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**On the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, Brahman Migrations,  
 and Brāhmī Paleography**

(For Frits Staal)

**Introduction**

It is well-known that the *Mahābhārata* has come down to us in two recensions, the Northern and the Southern. The editors of the Poona Critical Edition (1933-70)<sup>1</sup> of the epic determined, in the process of collating and isolating the archetype of the epic, that its Northern Recension (NR) constitutes in general what is called in textual scholarship the *editio simplicior*, the naive or the original text, and they created the Critical Edition (CE) from the irreducible archetype of the NR texts, the Śārada codex of the Kashmir region in the northwest of South Asia. They found likewise that the Southern Recension (SR) was generically an *editio ornatior*, an ornate text, a version made consciously and systematically: all hundred Kaurava brothers get named, all but a few with the pejorative *du* prefix; the 18 parvans of NR rise to 24 in the SR, with many insertions and transpositions of crucial episodes within *parvans* (those of Śakuntalā and Yayāti, for example, in the *Ādiparvan*); further, the SR is overlaid with a Brahmanical ideology, already incipient in the NR.

Of even greater interest was their discovery that the Malayalam version of the SR texts was itself an *editio simplicior*, albeit of the SR-*ornatio* text: it was the shortest of

the SR texts which included the Telugu-Grantha versions of the SR tradition. It also aligned itself with the Śārada version of the NR texts. This made no geographical sense, as was noticed forthrightly by V.S.Sukthankar, the life spirit behind the CE.<sup>2</sup> Logically, when a text radiates over a wide area, the versions at the farthest belts of radiation tend to be at greatest variance with the founding text, more so, than those in the inner belts: we see this in the eastward radiation of the Śārada text, the first formation of Sukthankar's  $\gamma$ -sub-recension (Sukthankar 1933: lxxiii; see below, Section A, for Sukthankar's master chart of recensions and versions) and the North-Eastern versions in Nepali, Maithili, and Bengali scripts. By a similar logic for the southward radiation of the epic along the well traveled and traditional *dakṣiṇāpatha* as the transmission route,<sup>3</sup> the Malayalam version, being at the outermost extent of the *Mahābhārata* radiation, should also be far more differentiated than those, like the Tamil (Grantha) and Telugu versions, in the intervening space. Yet it was the shortest of the Southern Recension texts, being to it what the Śārada codex was to the NR (Dandekar 1961 [XI]: xlix). More anomalously, the Malayalam version was also found to align itself regularly with the Śārada text, "a fact all the more impressive because M[alayalam], a Southern version, hails from the province at the opposite end of India from the province of Ś[ārada], a Northern version" (Sukthankar 1933 [I]: lxxiv)—indeed, across the vast buffer zone of the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu version of the SR *Mahābhārata* tradition between itself and the Northern Recension texts. In fact, some of the grossest inflations of the text and thus possibly the latest are found to occur in the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions (see below).

The preparation of the CE of the *Mahābhārata* was not contingent on solutions to these anomalies, so we have a consensus Critical Edition of the text, but I believe that the

seeming anomalies right themselves out, opening thereby a way to a correct assessment of the textual history of the SR text of the epic and perhaps the *Mahābhārata* tradition itself, if we approach the entire problem from the perspective of Brahman migrations to the south, the irreducible human agency that brought Sanskrit texts—oral or literate—to peninsular India through the dakṣiṇāpatha. As we will see, all the *Mahābhārata* manuscripts that went to Poona [Pune] from peninsular India were from Brahman centers of learning, or facilities with intimate links to Brahman communities of the area. The textual history and transmission of the epic are thus inextricably intertwined with the Brahman migrations to the south. We will also see that the *Mahābhārata* passes on to non-Brahman groups in time, both in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, to form staples of the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and *kathakalī* repertoires in the former and that of the *kūttu* repertory in the latter, but there can be little doubt that its first migrations to South India were in Brahman hands.

In on-going work,<sup>4</sup> I show that two distinct waves of Brahmans arrived in the Tamil-Kerala country in the pre-modern period from the Vedic regions of Northern India, adhering to two separate *śrauta* praxises, the first wearing their traditional hair tuft--*kuṭumi* in Tamil--in front and thus collectively known as Pūrvaśikhā, and the second, Aparāśikhā, wearing it toward the back, as a pony tail (See Illustrations A and B respectively).<sup>5</sup> I address below the question if other Brahmans or Brahman groups arrived in the Tamil country for our historical period, 50 BCE to 1350 CE. We will see that only these two Brahmans groups can be linked to srautism, and thus to a Vedic home, extant or in epigraphy. Moreover, as we will see, between them, they exhaust all

the Brahman groups of the area in Thurston (1909), our most important ethnographic source of Brahman groups.

My specific thesis with respect to the Brahman migrations of the two groups and the epic is that what Sukthankar isolates as the Śārada text, his archetype for the epic and basis for the CE of *Mahābhārata* epic or a text very close to it, say \*Śārada version, came to the Tamil country with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans by the beginnings of the Common Era (CE): these Brahmans with their fronted tuft are well attested in the Sangam poetry, ca. 50 BCE to 250 CE, and they created from the \*Śārada text what has come down to us as SR in the first four or five centuries of CE. I will designate this \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the SR of the *Mahābhārata*. This \*Śārada text present in the Sangam Tamil country, being made in the first half of the millennium CE into the \*Pūrvaśikhā SR text, supplied the knowledge of the epic displayed in the poetry of the Sangam anthologies, these perhaps being composed simultaneously with the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, the basis perhaps even for a Sangam Era translation of the epic, Perutēvanār's lost *Pāratam*.<sup>6</sup> At the close of the Sangam period of Tamil history, brought about by the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, ca. 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> CE, a far-reaching disruptive moment in Tamil history, a branch of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans moved to the Malabar region of Kerala, later the historical Nambudiri Brahmans of Kerala, through the Palghat gaps, a travel route already in long use,<sup>7</sup> with the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, the text remaining there in relative isolation till 1920's when summoned to Poona for the CE. Further, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text remained behind in the Tamil country as well with the rump Pūrvaśikhā group, the historically Tamil-speaking Śōḷiya Brahmans, the formative Brahman component of the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism in 7-9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and thus transfusing the Kṛṣṇa myths of the *Mahābhārata*, especially

from its *khila* (or appendix) portions, the *Harivaṅśa*, into the emerging Vaiṣṇava *Bhakti* poetry.

I will be designating this the  $\Sigma$ -text: it is still an SR text and is identical to the text that went to Malabar with the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, but I have designated a Greek letter for it as it will host Sukthankar’s  $\sigma$ -text (see Section A below for Sukthankar’s master chart of the epic’s different recensions and script-based versions): the  $\sigma$ -text is an imaginary text he constructs from the evidence in the manuscripts that came to Poona for collation purposes. He sees that all Grantha-Telugu versions of the epic were of the SR mould, but unlike the Malayalam version of the SR with its allegiance to the \*Śārada text of the NR tradition, the Grantha-Telugu texts’ allegiance lies with a longer, inflated version of NR, part of the  $\gamma$ -family of texts. The SR mould in this complex is my  $\Sigma$ -text, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text resident in the Tamil country after the departure of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās to Malabar through the Palghat gaps and finding itself hosting the arrival of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans and their NR  $\sigma$ -text. The SR-NR admixture seen in the Grantha-Telugu versions—an SR mould but with great infusions of *métier*, what comes to be called “excesses” of the SR text, from an NR text-- is one of the more direct proofs in support of the thesis advanced here: Sukthankar’s hypothetical  $\sigma$ -text, derived by him entirely from textual evidence of his manuscripts, is verified by the evidence from the Brahman migrations.

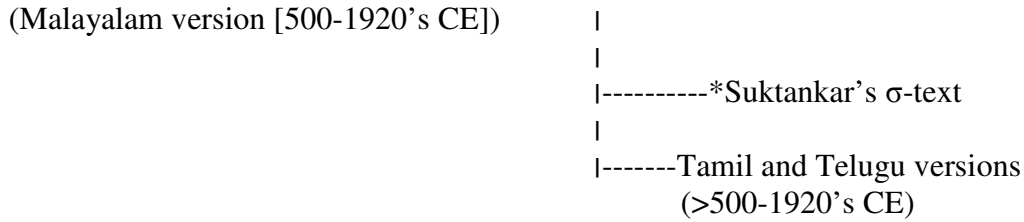
I would be suggesting that this text came with the second Brahman group of my study, beginning to arrive at the upper peninsular regions from 5<sup>th</sup> century CE onward, reaching the Tamil country proper in significant numbers by 8<sup>th</sup> CE. Their arrival in the Tamil country is one of the best documented instances of large scale migrations of people

anywhere in pre-modern history. Elsewhere I characterize them as the Burton Stein Brahmans, after the historian's path-breaking analysis of their pivotal role in the history Tamil Nadu from the pre-modern times to the modern period although his extreme stress on local autonomy, as a segmentary feature of the Cōḷa state, has been questioned and moderated (Karashima 1984; Champakalakshmi 2001).<sup>8</sup> The Pallavas (4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, CE), later the Cōḷas (10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) and the subsequent Pāṇḍya and Nāyaka kingdoms, are their patrons, and they constitute the subject of the famous Pallava-Cōḷa Copper Plate epigraphy, with every immigrant's name, the number of shares of the land granted to his family, his Veda *śākhā* in the form of its *sūtra*, his *gotra*, his titles of Vedic learning, and in the most elaborate deeds, his place of domicile before arrival in the Tamil country recorded in copper plates that regularly turned up at the tilling of the paddy fields of the Tamil country throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century. The initial deeds show them settling in the north and north-east parts of the Tamil country, the Tonṭaimaṅṭalam area and its northern outskirts in the Vēnkata hills and what is southern Andhra Pradesh today, and later deeds, the Kaveri delta. Their places of domicile before arrival in the Tamil country are, in most cases, villages in southern Andhra Pradesh, but these Brahmans as a whole are traceable from their *Śrauta Sūtra* traditions ultimately to the Mathurā region of the Yamunā river (see below). And these show them to be following different śrauta traditions from those of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans.

A stemma chart of the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata* epic would look like this:

\*Sārada Text (ca. 150 BCE)  
 |  
 \*Pūrvaśikhā Text (ca. 50 BCE-500 CE)

Nambudiri \*Pūrvaśikhā text----- -|-----\*Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhā text (Σ-text)



I seek below to correlate the above stemma chart of the SR, first with its putative agents, the Brahmans and their migrations to the peninsular region from their Vedic homelands, and secondly with the requisite paleography for the literate transcriptions of the texts. We will see that the findings presented here in terms of the relevant human agency and script substantially extend our current understanding of the rise of the *Mahābhārata* tradition. The *communis opinio* of our ideas about this may be reduced to what may be called the Hildebeitel-Witzel model: the Hildebeitel (2001; 2005) part of the model addressing issues relating to the literate redaction of the epic by a human agency, an inter- or trans-generational “committee of out of sorts Brahmans,” ca. 150 BCE and the Witzel (2005) half providing a possible venue for this textualization event in the reformist Hindu-Vedic kingdom, like the Śuṅga dynasty, promoting the Vedic traditions, possibly the core *métier* of the epic deriving from a Vedic event, the Ten King’s Battle referred to at RV 7.18.5-10; 33. 3, 5. The work presented here may be said to address the default conclusions from this model: can we characterize the Brahmanical redactorial agency with any historical precision? What script aided the redactorial process, and what might have been the physical manuscript aiding the textualization? Further, I address how this nascent text, what I have designated as \*Śārada text, came to the south by the Sangam age serving as a template for the creation of the first SR text, the \*Pūrvaśikhā

text, thus explaining the anomalies of the textual history of the SR listed above from Sukthankar.

In sum, then, a version of the epic close to the Śārada text, \*Sarada text, leaves North India sometime after its redaction, ca.250-150 BCE, with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins in a \*Southern Brāhmī script<sup>9</sup>, most likely the parent of the extant Grantha script, in palm leaf manuscript or birch bark.<sup>10</sup> The SR of the epic is forged from this in the following half-millennium, reaching a final form by 500 CE, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, the Grantha script taking shape in the process, the palm leaves of South India with the iron stylus technology of writing serving the transcription. About this time, both the text and script go to the Malabar area of Kerala with one branch of the Pūrvaśikhā group which emerges in time as the historical Nambudiri group, and goes into seeming hibernation for the next 1500 years till summoned to Poona for the preparation of the CE. This is the text that came to Poona in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1920's, which the CE editors found to be the shortest version of the SR texts and thus anomalous.

What has not been recognized is that the \*Pūrvaśikhā text (the Σ-text in my designation; see below for more details) remains with the rump Śōliya Pūrvaśikhā group in the Tamil country, playing a far more active role in the subsequent history of the peninsular region. It shapes the Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism, emerging in the centuries following the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, all four Brahman Ālvārs being by tradition Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās. It also hosts the σ-Aparaśikhā text as it arrives in the Tamil country ca. 8<sup>th</sup> century onward and shapes the subsequent textual history of the epic in the Tamil country, resulting in the Tamil and Telugu versions. I present these findings in the following sequence:



**Section A** sets forth the relevant details of the epic in its different recensions and versions.

**Section B** is concerned with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins under the following aspects:

- i. the origins of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, their śrauta traditions, and their migration southward.
- ii. their presence in the Sangam Tamil country and the creation of the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the *Mahābhārata*.
- iii. the Kaṣabhra Interregnum and the dispersal of the Pūrvaśikhā group.
- iv. the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās and \*Pūrvaśikhā text in the Malabar area of the emerging Kerala.
- v. the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, and the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism.
- vi. the \*Pūrvaśikhā text and the Poona Critical Edition

**Section C** examines the Aparāśikhā Brahmins and their bearing on the textual history of the *Mahābhārata*:

- i. the origins of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins, their Śrauta traditions and their arrival in the Tamil country.
- ii. the Pallava period epigraphy about the Aparāśikhā Brahmins.
- iii. the Cōḷa period epigraphy about the Aparāśikhā Brahmins.
- iv. the emergence of the Aparāśikhā Śrīvaiṣṇavism in its Ācārya phase.

- v. the Tamil and Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata*.
- vi. the Tamil and Telugu *Mahābhārata* and the Poona Critical Edition.

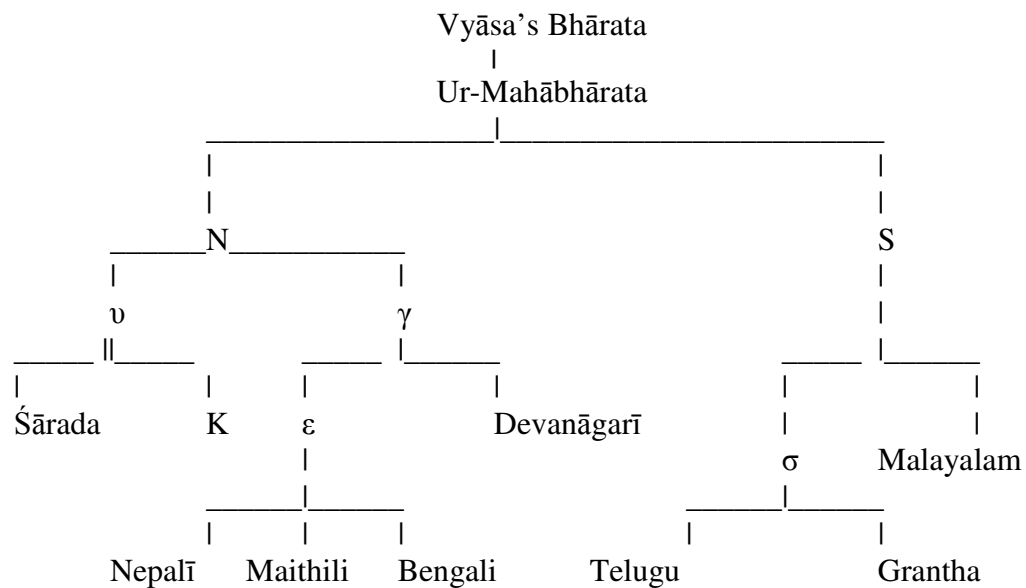
In **Section D**, I provide further proof for the above from the history of the Tamil-Malayalam paleography as has been constructed by I. Mahadevan (2003):

- i. Introduction and an over-view of Mahadevan's findings
- ii. the Tamil Brāhmī script and its history
- iii. the Southern Brāhmī script and its history
- iv. the Brahmans, the epics and paleography

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#### Section A: The Mahābhārata Epic and Its Recensions

I start with Sukthankar's master chart of the recensional history for the epic as a whole:



The Vyāsa phase of the epic, the so called Jaya Bhārata, began perhaps in an oral tradition, by consensus in the Kuru area, and most likely in the kṣatriya circles, as a lay about war for land and territory, perhaps based on the Ten King Battle of the Ṛgveda (Witzel 2006: 21-24). By the Gṛhya Sūtra period—considerably later than the Śrauta Sūtra period, as Oldenberg has shown, thus perhaps 500-300 BCE<sup>11</sup>—a *Mahābhārata* has come into existence, the Gṛhya Sūtra passages linking it with the primary, inner circle of redactors, Sumantu, Jaimini, Vaiśmpāyana, and Paila (omitting Śuka, however).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this marks the first “possession” of the epic by the Brahmans, that of the inner frame, a process seen much more deepened in the outer frame, unfolding as a discourse in the sadas of a Śrauta ritual of the Sattra type, with Vyāsa himself present in the sadas and claiming for itself subsequently the status of the Fifth Veda. It is possible that the śrauta device of the outer frame reflects the real-life setting of Hildebeitel’s intergenerational Brahman committee, engaged in śrauta rituals and redaction of the epic at the same time in one of the new reformist Brahman kingdoms, like the Śuṅga, its Brahman king Puṣyamitra performing two aśvamedhas and committed to the promotion of Śrautism.<sup>13</sup> Plausible links, as we will see below, can be surmised, between the first group of Brahmans of this study and this original redaction. There is general consensus that the epic passes into literacy by this stage, by 300-100 BCE when the Brāhmī script had taken shape in North India, providing the Sanskrit sound system a syllabary, devised, as its separation of the vowel and consonant sounds into two classes shows, by the Vedic oral tradition and its svādhyāya institutions.<sup>14</sup>

With the NR and SR phases, we are on firmer ground, what Sukthankar characterizes as the “incontrovertible fact” (1933: [I] xxxi) about the early history of the

epic: they are the two broad and distinct recensions of the epic, each with further different versions later in regional languages. The NR text first breaks into two large families, the  $\nu$ - and the  $\gamma$ -family texts, the former in the Kuru realm, the area of the origin of the epic, and the latter, an inflated version in the Magadha realm, in the eastern parts of North India, in Bihar, Nepal and Bengal. The shorter  $\nu$ -family of the Kuru-Pāñcāla area gives us the Śārada text, the basis of the Poona CE.

We have no information in Sukthankar about how exactly the SR rises or is found in the peninsular region in terms of a human agency or other irreducible correlates—script, the physical form of the manuscript. All the same, however, from the evidence of his manuscripts, Sukthankar is able to affirm that its appearance can be dated to a “primitive” ([1927]1933 [I]: *Forward* vi) moment in the textual history of the epic. Noticing the concord in the *Ādiparvan* between the Kāśmīrī version of the NR and the SR texts, Sukthankar notes, “Since I have not been able to discover any traces of “secondary interrelationship” between archetypes K [NR] and S [SR], I consider the agreement between these two archetypes as “primitive,” that is depending upon their primitive connection through the Ur-Mahābhārata” (Sukthankar’s quote marks; my parenthetical gloss)--a concord, further, he sees to be of “supreme importance for the reconstruction of the text” ([1927] 1933:[I] *Forward* vi-vii).<sup>15</sup> We should note that the “primitive” accord between the NR and SR texts, so phrased in his 1927 *Forward* by Sukthankar, becomes the “impressive fact” (1933 [I]: lxxiv) of the recensional history of the epic in the 1933 *Prolegomena*, in view of the antipodal locations of the two texts, the NR in Kashmir and the SR in Kerala, and we should further note that the picture of the Brahman migration presented below adequately explains this anomaly.

The SR, having thus risen at an early moment in the history of the epic, differentiates essentially into two versions, the shorter Malayalam text, that came to the Poona editors from the Malabar region of Kerala and the longer, inflated Grantha-Telugu version, the latter forming from an interaction between Sukthankar's theoretical  $\sigma$  text and the resident  $\Sigma$ -SR text, the  $\sigma$  text being an NR version (not indicated to be so in Sukthankar's chart but made abundantly clear in his *Prolegomena* to the *Ādiparvan*) and coming to Poona from the Tanjavur area of Tamil Nadu.

Thus, Sukthankar noted, "all textual criticism of the *Mahābhārata* begins with this incontrovertible fact that the text of the Great Epic has come down to us in two divergent forms, a Northern and a Southern recension, texts typical of the *Āryāvarta* and *Dakṣiṇāpatha*" (xxxix). Yet this is an issue scarcely addressed in the *Mahābhārata* scholarship since the publication of the CE (1933-1970). The 18-parvan division of the NR increases to 24 in the SR, the SR being almost a Virgilian response to the Homeric NR, characterized by "*precision, schematization, and thoroughly practical outlook*" (xxxvi; Sukthankar's italics) compared to the NR version which is "distinctly vague, unsystematic, and sometimes even inconsequent, *more like a story naively told, as we find in actual experience*" (xxxvi; Sukthankar's italics). Sukthankar noted further that "there persists throughout, between the recensions, a distinct and undeniable family resemblance, and there cannot be the slightest doubt that both spring from a common source, albeit a distant and somewhat nebulous source" (xxxvi), remarking in addition that "even in its early phases the *Mahābhārata* text tradition must have been not uniform and singular, but multiple and polygenous" (*Forward*: i).

That is, the longer and ornate SR text rises at an early moment in the textual history of the epic—a finding echoed further by Belvalkar (1947: lxiv)<sup>16</sup>, the other CE editor with an equal breadth of experience with the *Mahābhārata* manuscripts. However, the inflation does not seem to have been the inherent result of the dynamics of an oral tradition;<sup>17</sup> that is, the two recensions do not constitute what are called multiforms in oral theory—a virtual impossibility, considering the epic’s eventual extent. Rather, as Sukthankar noted for the Ādiparvan of the SR version but true for the entire recension, “the excess is due to additions, large and small, distributed almost entirely throughout the [Ādi] parvan” (xxxv). Sukthankar also noted omissions, passages found in the NR texts but not in the SR tradition. Additions and omissions: surely we are by now in a literate world (how can an “omission” occur in a dynamic oral tradition?). In other words, we have a transcript laid out, read and episodes and elaborations added on (or dropped).

It would seem thus that the SR text clearly rises as a make-over of the NR text, the Southern redactors creating a sentimental version of a naïve text, by adding passages where they felt necessary and dropping them elsewhere. A famous example shows how this process of addition probably worked in actual practice, providing evidence that complements Hildebeitel’s (2006) finding,<sup>18</sup> solely derived from structural considerations of the “dips” between the main frames that make up the epic, both revealing the subterranean dynamics of the formation of the \*Pūrvaśikhā SR text. An insertion of 1612 verses into the SR occurs between *adhyāyas* 34 and 35 of the CE of the *Sabhāparvan*, not found in the Śārada version, nor the NR as a whole, and thus relegated in the CE as an appendix (II: [Appendix 1, #121]: 386-422). Edgerton, (1944 [II]: xxx), the editor of the *Sabhāparvan* for the CE, notes that “it is the longest single insertion...occupy[ing] a

full hundred pages of [P.P.S] Sastri's text...seven *adhyāyas*...a glorification of Kṛṣṇa put in the mouth of Bhīṣma[.] It is not found in N[orthern] MSS" (My parentheses). In the peroration, Bhīṣma justifies the fitness of Kṛṣṇa to be the Guest King to be honoured at Yudhiṣṭira's Rājasūya, at the *sabha* of the Sabhāparvan.

P.L.Vaidya (1969: [I] xlviii) shows that the entire discourse is fabricated from the *Harivaṃśa*, mainly from *adhyāyas* 38, 41, 42. One aspect of the *Harivaṃśa* that Vaidya emphasizes is its dual nature, first as an "organic" part of the great epic, justifying the attribution of "*śata-sāhasrī Saṃhitā*" (100,000-verse epic) to it, and second, as its *khilā*, a "supplement". Yet we find material from the supplement forming sections of the main epic, in the SR, forcing us to conclude that the redactor of the SR must have had the entire epic before him, and that he knew the whole of the epic, the main body of 18 parvans and its supplements, to find or remember a discourse from the supplement suitable to be inserted into an earlier section of the main body of the text, no matter that this introduces in the process awkward repetitions, what Edgerton (xxx) calls "internal duplications" as with Sahadeva's threats.<sup>19</sup>

My argument in the rest of the paper is predicated to this incontrovertible fact, that at an early, decidedly "primitive" moment in its textual history, the epic is already found to be present in the peninsular region, the logic of chronology demanding that this be very likely a \*Śārada text, 75,000 verses long in its modern CE and nearly the same length at this time, providing the NR text-template for its SR makeover. I will attempt to account for its rise in terms first of its plausible redactors and then the paleography needed for the transcription of the Sanskrit of the epic in an area already widely literate at

this time with a script adopted to Tamil phonology, the Tamil Brāhmī syllabary, created by Jains ca. 250 BCE.

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**Section B. i: The Origins of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, their Śrauta Traditions, and Southward Migration**

We know that the style of wearing one's hair was a matter of ritual importance to the Vedic Aryans, often signifying adherence to a specific orthodoxy-orthopraxy complex. The term *kapardin/kapardī*, itself thought to be non-Vedic,<sup>20</sup> occurs in the Ṛgveda, with six attestations (s.v. Lubotsky [1997] I: 420) in its different forms and seems to have signified the braided or tufted hair on a male's otherwise shaven head, and the Vasiṣṭhas are said at ṚV 7.33.1 to wear their kapardin on the right side of the scalp. The *pūrvaśikhā* mode may well signify one such way of wearing one's kapardin (indeed, just as its counterpart in this study, the *aparaśikhā*, another). In its extant practice, it consists in massing up the hair on top of otherwise shaven head into a knotted heap (Illustration I). Its earliest attestation occurs, as Gerhard Ehlers notes, (Response to EJVS 10.1),<sup>21</sup> at TS 7,4,9,1 (*śikhām anu pra vapante*): "to shave (the hair) forward in order to have a pūrvaśikhā" (Ehlers' translation). As Ehlers points out, in the Taittirīya context, the ritualists are performing the *gavamāyana* ritual, imitating the "session of the cows" and accordingly wear the pūrvaśikhā at the end of the year in order to look like them: "*gavāṃ hi tarhy anurūpā bhavanti* (JB 2, 374)". In other words, by the time of the redaction of the Taittirīya śākhā of the Yajurveda, ca. 1000-900 BCE, we have a distinct group wearing their hair in the pūrvaśikhā mode. We will see that the Taittirīya



comparison of the pūrvaśkhā with a physiognomic feature of an animal will reappear in an almost identical trope, later, in the Sangam poetry.

Their śrauta traditions are made up from the following Veda śākhās<sup>22</sup>:

- i. Ṛgveda: The Śākala Ṛgveda and its *Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra* (AŚS) make up the lion share of their Ṛgveda affiliation. However, in addition, the *Kauṣṭiki* tradition (allied to the *Śārikhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* [ŚSS]) of the Ṛgveda occurs among the Pūrvaśkhās, once, it is thought, with the Bāṣkala śākhā as its Ṛgveda text.<sup>23</sup> The Bāṣkala śākhā is no longer extant even among the Nambudiri Brahmins, the Pūrvaśikhā group with still a very robust Kauṣṭiki tradition. The Śākala śākhā is the universal Ṛgveda śākhā among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, as it is the case amongst all Brahmins now globally. All the same, the Kauṣṭiki tradition seems to have been ritually the most active of all axes among the Pūrvaśikhās (see below, and note 11).
- ii. Yajurveda: Only the Taittirīya śākhā of the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda School occurs among the Pūrvaśikhās, in three different sūtra traditions:
  - a. the *Baudhāyana* (both Śrauta and Gṛhya);
  - b. the *Vādhūla* (both Śrauta and Gṛhya);
  - c. the *Āgniveśya*, almost identical with the Vādhūla tradition, but only in its Gṛhya form.
- iii. Sāmaveda: Only the *Jaiminīya* śākhā of the Sāmaveda occurs among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins.

Of the above, the Kāuṣītaki Ṛgveda, the Vādhūla-Āgniveśya Yajurveda and the Jaiminīya Sāmaveda occur only among the Pūrvaśikhās, so as to constitute positive proof of identity in epigraphic records and fieldwork: that is, if a Brahman is recorded in the *grāmadeya* plates or encountered in fieldwork in peninsular India as belonging to one of these Veda śākhās, he can be identified as a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman. Likewise, we have two epigraphic terms with unique Pūrvaśikhā attestations, *paviḷya* and *śljāmbavya*, first a phonological corruption of *bahuvṛca*, the Āśvalāyana tradition, and the second, designating a branch of the Kāuṣītaki sūtra of the Ṛgveda.<sup>24</sup> From Witzel (1989; 1995), we can localize these Veda śākhās and sūtras to a broad area in the Gangā-Yamunā doab, in the Pāñcāla country, extending to the east along the Gangā (the Vādhūla tradition of the Taittirīya Samhita) to the Kosala area (the Kāuṣītaki-Baudhāyana alliance), with substantial south-south-west extensions in the Jaiminīya realm (Map I). I argue in on-going work that some sort of geographical contiguity of the different schools produced specific śrauta axes *in situ* listed below.

A śrauta tradition, arguably the most authentic, has, as we know, survived among the Pūrvaśikhā group, among the Nambudiri Brahmins,<sup>25</sup> with abundant epigraphic evidence of śrautism among the other branches of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins till the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE from epigraphy (see below). Again, as we know, a tri-Vedic axis is the core of a śrauta ritual, the coordinated orchestration of the *ādhvaryam*, *hautram*, and the *audgātram* praxises in the unfolding of the ritual. I list below the four theoretical tri-Vedic axes possible for the performance a Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta ritual:

- i. Kāuṣītaki Ṛgveda-Baudhāyana Yajurveda-Jaiminīya Sāmaveda
- ii. Kāuṣītaki Ṛgveda-Vādhūla Yajurveda-Jaiminīya Sāmaveda

iii. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Baudhāyana Yajurveda-Jaiminīya Sāmaveda

iv. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Vādhūla Yajurveda-Jaiminīya Sāmaveda

Of the four, the śrauta axis i seems to have been historically the most active,<sup>26</sup> with iii and iv following, respectively. The axis ii does not seem to occur in practice,<sup>27</sup> the original geographic regions of these traditions not having been, perhaps, contiguous.

I must add that the Kauṣītaki tradition adds to the 16-priest complement of the śrauta ritual personnel an additional ritualist (BŚS 2.7), the *Sadasya* priest, in as much as Vyāsa, the traditional redactor of the *Mahābhārata* epic appears as part of the *sadasya* assembled in the Janamejayas's Snake Sacrifice when the epic is formally sung to the world, by the *Śauti*. It is not clear if Vyāsa is designated formally as the *Sadasya* priest or merely as a member of the learned group assembled at the *sadas*, the ritual hall.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the Kauṣītaki tradition merely formalizes an existing tradition surrounding the installation of a learned member of the śrauta community as *Sadasya*.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, if the Śārada text is the *simplicior* text, it would follow that it is traceable to the Kuru-Pāñcāla area: by general consensus, the epic took shape in the northern Kuru area, around Kurukṣetra, not far from the regions to which the Pūrvaśikhā Veda śākhās have been localized, generally the Ganga-Yamuna doab. It is possible that they had the text with them, or even that, they were part of the agency of its final redaction.

We have some direct evidence supporting the second conjecture, that the original Pūrvaśikhā group may have had links to the redaction of the epic in its extant frame-narrative form. We know that in the immediate post-Vedic period, when the form of frame narratives begins to arise as a function of the emerging narrative perfect in the Vedic, it reaches, as Witzel shows (1987c: 395; *passim*),<sup>30</sup> its most sophisticated

development, in the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa*, part of the signature Pūrvaśikhā Sāmaveda tradition, in the retelling of the legend of Cyāvana a ṛṣi of the Bhṛgu lineage. And as we know, the form reaches its culmination in the extant *Mahābhārata*, framed at the innermost frame by Vyāsa’s discourse to Sumantu, Jaimini, Vaiśampāyana, Śuka and Paila and at the outermost frame by the Śauti Ucchaśravas’s discourse to Śaunaka and the other ṛṣis in the sadas, with Vyāsa himself present possibly in the ritualistic role of the Sadasya priest, an office only evidenced in the Pūrvaśikhā śrauta praxis. A link to the Jaiminīyas is further seen in the development of closely related *Bṛhaddevata*: Tokunaga (1997: 186) cites the Sāmaveda Brāhmaṇas, Jaiminīya and its lost proto-text, the *Śātyāyana* as “[of] special importance” in the development of the story of Dadhyañc (Bd. 16d-23), adding, (186, note 2): “A close relationship of our author [that of *Bd*] with the Sāmaveda is also attested by his frequent mention of the teachers and sources presumably associated with this school” (My parenthesis]. Parpola (1984: 463-64) adduces a similar link between the epic and the Jaiminīya tradition, noting that Jaimini was the udgātha priest of Janamejaya’s sarpa sattra and one of the five figures to whom Vyāsa committed the epic.<sup>31</sup>

We should note that this picture dove-tails with the main features of the Hiltebeitel-Witzel model of the textualization of the epic mentioned earlier: the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, still in the Vedic realm, would be part of Hiltebeitel’s “committee of Brahmins” who redact the epic into a Brahmanical work. Hiltebeitel (2001: 19) sees them as “out of sorts” Brahmins “who may have had some minor king’s or merchant’s patronage, but probably for personal reasons show a deep appreciation of, and indeed exalt, Brahmins who practice “the way of gleaning”: that is *uñchavṛtti* Brahmins reduced

to poverty who live a married life and feed their guests and family by “gleaning” grain,” not unlike, as Hildebeitel (27) notes, Patañjali’s *śiṣṭha* Brahmins.<sup>32</sup> It goes without saying that such Brahmins would also be śrautins, functioning as the agents of the Vedic oral traditions, as what comes to be called in Manu the Śrotriya Brahmins.<sup>33</sup> We must note that a serious threat does rise in the east, as I argue below, to these Vedic traditions formed in the west, in the Kuru-Pñcāla area, in the form of the Vājanseyi-centered Vedism, promoted by the Magadha imperialism, possibly rendering these western Brahmins “out of sorts”. Thus the reformist Brahmanical dynasties, who would seek to support śrauta traditions, would naturally form suitable patrons (Witzel 2006). I argue below, in Section D, that what comes to be schematized in I. Mahadevan (2003) as the Southern Brāhmī script, a \*Southern Brāhmī script, served the textualization of the epic and traveled southward later with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins with their departure, evolving later into its different attested scripts in the peninsula, the Grantha being the one most relevant to this study.

