

Kumārasambhava 3.15 Kālidāsa's Sources for Śaiva Theology

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In his *Kumārasambhava* Kālidāsa, when describing the wish of the gods for a son of Śiva, makes Indra say the following:

*amī hi vīryaprabhavaṃ bhavasya jayāya senānyam uśanti devāḥ /
sa ca tvadekeṣunipātasādhyo brahmāṅgabhūr brāhmaṇi yojitātmā // 3.15 //*¹

The verse is translated by Otto WALTER as follows:

Denn die Götter wünschen, um den Sieg davonzutragen, den Sohn aus Schiwas
Kraft als ihren Herzog. Der Gott aber, den Du durch das Niederfallen nur
eines Deiner Pfeile bezwingen könntest, hat sich ganz in Brahman versenkt,
und mit Hersagen von heiligen Sprüchen berührt er die brahman-heiligen Stel-
len des Körpers.²

The sense of *brahmāṅgabhūḥ* in the last quarter of the verse remains opaque in this translation and has remained so in all the others which I could check.³ For it to be meaningful we first have to reverse the position of statements in Pāda c and d. KĀLE in his translation has done this: "... who has concentrated his mind on Brahman, can be subdued (managed) by the fall of your arrow only."⁴ His translation of *eka* gives the right emphasis in the context, because what is relevant here is not that Kāma would need only *one* arrow, but that *only his* arrow can accomplish the objective: the birth of

¹ The variant readings given in the editions (*harasya* for *bhavasya*, *-hāryo* for *-sādhyo* and *brahma-
niyojitātmā*) are not relevant for our context.

² Otto WALTER, *Der Kumārasambhava oder die Geburt des Kriegsgottes*, München-Leipzig, 1913.

³ *Kumāra Sambhava, Kālidāsa's Carmen*, edidit Adolphus Fridericus STENZLER, Berlin/London, MDCCCXXXVIII; M. R. KĀLE, *Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava Cantos I-VIII*, Delhi, 1981; Bernadette TUBINI, *Kalidasa, La naissance de Kumara*, Gallimard, 1958; Renate SYED, *Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava*, Reinbek, 1993.

⁴ M. R. KĀLE, *Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava Cantos I-VIII* (see n. 3 above).

Kumāra!⁵ We would assume that the fourth Pāda gives the reason why it is only through Kāma's arrows that he can be conquered, that is, why he is invincible by ordinary means, a quality that is exactly the reason why the gods wish Śiva's offspring for their purpose.

But we shall first look at Mallinātha's commentary on the fourth Pāda, which has been the source for WALTER's and many other translations that we may ignore for the present purpose:

[He is] the abode [*bhūḥ* = *sthānam*] of the *brahmans*, i.e. the mantras of Sadyojāta etc. [and] the *aṅgas*, i.e. the mantras called *hṛdaya* etc. The sense [of this qualification] is that he has performed the ritual placing (*nyāsa*) of [these] mantras [onto his body].⁶

There is reason to assume that Mallinātha was influenced by the undoubtedly more coherent interpretation of the earliest commentator on the *Kumārasambhava*,⁷ Vallabhadeva, who says on *brahmāṅgabhūḥ* after discarding two interpretations of others:

But we say that [*brahmāṅga* means] *brahmans* and *aṅgas* and these are specific well-known mantras; their source (*bhūḥ* = *prabhavaḥ*) [i.e. Śiva, is therefore *brahmāṅgabhūḥ*], because these mantras originate from him (*taḥ*).⁸

⁵ Cf. Vallabhadeva on the first part of the verse: *ataś ca tvadanyaḥ ka iva vaśīkartum īso bhavet*. For the text of Vallabhadeva's commentary the edition by M. S. NARAYANA MURTI (*Vallabhadeva's Kommentar (Śārada-Version) zum Kumārasambhava des Kālidāsa*, Wiesbaden, 1980) remains the most reliable. Gautam PATEL's edition (*Kumārasambhavam [With the Commentary of Vallabhadeva]*, Ahmedabad, 1986) is methodologically weak, as it selects a Devanāgarī paper manuscript "as the base text because it is found to be the best preserved and faultless MS." (p. 8) As HOUSMAN says in his famous polemical article (A. E. HOUSMAN, "The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism", in: *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman*, collected and edited by J. Wiggle and F. R. Goodyear, Volume III 1915-1936, Cambridge, 1972) one must wonder why the intrinsic worth of the readings of a particular manuscript can be damaged through mechanical processes.

