. 9.

[45] For a discussion of the regional labels of *dākśiṇātya* and *pañca drāviḍa* used by Brahman communities, see O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 261–64; O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', pp. 213–17. *Drāviḍa /dākṣiṇātya* included regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Konkan, Tailanga (ibid., p. 230). For a history of these categories, see Madhav M. Deshpande, 'Pañca Gauḍa and Pañca Drāviḍa: Contested borders of a traditional classification', *Studia Orientalia Electronica*, vol. 108, 2010, pp. 29–58.

[46] Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 131–32, 141, 144, 150. See also Richard Eaton,

community, even as their activities were increasingly defined by household ventures, which were inherently regionally bounded through kinship relations. This commitment to translocal prestige, well into the seventeenth century, is poignantly illustrated in a commemorative volume, *Kavīndracandrodaya* (*circa* 1650). Written in honour of the Banaras resident and Maharashtrian Brahman Kavīndrācārya, the volume compiled the praise of more than 70 intellectuals from across North India, pointing to an intellectual community that exceeded the boundaries of regional identity.[47]

Marathi in the Sanskrit philological toolbox

In the second half of the seventeenth century, however, we see two parallel trajectories: Śivāji consolidated a Maratha state and Sanskrit intellectuals in Banaras began ruminating on their connections to a Marathi language. These ruminations, however, were not yet a fully fledged articulation of 'Maharashtrianness', which we will see in the work of Ghanaśyāma, and Sundarī and Kamalā down south in eighteenth-century Maratha-ruled Tanjavur. Although these two trajectories may not have developed in direct relation to one another, over the course of the late-seventeenth century, points of connection may have further catalysed reflections on regional-linguistic affiliation among Sanskrit intellectuals with family origins in the Deccan.

From the 1650s onwards Śivāji had begun expanding his territory beyond the bounds of his father's *jagir*.[48] By 1660 he had firmly carved out a polity which included the Deccan Desh and the Konkan and he had begun recruiting Brahmans into administrative positions in large numbers.[49] Śivāji's rule also saw a reintroduction of Sanskrit as a prestige language of central administration.[50] He began using a Sanskrit seal instead of a Persian one and commissioned a lexicon that provided alternative Sanskrit administrative terms to replace the Persian ones.[51] Seeking to shore up his political base, in 1674 Śivāji recruited a prominent Maharashtrian Brahman from Banaras to curate a coronation ceremony that would put to rest debates about his caste

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'The rise of written vernaculars: the Deccan, 1450–1650', in *After Timur Left*, (eds) Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 115–116.

[47] Audrey Truschke, 'Contested history: Brahmanical memories of relations with the Mughals', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2015, pp. 419–52; Pollock, 'The death of Sanskrit', p. 417; Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India', p. 21.

[48] Gordon, *The Marathas*, pp. 62–65.

[49] Ibid., p. 86.

[50] Although Maratha military and service elites employed at courts across the Deccan had firmly established Marathi as a prominent administrative vernacular language, Persian remained an important prestige language well into the seventeenth century. See Sumit Guha, 'Bad language and good language: lexical awareness in the cultural politics of peninsular India ca. 1300–1800', in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, (ed.) Sheldon Pollock (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 50, 54–56. See also Eaton, 'The rise of written vernaculars', pp. 119–23.

[51] Guha, 'Bad language and good language', p. 60. The renewed emphasis on Sanskrit under Śivāji also penetrated letter-writing practices and influenced patronage patterns (ibid., p. 62).

identity.[52] This Maharashtrian Brahman was a well-networked intellectual from a family of Sanskrit powerhouses.[53] Whether through connections of family networks in the Western Deccan, an orientation towards new potential patrons, or other tangential reasons, at this time, grammatically oriented Sanskrit intellectuals in Banaras were becoming increasingly preoccupied about the place of the vernacular in Sanskrit discourse.

In the Sanskrit sphere, experimentation with vernacularity in Sanskrit cultural production was not new. Beginning at the turn of the millennium, scholars have identified a growing regional and vernacular self-awareness in literary texts.[54] The entrance and development of vernacular languages as a philological tool in big debates in Sanskrit was, however, a new phenomenon.[55]

In the Sanskrit intellectual world, grammar and linguistic correctness could be a powerful tool to undo or defend against philosophical detractors.[56] For example, in early seventeenth-century Banaras, the influential grammarian Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita (active *circa* 1550–1630) levelled an attack against the Mādhva philosophical school. Bhaṭṭoji accused Madhva and his followers of using ungrammatical words (*apaśabda*). The accusation stuck and the commentators who followed Bhaṭṭoji spent much of their time justifying these ungrammatical words (*apaśabda*).[57] Folded into this category of 'ungrammatical words' (*apaśabda*) is the implication that such words are, at best, vernacular and, at worst, foreign (*mleccha*).[58]

Within a generation the transition from vernacular language as a potential pitfall in philosophical argumentation to productive philological tool had started to shift. By the mid-seventeenth century, for one reason or another, the authorization of the grammatical efficacy of vernacular languages had begun to penetrate Sanskrit discourses.[59] Around 1650, the grammarian Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa,[60] the nephew of the Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita, offered a vigorous defence of the 'signifying capacity' of vernaculars, using Marathi as his prime

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[52] Vajpeyi, 'Śūdradharma and legal treatments of caste', pp. 154–66; Madhav M. Deshpande, 'Kṣatriyas in the Kali Age? Gāgābhaṭṭa and his opponents', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2010, pp. 95–120; Gordon, *The Marathas*, pp. 86–87.

[53] On the Bhaṭṭa family, see O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 257–58, 260–61; Shastri, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benares'.

[54] Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, '"A cloud turned goose": Sanskrit in the vernacular millennium', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–30.

[55] Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India', pp. 26–27.

[56] See, for example, Jonathan R. Peterson, 'The language of legitimacy and decline: grammar and the recovery of Vedānta in Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita's Tattvakaustubha', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 48, 2020, pp. 23–47 on sectarian grammar in early modern philosophical debates.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā seek to authorize *apaśabda* words in Rājaśekhara's text. For select examples, see *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, p. 23 and *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, p. 23.

[59] In part this may be related to tensions between Mīmāṃsā and *bhakti*. See Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Are there atheists in potholes? Mīmāṃsakas debate the path of bhakti', in *Regional Communities of Devotion in South Asia*, (eds) Gil Ben-Herut, Jon Keune and Anne E. Monius (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 186.

[60] Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa is also called Koṇḍa Bhaṭṭa

example.[61] If Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa was not himself from Maharashtra or a Marathi language-speaker, he must have had in mind interlocuters who could be compelled by such an example.[62]

Regional identification, which had crept in as a tool in 'big debates' on grammar and philosophy, started to emerge more strongly at the same time that the regionally and linguistically defined Maratha state was on the rise.[63] Take, for example, Ananta Deva II, whose family had migrated from somewhere near the Godavari to Banaras.[64] Two generations earlier, his grandfather (fl. 1580) had expressed considerable anxiety about the place of the vernacular in Sanskrit philosophical traditions.[65] At around the time that Gāgā Bhaṭṭa oversaw Śivāji's coronation, Ananta Deva II, despite being a fully committed Sanskrit intellectual, memorialized his family ties to Eknāth, the *bhakti*-poet known for championing Marathi over Sanskrit.[66] The memorialization of this family tie points to the growing role of regional vernacular languages in the toolbox of Sanskrit intellectuals.

