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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETYMOLOGY IN EARLY MODERN POLEMICAL WORKS OF VEDĀNTA

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In this paper, I wish to discuss the role of etymology-based arguments in a polemical debate that took place between two major theologians of Vedānta active in the early modern period, namely Appaya Dīkṣita (1520-1593 CE) and Paravastu Vedāntācārya (fl. 18th cent.). The debate revolves around the meaning of the term ‘Nārāyaṇa’, and involves wider issues such as the identity of the creator of the world and the Supremacy of God. The first part of this paper provides some background to this debate. The second part discusses one key aspect of Appaya's argumentation, namely that the term Nārāyaṇa is the name of Śiva and not *only* of Viṣṇu; the response to that offered by Paravastu two centuries later is also discussed. I conclude this paper with some observations and remarks.

Introduction

As a foremost school of Indian philosophical theology, Vedānta investigates the nature of Brahman, the ground of being and supreme soul hailed in Upaniṣads, and its relation to the world and sentient beings. The Dvaita (dualism), Advaita (pure non-dualism), and Viśiṣṭādvaita (pan-organismal monism¹) systems are the most popular forms of Vedānta. Although many philosophical discussions are found in Vedic passages, the Upaniṣads (hereafter UP), the *Bhagavadgītā* (hereafter BG), and the *Brahmasūtras* (hereafter BS), termed as *prasthānatraya* (the canonical texts), together constitute the basis on which every Vedānta must establish its final philosophical position (*siddhānta*). The UPs expound the essence of Vedas while the ultimate reality (*param tattvam*) referred to in the UPs is elucidated in the BG and the BS. Several commentaries have been written notably on the BS, and these commentaries have contributed widely to the flourishing of the Vedānta tradition. In the second

¹ I would like to use this translation for the word ‘Viśiṣṭādvaita’ in preference to other translations like qualified non-dualism, etc.

millennium, philosophers begin to comment on the BS following the principles of their own religious tradition (*sampradāya*), principally either Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism. Among such commentaries are those written by Rāmānuja (1017-137 CE), Madhva (1238-1317 CE), Śrīkaṅṭha², Vallabhācārya (1479-1531 CE) and others. One of the central concerns of commentaries on the BS, especially those written in early modern period, is the identification of the supreme deity (*parabrahman*) with the 'preferred deity' (*iṣṭadevatā*) worshipped by the commentator. Since contradictions are found in Vedic passages quoted by the commentators to support their arguments³, a doubt is raised about the identity the supreme deity with that of their religions. Hence, Vedāntins composed many works to defend the supremacy of their preferred deity as well as the arguments advanced on this topic in the earlier commentaries.

This is particularly evident in polemical debates involving Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta. Starting with Rāmānuja and Sudarśanasūri (fl. 13th cent.), this Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava debate was fueled by the Śaiva Vedānta work of Appaya Dīkṣita, which for the most part attacked the Viśiṣṭādvaita school. The challenge posed to this school led later Viśiṣṭādvaitins, notably Paravastu Vedāntācārya, to defend their views. The scholarly work of Paravastu Vedāntācārya, the *Vedāntakaustubhā*, has never been studied so far. However, my study reveals that he was a major opponent to the great Appaya Dīkṣita. His *Vedāntakaustubhā*, from which the arguments discussed in this paper are taken, is a monumental work of polemics attacking Appaya's Śaiva views. In this paper I wish to discuss one of the key debates taken up in this work, namely the linguistic and conceptual referent of the word Nārāyaṇa.

Background of the debate

The UPs refer to the Supreme by the words *sat*⁴, *brahma*⁵, and *ātmā*⁶. The word *īśvara*⁷ is also frequently used in the BG to address the Supreme. Bādarāyaṇa (between 400 and 200 BCE), the author of the BS, did not mention the name of any deity and addresses the supreme cause of the creation by the word *brahman*⁸. However, in the course of commenting on Upaniṣads

² The date of Śrīkaṅṭha is still in dispute. But it could be assumed to be between Rāmānuja's period [11th cent.] and 14th or 15th cent. To know more about Śrīkaṅṭha's period, see Duquette, 2021: Chapter 1.

³ Śaivas quote the Vedic passages in which the names of Śiva are mentioned whereas the Vaiṣṇavas quote those that concern Viṣṇu.

⁴ *sad eva somya idam agre āsīt, ekam eva advitīyam*: Oh Somya! at first (before the creation) there was only existence, one without a second - *Chāndogyopaniṣad* 6.2.1.