⁶ *brahmaṅgām sadyojātādīmantrāṅgām aṅgānām hṛdayādīmantrāṅgām bhūḥ sthānam brahmāṅgabhūḥ / kṛtamantranyāsa ity arthaḥ (The Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa with the Commentary of Mallinātha [. . .], ed. N. Bh. PARVANĪKARA and Kāśīnātha Pāduranga PARABA, Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1886.)*

⁷ In his commentary on *Kumārasambhava* 1.35 Mallinātha quotes Vallabhadeva by name.

⁸ *vayaṃ tu brūmah / brahmāṅgāni ca mantraviśeṣāś caiva prasiddhās teṣāṃ bhūḥ prabhavaḥ / tatprabhavatvān mantrāṅgām*. Gautam PATEL's text hardly makes sense (my addition in pointed brackets): *brahmaṅgāni 'ṅgāni pañcaśaḥ mantraviśeṣāś śaivāgamaprasiddhās teṣāṃ bhūḥ prabhavaḥ, teṣāṃ tatsambhavatvā(n) mantrāṅgām*. It adds the numbers of these mantras, namely five and six, and states that they are well-known in the Śaivāgamas, but the editor apparently did not understand the point of *brahmāṅgāni aṅgāni* and therefore accepted the reading of the "faultless" Devanāgarī manuscript against all the others!

The five *brahma*- and six *aṅgamantras* are indeed well-known to an author like Valabhadeva, as they form the very basis of the Tantric Śaiva ritual system that was wide-spread in Kashmir during his lifetime. These eleven mantras form the so-called *mantrasaṃhitā* or *śivasāṃhitā*⁹ to be recited in certain rituals. They are formed with four parts, (1) *oṃ*, (2) the monosyllabic seed-syllable (*bija*) that defines this mantra as Tantric,¹⁰ (3) a word in the dative and (4) the concluding formula (*jāti*). The *brahma-mantras*, as given by Kṣemarāja according to the mantric system of the *Svacchanda*, would be the following:¹¹

oṃ kṣaṃ īśānamūrdhne namaḥ

oṃ yaṃ tatpuruṣavaktrāya namaḥ

The five *brahmamantras* *oṃ raṃ aghoraḥṛdayāya namaḥ*

oṃ vaṃ vāmadevaguhyāya namaḥ

oṃ laṃ sadyojātāmūrtaye namaḥ

The effective part of these mantras are the *bijas*,¹² here the *bijas* of the five elements, which differ according to the mantric system of the Tantra that is used. The *Sārdhatriśatikālottaratantra* (1.9c),¹³ for instance, teaches that these *bijas* are formed by *h* followed by the five short vowels and *anusvāra*, i. e. *hoṃ* for *kṣaṃ*, then *heṃ*, *huṃ*, *hiṃ*, *haṃ*.¹⁴

⁹ HÉLÈNE BRUNNER-LACHAUX, *Somaśambhupaddhati*, Première Partie, Pondichéry, 1963, p. 45 (vs. 1.51).

¹⁰ Pace STAAL: "To sum up, it is not possible to make a systematic distinction between Vedic, Tantric, and other Hindu mantras." FRITS STAAL, "Vedic Mantras", in: *Mantra*, ed. HARVEY ALPIER, Albany, 1989, p. 63.

¹¹ See *The Swacchanda-tantra with commentary by Kshemarāja*, ed. by MADHUSUDAN KAU. SHĀSTRĪ, [Vol. 1], Bombay 1921 (Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, 31), p. 41 (vs. 1.46cd).

¹² For the Śaiva theologian Abhinavagupta the *bija* is effective, because it partakes of the fullness of consciousness in as much as it is not confined by an object to be expressed (*vācya*): in a sense the mantra is powerful, because it has no conventional meaning (*Tantrāloka* 4.141).

¹³ *Sārdhatriśatikālottarāgama avec le commentaire de Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha*, édition critique par N. R. BHATT, Pondichéry, 1979.

¹⁴ See Rāmakaṇṭha's commentary on the verse for the justification of the doctrine that *o* and *e* are short here.

oṃ hām hṛdayāya namaḥ
oṃ hīm śirase svāhā
oṃ hūṃ śikhāyai vaṣaṭ
oṃ haīm kavacāya huṃ
oṃ hauṃ netrebhyaḥ vaṣaṭ
oṃ haḥ astrāya phaṭ