It is at this time that we also see the incorporation of vernacular language into Sanskrit commentary as a productive philological tool. Nārāyaṇa Lakṣmīdhara Ārḍe (*circa* 1650–1727) and Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara (fl. 1680–1693),[67] also migrants from the Western Deccan, both used Marathi glosses in their Sanskrit commentaries.[68] In his Mahābhārata commentary,

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[61] Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India', pp. 27–30. Only a couple of decades earlier, Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa, the uncle of Gāgā Bhaṭṭa who performed Śivāji's coronation, argued exactly the opposite, fearing the capacity of vernacular and foreign words to undermine the integrity of Sanskrit grammatical expression in Vedic exegesis (*Mīmāṃsā*) (ibid., p. 29). For the dating of Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa's texts, see P. K. Gode, 'The chronology of the works of Koṇḍabhaṭṭa (a nephew of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita) between A.D. 1610–1660', in his *Studies in Indian Literary History* (Poona: Prof. P. K. Gode Collected Works Publication Committee, 1956), Vol. 3, pp. 207–08.

[62] Scholars variously identify the family as being from as being from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, or the Chittoor District of Tamil Nadu, or simply the broader Deccan region: Peterson, 'The language of legitimacy', p. 28; P. K. Gode, 'The contact of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita and some members of his family with the Keḷadi rulers of Ikkeri between c. A.D. 1592 and 1645', in his *Studies in Indian Literary History*, Vol. 3, pp. 203–06, 206; Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita and the revival of the philosophy of grammar', in *Saṃskṛta-sādhutā: Goodness of Sanskrit. Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok N. Aklujkar*, (eds) Chikafumi Watanabe, Michele Desmarais and Yoshichika Honda (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2012), p. 53.

[63] The orientation of these Brahman intellectuals in Banaras towards the Maratha state may have been further precipitated by a shift in the political priorities of the Mughal empire. See O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 267–68.

[64] On dates and place of origin, see Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Ritual, reflection, and religion: The Devas of Banaras', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, p. 149–50.

[65] Venkatkrishnan, 'Are there atheists in potholes?', p. 186.

[66] Venkatkrishnan, 'Ritual, reflection, and religion', pp. 149–50. It should also be noted that Ananta Deva II had close associations with Gāgā Bhaṭṭa. See O'Hanlon, 'Letters home', p. 232; Vajpeyi, 'Śūdradharma and legal treatments of caste', p. 164, fn 6.

[67] P. K. Gode, 'Nīlakaṇṭhacaturdhara, the commentator of the Mahābhārata: his genealogy and descendants', in his *Studies in Indian Literary History* (Bombay: Singhi Jain Sāstra Śikshāpīth and Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan, 1954), Vol. 2, p. 476, fn 2.

[68] Christopher Minkowski, 'Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's Mantrakāśīkhaṇḍa', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 122, no. 2, 2002, p. 330; P. K. Gode, 'Some authors of the Ārḍe family and their chronology between A.D. 1600 and 1825', in his *Studies in Indian Literary History*, Vol. 3, p. 21.

Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara further offered glosses in Hindavi, Dravidian languages, Persian, Arabic, and possibly Bhojpuri.[69]

This new orientation towards the vernacular, and Marathi in particular, came just as the Sanskrit intellectual centre of Banaras, and the infrastructure that supported it, was collapsing. Rosalind O'Hanlon has suggested that the execution of Dara Shukoh in 1659 precipitated the dismantling of support networks for the Pandit intellectual community in Banaras.[70] With the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, North India experienced a recalibration of courtly centres. Sanskrit intellectuals were drawn away to emerging regional courts such as Tanjavur.

The integration of vernacular Marathi glosses, seen in the late seventeenth-century commentaries of Maharashtrian Sanskrit intellectuals of Banaras, exploded in the commentarial style of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives Sundarī and Kamalā down south in Maratha-ruled Tanjavur in the 1730s.[71] These three commentators turned their Marathi glosses and regional expertise into the central focal point of their commentary on Rājaśekhara's *Viddhaśālabhañjikā.*

Language, lexicons, and Marathi in the broader Deccan

While the Banaras intellectuals from the Western Deccan started to gloss words in Marathi, Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā incorporated this into a broader vision of commentarial practice that displaced grammatical explanations with lexical concerns. Redefining commentarial praxis, Sundarī and Kamalā argued that there was no need to chew-over-what-has-already-been-chewed by rehashing grammatical principles:

Prior[72] grammarians have explained every word in multitudes of dictionaries. Thus, the rules concerning the formation of words have a long-winded

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[69] Minkowski, 'Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara's Mantrakāśīkhaṇḍa', p. 330. There are other examples of vernacular glosses in Sanskrit commentary, but I have not been able to identify any associated dates. For example, the commentator Raṅganātha includes glosses in Malayalam in his commentary on the *Harṣacarita.* See S. K. Pillai (ed.), *Harṣacarita with the Commentary of Srīraṅganātha* (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1958).

[70] O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', p. 267.

[71] The ideas and the work of Banaras intellectuals were making their way south to the Nayaka courts of Tanjavur and Madurai through personal networks in the seventeenth century. This is exemplified by the personal library of the intellectual Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita (fl. 1637) which housed a manuscript sent directly from a member of the famous Maharashtrian Bhaṭṭa family of Banaras: Elaine M. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 50, 52. The last commentary that Ghanaśyāma composed was on Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's *Nīlakaṇṭhavijayacampū*: see Chaudhuri, 'Sanskrit poet Ghanaśyāma', p. 247. On north-south connections at the end of the sixteenth century, see also Yigal Bronner, 'South meets North: Banaras from the perspective of Appayya Dīkṣita', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 10–31.

[72] *Prāc* is sometimes taken to refer to a specific grammatical school—'the eastern grammarians'—or as an umbrella category used to refer to grammarians of a previous generation. For *prāc* as the eastern school of grammarians, see K. V. Abhyankar, 'A short note on paribhāṣā

format that is unbearable to sincere readers. It is chewing-over-what-has-already-been-chewed. Dictionaries and usage are both approved by the learned. As the sayings go: 'grammarians take refuge in usage,' and 'definitely an *ācārya* (learned teacher) is someone in possession of dictionaries'.[73]

They define dictionaries as final authoritative sources and cast grammatical explanations as unnecessary and even distasteful. Likewise, Ghanaśyāma silences his objectors by defending his decision to rely on inflected forms in his exposition rather than grammatical derivations:

> Rivers of inflected verbs and nouns have found their way into the oceans of verbal glossaries, and dictionaries.[74] Here, [in the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*] there are glosses from those in plenty. I have explained all of the words there[75] [in the *Viddhaśālabhañjikā*].[76]

Such a lexically driven approach is not just stated in the commentarial prefaces but is abundantly clear throughout the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā* and the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*. The commentators routinely include Marathi glosses, as well as occasional glosses in Tamil (Drāviḍa) and Kannada, and hash out concerns about undesirable secondary meanings in vernacular languages.[77]

 The focus on lexical form over grammar mirrors a broader trend seen in Tanjavur's cultural production. The politics of cultural production in Tanjavur were influenced by the movement of Marathi-speaking Maratha troops and service elites throughout the broader Deccan, including the Karnatak and Coromandel Coast, as well as by the social, cultural, and political practices of the Tanjavur Nayaka court prior to Maratha rule. By the early seventeenth century, Marathi-speaking Maratha troops were being employed

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works in Sanskrit grammar', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, 1955, p. 158. For *prāc* as a relational term distinguishing between old and new generations of grammarians, see Madhav M. Deshpande, '"Disagreement without disrespect": transitions in a lineage from Bhaṭṭoji to Nāgeśa', *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 34, 35.