We cannot determine the exact dates of departure of the Pūrvaśikhā group from the antarvedi area, nor the motives behind the departure, but we can go farther than the vague wanderlust of the Brahman often noted in literature impelling migration—Agastya of the Ṛgveda himself seen in some fanciful historiography as the redoubtable Vedic counterpart of Friar Tuck of Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, leading Brahman migration southward.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the śrauta axes that I have listed above and their survival in a live oral tradition to our times make it probable that it was an organized departure.<sup>35</sup> Its live survival today among one of the branches of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins in a continuous and unbroken practice testifies to the continual Vedic *svādhyāya* institutions

at work over time and space, suggesting a sizeable number of families moving in tandem, necessitating, as I argue in on-going work, a complete revision of our existing ideas about Brahman migrations. It is possible that the rise of the Śukla Yajurveda tradition as an imperial praxis under the Magadhan hegemony in the Kosala-Videha lands (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>36</sup> may be a factor: it is useful to note here the well-attested and extreme dislike of the Māgadha Brahmans in Vedic texts as for instance the reference at *Lāṅyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* (8. 6. 28), “the despicable Brāhmaṇa-fellows native to Magadha” (Parpola 1968: 29; n.1).<sup>37</sup> The rises of Buddhism and Jainism may also have played a role.

There is little doubt that an external agency impelled the movement. We may rule out impulsive or eccentric migrants, although as with Bāvāri of the Buddhist texts (see below) there were such cases. As I have indicated above, a live śrauta tradition has survived among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans (as well as among the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, the second group in migration) showing that the start-up migrant population should have met, as I argue in greater detail elsewhere, two sustainability criteria: first biological and thus linked to the Gotra distributions of the start-up population; second, in terms of the Vedic praxis, thus linked to the Sūtra affiliations. That is, from the first criterion, we can deduce, and this is confirmed by both epigraphy and field work, that the start-up population had enough affiliates to the different Gotra labels to meet the twin criteria of a Brahmanical marriage: exogamy, ruling out a spouse of one’s own Gotra label; endogamy, allowing kinship only between Gotra affiliates. Both the Pūrvaśikhā and Aparāśikhā Brahmans meet this criterion. Both groups also meet the second sustainability criterion, that of the Sūtra distribution of the start-up population to maintain

live Vedic praxises, especially in its *śrauta* form. As we know, this requires the coordination of three individual Vedic praxises, those of the *hautram*, *ādhvaryam* and *audgātram*: sufficient human agency in terms of numbers must be presumed to be present in the original migrant population to have enabled the sustainability of the Vedic oral traditions. Thus in both cases of the Brahmins, and we have ample epigraphic evidence for the *Aparaśikhā* group, the migrant population was large and varied enough along the two sustainability criteria, suggesting that the migration itself was possibly well-coordinated and planned.

We may rule out in this context the commonplace economic motive of migration in the case of Śrauta Brahmin communities. A self sustaining Śrauta Brahmin community is generally seen to be affluent in its traditional setting, the affluence arising entirely from patronage—indeed, the śrauta culture demanding it and royal patronage providing it, the *brahma-kṣatra* alliance of the Vedic age functioning at the ground level. This does not necessarily conflict with the idealized poverty of the *uñchavṛtti* institution, noted above, the affluence essentially funding the expenses of the annual śrauta rituals.<sup>38</sup>

It is tempting to place the departure of the *Pūrvaśikhā* Brahmins before the formation of the *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* tradition, ca. 300 BCE, as it is signally absent among them. However, we can possibly mark their southward movement on the *dakṣiṇāpatha* from Buddhist records—in keeping with the general pattern, noted by Witzel,<sup>39</sup> that many details of early Brahmin history are often evidenced in Buddhist records. The Pāli Canon text, the *Suttanipāta*,<sup>40</sup> records the performance of a śrauta ritual on the *dakṣiṇāpatha*, calling it a *mahāyāññam* (l. 979), at Assaka on the *Godāvārī*: *Bāvārī*, a wanderlust-type Brahmin, arrives at Assaka in the neighborhood of *Aḷaka*, from

Mithila, Kosala and after making himself welcome at the prosperous Brahman settlements and alms from them on the banks of the river for three years performs the *mahāyajña* with 16 priests (l. 1006: *soḷasa brāhmaṇa*) from among his hosts in the Assaka Brahman community—clearly a śrauta ritual, 16 priests being the complement of a śrauta ritual. We already know that Bāvāri in his native Kosala is a product of the Vedic svādhyāya system, a master of mantras (l. 977 *manta pāragū*). A traditional *brahmodya* follows at the conclusion of the śrauta ritual and with it, the danger of possible explosions of heads. The 16 priests go north to the Buddha, traversing the dakṣiṇāpatha northward to learn, as per the Buddhological plotting of the account, the secret of keeping their heads from exploding and thus avoid, again, from the Buddhist point of view, the occupational hazard of the Śrauta Brahmans.

The *Suttanipāta* text is part of the older layers of the Pāli Canon text, placed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>41</sup> It is quite likely that this was a Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta ritual: the Assaka settlement would seem to be too far away from the śrauta traditions surrounding the Śukla Yajurveda, relatively recently formed, some three centuries or so ago, in the Kosala-Videha area. The newer Āpastaṃba-based ritualism of the second group of Brahmans of this study, ca. 300 BCE and centering around Mathurā on the Yamunā would be too recent also to have reached this far south and east by the time of the *Suttanipāta* text. And the total priestly complement, the 16 that went north and became, alas, Buddhists plus Bāvāri, giving us 17 ritualists in all, resonates with the Kauṣṭiki Śrautism.



**B. ii. The Pūrvaśikhā Presence in the Sangam Tamil Country and the Creation of the**

**\*Pūrvaśikhā Text.**

Their arrival and presence in the Tamil country during the *Sangam* period is, on the other hand, beyond dispute. Hart (1975: 149) estimates that about 10% of the Sangam poets were Brahmans, deeming it a low estimate as “not all Brahmins could have had telltale names.” It is difficult to imagine what the global numbers of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans were in the Sangam country for this period; there is little doubt as inferred from the two sustainability criteria above that it must have been substantial. The Vedic imprint on Sangam poetry is really quite vast, indicating a sizeable Brahman complement behind it. Moreover, Brahmans are equally attested in all three Sangam kingdoms, indicating an isotropic distribution along the three Sangam kingdoms. And the one Vedic item that reveals to us the Brahman presence in the Sangam period is the “experience-near” feature,<sup>42</sup> the style of the wearing of the hair among the males of the group, namely the *kuṭumi*. The *kuṭumi*, the Sangam Tamil word for the hair tuft (from *koṭi* and *koṭu* [DEDR # 2049]<sup>43</sup> first signifying “banner, flag, streamer” and the second, “summit of a hill, peak, a mountain”) is distinctly in the *pūrvaśikhā* mode, attested in poem after poem, amounting to a poetic trope<sup>44</sup>—or Ramanujan’s “poetic code” (1985: 282)--as in the two following examples:

“And all those horses of our man of the tall hills  
have tufts of hair like the Brahman urchins of our town”

(*Aiṅkurunūru* 202; A.K.Ramanujan’s [1985: 9] translation)

“[T]he tuft on his head is like the mane of a horse”

(*Puṛaṇānūṛu* 310:11; George Hart's [1999: 179] translation)

The horse's mane to which the kuṭumi is being compared above recalls the calf's newly forming horns of the Taittirīya passage, noted earlier: the hair in both cases is massed up toward the front of the head.

Because of its excellent DEDR derivation noted above as a “flag” or “streamer,” the kuṭumi as pūrvaśikhā may be taken to signify the indigenous mode of wearing hair in the Tamil country before the arrival of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans: if so, we have here a striking coincidence between the indigenous style and immigrant style, perhaps even accounting for the wide patronage and welcome the Brahmans are seen enjoying in the Tamil country in the Sangam period. Above, the pūrvaśikhā is specifically linked to a Brahman child in the Ainkuṇūṛu verse, the language suggestive of total acculturation—an urchin running about the streets—of the Brahman group in the host region. The elegiac subject in the second example is a young warrior, fallen in battle, having “slain painted elephants” (1.5) and thus presumably not a Brahman, but presented in the same trope as the Brahman child, suggesting that the front tuft was universal in the Tamil country at this time and that the term as such signified only this mode in the Sangam period. It is also significant that a Tamil word comes to signify a Vedic item, suggesting an exuberant acculturation between the Sangam era Brahmans and the indigenous people of the Tamil country

Could “kuṭumi” signify the aparāśikha mode as well?<sup>45</sup> The aparāśikhā mode would signify a tuft of hair hanging down from the back of the head, like a pony tail. It would seem that either *tōkai* (DEDR 3532) or *vāl* (DEDR Appendix 17) is the more suitable word for comparison, to indicate an item hanging vertically down. The poet uses

instead, kuṭumi, signifying the mane, a horizontal item on a galloping horse, thus more appropriate for the pūrvaśikhā mode. Etymologically, “kuṭumi” seems to signify the fore part of the head, as with the crown of peacock (Subrahmanian 1966: 285). The poet uses, moreover, the horse to suggest abandon and virility—especially in the case of the fallen hero. Thus it would seem that the poet had in mind a horse in gallop, an apt image of heroism of the fallen hero and the urchin running about wildly, with the top knot streaming, like the horse’s mane, from the fore part of the head. Finally, the word is sex-specific: it is never used to refer to a woman’s braids, hanging from the back of the head, not generically different from the aparāśikhā mode. Thus, it would seem this that the kuṭumi of the Sangam poetry is the fore-lock kind, wound and tied up at the top of the head, streaming out like a flag or banner or the mane of a horse when loose.

The much noted Vedic details of Sangam poetry (Sastri: [1935] 1975: 93; Parpola: 1983)<sup>46</sup> also accord with what we know of the Pūrvaśikhā śrauta tradition: the most notable śrauta ritual described Sangam poetry is the Agnicayana, in Puṛaṇānūru 224 (ll. 6-9), still extant among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās in a live praxis. It is true that the Agnicayana ritual occurs among the second group, the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, as well. However, the Agnicayana of the Sangam poetry is either the *pāñcapatrikā* (“five-tipped”) or the *ṣaṭpatrikā* (“six-tipped”) type, in which the altar is shaped after a bird (kite, at l. 9 above): the Agnicayana with the bird-shaped altar is the only type known among the Pūrvaśikhās, whereas it is only one of several types of altars known among the Aparāśikhās and nor is it the most popular one.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in conjunction with the pūrvaśikhā kuṭumi attested in Sangam poetry, we can conclude that the Sangam-era Brahmans were Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans.

The one *Sattra*-type ritual referred to in Sangam poetry is the *Rājasūya*, performed by a Cōḷa king, Vēṭṭa Perunārkiḷli, styled by the poet Pāṇṭaran Kaṇṇanār as Cōḷan Irācacūyam Vēṭṭa Perunārkiḷli at Puṇanānūru 16. The Pūrvaśikhā Vedism was developed fully enough to meet the performance of the *Rājasūya* ritual. We may assert this not just on ritual grounds; a considerable discursive literature exists among Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās on the *Rājasūya* literature, the most significant of which is Narayana Bhaṭṭatiri's *Rājasūyaprabandha* (ca. 17<sup>th</sup> century; Kunjunni Raja *Agni* II: 309), an allegorical interpretation of the Agnicayana, in which the bricks that go into the making of the altar are related to the story of Kṛṣṇa (Staal 1983 [I]: 187). We have already seen how a 1612-verse insertion into the Sabhāparvan from the Harivaṃśa celebrates Kṛṣṇa as the worthy guest at Yudhiṣṭira's *Rājasūya* in the SR *Mahābhārata*. The interest in *Rājasūya* persists to the modern times, in the writings of the foremost Nambudiri ritualist of our times, Ērkkara Raman Nambudiri.<sup>48</sup> It should be added that the responsibility of ritually crowning the Cōḷa monarch lay with the Pūrvaśikhā Dīkṣitars of Chidambaram in historical times.<sup>49</sup>

Altogether, four Brahmanical *gotras* occur in *Sangam* literature (*kaunḍṇiya-vasiṣṭha*, *kauśika-viśvāmitra*, *ātreya*, and *gautama-aṅgirasa*)<sup>50</sup> and they also occur regularly among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, although this could not be thought to have probative value, as the same *gotras* occur among the Aparāśikhās as well. It is very likely, as my on-going study shows,<sup>51</sup> that the distribution of *gotra* labels is globally isotropic for the Brahman group as a whole, having formed in the period right after the redaction of the Ṛgveda and but before the formation of the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda traditions. This is seen from the fact that the *gotras* of the adherents of all the three

Vedas, the Vedas of the rituals, go back to the ca. 50 gotra-pravara lists of the *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* appendixes, and these 50 pravaras are linked in turn to the ṛṣi composers of the Ṛgveda as indexed in the *Anukramaṇī* lists. In other words, when the adherence to the Yajurveda or the Sāmaveda, as the case may be, arose as a family tradition based on birth and institutionalized subsequently by a svādhyāya system, the adhering family already possessed a gotra identity originally derived from a ṛṣi of the Ṛgvedic hymns. It is useful to note, on the other hand, that the gotra profile of the adherents of the *Atharvaveda*—a Veda with no function in the śrauta tradition—is entirely different.<sup>52</sup>

A further link between the Sangam poetry and the Pūrvaśikhā group may be the polygamy referred to at Puṛaṇānūru 178, a full-dress description of an ideal Vedic Brahman of the lineage of the kauṇḍinya gotra. He is pictured with three wives. It is quite possible that polygamy existed among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans; it was not uncommon among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās even into the historical period,<sup>53</sup> while it seems almost entirely unattested among the Aparāśikhā group. In the poem, the chief wife wears an ornamental head-piece called *valai*: however, I have not been able to trace it to either the Pūrvaśikhā or Aparāśikhā Brahmans.

Hart (1975: 33-34; 1999:22) based on the “war sacrifice” mentioned Puṛaṇānūru 26 theorizes that the Sangam era Brahmans were “different” (1975:51) from their Northern counterparts, adding, however, a few lines later that they “retained much of their Northern outlook and way of life” (51). We do not know what exactly the “war sacrifice” entailed; the verse referring to the sacrifice reads (Hart 1999: 22):

“As Brahmans of the Four Vedas, calm though the breadth of their knowledge, devoted to restraint, surrounded you and kings carried out your orders, you completed the sacrifice established by tradition.” (Il. 12-14)

The Brahmans are shown to be present at the sacrifice, but it is not clear if they perform it or take part in it. It is also not clear if the ritual was Vedic, although it is referred to as *kēhi*, a term usually signifying Vedic ritual, the term itself thought to be a translation of the Sanskrit śruti (Hart 1999: 252). Could it be an indigenous ritual? As Harts notes, “the earliest Brahmans did the only thing that they could if they were to stay in Tamilnad: they associated themselves with the kings....Thus they had to participate in such unbrahminical activities as the war sacrifice and cutting the bodies of those who had died in bed” (1975: 55). In other words, there was acculturation between the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans and the indigenous people, the temple-based Bhakti movements being the most striking result of this, and as we will see, the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans are concretely linked to both temples and Bhakti movement. All the same, a śrauta core, still extant, remains intact with the group.

One other piece of evidence, albeit negative, favouring the view that the Sangam era Brahmans were all Pūrvaśikhās comes from epigraphy (see below). The first Brahman with the signature Aparāśikhā sūtra affiliation to the Āpastamba tradition appears in a Pallava brahmadeya Copper Plate only in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, and even then still in Upper South India, with the Pallava influence still far from descending into the Tamil country proper. As we will see below, the Āpastamba affiliates eventually constitute the principal segment of the Aparāśikhā population, upward of 70%, and we begin to see this dominance only by the 8<sup>th</sup> CE, with the 108-Brahman complement of the

grāmadeya system. In other words, it is quite unlikely that they were present in the Tamil-Kerala country during the Sangam period and its immediate aftermath.

Likewise, we can eliminate the Gurukkal Brahmans, indigenous to the Tamil country, but on different grounds. Their presence is attested in the Tamil country in epigraphy in the Tamil middle ages and may well date from the Sangam period and even earlier. In the modern period, they are chiefly temple priests, adhering to an Āgama praxis. However, their Vedic traditions are incomplete or improvised, thus ruling them out as the Brahmans of the Sangam poetry. They are an all-Baudhāyana group with just five gotra affiliations, confined to “Bharadvaja, Kaśyapa, Kauśikā, Gautama and Ātreya (or Agastya) (sic)” (Fuller 1984: 28), but the mastery of the Taittirīya Samhita through an oral tradition is not found amongst them. I argue elsewhere that they might be seen as acculturated into Brahmanism by Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans on the latter’s first arrival in the Tamil country. It is possible the Gurukkals were already temple priests in the Tamil country when the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans arrived there; it is their universal profession today (Fuller 1984). Several historical Pūrvaśikha groups of the Tamil country are also linked to temple priesthoods, the most famous being the Dīkṣitars of Chidambaram. However, we must note that when the two groups are priests together in temples in the Tamil country, as at Avaṭaiyār Koil in Tanjavur or Tiruvanakkavu in Tiruchirappalli, the Tamil Śōliya Pūrvaśikhā priests follow strictly Vedic liturgies, whereas the Gurukkals follow the Āgama liturgies.

Were there other groups of Brahmans with a Vedic tradition in the Sangam country that have escaped our notice here? We can answer this question broadly in the negative thanks to the gazetteer discourse of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the different volumes

of “Castes and Tribes” of India: the gazetteers charted out, as in the case of the Thurston-Iyer inventory, all the Brhman groups there were attested in the peninsular India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century CE--all, then and now, still extant.<sup>54</sup> It is seen that every Brahman group of the Gazettes can be plausibly accounted for in my stratigraphic scheme, the Pūrvaśikhā group in the Sangam period with its later different historical branches listed in Thurston and the Aparāśikhā group, with its many branches, likewise, listed in Thurston, arriving from the beginnings of the Pallava period.

A preponderance of evidence thus suggests that the Brahmans of the Sangam poetry were Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans. We have already seen in Section A above that we have a *Mahābhārata* epic, almost certainly in its \*Śarada form, present in the Tamil country at a “primitive” moment of the epic’s evolution, in the very beginnings of the first millennium of the CE. In other words, we see that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans and the epic are present in the same area at the same time. Both Sanskrit epics are attested in Sangam poetry, with the *Mahābhārata* appearing in a Tamil translation, known in subsequent commentarial discourse as the *Peruntēvanār-pāṭiya Pāratam*—the Bhārata sung by Peruntēvanār. Five groups of verses said to be excerpted from this translation appear as invocations to gods--*kaṭavul vāḥtu*--in five collections of Sangam poetry, but they are clearly of later origins, with the verses themselves not linked to the *Mahābhārata* thematically or otherwise. However, these gods’ praises—two to Śiva; two to Viṣṇu, one to Murukan—are without the later sectarian tones, especially in the case of the first two sets and thus dating themselves earlier than the Bhakti poetry, starting ca. 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>55</sup>



The link between the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins and the epic is further substantiated by what may be seen as the post history of the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of my chart, resulting in the eventual Malayalam version in the Malabar area of modern Kerala and what I have designated as the  $\Sigma$ -SR text, remaining in the Tamil country.

First, the Malayalam version of the SR text: as noted above, the Poona editors found this text to be shortest, the Śārada text of the SR tradition. Being almost the archetype, it must be closest to, if not identical with, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of stemma chart (6-7 above) above. All the manuscripts of the Malayalam version, as we will see in Section B.vi below, came to Poona from the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhā homes and centers of learning in the Malabar region of Kerala. It is legitimate to assume thus that \*Pūrvaśikhā text and the Malayalam version must be one and the same, taken in my scheme to the Malabar country by the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās at or after the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, ca. 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, when the different historical identities of individual Pūrvaśikhā groups begin to emerge. In other words, in the pre-Kaḷabhra period, the Pūrvaśikhā group was one large intact group, no doubt with internal segmentations, but linked through common Veda śākhās and the pūrvaśikhā tuft. We have enough evidence to link the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, historically attested today in Kerala—and so linked to that area as to appear autochthonous--to the Tamil country: We encounter, for instance, the uniquely Pūrvaśikhā epigraphic term, “paviḷiya” (or pakalīya) for the bahuvṛca-Āśvalāyana tradition, occurring in Taṅṅantotṭam Plates of the Pallavas, dated to 790 CE: four families (items 23 [kāśyapa gotra; Nimbēi Vaḍugaśarma-trivedi]; 97 [bhāradvāja gotra; Aṅappūr Bhavarudra-caturvedin; 128 [rathītara gotra; Mērramaṅgalam

Uttarakaraṇika *alias* Ayyan Parameśvaran; 134 [gārga gotra; Vaṅgippāru Damodara Bhaṭṭa]; Mahalingam 1988: 289-313; see below) adhering to this sūtra are part of the brahmadeya deed, living in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area of the Tamil country, in the southern parts of today's Andhra Pradesh. Today, the term has survived only among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, designating the Āśvalāyana tradition, placing the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās thus in north-eastern part of the Tamil country as late as the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE (see below for a fuller discussion of the Pallava epigraphy and significance of the occurrence of the term pavīḷiya this far north and northeast). We know as well that a Vedic ritualist like Hastīśarman—of Kāśyapa gotra and Jaiminīya Sūtra--of Vasiṣṭhakuṭi, thus with the historical identity of a Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhā and from the southern parts of the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area in the Tamil country, could arrive at Kerala and become a “Nambūdiri” Pūrvaśikhā there in roughly the same period: the impediment of the language and the alienation from long separation having not yet arisen.<sup>56</sup> All of this would also explain the ‘anomalous’ alignment between the Śārada text and the Malayalam version, the latter being almost identical to the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, rising directly from the template of the Śārada text, but leaving the Tamil country proper with the historical Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās at the Kaḷabhra Interregnum. As I elaborate elsewhere, it is possible the Pūrvaśikhā group which moves to Malabar to become the historical Nambudiri Brahmans, were already concentrated in the Karur region of the Cēra kingdom during the Sangam period, facing the Palghat gaps and arriving in the Malabar country through those gaps at the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, their settlements literally ballooning into Malabar from the Tamil country (Map II).<sup>57</sup>

It is even more significant that a \*Pūrvaśikhā SR text remains in the Tamil country. This is my  $\Sigma$ -SR text, my choice of Greek letter hosting the ‘ $\sigma$ ’ of Sukthankar’s  $\sigma$ -text, the two together giving rise to the Grantha-Telugu SR version in time. We must keep in mind that Sukthankar created the  $\sigma$ -text out of a theoretical need: he saw that all manuscripts from the peninsular region were familiarly Southern Recension texts, but the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu texts showing greater exposure to the Northern Recension texts than the Malayalam versions. He hypothesized the  $\sigma$ -text, a Northern version, coming to the peninsular region, with, as we see now, the Aparāśikhā Brahmans. It is of interest as well that Sukthankar assumes a Southern Recension text to be resident in the Tamil country, although he does not designate it with a Greek letter, to host the  $\sigma$ -text, and transform it at the same time to the mould of the Southern Recension. In my chart above, this is the  $\Sigma$ -\*Pūrvaśikhā text, remaining in the Tamil country with the rump Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans.

It is possible to link, in fact, the  $\Sigma$ -SR text to one branch of the rump, the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās, concentrated in the Cōḷa region thus acquiring the name. The evidence for this—more fully rehearsed below in Section B. v--comes from the role that the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās are seen playing in the emergence of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the post Kaḷabhra period, ca. 7<sup>th</sup> CE. All four Brahman Ālvārs are Śōliya Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans by tradition, functioning thus, as we will see below, as a conduit for the Kṛṣṇaism of the emerging Śrīvaiṣṇavism from the *Mahābhārata*. We know that the epic, especially the Harivaṃśa, is the sole source for the Kṛṣṇa material in the Ālvār songs, not the Purāṇas, the earliest of the latter emerging in North India, ca. 200 CE when the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans are already in the Sangam Tamil country (see below). We noted above the

long Kṛṣṇaistic insertion from the Harivaṃśa into the Sabhāparvan, already done in the Sangam period, certainly before the Kaḷabhra Interregnum. It is quite likely that Kṛṣṇaism is incipient in the Tamil country even during the Sangam period: Ramanujan counts some 34 names among the Sangam poets with “*kannan*” in their names, the endearing diminutive for the god in Tamil.<sup>58</sup>

### B. iii. The Kaḷabhra Interregnum and the Dispersal of the Pūrvaśikhā Group

Although the precise details of this famous interlude in Tamil history are still shrouded in mystery, there is wide consensus of historical opinion that, first, it occurred; second, it was caused by the invasion of the Tamil country by the Kaḷabhras from the Karnataka in the west and northwest, and third, the invasion had a religious component to it in that the Kaḷabhras were Jains. No doubt, the Kaḷabhra’s anti-Brahmanism, as evidenced in the Vēḷvikkuṭi Plates, received exaggerated play in the early historiography of the subject, the famous “long night” interlude of Tamil history according to K.A.N. Sastri (1964:19),<sup>59</sup> but as the plates, certainly the central document of the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, show, the dispossession of Brahmans did take place and some sort of restoration under the Pāṇṭiyan rule was in place by early 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, ca. 620 CE, in Kaṭuṅkōṇ’s reign.<sup>60</sup> It is useful to remember that the anti-Jainism of the Bhakti poetry, especially that of Appar and, with greater virulence, in that of Tirujñānasambandar post-dates the Kaḷabhra Interregnum,<sup>61</sup> perhaps, as I argue in Section C below, is even caused by it. Neither the Tamil Brāhmī cave inscriptions nor their literary counterpart, the Sangam poetry, even with, as noted above, a significant Vedic and Brahmanical content, is hostile to the Jains or their religion: in fact, as we will see below, in Section C, the

Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions show that the Jain religion played a role of paramount importance in the Tamil-Kerala country from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.

In other words, there was an interregnum in Tamil history about this time, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, with a before-and-after scenario: Sangam poetry with its heroic ethos before and the Bhakti poetry with its devotional ethos after. No doubt, there were many cross-over features from Sangam poetry to the Bhakti poetry, for example, in addition to those already noted above, the itinerant poet in both Sangam and Bhakti periods; a gradually sectarian god replacing the king of the Sangam poetry, among others.<sup>62</sup> It is in this changed landscape that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins' extant historical identities seem to begin to shape. One broad division is that of language, dividing the group into two historical divisions, Tamil-speaking and Malayalam-speaking, but only from ca. 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, reaching its final shape by the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. As noted, intercourse existed between the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās and the Tamil Pūrvaśikhās well into 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, but by the middle ages of Tamil history, the different segments had begun to acquire their historical characteristics, defining broadly four extant groups: the Malayalam-speaking Nambudiri Brahmins; the Tamil-speaking Śōḷiya Brahmins (with many sub-divisions); the Dīkṣitar Brahmins of the Chidambaram Śiva temple; and the Mukkāṇi Brahmins of the Tiruchendur Murukan temple.

In my scheme, the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās move to Kerala, to its Malabar region, through the Palghat gaps, their arrival creating a śrauta realm along both sides of the Bhāratap-ṇa river (Map II).<sup>63</sup> The Tamil Pūrvaśikhās, still, it would seem, in the Kaḷabhra realm, fragment through most of the Kaveri area of the Cōḷa realm and the south east in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, each group carrying with it a common *sthalapurāṇa* of

their new homes, the most well-known of which is to be found among the Pūrvaśikhā Dīkṣitars of the Chidambaram temple: a given number of families, 3000 in the case of the Dīkṣitars of Chidambaram (3700 among the Śōḷiya-Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmans of Tiruveḷḷarai; 2000 among the Mukkāṇi Brahmans of Tiruchendur, 300 among both the Śōḷiya-Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmans of Tintiruepparai on the Tāmravarṇī and Śōḷiya Śaiva Brahmans of Avaṭaiyar Koil on the coast in the north in the Tanjavur District) arrive at their new homes and find one family missing; the deity of the temple in the new home—Śiva in Chidambaram or in Avaṭaiyār Koil, Viṣṇu-Perumāḷ in Tiruveḷḷarai on the Kaveri or Tintirurupperai on the Tāmravarṇī, or Murukan-Subrahmaniam at Tiruchendur--taking his place. It is seen that this particular narrative occurs only among the Tamil Pūrvaśikhā groups, suggesting a common origin. It should be further noted that all three principal gods of the Tamil country appear in the trope.<sup>64</sup>

#### **B. iv. The Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās and \*Pūrvaśikhā Text in Emerging Kerala**

A central point of my argument is that a \*Pūrvaśikhā text leaves the Tamil country with the Pūrvaśikha Brahmans, the later historical Nambudiri Brahmans, by now almost certainly in the palm leaf manuscripts and, most likely, already in Grantha script or an early related Southern Brāhmī script, an important point to which I will come back in Section D below. When this manuscript arrived in Poona for collation purposes toward the preparation of the CE, it was found to be the shortest SR text, besides being the “best,” a universal editorial comment,<sup>65</sup> pointing to the high order of its native scholarly ecology in terms of the manuscripts and transmission over time. They were in palm leaf manuscripts, many bearing the colophon datings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the

script in which it was transcribed was the *Ārya-eḷuttu*, a script that Mahadevan see as originating from adaptation between the Grantha script and the *Vaṭṭeḷuttu* scripts (see below for a full discussion of this.) The earliest manuscript dates from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and as far as can be ascertained, the longevity of the palm leaf manuscript in the tropical weather of Kerala is somewhere between 200 to 300 years, giving us three cycles of re-copying from their probable date of coming to Kerala.

We do not know if the text developed during this phase.<sup>66</sup> The traditional Nambudiri lore lays great stress on the śrauta tradition: dating from about precisely this period, how ca. 400 CE, it received a new orientation from *Mēḷattōḷ* of 99 Agniṣṭomas, a figure of the first importance in this tradition-bound community, only Indra's intervention deterring him from the 100<sup>th</sup>—in a sort of variation of the play of numbers in general of the *Pūrvaśikhā* *sthalapurāṇas*, noted above.<sup>67</sup> The entire extant Nambudiri śrauta tradition derives from this figure such that the eight families or *gṛhamas* which took part with *Mēḷattōḷ* in the original marathon series of *Somayāgas* form the traditional elite of the community, the well-known *ādhyān* group of eight families, and the root sites of these families cluster on the *Bhāratap-Puḷa* banks on both banks, west of the Palghat gaps, comprising the current districts of Malappuram to the north of the river, Palghat directly to its west and Trichur south-southwest (Map III).<sup>68</sup> The six temples to which all families with the traditional śrauta rights also cluster in the same area.<sup>69</sup>

The epic seems to have had a different history, a line of development we will see in the Tamil country as well: it becomes widely disseminated into the Kerala society at large, supplying first a fundamental set of scenes of the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and later the *kathakaḷi* dance repertoire, passing thus from the hands of the Brahmans per se, as the performing

and singing personnel of the dance drama were traditionally non-Brahmans. It is likely that the manuscripts themselves of the different parvans lay dormant during the process, the epic leaching out to a wider public in songs—in striking contrast with the strictly regulated śrauta tradition, with only families with the traditional right, deriving from the 99 Mēḷattōḷ agniṣṭomas, to perform the śrauta ritual undertaking it, even today. Thus it is that that the first re-telling of the *Mahābhārata* in Malayalam comes from Tuñjettu Eḷuttacthan, a member of the Nair community, ca. 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, in the *kiḷppāṭṭu* mode, one tenth in extent of the entire epic. It is of equal interest that a complete verse-to-verse translation of the epic appears also in non-Brahman circles, not Nair but princely families with links to the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās through the *sambandham* alliance system, in Kuññukkuṭṭi Tampuran’s 125,000-verse (inclusive of the Harivaṃśa) translation of the epic, reliably recorded to have been accomplished in an astonishing 874 days, (1904-1907), with the Harivaṃśam taking another 3 ½ months.<sup>70</sup>

#### B. v. The Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, and the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism

It is of the utmost importance to note that a \*Pūrvaśikhā text remains behind in the Tamil country, my Σ-text, in the hands of the future Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās. It stands to reason that it would; it is unlikely that all traces of the epic would have left for the Malabar country with the future Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās at the Kaḷabhra Interregnum. It is also the concrete evidence that the \*Pūrvaśikhā version had risen in the Sangam country before the Kaḷabhra Interregnum as a text of the entire Pūrvaśikhā group: we see the texts in the hands of its two branches, otherwise already linked by the pūrvaśikhā tuft and rare Vedic śākhās. And the Σ-SR text produces even more far-reaching aftermaths



than the \*Pūrvaśikhā that moved to the Malabar country with the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās: it functions as the nursery of the Śrīvaiṣṇava-Bhakti movement in the peninsular region. It also hosts the Sukthankar  $\sigma$ -text, a theoretical entity conceived by him to fit the patterns of textual histories and developments revealed by the manuscripts.

First, the  $\Sigma$ -text provides the basis for the Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa-Kṛṣṇa content of the Ālvār-Vaiṣṇavism, especially its khilā parvan, the Harivaṃśa. As we have already noted, the Harivaṃśa of the *Mahābhārata* was the principal conduit of the Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa content to the merging Ālvār-discourse of the Śrīvaiṣṇavism: All the four Brahman Ālvārs (three male and the fourth the foundling daughter of one of them) were Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās, presumably thus with  $\Sigma$ -text of the SR. It is their songs, and those of other seven non-Brahman Ālvārs, that are collected as the *Nālāyiradivyaṅṅam* (The Four Thousand Sacred Utterances; *NDP*), establishing the Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu of the *Mahābhārata* (and Rāma of the sister epic *Rāmāyaṇa*) as the central figure in the emerging Śrīvaiṣṇava Bhakti movement, in the post-Kaḷabhra period, 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. We must note here, and I will come back to it, that the source for the Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism is solely and entirely the epic (Hardy 1983), the Vaiṣṇava literature of the north (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), the *Viṣṇu* and *Brahmapurāṇas* in particular, playing no part in its formation.<sup>71</sup> As in Kerala above, in Section A. iii, the epic seems to spread beyond the Brahmans in the Tamil country as well, in that the other seven Ālvārs are from non-Brahman social groups, Nammālvār-Śaṭṭagōpan in particular, eventually to become the most iconic of all Ālvārs. Also, as in Kerala, the epic comes to structure the important non-Brahman repertory of the *kūṭthu* rituals of the non-Brahman social groups of the Tamil country. I will come back to both these problems below.

And second, the  $\Sigma$ -text functions as the host *Mahābhārata* to the in-coming Aparasikhā Brahmans and their  $\sigma$  text. As noted earlier, we do not know if this group, beginning to be attested in significant numbers in the Tamil country proper well after the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, brought with them the epic, although the conclusion, based on their distinguished Vedic credentials (see below), that that they did so is irresistible. And if they did, considering that their original homes lay in the Mathurā region on the Yamunā in a time period starting with 5<sup>th</sup> to several centuries afterwards, it was a Northern Recension text, possibly part of the Vulgate (K) group, as is indeed shown by the Sukthankar phantom  $\sigma$ -text. Yet the Tamil and Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata* that went to Poona, mostly from Tanjore's Sarasvatī Mahāl library, subsequently, an Aparasikhā center of learning, (first created in the 1600's CE under Tanjore Nayakas as Sarasvatī Bhaṇḍār, re-established in 1820 in its present name by King Serfoji II of the Mahratta rule of Tanjavur; see below), are all in the mould of the SR.