⁵ *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yat prayanti abhisamviśanti, tad vijijñāsasva, tad brahma iti*: That from which these beings are born, that by which the born-beings live, that which they go to and enter inot (at the end) - know that; That is Brahman - *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, 3 *Bhrguvallī*, - 1

⁶ *ātmā vā idam eka eva agre āsīt*: (all) this was only one Ātman (supreme soul) at first - *Aitareyopaniṣad* 1.1.1

⁷ *īśvaraḥ* in 4.6 and 18.61, and *maheśvara* in 10.3

⁸ *Athāto brahmajijñāsā*: Now, therefore the enquiry into the Brahman (should be taken up), *janmādyasya yataḥ*: from which (Brahman) the origin, etc., of this (world proceed) - BS. 1.1.1-2

and the BS, later Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta, quoted Vedic passages that helped them to associate the general terms mentioned above to the deity of their cult, namely Śiva or Viṣṇu, and they did this in order to argue for the superiority of a deity over the other. Although most of the passages quoted to support their arguments differed from each other—some centered on Śiva and others centered on Viṣṇu—some passages were quoted by both parties. Most of these common passages are found in the *Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad* and the *Subālopaniṣad* (hereafter SU), theistic Upaniṣads in which the ultimate reality is addressed by the name Nārāyaṇa⁹. The use of the term Nārāyaṇa to denote the supreme creator is also found in many Vedic passages. For this reason, it was imperative for Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta to reflect on the meaning of this term, and argue, making use of rich and complex etymology-based arguments, that the term Nārāyaṇa actually refers to their own preferred deity.

Let us take a step back in history. Śaṅkara (8th cent. AD), in his monumental commentary on the BS, the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, says, ad BS 2.2.42:

[...] *tatra yat tāvad ucyate - yaḥ asau nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ avyaktāt prasiddhaḥ paramātmā sarvātmā, sa ātmānam anekadhā vyūhya avasthitaḥ iti - tat na nirākriyate*[...]

That which has been said--namely, that this Nārāyaṇa, who is known to be superior to the unmanifest, the supreme soul, soul of all, manifests himself into many forms --that is not refuted.

This passage makes clear that Śaṅkara does not explicitly identity the term Nārāyaṇa with a particular deity, whether Śiva or Viṣṇu. While commenting in their respective commentaries on the BS, Rāmānuja and Madhva also felt no need to comment on this identity either because the term Nārāyaṇa is commonly associated with Viṣṇu, their own preferred deity. Things took a different turn with Śrīkaṅṭha in his Śaiva commentary on the BS, *Brahmamīmāṃsābhāṣya*, composed around the 14th century. He says, ad BS 1.2.3:

[...] *nārāyaṇaḥ eva mūrtyātmā viśvapatitvādinā liṅgena pratipādyate iti pūrvapakṣaḥ. siddhāntas tu nārāyaṇātmā maheśvara iti* [...]

[...] the prima facie position is that only Nārāyaṇa is understood to be the soul-form because of textual markers [found in Vedic passages] such as the fact of being the lord of the universe, etc. However, [our] final position is that Maheśvara [i.e., Śiva] is the soul of Nārāyaṇa [himself].

⁹ For instance: *sa eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātmā apahatapāpmā divyaḥ devaḥ ekaḥ nārāyaṇaḥ* (*Subālopaniṣad*. 7.1); *nārāyaṇaḥ paraṁ brahma tattvaṁ nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ* (*Nārāyaṇopaniṣad* of *Taittirīyāranyakam* - 4th hymn).

According to Śrīkaṇṭha, Nārāyaṇa is the cause of the universe but his soul is none other than Maheśvara (i.e. Śīva is superior to Nārāyaṇa in his view). Around the same period, Veṅkaṭanātha (1268-1364 CE), one of the most important preceptors of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition and a notable theologian of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, discusses the term Nārāyaṇa in his *Tattvamuktākalāpa* (hereafter TMK). He says that Nārāyaṇa is not an indefinite term like *sat*, *brahma*, etc., neither a characteristic of a specie (*jāti*) nor a limiting factor (*upādhi*) denoting any other deity. In his view, the term Nārāyaṇa has a unique referent and this referent can only be Viṣṇu¹⁰.