[73] *prāgbhiḥ kośacaye same 'pi vivṛtāḥ śabdās tataḥ prakriyā śābdī carvitacarvaṇaṃ sadanupādeyākṛtir vistarā | yadvaiyākaraṇāḥ prayogaśaraṇā eveti yatkośavān ācāryo dhruvam ity ato budhamatāḥ kośāḥ prayogā api|| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 24 ||

[74] While *nighaṇṭu* is often associated with Vedic glossaries, I read it more capaciously following Vogel's note that in South India *nighaṇṭu* is synonymous with *kośa*: Claus Vogel, *Indian Lexicography* (München: P. Kircheim Verlag, 2015), p. 11, fn 1. Thanks to Srilata Raman for bringing this to my attention.

[75] *tat* for *tatra*

[76] *prāpur dhātunighaṇṭukośajaladhīn yās tiṅsubantāpagās tadvyākhyāḥ śataśo 'tra santi vi[v]ṛtāḥ śabdāḥ same tan mayā| Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, v. 10 a/b | emended on the basis of Ms. D. no. 669/JL 670; Ms. no. 2511/s.k. 222; Ms. no. 670/JL 671 in the Tanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library.

[77] Selection of Marathi glosses in the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*: *śṛṅkhalā nigale striyām ity amaramālā| sāṅkhalīti mahārāṣṭrāḥ| p. 24| āsphoṭaṃ ghoṣaṇam| kikalīti mahārāṣṭrāḥ| p. 71| maṣi kajjalarasaḥ| śāyīti mahārāṣṭrāḥ| p. 123.* Selection of references to other vernacular glosses: *śirīṣas tu kapītana iti dhanvantariḥ| śirīti draviḍeṣu dhvaniḥ| p. 35| teṣāṃ vāṇībandha ivasundarījana ity anvayaḥ...'sundarī' iti kannaḍeṣu parihāsadhvaniḥ | p. 175.*

in the tens of thousands in regional states whose military affairs saw them set-tle throughout the broader Deccan.[78] They brought with them a new language of administration and literary expression. The establishment of a new Maratha-ruled court on the far-flung Coromandel Coast, however, forged a new milieu for such Marathi-speaking elites and Brahman intellectuals alike.

In 1676, after becoming involved in the succession struggles of the Tanjavur Nayaka court, Śivājī's half-brother Ekoji swooped in and installed himself on the throne of Tanjavur.[79] What followed was tense military confrontation and negotiation over spheres of influence between Śivājī and Ekoji. Though a formal agreement was eventually reached, this new Maratha court in Tanjavur set itself apart in other ways as well.[80]

Looking to their Nayaka predecessors who had refined the practice of bilin-gual literary production, the Maratha-ruled court of Tanjavur further expanded on this and experimented with new literary forms.[81] These cultural politics extended beyond just literary works, registering, for example, in the production of special Marathi lexicons in Tanjavur. These lexicons included guidance on the gender and conjugation of Marathi words, adhered to earlier Marathi lexical forms, focused on Marathi 'vocabulary and its corruption', and offered glosses in Kannada and Tamil.[82] As Sumit Guha has suggested, they were aimed at a regionally and culturally distanced community of Marathi speakers in a new dynamic polylingual court.[83]

The labour of gender in vernacularizing Sanskrit

The expansion of new regional polities in the Deccan, and the migration of Maratha military elites and Sanskrit scholar households in early modernity, spurred new ways of articulating regional identity. One of the ways in which this manifested was in new philological tools that repositioned the vernacular in relation to Sanskrit. This is also displayed in diverse cultural forms of pro-duction where abstract regional identity was concretized by identifying region-ality with the female body.

Such impulses are seen in the new artistic styles of Maratha painters who combined the cosmopolitan Persianate culture of the Deccani courts with expressions of Maharashtrian regionality. New genres of paintings emerged depicting women in their local attire, namely the nine-yard sari, while men were depicted in the standard cosmopolitan Islamicate dress of 'Hindu' ruling

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[78] Guha, 'Bad language and good language', p. 50; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, pp. 122–23.

[79] Subrahmanyam, 'The politics of fiscal decline', pp. 181–83.

[80] On the signing of an agreement, see ibid., p. 183.

[81] Peterson, 'Multilingual dramas', pp. 288–91. See also Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 313–18; on constructing a political identity in relation to the Nayakas, see Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, pp. 74–75.

[82] Guha, 'Bad language and good language', pp. 63–64.

[83] Guha further states, 'both authors clearly address an expatriate community that is increas-ingly losing touch with its ancestral tongue' (ibid., p. 63). On the production of dictionaries as a response to hybridization, see ibid., p. 55.

elites.[84] These new Maratha paintings also drew on Marathi literary tropes of the mobile warrior juxtaposed to his wives, rooted at home in their regional homeland of the Western Deccan.[85] The female body, a crucial site of contention in debates about regionally bounded social relationships such as caste and kinship, was positioned as the pre-eminent 'matter' in which regionality was signified.[86] Through identification with the female body, regionality, in turn, was articulated as both a cultural code and a bodily substance.[87]

Across diverse forms of cultural production, abstract regional identity was thus concretized by identifying regionality with the female body. It is unsurprising, then, that Sanskrit intellectual production also formed new associations with female bodies as it reconstituted its own relationship to regional identity. In the case of the husband and co-wife trio discussed here, regionality was articulated through a careful deployment of the co-wives' gendered bodies in their joint commentarial project.

The commentaries on Rājaśekhara's *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* were undoubtedly envisioned as a joint project, albeit with divided labour. The co-wives wrote:

May this trio of works (the *Śālabhañjikā* of Rājaśekhara, the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā* of Ghanaśyāma, and the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī* of Sundarī and Kamalā), interconnected like the *tristhalī* cities (of Kashi, Prayag, and Gaya) prosper. If even one were missing, those seeking merit would not accomplish their aim.

If the words of Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā are attached to the *Śālabhañjī*, it can circulate among learned people and not hide on a shelf like the statue-of-a-lady (*śālabhañjī*) carved into a wall.[88]

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[84] See Holly Meredith Shaffer, '"Of Men and Gods, and Things:" The Making of Maratha Art in India and Britain, 1700–1900', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2015, pp. 29–30. In contrast to the Maratha paintings discussed by Holly Shaffer, elite women in the earlier Vijayanagara court adopted Islamicate dress. On Islamicate dress in Vijayanagara see Phillip B. Wagoner, '"Sultan among Hindu Kings": dress, titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu culture at Vijayanagara', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1996, pp. 859–60.