It was in order to solve this difficulty that Sukthankar created the  $\sigma$ -text. He is not linking it to Brahman migrations; he sees that the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu manuscripts of the epic are all in the mould of the Southern Recension, vastly inflated in comparison to the Malayalam version of the epic, but familiarly also of the SR. Moreover, he finds this extra epic material to align itself regularly with the Northern Recension: so a NR must be present in the scene, the basis for his  $\sigma$ -text—the text we see coming in the scheme I am suggesting, with the Aparasikhā Brahmans. As I noted above, that Sukthankar's hypothetical  $\sigma$ -text finds a logical niche in the scheme proposed here of the migration of epics and Brahmans may well be the most probative link in its

reasoning--Sukthankar's hypothesis validated by concrete evidence from the Brahman migration of my scheme.

What is of interest, on the other hand, is that the SR text of the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās, our Σ-text, holds the stage in facing the σ-text of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins. The Aparāśikhā Brahmins, arriving in the Tamil country at the Pallava-Cōla patronage for more than half a millennium, become in time the dominant Brahman group of the Tamil country, outnumbering the Tamil Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins almost 25 to 1 by modern times and transforming them in the process into a minority in their own homes, and at that a thoroughly "interpellated" group.<sup>72</sup> Yet the resident Southern Recension text, the Σ-text of the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās, holds the stage for the day. I will note that this is in keeping with another major product of interaction between the two Brahman groups, the complex tradition of the mature, historical Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

We know from their Veda śākhās (see below) that the Aparāśikhā Brahmins originate in the Mathurā region on the Yamuna River, already a major area of the Kṛṣṇa cult at their departure ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and later. There can be little doubt that the early Vaiṣṇava literature (*Viṣṇu- and Padma-Purāṇas*) was known to them, if they were not its creators in the first place. Yet we see that they re-orient their native Vaiṣṇavism to the Ālvār texts, the resident host Vaiṣṇava tradition of the Tamil country, eventually producing with Nāthamuni and later with Rāmānuja, the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the historical Śrīvaiṣṇavism. As Dihejia (1990) shows, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, ca. 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, clearly showing the influence of Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism, is the outward manifestation of this synthesis, in some ways a counterpart in the Bhakti world to the

Tamil (Grantha) and Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata* in the epic world. I will come back to this problem in detail below.

It must be added here as a general point that the precise knowledge of the origin and development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in South India is far from adequate and still clouded by zealous hagiography and sectarian ethos. We find that as late as S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar's *Early Vaiṣṇavism* (1914), Rāmānuja is thought to have preceded the Ālvārs in the traditional Aparāśikhā historiography. Aiyangar is establishing what we know to be the broad historical sequence that characterizes the development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the Tamil country: first the Ālvārs, fixed at a number, twelve in Rangachari ([1931]1986: 9), then the open-ended sequence of Ācāryas beginning with Nāthamuni, as we will see, an Aparāśikhā Brahman. We must note that the founding Ālvār stratum of Śrīvaiṣṇavism entirely pre-dated the Aparāśikhā Brahman arrival, and it comprised several non-Brahman figures, not found to be the case with the Ācārya phase, which is an all-Brahman list. This is the reason why the entire Brahman content of Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism is found to be made up of the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās; the Aparāśikhā numbers swell through the 108-grāmadeya system only by the latter half of the Pallava reign, indeed supplying Nāthamuni the first figure in the Ācārya sequence and an Aparāśikhā Brahman, who creates the *NDP* from the Ālvār compositions with the assistance of Maturakavi, a Śōliya Pūrvaśikhā. An interesting incident in the life of this figure gives us a picture of the social dynamics between the resident Pūrvaśikhās and the immigrant Aparāśikhās, resulting in what I have characterized above as the interpellated status (see note 50 above) of the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās. Nāthamuni, already seen to be associated with the Pūrvaśikhā Maturakavi, sends his disciple Uyyakkondar, also a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman and

second to Nāthamuni in the later Ācārya sequence, as his wife's escort to one of the area Pallava era land-grant Aparasīkhā settlements, where he is fed stale food outside the host-Aparasīkhā home because of his pūrvasīkhā, the outwardly, visible and experience-near marker (an incident strikingly recalling the more famous later one, in Ramanuja's life, [see below] involving a similar conduct by his wife toward Ramanuja's guru, Periya Nambi). The principals in both incidents, Nāthamuni and Rāmānuja, behave with noble revulsion toward the interpellation, Rāmānuja renouncing family life and wife and Nāthamuni extolling his disciple with the name Uyyakkondar ["you elevated me"], the name by which he is known in subsequent tradition.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, so much so, it is hardly known in the Śrīvaiṣṇava community, as I found in my fieldwork, that all four Brahman Ālvārs were Pūrvasīkhā Brahmins,<sup>74</sup> even though as noted already and as we will see in detail in Section C, this scenario is verified by the epigraphy of the Aparasīkhā Brahman migration and the textual history of the SR *Mahābhārata* beyond all uncertainty.

All of this throws, it must be added, interesting light on the acculturated state of the relationship between the Pūrvasīkhā Brahmins and the indigenous non-Brahman groups: together they create (as is the case with the Nāyanmār-Śaivism as well) the Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism. And we may ask what were the sources for the Kṛṣṇa myths—the three Viṣṇu steps, the various avatāras, that of dwarf Vāmana especially; the Govardhana mountain and above all, what Ramanujan (1981: 150-152) calls the “mutual cannibalism” of Kṛṣṇa and his devotee—in the poetry of Nammālvār, a non-Brahman Ālvār and eventually the most iconic of all Ālvārs? It will be recalled that Friedhelm Hardy (1983: 413 and see note 49 above) poses this question with respect to the Brahman Ālvār, Periyālvār (Viṣṇucitta), answering that the source could only have been the *Mahābhārata*,

Harivaṃśa in particular (the Σ-SR text in my scheme) and not the early Purāṇas—a conclusion broadly applicable to Nammālvār as well as other non-Brahman Ālvārs. Hardy takes Periyālvār’s Sanskrit learning for granted: can we do so for the non-Brahman Ālvārs as well? Perhaps not, but it is clear that the epic is no longer confined to its Sanskrit traditions. As we know, a Tamil translation already existed in the Sangam period, and as in Kerala, the material from epic begins to enter broadly into the social life of non-Brahman groups, in the *kūthu* repertory. As additional evidence of this, Hildebeitel (1988; 1991a) has shown that the Draupadī cult is deeply entrenched through the length and breadth of the Tamil country.

#### B. vi. The \*Pūrvaśikhā text and the Poona Critical Edition

Altogether 11 centers sent \*Pūrvaśikhā *Mahābhārata* to the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Poona from inside Kerala, 5 of them private Nambudiri homes (*mana*), others chiefly princely families and palace libraries, all, however, with close connections to the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās through the *saṃbandam* alliance system.<sup>75</sup> The colophon dates appear only occasionally, generally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No single center sent an entire corpus, Cochin State Library sending a maximum of 15 (*Ādi*, *Sabhā*, *Virāta*, *Udyoga*, *Drona*, *Śalya*, *Sauptika*, *Strī*, *Anuśāsana*, *Śānti* [minus the *Mokṣadharmā*], *Aśvamedhika*, *Mausala*, *Mahāprasthānika*, *Svargārohaṇa*) and four sending only one parvan. However, all 24 parvans of the \*Pūrvaśikhā text existed in Kerala. Moreover, if a particular house or center did not send a parvan to Poona, it did not mean that the parvan did not exist in that house or center. Thus for example in 2005

when I visited the Poomulli Mana, which sent the largest number of parvans (12) from among the Nambudiri homes to Poona, I saw the *Bhīṣmaparvan* in the *mana*'s very dilapidated library in regrettable contrast to its traditional repute for care and up-keeping of records. But it was not one of the 12 parvans that went to Poona from this center.

The literary or scholarly ecology which kept these manuscripts in transmission shows itself to have been highly viable. We have the best data available for the Ādiparvan: 26 Malayalam manuscripts of the parvan went to Poona for the collation of the CE, of which 8 made the critical apparatus.<sup>76</sup> All the above manuscripts that went to Poona were in palm leaf, written in Malayalam script, in the Āryeḷuttu script that the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās developed in the Malabar province of the present-day Kerala state between the Grantha and Vaṭṭeḷuttu during the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE (I. Mahadevan 2003: 212). We will see in Section C below that what may be thought of as the '*scripta franca*' of the entire region of the Kerala—along with the eastern coast of the Tamil country, the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom—was at this time the Vaṭṭeḷuttu form of the Tamil Brāhmī script, a script that cannot meet the entire range of Sanskrit phonology, thus ruling itself out, I will note, as the script in which the SR was created in the same linguistic area. We will further see, from I. Mahadevan (2003) on the scripts of South India, that the only script that offers itself for the composition of the Sangam era SR \*Pūrvaśikhā text was the Grantha script, or an earlier form of it, derived from the Southern Brāhmī script. Mahadevan notes without explanation that the Nambudiris developed the Āryeḷuttu script from the Grantha and the Vaṭṭeḷuttu scripts, around 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. In fact, in the linguistic map of Kerala, the traditional Āryeḷuttu region forms something of a wake in the Palghat area, largely overlapping the area of the Nambudiri settlements on the

Bhāratap-puḷa, the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script spreading to the south from the Bhāratap-puḷā and Kōleḷuttu, a form of Vaṭṭeḷuttu, to the north (Map IV). It is further seen that the area of the Āryeḷuttu script and Śrauta praxis of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās coincide, suggesting that this script is the product of interaction in situ between the Grantha script that traveled with them to the Malabar region and the local Vaṭṭeḷuttu.

Our best estimate for the longevity of the palm leaf manuscript is 300 years, plus or minus 100 years: thus, the \*Pūrvaśikhā text must have gone through two cycles of copying after its creation. We know that there developed in Malabar a social caste of scribes, used by Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās to write down non-Vedic texts, the Sanskrit epics falling in this category.<sup>77</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

### Section C. i. The Origins of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, Their Śrauta Traditions and Their Arrival in the Tamil Country

The outwardly distinguishing feature of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, corresponding to the pūrvaśikhā of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, is their aparāśikhā, “*pin kuṭumi*,” or back tuft in Tamil, as opposed to the “*mun kuṭumi*” or front tuft of the Pūrvaśikhās (Illustration 2; the illustration is a painting in the Panjab Hills school of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, precisely the area to which we will trace the Aparāśikhā group below.) Indeed, the aparāśikhā style is the ubiquitous mode now, in all of India, so much so that kuṭumi neutrally signifies the aparāśikhā mode, although in Sangam period, it did the pūrvaśikhā. As we saw, the ‘poetic code’ surrounding the representation of the kuṭumi in the Sangam poems clearly excludes the aparāśikhā mode.



Unlike the case with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, everything about the Aparāśikhā Brahmins is grounded in recorded history: their arrival in the Tamil country is one of the most meticulously recorded movements of human groups in history, especially considering its time span, ca. from 4<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Like the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, they too brought with them live, if semi-literate, śrauta traditions to peninsular India. Their Veda śākhās fall into the following groups:<sup>78</sup>

- i. Ṛgveda: Only the Śākhala śākhā of the Ṛgveda and its Āśvalāyana tradition are known among the Aparāśikhā Brahmins. The Kauṣītaki tradition of the Ṛgveda, the mainstay of the Pūrvaśikhā śrautism, is entirely unknown among them.
- ii Yajurveda: Both the Kṛṣṇa and the Śukla Yajurveda śākhās, the latter both its *Kāṇviya* and *Mādhyandina* recensions, are attested among the Aparāśikhā Brahmins, although a śrauta tradition has not survived along the Śukla Yajurveda matrix. The Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda is entirely of the Taittirīya śākhā, attested in four schools, a minority Baudhāyana school and the prepossessingly dominant Āpastamba school and its two sister traditions, the Bhāradvāja and Hiraṇyakeśi (aka Śātyāśāḍha) schools.
- iii. Sāmaveda: Only the *Kauthuma* śākhā of the Sāmaveda is attested among the Aparāśikhā Brahmins, in its Drāhyāyana school.

Of the above, the Śukla Yajurveda occurs only among the Aparāśikhā Brahmins in the Tamil country.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the Āpastamba (along with the nearly identical Bhāradvāja and Hiraṇyakeśi) and the Drāhyāyana traditions also occur only among the Aparāśikhā

Brahmans: these signify thus positive control with respect to the Aparasikhā Brahmans in epigraphy and fieldwork, just as the Kauṣītaki Ṛgveda, Vādhūla/Āgniveśya Yajurveda and Jaiminīya Sāmaveda do for the Pūrvasikhās. And as with the Pūrvasikhā term “pavīliya” for the bahuvṛca tradition and ś/jāmbavya for a branch of the Kauṣītaki tradition, the term “*pravacana*” for the Baudhāyana tradition seems to be an exclusive Aparasikhā usage, in epigraphy (see below).

As a Śukla Yajurveda Śrauta tradition is not extant among the Aparasikhā Brahmans, the following four Śrauta matrices are possible among them:

- i. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Baudhāyana Yajurveda-Drāhyāyana Sāmaveda
- ii. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Āpastamba Yajurveda-Drāhyāyana Sāmaveda
- iii. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Hiraṇyakeśi Yajurveda-Drāhyāyana Sāmaveda
- iv. Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda-Bhāradvāja Yajurveda-Drāhyāyana Sāmaveda

The second axis seems to be the near universal tradition extant among the Aparasikhā Brahmans, mostly in the *agrahārams* along the Kaveri river from Tiruchirapalli to Tanjavur and onward to Kumbakonam.<sup>80</sup> Key epigraphic records, as we will see below, show that at least 70% of the Aparasikhā Brahmans belong to the Āpastamba tradition, the Yajurvedis as a whole forming possibly upto 90 per cent, and they are the subjects of the Pallava-Cōla land grants in the villages along the Kaveri river.

This striking statistic helps us trace the Aparasikhā group to the Mathurā regions of the Yamunā River, to which the Āpastamba tradition has been localized.<sup>81</sup> The region would extend to the Hariyana area in the northwest (Map V) to the old Kuru area in the

north with its Kauthuma Sāmaveda, the Malva territory in the south and southeast. A name that appears frequently in the Aparāśikhā epigraphic records is *Daśapuriyan*, after the Malva city Daśapuri (also known as Mandasor). The Aparāśikhā emigration seems to coincide in the main with the fall of the entire region first to the Huns (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) and the Muslims later, with widespread dispersion of the Brahmans of the area, including the Daśapuri Brahmans.

Like the Pūrvaśikhā group, the Aparāśikhās also fall into several internal divisions, not endogamous with one another till recent times and even today not fully so. We know that this division goes back to the time—and place—of migration. Its first attestation comes to us from the famous family history of Rāmānuja. His family was of the “*vaṭama*” division, his preceptor’s that of “*bḥatcaraṇam*” (as it happens, the two principal and largest groups of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans) forcing, as we noted above, Rāmānuja’s wife into a conduct unbecoming toward his *guru* and embarrassing personally to him.<sup>82</sup> That is, these divisions existed among the Aparāśikhā Brahmans before their arrival in the Tamil country and they arrived as strangers, despite adherence to common Veda śākhās. We will see that the Vaiṣṇava group, when it begins to emerge as a separate group within Ramanuja’s life time, is made up almost entirely from the Aparāśikhā group, all of the *vaṭakalai* group and 85% of the *tenkalai*, the balance of 15% made up of the Pūrvaśikhā group, the Brahman element of the founders of Āḷvār-Vaiṣṇavism.

I list here from Thurston (1909) the names of these divisions, from the most numerous to the least as determined in my field work:<sup>83</sup> i. the *vaṭama*; ii. the *bḥatcaraṇam*; iii. the *aṣṭasahasram*; iv. the *vāttima*; v. the *prathamasākī*. The first four

are all Taittirīya adherents, mostly its Āpastamba Sūtra; the last is made up entirely of adherents of the Śukla Yajurveda in both its recensions, the Kāṇva and the Mādhyandina.

### C. ii. The Pallava Period Epigraphy and the Aparāśikhā Brahmins

As I noted above, the first Aparāśikhā Brahman we can positively identify as one may well be Jyeṣṭha Śarman of the Gautama gotra and group-specific Āpastamba Sūtra of the Vēsantha (Jalapuram) Copper Plates of the Pallava King Simhavarman II, issued in his 19<sup>th</sup> Regnal Year, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, granting the village of Vēsantha to Jyeṣṭha Śarman (Mahalingam 1983: 52-54; Item 7).<sup>84</sup> The royal order is issued from Kanchipuram (not perhaps the extant city of that name in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area of the Tamil country<sup>85</sup>) to the “villagers of Vēsantha in Nādattapādi and to the *Mahāmātras*, *Adhyakṣas*, *Rājapurūṣas*, and *Cancarantas*,” the oral order recorded by “Kulippoṭṭar, a *Rahasyādhikṛ*”. The village lay still in the present Guntur district of southern Andhra Pradesh, the northern reaches of Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam, in the east coast area between the Pennār River in the north and the Pennaiyār river: this will include as Frasca (Map VI after Frasca 1990: 3; Map 2) shows well-known centers like the state capital, the city of Madras (also known as Chennai), Kanchipuram in the south and Tirupati and Nellur in the north, the whole area containing islands of both Tamil and Telugu communities even today.<sup>86</sup> We already face here the Vēnkata hills, the northern boundary of the Tamil country as recognized in the Sangam poems. The Kaveri delta lies still to the south, the eventual destination of many of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins. Nāthamuni, the redactor of the Ālvār hymns, was born in Viṣṇunārāyaṇapuram ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century CE and Rāmānuja, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE in Śrīperubendūr, three generations later in the same family lines,

both with signature Aparāśikhā Vedic affiliations, both still in the Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam region.

For the Pallava period, we have data for some 467 Brahmans arriving into the Tamil country, in 20 Copper Plate deeds that have survived, ranging from single families as with Jyeṣṭha Śarman above, to 308 families of the Taṇṭamtōṭṭam Plates of Nandivarman II, dated to his Regnal Year 33, 765-6 CE, with 108 families becoming interim the standard complement in a grāmadeya. The happenchance discovery of the original Copper plates,<sup>87</sup> mostly unearthed by farmers tilling the land, suggests that the discovered deeds constitute only a fraction of the total, as suggested by Burton Stein for the later Cōḷa period.<sup>88</sup> Of the 467 families, the Veda śākhās of 442 families are recorded in the plates. The Veda śākhā breakdown of these immigrants is given in Table I:

<b>Āpastamba</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>Hiranyakeśi</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Bhāradvāja</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pravacana</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Āśvalāyana</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Candogā</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Kātyāyana</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>*Agniveśya</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>*Paviṭiya</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>*Jaiminīya</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Kalarakha</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Kaṭu</b>	<b>1</b>

Goduma	2
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**Table I: The Veda Śākhās of Pallava Aparasīkhās**

The followers of the Āpastamba tradition constitute 62% of the total, the number increasing to 66% if we include the closely related Hiraṇyakeśi and Bhāradvāja Sūtra adherents, reaching 90% (including the *prarvacana* adherents) for the Yajurvedis as a whole, giving rise eventually to the adage that every “house cat” in South India, as Witzel notes (1995:335), can recite the Taittirīya Saṃhita. The backbone of the Aparasīkhā Brahman group takes shape in this period, constituting close to 95% by the modern period of the Tamil country, eventually coming to define the rubric “Tamil Brahman” for the area.<sup>89</sup> We do not know what Veda Sūtras the Kaḷarśa (also Kaḷarakha), Goduma (also Godu), and Kaṭu signified.

The three starred items in Table 1 belong to the Pūrvasīkhā group, represented by five families, identifiably so from their Veda śākhās (Jaiminīya, Āgniveśya and “paviḷiya,” a corrupt form of Bahuvṛca but part of the Pūrvasīkha argot) although there may have been some Pūrvasīkhā families in the Āśvalāyana group, the Baudhāyana group excluding itself out, however, being all “pravacana,” the Aparasīkhā term for the Baudhāyana tradition.<sup>90</sup>

The “paviḷiya” term for the bahuvṛca appellation is of exceptional interest: today, as noted above, it occurs only among the Nambudiri Pūrvasīkhās, yet the four paviḷiya families, at least two of them, are shown coming from the villages in southern Andhra Pradesh (#23, Vaḍuga Śarma of Kāśyapa gotra from Nimbēi and #134, Dāmodarabhaṭṭa of Garga gotra from Vaṅgippāru), both in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area extending northward into southern Andhra Pradesh, suggesting that the Pūrvasīkhās were present in areas

beyond the traditional boundaries of the Tamil country during the early era of the Pallava regime. It is possible as well that the families were Śōlīya Pūrvaśikhās, who regularly share with the Nambudiris several rare Veda śākhās. The term occurs, designating a Veda śākhā at *NDP*: 1611-12:

*Candōgā! Pauḥyā! Taittirīyā! Cāṃavēdiyinē! neṭumālē*

*Anto! ninnaṭṭyanṇimarriyēn aḷuntūrmēlticainin ammānē*

It is of interest in the above that there are two terms for the Sāmaveda: one Candogā, the Aparāśikhā śākhā, beginning to be known in the Tamil country among the Brahmans coming under the Pallava grāmadeya system and the other neutral Sāmaveda, possibly designating the Jaiminīya śākhā of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, being the Veda śākhā of Maturakavi, one of the four Brahman Ālvārs and the figure supplying the corpus *Nālāyiradivyaṃprabhadam* to the Aparāśikhā Nāthamuni in the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

We must also note that the Pūrvaśikhā presence in the Pallava epigraphy is practically non-existent, seven families of the total of 467, showing that they were not part of the grāmadeya deeds, near autochthons by now in the Tamil country; it also marks the relative eclipse of the group in the Tamil country, being reduced, as noted above, to a small minority eventually. On the other hand, the epigraphy also shows that the Aparāśikhā Brahmans are the group sponsored primarily and brought in by the Pallavas. It would seem that the Pallavas adopted in return the Bhāradvāja gotra, the predominant gotra of the Aparāśikhās, regularly attested upto 30% in some gotra samples I have studied, leading to the Tamil saying, “half of Brahmans are Bhāradvājas” (“*pāppānil pāti pāratvācam*”).<sup>91</sup>

A line (l. 198) in the Tanṭantōṭṭam Plates noted above reads: *pārataṃ vā[ci]ppānukku ppaṅgonrum* (“one share for the Bhārata reader”)—in 789 CE. What recension was read by this person in the temples? We do not know. Our hypothesis is that the \*Pūrvaśikhā text is in existence in the Tamil country at this time, as our Σ-text facing the Sukthankar-σ-text. Did the epic, corresponding to the Sukthankar-σ text, come with the Aparāśikhā Brahmans? I list below what would be a “learning quotient” of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans from the Pallava grāmadeya deeds:

<b>Dvivedi</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Trivedi</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Caturvedi</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Kramavittan</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Ṣaḍaṅgavit</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Somayājis</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Vasantayāji</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sarvakratuyāji</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Vājapeyi</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table II: The Aparāśikhā Vedic Titles**

It is true that titles, especially ones like *caturvedi*, are not always, as Louis Renou noted, to be taken literally.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, we have here (as with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans earlier) a fairly elite group moving from one part of the country to another, and it stands to reason that a *Mahābhārata* traveled with them, most likely, by the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE or



later, a vulgate Northern Recension text. The Aparasīkhā migration was to continue in this fashion to well-nigh pre-modern times, the last deeds of the brahmadeyas occurring in the Nāyaka period,<sup>93</sup> giving us the veritable modern Tamil Brahman.

Yet the \*Pūrvaśikhā text resident with the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās in the Tamil country as the Σ-text dictates the terms of reaction between it and the in-coming, Sukthankar σ-text of the Aparasīkhā Northern Recension. It seems improbable at first consideration, but as noted, it accords, on the other hand, perfectly well with the development of the texts of the emerging Vaiṣṇava movement. As we have already noted, the founding Āḷvār text, the *NDP*, begins its career, in part, with the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhā's Bhakti compositions in Tamil, depending upon the *Mahabharata* Σ-text, specifically its Harivaṃśa, for its Kṛṣṇāism: it is these texts that are collected by the Aparasīkhā immigrant, Nāthamuni, with the north Indian name Mīśra still common in his circles, and fashioned into the founding text of Śrīvaiṣṇavism (see below).

We do not have a similarly concrete narrative as regards the interaction between northern and southern strands in the case of the *Mahābhāratha*. That is to say, we do not have a Nāthamuni-like figure orchestrating the formation of the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu version of the epic. However, it would seem that the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās functioned like the Āḷvār compositions, providing the basis for the emerging Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions of the Southern Recension, most likely, as I argue below, in the Tanjavur Nāyaka courts.

### C. iii. The Cōḷa Period Epigraphy and the Aparasīkhā Brahmins

When the Pallava imperium comes to an end in the first decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE—we need to remind ourselves (Mahalingam 1983: xxvii) that it began almost with the Guptas, in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, outlasting them by two centuries, indeed reaching its apex with the long rule of Nandivarman II from 731 to 792, well after the decline of the Gupta period in the north—the system of the grāmadeya passes on seamlessly to the Cōḷa empire. The story that Burton Stein (1968; 1982) tells of the Brahman alliance with the land-owning Vēḷḷāḷa group under the local, segmentary control of the Cōḷa rule is essentially that of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, and he estimates that there were some 300 grāmadeya deeds in the Cōḷa period—with the rider about this being a fraction of the original number. Champakalakshmi (2001) shows that the Cōḷa brahmadeya system builds on the Pallava practice by designating certain brhmadeya units as tankūru (taniyūr) as “separate unit[s] of political-economic significance from the early tenth century [CE]” (65), a total of 22 such “rural-urban continuums” attested so far in the Cōḷa realm.

All the same, it has not been noticed how strikingly similar the practice of the Cōḷa period (ca. 900-1350 CE) is to that of the Pallava period:<sup>94</sup> essentially the same infrastructure supervises the same Aparāśikhā Brahmans, most, followers of the Āpastamba Sūtra, entering the Tamil country from an immediate domicile in southern Andhra Pradesh, and many more Daśapuriyans. Besides, the epigraphy clearly shows a gradual increase in the numbers per deed of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans arriving in the Tamil country, the earliest Pallava deeds being brahmadeya, in which the recipients of the royal bounty are single families and later ones grāmadeya, in which a number of families, eventually becoming 108, come to be settled in a village with various privileges

stipulated relating to taxes, water rights, access paths and other such matters—the entire process achieving a greater level of sophistication and organization in the Cōḷa institution of tankūru. And because their śrauta traditions place them in the Mathurā region in north-central India, covering areas in the north in Hariyana and eastern Panjab, western Rajasthan and the entire Malva region in the south and east we can say that the era of the Aparasīkhā migration begins with the arrival of the Huns in northwest South Asia (5<sup>th</sup> century CE) and continues un-interrupted with the Islamic conquests. To be sure, in the grāmadeya deeds, these Brahmans are also immediately from their domiciles in southern Andhra Pradesh, but originating eventually in the northwest, in the Malva country and its immediate northwest, the Eastern Panjab, the original Āpastamba home.

Not many of the Cōḷa Copper Plates have come to light yet, but one spectacular find gives us three times the data of the entire Pallava epigraphy, the Karandai plates, weighing in at nearly 250 pounds of copper and miraculously unearthed in a field in the village of Puttūr in Papanāśam Taluk and Tanjavur District ca. 1920's.<sup>95</sup> Planned as a grand grant to 1080 families by Rajendra I, the entire process lasting almost two years, 1019-1021 CE, *Tribhuvanamahādāvic-caturvēdimarigalam*, named for the king's mother, was made up from some 52 villages, covering a total area of 20,305 acres, almost the entire southern part of today's Papanasam Taluk in the south and extending to the Mannargudi Taluk in the northeast of the Tanjavur district.

I give below the Veda śākhā distributions of the Brahmans of the Karandai Plates in Table III below:

Āpastamba	615
Hiraṇyakeśi	42
Bhāradvāja	11
Āgastya	29
Baudhāyana	54
*Āgniveśya	2
Āśvalāyana	154
*Ś/Jāmbavya	4
Drāhyāyana	77
*Jaiminiya	41
Kātyāyana	50

**Table III: The Veda Śākhās of the Karandai Plates Brahmans**

Essentially this is the Aparāśikhā profile of the Pallava plates above. The adherents of the Āpastamba Sūtra and related Sūtra traditions amount to 62% of the total, almost the same ratio as with the Pallava grant. “*Pravacana*,” the Aparāśikhā term for the Baudhāyana Sūtra, is absent here: the 54 Baudhāyana families could thus be from either Aparāśikhā or Pūrvaśikhā group, as is the case with the 154 Āśvalāyana families. We encounter a significant number of Vājanaseyi adherents, following the Kāṇva recension of the white Yajurveda as well, 50, many of them carrying the title *kramavittan*—trained to recite the birth Veda upto the krama vikṛti level. The *Agastya Sūtra* designates a Yajurveda tradition and seems to be confined to the Aparāśikhā Brahmans<sup>96</sup>

On the other hand, the starred items are signature Pūrvaśikhā sūtras: 47 families of the 1080, all moving from the western parts of the Tamil country to the eastern parts.

Here we note a new Pūrvaśikhā Veda sūtra, the *Ś/Jāmbavya*, a close branch of the Kauṣītaki Ṛgveda tradition (Oldenberg 1884; Gonda 1977: 606)<sup>97</sup> with four followers. Considering the date of the Karandai Plates (1029-31 CE), it is most probable that the Jāmbavya Sūtra of the Ṛgveda would be found among the Tamil Pūrvaśikhās, almost certainly among the Śōliya Brahmins.<sup>98</sup>

We should note as well that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins of the Karandai Plates are not domiciled in the villages of the southern Andhra Pradesh: it will be recalled that the four “pavīliya” adherents of the Pallava Plates, almost three centuries earlier, were from the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area. The bulk of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins of the Plates, as Krishnan notes with emphasis, are also from this area.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, the 41 Jaiminīya Brahmins of the Karandai Plates—the Brahmins that we can unambiguously identify as Śōliya Brahmins as with the Jambavya and Āgniveśya adherents--come from the following domiciles, all recognizably of the Tamil country: Kōṭṭaiyūr: 2; Emappērūr: 1; Ādanūr:7; Palurūr:1; Puḷḷamaṅṭalam 10; Marudūr 2; Pulvāvūr 1; Tiṭṭakuṭi:2; Itaiyārṛukuṭi:5; Māruṇḍūr:4; Anbil: 3; Nāraṅamaṅṭalam: 1; Cātthamaṅṭalam:1; Aruvalam: 1. Moreover, as noted already, some of the adherents of the Āśvalāyana and Baudhāyana Sūtras may also be Pūrvaśikhās, indeed cohorts of the Jaiminīyas, as several of them are from the same Tamil villages as the Jaiminīya Śōliyas.

All the same, the dominance of the signature Aparāśikhā Veda śākhās, already clear in the Pallava period, is even greater in the Karandai Plates: more than 800 belong to Veda śākhās recognizable as those of the Aparāśikhā group. The largest single group, at 615, is made up of the adherents of the Āpastaṃba Sūtra, with another 33, of the closely related Hiranyakeśi and Bhāradvāja. The 77 Drāhyāyana adherents represent a

robust Aparāśikhā Sāmaveda tradition, no doubt the back bone of the Aparāśikhā Śrautism attested in the Plates, a strength that is still extant among the Aparāśikhā Brahmans in the Tanjavur-Kumbakonam area.

Some 500 families, all following the signature Aparāśikhā Veda śākhās, carry the last name *daśapuriyan*, derived from the city of that name in Malva, increasing from its 30 occurrences out of the Pallava total of 467, pointing to the origins of the Aparāśikhā group in north-central and northwestern regions, along the Narmadā, Chambal, and Yamunā banks.

As for the Pallava Brahmans, I give in Table 4 a breakdown of the “learning quotient” of the Karandai Brahmans:

<b>Trivedi</b>	1
<b>Caturvedi</b>	2
<b>Ṣaḍaṅgavit</b>	4
<b>Kramavittan</b>	118
<b>Āhitāgni</b>	4
<b>Somayāji</b>	28
<b>Kāṭaka-Somayāji</b>	3
<b>Vasantayāji</b>	3
<b>Kāṭaka-Sarvakratu Vasantayāji</b>	1
<b>Sarvakratu</b>	1
<b>Agnicittayāji</b>	2
<b>Vājapeyi</b>	1
<b>Atirātran</b>	1
<b>Sahasran</b>	151

**Table IV: The Learning Quotient of the Karandai Families**

There are almost 50 *Śrautins* in the group (of which 5 are identifiably Pūrvaśikhās, being Jaiminīyas, of a total of 41 [12.5%], indicating a robust śrauta tradition among the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE; the one Atirātran may also be a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman, this being the term still in use among the Nambudiri

Pūrvaśikhās to signify a ritualist who has performed the Agnicayana), with another 118 Brahmans who can recite the Vedas upto the *krama vikṛti*. In other words, the in-coming Aparāśikhā Brahmans continue to be drawn from the same elite levels as in the Pallava period, a trend that is to continue, further justifying the assumption that a version of *Mahābhārata* epic, almost certainly a Vulgate text by now, came with them.

#### C. iv. The Emergence of the Aparāśikhā Śrīvaiṣṇavism

One way to approach the development of the eventual Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu *Mahābhārata* of the Aparāśikhās is to approach it in the perspective of a precedent. Such a precedent exists in the formation of the texts and traditions of the mature Śrīvaiṣṇavism by the Aparāśikhā Brahmans from the Ālvār songs, collected in the *Nālāyiradivyaṅgrahandham* by an Aparāśikhā Brahman. This is, as noted earlier, the famous Nāthamuni, generally thought to have been born in 11<sup>th</sup> century, in Vīranārāyaṅapuram, very much the village of the Pallava-Cōḷa epigraphy, perhaps a first generation Aparāśikhā immigrant, among, as noted above, people still with the northern name, Miśra (Carman 1973: 24).<sup>100</sup> Once hearing a decad of the still uncollected *NDP* the *pāsuram*, *Āravamudē* (3194) by singers from the “west” (the traditional Cōḷa area along the Kaveri river west from Nāthamuni’s Vīranārāyaṅapuram in the relatively northern and eastern Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam-Arcot area, the region of the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās who supply all the Brahman Ālvārs), tradition has it that Nāthamuni seeks out and collects the songs into the extant text, the *Nālāyiradivyaṅgrahandam*, setting it besides to music, inaugurating the great performance tradition of the *aṛaiyars* in the Viṣṇu temples

of Tamil Nadu. And the figure from whom he is able to collect the 4000-verse long text is Maturakavi, a Jaiminīya Sāmavedi and hence unambiguously a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman.