Two centuries later, this controversy, took a more aggressive turn with the work of Appaya Dīkṣita. A 16th-century erudite and ardent devotee of Śīva, Appaya was a prolific scholar who wrote on poetics, Śaivism, and Vedānta, notably many polemical works in which he defends the supremacy of Śīva. One of the major strategies he uses in these polemical works centers around the interpretation of the term Nārāyaṇa found in scriptures and other texts. Appaya claims that it refers not *only* to Viṣṇu but also to other deities, notably Śīva. He deals with this topic in a portion of his sub-commentary on Śrīkaṇṭha's *Brahmamīmāṃsābhāṣya*, the *Śivārkaṇṭhidīpikā* (hereafter ŚMD). Appaya discusses this topic also in his earlier *Śivatattvaviveka*¹¹ (hereafter ŚTV), a self-authored commentary on the *Śikhariṇīmāla*, a work containing 60 verses that defends the supremacy of Śīva. In the following, I focus only on the ŚMD.

Appaya's etymological argument

Śrīkaṇṭha, in his commentary on BS 1.1.2, says that the *śivatattva* (i.e. Lord Śīva) is the substratum of all auspicious things and is devoid of all worldly stains, and also that he is the ultimate cause of the world creation, etc¹². Appaya, while commenting on this passage, refers to the following hymn from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* (hereafter ŚU) to claim that Brahman, the cause of the universe, is only Śīva:

*yadā atamaḥ tan na divā na rātriḥ
na sat na ca asat śivaḥ eva kevalaḥ[...]* (4.18)

When the ignorance is dispelled, there is neither day nor night, neither being nor non-being, there is only that Śīva.

¹⁰ TMK 3.5

¹¹ Appaya deals with it in verses 49 and 59 of the ŚTV.

¹² The characteristics stated earlier in the commentary by Śrīkaṇṭha are: *sarvajñatva* - Omniscient, *sarvaśaktimatva* - Omnipotent, *sarvavyāpin* - Omnipresent, *mahatva* - Greatness, etc.

According to Appaya, the word Śiva in the hymn indicates only the Lord Śiva and not a characteristic namely auspiciousness of the ultimate. Moreover, he holds that the purport of this hymn is to establish that only Śiva is referred to by all Vedic hymns about the creation of the world, and by all names, notably Nārāyaṇa, mentioned in those hymns. It is striking that although the particular term Nārāyaṇa had generally been used to denote Viṣṇu, the supreme deity of Vaiṣṇavas, Appaya insists that should be identified with Śiva. In this context, Appaya deals with the denotation of the term Nārāyaṇa in two different ways:

- A. Ascertaining that the term Nārāyaṇa refers to Śiva
- B. Arguing that it does not exclusively denote Viṣṇu

A. Ascertaining that the term Nārāyaṇa refers to Śiva

In Sanskrit, the word '*śiva*' generally refers to something that bestows goodness or auspiciousness. Hence, Appaya asks: if, both in worldly and Vedic usages, the term '*śiva*' can be associated with 'Nārāyaṇa' (understood to mean Viṣṇu) insofar as Nārāyaṇa is [the bestower of] goodness, etc., then why is it not possible to identify the term '*Nārāyaṇa*' with Śiva?

The intention [of Appaya's question] is: if a proper name of Śiva can be identified with that of Viṣṇu (by some means), then why cannot a name of Lord Viṣṇu (i.e. Nārāyaṇa) be identified with Lord Śiva?

Hence, he claims that the term Nārāyaṇa, in fact, means Śiva only, and he demonstrates it based on etymology. In Sanskrit, the signification of a word (*śabdaśakti*) is of three types: (i) direct expression (*abhidhā*), (ii) indication (*lakṣaṇā*), and (iii) suggestion (*vyañjanā*). According to Appaya, as said above in the ŚU, Śiva is the only one who existed at the beginning of the creation. Hence, the term Nārāyaṇa, insofar as the entity Nārāyaṇa originates from Śiva, refers to Śiva by means of its indicative power (*lakṣaṇā*). However, Appaya is aware that Vaiṣṇavas may not agree with this and may invoke a grammatical rule applied to the formation of the term.

What is the grammatical rule and why Vaiṣṇavas may not agree with Appaya's view?

To proceed further, it is essential to know the formation of the word. The word *Nārāyaṇa* is a compound (*samāsa*) consisting of two members, *nāra* and *ayana*. Usually, a gloss in the form of a sentence is required to comprehend the denotation or the formation of a compound and it is called '*vigrahavākya*'. And, the *vigrahavākya* for the compound *Nārāyaṇa* is: '*nāram ayanam asya*' meaning 'his place of refuge is [cosmic] water'. Here, in the compound, a grammatical rule is employed to replace the dental letter '*na*' by the cerebral letter '*ṇa*' in the

word ‘*ayana*’ (i.e. the latter member of the term). It should be remembered that the rule is applicable only if the compound word (i.e. the words—*nāra* and *ayana*—that are united together) denotes ‘a proper name’ (*saṃjñā*)¹³. From this standpoint, Appaya’s argument that the term *Nārāyaṇa* refers to Śiva through indicative power cannot apply. Besides, for Vaiṣṇavas the term *Nārāyaṇa* is familiar as ‘a proper name’ *only* of Viṣṇu and not of Śiva.