[85] See Shaffer, '"Of Men and Gods, and Things"', pp. 72–73.

[86] See, for example, anxieties around the sexuality of women in the Marathi *lāvaṇī* literature in Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), p. 65. On women in the legal writings of Maharashtrian Brahmans, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Disciplining the Brahmin household: the moral mission of empire in the eighteenth century Maratha state', in *Looking Within, Looking Without: Exploring Households in the Subcontinent through Time. Essays in memory of Nandita Prasad Sahai*, (ed.) Kumkum Roy (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), pp. 1–20, available at https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:4e98e222-b1ca-46a2-9368-027f5ea7edd3, [accessed 28 February 2022].

[87] Anthropologists have emphasized the inseparability of two central components of kinship, namely 'substance (*dhātu*)' and 'code for conduct (*dharma*)', which are particularly evident in the functioning of caste (*jāti*). See McKim Marriott, 'Hindu transactions: diversity without dualism', in *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, (ed.) B. Kapferer (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), pp. 109–42; Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2005), pp. xv–xvi. I suggest that this new idea of regionality also draws on these categories.

[88] *tristhalīva mitho yuktā jayaty eṣā kṛtitrayī| asyām ekāpi ced ūnā kṛtārthāḥ syur na te 'rthikāḥ|| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 33 || *yadi yuktā ghanaśyāmasundarīkamaloktibhiḥ| saṃcaret sālabhañjīyaṃ satsu kuḍyāśrayā na cet|| Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, v. 34 ||

Alluding to the rising popularity among Maharashtrians of performing the *tristhalī-yātrā* from the sixteenth century onwards, the co-wives suggest that a complete understanding of, and wide audience for, Rājaśekhara's play (*nāṭikā*) depended on the circulation of both commentaries together.[89]

The basic form of Sanskrit plays—applicable to almost all genres and sub-genres, including *nāṭikā*—is in fact multilingual. The dialogue is a mix of Sanskrit and various types of Prakrit, which is to say, Middle Indo-Aryan languages with putatively regional characteristics. These languages essentially stand in for vernacular speech.[90] On the whole, Prakrit is cast as the language of women, although it is also spoken by lower-status male characters who are arguably feminized through their lack of social power. Sanskrit is the language of men, though it is occasionally spoken by female characters who transgress socially preferred female roles.[91] Whether due to Prakrit's historically smaller share in literary production or a further marginalization of the language in the second millennium, Sanskrit plays are often circulated with a translation (*chāyā*) of the Prakrit dialogue into Sanskrit.[92]

Given the highly regulated gender conventions of Sanskrit, the husband and co-wife trio divided their labour in a surprising way along the Sanskrit-Prakrit axis. Ghanaśyāma's commentary, the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, acts as more of an annotated translation, focusing on Prakrit issues (female voice), with only occasional quick notes on the Sanskrit. By contrast, Sundarī and Kamalā's commentary, the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, provides extensive comments focused primarily on the Sanskrit dialogue (male voice) and Sanskrit issues. While Ghanaśyāma's concern with Prakrit might be representative of a renewed interest in, and prestige associated with, knowing Prakrit grammar which emerged between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the underlying gender identifications of the languages remained intact.[93] This striking division of labour between husband and co-wives, then, might be seen to disrupt the binary nexus of associations: Sanskrit/male versus Prakrit/female. While the relationship between Sanskrit and Prakrit does not exactly replicate the relationship between Sanskrit and the vernacular (that is, Marathi), Prakrit sets a fundamental precedent for imagined intersections between gender and place.[94]

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[89] On Maharashtrian women performing the *tristhalī-yātrā*, see Irina Glushkova, 'Tīrtha-Yātrā in Maharashtra: recorded and imagined', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 86, 2005, pp. 179–201.

[90] Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*, p. 176.

[91] See *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni: With the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī*, vol. 2, vv. 17.36–43.

[92] On the question of Prakrit's decline, see Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*, Chapter 7.

[93] On the renewed interest in Prakrit grammar and prestige of Prakrit learning in the latter part of the second millennium, see ibid., pp. 173, 181–185. On the revival of Prakrit and gender, see also ibid., p. 182.

[94] Regarding the positioning of Prakrit and vernacular languages as regional languages, Ollett points out, 'With the first full articulated theory of the regional in India, Prakrit discourses give regional-language discourses a way of understanding themselves in relation to Sanskrit, as we have seen in the case of the earliest grammars of Kannada and Telugu': ibid., p. 171.

Prakrit occupies a precarious in-betweenness. It is imagined as a pre-eminent cosmopolitan literary language (even if 'not-quite-so high' as Sanskrit) and the metonymized female voice; it is also imagined as a low literary register of the common people, which simulates a regionality, namely *Mahārāṣṭrī*.[95] In Ghanaśyāma's imagination, Prakrit is intimately associated with a highly vernacular register.[96] He signals this through his reading of Rājaśekhara's Prakrit, pointing out the many places where Rājaśekhara uses *deśī* (regional) words.[97] While the husband and co-wife trio cast both Rājaśekhara's Sanskrit and Prakrit as representative of a regional identity, the reassociation of these languages with gendered bodies through the division of labour between husband and co-wives points to the force of new early modern ideologies of gender and regionality.

The inversion of the literary languages' encoded genders, combined with a renegotiation of the boundaries between Sanskrit and the vernacular was not an accidental aberration. It mirrors a transaction between gender, the cosmopolitan, and the vernacular that was already taking place in Tanjavur at the court of Raghunātha Nāyaka (r. *circa* 1597–1626) just prior to the arrival of the Marathas.[98]

At least two women at Raghunātha's court were involved in Sanskrit literary production.[99] Rāmabhadrāmbā, who was trained in eight languages, composed an important Sanskrit biography of Raghunātha;[100] and Madhuravāṇī translated Raghunātha's *Telugu Rāmāyaṇa* into Sanskrit. Madhuravāṇī recounts the conditions under which she produced the translation, explaining that Raghunātha had specifically sought out a woman to translate his vernacular Telugu composition into Sanskrit.[101] The gendered bodies of Madhuravāṇī, Sundarī, and Kamalā are positioned as mediating the changing relationship between Sanskrit and the vernaculars while also concretizing regional identity. Though Sanskrit was never impervious to social, cultural, and political

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[95] For the figuration of Prakrit as feminine and also 'not-quite-so high' as Sanskrit, see ibid., pp. 119–20. For Daṇḍin's conceptualization of the regionality of Prakrit, see ibid., p. 131. For Prakrit as a 'low' literary register, see Jesse Ross Knutson, *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry: The Sena Salon of Bengal and Beyond* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2016), pp. 47–71.