However, and this is the other half of the reaction, tradition has him also bring to the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism northern texts and practices as well (the counterpart of the Sukthankar  $\sigma$ -text), as set forth in his *Nyāya Tatva* and *Yoga Rahasya*, laying the foundation through his grandson and disciple, Yāmuna, to the Pañcarātra-Āgama tradition (Carmen 1973: 25), the entire line of development culminating in Rāmānuja, Yāmuna’s grandson. We know that Rāmānuja belonged to the signature Aparāśikhā sūtra of Āpastamba, belonging in addition, as noted above, to the *vaṭama* group, hailing from Śriperumbedur, in the Tonṭaimaṅṭalam area, near Kanchipuram and a descendant of Nāthamuni on his mother’s side.<sup>101</sup>

I noted above that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a literary expression of this religious synthesis. Dated to ca. 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, very much in the period of Nāthamuni, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* incorporates, as Dihejia shows,<sup>102</sup> many elements of the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism, but addressing at the same time an extra-Tamil audience, in the north, still no doubt a place historical memory for many Aparāśikhās, with Nāthamuni himself going to Mathurā on a long sojourn and coming back to the peninsula only when compelled by a vision of the deity of his natal village commanding him to return (Carman: 24-25). Indeed, when the great Śrīvaiṣṇava schism into “*vaṭakalai*” (northern) and “*tenkalai*” (southern) occurs in the post-Rāmānuja period, the *vaṭakalai* branch is seen to be made up of entirely Aparāśikhā Brahmans, with Tirupati in the north, outside the northern boundary of the modern state of Tamil Nadu, as its center, with the *tenkalai* school, located in the south, in Śrī Rangam, Śrīvilliputhūr and Āḷvārtirunagarī, orienting itself to



the Ālvār Vaiṣṇavism and Tamil, its language. The tenkalai branch is made up both of the Aparāśikhā and the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās, the latter less than 15% of the smaller tenkalai group and relegated to a low social status among the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, although originally among the founders of Ālvār-Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>103</sup>

### C. v. The Tamil (Grantha) and Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata*

It is in the perspective of the above precedent that we must approach the formation of the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata*. In both cases, we have a resident tradition hosting an immigrant tradition, giving rise to broader and larger developments in both cases, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the *summum bonum* of the Śrīvaiṣṇava precedent, and the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata*, its epic counterpart. However, as we noted, we have very little concrete information about the precise details of how the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions of the epic developed: we do not have the equivalent of an iconic figure like Nāthamuni of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the figure who weaves the southern Ālvār and the northern Pañcarātra, its σ-text, into Śrīvaiṣṇavism of the Tamil country through Yāmuna first and Rāmānuja thence.

It is quite possible that the Villipputhūr *Mahābhārata* represents a stage in the development of the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu *Mahābhārata*. Śrī Villipputhur is traditionally a Pūrvaśikhā *agrahāram*, the birth place of Periyālvār and Āṇḍāl, two of the four Pūrvaśikhā Brahman Ālvārs. The author of the Tamil translation of the epic is named after the village and traditionally considered to be a Śrī Vaiṣṇava Brahman, and dated to the Tamil Middle Ages (12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> CE) although we do not know if he was a

Pūrvaśikhā or the Aparāśikhā type.<sup>104</sup> We know that the Villipputhūr text served as the fundamental source for the Tamil *kūthu* repertory, in the non-Brahman circles.<sup>105</sup> Being a center of the emerging Śrīvaiṣṇavism, second perhaps only to Śrī Rangam, being in regular contact with this bigger center, Śrī Villipputhur may well have been the center of reaction between the two recensions in the Tamil country, with the final phases of it occurring in the Nāyaka period, in the 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as P.P.S.Sastri pointed out, in his Southern Recension edition of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>106</sup> made from pretty much the same Tamil(Grantha)-Telugu manuscripts of the Sarasvatī Mahāl Library of Tanjavur that went to Poona for the collation and preparation of the Critical Edition.

#### C. vi. The Grantha and Telugu Mahābhārata and the Poona Critical Edition

We have from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a *kāvya* work titled *Viśvāguṇadarśacampū*<sup>107</sup> by a Veṅkatādhvarin, identified as “an orthodox Śrī Vaiṣṇava Tamil Brahman” (Rao et al 1992: 1) with his name *ādhvarin* deriving from *adhvaryu*, the main śrauta priest and belonging to the Yajurveda. Purporting to be an aerial journey over the Tamil country by two *gāndharvas*, conversing between them on the earthly sights below, the poem is an objective representation of the final Aparāśikhā ‘possession’ of the Tamil country, an aerial map literally laid over the territory of the Pallava-Cōḷa and subsequent grāmadeya epigraphy about the Aparāśikhā Brahmans. The *gāndharvas* begin their peninsular journey at the Karnataka Aparāśikhā centers at Udupi and Melkote and, flying due east to Tirupati, the most important, by the time of the poem, *vaṭakalai*, and thus all-Aparāśikhā, center of Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇavism, they turn southward and retrace the path of the Aparāśikhā immigration, covering the entire region of the Pallava and Cōḷa

epigraphy, starting with Kanchipuram in the northeast, coming to the Kaveri river banks stretching from Śri Rangam through Tanjavur to Kumbakonam in the east, the Tanjavur-Kumbakonam-Mannarkode area, and south to the Tāṃṇavarṇī delta (Map V after Map 1 in Rao [1992] et al.) The gāndharvas notice the author's village, Vīkṣāraṇya, not far from Ramanuja's village at Sriperumbudūr, both in all likelihood villages of the Pallava-Cōḷa gramadeya system, a system the Nāyakas continued.

We know that poets like Venkatādhvarin above found patronage with the Nāyaka chieftains, the latter, Telugu-speaking, coming south to the Tamil country with the dissolution of the Vijayanagara empire, and establishing themselves as rulers there, the “little kings” eventually with “hollow crowns”.<sup>108</sup> Indeed Venkatādhvarin is himself linked to the Seṅgi Nāyakas, and his poem partakes of what has been identified with the Nāyaka ethos, centering around the theme of the “unknown, unpedigreed warrior who fights his way into power and a kingdom of his own” (Rao et al. 1992: 7). Moreover, the Nāyaka courts produced “an enormous corpus of Sanskrit works, reflect[ing] the accumulated erudition of late medieval south India” (336), altogether a fitting environment for what P.P.S.Sastri has called the “Nāyaka excesses” of the Grantha-Telugu *Mahābhārata*.

This is particularly true in the case of Tanjavur, which by all account went through a brief renaissance—beginning thus a journey toward the eventual capital of Brahmanical culture of the Tamil country--under its three Nāyaka kings, Accutappa Nāyaka (1564-1612), his son Raghunātha Nāyaka (1600-1634) and his son Vijayarāghava Nāyaka (1631-1673). The famous Govinda Dīkṣita begins his career as the King's Minister with the first of the three Nāyakas, providing tutelage and a splendid

education for the middle Nāyaka, a Renaissance prince in every respect,<sup>109</sup> and his son, Yagnanārāyaṇa Dīkṣita, continuing his father's cultural and artistic leadership. The Tanjavur court was the host to many poets and musicians, with Raghunātha Nāyaka actually fashioning the extant *vīṇa* of the Carnatic musical tradition. As Krishnasvami Aiyangar (1941: [II] 296), a 20<sup>th</sup> century descendant from the grāmadeya village of the third Nāyaka--called at the time of the grant Raghunāthapuram in honor of his father but now Śakkotṭai--notes, Raghunātha Nāyaka “held a competition among the ladies of the court, several of [whom] could compose poetry in the four kinds. They were also expert in resolving curious literary puzzles. Some of them could compose hundred verses in “an hour” and write poetry in eight languages. One lady of the court by name Rāmabhadrāmba was accorded first place in this and was installed as the “empress among poets” (sāhityasāmrājya) which probably involved the honor of kanakābhiṣeka (bathing [*sic*] in gold)”. Thus we have every reason to think that the Tanjavur court functioned as a nursery for the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu versions of the Southern Recension, with their inflationary excesses.

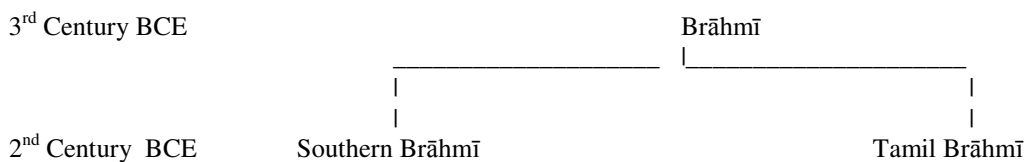
We must note that Tanjavur's famed Sarasvatī Mahāl Library, the final source<sup>110</sup> of the manuscripts of the Tamil (Grantha) and Telugu Mahābhārata for the Poona editors began its life as the Sarasvatī Bhandār in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century under Raghunātha Nāyaka. This tradition of scholarship and respect for the arts continued after the Maharashtrian take-over of Tanjavur in late 17<sup>th</sup> century, in 1674 CE, with Sarasvatī Bhandār metamorphosing into the Sarasvatī Mahāl Library and acquiring vast numbers of manuscripts from Benares, under Serfoji II, during his famous pilgrimage to the holy city in 1832 with a retinue exceeding 3000. True, some Maharashtrian Brahmans came to

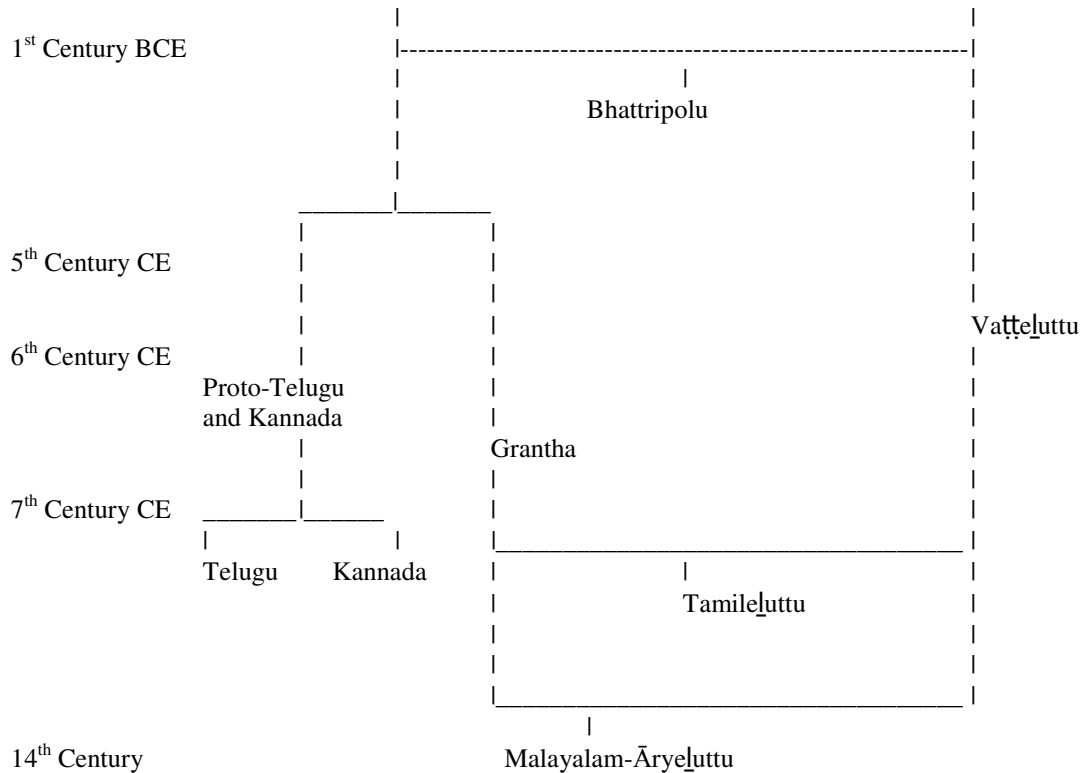
Tanjavur with the Maharashtrian conquest and rule, but there is little doubt that the city's intellectual and cultural life was entirely the creation of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, long prepared for their eminent role through the historical processes described by Burton Stein (1982). A roll call would include such names as Appayya Dīkṣitar (1520-1593); Govinda Dīkṣita and his son, Yagnanārāyaṇa Dīkṣita; and later, the musical trinity of composers of the Carnatic music, all from Tanjavur, all anecdotally Aparāśikhā Brahmans. In all likelihood, the final form of the Tamil (Grantha) and Telugu *Mahābhārata* takes shape in this period, 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, CE.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Section D. Brāhmī Paleography and the Southern Recension Texts

Impressive proof for the above links between the history of Brahman migration and the textual history of the SR of the *Mahābhārata* is furnished by the history of the Brāhmī scripts and their various derivatives, as it has been re-constructed by Iravatam Mahadevan (2003). We must keep in mind we cannot have a textual tradition without a phonologically appropriate script, linking, in other words, the epic to the relevant human agency, the third correlate in the equation. I begin with Mahadevan's master chart for the entire development:





We see that the Brāhmī script devolves into two separate and independent lines of developments, starting with the Southern Brāhmī and Tamil Brāhmī, arriving in peninsular India separately and giving rise to the five major historical scripts of the area, Telugu, Kannada, Grantha, on the one hand, and Tamil and Malayalam, on the other. The Southern Brāhmī script is seen to give rise to the first three, the Kannada and Telugu scripts emerging from an intermediate proto-script of the parent Southern Brāhmī and the Grantha, more directly from it. This latter fact has great significance for us. On the other hand, the Tamil Brāhmī script is seen first to evolve into Vatṭēḷuttu, which from reaction with the Southern Brāhmī derivative, Grantha, gives us the Āryeḷuttu script of Malayalam and Tamilēḷuttu script of Tamil, (the latter, as we will see below but not shown in

Mahadevan's chart, showing a further influence of a Northern Brāhmī script—what we may call the  $\sigma$ -script after Sukthankar's use of the Greek letter for the NR text that comes south with the Aparasikhā Brahmins, from about 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, the period of the Aparasikhā migration.)

These paleographical facts have significant bearing on the arguments presented above on the different genealogies of the *Mahābhārata* epic and their agents of transmission, the Brahman groups, that came to the peninsular India, starting with the Pūrvasikhā Brahmins, arriving in the Tamil country well enough in time to take part in the production of the poetries of the Sangam period, and the Aparasikhā Brahmins, arriving almost half a millennium afterward, under the Pallava patronage, from 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

It is useful to consider the problem in its three main aspects:

- i. Introduction and an over-view of Mahadevan's findings
- ii. the Tamil Brāhmī script and its history
- iii. the Southern Brāhmī script and its history
- iv. the Brahmins, the epics and paleography

#### **D. i. Introduction and an Over-view of Mahadevan's Findings**

As Mahadevan (2003: 315) shows, the Tamil Brāhmī script is attested in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Jain cave inscriptions, starting with those of the Māṅgulam caves, around Madurai in the Pāṇṭiyan territory, the Pāṇṭiyan kings being thus the earliest and in the early period the most frequent hosts and patrons to the Jain monks and the Jain religion.

It is quite likely that the indigenous Tamil society at this time was largely oral, as Hart (1975:157) has argued, still in the phase of the *pāṇan* songs and their oral traditions and the latter in the process of beginning to become the templates for the literate and decidedly literary overlays of the Sangam songs, as they have come down to us. The Tamil Brāhmī script evolves over the next four centuries, providing the script for the Sangam-era compositions, dating from ca. 50 BCE to 200 CE, transforming into an early form of the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script by ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE and mature Vaṭṭeḷuttu script afterward. Correspondingly, the language itself changes from Old Tamil (250 BCE to 100 CE), represented by Tolkāppiyam and probably some Puṛaṇānūru songs, to middle Old Tamil (100 to 400 CE), represented by bardic poems on love and war collected in the Eṭṭutokai and Pattuppāṭṭu anthologies, into Late Old Tamil, (400-700 CE) with the two epics, Cilappatikāram and Manimēkalai, as its representative texts (Lehman 1994; Takahashi 1995; Steever 2004). The key point to note here is that there is a complete fit between Tamil phonology and Tamil Brāhmī script, and the body of Saṅgam, “academy” literature, cited so from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onward to signify the canon of the academy, *cāṇṇor ceyyu!*, “poetry of the nobles” (Steever 2004: 1037), runs into some 32,000 lines (Lehman 1998: 75).

The Southern Brāhmī script constitutes, on the other hand, an independent derivation from the parent Brāhmī script (Mahadevan 2003: 176), arising at the same time as the Tamil Brāhmī script, but it provides an entirely different history. The modern languages of Kannada and Telugu are the outcome at one line of development, thus through the western areas of the peninsular regions, but it gives rise to the Grantha script



in the eastern parts, in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam region, appearing in epigraphy ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, with what is considered to be the first Grantha inscription (213).

We do not have much information in Mahadevan about their parallel evolutions other than that, at its attestation, the Tamil Brāhmī script is already the entrenched script of the Tamil country, fashioned, as Mahadevan argues, in the Jain monasteries around Madurai in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, already adapted to meeting the requirements of the Tamil phonology. As noted, this is the script in which the literate—and literary--overlay of the Sangam songs on the Pāṇan oral templates by the *pulavan* (“learned”) poets takes place (Hart 1975). On the other hand, the Southern Brāhmī script is attested along an independent line of descent in its Grantha form only ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE (Mahadevan: 213), meeting, it should be noted, the needs of the Sanskrit phonology. And in Mahadevan’s scheme, the Telugu and Kannada scripts are cohorts in this development.

We notice a gap of almost 600 years between the attestations of the two scripts in the Tamil country, the Tamil Brāhmī script by 250 BCE and the Southern Brāhmī script by 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, the first meeting Tamil phonology and the second meeting, the Sanskrit phonology. Because of the efflorescence of the Saṅgam poetry in this period of 600 years—largely in Old Middle Tamil and in Tamil Brāhmī script--we do not raise the question if there was literary activity in the peninsular region in Sanskrit in the same time period. We have already noted that a substantial number of these poets of Saṅgam poetry were Brahmins, wearing the pūrvaśikhā and using the Tamil Brāhmī syllabary to compose the songs. Was there no composition among them simultaneously in Sanskrit? And if so what script served them? These questions lead in turn to a fundamental

question: if the Jains brought with them a script (the parent Tamil Brāhmī script) with them, did the Brahmans bring with them a script?

Yet this question is never posed. Consider for instance this statement by Lehman (1998:75), “During this period [Sangam], with the propagation of Jainism and Buddhism in South India a number of Prakrit and Sanskrit borrowing entered Old Tamil and appear in Sangam anthologies (my parenthetical gloss).” The arrival of Brahmanism is not similarly posed as an alien influence, presumably because the later Hinduism subsumes both Brahmans and non-Brahmans as one group in the Tamil country in contrast to the Buddhists and Jains. Yet for this period, Brahmanism in the form of its Śrauta ethos is just as alien in the cultural ecology of the Tamil country, and as Sangam poetry shows by far the most dominant. For instance, Mahadevan considers the presence of Buddhism in the Brāhmī inscriptions to be negligible, something that can be said with equal justice for its presence in Sangam anthologies as well. Jainism is the dominant religion in the inscriptions, but tapering off in time and almost totally eclipsed in Sangam literature. On the other hand, as we will see, the Brahman presence, just as alien in the context as the Jain and Buddhist, is on the ascendance. It is almost completely unattested in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, but as an alien presence, it dominates the Sangam anthologies: a good percentage of the Sangam poets are Brahmans; śrautism is decidedly extolled, a king coming to be named after the ritual hall where the sacrificial animal is immolated, the Pāṇṭīyan King, Paliayākacālai Muṭukuṭumip Peruvaḷuti.

This poses a fundamental question to the recensional history of the epic: if the SR text arose as the \*Pūrvaśikhā text in my chart in the first millennium of the CE, what script could have served the composition? We have placed the epic in the form of a

\*Śārada text and a human agency in the form of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans in the scene; we have now to place a script in the region, a script that can meet Sanskrit phonology. It is easy to see that the only option we have is the Southern Brāhmī derivative, the Grantha script. Thus, I would be arguing that the SR \*Pūrvaśikhā text begins its life in a \*Southern Brāhmī script, Grantha, or an early form of it, being the most logical candidate. Mahadevan (213) considers the Grantha script to be derived from Southern Brāhmī of the Prākṛt Charters of the Early Pallavas, 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. If my scenario that the SR rises in the first centuries of the CE, soon after the arrival of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans in the peninsular India with a \*Śārada text of the epic is valid, the only script that can meet the demands of the literate composition of the SR is the Grantha script. I would be arguing below thus that a form of the Southern Brāhmī script, substantially similar or identical with this, arrived in the Tamil country with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans and was already present in the area when the Pallava reign begins. The attestation of the pavīliya adherents, ca. 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam area in the Pallava epigraphy, suggests that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans were present in this area as well, around Vēṅkata hills, after their dakṣiṇāpatha migration. This is also the area of the Prākṛt Charters of the early Pallavas, which display the first epigraphic evidence of the Grantha script.

In sum, then, both the Tamil Brāhmī and the Southern Brāhmī scripts originate from a common parental \*Brāhmī script (Mauryan?) and both are attested only in peninsular India, but at entirely different time intervals, the first by ca. 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and the second by only ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Tamil Brāhmī script, eventually becoming the Vaṭṭeluttu of the Tamil-Kerala country, meets the linguistic needs of the

Tamil language in the area, most significantly that of the Sangam poetry. On the other hand, the Southern Brāhmī scripts must be seen, in some incipient form of the later Grantha script, as the vehicle of the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, when it takes shape, in the first centuries of the Current Era in the same area.

#### D. ii. The Tamil Brāhmī Script

Based on Mahadevan’s chart given above, we can say that the Tamil Brāhmī arrived in South India in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, and it was brought to peninsular India by the Jains, arriving there from the north, it is widely accepted, through Karnataka in the west and not through the Vēṅkatam hills of the later Brahman migrations: it is likely, as Mahadevan (135) notes, that “Tamil Brāhmī script was adapted from the Mauryan Brāhmī in the Jain monasteries (*paḷḷi*) of the Madurai regions sometime before the end of the third century BCE” (Mahadevan’s parenthesis). In the Early Period (3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE) in Mahadevan’s chronology, out of 30 sites with 86 Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, in Early Old Tamil, 28 sites with 84 inscriptions pertain to Jainism, and they are mostly in the Pāṅṭiyan region, around Madurai, leaving, as Mahadevan notes (128) “no longer any doubt that the Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscriptions are mostly associated with the Jaina faith.” In the Middle Period (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE), the period of the Middle Old Tamil, there is a sharp decline in cave inscriptions, and this is accompanied by a striking shift of Jainism from the Pāṅṭiyan kingdom to the Karur-based Cēra region, with the main trope of the inscriptional passages—the grant of the cave shelter to a Jain monk by a ruler—continuing, as for instance in the case of the Pugalūr site on the southern banks of the Kaveri river 15 kilometers northwest of Karur, dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (405-

421; Items 61 through 72). By Late Period (3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries), that of the Late Old Tamil, the natural cave inscriptions come to an end, with the Sittanavasal B site (451-461; Items 101 through 109), already in early Vaṭṭeḷuttu, being the last of the Jain cave shelters—giving way as well to a new kind of Jaina monuments in the form of *nicītikai* (← Kannada inscr. *nisidige* [Mahadevan: 632]) inscriptions, denoting a “seat of penance...where a Jaina monk performs the religious penance of fasting unto death” (Mahadevan: 632), the *sallēkhana* death (“death by starvation”) at Paṛaiyanpaṭṭu and Tirunātharkunru (470-473; #s 115 and 116 in Mahadevan’s numeration), ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.

We are no longer in the oral society of the itinerant pāṇans now but in a fully literate period of Tamil history, the lasting legacy of Jainism, as Mahadevan (139) notes, to the Tamil history, leading to the efflorescence of the Sangam literature of the early centuries, CE.<sup>111</sup> As Hart (1975) has conclusively argued, the Sangam poetry is a literate—and literary—copy created by a written overlay on the original oral templates of the pāṇan songs.<sup>112</sup> The Tamil Brāhmī script gives us a script for this overlay, as indeed already suggested by Hart (147), the script in which these poems were written, presumably with an iron stylus on palm leaves, the stylus held in the tightly closed, ritually correct right fist, the technique and practice of the mode of writing, producing in time, presumably, the circular shape of the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script. We are at the juncture of the rise of the historical Tamil script, Tamil-eḷuttu, adapted, ca. 8<sup>th</sup> CE, from the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script and the Grantha script of the Southern Brāhmī filiation with as noted an input from a σ-script that came with the Aparāśikhā Brahmans: I come back to this in C. ii below. We must note, however, that the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script remains, at this stage, in its pure and

unalloyed form in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Tamil country, as for instance in the famous Vēlvikkuṭi Plates of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and covering besides most of the modern territory of Kerala.

It is striking that in this new literature of the Sangam poetry, written in a Jain-invented script, the Jains and Jainism are signally absent. Other than the solitary *Akanānūru* (123)<sup>113</sup> reference to the Jain practice of *sallēkhana* death, the trope, as we saw, of the later, 6<sup>th</sup> CE, Late Period Tamil Brāhmī-Early Vaṭṭeḷuttu inscriptions—marking, it should be added, a Karnataka Jain practice, and not so much Tamil—aspects of Jainism itself are remarkably absent in the Sangam poetry.<sup>114</sup> We do not have as yet an adequate explanation for this sudden decline of Jainism through the six centuries, from the Early Period (3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE) to the Middle Period (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE) and the Late Period, (3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). Why are the Jains and Jainism unrepresented or represented so meagerly in the Sangam poetry, generally accepted to be in composition in the first centuries of the Current Era?

Let us consider. The cave inscriptions testify to a deep and organized Jain establishment in the Tamil country from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE onward. Mahadevan adduces (128-139) seven terms of various but precise significations for a Jain monk, from *kaṇi* (head of a *gaṇa*) through *amaṇan* (an ascetic), to *upacaṇ* (a lay teacher of scriptures) to *māṇākkar*, a student or novice. They appear linked to some 14 individual Jain names in these inscriptions: one Attiran (<*Atri*, a gotra term) is an *amaṇan*; Naṭṭi, Naṭan, Nākan, Nanda-Siri-Kuvan are *kaṇis*. We have seven dhārmic terms, like *aṭṭānam* (< Skt. *aṭṭhāna*), ‘seat’ of authority; *aṇam*, ‘charity or religious life’ and ‘*paḷḷi*,’ for hermitage, the last term also serving as the suffix in the names of many human settlements in the

Tamil-Kerala country. Mahadevan (139) considers thus the contribution by the Jains to the Tamil history “enormous” and “most basic and fundamental”.

The inscriptional evidence shows that the first stage in the decline of Jainism, or its royal patronage, is marked by the cessation of cave sites in the eastern parts of the Tamil country, the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, and their shift to the west, in the Karur-based Cēra kingdom (the Pugalūr sites, Item XX: 1 through 12; Mahadevan: 405-421), later to produce landmark works by Jain authors, the *Cilappatikāram* and *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, to name just two of the most noted texts. We must note as well that the inscriptional evidence points to continuous contacts between the Tamil Jains and the Jain centers of the Karnataka region, a point emphasized by Mahadevan (135).

It is useful to note that this is precisely the time period, the dawn of the Current Era, in which the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans arrive in the Tamil country in the scheme presented above in A.i and to be taken up again in C. iii. below: they are clearly and concretely attested in the Sangam poetry with their pūrvaśikhā kuṭumi. Like the Jains, they also come from the north, but not through the Karnataka region, but through the dakṣiṇāpatha route in the lower Godavari region, possibly at Assaka in its banks, and further south through the Vēnkaṭa hills, and eventually into the kingdoms of the *mūvēndar*—the land of the three Indras, the Cēra, Coḷa, and Pāṇṭiya kings, the occurrence of the pavīliya term in the Pallava epigraphy of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE still placing them in the Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam area as late as 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

We have already noted that the Vedic content of the Sangam poetry is considerable, and that a good 10% of the Sangam poets were Brahmans. We must add to this the evidence from the Sangam poetry that some of the foremost patrons of the Vedic

ritualism were the Pāṇṭiyan kings, erstwhile hosts to the Jain religion. Perhaps the most prominent of these kings is the great Paliyākacālai Muṭukuṭumip Peruvaḷuti, (of *Puṛanānūru* 6, 12, 15, 64)—such a patron of Vedic ritual as to be named after the *yāgaśāla* of the Vedic ritual, with the *yūpa* or the pole fixed just outside the eastern boundary of the ritual hall, on the *pr̥ṣṭha* axis, the line to the rising sun, to which the animal (*'bali'*) is tethered to be sacrificed in a Soma class ritual. At *Puṛanānūru* 15. 11-17, the poet-singer, Naṭṭimaiyār, almost certainly a Brahman, celebrates this king:

Given your fury, which of these is in greater in number  
 --your once eager enemies shamed and despairing after brandishing  
 their long spears that throw shadows and their beautiful shields  
 embossed with iron against the power of your swift vanguard  
 with its shining weapons, or else the number of spacious sites  
 where you have set up columns after performing many sacrifices  
 prescribed by the Four Vedas and the books of ritual  
 fine sacrifices of an excellence that will not die away[.]

Hart's (2000) translation.

Yet Peru-vaḷuti's namesake first appears in the Tamil-Brāhmī Māṅgulaṃ I inscriptions, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, the oldest Tamil-Brāhmī inscription in the Pāṇṭiyan region and the oldest Jain inscription all of India, as "Kaṭalan Vaḷuti" (Vaḷuti of the Sea'), the paṇavan ("servant") of Neṭuñceliyan, the Pāṇṭiyan king of the Māṅgulaṃ I inscriptions, and who oversees the construction of the stone bed for the Jain kaṇi, Nanda-Siri-Kuvan (Mahadevan 2003: 315-323; Item I, 1 through 6). "Vaḷuti" is widely attested as a generic



Pāṇṭiyan name, passing on later to Pāṇṭiyan kings—indeed, one of the two kings credited with the collection of two anthologies, Ainkuṇūru and Akanānūru, being Ugra-pperuvaḷuti. The Vaḷuti of the Māṅgulam I inscriptions need not thus be a direct ancestor of the later Muṭukuṭumip-Peruvaḷuti, the ‘big’ (*peru*) Vaḷuti, but the fall from favour of the Jains in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom by the end of the Early Period (beginnings of the CE) of the Tamil Brāhmī paleography cannot be ignored. The first Vaḷuti is the paṇavan, the overseer of the construction of a stone bed for Nanda-Siri-Kuvan, the Jain kaṇi, whereas the “Big” Vaḷuti of the Sangam poetry, the patron of four of its songs, is seen to be synonymous with Vedic Śrautism, brought to the Tamil-Kerala country by the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins. It is clear that the Brahmins of the Sangam period—that is, a period synchronous with the Middle Period of the Tamil- Brāhmī paleography, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> CE-- replace the Jains of the Early Period of the Tamil Brāhmī paleography as the new recipients of royal patronage at the Pāṇṭiyan courts, with the Śrauta ritual, certainly more spectacular than the spectacles of the Jaina religion and more promising of worldly and other-worldly glory,<sup>115</sup> forging the old Āryan *brahma-kṣatra* alliance between Brahmins and Kings, but now in the Tamil country, as the Rājasūya ritual of the Cōla king, Vēṭṭa Perunārkiḷi, shows. Indeed, as Hart notes (1975: 70-71), the Sangam poetry acknowledges, as at Pur.166, that “a struggle is under way between the orthodox and non-orthodox religions” with the Brahmin (of the kauṇḍinya gotra) to whom the poem is addressed seen as establishing the truth “not agreeing with those who claim the true is false, and who realized the lie that seemed as if it were true to utterly defeat those who would quarrel with the one ancient book.” The śrauta ‘status kit’<sup>116</sup> of the Brahmins wins the day, not for the first time, nor the last.

A corresponding Jain resentment at the Brahman usurpation of their patronage is not totally impossible, nor illogical, and only extreme political correctness, no doubt, a corrective reaction to the Brahman historiography of the Tamil country of the first five decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, would be blind to this.<sup>117</sup> The continuous contact of the Tamil Jains with their Karnataka counterparts is an important element in this complex and changing picture. For, the next great historical event, and perhaps the most important in some ways of Tamil history as a whole, although not sufficiently understood, is the invasion of Tamil country by the Jain-Kaḷabhras from Karnataka, creating the famous Kaḷabhra Interregnum, the “long night” of the Tamil history in the extreme Brahman historiography of the subject, with the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom receiving the brunt of the invasion.<sup>118</sup> Thus while the Kaḷabhra’s anti-Brahmanical excesses may have been exaggerations of a Brahman historiography, there is wide-spread consensus that the Kaḷabhras were both Jain and from Karnataka, and their conquest and rule of the Tamil country over three centuries constituted a complete break with the classical Sangam period. As Mahadevan (136) notes, “[the Kaḷabhras] displaced the traditional Tamil monarchies and held sway over the Tamil country for nearly three centuries until they were expelled in the last quarter of 6<sup>th</sup> century CE by Kaṭuṅkōṇ, the Pāṇṭiya, from the south, and Simhaviṣṇu the Pallava from the north (my parenthesis).” It is an eighth descendant of this Kaṭuṅkōṇ, Neṭuñjaṭaiyan, who appears in the Vēlvikkuṭi Plates (EI XVII (1923-24):271), restoring lands of the Vēlvikkuṭi village to a Brahman petitioner by the name of Korkaikiḷan Nar Ciṅkan, originally gifted, as recorded in the plates, to his ancestor Korkaikiḷan Narkorran, by the great Paliyākacālai Muṭukuṭumip Peruvaḷuti of the Sangam poetry.

We have here a grid of three Pāṇṭian kings and three Brahman beneficiaries spread over some six centuries. Peruvaḷuti of the Sangam period (ca. 200 CE) gifts the village of Vēḷvikkūṭi to a Śrauta Brahman, Narkorran, the village acquiring its name from Tamil *vēlvi* (“sacrifice”) from Narkorran’s śrauta ritual at the site; the Kaḷabhra dispossess his descendants of this gift some length of time later, perhaps two centuries. King Kaṭuṅkōn, in marking the end of the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, restores the Vēḷvikkūṭi land grant to an unnamed Brahman descendant of the original donee, ca. 620 CE, almost four centuries after the Peruvaḷuti grant of the Sangam period. All of this is ratified by King Neṭuñjaṭaiyan, the issuer of the Vēḷvikkūṭi Plates, seven kings after Kaṭuṅkōn, thus ca. 760 CE, by affirming the right of Nar Ciṅkan, the petitioner and remote descendant, indeed, of the original donee, Narkorran. And Narkorran’s patron, King Peruvaḷuti of the Sangam period looms as the prime mover of the narrative, himself linked at least by name to a Vaḷuti of the Māṅgulam Plates and a patron of the Jains. We are thus witness to a period of Jain dominance and patronage, a Brahman usurpation of their patronage in the Pāṇṭiyan court, a Jain disruption of the established order of the Tamil society through the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, and an eventual Brahman restoration.