To answer this, Appaya quotes the following verses from the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (hereafter KP) to say that the term *Nārāyaṇa* it is also ‘a proper name’ of Śiva:

nāmāni tava govinda yāni loke mahānti ca ।

tāny eva mama nāmāni nātra kāryā vicāraṇā ॥ (Harivaṃśa 3.88.61)

Govinda! Your great names [known] in the world are also mine, and no investigation should be done into this.

vaśitvād apy avasīyatvād īśvaraḥ paribhāṣitaḥ ॥ [...]

narāṇām ayanam yasmāt tena nārāyaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ ।

haras saṃsāraharaṇād vibhutvād viṣṇur ucyate ॥ [...]

śivaḥ syāt nirmalo yasmād vibhus sarvagato yataḥ ॥ (KP 1.4.59-63)

He is technically named *Īśvara* because he is *Vaśin* (full of self-control) and *Avaśya* (not liable to be subjected to anyone else’s control).[...]

Since he is the goal of men, he is called *Nārāyaṇa*. He is called *Hara* because he removes the [bondage of] worldly existence. He is called *Viṣṇu* because of his omnipresence¹⁴.

Thus, according to Appaya, the verses from the *Harivaṃśa* are evidence to associate not only the term *Nārāyaṇa* with Śiva but also all other names that denote Viṣṇu. Moreover, the verses from the KP affirm that this particular term *Nārāyaṇa* is also ‘a proper name’ of Śiva. Hence, the grammatical rule mentioned above can apply and the substitution of ‘*na*’ will take place without any difficulty as the term, now, is referred to as ‘a proper name’.

B. Arguing that the term *Nārāyaṇa* does not exclusively denote Viṣṇu

After ascertaining that the term refers to Śiva, Appaya argues that it does not *exclusively* refer to Viṣṇu as references are found in scriptures that show the identity of the term *Nārāyaṇa* also with *Viriñci* (i.e. *Brahmā*, one among the three-fold deities). He starts discussing this identity because it may be argued that according to etymology—*nārāḥ ayanam asya*—the term

¹³ The Pāṇinian formula ‘*pūrvapadāt saṃjñāyāmagah*’ (A. 8.4.3) prescribes it. This says that ‘*na*’ becomes ‘*ṇa*’ if the cause for change is in the first member of the compound which does not end in ‘*ga*’, and if, with the change, some proper name is understood.

¹⁴ I adapted this translation from the English translation of the KP published by the Motilal Banarsidass publishers, New Delhi in 1998.

Nārāyaṇa refers to the person whose abode is [cosmic] water and therefore that this characteristic is not applicable to Śiva though it is established (above) as 'a proper name' of him. So, he quotes the following verses from, again, the KP in which the term is used to refer to Viriñci:

[...]

brahmā nārāyaṇākhyas tu suṣvāpa salile tadā ॥

imaṃ ca udāharanty atra ślokaṃ nārāyaṇaṃ prati । [...]

āpo nāra iti proktā āpo vai naraśūnavaḥ ।

ayanam tasya tāḥ yasmāt tena nārāyaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ ॥ (1.6.3-5)

Brahmā, named as Nārāyaṇa, fell asleep on the [cosmic] waters at that time. [They, i.e., the sages] cite this verse in this context with reference to Nārāyaṇa.[...]

The waters are called 'nārāḥ' since they (the waters) are the descendants of 'nara' (the man [contextually the very first person]). Since they became his [i.e. the first man's] abode, he is called Nārāyaṇa.

Based on this passages, Appaya concludes that the first quarter of the verse—*brahmā nārāyaṇākhyah*—shows the identity of the term Nārāyaṇa with Viriñci. Besides, the characteristic, waters as his abode, qualified by the etymology of the term—*nārāḥ ayanam asya*—is also applicable to him as evident from the second quarter (*suṣvāpa salile tadā*).

To sum up, in the first stage of his argumentation, Appaya ascertains, by making use of etymological arguments, that the term Nārāyaṇa refers to Śiva by means of its indicative power (*lakṣaṇā*) and affirms that it is 'a proper name' of Śiva. Then, in the second stage of his argumentation, he argues that the term does not *exclusively* denote Viṣṇu as sources are found in scriptures that show the identity of the term Nārāyaṇa also with other deity, namely Viriñci.