[96] Ghanaśyāma's own Prakrit writings are, in fact, heavily inflected with Marathi vocabulary and verbal roots. For a discussion of this, see A. N. Upadhye (ed.), *Ānandasundarī: A Saṭṭaka, or Drama in Prākrit, with the Sanskrit Commentary of Bhaṭṭanātha* (Banaras: Motilal Banarsidass, 1955), p. 19.

[97] For a complete list, see T. G. Mainkar, *Studies in Sanskrit Dramatic Criticism* (Delhi, Patna and Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), pp. 67–68.

[98] For dates, see Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, p. 145.

[99] It is not entirely clear whether these women were wives or concubines. The distinction between wives and concubines is likely to have been much more complex than the binary implies, with a further designation of 'sword-wives' whose claim over heir production was murky. See ibid., p. 100.

[100] For an extended discussion of Rāmabhadrāmbā's text, the *Raghunāthābhyudaya*, see Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*, pp. 191–98.

[101] As Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam put it, when Raghunātha seeks out a translator, 'of course it never crosses his mind that it could be anyone other than a woman': Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*, p. 200.

changes, it would have required significant and novel forces of influence for these changes to register in Sanskrit production.[102]

Gender and the labour of intellectual production

Labour in Sanskrit intellectual households

Brahman articulations of Maharashtrianness were driven by highly localized and historically contingent factors. There were, however, also broader trends emerging throughout the subcontinent that influenced Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā's household project. The household, for example, was emerging as a crucial site of economic, political, and cultural activity.[103] In the arena of cultural production, the household facilitated access to the cultural capital of specialized training and family style.[104]

The rise of Sanskrit scholar households between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has recently been elucidated by scholars tracking the migration of Maharashtrian Brahman households to the 'hyper-competitive' city of Banaras.[105] These households sought to consolidate and maximize their scholarly resources through marital alliances, building up manuscript collections, and participation in local assemblies.[106] The absence of centralized state patronage meant that they had to diversity their sources of income at a time when their respective Brahman communities in the Western Deccan were also accruing wealth and 'nested rights' associated with the rise of early capitalism.[107]

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[102] On the tendency of Sanskrit texts and archives to repress historicity through a robust facade of convention, see Vajpeyi, 'Śūdradharma and legal treatments of caste', pp. 159–60. Examining Śūdradharma digests, Ananya Vajpeyi observes, 'we may read and re-read the Śūdra archive to try and find in it its historical conditions to which it responds. It remains almost completely unyielding...the elision of *historicity* from Sanskrit discourse is related to its repression of *subalternity*' (ibid., p. 159).

[103] On the significance of family firms and portfolio capitalism, see Karen Leonard, 'The "great firm" theory of the decline of the Mughal empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1979, pp. 151–67; Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C. A. Bayly, 'Portfolio capitalists and the political economy of early modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1988, pp. 401–24. More recently, Hannah Archambault has expanded on these insights, arguing that in the Deccan, it was the *household*, not the state, that constituted the primary political unit. See Hannah Lord Archambault, 'Geographies of Influence: Two Afghan Military Households in 17th and 18th Century South India', PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018.

[104] On the household and access to specialized training, see O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', p. 261.

[105] O'Hanlon, 'Letters home'; O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple'; Christopher Minkowski, Rosalind O'Hanlon and Anand Venkatkrishnan (eds), *Scholar Intellectuals in Early Modern India: Discipline, Sect, Lineage and Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

[106] See, for example, O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 255, 258–59, 264–66.

[107] Pollock, 'New intellectuals in seventeenth-century India', p. 21; Vajpeyi, 'Śūdradharma and legal treatments of caste', p. 163. On the 'nested' rights of Deśmukh families, see Gordon, *The Marathas*, pp. 26–27. Deśmukh families accumulated overlapping rights connected to land and revenue, judicial and administrative functions, and military recruitment and ritual leadership. On these rights as a distinguishing feature in Maratha Brahman communities, see David Washbrook,

Brahman intellectuals in Tanjavur did not appear to follow the same economic trajectory, operating instead through centralized court patronage.[108] The Maratha-ruled court of Tanjavur aggressively endowed tax-free *agrahāras* (villages) to Brahmans. Nevertheless, the household was an important means of consolidating 'intellectual capital'.[109] Like their counterparts in Banaras this was also facilitated through marital alliances or quasi-familial intellectual lineages.[110] Intellectual capital in turn manifested in material capital. For example, in 1693 King Śāhaji endowed a particularly large *agrahāra* in Thiruvisanallur (also called Śāhajirājapuram).[111] The 45 Brahmans who received land grants there received shares according to their intellectual stature.[112]

Across the board, it was through the Sanskrit intellectual households that budding intellectuals gained access to the social prestige of intellectual lineages. This ranged from cross-pollination of ideas between family members, to the joint authorship of texts, to the joint appearance of fathers and sons, brothers, and scholar-brothers in debates.[113] As O'Hanlon has pointed out in the case of Banaras households:

> As sons matured, they might write alongside their fathers and in some cases complete their works. Gagabhatta completed his father's digest the *Dinakaroddyota*. Samkarabhatta edited and added to the work of his father Nilakanthabhatta.... Krsna Sesa very likely completed the *Govindārṇava* of his father Narasimha.[114]

Such joint production blurred the lines of intellectual ownership.[115] This is similarly evident in the commentary of Sundarī and Kamalā. They deploy what we might think of as Ghanaśyāma's signature commentarial remarks: first, the regular citation of regional, particularly Marathi, words (*iti mahārāṣṭrāḥ*);[116] second, flagging *dhvani* when no *dhvani* is readily apparent

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'The Maratha Brahmin model in South India: an afterword', *The Indian Economic aand Social History Review*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2010, p. 609.

[108] Washbrook, 'The Maratha Brahmin model'.

[109] I borrow the term 'intellectual capital' from O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', p. 258.

[110] On intellectual networks, see T. S. Kuppuswami Sastri, 'Ramabhadra-Dikshita and the southern poets of his time', *The Indian Antiquary,* vol. 33, May 1904, pp. 126–42, 176–96. For example, Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita studied grammar with Cokkanātha Dīkṣita and was then married off to his eldest daughter (ibid., p. 129). See also Raghavan, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, pp. 38–60.

[111] Raghavan, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, pp. 37–38.

[112] Ibid., pp. 38–39.

[113] O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 257–60.

[114] Ibid., p. 258.

[115] The question of intellectual ownership was connected to debates about whether a father had property rights over his son or wife. In this regard, O' Hanlon cites differing views from two cousins of the Śeṣa family: ibid., p. 260.

[116] For extended discussion, see Mainkar, *Studies in Sanskrit Dramatic Criticism*, pp. 67–68 and 79–80.

(*iti dhvaniḥ*);[117] third, the problematizing of literary usages (*iti kaveḥ pramādaḥ/ acāturyam*);[118] and fourth, the negotiation of linguistic flexibility ('*x*' *kṣantavyaḥ (m)/dayanīyaḥ(m)*).[119] Based on the commonalities of commentarial vocabulary across the works of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives, scholars have either hastily attributed this to stylistic imitation or else raised doubts about the attribution of the *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī* to Sundarī and Kamalā.[120]

Anxieties about stylistic similarity are predicated on a Eurocentric model of authorship that privileges the idea of individuality. This historically maligned paradigm fails to take account of the centrality of family enterprises in early modern South Asia. In this context, collective and even composite authorship were forms of cultural capital and prestige across multiple contexts of cultural production. This has been particularly well-theorized by B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer who have identified the early modern development of a coherent 'family style' with stylistic trademarks in family painting work-shops.[121] That the co-wives' commentary would resemble Ghanaśyāma's is nei-ther unusual nor evidence of rote imitation.