I would suggest that part of the disruption of the Kaḷabhra period also results in the break-up of the first Brahman group of the Tamil country, the Pūrvaśikhā group, into its historical remnants. We first see them in the Tamil country in the Sangam poetry, portrayed in it with their kuṭumi in the likeness of a horse’s mane, composing themselves a sizeable number of these poems, no doubt using the Tamil Brāhmī script, created by the Jain monks in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom almost two centuries before. After the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, we begin to see the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās in Malabar across the Palghat

gaps facing the Karur-based Cēra kingdom, certainly the śrauta elites of the community, and, as Mahadevan notes, creating from 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> CE the historical Malayalam script from the Vaṭṭeluttu and Grantha script, called locally the Āryeluttu (2003: 212).

However, Mahadevan does not explain how the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās come to possess the Grantha script, by 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. True, the Grantha script has already been in existence, but in the Tamil country proper, for almost half a millennium, and Mahadevan does not explain how it comes to the Nambudiris, in Kerala. It is unlikely that the Grantha script arrived in a disembodied form to Malabar and to the Nambudiris; it is equally unlikely that the conservative Nambudiris would have accepted a script from the outside. Besides, composition in Sanskrit went apace among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās in Malabar before the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, showing the presence of a Sanskrit-able script in the region. We must note too that almost all intercourse between the Tamil country and the emerging Kerala entity had ceased by the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, Mahadevan's date for the start of the formation of the Āryeluttu. In my scheme, the script would have accompanied the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās at their departure at the Kaḷabhra Interregnum to the Malabar area: indeed, it is the script of \*Pūrvaśikhā *Mahābhārata*, the archetypal Southern Recension text that was found in the Nambudiri houses and centers of learning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: I consider this in fuller detail in Section D iii below.

#### **D. iii. The Southern Brāhmī Script**

This is the other script into which the Mauryan Brāhmī originally devolves and which, like its counterpart, the Tamil Brāhmī script, came to the Tamil-Kerala country, giving us three historical South Indian scripts, Kannada and Telugu on the one hand, by

6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Grantha script, on the other, a little earlier, by 5<sup>th</sup> CE. As we have already seen, Mahadevan has persuasively suggested that the Tamil Brāhmī script was fashioned by the Jain monks ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE in Madurai Jain monasteries, and this script fashions the course of Tamil history for the next half a millennium, functioning as the script of the Sangam poetry and transforming later into the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script and serving vast areas of the Tamil-Kerala country, all along the east coast of the Tamil country and all of today's Kerala. But what about the origins of its sister script, the Southern Brāhmī script, and its development? Who brought it to the south? Why was it not attested till ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, with the first Grantha inscription, marking a 600-year gap between the Tamil Brāhmī derivatives and Southern Brāhmī derivatives?

Answers to these and related questions lie in the scenario I have been advancing regarding Brahman migration to the south—especially with the *Mahābhārata* epic. In fact, we will see that it is the epic half of the story that completes the validity of the argument presented above: the departure of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, ca.150 BCE from the *antarvedi* area of the Ganga-Yamuna doab with a version of the epic resonant with the \*Śārada text of the *Mahābhārata* epic and their arrival in the Tamil country in time to be attested in the Sangam poetry both as players in the poems and their composers on the one hand, and fashioning on the other hand, the \*Pūrvaśikhā version of the Southern Recension in the half millennium or so after their arrival, by the Kaḷabhra Interregnum.

The question that will elucidate the entire problem concerns the script in which the \*Śārada text came to the south with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans. The Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans have displayed strong oral traditions; the famous example of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās is only the most conspicuous one. As Raghavan notes in the 1958 survey of

the state of all-India Vedic recitation, the Śōḷiya Brahmins also possess live family-based Vedic oral traditions.<sup>119</sup> Something similar to this could be said about the two other temple-based Pūrvaśikhā groups as well, the Chidambaram Dīkṣitars and the Tiruchendur Mukkāṇi Brahmins, although outside the Vedic tradition properly so called.

With this in background, we could raise the question if the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins brought the \*Sārada text as an oral archive. The \*Sarada text, as it has been assembled in the Poona CE, runs into 75,000 verses—not a formidable number for a person oriented and trained in the arts and sciences of the oral tradition to commit and transmit in a memorial tradition: we have the example of a Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhā, Ēṛkkara Rāman Nambudiri, dictating the entire text of the Kauṣītaki Brāhamaṇa from memory to E.R. Sreekrishna Sarma in 1968, rather to a tape recorder commandeered by Professor Sarma for the task of the textualization of the text.<sup>120</sup> And this would have been only part of his oral repertory; as a Kauṣītaki Ṛgvedi, he would know by memory all of the Ṛgveda from the *saṃhita* mode to the *jaṭa vikṛti* as well as the Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣadic texts of his birth Veda, all part of the svādhyāya regimen of his family. The memory load of 75,000 verses is not the problem *per se*, inside the context of a fully functioning and flourishing system of oral tradition, as we know the Vedic system to have been.

The problem lies in the fact, on the other hand, that there would have been no need nor use for the memorization of the epics, as no rituals demand intact recitation of verses from the epic as is the case with Vedic verses—ignoring for the moment the oral origins of the epic, the original oral pragmatics that gave rise to the epic at its formative stages. We must note that the various mnemonic devices associated with the Vedic oral traditions—the padapāṭha and its vikṛti modifications—possess no epic counterpart.

Verses from the epic never really possessed a ritual context, demanding the phonetically correct recitations, as we know was the case with the Vedic verses. In other words, there is no oral infrastructure for the transmission of the epics, comparable to that of the Vedic texts.

Consider for instance the case of the Pallava epigraphy, where a share of the land grant is predicated to the livelihood of a reader of the epic (*'vāśippavanukku'*)<sup>121</sup>: we know that the epic was not “read” ( $\sqrt{vāci}$  [?], to read; not in DED), much less recited to an audience. To judge from the well-founded latter day praxis of the craft, a verse or a group of verses would be read or declaimed (rather than ‘recited’ with its Vedic connotation of proper accentuation and exact phonology) by the discourser to expatiate on issues of right and wrong, right conduct at moments of ethical or moral ambiguity, with, as we know, a good deal of sophistry and expostulation. A sample of such exposition is in fact a regular weekly column in the *Hindu* newspaper, appearing in the back page of the newspaper.<sup>122</sup> We should contrast this with the example of the Homeric epics and public recitations of portions of the epics in the Pan-Athenian festival in Athens. Plato’s *Ion* (530B2) makes it clear that the rhapsodes merely recited, if performatively, stretches of verses from the Homeric epics on stage in competition or contest with other rhapsodes<sup>123</sup>: no commentarial discourses followed the recitation. In the Indian example, we know that the praxis is completely different, the discourser reading from a written (printed, today) copy of the epic verse or passage from the epic as a take off strategy, as a point of departure, to pass on to his many homilies and casuistries on matters related and unrelated to the epic verses. In turn, we must contrast this with the tape recorder-like fidelity of recitations of the Vedic verses in Vedic rituals among the

same people, in the same tradition. In other words, we may rule out oral tradition as a means in the transmission of the epic, both in time and space.

In addition, the *parva*-based transmission of the *Mahābhārata* text would have made the mastery of the entire epic to a memorial tradition impossible—the *parva* transmission itself being a consequence of the literate tradition, it should be added. One of the discoveries made by the Poona editors during the preparation of the Critical Edition was that the transmission of the epic was often along individual *parvans*, rather than the entire text of the epic, an inevitable condition with a text of the size of the *Mahābhārata*. It makes no sense to think that just one or two *parvans* would be mastered in oral tradition and transmitted as such. We could add parenthetically that if all *parvans* of the epic are found in a given resource center, then the text tradition of the center in question must be generally unimpeachable. This is what we find in the case of both the Pūrvaśikhā and Aparāśikhā Brahmins: each of these groups could have assembled a complete 24-*parvan* Southern Recension *Mahābhārata* text, as indeed they did. We have a complete verse-to-verse translation of the Pūrvaśikhā-Malayalam version of the *Mahābhārata* into Malayalam by the prince Kuññikkuṭṭi Tamburān in 1904-07; we have P.P.S. Sastri's Kumbakonam edition of the Aparāśikhā Southern Recension in 1933, assembled from the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu version of the *Mahābhārata*, from the Sarasvatī Mahāl Library: P.P.S.Sastri was the director of the library.<sup>124</sup>

For all these reasons, we can discount the possibility of an oral archivization and transmission of the *Mahābhārata* epic—both vertically in time from generation to generation and horizontally, across geographical space, from northern India to other parts. Indirectly, this supports the Hildebeitel (2001: 20-21) thesis of a committee-based



redaction of the entire corpus,<sup>125</sup> a script driving, perhaps, the redactorial process. It is easy to see that the only script that offers itself is the Southern Brāhmī in Mahadevan's chart, providing the conveyance of the \*Śārada text to South India with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, the latter group, with strong adherence to the Jaiminīya tradition and thus frame narratives, originally perhaps even part of the Hildebeitel committee. Let us note that the sister script, Tamil Brāhmī, has already traveled southward independently with the Jain monks, who fashion this script by 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE to meet the demands of Tamil phonology, a point that cannot be overemphasized. That is, in effect, this script, the script of the Sangam poetry, cannot carry the full range of the sounds of the Sanskrit language and literature, ruling itself out for the transcription of the \*Pūrvaśikhā SR *Mahābhārata*, although attested in the Tamil country by 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The only script that possesses at the same time attestation in peninsular India, albeit late in Grantha script, by 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, and the ability to carry the full range of Sanskrit phonetics, is the \*Southern Brāhmī script.

Once we accept this, many known and stray facts fall in place. The Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins depart the *antarvedi* area of the Gangā-Yamunā doab, with the \*Śārada text in the Southern Brāhmī script, ca. 150 BCE. At and after their arrival in the Tamil country, they participate in the creation of the Sangam literature in the Tamil-Brāhmī script, already in use in the area, having been created earlier by the Jain monks. They also create the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the *Mahābhārata* in the Southern Brāhmī script, over the next several centuries. In other words, we must assume a sort of di-graphia,<sup>126</sup> equivalent to diglossia, but in the realm of scripts, among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, using the Tamil Brāhmī script for writing in Tamil and the Southern Brāhmī script to write in Sanskrit.

The rise of the Southern Recension text is proof positive for this: the text exists as a physical object, each of the 18 parvans of the Northern Recension worked over; material adapted from *khilā* (“appendix”) sections to re-fashion the main parts of the epic, as in the peroration of Bhīṣma on behalf of Kṛṣṇa in the *Sabhāparvan*; with several episodes transposed, the whole epic becoming more Brahmanical than the already Brahmanical Northern Recension and attaining a 24-*parvan* extent in its final form. It is not enough if we imagine the process in the abstract: we must account for the human agencies behind the process and the possible scripts that could meet the demands of a Sanskrit phonology. It is thus that the Southern Brāhmī script evolves into the Grantha script, over the half-millennium or so. The royal epigraphy of the three Tamil kingdoms in the area continues in the meanwhile to be in the Tamil-Brāhmī script, a practice already established by the Jain monks, with the “unique” adoption of a northern Brāhmī script for the non-Sanskrit, Dravidian phonology of Tamil, attested in a total of 70 inscriptions in the Pāṇṭiyan kingdom, 17 in the Cēra kingdom, 5 in the Toṅṭai region, and 4 in the Cōḷa area, from 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE to 6<sup>th</sup> CE (Mahadevan 2003: 134). In the meanwhile, the Southern Brāhmī script, the script of the *Mahābhārata* epic, remains with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, becoming the Grantha script in time and giving us the \*Pūrvaśikhā text by the Kaḷabhra Interregnum. The date of the first appearance of the Grantha script in inscription supports this, the early 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, a century or so before the Old Kannada and Telugu scripts. Let us keep in mind the *paḷaiya* attestations, and thus a Pūrvaśikhā presence, in the Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam region during the Pallava period.

In other words, the Southern Brāhmī-Grantha script, say \*Grantha script, is a paleographic counterpart of our \*Pūrvaśikhā SR text. At the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, the

future Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās take both the \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the Southern Recension and the \*Grantha script to the Malabar area over the Palghat gaps, creating the Āryeḷuttu from the Grantha and the resident Vaṭṭeḷuttu scripts from 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, the area of the Āryeḷuttu script shows itself clearly as an intrusive wake in the linguistic map of Kerala, formed by the arrival of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās through the Palghat gaps, with Vaṭṭeḷuttu in use in areas both to the north, as Kōleḷuttu, a form of Vaṭṭeḷuttu, and Vaṭṭeḷuttu proper in the south, in the historical Travancore-Cochin region (Map IV). Both the \*Pūrvaśikhā text, now distinctly as the Σ-text, and its Grantha script stay behind in the Tamil country, with the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās. They create from the Grantha script of the epic and the Vaṭṭeḷuttu script of the Tamil Brāhmī family the extant historical Tamil script, the script of the Āḷvār (and Nāyanār) poetry.

We are now in the Pallava period of Tamil history and the arrival of the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, from 4<sup>th</sup> CE onward. There can be little doubt that the Aparāśikhā Brahmans were a literate group, allowing writing, unlike the Pūrvaśikhās, to enter even their Śrauta praxises. And the early Pallava epigraphy shows the script to have been the “Brāhmī Script of the Southern Class” (Mahalingam: 29-30).<sup>127</sup> By the mature Pallava period, the Sanskrit parts of the Copper Plate paleography are in the Grantha script and Tamil parts, in historical Tamil script, the common script of the region, created from the Grantha and Vaṭṭeḷuttu scripts. As with the precedents of the Śrīvaiṣṇavism and the Southern Recension *Mahābhārata*, the Aparāśikhā Brahmans adapt themselves to the host traditions, in the matter of the writing systems as well.

Is there a trace of the Aparāśikhā script that came with them, a counterpart to the σ-text in the final paleographical picture of the Tamil country? Sure enough: as William

Bright notes (1998: 45) “[I]n the eighth century (CE) a competing script came into use for Tamil—probably reflecting a northern variety of Brāhmī, but with strong influence from the Grantha.” It needs to be scarcely added that the eighth century marks the arrival of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins in large numbers, with the rise of grāmadeya of 108 families, and we have our σ-script.

#### **D. iv. The Brahmins, the Sanskrit Epics and Paleography**

The famed Laurentianus codex of the plays of Sophocles,<sup>128</sup> in the early “miniscule” style of writing, six plays and a fragment out of, it is thought, a total of 120 plays the playwright wrote through his long life in Athens, from 495-406 BCE, is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. It was made in a Byzantium scriptorium from an eighth century CE archetype, with five extra lines on each page and enough marginal space for the scholia, already, it would seem, a set practice in the tradition of manuscript transmission of Western classical texts. It was acquired in Byzantium by Giovanni Aurispa, a Sicilian manuscript collector and dealer, between 1422 and 1423, and sent in advance of his own journey with an additional 238 volumes back to Florence, to Niccolo dé Niccoli, a prominent member of the group which surrounded Cossimo dé Medici in Florence. It lay in the Medici collections till 1523, traveling then to Rome with the Medici Pope, Clement VII, when he built the extant Florence Laurentian library to receive them. Another edition of the Sophocles plays appeared in the meanwhile, in 1502, in Venice, also from other Byzantium manuscripts, dating from 14<sup>th</sup> century CE, published by Aldo Munuzio, but in ignorance of and thus without consultation with the Laurentian manuscript. The

Aldine text held sway till the second Juntine edition of 1547, the first Juntine edition having been published in 1522 largely based on the Aldine edition of 1502. The second Juntine edition of 1547 incorporates the codex Laurentianus of the Sophocles plays for the first time into the textual tradition the plays, thereby and thereafter making codex Laurentianus the basis for the editio princeps of the Sophocles textual history.

I provide this excursus into the textual history of the plays of Sophocles, not, as it might seem at first sight, to draw contrast between the histories of transmission of texts between east and west, the precision of the latter and the looseness or waywardness of the former but rather to show that an equally sagacious narrative of the transmission of texts is possible for the family of the *Mahāhārata* texts and manuscripts, if the right questions are posed and rational answers arrived at. Far too often, a regional text is taken for granted, given a disembodied existence, as if the epic unearthed itself there like the Copper Plate inscriptions, outside the realm of the questions that have governed this investigation. Both Brahman groups can be concretely linked to the textual history of the Southern Recension of the *Mahābhārata* epic. Moreover, we see that an adequate narrative of its formation can be obtained from the history of the paleography of the two major families of scripts of the region, the Sanskrit-able Southern Brāhmī script and the Tamil-able Tamil Brāhmī script—in other words, a literate version of texts, pointing to the fallacy of the idea of nebulosity, or worse, the absence of “texts”, in the east. The Ṛgveda all by itself is a constant and eternal repudiation of this fallacy, remaining an oral text for all practical purposes to this day among the Brahmans of this investigation. However, even Sukthankar echoes such a sentiment in his persistent invocation of the difficulty of the creation of a CE of the *Mahābhārata* with his reiteration, surely once too

often, of the *sui generis* nature of the epic. There is no doubt the epic is *sui generis*, but it is so in the manner of most archaic texts.

This is the larger context in which I have framed the above argument that brings together three items in an algorithmic relationship, the Brahmans, the Sanskrit epics and their various scripts, the three irreducible correlates. It is quite true that we cannot conjure the Byzantine scriptoria in the various points of interest in the textual history of the *Mahābhārata*—a point, ca.150 BCE, in the erstwhile realm of the Kuru-Pāñcāla chieftains and kings--Witzel's Brahman kings promoting the Śrauta traditions--of the gathering of Hildebeitel's Brahman committee and the resulting \*Śārada codex; a Sangam locale later, ca.100-400 CE, where the \*Pūrvaśikhā *Mahābhāratha* was created; or a Nāyaka facility where the Aparāśikhā text took shape. What I have tried to show above is that only because some analogues of these facilities existed at these and other such relevant geographical points do we have the extant manuscripts of the different text-traditions of the *Mahābhārata*.

First of all, the analogues to the vellum parchments of the Byzantine scriptoria. I have claimed above that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans left the antarvedi area of the Ganga-Yamuna area with the *Mahābhārata* epic, a version close to the Śārada text. What was the epic written on? I believe that we can rule out leather as the physical manuscript: \*Śārada text was close to 75,000 verses and it is difficult to imagine enough leather for this much text. The *būrjapatra* is a choice for the material, and it appears as an item of trade in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>129</sup> However, its supply, available only in birch forests 7500 feet high in the Kashmiri-Himalayan mountains may well be as rare as the Soma of the Mujāvat mountains. More likely, the physical manuscript would be the palm leaf linked

to an ink-quill technology. Once it reaches peninsular India, the palm leaves can readily be imagined to take its place, and considering the sheer size of the text, it is even possible that the first transcription of the \*Śārada codex in būrjapatra or palm leaf into the traditional peninsular palm leaves based on an iron stylus technology may well be the beginning of the process of the revision of the \*Śārada text into what becomes the first ornate \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the Southern Recension. We must keep in mind that by now, as Mahadevan notes,<sup>130</sup> the Tamil society has become truly literate and the use of palm leaves for writing, pervasive—leading, indeed, as I note above, to the circular shape of the Tamil-Brāhmī script as it becomes Vaṭṭeḷuttu. Professional scribes, the equivalent of the personnel of the Byzantine scriptoria, must have been widely available, extant in the 1950's in my memory in Kerala as recorders--directly on palm leaves with iron stylus held in a closed right fist--of the horoscopes of new born babies, when pen and paper had become *de rigueur* in our other lives.<sup>131</sup>

Second, the script. If we accept that the *Mahābhārata* tradition is literate, then we have to deal with issues relating to a script in which the corpus was copied—in either būrjapatra in the north and palm leaf in peninsular India. An alternative, of course, is to imagine that the epic was in an oral tradition all the way to the dawn of the CE, as Fitzgerald intimated to me,<sup>132</sup> close to 100,000 verses—without, however, a plausible infrastructure to support or maintain it in oral tradition. As already noted above, an institutionalized oral tradition was never part of the transmission of the epic, except perhaps at its origins. Things clarify themselves exemplarily once we cross this Rubicon. We see that, for the development of the Southern Recension in the physical medium of the palm leaf, the only relevant script is the Southern Brāhmī script. Its sister script, the

Tamil Brāhmī script is already attested in the Tamil country by 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, its archetype having left northern India with the Jain monks some considerable time before—a century or so, as Mahadevan suggests (159)—for the Jain monks to develop from a Sanskrit-based writing system a script appropriate for Tamil phonology. However, the epic did not come to the Tamil country with the Jains, but with a group of Brahmins, almost two centuries later, by the dawn of the Common Era and the Sangam poetry, into an area already widely literate with the Tamil Brāhmī script. This is the logic—a Sanskrit text being made from one version to another—that forces us to accept the reality of the Southern Brāhmī as the script of the epic, and that it came with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, the latter being the di-graphic human agency behind both the Sangam poems, in their Brahmanical contents and authorships, and the Southern Recension text of the *Mahābhārata* epic. We do not have an alternative explanation in the present state of our knowledge.

Third, the Brahmins: the analogues of Niccolò dé Niccoli and Cossimo dé Medici of the Sophocles text history. Both groups of Brahmins, Pūrvaśikhā as well as Aparāśikhā, were full equivalents to the Renaissance figures, in the matter of the transmission of the texts and literate scholarship. More than this, the really important point to note is that the infrastructure that served the transmission of the texts in South Asia was analogous, and of a high order. Both groups of Brahmins above brought the śrauta traditions of Vedism to the peninsular India, the first group, the Pūrvaśikhās by the beginnings of the Common Era and maintaining them still in a live oral tradition, and the second, Aparāśikhā Brahmins by the Pallava-Cōḷa periods, an entirely different tradition derived from a later corpus of Vedic texts and in a partly literate state. Indeed, this



demands an infrastructure of far greater complexity than that needed to run the Byzantine scriptoria. First and foremost, it needs a specific tri-Vedic axis of praxis: the *hautram* of a specific school of Ṛgvedic texts, the *ādhvaryam* likewise of a specific Yajurveda tradition and, third, easily the most important of the three, the *audgātram* of a specific Sāmaveda tradition—all institutionalized in the family-based svādhyāya system.

Migrations of Brahman groups who have sustained a Śrauta tradition could only have been well-organized and systematized with the sort of sophisticated infrastructure such as the one we are led to imagine for Byzantium or Florence.

A large part of the infrastructure would be linked naturally to the demands and praxis of the Vedic tradition, the mastery of the three ritual Vedas in the first place and their immense and baroque *viniyoga* deployments in the rituals—demanding 16 priests for the śrauta ritual. We know that the śrauta ritual demands a rehearsal of some six months,<sup>133</sup> as observed in its modern day performances. Even if we allow a shorter period for preparation and rehearsals from constant and regular practice, it would be nearly the occupation of an entire year. In other words, the two Brahman groups in question here, Pūrvaśikhā or Aparāśikhā, must be imagined as engaged in śrauta matters most of the year, performing the śrauta ritual every year at vernal equinox on their centuries-old migrations southward.<sup>134</sup> The Assaka Soma ritual of the *Suttanipada*, possibly, is one such example. That they did so is proved by the survival of the śrauta Vedism in both groups, each distinct and autonomous. For instance, we know that the śrauta tradition with the Vādhūla school of the Yajurveda meeting the praxis of *ādhvaryam* has been extinct among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās since the beginnings of 20<sup>th</sup> century CE<sup>135</sup>: it also means that it had survived among them till then, from 5<sup>th</sup>

century BCE, at the latest. To consider another example, a śrauta tradition is altogether no longer extant among the Tamil-speaking Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās,<sup>136</sup> but we know from the Karandai Plates that it existed among them till 1029-30 CE, presumably in a live and continuous tradition from its origins.

To throw in the *Mahābhārata* epic into this infrastructure of transmission of systematized knowledge is to ask a small camel--okay, a large one--into the tent, albeit in a literate transcript in a generally oral tent. Once we accept the formation of the *Mahābhārata* in its present form and extent, and its canonical status as the fifth Veda, we cannot separate it from the Brahman groups of the type we encounter above. We must recall here that the founding myth of the *Mahābhārata* is a śrauta ritual, the Janamejaya *Sarpa Sattra*. This represents a Brahman possession of the epic, perhaps not wholly disconnected from the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans of the above account in that Vyāsa, the master composer of the epic and a Parāśara Brahman, appears as part of the *sadasya* of the Śrauta ritual, an office unique to the Kauṣītaki hautram of the Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta axis and second, the hyper-developed frame narratives among the Jaiminīya groups, also part of the Pūrvaśikhā matrix: whether it was also at the same time a Bhṛgu usurpation of the epic is, I believe, not a wholly closed question.<sup>137</sup> Brahman groups with the sort of learning infrastructure, or learning quotient, as above, would also keep the text in transmission, but as a literate transcript in an otherwise still predominantly oral culture. A literate artifact means a script, and we see that appropriate and relevant paleography is attested in both Brahman groups.

Lastly, we should resist the ease of imagination a disembodied regional version found *in situ* in isolated points of South Asia affords us, as in an abstract statement like

“The *Mahābhārata* epic is found in its shortest Southern Recension in Kerala.” To subject such a statement to an Occam razor analysis, an analysis of its irreducible physical, areal correlates—the script, the physical form of the manuscript, the extent of the epic itself, the human agencies behind the texts—in terms, further, of their final filiations, is to arrive at the conclusions reached above: that the *Mahābhārata*, substantially the Śarada codex text of the CE, or the \*Sarada text in my scheme, left the antarvedi area of northern South Asia ca.150 BCE with the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans in a \*Southern Brāhmī script in possibly the būrjapatra manuscript or the palm leaf manuscript of northern India, both using an ink-quill technology of writing;<sup>138</sup> they created the \*Pūrvaśikhā text in the Tamil-Kerala country from this in the half millennium after arrival, the recensional change from the \*Sarada to \*Pūrvaśikha probably taking place in the process of transcription from the northern manuscripts to the palm leaf manuscript of the South with the stylus technology, the original \*Southern Brāhmī script becoming gradually the Grantha script in the process; a \*Pūrvaśikhā text moves to the present territory of Malabar in Kerala at the Kaḷabhra Interregnum and comes to Poona for collation purposes toward the creation of the Poona CE; a \*Pūrvaśikhā text remains in the Tamil country as the Σ-text to host Sukthankar’s σ-text, that is, playing host to the Aparāśikhā immigrants and to their Northern Recension text, creating eventually the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu version of the Southern Recension.

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<sup>1</sup>Sukthankar, V.S., et al., eds. 1933-70. *Mahābhārata: Critical Edition*. 24 volumes with *Harivaṃśa*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. Almost every editor of the Critical Edition comments on the general differences between the two recensions; the sustained exposition of these is to be found in V.S.Sukthankar’s *Prolegomena*, i-cx, in his edition of the *Ādiparvan* (1933).

<sup>2</sup>The picture as it relates to the Critical Edition of the sister epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is altogether a different matter for want of a Sukthankar-like figure in the editorial team. The Rāmāyaṇa project began in 1952, when a substantial part of the CE of the *Mahābhārata* was already available in published form. That is, the “anomalous” status of the Malayalam version of the *Mahābhārata* was already well established in

Sukthankar's Prolegomena (1933) to the Ādiparvan and in the introductions by the other editors of the *Mahābhārata* CE. It would seem that the Baroda Editors of the Rām. would have shown special interest in the Malayalam version of the Rām., especially after their decision to settle on its Southern Recension for their primary text, (itself a problematic decision), but such does not seem to have been the case. There is no discussion, nor reference, to the problem in G. H. Bhatt's edition of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1960), the first volume of the CE; the other editors Divanji, *Āraṇyakakāṇḍa* (1963); Mankad, *Kiṣkindakāṇḍa* (1965); Jhala, *Sundarakāṇḍa* (1966) seem to have followed the example of Bhatt. It is left to P. L. Vaidya, already with editorial experience in the *Mahābhārata* project (having edited the Karṇa-, Bhīṣma-, Mokṣa-parvans and all of Harivamśa) to raise the question, when he joins the Rām. project to edit the *Ayodhyakāṇḍa* (1962) and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (1971): he raises the issue of "special alignments" between some Malayalam versions and the Northern Recension Rām. texts. Subsequent to this there seems to have been some effort made to procure more Malayalam manuscripts under the direction of U. P. Shah, the second and last Chief Editor of the Rām. project. Several more Malayalam manuscripts are actually collected, confirming Vaidya's discovery of close alignments between some Malayalam mss. and some NR texts. For good measure, as if in some penitence for the earlier oversight, Shah reproduces in the last volume of the Rām. CE no less than ten facsimile pictures of the new Malayalam manuscripts freshly collected from various Nambudiri homes in Kerala. But it was too late, as Shah himself acknowledges, astonishingly, in what amounts to a retraction of the entire Rām. CE in a note well after the completion of the entire Rām. project (1980:102): "So far as the Rāmāyaṇa Critical Edition is concerned, I believe that further search of M[alayalam] version MSS, representing earlier tradition, and agreeing with N[orthern] for the different kāṇḍas would be necessary and fruitful. We could not do this as we came to know of this at a very late stage, i.e., while editing the Uttarakāṇḍa." Shah further notes that M4, the Malayalam manuscript used for the *Bālakāṇḍa* and *Ayodhyakāṇḍa* "could have suggested this possibility" (102)--rather disingenuously, as it had been done by Vaidya while using the M4 ms. in his introduction to the *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*. See Pollock, "The Rāmāyaṇa text and the critical edition." In Princeton Rāmāyaṇa, Volume I: 82-93.

<sup>3</sup>A sea-borne arrival of the epic along the western sea with the Nambudiri Brahmins is to be rejected for several reasons. I believe that the legend of a sea-borne arrival of the Nambudiris on the Malabar coast is itself not viable: it results from confusing two Brahmin groups of Kerala with one another; the Sāgara or Samudra Nambudiris and the Nambudiris properly so called, with a śrauta tradition, profiled in Thurston (1909) and Iyer (1912). The former group does seem to have arrived by sea well into the middle ages, as the name suggests, but just from the Tulu coast, probably bringing with it the Paraśurāma myth from the Maharashtra-Goa coast. An all-Baudhāyana group and known in Kerala as "pōrris" in yester-years, these Brahmins do not have an extant śrauta praxis. On the other hand, as we will see below, there is strong epigraphic evidence for the presence of the second group, the Pūrvaśikhā Nambudiris with Śrauta traditions in the Toṇṭaimaṅṅalam and Cōḷa areas of the Tamil country as late as the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. We will also see that the Nambudiri Brahmins share many rare Veda śākhās with their fellow Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, found historically in Tamil Nadu. It is easier to imagine, as is argued here, that the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās moved to the Malabar area of Kerala through the Palghat gaps from the Tamil country than that the Tamil Pūrvaśikhās moved from Kerala to the Tamil country, as the scenario of the sea-born arrival for Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins would have us imagine. Besides there is something overdetermined in the thesis that the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās set sail from the Gujarat coast and traveled south till they arrived in Kerala (Veluthath 1978). I develop in the body of my paper the thesis that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins as a whole group, were the first group of Brahmins to bring Vedism to South India, and that they formed in the first few centuries of the Common Era a single group, fragmenting into their historical groups and identities after the Kaḷabhra Interregnum, ca. 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās can be dated to their Kerala home only from the Sangam-Kaḷabhra period South Indian history.

<sup>4</sup>Thennilapuram P. Mahadevan. The Arrival of Vedism in the Tamil-Kerala country: the Pūrvaśikhā and Aparāśikhā Brahmins.

<sup>5</sup>It is in Thurston (1909 [I]:393; [V]; 152-241) that we see this distinction formally acknowledged and discoursed, although distinctly from an Aparāśikhā perspective: for instance, we see that the Thurston informants mention the *pūrvaśikhā* as worthy of note. All the Thurston 'native informants' see the

pūrvaśikhā mode as exceptional. K. Rangachari is listed in title page as Thurston's assistant, and he was almost certainly the compiler of the information on the Brahmans of the Tamil and Telugu country. One M.N.Subramania Aiyar (154) is mentioned as the informant for the Nambudiri section for the Thurston volumes. L.K.Anantha Krishna Iyer ([III] 1912: 171-188) is strong on the Nambudiris. All these are, anecdotally, Aparāśikhā Brahmans, in particular from the "vaṭama" and "bḥatcaraṇam" sections of the Aparāśikhā group, what I characterize (see below; note 6) as the Burton Stein Brahmans, the Brahmans of the Tamil country (including the vaṭakalai section of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Brahmans) to take to Western education earliest, beginning indeed their lives earlier in the Tamil country under the Pallava-Cōḷa patronage from ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century CE onward. The distinction between the two types of *kuṭumis* has been further elaborated by Raghavan (1958); Staal (1960); Parpola (1973; 1984).

<sup>6</sup>This is the Peruntēvanār of the invocatory verses to the *Sangam* anthologies. Peruntēvanār addresses different deities, one each for an anthology, without the sectarian affiliation of the Bhakti period to a single god-head, plausibly thus datable to the period after the Sangam age and before the Bhakti period, 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. The three invocatory deities are Murukan (*Kuṇṭokai*); Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa (*Naṛṇinai*); Śiva (*Ainkurunūru*; *Netuntokai*, *Puṇānūru*). J. R. Marr (1985: 71) shows convincingly that these verses are decidedly post-Sangam in that their "terms of praise" are similar to those in Tēvāram and NDP, and thus cannot be dated before 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. They must date thus to the period between the Sangam period and before the Bhakti poetry and its sectarian celebrations of their respective gods.

<sup>7</sup>The route is of great interest in contemporary archeology: "Perhaps the most interesting region for an examination of issues related to cultural transformation is the stretch extending from the Palghat gap and Coimbatore to the Kaveri delta. One site especially significant... is ... Kudumanal on the northern bank of the river Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri. The site saddles the ancient route from the Palghat gap eastward from Karur and Urayyūr along the Kaveri and dates from the late Megalithic to Early Historical periods (3<sup>rd</sup> BCE to 3<sup>rd</sup> CE.)" (Ray 2006: 118).