The six *aṅgamantras*¹⁵

The *brahmantras* are used for instance in the ritual purification of the body in the worshipper's daily schedule (*nityakarma*): in order to purify the body with sacrificial ash (*bhasmasnāna*) the mantras are ritually placed (*nyāsa*) onto the body through dusting the parts of the body that correspond to the mantra with ash, i.e. the head while reciting the *Īśāna*-mantra etc.¹⁶ This is what Mallinātha refers to, but his commentary is a serious misinterpretation, for it is not Śiva who performs the *nyāsa* on his body, but—if we follow this line of interpretation—the essentially formless deity (*niṣkalaśiva*) has created himself a body through these mantras.¹⁷ The Śiva who can be perceived by the gods is a form created by these mantras, whereas the formless Śiva is the source of these mantras. It seems that Mallinātha, although aware of the doctrinal background of Vallabhadeva's interpretation, cannot make sense of it—he also gives the *brahmantras* in the wrong sequence¹⁸—, whereas Vallabhadeva gives us a concise, but sound Tantric interpretation of the passage.

And this interpretation would indeed provide us with the reason appropriate for the context: Precisely because Śiva's body is formed out of the mantras that are the instruments for the creation and destruction of the universe, the gods have reason to believe that his offspring will inherit this power, and be able to defeat the demon. From the

¹⁵ See HÉLÈNE BRUNNER, "Les Membres de Śiva", in: *Asiatische Studien* 40.1 (1986), pp. 89-132, and *Svacchandatantra* 1.71-72.

¹⁶ See *Somaśambhupaddhati*, 1.39: *Īśatapurūṣāghoraguhyakājātaśambaraiḥ / krameṇoddhūlayen mūrdhavadaktrahṛdguhyaviḡrahān //*. See *Sārdhatriśatikālottara*, 2.10cd and 4.2cd-3.

¹⁷ See for instance *Mṛgendratāntra* (ed. Madhusūdan Kaul SHĀSTRĪ, Bombay, 1930 [Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, 50], *vidyāpāda*, 1.3.8cd-9ab: "His body, starting from the head, is made of five mantras that are conducive to the five acts, namely *Īśāna* (*īśa*), *Tatpuruṣa*, *Aghora*, *Vāma*[*deva*] and *Sadyojāta* (*aja*)."
(*tadvapuḥ pañcabhir mantraiḥ pañcakṛtyopayogibhiḥ // īśatapurūṣāghoravāmājair mastakādīkam /*) Cf. also *Pūrvakāmikā* 4.327 (quoted in BRUNNER 1986 [see n. 15 above], p. 104): *saddśivam [. . .] brahmāṅgākṛtavigraham*.

¹⁸ The series beginning with *Sadyojāta* is derived from the Vedic *brahmantras* (*sadyojātaṃ prapadyāmi . . .*) that occur in the *Taittirīyāranyaka* (*prapāṭhaka* 10, *anuvāka* 43-47 in *Sāyaṇa*'s; *prapāṭhaka* 6, *anuvāka* 43-47 in *Bhāskara*'s text), but if the Tantric form together with the *aṅgas* is meant, the sequence starts always with *Īśāna*!

perspective of a Kashmirian of the tenth century like Vallabhadeva this makes perfect sense; even the *vīrya* in Pāda a rings with a hidden sense: besides meaning semen, it is also the technical term for the power of a mantra.¹⁹ To go back to a more unspecific meaning of *brahmāṅgabhūḥ* like ‘born from the body of Brahmā’, as suggested by other commentators²⁰ is not satisfying,²¹ but the question remains whether Vallabhadeva’s interpretation is anachronistic. We know of the practices referred to above from texts that cannot be dated with any certainty: their terminus ante quem is provided by dated Nepalese palm leaf manuscripts and commentaries by the Kashmirian exegetes like, in the case of the Mṛgendra, Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha (early tenth century), which leave us with perhaps the ninth century. We might also imagine that the eleven mantras which form the core of the ritual system of the Tantric Śaivas cannot be a late development and might have been part of the Śaiva canon that must have existed in the seventh century.²² We know that Kālidāsa lived most probably in the fourth or fifth century AD, which would mean that a further gap of two centuries has to be explained. An alternative interpretation that would not upset the historical framework would be to understand *brahmāṅga* as *brahmaṇām aṅgāni* and to take it as a reference to the use of the five Vedic *brahmantras* in the practice of the Pāśupatas. We can see from the *Pāśupatasūtra* that the five mantras play a decisive role in their practice and that these mantras are divided into parts in the Sūtras themselves. As Pāśupata Śaivism must predate Tantric Śaivism,²³ we could thus solve the incongruence between Vallabhadeva’s interpretation and Kālidāsa’s date. But is it more plausible? I think not, because we would then have to regard *brahmāṅgabhūḥ* as meaning no more than *brahmabhūḥ*, in other words *aṅga* would be redundant. Furthermore *aṅga*, unlike *brahma*, does not

¹⁹ See Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka* 30.121 (*The Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta*, ed. [but in fact only reprinted] by R. C. DWIVEDI and Navajivan RASTOGI, Vol. VII, Delhi, 1987), and *Śivasūtra* 1.22, which predates Vallabhadeva (*The Śivasūtravimarsinī of Kṣemarāja* [Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies 1], ed. by J. C. CHATTERJI, Srinagar, 1911.)