Joint authorship and family style

In Ghanaśyāma's family, several other household members also took to the family enterprise. Sundarī and Kamalā, who frequently cite Ghanaśyāma's commentaries, also refer to Ghanaśyāma's elder brother Cidambara, who appears to have been a commentator.[122] Likewise, Ghanaśyāma's sons, along-side Sundarī and Kamalā, also became commentators. One son, Candraśekhara, wrote a commentary on his father's original composition, the *Ḍamaruka*. His other son, Govardhana, authored a commentary on the *Ghaṭakarparakāvya*, and a text called the *Rukmiṇīcampū*.[123] These texts require further study. However, in a small sample of preamble verses from the sons we already see indicators of a shared stylistic vocabulary.

Ghanaśyāma's commentarial style is often quite terse. He, as well as Sundarī and Kamalā, quickly move from lexical notes to authorizing examples culled

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[117] I suggest that *dhvani* is most frequently used to denote something like *lakṣaṇam*, or second-ary, meaning. My anonymous reviewer has offered the compelling suggestion that 'Ghanaśyāma used "*dhvani*" as a quite literal comment on the way an expression sounds when spoken aloud.' The problem of Ghanaśyāma's use of *dhvani* has been noted by Mainkar, who indicates that it seems to denote a number of functions: ibid., p. 66.

[118] For a discussion of Ghanaśyāma's critiques, see ibid., pp. 61–65 and 76.

[119] Ibid., p. 76.

[120] While these signature remarks are widely used throughout Ghanaśyāma's commentaries on *Abhijñānaśākuntala* and *Uttararāmacarita*, they rarely appear in the *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, which is more of a standard gloss (*chāyā*) of the Prakrit with occasional interpretive remarks.

[121] B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India* (Zurich: Artibus Asiae and Museum Rietberg, 1992), p. 312.

[122] See *Camatkārataraṅgiṇī*, pp. 25, 44. The *Kalpataru* of Ghanaśyāma's brother is no longer extant: Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 3, p. 12.

[123] Ramaswami Sastri, 'Paṇḍita Ghanaśyāma', pp. 235–36; V. Raghavan et al. (eds), *New Catalogus Catalogorum: Gāyatrīkavaca-Cahāgītā* (Madras: University of Madras, 1949), Vol. 6, pp. 368, 183–84.

from literary sources without much explanation. For Ghanaśyāma, the adoption of a concise style is a point of great pride. He asserts:

> Moreover, those who act like Raṅgarāja send noble people wandering in the wilderness of poor wording.[124] O sober-minded people! Since I am a virtual Mallinātha, with concise and essential explanations, this is a blessing to all you wise people.[125] For idiots, what's even the point of ten million words? A single lamp is enough in the dark for the god Indra, who wields a lightning-bolt. For the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, what's even the point of ten thousand candles?[126]

Drawing from his father's laconic commentarial style, Govardhana carries on the tradition, valuing brevity and efficient productivity:

> I praise my own father, Ghanaśyāma, who is partial to the word '*śeṣa*' (the commentarial expression 'this is what is left-out') who knows the *śāstras* with nothing left-out (*aśeṣa)*. The pain of my blindness became easily bearable through the sight of the scriptures which he bestowed upon me.

> Even though I am slow-witted, by the grace of my father, my learning is flawless. I, the poet named Govardhana, just now quickly produced a concise commentary on the *Ghaṭakarpara*.[127]

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[124] Raṅgarāja appears to be another commentator, but I am uncertain as to the specific referent. A Sanskrit intellectual named Raṅganātha Sūri (a possible kenning for Raṅgarāja) was active in Tanjavur during the reign of Śāhaji (1684–1710). See Raghavan, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, pp. 31–32. P. K. Gode mentions two commentators named Raṅganātha. One Raṅganatha active after 1685 wrote a commentary on the *Vāsavadattā* called the *Cūrṇikā*. The commentator Kṛṣṇabhaṭṭa Ārḍe, a Maharashtrian Brahman in Benares, names himself as the son of another Raṅganātha (d. *circa* 1745), who wrote a commentary on the *Daśakumāracarita*. This Raṅganātha would have been a close contemporary of Ghanaśyāma. See P. K. Gode, 'The dates of Nārāyaṇa Dīkṣita and other commentators of the Vāsavadattā of Subandhu', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 21, no. 1/2, 1939–40, pp. 136 and 143 fns 1–2.

[125] On Mallinātha's commentarial style, see Deven M. Patel, *Text to Tradition: The Naiṣadhīyacarita and Literary Community in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 60–63. Patel notes the special resonance that Mallinātha still has in Maharashtra today, albeit contrasting Ghanaśyāma's sentiment: 'in present day Maharashtra, there is an expression of "doing a Mallināthi" (*mallināthī-karaṇam*) if one goes on and on about something' (p. 63).

[126] *apy āryān bhramayanti kūktivipine ye raṅgarājanti te he dhīrā mitasārasūktibhir ahaṃ śrīmallināthāmi yat| sāśīr vaḥ sudhiyāṃ kim artham adhiyām uktyarbudaṃ vajriṇo dīpo 'laṃ timire suyodhanapitur dīpāyutaiḥ kiṃ phalam|| Prāṇapratiṣṭhā,* v. 8 || emended on the basis of Ms. D. no. 669/JL 670; Ms. no. 2511/s.k. 222; Ms. no. 670/JL 671 in the Tanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library. I thank my anonymous reviewer for translation suggestions on *pādas* a and b.

[127] *nijajanakaghanaśyāmaṃ śeṣavacaḥpriyam aśeṣaśāstrajñam| vande yad dattāgamadṛśā sukhasahaṃ mamāndhyaduḥkham abhūt|| mūḍho 'pi govardhananāmadheyaḥ pitṛprasādād anavadyavidyaḥ| sadyaḥ kaviḥ satvarayā tanoti saṅkṣiptaṭīkām ghaṭakarparasya|| Ghaṭakarparavyākhyā* of Govardhana || as printed in Ramaswami Sastri, 'Paṇḍita Ghanaśyāma', pp. 235–36.

Candraśekhara, on the other hand, dutifully employs the idiosyncratic Marathi maxim of *jāmātṛśodham* (a son-in-law's wrongheaded revisions) used by his father, warning critics to hold their tongue.[128] He says:

> I bow to the illustrious lord Śiva as Kāmeśvara and the goddess Śakti as Kāmeśvarī,[129] and to my father who remains only in name, to fulfil my wish that I, Candraśekhara, should compose a commentary on the *Ḍamaruka*, the work of Ghanaśyāma who holds the title of 'most excellent of poets'.