<sup>8</sup>Stein argues (1966: 236) that throughout the Pallava area of Toṇṭaimantalām, "large-scale tank-irrigation projects were carried out to convert the central Tamil plain from a region of forest and hazardous dry crop agriculture to a reliable wet cultivation capable of supporting dense population." Although Stein's over-emphases on the local autonomy of the nāṭu system, with the Cōḷa state machinery playing no role in its administration, has been questioned and corrected by Karashima (1984:xxv-xxvi) and on the role played by the Brahmans by Champakalakshmi (2001: 60), his thesis that the Cōḷa state undergoes a fundamental transformation by large scale arrival of Brahmans, a process already begun in the Pallava period, remains a historiographical breakthrough for South Indian history. The immigrant Aparāśikhā Brahmans, first attested in the Pallava land grant deeds, form the backbone of this population, the Cōḷas, succeeding the Pallavas and continuing their *grāmadeya* system seamlessly—the entire process developing a "southern variant of the Āryan civilization," and "a large population of peasants lent their support to the maintenance of this culture" (237). Stein's *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (1980) is a fuller treatment of this thesis that the Coromandal Brahmadeya village was a keystone of Coromandal culture: "[D]uring the Chola age, we are afforded the first view...of how wealthy and powerful peasants, Brahmans, great chiefs and kings...shaped a highly variegated landscape to their distinctive purposes. And the arrangements established... during the the Chola period persisted into the modern age notwithstanding political, social and cultural developments which transformed many crucial aspects of South Indian life" (4). It is these Aparāśikhā Brahmans "who had come from North India in the medieval times...went after the English educations (sic) in a big way. These Brahmans had been given special villages or brahmadeyas by the medieval landlords and kings, and they had continued with the study of Sanskrit texts, but they had weak economic roots in South India because they preferred not to do priestly work in the temples and did not work in the land. With their English educations (sic), these Brahmans quickly got the best positions in the civil service and educational institutions, but their success led to resentment on the part of others in South Indian society" (Younger, 1994: 148). Paul Younger is drawing a contrast between the Aparāśikhā Brahmans and one section of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans of my study, the Chidambaram Dīkṣitars.

<sup>9</sup>Obviously we do not know what this script was, my asterisks indicating this. From Iravatam Mahadevan (2003), we know that two families of Brāhmī scripts came to the peninsular region; see below Section D for full details and discussion. The first of these seems to have been the prototype of the Tamil Brāhmī script, developed in the Tamil country by the Jains to meet the needs of Tamil phonology, by 250 BCE, with almost a hundred years or so presence there to develop the script to meet the Dravidian phonology. We have no information in Mahadevan about who brought the second Brāhmī script to the peninsular region, giving rise to the Telugu-Kannada scripts on the one hand and the Grantha script, on the other hand, and all meeting the needs of Sanskrit phonology. I raise the question in the text that if the Jains brought a script to South India, the Brahmans could have, too. Thus I would predicate my argument here to the thesis that that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans were literate when they left the Vedic realm, naturally in a script able to meet the Sanskrit phonology, and that the Sanskrit epics were conveyed in this script to the south, most likely in palm leaf manuscripts.

<sup>10</sup>Birchbark was in use in the northwest, palm leaf in the north of India (Witzel 2008). We do not know where exactly the first textualization of the epic took place, (possibly in the western Pāñcāla land). The physical manuscript may have been one of the two.

<sup>11</sup>Based on the prosodic study of the meters of the verses that appear in the Gṛhyasūtras, Oldenberg (1892: xiv) shows that these verses, mostly in anuṣṭubh meters, dating from the late Vedic period, are “later than the time of the oldest Vedic poetry, and coincides rather with the transition period in the development of the Anuṣṭubh metre, a period which lies between the old Vedic and the later Buddhistic and epic form.”

<sup>12</sup>The verse in KGS is a pitṛ-tarpaṇa oblation: sumantuajaiminīyavaiśampāyana pailasūtrabhāṣyamahābhāratadharmācāryaāstrupyantu. The epic seems to appear here along with Sūtras and Bhāṣyas, all three linked to Sumantu, Jaimini, Vaiśampāyana, and Paila. It is not clear why Śuka is missing in the list. It is not clear who the “dharmācārya” is? I have used the Malayalam *Kauṣṭiki caḍaṅgu*. Kunnamkulam: Panjangam Press, 2001: 118. In Oldenberg’s (1886:122) translation of the ŚGS (SBE 29), *Mahābhārata* is missing, but in his translation (1886:220) of the ĀGS, *Bhārata* appears in addition to the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>13</sup>Witzel (2005:66): “If the Śuṅga, as Brahmans, took an active interest in the traditional Kuru tales and therefore actually ordered some (‘committee’ of) Brahmins to come up with a unified, pro-western and anti-eastern MBh, it would not surprise us to see such Brahmanical patterns in the text.” Kulke and Rothermund (1986: 71) note that the Śuṅgas were not exactly anti-Buddhist. Of Puṣyamitra’s Vedism, there is little doubt, even the *puruṣamedha* is attributed to him (Kulke-Rothermund: 71)..

<sup>14</sup>J. F Staal (1987:371): “The most remarkable feature of the Indian scripts is not their shapes but their scientific arrangement which is basically the same in all the many forms with which we are familiar. Instead of the haphazard ABC’s of the West, the Indian scripts begin with a series of vowels—basically a, e, i, o, u, ai, au—followed by the consistently ordered consonants, beginning with ka, kha, ga, gha, nga etc.” In other words, the phonological analysis of the language preceded the syllabic notations in the Indian example. The significance of this is entirely lost on Western scholars who do not believe that an oral tradition engineered the transmission of large texts in a tape-recording-like fidelity. Goody (1985) is the prime mover of this literacist (mis-)understanding of the workings of the oral tradition, and although refuted and corrected more than once (Staal [1986; 1989], Falk [1988]) but it has continuing vocal proponents in the likes of Rosalind Thomas (1992) and Barry Powell (2002).

<sup>15</sup>The *Foreword* is oddly situated in the CE Ādiparvan, with separate numeration (i-viii) after the lengthy Prolegomena (i-cix) and is easy to miss. It purports to be “cursory remarks “to guide the reader through the labyrinth of the very complicated *apparatus criticus*.”

<sup>16</sup>Belvalkar (1947: lxiv): “[T]he urge for variation which is one of the dominant factors resulting in what we now designate as the Southern Recension, was already in operation in the North some ten centuries ago.” I should add here that the only other scholar who really came to grips with this problem was P.L.

Vaidya, with a breadth of exposure to the manuscripts of the epic equalling that of Sukthankar and Belvalkar. See note 2 above.

<sup>17</sup>We see this best with the African oral epics, and it is very probable that such an inflation probably took place with the Homeric epics as well, with the Parry-Lord systematics of oral poetry suggesting intuitively that an oral song conceived in these systematics and transmitted orally from generation to generation would grow in length over time. For example, there is persuasive evidence that the Malian epic, *Sundiata*, began its career as a lay in the life-time of its hero of the same name and has remained in oral tradition till mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, inflating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, *Sundiata*'s times in Mali and incorporating into the body of the song many features anachronistic with respect to the original first song. It would be safe to say the *Mahābhārata* was in such a phase only in its formative stages, during the "Vyāsa's Bhārata" phase in Sukthankar's master chart of recensions and version of the epic. Its further local inflation was more likely along the lines and modes suggested by Sukthankar (1933). Oral dynamics in the text as we have it may be entirely ruled out; see Hildebeitel (2005).

<sup>18</sup>Hildebeitel (2006:227-253) focuses on the *Nārāyaṇya* unit of the epic, and its recent study by the German *Nārāyaṇya Studien* group (Schreiner 1997a; Oberlies 1998; and Gruendahl 2002.) Calling for a "full study" of the M-manuscripts—that is, what I have called the \*Pūrvaśikhā SR Mbh—Hildebeitel (252) shows that the M-manuscript redactors were "concerned to make the epic as comprehensible as possible for a new and linguistically different milieu."

<sup>19</sup>One plausible chain of events may be, considering the consensus of a 300 CE for the Harivamśa section, that the \*Śārada text first arrives at the peninsula plausibly with the Pūrvaśikhās by the Sangam period; the Harivamśa follows it to the peninsula after a gap of two or three centuries, by late Sangam period inspiring an entire revision of the \*Śārada text, the first SR version. This would also explain the prominence of the Harivamśa-based Kraiṣṇaism in the Ājvār Vaiṣṇavism; see below.

<sup>20</sup>"*Kapardin/kapardī*" is one of the para-Munda words in Witzel (1999: 7). It is accepted that it refers to a "hair knot"; Kuiper (1955) qtd. in Witzel (1999:7). We do not know yet how a para-Munda word comes to describe such a striking Indo-Aryan trope.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Ehlers (gerhard.ehlers@sbb.spk-berlin.de) to "Mi. Witzel" <witzel@fas.harvard.edu> Subject: Re: EJVS 10-1a. Wed, 24 Sep 2003 11:38:50 +0200

<sup>22</sup> See Frits Staal, *The Nambudiri Veda Recitation* (1960) for information on the Pūrvaśikhā Veda affiliations. This has been supplemented by my two field trips, 2000 and 2004. For instance, the occurrence of the Kauṣītaki Sūtra among the Śōlīya Pūrvaśikhās (found in Parali village, west of Palghat with Tamil Nadu adjuncts in Ālangudi agraharam in Tanjavur area) came to light in my 2000 field trip, a trip I undertook, if I may add, in part at Michael Witzel's (1999) Mao-like "back to villages" call in the Indology list; cf. "Vaidics and Vedic religion" [Indology@Listserv.LIV.AC.UK](mailto:Indology@Listserv.LIV.AC.UK), Thu, 13 May 1999: "Work needs to be done on the last remnants of these [kaṭha (Kashmir), Caraka (Maharashtra), Vādhūla (Kerala), Āgniveśya (Tanjore area), Vārāha (border of Maharashtra/Gujarat), Kapisthala-Kaṭha ([may be] in Gujarat)]. Why not on your next trip to India? They may be just next door, outside of Nagpur, Tanjore or Ahmedabad. Not to forget some of the reciters who may have settled in Benares...."

<sup>23</sup> Kunjunni Raja, "Introduction" (1995 [VIII]:710) to O.M.C. Narayanan Nambudirippad, 1966-85. *Ṛgvēdam: Bhāṣābhāṣyam*. 8 Vols.

<sup>24</sup> The Malayalam title for the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhā's Āśvalāyana-Bahuvṛca Gṛhya Sūtra text is *Pakaḥya Caḍaṅgu*. Ed. and collected by Kāṇippayyūr Sankaran Nambudirippad (Kunnamkulam: Pañjāṅgam Press, [1986] 2001). Paviḷiya [pavaḷiya, pakaḷiya] is authoritatively explicated by K.V. Subramania Ayyar ([*Epigraphia Indica* XXI]: 223). He quotes from his earlier article in South-Indian Inscriptions (n.d.VI: 312): "One of the epigraphs of Uttaramallur belonging to the reign of the Cōḷa King Rajendra Cōḷa I (A.D. 1031-1045) registers a gift of land as *paviḷya-kiḍaiḍippuḍam* and stipulates that the men who enjoyed the

income from it should live in the village and teach the Veda.” He adds in note 3 (223):”*kiṭai* [sic for *kiṭai*] in Tamil means teacher and *pavifya*, a term that is not explained in dictionaries is connected phonetically with *bahuvṛca*. As such provision must be made for teaching the Ṛgveda.” It is almost certain that its extant use in the Tamil middle ages was among the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās, the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās having already left the Tamil country for the Malabar region through the Palghat gaps. Oldenberg (1886: 6-7) notes the link between Śambavya and the Kauṣītaki tradition; he uses a Grantha ms. to reconstruct the “correct text of the Śāṅkhāyana-Gṛhya” bearing the title *Kauṣītaka-Gṛhya* at the end of each chapter, with a metrical commentary following the text, declaring the link between Śambavya and Kauṣītaki in the opening verse: “Having bowed to the most excellent author of Sūtras, to Śambavya, the Ācārya belonging to the Kauṣītaka school, I shall compose a short commentary on his Gṛhya, which has been forgotten by many” (Oldenberg’s translation). Gonda, *Ritual Sūtras* (1977: 606-607) expatiates further on the link between the *J[Ś]āmbviya Sūtra* and *Kauṣītaki Sūtra*: “A southern text, designated at the end of the single chapters as *Kauṣītaka-Gṛhya* and therefore professing to follow the same ṛgvedic tradition, is in a metrical commentary attributed to Śambavya. This work—which contains nothing of the last two chapters and only parts of the rites described in ŚGS. III and IV—differs in certain details from Śāṅkhāyana and includes *inter alia* the piercing of the lobes of a child’s ear (*karṣavedha*) (1, 20-1-8) which is wanting in the other *gṛhyasūtras* of the Ṛgveda and (in Chapter V) rites concerning the *pretas* (the departed spirits for whom the obsequial rites have not been performed)” (Parenthesis in the original). It is significant that Gonda notes that it is a “southern text”. Most likely, it belongs to the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās. This needs further investigation.

<sup>25</sup> See Frits Staal (1983), *Agni*. 2 Volumes.

<sup>26</sup> See C.V. Somayajippad, M. Itti Ravi Nambudiri, and Erkkara Raman Nambudiri (1983), “Recent Nambudiri performances of Agniṣṭoma and Agnicayana” in *Agni* II: 252-255. Eighty families are listed, from 1837 to 1965, with *hautram* being that of the Kauṣītaki tradition in *all*. This has been supplemented in Namboothiri.com website, “Recent Namboothiri Performances of Agniṣṭoma and Agnicayana.” The total dominance of the Kauṣītaki tradition in the extant Pūrvaśikhā Śrautism resembles that of the Āpastamba tradition in the extant Aparāśikhā Śrautism (see below), although unlike the Āpastamba adherents, the Kauṣītakis constitute a distinct minority among the Pūrvaśikhā Ṛgvedis.

<sup>27</sup>At a draft stage of this paper, Michael Witzel (2008) raised a question if this assertion was true. I corresponded with Vinod Bhattarippad, the convenor of the Namboothiri.com and a person with easy access to Nambudiri śrauta experts at all levels, on the question and am able to report here that no Śrauta praxis aligning these Vedic canons is extant even anecdotally or in memory and nor does it seem to have ever existed. Interestingly in Witzel’s (1987; 1989) localization scheme, the Vādhūla home is in the farthest east, on the Gangā, not far from the home of the Kauṣītaki Ṛgveda: it is possible that the special alignment between the Kauṣītaki and Baudhāyana traditions—the BSS stipulating a Kauṣītaki sadasya—perhaps excluded a tie up with the Vādhūla tradition. It must be noted too that in the recent past, the Kauṣītaki Ṛgvedis routinely mastered the Baudhāyana ādhvaryam (over and above their own *hautram*), showing that Kauṣītaki and Vādhūla traditions never really aligned in śrauta praxis in the first place in their original homes.

<sup>28</sup>“*Sadasya*” occurs thrice in the *Ādiparvan* (48.5-10) in the context of the Snake Sacrifice, first to mark in general the king’s sadasya. i.e., assembled guests; second referring specifically to Vyāsa, after enumerating the four chief śrauta priests (hotar, udgātar, brahman, adhvaryu), and third, as in first, signifying the collective audience at the ritual, first Vyāsa’s sons and pupils, followed by an honor roll call that lists Uddālaka, Śamanthaka, Śvetaketu, Pañcama, Asita Devala, Nārada, Parvata, Ātreya, Kuṇḍajaṭhara, , Kuṭighaṭa, Vātsya, the old Śrutaśravas, Kahōḍa, Devaśarman, Maudgalya, Śamasaubhara. van Buitenan (1973: 445) glosses the term as “cocelebrants”

<sup>29</sup>Erkkara Raman Nambudiri provides an instance of it. He was the Sadasya priest of the 1975 Agnicayana, studied by Frits Staal, and is generally acknowledged to be the foremost Nambudiri Srauti of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; see Mahadevan and Staal (2005: 377). See note 26 below.



<sup>30</sup>See now Witzel 2005:65; note 153: “The first elaborate frame story, with several *hierarchical* levels, additionally distinguished by narrative tenses, is found in JB 3.120-128 (italics in the original).

<sup>31</sup>Parpola notes further that the migration of the Jaiminīyas to South India was somehow “intimately related to the composition of the *Mahābhārata*.” (1984: 463). The Pūrvaśikhā link to the epic may also be seen in the name Śukapuram, the most active Śrauta village of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, derived from Śuka (Parpola 1984: 463), one of the five redactors of the epic under Vyāsa.

<sup>32</sup>For a concise discussion of the term *śiṣṭa* in Patañjali, see Cardona (1990); see See Madhav Deshpande (1993) for the evolution of the idea of the *śiṣṭa* Brahmins.

<sup>33</sup>Apte (1958: 1177): “[B]y birth he is known as a *brāhmaṇa*; on account of sacraments he is called twice-born; through knowledge he becomes *vipra*; on account of all three he is called *śrotriya*.”

<sup>34</sup>Friar Tuck is P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar’s (1928) choice of figures, as quoted in K.A.N. Sastri (1976: 72-73), but a mythology centering around Agastya as the figure bringing Brahmins southward is commonplace in South Indian historiography. Paradoxically, my on-going study of the *gotra* distribution among South Indian Brahmins shows that the Agastya *gotra* is a rare occurrence, one in a thousand, in their *gotra* samples.

<sup>35</sup>This is especially the case with the *audgatram* cadre as it is the royal road to the śrauta phase of the Soma ritual. The priestly axis between the *ādhvaryam* and *hautram* axis seems to have been looser, historically. We have the *kāṭhaka-bahuvṛcas* of Kashmir, (Renou 1950: 215; n. 1), Yajurvedis (of the Kāṭhaka school) by lineage and svādhyāya, but acquiring the needed proficiency in the praxis of the *hautram* to function as its personnel--the *hota*, *maitrāvaruṇa*, *acchāvāka*, *grāvastut*--in the ritual. Kashikar and Parpola (1983 [II]: 249) note that in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the traditional Baudhāyana and Āpastamba ādhvaryams were not available in Poona, an Āśvalāyana sacrificer chose a Satyāśāḍha school of ādhvaryam causing a “stir among the priests for sometime”. Deshpande (2007) reports a similar case from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra of the Vājanaseyi (-Mādhyandina) Yajurvedis mastering the necessary Āśvalāyana-*hautram*, even staking a claim to the practice in view of the lucrative fees of a śrauta ritual. We see an opposite example among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, the Kauṣītaki-Ṛgvedis appropriating the praxis of the Baudhāyana-ādhvaryam for a śrauta ritual. However, on the other hand, it would seem that the praxis of the *audgatram* had become specialized altogether, with the adherence becoming family-specific from early times. No cross-Vedic training is evident with the Sāmavedis: whereas Ṛgvedis (the Nambudiri Kauṣītakis) acquire the necessary ādhvaryam expertise to function as *adhvaryus* in śrauta rituals in Kerala and Yajurvedis (the Kāṭhakas of Kashmir) acquire enough *bahuvṛca* (Āśvalāyana) *hautram* to meet the demands of *hautram* praxis of the śrauta ritual, the Sāmavedis are an independent śrauta cohort. Indeed the Sāmavedis rehearse on their own during the preparation for a śrauta ritual (Staal [I] 1983: 175-183). Thus the Jaiminiya-*audgatram* families of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins must have constituted an independent cohort of the migration. It is scarcely possible that they showed up sometime later in a Pūrvaśikhā settlement and picked up with the parent body all over again. As we will see below, such a link-up does not take place even when adjacent to one another physically.

<sup>36</sup>*Schwartzberg Atlas* (1992:15) shows the Magadhan hegemony to be total all the way from 76<sup>th</sup> parallel to the 88<sup>th</sup>, with the Matsyas, Pāñcālas and Kurus forming an arc on its western borders. This would cover the entire present-day states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

<sup>37</sup>Parpola adds, “Dislike of Māgadhas is ...common to most Vedic texts from the AS [AV]....Prof Aalto has suggested [to] me, this contempt of the Māghadans in the Veda may have contributed to the growth of Buddhism there” (1968: 30. n.1).

<sup>38</sup>As is well known, Brahmins are a secular community today and perhaps do not accord to this ideal. However, Brahmins still linked to a Śrauta tradition and its svādhyāya institutions generally accord to this

picture, especially, as literature and fieldwork show, the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās. See Staal (1961; 1983 [I]: 167-189).

<sup>39</sup>Witzel (1987: 381): “As often, it is early Buddhist texts which provide more detailed and very useful information [on Brahmins]. The Pali texts, which have been composed only shortly after the end of the late Vedic period, frequently describe in lively and graphic detail what is only alluded to in the Vedic texts, which were, after all, composed by Brahmins for Brahmins...” (My parenthesis).

<sup>40</sup>I have used the Dines Anderson-Helmer Smith text (1913) of the *Sutta-Nipāta* and the K.R.Norman (1995) translation.

<sup>41</sup>The dating of the Buddhist canonical texts is problematic. It is generally accepted that an oral tradition worked initially behind the recording and transmission of the Buddhist canonical texts (Gombrich 1988: 29). The “four nikāyas and the early verse collections” are “transmitted as instructions of the Buddha himself” (Schmitthausen 1990:1). However, “in view of the discrepancies between the versions of the different schools as well as other reasons, modern scholars will hardly assert that *all* (emphasis in the original) materials are *literal* (emphasis in original) transmissions of Buddha’s sermons” (Schmitthausen 1990: 1). “The inconsistencies in the earliest materials show/imply (sic) a chronological development of the teachings: this development may well have taken place within Buddha’s own life time and preaching career” (Gombrich 1990:5). Bailey and Mabbit (2003:1) note that “the Pali Canon took shape between 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (BCE) and to another 200 years.” The revision of Buddha’s date, now accepted ca. 400 BCE, after Bechert (See Cousins [The dating of the historical Buddha: a review article,” *JRAS* Series 3,6.1] 1996:57-63), makes the Assaka śrauta scenario even more probable.

<sup>42</sup>The phrase is of course Geertz’s (1986: 377-78).

<sup>43</sup>S. Palaniappan (2008) has raised questions if this DEDR derivation is acceptable, as the word *koṭi* also refers to a laundry cord from which clothes are hung for drying. However, as I argue in the text, the DEDR etymology is fairly persuasive that the item referred to, in our example, the fronted tuft, is on the top of the head, as for that of the peacock. The poet uses the horse, rather than the peacock, in his simile to suggest the “streaming” aspect of the hair during flight or gallop.

<sup>44</sup>Hart (1999:370, extensive entry: s.v. “hair”) thinks it necessary to provide a subject category under “hair”. Lehman and Malten, *A Word Index for Cankam Literature* (1993: 159) has 31 entries for *kuṭumi* in its different forms, spread through virtually the entire Sangam canon.

<sup>45</sup>Palaniappan (2008) raises this point. N.Subrahmanian is inclined in both directions in his different publications: In ([1972] 1978: 333) “The Brahman lad wore a tuft in a knot which resembles a horse’s tail done into a knot;” in (1989: 16) “the Brahmin youth wore his tuft and it resembled the knot of hair on horse’s head.”

<sup>46</sup>Varier and Gurukkal (1991) and Narayanan Kutti (2003), both in Malayalam, are welcome additions in this regard.

<sup>47</sup>Personal Communication. Sri Narayana Sōmayāji, Ṛgveda *adhyāpaka*, Rajaveda Pāṭhaśāla, Kumbakonam. July 2005. The most popular and frequently performed *vikṛti-śrauta* ritual in the Tanjavur-Kumbakonam area is the Vājapeya, perhaps the backbone of the Aparāśikhā Śrautism.

<sup>48</sup>See his *Śrautakaramavivekam* (1983). There is universal agreement about his pre-eminence as the śrauta ritualist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Mahadevan and Staal (2005: 377).

<sup>49</sup>See Younger (1994: 120. n. 21.) In a fuller study of the emergence of Chidambaram as a “sacred dynastic center,” Hall (2001) notes Kulōttuṅga (1070-1118 CE) as instrumental in the emergence of the Naṭarāja temple of Chidambaram as the sacred center of the Cōḷa polity, and thus naturally the Pūrvaśikhā Dīkṣitars

as the ritual arbiters of the king's legitimacy, the reciprocity between the monarch and the Dīkṣitars beginning with Vijayālaya Cōla in the second half of the ninth century when the Dīkṣitars “invest him with the diadem and thus confer on him the royal status in recognition of his extensive conquests” (88). Was there a śrauta component to this ritual as with the Rājasūya? We do not know. Perhaps the first question we should raise is about the Dīkṣitar's śrautism. The audgatram necessary to sustain a śrauta tradition is not extant among them, as a Sāmaveda tradition is not attested among the Chidambaram Dīkṣitars: they are a bi-Vedic group, only the Āśvalāyana Ṛgveda and the Baudhāyana Yajurveda, having survived among them: Ṛgveda-Āśvalāyana makes up ca. 20% of the group, with the rest made up of the Baudhāyana Yajurvedis. In this they resemble the other solely temple-based Pūrvaśikhā group, the Mukkāṇi-Tirucutantiram Brahmans of the Truchendur temple on the eastern coast in the Pāṇṭiya realm: neither group possesses a Sāmaveda adjunct, suggesting a lapse or absence of the śrauta tradition. The ritually hyper-active Kauṣītiki Ṛgveda tradition is absent in both of these Pūrvaśikhā groups. Thus it would seem that the Nambudiri and the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās formed a closer group—they are both tri-vedis and they share several signature Pūrvaśikhā Veda śākhās. It is of interest too that when the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās are found linked to temple liturgies, as for instance at Avataiyār Koil or Tiruvaṇakkāvu, the liturgy is Vedic, the Āgniveśya Gr̥hya Sūtra with the first and the Baudhāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra with the second. Neither the Dīkṣitars nor the Tirucutantirars employ Vedic liturgies in their respective temples. It is also not clear if the mastery of the Ṛgveda or the Taittirīya Saṃhita was extant among them, but is avidly pursued today by both, as I found in fieldwork.

<sup>50</sup>The Sangam gotras belong both to poets and subjects of poems: “kauśikan” (Aka. 66) and “gautamanār” (Patirru 3), “ātreya” (Pura. 175) being poets and “kauniyan,” the subject of Pura. 166.

<sup>51</sup>Thennilapuram P. Mahadevan, “The Institution of Gotra, the Ṛgveda, and the Brahmans.” The Fourth International Vedic Workshop, Austin, 2007.

<sup>52</sup>We have two epigraphic attestations of this: at *Epigraphia Indica* XXII (1933-34:167-176); Item 27, (“Tirodi Plates of Pravara Sena II,” “hārkari” is listed as the gotra affiliation of a donee, Varunācārya, by name, located Bālāghāt District in Central Provinces [Madhya Pradesh]. This gotra is not attested in BŚS, the canonical list of gotras linked to the śrauta praxis. *Epigraphia Indica* (XIV (:163-168), Item 11, “Saṅgōḷi Plates of Harivarman, 8<sup>th</sup> year” records a grāmadēya to 23 Brahmans of 8 gotras, all well versed in AV, dated to 6th century CE from Vaijayanti, the modern Banavāsi in Śirśi Tālūk in North Kanara District. Harivarman of the Kadamba dynasty is the king. The Brahmans bear the following gotras: Kaimbala (5 donees), Kālāśa (4), Cauliya (1), Valandata (2)—none attested in the BŚS list. The village is apparently extant as Saṅgōḷi on the Malaprabhā in Belgaum.

<sup>53</sup>Vinod Bhattarippad, Personal Communication, June 26 2007; O. N. Damodaran Nambudirippad, Personal Communication, June 23 2007.

<sup>54</sup>Indeed, the importance of the gazetteer literature to our understanding of the British India, and one may add the pre-modern period, cannot be over-emphasized. As Ian Jack (2001: xviii) remarks, in a different context, “... as an inventory of India and its great variety the Imperial Gazetteer has never been bettered.” The pervasive ethos of political correctness will not now allow a continuation.

<sup>55</sup>J.R.Marr (1985)

<sup>56</sup>See Parpola (1984: 442-448): Hastiśarman is the paternal grandfather of the famous Bhavatrāta, the author of a commentary of the Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra; he married Brahmadatta's daughter (of Viśvāmitra gotra) in Malabar and Mātrdatta was their son. Mātrdatta was apparently a Vedic prodigy and much in demand both among Brahmans and kings to find enough time to impart to Bhavatrāta, his son, the traditional *svādhyāya* and thus the latter was taught by his maternal grandfather, Brahmadatta. In due course, Bhavatrāta himself becomes a famous Śrautin, performing the office of the Subrahmaṇya priest of the praxis of the *audgatram* for the famous Mēḷattōḷ, the figure credited with the revival of śrautism among the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās through his 99 Agniṣṭomas. See also Parpola (Agni [II] 1983: 700-36).

Professor Paropla's edition of the *Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra*—that is, representing the Pūrvaśikhā praxis of the *audgatram*—is still eagerly anticipated.

<sup>57</sup>The geographical pattern of the settlements further questions the notion of the sea-borne arrival of the Nambudiris: the estuary of the river at Ponnani is a wide swathe. But if one follows the course of the Bhāratap-Puḷa from the Palghat mountains, in the Silent Valley region, toward the Arabian sea, one is actually traversing through the sites of the traditionally most important families of the community. There can be little doubt that the movement of the Brahmans was east-west, not west-east.

<sup>58</sup>Ramanujan (1985: 323): “34 poets' names include Kaṇṇan in them. Later, of course, Kaṇṇan was the Tamil form of Kṛṣṇa.”

<sup>59</sup>K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Culture and History of Tamils* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.Mukhopodhyaya, 1984: 19): “[I]n the Tamil country...we have a historical night after the Sangam period, the curtain rising again only toward the latter part of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Then we hear of the mysterious and ubiquitous enemy of civilization, the evil rulers called the Kaḷabhras, had come and upset the established political order which was restored only by the more or less simultaneous emergence of the Pāṇdyas and the Pallavas of the Siṃhaviṣṇu line in the Tamil land and of the Chālūkyas of Badāmi across the Tuṅgabhadra in western Deccan.”

<sup>60</sup>The text of the Vēlvikkuṭi Plates was published in *EI* [XVII] 1923-24: 291, but Krishna Sastri's 1923 translation was found inadequate and was amended by S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1941:473). Interpreting Ta. *vēlvi* in the name of the village to signify “ritual” or “sacrifice” (DEDR #5544 [506]), Aiyangar showed that the text refers to Vēlvikkuṭi as a *brahmadeya* grant to Korkai Kilan Narkorran for holding śrauta rituals from the Pāṇṭiyan King Paliyāka Muṭukuṭumi, himself a fabled ritualist as the name indicates and as we know from Puṛaṇānūru 15; see Section D.iii below. Indeed, Korkaikilan Narkorran's name resembles in both its phonology and construction those of Sangam poets. In other words, we have here an historical Pūrvaśikhā Brahman, shown as a śrauta ritualist, justifying the name of the village. It is this village that the Kaḷabhras dispossess from his descendants and is being restored to a later, descendant branch, ca. 620-30 CE, in Aiyangar's estimate (473), by Kaṭuṅkōn, the whole act being memorialized and reaffirmed by Neṭucaṭayan Parāntaka, the sixth descendant from Kaṭuṅkōn, on his third Regnal Year, 769-70, to a present descendant of the original donee family, Kāmakkāni Nar-Cingar, a name recognizable as a form of Viṣṇu, namely Narasiṃha, illustrating by this date the rise of Vaiṣṇava sectarianist tendencies. As Aiyangar notes (473-4), we have to give a considerable interval from the date of Kuṭumi who originally made the grant, which gave the name Vēlvikkuṭi to the village to the date of its dispossession by the Kaḷabhras; similarly, we have to make allowance for a comparatively long occupation of the Pāṇṭiya country by the Kaḷabhras for Kaṭuṅkōn's restoration in ca. 620-30 CE. However, by far the most interesting aspect of the Vēlvikkuṭi plates, unremarked by Aiyangar and other historians, is the extreme durability of the family of the donee: it is first recorded in the era of the Paliyāka Kuṭumi of the Sangam era; it then appears as a family dispossessed by the invading Kaḷabhras; the land is restored to the family in the beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> century, several centuries later; the grant is being ratified, to the continuing line of Narkorran, late 8<sup>th</sup> century. We cannot help but think that other Narkorran-like families were similarly dispossessed, some fleeing. N. Subrahmanian (1996:111) notes that “it is also known that a number of Brahmins migrated to the western parts of the Cērar country particularly when the Kalappirar [Kaḷabhra] were upsetting the social order of Tamil Nadu (my parenthesis).” We know that the Nambudiri tradition orients its śrauta tradition, roughly from this period, in the figure of Mēḷattōl.

<sup>61</sup>The anti-Jain sentiments of the Śaiva poetry are to be found in the Tevāram songs of both Appar (6.3) and Sambandar (3.108), generally on grounds of want of ritual purity. The Jain practice of plucking hair of the body seems to have attracted particular bile from the Saivite poets. See M. Arunachalam (1979: 49-50) for a composite picture culled from Sambandar's Tēvāram songs.

<sup>62</sup>Hart (1975: 29) likens the Bhakti poets—the Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs—to the Sangam bards going about the Tamil country “singing ecstatic songs about Śiva and Vishnu.” The loyalty of the Sangam bard to his king

transforms into the devotional loyalty of the Bhakti poets to a sectarian god. Ramanujan (1981: 98-99): “[T]he conventional phrases of praise offered to kings in classical Tamil heroic poems” are transferred to God in Bhakti poetry. “In bhakti, all the insignia of a king become the Lord’s, as in South Indian temples—white umbrellas, elephants, yak tails, etc. In Tamil, *kō* means both “king” and “god”; *koyil* means both “palace” and “temple” (98).

<sup>63</sup>The seven temples to which the historical śrauta segment of the Nambudiri community is affiliated are to be found on both sides of the river: Perincullūr, Karikkar, and Ālathiyūr north from the right bank of the river and Panniyūr, Śukapuram, Peruvanam, and Irinjalakkuda, south from the left bank of the river. Except for Perincellūr, the other six temples dot both sides of the Nīlā [Bhāratapuḷa] River. Perincellūr is situated in the far north, in Cannanore district, and does not fall within the live śrauta core of Nambudiri community, the latter is clustered on the banks of the Nīlā River. Perincellūr is often taken to be (Veluthath 1978) the “Cellūr” of Sangam poetry (Aka. 90), dating from before the Kaḷabhra Interregnum.

<sup>64</sup>See Chapter III of my forthcoming “Arrival of Vedism in South India: the Pūrvaśikhā and the Aparāśikhā Brahmins.”

<sup>65</sup>“Best” is Sukthankar’s (1933:lxxviii) phrase. Other editors echo this: De (1958:XXX) notes that the Malayalam version is “the most important and representative Southern version;” Belvalkar (1947: CXI): “The Malayalam is the primary Southern version.”

<sup>66</sup>It is difficult to decide this as we do not have an extant Σ-SR version, the text we know remained behind with the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās: we have only the Grantha-Telugu version, a result of interaction between the Σ-text and the σ-text, a northern text that Sukthankar constructs theoretically from the evidence of the manuscripts.

<sup>67</sup> See Namboothiri.com website for information on the legends of Mēḷattōl.

<sup>68</sup>These are: Kalakanḍathūr; Mēḷattōl, Māthūr, Kulukkallūr, Cemmanḡād, Pālūr, Muriḡoth, and Vēḷḷa.

<sup>69</sup>See note 42 above for a list of these temples.