What is the need here for Appaya to discuss this term Nārāyaṇa in detail and to associate it with Śiva while there are some terms that exclusively denote him? It is because this term is frequently used to address the ultimate cause of creation in [many] Vedic passages. Furthermore, the SU, which is very often quoted by Appaya in his polemical works to defend the supremacy of Śiva, mentions and often repeats the term Nārāyaṇa. Hence, if it is established that the term indeed denotes Śiva, then, the supremacy of Śiva can be easily defended.

Paravastu's defense against Appaya's claim

It is a known fact that Appaya's polemical arguments in support of Śiva's supremacy were very much criticized by the other Vaiṣṇava schools of Vedānta, particularly by Dvaitins and

Viśiṣṭādvaitins, during and after his time. Two centuries after Appaya, Śūrapuram Venkaṭācārya (fl. 18th cent.)¹⁵ wrote the *Siddhāntaratnāvalī*, a polemical work consisting of four chapters in which he aggressively criticizes the views of Appaya. Around the same time, a Vaiṣṇava, again from the Śūrapuram family, called Śrīnivāsācārya¹⁶ composed a work called *Ṇatvadarpaṇa*, in which he strongly argues that the term Nārāyaṇa denotes only Viṣṇu. Later on, the great Vaiṣṇava scholar Paravastu Vedāntācārya¹⁷ (fl. 18th cent.) wrote the *Vedāntakaustubha* (hereafter VK), a voluminous work in which he refutes, just like Venkaṭācārya had done, the views of Appaya. The author has taken principally the ŚTV and ŚMD as the prima facie for his position and responds to them. Although Appaya's argument about the term Nārāyaṇa had already been partly refuted and responded to by many Viśiṣṭādvaitins, our author, Paravastu, differs from others for dealing in greater detail with the etymological arguments of Appaya. He responds to Appaya's claims in the VK in four sections: (i) the etymological interpretation of the term Nārāyaṇa, (ii) the meaning of this term through derivation, (iii) the irrelevance of this term to other deities and (iv) the affirmation that the term Nārāyaṇa denotes only Bhagavān (i.e. Viṣṇu).

(i) The etymological interpretation of the term Nārāyaṇa

Unlike Appaya, Paravastu quotes the following verses from the *Mahābhārata* (MB) and the *Padmapurāṇa* (PP) to interpret the term Nārāyaṇa etymologically:

narāj jātani tatvāni nārāṇīti tato viduḥ |

tāny eva cāyanam tasya tena nārāyaṇa smṛtaḥ || (MB. 13.186.7)

The elements produced by ‘nara’ (i.e. the very first person) are called ‘nāra’. And since they become the abode for him (the *nara*) he is called Nārāyaṇa.

nāras tviti sarvapumsām samūhaḥ parikīrtitaḥ |

gatirālambanam teṣām tena nārāyaṇa smṛtaḥ || [...]

nāro narāṇām saṅghātaḥ tasyā sāv ayanam gatiḥ |

tenā sau munibhir nityam nārāyaṇa itīritaḥ || (PP. 6.226.53 & 56)

By [the word] *nāra* all men (living things are meant) are stated. He is called Nārāyaṇa because he is the destination and also the means for them. [...]

¹⁵ See - Potter K.H (1983) - p.461 and Raghavan V K S N (1979) - p. 60

¹⁶ Ibid - p.468 & p.61

¹⁷ Raghavan V K S N (1979) - p.61. According to him, Vedāntācārya was the son of Ādivarāhācārya and the grandson of Mahāvedāntācārya. The same date is referred to in the NCC (Vol.31, p.348). Paravastu is referred to as Vātsya Vedāntācārya by Potter. See Potter (2017) p.468.

The group of humans is called *nāra* and He is the destination for them. Hence, he is always called *Nārāyaṇa* by the saints.

According to Paravastu, both verses, from the MB and PP, etymologically interpret the term *Nārāyaṇa* along with the unique characteristics applicable to the deity denoted by it. They are: (i) having the elements originated from himself as his abode (i.e. indirectly being the inner-soul of all), and (ii) being the [ultimate] destination of souls and the means to attain it. The point is that these characteristics are applicable only to the supreme soul and not to any other deity. Thus, by making use of this etymological analysis, Paravastu directly refutes Appaya's own etymological analysis.

(ii) The meaning of the term through derivation

To support this argument, Paravastu then quotes the verse from the *Manusmṛti* (hereafter MS) given below:

*āpo nārā iti proktāḥ āpo vai naraśūnavaḥ
tā yad asyāyanam pūrvam tena nārāyaṇa smṛtaḥ* (1.10)

The [cosmic] waters are called *nārāḥ* as they are the offsprings of *nara*. Since they become His earlier abode He is called *Nārāyaṇa*.