> Those who don't make a son-in-law's wrongheaded revisions shall appreciate the entire array of verbal roots and so forth, like a palette of mineral-paints, in the gallery of dazzling pictures that is the *Ḍamaruka*, composed by my venerable father.[130]

The reference to the misguided, critical son-in-law draws directly on the introductory comments of Ghanaśyāma, who states:

> I have eschewed chewing-over-what-has-already-been-chewed. Wise scholars, drink up the wine of my words, and then without a son-in-law's wrongheaded revisions, belch silence, the incarnation of Śiva-Dakṣiṇāmūrti.[131]

Although the warning that critics should hold their tongues is directed at a wide audience of potential critics, this signature phrase betrays a trace of anxiety about the potential departure of a younger family member from the family style by casting the son-in-law as the exemplary critic. As scholars of Indian painting have pointed out, although families of painters developed stylistic trademarks, new generations made their own revisions, an act that might register as a form of critique.[132]

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[128] Apte notes that the Sanskrit maxim of the wrongheaded revisions of the son-in-law (*jāmātṛśuddhinyāya*) comes from a Marathi saying (*jāṃvaīśodha*). See Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 2003), Appendix B, p. 61.

[129] Here Kāmeśvara/Kāmeśvarī refers to Śiva/Śakti. Ghanaśyāma composed the *Ḍamaruka* after Śiva appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to compose the work: Chitra Shukla, 'Three One-Act Plays of Ghanaśyāma', *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, vol. 35, no. 1–2, 1985, p. 40.

[130] *śrīmatkāmeśvaraṃ devaṃ devīṃ kāmeśvarīṃ punaḥ| pitaraṃ śabdaśeṣaṃ ca vāñchāpūrtyai namāmy ahaṃ|| ghanaśyāmasya sumahākaviśabdajuṣaḥ kṛteḥ| kuryāṃ ḍamarukasyāhaṃ ṭippaṇaṃ candraśekharaḥ|| jāmātṛśodham atrākurvadbhir dhātuvistarādyakhilaṃ| ḍamarukacitrāvalyāṃ jñeyaṃ mattātapādaracitāyāṃ|| Ḍamarukavyākhyā* of Candraśekhara || as printed in Hultzsch, *Reports on Sanskrit Manuscripts in Southern India*, Vol. 3, p. 66, no. 1674; see also Ramaswami Sastri, 'Paṇḍita Ghanaśyāma', p. 235.

[131] *tyaktaṃ carvitacarvaṇaṃ mama budhā jāmātṛśodhaṃ vinā pītvā vāṅmadhu maunam udgirayata śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtitām||* Prāṇapratiṣṭhā, v. 10 c/d || emended on the basis of Ms. no. 670/JL 671; Ms. no. 2511/s.k. 222 in the Tanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is a form of Śiva associated with knowledge.

[132] For example, the painter Nainsukh deployed the family trademark of rolling hills and small circular-leafed stylized trees alongside his father and brother. He also, however, pioneered a new porcelain-like idealized female face. This new idealized face came to replace the style of an older

The regional, political, and economic factors in the development of 'family style' in Indian painting may have been different from that of Sanskrit intellectual production. Nonetheless, the rising significance of the household in early modernity was a far-reaching structural change. The cultural sphere of early modern Indian painting offers a productive point of reference for how the household facilitated access to cultural capital. In painter families, for example, it was common to pass down master sketches, underdrawings, and plans for paintings from which the next generation could work.[133] Similarly, Ghanaśyāma's annotated translation (*chāyā*) provided the commentarial outline upon which Sundarī and Kamalā built.

While the particularities of education for women in these early modern Brahman households have yet to be uncovered, in general family homes were a crucial locus of education. This has been observed by Rosalind O'Hanlon in the context of Maharashtrian Brahman families in Banaras. Although Banaras was full of great sectarian *maṭhas*, much of the Sanskrit education took place in small 'private houses'. O'Hanlon has pointed out that these 'private houses' in turn facilitated the exchange of sons between families. A son might be sent to another household and then be married into that family. Thus, in effect, they received their training in their wife's family home.[134]

J. B. Chaudhuri has speculated that Ghanaśyāma and his first wife were married as children, and that his second wife, whom he married after the age of 29, would have been substantially younger.[135] Given the structure of access to Sanskrit training, it is possible that Ghanaśyāma's wives were trained in Sanskrit, either alongside him or by him in the case of the younger second wife. There is certainly evidence of such arrangements in the nineteenth century.[136] Although the details of the Sanskrit education of women in the

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generation. It was then carried forward by his sons and nephews: Goswamy and Fischer, *Pahari Masters*, p. 274. On subtle modes of critique within early modern Sanskrit lineages, see Deshpande, 'Disagreement without disrespect', pp. 32–49.

[133] Goswamy and Fischer, *Pahari Masters*, p. 272.

[134] O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's temple', pp. 257–58.

[135] Sundarī is mentioned in all of Ghanaśyāma's extant works, beginning with the *Dhātukośa*. While Ghanaśyāma does not provide his exact age in this work, he calls himself a 'youth'(*kiśoraka*). Such a designation is closely aligned with the moniker 'little boy' (*bālaka*), which he uses in the *Rāmāyaṇacampū*. In this instance he gives his age as 18: Chaudhuri, 'Sanskrit poet Ghanaśyāma', p. 245. We don't have a firm age of marriage for Ghanaśyāma and Sundarī, but J. B. Chaudhuri speculates that according to custom they would have married quite young. See ibid., p. 238. References to Kamalā, on the other hand, only start appearing after Ghanaśyāma becomes minister to King Tukkoji I at the age of 30—an indication, perhaps, of his newfound socioeconomic status as a member of the courtly elite. For debates about Ghanaśyāma's year of birth, see Chandramouli S. Naikar, *Saṭṭaka Literature: A Study* (Dharwad: Medhā Publishers, 1993), p. 107.

[136] See, for example, Nañjamma (b. 1841). She was trained by her father alongside her wayward husband in Mysore. See Chinya V. Ravishankar, *Sons of Sarasvatī: Late Exemplars of the Indian Intellectual Tradition* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black in association with Ashoka University, 2017), p. 91. Thanks to my anonymous reviewer for bringing this reference to my attention. It is worth noting that such practices were also seen in the context of painter family ateliers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Examining hereditary Nathadwara painting families, Tryna Lyons has demonstrated that it was quite common for women to be trained in painting when

eighteenth century have yet to be uncovered, what we can say for sure is that women scholars who were not part of royal households gained access to Sanskrit through intellectual households.[137]

Conclusion: Positioning gender in the royal courts of early modern South India

The emergence of the household as a significant political and economic unit was not the only early modern shift that impacted on the gendering of social and cultural spaces in the broader Deccan, Karnatak, and Coromandel Coast regions. From the Vijayanagara empire until its fragmentation, women were becoming increasingly visible in historical records. The early decades of the Vijayanagara empire saw the first of several royal-affiliated women composing full-length Sanskrit historical and literary works. Gaṅgādevī (active *circa* 1343–1379), who wrote the dynastic memoir the *Madhurāvijaya*, was either the wife or concubine of the Vijayanagara prince, Kamparāya.[138] New visibility and new roles for women seemed to have emerged with greater consistency, however, as Vijayanagara's power waned and new states were formed.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, power was recalibrated in the empire of Vijayanagara. As the state expanded territorially, it became increasingly reliant on military elites (*nāyakas*) to govern these annexed regions. These military governors could accumulate significant political and economic clout and eventually began establishing new regional states and royal households throughout the Karnatak and Coromandel Coast.[139] The conditions for such social mobility, particularly the rise of new royal households, were the same ones that made elite women visible and, at times, prominent actors.