<sup>70</sup>See Ramavarma, *Kuññikkuttan Tamburan* (1998: 241-273): “Although Koduḡallūr Kuññikkuttan Tampuran served Kerala in many great ways, there cannot be two opinions that the metrical and *pāda* translation, in single-handed labour of 2 and ¾ years, of a lakh and quarter verses of the *Mahābhārata* (including *Harivaṃśa*), stands out as his single greatest service” (My translation). The prince began work on the translation on the Vernal Equinox of 1904 and brought the project to a completion in 874 days in October 1907 at the rate of 143 granthas a day although the original plan was to attempt 50 (with the *Harivaṃsa* taking another three months). Ramavarma shows the literary culture behind the entire project to have been of a high order: the original plan, ca. end of 1892, was apparently to translate the epic into a *kiḷippāṭṭu* mode as a team effort of 10 or 12 poets and scholars, with the *Āraṇya-*, *Śalya-*, and *Śānti* (minus *Mokṣa*)-*parvans* being the prince’s share of the project. Apparently the prince met his target, but the project came to nothing as others failed to meet their quota. Early in 1904 the prince was involved in another team project, the translation of the Kṣemendra’s *Bhāratamañjari*, with the prince taking up its *Droṇaparvan* and his translation appearing serially in magazines in five issues, but this project too came to nothing. Thus when he embarked on the project of the full translation of the epic including *Harivaṃśa*, all by himself, on the day of the spring equinox of that year, on the first day of the *uttarāyana* of the sun, he was sufficiently ready. I have gone into such length here to show the ease with which the entire epic functioned in the literary life of Kerala and was handled by poets and scholars.

<sup>71</sup>Friedhelm Hardy (1983) shows beyond doubt that this is the case: as he notes (413), “I would strongly doubt that the Āḷvārs were familiar with the versions [of Kṛṣṇa story] found in Br/ViP [Brahma and Viṣṇupuraṇas]....[I]t seems fairly certain [Periyāḷvār] cannot have known the BhP [Bhāgavatapurāṇa] either” (Parenthetical glosses mine). Posing the question (413), “Where does Periyāḷvār take his mythical themes

[*bālacarita; gopi metier*]?” Hardy answers, “We know that the *Harivaṁśa* most probably was one of his sources.” As we have already seen, *Mahabhārata* (II Appendix I: Item #21): 386-422 is substantively derived from adhyāyas 38, 41, 42 of *Harivaṁśa*.

<sup>72</sup>I use the term ‘interpellation’ after Louis Althusser (1971: 127-186), how a people are reduced in status on racial, religious, cultural or economic grounds: the Tamil Pūrvaśikhās as a whole faced such an interpellation, after being reduced to a minority population by the immigrant Aparāśikhā Brahmins, the latter arriving, it should be added, at royal favour so much so that the marginalization of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins in the Tamil country—among Brahmins groups as intra-group phenomenon—is an obvious feature of its ethno-history. I begin with N. Subrahmanian’s (1989: 178; n.5) anecdote about placing social status of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins in the Tamil country in general: “[A] wise person once said that among the Brahmins the Brihatcharanas and Ashtasahasras were brahmins, Vadamas were kshatriyas, the Vathimas were vaisyas and Śōliyas chaturthas [i.e. the Śūdras].” The first three groups make up the main body of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins; the near autochthonous Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās are seen as outside the pale. It must be added that the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās show themselves as an interpellated group in their first attestation in ethnological literature, appearing in Abbe Du Bois (ca. 1790’s; 1897:110): “There are also Brahmins known as Cholias, who are more or less looked down upon by the rest. They appear to be conscious of their own inferiority, for they hold themselves aloof from the other Brahmins.” Whether their aloofness originated from a consciousness of inferiority is an open question, but Dubois points to the historical distinctness between the Aparāśikhā and the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins well into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Dubois adds that the Śōliya association with the non-Brahman groups of the Tamil country, involving rituals in which blood is shed, is the basis for the low status. This confirms the main point of my argument, that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins were the first to arrive in the Tamil country and as seen in the Sangam poetry already acculturated to the indigenous Tamil population—indeed, to such an extent that Hart (1973: 51) thinks that the Sangam era Brahmins were “unlike” their northern counterparts. If we accept that śrautism is the main, original Brahmin profession, then we see that these Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins were and are not different from their northern brethren. In fact, as noted, śrautism is a central feature of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins. It must be noted that the devotion to śrautism did not prevent the rise of Bhakti ethos in the same Brahmin group: we see this in the fact that the entire the Brahmin component of the *Nālāyiradivyaṅgrahandam* were Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins, and the Vaiṣṇava Bhakti movement (and the same can be said for its Śaivite branch) with its seven non-Brahmin Ālvārs of the twelve represents fundamental acculturation by the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins into the Tamil world. The Aparāśikhā Brahmins must certainly have been aware of this at their first arrival from the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE onward. Yet, ironically, both in religion and epic, they accept the Pūrvaśikhā precedent.

<sup>73</sup>Swamy Deśikan, *Yatirāja Saptati*. Ed. Varadachari Sadagopan and tr. C.G.Balaji. 2007: 46-47. Web publication: [yatiraja\\_saptati\\_part 1 \(PDF\)](#).

<sup>74</sup>The first three Ālvārs are sometimes classified as Brahmins as well, originating in the Tonṭaimaṅṭalam area (Gopinatha Rao 1917:2), but clearly mythological figures, all three represented as having been born within a flower on successive days from the same parent. On the other hand, Periyālvār (and Āṅṭāl), Toṅṭaratiṅṭōṭi, and Maturakavi seem “historical” figures: I met the 224<sup>th</sup> descendant of Pariyālvār, Vēṭappirāṅṭ patti Govindaraja Iyengar, at his home in Āṅṭāl Sannidhi Street, Srivilliputhur on 24, July, 2006 and was able to confirm that he was a Bauddhāyana by sūtra and Aghamaṣaṣa-Kauśika-Vaiśvāmītra (aka Śālāvata) by gotra. Toṅṭaratiṅṭōṭi Ālvār was Bauddhāyana by sūtra and Maturakavi, a Jaiminīya (gotras unknown for both).

<sup>75</sup>Kuñṅikkuttan Tampuran’s (of note 46 above) father was the famous Veṅṅmaṅi Atcchan Nambudiri, part of a literary movement named after the Veṅṅmaṅi family.

<sup>76</sup>Sukthankar (1933: v-ix): A total of 235 Ādiparvan manuscripts came to Poona with the following breakdown and script-based distributions: 108 in Devanāgarī; 32 in Bengālī; 31 in Grantha; 28 in Telugu; 26 in Malayalam; 5 Nepālī; 3 in Śārada; 1 in Maithilī; 1 in Nandanāgarī. 60 were actually used.

<sup>77</sup>We have a fascinating account of the now lost craft of writing—the preparation of the writing medium from the black palm leaves, the utensils and implements of its technology—in Kānippayyūr Sankaran Nambudirippad *Ente Smaraṇaka* (1964 [II]: 187-195). The social group of ‘*kuruppu*’ formed apparently the scribal caste. Nambudirippad notes that the Pūrvaśikhā Nambudiris still relied on oral tradition for the Vedic texts and only reluctantly reduced anything Vedic into writing—well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The kuruppus being non-Brahmans may not read anything Vedic: this square was circled by the strict injunction to the kuruppus that they may not read jointly more than four letters at a time. See K.Gough (1968).

<sup>78</sup>The Aparāśikhā Vedic texts: Staal’s *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* (1961) although focusing on the Nambudiris, is fully informative about the Aparāśikhā texts: see Chapter 2 (21-30), “The Veda Recitation of Tamil Brahmins.” His ‘Tamil Brahmins’ are my Aparāśikhā Brahmins—as indeed universally so, as I note in the text below. Kashikar and Parpola (1983:199-251) “Śrauta Traditions of Recent Times” note on their section for, again, the Tamil Brahmins: “The schools followed in the Śrauta rituals Āpastamba of the Yajurveda, Āśvalāyana of the Ṛgveda, and Drāhyāyana and Kauthuma of the Sāmaveda (233).” I have corroborated this over two field trips, 2001 and 2004, to the extent of finding that the Śōliya Pūrvaśikhā Vaidikas in urban centers today train themselves in the Āpastamba tradition, as the Aparāśikhās predominate in numbers—and thus prospective clients. Also, the Tamil Śōliya Pūrvaśikhās perform the śrauta rituals using the existing Āpastamba cadre of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins, available in the Tanjavur-Kumbakona area.

<sup>79</sup>Śukla Yajurveda is attested today in Kerala, around Palghat area, in the both Kāṇva and Mādhyandina traditions, but this is the result of a fairly recent migration from the Tamil country of Brahmins, both Aparāśikha and Pūrvaśikhā, from along the Kaveri delta, to the Palghat area ca. 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century CE and afterward.

<sup>80</sup>Kashikar & Parpola, “Recent Śrauta Traditions” (Agni [III] 1983: 199-251): 233: “The schools followed in the śrauta rituals of Tamil Nadu are Āpastamba of the Yajurveda, Āśvalāyana of the Ṛgveda, and Drāhyāyana and Kauthuma of the Sāmaveda.”

<sup>51</sup>The Āpastamba tradition forms the backbone of the Aparāśikhā Śrauta tradition, localized by Witzel (1997: 229) on the Yamunā River, around Mathurā, and the two closely related Aparāśikhā Taittirīya traditions, Hiraṇyakēśi [Satyāśāḍa] and Bhāradvāja, located on the banks of the Ganga, to the east. Together, they constitute a late development in Vedic tradition, ca. 300 CE, with the Āśvalāyana and Kauthuma praxises for its hautram and audgātram adjuncts, respectively. The formation of this Taittirīya school must be seen as a major counter-development to the Vedism of the Kosala-Videha area, with the royal patronage of the Magadha kingdom, the latter derived from the Śukla Yajurveda, its Vājanaseyi Saṃhita. I have already indicated above that the Pūrvaśikhā departure from the antarvedi area may be seen as a reaction to the reformed Vedism of the Śukla Yajurveda. The Āpastamba tradition must be seen as covering the entire Mālva territory, extending into the eastern Panjab-Hariyana in the west and the old Kuru area in the north. Its departure from the area, starting with the arrival of the Hūnas in 6<sup>th</sup> century CE and the Muslims in the later centuries, casts the death knell of śrauta Vedism in the area and the erstwhile heartland of Vedism. However, it survived with the migration of the Aparāśikhā Brahmins from the Mālva plateau to the Tamil country, 6<sup>th</sup> century CE onward. See below for the Copper Plate epigraphy of the Pallavas and Cōlas that tells this story.

<sup>82</sup>Carman (1974: 32) errs in identifying Periya Nambi (aka Mahā Pūrṇa) as a Pūrvaśikhā Brahmin; he was like Rāmānuja himself an Aparāśikhā Brahmin, belonging to the Bṛhatcaraṇam group.

<sup>83</sup>The ‘Tamil Brahmin’ population is generally estimated to be 2 to 3% of the Tamil Nadu population, giving us almost 5 million for the entire state, a high number, I believe. The “vaṭama” group seems to be the largest (Subrahmanian 1972: 334). My estimate of their relative numbers comes from tracking the matrimonial columns of the *Hindu* newspaper. The once strictly endogamous sub-sect is named in these advertisements, along with the gotra of the prospective groom or bride, the exogamous consideration, the other criterion in Brahmin marriages. I must add here that the recent trend, from these advertisements, is

greater endogamy between the *vaṭama* and the *bṛhatcaraṇam* groups, easily the two largest segments of the Aparāśikhā population. For the Hindu newspaper issues of May 26, 2002 and June 23, 2002, I found the following ratio: Vaṭama:209::Bṛhatcaraṇam:71::Vāthima:12:Aṣṭasahasram 25. The scientific validity of these numbers and ratio is open to question. It is possible that the numbers of the vaṭama group are overrepresented in the sample because they, being most and first open to Western education, use the newspaper for matrimonial purposes. However, I believe that it is generally trustworthy for the two biggest groups, the vaṭamas (66%) and bṛhatcaraṇam (22%): the appearance in an English newspaper is a measure of modernity, and as Burton Stein-Brahmans, the Aparāśikhā group was well-favoured., especially its two largest segments.

<sup>84</sup>Mahalingam (1988) has brought together (xxvii) “the texts of all Copper Plates and stone inscriptions of the Pallavas in Prākṛt, Sanskrit, and Tamil” from ca. 350 to 875 CE. The data for the Aparāśikhā migration come all from the Copper Plates, mainly from 19 plates, deeding land to Brahmans belonging to the Aparāśikhā Vedic traditions. The earlier deeds are in Prākṛt and Sanskrit written in different Southern Brāhmī scripts, and later the Pallava Grantha script and Tamil. The earlier deeds are all located in the southern reaches of Andhra Pradesh, the Guntūr and Nellore Districts, historically forming with the northern parts of the Tamil country, the Arcot and Kāñcipuram areas, the Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam. It is only with Simhavarman, ca. 540 CE that the Pallavas reach the Kaveri river (xxix).

<sup>85</sup>Mahalingam (1988: 31-34)

<sup>86</sup>Richard A. Frasca (1990) shows that the Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam region is traditionally the core area of the *kūthu* rituals and performances, the *Mahābhārata* supplying through the Tamil *pāratam* its sole repertory. See Map VI.

<sup>87</sup>This is a mind boggling detail for a modern investigator. Here is a migration story that casts the Mayflower story into shade, in the proper contexts of both, yet its original Copper Plate land grant deeds occasionally turn up when a tiller turns a clod of soil in the field. One might add that this throws interesting light on the issue whether Indians are historical or not. Epigraphy shows clearly that Indian history was written with zeal in these epigraphic records; it does not seem to have been preserved in equal zeal. Witzel (1990) has anticipated me on this question considers the whole question in some detail concluding

<sup>88</sup>Stein (1980: 150) notes with reference to the 300 Brahman villages of Cōḷa period for which we have epigraphic record, “It cannot be claimed to be a complete representation of Brahman villages of the period for new ones come to light ... and all of them may never be known.”

<sup>89</sup>See note 34 above.

<sup>90</sup>Āgniveśya adherents are #212 and 213 of the Taṇṭantōṭṭam Plates of Nandivarman II RY 58 [=789 CE]; Jaiminīya adherent is #19 in Chitrur Plates of Nṛpatuṅgavarman RY 6 [875 CE]; the Pavīḷiyas are #: 23; 97; 128; and 134 of the Taṇṭantōṭṭam plates.

<sup>91</sup>See Thennilapuram P. Mahadevan, “The Institution of Gotra, the Ṛgveda, and the Brahmans.” The Fourth International Vedic Workshop, Austin, 2007.

<sup>92</sup>Louis Renou (1950:215; n.1): “In reality one never belongs to more than one school, either through family tradition or initiation....The innumerable *dvivedis* and particularly *trivedins* and *caturvedins* that we find in epigraphy are merely honorific titles[.]” However, it follows as well that these title holders constituted an elite group among their peers.

<sup>93</sup>We have accounts of two Nāyaka period brahmadeyas from the living memory of two illustrious Tamil Brahmans of the modern period, one by U.V.Swaminatha Ayyar (1860-1925) and the other by Śākkōṭṭai Krishnasvami Aiyangar (1871-1947). Aiyar (1950: 1-3) tells the story of the foundation of his natal village



Uttamadānapuram, how a Tanjavur nāyaka king breaks the rule of *ekādaśī* observance and in expiation founds the village with 24 wells for 48 Brahmans from far and near. Aiyangar's (1941: [II] 297-98) village is the grāmadeya of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, the son of Raghunātha Nāyaka in latter's memory and carrying the name Raghunāthapura, near Kumbakonam. Fortified by the Mahratta kings, when Tanjavur passes into the Mahratta control, the village acquires the name Shahjikkōṭṭe after Shahji, the Viceroy of Bijapur and father of Śivaji, and becoming later the modern Śākkōṭṭe.

<sup>94</sup>As Champakalakshmi (2001) notes, "the studies of Burton Stein, Kenneth Hall, and Noburu Karashima are historiographically significant in recognizing that there is no homogeneity in the brahmadeyas of the Tamil region"(61). However, as I show here, there was some homogeneity in the Brahman immigrants sponsored by these post-Kaṭabhra kingdoms, a homogeneity that was to continue into the Pāṇṭiyān and Nāyaka periods to follow.

<sup>95</sup>We have a meticulous edition of the text of the Karandai Plates in K. G. Krishnan (1984). However, Krishnan treats the Brahmans of the Karandai Plates as a monolith. Tracking them through their Veda Śākhās as is done in this investigation shows them to be made up at their broadest the two groups of this study.

<sup>96</sup>Gonda 1977: 489, note 6: "According to a later text, *Ānanda Samhita* [see Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, in Volume II of this History, p.144] there were fifteen *sūtras* of the Yajurveda" (parenthesis in the original). Agastya Sūtra is one of the fifteen named. My field work among the smaller Pūrvaśikhā group being more complete, I would say that this sūtra occurs among the Aparāśikhās rather than the Pūrvaśikhās although I have not established a positive affiliation. Gonda (1977[II]:105) mentions an unpublished *Agastya Samhita*, related to the Pañcarātra tradition: it is not clear if the Agastya Sūtra of the Karandai Plates is linked to this text.

<sup>97</sup>For Oldenberg, the *J/Śāmbavya Gṛhya Sūtra* functions as a control text for the Gṛhya Sūtra traditions of the Ṛgveda.

<sup>98</sup>I plan to include the search for this in my next field trip.

<sup>99</sup>See K. G. Krishnan (1985: 55-56) about the Andhra Pradesh domiciles of most of the Brahmans.

<sup>100</sup>Indeed, Nāthamuni's natal village, Vīranārāyaṇapuram features in the Cōḷa era epigraphy: The village lies in South Arcot, still in the northern reaches of the Tamil country, founded by Parāntaka II (906-946 CE) in 906 CE. See Ramanujachari (n.d.:272), "Nathamuni and His Times"

<sup>101</sup>As I show in my on-going work on Brahman migration, Nāthamuni's gotra is ṣaṭamarṣaṇa: his father is known as ṣaṭamarṣaṇa Īsvaramuni. Although ṣaṭamarṣaṇa gotra occurs among the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans also, it is never referred to by that rubric, but either as Āṅgīrasa or Viṣṇuvṛddha, the pravara formula for the gotra being Āṅgīrasa-Paurukutsa-Trāsadasyava. In other words, "ṣaṭamarṣaṇa" is an Aparāśikhā term, like pravacana for the Baudhāyana tradition (or pakalīya a Pūrvaśikhā term for the Āśvalāyana tradition). Ramānuja's family gotra, on the other hand, is hārita: we know that it cannot be Nāthamuni's ṣaṭamarṣaṇa gotra because the matrilineal descent forbids it in that all male descendants of Nāthamani will be necessarily of the ṣaṭamarṣaṇa gotra

<sup>102</sup>Dihejia (1990) adduces support for the Friedhelm Hardy thesis (1983) that the Āḷvār Vaiṣṇavism was independent of the *Viṣṇu-* and *Brahmapurāṇas* and that it influenced the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for example, in the trope of *pāvai* vow (16-18), girls bathing in the river in mid-winter and praying for fine husbands and children, but represented in the *BhP* in a 'restrained way'" (18). Dihejia (22) further shows that the *pavai* and *cimil* tropes (girls pleading to Kṛṣṇa not to break up their sand castles), the latter absent in the *BhP*, belong to the Sangam poetry.

<sup>103</sup>Jagadeesan (1977: 323) notes the tradition, confirmed for me by Puthur S. Krishnaswami Iyengar Swāmi (2000; 2004), that among Ālvārs, Periyālvār (and thus his daughter Āṇḍāḷ also), Toṅṅaraṭṭipṭṭi Ālvār, and Maturakavi Ālvār and among Ācāryas Uyyakkōṇḍār, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Naṁbi, Eṅgaḷ Ālvār, Periyavācchan Piḷḷai are Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans. We must note first that all the 3+1 Ālvārs are Pūrvaśikhā Śōḷiyas and, second, that these are the only Brahmans among the 12 canonical Ālvārs. The situation alters in the Ācārya phase of Vaiṣṇavism. To begin with, the first Ācārya, Nāthamuni, is an Aparāśikhā Brahman. The fact that all the Brahman Ālvārs are Pūrvaśikhās might well be the most probative evidence in support of the theses of this work. However, although the Pūrvaśikhā Śōḷiyas supply all the Brahman Ālvārs and a significant number of the Ācāryas, including Rāmānuja’s most important of the five preceptors, the *mantra*-preceptor (Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Naṁbi), their new and interpellated status in the Tamil country as a minority leads to such statements as these: “Śōḷiyārs...because of their ‘inferior’ social status and a natural willingness to move upward towards a higher status by religious conversion, an opportunity provided by Śrīvaiṣṇavism, converted in large numbers into Śrīvaiṣṇavism” (Jagadeesan 1977: 322; the author’s quote marks). Yet the same author is our printed source for the data that all founding Ālvārs and a number of Ācāryas were Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās. It is difficult to see how “founders” can be at the same time “converts.”

<sup>104</sup>See Vai Mu Gopalakriṣṇācīriyar, ed. *The Villiputhur Mahābhārata* (Ādīparvan). Chennai: Kuvai Publications, 1976: vi. His father’s name was Vīrarāghavācārya, and the poet apparently styled himself as “Villiputhūrālvār” after Pariyālvār, who we know was a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman, raising the possibility that the poet might have also been a Pūrvaśikhā Brahman.

<sup>105</sup>Richard A. Fresca (1990) is the fullest treatment of the use of the *Mahābhārata* in terukkūttu performances. See also Alf Hilterbeutel (1991b).

<sup>106</sup>P.P.S Sastri (1933:iii), quoted in Sukthankar 1942[III]: xxix): Sastri is writing about the differences between the Malayalam—our \*Pūrvaśikhā text of the Southern Recension—and the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu version of the Southern Recension: “Not having been subject to Nāyak influence in any manner whatsoever, the tradition handed down by the Malayalam manuscripts preserved the Grantha text, in a purer and more unmixed form than even some early Grantha manuscripts, as the Malayalam Mss. do not seem to have come into contact with the Northern Recension till very recent times.”

<sup>107</sup>See Velcheru Narayana Rao et al. *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamil Nadu*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992: 1-12.

<sup>108</sup>Dirks (1987: 55-107) shows that a distinct “discourse of kingship” exercised this ethos.

<sup>109</sup>As S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1941 [II]: 286) writes: “He became a great expert with the sword and the shield. He was a past master in the training of elephants. He had mastered both the theory and practice of music. He was a good poet both in Sanskrit and Telugu and was a great scholar in the art of literature.” Aiyangar notes that he composed the Pāñjātaḥaraṇam in two *yāmas* (six hours) and scribes had difficulty keeping pace with his composition. At his death, the leading woman poet of his court, Rāmabhadraṁba, composed a Sanskrit epic on his life.

<sup>110</sup>Indeed, the role of the Sarasvatī Mahāḷ Library as a supplier of manuscripts to the CE project is worth a study in itself, the Southern Recension texts of the Tamil (Grantha)-Telugu script being only one of the areas of interest.

<sup>111</sup>I. Mahadevan (1994) “From Orality to Literacy: the Case of the Tamil Society” notes (180-181) that Tamil literacy had an “earlier commencement;” the ruling agencies depended on the “use of local language for all purposes from the beginning;” and literacy had a “popular democratic character.”

<sup>112</sup>Hart (1975: 147) draws a radical distinction between the orality of the Pāṇans and literacy of the Pulavans of higher social standing. “Even though the Pulavans did not belong to the low castes, and did

not have the ritual status to play the instruments of those, they did compose songs modeled on those of the oral bards” (148), suggesting the Tamil Brāhmī script as the alphabet of these literate songs.

<sup>113</sup>I. Mahadevan (135) translates the relevant Aka. verse thus: “[L]ike the (jaina) monks whose bodies are emaciated by fasting and not bathed (Mahadevan’s parenthesis).”

<sup>114</sup>Hart (69-72) has only rather general and vague remarks on the aspects of Jainism (and Buddhism) in Sangam poetry: “There are many poems on the ephemeral nature of life that seem certainly have been influenced by Buddhist and Jaina ideas” (69).

<sup>115</sup>We have the famous instance in the third Ten of *Patimuppattu* of the Cēra King Palaiyānaccel Keḷukkuṭṭavan hosting the heavenly ascent of his poet Gautamanār and his wife, at the performance of the 10<sup>th</sup> Śrauta ritual, with echoes to the 100 agniṣṭomas of Mēḷattōḷ Palaiyanār Gautamanar was the King’s poet; Melangath Narayanankutti (2003: 378-79). J.R.Marr (1985:299-300).

<sup>116</sup>This is the Ehret model (1988) which Michael Witzel has used in his writings (1999, 2003) to characterize the mutual acculturation between the immigrant Vedic Aryans and the indigenous peoples of South Asia in the Vedic period. The Vedic oral traditions would constitute in this model a sort of prestige or status kit, with the host populations adapting themselves into these oral traditions, transforming them in the process. A similar acculturation is evident in the early Tamil history, between immigrant Brahmans with the Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta traditions and the indigenous chieftains and kings. As in the Vedic context, the acculturation was certainly mutual so much so that Hart (1975: 55) considers the “earliest Brahmans” of the Tamil country to resemble their northern counterparts very little—however, rather incorrectly in terms of their śrauta Vedism. Hart’s discussion of the “different types” of Brahmans of the Tamil country is rather in the abstract. The Vedic traditions of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans allow us to trace them to the Yamunā-Gangā doab. On the other hand, it is quite true that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans did acculturate themselves completely with their host Tamil society, their roles, first in the production of the poems of the Sangam anthologies and second, in the development of the Bhakti traditions being an illustration. And as I have noted above, the Aparāśikhā Brahmans did consider their host Purvaśikhā Brahmans “different” and interpellate them to a lower status.

<sup>117</sup>Thus in recent scholarship, the anti-Jain sentiments in the Śaiva-Bhakti poetry of Appar and Tirujñānasambandar is seen as the Hindu “othering” (Petersen 1998: 163-186) the Jain, a view supported by Richard H Davis (1998: 213-224): indeed, the Bhakti poetry does contain anti-Jain sentiments; see note 40 above. However, the hostility to Jainism is entirely new: it is not encountered in the Sangam poetry with a significant Brahman-Śrauta content, nor in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions. Indeed as I. Mahadevan notes, Jainism was the paramount attested religion in the Tamil-Kerala country from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to about 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. It is with the arrival of the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans that we begin to see the decline of the royal patronage toward Jains and Jainism. However, the Jains are still far from the “other” all through this period. The anti-Jain sentiments begin to appear in the Tamil country only after the Kaḷabhra Interregnum (see below), and I would be arguing, caused by it in as much as the Kaḷabhras were Jains. Even so, it is hardly obvious that the Śaivite Nayanmārs “other” the Jains, as fashionable as the notion may be. The main grounds of the Śaivite criticism of Jains seem to be based, as noted above, on matters of ritual purity.

<sup>118</sup>K.A.N Sastri (1955) 1976: 144: “A long historical night ensues after the close of the Sangam period. When curtain raises again afterward, the close of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, we find that a mysterious and ubiquitous enemy of civilization, the evil rulers called the kaḷabhras have come and upset the established political order which was restored only by their defeat at the hands of Pāṇṭiyas as well as Cālūkyas of Bādāmi.”

<sup>119</sup>Raghavan (1962: 7): “The Cōḷiyas who wear their tuft on the front of their heads and are to be found both in Tanjore and Tirunelveli villages are followers of the Ṛgveda. Ālaṅgudi, Rādhāmaṅgalam, Kunniyūr, Tiruvayāru are villages in Tanjore having Ṛgvedins. In Tirunelveli district, Ṛgvedins are to be found in Vallanādu, in Śrivaikunṭam Taluq; they are also to be found in Vembattūr near Sivagaṅga. Among the

Cōliyas or Mukkāṇis of Tiruchendūr temple and of Maṇakkarai and Trivandrum, the prevalent Veda is the Ṛk (Śākhala Śākhā). Further, “[i]n Palghat...Koḍunthirappalli [and] Añjumūrtimangalam near Alattur are noted for their Jaiminīya Sāmagas. They belong to the Cōliya class of Brahmans” (13). The three Ṛgveda *adhyāpakas* in the Kumbakonam Veda Pāṭaśāla were from this group, in 2006.

<sup>120</sup>See E.R.Sree Krishna Sarma, *Kauṣītakiṛāhmaṇa*. 3 Volumes. Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1968-76. Neḍḍum Bhavadrātan Nambudiri, the Hota of the Trichur Agniṣṭoma (2003) was an eye witness, as a boy, of this transaction, the entire proceeding staying in his mind because it was his first sight of a tape recorder.

<sup>121</sup>The grant occurs in the Tanṭantottam Plates (789 CE); see Mahalingam (1988: 303, line 198)

<sup>122</sup>The Hindu newspaper of August 12, 2007 carried the following caption:

Chennai today: RELIGION

**Ramayanam:** A.R. Chandrasekar, 5, Postal Colony, 2nd St., West Mambalam, 5.30 p.m.; Gagan Chaitanya, R.S. Kalyana Mandapam, 26A, Oragadam Road, 6.45 p.m.; Keeranoor Ramamurthi, Desikan Pravachana Mandapam, 26, St., Thillai Ganga Nagar, Nanganallur, 7 p.m.

**Mahabharatham:** Dhamodhara Deekshithar, Vallaba Ganapathy Veera Anjaneyar Temple, Muthulakshmi Nagar, Chitlapakkam, 7 p.m.

Bhagavatham: Gomatam Madhavachariar, Aasthika Samajam, 124, 3rd St., Venkateswara Nagar, Pozhichalur, 5 p.m.

**Gita:** K.R. Neelakantan, Sri Aurobindo Society Centre, J Block, 8th St., Anna Nagar, 6 p.m.

**Vishnu Sahasranamam:** P. Badrinath, Sri Manavaala Mamunigal Sannithi, 57, Bhimanan St., Alwarpet, 4 p.m.

**Meeravum Andalum:** M.K. Ramanan, Asthika Samajam, Venus Colony, Alwarpet, 6.30 p.m.

Valli Kalyanam: R. Mohandoss, Vidya Akadamy, Hariharan Hospital Road, Nanganallur, 6 p.m.

**Thayumanavar:** P. Venkatesan, Kothandaramar Temple, Old Washermanpet, 4 p.m.

<sup>123</sup>See Gregory Nagy (2002: 36-69) for a discussion of the Panathenian festival and the roles of the rhapsodes in singing the Homeric epics to the Greek public.

<sup>124</sup>Sastri seems to have been influenced by the Parvasaṃgraha of the Northern Recension: as Sukthankar (1933[I]: xxxiii) notes that Sastri’s edition follows the 18-parvan convention of the Northern Recension, although his manuscripts follow the 24-parvan division of the Southern Recension.

<sup>125</sup>Hiltebeitel (2001): “[T]he Mahābhārata was written by ‘out of sorts Brahmans’ who may have had some minor king’s or merchant’s patronage, but, for personal reasons, show a deep appreciation of, indeed exalt, Brahmans who practice the ‘way of gleaning’: that is uñcavṛtti Brahmans reduced to poverty who live a married life and feed their guests and family by ‘gleaning’ grain” (The author’s quote marks).

<sup>126</sup>I owe this coinage to Carrie Cowherd of the Classics Department of Howard University, Washington D.C. August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007.

<sup>127</sup>George Hart (“Use of Devanāgarī”: 9.4.2007 Indology list): “I would be interested in getting some feedback on this matter--when and where did Devanāgarī become standard for Sanskrit? I would guess that it begins fairly early in the North and only reaches South India in the 20th century.” Ashok Aklujkar responded (9.4.2007): “I suspect that Devanāgarī gradually became “Sanskrit script” for South India in the late 19th and the early 20th century mainly because relatively inexpensive editions of Skt texts were produced in Devanāgarī by presses such as the Nirnayasagar Press, the Venkateshwar Press, and the Sarasvati-yantra or Saraswati Press (of Jibananda Vidyasagara). The Vani-vilasa Press in South India might also have played a significant role in this process.” Both scholars ignore the Brahman migration to the south from areas where Devanāgarī had become prevalent. As I have noted above, some of the oldest *Mahābhārata* ms. from the Sarasvatī Mahāl Library were in Devanāgarī; the class of ms. D1-D14 of the Ādiparvan (I: XVIII-XX). D2, for instance, is dated 1598, CE, written at Benares by Govinda. There is little doubt that the Devanāgarī script arrived in the Tamil country with the Aparāśikhā Brahmans, during 14<sup>th</sup> CE and later. The Devanāgarī script was part of the educational curriculum of the (Aparāśikhā) Tamil Brahmans, and it never became part of the education of the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, although with significant activity in Sanskrit writing and composition.

<sup>128</sup>All the information on the transmission of the Sophocles MSS is from R. Jebb, *Sophocles* (1906: vii-xliv), “Introduction.”

<sup>129</sup>Būrjapatra appears as an item of trade in the Ramayāna at 2.1905\*. See Brockington (1984: 66).

<sup>130</sup>I. Mahadevan makes a sharp distinction between Upper South India and the Tamil area: the former was not politically independent, being part of the Nanda-Maurya imperial system, with the Prākṛt language and script imposed upon the population whereas with its political independence from northern empires, the Tamil area was able to become literate in a democratic and popular way in its own language and script: “As a direct result of political independence, Tamil remained the language of administration, of learning and instruction, and of public discourse throughout the Tamil country. When writing became known to the Tamils, the Brāhmī script was adapted and modified to suit the Tamil phonetic system. That is, while the Brahmi script was borrowed, the Prakrit language was not allowed to be imposed along with it from outside. When the Jaina and Buddhist monks entered the Tamil country, they found it expedient to learn Tamil in order to carry on their missionary activities effectively. An apt parallel is the case of the European Christian missionaries in India during the colonial period, who mastered the local languages to preach the gospel to the masses.” We must certainly add to the Jains and the Buddhists, the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans, first attested in Sangam poetry.

<sup>131</sup>The ōla or the palm leaf was a widely used article of literacy well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century so that in its early decades it functioned in Kuñṅikkuṭṭi Tamburān’s correspondence very much like a post card, when the use of paper had become widespread, with newspapers, some like the *Malayala Manorama*, playing influential roles in the literary life of the public. The first best seller of Malayalam literature appears about this time, in the 1890’s, that of Koṭṭāratil Śaṅkuṅṅi’s *Aitihyamāla*, first appearing in the Manōrama newspaper serially.

<sup>132</sup>Personal Communication, at the AOS annual conference at Chicago, March 15-17, 2008. Could the entire epic, practically its present extent in the Poona CE, have formed in an oral tradition? And transmitted in an oral tradition? In the text of my paper, I note the extra-ordinary feats of the oral tradition in South Asia, but always in the Vedic context, with an elaborate system of the svādhyāya institutions. It is sometimes envisaged as for instance by Biardeau that there may be actual Indians, not far from the earlier Blavatski fantasies of the Secret Masters hiding in the Himalayas, who could master the entire *Mahābhārata* into memory and recite it.