Paravastu says that the first two quarters of the verse, collectively, indicate two characteristics of the deity denoted by the term *Nārāyaṇa* while the third one indicates a third characteristic. To answer the questions as to what those three characteristics are and how they are expressed, he analyses, along with the meaning, the formation of the term *Nārāyaṇa*:

- *naraḥ* - He says that the word '*naraḥ*', derived from the root '*ri*' by adding the affix '*ḍa*'¹⁸ and the negative particle '*na*' as a prefix to it, means 'imperishable.'
- *nārāḥ* - The secondary affix '*aṅ*' is employed after the word '*naraḥ*' in the sense *tasmāt jātam* meaning 'originated from him' (i.e. *nara* - the imperishable one). Thus, it gets the form '*nārāḥ*' meaning water.
- The term *Nārāyaṇa* is derived from the etymology *nārāḥ ayanam asya* meaning 'waters are his abode'.

Furthermore, according to Paravastu,

1. the word '*naraḥ*' indicates the characteristic of 'unchangeability';

¹⁸ The *uṅādi*-affix '*ḍa*' can be employed after all roots by the enforcement of the Pāṇinian formula '*uṅādayo bahulam*' (3.3.1). It is because the rule says that affixes '*uṅ*' and the rest (all *uṅādi*-affixes) are variously used after (all) roots to express present tense as also designation. As '*ḍa*' is an '*uṅādi*-affix', it is now employed here after the root '*ri*' to form the word '*raḥ*' meaning '*that which perishes*'. Then, '*na*' is added before it, as said above, to mean 'imperishable'.

2. the word *nārāḥ* indicates 'the cause of [whole] creation' and;
3. the word 'ayanam' (abode) indicates 'the nature of the inner soul of all'.

Therefore, the verse quoted above from the MS, which includes the words *nara* and *nārāḥ* (in the first half), and *ayanam* (in the second half), implies that the deity denoted by the term Nārāyaṇa should possess these three characteristics. And, these are, undoubtedly, applicable only to the supreme soul (i.e. Viṣṇu). Besides, the SU¹⁹, in which the term Nārāyaṇa is frequently mentioned, also ascribes these three characteristics to him²⁰. Thus, Paravastu concludes this section by saying that the term Nārāyaṇa, when we analyse it part by part (*avayavārtha*), can denote only the Supreme and not any other deity.

(iii) The irrelevance of the term to other deities

This section is discussed by taking a lead from the last statement of the previous section. Paravastu quotes the following verse known to the scholarly world for establishing the meaning of a word:

*prayogo yasya śabdasya yasmin narthe vyavasthitaḥ
sa eva tasya śabdasya hy abhidheya iti sthitiḥ*²¹

The [direct] expression (*abhidheya*) of a word is that meaning in which the usage of the word is well established [in the world].

After quoting this, Paravastu says:

*sarvatra ca śruti-smṛt-ītihāsa-purāṇāgameṣu loke ca sarveṣu deśeṣu
āpāmaram nārāyaṇaśabdaḥ bhagavaty eva prasiddhiḥ*²²

Everywhere in Vedas, Smṛti texts, Epics, Purāṇas, and Āgamas and in all over the world from (or till) the illiterate, the word 'Nārāyaṇa' is established to have the sense of Bhagavān (i.e. Viṣṇu) only.

Based on these quotations, he then deals with the arguments made by Appaya. He renders the whole passage from the ŚMD and mentions it as a prima facie. He then quotes many verses from different scriptures like the KP, the MB, the PP, etc. to refute and respond to the views expressed by Appaya. This is a large section compared with others in this context and I will

¹⁹ Paravastu refers to the SU for it being quoted very often by Appaya as said earlier at the end of Appaya's arguments.

²⁰ *antaḥśarīre nihito guhāyām ajaḥ ekaḥ nityaḥ* [...] - he who resides inside the body, is unborn, [only] one, eternal [...] - SU. 7.1

²¹ VK. p.28

²² Ibid.

therefore present below just the refutations and responses put forth by Paravastu given special references to the etymological aspects.

He says:

*nārāyaṇapadaṃ loke puruṣaiḥ prākṛtair api
prayujyate ramākānte na tu brahmaśivādiṣu!*²³

In the world, the word 'Nārāyaṇa' is used by humans (i.e. learned) and also by illiterates in [the sense of] the husband of Ramā (i.e. husband of goddess Lakṣmī - Viṣṇu) and not in the sense of Brahmā, Śiva, etc.