²⁰ See M. R. KALE, *Kālidāsa’s Kumārasaṃbhava Cantos I-VIII* (see n. 3 above), commentary, p. 56.

²¹ One might wonder, why the most simple interpretation for *brahmāṅgabhūḥ*, “arisen from the body of Brahmā”, is not the obvious solution. The episode in Sarga II, 53ff could be taken in favour of this interpretation, that is, Brahmā declines only because of his role as a Creator, but remains the ultimate source of power. But this is contradicted in vs. 58, where he describes Śiva as superior to himself and Viṣṇu.

²² We know this much from a reference in the *Harṣacarita*. There Bāṇa describes a Śaiva practitioner, “who has the whole Śaiva canon on the tip of his tongue . . .” (*jihvāgrasthitasarvasaivasamhitātībhāreṇeva*, ed. KALE, p. 47, l. 6/7.)

²³ See Alexis SANDERSON, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions”, in: *The World’s Religions: The Religions of Asia*, ed. by Friedhelm Hardy, London, 1990.

seem to be a technical term in the Pāśupata sources of which I am aware and we do not know of a Pāśupata practice similar to the Tantric [*brahma*]kalānyāsa, in which the parts of the five Vedic mantras are invoked singly with or without their powers or any other similar practice that would justify such an expression.²⁴

One may also wonder how serious one should take a doctrinal allusion in a Kāvya that is necessarily guided by other rules and may therefore by its very nature misrepresent the doctrine alluded to. Even the next attribute of Śīva in the poem, *brahmaṇi yojitāmā*, could be seen to contradict Vallabhadeva's interpretation, because the highest deity of the Tantras would not be in need of meditation on the absolute. But there are no rules on how to refer to theology in a Kāvya and the fact remains that Vallabhadeva's interpretation is the only one that makes sense in the wider context and this can hardly be accidental. We therefore have to conclude that there remains the possibility that not only proto-Purāṇas,²⁵ but also proto-Tantras were among Kālidāsa's sources.

²⁴ One instance of such a practice can be found of in a text of unknown religious affiliation: *oṃ aghorebhyo hṛdayāya namaḥ / atha ghorebhyaḥ śirase svāhā / ghoraghoratarebhyaḥ sikhāyai vausaḥ / sarvebhyo kavacāya huṃ / sarvaṃ sarvebhyo netratrayāya vaṣaḥ / namaḥ te rudrarūpebhyaḥ astrāya phaḥ* / (Rāmadulāra SṚMHA [ed.]: *Collected Works of Aghora Manuscripts*, Vārāṇasī, 1986, p. 1)

²⁵ Ludo ROCHER (*The Purāṇas* [A History of Indian Literature II.3], Wiesbaden, 1986, p. 89) takes it for granted that the parallels between some Purāṇas and the *Kumārasambhava* point to an influence of Purāṇas on Kālidāsa. There is also a study by HENSGEN of the parallels between the *Kumārasambhava* and the *Śīvapurāṇa* (Hans HENSGEN, *Kalidasa's Kumarasambhava und seine Quellen*, PhD dissertation, Bonn, 1953). Even if HENSGEN's line of reasoning, in which he excludes the possibility that the *Śīvapurāṇa* could have been on the receiving side, were compelling, it would not amount to much, for it would only mean that a prototype of the story which runs parallel to the *Kumārasambhava* was known to Kālidāsa. The rest of the Purāṇa may be much later than this story, and for the last chapter, the *Vāyavīya-Saṃhitā*, this is not difficult to establish: it talks of "*śīvaśāstra*" when referring to what seems to be its own doctrine and in the edition this is made clear even in the colophon. It incorporates doctrines which are clearly lifted from Tantric sources, as for instance the *brahmakalānyāsa* in 22.32-36 and introduces doctrines in a way which makes the borrowing explicit: *śīvaśāstre śīvenaiva śīvāyai kathitasya tu / . . .* (23.1). The *brahma*- and *aṅgamantras* as well as the *mūlamantra* are mentioned in the first chapter (*pañcabrahmabhir aṅgaiś ca . . .* 1.25.42), which makes one suspect a rather more pervasive influence of Tantric material.