<sup>133</sup>Staal [I]1983: 193-273. “[T]he priests were engaged in rehearsals from December 1974 until April 1975. Nellikkat Nīlakanṭhan Akkittippad and Itṭi Ravi Nambudiri supervised the Sāmaveda rehearsals in Panjal, while Cherumukku Vaidikan and Erkkara supervised all other rehearsals, which took place in Shoranur” (273). As the *Dramatis Personae* (I: 266-67) of the 1975 Agnicayana show, the ṛtviks were veterans and brought years of training and practice in erstwhile śrauta rituals to their work as the priests.

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See Mahadevan and Staal (2003) for the ground-level workings of the Nambudiri śrauta system: the 1975 Hota functioned as the ācārya for the hautram praxis of the 2003 Agniṣṭoma at Trichur; the yajamāna of this Agniṣṭoma was the son of the yajamāna of the Kundoor Agnicayana (2001).

<sup>134</sup>No modern student of the śrauta traditions saw this more clearly than Frits Staal, who envisaged the Nambudiri Śtrautins to be “professionals,” very much like scholars and scientists, engaged in a self-sustaining activity.

<sup>135</sup>Ikari (1998:2) notes that the last Somayaga in the Vādhūla tradition took place in the 1920’s. I have not been able to confirm this. It does not appear in the *Agni* II list (252-255) of the “Recent Nambudiri Performances of Agniṣṭoma and Agnicayana” nor in the revised list in the Namboothiri.com website.

<sup>136</sup>I have come across individual Pūrvaśikhā Śōḷiya Brahmans who have performed the Agniṣṭoma in Kumbakonam area, but following the Aparāśikhā praxis available in the area. Interestingly, they show surprise when told of an ancient Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta tradition outside the Āpastamba-Drāhyāyana axis of the Aparāśikhā Śrauta tradition.

<sup>137</sup>The problem of Bhṛguization is discounted in the epic traditions: C. Minkowski (1989). But as I argue elsewhere a case for it can be made in the period of the formation of the Ṛgveda (“The Institution of the Gotra, the Ṛgveda, and the Brahmans [2007]”); the Bhṛgus do appear first in all Pravara lists, although their output in the Ṛgveda is relatively little for their great prominence in the subsequent periods.

## Abbreviations

### Indian Texts:

#### Sanskrit:

ĀgGS	Āgniveśya Gṛhya Sūtra
ĀŚS	Āsvalāyana Śruta Sūtra
ĀGS	Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
ĀpŚS	Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra
BD	Bṛhaddevata
BŚS	Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
BhP	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
BhrP	Brahma Purāṇa
BhŚS	Bhāradvāja Śrauta Sūtra
DŚS	Drāhyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
HV	Harivaṃśa
JS	Jaiminīya Saṃhita
JB	Jaiminīya Brahmaṇa
JŚS	Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra
KauS	Kauthuma Sāmaveda
KB	Kauṣītaki Brahmaṇa
KGS	Kauṣītaki Gṛhya Sūtra
KŚS	Katyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
LŚS	Lāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
Rām	Rāmāyaṇa
RV	R̥gveda
SŚS	Satyāśādha Śrauta Sūtra
ŚGS	Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
ŚŚS	Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhita
VP	Viṣṇu Purāṇa
VS	Vājanseyi Saṃhita
VŚS	Vādhūla Śrauta Sūtra

#### Tamil:

Aiñ	Aiñkuṇūru
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Ak.	Akanānūru
Kal.	Kalittokai
Kuṛ.	Kuṛuntokai
Naṛ	Narrinai
Neṭ.	Neṭuntokai
Patirru	Patirruppattu
Puṛ.	Puṛanānūru
Tol.	Tolkāppiyam

### General

EI	Epigraphia Indica
JAOS	Journal of American Oriental Society
JRAS	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society
DED	Dravidian Etymological Dictionary

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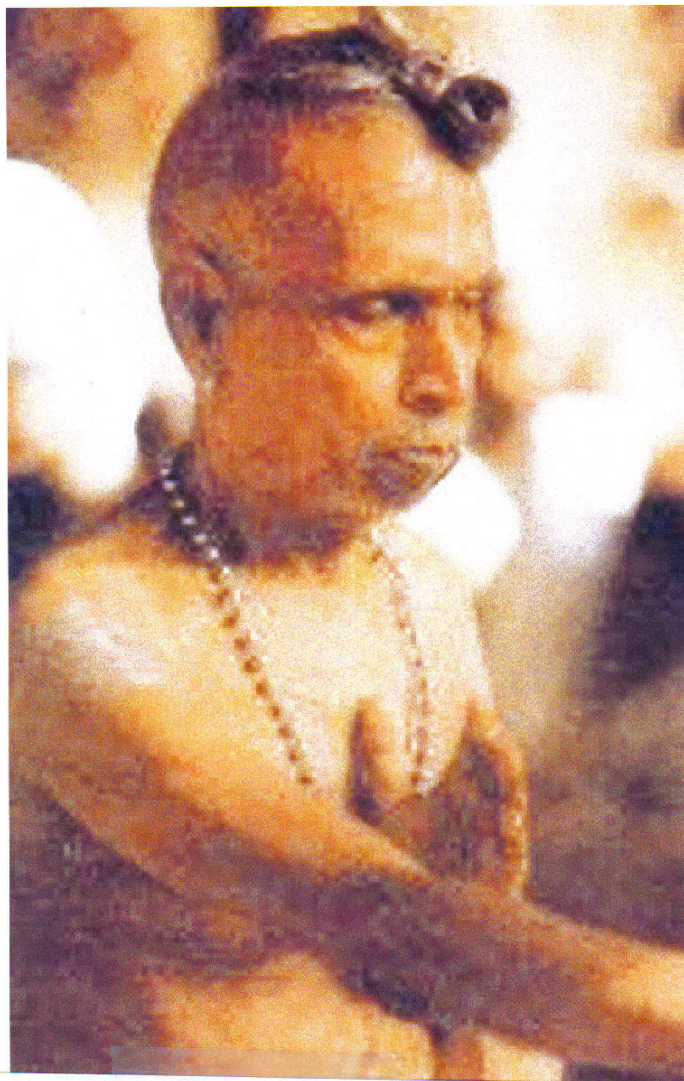
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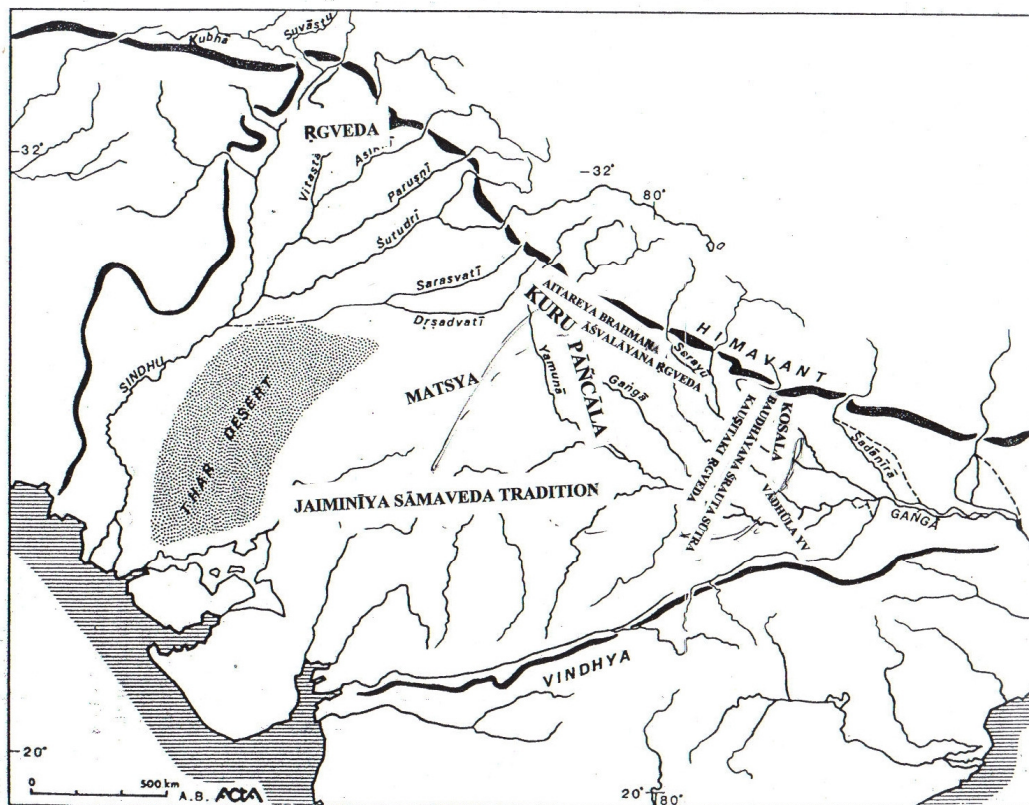
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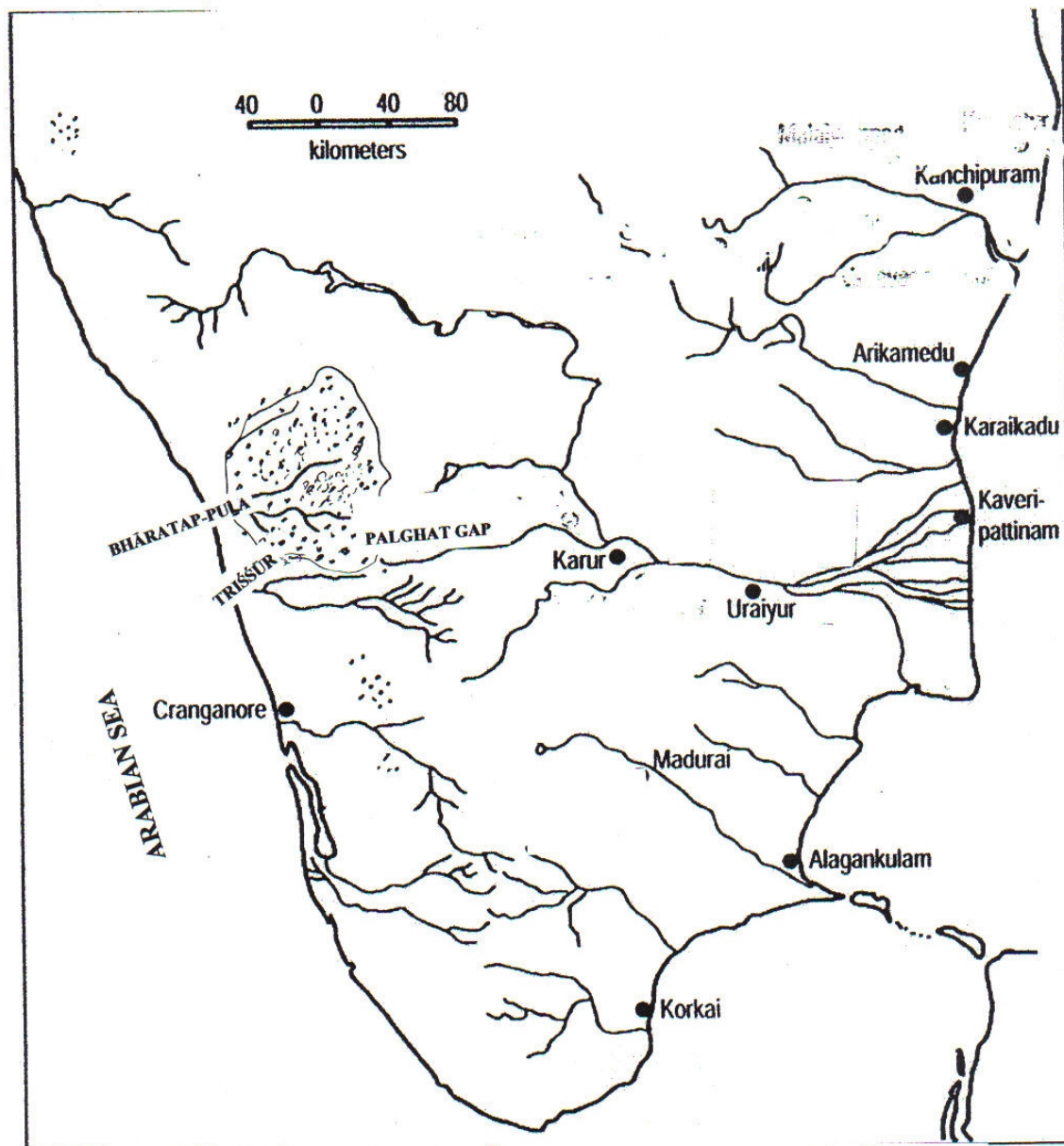
**Illustration I: Ērkkara Raman Nambudiri with the pūrvaśikhā tuft, as the Sadasya priest in the 1975 Agnicayana at Panjal**



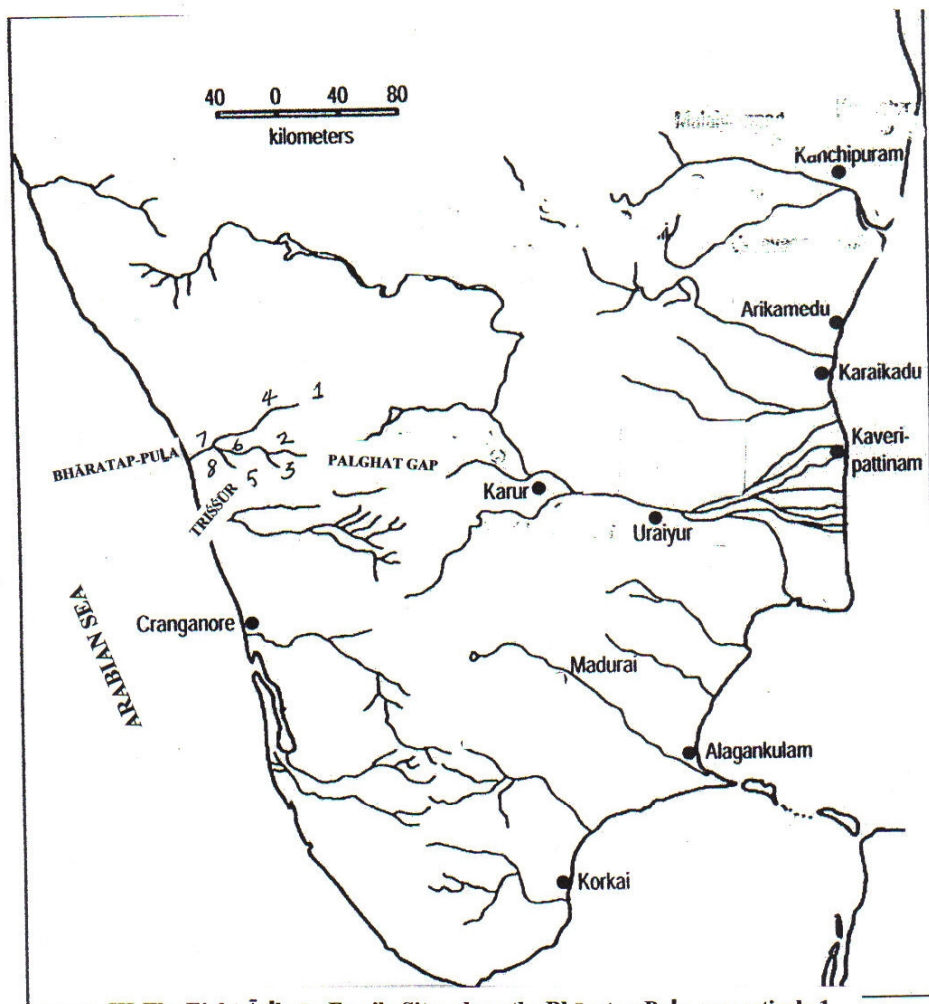
**Illustration II: “The Rāja Consults His Priests”:** Bilaspur, Panjab Hills, ca. 17<sup>th</sup> century; the priests with the *aparaśikha* tuft.



I. The Realm of Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta Axis (after Witzel 1987; 1989; 1995)



**II. The Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhā Śrauta Realm on the banks of the Bhāratap Puḷa, ballooning westward through the Palghat Gaps.**



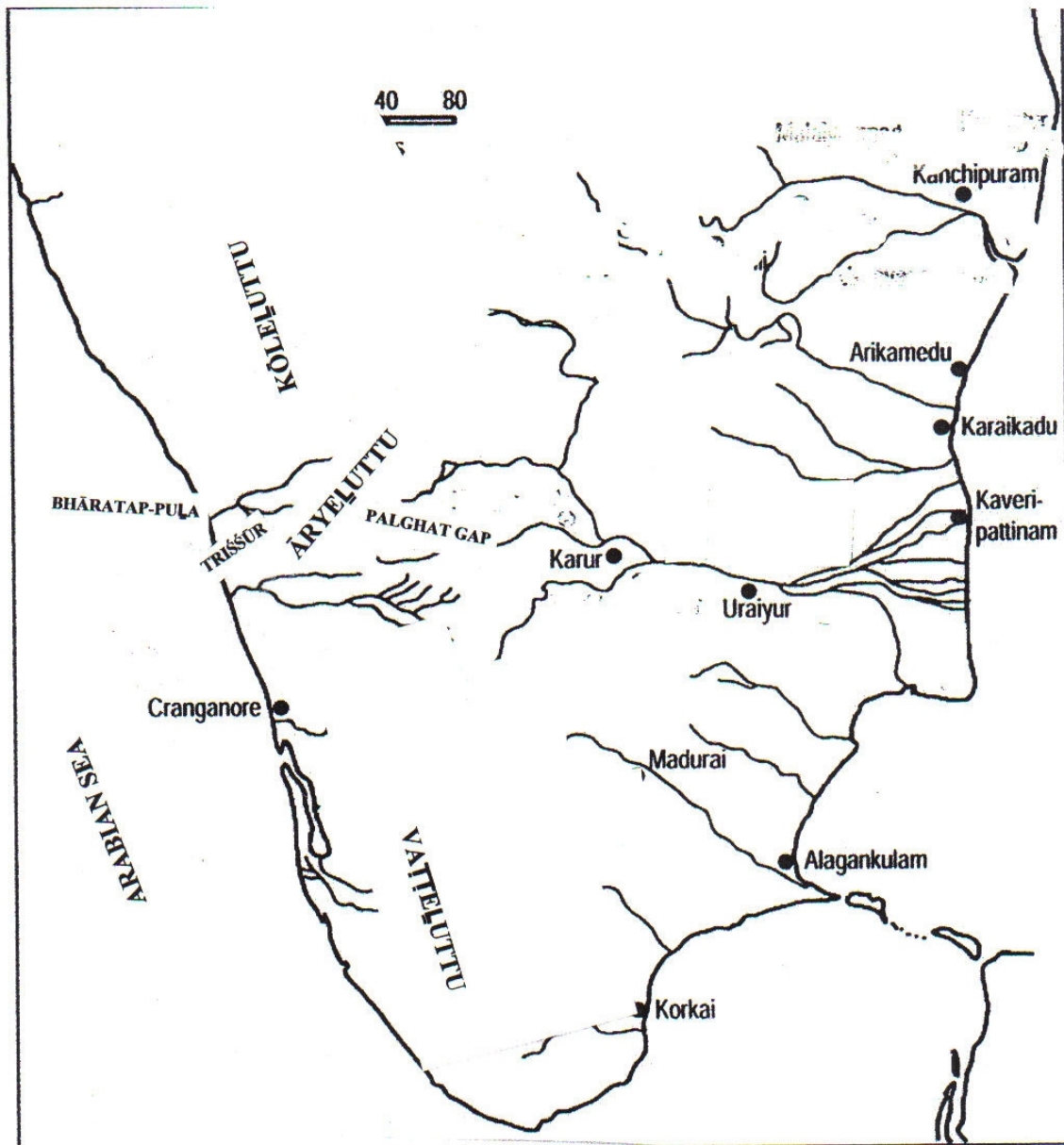
III. The Eight Āḍhyān Family Sites along the Bhāratap-Puḷa, respectively 1

through 8: Kalakaṇḍathūr; Meḷattōḷ, Māthūr, Kulukkallūr, Cemmaṅgād,

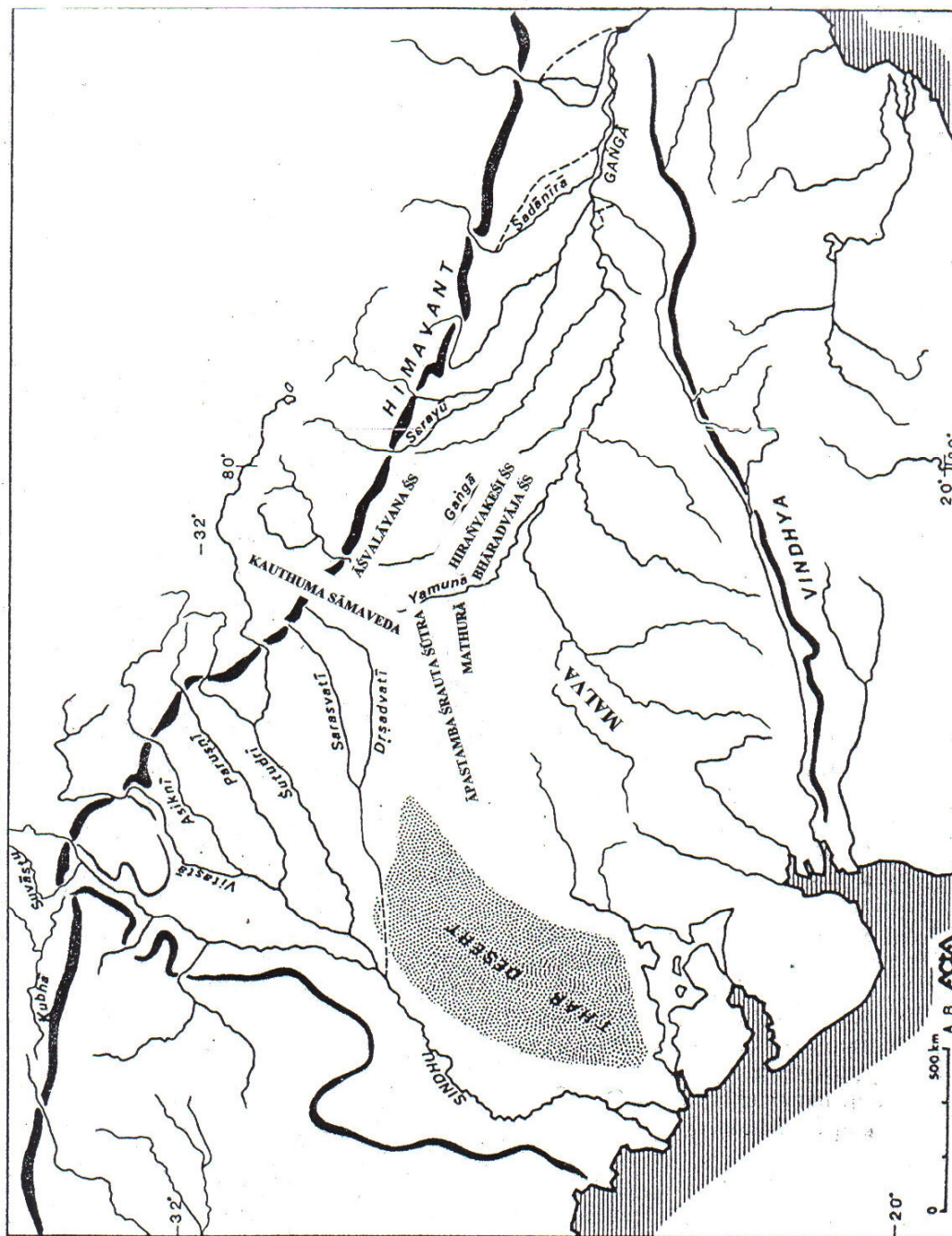
Pālūr, Muriṅgoth, and Veḷḷa



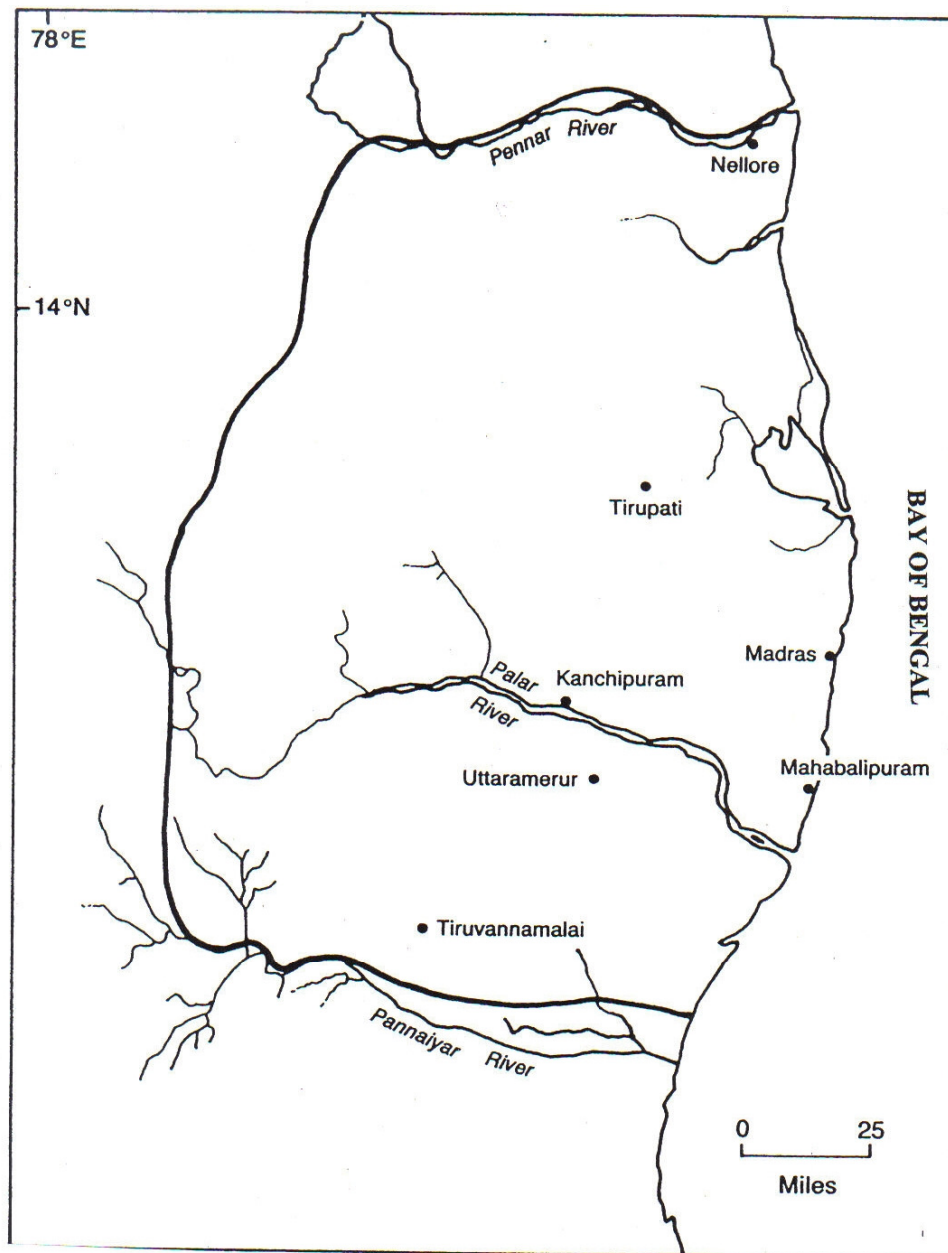




IV. The Three Paleographic Realms of Kerala: Vatteḷuttu (in the south, historical Travancore-Cochin); Āryeḷuttu in Malabar in the Nambudiri Srauta Realm, Kōḷeḷuttu in the north, still in use among the Mappiḷa communities. Drawn from I. Mahadevan (2003: 212).



V. The Realm of the Aparasikha Śrauta Axis (after Witzel 1987; 1989; 1995).



VI. The Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam Region: the Hosting Areas of the Aparāśikhā Immigrants.

## Appendix I

### Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans: Different Groups and Settlements:

1a. **Nambudiris** [Namboothiris]: Malayalam-speaking. Traditional home is Kerala, almost exclusively so as to be though aitchthonous, but attested in the Cōla land till about the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, presumably as part of a larger Pūrvaśikhā population with the many rare Veda śākhās and the forelock kuṭumi common to the entire group. Good, reliable information about the the community is available in the Namboothiri.com, a professionally maintained and managed website.

A live Śrauta tradition is attested among them, arguably the most authentic. The Śrauta tradition is found clustered, almost like a balloon, directly to the west of the Palghāt gaps, on both sides of the Bhāratapuḷa river and toward the Trichur-Irinjalakuda region, in the far north, in Cannanore. The Śrauta praxis is managed by six Vaidikan families: Ceṟumukku and Taikkāṭ from Śukapuram gramam; Perumpaṭappu and Kaplinḡāṭ from Perumānam gramam, and Kaimukku and Pantal from Irinjalakkuda gramam.

The 1901 census places the entire community at 28,895, with 19279 in the “British” Malabar, 5,326 in Travancore, and 5290 in Cochin. After 1933 with the younger sons in a family being able to marry within the community, there has been an appreciable rise in total numbers, estimated today at about 150, 000 probably a high estimate.

#### Tamil-speaking Pūrvaśikhās:

1b. Non-Vaiṣṇava Śōḷiya Brahmans. Perhaps the most “secular” group, they are found throughout Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the major urban centers of India.

Traditional settlements in Tamil Nadu:

- i. Tanjavūr area: Śrīvāñciyam, Tirukaṭaiyūr, Pālūr, Valangaiman, Tanjāvūr, Śēnganūr, Iṭayāṭṭukuṭi, Ālanguṭi, Tuyili, Kañcanūr, Visulūr, Vṛddhācalam, Kōnairājapuram, Avaṭaiyār koil, Tiṭṭakuṭi, Vasiṭṭhakuṭi
- ii. Madurai area: Vēmbattūr, Tirupparakunram, Śrīvilliputhūr.
- iii. Tiruchirapalli area: Tiruvaṇaikkavu, Anbil, Śrī Rangam.
- iv. Tirunelvēli area: Vaḷḷanāṭu, Tenkāśi, Kiḷappāvūr, Kṛṣṇāpuram, Kaṭaiyanallūr, Koṭṭāram, Śrīvaikunḍam, Bālamārtāṇḍapuram, Aḷakiyarpāṇḍipuram, Panaiyūr, Kāraikkūṭi, Ambāsamudram, Pāppākkūṭi
- v. Salem area: Tiruppattūr, Bhavāni, Cinnasalem, Nāmakkal.

They are found in significant numbers in Kerala as well (as immigrants after ca.18<sup>th</sup> century CE):

- i. Palghat area: Koḷunthirappulli, Chembai, Mekkanamkulam, Padur, Thennilapuram, Añjumūrti, Trittamarai, Taṭṭirkasserī, Vellinēḷi, Vēṅgassēri,
- ii. Trivandrum metro area, Karamana, Aḷakiya-pāṇṭi-puram, Nagar-koil area.

Like the Nambudiri Pūrvaśikhās, the Śōḷiya Pūrvaśikhās display tri-Vedic affiliations, to the Ṛg-, Yajur (Taittirīya) and Sāma (Jaiminīya) Vedas, suggesting a Śrauta praxis, attested in epigraphy till about 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The group constitutes perhaps the second largest population among the Pūrvaśikhās, perhaps around 50,000, again perhaps a high estimate.

1c. Vaiṣṇava Śōḷiya Brahmans. Tamil-speaking. Estimated at about 15% of the tenkalai Vaiṣṇava Brahmans. Found along the Kāvēri river around Tiruchirapally (Anbil, Śrī Rangam, Tiruveḷḷarai, Tirukōṭṭyūr, Aḷakarkoil, Puthūr) and the Tāmravarṇi river around Tirunelvēli (Tenturupperai, Ālvārtirinagari) in Tamil Nadu. One tiny group attested in Karnataka, brought there by Rāmaānuja, in Nandidurga and Aṣṭagrāma areas, now living in Mēlkotte village.

1d. Dīkṣitars of the great Chidambaram temple in Tamil Nāṭu. Tamil speaking and numbering around 250 families today. Only Ṛgveda (20%) and Yajurveda (Taittirīya-Baudhāyana) affiliations.

1e. Mukkāṇi or Tirucutantirar Brahmans: Priests of the Tirucchentūr temple and found in Tirucchentūr and the old Pāṇṭian kingdom. Only Ṛgveda (80%) and Yajurveda (Taittirīya-Baudhāyana) affiliations.

## Appendix II

### Aparaśikhā Brahmans: Different Groups and Settlements:

2a. Vaṭama. Tamil-speaking. Found all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with strong presence in most urban centers in India. The largest single group from all evidence.  
Sub-divisions [Thurston: 1907:334]:

2.a.i. Cōḷa Dēśa; 2.a.ii. Vaṭa Dēśa; 2.a.iii. Sabhayar; 2.a.iv. Iṅji; 2.a.v. Tummagunḍa Drāvida.

2b. Kēśi [or Hiraṇyakēśi]. Tamil-speaking. All ṣatyāśāṭa Sūtra of the Taittirīya Śākhā of the Black Yajurveda. Unknown settlements, but said to be very conservative, hence to be found in Tanjāvūr and Kumbakōṇam area.

2c. Bṛhatcaraṇam. Tamil-speaking. Found all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with strong presence in the major urban centers of India. The second largest group.

Sub-divisions [Thurston: 1907: 336], presumably by traditional settlements:

2.c.i. Kantramāṇikka; 2.c.ii. Mīlankanūr; 2.c.iii. Māṅkuṭi; 2.c.iv. Paḷavanēri;

2.c.v. Muśanāṭu; 2.c.vi. Kōḷathūr; 2.c.vii. Satyamaṅgalam; 2.c.vii. Puthūr-Drāvida.

2.d. Vāttima. Tamil-speaking. Most numerous in Tanjāvūr.

Sub-divisions [Thurston:1907:337]:

2.d.i. Patinēṭṭu Grāmattu; 2.d.ii. Udayalūr; 2.d.iii. Naṅṅilam;

2.d.iv. Rāthāmaṅgalam.

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2.e. Aṣṭasahasram. Tamil-speaking. Sub-divisions [Thurston: 1907, 339]:

2.e.i. Āttiyūr; 2.e.ii. Arivarpede; 2.e.iii. Nandivādi; 2.e.iv. Satkulam.

2.f. Prathamasāki. Tamil-speaking. Vājanseyi Samhita, both the Kāṇva (majority) and Mādhyandina (distinct minority) recensions Found in Tanjāvūr area, especially in Śetanipuram. A traditional Pāṭasāla of Śukla YV is being run Kulithalai at Vaigainallur agraharam by Sri Saranathan, financed by Sarasvatī Ammāl trust in Trichināpalli District. In July, 2005, there were 12 pupils, all from the Kola district, which has a large (~5000 according to Saranathan) śukla yajurvedi population. It takes him 28 months to train his students in 2086 mantras. (July, 2005)

3. More than 90% of the Vaiṣṇava Brahmans: All vaṭṭakalai sect of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Brahmans are Aparasīkhā; and close to 90% of the tenkalai sect are likewise Aparasīkhā Brahmans.