Just as the Vijayanagara empire was beginning to fragment, another woman at court, Tirumalāmbā (active *circa* 1529–1542), distinguished herself in the Sanskrit arena with a royal biography of the Vijayanagara king, Acyutarāya. Though not the chief queen, she was an influential consort.[140] Her public persona is amplified by her association with the founding of a new state. When the low-born military commander Sevappa gained favour at the Vijayanagara

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entering the household of their in-laws as children. Lyons explains, 'Girls worked alongside their brothers as children, brides had studied with their husbands or mothers-in-law after marriage, and in one case a young woman had actually been taught by her father-in-law (a well-known artist)': see Tryna Lyons, *The Artists of Nathadwara: The Practice of Painting in Rajasthan* (Bloomington and Ahmedabad: Indiana University Press and Mapin, 2004), pp. 227–28.

[137] See, for example, Abhirāmakāmākṣī of the Ḍiṇḍima family: Gibbons, 'An Edition of the *Abhinavarāmābhyudaya*'; Jayantī: Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 35–37; and Lakṣmīdevī Pāyaguṇḍa: Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 7.

[138] In most cases, there is disagreement about whether these women were wives or concubines. Regarding the debated status of Gaṅgādevī, see B.A. Dodamani, *Gaṅgādevī's Madhuravijayam: A Literary Study* (Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 2008), pp. 9–12. See also Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 31–34.

[139] Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, pp. 10–11.

[140] On the identity of Tirumalāmbā, see Chaudhuri (ed.), *Contribution of Women to Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 55–63.

court, his marriage to Tirumalāmbā's sister was arranged. As a dowry, he was granted the governorship of Tanjavur where he subsequently established an independent Nayaka court.[141] The Nayaka court of Tanjavur, which had particularly uneasy successions, then saw two more women from the newly minted royal household enter the public sphere of Sanskrit literary production: Rāmabhadrāmbā (active *circa* 1597–1626) and Madhuravāṇī (active *circa* 1597–1626).[142]

The Vijayanagara successor states, with newly established royal households, saw a relatively large number of royal successions that brought queens to the throne as paramount rulers: in Ikkeri, Cennamāji (r. 1673–1697) and Vīrammāji (r. 1757–1763); in Madurai, Maṅkammāḷ (r. 1691–1707) and Mīnākṣī (1732–1739); and in Maratha-ruled Tanjavur, Sujāna Bāī (1736–1738).[143] The dynamic politics of these courts were further punctuated by increased political and economic engagement with European actors. Dutch East India Company archival records indicate several instances of trade negotiations being overseen by court women. For almost a decade, the courtier 'Wengama' (active 1658–1666) liaised with the Dutch on economic matters as a representative of the Nayaka Tanjavur.[144] At the Nayaka court of Ikkeri, the courtier 'Maribassuama' (1681–1684) was a point person in the discussion of trade matters with the Dutch.[145]

The fluid social situation through which women found new visibility and agency might also be seen as a moment of social uncertainty. Sometimes this uncertainty crystalized in royal or scholastic authority, as in the case of Ghanaśyāma and his co-wives Sundarī and Kamalā; in other instances, it inspired new projects of social regulation. In Maratha-ruled Tanjavur there was increased investment in new genres of texts treating *strīdharma* or 'women's dharma' (that is, the ideal conduct and social obligations of women). The powerful minister Tryambaka (active *circa* 1684–1730) systematized and indexed all such concerns in a single standalone treatise on *strīdharma* that catalogues the minutiae of daily activities prescribed for women.[146] King Śāhaji, under whom Tryambaka served as minister, composed several works on thematics of *strīdharma*, while the queen mother Dīpāmbā commissioned a Marathi text on the subject entitled *Pativratādharma.*[147] Even

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[141] Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, pp. 66–67.

[142] Both Rāmabhadrāmbā and Madhuravāṇī were either concubines or wives of Raghunātha Nāyaka. For the dates of Raghunātha's reign and circumstances of his accession, see ibid., pp. 142–45.

[143] Ibid., pp. 138–39, 173, 158.

[144] As referred to in the Dutch records. See ibid., pp. 239–40, 327–28.

[145] As referred to in the Dutch records. See ibid., pp. 226–28, 319–21.

[146] Tryambaka states: 'At his mother's command (jananīnideśavacasā), Tryambakayajvan has gathered together those sacred laws relating to women and now proclaims them one by one so as they appear in the lawbooks the *purāṇas* and so on': Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife (Stridharmapaddhati) of Tryambakayajvan* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 32. On the unusualness of this project, see ibid., pp. 6–7. Tryambaka is described as 'second in power' under Śāhaji (r. 1684–1712) and maintained his powerful position under Śarabhoji (r. 1712–1730): Bes, *The Heirs of Vijayanagara*, pp. 244–45.

[147] Leslie, *The Perfect Wife*, pp. 17–18 and 21–22.

a popular Marathi text on food and consumption composed under the patronage of Dīpāmbā included what Anand Venkatkrishnan refers to as a 'legalistic section on women's duties (*strīdharma*) in a medicalised discussion of the female body and sexual performance'.[148] These *strīdharma* texts, which project the desire to regulate every detail of women's social activities, their bodies, and their sexuality, are also a record of a social fabric in flux, which made it possible for women to find new avenues of access to Sanskrit and public roles alike.

These social changes came at a time when Sanskrit was no longer the primary language of power or among the primary means for producing cosmopolitan subjects. Although discrete centres of Sanskrit intellectual production existed well into early modernity, this kind of Sanskrit thought usually struggled to circulate widely or elicit comment from a broader community of readers.[149] In many respects the concerns of these texts had become too hyperlocalized to register outside their region of production. Attending to the labour of gender makes these hyperlocal concerns—spurred by migration and changes to social and political structures—more legible and intelligible.

In the case of the household project of Ghanaśyāma, Sundarī, and Kamalā, several new insights emerge: first, the incorporation of vernacularity in the Sanskrit philological toolbox was facilitated through kinship networks even as modes of regional identification shifted according to very local contexts and politics; second, processes of gendering were constitutive forces in the articulation of more abstract concepts such as regional identity; and third, one of the many outcomes of the household's increasing prominence was the cultivation of a 'family style' in scholar households; this offered a new rubric for women's access to Sanskrit. The labour of gender is the thread connecting all of these. It is what turns obscure texts like the commentary of Sundarī and Kamalā into valuable early modern archives.

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[148] Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Leaving Kashi: Sanskrit knowledge and cultures of consumption in eighteenth-century South India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2020, p. 571.

[149] Pollock, 'The death of Sanskrit', pp. 413–14.