By this verse, Paravastu starts refuting the first argument of Appaya that the term Nārāyaṇa denotes Śiva by means of its indicative power (*lakṣaṇā*). He then says that the hypothesis consisting in ascertaining that the term, by any means, denotes Śiva is improper. He argues that assuming multiple meanings for the term Nārāyaṇa may lead to the complexity of understanding it in different contexts.

Paravastu is aware that the following claim may be invoked on the aforesaid complexity:

If a word has the power (*śakti*) to express multiple meanings and there is an uncertainty among the alternatives denoted by the word, then it can signify different meanings in different contexts. No complexity will be found in understanding that word in those contexts. Therefore, in the present context, the word Nārāyaṇa, has that capacity and it can denote Śiva by means of its indicative power.

To respond to this claim Paravastu refers to the previous passage and says that it is improper in this context since the term Nārāyaṇa is not used in Vedas and worldly usages to denote either Brahmā or Śiva in any context. Hence, it can denote only Viṣṇu in all contexts and by all means.

He then responds to Appaya's claim that the term Nārāyaṇa is also 'a proper name' of Śiva as understood by the verses (1.4.59-63 quoted above) of the KP. He uses a method of Mīmāṃsakas here in determining the purport of the chapter mentioned by Appaya. The method is called *ṣaḍvidhatātparyalingāni* meaning 'the six-fold marks of determining the purport'. According to this method, the purport of a text or chapter is determined by six indicators. They are: (i) the initial (*upodghāta*) and the final (*upasaṃhāra*) statements, (ii) reiteration (*abhyāsa*), (iii) novelty [of the subject] (*apūrvatā*), (iv) mention of the fruit or aim (*phalam*), (v) eulogy (*arthavāda*), and (vi) reasoning (*upapatti*). Thus, he says that the initial statement (*upodghāta*)

²³ Idib. p.30

of that chapter (i.e. 4th one of the KP), where it is said that Nārāyaṇa in the form of a tortoise spoke about the origin and the destruction of beings, should be noted.²⁴ Furthermore, the final statement (*upasaṃhāra*) should also be observed where it is said by the Supreme that He explained the primary creation (*prākṛtasargaḥ*) briefly²⁵. Hence, the initial and final statements of the chapter imply that the chapter deals with the creation and destruction of the beings and not with the names of any deity (i.e. Śiva in this context)²⁶. The interesting fact is that this technique of using '*upodhgāta*' and '*upasaṃhāra*' is also dealt with by many theologians, notably Appaya, in their polemical works.

In what follows, Paravastu responds to the second of Appaya's arguments to the effect that the term Nārāyaṇa does not *exclusively* denote Viṣṇu and is also referred to as Viriñci (Brahmā) in the KP. Paravastu says that the term mentioned in the sixth chapter of the KP (quoted by Appaya) and the same verse repeated again in the 10th chapter²⁷ makes it clear that the deity referred to by the term Nārāyaṇa, in both chapters, is none other than the ultimate cause of creation and not Viriñci. Moreover, characteristics such as possessing a thousand heads and eyes, etc., mentioned in both chapters, are applicable only to the ultimate cause of creation and it is, here, none other than Viṣṇu. He says further that even the following verse, which comes after the verses quoted by Appaya (1.6.3), clarifies that only Hari (a well-known name of Viṣṇu) is referred to by the term Nārāyaṇa in that context (i.e. chapter 6):

dṛṣṭvā daṃṣṭrāgravinyastām pṛthivīm prathitapauruṣam

astuvan janalokasthāḥ siddhāḥ brahmarṣayo harim || - KP. 1.6.10

After seeing the earth held upon the tips of his tusk, the siddhas [and] saints eulogized

Hari whose manliness is well-known.

Thus, according to Paravastu, this verse (1.6.10) that comes after Appaya's quotation (1.6.3) is a major evidence to say that only Lord Hari (i.e. Viṣṇu) is referred to by the term Nārāyaṇa everywhere in the KP, notably, in the chapters quoted by Appaya. Therefore, he says that it is impossible to identify the term Nārāyaṇa with any other deity as it can be identified with and denotes only Viṣṇu.

²⁴ [...] nārāyaṇaḥ [...] kūrmarūpadhṛk | prāha [...] bhūtānām prabhavāpyayau || - KP. 1.4.4

²⁵ ityeṣa prākṛtaḥ sargaḥ saṃkṣepāt kathito mayā | - KP. 1.4.65

²⁶ [...] tad adhyāyopkramavacanena [...] tad upasaṃhāragatavacanena tasya adhyāyasya sṛṣṭinirūpaṇārtham pravṛttatvāgamena śivanāmanirvacanaidamparyeṇa pravṛttatvābhāvāt. - VK. p.31

²⁷ sahasraśīrṣanayanaḥ śaṅkhacakraḡadādharāḥ | brahmā nārāyaṇākhyo'sau suṣvāpa salile tadā ||: Having thousand heads and eyes, the bearer of conch, discus and mace, this Brahmā named as Nārāyaṇa slept in [cosmic] water - KP. 1.10.9-10.

(iv) the affirmation that the term denotes only Bhagavān

In the last section of his argumentation, Paravastu summarizes what he said in the earlier chapters and strongly says that the term Nārāyaṇa can only denote Bhagavān (i.e. Viṣṇu). He concludes the section by referring to the aforementioned statement of Veṅkaṭanātha from the TMK. He says, like him, that Nārāyaṇa is not a general term like *sat*, *brahma*, etc. that can denote any deity. Since it has a unique referent it can only denote Viṣṇu who is also known by (his) other names such as Hari, Vaikuṅṭa, etc. He thus concludes this debate with the following verse:

*tan nārāyaṇasaṃjñāyāḥ pātivratyaṃ ramāpatau |
vyavasthitaṃ nirātāṅkaṃ iti paśyata sūrayaḥ ||²⁸*

Thus, O wise men! may you see the devotion of the term Nārāyaṇa to the husband of Ramā (i.e. husband of goddess Lakṣmī - Viṣṇu). This is [well] established without distress.

By this verse Paravastu affirms that the term Nārāyaṇa is well established in the husband of Ramā, (i.e. Viṣṇu) not only by the usage but also by the etymological aspects. Therefore, he says that the term Nārāyaṇa can denote only Viṣṇu who is the Lord (*Bhagavān*) for everyone, notably for Vaiṣṇavas.

So, we can see that both views of Appaya, namely that the term Nārāyaṇa denotes Śiva by its indicative power and doesn't *exclusively* denote Viṣṇu, are refuted by Paravastu. He also says that in all senses (i.e. signifying power of words like indicative, inherent, etc.) and in all contexts the term is referred to as the ultimate cause which for him is none other than Viṣṇu. Thus, the VK, even though it has attracted little scholarly attention so far, seems to be one of the notable polemical works from the Viśiṣṭādvaitins to oppose Appaya's arguments as evident in also other sections where Paravastu rejects the concept of *Tūriyaśiva* (the fourth one), the supremacy of Śiva, etc., all key topics that are dealt with by Appaya in his Śaiva works.

Conclusion

The debate between Appaya and Paravastu shows how, beyond the mere quotations from the scriptures found in the arguments on either side (at times even the quotations), importance was given to the interpretation, denotation, and identification of the term Nārāyaṇa, which reflects the significance of grammatical aspects in the texts. The use of etymological arguments turns out to be very significant in polemical works composed across all Vedānta schools in the early

²⁸ VK. p.41

modern period, a topic that only begins to receive attention. The Late Vedānta project²⁹ currently taking place at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge is uncovering a plethora of polemical works of Vedānta composed in the modern period. It remains to be seen whether etymology plays a significant role in these works.

Title and the authors of the works extensively mentioned in the article:

Title	Author
• <i>Brahmamīmāṃsābhāṣya</i> on BS	- Śrīkaṇṭha (fl. between 11th and 14th cent.)
• <i>Brahmasūtrabhāṣya</i> on BS	- Śaṅkarācārya (8th cent. CE)
• <i>Brahmasūtras</i> - BS	- Bādarāyaṇa (between 400 and 200 BCE) - Also known as Vyāsa
• <i>Kūrmapurāṇa</i> - KP	
• <i>Padmapurāṇa</i> - PP	
• <i>Mahābhārata</i> - MB	- Attributed to Vyāsa
• <i>Harivaṃśa</i> - HV	
• <i>Śivārkamaṇidīpikā</i> - ŚMD	- Appaya Dīkṣita (1520-1593 CE)
• <i>Tattvamuktākalāpa</i> - TMK	- Veṅkaṭanātha (1268-1364 CE)
• <i>Vedāntakaustubha</i> - VK	- Paravastu Vedāntācārya (fl.18th cent.)

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²⁹ An Intellectual History of Late Vedānta (1750-1900) - led by Prof Vincenzo Vergiani and Dr Jonathan Duquette as the main research associate. For more details - see the official website.

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